

CANADIANART

5 Questions for Julia Dault

By Canadian Art

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Julia Dault in her Brooklyn studio / photo Jody Rogac

In the past couple of years, the career of Brooklyn-based Canadian artist Julia Dault has skyrocketed. In 2012, her art was included in the New Museum triennial “The Ungovernables” as well as the Ninth Gwangju Biennale, and this year she has presented solo exhibitions in Zurich and Toronto. Today (October 27) at 3 p.m., she will discuss her work as part of the Power Talks series at Art Toronto. Here, she answers some advance questions from *Canadian Art*’s Britt Gallpen and Leah Sandals.

1. Your talk at Art Toronto promises to focus on the fluid concept of home, as well as the process of installing sculptures in situ. What was your first experience seeing your work installed in the home of a collector? How does such an installation proceed when one of your in situ pieces is acquired?

Seeing work—any work—in a collector’s home is so different from seeing it in a white cube; it’s nice to be reminded of the different contexts in which art lives. I was lucky enough to see a living room in New York recently that had beautiful Renaissance bronzes near works by Roy Lichtenstein, Brice Marden, Philip Guston, Andy Warhol and Francis Bacon. Talk about weak in the knees!

Seeing my work in a collector’s home is always fun: it takes on a different life. When the sculptures are re-installed there is an understanding that, while they may follow the same colour sequences and the forms will be quite similar to the original, it will never be exactly the same—this is an important part of my practice. I write very technical instruction manuals to accompany each sculpture, which contain detailed photographs and are accompanied by re-installation kits. Finally, I have trained assistants who know how to re-install the pieces, so that the works meet my specifications; these

installers' names are always credited once the piece is complete.

2. This past year, your work was featured in two booths at Art Basel Miami, as well as at a booth at the Armory Show in New York. What has been your experience with art fairs overall, both as a critic and as an artist?

I no longer write about art as a critic. As an artist, I've had good experiences at fairs. The quality of art on view is often stupendous. Fairs are also a chance to reconnect with friends who live in other cities, which is always a pleasure.

Of course, art fairs' incessant growth, the ever-increasing pressure on dealers to attend them all, and the potential that they might usurp the place of the solo exhibition [see Jerry Saltz] engender interesting, if fraught, conversations about how the market impacts creative production and presentation. As many have pointed out, this conversation isn't exactly a new one, though it's filtered through today's concerns.

Even though I participate in fairs, I approach them at a bit of a remove. I look, I observe, I reconnect, but ultimately I'm most excited to return to the studio to keep working.

3. Your paintings often oscillate between obscuring and revealing the materials of their making, while in your sculptures, the process is alternately detailed (in each work's title) and hidden (to the extent that the installation process is not documented for public view). Can you speak to this interplay between transparency and opaqueness in your practice?

My fascination with transparency grew out of attempting to make pieces that are as self-evident as possible, which necessitated finding equilibrium between process and final form. This is why I build the sculptures in situ and follow strict rules: no pre-planning, cutting, or gluing; tethers must be visible; no assistance in building them, etc.

With the paintings, after building layers of the surface (either with paint or various non-traditional substrates), I use tools (rather than brushes) to reveal what's underneath. In the same way that the industrial-cut sheets of Plexiglas and Formica standardize the sculptural forms, the tools restrict the gestural arbitrariness of the composition. They provide a way for viewers to comprehend the work's genesis by creating a sense of pictorial duration.

The play with opacity you refer to is born of a need, ultimately, to have a small redoubt of inexplicability. While in both mediums the process is laid bare for the viewer, there is a small part that is withheld. I would never reveal myself building the sculptural forms, since I want the viewer to imaginatively piece together that activity. My favourite first reaction to the sculptures is, "Wait, what?" Often, the paintings—especially those with multiple layers—require more looking. I want to draw out the viewing experience without relying on cheap tricks.

4. Pop culture is also an aspect of your work, particularly in titles that refer to Debbie Gibson's *Electric Youth* and other 1980s/1990s pop music and movie hits that are far from highbrow. Why do you wish to reference these types of pop phenomena in a white-cube context?

I grew tired with the overwrought, poetically “sublime” and philosophically drippy titles that often accompany abstract work. Why place such burden on form? The titles often refer to cultural touchstones from the recent past, which serve to anchor the work with a kind of generational shorthand.

But not knowing what *Electric Youth* or *Jordache* are does not prevent anyone from finding meaning. The titles add levity to the work, but that’s not the only goal.

5. What are you currently working on?

I just completed a sculpture for “Outside the Lines,” curated by Bill Arning for the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, and fly down to Miami next week to install a piece at the Pérez Art Museum Miami for a show of works from its collection called “Americana.” I’m working towards my next solo exhibition, which opens in April at my Los Angeles gallery, International Art Objects. I’m also in the planning stages of a larger travelling exhibition, the details of which I hope to be able to speak about soon.