

Lyn Carter - *11th Line (11e Rang)*
By Johanne Tremblay (translated by Peter Legris)

Until May 6th (2018), Le Musée d'art de Joliette (MAJ) hosted a travelling exhibition of works by the Canadian artist Lyn Carter organized by the Textile Museum of Canada (TMC). Entitled *11th Line*, echoing the country road where Lyn Carter resides and works, the exhibition allowed viewers to see a corpus of sculptures sewn by the artist, as well as her drawings on paper, and her digital prints on industrial textiles.

For close to thirty years, Carter has associated art and craft, and built imaginative territories at the junction of the familiar, the abstract, and the enigmatic. With *11th Line*, she establishes a dialogue between her contemporary production and the collections of the TMC from where she selected a series of textiles containing complex spatial organizations of lines, bands, and stripes. Sarah Quinton, TMC Chief Curator, points out that the meanders of rural roads, the indistinct edges of tracts of land, as well as concession roads (ubiquitous in the rural landscape), were a source of inspiration for the artist.

At the MAJ, *11th Line* was deployed in a large rectangular gallery (a neutral and minimal space) that allowed a new configuration for this body of work previously seen in more constrained spaces. The experience for viewers became more architectural in its emphasis than with previous installations anchored in the discovery of objects. Lines thin or thick, drawn in ink or charcoal, sometimes perfectly controlled, sometimes overflowing and bleeding, punctuated a space that could be apprehended almost in a single view. Everything seemed straightforward, even obvious, at first glance. Here we understood that the artist was playing with the geometry of the rural landscape, and where the sobriety of the installation only intensified the evocative force of her exhibition.

Carter invokes the stripe as a fundamental element of textile design, as well as a rhythmic pattern that she discerns in landscapes, both natural and built. Her works suggest either singly, or all at once, the horizon, vernacular architecture, topographical plans and surveys, as well as various physical phenomena of space, movement and visual perception. The parallel lines and alternating black and white surfaces of her works create optical effects that seem to exaggerate one's apparent distance from the exhibited elements.

Carter's sculptural forms are varied in their size and placement; some works are suspended from the ceiling, while others are mounted on the wall or positioned on the floor. The works are given ample space, but with clear formal associations between them. These seemingly anonymous volumes, without doorways or edges, allow the spectator to compare the three-dimensional version of an object with its two-dimensional counterpart (carefully framed) upon the wall - to see a detail or even the "plan" that allowed construction of the "form." The works are all surface, without being smooth; they are fleeting without apparent weight. The textile coverings of the works enclose spaces that are seemingly personal, but ones the viewer cannot enter. These enclosures may evoke a disappearance, but also a strategy to conserve the memory of place.

In addition to providing context for the exhibition, the title contains within itself a number of suggestive associations. The number 11, most obviously a symbol composed from two parallel lines, is also used to represent a value, a scale, and a position within a series. The "ligne" (or line) is also an old unit of measure, and exactly one twelfth of the "pouce" (or inch). The French translation of the word "line" as "rang" (in the exhibition title) may also denote a series of elements placed in a line, a way of dividing rural properties, as well as the country road that connects all dwellings along the same axis. In townships (especially in Quebec), the front of a "rang" is the dividing line that separates the populated area of the town from the river on which it is built, or the line that separates neighbouring townships. Whether obvious or discovered through play, all these associations become inevitably intertwined through the process of cutting-out, positioning, and sequencing.

In these agricultural zones, where landscapes are determined by topography and the course of water, nature is often regarded as an enormous blank page subject to the redrawing of tooled human labour. Furrows cut by tractors equipped with GPS systems run alongside those traced using traditional farming methods. Roads or paths following straight lines must adapt to the presence of hills, rivers, and lakes. These are the conditions we consider while viewing Carter's textiles draped over the gallery floor, their surfaces folded as though they followed existing landforms and clung tightly to them. Within the exhibition space the directional lines of Carter's works appear to continue along the floor, as though the edges of the textiles remained joined to their native ground like pieces of clothing.

The design of the installation, realized by both the curator and the artist, echoes the characteristic features of rural architecture in Eastern Canada. These are typically constructions with small footprints, individual houses and secondary buildings with recognizable forms. There are also barns with their large silhouettes and tall silos that overshadow the smaller houses and become landmarks. The building limits, defined by the edges of lots, create rhythmic intervals that punctuate both the use of land and the experience of viewers.

In the same way that local know-how and traditional building types reinforce the identity and the image of the rural milieu, Carter's work fosters a connection with the landscape she inhabits through her association of craft, manual labour, as well as mechanical and digital technology. *11th Line* becomes a reflection upon the way we construct our identities through the landscapes that we make, the territories that we virtually wear like clothing. This may be why we speak of a "tissu rural" or a "fabrique du paysage," notions that Carter seems to employ almost literally in these works.

As a creation combining nature and the imprint of the human being, landscapes, especially rural landscapes, express the long and intimate relationship of peoples with their environment, and allude to the dynamic interaction of concrete, abstract, physical, and cultural elements. *11th Line* reminds us that landscape, whether real or imagined by the artist, constitutes not an object, or a collection of objects, but a setting whose character results from these interactions.

Thus, this research into one of the most ordinary motifs in the textile universe allows a reflection (still highly relevant) as to what constitutes rurality, and the unique blend of the soft and the rough, of the artisanal and the industrial, and of stability and movement that characterize the rural milieu. This assemblage blurs the boundaries between nature and culture, between the past and the future, between the already there and the built, a milieu that the artist has invited us to consider by reducing it to its smallest expression: the line and the space the line cuts out, and the space the artist creates by doing so.

Doctor in Museology, Mediation and Heritage, Johanne Tremblay first acquired a foundation in Human Sciences at York University. After a Master of Arts degree at the University of Quebec in Montreal, focused on the reception of artworks and issues concerning the organizations in which she works, she became interested in the institutional and political factors fostering the creation and dissemination of the arts, and entered the HEC where she completed a DESS in management. Her PhD, done in France, complemented her studies by integrating the question of heritage. She presently works as a consultant in art and cultural heritage.