

Lois Andison

Tomas Jonsson

Du jardin au désert
From Garden to Desert
Number 54, Winter 2000–2001

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/9492ac>

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Publisher(s)

Le Centre de diffusion 3D

ISSN

0821-9222 (print)
1923-2551 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Jonsson, T. (2000). Review of [Lois Andison]. *Espace Sculpture*, (54), 50–51.

ment persuadés que l'œuvre n'a pu naître que d'une nécessité qui nous concerne tous. Quand, après coup, on consulte le dossier de l'artiste, on apprend qu'après avoir été séparé de sa mère et de tout son passé biologique pendant près de quarante ans, il vient de renouer avec hier et avec le moule original de sa propre identité. L'œuvre ne fait donc qu'élargir aux limites de l'original de problème de l'origine. Et c'est sans doute pourquoi nous nous y sentons inclus.

Nombre d'œuvres affichent un curieux déplacement, un décalage entre le sens perçu et la perfection du métier et de la technique au moyen desquels pourtant il s'est exprimé. Cela ne va jamais jusqu'à la négation de ces spécialités, mais peut aller jusqu'à une sorte de volonté de faire oublier la matière même qu'elles mettent en œuvre. Nul ne peut affirmer devant *Le Rail*, de Paul Bogati, de Québec — « ... bref moment d'arrêt d'un périple millénaire durant lequel la roue a porté la civilisation humaine » —, que la matière en est l'argile. Mais que de métier, non proclamé, pour en arriver à cet oubli ! *Connective Mythus* et *AB Intra*, de Laurie Rolland, de Sechtel, Colombie-Britannique, participent du même esprit. Dans ces barques, symboles mythiques de passage et de salut, l'aspect de l'argile s'efface devant celui de la tige de roseau. Dans *Calm and Chaos Series*, de M. Bernadette Pratt, de Kingston, Ontario, c'est au contraire le sens d'aujourd'hui qui se dissimule derrière la très ancienne technique de pâte céramique égyptienne. En fait, le sens véritable est celui de la continuité entre l'aspect imprévisible et chaotique que prend la pâte surchauffée et le calme des éléments naturels que l'artiste y inclut.

Il faut noter aussi, parmi les preuves tangibles de la mutation de la céramique, la distance qui s'est établie entre la forme et le dessin ou le tracé qu'elle montre. Dans bien des cas, il faudrait d'ailleurs parler de matière et de récit, plus que de forme et de dessin, car les premiers impliquent la notion de temps. Mais ce qu'il faut retenir, c'est l'absence totale de hiérarchie entre les deux moyens d'expression. Aucun des deux n'est là pour servir l'autre mais, par contre, le lien qui les unit est indissociable. Comme l'est celui qui unit l'abstraction à la matière et la raison au sensible. Les œuvres de Marianne Fisher, de l'Ontario, et de Jeannie Mah, de la Saskatchewan, sont exemplaires de cette tendance.

Il est impossible, et c'est dommage pour les artistes, de mentionner tous les points d'intérêt de cette Biennale, mais il est indispensable de noter l'attention de plus en plus grande que les céramistes, particulièrement ceux de la relève, portent à la sculpture installative. Il faut dire que le travail de l'argile, la complicité directe entre la main et la matière et le moulage modifié, entre autres, apportent à la sculpture des possibilités ignorées, aussi bien de la sculpture par retrait que de celle par ajout. Cette intimité possible entre le corps et la matière ne peut que servir un art actuel qui s'inquiète de plus en plus des notions du même et de l'autre, du dedans et du dehors, et surtout de la limite parfois infime qui les sépare.

Alors j'ai noté parmi d'autres, au fil du parcours des deux expositions principales, quelques installations qui font taire la différence que certains s'acharnent encore à faire, au seul nom de la technique, entre la céramique et la sculpture. *Separating blue from white*, de Roy MacDonald, Guelph, Ontario, l'amas d'assiettes brisées qui oblige à réfléchir sur le sens de la matière ouvrée. *Jusqu'à Gavrinis*, de Francine Prévost, Montréal, dont les îles échouées sur le plancher de la galerie semblent encore illuminées de l'intérieur par le feu originel qui les a mises au monde. *Le temps d'un lit*, d'Annie Pelletier, Sainte-Marthe-du-Cap, Québec, parce qu'entre autres, dans cette exposition qui lui est dédiée, sa céramique a su se faire dans son œuvre aussi discrète qu'efficace. *L'horizon des événements*, Simon Robert, de Québec, dans lequel les plumes de céramique ne sont révélées que par leurs ombres fragiles. Et enfin, *Intemporel*, de Tanya St-Pierre, de Québec, une installation-cauchemar et multimédia qui nous glisse insidieusement dans la tête l'idée que la vraie santé n'est peut-être pas ce que nous croyons. L'artiste, dans un texte qui accompagne son œuvre, et qui n'est pas un aveu, fait dire à son personnage : « Je suis née en enfer dans un énorme spasme de vivre. J'y vois très clair... »¹ ■

NOTE :

1. Les artistes de l'exposition *Voyage* ont été sélectionnés par Francine Potvin, céramiste et professeure à l'Université Concordia, Richard Purdy, artiste et professeur à l'UQTR, Barbara Silverberg, historienne et commissaire d'exposition. Richard Purdy était le commissaire de l'exposition *Machine à voyager dans le temps*.

