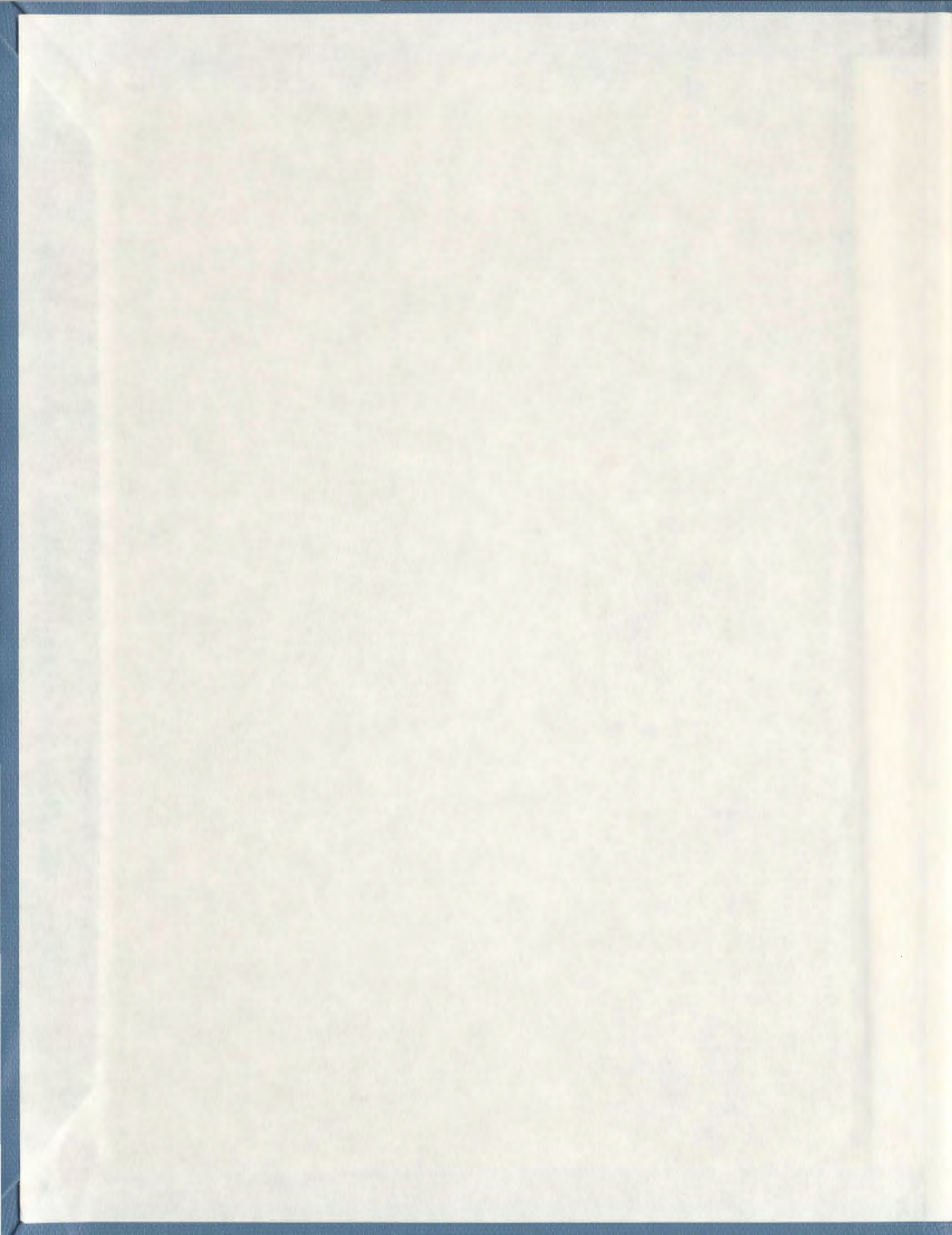


"THAT NICE GORGEOUS CUSP":
SOCIAL STRATIFICATION IN CONTEMPORARY
NEWFOUNDLAND RUG-HOOKING

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**“That Nice Gorgeous Cusp”: Social Stratification in Contemporary
Newfoundland Rug-Hooking**

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requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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Abstract

This is a study of hooked rugs and their makers in contemporary Newfoundland. Rug-hooking symbolizes a culturally “pure” and sometimes glorified past where the ancestors of today’s island population worked with their hands and used the materials and the land (and sea) that was available to them. Today, women are using the traditional rug-hooking method as a means of artistic expression, as a leisure activity, and in an effort to earn income following the collapse of the Atlantic cod fishery. This thesis explores how each of these categories influences the subject, style and media of the rugs, and how social stratification and self-identification manifests within the faction of women who practice rug-hooking.

Acknowledgement

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grandmother who introduced hooked rugs into my interior space and thus planted the first seed.

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Chapter One

Rug-hooking 101: An Introduction to the Study and the Craft

This is a study of hooked rugs and their makers in contemporary Newfoundland. In it, I will explore the social stratification that exists within the faction of women who practice this craft as well as the different reasons that these women engage in the act of rug-making. In this study, the impetus for rug-hooking lies in three main categories: artistic expression, leisure activity, and earning income. I will investigate how these categories influence the subject, style and medium of the rugs, and how social stratification is manifested in aesthetics.

In Newfoundland women don't hook "rugs" they hook "mats." This is a small but nevertheless important note on terminology. The words "mat" and "rug" refer to the same object. The title of this thesis and the first paragraph refer to the objects of study as "rugs" in an effort to avoid confusion. The word rug will also occasionally crop up for stylistic reasons in an effort to avoid repetition, but because this is a study of Newfoundland *mats*, they will be referred to as such throughout the following five chapters.

Although hooked mats were a decorative feature in my childhood home in Ontario—punctuating the floor spaces of entryways and laying flat at the foot of beds—like most household objects, they were an unremarkable almost organic aspect of interior decoration. Later, I would develop a vague notion of their monetary value and worth as a historical object and their prized status among antique collectors. I did not, however, look at these hooked mats in the same way as the sculptures and oil paintings that I studied while earning an undergraduate degree in art history. Back then, I simply wouldn't have

classified a hooked mat in the same way that I would an oil painting by Edgar Degas or a sculpture by Auguste Rodin.

It was during my first year in St. John's that the idea of the hooked mat as a work of art and also a research topic began to take shape. In Newfoundland the hooked mat symbolizes a difficult yet glorified past that was rich in culture and (seemingly) simple in structure. Seeing the hooked mat within this context heightened my perception of the object's value. What was of particular interest to me was that some of the contemporary mat-makers were using the traditional method and form of mat-hooking as a springboard from which to create "high" art—the kind displayed on gallery walls. Equally intriguing were several collectives in the province engaging in mat-making cottage industries as a means of boosting rural economies, a concept in place since the early 19th century. I wondered what fundamental differences might exist between these two groups and how these differences might manifest in the aesthetic of their works. Also, what sort of crossover, if any, exists socially and aesthetically? While considering these questions, a third group of mat-makers came to my attention. They did not hook mats for artistic recognition nor as a form of livelihood. These women treated the act as a hobby, and mat-hooking provided a link to their surrounding community as well as to their heritage. I identified this crowd as the "leisure" category and the other two groups as "artists" and "vocational mat-makers." It should also be noted that reading the article, "Hooked Rugs of Newfoundland: The Representation of Social Structure in Design" by Gerald Pocius (who would later become my supervisor for this thesis) helped me to see the hooked mat

as a social and folkloric research area, giving me license to pursue a thesis topic on the same aspect of material culture, if in a slightly different vein.¹

The scholar of folk art is challenged to suspend their aesthetic preferences and bias when approaching the works they study. The fine art scholar rarely engages with works they deem amateur or lacking in particular skill, or with works that don't suit their aesthetic preference. In the introduction to her historical overview of Canadian craft, Alfodly writes that "Art historians are not obliged to qualify that their scholarly publications focus on professional art, yet studies in craft history still require to delineate between amateur and professional art activities" (3). In some ways, a background in the fine arts presents a problem for a scholar crossing over from the "fine" to "folk" area of study. Alfodly is pointing out the main differences between the scholarly approach to art and craft histories. This study is more closely aligned with the latter, although borrows, on occasion, from the former. The hooked mats that I will examine in this thesis are defined as craft, or material culture, or folk art. Jones writes that "An approach more revelatory of folk art and its production would involve the temporary suspension of the observer's judgment and the collection of data concerning attitudes of group members toward the products created in their community" (18). It is unlikely that a fieldworker could temporarily suspend judgment—an act that would need to carry on through the processing of the research and the subsequent act of shaping that research into a paper, talk or thesis. It is my opinion that judgment and theoretical argument are close cousins. I

¹ Pocius observed that the symmetrical, repetitive geometric mats were representative of the social cooperation and egalitarian aspects of Newfoundland outport life and thus displayed in the gathering spaces and communal areas of household kitchens. The mats with individual patterns (floral, animal) represented the less pervasive hierarchal aspects of outport life and were generally displayed in the 'proper' sitting room where homeowners brought special guests—like clergymen or merchants.

believe Jones is speaking idealistically not realistically. Following Jones' line of thought I did try to "temporarily suspend" any bias when approaching objects and their makers. How successful I may have been remains to be seen. Further following Jones' edict, I collected data from mat-hookers regarding the standards they place on their *own* work as well as the work produced by other women working in the same medium and this provided an invaluable component to my research.

History of Mat-hooking

It has been suggested that the hooked rug is an indigenous North American art form (Kogan 41). However, other theories propose that mat-hooking was a skill brought to North America—New England, Quebec and the Eastern Provinces initially—by immigrants sailors and fishermen from England and Scotland (RHGNL 7). In 1947 folklorist Marius Barbeau wrote that "Opinions as to the origin of the hooked rug have brought us to a blind alley; they differ and can not be reconciled" (110). Tracing the history of the hooked mat is not the purpose of this study, but what *is* important is to understand the historical value that Newfoundlanders place on the act of mat-hooking and the artifacts themselves. Mat-hooking is considered an important part of the province's heritage, and the preserved objects are glorified, as heritage artifacts often are. In 1997 The Rug-hooking Guild of Newfoundland and Labrador created The Heritage Hooked Rug Registry with the aim of eventually publishing a book displaying the mats they gathered through this search. Nine years later they amassed 600 images from across the province cataloguing a huge array of mat styles hooked from the early 1900s onwards (RHGNL). *Hooked Mats of Newfoundland and Labrador: Beauty Born of Necessity* was

published in 2006 and is widely available in book and tourist shops throughout the province.

Still, like the ancient plow and farming tools displayed in museums as vestiges of the past, matting represented a harder life. It was initially an act of sustainability associated with hard work and survival in a harsh climate devoid of central heating and wall to wall carpet. "In both Newfoundland and England, mat-making was a part of rural life, fostered by necessity. It is believed many Newfoundland women were proficient in mat-making from the early 1800s, and as immigrants moved throughout the island of Newfoundland and coastal Labrador, this craft spread with them" (RHGNL 10).

In the late 19th and early 20th century women in Newfoundland and Labrador began supplementing their income through a cottage industry set up by British physician Sir Wilfred Grenfell. Part of the profits from the sales of the handicrafts helped to finance his medical and religious missions and hooked mats soon became the staple product of the industry (Lavery). Although his goodwill and business sense left a lasting footprint on Northern Newfoundland and Labrador, it is perhaps the hooked mats produced by Grenfell Handicrafts that remain the good doctor's legacy. A Grenfell mat is instantly recognizable both by subject matter, often Northern landscape complete with regional flora and fauna and the occasional parka-clad figure (see figures 1-2), and in the impeccably tight loops, hooked low against the surface of the brin.² Stories about Grenfell's strenuous attention to detail abound to this day. It has been said that if a woman presented sloppy work she was made to pull out her fabric and start all over again. Whether this presents Grenfell as a figure of stringent cruelty or a keen businessman is debatable. What *is* certain is that the Grenfell handicrafts cottage industry

² Brin is another, more old-fashioned term for Burlap.

remains the business model for flagging rural economies in Newfoundland and Labrador—particularly in the production of hooked mats. Today Grenfell Handicrafts is a private enterprise that continues to produce work from the original designs, sold from the gift shop adjacent to the museum that chronicles the doctor's life (Lavery; Grenfell Museum). However, it is the original mats that that most collectors covet. Almost a century later, the sales and value of the early 20th century Grenfell Handicrafts mat continue to rise whether they are being sold on-line, at auction, or in antique shops. With this kind of lasting legacy, it's no wonder that dwindling rural communities have followed suit.

The story of a rural and somewhat idealized past is intertwined with the history of mat-hooking in this province and works today as a means of selling mats to potential buyers—both tourists and locals. Although the mats for sale in the Water Street tourist shops and the Newfoundland and Labrador Craft Council shop are contemporary, they represent a rose-coloured past; a pre-confederation lifestyle when cod was plentiful and lives were, seemingly, simple. In many cases this is evident in the subject matter of these works, like the Placentia West Mat-makers collective's ubiquitous outport village scene complete with a whale, or dory in the bay, and laundry flapping on the clothesline (figure 4). In other cases, it's the act of mat-hooking and the link it suggests to a specific regional past that attracts (or repels) consumers, as seen in fiber artist Shawn O'Hagan's experience at a Toronto craft fair, detailed in Chapter Five. O'Hagan discovers that without an emotional attachment to mat-making, consumers are reluctant to pay the price of her work. This is not a study of historical mats, but the relevance of the contemporary

craft is rooted in the history of mat-making on this island. This is implicit in the interviews, ideas and arguments expressed throughout.



Figure 1: Grenfell Handicrafts mat for sale on eBay (2008) depicting a typically Northern scene with two “Northern” figures and dog sled.



Figure 2: Grenfell Handicrafts mat for sale on eBay (2008). Pitcher Plant seat cover design.



Figure 3: Examples of Placentia West hooked mats depicting typical outpost scenery, buildings, fishery, sea life, birds and clothes drying on the line.

Craft Revival

It is safe to say that rug-hooking is undergoing a revival period in Newfoundland. The pamphlet sent out by the Anna Templeton Centre for Craft, Art and Design runs a disclaimer under the listing for their rug-hooking workshop: "Register early this is one of our most popular classes." The interest in learning the craft is at an all time high and this St. John's-based workshop series churns out close to 100 new 'hookers' every year.. Many of these pupils are artists who typically work in other mediums, like painting, printmaking, or photography. These artists engage with a new form of media that is very staunchly emplaced in the national narrative of the province. The introduction of art theory into the production of hooked mats is a movement unto its own and serious collectors have gravitated from the classic antique mats to the modern art inspired contemporary works. Recently, mats made their debut as a serious art form in shows at The Rooms in St. John's and Sir Wilfred Grenfell College Art Gallery in Corner Brook.

Often the juxtaposition of tradition and heritage with modern art ideals are evident in the work being produced. O'Hagan, who lives and works in Corner Brook, recently produced a series of Art Deco mats. In her artist's statement she writes: "These mats are a celebration of design, of strong shapes and bold colour. My inspiration comes from art deco textiles of the 1920's. The art deco movement drew upon sources that ranged from ancient Egypt, Imperialist China and tribal Africa. It also was an optimistic expression of industry, jazz and speed. This is the world we live in today. I love the juxtaposition of frenzied design and the slow process of rug-hooking" (Emma Butler Gallery). This juxtaposition of old and new is a shift seen across North America producing a proliferation of DIY craft books and magazines, groups and organizations, night classes and even a few cafés. In some cases this renewed interest in craft is actually incorporated into the technological world. As reported in the *Globe and Mail*, "Generations X through Z have rediscovered crafts such as knitting, quilting and crocheting, and now they're blending these old-fashioned arts with their love of newfangled technology to create a new genre: nerdcraft" (Dube).

Meanwhile, membership numbers within the Rug Hooking Guild of Newfoundland and Labrador (RHGNL) are climbing steadily and the craft has garnered a good deal of media attention over the past few years. In 2007, a sampling of headlines from across the province includes: "Reviving a Dying Art" (*The Northern Pen*); "Hooked on History" (*The Telegram*); "Students Getting Hooked on Tradition" (*The Telegram*); "Hooked on Mats" (*The Independent*).

A contributing factor to this revival is that the materials needed for mat-hooking are mostly recycled, cheap, and widely available. "You can hook with anything," textile

artist Catherine McCausland tells me while we sit at her kitchen table in Tors Cove and discuss the craft. She's right, you could hook with thin strips of plastic if you liked, with sticks (like Janet Davis, see Figure 15), with cotton, even with wire. But mostly, outside the boundaries of the art world, rug hookers use two main materials; manufactured spun wool or recycled fabric torn in to thin strips.

The mats that will be examined and discussed in this thesis are mostly made from recycled fabric. Rug hookers in contemporary Newfoundland scour Value Village, garage sales and thrift stores for their materials. These can be anything from old soccer t-shirts, blouses, wool pants and blankets to shiny 1980s club-wear and spandex. The rest of the tools and materials are quite simple and include a wooden frame, a hook, and a bolt of burlap. Mat-hooking is an uncomplicated act and doesn't require a great degree of skill or knowledge, yet work will obviously improve with practice. It's a rather democratic pastime in that almost anyone can do it. However, those who seek out mat-making courses or kits generally have some form of connection to the craft. Times have changed and women learn to hook in classroom settings through guilds and outreach programs rather than from their mothers and grandmothers. This has widened the circle of women participating in the craft and in many ways, helps to keep the tradition alive.

It is in part a symptom of the changing times as crafting receives a renewed interest in response to the fast-pace of technology and life in general. "People want to slow down and pay attention to the little details like our mothers used to do," remarks Anne Manuel, Executive Director of the Craft Council of Newfoundland and Labrador (Urquhart). In Newfoundland, mat-hooking is at the forefront of this 'slow movement.'

Overview of Three Mat-hooking Categories

In the initial draft of this introduction, I'd used one mat to represent each of the main theories and concepts to be explored in the ensuing chapters of this thesis. In that version of my introduction, I referred to an individual mat and suggested how each one might symbolize a particular aspect of the study. However, this proved problematic. The works and their makers were more complex than what a simple definition could achieve, and encompassed many theories at once. This thesis explores mats as a form of visual art as well as the mat-makers and how they classify themselves—artists, hobbyists, or in some cases, vocational mat-hookers.

1. Mat-hooking as Art

Being from Waterloo County, Ontario where the Mennonites have a long rug-hooking and quilting tradition, I am surprised to encounter hooking being used as a medium in works of modern art. "Traditions in Transition," an exhibit curated by Gloria Hickey, is on display at The Rooms Provincial Museum when I arrive in St. John's in September 2006. In it, artists are encouraged 'hook' beyond the boundaries of the craft, resulting in a variation of structures, some of which only vaguely resemble the original format. There are three dimensional hooked mats that incorporate materials like sticks and wire, and the subject matter ranges from figurative to landscape to abstract, and, in the case of Kathleen Knowling's Cod Save the Queen (2005) political. Political! I'm amazed, although art has always been a vehicle for political statement (like Picasso's Guernica (1937), or Goya's The Third of May (1808).) Part of my astonishment lies in

the fact that although I valued hooked mats, I hadn't considered the act an "art form" and the product "art."

When setting out to categorize the mats and their makers, the artists initially seemed, to me, the easiest group to define. The hooked mats that were the farthest removed from their original purpose and style sometimes carried within their execution and intent, a very traditional meaning. Each artist's mat, no matter how avant-guard its materials or subject matter, incorporated the same aspects of history, heritage and place as the vocational and leisure mats. It seems these aspects of mat-hooking are inherent to the craft and inseparable from the act of mat-making.

