

VISUAL ARTS

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It is hard to believe that violent sculptural works of broken chairs and delicate text-based images of scattered words come from the same hand, but both are by Montreal artist John Latour

Furniture and fiction

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SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE

Montreal artist John Latour's work, on view at the Pierre-François Ouellette contemporary art gallery, is split dramatically into two approaches, one that is sculptural and one that is two dimensional.

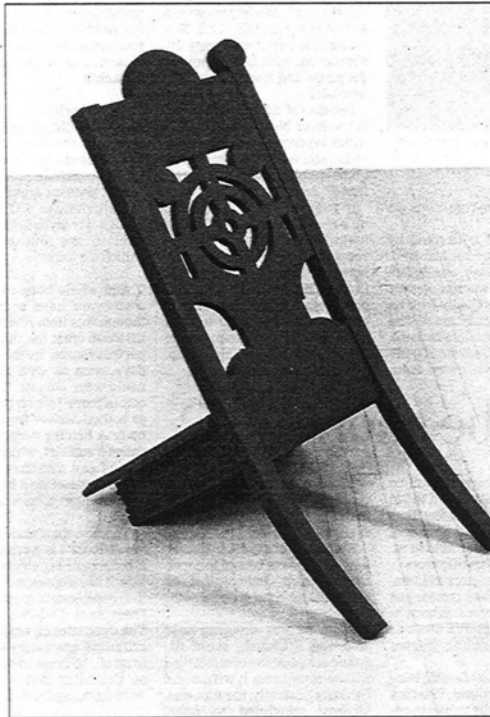
We were almost surprised to learn that the sculptures, consisting of broken and/or reconfigured furniture, are made by the same hand as the two-dimensional, texts-on-paper works that are so exquisitely delicate.

There's something violent about two chairs, part of a loose-knit installation titled *Four Corners*, which also includes several drawers spread out on the floor and a dresser on its side. One chair tilts forward, with its two front legs amputated, as though bowing to an unseen tormentor. The other chair is sliced in two, with the parts collapsing in on each other.

This "crime scene" recalls the anthropomorphic nature of furniture, which, along with our clothes, is a kind of second skin. Also connected to this is the role of furniture in our maintenance of personal dignity: the tilted chair suggests the recent unceremonious dumping of some unfortunate person. Certainly, the broken and reoriented furniture, reminiscent of works by another Montreal sculptor, Goulet, intentionally thwarts traditional notions of form and function.

Latour's delicate, text-based works, some not much larger than a memo pad, seem the work of some over-eager censor, willing at times to white out almost an entire page. In fact, there are never more than a few typed words left exposed to view. In one of these works, bringing to mind that of Montreal conceptual artist Rober Racine, we see only four words, "pale, bedroom, with, drawers," which is also the title of the work.

Who knows how our experience would differ – and the meaning change – if the artist had left the texts untouched. Greatly touched up, they become a kind of poetry, at once verbal and visual, with the white spaces and long dribble-lines of white-out existing in precarious balance with the remaining words. Some of these are in rows, while others appear at the far reaches of the paper.



Two chairs are part of a loose-knit installation titled *Four Corners*, which also includes several drawers spread out on the floor and a dresser on its side.

Indeed, on one level, these untitled creations, of which the thin, patterned frames are an integral part, are about space, both literal space and the space that we conjure up when reading. Certainly, all texts ultimately have to do with existence in space or use spatial analogies.

On another level, these works on paper, like the furniture, are about human intentions and how they can be hijacked. The original function of the furniture has been altered, as has the meaning of the texts. Indeed, if some of the furniture has been split in two, so also, in a sense, have the texts.

Yet in both cases, this act of splitting is in the end creative and positive, a kind of moral gesture, in that it invites us to consider space, form and meaning in a new light. If the texts examine the semantics of pattern and word, the furniture relates to the semantics of human move-

ment and orientation.

Odd as it may seem, the texts tell the real story of the furniture.

John W. Latour's *Four Corners* and text-based works are on view at Pierre-François Ouellette Art Contemporain, 372 Ste. Catherine St. W., Room 216, until Aug. 16. Call (514) 395-6032 or visit www.pfoac.com
