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**Louise Lemieux Bérubé: Artist in Motion**

**Rosaline U. Edeh**

**A Thesis**

**In**

**The Department**

**Of**

**Art History**

**Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of Master of Arts at  
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## ABSTRACT

Louise Lemieux Bérubé: Artist in Motion

Rosaline U. Edeh

This study is an analysis of textile artist Louise Lemieux Bérubé and her substantial contributions to the field of arts and crafts within Quebec. The emphasis is placed on her recent body of work *Pour la Passion des Textiles* (2000) and its use of computer aided design technology. As well, her roles as president of the Conseil des Métiers d'art and director of the Montreal Centre for Contemporary Textiles, will be examined. Her extensive efforts as an artist, teacher and leader must be explored in order to determine the breadth of her influence within the construct of Quebec's arts and crafts milieu. Adding to the study is an exploration of the use of technological advancements in the art of weaving which will determine whether or not this results in a dichotomy or serves as an ideal pairing of art and science.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to thank Madame Louise Lemieux Bérubé for her gracious disposition toward my unrelenting probing into her very existence. Thank you for allowing me into your school, your home and indeed your life, so that I may reveal an honest and accurate account of a most remarkable artist. I decided to embark on this study about you.

Madame Bérubé, for the simple fact that your story needed to be told. I would also like to thank Dr. Jean Bélisle for undertaking the task of supervisor. Your guidance allowed me to realize my academic capabilities when I myself doubted them. Your wisdom is matched only by your kindness, and I'm grateful for the opportunity to learn through your ingenious and unique style of instruction. The ease at which I relate to you, Jean Bélisle, made me truly feel a part of Concordia University's Master's program in Art History and gave me the appetite to complete my thesis. I must also thank my readers, they are, Dr. Clarence Bayne and Dr. Loren Lerner. This thesis was an academic as well as emotional undertaking that I will always be proud of. The months and months of assiduous research and writing and rewriting of my thesis was an endeavor that at times seemed eternal but with the encouragement of my mother, whose life struggles and hard work taught me the meaning of resilience, I was able to persevere. Let my many efforts to complete my thesis act as inspiration to my precious daughter who was the very illumination and impetus for my pursuit of higher education. May you seek out and embrace all that is divine and uncorrupt in this world and beyond.

For Micha,

May your favorite “doux-doux” made of cloth, by hand and with love, lull you to  
a sweet slumber each and every night.

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## Introduction

Textile artist Louise Lemieux Bérubé is not a name readily associated with greater known Quebec weavers such as Mariette Rousseau-Vermette or Micheline Beauchemin but she has nevertheless, exceedingly contributed to the Quebec arts and crafts milieu. Bérubé's offerings extend beyond the walls of the gallery, into the cultural-political make up of the Quebec arts and crafts landscape. From a career that extends over three decades, Louise Lemieux Bérubé has successfully navigated her way through the oftentimes tenuous fields of the arts and crafts.

Is it the *raison d'être* of Bérubé to promote Quebec arts and crafts as an essential and credible component of the visual arts milieu in Quebec? Can her passion for the art of weaving, which is reflected in her wall hangings and in her many endeavors, help augment the profile of Quebec arts and crafts? It is the purpose of this thesis to answer those questions and highlight Bérubé's innovative use of computer technology which has helped produce a recent body of work that warrants critical analysis as to the paradigmatic union of art and science. Coupled with her work as an artist is her performance as an educator and leader. As president of the Conseil des Métiers d'art du Québec, Bérubé has lead the charge to push arts and crafts beyond the margins and make it a viable entity worthy of the attention, funds and respect often reserved for fine arts.<sup>1</sup> Bérubé is also dedicated to teaching the art of weaving. She firmly believes instructing students with an experienced staff and state of the art equipment, will continue to yield skilled weavers who will enhance the province's arts and crafts landscape.

This thesis will endeavor to cover the artist and her work, in and out of the studio, in three chapters. The first chapter of this study will chronicle the artistic evolution of Louise Lemieux Bérubé. Her transition from young apprentice to master weaver reveals a body of

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<sup>1</sup>. In Quebec, arts and crafts is excluded from university degree programs. Education solely in the arts and crafts is reserved for colleges and art institutes, therefore, limiting the funds available to students of the arts and crafts.

work steep in self-discovery. Bérubé's career as a textile artist spans over four decades and in many ways, her most recent solo exhibition, *Pour la Passion des Textiles* (2000), which will be discussed in detail in the second chapter of this thesis, is a culmination of years of research focused on the art of weaving. Chapter one will analyze the significant contribution Bérubé has made to the overall strengthening profile of the arts and crafts within Quebec. Two key affiliations proven to be contributory to the recent arts and crafts movement in Quebec intent on bettering the visibility and artistic level of Quebec artisans, are the Conseil des Métiers d'art du Québec and The Montreal Centre for Contemporary Textiles. Bérubé and a partner founded the latter in 1990 and since its inception Bérubé's exemplary pedagogical efforts have aided hundreds of students seeking to acquire proper skills and knowledge in the art of weaving. The school offers a comprehensive program, which trains artists in traditional and contemporary weaving techniques. Understanding the need to produce more highly skilled weavers in order to maintain a strong profile within the province's art milieu, Bérubé has insisted on maintaining up-to-date courses and has been personally responsible for faculty selection. In keeping with her mandate to attract increasing numbers of students, Bérubé has also kept the cost of learning to a minimum. Her now decade old tradition of supplying students and emerging professional artists with free work time on expensive equipment at the school has helped bridge the economic gap which can exist between wealthier established artists and the oftentimes cash-strapped student/artist.

The mission of the school will be cited along with different courses available. It is necessary to compile this information making it available to textile artists and art educators and to allow the public access to information about an institution that is an integral part of the province's arts and crafts community. By highlighting Bérubé's school of weaving and revealing its diverse and innovative programs, this study will reveal Bérubé's passion for her art and her impetus for sharing that passion and knowledge with others.

The second part of Chapter One will also demonstrate Bérubé's far-reaching influences in the arts and crafts. As long standing president of the Conseil des Métiers d'art du Québec, Bérubé has initiated and furthered several programs which have strengthened the economic, political and cultural position of the arts and crafts within Quebec. It remains clear that Bérubé is focused on provincial affairs of the Conseil des Métiers d'art du Québec, herein known as the CMA, but she is also eager to reveal the dynamics of the association to the rest of the country. Below, Bérubé articulates a portion of the restructuring plan of the CMA.

"At the last general assembly of the council, the artisans ratified amendments to the general regulations concerning the evaluation of candidates for professional membership status in the council. These regulations place the mastery of a craft, not just the product, at the core of the evaluation. In order to participate in events approved by the council, a selection process has also been established. Finally, it is agreed that to be recognized as a professional, a craftsperson could also offer services in design, production, restoration and training.

All these changes will greatly strengthen the association over the course of the next years, as much by the increase in the quality of the membership as by the improvement of products and services."<sup>2</sup>

Bérubé discussed the detailed restructuring plan of the CMA in *Ontario Craft* magazine, which has national and international distribution. Her interaction with establishments dedicated to the advancement of the arts and crafts regardless of linguistic, cultural or geographical status displays her intention to extend Quebec's arts and crafts revival beyond provincial borders.<sup>3</sup> Bérubé's presidency of the CMA and the inner workings of the association will be noted in order to provide an indepth look at the artist in the role of leader and reveal the CMA's mandate so as to increase awareness of growing solidarity of Quebec craftspeople and their increased productivity and visibility within

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<sup>2</sup> Louise Lemieux Bérubé, "A Turning Point for Crafts in Quebec," *Ontario Craft* 18 (winter 1993): 10-11.

<sup>3</sup> The founding of Le Conseil des Métiers d'art du Québec in 1988 marked the beginning of a resurgence of the arts and crafts community as a united front in Quebec.

Quebec.

Chapter Two of this study will analyze Bérubé's latest body of work, *Pour la Passion des Textiles* (2000). There is a marked transition from her earlier works to this latest exhibition, which reveal an artistic and personal development worthy of critical analysis. *Pour la Passion des Textiles* transcends adversaries of the merging world of science and art and advances into an intimate domain of nature and textiles. Bérubé's work is less of a mechanical re-production of an image or design and more of an artistic expression. Bérubé's refined skills as a weaver and her in depth knowledge of computer aided design as it applies to textiles allows both the image and tapestry to be appreciated in their own right for their intrinsic characteristics. The images of nature in her most recent wall hangings are a personal interpretation that clearly displays her successful venture into technology, while remaining true to the integrity of the art form of weaving. In fact, every warp and weft of her most recent works has become an aesthetic enhancement of the conceived design.

The third chapter will cover postmodern discourse pertaining to the use of technology in art. Relying on several contemporary arts and crafts magazines as well as the work of Margot Lovejoy who discusses, in depth, the impact science has had on the actual construct of art as well as society's response to the amalgamation, this thesis will display ways in which Bérubé's art propels the art and tradition of weaving into the new millennium.

Poet and modern thinker Paul Valéry dedicated some thought to advancing science on the arts at the turn of the twentieth century. His reflection pertaining to the subject will add to the mounting discourse by offering a precursor analogy of the sometime contentious union of art and science. By including the critical thoughts of Paul Valéry and Walter Benjamin to this study, an attempt will be made to further dissect Bérubé's latest exhibition and lay claim to the successes of technology merging with the art of weaving. By analyzing the writings of the above mentioned individuals along with several

contemporary periodicals such as; *Fiberarts, Crafts and Ontario Crafts*, it is the intent of this study to allow for greater acceptance and even enjoyment of the art of weaving with its relatively new method of production evident in Bérubé's work.

Louise Lemieux Bérubé is an artist, a leader and an optimist in the landscape of the arts and crafts. This thesis intends to note and analyze her numerous accomplishments in order to add even more insight to Quebec's dynamic and diverse arts and crafts community.

## **CHAPTER 1 LOUISE LEMIEUX BÉRUBÉ**

### **Louise Lemieux Bérubé: Artist in Motion**

Montreal fiber artist Louise Lemieux Bérubé began her career in the textile industry as a fashion designer in the early 1960's. After completing studies in fashion design at École des Métiers Commerciaux à Montréal in 1959, Bérubé worked for various designers throughout the city. Following a few years working in the domain of fashion Bérubé grew increasingly dissatisfied with available fabrics. It is this discontentment that led the designer to alter her career path. Disenchanted with what she found to be a shallow selection of fabrics, Bérubé was determined to discover new materials for her use as a fashion designer. However, while in search of better textiles, Bérubé discovered a new field that would allow her to actually manipulate and create fabrics by her own hand. In 1971, twenty-eight year old Bérubé enrolled in a weaving course at Collège Vieux Montréal; it was there she discovered her penchant for weaving. At the school Vieux Montréal, Bérubé was able to examine fibers and create various textures and patterns of cloth. This was the artist's first exposure to the art form of weaving. Bérubé learned the tradition of early twentieth century Quebec weaving using the handloom and conventional fibers such as cotton and wool, which offered her the technical background required for proficiency in the art form.

While growing adept in the technique of weaving , the first decade of Bérubé's weaving career was dedicated to the exploration of threads, patterning and colours. Experimenting with various dye methods while trying to maintain the integrity of the fabric engaged her many efforts. Influenced by the works of Marriette Rousseau

Vermette<sup>1</sup>, Bérubé worked in the modernist style, creating abstract, textured works. A strong example of such work is her piece "*Triplure ou l'habit ne fait pas...*" (fig. 1). Bérubé worked with wool and linen to create the large wall hanging which earned a place in the Third Biennial of Quebec New Tapestry, 1984. The 1980s was a decade of immense discovery for Madame Bérubé. In 1981, a whimsical piece was chosen for the Biennale de Tapisserie de Montréal, entitled, *Première Année 'A'* (fig. 2). The cotton and linen woven piece was made to resemble a notebook. Slightly open, several rows of the letter 'a' were woven into the first page of the cloth notebook. An actual pencil and eraser accompany the notebook. *Première Année 'A'* takes on the actual form of a notebook rendering it an exercise in weaving with particular regards to sculptural form. *Première Année 'A'* is one of Bérubé's few spacial works. This experimentation in weaving and space came to fruition in part due to the influence of Quebec weaver Micheline Beauchemin.<sup>2</sup> The tactile and representational qualities of the piece incline the viewer to move in for closer inspection. Subsequent pages of the work are partially visible purposely generating curiosity as to what may be on the following pages. Regardless of the form a woven piece assumes it is tactile in nature. *Première Année 'A'* beckons the viewer to touch the woven pages to make comparisons between the fabric and the already known feel of a paper notebook. This work reveals Bérubé's predilection for detail and interest in the different

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<sup>1</sup> Marriette Rousseau-Vermette, born in Trois-Pistoles, Quebec, 1926. Known throughout the world for her monumental, massive tapestries. She helped advance the art form of weaving beyond the confines of pictorial painterly representation, to bold modernist geometric designs. Please see the 1st through 4th catalogs of the International Lausanne Biennial of Tapestries for examples of her work. Plus, Light and Shadow: Tapestries by Marriette Rousseau-Vermette.

<sup>2</sup> Micheline Beauchemin, born in Longeuil, Quebec, 1932. The textile artist has dedicated most of her career, which spans over four decades, to creating spacial textile pieces. Her work has been featured in exhibitions throughout Canada, the U.S., Japan and Europe. Please see the 10th International Lausanne Biennial of Contemporary Tapestries and the 3rd Montreal Biennial of Tapestries, 1981, for examples of her work.



forms a woven piece of fabric can assume. It is this concern for detail which will profoundly affect her future works. *Première Année 'A'* also reveals Bérubé's pedagogical interests. *Première année*, literally translated, means "first year", which refers to grade one in elementary school. This is the first year in which children are actually graded on their work and the teacher/student dynamic begins to form. *Première Année 'A'* expresses Bérubé's love for teaching and indeed, learning. The profuse rows of the letter 'a' display dedication and focus. Each 'a' is identical to the last, which indicates the assiduous nature of the artist. The collaboration between teacher and student allow the process of teaching and learning to advance. The theme of *Première Année 'A'* reveals Bérubé's fondness for this formative and crucial juncture in the learning process.

