

Manon Labrecque, L'origine d'un mouvement

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MANON LABRECQUE,

Stepping into the first exhibition room at AXENÉO7, I encounter a hanging video screen at the centre of which is the outline of two hands, as if I had traced my own hands onto the screen and filled them in with scribbles. I want to reach out and touch the screen, fit my hands into the outlines. Instead, I watch another's body on the screen as it begins to move slowly and hesitantly towards the scribbled hands. As she gets closer, I watch her move, with eyes closed, arms outstretched, hands moving into the outline of the drawn hands. For a brief moment, her hands and the sketched hands unite as screen,

body, and drawing become one. In this video, aptly named *touchée* [touched] (2015), touch, not sight, is the focus of the recorded gestures. This video installation is part of Montreal artist Manon Labrecque's enticing solo exhibition, *L'origine d'un mouvement*.¹ The curator Nicole Gingras has named each of the three exhibition rooms. She calls the first room The Gallery of Shadows, as each of the black and white videos explore the relationship between seeing and not seeing, between a body and its visible traces. In the second video, *apprentissage* [learning] (2015), we see a simple red outline of a body on the screen, and again the same figure

(Labrecque), this time blurred, moves slowly into the space of the outline, but only momentarily. The living body slowly moves to the ground and lies prostrate, a fleshy shadow of the standing hollow outline—a body learning how to be in relation to its image. The last installation in The Gallery of Shadows is *dessous ma chair rouge* [under my red flesh] (2015). Here two video screens face each other. In one video, a woman's face dissolves and briefly vanishes, and in the facing video she covers her mouth and eyes with her hands.

Manon Labrecque's unassuming yet provocative works in this exhibition speak most strongly to iden-



Manon Labrecque, *Moulin à prières*, 2015. Kinetic sound installation. Wood (red oak), aluminum, tripods, motors, LED lights, lenses, prints on acetate sheets, clamps, contact mics, speakers, mixer, amplifier, electronic circuit. Photo: Manon Labrecque.

L'origine d'un mouvement

tity, subjectivity, and the body. Making concrete the demise of the Cartesian subject (as static and fixed), Labrecque's works seem to ask questions about subjectivity. How does a body feel? How does a body remember? How does a body move? In these video installations in the first room, Labrecque challenges the priority often given to vision, looking for other ways to be, or perhaps more appropriately, to become, as a process of time passing, of a body feeling, breathing, moving.

Trained in both contemporary dance and visual art, Labrecque combines movement into her visual work in interesting and original ways, the most remarka-

ble of which is the installation in the largest room at AXENÉO7. In *moulin à prières* [prayer wheel] (2015), three handmade projectors, which resemble old overhead projectors, are crudely set up to project a series of static images onto three of the four walls. Like a rudimentary zoetrope, or a simple animation, the consecutive images move into the light and frame of the projector in quick succession. In the first series, we see the upper part of a woman's body dressed in red, hands hiding her face; in the second, we see only hands gesturing out, palms up; and lastly, a body which appears to be floating or falling through space, first the legs and then the torso. Or

first the torso and then the legs, as the repetition of the images creates a rhythm of its own. The rhythmic clicks resonating in the large room—the amplified click of the machines, as they turn off and on, and the sound of the acetate sheets with the images, as they come into view—remind us of our other senses, particularly our hearing. This work offers a different kind of prayer, a new mantra, as we watch the woman's body rhythmically move through space and time in *The Gallery of Light*.

The last space, described by Gingras as *The Gallery of Traces*, contains six child-like drawings placed on easels scattered around the room. *Les uns* [the ones]



Manon Labrecque, *apprentissage*, 2015. Installation: HD video, black and white, 5 min 56 s. Drawing on wall. Photo: Manon Labrecque.



(2008-2015) again displaces the hierarchy of vision. With her eyes closed, Labrecque has attempted to remember and represent sensations and experiences through trace and gesture. Made with graphite and oil pastels, these works offer misaligned bodies—often doubled, with misplaced hands and eyes, smears of colour, smudges, and fingerprints—traces of the body and of the past. Here, as I manoeuvre around the easels, I become more aware of my own body in the space, my inability to touch, my own breathing.

Labrecque's work is not only reflective of the demise of the Cartesian subject, but also offers a world in which the phenomenological body—our bodily experience—and not simply vision, is central to our understanding of subjectivity. Labrecque's work also seems to underline the ways in which the phenomenological body is linked to duration, to lived experience, to bodies moving through time. The implications of such a shift, in which subjectivity is seen as a process rather than a located place of being, seems to reflect more recent shifts in critical thinking about identity, such as Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's concept of becoming, or Julia Kristeva's subject in process, or Amelia Jones's recent use of the term identification rather than identity, which she considers a more static category.

Labrecque's elegant solo exhibition incorporates movement and gesture to reflect on subjectivity, bodily experience, and memory, sometimes more directly, as in her drawings, and sometimes in more subtle ways through gestures that focus on touch, sound, and experience. Her exploration of the body moving in time and space seems to reiterate the way in which our sense of being is always in process and never fixed.

I walk back to the first room, The Gallery of Shadows, and I watch the videos again...

Anna Khimasia

Anna Khimasia received her Ph.D. from the Institute for Comparative Studies in Literature, Art and Culture at Carleton University, in 2015. Her dissertation considered the intersection of autofiction, performance archives, and performativity in the work of contemporary French artist Sophie Calle. Khimasia has been a Contract Instructor at Carleton University since 2008.

¹ *L'origine d'un mouvement* by Manon Labrecque was curated by Nicole Gingras and presented at AXENÉO7, Gatineau, Quebec, from April 1 to May 2, 2015.



Manon Labrecque, *touchée*, 2015. Installation : vidéo HD, noir et blanc, 4 min 50 s. Dessin sur papier calque. Photos : Manon Labrecque.

