

her life Poulson wrote a series of powerful articles on communication, cancer fatigue and the experience of cancer treatment. These articles, first published in leading journals such as the *New England Journal of Medicine* and the *Journal of Clinical Oncology* and *CMAJ*, are reprinted in her book.

Many of us, in medical school or during the course of our careers, come across a book or an article that profoundly influences our professional lives. Today, when the nature of “med-

ical professionalism” is frequently dissected and debated, Jane Poulson’s final work offers a beautiful illustration of a complete professional’s life. The combination of elegant writing and perceptive analysis evident in *The Doctor Will Not See You Now* is uncommon. Her journal articles, indeed her full autobiography, should be read by all medical students and residents. What a way to start a doctor’s life: with the memorable example of Jane Poulson.

To someone such as myself, who

is too accustomed to writing in a medical cadence, hyperbole does not come easily. Suffice it to say that Jane Poulson’s book almost matches the stature of the woman.

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Lifeworks

Songs of renewal

Dale Roberts’ sculptural creations are like the working songs of Maritime communities, built up from compounded rhythms, tightly woven harmonies and meticulously ordered repetitions. His larger works expand from their small-scale origins in traditional woven or crocheted textiles, incorporating small units into ceiling-to-floor, free-hanging sculptures divorced (as much by sheer size and narrative sweep as by whimsy) from their original practical functions. Like the traditional “nonsense” lyrics of working songs, the meticulous articulation Roberts gives to these sculptural forms creates greater patterns out of tiny, painstakingly crafted components. They are married to found objects such as driftwood, or to carefully curated objects such as marine “bobbers,” boat bumpers and lead weights. In pieces such as *Testing the Waters* and *Portage*, great drapes of white netting hang from wooden hoops or frames reminiscent of the ribs of ships’ hulls. Smaller wall-mounted sculptures are constructed from layered paper artefacts (such as turn-of-the-century maps), traditional textiles, iron oxides, molten lead, encaustic, pigments and shellac, among other materials that might be found at shipyards and shorelines.

Roberts’ recent show, *Threaded Chronicles*, was presented at the grunt

gallery in Vancouver July 10 – Aug. 10 in conjunction with Convergence 2002, the biennial conference of the Handweavers Guild of America. It’s easy to see why: from traditional, hand-crafted forms Roberts creates beautiful hybrids that transcend the humble units of their making.

With their swelling volumes and minutely diminishing shapes, these composite sculptures are organic not

only in their structural patterns and organisation but also in their way of “growing.” One consists of rope fragments scavenged from coastlines over the period of a year; another is built from 360 crocheted loop circuits that suggest the growth rings of a tree. Other works acquire weathered finishes, patinas or discolorations from exposure to natural elements.

To this end, Roberts “launches”



Dale Roberts, 2002. Installation view, grunt gallery, Vancouver. *Nereid's Gold*. Netting twine/cotton, gold leafed fishing floats, 8'(H) x 14' x 7'. *Testing the Waters*. Wood, crocheted cotton, lead sinkers, 84"(H) x 60" x 27".

some of his wall sculptures as if they were ships. They typically spend a day or so “moored” in the ocean, picking up aquatic debris and the occasional marine life form. Smaller wall-pieces are collaged composite works that use antique nautical maps as grounds. The maps suggest a saga of migration and survival, and hence the values and themes of the struggle to prosper in the most challenging of wildernesses. Traditional technologies and crafts, the collected survival acumen of Maritimers, and the practised techniques of fishers, voyagers and settlers can be traced in the material substance of these works. In this homage to a childhood spent in Newfoundland, Roberts preserves a pretechnologic coastal culture. His works are odes to the traditional repertoires of antique industries.

Traditional materials such as oakum and tarred rope are redolent of the dockyards and harbours that informed Roberts' earliest perceptions. He acquired his affinity for fishers' and trappers' materials at his father's knee, among the tenacious communities of Newfoundland's woodlands and coasts. The wall piece entitled *Conception* portrays an earthy understanding of the providence and fecundity of earth and ocean. Named for the antique tidal

map of Conception Bay, which provides the main surface and ground for the piece, this work is rent by a womb-like opening. Stained with red ochre and other earthy pigments, it suggests uterine blood or the volcanic birth of new terrain from the ocean floor. *Conception* was “launched” in the sea after completion and spent some time immersed beneath the waves; it has collected a “caul” of seaweed, sand and other organic debris. Its colours, weathered from the salt, create an aura of inexhaustible fertility and great age.

Roberts' works seem to “catch” meaning within their layered draperies, netting and twine. Nautical weights or floats distort the weft and weave of the nets; their weight pulls the fabrics down in some instances, as with *Testing the Waters*, while their bulk stretches the netting into suggestive shapes in others such as *Cottle's Cove Synet*. Hemp, twine and oakum are used as stuffing, filling huge “corked” (tubular) forms and giving them a mysterious, subtextual inner life. *Quoiled Boundary* is particularly animate, as if it might suddenly come alive and writhe across the gallery floor. Other pieces are more evocative of herring nets cast for a rich harvest: one glitters with gold threads. Tactile and olfactory Maritime references speak to nostalgic ideals, memories and sensory fascinations. Designed to have a palpable presence in the gallery space, the smells that emanate from the Roberts' materials (and from the accretions of seaweed and desiccated sea life in the “launched” pieces) are a striking feature of these installations.

I was raised on a sailboat. For me, Roberts' works are a powerful trigger of sensory memories of nautical life: black-tarred dock pilings, oiled can-



Dale Roberts, 2002. Installation view, grunt gallery, Vancouver. *Neptune's Crown Synet II*, corked/crocheted tarred hemp, burlap (53" [H] x 36" x 36"). *Quoiled Boundary*. Crocheted netting twine, rope fragments (8' x 5' x 6').



Dale Roberts, 2002. Installation view, grunt gallery, Vancouver. *Cottle's Cove Synet*, *Sailor's Synet*, *Drifter's Synet*. Driftwood, crocheted cotton, lead sinkers, brass, 7'(H) x 8' x 10".

vas, hemp, wet rope, aromatic kelp beds and mud flats. This is a romantic body of work with strong narrative elements. It lulls the viewer with vaguely familiar scents and shapes, then ambushes the senses from several directions at once. This was an exhibition certain to speak to anyone who recalls immigrant ancestors or seafaring parents. Roberts has revived age-old industrial arts in an artistic re-evaluation of Maritime culture, science and craft. Freed of functionality, what is enduringly beautiful about these traditional materials, objects, and icons provides Dale Roberts with the expressive vocabulary for a renewed, narrative role.

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