

Maskull Lasserre: *Wishbone Hangers* and Other Objects

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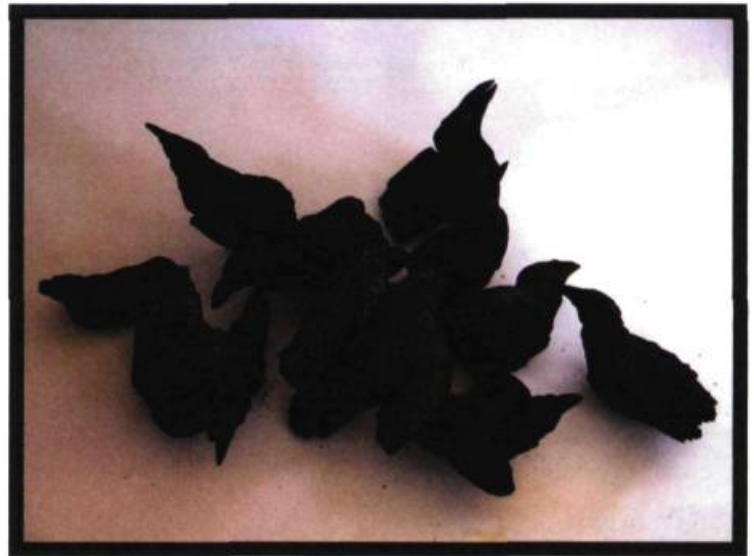
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MASKULL LASSERRE

Wishbone Hangers and Other Objects

By Veronica Redgrave

I "discovered" MASKULL LASSERRE IN A GALLERY AT THE BELGO, A BUILDING FULL OF ARTISTS, BOTH EMERGING AND ESTABLISHED. BORN IN SOUTH AFRICA, LASSERRE IS A GRADUATE OF NOVA SCOTIA'S MOUNT ALLISON UNIVERSITY, AND HAS A MASTERS OF FINE ARTS DEGREE FROM CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY, WHERE HE IS NOW TEACHING. THIS SOMEWHAT HYBRID CULTURAL BACKGROUND SEEMS TO HAVE TOUCHED LASSERRE'S APPROACH TO HIS WORK. HE MODIFIES EVERYDAY OBJECTS, OFTEN USING MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS IN HIS COMPOSITIONS. THUS, HE CREATES WHAT HE REFERS TO AS "INSTRUMENTS OF UNDERSTANDING". I LOVE THE WAY HIS "HYBRIDS" INVOKE A DOUBLE TAKE: THEY CHALLENGE OUR PERCEPTION OF REALITY; THEY MAKE US THINK — AT LEAST FOR A MOMENT.



Murder, 2006
Charred Wood
Dim Variable (Life size)

Focusing on such diverse objects as coat hangers, a sniper's rifle sight, a violin and birds, Lasserre transforms and reconfigures their identities. As a sculptor (he doesn't like being referred to as an "artist"), he takes the ordinary and makes it extraordinary. How we see things is altered in his paradigm shift. My favourite piece at his recent show was a grouping of black birds (*Murder Charred Wood*). Using fire, the most basic of elements, Lasserre burnt away details of his carved birds, yet by this phoenix-like transformation revealed their intrinsic identity. Charred black, the birds still retained the perfectly recognizable stance of pecking avians.

Life-size, they drew one to bend down to floor level in order to examine them from all angles, feeling like a child with a sense of wonder and a driving curiosity to know more about the "why" and the "how".

In another work, mounted on the wall, titled *Perfection as a Unit of Distance*, 2008, Lasserre once again applies his transformative imagination. He subtly shifted the "persona" of the musical instrument by painting it a dull battleship grey. Our prior knowledge of the object — usually a violin is gleaming lustrous wood — is thus challenged. His sullen, matte instrument, arrayed with an army-issue thick khaki canvas strap (slightly used), has

a sniper's rifle sight attached to its side like some kind of alien being. The juxtaposition alters the character of each of the elements, changing our concept of the two narratives

Wishbone Hangers, a witty piece, again plays with our perceptions, forcing one to think about the subject matter in a different way. Lasserre adds another layer of meaning to the objects — but the meaning is left open, thus inviting the viewer to investigate, and to think. *Wishbone Hangers* shows a bare iron coat rack haphazardly strewn with wooden hangers. But, on closer inspection, one notes that some of the hangers' ends are carved into tiny bones. *Wishbone Hangers* can be read on many levels. When we don clothing, do we wish to take on another identity? Are the bones a contemporary *memento mori* — a reminder of life's mortality,

no matter how beautifully we may be clothed? Do the bones slyly suggest the tendency of fashion models to eat too little? Or, do the elegant little bones hint at man's humanity; underneath all the varied clothes we are, after all, the same. Whatever the elusive meaning of Maskull Lasserre's works, he sculpts his artistic vision into our consciousness. We will never look at these banal objects the same way again. □

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