

Sandra Gregson *Divined*

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[See table of contents](#)

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Bruce Nauman, *10 Heads Circle/Up and Down*, 1990. Cast wax heads. Installation: 2.43 m diameter x 139.7 cm off the ground. Photo: Dorothy Zeidman, "Bruce Nauman 25 Years". Courtesy of Leo Castelli Gallery, New York.

defense mechanisms that inform perception, were seen in a group exhibition on Broadway at the Alternative Museum's 20th season. Japan and China artists are also represented in separate galleries, through work by Yoshiko Kanai using combinations of sculptural figurative representation and selected materials directed toward producing a collision of different values, both physical and existential, and by Wenda Gu, whose work crosses racial borders and national divides in illuminating the effects of ethnic beliefs and prevailing cultural practices on the perception of the art object and notions of the object. Amos Eno artist centre in its 20th season, bridges between sculpture and architecture in Joseph Polmar's Totemitecure installation.

At 560 Broadway, at Max Protech Gallery, photographs of his-

torical monuments by Fariba Hajmadi, in *The Invisible Mirror of Memory*, resist the translation of abstract perceptual relations put into a structure of language which occurs in painting, but which form entire installation environments. At Cavin Morris Inc., an exhibition of mixed media work by Bessie Harvey parallels her participation in the Whitney Biennial.

At this same address across from the SoHo Guggenheim, the modernist minimalist sculpture by Claude Simard in *Passé composé*, transforms time into art, with the notion that the past is only what we carry with us into the present, and at the Nicholas Alexander Gallery on Spring Street, *Material Identities* including work by Simard, Elise Siegel and Carolee Thea. Simard uses material as metaphor for lived experience: the raw material of memories. His objects and installa-

