

Clint Roenisch

a gallery for contemporary art, founded 2003

Catherine Carmichael

*Sculpture, paintings
and works on paper*

12 September ~ 31 October, 2020



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Strongly influenced by a background in improvised movement and dance, Carmichael's sculptural works reference the body and its dynamism in space, while her drawing and paintings are often intuitive responses to daily life. Three large floor sculptures from the 1980s anchor the exhibition, each of which harken back to the artist's early performance works which Carmichael began in 1979 before moving into sculpture in 1986. She has said that "performance is like building sculpture, only instead of it being an object it's happening within a specific time frame." By contrast the paintings and works on paper are all recent. Often diaristic and reflecting the artist's perpetual wonder at the basic fact of being, the drawings and watercolours can be densely active, text-based or elegantly spare and open. Everyday existence, internal dialogue, the cycle of life and decay, yearnings, doubt, exuberance, the messy vagaries and conflicting pulls of contemporary life all shine through. Should one care to look for them, associations can be made with the work of Maria Lassnig (especially in Lassnig's interest in "body consciousness" or *Körpergefühlmalerei* in her native German), the expressive sculpture of AR Penck, of Louise Bourgeois and Marlene Dumas, the earth/body works of Ana Mendieta and the restrained drawings of Silvia Bachlii.

Catherine Carmichael has an MFA from Concordia University, Montreal. She also studied at OCAD, Toronto and Emily Carr, Vancouver. Since 1977, the artist's work has been presented in solo and group exhibitions throughout Ontario including Mercer Union (1988), Montreal, Vancouver, and New York City. Carmichael has also presented performances in Vancouver, Toronto, Ottawa, and Guelph. Her drawings were included in the group show, Drawings, at Clint Roenisch in January 2019.

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Untitled (red circle)

circa 2013

watercolour on paper; unique

32 x 24 inches, framed with anti-glare uv glass

\$2,400 including tax

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Holiday

1980

cement and stones; unique

16 x 23 x 6 inches

\$4,000 including tax

accompanied by a Certificate Of Authenticity

416.880.8593 / 190 Saint Helens Avenue, Toronto, Canada, M6H 4A1 / yes@clintroenisch.com

