Espace Sculpture

Karen Trask

Touch Wood—Touchez du bois

Julia Blushak

Hochelaga-Maisonneuve
Number 64, Summer 2003

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/9147ac

See table of contents

Publisher(s)
Le Centre de diffusion 3D

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

Explore this journal

Cite this document
Now transport yourself into an art exhibition by Karen Trask, entitled Touch Wood-Touchez du bois. Although you find yourself inside an artificially lit room surrounded by carefully arranged art pieces, you may eventually enter a sizable space within yourself — the space that nurtures dreams, memories, and yearning palpable.

For over ten years, Trask has been giving sculptural treatment, often through artist books, to the relationship between the abstractions of spoken and written language and their visceral roots. The works exhibited here are part of an ongoing exploration inspired by the venerable tree and its sublime offshoots. She has been giving sculptural treatment to our current day's digital preoccupation in its proper place, Trask draws together a narrative on how our human legacy of sounds, signs, words, and pages.

porary virtual imaging and remote devices that bloat senses and assault attention for a quieter place — dotted with intricate objects that are portable and personal in size, often evoking a “touchableness.”

It seems that the real story of where our thoughts come to live for us is between the covers — book covers. If you accept the artist’s invitation to be seated at the library table and gently handle one of the hand-made books (using the cloth gloves provided, of course) you discover layers of meaning and intent. Pick up the charming palm-sized book entitled Petit message. Its handwoven paper cover opens to reveal two facing pages, each dotted with intricate objects that the mouse the visitor directs a dialogue of one-liners and animates a concrete poem on the computer screen. Phrases like “turn a new leaf,” “knock on wood,” “can’t see the forest for the trees,” tumble onto each other as the screen displays its own giddy alphabetized version of a “T” tree. Etymological sources are important throughout the show, but they are revealed rather than cited. Trask sculpts with language and form, twisting her word games between English and French to reveal the common roots in words, such as “livre” and “library” from the Latin “liber,” meaning inner bark of the tree.

At some point, while moving through the exhibit, you may notice a soft rustling sound. Look up and around to view a display that appears almost monumental in this room of small wonders. There on the wall, suspended and ghostlike, is a 12-by-10-foot elm tree. It is actually a composite image, comprising page- or leaf-size pieces of ink-jet printed Japanese washi paper that have been pinned to float gently from the wall. Your body movements and perhaps the room’s quiet air conditioning set these pages to float and flutter as if on an invisible breeze. Here again is the elegant and elegiac elm tree you may have noticed solitary and stolik in a nearby meadow or urban park. Something about its long slender trunk and fan of branches pulls you up out of your mind and into its grand space. Mirage-like in this room, its existence is mere perception on your part, though you feel you are breathing the same air and sharing the same ground. After a while you notice your own sense of comfort in its presence, not unlike the way you can feel when alone and inward-focused while engaged in reading or writing. These may seem like far-fetched impressions for some. But perhaps this is simply instinct responding and affinities connecting, as when orphan animals are raised by unlikely surrogate parents. At the very least, you should agree to claim these for friends. It is good to recognize the intimacy we’ve developed with words and books and trees as companions and to understand the weaving of our shared histories. Throughout this exhibit, Trask manages to entertain with wit and educate by example, playing with textures, form, and text manipulation to celebrate structures and techniques still alive after thousands of years. Here is homage to the ingenuity, craft and patience invested in the evolution of our most human activities — creating and sharing our world through words. I guarantee the lowly paper back will never feel the same. —

NOTE
1. Touch Wood/Toucher du bois has been exhibited in several venues in Quebec and Ontario over the past two years, commencing in Gallery B312, Montreal, in the autumn of 2002, Centre national d’exposition, in Jonquière, Quebec, in 2001, Burlington Art Centre, Burlington, and Latcham Gallery, Stouffville, Ontario, in 2002, and will be presented at The Vieux-Palais in Saint-Jérôme, Quebec, in 2003.