

Peter Powning

Catalogue Essays and Images

Peter Powning's technical prowess in so many materials is second to none, particularly, when he skillfully manipulates these materials into one, single work of art ... What is also astounding is that Powning can work in such varied scale: small domestic tabletop objects, larger sculptural works to monumental public commissions. It cannot be said enough, that the breadth of materials and the dramatic change of scale in which he uses them is extraordinary.

Rachel Gottlieb

Associate Curator, Gardiner Museum, Toronto

Powning combines disparate materials to create a complex totality. He primarily works with bronze, steel, glass and stone finished in rich textures and colours evoking a sense of antiquity. "His work is multi-leveled," says visual artist Susan Edgerley, who shows glass sculpture with Ainsley, "and brings together many elements – each piece has so much information. The work is contemporary, but it feels as if it's being pulled through history, which implies that it will endure.

Susan Edgerly

Artist

Quotation from *Seeking Balance* catalogue.

Phases of the Moon.
7' 6"h. Glass, bronze and stone. 2008



On the occasion of the opening of Peter Powning's solo exhibition at the **Sandra Ainsley Gallery** and the Toronto announcement of the **NB Museum's** acquisition of "the Powning Collection". April, 2015.

Thank you for inviting to me speak about Peter Powning's work. It's quite an honour. As Peter just said, when he came to Canada in 1970 with his wife Beth, today a noted author in her own right, they set up a pottery in rural Sussex, New Brunswick. Just to provide you with some historical context here, Peter was part, whether he was conscious of this or not at the time, of a larger phenomenon known as the American studio craft movement in which many artists and designers came to Canada in the 1960s, to work and teach, such as Donald Lloyd McKinley (with his wife Ruth Gowdy McKinley) and Robert Held at Sheridan College in Ontario, or Kent Benson who met the famous Michael Cardew in Abuja, Nigeria or yet another transplanted American is Walter Ostrom who settled out east to teach ceramics at NSCAD in Halifax. Some were avoiding the American draft and others felt sympathetic to the Canadian way of life and others, like Peter, were not formally educated in the crafts but they all came from the back-to-land, counter culture movement and they all significantly shaped the craft revival movement here in Canada. It's also remarkable that the Pownings chose to set up their 300 acre studio in Sussex, New Brunswick because this, some historians argue, is where Canada's studio pottery movement was born under Danish Canadian husband and wife Eric and Kjeld Deichmann who began making pottery in the 1930s in Moss Glenn, New Brunswick and eventually settled in Sussex. The Deichmanns became famous in their day, their portraits shot by Yousuf Karsh and romantically documented by the National Film Board until they closed their pottery in the 1960s.

Pyxidium.
Slumped glass and cast bronze.
24" w.

Peter, therefore, is part of this history and now contributes to it in his own right by demonstrating how studio craft can operate in a much expanded field.

Peter began his career as a traditional studio potter, living off his own work making functional and decorative vessels in the then popular Japanese firing technique of Raku for the local and national markets. But look how far he has come 45 years later! While he still lives on his 300 acres with Beth, and works in clay, his practice has expanded to include not only the exquisite Raku crackle vessels but also sculptures made of cast glass, bronze, and steel and, more recently, he returned to photography which he studied in school. This is astonishing since most process-based artists or craft makers stick to a single media. You are a ceramist, or glass artist, furniture maker or a metalsmith. I believe only Roman Bartkiw, who taught in Ontario and Nova Scotia in the 60s, and the aforementioned Robert Held worked in glass and ceramics but certainly not on the same sophisticated level as Peter Powning. Peter's technical prowess in so many materials is second to none, particularly, when he skillfully manipulates these materials into one, single work of art. Powning is technically curious and an auto-didactic which explains his ease at handling a variety of materials and his ability to invent new processes such as pioneering indoor Raku firing by introducing a protective heat-resistant suit of armour, so to speak



The materials he chooses to work in are rooted in the ancient art of alchemy. While Peter is not transforming stone into gold, of course, nonetheless, he is altering material properties: clay to stone, sand to glass and metals from solid to fluid, back to solid once more but transformed into new wondrous shapes. Under his deft hands and distinguished eye, clay, metals and glass undergo transformation by fire. What is also astounding, I think, is that Peter can work in such varied scale: small domestic tabletop objects, larger sculptural works to monumental public commissions. It cannot be said enough, that the breadth of materials and the dramatic change of scale in which he uses them is extraordinary.



Raku Vase. 7.25"h.

