

ETN

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textileforum



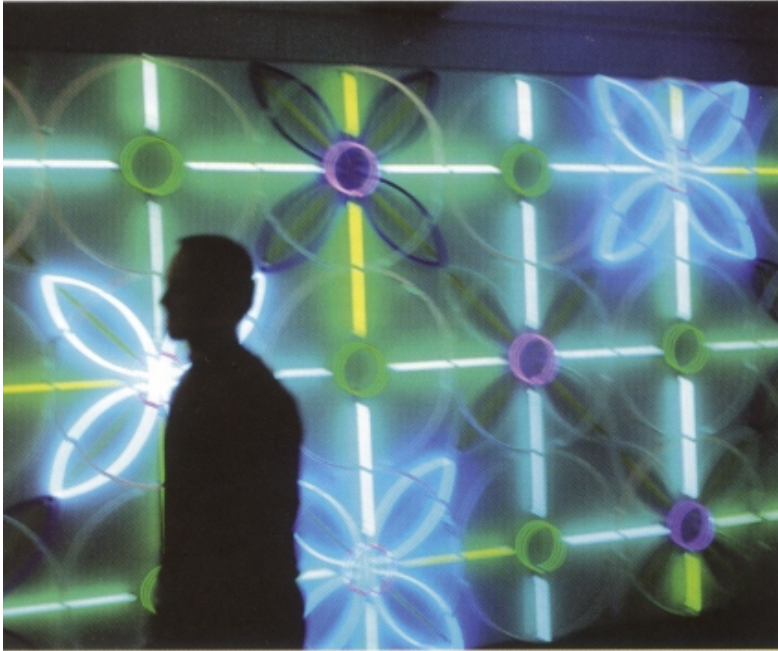


Saulius Leonavičius/LT: "Wardrobe 2005", 500 x 150 cm, installation



View at the American division by curator Jon Eric Riis

Photo: Fran Reed



Centre: Jon Eric Riis/USA, "Freedom's Price, 2005, 168 x 76 cm, tapestry

Above: Eglė Ganda Bogdaniienė/LT, "Awakening", 2004, 200x 90 cm, silk

Centre left: Astrid Krogh/DK, "Politics", 2004, wall decoration for the Danish Parliament

Left: f. marquespenteado/P, "In Double Bodies", 2004, detail, installation

THE PRIZES

Technology Prize: Inga Likšaitė/LT; **Concept Prize:** Patricija Gilytė/D; **Room Prize:** Fiona Kirkwood/South Africa; **Special Prizes:** Inga Blix/N, Eglė Ganda Bogdaniienė/LT, Lina Jonikė/LT, Danica Maier/UK, Seamus Mc Guinness/IRL and Monika Žaltauskaitė/LT.

The 287-page catalogue with 196 colour and 5 black-and-white illustrations and Lithuanian and English text is available from the organisers at a price of Litas 40 (~Euro 12) plus postage: Vita Geluniene, Kaunas Art Institute, Textile Department, Muištinės 4, LT-3000 Kaunas, Lithuania; email: vita_geluniene@yahoo.com

In the biennial catalogue Vita Geluniene, who inspired this event, points out the special situation of her country and its citizens now that the borders have opened. She also mentions their isolation before that time, and the new opportunities that now exist for artists to become involved in international discussions. The biennial was established at their own initiative in order to create a context that would stimulate their creative energies. In the following text Swedish textile artist Annika Ekdahl describes her impressions of the latest Kaunas biennial. Her account assumes that readers have sent for and read the conditions for participants (see TF 4/04, p. 16 and TF 1/06, p. 17), and are thus aware of them. *Beatrijs Sterk*

When I left Kaunas on 23rd of October of last year, a couple of days after the opening of Textile 05, I couldn't help saying to people around me: "This is the best textile art show ever!" I felt so uplifted, inspired and impressed. I will try to explain why.

It began with a letter: "We are inviting you to hold personal textile exhibition in gallery Meno Parkas in Kaunas, Lithuania. Your exhibition will be attendant exhibition of great international textile event, Textile 05." Of course I wanted to join! I assumed that the biennial would be like it used to be. Interesting, extensive, a mixed bag, full of well known names and maybe a couple of new acquaintances. I expected perfect organisation and a spectacular opening ceremony (yes, I've been to Kaunas before!). In other words: business as usual. Well, I was wrong, nothing about Textile 05 was "as usual".

I arrived in Kaunas some days before the opening, and almost immediately bumped into Vita Geluniene. My first glimpse of her that day – in a parking lot at Rotuses Square – will stay in my memory as a symbol of the organisers' achievements. You see, she was actually pumping up a flat tyre by hand. ON HER CAR! I was so amazed, I didn't even know it was possible to do that.

There is something about that image, getting air into the tyres, that has the quality of a metaphor. Because now and then even well established and functioning events need to be lifted,

developed, taken to the next level. The Kaunas biennials have been going on for ten years now and are considered by artists to be among the important exhibitions in the world, if you want to scan your discipline and interact with colleagues, and take part in an academic analysis of the genre. But things can get predictable – both textile art and the events promoting it. They need an X factor!

