

J. Lynn Campbell *Symbol-Process-Provocation*

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J. Lynn Campbell

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SYMBOL-PROCESS-PROVOCATION

J. Lynn Campbell's work is based primarily on the relationship between symbol and process. What is essential to the notion of process is how the material can be shaped to evoke significance. Thus, symbol and process provide a bridge to address a provocation of meaning and to call forth a perception of sentiment. The human form serves for Campbell as a totality symbol for the human experience. In the construction of her figurative sculptures, what the material and process has made perceptible are notions of aesthetics and persona; armour or encasement; interior and exterior; vulnerability and strength.

Symbol-Process-Provocation presents almost a decade and a half of her work. A number of the pieces are based on the human form and consist of a series of torsos and lower body shapes fabricated from stainless steel or copper mesh fabric. She developed the forms with the help of a costume designer. First, a paper mold of her body was fabricated and then sectioned into shapes resembling human muscle structure. This working pattern was then used as the basis for the final flat cardboard pattern where each piece was aligned, colour-coded and numbered. Campbell then cut out and hand sewed the wire fabric using a fine-gauge wire, resulting in a three-dimensional semi-transparent fascia-like component of the human body. Many of these figurative shapes were then further embellished with shapes and symbols that Campbell embroidered in various locations onto the forms.

Many of Campbell's earlier works have referenced the body. For example, *Passage* (1988-1990) is a wall of interlocking wood into which has been cut the outline of a human figure — in essence, the figure becomes the means of traversing the threshold with all of

its inherent associations. Apart from its being a physical place, "threshold" imagery represents the transition time of going from conscious to a psychic condition (sleep, dreaming, trance, death). *Passage* becomes a metaphor for both physical and metaphysical journeys. *Treaty* (1995) is an arrangement of 20 black folding chairs onto which the artist had embroidered various texts. The chairs, by virtue of their function, imply the human presence — effectively through its absence.

However, the body becomes a more defined and integral image in *Symbol-Process-Provocation*. For Campbell, the body becomes a symbol of the human psyche. The physical form becomes the manifestation of the intangibles of consciousness, spirit and the divine. Her use of the body is almost that of creating a new language.

The marks and images which she has inscribed onto her truncated figures reference tattoos. Tattoos, as well as being a means of adornment, have traditionally been used by many cultures to denote coming of age or other significant markers in a person's life. Much like the inferred threshold imagery of *Passages*, these embroidered embellishments become a means for Campbell to create an associative understanding of the work's symbolism.

Her choice of imagery, while very carefully selected, is rarely oblique or obtuse. She chooses images which can be accessible to many. Feathers, flowers, the body — these are archetypal symbols which carry within them a myriad of associations. Without doubt, Campbell is extremely selective in what she chooses and how she combines them. However, she is also intent on making sure that the works are accessible. The imagery she uses is treated as elements that create in effect a visual text or story line. It is sometimes complex, but is always approachable.

A recurrent image in this body of work is the use of feathers or other



images referencing the potential for flight. Flight is something that has always fascinated humankind. From the mythology of Icarus, with its moral of hubris and nemesis, to the daring deeds and drama of early twentieth-century pilots, humans have wanted to reach the sky. Campbell has stated that as a child she used to dream of flying — not with mechanical aids, but with the freedom of a bird. Once more, her work evokes the sense of a state of change, a desire for a new sensation of experience.

Formally, Campbell uses the feathers within her structures to

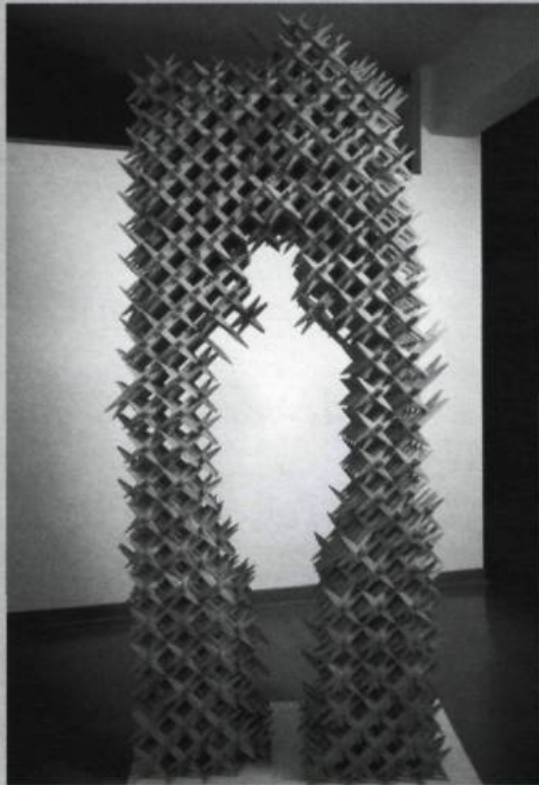
imply muscle structure, thereby creating an amalgam between what might otherwise be two disparate experiences. Her work creates a synthesis of the symbols however. The body — through its having been covered with feathers — is now changed. This transformation allows the body to experience what was heretofore impossible. In doing so, there is also the symbolic meaning in breaking through or triumphing over limitations related to barriers in imagination and intellect. The impossible is possible.

