

## **Lyne Lapointe: From Silk to Porcupine Quills**

November 13<sup>th</sup> to December 18<sup>th</sup> 2021

Curators: Lesley Johnstone and Stéphane La Rue

Entering an artist's studio is a privileged moment, not only because it offers glimpses of works in progress, but also because we are privy to methods and materials, traces of research and insight into paths not yet explored, and can see works that are about to leave the studio or have recently returned.

Lyne Lapointe's studio comprises two large rooms off the house, located up against a pine forest and a mountain, which she shares with her partner Nancy Marcotte in the Eastern Townships. On the 15-acre property are ponds, multiple vegetable gardens protected from deer by homemade (and somewhat makeshift) fences constructed of found wood, and two small cabins: one for guests and the other for storage. It is a truly magical place, and Stéphane La Rue and I feel blessed to be there. This is Stéphane's first visit, while I have been going for years; but there is still a sense of wonder and discovery every time.

The studio is part cabinet of curiosities, part natural history museum, part antique-paper-and-book store. The wealth of objects and materials is astounding: treasures collected from around the world or found in the fields and woods around her home. Works are carefully placed in everchanging arrangements, perhaps fragments of exhibitions in the making. There is a very particular smell to the place, as plants and flowers are drying, a wasp's nest sits in the corner, and crystals and hamsas (charms to ward off evil eyes), old papers and books are everywhere, along with wood chips and dust. On the porch outside is a miter saw with beautiful cedar planks waiting to be transformed into frames or wooden bas-reliefs. It is all of this, and much more, that finds its way into Lyne's work.

Stéphane and I focus our attention on a large wooden rack containing hundreds and hundreds of rolls of paper tagged with handwritten titles. Each contains multiple variations of prints on coloured papers, made from glass matrices.

In essence, Lyne produces engravings on glass and then makes prints in which she can mix and match fragments from different plates, creating surprising and intriguing juxtapositions. The (female) body figures in many, and quickly becomes the nexus from which we construct our selection for this exhibition. We want to reveal the richness of a practice that is at once fragile and vulnerable, yet also filled with strength, and that manifests a remarkable economy of means.

We begin by selecting a grouping of prints of a small female figure bedecked here with an apple core, there with a spinning top, a coloured sphere, paper-thin fragments of wasp's nests, porcupine quills or caterpillar cocoons. It is remarkable how this relatively static frontal figure spins off in multiple directions of evocations, metaphors and narrative streams. At times, the prints are mounted on linen and integrated into imposing wooden frames, affording them a heightened material presence.

The thirteen prints from amongst dozens and dozens in The Head and the Body series demonstrate in a very eloquent way the richness of visual propositions possible from a single glass matrix. Figures layered one on top of the other create an almost stereoscopic effect; the slight displacements become ghostly apparitions of figures in the process of appearing or fading away, while in others the thick layers of black ink render them opaque and almost menacing.

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Perhaps the most playful works in the exhibition are those drawn from a series that portrays Joseph Beuys. Here we see the familiar figure, vest and staff in hand, not in the company of a coyote, but with a lion, a trout, a seahorse, a St. Bernard or a patterned pig (a nod to the Belgian artist Wim Delvoye). The play in scale dislocates the rapport between man and animal: Beuys is literally dwarfed by the animals, who observe him with amusement, menace or complete indifference. He seems to be a little taken aback by the whole thing, not quite sure who these creatures are and what they want of him. A wealth of narrative possibilities are proposed, and we in turn are not sure if Lyne is making fun of Beuys, mocking his somewhat problematic performances with the coyote, or sympathizing with the pathos of his situation.

In all of these works we are made acutely aware of the degree to which Lyne feels the fragility of the world through her body (à fleur de peau). They embody her own resilience and display her conviction of the role art plays in healing the soul and the mind. Integral to this is her own indomitable will to create, despite at times traumatic challenges. A near-fatal accident in the 1990s, for instance, forced a major shift in her practice, as the site-specific installations she had been creating in abandoned buildings to that point were no longer possible. Then a recent bout with cancer, coupled with the pandemic, initiated the transition from large-scale wooden bas-reliefs to the engravings on glass seen in this exhibition. Forced to find solutions that allow her to continue, she demonstrates at each juncture an opening up of new possibilities and material explorations.

For Lyne the body is political; it is a place from which to process the complexities, and the horrors, of the world around her, with humour and deep-felt humanity. She interrogates the interconnections between science, politics, history and identity, between the animate and inanimate worlds, through a layering of incongruous, anachronistic images. Fragmentation and juxtaposition have always been amongst her visual strategies, and here we see her probing questions of hybridity, transformation and metamorphosis in a particularly poignant way, as she is able to alter the meaning of a work through the very simple gestures printmaking allows. A single glass matrix becomes the ground from which the natural, spiritual, metaphysical, philosophical, literary and visual worlds come together to create images that offer multiple perspectives from which to apprehend the complexities of the world in which we live.

Text: Lesley Johnstone