

Medical Imprints
Empreintes médicales

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MEDICAL IMPRINTS

EMPREINTES MÉDICALES

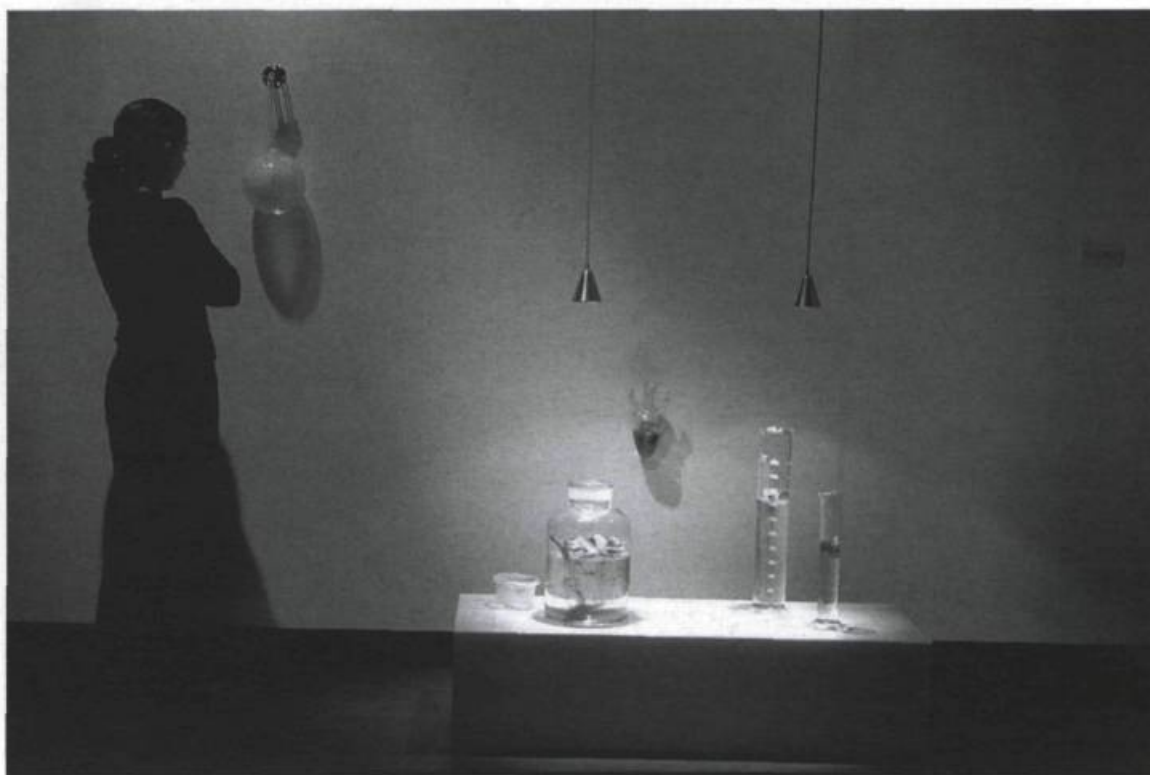
GAIL BOURGEOIS

Curated as three solo shows that mutually enhance each other, *Medical Imprints* presents distinctly differing perspectives on questions of the examined body under medical treatment. The artists present an unhiddenness of being that reverses the medical gaze and connects desire to the social system. Works by Cindy Stelmackowich, derived from the politics of reason, reflect perceptual reciprocity. Finely crafted drawings by Jane Martin witness a healing practice as she records the abatement of intense trauma. Theodore Wan, in his late 1970's work, investigates the conceptual displacement of medical illustration and their codification of the body.¹

From Wan's large black and white procedural photographs in the main gallery the viewer enters into another exhibition space.² The lighting is subdued and directional but the large institutional space is animated by curious objects and the selective inclusion of some bright colours and wall pieces that cause the eye to dance around the room. With incisive vision, artist Cindy Stelmackowich has converted the tools of medical enquiry into the penetratingly critical tools of her trade. Each of the seven works meshes scholarly research with her visual art practice.

The subject of her critique centres on the objectifying nature of scientific inquiry and on how the subjective voice is often lost to an overriding authority. The breathing body, as it experiences and inhabits the world, is very different from the objectified body diagrammed in physiology textbooks, with their separable circulatory, digestive, and respiratory systems laid bare on the page. Also, it is different from the body we have been taught to see and feel. It is different from the complex machine that breaks down and must be diagnosed and repaired by our medical specialists.

