



INSTALLATION NATION

La Belle Province is pumping out some of the world's hottest installation artists.



a wrought iron bed frame with medical needles laced into its springs in place of a mattress, taunting viewers to lie down.

ERIC SAUVÉ

Eric Sauvé turns mundane commodities into functional – albeit strange and at times injurious – works of art.

This avant-garde approach is reflected in his choice to work with “dangerous” materials – from shards of broken glass to massive pianos dangling overhead from warily thin suspensions.

“Materials like that remind us of our vulnerability, makes us aware of our physical selves,” he says from his home in Montreal.

Sauvé’s works call familiar objects to mind, but refuse viewers the pleasure of the originals, seducing them with their imposing danger.

In his series entitled “De valse et d’abattoir,” Sauvé created a series of eight fully operating chandeliers made from broken bottles hanging seven feet off the ground. The chandeliers – once a glimmering status symbol – now hang too close for comfort. The work was on display recently at the Galerie Thérèse Dion in Montreal.

In another untitled piece, Sauvé created a wrought iron bed frame with medical needles laced into its springs in place of a mattress, taunting viewers to lie down. The bed, typically a place to rest and dream, is now a morbid torture device.

Sauvé studied sculpture at Concordia University, and visual art at l’Université du Québec à Montréal. Today, he is revered around the globe, having shown in contemporary galleries from France to Spain.

Although his pieces reside in the confines of a gallery, they often double as real-life objects, serving a purpose outside the traditional realm of art.

“We imagine ourselves lying on the needles or walking through the garden of glass,” he says. “Maybe the functionality, or illusion of functionality, draws us more intimately toward the object. Interestingly, the collectors who have bought the chandeliers of broken bottles – originally part of larger installations – do install them as lighting, and interact with the [illusory] danger of the object in their daily lives.”

Sauvé drew on glass’ property to break into randomly complex forms, smashing the bottles, essentially using destruction as a tool for the creation of his chandeliers.

“I enjoy the element of surprise in the process of breaking things to create new forms, and I like the balancing act between releasing chaos and imposing order.”

To create such a dangerously seductive body of work, a vivid imagination is key. If there were a window into Sauvé’s mind, he says, we’d see “all kinds of icons and objects with strong symbolic significance bobbing on a sea of questions.”

Having conquered the physical world, Sauvé has now turned his attention to the absent with a new series of works based on concepts of sound and space.

For more information, visit www.ericsauve.ca.





MASKULL LASSERRE

One of Canada's most creative young talents, Montreal-based Maskull Lasserre is redefining what it means to be an artist, preferring to call his pieces "artifacts."

"My interest in making has always been in the effort of work," he says. "It is in the material challenge of reconciling myself with elements of the immediate quotidian world, and not with those of a rarefied second order."

Originally from South Africa, Lasserre moved to Canada at age six. He has since grown to embody all things Canadian, even escaping on canoe trips to the Yukon shores. As an artist, however, Lasserre shares a global perspective, pouring creativity into everything he does, from his etched newspaper skeletons to his disassembled pianos.

Music is a reoccurring theme within Lasserre's collective works.

"The musical instrument itself is a really interesting tool, and provides a ready metaphor for a lot of what I try to accomplish in my work," he says.

Having recently completed his studies at Concordia University in Montreal, Lasserre already boasts an impressive resume of exhibitions and large-scale public commissioned works. In spite of this, he has strong feelings about being referred to as an "artist."

"I have never felt any connection to it," he says. "It is just a levee, built far up stream, that is useful for holding back water — holding open a place for me to dig."

Describing his sculptures as "artifacts", his works lure viewers in with their ability to tug on emotions that are often lost with traditional high art.

"I am curious about the role that functionality plays in our expectation of — and relationships to — the objects of general experience," he says.

"Our relationship, especially to objects, is based on our expectations of the use we perceive for them. I think that this is as true for art as it is for a set of pliers."

Part of his "Recital" series, an old wartime typewriter with piano keys in place of letters is asking to be played. Another is built from a traditional violin, an instrument that Lasserre has played for 14 years. On its neck, however, he has attached a shotgun viewfinder, rendering the instrument devoid of its musical ability. Found objects like these are central to Lasserre's creative process.

"The wood, ivory, and steel are what ultimately have to be persuaded into a work's final form," he says. "But typewriters and pianos, for example, are so much more than just these constituent substances. They are — perhaps even more so — the host of cultural associations, purposes, and meanings that inhabit their matter. These incarnations of time, history, value and potential are shaped and attached in the same way as the wood and iron. These are all, equally, my materials."

Lasserre recently completed an interactive public sculpture for the City of Ottawa. The work, on display at the Shenkman Arts Centre, consists of a life-sized piano cast in bronze, and a stool partially carved from a boulder.

Lasserre describes his thought process as "an earth-floored room that is lit by train smoke, built out of poetry and smells like the sea." He is inspired by the most ordinary of things.

"I have the time to let things develop, as they do best, as a sort of accident of daily work," he says. "I have few days as productive as those that start off without any plans."



MICHEL DE BROIN

Don't be fooled by what appears to be a grimy dumpster and an outdated television set. These are actually the works of Montreal-based artist Michel de Broin, and you will find them in a gallery, not a landfill.

Look a little closer and you will see the dumpster, entitled "Blue Mono-chrome," is not filled with insect ridden garbage, but rather a functional — and perfectly clean — Jacuzzi hot tub. The old television actually houses a wood burning stove.

"[My process] is a constant negotiation between things and ideas," he says. "Coming from a conceptual point of view, I will say that I test my ideas in reality to see how they resist to the matter."

Called "Late Program," the stove is meant to draw a link between man's primal attraction to fire, and the glow of the television which has replaced it in modern times. Instead of huddling around a campfire, transfixed by its warmth and beauty, we gather in front of the TV and soak up its mindless entertainment.

Although his works lay within the confines of a gallery, de Broin refers to his mindset as nothing short of a "scrapyard".

"To create a new object, I'd rather conciliate two completely opposite objects than risk creating consanguine objects," he says.

Despite the radical appearance of his works, de Broin is no mere rebel without a cause. A native of Montreal, he received a degree in Fine Art from Concordia University, and a Master's in Fine Art from l'Université du Québec à Montréal. Living between Montreal and Berlin, de Broin has received international acclaim, showing across Europe and Canada, including an exhibition at the National Gallery in Ottawa.

Beyond gallery walls, de Broin's works have attracted a different kind of attention. The artist was arrested in 2005 for peddling his "Shared Propulsion Car" — a banged-up 1986 Buick Regal transformed into a four-person peddle car — down the streets of Toronto.

"After winning our cause in the court, the revolutionary vehicle is now street legal in Toronto," he says. "There is no need for petrol anymore. Now engines can be replaced by human will to power."

The artist is now preparing to break the Guinness record for the world's largest disco ball. The finished product is to be suspended over the city of Paris, visible to all for "Nuit Blanche," the city's famous all-night arts festival. He is also working on two public pieces for display in Montreal and Winnipeg.

For more information, visit www.micheldebroin.org.

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