Romancing the stone

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The recent sculptural works of Thierry Delva that took place at Romancing the stone in Montréal, pour combler la place.

Daniel Carrière

Romancing the stone

The recent sculptural works of Thierry Delva that took place at the Brenda Wallace Gallery in Montréal this spring shows the Belgian born sculptor taking a new direction in his work. If you compare it to his "Cultivar" exhibition of 1991, which was largely inspired by Art Deco forms, the materials are the same, but the subject matter and the manner in which they have been put to use has radically shifted. Previous assumptions about this man's work and its likely evolution were given a jolt when confronted with the unexpected turn that these untitled new works represent, perhaps a synthesis of Minimalist and Readymade art. They are Minimalist in their adherence to the principles of Minimalism, i.e., the forms are prosaic and unremarkable; simple squares, rectangles, and cylinders, cut and shaped out of stone blocks that could be easily mistaken for cement or concrete. Gone are the floral-like patterns and shapely curves that were present in the author's "Cultivar" exhibition of 1991, with its honed and polished plant and leaf forms blossoming out of their stone columns, a moment of inspiration at the culmination of his stonemason apprenticeship on the Nova Scotia Province House project. These new works are representations of domestic objects one can find readily in one's backyard, in the kitchen, or on the factory floor. Their Readymade association is palpably clear, although one can see a struggle between Brancusi and Duchamp precariously balancing, yet neither one dominating the other. These fossilized domestic objects are like archaeological artifacts, whirled away with the passage of time, an echo of a time immemorial that is even now our present age. These cups, pails, and jars are made from Mary's Point Sandstone, Wallace Sandstone, and Indiana limestone; cheap and readily available sedimentary stones that lend themselves well to the carving of ornamental detailing. Here they have been removed from their normal use and decontextualized, suggesting an "excess" of contained material. Their weight and value is allusive; the materials were chosen by the author for just this effect. Their "excess", according to Mr. Delva, is the "key" to understanding the intention of the work.

The method used in the production of these pails, cups and jars are those of the mason or stone cutter, and are to the curve is similar to adjusting the tension and balance of the spokes on a bicycle wheel. The process of production, while straightforward, is singular and labor intensive. Each object is revealed as a container by its shape and scale. The carved edges and the natural smoothness of the stone surfaces (though rough to the touch) are almost abrupt in their nakedness. They are stark and disembodied, producing a kind of pathos that, according to the author, was unintentional. This pathos resides partly in the hidden quality of these objectified containers of the custodian's tools. Its impertinent yet real objectness is modified and transformed by the curves and edges that line their rims and lids. They invite us (or dare us) to open them up and look inside. But they have an impene-

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Notes:
2. Marcel Duchamp, The Creative Art, a paper presented to the Convention of the American Federation of the Arts at Houston, Texas, April 1917.