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TEXTS IN ENGLISH

McLUHAN'S AESTHETIC EXPLORATIONS

By Donald F. THEALL

THE ARTS AT THE TIME OF SIMULTANEOUSNESS

By Andrée PARADIS

We learned recently of the appointment of Canadian professor and writer Marshall McLuhan by Pope Paul VI as special advisor to the Vatican on communications. Once more, following great societies and governments, an appeal was made to the famous expert who, without hesitation, predicted the coming of an electric liturgy for electric man.

His short, striking formulas charm vast audiences and have been heard around the world for twenty years. A new sage of the present time who, from his headquarters, the Cultural and Technological Centre of the University of Toronto, fulfils the duties of an original thinker, very personal, McLuhan, enthusiastically followed by some, opposed by others, draws from the arts (poetry, visual arts) the greater part of his thoughts on the evolution of western awareness, and, on the other hand, exerts a predominant influence on many contemporary artists. In this respect, he particularly interests *Vie des Arts*. Since the authoritative interview he granted a few months ago to Jean Paré for the magazine *Forces*, as well as the one that appeared in *L'Express* last year, we have come to ask ourselves certain questions about the thought of McLuhan concerning art, nature and freedom, which our contributors have tried to answer.

McLuhan's most outstanding contribution to the examination of western thought has been to make him aware of the blind alley in which it is at present. The whole problem of formal logic is questioned in a world of sound.

Electrical time is no longer the hour of the analysis of elementary processes, of deductive reasoning. It is that of the simultaneous, therefore of reflection on the sequence and the ensemble of allied problems. The upheaval in the media throws into confusion the idea of environment, the sense of perception, the ability of assimilation and the conception of the arts in general, painting, sculpture, architecture, cinema, which are becoming old forms of art in relation to the new ones, radio, television, video. Are the old forms of art, which seem no longer productive of the avant-garde, sentenced to disappear? Or are they now undergoing still badly defined transformations? Doubtless it is necessary to know what passion will animate the dynamism of the successive changes that the artist foresees and which he tries to convey to us. The art of McLuhan examining Art: "A musical house for our clear harmony", a step toward a new awareness.

(Translation by Mildred Grand)

When Marshall McLuhan succeeded in erasing the imaginary line which many thought existed between the arts and the mass media, he achieved the feat by using the insights of artists and poets who had created the contemporary aesthetic revolution. Ranging through McLuhan's works the reader discovers references to Dadaism and Surrealism, the Bauhaus, Klee, Kandinsky, Picasso and Le Corbusier — to select only a few of the many names and movements which suggest to McLuhan probes into how modern man can cope with his universe. These artists and their insights are rooted in representatives of other arts, especially writers and critics, like Mallarmé, Valéry, Joyce, Eliot, Pound, and Beckett. McLuhan's chief inspiration, symbolism, leads to his artistic tastes and to his conviction that the new arts would encompass the new technology, as Mallarmé had attempted to encompass the effect of the mass-produced newspaper and its headlines. His whole commitment to the artist is enmeshed, however, in a historical knowledge and awareness of the arts — visual, verbal and aural — which include the Gothic cathedral, Renaissance iconography, Romantic landscape and a multitude of other historical styles.

His metaphors come from the arts, particularly his most effective ones, such as his peculiar use of mosaic for the effects of contemporary electronic technology. Mosaic, sometimes close to being confused in his usage with both collage and montage, is a flat, tactical, iconic form that creates a type of involvement similar to that which is supposed to occur in television or contemporary multimedia exhibiting of the kind that the Czechs carried out in their cubed-screen and other media exhibits at Expo 67. But far more than metaphors, the arts for McLuhan are the index to contemporary survival. He sees the artist as the person who must be in the "control-tower" of society, for only in the ability of the artist, especially the contemporary artist, to deal with changing perception is there a hope to achieve the maximum value out of the potential which may be implicit in contemporary society. The artist, according to McLuhan, creates a counter-environment which elevates the unconscious aspects of the environment to consciousness. He appears to believe that once Andy Warhol takes a potential piece of junk such as a Campbell Soup can and turns it into a work of art, this act releases elements in the environment for conscious recognition which have previously gone without notice. Pop art, for example, makes us see the world of ads, of comics, of film, of fashion, of the personality cult with new eyes and consequently in the process has taken account of the phrase that Pound borrowed from Confucius and quoted incessantly, "Make it New."

McLuhan presents a world in which art is a process and a process which is dialectical in nature. The very dialectical nature of art in its operation of illuminating or bringing to light aspects of the everyday which have been unrecognized is the reason why McLuhan's own vocabulary becomes dialectical — hot and cold, environment and counter-environment, war and peace, visual and tactile. Such a strategy often leads to over-simplification

and confusion, yet it is a dramatic necessity in the way he approaches the problem of trying to record the process of art in act rather than making the usual descriptive or analytical critical statements about it.

Probably his first sensitivity to the way that the arts and the world of everyday objects and mass produced entertainment are interlocked came from a British artist, Wyndham Lewis, whose critical writings related together such diverse aspects of the life of the Twenties as *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, the length of women's skirts, the films of Charlie Chaplin, the music hall, the Russian Ballet Joyce, Stein, and the philosophy of Bergson. Lewis held the view that all great art is satire and McLuhan's way of seeing art as counter-environment, dialectical opposite or as breakthrough from breakdown is closely related to the way that Lewis saw the artist as enemy, satirist, colossus attacking the pigmies. But McLuhan elevated the hints of Lewis into a total vision of a media world and a world of objects which could themselves be viewed as media being placed on the same level as the works of art produced for the museum, the record player or the library. In fact, he constantly hinted that these might well come to replace the others.

The result was that McLuhan became the prophet of the art movements of the 50's, and 60's and 70's. When this phenomenon began to reach more popular consumption in events such as Expo 67, McLuhan came to be described as the father of the new multi-media revolution. Yet his major achievement had been to elevate the object and the pop interests of a mass audience to a level of illumination that they could create a conflict with what had previously been considered legitimate art. If, as in McLuhan, fashion, comic books, ads and the like are analyzed as if they were works of art, the line of demarcation between art and non-art becomes blurred and uncertain. The uncertainty so created becomes itself a kind of counter-environment which permits these artistic insights of the 10's, and 20's and 30's to assume a more crucial place in the vocabulary and style of the new. Pop becomes Dada revisited, but revised as Harold Rosenberg has pointed out with a difference — the Pop artist has a kind of "love affair" with his objects and even at times romanticizes them in a way not envisioned by Duchamp and his "Fountain." Klee's quest for the fundamentals of an art of motion, for the elements and the processes which would create a way of coping with a new world of change become transformed into the quests of the minimal artists, the conceptual artists and others who lose themselves in the process, losing simultaneously the stress that Klee, like Focillon, placed on conceiving art as form-making, as opposed to conceiving art as form. Yet in this process McLuhan is not only influenced by the artists of the first half of the century, but he is influencing the artists of the second half of the century.

This influence is complex, sometimes direct, sometimes mediated through other critics. Barthes, for example, wrote his *Mythologies* after McLuhan's early work, and either through knowledge or the accident of parallel influence communicates many of the same attitudes and concerns. More directly in North America, McLuhan not only enters the art criticism of writers such as Rosenberg or Lippar, even if at times negatively, but he becomes the inspirer of artists in a wide variety of media from those who staged the

Armoury Show of EAT (Experiments in Art and Technology) to those who encouraged artists to participate in experimental broadcasting at WGBH in Boston for the National Educational Television Network.