Following experimentation with spacial work Bérubé returned to the form of wall hangings but her work would soon take on a new scope. In 1980 Bérubé traveled to Bretagne, France to take part in a course using a newly designed computer software system specifically created for the jacquard loom. The software, named Pointcarré, was a relatively new way to create and execute designs for tapestries. Created by French mathematicians, Olivier Masson and François Roussel, Pointcarré allows for the computer to work in tandem with the jacquard loom. The software, which is stored on a diskette or compact disc, is inserted into the computer and opened with appropriate keystrokes. By initiating the software program the computer is enabled to read and interpret a scanned image, the primary design for textile work. With this technology there is no longer need for punched cards, which was an essential element necessary in the creation of a textile design. Punched cards are hitched up to a drum then fed into a conventional jacquard loom, which in turn reads and reacts to the cards, creating the pattern. With Pointcarré, the

computer displays the pattern on its monitor and with multiple features from the software, such as size, colour, shade and pattern modification components, the artist can manipulate the scanned image to accommodate artistic desire. During this process, if at any time the artist is unhappy with results, the design can be reshaped backed to its original form or a freshly modified image can be created, all with the click of the mouse. The original image, which is stored in the computer's data bank, remains intact. Working and reworking a textile design was a time consuming task that didn't always produce the desired result but through this specific software, the artist is given electronic design tools which allow for greater possibilities in terms of overall design and colour, resulting in complex and preferable patterns in a matter of minutes. Once the desired effect is established the artist need only send the information to the loom by clicking the appropriate keys on the computer. It is an electronic jacquard loom, which responds to the commands of the computer due to its modified jacquard head. The head is altered so that it may receive electronic data directly from the computer. The warp springs which respond to punched cards and the cards themselves are no longer needed. The modified loom's warp selection is electronically controlled and able to directly receive data from the corresponding computer (the basic function of a traditional jacquard loom is explained in chapter 3). Several revisions were made over the past two decades to Pointcarré software which, in turn, has increased the speed and complexities of textile design.

Upon returning from France Bérubé began experimenting with the new technology, which became the impetus for her new approach to the art of weaving. Pointcarré allowed her to experiment with the relatively new world of computer aided design as it applies to textiles, while the practice was still relatively new in North

America. Over a ten year period Pointcarré was updated several times and computers became even faster allowing for more complex weaving patterns. These technological advancements would set Bérubé on a focused mission that became the impetus for her most recent textiles. Bérubé was in a minority of artists who chose to explore this new technological frontier. It is her explorative nature that helps define her as an artist.

“I always rely on the textiles themselves to help me discover new directions in which to travel, and this enables me to refine, develop and explore various processes.”<sup>3</sup>

Despite many artists and art critics who deplore the inevitability of computers merging with art, Bérubé sees this duality as an event that must be engaged to its fullest potential.

“Via computer technology, my textile work becomes an experiment enabling me to express myself in the world through my creations, which are simultaneously physical, tactile and visual.”<sup>4</sup>

From fashion designer to master weaver Bérubé has evolved into a prolific textile artist uninhibited by the vast possibilities of modern technology. Her passion for the art of weaving has prompted her to pursue avenues which add new dimensions to textile art. Computer aided design has enabled Bérubé to create more intricate and visceral textiles. Bérubé entered the field of textile art searching for ways to modify cloth, she emerged, several years later, with a new technological and artistic approach to her art which enhance the discourse and profile of weaving. Her pioneering use of computer aided design in textile art has created an undeniable niche for the artist in Quebec’s textile art milieu.

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<sup>3</sup>Louise Lemieux Bérubé, Statement 1997, written as subsequent text to her Positive/Negative (1996) exhibition, Special Collections, Centre des Métiers d’art du Québec, Montreal.

<sup>4</sup>Louise Lemieux Bérubé, “La chambre blanche nos. 1 & 2”, 1998, written as a statement on her homepage website explaining her success working with technology and textiles, internet site: <http://tweek.net/atextiles/berube.htm> : 1.

### **The Montreal Centre for Contemporary Textiles**

While improving both her weaving and computer skills, Bérubé was also engaged in a very ambitious endeavor of a different, yet related nature. Bérubé traveled extensively in order to acquire additional training for her art. During her travels to the U.S., Europe and even Asia, Bérubé was taking action in her hometown of Montreal to form a school dedicated to textiles and weaving. Bérubé realized most up and coming artists could not afford to embark on extensive travels in order to pursue a career in weaving. Education and training had to be made accessible to potential Quebec artists. After years of planning and lobbying provincial officials and organizations, she and fellow weaver Regine Mainberger opened the Centre des Métiers d'art en Construction Textile in Montreal, Quebec in 1990. The school is a not for profit corporation subsidized by the government branch of the Société de Développement des Entreprises Culturelles.<sup>5</sup> The mission of the Société de Développement des Entreprises Culturelles is to contribute to the growth of Quebec culture. The association must create favorable conditions which allow cultural industries to develop and flourish.

"...Contribuer à l'essor de la culture Québécoise. Pour y parvenir, elle doit créer des conditions qui permettront aux industries culturelles de se développer autant du point de vue artistique qu'économique."<sup>6</sup>

The government body acts as a lifeline to Quebec's cultural industry. This

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<sup>5</sup> Société de Développement des Entreprises Culturelles, established in 1948, is the provincial government branch in charge of overseeing the development of cultural organizations through the dissemination of funds provided by the government and the implementation of programs designed to help organizations and individuals working in the arts, music and/or other fields that promote culture in Quebec.

<sup>6</sup> "Priorités d'action 1997-1998", Société De Développement Des Entreprises Culturelles, mission statement pamphlet, Société De Développement Des Entreprises Culturelles, Montreal, Quebec (1997-1998): 1 .

government "artery" creates favorable conditions in which various cultural and artistic endeavors can flourish. As it pertains to Arts and crafts, the Société de Développement des Entreprises Culturelles, herein known as SODEC, channels financial aid to arts and crafts schools/studios' research programs. SODEC works in tandem with the Conseil des Métiers d'art du Québec in hopes of building a pervasive arts and crafts industry in Quebec. Many arts and crafts events vital to the longevity of Quebec artists' careers are sponsored in whole or in part by SODEC. As well as a financial source, SODEC is an informational resource where artists can access information as to workshops, lectures, art shows and contests that may help further the career of the artist.

Similar to SODEC, the Centre des Métiers d'art en Construction Textile aims to develop and nurture artists. The school is viewed as "a center for research, promotion and innovation in the field of crafts."<sup>7</sup> Each year the school accepts roughly 25 students, although the student body is mainly female, male students are common, though not as numerous (males made up about 15% of the student population for the 2000 winter semester). The age for both male and female students, range roughly between, 20 to 65. The school occupies two large lofts in the former Northern Electric Company factory on Richardson Street in Montreal. The eight story building, erected in 1912, is an appropriate locality for the school, seeing it is situated near the Lachine canal, the site of one of Canada's first major industrial corridors which later developed into Montreal's second textile district in the 1880's.<sup>8</sup>

Ten years after the school's inception, it continues to grow in notoriety. In 1997, Quebec teen magazine *Filles* highlighted courses offered at the school citing it as a "solid avenue for the craftminded girl".<sup>9</sup> Louise Lemieux Bérubé and the school were featured

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<sup>7</sup> The Montreal Centre for Contemporary Textiles, 2000 pamphlet, The Montreal Centre for Contemporary Textiles Collection, Montreal, Quebec.

<sup>8</sup> A.B. McCulloch, The Primary Textile Industry in Canada: History and Heritage (Ottawa, Ontario: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1992), 163.

<sup>9</sup> *Filles* 19, no. 1 (November 1998): 58.

in *Fiberarts*, an arts and crafts magazine published in London, England. The article, entitled, “A Jacquard for hire in Montreal”, enthusiastically described the state of the art facilities at the Centre des Métiers d’art en Construction Textile.

“Finally it is possible for an artist to book weaving time on a computerized jacquard hand loom. This incredible loom is in the enormous light-filled weaving room of the Centre des Métiers d’art en Construction Textile (CMACT) in Montreal...Louise Bérubé will teach an intensive two-week class this summer covering designing on a computer for the jacquard.”<sup>10</sup>

For just over a decade Bérubé taught one of the most sought after courses, the *Pointcarré* program. In this course a computer is available for each student (average class size is eight), a great deal must be learned in the two and a half month semester, making the course intensive. The majority of students in her January 2000 class (age range approximately 20 to 50) appear to be somewhat comfortable with the new technology. The preponderance of younger students grew up with computers and view technology as a way of life. Much like a paintbrush to a painter, the computer, to relatively young students, 35 and under, is simply an everyday tool that can be used in a variety of ways to help convey an idea or message. The course produces intricate details necessary for an optimal understanding of computer aided design. Upon viewing the winter 2000 class, it is evident that most students are determined to learn the program but all rely on Bérubé to guide them through the relatively new world of computer aided design, herein referred to as CAD.

At the turn of the twenty first century the Centre des Métiers d’art en Construction Textile changed its name to The Montreal Centre for Contemporary Textiles, (MCCT). Bérubé and board members, made up of mostly professional artisans who also teach at the school, realized the institution’s international appeal and decided to include an

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<sup>10</sup> Cynthia Schira, “A jacquard for Hire in Montreal,” *Fiberarts* (London), Vol.24, No. 1, (Summer 1997): 10.

English version to the revised school name. The MCCT normally offers 6 courses per semester. The winter 2000 semester's course selection ranged from a beginner's weaving course to advanced design setting, using computers. Students interested in the latter course were required to have a good knowledge of the computer software, Pagemaker and Photoshop, as they were used extensively in the class. The course taught by Bérubé during that semester was "Analysis of Fiber". An advocate for individual thought, Bérubé's course allowed students to progress at their own pace.

"Un atelier de recherche et de perfectionnement pour les tisserands. Cet atelier permettra de développer la recherche et des méthodes d'indentification, d'analyse de tissus afin de développer une meilleure connaissance de la construction des tissus, à partir de tissus simples à ceux plus complexes. Chaque participant progressera à son propre rythme."<sup>11</sup>

Since many student/artists will eventually work as freelance artists Bérubé recognized the need to educate students in the field of business and to offer courses that teach "basic concepts of business management."<sup>12</sup>

In collaboration with Collège Vieux Montréal and the Institut des Métiers d'art, students who complete their studies at the MCCT will receive their Diploma of Collegial Studies in crafts, also known as DEC.<sup>13</sup> Being associated with a public college also entitles the students to government loans and grants. In keeping with Bérubé's mandate, school fees are kept relatively low. In most courses, materials are available free of charge

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<sup>11</sup> The Montreal Centre for contemporary Textiles, written course description pamphlet, January 2000, The Montreal Centre for Contemporary Textiles collection, Montreal, Quebec.

<sup>12</sup> The Montreal Centre for Contemporary Textiles, advertising brochure, 2000, The Montreal Centre for Contemporary Textiles collection, Montreal, Quebec.

<sup>13</sup> "Un diplôme pour une carrière", The Montreal Centre for Contemporary Textiles, written course description pamphlet, 2001, The Montreal Centre for Contemporary Textiles collection, Montreal, Quebec.

or at a minimal cost. The fee for each of the two and a half month long courses, was set at \$180.00.

The dynamic programs that promise to emerge from the school for the new millennium clearly testify to the institution's progressive constitution. But the school did suffer a set back in 1996: Régine Mainberger, co-founder of the institution, died of cancer.

Régine Mainberger was director of textiles at the Visual Arts Centre of Montreal for the better part of the 1980's. Being a quilter and textile print artist, Mainberger was determined to expand the school's textile department and sought after a fellow artist willing and able to assist Mainberger with her mission. After attending a mutual workshop, Mainberger felt it appropriate to approach Louise Lemieux Bérubé about the possibility of assisting her with enlarging the textile program at the Visual Arts Centre. What brought the two together, in all likelihood, was Bérubé's strong interest in computer technology in textile art. Mainberger felt technology was "the wave of the future" and in order for textile art to thrive in the new millennium, computer technology, she felt, would have to become a comprehensible element of textile art. Though not a computer enthusiast herself, she encouraged Bérubé to pursue computer aided design technology and welcomed her expertise on the subject and so, a friendship and partnership, was born. It was through this partnership that Bérubé was asked by Mainberger to create a program for textiles as it relates to computer aided design, for the Visual Arts Centre.

The collaboration of Mainberger and Bérubé created a robust textile department at the Visual Arts Centre but the two believed an entire school dedicated to textiles was



wanting. After lobbying the Minister of Culture of Quebec, the two women received permission, plus a grant, to establish an independent school of textiles.

Once the endeavor was underway, by the late 1980's, Mainberger left her post at the Visual Arts Centre and dedicated her efforts to bringing a school of textiles to fruition. Following her employment at the Visual Arts Centre Mainberger continued to create quilts and taught textile printing at Concordia University in Montreal, up to her death in 1996. Despite years of service as director at the Visual Arts Centre, Mainberger insisted Bérubé become director of their new textile school. Mainberger preferred pedagogical pursuits and endorsed Bérubé to take on the administrative role of operating the school. This, in turn, was the impetus that allowed Bérubé the confidence to pursue other roles of leadership. Bérubé believes her collaboration with Mainberger propelled her to amplify her research into computer technology as it pertains to textiles. Although Mainberger herself was not computer savvy, she learned vicariously through Bérubé. At the time, not many textile artists in Quebec, or even Canada, were working with the relatively novel technology of computer aided design, yet Mainberger saw the potential of the union of art and technology. She believed Bérubé's expanding knowledge in the field of CAD would increase the credibility of their school of textiles and, to be sure, expand Bérubé's own work.

