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Robert Therrien: Reimagining the Readymade

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Robert Therrien: Reimagining the Readymade

Ariane Belisle

GAGOSIAN GALLERY
LONDON
APRIL 14 –
MAY 30, 2015

Presenting visitors with a portal into a fantastical world where the uncanny rubs shoulders with the familiar, Robert Therrien's oversized objects displayed at the Gagosian Gallery in London from April 14 to May 30, 2015 speak of childhood curiosity. The colossal sculptures are a bid, if you will, to preserve the fleeting days of innocence through the ribbons of whimsical narrative that run through the exhibition. The exaggerated dimensions of the everyday housewares that are depicted punctuate the rigid white cube, as the space transforms and transcends into the absurd. Hence, it is difficult to walk through the gallery and not feel transported back to a simpler time. Akin to the artist's earlier works, the exhibited œuvres dissolve the boundaries that exist between dreams and childhood memories; Therrien depicts humdrum objects that each viewer is sure to have encountered in their past, objects that we can only revisit through a hypnagogic exploration. Thus, his installations simultaneously evoke the wide-eyed idealism and trepidation of youth. It is this guileless awe that beckons within us the sensation of being little again. I find myself unwittingly reminiscing about Lewis Carroll and his Alice, who when faced with the little door she was too big to fit through drank the shrinking potion. Much like Alice in Wonderland, visitors fall down the rabbit hole when confronted with the inevitable perception shift that occurs upon encountering Therrien's rounded artworks.

Creating a ruptured continuity with the past, the artist's œuvre subtly alludes to the Pop and Conceptual movements of the 1960s, while aesthetically engaging with folk culture, cartoons and American design. Through Therrien's exploration of both two and three-dimensional form, familiar commodities are borrowed from the visual lexicon of everyday life and morphed into works of art that conjure classical archetypes. Needless to say, the subject is deceptively simple. It is through this artistic manifestation of the mundane that the sculptures lend themselves to psychological interpretation. Stripped of the superfluous, they extend an invitation to the beholder to explore his/her own analysis. To redouble and rephrase, while the installations are anchored within an objective framework due to their affinity with minimalism and their literal interpretation of the real, they flirt with each viewer's personal history. Negotiating the space that exists between reality and simulacrum, authenticity and caricature, the three castings of everyday housewares can only belong to a parallel universe of Therrien's making.

The early nineties saw a shift in the artist's career as he moved from the abstract to the figurative. *No Title (Table Leg)* (1993) and *Under the Table* (1994) are perhaps the most recognized works from this period and amongst the first sculptures to engage with the dry conceptual humour that would go on to inform Therrien's œuvre. As his aesthetic expression turned towards the absurdity of contemporary life, his artistic pendulum consistently swung from the real to the surreal.

Robert Therrien, *No title (Pots and pans II)*, 2008. Metal and plastic. 274 x 168 x 203 cm. © Courtesy of Robert Therrien and Gagosian Gallery. Photo: © Robert McKeever.

The works on show at the Gagosian Gallery are a natural progression of these themes, further negotiating notions of domesticity. Hence, pots, pans and lids reach for the ceiling in the artist's well-recognized sculpture from 2008, *No Title (Pots and Pans II)*. Measuring almost three meters high and two meters wide, the dizzying structure towers over visitors, as twenty-five pieces of stainless-steel cooking ware perform a balancing act. While the scale of the installation is far removed from the reality of the objects on which it is based, the factual accuracy of the handles and silver patina incites a double take. As we move further away from the work, it grows in both stature and complexity, further warping our illusion of reality.

No Title (Pots and Pans II) is juxtaposed with *No Title (Black Dutch Door)* (1993-2013), a comically enlarged replica of a farmhouse door. The similarities and disparities between the two works create a fluid dialogue within the gallery space. While *Pots and Pans II* is a confused disorderly mess, the monochromatic *Black Dutch Door*—also three meters high—speaks of the minimalist tendencies of the 1960s. Yet, while the latter engages with a structural grid, it is not cold and calculating; instead, it is a hint about the artist's past, the simulacrum of a relic from his

childhood home. The two works are joined by a third, *No Title (Disc Cart II)* (2006-2008). The final installation consists of a stainless-steel wire rack carrying nine brightly hued plastic kasina discs that resemble meditative plates used in Buddhist tradition. Their function, however, is not immediately clear due to their warped dimensions. Each ring has a seemingly random silkscreened image at its center—examples include, a coffin, a bell tower and a duckbill. There is a tenth disc that hangs on the wall, vacillating between secular and sacred. Collectively, the three sculptures create a mystifying enigma with plot holes and unexpected twists.

