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[See table of contents](#)

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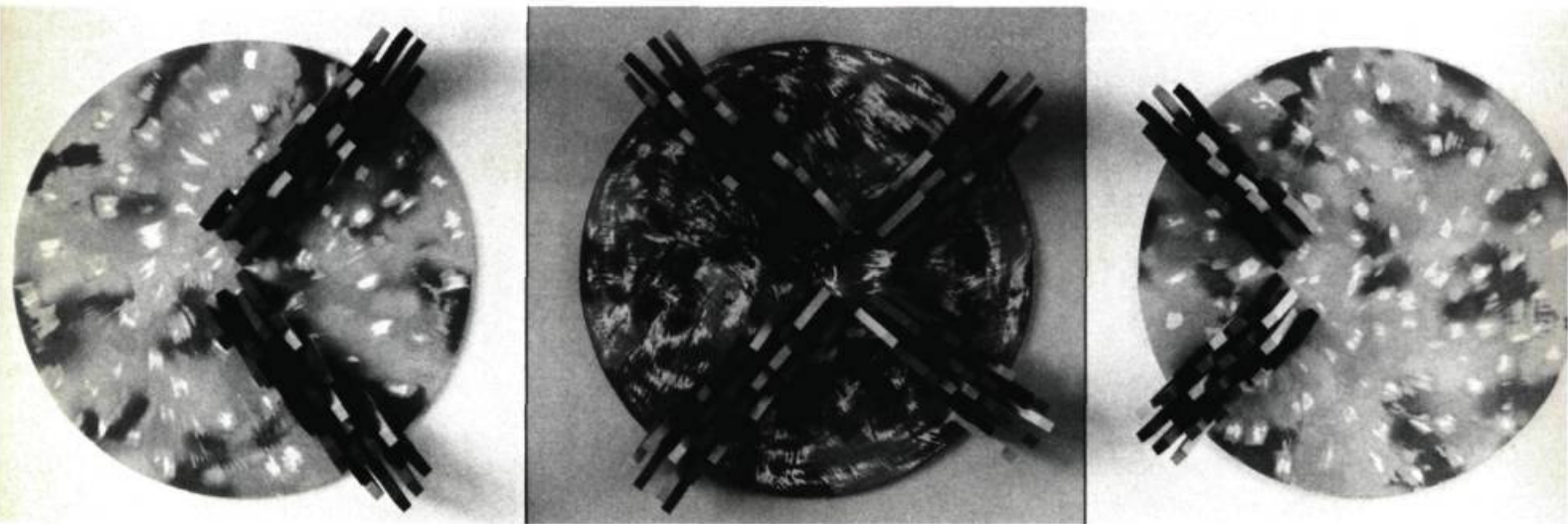
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Les structures
de
Ron
Kostyniuk

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Ronald Kostyniuk est professeur dans l'enseignement du design, à l'Université de Calgary. Il a beaucoup exposé, tant au Canada qu'aux États-Unis, et des œuvres de lui figurent dans plusieurs des collections permanentes publiques de tout le pays. Il exposait, en février 1975, à la Galerie Mount Saint Vincent University, à Halifax.



2

Dans un siècle marqué par de si nombreux remous dans tous les domaines de l'activité humaine, il n'est pas surprenant que l'absence de direction et d'expression cohérente se traduise et se manifeste par un art également divers, trop libre et fréquemment nihiliste. Le seul des arts visuels qui, au cours d'une discrète progression et tout en gardant ordre et logique, ait réussi à se frayer une voie à travers les influences et la confusion régnantes, a été et continue d'être le relief par construction.

Ce type de relief s'est développé, à la fin des années trente, à partir du cinétisme à deux dimensions des peintures de Piet Mondrian et à la suite des théories et de l'œuvre de l'artiste américain Charles Biederman, qui est passé de la vision néo-platicienne au champ effectif et sensible des relations matérielles à trois dimensions. Par la définition et la manipulation d'éléments qui saillissent d'un plan horizontal, il est parvenu à une réalité, entre peinture et sculpture, qui n'est pas sans relation avec l'art cinétique et dans laquelle les relations d'espace et de temps exigent la participation de l'artiste et du spectateur.

Dans ses notes sur la vision structuraliste, Eli Bornstein affirme que la lumière, la couleur, l'espace et la structure, qualités élémentaires et équivalentes dans la nature, font en quelque sorte émergence afin de remplacer leurs représentations frontales statiques par des réalités dynamiques multidimensionnelles. C'est ce sentiment de la réalité bien ordonnée, en union avec la nature, qui, à son sens, explique qu'un enfant peut, sans faire de différence, être mis en présence d'un relief par construction ou devant un fleur et comprendre immédiatement, en toute simplicité, la réalité visuelle de chacun d'eux.