In addition to Mainberger's positive effect on Bérubé, she was also a driving force behind the newly formed Centre des Métiers d'art en Construction Textile, (1990). Mainberger was highly regarded for her artistic talents and her human relations with individual students. At the Centre des Métiers d'art en Construction Textile she taught a course in creativity that encouraged students to find and develop their own style, something she had done decades earlier after finding refuge in Canada during World War

II. Following her death in 1996 at the age of 65, Mainberger remains in essence, a positive spirit, if you will, at the newly named Montreal Centre for Contemporary Textiles. In 1997, by Bérubé's initiative, a quilt was dedicated in Mainberger's honor to the school. Several of the artist's closest friends and family members were asked to create one patch representing a unique time in the artist's life that they hold dear, which in turn, formed a large quilt that has now become a permanent addition to the main hall of the MCCT. The quilt serves as a reminder, to Bérubé, of her friend and mentor and of the years of assiduous, yet rewarding and collaborative work, which led to the establishment of the province's first independent school of textile art.

Despite the tragic loss of her colleague, Bérubé has maintained a vigorous agenda dedicated to ensuring the continued success of the school. In the year 2000, at the age of 57, Bérubé still managed to teach, exhibit and tour the world with enthusiasm. First and foremost a textile artist, (she cannot go long spells without weaving) Bérubé is also a natural teacher and is in her element when addressing a class. Her desire to establish the MCCT clearly displays her aspiration to share the craft she has come to master. She is resolved to ascertain Quebec becomes a major site for creativity and productivity in the area of weaving in the arts and crafts. The MCCT is the only studio/school which features the Pointcarré CAD software in the province. In the large studio over thirty hand looms occupy most of the space while an immense jacquard loom, for advanced students, is situated in the front of the studio. Some theory takes place in separate classes while practical application, which occupies more than 60% of an average student schedule, is accomplished in the studio. The school contains the latest model looms and current software programs coupled with powerful Macintosh computers, for optimal learning. In the 2000 brochure, Bérubé stipulates the institution's intention to simulate actual in-studio work situation.<sup>14</sup> With a faculty of ten (depending on the semester there may be

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<sup>14</sup> The Montreal Centre for Contemporary Textiles, advertising brochure, 2000, The Montreal Centre for Contemporary Textiles collection, Montreal, Quebec.

two or three more or less), students receive individualized attention and are able to master their skill with constant guidance from trained instructors.

Almost ten years after the school's inception, Bérubé realized yet another venture. September, 1998 marked the completion of her first book entitled, *Le Tissage Créateur*, the prefatory remarks in the book clearly display Bérubé's strong identification with her students.

“Je dédie le présent ouvrage particulièrement à mes étudiantes et étudiants du Centre des Métiers d'art en construction textile de Montreal. Que notre nouveau langage textile commun nous permette de mieux communiquer avec nos contemporains!”<sup>15</sup>

The MCCT has implemented job placement support for students for up to two years following graduation. Bérubé, aware of the difficulties a textile artist may face in acquiring work in her field, has secured collaboration between the MCCT and several institutions, such as the aforementioned Cégep du Vieux Montreal and SODEC (Société de Développement des Entreprises Culturelles), to help place graduates in productive work situations. Equipment and workspace is offered free of charge to students and recent graduates. This service allows the student/artist who has recently left the familiarity of the school environment, to remain connected to the institution where she can still find support if needed. Bérubé is acutely aware of the challenges facing textile artists, she feels the arts and crafts milieu is still marginalized by society. In her opinion, the fine arts, by and large, remain in higher regards than the arts and crafts in North America. Institutions such as the one run by Bérubé, gives the arts and crafts community an opportunity to increase its profile through highly trained individuals who are prepared to produce innovative quality work. Formal training offers the artist greater exposure to individuals and organizations willing and/or seeking to commission artists. The MCCT serves as a vital connective element for Quebec textile artists. This link allows artists to

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<sup>15</sup> Louise Lemieux Bérubé, *Le Tissage Créateur* (Montreal, Éditions Saint-Martin, 1998), 5.

associate with galleries, schools and organizations concerned more specifically with the arts and crafts. The growing number of alumni helps create a steady stream of skilled artists who are employed throughout Quebec and Canada and who contribute to the overall productivity and artistry of textile arts.

Bérubé has in several ways contributed to the arts and crafts milieu in Quebec, her art and school are two such powerful examples. Another way in which this artist has contributed to the Quebec arts and crafts milieu is through her pedagogical efforts in the aforementioned book she wrote. *Le Tissage Créateur*, is an instructional publication pertaining to the art of weaving. The ambitious undertaking became more work than anticipated when she first embarked on the project three years prior to its completion. Nevertheless, the three hundred and ninety-one page book was published in 1998 and became yet another instrument used by the artist to educate and tell her story about weaving. The well illustrated instructional book reflects Bérubé's extensive knowledge of the art of weaving. The book begins with the fairly elementary frame loom, explaining the origin of the warp and weft and their significance. It then displays several complex jacquard looms (black & white photographs) and describes the particular intricate functions of the loom. A centuries old Chinese print of a woman working a draw loom with a man on top pulling up the warp threads emphasizes the benefit of the mechanization of the modern jacquard loom. The book tackles the complex element of colours and how one can blend and contrast with success. She discusses in detail, design concept, patterning and textural make up while utilizing photographed examples of her own work, her student's textiles and also internationally known textile artists such as Fuyuko Matsubara from Japan. The twentieth and final chapter is dedicated to computer aided design in textiles, highlighting the Pointcarré system Bérubé learned while in France. The 1996 version of the Pointcarré software is utilized to explain the function of computer aided design. Bérubé's "labor of love" did not go unnoticed; the book received a positive review from *Textile Forum*, a German textile periodical published in German

and English.

"The present weaving textbook explains the author's teaching methods and contains everything worth knowing about hand weaving, from the simplest and most basic techniques up to highly complex processes for fabric construction that may only be carried out by means of computers and jacquard technology."<sup>16</sup>

However, the review was not without minor criticism.

"The publication by Lemieux- Bérubé merits translation into other languages since it is excellently suited for weaving courses at universities. However, any new editions should depict the drawings more clearly and seek to improve on the colour illustrations."<sup>17</sup>

In a personal letter from the author of the review to Bérubé, she expresses her enthusiasm about the book.

"You have done an enormous job which deserves translation into other languages! I already told the publishers Thames and Hudson in London...we will have to wait until the hype on technical textiles makes a growing demand for good books such as yours!"<sup>18</sup>

The book is yet another contribution by Bérubé to the art of textiles, judging by the above review, it is proving to be a highly regarded book for textile artists, amateurs or professionals, who seek to further their knowledge of weaving. *Le Tissage Créateur* offers readers a comprehensive look at the centuries old art form of weaving and how it can be a complex yet therapeutic and aesthetically pleasing art form. Mariette Rousseau-Vermette, one of the most established and well-known textile artist in Quebec and Canada, wrote the introduction to Bérubé's book. Rousseau-Vermette's contribution places an additional seal of important approval on Bérubé's effort. Vermette, being such

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<sup>16</sup> Beatrijs Stork, "Le Tissage Créateur," *Textile Forum*, (January 1999): 50.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

a well-known and respected textile artist nationally and internationally, affirms the author's work as a credible and significant piece of literature.

“L’auteure, Louise Lemieux-Bérubé, nous transmet son professionnalisme. Grace à l’élaboration de ce travail, on doit la considérer comme la principale ressource d’information en construction textile.”<sup>19</sup>

From her beginnings as an up and coming fashion designer to her development as a master weaver and professor of textile art at the MCCT, Bérubé has helped promote the art of weaving within Quebec and Canada. Bérubé has taught and influenced hundreds of students over the past decade at the MCCT and helped spread the seed of interest and activity for textile art throughout Quebec and beyond. Her explorative nature has led her to discover innovative ways to weave which in turn has enhanced her pedagogical abilities and has contributed to growing discourse concerning the use of computers in art. Bérubé has not been daunted by the sometimes steadfast resistance to computers in textile art by fellow artists. Through her extensive research into computer technology as it applies to textile art Bérubé continues to create tapestries full of colour, texture and warmth.

Bérubé's vast travels throughout Canada, USA, Europe and even Japan, lecturing about her research into technology and textiles, enhance her notability as a master weaver and expert in computer aided design as it applies to textiles. By traveling so extensively and addressing textile art, whether it is her intention or not, Bérubé serves as a representative of Quebec arts and culture. She represents, in part, Quebec's growing arts

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<sup>18</sup> Personal letter written by Beatrijs Stork to Louise Lemieux Bérubé, March 11, 1999, Hannover, Germany. Letter supplied by Louise Lemieux Bérubé.

and crafts milieu and is proof to the arts and crafts community at large that Quebec is abreast of the ever expanding field of textile arts. Receiving a review in *Textile Forum* only furthers Bérubé's goal of bringing weaving into the forefront of Quebec's art milieu. Gaining notoriety outside of Quebec allows Bérubé more accolades, which in turn gives her a larger platform in which to advance the art of weaving within Quebec.

Bérubé seems to effortlessly flow between the roles of artist and teacher. She is committed to teach the art of weaving and CAD as it applies to textiles to those who have an appetite for learning the art. The MCCT came to fruition because Bérubé and Mainberger believed textile art could stand independent as a viable artform deserving of indepth study and practice within Quebec. The apparent success of the school further exemplifies their belief. Assuming responsibility as educator at the MCCT inspired Bérubé to delve deeper into academia and endeavor to complete *Le Tissage Créateur*, a book detailing the art she has been dedicated to for over two decades. The completion of the book marked another milestone in Bérubé's career. The book, however, turned in to more work than anticipated but the fruits of her labor came to symbolize yet another advancement for textile art in Quebec.

Bérubé has made an indelible mark in the Quebec arts and crafts milieu, her school and her wall hangings are examples of textile artistry of an emerging new tradition. Committing to write an extensive book explaining the intricate world of weaving, further displays Bérubé's inexhaustible determination to demystify the art of weaving and take it beyond the margins into the very mainstream of Quebec culture.

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<sup>19</sup> Louise Lemieux Bérubé, *Le Tissage Créateur* (Montreal, Éditions Saint-Martin, 1998), 7.

### **At The Helm: Le Conseil des Métiers d'art du Québec**

Since 1990, Bérubé has presided over the most influential provincial governing body for the arts and crafts in Quebec, which is known as Le Conseil des Métiers d'art du Québec. The association is responsible for the Salon des Métiers d'art, which is proving to be a financial and artistic success. The 1998 Salon des Métiers d'art saw roughly 150,000 people visit and generated over 5 million dollars in sales.

In 1949 Quebec had its first craft association, Association Professionnelle Artisan du Québec, which was created by Jean-Marie Gauvreau.<sup>20</sup> As well as being responsible for the first arts and crafts association in Quebec, Gauvreau (1903-1970) founded the École du Meuble in 1935. Jean-Marie Gauvreau's hand made furniture, which can be viewed at galleries and museums across Canada, introduced the province to the art deco genre. He is regarded as one of the most influential Quebec artists of the twentieth century. His cultural and artistic contributions to the province have inspired many artisans. 1997 saw the formation of the Corporation des Métiers d'art en Charlevoix. This organization is comprised of professional artisans from the eastern region of Quebec who are dedicated to promoting the arts and crafts of eastern Quebec. Members come together to form a strong union of Charlevoix artists who exchange ideas and create works rich in tradition of past Quebec artisans, Gauvreau being one of their main influences. At the Salon des Métiers d'art, which is an annual arts and crafts fair held in Montreal, Gauvreaux's influence is present. The grand prize, also known as the

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<sup>20</sup> "Qu'est-ce que le Conseil des Métiers d'art du Québec?" Le Conseil des Métiers d'art du Québec, written pamphlet, Le collection Conseil des Métiers d'art du Québec, 1999, Montreal, Quebec.



“prix d’excellence”, of \$5000.00, is awarded to the top artist of the event in the name of Jean-Marie Gauvreau.

The Association Professionnelle Artisan du Québec attracted well-known artists from across Quebec such as Jean Cartier and Georges Delrue to name a few.<sup>21</sup> This conglomeration of artists eventually gave way to the regionalist style of provincial government of the 1970’s which preferred to disseminate funds to separate regions of Quebec rather than a single organization representing the entire province.<sup>22</sup> It would be almost two decades later before the province would have its next craft organization representing of all Quebec artisans. In the 1980’s, when the recession took its toll on the arts and crafts scene, leaving it with dismal sales, low productivity and poor quality imports, Le Conseil des Métiers d’art du Québec, also known as the CMA, came into being and was officially recognized by the Quebec government in 1988 as the sole association of professional craftspeople.<sup>23</sup> Similar to the mandate of the Association Professionnelle Artisan du Québec, the CMA remains concerned with the promotion of crafts, building arts and crafts’ commercial strength, the quality of the crafts and the viability of the association itself.<sup>24</sup> The CMA addresses the above concerns through various programs. One such successful venture is the Salon des Métiers d’art (fig. 3), an arts and crafts fair that brings close to 300 professional crafts people together to showcase and sell their work. A fee of \$57.51 is paid by each artist applying to participate in the salon. Their work is judged by a panel from the CMA which ultimately

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Louise Lemieux Bérubé, “A Turning Point for Crafts in Quebec,” *Ontario Craft* 18 (winter 1993): 10-11. Louise Lemieux Bérubé talks in detail about the Conseil des Métiers d’art du Québec.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid

selects participants of the event. Once accepted, depending on the space required, the artist may have to pay between \$200 to \$1000 for a kiosk to exhibit his/her work. The CMA requests a great deal of information from each applicant vying for a spot in the event. A curriculum vitae, copy of educational merits in the field of arts and crafts and slides of work are all required as part of the admission process. The CMA is adamant that only well trained professionals participate in the fair. It is the desire of the council to ensure the highest of quality objects are featured so a positive rapport with visitors, artists and the media is maintained. Since 1996, the two week event (which takes place at Place Bonaventure in Montreal, Quebec) has seen a steady increase in revenue. The CMA developed a more aggressive marketing approach, waved the entrance fee and in effect forced the Salon des Métiers d'art into the media. In the month of December (the event takes place annually from the first through to the third week in December) newspapers and billboards throughout the city of Montreal carry colourful, eye-catching posters advertising the event.

