

# SAMUEL ROY-BOIS

## Life is a Tool Like Any Other

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Québec artist Samuel Roy-Bois, who has lived in British Columbia for the past fifteen years, presents select projects from two independent bodies of work. First exhibited at the Kamloops Art Gallery in 2019, the nine photographs produced in 2016 during a residency in Germany each capture the brief moment where everyday objects hang in perfect balance to create improbable sculptures. The images prove that these assemblages, as ephemeral as they are and almost performance-like in their execution, did in fact occur. Strangely, they appear more “real” and irrefutable than the reality they manifest. Roy-Bois’ most recent sculptures—either hand-carved or formed by connecting objects he finds in his studio or in his immediate environment—elevate otherwise banal materials to the status of artworks capable of generating an esthetic experience.

Usage is what differentiates an everyday object or a design object from a work of art, which is typically conceived as a sensorial experience rather than one that fulfills a specific function. Roy-Bois complicates these distinctions by repurposing utilitarian objects as plinths, counterweights, or simply sculptural components, by positioning them in ways that negate their function. As such, he emphasizes how the context in which an object is found plays a decisive role in determining how we react to it. Is it only because they are presented in a museum that we don’t pick up the bucket on the floor, act surprised that the speaker remains silent, or that the overturned printer doesn’t print a document? Through his works, Roy-Bois underlines the power of institutions—namely museums but also, more broadly, every cultural, technological, or physical structure that surround us—to frame and even condition our behaviour.

Created in 2021 during the pandemic, these new sculptures, presented in Québec for the first time, emerged under very specific conditions. Their dimensions were determined by the available working space; their fabrication was based on Roy-Bois’ skill-set at the time and the non-specialized tools he had on hand, such as a chain-saw, clamps, or vises; and their materials came from his home renovations, his proximity to a sawmill, and the recycled remains

of his previous artworks. They are the result of a series of happenstance and coincidence, of decisions made in a context of limited means and resources. They remind us of the notion of *free choice*—the power to act as one pleases, to follow one’s own will—because they exemplify that every action is dependent on the environment in which it occurs. If, theoretically, anything is possible, in reality, our ability to act is determined by many factors that are largely beyond our control: the environment we come from, our gender, our financial means, our aptitudes, or our physical abilities.

These works are like *portraits* that demonstrate, in material form, what was possible for Roy-Bois during those few months when he was open and attentive to the opportunities his environment had to offer. In some way, they remind us of the role photography plays in fixing the memory of a moment onto paper—a moment that is the sum of very precise circumstances that led to its occurrence. This back-and-forth between sculpture and photography, tangible and virtual reality, accomplishments or potentialities, have motivated Samuel Roy-Bois’ practice over the past few years. These inquiries led directly to the works he presented in Kamloops and at Esker Foundation in Calgary. The new outcomes of these reflections form the core of his exhibition at the Musée d’art de Joliette.

Anne-Marie St-Jean-Aubre, Curator of Contemporary Art  
Charo Neville, Curator, Kamloops Art Gallery

This exhibition is organized in collaboration with the Kamloops Art Gallery, where Roy-Bois had a solo exhibition, *Presences*, in 2019. The project toured to Esker Foundation, Calgary, in 2020. The photographic series presented here was first shown in that earlier exhibition.

Translation: Jo-Anne Balcaen

# ***It's Not Me, It's My Central Nervous System***

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## Assumption #1

All the sculptures in this exhibition existed well before I even started to make them. I showed up and moved some of the aggregated particles that had formed the matter. I moved particles around, removed chunks, displaced dust and dirt. I pushed stuff out of the way. All of these sculptures existed before I showed up at the studio: all the materials were already floating around, the colours were already inhabiting the world, the required skills already in use, the forms and ideas already recognized and circulating. I facilitated the emergence of a tangible manifestation of what would otherwise have been only a fleeting mental model.

## Assumption #2

We disagree with the trajectory that matter is taking, and we realize that the only form our disagreement can have is the transformation of that said matter.

## Assumption#3

The objects I created are meaningful due to the mere fact of their existence. I am an agent exclusively motivated by the purpose of bringing certain information into the future. I concluded, for some vague reason, that art-making was the best strategy for bringing that little bit of information further down the line.

