

# SHANNON BOOL

## The Shape of Obus

June 9 to September 9, 2018

Curator: Anne-Marie St-Jean Aubre

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Shannon Bool's recent practice takes on many forms, including tapestries, silk paintings, collages, sculptures or photograms, all of which gravitate around a central theme: a critique of Modernism through unconventional material processes, combined with her own interpretation of psychoanalytical concepts. By examining the flip side of modernist currents, the artist reveals repressed aesthetic influences in both visual art and architecture.

The new body of work presented in *The Shape of Obus* foregrounds Bool's current research on a series of erotic drawings begun by Le Corbusier in Algeria during the 1930s. These coincided with the initial stages of the architect's urban plan designs aimed at transforming Algiers into a modern imperial capital, thus asserting the French presence in North Africa. Bool detects in the architect's curved urban designs the direct consequences of his voyeuristic sessions; the sensuality of Moorish bodies, by association and projection, informing his proposals to redesign the city. The role of architecture in controlling both bodies and behaviour is also at the core of Bool's approach, which identifies objectifying strategies used in interior design, specifically in the arrangement of niches, alcoves and viewpoints within domestic spaces. Here, the violence of the idea of progress supporting Le Corbusier's proposal to modernize the city is made visible by the artist, who literally superimposes on the bodies – of women and colonized – the plans' intended restrictive megastructures.

Decorative motifs, craft techniques, images from popular culture, references to bodies, and the stimulation of affect are just some of the methods used by the artist to disrupt our interpretation of formalism. By integrating the Other – whether it be the female figure or exotic fetishism – Bool manages to reveal Modernism’s unconscious side. Through her psychoanalytic readings, the themes and spaces she observes become “cases of dissociation” exemplified by the encounter of opposing materials, techniques and concepts, therefore undermining their internal cohesion. The artist’s critical stance reveals the sub-texts of images that have held her attention. By thwarting their seductiveness, Bool reveals the density of the messages they convey, even unwittingly.

Anne-Marie St-Jean Aubre, Curator of Contemporary Art

# SHANNON BOOL

Comox, British-Columbia, 1972

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## **1. *The Four Seasons***

2018

Jacquard Tapestry, embroidery, 255 x 168 cm

Courtesy of Daniel Faria Gallery Toronto,  
Gallery Kadel Willborn Düsseldorf

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## **2. *Women in their Apartment***

2018

Archival print on fiber paper, paint

112 x 68 cm

### ***Little Hans***

2018

Archival print on fiber paper, paint

18 x 24 cm

### ***Raumplan***

2018

Silkscreen and embroidery on cotton

30 x 40 cm

### ***Sugar Veins***

2018

Marble, marble powder, steel

90 x 110 x 22 cm

Courtesy of Daniel Faria Gallery Toronto

Mies van der Rohe, another leading modernist architect, designed the Seagram Building in New York with the collaboration of Montreal architect Phyllis Lambert. The men's restroom, located within the building's restaurant, is reproduced in Bool's tapestry *The Four Seasons*, and the painted photograph *Little Hans*. The restroom's sharp lines are softened by the sinuous veins of the black and white marble. On the floor, the long train of a women's gown embroidered with small flowers seeps from within one of the bathroom stalls. Like a dark pool, the form quietly subverts this otherwise masculine space. Elsewhere, a horse resting beneath a urinal brings to mind one of Freud's published case studies through a word play that combines the word 'stall' and the French 'stalle', while the image of a bathroom at the Villa Savoye, built in 1926 by Le Corbusier, features sketches of nude Algerian women. Based on Picasso's series *Les Femmes d'Alger* [Women from Algiers], painted between 1954-1955, these women are a variation on a theme explored by Delacroix in his painting *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement* [Algerian Women in their Apartment] (1834). The interior scene is transformed into a harem as Kim Kardashian's well-rounded bottom is superimposed onto the Moorish figures; a reminder that the fascination held by millions of Internet followers for the American star's voluptuous form can perhaps be traced back to a colonial past that has informed the gaze in covert ways to this day.