Et, tel est le cas pour les œuvres de Ronald Kostyniuk. Grâce à son acquis en biologie et à son approche tout empirique de la nature, il rejette, dans la composition de ses formes colorées, les formules mathématiques toutes faites, se fiant plutôt sur sa sensibilité et sur

son intuition. Quand on étudie ses ouvrages, on s'aperçoit qu'il développe simultanément ses couleurs et ses formes, dont la connexité est si totalement intégrée qu'aucune des composantes ne peut s'imposer à l'autre.

Afin de centrer l'attention sur les caractéristiques formelles de ses constructions colorées, il évite toute indication sur la nature véritable des matériaux utilisés dans ses œuvres. Ces matériaux perdent toute importance, de sorte qu'il n'est ni possible ni nécessaire de les identifier. Toutes les formes et toutes les surfaces sont méticuleusement épurées, et les couleurs, par la matité de leur fini, font tellement partie des formes qu'elles ne produisent jamais un effet d'application arbitraire ou de confusion de sujet.

Graduellement, il s'est éloigné de la conception que la surface de fond est la limite ultime dans l'établissement des relations formelles. Ses derniers ouvrages combinent activement les surfaces de fond et les éléments tridimensionnels. Comme résultante de l'utilisation des modulations de surface, des mouvements de rotation et des inclinaisons obliques, il parvient à supprimer les rapports du positif et du négatif, du plan et du surélevé, de la forme et du fond. Les éléments en saillie ne sont plus séparés par des espacements mais sont plutôt joints par eux.

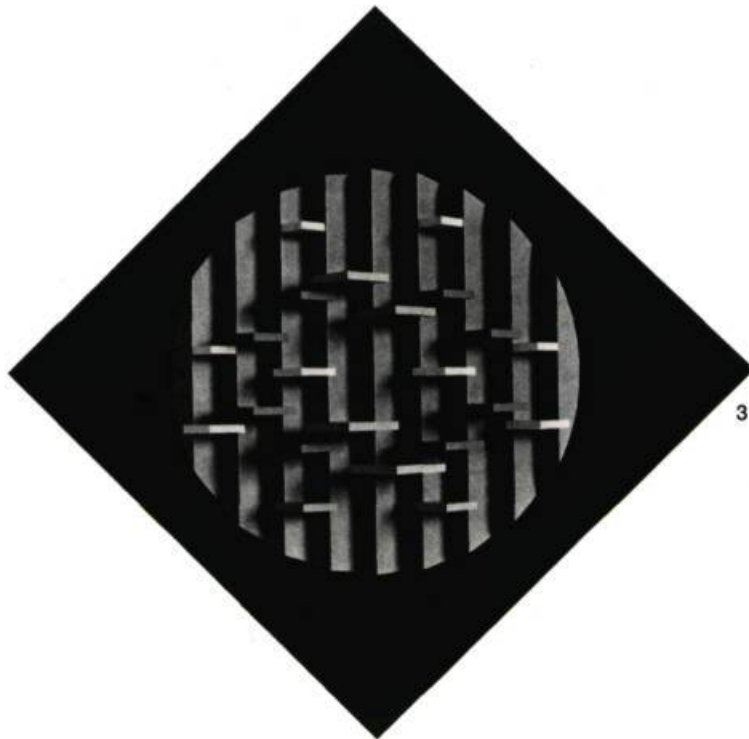
Parfois, on est conduit à prendre conscience des effets produits par le resserrement des plans dispersés et parallèles ainsi que de l'effet de contraste et d'opposition, là où les directions axiales de chacune des formes colorées sont disposées en sens contraire les unes des autres. Le traitement de la surface du plan de fond peut engendrer un rayonnement spatial de bascule et d'obliquité qui n'est pas sans ressembler aux ondulations concentriques de l'eau dans un étang ou au tremblement des feuilles dans le vent.

