

NADINE
SIMEC

Where ever you go focuses on the intrinsic need to feel connected. Within my work, intention is given form in the intricate detail of embroidery, and beauty is found in seemingly ordinary handmade or found objects. As the moths move from doily to doily towards the light, they transition from a need to settle to a need for something greater.

I grew up in rural Ontario—but after moving multiple times for school, I have realized that home is more than just a familiar place. This piece is a visual representation of how we are all drawn to something in our lives. Something that gives us comfort and a sense of belonging, whether that is a place, a person, or something unexplainable.

Nadine Simec is a practicing Canadian artist whose work spans a variety of media. However, she is currently focusing on fibre arts—specifically, embroidery.

Simec has spent her whole life in rural Ontario, taking her surroundings as inspiration for her artwork. Through her work, she aims to inspire wonder and contemplation by positioning fibre art in a contemporary and conceptually-driven context.

nadinesimec.mypportfolio.com



Where ever you go, installation detail
Embroidery, wood, paper
approx. 21x12"
2018



OF (GRAND)MOTHERS AND MOTHS

by Katie Lawson

I was introduced to Nadine Simec's *Where ever you go* in the final throes of a summer that smelled of rot and decay, overripeness and mold. A summer as hot as it was damp, whose finale was marked by the usual suspects of cicada songs and goldenrod blooms. A rare summer where I would retreat indoors in the evening, rather than sit outside well into the night, enjoying the orchestra of thriving critters. A rare summer that lacked the echo of mosquito-bitten skin repeatedly slapped, and the afterimage of moths hovering around porch lights, around street-lights, around sports field lights. At times this hovering appears as a careful dance of attraction and repulsion; but then some nights, it is the violent slam of a body into light.

Entomologist-led speculation on the behaviour of moths has bled into popular culture, with the pervasive belief that moths rush toward unnatural light sources because the lights throw off their internal navigation systems. *Transverse orientation*: a form of navigation used by insects, flying at a constant angle relative to a distant light source. We come at things obliquely, the moth and I. Moths didn't evolve around artificial lights, after all; they evolved at a time when the light on Earth came mostly from the distant sun, moon and stars. There are those, however, that refute the moth's potential reliance on transverse orientation — a mechanism that is rooted in migrating species trying to find their way by the light of the moon, calibrating a flight path in relation to an astronomical body, our natural satellite. Most moths simply don't migrate — they are always already home, though they seem to be constantly seeking more. Fact and fiction are riddled with holes.

In the 1970s, entomologist Philip Callahan discovered that the infrared light spectrum emitted by a candle flame happens to contain a few of the exact same frequencies of light given off by female moths' pheromones. Callahan had previously discovered that the pheromones are luminescent — they glow very faintly. Male moths, with their larger, bulging eyes, are attracted to flames under the false belief that they are females sending out sex signals. Like a moth to a flame, like a flame to a moth. Why, then, is ultraviolet light more attractive to insects than infrared light? It doesn't contain the same wavelengths as their radiant pheromones. Maybe it is simply a matter of phototaxis: an organism's automatic movement

Where ever you go, installation detail
Embroidery, wood, paper
approx. 8 x 6"
2018

towards or away from light. A way of telling up from down, of making sense of here and there. Back and forth, back and forth.

Theories have their holes, holes we embroider with our ideas about the world and our relationship to it. A bridge, a link, a bind. Thread or yarn stitched to connect disparate patches on a textile surface — or in the case of Simec, paper doilies. While the decorative possibilities of needlework are celebrated, we often forget the dual-purpose of embroidery stitches, rooted in processes of tailoring, patching, mending and reinforcing. That which is by all appearances delicate and fragile is fortified, supported. Lacking competency in the fibre arts myself, I hold memories of my paternal grandmother knitting and stitching with reverence. Hands fluttering, needles clicking, a rhythmic and methodical back and forth of needle and thread, kissing cloth in a way that is reminiscent of pollinators' careful dance with flora or, again, the behaviour of moths. Back and forth, back and forth. This ritual, this bodily act and craft doesn't feel like home to me, but I can see that it does for her.

Elaborately embroidered clothing, religious objects, or household items have been a mark of wealth or status through history and cross-culturally, yet the highly gendered practice of producing these items carry associations of the quotidian, of slowness, of domesticity. In Western society, particularly prior to industrialization, the mastery of embroidery and textile arts marked the transition from girlhood to womanhood in a way that mirrors how Simec frames her practice as an interpretation of the transition from childhood to adulthood. There is a sense of passage, of transformation and metamorphosis — not just at the level of the individual, but between generations, calling on a matriarchal lineage and transference of muscle memory and bodily repetition.

We are all drawn to something. I feel that Simec believes as much, and so do I. What does the representation of a moth's search for light tell us about memory, about ritual? What do the practices of embroidery tell us about home? There's a certain romanticism that links the two, yet beyond that we can recognize that most ways of thinking are shaped by metaphors, and that theoretical work comes through figuration and imagining. A close reading of the etymology of moths and the practice of embroidery as they relate to Simec's work provides a framework to think through ideas of nature; of belonging; of human and more-than-human companions, bound by an intrinsic need to feel connected, to make sense of the world.

Katie Lawson is a graduate of the Master of Visual Studies Curatorial program at the University of Toronto, where she previously completed her Master of Arts in Art History. A researcher, curator and art educator, Lawson is the Art Editor for the Hart House Review and is currently the Education and Outreach Assistant the Doris McCarthy Gallery, Scarborough.



ALEX
MURPHY