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Untitled

no date

mixed media; unique

21 x 48 x 7 inches

accompanied by a Certificate Of Authenticity

\$4,000 including tax

Clint Roenisch

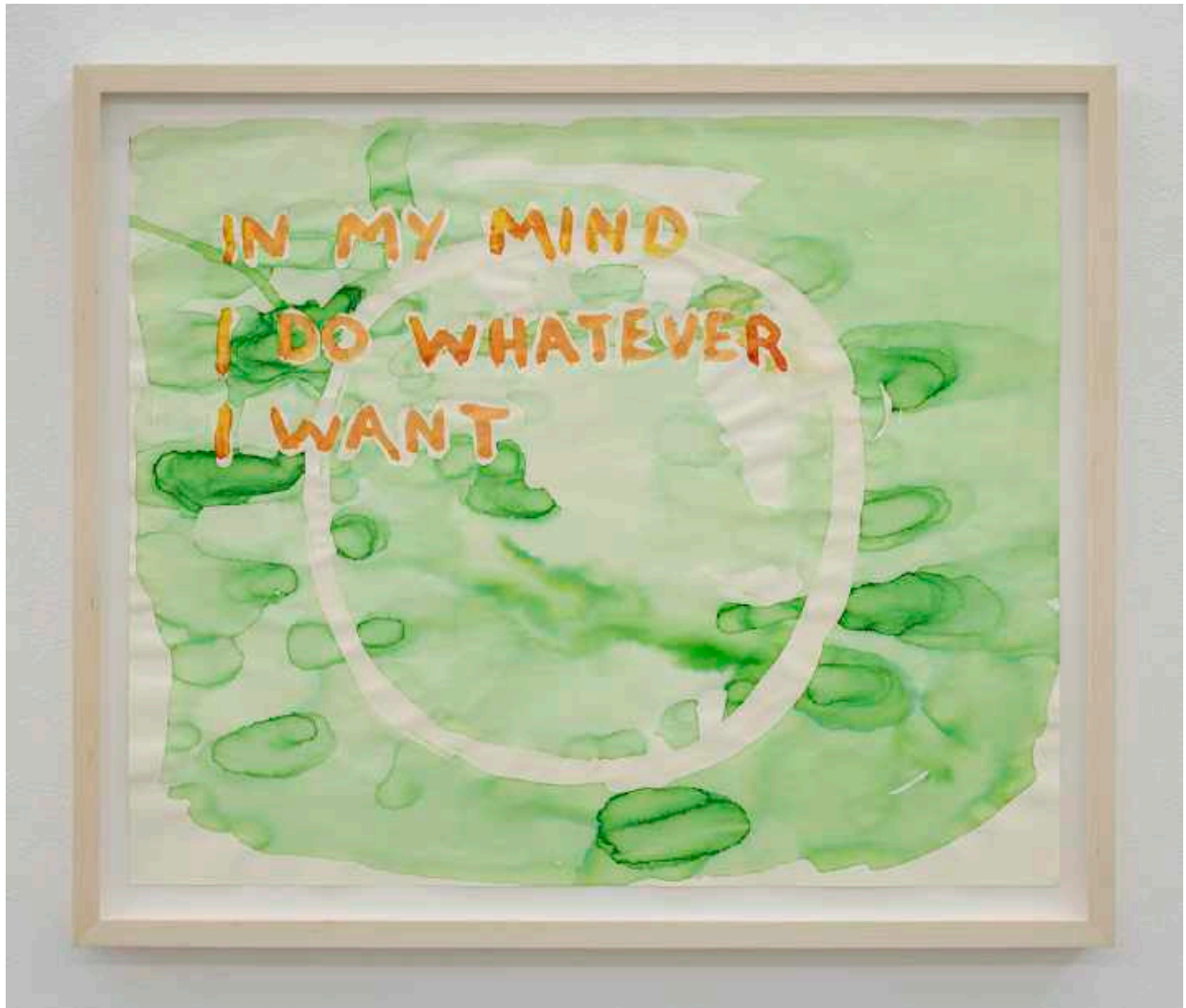
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Untitled (in my mind)

no date

watercolour on paper; unique
19 x 16 inches, framed with AG/UV
accompanied by a Certificate Of Authenticity
\$1,600 including tax

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Untitled

2013

watercolour on paper; unique
19 x 16 inches, framed with AG/UV
accompanied by a Certificate Of Authenticity
\$1,600 including tax

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Untitled (thrill)

