Espace Sculpture

_Maelstrom and River Styx_

Paula Gustafson

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Citer ce compte rendu

The patient's body becomes the ground, loss of self. In this world, from the patient's perspective, we act. Lit from the back, they act as essences, video monitors occupy a central corridor, pulsing with the rhythm of shiny floors metered by ominous feet.

In both Storm's installation spaces, video monitors occupy a central location and are key elements for the comprehension of the work. Here, the opposing forces are perceived in the immediacy of the woodcut's primitive gesture and the intervening distancing of video's modern technology are combined. We are reminded that woodcut was once a modern technology that also revolutionized the communications world. For Storm, they are all tools of expression, essentially the same, different only by degrees.

Storm uses video to explore her presence in two public areas within the city; the hospital and the mountain. I sense each of the video monitors as standing in for the body of the artist. Through the superimposition of moving picture planes, repetition, the piecing together and juxtaposing of the many fragments, she tells us her personal story about these sites as possible places for healing. One story does not negate the other, rather both are necessary and connected.

Storm's interest lies within the creation of space itself, and more specifically a contained empty space. Here, emptiness is not a frightening void, but rather a potential for existing, a place where emptiness can speak, and a space for sharing that existence. It is a space where the imperfections of life are accepted and appreciated for their particular beauty. I experience this installation and particularly the second space as an expression of the artist's appreciation of the generosity and richness of life in Montreal. The presence of the mountain, as an essential part of this city, is a central element in the experience of the second space. The corridor space physically compresses the viewer. Our shadows are ominously close and intrusive, obstructing our perspective. Pushed along by the space itself, we have little control of our direction; there is only advancing or retreating. But, once beyond the corridor, a giant image of forest and green falls on another constructed wall. Entering this quieter, reflective space is not so obvious. Its entrance works more like a tear in one's perception, a place where one arrives by accident, or by magic. Here, one must step through an imaginary barrier; the projected image of a fallen tree. Arriving unexpectedly in the expansiveness of this space we rediscover our breath.

To set foot here, as the artist proposes in the video is to "voir par la plante du pied", or to see through the sole of the foot. The words "plante" and "sole" although meaning essentially the same, can lead us to the richness of their respective roots; both connected in the ideas of planting and the soil. But, it is not the usual ground one walks on here. This is an open interior space, where artist and spectator are allowed to dream and to play. The body can relax, footprints crawl up the walls, feet walk on trees, the body becomes tree. As portrayed in the video, the horizontal of the tree is superimposed over that of the hospital bed. This tree, though imperceptible and almost completely uprooted, lives on tenaciously leafing year after year - testimony to the fragile strength of our physical beings.

There is a paradox in Storm's work, one I have also sensed in many other artists' work. There is in her desire to disclose and explore as many points of view as possible, a determined almost frenzied resolve to at last reveal and encompass the essence of a reality. She continues despite the knowledge that success will only be partial and momentary. Succeeding does not even appear to be the objective; it is the search which is important. This installation is the attempt by Storm to explore and to communicate her insight into the nature of health and healing.

Hannelore Storm, Un temple de guérison; lectures plu­rielles
Maison de la culture Plateau-Mont-Royal
March 1996

NOTE:
1. From Jean-Paul Sartre, Les Mouches.

Paula Gustafson

Any kid who has ever built a fort out in the bush understood what Peter von Tiesenhausen was doing with alder branches and blackberry vines during the week prior to January 25, when he was weaving his 24-foot diameter Maelstrom sculpture inside the Richmond Art Gallery. For gallery goers who watched the 36-year-old artist at work, it was easy to imagine his boyhood in Alberta's Peace River country, or the summers he has spent in the Yukon as the lead hand in a gold mining camp. However, why he was building a 17-foot...
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when Spring came."
always "stiff and tight, but when I
winter I walked the 50-acre field, I
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like that. After
was a hell of a lot of fun," al­
though he admits that initially he
me that I was on the right track, I
richer and richer. I'd just sit in
reinforced my ability to draw,
me with sticks, green sticks and burned sticks are
so much more expressive," he
"Sometimes they break, or
gouge the paper, but they leave
beautiful lines. Or I make
wood and char them, then roll
them around on paper where
they leave growth ring marks be­

