

Twenty Years at Galerie UQAM Interview with Luc Monette, Gallery Director

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ment inégale des travaux. «De toute façon, expliquent Poulin et Côté, le but n'est pas de placer les pièces de même force entre elles. Cette exposition est montée par les étudiants eux-mêmes et ceux qui ont choisi de présenter leurs travaux témoignent qu'ils en sont satisfaits. Voilà au fond ce qui est important. Nous sommes heureux des résultats, soutiennent-ils, car ils ont su aller plus loin que l'objet esthétique; n'oublions pas que la résine est un matériau qui peut facilement donner dans le décoratif».

Comme pour les sculpteurs sur pierre, on retrouve des oeuvres sur socle mais tout autant sous forme d'installation. L'acier et le bois, fréquemment intégrés au polyester, semblent les matériaux privilégiés. Dans *Griff* et *Lanie*, Michel Clavet rajoute un troisième élément soit de longues chevilles de métal accompagnées de leurs écrous, donnant par le fait même un caractère mécanique à l'objet. On peut observer également les travaux de Danielle Ellyson et de Réjean Langlois qui recourent à leur manière à des formes pyramidales accusant, par leur composition, un caractère monumental.

Sylvain Bélanger, dans *Conservation*, une oeuvre plus narrative, juxtapose des codes figuratifs sur deux supports différents (l'un au mur et l'autre sur une base) avec la céramique et le plâtre combinés au polyester. Une figuration qui réfère à des archétypes historiques (une colonne romaine) et d'étranges signes graphiques.

Lorraine Tanguay aborde un domaine particulier, celui de la miniature. De minuscules chevaux sont visibles à l'intérieur d'une boule transparente à peine plus grosse, celle-ci posée sur une base triangulaire soutenue par trois languettes de bois. *La mort d'un cheval* démontre une oeuvre épurée, connotative, peut-être une des plus insolites.

Les étudiants sont-ils au courant des tendances actuelles de la sculpture? De l'avis des trois professeurs, la majorité n'ont pas une très bonne connaissance de l'histoire de l'art. «La tendance dans les groupes se fait tout naturellement par des échanges et des discussions entre eux», répond Poulin. «Dans les années 70, les travaux étaient automatiquement plus formels, maintenant ils sont beaucoup plus diversifiés et

ces changements se produisent d'une manière instinctive». Joan Esar de préciser: «On ne préconise pas ici une tendance particulière, "le modèle" est une notion très artificielle. On ne cherche pas à faire quelque chose de nouveau, la nouveauté, moi je n'y crois pas. Aujourd'hui on met beaucoup de pression là-dessus, ici ce n'est pas la place pour ça. Ce sont des étudiants après tout, il est plus important qu'au départ, ils s'identifient totalement dans leurs travaux».

Quoiqu'il en soit, ces étudiants se défendent fort bien. Une exposition dont les ouvrages n'ont pas la prétention d'être le résultat d'un cheminement soutenu, dans le sens de celui de l'artiste professionnel, mais des étudiants qui exploitent pertinemment, entre autres, l'audace, la diversité et l'expérimentation. Des caractéristiques ici moins propices à juger sur des attitudes individuelles qu'à travers le "corps" du groupe lui-même. Ces caractéristiques, qu'elles relèvent de facultés cognitives ou non de la part de leurs auteurs, rejoignent étrangement celles d'une "certaine" vague post-moderne... celle où tout est permis.

ELIZABETH WOOD

Twenty Years at Galerie UQAM

Interview with Luc Monette, Gallery Director.

On September 8th, 1989, a special exhibition will open in the "Grande Place" of the University of Quebec in Montreal (UQAM's large central foyer), launching the university's 20th anniversary year. Espèce d'Espace is being curated by Ghyslaine Lafrenière, and includes ceiling installation works by five artists, Francine Larivée, Robert Saucier, Normand Moffat, Miguel A. Berlinga and Manon B. Thibault, four of whom are graduates of UQAM. The large scale ephemeral pieces will be suspended "like a huge décor".

Elizabeth Wood: Historically, what are the origins of the Galerie UQAM?

Luc Monette: With the founding of the Université du Québec à Montréal, the Ecole des beaux-arts was integrated with the university, and eventually became the Department of Visual Art. Mr. Frankston (head of arts half time at UQAM and half time at Concordia) created the bridge between the two schools. Having received his formal education in the United States, he also founded a committee responsible for putting together a University collection at UQAM, as was the custom within many of the American university structures. Given the "popular" (that is democratic, urban) orientation of UQAM at the time, the idea of a collection was transformed into the idea of an exhibi-

tion service for students and professors as well as national and international exhibitions. In 1972 we obtained our first exhibition space at 3450 St. Urbain (now the CACUM). It was extremely small and the first exhibitions were internal (students, teachers, invited guests) in the field of art and related subjects such as archaeology and history. With the construction of the campus in 1979, it was decided that it was important to create a gallery. The gallery as it is today is thus ten years old.

