

# Pattern Recognition: A Letter from Montreal

By Jason Urban

In *\$100 and a T-shirt: A Documentary About Zines in the Northwest*, someone suggests that the flourishing zine scene in Portland, Oregon, owes its existence to the rainy weather: there's nothing else to do but stay inside and make zines.<sup>1</sup> When I asked artist Dominique Pétrin if Montreal were a supportive place for the arts, she answered, "Montreal is a great city to live as an artist. I can afford a studio and a place to live by myself and still have a wonderful quality of life ... but winter is harsh." Perhaps those bitter winters explain why it is that Montreal is exploding with dynamic new art. For a large portion of the year, there's nothing else to do but stay inside and print.

I have visited Montreal twice in as many years—both times taking care to do so in the spring. During a recent month-long stay, I revisited artists and galleries and encountered new ones. I saw some work, asked some questions and got some answers. Like any scene, art in Montreal defies strict categorization, but as an outsider I have been particularly aware of a tendency toward large-scale works that embrace ephemerality and utilize the multiple.

Print projects rarely require the three industrial lifts that were necessary to install Pétrin's latest piece, *House of Xtravaganza*. This series of screen-print collages covers a Metro station, a bank and an apartment building on rue Sainte-Catherine, a busy thoroughfare in downtown Montreal. When I stopped by to meet Pétrin, she and her crew had been working round-the-clock for 12 days, wheatpasting the prints into place. By means of bright color, pattern, and flag iconography, the apartment building was transformed into a kind of alternate-universe United Nations building. Though the piece was not conceived as a portrait of Montreal, it works as a metaphor for the international spirit of a city where people constantly flip between two languages and where remnants of the Expo 67 world's fair and the 1976 Olympics still loom large.

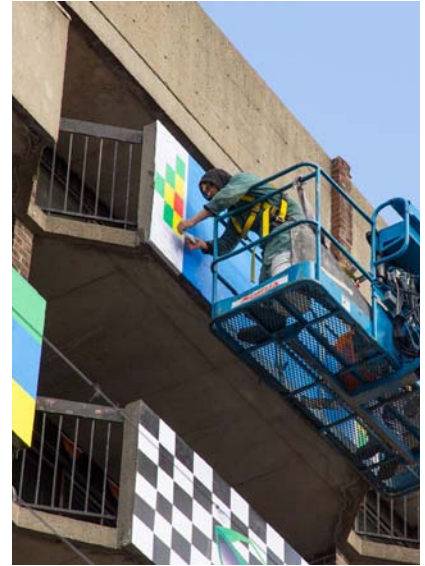
Pétrin had created her first site-specific



Andrée-Anne Dupuis-Bourret, *Studio View*. Photo: Andrée-Anne Dupuis-Bourret.

mural project a year earlier in Val-David, a small village in the Laurentian Mountains north of the city, but her work has quickly increased in scale and complexity.

With orchids and parrots making cameos, her motifs are reminiscent of television programs from the '80s and '90s, like *Miami Vice* and *Saved by the Bell*. Vibrant



Dominique Petrin, views of *House of X-travaganza* (2013), screenprinted paper pasted with potato starch glue, approximately 80 x 100 x 100 feet. 1390 Sainte-Catherine E., Montreal. Photo: Caroline Cloutier.

and loud, the work cannot be ignored. The performative act of public installation suits Pétrin, a former member of the band Les Georges Leningrad.

Yannick Desranleau and Chloe

Lum—arguably the most recognizable print artists in Montreal—also segued from music to art. Former members of the defunct avant-rock band AIDS Wolf, they now form the collaborative duo Seripop,

which has been exhibiting throughout Canada and internationally for over a decade. When I bumped into them, they were between exhibitions, entrenched in “studio experimentation with new-to-us



Seripop, installation view of *This Peculiar Bias Will Nonetheless Set Up A Vast Field For The Unforeseen* (2013), screenprinted paper, wood, chairs, stool, spools, polyurethane foam, tempera, c-clamps, PVC shrink wrap, fabric, rope, rubber, variable dimensions (163 x 452 x 1005 cm). Galerie Hugues Charbonneau, Montreal. Photo: Éliane Excoffier.

materials and techniques.” They have returned to school after a long hiatus, so most nonstudio time is consumed by classes and the library. Desranleau says, “We tend to sustain a low energy but long and endurance-driven workday.”

