



TIMES & TRANSCRIPT

Jocelyn Philibert creates his sculptures over two days, pouring the plaster into holes (left), then digging it out (centre). He'll scrape off some of the surface dirt before putting the anonymous "bust" on display (right).

A head for sculpture

Montreal artist exhibits "found art" at Galerie Sans Nom this month

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Jocelyn Philibert makes his living pulling heads out of the ground.

Well, not live heads. His work consists of irregular shapes formed by pouring plaster into holes in the earth, then plucking them out and mounting them on scaffolds. If you squint your eyes and use your imagination, the figure's random pockmarks and edges take on human characteristics.

"It's about the unknown world behind a frontier or wall of the brain," Philibert said last week before a demonstration at the Aberdeen Cultural Centre in front of 20 adults and 60 children.

Based in Montreal, the postmodern sculptor's "found art" is currently on display at the Galerie Sans Nom. The exhibit's title, *Au commencement, il y a la ruine* (In the beginning, there is ruin), is a quote from French

philosopher Jacques Derrida, who, like Philibert, believes that humans impose meaning, or presence, to things that by their nature cannot be defined. But when an object is no longer assigned an absolute meaning, the human imagination is free to experience its potential for infinite interpretations.

Subsequently, presence (in this case, the physical existence of Philibert's sculptures) always points to an initial absence (the spaces he digs out of the ground). By creating casts of irregularly shaped holes, he makes a record of the absence which gave the plaster its shape. Once the plaster sets and dries, it becomes an historical record of the empty pit, or, as Philibert writes in the exhibit program, "a concrete exploration of the transient."

"It's like an archeologist finding in the earth some kind of vestige of civilization," Philibert said.

Galerie Sans Nom director Mario Doucette said the four- to 12-year-olds in the audience were enthralled with Philibert's work-in-progress. "When he poured the plaster in the holes, they were cheering him. I think he was surprised.

"One kid said (the finished sculpture) looked like a toilet, another said they looked like aliens."

Philibert said he thinks the unpredictable nature of his work appeals to kids. "My spirit is a bit like a child's — my objective is to repeat sometimes the same idea, but like (a child), I never know the result."

It took Philibert one hour to unearth three plaster mounds, using a spoon to scrape the dirt off each one's surface, leaving a thin layer of mud and silt on the work.

"They're in the gallery now, and you can smell the dirt," Doucette said.

The emphasis on randomness — manifested in the uniqueness of each sculpture — is important to his work. "Chance happens more often than we think," Philibert said. "I don't see into the earth. It's a blind attitude. The surprise after making it is very important.

"Like the English painter Francis Bacon said, 'Chance is better than me.'"

Philibert's works will be on display at the Galerie Sans Nom, at the Aberdeen Cultural Centre on Botsford Street, until October 11.