

MILAN BERNARD  
(MONTRÉAL)

**MULTIFARIOUS AUSTERITY  
AND THE FALLEN NOBILITY OF  
MARBLE**

Text by the curator of the exhibition  
*La pression austéritaire (Austerity  
pressure)*

Austerity is the central political concept of the turn of the 21st century, becoming the instrument by which neoliberal ideology, once in power, has imposed its agenda on the different sectors of society.

Austerity appears as a mechanical conjunction, analogous to that of the artist exerting a systemic pressure on the results of creative work, and on their reading. It is not a matter of the artist's adhering to the principles of austerity, but rather of noting the inevitable reflection of the ideology on practice and of highlighting the aesthetic markers provided by this junction.

Marie-France Brière's project crystalizes the influences, imprints the mental lexicon as process. It materializes the vocabularies at play in the work, displays them—part museum, part *dazibao*—in a to-and-fro between imagination, inspiration, and ideology. Marked by restraint and minimalism, this sculptural body of work traces its conceptual origins in *Arte Povera*, particularly by its attention, beyond the aesthetics of austerity, to the question of materials. Because of a concern for marble's extraction in the context of the Anthropocene, and given an industrial exploitation whose growth poses a threat to several ecosystems in Italy, the use of marble takes on new meaning and calls into question its status as a noble material.<sup>1</sup> Extractivism is in fact characteristic of the current political and economic system due to its vision of limitless resource exploitation, despite the constantly intensifying environmental impact.

Marble has also lost some of its nobility due to its replacement as prime sculptural material: Brière thus redirects marble's use toward a contemporary exploration that confronts the solidification of a traditional and figurative vocabulary.

### Transition of the Material Regime

While Brière has often explored the notion of deconstruction,

the new works in this exhibition testify to a transition to the next stage, to the next form of social, political, and economic organization, one centered on dematerialization, suspension, and invisibility, which are associated with digital or surveillance capitalism. In line with feminist readings, one can see in the presented works a non-visible structure, one that is present and powerful nonetheless: the structure is a domination that, in Gramsci's words, acts as hegemonic consent "armoured with coercion," concealing/revealing this dynamic through an approach based on envelopment.

Deconstruction, in its political dimension, prescribed a phoenix-like austerity: a purge, a generalized elimination, that allowed for the preservation of the bare minimum. Now, entering the era of digital capitalism, the subsequent stage of neoliberalism after austerity, the enquiry shifts to other issues: reproducibility, unicity, formalism. The exhibition *La Pression Austéritaire* situates this shift.

### An Autonomous Work

Brière's work allows for an open reading: its rejection of a single implication makes room for an autonomous critique, an imprint in the world, rather than the imposition of a prescriptive framework. It thus combines a contemporary visuality with a resistance to patterns of modernity and to the logic of withdrawal from effort and autonomous thought. It is also a sign of the artist's adherence to abstraction as a fundamental value in her practice, on the path of an alternate imagination, of a constantly forthcoming and developing reality.

<sup>1</sup> The Carrara marble used for the works in the exhibition comes from an extraction that predates the development of the marble industry so deleterious to Tuscan ecosystems.

**Milan Bernard** is a doctoral student in political science at the University of Montréal. His work is focused on the question of conflict and on the interactions between the visual arts and political thought.

Translated from French by Ron Ross

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MARIE-FRANCE BRIÈRE  
CURATOR: MILAN BERNARD

LA PRESSION AUSTÉRITAIRE  
(AUSTERITY PRESSURE)

March 10th - April 16th, 2022  
Sculpture



The material universe in all its extent lies at the heart of Marie-France Brière's work. Favouring stone as a medium, her work revolves around pairings with other materials having opposite qualities (suppleness, fragility, softness) and/or with symbolic elements (objects, photographs, texts, sounds) often foreign to stone's semantic vista.

For some of the works presented in this exhibition, Brière used blocks of Carrara marble brought back after an extended stay in Italy in the early 1980s. Long-known for its artistic vocation, the Carrara region is now increasingly under pressure from massive industrial extraction of this non-renewable resource.

The artist broached the material as if it were inhabited by this history and new reality. Thus rendered, it articulates a political reading of the exhibition, opening up avenues of reflection on the ideological effects of austerity on the production and on creative work, and vice-versa.

Bearing this layer of meaning in its very materiality, *La pression austéritaire* explores the identity of the materials, their capacity for transformation, for dissimulation, and for revelation.

**Marie-France Brière** is a multidisciplinary artist born in Montreal in 1957. In the 1980s, she studied at the Université du Québec à Montréal, where she obtained a master's degree in visual arts. During this period, she also lived and worked in Pietrasanta, Italy, where she perfected the techniques of sculpture in stone, a material which has held a central place throughout her career. She is the recipient of multiple grants from the Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec and the Canada Council for the Arts and was conferred the Louis-Comtois Award in 1996. Marie-France Brière has been developing sculpture-oriented research for several years. By bringing heterogeneous materials together in unusual ways, her work employs strong contrasts to prompt reflection on impermanence, loss, absence and invisibility. This allows for testing the identity of materials, as well as their capacity for transformation, disguise and revelation in order to examine and review the nature of the world.

*The artist would like to thank Claude Bernard, Simon Rancourt and Simon Lachapelle for their precious collaboration.*

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