

## *Inhabiting Spaces*

Mireille Perron

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## Inhabiting Spaces

Mireille PERRON

*Inhabiting Spaces*, an exhibition curated by Bozenna Wisniewska, invites an international audience to take part in a 'spatial dialogue' with four Calgary artists: Katie Ohe, Greg Payce, Laurel Smith and Helen Hadala. Wisniewska puts forward these artists' works as 'spatial declarations.' In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau finds it useful to distinguish between 'place' and 'space.' Place, according to de Certeau, refers to a pre-established order while space, on the other hand, needs to be constantly activated to exist. In short, space is produced when place is activated in practice. Space, for de Certeau, is therefore "practiced place."<sup>1</sup> This distinction between space and place constitutes a useful reference to understand how the following selected works, from the larger group exhibition, 'inhabit spaces.'

Katie Ohe is a long time expert at choreographing objects and people to generate space. If place is where we are, the relationship of our everyday actions to our surroundings is what creates space. Kinetic sculptures such as *Monsoon*, *Weeping Bees*, and *Typhoon* are space-generating devices. In *Monsoon*, mesmerized participants engage in a dance with perfectly scaled and balanced cloud forms rotating on the floor. The objects' surfaces are smooth and tactile, inviting spontaneous touch to set them into motion. Each 'cloud' displays a unique rotary movement. Similar tactics of engagement are used in *Weeping Bees* and *Typhoon* but with different references to the natural world and everyday life. Katie Ohe makes her audience engage in the process of space-making; the 'place' of the gallery is transformed into a 'space' of haptic poetry where we can dance on/with/in the clouds, away/in/with the *Weeping Bees* or swirl around with the *Typhoon*.

Haptic perception or the process of recognizing objects through a sense of being there or touch is also

in operation in Greg Payce's arrangements. Payce's clay vessels use a sophisticated optical illusion to create human forms out of the negative spaces between the objects. In *Passion over Reason over Passion*, the space left from the contours between two white porcelain vases forms a human head. This play is echoed in his life-size lenticular photography titled *Pantheon Verisimilus*. Lenticular images convey the illusion of 3D and/or video motion and are familiar images in smaller size novelty versions. But contrary to these popular versions, the scale of *Pantheon Verisimilus* is simply striking. The 'lenticular temple' is composed of five large panels that form a continuous image, displaying a row of vases where again the negative spaces take the form of human figures. Walking back and forth in front of the lenticular photograph gives the impression that one could pass through the apertures between the vases. All Payce's compositions play expertly with liminal space/state characterized by ambiguity, openness and indeterminacy. One's sense of

identity dissolves to some extent, bringing about disorientation where 'in-betweenness' or the 'void' is made more or as concrete as 'objectness.' Payce invites us to live in the space of verisimilitude.

Laurel Smith has coined the term "ornaminimalism" to describe the combined references to ornamentation and minimalism in her work. For *Inhabiting Spaces*, one of her recurring motifs is adapted from botanical designs seen in photographs of Empress Cixi in her royal regalia. In *Carrick Bend* and *Pale Morning*, this motif is laser-cut into Plexiglas panels with the swirls and curls casting dramatic shadows on the walls. In *Cixi's Garden*, they are printed in bright colours while other rococo motifs historically acknowledging the presence of chinoiserie, are embossed beside them. These works become a hybrid of contemporary and historical Western and Chinese aesthetics. Cixi, nicknamed 'The Dragon Lady,' was a powerful Chinese empress ruling from 1895 to 1909 during the Qing Dynasty, the last dynasty before the Republic of China.



Greg PAYCE,  
*Pantheon  
Verisimilus*, 2007.  
Lenticular  
photographs  
composed on  
5 panels. 170x122  
x8cm. Photo:  
courtesy the artist.



Laurel SMITH, *Cixi's Garden*, 2010. Detail. 40 prints of 25.5x19 cm. Embossed etchings on BFK Rives paper. Photo: courtesy the artist.

→→  
Helena HADALA, *After Coomba #1*, 2009. Sumi ink, charcoal & conte on frosted Mylar. 183x107 cm. Photo: Geoff WILLIAMS.