Though it might seem that McLuhan, by this means, creates a situation in which the media and the world of everyday objects subsumes art, his actual intent is the opposite, for he sees art as providing the only way of controlling the process of change represented by the phenomena of everyday life. He sees the artist as providing precisely the same kind of critical perspective on the world that the launching of a satellite will do. The satellite, as McLuhan asserts, turns the world into a Globe Theatre, a global art museum with its junk reconverted into new objects of perception. This is because, imaginatively, man can now think of viewing his environment from the outside and consequently the satellite is a revolution in consciousness. The artist, like the satellite, turns the environment into works of art which create a process that illuminates previously unnoticed aspects of the world. For his prime example of this process McLuhan selects a writer, though the writer, James Joyce, has a close visual analogue in the work of Klee, to which both McLuhan and Joyce refer. Klee's "thinking eye", investigation of the way to encompass change, growth and movement in the world of forms, becomes one of the metaphors for McLuhan's ratio of the senses, for a thinking eye playing with form can realize an orchestration of the senses through a single medium, just as the language of James Joyce. Joyce and Klee, using puns, verbal or visual, discover ways of breaking down the previously integrated visions of their society, forcing men to focus on the world with new eyes and creating a situation in which, as McLuhan insists, the new world will have to adopt the attitude of the Balinese who do everything as well as possible because life is a work of art.

Criticism of McLuhan comes easily because he is a prose poet *manqué*. He has refused to decide whether he wants to be artist or analyst himself, though he could rightly argue these distinctions in the world he prophesizes cease to exist. He could not argue, however, that his lack of sensitivity to a theory of society which would be life-enhancing and humane is commendable. Yet, whatever his weaknesses, and I outlined many in a study called *The Medium is the Rear View Mirror*, his work is fundamental in stating before Marcuse or the hippies or the structuralists, the centrality of the aesthetic perception in the life of man in a way immediately relevant to the dilemmas of his own time. Besides, that, his work is intrinsically influenced by so much in the arts that its very effectiveness in approaching the media, the technological and the everyday object becomes itself a way of validating the importance of the arts, ancient and modern. Among art historians the work of Gombrich, Giedion, Panofsky, Wölfflin and many others have been essential to what McLuhan has achieved. Stained glass windows become a way of thinking about the parallels between Gothic Cathedral as multi-media and contemporary multi-media presentations and who can argue that even at a popular level the Czechs did not encompass something of this sort in their Expo presentations. Perspective becomes an index for thinking about the changing relations of space and time in the Twentieth Century in which a Klee or a Picasso was exploring the newly

needed art in motion and the exponents of what was to become a new art, the moving picture, were creating their first major works. The *Vanishing Point* as metaphor becomes the way to see an entire history. *Though the Vanishing Point*, McLuhan's book co-authored with the Canadian painter Harley Parker, becomes a way, like Alice's *Through the Looking Glass*, to move behind the mirror of realism into the world of abstraction but also into a world where a new realism, that of the Pop artist, that of the minimal artist, that of the happening, play their role as well.

What then is the difference between art and other objects and other events or presentations? In one way it does not matter, for the media or everyday objects of one generation may become the art work in the next, just as McLuhan quips that the old films become works of art in the television set. But art is also most significantly the counter-environment, that perceptual act which releases the unconscious potential from the verbal, aural and visual clichés of everyday life. As such it is essential to the total human person and is perhaps the fundamental perceptual act required to save our ecology, which McLuhan spells echo-logy, because it has now through art been raised to the level of consciousness where it echoes in our world and therefore to the point when change and growth are at least potentially possible.

McLUHAN AND ART

By Derrick de KERCKHOVE VARENT

To read the work of McLuhan is to seek the sentence or the word which, at some place in the text, suddenly invades the consciousness of the reader like an unexpected recollection. The image made of the inward horizon changes in quality. An original transparency reveals the whole text. The personal memory of the reader yields to a greater memory which simultaneously refers numerous presences to a mind now concerned with not enforcing its prejudices. Perhaps it is quite simply a matter of going from fragmentation to concentration.

It is necessary to pass through this transition; from that time onward, intellect moves without more effort than if it were enough to remember. Beginning with this state of intelligence, the most disturbing characteristics of a style which has annoyed so many persons are charged with an informing energy. This is a space governed by a strict authenticity.

Among Pascal's *Thoughts*, we find these few sentences which can serve as clues complying as much with the demanding appeal which subtends all his "fragments" as with the real unity of McLuhan's thought: "... to understand the meaning of an author it is necessary to reconcile all contrary passages. (...) Every writer has a meaning with which all the contrary passages are in accord or he has no meaning at all. (...) We must therefore look for one which reconciles all

contradictions." (Fragment 257-684)

This relationship between Pascal's work and McLuhan's arises from the fact that both appeal to sensitivity to *resonances* rather than to rational deduction. These resonances arise around the thin line of logical discourse, and often in spite of it, a space of multisensory perceptions which becomes the awareness of the reader. This interval is, paradoxically, the beginning and the end (in every sense of the term) of art and, perhaps, of communication, such as we understand it every day. However, more simply, it is perhaps only the moment of synthesis which suddenly occurs, and all at once, at the end of every well-conducted analysis.

McLuhan's method of writing has this in particular and is very annoying to specialists and experts, that it dispenses with analysis. A follower of the Symbolists, McLuhan gives only conclusions which he arranges in a strategic manner; like poets, he offers effects without giving causes. Writing from the completed synthesis, he does not concern himself with having the reader go along with him by following a road paved with patient deductions. He invites him to understand right off or to abandon the matter. He sets his sentences in relationship to resonance. Let us recall a technique of the Surrealists which consisted of juxtaposing two ordinarily incompatible terms in order to cause a spark of understanding to arise between them. That is a mini-happening. One can get fire by rubbing two sticks of wood together. The text should, finally, reveal transparency in the same way as analysis should reveal synthesis. By dint of reading the work of numerous experts who begin by forgetting the real object of their research to plunge more conveniently into analysis, we end up no longer expecting to obtain anything more than an increase of information. There are many analyses which are nothing but the practice of an abolished ritual.

To write on McLuhan is to try, after having been gripped by synthesis, to put it at our disposal, but it is above all to describe it, to submit it to the reader as the very aim of all the effort of the reading. It is among the same kind of ideas that Maurice Blanchot points out, by way of foreword to *L'Espace littéraire* that: "A book, even fragmentary, has a centre that attracts it: a centre not fixed, but which moves through the pressure of the book and the circumstances of its composition. A fixed centre as well, which moves, if it is genuine, by remaining the same and by always becoming more central, more concealed, more uncertain, more imperative." As it is not literary space but acoustical space that especially interests McLuhan, his intuition of the centre is not as Cartesian: "Acoustical space is a sphere with its centre everywhere and its circumference nowhere" (*Du cliché à l'archétype*). Acoustical space is one of the most common metaphors in McLuhan's work. It is the interval of the resonance and the total simultaneousness of all human experience. Art is one of its keys.

Here is the report of a few minutes of conversation on this article (when it had not yet been edited) with the interested party: *McL.* — Art is the school of perception. Advertising tries to adjust us to its world. There we become servo-mechanisms. All prealphabetic societies are made up of robots. Wyndham Lewis said that the best definition of a robot is the person who is perfectly adapted to his environment. Art seeks to dislocate man.

KV. — What are the relationships between man and nature?