Firmly rooting himself within the aesthetic tradition of the great surrealist artists that came before him—namely, Max Ernst, Salvador Dali and Rene Magritte—Therrien triggers a sense of whimsicality, enchantment and awe in the viewer through his relentless manipulation of dimension and form, and reinterpretation of the readymade. Akin to Jeff Koon's balloon animals, Urs Fischer's mammoth teddy bear, and Ron Muerk and Evan Penny's corporeal distortions, Therrien's fanciful fabrications move us on both an emotive and physical level.

Using a pool of personal and collective consciousness as inspiration, the resultant artworks elicit nostalgia within the beholder. In the artist's words: "I try to stay with themes or objects or sources I can trace back to my personal history. The further back I can trace something as being meaningful to me in some way or another... the more I am attracted to it." The effect is a conceptual reinterpretation of what we know and a muted, nuanced and cerebral response to the art canon.

Ariane Belisle is a London-based art advisor and freelance writer. Since graduating from the Courtauld Institute of Art (MA Curating the Art Museum), she has managed two major private art collections on an international scale. She has written critical reviews and feature articles for publications such as *Photomonitor*, *ESPACE art actuel*, *Magazine*, *ARTUNER*, *This Is Tomorrow: Contemporary Art Magazine* and Courtauld reviews, as well as catalogue essays for Sotheby's London, the Courtauld Gallery and the Victoria and Albert Museum.

Les eaux profondes de Patrick Coutu

Éric Legendre

GALERIE DIVISION
MONTRÉAL
9 MAI -
4 JUILLET 2015

Patrick Coutu, *Récif*, Extrait I, 2015. Bronze et aluminium, 91,44 x 152,4 x 142,24 cm. Photo : Guy L'Heureux.

Bien que l'artiste nous propose son travail depuis bientôt 20 ans, à plusieurs reprises chez René Blouin, Patrick Coutu présentait une première exposition éponyme à la galerie Division. Celle-ci prenait place au sein d'un triptyque – avec l'artiste et architecte An Te Liu (*Des bribes et des morceaux*) et l'artiste Michel de Broin (*Interception*) – dans ce qu'il est admis de considérer comme un des moments forts de la saison culturelle 2015 et assurément la meilleure prestation individuelle de Patrick Coutu à ce jour. Alors que tous les yeux – et les médias – sont tournés sur un autre sculpteur important – David Altmejd - issu exactement de la même génération et de la même école, Patrick Coutu développe tranquillement, de son côté, une œuvre d'une force considérable qui manifeste une capacité de renouvellement, sinon de développement, impressionnante[1].

Les œuvres qui composent *Récif* (2015) captivent d'emblée et attirent l'œil. Placé au centre de l'espace principal d'exposition, un « véritable » jardin de sculptures réparties sur six socles – à hauteur des genoux – rassemble une centaine de sculptures, très variées dans leurs grandeurs et formes; certaines petites (toutes petites même !) et d'autres plus grandes, longues, longilignes; lignes courbes, amas ou cristaux, coraux, similaires à cette flore qui jonche le fond des océans et des lacs. Mais cette délicatesse toute florale, fragile, cristallisée est ici [re]composée de tout petits cubes d'acier ou d'aluminium agencés les uns par-dessus les autres, comme des pixels 3D géants, laissant entrevoir – d'un même coup d'œil – l'architectonique interne et la loi de la répartition. Un logiciel créé par Coutu lui-même l'assiste dans cette exploration des modèles scientifiques et mathématiques au cœur de l'organique; modèles également au centre de son travail depuis maintenant plusieurs années.