## Assumption #4

Sculptures must portray the performing of their own making. The gestures leading to the emergence of a form are visible, the choices made in their conception must be manifest. That clarity, however, is there only to conceal the unadulterated darkness of the unknown and to entertain the obscurity associated with travelling through the unidentified.

#### Assumption #5

All fabricated objects are the manifestation of a form of anticipation. We build things because we expect something specific to happen. We make because we fear. Most of the fabricated objects surrounding us are tools created in anticipation of changes. The pieces in this exhibition are an attempt to repress a reflex of anticipation. There is a minimal amount of fear involved in the making of these sculptures.

#### Assumption #6

The only relationship with reality is our awareness of its simulation. Objects have the potential to provide the narratives that can explain, justify, and reassert the model that each of us is living.

#### Assumption #7

Any object has the potential to carry meaning unrelated to its initial purpose.

Samuel Roy-Bois

# SAMUEL ROY-BOIS

Québec, Québec, 1973

## **1. *It's Not Me (Tawny Accordion)***

2022

Wood and acrylic

94 x 30.5 x 30.5 cm

Property of the artist

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## **2. *It's Not Me (Salmon and Jade Corner)***

2021

Wood and acrylic

46.4 x 16.5 x 14.6 cm

Property of the artist

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## **3. *It's Not Me (Dark Green Panel)***

2021

Wood, acrylic and found object

88.9 x 53.3 x 30.5 cm

Property of the artist

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## **4. *It's Not Me (Red Mesh Organic)***

2022

Wood, acrylic, clear acrylic panel, found object and stone

48.3 x 30.5 x 30.5 cm

Property of the artist

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## **5. *It's Not Me (Chili Red Corner)***

2021

Wood and acrylic

106.7 x 47 x 36.8 cm

Property of the artist

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## **6. *It's Not Me (Mulberry Corner)***

2021

Wood, acrylic and found object

121.9 x 45.7 x 38.1 cm

Property of the artist

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## **7. *It's Not Me (Misty Rose Panel)***

2021

Wood, acrylic and found object

81.3 x 31.8 x 30.5 cm

Property of the artist

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## **8. *It's Not Me (Off White Perforated Panel)***

2021

Wood and acrylic

50.8 x 24.1 x 24.8 cm

Property of the artist

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## **9. *It's Not Me (Red Corner, Wall)***

2021

Wood and acrylic

63.5 x 29.2 x 28.6 cm

Property of the artist

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**10. *It's Not Me (Teal Trellis)***

2022

Wood and acrylic

66 x 30.5 x 15.2 cm

Property of the artist

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**11. *It's Not Me (Buckets and Black Mesh)***

2021

Wood, acrylic, found objects and stone

53.3 x 77.5 x 58.4 cm

Property of the artist

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**12. *It's Not Me (Salmon Mesh)***

2021

Wood, acrylic and found objects

120.7 x 48.3 x 20.3 cm

Property of the artist

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**13. *It's Not Me (India Green Mesh)***

2022

Wood and acrylic

55.9 x 25.4 x 25.4 cm

Property of the artist

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**14. *It's Not Me (African Violet Nook)***

2021

Wood and acrylic

66 x 29.2 x 29.2 cm

Property of the artist

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**15. *It's Not Me (Silver Corner)***

2021

Wood and acrylic

165.1 x 45.7 x 38.1 cm

Property of the artist

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**16. *It's Not Me (Dayglow Pink Stick)***

2022

Synthetic polyurethane, polystyrene, spray paint and stone

25.4 x 10.2 x 10.2 cm

Property of the artist

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**17. *It's Not Me (Creamy Pink Corner and Printer)***

2021

Wood, acrylic and found object

80 x 30.5 x 30.5 cm

Property of the artist

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**18. *It's Not Me (Pink Board)***

2021

Wood, acrylic and found object

64.8 x 48.3 x 20.3 cm

Property of the artist

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**19. *It's Not Me (Yellow Mesh)***

2021

Wood, acrylic, found object and stone

40.6 x 62.2 x 33 cm

Property of the artist

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**20. *It's Not Me (Forest Green Perforated Corner and Clear Cabinet)***

2005-2021

Wood, acrylic, clear acrylic and hardware

91.4 x 31.8 x 19.1 cm

Property of the artist

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**21. *It's Not Me (Bucket and Red Mesh)***

