

ALANNA THAIN
(MONTRÉAL)

SHADOWS FOR THE TOUCHING

Texte commandé par Skol pour l'exposition
*Où allait mourir le bruit de la chanson, there
came forth a dark and undefined shadow*

The shadow, in the form of the sundial, is the first form of legible time, and the first omen that our days are numbered. Between capture and threat, shadows are a dangerous yet irresistible realm. How do we restore to the wild time of shadows the uncontainable impulses of life itself? To enter into Amélie Brisson-Darveau's *Où allait mourir le bruit de la chanson*, there came forth a dark and undefined shadow, you must first submit to a vertiginous scene: a kaleidoscopic confound of fearful faces, from film noir's greatest poet, Jacques Tourneur. You pass into the installation held in the suspense of an unseen reverse shot: you never know what causes eyes to widen in terror, even as your body holds open that charge. Inspired by the fatal fascinations of Tourneur's *Cat People* and *I Walked with a Zombie*, Brisson-Darveau fully exploits film noir's shadow play. A notoriously elusive object, film noir belatedly names a traumatized and fatalistic cycle of work that emerged during and after the horrors of World War Two, of moody atmospheres, dramatic shadows and moral ambiguity. Brisson-Darveau animates a noir affect for our own anxious times, where the rapid race of humanity beats a deathly counter-rhythm against other lives, from the spiralling climate crisis to the lingering spread of atomic shadows. In the space of a shadow is a whole world of delicate, uncapturable life.

If noir's "visual language...menaces the characters while seducing the audience" ⁱ, Brisson-Darveau blurs that line between seduction and menace, character and viewer. She thus recharges the essence of Tourneur's work: the sense that everything bristles with a wild agency that we humans may or may not survive. Her rigorous, tender refusal to distinguish object and action, material and immaterial, background and foreground reanimates noir's affects in the service of other vitalisms. She prompts us to linger in the shadows of unsettled and mutable forms: not to look over our shoulders for terror's source, but to remain in a playable chiaroscuro. Shadows are thus never simply bad copies, but

another world of relations, orientations and texture. Her meticulous crafting of objects makes palpable and vivid their negative space, as in the torsions and textures of the ceramics scattered on the floor. Horror can't be dispelled by turning on the light: its affects nonetheless transform in the work of shadow-making. Scrim and cucoloris, behind-the-camera tools for texturing the background of the cinematic image, are carefully confected to take centre stage. A sweater comes off the body to become a scrim, shifting from protection and cover to a wild release. A brancholoris, whose shadow creates the illusion of a nature just out of view, regains its agency, the branch's flocked skin redressed in velvet as it plays itself. In noir, characters are trapped by a tragic destiny. Brisson-Darveau shifts such fatalism by animating a more-to-life across other forms and matters beyond the human. Puppets adapted from two avant-garde artists working in the wake of war, Sophie Taeuber-Arp and Sonia Delaunay, extend and decentre from the human body, suspended between anthropomorphism and geometry. Of Tourneur's work, Chris Fujiwara wrote "Places, objects and atmospheres are living presences...while emotion and drama speak very softly, the better to show how deeply they are affected by the physical world around them" ⁱⁱ. This is the tender ethics of the "aestheticized monstrosity" Brisson-Darveau exposes. There is no offscreen in this work, no illusion that is not simply the moment something comes alive, in movement and in time. Up against the screen of the wall, everything appears on the same plane yet enters another dimensionality, a softly insistent vitality that echoes beyond our own.

ⁱ Janet Bergstrom, "Warning Shadows: German Expressionism and American Film Noir" In Homer B. Petty and R. Barton Palmer, eds. *Film Noir*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014.

ⁱⁱ Fujiwara, Chris. *Jacques Tourneur: The Cinema of Nightfall*. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 1998.

Alanna Thain is a professor at McGill University. She directs the Moving Image Research Lab and the Collective for Research on Epistemologies of Embodied Risk (CORÉRISC). She is the author of *Bodies in Suspense: Time and Affect in Cinema* (2019).

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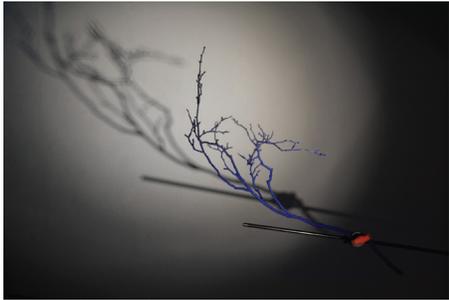
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AMÉLIE BRISSON-
DARVEAU (MONTRÉAL)

OÙ ALLAIT MOURIR LE BRUIT
DE LA CHANSON, THERE
CAME FORTH A DARK AND
UNDEFINED SHADOW

April 24th - May 29th, 2021
Installation



Amélie Brisson-Darveau's work is composed of installation, drawing, and performative action. By giving shape to imperceptible elements of our environment, by exploring their tangibility, she proposes alternative experiences of what is often left unseen. Whether it is the texture of the elements she explores or that of her materials, the notion of texture plays a key role in her practice. The artist uses the participation of the public as a subtle way to link the historical content of her projects to the actual socio-political, economical and environmental context.

In her project at Skol, she explores the materiality of shadows, and the role it plays in early horror movies of the 40's and 50's. Emerging from a dark socio-political context (Second World War and the Great Depression), these movie's directors have used shadows to create an estheticized monstrosity, in echo to their times. Creating a link with the actual context, the artist questions herself about the relationship between fear and depression, obscurity and estheticized monstrosity, in an era characterized by social, political and environmental instability.

At Skol, Brisson-Darveau presents installative pieces that create shadows and that are made of objects related to cinema. Proposed as essays on the creation of dreamy and monstrous atmospheres, they also « feature » the exhibition visitor's moving shadow. Playing at once on the deconstruction of cinematic strategies and the creation of a fictive and performative space, the exhibition becomes a place of conjuncture between real and cinematic space.

Amélie Brisson-Darveau lives and works in Montréal. She received her MFA from Concordia University in the Fibres and material practices art program. Before doing her MFA, she completed a B.A. in Visual and Media Art at the Université du Québec à Montréal (UQÀM) and received a second BA in Social Work from Université de Montréal (UDM). Her work has been shown in various exhibitions and events in Canada, United-States, Switzerland, England, France, Germany, Greece, Finland, Lithuania, Turkey and Norway. She has received grants from Fonds de recherche Société et culture, the Canada Council for the Arts and the Emerging Artist Award from the Kaunas Textile Biennale. While currently pursuing doctoral studies at UQÀM, she is coordinator of professional development at RCAAQ.

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