

## Brian Jungen

Greg Beatty

Number 54, Winter 2000–2001

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/9493ac>

[See table of contents](#)

### Publisher(s)

Le Centre de diffusion 3D

### ISSN

0821-9222 (print)

1923-2551 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

### Cite this review

Beatty, G. (2000). Review of [Brian Jungen]. *Espace Sculpture*, (54), 51–52.

# Brian Jungen

GREG BEATTY

industry and dining. An oversized dinner table was cut with two circles on its surface. Sunken basins were placed within these wells, one filled to capacity with miniature hydro-stone cows, the other with Styrofoam pigs, both painted white. Using turntables, these churns slowly rotated counter to each other. The numbing uniformity and endless revolution of the animals in their containers speak clearly of their status in our eyes.

In *Camouflage I*, the second part of Andison's installation at SAAG, a dried veil of flowers divides the dimly lit gallery, and in the spirit of the exhibition hides another installation. Behind this enticing scrim we see a dress-maker's dummy covered in pressed flowers of the same variety as the veil. The flowers are Queen Anne's lace, common to the highways throughout Ontario. Andison meticulously cultivated this royal weed for three years for her installation. A floral Elizabethan collar rests above, awaiting the viewer to inspect it. Upon approach, the viewer triggers a motion detector and the collar bristles up lizard-like, in a way that could be in equal parts flattery and aggression.

Notions of status, the strutting of cultured plumage, are given a subtle and playful poke. In this piece, Andison brings the focus to the individual. She identifies the animal kingdom as a source for social mores and posturing. The collar points to the now dissociated connection between nature and fashion, a reminder of the relationship, which was much stronger for women. One need only think of what it means to "come into bloom" or to be "deflowered."

As in the grass grid, Andison includes a reference to the hiding of mechanical processes, within the cloth of "nature." *Camouflage II* might point a wagging finger at us now for our misplaced emulation and improvements on nature, but *Camouflage I*, in its send-up of Elizabethan fashion, points out that the roots of this tradition run deep. ■

Lois Andison, *Camouflage*  
The Southern Alberta Art Gallery  
Lethbridge, Alberta  
June 24–August 20, 2000

Brian Jungen,  
*Prototype For New Understanding #4*,  
1999. Nike Air Jordans.

It is only in the last decade or so that Canadian museums have begun to consult with First Nations people on exhibitions devoted to their history and culture. Before then, they generally displayed artifacts (often obtained under questionable circumstances) in an insensitive manner, and failed to recognize the diversity of lifestyles, languages and cultures that existed among the First Nations. Not only did these ethnographic distortions fuel prejudice and misunderstanding among Euro-Canadians, they also hindered aboriginal people intent on reclaiming their true heritage, as opposed to just passively accepting an academically-prescribed inventory of icons and images (which also would have manifested themselves in pop culture).

Even today, cultural institutions still have much work to do in repairing relations with the aboriginal community. Exhibitions like this one by Vancouver artist Brian Jungen are a definite step in the right direction. Of mixed Dunne-Za First Nation and Swiss ancestry, Jungen received a Diploma of Visual Art from the Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design in 1992, and completed a degree in Art History at Concordia that same year. Here, he adopted the Northwest Coast mask form, but with a perverse twist. Instead of using wood, his six masks were made of parts sewn together from Nike Air Jordan shoes. Together with two others, they were executed in 1999 under the collective title *Prototype for New Understanding #1-8*.

Historically, Jungen's Dunne-Za Nation was based in the B.C. interior, and had no contact with the coastal First Nations. Were he to recreate their designs in his masks, therefore, he would arguably be guilty of appropriation. Instead, he let the architecture of the shoes dictate his aesthetic direction — although it is Reid Shier's contention, in an accompanying catalogue essay, that the masks recall Kwakwaka'wakw, Nuuchah'nulth and Bella Coola designs.

By mounting his masks in glass display cases with metal armatures, Jungen echoed the tradi-

tional method employed by museums in displaying aboriginal artifacts and art. This effectively decontextualized the objects. Instead of being acknowledged for their function and form — masks, for instance, would have been worn by their makers and other tribal members on ceremonial occasions — they were fetishized for their "uniqueness"

were readily discernible, and most were adorned with long, straight black hair. There was even a sun mask. Still, even a cursory examination of the masks revealed numerous incongruities that shattered any illusion of authenticity — most notable were the words "Nike," "Jordan" (now-retired NBA star Michael Jordan) and "Pippen" (a former teammate of Jordan's on



and implied worth. Rather than reflect the communal values of the originating civilization, therefore, the objects were commodified and incorporated into a Western capitalist narrative.