Une des caractéristiques de l'évolution des desseins humains consiste en un prétendu retour cyclique qui suscite le commentaire fréquemment entendu que les choses sont reve-

nues à leur point de départ. Ceci, pourtant, est une illusion. Les choses ne restent pas immobiles mais se transforment graduellement, d'une époque à l'autre. Le cercle n'est pas un cercle mais une spirale qui se déroule de façon imprévue et incohérente. A ce sujet, il convient de se rappeler que Mondrian en est venu à ses compositions non figuratives en passant par une abstraction progressivement consciente du paysage et, enfin, est retourné, peu avant sa mort, à la représentation des aspects du monde réel, à la suite de la vive sensation que lui causèrent l'eurythmie et les spectacles qu'il trouva à son arrivée aux États-Unis. De même, c'est une semblable qualité de parallélisme et d'analogie qui relie l'œuvre de Ronald Kostyniuk à l'évolution finale de Mondrian, ainsi que le sommet qu'il a atteint en lui faisant franchir un nouveau pas par le moyen du relief par construction. C'est la disposition délibérée et ordonnée des parties qui excite la mémoire rétentive.

Selon ses propres paroles, le premier souci de Ronald Kostyniuk est de créer des formes visuellement analogues à celles que produit la nature, mais en les interprétant et en les rendant au moyen d'un art non imitatif qui tire parti de la forme géométrique et du jeu de la couleur. Se bornant, dans son travail, à un langage difficile et réduit, il aurait pu facilement tomber dans le piège d'une servile adhésion — étroite et conformiste — à l'interprétation formaliste des principes du structuralisme. Quoiqu'il en pût être et tout en admettant et en acceptant le fait que, dans la nature, les processus et la croissance des structures ne sont pas universels mais pleins de variations évolutives, il lui a été possible de s'en tenir aux limites du relief pour acquérir un style relevant essentiellement de la vie plutôt que d'une contemplation d'autant plus stérile qu'elle serait expressive.

(Traduction de Geneviève Bazin)