2021

Wood, acrylic, found objects and stone

50.8 x 61 x 33 cm

Property of the artist

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**22. *It's not me (French Pink Corner)***

2022

Wood, acrylic and found object

25.4 x 30.5 x 10.2 cm

Property of the artist

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**23. *It's Not Me (Yellow Stick)***

2021

Wood, acrylic and found objects

111.8 x 58.4 x 49.5 cm

Property of the artist

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**24. *It's Not Me (Bin and Yellow Stick)***

2021

Wood, acrylic, found objects and stone

59,7 x 27,9 x 19,1 cm

Property of the artist

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**25. *It's Not Me (Locker, Bucket and Blue Mesh)***

2007–2021

Wood, acrylic, found objects and hardware

200.7 x 81.3 x 50.8 cm

Property of the artist

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**26. *It's Not Me (Royal Blue Nook)***

2021

Wood and acrylic

49.5 x 27.9 x 26.7 cm

Property of the artist

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**27. *It's Not Me (Lime Green Corner)***

2021

Wood and acrylic

29.2 x 12.7 x 8.9 cm

Property of the artist

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**28. *It's Not Me (Melamine Mesh)***

2022

Melamine and found object

101.6 x 43.2 x 15.2 cm

Property of the artist

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**29. *It's Not Me (Baby Blue Corner)***

2021

Wood and acrylic

58.4 x 25.4 x 25.4 cm

Property of the artist

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### **30. *It's Not Me (Light Pink Corner)***

2021

Wood and acrylic

179.1 x 77.5 x 77.5 cm

Property of the artist

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### **31. *It's Not Me (Orange Glow Panel)***

2021

Wood and acrylic

63.5 x 29.2 x 29.8 cm

Property of the artist

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### **32. *It's Not Me (Light Blue and Lemonade Pink Panels)***

2021

Wood and acrylic

180.3 x 45.7 x 50.8 cm

Property of the artist

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### **33. *It's Not Me (Grey Accordion)***

2022

Wood and acrylic

94 x 30.5 x 30.5 cm

Property of the artist

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### **34. *It's Not Me (Pink Lavender Mesh)***

2021

Wood, acrylic and found objects

124.5 x 55.9 x 49.5 cm

Property of the artist

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### **35. *It's Not Me (Silver Trellis)***

2022

Wood, acrylic and found object

50.8 x 25.4 x 25.4 cm

Property of the artist

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### **36. *It's Not Me (Yellow Panel)***

2021

Wood and acrylic

49.5 x 29.8 x 8.3 cm

Property of the artist

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### **37. *It's Not Me (Black Corner)***

2021

Wood, acrylic and found object

127 x 38.1 x 35.6 cm

Property of the artist

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### **38. *It's Not Me (Silver Panel)***

2021

Wood and acrylic

43.2 x 30.5 x 30.5 cm

Property of the artist

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## ***It's Not Me, It's My Central Nervous System***

Samuel Roy-Bois' recent sculptures go against the current of cutting-edge technology we rely on in many of the objects or devices we use every day. They don't attempt to mystify the viewer with their complexity. On the contrary, each of the basic gestures that went into these sculptures can easily be deduced at a glance, then copied. As such, they foreground a more primary, mechanical relationship to our surrounding material culture, and serve as a reminder that not so long ago, it wasn't so unusual for us to understand, and repair, what we owned.

Many of the tools on which the Western world depends on today, such as computers, cell phones, cars, or appliances, are manufactured electronically. We use these products without understanding the mystery of how they work, thus reducing us to the role of consumers with limited power to act against the businesses that design, market, and make them essential to our daily lives. In some way, these businesses form the structure of the societies in which we evolve; they have the power to generate and frame our behaviour, our interactions, and our thoughts through the tools they have created, enabling actions and attitudes that soon become a way of life. Their power is pernicious because it is so often invisible. It affects us without our really being aware of it, alternately limiting or widening the context in which we live.

Samuel Roy-Bois' works can be read as reactions to these circumstances, like dissent in the form of a valorizing return to a more concrete and tangible relationship to things. During a studio visit in 2022, Roy-Bois insisted that, although his works may seem like formalist sculptural studies, they should be considered from a political point of view. They do not illustrate a political issue as such, but their underlying approach is fundamentally political. Samuel Roy-Bois' works demonstrate the worldview through which he questions our place within the built environment. Sculptures from his series *It's Not Me* exemplify this.

