



Lou Lynn, *Button Box*, 2014.
Circular metal structure,
95 disk-shaped glass and
wood objects, one glass
needle. D 42, H 18 in.

COURTESY: THE ARTIST
PHOTO: JANET DWYER

Lou Lynn

"Out of the Ordinary"

Centre Materia

Quebec City, Quebec

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As a child, I was fascinated by my mother's button box. It was a circular tin object with imagery of folkloric flower motifs. It was a gift from my mother's mother and I regarded it as a treasure chest—a family legacy. As a small child, I thought it seemed large. Once I managed to open the lid, the experience of all those buttons, in a wide array of shapes, forms, textures, colors, and materials, was one of my first aesthetic experiences, my first domestic experience of the sublime. I couldn't resist touching the buttons to feel the textures and contemplate them more closely; I still remember the clicking sound of sifting for the ones I found most interesting and beautiful.

Those forgotten memories came rushing back in my mind when experiencing Lou Lynn's most recent exhibition. Building on her previous artistic endeavors and perusing her remarkably coherent creative vision, the exhibition offered a series of objects made from hot-formed glass, cast bronze, and wood.

In the work titled *Button Box* (2014), a waist-high circular metal structure acts as container for a stack of 95 disk-shaped objects made of glass as well as different types of wood, all suggesting buttons by their patterns of holes. A glass needle protrudes through the hole in one of the buttons, which both

reinforces the association with common buttons and also opens up the symbolic narrative to larger considerations regarding tools, processes, decoration, and functionality. The correlation between the viewer and the artwork is key in appreciating this installation piece, which operates through the accumulation and transmutation of scale. The buttons range from 3 to 12 inches in width, and their variety and combination of textures creates a compelling tableaux. Staff at the Centre Materia told me that I was not the only one to express a desire to manipulate the oversized buttons and share personal memories of domesticity, craft, and womanhood.

The viewer is similarly drawn to a wall installation titled *Fasteners* (2014). Situated in a corner of the gallery and spread out over two walls at eye level, a display of 55 cast-bronze fastener forms creates a large rectangle that is visually reinforced by an apricot-colored background. This creates a distinct and beautiful pattern, with appealing tones ranging from bronze to black. In this piece, Lynn makes use of accumulation, but here the accumulation on the walls results in a coherent network of interrelated objects. The fasteners are mounted on metal rods, which makes them seem to float in space about six inches from the wall. Upon close inspection, one is struck by the diversity of textures in the individual objects. Before the bronze casting is undertaken at a foundry, Lynn sculpts wax using ceramic tools in her studio, allowing her to achieve a rich variety of original motifs and textures. The use of wax further allows her to shape, bend, and twist the fasteners at will, from folded disks to angular shapes and

forms. Images of jewelry, brooches, belt buckles, fibulae, and medallions instantly come to mind.

From the assemblages of *Buttons* and *Fasteners*, the viewer is brought directly to the second segment of the exhibition, which is comprised of a series of ten *Tools* (2011) and *Utensils* (2011–12). The objects in the wall installation are displayed at eye level, offering a frontal view in an ordered horizontal line, akin to artifacts in a museum of anthropology. The massive tools, a combination of hot-formed glass (fabricated by Tyler Rock and Julia Reimer) and cast bronze, have an unsettling effect in relation to the viewer's body, their outsized materiality, size, and weight creating a sense of unease. How could one hold or use these objects, which are transformed from functional to enigmatic when regarded at close range? The individual components and surfaces are highly textured—for what purpose? Are they tools, or sculptures? The two last artworks from these series, which are displayed on pedestals, further reinforce these questionings on the interrelations between form, function, and decoration, especially *Twisted Spoon* (2012), with its surprising twisted glass handle.

Leaving the exhibition, my thoughts wandered from my mother's button box to Marshall McLuhan's oft-quoted observation, "We shape our tools and then our tools shape us." Indeed, tools are fascinating objects: They are created to satisfy particular needs and to transform other objects, but once they are created, they seem to become the determining channels through which other operations are conceived. Although not primarily conceptual works, Lynn's research, exploration, and engagement of zones of ambiguity and hybridity mine the territory between expression, function, form, decoration, process, commodity, tool, and sculpture. Operating a series of distortions, Lynn's art brings familiar objects, such as the aestheticized tools of the artisan and of domestic craftsmanship, out of the ordinary and into the extraordinary. By doing so, she leads the viewer to an experience that is artistically rich and stimulating, intellectually challenging, and most certainly empowering.

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