Shoe Stories: A Textile Art Narrative

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Shoes are a popular obsession for many in contemporary society as indicated by the character Carrie Bradshaw in the popular American television show, "Sex and the City," yet they also have a long and varied past as identifiers of status, wealth, and occupation. This paper examines a new body of textile artwork, reflecting on the implied meanings of shoes, their associations and stereotypes.

My creative work plays on the familiarity of textiles to subtly/subversively impart meaning. The textile art pieces I create investigate issues of containment; my current research explores the shoe as a container for identity. This new series builds on the embedded meanings and iconic qualities of shoes to develop a narrative. The body of work includes shoe structures, actual shoes and shoe portraits created with my characteristic stitching technique. While stitching is often used for surface embellishment (embroidery) or joining materials, my work is unique in that I simultaneously develop both the structure and surface of an object through the stitching process. I am committed to stitching constructions because this ubiquitous method, prevalent throughout history still has something new to say. The stitch creates a mark, adds color and defines the structure.

This new body of work will initially be exhibited in a solo exhibition titled "Shoe Stories" at the Contemporary Craft Museum and Gallery in Portland, Oregon, August 4-September 18, 2006. The exhibition includes several discreet objects, as well as a large-scale installation, filling an entire room. The installation work extends from the ceiling creating an
expansive forest of legs. The piece reflects on the idea of population and
urbanization as well as the readiness humans have to create faux surfaces
to stand in for nature. The fanciful and humorous appearance of the work
contrasts to the reality of disconnected limbs and a fragmented society
devoid of human contact. For this installation I have created oversized
shoes with digitally printed fabric skins alluding to the natural
materials seen on the ground (i.e. leaves, rocks, dirt). The "legs"
tubular net and fabric forms referencing stockings) are created with my
own innovative technique for creating openwork fabric structures. For
nearly 20 years I have worked with water-soluble plastic film (polyvinyl
alcohol) to create webs, nets, and lace.

My work includes interpretations of historical trends and objects, such as
the high platform *chopines* worn during the Renaissance in Venice, Italy, or
the red heels that were de rigueur for the French courtiers of Louis XIV.
The work also includes shoes as fetishistic or fantasy objects such as
Cinderella's glass slippers or Dorothy's ruby slippers from the "Wizard of
Oz." Other pieces are statements of identity, for example, the fabric wall
hanging *Disco Fever* includes a digitally printed photograph of a 1970s high
platform shoe covered in gold beads. The piece is covered with a layer of
gold filigree netting and an assortment of words such as "hustle"
immediately transport the viewer back to the disco era. Another piece,
*Autumn*, depicts an oversized high top tennis shoe with a colorful maple
leaf print. Along the sole are written the words "stomp" "crunch" and
remind the viewer of jumping on a fresh raked pile of autumn leaves. The
entire shoe series incorporates humor, color, and text to aid the
viewer's perception and create a thoughtful, provocative environment for
a visual promenade.