McL. — In *Man's Presumptuous Brain*, Simeons states that our biological heritage, which allows us to adapt ourselves to our environment, has ceased to evolve for more than half a million years, before the appearance of the least degree of technology. The brain of man has not changed since then. With the invasion of all the technologies, the only way of becoming acclimatized comes from art. Art takes up the task of evolution that nature has abandoned.

KV. — How?

McL. — The artist *reprograms* the senses to render us able to survive in the technological environment. Naturally, to survive as human beings. Because man adapted to technologies is a *robot-zombie* who sleeps soundly.

KV. — And what about nature?

McL. — There isn't any, any more. Since October 17, 1957.

KV. — Ah!

McL. — The launching of the first sputnik. The Russians have transformed the planet into a form of art. As a form of art, the planet puts us back into the situation of the most primitive man; that is, in prearcheological times. The rôle of art changes radically under these conditions. It becomes crucial. Now that we have passed from the world of the eye to that of the ear, because the environment of simultaneous information is structurally acoustical, history, which belongs to the world created by writing, and which is essentially visual, has dissolved wholly in the *Now* — the eternal present of Siegfried Giedion, the author of *Space, Time and Architecture*. Art will have to pull us out of there.

This is the end of the conversation on this subject. After that, we went on to that of abortion upon request, and we returned to the robot theme.

By these few remarks, McLuhan invited me to draw some important conclusions from my own experience. Why is the rôle of art more *crucial* than ever? A useful answer to this question demands a rapid return into history such as visual linearity has given it to us, and such as it still appears in its evolving continuity to those from whom everything is not *Now*.

Between the Renaissance and the first thrusts of Symbolism which, toward the middle of the nineteenth century rediscovered old practices of the magic of the word, and echoed the more and more rapid progress of electricity, linearity imposed its law on man and on art. The rationalist current, as defined by Descartes and fostered by Newton's work, isolated man from the community according to a process which was accelerated during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

The achievement of the individual went through a profound identity crisis which was recorded by tragedy in England and France. Art, in its different forms, replayed all the stages of this transformation for man. The categories defined themselves, and art, on the one hand, began with nature, on the other, a dialogue which would be over only with the conquest of the latter by technology. As long as one environment is not limited by another it remains the ultimate source of the fundamental models of the human organization; but as soon as it is placed in a setting, it is the new environment that takes over and imposes its laws. Since the arc described by the first man-made satellite, technological artifice has replaced nature to turn the latter into a work of art where *programming* is involved. The

sages of the Orient always considered nature, not as a system of laws regulated in categories, but as a vast whole committed to *interpretation*: that is, a work of art. The *point of view*, which allows interpretation, is neither fixed nor visual, but multisensory and mobile; therefore it is not, properly speaking, a point of view, but a magnetic field or a dynamic sphere, capable of combining with all the forms of a universe in perpetual motion, without perspective and without history, where a series of discontinuous but *inter-resonant* myths are used as tools of navigation. The sixty-four hexagons of the *Yi King*, a book of Chinese wisdom whose popularity has continued to grow since C. G. Jung became interested in it, are so many fundamental equations that do not define the situations to which they apply, but are used as soundings to explore them. The person who makes use of them automatically enters the ebb and flow of the movement he explores, and his identity merges with it.

On the contrary, perspective, since the Renaissance, gives the viewer a fundamental base for his individualization, and his objective detachment of the situation he observes. Figurative painting, at its height, endows the persons it represents with a high pictorial definition. The novel, since its own rebirth (in France at the beginning of the seventeenth century) assured its own characters a still greater degree of autonomy and mobility. The theatre, struggling with this new man, fought at first to maintain feudal and collective traditions; this was how Corneille presented to us a type of individual who consented, at the cost of a tremendous effort of renunciation, to sacrifice his private interests to those of the community, the family, the State and God. With Racine, man was no longer in a position to resist his *passions*. From Saint François de Sales to La Bruyère, generations of moralists against the presumptuousness of a new I which plunged all consciousness into confusion. With Voltaire, the crisis passed: his tragedies, founded on chance, denied any form of *fate* and replaced it by a statement of mediocre misfortunes that are owing only to impatience or to very ordinary human failings. From entreaty, thousands of middle-class persons individualized in their motivations and actions proceeded to the exploration and the exploiting of a nature from which by scientific analysis and commerce they demand fragments always smaller, more personal, guaranteed by general, civic and cosmological laws.

As very well seen by Jean Starobinski in his wonderful book on the art of the eighteenth century, it was during this era that freedom was invented. Autonomy, of which we speak with respect to figurations of a linear kind, whether it be pictorial representation (where the reproduction is distinguished by concern for accuracy of detail), or dramatic, or narrative (it is in the novel that this form blooms best), this mobility is applied to the contents of the work, but not to the work itself. That is, the human person is presented there as free and mobile within a fixed frame. Even in the pictures where perspective prevails, this general law is strictly observed: the person, on whatever plane he may be, *stands out* on the background. Set in a pose or a kinetic expression, he has also been *fixed in motion*, but it is only in order to follow this movement in the awareness of the viewer. The whole definition he receives from the hand of the painter is precisely accentuated only to free it always

more from the inertia of the context. This is true for sculpture as well: the famous blow of the hammer that they say Michaelangelo gave on the head of his just-finished *Moses* is explained exactly by this sudden autonomy acquired by human representation: "Well! Speak then, if you are alive!" However, the context or the environment, in the case of sculpture, does not have this mobility: perspective fixes it in a set position — it would mean being able to move the picture or the cathedral, but that would change nothing in the tridimensional fixity of the cathedral or the painting. In the novel, the world is also fixed and the person mobile. In a universe of indifferent forms, linked among themselves according to our choice and in accordance with the application of our individualized observation, we were as free as the characters of our past novels.

We began to lose this freedom only when the world, with the Romanticists and especially the Symbolists, became an ensemble of *signs*, a time when it was the turn of nature "Nature is a temple where living pillars Sometimes send out confused utterances; Man passes there through forests of symbols That observe him with intimate glances."

(*Correspondances*, Baudelaire)

As long as nature's dialogue with us is confined to impressionist mumblings, as long as Chateaubriand's *René* is pursued only by dead leaves, we are still free. That is, not to misuse an excessively ambiguous term, we are still self-governing as individuals separated from one another and from the environment, by a power of personal decision which is the foundation and the guarantee of our private identity. However, when the whole environment changes into a network of information, it seizes us and, while still showing us always more haughtily roads which we have not discovered ourselves, sweeps us along there in spite of ourselves like the voices of Ulysses' sirens. Because we are not tied to the mast of our *spatial ship*, we cannot resist: we must dive into the sea of ravenous signs — we must drown there.

Our only chance to resist does not rest in us. Or almost not: we can gain time by blocking our ears; we can stuff ourselves with tranquillizers to stop this opening of all our pores until they do not work any more or until they kill us by their very excess, in order to arrest this terrible and inexplicable fluttering that grabs us at the hollow of the stomach. Our real chance to resist is that the mass of information remains shapeless, that its very volume guarantees us against a single path; that it is incoherent — in which case, all the signs find the value of simple forms, supple, malleable, obedient to our fantasies of artists, philosophers and educators. While there is contradiction, there is hope. And yet, the conquests of structuralism, so long repudiated by the fears of the old guard, seem to refuse us this hope: "In a situation of an excess of information, we have no other route but the recognition of models" (Marshall McLuhan, *Counterblast*). If art intends to remain effective, alive, it must confuse the trails or discover wholly new ones. Because with a world of coherent signs, there is no more art, there are only prayers and magic.

