



# Tempered Textiles

by Kathleen Whitney

Janice Jakielski's lavish objects humorously explore notions of sensory perception and human connection.



ABOVE: *Conciliate/Aggravate* (with detail OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP LEFT), 2010; porcelain, fabric, paper; carved, hand-embroidered; 18" x 30" x 10". LEFT: *Object for Optical Exploration*, 2009; cardboard, fabric, screen; hand-embroidered; 3" x 6" x 6". All works are machine- and handstitched. Photos by the artist.

Janice Jakielski's work is what the French philosopher Jacques Derrida would label an *undecidable*, something that seems to belong to one class of thing but overshoots its borders and is home in another. Her ornate bonnets, caps, and headdresses clearly embody issues of feminine adornment, fashion, and taste. But the hybridized accessories she invents with ceramics and textiles are also rich in history and meaning. This gives her work a divided nature: accessible and beautifully fabricated but also ambiguous and complex, patched together from parts that expose and conceal their conceptual seams.

The first sight of Jakielski's work provides an *Alice in Wonderland* experience, placing you in a Victorian parlor to ponder the nature of good behavior. From that point of view, her work is a serious, direct critique of communication and relationships. Then, like Alice slipping through the mirror, you are seduced by playful shapes, colors, and textures into a different reality. What you see there is sweetly and slyly humorous.

Her hats mimic old-fashioned bathing caps, crowns, and helmets with colorful porcelain or embroidered puffs worn like earmuffs and headsets. Old movies and imagery from her childhood growing up in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, are rich sources of inspiration. "The latest hats reference Amish and Mennonite bonnets." She explains, "I'm attracted to the solitude, simplicity and shunning of technology that these bonnets symbolize to me."

Jakielski's background is in ceramic sculpture with a BFA from the New York State College of Ceramics at Alfred University, Alfred, New York, and a MFA from the University of Colorado, Boulder. With no formal training as a textile artist, her skill in embroidery, machine stitching, pleating, quilting, and smocking is gleaned from the Internet, books, and exper-



imentation. Mysterious and dysfunctional, her complex creations are a mix of plain muslin, silk, ribbons, delicate pieces of porcelain, and a lot of hot glue.

Her recent solo exhibition at Roswell Museum and Art Center in Roswell, New Mexico, *Far from Near: an exercise in tempered communication* (March 20–May 2), was dominated by pairs and trios of heads wearing elaborately constructed—and connected—headdresses. Like conjoined twins, the heads are linked together via narrow, pleated, rectangular tubes growing from the sides of their hats. The most striking of these is *Whisper Down the Lane* (2010), a trio of conjoined bonnets reminiscent of the childhood game telephone that distorts messages whispered from ear to ear. Jakielski learned to make the linking forms with cardboard by following Internet instructions on how to repair old-fashioned camera bellows.

Developed during a yearlong Roswell Artist-in-Residence experience, this new body of work explores notions of sensory distortion. Her objects are designed as if she tallied up the senses and then reconfigured them with humor and skill.

*BELOW: Whisper Down the Lane (with detail ABOVE, RIGHT), 2010; porcelain, fabric, rickrack, paper; Kanzashi folded; 18" x 48" x 9".*

Her earflaps and muffs imply deafness or shutting out sound. Her wearable soft fabric goggles blind, obscure, and distort the wearer's vision. Her display heads, covered in taut white fabric, lack eyes and lips, representing the loss of sight and speech. While Jakielski's eyewear encourages audience participation, her headgear confuses and frustrates the sense of touch. Hats are meant to be handled in a shop—but in an art context, it's hands off. Jakielski's work updates the kitschy monkey trio of "hear no evil, speak no evil, see no evil" while adding an undeniably intriguing sense of style. ●

The artist's website is [www.janicejakielski.com](http://www.janicejakielski.com). To learn more about the Roswell Artist-in-Residence program, visit [www.rair.org](http://www.rair.org).



To see more of Jakielski's work from her residency, visit [fiberarts.com](http://fiberarts.com).