As head of the CMA Bérubé implemented several programs which enhanced the profile of arts and crafts in Quebec. She called for aggressive marketing of the Salon des Métiers d'art which directly resulted in increased public attendance. Due to the new strategy, the event has grown in popularity and is now a major event during the Christmas season in Quebec. Bérubé has also introduced stringent quality guidelines resulting in improved quality and productivity of goods produced under the auspices of the CMA. The CMA can now boast an impeccable reputation of representing artists who create top quality arts and crafts.

Bérubé's progressive leadership allowed for unprecedented growth of the CMA, its projects and affiliations. In spite of her successful leadership Bérubé is not one to rest on her laurels. In 1999 the Salon des Métiers d'art attracted just over 200,000 and generated close to 6 million dollars.<sup>25</sup> Despite the positive growth of the event, Bérubé, as president of the CMA, helped to implement even more innovative means of ensuring the Salon des Métiers d'art's popularity and longevity.

“En effet, un sondage effectué par la firme Omniscope au Salon 1998 auprès de plus de 400 personnes a révélé que les visiteurs souhaitaient majoritairement une transformation marquée du Salon en un événement élargi, incluant d'avantage d'exposants, des thématiques diversifiées et une variété plus grande de produits et de métiers artisanaux...”<sup>26</sup>

The revelations of the 1998 survey, which was implemented at the request of Bérubé, gave the CMA the impetus to expand the goods offered at the Salon. In 1999 the Salon included specialty bakery kiosks and even chocolate booths. Thematic arrangements also came at the request of the visiting public. Areas at the Salon have been arranged to offer specialized goods, such as table art for example, featuring dishes, glasses and cloth for the table, all of which can be found in a particular space in the hall. Adding specific arrangement to the event allowed for a more pleasurable experience for the public, as a result, sales increased yet again. Bérubé not only brought financial success to the Salon des Métiers d'art, she ushered in a new level of quality products. Bérubé initiated an

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<sup>25</sup> Figures supplied by Madame Lucy Morency, Secretary of The Conseil des Métiers d'art du Québec, 2001.

<sup>26</sup> Louise Lemieux Bérubé, “Message de la Présidente,” *Métiers d'Art* Volume 12, no. 1, (April 1999): 2.

exhibition featuring the elaborate costumes of the Cirque du Soleil, an internationally known circus group that originated in Montreal. The exhibition revealed how the idea for a costume is conceptualized on paper, then realized in textile. Bérubé's impetus for the exhibition was to bring textile art to the forefront of the arts and crafts event. Showcasing the widely popular Cirque du Soleil's elaborate costumes would generate more interest in the Salon des Métiers d'art and bring the milieu of textile art into the consciousness of the viewing public. The intricate designs from the Cirque du Soleil exhibition complimented Bérubé's own work, which was showcased as well. Bérubé allowed her wall hangings to be hung from the ceiling, without the benefit of a wall as backdrop. The wall hangings from her *Positive/Negative* show revealed the complexities of her work both front and back, much like the Cirque du Soleil's costumes. By suspending her work in mid air without the use of a wall framework, Bérubé allowed the public a particular viewing experience of tapestries not often seen. By displaying her work in this uncommon manner, Bérubé was stating her works' strength and independence as a featured art form worthy of intimate viewing. The wallhangings depicted images of dancers in mid-flight, full of energy and expression. The intricate weaving patterns allowed for greater detail and realism than any of her previous works. By using contemporary black and white photographed images and transforming them into wallhangings, Bérubé displayed weaving as a contemporary art form capable of taking modern, dynamic subject matter placing it in the context of textiles. Her works were for sale, unlike the Cirque du Soleil's costumes, but the manner in which Bérubé's work was displayed, both sides in full view, allowed for an increased viewing experience which displayed her work as more than a commodity that could be bought, but also a body of work that could be admired for its

artistic qualities and complexities. There was a sense of increased product quality and refinement with the inclusion of the Cirque du Soleil's exhibition. The costume exhibition offered the public a chance to escape the sometimes frenzied capitalist activities of the Salon and simply enjoy art, particularly textile art. The exhibition helped transform the event into more than a crafts fair, the yearly Christmas event took on in part, a museum aesthetic which allowed for cultural/artistic discourse. As an artist dedicated to the advancement of textile art and the arts and crafts in Quebec, Bérubé ushered in a new and welcomed outgrowth to the Salon.

The 2000 edition of the Salon des Métiers d'art generated close to 6.4 million dollars in sales. Bérubé's relentless quest for improvement resulted in increased revenue for the forty-five year old event which has become one of the oldest running arts and craft shows in North America.<sup>27</sup> Bérubé realized tapping into public interest would help further the success of the event and usher in a new public awareness of Quebec arts and crafts. Bérubé felt it necessary to draw in the public in part because her own field of textile art is a complicated area of arts and crafts not always readily accepted by society at large.

"Because they demonstrate so well both human manipulation and intervention, they may seem unrecognizable or unusual at first until our experience allows their absorption into our collective consciousness or individual psyches."<sup>28</sup>

Attempting to augment arts and crafts into mainstream art culture, through events such as the Salon des Métiers d'art, would help increase occasion for the arts and crafts to be absorbed into society's collective consciousness, as Bérubé speaks of, and play a more

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<sup>27</sup> Information gathered from brochure "Qu'est-ce que Le Conseil des Métiers d'art du Québec?" CMA collections Montreal, Quebec (December 1997): 10.

<sup>28</sup> Louise Lemieux Bérubé, Statement (1997), written as subsequent text to her Positive/Negative (1996) exhibition, Special Collections, Centre des Métiers d'art du Québec, Montreal.

significant role in society.

As of 1993, three years into Bérubé's presidency at the CMA, the organization could lay claim to generating 40% of the entire sales of craft goods in Quebec.<sup>29</sup> By the early 1990's arts and crafts was once again recognized as a cultural industry, largely due to the CMA. The association united arts and crafts artists throughout the province and gave them a stronger voice and greater presence throughout Quebec. The CMA, which has a membership of 700 professional artists, publishes a bi-monthly magazine highlighting arts and crafts activity in Quebec. The thin yet stylish publication has a professional appeal that attracts both artists and patrons alike. The minimal cost of \$2.50 per issue displays the organization's desire to create a perfusion of the arts and crafts throughout Quebec. The magazine, called *Métiers d'art*, features artists and their work and promotes galleries, boutiques and events dedicated to the arts and crafts in the province. The magazine offers artists yet another venue to display their talent. *Métiers d'art* extends opportunity to members to submit articles for publication and is free of charge for all members. Vital information such as artists' progress, international exhibitions and news of government grants can be found in *Métiers d'art*. The publication helps to maintain the council's viability and membership count. Articles and information on craft courses and exhibitions found in *Métiers d'art*, along with the fact that it highlights mainly Quebec artists, generates continued interest concerning Quebec arts and crafts and hence, maintains the CMA's *raison d'être*.

The CMA also acts as legal advisor for Quebec artisans interested in protecting their work against illegal reproduction. The CMA draws up contracts for artists and it also monitors sales and exhibitions in galleries, boutiques, and museums and on the internet, to ensure the artist's rights are being observed. Yvan Gauthier, director general of the CMA explains further,

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<sup>29</sup> Louise Lemieux Bérubé, "A Turning Point for Crafts in Quebec," Ontario Craft 18 (winter 1993): 10-11. Louise Lemieux Bérubé talks in detail about the Conseil des Métiers d'art du Québec.

“Comme les artistes en arts visuels, comme les écrivains, les artisans créateurs en métiers d’art possèdent des droits d’auteur sur les objets qu’ils conçoivent. La loi Québécoise sur le statut de l’artiste (S32.01) votée en 1989 oblige tous les diffuseurs à signer un contrat de diffusion avec les créateurs des oeuvres.”<sup>30</sup>

To ensure high quality of goods being created by artists the CMA oversees school/workshop training and programming agendas. The CMA tries to ensure the products developed by sanctioned institutions registered with the CMA and recognized by the Quebec’s Ministry of Education, are technically sound. The association has artisans from all sectors of the arts and crafts who rate the quality of the crafts and offer input as to how to improve the technical and/or artistic component of the work. By ensuring quality work is produced throughout Quebec, the CMA is helping to strengthen the economic, as well as, cultural profile of the arts and crafts. The strict agenda enforced by the CMA may appear too stringent for some but the association is made up of artists who have agreed that the best method for protecting and furthering the integrity of the arts and crafts is by banding together to form a common program. All members of the CMA must be professional craftsperson whose primary interest is working in his/her field creating and selling high quality crafts as well as possibly offering services in design, production, restoration and training.<sup>31</sup>

A 1993 article by Bérubé shows her obsession with quality.

“The quality of products at all levels, the quality of events, the quality of training, the quality of craftsmanship, the quality of the image of craft, the quality of marketing...find the key word! It is only through constant effort to search for quality and excellence that

<sup>30</sup> Yvan Gauthier, “Message du Director General,” *Métiers d’Art* Volume 12, no. 1, (April 1999): 3.

<sup>31</sup> For more information on the CMA see brochure “Qu’est-ce que Le Conseil des Métiers d’art du Québec?” December (1997) CMA collections Montreal, Quebec.

craft will take the place it deserves, and will further contribute to defining and promoting the cultural identity of Quebec.”<sup>32</sup>

Bérubé's impetus for helping advance the arts and crafts in Quebec are evident in her commitment to the CMA. Her ten years as president brought about notable change critical to the increased prosperity of the arts and crafts. The Salon des Métiers d'art has generated millions of dollars in revenue for Quebec artists and serves as one of the most significant arts and crafts events in the country. Through a concerted effort the CMA has created a number of credible venues for artists to showcase their work. The Marché Bonsecours is the site of the head office of the CMA which is located in Old Montreal. This particular sector of Montreal is a popular tourist site during the summer months and a large number of these tourist visit the Marché Bonsecours where the CMA has created a banquet of crafts stores open to the public. Exclusively Quebec artists affiliated with the CMA may sell their goods in one or more of the several shops gainfully situated in the heart of Old Montreal.

The most important element of the association is the artists who make up the very core of the organization. With increasing productivity and high quality goods, the CMA exists to carry out the concerns and wishes of its artists while serving a growing patron base who serve as the lifeline to the craftsperson. It is the paying public and private businesses that help to boost a craftsperson's career, both sectors must be made constantly aware of the products created by the artists, or the financial feasibility of arts and crafts in Quebec will dwindle. The CMA's rise to prominence as a significant cultural and artistic organization within the Quebec cultural-political milieu is in part the result of Bérubé's insightful and determined leadership. Her extensive career as a textile artist prepared her for the presidency. As a practicing artist herself, she is fully capable of representing craftspeople throughout the province, as she clearly understands their needs. Her worldwide travels have allowed her to witness diverse arts and crafts organizations

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<sup>32</sup> Louise Lemieux Bérubé, "A Turning Point for Crafts in Quebec," *Ontario Craft* 18 (winter 1993): 11.



which strengthen her ability to lead the CMA in a progressive and largely efficient manner. Her “pet project” during her leadership at the CMA was the Salon des Métiers d’arts which has boasted a steady increase in revenue and notoriety for the past four years.

## **CHAPTER 2 *POUR LA PASSION DES TEXTILES* (2000)**

### **Pour la Passion des Textile: An Analysis**

This chapter deals with the documentation and analysis of *Pour la Passion des Textiles* (2000), the most recent solo exhibition of textile artist Louise Lemieux Bérubé. Following years of study in the field of computer aided design as it applies to textile art, Madame Bérubé has generated an ambitious body of work that blends the worlds of art and science. The exhibition marks an aesthetic and technical evolution worthy of analysis. The tapestries in the exhibition are created with the use of Pointcarré software created by two French software designers, Olivier Masson and François Roussel. Pointcarré, when used properly, can yield greater detail from a selected image enabling the textile artist to achieve more intricate patterning in the work. Bérubé used photographs to create images for her tapestries. The photograph was scanned then digitized by the computer. Observing the monitor, Bérubé then modified form and colour then printed the design. The image, which upon close inspection, appears as a series of dark and light points, was then fed into the jacquard loom which uses the binary language of 1's and 0's (which is the basic language of all computers) to read the image. By digitizing the image the computer is able to attain greater detail and hence able to create far more intricate patterning for the loom. The warp ends move accordingly when a positive demarcation is sensed and does the opposite when there is a negative or no demarcation read. The more information read, the greater detail the loom can achieve. It is, however, still up to the artist to input the information and choose colour and tonal changes. Creating a cartoon, which is the design to be feed to the jacquard loom, can take hundred of hours to complete, however, with the use of computers, the process is completed in a matter of hours, sometimes less. Bérubé is a computer knowledgeable individual who is intrigued and motivated by the increasingly computerized North American society in which she lives. She is surrounded by computers and tapestries in

her home and at her school, The Montreal Centre for Contemporary Textiles. Even in her school's 2000 brochure, a computer is featured with yarns and finely woven materials on the cover. Bérubé boldly displays technology alongside cloth (which implicitly indicates the very early beginning of humankind) with no hesitation. Unlike some textile artists who use the computer as part of language making a social statement against the use of technology in art, the computer functions as a tool. like the flat shuttle or tapestry comb for example. (albeit the computer is far more complex and expensive) for Bérubé.

