The specifics of J. Lynn Campbell’s work – her fluid movement between materials – mirror an engagement in the movement of thought, the ways in which images contain knowledge and the illusions both material and ideological that not only inform her work but are at its core. Exhibitions in general deal with the moment, the work at hand, but for most artists, and in particular a senior artist like Campbell, their exhibitions are not of the now, not works in isolation, but part of a continuum of thoughts and ideas. And so it is with this current exhibition, subjective body.

*With this work I drew on my interest in symbology and architecture. The three entrances of a cathedral, one of the principle structures of western society, symbolize faith, hope, and charity.* — JLC

I first encountered J. Lynn Campbell’s installation work Faith (1990-1991) at the Kitchener/Waterloo Art Gallery in 1995. As with all her work before and since, I have wanted to seek what was beneath the object created. Faith is a series of fifty-five interlocking units composed of Greek crosses and modules. This structure within a structure – a work ripe with latent possibilities, not of what it as an object will do but what we viewers will experience as a result of our interaction with the work.

In Faith, Campbell overlaps the crosses, and the ancient symbol of the swastika emerges where the units/modules touch. These are ancient symbols that carry the baggage of a complex history. Levi-Strauss suggests that the effectiveness of symbols is determined by the formally homologous structures, built out of different materials at different levels of life – organic processes, unconscious mind, rational thought.1 Symbols – the reading of symbols and metaphors – are related to the maker/viewer. In her artist’s statement for the Kitchener/Waterloo exhibition, Campbell asked “What is the significance of these symbols and how do they relate to faith?” – questions that she addresses time and again. This faith that Campbell asked “What is the significance of these symbols and how do they relate to faith?” questions that she addresses time and again. This faith that Campbell

process as meditative

is a part of the title. The process is one of the defining elements, a process that stands outside of the making of the works; a process in which the use of materials (stitching of and into wire mesh) also informs the content of the work. This “process,” this “symbol-process,” is both a strength and a narrow definition. These works and what they symbolize are connected with all her work before and since, I have wanted to seek what was beneath the object created. Faith is a series of fifty-five interlocking units composed of Greek crosses and modules. This structure within a structure – a work ripe with latent possibilities, not of what it as an object will do but what we viewers will experience as a result of our interaction with the work.

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of the work, there is the possibility of self-awareness, of interpretive possibilities and ‘poetic’ autonomy. The four works Passage, Faith, Offering and Treaty link her investigations of what it is to be human — to think, to reflect, to imagine.

“The human form in essence has made its passage. What remains possibilities and “poetic” autonomy. The four works Passage, Faith, Offering and Treaty link her investigations of what it is to be human — to think, to reflect, to imagine.

The body takes on multiple meanings and ambivalence in the Akel series (2001-2003). This series becomes inextricably hermetic in its content, and by process and use of materials more open. In this series Campbell employs her own body and that of her partner, Ka Aris, to create the initial paper body moulds and templates for the Akel series, their bodies becoming subject matter. Using copper and stainless steel wire fabric for the female form (Akel #4 through #8) and for the male form lapinsk paper (Akel #6) and stainless-steel wire fabric (Akel #7), she creates a series of torso and lower-body parts. Campbell cuts out the wire fabric actions using the paper templates and then hand stitches the sections together. The joining of the sections forms and follow the musculature of the body, reminding us that the human body is merely matter. In Model #7 through Model #8 the works are open: you can look right inside and through the bodies, transparent open containers with the surfaces tattooed. Model #8 is filled with interwoven wire, suggesting visceral contents, while Model #7, which is composed of separated halves of a female torso, contains knitted wire gloves acting as lungs. These works intimate intense emotion but with a strong reserve. They beckon us in and then say, “Stop.” Are these self- portraits Janus-like, or self-reflexive mirrors for the viewer? These works are calmly subversive of our expectations of such objects, posing questions that we may or may not have answers for.

As in previous works Study (1995) and Stillness (1996), text and symbol are essential elements. Delicate, beautiful symbols/images (a skull, a spiral, a honeycomb, a rose) are found on Model #2, and on the foot of Model #3 the word “sympathy” is tattooed. Among the works are whole series of passages. In many cultures, body art defines and celebrates the transition from childhood to adulthood, and gives meaning to age and gender. It also honors beauty, bravery and the acquisition of knowledge. Body art allows people to reinvent themselves to rebel, to follow fashion or to experiment with new identities; to cross boundaries of gender, national identity and cultural stereotypes.

“The shape’s hollowness gives reference to a vessel emptied of its contents, or conversely, in readiness to being filled.” — JLC

In Model #8 (Extensions No.1) and Extensions #4 (headress) Campbell returns to the dressmaker’s form, “a symbolic reconstruction of the body,” but uses hair as the covering element, creating works that are once again both beautiful and disquieting. For centuries hair has been used as a locus of identity: short hair/beautiful, long hair/beautiful, hair as a visceral and cultural symbol of power and desire. Primitive cultures made extensive use of hair in their ritual masks. Do you see who is the sire, the mother, the one who is the other, the beauty is there but is it in control? — JLC

Three works in the Extensions No.1 and No.2 series (2004-2005) re-presented in solo and group exhibitions in Ontario and Asia. She is a member of The Tree Museum Collective, Gravenhurst, Ontario and a member of Red Head Gallery in Toronto. Her work has been included in private, public and corporate collections.

JLYN CAMPBELL is a Toronto-based artist-educator at the Ontario College of Art, with independent studies in France, Switzerland and Italy. She is a member of the Contemporary and Site-specific installation. Since the early 1980s Campbell has exhibited her work in Toronto, Ontario regional galleries and Europe. She is currently a member of The Tree Museum Collective, Gravenhurst, Ontario and a member of Red Head Gallery in Toronto. Her work has been included in public, private and corporate collections.

ANNE O’CALLAGHAN was born in Ireland and immigrated to Canada in 1966. Her art practice extends from photo-based installation to sculpture. Since 1981, her work has been presented in solo and group exhibitions in Ontario and Asia. She is a member and co- curator of The Tree Museum Collective, Gravenhurst, Ontario and a member of Red Head Gallery in Toronto. 

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