no date

watercolour on paper; unique

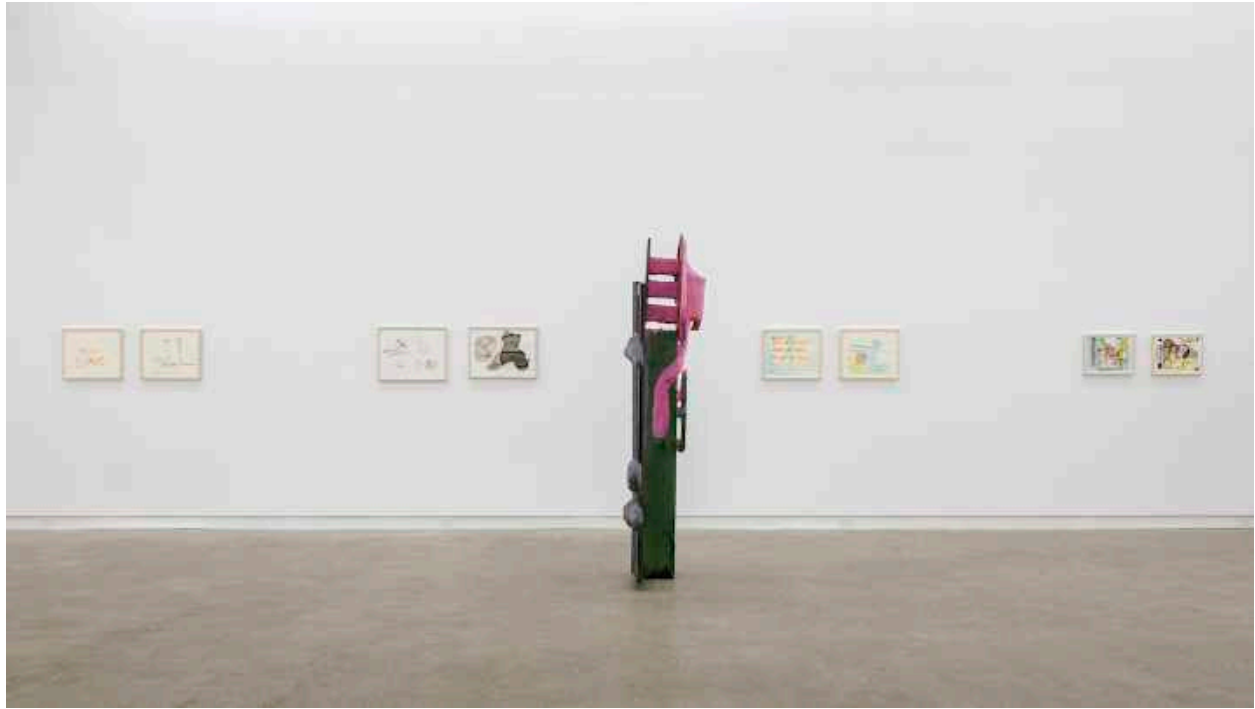
19 x 16 inches

accompanied by a Certificate Of Authenticity

\$1,600 including tax

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Untitled

no date

watercolour on paper; unique

16 x 13 inches

accompanied by a Certificate Of Authenticity

\$1,500 including tax

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Au Musée

no date

watercolour on paper; unique

16 x 13 inches

accompanied by a Certificate Of Authenticity

\$1,500 including tax

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Untitled

no date

watercolour on paper; unique

22 x 16 inches

accompanied by a Certificate Of Authenticity

\$1,800 including tax

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Untitled

no date

watercolour on paper; unique

22 x 17 inches

accompanied by a Certificate Of Authenticity

\$1,800 including tax

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Untitled

no date

watercolour on paper; unique

19 x 16 inches

accompanied by a Certificate Of Authenticity

\$1,600 including tax

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Untitled

no date

watercolour on paper; unique

19 x 16 inches

accompanied by a Certificate Of Authenticity

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Manifestation Of Reason

1986

wood, paint steel; unique
46w x 81h x 18d inches