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### **3. *Maison locative Ponsik* [Ponsik Rental House]**

2018

Jacquard Tapestry, embroidery

234 x 310 cm

Courtesy of Daniel Faria Gallery Toronto,  
Gallery Kadel Willborn Düsseldorf

### **4. *Oued Ouchaia***

2018

Jacquard Tapestry, Embroidery

209 x 325 cm

Courtesy of Daniel Faria Gallery Toronto,  
Gallery Kadel Willborn Düsseldorf

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## 5. *Obus Girls*

2018

14 contact prints on fiber paper

22 x 28 cm each

Courtesy of Daniel Faria Gallery Toronto

**“Architecture is the establishing of moving relationships with raw materials.” – Le Corbusier**

Travel played an important role in the development of Le Corbusier’s architectural thought-process. In 1931, he visited Algeria for the first time, when Algiers was the administrative and industrial capital of the North African French empire, and was divided into two sectors: one reserved for French settlers, the other for the local Muslim population. Le Corbusier was obsessed with this city, and took it upon himself to design a series of urban plans that would completely reorganize its layout. Designed between 1932 and 1942 and known as the Plan Obus, they were entirely rejected by the authorities. From his very first visit, Le Corbusier began frequenting the brothels of the Casbah, where he sketched erotic drawings of Algerian women whose curves inspired his modernisation project for Algiers. Some of his plans promoted the concept of a linear city in the form of an arcing line across the landscape, like a spiraling shell, or *obus*, hence the project’s name. The theme of the female nude, and more specifically the eroticism of female couples, occupied Le Corbusier’s imagination from the very beginnings of his drawing and painting practice. Fisherwomen and bathers, the Brazilian women of Rio’s favelas, and the musicians and dancers of Bogota are an integral part of his repertoire, drawn live or from postcard images.

Typical of the Western male fetish for “exotic” women, these images are less a record of truth than of the orientalism conveyed in the early 20th century by artists such as Matisse and Picasso, in direct line with the paintings of bathers and harems by Ingres and Delacroix in the 19th century. Focusing on the objectifying gaze of the Le Corbusier’s imagination, Shannon Bool has superimposed European erotic postcards of Algerian women from this colonial period with the architect’s proposed urban plans. Along with these photo-collages, the *Oued Ouchaia* and *Maison locative Ponsik* [Ponsik Rental House] tapestries replicate housing project plans designed for Algiers, with the addition of Le Corbusier’s drawings of paired women covered in decorative motifs from Berber carpets, which he was particularly fond of.

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## **6. *Wotruba Bleu* [Blue Wotruba]**

2018

Textile paint and oil paint on silk, plexiglas mirror

195 x 130 cm

## ***Black Böhm***

2018

Textile paint and oil paint on silk, plexiglas mirror

195 x 130 cm

## ***Indigo Blocks***

2018

Textile paint and oil paint on silk, plexiglas mirror

178 x 112 cm

Courtesy of Daniel Faria Gallery Toronto

Brutalist architecture first appeared in England after the end of the Second World War. It was mainly influenced by Le Corbusier, who built the *Cité radieuse* [Radiant City], a raw-concrete building in Marseilles in 1952, and by Mies van der Rohe, who in 1947, designed Chicago's Illinois Institute of Technology, a building dominated by the rigidity of an austere and precise structure supported by a metal frame. Brutalism, with its open volumes, concrete, glass, exposed steel and visible structures, descended from modernist architecture. In keeping with Modern art, the forms are free of ornamentation and decoration, which detract from the building's primary objective or function as revealed through its architecture. By contrast, abstract painting celebrated the intrinsic qualities of colour, the work's liberation from its immediate context, and the flatness of its support – a trend associated with the idea of "art for art's sake," that is, the rejection of figuration that distracts us from observing what is concretely before us.

