

Sophie Jodoin  
*close your eyes*





# Sophie Jodoin

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Montreal-based artist Sophie Jodoin creates works that are meticulously rendered and amassed through empirical collection; works that represent a consistent conceptual engagement visualized by a skilled hand. This critically adept process, functioning exclusively in monochromatic minimalism, has led some to argue that Jodoin perceives the world in black and white.<sup>1</sup> While the commentary is astute in its analysis it nonetheless reduces the work of Jodoin to that of a binary, and one that leaves many interpretations outside a greater spectrum of engagement. Consequently, there is a difficulty to her œuvre that defies a conclusive reading, and, as such, in lieu of a traditional text, what follows is a cerebral mapping that surveys the work of Jodoin in site-specific context. Rather than seeking out definitive explanations, this text seeks to echo the pathway of the exhibition itself:

Perhaps it is irony to say that everything is contemplation, even rocks and woods, animals and men, even Actæon and the stag, Narcissus and the flower, even our actions and our needs. But irony in turn is still a contemplation, nothing but a contemplation... Plotinus says that one determines one's own image, and appreciates it, only by turning back to contemplate that from which one comes.<sup>2</sup>

Two hands raised in the darkness greet us, beckoning entry while warning of hazard. Little pieces they are, wholes of something greater and shrouded in confusion. While familiar, they remain

hidden and reside near a sense of loss that is nonetheless comforting. Yet, upon entry there are hundreds of them, each requiring their own care, their own personal difference. Through careful attention an arrangement is discovered. Upon reflection, the preceding arrangement becomes broken, reformed, and constructed anew. This structure appears much more solid, better akin to take the weathered damage of burden.

***close your eyes***: it is a call to quiet and an imminent peril in waiting. To be both a whisper and a threat, one must convey power, authority, yet this power must be tempered — a subtle force. These *Small Dramas & Little Nothings* of experience, they find places to hide. Somewhere dark, our memories dress up as each other, mimicking and melding our pasts into a collective abstraction. Each recurrence is repetitious of its former, an assemblage that acknowledges its past and prophesizes the future. The kitten led along by hook long forgotten looks up, one among many messes, strewn about in an endless configuration of nightly traumas. It begs the question, what if we are not the sum total of ourselves but of all? One larger whole made up as individually interchangeable typecasts, cut and arranged to reveal new mysteries. What might we look like under this arrangement? What horrors might be gleaned from our fields of misery? Each one of us an anachronism, something Sylviane Agacinski sees as “a relic, a paradoxical holdover, displaced, chronologically strange,”<sup>3</sup> and therefore forever recognizable and unknown. Repeated, yet different and still nonetheless out of place from its



surroundings. To absolve oneself from the burden of individuality and thus enter ubiquity, it would be necessary to remove all recognizable traits. Those that remained, our humanity, are they forgiven? Or does it require violence... empty shots into a crowd of confused onlookers.

What I describe here is evocative of the aesthetics of anarchy, which Nina Gurianova sees as "neither order nor chaos."<sup>4</sup> Containing elements of both, it is defined as an action of permanent strife that is "produced between the constructing and deconstructing of origins."<sup>5</sup> As such, anarchy is the next step after chaos and order.<sup>6</sup> It reveals itself in the burned out houses of *Charred*. They are something one might expect in a state of permanent strife, save for the sculpted chaos that permeates their well-ordered compositions, each one with its own internal logic. The charred remnants of home posit a point of nothingness, which is both a return to and step away from our origins — we romanticize what is lost while embracing the sublime possibilities of the new and unknown. This point, a kind of nothingness, realizes the permanent opposition of real and ideal. They resonate with the irreconcilable prospect of their unity, where dialogic interplay assures mutual destruction. In the aftermath, once emptied of meaning, a creative nothing will remain, set to be filled with fresh utterances, formations and assumptions — the daily weight of memory.<sup>7</sup>

