

SHARED SENSIBILITIES

THE POWER OF MUSIC ROLLS ON

Black ink dances up and down, left and right, intertwining in loops, ridges, curlicues, arcs, waves and pirouettes. Dark solitary streaks bob frenetically or lackadaisically and flatten out. Clusters of lines bunch tight together and then release in varied contours.

Interspersed between them, following their own systematic patterns, are punched-out holes, rectangular voids of space: short... short... short... pause... long... long... pause.

Snippets of verse also accompany at random, beginning, ending and drifting off in mid-thought.

"...had our share, we've known the mean-ing of sor-row, blos-soms of..."

"...rea-son, Jean-nine, I dream of li-lac time, your eyes the beam..."

Billowing out more than 20 feet, the roughly foot-wide scroll, "Dream in Lilac Time" by Lewiston artist Gail Skudera, is a physical manifestation of lyric and melody.

On display at the Bates Mills complex in Lewiston through October 30, it is one of more than two dozen works that interpret, manipulate and alter vintage rolls from self-playing pianos.

As part of "The Piano Roll Project: Shared Sensibilities," 30 artists painted, drew, wove, sewed, wrote, cut, tore and incorporated collage and repetition as a means to meld abstract and geometric patterns, pastoral scenes and contemporary themes with the enduring power of music. Crafted of continuous rolls of perforated paper, a few measuring as long as 40 feet, they are spread throughout the second floor of the 19th century Bates Mill Complex. Some entwine multiple supportive posts in the rehabbed industrial space; others span their full length along walls and beams; a few drape and dangle from the rustic ceiling.

"Highly valued was how each artist would interact with the inherent beauty and pre-digital language of the roll," Skudera, co-organizer of the exhibit with plein air painter Kristin Malin – who is represented by Rockland's Caldbeck Gallery – said in a statement.

Piano rolls, which were in mass production from 1896 to 2008, are continuous spirals of paper punched with perforations; each hole represents a note that is then registered and played when fed into a tracker bar on a player piano (also known as a pianola). The simplicity of their function and design share a trait with the Jacquard looms that once whirred away in Bates Mill, which dates to 1894 and, in its heyday, manufactured high-quality woven coverlets. A system of punched cards was used to help facilitate the mechanical looms with the massive task of weaving various intricate and complex designs.

Throughout the "Piano Roll Project," participating artists both accentuate and emphasize the choreography of perforations, which can at once be jarringly simple and complex, random and methodical – and in many cases, when inspected closely, reminiscent of Morse code.

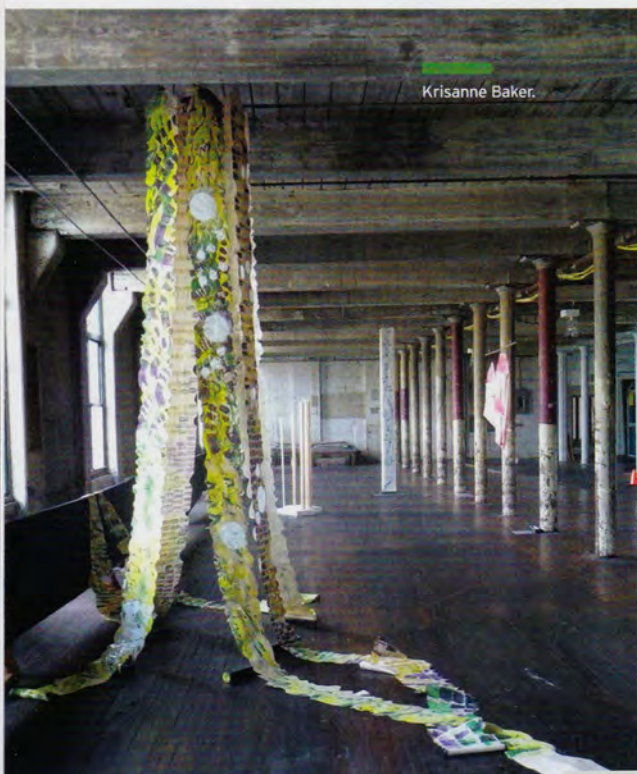
For example, in Skudera's "Dream in Lilac Time," the pattern of punches is incorporated into what becomes its own piece of visual music. Malin, similarly, highlights the holes with bright splashes of purple that undulate to their own rhythm.

Meanwhile, Farmington mixed-media artist Ellen Roberts assimilates them into the backdrop of a dynamic nature piece; as the roll drops in casual waves from the ceiling of the rehabbed industrial space, the play of light cascading through the floor-to-ceiling windows and the machine-made slits create the three-dimensional illusion of sky behind alighting birds.

Portland artist/chef Jung Hur, on the other hand, entwines them with his unique brand of colorful pattern and repetition, so that the two become one.

Duo Gayle Fraas and Duncan Slade of Edgecomb, Maine, for their part, play the slits against curtains of black and white and silhouetted nature scenes – so that they ultimately become a larger piece of a unique symphony.

**THE PIANO ROLL
PROJECT
BATES MILL
COMPLEX
35 CANAL STREET
LEWISTON, MAINE
THROUGH
OCTOBER 30**



Krišanne Baker.