

PATRICK COUTU

The Attraction of the Landscape

October 5, 2019 to January 5, 2020

Curator: Charlotte Lalou Rousseau

The Attraction of the Landscape presents a survey of recent work by multi-disciplinary artist Patrick Coutu. It brings together sculptures, works on paper, and textiles that draw links between various aspects of the artist's research over the past decade, inspired by natural phenomena and their scientific representations. The word attraction in the title refers both to the human attraction to landscape—its representation and organization—and to the physical forces that regulate its elementary particles. It is both an emotional and analytical view of nature, its underlying rhythms, and the precarious order we impose on it.

Coutu's recent practice examines mathematical concepts that attempt to translate natural phenomena, such as plant growth or mineral formation. The artist alludes to these systems and uses randomness as a way to build forms. The reproductive pattern of plant cells, for example, is particularly interesting to Coutu as an autonomous and recursive evolutionary structure. Various mathematical models are altered and embodied, as if tested in a material that would not otherwise be affected by these laws. The result is then subjected to a number of formal interventions. Through deceptively simple gestures like folding, imprinting, modeling, and repetition, Coutu reveals the complexity of marine or sub-marine landscapes, as well as austere and solar ones. A fold creates a horizon. An algorithm cultivates a garden.

Simultaneously abstract and rooted in their materiality, Coutu's works have an elusive and evanescent presence. Whether two- or three-dimensional, they locate us on the dizzying cusp between the infinitely small and the infinitely large. Their scale confronts us with the standard measurement of our body in relation to our environment. Dialoguing with each other and with the outside world, these works create a field of primary elements, an extension of forces that are essential to the landscape: light, horizon, wind, gravity, water, earth, vegetation, and randomness. The artist's process helps us envision time in its longest forms: through botany, geology, and astronomy. What we see here is the temporality of nature in the making—one that eludes and overcomes us.

Charlotte Lalou Rousseau, Assistant Curator of Contemporary Art

PATRICK COUTU

Montréal, Québec, 1975

1. *Éruption II* [Eruption II]

2017

Brass and steel

213.4 x 91.4 x 6,4 cm

Collection of the artist

2. *Vie et mort d'un système au départ aléatoire IV, I, II, et III*

[The Life and Death of a Random Start System
IV, I, II and III]

2013

Ink on paper

102.8 x 49.5 cm each

Collection of the artist

3. *Flottés I, III et II* [Floats I, III and II]

2015

Coton, polyester and rayon

221 x 92.1 cm; 208.3 x 99.1 cm; 218.4 x 101.6 cm

Collection of the artist

The *Flottés* [Floats] were created using the same mathematical diagrams as *Récifs* [Reefs], but in two dimensions. They were woven on a Jacquard loom, a machine invented by Joseph-Marie Jacquard, of Lyon, in the early 19th century. The first looms read instructions encoded on perforated cards that could automate the production of patterned, woven textiles, a process reminiscent of the early days of computer programming. Coutu is in some way indebted to this technique, as he used computer programs to develop the algorithms that make up the series. Hand-finished by loosening the end stitches, the final product is actually presented on the reverse side, highlighting the textile's organic aspect—the guts of the fabric. Like driftwood slowly worn by the water, these textiles seem to have a life of their own, despite being produced in just one day.

4. *Attracteur* [Attractor]

2019

Silver on bronze

123.9 x 158 cm

Collection of the artist

Chaos theory, which emerged in the United-States during the 1960s, is part of morphogenesis, a branch of mathematics that studies the forms that animate and inanimate objects take in a stable and recurrent manner. The theory aims to understand the random aspect of phenomena such as how smoke curls upward, or how a dead leaf falls to the ground. These are systems in which minute, initial variations produce radically different and complex outcomes, qualifying them as unpredictable. In 1971, mathematical physicists David Ruelle and Floris Takens put forward an analysis of chaos based on the notion of the “strange attractor,” which suggests that random phenomena tend to eventually become stable systems. American meteorologist Edward Lorenz helped popularize this notion. His observations of atmospheric conditions led to his presentation, in 1972, of an article entitled, “Predictability: Does the Flap of a Butterfly’s Wings in Brazil Set off a Tornado in Texas?” It turns out that the phenomena Lorenz observed follow a strange attractor whose curves,

when rendered three-dimensionally, resembled the wings of a butterfly. The clever witticism served to illustrate the unpredictability of a system in which a tiny event, a nearly imperceptible variation in initial conditions, results in exponential effects through time and space. This is known to this day as “the butterfly effect,” and is applied in a wide range of fields, including psychology and sociology.

The study of chaos, or chaology, is more qualitative than quantitative. It conceptualises and speculates more than it forwards precisely calculated and verifiable results. Some think of morphological theory as the combination of science and philosophy, in that it requires a certain degree of contemplation. Coutu calls for this in his piece *Attracteur* [Attractor], which was made with a computer program that generates strange attractors. The form is a three-dimensional model of a random mathematical system; an unnatural phenomenon. It does not suggest the wings of a butterfly, but perhaps the movement of a pendulum or the tossing of a boat over rough seas. In a way, it materializes the passage of time, and makes visible the form being made.