Who have been the directors since the gallery's founding?

Dr. Bruno, painter, technician, restorer and professor at the Faculty of Visual Art was first hired half time as curator; he then assumed

the position of director until his retirement in November 1979. I had been working with the gallery since 1973, first as summer employment while a student, then as half time. By 1979 I was animateur culturel and his assistant and, following the retirement of Dr. Bruno, I took over, first as interim director, and then as director.

What was the initial mandate of the gallery?

The mandate was to present exhibitions, both national and international, and exhibitions of UQAM professors and students, as well as to develop a collection.

Has this mandate changed since the beginning?

It has expanded as the university program has grown, according to the needs of the university. For example, in the beginning there was no masters program, and thus no special status as there is today for graduate students who present exhibitions here. We are in the process of creating, together with the University of Montreal, a multidisciplinary doctoral program in art. A committee has been formed and will begin meetings in September. The program should be approved by December 1990. With the integration of the doctoral program, there will be further expansion of the mandate.

What role does the gallery play in the pedagogical aspect of these programs?

In the visual arts this is evident. Per year, 3-4 solo exhibitions in the small gallery are reserved for graduate students. The undergraduate art students are allotted two large group exhibitions annually. We also offer our technical assistance, as in the loan of pedestals and glass cases for exhibitions which take place in other unofficial exhibition areas of the university such as the *Halle du Théâtre*. As well, with the current masters program in museology, for example, we have a *stagiaire* who is working with us to develop the collection. In addition, projects such as the production of catalogues are important not only to raise the profile of the artists, but also to eventually provide an opportunity for graduate students in art history to write and publish texts. In this way, supplementary pedagogical aspects can be integrated into the process.

How has the role of the Galerie UQAM, since its inception, been perceived from outside, by the Montreal arts community?

I believe that the response, in general, is positive. We have a fine press dossier, even though the press in Montreal is limited. Naturally for academic or pedagogical activities, there is no press coverage. A collaborative exhibition several years ago between with the members of the Association of Contemporary Art Galleries of Montreal and the Galerie UQAM resulted in the establishment of a certain dialogue.

In your opinion, does Galerie UQAM respond more to the needs of the university or to those of the arts community?

I believe both... our goal is to maintain a balance between the two roles; academic and cultural. Naturally, if the University is going to fund the gallery, it must serve the internal needs of the university population in the form of an exhibition service for students and professors. Other exhibitions such as "La Pataphysique" fulfill a more a pedagogical role. The audience for this is not limited to the students, but extends as well to the greater university community, and the Montreal Urban Community. As such, it serves as an important showcase for the university. I believe that it is important for the two roles to be mixed. In this way, visitors who would regularly visit a curated exhibition such as *La Pataphysique*, at some point stumble upon an exhibition of work by graduating students. Conversely, we receive many inquiries about student exhibition dates. People come for a specific reason, but end up returning to the gallery regularly.

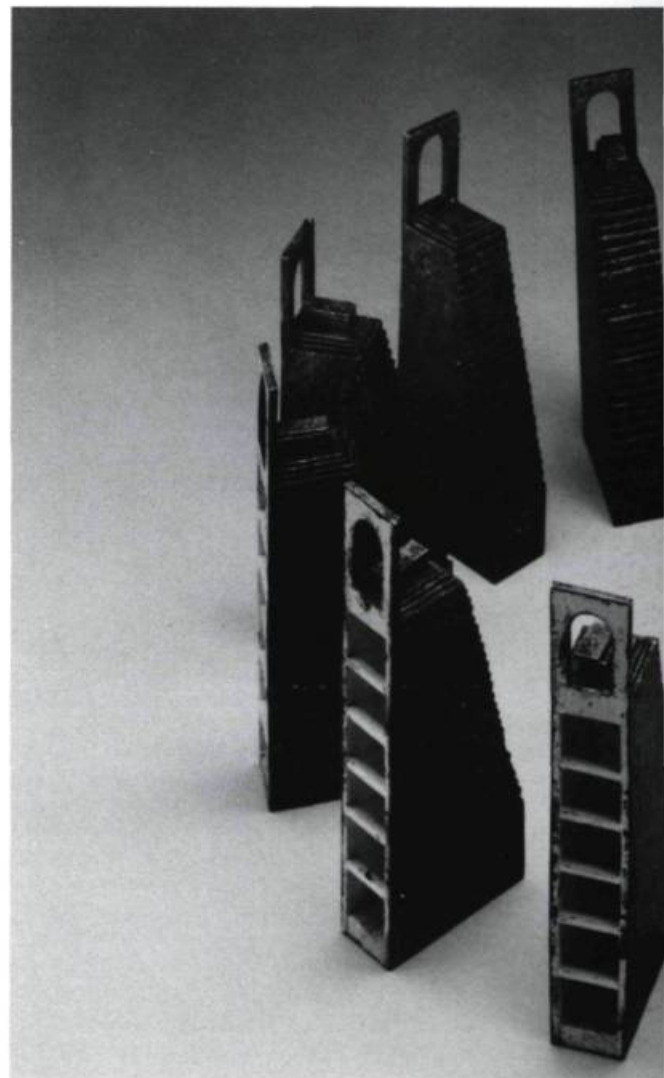
What changes if any, would you make at Galerie UQAM?