Between the Renaissance and the present, the artists and the scholars have torn us from the power of the Magus only to put us back there. This is not necessarily worse; many young rebels, howling against pollution, bureaucracy and the education systems, will

tell you this. Must one howl with the horde because it is right, but lose one's own awareness and the taste for museums, or else must one fight against it, because I am right, and wait in fear to be eliminated by the mob? Do we have a choice? In the western world, opinions in favour of abortion on request signify from country to country what the *new* novel has been teaching us for last twenty years: that the individual human person is dead, absent. Is art concerned with this basic problem? Art takes no moral position, even when it is busy only with making money. It is possible, however, that art should again become *religious*, that from the source of instructive pleasure it was in the eighteenth century, it should become an instrument of total survival.

Nonetheless, when art is so narrowly integrated into the very conditions of our daily reality, when our attention moves away from the object to concentrate on the sign, when the latter tears our judgment from us, so to speak, instead of inviting it, art strips us of all that makes up our inner and personal *self*. Art turns against its admirers and sends them to worship elsewhere. We shall go back to building nameless cathedrals. And we shall make niches for Saint Voltaire, asking ourselves with a great deal of confused amazement who was this demigod who spoke to us of freedom.

Yes, doubtless, the rôle of art is crucial to-day, were it only to send us on the trail of a new liberty.

(Translation by Mildred Grand)

Mr. R. H. Hubbard, curator at the National Gallery of Canada, chose to present the painting of the nineteenth century, in preference to contemporary art¹. This choice, which was necessary, considering the size of the collection, promotes our understanding of old Quebec painting and offers an excellent history of the portrait in French Canada.

Maurice Corbeil tells, in an interview printed in the first part of the catalogue, how his collection was born². Two facts came out of his remarks: the spirit in which the collection was developed and the outside help necessary to the collector. Influenced by Marcel Parizeau to meet artists, such as Pellan (back from Europe in 1940) and Borduas (before the 1942 exhibition), Maurice and Andrée Corbeil also made acquaintance of other collectors active at this time. One can believe that the Corbeils were pioneers in the collecting of traditional art. If they were among the first to buy works of the nineteenth century, their initiative was to be found in a century-old movement, at a time when art collectors and members of the clergy were encouraging Canadian artists with their orders. Historical societies and newspapers were publishing articles, often badly informed, but which praised the beauty of our traditional art. Men like Louis Fréchette, Marius Barbeau, Ramsay Traquair, Louis Carrier, Jean Chauvin, Gérard Morisset, Father Alain-Marie Couturier, to name only a few, spoke of the wonders of our art, produced under the French regime.

The rare works of this period led the Corbeils to settle their choice rather on the painting of the nineteenth century: they understood that it was the expression of the society of Lower Canada and that it was important to know and to interpret our history. In 1953³, therefore, they joined the movement of collectors and amateurs of old art who ferret out and covet beautiful productions, who exchange among themselves the works of artists missing from their collections⁴.

The Corbeils began by acquiring works of their contemporaries and this search continued at the same time as the acquisition of old art. They took advantage of each opportunity to buy works directly from the artists, without going through galleries, benefitting in this way in a better choice. They participated actively in the artistic movement of the forties and fifties, while encouraging members of the Society of Contemporary Art, artists whom they continued to help. In this respect, another exhibition of their collection would be necessary to show us the art of Bonin, Gauvreau, Gadbois, Parizeau, Lyman, Jori Smith, Riopelle and others.

Maurice Corbeil recalls often, during the course of the interview, the outside help he obtained in the gathering of his collection, whose eclecticism is one of its chief qualities. It seems that the most important factor to have influenced the formation of the Corbeil collection was the will to respect a historical knowledge of our art. The taste of the collector is no longer at stake, the choice of the works takes note of a chronology representing the greatest number of famous artists from 1800 to 1960. Among all the artists active during this period, history has already made a choice, the same one as the collector, moreover: it has preferred Joseph Légaré to Yves Tessier, Ozias Leduc to Jules-Bernardin Rioux. This collection therefore reveals a first conception of the history of Quebec art: a linear evolution which goes from naïve painters to the Montreal School. The canvas of Alfred Boisseau, for example, and the sketches of

Henri Julien allow us to foresee what might be a knowledge of the painting of Quebec, freed from the historical grid which retains only a few names, a few expressions.

The exhibition devoted to Quebec art arises, I am afraid, from a nationalistic ideology of discovery at any price and of a valuation exclusive of our cultural patrimony. Maurice Corbeil will say: "Certainly, Plamondon is not Ingres, but he is ours, he is us. . ."⁵ In the face of our excessive need to define ourselves, the criteria of personal taste no longer hold good. How to justify a preference for Plamondon, if not by nationalistic pre-occupation? The family, the house, the cultivated soil, those are the themes of *La Propriété de l'artiste, à Gentilly* of Légaré (No. 17 in the catalog). They well define the values which, in the Corbeil collection, are expressed by the men who defended them: the lesser nobility⁶, the nationalist leaders⁷, the prominent middle class persons⁸ and the artists who have taken part in the creation of a nationalistic bourgeois culture⁹.

The anglophone painters, in the tradition of the English landscape artists, marked their ownership of the country by the topographic description of our soil: Duncan (No. 27), of our customs; a tradition which is perpetuated with Roberts (No. 69) and Surrey (No. 78). The francophone painters seem to have preferred to represent the defenders of nationalistic ideas or to express by an equivalent plastic abstraction a gesture having a nationalistic significance.

The portraits in the exhibition¹⁰ allow us to establish a first contact with a knowledge of ourselves. How do we wish to be seen? First, by the diagrammatic and almost anonymous quality of the naïve painters, then by the objective description of the faces, as with Plamondon and Hamel, who devote themselves to sending back to their subjects the image which they make of themselves: made-up, adorned with jewels and decorations, with braid or stocks; finally, through psychological observation of the person of the twentieth century, where colour and brush place themselves in the service of an atmosphere, a personality. But always the subject remains fixed in his pose, dependent on his attributes, his formal garb.

The portrait *Fillette assise* (No. 3), dated 1792, is done in a sure technique. The child is represented seated in the corner of a room. Clad in a dress decorated with embroidery, fine fake pearls and lace, with a bonnet and a hat trimmed with fur and ribbon, ornamented with two bracelets, she holds a pot of flowers in one hand and a bunch of roses in the other. Her dog is sitting up on its hind legs in order to be seen too in the portrait. The scene, inscribed on a medallion, is held by a chain on a background of imitation marble. At the left of the room where the child is seated, there is a frame set with a rococo design. This little picture presents a scene composed of trees, a stele bearing the initials L.D., a shepherd's crook and two doves. The monogram L.D., according to the author of the catalogue, means the painter of the picture; in my opinion, it designates rather the name of the child or the intertwined initials of the loving couple, the parents, represented also by the birds giving each other a little peck. Nor is it here a matter of a funeral portrait in which the dead child is shown near her epitaph or surrounded by weeping cupids¹¹. On the contrary, a scene of happiness is involved: the birds are kissing each other, the stele is whole.

THE MAURICE AND ANDRÉE CORBEIL COLLECTION

By Laurier LACROIX

"... art, at whatever moment in history we observe it, does not express directly the total state of society. It is the prerogative of those who possess power and wealth. The latter order works, appreciate them according to the criteria of their taste and their culture. . . The life of forms is inseparable. . . from the history of the intentions formulated by patrons; and these intentions, these tastes, in their turn, are not separated from the social, political and psychic context of the period." (Jean Starobinski, *L'invention de la liberté*, p. 13.)