2. Mat-hooking as Vocation

Part of this study took place on the Great Northern Peninsula, a finger-shaped body of land that points north towards Labrador. I undertook the 900 kilometre drive to the tip of "The Pen" in July 2007 to view the Grenfell museum and homestead in St. Anthony, and in particular to visit the outport community of Raleigh. My interest in Raleigh was rooted in their recently-formed mat-making collective. I wanted to know if the mat-hookers, out of work and displaced by the cod moratorium, enjoyed their new handicrafts vocation; if they considered themselves artists or not; if the work replaced their previous employments in a financial and emotional way. And I did ask these questions but I didn't find a collective so much as a sole mat-hooker in a room surrounded by fabric scraps, sitting with her back to the ocean. Still, there was much to learn about vocational mat-making, such as whether or not it pays the bills, and where on the social ladder the mat-makers are placed and place themselves within the craft. Aesthetically, I wanted to know what style (high or low loops) the women adopted,

which colours they favoured (suggested or chosen) and how hooking from a pattern (designed by others) affected how they felt about the work. So, there weren't as many subjects as I'd hoped, but I discovered a larger pool of people to speak with and learn from and my visit to Raleigh helped inform every chapter in this thesis.

3. Mat-hooking as Leisure

People "explore the urge to create as a condition fundamental to being human" (Jones 55). In reference to the "masterpiece" chair crafted by his informant Chester Cornett, Jones writes that this is an "extreme" example "of behavior common to us all: mastering skills, expressing ourselves, and creating forms whose existence is to be understood in terms of identity and experience, needs and aspirations, self and others" (55). The masterpiece chair was a departure from the regular straight backed rockers and table chairs that Cornett produced. It was an unusual throne-like creation with built-in book shelves and it held zero appeal to the chair-maker's usual market. The impetus for creating this chair, like the work of most hobby rug hookers, was not rooted in marketability. This is the main factor that sets the leisure mat-makers apart from their vocational and artistic contemporaries. They are not constrained by market trends or art gallery specs. They are not relying on the money from their hooked mats for income. Because of these factors, the mats being produced by hobbyists range in style and form. This becomes evident the first time I visit a Monday night hook in hosted by the RHGNL and run out of a classroom on the campus of the College of the North Atlantic in St. John's. There are about thirty women present and their skill levels vary. There are several perfunctory outport/ocean/lighthouse/whale scenes, likely influenced by the ubiquitous Placentia West mats. One woman is hooking a Winnie-the Pooh mat (the cartoonified

Disney version of the bear, not the fine pencil strokes of original illustrator E. H. Shepherd.) Regardless of her skill as a mat-hooker, it is doubtful that this image would receive a pass from the jury at the Craft Council of Newfoundland and Labrador to appear in their gallery spaces or gift shop. Marketability is not an issue for this mat-hooker, a beginner, working in neat loops and carefully staying within the lines of her (self-drawn) pattern. For this woman (and for most of the women in that room) mat-hooking plays a side role in her life. What I found was that mat-hooking provided the leisure group with a creative outlet, but more so with a connection to their past and to their contemporary community.

Methodology

How well can we understand an art form that we have never tried to create? Can the art critic compare oil to acrylic without ever having worked with these two media forms? Could I write about rug-hooking without knowing how the wooden handle of the hook felt in the palm of my hand, feeling the tension of burlap stretched over a frame, or how a bright floral patterned material distills when cut in to strips and tightly looped through that burlap? No, I decided, I could not write about this craft without learning how to perform it. Besides, what better way to validate myself amongst my informants than to assimilate?

In three steps my fieldwork methodology is as follows: 1) Take a mat-hooking course and learn the craft; 2) Participate and observe throughout the process of learning and the subsequent act of “becoming” a mat-hooker within the craft community; 3) Interview a cross section of mat-hookers both regionally and stylistically.

The fieldwork for this thesis was conducted in St. John's and the surrounding area, Corner Brook, St. Anthony, and on the Great Northern Peninsula, during the spring and summer of 2007. The women interviewed for this study are professional artists, vocational mat-makers, and leisure mat-hookers or hobbyists. Interspersed with these sources are the sentiments of a pair of contemporary mat collectors as well as an on-line mat retailer. When I began this project I'd planned to focus solely on the collective of mat-makers in Raleigh, but I soon realized the subject was more complex and required different groups as well as locations to round out the study. Part of what brought me to this conclusion was a magazine assignment I undertook during my field season. I pitched the story idea of "mat-hooking in Newfoundland" to include a few individual profiles as well as feature an informal collective hook-in. The research for the article was extensive and broadened both my understanding of the craft as well as my contact base. I decided that to properly explore contemporary mat-hooking I would need to also include hobbyists and artists. My research was constant and intruded on everything from my academic work to my social life. Professors and fellow classmates would bring mat-hooking articles and their own personal reflections on the craft to my attention. Strangers that I met in loud bars would seek out my email address weeks later to send me information they'd seen in the local press that pertained to my research topic. Eventually, I was invited to participate in local gallery events as the "token" mat-hooker. All of these chance encounters, tips, stories and experiences informed this study, even when they aren't specifically mentioned.

Beyond fieldwork and biblio-based research, this study was influenced and informed by a number of collections and travelling exhibits in museums and art galleries

in Newfoundland, Nova Scotia and Ontario. These include The Rooms, The Craft Council of Newfoundland and Labrador, The Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, The Textile Museum of Canada, Grenfell Interpretation Centre and Grenfell House Museum, and The Emma Butler Gallery among others. Further, I undertook ongoing observations and notes in craft shops across Newfoundland from Ferryland to Fogo Island to Woody Point. The methodology and research choices for this study are further laid out in Chapter Two, which I hope will give an understanding of where I began and the ground I covered along the way to my conclusions.

Chapter Outline and Literature Review

This thesis was influenced and based in a variety of literature that ranged from published oral history accounts to media reports to scholarly texts in a variety of disciplines: ethnology, folklore, history, and art history. My research builds on work that traces the history of mat-making and textile production in Newfoundland and Labrador (RHGNL; Flynn; Laverty; Lynch; Pocius) and more personal memoirs and experience-based narratives (Ennis; Fitzpatrick). There were some scholars whose works I found myself returning to for both reference, guidance and inspiration throughout the research and writing process of this thesis and these include texts by Sandra Alfoldy, Linda Cullum, Henry Glassie, H. L. Goodall Jr., Michael Owen Jones, Paula Laverty, James Overton, Gerald Pocius and Sally Price. In the following Chapter Outline I will expand on how my work builds on the existing body of literature produced by these scholars.

Chapter Outline

The following four chapters explore the main concepts of this thesis and they are as follows:

Chapter Two: Joining the Collective: Fieldwork and Research Methodology

As outlined in the methodology section of this introduction, Chapter Two will be an overview of the methods employed and fieldwork undertaken during the research process of this study. The approach I took was based on what Goodall terms the “new” ethnology in which the ethnographic researcher acknowledges themselves within the context of their study group, and incorporates a more personal approach to theorizing on fieldwork that includes thoughts, feelings, notes, and reactions (Goodall). Inspired by the methodological essay of researcher Linda Cullum on similar fieldwork undertaken in Newfoundland, I included the negative, or at least less palatable aspects of ethnographic work—bias, misunderstandings between fieldworker and subject, and distrust of academic institutions on the part of subjects—and explored what role these obstacles played in my research process.

Chapter Three: Three Kinds of Mat-hookers: Leisure, Vocation, Artist

In Chapter Three I begin by examining and defining the three categories of mat-hookers. These classifications formed naturally throughout my research, and just as naturally overlap and cross one another’s boundaries. The root of these three groupings lies in the pre-existing literature and classifications within the disciplines of folklore and craft history, all of which provide context for this study. To set context, this chapter explores the terms and definitions that have come to qualify craft in North America.

Beginning with the notion of “Primitive Art” a classification which suggests a cruder, more simplistic creative form, as examined by Sally Price in “Primitive Art in Civilized Places”, I explore how [North American] society defines and values art/folk art. Following this, I survey the elevation and professionalization of craft in Canada as examined by Sandra Alföldy in her extensive look at “fine” craft and also Sandra Flood in her history of craft and museum practice in Canada from 1900 to 1950. Following Glassie’s definition of material culture in the context of the maker, the marketer and the consumer, this section explores the link between creative output and self identification, as well as the role that display, venue and consumer play in the classification of mats and their makers.

Chapter Four: The Story Needs a Hook: Selling Heritage in Post-Fishery

Newfoundland

Next, I expand on vocational handicraft in Newfoundland, with a focus on a mat-hooking cottage industry in Raleigh, by looking at the commoditization of rural identity and heritage within the marketing of this folk art as well as the viability of craft as a means of sustainability in rural communities. In this chapter I draw on Overton’s theories of commoditization of Newfoundland culture that are rooted in both pre and post confederate history and the socio-political events that shaped contemporary Newfoundland. In a comparative effort, I include examples of recent studies on similar deindustrialized landscapes in Atlantic Canada such as Marian Binkley’s look at the reconstruction of Lunenburg, Nova Scotia from fishing village to tourist destination and Robert Summerby-Murray’s interpretation of memory and heritage in the redevelopment

of two former foundries in Sackville, New Brunswick. Finally, I rely on Jane S. Becker's extensive survey and interpretations of craft production in Southern Appalachia during the 1930s. Becker's approach and ideas helped shape my own arguments regarding the notion of cottage industries as rural panacea.

Chapter Five: Hooking High and Low: Social Stratification in the Aesthetics of Mat-Making

Finally, I discuss the aesthetics of the mats as they pertain to each of the defined groups: Artistic, Vocational, Leisure. Following the definition of material culture studies as outlined by Glassie, Bronner and Jones, in this chapter I examine how style, material and subject matter vary depending on the reasons for creating a mat: artistic recognition, retail sale, or for pleasure. Borrowing from the discipline of art history I use the compare and contrast method to explore the stylistic similarities and differences, essentially exploring the choices each mat-hooker makes when approaching her work.

Conclusion: The Opening

The conclusion ties together my final theories on the craft of mat-making in contemporary Newfoundland. First, however, it is important to start at the beginning of the research path. The following chapter explores how my fieldwork research unfolded, where it overlapped with other professional areas of my life and how I approached the study of the hooked mat.

Chapter Two

Joining the Collective: Fieldwork and Research Methodology

Introduction

It is another country, this rock within the sea, Newfoundland. In remote outposts the language is Elizabethan English, or a language as close to it as five hundred years past can echo into the twentieth century. A man like myself, used to the jargon of Americanized English in mid-Canada, listens to this speech with the despairing feeling that here is a land preserved out of time long past, and I am a foreigner. Not only in language, but also foreign in life-rhythms of fishermen and pulpwood cutters. Those are the bread-and-butter basics of this other country that joined Canada in 1949, but that still remains essentially different. Only the baby bonus, UIC benefits, the CBC, and similar federal encroachments into the great island reach the surface of awareness, but they scarcely touch the pride of people who live and die beside the sea. (Purdy 152).

I relate to this piece of writing from Al Purdy's recollections of his visit to Harbour Deep on the East Coast of the Great Northern Peninsula. Like me, Purdy's roots lie in Eastern Ontario. (Family folklore has it that we're distantly related.) Like me, when in Newfoundland Purdy had "the despairing feeling" that he was "a foreigner." The national narrative runs deep in these waters and can be difficult to navigate. As an ethnographic researcher whose frame of reference lies elsewhere, it sometimes feels as if you've just penetrated the surface. In my journalism work I constantly tread on foreign soil, so to speak, entering and then reporting on worlds I initially knew nothing about. Perhaps this is why I chose to focus my folklore thesis research on mat-hooking, a distinctly Newfoundland topic. I was well-versed in being the outsider looking in. As my research on this handicraft unfolded and I began to engage with my subjects during fieldwork I realized that the scope of what lay before me was far greater than any of the political, health or society issues I'd dipped in and out of while writing for magazines and newspapers. While mapping out my research path I'd managed to narrow my focus to a group of former fish plant workers turned mat-makers in Raleigh, a small town at the tip of the Great Northern Peninsula. It was a handicraft make-work project; successful in

theory, if not yet in practice. The idea was that the women would learn mat-hooking skills and go on to work for an on-line handicraft company called North by Design, headed by St. John's businesswoman Adele Poynter. Alternatively, they might find employment through the Raleigh Historical Corporation—a group working to create a historical fishing village in hopes of drawing tourist revenue to the town—run by Bernitte Smith and her husband Noah. A major component of the village is the mat-hooking studio where tourists can drop in or actually learn how to hook mats themselves. This is Bernitte's domain, being one of the formally trained mat-hookers from the original group. The impetus and details of the Raleigh rug-hooking project are fleshed out in Chapter Four, but suffice it to say that the "group" I'd hoped to observe had disintegrated by the time I visited Raleigh in July 2007. Only one woman, Bernitte, was carrying on the handicraft production and a second mat-hooker, Annie Hillier, had been hired on for piecemeal work. Hillier's main source of (personal) income is through Grenfell Industries in St. Anthony but she periodically helps fill orders for North by Design. The rapid disappearance of my intended subjects wasn't a major surprise. Since the collapse of the fishery in 1992 work is scarce and outmigration is high. This exodus is exceptionally high in small outports like Raleigh. The fact that all but one member of the trained mat-hooking group had departed for Alberta simply spoke to the greater social context surrounding the handicraft project.³ Although the diminished numbers changed my research slightly, it was an article that I wrote for *Chatelaine* magazine that broadened my thesis focus to include the artists and hobbyists in the more economically stable Southern region. The common artifact that links these groups of women is the hooked

³ The 2006 Census by Statistics Canada showed that while Newfoundland and Labrador lost close to 3,000 residents in 2005, Alberta gained 90,000. (<http://www.cbc.ca/canada/newfoundland-labrador/story/2006/03/29/nf-population-20060329.html>) I expand on this in Chapter Four.

mat but social and class issues, geography, even the availability of material molded and shaped the hooked mats in different ways. After conducting numerous interviews with rug hookers in Southern Newfoundland, in their homes and at local hook-ins, I realized that in order to fully understand the artifact, it would be necessary to look at a cross section of mats (and their makers) rather than focus on one aspect of the craft in one area of Newfoundland.

Before embarking on my academic journey towards a master's degree, a sociologist friend told me that to engage in the same research for both academic and journalistic purposes would be unethical, and that there would be no middle ground. I objected. Stories are stories. They may be theorized and conceptualized in the realm of academe or they may inspire a fictional narrative or be poured in to the inverted pyramid of a newspaper report. I could not see where the line should be drawn. As long as the sources are clear on where their information will appear, shouldn't we be able to accomplish both?⁴ She was right and I was right. The lines blurred. My biggest challenge was deciding what role I played in the story.

When I worked for a fashion magazine in Vancouver my editor told me that no one wants to read a first-person account unless it is written by somebody who *matters*. Later a newspaper editor told me to stop using the term "you" when recommending tourist attractions or restaurant dishes that I had disliked or enjoyed. (e.g. "You will find yourself delighted by the beef bourguignon at the new French restaurant in town!") The note at the end of a folklore paper I wrote in my second term at Memorial read: "This paper tells me more about your ability as a writer than it does about the subject at hand."

⁴ To be clear, I passed my proposal through an ethics committee at Memorial University and my questions along with the participant consent form were approved through this process. Although I questioned my role, I always followed procedure as dictated by the university while conducting fieldwork.

Professors have expressed irritation at the usage of the term “one” when the writer is referring to an idea they’ve come up with themselves. Trends come and go and, as my supervisor, Dr. Gerald Pocius, told me during a meeting in his office, “It’s only the facts that remain.”

I believe that the facts of the journey, how you arrive at your conclusions and what happened along the way is an important part of the story. Not the most important part, but in your research path you are at least one of the people who *matter*. This is why I’ve chosen to begin this thesis with an autoethnographic account of the research journey I undertook to come to my conclusions, what led me there, and the challenges I faced along the way. Goodall writes of the ‘new’ ethnography that it “is a story based on the represented, or evoked, experiences of a self, with others, within a context. Its theme is the persuasive expression of interpreted cultural performances” (83). In this methodology review, I also include the less appealing aspects of research, like the mistakes that I made, and the preconceptions I had in place when approaching my sources. I won’t use the terms “you” or “one” but I’ll try not to stray too far from the intended path either. Beginning with the act of learning the craft that I set out to study this chapter will be an overview of the main points of methodology including coursework (learning the craft) journalistic research (interviewing and observing) fieldwork (interviewing and observing) and participant observation (engaging with the subject and object on a personal level). Here is how I navigated these waters.

Learning to Hook

It's been day and a half since I returned from my grandmother's funeral in Ontario and I am making my first foray into the art of mat-making. She was a figure of great importance in my life and I feel that some part of me has shattered. I consider cancelling my spot in the mat-hooking course, offered through the Anna Templeton Centre for Fine Art, Craft and Design, but this is my third attempt as the previous three classes filled immediately. Because I've already applied – and received – funding to take the course as part of my thesis research there is no turning back.

My grandmother was a farm-raised, rural Ontarian who remained staunchly emplaced in the landscape where her ancestors settled shortly before the great famine swallowed 1/8 of Ireland's population. She was 95 when she died. When I took an academic interest in mat-hooking, the rugs that were displayed on her walls and laid flat on her floors took on new meaning. She had, in fact, hooked a mat of her own when my mother was a toddler. It was just one of many crafts she would pursue during the twenty years she spent in a small mining town in Northern Ontario—the wife of the mine's shift boss (my grandfather). During my first year in Newfoundland, she discovers a photograph of her mat in progress, stretched over a three by two foot wooden frame. My mother, who is about two at the time the photo is taken, sits directly in front of the mat on a rocking horse, staring absently in to the camera lens.

"I designed it myself" my grandmother told my mother before putting it in an envelope and mailing it to my home in St. John's. Looking at the photo now, I can plainly see 'Eaton's' stamped in block letters above the border of the pattern. Perhaps what she'd meant is that she'd chosen the colours or changed the shapes or obliterated a border and

skewed the symmetry. I will never know as the photo is all that remains of the mat and my grandmother died shortly after she posted it to me.

The issue of design and pattern crops up often during my research. If a mat-maker works from another person's design, do they lay artistic claim to the final product? While at her own art opening in winter 2008, fiber artist Shawn O'Hagan is approached by a wealthy patron, a collector her art work. "I bought one of your pieces recently, through North by Design Handicraft" the woman tells her. "It's not the same," Shawn says when she relates this story to me in spring 2008. It's her design, but it's not her work. She'd been hired to create several patterns for North by Design, and so she'd produced a number of graphic works reminiscent of her own style. The mats are undeniably Shawn's designs, but the hooking work and colour composition are not. She was paid for her designs, but will not receive financial compensation for the subsequent sales of the mats.

It strikes me as odd that neither designer nor creator will lay claim to these mats. I wonder if the process is akin to product assembly in a factory. Do the people who assemble Umbra's designer furniture and household items claim the final work as their own? Could Umbra designer Karim Rashid walk in to a high end furniture shop and, upon seeing his popular 'Oh Chair' for sale, truthfully say that he 'made' it himself? In the case of vocational mat-making and pattern designing the results are a lot less uniform than factory products, but parallels exist. For instance, I trace the image for my first mat from a pile of available designs. It looks nothing like the next nine mats I would go on to hook from my own patterns. Placing these mats together in a group you might think the first was hooked by an entirely different person (figure 4). It was not, but an unseen hand drew the outline of the birds and placed them a particular distance apart and made the

branch they sat on of a decided thickness and proportioned their beaks and wings. This person was not me.



