

Where Ritual and Re-conceptual Art Meet: The Work of Anne Lewis

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Numéro 79, printemps 2007

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/8808ac>

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Éditeur(s)

Le Centre de diffusion 3D

ISSN

0821-9222 (imprimé)

1923-2551 (numérique)

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Citer ce document

Ascher, C. (2007). Where Ritual and Re-conceptual Art Meet: The Work of Anne Lewis. *Espace Sculpture*, (79), 37–38.

être vers la fin de certaines journées sombres d'automne) accentuait par ailleurs l'effet de chute dicté par la verticalité spectaculaire de l'installation. La tentation est grande de relier, ne serait-ce qu'indirectement, cette précipitation de matière translucide au genre de la ruine. Comme le suggérait le communiqué de presse rédigé par la directrice de Quartier Éphémère, Caroline Andrieu, *My Darling* se laisse lire comme si chacun de ses fils provenait de fuites dans la toiture, révélées par une ondée, rappelant au souvenir le degré de délabrement connu par l'édifice avant les rénovations de 2002 en vue de sa reconversion en centre de création et de diffusion de l'art contemporain.

Bien que cette lecture ait demeurant fort séduisante ait comme effet de réduire *My Darling* à une fonction figurative, tronquant du coup sa charge sémantique, elle avait néanmoins l'avantage d'aviver, par une sorte de flirt avec

l'histoire récente des lieux, une indéniable dimension archéologique, laquelle résonne avec d'autres aspects de l'œuvre. Il faut noter que cette lecture était sans conteste favorisée par l'ajout au bout de certains fils, par l'artiste, de flaques d'eau simulées par des pastilles de vinyle transparent, comme si l'eau s'accumulait dans les airs, figée, comme pour souligner le caractère intemporel de l'installation. L'impression forte d'une interruption de la cascade d'eau donnait lieu à un fascinant saisissement temporel auquel le cinéma nous a habitués ces dernières années.

Au gré de l'expérimentation de cette œuvre dont la dimension pragmatique n'était qu'une des facettes, le visiteur aura noté la présence de petits éclats de lumière – des lucioles, suggère bellement Andrieu – témoignant de la présence d'autres éléments encore. S'approchant pour saisir la nature de ces « apparitions », le

visiteur avait tôt fait de constater que les fils supportaient des étiquettes de vinyle transparent sur lesquelles étaient inscrits les noms de personnages et la mémoire de faits historiques marquants, tirés du passé du quartier du Faubourg des Récollets, anciennement Griffintown, qui accueille Quartier Éphémère. En plus de résonner avec la mission que s'est donnée Quartier Éphémère de revigorer ce quartier, la pluie matérialisée s'avérait être un champ d'honneur dédié aux fantômes de ces lieux, convoqués par une œuvre affairée à commémorer l'histoire d'un quartier dont le nouveau nom, imposé en 1990 en l'honneur des premiers missionnaires venus en Nouvelle-France, fait peu de cas de la riche culture irlandaise qui en a marqué l'histoire.

Ainsi, l'œuvre – et la publication d'un modeste livre d'artiste sous forme de carte singulière reliant géographie et histoire par un fil de nylon – venait remplir un vide bien

différent de celui, physique, de l'espace, en orchestrant des rencontres réelles (avec l'œuvre et ses filaments) et virtuelles (entre les acteurs de l'histoire), conjuguant la fragilité de son matériau avec celle de l'histoire. De même, ce *My Darling*, dont le titre inscrivait un énoncé à la première personne, traduisant une appropriation personnelle de l'histoire, agençait une union entre le temps qu'il fait et le temps qui fut, et fuit. ←

Karilee Fuglem, *My Darling*
Fonderie Darling, Montréal
21 septembre – 19 novembre 2006

Ancien critique d'art au quotidien *Le Devoir*, Bernard LAMARCHE est conservateur de l'art contemporain au Musée régional de Rimouski. En plus de ses nombreuses publications, il a en outre été commissaire de l'édition 2003 de la Manif d'art, à Québec, et de *Riopelle. Impressions sans fin* au Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, en 2005.

Where Ritual and Re-conceptual Art Meet: The Work of Anne LEWIS

Claudine ASCHER

As the Director/Curator of Galerie de la Ville, in Dollard-des-Ormeaux, I had the pleasure of working with Anne Lewis in October of this year to mount her exhibition entitled *The Field Hospital* at the gallery. Her submission for exhibition was especially interesting to me because her work combines two opposing and perceptually contradictory professions: she is both an artist and a news reporter.