Maurice and Andrée Corbeil have made public a part of their immense collection of Quebec painting. It has been called the most "impressive" private collection in this field¹. The canvases were exhibited in Montreal and in Ottawa². As some works had been shown on different occasions, in books or in exhibitions devoted to a few of the artists represented in the collection³, it became important that it should be presented, even in a selective way, because it allows us to become familiar with two centuries of painting in Quebec.

The romantic portrait of *Toussaint Decarrie* (No. 14), if it was produced about 1795, shows a remarkable knowledge of the European style, revolutionary and romantic, and of the ideology that it conveyed. We had always believed that this ideology had shown itself much later here. The boy wears a very high detachable collar (Directoire style) held by a black stock. Drawn in an oval, the youth looks at the spectator. The softness of the green tones harmonizes with the mellowness of the touch.

The person of the energetic *Mme Ruellan* (No. 25) fascinates me. Plamondon, to whom the work is attributed here, freely lengthens her long hands and elevates the subject in a pose which brings out her round and sensual face where all the members are exaggerated.

Leduc, in the portrait in profile of *Guy Delahaye* (No. 45) links symbolic elements to his divisionist manner. A man looks at his friend, someone with whom he has had a long association. Guillaume Lahaise had published *Les Phases* in 1910, of which a part was dedicated to Leduc. In 1911, Leduc created twenty-six vignettes to illustrate the volume of poems *Mignonne, allons voir si la rose... est sans épines*. We do not penetrate the dreamy look of the poet. Behind him stands out a frieze showing laurel leaves, symbol of poetry, which are joined to a wheel with three spokes, symbol of the crossroads where Guillaume Lahaise finds himself. The latter is hesitating at this time between a career in poetry and one in psychiatry.

Jean Dallaire takes up again the subject of the *Femme à l'enfant* (No. 81). This theme of mother and daughter has been familiar in Quebec since the Education of the Virgin. The mother holds a little girl standing on her lap. Clothing, hat, furniture: all is a pretext to Dallaire for a geometrisation of forms and a multiplication of colour.

Ozias Leduc's small sketch of religious decoration reveals the paucity of interest that private collectors have accorded this aspect of our painting, and which was one of the most practised forms of art until 1940. We no longer recognize ourselves in this painting which was so flourishing a few years ago. Its place will reappear when we have understood that for our painters there was no dissociation between religious and secular painting, and that the former is just as much a revelation of our past as the latter.

The catalogue of the exhibition seems to have been made up in a hurry: one cannot hide too numerous errors under a quite original presentation. The reader who contents himself with a book of pictures will be satisfied: all the canvases are illustrated. For the person who is interested in Canadian art, the price of the catalogue is too high.

The interview with Maurice Corbeil, which serves as introduction, brings out certain facts, but in a vague way. The interview should have been preceded by an introduction in which the collection was analysed. The history of the collection, which is recalled in several answers, remains incomplete. The reviews accompanying each canvas might have given us details, but only a third of the pictures have a historical summary. The biographies which introduce each artist are incoherent or incomplete concerning the quoted facts. The latter are badly chosen, too scanty and never concern the canvases exhibited, when they do not rest on very free interpretations. Thus one learns that François Beaucourt spent some time in Russia, that he came under the influence of

Fragonard, which certainly the two pictures of the Sabrevois of Bleury, which are attributed to him, do not illustrate at all; Légaré perhaps took part in the Rebellion of 1837-1838¹⁴; Napoléon Bourassa decorated the Notre-Dame de Montréal Church. Why continue to repeat that O. Leduc was influenced by René Ménard, Alphonse Mucha and Le Sidaner, at a time when Leduc reveals his sources of inspiration in his writings? The attributions have been revised little or not at all and rest most of the time on primary stylistic associations. The two *Sabrevois de Bleury* are stylistically rather far from the *Autoportrait* of Beaucourt and from the *Trottier* couple. Let us note a fortunate example: *La Femme au chien* (No. 34) is attributed in the catalogue to Napoléon Bourassa rather than to Ludger Ruelland. The suggested date is very cautious, circa 1855. In 1855, the painter was still in Europe, where he had been since 1852. It would be rather a previous work, of the period when he studied with Théophile Hamel, from 1850 to 1852¹⁵.

The Corbeil collection abounds in important and interesting works; we are here in the presence of a group of paintings which must be reckoned with in the history of art in Quebec. Private collections, often richer than our museums, are nonetheless accessible with difficulty. We must therefore congratulate Andrée and Maurice Corbeil for having shared their knowledge and their love of art with us. It is thanks only to private collections that we shall be able to reconstruct a history of art and taste in Quebec. In the presentation of these collections, it will be necessary to apply ourselves less to creating a myth of the collector than to doing research on the works exhibited. The collector will find himself among the first to be richer in information on the works he loves, without fearing that the Kriehhoff he has bought may prove to be a Duncanson.

1. Jean Sutherland Boggs, in the preface to the catalogue of the exhibition *Collection Maurice and Andrée Corbeil*, p. 20.
2. At the Museum of Fine Arts in Montreal, from the thirtieth of March to the twenty-ninth of April, 1973 and at the National Gallery of Canada, from the eleventh of May to the tenth of June, 1973.
3. In *Painting in Canada*, J. Russell Harper makes full use of the Corbeil collection for his illustrations. Among the numerous exhibitions, let us mention: *Onze artistes à Montréal* (MFAM, from the eight of September to the second of October, 1960) and *Antoine Plamondon — Théophile Hamel* (NGC, from the twenty-second of January to the twenty-first of February, 1971).
4. Contemporary painters not exhibited are: Paul-V. Beaulieu, Fernand Bonin, Charles Daudelin, Marcelle Ferron, Marc-A. Fortin, Denyse Gadbois, Louise Gadbois, Pierre Gauvreau, Jean-Paul Lemieux, Rita Letendre, Jean-Paul Mousseau, Marcel Parizeau, Jeanne Rhéaume, Gérard Tremblay, Marian Scott. Other artists represented in the collection but not exhibited: Charles de Belle, Berczy, Brymner, Carr, Coburn, Cullen, William Hickman, Ed. J. Hughes, Jacobi, Raphaël, Triaud, Fernand Toupin is not mentioned in the catalogue but he appears with a *Composition* of 1966.
5. Catalogue, op. cit., *Propos de Maurice Corbeil recueillis par François Gagnon*, pp. 23-33.
6. Page 28 of the Catalogue. It is to be noted that the previous year, from the twenty-ninth of May to the twenty-eighth of September, 1952, there had been held, at the Museum of the Province of Quebec, l'*Exposition rétrospective de l'art au Canada français*. Ninety works exhibited, from Frère Luc to Charles Huot.
7. Among collectors, let us point out: Joseph Barcelo, Luc Choquette, Maurice Gagnon, Jules Brahy, Jean-Paul Lemieux.
8. Les Sabrevois de Bleury, Cat. Nos., 1 and 2.
9. Viger, Cat., No. 20.
10. Bourdages, Cat., No. 16; Mme Paradis, Cat., No. 24; Mme Pelletier, Cat., No. 22.
11. Mme Amiot, Cat., No. 13; Louis-H. Fréchette, Cat., No. 37.

12. Thirty-nine artists are represented by a group of ninety works. In this number of canvases, we count forty-four portraits, fourteen landscapes, thirteen abstracts, nine still-lives, seven subject pictures, two historical scenes and one religious painting.
13. Flexner, James Thomas, *Nineteenth Century American Painting*, New York, 1970, page 108.
14. On the subject of Légaré's political activity, see the master's paper of Claire Tremblay: *L'Oeuvre profane de Joseph Légaré* (University of Montreal). Napoléon Bourassa planned and decorated the Notre-Dame-de-Lourdes Church in Montreal.
15. Le Moine, Roger, *Napoléon Bourassa*, Montreal, Fides, 1972. A chronological summary is given at the beginning of the book.

