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In this issue of SS&D...

- **Kaunas Art Biennial: TEXTILE 05**
- **Matisse and His Textile Library**
- **Maine Fiberarts**

- **HGA's Learning Exchange**

Weaving:

- **Loom-Controlled Stitched Double Cloth**
- **Advancing Twill**

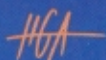
Spinning:

- **Merino: A Golden Fleece**
- **Shetland Wool**

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Fiber Quarterly
For Handweavers,
Handspinners, Dyers
and Basketmakers
www.weavespindye.org



Handweavers Guild
of America, Inc.
VOLUME XXXVII NO. 1
ISSUE 145, Winter 2005/06

Winter

Volume XXXVII No. 1 Issue 145 Winter 2005/2006
Published by The Handweavers Guild of America, Inc.
Suggested Retail Price: \$7.00

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INSET: Suzumi Noda, Japan. *Words Possessing Value as Commodities: Diet, (Diet Coat)*, detail, 2003. Printing, knitting. Photograph by Suzumi Noda, Kienji Yamazaki, Yoshimitsu Baba, courtesy of Kaunas Art Biennial: *TEXTILE 05*. See feature on page 31.

COVER: Fran Reed, United States. *Body Politic*. Salmon skin, gut, bamboo; approximately 24.75 by 17 by 11.75 inches. Photograph by Chris Arend, courtesy of Kaunas Art Biennial: *TEXTILE 05*. See feature on page 31.



This logo indicates an HGA Convergence 2006 Grand Rapids related article.

Features

- Grant Recipients for 2005* **15**
- Right From the Start—
Compare Summer-and-Winter and Overshot* **21**
by Marcy Petriani
- Maine Fiberarts* **27**
by Peggy Whitney Hobbs
- The Kaunas Art Biennial: TEXTILE 05* **31**
by Kevin V. Wallace
- Matisse and His Textile Library* **37**
by Carol D. Westfall
- Merino: A Golden Fleece* **43**
by Paula J. Vester
- Advancing Twills* **48**
by Bonnie Inouye
- Shetland Sheep: A Tenacious Breed
with a Treasure Trove of Textures* **53**
by Heather McCloy
- Loom-Controlled Stitched Double Cloth* **56**
by Robyn Spady

Insert HGA Update, Learning Exchange 38 Application, Grand Preview: Convergence 2006 Grand Rapids, HGA Board Nominations, HGA Membership Form, Fiber Trust

Learning Exchange Support Articles*

Departments

- Advertisers' Index** **66**
- Books & Videos** **10**
- Calendar** **64**
- Classified** **63**
- News & Information** **6**
- President's Letter** **4**
- Resources** **62**
- Travel & Workshop** **18**

The Kaunas Art Biennial: TEXTILE 05

by Kevin V. Wallace



Lithuania is an Eastern European country slightly larger than the state of West Virginia. Bordering the Baltic Sea, between Latvia and Russia, it is a country with a complex history. Centuries of war and political struggles are at the forefront of the country's history, yet it is a land with a rich cultural history. It is also home to an important international exhibitions of contemporary fiber art, the Kaunas Art Biennial, in Kaunas, Lithuania.

Kaunas, population 40,000, lies near the heart of the country and is one of its oldest and most significant cities. It is a place of old tradition and modern industry, with historical and architectural monuments, museums, theatres, art galleries and churches. With over 35,000 students studying at its seven universities there, it is a city largely populated by those who will shape the future. Kaunas also has a history of industrial textiles and a large and active community of artists.

"More than ten years ago, textile artists of different ages and views from various organizations came together with one aim—to create a space where textile art could flourish," explains Vita Geluniene, Chief Executive of the event. What is now called the Kaunas Art Biennial grew out of this gathering of artists and a desire to become acquainted with and connect to the international textile art community, thereby allowing Lithuanian artists to move from a closed creative life to being viewed in a wider geographical context.

