

The Etymologist
Maggy Hamel-Metsos

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The Etymologist

In her first exhibition at Galerie Tschudi, Montreal-based artist Maggy Hamel-Metsos (*1997, Montreal, Canada) presents *The Etymologist*, a continuation of her plaque series. Her process begins with the acquisition of a variety of different metal objects found in what she calls the limbos of ownership, places where people want to get rid of objects either by selling, giving or forgetting. The artist considers these fragments of everyday life for their symbolic and poetic qualities. They are melted into ingots shaped as commemorative plaques onto which the items' names are branded using metal punches. At times, an object will be melted on its own, revealing its material essence, weight and size. In this sense, the object can be read as edified to a monument. In other circumstances, multiple objects are brought together in a single plaque so as to create a scene or a poem. Either way, the forms are abstracted into words to give place for a new image to arise, the one existing in the mind of the viewer. The process of *decreation* at the heart of the production of the plaques has to be recreated in the viewer's mind with an image that cannot be seen but only imagined.

This exhibition *The Etymologist* shows four works that can be read as verses of a poem that meanders across the architecture of the gallery. Each work comprises a group of objects. In one group we find *two kettles*, *six skillets*, *four sad irons* and *one hand*. The artist introduces cast iron into her lexicon as a means of appropriating objects that imply domesticity and routine labour. The utilitarian nature of these objects suggest the presence of a body which floats in disarticulated parts across the space. Yet at last, the artist does not leave us wondering. Above, we are offered a form that is not merely a suggestion but the origin of its parts, a missing piece from which we can reconstitute the whole.

Note from the artist

When thinking about the making of plaques lately, I was cornered by limitations. Limits of language, limits of bodies, limits of destruction, limits of humanity, limits of my own, limits of others.

Words are limits. This means this- not that-. Perhaps they are conceptual outlines of an original given form. Perhaps the form is then hollowed out, maybe it was always hollow- perfection is. Perhaps we sometimes fill the outline with truths, at times with lies¹. Perhaps an outline like peace gets filled with war. *Sense leaves the conversation.*

Here you may read outlines also as borders.

The work of an etymologist is to dig out, within the given outline, all that has been thrown in the pit, down to the original object. Perhaps she sometimes reaches the initial form from which the outline was created- but like borders, this remains a myth. Perhaps imagine, as compound as rock or ore, a word as the sum, the sedimentation of all those things. To understand the whole, the etymologist cuts into it. She probably disarticulates units at the joints. She does so to understand the being in the different parts of the hole. *Sense perhaps re-enters the conversation.*

I think of my work as a sculptor being analogous to an etymologist too²-or perhaps a reverse etymology. When confronted with the object, to melt it into a plaque, to commemorate it, I first need to name it. I need to figure out where I draw the outline.

You may notice here in the gallery space that while I've melted whole objects, I have also cut parts of ONE.

At a certain point in the business of the cutting, the body I was standing in front of or more so the remains of it, imposed a limit. What I was looking at escaped all words, all signs, in all languages. I stood at the vertiginous outline's hole, standing outside WORD and cried : e oo ee ooo oe oo o o a, oe i oe ea oe aiy, o ee i ie ou a io oe a, ou iya oe a oe e o o...

LIBERATION

¹ Conflations also happen in the pit of lies. Some can be very dangerous, like conflating identity with enemy, especially national identity.

² In Cassandra Float Can, Anne Carson refers to the work of Gordon Matta-Clark as an etymologist.