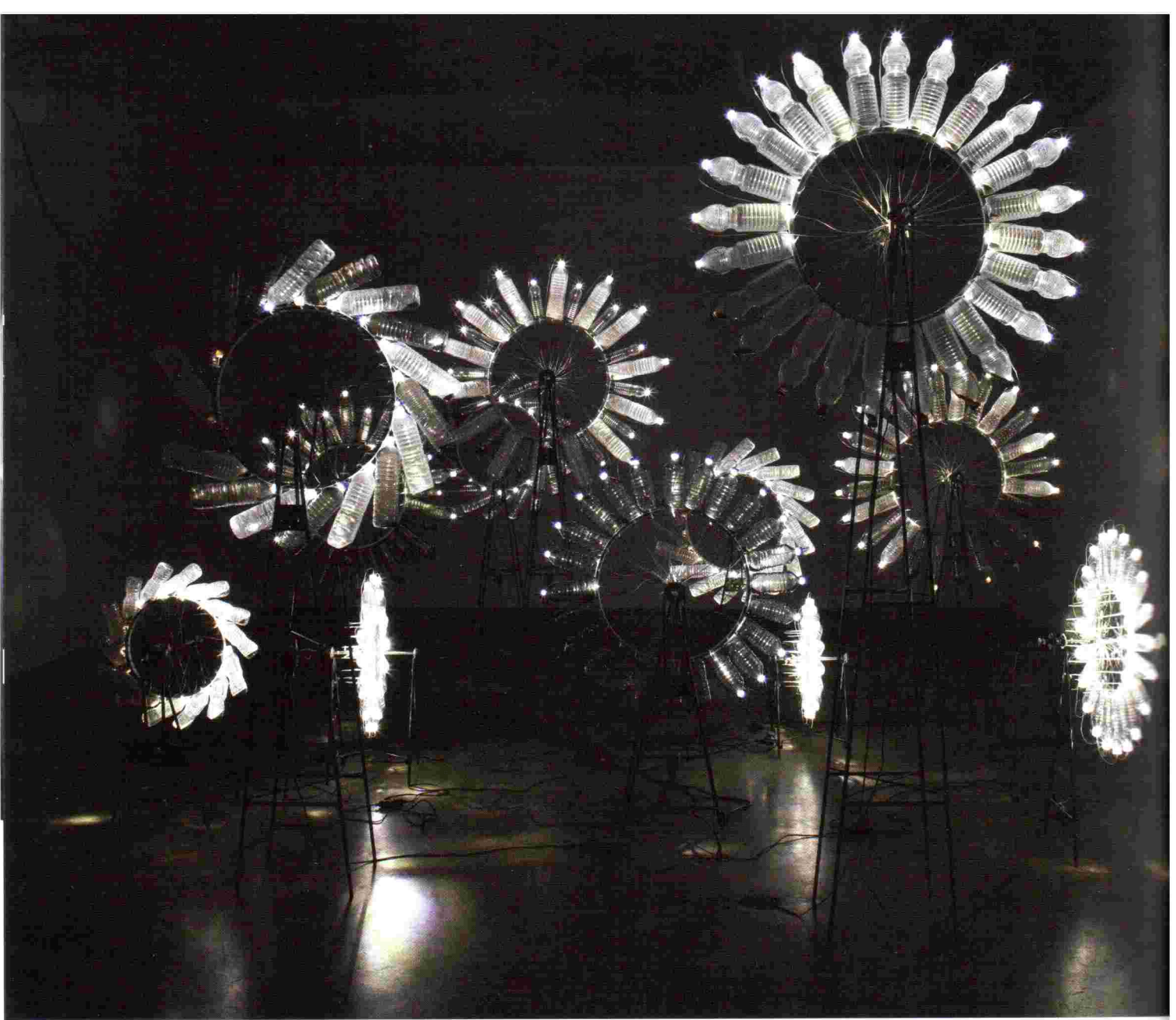


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Diane Landry

**The Clutter  
of All Things**



BY GIL MCELROY

The world knows many rhythms. From the Earth's orbit around the sun, which gives us the cycle of seasons, to the planet's rotation, which creates the periodicity of day and night, down to the very beating of our hearts and the systolic and diastolic movements of blood through our bodies, existence is all about the cadences of things.

Diane Landry's work pulses with the aesthetic heartbeat of existence. Over the last 20 years, she has rendered the familiar patterns of periodicity in a variety of fresh forms, the best of which incorporate the natural cadences of motion and light as well as sound. A Canadian artist who did her post-graduate work at Stanford University and who has exhibited internationally, Landry recently followed "The Defibrillators,"

Opposite: *Knight of Infinite Resignation*, 2009. Sound installation with automation, approximately 19 x 14 x 10 ft. Above: Installation view of "The Defibrillators" at the Art Gallery of Hamilton, 2011.

a Canadian touring retrospective of sculptural installations from the last two decades, with a new performance work at Le Printemps des Poètes in Quebec.

