



Putting a focus on things barely perceptible

Artist Karilee Fuglem likes to live in her pieces and uses materials that can drive one crazy

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SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE

Last year, I went to see the exhibition *Dé-con-structions* featuring Quebec art at the National Gallery of Canada. One of the artists listed was Montrealer Karilee Fuglem. I searched for her work in the galleries before finally giving up and asking the security guard where it was. They led me outside the gallery space into the hallway and pointed up. There, unlit, hanging from the ceiling was an intricately constructed cloud made of 18 kilometres of nylon thread.

Fuglem is noted for exploring the barely visible via installations, drawings, sculptures, photographs and video. The National Gallery ended up buying that piece. She told me her friends joked, "They had to buy it; they couldn't find it."

I visited Fuglem's studio just before she installed the work for her latest exhibition, titled *learning to live on the ground*.

Tell me about this installation.

This is the main piece in the exhibition. The weights on the floor are mapped out in relation to a star pattern that would be overhead in the afternoon during the exhibition. The top layer is mapped out from one of the photographs I took of the skin on my back, blown up ridiculously large so that I can stand between the pores – which are these points.

Now that you mention that, they look like pores. How did you come up with this idea?

I took photographs of this spot on my back that I can't see. Then I just kept blowing them up, way more than they should be for the size of the (photo) file. I didn't know what was going to happen, but when I saw them, they looked like space maps, so that seemed to work back into what I was thinking about and it was one of those ah-ha moments. I really like that, the idea of our body as part of space.

Your work is so labour-intensive.

I guess what keeps me working on these things that are really labour-intensive is I get to live in the piece in a way that I think becomes part of the piece. All the daydreaming and mind wandering that goes on to make it, it somehow gets embedded in it.

What does the title signify?

It's from some writing I read, an interview with Lygia Clark. She said, "We have to learn to live on the ground of precariousness," and that phrase always stuck in my head. Things are not quite what they seem to be. They are shifting, as we are, and accepting that as something about being in the world.

Before I came here, I was thinking about some of your past work: the plastic bags, the acetate discs, the drawings on Mylar and lots of nylon thread. Do you consider plastic one of your principle mediums?

I like working with stuff like this because it is just so horrible. I like that. I mean if you start with something like silk, it is already amazing. A bunch of bugs made that. How can you beat that? Just hold it in your hand and imagine – it is good enough. But to take something that is horrible, that tangles and drives you crazy, and you just want to throw it out the window, and you find a way to make something out of it that is not horrible. I think that is a good thing.

And what is your interest in the barely perceptible?

That is a very important thing to me. I really like the way when you can't see something, you have to engage with it in a different way. Obviously there is a lot of amazing art that you see and that draws you in and you start to see more. But in my work, you have to move around and engage with your body. It is a visceral thing, not just in your head. To me, it is an attentive way of looking

at something. I think it started when I'd see a dust bunny out of the corner of my eye in my apartment and think, "It's a bug!" And in that moment, you know your hair stands on end, and you are concentrating really hard about what is around you. Obviously we can't go around like that all the time, but probably more often. Also, something that is hard to see, when you do find it, you feel like it is there for you. It's not, all the art is here and whether you are here or not, the art will be here. It is more like: This isn't here unless you are looking at it. The work rewards that attention.

Karilee Fuglem: learning to live on the ground continues until Dec. 20 at Pierre-François Ouellette Art Contemporain, 372 Ste. Catherine St. W., Suite 216. For more information call 514-395-6032 or visit www.pfoac.com.

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