

Espace Sculpture

Ana Rewakowicz *Uniblow Outfits*

Rebecca Roberts

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mystery of thought takes place, and this mystery then passes into the arms and legs, into life. The head by itself could also symbolize the entire body at rest.

Your sculptures remind me a bit of the early Greek votive statues. Is there any historical significance to this, or is it just coincidence?

It could be a coincidence, if we only look at the forms of the figures. But making sculptures is definitely like having a mission. It is not a hobby or just a pleasurable activity. To me it is a mission. My sculpture must include all that I will leave behind me, all that I can leave behind me, because eventually it will have to carry on its own autonomous life — that is, if it will be lucky enough to continue on by itself. I think that any sculptor, whether he lived three-thousand years ago, or will live three-thousand years in the future, if he really believes in what he is doing, already has inside him a linearity — a very long thread that embraces all humanity.

The texture of your work is similar to that of Giacometti, who lived in this area. Has his work had much of an influence on you?

Giacometti has probably influenced many artists, but one has also to consider those who influenced Giacometti. There are many books that explain this process. He used to make very flat forms, figures, up until the 1930s.

Then he realized that even when finishing these figures, textures, the sculptures were still unfinished. So he quit making them smooth. I believe that instead of looking at an analogy with Giacometti, one should look for it with the world we are living in — a world where everything that has been made is never really finished. It remains fragmented, so an artist sensitive towards this aspect will find out that all things are always moving and changing, and that the structure of the world itself is also continually changing. — Just think about this table at which we are

sitting. It is made up of a myriad of atoms, which are continually in motion. And we ourselves are made up of atoms. Maybe it seems pretentious, but I cannot finish my works, I leave them like this, and I am glad if others feel this aspect. Maybe they can finish my sculptures themselves, maybe with their thoughts... Maybe. In the future, — who knows! There is often one original idea which continues throughout your life. In a way there aren't any changes. There are these artists who change their own style, but I don't really know what to say about it. Giacometti changed his own style, from surrealism to a more important style.

Yes, if Giacometti had died when he was young, when he was still a surrealist artist, maybe he would not be particularly well known. That's true. It is very interesting. Probably the first works of any artist, aside from those few who are absolute geniuses, are never completely original. They need sev-

eral passages in life, in existence. I believe it is necessary to live life, to make mistakes, to make different things, then maybe, slowly, there is this thread that gives you linearity.

What you say about the possibility of your sculptures being finished by other people, with their own thoughts, is interesting.

Yes, in fact sometimes I happen to have several projects going on at once in different places, and I end up abandoning a work here or there. Then, after ten days or a month, I see it again, and it is as if somebody else had finished it. Sometimes I find it interesting, or maybe I end up destroying it. — If you are always very near to your own work, you don't always realize what you are doing any more, so giving yourself a break is also necessary. — And who knows, maybe there really is someone else who finishes up the sculptures, at a mental, energetic level. <—

REBECCA ROBERTS

Ana Rewakowicz Uniblow Outfits

On first encounter, Ana Rewakowicz's *Uniblow Outfits* is so ordinary that it's a little boring. In the Ballroom Gallery of the Khyber Centre for the Arts, a Halifax artist-run centre, Rewakowicz has set up a simple model of a conventional retail space. Two one-piece latex suits hang on shiny metal stands in the centre of the room, their matching shoes below them on the floor. They are loosely flanked by an inflated latex sofa and a freestanding silver changing-booth, curtained in red.

Rewakowicz draws viewers' attention to her latex suits in much the same way that clothing stores create customers. She employs what she calls "fantasy projections" and "desire strategies," borrowed from the fashion and advertising industries. Photographs of similar installations in other cities line the walls, featuring smiling gallery-goers encased in

the latex suits, some reclining on the sofa. Tags attached to the suits invite viewers to try them on.

Using strategies of retail sales and advertising, Rewakowicz positions visitors to the installation as potential consumers of a pleasurable experience. Not surprisingly, those who fall for it are disappointed. The suits are constructed of two layers of rubber latex, between which air may be pumped. They look loose and comfortable because the outer layer, before inflation, hangs limply. But the inner layer stretches tightly around the body of its wearer, who must put the suit on over clothing, and who immediately starts to sweat. Thus constricted, his or her first task is to attach a hand pump to the suit and inflate the hood, which expands to fit tightly over the head and around the face, impairing hearing and raising body temperature significantly. Second, the wearer must slip on the shoe/pumps and, sweating profusely, must walk around the gallery to inflate the suit. Inflation may take up to ten minutes, and it is an arduous process of



ANA REWAKOWICZ, *Uniblow Outfits*, 2002. Photo: Courtesy of the artist.

careful and forceful stepping in order not to dislodge the pump-tube or fall out of the shoes themselves. Any attempt to take a breather on the inflated latex sofa is thwarted by the slipperiness of the material and the likelihood of sliding off onto the floor. Deflation takes an additional five minutes, and many suits are removed still partially inflated.

