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Novel methods win Karsh Award showcases

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Viewers examine the photographs from 2014 Karsh Award winner Chantal Gervais at Karsh-Masson Gallery in Ottawa city hall.

The photograph, *Vitruvian Me* by local artist Chantal Gervais is a familiar sight with art lovers. It features a naked Gervais in two superimposed positions and with her arms and legs wide apart, much like the famous *Vitruvian Man* by Leonardo da Vinci. The twist? Gervais' version was created by piecing numerous scanned images of her body together, against a dark background.

"I put masking tape on the scanner, made sure I grabbed my body every four by four inches and kept taking the images until they were precisely conjoined together," she says of the photograph.

This experimentation with the scanner started when Gervais began working with medical images and technology. Her experience with magnetic resonance imaging in particular was a source of inspiration. "I really started to think about the interesting connection between me and the image being captured . . . the machine would take slice by slice of my body but I could not physically feel anything," she recalls.

It is this exploration of different photographic mediums that caught the eye of 2014 Karsh Award jury members, Raymond Aubin, Rosalie Favell and Jonathan Shaughnessy. In a jury statement, they praised Gervais for her willingness to use non-traditional instruments like the flatbed scanner and MRI in her work.

“I haven’t seen anyone else do this type of exploration, so she’s pushing the limits that have been established,” says Favell, the 2012 Karsh Award winner.

Gervais was presented with the 2014 Karsh Award at an opening ceremony held on Sept. 12 at the Karsh-Masson Gallery.

The award is presented to an established local artist every two years for “outstanding work in a photo-based medium.”

It honours the artistic legacy of Ottawa photographers, Yousuf and Malak Karsh and offers an opportunity for winners to display their work in an exhibition at the city hall gallery.

A walk through Gervais’ collection at the gallery quickly reveals her deep examination of the human body and its relationship with technology.

An example is “Autoportrait #1 à partir d’IRM (Self-portrait #1 from MRI) from the series Les maux non dits (The Body Ineffable), which shows an MRI of Gervais’s body.

She combined the different layers of organs to “humanize and personalize these images” and links them to ideas of “suffering and death” as a description points out.

But beyond the human body, Gervais also pushes viewers to reflect upon the emotional impact of human existence. Her series of photographs, Portrait de mon père Paul (Portrait of my father Paul) shows various snapshots of her late father’s garage. These photographs display labeled drawers and an impressive array of tools organized according to their function.

It is through this series that Gervais explores how the things one leaves behind can mark a person’s existence.

Gervais’ exhibition runs until Oct. 19. She will be speaking about her work on Oct. 5 at 2 p.m.. The Karsh-Masson Gallery is open daily from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m.

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