Underneath the anatomized and mechanical body received from medical science, prior to our very conceptions of our own materiality, is the animate self, breathing passions, living the passage of time, and storing the memory of its



experiences. In her practice, the artist reaches through the commanding text in an uncanny symbiotic process — a mutually advantageous association or relationship between parts of the same person — to confer the power of seeing upon herself. It is this same agency that she offers us. The attentive body, which Merleau-Ponty called the “body subject,” is poised to create new meanings.

Stelmackowich sees herself as intervening into the violent language of medicine and its separation of the body from mind and spirit, as enacted through scientific anatomical representations. Her artistic interventions represent a glitch in the system. With her choice and presentation of materials, she inverts meanings. What we sense is an in-between space of critical humour. I suspect that we are never meant to laugh out loud, but rather to nod in recognition of a common, sentient body. She presents works that must be encountered.

Encyclopédie de la médecine, vol.1-3, 2004, offers a key to reading her creative works as strategic in-between sites, as Deleuzian betweenness. In addition, this piece resonates with the pathos and humour of her earlier

feminist inquiries.³ Here, three unfolded book jackets cover medical illustrations like surgical sheets. Looking through the peepholes we can just discern images of goings-on in laboratory settings. What is imagined underneath is important. We are placed as voyeurs on the outside of the display. The viewer becomes the one gazing at the surface beneath through the paper covers, yellow with age and smudged with fingerprints.

Two book-works dissect the determining language that holds authority over the body. They literally sprout glass and metal scientific implements into the surrounding space. Humorous in their irreverence, these imaginative works create playful sculptural objects out of medical instruction books. From the gallery's collection, *handbook of SURGERY* lies on its back with dissecting pins, bandages, surgical gloves, pipette, tracheotomy tube, and colour anatomical illustrations jutting out in all directions from the small red manual. It has become an emblem of authority rendered chaotic, like the body itself, full of dynamical synapses and seeping fluids.

Lippincotte's Quick Reference Book – Medicine and Surgery

(2004), would be hard to grasp with one hand. It has the look and feel of a large dictionary given its own stand in the library. Here the stand is a three-foot high pedestal with the contents of glass tubing extended from the upright tome towering at around six feet. This is a more contained piece where the scientific test tubes, glassware and stainless steel surgical tools are bound inside the pages with an aluminium belt buckled tightly around the girth. Here, the language and apparatuses of the text depict a restriction of the material body.

Each work employs glass.⁴ As a transparent medium, glass contains the work and also lets the viewer see the artist pointing to the ironic inversion of meaning that is being produced. Glass visually unites the pieces in the room and upholds the work's theoretical underpinnings. For example, a long wall installation titled *Suspending the Laws of Medical Practice* presents two staggered rows of vintage test tubes held to the wall with dissecting pins. Suspended in another transparent medium — water — are cut-up dictionary phrases. Present here is the displacement of all transcendentalism, and an active embodied search for the conditions of a new production.

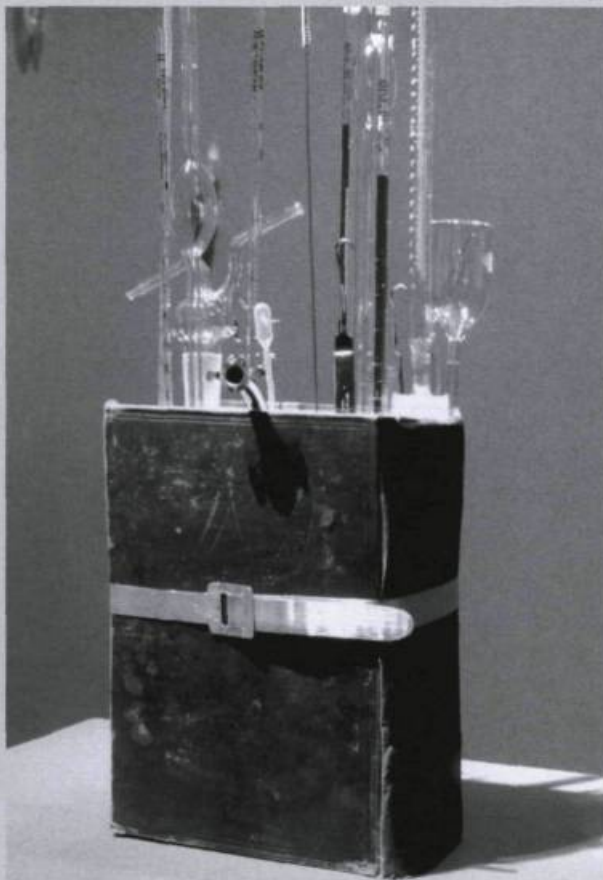
Cindy STELMACKOWICH, *Retreat from Reason*, 2004. Scientific glassware, water, pond plants (water lettuce and duck weed), grow lights. 44 cm x 105.6 cm x 26.4 cm. Photo: David Barbour

