A series of four woven portraits portraying four of Youngstown businessmen whose contributions shaped the history of Youngstown during the 170-year period. The project is a continuation of a portrait series developed from research into local theatres and related business individuals. The four entrepreneurs represented include Richard Mills, developer of commercial real estate, Fred Lee manager of The Hippodrome Theatre, George Wick founder of the Youngstown Sheet & Tube Company and German Lanterman, owner and operator of a water-powered gristmill. The portraits are woven using the double weave pick up technique and dyed yarns. The designs and images used in each portrait represent the individual’s business specialty and elements that are associated with their identity.
WOVEN PORTRAITS OF FOUR YOUNGSTOWN BUSINESSMEN

A thesis submitted to the College of the Arts of Kent State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts

by

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May, 2009
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WOVEN PORTRAITS OF FOUR YOUNGSTOWN BUSINESSMEN

The Subjects

My thesis project represents an integration of my interests in history, graphic images and weaving. The inspiration for the series of portraits evolved as I worked with a research project that was designed to assist with the restoration of the historic Liberty Theatre in my hometown of Youngstown. This made me aware of the contributions that numerous individuals had made to the growth and development of this northeastern Ohio city.

Four men were chosen as the subjects for the portraits. These individuals lived from the 1850-1990’s, growing up during the time when the region was recognized for innovations in steel production and related industries. But the series is not limited to businessmen, since the wealth generated by industry contributed to the development of the arts and entertainment.

Richard Mills started out in the moving business in the 1950’s and later became a developer of commercial office and retail space. In the mid 1970’s Mr. Mills began construction of City Center One a high-rise office tower that was fully leased at its completion. His love of theatre and nostalgia for the past led to the purchase of the Liberty Theatre. Built in 1918, his plan was to restore it to its original splendor, but his
death in 1990 halted the project which had motivated my thesis. It seemed appropriate that he should be the first subject for my weaving.

Because Fred Lee was also involved in the theatre, he was the focus for the second weaving in the series. He originally came to Youngstown to manage the Hippodrome Theatre at the request of local owners who had an entertainment contract with B. F. Keith Vaudeville Theatre Circuit. As manager, he made the theatre profitable for the investors by booking quality shows. Will Rogers was part of the grand opening week bill of performers in 1912. The Hippodrome seated almost 2,000 people and designed to attract patrons by setting it apart from its competitors. It was rich with architectural elements, luxury amenities, and the latest innovations such as electric lights.

George Dennick Wick was a member of the Wick family, who were among the original settlers in Youngstown. George was a founder of the Youngstown Sheet & Tube Company, a major producer of sheet steel and pipe. Using the resources from this highly profitable business, he acquired several smaller steel mills. One of these, the Thomas Steel Company brought with it the acquisition of the Jeanette Blast Furnace which was constructed in 1917-18. Both Wick and the Jeanette Blast Furnace met with sad fates. Wick resigned from his position as the first president and treasurer of Youngstown Sheet & Tube due to illness. After spending time in Europe to rest and recover, he was returning home as one of the passengers on the maiden voyage of the Titanic. The blast furnace was destroyed in 1997, after valiant efforts by local historical groups to purchase and restore it as a museum.
German Lanterman constructed a water-powered gristmill in 1845 on Mill Creek, on the site of the two previous mills, destroyed by floods. Lanterman’s mill ground grains on stone millstones. The mill operated until 1888 when new technology made his business unprofitable. Purchased by Mill Creek Park in 1892, the building served other purposes until undergoing extensive renovations in the 1980’s to return to a gristmill/museum.

The Designs

Portraits are traditionally created using paint on canvas, but there is also a rich history of pictorial and commemorative weaving. The process itself is unique because it is totally rooted in the grid. The intersections of the warp and weft threads are the basis for the development of all woven figures – patterns, and imagery. In this series of pieces, I chose to use the process of pick-up double weave. This required that the images be reduced to very simple graphic shapes and the palette limited to two colors of generally high contrast. And while it is easier to work with larger shapes of solid color, these big shapes can sometimes create difficulties in the way the fabric drapes. As a result, I decided to break up the larger areas with patterns of lines. These lines added another layer of visual interest, helped to connect the figure and the ground, and define contours of other support images.

After doing initial research on the individuals chosen for the series, a photograph of each man was interpreted in a drawing focusing on the relationship of the play of shadows and highlights on the face. Consideration was then given to how the ground would become integral to the content of the portrait and reference the profession or the
accomplishments of the individual. In the portrait of Richard Mills (Figs. 1 & 2), the towering City Center One building inspired the use of the vertical lines and simplified city skyline at the top of the weaving. Ornate theatre decorations were graphically reduced for inclusion along the edge of the portrait of Fred Lee (Figs. 3 & 4). With the Jeanette Blast Furnace figuring so strongly in my vision of George Dennick Wick, a stylized image of the factory was designed to fill the space around his face (Fig. 5). The portrait of George Lanterman was a breakthrough visually and technically. While considering the surface of the millstone, I was intrigued by the pattern of the radiating grooves. These lines became the means to define the features of the face and became a symbol of the millstone. After completing the George Lanterman portrait, I decided to revisit the two earlier weavings of Mills and Lee. By introducing more lines of varying weights at regular intervals, the designs became more active with pattern and represented an interesting way to integrate the process and the image.

The Weaving

With initial sketches completed, the process of translating the information onto graph paper begins. This graph will be used as a blueprint for the creation of each weaving. The images are drawn to scale with each square on the graph paper representing the intersection of one warp and one weft. Because the number of threads varies in each direction – 12 squares representing the number of warps (vertical elements) per inch, and 10 square representing the number of weft (horizontal elements) per inch – the drawing looks distorted. But this is necessary to create a more accurate weaving. Once the threads are on the loom and the weaving is ready to begin, the graph paper
design must be carefully followed to get the desired image. It is a slow and laborious process, but is worthwhile to get the effect that I want.

Conclusion

The woven portraits are larger than life as a way to emphasize the importance of the individual. This size also made it easier to weave the appropriate amount of detail through the careful hand manipulation of the threads.

Gaining further mastery of the medium continues to motivate me, as the discoveries about the craft of the process and new design ideas lead to refinements in each weaving. The woven portrait series will continue, as the thesis work has inspired me to consider how other individuals may be commemorated in recognition of their special contributions to the fabric of society.
Figure 1

Portrait of Richard Mills - Number One
Figure 2

Portrait of Richard Mills - Number Two
Figure 3

Portrait of Fred A. Lee - Number One
Figure 4

Portrait of Fred A. Lee - Number Two
Figure 5

Portrait of German Lanterman
Figure 6

Portrait of George Dennick Wick
REFERENCES

“Executive Genius of Youngstown’s Hippodrome; Put the Local Theatre in Important Circuit,” The Youngstown Vindicator, February 21, 1915, Section E, page 3.

