

Globe **British Columbia**



Mosaic artist Lilian Broca displays one of the scarves based on her artwork while at her home studio in Vancouver last Friday. DARRYL DYCK FOR THE GLOBE AND MAIL

ON CULTURE

Ripped-off mosaic specialist fights back with scarves



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Vancouver-based artist Lilian Broca has been working with mosaics for more than a decade – and coming across unauthorized copies of her designs for almost as long. Ms. Broca makes meticulous, large-scale artworks, and friends in the international mosaic community have reported seeing rip-offs of her distinctive work on eBay, at a high-end Venice gift shop and an upscale depart-

ment store in Turkey. Online, she has seen images of her actual work used to advertise sales of the copies made without her consent – or knowledge.

When Ms. Broca contacted eBay about an unauthorized fake being offered for sale by a mosaic company, the item was removed. She also e-mailed the company that was selling the stuff. Its response after the removal from eBay read, in part:

“How can [someone] be that dumb? Our account ... will be back in 8 days. We didn’t steal [anyone’s] picture, we take our pictures from google search, go sue them.”

Frustrating, to say the least. The discovery in Turkey – a rip-off of Ms. Broca’s Queen Esther series, for which she is best known – was particularly upsetting.

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Artist Lilian Broca models one of the scarves inspired by her mosaics last week at her Vancouver home. DARRYL DYCK FOR THE GLOBE AND MAIL

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Culture: If Cartier can't prevent rip-offs, what can one artist do?

» That time, her images were being used on blouses. A bit of Googling led to a further discovery: Her imagery was being used – badly – on dresses for sale. Now Ms. Broca is fighting back – if only symbolically. She's designing her own line of scarves, bearing her mosaics.

The line of wearable art will be limited – with only 100 scarves made of each of three designs. They will be sold at galleries where she is having two upcoming shows. The price is yet to be determined.

The Globe and Mail's Marsha Lederman met with Ms. Broca at her Vancouver home.

When did you learn that something nefarious was going on?

Soon after I started mosaics, actually; I would say around 2002. People noticed on the Internet various websites that were selling mosaics, cheaply made, and they were copies of my designs.

When did you discover that your designs were being used on clothing?

In November of 2013, I was invited to Turkey to give a talk [at the Zeugma Mosaic Museum]. I got to meet Turkish mosaic artists, and I would say about a month-and-a-half after I returned, one of them wrote to

me and said that in Izmir, this very posh store is selling blouses with your mosaics. She sent me pictures; I couldn't believe it. So I immediately said, "Can you buy me two and I'll pay you?" She did and she sent them to me.

How did you feel?

I felt very depressed, because, although they're beautiful, they wrecked the design. They took the head and put it on a very busy background which doesn't go at all. So it lost integrity. And I thought I could have done such a good job if I were to design my own blouse. I would never do it that way.

But how did you feel about the fact that someone was ripping off your design?

I was upset. Because I put my heart and soul into these works. But more than losing money was the fact that it didn't look quite right. That hurt me more than not making the money.

How did you discover the dress using your design?

After I found out about Turkey, I said, "Okay, let me look on the Internet and see if anybody else has done that." So I searched on Google under "garments with mosaic images on them" and I

saw some dresses made in England with my mosaics. But they changed things on it. [In the original, the biblical character] Haman was pulling a horse and on the horse is Mordecai. Here is what this person did: He took Haman's head and put it on Mordecai's body and it's too big. All the proportions are wrong. They wrecked it.

Was there any doubt in your mind that these designs had come from you?

No. How could it? I would recognize my work anywhere.

Did you contact the manufacturers of the dress or the blouses?

No. I didn't do anything. Look, my son is a lawyer. He says, "Mom, theoretically, you can sue because it's illegal, but you know you'll spend thousands upon thousands of dollars over years and who knows if you'll get anywhere?" It's very upsetting because nothing could be done. Other people say, "Look, if Cartier cannot stop people from reproducing their luxury items, how can an artist do it?"

But you decided to take matters into your own hands.

This is symbolic. By doing this, I thought, "Okay, I'm doing something about it."

How did you arrive at this decision?

I have a good friend who is an artist and she designs clothes and she said, "That's it; you have to do it. Do scarves." She said do three scarves: two for women, one for men. So I designed them. It's a statement. It's a symbolical thing. Because it's not something that will make me millions.

Why scarves and not blouses or dresses?

Because I don't know anything about fashion. And a scarf is an accessory, and I don't have to think in terms of how the material is going to [fall]. Everybody wears a scarf.

Do you feel empowered by doing this?

Yes, and I think that other mosaic artists should do the same thing. I don't know if they want to design scarves, but there must be way to fight back and to say look we can still hold our own.

Heroine of a Thousand Pieces: The Judith Mosaics of Lilian Broca will open at Il Museo of the Italian Cultural Centre in Vancouver on Nov. 12, 2015. The show will move to the Joseph D. Carrier Art Gallery at the Columbus Centre in Toronto in May, 2016.