Figure 4: The mat that I trace from a pattern (bottom left) is a very different style from the mats I go on to hook later.

The Anna Templeton Centre is under construction and so our class is held in the uninspiring College of the North Atlantic building off the ring-road that circles St. John's. There are five women in my mat-hooking course and we range in age from early twenties to mid-forties. Most classes are larger, but we are the overflow from the first spring class. The interest was so high that the organizers thought it financially worthwhile to offer a second class in late April. Our instructor, Elizabeth Tucker, immediately wants to know which pupil is writing "the article." This is me. She's been tipped off by the

Anna Templeton program coordinator Catherine McKenzie, whom I'd interviewed for an article I was writing on mat-hooking for *Chatelaine*. Before leaving Toronto, I'd been on staff at the magazine and I continue to write what I can manage with my academic workload. It can be difficult to know where exactly my role lies when my academic and journalistic research collide.

Tucker is mildly hostile and challenges me immediately. "You should have called me first," she says. "I taught them all to hook." She goes through a list of women who'd taken this class and whose works now fetch even more than her own. From my research, I know that most of the women she mentions were already promotion-savvy working artists with links to galleries throughout the community.

I've encountered mild suspicion while conducting fieldwork but being connected to the media adds an even greater level of tension to an already unconventional meeting (interviewer and interviewee.) People can feel used, or they can feel excluded, and, in many cases they want to use your resources to promote their own agenda, mission, product, or simply themselves. When addressing the issue of "gatekeepers" in the art world later in this thesis, I wondered if my decisions on which mat-makers to showcase in this article would put me in this category—if only for a short while. My decisions, to be honest, were based on personal connections, suggestions from people with special expertise, and of course the work (i.e. my own taste.) I had a limited number of people to include and a non-existent travel budget. Anyone too far outside St. John's did not make the cut. It's difficult to digest that exclusion can be based on something as simple as geographic location. With their place within Canada so often contested, Newfoundlanders are well-versed in this process of elimination.

However, Tucker softens eventually and in the end I do interview her for the article ("My mother will be so proud to see me in *Chatelaine*," she writes later in an email.) By our second and final class, Tucker looks over my mat and says, "I think you'll take to this." I would go on to prove her right. I enjoyed the work, and the creative outlet it provided. It also helped with the technical aspects of describing mat-hooking in writing—the feel of the hook, the tension, the textures, the even or uneven loops, and the difficulty of pulling a threaded needle through layers burlap when finishing off the corners. In theory, it would also help me as a researcher to understand the mindset and actions of the artists whose work I was examining. When studying the ancient cave paintings at Chauvet in Southern France researchers trace and re-trace the animal images in an effort to understand the artist's creative process and decisions. They set up digital photographs printed to scale on easels as close to the wall as possible and then trace the image over and over on successive sheets of plastic. "This dynamic act of translation gives him a deeper insight in to the artist's gestures and techniques than a mere reading would," writes Judith Thurman in her recent essay on Chauvet (66). The act allows researchers to theorize on the artist's mindset—perhaps certain pauses or scrapes reflect a moment of doubt or reflection; strong lines might represent confidence and certainty in inspiration (Thurman). These researchers are looking at the work of artists who lived at least thirty-two thousand years ago, therefore interviewing their subjects is clearly impossible. But how well do people articulate their creative urges or inspirations and what words do they choose explain their final product? Artists are constantly defining and defending their work in exhibition statements, biographies, media interviews and

throughout the process of formal training at universities and colleges. Vocational and leisure mat-makers, however, are less versed in this process. (And it could be argued that the process of self-definition is rarely a true representation of the maker and her work.) Although I am able to interview my subjects, I am also able to look at their work and understand the technical aspects as well as theorize on the creative act itself. I owe this ability to my instructor Elizabeth Tucker. Her inclusion in the magazine article would also round out the piece as a whole and helped exemplify the popularity of mat-hooking as a rising leisure craft.

Editorial Slant

The editor of the magazine wants to bill rug-hooking as the next 'craft craze' and makes reference to the knitting phenomenon in urban centres like Toronto that now boasts a 'knit café' where hip young women gather over lattes while knitting cozies for their iPods. More than once she uses the term 'stitch 'n bitch' coined by American writer Debbie Stoller, editor-in-chief of *Bust* magazine who wrote a series of 'Stitch 'n Bitch' handbooks (*Stitch 'n Bitch: The Knitter's Handbook*, *Stitch 'n Bitch Nation*, *The Happy Hooker*⁵) spawning an entire generation of unconventional crafters. The editor wants the lead to be that young women are revisiting their grandmother's crafts in new ways. Except that the mat-hookers that I meet are mostly over forty. I worry that I may have deceptively billed the craft in this manner to sell the story. The editor tells me that we will have to re-focus. "Maybe *you* are the only young woman rug-hooking? Maybe you're at the forefront of this trend?" She suggests. From what my research has shown my age puts me in the minority and I do not think that I am at the forefront of a

⁵ "The Happy Hooker" is a book about crochet not rug-hooking.

generational craft shift. "Let's put you in the story," she suggests, firmly. So, I become a central character in the story. It begins with the mat-hooking class, where I tentatively step in to my fieldwork and journalistic research as not only observer but full-fledged participant. It seems a bit self-obsessed, a bit showy, but I find writing in first person easier. Writing as omnipresent "objective" narrator has always felt deceptive to me both in academic and journalistic work.

A week after filing the story I am propped precariously on the gunwale of a beached dory in Tor's Cove, acting as a stand-in during a photo shoot with a photographer who's been flown in from Toronto. I am trying to pose naturally but the edge of the boat is too high and the wind is too strong and I am swaying about on tip-toes. Smiling would seem preposterous as I am, after all, only the stand-in. To make matters worse, there are spectators. The men from the adjacent fish plant are gathering along the chain-link fence that encloses the factory and watching the shoot with a mixture of mild interest and cynical bemusement. I look and feel ridiculous and no doubt these men concur. In a few minutes the women from the mat-hooking group make their way down to the beach and I am relieved of my stand-in duties although now I am holding the base of the ten foot light stand that is blowing precariously in the wind. The women are compliant and fall into easy poses, and to my great relief, the photographer is a kind and gentle director. His only insistence is that we include fiber artist Catherine McCausland's giant Newfoundland dog who is more interested in the crab shells along the shore than she is in posing for the camera.

I bring my mat with me to Tors Cove so that I can show the other rug hookers what I've done so far. I promised them I would during our interview the previous week.

When the women are called together to pose with their mats against the weathered backdrop of Catherine's shed, a member of the mat-hooking group encourages me to join them. I decline. Finally she relents, but she picks up my mat-in-frame and props it against the leg of a chair during the shoot. Following this we head up to the school house in Tors Cove, now an art gallery, to photograph Frances Ennis alongside a 60" x 90" mat, co-created with family members Maxine Ennis, Andrea Ennis and Sheila Coultas.⁶ At the end of the day we go through the photographer's shots as he uploads them on to his computer. He is pleased, and I am impressed. In one day he's managed to capture a sense of place, the camaraderie between the women, their pride in their work and their province, and has used the landscape like a well placed prop. A few months later when I am visiting Toronto I have lunch with a former colleague who tells me that the editors were shocked when the photographs came in. "You'd think they might have dressed a little nicer for a photo shoot," the editor-in-chief commented. "What are they wearing?" Well, I think to myself, they are wearing practical walking shoes, warm sweaters and windbreakers, glasses strung around their necks or perched on their noses. They are wearing naturally graying hair, and little or no makeup.

The comment fills me with a combination of rage and humiliation, and I feel extremely defensive. These women had been so patient in the biting cold and they'd provided us with bread from their ovens, goat cheese from their farms, and hot tea from their kettles. Did the Toronto editor think the women of outport Newfoundland would don heels and trench coats and wear ruby red lipstick while perching sexily on the edge

⁶ The title of this mat is 'A Sleepy Cove.'

of a dory? It wouldn't have been accurate and it certainly wouldn't have been practical given the weather. Besides you can't get away with that kind of charade in this province.⁷

I wonder why my colleague would relate this information to me. Had she intended me to feel badly? Was it meant to hurt my feelings in some way? I think back to the other stories that I've worked on and the other sources I've worked with and I try to imagine if I'd feel the same sense of protectiveness. No, I conclude, I would not. I was deeply involved in this story as it had become, for the time being, my life's research. The women were informants but more and more they were becoming part of the fabric of my life. The comment stung and stuck with me for some time. When working as a journalist I am emotionally invested in each story that I work on and I become very close with my sources. But the timeframe is shorter and once the story goes to print the relationship is over. I'll never forget the people who've allowed me in to their lives, but they fade into the background of my social landscape. Conducting fieldwork and writing an academic thesis is very different from my journalism work. I keep revisiting my sources by listening to our taped interviews, each time finding different meanings—sometimes in the silences, pauses and hesitations rather than in the spoken words. Over and over I look at their work, and as time passes the mats are no longer static but move and breathe and they change with the seasons, in different lighting, and when displayed in new surroundings. When the editor looks at the women in the photos she sees jeans, graying hair, and practical shoes, but I see creativity, inspiration, and history. I see a much larger story.

⁷ I was told early on not to try and make yourself out to be better than anyone else in Newfoundland culture. It was during my first volunteer shift as the folk night doorman at the Ship Pub. The woman in charge said that you "can't get away with anything here, even if you're some lawyer or doctor because I'll still be able to say 'Don't play that game with me. I saw you throwing up in the alley behind the Spur last weekend.'" It was an excellent piece of advice.

Field Work

I'm changing my shoes in the parking lot of the Viking Mall in St. Anthony. It's just before 10 a.m. but I've been here since six—woken by tourists in RVs leaving the campgrounds on their way to the L'Anse aux Meadows Viking settlement. The turnover is constant. We've been camping in Pistolet Park for only three days and yet we've been there the longest.

I have an interview with mat-hooker Annie Hillier and in preparation I'm putting on proper shoes—chucking my campsite flip-flops into the back of my station wagon—and checking that my recording equipment works. I tentatively hold the microphone to my mouth and say my name a few times, then play it back again. I glance towards the window of the nearby Tim Horton's convinced that the morning coffee and doughnut crowd is watching my conspicuous behaviour. Of course, they are not watching me test my microphone in the parking lot. I, on the other hand, seem to be critically watching myself. Although the impetus for this research began in academia—it has hardly any bearing on my present surroundings. As a journalist, I've found myself in this situation many times, but this is my first real foray into ethnography and I'm having difficulty separating the two fields. I find myself questioning my intentions. What am I really doing here in this Northern landscape, in this barren town? Am I gaining academic street cred? Looking for answers to pressing questions? Does this work really matter to anyone but me? I'm certainly not making any money, but is it leading towards a profession?

I can imagine that Annie Hillier might have had some of the same questions about my intentions when I called her from the payphone outside the *Bargain!* store in a dimly lit corner of the shopping mall. Still, she'd relented to having a stranger from the

university visit her home and ask questions about her rug-hooking work. In my preconceptions of Annie and her world, I'd immediately assumed that an interview request would seem outlandish. My theory is quickly proven wrong.

After confirming my interview with Annie I stop by a convenience store and buy the latest issue of the *Northern Pen*, the local paper. (As it turns out, the *Northern Pen* is the only newspaper available on the Great Northern Peninsula. I couldn't find a copy of the latest *Telegram*, and the *Globe and Mail* simply wasn't available. I asked around and checked every dispenser.) Strangely, *The Pen* from the week of July 23rd seems to be devoted to my fieldwork. On page 8 (Section A) there is a 10.5 x 8 inch photo of Noah Smith and Laurie Patey erecting a road sign for the fishing village with the headline: 'Putting Tourists on the Water' and the cutline reads: "Raleigh's Working Historical Fishing Village will be opening in mid-August. The fishing village is a creative attempt by the community to bring more tourists to their town."

The story of the fishing village and its mat-hooking centre had been the impetus for my fieldwork on the Northern Peninsula.⁸ Then on Page 2 (Section B) there is a photo essay titled 'Reviving a Dying Art' with an accompanying few lines about Annie Hillier and her work as well as the mat-hooking courses she offers at the St. Anthony campus of the College of the North Atlantic.

Being media-savvy wasn't Annie's only brush with fame. Near the end of our talk, she tells me, modestly, that the Queen of England owns one of her mats. The city of

⁸ As mentioned in Chapter Four it was an article by Mandy Cook that ran in *The Independent* that sparked my interest in the Raleigh mat-hooking organization. It is worth noting that many of the ideas and stories that inspired further investigation in this thesis originated in the local and province-wide media. This is a good example of how fieldwork can begin at the local newsstand. Whether conducting research in Paris or Bonavista it's always a good idea to buy the local paper.

St. Anthony bequeathed it to her majesty during a past visit to Newfoundland.

Preconceptions are tricky to avoid but I quickly understand that a folklore student interested in your work is no match for the attentions of the Queen of England.

Annie lives across from the Shear's building in a cul-de-sac off North Street.

When I'd phoned her from the mall the day before she gave me the number to her house, but when I drive up and knock on the door, no one answers. A dog barks ferociously from inside. I look down the hill and see a white-haired woman sitting on the front stoop of her home. I'd noticed her when driving by as she'd been hanging laundry on the line. I drive back down the hill and tentatively nose my car in to her driveway but the woman's expression doesn't change. When I roll down the window she says, "I thought that must have been you." This is Annie. She is average height and in her early 60s. Her limbs are tanned and her hair is a snow-white. Her eyes are an uncommonly bright blue.

Annie told me she lived at number 25 when really she lives at number 27. She'd told me she lives on North Street, but really, the cul-de-sac has its own designated name. All of this seems odd, but then, Annie has lived in St. Anthony all of her life. Her frame of reference includes North Street and the Shear's building, but not her own street name and house number. (I constantly forget the digits of my own phone number, as I have rarely dialed it myself.) How often has Annie given directions to her home? St. Anthony (pop. 3,100) is small enough that people generally know who lives where.

We sit down at the kitchen table together and Annie offers me a cup of tea. While I set up my recording equipment she stares absently out the window and swings her feet in a childlike manner. For part of the interview her husband sits across from me and grunts out the occasional comment. She does not introduce me. One of her daughters

wanders in and sits down across from me. She's in her late 20s and has the same striking blue eyes and tanned skin as her mother. I never learn her name, but she tells me that she has no interest in learning how to hook rugs.

Again, I am hyper-aware of my outsider status. I have trouble with Annie's accent, particularly with the dropped "h" as seen in the following passage and field notes:

EU: When you weren't hooking for Grenfell did you have a different job or were you raising your children?

AH: I worked at the fish plant, yeah, I worked down at the fish plant. I worked there for a while and then, yeah.

EU: What was your job?

AH: Heh?

EU: What was your job at the fish plant? (*End of sentence ends on a nervous-sounding upturn.*)

AH: An and cutter

EU: An ancuder? I don't know what that is.

AH: H-A-N-D. I was cutting fish by hand. (*Annie makes a gesture with her hand.*)

EU: Oh, ok, yes, sorry. (*Both of us laugh*) As you can see I grew up in a farming community so I know cows and fields and stuff but fish is new to me.

AH: All hard work my dear.

I cannot listen to this passage or read it on paper without cringing. I wanted to get Annie's job correct. If it was a lesser piece of information I might have moved on and tried to decipher the word later when re-listening to the tape. However, the most horrifying aspect of this passage is when I assert my rural roots in an effort to make myself relatable. Yes, I grew up in rural Ontario but I never set foot in a barn (unless it involved a keg and absent parents) and I grew up with the smell of cow manure in the air

but I certainly never fertilized or tilled a field. Graciously, Annie punctuates the uncomfortable exchange by acknowledging my attempt to relate and the interview moves swiftly forward from there.

In her article on qualitative fieldwork amongst female fish plant workers in Newfoundland, Linda Cullum notes a similar shift in her persona. In a fieldnote she writes: "I hear myself on the tapes and I hear someone who slips and slides in and out of different identities...My voice level, speech patterns and use of language changes in these shifts as well. I move in to a more colloquial way of speaking, laugh at jokes, drop my g's at the drop of a hat!! I am dumb to different degrees..." (128). In conducting this research Cullum finds herself faced with what she terms "the declining subject" when a source seemingly crucial to the crux of the study refuses to be interviewed. She concludes that the refusal should not eliminate the source from the study but be a case for further analysis in which she addresses the issues at play between fieldworker and subject including class, background, a wariness or suspicion of academic intuitions on the part of the interviewee and the shifting identity of the researcher. Cullum contends that "it is not only the identities of "our subjects" which are examined, but our own as well" (128).

Annie warms up to me about half-way through my visit. When we move beyond the basic background information we are able to find common ground in the act of mat-hooking. She likes that I hook too and is curious to know what I use—wool or scraps—and how many mats I've made. She takes me into her work room and demonstrates how quickly she's able to hook a line. It's astonishing, almost as if she was dragging a fat black marker across the brin rather than hooking in to it. She asks if I'd like to give it a try, to see if I can hook as fast, but her request makes me suddenly shy and I decline.

When I leave I ask Annie if I can call her later with any follow up questions and she says, "Sure, *now* you can call me. Now that I know you, you can call any time." It seems like an odd thing to say, but I think I know what she means. Initially she'd been suspicious of me, maybe because I am from the university, the city, and originally from the mainland, or maybe just because I'm a stranger (which makes the most sense.) She didn't know what I wanted exactly or if she could relate to me but through questioning and bonding over a shared artistic medium she'd accepted me. It's an important lesson to learn and although I don't think it would work for all fieldwork, in many cases it worked for mine. Learning how to hook rugs, understanding the various textural and visual differences of the form, style, and materials, not only helped me to understand the craft I'd chosen to study, but in this case acted as a vehicle for acceptance by my informant. In a different vein, during my interview with Bernitte in Raleigh my role as a fellow 'mat-hooker' actually *added* another level of difference between fieldworker and subject. However, the difference sparked a new direction of thought on the topic (high and low hooking, both literally and theoretically) and therefore brought about an integral aspect of the study further explored in Chapters Three and Five.

Participant Observation: Mat-Hooking in the art world

The 24-Hour Art Marathon at the Eastern Edge gallery in St. John's is an annual event that takes place every August. With persuasion, I enter myself as an artist and set out to hook and finish an entire mat in twenty-four hours. I am placed on the second floor with a quilt-maker and two clothing designers. A misplaced cartoonist sets up a small table in the corner. Outside it is pouring rain and a blacksmith works under a canopy that

threatens to blow away in the wind. He stands on a plank of wood that hydroplanes across the giant puddles that have formed below him. Inside the potter's wheel is constantly turning as people throw clay with their feet and one entrepreneurial young man has set up a booth where women (and men if they choose) can create plaster casts of their nipples. There are more traditional artists interspersed throughout the two-storey building, including painters, caricaturists, sculptors, and print-makers. Near midnight a volunteer hangs a giant piñata in the shape of a penis from a ceiling beam in the main gallery and giddy students take turns swiping at the phallic form with a baseball bat until it bursts open and hundreds of condoms fall to the floor. It's a circus-like atmosphere, far removed from the hook-ins and hooking-related exhibits I'd participated in and witnessed, but still the interest in my own work is high as seen in the following field note:

Fieldnote: "A lot of interest and questions and some people even wanted to try hooking themselves (which I actually didn't like but conceded)...by the sheer fact that I'd participated in this event, my work was sold as that of an artist for \$110...I was on 'display' as an artist and a lot of strangers took my photograph. I did not like this."