At the end of the wall, placed in a far corner, is a work titled *Luminaries* (2004). The black antique wooden table has two bell jars, looking like giant upside down test tubes, one inside the other. They cover a six-inch opening in the middle of the table. A light box under the table softly illuminates upward through several layers of anatomical transparencies. Slices of the medicalized body, with diagrammatic numbers and corresponding name-list for the internal organs, bask romantically in a red glow of represented tissue and muscle. The light, as if projected through the body, raises ethical concerns about these images.

In these anatomical illustrations, the body's encounter with medicine is certain, but, rather than point to disease and death, it holds the promise of immortality. Taken up as an issue of violence to the body, this negation of mortality is imaged as dissection in a work titled *Sliced*. On the wall, at eye level, wafer-thin transparencies of shadowy figures are situated between slices of Plexiglas replicating microscope slides. Presented parallel to the eye, a delectable picture in reds, the viewer is caught in the brightly-lit spectacle and erotic display of the dissected body.⁵

With this exhibition, Stelmackowich has shifted her focus slightly. An attraction to the beauty of language and a passion for recontextualizing apparatuses fuel this work. However, there is a tangential idea to the politics of reasoning. She has included green plants as another body. Through the inclusion of living, fibrous, rhizoid pond plants encased in scientific glassware, *Retreat from Reason* (2004) more directly engages alterity's perceptual reciprocity. As Merleau-Ponty suggests, to touch can not be understood without the concrete potential of being touched, of the situation in reverse.

The isolation and violence inherent to her subject matter disappears with this piece. Low on the wall, behind a transparent glass-tiled plinth supporting three tall graduated cylinders of glass and an apothecary jar, is a glass, heart-shaped Pyrex wall-piece filled with water and sustaining green life. Completing this installation is another belly/organ-shaped Pyrex vessel attached high on the wall with steel braces. The encounter with these living works engages the open-ended paradox of self and other, both distinct and intertwined. Like the soft light



seeping out from under the table and gently lighting the floor beneath in *Luminaries*, the presence of plant life shifts Stelmackowich's work from a singular discourse on the medical gaze toward a conversation.

Employing theory as a critical force against the fluidless tomes of medical science, she makes the underside visible. We catch glimpses through the gendered body beneath the book covers, the protruding medical equipment, the backlit anatomical illustrations, the exposed roots of plants, and the filtering light over the shadows of medical reason. Duality disappears, and more importantly, self and other are felt to co-exist in reciprocity. The search for wholeness, at the heart of her artistic practice, replicates the experiencing body as open and incomplete.

I am reminded of Francine Larivée's stunning installation of nine ecosystems comprising three high narrow steel tables and steel place settings with moss under bell jars sustaining nine microclimates.⁶ Although Larivée's reappropriation of scientific experimentation in *être* differs from *Retreat from Reason*, what strikes me is the emotional impact these living artworks have on the viewer. One develops an empathy for plants separated from nature and caught in a completely man-made environment. Conversations about their well-being break out spontaneously. In short, the plants fulfil the body's longing for completeness through a crossing over of spirit.

A process of overlapping, carefully extended to the more-than-human world of objects, plants and animals, attests to alterity, because we become open to the possibility of being influenced and changed by the encounter. In each of her pieces, Stelmackowich is demanding an empathetic response. If the other can be understood as always being there, as not being us, then this overlapping can be understood, following Merleau-Ponty, as interaction with and influencing of the other. An inadequate apprehension of human relations, exemplified by these imprints of scientific apparatuses on the body, follows from authoritative positions of certainty or uncertainty regarding the other.

All three exhibitions imply an ethics of the flesh. Allowing for variations in the artists' intentions in producing their pieces, the crossovers found between the shows can be extended to the relationship the works set up with the viewer. The other is always intertwined within the subject. For Merleau-Ponty, the self and other are relationally constituted through the ever-present potential of reversibility. We can not be a disembodied onlooker because of the alterity of the other's gaze. This is a relevant reading of *Medical Imprints*, suggesting that self and non-self (creative intentions) are the reverse of each other. This reading was signalled by Stelmackowich's *Retreat from Reason*, and by Jane Martin's *Dear Heart* in the third gallery space.



