

*La chambre virtuelle*

Dominique Sirois

Curator : Jean-Michel Quirion

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The overexploitation of resources, the rise of technologies, speculative systems, and commodification form the dominant mechanisms shaping our consumerist ways of life. We work in order to produce, produce in order to consume, and consume in order to justify work that becomes ever more invasive, caught in an excessive cycle that absorbs our existence—even in its most intimate spheres. What can we do, immediately, to slow these persistent and invasive mechanisms? Refuse the imposed awakening. Doze. Transgress the day. Fall asleep. (Sur)vive the night. Awaken the chimeras of surrealism. Become alchemical beings. Withdraw from the emptiness of screen-based surfaces. Sleep. Dream. Forever.

Dominique Sirois's artistic practice unfolds through sculptural installations that, far from lacking presence, compose a theatre of female subjects and computer-related objects. Through the lens of the archaeology of sculpture, the artist telescopes temporalities. Inscribed within a surrealist lineage, Sirois explores the processes of material transformation—through clay, mineral glazes, metals, and glass—while questioning the systems of value and desire inherent to contemporary capitalism. By combining artisanal know-how with technological references, she shapes timeless worlds that carry narratives oscillating between fiction and speculation. In this world on the threshold of the future, traces of the past surface in the fractures of the present.

The body of work *La chambre virtuelle* adopts a posture of withdrawal and transmutation. Metamorphosis is conceived here as a power that is both evocative and emancipatory. Alchemy—an ancient practice situated at the intersection of philosophy, science, and spirituality—emerged in the Middle East before spreading throughout Europe from Antiquity to the end of the Renaissance. A proto-science of modern chemistry, it sought the transformation of mineral matter, then perceived as possessing unlimited potential. Sirois revives the quest for the philosopher's stone, the legendary substance capable of transmuting the most base metals into precious matter. This heritage marks a turning point between the exploitation of natural resources and the advent of a synthetic industry. From these ancient narratives, Sirois distills a residual magic with unsuspected possibilities. The analysis thus draws connections between the evolution of alchemy toward modern chemistry and applied sciences—including computing—in order to question our contemporary relationship with raw materials. During the Renaissance, alchemy conceived the earth as a living body, a “womb” in which minerals formed according to a logic of gestation and transformation. Today, chemistry and digital technologies rely on the intensive extraction of minerals. This shift reveals a profound change: the earth is no longer perceived as an organism to be revered, but as a resource to be exploited in the service of progress.

In the history of occult sciences, women alchemists occupy a foundational place, although they have largely been marginalized by dominant narratives. As early as the beginning of the Middle

Ages, figures such as Mary the Jewess and her student Cleopatra the Alchemist accomplished the magnum opus and developed devices still used today, including the bain-marie. In the seventeenth century, Marie de Gournay and Marie Meurdrac extended this experimental knowledge, consolidating practices maintained at the margins of dominant discourses of progress. Dominique Sirois thus opens narrative breaches between the imagined and the (mis)known. She constructs a tribute-narrative under tension—nonlinear and unresolved—in which the recognition of women’s knowledge persists.

To achieve this, the artist has built, over the past two years, a chamber. In her studio in Montreal’s Chabanel district, she has daily shaped, molded, and assembled the components of this place suspended in limbo. The resulting exhibition unfolds as a chamber of creative gestation, echoing the necessity of a space of autonomy for imagining more freely, as formulated by Virginia Woolf in *A Room of One’s Own* (1929). Sirois transposes this aspiration into a mental and symbolic zone where matter, imagination, and identity can endlessly metamorphose, sheltered from the governing and persistent constraints of our world. In this sense, the works extend the capacities of the corporeal while revealing zones of unconsciousness, friction, obsolescence, or loss of control.

The installation appears as a bedroom that gradually dissolves into an office-laboratory. The space is activated by female figures shaped in clay: inert presences that inhabit it like silent operators, maintained in a state of vigilance. Dominique Sirois stages, with controlled acuity, the contemporary tensions linked to systems of automation and artificial intelligence (AI). The works in the corpus appear as substitutive entities, comparable to doubles of ourselves—fragments of learned bodies, relics of stillborn futures, occult artifacts, and obsolete technological objects.

Faces sculpted in clay—echoing the techniques of direct carving in gemstones—punctuate the room. Their chiseled features, cut in pear, round, or trillion shapes, evoke the cartographies, filters, and grids associated with facial-recognition technologies, inscribing the flesh within a regime of algorithmic visibility. Oscillating between portrait and interface, these physiognomies place embodied subjectivity in tension with its reduction to exploitable data.

The furniture-sculpture, for its part, acts as a visual marker, a formal beacon from which chains of associations unfold. Drawn from the administrative universe of the early 2000s, these office elements become supports for hybridization, highlighting unstable forms of integration and a plural deformability of bodies, assimilated to objects of science. Bodily extensions remain perceptible within them, yet never fully functional.

Windows of colored glass, adorned with motifs of external hard drives, overlook the frame of a bed. They activate metaphors of algorithmic surveillance: surfaces of constant penetration, porous borders into private life—even in a state of drowsiness.

The scenography also draws from the surrealist imagination of Remedios Varo, particularly the paintings *Harmony* (1956) and *The Creation of the Birds* (1958). The mental architectures and

operative figures drawn from these works structure the arrangement of the Écart space. We are thus projected into a space with uncertain contours: a laboratory of reveries where the vestiges of a post-AI (over)bureaucratized universe persist, placing in tension the figure of the occult scientist and that of the creator, both confronted with algorithmic formatting and the automation of knowledge.

Presented in Rouyn-Noranda—a territory marked by mining extraction—*La chambre virtuelle* functions as a place of withdrawal where matter becomes a vector for slowing down and the wandering of the mind. In this context, Dominique Sirois's philosophical quest does not seek the production of gold, but the creation of a dreamlike space in which to pause, inhabit, think, persevere, survive, and resist differently the logics of exhaustion and the disappearance of the self.