

Darcia Labrosse

# METAL LANGUAGE

By Deborah Margo



*Industrial No. 16, 2013*  
Powdercoated aluminum  
153 x 97 cm

Documentation of Labrosse's work is misleading, to pigeon-hole it as a manifestation of Abstract Expressionism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is all too easy. And yet this is what I precisely did, before visiting *Research in Art* in Ottawa, this past November.

Since New Year's Day 2015, *Research in Art* (RIA) has been grappling with the concept of "Growing Up Human". Questions addressed in the project room, as well as discussions and group readings, have focused on what does it mean to be born and raised in a post-humanist age and how can we re-imagine our place in an interconnected life-world. Darcia Labrosse's exhibition, *Metal Language*, makes an incisive and disquieting contribution to this opportune investigation.

To begin, one enters a residential garden leading to a covered porch. Due to its placement in the middle of the outdoor room, Labrosse's *Anodized Grey No 39* is unavoidable. It is a long, narrow, horizontal work, raised from the floor by four short metal legs, to be seen before reaching the home's front door.

Neither a representation of a confined figure nor a human form reclining on the low table-like surface, I look down on gestural traces indicating a figure in transformation. Not quite decomposed, skeletal, nor complete, it appears in movement. Similarly ambiguous, a sense of pictorial space passes through and around the solitary figure. The colour palette is cool, like the metal support itself, and yet, due to its outdoor location, the temptation to touch the surface can be fulfilled. Despite the support's solid materiality, I experience a psychic shiver at the depiction of a human spectre.

*Industrial Anodized No. 2, 2013*  
Powdercoated aluminum  
122 x 92 cm







*Industrial Raw Portrait No. 1, 2014*  
Powdercoated aluminum  
120 x 98 cm

Unlike the initial outdoor room, once inside in the Artist Project Room, I am surrounded by multiple works. Four large, rectangular metal plates lean against the room's walls, each one seated into long slots running across the surface of low lying, plinth-like white furniture. Their presentation does not allow the images to function as wall-hugging paintings. In their in-between zone, they operate as invitations to step closer. The intimate room and the works' raised installation allow the viewer to meet the human presences, to engage in a physical proximity.

The metal can now be identified as aluminum sheets, a thin silver resilience bearing an industrial polished surface that could bend under substantial corporeal force. In contrast, the applied films of colour exert no thick, impasto brushwork, rather they are fused into and onto the support's surface due to an electrostatic paint application that is completed by the work being baked at a high temperature in an industrial oven. I can imagine such a stressed process, where the artist engages in a performance-like, quickly paced action painting, but it is also about

the very application of powdered particles or atomized liquid. Initially the paint is projected towards the conductive aluminum using normal spraying methods, then accelerated by a powerful electrostatic charge. The visual qualities of the images are complex: they are quickly executed, yet in their questioning of human scale and tight bonding to the aluminum surface they are unexpectedly monumental in their expressive force.

Gestural drawings and sketchbooks filled with quick-paced drawings of the human form surround the metal works, depicting a thorough knowledge in the studio tradition of drawing the model. This practice has served Labrosse well: in her *Industrial* works she does not represent the figure, but rather its emanation and memory of previous states of bone, muscle and flesh. To do so, she uses a subdued palette of black, rust, blue, white, brown, greys, dusky pink, applied in multiple, fractured veils allowing for a strobing effect.

Each work contains a centered, gender-less solitary presence, in motion, but also defined by series of broken traces. Multiplied, these substantial bodies are similar to x-ray apparitions, but they are not whittled down to tenuous skeletons. They also do not possess their allotted space: cut-limbs, blocked movements, innards twisting, depict a disintegrating human presence caught and contained within the edges of their sleek supports.

There is no sense of place, barely even a space, rather a state of transition without clear definition. What is this feature-less gloom, neither dusk nor night, they inhabit? By their movement they appear alive and existing, but where are they going?

Curator Petra Halkes accurately writes that Labrosse is borrowing the trappings of an Abstract Expressionist style. The difference lies in a skeptical, restrained Romanticism where the very present geometric industrial object contrasts with the imprint of the solitary human body in each image. This is existentially-infused work made in and for our uncertain times. ●

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