In the different and repetitive quotidian existence, the act of wandering reveals the ephemeral monumentality of the found object. Walk any street to stumble upon keepsakes, garbage, and the lost memorabilia of generations past. While many will deposit the detritus, others glean the streets to find traces, pieces of life that can be arranged, assembled and ordered. Confronting one such assemblage, the relics of the past displayed here on tables are renewed as markers of the present, vacated of subjectivity and born-again as aesthetic. These repetitive signifiers that make up our daily whole, once they are lost, who listens? Does it follow that through this loss we become nothing once again? The reduction of the personal to that of the peripheral, where the entirety of our being might be held in a single-chip device easily replaced yet loaded to capacity by that which animates us, is effortlessly lost among the currents of digital bandwidth. Here and now, there is much mystery to the object without content. It can be found folded, dirty, perhaps a fraction of its former self. The objective

social life of things sees its death in the digital era as a series of captured moments removed of their physicality. The space of wandering is a lonely place. In a world of assurances and surely timed algorithms, many cease contemplation. Countless turn their backs on the real and embrace in *Vigil* the ideal as if it could exist without its antithesis.

*close your eyes* occupies momentary form, where temporary structures are built up from individual parts. In this way, questions of formalism, abstraction, weigh heavy on a narrative defined by its totality, and consequently much greater than the sum of its parts. Each mark, each piece, they reveal the methodical nature at which a determined interrogation summons the specters of the mind. What appears absent, fading into the white consumes its environment, evolving until it alone is visible and its origins erased. The pathway of the exhibition echoes the passages of life, one may see many strange things only to be reminded of a simple truth: that one's home is never home. It is to be remade slowly and with patience, collecting the little things that make us who we are, only to be left in isolation, where the faceless guard our keepsakes and leave us to revel in reflection.

## Michael Rattray

1. Robert Enright, "Sophie Jodoin's War Series – Drawing on the Poetics of Deflection," *Sophie Jodoin: War Series* (Montreal: Battat Contemporary, 2009) 11
2. Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994) 75
3. Sylviane Agacinski, *Time Passing: Modernity and Nostalgia*, trans. Jody Gladding, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003) 108
4. Nina Gurianova, *The Aesthetics of Anarchy: Art and Ideology in the Early Russian Avant-Garde*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012) 24
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid. 23
7. The term creative nothing is attributable to Max Stirner (1806-1856), who offers: "I am not nothing in the sense of emptiness, but I am the creative nothing, the nothing out of which I myself as creator create everything." See Max Stirner, *The Ego and its Own: The Case of the Individual Against Authority*, trans. Steven T. Byington, (New York: Dover, 2005/1973) 5

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IMAGES

Cover: *Remnant 2*, detail, 2011, black gesso on magazine page, 20 × 15.5cm

Overleaf: From the series *Small Dramas & Little Nothings*, 2008-,

conté and collage on mylar, 24 × 19 cm

Interior Spread: *Vigil 1* (large), detail, 2012, pastel and charcoal on coventry

rag vellum paper, 153 × 112cm

**Sophie Jodoin** is a Montreal-based artist who exhibits internationally. Her practice rests on a commitment to drawing as a discipline for exploring engaged content and includes collage, painting, light-boxes, objects and video. Her work is found in numerous private, corporate, and public collections. She studied Visual Arts at Concordia University. Recent exhibits include Volta NY, Musée d'art de Joliette, Museum London, Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, Galerie Bertrand Grimont (Paris). She is represented by Newzones (Calgary) and Battat Contemporary (Montreal).

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**Michael Rattray** is a Montréal based academic and artist. Currently, he is a Ph.D. Candidate in Art History and part-time faculty through the Department of Art History at Concordia University. His research interests include Contemporary Art, Globalization and Transnational Studies, Anarchist Studies, Postanarchist Theory, and Exhibition Practices. His dissertation project explores how anarchist theory is relevant to the global arts paradigm. Under the pseudonym steven somersbee, he produces new-formal objects that have been exhibited within Canada. As Michael Rattray, his writings on contemporary art and theory have been published internationally in a variety of media.

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