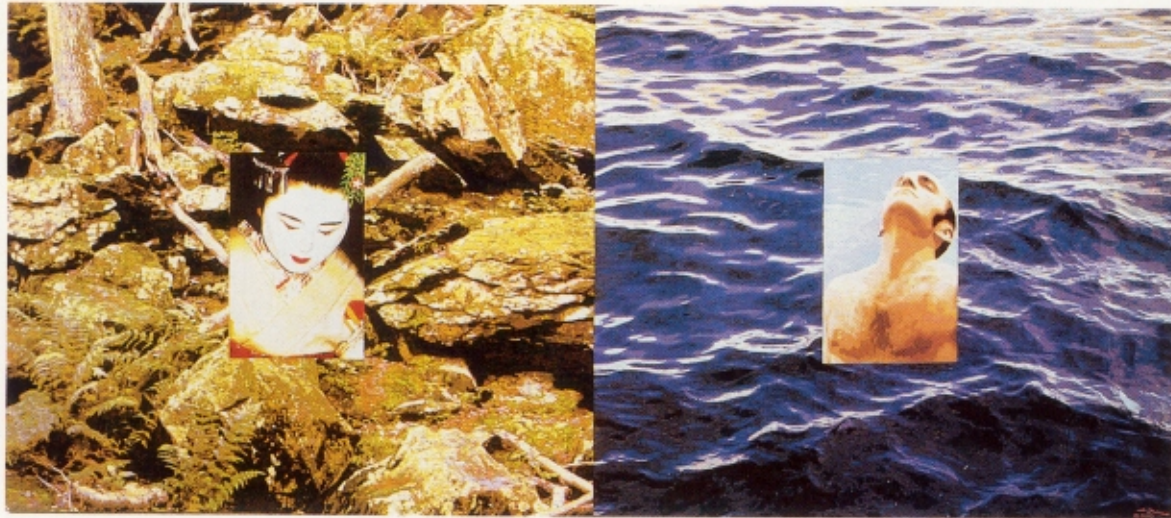
TEXTILE 05, the Fifth Kaunas Art Biennial, was held October 21st to November 4th, 2005, and featured 171 artists from thirty-three countries, representing five continents of the world. "The main idea of the Kaunas Art Biennial: *TEXTILE 05* is the attempt to analyze the potential of contemporary textile art and the means of expression used," organizer Virginija Vitkienė wrote in the introduction to the beautiful catalog produced to document the event. Although there was no theme name for this biennial, as in the past, the exhibition had three categories: Place, Technology, and Concept. "Place" explored textiles in relation to living spaces as

Kristveig Halldórsdóttir, Iceland. *Sour Responses—Triptych*, detail, 2002. Digital photograph, rhubarb papyrus; approximately 62.5 by 80.5 inches.



All photograph courtesy of
Kaunas Art Biennial: *TEXTILE 05*.

Michael James, United States. *Women Are? Men Are?*, 2003. Digitally developed and printed, dyed, machine-pieced, machine-quilted; cotton; approximately 42.25 by 98 inches. Photograph by Larry Gawel.



WAR RAW ARM RAM MAR

Gyöngy Laky, United States. *Globalization*, 2005. Apple and commercial wood; plastic soldiers, screws, construction bullets; approximately 1.25 by (32 by 96.75 by 4) inches.

well as open spaces, such as works that were commissioned as specific places or created for a particular location. "Technology" looked at technologies as a base and reason for artistic ideas and expressions. It investigated the impact and value of technology (industrial and individual) in the field of textile art with original technologies and new materials concerning textile art. "Concept" examined textiles as a medium in a conceptual art field, tracing the position of textiles in forming conceptual art with regard to interdisciplinary art and site-specific art.

The exhibition was comprised of two parts, with one part consisting of works by prominent textile artists selected by three international curators: Keiko

Kawashima, Director of the Kyoto International Contemporary Textile Art Center (Japan), Silja Puranen, textile artist and President of the Association of Textile Artists TEXO (Finland), and Jon Eric Riis, textile artist (United States). Each curator selected approximately twelve art works for inclusion to represent contemporary textile art from Japan, Europe and the United States.