accompanied by a Certificate Of Authenticity
\$7,500 including tax

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Untitled

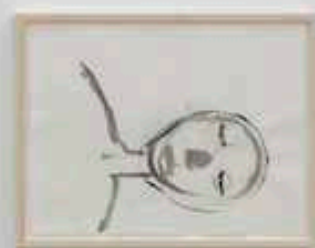
no date

watercolour on paper; unique

16 x 13 inches

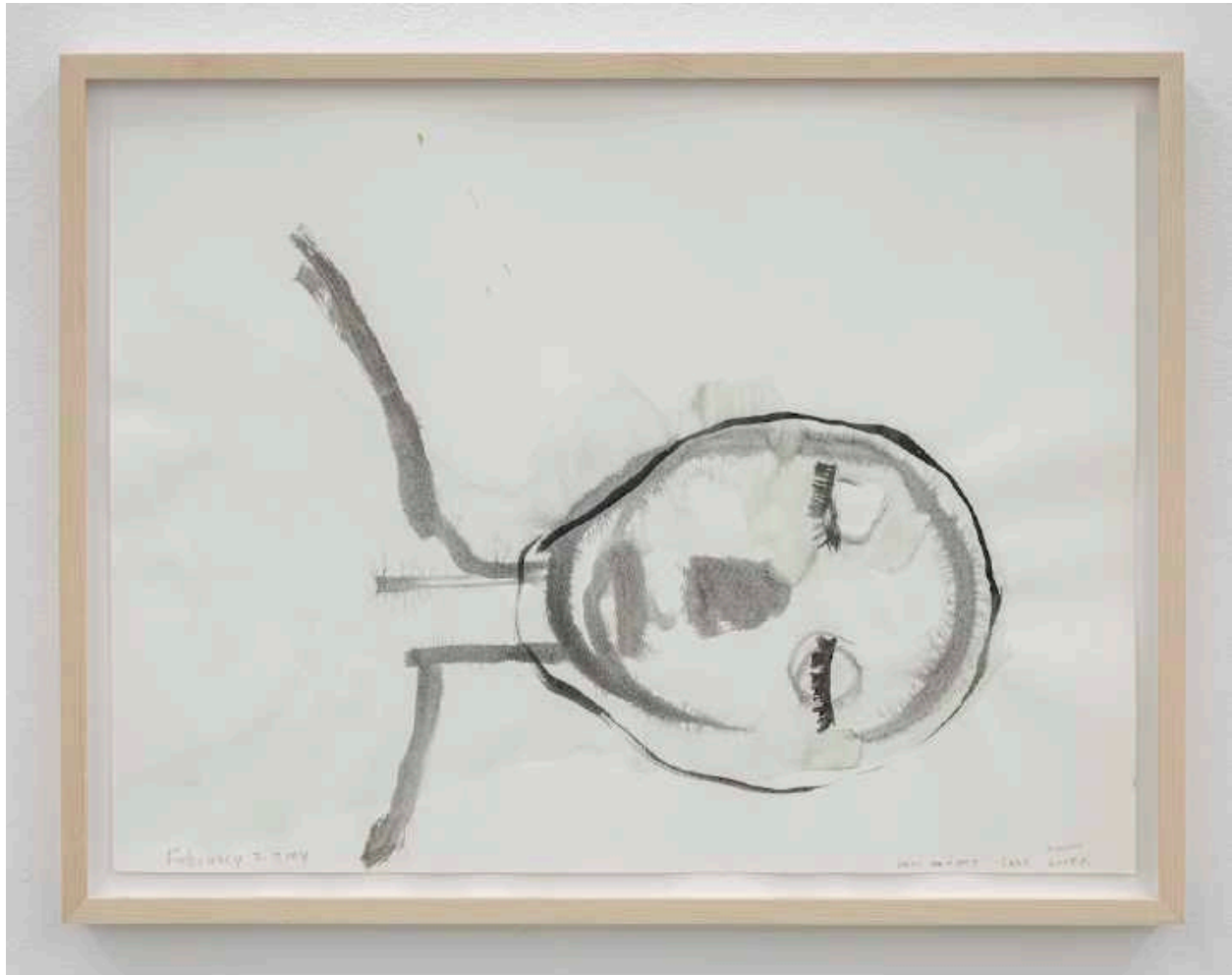
accompanied by a Certificate Of Authenticity

\$1,500 including tax



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Sans Cover

2004

watercolour on paper; unique

22 x 17 inches

accompanied by a Certificate Of Authenticity

\$2,000 including tax

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Untitled

2013

watercolour on paper; unique

19 x 16 inches

accompanied by a Certificate Of Authenticity

\$1,600 including tax

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If Lost And Found

no date

paint, wood, cement, paper maché; unique

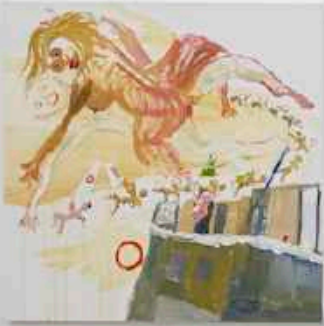
91h x 49w x 22d inches

accompanied by a Certificate Of Authenticity

\$12,000 including tax

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You Got Born (1)

2016 -2019
oil on canvas; unique
48 x 48 inches
accompanied by a Certificate Of Authenticity
\$4,000 including tax

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You Got Born (2)

2016 -2019

oil on canvas; unique

48 x 48 inches

accompanied by a Certificate Of Authenticity

\$4,000 including tax

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You Got Born (3)