It was a learning experience, certainly, in becoming the subject rather than the observer and it occurred just after I'd completed my fieldwork. Being the subject is an uncomfortable role, although I speak personally, and I do believe that people enjoy being interviewed generally. (When else in your life does someone want to only ask you question about yourself?) Still, this was not an interview, it was more zoo-like, more of a display and I found myself continually defining who I was, where I came from, what my work meant, why I was drawn to the medium and what I hoped to accomplish. These were, of course, similar to the questions I'd asked of my informants. They were also

similar to the questions asked of most students in the process of writing a thesis: What is your thesis about? Why did you choose this topic? How did you conduct your research?

Conclusion

Methodology is the back story. Potential conclusions are formed long before the research process is put in to place. Anyone who has filled out a grant application is well versed in the projection of theories and concepts at the onset of fieldwork. After passing a standard set of interview questions by an ethics committee, after creating and photocopying consent forms, after setting up interviews and preparing a specific list of questions for each one, the fieldworker embarks on their quest. In my case the quest began with a mat-hooking course, took form while I was conducting research for an related article, and, at the end of a very long drive, it changed again when I discovered that my subjects had dwindled down from twelve to one. Throughout the research process my intended path changed but the focus remained the same. Just as the hooked mat is the object that links my subjects across regional, class and social boundaries, it also links the concepts, theories and ideas of this thesis.

Chapter Three

Three Kinds of Mat-hookers: Leisure; Fine Art; Vocation

Introduction

Jenkins and Puddicombe Sheet Metal is a small independent business run out of a two-room office at the foot of Hamilton Avenue in St. John's. Their main business is, of course, sheet metal, but their display window is filled with varying sizes of tin-men, an imitation of the tin-man in the 1939 film *The Wizard of Oz*. These pint-sized replicas are not for sale, and apart from the obvious association with tin, they don't act as a display of the employees capabilities as sheet metal workers. What made a sheet metal worker stay on past his shift to use his tools and material to create what is arguably a work of art, and is certainly a complete deviation from the corrugated metal roofs and dormer vents that he manufactures during business hours? How is it different from a government employee coming home after a day of pushing papers and picking up her hooking frame to fill in the last corner of her two by three foot mat depicting the village where she grew up?

The obvious difference is that the mat-hooker does not work with burlap and fabric in her day job, but the parallel is that both people are compelled to create, and to do so beyond the parameters of what necessitates sustainability. The miniature tin-man and the hooked mat may only be viewed by a handful of people, may be valued only by the maker, and may never provide monetary compensation for the hours of labour.

Is the hooked mat a work of art? Is the tin man? Henry Glassie writes that "Things are works of art when the act is committed, devoted, when people transfer themselves so completely into their works that they stand as accomplishments of human possibility" (Glassie 41).

Would the sheet metal worker and the mat-hooker consider themselves artists and their work art? That depends on how their makers classify themselves and where their work falls within the social stratification of their craft. To further explore the idea of self classification, I asked rug-hookers throughout Newfoundland if they would call themselves artists and their work art. Their answers varied—there were both esoteric and exoteric viewpoints. There were factors that aligned mat-makers with certain groups and three categories formed: artist, leisure, and vocational mat-hookers. Before exploring these thematic classifications, it is important to look at the evolution of ‘fine’ craft as well as previous academic scholarship on craft, both in Canada and elsewhere.

Craft Classification Systems

Peter Weinrich, the first executive director of the Canadian Crafts Council, attempted to define craft and craftspeople when the organization took shape in 1974 (Alfoldy). The categories were as follows:

1) Producers of non-functional, decorative, or folk arts; 2) producers of utilitarian objects; 3) producers of pre- or post-mass production artifacts (to provide the models and tools for craftspeople); and 4) service and repair men [sic] (watchmakers, electricians, etc.) (Alfoldy 202).

Defining craft within a folkloric context, David S. Hulst uses the terms elite, popular and folk to differentiate folk crafts from other creative forms. Elite works are at the top of the pile. The most expensive, they are the most exquisite hand-made objects as dictated by critics and experts, and the skills of the makers are obtained through established and respected academic institutions. Popular craft covers the mass-produced commercial products available to amateur or hobby crafters—kits, patterns, DIY magazines. The end goal is rarely sale and profit. The skills of folk craft are transmitted

within a group, usually ethnic, peer, national, occupational or religious in nature. The training is informal, but the perimeters are in strict keeping with tradition. There are both commercial and non-commercial streams within the folk craft (Flood; Hults).

There are some troubling issues that arise when applying both classification systems to contemporary mat-making. Hooked mats are utilitarian or decorative (depending on context) therefore they straddle both points one and two of Weinrich's four categories. The vast stratification throughout the craft means that mats and their makers could fall under three of Hults classifications. Finally, in contemporary Newfoundland most women learn how to hook through workshops, classes and formal training. My own mat-hooking instructor, Elizabeth Tucker, estimates that she's taught approximately 1,000 people to hook over the past decade. In her history on rug-hooking in Atlantic Canada, master mat-maker Deanne Fitzpatrick begins with the lament: "I so wish that I could say that I learned to hook at my mother's knee, or that my grandmothers had lovingly passed on their hook for me to learn with, but I did not receive such gifts. When I was growing up in the 1970s in rural Newfoundland, it was 'in with the new and out with the old'" (1). So, although mat-hooking is a traditional craft that can be linked to the heritage, lineage, and culture of a group, most women in contemporary Newfoundland learned to hook from an instructor like Tucker, not their mothers and grandmothers.⁹ Therefore, Hults' definition of how folk craft is transmitted simply doesn't suit this study. Craft scholar Sandra Flood also finds fault with these definitions and writes that "what is not discussed is the hierarchical, class and financial structures

⁹ Deanne Fitzpatrick goes on to say that although she did not learn to hook in a 'traditional' manner there was never a time when she was not aware of hooked mats and their place in her family and regional history. This is a sentiment I heard often from the women I interviewed. They were always familiar with mat-hooking, but learned the skill in a classroom setting as adults.

implicit in the designation elite, popular and folk. Nor am I happy with the rural connotations of folk" (8). However, you might argue that the issues of hierarchy, class and financial structures aren't overlooked in Hults' craft classification system, but simply inherent, and pre-existing within the social world of the craftspeople.

This method of classification can be traced back to the introduction of the word "fine" into craft vernacular. "In the 1950s, actively identifying craft as "fine" was perceived as distinguishing it from the non-professional objects that cluttered the field. Donald Buchanan made this point explicitly in his writing on Canadian craft and design and through his meaningful use of the term "fine" in his craft exhibitions at the National Gallery of Canada. For Buchanan, craft had a responsibility to work with industry, both to overcome the division between the two and to aid postwar Canada in creating a supply of well-designed, mass-produced objects to replace wartime shortages. By simply inserting the term "fine," loaded with overt references to the "fine" arts, it was believed that the crafts could be elevated" (Alfoldy 4).

The art versus craft debate has been pronounced dead by scholars within both disciplines—and they remain two distinct and separate disciplines (Alfoldy). For instance, when I bring up the debate with Executive Director of the Newfoundland Craft Arts Council, Anne Manuel, she refuses to discuss the topic, dismissing it as irrelevant. Within craft a hierarchal schema exists to separate hobbyists and Martha Stewart disciples from those working in the "fine" crafts. A second separation exists between the production of functional and non-functional objects. Professionally-trained craftspeople make functional, if aesthetically pleasing, objects. In some cases craftspeople use the same training and tools to make aesthetically pleasing objects with no function. Hooked

mats were once functional but now they are functionless. They are called mats but no longer take up residence on living room floors nor are they used to wipe muddy boots or keep out cold winter drafts. They are wall art. So, in the case of the vocational mat-makers in this study, yes, they share the same level of technical training as a crafter of fine furniture or a potter, but the mats are non-functional—in a physical sense. They do function as a source of livelihood for the maker, as decoration, and as a past-time. But they are not useful in the same manner as a teapot or a chair.

Although I felt that the mat-makers fell naturally into three categories, there is also a great deal of cross-over and movement between the categories of artist, leisure and vocational mat-makers. The perimeters are not finite. Still, as my research progressed the categories took shape and definitions formed.

Three Different Kinds of Mat-hookers

1. The Artists

I've heard rug hookers defined—by themselves and others—as “textile” or “fiber” artists. I've used these terms in my own writing but I'm not sure I wholly understand the need for differentiating the artist by the medium in which they work. It's not uncommon in the art world (sculptor, painter, printmaker) but the coupling of the medium with the term “artist” is simply not done. I have never heard of someone being referred to as a sculpture-artist, painter-artist, or print-maker-artist. Qualifiers are integral to the professionalization of the crafters and their products. This is evident in the titling of craft institutes here in Newfoundland. It is The Anna Templeton Centre for Craft *Art* and Design. It is the *Fine* Craft and Design Fair. Both the institutions and the individuals

actively engage in the elevation, classification and professionalization of craft. Referring to someone as a textile artist differentiates them from a person who designs textiles, manufactures textiles, or runs a textile import/export business. It also defines that person as an artist rather than a craftsperson.

An important role in the business of defining work as fine art or craft is that of the connoisseur. The connoisseur has many faces and roles; curator, critic, journalist, academic, peer (artist). They are the experts who sit on juries and decide which works are worthy of winning prizes or which artists are awarded grants. They are the discerning eye at the gallery who, with pen in hand, chooses which works to praise and which ones to overlook. They are the gatekeepers of the creative world and they wield a great deal of power.

In her chapter on the “mystique of connoisseurship” Price contends that a connoisseur is “a person whose opinions carry special authority,” and whose “perceptions” we trust. These authorities, Alföldy suggests, are essential to the professionalization of craft. In reference to the professionalization of craft in 1960s/70s Canada she writes: “The existence of craft experts was a necessary component of this professionalization. The development of standardized knowledge for craft during this period was inseparable from the individual producers who applied it and from the governance and institutions that promoted it, with both contributing to the discourse of professional craft that we adhere to today. These professional standards mirrored the modern art community, placing equal emphasis on the technical and the conceptual. It was no longer enough to simply be a proficient craftsperson. One had to be able to contextualize wool, clay, metal, and wood as well as manipulate them” (Alföldy 7).

The commercial venue is also an important factor when contextualizing craft. Whether a mat is being displayed on eBay, at auction, in a commercial gallery, as part of an on-line store, or on the walls of a provincial art gallery, it is almost always for sale. However, each of these venues carries with it a very specific classification—particularly the art galleries. A mat-maker can place her own work on ebay, and many have. What she cannot do without being accepted and approved by the gatekeepers is place her work in a gallery. The mats made by women in the “artist” category are almost always decorative and rarely functional. The final resting spot, in the end, is up to the consumer, but I have yet to see a work by Frances Ennis, Shawn O’Hagan, or Catherine McCausland used as a household door mat.

2. The Vocational Mat-maker

“Are you an artist?”

The question seemed innocuous enough, simple, integral to the study but not particularly controversial, or so I thought. Both vocational mat-makers that I interviewed vehemently denied any connotation with the word artist. Both women blushed at the suggestion, and waved away the term artist along with the pretense it carried. They laughed and shook their heads, as if the mere suggestion of artistry was preposterous enough to be comical. I asked Bernitte Smith first, because, well, I interviewed her first. Her reaction did more than prepare me for my interview with her colleague Annie Hillier the following day; I proceeded with trepidation. However, as mentioned, it was a crucial question and so I persevered and Hillier shook her head and laughed at me just like Smith

had the previous day. Because of their reactions to the term artist, the answers that both Smith and Hillier gave me to my subsequent question were very puzzling.

“Are the mats you make art?”

“Oh, yes.”

Yes? So the maker is not an artist but the product is? The maker is transferring learned skills in to the creation of an aesthetic object. But there's more than that. I ask Smith how she chooses the colours for her mats:

I takes any colour and goes on with it. It don't matter what colour. But now if I'd done something like a design like of that jug and basin then I'd have to look at my colours. You knows what colour you want your water, your grass... I'll look through the pile. Then I got a colour wheel to go by... We done a couple of courses with colour wheels in trade school... I won't use the two same colours and I'll go back over there and look and see if I should put a brighter colour in... I just done it on me own, and they say 'my god you must know something about colours because your mats are beautiful,' I say 'no, I just go on.' Same as the first one that I did. All my instructors see it and see it and say 'oh my god, that's beautiful Bernitte. You need to do more like that and sell them. That's folk art.' I just went and done that. It's just something. Now you knows your colours. Now I can almost tell my colours that I wants to do something with.

I point to the placement of the colour turquoise in a stained glass style mat and ask if she'd ever put two chunks of turquoise side by side. She said no, and that she just knows where to put the colours. Having a background in art history, I find this concept particularly pertinent. Colour placement is a fundamental to the study of art. When looking at a work by abstract expressionist Wassily Kandinsky (1866 - 1944), the colour acts as a visual cue, to guide the viewer's eye across the canvas. A good example is the work Transverse Line, 1923 (figure 6). In the artist's own words: “Colour is the keyboard, the eyes are the hammer, the soul is the piano with the strings. The artist is the hand that plays, touching one key after another to cause vibrations in the soul”

(Thompson 102). Just as we read from right to left, our eyes are trained to pick out and match same or similar colours within a work whether we are looking at a diamond patterned quilt, an abstract painting, the pattern on a sofa, or a hooked mat.



Figure 5: Bernitte Smith works on a "stained-glass" style mat in her Raleigh studio in July 2007.



Figure 6: Wassily Kandinsky, Transverse Line 1923.

Artists like Yves Klein have challenged colour theory by taking a monochromatic approach to painting. Klein's 1961 Monochrome is a 6' 4 7/8" x 55 1/8" work on cotton stretched over plywood (essentially looks like a regular canvas) painted entirely blue. It's a celebrated work, and is in the permanent collection of the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Klein likened monochrome painting to an "open window to freedom" (MoMa).

If Smith hooked a monochrome turquoise mat, would it sell as quickly as the stained glass designs? Would it cost less than the mats with many colours or recognizable visual images or a pattern? She may not consider herself an artist, but by making her colour choices Smith is practicing an act of creativity. Rug-hooking is her day job, but it's not so far removed from the art world that she should entirely reject the notion that she might be a part of it.

Another defining factor between vocational mat-makers and artists is how the pay differs. It's difficult to ascertain as the artists don't generally base their prices by square inch, nor do they work on an hourly wage. The "art" works sell for more, to be sure, but how much work an artist might put into their mat, from research to design to execution, isn't as easy to measure. For vocational mat-hookers the pay is generally based on size, as the slow process makes hourly wages nearly impossible. For example, when the Raleigh Historical Corporation initiated the mat-hookers made \$8.50 an hour. Now the company pays 60 cents per square inch. Smith explains the pay as follows:

It's just a side thing. But a lot of people does it for a profession but I don't know how they makes it out all saying...must have something else, (*Breaths in—sharp*) Don't think you live on it. But like you know a lot of people does it, they can say they pay their car payment on it. If you can do two a month you can get 400 to 500 dollars that's enough for your car payment.

Speaking of her work with Grenfell Handicrafts in the past and now again today, Hillier explains the difference:

It wasn't enough money. They didn't pay enough money to hook mats at the handicrafts Their pay was really low and it was hard work and I didn't think I was getting really paid for it right, paid enough to hook...Right now I hook my mats and leave them there on consignment. They paid me like by the size of the mat. But right now with Handicrafts they pay me 66 cents a square inch, everything has changed over there now, and that makes it much better. The way it is with hooking mats, some weeks you would make money and some weeks you wouldn't because some weeks you might sell neither mat and next week you might sell three or four, that's how mat-hooking is.

Regardless of how they might classify themselves, I do believe that mat-hooking plays a part in how both Smith and Hillier identify themselves just as a banker, a doctor, or a fish plant worker would identify themselves by their day jobs. It may not define their entire existence—what we do to earn our income and sustain ourselves rarely does—but

it is an important part of who they are and their sense of pride is evident in the way they value the work they produce as art.

3. The Leisure Class

It's a blustery evening in early April 2007 and inside the College of the North Atlantic about thirty women are gathered for the Rug Hooking Guild of Newfoundland and Labrador (RHGNL) weekly hook-in. Initially they met on Sunday nights, but then decided that Mondays were a better fit. It gave the women something to look forward to at the end of the workday. This is the Avalon Chapter of the Guild, the largest of the Guild's branches.¹⁰

The skill level and subject matter varies from beginners working from pattern-stamped kits to more experienced mat-makers hooking original designs. The women (and they are all women) sit at classroom desks and are grouped into tables of four. Although this is a social activity, most quietly focus their attention and energy on their mats in progress rather than each other. The first portion of the hook-in is devoted to housekeeping—membership fees, newsletter topics, details of a fundraising event for a local choir. These are taken care of by Diane Warren, current president of the Avalon Chapter. This is just one of about twenty positions within the guild, ranging from newsletter editor, to treasurer, to chairperson of the awards committee. The Guild is a hive of organization, administration and activity. Initiated by about twenty women in the mid 1990s, the group now boasts 200 members province-wide and the numbers continue to climb each year. In fact, RHGNL can be partially credited with renewing interest in

¹⁰ The Avalon Peninsula has the highest regional population in Newfoundland and includes the capitol city of St. John's.

this traditional craft by undertaking an inventory of hooked mats in Newfoundland and Labrador. The project, official titled the Heritage Hooked Rug Registry, was instigated by Guild member Joan Foster in 1997 when she began photo-documenting heritage mats. In 2006 the Guild co-published Hooked Mats of Newfoundland and Labrador: Beauty Born of Necessity, showcasing a selection of the 600 registered mats. The effort to promote and preserve mat-hooking is on-going—new fundraising events are created and committees are formed, and the Guild hosts a rug camp in August that sells out every year (Rug Hooking Guild of Newfoundland and Labrador).

Like the vocational mat-hookers, these women were shy about being observed. In fact, I wondered if my presence was contributing to the silence in the room. A few were eager to show me their work, like a woman working on a ‘poked’ mat—this is a shag style mat where the material is ‘poked’ through the burlap and the ends are cut not looped. This was the only poked mat in the room and the maker appeared proud of her work and confident in her skill level. (This was not her first mat in the poked style.) Most of the women apologized when I approached, claiming that they lacked skill, and that their work wasn’t as good as the others.

About a 30 minute drive from town a very different kind of hook-in takes place, sporadically and sometimes only in winter, at fiber artist Catherine McCausland’s home in Tors Cove. About seven women gather on a weekly basis from September to May and, unlike quilting bees, each woman brings her own project to work from. The regular four-hour event has grown to include a potluck lunch and goods swap—the kitchen table is often covered in second-hand books and magazines, houseplants, and, of course, fabric. Crafting is still the focus, but it’s the social aspect of this meeting that has these women

returning week after week. McCausland is an example of the social crossover that exists between artistic and leisure mat-makers. She is an artist by trade, well-known and respected in the art community for her work with fiber. The hook-in, therefore, is not a creative outlet as much as a means of maintaining social ties in a somewhat disparate community. McCausland describes the meeting as an opportunity to connect on an emotional level in which mat-hooking plays a peripheral role:

[The hook in] has provided that sort of community connection where we don't have the kind of in-depth family ties that a lot of the small communities have. There are existing, well-established family ties in small communities and as a new person you never really fit in to those ties that well, so this has ended up creating a family of independent people.

Fellow group member Vicky Walsh agrees: "The group certainly gives all of us a little social interaction that we never had before, so it's really nice for us."