The artists invited by Silja Puranen alone made clear that, more than just an international presentation, this was an exhibition with roots in a wide array of cultures ranging from Scandinavia to Eastern Europe. The artists included Niran Baibulat (Finland), Kristveig Halldórsdóttir (Iceland), Peter Hellsing (Sweden), Ainsley Hillard (Great Britain), Eva Holubíková (Slovakia), Astrid Krogh (Denmark), f. marquespenteado (Portugal), John K. Raustein (Norway), Snežana Skoko (Serbia), Isolde Venrooy (Netherlands) and Sally Williams (Great Britain).

Conceptual work is often difficult for the public and aspiring artists to understand and is often criticized for this inability to connect with a larger audience. Kristveig Halldórsdóttir's *Sour Responses—Triptych* offered an approach that could be understood by even the most jaded neophyte. The work juxtaposed a digital photograph illustrating the involuntary physical reaction produced by the sour taste of rhubarb, with the normally discarded peel of the work. Using the ancient Egyptian technique of creating papyrus from the material, she combined modern technology and this ancient method of transferring and recording information to share a particular experience.

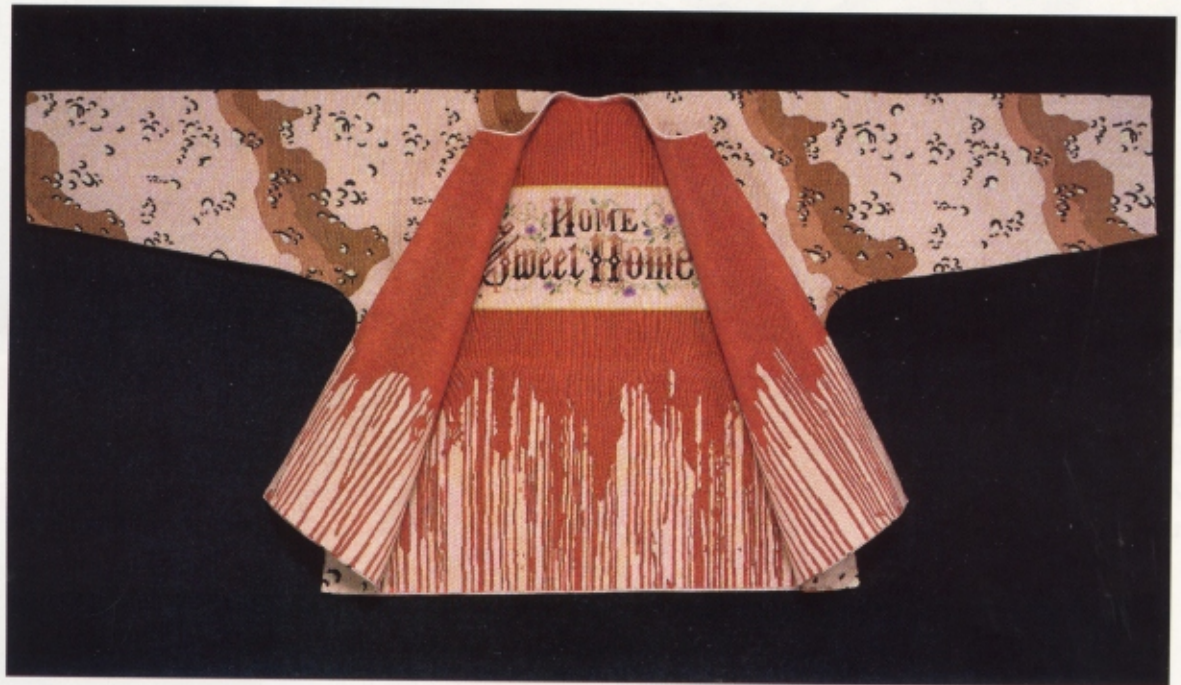
The artists invited by Keiko Kawashima were Machiko Agano, Tomoko Baba, Shihoko Fukumoto, Suzumi Noda, Tohru Ohtaka, Reiko Sudo, Harue Takami, Mitsuo Toyazaki and Masako Kitagawa. The West has long been in awe of Japan's rich cultural heritage and the works exhibited in *TEXTILE 05* certainly did not disappoint.