Bérubé's most recent solo exhibition displays an entirely new side of the artist. Following her *Positive/Negative* exhibition where she utilized photographs from established photographers as the basis for her wall hangings. Bérubé has now learned the art of photography and provided herself with photographic images for her textiles. *Pour la Passion des Textiles* (2000) is a two part exhibition where the viewer is greeted by tapestries and photographs throughout the gallery. With the exception of four, the wall hangings are noticeably smaller than the close to two meter tall works from her previous show. The smaller works average a size of 46cm x 60cm and take on a scenic quality due to their size, framing and subject matter. Bérubé's approach to this exhibition is inherently personal. Her new found interest in photography is intrinsic in her wall hangings. Two works in particular reveal a more personal relationship between the artist and the subject matter.

When working on her previous exhibition, Bérubé developed a respect for the art of photography. She was fascinated with the way photographers were able to capture moments in time on film. She set out to teach herself the art and bought a camera immediately following the opening of the *Positive/Negative* (1996) exhibition and began photographing subjects that interested her. The act directly lead to her most recent exhibition. Following two years of photographing flowers and scenic sites throughout the Quebec city of LaSalle (less than 7km from downtown Montreal) and even in France, her skills as a photographer improved greatly. She trained her eyes to see beauty through the

camera lens.

“Depuis, j’ai découvert mon intérêt pour la photographie. J’ai réalisé une série de photos en observant la nature et plus particulièrement les fleurs... Récemment, en vue de cette exposition à LaSalle, j’ai regardé d’un oeil neuf les rives du fleuve et notre patrimoine culturel bâti.”<sup>1</sup>

Bérubé refers to her photographic images as magic instances. Her love for nature and particularly flowers, is what drove her to choose them as subject matter for her latest exhibition. A review of the exhibition in local newspaper, *The LaSalle Messenger*, further exemplifies the artist’s close relation to her home city of LaSalle, and her desire to relate the natural beauty she sees in her city to fellow citizens.

“Une autre série d’oeuvres de petits formats a été réalisée spécialement pour le public LaSallois sur le thème de la beauté du fleuve et des sculptures à LaSalle.”<sup>2</sup>

Bérubé discusses her artistic intentions in the same newspaper article.

“Durant l’automne, j’ai regardé le fleuve et LaSalle à travers l’objectif de mon appareil photo et préparé par la suite une série d’oeuvres textiles mesurant environ 15 po x 15 po. Seules ou regroupées, ces oeuvres manifestent de la beauté de notre appartenance à ce coin de pays.”<sup>3</sup>

*Pour la Passion des Textiles* is a celebration of nature through the art of textiles and photography, this time, the photographs belong to the artist. The transition was inevitable, from borrowing images from photographers to create wall hangings (fig. 4) in her previous exhibition and subsequently sharing credit with them, to creating the subject matter for her wall hangings herself, she has emerged in complete artistic and contextual control of her work. *Pour la Passion des Textiles* was a journey for the senses. Gone was

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<sup>1</sup> Louise L. Bérubé, “Arts et Culture” *The LaSalle Messenger* (January 9, 2000): 9.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

the long list of contributing artists to a single tapestry, the viewer was invited to follow Bérubé's photographic progress and then relate and/or compare it to her tapestries. The impetus was evident. Bérubé wished for the viewer to experience the beauty of nature in a deeply personal manner. By becoming a skilled photographer and taking the pictures herself, she has full control of her exhibition and inherently creates an exhibition of self expression. Images of flowers in colour photographs were created with a zoom lens and softly detailed using a diffuser. Across the room of the gallery, abstract patterning of the same images were presented through the art of weaving. The focal point of the exhibition, situated roughly at the center of the gallery was a wall hanging entitled, *Rose*, (fig. 5). Bérubé used the Pointcarré computer aided design software to create the image. The subtle hints of purple, green and yellow which highlight and contour the subject inferred rather than clearly depicted the image. This inference provides the viewer with a layered viewing experience. The viewer can consciously determine the subject in the wall hanging and see and enjoy it for what it is and/or become immersed in the abstracted colour blends and mastery weaving skills of the artist. The exhibition allows viewers freedom to experience the show as they wish. Bérubé's previous exhibition concisely exposed the artist's intentions. A complete explanation of the title, detailed images and full credit allocated to all involved in the multi-layered process of the works meant the viewer was carefully directed as to how to view the show. Her most recent exhibition offers little text explaining the exhibition. Abstract images seem to cajole rather than require the viewer to experience the works. The abstraction of her tapestries meant a new sense of liberation for the artist. Bérubé released any former concerns and constraints of representation, and affirmed her emotion and imagination room to expand. There is an increased sense of empathy in her recent works as opposed to her former exhibition which appeared to simply regurgitate found photographic images in a different medium but essentially maintain the same meaning as the original photograph.

By foregoing detail for colour and shading, Bérubé created in the wall hanging,

entitled *Rose* (fig. 6), the ‘essence’ of a rose. By not committing to every detail of the flower, the artist was able to add her own insight and emotion to the piece. The colours and shading indicate the artist’s close relationship with the flower. It is obvious the subject matter had been studied, even adored, by the artist. Bérubé appeared to have created her tapestries through a spiritual connection with nature as opposed to what many regard as the inhuman automation of computer technology. The abstraction of Bérubé’s floral tapestries is best described when comparing her work to impressionist painters. This mode of creativity is discussed in *Art and the Creative Unconscious*.

“This process is evident in the landscapes of the Impressionists. The transformation begins with the outside world, which becomes psychic and gradually loses its objective character. Instead of painting a segment of the outside world, the artist paints for painting’s sake, concerning himself only with the inherent modality of the picture, with color and form; the psychic symbol has replaced the object. But through *participation mystique* this psychic symbol has a closer, more effective, and more inward contact with the segment of the world to which it relates than a naturalistic, objective picture, dictated by consciousness and “made” with detachment.”<sup>4</sup>

Bérubé makes the transformation of the subject through her own supersensible relation with nature and appears to have overcome the inhuman stigma associated with technology. In order to alter the scanned image on the computer screen to the degree that Bérubé did her floral images, an in depth knowledge of the subject must be attained before the transformation. Although the computer can modify the image, the artist must first become immersed in the very essence of the object, then command the computer to perform modifications according to the artist’s wants and needs. This can become an engrossing task where skill and creative instinct are a must. When an image is brought up on screen and magnified several times it becomes distorted, the artist must rely on her intimate knowledge of the subject in order to successfully treat the picture.

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<sup>4</sup> Erich Neumann, *Art and the Creative Unconscious*, (New York:Harper,1959), 119.

Bérubé's creative freedom in *Pour la Passion des Textiles* constitutes a display of self-expression, her idea of beauty is represented through her floral wall hangings. The viewer is bestowed with a collection of tapestries and photographs that reveal the personal passion of the artist. Gone are the constraints of the previous exhibition where Bérubé was forced to consider the requests of photographers who required viewing the tapestry work in order to offer their final approval. *Pour la Passion des textiles* is a celebration of weaving and a strong display of Bérubé's idea of beauty through the abstracted subject matter in her wall hangings.

When Bérubé's most recent exhibition is examined it becomes lucid that her conceptual approach to weaving has changed quite resolutely. The art of weaving itself is predominant and the artist's conceptualization of each wall hanging is her own. Her relatively new found enthusiasm for the art of photography enabled Bérubé to create her own subject matter. After re-discovering nature and its beauty through the camera lens, Bérubé translated the findings to her wall hangings. By relinquishing the formal qualities of the photograph and allowing herself creative liberty, she was able to incorporate the art of photography into the art of weaving without sacrificing the integrity of the latter. The fiber gave new tactility and texture to the image but in this body of work Bérubé went beyond the photographic image and re-created a new image in her tapestries.

“En résumé, cette exposition ne se limite pas qu’au tissage...elle veut célébrer la beauté de la nature, les liens qui nous unissent et l’espoir a offrir à tous les enfants du monde.”<sup>5</sup>

Bérubé's personal reflection of *Pour la Passion des Textiles* revealed her interest in a more visceral, introspective reaction to her latest exhibition. Bérubé showed no hesitation in incorporating technology and art. The digitization of the photograph so that it can be read by the computer is a form of deconstruction of the image. The philosopher

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<sup>5</sup> Louise L. Bérubé, “Arts et Culture” *The LaSalle Messenger* (January 9, 2000): 9.

Walter Benjamin mused about the very “aura” of an object being destroyed due to its reproduction. The technology Bérubé uses takes the image, breaks it apart, reconstructs it so as to be understood by the computer, then re-creates a new image that is interpreted by the jacquard loom. The “aura” of the original photograph was changed. A new history was created when the image was transformed into another medium. The intention of Bérubé was not to maintain the “aura” of the photograph to be used in the wall hanging, it was to re-create, and to re-define the image as it related to textiles. Her most recent exhibition is testimony to this approach. The tapestries entail their own tradition and history. The image re-created in the wall hangings belong to the warp and weft of the textile created by the artistic intuition of the artist.

Walter Benjamin believed the copy of the original allowed the original object to reach more people but with the absence of its true setting, its history was missing. Walter Benjamin writes,

“One might generalize by saying: the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition. By making many reproductions it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence.”<sup>6</sup>

Since Bérubé is using one art form as inspiration for another, the process cannot be considered reproduction in the sense that Benjamin speaks of. Much the same way painters, photographers and indeed most artists use nature as their subject matter and bear works of art deriving from that environment which they see and experience, Bérubé takes the image of nature from her own photograph and uses that vision to deliver her textiles. The textiles Bérubé created in *Pour la Passion des Textiles* are a re-creation of a scene of nature taken from her photographs, not a reproduction of the photograph. The scene in

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<sup>6</sup> Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” *Illuminations* (New York Schocken 1969), 221.



the photograph is reinterpreted by Bérubé and assumes the new language of cloth in its new medium.

Some would argue the use of technology in textile design subverts the human tradition associated with weaving. William Morris who lead the arts and crafts movement of the late nineteenth century believed the industrial revolution would be the end of “the beautiful” if society wasn’t willing to usurp the current trend and resort back to a time when all was made by hand. Morris’s dreams of Utopia were just that, dreams. His desire to resort back to a time gone by was unnatural to the very essence of human beings.

“His Utopia was a loving place, where gentle people laughed lightly at the thought of pain. Their happiness was based upon respect for the environment and the integration of daily life with the processes of work. The people of his Utopia ambled through life in a relaxed, confident way, passively enjoying the fruits of a man-made paradise. They had what they needed and so they didn’t need to change, progress or criticize. They had gone beyond time. They just were.”<sup>7</sup>

Human psychology warrants that the mind, body and soul evolve, adapt and change through the continuum of time. Morris’s call to a Utopian society whereby the masses would reject machines, can be equated to asking society to reject human evolution. Change is inevitable and with change people develop the mechanisms to adapt to and engage the new elements present in society. In the twenty-first century, negotiating with technological breakthroughs is not to reject or succumb to them, but to work with them.

*Pour la Passion des Textiles* is an ideal example of such mediation. By allowing technology into her world of textile art Bérubé learned to use the technology and have it perform to her liking. Working in tandem with technology resulted in aesthetically pleasing textiles in her latest exhibition. Through Bérubé’s latest tapestries, it would appear that evolving with time and technology doesn’t necessarily have to result in the

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<sup>7</sup> Paul Greenhalgh, “The Trouble with Utopia,” *Crafts*, (1990): 24

end of quality and skillfully created works of art.

## **CHAPTER 3 ART AND TECHNOLOGY**

### **Past, Present and Future will Merge**

Textile artists incorporating computer technology to create their works are shaping a new tradition in textile art. Louise Lemieux Bérubé is among a growing number of such artists active in the area of computer aided design as it applies to textiles. This new method of creation is developing through the inevitability of society's evolutionary pattern. As time progresses, the body changes, as does the mind's very perception of the world it exists in. It is this constant development that has helped to create the new tradition of weaving. As Walter Benjamin so aptly observes:

“The uniqueness of a work of art is inseparable from its being imbedded in the fabric of tradition. This tradition itself is thoroughly alive and extremely changeable.”<sup>1</sup>

Amidst Benjamin's lamentation of the fate of art in modern society arrived a thought of acceptance and understanding of the ever changing idea of tradition. Benjamin realized civilization continues to grow and hence, evolve. It is this constant evolution that accompanies the changeability of societies' perception of tradition. As long as time continues to advance, so will our ideas and understanding of the world around us.

As more and more textile artists delve into the world of technology, increasingly more literature is generated extolling the virtues and vices of the inclusion of the computer in the field of arts and crafts. For many, there is a sense of panicked concern while others are bursting with enthusiasm and have great hope for the growing insurgence of computer assisted art. Those who are either for or against the integration of computer technology into the art process represent individuals from many different vantage points in the art world. Art critics, curators, art professors and artists alike, are involved in the discourse. Revealing the thoughts of individuals involved in the art

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” Illuminations (New York, Schocken 1969), 223.

world, along with the personal viewpoint of textile artist Louise Lemieux Bérubé, will disclose ways in which art, using computer technology, triumphs over the controversy.

