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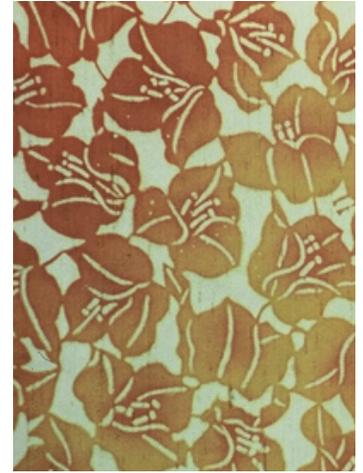
[/BILL MORTON – TINCTORIUM](#)

MAIN SPACE. SEPTEMBER 7 – OCTOBER 19, 2012

RECEPTION AT STRIDE  
 FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 7, 2012 AT 8PM

ARTIST TALK: SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 15 AT 2PM  
 AT STRIDE

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## [/EXHIBITION INFORMATION](#)

/I cut stencils in mulberry paper and extract dyes from plant materials to produce dyed cloth. A wax resist is applied before brushing plant dyes onto silk fabric in a rich and subtle palette. Motifs and patterns are built up with many layers of dye and wax. My process is open-ended, offering limitless opportunities for exploration of colour and pattern. Each piece reflects a particular state of mind. The techniques I use take time and patience and require focus as unanticipated variations can occur when material, colour, and process coalesce into something new.

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## [/ARTIST BIO](#)

/BILL MORTON is a Calgary-based artist and teacher. His work is collected and shown in the United States, Japan, China and Canada. A graduate of the Alberta College of Art (1967), he studied in Japan from 1969 to 1983 including ten years apprenticing with a Master Dyer.

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## [/EXHIBITION TEXT](#)

TINCTORIUM  
 /MACKENZIE FRÈRE

“We may be looking at the ocean when we are aware of beauty but it is not the ocean.”  
 Agnes Martin

Bill Morton has dedicated his career to investigating aspects of the natural world, perception, and the emotive power of colour and pattern on cloth. Morton’s exhibition *TINCTORIUM ii* at Stride Gallery provides a rare opportunity to contemplate the artist’s recent dyed works alongside a selection of his meticulously hand-cut stencils. These artifacts of process span four decades of Morton’s career, and are compelling not only for their beauty, but also because they provide a key access point to the artist’s studio practice. In these stencils it is possible to apprehend Morton’s hand in motion as he draws and then cuts sinuous curves and delicate motifs that are later embedded in silk. Although he works within the traditions of silk dyeing, Morton’s approach

embodied in silk. Although he works within the traditions of silk dyeing, Morton's approach retains a technical and aesthetic pragmatism that allows him to incorporate new influences and approaches. In the studio Bill Morton engages in an intuitive process in which technique, material, and colour are points of departure toward works that possess the quiescent stillness and beauty of the landscapes that have inspired them.

Bill Morton has worked with generations of emerging artists at the Alberta College of Art & Design since 1983 and is known to many in Calgary as a generous teacher. His own education began in Alberta in the late sixties with influential mentors Illingworth Kerr and Marion Nicoll. An interest in Japanese culture eventually led Morton to Japan, where he traveled on behalf of Alberta Culture to help arrange exhibitions in Alberta for artists from Japan. At this time, he met master dyer Kunio Isa who later invited him to work at his Kyoto studio designing kimono. Morton began working at Isa's studio doing small cleanup tasks and mixing colours for other artists. Eventually he was taught how to dye backgrounds and apply wax with brush and stencil to create *katazome* iii patterns. After five years Morton was creating his own dyed works and showing regularly in Japan. His apprenticeship with Isa lasted for ten years. It was a remarkable working relationship that has profoundly affected the artist's studio practice to this day.

