

## James Carl

DIAZ CONTEMPORARY

While a long-awaited midcareer survey of James Carl's work was being held at three other Ontario venues this winter, the Diaz Contemporary show modestly offered five of the artist's sculptures, all from

a series titled "*jalousie*," 2006–, a term used in France and Germany to designate venetian blinds (and, in the former, jealousy). In a manner reminiscent of chair caning or basket weaving, Carl arduously plaits metal slats from these window treatments into elegant biomorphic shapes.

The artist's painstaking process of testing his material's tensile limits is especially evident in *jalousie (bananier)* (all works 2008). The strips of metal (in a retro and diverse mix of synthetic colors ranging from deep purple to banana yellow) appear slightly battered, suggesting that a certain degree of trial and error went into the work, the artist perhaps seeking to render the boat implied by the title. The vessel's integrity seems compromised due to a lack of adhesives, as made apparent by a few slightly hovering ends. Such formal imperfections serve to complicate the sculpture's dialogue with notions of idealistic purity associated with mod-



James Carl, *jalousie (bole)*, 2008, venetian blinds, 10' x 4' x 4'. From the series "*jalousie*," 2006–.

ernism. In its palpable potential for failure the piece is reminiscent of the models for Buckminster Fuller's early dome-related experiments; these were likewise made with blinds, but in the end did not, as it were, bear fruit. Carl's work, with its bent and rounded form, also suggests both a banana itself and a monumental Henry Moore reclining nude.

Loosely woven, the blinds form a flexible fabric punctured by evenly spaced hexagonal holes, retaining in each work a three-dimensional shape as if they were once wrapped around an object now evacuated. Notions of loss and negative space are emphasized most strongly in *jalousie (baluster)*, a work that invites viewers to look at and through its convex and concave expanses of green, blue, and maroon, their eyes shifting between focusing on the front surface, with its six-sided, hard-edged shapes, and peering through to the back, an activity that causes the two hole-ridden surfaces to interact as a moiré pattern.

In Alain Robbe-Grillet's 1957 novel *La Jalousie*, an unidentified narrator watches—through the slats of blinds—the interactions of his spouse and a neighbor, continuously replaying his suspicions and observations so that neither he (the viewer) nor we (the readers) can distinguish between intertwined layers of fact and fantasy. Voyeuristic narratives are also suggested by Carl's woven, screenlike surfaces, through which viewers may look upon one another, from positions wavering between public and private. Or perhaps the works are the inchoate, jealous fantasies themselves, appearing as they do in a state of becoming, as if they are materializing from irrational or illusive origins, a notion best conveyed by *jalousie (bole)*, the tallest and most striking of the works on view. The piece, its lower and middle regions rendered in solid blue, its top in a diverse and seemingly random array of colors, appears in transition toward becoming a coherent whole, an invention distilled from the imaginary ether. Then again, this chromatic transition might be less symbolic than material in origin; Carl might have merely run out of the blue slats, and the shape, rather than the color scheme, is what matters most. Similarly, the two protuberances at the sculpture's base that initially register as figurative limbs may merely be structural necessities. Despite their many emotional and psychological resonances, Carl's works speak most strongly to material and form, and constitute considerable achievements in technique.

—Dan Adler