The Galerie UQAM is a very small entity, within a

very large university structure, a reality which becomes very heavy at times. Although there are norms, we do not always fall under them since we are not considered teaching service, neither are we research. This ambiguity creates problems, due in no way to ill will on the part of the university. I would wish at times that the administration could be lighter; that I be given the budget and the responsibility to manage it.

Given the sometimes controversial nature of a fine arts department within an academic institution, are you called upon to justify existence of the gallery or visual arts at UQAM?

I think that the problem at the university as compared to a School of Fine Arts is that the education is too fragmented. A sculptor who really does not want to take



Normand Moffat, *L'envers des frontières*, 1989. Maquette de l'oeuvre qui sera exposée à l'automne (échelle 1" : 1'). Oeuvre originale: 8' haut, 20' diam.

courses in painting, should not have to do so. University studies, ideally, should have nothing to do with "la cuisine", the pure "how to", which should have been done at the CEGEP level. The creative process cannot be developed in three hours... it happens over a long period of time, with perhaps one professor, perhaps three. To establish a certain dynamic of question-response between teacher/student is far more important than to spend three hours with someone with whom the student does not work well.

Many believe that a solid education should entail a wide variety of experiences in many different subject areas...?

Yes, but this should already be completed prior to university studies, which are supposed to entail a certain amount of reflection; craft is learned at the college level. Of

course the student should continue to develop a certain technical expertise. Often, when describing concepts for a project, students are called upon to draw them and are not able. Technical courses should be optional; each student should be responsible for the attainment of their own needs, developing their creativity.

To summarize, you believe that there is room for independence in the university, but it is poorly utilized within current structures?

Exactly. The bachelors program is only slightly more refined than a college level course. Any real reflection begins at the masters level where the projects produced resemble the kind of work which I feel we should be seeing at the bachelors level. There are many people here who should not be. In my opinion, a good majority of the students come to take courses in visual arts as they would in a cultural centre, creating, I believe, a negative dynamic in relation to the those students who are informed, determined. But the university receives its funding based on the number of students accepted, and accepts a certain number of students in order to obtain a specific budget. This harms the quality. At the same time, we pay an extremely high price for the little quality that is there.

Are you called upon to defend the university program and gallery outside the immediate environment?

I think that our defense is articulated through the exhibitions that we present. Graduate students applying for an exhibition must present a dossier, exactly as they would for a commercial gallery, and it is up to the selection committee to say yes or no.

To conclude, could you indicate the future orientations of the Galerie UQAM... areas where you hope to place more emphasis?

The most important goal, in my opinion, is to try to maintain the balance that exists... between international, national and pedagogical exhibitions. Following that, I would like to be able to present at least one prestigious international-level exhibition per year, such as the exhibition on Contemporary Australian Ceramic, which was a great success. Collaboration with other organizations and/or museums is something that I also think is very important. In the milieu for some time now there has existed a type of mutual collaboration and *entraide* - and this is something which I would hope to be able to develop further... especially with the Musée d'art contemporain to be downtown, and with the expansion projects of the Musée des beaux-arts and the Musée McCord. What I find unfortunate is that we each do good work independently, but we don't always take advantage of the collective energy. I believe that this is beginning to happen through personal initiative. For example, when Line McMurray curated the exhibition on "La Pataphysique", in addition to the exhibition at the Galerie UQAM, the Cinémathèque screened works, there was a concert at the Chapelle du Bon Pasteur and Madame McMurray presented a colloquium on the subject at a third location. This was the result of a personal initiative. More of this type of exchange would be interesting, where there could be developed a kind of coordination, a sharing of resources, where each would benefit from the others.