Once you pass The Goulds, the road that leads to Tors Cove is quite picturesque—a combination of pine trees and lakes and further on, the ocean. It's a leisurely drive in the summer, but sometimes impassable in the winter. The Guild hook-ins that take place in town aren't practical for the women who live in the smaller communities, and that's part of the reason why McCausland started hosting her own small gatherings. The administrative side of the Guild was another reason cited for leaving the formal hook-in. It was too much. This was, after all, supposed to be fun.

Although the Tors Cove hook-ins take place beside the ocean in a traditional saltbox home, most of the group members are not from Newfoundland. Both Walsh and McCausland are "from away." They found the social waters tricky to navigate when they arrived, and to some extent, feel the same way still, years later.

There is a cross-over between categories here in Tors Cove, as both Walsh and McCausland are successful artists (or we could say “textile” or “fiber” artists as they work primarily in this medium). The other women in the group—a neighbour, McCausland’s mother, a friend trying out rug-hooking for the first time—are not artists. These non-artists exemplify another group of women within the “leisure” category and they are hobbyists not self-identified artists. They do not vie for an administrative position within the guild nor do they aspire to show their work in an art gallery. They have a passing interest in the craft and likely took a course in mat-hooking.

My own hook-in group happens at night and usually involves gin, snacks and some level of social drama (i.e. gossip). Our group includes two artists, two leisure mat-makers, and perhaps in the interest of variation I could call myself a vocational hooker as I make the study of craft my current research focus. I apply for grants and receive fellowship funding to conduct this research and rely on that income. And every once in a while, I sell a mat and the money goes towards my rent.

Defined by Handiwork: Creative Production and Self Identification

Stripping away classifications and the varying degree of skill, each woman is, at the root of the craft, creating the same object. What propels human beings to create art? What need does this satisfy and what necessity does it feed? Glassie writes that “The act of creation bundles up distinct sets of relations within each of which the object gathers significance” (53). Sometimes the “significance” is in place before the act of creation begins and the “transfer” of the creator into their work is the impetus for the design. This brings to mind a hooked mat that I saw at the graduate year show of students from the

Anna Templeton Centre for Craft, Art and Design in spring 2007. The subject of the mat was figurative, it was about five by six feet and used a considerable variation of fabrics and colours. As I had always done since beginning my research into mat-hooking, I inquired about the work.

“Oh, that mat’s really special,” the young woman at the front desk tells me. “After her sister died, she saved all of her clothes and then hooked it in to a mat.”

“It’s not for sale,” she adds.

This mat, an act of commitment and devotion, is both a testament and monument, but also embodies the possibility of healing. Mat-hooking, like other kinds of handicrafts can be very therapeutic. Frances Ennis cross-stitched her way through chemotherapy and radiation and following her clean bill of health hasn’t done a stitch since. (She’s focusing her energy exclusively and successfully on mat-making now.) In her own words:

I do believe that at the time I was really in need of finding an alternate form of expression. I had cancer and so when you look at cancer in the face, for me anyhow, the experience was, you’ve really got to look at death and you’ve got to say, ‘I’m not having it.’ That’s the way it was with me. But you’ve almost got to make friends with it to move forward. Part of my moving forward was finding the form of expression that I wanted...I was doing cross-stitches and in fact throughout my chemotherapy and radiation period—which was very traumatic and dramatic in itself—I did a big cross-stitch and to me that was my healing. I called it that as I was doing it, “this is my healing piece of work” and it was the last cross stitch that I did.

Glassie goes on to name these various contexts including: learning, technology, memory, hope and communication. Glassie uses a Turkish carpet weaver as an example but the textile student’s homage to her sister also fits these various contexts (53). As a graduating textile student she has learned to use the tools and materials to create her work, she has assigned these acts to memory and it is in memory of her sister that she

creates this mat. The craftsperson, particularly when working with recycled textiles, will attach a keen sense of history and memory to their work. For instance, when I look at my own mats I remember drawing the outline and how that pattern changed as I hooked—effectively creating an underpainting that will only be exposed if the mat is unraveled. At this point, I am still able to identify where each strip of fabric was procured. As students graduated from the folklore program at Memorial, or simply moved on to other places, other things, they began to leave the clothing they'd outgrown or couldn't fit in their luggage with me, knowing that I could use the material to hook mats. I can look at a mat and identify the source of the materials (e.g. Cheese Scholar Turquoise; Indian who moved to Indiana Plaid).

Conclusion

Separating the mat-hookers into three different categories helped to further my understanding of the social stratification within the craft. At the root, each mat-maker is creating the same object but the decisions she makes and the ensuing results vary widely. These results depend on background, social status, mat-hooking objectives, and self-definition. The vocational mat-makers rejected being pegged as an artist, while the artists actively engaged in elevating their status through qualifying words like “fine” and “art.” I discovered some crossover between the categories as the artists and hobby mat-makers hook together as a group. The act provided the means for the crossover but the motive is emotional. The gathering is social and the mat-making can be fairly peripheral to the event. It is the leisure group that exemplifies what all of these mat-makers have in common, and that is, simply, the urge to create and the act of creation itself.

Chapter Four

The Story Needs a Hook: Selling Heritage in Post-Fishery Newfoundland

Introduction

When you drive to the northern tip of Newfoundland and you're almost at the water's edge, and beyond that Labrador's southern shore hangs like a cloud on the horizon, you'll come to a fork in the road. One path leads to the Viking settlement of L'Anse aux Meadows and the way is paved with lodges, bed and breakfasts, hotels, craft shops and berry stands and a glut of restaurants ranging from gourmet to greasy spoon—all Viking in theme. At the end of the road you'll find a busy parking lot, an interpretation centre and a re-created Viking village where university students dress like Eric the Red and make bannock over open fire. The other route leads to a quiet campsite in Pistolet Provincial Park, and beyond that, down a road lined with pine trees and shale, is the town of Raleigh, official population 304 (Statistics Canada 2001)¹¹, although locals estimate that it's closer to 150 these days. Because Raleigh is not on the provincially designated "Viking Trail" few tourists—who aren't lost—stop in. It's an on-going issue for the residents of this ever-shrinking outpost on Newfoundland's Great Northern Peninsula. They watch with frustration as the giant white cruise ships slink by the mouth of their harbour en route to St. Anthony, and although there is no infrastructure in Ha Ha Bay to dock a ship of those giant proportions, the residents of Raleigh are hoping to lure some of the Viking Trail revenue their way.

¹¹ The most up to date community profile is from 2001. The 2006 census tallied results for Raleigh based on numbers from the region instead individual towns.

In this chapter I will explore the idea of “selling tradition” (as coined by Jane S. Becker in her book of the same name) as a stop-gap measure against out-migration and as a replacement for the jobs lost in the wake of the fishery collapse. In her examination of the 1930 folk revival in Southern Appalachia, Becker explores similar themes surrounding craft production, such as the use of domestic arts to buoy ailing rural economies and the implications this had on the identity of the people. Becker addressed the craft-workers’ own feelings of identity as well as how they were perceived by outsiders. Another aspect of the study that inspired my own line of questioning was the concept of how authenticity in folk craft was molded and shaped to suit the consumers and the market (Becker).

I will examine the commoditization of a “heritage” craft as a means of boosting rural economy and look at how heritage is used and idealized, packaged and sold. Further, I will look at how the story of rural economies turning to heritage craft in post-fishery Newfoundland works to sell product. Finally, I will turn to the marketer and the consumer to explore concepts of value as they pertain to handicraft, hooked mats in particular.

Recreating the Past: The ‘New’ Outport

Like many former fishing communities in Atlantic Canada, Raleigh is in the midst of repackaging itself as a tourist destination. Handicrafts, mat-hooking in particular, play a major role in this task. Under the umbrella of the government funded Raleigh Historical Corporation (RHC) there is a reconstructed fishing village underway that will provide tourists with the “authentic” experience of “traditional” outport life. This project,

spearheaded and run by Noah and Bernitte Smith is a yet unrealized but ambitious endeavor that the couple hopes will bring revenue and sustainability to their town.¹² The authenticity, hindered by government regulations, is the sell. Bernitte describes it as follows:

What we want to do is that you come and live like a fisherman and eat like a fisherman and work like a fisherman. We got bunkhouses that the tourists will all be staying in and they can come and go out in boat and we're setting a trap, and they can see a trap being hauled and hopefully they'll see the fish being split because we can buy it from local fishermen. We can't actually catch the cod in the trap, right? No, because it's not allowed now. Regulations. And we're hoping that you'll see the fish being split and salt and cook it and eat it.

Guests who prefer to stay onshore have the option of learning to hook mats in a specially designated handicraft centre adjacent to the fishing stage. At the end of their stay, it is hoped that visitors will buy a souvenir mat from the centre's collection. These works are hooked by local women and the subject matter ranges from traditional outport scenes to schools of unlikely-coloured fish. The mat-hooking centre is a major facet of the project, says Bernitte:

We wanted to do this fishing village and that so mat-hooking was part of it, it was traditional in that day, not in my day but in our grandmother's day so it was traditional thing that I wanted to bring back to our community and surrounding areas right...They always hooked for the Grenfell, not my grandmother. My husband's grandmother did. I guess most of them did in them days right? In those days it was a lot of money. Five dollars a month, or five dollars every two months was a lot of money in dem days for the older people.

I first read about mat-hooking in Raleigh in *The Independent*, a weekly newspaper alternative to the corporate-owned *Telegram* in Newfoundland. The crux of the story is that a group of twelve women who'd once worked in the town's now defunct fish plant

¹² In July 2008 I receive a phone call from Noah Smith when he is visiting St. John's. He tells me that they are now open for business.

had been retrained as mat-hookers through a government-funded program. The goal of the program was that these women would eventually earn an income through the production and subsequent sales of their work. There are two streams of mat revenue. The first is the on-site mat-hooking centre and shop and the designs and revenue are specific to the Raleigh Historical Corporation. A second organization, headed by St. John's resident Adele Poynter (a "veteran of economic development" (Cook)), markets the mats and sells them through her on-line business, North by Design Handicrafts.¹³

This company, just one year old, is still in its infancy and undergoing the usual struggles of any start-up business but with the added pressure of a declining pool of potential and existing workers. The mat-makers, all women in their 20s, 30s and 40s, are leaving the province, lured by more lucrative jobs in the Alberta oil patch.¹⁴ As noted in the previous chapter, none of the women subsisted primarily on mat-making. The money was useful—one woman used her mat money to make monthly car payments—but in each case their husband's work provided their main source of income. In Bernitte's words:

I'm the only one that's hooking now in Raleigh but I got other hookers that are around. Two now they is leaving to go to Alberta, and (*sighs*), so, it's, that's how she goes. Your family moves, you gotta go with them. I mean you can't stay around here and live on mat-hooking, you'd starve to death. (*Laughs*)

Since the collapse of the Atlantic cod fishery in 1992, the economy is flagging in Northern Newfoundland and full time work is rare.¹⁵ Currently, rural Newfoundland is being rebranded by the government and private enterprises as an "authentic" and

¹³ Northbydesign.com.

¹⁴ For more on out-migration see Mahoney and "Outmigration" in the bibliography.

¹⁵ For an overview of cod fishing and the events that lead to the demise of the fishery see Kurlansky in the bibliography.

“unique” tourist attraction. The fishing village and the mat-making program are two examples of this.

James Overton writes that “There is a persistent dream amongst one class of tourist. It is to escape from urban-industrial society and from commodity culture to a land where there is a simpler, more meaningful existence; a land of tradition, history and ‘real’ culture, spontaneous and home grown, where people, untainted by the logic of commodity society, are living an ‘alternate’ way of life in authentic ‘places.’” (162). This “real” culture is often rooted in make-believe recreations of the past, like the fishing village in Raleigh or the Viking settlement across the bay.

The Pen

I’ve heard Newfoundlanders describe someone with a certain kind of personality as a “hard case” meaning, from what I understand, a person with a difficult character—stubborn, unpredictable, brooding, and sometimes dangerous. If the Great Northern Peninsula were a person, it could be described in precisely the same way.

It is late July 2007 when I set off to undertake fieldwork in Raleigh. Having come directly from the bustle of tourist season in Gros Morne National Park, the desolation of the Northern Peninsula is both awe inspiring and foreboding. The landscape that spreads out on either side of the Peninsula’s sole highway is part Californian-style ocean shoreline, and part apocalyptic ghost town. There are mountain ranges and empty houses to the right and white-caps to the left. It is high season, but we drive for long stretches without encountering another vehicle. Just twenty-five kilometers up the peninsula from Gros Morne there is a detour around the town of Daniel’s Harbour. The natural rock

formations that draw in the camper-van crowd are also the cause of a giant sinkhole that swallowed a good portion of this small outport. From the detour road I am able to see the town's small provincial liquor store, perched precariously at the edge of the sinkhole. The radio cuts out somewhere between Dead Man's Cove and Savage Cove, so we hear the polar bear warning issued for Raleigh and Burnt Cape much later—through word of mouth and hand-printed signs at our campground. Yes, this landscape is a hard case.

Selling the Fishery

Federal Fisheries Minister Loyola Hearn recently approved a food fishery to start at the end of the month and blue and green nets are laid out across every flat inch of The Northern Peninsula's shoreline in anticipation. Although scientists expressed concerns about allowing any type of fishing since the 1992 moratorium was enforced, Hearn ignored their warnings, issuing a statement that "Fishing for cod is an important part of Newfoundland culture" (CBC).

Yes, fishing for cod *is* an important part of Newfoundland culture. In the current post-fishery economy, however, tourism is the new cod. Luring visitors and their pocketbooks eastward is an Atlantic Canada-wide panacea that relies heavily on the glorification and commoditization of the past. Binkley comments, "Fishing as a way of life has become a commodity, and historical artifact, a romantic adventure, which has been used to promote tourism" (Binkley 2). Communities and individuals engage in the tourist trade in any way possible; Overton writes that "anxious people grasp at the tourist straw, encouraged by the state and by the efforts of the tourist industry's lobbyists." (168).

Industrial settings that once provided economic stability in Atlantic Canada are being “reinterpreted, rehabilitated and remade” (Summerby-Murray 47) as tourist destinations under the guise of heritage —The Family Forge, Trinity, Newfoundland; The Fawcett Foundry, Sackville, New Brunswick; The Tall Ships, Lunenburg, Nova Scotia. The act of redefining deindustrialised landscapes as heritage and tourist sites has become the logical next step following the collapse of whatever industry once sustained the surrounding community. (En lieu of museums and tourist attractions, major urban centres generally repackage former industrial buildings as trendy living spaces as seen in the case of the Seagram’s lofts in Waterloo, Ontario and the Toy and Candy Factory lofts in Toronto’s west end.)¹⁶

Raleigh is no exception to this phenomenon. With the help of government funding in 2003 Noah and Bernitte Smith founded the Raleigh Historical Corporation and hired on local labourers to build a mid-20th century style bunkhouse that sleeps 18 people, a traditional pine wharf, fishing stages and rooms (figures 7, 8). Their hope is that the village will divert some of the Viking Trail traffic towards Raleigh and become a major tourist attraction—keeping the people in the area employed and emplaced. The tourists will sleep in the traditional wooden bunkhouses and fish and eat and essentially “live” the outport life. It is an attempt to recapture and in many ways re-imagine and recreate pre-moratorium Newfoundland and they’ve pegged the very best years, the most idyllic and pristine, to be in the 1940s. It should be noted that this utopian fishing village is a depiction of the colony of Newfoundland before confederation with Canada in 1949. The decision to join Confederation divided Newfoundland almost exactly in two and the

¹⁶ For more examples of this see: www.toyfactorylofts.ca, candyfactorylofts.net, www.g-a.ca/p_seagram.html

benefits of becoming the tenth Canadian province remain a point of contention today. The final referendum vote showed only 52 per cent of the population were in favour of joining (CBC). Pocius writes, "In Newfoundland, life before Confederation is often perceived to have been simple, less complicated than today, and—although people were poor—the culture was intact" (19).

So when the tourists arrive and settle in to the bunkhouses and fish from the (government-licensed) boats and wear the carefully hand-made clothing it will all be within keeping of a very exact and time period. However, like actors on the set of a period film who retire to their fully wired trailers, once the day is over visitors are able to relax in the 21st century comforts of the main guest house that includes high speed Internet, cable television and indoor plumbing.

Signs for the mythical village can be spotted along the Trans Canada Highway (the TCH as it's known here in Newfoundland) as far back as Deer Lake (400 Kilometers away) but when I arrive in July, having been promised a place to stay, it is still under construction.

"We had almost a year's set back because we lost our wharf to a storm last summer and we had to re-build that again. We probably could have been on the go this year, but that was a set back there," Noah Smith tells me. While we talk, a handful of men are hard at work, pushing wheelbarrows filled with boulders down the centre line of the wharf out to the end of the dock where they will be inserted under the structure to weigh it down against the unpredictable Northern weather.¹⁷

¹⁷ The cynic in me wondered if the wharf would "blow away" every winter and then get reinstated the following spring and summer effectively elongating the work period—keeping people employed in the set up of this tourist attraction without having to ever deal with an actual tourist.



Figure 7: Recreated 1940s fishing village in Raleigh, Great Northern Peninsula, Newfoundland. The bunkhouses are where the guests stay.



Figure 8: Recreated heritage wharf and fishing stage in Raleigh, Great Northern Peninsula.

Selling Heritage

The Raliegh mat-hooking headquarters is an L-shaped bungalow shingled in cream-coloured siding with a wooden sign nailed to the west-facing exterior wall that reads: "Traditional Mat-hooking in Progress 9 – 4. Come in and Learn!" The sign faces the main road in a hopeful encouragement to tourists who might be passing through town. This bungalow began life as a community centre for the town's young. However, a quick survey of the surroundings—an elementary school stands empty, windows boarded, doors locked, and the playground at the edge of town is overgrown with wildflowers and tall grass—indicates that there are few children in this outpost. The centre was built seven years ago when there were about 45 kids in the community. Now there are six. The rest have gone west with their parents who left in search of employment. Locals refer to Grand Prairie, Alberta as "Little Raleigh" because about forty former residents currently live and work there.

The article on the Raliegh mat-hookers is published in fall 2006 but when I arrive six months later I find one solitary mat-hooker at the centre.¹⁸ It is Bernitte Smith, co-founder of the Raleigh Historical Corporation. She has streaky blonde hair, bright blue eyes, and a ruddy complexion and she looks much younger than her 46 years. There is something Nordic about her appearance, like she's the descendent of the Vikings who settled here ten centuries ago, although this is obviously not the case. She's sitting with her back to an open window and contour of the bay and the Burnt Cape Ecological Reserve lie behind her. She's hooking a "stained glass" style mat, filling in angular

¹⁸ North by Design recruited a second woman to hook for them that summer. Her name is Annie Hillier and she was one of the women who taught the mat-hooking course to Bernitte and her peers. She also does work for Grenfell Industries. She learned to hook from her mother who also worked for Grenfell. I interviewed Annie for other aspects of this study.

shapes of primary colours and outlining them in black. She's surrounded by strips of material—heaps of recycled fabric tangled together, pre-cut (figure 9). I ask her why she'd turn her back on the view, and she laughs and tells me that she needs the light to hook by. "We take this all for granted," she says motioning towards the stretch of rock, ocean and small white houses that dot the whimsically named Ha Ha Bay. "We don't even notice that ocean out there. I've seen it 40-something years now."



Figure 9: Fabric scraps in the Raleigh mat-hooking studio.



