



MONTREAL

SUSANNAH WESLEY

COLLEEN HESLIN AND JEN AITKEN AT BATTAT CONTEMPORARY

February 25, 2014

Like 19

I saw the exhibition of **Colleen Heslin** and **Jen Aitken**'s work at **Battat Contemporary** the day after returning from a trip to Vancouver where I spent the better part of a week doing site visits of Brutalist housing projects and squares, while also walking around the UBC campus. Some sites remained confidently monolithic and up-kept, while others had crumbled, grown over with moss, and been patched together with dissimilar sheaths of cement and tarps.



Colleen Heslin and Jen Aitken, installation view

Both of these artists' works are also comprised of monochromatic blocks of grey with small patches of similar colour. Upon entering the gallery you could almost mistake the sculptural and wall work as being by the same artist. On closer inspection it quickly emerges that Heslin's paintings depict a near opposite of Aitken's architectural concrete shapes and surfaces: they instead comprise the traces of wrinkled, stitched, and dyed patches of fabric. The subtle but definite switch in perception is a nice little revelation and touched on what I had witnessed in Vancouver (coincidentally, both artists completed their BFAs at Emily Carr University). The shift from two-dimensional layered drawings and shapes to three-dimensional concrete objects that then collapse into a near two-dimensional patchwork is evocative of an archeological site. Conversely, the paintings also reminded me of what a strong, structural edifice the crafting of fabric can provide.

Even though the artists are both MFA candidates (at University of Guelph and Concordia respectively), they are not complete unknowns. Heslin recently won the **2013 RBC Canadian Painting Competition**. Her work in this exhibition is reminiscent of Tauba Auerbach's painting, and you can't help but think she has been an influence. Aitken's work also falls into a certain vogue, which includes artists such as Thea Djordjadze, for example. The exhibition itself, also well paired and constructed, is another example of Battat Contemporary director **Daisy Desrosier**'s delicate and focused eye.

Montrealers can look forward to a solo exhibition of Heslin's work at **Galerie Laroche/Joncas** beginning March 8 and should also check out *I think of you*, a group exhibition at Battat (which for the past few years has been rolling out, under the radar, some of the strongest programming amongst local commercial galleries), opening March 13th.

Battat Contemporary: http://www.battatcontemporary.com/en/index_en/

Colleen Heslin and Jen Aitken continues until March 8.

Susannah Wesley is an artist and curator living in Montreal. She has been a member of the collaborative duo Leisure since 2004 and from 1997-2000 was part of the notorious British art collective the Leeds 13. Formerly Director at Battat Contemporary in Montreal, she holds an MFA from the Glasgow School of Art and an MA in Art History from Concordia University. She is Akimblog's new Montreal correspondent and can be followed [@susannahwesley1](#) on Twitter.

Comments (newest first) [+click to add comment](#)