

**LUANNE
MARTINEAU**

RESIDENCY EXHIBITION

ThreeWalls

June 4 - June 30, 2004

Luanne Martineau is an artist, curator and educator, residing in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada. Her work has been exhibited widely throughout Canada and Europe including a solo exhibition at the Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver; the Vancouver Art Gallery, and the Fruitmarket Gallery in Edinburgh, Scotland.



Figure 1. The German General

The stinking garbage heaps, rotting nature, and piles of shit that dot the junkyard landscapes of Luanne Martineau's drawings, depict a troubled American landscape—one that has as much in common with the 19th century, social realist comic she mines for material, R.F. Outcault's "The Yellow Kid"—as it does with the currents in contemporary culture, economically and politically. Miles Orvell describes the junkyard as the "anti-world of the technological civilization...a system of disorder, of things gone wrong, of waste, a negative in the balance sheet of civilization."¹ Martineau takes the junkyard as a point of departure, locating the racial, intellectual and aesthetic tensions of the 20 C. as the detritus on which current culture is built.

Martineau has long expressed an interest in the tensions between realism and abstraction, and her means of work: drawings made on typewriters; soft sculpture with a knitted, tartan or felt shell; and detailed embroideries of wastelands, negotiate that position by her combination of the vernacular with abstracted forms. Three of her large sculptures, *Knitted Accumulation Sculpture* (2001), *The German General* (2002), and *Lubber* (2003) are all made from fiber materials and constructed into gigantic pillowy forms, each an abstraction from an ongoing investigation into the narrative of institutionalized discrimination. *Knitted Accumulation* is a pile of saggy, knitted tartan poo-forms; the patterns derived from the ones depicted in *The Yellow Kid*, that narrated the life of the ghettoized Irish-American immigrant in 19th C. New York City. *The German General* (Fig. 1) on the other hand, branches away from the Outcault material, sculpting a faded and cartoonish submarine from industrial felt, vaguely resembling a childish floor pillow or riding toy. Modeled on material derived from a Sid Ceasar skit on the 1950s TV program *Your Show of Shows*, *The German General* is not what or whom you think it is. In the skit, Sid Ceasar plays a childish German man being dressed by his valet. After watching the 'help' scramble to meet the General's needs, we discover the twist in the end: the General is nothing but a lowly hotel doorman². Much like this skit, we find the same of Martineau's sculpture: it is not what we think sculpture (or fiber) is either. It is an amusing twist on our sense of the abstract or the sociopolitical. At first glance, all of our prejudices are prepared for the abstract (dry?) and soft sculpture (pop art?) - but in reality it is the abstract that is wit and the pop that is political. Her application of materials is masterful, allowing room for entry, followed by ample chance for surprise.

Ideas about authenticity have close ties with the American sublime and are related to ideas of alienation and awkwardness, two adjectives embodied by the spirit of artwork made in vernacular traditions. Ralph Waldo Emerson argued that the sublime is located within the individual and said that, "what draws us in other's works is our own alienated majesty."³ Responding to the sublime relies heavily on a sense of otherness and an audience who will appropriate and struggle to overcome that sense. Most of the humble materials chosen by artists who work in this fashion have had a history of otherness built into them. Hobby craft has been hindered by long term associations with sentimentality, nostalgia and cheapness—terms that make it difficult to locate handicraft outside of the domestic sphere, and conversely, has painted the domestic sphere as an undesirable place to be located.

Martineau combines the narrative and the materials of the othered, but in a double bind: her 'aliens' are an uncomfortable, difficult to address group, situated in a precarious political place between oppressor (white, European, male, modern art) and the oppressed (the ghettoized, white trash, feminine, social realism). Martineau's deft use of handicraft (fiber) materials removes them from the solely female or domestic domain by invoking the history of dress and adornment through the subtle application of patterns to fabrics to indicate rank and status. Fashion as a modifier of identity is situated in a similarly uneasy place, on the one hand the privilege of the oppressor, while on the other, the mark of the oppressed. Combining these associations with some of her abstracted, modernist forms, begs a reevaluation of much of the symbolism that has become institutionalized. Her work levels debates between high-and-low/art-and-craft/privilege-and-ghetto by posing the contradictions inherent to each binary through the hybridizing of form and subject.

-Shannon Stratton, Director of Programming, ThreeWalls

1. Orvell, Miles. *The Real Thing: Imitation and Authenticity in American Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989)

2. Turner, Michael. "This Land is Your Land", *Hammertown*. (Edinburgh: The Fruitmarket Gallery, 2002). p. 16.

3. Orvell.



ThreeWalls is a nonprofit organization dedicated to contemporary art and art education. Our mission is to provide workspace for emerging artists who are at pivotal points in their careers, and to offer the public new approaches to contemporary art-practices through unconventional exhibitions and educational programming.

Handwritten red text on the left margin, possibly a signature or name, partially cut off.