Figure 10: Complimentary colour lists and suggested colour combinations for North by Design mats.

Bernitte is a vocational mat-hooker. Like any regular day job, she arrives here at 9:00 am and leaves at 5:00 pm. She works in silence. There is no music and no chatter from colleagues, but she insists that she is never lonely and that she never tires of the work. Although the North by Design web site alludes to women displaced by the collapse of the fishery, Bernitte was employed as a homecare worker for eleven years before she turned to mat-hooking full time.¹⁹ Her husband Noah works for Newfoundland Hydro full-time ensuring a steady income, and part-time setting up the fishing village ensuring their retirement years. When I ask Bernitte what there was to do following the moratorium and she is quick to answer: “Nothing.”

I’m not sure what I expected her to say. Maybe talk about what followed this dramatic event in history: “the package,” the retraining, the mass out-migration, protests,

¹⁹ The bulk of the retrained women were former fish plant workers (Annie Hillier is one example).

and gatherings of solidarity. But, she sums up the reality of the collapse of a 500 year old industry in the best way anyone could: There was nothing.

The nothing was followed by a mass exodus, and then, tourism. Fifteen years later, Bernitte sits here with her back to the water churning out handicrafts like women in her region have done for centuries. Although she doesn't find the work isolating, the departure of her peer group is another matter. Most of Bernitte and Noah's generation has disappeared as described in the following passage from my interview with Bernitte:

BS: There was a fish plant in Raleigh down that wharf there, but it didn't last very long. Four or five years. Only about 10 or 15 people working there. St. Anthony plant was the big one. After the moratorium, then they came out with the shrimp plant. 100 something people over there working now.

EU: What did people do to stay here?

BS: Government money funding same as EI. They had a cheque coming every two weeks.

EU: What about now?

BS: A lot of people left then. Done the courses went to school and moved on. Our communities went out then a lot. Used to be, I spose, 400 to 500 people living here in Raleigh 5 or 6 hundred years ago and now I don't know if there's 200. [This was] originally a community centre for 44 children, now there are six. Closed down the school because there's only 10 kids combined with Ship Cove. I'd say 60 percent of our people here are 65 and over.

EU: Have a lot of your friends gone?

BS: Oh yes. Our friends are all gone. All gone out west. Grand Prairie, they got a little Raleigh out in Alberta now. Out in Grand Prairie. I believe it's 30 or 40 something people out there from Raleigh alone. I'm hoping to go there for a trip one of these days. Yeah, there's a big crowd out there now...All of our friends are all gone—all gone out west. I'd go if I could.

Still, Bernitte and Noah remain in Raleigh despite the constant departures of their friends and family. They're hoping to have the village ready for a test-run in August and

“full-blown” next season. One of the major components of this village life will be crafting and that is where Bernitte and her rug-hooking centre come in. “When we start our fishing village and the families come a lot of the women might not want to go out on the boat all the time,” says Bernitte. “I got this on the side, if they want to go hooking to pass the time.”

Bernitte will offer mat-hooking courses and the other local women (“the girls” as Bernitte calls them) who work for the Raleigh Historical Corporation will offer quilt-making workshops. Like the mat-hookers, these women have been trained as seamstresses and they’ve been hard at work sewing the 1940s style clothing that they will wear along with the tourists. They work in a high-ceilinged building down the road, once a community hall and now a museum and workshop. The finished clothing pieces are laid out neatly on tables with handwritten tags attached that say things like: “typically worn by the lady of the house after a week’s work and after cleaning up and preparing for Sunday” (figure 11).

No detail is lost in this recreation, including the gender divide. This is in some ways refreshingly realistic. In all likelihood the women did not go out in the boats with the men because of precisely the reasons listed on the tag that accompanies the dress. There was a week’s worth of cleaning up to do, there were preparations for Sunday dinner, and every meal that followed.



Figure 11: Handmade clothing on display with descriptive tag in the sewing workshop where “the girls” work.

Selling Stories (We like a Good Hardship Tale)

I intend to write a travel article about Raleigh but my efforts are made impossible by a hostile and jaded editor at the *Toronto Star* who writes in an email that “it looks to me like you didn’t do the village – get in touch when it’s actually open.” She puts a harsh but realistic spin on the situation. She’s right. The story needs a hook. The new tourist is not satisfied with sight-seeing and instead wants to engage and consume. Why would someone go all that way to see this village as a work in progress or stay in a nearby B&B and enjoy the views and the satellite TV? Photographs are yesterday, today’s leisure class wants to experience. Overton writes, “When we purchase the commodities sold by the

tourist trade we seldom buy anything as simple as a plane or ferry ride, a place to stay, or a drink. Inextricably tied up with the whole process of consumption is the promise that a particular commodity will transform our lives in a positive way" (Overton 138).

Smith understands this trend better than anyone—it was her inspiration for the village, the mat-hooking centre and also the sales of the mats—selling the story of a struggling rural class turning to the repetitive work of their grandmothers before them in an effort to remain emplaced in their seaside landscape. They are selling the perceived memory of the past in hopes of those sales ensuring their future, their children's future (the Smith's daughter Zonya is away studying the hospitality trade and hopes to return and work at the village) and their retirement years. The Smiths have no illusions about the resurgence of a fishing industry. "It's gone," says Noah. "It's never coming back."

It's a valiant tale with all the markings of a great narrative: familial connection to a harsh and unforgiving landscape, the decline of prosperity, hardships endured and overcome, the stubborn resolve to stay put by the innocent and pure country folk, rural romanticism, and a community economy buoyed by quirky and unconventional circumstances. As Becker writes:

"The core of pastoralism is formed by the illusory conception of the transition from rural to industrial society as a fall from innocence into disorder and the assumption that we must look back to the past to find an organic society. The remembered past, however, must lack specificity; in order to maintain the image of rural innocence, many of the facts of country life must be denied or ignored" (Becker 21).

To create this palatable narrative, some of the grimmer details of the fishery are either glossed over or elevated to honour tales. "Fishers, in general, have reinterpreted and romanticized their historical, cultural, and material subordination as a yarn of success and survival against the odds...A shared history of struggle and commitment to the

“traditional” fishery has led some to characterize Newfoundland, like other maritime economies, as having a distinct culture” (Nadel-Klein and Davis; Power 79). In reference to resettlement, Pocius writes that “For Newfoundlanders no longer tied to place, what is considered the authentic essence of indigenous life has become objectified as expressive cultural forms: wonder tales, broadside ballads, mummers plays, fiddle music—and locally made rural objects.” He goes on to write that “Simple handicrafts like rug-hooking, coopering, or wool spinning have become embodiments of past culture” (22). The same theory might be applied following the recent out-migration trend. These aspects of material culture symbolize a romanticized rural past and provide fodder for the new tourist economy. The consumer who buys the stained glass mat that Bernitte is in the process of hooking will have a tangible memory of the “authentic” outport experience. The goal of the tourist souvenir is to distill a place in to an object. These mats are portable and aesthetically pleasing artifacts and what Peach terms “semiotic reproductions of tourist experiences” (248).

The story can continue long after the experience when one purchases a material object that connotes the culture, history and heritage of the place where it was created. Today’s global traveler personalizes their interior space by showcasing souvenirs of their travels. This eclectic home display can include things as varied as a woolen pile carpet, handknotted by village women in the Aegean region of western Turkey, a collection of hand-woven baskets from Appalachia region in the U.S., and on the wall above the dining room table, a hooked mat from Northern Newfoundland.

History of Hooking on the Pen

Mat-hooking is revered in Newfoundland and Labrador as a distinct and important part of the province's history and heritage (Fitzpatrick; Rug Hooking Guild of Newfoundland and Labrador). And although mat-hooking was carried out by women and sometimes men across the province, it was the Grenfell Mission based in St. Anthony on the Great Northern Peninsula that propelled the status of the hooked mat from common object to collector's item. In the late 19th and early 20th century, women in Northern Newfoundland and Labrador began using their mat-hooking skills to supplement their income through a cottage industry set up by British physician Sir Wilfred Grenfell, who sold the mats to buyers in the United States and England and used part of the profits to finance his medical and religious missions (Lavery). Grenfell was a remarkably multifaceted man—a writer, an artist, a medical doctor, a religious missionary, a businessman and an overall visionary. (Lavery; RHNL). Today, a quick search on *ebay* cements Grenfell's lasting legacy as a businessman above all, and the continued interest in the handicraft as an object and as a story.²⁰ Because, what is an object without its story? "All objects exist in context" writes Glassie, "There is no such thing as an object out of context" (59). It is improbable that a consumer with no prior knowledge of Grenfell Industries would be interested, financially and emotionally, in buying an expensive antique mat.

The mat shown in figure 1, page 14) had been appraised at the Antiques Roadshow in Cleveland, Ohio for \$2,500. It is fairly large (2 x 3 feet), in good condition and depicts the kind of scene that those with even a slight knowledge of Newfoundland

²⁰ Search conducted on Feb. 5, 2008.

and Labrador's history would immediately associate with Grenfell Industries and thus recognize the mat as an authentic piece of the past. The dates of the mat are approximately 1900 to 1939 and the starting bid is \$2000 (USD). The subject matter cements this item as a specialty object, to be collected, and to be revered. There are two other Grenfell mats up for auction and the starting bids begin at \$51 (USD) for an eight inch in diameter circular floral pattern mat (figure 2, page 14) and \$25 (USD) for a 5 ½ x 4 ¼ snowy landscape with two houses and a pine tree (figure 12).²¹



Figure 12: Grenfell mat for sale on eBay (2008).

²¹ This mat does not employ the low and even hooking generally seen in the Grenfell Handicraft work and I'm dubious of its origin although it does come with the 'original label intact.'

What makes the mat with the dog sleds so much more valuable? Certainly it is larger, but generally the quality of a Grenfell mat doesn't vary—the technique and the fabric were uniform and any mistakes were ripped out and done over again. If the mat didn't meet the industry standards, the mat-maker didn't get paid. However, neither of the less expensive mats exudes a feeling of place, or a story. While the dog sleds, icebergs and "Northern" caricature can be read immediately and placed in a certain category, the other two are more generic. The snowy houses could be in Labrador, or they could be in Winnipeg. The flowers are also generic. Flowers are everywhere, but icebergs are not. Still, it is only the floral mat that I'm able to identify, absolutely, as a Grenfell product. The flowers depicted are sweet peas, or 'beach peas' and this work is mentioned in Paula Laverty's extensive inventory and writings on the Grenfell mission. She quotes from a letter that the manager of the Philadelphia Grenfell shop wrote to Rhoda Dawson, manager at Grenfell Industrial in St. Anthony, in October 1935 "We do hope you can make some more floral designs such as the little round gentian mat. We should like to have a set of Labrador flowers. We have the Twinflower, Crackerberry and Sweet Pea but not in the small mats..." (114).

Although this runs next to a rectangular version of the Sweet Pea mat the author goes on to cite that the "mat is most often seen as a smaller round chair or table mat" (114). So I was wrong to assume that flowers are everywhere, as this seemingly common subject matter is a credible artifact of both Grenfell Handicrafts and the native plant life of Labrador. Still, one would have to either be familiar with regional flora or an expert on Grenfell mats to place value on this object.

This foray into the online world of mat buying may seem like a departure from Bernitte Smith and her mat-hooking centre, but it's actually an important aspect of market research. No one knows this better than Adele Poynter.

The Business Partner

In a 2006 newspaper article published in the *Independent*, Poynter is characterized as a driving force behind the Raleigh mat-hooking collective:

Poynter is fiercely devoted to the success of the Raliegh mat-hookers. She says their product is generated from a very real need—the survival of a rural Newfoundland community—that results in a rigorous insistence for impeccable standards worthy of global distribution (Cook).

Adele Poynter has been working in both private and public sector economic development in Newfoundland for about 20 years. However, the inception of North by Design marks her first self-funded business venture. (She cites both a distrust of government funding and distaste for bureaucratic interference as reasons for striking out on her own.) North by Design acts as partner with the Raleigh Historical Corporation—they are the producer and the mats are the product. She explains it in her own words as follows:

“Just to help you differentiate there are two projects going on here, mine is a company called North by Design and what I do in that company is that I set it up as an exporter of distinctive craft and art of Newfoundland and Labrador. One of the products I’m carrying is hooked mats. Right now and to help me really get the thing launched, 70% of the emphasis is on hooked mats. And I like that for several reasons. I like the story around the hooked mats. I thought it was a very compelling story and it actually

provided, to me, a marketing edge. That sounds almost mercenary when I say it but I'm being very frank."

Both the artisan and the retailer are capitalizing on a way of life, essentially selling the memory of an imagined or idealized past. In Grenfell's day the mats were hooked anonymously, but in the present market the mat-maker's story is sold as part of the package. The rural, home-based production of hooked mats sets the bar in terms of authenticity. It is not unlike craft production in Southern Appalachia following the 1930s handicraft revival that Jane S. Becker chronicles in her book on the subject, *Selling Tradition*:

The marketplace may have shaped the forms, styles, materials, and designs used by craftspeople, but it was the idea of *tradition* that sold mountain handicrafts and defined Southern Appalachian folk as cultural "others" The people who promoted these mountain crafts followed the lead of an earlier generation of reformers and writers by situating Southern Appalachian culture in an idealized Anglo-American colonial past. "Traditionalizing" mountain craftwork and its producers served to obscure the conflicts and specific histories that constituted the reality of mountain life and craft production, endowing them instead with constructed meanings that increased their market value (Becker 7).

Initially Raleigh mat-makers produced their own designs, but the result, although "lovely and almost art naïf" (Poynter) were simply not going to sell to the intended market. "I just didn't feel they had the appeal to where I saw the market, the market being somewhere closer to my age than yours, [addressing me] between 30 and 60, so younger people who really wanted something dynamic and fun, so I wanted something that was brighter cheerier, more folk art and that's why I insisted on the designers," Poynter says.

When the designs arrived from textile artists Libby Moore and Shawn O'Hagan, the mat-hookers were skeptical. There were multi-coloured starfish and rows of orange capelin (nothing like the actual colour of this fish which is a dark silvery grey.)

“Of course the women when they first saw the designs said “What? Nobody’s going to get that.” But I mean that’s just typical. But I have to say we worked together and they trusted my sense of it and they were quite happy producing them,” Poynter says.

The designs came with colour instructions and fabric swatches that suggested the varying hues of, say, a yellow and purple cod fish (figure 13). Regardless, the work continued to deviate from the enforced marketable parameters. One woman revealed a penchant for pastels in her work, pink in particular, and Poynter stepped in. It might work for a baby’s room, but in all likelihood, this Easter-coloured mat would simply not sell. It’s not that the palette didn’t suit the work—it didn’t suit the perceived customer. I use the term “perceived customer” because at this point there have been few sales, and all through word of mouth. Poynter envisions a market of wealthy Americans, and plans to leave brochures at selected St. John’s inns during the summer tourist period. She’s also toying with the idea of taking out an ad in the *New York Times*. But she’s still building this company, and there are other hurdles to face.

The declining pool of workers is an issue, but an even greater problem is that mat-hooking cannot provide the hours necessary to qualify for Employment Insurance (EI). It’s a scenario that is repeated in handicraft production throughout rural Newfoundland (McCay). Poynter describes the problem as follows:

You have to watch out for the whole EI thing... I can’t have them in and pay them \$8.50 an hour. It would mean each mat is about \$1000 and it doesn’t suit this kind of industry... What I mean by the EI dilemma is this—that rural life is structured around getting projects that will allow you to work a sufficient enough weeks to then earn unemployment insurance. What that means is that you get income all year around but you work very little. The program was designed with many things in mind but it has lead to abuse and it means it’s hard to get full time workers, and they’re not interested unless they can get their stamps... For the mat-makers they have to be interested in doing it and they can’t be EI collectors.

With work being so uncertain and scarce, local women may be nervous to leave the EI fold. As mentioned earlier in this paper, the mat-hooking revenue does not provide a sustainable income. The two women currently employed by North by Design both have alternate revenue sources—working husbands. It should also be noted that collecting stamps²² is not unique to the collapse of the cod fishery. McGrath writes that “Unemployment Insurance (UI) is an integral part of the economic structure, providing security for the long winter between the end of the fishing season in the fall and the beginning of the new one in the spring” (310).

Becker discovers a similar situation when she surveys the findings of the Women’s Bureau, a group of middle-class educated women who were dispatched in to Appalachia in the early 1930s to review the working conditions of the (mostly female) craft producers in the region. These fieldworkers were equipped with forms from which to read questions regarding handicraft production in about sixty craft centres. The purpose was to “draw a new picture of mountain craft producers that would dispel romantic notions of self-sufficient, traditional mountain artisans. The focus of the inquiry, and the people the bureau hoped to make visible, were the hundreds of mountain craft producers hidden in their homes, making goods out of need for cash but making profits for others” (130).

Reading this account, I realize that I’d had some of the same questions when approaching my own study, although my research was entirely independent. Like the Women’s Bureau investigation of 1930s Appalachia, the women I spoke with (only two, not hundreds) were not able to get by on their handicraft work. Still, the mat money

²² “‘Making Stamps’ is a Newfoundland term for earning credits towards unemployment insurance” (McCay 147).

income can offset household expenses and perhaps provide a sense of pride and accomplishment with each finished product. What it cannot do is replace the emotional and monetary value of full-time work. Near the end of our interview, as I discuss my plans to visit Raleigh and interview the mat-hookers, Adele gives me an important piece of advice. She tells me not to suggest that life is better outside the fish plant:

Don't make the mistake that I did of assuming that—my god I remember saying it to Tammy, a woman who was there that summer—'God Tammy, you must be some glad to be out of that fish plant.' She said, 'I really liked that work.' It's kind of like a city folk always assuming they're not going to like it. She loved it. She may have liked the work, she may have liked the people, she may have liked the money. And the trouble is that you can't possibly pay them as much as they made in the fish plant, so that's a tough thing for them, I mean there's just no way.

In her research in Bonnavista following the fishery collapse, Nicole Power discovered that women are less likely to miss the fisheries work than men and that "they tended to miss their paycheques rather than the actual work" (Power 163). What they did find difficult was the sudden disintegration of their social network, "it was clear that many women missed the social and psychological benefits of their paid work" (Power 164). Home-based handicraft work, then, can never really act as a replacement for the work lost in the collapse of the fishing industry—not monetarily and not emotionally.

The Bureaucratic Efforts

The provincial budget for tourism marketing in the 2006 to 2007 fiscal year was \$10 million. Tourism Newfoundland and Labrador used part of these funds to buy a series of full page ad spots in the *Globe and Mail* that ran on the back page of the travel section throughout the winter and spring months in an effort to boost tourism. An enormous photograph (approx. 10.5 x 22 inches) generally showcases rocky seaside

vistas and is coupled with conversational banter, giving out the first name of a (possibly fictional) staffer, always Irish in origin (Sean and Connor are two examples), and the tourism 1-800 line. One of these ads depicts an elderly woman hanging her hand-stitched quilts on a clothes line—rocky hills and ocean stretched out behind her (figure 14). She has white hair and wears a long floral dress. The tag line that runs beneath it is “No, it’s not an art auction. It’s Thursday.” Part of the text below the photo reads:

So please resist the urge to bid on something. But feel free to get out and take a few pictures, and say hello. Which brings to mind a few questions: Is this art? And if so, how in the world could anyone ever frame it? How do you frame a work so painstakingly crafted by an artist who would be the first to tell you she is not an artist? Or, for that matter, an exquisite heirloom created by her great-grandmother out of a simple need for warmth? It seems more than a little ironic that, if beauty is art, so few of our pieces can ever hang on a wall. How could you frame the azure sky? Or the white picket fence, the towering cliffs, the sensuous light that washes over the meadows, a well-weathered house painted in a colour palette you never knew existed...In all fairness, we should tell you that many visitors are tempted to ask people (like the woman in this photograph) if they’ve ever had a showing. Don’t be surprised when they reply, ‘Every Thursday.’

