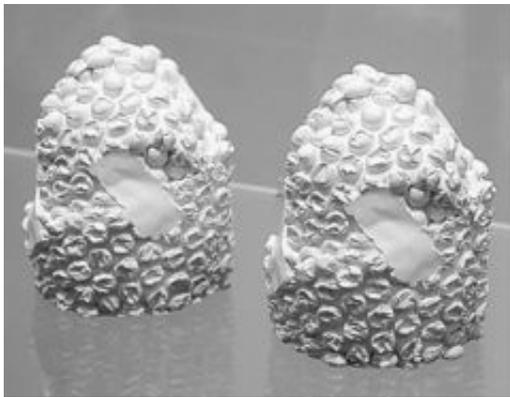


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Now that you point it out

Artist's delicate casts of packing peanuts and bubble wrap invite us to look at everyday objects in new ways

By: **Steven Leyden Cochrane**
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Double (detail)



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Bronzes, by Chloé Desjardins

For most of us, the sight of rising smoke means "fire" as certainly as an image of actual flames or the word "fire" itself. Smoke is a tangible byproduct of fire, a trace of it, or, to borrow an academic term, its "index."

In the same way, a footprint is an index of the foot that made it (and, by extension, the owner of said foot). More broadly, an index is anything that "indicates" or "points to" something other than itself -- it's why we point with our index fingers and why books have indexes to point us in the right direction.

The equivalent word in French, indice, has the complementary meaning of "evidence" or "clue," and all of these overlapping connotations are at play in *Indices*, Montreal sculptor Chloé Desjardins's exhibition at La Maison des artistes. Always the trace or trapping of something else, an index's meaning and value is usually tied to the thing it refers to. Desjardins offers them for consideration in their own right, however, and the results are as satisfying as they are unexpected.

Most of the works are reproductions, casts made in porcelain, plaster, bronze and wax. Such reproductions are "indexical" by their very nature, always referring back to some (usually absent) "original," a second-class status that Desjardins contradicts with rarified materials and exquisite craftsmanship but compounds with her choice of subject matter.

Instead of the traditional "fine art" subjects (portrait busts, horses, etc.) that most associate with bronzes and plaster

copies, she looks toward the stuff surrounding art objects. Literally: the show is all wads of bubble wrap, shipping boxes, disposable gloves, and Plexiglas display cubes.

Indices challenges our expectations on multiple levels. You rarely see foam packing peanuts put on display, much less cast in porcelain, but the humbleness of the source material is important. Desjardins shuts down any impulse to look past the objects themselves -- you'll never know what's written on the crumpled ball of bronze "paper" or what (if anything) is (or was) underneath the layers of plaster "bubble

wrap." In Nest of Windows, a Plexiglas box on top of a wooden pedestal only houses a series of five incrementally smaller Plexiglas boxes.

Evasiveness and frustration are central to Desjardins's practice -- she needles our curiosity; some people just can't control themselves around bubble wrap -- and the appearance of the work is austere, but it's engaging, even playful, in spite of this. The sculptures may keep us at arm's length (the temptation to pick them up to confirm their weight is hard to resist), but they also refer to familiar, relatable materials and objects, and Desjardins's quirky substitutions and deflections are undeniable playful.

Double is a long, suspended Plexiglas box containing several pairs of (seemingly) identical plaster casts. The duplicate broken bowls and wadded-up gloves invite scrutiny and comparison, compelling viewers to seek out the minute variations and artifacts of the casting process that make each "identical" object unique. It becomes a bit of a game, and it's fun; the rules are easy to pick up, and it gets you thinking (and looking) in different ways.

Desjardins's use of traces, copies, hints and clues to draw us out of the realm of ideas and signs and back to the matter at hand, the things in front of us, is surprising but effective. Indices subtly reinvigorates our experience of the world around us, gently pointing us in new directions.

Steven Leyden Cochrane is a Winnipeg-based visual artist, writer, and educator.

Art Review

Indices by Chloé Desjardins

La Maison des artists visuels francophones

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