

LOU LYNN

Exhibition: Retro-active

Where: The Reach Gallery Museum, Abbotsford, B.C.

When: March 19 to May 24, 2009

Reviewed by: Bettina Matzkuhn

Do you remember the awkwardness of holding an unfamiliar tool in your hand? Wondering how much pressure to exert, and how to make it work properly? Lou Lynn's mid-career retrospective *Retro-active* evokes both a physical and conceptual unfamiliarity. Her glass and metal sculptures are markedly not functional, yet they imply a purpose.

Such esoteric shapes — suggestions of blades, hooks, and funnels — conjure the other materials they might be used to carve, gather or measure. The exhibition spans the years from 1992 until the present. The early works are cast glass with a variety of surfaces, or industrial glass set in cast aluminum forms. The more recent work, such as *Scorp* (2007) combine blown or cast glass handles attached to cast bronze forms. *Tools as Artifacts* (2008) is a collection of almost 40 smaller, hand-size tools — at once familiar yet mysterious. A handle sprouts a skewed glass corkscrew, or an ominous bronze hook below a small loop. Lynn spares no detail — tiny rivets are suggested in some forms. The illusion of manufacture reinforces an uncanny credibility.

Creating each implement requires multiple technical processes. Lynn sculpts each out of wax, complete with areas of texture. She imagines and draws the kind of glass handle to fit, either casting the glass and treating the surface herself or commissioning a glass blower to produce the handle. A foundry then casts the bronze and another person prepares the individual mounts. Lynn is the premier performer in a chamber ensemble that plays metal and glass.

Lynn insists on the integrity of her materials — no colour is introduced into the glass, and nothing masks the inherent colour of the bronze. This unembellished, material honesty ensures the objects are not disguised, so the form becomes paramount. The surfaces are also compelling — the glass can be luminous green on the polished edges or like ice, hinting at rapid transformation. The bronze is dark and glowing, heavy, yet full of delicate texture.

Lynn's work germinates from a personal collection of old tools, bolts, knobs, nozzles, and propellers gleaned from abandoned work sites, flea markets and garage sales. While she evokes a universe apart from the mania around efficiency, this work is not about nostalgia. Rather she describes the grand flow of cultural evolution, our capacity to forget skills and processes within one generation. But out of loss comes new invention and speculation and she prods her viewers to excavate and sift for possible meanings.

Retro-active will travel to the Grand Forks Art Gallery (June 13-August 15, 2009) and the Yukon Arts Centre Public Art Gallery (September 10 – October 25, 2009).

Lou Lynn, *Tools as Artifacts* (five of 38 components), glass and bronze, 2007.

