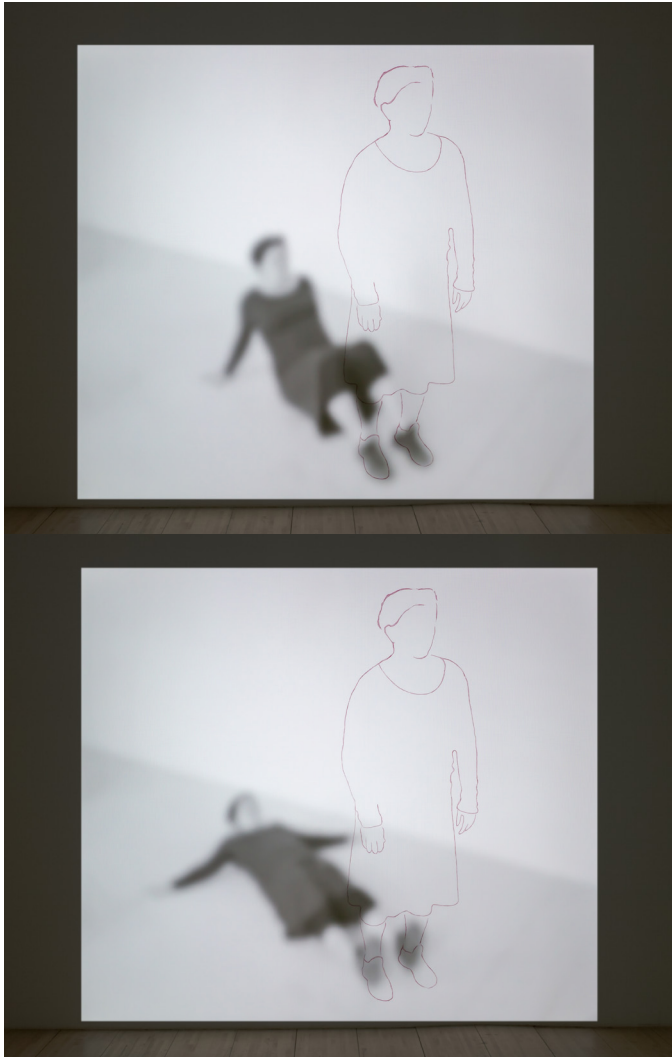


Genealogy



L'origine d'un mouvement, a solo exhibition of the work of Manon Labrecque taking place in the three exhibition galleries of AxeNéo7, is comprised of five recent works. Here she pursues her exploration of some of the themes most dear to her: movement and what flows from it, such as animation, slowing down and stopping; the question of the double; a body's muteness; the relations between touching and seeing; the weight of a remembrance; the present; and experience. At the centre of all the works is a figure: a woman, the body of a woman. This woman holds a movement, resumes an action, observes, draws, becomes indistinct. She *thinks* her shadow and tames it. Taming requires time.

The exhibition has been designed in such a way as to suggest to viewers an open visit, inviting them to *pass* from one gallery to the next. To pass in the sense of travelling through a place, by which is implied a movement, a transformation, but also to pass in the sense of being and disappearing in the face of the artwork. The exhibition as a whole is based on the idea that the artwork, born of a movement of thought, creates in turn a movement and emotion in the visitor. By passing from the gallery of shadows to the gallery of light, and then to the gallery of traces and back to the gallery of shadows, the visitor puts the space in motion by enacting a never-ending circular movement.

—
apprentissage, 2015
installation

HD video, black and white, 5 min 56 s
wall drawing

— the gallery of shadows —

In the first gallery are found three works. Two video installations have a close connection to a projected moving image and a drawing, establishing a dizzying contrast of scale. *apprentissage* (2015) is the encounter of a projected video image and a drawing traced onto the wall: a female figure, slightly larger than life, is in search of her shadow. At the beginning of the video, the red line that has been drawn on the wall outlines the fluid and blurred form of a body. This form then slowly breaks free of the drawing, leaves a silhouette in its place, and gradually curls up and stretches out on the ground to become a shadow. We are in the presence of one of the artist's most singular performances: from a vertical to a horizontal position, a body has become a shadow.¹ In this subtle passage from form to formless, as Manon Labrecque alone knows how,² the shadow is understood as the indissociable double of being and a distinct entity

endowed with its own movements. Here it is a question of oscillating between substance and essence. The learning to which the title refers is that of learning to become a shadow, to give form to one's shadow. An unsettling experience summed up in the words of the physiologist Claude Bernard: "in the end, experience is nothing more than an instigated observation."³

touchée (2015) evokes one's ultimate contact with oneself and demonstrates that we exist through touching. A video, seen in back projection, shows a woman – the artist, her eyes closed – slowly moving forward with her hands in front of her. Once again, a singular performance. All her energy appears to be channelled towards a precise point. The space she is passing through is virtual until the moment when contact is made between her filmed hands and those drawn on a screen hanging in the



