



LEFT CENTRE: *Volvox #3*, 18" x 18" x 1-1/4"; *Volvox Study*, 8" x 8" x 1", steel and mixed media.
LEFT: *Diagram B*, 29" x 25" x 1-1/4", steel and mixed media.

BIOLOGY MEETS FINE ART IN THE STRIKING AND SENSUAL SCULPTURES OF LONDON-BASED CANADIAN MARIANNE LOVINK.

BY BETTY ANN JORDAN



ABOVE: *Morph Stack Study #1-5*, sizes vary, styrene and wire.

Revealing her fondness for little-celebrated natural phenomena, Canadian artist Marianne Lovink's sculptures interpret life-forms from the exotic flora and fauna still being discovered in the hidden recesses of the world's oceans to the fossilized primeval creatures found in B.C.'s Burgess Shale fossil bed. She is equally fascinated by molecular biology and the mysterious forms of human and plant cells. There's captivating mystery in the things we can't readily see, she explains, adding that her pieces are "a cross-fertilization of all these influences, creating a new specimen, something familiar but not completely knowable." Currently living in England, where she maintains a studio in West London, she makes frequent visits to the city's science museums. Her sketches of specimens on display in the Marine Invertebrates gallery at London's Natural History Museum are an important source of her imagery, as are microscopy picture banks. "I like turning fact into fiction, creating hybrid forms based partly in reality and partly in imagination," she says.

STYLE: Fluid and multifaceted, Lovink's stylized pieces (both suspended and wall-mounted) incorporate materials such as hand-carved wood, laser-cut aluminum and plastic. The result is a range of strikingly original sculptures that alternate between soft and hard, opaque and translucent, organic and industrial. Earlier suspended works resembling plant and marine forms arranged like imaginary fossil beds were followed by more recent low-relief, hand-welded steel sculptures, which cast exquisite "shadow drawings" on nearby walls. And though she is always looking for new fabrication techniques and media, she has made particularly effective use of thermoplastic, which is employed by the medical industry to make orthopedic splints. Lovink first encountered the material while working in film and theatre production in Toronto, where she used it to create props, masks, prostheses and special effects.

BACKGROUND: Born in Durham, N.C., to a British mother and Dutch



TOP: *Schemata #12*, 35" x 12" x 10", polymer-coated paper, wire, pigment.
ABOVE: *Morph Stack Series #9*, 33" x 12" x 12", aluminum, wire.

“*I like turning fact into fiction, creating hybrid forms based partly in reality and partly in imagination*”

academic father, Lovink spent her high school years in Ottawa and obtained a BFA from Queen’s University in Kingston, Ont. As a student there, she had a creative epiphany while sculpting a portrait head in clay. To capture the contours of the model’s skull, she asked him if she could run her hands over his head. “I had an instant understanding and innate sense for the volumes and could recreate them with a tactile memory,” she recalls. “It was natural, comfortable and inherent.” To earn money after graduation, Lovink worked for three years at a Toronto public relations firm, but remained committed to becoming a full-time artist. In 1991, she quit the PR post to devote herself to her sculpture, supplementing her income between sales with jobs such as fabricating props for a special effects company catering to film and theatre clients. Several years ago, Lovink relocated to London with her British husband, Julian Siggers, a former Royal Ontario Museum archaeologist whom she met when he was the host of Discovery Channel Canada’s show *Hidden Treasures*.

BIG BREAK: The turning point for Lovink’s artistic career was her critically acclaimed solo exhibition at the Art Gallery of Mississauga (AGM) outside Toronto in 2000. To meet the challenges presented by the large spaces at her disposal, she created a series of big-scale biomorphic pieces on the gallery walls. With their implicit connection to living organisms, not all of them benign, the works were equal parts sensual and unsettling — and extremely well received.

WHY IT’S HOT: Lovink’s craftsmanship and use of unexpected materials is never less than ingenious. Fans of her gorgeous and sophisticated biomorphic work, including former AGM curator Stuart Reid, also admire the profound way she connects with nature. “Lovink has produced unsettling forms that visually reference organisms and the human body,” Reid, now director/curator of the Tom Thomson Memorial Art Gallery, has written. “While her sculptures seemingly depict interior structures and patterns, the objects themselves manifest in an elegant, stylized exterior that speaks much more about our consumer culture than biology. In tandem with an underlying critique of the commodification of the decorative, Lovink’s installations often conjure great spectacle from very spare elements.” Late last year, her international profile received a major boost with showings at important art fairs including Scope London, Scope Miami and the Palmbeach³ Contemporary. Her hanging sculptures are also in the permanent collection of Toronto’s ultrahip Drake Hotel.

BUDGET: \$800 to \$5,000 (for individual pieces)

WHERE TO GET IT: The Katharine Mulherin Contemporary Art Projects gallery in Toronto will host a commercial exhibition of Lovink’s sculptures this fall. In Vancouver, recent works can be obtained through the Jennifer Kostuik Gallery. Lovink’s latest work can also be viewed at www.mariannelovink.com.

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