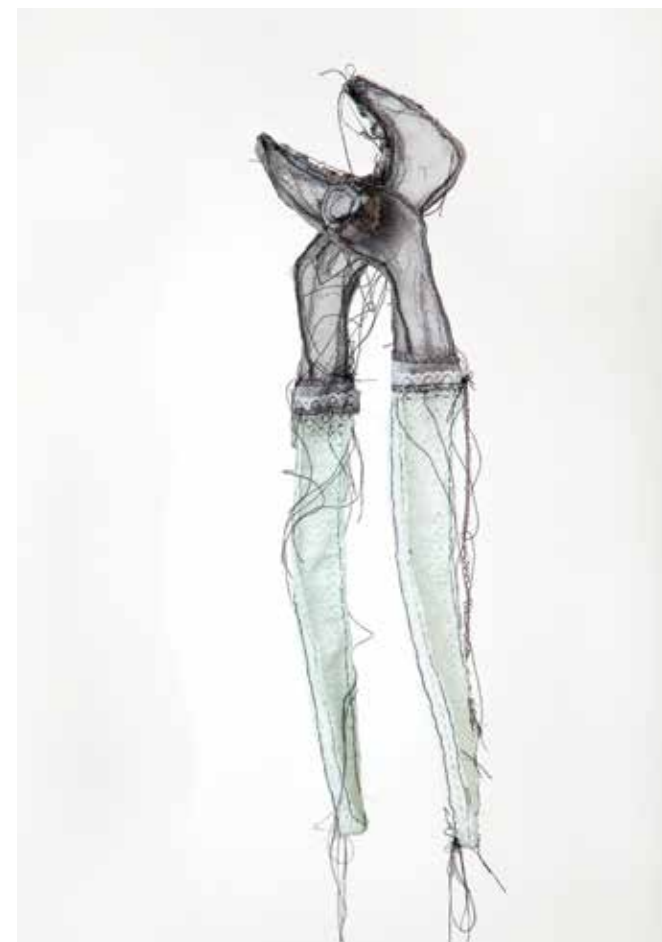


JANNICK DESLAURIERS : *CHANTIER*

The Handyman's Hades

Text by Edwin Janzen

A mitre saw, a hammer drill. Scaffolding. Small, everyday useful objects like an extension cord, a screwdriver and a wheelbarrow. Jannick Deslauriers' humble little construction site is much like any you might encounter in urban and suburban yards across North America this summer, as home handymen everywhere set about to improve their little patches of paradise: a new deck, perhaps. Replacing a section of old fence. Fixing the roof.



But something is afoot. In Deslauriers' worksite, the implements appear to have slid into a shadow-world, a handyman's Hades in which banal, once-reliable items have become separated from their former purposes. Fabricated from lace and tulle, they seem fragile and diaphanous—ghostly, solemn presences. The visitor is disconcerted, intuitively aware that the ordinary has been upended, that whoever was operating these tools will probably not be returning.

One of the twentieth century's most enduring legacies is how assured we have become in our proximity to industry. The Bauhaus-led merger of form and function no longer provokes even a raised eyelash. Today, building with concrete is almost a ceramic art, exposed cables, ducts and girders function as decor, and industrial lightbulbs in little safety cages are found not in factories but in the hippest cafes.

The local Rona or Canadian Tire store, therefore, has become a zone saturated with aesthetic deployments: rubberized blacks, Dewalt yellows and Black & Decker oranges, the volatile compound aroma of pressure-treated lumber, whole walls of steel nuts, bolts and screw-nails apportioned in pouches in amounts sufficiently heavy to be held in the hand with satisfaction. It is a gendered aesthetic world of primary colours, in which confident white men display their toolbelts, threatening to enact virtuoso performances of technical know-how.

Deslauriers' construction site upends these masculinist relations, and her tools and implements, though fragile, cobwebby ghosts, have yet replaced their former human "masters" as the worksite's chief actors. Indeed, even as they are indistinct, half-seen, they evince a livelihood, a wholeness all their own, which their real-world counterparts never attained. In a quotidian spin on *I, Robot*, Asimov's dystopian fantasy, the implements in Deslauriers' worksite seem to assume their own character, defined, perhaps, in a refusal to participate. The sound-engineered hammer drill forbears to speak. The sturdy wheelbarrow has cast off its burdens in favour of a more spiritual life of prayer and contemplation. And the scaffolding, glancing in the mirror, admires its own geometries and decides it likes itself just the way it is.

