



### *Béatrice Coron and the 'Language' of Silhouettes*

With nothing more than an X-acto knife and paper, artist Béatrice Coron creates intricate worlds: cities and countries, heavens and hells. Recently, walking onstage to give a talk at New York's prestigious TED Conference, Coron was arrayed in a glorious cape that she had hand-cut from DuPont™ Tyvek®, as she greeted an appreciative audience. TED is a nonprofit organization devoted to what it terms "Ideas Worth Spreading." Beginning in 1984, TED has held conferences that bring together people from three distinctive disciplines: technology, entertainment and design. During her TED Talk, Coron described her artistic vision and creative process, and the way her stories—her worlds—ultimately develop from "snips and slices."

Born and raised in France, Coron attended art school in Lyon, at the acclaimed *École des Beaux-Arts*.

While there, however, she rebelled against what she calls the "formality" of the art training. "You had to draw formal plaster busts and make paintings, and if the teachers liked your stuff you were a 'protégé' and if they didn't, they ignored you. I couldn't adapt to that type of teaching—it blocked me."

She soon left school and began, as she says, "experiencing life," taking on a series of widely varying jobs—a shepherdess, a factory worker, a house cleaner and a tour guide, among others. "It was a great way to experiment in the world," she says, of that period.

Since moving to the U.S. in 1985, Coron eventually gravitated toward paper cutting as her chosen medium. Her rationale was practical as much as it was creatively inspired. "I realized starting so late [at 40] that I wouldn't have time to master any particular medium or genre, and paper-cutting seemed to me so direct. It's good, fast, cheap and light."

Today, Coron's oeuvre includes book illustration, fine art and public art. In addition to cutting her characteristic silhouette designs in Tyvek® (a paper-like DuPont product made from flash-spun, high-density polyethylene fibers), she also creates works in stone, glass, metal, rubber, stained glass and digital media. Her work has been purchased by major museum collections, such as the Metropolitan Museum, the Walker Art Center and The Getty. Her public art can be seen in subways, airports and sports facilities, among others.

## Ancient Art

Coron's work follows a long and multicultural tradition. The art of paper cutwork originated many centuries ago in China. It then crossed from Asia into Europe, where the Swiss, Dutch and Polish took it up. Yet it is the Germans who are perhaps best known for what they call "scherenschnitte," or "scissor cutting." The art form made its way to America in the 18th and early 19th centuries, as German immigrants settled in Pennsylvania. Paper cutwork enabled them to connect with their birthplace while strengthening their ties to the new land.

## Beauty, Imagination, Enchantment

Because, as Coron says, she cannot always express herself or her ideas in words, she has seized upon paper cutting as a language in and of itself. "It is indeed a language," she says. "It elicits comment and reaction. It's like 'pictographs' or Egyptian [hieroglyphics]. It's recognizable because I'm telling stories, depicting things that I'm very attracted to. I see everything that I do as artists' books, in a way, meaning that there's a story and a narrative; you can follow the silhouettes and see a relationship among them to what is happening in the whole piece. People tell me what they want or like and I reweave it into what I call 'mindscape.'"

Coron begins her intricate pieces with a drawing. "It's my structure," she explains. "Like a sculpture, it's the architecture of my work. I next make a sketch, which then becomes the main sketch of my architecture." Coron can then layer stories onto the framework for her piece, and so begin her cutting process. "I add a lot of things into the work while I'm cutting," she admits. "It's two different brains—the one that builds the architecture and then the more imaginative period while I'm cutting. Because cutting takes a certain amount of time, it has a meditative quality to it ... that helps me to see connections [within the piece]. I'm living it, imagining being there and experiencing what it feels like to be in this other world."



Heavens Detail

Many of her pieces are very large. One installation called "Heavens and Hells" is composed of two pieces, each measuring 13 feet high by 45 inches wide. Another series is nine yards long.

## Tailoring Tyvek®

Coron works predominantly in Tyvek®, she says, because she likes the material's strength and durability, especially when she's working on large-format pieces. "It has a 'crafty' quality to it," she notes. "I love that it is so resistant and that I don't have to be very careful with it. It has less 'memory' too, meaning that I can roll and unroll it without too many worries." Also, because Tyvek® is lighter than paper, Coron says it's easy to transport to art shows and other events.

Recently, the artist agreed to create one of her unique pieces for installation at a FiberMark North America, Inc., location. When she completes it, the piece will have a home in FiberMark's fashionable Manhattan Design Center, in downtown New York. "It will be a piece about



connections, about New York," Coron explains. I like to do things that are related to the neighborhood and the business, because it's kind of a dialogue."

She adds that she's looking forward to working with new Tyvek®-based products that FiberMark has available. "I would like to experiment with materials that are printed or colored; I'm always seeking new methods and ideas in my work."