

Claudio Rivera-Seguel *infoMatic*

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La sculpture vêtue/dévêtue
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Claudio Rivera-Seguel: *infoMatic*

être pris à la légère. On ne rit pas de l'animal, mais du fait de regarder un être regarder un objet sans le comprendre. Au moins, l'aigle ne feint pas la compréhension. Il n'est pas critique d'art, après tout. L'animal le plus ridicule sera toujours l'humain.

Le projet touche au sublime en ce qu'il capte et transmet le moment ineffable de la rencontre avec un animal sauvage. La rencontre impressionnante avec le cerf, la loutre ou l'ours, dont on croise un instant le regard. Ce regard est réciproque et nous réalisons à ce moment précis, et bien que nous pensions nous être éloignés d'eux, que nous, humains, sommes des animaux parmi les animaux. Sublime aussi parce que contrairement à la beauté, la terreur est toujours possible. Une rencontre nocturne avec un grizzly peut être sublime tout en étant terrifiante; ou plutôt, elle est sublime parce que terrifiante. La beauté repousse la terreur, le sublime l'adore, l'englobe. Dans *Le regard des animaux*, ces trois modalités de l'expérience esthétique sont habilement interreliées et nous invitent à emprunter des sentiers non balisés. En définitive, il ne s'agit pas ici de capter le regard de l'animal, mais plutôt de rappeler au spectateur que c'est bien lui qu'on distrait si facilement, et de toutes sortes de manières. Dans notre civilisation [*sic*] de cent millions d'yeux et d'oreilles électroniques, le travail de Blass tombe à point. Un territoire sauvage de l'art s'est ouvert. ■

Valérie Blass,
Le regard des animaux
Galerie Dare-dare, Montréal
Octobre 2001

NOTE

1. Voir en particulier *Phoque Le Chien*, une sculpture-installation-cœuvre sonore créée en collaboration avec Philippe Bézy et montrée à la galerie L'Œil de poisson, Québec, 1999.

Actively sanctioned public art for sometime, Claudio Rivera-Seguel has devised an ingenious project—*infoMatic*. Contemporary media practices are used by the artist to send duplicitous, often challenging messages about the state of the world. Photoshop-produced, freehand-synthesized images address current issues such as Chernobyl, the earth's depleting ozone layer, nuclear power and other adjuncts of post-modern civilization.

Details alluding to ecological disasters and general mistreatment of the planet are neatly inset into billboard and panel structures Rivera-Seguel has discreetly and simultaneously integrated into five public spaces around the world: Galleria Animal in Santiago, Chile; Festival Frestas in Porto, Portugal; Pati Manning at the Contemporary Art Museum in Barcelona, Spain; Plaza Santa Maria in Trastevere, Rome; the

Kenkeleba Sculpture Garden in New York's lower east side. After the billboard signs have been taken down, Rivera-Seguel leaves behind medium-sized, permanent panels. They remain as evidence of the event, expressing the same messages in perpetuity.

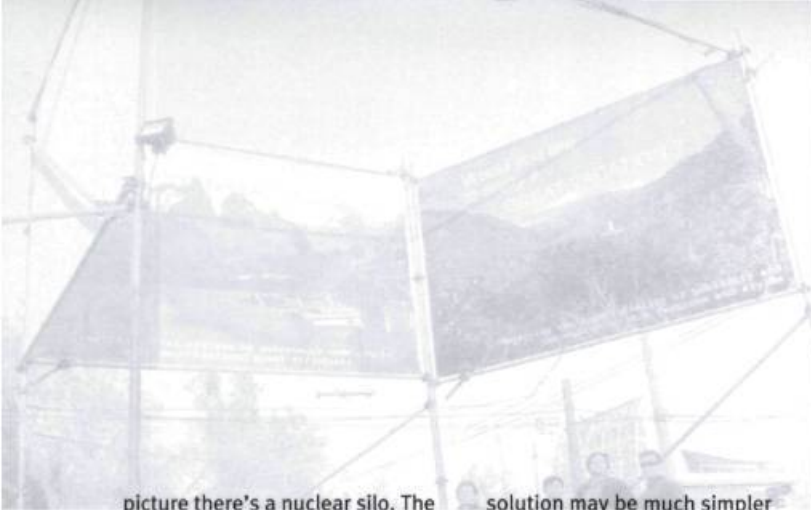
These images have also been put into a micro postcard format. Rivera-Seguel hands them out during performances that accompany the installation openings. They include the typical touristic view designed to grab the escapist imagination of First World middle and upper classes, to attract them to faraway, so-called exotic places. They all have the same banner headline. It reads: "Would you like to enjoy a great vacation?" One has a panoramic view of a beatific mountain and lake view in the las Torres del Paine region in the south of Chile. What could be more attractive? Strange subliminal cues begin to surface in the visual subtext of these scenes. In this one, we discover a partially submerged oil tanker in the foreground. Fused into the waters

of the lake are strangely abstract images of deformed fetuses from pregnant women in Chernobyl, Ukraine. The subtext (much less visible) states: *Creating social systems of autonomous communities with decentralized power structures.*

Another open and treed landscape and stream image of the Magallanes region, also in southern Chile, has a neatly inset scene of a Norwegian whaler going to work on a dead whale. The grassy shore and beach has strange luminescent glowing colours. Is this irradiated, or are toxic materials leaching into the soil? This subtext reads: *Understanding life as a holistic process evolving towards a universal destiny.* In the third image we see a snow capped mountain—the Volcan Villarica in Chile—centrally placed in what yet again looks like a beatific park scene. But to the left we can see an emaciated bird covered in oil (presumably from an oil tanker spill). The bird looks awkwardly onto the scene. He's not so beautiful anymore. Dead centre of the



CLAUDIO RIVERA-SEGUEL, *infoMatic*, 2001. Installation in Chile. Photo courtesy of the artist.



picture there's a nuclear silo. The text: *Rejecting the superficiality of publicity and the vanity of its fashions and styles.*

The most arresting image yet is that of a South American sheep, its eyes blinded by the effects of reduced ozone protection from the sun, common to many South American regions. A surgeon is at work on the sheep's head, as if it was a lab specimen. Right next to it is the head of a deformed child from Chernobyl. The juxtaposition is horrific. Nature, of which we are a part, has been violated. Both the animal and human worlds are affected by abuse of and lack of respect for our environment. Both are inseparable. The project's *infoMatic* Registered TM label appears prominently on the image.

