

Liz Magor
Susan Hobbs Gallery, Toronto
Oct. 29 — Dec. 5, 2015
by *Lena Suksi*

Liz Magor recently showed five new sculptures (all produced in 2015) at Susan Hobbs Gallery. In *Speckled Veil*, a stuffed blue bird sleeps in a glove. The posed fingers appear tenderly possessive, closing gently around the bird's throat and chest, while the bird's head remains animated as its live self would. It angles into the world through the spotted cellophane that gives the work its name. This evocative glove, though, is as eerily unoccupied as the bird's body, its fingertips collapsing into the softness of shed clothes. Upstairs, the glove in *Pink Shimmer* makes this still more clear, with fingers limp along their length, and the bird that it supports in a death pose, breast to the sky.

Magor's work gets talked about in terms of entropy and detritus, but the sculptures on display here mark the moment between disposal and its opposite: offering. Casts of cardboard boxes acting like plinths have come up from the basement and been altered by her in a way not unlike what the weather does when we leave things on the street. So, the boxes look salted and wet, ready for the garbage collector. However, the levitation of their potential contents – *on* them, rather than *in* them – takes us again to that delightful act of display in order to give away. Giving is the best outcome of shedding. We hope that others will take what we no longer need. The glove in *Speckled Veil* could be catching what it's catching to release it.

Indeed, the central objects of these sculptures are still things that we expect to see as trash. Ornamental taxidermy is, like pressed flowers, a typically clumsy Victorian way of commemorating nature. The way that the stuffed dog topping *Glow Pet* has been unevenly painted is intriguing, like the teen impulse to spray-paint our stuff out of boredom with its stubborn persistence as our bodies change. However, these works suggest that the decision to transform something comes as much out of hope for an object's future as the desire to dismissively sabotage it.

The sculptures refer still more strongly to giving and sharing through the wrapping materials used in each one: bubble wrap resting gracefully around the toy dog of *Glow Pet*, yellow cellophane generating reflected light around *Gold Box*. More specifically, these materials lend the works movement. Formally, in the lovely way that they offer light and potential sound to the other, calcified components. Otherwise, in that gift wrap and packing material is suggested the passage of our things between destinations and hands. They also present the event of covering and uncovering. Without their rustling skins, the stacked birds, gloves, toys and their boxes might feel consigned to the dump, the curb, or the specimen cabinet. With them, they circulate through those and other places.

The cellophane that, again, gives the bird works their names – *Speckled Veil*, *Pink Shimmer*, *Gold Box* – does another sensitive thing. In her artist talk upon reception of the Gershon Iskowitz Prize at the Art Gallery of Ontario this past October, Magor spoke tenderly about wanting intimacy with the world in an impossible way. She described wanting to feel her pillow closer to her head than it could be, and wanting to absorb all the rain that fell in Prince Rupert, BC, and how her practice copes with these impossible desires. Sensitive cellophane is radiant and seductive, but it is also a slippery obstacle. The bubble wrap perched beneath *Glow Pet*'s little bum cuts it off entirely from its grounding support. Sensible knowledge is realized through the same material as protective distance, like how our skin holds our organs in while it sends them nervous signals. The lovely transparencies invite the inspection of the boundaries of our senses at the same time as they enforce them. The satisfaction of pinching bubble wrap still gives way to two seamed plastic surfaces. Feeling, rather than dissolving, limits us. At the same time, it is a condition of survival.

This thwarted investigation of the stuff of our world looms in Magor's long body of work: casts of tree trunks stuffed with unlikely secrets, blankets repaired and folded. For her, nothing can be altogether handled, much as we might inspect it. What is unknown is an inevitable frustration. That she achieves experience of resistance in an expertly crafted way

Liz Magor, *Speckled Veil*,
2015 (detail)
PHOTO: TONI HARKENSCHIED;
IMAGE COURTESY OF SUSAN
HOBBS GALLERY



is poetic. That she works through our mundane surroundings reminds me of more of the close afternoon light of an enigmatic short story. Alice Munro writes experience through minor details, describing, for instance, in “Deep-Holes” (2008), a landscape of champagne bottles, picnic blankets and cellars that nervously supports the untethering of a family. Ultimately, these objects are not catalysts but settings for our experience, advancing and receding in the way of weather and dust. Munro and Magor might agree that our efforts to solve our lives with signs or objects are futile, but that we cannot entirely neglect their delicate impacts. In 2011, Magor produced works called *Marks* for the City Centre Library in Surrey, BC: big clay ottomans with barely legible evidence of relaxing bodies impressed into their surfaces. This treatment of trace persists in her new sculptures, allowing the effects of the world and ourselves on one another while acknowledging that we get up, that we move on.

This observation is not sentimental. The *Pets*' noses are inches from the wall they are mounted on, diverting us from nostalgia. The birds do not invite us into the wilderness. Everything here has flown its obvious coop and past uses get confused by the closeness of the inspection Magor's work demands. We want to angle our heads, like the bird in *Speckled Veil*, near to the wall to measure the barely present distance between it and *Glow Pet*'s nose. Between disposal and offering, taking stock and imagining new purpose, there is fleeting space in this work for our solitude and innocence.

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Amy Bowles: *Echoing Wood*
 Paul Petro Contemporary
 Art, Toronto
 Sept. 11 — Oct. 10, 2015
 by Simone Wharton

As I wandered around the cozy upstairs gallery at Paul Petro, the city sounds melted away and a magical forest with flora and mythical creatures surrounded me. In the recent exhibition *Echoing Wood*, Amy Bowles asked the viewer to step into an enchanted forest populated with her ceramic sculptures of the past year. On the walls and plinths, spritely faces were nestled amid coral-coloured flowers, twig-like forms twisted and wriggled over and under each other, and hands and fingers reached out, beckoning and welcoming the viewer into the fantasy. A cohesive environment was created through Bowles' colour palette and recurring flower, branch and humanoid motifs, bringing together the familiar and the strange to consider the fundamental relationship between humans and nature.

Echoing Wood was created from a combination of Bowles' own imaginings, beloved children's stories, and inspiration from the English and Canadian wilderness. Bowles moved to Toronto from the small English village of Doultling in 1999. Driving across Canada, she was struck by the rows and rows of trees that seemed to continue without end, suggestive of an ancient and vast wilderness. The English countryside of Bowles' youth also holds its own ancient worlds, where, according to the artist, it is not out of the realm of possibility to step off the roadside and find old ruins or rubble and feel as though you are

Liz Magor, *Glow Pet*, 2015
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