

# cmagazine

## Julia Dault

Jessica Bradley Annex, Toronto

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by Rose Bouthillier

Unlike many others my age who attended his concerts during the early 1990s, my MC Hammer experience was delayed until the summer of 2007 at the River Cree Resort & Casino in Enoch, Alberta. While I was expecting the music to nostalgically transport me back to the 90s, it was surprisingly overshadowed by a heightened material awareness. My memories of that night are predominantly comprised of the sense of material objects around me—black fabric stretching across the stage; labels peeling off bottled waters; wisps emanating from a smoke machine; Hammer's belt buckle flapping open, unable to hold together under the duress of "Hammer time"—these details floating in an atmosphere of light, heat and movement.

This all came flooding back to me when I saw Julia Dault's painting *2 Legit* (all paintings 2012) at Jessica Bradley Annex, as part of the Toronto-born, Brooklyn-based artist's first solo exhibition in Canada. Dault has a particular way of drawing the viewer in close to material details and this work is no exception: I was absorbed by the tautness of the plastic surface, the satisfying ridges of combed paint and the milky smoothness of white layered over bright colour. *2 Legit*, as well as the six other paintings and two sculptures on view, *soaks up* vision, pulling it in a nearly magnetic way.

This was my second encounter with Dault's work, but my first time seeing her paintings and sculptures together. The sculptures—warped and curled sheets of Plexiglas, Formica and other industrial, sheeted materials, stacked and bound with boxing wraps and chords, bursting—received critical attention for their place in *The Ungovernables* at the New Museum last year. There, they had an edginess and anxiety that was attributable, in part, to the exhibition's premise—their unfamiliarity came across as defiance.

The intimate, unaccompanied and untitled show at Jessica Bradley Annex emphasized a more playful aspect of the sculptures, which have a productive rapport with the paintings. Dault's media for the latter include vinyl, polyester, pleather, canvas and linen (often layered together), covered with oil and acrylic paint that has been vigorously scraped, fanned or combed away from the surfaces. The paintings lend the sculptures something of their noise and *joie de vivre*, while in turn the sculptures lend the paintings something of their tension and volume.

The initial and overarching effect of the exhibition was one of exuberance and *fitness*. Everything is tensile, toned. Yet more than bouncy, this material energy is complex, internal. The longer one looks at them, the trickier the works become. It is difficult to *see* everything: the paintings' layers mean that there is something hidden or masked while the sculptures have so many surfaces, invoking their private creation. The sculptures draw inward, self-absorbed, fully concentrated on their own equilibrium, projecting an almost threatening indifference to the viewer. The works abound with personifying traits, and, oddly, I felt voyeuristic approaching them, as if they were having a really good time and I was just watching.

This self-sufficiency emerges in part through the materials the artist has used. Industrially-manufactured surfaces, patterns and textures, have a certain independence from the human minds and hands that engineer them. Dault's relationship to them is less revealing than revealing, less control than corroboration; as a result, there is a sense of mutual satisfaction. The titles for the sculptures address this idea directly: they recount the date and duration of Dault's art-making, namely the amount of time she spent warping, holding and tying each assemblage of sheets together and into place. Towering at just about 2.5 metres tall, *Untitled 26, 10:30 AM–2:30 PM, January 22, 2013* looks anthropomorphic, totemic. Cold white, silver and inky black surfaces give it a designed, space-age feel. On the opposite wall, *Untitled 27, 11:15 AM–2 PM, January 23, 2013*, at just over 1.5-metres, is more squat, but transparent and shifting. Curved, its iridescent Plexi looks the tools to shape it. Others related more through effect than process: Roger White (musicality, textile inspiration); Sam Moyer (tactility, presence); Elizabeth McIntosh (palette, bustle, relationships to the edge); Eli Bornowsky (personality).

Darker and quieter, Dault's *Night Tripper* hung alone in the gallery's office suite. Showing through the black overlay, delicate streaks of rainbow colour appear more as shaded light than flat plane. Clear dominance of one layer over the other sets it apart from the other paintings, and the sculptures as well, which are all very much in balance (pattern and texture, colour and line, above and below contend as equals, pressing up against one another). Thinking back to it now, *Night Tripper* was something of a relief; the comparable simplicity and element of depth gave my eyes a place to rest after being pushed around so much. The intrigue of Dault's works is in just this ability to activate and also to exhaust, emphasizing the physicality of looking through the restlessness of her materials. ×

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