—
touchée, 2015
 installation

HD video, black and white, 4 min 50 s
 drawing on tracing paper



exhibition space. In a brief moment of reconciliation with the self, time and space vanish. There is event, presence. Labrecque relates: "Sometimes I wonder whether my hands are foreign bodies, there to keep me company."⁴

dessous ma chair rouge (2015) is a face-to-face encounter between two video screenings punctuated by intermittent sounds. We discover two moments of the face of a woman who, in movement, dissolves before our eyes and vanishes. This woman conceals with her hand an expression on her face, covering her mouth – a gesture of discretion, reserve, embarrassment or shame? On the opposite wall, she hides her eyes with her hand as if to elude our gaze, to become invisible or disappear. This disarming exchange of glances and veiled expressions displays intimacy and vulnerability. *dessous ma chair rouge* proposes the *story* of a different contact.

—
dessous ma chair rouge, 2015
 installation

video, colour, sound, 1 min 47 s
 video, colour, sound, 5 min 56 s

— the gallery of light —

moulin à prières (2015) is an installation made up of three apparatuses for projecting images and playing sounds. The gallery is overrun by projected images which, through the kinetic mechanisms created by the artist, slip across the walls and ceiling. Vertigo. This complex work is based on a principle of frame-by-frame animation, associated with pre-cinema. Three choreographed actions – simple attitudes and gestures – are depicted: the upper part of a woman's body, dressed in red, hiding her face with her hands; two hands opening three times; a woman seen from behind rocking backwards. These actions are seen uninterrupted: one after the other, two by two and all

three at once. The wooden “mechanisms for reanimating the image,”⁵ to which are added lenses on stands, form an adroit assemblage of sculptural elements. The movement of the mechanisms, amplified by contact microphones, produces the work’s sound track.⁶ Visitors find themselves in the heart of a fascinating machine with rotating movements, bursts of light, projected images and frictions in which circularity, the flow of images and the regularity of the rhythmic sounds produce a captivating and soothing effect. Three bodily states are offered up to the visitor: trust, letting go and abandon. Viewing *moulin à prières*, I cannot help but think of Yoko Ono’s conceptual work *Earth Piece* (April 1963), whose instructions to the reader are as follows: “Listen to the sound of the Earth turning.”⁷