Shihoko Fukumoto's *Tea House of Mist* relates to the place where the Japanese tea ceremony is practiced, expressing the experience through indigo dyeing. The

structure is designed to be carried and installed wherever one might want to sit and drink tea, feeling the quietude of nature with the floating mist.

Suzumi Noda presented a conceptual piece with words woven into every element, including the garments. “Cute-Pretty-Diet-Low calorie-Natural-Secure-Safe-Healthy... did you notice that the more you repeat these words, the more difficult it is to grasp what they really mean?” the artist asks. “You seem to be bound by a sort of spell. If I have to wear clothes knitted with the words, is it possible for me to free myself from the spell?”

The artists invited by Jon Eric Riis from the United States included Lia Cook, Michael James, Gyöngy Laky, Junco Sato Pollack and Fran Reed. Cook and James



TOP: Shihoko Fukumoto, Japan. *Tea House of Mist*, 2003. Installation; indigo dyeing; linen. Photograph by Katsuhiko Ushiro.

ABOVE: Jon Eric Riis, United States. *Freedom's Price*, 2005. Tapestry; metallic thread, crystal beads; approximately 30 by 66 inches. Photograph by Bart Kasten.

both utilized digital processes in creating textile works. Lia Cook's recent *Binary Traces Series* are black and white works that include evidence of this digital process by mirroring the pixilation that occurs in digital printing in the structure of her weaving. Michael James creates his own printed fabric by manipulating his photographs using computer software and printing the resulting images on cotton fabric.

"The process is labor-intensive despite the use of digital technology, and the hands-on aspect of the piecing and quilting, remains as time-consuming as it was long before the advent of these latest technologies," James says.

A wonderful work by Jon Eric Riis, *Freedom's Price*, was included as well. While the juxtaposition of imagery resulted in a bold statement regarding the relationship between war and home, the techniques employed by Riis, featuring metallic and silk thread embellished with beads, was exquisitely beautiful.

THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP, LEFT:

Seamus McGuinness, Ireland. *21 Grams—A Silent Community*, 2005. Installation; collars.

Inga Likšaitė, Lithuania. *Double-Portrait—7*, 2004. Sewing; linen, polyester; approximately 45.25 by 71.75 inches.

Eglė Ganda Bogdaniienė, Lithuania. *Awakening*, 2004. Photo transfer, painted; silk; approximately 3 by (78.75 by 35.5) inches.

The second part of the exhibition was open to invitation, with awards given to seven works. Excellence Awards were given in each category and went to Fiona Kirkwood (South Africa) for her installation *Survival* in the category of "Place," Patricija Gilyt (Germany/Lithuania) for her video work *Ruecksicht/Heed 360* in the category of "Concept," and Inga Likšaitė (Lithuania) for *Double Portrait—7* in the "Technology" category.

Certificates of Achievement were given to Danica Maier (England), Seamus McGuinness (Ireland), Inga Blix (Norway), Lina Jonike (Lithuania), Eglė Ganda Bogdaniienė (Lithuania) and Monika Žaltauskaitė-Grašienė (Lithuania).

Social commentary was a strong current throughout the exhibition. The installation by Seamus McGuinness was titled *21 Grams*, a reference to the amount of





LEFT: Inga Blix, Norway. *Global Coverlet*, 2005. Felting, appliqué; wool; approximately 78.75 by 59 inches.

RIGHT: Eva Henneberry, United States. *Peace Quilt*, 2003. Piecing, painting, appliqué; cotton upholstery fabric, photo transfers; approximately 70.75 by 74.75 inches.

weight a body supposedly loses at death, which was also the weight of each element. It was a haunting work, consisting of variations of white cloth torn from shirts and hung to represent a gathering of souls. The work addressed suicide, with the shirts randomly selected at charity shops to represent the randomness of the experience and the white collars representing the pressures placed on the modern male to succeed and conform, often at a high personal cost.