2016 -2019

oil on canvas; unique
48 x 48 inches

accompanied by a Certificate Of Authenticity
\$4,000 including tax

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Trying To Become God

1986

oil on canvas; unique
24w x 24d x 85h inches

accompanied by a Certificate Of Authenticity

\$7,500 including tax



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In Between

2013

oil on canvas; unique
40 x 60 inches

accompanied by a Certificate Of Authenticity
\$3,800 including tax

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Three Things At Once

no date

gouache on paper; unique

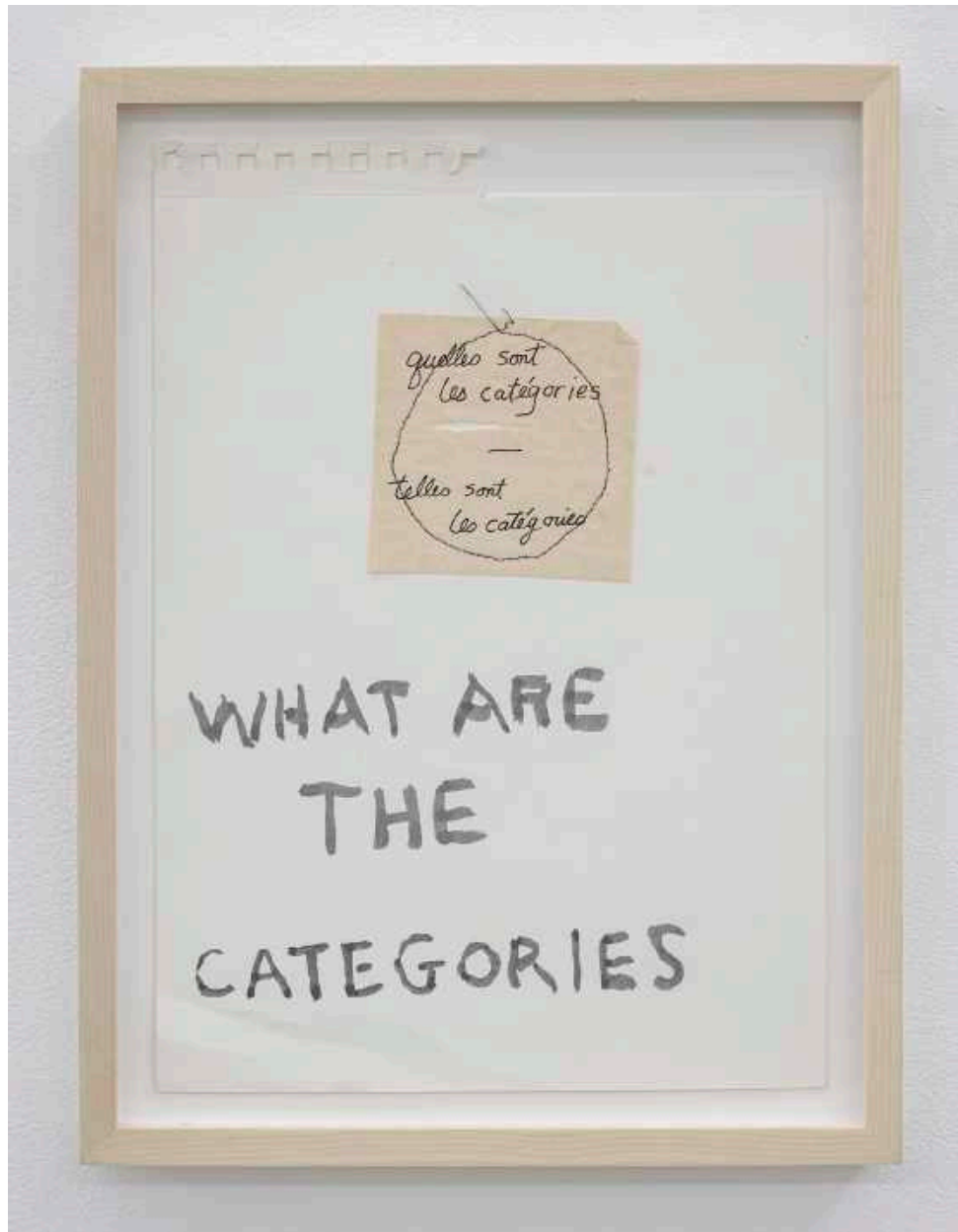
19 x16 inches

accompanied by a Certificate Of Authenticity

\$1,600 including tax

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What Are The Categories

no date
mixed media on paper; unique
15 x11 inches
accompanied by a Certificate Of Authenticity
\$1,600 including tax



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"REAL TIME" A LIVE PERFORMANCE

