

Jaime Angelopoulos | Act Naturally

By RENÉE VAN DER AVOIRD

Entering a room of artworks by Jaime Angelopoulos is like chancing upon an assembly of eccentric individuals, each with their own unique personality and temperament, engaged, collectively, in a boisterous discussion. As they populate the gallery, her drawings and sculptures function not only as characters but as allegories for contemporary life. They expose our anxieties, desires and insecurities, all inherently tangled yet somehow balanced. Indeed, Angelopoulos is interested in the human psyche. Her work deals with psychological states, politics, social interactions and the way our intellectual comportment is revealed through physical acts. Moving from highly personal thematic content into universal narratives, her work empowers us to contemplate, and perhaps untangle, the complexities of our own lived realities.

At the MacLaren Art Centre, *Act Naturally* gathers seventeen framed drawings made between 2012 and 2016 that highlight the evolution of Angelopoulos' linear style as well as the affective power that typifies her work. The drawings, installed in the historic Carnegie Room, are juxtaposed with a major sculptural work, *Rise Up* (2015), in the Massie Family Sculpture Courtyard. Not quite anthropomorphic, the sculpture, like the drawings, alludes to states of flux and transmutation while reverberating with a profound humanity. Spirited colour, buoyant line and hard-won compositional balance—qualities for which Angelopoulos' work is celebrated—are embodied in the drawings and the sculpture, two stand-alone practices that transpire concurrently in the artist's studio. The material conversions between her two- and three-dimensional works are fluid and consistently dynamic. However, where the sculpture is bound by the restraints of gravity, the drawings are unharnessed, telling stories of convergence or opposition. "The drawings depict fragments or opposing elements coalescing and reconciling into a unified whole," the artist notes. "It is almost as though the drawings offer alternative transformative paths for where the sculptures might have gone."¹

Angelopoulos' drawings summon emotions ranging from delight to melancholy. *The Emitter* (2013), the largest and second earliest drawing in the exhibition, conjures a curious sense of joy. The conté-and-oil-pastel drawing contains luminescent pinks, oranges, yellows and blues rendered in confident, carefully planned linear forms. It communicates positivity and hopefulness, and resembles a diagram or blueprint for an imaginary scientific contraption. It also exemplifies the exuberance of the artist's imagination, as well as her ability to map out sculptural potentialities via gesture, colour and line on paper. *Hot Loop* (2014), a slightly later work, demonstrates a comparable liveliness, only with thicker lines. Graceful and uncomplicated, it is not unlike a quickly signed autograph, or a dance in which the fleeting body becomes an abstract form. However, dense black sections drawn directly over vibrant hues of pink deliver a smothering sense of anxiety. *Mind Control* (2014) evinces a similar heaviness that feels quite personal. A stick-like apparatus collapses under the oppressive weight of a black balloon form. Conceptually, this work, like many others, is rooted in the artist's subjective experience; however, it moves beyond the personal in the way it is read.

As Angelopoulos' work evolves, interior narratives give way to more universal associations. The compositions become more complex. *Powers* and *Hypnos* (both 2015) depict curvilinear structures that twist, overlap and fold over themselves. Both contain striped lines that echo the painted bands on *Rise Up* in the courtyard. Derived from animal camouflage, stripes suggest the urge to be hidden, a trait that is not only animal but human, one that is symptomatic of such disorders as social anxiety and depression. While referencing animals through stripes and serpentine forms, these drawings are chaotic yet poised, precarious yet stable, evocative of disquieting social behaviours that are common yet often overlooked. A palpable sense of vulnerability also comes through in *Parents* and *True Proximity* (both 2016). Denser still, these large-scale conté drawings depict black, web-like structures laced with winding pink and blue bands and repeating black circles. Exhibited at Parisian Laundry in 2016, they are part of a larger body of work in which Angelopoulos "allow[ed] her artwork to function as a site for the identifications and projections of others."² The artist describes them as "part of an attempt to highlight the ubiquitous—[and] therefore invisible—structures oppressing our feelings, impulses and desires."³

¹ Saelan Twerdy Interviews Jaime Angelopoulos. <http://www.mocca.ideeclic.com/insitu-web-mobile/?page=resource&id=88&view=full&lang=1>. Accessed March 31, 2017.