Claudio Rivera-Seguel's publicity panels are strange and duplicitous, particularly as they look so much like the real ones. It's a kind of *Adbusters* approach to anti-advertising, where the medium is the message — produced, presented, and packaged in a way that mimics or replicates actual advertising. The format is promotional and the presentation public. But where *Adbusters* produces physical publications / objects, Rivera-Seguel invades the physical landscape of the urban environment with his publicity billboards, presented simultaneously in five locations worldwide. Is this self-defeating? Perhaps not, as the general public is so attuned to the semantics and visual ad format, even the packaging, that they might not even pay attention otherwise. The ultimate irony in all this is that the Chilean government, in collusion with big business polluters, actually backed this project. Of course, being a so-called Third World country in an age of globalization cannot help. It's like being an artist in today's society.

People will say cultural survival depends on economies of increasing scale, on serving your masters, on exploiting ever greater amounts of resources, and on low-wage labour. The

solution may be much simpler than we think: simply to encourage cultural diversity, local small scale economies, and less dependency on imported products and resources. The city of Curitiba in Brazil, for example, no longer relies on any government support, employs the elderly to look after the young, and has initiated programs that include free transport, family planning, nutrition education, food exchanges, and a garbage purchase program where the poor transport their waste in exchange for food. In Curitiba, where defunct city buses become job training centres, citizens own all the city's assets. As mayor Jaime Lerner recognizes: "If people feel respected, they will assume responsibility to help solve other problems."¹ But this is not the way of the world, we are told. Democracy ironically becomes a bulwark against self-determination.

The art in this work does not necessarily reside in the imagery itself, nor in its locations, but in the replication of the actual system of global marketing processes, the oppressive overkill of mass market mediatization. This force-fed product and service schedule is rather like overeating at McDonald's. Can we really escape the spoilage of the environment, the chemical and toxic devastation of our food systems and air and water supplies? That is the dilemma we all have to deal with in the present and future. The Third World is being pressed into this frame too. It's all about monopoly politics. But the possibilities for change are real. They involve local governments, direct community involvement in the democratic process and minority participation (not eradication). ■

Website: www.luzluz.com

NOTE

1. Paul Hawken, Amory Lovins, L. Hunter Lovins, *Natural Capitalism* (Boston: Back Bay Books / Little Brown & Co., 1999) pp. 288-308.

Michel de Broin: L'ÉCLAIREUR ÉCLAIRÉ

« On avait coutume de repro-
duire seulement l'image
des hommes qui méritaient
l'immortalité par quelque action
d'éclat » (*Histoire Naturelle*,
XXXIV, 9-10).

Plin l'Ancien, au premier siècle de notre ère, nous rappelle que dans l'Antiquité les premières statues érigées par l'État l'étaient en l'honneur des hommes qui s'étaient illustrés dans le domaine de la politique ou des Jeux olympiques. Ces sculptures fonctionnaient comme autant de modèles à suivre et

accompagné les politiques de démocratisation scolaire de Jules Ferry. Lorsque les municipalités républicaines voulaient commémorer les grands hommes et les valeurs de la République, elles faisaient appel à la sculpture publique. C'est dans ce contexte que Rodin réalisa ses grandes commandes : *Les Bourgeois de Calais* (1884), *Victor Hugo* (1890), *Balzac* (1890)... Montréal n'est pas en reste avec la *Fontaine Jacques-Cartier* (1893) d'Arthur Vincent, le *Monument au sieur de Maisonneuve* (1895) de Louis-Philippe Hébert... Si les valeurs républicaines font ici défaut, il



offraient à la jeunesse des valeurs sûres qui devaient les guider dans leur vie de citoyen. À cette époque, art et éducation (*paideia*) se trouvaient inextricablement liés. Si Platon avait décidé de bannir les artistes de sa cité idéale, c'était parce que l'art imitatif, selon lui, exacerbait les passions des jeunes citoyens et ramollissait leur courage. Ce lien ancestral entre sculpture publique et éducation a perdu jusqu'à nos jours. La commande publique moderne, relancée en France sous la Troisième République (1870-1940), a

s'agit néanmoins de commémorer la mémoire des hommes qui, par leur courage et leur détermination, ont fondé une nouvelle cité. Aujourd'hui, la sculpture publique contemporaine a rompu avec cette tradition monumentale et commémorative. La sculpture publique est la plupart du temps abstraite ou conceptuelle, même lorsqu'elle commémore la mémoire d'un grand homme comme *Obélisque en hommage à Charles de Gaulle* (1992) de l'artiste français Olivier Debré, au Parc La Fontaine de Montréal. De plus en plus d'artistes interviennent dans

MICHEL DE BROIN,
L'Éclaireur éclairé,
2000. Centre de
formation Daniel-
Johnson, Pointe-
aux-Trembles.
Photo : avec
l'aimable autorisa-
tion de l'artiste.