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JAIME ANGELOPOULOS received her MFA from York University (2010), and BFA from NSCAD University (2005). She completed Post Baccalaureate studies at Meadows School of the Arts in Dallas, TX (2006–07), and an artist residency at the Banff Centre for the Arts (2006). Angelopoulos works primarily as a sculptor, but also creates large-scale drawings. Her sculptures are constructed primarily in fabric, plaster, and found objects. Angelopoulos has presented solo exhibitions at Parisian Laundry (Montreal, QC), Stride Gallery (Calgary, AB), Anna Leonowens Gallery (Halifax, NS), Meadows School of the Arts (Dallas, TX), and The Banff Center for the Arts (Banff, AL). Her works are included in the collections of The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ALDO Group, York University, BMO, as well as private collections. Angelopoulos is represented by Parisian Laundry in Montreal. She lives and works in Toronto.

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JAIME ANGELOPOULOS: THE TRICKSTER WITHIN

BY SHANNON ANDERSON

As I stood with Jaime Angelopoulos inside her studio, it was admittedly difficult to concentrate. Trains of thought kept running away from me, questions on the tip of my tongue suddenly dissipated from memory. Initially, I chalked it up to the relatively tight quarters of her cube-shaped studio, tucked into the back corner of an industrial warehouse. At the time, the room seemed as much a storehouse as a studio, with sculptures and drawings occupying most of the available wall and floor space. Angelopoulos and I carefully shuffled around them as we spoke about the work she planned to exhibit in *The Thief in Your Sleeve*. It wasn't until I left the studio, then realizing that I somehow neglected to take snapshots of her work and record our discussion, that the real source of this discomfort became apparent: the sculptures themselves held the crux of my problem. As they surrounded us, each one had been speaking in competition with the others, simultaneously pulling for attention. Despite their deceptively simple, colourful and nearly abstract forms, each held within a distinctive personality that insisted on acknowledgement. Slippery and clever, Angelopoulos' sculptures have an uneasy way of burrowing up your sleeve and getting under your skin.

Standing in the midst of all those sculptures emphasized how much space each one really requires. It wasn't surprising to learn that only four pieces will fill the gallery at YYZ: *The Big Reveal*, a wooden theatre curtain of sorts destined for ruby-red flocking; *Prick*, a wall-mounted piece comprised of a grid of hooks; *Like Air & Water*, a tipsy, stick-like structure with two yellow balloon-shaped heads; and *He Moved Just So*, a piñata-esque royal-blue shaggy figure that wielded peculiar command in the studio.

The other sculptures residing in the studio that day were in various stages of completion. A multi-limbed creature veered up in front of us as though in attack mode. Although still in raw plaster, ready to be flocked, painted or layered in fabric, Angelopoulos had already

named it *Stand up for Yourself*. Behind it, a lumpy odalisque draped in strands of bright orange fabric, *You, You're a Luminous Being*, seemed to strain for breath beneath layers of wrapped plastic, having recently returned from an exhibition. Finally, a robust baby-blue figure, *Just Passing Through*, resided in the back corner of the room, its bulky body suggesting a wrestler depicted in a hybrid cubist/futurist/video game style and curiously sporting a peg-leg. There wasn't a quiet work in the bunch, and the unexpected oddities—such as the peg-leg—were the very things that amplified their presence. The suggestive titles that Angelopoulos lends to each one drapes them in further layers of intrigue, always leaving enough open to lure a viewer in close.

