

IT IS

Recent Acquisitions of New Canadian Art

WHAT

IT IS

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James Carl

Born in Montreal, 1960.
Lives and works in Guelph, Ontario.

James Carl surfaced on the Montreal art scene in the early 1990s with *Re-possession*, a series of sculptural interventions in which he placed replicas of large consumer and utilitarian objects he had constructed from salvaged cardboard in alleyways. During his studies at Beijing's Central Academy of Fine Arts in 1990 and 1995, he turned to traditional sculptural practices, carving stone and marble but choosing to scrupulously render objects such as cell phones and Styrofoam cups. Carl's practice is situated at the nexus of form, material, and perceived value, reflecting on social exchange and the public functioning of art, as well as consumer society's penchant for planned obsolescence and disposable materials.

Continuing to work with discarded consumer objects, Carl began using Venetian blinds in 2006. Weaving the colourful slats in a three-way pattern, he produced a body of sculptures, *jalousie*, that are simultaneously biomorphic in their overall shapes and geometric in their three-way woven construction. The way Carl has plaited together these "colour errors" from window-treatment manufacturer Hunter Douglas has resulted in vessel-like forms whose surfaces are punctuated by innumerable hexagonal apertures that play upon the blinds' original function of concealing and revealing. Looking through the holes affords a view into the sculpture's "negative space"—what Carl refers to as "ghost forms."¹ The viewer can peer both into and through the airy interiors to the far surface such that a moiré pattern is created by the interaction between the front and back surface patterns.

The horizontal, yellowish form of *jalousie (bananier)* recalls the banana boat of its name; *jalousie (bole)*, the tallest of the series, towers as it transitions from red to blue; and *jalousie (baluster)* is a buoyant, rounded blue and green structure. Although the *jalousie* series presents a departure from Carl's earlier concern with a 1:1 scale representation of everyday and consumer items, the artist continues to pursue his interest in reworking familiar objects from contemporary culture and repositioning assumptions between usefulness and uselessness, trash and what can be recuperated. As the artist explains, these works "consider the ambivalent relationship, for example, between art and craft, and the quite literally central position of 'negative space' in modernist sculpture. In perceptual terms, these woven works invoke a strong

***jalousie (bole)* 2008**

Coloured aluminium strips on wood base
304.8 × 121.9 × 121.9 cm
Purchased 2009

***jalousie (bananier)* 2008**

Coloured aluminium strips on wood base
167.6 × 289.6 × 152.4 cm
Purchased 2009

***jalousie (baluster)* 2008**

Coloured aluminium strips on wood base
167.6 × 243.8 × 152.4 cm
Purchased 2009

physical sense of negative space as a positive and palpable constituent force: The empty interiors of these sculptures approach presence as a direct corollary of absence."²

The series title *jalousie* plays on the French and German word for Venetian blinds and also refers to Alain Robbe-Grillet's 1957 novel, *La jalousie*. The parenthetical parts of the titles were selected from the "b" words in Robbe-Grillet's story. Set in a banana plantation, the novel is narrated by a jealous man who voyeuristically watches his spouse together with his neighbour through the Venetian blinds. According to Carl, nothing happens in the novel – "[it's] a story in which the narrator is a negative space at the centre of the thing." This void in Robbe-Grillet's narrative is echoed by the "empty" core of Carl's sculptures. The convex and concave contours created by the tightly woven blinds suggest a skin moulded around a now absent object, in Carl's words, "a palpable absence."³

Heather Anderson, with Kari Cwynar

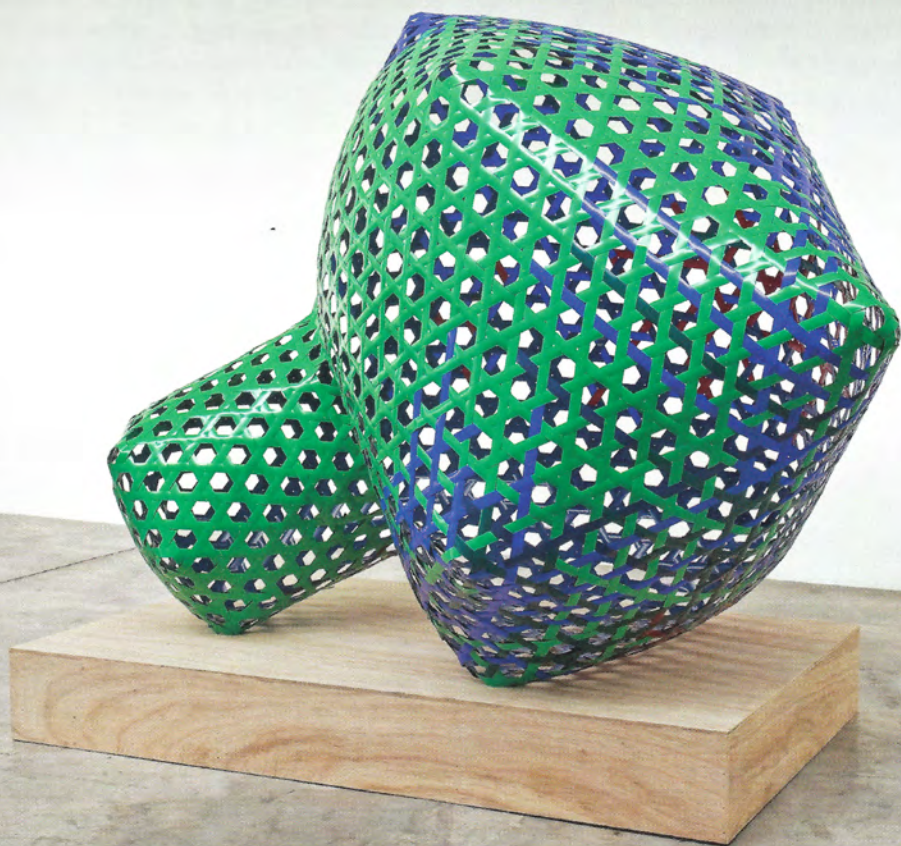
1 James Carl, in Murray Whyte, "Turning Trash into Treasure," *Toronto Star*, 27 November 2008.

2 Artist statement from Diaz Contemporary, Toronto.

3 James Carl, in Sarah Milroy, "Getting under the Skin of Things," *Globe and Mail*, 10 January 2009.







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