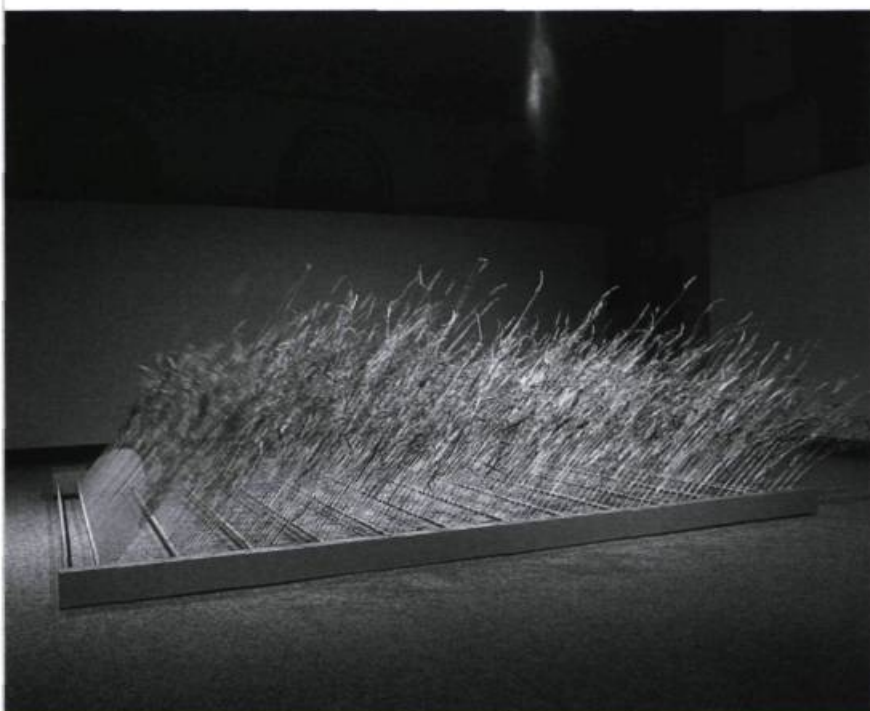
Lois Andison

TOMAS JONSSON

I get a disconcerting feeling when I look into the waters of Henderson Lake in Lethbridge, Alberta. Sitting on the dock, my feet dangling, I see the light play off the water in unfamiliar patterns. Something is wrong in the way the water moves, without cresting and only nudging the

Confined to an impossibly small enclosure in relation to the vast terrain it would naturally inhabit, the bear — the second one to do so, in fact — “malfunctions” and is reduced to a compulsive pacing back and forth, back and forth.

Camouflage II is an absurd recreation of natural processes. Ironically, it very closely resembles the elongated irrigation



shore. These are not proper waves, and why this is so is clear when I'm told the lake is man made.

The same feeling returns when I look at Ontario artist Lois Andison's kinetic installation, *Camouflage II*, in the upper gallery at the Southern Alberta Art Gallery. Large stalks of wheat sway in uniform rows, as if blown by an unseen wind. Soon, it becomes apparent that it is not wind that drives the wheat to bend, but an elaborate system of motors and cogs contained within an 8' x 12' metal armature. Uniform rows of metallic chutes hold the grains in place. Like cattle hitched to yokes, the lifeless grasses can do nothing but kowtow to the endless rhythm of the machine.

The exhibit brings to mind another memory. This time I'm at the Calgary Zoo at age 12, watching the polar bears.

What's frightening to consider is that this installation does not seem so far fetched a concept; some would no doubt find this way of looking at the “natural” appealing. Soon, as our parks and urban green spaces become more like amusement parks and nature malls, there might not be any alternatives.

A graduate of York University and Sheridan College, Andison has maintained a focus on integrating the mechanical with the organic and creating something that technology can mediate. In her work, Andison shows the reconstruction or emulation of natural processes and of forms of life. For *The House Project* (1994), Andison and nine other women artists each took over a room in a house to exhibit their works. Working with the dining room, Andison decided to create an installation referencing the association between the meat

Lois Andison, *Camouflage II*, 2000. Detail. Photo: Don Gill.

Brian Jungen

GREG BEATTY

industry and dining. An oversized dinner table was cut with two circles on its surface. Sunken basins were placed within these wells, one filled to capacity with miniature hydro-stone cows, the other with Styrofoam pigs, both painted white. Using turntables, these churns slowly rotated counter to each other. The numbing uniformity and endless revolution of the animals in their containers speak clearly of their status in our eyes.

