FIGURES EN LISIÈRE (2011), by Marie-France Brière

This is the second stop on the Public Art, Science and Technology tour of Loyola Campus.

As you cross from Sherbrooke Street to the southwest corner of the Loyola Campus, a soaring black and grey tower comes into view. Located directly in front of the Centre for Structural and Functional Genomics — or the GE Building — a six-metre-high sculpture occupies a four-cornered cement platform: Marie-France Brière's work, *Figures en lisière*, was financed by the one per cent program and installed in 2011 as part of the GE building's construction.

Two identical walls of black African granite protrude from the centre of the platform's base, placed on a diagonal axis. Attached to the wall is Georgian white marble, carved in a continuous, three-dimensional serrated pattern which travels up and down each wall. Between each carving, a stainless-steel plaque is inserted at a 45-degree angle, reflecting the marble and granite surfaces on either side. At night, light panels integrated into the platform's base beam onto each wall, casting shadows onto the carvings. The work might resemble an escarpment or a rocky cliff.

The work's title, when translated from French to English, means "figures on the border." In French, the word "figure" has multiple associations, from monetary values to visual representations, such as statues and silhouettes. Take a moment and pause the tour. If you can, have a look at the statue. What associations with the word "figure" come to mind?

Born and raised in Montreal, Brière has been a practicing artist since the mid-1980s. Holding both a BFA and MFA in Visual Arts, she is an alumna of the Université du Québec à Montréal. The artist also has a notable reputation in the Quebec arts scene. To date, she has had over 10 solo exhibitions, her work has been acquired by the permanent collection of the Musée national des beaux-art du Québec, and her public art installations appear in prominent Quebec institutions such as the Cinémathèque Québécoise.

In all aspects of her practice, Brière works with sculptural materials such as stone, marble, and granite. As evidenced by *Figures en lisière,* her sculptures are styled in a contemporary fashion, yet these materials are usually associated with traditional

sculpture and architecture. Some of the earliest examples date back to the Greek and Roman periods, when these materials were used to construct statues and temples. In more recent European and North American contexts, they appear in monuments, banks, government buildings, courthouses, universities, art galleries and museums — all sites of power and knowledge. In contemporary post-modern and brutalist architecture, granite has come to signal prestige, often used as cladding for buildings, staircases and lobbies.

Although Brière uses these historically resonant materials, as seen in *Figures en lisière*, her work does not seek to emulate that legacy. Instead, it asks us to consider what stone is — and where it comes from. Her practice is rooted in political questions of extraction, particularly in the context of the Anthropocene. She grounds her approach in multidisciplinary research, drawing connections between artistic form and its broader sociohistorical context.

As part of her research for *Figures en lisière*, Brière consulted geological, geographic, scientific and photographic studies of quarries across Quebec. She also conducted her own field work, visiting and photographing these sites to understand their topography, their impact on the land, and to draw inspiration for the sculpture's carvings.

Through this piece, Brière sought to translate her findings into a formal and visual language, expressed through the granite carvings themselves. To her, a quarry is a kind of laboratory, and *Figures en lisière* becomes a sculptural metaphor for experimentation, discovery, and interpretation — perhaps not unlike the very activities taking place inside the GE building.

Because these materials are extracted from the earth, there's a delicate balance between using them while critiquing the ecological consequences of their extraction. Based on what you've learned about the sculpture and its context, does the work offer a critical perspective on marble and granite?

To continue this tour, click on *Montre-moi par où on commence, Dis-le-moi au creux de l'oreille* by Marc-Antoine Côté.