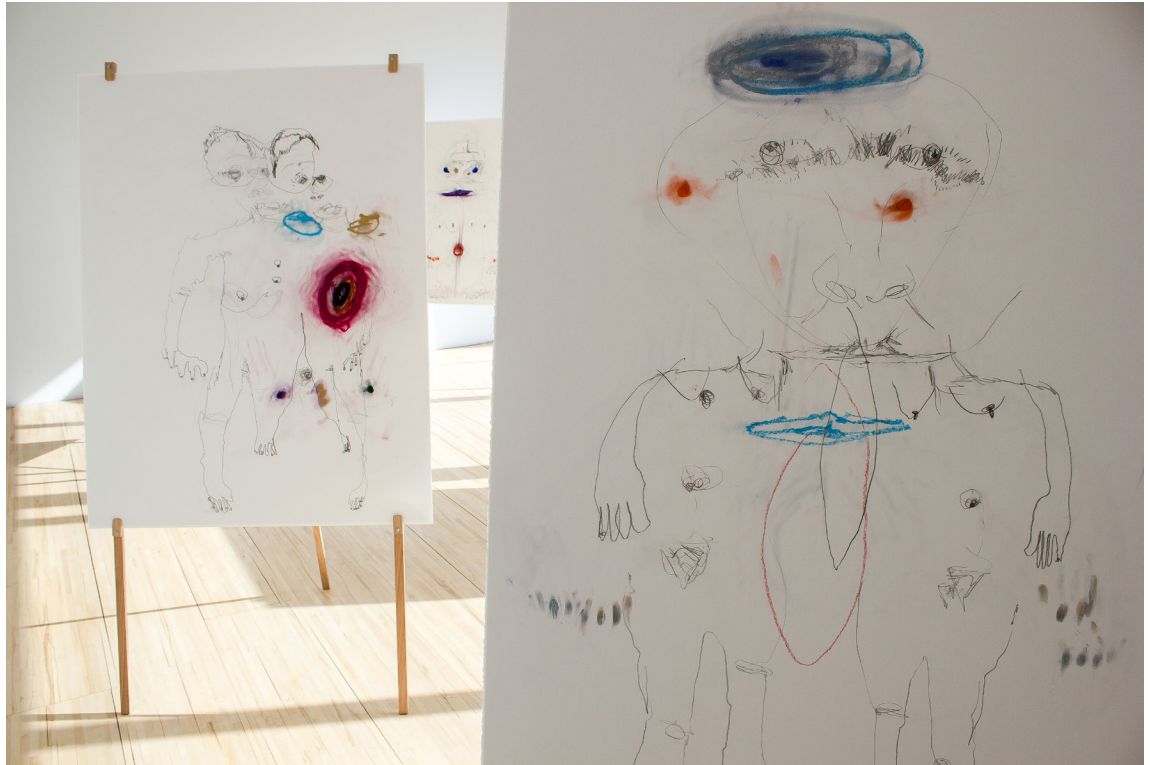


moulin à prières, 2015
kinetic and sound installation

red oak, aluminum, tripods, motors,
LED lamps, lenses, impressions on transparent
film, clamps, contact microphones, speakers,
mixing board, amplifier, electronic circuit

— the gallery of traces —

The gallery in which is found *les uns* (2008-2015), a series of six drawings placed on easels,⁸ is bathed in light and silence. They literally float in space. Each drawing, made with two hands and with eyes closed,⁹ depicts double, twin figures: amalgamated, parallel and superimposed bodies, or bodies keeping their distance from one another. Here the movement that is so important to Labrecque is conveyed by gestures and lines. Weakened bodies emerge from these vibrant, hachured lines, to which is sometimes added a splotch or mass of colour. These aerian figures have a disquieting physical reality and corporeality: hands with red nails, staring eyes, a body whose chest is covered with eyes, another with a carmine red splotch near the heart, merged bodies, a blue halo floating above the head, two enmeshed silhouettes radiating luminous energy. The intensity emanating from these drawings is multiplied many-fold by the silence of the room, providing them an “arrangement of resonance,” which is how the philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy defines silence: “Silence in fact must here be understood [*s’entendre*, heard] not as a privation but as an



arrangement of resonance: a little – or even exactly . . . – as when in a perfect condition of silence you can hear your own body resonate, your own breath, your heart and all its resounding cave.”¹⁰

Drawing is a reflexive activity which engages Labrecque in the deepest part of her being. It enables her to recover physical states and to return to unsuspected areas of her memory. Drawing, like preparing to record herself on video, is imagined and experienced as a performance, a test, an experiment – embracing the medium she has chosen, with the movement of everything to which she attempts to draw near.

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les uns, 2008-2015
 installation (detail)

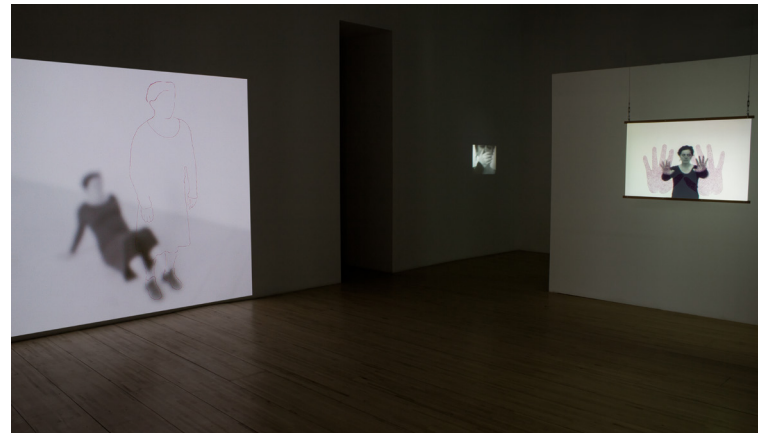
6 drawings, graphite and oil pastels on paper
 6 red oak easels