(Translation by Mildred Grand)

THE MUTATIONS OF SAXE

By Laurent LAMY

Why take an interest in Saxe and his latest exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art last April? Because it is always fascinating to retrospect the advancement of an artist in order to try to understand how he achieved his most recent works. This survey contradicts the impression of the discontinuous, of leaps and sudden turns left by the memory of solo exhibitions which we have able to view in the space of ten years. A retrospective or a look at the entirety of the works that photographs revive for us smooths the visible cracks, brings out the connecting thread that binds the works one to the other. (Unless the work reveals itself as being irremediably gratuitous.) It is this link to the interior of a development winding and chaotic in detail but direct and logical in the whole which arouses a sustained and growing interest in the work of such and such an artist, in this case of Henry Saxe.

Saxe began to exhibit in 1961 and already in 1963 he expressed himself a little in the style of Jacques Hurtubise, with whom he was connected through forms and colours: surfaces in diagonals scarcely broken, hard contrasts arising from abstract landscape art where coloured foregrounds are placed in a third perspective dimension.

From Canvas to Open Work

But it was from 1965 and at the time of his exhibition at the Galerie du Siècle in 1966 that Saxe aroused a very strong spontaneous interest, like a thunderbolt but resisting a view in depth.

His personal language holds the attention by compositions in flat tints from which all textures and effects of depth have disappeared. Nothing exists any more but pure colour on the surface, which reflects back only on itself without possible lyrical interpretation, and asserts a great concern for formal clarity. At that moment the canvas hinders Saxe more and more by its rigid sides: his forms not being able to develop freely within the conventional limits of the picture. Whatever may be their soaring, the forms strike against the arbitrary, there exactly where... space begins. Out of this frustration, it seems, were born the works painted on plywood whose irregular contours are dictated by the specific qualities of the form. A generous form, with sharp

curves, all forceful and supple.

The square or rectangular prop which supported these forms has disappeared. Nevertheless the work is still presented as a full, closed surface (fig. 1). Saxe presses further the explosion of the surface by eliminating the support on the inside. Example: this work where an arc of a circle rests on one rectangle and ends at another (fig. 2). There remains only the coloured movement which takes the whole importance in the space. Saxe is ready to work in real space. By planes on an angle which stand out from the picture and lengthen a movement colored in flat tints which comes toward the spectator (fig. 3), he intensifies the possession of this new space. From there, right to the coloured surface unfolding truly in tridimensional space, there is only one stage, which Saxe crosses very quickly (fig. 4).

From 1966, his work is expressed in very precise formal arrangements, finished in the sense of objects of art corresponding to a well-developed industrial society, technologically advanced. His language builds up, becomes richer. If one wanted to speed up the road covered, as in the movies, one would arrive at this: an orthogonal surface bursting forth on one, two, four sides and finally forward, in such a way that there remains of the first element, canvas, only fragments which are linked in a space of three real dimensions. The surfaces have gone down from the wall to stop at the ground, while keeping a minimum contact with the wall out of which they emerged.

In a diffident way at first, then more definite, Saxe therefore progressed from painting to sculpture, after having been involved in the process of the destruction of the canvas, through formal necessity, while keeping for a fairly long time the attraction of the brilliant colour of paint. Saxe may have been influenced from the exterior, but the basic interest of his evolution lies in the fact that his works have arisen from the interior, one from the other.

But among these works of 1966, *Thisaway* already presents a different problem in its composition made up of flat modules, fixed, assembled in a linear manner, forming a V, but with one of its points of departure still the wall (fig. 5). Like some artists of his generation, Saxe has carried his research toward an extreme simplification, tending toward a limit. Think of Molinari, Tournant, Hurtubise. But as for them, this limit of simplification was revealed as also being a point of departure, the first element of a new complexity. From a simple structural a priori, the vertical band of Molinari, the concentric circles of Tournant, the spot of Jacques Hurtubise, all have emerged through the phenomenon of serialization, on works with very complex structures. But Saxe outdoes by the integration of flexibility inaccessible to painters whose every canvas is finished. Saxe thus creates a work open in the sense that Eco gives to this word, by making the viewer share in his creation. The modules first used by Saxe are made of simple juxtaposed fixed surfaces, and it is the whole which regulates the volume, repetition which creates the work. When the flat module becomes mobile and more complex, that is to say in irregular forms including curves, straight lines, varied angles, it loses its identity and disappears almost completely into a whole which yields literally to all whims to form in space a kind of tridimensional graphism of an extreme freedom.

Other works follow, composed of tridimensional modules (hexagons folded in a V) which revolve on one of their sides offering many possibilities of the occupation of space (fig. 6). Three factors consequently have an effect upon the final spatial disposition of the production: the position of one module in relationship to another (identical or reversed), the position of the hinge between two modules (on the side or on the end) and, especially, the swivelling of each of the modules. The first two factors arise from the decision of the artist, the third from the involvement of the spectator. These three factors determine the entirety composed of simple modules. The multifiform, almost inexhaustible, paradoxically presents no gratuitousness on account of the coherence of the basic structure. These open structures, placed on the ground, of a rather impressive size compared to human proportions, are established, in abstract terms, like parallels with gestures or movements. The fact that they invite manipulation is in keeping with the way they are displayed in suppleness and severity.

The path of Saxe went from the simple to the complex through the progressive evolution of the module at first as fixed surface (fig. 5), then surface bent to supply an open mobile volume (fig. 6). Then came closed modules, mobiles within mobiles and variable inside themselves (fig. 7). Flexibility within flexibility.

In a contrary manner, from 1970 the module was simplified by the return to the line: a pole of bent metal whose ends turned back on themselves form loops which allow all the modules to be threaded one inside the other in the manner of a piece of knitting (fig. 8). The pliability then achieved by Saxe in the arrangement is such that it verges on an almost total freedom of movement in the model at the interior of the ensemble. Paradoxically, the creations formed of tridimensional modules have a variable linear character, at the same time as the works composed of linear modules become surfaces with variable perimeters or create volumes if one pulls on one of the modules. The whole can change its form to a point such that it is nothing but chaos (fig. 8).

From Process to Work

By personally destroying and disputing his work, Saxe arrived at a limiting point, a place from which he initiated a turning of importance which led him to the productions presented at the Museum of Contemporary Art. A turning which marked at the same time a prolonging of what had gone before but also a very clear change in attitude in relationship to the conception of the work which had prevailed for him until that time: Saxe wrote in *Ateliers*: "The development in my latest works is the result of reacting contrarily to an earlier series of works", and, as well: "I now wanted a three-point system as a guide to continue my development of a visual but non-structural linked system."

By choosing common materials, ropes, pipes, wood, stones, rubber, manufactured objects such as a stepladder, a tripod, by opting for the absence of colour and by preserving the essential commonplace quality of his objects and materials, Saxe places himself outside of commercial galleries. It is not by chance that he exhibits in a museum and not in a gallery. Through this set purpose toward a style reduced to the essentials, toward a spirit of poverty, Saxe changes the under-

stood but always implicit covenant that he had established with his public. The attraction of colour has disappeared like that of the game inviting to participation. Thus the work of Saxe demands much more of the public. The uncompromising manner in which he uses his materials and his objects indicates clearly to the viewer that there no longer exists an aesthetic object in the traditional sense, an object previously disputed by lattices, as we have seen.