The advertiser is using the quilts and their maker to sell a way of life, a handicraft tradition, perceived heritage and authenticity to outsiders. In this way, the tourism industry is helping to create a mythical bygone era that seemingly exists in the rural landscape of Newfoundland. Although the text claims that these crafts aren’t actually for sale—the photo suggests the possibility of a souvenir. If the Department of Tourism, Culture and Recreation is correct in their projection of what tourists hope to find in Newfoundland—handmade objects and their makers who live by the sea—Bernitte and her mat-hooking centre must might have a shot at success.



Figure 13: North by Design Cod Mat (courtesy of Adele Poynter.)



Figure 14: Tourism Newfoundland and Labrador advertisement entices tourists with the suggestion of handmade craft on display at the ocean's edge.

Conclusion: The Future

No one can predict the future of Raleigh, the success or failure of its recreated fishing village, or the popularity of hooked mats as tourist souvenirs at the centre, or the percentage of sales that Adele Poynter's web-based handicraft company might incur. Overton observes "In trying to escape the capitalist consumer bubble and the world of staged authenticity and mass tourism, many seek 'simpler' lifestyles and 'real' culture in

places like Newfoundland. What exists in such 'backwaters,' however, is poverty, unemployment, inequality and desperation. But there is also hope and activity as people try to find ways to turn 'underdevelopment...to advantage' (113). Hence, the pull to remain emplaced and employed is strong. At the end of our interview, I ask Bernitte again if she'd leave for Alberta and she gives me a different answer than when we'd first sat down together:

I wouldn't leave, not now. I wanted to go before I started Raleigh Historical Corporation. But I don't know sometimes I would and sometimes I wouldn't. You miss it. But like everything is changing and all your communities—I would want to be in Newfoundland not Ontario.

As the economic trend shifts towards tourism revenue, regardless of what happens with these particular ventures, it is clear that the future of rural Newfoundland is rooted in the recreation of its past.

Chapter Five

Hooking High and Low: Social Stratification in the Aesthetics of Mat-making

Introduction

During my interview with Bernitte Smith in her one-room hooking studio in Raleigh I give her a copy of the recent article I'd written for *Chatelaine* on mat-hooking in Newfoundland. Smith takes a quick glance over the glossy colour photographs of the women and their mats. "I've heard about them high hookers down there," she says. Then she asks me, "What kind of hooker are you—high or low?" I'm at the onset of my research and haven't categorized hooked mats or their makers in this manner, so it takes me a few moments to reply. Thinking it over, although I've only produced three small mats at this point, I conclude that I've adopted the high hooking method of my instructor and her contemporaries in Southern Newfoundland. My purpose for showing Smith the article is to prove my credentials, but I tell her that I hook mats in an effort to make myself relatable. However, in her quick assessment of where I fall within the social stratification of the craft, I accomplish the opposite result.

In my attempt to find common ground with Smith I stumble across a classification system that was in place long before I entered the Raleigh mat-hooking headquarters. As discussed in Chapter Three, academics, art critics and professional craft organizations have all taken on the task of defining crafts and their makers, mostly to either legitimize or discredit the value of their production as "fine" art. It should come as no surprise then that the craftspeople themselves have their own system of social classification. Smith asks me if I am a low or a high hooker in an effort to place where I fall within the larger group of mat-hookers. This seemingly simple question contains many layers and poses a

number of defining questions, such as: Are you an artist or a craftsperson? Do you rely on your mat money? Are you urban or rural? Who funded your training (self or government)?

There is, in the terms high and low hooking, an obvious parallel to what is considered high and low art. Jones argues that folk, primitive and fine art “are not independent phenomena clearly distinguishable from one another. Attempted distinctions among these modes of production are an academic convention tending to obscure, rather than to clarify, the study of behavior...criteria usually employed to distinguish folk and primitive art from each other or from other kinds of behavior are not consistent or mutually exclusive: several qualities, such as the extent of conscious manipulation of materials, the degree of originality or conservatism, the range of skills and imagination, claimed to differentiate the folk or primitive artist from the elite (or “sophisticated”) artist are obviously disconfirmed by research of individuals making and doing things” (7).

Jones is correct to argue that the “distinctions” are an “academic convention” but the classifications can be pre-existing within the group as well, as demonstrated by Smith’s query regarding my mat-hooking style. In this situation, I am the academic, but I’m being categorized and assessed by my informant. She did not slot me in to this category by my appearance, or my scholastic achievement, but in the aesthetics and form of my craftwork. This account is important for two reasons. Firstly, Bernitte’s distinction between high and low mat-hookers provides insight into how she identifies herself within a larger group, as well as how she identifies the other members. Secondly, Bernitte’s observation underlined the importance of style and form to the greater understanding of the mat as artifact and through this, the mat-maker.

Bronner writes that “Folk objects materialize tradition. Typically learned by imitating the work of community of family members and by participating in local customs, folk objects exhibit the repetition and variation common to other forms of folklore such as tales, songs, proverbs and riddles...The forms of folk objects are usually slow to change. Consequently, form becomes an especially good indicator of a historical region and its culture” (199-200). Glassie contends that the study of material culture “uses objects to approach human thought and action” (41). The hooked mats reviewed in this thesis are both folk object and fine art. They suit Bonner’s definition of folk object, as the mats are both a materialization of tradition, as well as an indicator of a specific region and its culture. Following Glassie’s approach to the study of material culture, and drawing on the notion of “any object of interpretation as text” (Tilton 69) this chapter explores the aesthetics of hooked mats (the texts) to interpret the individuals who produced them (mat-makers) and those who consume them (collectors). Borrowing from the discipline of art history, I will take two works and display them side by side and use this as a springboard for discussion through comparison and contrast. However, before looking at the work, it is important to first look at the tools and materials as well as the two methods of mat-hooking, high and low.

Materials and Tools

It all started with burlap—a roughly woven textile originally used to package and carry heavy food products like rice, grain, potatoes, coffee and flour. The grid-like surface allowed the contents to “breathe,” preventing them from rotting during transportation. The evenly placed negative spaces also serve as a base to pull the strips of

fabric through, into tight loops or shaggy ends. In the early days of mat-hooking in Newfoundland and Labrador the size of the burlap bags dictated the size of the rugs—generally two by three feet. The mats for sale in modern day souvenir shops come in smaller sizes, more suited to be displayed on a wall than a floor (and they fit nicely in your carry-on luggage too.)

The burlap is stretched over a wooden frame and secured in place with pins or staples to create tension not unlike a painter's canvas. The frames vary in size and shape as most of them are handmade. Some mat-hookers use the wood or plastic hoops generally reserved for cross-stitching. My own frame resembles a TV dinner tray and was constructed by a man named Clem Dwyer on Fogo Island. His wife developed back pains from hunching over her matting work so he created a wooden frame that sits comfortably on your lap while the working surface is raised almost a foot above. The other mat-hookers on the island started putting in orders. On the way to the Northern Peninsula, I visited a friend who was working on Fogo Island for the summer. She'd purchased one of Mr. Dwyer's frames and after examining his design I put in an order.²³ Tucker, my mat-hooking instructor, uses a specially designed frame for her large scale works. The frames are built by her son who takes commissions from the women in Tucker's class with big ambitions for their hooking futures. Printmaker Anita Singh, who in recent years has produced a number of hooked mats, has her partner build the frames for her work. Unlike the other mat-hookers, she never removes the mat from its frame,

²³ Maureen Power was working on an intangible cultural heritage project for Fogo Island over the summer months in 2007. The story of how Clem Dwyer invented the mat frame was part of this research.

choosing instead to incorporate it as another part of the finished work. After all, most art *is* in a frame.²⁴

There are very few tools needed to hook mats. A rotary cutter and plastic cutting mat to make fabric strips (and a ruler to keep them straight) are helpful and scissors are a given but the tool that is absolutely necessary is the hook. The hook has a smooth wooden handle and a thick needle, about the size of a nail, bent at the tip to catch hold of the fabric. Like the rest of the tools, the hook is often borrowed from another handicraft (cross-stitch in this case.) However, in Newfoundland it is possible to buy a hook that has been constructed for the purpose of making mats. My own hook comes from the Green Family Forge, a working blacksmith museum in the heritage town of Trinity on the Bonavista Peninsula.

At one time, rug-hooking tool manufacturing was a thriving business. This was the case for the John E. Garrett Company of Nova Scotia (founded in 1892) whose Bluenose Burlap Patterns for hooked rugs and tools were shipped to businesses across the country. A century after the company's inception my mother discovers a Bluenose Rug Hooker—still in its original packaging—at a flea market in Northern Ontario. It costs her three dollars and she mails it to my home in St. John's (a return eastward voyage for the object, I suspect, as the tools were manufactured in New Glasgow.) It looks like an out of date surgical instrument and possibly dangerous. The instructions are long and confusing, despite the claim on the box that "a child can use it." After some puzzling over the words and pictures I decide that nobody ever used the complicated Bluenose Rug Hooker. However on closer inspection of the tool, I notice bits of faded blue yarn and

²⁴ The role that men play in mat-making has changed little over the last century. In many historical references to mat-hooking the man was cited as the frame-maker and in some cases, the pattern designer.

wisps of burlap caught behind the metal handle that works the “presser foot.” Some long ago rug hooker had obviously used this tool. It makes sense that the fiber caught in the tool would be yarn. Unlike the Newfoundland tradition, the mat-makers in Nova Scotia typically used yarn and from a quick perusal of craft stores in Halifax, still do to some extent.²⁵

Instead of pre-spun wool, mat-makers in Newfoundland traditionally hooked with fabric strips cut from worn-out clothing. Although some women work with wool today, recycled material remains the norm in contemporary mat-making in this province. The current shift towards reusing and recycling should secure the popularity of this method.

Many mat-hookers will tell you that they prefer to work with t-shirt material, or jersey, as it provides some stretch. This can be purchased at fabric stores but is more commonly acquired in thrift stores like Value Village and The Salvation Army where racks of used t-shirts provide an economical and wide-ranging colour palette. Mat-hooker Frances Ennis says her preferred medium is wool fabric and when she discovers a large blanket or a long women’s skirt at the second-hand store she feels as if she’s “hit the jackpot.”

Material varies, but the tools are fairly uniform and the physical act of mat-hooking, pulling the fabric through the burlap, is consistent across the craft. It’s the choices that each woman makes in the act of creating a mat that differentiates one work from another.

²⁵ I spent a weekend in Halifax in February 2008 and made a point of visiting the city’s craft shops and art galleries. It was in Jennifer’s of Nova Scotia that I saw the largest collection of mats, all hooked with wool.

Low Hooking and High Hooking Defined

Low Hooking

Def: *Low Hooking* is seen in the often anonymous works made from a company-approved patterns generally of historic, pastoral scenes, depicting an idealized rural past.

Low Hooking is usually created from a pattern. I would hesitate to use the term mass-produced in this case, however, these patterns are drawn or “stamped” on to the burlap to create a uniform and marketable product, generally sold in a kit that comes with instructions and in some cases, includes pre-cut fabric and colour directions. The pattern is created by a person who has mastered the craft and it is intended for the beginner, or leisure mat-hooker.

The work of vocational mat-hookers is mostly pattern-based. For example, textile artists Shawn O’Hagan and Joan Foster were commissioned to create patterns and suggest colour schemes for the North by Design hooking group. In the case of Grenfell Handicrafts, women work from copyrighted patterns that date back to Sir Wilfred Grenfell and his contemporaries (Laverty; Grenfell Handicrafts Shop). The subject of the low hooked mats is generally pastoral, like those of the Placentia West mat-making collective. These methodically hooked mats depict an idealized and rural past where the cod flakes dry in the sun and whales frolic in the harbour. Adjacent to colourful saltbox homes, clothing dries on the line. On a snowy winter night, a band of mummers approach a neighbour’s home. Perspective is disregarded. The Grenfell mat-makers use a more muted, natural palette, in keeping with tradition. Workers in the 19th century weren’t working with the scraps of kid’s soccer t-shirts, back then they dyed silk stockings and used clothing scraps, all fairly neutral in colour. The original mats have faded over time, giving the impression that the colours were always a bit muted, however, the hooked

scenes were based in nature and the matters fairly consistently tried to reproduce the same colours. Like the work of today's Placentia West mats, the subject of the Grenfell mats is pastoral, but the landscape is wider, more open, and snowier. Unlike the southern mats, the Grenfell designs are often figurative, showing parka-clad figures being pulled by dog-sled in a vast and Arctic landscape. Fish and whales are replaced by polar bears and husky dogs. These mats depict an art-school level of colour gradation, using both shadow and perspective. Although different in subject matter both the Grenfell and Placentia West mats can be classified as low-hooking. The subjects of the North by Design mats are also sea and landscape-based although there is greater variation in the colours and fabrics as the mat-makers work mostly with recycled materials. In anticipation of colour variations, the fabric swatches that hang on the wall in Smith's hooking studio suggest an array of options to account for inconsistencies in material. There is also a disclaimer on the North by Design web site: "Please allow for some colour variation in the rag mats as these are made from recycled fabrics and we are limited at times by availability. But we try to stay true to the photo and if we must depart significantly we will advise you" (North by Design).

The low hooking technique is uniform with evenly placed looping. Expert mat-hookers have the ability to produce machine-like products. The fabric is looped tightly and very close to the base of the burlap. If there were an entry in the Guinness Book of World Records for mat-hooking speed, Annie Hillier would own that title. She can hook 75 to 80 loops per minute, although referring to her fine, low style as "loops" is not entirely accurate. Hillier's mother was employed as a mat-hooker by the Grenfell mission and as a girl, Hillier helped with the production of mats in their family home. It was

through this that she developed her tight and even style, as dictated by Grenfell's stringent quality standards. Today, she is the only mat-hooker showcasing her original designs and work in the Grenfell Historic Properties handicrafts shop. She is also the only mat-hooker whose name is attached to her work. The rest of the copyrighted images are hooked by anonymous local women—it's been that way for 100 years.

Hillier's work is so consistently uniform that some of her mats don't actually look hand-made, but more like the copy-cat rugs mass produced by machines and sold in box-stores across the country. I almost wondered if any of the tourists who wander off the cruise ships and into this museum would bother paying the \$800 for her 4 x 3 ft mats, assuming immediately that they weren't actually made by hand and therefore not authentic. How would visitors to their home differentiate this original from an imposter? In a cyclical pattern of inspiration, this particular mat seems to mimic the floral design found on so many synthetic carpets of the same size and shape. The designs of these mass-produced mats mimic that of the original handmade mats from the early and mid 20th century.

The low-hooked style mat is generally displayed for sale in heritage, tourist and souvenir craft shops. For instance, mats from the low-hooking category line the walls of the Craft Council of Newfoundland and Labrador shop—some have been transformed back to a more utilitarian function such as teapot cozies and trivets, or the more decorative Christmas tree ornament.

High Hooking

Def: Uneven, often experimental and sometimes incorporating other textiles and art forms, *High Hooking* is generally what is displayed in gallery spaces. The artist's name is always attached to the work.

Outside the retail shop, along the staircase that leads to the Craft Council's gallery spaces the walls are lined with one-of-a kind mats, hooked by local artists, the looping is often uneven and textured; the material varies and can be somewhat experimental by incorporating a variety of other art forms like quilting and oil painting. This is what Smith calls 'high hooking' where the loops can be uneven, pulled up high through the burlap to create a sense of depth and movement. The high hookers identify themselves as artists, or more specifically, 'textile' or 'fiber' artists. They work from original designs and the subject matter is often very personal and reflective of the artist and her life. Mat-hooking, like any creative expression is a physical act with deliberate choices performed through colour, technique, materials and subject. The 'high-hookers' feel free to explore beyond traditionalist confines and marketability (although one could argue that both high and low mat-hookers are creating pieces that they hope will eventually sell.) These experimental forms of high hooking are usually exhibited in galleries, spaces reserved for art works and artists.

In the 2006 exhibit "Traditions in Transition: Contemporary Hooked Rugs of Newfoundland and Labrador" the participating artists hooked with a variety of unlikely materials including wire, twigs, and plastic and incorporated other mediums like oil paint, felting work and beeswax. (All of the artists work in other mediums as well as mat-hooking.)

In her curatorial statement, Gloria Hickey writes that “divorced from necessity and the limits of function, it was inevitable that the hooked rug would evolve into an art form” (Hickey). There were 21 participating artists and regardless of their backgrounds, each woman was drawn to the act of rug-hooking through exposure to the regional handicrafts of Newfoundland. The inspiration for the artistic act is rooted in history and geography. This is part of what makes contemporary rug-hooking in Newfoundland so unique. With roots in the “Newfoundland Renaissance” of the 1960s and 1970s (Gwyn) the current hooking revival is a marked trend—a *movement* in artspeak. Continuing in the visual arts vein the next section of this chapter uses the comparison method to read the aesthetic objects.

Comparison One

Two Examples of Contemporary Mats

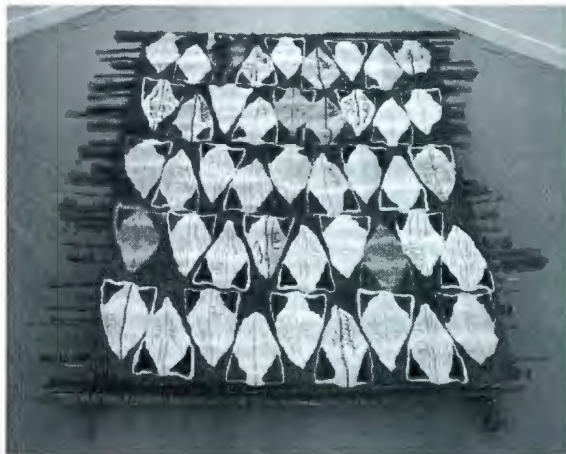


Figure 15: Janet Davis, “Clifford’s Education Fund” (8 x 10 ft)



Figure 16: North by Design, “Salt Fish” (20” x 26”)

Comparisons

Salt cod is a common theme in both traditional and contemporary hooked mats. Both mats use the image of the split, salted codfish laid out to dry on a fish flake. Since each mat was hooked post-moratorium, it could be said that they are nostalgic and symbolic of Newfoundland heritage and are an attempt to encapsulate the history of province. Both mat-makers created their works to be viewed by a greater audience, either via the Internet or on display in an art gallery. Therefore, both mat-makers intended their work for consumption, rather than for personal use. Davis is an artist by vocation, and although her primary medium is print she has strayed in to textile/fiber territory. The North By Design mat-maker is a mat-hooker by vocation and the fabric and burlap serves as her primary medium.

Contrasts

The first major difference between these two mats is that “Clifford’s Education Fund” was made to show in an art gallery and “Salt Fish” was made for retail sale. The

second is that Davis' mat is three-dimensional while the North by Design mat is one dimensional. "Salt Fish" is hooked in the traditional Newfoundland style using recycled fabric and burlap and is the size of a traditional mat. However, Davis' mat is arguably the more realistic of the two, although her work would be considered modern and experimental. In size and form the work recreates a traditional flake and the hooked fish that lie "drying" across it are truer in dimension and colour than the same scene in the one-dimensional "Salt Fish."

