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Crépuscule: Jennifer Macklem

Lilly Koltun

**MAISON DES ARTS DE LAVAL
LAVAL
MAY 3 –
JUNE 28, 2015**

What is the difference between art and life? The question is relevant because today, there is no longer any difference between the mediums of art. Or rather, there is no longer any difference in the value assigned to any medium, nor is any value assigned to separating them into different specialities. Where once painting was king, at the top of a hierarchy that descended through sculpture and drawing down to precarious “arts” like performance and crafting utilitarian objects, with no place at all for digital or interactive art, now any browse through the catalogues of the last decade of Venice Biennales or of Tate Modern (or name your own contemporary art site) reveals the intermixing of many mediums in one work or installation, and the pre-eminence of the artist’s idea driving which mediums are selected for the work. Diversity and integration have moved from hallmarks of society to hallmarks of art making.¹

And this is a very good thing, making the art relevant by reacting to and reflecting a contemporary world.

Jennifer Macklem’s exhibition *Crépuscule* brings together work created over ten years to perform in that multi-disciplinary arena. Having opened May 3 in the Salle Alfred-Pellan, Maison des Arts de Laval, it will be on exhibit until June 28, 2015. Built, as the curator Lise Lamarche says, around the theme of nordicity (what could be more Québécois? or Canadian?), the room invites visitors to explore: sculpture, painting, video, found artefacts, polyethylene wrap shooting through the air like space lightning. A drone plane is waiting for your hands to wing it through the room while its camera eye shows what it sees on a monitor. A sacred circle of animal fur coats on the floor gives children (that’s us, too!) a place to sit while we doodle on the paper at a low table, check out the vintage illustrated natural history books and touch the former animals whose skins seduce and appall us. By making abject these once living and sentient beings as we sit on them and stroke them, we take our pleasure at the cost of a thrust at our consciences.

How can a room so jumbled with things past and futuristic, things fantasized and real, things found and made, still strike us like a single, slow and building blow? It may be the virtuoso skill of the artist, whose hand invites us everywhere, pointing to delicate, tragic details through an unerring touch of the real/surreal, where animals sprout branches for horns and their bones and eyes tell of life and death. Bronze is bone and fur, wax is ghost and memory, paint is cold and space.

The attraction of humour and play is also one of Macklem’s ruses—who can resist rocking in the white, fur-covered family swing set? Or dropping the marbles from on high to watch them roll down the winding path bordered by alien shapes to the floor? Or sit to watch a video of a goat

Jennifer Macklem, vue partielle de l'exposition *Crépuscule*, 2015. Salle Alfred-Pellan de la Maison des arts de Laval. Photo : Guy L'Heureux.



in love with himself in the winter wilderness? But even as we play, we know there is a current of disaster past and impending that permeates the room. We know we collude, but are unsure how; are we victims or perpetrators of Macklem's biological mutations and unwelcoming climate?

There is another installation, in Toronto, which is of the same interdisciplinary realm and enticement of visitors. The collective of seven artists called VSVSVS has installed *Not Together, But Alongside* at Mercer Union. Their work as well tempts visitors to participate, putting spaces with objects and imagery at their disposal—to be climbed, and crawled upon and into, even broken, because, as one of the members says, “We love objects so much, we need to destabilize them.”² Over the last several years, other artists such as Ryan Trecartin and Ai Weiwei have exhibited a similar powerful current of broken and aggregated, often messy works, of de-familiarized found objects and scenarios, to trigger the visitors' involvement in their social relevance.

This spreading de-sacralization of art positions Macklem within the new encouragement to communicate our impulses in the face of this art in a new way, as unscripted, communal experience. This is like Sue Broadhurst's “liminal performance” in theatre—that she defines in part as “hybridization, indeterminacy, a lack of ‘aura’ and the collapse of the hierarchical distinction between high and popular culture”³—brought into art's white cube. Macklem has said that, during the ten years that these works in *Crépuscule* have been in progress, she has felt their fragmentary nature, as though she were groping, unable to settle on one medium, unstable. We, too, put our hands out to perform, without the boundaries of mediums or rules. Thus Macklem offers us the theme of nordicity, of an ice cold that signals both danger and clarity, to frame the new parameters where we can see ourselves, feel intrigue and sorrow over our strength and our fragility. In the end, Macklem's parts cumulate to reveal the secret of their ambiguity: their fluidity between mediums offers both fear and solace; that is, both sides of our dreams.

