



The Heroine of a Thousand Pieces: the Judith Mosaics of Lilian Broca

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A full house was present at [il Centro's Museo](#) to celebrate the opening night of the exhibit "The Heroine of a Thousand Pieces: the Judith Mosaics of Lilian Broca." Not even a torrential rain storm could stop the crowd from attending to view the stunning results of four years of meticulous, hard work. "This will be one of the highlights of my career. I will never forget this," said Angela Clarke, the Museo Curator, to the group during her introductory comments.

Mosaics have been around since the 8th century BC, and have been discovered in most areas that

were part of the Roman Empire. Coined by ancient writers as the art of '*lapide pingere*,' (painting in stone), the images not only functioned as artwork to beautify one's dwelling, but as dramatic storytelling, illustrating the valued stories from that age.

Fast forward to present day, and Canadian artist [Lilian Broca](#) utilizes the mosaic medium to recount the story of Judith: a town is on the verge of being invaded. Judith, a widow, leaves her town and goes to the military camp (where the invaders are finalizing preparations to siege her town), seduces the General, gets him into a drunken state and finally kills him (spoiler alert: he is beheaded), saving her people from total inhalation. What makes the story even more sensational is the fact that the protagonist is a woman.

But as time passes, the iconography of Judith finds itself slowly detaching from its original text, such that by the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, there are many instances where she is depicted in a negative light: a seductress, a murderous, more associated with the likes of the Solomon's of the world.

The intent of "The Heroine of a Thousand Pieces" was to recreate the story of Judith as told by the original text from the Biblical Apocrypha. Lilian dedicated four years of her life to the story, and persevered to uncover the true authentic essence of her subject. It may sound like a taunting task, but this is the life of an artist.

Consisting of seven panels, each panel captures a pinnacle moment of how Judith single-handedly saved her village. Upon entering the perfectly lit museum space, the six-foot-high panels are intimidating, but the starry, smalto glass tiles ease the uncertainty and embrace you, guiding you on this journey from the mourning widower to the victorious heroine.

The colours on the first panel are subdued, and with each panel the colours intensify and spill further outwards, until in the final panel, jewels can be seen glistening from Judith's crown, amplifying her personal transformation.

Mosaic artwork may seem like an 'ancient' form of art and storytelling, but as Sheila Campbell explains in the Exhibit Catalogue, in these contemporary times "we are conditioned by television and the internet to concentrate for only a few moments at a time," pushing us "to speed, rather than reflection." However when you are faced with these powerful panels, and there isn't a screen to hide behind or a cell phone app to support your interaction, you are left to stop, discover, linger, and contemplate in the spirit of a tale penned long ago, but its layers of morality still relevant today.

The exhibit will be on display at [il Centro's Museo](#) from November 12 - March 31, 2016, and then at the [Joseph D. Carrier Art Gallery](#) at the Columbus Centre in Toronto in May 2016. For more information on Lilian Broca and the art of mosaics, visit www.lilianbroca.com.