

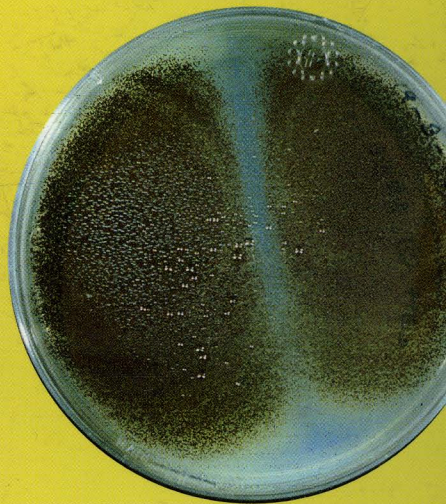
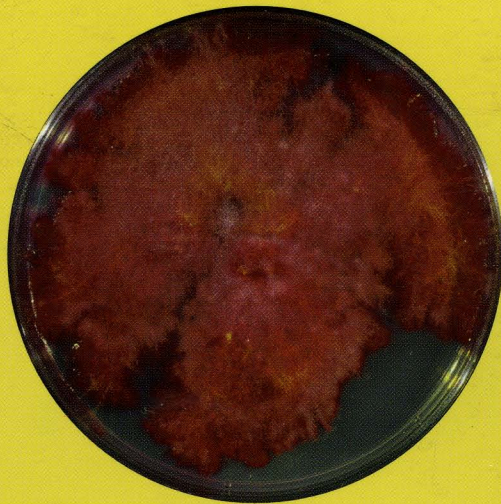
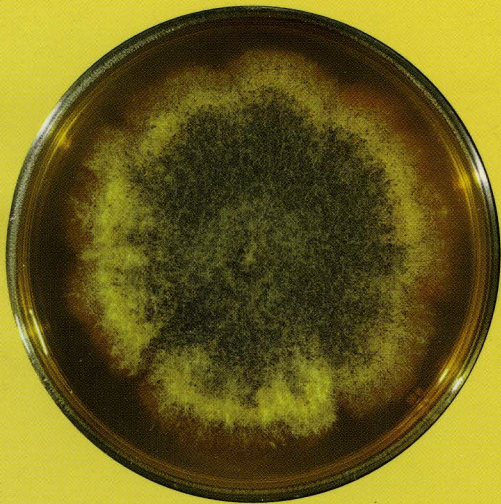
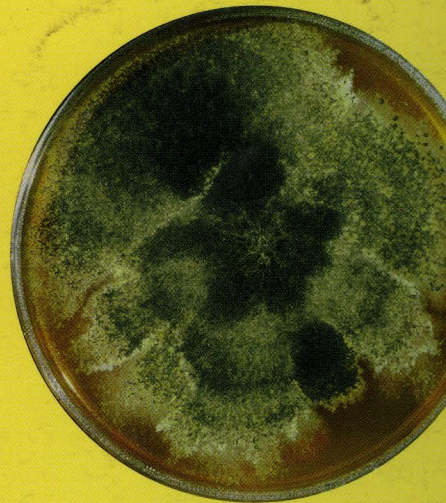
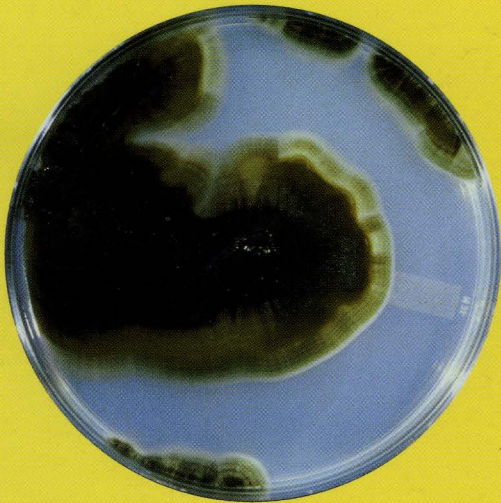
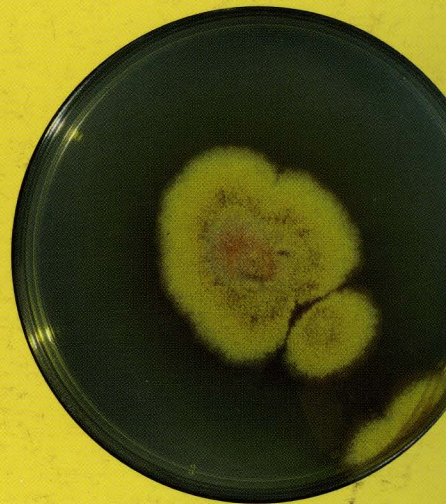
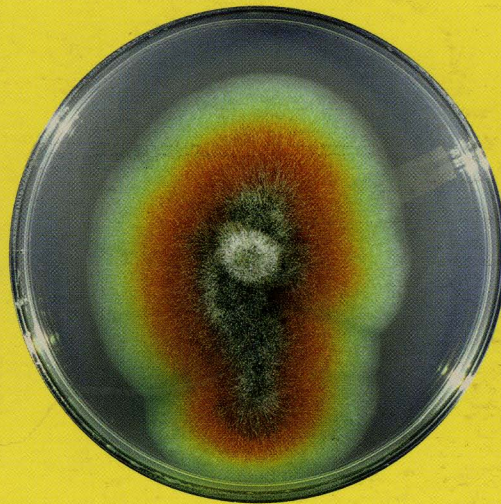
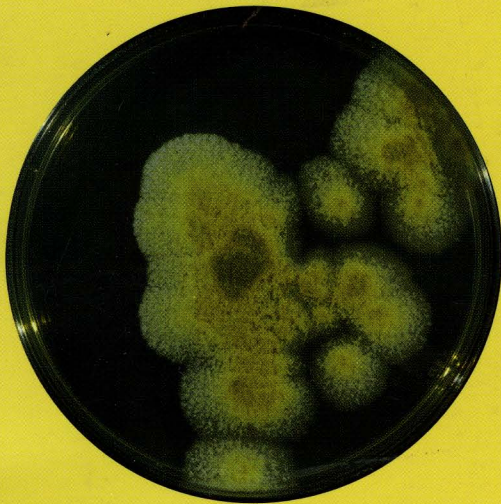
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# ESPACE

