

REVIEWS

## Valérie Blass: Going All Out

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Valérie Blass *In the Very Singular Position Which Is Mine* 2012 Courtesy the artist and Parisian Laundry / photo Guy L'Heureux

Since a breakthrough showing at the 2008 Quebec Triennial, Valérie Blass' star has risen quickly, and for good reason. Her current solo exhibition at the [Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal](#)—happening alongside similarly sized exhibitions of much better-known international practitioners [Wangechi Mutu](#) and [Ghada Amer](#)—continues to demonstrate the evolution of her distinctly humane, witty and intelligent sculptural practice.

The exhibition contains works that might already be known in some circles as Blass' popular favourites, like *L'homme paille* (that one is now in the collection of the National Gallery of Canada, where it was a major promotional image for its 2010 Canadian Biennial). But the show also contains works that seem to be fresh from the studio, like *In the Very Singular Position Which Is Mine*, an amalgam of perfectly cast bodies in a hot-and-heavy pose mashed up with abstract 1980s designs and po-mo mirrors.

In fact, one of the most remarkable evolutions in Blass' recent work, to her existing fans, might be her integration of casting from the human body. Her work has always referred to the body, whether it be animal, human, sculptural, or otherwise. But here, with the casting, Blass' characteristic tensions between figuration and abstraction, physicality and representation, are sharpened.

This new turn is well demonstrated in *Ce nonobstant*, a 2011 sculpture. Approaching it in the back of the MACM space, I could only see a large, abstracted ellipsis. But when I got closer, and turned to see the far side of the work, I was confronted with what appeared to be a human arm poking out from the pod, tensely brandishing a sharp, pointed stick. The verisimilitude is such that I felt the arm might actually strike out at me at any moment; I nearly jumped back from it, and viscerally felt a simultaneous sense of fun and fear.

This is just one anecdote, but it demonstrates an overall effect: Blass' work doesn't actually move, but it still manages to move me—physically and otherwise. It's full of different references, perspectives, materials and sentiments, so that walking around any given work becomes a kind of prismatic experience. Such is the continuing power of Blass' practice—and the reason it's worth betting on for a terrific viewing experience, both now and into the future.