



John Latour

◀◀ PIERRE-FRANÇOIS OUELLETTE ART CONTEMPORAIN, MONTREAL

A six-foot-eight-inch walking cane leans against the wall. A chair lacking front legs bends to the floor. All but the phrase "He was a – nobody" is obliterated from a printed page. In his show "Four Corners," John Latour presents the four corners of a room, the four corners of a page; within these spaces he exposes histories of human associations and forgotten feelings.

Each sculpture is a domestic construction originally intended to support people or to hold their belongings: chairs, a bureau, drawers. Latour cuts, rearranges, twists, adds to and paints each piece until it resonates with associations, often considering each object for up to a year before imposing his will onto the final form. Many of his works remain untitled, leaving the exact meaning up to each viewer.

A carved antique chair is tilted down to touch the floor as though kneeling. The inanimate object mimics a human event and thoughts of

kneeling benches, supplication, stumbling and sinking spring to mind. Another chair is split in half, one side twisted up; its angular planes intersect and overlap. The chair becomes a Cubist construction seen from all sides. A bureau lies prone, a panel cut out and repositioned, creating a visual pathway leading up the curved leg, over the edge and into the empty shell that once held the artifacts of someone's daily routine.

While the furniture may be violently disjointed, the body of work seems held together by the dark brown patina Latour paints all the pieces. A subtle formal beauty pervades the best works. In these antiques reside human histories and embedded emotions. Latour releases possible narratives lying within each object, histories dense with mystery. His result is a Gothic, emotive drama flavoured with postmodern psychoanalytic theory.

Anthony Vidler, in his book *The Architectural Uncanny*, connects the unsettling aspects of contemporary disembodied architectural fragments to psychology. It's a theory that would describe Latour's manipulation of objects as a means to stress their affective content. The tall cane, titled *Fragile*, shifts scale to create its own drama of evocations. Firstly it functions as a self-portrait of the artist, who stands only two inches shorter than the six-foot-eight cane. The hyper-extended staff is an ironic characteristic in an object often linked with shorter people and longer lives. It draws out reflections on the length of life, steps taken, memories of the deceased, and also suggests the grotesque, the unnatural, the frightening. Depending on their associations, Latour's works can be both comforting and unnerving.

Hung salon-style on the walls are framed pages from two of the artist's favourite novels, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and *Frankenstein*, and it's no surprise that both are Gothic stories. Latour has painted over all but a few words to create a new meaning on each page. "The thing was most absurd" remains on one; another reads, "This strange home." Indeed, Latour has created a strange home, constructed with the discards of human life and populated by the echoes of human emotion. CHRISTOPHER WILLARD



JOHN LATOUR Untitled 2000 Wooden chair, acrylic paint
85 x 40 x 73 cm PHOTO PAUL L'HERLAND