

THE KANSAS CITY STAR.

FIRST FRIDAY | Textile art

IN A WORD, THIS SHOW IS FUN

Obscure term inspires show tied to Surface Design Association conference.

By ALEX SCHUBERT
Special to The Star

At the annual Surface Design Association conference in 2005, someone brought up the word “merkin.”

Los Altos-based fiber artist Linda Gass was so intrigued by its definition that she kept it in mind for two years, using it as the basis for the exhibition “Intimate Apparel.” The show opens Friday at the Pi Gallery as part of this year’s SDA summit.

The 37 artists in the show seem to be having fun with Gass’ obscure reference, and Pi director Jody Wilkins said it was the “most fun show (she’s had) in five years.”

So what is a merkin?

The term was first used in the 1600s, describing the pubic wigs worn by prostitutes to disguise the marks of syphilis or the loss of hair that resulted from treatment for lice. For 21st-century artists, this is comedic gold. Titles of the works include “Caught You Looking” and “Traveling Merkin Salesman’s Display Case.”

“One of them came with growing medium and a couple packets of seeds,” Wilkins said. “Next to the piece, on a pedestal, is a pair of scissors.”

Kansas City Art Institute instructor Carolyn Kallenborn in-



JEFF BRUCE

“Yes or No” (2006), by Carolyn Kallenborn is part of the “Intimate Apparel exhibit at the Pi Gallery.

cluded a work called “Yes and No.”

“Yes” is a merkin made of an assortment of bells, while “No” is made of art-knife blades. Kallenborn is serving her second term as SDA’s conference coordinator.

“We have every continent, including Antarctica, represented this time,” Kallenborn said.

Every two years the Surface Design Association’s international membership of fiber and textile artists, designers, educators, vendors and enthusiasts gathers for a weekend of events related to textile design.

This year marks the conference’s fifth tour of Kansas City, where it enjoys the sponsorship of the Art Institute and the en-

thusiastic response of many galleries.

At the KCAI Crossroad’s Gallery, for example, students are exploring the boundaries of their medium with an exhibition called “Phyber?”

“They’re looking at other ways of dealing with fiber,” Kallenborn said. “One person’s work is a series of marshmallows stitched together.”

All of the exhibition openings are free, and everyone is invited to peruse and purchase the handmade wares of SDA members at the “SDA Trunk Show” from 6 to 9 p.m. Friday at the Belger Arts Center, 2100 Walnut.

“A lot of people come because

conference facts

For conference registration information and a full listing of events, including a fashion show of one-of-a-kind art clothing June 2 at the Folly Theater, go to surfacedesign.org

they know they’ll see things from around the world,” organizer Holly Stuart said. “We have one woman from India. It’s a mob scene when she brings out these silk scarves.”

Gallery visitors who aren’t interested in trying on silk scarves or cutting-edge merkins might find that prominent graffiti artist Gear’s “Idiotic Ideologies” is a better fit.

Gear put down the spray paint for this one, turning to graphite and Photoshop in an effort to better express his overt, anti-war message.

INTIMATE APPAREL

Reviving an Undercover Cover-up

Pi Gallery

419 E. 18th St.

816-210-6534

June 1-30

Reception: 6-10 p.m. Friday

Hours: 11 a.m. - 5 p.m. Thursday-

Saturday; and by appointment