

A Treasure and a Pleasure

The Judith Mosaics of Lilian Broca

§ by
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I was originally thinking about writing my first 2016 *Pulse* article about the best stressbusting foods, or a part 2 of snackurgencies. But then I saw this exhibition at the Italian Cultural Centre's Il Museo and it blew my mind and I just have to tell you about it.

In the words of the artist Lilian Broca herself:

*The magic of mosaic art begins when the intrinsic natural beauty of the mosaic material is first observed and secondarily from afar when the image begins to emerge from within the abstract of a calculated arrangement of closely fitting mosaic glass tesserae. The result is spectacular and eternally enduring.*¹

The exhibition of Broca, an internationally recognized, award-winning artist, features monumental mosaic panels executed in Italian smalto glass. The mosaics, completed over a span of four years, are huge (8 x 6.5 feet) and weigh around 70 pounds. Each piece of glass (tessera) is like a pixel, and each panel contains thousands of pieces of glass that are individually cut. It's mind boggling to know that Broca only started working in the medium of mosaics in 2002.

The Judith mosaics tell the story of the strong-willed Hebrew widow and the enemy, Assyrian general Holofernes. They depict her sacrifice, courage and sheer force of will which resulted in powerful social change. The exhibition in particular, raises ideas about contemporary women and how they too, possess the courage and strength of the independent and daring Judith.²

I had the privilege of meeting and hearing Broca lecture at Il Museo where the show runs until March 31 2016, before travelling east to Toronto. The coolest thing about the show is that the preliminary sketches and watercolours the mosaics are based on are also on exhibit, alongside the mosaics.

Broca does extensive research, then sketches and sketches, eventually choosing her favourite ones before rendering them into mosaics. All the characters in the sketches are based on live models. Some she hired, while others were family members who volunteered to have parts of their musculature sketched.

Broca said she had no life in 2015 when she was on deadline to complete the series. *"It's such a joy when it comes together,"* she exclaimed describing

how it took three weeks to finish the expression on Judith's face in the mosaic where she's holding the freshly chopped off head of Holofernes. "This is what we call labour-intensive type of work," she said.

I could go on and on about Lilian Broca and her wonderful mosaics that will both dazzle and knock you out. This monumental body of work of seven, 6-foot-high mosaics really have to be viewed in person to appreciate their beauty created from thousands of pieces of glass. Broca is also a master story teller and teacher who loves to talk about her work as well as the art and history of mosaics. Her lecture was simply fascinating.

Both Broca and museum curator Angela Clarke know that I'm writing a review for *The Pulse* and they offered to provide a free private lecture to Doctors of BC staff. I hope a group of you will take them up on the offer. There's also an Italian restaurant and cafe at the Centre where you can grab a cappuccino and snack. Enjoy the show! *Ciao*.



Judith Displaying Her Trophy detail

Judith Meeting Holofernes diptych



To arrange a private tour contact:

Angela Clarke, PhD
Museum Curator
The Italian Cultural Centre
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free parking

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References

- ¹ www.lilianbroca.com
- ² Oct 28, 2015 Press Release Celebrated Vancouver mosaic artist, Lilian Broca, opens her travelling exhibition Heroine of a Thousand Pieces: The Judith Mosaics of Lilian Broca at the Il Museo, Italian Cultural Centre, Vancouver, BC, Canada.