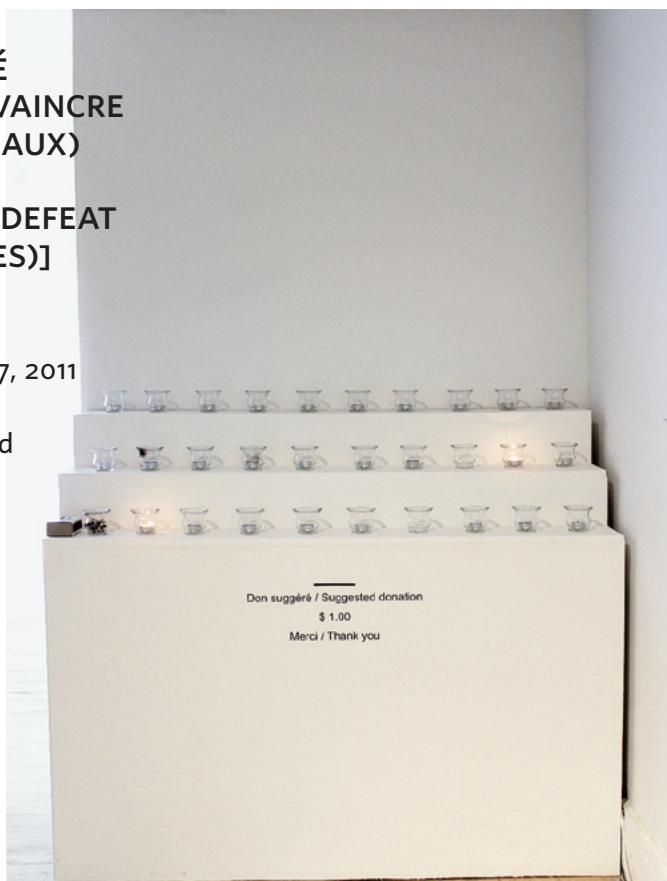


PAVILLON LEVÉ
(DIX JOURS À VAINCRE
LES MORTES-EAUX)
[RAISED FLAG
(TEN DAYS TO DEFEAT
THE NEAP TIDES)]

CIRCA, MONTREAL
JULY 29 - AUGUST 7, 2011

by Emily Rosamond



A last-minute gap in Circa's summer programming prompted artist-curators Andréanne Godin and Guillaume Clermont to fill it. They proposed and quickly assembled a diverse exhibition of work mostly produced within Concordia and Université du Québec à Montréal's MFA programs. Installations, paintings, drawings, sculptures, a video loop, textiles, photography, and text sprawled through the gallery's two exhibition spaces. And performances from opening night left traces that remained throughout the show. The works were only loosely strung together by a poetic, polemical image in the title: "defeating the neap tides" (*vaincre les mortes-eaux*) speaks to the desire to overcome a stagnant period in which, as Godin puts it, "whole ocean ecosystems impatiently wait for the rhythm to return."¹

While the works were disparate almost to the point of being incoherent, the exhibition was anything but. Its curators admirably arranged the works into a dynamic, heterogeneous whole, creating a space pulsating with inter-related inflections, narratives, risks, and restless critical acts. Their evident delight in supporting each artist's capacity for risk-taking blossomed into another interest: that in "détourning" one artwork with another, radically shifting its connotations by means of

its proximity to the next piece. The result was, among other things, a fruitful examination of the difference between the qualities of the individual works on display, and those of the exhibition they comprise.

The front reception area offered a first glimpse of the intricate spatial and conceptual strategies threaded through the show. Mona Sharma's installation *Sun Sea* (2011) lends the exhibition's title an oceanic complement. A plush ship rests gently on the floor, surrounded by hundreds of long lengths of turquoise yarn, hanging densely from the ceiling as if to transform the air into water. The work's soft, comforting textures starkly contrast with the story that inspired it: its namesake, the MV *Sun Sea* carried 500 Tamil migrants to British Columbia in 2010 who were seeking refugee status but received an ambivalent Canadian response. In such instances, oceans become vast grey areas between nations. Migrants voyaging from one nation to another trade on the hope that their human rights as refugees will be recognized—rights which, at their most tenuous, seem to hang in the balance between a host country's attitude of either hospitality or hostility. Sharma's work asks us to recognize our everyday participation in fashioning such collective attitudes. Her work will not let us

pass: the yarn ocean encroaches on the entrances to the exhibition spaces. We must agitate the uncertain waters of encounter, rousing the tides. Yet we are also coddled by the work's softness and its lulling narrative propensity.

Carried by the yarn ocean down a corridor, we come to a small, dark room housing Simon Gaudreau's video projection *Dead Wall Reverie* (2010). Jack Nicholson's character in *The Shining* (1980) throws a baseball at the wall of a luxurious hotel. The video loops, making him repeat the crazed gesture over and over. On the title card, a Melville quotation describes his character Bartelby's inability to write, his indifferent "dead wall reverie." The ominous, echoing sound of the ball hitting the wall becomes a Sisyphian soundtrack, describing a feedback loop of frustration, personal stagnation, and failure. The loop festers in the closed-off room—yet not without an escape route. Mathieu Lévesque's *Tableau négatif I (Fantôme)* (2011) is an angular, oddly-shaped hole cut into the wall with brightly painted interior edges. It punctures the room's self-containment, providing a window onto the main exhibition space. This work recalls conceptual art's challenge to commerce, its refusal to produce saleable products (as in William Anastasi's *Wall Removal* pieces from the 1960s). Even so, its smooth interior edges, coated in colourful spray paint, retain a sensuous nod to abstract painting. The bright colours both highlight the form and frame its architectural function. Lévesque's hole in the wall opens the sonic floodgates between the two rooms, allowing *Dead Wall Reverie*'s soundtrack to seep into the rest of the space, washing over it like a mysterious, distant activating pulse.