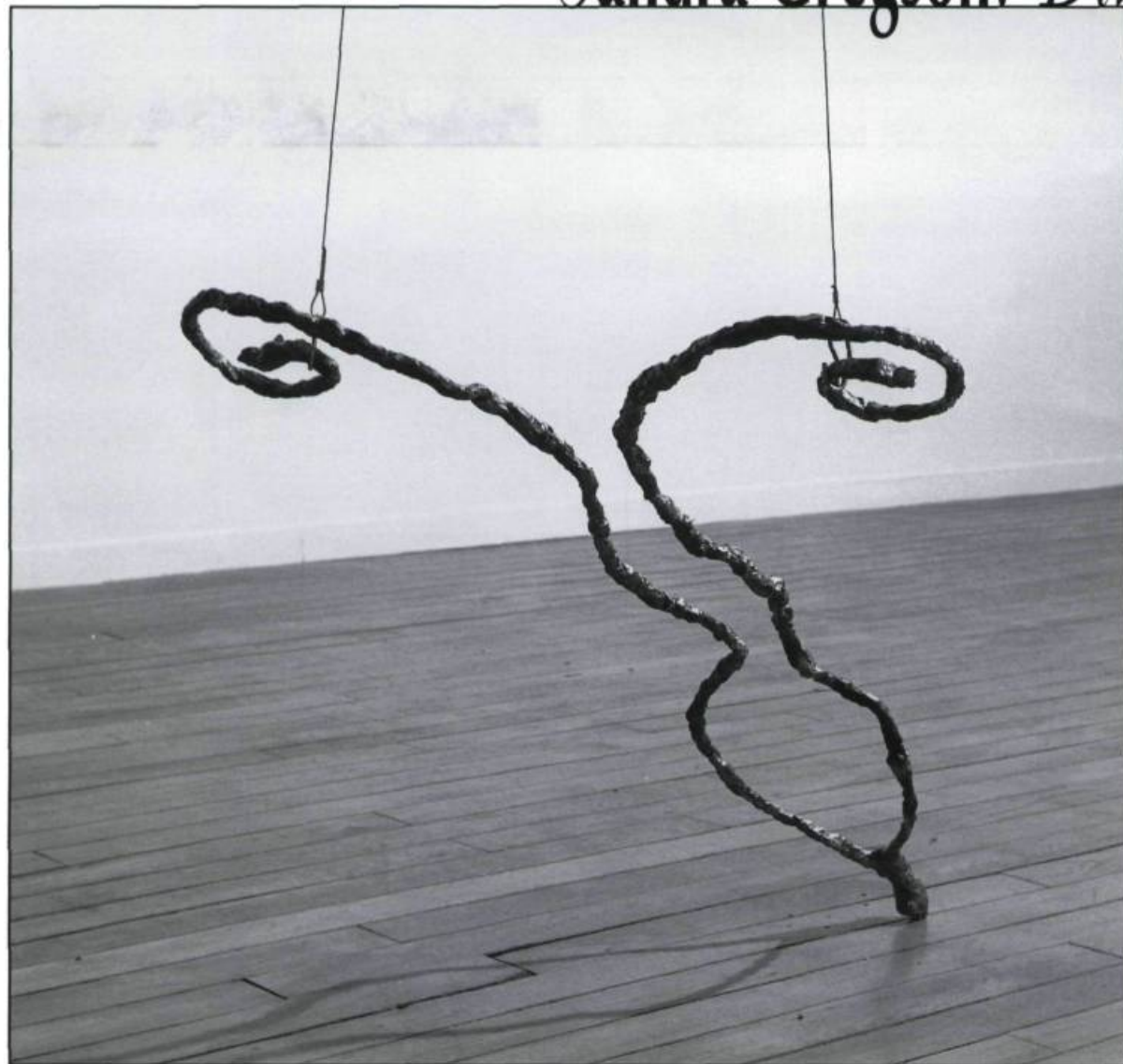
tions implicitly ask why we change and raise questions about gender stereotypes. Born in Larouche, Quebec, Simard commemorates the 100th anniversary of his birthplace, both in a major work in *Passé composé* which includes the names of those 12,000 who have been known to have lived in Larouche revealed through town archives, as well as through the organization of an exhibition, from July 1 to August 25, of international artists in Larouche from the USA, Belgium, Germany, France, Switzerland, and England. Among Canadians represented are Sylvie Bouchard, Marion Cuff, Pierre Dorion, Evergon, Michel Goulet, Louis Lussier, Roberto Pellegrinuzzi, and Marc Tremblay.

At the Kabella centre on 2nd Street in the East Village, and the Asian Centre Gallery on the Bowery, curator Robert Lee assem-

bled work in *Ancestors*, that profiles Black Asian American artists. A collaborative piece by Robert Craddock, (who in 1995 undertook a monumental 50' totemic bronze sculpture, built for Chung Qing, Schechuan, China), and Liu Lan Ding, Chinese brush artist, (who has exhibited in both Toronto and Montreal), is a synthesis of the two mediums in an installation tribute to mediums and messages. On a final note, Up-town the Solomon Guggenheim exhibition of work by Felix Gonzalez Torres, included something for everyone with photo reproduction posters and mounds of edible samples for hungry visual art visitors in the form of Bazooka bubble gum and black rock candy with a sign that read: Not for consumption in the museum gallery, please. ■

