

# Reviews

## OUT OF THE ORDINARY / HORS DE L'ORDINAIRE

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CENTRE MATERIA, QUEBEC CITY

REVIEWED BY BRUNO ANDRUS

LOU LYNN'S EXHIBITION *Out of the Ordinary / Hors de l'ordinaire* showcased her most recent body of work. Building upon previous artistic endeavors, the renowned Canadian artist presented a series of installed objects made from hot-formed glass, cast bronze and wood. By performing a series of distortions and creating ambiguous objects of contemplation based on the formal vocabulary of functionality, Lou Lynn brings familiar objects out of the ordinary and into the extraordinary. More intuitive than conceptual in nature, Lou Lynn's artistic explorations of zones of ambiguity between expression, function, form, decoration, process and sculpture challenge traditional Western perception. Consequently, she draws the public into a poetic experience that is artistically rich and stimulating, intellectually challenging and potentially empowering.

In certain cultures, among the Haida people for example, tools are traditionally highly symbolic and their usage ritualized. Tools are themselves aestheticized, decorated and ornamented to emphasize their spiritual nature. From this perspective, the tool is an object of power, which possesses the potential to create or reinstate meaning, identity and status. Often, their usage is related to a set of performative gestures, which may include song and music. On the other hand since the Italian Renaissance, under the influence of Platonic idealism, the importance of tools has diminished in artistic practices, discourses and theory. In the Western perspective of artistic genius and mastery, the tool is relegated to a negligible and meaningless intermediary between the generation of the concept and its materialization in the artistic masterpiece. Modernity, through the mechanization of production methods, has tended to further dehumanize the tool. Regardless of this shift in post-medieval Western thinking the fetishization of tools remains a constant reality to this day. An artisan can develop and maintain a special, personal and even sentimental relation to tools.

The first piece of the exhibition, entitled *Button Box* (2014), consists of a waist-high circular metal structure serving as container for a stack of 95, disc-shaped objects, ranging from 3 to 12-inches in diameter, suggesting buttons made of either glass or wood. A large glass needle protrudes from the hole of one of the buttons, which both reinforces the association with common buttons and also opens up the symbolic narrative to larger considerations related to traditional handicraft and domesticity. The correlation between the viewer and the artwork is key in appreciating this piece, which operates through transmutation of scale. The accumulation, variety and combination of visual textures thus created is compelling, especially to touch.

From the *Button Box*, the viewer is drawn to a wall installation entitled *Fasteners* (2014). Situated in a corner of the gallery and spread out over two walls at eye level, the display of 55 cast bronze *Fasteners* forms a large rectangle that is visually reinforced against an apricot-colored background. This creates a distinct and beautiful visual pattern, with appealing tones ranging from bronze to black. Images of Celtic and Germanic fibulae and medallions instantly come to mind. In this piece, Lynn's use of accumulation results in a coherent network of interrelated objects. They are





ABOVE: Lou Lynn,  
*Fasteners*, 2014.  
Bronze and steel.  
107 cm h x 914 cm l.  
PHOTO: ÉTIENNE DIONNE





mounted on metal rods about 6 inches from the wall, which makes the objects seem to float in space. When approaching the installation for a closer view, one is struck by the diversity of the textures of the individual objects. Lynn directly sculpts slabs of wax with ceramic tools, allowing her to achieve a rich variety of original motifs and textures before the casting process. The use of wax allows her to shape, bend and twist the *Fasteners* at will, from folded discs to angular shapes and forms.

From the assemblage of *Buttons* and *Fasteners*, the viewer is brought to the second segment of the exhibition comprising a series of ten *Tools* (2011) and *Utensils* (2011-12). The objects of 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. Because of their materiality, size and weight, these rather large and massive tools, made of a combination of hot-formed glass and cast bronze, create an uncanny relation to the viewer's body. These objects, which do look functional from afar, soon become enigmatic when observed at closer range. The two last artworks from this series, which are displayed on pedestals, further question the interrelations between form, function and decoration, especially *Twisted Spoon* (2012), with its surprising twisted glass handle.

By appropriating and re-contextualizing tools in the space of the art gallery – one hundred years after Marcel Duchamp – Lou Lynn performs an artistic gesture, which is highly subversive in nature. In the current postmodern context, poetically reaffirming the artistic potential, nature and value of the tool, is akin to celebrating humanity's capacity to directly act upon and transform the world, hence to make it more human. ■

ABOVE: Lou Lynn,  
*Button Box*, 2014. Glass and  
wood: 42 glass buttons,  
53 wood buttons, 1 glass needle.  
107 cm di. x 46 cm h.  
PHOTO: JANET DWYER

OPPOSITE PAGE: Noriko Masuda,  
*St. Ives Teaset*, 2013. Slip-cast  
bone china, underglaze.  
12 cm h x 30 cm w.  
PHOTO: COURTESY OF THE ARTIST