Espace Sculpture

Light Conditions
Rebecca Belmore, Michael Belmore and Brian Jungen

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Her second work here, however, is another matter entirely. *Black Cloud* (2001) consists of a short, twisted, corkscrew-like piece of wood that has been scorched almost to the point of charcoal and from which protrude nails of varying sizes arrayed in careful patterns along its length. No surface has been left unnailed, barring the ends with which the work is affixed to a framework and onto the wall. Salt apparently figures prominently in *Black Cloud*; a mound of the stuff sat on the floor, onto which the studded wood cast its shadow, contrasting with the reflective and refractive quality of the substance. However, as shown here, the salt was missing, and noted so with a label affixed to the gallery wall explaining that this wall-mounted version of Belmore’s piece did not include the element. Possible readings of this version of the work were therefore deformed and even deflected by this official notation of absence and aesthetic incompletion.

Michael Belmore’s *Immune* (1996) was the oldest piece shown here. The work consists of a solid, roughly rectangular block of Lucite held in a steel framework and base by knurled screws at both ends. The word “IMMUNE” is etched into the flat top surface of the Lucite, but the work’s antiseptic and cold remoteness is mitigated only along the bottom of the block, where the surface has been unevenly eroded. It is almost topographic in its variability; seen in profile, it resembles the contour of a hilly landscape rising upward and making a negative indentation into the technologically clean and precise dimensions of the artefactual Lucite.

Geography indeed has a place in Belmore’s aesthetic, for the eroded Lucite surface is mapped with the impressed pattern of a wampum bead-belt, an aboriginal artefact recording formal agreements, many having to do with land. Viewing the work from directly above binds the semantic weight of Belmore’s titular text into an inescapably gravitational relationship with the politically and socially inscribed Lucite landscape below. Ironic, angry, matter-of-fact — there is room enough for all.

Brian Jungen made headlines in 2002 as the inaugural winner of the Sobey Art Award, but he had established himself well before that as an up-and-comer. His inspired use of common household materials gave voice to an aesthetic shaped in large part by his First Nations background. The problem here, however, is that the example of Jungen’s work in the Agnes Etherington Collection — a piece entitled *Mise en scène* (2000) — is flat and devoid of the representational...