

## Laminoir

Martha Townsend chez Molinari

May 24–July 29, 2018

### Townsend / Molinari / Laminoir

For almost forty years, Martha Townsend has been creating objects with (apparent) simplicity, objects that are remarkably perfect in their crafting and attention to subtle fine details, that suggest a continual and reciprocal movement between the forms and materials used, between abstract values and meaning(s). In the introduction to a retrospective exhibition presented at the Musée d'art de Joliette, Director France Gascon referred to "a spellbinding effect reminiscent of that encountered in objects shaped by time, or in the great poetic works."<sup>1</sup>

In the early years, the sculptures were closely linked with found objects and old farm tools that were modified slightly yet just enough to instigate an unexpected reading, similar to the effect of a haiku. Witness a work titled *Pool* (1987) made of an old rusted shovel blade resembling a frying pan with a pool of mercury in the middle of it about which Townsend says: "With that work, I really felt like I had come to the end of an investigation, and I took a lot of distance, I guess there were about six months when I didn't make any work."<sup>2</sup> The works that followed were less referential assemblies of objects, sometimes in suggestive arrangements, yet always with extreme attention to the materials, which, once chosen, truly lead the dance. Art critic Stéphane Aquin rightly evokes "a kind of geometrizing Gilles Mihalcean"<sup>3</sup> relative to this work. In a natural progression, Townsend has been increasingly turning to abstraction in her work: "The exhibition at the Fondation is an exceptional opportunity to emphasize my abiding interest in the volumes and spatialities of sculpture in dynamic

dialogue with an artist whose work had already begun to influence my thinking as a young art student."

She adds: "Most often my simple forms are composed of two materials in dialogue. My sculptures play on material, form, and volume to create a quiet place that arrests time. Their symmetrical geometry is soothing and easily grasped. Traditionally, sculpture unfolds as you walk around it, and in this case, the viewer's mind wraps around the sculpture. This aspect of geometric abstraction generates feelings of anticipation for viewers, who can confirm their intuition by circling the work."<sup>4</sup>

Almost twenty years ago, Molinari and Townsend participated in *La sculpture fait surface* [Sculpture Surfaces], an unforgettable exhibition presented at the Christiane Chassay Gallery, whose title would also be appropriate for our exhibition. Yet this exhibition's title *Laminoir*, in which you may have recognized an anagram of Molinari, is borrowed from poet Patrick Lafontaine<sup>5</sup> and appropriately reminds us, with an implied half-smile, that two words wrought from the same letters may look alike, provided that we observe them in a certain way, that is with a roving eye that does not consider the order of elements in a series as an immutable thing. The sculptor reminds us that the word "laminoir" [rolling mill] can mean layering, or cutting into bands, and that it evokes a strategy that her work and Molinari's work have in common.

We would like to leave the last word to poet Nicole Brossard who has collaborated with the artist twice: "Martha Townsend's works compel our eyes to make instantaneous syntheses of meaning, which subsequently silently unfold and extend inside us. This is beautiful and invigorating."<sup>6</sup>

— Gilles Daigneault

## In the beginning . . .

It began with an inkling. Happenstance came into play and a set of circumstances gave way to a vague desire. That feeling found a shape, a colour, a weight. I cast about waiting for a reason, a place, an event to ground what was still unformed. When it happened it was a memory of something I never saw, coupled with a bit of history hidden in a piece of fiction. The material emerged and some things I had saved for years were standing by. There was the tradition I work in and out of to consider. By now I was getting quite deliberate. Deliberate enough for the yellow pages, quotes, dates, negotiations, setbacks, money exchanged, delivery, assembly. Now I have before me the image of my longing and my belonging and I feel an inkling begin to stir.

Martha Townsend, *in L'origine des choses*, Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, 1994.

Translation: Denis Lessard

- 1 Martha Townsend, *Between Silence and Listening* (Joliette: Musée d'art de Joliette, 1995), 7. Translation from the French original: Donald McGrath and Denis Lessard.
- 2 *Ibid*, 47.
- 3 Stéphane Aquin, "Matière grise", *Voir* (Montreal), April 27–May 3, 1995.
- 4 Artist statement, 2017.
- 5 Guido Molinari, *Nul mot* (Montreal: les Éditions du Noroît, 2017), 121.
- 6 "Entretien", *Bulletin 2015* (Montreal: les Éditions du Noroît, 2015), 9.

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