The decision to abandon a successful and secure career as art critic and stake all on her creative instincts was, while daring, a natural and perhaps inevitable one.

Julia Dault's expressive range as creative agent and cultural commentator is uniquely shaped, accented you might say, by a somewhat unusual launching point for an artist now securely established in the international art scene with a focus in New York. Surprisingly, she began her career in the visual arts in the somewhat more formalized world of journalism, as Visual Art Critic for the National Post [2003 – 05]. This opportunity to work in an analytic capacity has given Dault an awareness, a critical acuity and verbal, conceptual scope as free ranging, idiosyncratic, honed and sharpened as her ingenuity and experimental daring with paint brush and rubber comb, a preferred tool for manipulating oil and acrylic.

The decision to abandon a successful and secure career as art critic and stake all on her creative instincts was, while daring, a natural and perhaps inevitable one. She entered Parsons The New School for Design in New York in 2006 'with a more conceptually oriented portfolio [... and] spent the two years at Parsons just finding my aesthetic voice', as she comments. After graduating with her MFA in 2008, momentum began to build quickly, and her pieces are now exhibited all over the world. Dault's work is in the permanent collections of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto; the Museum of Modern Art Warsaw; and the Pérez Art Museum Miami.

The contours of that inner aesthetic vision can be tentatively traced with reference to points of orientation, excitation, influence. Minimalism and an industrialist aesthetic have given her, broadly speaking, a conceptual as well as a material home, a field for navigation; the gestural language of Abstract Expressionism, her stride. The fusion is exciting. Working within a highly patterned formal environment, whose geometric iterations and precisions devolve organic vistas and deviations that defy their seemingly predictable schematic construction, she produces layered paintings, whose complex striations achieve seductive intimations of three-dimensionality, rhythm, movement, visceral charge.

Layering is a primary strategy in Dault's paintings generating surface-depth tensions often reinforced by the use of textiles and an elaborate process of pigment application using tools other than the conventional brush. Found objects, 'objets trouvés' are an essential part of an aesthetic of slippage, a blurring of boundary between aesthetic and non-aesthetic artefact. This travesty of boundaries is further sharpened by the use of mirrored surfaces in the exhibitions which intrude into the all too passive process of confrontation between viewer and art object. Dault incorporates reflective barriers, whole walls on occasion, as well as sculptures...

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with reflective surfaces to add narrative complexity, to inject fluid momentum. Access to and framing of her pieces thus receive dynamic elaboration; viewer and art object become destabilized. Her Formica-Plexiglas sculptures can reverberate, translate the geometric patterns and vistas opened up by her canvases into an organically distorted field: an iterative recurrence she playfully indulges in other ways too. The show Maker's Mark, just opened at Marianne Boesky Gallery in New York, boasts an entire wall worked with an embossed brayer, a tool used in the preparation of the largest of the canvases in the show, ‘Hero Champ’ (120 x 108 inches), whose textures and visual effects playfully reverberate those of the wall. Thus safe distances between viewer and work, viewing space and reified, static art construct recede and boundaries are challenged.

That same instinct for challenging the viewer is mobilized, too, in her desire to give transparency to the creative process itself. Moved by an urge to reinvest artistic generation with a kind of experiential depth, a specificity and visceral pull accessible to all, her paintings introduce a sense of tactile unfolding, legible not only to the experienced eye, but to the ordinary viewer. Unconventional tools like rubber combs, licorice twizzler sticks, door handles, sea sponges, and squeegees are used as a way of drawing attention to the process by which the forms on the canvas come into being. ‘A brush can obfuscate the process whereas with a tool a viewer can more easily trace the choreography of gestures across the surface', she explains. Other objects mediate, translate or reflect the process of engagement with paint, surface, texture and space in more intimate, meaningful ways. The work thus embodies not only visual and textural layers, geometric and material layers, but chronological ones, inscribing the process of artistic generation.

