**Joe Fafard: *Retailles***

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Internationally renowned, Joe Fafard is one of Canada’s most recognized and prolific artists. Whether in clay, bronze or steel sculpture or in drawing and printmaking, Fafard’s work is characterized by his connection to his rural Saskatchewan roots, his reverence for art history, his inquiry into form and his experimentation with three-dimensional illusion and perspective. The exhibition *Retailles* offers a glimpse into the evolution of Fafard’s inquiry into representational space and considers how drawing has been a sustained curiosity throughout his practice. *Retailles* focuses particularly on Fafard’s exploration of the laser-cut process and his creative renderings of its by-products in this collection of laser-cut and welded steel sculptures along with embossed and woodblock prints. French for scraps or trimmings that which is cut away, *Retailles* not only references the act of removing the negative from positive space to create form, but refers to the act of recycling these “out-cuts” to create new works.

Drawing features prominently in this exhibition, from the reduction of form to line in both three-dimensional and two-dimensional spaces to Matisse-like cut-outs and the creation of recycled, sculptural collage. Fafard’s curiosity with drawing goes hand-in-hand with his exploration of illusion and how sculpture occupies space. Works by Picasso, Anthony Caro and David Smith, as well as theories on illusion in pictorial representation have influenced Fafard’s inquiry. In 1980, he began exploring the possibilities of illusion in three-dimensions by collapsing, physically foreshortening and flattening his sculptural forms, thereby creating unexpected views of his works. This experimentation led him to further reducing his forms to contours and outlines, a play with the conventions of drawing within three-dimensional space. Fafard’s first line sculptures or ‘drawings in space’, dating from the early 1990s, were created in bronze through innovative casting methods. *Red Interio*r and *Gris* featured in the exhibition are two fine examples.

Fafard’s interest in new media led to his experimentation with laser cuts, allowing him to explore working with drawn or inscribed images in steel. Through this process, he began to see possibility in collecting and reworking the cut-out pieces of steel , what he refers to as the “out-cuts”. Welded together to create new original works, these recycled retailles have resulted in a range of possible forms, from three-dimensional, sculptural collage to wall-mounted steel works to prints. Works like *Le Coq* are made up of small, individual “collaged” steel pieces. Close inspection reveals not only retailles inscribed with markmaking but images embedded within the work’s structure.

Subtle, embedded images are revealed within a number of the steel sculptures. First created through welded out-cuts to be digitally scanned and then laser cut, these works introduce a more expressive and intuitive representation of Fafard’s subjects. Reminiscent of Matisse’s paper cut-outs and dancing figures, these works have fluid, exaggerated and almost lyrical forms. Moving in varying degrees towards abstraction, the anatomy of these forms is broken down into pattern and embedded symbolic imagery - a figure, church, tree, rooster, facial profile or cow. Repetition of these images throughout the works in the exhibition could suggest that Fafard is creating and communicating his own visual vocabulary or personal symbology. Perhaps in their subtlety, these works speak to the symbiotic history of humans and animals and the dependence of human existence on agriculture and nature.

Domesticated farm animals have been a significant focus of Fafard’s artistic inquiry. They are his means of connecting to his roots and expressing the concerns of his time. They are metaphors, political statements and objects of humour and delight. Providing the perfect architecture for his investigation into form, they are his means of exploring representational space in sculpture. Fafard’s laser cut and welded works, much like the earlier ‘drawings in space’, are made to be looked at and through. In the cut-outs and out-cuts, the viewer is made conscious of space, both within and surrounding these forms, and how the works engage in their surroundings. Always in search of the unexpected and best form, Fafard’s commitment to his inquiry and his ease in transitioning from one medium to another is truly inspiring.

Curated by Jennifer McRorie and Kim Houghtaling; Organized as a partnership project between the Moose Jaw Museum & Art Gallery, Art Gallery of Swift Current, Burnaby Art Gallery, Esplanade Arts & Heritage Centre, Strathcona County Art Gallery @501, Art Gallery of Grand Prairie and Yukon Arts Centre.

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