But as curators have pointed out, and Peter himself says, and as you can see for yourself in the gallery, there is strong continuum that unites his eclectic body of work. And it's simply this: Peter Powning's artwork questions humankind's connection and relationship to nature, the environment and history. He employs a repertoire of shapes, be it the disk, the circle, the arch, the fragment, the totemic column or the box reliquary (all signifiers of mysterious artifacts and time passing), the twig (the symbol of nature), or the house, the garment (emblematic of shelter)— he returns to these forms, imprinting with them with his own personal glyphs, time and time again and they all strike a fine balance between the organic elements of nature and the antiquated artifact. Powning's artwork is timeless and enigmatic but also it's very much grounded in our busy, daily post-modern life. *There is nothing ironic about Peter's art; it invites us to pause, to look and to contemplate our profound relationship with culture, history, the environment, the passage of time and ultimately the meaning of life itself. Today, we are witnessing by many contemporary artists a return to material processes, and who show archaeological and archival impulses in their work to similarly question memory and making and offer metaphors drawing upon relics and fragments of the past. It's good and important to know that Peter Powning has been offering these interpretations in his vessels, and totemic forms other work for over 45 years like no other.* Congratulations to you Peter on such an illustrious career and congratulations to the New Brunswick Museum for acquiring such an important archive and collection.



Rachel Gottlieb
Associate Curator, Gardiner Museum, Toronto

The language of Time is spoken in remnants and residue. Powning catches it in the midst of conversation. The artist engages with his materials, fashioning and altering them, often proceeding intuitively and experimenting with chance. His work is practicality at play, coming from a desire to explore and understand the material world while allowing it to assert itself, build itself on its own.

Although originally based in craft, his practice engages sculpture as its central pre-occupation. The artist builds from the elements available to him with an eye toward resultant forms. His methodology is overt; his process is laid bare. Powning intricately understands his materials, the combinations of substances needed to produce content, texture, and form. Different contexts determine outcome, particularly evident with work intended to be situated outdoors.

Says Powning of his process, "I set up conditions for the accidental to shape both the process and the outcome, a sort of evolution by mutation. I work with the results of accident as part of both the physical and metaphorical process. The other sort of 'accident' I deal with is inadvertent breakage. I try to incorporate this kind of accident in the work, although there are times that this isn't possible, in which case the bits and pieces can insinuate their way into new work at some later time. In fact, for some time I have been deliberately breaking parts of sculptures to provide pieces of the whole to transform into other materials (by casting ceramic or glass shards in bronze) and then reassembling them as a renewed whole. I like the metaphorical resonance of transformation, the broken reunited, made whole but altered."

Aesthetic satisfaction comes from the alternate revealing and concealing of the materials in the works. Powning does not encode but, rather, exposes the symbolic nature of art and language while employing material and message in mutual reinforcement. He plays with the capabilities of available media, manipulating them to points that would seem "unnatural." Substances take on the qualities of other seemingly disparate materials, and opposites exist in tandem. Stone becomes wood-like, glass seems like water.



A recent group of works portray books under a series of unusual conditions. Some have been immersed in water. Many of the books are suspended in the ocean just beyond breaking surf while the artist chases them, shooting them as they are animated by currents. Other books are portrayed in mid-flight, thrown by the artist. All have become illegible.

Books are carriers of words, the method by which we communicate thoughts and ideas with symbols understandable to the reader. By removing this function, Powning asks us to consider not what the books convey literally, but what they are in themselves. They become sculptural objects. The photographs which we see are documentary records of a process that is utterly transitory.

Other series of works acknowledge the heritage of craft to extract ghosts of tradition past – the plinth, the reliquary, the ornament – with a view to carrying on in this lineage while subjecting it to transformative effects. By once again moving beyond utility, Powning digs through the strata of what has come before to discuss the processes of memory and forgetting, of history as patina.

Powning describes his work as "metaphorical and allusive, but in loose felt ways, rather than by use of conscious specific literal references. I'm usually seeking qualities of antiquity and mystery, something unmoored from time and place. I strive for work that projects a feeling of obscure provenance and yet evokes feelings of deep recognition and connection."

On the one hand, his work resonates between the lines of narrative that, though steeped in history, nevertheless proves to be centered on a projection of humanness, on its universal desire for immortality through the objects it produces.

On the other, it describes a continual recreation of meaning and, therefore, function. The objects are destined to be once again re-written in the present, in the moment of our encounter.

