

EXHIBITION REVIEW

Maryse Larivière: under the cave of winds, curated by Natasha Chaykowski,
Calgary, Untitled Art Society, June 30–September 23, 2017

Canadian artist Maryse Larivière's art practice interrogates a place between conceptual art and what is contemporaneously known as art writing. Her writing is a thread weaving its way through her entire oeuvre, uniting these two intrinsic aspects of her practice. The lyricism of her prose and poetry on love and art, which confront the reader with fragile, vulnerable and whimsical poetic imagery, "draws from both the tradition of women's writing and parallel texts to create the unique concoction of art writing" (Larivière 2017a). In uniting art writing and her visual art practice Larivière paves the way for a new form of creation, one that is conceptual in its visual and written form and evades a simplistic consideration of either aspect. Through this hybrid form of making, Larivière tears away the veil that covers much of women's art, expanding the dialog on creation through language and the body.

Art writing as a conceptual practice is currently at its height. Artists such as Larivière are creating a space for their work in a largely patriarchal art world. Brazilian author Clarice Lispector's work *Água Viva*, her short story *Such Gentleness* and the work of "proto-punk poet" (Gammel 2011, 4) Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven are among the writers who opened a framework for body works through language, creating inspiration for Larivière. Lispector and Loringhoven both use language in a manner that pays particular attention to sound and movement which surfaces in Larivière's writing. The confluence of writing and art for Larivière is the performativity of the body in a place where her work exposes the conceptual side of art writing.

In her recent exhibition *under the cave of winds* at Untitled Art Society in Calgary, Larivière brings art writing as a conceptual practice to the fore. Alongside her third publication *Orgazing*, an invented word combining "gazing" and "orgasm," the exhibition becomes a threefold experience: lived through watching, living and reading creating a space for a new form of the gaze. Inside the gallery, a small, multi-colored striped quilt hangs on a sculpture that is an improvised parrot perch. The tiny blanket acts as a screen for the projection of a 16-mm film (Figure 1 and Figure 2). The film pictures waters tumultuously alive with movement, in reference to Lispector's manifesto *Água Viva*. A haunting siren song, an original composition by Cosima Freisen, fills the space, the sound flickering and wavering alongside the sea. The sounds of the song mimics the motion of the waves the visitor witnesses while watching the film. It is both lonely and bird like, cooing and twittering longing to be heard over the water. Many images of portals and cave openings that are dark or barred in some form, emerge in the film contributing to a theme of isolation, loneliness and captivity. As viewers find themselves within the cave looking out and back upon it from a boat upon the sea in a dream like sequence at the end of the film. Immersing oneself further into the imagery, the bodily aspect of the feminine becomes ever more prescient. The cave, like a chasm engulfing the viewer, is dark and emits an impression of foreboding, can be interpreted to represent the feminine in its mysterious and dark nature, which has surfaced as a common trope in the past.



Figure 1. Maryse Larivière, *under the cave of winds* (2017), installation view. Photo: Jeremy Pavka, courtesy Untitled Art Society and the artist.



Figure 2. Maryse Larivière, *under the cave of winds* (2017), still from 16-mm film (2014/2017). Photo: courtesy Untitled Art Society and the artist.

The poetry book *Orgazing* was written to accompany the exhibition. Written from the perspective of the woman in the film it becomes clear that she is imprisoned on a lonely island and is attempting to communicate with her lover:

I am alone.

I have been moved into a new cell, one all to myself, a little salon almost with a concrete bed, table and stool. I dream of escape when I look out the window. Yes I have a window now. If

only I could hear birds singing. Only puffins make the trip to this island, and those little birds are anything but talkative. Their purrs and croaks, though, inter rupt the drone of my confinement. I find myself murmuring to them, with them, from my cell. (Larivière 2017b, 22)

Holding the small publication in hand and watching the film, the narrative comes alive and soars. Invented syllables are interspersed among the narrative, written in epistolary form. When read aloud, syllables begin to emerge in the text that when sounded out roll off the tongue through the lips like a love song or the song of birds, all coming together in a new language. Through her writing the protagonist awakens to a different level of consciousness and communication: one through language read on the page and sound that translates from written word into song, transitioning into a cross between woman's voice and birdsong. With these rapturous syllables, Larivière manifests a new form of communication between lovers:

Quitouti quitouti quitouti

Trushhh tsip tsip tsee

Your iridescent susurrus

Cli cli cli clit rsst

Awww zee zee zee

(Larivière 2017b, 57)

These sumptuous and bizarre sounds bring the viewer back to the significance of movement and sound. The writing draws the reader and audience in and creates the occasion to be attentive to the music of the body, of the world humming around the character central to *Orgazing*. This offers an opportunity to enter the artist's work as if in a trance. In this way, Larivière is at once artist, writer and sorceress performing a divination. The book exists as a space where the protagonist, but more broadly women's voices and bodies, can live. As the narrative progresses, the protagonist – trapped and entrapped, barred and voice stolen – begins to break down the physical barriers around her. In the work, she is fluid within the landscape like the sea, herself becoming a moving soundtrack:

My isolation is a constant reminder of how my intelligence resides all over my body. My nipples, little antennae that they are, pick up your charge over however great a distance. They pique at the possibility of your approach, my chest sensing the otherworldly smell of your armpit, hovering somewhere in the air. ... And I write you. Toward you I begin to sing. As this universe traverses me, carves its immemorial message with me, a note comes out, a soft weeping sound that shapes my mind to my body. (Larivière 2017b, 31)

Illuminating particular areas of the body within her poems, combined with the imagery of the exhibition, Larivière accomplishes a new form of understanding the body. Reimagining how areas of the body can function, here nipples and armpits, allows the reevaluation of one's own understanding and appreciation of the body and the space it takes up in the world, in particular the bodies of women. Using language, imagery and sound Larivière envisions a platform for understanding how the performativity of the body can function in-between that of the visual, the audible and the spoken.

Larivière draws together a body of work that encompasses both a conceptual and performance art practice, embodied through art writing. She allows language to direct her in creating a fictional context for art in order to test the limits of what art can be. Through the making of her own space, Larivière equally makes space for art writers and women's writing today, activating inner soundscapes through performative sounds, trills, incantations and the

folding of syllables. Larivière allows language to lead her toward a new way of experiencing the written word, the book itself and writing as a conceptual act, a voice of its own. Through her art writing practice, Larivière creates a fictional context for art in order to test the limits of what art can be: “I am interested in questioning how we can talk about art, expand the limit of what is considered as art and making use of the same methodologies for art making and art writing” (Larivière 2017a). As a poet-feminist-writer-songstress, Larivière sets the stage for a new wave of writing comingled with art in the landscape of contemporary Canadian creation and feminist art.

Notes on contributor

Maeve Hanna is a writer and curator based in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. She has published work in art periodicals nationally and internationally including *C Magazine*, *Canadian Art*, *esse arts + opinions*, *Frieze* and *Sculpture Magazine* and has creative non-fiction forthcoming with the *Globe and Mail* and CBC Radio.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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