

Presence 27: The future of women in sculpture

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models, the desire to "be like Mike," as the slogan went, would have bordered on all-consuming.

To anyone with a social conscience, this is disturbing enough. Yet when one considers the accusations levelled at Nike for operating sweatshops in Third World countries, where workers labour 80-100 hours a week for a paltry 20 cents an hour (while Jordan received \$20 million annually for his promotional efforts), one's revulsion grows. The tragedy is further compounded by the integration of Air Jordans and other sports-themed apparel into gang culture (the black-and-silver jerseys, hats and jackets of the NFL's Oakland Raiders are particularly popular). In one article I read while researching this review, a psychologist was quoted as saying, "The biggest thing you get from a gang is respect. They are a substitute family, school, religion, employer, provider and protector." Through movies, TV shows and gangsta rap videos, many teenagers far removed from the brutal reality of inner-city ghetto life become fascinated with gang members and seek to emulate them. In western Canada in particular, aboriginal people occupy the lowest rung on the socio-economic ladder. Problems with alcoholism, drugs, prostitution, violence and unemployment are rife. Desperate for role models, aboriginal youth identify strongly with media portrayals of African-American ghetto culture as it pertains to fashion, music and slang.

After viewing Jungen's exhibition, I was struck by the duality of his work. One could interpret his sculptures, with their blend of traditional First Nations and contemporary Western influences, as a positive statement of identity. If aboriginal culture is not allowed to grow and evolve, after all, and is instead confined by dominant society to dusty museums, then there is little hope of that culture surviving, let alone thriving. But the exhibition could also be read as articulating yet another act of colonization, where ruthless transnational corporations use multi-million dollar marketing campaigns to seduce vulnerable aboriginal youth — claiming not only their scarce consumer dollars, but their very spirits. ■

Brian Jungen, *Prototype for New Understanding #1-8*
 Sherwood Village Branch - Dunlop Art Gallery
 July 7-Sept. 2, 2000

PRESENCE 27

The future of women in sculpture

HEATHER OKE

The beginning of a new millennium of women's art is marked by an exhibition of twenty seven female professional artists from south east New Brunswick. From the centre of contemporary Acadian culture, these artists have created new three-dimensional work on the theme of "the dress as self-portrait", a theme rich in its history and significance for feminist art practice and contemporary popular culture. These sculptural works inhabit the two main exhibition spaces of the gallery like a collective of manifest and articulate characters. The collective is strong in the breadth and depth of its members' individual contributions.

A selection of pre-1960 paintings by francophone women, from the collection of Maurice Cormier and Maurice A. Leblanc, complements the installation by pointing to an established tradition of women artists in Acadia. Lise Robichaud, one of the exhibition organizers, sees these pictorial works, with their quality of beauty from nature, at the heart of *Presence 27*.

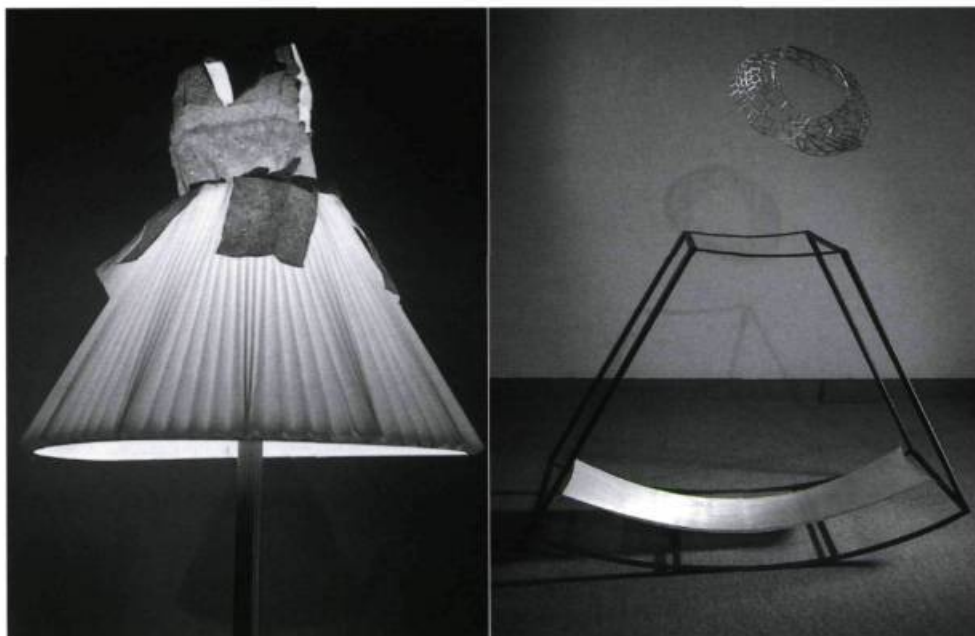
The installation and sculptural works are diverse in their use of materials, process, theme treatment, and even in their fundamental approach to art. The works range from the traditional stone sculpture of Marie-Hélène Allain, expressed through *Presente 2000*, to the cool post-modern photo-based objects, such as *Ce n'est pas une Pipe* by Valerie LeBlanc and *Mesure du Temps* by Lise Robichaud. Across the exhibition the use of natural elements such as dirt, stone, found objects and wood stand side by

side with elements of metal, photography, and plastic. These self-portraits, despite their differences in treatment and process, seem to revolve and grow out of the appropriation of found objects or the contemplation of personal photographs or objects from the past, especially childhood.

In this exhibition of self-portraits

and with it the fragile but resilient nature of desire.

Others are suspended from the ceiling. Elaine Amyot's *La mante/Cloak* hangs like a guard over a collection of symbolic objects on the floor beneath it. While the cloak occupies the space between floor and ceiling with graceful authority, it is visually anchored by the things it



traits in the form of dresses, identity manifests itself with authority and feelings are expressed through the merging of painting and sculpture, craft and art, woman and consciousness.

Some dress forms are displayed on mannequins, plinths or other supports. The work of Marjolaine Bourgeois, of crocheted coloured wool, represents the dress as an outer skin, expressing the physical body as a finely tuned sensory instrument. Anne-Marie Sirois' completely original presentation (*Sans titre*) positions a carefully constructed bodice made of pattern paper over a lit floor lamp with a crinoline shade. It evokes the body and spirit contained with the decorative armour of the feminine,

seeks to shield. Many other works in the exhibition, including Nancy Morin's *Second Skin*, work with this ground relationship.

Some of these works are compilations of objects invested with personal narrative, others are forged, modeled or constructed from raw material; regardless of the approach, the exhibition is remarkable in that the character of the artist is expressed in each work. These self portraits speak with authentic voice of a facility with process and of commitment to art and expression. ■

Presence 27: the future of women in sculpture
 Galerie d'art de l'Université de Moncton
 June 7-September 10, 2000

Anne-Marie Sirois, *Sans titre*, 2000. Mixed media. 244 x 43,2 cm. Photo: Marc Paulin.

Garry Collins, *Enrobée*, 2000. Mixed media. 167.6 x 170.2 x 170 cm. Photo: Marc Paulin.