



Bev McNaughton, 2002. *Reduction Series #2*. Oil painting on silk; cotton and silk embroidery, 16" x 14"

the language of film theory to describe how the film pulls viewers into the scene, making them feel as if they were present. McNaughton makes her viewers feel present by positioning them in the surgeon's place. She also commands their attention by showing a private, disturbing moment (one wants to look away) and by achieving an aesthetic allure: the quality of her embroidery invites the eye to linger and the hand to venture a hesitant, surreptitious touch. Contrasting the embroidered, open wound against the discreet and bland surface of the oil paint, she deftly expresses the complexity of our physical, intellectual and emotional "insides."

McNaughton learned to embroider and knit from her mother in a typically osmotic process. She remembers spending hours as a child experimenting with coloured floss. The embroidery in *Reduction Series #1* and *#2* does not resemble the repetitive, formal stitchery one finds in a needlework instruction book. Rather, it is an intensely complicated layering. And it makes a feminist statement. The embroidery (traditionally seen as a frivolous, female pastime) is used to achieve a sense of realism for which oil paint (a heroic and masculine medium) is inadequate.

There is an overlay of anxiety in McNaughton's work. Her father survived a malignant melanoma, and

she describes how that experience irrevocably demonstrated to her that the body is vulnerable and transient. A recent graduate of the University of Saskatchewan's Master's program in Fine Arts, she has worked with microscopic imaging of her own blood cells dying and has examined her own fear of cancer in sculptural work. Much of her work is concerned with the body and its capacity for metamorphosis, both natural and imposed. She has worked with fruit as a metaphor

for the body — for example, using real surgical tools to make a new species by suturing half an apple to half a pear, or presenting a banana with stitches holding its pathetic peel together. McNaughton's dark humour calls to mind a *Far Side* cartoon in which a chicken doctor informs his plump chicken patient that he appears to be filled with "a tasty, bread-like substance." The effect is amusing, but menacing.

McNaughton is interested in how we change our bodies through piercing, tattooing, branding and scarification to make strident statements, as well as in the transformations wrought by medical procedures such as plastic surgery. Previously, only nature and time worked changes on the body, but today many people hire surgeons to make alterations of their own designing. (A glance at a chronological series of Michael Jackson's album covers describes a transformation that in itself enters the realm of performance.) All of these processes reveal something about a person's sense of who they are and who they want to become.

Without being judgemental, McNaughton's works focus our attention on the complexity of the inner self. Her embroidered version of human flesh, with its brilliant shadings and layered threads, is an apt metaphor for the stuff we are made of.

Bettina Matzkuhn

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ARS MEDICA: a new medical humanities journal

The Left Atrium, that gracious and accommodating space, deigns to point out to poets, writers, photographers and artists with an interest in illness and healing that they will soon have an additional forum for their creative productions. *ARS MEDICA*, a quarterly literary journal to be launched this year, will examine the art of medicine and explore the interface between medicine and the arts. Content will include narratives from patients and health care workers, medical history, fiction, poetry, illustrations and photography. Editors Allan Peterkin, Ronald Ruskin and Rex Kay, all of the Department of Psychiatry at Mount Sinai Hospital in Toronto, invite submissions by mail or email (arsmedica@mtsinai.on.ca) of unpublished work. Poetry should be typed single-spaced up to two pages and prose double-spaced to a maximum of 3000 words. For mail submissions, three hard copies and an electronic copy on diskette are requested. (MS Word preferred.) And, oh yes, don't forget your SASE (self-addressed stamped envelope). The mailing address is: *ARS MEDICA*, Department of Psychiatry, 9th Floor, Mount Sinai Hospital, Toronto, ON M5G 1X5. More detailed guidelines are available at www.mtsinai.on.ca/arsmedica — CMAJ