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Guest blogger: Anne Paprocki on the Atlantic Gallery's "What Have you got to say?" exhibit



By Anne Paprocki

The WHYGTS? (What Have You Got To Say) exhibit, currently at [Atlantic Gallery](#) in Soho, showcases artists' responses to the current political climate in the United States. Some of the entries are bold and dramatic, like an American flag made to look like a large IV bag, red fluid dripping down the insides. Huge canvases are painted with political figures in bobble-head form, and a large piece of cloth is covered with stars, one for each American death in Iraq.

Carmen Kolodzey's delicate textile pieces are more subtle. "Song of the Shirt" offers a critique of sweatshops and the garment industry. On first glance it appears seraphic, the gauzy white clouds of a shirt billowing from the gallery's ceiling. This delicacy, however, belies an almost hidden violence. What seems to be a black floral print on the shirt is, on closer examination, actually a pattern of guns. Pieces of red yarn that might look like bows represent streams of blood. Kolodzey's work begs for this second glance.

The artist says that she appreciates art that "transports the message without having to shout or blast it at the viewer."

Kolodzey explores the inhumanity of the garment industry, asking, "do we need to break the back of other people just to get THAT shirt, THOSE trousers..." She also uses text, printing the Thomas Hood poem, "Song of the Shirt," on her piece of the same name, and an article describing an INS raid on a garment factory on another.

She finds the Hood poem, written in 1843, especially effective in that it shows how little has changed. The first few lines,

"With fingers weary and worn,
With eyelids heavy and red,
A woman sat, in unwomanly rags,

Plying her needle and thread--
Stitch! stitch! stitch!”

are, according to Kolodzey, “still relevant today.”

Even Kolodzey’s artistic process links to her feelings about the garment industry. She begins by affixing a garment directly on a dress model. Of this action she says, “the garment will become inseparable from the dress model—will become a second skin—just like the issues addressed become second skin for the individual(s) having to deal with them.”

Despite Kolodzey’s obvious concern over current labor practices in the United States, she does not consider herself an activist. She notes that all artists are a product of the society in which they live. Even if he or she is “tucked away and isolated in a studio,” the work created “is the product of the way each individual artist digests society.” The art must come before the message, though, otherwise it risks becoming simply “documentation or illustration.”

It is an achievement for Kolodzey if the viewer of her work, “is attracted by its beauty and at the same time inspired by its social message.” Her work in WHGYTS? does just that. Walking through the gallery, one is struck first by the work itself—black ink harsh against a satiny pink pillow, diaphanous layers of cloth smeared with stark red. It is only with further study that the craft gives way to the message, and a history of violence rises quietly to the surface.

Those interested in seeing Kolodzey’s work can go to the WHYGTS show at Atlantic Gallery, on view through February 10, 2007. The gallery is located at 40 Wooster Street on the 4th floor.

Kolodzey also has two upcoming shows:

Juried Fiber at the Mills Pond House Gallery is run by the Smithtown Township Arts Council in St. James on Long Island. The opening is on Saturday, January 20th from 2-4pm. See <http://www.stacarts.org/exhibit> for more information.

She will also have a solo show at the Hoyt Institute of Fine Arts in New Castle, PA. This show will open on July 8, 2007.

*Update: Carmen Kolodzey is the winner of the Fiber Arts 2007 show at the Smithtown Arts Council. Her work will be displayed at their Winners Show in the fall. More information to come