"for his very competent landscape
sculpture." he said. At the time,
property near Demmift, Alberta.
he and his wife "didn't have any
money to speak of," and the cost
of a picket fence would have been
$1 500.
"I remembered a Monet paint­
ing of a willow fence, a wattle
fence, and I thought I could build
one of those. Willows wouldn't
cost me a cent, and they grow
back at the rate of sometimes six
feet a year, like blackberry bram­
bles. So right away in the Spring I
start to build this willow fence,
and because it's not confined to
being linear it went circling
around the yard. One day I was
walking back, looking at the fence
curving up the hill and I thought
about the ship I'd always wanted
to build. So that Fall I built a 17­
foot boat from willow sticks—inside
my shop because by then it
was kind of cold—and a friend
decided he'd drag it out into the
field.
Since his studies at the Alberta
College of Art in the early 1980s,
Tiesenhausen had done innumerable
drawings. He says they were
always "stiff and tight, but when I
looked at this willow boat out
there in the field, the lines weren't
like that. After 25 years of trying, I
learned how to draw. I was so ex­
cited, I started stretching big rolls
of paper in the studio and plan­
ing the boat I was going to build
when Spring came.
"I wanted to find the exact
space to put the boat, so over
the winter I walked the 50-acre field,
knowing I wanted it on a hori­
zon, probably on the highest
point so I could look at the lines
against the sky and see it as a
drawing. I finally found the spot
and stepped out the length and
width. Then one day I went out
fairly early in the morning and
walked around the boat again,
knocking the dew off the grass.
There was this beautiful outline,
sort of like an Andy Goldswor­	hy or a Richard Long environmental
sculpture."
Tiesenhausen related how all
during that winter he walked the
path of the boat "like a complete
lunatic, the fool on the hill, but I
didn't want to lose the trace." In
the Spring he had to go to Ed­
omonton, to deliver a painting.
While he was away, a Chinook
melted all the snow. Driving
home, he said he was "was ter­
fied that my marks would be
gone. I ran out into the field
and there on the grass, the snow
was pretty much gone, except
for this perfectly straight path:
drawing of the boat. It was just
wonderful, and an indication to
me that I was on the right track, I
was drawing with the whole field,
in the landscape."
From that revelation, he said
"things just took off. The sticks
reinforced my ability to draw,
and my drawings were becoming
richer and richer. I'd just sit in
the studio and try to be as intu­
tive as I could be, hanging up a
piece of paper and when I saw
something clearly there I'd go
draw it. I'd see trees, think
hanging up in trees, and think
'that's a good idea' and go off
and build it. That's how the pods
developed."
Getting a woven hive-like pod
up into a sixty-foot tree was an­
other matter. The first three pods
took three weeks to build and
hang. Tiesenhausen recalled "It
was a hell of a lot of fun," al­
though he admits that initially he
didn't realize how big a problem
it would be to accurately shoot
an arrow with a rope attached
cover a branch at that height in or­
der to hoist up the woven willow
pods.
The Maelstrom sculpture he
built in the Richmond Art
Gallery is nominally based on those
drawings, but it was the first time Tie­
senhausen has specifically con­
structed one of his works "dealing
with architectural space" rather
than an outdoor setting. He said
the fresh cut saplings and vines
from a vacant lot a block away
from the gallery behaved differ­
ently from the materials he has used
previously, and he was thrilled to
discover how strong blackberry
vines are.
He also commented on the
chalky algae-like scum and green
moss growing on the reddish-
brown alder branches, and the
blackberry's acid green colour,
remarking that he hardly ever
uses charcoal to draw with any­
more. "Lines made with sticks,
green sticks and burned sticks are
so much more expressive," he
said.
"Sometimes they break, or
gouge the paper, but they leave
beautiful lines. Or I make
wood and char them, then roll
them around on paper where
they leave growth ring marks be­

"Writing about his 1993 Making
Myth in Landscape exhibition at the
Whyte Museum of the Cana­
dian Rockies, curator Katherine
Lipsett remarked that, like many
artists, von Tiesenhausen's "ideas
come more quickly than they can
be accomplished." A year earlier,
during his residency at The Banff
Centre for the Arts' Leighton Col­
ony, he had built a seven-foot
long ice boat, loaded it with a
big, rectangular rock, and floated
it down the Bow River. He says
the ice boat was like a mantra. "I
have nothing to show for it ex­
cpt a couple of photographs,
and an idea of how far it floated
before it sank, but there's a big,
squarish rock somewhere down
river."
Commenting on his own work,
von Tiesenhausen wrote in the
exhibition catalogue for Projects,
his 1995 exhibition at The Prairie Art
Gallery, "I sometimes call my struc­
tures "interactions". The end
result is often very different than
the initial idea. Nature dictates
the limitations and peculiarities of
the materials. Wind and
weather change the look and feel
and even the meaning of the pro­
jects." During the six-week Mae­
strom exhibition, the enormous
sculpture went through subtle
shifts in form and colour, and lost
its natural, resinous aroma. Like
his ice boats, natural changes that
occur with the passage of time
also factor into von Tiesenhaus­
sen's work.

"We cut sticks from trees for
the framework, then we took the
wet gut and laid it over the
branches," she explained, adding
that draping the gut and stitching
it is probably the least pleasant
part of the construction process.
"It doesn't smell great, and it looks
awful, but after a couple of days
when it dries, it's just phenome­
nal. It's like a drum. We try to
make the skin of the boats loose, but it takes up any slack that we leave."

The gut covering is white when the sculptures are new, but it soon ages to a transparent yellow. The salt crystals the gut is packed in, when it comes from the slaughterhouse, remain on some of the sculptures. Instead of washing off all the salt the two artists often take advantage of its textural effect, rubbing inks and dyes onto the encrusted surface. Other interesting surface textures come from the stitched seams and the natural veining of the "casings", reminiscent of rivers and tributaries.

