Espace Sculpture

Medical Imprints
Empreintes médicales

Gail Bourgeois

Numéro 70, hiver 2004–2005

URI : https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/10209ac

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Éditeur(s)
Le Centre de diffusion 3D

ISSN
0821-9222 (imprimé)
1923-2551 (numérique)

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Cindy STELMACKOWICH, *Retreat from Reason*, 2004. Scientific glassware, water, pond plants (water lettuce and duck weed), grow lights. 44 cm x 105.6 cm x 26.4 cm. Photo: David Barbour

**MEDICAL IMPRINTS**

GAIL BOURGEOS

Curated as three solo shows that mutually enhance each other, *Medical Imprints* presents distinctly differing perspectives on questions of the examined body under medical treatment. The artists present an unhiddenness of being that reverses the medical gaze and connects desire to the social system. Works by Cindy Stelmackowich, derived from the politics of reason, reflect perceptual reciprocity. Finely crafted drawings by Jane Martin witness a healing practice as she records the abatement of intense trauma.

Theodore Wan, in his late 1970s work, investigates the conceptual displacement of medical illustration and their codification of the body. 1

From Wan’s large black and white procedural photographs in the main gallery the viewer enters into another exhibition space. 2 The lighting is subdued and directional but the large institutional space is animated by curious objects and the selective inclusion of some bright colours and wall pieces that cause the eye to dance around the room. With incisive vision, artist Cindy Stelmackowich has converted the tools of medical enquiry into the penetrately critical tools of her trade. Each of the seven works meshes scholarly research with her visual art practice.

The subject of her critique centres on the objectifying nature of scientific inquiry and on how the subjective voice is often lost to an overriding authority. The breathing body, as it experiences and inhabits the world, is very different from the mechanical body received from medical science, prior to our very conceptions of our own materiality, is the animate self, breathing passions, living the passage of time, and storing the memory of its experiences. In her practice, the artist reaches through the commanding text in an uncanny symbolic process — a mutually advantageous association or relation between parts of the same person — to confer the power of seeing upon herself. It is this same agency that she offers us. The attentive body, which Merleau-Ponty called the “body subject,” is poised to create new meanings.

Stelmackowich sees herself as intervening into the violent language of medicine and its separation of the body from mind and spirit, as enacted through scientific anatomical representations. Her artistic interventions represent a glitch in the system. With her choice and presentation of materials, she inverts meanings. What we sense is an in-between space of critical humour. I suspect that we are never meant to laugh out loud, but rather to nod in recognition of a common, sentient body. She presents works that must be encountered. *Encyclopédie de la médecine*, vol. 1-3, 2004, offers a key to reading her creative works as strategic in-between sites, as Deleuzian betweenness. In addition, this piece resonates with the pathos and humour of her earlier feminist inquiries. 3 Here, three unfolded book jackets cover medical illustrations like surgical sheets. Looking through the peepholes we can just discern images of going-on in laboratory settings. What is imagined underneath is important. We are placed as voyeurs on the outside of the display. The viewer becomes the one gazing at the surface beneath through the paper covers, yellow with age and smudged with fingerprints.

Two book-works dissect the determining language that holds authority over the body. They literally sprout glass and metal scientific implements into the surrounding space. Humorous in their irreverence, these imaginative works create playful sculptural objects out of medical instruction books. From the gallery’s collection, *handbook of SURGERY* lies on its back with dissecting pins, bandages, surgical gloves, pipette, tracheotomy tube, and colour-anatomical illustrations jutting out in all directions from the small red manual. It has become an emblem of authority rendered chaotic, like the body itself, full of dynamical synapses and seeping fluids.