Jungen countered this misappropriation in two ways. First, he permitted us to view his masks from all angles. Not only did this enhance their kinaesthetic appeal, it also diminished their preciousness by exposing their ragged inner seams, loose threads, foam padding and gobs of glue. Second, of course, is the synthetic material he used to construct the masks. Even here, the disjunction was not as great as one might imagine. According to Shier, the Nike colours of black, red and white are the three most common in traditional First Nations art, while the fabled swoosh is evocative of a principle aboriginal design element — the graduated curve. While stylized, the masks did resemble animals like the raven, wolf, dog and bullfrog that one would expect to find in any tribal menagerie. Eyes, ears, jaws, beaks and tongues

the Chicago Bulls) that were prominently printed on the shoe panels. Silhouette and holographic images of a "skying" Jordan were also visible, as were labels that identified the shoes as having been made in either China or Indonesia.

Through skilful advertising campaigns involving Jordan — and most recently, golfing sensation Tiger Woods — Nike has achieved the type of brand recognition that most corporations can only dream about. Priced at around \$200 U.S. when they debuted a few years ago, Air Jordans were the ultimate status symbol on playgrounds across North America. Indeed, so desperate were children to acquire them that some were not above stealing them from other kids. Two hundred dollars for a simple pair of kid's shoes would strain the budget of even a middle class family. But for families lower down on the socio-economic scale, the expense would be horrendous. Yet for visible minority children growing up in poverty, with few, if any, positive male role

models, the desire to "be like Mike," as the slogan went, would have bordered on all-consuming.

To anyone with a social conscience, this is disturbing enough. Yet when one considers the accusations levelled at Nike for operating sweatshops in Third World countries, where workers labour 80-100 hours a week for a paltry 20 cents an hour (while Jordan received \$20 million annually for his promotional efforts), one's revulsion grows. The tragedy is further compounded by the integration of Air Jordans and other sports-themed apparel into gang culture (the black-and-silver jerseys, hats and jackets of the NFL's Oakland Raiders are particularly popular). In one article I read while researching this review, a psychologist was quoted as saying, "The biggest thing you get from a gang is respect. They are a substitute family, school, religion, employer, provider and protector." Through movies, TV shows and gangsta rap videos, many teenagers far removed from the brutal reality of inner-city ghetto life become fascinated with gang members and seek to emulate them. In western Canada in particular, aboriginal people occupy the lowest rung on the socio-economic ladder. Problems with alcoholism, drugs, prostitution, violence and unemployment are rife. Desperate for role models, aboriginal youth identify strongly with media portrayals of African-American ghetto culture as it pertains to fashion, music and slang.

After viewing Jungen's exhibition, I was struck by the duality of his work. One could interpret his sculptures, with their blend of traditional First Nations and contemporary Western influences, as a positive statement of identity. If aboriginal culture is not allowed to grow and evolve, after all, and is instead confined by dominant society to dusty museums, then there is little hope of that culture surviving, let alone thriving. But the exhibition could also be read as articulating yet another act of colonization, where ruthless transnational corporations use multi-million dollar marketing campaigns to seduce vulnerable aboriginal youth — claiming not only their scarce consumer dollars, but their very spirits. ■

Brian Jungen, *Prototype for New Understanding #1-8*  
Sherwood Village Branch - Dunlop Art Gallery  
July 7-Sept. 2, 2000

## PRESENCE 27

# The future of women in sculpture

HEATHER OKE

The beginning of a new millennium of women's art is marked by an exhibition of twenty seven female professional artists from south east New Brunswick. From the centre of contemporary Acadian culture, these artists have created new three-dimensional work on the theme of "the dress as self-portrait", a theme rich in its history and significance for feminist art practice and contemporary popular culture. These sculptural works inhabit the two main exhibition spaces of the gallery like a collective of manifest and articulate characters. The collective is strong in the breadth and depth of its members' individual contributions.

A selection of pre-1960 paintings by francophone women, from the collection of Maurice Cormier and Maurice A. Leblanc, complements the installation by pointing to an established tradition of women artists in Acadia. Lise Robichaud, one of the exhibition organizers, sees these pictorial works, with their quality of beauty from nature, at the heart of *Presence 27*.