SCULPTURE

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## Une vision paradoxale de l'existence

Depuis près de trente ans, Dyens porte un regard critique sur certains éléments constitutifs de la terre, du cosmos et de l'univers. Cette réflexion, véritable culte à la terre, se poursuit à travers ses holosculptures *Big Bang II*, *Big Bang III* et *Vertigo Terræ* qui constituent ses plus grandes réalisations. Il parvient à allier les bouleversements perceptifs générés par les nouvelles technologies aux valeurs ancestrales de la terre, permettant une fusion entre ce présent déjà futuriste et un passé nostalgique. La vision de cette terre que nous livre Dyens n'est pas toujours rassurante, mais revêt souvent des aspects apocalyptiques, rendant ce lieu matriciel sordide et inhospitalier.

Au fil du temps, la démarche de cet artiste témoigne d'une préoccupation plus métaphysique. Dyens s'inspire fortement des bouleversements de la guerre, des catastrophes naturelles et des changements qu'entraîne l'avènement des nouvelles technologies dans la vie. Par ricochet, il aborde également l'impact de cette intrusion technologique dans le champ des arts visuels. Souvent monumentales — les installations accaparent littéralement le lieu d'exposition — elles se veulent le reflet direct des propres craintes

de l'artiste face à la société en perpétuelle mutation. Le travail de Dyens est rempli de paradoxes, en plus de mettre en scène des concepts diamétralement opposés tels la pérennité et la précarité, la matière et l'intangible, le réel et le virtuel, le plein et le vide, etc.

