

Rachel Kneebone: *399 Days*

Ariane Belisle

Numéro 109, hiver 2015

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/73329ac>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Le Centre de diffusion 3D

ISSN

0821-9222 (imprimé)

1923-2551 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Belisle, A. (2015). Compte rendu de [Rachel Kneebone: *399 Days*]. *Espace*, (109), 78–79.

Rachel Kneebone: *399 Days*

Ariane Belisle

**WHITE CUBE
LONDON
JULY 18 –
SEPTEMBER 28, 2014**



Hybrid body parts, severed limbs and phallic figures populate Rachel Kneebone's *399 Days* (2012-2013). Towering over visitors as they enter the White Cube's 9x9x9 gallery space in Bermondsey (London, UK), the artist's psychosexual hinterland takes the form of an erect column that soars towards the cubic room's bright skylight. Porcelain tiles depicting erotic states of flux cascade towards the beholder's feet, as organic outlines ambiguously morph into bodies. Unfolding in an

infinite spiral narrative that purposefully lacks a cohesive beginning, middle and end, the ivory sculpture refutes both history and the passage of time. Instead, Kneebone chooses to focus on the now, or rather the viewer's immediate visceral reaction to the anagrams of vehemence and violence that inhabit the porcelain chrysalis. Hence, recognizable shapes rub shoulders with the quintessentially bizarre; *399 Days* simultaneously conveys familiarity and strangeness, beauty and horror, purity and adulteration, ecstasy and mortality, fragility and monumentality, playfulness and menace, and completeness and provisionality. It is through these acts of negation that the artist's uncanny plot unfolds.

Seductively treading the line that exists between aesthetics, philology and philosophy, *399 Days* is firmly anchored within the contemporary art canon. Yet, it seeps art historical references through its physical form, speaking of Trajan's Column, the Zoroastrian Towers of Silence, Hieronymus Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights* and August Rodin's *Gates of Hell*. Furthermore, for her *œuvre*, Kneebone relentlessly engages with transgression, sin, existentialism, romanticism, eroticism and the unconscious, mining Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, Dante's *Inferno* and *Divine Comedy*, R. D. Laing's *Knots*, as well as the writings of William Blake, Georges Bataille and Sigmund Freud. Thus, while the purity of the medium instills the artwork with transcendental beauty, these subtle allusions present gallery visitors with a portal into their own dark subconscious minds.

In many ways, *399 Days* is a natural progression from Kneebone's previous large-scale seminal installation *The Descent* (2007). Yet, while the two works speak the same visual language, their themes diverge. The earlier sculpture communicates fear through beauty; this dichotomy, according to the artist, represents "an attempt to access the state [of fear] through making an equivalent in beauty." *399 Days*, however, effaces meaning through its saturation of form. Its title reiterates this sense of nothingness, as it points to the facture process's temporality – the time it took to mould and construct the work – instead of imposing a preconceived meaning through the title. It is also worth noting the disconnect that exists when we encounter both installations. To fully explore *The Descent*, the beholder must view the work at close range and physically bend forward to peer into its depths. The audience stares down onto the piece, and ultimately retain full control for the duration of the physical encounter. Adversely, *399 Days* presents us with a series of 54 highly detailed porcelain tiles, yet it is only when distancing ourselves from the colossal architectural structure that the work takes on stature and complexity. This distance is needed to completely explore the piece visually. We look forward and upwards dwarfed by its size. Much like she inundates with detail, Kneebone dissolves meaning through exaggerated dimensions.

Divided into seven sides and 63 outer tiles, the column uses a heptagon as its base. The plinths that support the porcelain pieces have cracked and ruptured during firing, allowing the pillar's various parts to stand a couple of centimetres apart. This creates small visual openings into the otherwise hidden core of the artwork. Here, one can observe the erratic states of erogenous transgression as anthropological forms mutate into amorphous shapes within the darkened cavity. Arguably, it is within this core that Kneebone's hybrid fiends are born, subsequently spilling out of the top of the column and clinging to its

outward facing walls. A palpable reference to Marcel Duchamp's last major endeavour, *Étant Donnés: 1° la chute d'eau / 2° le gaz d'éclairage* (1946-1966), *399 Days* toys with the idea of voyeurism. However, unlike Duchamp's oeuvre, it simultaneously refutes the notion of prurience, as images of heightened sexuality and fetishism also saturate facets of the work that are clearly visible to the outside world.