Martin's drawing series describes in minute detail the traces of open-heart surgery on her husband's body. Curated into the exhibition were the drawings created directly from Polaroid photos taken by the artist within days of the successful operation. The drawings record not only the photographic image but also its Polaroid frame rendered to the exact size of the original. These processes of documenting reflect a way of mediating those aspects of life where no control can be established. These drawings operate as instruments of disclosure through which immediacy, intensity and emotional authenticity are integrated into the works.

The series records individual memory, where fear, pain and desire are implicit in the image. It took three years for the drawing series to surface as a necessary extension of the photos. The photographs were "concrete and clinical but also unsettling in a way they hadn't been... By transforming them into drawings, the transfigured images became the metaphorical heart; the act of drawing a tactile pleasure; and the vulnerable body unbearably exquisite."⁷ These works were slow and laborious to do. The repetition of the artist's strokes recall, for me, the rocking movement of a body calming itself, and by extension, the transformative relief of the healing process.

While she records the traumatized body of her husband in the healing stages after surgery, she also records her own healing by creating meaning out of the repeti-

Cindy STELMACKOWICH, *Lippincottes Quick Reference Book-Medicine and Surgery*, 2004. Medical dictionary, scientific test tubes and glassware, stainless steel surgical tools, aluminum strapping. 309.626 cm x 45.212 cm x 28.956 cm. Photo: David Barbour

Cindy STELMACKOWICH, *Retreat from Reason*, 2004. Scientific glassware, water, pond plants (water lettuce and duck weed), grow lights. 44 cm x 105.6 cm x 26.4 cm. Photo: David Barbour

tion of carefully placed pencil marks. The drawings become an ongoing conversation. Like Stelmackowich's sculptures, Martin's drawings are storied with participatory accounts of reason. There is no sentimentality, only the humility and grace that grows from being fully in the world with an other. Repetition of the image, the repetition of their making, pulls their inherent meaning forward, uniting cool reason with more sensual and mimetic ways of knowing. ←

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The Ottawa Art Gallery / La Galerie
d'art d'Ottawa
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NOTES

1. The exhibition curator of *Theodore Wan*, Christine Conley, originated her project at the Dalhousie Art Gallery, Halifax, Nova Scotia, in 2003. This travelling exhibition and accompanying catalogue represent a complete introduction to the intriguing photographic work of the late Vancouver artist, Theodore Wan. Conley makes available, on a CD ROM station in the gallery, all but lost information about the artist. She presents his early works and interviews with people who collaborated with Wan. The CD represents the underside of the exhibition and provides special insight into the curator's process of retrieving and ethically presenting sensitive material.
2. For the purposes of this review I will focus on the sculptural pieces of Ottawa based artist, Cindy Stelmackowich, and on the drawings of Jane Martin. Although Conley's project resonates strongly with the other artists' works, Renee Baert brings together two engaging exhibitions in the works of Stelmackowich and Martin. Each of the three exhibitions lends meaning to the others. This linking aided my reading of the exhibitions.
3. In her earlier works, Cindy Stelmackowich employed everyday objects to enact a transformation from their original purpose with humour, pleasure and pain. In the present works, dressmaker's pins are replaced by dissecting pins, the fish-bowl covered with pink pantyhose now contains plant life, etc. I first encountered her art practice through her pantyhose series dating from 1996-97. In those works the artist attached significance to the object's ability to elicit an immediate recognition of its own social space. She stated that her "artistic investigation inverted the viewer's expectation of the material presenting a weighted space, prohibiting flight and forwarding an assumed transparency of social roles." In her artist's statement she established meaning in the following way: "[s]ituating the identity of the female subject in a variety of subjective spaces which are personal, real and metaphoric, questions how the possibility of transgressing the border between body, action and speech can begin to occur." Her feminist intentions were well suited to the second part of *amour-horreur*, one of three exhibitions under the same title that I curated for La Centrale in the winter of 1999.
4. In her presentation at the opening of the exhibition, the artist responded to a question about the prevalence of glass in the exhibition by saying that glass has the potential for double readings, and that shadows themselves are revealed.
5. The anatomical representations are of young healthy male and female bodies, fully coiffed, with make-up and pert, self-assured airs. This kind of representation pervades scientific illustrations. Andreas Vesalius (1514-1564), the Father of Anatomy, imaged the corpse upright, eyes open and with the skeleton or muscle structure displaying itself in full action poses. Stelmackowich's dissertation addresses the rhetoric of nineteenth century anatomical atlases and how and when they moved from science, to archive, to the modern museum and into the space of Art History.
6. This elegant, ecologically conscious work was created for the first section of *amour-horreur*. There is a description of Larivée's piece in *Textura*, published by La Centrale. Beside the obvious parallel between the works being discussed — living organisms kept alive for an extended time by grow lights in a cavernous institutional environment — these works cross over in many ways, but also hold their own distinct meanings. What is curious is the viewer's potential ability to participate, even to nurture the presence of living organisms in the gallery. I interpret this as widening the community of nature and providing insight into how we live.
7. Jane Martin's artist's statement, 2004.