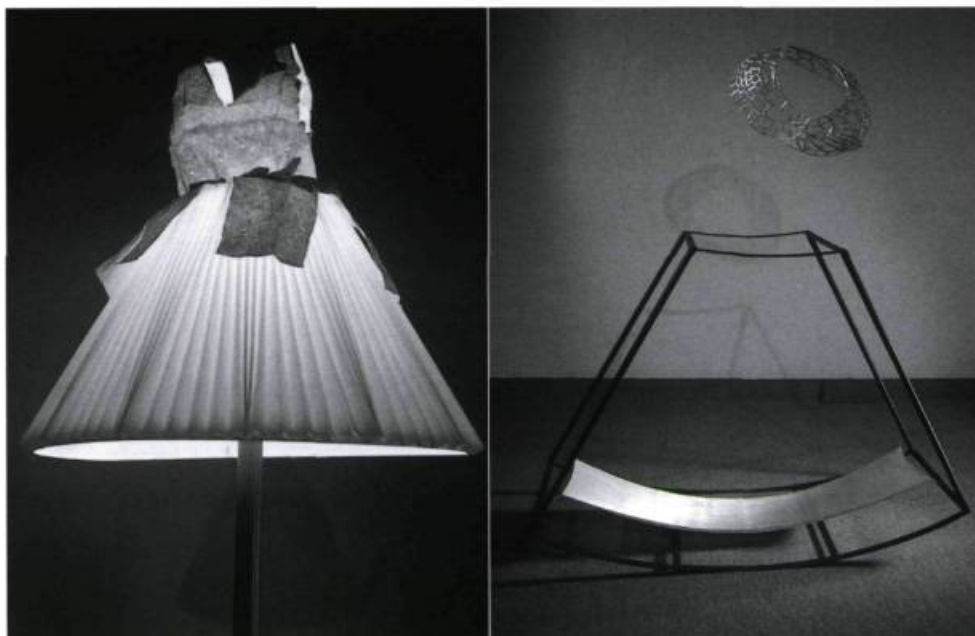
The installation and sculptural works are diverse in their use of materials, process, theme treatment, and even in their fundamental approach to art. The works range from the traditional stone sculpture of Marie-Hélène Allain, expressed through *Presente 2000*, to the cool post-modern photo-based objects, such as *Ce n'est pas une Pipe* by Valerie LeBlanc and *Mesure du Temps* by Lise Robichaud. Across the exhibition the use of natural elements such as dirt, stone, found objects and wood stand side by

side with elements of metal, photography, and plastic. These self-portraits, despite their differences in treatment and process, seem to revolve and grow out of the appropriation of found objects or the contemplation of personal photographs or objects from the past, especially childhood.

In this exhibition of self-portraits

and with it the fragile but resilient nature of desire.

Others are suspended from the ceiling. Elaine Amyot's *La mante/Cloak* hangs like a guard over a collection of symbolic objects on the floor beneath it. While the cloak occupies the space between floor and ceiling with graceful authority, it is visually anchored by the things it



traits in the form of dresses, identity manifests itself with authority and feelings are expressed through the merging of painting and sculpture, craft and art, woman and consciousness.

Some dress forms are displayed on mannequins, plinths or other supports. The work of Marjolaine Bourgeois, of crocheted coloured wool, represents the dress as an outer skin, expressing the physical body as a finely tuned sensory instrument. Anne-Marie Sirois' completely original presentation (*Sans titre*) positions a carefully constructed bodice made of pattern paper over a lit floor lamp with a crinoline shade. It evokes the body and spirit contained with the decorative armour of the feminine,

seeks to shield. Many other works in the exhibition, including Nancy Morin's *Second Skin*, work with this ground relationship.

Some of these works are compilations of objects invested with personal narrative, others are forged, modeled or constructed from raw material; regardless of the approach, the exhibition is remarkable in that the character of the artist is expressed in each work. These self portraits speak with authentic voice of a facility with process and of commitment to art and expression. ■

*Presence 27: the future of women in sculpture*  
Galerie d'art de l'Université de Moncton  
June 7-September 10, 2000

Anne-Marie Sirois,  
*Sans titre*, 2000.  
Mixed media. 244 x  
43,2 cm. Photo:  
Marc Paulin.

Garry Collins,  
*Enrobée*, 2000.  
Mixed media. 167.6  
x 170.2 x 170 cm.  
Photo: Marc Paulin.