As the concept of tradition continues to alter, so does the centuries old art form of weaving. The current wave of technological advancements reaches deep into the arts and crafts milieu. The traditional scene of a weaver at her loom, assiduously and slowly creating her work, is being replaced by the artist who works with an expensive computer system hitched up to a loom. Louise Lemieux Bérubé is confident the addition of the computer is a positive one, and believes change is inevitable. In this sense, Bérubé follows in the footsteps of poet and philosopher Paul Valéry, who writes,

“Mais l’étonnant accroissement de nos moyens, la souplesse et la précision qu’ils introduisent nous assurent de changements prochains et très profonds dans l’antique industrie du Beau.”<sup>2</sup>

Valéry foresaw the inevitability of technology and seemed to embrace it.

“Il faut s’attendre que de si grandes nouveautés transforment toute la technique des arts, agissent par là sur l’invention elle-même, aillent peut-être jusqu’à modifier merveilleusement la notion même de l’art.”<sup>3</sup>

These lines were written before computers had invaded the offices, homes and, if you will, psyche of the west, Valéry understood innovation to be a part of the artistic milieu, and believed technology would indeed alter our very perception of art. It could be said that both Valéry and Benjamin are eluding to similar concepts as far as society’s changing ideas and tastes towards art is concerned. The inevitability of humankind’s continuously changing comprehension of tradition as it applies to art allows for the emerging tradition of computer aided design, as it applies to textiles, to flourish.

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<sup>2</sup> Jean Hytier, Paul Valéry: Ouvres (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1960), 1284.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

## **The Past**

Scrutinizing the present milieu of art with regards to weaving and technology, it is obvious the tradition of weaving, its processes and the work it produces, is undergoing dramatic change. In order to understand this change it is necessary to examine the historical background of weaving and its previous innovative transition.

For the better part of 200 years, since Joseph-Marie Jacquard (1752-1834) invented the loom of his namesake in 1801,<sup>4</sup> the jacquard loom has been the machine of choice for many weavers. The jacquard loom enabled an artist to create stylized, intricate weave patterns in a relatively short period of time. Weaving with a drawloom was a two person exercise where one would weave while the other would draw the warp strings. The second person was not fully immersed in the creative process, it was manual labor with little creativity involved. Prior to the jacquard loom, weavers were limited in their choice of design and adding to this limitation, the entire process was, in a word, slow. The accession of the jacquard loom meant the liberation of the artist. She was free to work without the additional set of hands. The level of creativity rose significantly and time spent at the loom was cut dramatically. This invention marked a significant advancement in creativity and production for textile artists. Jacquard had created a machine that was a technological marvel for Europeans and eventually the rest of the world.

Intricate designs such as floral compositions with slight curves, could be fully realized with the jacquard loom, unlike a hand loom which is limited to less complex degrees of design. The jacquard loom functions through a card system. These cards have holes punched in them corresponding to the actual warp end that is to be moved. Each card represents one line or row of work. The cards are hooked together and suspended

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<sup>4</sup> For additional information pertaining to the history of the jacquard loom see Janice Lourie, Textile Graphics/Computer Aided Design.

from the top of the loom where it is fed into the machine. The functioning of the loom is based on a positive/negative system. If there is a hole punched in the card, that hole is deemed positive, no hole is viewed as negative and the warp end for the corresponding block does not react. This binary system is the element in which the analytical engine, which is the forerunner to today's high speed computers, are predicated upon. Janice Lourie, in her 1973 book entitled, *Textile Graphics/Computer Aided*, offered a lucid description of the intricate mechanism of the loom. Lourie also made the connection between the jacquard loom and how it in fact inspired the analytical engine created by Charles Babbage.

“The Analytical Engine, developed between 1833 and 1840, was the direct predecessor of modern computers; it was capable of performing any sequence of mathematical operations upon command from a series of instructions. The instructions which were fed into the engine in the form of punched cards, which, as we now know, was inspired by the Jacquard loom which was considered a significant achievement of its time.”<sup>5</sup>

The primary system of operation of the jacquard loom was the very inspiration of the analytical engine. The two machines shared an obvious link in the early nineteenth century when both were fairly new to the world but over the decades that connection has weakened, due to the tremendous evolution of the computer through rapidly developing technology, particularly in the last 50 years. Computers have diminished in size, they are now portable enough to fit into a briefcase, whereas the jacquard loom remains a fairly large piece of machinery not easily transportable. Once the structural and logical foundation of the computer had been accomplished, the race to build faster, and smaller machines was on, while the jacquard loom remained essentially the same.

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<sup>5</sup> Janice Lourie, Textile Graphics/Computer Aided (New York: Fairchild Publications, Inc. 1973), 21.

## **The Present**

By the 1960's, the computer would come full circle and enter the textile milieu to aid with patterning and begin to work closely with its predecessor, the jacquard loom. IBM led the way in computer aided design, herein known as CAD, and twenty years hence, Apple computer systems also developed computers fit for the loom. Artists, mathematicians and computer technologists realized the immense potential in technology. Computers were powerful enough to go beyond algebraic problems and deal with design and colour.

“And then came the computer. Computers were designed to add, subtract, multiply, and divide-totally alien to art. But the crafty heritage of a thousand generations of artists came to the fore. The computer was compelled to obey the will of the artist, to be an extension of their creative powers. It was a new tool with tremendous flexibility for producing form and color.”<sup>6</sup>

Early IBM systems had limitations but were nevertheless a tremendous leap forward for designers who were in search of methods that would cut time between pattern creation and actual production of the textile on the loom. The cathode ray tube, herein known as CRT, and the light pen, were used to draw images. The figure could be modified once in the computer but only slightly. The pen had a blunt tip and was unsatisfactory for designers who desired to create fine intricate patterns.<sup>7</sup> Once the design was completed the computer would print out the information in the binary language of 0's and 1's, which would be read by the loom. Because of this process the loom could achieve more intricate patterning imagined by the artist. The more information on the cards, the higher potential for a complexly detailed textile.

Two consequential inventions, the jacquard loom and the analytical engine, the

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<sup>6</sup>Melvin L. Prueitt, Art and the Computer (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1984), 2.

<sup>7</sup>Janice Lourie offers a comprehensive study concerning the evolution of computers in her book Textile Graphics/Computer Aided.

latter brought to fruition because of the former, were invented by the French. Although the analytical engine was invented primarily for algebraic problem solving, and the loom for creating functional and aesthetic tapestries, the analytical engine's birth is intrinsically linked to the jacquard loom. Following close to two hundred years in existence, technology has evolved the computer so that it may be useful in textile studios to aid with design. However, the computer alone cannot create intricate design patternings, it has to be instructed to do so, it is computer software that formulates the designs into readable material for computers. Software was designed on floppy disks up to the mid 1980's, then came computer disks, slightly smaller, 90mm in diameter, and able to contain far more information than the floppy disk. Today, there is software available on minidisks (about half the size of regular disks with even greater memory capability) and disks, you can even acquire software via internet by downloading pertinent programs directly onto your computer. The software used by artist Louise Lemieux Bérubé was yet another invention to aid the textile industry made by the French. The software, named Pointcarré, was created by Olivier Masson and François Roussel of Bretagne, France. Bérubé was taught firsthand by the programmers during a 1980 excursion to France. She returned to Canada with a strong working knowledge of computer aided design relating to textile art. Sixteen years hence, following several upgrades to the Pointcarré system, Bérubé had become highly skilled in CAD. The work she created using the system is unlike any of her previous tapestries. The complexity and realism in her 1996 exhibition, *Positive/Negative*, would not have been possible using the light pen of the 1960's. In Bérubé's most recent solo exhibition, *Pour la Passion des Textiles* (2000), she used the latest Pointcarré software to achieve highly abstracted subject matter in her textiles. Bérubé's recent work fluidly reveals the union of art and technology and embraces the relatively new method of production. This particular collaboration of art and computers was destined to transpire, considering the evolutionary paths of the art of weaving and computers. The hybridization of technology and the



jacquard loom has undoubtedly created some unrest and concern in the arts and crafts community. Some view technology advancing on the arts and crafts as inevitable and seek to welcome it, while others believe technology will remove the artist from art.

### **Communion with New Technology**

Most concerns pertaining to technology blending with art cannot be ignored. Those who actively endeavor to bring the two worlds closer together must face possible problems arising from the emerging new tradition. Among the many concerns of CAD in textile art is cost. A textile artist inclined to follow the technological wave and create work with the aid of computers will no doubt take on a creative and financial venture. Bérubé's years of extensive research in the field of textile art and technology, has allowed her to share her knowledge with students and established artists alike. Realizing the tremendous cost to artists interested in CAD, through government funding, Bérubé has created one of the few CAD textile programs in North America and rarer still in Canada. By furnishing computers, software and training, Bérubé hopes to bridge the seemingly inescapable rift between artists along economic lines. She feels the best way to combat the costs of technology is to furnish students and up and coming textile artists with fundamental equipment required for artistic growth, at low cost or even free of charge. By helping textile artists achieve their artistic goals through the use of studio time at her school, The Montreal Centre for Contemporary Textiles, Bérubé stands to help hundreds, if not thousands of artists over the years, evolve into skilled weavers in the field of textile art and CAD. The generous help of Bérubé allows artists a chance to extend their careers without incurring hefty additional costs, which can run into the thousands of dollars when using advanced computer systems.

The tradition of weavers communing and working in shifts to create their tapestries date back hundreds of years. Weavers meeting and working at a common locale create a community where they may exchange artistic ideas and/or concerns. The advent of the computer to weaving only furthers this movement. Many artists have little choice but to utilize the services of a studio furnished with the latest equipment due to the high cost of owning a computer system and weaving equipment capable of creating highly

intricate designs for textiles. Bérubé's initiative has enabled many Quebec weavers, so inclined to work with CAD, to operate quite regardless of their financial background. Bérubé's generosity allows yet established textile artists, who are less likely to be financially stable, a chance to develop their skills without spending a great deal of money.

While exposing students to the new world of CAD, Bérubé uses the aid of modern technology to assist in creating tapestries, and in so doing, proves technology has contributed to, rather than subtracted from, the art form. Her work remains highly tactile and human while simultaneously revealing innovation and insight not seen in her earlier works. There are indeed artists who utilize computers to create works that illustrate a particular patterning of a chosen fabric resulting in an image of textile, without cloth. Artist, Alicia Broide who creates such work believes the computer is a separate and foreign entity that creates art within a new light.

"The computer is the space of another encounter, in between spaces, a new location with its own resources."<sup>8</sup>

Printed computer images of textiles without cloth offers a metaphorical relation to textiles instead of a literal one. It is a display of disconnection between the computer and art. This facet of production eliminates the need for fibers, the very foundation of textile art and hence attempts to prove the deconstructive nature of computers in art.

Bérubé has not opted to ostracize cloth. Her work remains grounded in the tactility of fibers. Work from her most recent exhibition displays a harmonic sensitivity to colour, minute tonal differentiation and convincingly showcases abstract representation. Her 1996 exhibition, *Positive/Negative*, has since received a fair amount of media coverage. In a 1998 Montreal Gazette article the writer describes Bérubé's work.

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<sup>8</sup> Alicia Broide, "Electronic Textiles: New Possibilities." *Fiberart* (Summer 1996): 42.

“Her monochromatic textiles with touches of violet and red endow the images with depth that doesn’t exist in the original photos.”<sup>9</sup>

In May, 1997, Serge Desrochers of *Le Messenger de LaSalle* wrote,

“Chacun des grands tissages offre au visiteur une étonnante vue sur le travail artistique des danseurs ou la sensibilité, l’expression, le mouvement et la perspective s’articulera autour de deux entrées: le noir et le blanc.”<sup>10</sup>

The discourse surrounding Bérubé’s work is seeded within human experience. Claiming her work exposes depth and surprise indicate human essence is alive in Bérubé’s computer aided textile design tapestries. The artist herself believes the computer simply eliminates long hours of design preparation; the creative process remains that of the artist.<sup>11</sup> Weaver Chloe Colchester also believes the artist can work in tandem with computers.

“...the jacquard loom, with its system of punched cards, was after all the forerunner of the computer. It is also an interesting example of the way in which the intangible-electronic data processing-can be used to heighten our awareness of the tangible.”<sup>12</sup>

The computer can augment the complexity of textiles with intricate patterning achieved with the use of CAD. This complex ornamentation results in works such as that of Madame Bérubé. The artist well versed in this mode of production can achieve detail and subtle shading with convincing realism and master craftsmanship. With this new technology, weavers who choose to utilize CAD can increase the speed of productivity,

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<sup>9</sup> Charlie Fidelman, “Woven images.” *The Gazette* (March 12, 1998) Arts & Leisure section.

<sup>10</sup> Serge Desrochers, “La ministre Louise Beaudoin assiste au vernissage de Louise Lemieux-Bérubé au Centre Henri-Lemieux.” *Le Messenger de LaSalle* (May 4, 1997) Culture section.

<sup>11</sup> Information taken from an audio taped interview with Louise Lemieux Bérubé conducted by the author in 1999.

<sup>12</sup> Chloe Colchester, “High-Tech and Texture.” *Crafts* (Sept./Oct 1991): 33.

and stretch the boundaries of artistry.

“The computer allows for rapid visualization of complex spatial concepts at a different level of conceptual decision making, as well as for ease in quickly cycling through color harmonies when making decisions about colour composition. Pluralistically, applications for the computer open out important new avenues to art making beyond rigid categories. Interactive environments enter an expanded realm where a different set of abstract relationships can be brought into play.”<sup>13</sup>

The relatively moderate pace of weaving using an unmodified jacquard loom is giving way, for some, to computer aided looms. Work time is reduced and artists, like Bérubé, are more than able to produce highly palatable works through this advanced process. Bérubé sees this innovation as a positive addition to the weaving community.