Déchiré entre l'attrait des nouvelles technologies et une passion viscérale pour le tangible, l'artiste arrive à concilier cette dichotomie en traduisant, à travers un appareillage sophistiqué, des valeurs traditionnelles empruntées à celles de son pays d'origine, la Tunisie. Il trouve le juste équilibre entre les deux mondes et humanise la technologie en lui donnant un souffle nouveau.

### Un spectacle engagé

De simple regardant, le spectateur devient participant, acteur. Dans la tourmente et l'angoisse d'une fin imminente, celui-ci s'avance, incertain, vers ce dispositif technologique. Catapulté au cœur de cet environnement immersif et polysensoriel sur lequel il n'a aucun contrôle, le sujet doit interagir avec l'œuvre, faire corps avec elle. En effet, les holosculptures de Dyens relèvent de la kinesthésie et de la polysensorialité : elles s'adressent d'abord au corps, à sa mobilité et aux sensations du

participant. L'apparition des multiples éléments conditionne les déplacements du sujet qui doit se mouvoir, les sens en alerte, au cœur de cet environnement chancelant et précaire, hésitant entre l'action et l'inertie. Car à chaque seconde, le temps se précipite, fuit à la vitesse de l'éclair, au rythme du déroulement de l'œuvre, l'obligeant à prendre une décision rapide.

Angoissante, déstabilisante, l'œuvre de Dyens conscientise le spectateur à la précarité de la vie, à un futur eschatologique tout en l'amenant au cœur de ses conflits intérieurs. *Vertigo Terræ* propose une expérience brutale dans laquelle s'enchevêtrent angoisse existentielle et angoisse personnelle. Cette expérience cathartique bouleverse l'univers perceptif et émotionnel de celui qui tente cette traversée virtuelle.

### Défier le temps et l'espace

Dans ses installations monumentales, Georges Dyens s'amuse à défier les lois de l'espace-temps en construisant des mondes inspirés de sa vision de l'existence : à mi-chemin entre la terre et le cosmos. On passe continuellement d'un monde et d'une dimension à un autre dans l'œuvre de Dyens : tous les médiums se chevauchent et interagissent. Les fron-

tières entre le virtuel et le réel sont ténues, amplifiant la déroute du spectateur. Dans ces holosculptures robotisées, le temps est précieux, calculé à la seconde près. Les œuvres ont une « durée de vie » précise visant à faire ressortir la fugacité des choses et l'évanescence du temps. Dans *Big Bang II*, le spectateur est projeté dans un espace sidéral, imaginé par l'artiste, par le biais de l'holographie, de la sculpture et de la musique. Il traverse les frontières du temps et de l'espace. Quant à *Vertigo Terræ*, elle calque la société actuelle en mettant en évidence un quotidien chargé de sollicitations interrompues. L'artiste défie et manipule habilement le temps en imposant au spectateur une imagerie multiple et diversifiée dans une durée très courte. L'artiste comprime le temps, ce qui fait que l'instant présent accapare toute la place. À tout moment, notre champ visuel est traversé par des images chocs et des flashes lumineux à peine perceptibles compte tenu de leur vitesse.

L'univers technologique de Georges Dyens propose une approche globale qui immerge le spectateur physiquement, philosophiquement et émotionnellement. La technologie convie à une quête spirituelle, quête à laquelle participe le spectateur. ■

Georges Dyens, *Vertigo Terræ*, 1994-1995. Installation multimédia ou holosculpture, comprenant cinq modules chacun. Lumière, hologrammes, sculptures, musique électroacoustique, vidéo et fumée se déroulant dans l'espace et le temps grâce à un système électronique programmé de sept minutes trente. 280 x 1200 x 200 cm. Photo : Guy L'Heureux.