The White Cube's 9x9x9 space, as the name suggests, is a 9 x 9 x 9 metre room. In many ways, a mise en abyme of the gallery that houses it, the area epitomizes a literal interpretation of the museological 'white cube.' Akin to Carlo Rossi's *2 Architect Rossi Street or Street of Ideal Proportions*, in which the height and width are identical (22 meters) and the length is exactly ten times the width (220 metres), 9x9x9 appears to represent mathematical purity. Standing as a blank backdrop to the artworks that have been presented here over the years, objectivity and impartiality are proposed. Yet, while neutrality is attempted, in this instance the room seems to heighten and accentuate the climactic struggle and incongruous scenes it harbours. Likewise, the divine bright white sunlight that seeps through the skylight presents a stark contrast to the artist's netherworld-like column, as the environment facilitates the meeting between heaven and hell.

By far Kneebone's largest and most ambitious project to date, *399 Days* fosters the artist's unique formal language and exploration of the human condition. Deeply entrenched in an infinite chronicle of existential lore, the deceptively delicate porcelain tower interlaces the narratives of myriad knowns and unknowns. Echoing Bataille's notion that the imagination joins together that which is never given except in parts, the artwork's disparate fragments are fused together only through the beholder's interpretation of the object as a whole. Above all else, it is this encounter with the audience that will forever be anchored within the annals of time.

Ariane Bélisle is a Canadian London-based art advisor and freelance writer. Since graduating from the Courtauld Institute of Art (MA Curating the Art Museum), she has managed two major private art collections of international scale. She has written critical reviews and feature articles for publications such as *ARTUNER*, *This Is Tomorrow: Contemporary Art Magazine* and *Courtauld Reviews*, as well as catalogue essays for Sotheby's London, the Courtauld Gallery and the Victoria and Albert Museum.

Galland et Lalumière : mises en récit de l'espace d'exposition

Benoit Jodoin

CENTRE CLARK

MONTRÉAL

28 AOÛT –

4 OCTOBRE 2014

Avec *Avenir avenue (prequel)*, une installation *in situ* des artistes Emmanuel Galland et François Lalumière, la structure et l'usage de l'espace d'exposition du Centre Clark est mise à jour. Occupant la salle principale, l'œuvre invite le spectateur à évoluer dans un lieu circonscrit par deux séries de barrières de contrôle pour files d'attente de manière à dévoiler l'autorité habituelle de la mise en exposition.

Le spectateur est ainsi invité à déambuler dans un parcours construit, régulé, déterminé. Au sol, des flèches noires collées et une rose des vents dessinée à la craie blanche – et donc partiellement effacée par le passage des visiteurs – appuient cette idée d'orientation et de contrôle. Les dimensions de la galerie inscrites par terre tendent à rappeler, quant à elles, le rôle que joue le dispositif architectural dans cette prise en charge de l'itinéraire du spectateur.

Court-circuitant cette expérience organisée, les œuvres disposées pêle-mêle sur les quatre murs forment au contraire un contraste assez marqué et déroutent le visiteur. Des propositions disparates sans cartel sont en effet accrochées ou collées à différents niveaux de sorte à diriger le regard dans tous les sens : photographie d'un personnage couvert d'un drap, image saisie d'un écran représentant un homme qui tient son visage dans ses mains, peintures à numéro, panneaux de bois ornés de bouts de ruban adhésif qui forment des figures rayonnantes à la manière d'icônes religieuses. Parmi ce parcours à l'éclectisme déstabilisant, seul le motif de la flèche est récurrent et s'impose tantôt autour d'une cloche d'incendie, tantôt sous forme de croix modifiées pour en reprendre la forme.

La sensibilité aux problématiques de l'espace que l'on retrouve dans *Avenir avenue (prequel)* n'est pas nouvelle chez Emmanuel Galland et François Lalumière. En 2012, Galland proposait à Vu Photo (Québec) *De Lafontaine à Racine, en passant par Bossé et Talbot*, une exposition de photographies prises le soir dans les rues de Chicoutimi sur lesquelles triomphent des enseignes lumineuses comme des sculptures symbolisant l'occupation commerciale de l'espace public. En 2010, il présentait à l'Atelier Punkt (Montréal), en tant que commissaire, la première exposition en solo de Roadsworth, un artiste connu pour avoir transformé en propositions esthétiques éphémères les marques peintes de la signalisation routière urbaine. Par ailleurs, le travail d'exploration des possibilités chromatiques et géométriques du « duck tape » de François Lalumière a été présenté dans l'espace public, notamment dans une friche urbaine du Vieux-Montréal dans le cadre du 9^e Sommet mondial Écocité et dans des espaces publicitaires lors de l'intervention urbaine Artung! en 2011.