

Cast-off clothes yield funky, heart-felt rug



Amy Karlinsky

ART REVIEW

- Rugs by Nancy Hall
- Manitoba Crafts Council Exhibition Gallery
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LOOKING for something to do with Grandma's old blue wool coat from Eaton's, circa 1950?

Ask Nancy Hall. She knows what to do with cast-off clothing and blankets. Her one-woman exhibition of hooked rugs at the Manitoba Crafts Council Exhibition Gallery is a rich and warm invitation into colour and texture.

Hall uses second-hand clothing and blankets almost exclusively in her colourful rugs, hangings, and cushion covers — wool fabrics chosen for their pattern, colour and bounce. The process of so-called "primitive" rug hooking involves hooking the one-quarter- to one-half-inch-sized strips through the burlap with just the right amount of tension, rhythm, variation and repetition of colour combinations. Hall dyes some of her wools to come up with just the right shade of orange or green for insertion into a variegated colour palette where the colour sings and flies.

Hall's use of recycled fibre has a personal resonance, particularly when she uses items from the family closet. Her father's yellow coat finds a new life and, arguably, a new meaning and role in a small, rectangular rug called *The Grrrs Face Off*, where the yellow provides the emotional ground for a pair of mirrored-image canines whose jaws and mouths are prominently featured.

Such total and robust transformation of textiles and experience into art that works is not easy. "I had been looking all my life for a medium. I have always sewn clothes, embroidered and woven," Hall explains. But her initiation into rug hooking provided just the right medium for her interest in textiles, storytelling and image-making.

Her thrill is conveyed in the large-scale rugs hanging in the gallery. The rugs are funky, quirky, personalized and heart-felt. Her images include some of the staples of California funk and naive art, such as dogs with big snouts, robust fish, terrific flattened-out flowers and intense colour and pattern combinations.

There also are works related to self-portraiture, poetry and paradise.

Tread Softly is an elegant decorative

rug with no ground line. The orientation is from all sides with a line of text encircling the leaf-shaped motif in the centre. It's from a Yeats poem and one that Hall remembered from her school days. It's as if the line was waiting in memory all these years to emerge as the perfect foil for Hall's floor coverings.

Who among us hasn't a hoard of family matter comprised of Mom's beaded cocktail dress, baby's first sleepers, or a favoured plaid robe from childhood just waiting for transformation into art?

It's therapy or transformation, and the latter sounds more appealing. I just might take one of the day-long workshops in rug hooking at Hall's *Playing Hooky Rug Studio* in Sandy Hook.

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