

Art et régionalisme Art and Regionalism

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Volume 23, Number 93, Winter 1978–1979

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/54772ac>

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Publisher(s)

La Société La Vie des Arts

ISSN

0042-5435 (print)

1923-3183 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Paradis, A. (1978). Art et régionalisme / Art and Regionalism. *Vie des arts*, 23(93), 17–97.

ART ET RÉGIONALISME

L'art des régions est-il un art régionaliste, et comment peut-on définir un art régionaliste? Voilà les questions que nous nous sommes posées au cours d'enquêtes qui ont été faites dans la région de Chicoutimi et au Lac Saint-Jean auprès des groupes qui s'occupent d'arts plastiques, de même que nous l'avions fait, quelques mois plus tôt, dans la région de Sherbrooke, lors de la préparation de notre numéro précédent.

L'art régionaliste, tel qu'on le conçoit aujourd'hui, reflète une appartenance toujours plus approfondie à un milieu qui n'est pas seulement dû à un accident de naissance mais qui est véritablement un lieu où l'on vit, où la nature immédiate et environnante nourrit l'œil et l'imagination, où l'appel à l'expression se fait pressant. Autrefois isolé et protégé, l'art des régions a suscité un art intime, un art réaliste largement dominé par le besoin de traduire le paysage et un art naïf dont nous ferons une étude thématique dans un avenir prochain. Et nous y soulignerons l'importante contribution des peintres naïfs du Saguenay et de Charlevoix, les Villeneuve¹, les Bouchard et les Bolduc. L'art des régions est actuellement caractérisé par sa liberté d'expression et par son souci de participation aux interrogations qui préoccupent les artistes de tous les coins du monde.

L'implantation récente de l'université dans les régions a contribué à créer un climat social et culturel nouveau. D'une part, l'université est en train de redécouvrir une de ses plus anciennes fonctions, qui consiste à être un foyer de rayonnement spirituel, intellectuel et artistique autant que scientifique. L'âge de l'expansion politique est peut-être enfin révolu. Et l'université retrouvera sa vocation de culture et de civilisation.

D'autre part, l'art est toujours le premier agent à nous informer qu'il y a quelque chose de changé. Ses orientations nouvelles nous semblent positives. Grâce à la présence de l'université et des collèges, l'artiste de la région est bien informé. Il cherche à mieux s'intégrer dans la communauté, et son besoin de communiquer se manifeste. Il avoue facilement qu'il est plus influencé par New-York que par Montréal, Québec ou Toronto. Mais dans les bibliothèques, la documentation n'est pas seulement nord-américaine, elle voisine avec une bonne sélection de publications européennes.

Dans cet esprit, il faut souligner le rôle important d'un agent culturel tel que la Bibliothèque de prêt du Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean à Alma, qui dessert 65 municipalités de la région, de Tadoussac à Chapais, et qui, en plus de diffuser le livre, le film, le disque, le jouet éducatif, fait aussi le prêt gratuit des œuvres d'art à domicile. Son directeur, Jean-Marc Bourgeois, n'est jamais à court de projets: il constitue en ce moment, en collaboration avec la Fondation René-Bergeron, une collection de gravures et de sérigraphies des artistes du Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean, dont il se propose d'assurer la promotion. Il ne fait aucun doute qu'une telle activité et un tel sens de l'animation suscitent une prise de conscience d'où la contradiction n'est pas absente, mais ce qui frappe surtout, c'est la volonté de s'exprimer sans contraintes, d'aller vers une pensée qui cherche à prendre forme.

A ces artistes qui œuvrent si près de nous, je laisse cette réflexion de Bernard Noël: «Le monde pourrait être le livre ouvert de la pensée du monde mais l'habitude ferme nos yeux et fait que nous ne sommes pas au monde. Le penseur veut réveiller le regard mais il doit, pour cela, récrire le livre du monde.²»

1. Voir l'article de François-Marc Gagnon, dans *Vie des Arts*, Vol. XVI, No 65, p. 38-41.

2. Bernard Noël, *Magritte*. Paris, Editions Flammarion, 1976.

By Marcel RIOUX

ART AND REGIONALISM

By Andrée PARADIS

Is the art of regions a regionalist art? How can we define a regionalist art? These are the questions that have arisen during the surveys made in the region of Chicoutimi and Lake St. John among groups involved in plastic arts, as also occurred a few months earlier during those undertaken in the Sherbrooke area for the preparation of our preceding issue.

Regionalist art as conceived to-day reflects an always thorough relationship to a milieu which is due not only to an accident of birth but which is truly a place where one lives, where immediate and surrounding nature feeds the eyes and the imagination, where the appeal to expression is urgent. Formerly isolated and protected, the art of regions has inspired an intimate art, a realist art largely dominated by the need to interpret the landscape and a naive art on which we shall do a thematic study in the near future. In it we shall stress the important contribution of the naive painters of the Saguenay and Charlevoix, the Villeneuve¹, the Bouchards and the Bolducs. The art of regions is presently characterized by its freedom of expression and by its concern for participation in the interrogations that preoccupy the artists of all parts of the world.

The recent establishment of universities in the regions has contributed to the creation of a new social and cultural climate. On the one hand, the university is in the process of rediscovering one of its most ancient functions, which is to be a centre of spiritual influence, intellectual and artistic as much as scientific. The age of political expansion is perhaps over, finally. And the university will regain its vocation in culture and civilization.