## Paul Mathieu SUIITE SERPENTIN

*The most elegant equation is the double-twist. The part of one is the whole of the other, and each is metaphorical to the other.*

[WILSON DUFF<sup>1</sup>]

PAULA GUSTAFSON

Paul Mathieu's *Suite Serpentin* unashamedly appropriates the abstract apotheosis of eroticism and female form of Matisse's *La Serpentine* and the magnificent sculptural representation of the male nude of Rodin's *Age of Bronze*, then proceeds to recompose their form and meaning to develop multiple-level dualities and differentiations.

Playing with masterworks is a vandal's game. Operating inside the sexual ambiguities of male and female invites criticism. Both require expiation. Writing about *Suite Serpentin* in the catalogue accompanying the only

exhibition of these works to date (August 1998 at the Burlington Art Centre and October 1998, at Calgary's Stride Gallery), Mathieu writes: "The Matisse is a formal exploration using the human form (female) for abstract purposes. My version (male) is more eroticised and sexualized (even when there is only one figure). Also, the Matisse is an image of a figure, it is still a «representation». Mine is an image of a sculpture and it represents sculpture as an image. For that reason, it is not so much two male figures that are kissing, sucking, fucking, but two sculptures doing these acts. This is a distinction that is reinforced by the use of the Rodin in one of the pieces. Art as representation becomes both the subject and object of the work."

*La Serpentine*, for its part, can be traced back to the pictures on naughty postcards popular at the turn of the century; photographs

that portrayed scantily-clad, plumpish women in provocative poses. In Matisse's bronze-sculpture version, the female is shown in a languid stance, inserting her finger suggestively in her mouth. In Mathieu's bronze-and-ceramic transpositions, *Serpentine's* lithe body has assumed male musculature and genitalia and the pedestal he/she leans against is no longer merely a prop but a penis.

However, Mathieu's reconfigurations intend more than gender transformation. The works in his *Serpentin* series operate on multiple levels of ambiguity. They play on reversals and inversions: "upside-down, exterior/interior, contained/container, sculpture/pottery, representational/functional," he explains. Essayist Bruce Hugh Russell, in the *Suite Serpentin* catalogue, suggests that Mathieu

literally stands his prototypes on their heads, "deliberately invoking the now displaced terminology of sexology and psychology which referred to homosexuality as an inversion of hetero-normative sexual relations."

In a recent interview<sup>2</sup> Mathieu offered a candid appraisal about the ongoing development of this series of works: "There is a strong sexual content," he admitted, "but that's not just what the pieces are. They're also about «what is a vase?» and how the bodies relate to each other, the negative space between them and what is real. There are a lot of reflective surfaces in the pieces, so you always see the real object and its reflection, and its reflection is usually inside of something, so the container, instead of containing something tangible, just contains the reflection, which is a form of representation."

"I like that it's all those things and none of them is privileged. I don't think I would be very interested in making a piece that was solely about sexuality. Some people do that and it's fine, but it's not my interest. Because of the culture we live in, people might grab it [the gaphic sexual imagery] and forget other kinds of reading. The sexuality for me

is just one way of dealing with issues of reversal which is what is at the centre of the pieces. If I was to say it very simply—take a sculpture and make it into a personal object, turn it into a vase—that's the reversal. But in order to make that reversal more interesting, I pile on other reversals, so the sculpture becomes upside down and then there are two of them. One is propping up the other. One is a vase, a container, installed on a garbage can, which is another container, and then there is a mirror, a reflective surface, which creates another reversal, so stacking them ups the level of the function. By making a reversal from female to male, you can engage the body parts in all kinds of postures," he laughed.

Mathieu's ceramics have been discussed almost exclusively in the language of post-modernist theory. Mathieu himself has written and lectured extensively on Michel Foucault's investigations of «otherness» and the relationship between power and knowledge. In *The Space of Pottery: An Investigation of the Nature of Craft*,<sup>3</sup> he challenges conventional cultural hierarchies by stating simply that "crafts are unclassifiable. They defy categories. In fact, craft is the activity where dehierarchisation,

the crossing of borders and categories and differences between the races and sexes are explored the most thoroughly today, as well as historically."

