

ETC



Entrevue avec David Moore

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Number 92, February–March–April–May 2011

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/64266ac>

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Publisher(s)

Revue d'art contemporain ETC inc.

ISSN

0835-7641 (print)

1923-3205 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Palmiéri, C. (2011). Entrevue avec David Moore. *ETC*, (92), 44–47.

Entrevue avec David Moore

Puissance et fragilité des arbres et des humains, interrelations tendues ou ludiques, l'univers de David Moore ne cesse de nous surprendre, de nous bouleverser et de nous ravir tel qu'on a pu le voir lors de l'exposition *Colère Druide* chez Circa, au printemps 2010. Depuis déjà plus de trente ans, l'artiste élabore un langage singulier entre sculptures, installations, dessins, photos et vidéos dans un travail spéculaire entre l'illusion et la réalité. Ces œuvres ont été présentées au Canada, aux États-Unis et en Europe dans plus d'une cinquantaine d'expositions personnelles. Il a aussi réalisé des œuvres d'art public monumentales telles qu'*aLomph aBram*, à Québec et *Site/Interlude*, à Lachine.

Christine Palmiéri : *David Moore, on est d'abord frappé par le titre de l'exposition. Existe-t-il une colère propre aux druides pourtant connus pour être des sages ?*

David Moore : My projects are often ahistorical, that is, I use history as a metaphor for speaking about contemporary issues like in my *Pompéi Project*, 1979, where I was referring to the dangers of the cold war. It's the same with *Colère Druide*. We really don't know much about the Druids except that they seemed to have a respect for nature and in particular trees. Hopefully the love of Druids may be on the return. In my exhibition, *Corps Malique* is a work made from the hollowed trunk of a large maple tree. It stands upright on the floor and one can step, literally, inside its skin. Lovelock wrote his seminal book *Gaia* in 1974 that after seeing images of our planet from the trip to the moon, he realized that the earth is a single organism in which every part is interrelated. That's why, in this exhibition, ropes connect some of the works. Each element is a micro-system that exists as part of macro-system. That is my idea of installation.

But the real answer to your question lies elsewhere. The title *Colère Druide* acts as a switch. The word Druid is a synonym for David, my name. It is my signature. This exhibition is marked, coded and signed.

The other dimension to the word Druid is the affiliation with my Celtic heritage. I arrived

here from Ireland, alone, twenty-one years old, to experience the new world. I did a number of unimportant jobs before plunging into the turmoil of the old École des Beaux-Arts in a language I barely knew. The Celtic heritage fits all of this very well. It is one of strangeness, otherness, the reinvention of a familiar reality as seen by the eternal outsider: exiles such as Francis Bacon, Jonathon Swift, Samuel Beckett, James Joyce.

C. P. : *Dans toute l'exposition, on assiste à la puissance et à l'impuissance des arbres et des hommes, à une contraction temporelle de l'époque celtique et du présent, à une expressivité sereine et agressive en même temps. Est-ce sur le mode des oppositions que vous avez imaginé ces œuvres ?*

D. M. : This is an extended discussion about the power of the blade, in war and in peace. Yes, it is the mode of opposites that reveals on what side power is being wielded. In this show, for someone who looks and feels deeply, they will see that I am just witnessing the contradictions of my own practice in wood sculpture as well as the contradictions of what goes on around me. Nobody is innocent. Responsibility comes with recognition. In *Corps Malique* you see the little figure inside the big tree: that is pure Swift inversion of scale as in *Gulliver's Travels*. In *Orchestre Spastique-duo* you see the two little figures back to back about to have a dual with the lead of bullets wrapping their hands. They are just toys, but cunning, knowing toys. You see the helmet in *Table Polémique* and the pathetic flag of truce. You see the fierce blade in *Disque Horrificque* and the cringing dwarf, *Être Frénétique*. I hope one will look back at my former works, for example, *La Table de Complicité Inégale*, and realize just how many of them were about unequal power. These works are not just objects: they are signs. They act like tools to rub against our minds. It is the relationships between each of them and us that matters. They have much in common with relational art.

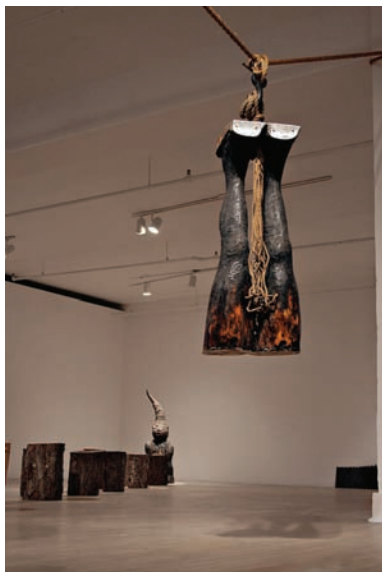
C. P. : *Entre corps musclés, démembrés, torturés et arbres mutilés et malades, vous offrez une vision apocalyptique du monde, un monde habité par*

des esprits vengeurs qui punissent et transforment les bourreaux en victimes. Croyez-vous en des puissances chamaniques ?

D. M. : The bits and pieces, legs and arms, hands and torsos are the stuff of reconstruction. It is important that you visually understand that there is a reconstruction. This comes partly from my own life experiences and how I have had to reconstruct myself several times over, and partly from a memory dating to my early childhood. I was exposed to very graphic diagrams of different parts of the human body that covered the walls in my doctor-father's surgery. It also comes from my many visits to archaeological sites where a certain fragmentation of statuary seemed more congenial to the imagination than a splendid wholeness, which seems false. The wholeness I get seems more profound and moving because the vision is not prescribed by a mimetic agenda. It also comes from *ex-votos*. But there is no program to all of this. Humanity is still being invented from the wreckage. Isis is still looking for Osiris. To answer your question I don't see this work as apocalyptic.