The observer is therefore involved in a new reading for which Saxe gives a few clues in *Ateliers*: "The number of materials, shapes, relationships and procedures in each unit is critical to the total sculpture as a visual structure."

Indeed, in an ensemble like *Three-Point Landing* (fig. 9) the fundamental theme is the three-point structure present in the four elements of the whole. A structure that is rigid and simple in the manufactured tripod, in a more elaborate way in the step-ladder whose first balance Saxe destroys and the finality of the object by adding to it a peg which turns it into a structure with three points of support, in the flat suspended triangle whose sides are made of attached pieces of wood and of knotted rope and, finally, in an element highlighting a tetrahedron formed of braids of metal and ropes.

The reading takes place arising from contrasts between the materials: rigidity of wood and softness of rope, flexibility of rope and limited malleability of metal. Contrasts between the different capacities of the materials to combine in a structure: solid materials such as wood and iron, inertia of rope. Contrasts between the plane surface of the large triangle and the volume of the other objects. Contrasts again at the interior of the triangle between string, rope and cable. Contrasts between raw material, material treated in the manner of a craftsman in the rope knotted by Saxe and material treated industrially.

The viewer recreates the continuous from the discontinuous set up by Saxe. He invents his own reading but crosses the usual process of Saxe which goes from simple to complex. In that way, the spectator is one with the experience of the creator and walks in his footsteps. What is the meaning of this work if it is not to be a matter of experience? Unfit for any plot of a story, it says nothing more than what is there. Its subject is Saxe's experience, his work on the three-point structure and on relationships and contrasts. Irreparable at least at the present time by the art lover, it asserts itself only as a creation, in its complete nudity, in the pure essence of the material.

A composition of 1972, *Levels* (fig. 10), formed of a beam on which are balanced stones, pieces of wood, a pipe, a rope, attracts to a similar questioning. Assembled in an orderly fashion, these objects are presented in their elementary volumes known by all, according to an arrangement which gives importance to the always fragile point of balance. The potentiality of the movement, inherent in the steel ball ready to roll on an upright inclined plane, suggests a return to the simplest laws of physics.

In a production formed of a coiled cable from which emerge bent sheets of metal, Saxe exploits the theme of the curve while still opposing the flexibility of the rope on the ground to the metal which spreads out in space and which by this fact appears more alive, more organic than the rope. Further, Saxe plays on the relationship between the

tangling of the rods of metal in an identical circumference, placed parallelly and supported at three points by triangles of metal (fig. 11).

Very spare in appearance, these groups by Saxe reveal themselves to the contrary to the keen eye, much richer and denser than appears at first.

The path into which Saxe has entered is narrow because it pushes back the barrier between what is art and what is not. Rejecting the conventions which perpetuate the idea of work of art, he lessens his public, risks reaching the point of no return beyond which there is no more art, where the race is finished. Saxe has also proved the continuity of his plastic adventure and of the dispute which has been inscribed at the very heart of his work for several years. While seeking to forget art, while trying to begin almost from zero (but is this really possible?) the development of Saxe arouses esteem and admiration.

1. *Ateliers*, published by the Museum of Contemporary Art, Vol. 2, No. 3, April-May 1973.

(Translation by Mildred Grand)

THE RICH ARCHITECTONICS OF BINNING

By Doreen E. WALKER

Even a casual glance at the 56 works on view at the recent B.C. Binning exhibition, held at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, was sufficient to convince the viewer that there are strong references to the B.C. coastal environment in the majority of Binning's art. In the early drawings and paintings the west coast region provided the artist — somewhat consistently — with forms and themes; and in the non-objective works as well, a persistency in use of earlier forms and colours was not infrequently detected.

B.C. Binning has continually stressed his basic commitment as an artist to formalist principles:

"I am more interested, really, in the idea of form than of content. Though they ultimately come together, my starting point has always been the form, the colour, the textures, the relationships, the idea of the flat canvas, the rectangle in which I work, and so on. . ."

And he has insisted, too, that for an artist with formalist leanings the subject is *relatively unimportant*: "I think it is just something to hang his hat on." However, the artist has acknowledged freely also, that the B.C. coastal world has provided him with a very strong peg. Since 1913, with the exception of limited periods of foreign study and travel, the artist's home has been in the vicinity of Vancouver, and throughout his lengthy career he has derived a rich vocabulary of forms from the coastal area which he loves so deeply.

B.C. Binning attended the Vancouver School of Art, and in 1934 — two years

following graduation — was appointed Instructor of Drawing at the School. In 1938-39, seeking a broader experience and additional training, Binning went to England for further study. ("The first original modern paintings I saw were in London.") While abroad Binning worked under such eminent artists as Amédée Ozenfant and Henry Moore, and on his return to the American continent he remained in New York for a period, studying at the Art Students' League under Morris Kantor.

Binning's long and fruitful association with UBC commenced in the fall of 1949 when he became a member of the faculty of the School of Architecture. From that time on, his contribution to the cultural life on the UBC campus is inestimable. Several tangible accomplishments might be cited: founding of the Department of Fine Arts, 1955 (and Head from 1955-68); development of the Fine Arts Gallery; initiation of the Student Union collection of Canadian art (formerly known as the Brock Hall collection); organization and direction of the Festival of Contemporary Arts; and planning (with the late Fred Lasserre) of the Norman MacKenzie Centre for the Arts at UBC. Binning has stated that his basic motivation in all his endeavours was always the desire to bring to the campus "a little richer texture than before".

Binning's rôle as teacher has been an exceedingly influential one. Ron Thom, FRAIC, one of several Binning students who has achieved recognition on a national level, has written the following tribute:

"He taught me to see. He taught me to think. He was an irreplaceable teacher whose lessons have lasted."

The Binning influence has, thus, over the years, spread well beyond the confines of UBC and Vancouver. His contribution as an artist to architecture in Canada was recognized in 1962 when he became the recipient of the Allied Arts Award presented by the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada. In 1966 the artist was Canadian Representative of UNESCO Conference, Tokyo. Further service on a national level includes the Visual Arts Committee, National Arts Centre, Ottawa, 1964-67; and Advisory Panel for the Arts, Canada Council, 1965-67. In 1971 Binning's extensive contribution to the cultural life of Canada was acknowledged when he was designated Officer of the Order of Canada.

It was, however, in the rôle of painter-draughtsman that Binning first received national acclaim, and examples of this aspect of his career were handsomely displayed at the recent exhibition. Recent reflections of the artist are cited rather fully below to reveal something of the artist's attitudes and intentions concerning these works. His reactions (and reminiscences) with regard to the pen and ink drawings of the forties (which for many were the highlight of the show), are perhaps of particular interest: one reaction concerns a recent realization of a strong formative influence for his early style of drawing.

"At one time I was terribly interested in child art. (In 1941-42 I started those Saturday morning classes for children at the Vancouver Art Gallery.) I believe that the teaching of drawing to children provided me with a major source of influence for my drawings. I used to watch them intently at the way they went about things: I admired the straightforward motivation that they had in

doing any statement in visual terms. Their kind of directness was infectious. . ."

The artist was struck, too, on viewing his works, at the documentary value of the drawings.

"It wasn't until this last retrospective exhibition of mine, when I looked at the early drawings of all the seaside places I used to frequent, that I realized that I had made some kind of historical record. . . These places were reproduced with a fair amount of accuracy, and you simply could not find them if you went out to look for them now. The subjects of many of these drawings are non-existent."