Mireille Eagan: catalogue essay for 2009 solo exhibition at Ingrid Mueller Art + Concepts.

24 page colour catalogue in French, English and German. (see page 11 for french translation)

Mireille Eagan is a Canadian arts writer and curator. ... She is currently Curator of Contemporary Art at The Rooms in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador.



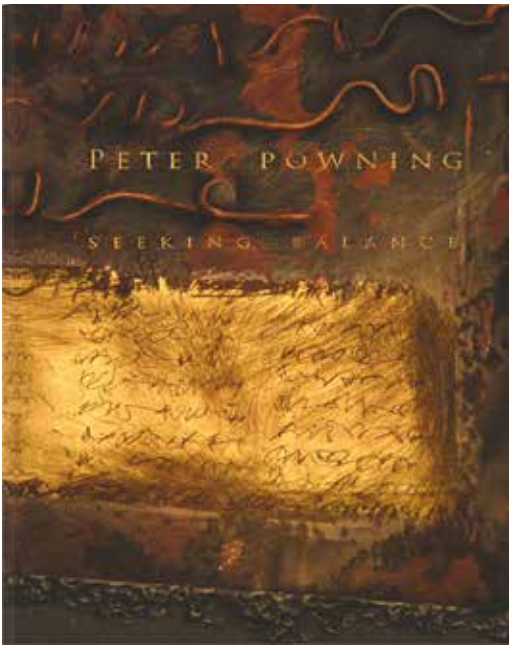
Waterbook.
40" wide photograph mounted on aluminum.



Transmutation #5
Wood, cast bronze, granite, lead, copper and gold leaf. 19"h.

Transmutation #1
Cast bronze, acrylic and granite. 46"h.





Seeking Balance solo exhibition
Sandra Ainsley Gallery, Toronto, 2008.
40 page colour catalogue
catalogue essay:

Seeking Balance, Peter Powning's latest solo show at the Sandra Ainsley Gallery, is a significant body of work, highlighted by dramatic lighting against the distinctive industrial backdrop of Toronto's Distillery District: stone and brick walls, polished concrete floors.

In "Seeking Balance" Powning combines disparate materials to create a complex totality. He primarily works with bronze, steel, glass and stone finished in rich textures and colours evoking a sense of antiquity. "His work is multi-leveled," says visual artist Susan Edgerley, who shows glass sculpture with Ainsley, "and brings together many elements – each piece has so much information. The work is contemporary, but it feels as if it's being pulled through history, which implies that it will endure. This show is cohesive. Threads link one piece to another, his visual vocabulary creates a sense of unity. The work is akin to a book, its narrative Powning's evolution as an artist. Each series is like a chapter in his book." Edgerley observes that "these forms could exist in nature, as easily as in this space, there is a sense that they have always existed and will continue to exist. When you look at these pieces you can feel the history, and see the flow of time, but they're still very modern."

That sense of history is recurrent in Powning's overall body of work. There are sculptures based on the stela – an ancient upright tablet used to mark a significant place or event; a perfectly round torus; and the bronze branches that have become a motif in his work – natural history. In this show the

branches emerge not only from ceramic sculptural vessels, but serve also as an organic matrix joining two house forms in the sculpture entitled "Metamorphosis." "Peter is a tour de force," says Toronto visual artist Irene Frolick. "He's a master of materials but he's not ashamed to have a very poetic look at the world – there's no irony, no tongue in cheek, it's just a very soft poetic look at the world around him. The humbleness and emotional quietness of 'Metamorphosis' is really beautiful."

Powning says the process of making involves a series of creative experiments, a journey of discovery -- about the piece, himself, the limits of materials and his skills. "I don't come to a piece with a fully realized concept. The concept is the starting point not the finishing point."

"Peter Powning is courageous," says Susan Edgerley, "and he is true to his creative impulses. It's very unusual. He can see beyond disappointment, beyond the limits of particular materials, stay open, and maintain a child-like sense of wonder. When he started the book series, it seemed to come out of the blue, but it makes sense when you think about language and its place in our society - to use that creative impulse, to bake them and make them fly and put them in water - the motion of that series is extraordinary. To stop and be aware and to use that awareness to develop another language is wonderful. When people work with material as opposed to ideas it's so instinctual from the beginning, because you're working with something from nature. Of course if you are aware in a more intellectual way, as he is, and have an intuitive sense of the world and nature those intuitive processes are very evident. His ability to easily shift from intimate to large scale sculpture is rare."



White Branch Vessel, 22" h. Cast bronze and clay.

