



Family: Maida Kapetanovic

Artist: Robert Hillestad

Seventeen years ago Maida Kapetanovic lived contentedly in the region of Bosnia and Herzegovina situated in what was then known as Yugoslavia. Her cultural heritage was defined by the rich traditions left behind by the Roman, Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires as well as the Karadjordjevic dynasty. She enjoyed a rich family tradition because she, her husband Nerman, their sons, Nino (age seven) and Darko (age four), as well as her parents, grandparents and great-grandparents had all been born in the town of Mostar.

In May, 1989, the Serbs attacked Bosnia. Bonds of cohesion between friends, families and citizens crumbled as trust gave way to suspicion. Bribes and killing became part of daily life. Maida's husband and brothers were placed in concentration camps. Eventually Nerman and Maida were reunited and lived with their sons in a Croatian refugee camp for two years before coming to the United States in 1993. They settled in Lincoln, Nebraska, where they became integrated into the community. Their joy and sense of security was restored until 2005 when Nerman suffered a major stroke.

This textile sculpture is a tribute to Maida's strength as a human being. The stately garment form depicts the dignity with which she continues to tower over the challenges of life. The principle garment form was constructed from multiple triangles that were inspired in shape and color by the Bosnian national flag. They were woven by hand on special triangular looms for the project. The detail work of manipulated threads and fabric that commands attention throughout the sculpture was inspired by Maida's concern for order and beauty. Viewers who look closely will find blemished colors, irregularities of weaving and other reminders of conflict, devastation and war.

Although this sculpture was implemented in garment form, think of it not as an outfit for enhancing the body or an ensemble to wear for some occasion. Instead, think about how the burdens and joys of life fall on our shoulders and how they can be carried with dignity just as Maida Kapetanovic has done for so many years.

Robert Hillestad

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When Maida Kapetanovic thinks of Mostar, her memories are of an ancient region in which people of diverse ethnicity and religion coexisted peacefully. Generations of her family had lived in the green valley with the huge, white stone bridge. She says that changed in May 1989, when the division of Yugoslavia began to trigger political tensions. During the violent years that followed, her town was torn apart. Members of Mrs. Kapetanovic's family lost their homes. Two of her brothers disappeared. Her husband was placed in a concentration camp. Fighting and killing were part of everyday life, she says. Life was cheap. Mrs. Kapetanovic and her children spent two years in a refugee camp before her husband was freed and they could come to the U.S. Life here has had its challenges, but she grieves for Mostar. "When the Croatian army destroyed the Old White Bridge in Mostar," she says, "they destroyed the last link of happiness and the will to live together again between Bosnians, Croatians and Serbs."

Photo: Robert Hillestad, Maida Kapetanovic

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