By transposing the grid pattern onto silk, the most sensual and feminine of fabrics, Shannon Bool makes a critical comment on both modernist painting and Brutalist architecture, primarily championed by men from Western cultures. Stretched over mirrors, the silk paintings allow viewers to see themselves reflected through the fabric, therefore negating the modernist principle that a work must remain autonomous from its presentation context. Materiality remains central to Bool's approach. In harmony with modernist theories, it capitalizes on the characteristics of silk and mirrors, namely transparency and reflection. Bool's work thus attests to the complexity that lies at the heart of Brutalism, fluctuating between a propensity for "rigorousness" that favours the sincerity of materials, and a more "sensuous" tendency based on the pleasure of natural textures.

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## ***7. All Saints Bench in the MAJ's collection***

**"It is through a long, mysterious journey from the depths of time that the majority of the pieces from the Museum's remarkable collection have been assembled here. Within them, they carry the image of an obscure past and the essence of their homeland, which adds to their sacred and unique character a relic-like reverence." – Father Wilfrid Corbeil**

With these words, Father Wilfred Corbeil, then curator at the Museum, opened his preface to the first guide to the collection, published in 1971. The "mysterious" character of an eclectic collection, originally acquired through a unique set of circumstances – unusual donations, random purchases from various trips and meetings – is what captured Shannon Bool's attention. Bool chose pieces from the Museum's collection that were linked to spirituality in the broadest sense; witnesses of different periods and religions, from Greek mythology to Catholicism. These marble objects – a votive altar in honour of the Roman gods Mercury and Jupiter Dolichenus, a statuette of Venus probably removed from a high-relief sculpture, an Italian bas-relief depicting the Madonna and Child, altar stones marked with crosses, a Romanesque capital from a French cloister dating from the Middle Ages – and other secular items, are juxtaposed against her own work, titled *All Saints Bench*.

These sometimes undated, often unattributed vestiges form a heritage that reflects our fascination with the past and our propensity to preserve things, down to the smallest fragments, and to treat them as carefully as an authentic masterpiece. These objects allow a different kind of history to speak – not by chronicling important events, but by making the past more tangible, and by uncovering the lifestyles, beliefs and skills of anonymous, everyday people.

The inscriptions covering Bool's marble bench fulfil the same function. Into its stone surface the artist has carved various signs, initials, and words in Latin, English and Hebrew, carved in large part by parishioners in English churches during the Middle Ages. A common and possibly accepted practice, these vestiges were recently uncovered by teams of volunteers, with the help of anthropologists. They are a testimony to social history. For example, some names commemorate individuals who died during the plague epidemic that ravaged south-east England in the mid 14th century – mostly children who never received an official burial. Other markings attest to the passage of pilgrims or to prayers made by the faithful; still others aim to ward off evil fate. These graffiti are the voice of a segment of the population that was never conserved in the archives of that period; they act as monuments, honouring the lives of the forgotten.

## ***All Saints Bench***

2018

Marble, wax, pigments

250 x 42 x 45 cm

Courtesy of Daniel Faria Gallery Toronto

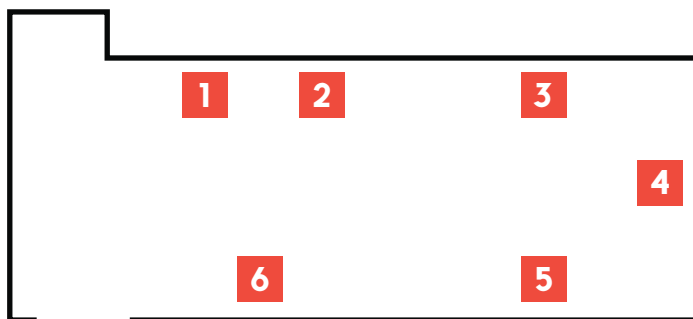
\* The labels of the works from the collection are bilingual.



# FLOOR PLANS

## 1<sup>st</sup> floor

Salle Nicole et René Després et Jeannette et Luc Liard



# 3<sup>rd</sup> floor

Salle Yvan Guibault