Anne Lewis is known locally as the medical news reporter for CTV Montreal, an English-language television station which is part of the Canadian CTV News network. Her twice-weekly reports include information about new medications, and medical procedures, and about laws or edicts that affect medical practices or policies. She also presents profiles of people who have been affected by these, doctors or other practitioners, patients, researchers, government officials, anyone, in fact, who has made medical news, or who reflects their effects for good or ill.

Placing herself in front of the camera to deliver "the news," she becomes the narrator. What the camera eye and therefore the viewing public see is the face and voice of "information," personable, poised, professional, able to modulate body language, facial expression and voice inflection on cue to communicate an informed, trust-

worthy objectivity.

There is only a very small place there, in the taped image and the recorded voice captured by video or digital technology or written in words on the printed page, for Anne Lewis the individual. She must suppress the wonder, shock, fear, pain or any other emotion the human being feels as she confronts the raw elements of the story she tells. Any reaction, a raised eyebrow, an intake of breath, the turn of her face or widening of her eyes, can colour the story, taint it with "subjectivity" and therefore threaten to discredit her report. She has to be very controlled to avoid any hint that she is manipulating the information to minimize the perception that she may be influencing the viewer.

She does not have any such restraint in her studio. For Anne Lewis is also a visual artist. She was an artist, in fact, before becoming a reporter, one born and raised in Belfast, Northern Ireland at the height of its sectarian violence. In her works of that period she channelled what she witnessed, much of it inhumane acts by enemies on a conceptual level, into works of art that did not gag her emotions or restrain her gestures. Manipulating charcoal, paint and mixed media, she edited

in a different way, searching for the visual elements that would communicate not the facts of what she experienced but their essence, the impact these had on her humanity and by extension our humanity.

Today, these two aspects of her life co-exist symbiotically: as a reporter, she witnesses, notes and informs about the major events of our lives in the role of the objective observer; as an artist she experiences and expresses them from the position of philosopher and poet. The reporter's media are the facts, figures and details of current events and her product the spools of videotape, digital disks or even the newspaper pages on which news articles are printed. These are broadcast or circulated then stored in their cases and shelved. The artist then takes these same elements and combines them, mixed-media style, that is, by causing them to interact and merge physically with the materials used by the medical professionals in her reports and with her artist's mark-making media: paint, plaster, oil, acrylic medium, surgical tape, tissue and wax papers and natural materials like earth and seeds combine with plastic video

cases, video cassettes and newspaper sheets in her art-making process.

While as a reporter she must deliver the news, as an artist she can manipulate it. She has, in fact, made the news itself her subject, not the details of a ravaging cancer or of a breakthrough in medical technology, but "the news" as an



→ Anne LEWIS, *Knowing Too Much (En savoir trop)*, 2006. Detail. Photo: David Weigens.



inevitable presence in our lives, its content, its impact, its volume. By handling the video cassettes, their cases and the newspaper pages that transmit and store her news stories as an artist, she can transform them. She takes these objects apart, cuts them or into them, buries them in dirt or submerges them in water for days, glues them on other surfaces like tissue or wax paper and floats them in lakes and rivers to later document their experience via digital photographs; she collages them onto paper surfaces, paints them with oils, binds them with acrylic medium, plaster, wire or plastic wrap... all these free gestures allow her to deconstruct "the news," thus symbolically mitigating the impersonal, often intimidating and sometimes frightening nature of its content.

The most recent manifestation

of this process was the work we installed in Galerie de la Ville, which was on view from October 11 to November 12, 2006 as part of her solo exhibition. Composed as a high-relief, mural assemblage on three recessed walls of the gallery, the collection of 270 broadcast cassettes and their cases was arranged in rows, much like books are arranged on library stacks.

At first sight, the final assemblage evokes images of cartouches of the kind found on the inside of pyramid walls. Approaching the mural, one feels as an archaeologist entering a hidden chamber for the first time, a chamber to which the elements have found access. Dark and dank seems the environment after a few moments of pause, ghosts seem to linger here. The feeling is doubly uncanny because these objects one sees assembled

are not "ancient" or "foreign" but the detritus of a technology only recently touted as "cutting edge" and still in its death throes.

