

Walter May

André Jodoin

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que où les jeux des rectangles se répondent, les photos accrochées au mur spécifient le contenu même de la thématique et répondent à la structure de l'espace. Comme une sculpture où chaque facette offre un aspect autre de l'oeuvre, l'endroit est marqué d'une présentation distincte sur chacun des plans : le sol devient mer, l'un des murs est rocher, un autre se fait herbe, un autre montre la lune se reflétant sur la mer-la-nuit, tandis que le quatrième sert de support aux photocopies des photographies. Le lieu est fermé, replié sur lui-même; les volets qui bloquent les fenêtres ramènent l'espace vers l'intérieur. On regarde la mer sur laquelle flotte une maquette de chalet. Mais on reste en dehors. Ces souvenirs que l'artiste présente n'appartiennent qu'à elle qui les

projette. Le spectateur est maintenu à distance.

Invitation à la rêverie. Dans le chalet conçu par Helga Schlitter, des montagnes sont accrochées aux fenêtres, un chevreuil voyeur est installé dans l'antichambre. Un banc/quai accueille le visiteur et l'invite à se reposer. Assis ou couché sur cet objet aquatique, au milieu des nénuphars comme dans un tableau de Monet, il lève les yeux sur des fresques/bas-reliefs. Des scènes idylliques où l'homme, l'animal et la nature sont en parfaite harmonie, des scènes comme en véhiculent les clubs de chasse et de pêche. Le regard s'arrête sur un mur rempli de poissons, traverse des temples dorés issus d'un autre monde. Des vestiges récupérés dans la bâtisse font écho à ces temples, témoins d'une culture disparue. L'artiste indique des pistes qui sont tantôt des réalités connues, tantôt des visions fantastiques. Des pistes que le spectateur emprunte pour poursuivre ses propres rêves...

Josette Lamoureux Paquin



Carole Baillargeon, *Le chalet dans la ville*, détail. Installation in situ, boulevard Charest, Québec.

Walter May

Paul Kuhn Fine Arts, Calgary
April 1 - 22, 1989

For some time now Walter May has combined natural objects and industrial materials in the production of sculptural works. On the whole these works have been metaphorical images, using the contrast of materials, the disparity of their functions and visual illusion to draw relations between the natural world and the naturalizing effect that culture has on itself. In the recent works exhibited at Paul Kuhn's, May has left behind this method of making sculpture, at least temporarily. Instead, he has selected ordinary objects from the local environment and surrounding areas and modified them for exhibition. By now, the practice of placing found objects in the gallery prevails in contemporary art to the point where it is perhaps already a *natural* activity to the sculptor, to be included in a time-honoured repertoire of techniques: casting, carving, constructing, placing. In May's work, however, the apparent shift of modes is decisive in that it reveals a text.

Some of the works in the installation appear to be representations of various things, such as a mask and fragments of architecture. Other works just appear as found objects. The perception of these

works is further complicated by their titles. In electing to exhibit found objects, May has precipitated a change in the overall configuration of works so that titles function metonymically, as details of the work. (This stands in contrast to the titles of previous works which are generally related to the works metaphorically, as names). May's titles also group in pairs almost all of the works in the installation (consider the titles *Skin*, *Bones*; *Myth*, *History*; *Empty*, *Full*; etc.). Evidently this is a deliberate strategy on the artist's part to tip the viewer to the text of the installation.

The titles of the works *Myth* and *History* reference concepts which are related to the science of the Museum. For the work *Myth* the box of a contemporary wheelbarrow, without handles or wheel, is hung inverted against the wall and a hooked nose cone attached to its surface. The object resembles a stylized mask, recalling the sense of bold stylization found in the artwork of the North Pacific Coast Indians. In contrast to its origin as a utilitarian object (wheelbarrow), the unusual placement of *Myth*, high on the gallery wall, signifies its removal from the realm of the everyday (*muthos*). *History* is a representation of an architectural fragment, a church alcove, normally reserved for a statue of a saint but here presented as empty. The image is taken from a washtub, a galvanised vessel similar to the wheelbarrow, but hung with its open side facing the gallery and thus forming the image of the arched alcove. Hanging from the bottom are ice picks and a small shovel. Their oxidized surfaces contrast with the galvanized washtub and signify the action of time. *Myth* is a representation of a mask, *History* a representa-

tion of an architectural fragment. Both works are primarily representations of ethnological artifacts, framed within the discourse of museology. That discourse is the forceful play of tacit beliefs and formal conventions which shape widely-held opinions about the cultural and historical signifi- cance of artifacts which form part of a common heritage. The heterogeneity of objects, recognizable artifacts and artifacts whose purpose is unknown, forms the basis for such discursive activity.

The thematic connection between the titles of the works *Skin* and *Bones* suggests a display of native art and culture as found in the Museum's ethnological collections. The work titled *Skin* is a large red metal covering taken from an old garage door and hung on the gallery wall. The reference to a painting on the wall is obvious.

