

FOREWORD

The last time Liz Magor exhibited at this Gallery in 1977 (Four Places), she demonstrated through her work an uncommon vision. The translation of that vision into an intriguing and challenging visual record resulted in a strong and positive audience response. We are delighted, therefore, to bring to our public this recent work by Liz Magor, who, in our view, is one of Canada's most exciting talents.

We want to thank the artist for her cooperation in the formulation of this exhibition. Vancouver Art Gallery Curator Lorna Farrell-Ward organized the exhibition and wrote a perceptive and thoughtful essay for this catalogue.

Luke Rombout
Director

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INTRODUCTION

Liz Magor's work has always been about life. Life in the sense of a process of being, of transition and change. Artists have attempted in various ways to tap that universal human experience, by making apparent through the making of a work and the object created by that activity, proof of one's own process and experience, which surface and become visible at a given point in time.

The process in Magor's case has been a natural one, which parallels the making of one new order from another and the time involved in that passage. In that sense there is a natural evolution from her previous work to the approach and nature of the work in this exhibition.

Whether sorting and gathering the natural materials of moss, twigs and grass for earlier work such as *Breast Nest Pressers for the Perching Birds of Canada* or dried plant life for *Sowing Weeds in Lanes and Ditches*, the materials have always been used with a strong feeling for their inherent qualities, with the imprint of both the worker and her tools inevitable. Although in all her work there is that involvement with the materials, it is never self-indulgent at the expense of a distinctly visual statement.

The work that followed, such as the coats in *A Concise History* and the compost figures, began to deal with some aspects of the figure that had occurred to Liz while travelling in Europe and Egypt, as well as encompassing the concerns of some of the earlier pieces. It was then she began thinking of the body as a mold, something that shaped other things and from which various materials and objects found their forms, or were formed. Clothing obviously conformed to the shape of the figure and from that impression created a narrative or personal history. Clothing was again used for the compost figures that followed. In producing these figures with grass, glue and water, and pressing them into an almost two-dimensional, horizontal form, many of the elements present in the works in this exhibition were introduced.

In these new pieces she wanted to make tangible some of the forces that affect the figure and transform it. The machine; the creator, the mold maker, as an important part of that process for reproduction, was introduced as part of the work in *Four Boys and a Girl*. Machines, even when they are not works of art, underlie our art in the way that Nature underlies it. One of the first

products was, of course, the machine itself; and in pushing, pressing down, compressing, squeezing, these new forms were born/created. This process of production or reproduction is not unlike the pressure (gravity) that happens to the body during the natural process of decay. This is not to say that the machine is only a direct expression of its own function, although from the standpoint of design it is very clear and direct. The machine is also an instrument in the hands of the artist, a tool, and therefore upon looking at it one is aware of the human factor, "the presser". With this machine the worker is allowed to show input, and the machine itself, made of wood and steel with handles that screw down the lid, presses out these slabs of organic material (bodies), and as such is not just a record of the process, but part of the process itself.

The slabs or bodies have become more simplified from the earlier compost figures with the figurative outline gone, but the human dimensions maintained. Although the materials vary, they are forced to conform to a common mold. These slabs, as part of their own natural process and transformation, will also continue to decay and parallel our own process in time — a continuation from life to death to life. With this in mind, it becomes clear that the visible process is a continuous one. The slabs could well return to what appears a coffin-like machine in the passage from one state to another, just as death becomes a part of the continuous force of creation, making life possible again.

The two other works, *Schist* and *Double Scarp*, also actualize the process or forces that transform and eventually reduce the body as they are literally pressed into their final form. The building up of layers of clothing and plaster and pressing them to the thickness of a person's body, creates a layering that is more evident in these pieces where the sides have been exposed and trimmed. Referring also to a geological process, as the titles indicate, they are richly visual like layered rock of a sheered away cliff — a graphic indication of force and time. Magor sees this more as an attempt to parallel a physical event rather than to make a metaphor of it. The machine has become an even more integrated aspect of the work in the case of *Double Scarp*, where the metal framing and bolts are part of the work, and the physical connection of the product and machine is clear. The connection with the machine and the artist is also there where her

participation in the work is understood. The difference between this and her latest work, *Production*, is the successful degree in which all these elements are combined; the producer, process, product and machine.

With *Production*, Magor has simplified the narrative. By unifying the work process and product, this piece tells its own story, and in the work involved in that process of change, the artist sees a means of defining her own input and herself.

In producing the bricks, pieces of newspaper were soaked, mushed together by hand and squeezed through the machine before being turned out of the brick mold. Through the drying process and after, a variety of tonal changes occur in the bricks, and once stacked, the resulting wall has an undeniably sensuous surface and texture. With the immediate goal of effective work, the machine is capable of reproducing brick after brick. A certain ritualistic activity is required to produce the great number of bricks necessary, but there is no gap between that production and the brick product itself. Although the walls have a minimal architectural form, the process of production is what is important. In viewing this piece, the machine is obscured by the wall (product) so that as you walk past the wall, the breakdown of the process of bricks to newspapers to machine and ultimately to machine maker is revealed. The piece is therefore approached in a certain way, perceived in a certain order, and broken down in a certain order.

That honest directness of *Production* is there in Liz Magor's need to work, as well as in the objects she creates. The pieces in this exhibition are about work and her need to evolve and identify herself through this process. In doing so she has dared to go further, to be more personal and direct, thereby allowing one to reach in at one's own level of experience and recognize that art and the process of art making is not outside the common experience.

Lorna Farrell-Ward
Curator