“The computer doesn’t replace the creative process... but it makes things a whole lot faster. Without the computer it would take about 500 hours just to prepare the design.”<sup>14</sup>

The end of the twentieth century has seen major advancements in the field of computer assisted textile designs and with that the culture of weaving has taken on a new element, the computer. Artists and viewers are facing a new tradition in weaving. Although the practice is relatively new to the art milieu, (30 years old but major advancements have come forth in the past 15 years) artists who explore this method are adapting to it quite easily and so are viewers. Many artists now speak of RAM, bits and disks along with the warp and weft of their work. Viewers at Bérubé’s two most recent exhibitions viewed her work with enthusiastic curiosity. Patrons were just as eager to understand the process as they were to enjoy the aesthetic quality of her work. In newspaper reviews of her work she received mostly accolades. Bérubé has helped to

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<sup>13</sup> Margot Lovejoy, Postmodern Currents: Art and Artists in the Age of Electronic Media, (New Jersey, Prentice-Hall 1997), 177.

<sup>14</sup> Louise Lemieux Bérubé quoted in Charlie Fidelman, “Woven Images” The Gazette (March 12, 1998) Arts and Leisure section.

demystify and de-demonize the computer, through her tapestries. Her relentless pursuit of artistic excellence with the use of computers and her ability to teach the very process of CAD as it applies to textiles, to others, has created a bridge that reaches out to skeptics of the new creative method.

Another component that is cause for skeptics to rethink their views on art and technology is the artists' growing autonomy in the field of computer science. In the early 1960's it would have been necessary for artists interested in achieving even a fraction of the complex patterning in Bérubé's recent works, to engage the expertise of scientists and engineers. As pertinent system software became available in the decades to follow, artists were able to explore the creative capabilities of the computer independent of intervention from the scientific community.

"Artists began to challenge the computer to go beyond the formal tasks it had up to then performed and found it could be used as both a tool and as a medium. Imagery becomes dematerialized information in the computer's database. When digitized, this information affects a completely new outlook on the visual field."<sup>15</sup>

The positive aspects of technology in art outweigh the negative. True, technology can be costly, the equipment and software used by Bérubé are expensive for a student or moderately successful artist. This expense can dissuade a potential textile artist interested in computer aided design from pursuing the career further than that of a hobby. Bérubé's willingness to introduce the system to students and artists, and lecturing on a regular basis about Pointcarré software and ways in which it is utilized in the art of weaving, allows greater accessibility to the new technology by a growing number of artists. By supplying equipment and training, Bérubé helps to dispel concerns pertaining to the high price of technology. By exhibiting her innovative tapestries, she reveals working with technology is not only possible but also highly enjoyable.

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<sup>15</sup>Margo Lovejoy, *Postmodern Currents: Art and Artists in the Age of Electronic Media*, (New Jersey, Prentice-Hall 1997), 77.

## **The Future**

As time advances artists will become more familiar with computer technology and inevitably more and more will harness the great potential of science and use it to enhance their works of art. Society's growing acceptance of the computer in art partly lies in its ability to adapt to change, something human beings have been doing since our very existence on this planet. North America in general, has come to accept the ubiquity of computers. It is now an integral part of society. The first automatic teller machine was installed in the UK in 1967. Twenty years hence, automatic teller machines became a worldwide phenomenon. Presently, the majority of North American bank clients use the machines to conduct some or all bank transactions. It is not uncommon to find a greater queue at the teller machine than in the bank itself. Society made the transition to computer banking despite the fact that many of its users are individuals over the age of fifty who did not work with computers until mid life. Walter Benjamin addresses the adaptive nature of humans in this phrase.

“During long periods of history, the mode of human sense perception change with humanity's entire mode of existence. The manner in which human sense perception is organized, the medium in which it is accomplished, is determined not only by nature but by historical circumstances as well.”<sup>16</sup>

In the not too distant future computers and its relation to humans will seem a natural pairing. North Americans will wonder how they managed without the computer. Our existence will appear most intimately and even organically tied to technology. Human beings are living longer due to computerized instruments implanted in the body. These technological advancements have some in society fearing machines are appropriating human existence, usurping our ability to think and feel. Within the milieu

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<sup>16</sup> Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” Illuminations (New York, Schocken 1969), 222.

of art reality reveals the consequential fact that it is still the artist and not machine, who forms art for the sake of art. The impetus to create is not caused by a command, it remains a visceral experience generated by emotion and human experience.

It can be said that in order for weaving to remain a viable part of the art milieu it must develop with society. Artist Louise Lemieux Bérubé believes textile art using the latest technological advancements does just that.

“Curiously enough, textiles, as domestic, timeless traditions, navigate easily in this new electronic world, as if they had been its precursors.”<sup>17</sup>

The tradition of weaving solely with a loom will not soon be usurped by the technologically advanced method of CAD but tapestries created with computers generate continuous discourse concerning the merits and vices of technology pertaining to art. According to Bérubé, textiles are inherently human objects and the art and art form will survive because, “textiles are somehow essential to human survival, even essential to living.”<sup>18</sup>

Philosophical as well as artistic debate attracts artists, critics and patrons to the discussion, resulting in more attention to the art form. *Quebec Science* magazine featured an article dealing with CAD in the arts and crafts and cited weaving as one of the domains most active with computer integration.

“La révolution informatique bouleverse depuis quelques années tous les secteurs de la société. A son tour, le monde des artisans a, depuis peu, contracté la fièvre de l’ordinateur. La contagion touche principalement les métiers du tissage et de la céramique, qui représentent environ la moitié de la force artisanale professionnelle

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<sup>17</sup> Louise Lemieux Bérubé, quoted from audiotaped interview by the author. (Montreal 1999).

<sup>18</sup> Louise Lemieux Bérubé, Quoted in a 1997 personal written statement.



répertoriée du Québec.”<sup>19</sup>

When discussing innovative textile art, CAD is often mentioned. British textile artist Chloe Colchester comments on the increased speed at which textile artists are now able to work due to the integration of computers.

“The computerization of jacquard weaving has meant that the richness of colour and pattern characteristic of woven jacquard fabrics are for the first time available at speed.”<sup>20</sup>

“The automation of the jacquard weaving process has brought it into line with the accelerations in the rest of weaving production.”<sup>21</sup>

Colchester speaks to the idea of the art form continuously advancing through technology so it may remain at par with the rest of the textile industry and hence, maintain society’s advancing tastes. Another example of society’s changing perceptions towards computers in art comes from artist and assistant professor in fiber/fabrics at Western Washington University Mark Newport, who writes,

“We may find that these new technologies will make textile practice even more exciting as well as accessible. The past always becomes the future. It is up to artists and designers to take advantage of it.”<sup>22</sup>

Newport is calling upon artists to take a proactive approach to technology and create their own tradition. In spite of Newport’s enthusiasm toward technology in fiber arts, many involved in the world of art express trepidation as to whether viewers will embrace science in art or see it as an encroachment. Attempting to determine society’s

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<sup>19</sup> Yvon Larose, “Le Tissage Assisté par Ordinateur (TAO).” Quebec Science (July 1984): 50.

<sup>20</sup> Chloe Colchester, The New Textiles: Trends and Traditions (New York: Rizzoli inc., 1991), 40.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Mark Newport, “The Future is Past.” Fiberarts (Sep/Oct 1998): 58.

reaction to computer assisted art is not an altogether simple task but if it is asked whether society is capable of adapting to a changing environment, the answer is yes. Since the viewing experience of CAD textiles is relatively new, patrons are presently adapting to the novelty of the experience and allowing themselves to consciously and subconsciously absorb the change of style, design and in some cases, texture, of tapestries created with the help of computers.

It is evident upon viewing the work of Bérubé that she intends to continue tactility in her tapestries. While some artists use the computer to symbolically represent textiles, Bérubé wishes to maintain the primary purpose of her tapestries, which is in its most basic form, to essentially provide warmth and protection to humankind. Although her work is for aesthetic viewing pleasure, Bérubé tries to remain true to the art form's inceptive purpose by not foregoing the use of fibers. The viewer will continue to experience the tactility of fiber art when viewing Bérubé's work, even though it is created with the help of the intangible electronic circuitry of the computer.

Adjunct assistant professor in fiber at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Margo Mensing, expresses an open approach to the merging worlds of art and technology,

"We may come to understand textiles in a new light. At this juncture, all possibilities are open. It seems imperative not to reject any of them..."<sup>23</sup>

Much like Mensing, Bérubé maintains consistent optimism towards the vast possibilities open to textile art. Her latest body of work is a particularly strong example of how a textile artist can indeed succeed in producing work that is rich with emotion, artistry and content in the face of rapidly advancing technology. Bérubé's work is highly tactile and deeply grounded in human experience. Her art reveals it is possible to utilize computers without becoming subservient to technology. Bérubé firmly believes the

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<sup>23</sup> Margo Mensing, "Electronic Textiles: New Possibilities." *Fiberarts* (Summer 1996): 46.

technological addition is necessary to the evolution of the art form.

It is clear contemporary artists and art critics display some trepidation when computers in textile art is discussed. Throughout history man has approached invention with caution but there are always those who accept change more readily than others. Bérubé is an artist who has embraced technology and continues to explore its scientific and artistic capabilities. It is only through this explorative and bold nature will technology cease to maintain such a threatening position for some within the textile art milieu. As the public, artists and art critics alike become familiar with various technological processes involved in the creation of textile art, the computer will become less mysterious and hence, less threatening. It will reveal a new alternative to somewhat hesitant textile artists, allowing them to explore the computer in art further. The focus will eventually begin to shift from technology back solely to art and the artist. With artists like Bérubé remaining consistent and steadfast in their stance toward the inclusion of science in art, they create a well-lit path that offers clearer insight into a new and continuously evolving tradition, the tradition of technology in art.

## CONCLUSION

The contributions Louise Lemieux Bérubé has made to Quebec arts and crafts reach far beyond the walls of museums and galleries. Since taking up the art of weaving in the 1960's she has sought ways in which to advance the art form. After becoming an expert weaver and travelling extensively throughout the world for the sake of her art, Bérubé co-founded The Montreal Center for Contemporary Textiles, an institution dedicated to educating students, young and old, in the art of weaving. The school serves as a bridge to the generation and economic gap that can exist due to rapidly advancing computer technology used in textile art. Expensive equipment and experienced instructors are at the disposal of students at little cost. The Montreal Center for Contemporary Textiles also serves as a place of fellowship for artists. Student/artists and professional artists from Quebec and beyond frequent the school to use the state of the art equipment available. The school is a meeting ground where artists exchange ideas and develop vital associations with one another necessary to the advancement of the art of weaving.

Not only does Bérubé believe it necessary to educate in order to advance the art of weaving, she believed so strongly in the Quebec arts and crafts milieu that she engaged leadership at the Conseil des Métiers d'art du Quebec for a decade. During the ten-year period she led the charge in promoting and ensuring the viability of arts and crafts in Quebec and throughout Canada and beyond. Bérubé injected new life into the Salon des Métiers d'art during her presidency by implementing an aggressive media campaign and allowing for some much needed changes to the annual two week craft show. Her progressive, proactive approach to the nearly fifty year old craft show saw sales and attendance rise dramatically. Her determination to establish a school of textiles and her ten year tenure at the CMA are two convincing examples of the indelible contributions Bérubé has made in the Quebec arts and crafts milieu.

Along with her academic and political contributions to Quebec arts and crafts,

Bérubé's innovative tapestries using the latest computer technology display bold new textiles rich in emotion, colour, and texture, which also add to the arts and crafts discourse. Her willingness to explore the continuously evolving world of technology and apply it to the art of weaving permits the art form to move forward into the twenty-first century and beyond. Her intentions are not to destabilize the very foundation of the art of weaving with the inclusion of computer technology but to add a new scope and bring forth a new tradition in the art that will serve to enhance the art form of weaving. Her latest tapestries still hold traditional elements essential to the overall construct of the art form; tactility, accessibility and human essence. By introducing technological applications to weaving, technology moves to enhance these elements, not diminish them. Bérubé's wall hangings are created with the aid of computer technology but the completed tapestry remains a part of the physical world deeply rooted in human experience. Her wall hangings clearly reiterate a statement made by fellow textile artist Barbara Layne who refers to cloth as "a return to the physical world, a grounding of electronic transmitted information."<sup>1</sup>

Bérubé's latest work is the result of two decades of assiduous research and the embracing of technology. Bérubé chose to harness the power of computer science and use it to help further develop the art form of weaving as it moves into the new millennium. Her determination to utilize computer applications and push the boundaries of computer aided design as it applies to textiles has made her one of the foremost authorities in the relatively new avenue of production. Her inexhaustible search for design enhancement has resulted in tapestries that go beyond the formal qualities of the materials and generate a new dimension of innovative design. Bérubé's consistent use of computers, which created her two latest bodies of work, has helped to develop a new tradition in weaving. This tradition will not subvert weaving culture as it has been known for the past two hundred years since the invention of the jacquard loom. The loom and fibers, warp and

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<sup>1</sup> Margo Mensing, "Electronic Textiles: New Possibilities." *Fiberarts* (Summer 1996): 46.

weft remain, but technology will allow for a new thoroughfare of expression not possible only twenty years ago.