In the main space, disparate works carefully weave together rhymed material and conceptual concerns. Clusters of common interests and approaches ripple between works—even works with diametrically opposed means of addressing their audience. Particularly interesting are the resonances between the easily legible premises of pieces strongly influenced by conceptual art, and the more open-ended works on display. Kesso-Line Saulnier's *Servez-Vous* (2011) consists of a pile of found and washed textiles and clothing on the floor, along with a wall-mounted, handwritten catalogue of each article's make, size, place of fabrication, and the location where it was found. Visitors are invited to try on the clothes and take away items if

¹ Alexandre Jimenez and Maud Marique, *Un cierge pour l'art/A candle for art*, 2011, interactive installation, candles, matches and collection box

PHOTO: GUILLAUME CLERMONT AND ANDRÉANNE GODIN

Kesso Line
Saulnier,
Sans titre,
2011, textiles
found on the
street, sewing
machine
PHOTO:
GUILLAUME
CLERMONT,
MÉLANIE
MARTIN AND
ANDRÉANNE
GODIN



they so wish. In doing so, they turned a portion of the gallery into something between a second-hand shop and an interactive museum of discarded objects. Such works must court didacticism in order to support a clear call to participation, in this case using easily recognizable objects and directly inviting visitors to act. This approach was thrown into relief against more enigmatic works, such as Guillaume Adjutor Provost's lathed, chromium-plated aluminum rods resting against the wall, or Maude Bernier-Chabot's large, untitled plaster sculpture—an ultra-smooth, rounded cone with areas scratched and gouged out to house sparkly red strawberries. Their juxtaposition strengthens each work, infusing the conceptual premise with an added poetry, and emphasizing the more oblique sculptures' specificity as cultural interrogations into everyday materiality.

Many of the works on display broadly share an engagement with institutional critique—yet they work with this legacy along highly divergent lines. Alexandre Jimenez and Maud Marique's *Un cierge pour l'art/A candle for art* (2011) consists of a tiered, plinth-like structure near the front desk displaying candles that visitors can light, like votives in a Catholic church. This piece calls out the quasi-religious underpinnings of supposedly secular spaces such as contemporary art institutions. (Its tongue-in-cheek religious invocation of "art" also recalls Robert Filliou's humorous, playful didacticism.) In Sheena Hoszko's *Floor Area of Musique Plus: 99 x 81 feet (or 33 x 27 steps)* (2011), a large swath of brown craft paper is folded over itself many times on the floor, its total area the same (so we were told) as that of the Musique Plus store across the street from Circa, visible through the gallery's fourth-floor windows. Hoszko's work thus considers the relations between not-for-profit and commercial spaces as brokers for the arts. These two pieces share an interest

in folding one milieu into another in order to draw out the complex cultural underpinnings of seemingly "neutral" white cubes. My final impression of the show was that of a space re-described many times—ocean, church, thrift store, museum, shop, soundscape—as if each work told us where we were in a different way.

Certainly, this curatorial strategy is not without its trade-offs. Not every work fully succeeds in carrying the exhibition's push to the tides; and the vast array of pieces makes it difficult to focus deeply on the divergent thematic subtexts at play. However, what is achieved is far greater than these caveats: an exhibition that weaves together a lateral network of interconnected critical attitudes toward gallery space. These attitudes carry strong ties to explorations of the late 60s and 70s, such as the landmark 1969 exhibition *When Attitudes Become Form* in Bern and London. A hodgepodge of conceptual art, earthworks, postminimalist sculpture and process art, Scott Burton described the works in this show

as having "very little in common yet also a great deal in common."² This is exactly the paradox that *Pavillon levé* explores: that radically different works, in certain configurations, can stir up a shared attitude while remaining radically different. They magnify each other's edginess, whipping up a restless, coursing, unfocused yet sustained intention to "ask" the space, again and again, what it is. In this, the exhibition interprets the potentials of conceptual art and institutional critique in a highly positive light—not as nihilistic or anti-aesthetic, but as sensuous affirmations (albeit uneasy ones) of the rich, conflicting historical and cultural subtexts of gallery space, rendering them poetically as imagined inflections volleyed between works.

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ENDNOTES

- 1 Andréanne Godin, August 2, 2011 e-mail to the writer.
- 2 Scott Burton, "Notes on the New," in *When Attitudes Become Form: Works—Concepts—Processes—Situations—Information* (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1969).

THE NORMAL CONDITION OF ANY COMMUNICATION

GALLERY TPW, TORONTO
JUNE 23 - JULY 30, 2011

by Joanna Sheridan

In *The Normal Condition of Any Communication*, curator cheyanne turions has gathered together five works that address the distance inherent in communication. Drawing heavily on French philosopher Jacques Rancière's *The Emancipated Spectator*, turions argues in her curatorial essay that language does not close the distance between people, it is the distance between people: communication preserves and reveals that distance. While spoken or written language is central to each of the works in the exhibition—dialogue-based and narrated videos, text-based paper works, and a neon-lettered sign—each frustrates the expectation of clear communication.

The exhibition begins in the storefront of the gallery with a blue neon sign, *Foreigners Everywhere* (2011), by French collective Claire Fontaine. This work can be commissioned in any language except English and here it has been translated into Ojibway by Shirley Williams as *Kino ngawaji megizijig eyaaway*, meaning roughly "All to be out of the way, foreigners are there everywhere."¹ Turions' decision to have the sign rendered into Ojibway, the language of the Mississaugas on whose territory the