

André Fournelle: *Black Fire*

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## André FOURNELLE: *Black Fire*

John K. GRANDE

Like so many of André Fournelle's shows, *Black Fire* at Galerie Éric Devlin in Montreal is not really about the objects in situ. They are like souvenirs of his whole process of thought, and the ongoing continuity of his art. Continuity is here in the charcoal medium, not only figuratively but literally. What better emblem of the Gods' gift to Prometheus than fire, but look what we have done with the gift! Entering into the show, you literally walk through an entranceway whose "walls" are charcoal, held in place by glass. After entering through this portal, you can see light filtering through all over and around the charcoal. The wall becomes like fine embroidery, but embroidery about life — the cycle



of life — and the fragility of life, for all the massive character of this space separator. Charcoal becomes a metaphor for the ephemerality of it all without question. In a fitting tribute to Serge Lemoyne, an artist who has gone on into the afterlife and whose house in Acton Vale (since destroyed) was an artwork itself, laden with hockey skates,

painted details and the like, Fournelle has painted the charcoal red, white and blue, colours that recall some of Lemoyne's favourites. These charcoal elements are fitted into containers (a reference to the object-ness of minimalism perhaps).

With André Fournelle the relation between body and architecture is present. The gallery's architecture itself becomes a medium, a body into

which the artist pours his lead, charcoal, glass and mixed media artworks like a modern-day alchemist who plays on and with materials and their potential symbolic and transformative significance. The layout is formal in the way Fournelle's installation and artworks are placed hieratically, as if the art has a deeper spiritual significance. The walls become a body that holds art and the exhibition space, of which we become aware due to Fournelle's placement of works, the container. One particular piece has a plumb-bob hanging between two triangular sections of charcoal. The plumb-bob is hand cast as a micro-sculpture by the artist, and could symbolize the immeasurability of experience, while a red painted line of charcoal follows the vertical sides downwards. The piece recalls *L'esprit des lieux—la paix* (2001), an installation in France that used a variety of projections and blue cobalt neon tubing. Again at the Fortress of Vezeleis, a series of plumb-bobs hung in space, following the old stone structure's interior.

While Fournelle has referred to his art as an act of cultural terrorism such as when in the 1960s he released a flock of chickens, each carrying a message, or later on at the CACQM on St. Dominique in Montreal, he had live pigeons in a cage, a shotgun and neon elements, all bringing a sense of the symbolic,



André FOURNELLE,  
*La porte d'or*, 2009.  
Steel, glass, charcoal, gold  
loafs. 2,44 x 3,70 m.  
Photo: Michel Dubreuil.

→  
André FOURNELLE,  
*Charbon noir Cendre de  
charbon Charbon blanc*,  
2009. Charcoal covered  
with pure pigment, tita-  
nium white; Plexiglas  
boxes. 2 x 2 m x 15 cm;  
2 x 2 m x 13 cm; 2 x 2 m  
x 11 cm. Photo: Michel  
Dubreuil.



André FOURNELLE, *L'épreuve de l'eau L'épreuve du lait L'épreuve du sang*, 2009. Black charcoal and charcoal covered with pure pigment, cobalt blue, titanium white and quinacridone red; Plexiglas boxes. 1,10 x 1,10 m/each. Photo: Michel Dubreuil.



André FOURNELLE, *Rayonnement fossile*, 2009. Black charcoal and charcoal covered with pure pigment, cobalt blue, titanium white and quinacridone red; Plexiglas boxes. 1,10 x 1,10 m/each. Photo: Michel Dubreuil.

André FOURNELLE, *Et si la blessure était de plomb*, 2009. Black charcoal and charcoal covered with pure pigment, quinacridone red, lead; Plexiglas boxes. 1,30 x 1,30 m. Photo: Michel Dubreuil.

and of the moment in time. And it is this referencing of an imaginary, illusory world, where memory and time intermingle that formed part of Fournelle's 1990 *Resecare* show held at CIRCA gallery, with the hanging map-like segments, and ears, eyes fused to these movable elements. Now we have a fusion of public art, such as *Pyrophore* (2003) at the Museum of Art and Ethnology at the Pulperie de Chicoutimi, with its structure, its flame and its context. Indeed Fournelle is one artist whose understanding of context merges issues of identity with place, just like the geopoetics of Kenneth White that has inspired him.

*Requiem pour un fluide noir, hommage à Malevich* (2001) presents a lithograph (one of four with texts by Françoise Legris on Arches paper) on a wall space. We see a black square surrounded by white, and adjacent to this is a red cross. The "square" reference could be to the public performances and events Fournelle has staged, which are often sited at a square or public space. The "square" is a site for Acts of Art such as *Les Incendiaires* (2005) where red, white and blue painted charcoal was burnt on bed frames in the square at the Centre national d'art et de culture Georges-Pompidou in Paris. This ritual enacted next to an official site for art museology, was a rite, a symbolic performance that recalled Serge Lemoyne's own place as an outsider of sorts, but enacted by another artists, a symbol of his central place in Quebec's arts scene. The red cross also recalls Fournelle's significant performances with lines of

fire, and the unforgettable X that marked the spot (*Fire in Your Cities* in 1982 at a demolition site on rue de Bleury, Montreal is one of these events). And the Malevich, of course references Kazimir Malevich's Suprematist art, and this presages the incontestable diachronic dilemma that art as an idiom always faces when facing life! Fournelle's most fitting *Homage to Malevich*, originally exhibited at the Old Port during Montreal's 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations, consisted of a cobalt blue neon circle of light encased in a glass cube. It is now in the Ville de Lachine collection.

With a profound understating of life's ephemeral character, the messages André Fournelle carries with the four elements — earth, air, water and fire — go beyond the ordinary artist's search for identity, and address the universal state. *Black Fire* is a solid show that addresses unanswerable questions, like the light that pierces through the glass charcoal wall installed within the walls at Galerie Éric Devlin. It's a song that touches upon issues of mortality, our consciousness and how it relates to symbols, and on a broader scale the cycle of life, this artist's song of experience. ←

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John GRANDE's *Dialogues in Diversity: Art from Marginal to Mainstream* was published by Pari Publishing (Italy) in 2007. His most recent books include *The Landscape Changes* (Propect/Gaspereau Press, 2009) and *Bob Verschueren – Lifelines* (Pori, Finland 2010). [www.grandescritique.com](http://www.grandescritique.com)