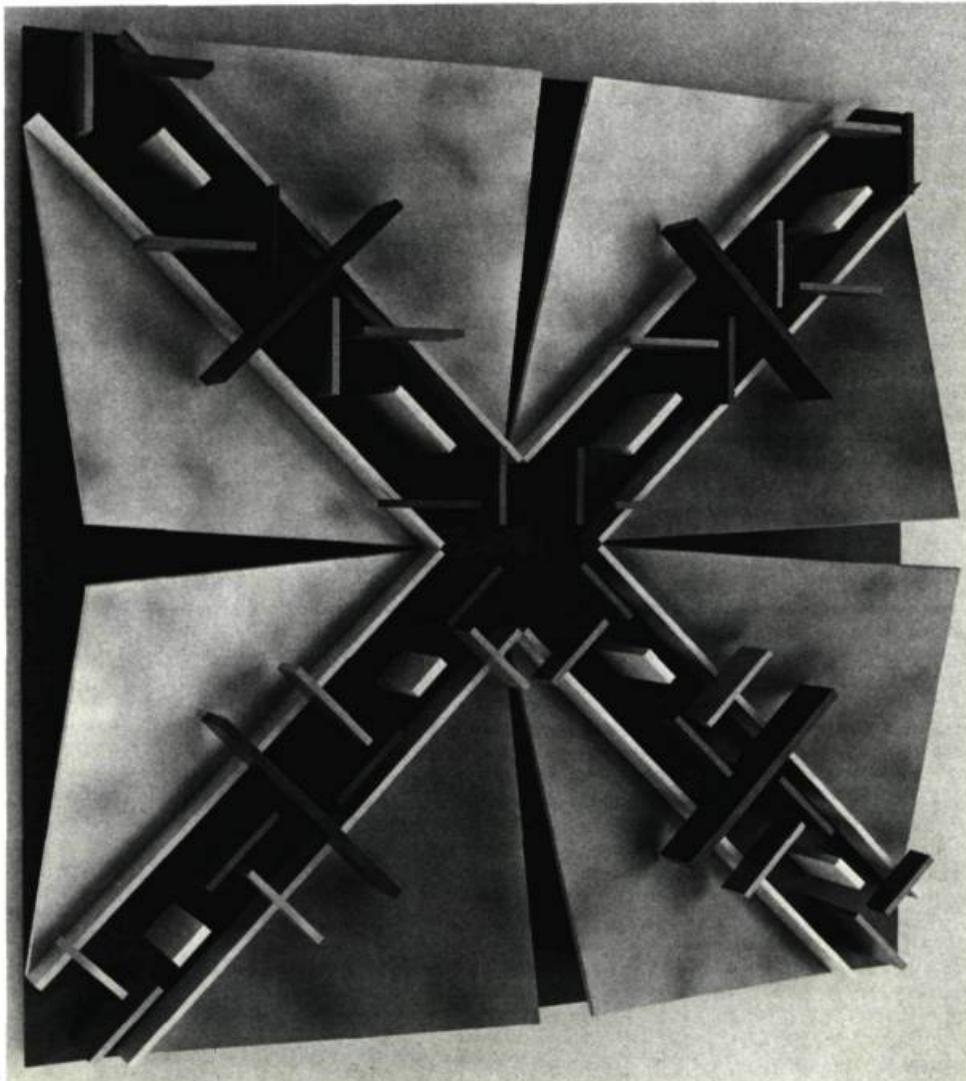


1. Ron KOSTYNIUK
Relief Structure, 1974.
 Émail sur aluminium, plexiglas,
 cuivre plaqué nickel; 114 cm. x 114.

2. *Tryptique Relief Structure*, 1974.
 Émail sur crezone et bois; 114 cm. x 317.

3. *Relief Structure*, 1974.
 Émail sur plexiglas; 163 cm. x 163.

4. *Relief Structure*, 1974.
 Émail sur plexiglas; 117 cm. x 117.



and to his self-identification with the *Sleep of Arthur in Avalon* (1881-1898, Ponce, Puerto Rico). In the *Briar Rose* series which illustrates the Sleeping Beauty motif, the knights, the king and his courtiers, the princess and her companions are enclosed by the vegetation. Their bodies have the same weightlessness as the thorn-bushes which surround them. Once again, the armour, the crowns, the jewels and the rich materials contrast with the wild roses in flower — or does Nature reflect the sumptuousness of the former? Is it her triumph over Civilization? The impression is one rather of simultaneous difference and harmony between the two orders, each equally important and as complementary as the masculine and the feminine elements, or as the colours, red and green. Medieval, alive with musical instruments, the society depicted by Burne-Jones contains nothing to offend a sensibility out of tune with its own time. The sleep which moulds together the wild roses and the princess' court is the way to stop the march of time, to deny History. In a sense, Burne-Jones' painting itself is a sleep, rather than a dream. Contrary to the works of Fuseli, or of Goya, this sleep remains untroubled by nightmares. Conversely, it is a work which shows no real evolution.

3. Eroticism

We are constantly aware of a definite erotic element in these paintings. The Beggar Maid gazing past King Cophetua with her ringed eyes has a certain disturbing fascination. But it is an eroticism which is essentially passive. Eighteen times, the slender silhouette of a young girl in ancient dress descends *The Golden Stairs* (1872-1880, Tate Gallery), gracile, long-limbed, with sensuous hollows around her eyes. Of course, as in fairy-stories, the sheer number of these sister-figures accounts for part of their charm, being plural and singular at the same time. Once again, we find confirmation of the static, almost interchangeable, quality of Burne-Jones' oppositions: he prefers to paint the young girl, the adolescent, the ephebe, the hermaphrodite.

4. The Industrial Society

In spite of what has been said, it would be wrong to think that Burne-Jones was not a painter of his day. Apart from the fact that the dream aspect is the necessary reverse of the industrial society (witness the painter's extraordinary success in his own life-time), it must be remembered that Burne-Jones (and William Morris) are Victorians inasmuch as they tried to escape from what to them was a mercantile and philistine environment. In other words, their love for the decorative arts, stained glass windows, painted furniture, tapestries and ceramics indicates that they are real Victorians with a concern for the relationship between industry and the arts. Before enlarging on their idealism, it would be as well to point out that they were, in the practice of their art, materialists. Their understanding of the word "art" was that implicit in the term "arts and crafts". It is in this sense that Burne-Jones was not, as Lord David Cecil has put it, a "visionary", as was Samuel Palmer.

5. Burne-Jones' influence

Burne-Jones' influence on the Art Nouveau movement can be ascribed partly to his formal technique and partly to his efforts to bring about a greater understanding between industry and the arts. The subject has already been dealt with very adequately, and I shall limit myself to a few brief remarks. Firstly, the excellent

book by Martin Harrison and Bill Waters *Burne-Jones* (Barrie and Jenkins, London, 1973), devotes a final chapter to the influence exerted by the artist but fails to mention Carlos Schwabe. It seems nevertheless evident that an allegory such as *The Marriage of the Poet and the Muse* (1901-1902) is directly inspired by *The Depth of the Sea*. Its structure shows the same system of fixed oppositions (moreover, although this system is particularly evident in Burne-Jones' work, it might prove a fruitful basis of analysis for other symbolist painters). It is difficult to say whether the technique is typical of allegorical painting in general, or whether it expresses the particular powerless antagonism of these painters towards the industrial society). In addition, some of the drawings in the "Secret" book (1885 . . . , British Museum), *Sky and Waves*, for example, constitute one of the many links between symbolism and abstraction. Finally, a comparison seems called for between *The Golden Stairs* by Burne-Jones and the *Nu descendant un escalier* by Marcel Duchamp (1912). Duchamp, however, aimed at reproducing movement, whereas Burne-Jones spent a lifetime denying it.