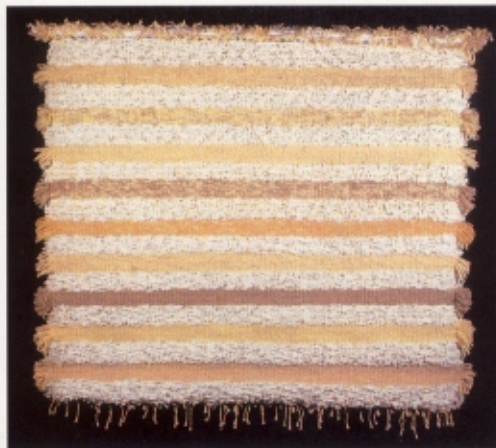
Inga Blix's *Global Coverlet* concerned the fact that the most common use of the word "textile" today relates to the global trade in textiles, with clothes produced in the third world as consumer goods.

"The consumption of clothes in our part of the world is immense and has to do with our intense need to shop in order to feel alive," Blix noted. "The production of clothes is fast, cheap and inhuman; it includes children as workers and even slaves. By using the neat grammar of a traditional coverlet, these woolen sweaters speak of the cruel duality in the meaning of the word 'textile'."

Eva Henneberry's *Peace Quilt* was born of her frustration and desire to communicate her feelings about the war with political leaders. The artist sent strips of



LEFT: Baiba Ritere, Latvia. *The Same Story*, 2005. Tapestry; wool, linen; approximately 80.75 by 59 inches.



RIGHT: Kathryn Pannepacker, United States. *7,000 Q-Tips*, 2004. Handwoven; cotton, wool, cotton swabs; approximately 53.25 by 58 inches.

Kevin V. Wallace is an independent curator and writer specializing in the field of contemporary craft art. At Convergence 2006 in Grand Rapids, Wallace will present a studio class, U127 Galleries, Museums and Magazines: Sharing Your Work with the World. He will also give the following seminars at Convergence: S226 Artistic Identity and the Market; S325 Contemporary Basketry: A Panel Discussion with JoAnn Kelly Catsos, Marilyn Moore and Carol Stangler; S425 Marketing Your Product; and S524 Designing Proposals.

A limited number of The Kaunas Art Biennial: TEXTILE 05 catalogs are available on HGA's eshop at <www.weavespindye.org>.

muslin around the world to family and friends to be returned for her to design and complete the quilt.

"Expressing my opinion in a format of a 'womanly' art of sewing has a long tradition in the United States," Henneberry says. "This is how women expressed their opinions before they were able to legally vote."

Modern painting was an obvious influence on many of the works in *TEXTILE 05*. Abstract painting was transformed through gesture's being replaced by hours of meticulous labor. There was also hyperrealism combined with the natural pointillism of the woven surface. Much of the work presented in *TEXTILE 05* was large scale, including dyed fabric panels by Naoko Fujii and Ken Kagajo and the site-specific installation *Windows Into The Sky* by the OLOOP Design collective, which stretched three stories high in the center of the Ljubljana City Hall in Slovenia. Other works on display offered numerous surprises, from the photo realism of the Latvian artist Baiba Ritere's tapestry to Kathryn Pannepacker's work, which initially looks like a fairly simple and subdued textile, before the title *7,000 Q-Tips* makes it obvious that the work is indeed made of cotton swabs woven into cotton and wool.

The *TEXTILE 05* exhibition is as important for fiber art as it is for the larger art field, as it offers work that is distinctly original. While this is clearly contemporary art, there is also respect for craft, embracing the value of materials and techniques that require discipline and experience. Concern for skill and material has been secondary in modern art to an emphasis on pure expression and concept over the last few decades. To realize fiber's artistic potential, artists have moved beyond materials or techniques associated with the field, as well as traditional forms and scale. Indeed, questioning traditions and testing the limits of preconceptions is an important part of growth. In the process, these artists have created works that demand meticulous attention and hours of labor to realize their visions.

With the presentation of *TEXTILE 05*, almost all of the exhibition spaces in Kaunas were filled with contemporary fiber art. Being selected for the Kaunas Textile Biennial has become a matter of prestige, as it is quickly becoming an important contemporary art exhibition. To find such an exciting event in a Lithuanian city that is unfamiliar to most of us in the Western world is a wonderful surprise and evidence that contemporary fiber art offers an expansive, universal language.