



Photos: Jill Sabre



OR GALLERY

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alterations
reprotecting the space



A *DIS-REGARD* INSTALLATION BY
MARGARETHA BOOTSMA AND JILL SABRE

January 6 to February 3, 1996

**“This map is useless now, a quaint articulation of the past.
Eden dies; green thoughts in a green shade
Cannot withstand tectonic pressures of an urgent time.”**

alterations: reprotecting the space

This installation is a collaboration by DIS-REGARD; two Vancouver artists, Jill Sabre and Margaretha Bootsma. The artists have worked on similar installations, addressing issues of place and neighborhood and the impact humans have on these spaces.

At the heart of their collaborative work is a high degree of archival research, which excavates the hidden histories often “lying” behind closed doors of institutions, revealing through exposed layers the foundations of contemporary issues such as urban decay, demolition and gentrification.

The artists experiment with found discarded materials from the immediate environment, juxtaposing these materials with other elements to “re-present” them in a newly perceived way. They also use drawing, usually associated with classical imagery, to resurrect the object from its earlier discarded context.

Their newest work expresses concerns over the rapid changes that continue to take place on one of Vancouver’s oldest city streets - the 100 block of West Hastings Street. The installation *alterations: reprotecting the space* echoes, in both a concrete and abstract manner, the alterations to the surrounding buildings and neighborhood and indicates a way to reprotect or repair the spirits of the place; spirits such as the Three Sisters of Fate, symbolized by the treadle sewing machine in the middle of the gallery. According to Roman mythology, Clotho, the spinner, spun the thread of life; Lachesis, the Disposer of Lots, assigned destiny to every human; and Atropos cut the thread at death.

A 10-foot door, (constructed of found wood and metal recycled from another installation) is hinged to the wall, where its irregular shape is repeated in the excavation. Inside the excavated wall are archival material and found objects collected from the street and surrounding neighborhood. These often inaccessible archival facts, along with the fragments, bespeak the overlooked relationships and lost concerns over home and place/stability and family/neighborhood and function.

Standing opposite the door excavation is an Industrial Era treadle sewing machine, on which the needle penetrates an old map of Canada and a patchwork of stitched fragments of street maps from the 1880’s to the present. The maps are torn

and ripped to represent the chaotic discourse on civic development and its disintegrating impact on forest and urban environments.

An image of a woman sewing in a local garment factory, is a recurring motif on the patchwork, which refers to the “stitching together” or manufacturing of change, while the woman herself harkens back to when the gallery was a tailor shop (the basement still stores clothing and machines from that time).

The machine also indicates the unalterable *feng shui* of the space as a place of assembly and manufacturing. The ancient Chinese concept of *feng shui* refers to the harmony between a space and its users, a building and its environment, which contributes towards human destinies.

Although the mercantile heritage of the 100 block of West Hastings Street is still seen in the building facades, the neighborhood is now marginalized, carelessly dismissed and uncared for. Many of its inhabitants are forced to find temporary shelter in the darkened alley, where the thread of life is cut. Despite these disintegrating effects, the community continues to survive.

In the installation, the front and back facades of two buildings from the West Hastings block are projected directly onto the gallery walls, which are covered in draped canvas (a familiar art material). These large photographic slide images (15’x25’) envelope the

viewer in a reprotected space, providing an intimate, safe place to experience the outer skin of the buildings while standing within the safety of an inner shell.

The artists have also knotted the canvas to create a strong sculptural space, a metaphor for the entanglement of time (the “thread of life”) that holds these buildings intact, but restricts them to simplistic solutions—demolition or gentrification—both of which would destroy the unique character of a neighborhood as old and experienced as this one.

Alison Jennings, Seattle, Washington

Margaretha Bootsma and Jill Sabre are Vancouver-based artists.