Most of Powning's large sculpture is designed for use both inside and outdoors, made to withstand the weather. He documents his sculpture in different seasons to emphasize its durability, and to show that exposure to wind, rain, and sleet only enhances the surfaces on these forms.

Powning started his studio practice in the rolling hills of Markhamville near Sussex, New Brunswick, in the early 70's. His studio and foundry expanded in response to his need to overcome the challenges inherent in working with multiple materials in a rural area far from art foundries or other necessary services. He built much of the equipment he uses in his studio.

Early in his career he worked solely with clay, creating functional pieces and small sculptures, in order to make a living in a small rural community. The small sculpture eventually led to larger works in a wide range of materials. These days he's as likely to use his kilns to slump glass or to bake water-soaked books as he is to fire ceramics. The book series completely captured the imagination of Irene Frolick. It started when Beth Powning loaned a book to a friend who decided to read it in the bath. When the book was returned, in a distinctive, decidedly bloated organic state, its new shape told a tale. Soon after, Powning dropped a book into an aquarium filled with water to see what would happen. After a month, when it started to go septic, he placed it in a hot kiln, thinking he could stabilize it in its bloated state. The result was stunning – a sculptural, ephemeral shape the colour of singed wood. One breath might collapse the whole structure. Powning's photographic journey began. Since then, he's photographed books in the ocean, and now has them flying through the air. These photographic works are magical, playful, daring.

"Seeking Balance" is one more marker on a long path for Powning, who in 2006 won the prestigious Saidye Bronfman Award (as of 2007 a Governor General's Award). His work is widely published: included in Robin Hopper's book, "Stayin' Alive;" John Mathieson's recent book on raku ceramics; and "GLASS ART: Urban Art 2003" by Richard Yelle. He is the recipient of numerous awards, including the Strathbutler Award, grants and awards of recognition from the New Brunswick Arts Board, and Canada Council for the Arts. He has been commissioned to produce two sculptures for Festival Tower, the new home of the Toronto International Film Festival, to be installed in 2010: "Fantasm," a bronze and glass wall array backlit by a video wall, and "Split Rock," a large stone and bronze sculpture for a rooftop meditation garden.



He created "Light Spirals" at the Residences of College Park on Bay Street (above), and is currently in shows at the Harbourfront Centre, "The Importance of Being Banff," the Burlington Art Centre, "East Coast Ceramics," and The Beaverbrook Art Gallery, "Meaning and Metaphor: Highlights from the AGNS Contemporary Ceramic Collection."

Unlike many visual artists, it's hard to categorize Peter Powning. The Sandra Ainsley Gallery is primarily known as a glass gallery and although Powning employs glass in many of his works, "glass artist" is a label he resists. He prefers the freedom of expression and challenges inherent in the use of any material that serves his creative purposes. Peter Powning is a mature artist in full stride who consistently produces work that is at once sophisticated, imaginative, and deeply moving.

Karen Ruet - Gallery Curator/Director at NBCCD



New Hope Nimbus
29" d. Glass, cast bronze and ceramic.

In looking over the range of work that I've included in this show, I'm pondering some common themes in the selection. The book images, and some of the sculpture, involve either unreadable text, glyphs, or what looks like writing. Cryptic calligraphy. I started using this "calligraphy" in response to stela, tablets and other ancient artifacts bearing indecipherable symbols. For a long time, I have been engaged by the humanness of them, and their sense of meaning without the burden of specific content.

My use of cryptic glyphs is an attempt to engender a sense of inherent meaning, meaning that is visually contextual but perhaps beyond the capacity of text (words) to convey. It is also an exploration of the power of lost languages as represented by obscure human artifacts unearthed from a time beyond cultural memory. It might also represent the murky evanescent text of dreams, that kind of dream reading in which the text is visible but the words and meaning dissolve and distort when examined; and yet still have power.

I attempt to create a sense of being at the threshold of meaning, a place where you have to accept the experience as the meaning, and relinquish the need to explain. The direct experience of the object is sufficient, more than sufficient. The experience is the point. Explanation and analysis diminish or confuse the reality of the moment and become something else, their own reality, not the reality of the experience. The on-going experience of the physical presence of things deepens our awareness of seeing, just seeing, without the filters and intellectual garnish that analysis encumbers us with.

