

New York Exhibition

CAROLINE MONNET

ODÁMITANANG / CHANTIER / WORKSITE

Curated by Greg A. Hill

September 8 – October 21, 2023

Odámitanang, Chantier, Worksite. A space for building. A place of building. Transforming a space. A transforming place.

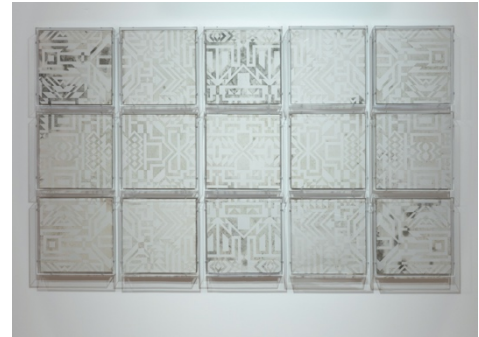
Caroline Monnet's multidisciplinary oeuvre is extensive and diverse. In addition to her work as a visual artist, she is also a successful filmmaker. I was honoured that Caroline asked me to curate her show, this, her first solo exhibition in the United States. As a curator, I have been following her work for some time and have witnessed her prolific output and progressive development as she established herself as one of the most exciting young artists in Canada.

I have come to know Caroline further through my personal relationship with her sister. This family proximity has, over time and in the lead up to this exhibition, provided me with privileged access and a unique perspective on her life and work.

I have also witnessed, and experienced firsthand, the Monnet family passion for construction. For the Monnets, being in a perpetual state of change is an art form. The seemingly endless process of deconstructing one thing and re-building another is a way of living and being. It is a part of Caroline's life that has reconfigured many of the spaces she has lived in, and in significant ways, has shaped her as well.

She recalls this state of being throughout her childhood. Her parents' many building projects have left her with a fondness and comfort with this state of becoming—the unfinished walls, fibreglass insulation, tar-paper, and the spiders. Her lived experience in these spaces and her exposure to these materials have led her to this de-constructive investigation of construction. Her unique aesthetic utilizes the materials of construction as a matrix of her personal cultural and socio-political contextual overlays.

It is as if continuous building is an unconscious impulse that manifests as both an aesthetic and a work ethic. Caroline is always working—like the beaver, that industrious rodent synonymous with continuous building—constant, steady work is a way of being. For the beaver it is also a matter of survival, if it doesn't always gnaw, its incisors will grow in an arc that will eventually pierce its throat. The assiduous beaver is not only a source of



Caroline Monnet, Depredation, 2023, Mold on gypsum board, Overall dimensions 39 x 69 in

inspiration but is also a being of important cultural significance that has figured prominently in several of Caroline's works.

This selection of recent works, almost entirely from this year, is focused on her continued exploration of modern residential construction materials. At times, Caroline adds a critique of the construction industry and its negative environmental effects by using the physical qualities of the materials to produce new meanings through their manipulation. In so doing, she transforms the materiality of one thing and makes it into another. Take gypsum board for example, a ubiquitous housing material that functions well in optimal conditions, however, if exposed to high humidity over long periods, it can be host to toxic mold. Caroline uses this board as a substrate, creating her intricate symmetrical patterns by growing this noxious black mold in a highly controlled (and safely contained) manner. It's an aesthetic presentation that belies the deadly nature of this substance, one that is too present in the substandard housing of many Indigenous communities.

Additional meanings are encapsulated in materials such as waterproofing membranes as well. Intricate weavings carrying embroidered patterns inspired by ancestral Anishinaabeg designs in quillwork, beadwork and birchbark bitings, become a means of knowledge transfer, bringing these encoded patterns forward. The designs can also appear as electronic circuitry, invoking a contemporary reading, both are ways of transferring knowledge/information/data.

Caroline's special power is in how she animates fabricated materials and reanimates organic materials that have had the life force removed from them. While the trees that have been cut and processed into panels marketed as oriented strand board (OSB) are long gone, here, transformed into art, the OSB is imbued with a force that goes far beyond its manufactured function. With these works, Caroline breathes life into construction materials, creating artworks that have the ability to tell their own stories.

**Caroline Monnet** (b. 1985, Ottawa, Canada) is a Anishinaabe/French multidisciplinary artist. Deploying visual and media arts to demonstrate complex ideas, Monnet renders Indigenous identity and bicultural living through an examination of shifting cultural histories. She is noted for working with industrial materials and processes, blending vocabularies of popular and traditional visual knowledges with tropes of modernist abstraction to create a unique formal language. Consistently occupying the stage of experimentation and invention, her work grapples with the impact of colonialism by updating outdated systems with Indigenous methodologies.

Her work has been featured at the Whitney Biennial (NYC), Toronto Biennial of Art, KØS museum (Copenhagen), Museum of Contemporary Art (Montréal), the National Gallery of Canada (Ottawa). Solo exhibitions include Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt, Arsenal Contemporary (Toronto) and Centre d'art international de Vassivière (France). Her films have been programmed at film festivals such as TIFF, Sundance, Aesthetica (UK), Palm Springs and ImagineNative. Her work is included in in public and private collection, including the permanent UNESCO collection in Paris. She is based in Montreal and is represented by Blouin-Division Gallery.

**Greg A. Hill** (b. Fort Erie, Ontario) is an artist and curator based in Chelsea, Quebec. He is a Kanyen'kehàka member of the Six Nations of the Grand River Territory. As a curator, Hill worked in museums for almost 30 years, most notably as the National Gallery of Canada's Audain Senior Curator of Indigenous Art (2008-23) where he was dedicated to building the collection of Indigenous art and presenting a series of retrospective exhibitions for senior Indigenous artists in Canada—*Norval Morrisseau* 2006, *Robert Davidson* 2007, *Daphne Odjig* 2009, *Carl Beam* 2010, *Charles Edenshaw* 2014, *Alex Janvier* 2016, and *Shelly Niro* 2023. He also established an ongoing series of international Indigenous art exhibitions with *Sakahán* 2013 and *Àbadakone / Continuous Fire / Fue*

*continue*/2019-20. Through astute acquisitions from those shows he founded a world-leading collection of works by the most significant national and international Indigenous artists of our time.

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