

Katie Bethune-Leamen

La douche écossaise

28 November 2019 to 25 January 2020

To drift through a foreign city, a regional carnival, a mind on the edge of awareness, is to wind through an assemblage of living, throbbing miscellanies. A certain selection of literal and abstract imagery sticks to the surface of our travels: strawberry Perrier cans, the green tiles of Victorian public washrooms or Parisian metro platforms, a squish-squashed soda can that looks like a shrimp, the radiant façade of a Las Vegas casino, ceramic blobs, mother of pearl teeth set in stone effigies. When combined, this vernacular of everyday life generates emergent properties distinct from the capacities of its constituent parts.

The 19th century expression, *la douche écossaise*, embodies a similar collection of references and histories. A direct translation gives us, ‘the Scottish shower’—a practice of hydrotherapy, which alternates hot and cold streams of water to aid blood circulation. By analogy, the turn of phrase took the figurative meaning of contrasting behavior: “*Cause you're hot then you're cold. You're yes then you're no. You're in then you're out. You're up then you're down.*” At the Théâtre du Grand-Guignol—Paris’s storied populist theatre of the shocking and schlocky (1897-1962)—the term became a metaphor for a nightly bill of short plays that alternated between lighthearted, romantic, or sexy fare, and psychological, visceral horror.

With similar affective intensity, in *Rabelais and His World*, philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin describes the profound ambivalence of the ‘grotesque body’, how our sweaty stinky slimy sexy lowest physical stratum, which both defecates and copulates, contains an essential duality. For Bakhtin, the degradation of corporal material “digs a bodily grave for a new birth; it has not only a destructive, negative aspect, but also a regenerating one [...] it is the fruitful earth and the womb.” It is within these wavering encounters between object and subject that meaning emerges. We exist because of these interactions; we are the materialization of unruly relationships. To be one at all is always to be both, and probably many more.

With a stream of material shifts within individual works—cast, pierced, studded, dotted, painted, coated, carved, and compressed—Katie Bethune-Leamen makes evident these eternal vacillations. The world’s engine feeds on such provisional contrasts: formation and dissolution, presence and resonance, attraction and repulsion. A mound of clay can transform into a face, but the worm will always melt towards the same earth it devours. A pearl is a temporary object; irises, fleeting subjects; he loves me, he loves me not.

For their generous financial support the artist wishes to thank:

the Canada Council for the Arts, the Ontario Arts Council, the Chalmers Arts Fellowship, the Toronto Arts Council, the Vermont Studio Center, Nordisk Kunstsenter Dale, and the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity.

For their fabrication work and material consultation the artist wishes to thank Alexx Boisjoli (slipcast porcelain tiles and glaze development), Marek Kubat (steel), Toni Hafkenschied (photography), Superframe (frames), Dimitri Levanoff (printing), Alynne Lavigne (bronze consultation), Marina Guglielmi (bronze consultation), Michael Doerksen (bronze casting), Liz Charters (bronze casting), Tyler Jordan (3D printing), Mat Lindenberg (3D printing), Don Lee (photography), Ed Bamilang (porcelain), Coulage MD (bronze casting).