Davis' mat can be categorized as high hooking even though the fish are hooked low and evenly. I say this because the work is experimental in its dimensions, in the negative space left by unhooked burlap and in the incorporation of other mediums—branches and twigs—not traditionally associated with hooked mats. "Salt Fish" is an example of low hooking in both style and format. It is a typical size, created from a pattern, and uses a safe range of colours as well as a placating subject matter. All of these rules fall within the parameters of retail sale.

Comparison Two

One Design, Two Hookers



Figure 17: Annie Hillier, "Starfish" (10" x 22")



Figure 18: Shawn O'Hagan, "Starfish" (10" x 22")

Annie Hillier: Starfish

"For me, I don't think I'd be able to do it, this big hooking, because when I do it like that it seems like it's not done right," Hillier says of the high hooking style. Here is an excerpt from our interview where we discuss the difference in style between the more traditional Grenfell handicrafts and the mats produced by the Raleigh Historical Society:

AH: "Grenfell Handicrafts is traditional but the Raleigh Historical Site is what they call folk art. And they got a whole different thing all together, it's mostly fish and I did one with a squid on it. Did you see that? I did one like that and I did another one with a fish on it, I don't know what kind of a fish it was, I don't know, but it was beautiful when it was done. Mostly they do like, capelin, I never done one like that but I seen them.

EU: Do you like one better than the other?

AH: Yes I like the Starfish best, I think that's my favourite.

EU: Do you like traditional mats or the Raleigh mats best?

AH: I like the both of them but I like the traditional ones. Some people like traditional ones the best and some people now like these. (*Hillier points to the starfish*)

This exchange is a good illustration of how Annie categorizes the different methods of rug-hooking. It is not surprising that Annie finds the high hooking style

unusual, or not right. As a second generation Grenfell mat-maker, her views on the craft, how it should look, and how it should be done, are staunchly emplaced. The stories of women being forced to unravel any sloppy or uneven work at the Industrial during Grenfell's time likely carry some truth. The mats were, and still are, impeccable. The loops are even, low to the brin and always hooked in ruler-straight lines. To Annie, the loose and uneven loops seen in "high" hooking might suggest laziness, and a laissez-faire attitude towards order and hard work. It is interesting to note that Annie defines her matting work with the Raleigh collective as "folk" art while her mats destined for Grenfell Handicrafts are "traditional." It implies that a hierarchal system exists where one type of mat is revered and serious and the other is a bit kitschy and playful.

Shawn O'Hagan: Starfish

Shawn O'Hagan is the original designer of the Starfish pattern. As her designs became products being sold at craft fairs in the province, O'Hagan finds herself in the uncomfortable position of competing against her own patterns for sales. As mentioned in Chapter Two, a regular patron of her work approached O'Hagan at an art gallery opening of some of her recent mats in winter 2008 and told her they'd bought a piece of her work through North by Design. Of course, it was her pattern, but it was not her *work*. When she first laid eyes on a finished mat based on her original design, it was, to her, unrecognizable. "There was a stiffness to it, it was disassociated with the original and not inspired." She concedes that in order to sell your designs, "you have to be able to give it up."

Comparisons

The comparisons to be made between these two works are very few. They are

obviously hooked from the same pattern and the colour scheme is somewhat similar—yellow starfish, dark boarder—but this is where the similarities end.

Contrasts

Although the imagery is the same, the mats are fundamentally different. I was familiar with Shawn O'Hagan's work and looking at Hillier's "Starfish" I felt as if I was peering through a magnifying glass. It reminded me of when I got my first pair of glasses and looked at my parents' lawn and I could see every blade of grass. The even uniformity of Hillier's hooking style sharpened the "Starfish" mat and made the images and colour more static than in the original work. The boundaries are finite and the shapes are more defined. O'Hagan's mat is less uniform and the texture and colours suggest movement, a hint of the water where the starfish might be found. There is no right or wrong way to hook a mat; Hillier's use of bright colours and pronounced boundaries may be more appealing to a consumer than O'Hagan's looser, more muted work. There is organization and methodology evident in Hillier's low-hooked mat and that is very appealing while O'Hagan's mat has an experimental quality in her high-hooked textural style, suggesting movement, and life, equally aesthetically appealing.

How is art valued in Canadian society?

New York artist Barnett Newman's best known work uses only two colours. In Voice of Fire (1967) one stripe of red is flanked by two stripes of blue. In 1991 while under the directorship of Dr. Shirley Thompson, The National Gallery of Canada acquired the work at a cost of \$1.8 Million. The purchase made headlines across the country and instantly became the topic of several special television and radio reports

along with a slew of parodies penned by the nation's political cartoonists. What this controversy ultimately accomplished was a nationwide discussion on the value and definition of modern art. Public opinion was strongly divided but the general consensus was that the government had wasted tax dollars on a painting with only two colours (Barber). Had the work been figurative, non-abstract, a landscape, even a traditional outport scene, the reaction might have been different.

We read objects through visual clues, and approach material culture with our experiences and background acting as a map and guiding us towards our reactions. Mat-hooking in Newfoundland is not simply unique to a region but to an entire province—a disparately grouped and geographically large area. In literature on the subject, the act of mat-making and the works are often cited as an important aspect of the heritage of the province (RHGNL; Hickey; Pocius; Lavery; Ennis). This aspect of heritage and connection to the past is also an important consideration to the consumer, the art patron, the person who buys a mat to hang on their wall or lie flat across their floor.

As a participating artist at Toronto's enormous One of a Kind show, O'Hagan discovered that the interest in her mats was highest among people with a connection to Newfoundland (or a country with its own form of mat-making, like Portugal.) There are roughly 800 participants in this annual "fine" craft fair and catching the attention of a passer-by can be tricky.

"There are so many choices, there has to be a reason to visit a booth. There was definitely an East Coast connection but the Caribbean people came to visit my stall because of the colours. The mats didn't sell well if there wasn't that connection to the east coast. There was interest, but it didn't lead to sales," O'Hagan says of her time at the

Toronto craft fair. She explains a possible theory that "there's still that slightly down-homey association with it. It's not an urban thing to buy." She adds that people did not know what to do with the mats, perhaps searching for the lost functionality of the traditional object.

The Role of the Collector

When examining the "mystique of connoisseurship" Price suggests that:

"Art appreciation in our society represents a dilemmic clash of principles. On the one hand, true art lovers felt they should, on some level, experience "pure" aesthetic reaction to form—reactions that in no essential way depend on "clinical" knowledge, aristocratic upbringing, or access to estimated prices in an auction catalog. On the other hand, the entire edifice of art connoisseurship is a well-defined and defended hierarchy of authority, in which some among us are assigned responsibility for recognizing the intrinsic beauty of masterpieces and others among us are expected to nod our heads in assent." (15)

How the art collector/appreciator responds to the work can have many variables: Is it familiar? Does it evoke happy memories? Is the artist known or unknown to the person (personally or through formal education?) Is the medium known or unknown to the collector? When speaking on the emotional value we place on works of art, Boas writes: "The emotions may be stimulated not by the form alone, but also by close associations that exist between the form and ideas held by the people. In other words, when the forms convey a meaning, because they recall past experiences or because they act as symbols, a new element is added to the enjoyment. The form and its meaning combine to elevate the mind above the indifferent emotional state of every-day life" (12).

Therefore the viewer brings with them a cache of previous experiences, knowledge, preferences and ideas. This is particularly pertinent in the case of art acquisition. The role of the connoisseur has been established earlier in this chapter, but there is another very important figure not to be overlooked in the production and consumption of craft and that is the collector. The experts (art dealers, gallery owners) put the work on display, often in hopes of regaining capitol through sales, but in reality the consumer plays an equally important role in establishing the profile of the artist and craftsperson. The buyer may be an art gallery or the government art bank or a patron. A patron, or philanthropist, supports the arts in several ways. They donate money to arts organizations (and sometimes artists), they attend and host fundraising events in support of the arts, and they buy work for their private collections.

The first large private collection of contemporary hooked mats that I see in St. John's is at the home of Kevin and Anne Major. Both in their 50s, they have been collecting hooked mats for 20 years. I met Kevin through a mutual friend and expressed interest in seeing his collection. He kindly obliged, and on a Sunday afternoon in April 2008, I was invited to his home for brunch. Immediately after entering the front door I am able to identify works by Catherine McCausland, Elizabeth Tucker and Deanne Fitzpatrick. It was a surreal experience, having the images that I'd looked at and researched and written about gathered together in one space—somebody's *home*. What was most interesting, however, was that over the two decades that they'd been collecting hooked mats the Majors progressed from buying "low" to "high" hooked mats. The recent shift from traditional to artistic and experimental hooked mats obviously played a

role but their attitude that hooked mats were fine art took shape long before they invested in their first “high” hooked mat.

Kevin Major purchased the family’s first hooked mat about twenty years ago while visiting the Burin Peninsula. He’d heard of mat-maker Louise Belbin and her work, and his curiosity was peaked. Belbin was an iconic figure in the history of mat-hooking in Newfoundland and her most recognizable works mostly feature primitive-style animal designs—depicting two cats, or two ducks, or a lone moose—although she was also well known for her “poked” style mats. She ran a confectionary store in Grand Bank and often hooked while sitting behind the counter, and at night during the long hours that her husband would be away at sea.

In a published interview, Belbin reflected on her relationship with mat-hooking: “I was twenty-three when I came to Grand Bank. I came from Jacques Fontaine; it was my home...I was a Johnson before I was married in 1922. My husband was at sea and I only saw him for a month and a half that year...The first thing I asked my husband when I was married was to make a mat frame as I had to do something in the long winter evenings” (Ennis Twas a Way of Life 4).

In a small pamphlet that accompanied Belbin’s 1978 show of hooked mats at the Memorial University Art Gallery she was described as a dedicated and constant worker, even more so after the death of her husband: “After he died, she spent even more time matting, and she now mats every spare moment in her shop when she isn’t waiting on friends. She often completes one mat a week, commenting that “work is company.” (Art Gallery of Memorial University).

When Kevin Major visited her home with the intention of purchasing a mat she laid out about fifteen different styles, and he chose one with two cats, a design that she'd done quite a number of times. This would be the first of many mat purchases to follow, but at that particular point in time the object was still very much utilitarian for the Majors. The next purchase was at work by the Placentia West group of mat-makers, but not the usual outport scene, instead, it was a meta-mat of sorts, depicting, of all things, a bathroom scene complete with its own tiny mat in the foreground. This rug acts as the turning point in their collection, where they began to look for works that were different, or special, those mats that pushed the boundaries of the craft, and defined in this study as "high hooking" (although this would come much later as the experimental form of mat-making is still in its infancy.)

Anne Major explains their urge to collect:

I think if we were just interested in mat-making as a craft I think we would be buying more traditional things but that's not it at all, it has to do with image, but it also has to do with textures being used and there are so many artists now who are using new media with fabric and fiber in interesting ways. That's just so fascinating to see how this is evolving in the hands of artists or people who are on that nice gorgeous cusp between craft and art.

Glassie writes that "Consumption, like creation, collects contexts in which the meanings of the artifact consolidate and expand" (57). For the Majors, their hooked mats exist in the context of their home and in the greater context of their place (emotionally and historically) in Newfoundland. The mats are decorative, but contain a greater emotional cache than the oil paintings that hang on the same walls. Although their current collection is an extension of the oil paintings and print works that fill their home. Still, the mats carry a different and possibly more personal meaning for both husband and wife who have roots here in Newfoundland. (Kevin comes from a long line of

Newfoundlanders while Anne has lived here for 38 years—"same gene pool, just a bit newer," is what she tells people when they question her origins.) In Kevin's words:

It's more of a direct link to ordinary people. Whereas an oil painting or a print that I might have acquired in Toronto or New York City when I travel, it's beautiful in itself but it doesn't, for me...have the same indigenous connection to this place and I know a fair bit about the history of Newfoundland and Labrador and the part that women in particular play in its well-being and that was part of a lot of people's lives at the time, in the early days, and then now it's carried on and emerging in a new form but there is still that connection to the past and I think that's part of what we appreciate.

Conclusion

Academics classify their subjects and their subject's work, but there are existing social dynamics at play within the chosen study group long before the researcher approaches their topic. Interestingly, the social stratification discussed in this chapter originates in the technique and method applied in the act of creating and in the aesthetics of the craft object. There are, of course, many other factors that contribute to the social stratification within the larger "group" of mat-hookers, such as collectors and display, but the root of these differences is a visual divide. A low mat-hooker generally falls in vocational category. High mat-hookers define themselves, or are defined by their peer group as artists. The women who cross this divide are the leisure mat-makers. These hobbyists float between the two categories and act as a middle ground. In the vein of categorization they are really their own group, and could be called the "middle" or "medium" mat-hookers. They vacillate between extremes and practice neither for money nor artistic credibility but for their own personal enjoyment acting as an equalizer in the greater scheme of social stratification.

Conclusion: The Opening

On one of the first sunny days in spring 2008 a crowd gathers at the Emma Butler Gallery in St. John's, Newfoundland to celebrate the opening of a new art exhibit. There are about fifty people present, and a few more trickle in as the afternoon slowly shifts in to evening. They are artists, patrons, gallery owners, writers, and their various familial accoutrements—babies both in utero and slung across their parents chests in slings, curious toddlers drinking cranberry juice and causing havoc amidst the legs of the grown-ups, and parents, lovers, and friends of the exhibitors. There isn't anything unusual about this crowd, or this event, as it is like so many art gallery openings in this space. And yet, there is a seismic shift happening here, on this day. It's a shift in the divide between what is considered art and craft in Newfoundland. There are three participating artists with vastly different styles but they all work in the same medium and that is the inspiration for this grouping—they are all mat-hookers. The works are figurative (McCausland), Art Deco (O'Hagan) and politically current (Knowling). They are playful and serious and emotional. This exhibit signifies the first of its kind in the province. Yes, mats have long been on display and valued in Newfoundland, but not on the same commercial level as artists like Christopher Pratt and David Blackwood (two examples of the artists represented by this gallery.) The prices range but are generally upwards of \$900 and some of the patrons, despite the distraction of the social crowd, have set their sights on their next acquisition. Kevin and Anne Major are there, contemplating an Art Deco mat hooked by Shawn O'Hagan. It's a careful consideration, a conclusion the couple came to earlier in the day. They'd been invited by the gallerist to view the works on display before the influx of the official opening.

The exhibit is titled “Honest Beauty” and perhaps Kathleen Knowling’s artist statement explains this title best when she writes that “Hooked Mats celebrate women’s skills. They tell of their ability to overcome difficulty, hardship and privation. The women live in a ragged world and make art from the scraps. As my images grow under my hand, these women come alive in my heart and head. My mats honour them.”

Mat-making in Newfoundland does represent an honesty, a refusal to conform, an acceptance of modernity through a slow process once necessary and now non-functional and yet still aesthetically desired. It represents history, and a fierce grasp of place, and also, the uniquely human desire to create.

The art show comes at the end of my research path and standing amidst a good number of my informants, and their work, I reach the first of my conclusions. Mat-making in Newfoundland is closely associated with identity and belonging. Knowling demonstrates this theory in the issues she chooses to cite in her artist’s statement. It is the concept of honouring the past, of recognizing a regional heritage and culture, and paying homage to the women of this province who lived, and hooked mats, before her. These women may have toiled away at their burlap canvasses in an effort to create a functional object that might warm the floors of their homes, but, in the artifacts they leave behind, they show us that they were always aware of the decorative aspects and the aesthetic quality of their work.

When setting out to explore contemporary rug-hooking in Newfoundland I wanted to know what the fundamental differences were between the three groups that I’d identified as well as how these differences might manifest in the aesthetic of the work. I was also interested in what kind of crossover might exist between these groups—socially

and stylistically. The differences that I discovered lay at the root of why the women I interviewed engaged in the activity of mat-making. The vocational mat-makers conformed to marketable styles—their colour and textile choices reflect this conformity. The artists' work was more experimental and deviated, sometimes vastly, from the original medium. None of the mats, whether artistic or vocational, were destined to warm a kitchen floor. However, the walls, and the interior spaces that the mat is destined for will dictate the style: art gallery or home. Meanwhile, the leisure mat-hookers engage in the act of mat-making for a variety of reasons. Free to make a floor mat (like the poked mat) or to trace and then hook a copyrighted image of Winnie-the-Pooh without fear of reprisal.

Vocational craft operations have come and gone throughout history to varying degrees of success. These money-making ventures, set about by a concerned middle class to mend a flagging rural economy are not new, as seen in Becker's study of Southern Appalachia's 1930s craft industry, and Jones' ethnographic portrait of chair-maker Chester Cornett of Southeastern Kentucky. Will the Raleigh Historical Society find success in its mat-making program, or Adele Poynter in her on-line craft venture? Speaking, honestly, and not terribly academically or non-biased, I sincerely hope so. Realistically, though, I have my doubts knowing that hooking rugs simply doesn't pay the bills. However, in summer 2008 I hear from Noah Smith when he's in St. John's on business. He's calling to tell me that the fishing village is up and running—matting centre included. They are, he says, "(h)open for business." Although the mat-hooking course initiated with a cottage industry in mind, it will now exist as a component of a larger tourist attraction. It will exist to further authenticate the tourist "experience" and I believe

that with tourism the way of the future here in Newfoundland, this will fare far better than any cottage industry ever could.

As for the hobbyists, the Rug Hooking Guild of Newfoundland and Labrador is a strong and exuberant crowd. It is a determined and well-maintained organization and I hardly think it should flag. Nor should it. For the women who run it, who are members and who participate in the weekly hook-ins, it provides a link to their past, and a social outlet within which they may escape their contemporary lives, if only for a Monday evening. I have no doubt that this well-oiled machine will continue to roar forward while keeping fastidious tabs on their past.

The similarities between the artists, vocational mat-makers and hobbyists were that the women work in the same medium and that each work is non-functional. Also that each woman engages in the act as a means of belonging. This can manifest itself physically, such as belonging to a group, like a regular hook-in meet-up, or emotionally, by providing a connection to the past. Even as a researcher and outsider with an interest but not a strong connection to Newfoundland, I too learned to rug hook in an effort to belong—amidst informants, to better understand my subjects and to educate myself in the nuances of the craft (the difference in burlap types, where to buy it, how to cut material, what to cut it on, which hooks are best, which type of t-shirt material rolls the nicest, what kind of designs transfer well from paper to hooked mat.)

In his study on community and order in Calvert, Newfoundland, Pocius writes that “Once people decide to leave places, culture becomes objectified. In Newfoundland generally, there is increased interest in a select group of items—stories, songs and objects—that are believed to embody the essence of indigenous values.” I believe this

sentiment is just as strong and perhaps even more apparent now than when Pocius posited this theory in the mid seventies. The hooked mat is an example of how an object can symbolize the many facets of a culture—it is history, commodity, decoration, traditional knowledge, lineage, survival and art.

This is a study of people who belong to Newfoundland for different reasons. Some married into the culture, and others moved to the eastern edge for work and never returned home. Others still were born and raised in the province and with the exception of schooling or travel, have never left. In just two years I have witnessed this island's transience first-hand. (This constant social shift is not new, Newfoundland is a port city and has been for 500 years.) With each new outmigration headline the perceived threat to Newfoundland culture grows stronger and more value is placed on "indigenous" objects that symbolize the traditional knowledge associated with the culture of the province. Whether this value inspires a cottage industry geared towards tourists, an artistic expression fusing past and present, or an organized meeting of crafters on Monday nights, it is essentially rooted in the same concept of belonging.

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