— **being** —

Genealogy is the search for people's relations and filiations. Metonymically, it can also mean the fruit of the creative enquiry underlying an artistic practice, taking material form in a drawing, a video or an installation. It is interesting to imagine an artistic practice finding its source in a word that encompasses the initial intuition and its renewal over the years. Observing Manon Labrecque's work, a word comes to mind: being. Being is the self, the other, the double. Being speaks of presence, anchored in a precise place and existence. Being reveals an experience of time and duration and an experience with space and thus with a precise place – in a kind of amalgamation with space and time. The being is defined in repetition – in the repeating of a gesture, a word; in the return of a memorised image or sound; in the return to this memorised image or sound; in the search for those moments, those states of being, those spaces which make being *other* in order to exist and become manifest, or to dissolve. Hesitation, vacillation of affects.

To dwell on the genealogy of a work raises the question of both origin and family. Here the term *family* can be understood as everything that touches on the affinities (philosophical, symbolic, conceptual, formal) that link an artist to other artists, for example. By extension, it also encompasses all those connections that are woven between artworks, many of which the artist is unaware of, absorbed in her creative process. Over the years, she develops a family¹¹ of forms, images and experiences. Some of these have been identified and commented on in this text. They all converge on movement, that fundamental element which Étienne-Jules Marey defined as “the most visible of life’s distinguishing marks.”¹² Movement introduces time into the image, connects the virtual and the actual, and re-animates our memory of the body. Manon Labrecque is constantly exploring this movement.

Nicole Gingras



—
**apprentissage, dessous ma chair
rouge, touchée, 2015**

1. The video *Hara-Kiri (exercices)* (1998) relates a series of twelve “petites morts,” rituals in which the substance of the body is momentarily separated from and floats above it.

2. Over the years, Manon Labrecque has conceived a number of video filming and editing apparatuses for transforming images: the face, body, objects and space metamorphose. For example, *En deçà du réel* (1997) is a video in which a face is deformed to the point of becoming illegible, dissolving into the raster of the electronic image. The work’s synopsis, written by Labrecque, reads as follows: “Alone. In an empty space. Dance and then laugh? Amusing oneself in passing and re-passing time. Compress, stretch, squeeze space and time. Discover the charge of a rather ordinary reality. Enter into the folds of reality. See between the lines.” The body is transformed, dislocated; in this operation of “squeezing space and time,” the face is deformed to the point of becoming monstrous. In the video *C’t aujourd’hui qu’* (1999), Labrecque conceived a method for animating props: a soup bowl and the table on which it is placed turn about and, in this way, decompose the image, and thus the filmed shot, into pure movement.

3. Claude Bernard, quoted by Georges Didi-Huberman, “Le mouvement de toute chose.” *Mouvements de l’air – Étienne-Jules Marey, photographe des fluides* (Paris: Gallimard, 2004), 187.

4. Manon Labrecque, in discussion with the author during a visit to her studio on 6 January 2015.

5. The expression is Labrecque’s and refers to a fundamental element of her practice.

6. The source of the installation’s sounds lies in contact between the acetate surfaces on which the images are printed and a wooden component of the structure or mechanism which animates them and gives rise to these revolutions (circular movements around vertical and horizontal axes).

7. Yoko Ono, “*Earth Piece*,” 2008 *Biennale of Sydney: Revolutions – Forms That Turn* (Fishermans Bend, Victoria: Biennale of Sydney in association with Thames & Hudson Australia, 2008), 279.

8. Labrecque has developed a mode of presentation for her drawings which enables the visitor to move between them. Oak easels of her own design lend each drawing a different presence than that which it would have if hanged on a wall. The image becomes a body.

9. Drawing with her eyes closed is a practice begun by Labrecque in the early 2000s, enabling her to rediscover or move towards bodily states, intensities and organic or psychic frailties. These *drawings by memory* create what she describes as “sensation images.”

10. Jean-Luc Nancy, *Listening*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007 [2002]), 21.

11. I have discussed this idea, one that is dear to me, in texts such as “Les images soeurs,” in *Raymonde April – Les fleuves invisibles* (Joliette: Musée d’art de Joliette, 1997).

12. Étienne-Jules Marey, *La machine animale* (Paris: Baillière, 1873), 5.

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Based in Montreal, Nicole Gingras is a researcher, independent curator and author. The exhibitions and programs she has curated and the publications under her direction as well as the seminars she has lead, deal with such notions as time, the creative process, traces and memory. She has extensively written on the moving image, photography, as well as sound and kinetic art.