Chant, for example, is an almost 10-foot long kayak shape with upraised, curved bows. Despite its large, functional size, the pod form suggests vulnerability, partly because it appears to be fragile and structurally unsound (it's not), and partly from the idea it conveys about being able to see the skeleton beneath the skin.

In her artist's statement Vanbianchi explains that, as she works on the boat sculptures, "the shapes that emerge often resemble cocoons, insect wings, or sea mammals. I develop these zoomorphic sculptures both consciously and unconsciously. The unconscious development occurs during the early stages when I select the sticks for the keel, ribs, and gunwales, and begin to assemble the skeleton of the boat. Often, it is not until after I have attached the gut that I become consciously aware of the emerging shape." In some of the sculptures she and her partner have given the branches a chalky white plaster coating to emphasize their resemblance to bones.

But Vanbianchi's and Standley's life-size gut boats are not representative objects, they are vessels for mythic voyages, for spiritual journeys, for explorations into the territories of fantasy. Vanbianchi refers to them as "part of a personal longing...for earlier times and a way of life more directly connected to land and sea."

She admits her choice of materials and motifs puts her in a position similar to a cultural tourist who looks at ancient relics and supposes he or she truly understands their meaning. Yet if Vanbianchi is guilty of appropriating traditional techniques, the justification lies in the collaborative way she and Standley have worked together for fifteen years. Originally textile artists, they shared a fascination for the process of transforming fibres into cloth; an art that is inextricably entwined in human history. Their sure use of texture, pattern, and surface decoration is from the universal language of weaving. Symbolism and Abstractionism may have been named by modern Western art, but they have always been there in the decorative motifs of ancient textiles, baskets, and carvings.

"Fibres were so seductive, and they had so many associations with so many other kinds of art," Vanbianchi recalled, "but I couldn't get the type of imagery I wanted. Textile work was just too pretty. Cow gut has a raw look about it that I can use in many different ways. Once I started working with it, I just dropped everything else."

Three of the sculptures in the exhibition, including the River Styx title piece, are Vanbianchi's own constructions, made after the partnership ended last year when Standley decided to focus her talents on teaching. Although they are more abstractly modelled than the previous collaborative works, these newest sculptures eulogize both naturally occurring materials and animistic/spiritual fetishes.

Vanbianchi says she realizes she can "never really be an Eskimo, Native American, or Maori," but by working with the same kind of organic materials used throughout human history for the creation of both functional and ritual objects she says she is gaining a deeper understanding of their lives.
Recu à Espace : le catalogue monographique qui accompagne l'exposition Jean-Baptiste Côté : caricaturiste et sculpteur, qui se tient au Musée du Québec jusqu'au 20 octobre prochain. Conçue et réalisée par Mario Béland, conservateur de l'art ancien, assisté de Nicole Allard pour le volet caricature et de Denis Castonguay pour la recherche, l'exposition est la première rétrospective consacrée à l'artiste. Abondamment illustré, le catalogue comporte une chronologie, une esquisse biographique de l'artiste qui a vécu de 1832 à 1907, deux études sur sa production (caricature et sculpture), accompagnées de tout l'appareil scientifique inhérent à ce type de publication (catalogue des œuvres exposées, liste des expositions, bibliographie exhaustive). Chacun des trois principaux chapitres est présenté comme une suite de courts essais abordant diverses questions liées à la carrière et à la production de Côté en regard de l'évolution de son marché et de ses pratiques :

Jean-Baptiste Côté, souligne Mario Béland, passa toute sa carrière à Québec. Après avoir travaillé avec l'architecte Louis-Thomas Berlinguet, il s'oriente vers la sculpture navale au milieu des années 1850. Il s'adonne de plus, durant les années 1860, à la gravure sur bois et à la caricature dans des journaux humoristiques. Au cours des années 1870, il se tourne vers d'autres marchés dont celui de la sculpture religieuse qu'il exploitera jusqu'à la fin du siècle. L'invocation de son œuvre fait état d'une production aussi diversifiée que colorée se situant à mi-chemin entre l'art savant et l'art populaire : reliefs historiés de la vie du Christ, figures de proue, pièces de mobilier, personnages religieux ou historiques, enseignes de commerce, effigies commémoratives, allégoriques, animaux domestiques et exotiques, figures caricaturales et stéréotypées, monuments funéraires, etc. (p. 19).

(Source : Lise Boyer, Suzanne LeBlanc, Musée du Québec)

Errata

Des erreurs se sont glissées dans la transcription du texte de Suzanne LeBlanc, Leçons de relativisme, paru dans Espace #36. À la page 43, on lira plutôt : «Le globe marqué du signe “plus” présente la carte de l'hémisphère sud “à l'endroit”, à l'endroit pour nous, bien sûr, de l'hémisphère nord, et finalement aussi pour toute la planète, puisque cette convention a gagné l'hémisphère sud.» — L'univers comportant l'atome de la planète se trouve maintenant condensé dans la concavité de l'orbe terrestre. Nous présentons nos excuses à l'auteure et à l'artiste.