1. At random, of five exhibitions on the June 16, 2015 on-line calendar issued by artengine of Ottawa (artlist@artengine.ca), three were by multi-media artists: the Z'otz* Collective; Juanita Lee-Gonzales; Kenneth Emig, a “trans-disciplinary artist whose work intersects form, light, sound, movement and technology;” and The Department of Biological Flow of 30 artists in a durational work along 200 km of the Rideau Canal, and connecting with *Chimeda*, an aboriginal/settler reconciliation paddling art event.
2. The artist Stephen McLeod quoted in “VSVSVS's gigantic multimedia art installation,” Murray Whyte, in: *Toronto Star*, (June 1, 2015), E3.
3. Susan Broadhurst, “Introduction,” *Liminal Acts, a Critical Overview of Contemporary Performance and Theory*, (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014). Among other characteristics, Broadhurst also refers to “the utilization of the latest developments in media technology...feelings close to disquiet and discomfort.... A certain ‘shift-shape,’ stylistic promiscuity favouring pastiche...parody, playfulness and a de-legitimization of authorial authority.”

During a distinguished thirty-five year career, Dr. Lilly Koltun has led major national cultural initiatives, including the position of Director General of the Portrait Gallery of Canada. Winner of the Commemorative Medal of the Queen's Golden Jubilee in 2002, she has been a noted speaker, author, consultant and teacher in art history and cultural management. Since her BFA *summa cum laude* from the University of Ottawa in 2014, she has worked as an interdisciplinary artist.

Public Studio. Conflits d'intérêt(s)

Laurent Vernet

**O'BORN CONTEMPORARY
TORONTO
1^{er} MAI -
27 JUIN 2015**

Avec l'exposition *The Accelerators*, Public Studio poursuit une recherche aussi engagée qu'engageante sur des enjeux sociétaux de premier plan comme les conflits, les identités et la surveillance. Le collectif torontois, créé vers 2009, est composé de la cinéaste Elle Flanders (qui a passé sa jeunesse entre Montréal et Jérusalem) et de l'architecte Tamira Sawatzky (originaire de Winnipeg), auxquelles s'ajoutent ponctuellement d'autres collègues. À l'image de la collaboration interdisciplinaire qui est à la base de Public Studio, ces œuvres protéiformes (vidéos, photos, installations, objets) témoignent d'un intérêt soutenu pour la technologie (comme médium et sujet) et sont destinées tant à la galerie qu'à l'espace public. D'ailleurs, peu importe leur contexte d'exposition, ces propositions trouvent leur force dans leur ouverture, en ce sens qu'elles ne se livrent jamais au premier regard et qu'il revient au spectateur de s'approprier leur contenu sociopolitique.

Pour l'illustrer, évoquons le traitement polysémique que fait Public Studio de la question israélo-palestinienne, sujet de prédilection du collectif. *Isdud*, tirée de la série *What Isn't There*, est une photographie grand format qui donne à voir un attrayant paysage et qui a été exposée sur un mur de la cour intérieure du Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art (Toronto) en 2011. Ce que l'on regarde est, en fait, le lieu de l'ancien village palestinien qui donne son titre à l'œuvre et dont les habitants ont été contraints à l'exil à la suite de la création de l'État d'Israël, en 1948. Le projet *Visit Palestine: Change your View* mise aussi sur la subjectivité, mais cette fois des participants. Dans le cadre d'une résidence artistique en Israël en 2014, Flanders et Sawatzky ont mis sur pied une agence de voyage offrant des visites guidées de la Cisjordanie. L'objectif était à la fois basique et signifiant : traverser la frontière pour aller à la rencontre de l'Autre et être, de cette manière, confronté à ses propres préconceptions. L'exercice bénéficiait d'une connaissance des nombreux moyens de contrôle de ce territoire, que les artistes ont acquise en le traversant en auto et à pied : ces explorations ont d'ailleurs fait l'objet de l'installation vidéo *Road Movie* (2011) et des photos de la série *Road Shots* (2012).

Alors que le propos de Public Studio est habituellement ancré dans les notions de territoire ou de paysage, il se déploie cette fois-ci, avec *The Accelerators*, dans le temps. Présentée dans le cadre de l'édition 2015 de CONTACT, le festival de photographie de la Ville-Reine, cette proposition installative interroge le rôle et le fonctionnement de l'image contemporaine en faisant dialoguer la vidéo et la photo avec des objets. Ces éléments forment un réseau qui se déploie dans l'espace de la galerie, et les visiteurs peuvent tenter de le reconstituer à partir du diagramme qui leur est fourni.