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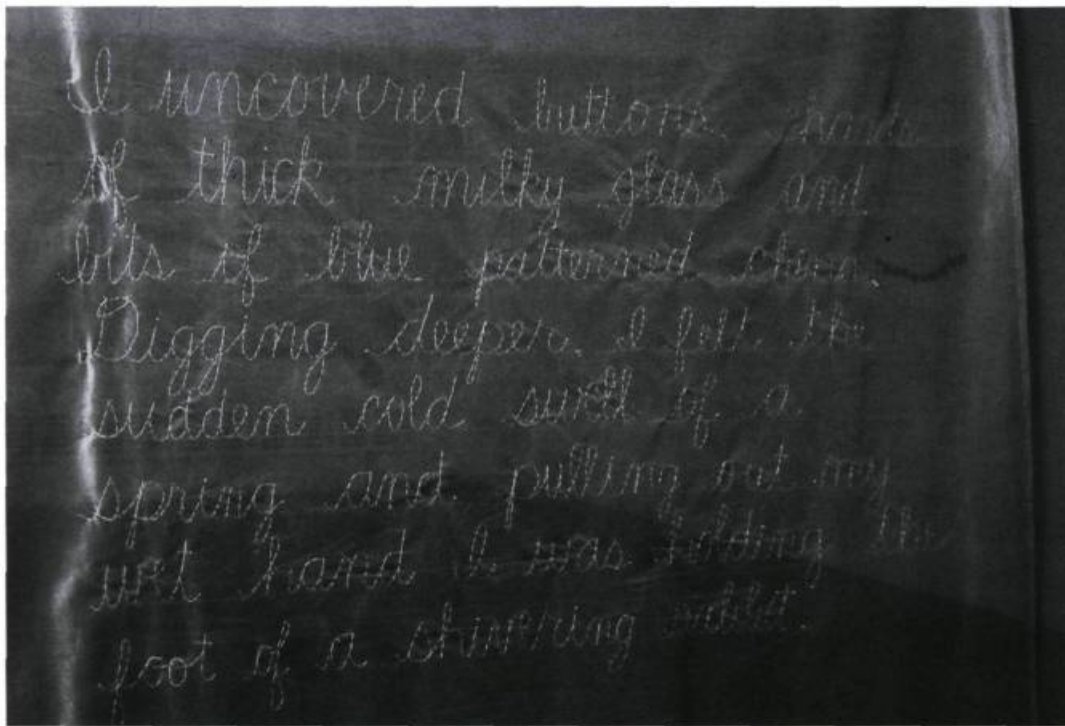


Sandra Gregson, *Untitled (divining rod)*, 1995. Bronze, cable. 72 x 72 x 122 cm. Photo: Simon Glass.

Systems of divination have existed in all times and places. They are, in fact, the roots of our own culture's highly valued scientific methods. While we are ignorant of how to read the entrails of dead animals for meaning (and suspicious of such practices), we use, both professionally and popularly, the language-mediated insights of psychotherapy to understand our circumstances.

This has become our culture's preferred divinatory method. But is it sufficient? What of that which exists outside of language, in the silence before utterance? In the spaces for which words do not exist?

A bronze divining rod, forked near its base and curving upward into elegant, fallopian handles, occupies the center of the room in Sandra Gregson's recent installation at the Red Head Gallery. The broadened, hoofed toe of the piece rests lightly on the floor while two lumpy finger-thick branches swell away from it, then together, before curling in opposite directions and back toward themselves. This object recalls the water-seeking rod of the professional diviner, as well as, in



Sandra Gregson, *divined*, 1995. Detail of screening with text: "I uncovered buttons, shards of thick milky glass, and bits of blue patterned china. Digging deeper, I felt the sudden cold swell of a spring and pulling out my wet hand, I was holding the foot of a shivering rabbit".

outline, the reproductive system of the human female.

In water-witching it is believed that a magnet-like force in the earth draws the point of the rod to itself giving the receptive diviner knowledge of water's location. What is being "witched" in this exhibition is not water, but a way of knowing that exists at the periphery of language, that acknowledges the ache of loss that is part of our culture's coming to rely so heavily on what words can tell.

Four panels of light gray screen create a veil across the gallery space, separating the entrance and office from the space where Gregson has placed the divining rod, five other bronze sculptures and a small drawing.

Along one wall, at eye level, is *Held sound*, a piece consisting of ten lumps of bronze hanging from thin aluminum wire in a slow curve. The lumps are the size of the space inside a mouth. Indentations and protuberances vary the shape of each volume so they seem to represent different sounds - or distinct sensations inside the body built up through accretion into these solid knots, stuck just this side of sound.

Grief, pain, joy: the lump-in-the-throat blocking speech. A fragment of text is written faintly on the wall above this piece: "sound wells up in his body/words pressed through his tongue." The weight of waiting for speech.

