

## Amélie Proulx, Barbara Sutherland and ideas of translation

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The impulse towards translation begins from the sense of something unavailable or not yet available. Artists tend to believe that this is a temporary condition. If not for language's entirely systemic nature, the unraveling, the stirring of meanings out of the untranslated would be impossible. Some image of equivalencies – like the two halves of a metaphor – is suggested here, as if what is hidden and what is revealed are the same things. But the act of translation changes everything.

**Knotshells** is a series of fired but unglazed porcelain molds, whose interiors are impossibly delicate and fossilized webs, the burnt out remains of woven and knitted cloth. Amélie Proulx made the first of these molds by first knotting a remnant of cloth, over and over, then dipping it, over and over, in thin porcelain slip until the cloth fibres were deeply saturated, and the outer shell was built up. She cut each mold in half and fired it to reveal “the imprinted knots” on the porcelain shells.

*That Proulx refers to the remains of the burnt out cloth as “prints” speaks not only of her deep background in printmaking, but also of her tendency to render one material in terms of another.*

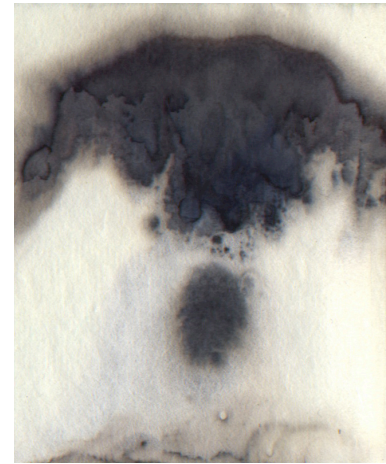
The act of translation is her conceptual template, which, at this point in Proulx's translanguistic existence, comes so naturally that it is nearly unconscious.

As always, when we translate, part of what is innate clings to and disappears into the thing we are looking at – like Wallace Stevens looking at a mountain, and finding a poem in its place, the mountain itself forever lost to him (The Poem That Took the Place of a Mountain). Where recollection is involved, the memory image is like the enshrouded mirror of mourning, no longer a mirror.

**aliquot** is an arrangement of six standing metal structures, each supporting a cushion of seven thick strips of natural wool felt. In these precarious objects, Barbara Sutherland has approximated, from memory, the dimensions of now obsolete library card catalog drawers. The top layers of felt are drawn upwards, lifting and furling like frames in a windblown animation.

These are cartoonishly drawn object/images, too wobbly to be furniture – more like a polite gathering of educated herons with heads tossed back in laughter – and no longer articulated as anything like the original referent of drawers holding cards. The word, aliquot, defines something that is a portion of a larger whole. The title, **aliquot**, describes not only the individual drawer structures grouped, but also each felt piece that rests or lifts upwards, their movements articulated to suggest that the animation might conclude with all of the felt layers flying away. Leaves leaving. The wordplay is built into the object.

There is a figurative use of the word translation that amounts to converting or being converted into another form or medium, as in, “few of Shakespeare's other works have been translated into ballets” (Apple Dictionary). **The Aerial Migration of a Potato** converts a long-remembered narrative from Proulx's childhood into “a device to measure the imagination” (Proulx). An electronically mechanized folding ruler extends itself vertically according to changes in the level of light around it. By Proulx's logic, “Imagination grows in the dark.” On the surface of the ruler, she paints a faint, watercolour image of a potato sprout that also “grows in the dark,” as the articulated ruler unfolds, set in motion by the shadows of viewers who pass in front of a motion detector.



barbara sutherland *logwood narrative*

**Logwood Narrative** is a looping video work contained within a small LCD screen. Sutherland froze natural logwood dye into an ice cube and set it atop thirty stacked sheets of Japanese Kozuke paper. As the ice cube melted, the dye passed through the paper, its hue and stain pattern shifting, layer by layer. To make the video, Sutherland scanned each stained paper to create a digital image file, then used the images as animation frames in a layered sequence.

For **hollowing/burrowing**, Sutherland welded sheet metal to make four nine-inch open cube forms, which hold packets of felted wool squares, in much the way a tin napkin holder in a diner holds napkins. She has cut the centre from each felted square, so that, when the felt pieces are aligned vertically in their boxes, the shapes of the holes recede from view within the cube. One hole is a hand shape that seems to dig back into the felt.

*“The hand is so abstracted that it's impossible to tell what it is, but I love the strange shapes burrowed into the surface of the felt” (Sutherland).*

Other cut shapes include a hexagon (recalling the formation of standing structures in aliquot), a drawer pull shape (again, the memory of the library card catalogue), and plant dye stains taken from fifteen sequential layers of the **Logwood Narrative** papers.

For **Encyclopédie d'une orogenèse**, Proulx reinvents, in porcelain, a system of balancing weights that she first saw in an old-fashioned pulley lamp. Layers of porcelain strata form the topography of a mountain, and are suspended and kept in balance with a counterweight containing hundreds of tiles of stylized alphabetical letters printed onto porcelain.

*"Ultimately," says Proulx, "this sculpture suggests a kind of metaphorical landslide that would suddenly reveal the mechanics of language."*



amélie proulx  
Encyclopédie d'une orogenèse

Barbara Sutherland and Amélie Proulx made these works to be seen together, in mutual acknowledgment of a common way of working and thinking. Most of all, they wanted to know more about these acts of translation that seem to measure an idea in terms of a thing, or one thing in terms of another. Each artist brings into diagrammatical form ideas that often originate in experiences of reading and writing. And each speculated to me, separately, that the work in Sub Rosa, taken in one sweeping gaze, would appear to be the work of a single artist, rather than two.

Sutherland completed her MFA at NSCAD University in 2010. She has received numerous awards including a Joseph Armand Bombardier Graduate Scholarship from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and a Governor General's Academic Medal. Her work has been exhibited across Canada, in Europe and Australia and she has worked in collaboration with other artists and composers. In August 2011 she will be relocating to Calgary to teach in the Fibre Department at the Alberta College of Art and Design.

In 2010, Amélie Proulx completed her Masters of Fine Arts at NSCAD University. She was the first recipient of the Starfish Properties Student Art Award. She also received honourable mention for the Outstanding Student Achievement in Contemporary Sculpture Award from the Sculpture Center in New Jersey. She recently moved back to Québec city where she pursues her sculptural work in addition to developing an independent media project entitled The Enfolding Cloud that combines her interest for books, language and visual arts. The Aerial Migration of a Potato presented in the exhibition Sub Rosa is the first project launching The Enfolding Cloud.

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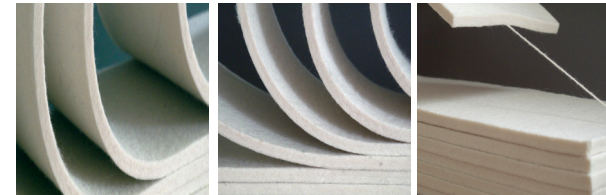
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amélie proulx knot shells



SUB ROSA  
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barbara sutherland aliquot

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