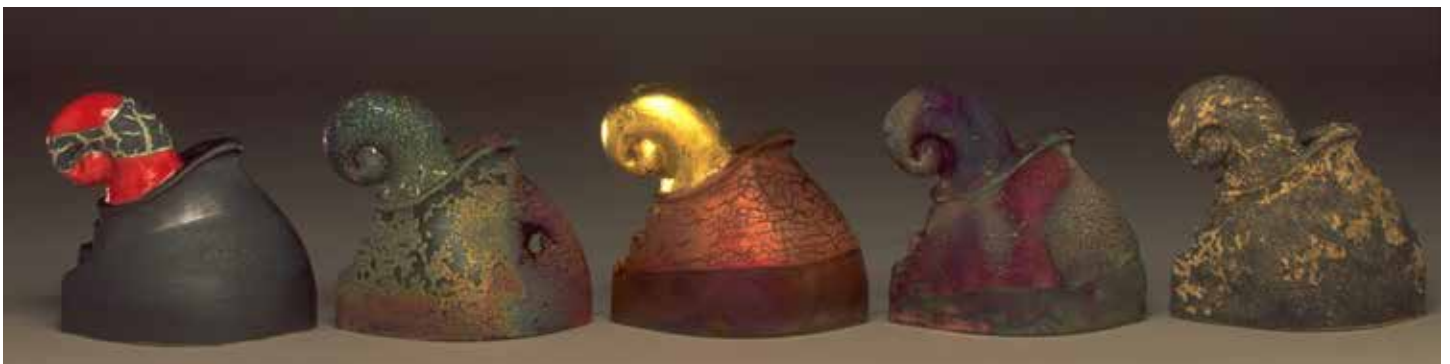
See page 12 for French translation

Analysis and historical contextualization have their place, but to my mind, not as a substitute for a direct engagement with art. There's a big difference between watching a bird in flight ... just watching... as opposed to analyzing as you watch - thinking about "bird flying", where it's going, flight mechanics, its species, what it eats, etc. Those are different experiences. Direct, unmediated experience is what interests me most. A flood of associations and other thoughts soon enough invade the experience; alter it, and inform it. Associations are made, and the whole web of analysis of one kind or another takes over. I aim for objects that are curious enough to evade immediate classification, not as puzzles, but mysterious, with a presence of their own that engage the viewer directly.

This is what it seems like I'm up to. The process of making art isn't this clear to me as it's happening. It happens in a state of "attentive inattention," as the poet Gary Snyder put it. There's a kernel of an idea as a starting point; the rest of the process develops its own logic. The glyphs or unreadable script are only one aspect of each piece. The form of the objects is yet another realm to consider.

I'm also grappling with transmutation in my work - the act or state of being changed from one form into another, for example, the book from a familiar common object, to something other. The transformation of objects or fragments of objects into different materials: wood to bronze, bronze to acrylic, glass to bronze. Fragments of objects that are reconstructed in the original form but altered in the process. This process is rich ground for metaphorical exploration. While this is a personal journey for me as an artist, my hope is that this work provides others with the chance for a journey of their own.

Peter Powning



Canadian Clay and Glass Gallery, Waterloo, ON. 1996

Gloria Hickey ~ curator



Discus.
Raku fired slip cast paper clay,
bone and gold and silver leaf.
24" d.

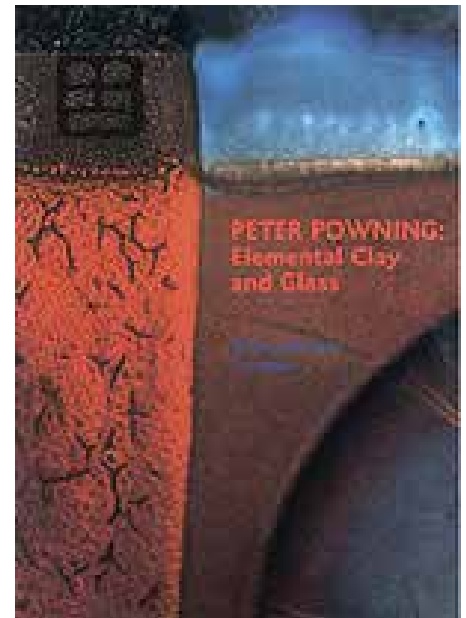
In the past 25 years, Peter Powning has earned respect among connoisseurs of fine craft as one of Canada's most innovative ceramists. Many people recognize his distinctive and commercially successful raku pottery, but few realize that he is also a sculptor with an international reputation. Gloria Hickey has curated the first national solo exhibition of Powning's sculpture for the Canadian Clay and glass Gallery, and Peter Powning: Elemental Clay and Glass documents this exhibition with 46 colour photographs, curatorial essay and artist's statement.

