

ETC



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ApriU 3, 1991

Paul McLure

Numéro 15, été 1991

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/35962ac>

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Éditeur(s)

Revue d'art contemporain ETC inc.

ISSN

0835-7641 (imprimé)

1923-3205 (numérique)

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Citer ce compte rendu

McLure, P. (1991). Compte rendu de [Tension and Balance / Lam de Wolf, Galerie Jocelyne Gobeil, Montréal, March 16 to ApriU 3, 1991]. *ETC*, (15), 44–44.

TENSION AND BALANCE

Lam de Wolf, Galerie Jocelyne Gobeil, Montréal, March 16 to April 23, 1991

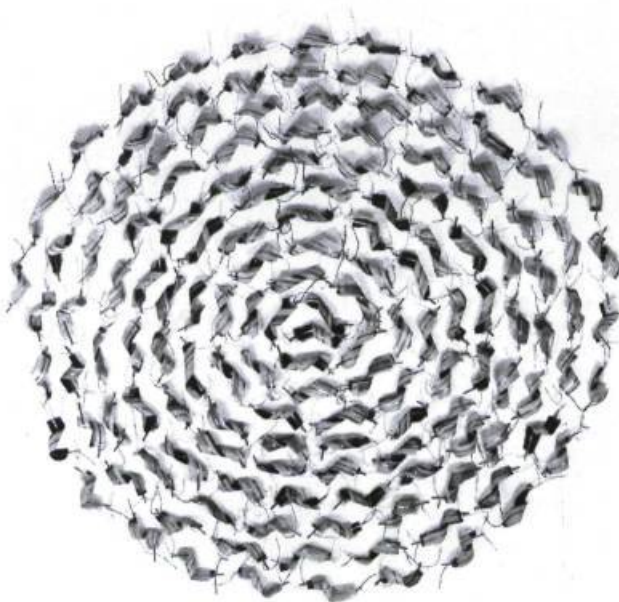
Dutch textile artist Lam de Wolf, in a predominantly emotional process of working, uses the materials as her starting point. Her work is about itself, the medium's characteristic properties and limitations. It evokes a sense of experimentation, of the process by which the artist has manipulated the materials in ways that they allow themselves to be manipulated. This process, although intuitive by nature, ultimately expresses a rationality in form. In combining layered and painted fabrics (silks, cottons and linens) with wood sticks or strips of iron, both tension and balance are created between the soft and hard qualities inherent in each. Her name, taken from the lamb and the wolf, is like her work – part soft, part hard. De Wolf has a strong sensitivity to colour, and colour plays a secondary role in her pieces. Hand painting rather than dyeing the fabric, she mainly uses rich pastel colours as emotional indicators that relate to specific experiences and places visited. Furthering her intuitive process, there is an “unfinished” character to all of her work because the edges of fabric are to fray, yet this aesthetic is really used to directly reveal the material's structure. At the start of her career, de Wolf used textiles exclusively in her free form work, which spoke directly of its relationship to the body. The path taken from these “wearables” to the more autonomous creations she makes today has led not only to an emphasis on structure, with the introduction of contrasting material, but also to an increased demand for space. Five of these pieces,

generally conceived as wall murals, were shown in this exhibition. Realized through a combination of independent similar elements, they are blended in a geometric and rhythmic pattern directly relating to the space they occupy. Like building blocks, this system allows the work to be displayed in an infinite variety of forms in an infinite variety of locations. Some of these structured pieces have again returned to the wearable theme as an option. Also displayed in this exhibition were these new “wearables”. Although functioning successfully as autonomous wall pieces or floor sculptures,

when worn they begin to explore once again the relationship they have to the body. The notion of body adornment and protection arises as these pieces extend out of the space the wearer occupies, appropriating it as their own. This work challenges both the viewer and the wearer through its theatrical or even performance-related approach. Although wearability, which engaged her over ten years ago, has returned to her works, de Wolf

continues to explore themes such as repetition, flexibility, colour and movement. These have remained constant throughout her career. As some of her textile sculptures may be used in relation to the body, de Wolf has, over the past ten years, played a vital role in the development of the “New Jewellery” movement in Europe and North America. It is these “wearables” that she exhibited with Galerie Jocelyne Gobeil in Montreal, a gallery devoted to contemporary art jewellery.

PAUL MCCLURE



Lam De Wolf, *Muurwerk*, 1988. Mural, faded fabric, iron ; 200 cm x 200 cm.
Photo : Tom Haartsen.