David Moore

COCELYNE CONNOLLY

Specular. Le musée céleste.

LA VIRTUALISATION DU MUSÉE

David Moore s'approprie l'espace du Centre d'exposition Expression afin de poursuivre son propos concernant la *virtualisation* de l'espace au moyen de supports architecturaux dessinés, d'images numérisées et d'effets miroitants. Déjà en 1998, les effets de réflexion au moyen de miroirs adéquatement installés dans l'espace sont utilisés par Moore dans l'exposition *Pendant que le monde* au Musée de la Ville de Lachine et, en 1999, l'exposition *Variations-inversions* chez Circa. Depuis, il construit des espaces et des relations entre des objets réels et des effets virtuels. Ainsi, l'allègement matériel de l'espace le conduira à conceptualiser une *virtualisation* des relations concernant les divers facteurs de médiation entre les objets de l'exposition muséale et les visiteurs, et finalement entre les visiteurs et l'artiste. Il met au jour ces relations par l'exposition chez Expression.

Notre commentaire porte principalement sur cette dernière proposition de *Specular. Le musée céleste* afin d'insister sur un volet d'un questionnement amorcé par Moore ces dernières années. Toutefois, soulignons que ce segment se situe en relation avec l'ensemble de l'exposition. On le verra.

LIEU MATÉRIEL ET ESPACE VIRTUALISÉ

On comprendra qu'ici le terme « virtuel » signifie que le dispositif élaboré par l'artiste répond aux effets qu'il veut produire indépendamment des moyens réels utilisables afin de produire les mêmes résultats physiques. Le virtuel accentue donc le caractère fictionnel du dispositif.

D'abord, voyons comment David Moore introduit le visiteur aux questions muséologiques. La première salle d'Expression montre les effets de *virtualisation* opérés sur l'architecture du lieu. Les procédures relèvent des motifs humains et humanoïdes, schématisés — on y voit uniquement les contours —, dessinés sur les murs. Aussi, des éléments-miroirs reflètent des zones et des images murales de

l'installation, et renvoient des zones lumineuses en forme d'ellipse et de cercle sur des figures au mur. Un bassin d'eau vibrant au sol s'ajoute au dispositif *réflexif*. Or, les images réfléchies s'ajoutent virtuellement au dispositif. De plus, la négation de la matérialité s'effectue par l'insertion de figures de pierres (et de crêpes créant l'illusion de pierres) photographiées puis modifiées à l'ordinateur afin de produire des effets tridimensionnels par des images planes au mur. L'éclairage par projecteurs, intégré à l'exposition, en plus de remplir sa fonction habituelle, accentue l'énonciation du propos discursif de l'artiste.

La compression physique et matérielle que l'artiste réalise jusqu'à maintenant, par cette exposition, introduit le visiteur dans la dernière salle d'exposition d'Expression, au cœur de réflexions que l'artiste mène ces dernières années concernant la perception visuelle du visiteur muséal.

Il faut cependant prendre en compte que Moore réalise, en 2003, une série d'impressions à jet d'encre — *Béatitudes* —, fruit d'un travail de questionnement et d'observation de quelques années,

conduit dans son atelier. Ces travaux, bien qu'ils furent réalisés avant *Specular...*, sont montrés dans l'exposition *Passages*¹, chez Graff peu de temps après *Specular...* Il est utile de mentionner cette exposition avant de poursuivre notre explication puisque les œuvres montrées s'intègrent au processus du commentaire muséologique de Moore. En empruntant les murs et le sol de son atelier, des figures humaines et humanoïdes sont tracées, et des objets produisant des reflets sont aussi posés aux angles du sol et des murs du dispositif. Puis s'ajoutent d'autres objets produisant diverses significations ne relevant pas de la pure perception visuelle par le visiteur. Ces subtiles mises en scène sont photographiées et imprimées au jet d'encre, en grand format. Référons au *Contre-relief d'angle*, 1915, du membre du groupe constructiviste Vladimir Tatline, lequel contribue à mettre en place les fondements théoriques et conceptuels de l'installation. Cependant, en 2004, Moore, au lieu d'exposer les objets réels, *virtualise* l'installation produite dans son atelier : il en présente uniquement