Seripop’s elaborate screenprint installations evolved from the two-dimensional discipline of the gig poster; they have moved from using posters as promotional materials to using them as raw material to build complicated, large-scale print environments. Like Pétrin, they embrace pattern and color but with a further exploration of materiality. Says Lum: “Posters in their natural habitat are ephemeral and could even be viewed as time-based works since they age and decay with the elements, get torn and get covered over. This decay and almost performative aspect comes up again and again in our installation work. We are really interested in entropy and having a work react to its environment.”

Andrée-Anne Dupuis-Bourret came to prints from painting and drawing. She began working with print out of necessity when she started producing installations and artists books that involved multiple components. Print was the way to generate those building blocks. Working mostly in black-and-white, she too combines multiplicity, repetition and three-dimensionality to make expansive paper installations. Her modular structures create sprawling organic landscapes not unlike those of American sculptor Tara Donovan. Her studio looks like an industrial



Mathieu Jacques / *Organ Mood*, *Spontaneous projection test* (2011), projected light, 9 x 6 feet. Photo: Olivier Laberge.

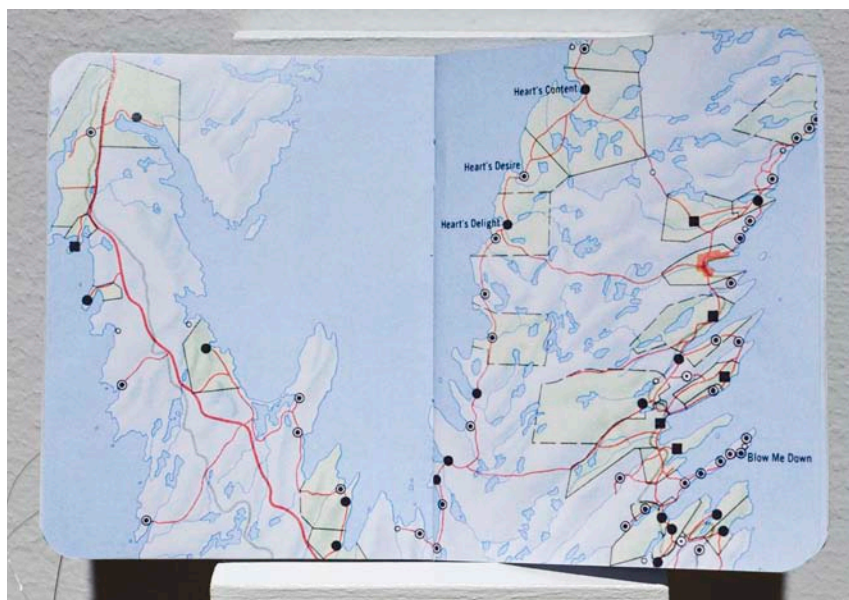
design lab with structural experiments and material studies carefully stacked on all surfaces, an indication of her focus on inquiry and process. The flexibility of her recombinant modules is a significant departure from standard editioned prints; there is no definitive end to her self-imposed problems. This emphasis on the experience rather than the object seems to be characteristic of many Montreal artists.

Siblings Mathieu and Emmanuelle Jacques both use print to explore space

but in very different ways. Mathieu, through his collaborative performance project *Organ Mood*, works with musician Christophe Lamarche to design interactive projections he describes as “influenced by a print media state of mind.” Like a visual disc jockey, he mimics layered printing processes by using acetates and overhead projectors to build color, images and patterns in response to music. Emmanuelle’s work starts with cartography to investigate a poetic space. She scours Canadian maps for



Emmanuelle Jacques, *Lieux communs : Commonplaces* (2012), artist’s book (laser print, embossed book cover bound with staples, 28 pages), 12.5 cm x 10.5 cm. Edition of 100. Printed and published by the artist and Terrain vague inc. and, Montreal. Maison de la culture du Plateau-Mont-Royal, Montreal. Photo: Guy L’Heureux.



intriguing place names—Misère (Misery), L'Espérance (Hope) and Bout-du-Monde (End-of-the-World)—and employs them as fodder for digital and offset prints and books. Jacinthe Loranger makes screenprints with a raw narrative approach reminiscent of American painter Chris Johansen or fellow Canadian Marcel Dzama, but her work also incorporates installation and sound.