If it is her desire to debunk a myth of consumer satisfaction in the retail world, Rewakowicz is successful. *Uniblow Outfits* is an uncomfortable, humiliating and ultimately unrewarding performance. No pleasure was to be had and no one looked cool. Those who were convinced by her strategies of seduction learned a lesson most of us know by heart: what seems good isn't always so, and looks can be deceiving — especially when allied with fashion and advertising.

However, there is more to this installation than meets the eye. *Uniblow Outfits* seems to be just a simple demonstration of what everybody already knows; regarded from an oblique angle, however, the exhibition becomes much more interesting.

Rewakowicz's model of the retail experience becomes nothing more than a prop, as the gallery itself is revealed as an important space of consumer transaction. For many visitors to the Khyber galleries, Rewakowicz's "desire strategies" are irrelevant. Most gallery-goers expect that when an artist invites them to physically engage with an artwork there is a good reason to do so, and that their understanding of the work may hang on their participation. They do not need to be manipulated into trying on a rubber suit because they are already drawn to it, in a spirit of investigation. In return for their effort, they expect to emerge from the experience somehow enlightened.

Rewakowicz highlights this exchange of participation for enlightenment by thwarting those looking for the artistic meaning of *Uniblow Outfits*, just as she thwarts their more naive counterparts by rather unusual physical discomfort and public humiliation relieved only by the removal of the latex suit and disengagement from the work. Meaning, made contingent on an almost intolerable physical action, is constantly deferred. The artist shows us how desire — not for pleasure, but for definitive meaning — is tied with the consumption of art, and creates a cycle of anticipation that can never be fulfilled. ←

Ana Rewakowicz: *Uniblow Outfits*
Khyber Centre for the Arts, Halifax
January 15–February 9, 2002

William Gill's work¹ is informed by contrasts and juxtapositions, the most obvious being the dichotomy between nature and culture, but he also plays with that of the traumatic and the monotonous, the exuberant and the upsetting and, of course, the man-made and the natural. Formally speaking, his work is rich in textures, forms and patterns. His sculptures are mostly in wood, with some mixed media elements. Interestingly, Gill never cuts a tree for his sculptures; instead, he recycles and reclaims fallen trees and dead wood that he finds in the forest or salvages from building demolition sites.

An example of such recycling is the wood coming from the infamous Mount Cashel orphanage ground. The main building was levelled four years ago, many years after the scandal of sexual and physical child-abuses by Christian Brothers. Trees were also cut down to put up a supermarket. The maple the artist recovered from the site is found in his work titled *Workhorse*, permanently installed at the Sculpture Park and Garden Foundry in St. John's. Hanging from the maple beam are some 500 rectangular pieces of birch on bronze rods. While the birch and bronze elements reflect each other by their similarity in size and shape, these two parts of the sculpture present opposing qualities. The marks left by the chainsaw stand as witness of the artist's intentions while conferring roughness, solidity, and strength to the piece. In contrast, the mirror image hung on bronze rods that is animated when the wind blows is delicate and lyrical in feeling. The work engages us in a troubling dialogue about nature and human culture, even more so when one knows the provenance of some of the wood used. Wind blowing through the rods produces a soothing sound — a metaphor, perhaps, for the passing of time that one hopes will bring peace to those who suffered at the infamous

site of Mount Cashel.

Most of Gill's works bear textural marks reminiscent of the rich encaustic oeuvres of Jasper Johns and of the large wall pieces on plywood by Paterson Ewen. Gill is also attracted by the latter's approach to natural phenomena, space, and stars. Beautiful in its quietness, the painting *Winter Road to Heaven*, which Gill produced in 2001, is directly inspired by Ewen's work. The plywood panel is divided into three parts. The middle one looks like snow flakes falling in very orderly fashion. On either side, are parts of a sphere, like the surface of the earth seen from space, from which, as the title suggests, one can see the roads to the heavens.

Heavenly occurrence appears in

Juxtaposing the artworks of William Gill



WILLIAM GILL,
Black Onions,
2001. Douglas
fir, birch, tar,
burning. 152.4
x 33 x 93.9 cm.
Photo : Ned
Pratt.

other beautiful objects created by Gill. *Black Onions* is a sculpture that seems to reconcile nature and culture, the wild and the domestic, the indoor and the outdoor. On a shelving unit, a large massive piece of wood, rest three handmade bowls filled with dozens of burnt twigs. The bowls are inspired by tiny lichen cups found in the forest and the side of the beam has been marked by a chainsaw, leaving the trace of what could have been a comet or a shooting star. Its shadow is still visible on the shelf.

Similarly, *Black Ball* is reminiscent of a comet. The burnt round shape has been cut in half, hollowed out, and joined together again. Small wood blocks keep a distance between each half. Each