Likewise, her sculptures are conceived as objects that offer an index, a reflection of raw manipulation and tactile engagement with a material whose inner dynamic unfolds its own forms of resistance, yielding and dialogue as the artist coaxes, shapes, and reacts to its material integrity. That labor investment Dault registers scrupulously in each piece with a date and time stamp to convey a sense of her engagement with an autonomous medium sounding out its own history, its own narrative and material being, structural unfolding. In Dault's approach there is an impulse to honor, to respect the material determinacies of the medium with which she is involved in a dance, a kind of reciprocity of listening, being, unfolding. She channels this impulse by working within certain specific constraints. In a painting like Braveheart, 2014 (80 x 68 inches) and many others her self-imposed formal mandate is to prohibit mixing of colors. Similarly, her sculptures are molded within well-circumscribed rule sets and always executed wholly on site. No preparatory steps are allowed.

The final form of this complex and materially sensitive process of engagement with her media is the art work, the painting or sculpture, not a finished static object, but one that is ‘securely insecure’ in a process of evolution, fruition, dialogic exchange. The intriguing question Dault poses for herself is: ‘Can you have process and final form in perfect equilibrium?’ Dault's innovative efforts to ‘make the process of creative generation transparent’ are certainly exciting, compelling on visceral as well as cerebral levels, and the completed work does full justice to her ‘hope to make the final resting place of the creative act seductive to the viewer’. In a Copernican twist, ‘the material reciprocity between the artist and her medium’ is expressed in and by the work itself, and ‘the sculpture becomes the meeting point between these two forces.’ The creative act is then a living dance, a confrontation of self and world, a pitting of energies, unresolved, autonomous but poised in a synergy of balance.
Featured Alumnus
Anne Abbass (BFA ‘93)

Anne Abbass: Life After Queen’s

I graduated from the BFA program at Queen’s in 1993 with a major in Printmaking. The year after graduation I was awarded the Don Phillips scholarship at Open Studio in Toronto. I have remained an active member of Open Studio, and the printmaking community. I have found printmaking to have a wonderful support system and through places like Open Studio there are lots of opportunities for printmakers to make and show their work. After taking a year to make prints and travel, I attended Sheridan College in the Computer Graphics department. At that time the program was new and we learned an amazing amount about image making on the computer. With that experience I got a job designing websites, back when that was a new industry. A job opportunity moved me to New York City where I continued to work as a designer, and then a Customer Experience Strategist helping major corporations develop and improve their online presence. I credit the 2nd year Queens BFA trip to New York as the beginning of my continued love for that city! Eventually I moved back to Toronto, started a family and continued some consulting work. Over all these years I have kept up printmaking, some years producing more work than others. Many times I have had to be creative in figuring out ways to produce prints without a press, or a studio, and have had to experiment with processes and materials more suited to working at home. I now have a small basement studio with 2 etching presses. Although I don’t print on big stones any more, I enjoy experimenting with different techniques and inks, layering it all together and seeing the magical results that printmaking can produce.

How the BFA program prepared me:

Queen’s taught me to be a creative problem solver. There is no right or wrong in making art, it is about finding a voice or perspective and convincing people of the integrity of that perspective. You have to believe in what you are doing, practice your skill and not care too much about what others think. In many areas of life since graduation, in business, art and even raising small kids, the skills I learned at Queen’s continue to benefit me. I loved the time I spent at Ontario Hall and am very happy to continue to use the skills, and continue to make prints based on the things I learned there.

“As a non BFA student and having the opportunity to participate in ARTF101 has been the most amazing experience of my university career thus far. I have learned incredible amounts about myself as a student, and more importantly young artist. My professor has opened my eyes to the world of art today, pushed my limits, and challenged my artistic ability. Additionally, creating work that I am proud of has been so rewarding that this program has pushed me to reconsider my degree choice and perhaps move into the BFA program. I would not trade this experience for the world.”

Danielle Ruderman, First year concurrent Education
Brian Hoad BFAH’15 and Rebecca Annweiler, Fine Art Program Undergraduate chair at the 2015 Governor General awards.

Francesca Pang BFAH’15 at the Governor General Awards

Selected Student Works

ARTF 228 Painting
Photo Credit Noreen Haun

ARTF 101 “Great Fakes” Exhibition
Photo Credit Noreen Haun

Iris Fryer BFAH’15
Photo Credit Noreen Haun

ARTF 101 “Great Fakes” Exhibition
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