

Emily Hermant, *Hesitations* by Natalie Olanick

At the point where the wall begins, there is a single grey line. As our eyes follow this line, we see that it feeds into a series of nails — hundreds of nails, carefully placed. The thread winds between the nails, resulting in several five-by-seven-foot mechanical wave patterns, all created from the single thread. Accompanying these wave patterns are faint sounds of voices — a sigh, hums and fragments of words.

The large wave patterns are artist Emily Hermant's representation of the gaps that come in between the words. The pauses or moments of the body's reactions to words — the need to clear the throat, to catch one's breath, the words restrained, the emotional states revealed — this is the focus of her work. The alteration of the sounds into wave patterns is a labour-intensive process that begins mechanically with recording devices. Then these sonic patterns are enlarged and printed out as waveform images, which in turn form the patterns for the placement of the nails and, finally, the lacing of the thread.

The objects on the walls stand out from the sounds as large, shimmering jagged wave formations that direct the gallery space. Hermant's study of speech or human sound patterns are grounded in an emotional reaction to physical form. Her choices of materials and her method of creating forms — the mechanics of representation — tell us something about the artist and our shared experiences.

Hermant's work contains echoes of what is traditionally known as "women's work": making and mending, sewing and weaving, and so on. The use of thread — a delicate material and a primary characteristic of our clothing and blankets — arouses feelings of comfort. Hermant's use of thread retraces these familiar qualities and allows us to reflect upon methods and materials typically used for the genesis of physical and emotional warmth. And we are given the option of looking beyond our comfort and pleasure into the unknown, which, too, forms an ever-present part of our daily life.

The threads that held together the clothing forms that Betty Goodwin brought to our attention in the later 1960s can be seen as ghost of the past now present in Hermant's threaded waveforms. Goodwin's etchings comment on how our bodies function. Her black prints of single items of clothing — vests, socks, or gloves on white grounds — are skeletons of garments. The clothing in her prints appear as isolated tokens of the wearer, who no longer has use for them. Owing to life-changing experiences, like growing out of clothes, aging and ultimately death, we leave behind us collections of things that may be reused by others, though perhaps memories or impressions of the previous owner linger. Goodwin's prints evoke a sense of loss and emptiness, yet at the same time a delicate structure possessing the beauty and reassurance of the objects closest to us.

Each artist's work describes her artistic process of making as her subject. Each uses grassroots forms of technology to recreate images that shadow an individual's movements: Hermant by recording and then visually reproducing human sounds, Goodwin by printing clothing items like those we don each day. These works lend greater weight or substance to ephemera of matter and time. Their processes become part of their end products. The artists' emotional impressions become known through their interaction with their materials, the consequence of the maker as a technical worker who utilizes her materials to reflect her process.

Hermant's use of scale — the large size of the wave patterns — gives human feeling to her representation of human activity. The thread's delicacy is given strength by the very size of the woven object. Colette Whiten's sculptural/performance works of the 1970s, in which men are static models in structures of wood, concrete, rope, chain and fiberglass, share a similar sensibility to recording human activities, yet achieve the reverse of Hermant's work. Whiten made the heavy qualities of wood and rope appear manageable to human strength by building models that encased the human figures as living beings, capable of functioning with these formidable materials. Hermant takes tiny, light objects and abstract images of human sounds and enhances their presence in the world by representing them on a human scale. In these works, the process of making steps beyond mastery of materials and into the role of the subject. "In Whiten's work, each part of the entire process, from the initial idea for the piece, through its conception, production and documentation is equally important. Her involvement in the development of these systems has resulted in the process and structures being codified and synthesized."

This outline of objects becoming codified and synthesized can be applied to all three artists' works. Each seeks to use art as a way to describe a personal impression of human nature, common to everyone. The works need patience and time — both for the artists to create the works and for the viewers to read and experience what the works have to offer, a thorough investigation of the body's reaction to communication and time. The appearance of unnamable emotions surrounds these works as the process of making keeps interpretations open. There is no one moment or image that best illustrates what the artist has discovered. Each has developed her own set of measuring devices to examine how a person occupies the world and how this feels in relation to physical fragilities.

The single thread that trails away from one wave formation to the next, and finally to the end of the work, suggests that possibilities are available and that we have the materials and means to learn.

1-Mayo Graham, *Some Canadian Women Artists* (National Gallery of Canada, 1975).

Natalie Olanick is an artist, writer and part-time curator. She teaches at Dawson College and is on the board of articule gallery in Montreal. She has shown her work in various galleries and museums in Canada and the United States. Her most recent show was At Propeller gallery in Toronto, Fall 08. In the winter 2010 she is curating an exhibition of Francoise Sullivan at Womens' Art Resource Center in Toronto. This event will be in partnership with the Art Gallery of Ontario. She is always amazed at where art takes her.

This text is part of a writing series by members of the gallery, reflecting on the works presented during articule's 2010-2011 programming season. Natalie Olanick's text has been produced for Emily Hermant's exhibition *Hesitations* presented at articule from September 17 to October 17, 2010, and is also available as a pdf on the gallery's website.



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