



QUEBEC TRIENNIAL

MUSEE D'ART CONTEMPORAIN, MONTREAL
24 MAY - 7 SEPTEMBER

The inaugural Québec Triennial, one of the most ambitious exhibitions ever of contemporary art from the province, aims to present a group portrait of its current artistic scene. The resulting exhibition, curated with panache by Josée Bélisle, Paulette Gagnon, Mark Lanctôt and Pierre Landry, is authoritative without being didactic, exceptional in parts, weak in others.

The exhibition's title, *Nothing Is Lost, Nothing Is Created, Everything Is Transformed*, refers to a quote by eighteenth-century chemist Antoine Lavoisier. Optimistically suggesting a cross-generational regeneration of artistic energy, the exhibition's guiding principle is viewed more precisely by Landry as a questioning of artistic frameworks that simultaneously sheds light on and challenges their origins. This tendency plays out most notably in the viewer's space vis-à-vis the artwork. Opening the show is *Tournis* (2008), a disorienting video by Gwenaël Bélanger in which the camera spins from its tripod. Suddenly plates of mirrored glass hit the concrete floor in a continuous sequence, smashing deafeningly around the camera/viewer in a stunning display. Manon De Pauw's elegant video *Fantasmagorie Lumineuse* (2008) is projected onto a white screen hung in front of a larger screen, casting its shadow and allowing for a visual dance between the two surfaces, upon which a hand carries out simple acts. The moving of elastic bands across the space, for instance, speaks to an awareness of artistic constraints and the need to reconsider one's limits. Also bridging spaces is Adad Hannah's *Two Mirrors* (2008), a *tableau vivant* that negotiates between Velázquez's *Las Meninas* (1656) and today through the use of a

mirror, twins and a video camera. The video is smartly shown alongside a production still that moves the viewer's space back one level further to the film set itself.

Other works assess the mythological, as evidenced by Patrick Coutu's sculpture *Fiche 1* (2008). The poetic, coral-like growths overtaken by a network of waxy cables reveal the limitations of human thought. More majestic are two excellent works by sculptor David Altmejd. Best known for his mirrored pavilion at the 2007 Venice Biennale, Altmejd presents two towers side by side, one a gargantuan fur-clad creature whose insides have been carved out into miniature Escher-like staircases; the other a mirrored monolith embedded with tiny vitrines holding quail's eggs, itself cracked in parts as if to suggest a shell.

Adrian Norvid riffs on the fragile with a lifesize paper organ covered with hilarious self-referential puns, inked in vintage comic book style. The title, *Very, Very Shaky* (2008), says it all. Two artists in the show work at the intersection of photography and film: David Ross's exceptionally long exposures unite the fragile and the photographic by capturing time and light in art storage spaces over the course of a week, while Bettina Hoffmann's mesmerising films and still photographs use isolated tracking shots to record the same frozen scene from different perspectives.

Hoffmann's camera draws the viewer's gaze intimately inwards, Bélanger's forces the gaze rudely out. Appropriately, these works function as brackets to a show in which self-reflection and a search – for authenticity, for value, for status – are the dominant themes. *Andrea Carson*

Adrian Norvid, *Hermit Hamlet* (detail), 2008,
Flashe on paper, 306 x 508 cm. Photo: Paul Litherland.
Courtesy Joyce Yahouda Gallery, Montreal