Rich textures and expressive, painted marks draw one in for a closer look. The plastic cassette cases have become the canvas on which strangely ritualistic marks have been made. Some of the cases are closed, the contents hidden inside, protected from prying eyes, their privacy restored. Some hang open and empty, their contents lost or destroyed, while in others, the cassettes themselves hang, bound in plastic sheeting or with string, earth or desiccated leaves clinging to them. They seem to have been embalmed, mummified, then assailed by the passage of time and the touch of the elements. The only clues as to what stories they contain are revealed when one perceives torn bits of labels on the backs of the cassette cases or on the tape housings.

Therein lies the true impact of this work entitled *Knowing Too Much*. Reading the snatches of text, one's stomach clenches. "Into Chaos," "Hussein is Handed Down," "Treatment for Erectile Dysfunction," "Beluga Whale Swims," "Heart Transplant," etc. These are "now" snatches, bits of what only yesterday

were "current events," yet they are already consigned to the past, their effect already "old news" and integrated into the fibre of our daily lives. These tragedies, innovations, aggressions, break-downs and discoveries all are "gone and buried," their funeral an artistic process at once ritualised and self-conscious, at once expressive and conceptualised.

Faced with this wall of the silenced, one cannot separate the altered object from the ritualised action from the interplay between the oral story tradition and the tactile image. More than the individual, physical works that ensue from this interaction between artist and reporter, between the reporter's product and the artist's, it is the process itself of re-conceptualising "the news" that is Anne Lewis' art. ←

Anne Lewis, *The Field Hospital*
Galerie de la Ville, Dollard-des-Ormeaux
October 11 to November 12, 2006

Claudine ASCHER has taught art techniques for the past nineteen years, currently at the Saidye Bronfman Centre School of Fine Arts, the Visual Arts Centre (both in Montreal) and the Dollard Centre for the Arts (in Dollard-des-Ormeaux). She is also a practicing artist, exhibiting sculpture and other works regularly in solo and group exhibitions, and represented by galleries in Montreal, Hudson and Regina.

Susan COLLETT: *Impluvium*

Virginia EICHHORN

An *impluvium* is a small sunken pool usually found in ancient Greek and Roman homes. It would catch the rainwater, trapping overflow in a subterranean cistern for reserve until later when needed. It was not uncommon for the impluvium to be decorated with mosaics or small sculptures and flowers. Susan Collett's *Impluvium* exhibition consists of six large sculptural works set amidst the birch trees, plants and flowers that ornament the Burlington Art Center's cloistered courtyard. These sculptures may indeed catch rainwater, but they cannot hold it—any more than we in the present can truly hold onto the past and the passage of time.

The sculptures developed out of her *Moiré* series which began when she undertook a residency in Jingdezhen, China, the centre for porcelain production, after winning the \$10,000.00 Winifred Shantz Award for Ceramists in 2001. Collett's response to the layered environment that she experienced there, with its multi-tiered tea

farming, layered tile rooftops and willowing bamboo forests, became an inspiration. She said that the exquisite environment inspired her in a daily ritual of sketching. Suddenly disparate objects such as piles of building bricks, the light from cut window panels and the delicate design of beehives and wasp nests became the foundation from which the *Moiré* sculptures grew.

The resulting works are sophisticated and unexpected, consisting of an elegant synthesis of contradictions and illusions. Roughly they are vessel shaped yet any potential for them to be seen as traditional markers of containment has been repudiated. Constructed with bands of paper clay, these undulating structures are pierced and punctured thereby allowing the interior space to spill out into the exterior and bringing light and air back into what would otherwise be the space hidden within.

They look unbearably fragile and delicate, seeming somehow vulner-

able and on the brink of disintegration. They appear to be folding in and upon themselves with edges and bodies that ebb, flow and gracefully undulate. This however is naught but illusion. The works are sturdy. They are heavy, solid and definite. What we think looks to be something in the midst of transition from one form to another is, in fact, in a state of stasis. While these sculptures continually appear to be on the brink of change and transformation, they are in fact eternal in their composition.

Central to the artist's motivation was engagement with the viewer's understanding and expectations of temporality. Placed upon large gunmetal grey plinths, the sculptures appear to grow upwards like moss or lichens surrounding trunks of trees or covering stones. Collett's use of colouring in the glazes is sophisticated and subtle, referencing her years of experience as a printmaker



and painter, as well as sculptor. Like the leaves on the bushes and ground cover that predominate the courtyard, Collett's interior/exterior are different. Exterior colours refer-

Susan COLLETT,
Impluvium, 2006. Detail.
Courtyard Burlington Art
Center. Photo: Nicholas
Stirling.