

ETC



CRASH

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CRASH (from left to right and from top to bottom) Michel Saulnier, Joseph Branco, Guy Bourassa, Suzanne Roux, Jean-Pierre Gilbert and Marie-Chrystine Landry. Text : Allan Pringle. Éditions Graff, 1989; 18 x 24 in. Printing of 31

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In the latter part of the 1980s Jean-Pierre Gilbert's fascination with the interrelationship of word and image and his preoccupation with the concepts of seriality, succession, and the multiple resulted in the annual production of a "book" project (in fact, sculptural components juxtaposed to passages of text bound in a book-like format). Early books were highly individualistic and introspective, serving largely as synopses of art and life lessons. More recent books, however, have reflected Gilbert's ascendant position in the milieu (appointments to *ETC Montreal* and the Fine Arts department at UQAM) and have implicated prominent but otherwise disparate members of the Quebec art community. Gilbert's 1988 project, *Technologia*, united the high-profile forces of Goulet, Whittome et al, while the 1989 edition, *CRASH*, under the aegis of the Ministère des Affaires culturelles du Québec's Artistes de la relève program, assembled the dynamics of younger enthusiasts.

Despite the overt implication of the *CRASH* title, preambles referencing the aviator's flight recorder, and the pre-production, symbol rich, nihilistic mood-text of guest essayist Allan Pringle (Pringle viewed the primal "black box" as an encyclopedia of scientific, cultural, and personal mythology condensed in the vocabulary of our postmodern world), only two of the six artist-participants would appear to have drunk heavily from the well of doom. Gilbert presented his trademark frieze of discharged bullet casings literally "wired for sound" (i.e., attached to domestic fire alarms) — vehicles of both destruction and warning.

Suzanne Roux's writhing anthropomorphic creatures (man-fishes) might be read as metaphors for that "glorious return" to the "house of the mythmaker" — to the "pharmakon".

Other contributors, although outwardly athe-matic in stance, did enhance the sublime mood of deprivation posited by the essay. Their work, charged with the negative dynamics of denial, was, at the very least, true to the nihilistic spirit of the *CRASH* theme. Marie-Chrystine Landry's colour-rich, univocal railings blocked narrative potential. Guy Bourassa's arrangements of book spines suggested the reduction of traditional stores of knowledge to the superficiality of image. Joseph Branco's mouldings served to frame the contributions of other artists (the mouldings evoked an innocuous presence) and thus failed to enter into interpretative exchange. Finally, Michel Saulnier would seem to have set out to prove just how far the leaf can fall from the tree. His carved wooden leaves — life symbols — belied the very indeterminate nature and direction not only of the *CRASH* project, but also of our fin-de-millennium culture.

Eclecticism, disjuncture, seduction, information bits that are behind or below experience ... these are the signs and symptoms of "saturnalia", of life lived on the brink of excess. "Sic itur ad astra" (thus we go to the stars) and wander in the darkness between those ephemeral nodes of light.

Annie Paquette