Learning through repetition in Isa's studio, Morton developed the intense concentration and steady hand necessary to apply hot liquid wax and dye to silk. The temperature of the wax, the pressure and speed of each stroke, and the thickness of material all affect the final mark that is made. As in calligraphy where the subtlest gesture may bear shades of meaning, Morton's brushwork speaks the tacit language of *rozome* iv in which transparent layers of dye and wax alternate creating pattern and surprising depth on silk which is often no thicker than a couple millimeters. Sometimes more than thirty layers of dye are required to achieve a particular shade. Work proceeds intuitively as Morton assesses the subtle changes produced by each new layer of colour in his search for a particular feeling or quality of light. Patterns emerge and fade, echoing natural cycles of growth and decay.

From early on in his career, Morton's work has been inspired by his fascination with plants and water. A dedicated gardener, Bill has grown his own dye plants and is intrigued by the healing properties of plants and their symbolism in different cultures. The ginkgo leaf in particular is an important motif for Morton, as it holds a connection to Japan and bears significant cultural importance in that country. Resistant to fire, pollution and drought, ginkgo biloba is associated with resilience in the face of adversity. An ancient plant with a fossil record dating back millennia, the ginkgo is also associated with longevity, particularly in China where it survived only through dedicated cultivation by monks.v Morton's Ginkgo Crane stencil presents one of the artist's earliest uses of the ginkgo leaf. Here crane and ginkgo are brought together, one flowing into the other suggesting a kind of transformation.

Morton has also applied his hand to the patterns created by reflections on the surface of the water. The poetic image of water, its surfaces and its depth, have recurred in Morton's dyed works since his years in Japan. These pieces often possess a mysterious, emotionally immersive quality. Ginkgo leaf and water come together in a key piece from the 1990's titled *Takaragaike*. The work was inspired by ginkgo leaves floating on the surface of a pond of the same name in Kyoto. The irregular accumulation of leaves and water plants across the surface of the cloth echo Morton's inspiration without representing it directly. Like Agnes Martin's observation that our awareness of beauty may not reside in that which we perceive,vi Morton's work often has the uncanny effect of drawing one's attention to the perceptual process itself. In *Takaragaike* and much of his more recent work, floating motifs often run off the edges of the cloth in all directions creating a complexity and illusory depth that suggests an infinite inner landscape. Careful contemplation will reward the viewer of Bill Morton's work with an opportunity to experience the kind of reverie Gaston Bachelard was referring to when he wrote, "In the presence of deep water, you choose your vision: you can see the unmoving bottom or the current, the bank or infinity..."vii The boldness, complexity, and freshness of *Tinctorium* is evidence of an artist, working at the height of his skill, who has managed to retain an enviable curiosity and daring at the edge of deep water

i Agnes Martin, Herausgegeben von Dieter Schwarz (Ed.) *Writings* (Germany: Kunstmuseum Winterthur Cantz Verlag, 1998) 135, 136.

ii *tinctorium*, literally meaning "used for dyeing or staining" in Latin is a word appended to the names of some dye plants including *Rubia tinctorium* (madder) and *Polygonum tinctorium* (Japanese indigo), both used regularly by Morton. As the title of this exhibition, *Tinctorium* evokes not only the materials or tools of dyeing employed by the artist, but also the confluence of material and gesture comprising the act of dyeing.

iii *Katazome* is a Japanese term for stencil dyeing

iv rozome is a Japanese term for wax resist dyeing

v Conversation with the artist, August 6, 2012

vi Martin, pp 135, 136

vii Gaston Bachelard, Edith R. Farrell (Trans.) *Water and Dreams: An Essay on the Poetic Imagination of Matter* (The Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture, Dallas Texas, 1999) 50.

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## /WRITER BIO

/MACKENZIE FRÈRE is an artist and teacher who lives Calgary, Alberta, Canada. His hand woven cloth has been exhibited in Canada, China, Japan, Korea and the United States. Mackenzie was educated at the Alberta College of Art & Design in Calgary, Alberta (BFA 1998) and the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design University in Halifax, Nova Scotia (MFA 2005). He has written for several Canadian publications including *Artichoke Magazine* and *Craft, Perception and Practice Vol III*.

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