Powning has exhibited his clay, glass and bronze works in over 60 galleries and museums in Canada, the US, Germany, Scandinavia, the UK, Australia, New Zealand, China and Japan. He has gained international recognition through the Mino International Ceramics Competition, Fletcher Award Show in New Zealand and the Kanazawa International Exhibition of Glass in Japan. In New Brunswick, he won the 1991 Deichmann Award for Excellence in Craft and the 1993 Strathbutler Award.

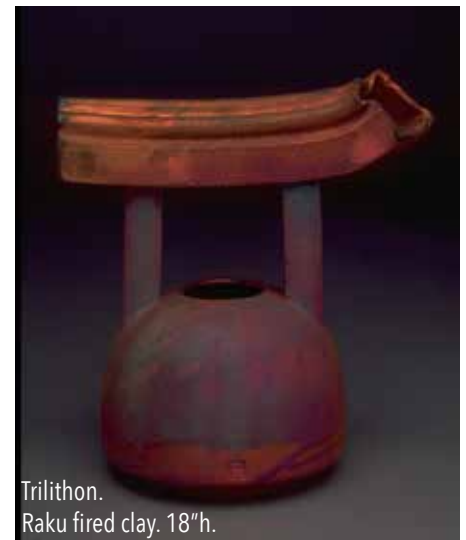
Gloria Hickey's curatorial essay tells how and why Powning made the pieces in the exhibition. Candid yet sensitive, it assesses Powning's importance among Canadian ceramists and glass artists, and it interprets the interests and values that permeate not only his pottery and sculpture, but his personal life as well.

Peter Powning's studio is near Sussex, New Brunswick. He has served on the New Brunswick Arts Board, the Premier's Advisory Council on the Arts, and the New Brunswick Craft Council, and he has been a visiting artist at the Banff Centre for the Arts. Gloria Hickey, a St. John's writer and curator, twice won the Betty Park Award of Merit for her contributions to critical writing about craft in North America. In 1994 she was nominated for the Imperial Oil Award for Excellence in Arts Journalism. C2G2 1996

Exhibition toured to NB Museum, Saint John and AGNS, Halifax, NS in 1997-8



28 page colour catalogue



Trilithon.
Raku fired clay. 18"h.



Lunarium.
Raku fired clay
cast bronze and glass, 26"h.

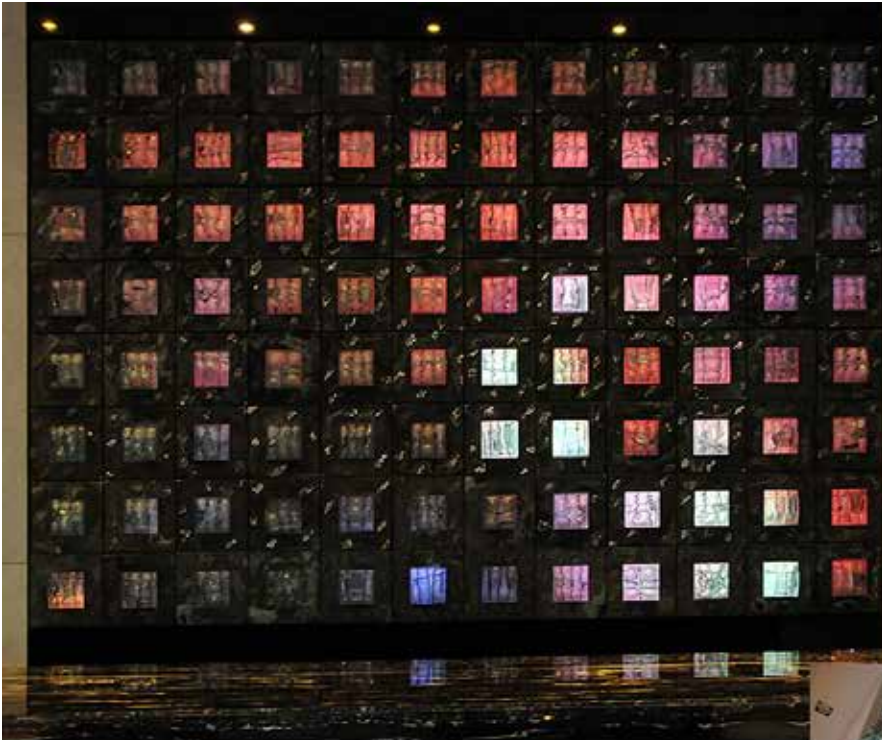
SPLIT ROCK

Festival Tower
Meditation Garden
King and John, Toronto, Ontario
2010

Bronze and Granite.

