

Marianne Lovink
hallucigenia

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Numéro 53, automne 2000

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/9572ac>

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Éditeur(s)

Le Centre de diffusion 3D

ISSN

0821-9222 (imprimé)

1923-2551 (numérique)

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Citer ce compte rendu

Ghaznavi, C. (2000). Compte rendu de [Marianne Lovink: *hallucigenia*]. *Espace Sculpture*, (53), 49–49.

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Marianne Lovink's sculptures grow and suspend from, and crawl across the walls of the gallery. Somewhere between aesthetic object and organic life form, the pieces are stunningly beautiful and inexplicably alien. We see fruit entwined in wire, delicate horn-like shapes sprouting blades of green, and the fine web of a leaf membrane holding a brilliant jewel at its centre. There are works like *Lady Slipper* or *Sensus*, wood and polyester resin suspended in and by steel wire, that look almost like hanging earrings. Others, like

In fact, every piece in the exhibition has a unique and captivating quality: the mixture of materials (wood, steel, polyester resin and plastic) strikes a tension, as does the colouring: some pieces are startlingly fluorescent, others entirely black. There is a careful balance between organic and artistic fantasy in the forms that Lovink creates. Certainly, she celebrates the multitudes of evolutionary shapes and creatures, yet we also see a quiet warning when the artist places her forms in a circular base, like laboratory samples in a petri dish.

A striking aspect of the work is its outstanding craftsmanship and Lovink's ability to work with various materials, whether modelling or carving her sculptures. On one wall, *Lotus* presents a circular steel ring around a stretched oval from which pale pink tentacles blossom out. Opposite we see *Bella*, a compact wood sculpture where two sausage-like shapes enclose a black, slit oval. The two pieces are in dialogue: their basic form is similar, recalling a vaginal shape. One signals warmth and protection, while the other invites entrance and promises growth. The pink hue of *Lotus* answers the flesh-coloured wood, and together, they create a lyrical correspondence between the solid and the ephemeral, the open and the closed form.

Perhaps the most disturbing piece in *hallucigenia* is a large, glaringly bright work entitled *Virus*, reminiscent of a sixties pop aesthetic. Circular lines of steel act as support and backdrop for many round forms. These vary in colour, some bright yellow or red, others turquoise, and still others paler whites and creams. Each form, like a petri dish, serves as a flat container for organic growths, amoeba-like shapes, or crab forms. The piece (measuring 137 x 165 cm) is powerful and quite brilliant in colour and size, yet it also hints ominously at a bubbling laboratory

growing out of control.

Lovink's discovery of the Burgess Shale near the Banff Centre for the Arts, in Alberta, influenced her work. The Shale, discovered by Charles D. Walcott in 1909, is an incredible fund of small fossilized creatures, some as old as 540 million years. As curator Stuart Reid points out, "these ghost fossils are evidence of evolution's casualties and they are at once sinister and otherworldly, possessing a strange beauty not unlike the organic forms that Lovink has fashioned." The strongest reference to the Shale is *Gene:sis*, a piece made up of some 250 sculptures spread out across one large wall. Despite their stillness, we have the feeling they are definitely alive. Looking at them directly, we are free to discover their odd black shapes: some blob-like, others thin creatures with small growths protruding, as if they had tentacles or weird tails. When we turn away, they seem to gain life and crawl across the wall so that we want to turn and catch their movements and metamorphoses.

Hallucigenia sparsa is the name of one of the creatures found in the Shale, christened thus for its "bizarre and dream-like appearance." (catalogue). Yet, while referencing these creatures, Lovink does not confine her shapes to match theirs. Rather, she creates an evolution of her own, playing with organic forms and moulding them in polyester resin to give them a radiant and vivid appearance. Their exquisite beauty always holds repulsion at bay: even as we fear their taking on a life of their own, their particular poignancy captures us. ■

Marianne Lovink, *hallucigenia*
Art Gallery of Mississauga
March 23 – May 7, 2000



Marianne Lovink,
Gene:sis, 1999/2000.
Detail. Polymer
compound, graphite.
Dimensions variable.
Photo: John Struthers.

Flux, recall squiggly creatures, whose elongated but bulging bodies twist and turn on an upward journey along the wall, either end sprouting thin feelers. The latter, casting extravagant shadows on the wall, are disconcerting, but stop short of repulsion, for the balance of the composition and the carefully hand-molded bodies are spectacular to view.