Angelopoulos says that the figurative element in her sculptures is a gradual progression in her work, that the representational allusions within her otherwise abstract forms are a recent phenomenon. Her current exploration of the fertile territory between figuration and abstraction is significant, as it shifts her practice toward a particular lineage of female sculptors. Her recent work recalls shades of sculptures by Meret Oppenheim, Louise Bourgeois and Kiki Smith. Not surprisingly, curator Lesley Johnstone listed this same lineage in comparison to Montreal sculptor Valérie Blass, whose work shares particular affinities with Angelopoulos' recent work. Although Blass' practice is quite distinct in her incorporation of seemingly banal objects as assemblage, her figurative sculptures resonate with a comparably unsettling sensation for viewers. Johnstone notes that Blass "navigates the terrain between figuration and abstraction, the recognizable and the indeterminate, the declared and the evoked, in order to create a duality that is charged with potential."¹ And although one can make an occasional parallel with Blass' material choices, such as flocking (seen in Blass' *Comme dans l'an quarante*, 2011) or fringed fabric (*L'homme paille*, 2008), it is this state of charged potential within her work

that holds a distinctive resonance with Angelopoulos' practice.

The potency within Angelopoulos' sculptures fully comes to the fore through the interplay with the viewer. By looking closer and injecting our own interpretations, we inevitably tighten the contours of their otherwise ambiguous forms. In other words, the way we feel about each object says much about us, and that's where things get slippery. There's a confrontational aspect to *Prick*, for instance, in the jutting hooks that simultaneously nudge us closer while threatening to grab hold. The title might be viewed as simple word play at first glance, but it also harbours an accusatory tone—just who does *Prick* represent, exactly? Are we meant to recall the nasty customer we watched hurling insults at a timid shopkeeper, or does it point to something closer to home, the spite within ourselves? And what does it say about the viewer when *He Moved Just So*, a blue snufalufagus that by all initial appearances seems playful and unaffected, over time shifts in feeling toward something irritatingly passive and ominously weighted?

A primal quality resides within these works, whose forms are by turns thick and cumbersome, as though they are just beginning to take shape, or fragile and overworked, as though they are one manipulation away from collapsing. The bright, primary colours that monochromatically cover each surface might first appear somewhat childlike, but the bold colouration also lends them a particular power, and the balance between the two reveals an underhanded, deceptive quality.

Does the manner in which these sculptures needle at our subconscious suggest that we in the presence of tricksters at work? Carl Jung describes the classic trickster archetype as "a collective shadow figure, a summation of all the inferior traits of character in individuals. And since the individual shadow is never absent as a component of personality, the collective figure can construct itself out of it continually."² Cunning and foolish on

the surface, the trouble-making trickster serves the keen role of revealing our faults to ourselves, thereby helping us to acknowledge and understand our true nature with greater complexity. The trickster is also known as the shape-shifter, and the forms that Angelopoulos creates tellingly contain this very amorphous, undefined quality.

Literature professor Helen Lock puts a particular spin on the trickster phenomenon by attempting to define its postmodern incarnations: "A new age brings a transmutation and a new repertoire of tricks. In fact, we may now have reached the stage of ultimate ambiguity ... when all possibilities can be both entertained and discounted, and tricksters become so elusive that they disappear..."³ One might consider the particular, charged ambiguity that resides within Angelopoulos' sculptures to be the trickster in its contemporary form, one that finds its power at the edges of our subconscious as it subtly, parasitically, points toward our insecurities.

In the presence of these sculptures, what appears innocuous or humorous at first glance is, ultimately, disarming. Move in too closely, and they may reveal the tricks you're hiding. Ulterior motives and surface appearances are all suddenly laid out on the table. Within these clumsy forms and weak structures lies the roots of inadequacy and insecurity, both within us and within everyone who passes by. Consider this fair warning: you may not be ready to expose the thief in your sleeve.

Notes:

1. Lesley Johnstone, "Anachronistic Contemporary," in *Valérie Blass* (Montréal: Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, 2012), 114.
2. Carl Gustav Jung, *Four Archetypes: Mother, Rebirth, Spirit, Trickster*, trans. R.F.C. Hull (London: Routledge, 2006), 177.
3. Helen Lock, "Transformations of the Trickster," *Southern Cross Review*, no. 18 (2002), <http://www.southerncrossreview.org/18/trickster.htm> (accessed 27 April 2012).