18' x 9' x 5.5'

Peter Powning



Fantasm
Festival Tower
Toronto 2010
cast bronze, slumped glass, video screen
& video
8' h x 12' w x 1' d

Le langage du temps se parle en vestiges et reliquats. Peter Powning le capture au milieu d'une conversation. L'artiste interpelle avec ses matériaux, qu'il façonne et transforme, souvent en se laissant guider par son intuition et en laissant libre cours au hasard dans son expérimentation. Son travail est en quelque sorte un jeu, animé par son désir d'explorer et de comprendre l'univers matériel tout en lui permettant de s'affirmer, de se construire lui-même.

Bien que sa pratique ait ses racines dans l'artisanat, Peter a fait de la sculpture son principal intérêt. Il crée à partir des éléments à sa disposition, l'esprit absorbé par les formes résultant de leur transformation. Sa méthode est ouverte, son processus, épuré. L'artiste a une compréhension intime de ses matériaux et des combinaisons de substances nécessaires pour produire un contenu, une texture, une forme. Les différents contextes le guident jusqu'à l'aboutissement de ses œuvres, ce qui est particulièrement évident lorsque celles-ci sont destinées à être installées en plein air.

Voici comment Peter explique son processus : « Je mets en place les conditions pour que l'accidentel façonne le processus et le résultat, dans une sorte d'évolution par mutation. Mon processus physique et métaphorique est inspiré des résultats de conditions accidentelles. L'autre type d'"accident" dont je me sers, c'est le bris involontaire. J'essaie d'incorporer ce genre d'accident dans mon travail, mais parfois ce n'est pas possible; dans ce cas, il arrive que les fragments et morceaux se frayent ultérieurement un chemin jusqu'à de nouvelles œuvres. En fait, il m'est arrivé de briser délibérément des parties de sculptures pour recueillir des morceaux à intégrer dans d'autres matériaux (en coulant des tessons de céramique ou de verre dans le bronze) et ensuite de les réassembler en un nouveau tout. J'aime la résonance métaphorique de la transformation, le réassemblage de ce qui était brisé en un tout remanié. »



La satisfaction esthétique vient de l'alternance entre la révélation et la dissimulation des matériaux utilisés dans ses ouvrages. Peter ne code pas, mais expose la nature symbolique de l'art et du langage, tout en faisant appel à des matériaux et des messages qui se renforcent mutuellement. Il joue avec le potentiel des techniques disponibles, les manipule jusqu'à ce qu'elles semblent « contre nature ». Les substances s'imprègnent des qualités d'autres matériaux disparates en apparence, et les contraires se juxtaposent. La pierre devient le bois. Le verre devient l'eau.

Une récente série d'œuvres présente des livres soumis à des conditions inhabituelles. Certains ont été immergés dans l'eau. D'autres sont en suspension dans l'océan, juste au-delà de la ligne où déferlent les vagues. L'artiste les poursuit, les photographie dans les courants qui les ballottent. D'autres livres encore sont figurés en plein vol, lancés par l'artiste. Tous sont devenus illisibles.

Les livres véhiculent des mots; ils sont la méthode par laquelle nous communiquons nos pensées et nos idées avec des symboles compréhensibles par le lecteur. En ôtant cette fonction, Peter nous invite à réfléchir non au message littéral transmis par les livres, mais à ce qu'ils sont en eux-mêmes. Ils deviennent des objets sculpturaux. Les photographies que nous voyons sont les fiches documentaires d'un processus absolument transitoire.

D'autres séries d'œuvres rendent hommage à l'héritage de l'artisanat pour extraire les fantômes d'une tradition passée – le socle, le reliquaire, l'ornement – dans l'objectif de poursuivre dans cette lignée tout en la soumettant à des effets transformateurs. En transcendant une fois de plus le fonctionnel, Peter fouille les strates du passé pour interroger les processus de la mémoire et de l'oubli, de l'histoire comme patine.

Peter décrit son travail comme « métaphorique et allusif, mais plutôt avec relâchement qu'en utilisant des références littérales spécifiques conscientes. Je recherche habituellement des qualités d'ancienneté et de mystère, quelque chose d'étranger au temps et à l'espace. Je m'efforce de livrer un travail qui donne une sensation de provenance obscure tout en suscitant des sensations de reconnaissance profonde et de connexion ».