1. From Nov. 5th 1975 to Jan. 4th 1976. The exhibition will then go to Southampton (January 24th - February 22nd) and to Birmingham, the artist's native city (March to April).

(Translation by Eithne Bourget)

RON KOSTYNIUK — STRUCTURES

By John W. GRAHAM

Set in a century of turbulent changes in every facet of man's endeavours, it is not surprising that the lack of direction and cohesive expression should be reflected and made manifest in equally diverse, disorderly, and frequently nihilistic art. The one consistent, orderly, though inconspicuous development in the visual arts which has managed to thread through the pervading influences and distractions has been, and continues to be, the constructed relief.

The constructed relief evolved in the late thirties from the two dimensional kinetics of Piet Mondrian's paintings through the work and theories of the American artist Charles Biederman who moved from the vision of Neo-Plasticism into the active and perceivable field of physical relationships of three dimensions. By defining and manipulating elements projecting from the ground plane, he achieved a reality between painting and sculpture, not unrelated to kinetic art, in which spatial and temporal relationships require both the artist and the viewer to participate.

In his notes on *Structurist Vision*, Eli Bornstein states that actual light, colour, space and structure, the parallel elemental qualities in nature, burst forth to displace their static frontal representations with dynamic multi-dimensional realities. It is this sense of ordered reality in union with nature which leads him to explain that a child may stand before a structurist relief or a flower and respond simply and directly to the visual reality of both without distinction.

And so it is with the work of Ronald Kostyniuk. Drawing upon his background in biology and an empirical approach to nature, he re-

jects rigid mathematical formulae in the ordering of his colour-forms, relying instead upon his intuitive sensibility. As one examines his work, it becomes apparent that he develops his colours and forms simultaneously; the relationships of the one with the other are too completely integrated to have been imposed one upon the other.

In order to focus attention upon the formal characteristics of the colour-forms, he avoids any indication of the inherent nature of the materials with which the work is executed. The materials become irrelevant, so that it is neither possible nor necessary to identify them. All the forms and surfaces are meticulously refined, and all the colours with their matte finish are so much a part of the forms that there is no sensation of arbitrary application or subjective distraction.

Gradually, he has moved beyond viewing the ground plane as the definitive limit of specific formal relationships. His later pieces actively engage the planar ground surfaces in the three-dimensional manipulations. As a result of his use of surface modulation, rotation and skewed inclination, he eliminates the connotations of positive and negative, on-off, figure-ground responses. The projecting elements are no longer separated by the spaces between them, but rather, are held together by them.

At times, we are led to a conscious awareness of the effects of squeezed space between extended parallel planes, and of the impact of contrast and opposition where the axial directions of the individual colour-forms are arranged in contrary directions to one another. The manipulation of the surface of the ground plane may set up a spatial radiation of tipping and tilting not unlike the concentric ripples in a pond or the flurry of leaves in a breeze.

One of the characteristics of man's evolving patterns is the apparent recurrence of cycles, which has led to the oft-repeated comment that things have come full circle. It is a misleading impression, however. Things do not stand still, but transform progressively, season by season. The circle is not a circle, but a spiral, unwinding in a shifting and inconsistent manner. In this context, it is useful to remember that Mondrian moved to his non-representational compositions through an increasingly conscious abstraction of the landscape, only to return again, shortly before his death, to the portrayal of aspects of the real world stimulated by the excitement of the rhythm and patterns he encountered after he came to America. It is also this quality of parallelism or analogue that links Ronald Kostyniuk's work to the latter-day development of Mondrian and the quality that he has advanced forward across a new threshold through the idiom of the structured relief. It is the deliberately ordered arrangement of the parts which stimulates the recollective memory.

In his own words, Ronald Kostyniuk's prime concern is the creation of visual analogues to nature's created forms, interpreted and translated into a nonmimetic art of geometric form and colour interaction. Working within a difficult and reductive idiom, it would be relatively easy to fall into the trap of slavish or narrow and legalistic adherence to formal pattern interpretation of Structuralist principles. However, in recognizing and accepting the fact that the processes and growth structures in nature are not universal but filled with adaptive variations, he has been free to work within the relief ethic to achieve a vital rather than sterile contemplative expressive style.