In *Camouflage I*, the second part of Andison's installation at SAAG, a dried veil of flowers divides the dimly lit gallery, and in the spirit of the exhibition hides another installation. Behind this enticing scrim we see a dress-maker's dummy covered in pressed flowers of the same variety as the veil. The flowers are Queen Anne's lace, common to the highways throughout Ontario. Andison meticulously cultivated this royal weed for three years for her installation. A floral Elizabethan collar rests above, awaiting the viewer to inspect it. Upon approach, the viewer triggers a motion detector and the collar bristles up lizard-like, in a way that could be in equal parts flattery and aggression.

Notions of status, the strutting of cultured plumage, are given a subtle and playful poke. In this piece, Andison brings the focus to the individual. She identifies the animal kingdom as a source for social mores and posturing. The collar points to the now dissociated connection between nature and fashion, a reminder of the relationship, which was much stronger for women. One need only think of what it means to "come into bloom" or to be "deflowered."

As in the grass grid, Andison includes a reference to the hiding of mechanical processes, within the cloth of "nature." *Camouflage II* might point a wagging finger at us now for our misplaced emulation and improvements on nature, but *Camouflage I*, in its send-up of Elizabethan fashion, points out that the roots of this tradition run deep. ■

Lois Andison, *Camouflage*
The Southern Alberta Art Gallery
Lethbridge, Alberta
June 24–August 20, 2000

Brian Jungen,
Prototype For New Understanding #4,
1999. Nike Air Jordans.

It is only in the last decade or so that Canadian museums have begun to consult with First Nations people on exhibitions devoted to their history and culture. Before then, they generally displayed artifacts (often obtained under questionable circumstances) in an insensitive manner, and failed to recognize the diversity of lifestyles, languages and cultures that existed among the First Nations. Not only did these ethnographic distortions fuel prejudice and misunderstanding among Euro-Canadians, they also hindered aboriginal people intent on reclaiming their true heritage, as opposed to just passively accepting an academically-prescribed inventory of icons and images (which also would have manifested themselves in pop culture).

Even today, cultural institutions still have much work to do in repairing relations with the aboriginal community. Exhibitions like this one by Vancouver artist Brian Jungen are a definite step in the right direction. Of mixed Dunne-Za First Nation and Swiss ancestry, Jungen received a Diploma of Visual Art from the Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design in 1992, and completed a degree in Art History at Concordia that same year. Here, he adopted the Northwest Coast mask form, but with a perverse twist. Instead of using wood, his six masks were made of parts sewn together from Nike Air Jordan shoes. Together with two others, they were executed in 1999 under the collective title *Prototype for New Understanding #1-8*.

Historically, Jungen's Dunne-Za Nation was based in the B.C. interior, and had no contact with the coastal First Nations. Were he to recreate their designs in his masks, therefore, he would arguably be guilty of appropriation. Instead, he let the architecture of the shoes dictate his aesthetic direction — although it is Reid Shier's contention, in an accompanying catalogue essay, that the masks recall Kwakwaka'wakw, Nuuchah'nulth and Bella Coola designs.

By mounting his masks in glass display cases with metal armatures, Jungen echoed the tradi-

tional method employed by museums in displaying aboriginal artifacts and art. This effectively decontextualized the objects. Instead of being acknowledged for their function and form — masks, for instance, would have been worn by their makers and other tribal members on ceremonial occasions — they were fetishized for their "uniqueness"

were readily discernible, and most were adorned with long, straight black hair. There was even a sun mask. Still, even a cursory examination of the masks revealed numerous incongruities that shattered any illusion of authenticity — most notable were the words "Nike," "Jordan" (now-retired NBA star Michael Jordan) and "Pippen" (a former teammate of Jordan's on



and implied worth. Rather than reflect the communal values of the originating civilization, therefore, the objects were commodified and incorporated into a Western capitalist narrative.

Jungen countered this misappropriation in two ways. First, he permitted us to view his masks from all angles. Not only did this enhance their kinaesthetic appeal, it also diminished their preciousness by exposing their ragged inner seams, loose threads, foam padding and gobs of glue. Second, of course, is the synthetic material he used to construct the masks. Even here, the disjunction was not as great as one might imagine. According to Shier, the Nike colours of black, red and white are the three most common in traditional First Nations art, while the fabled swoosh is evocative of a principle aboriginal design element — the graduated curve. While stylized, the masks did resemble animals like the raven, wolf, dog and bullfrog that one would expect to find in any tribal menagerie. Eyes, ears, jaws, beaks and tongues

the Chicago Bulls) that were prominently printed on the shoe panels. Silhouette and holographic images of a "skying" Jordan were also visible, as were labels that identified the shoes as having been made in either China or Indonesia.

Through skilful advertising campaigns involving Jordan — and most recently, golfing sensation Tiger Woods — Nike has achieved the type of brand recognition that most corporations can only dream about. Priced at around \$200 U.S. when they debuted a few years ago, Air Jordans were the ultimate status symbol on playgrounds across North America. Indeed, so desperate were children to acquire them that some were not above stealing them from other kids. Two hundred dollars for a simple pair of kid's shoes would strain the budget of even a middle class family. But for families lower down on the socio-economic scale, the expense would be horrendous. Yet for visible minority children growing up in poverty, with few, if any, positive male role