

Deconstructing Montréal

Artist/architect uses bones to question how we view our city and ourselves.

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Let's play a small game of word association. Tigers. Rabbits. Rabbit jaws. Montréal!?

That's the type of intellectual provocation you'll encounter when viewing Marie-Josèphe Vallée's latest exhibition entitled *Constructions Naturelles*. Vallée, a Plateau resident trained both as an artist and an architect, questions our accepted way of viewing the physical world around us. One of the ways in which she achieves this is by confronting the viewer with what at first appears as seemingly bizarre perspectives of the city Montréal.

Influenced by surrealist painters like René Magritte, who in his work *Golconde* uses images of little men raining

from the sky, Vallée jars our accepted way of viewing things. In *Ile*, one of the works in a series entitled *Montreal*, she juxtaposes cartographic images of the city with the jaw bones of rabbits. Take a close look and you'll see that the shape of the island is in fact exactly akin to the form of a rabbit's jaw. Surreal maybe, but true.

When we consider the multifaceted and highly charged symbolism of bones, including associations of permanence, decomposition, and artificiality, it is not surprising that they are so central to her work. The suggestions made when tying them to an urban setting become all the more interesting. Although it is easy to complacently accept the space we live in, consider for instance, the permanence of the orthogonal grid that was imposed on Montréal and how it

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has affected the development of the city.

For Vallée, this unconventional way of both seeing and doing things pervades all aspect of her professional life. She receives the support not only of her husband, himself an architect and professor, but as well the support of her ten year old son Edwin and four year old daughter Emily. Emily helps her to collect all sorts of bones that

are included in her works, and Edwin can be counted on to offer some of the most honest and forthright critiques of her work. With time being a valuable commodity, constructive input is more than encouraged.

Having created a new language with Emily, Vallée shows us that looking at things from a different vantage point really isn't that complex. And so, she asks her daughter: "cshingrd dro cnmsts," to which Emily quite obviously responds "zotchooka ngborg." Natural construction at its best.

*Constructions Naturelles
Until September 27, 1998.*

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