Catherine Carmichael



**UNIVERSITY OF GUELPH
ZAVITZ HALL – ROOM 307
Wednesday, November 23, 1983
11:15 a.m.**

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MERCER UNION

A CENTRE FOR CONTEMPORARY VISUAL ART

I N T E R V I E W

Catherine Carmichael

SCULPTURE

East Gallery

March 1 - 26, 1988

Interview by LINDA GENEREUX

Catherine Carmichael's sculptures evolve through an intuitive building-up of disparate materials and found objects, an accumulation that is stimulated by the subjective layering of past and present events. Returning to performance works she created from 1980 until she moved completely into sculpture in 1986, it was her focus on the body and human movement in the performances that served as the bridge to this new outgrowth of sculpture. This interview will explore the relationship of Carmichael's present sculpture with her previous time-based performance works.

Linda Genereux: In 1979 you began to do performance art. Because there is a strong continuity between your approach to performance and your present sculpture, I feel it is worthwhile to elaborate on these performances. Can you describe pieces such as *Time in Four Parts* (1982) or *Planet Life, Part One - Rooms* (1985) for me?

Catherine Carmichael: *Time in Four Parts* was a piece that I did four nights in a row, the four parts referring to the four nights. The performance was all about time and the variations that happened over those four nights. I had prerecorded tapes of things from 'real' time: live radio and weather reports. I was living down on Niagara Street in the coffin factory and on foggy nights the fog horn would just sound for hours on end. I recorded that, as well as a taped metronome and a real metronome. These overlapping sounds created time intervals. I had an electric guitar which I played a bit throughout the piece and some really heavy steel stairs and steel poles that I smashed to create another time interval.

LG: Was the exploration of time the purpose of this piece?

CC: The time element seemed to be my obsession in the piece not the purpose. In pretty well all the performances I painted a big canvas on the back wall. It wasn't a narrative or figurative painting; I splashed paint on the canvas and painted myself. That action was a visual component which marked the passing of time in a tangible way. When I think back on it, I was trying to stop time although I didn't go into it with that in my mind. All the intervals created small frozen moments. Performance is like building sculpture, only instead of it being an object it's happening within a specific time frame.

LG: In these performances you used found objects and fragments of building materials. Is there a link between how you were using these objects and the creation of sculpture?

CC: I brought all these things onto the stage on a scaffold. I used all the different objects and pieces and at the end everything was put back on the scaffold and removed. As in sculpture the whole thing was completed like an object in time. There were a lot of actions that overlapped in *Planet Life, Part One - Rooms*. Much of what I'm getting at is the overlapping of all these things at the same time, which is basically what life

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I N T E R V I E W

feels like to me; all our senses are working at the same time, and our thoughts are bouncing all around. As in everyday life, our thoughts are subliminally affected by every layer of input.

LG: In the same piece you dragged a sculpture sitting on a platform behind you. Is this the first time that sculpture has been such a major component in a performance work?

CC: No, it's basically always been there. Sculpture or object? I've always used objects. In my very first performance I used a chair and pretended it was a person. In a way, it was like using a piece of sculpture because it became more than a chair in the performance... At different times there have been objects that I actually built, and other times objects that I just found.

LG: When do they transform then from being objects into being sculpture?

CC: There's a very fine line here. Are they sculptures or not? Right now I wouldn't feel comfortable showing these performance objects as sculpture. When I am working on the development of a performance the focus is the total thing: action, sound, objects, time, etc. I take all of these components together to make the whole. When I am working on a sculpture the focus is on that specific object, which must be complete all by itself.

LG: Your affinity to movement and dance is so apparent in these performances. How is it translated in the sculptures?

CC: Because I have danced a lot, I am conscious of my physical self in the world. I feel like I am really grounded, standing on two feet, a certain size and a certain weight. I'm aware of it when I'm working. In that way it feels like a really huge influence. If I'm working on something that feels like a leg, it takes weight in my head. Through direct experience with my own body, I understand it in a way that transfers into the piece. A lot of times I put wheels on the freestanding pieces. They feel like they need to move. One of the pieces for Mercer Union has wheels. Somehow I am giving the sculpture a present...

LG: A present?

CC: Yes, movement.