² Jaime Angelopoulos: *Opaque Architectures*, exhibition text. Parisian Laundry. 2016.

Act Naturally presents an extensive range of Angelopoulos' drawings. Together, this varied grouping reveals fluctuations from hopeful to sinister, from the personal to the universal, from sparse to complex. The effect of viewing this constellation of drawings is one of simultaneity. Each represents a character or a series of bodily gestures frozen in time, dynamic but also suddenly fixed. Rather than a narrative or time-based sequence, the drawings are installed so that they operate independently and all at once, in a paused commotion of singular actions.

The equilibrium between movement and stasis is also evident in *Rise Up*. At eight-foot-six, the sculpture extends beyond the artist's usual scale, which mirrors her own body. Like the drawings, her sculptures exist between abstraction and figuration. She works with materials as diverse as steel, plaster, foam, fabric and winterstone to dexterously craft organic forms that refer to bodily states without ever actually rendering a body part. Psychologically charged, her sculptures encourage us to relate on both physical and emotive levels.

Rise Up is constructed of a hand-built steel armature methodically layered with plaster and orange and white bands of paint. For this outdoor presentation, a coating of industrial finish was applied. Although inert, fixed in a concrete base, its figure-eight form appears to expand and retract as one moves around it. Its sheer verticality creates a remove from the viewer, generating a liminal space that curator Shannon Anderson refers to as a "state of charged potential."³ Despite its towering presence, the sculpture, like *The Emitter*, exudes a sense of positivity and playfulness, like a giant slide in a futuristic Seussian playground. As critic Terrance Dick comments: "There is a pleasure in following the gesture, and being dwarfed by it." Unlike several of Angelopoulos' other sculptures, which seem to succumb to gravity, falling to the ground and collapsing in on themselves, *Rise Up* is self-assertive. Here, the artist seeks to engage us on a political level, suggesting activism and empowerment through not only the work's title but also its confident posture. The political is similarly iterated in other sculptural works, such as *A Stack of Triumph* (2013) and *Overtake* (2016), in which Angelopoulos incorporates flags to emphasize her convictions about political engagement and social equality.

Meaning is embodied and ambulatory in the work of Angelopoulos. Her vigorous abstractions give access to personal convictions and collective narratives. Allusions to bodies, behaviours and states of consciousness are slowly revealed in her two- and three-dimensional works. Striking combinations of line and colour illustrate a profound empathy that is the very core of her work.

³ Sabine Maaz, *Look again for Symbolism*. The McGill Daily, April 4, 2016.

⁴ Shannon Anderson, *Jaime Angelopoulos: The Trickster Within*. YYZ Publications, Toronto. <http://www.yyzartistsoutlet.org/2012/05/jaime-angelopoulos-the-trickster-within-by-shannon-anderson/>. Accessed March 7, 2017.

⁵ Terrance Dick, *Jaime Angelopoulos + Fun*. Akimbo TV Review. http://www.akimbo.ca/tv/review_watch2.php?ep_id=20. Accessed March 7, 2017.

Essay to accompany the exhibition *Jaime Angelopoulos: Act Naturally*, held June 30 to October 22, 2017 in the Carnegie Room, and June 30 to October 1, 2017 in the Massie Family Sculpture Courtyard, at the MacLaren Art Centre, Barrie, curated by Renée van der Avoird. © MacLaren Art Centre in collaboration with the individual contributors, 2017. All rights reserved.

The MacLaren Art Centre gratefully acknowledges the ongoing support of its Friends, Patrons, Donors, Sponsors, Partners, the City of Barrie, the Ontario Arts Council and the Canada Council for the Arts, and exhibition sponsors Barriston Law

The City of
BARRIE



ONTARIO ARTS COUNCIL
CONSEIL DES ARTS DE L'ONTARIO
an Ontario government agency
un organisme du gouvernement de l'Ontario



Canada Council
for the Arts

Conseil des Arts
du Canada

MACLARENARTCENTRE

37 Mulcaster Street

Barrie, ON L4M 3M2

www.maclarenart.com