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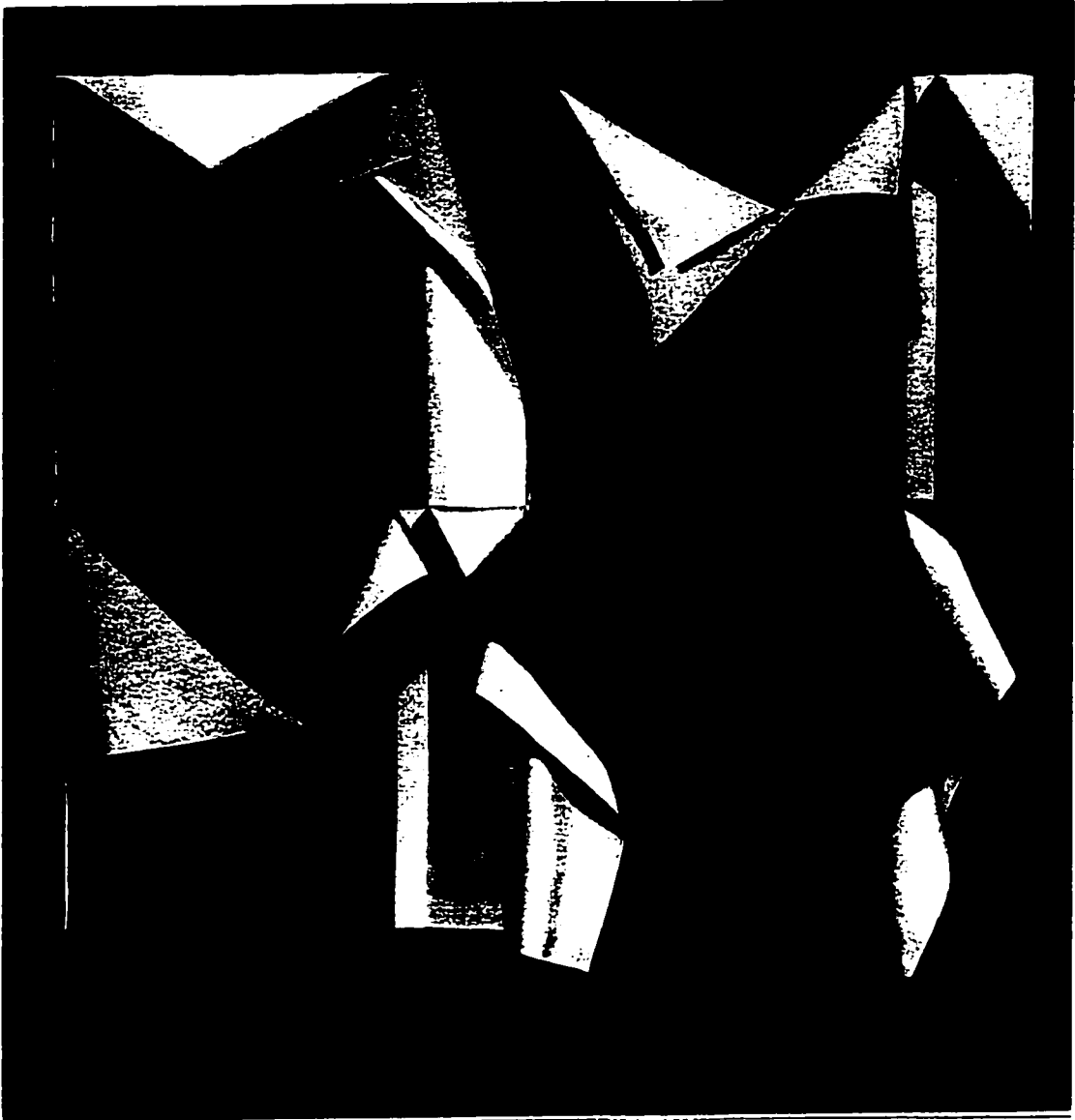


Fig. 1

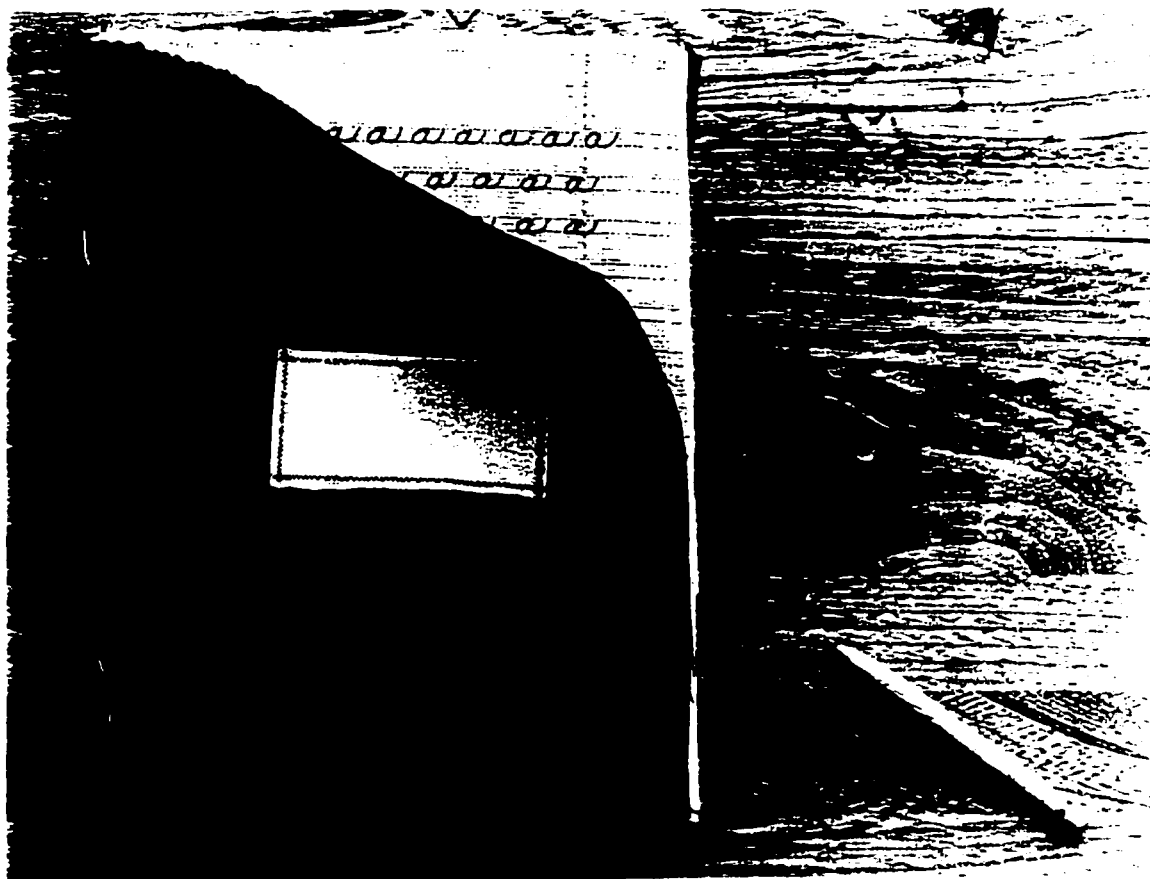


Fig. 2

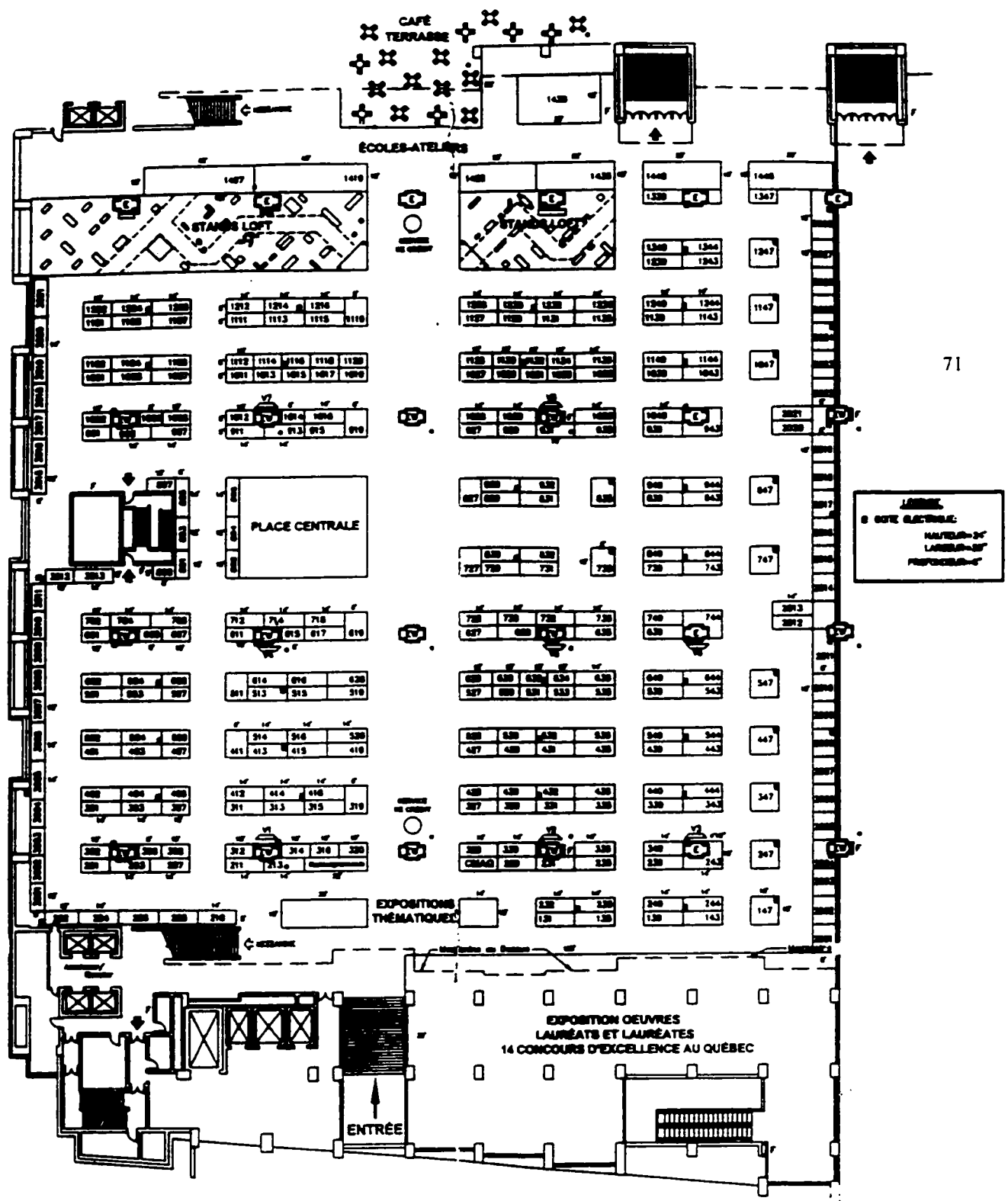






Fig. 4



Fig. 5

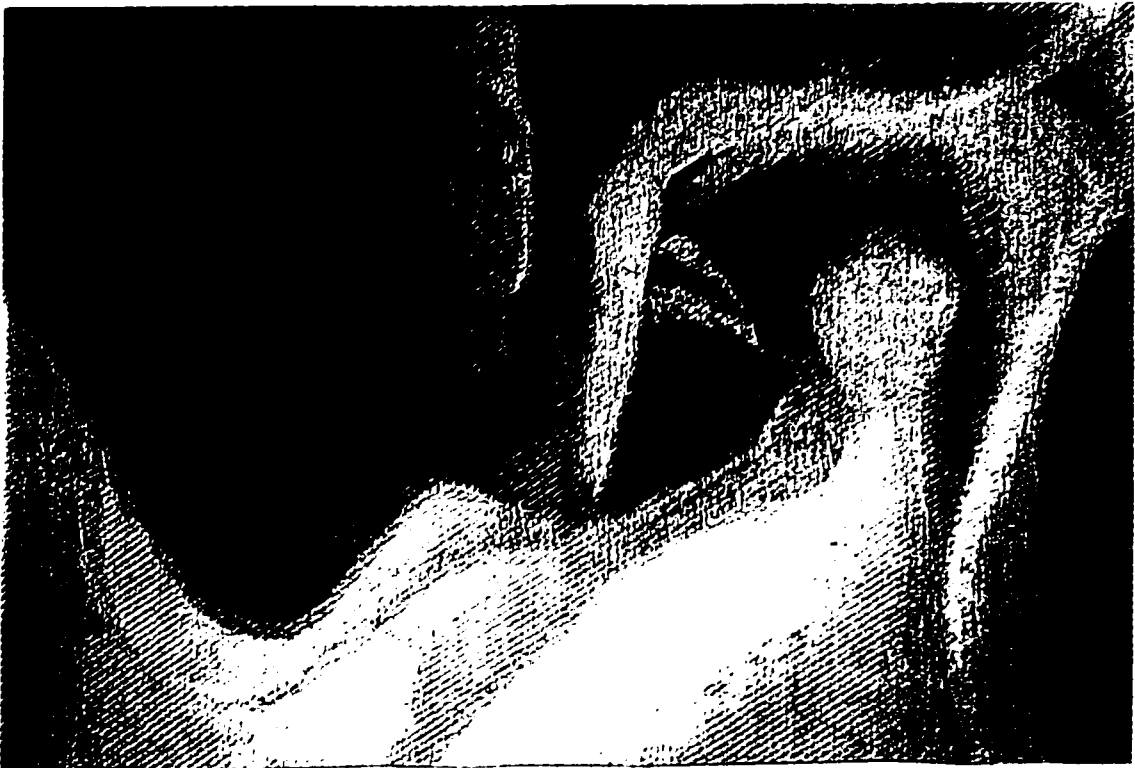


fig. 6