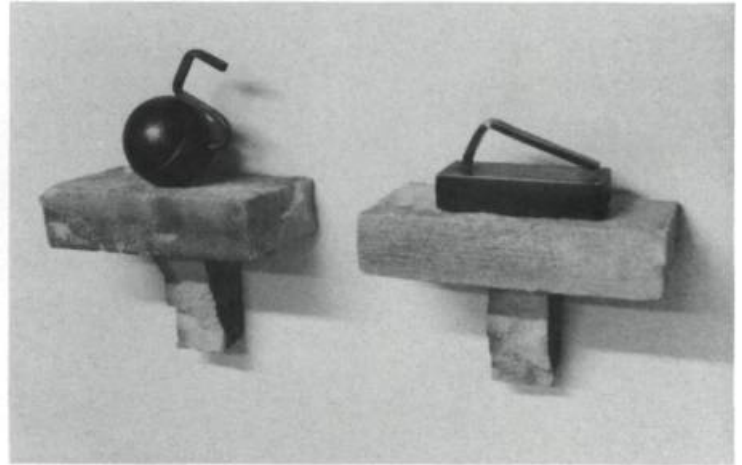
The word 'skin' is taken in terms of an analogy between the exterior siding of a garage door and the surface of a painting while the absent door refers to the painting's frame or support. Placed on the floor directly opposite Skin is a work titled Bones. There is a material, as well as linguistic, connection between the two. Bones is a wood structure, the surface of which is visibly related to Skin. It is a half of the wooden garage door, stood vertically on end in stone supports. Attached to the door's perimeter are numerous short bed legs. The door, bed legs and stone supports present us with references to a structure suited to the human body, a dwelling. It is the image of a frame for stretching skins, making them useful for a portable architecture. The title Bones points to the presence or absence of human or animal life.

May's representations of a painting, a mask and a statuary alcove, are not literal interpretations of these things. The viewer remains aware of the source materials which are of contemporary origin. On account of this the works are able to refer at once to the various historical and cultural functions of art as documented by the Museum and to the question of art's function in contemporary culture.

One work, *Wisdom And Folly*, is most

revealing of the status of the contemporary art in the Museum. Like *History* the work appears to be an architectural fragment, two stone shelves, placed side by side for the purpose of comparing the objects they support. One of these appears to be a metal tool, perhaps a heating iron, as evidenced by the prominent position of a handle welded to a rectangular piece of steel. The other object is a sculpture comprised of a small steel ball with a thick wire figure welded to it. The sculpture resembles the tool in that the wire figure could be used as a handle. However, the work character of the work (the Gestalt) dominates perception and the resemblance appears to be a didactic contrivance. Museum science assigns the artwork a double status: as a cultural artifact of historical significance; and as a work, a cultural phenomena whose meaning is immanent. *Wisdom And Folly* constructs the frame of a sculpture within a sculpture in which the artwork frames the artifact.

The text of May's installation shifts perception of the institution of art between the poles of found objects presented as artworks in the gallery context and artworks represented as artifacts in museum discourse. May's critical gesture lies in disclosing



Walter May, *Wisdom & Folly*. Steel, sandstone. Approx. 12" x 16" x 10".
Photo: K. Kanashiro. Photo courtesy of Paul Kuhn Fine Arts.

and reflecting upon the institution of art within the larger institution of the Museum. This of particular relevance in Calgary where the major public venue for art is in fact housed in a museum with ethnological collections, The Glenbow Museum.

André Jodoin

Les Bêtes industrielles

Galerie Espace

26 août - 10 septembre 1989

Centre-Sud de Montréal. Au bout d'une ruelle, dans la cour d'une maison abandonnée, l'atelier du sculpteur Jean Talbot. Un véritable bunker. Cube de béton armé, sans fenêtres. Rien qu'une porte, massive. Dans un coin, près de l'établi, des poutrelles, des baguettes d'acier, rangées à la verticale. Au fond, adossée au mur, une étagère métallique où attendent des pierres couvertes de poussière. Décor brut, dépourvu de romantisme. La froideur même. C'est ici qu'ont vu le jour les *Bêtes industrielles*. Jean Talbot lâche ses outils pour répondre à mes questions. Il retire ses mouffes de soudeur. Me jette un regard pardessus ses lunettes.

Point de départ de l'oeuvre, un simple

constat : la dégradation de l'environnement. Toute cette pollution et la lente disparition d'espèces animales. Effets indéniables de l'industrialisation. L'artiste a voulu aborder le sujet avec détachement, espièglerie. Sans porter de jugement, sans faire la morale. Tout bonnement, donner libre cours à sa fantaisie. «Déjà, enfant, j'utilisais mon jeu de construction pour fabriquer des monstres, des bêtes fabuleuses. Cette fois, je me suis amusé à imaginer des mutants, c'est-à-dire des créatures nées de l'industrie, produites par l'industrialisation».

Dix bêtes. Issues de croisements entre le mécanique et l'animal. Dix bêtes. Qui vous transforment une galerie en musée d'histoire industrielle. Tantôt, la forme évoque l'excavatrice. Tantôt, une parenté certaine avec la plate-forme de forage, la fusée ou même la catapulte. Machine inscrite dans le code génétique. Les *Bêtes industrielles* ont pour nom *Sorbitus*, *Isonhyque*, *Panthénum*... Du goudron coule dans leurs veines. Elles broutent les cendres de Saint-Basile. Creusent leur terrier

dans les sols contaminés de Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu. Le *Trisodirex* (le dinosaure) hante nos érablières acidifiées. L'*Aspodorum* (le chien) monte la garde à l'entrée d'un site d'enfouissement. L'*Ictosérum* (l'oiseau) niche au sommet d'une montagne de pneus. L'*Hydrolope* (la baleine) et le *Koprah* (le serpent de mer) escortent nos pétroliers, espèrent un naufrage, la marée noire. Libre à l'observateur d'imaginer...

Dix pièces. De dimen-