

# frieze

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## JAMES CARL

### Diaz Contemporary, Toronto

At first glance, James Carl's 'jalousie' sculptures (2006–13) seem straightforward, if odd: thin, pastel-coloured strips woven into hollow, vaguely biomorphic shapes. The mesh of their making emphasizes their lack of substance, urging us to see them as all surface.

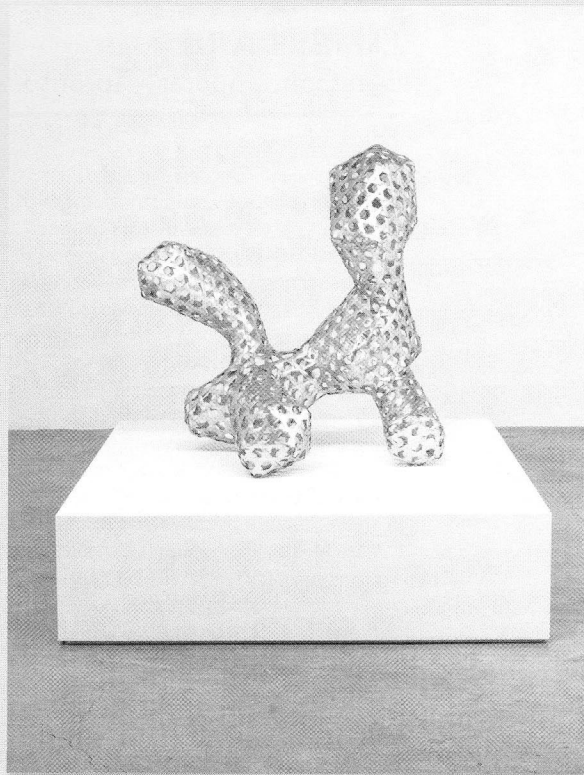
In effect, the 'jalousie' series, by showing us the thinness of its material, turns itself into a metonymy in reverse. Instead of referencing a larger whole as metonymies do – in the phrase 'the hand that rocks the cradle', for instance, the hand stands in for the person – the material's thinness conjures something smaller than itself. It suggests that, ideally, this already-thin material would be infinitely thin, and the works completely depthless.

Yet, typically of Carl's works – such as his *trompe l'oeil* elastic bands made of polymer clay (*thing's end*, 2008) or his similarly lifelike Styrofoam containers carved from marble ('Takeouts', 1995–ongoing) – dry wit also plays a role. The 'jalousie' works comprise slats from venetian blinds, in colours too wan to be popular, which Carl weaves into precarious shapes, held together by the tension created when he bends them into their awkwardly blobby forms. Weaving these slats into forms human-sized or larger has the air of mad-scientist virtuosity, the admiring question, 'How does he do that?' immediately undone by the query that follows: 'And, why?'

Our interest in the what, how and why of these works draws us near, until we grasp with a Homer Simpson-like 'Doh!' that, along with emphasizing the thinness of the material, the weave exposes the interior surface, where there is more to see – not much, but enough. Exploiting their gentle curve, Carl nestles blinds within blinds, so the inside differs from the outside. Despite this simplicity, though, we can't take in these forms all at once. Our gaze shifts between inside and outside, between surface and depth.

But venetian blinds do that: trap vision at their surface until the blinds are opened or, more dramatically, parted for a prying eye. Hence this series' name, French for both 'jealousy' and 'venetian blind', as well as being the title of a 1957 novel by Alain Robbe-Grillet, the master of the surface-orientated *nouveau roman* and its *nouvelle vague* cinematic equivalent. (The novel plays on the meanings of 'jalousie' by revolving around the protagonist's anxiety about his wife's affair, a tension heightened when he watches her through the blinds of their house.)

A shared reliance on geometry further links Robbe-Grillet's novel to Carl's sculptures. *La Jalousie* depends on angles and spatial relationships to the degree that it opens with a diagram of the protagonist's house and property, and its first paragraph describes the location of a shadow on a rooftop. This use of geometry as a metaphorical support for *La Jalousie* has its literal counterpart in the triangles formed →



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by the weave of Carl's blinds, which create the structure his sculptures need in order to stand.

The show's solipsistic references – materials, title, allusion to Robbe-Grillet – make it compellingly absolute. Two elements seem open to the world, but even they revert inward. *Spare* (2013), a small, vinyl wall piece, looks teasingly like a diagram of something, though of what is unclear. Meanwhile, *austerity* (2013) comprises two framed pieces of found cardboard. Hanging side by side, they feature a word that, in its inexplicability, blocks us at the surface as surely as venetian blinds do. 'DUMBBELL', they say, and then – as if for emphasis – say it again: 'DUMBBELL'.

CHARLES REEVE

1  
James Carl  
*convoiture no. 9*, from the series  
'jalousie', 2013, venetian blinds,  
112 × 107 × 71 cm

2  
Beatriz Milhazes  
*Domingo (Sunday)*, 2010,  
acrylic on canvas, 2 × 3.1 m

3  
McBride Charles Ryan  
*Community Hall*, 2013,  
mixed media, diameter: 15 m

4  
Marco Fusinato  
*Aetheric plexus (Broken X)*, 2013,  
mixed media, 8.8 × 4.1 × 2.3 m