Campbell has titled these sculptural body forms as "Modern Model

J. LYNN CAMPBELL, *Modern Model Forms #8*, 1998-2001. Detail. Dressmaker's form (Judy), found feathers, metallic paint (stabilized metal alloy base, Cu/Zn), brass wire, staples, dressmaker's tempered steel pins. 162.5 x 35 x 35 cm. Photo: Gary Mulcahey.



Forms." A model can be many things: a three-dimensional representation of a person, thing or structure; an object of imitation, archetypal image or pattern; or a person employed to pose for an artist or to display clothes by wearing them. Campbell's use of the term "model" combines all of those elements. In doing so she is creating



J. LYNN CAMPBELL, *Model #6*, 2003. Japanese handmade paper Kurotani #96, thread, 36-gauge copper wire. 137 x 131.5 x 18 cm. Photo: Gary Mulcahey.

J. LYNN CAMPBELL, *Passage*, 1990. Bass wood, Danish oil. 244 x 106 x 61 cm. Photo: Alex Neumann.

almost a prototype for new realms or possibilities of understanding and exploration. Her "model" becomes a means of allowing and inspiring the viewer to access that which was previously hidden or unattainable. The works become challenges, provoking one to find a new way of understanding and experiencing the surrounding world.

Spiritual, intellectual and emotional realities and perceptions cannot be captured completely either in pictures or in words. Campbell's sculptures, however, offer the viewer the possibility of grasping spiritual content psychologically. Jean Shinoda Bolen had written in *The Tao of Psychology* that Carl Jung describes archetypes

as "patterns of instinctual behaviour." She further develops the idea by suggesting that archetypal figures become activated then clothed with personally derived emotional colouration that combines emotional intensity and symbolic expression. When that happens, the usual everyday level of experience becomes altered. Campbell has achieved that end in *Symbol-Process-Provocation* through her use of materials and images combined to evoke significance and provoke meaning and understanding. ←

J. Lynn Campbell:
Symbol-Process-Provocation
Visual Arts Centre of Clarington
September 28th to November 2nd,
2003

DEUX JOURS POUR UN CONVOI

ÉRIC SAUVÉ, *Sans titre*, 2002. Métal, bois, panache. H. env. 2 m. Photo: É. Sauvé.

MARTIAL DESPRÉS, *Sur-vie*, 1997. Pot Mason et objets divers. H. 26,6 cm. Photo: É. Sauvé.

Deux jours pour un convoi est un ralliement spontané d'une vingtaine de créateurs (Stéphane Bernier, Sylvain Bouthillette, Christine Brault, Dominic Deschênes, Richard Deschênes, Martial Després, Patrick Dionne/Miki Gingras, Marc Dulude, Jean-François Fillion, Jérôme Fortin, Patrick Fortin-Desbiens, Philippe Girard, Suzanne Grégoire, Hugo Lachance, Fred Laforge, Alain Lefort, Diane Morin, Sylvain Pitre, Éric Sauvé, Constenza Silva) qui s'est tenu les 13 et 14 novembre derniers. Il a réuni en des lieux insolites des peintures, des photographies, des estampes, des sculptures et des installations avec pour objectifs l'échange convivial et la diffusion artistique. «Faisant faux bond au cadre traditionnel d'exposition,



écrit Marc Dulude, l'initiateur du projet, le convoi a permis la rencontre entre différentes communautés parfois extérieures au monde de l'art actuel. L'exposition a été créée en quête de multi-licité et de diversité, s'opposant ainsi à la tendance actuelle qui



cherche davantage à englober et à circonscrire. Cet événement fait écho à la complexité du monde contemporain par une variété de solutions artistiques. *On multiplie davantage les perspectives en ne canalisant pas l'art.* L'événement s'est déroulé dans les couloirs et

ateliers du second étage du 305, rue Bellechasse, à Montréal, un édifice qui compte plusieurs ateliers d'artistes. ←

Deux jours pour un convoi
305, rue Bellechasse, Montréal
13-14 novembre 2003