

surfacefriction

Unlike the great blue-grey boulders which litter Ontario, living beings like humans and trees have interiors and exteriors, cores and skins if you like, and their enwrapping surfaces are zones of continuous contact and symbiotic exchange, of corruption and regeneration. In his foundational text, the *De Anima*, Aristotle noted that the great question of metaphysics is how beings remain what they are amidst the dynamic flux of form, matter, and spirit. Living surfaces are at once porous and sealed, sensitive and tough, erotic and off-putting. While many artists are tempted to fantasize about the originary harmony of the world, the title and theme of Anne O'Callaghan's and J. Lynn Campbell's exhibit at the Red Head Gallery aptly captures the powerful and sometimes violent ambivalence of our relationship with the world. Our harmony with the world, inner or outer, is an illusion; it is our disjunction, our friction, full of wounds and pleasure, haunted by finitude and absence, that sets our minds and bodies in motion.

O'Callaghan's latex cast of tree bark transforms the rough chunks of bark she transports back to her studio into pure, skin-like, fluid surfaces. Hanging limp and heavy on the wall, the piece is not a static imprint of a natural form, but has a continuous, leaky, downward motion, as though the form itself were always in the process of being

formed and reformed. The cloudy translucence and spongy tactility of the latex make the surface seem responsive, as though it might swell and shrink to the touch, and for this reason it is suspended between the entropic gravity of dead matter and the anentropic lift of the living. While undeniably alluding back to the forest, O'Callaghan's work resists a reductive, mythologizing concept of nature, and is driven by a chemical sense of process reminiscent of, though far more intimate than, the flow pieces of Robert Smithson.

O'Callaghan's two other contributions to *Surface Friction* are poised between delicacy and menace. In one, she placed the elegant yet savage thorns of the Hawthorn tree in a pristinely vertical row; one can almost feel their seductive, curved prongs tearing flesh. If O'Callaghan's deceptively sleek thorns, which allude to their use in England's nasty and divisive hedges, suggest a defensive and wounding exterior, then her castings of the undersides of bark, fine skeins set in a long metal box filled with latex, evokes the quivering fragility of the inside of the body. And while O'Callaghan's imagery and metaphors come from both the body and the woods, for us our bodies are ineluctably psychic, at once vulnerable and violent.

The surface of a living being, Freud suggested in his darkly visionary *Beyond The Pleasure Principle*, is both the boundary of its evolving identity and a sensitized field of intimate exposure and repressive defense; hair, by contrast, and perhaps women's hair especially, is a strange

irruption from the inside, and has been read as dangerous, unruly, filthy, and erotic. In fundamentalist Judaism and Islam, women's hair is concealed because it is regarded as immodest, an invitation to desire; in today's commodified sex culture, body hair is shaved in order to make the body smooth and hygienic. Perhaps hair is connected to our identity in such an ambivalent way because it is at once decorative excess and literally grows out from our flesh.

In many of the works in her *Model* series, J. Lynn Campbell used meshed steel fabric and wire to create polished, brittle, and eerily fleshless shells of her body, their interiors for the most part left a void. Muscles delineated as in an anatomical chart, these pieces suggest the body as an almost abstract, diagrammatic garment floating free of the chaos of the actual body: one senses that for Campbell, the interior of the body, its wet viscera, is the locus of powerful subjective drives, and is therefore unrepresentable. The central piece Campbell made for *Surface Friction, Model No. 8 (Extensions No. 1)*, approaches what one might call the subjective body from the inside out: carefully measured lengths of braided horsehair cascade from a dressmaker's torso set atop a double spiral metal base. Up through the Renaissance, the narrative of the self, its well being, its depravity, was associated with the functions of the heart, liver and spleen, with blood and heat, and in *Model No. 8 (Extensions No. 1)* one senses that the hair flows out from an archaic inner flux. Though tightly groomed, the hair is a shameless excess penetrating

the surface of the body, reaching back down into the vicissitudes of a self and body that remains amorphous, unstable, and concealed. Hair is a kind of detritus, constantly growing, constantly shedding, but it is also luxuriant and allusive. Hair braids together filth, death, beauty, and desire.

Hung from armatures on the walls, Campbell's *Extensions No. 2* and *Extensions No. 3* consist of two arms and two legs intricately fashioned from artificial sinew. They are akin to earlier pieces in the *Model* series in their wedding of physiology and perverse haute couture, but these pieces are far more morbid and sinister. Bone and sinew are what holds the body's roiling flesh together, but Campbell's sculptures do not trace human anatomy. Instead, they hew the body's fragments together into an impossible prosthesis, turning functional elements into objects that are at once indulgent and haunted.

In a way, there is no such thing as a surface sharply dividing the inner from the outer. Or rather, as Gilles Deleuze suggests in *The Fold*, surfaces are dynamic and infinite, continuously folding in on themselves. The friction in both Anne Callaghan's and J. Lynn Campbell's work comes from their undefined yet fraught negative spaces and absences, on an invisible, formless element – desire, death – which flows through the works' skin and thorns and sinews.

Daniel Baird

J. LYNN CAMPBELL is a Toronto-based artist educated at the Ontario College of Art, with independent studies in France, humanities at the University of Toronto, and philosophy at York University. Her practice extends from two-dimensional collage to three-dimensional construction and site-specific installation. Since the early 1980s Campbell has exhibited her work in Toronto, Ontario regional galleries and Europe. An exhibition is scheduled at The Justina M. Barbicke Art Gallery, Hart House, University of Toronto in 2005. She is currently a member of the Tree Museum Collective, Gravenhurst Ontario, and the Red Head Gallery in Toronto. Her work is included in private, public and corporate collections. She would like to thank Wannietta Prescod, Sally Glanville and Lousie Liliefeldt for production assistance, Ric Amis for continued support, and the Canada Council for the Arts.

ANNE O'CALLAGHAN was born in Ireland and immigrated to Canada in 1968. Her work extends from photo-based installation to sculpture. Since 1981, her work has been presented in solo and group exhibitions in Ontario and Asia. Recent exhibitions include: *Bagdad Museum*, Visual Arts Centre of Clarington (2004); *Urn an Artist Garden*, York Quay Gallery at Harbourfront Centre On (2003); *Scenic View* (an interactive sound sculpture), Visual Arts Centre of Clarington (a Public Art Project 2001-2003); *The Tree Museum Collective: An Alternative Site*, York Quay Gallery at Harbourfront Centre Toronto, (2002); *Time as Place* at SCAM, Toronto (2001); site-specific installations at The Tree Museum (1998-99). She is a member and co-curator of the Tree Museum Collective, Gravenhurst Ontario and a member of Red Head Gallery Toronto.

DANIEL BAIRD is a writer who currently lives and works in New York and Toronto.

Images:

J. Lynn Campbell, *Model No. 8 (Extensions No. 1)* 2004
Dressmaker's form, steel, fabric, thread, braided horsehair, wrapped wire, copper wire, artificial sinew, 60" (h) x 14" (w) x 11" (d). Photo: Ric Amis

Anne O'Callaghan, *Untitled*, 2004
Cast latex, 47" (h) x 30" (w) x 1" (d).



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J. Lynn CAMPBELL

Anne O'CALLAGHAN

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Opening Reception
Thursday September 30 6 - 9 p.m.



the **redhead** gallery

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