

The Ann Hallett Phenomenon

by Donna VanDusen

While drooling over the Rittermere-Hurst-Field web site's Design Gallery lately, I was arrested by an image that seemed to capture the true Canadian spirit of February and March. Ann Hallett's *Northern Sign of Spring* epitomizes the authentic sign of spring as I remember it. Growing up on a farm I recognized the typical farmer's clothesline boasting an eclectic display of long johns. This was interpreted as a sound sign that the weather was finally warm enough that farmers (and farmerettes) shed their 'warm and woollies' and hence spring was on its way at last! I even had my own junior pair of red flannels. Why anyone could be attached to them is beyond me since I always found them itchy. But they were warm!!

At any rate, Ann's design instantly brought back a flood of memories. Just the picture of a row of johns on the line brought back memories of my mom bringing freshly washed (and frozen) underwear inside like so many stiff carcasses and standing them upright in the kitchen until they thawed enough to drape over the drying line in the attic. I was always fascinated by these empty figures that seemed to breathe a frosty breath.

While the focus of the piece is on the clothesline, even the background evokes visions of split rail fences, open fields with natural ice rinks that went on forever, and farm buildings, which always (to me at least) spelled a new adventure every day.

Ann's story behind her design of *Northern Sign of Spring* is just as warm as she tells in her own words.

"The Underwear" was a donation from Nancy Beard, a neighbour, whose father Reg Potter, had died.

"Dad went to the woollen underwear one winter when he had pleurisy and pneumonia and he always wore them after that."

Someone had mentioned to Nancy, that Ann Hallett would probably be interested in the long johns and I certainly was.

What a great way to pass a long winter day – dyeing those underwear!"

Ann mentioned that the onion-skin dye that she used gave an especially unique result. The original title of the photograph was "A Day in the Dye Pots – Recycling Leads to Redemption". "Northern Sign of Spring" was the result of a brainstorming session with Anne Boissinot."

Ann is very modest about her talent. Her designs seem to strike a cord in their viewers and they beg to be hooked. She was born on a market garden farm in Dundas, Ontario but eventually settled in Coldwater just north of Barrie. Her first rug-hooking project was to finish a Bluenose rug her grandmother had started (a popular beginning point for many of us). Twenty years later she took a course on basic hooking with Joan Boyle at St. Lawrence College and she has never looked back. She also graduated from the Georgian College of Art and Design in Barrie, which seems to have given her a certain discipline to her technique. She has become a celebrity in her own right, displaying her work in many exhibitions including some solos in Ontario and Quebec. She has been featured in *Rug Hooking* magazine (Volume XIV, Number 1, June/July/ August 2002) and now claims her own gallery of designs with Rittermere-Hurst-Field (<http://www.letshookrugs.com/photos/ah/ah.asp>). Ann also hooked the rug to be raffled for *MacLaren Against The Grain - The Farfard Field Project* as part of the International Ploughing Match in 1997 (<http://www.catchacoma.ca/farfard/rug.html>).

I'm a little late in giving Ann her due recognition. In 2001 she won the Rowan Award at the Annual General meeting with her whimsical wall hanging *The Sheepish Grin* (34"x58" using recycled, hand-cut wool and yarn on linen). She also took a 1st prize for this piece in the Original Design category and displayed *The Prize- Recycling Leads to Redemption*, *Cat Skins*, and *The Issuance of Margaret and James Watson – Not One Of Them Is Like Another. Don't Ask Us Why, Go Ask Your Mother* (inspired by a popular Dr. Seuss book), all of which are shown in the Rug Hooking magazine issue mentioned above.

In 2002, her contribution to the Annual was *The Sky is Falling* and *Family Tree*. Other examples of her artistic capabilities are shown in the Rittermere-Hurst-Field's Design Gallery (and on the back cover of this issue), including the humorous (and humanistic?) *Simon Says*, *Cabbage Patch Hares* (showing Ann's understanding of bunny-nature), *Hallelujah* (a tranquil piece to hook), and primitives *Eat Crow*, and *Dorothy's Rodeo*.

I'm looking forward to see what Ann's next contribution to the rug-hooking art form will be and can foresee (if we can ever get Ann to toot her own horn) possibly a book?