*Lippincott’s Quick Reference Book — Medicine and Surgery* (2004), would be hard to grasp with one hand. It has the look and feel of a large dictionary given its own stand in the library. Here the stand is a three-foot high pedestal with the contents of glass tubing extended from the upright tome towering at around six feet. This is a more contained piece where the scientific test tubes, glassware and stainless steel surgical tools are bound inside the pages with an aluminium belt buckled tightly around the girth. Here, the language and apparatuses of the text depict a restriction of the material body. Each work employs glass. 4 As a transparent medium, glass contains the work and also lets the viewer see the artist pointing to the ironic inversion of meaning that is being produced. Glass visually unites the pieces in the room and upholds the work’s theoretical underpinnings. For example, a long wall installation titled *Suspending the Laws of Medical Practice* presents two staggered rows of vintage test tubes held to the wall with dissecting pins. Suspended in another transparent medium — water — are cut-up dictionary phrases. Present here is the displacement of all transcendentalism, and an active embodied search for the conditions of a new production.
At the end of the wall, placed in a far corner, is a work titled Luminaries (2004). The black antique wooden table has two bell jars, looking like giant upside down test tubes, one inside the other. They cover a six-inch opening in the middle of the table. A light box under the table softly illuminates upward through several layers of anatomical transparencies. Slices of the medicalized body, with diagrammatic numbers and corresponding name-list for the internal organs, bask romantically in a red glow of represented tissue and muscle. The light, as if projected through the body, raises ethical concerns about these images.

In these anatomical illustrations, the body's encounter with medicine is certain, but, rather than point to disease and death, it holds the promise of immortality. Taken up as an issue of violence to the body, this negation of mortality is imaged in the middle of the table.

Opening in the middle of the table, other are felt to co-exist in an issue of violence to the body, the death of the body as another body. Through the inclusion of living, fibrous, rhizoid pond plants encased in scientific glassware, Retreat from Zoid Pond Plants Encased in Scientific Glassware (2004) more directly engages alterity's perceptual potential of being touched, of the potential of being influenced and changed by the encounter. In each of her pieces, Stelmackowich is demanding an empathetic response. If the other can be understood as always being there, as not being us, then this overlapping can be understood, following Merleau-Ponty, as interaction and influencing of the other. An inadequate apprehension of human relations, exemplified by these imprints of scientific apparatuses on the body, follows from authoritative positions of certainty or uncertainty regarding the other.

All three exhibitions imply an ethics of the flesh. Allowing for variations in the artists' intentions in producing their pieces, the crossovers found between the shows can be extended to the relationship the works set up with the viewer. The other is always intertwined within the subject. For Merleau-Ponty, the self and other are relationally constituted through the ever-present potential of reversibility. We can not be a disembodied onlooker because of the alterity of the other's gaze.

Martin's drawing series describes in minute detail the traces of open-heart surgery on her husband's body. Curated into the exhibition were the drawings created directly from Polaroid photos taken by the artist within days of the successful operation. The drawings record not only the photographic image but also its Polaroid frame rendered to the exact size of the original. These processes of documenting reflect a way of mediating those aspects of life which no control can be established. These drawings operate as instruments of disclosure through which immediacy, intensity and emotional authenticity are integrated into the works.

The series records individual memory, where fear, pain and desire are implicit in the image. It took three years for the drawings to surface as a necessary extension of the photos. The photographs were "concrete and clinical but also unsettling in a way they hadn't been... By transforming them into drawings, the transfigured images became the metaphorical heart; the act of drawing a tactile pleasure; and the vulnerable body unbearably exquisite." These works were slow and laborious to do. The repetition of the artist's strokes recall, for me, the rocking movement of a body calming itself, and by extension, the transformative relief of the health process.

While she records the traumatized body of her husband in the healing stages after surgery, she also records her own healing by creating meaning out of the repeti-
OCELYNE CONNOLLY
Speculor. Le musée céleste.
LA VIRTUALISATION DU MUSÉE

David Moore s'approprie l'espace du Centre d'exposition Expression afin de poursuivre son propos concernant la virtualisation de l'espace au moyen de supports architecturaux dessinés, d'images numérisées et d'effets mirotillants. Déjà en 1998, les effets de réflexion au moyen de miroirs adéquats installés dans l'espace sont utilisés par Moore dans l'exposition Pendant que le monde au Musée de la Ville de Lachine et, en 1999, l'exposition Variations-inversions chez Circa. Depuis, il construit des espaces et des relations entre des objets réels et des effets virtuels. Ainsi, l'allègement matériel de l'espace le conduit à conceptualiser une virtualisation des relations concernant les divers facteurs de médiation entre les objets de l'exposition muséale et les visiteurs, et finalement entre les visiteurs et l'artiste. Il met au jour ces relations par l'exposition chez Expression.