LG: While you were working on *Roughing it in the Bush* (1988), you expressed to me that this wall piece was developing as a visual diary. What did you mean?

CC: *Roughing it in the Bush* has eight relief sections that are built up, with a lot of objects attached to it and painted. I worked on it on the floor and so when *Roughing It* first started it felt left to right, like a page or a book. As pages, each section developed differently, like a diary, not a linear narrative.

LG: So do you mean a diary of symbols rather than events?

CC: Yes, it's a diary of symbols that represent feelings and responses to things. The specific events don't matter. For instance I used a type of stove pipe wire that feels like a symbol for some sort of writing. There are no words, it's the lines that have that feeling. One area is starting to become all art historical references; bottle boxes from the Liquor Control Board that remind me of the early Picasso collages. There is also an area that feels like a Joseph Cornell 'diarama'. Things that have all meant something to me are now being put together into one of the sections. I haven't ever done anything that is quite like this before.

LG: Did the performances incorporate these diaristic passages?

CC: The wall piece happens from left to right, right to left, bottom to top, top to bottom, which is like time. It's similar to the way performance goes through time, charting off experiences with one experience leading into another. The performance and the wall relief have the same sense of passing through time, whereas the sculpture feels like a moment caught.

LG: The way you deal with sculpture on the surface is very skin-like and when you were doing performance you often created a second skin with plastic clothing. Is there a crossover between the two?

CC: My reason for using the plastic in my performances was to try to get away from clothing that has specific reference, and plastic seemed not to make any reference. I was using green garbage bags in the beginning but when you are right in the middle of a work, you don't see how full of reference it is. I was trying to make myself into an object rather than a person who, in this performance, was looking cool. I wanted to be an object that was a human being but not an ego. I make the surfaces of the sculptures the way I do because I really like the abstract and tactile qualities of the plaster surface before it is painted.

LG: Since 1985 you have moved exclusively into sculpture. What was the catalyst?

CC: I felt like I was being torn all the time. I had to stop and do one thing. The focus came to be sculpture because there is something that is very satisfying about creating an object that stands alone. It has a life of its own and doesn't need me to keep it going. You can get immediate feedback from performance; you can create emotions that change and come and go. Trying to get that same feeling in the sculpture is a real challenge.

LG: You seem to be tackling this in the standing sculpture *Trying to Become God* (1986). In this work, the figure projects simultaneous emotional states. What is the significance for you of its double-head?

CC: One head is an obvious human head and the other is some idea of perfection. We are these incredible strivers. We are always trying to get better, trying to understand or 'be something' -so beautiful, so sad, so noble. One is the real head and the other

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I N T E R V I E W



Working notes from the performance
Planet Life, Part One - Rooms, 1984



Real Time, Performance at David Thompson University
Centre, Nelson, British Columbia, 1984

is the sublime head that we are aiming at. It is an idea that is constantly there when I am working.

LG: From the beginning there has been a recurring use of bright red enamel, yet in the most recent pieces there seems to be self-censoring of its use. Why is that?

CC: Just so I don't do the easiest thing. So that I fight with it. It has to come to a certain point where it's really necessary.

LG: You told me once how you came to use red...

CC: I guess I was about four. My first father was a house painter and so he had a lot of paint in the house. In the basement there was a white enamel stove stored. One day I went down and painted the whole thing with red enamel. I remember

it was just so beautiful. It wasn't a stove anymore, it was a red stove and it popped itself into objectness.