While no important scene can exist without adventurous, talented artists, innovative print production also requires infrastructure. Many artists I met had a current or past affiliation with either the English-speaking Concordia University or the French-speaking L'Université du Québec (UQAM). Dupuis-Bourret, for instance, is pursuing her doctoral degree at UQAM and teaches printmaking there.<sup>2</sup> For artists not connected to a school, the presence of well-established, open-access printshops such as Atelier Graff and Atelier Circulaire means that facilities are readily available. Graff is one of Canada's first artist-run centers, and its late founder, Pierre Ayot, was a professor at UQAM and a legendary Pop Art figure in Quebec. Atelier Circulaire also has a gallery focused on print.

Montreal is rich in galleries and alternative spaces supportive of print works. Three years ago the artist-run gallery Arprim redefined its mission in order to prioritize exhibitions of forward-looking print, such as American artist Leslie Mutchler's recent interactive installation, *trendFACTORY*, which invited gallery-goers to watch a short tutorial video and then make an artwork from her preprinted substrates.<sup>3</sup> During my visit, Diagonale, a space dedicated to contemporary fiber art, was showing "EVOL/LOVE," an exhibition of room-sized inflatable skulls made of screen-printed Tyvek by another collaborative team, Guillaume Brisson-Darveau and Pascaline Knight. A makeshift gallery is to be found in the storefront portion of Monastiraki, a vintage boutique, where artifacts from recent decades are mixed with with contemporary art. Monastiraki's flatfiles are full of affordably priced, locally produced prints.

Maybe it is this array of exhibition venues, schools and printshops; or maybe it's the winter; or the tensions of living in a bilingual, bicultural city, but for the moment at least Montreal appears to be an ideal incubator for contemporary print. ■



Jacinthe Loranger, *Phallic ceremony* (2012), screenprint collage on wood panel, 26 x 40 inches. Printed and published by the artist, Montreal. Photo: the artist.

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#### Notes:

1. Joe Biel and Phil Sano (directors). 2004. \$100 & a T-Shirt: A Documentary About Zines in the Northwest. IndieFlix, film.
2. A number of Dupuis-Bourret's students at UQAM formed the short-lived but prolific group *École de la Montagne Rouge*. These design/printmaking students generated a fantastic amount of graphic imagery for the 2012 student strikes colloquially known as the *Printemps Érable* or, in English, the *Maple Spring*.
3. Leslie Mutchler is the author's spouse.



Leslie Mutchler, installation view of **TrendFACTORY:MTL** (2013), birch plywood furniture, vinyl, informational video, silkscreen on chipboard, paper tape, miscellaneous hand tools. Variable dimensions. ARPRIM Gallery, Montreal, Quebec, Canada. Photo: the artist.

**Links:**

- <http://dominiquepetrin.com/>
- <http://seripop.com/>
- <http://www.aadb-art.com/>
- <http://mjack.net/>
- <http://emmanuellej.wordpress.com/>
- <http://jloranger.tumblr.com/>
- <http://www.graff.ca/atelier/>
- <http://www.atelier-circulaire.qc.ca/>
- <http://www.arprim.org/>
- <http://www.lesliemutchler.com/TrendFACTORY2.html>
- <http://www.artdiagonale.org/>
- <http://www.guillaumebd.com/>
- <http://www.pascaline.ca/>
- <http://monastiraki.blogspot.com/>
- <http://ecolemontagnerouge.tumblr.com/>



Leslie Mutchler, detail of **TrendFACTORY:MTL** (2013). Photo: the artist.