Notre commentaire porte principalement sur cette dernière proposition de Speculor. Le musée céleste afin d'insister sur un volet d'un questionnement amorcé par Moore ces dernières années. Toutefois, soulignons que ce segment se situe en relation avec le plus en place l'ensemble de l'exposition. On le verra.

LIEU MATÉRIEL ET ESPACE VIRTUEL
On comprendra que le terme « virtual » signifie que le dispositif élaboré par l'artiste répond aux effets qu'il veut produire indépendamment des moyens réels utilisables afin de produire les mêmes résultats physiques. Le virtuel accentue donc le caractère fictionnel du dispositif. D'abord, voyons comment David Moore introduit le visiteur aux questions muséologiques. La première salle d'Exposition montre les effets de virtualisation opérés sur l'architecture du lieu. Les procédés relèvent des motifs humains et humanoides, schématisés — on y voit notamment les contours — dessinés sur les murs. Aussi, des éléments-miroirs reflètent des zones et des images murales de l'installation, et renvoient des zones lumineuses en forme d'éclipse et de cercle sur des figures au mur. Un bassin d'eau vibrante au sol s'ajoute au dispositif réflexif. Or, les images réfléchies s'ajoutent virtuellement au dispositif. De plus, la négation de la solidité s'effectue par l'insertion de figures de pierres (et de crânes créant l'illusion de pierres) photographiées puis modifiées à l'ordinateur afin de produire des effets tridimensionnels par des images planes au mur. L'éclairage par projecteurs, intégré à l'exposition, en plus de remplir sa fonction habituelle, accentue l'énonciation du propos discursif de l'artiste.

La compression physique et matérielle que l'artiste réalise jusqu'à maintenant, par cette exposition, introduit le visiteur dans la dernière salle d'exposition d'Expression, au cœur des réflexions que l'artiste mêle ces dernières années concernant la perception visuelle du visiteur muséal. Il faut cependant prendre en compte que Moore réalise, en 2003, une série d'Impressions à jet d'encre — Béatitudes —, fruit d'un travail de questionnement et d'observation de quelques années, conduits dans son atelier. Ces travaux, bien qu'ils furent réalisés avant Speculor... sont montrés dans l'exposition Passages, chez Graff peu de temps après Speculor... Il est utile de mentionner cette exposition avant de poursuivre notre explication puisque les œuvres montrées s'intègrent au processus de conceptualisation de Moore. En empruntant les murs et le sol de son atelier, des figures humaines et humanoides sont tracées, et des objets produisant des reliefs sont aussi posés aux angles du sol et des murs du dispositif. Puis s'ajoutent d'autres objets produisant des significations ne relevant pas de la pure perception visuelle par le visiteur. Ces subtilités mises en scène sont photographiées et imprimées au jet d'encre, en grand format. Référons-nous au Contre-relief d'angle, 1995, du membre du groupe D'abord, Christine Conley, originatrice de Speculor, qui lui a donné le titre de l'exposition, MUSÉE LIEU MATÉRIEL ET ESPACE VIRTUEL, et pour qui elle a conçu la scénographie de la première salle d'Exposition. Elle a réalisé les illustrations. Andreas Vesalius, le Fère de l'Anatomie, imagina la coupe upright, yeux ouverts et avec le squelette et le muscle structure développer cet appareil en full action. Moore la direction des réticulaires et de centaines autres travaux et comment il a mis le plein sur des corpus et a planifié sa scénographie de la dernière salle d'Exposition dans l'espace de l'artiste.