The arguments Mathieu puts forth in this essay address Foucault's interest in spaces and sites. Mathieu writes: "These spaces are of two main types. The first he [Foucault] calls «utopias,» which are not real spaces, but basically unreal spaces (a category including the objects our culture usually refers to as works of art); the other he calls «heterotopias» (other spaces), which are real spaces where «all the other real sites that are to be found within a culture are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted»." He concludes by asserting the importance of "the grey zone where everything merges."

Without hesitation, Mathieu refers to the objects in his *Serpentin* series as vases. "Pottery as craft is something I've always celebrated in my work," he said<sup>4</sup>. "I think by switching to the materials I'm using, to bronze and ceramic, and making references to modernist sculptures, I bypass that association, but at the same time the final object is a vase. They are functional objects. You can put real flowers in them."

He suggests that, because ceramics has been intrinsic to domestic and sacred activities throughout human history, the way it is perceived is both obvious and ambiguous. At the formal or conceptual level, we distinguish between utilitarian objects and the items we call fine art, but he says you never know what to do with a vase. "Do you put it on the wall or on the table or in the cupboard? Where does it go?" he asks.

Probing the role of spaces/vases is an appropriate discourse within post-modernist theory, and particularly appropriate given Mathieu's career path. The majority of his 45 years have been spent in professional fellowship with a group of gay male Montreal ceramic sculptors — Léopold Foulem, Richard Milette, the late Jeannot Blackburn — each of whose bodies of work challenge traditional notions of high/low and fine/decorative. "In embracing a medium denigrated as effete and superficial these artists have found a vehicle to explore their own social status as gay men and as artists in

contestation of received social roles," essayist Russell writes.

Two years ago Mathieu left Montreal to teach at the Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design in Vancouver. Now that his residence is firmly established on Canada's West Coast — where ideological tendencies lean more toward Asian and indigenous practice — I propose considering his *Suite Serpentin* against the backdrop of Pacific Northwest Coast native art.

Traditionally, Pacific Northwest Coast sculpture depicts two beings simultaneously occupying a single space. A carving may, for example, be both Bear and Whale. Transformation — intrinsic to supernatural belief — occurs as the observer visually reorganizes the various shared or overlapping parts.

The transmutive quality of so-called primitive art was first recognized in the 1940s by the group of New York emigrés that included Max Ernst, André Breton, and Yves Tanguy. They introduced Claude Lévi-Strauss to Pacific Northwest Coast tribal art. For the Surrealists, the fascination was in the visual puns. Lévi-Strauss approached the painted masks, rattles, and other carved objects with an ethnologist's eye.

His early writings about the sculptures includes an enthusiastic description of a cedar storage box featuring a totemic animal carved in bas-relief: "The animal is represented altogether in full face and in profile, from the back and at the same time from above and below, from without and from within. A butcher draftsman, by an extraordinary mixture of convention and realism has skinned and boned, even removed the entrails, to construct a new being coincident by all points of its anatomy with the parallelepiped or rectangular surface and the object created is at once a box and an animal — many animals..."<sup>5</sup>

Lévi-Strauss's theory of dyadic oppositions (based on the symmetrical dualism of Pacific Northwest Coast art) dealt with the basic oppositions of life-death or male-female. Anthropologist Wilson Duff discerned that the carvings and paintings also revealed paradoxes that addressed some of the profound questions of metaphysics. From the 1950s until his suicide death in 1976, Duff was the foremost academic authority on Pacific Northwest



Paul Mathieu, *Suite Serpentin*, 1998.  
Soil / Flower Vase.  
Detail. Ceramics /  
Bronze. H. : 142,24 cm.  
Photo : Kate MacIntosh.