On the other hand, art is always the first medium to inform us that there has been something changed. Its new orientations seem positive to us. Due to the presence of universities and colleges, the artist of the region is well informed. He tries to integrate better with the community and his need to communicate becomes evident. He freely confesses that he is more influenced by New York than by Montreal, Quebec or Toronto. But in the libraries documentation is not only North American, it is accompanied by a good selection of European publications.

In this spirit, it is necessary to stress the important rôle of a cultural agent such as the Lending Library of the Saguenay-Lake St. John which serves sixty-five municipalities of the region, from Tadoussac to Chapais and which, besides circulating books, films, records and educational toys, also lends without charge works of art to homes. The Library's director, Jean-Marc Bourgeois is never short of projects: at present, in collaboration with the René-Bergeron Foundation, he is organizing a collection of engravings and serigraphs by artists of the Saguenay-Lake St. John, the promotion of which he plans to assure. There is no doubt that such an activity and such a sense of animation inspire an awareness in which contradiction exists, but what is particularly impressive is the will to express themselves without restraint, to advance toward a thought that seeks to take form.

To these artists who are working so close to us I leave this reflection by Bernard Noël: "The world could be the open book of the world's thought, but habit shuts our eyes and makes us not be in the world. The thinker wishes to awaken the gaze, but for that purpose he must rewrite the book of the world"².

1. See the article by François-Marc Gagnon in *Vie des Arts*, Vol. XVI, No. 65, pp. 38-41.

2. Bernard Noël, *Magritte*, Paris, Éditions Flammarion, 1976.

(Translation by Mildred Grand)

Others will relate what is original in the artistic and cultural manifestations of the creators of a region formerly called "the realm of Saguenay". It is altogether fitting that the series of sections published by *Vie des Arts* should include this region which has always had the reputation of being strongly individualized, for several reasons, of course, but assuredly on account of its historically relative isolation. Speaking for myself, I would like to try to bring out very briefly the meaning that regional manifestations and movements take on to-day in many western countries. Indeed, it seems to me that, beyond what is happening in Saguenay-Lake St. John and in other regions of Quebec, we can perceive a much more general phenomenon of cultural mutation. This definitely means that the regional phenomenon, far from being the expression of a nostalgia for what is dying, appears, on the contrary, as an avant-garde manifestation. This is a case of a rupture, a break in the model of development of western societies. A short time ago, people were interested in regions in order to compare them to metropolises, to discover survivals and to show how they were in the process of overtaking the model of big cities. To-day people are involved there for the purpose of bringing out what pattern there may be in the types of life and the cultural productions of the regions. To an extreme, the regions are fostering another notion of life, the alternative expressed by the fine title of René Dumont's book *L'Utopie ou la mort* or that of the heteronomy or the autonomy described by some sociologists. The artists who express themselves here must not be considered as gratuitous persons working outside of reality; on the contrary, they are completely immersed in a milieu that they inhabit and which they reveal to the world.

To-day everything is happening as though the metropolis-regions relationship was reversing itself. Since industrial society imposed its logic of centralization and control, its mega-machines and mega-agglomerations on the ensemble of life and society, large urban centres have given body to social imagery; it was there that the good life was lived; persons of regional and rural areas appeared somewhat like old fogies who sooner or later would catch up; which had repercussions on the idea they had of themselves; they were inclined to view their lives as a lack of something. For some time, something has gone wrong in this relationship. We are not concerned here with examining this phenomenon in all its dimensions, but rather with asking certain questions and evoking certain hypotheses on this break in the type of development which has prevailed in our industrial societies for several decades. Obviously, the criticism of our societies does not date from to-day, but what seems new is the weakening of ideologies and communist and Third World utopias. It appears that to-day more and more individuals and groups have come to believe that this desired other place and this other life must be imagined and created where one is and in everyday life. We are beginning to wonder if liberty is exclusively the freedom to advance, to rush forward, but if it is not also and particularly, perhaps, the freedom to remain, to take root, to live and to perceive, as Paul Virilio wrote, "the depths of a place, a time, a space . . ."¹ The words and phantasms that to-day feed the most lucid imagination are those of ecology, autonomy, self-management and self-rule. Closer to our subject and to the thematic plan of *Vie des Arts*, we are inclined to associate more and more ecology and region, ecologism and regionalism. For what reason? It seems to me that in this way we re-associate culture and nature, that we realize that the two are interdependent and that in destroying one we destroy the other because the same logic is involved.

As long as western societies existed on the idea that nature had been given to man so that he might exploit it always more and more effectively, all their life was oriented toward a galloping mobility, upheld by an economic growth and a technological development with no visible end. It is only recently that we have realized that the supply of non-renewable resources had been seriously depleted, that the balance of nature had been destroyed and that pollution is increasing inexorably. From this have arisen the ecological movements that aim at restoring man's harmony with nature. We quickly see that this type of development was destroying not only nature but also traditional heritages and collective memories — in a word, cultures. The fragmentations, specializations and divisions engendered by these kinds of living demand controls and coordinations on the part of states and the large enterprises that turn individuals and groups into robots and isolate them from nature,