Katie OHE, *Monsoon*, 2005-2006. Installation sculpture (2 components), welded steel, rotary system. 18x26x28 cm/each). Photo: Witold WISNIEWSKI.

Cixi is known for, among others, building a sumptuous pleasure garden by embezzling funds reserved for building a navy fleet. Excess, beauty and corruption are enduring themes in Smith's practice. She enrolled Madame de Pompadour's courtly excesses for similar reasons in a previous composition. Smith's production puts forward the pleasures of excess and the reductive purity of minimalism as dangerous illusions. *Cixi's Garden* is at once a 'place of beauty' and a 'space of corruption.'

Helen Hadala draws on large frosted Mylar sheets with charcoal, conte and ink. The artist depicts elusive landscapes and structures that mix scale, light sources and textures. The series *Coomba Road* and *After Coomba* are based on her Australian Journey in the remote region of Coomba. The artist explored the world of Australian Aboriginal culture, which understands time and space as cyclical, and non-linear. To better enact this non-Western position, Hadala adopts a fluid and organic genesis of forms. In doing so she invites her viewers to feel her work through their body, their physical being, in order to re-construct her encounters with the Australian Aboriginal world. *After Coomba* evokes landscape. The series presents, in an emblematic form, the physical landscape as a cultural, and thus symbolic, geography. Hadala's work also plays with the void as a

carrier of meaning. The translucency of the Mylar sheets reveals a layered complexity in complicity with the wall behind them and makes the later act as a dream-like space, inviting the viewer to journey into the beyond.

Ohe, Payce, Smith and Hadala invite us to share the creative, conflictive and changing nature of relationships between people, place and space. They make us experience what Derrick de Kerckhove refers to as having a 'point of being' in lieu of a 'point of view:' "the point of being,

that is a proprioceptive sensation of the world, may be doubling if not replacing the point of view as the principal referent of my position in space."<sup>2</sup> Ultimately it is through our senses that we make meaning, that we inhabit spaces with these artists.

The European Tour of this exhibition was launched in June 2010 at the internationally renowned Centre for Contemporary Art "Laznia" in Gdansk, Poland, followed by a subsequent presentation at the Contemporary Art Gallery of the Fine Arts Faculty of the University of Porto in

Porto, Portugal. The tour continued in August 2010 at the Porvoon Taidehalli—Gallery of Contemporary Art in Porvoo, Finland, before concluding back home at the Triangle Gallery in Calgary, Alberta from Oct. 1 to 27, 2010.<sup>3</sup> ←

**Mireille PERRON** was born in Montréal, Québec. Since 1982, her installations have appeared in solo and group exhibitions in Canada, Europe and the United States. She is the founder of the Laboratory of Feminist Pataphysics (LFP), which promotes social and collaborative experiments that masquerade as artworks/events. She has also written and published on a variety of subjects related to representation. Most recent examples of the range of her work include *The Laboratory of Feminist Pataphysics presents Ateliers of the Near Future*, 2010, a collaborative exhibition, Stride Gallery, Calgary; *Utopic Impulses: Contemporary Ceramics Practice*, Ronsdale Press, 2008, an anthology co-edited with Ruth Chambers and Amy Gogarty; *Medical Tabulae: Visual Arts and Medical Representation*, co-edited with Dr. Allister Neher, a thematic issue for *RACAR* vol.XXXIII, 1-2, 2008. Perron lives and works in Calgary, Alberta where she teaches at the Alberta College of Art + Design.

#### NOTES

1. Michel de Certeau. *The Practice of Everyday Life*, (University of California Press: Berkeley, 1984). 117
2. Derrick de Kerckhove. *Beyond Perspective: From the Point of View to the Point of Being*, Sonic Acts XIII, The Poetics of Space, Spatial Explorations in art, science and technology, Feb. 25-28, 2010, Amsterdam. <http://2010.sonicacts.com/programme/keynote-derrick-de-kerckhove/>
3. Inhabiting Spaces website: <http://www.trianglegallery.com/exhibits/2010inhabiting/>