In my mind I'm just talking about reality, the same reality we see nearly every day in the media and on the news. This exhibition is about my emotional relation to all these things. They exist already outside of me, just like in Goya, *Disasters of War* etchings, Bosch's metaphoric world in the *Garden of Delights* or Bruegel's *Blind leading the Blind*. I don't think there is any moral message except to wake up, be adult and stop the sclerosis of aesthetic posturing.

About shamanism I think the artist is a privileged person who, just by being alone for long periods of time, may be open to non-rational thinking. Potentially the artist is a little less conditioned than others. Unfortunately it's rare, due, I think, to the effect of money and status. Many artists are really just craftsmen finding a way to make a better name. But, generally, I don't think, coming from a different cultural context, they are shamanic. You have to die symbolically and come back to be a shaman. If you have



David Moore, *Membres iconiques*. 1995-2009.
Bois, métal, corde.
En arrière plan, à gauche,
Action systématique et Être frénétique.
Photo : Guy L'Heureux.

David Moore, *Réplique cacophonique*.
2009. Plomb. 900 x 280 cm.
Photo : Guy L'Heureux.



David Moore, *Disque horridique*. Métal.
2007. 1005 x 1005 x 3 cm.
Photo : Guy L'Heureux.



David Moore, *Humain phantomatique*. 1995-2010.
Bois, feutre, brins de scie, moteur électrique ; dimensions variables. Photo : Guy L'Heureux.

done that, OK. Then I could believe in shamanic powers. It's another discussion.

C. P. : *La scénographie de l'exposition ne correspond pas à une rétrospective, la réunion de ces œuvres, pourtant réalisées à quelques années d'intervalle, fait penser à une composition poétique qui accroît le mystère qu'elles contiennent déjà séparément. Comment avez-vous conceptualisé l'ensemble ?*

D. M. : It's not a retrospective, but I like how a dialogue is constructed between different works at different times, they are signs and there are subjects under discussion that are carried over with opinions that shift, reversals, contradictions, interruptions, all the ingredients of an ongoing non-terminated discussion about things much bigger than art. The works work together in a connected way. Syntax emerges. Yet, equally the images

resist interpretation, standing as mute signs to their own existence.

The *mise en scène* was intended to reconnect the space between comfort and uneasiness. The hanging legs, *Membres Iconiques*, are at the centre. The blade, *Disque Horifique*, is not far away. The diagonal line of split tree trunks, *Action Systématique*, points us in the direction the blade is travelling. We stand beside the blade as if it is ours. The dwarf, *Être Frénétique*, like all small people with no power, trembles, far away. He or she is literally cornered. The miniature figure is being born inside the tree. Yet it is mummified. The split figure, *Espoir Ombilique*, yields maybe guts or maybe just sawdust. Multiple signs, multiple presences. The blade is the army, the multinational entity, the profit principle. It is the powerful instrument to a pantheon of powers. But it

is also just a blade, any old readymade. Its literalness is so shocking it forces us to look for a metaphor to relieve its violence. The hammer, *Effet Acoustique*, falls loudly on the forehead of the figure, *Humain Phantomatique*, standing in the debris collected from the sculptor's studio: chaotic forms before the beginning of the end. The hammer blow is both a wake-up call to look, and, having looked, a verdict. It introduces and ends the exhibition.

C. P. : *Tout semble condamné à disparaître, les corps (démembrés), les arbres (brûlés, scarifiés), les mots (sur plaques déchirées), de même dans votre exposition de photos au titre évocateur, Architecturer l'absence. La disparition du corps, celle de la nature et du langage trouve un écho dans votre vidéo Trois livres et une lumière où la Bible, la Thora et le Coran semblent se réduire*

en poussière. Est-ce l'idée d'un grand sacrifice qui mènerait à un monde nouveau ? Ou, au contraire, la vision d'un monde en décadence, en déperdition, que ces œuvres expriment ?

D. M. : I don't have a moral message. I just see it as tragic and comic. Yes we change, we can laugh or cry. We don't have to understand. If we could anticipate our disappearance we would live better, love better, have more respect for our fellow man. My pieces are not genocides, they are just pieces of wood. If you look hard they are full of absurdity. The hanging legs of *Membres Iconiques* are standing to attention, but upside down. The strings are tickling the sex. After the initial shock, you'll start to smile, or not. I could answer your question on sacrifice by saying I think Jesus meant his self-sacrifice to be ironic. By choosing it, he exposed its emptiness. He

deflated authority. I don't pretend to all that but it gives a hint to my reasons for doing these pieces. I'm just asking the spectator to recognise the hidden violence in our culture. It's just a kind of reminder while we live our beautiful lives. Yes it is absurd.

C. P. : *Mais parlons du sculpteur qui refuse de voir les arbres meurtris, mais qui les découpe, les évide, les brûle, les scarifie avec couteaux et compresseur, inscrit en leur chair des morphologies humaines comme pour les imbriquer à jamais entre eux et crée de la sorte des sculptures-fétiches chargées d'affects. Vous refaçonnez la nature à votre façon. Est-ce pour y inscrire un cri ? Votre cri ?*

D. M. : Yes I have to live with my contradictions and my choice of material leads me directly to this reflection. None of us can claim innocence, but on the other hand my trees were already cut. The woodsmen

around know what I am looking for and let me know when they cut a maple with a cancerous growth. Poetry is everywhere, in strange places, and in my mind, these are not cancers but expressions of love. I save them so they can have a voice. Their cry is my cry, but not like Francis Bacon's pope, who is imprisoned in a cage. It's more like Bosch, strange and familiar, wonderful and terrifying.

Entrevue dirigée par Christine Palmiéri