

The Sculptures of Hannah Franklin

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Hannah Franklin, *Time Passes in the Sun.*, 1989. Bois, fibre de verre, résine. 18" x 12" x 10". Centre des Arts contemporains du Québec à Montréal 3-28 avril 1989.

The sculptures of Hannah Franklin represent a new, fresh, innovative approach to this art form, much of it having to do with her experimentation with new uses of plastic resin. The resin is prevalent in much of Ms. Franklin's work, most notably in pieces such as *Chantal*, *André*, and *Tango*. These pieces convey a first impression of human figures mummified in a strange, clear substance. They are, in fact, black and white photographic images approximately three feet tall, encapsulated in the once pliable, now completely hardened resin. *Chantal* and *André* appear to have been caught at quiet introspective moments, while *Tango* is a celebration of graceful, surging energy, now sealed motionless in resin.

The resin is used for similar ends, though in pieces markedly different in appearance, in a series of "treasure chests" which complement in theme, the first group. Appearing in a variety of sizes, these intricately and ornately designed caskets are each topped with a bubble of resin, actually thick and solid though seemingly delicate and freshly created. The bubble almost beckons one to touch, and it is while leaning over to look down upon the casket from above that it becomes clear that once again, the resin conceals, within its smooth dome, shimmering images – beautiful faces, figures from contemporary fashion magazines, sunbathing women and men – which cannot be seen from the sides. The images shimmer and distort until the eye perceives them directly from above.

The largest of Ms. Franklin's pieces, described as "modern-day totem poles", are imposing columns, symbols of antiquity, superimposed with images of modern-day life – once again contemporary fashion magazine figures as well as enlarged classified newspaper advertisements. Here the resin is apparent in graceful folds and swirls on the columns. The juxtaposition of the dignified, stately form of the columns and the ultra-modern, fast-paced world that the advertisements represent is striking.

The three forms of sculpture are linked by theme as well as by the use of plastic resin, each demonstrating in its own way the passage of time. The young ballerina *Chantal*'s expression radiates the cheerfulness and optimism of youth, deftly captured and stilled though time moves on. The treasure chests preserve the essence of the ever-elusive

present moment. The classified advertisements decorating the columns timelessly announce births, deaths, and apartments for rent. Ms. Franklin has attempted to capture the essence of humanity at selected moments and present it, unchanged and unchanging. Her work, however, has the effect of heightening consciousness of the transience of youth and moments that slip by unnoticed, and the viewer realizes with a twinge of discomfort that in the real world, time, and life, have pushed busily and relentlessly on.

Life then, as reflected in these pieces, is a series of fleeting moments whose meanings are elusive when reflected upon with memories tainted with subjectivity as ours so often are. The function of the plastic resin is that of a preserving agent, containing moments and images frozen so that we may objectively, at our own pace, grasp the significance of moments passed. It is an interesting twist, however, that the very preserving agent itself, the resin, is incapable of complete objectivity. As the artist works, the resin assumes varied characteristics of its own, resulting in an interesting combination of transparent and opaque, rough and smooth, which influences and in some cases distorts perception. This provides for a multitude of possible interpretations beyond the obvious, adding depth and an air of mystery to the silent, frozen images so prevalent in Ms. Franklin's work.



Hannah Franklin, *Time Passes*. 1989. Fibre de verre, résine, bois. 8' x 4' x 4'.