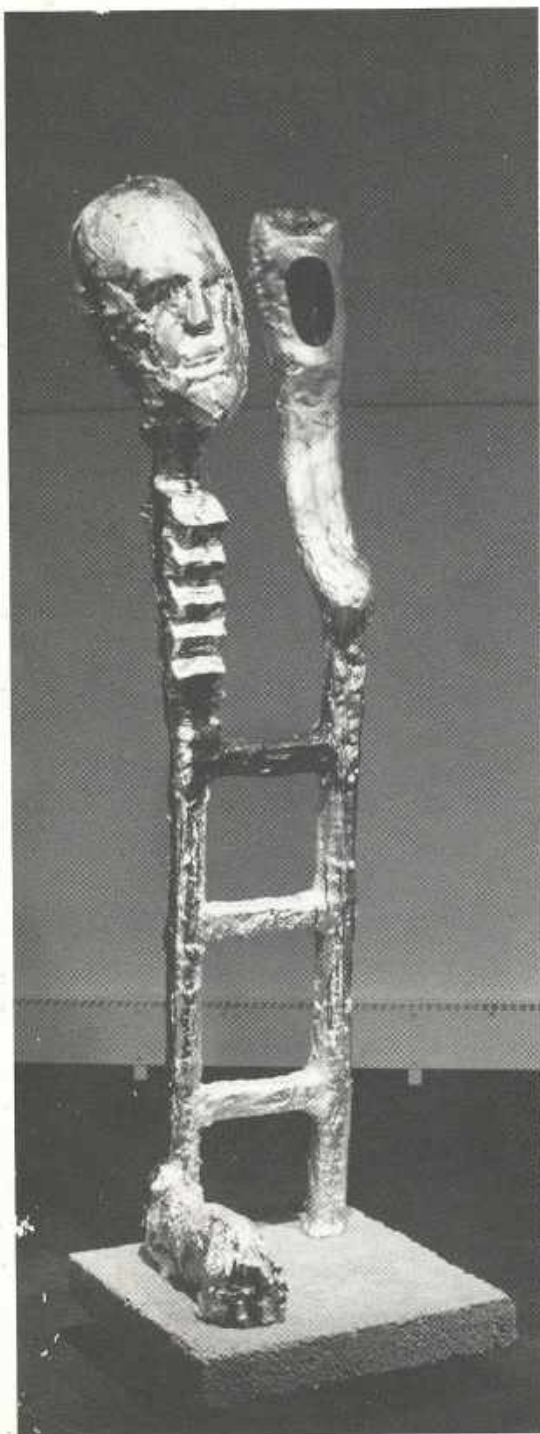
LG: What spurs your present choice of materials?

CC: Usually, I just gather things up. The reason I pick certain things in the first place is usually the shape. They catch my eye in a way that feels it has possibilities to be used somehow. This process happens in a couple of stages. The first is the 'finding' and actually deciding to bring it back and leave it in my studio. Also sometimes people just give me things, that actually happens quite a bit. If it survives long enough, at a certain point it becomes the right thing.

LG: Just as a 'bricoleur' or handyman will use whatever material is available to him, your materials seem to find their use as they are needed

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within a particular work. In this sense you are giving meaning to the forms that are created, rather than an artist who works from a scientific aesthetic giving form to function or meaning.

CC: Mine is an additive and intuitive process. It is not something that I think out ahead of time. I used to do a little exercise on my work table when I was young by trying to build some type of construction or assemblage within a certain space. Through the process of doing this, I became non-discriminating. In a way, I *can* use anything, it doesn't matter. It matters at the moment when I am making the choice, yet if I really had to, I could use anything to make the piece.

LG: Each of the found objects you use carries its own history. Does this history have any bearing on the meaning of the work?

CC: It's not a specific history, but a *sense* of history. I've got some older pieces that are built on heavy skids with iron sides. The fact that the skids come from the abattoir doesn't really matter, but that they came from the abattoir is still somehow there. I don't make any reference to this in the piece or the title.

LG: This sense of history, of the passing of time, is also conveyed through the use of materials in various stages of decay. Do you have an aesthetic interest in this process?

CC: I see the beauty in things that are decaying. It is just as much a part of life; to grow and to die are equally important. You can't ignore one part. What is very interesting are the workings of things as they decay. When things are decaying you actually get to see how they are constructed. It's a fine point when something is at its peak and then starts to rot. It is at a crest.

LG: Is this crest a point of finality or a culmination in the work?

CC: I think that ideally all of the parts are there at the same time, so that the whole process of something growing or dying, the total circle, would be there. It's hard to put specific words to the process. At certain times I feel like I'm working on what I think of as the 'dark side', or the painful part of experience and, at other times, I try to encompass all the hope and the potential. That's the transformation process. It's what you go through all the time in your life.

Trying to Become God, Mixed media sculpture
height 84", 1986

Photo: Hans Albarda

This publication has been made possible through the generous support of the Ontario Arts Council.

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Exhibition view, Mercer Union, 1988

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