June 5---30, 2009, OFF THE GRID, Circle Craft Gallery

The pure white of the central piece in this remarkable show hangs in a glorious tumble, as if thrown from the bed of giants. It is the work of Katherine Soucie, who has a passion for creating new textiles out of unlikely materials. This kind of passion is why textile artists slip off the grid to explore how the textile surface itself can be transformed to serve a new purpose. As Katherine says, "We shift. We transform. We go off the grid aesthetically, conceptually or environmentally."

Our artists have been well introduced in the section preceding these comments and my guest this month, Mary Lou Trinkwon, could not be a better exponent of their work. But first take a quick look at the labels attached to each piece which give the artists' names, the titles of their work, and a neat, minimal description of the process and materials used. To the uninitiated much of this may be puzzling; but don't despair. Just let the words tickle your fancy and sense the imagination, skill, scope and professionalism of these renowned Canadian women who live and work in our province. Here they are: *Lesley Richmond: FOREST Cotton/silk fabric. Heat reactive base, metal paint. Katherine Soucie: "GOD BLESS YOU" Nylon waste hosiery , screen print, heat reactive base, digital machine embroidery. Hand stitched. Yvonne Wakabyashi: "PINEAPPLE SEA FORMS"Mixed media, pineapple fiber (Pina), shibori based tied/bound resist. Monofilament.* Now it's time for Mary Lou Trinkwon to elucidate what is implied by the list of gallery labels. Mary Lou opens up the history of textile exploration, the multiplicity of ideas, and the astonishing momentum of human invention and imagination which sometimes hints at Alice in her Wonderland. But first, Mary Lou introduces herself.

As the coordinator of and surface design instructor within the Textile Arts Programs at Capilano University my main concerns are the dynamic approaches and applications of textile processes and the delivery of these processes and methods to my students. Working off the grids of convention and always working to push themselves away from their own foundational grids of tradition, technique and materials are Yvonne Wakabayashi, Lesley Richmond and Katherine Soucie. Lesley Richmond's work has always been inspired by nature. Her most recent works have developed out of her investigation into the natural process of decay, which gives an unusual balance of realism and abstraction. Her recent tree series create eerily beautiful atmospheres through colour and fabric modification using the devore process. Yvonne Wakabayashi's work moves off the traditional grid within the area of Shibori and moves onto the contemporary grid in her search for unusual materials and objects with which to shape her 3D forms. Katherine Soucie's work intersects with the grids of materials and technique and has over the years engaged with textile practices within the areas of fashion, performance and more recently conceptual art. God Bless You reads as a heavenly quilt, a gesture of the most angelic kind. The intersection between the heavenly and the earthly create an unusual tension between the precious and perceived harmlessness of textiles and the horrendous environmental damage that the textile industry is responsible for.

The works of all the artists here at some point intersect with the grids of fashion, performance, environmentalism, literature, and ancient spiritual practices. Referencing the healing capacity, and the balance between physical and spiritual energies. As artists we move across, along, and within grids and structures in the form of tradition, technique and ideology throughout our lives. As we engage in creative endeavors we explore the gaps, the transitions and transgressions between our chosen and imposed grids. We take risks, make leaps, we sometimes forget who we once were. As we engage and are inspired by others, as we engage and are inspired by our materials we free fall into or resist these grids or structures, but either way they exist as starting points from which we move from. It is precisely this dynamic process that we see in Off the Grid: Vancouver. These artists fuel their own creative process by taking risks, making leaps reinventing themselves along the way. Viewing this show has helped me gain incite into the necessity of falling Off the Grid in order to gain new perspectives, to learn new things and to develop as an artist.

What Mary Lou has written reminds me of three questions concerning the challenges confronting creative work. "Why the process is relevant to the finished piece? What is the impetus behind this work? Why is the work significant?" This hits the bull's eye being "off the grid." – exploring process, driven by the impetus of hanging in there, and finally the significance of pushing your talents, and in the doing discovered unexpected other possibilities.

Thelma Ruck Keene, Circle Craft