D'une part, le travail de l'artiste résonne entre les lignes d'une narration qui, bien qu'enracinée dans l'histoire, n'en demeure pas moins centrée sur une projection de l'humanité, sur son désir universel d'immortalité au travers des objets qu'elle produit.

D'autre part, il décrit une recréation continue de sens et, donc, de fonction. Les objets sont destinés à être réécrits dans le présent, au moment de notre rencontre.

Mireille Eagan

Pour ce qui est de la série d'œuvres que j'ai incluses dans cette exposition, on retrouve des thèmes communs. Les images de livre et quelques-unes des sculptures sont accompagnées d'un texte illisible, de glyphes ou de ce qui ressemble à une écriture. J'appelle cela la « calligraphie cryptique ». J'ai commencé à utiliser cette calligraphie en m'intéressant aux stèles, plaques et autres artefacts anciens portant des symboles indéchiffrables. Depuis longtemps, je suis attirée par leur caractère humain et le sens qu'ils véhiculent, sans pouvoir avoir une idée du contenu véritable.

En utilisant les glyphes cryptiques, j'essaie de conférer à mes œuvres un sens inhérent, c'est-à-dire visuellement contextuel, mais qui transcende ce qu'un texte ou des mots peuvent évoquer. C'est également une sorte d'exploration du pouvoir des langues perdues telles que représentées par des artefacts humains insolites remontant à une époque plus lointaine que la mémoire culturelle. Mon art peut aussi représenter le texte sombre et évanescant des rêves, ces lectures oniriques dans lesquelles le texte est visible, mais où les mots et le sens s'évanouissent et s'embrouillent quand on les examine, tout en conservant leur pouvoir.

J'essaie de créer le sentiment d'être au seuil du sens, en un lieu où il faut accepter l'expérience comme étant le sens en soi et renoncer au besoin d'expliquer. L'expérience directe avec l'objet est suffisante, plus que suffisante. Seule l'expérience compte. Les explications et les analyses compromettent ou embrouillent la réalité du moment et deviennent autre chose, leur propre réalité et non celle de l'expérience. L'expérience continue de la présence physique des choses approfondit notre conscience de la vision, rien que la vision, sans les filtres et les ornements intellectuels encombrants de l'analyse.

L'analyse et la contextualisation historique ont leur place, bien sûr. Mais j'estime qu'elles ne peuvent remplacer l'expérience directe de l'art. Il y a une grande différence entre regarder un oiseau en vol – tout simplement « regarder » – et analyser en regardant, penser à « l'oiseau qui vole », essayer de deviner où il va, ce qu'il mange, déterminer son espèce, s'interroger sur la mécanique du vol, etc. Ce sont deux expériences différentes. Ce qui m'intéresse le plus, c'est l'expérience directe, sans intermédiaire. Un flot d'associations et de pensées surgissent tout à coup, viennent modifier l'expérience, l'alimenter. Les associations apparaissent et un tissu d'analyse complet – quelle que soit sa nature – prend le dessus. J'aspire à des objets assez insolites pour échapper à la classification immédiate, pas à des objets compliqués en soi, mais mystérieux, qui interpellent sans détour de par leur simple présence.



Rétrospectivement, je pense que c'est ce qui semble m'animer. Vu de l'intérieur, le processus de conception artistique n'est pas très clair pour moi. Il se déroule dans un état d'« inattention attentive », pour reprendre l'expression du poète Gary Snyder. Le point de départ, c'est le noyau d'une idée; le reste du processus déploie sa propre logique. Les glyphes ou écrits illisibles ne sont qu'un aspect de chaque œuvre. La forme des objets en est un autre.

Lorsque je crée, j'aime bien exploiter la transmutation, l'action ou l'état de passer d'une forme à l'autre, par exemple de transformer le livre d'un objet ordinaire familier en quelque chose d'autre, de transformer des objets ou des fragments d'objets en des matériaux différents : le bois en bronze, le bronze en acrylique, le verre en bronze. Ces fragments ou ces objets sont reconstruits sous leur forme originale, mais ont changé. Ce processus est un terrain fertile d'exploration métaphorique. Bien que ce soit un voyage personnel pour moi en tant qu'artiste, j'espère que mes œuvres offrent aux visiteurs la possibilité de vivre leur propre voyage.

Peter Powning

Peter Powning
Markhamville, NB
Canada
www.powning.com