

ART

Ulysses unravelled

Montreal artist spins hopeful yarns

HEATHER ANDERSON

The latest exhibit at La Centrale Galerie Powerhouse beckons passers-by to explore the stuff stories are made of. Already known for using landscapes as notebooks and turning dictionaries into paper balls, Montreal artist Karen Trask transforms reams of audio tape into a full scale weaving: *Cette nuit, Defaire, une oeuvre en processus* is a meditation on perseverance and hope that weaves together the ancient tale of *Ulysses* and its modern day counterpart by James Joyce.

Behind her loom, Karen Trask twists recordings of bedtime stories into thread on a makeshift spinning wheel. With these prepared, Trask warps her loom, positioning the vertical threads before the woof, or horizontal threads, are added. Those threads will be spun from audio recordings of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, the elusive, modernist masterpiece. Trask has transferred the text onto reel to reel tape which sits in a confused heap (not so different from the printed version) on the floor of the gallery, waiting to be untangled and spun.

A heart of hopefulness has led Trask to this daunting aspiration. Both the bedtime stories and the text of *Ulysses* feature the voice of Trask's good friend who is battling cancer. During her days of chemotherapy, Trask and her friend decided to read Joyce's *Ulysses* together—something many would call a hopeless endeavour. The bedtime stories are subsequent recordings of Trask's friend speaking to her young daughter. This work thus represents small gestures of caring and daily actions of hope; of

going on in the face of impossibility.

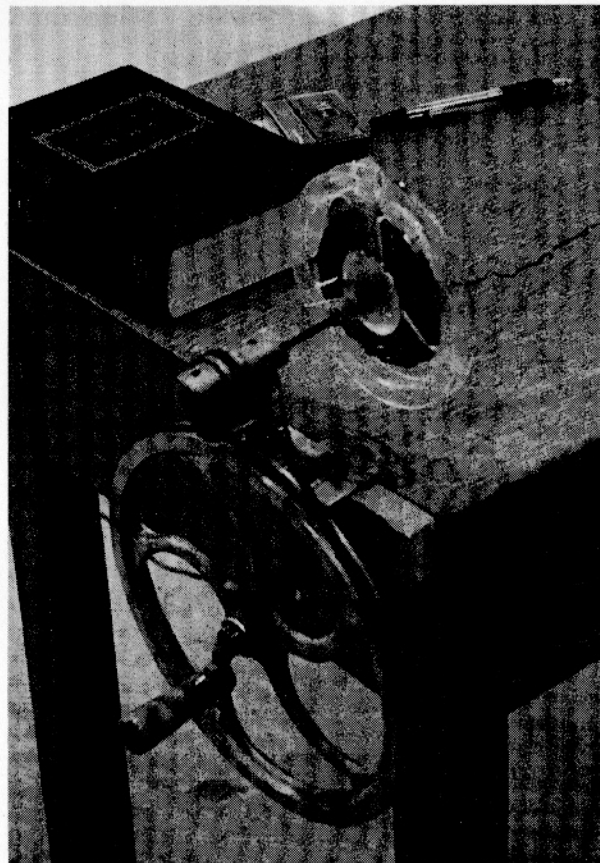
Oral storytelling, like weaving, is one of the endangered arts of generations past. Both invoke a sense of the domestic and feminine, two themes often present in Trask's work.

Trask's latest installation proposes a re-reading of the ancient tale of Homer's *Odyssey* which is also the basis for Joyce's novel. Rather than focus on the adventures of Ulysses (Odysseus in the Greek), Trask invites us to consider Penelope, Ulysses' faithful wife who stalled suitors during her husband's twenty year absence by weaving a shroud which she insisted she must finish before choosing a husband. The act of weaving also recalls the fates of Greek mythology: the spinner, the weaver and the cutter, who correspond to the three phases of the moon.

Trask is video taping her work as well, and like Penelope, who cleverly undid her weaving each night, Trask will show the film of her own work playing in reverse in the window of the gallery each night. When asked about the parallel of Ulysses' return Trask answered, "This is a work in progress, a statement about the doing, not the arriving."

Besides facilitating a reflection on perpetuity, Trask is also putting forth a challenge: "it's up to us to continue the stories", she said. Hence when you turn (at your own chosen speed) the crank on the wall of the gallery, you will hear Trask's voice speaking on behalf of Penelope: "my voice is in your hands." ■

You can visit Trask's exhibit at 4296 St-Laurent (metro Mont Royal) until February 10. See www.lacentrale.org for more details.



LEILA STAMBOULI

Trask weaves a classic tale—literally.