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### ***39. The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State (five brooms and stool)***

2016

Chromogenic print

91.5 x 61 cm

Property of the artist

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### ***40. The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State (blue sawhorse, paint, blue case)***

2016

Chromogenic print

91.5 x 61 cm

Property of the artist

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**41. *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State (ladder, t-shirt and box)***

2016

Chromogenic print

91.5 x 61 cm

Property of the artist

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**42. *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State (coal bag and dolly)***

2016

Chromogenic print

91.5 x 61 cm

Property of the artist

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**43. *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State (table and white blocks)***

2016

Chromogenic print

91.5 x 61 cm

Property of the artist

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**44. *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State (ladder and boots)***

2016

Chromogenic print

91.5 x 61 cm

Property of the artist

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**45. *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State (white blocks and footrest)***

2016

Chromogenic print

91.5 x 61 cm

Property of the artist

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## **46. *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State (footstool and wheelbarrow)***

2016

Chromogenic print

91.5 x 61 cm

Property of the artist

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## **47. *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State (sink and level)***

2016

Chromogenic print

91.5 x 61 cm

Property of the artist

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## ***The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State***

*The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (2016–2019) is a series of photographic sculptures Samuel Roy-Bois made from things he found on a property in Germany in 2016, during an artist residency at Künstlerhaus Worpswede. Realized with the help of his children, who balanced the found objects and then quickly disappeared from the camera lens, this series presents momentary, precariously composed sculptures that exist only long enough to be documented. Suspended for the brief opening of the camera shutter, the sculptures are only experienced by the viewer through the photographs. As improvisational and incidental photographic sculptures, they push up against our understanding of temporality and the certainty of concrete existence.

Roy-Bois' unconventional use of sculpture and photography subverts our expectations of both mediums. Rather than existing as separate, disconnected works, as one they serve to support one another. The sculpture is only there to generate a photograph; the photograph is only there to document the sculpture. The photographic image is in fact prompted by the production of the sculptural work, not the other way around. By intersecting sculpture and photography, Roy-Bois situates meaning between the two mediums. This approach alludes to existential questions underlying his work that interrogate

the very existence of things and our perceptions. The frozen moment captured by a photograph offers respite in a world of constant transformation and reveals our tenuous relationship with reality.

In her essay for a recently published monograph on Roy-Bois' practice (Samuel Roy-Bois: Presences, Kamloops Art Gallery and Esker Foundation, 2022), Helga Pakasaar articulates the underlying philosophical proposition that he sets up in this photo-sculpture relationship: "Roy-Bois mobilizes interactions between images and their referents that restlessly switch back and forth in a play of spatial and temporal conditions, highlighting the ambiguity of perception. Through decidedly analogue and embodied processes, Roy-Bois asserts that observation in itself is inherently performative and relational, always subject to social realities."

Further to Pakasaar's contention that observation is subjective, she points to the way in which our experiences are mediated through technology (the camera). Roy-Bois' work has long been engaged with the history of photography and its promise of capturing time. As expressed in his own words, the artist's inquiry probes the very meaning of images: "Why produce more images today? The ubiquitous nature of images renders it difficult to access a persuasive critical stance that could flout or cast off the image itself. What makes a picture relevant today? If we consider that all photographs—by their mere existence and through the humble fact that they document the real—generate meaningfulness, to reject their presence becomes singularly inappropriate. While it may be that images are inherently valuable, there is no obvious way to compare this value."

*The Origin of the Family* series questions our contemporary material knowledge by interrogating our relationship to things, property, and ownership. Shown alongside this recent sculptural project, these photographs of momentary sculptures destabilize our understanding of both mediums and shift our understanding of ordinary things and spaces as a strategy to examine our bodily relationship with material objects and their visual representation.

Charo Neville, Curator, Kamloops Art Gallery.

The Kamloops Art Gallery presented the exhibition *Samuel Roy-Bois: Presences* in 2019. This exhibition included *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (2016–2019) photographs along with a group of sculptures and site-specific works. *Presences* toured to Esker Foundation, Calgary, Alberta, in 2020. The Kamloops Art Gallery and Esker Foundation co-published the English and French monograph of Samuel Roy-Bois' practice that contains the texts quoted here.

# FLOOR PLAN

1<sup>st</sup> floor

Salle EBI

