

PAT HICKMAN a stellar life in Textiles

Labor is a big part of my work, the excessive, obsessive labor, the slowing down of time, stepping out of the urgent pace of daily life. Out of seemingly nothing, something is created. I invest in what I love doing. In the end the work itself is about the labor and about holding what cannot be captured: light, color, breath, time.



STORY BY JANET DE BOER

I first became aware of Pat Hickman's work through 'Fiberarts' magazine, that valuable U.S. publication, now terminated, which had such an impact, and where you could track the dynamic pursuit of Basketry in the USA in the past few decades. Some years ago, when I learned Hickman was doing a residency in Australia, I quietly vowed to try and get her to offer a workshop at a FORUM, knowing she was a well respected teacher and also knowing there was ample curiosity about her trademark use of 'gut' – the transparent material which is exactly that (hog casings), and can be used to provide an ethereal and dreamlike quality to work – to capture and enclose and create mystery.

Above, *CONSTELLATION*: installation, knotted netting using fine metallic gold silk thread and cricula silk cocoons; 1200 x 1000 x 125mm. Selected for the International Lace Award, 'Love Lace' at the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, 2011-2013. Photo by George Potanovic, Jr.

Pat did accept an invitation to teach for TAFTA at the April FORUM in Orange NSW in 2008, offering a workshop on *Baskets Outside the Comfort Zone*. Prior to this workshop I was able to visit her briefly at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, Honolulu where she was Professor and Head of the Fiber Program from 1990-2006, when she retired. She had initially taught for 13 years in California in renowned Textile Departments that had great influence in their time. I asked her how she has found life since retirement.

"I don't believe in 'retirement' and don't use that word. I want this phase of my life to be focused on my own studio work, without the demands of full time teaching. I found a wonderful studio in an old brick calico factory built in the 1830s in the lower Hudson Valley. Here I have space to work, in the Garnerville Arts & Industrial Center. This is the "beginning of the beginning", to see what I can do with this time and space. Being an hour from New York City, I have more access to art than I've ever had before."

I was pleased to learn Pat Hickman had been accepted for the International Lace Award which opened at the Powerhouse Museum Sydney in 2011 and continues until April of 2013. She writes of her work, *Constellation*: "For Hawaiians the stars represent the knots of suspended nets. During the rainy season, when these nets in the sky open, blessings pour down upon the earth. It is a time of renewal, when wars cease, games are played, and nets are mended. 'Constellation' also makes reference to this Hawaiian story, which has become part of my story.

"My thoroughly non-traditional lace-making allows me to work with light and shadow, with breath and air. Lace-like structure – with its repetition, its openings as essential as the knots holding tight is a natural fit for my themes of cycles and seasons, memory and loss, aging and mortality. What is absent is as vital as what is present." (Quoted from the catalogue 'Make Lace Not War' edited by Lindie Ward, pg 63).

An examination of Pat Hickman's website reveals an impressive resume as she is in the permanent collection of numerous prestigious institutions and has received various honours including being made Professor Emeritus when at the University of Hawaii and a Fellow of the American Craft Council. She served as President of the Textile Society of America from 2008-2010 and remains on the Board until 2014 as Past-President. As well she has accepted ambitious commissions, has been included in a vast number of group shows and has also staged many solo shows over the years.

For the group exhibition, *A Sense of Place*, curated by Bruce Hoffman and shown at the Philadelphia Arts Alliance, February 2-April 28, 2012, Joe Lewis wrote: "As a basket maker primarily, Pat Hickman has worked with numerous organic materials to shape vessels, she has used these materials to create 3-D and 2-D pieces and explored their materiality."

Specifically, Hickman used 'river teeth', found in rotted tree trunks, on land and in the woods, which Lewis says become, in her hands, "a brush stroke, a stitch with which she marks space." ▶▶▶



Top of page, detail of *LIGHT PASSAGE*, 8'3" x 40" x 2". Above, *VESICLE* made 1999 of gut (hog casings); 29" x 13" x 10". Photography by Brad Goda.



Hickman discovered the term River Teeth in the writings of David James Duncan who describes them thus: *There is in every log a series of cross-grained, pitch-hardened masses where branches once joined the tree's trunk. 'Knots,' they're called in a piece of lumber. But in the bed of a river, where the rest of the tree has been stripped and washed away, these knots take on a very different appearance, and so deserve a different name. 'River teeth,' we called them as kids, because that's what they look like. Like enormous fangs, ending in cross-grained root that once tapped all the way into the tree's very heartwood.*

Lewis goes on to say: "In three pieces wrapped around three walls, these river teeth provide a horizon line with a central vortex; you can almost feel the tidal pull that has brought this debris to shore. The evocation of this dislocated beach is gentle yet frantic..." (Joe Lewis in *fibreQUARTERLY Canada, Spring 2012*).



I asked Pat Hickman to comment on how her trips to Australia may have influenced her, always a difficult question to answer but one that she welcomed: "My experience with Australians and Australia has offered me the opportunity to deepen my understanding of the interaction between indigenous peoples and settler peoples, which I had come to appreciate by living in Hawaii. The monumental gates which I designed for the Maui Arts & Cultural Center were cast in Tasmania. It was in Australia that I did site-specific installations for the first time, and became interested in the translation of fiber to metal, working with natural materials, making them look like metal, i.e. 'good fakes'.

"The generosity of individuals—Pamille Berg, David and Rhonda Hamilton, Judy Watson, Alison Clouston, the musician Boyd, Denise Robinson, Christina Henri, Julie Gough, Christine Christophersen and others—continues to enrich my life as an artist."

Pat Hickman will be a tutor for TAFTA's Textile Retreat at the 'Geelong' FORUM 2013 with a class titled 'Structure and Skin'. Details from www.tafta.org.au or email tafta@inet.net.au



This page top to bottom: RIVER TEETH and detail; 4' x 17' x 7"; photography by George Potanovic, Jr. DEATH TUGS, 36" x 36" x 17". LANDSCAPE & MEMORY, 34" x 42" X3", photography by Brad Goda except where noted.