And that's exactly what Textile 05 had. A really big and fat X factor: they took away the jury! It was a totally open exhibition! Well, except for the curated part. The biennial consisted of two sections. The artists in the curated part were carefully selected by Keiko Kawashima (Director of the International Contemporary Textile Art Center, Kyoto, Japan), Silja Puranen (textile artist, Finland), and Jon Eric Riis (textile artist, USA). Each of the curators had picked out a collection of art works that represented contemporary textile art from their particular parts of the world: Europe, Japan and the USA.

The other section wasn't really called "open" in the invitation, it was called "competitive". But the competition wasn't about getting selected for the show, it was about prizes!

The M. Zilinskas Art Gallery, where the main exhibition took place, is a huge glass and stone building erected in 1989. It normally contains collections of foreign art, and was built in honour of a Lithuanian art collector. I immediately got the message: something to do with textiles was definitely going on! In the middle of the square in front of the museum a white limousine was parked. It was absolutely stuffed with clothes. The doors were forced open, clothes came out through the windows, it was like a pool of textile materials around the car. A work of art, of course, an installation: *Wardrobe* by Saulius Leonavičius. I got quite a blasphemous association when I saw it ("sometimes textiles make me sick, I really have to vomit, like this poor car"), but fortunately I heard a comment from a Norwegian painter/photographer who regarded the installation as a strong pro textile statement! Whew!

My blasphemous state of mind was renewed when I saw what had happened to the huge male sculpture (*The Man*, by Petras Mazūras) that usually

guards the museum entrance. This guy was now carrying pink, fluffy birds! The Textile 05 catalogue contains an article by curator/art critic Laima Kreivytė about a group of anonymous female artists, *Cootūristės*, who decked The Man out in pink swallows – and that seems to have been an attempt at transforming art with a critical eye. (So you definitely have to get the catalogue!) Textile art pervaded almost every corner of the sumptuous building, it had even squeezed in between paintings and objects in the permanent collection. There were 171 artists from 33 countries.

The curated divisions were great and looked as they should – accomplished performances from both curators and artists. Any X factors? Well, yes. In the European part, curated by Silja Puranen, I would like to point out *In Double Bodies* by f. marquespenteado (Portugal) and *Destiny of Textile Art* by Snežana Skoko (Serbia). Two storytelling and self-evident (in a good way) pieces about issues we all come across. *In Double Bodies* is an installation of four huge dolls. They are two-dimensional images without a back (which means something), and were accompanied by a video. The work is based on interviews with Portuguese men in London. I was very impressed with the way the dolls were made – so unflattering, unslick. Rough, like the issues this artist is dealing with. Snežana Skoko's contribution to this event was a performance, a piece of art in action, which was originally performed in a cafe with women around a table, sewing, talking, drinking coffee. "Work presented at exhibitions of textile and applied art are often vapid..." she says in the catalogue. Wow, this woman is brave!

I have been full of admiration for Japanese textile art for many years. It's a tribute to skill. It is trustworthy both as a craft and as an idea. Keiko Kawashima had picked out great examples showing the diversity of Japanese art. For some reason, I spent the most time in front of Mitsuo Toyazaki's inkjet printed kimonos. They surprised me, and I like that. They were beautiful, fun, cocky and humble at the same time.

Jon Eric Riis, USA, introduced six American artists. (Or in fact seven, since he took part himself.) Most of them were

known to me before. Lia Cook, for example, is a forerunner when it comes to computerised weaving; Gyongy Laky investigates structure, environment, attitudes... But I can't help it, I just find Jon Eric Riis's woven jackets so adorable. To me, they include that manic determination to just keep on exploring even time consuming, crazy techniques.

The open part of the exhibition surprised me greatly. As far as I remember, I have never before encountered art from Pakistan (Rabia Ahmad) in a show of this kind. Or from Thailand (Sarawut Chutiwongpeti). And Fiona Kirkwood, she came all the way from South Africa with her piece *Survival*, consisting of condoms and a video. All five continents were represented at M. Zilinskas Art Gallery. That's important, that's a change.

Virginija Vitkienė, the biennial organiser, explains: "Ideologically, the exhibition „Textile 05“ is divided into three categories that are defined by the words „Place“, „Technology“ and „Concept.“ That made no sense to me at all. I did not see it in the exhibition, I didn't hear any artist refer to it as particularly important or crucial. Especially the „Place“ aspect – it was supposed to be site specific, but in some cases it referred to another site, to somewhere else – just made things fuzzy. I decided to pretend these words didn't exist, I just re-read Jon Eric Riis's words concerning the American artists: "All of the artists are open to new ideas and techniques, and I believe speak very well of the state of contemporary textile art in the United States. Many of the artists can be put into all of the three categories that make up the theme of this event."

Artists, curators, students and the audience in Lithuania and Kaunas know what textile art is. I hope those of you who have doubts visited the satellite exhibition at The Sports Museum (!) where student's work made at the textile department of the Kaunas art faculty was displayed; it was brilliant. I hope there will be energy, enthusiasm – and money – to keep these Kaunas events going. Currently they are being organised through voluntary work. We are so glad that you did it. That you pumped fresh air into the tyres. ■