

Stitch at Rosalux Offers Artistry Combined with Craftsmanship

April 16, 2006



Detail of "1000 Women" by Ingrid Restemayer

By Sharon Parker

Rosalux Gallery is always good at pairing compatible artists in its two-person shows, and in the case of *Stitch*, featuring the works of Ingrid Restemayer and Marilyn Stevens, which opened on April 7, it may be even more true than usual.

When I first walked in to have a look at the show, I was a little confused as to which works belonged to which artist, especially since the first grouping was a series of works by both of them all mixed together in no apparent order; and all identically framed, as to size and style--only Restemayer's had black frames and Stevens's frames were natural (which a small sign tells us). But after a few moments of studying the works, their distinct styles began to be obvious, and when I turned to look at other, larger pieces hung about the gallery, I could easily pick out each woman's artwork before reading the tag next to it.

What they have in common is working with textiles and stitchery--and using paper as though it were fabric--and a muted natural color palette, and a propensity for texture, and a certain restraint in their compositional style: they do not clutter their works with too many elements, but make their statements and then get out of the way.

Restemeyer favors certain fine etchings she has made of fish (which are much more detailed than the low-resolution image above shows), which swim gracefully through many of her works; the fish are generally surrounded by careful patterns of stitchery on fine art papers, many appearing to be handmade rice paper. The stitchery is either perfectly spaced rows of running stitches, such as a quilter uses, or a precise grid of French knots--on close inspection, one can see through the paper to the thread running along the backside connecting the knots or stitches. This is not apparent and certainly does not detract from the look of the finished pieces. This blend of fine art and careful craftsmanship complement each other beautifully.

Stevens works with a variety of found and possibly also handmade papers--some with Asian lettering on them--accentuating their irregularities, forming them into rows of ridges, adding collage elements seemingly taken from miniature sewing patterns.

In her larger pieces, she carries this seamstress's theme into sculptural works that incorporate vintage dressmakers' forms. In many of them, metal rectangles hang like oversized dogtags, imprinted with letters as from a printer's shop,

leading this viewer to wonder what words may be hidden there. This element of mystery, combined with the otherwise mundane dressmaker's forms, creates a pleasant intellectual tension.

Other forms she uses suggest something less benign--the metal gadgetry with which clothing and sometimes bodies are pushed past their natural imperfections are paired with collage elements that suggest some discomfort, some disconnect between the natural and the ideal. Yet, while the works raise such thoughts in this viewer, it is not obvious that the artist shares them, and it's entirely possible that another viewer will draw a different meaning from the same pieces.

Artists should, in my opinion, show us new ways of looking at the "ten thousand ordinary things" of our everyday lives without belaboring the process, and these two certainly do that, going beyond either representation or abstraction to true artistry.

Stitch is showing through April 30 at Rosalux Gallery in the Open Book building, 1011 Washington Ave. S., Minneapolis. 612/747-3942 . The gallery is open Tue.-Thu., noon -8 p.m., Fri.-Sun., noon-5 p.m.