"[S]o much depends/upon/a red wheel/barrow," wrote the poet/physician William Carlos Williams. In Landry's work, much depends on the meanings and roles assigned to human artifacts. Her installations are decidedly rooted in the fecund world of the everyday and dependent on the objects that have come to shape that world. An early work—*19 gisants* (1993)—featured coffee pots collected from town halls in the province of Quebec (where she was born and continues to live). Landry installed the coffee pots high along the walls, placing them in front of photographic transparencies depicting the rivers that run through the towns in question; she then illuminated each pair with a small lamp that cast intermingled shadows of both pot and image on the wall behind.

The careful use of lighting and shadow continues to figure in Landry's more recent installations in which motion, sound, and

rhythm compound the aesthetic issues central to her work. A piece included in "The Defibrillators" exemplifies this fecund mixture of things. *Flying School* (2000) is largely composed of umbrellas, artifacts that Landry has previously employed as static sculptural elements. But umbrellas are actively utilitarian devices, with an incorporated rhythm (opening and closing) central to their function. *Flying School* makes use of that purposefulness by attaching the umbrellas to electric motors. Illuminated from below, each umbrella—of singularly colorful fabric and pattern—casts a shadow onto the ceiling above as it slowly spreads open and then closes again in a computer-controlled sequence. A sound element features here as well. Small, accordion-like squeezeboxes are mounted on what would be the terminal ends of the handles, and each one opens and closes in accord with the umbrella, emitting a sound—a kind of breathing—particular to its artifact.

The pattern of systole and diastole—without accompanying sound—is central



*Flying School*, 2000. Umbrellas, harmonicas, motors, steel, cardboard, halogen lighting, MIDI controller, and computer, installation view.

to the series “The Blue Decline” (2002) in which shadows of everyday objects bloom and decay on the wall. In *Mandala Perrier*, for instance, the image of a disk consisting of empty green glass Perrier bottles symmetrically interspaced with clear plastic water bottles is projected onto a wall by a small halogen bulb fixed to a motorized arm that moves it closer to and then back away from the disk. The mandala-like image consequently swells, then ebbs away as the

motorized light progresses through its cycle. In another work from the series, *Mandala Eska*, Landry uses an ordinary plastic laundry basket to project a feathery, symmetrical bloom of light and shadow.

Cinema long ago established 24 frames per second as the filmic standard—fast enough for individual frames to go undetected by the eye, slow enough not to consume vast amounts of footage. Landry explores the roots of this standard in /

*can't find my watch, yet it hasn't flown away* (2006), a work built on the domestic salad spinner. Six wall-mounted spinners are each powered by separate electric motors and illuminated from within, all of them hooked up to individual timers. A small slit provides a viewing aperture to witness the interior goings-on. Landry has created a personal version of the early cinematic device known as the zoetrope. The revolving salad spinners (each moving at its own rate) contain photographs of her hands responding to an apple on a table; we watch a repeating loop of motion that doesn't even attempt to approach the undetectability of conventional cinema. Here, technology does not become invisible; nor does the continuity of the story displace the discrete rhythms of the filmic apparatus.

With *Madonnas* (2008), Landry pushes her exploration of technological rhythms to an absurd extreme by employing a top-loading washing machine to generate the aesthetic matrix. Attached to the top of the agitator is a disk of 12 images of the same woman in different positions. Above each disk, a 12-sided pyramidal mirror reflects the images. When the work is activated by the presence of a viewer, the agitator begins its fiercely utilitarian work, causing the mirrors to alternately reflect an image from each sequence of photographs. What we see in the end, amid all the frenetic and noisy activity, is the rhythm of a woman nodding her head up and down. A second version of this work employed two washing machines to create a rhythmic alteration between two women.

The bed—arguably the most intimate artifact in the domestic realm—has also been subjected to Landry's aesthetic scrutiny. Such works are rooted in a recognition that beds are not the quiescent and calming things portrayed in advertising; instead, they are active devices that respond to our nocturnal rhythms and the stresses