5. *Source*

2019

Borosilicate glass and aluminum

355.6 x 86.4 x 86.4 cm

Collection of the artist

A veritable geyser of glass, *Source* seems to gush from the ground, or to have been split from a frozen waterfall. While seemingly random, the movement of fluids is anything but. Studying fluctuation at various scales is essential to understanding everything from blood circulation to predicting the formation of tsunamis. *Source*, based on the graph of a mathematical equation shaped like a waterfall and sea spray, is both flowing water and beaming light: sources of life. Created specifically for our window space, it can be viewed from both inside and outside the museum. The juxtaposition of multiple glass columns creates a face-to-face mirror effect and infinite reflections. The work is made of borosilicate glass, which is highly translucent despite its thickness. Natural light refracts in iridescent variations depending on the time of day and changes in the weather.

Early in his career, Patrick Coutu was inspired by Constructivist artists and architects and their relationship to materials and space. *Source's* shape is not unlike Vladimir Tatlin's *Model for the Monument to the Third International* (1919-1920), a six-metre scale model of the unrealized 400-metre tower of rotating glass volumes intertwined by an external steel structure. Tatlin, an avant-garde painter and architect, would have certainly admired the steel and glass skyscrapers that populate our horizons today, especially the spiral, arrow, or funnel-shaped ones inspired by naturally occurring motifs.

6. Roche-mère [Source Rock]

2019

Enamels on plaster

153.7 x 271.1 x 23.5 cm

Collection of the artist

Roche-mère [Source Rock] is a sample of the Temiscouata landscape. As a partial cutting, it embodies the gesture of creating a landscape. The piece is an imprint of the substratum beneath the valleys and mountains that define the land we inhabit, which was once the ocean floor. The rock has undergone major transformations, as evidenced by the vertically oriented layers of sediment. Perhaps modulated by a meteoric strike or tectonic motion, it may also have been split or ruptured by a glacier, then immobilized again until the next scission, when the highway was built. The vertical cylindrical grooves that span the rock face are traces of the blasting required for the passage of human machines. The scars suggests a violent intervention, the kind inherent in the creation of landscape, but one that also reveals a beauty that would otherwise remain hidden. It appears like a caesura, a vertiginous leap in time.

In the gallery, the presence of this source rock is mediated by two of the materials derived from it: plaster and enamel. Standing next to it is a sublime experience in that it helps us appreciate physical and metaphysical scales that are well beyond our comprehension. The layers of sediment are from a time we cannot perceive; their evolution is imperceptible to us, inconceivable. They precede us and will continue to outlive us. The term "source rock," or parent rock, is used to identify a primary, immutable rock structure, and refers to its creative and generative aspect. Many Indigenous cultures regard rocks as their grandfathers: animated elements, not living as such, but carriers of memory.

7. *Récifs, extraits 1, 2 et 4* **[Reefs, Excerpts 1, 2 and 4]**

2015

Bronze and aluminum

Variable dimensions

Collection of the artist

Reefs are underwater rocky structures that exude a flamboyant, yet vaguely menacing aura. They are often covered in coral, marine animals who build veritable wildlife landscapes by secreting their own calcium exoskeleton. Coutu's *Récifs* [Reefs] easily recall these robust yet fragile organisms. This series forms a body of work that was directly inspired by mathematics, more specifically, the principle of autopoiesis, meaning the evolution of autonomous, recurrent systems that respond to their environment. In this case, the artist is interested in the growth of plant organisms. Here, he alters equations derived from this phenomenon and translates them three-dimensionally. The cube, which allows this deployment in space, is one of the Platonic solids, along with the tetrahedron (four faces), octahedron (eight faces), dodecahedron (twelve faces), and icosahedron (twenty faces). For Plato, these volumes represented the four elements and the whole. Through the ages, Platonic solids have been observed and used to describe both microscopic and macroscopic orders. The modular structure of Coutu's work allows him to make final adjustments while the piece is being assembled, before it is cast. It's no surprise that bronze is the artist's material of choice here, having stood the test of time and been so widely used throughout the history of art. In some ways, the many complex and meticulous steps involved in their production reflect the considerable length of time coral reefs take to develop. Although the artistic process is indeed much shorter, their lifespans are conceivably comparable. An excerpt of Coutu's *Récifs* series is presented in the Museum's permanent collection on the second floor.

8. *Averse [Downpour]*, from the series *Marines*

2010

Pigment on paper

121.9 x 152.4 cm

Private collection

Paysages aux quatre soleils couchants [Land of the Four Setting Suns]*, from the series *Marines

2010

Pigment on paper

121.9 x 152.4 cm

Collection Madjudia

A landscape, in its most basic form, is a line drawn from one end of a page to the other. The *Marines* were created from a graphic and sculptural gesture; a single fold gives dimension to a horizon. In his 1988 book on the work of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze developed his theory of the fold. Arising from a force field, it constitutes an original event that modifies and divides as much as it multiplies, but above all, preserves the cohesion of the folded material. In *Marines*, the fold brings together the sky and the ocean—two inseparable, yet irreconcilable entities. Produced following Coutu's experience of spending several weeks out at sea, the works result from the combination of black iron oxide pigment, bound to an acid, and paper coated with a basic solution. Particles attract, repel, and agglomerate at random. The sky is reflected in the water, projected into it; a rain shower is visible in the distance. Or perhaps we are witnessing dawn on PH1, a planet with four suns located 5000 light years from Earth?

FLOOR PLAN

1st floor

Salle EBI



