

Véronique Chagnon Côté (b.1986) lives and works in Montreal. She is a professor at University of Quebec in Montreal and holds a master's degree in Studio Art from Concordia University (2016). Her research in painting focuses explorations of the phenomenology of our perception of space. These works were featured in solo exhibitions at Projet Casa and FOFA gallery in Montreal (2020), at Zalucky Contemporary in Toronto (2016), Circa Gallery in Montréal (2016), as well as several collective exhibitions such as *Material Remains* at Young Space (NY, E.-U. 2021) and *3D* at Alfa Gallery in Miami (2019). She was the recipient of the Elizabeth Greendshields Foundation (2020) and the Dale and Nick Tedeschi Studio Arts Fellowship (2014-2015). Her work was published in *VAST Magazine* (2021) and *Friend of the Artist* (2020). Her work is found in public collections, Prêt d'oeuvres d'art Collection of Museum of Fine Arts of Québec City, Art Contemporary Collection of City Hall Gallery of Ottawa, as well of numerous private collections.

Chloë Charce works both in Laurentian and Montreal. She is a visual arts teacher at College Lionel-Groulx, and has a MFA in studio arts at Concordia University (sculpture). Her multidisciplinary practice embraces sculpture, photography, video and installation. She is interested in various issues, notably the notions of disappearance, temporality and memory. She has received several grants and awards and participated in various events, residencies and exhibitions, among others in Canada and Argentina. In 2022, she has a solo exhibition at Circa art actuel (Montreal). In 2021, she is invited to a residency at Atelier Silex (Trois-Rivières). She is also a finalist for a public art project held by the city of Sainte-Thérèse, in 2020.

Jean-Michel Quirion, having received a Master of Museum Studies from the Université du Québec en Outaouais (UQO), he is currently pursuing his doctorate at the same university. Cultural worker for the past decade, he held a director position at AXENÉO7 artist-run centre until recently. He is a regular contributor to magazines such as *Ciel variable*, *ESPACE art actuel*, *Esse arts + opinions*, *Inter art actuel*, and *Vie des arts*. He has curated projects at Galerie UQO (2018) and L'Imagier (2020) in Gatineau, at Carleton University Art Gallery in Ottawa (CUAG) (2022), as well as at DRAC — Art actuel Drummondville (2022) and at l'Œil de Poisson in Quebec City (2022). He has also been part of the research group CIÉCO: *Collections et impératif évènementiel/The Convulsive Collections* since 2015.

S'Étreindre (Embrace)

Véronique Chagnon Côté
Chloë Charce

08 September – 22 October 2022

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To embrace (*Étreindre*) their respective practices in a collaborative architecture, a kind of total work of art, this is what the artist-friends duo Véronique Chagnon Côté and Chloë Charce propose for their most recent exhibition presented at Occurrence. By means of a creative synchrony, they fashion their sensory union into a meaningful and, indeed, singular installation. Between them, the soul sisters pair painting and sculpture in a 2D-3D interstice of an impressive fragility. The techniques are reflected in the mirror of altruism. In this specular space of their friendly relationship, the conjuring-up of the kindness inherent in the act of taking care of each other via a creative process spread over time are multiple: to meet up at regular intervals, over more than a year, in the alleys of Montréal or in the studio in order to create together. In this way, day by day, they forge other intimate experiences: those of a friendship and of a city.

Surface of reminiscences: embraced spaces

Over the last few months, Véronique Chagnon Côté and Chloë Charce have surveyed the city during daily strolls in view of jointly drawing out certain architectural and heritage components of the Mile-End neighbourhood in affective terms: various material reminiscences and formal traces, stories built around a narrative of shared observations. During these regular collections, they lingered before fragments of liminal spaces stemming from the facades of heritage

buildings, mainly Victorian, to capture their intrinsic values through snapshots (to be (re)used in the studio as influences). These are architectural elements built according to a logic of opening and closing: windows, shutters, arches, fences, gateways and doors. These objects function as portals between interdependent spaces: the interior to the exterior and the inner to the outer. The artists are manifestly inspired by the multitude of decorative motifs in order to make their own adaptations through both pictorial and sculptural explorations: represent them otherwise in the installation in schematized flourishes, or, conversely, in a detailed manner. Like cast shadows, the reverse sides of the forms appears in the background, or on the contrary appear forcefully in the foreground, between the superposition and the juxtaposition of ornamental vestiges rendered in improbable details.

A huge circular structure taking up close to the entire space of the cubical Occurrence gallery becomes the exhibition surface. The borderlines between the work and the space are almost non-existent. The status of the place is blurred. This porosity of the boundaries between art and architecture is notably foregrounded by Sylvia Lavin in her essay *Kissing Architecture* (2011). The author evokes the analogy of the kiss that intrudes into the interstice of these two disciplines (like painting and sculpture that intertwine) as a metaphor for their mutual attraction. For the duo, the intimate gesture of embracing represents the symbolic charge of bringing two surfaces together that soften, flex, and embrace upon contact with each other. This gives rise to temporary singularities, a union of confluence wherein separation is inconceivable—and yet inevitable. In many ways, Chagnon Côté and Charce's artistic work also refers to Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia as defined in *Of Other Spaces* (1967). In this text he describes the materialization of a distinct space, a place that has the power to juxtapose—in a single real site—several spaces that are in themselves incompatible, but which eventually meet. The transcriptions of Montreal sites directly on the surface here intersect in a *total-whole*. An enveloping courtyard. A tended with slowly applied gestures.

A shared virtuosity

For *Étreindre*, Chloë Charce, faithful to her artistic practice, begins with recollections of architectures that she interprets as doubles: mainly breaches, like imprints of time pierced by oblivion. The lines sketched by the cut-outs offer a glimpse of delicate hollowed-out materials: an embroidery woven into the wood. Véronique Chagnon Côté, for her part, (re)carves and (re)reduces the architectural forms resulting from these yokes. She presents a series of floral and botanical illustrations painted in pastel tones that seem vitrified, de-reconstructing the illusionistic codes of painting. The production processes of the pieces with mirror-like surfaces are inexplicable, due to the astounding reverberations and trompe-l'oeil reflections effects. However, the proposal was gradually transformed through a succession of meticulous incisions and painstaking interventions, testifying to the artists' daily commitment.

Intertwining of practices: spatial embrace

The variation of scales between the artists' actions and the installation's dimension radically thwarts the interaction as well as the reception of the work. The monumental cylindrical volume replays circulation and contemplation. Viewers enter it as one would a hidden sensorial garden and they instinctively turn towards the inside in following the gradual rising of the curved façade. Misty glows with fluctuating intensities envelop the viewer. They evoke a setting sun rising through glass walls. The observation of the ordered forms is disrupted by the intermittently dimmed light. The contours seem elusive. The images are sometimes cloudy and at others they are encircled by the evidence of their precision. The majestic exhibition encourages us to pay close attention to what surrounds us; to see the fine configurations of our relationships and the subtle structuring of our urban environments in a new light.

A spontaneous escape into an embroidery of fashioned blossoms, *Étreindre* reveals itself as a delicate visual voluptuous delight that creates a symbiosis between the life gestures of two sensitive artists.