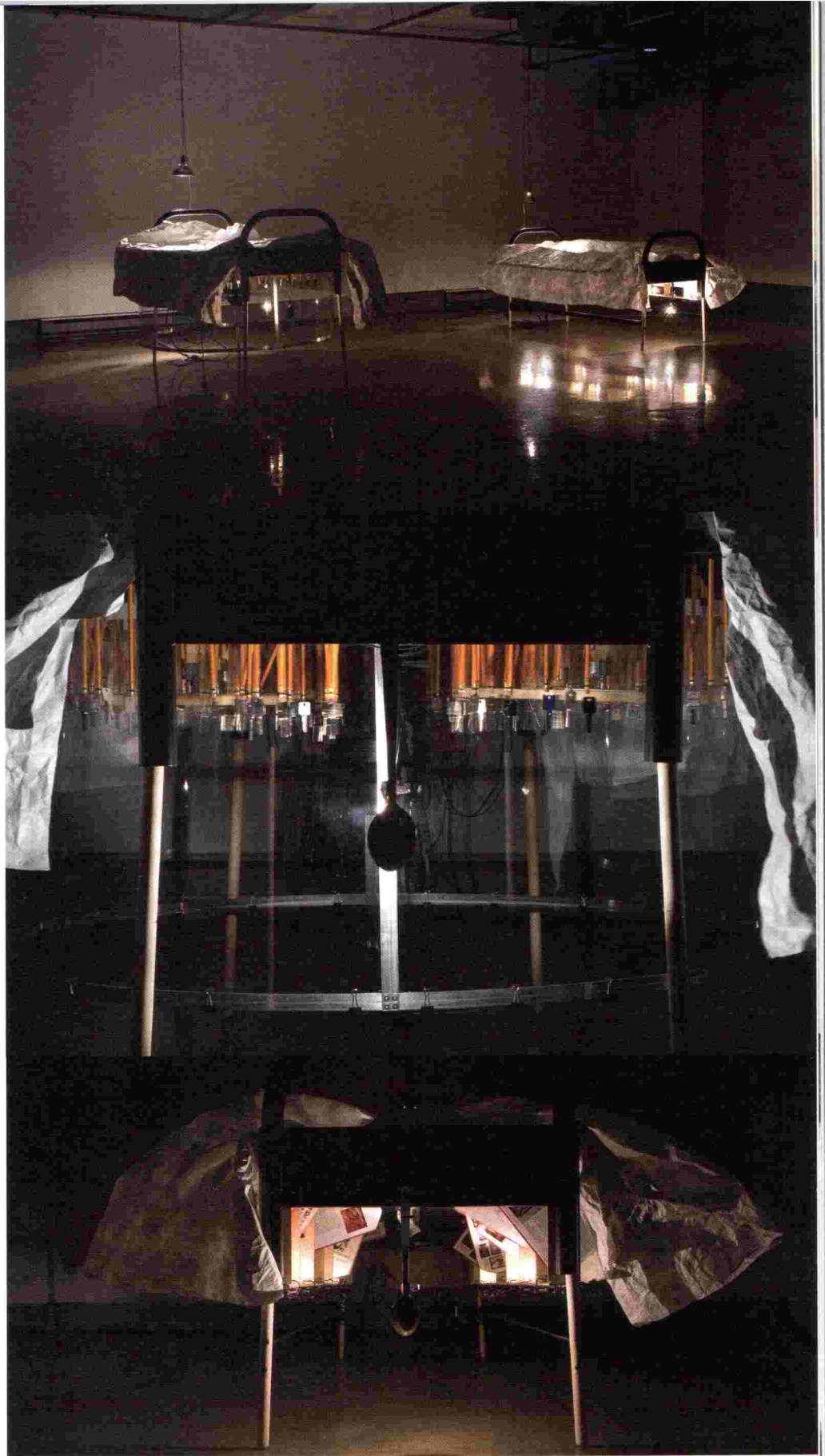


*I can't find my watch, yet it hasn't flown away* (detail), 2006. 6 salad spinners, motion sensors, print photos, lights, and hardware, 36 x 36 x 25 cm.

and strains we carry over from our diurnal lives. *The Magic Shield* (2009), Landry's off-site installation for Toronto's Koffler Gallery, presented two beds in a moody installation. Little more than narrow, old-fashioned iron frame cots (not very reassuring things to begin with), these beds were also stripped of the mattresses that promise physical comfort and from which we extract some degree of psychological solace. Their thin paper covers only meagerly suggested the warming consolation of a blanket or comforter, aesthetically proffering anything but solace—a sense suggested by more than mere appearance.

The installation was restless, even noisy, with the beds seemingly embroiled in interminable motion, as if Landry had somehow tapped into a latent reservoir of restlessness left over from long-absent bodies. They squirmed, they wriggled. The paper sheets moved and distended, rising and falling as though something were indeed beneath them. But metaphor matters here; like Dorothy in Oz, we must pay attention to the man behind the curtain. Beneath the surface of things, there is a complex world of technology and aesthetic intent hiding behind a deceptively make-do, slap-dash quality. And so, beneath one bed, electric motors rotated an axle attached to cams made from encyclopedia covers, driving them up against the paper covering and making it rhythmically rise and fall in sync with small halogen lights. Under the adjacent bed, electric motors drove wooden slats around in a circle so that they slapped against dozens of house keys hanging from the ends of pencils. Further down, a large ceiling fan shook the bed like one of Landry's washing machines, pulling at and distending the paper cover with its powerful downdraft. There was turbulence aplenty here, an endemic disease from which there was no apparent relief save exiting the windowless, concrete space.

Even when these marvelous elements produce discomfort, Landry's work makes us linger, watching for how she sets the animate pulse of existence to coursing through the inanimate, worldly clutter of things.



Top and details: *The Magic Shield*, 2009. Futon frames, motors, selected objects, aluminum, wood, halogen lamp, MIDI controller, and computer, installation view.

IVAR BIRLET

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