

ACTIJALITES / EXPOSITIONS

Montréal, Québec

1989

Allan Harding MacKay / Erika Rothenberg / Cathy Daley / Jenny Holzer

Allan Harding MacKay, Grünwald Gallery,
Toronto : November, 1989 -

*"I think we ought to read only the kind
of books that wound and stab us".
Franz Kafka*

Allan MacKay's modestly-sized painting on wood was not officially included in his exhibition at Grünwald Gallery, but its provocative use of text raises questions about this once avant-garde tactic - the invasion of language into pictorial space, which has become commonplace in contemporary art. Less formal than the major works exhibited, it is not quite a painting, but more than a "sketch". An outline of a cat rendered on a wax ground follows the demented domestic images that MacKay has produced in the past few years. This cat, if nothing else, is a sign of the banal and the domestic. There is no sense of urgency, nature threatened or the symbolic. MacKay's handling of this work is painterly and seductive, but it is the caption that saves it from being merely charming. *98% of women murdered are by men* was taken from one of the many statistical "facts" that appear in the media, serving as a type of "believe it or not" and catering to our need for socialized empirical information. MacKay's use of it is not a factual restatement. Its hand-inscribed lettering avoids a rhetorical reading, but it does take on an ironic and tragic tone. By coincidence, *98%... "appeared"* at the time of the November massacre at the École Polytechnic in Montreal. While the work preceded this event chronologically, the proof already existed, functioning as a kind of premonition. MacKay resisted further illustration and any engagement in a cheap emotional play. (The "fact", as MacKay presents it, raises questions about the "other 2%" and all possible gender-murder combinations, but they may lead no closer to a truth.)

Caption:

Allan Harding MacKay, *98% of Women Murdered Are By Men*, 1989,
Wax, oil, demar varnish on wood; 19 x 18 in.