



MARION WAGSCHAL
CULLERRES BRULANTES / 1994
BURNING SPOONS / 1994

je ne représenterais pas ça? La peinture de l'époque essayait de se libérer, et moi aussi. Mais je ne pouvais pas aller dans cette direction (l'abstraction). Ça ne résonne pas en moi. Ce qui m'intéresse surtout ce sont les gens, leurs expériences. Je veux essayer d'aller au-delà des apparences.»

Aujourd'hui, moins assujettie aux concepts, dit-elle, la peintre continue d'explorer son art. Marion Wagschal n'est plus prof à la Faculté des beaux-arts de Concordia (ce qu'elle fut durant 37 ans), et tout l'allume. Sur son cellulaire, elle montre des photos disparates, étranges, comme les reflets d'une cage de verre dans un zoo... «En ce moment, je suis dans une période très libre, avec des éléments surréalistes. Mais je reste quand même accrochée à certaines visions qui ont toutes rapport à l'aventure humaine, et à la projection extérieure de ce que nous sommes.»

Ainsi, sur les toiles continuent de se côtoyer des visages et des corps, des draps froissés, des savates, des fleurs, des objets et des jouets. Parfois la robe rouge flamboyant s'impose (*Woman with Still Life*), les masques vénitiens ne manquent pas d'actualité (*Dottore*) et un autoportrait (*Cyclops*) fascine. Les muscles se nouent, les chairs sont flasques. La nudité, la sexualité, la mort, le vieillissement; tout est radical. «L'aspect du corps m'intéresse en soi, ce sont des formes qui ont du volume, de la beauté. Et le corps est force de la vie.» Fabuleuses projections d'une grammaire visuelle qui nous renvoient à la complexité de notre être. Les comparaisons sont

create freely. "I am truly honoured that the Museum of Fine Arts has put on this exhibition," she says, sincerely delighted. "It's a way for me to reflect on my work, to see everything I've done over 50 years. It's an opportunity to become more familiar with my own identity, to get a more objective take on myself. Plus, it lets me show what's unique to my own work. Though things may take on a critical slant, it's a retrospective, so it's really a way to show my progression as an artist." The MMFA survey exhibition follows a 2014 exposition at the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia. Though our painter is still busily at work, the Montreal exhibition is a fabulous inventory of her oeuvre thus far.

Born in Trinidad to parents fleeing Nazi Europe, Marion Wagschal first set foot in Montreal in 1951 at the tender age of nine. "Leaving the old country for Quebec by way of a tropical island colony was an interesting and formative experience," she tells us. Her parents spoke little of their past and exile. "It was painful for them. They've given me fragments of what happened, anecdotes and memories, but not enough to know the whole story. Some of my work is based on that, like *Tales From the Schwarzwald as Told by My Mother*." As a young girl, painting enthralled her. She's always loved museums and she's even tried her hand at the abstract. "I've painted some horrid Borduas, and some terrible Riopelles!" Then came representational art, especially portraiture. "I started observing my parents, who had been through a lot and, at the same time, led a very normal life—the white picket fence and everything," she recounts. "How couldn't I depict that? At the time, art was in the process of breaking free from the past, and I was too. But I couldn't go down that road (abstraction). It didn't resonate with me. People and their experiences are what really interest me. I want to go beyond appearances."

Today, less constrained by concepts, the painter continues to explore her art. Marion Wagschal is no longer a fine arts professor at Concordia University (a position she held for 37 years), and everything excites her. On her phone, she shows us disparate photos, strange ones, like reflections from a glass cage at the zoo... "Currently, I'm in a very free period, with very surreal elements. But I'm still attached to certain visions that are tied into the human experience and the external projection of what we really are."

That's why faces, bodies, crinkled sheets, worn-out shoes, flowers, objects and toys find a place on her canvases. Sometimes, flaming red takes centre stage (*Woman with Still Life*), Venetian masks make an appearance (*Dottore*).



MARION WAGSCHAL
CONTES DE LA FORÊT-NOIRE TELS QUE CONTÉS PAR MA MÈRE / 1980-2013
TALES FROM THE SCHWARZWALD AS TOLD BY MY MOTHER / 1980-2013

élogieuses, les critiques appellent Goya, Egon Schiele, Klimt ou Lucian Freud. Une pointe d'agacement chez l'artiste: «Je pense que je suis unique. C'est O.K. de faire des comparaisons. Ce sont des grands peintres que j'adore! Il peut y avoir des points de comparaison dans les yeux du spectateur, mais pas pour moi.»

Ne jamais se laisser tenter par un cliché, oser le tabou, exorciser le sujet par l'image, s'interroger sur la représentation féminine, Marion Wagschal est en effet unique. Femme et artiste, elle a soutenu un séminaire sur les femmes en peinture. «Beaucoup de mes étudiants ne connaissaient même pas des peintres femmes, dit-elle. Il fallait réfléchir à la représentation orchestrée par une femme. Comment représente-t-elle le monde? Comment les femmes conçoivent-elles des idées à propos d'elles-mêmes dans la représentation?» Et à son admiration pour Goya, s'ajoute celle pour Suzanne Valadon (*la poupée délaissée*, un tableau de 1921 qu'elle adore) et pour des artistes contemporains tels Kara Walker et William Kittredge. «J'aime les figuratifs contemporains qui ont quelque chose à dire!» résume-t-elle en riant. Rendez-vous au musée pour regarder attentivement ce qu'elle a à dire...

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Her self-portrait (*Cyclops*) is also fascinating. Muscles are tied up in knots and flesh sags. Nudity, sexuality, death, ageing—everything is radical. "The very look of the body interests me, its shapes have volume and beauty. I see the body as a life force." Fabulous projections of a visual grammar that connect us to the complexity that is our being. The parallels being made

are laudatory, critics are dropping names like Goya, Egon Schiele, Klimt and Lucian Freud. This, however, is a point of contention for the artist: "I think that I'm unique. It's OK to compare, I love these great painters! There might be certain points of comparison for people studying my art, but not for me."

Never fall into cliché, dare to be taboo, exorcize the subject through the image, call into question the way women are represented on canvas—Marion Wagschal's approach is unique indeed. Woman and artist, she has lectured on women in painting. "A lot of my students couldn't even name any female painters," she says. "They were forced to think about how women put the brush to canvas. How do they depict the world? How do women conceive of ideas about women in their depictions of them?" To her admiration for Goya, add Suzanne Valadon (*La Poupée Délaissée*, a 1921 painting Wagschal loves) and contemporary artists like Kara Walker and William Kittredge. "I love contemporary figurative painters who have something to say!" she continues, laughing. Go to the Museum of Fine Arts to look closely at what she has to say.