



nothing is
lost, nothing
is created,
everything is
transformed

The Québec Triennial 2008

circumscribed yet teeming framework that constitutes the practice of art, which, today, is inconceivable outside of its context. This context is rooted in the personal realm, of course, as seen in the importance of the studio in Anthony Burnham's work. But it is also public, as illustrated by the various places of art painted by Michael Merrill, and interpersonal, as pointed up by the encounters engendered by Raphaëlle de Groot's practice. In a word, it is above all hybrid, as beautifully shown in Etienne Zack's painting, where vastly diverse components of art history come together in no apparent order or hierarchy.

Fictional framework

This is the place of infinite possibilities and thus infinite pitfalls. It is a framework of great richness (the least little intervention can lead to a story), and it is also a highly risky territory (the least little intervention can lead to a story...). Whatever its apparent subject, fiction usually exceeds its primary framework. This can take the form of adopting an unusual viewpoint (Cooke-Sasseville); multiplying the roles played by a single element (such as the Fashion Plaza building, serving as production location, décor, a lead actor and presentation place for Patrick Bernatchez's tales); mixing media (such as photography and film in Bettina Hoffmann's piece); or simply using joyful proliferation (as in Cynthia Girard's painting, whose astonishing extravagance must surely hide some mysterious story). In fact, it may well be that strictly linear fiction is nothing but a mental construct with which we proceed only insofar as it maintains the idea of framework, of boundary to go beyond.

Process

The notion of process no doubt renders better than any other the tension in play between the framework and its exterior — provided that it contains both the idea of boundary (all processes have limits) and that of transgression (whether actual or merely suggested, a process invariably involves the idea of movement, thus possible overstepping). And the attention paid to this notion by artists in recent times (particularly the past decade) likely has to do with the fact that it serves to transcend certain opposites (form/content, initial act/secondary times, upstream/downstream, work in progress/completed work) by condensing the (spatial and temporal) components of the artistic experience. We see this, for example, in Tricia Middleton's strange construction fashioned from recovered materials (including her own earlier work), whose shape (that of a factory), appearance (raw, incomplete) and production date (1996-2008) summon up and meld space and duration.

In various ways, the artworks in this triennial show seem to define themselves in terms of one or other of these frameworks — or of several, as many do. This is true of the work of Stéphane Gilot, for instance, whose interest in scale models relates to both fictional framework and formal strategies, and that of Adad Hannah, where the fictional narrative is strewn with references to the practice of art. Similarly, the mascot created by Doyon-Rivest offers a sort of critically humorous social fiction, while Julie Doucet's collages, at first glance dominated by a quasi-abstract formal framework, are in fact fraught with social significance and fictional appearance.

Notwithstanding the opinion that sees nothing but breaks with tradition and provocation at every turn, the history of art has also been marked by undeniable continuity since the mid-nineteenth century — at least according to the theoretical approach developed close to fifty years ago by the American art critic Clement Greenberg. From Manet (and even earlier) to Pollock and beyond, he says, modern art history is first and foremost a quest for the factors unique to each artistic discipline. Through self-criticism, "each art would be rendered 'pure,' and in its 'purity' find the guarantee of its standards of quality as well as of its independence. ... And I cannot insist enough that Modernism has never meant anything like a break with the past. ... Modernist art develops out of the past without gap or break, and wherever it ends up it will never stop being intelligible in terms of the continuity of art."¹

Damned as too directive, this formalism was roundly criticized for its essentialist nature, its autonomist conception of art, the primacy it affords to painting and its America-centric inflexions — not to mention the evolutionist aspect of the references to "purity." In response to his critics, Greenberg pointed out that the quotation marks around pure and purity should have been clear signals of his reservations. "'Pure' art," he explains, "was a useful illusion, but this doesn't make it any the less an illusion. Nor does the possibility of its continuing usefulness make it any the less an illusion."²

This clarification (albeit formulated nearly twenty years after "Modernist Painting" first appeared) is of capital importance. Beyond any cynicism one might perceive, it is in fact a call for the establishment of an action framework — and, to this end, to the possible use of notions considered from the angle of their operational or utilitarian value (their "usefulness"), rather than from that of their (hypothetical) value of truth.



Bettina Hoffmann p. 130



Cynthia Girard p. 112



Adad Hannah p. 120





Adad Hannah

Aphrodite, 2008
Eros, 2008
Two Mirrors, 2008
On Location, 2008

I have been making real-time video-recorded *tableaux vivants* for the last seven years in an ongoing body of work called *Stills*. By creating videos that mimic the appearance of a photograph, I can stretch out the privileged moment of photography and expose it in a way that compels viewers to interrogate the boundaries and characteristics that distinguish photography from video or film. While a photograph is the index of a specific moment when the shutter opened for a fraction of a second, with the before and after firmly implied, in each of these videos time itself becomes a crucial element, the live image negating the imagined before and after, insisting on the live/lived present. It is within this uneasy space between movement and stillness, the recorded and the live, that I hope to open up a space for viewers to take an active role in the generation of meaning — a meaning that is formed relationally between viewer and artwork.

The works in this exhibition look at unorthodox behaviours in the museum. In *Eros and Aphrodite*, a double-faced marble sculpture inspires passionate responses in a pair of museum visitors. In *Two Mirrors*, two men use a small mirror in order to implicate themselves and enter — if only visually — Velázquez's *Las Meninas*. In this work, I borrow a gesture from Velázquez's *Venus at her Mirror*, in which a nude Venus looks out at the viewer by means of a mirror held delicately by Cupid. The mirror in my work deflects one's gaze from the iconic painting to the world in front of the canvas, both within and outside the camera's purview. Once viewers see the video as a self-conscious performance of viewership, they cannot help considering their own performance within the gallery.

These videos and photographs were made at the Prado Museum in Madrid in December 2007.