In *Welling/wishing*, an inverted bronze vessel, the size of a child's head and suspended from two ear flaps, hangs belly-high. Like the divining rod, its surface is rough, fin-

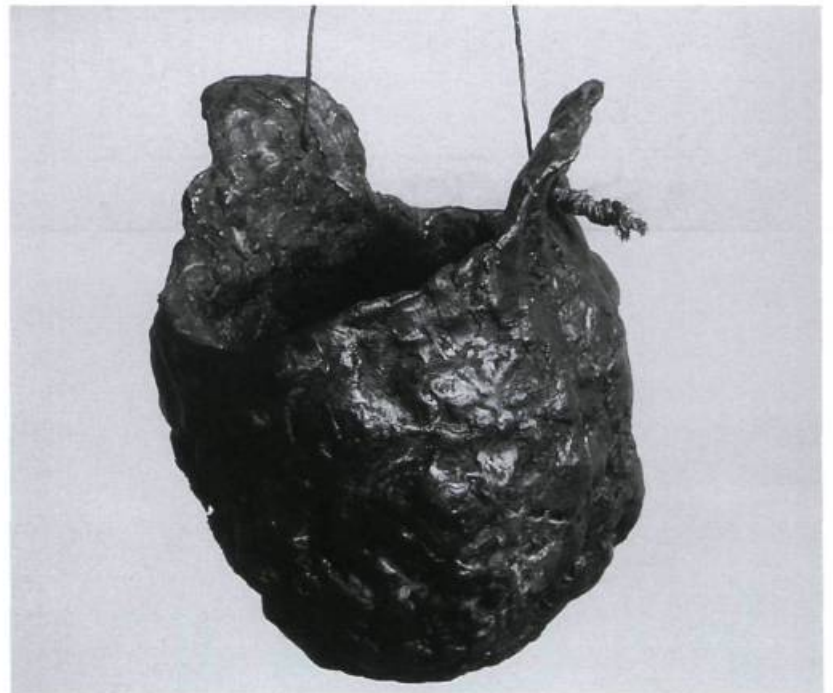
ger impressions in the original wax still visible in the metal that has replaced it. The loss in the bronze-casting process, implicit in each piece in the show, offers a parallel here for the separation that is birth.

In *Smoke drawing*, a small ring of burnt holes—empty spaces—is the drawing. A similar round hole in the broken-off bowl of a rough ladle-like tool that lies on the floor suggests the leakage of language, our tool for knowing. There are gaps in its ability to translate experience into meaning.

These objects inside the veiled space are mute, prearticulate. What do they represent? Are they real? They resist our desire to understand visually and symbolically, to translate with words. They are ambiguous, evasive, demanding a more visceral and associative approach.

A clue to their otherness exists in the assemblage piece that serves as their foil and hangs on the wall just outside the veiled space. Fetishistic—a wooden foot form bejewelled with hundreds of bright plastic eyes—it is an object of the surreal unconscious, of dream and fantasy. Realms that psychotherapy has made familiar, if still disturbing. Like the text stitched onto the dividing curtain (which describes the unearthing of buttons, shards of glass and an unexpected wet rabbit), the foot assemblage locates desire in a more symbolic world, closer to language, than do the bronze pieces inside the divined space.

These latter objects are heavy



Sandra Gregson, *Wishing/Welling*, 1994. Bronze, cable, hardware. Dimensions variable with hanging; bronze component 18 x 15 x 12 cm. The Red Head Gallery, Toronto.

with materiality yet describe, paradoxically, the insubstantiality of breath and sound ("I listened/as the breath left his body," is written faintly on the wall above the hole drawing and a bronze-and-silk "throat"). The divined objects inside the veiled space require a deeper attentiveness to the spaces and weight of the body. They remind us of the gravity that presses our flesh to the earth, of the suck and release of the thin air that holds us here. ■

The Red Head Gallery, Toronto
May 23–June 17, 1995