

Feature



Montreal's Centre for Contemporary Textiles

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It's not in the guidebook that the city of Montreal gives out with their museum pass. Like any other gem, you have to dig for it, but it's worth it!

My husband and I only found out about the Centre des Textiles Contemporains de Montreal because another guest at the bed and breakfast we were staying at mentioned it to us. Although it is not in the tourist section of Montreal, and is a long way from where we were staying, it is easy to get to by Metro.

The Centre des Textiles is a gallery and college for textile arts that offers a college degree. It also has non-degree courses that include introductory and master classes, which is what the guest who told us about it was attending.

The Centre looks like an office building on the outside (above). When we walked in to the lobby, the receptionist asked us if we'd like a tour. Our guide was the Communications Director and Business Instructor for their academic program, the distinguished visual artist Étienne Proulx.



He told us that they generally start with about 12 students at the beginning of the year, and typically graduate half at the end of the three-year program. This year, for the first time, they started with 25 students. They hold a graduation show so the newly minted designers can display their work.

M. Proulx said that since their focus is on textiles and not necessarily fashion, they

do not have much on the sewing aspects in their program, except, how to make your textile into a garment, and how to sell your design to the industry.

The Centre has one formal classroom, large enough for a couple dozen students. With the workrooms, though, it is reasonably large.

Our first stop was the Weaving Room (below), which had more than two dozen looms - mechanical well as computerized. My fingers were really itching to try a loom!



Two computerized Jacquard looms (below) stood in a side room. Each loom is eight feet tall and about six feet wide with room for a four foot wide panel.

The loom can weave any kind of pattern, including drawn designs and even photographs, using weaving structures for shadings. The warp consists of 1728 threads, generally set at 40epi.

The loom's operation is entirely computerized. The designer uses software like Photoshop and Pointcarrè to design the fabric and see it in full color before it is woven. Then the finished design is turned into instructions that drive the warp ends of



Photo courtesy of Erin M. Riley

the loom. The only thing the weaver has to do after loading the weaving file is put the shuttle through.

This results in fewer mistakes, offers greater possibilities, and makes the preparation faster. A design that takes 150 hours using point-paper and punch cards takes 30 minutes by computer. The human element is still a factor, though. While we were watching, the weaver had to stop the loom and take out a few rows because of a problem in handling the shuttle.

Off the Weaving Room is another room (above) dedicated to dyeing that would make any dyer happy. It has multiple sinks,



Photo courtesy Le Centre des Textiles Contemporains de Montreal

and multiple tables put together to form a large workspace, lots of cabinetry for storage, and fun tools to use.

Below is a sample of an unusual ikat warp that was made by the late Maria Schecter, and donated to the Centre by her son after her death.



Our next stop was the Knitting Room (right), where we saw manual and computerized control knitting machines in different sizes.

At bottom right are some sweaters, vests, and other knitting samples on display to test knitting concepts.

Our tour also took us to the sewing room (below). It is a large, well-lighted room with many worktables for students. The room contains industrial and computerized sewing machines, sergers, sewing forms, and other pieces of equipment



Photo courtesy Le Centre des Textiles Contemporains de Montreal



watched them installing a new exhibit, a group of black-and-white photo quality weavings called, "Love One Another" (below). At first, I mistook them for photographs until I looked closely; they were that good. The weavings were done on the Jacquard looms we saw earlier.

Throughout our tour, we saw a number of textile samples on exhibit, including this unusual wall display (above).

A new boutique opened in 2008, where medium and small textile objects, made by graduate students and teachers, can be found and purchased (below).

The gallery was our last stop. You could spend as little as a half hour, or as much as the whole day there if you're into the exhibit and study it closely. We

We were happy that we visited the Montreal Centre for Contemporary Textiles. For information about the Centre and its programs, visit their web site at: <http://textiles-mtl.com?lang=en>.

Carole Parker is an amateur costumer and fabric tinkerer with special interests in textiles, dyeing, and wearable art. See her review of a fabric paint product elsewhere in this issue. Visit her web site: <http://www.costumingtips.org/>.

Editors Note

See textile artist Erin M. Riley's description of the design class she attended in her August 17, 2008 posting at: http://tylergrads.blogspot.com/2008_08_01_archive.html. Thanks to Erin for her kind permission to use several of her photos for this article

Thanks also to Louise Lemieux Bérubé, General Director of Le Centre des Textiles Contemporains de Montreal for her kind permission to use several photos, for her helpful comments, and for providing additional information for this article.

Except as noted, all other photos in this article are by Carole Parker.



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