"AFTERNOON BOAT, BOWEN ISLAND WHARF, 1945, as an event does not exist any longer. The old Union Steamships which used to ply our coastal waters visited so many of the little ports within about a hundred miles of Vancouver: Bowen Island was one of the nearer excursion centres, and certainly one of the most popular. It was a familiar sight to see the Bowen Island boat come in and the passengers (mainly summer dwellers and campers) disembark with their bits and pieces of provisions and freight. The happy time and informality of atmosphere which existed on the pier was something everyone took for granted. Now, of course, you do not see it any more: so this drawing is one which has become a kind of documentary record."

"VIEW OF FISHERMAN'S COVE, 1944, I think in some ways reflects more than any of the drawings the haphazard, rather jerry-built quality that existed all up and down the coast. . . the makeshift floats, the hodge-podge of boats, the not always sandy beach, and the not too tidy foreshore. These things were all characteristic of the scene at that time; but the view no longer exists as such: it's tidied up! Great huge boat parks that they call marinas jam many of our coves."

"ME TOO 1, 1945, was the name of a shrimp boat that used to come into Fisherman's Cove periodically, with a hold filled with shrimp that had been scraped from the ocean floor. The boat fascinated me, and I drew it more for my enjoyment than anything else. I set out to make it as accurate as possible from the point of view of its gear and its detail (including the elaborate fishing net and the stove on deck for cooking the shrimp). I don't think you will find any of these boats now — just maybe the odd one still left. . ."

"SELF PORTRAIT IN SHIP'S CABIN, 1945, is a very sentimental drawing for me. It shows the interior of Skookumchuck, the little 20 foot sailing sloop which I had in those days — and which I built partly by myself. It was a kind of moveable studio. My wife and I would spend a good part of the summer puddling around the coves, bays and little snugs that you find around the coast. Frequently at meal time we would drop anchor and watch life in a little bay. . . there was always something happening: a small boy fishing; a man furling his sails; someone rowing from one side of the bay to the other; and there were a lot of curious craft around, too. . . The occasion for this drawing was one of the many days (even in our summers) when it rained, and when there is certainly not much to do on a 20 foot boat. I decided to draw the interior of the cabin with its equipment and gear. As I began to draw, my reflection in my shaving mirror caught my attention, and I decided to include that. It thus became a self-portrait — perhaps

By Jennifer OILLE

as much of my feet as my face! I have a very personal attachment to this drawing, because it recalls for me the boat on which I enjoyed myself so much... and loved so much."

Binning has made statements, too, on the works which followed the early drawings: "In 1948 when I came to painting in oils, the same kind of subject matter appeared; the sea and the ships that sail on it. I moved, however, from the particular to the general, and there was no longer any concern for any form of documentary accuracy. In the drawings I was always set off by some particular incident or thing, or collection of things. (In the paintings the inspiration might come, on occasion, from a particular experience, but the result was always a generalized statement.)"

"In painting I was aware that if a certain collection of forms were used together, one could get a certain reaction. I once said that the business of serious joy should be one of the main occupations of the artist. I do like joy... I do like order. I think my work plays between two sides of me: there is a certain joy and fun — perhaps even wit — but this seems to vacillate every now and then between another extreme of plain coolness — which I call a classic sense. I find myself almost turning from one to the other every now and then just to balance up.

"CLASSICAL CALM, 1948, is a generalized statement of order, yet I recall the specific experience which inspired the work: It was in the fall just after the War and I went up the Indian Arm on a little excursion boat. There were a number of World War II ships tied up in one of the coves. When you are in a small boat and low to the water, the large hulls of boats such as these tower above you. There is something about a ship viewed — especially bow on — that has a regalness about it and the great shapes, to me, were terrifically impressive. We passed the ships going up the Arm and then coming back down again, and they fascinated me. There they sat — absolutely still — in the calm water. There was something about them, too, in a way, simply sitting there with all their glory stripped from them..."

"FANCIFUL SEASCAPE, 1949, like many of the seascapes of the fifties, is in a lighter vein... from an expressive point of view the subject matter of these seascapes is perhaps more of a seascape of the feelings I experience during summer holidays along the B.C. coast than an actual interpretation of this coast... In the summer time, these little boats would look so joyful — certainly it wasn't a grim scene before me — it would seem to me that it had to be interpreted with some sort of 'joie de vivre'."

"The Seascapes of 1960 moved further in the direction from the particular to the general. I had got rather tired of all the detail of boats at this time — even in their more abstract and more general aspect. The sea itself became my main concern — its mood and expanse. In BLACK ISLAND, I have simply tried to synthesize the main essentials that make up this 'landscape-seascape'. It was a matter of trying to get the balance of forms right... In color I tried to do more what the Fauvists were doing — of actually changing the colors to get in some total on the canvas a combination of colors that might bear little relationship to the blue sea and the green mountains, but would give the intensity... and I strengthened tensions in space in order to add breadth to the expe-

rience. I haven't really worked at this very much since that time, but for that two or three years I was working in this direction — and I might well come back to it again."

"In the mid-sixties I did a number of large emblematic works which I called Motifs. In retrospect I can see that these works refer back, in many ways, to the seascape paintings of 1960. I think there is a definite relationship in the form and in the use of fairly strong color. In addition to this there is a bigness of shape around B.C. that you can't get away from. I find it pretty overpowering at times. Whether you are looking at the mighty trees, or up into the mountains — or at the expansive space of the sea — there is this tremendous scale. I would imagine that this comes into these works.

"The Optional Modules were large works made up of modular units which could be assembled according to a variety of choices. I suppose they came about in several ways. One, certainly, was the architectural idea — the idea that one can work in a more fluid and three-dimensional way than just with square or rectangle paintings. (I've always been very close to architecture — in my family and in my associations both friendly and professionally. I've worked at architecture — with architects and by myself — in an almost avocational way at times, in executing murals and in the capacity as consultant in matters of color and design.)"

"Another thing that was involved with the modules was that I felt that the total involvement of people in things should be more. (The beholder wants to be part of art — and just as the artist he wants to have a creative hand in it.) I felt there should be a kind of inter-relationship: I'll give you the parts and, within certain restrictions, you can manipulate and change. These ideas started to fascinate me, and again, it was a matter of setting up a program for myself and going through it in a unrelenting way."

"These works were executed during a sabbatical year: I began working in the spring and continued through the summer — working consistently in fairly bright colors. It was a strange thing that when it was coming to winter — the colourful days changed to grey — my paintings, too, changed to grey. (I was acutely aware of the seasons.) From then on the rest of the modules were all in greys. OPTIONAL MODULES (8 modules in greys), to me, frankly, is the best one I've done."

"These were the main steps, then: firstly the drawings, then the paintings of ships themselves, then the seascapes, followed by the emblematic Motifs, and from there into the Optional Modules..."

Alvin Balkind, former Director of the Fine Arts Gallery at UBC, was organizer of the Binning retrospective. This was his last major show at UBC before accepting the position of Curator of Contemporary Art at the Art Gallery of Ontario. In the Forward to the Binning catalogue, Balkind stated very perceptively — and sensitively — some of the unique qualities of his colleague, and included the following:

"His conviction about the importance of creativity in all areas of life not only forms his attitude, but has led him to bring this strongly to the attention of all those aspects of the world which he touches."

Emerging from twenty years of virtual seclusion The Peoples' Republic is prepared to present itself and its past to the west. The first Western diplomats, confronted with the cultural heritage of China, agreed; the French began negotiations three years ago, the British representative, John Addes, furthered them and Lord Thompson of Fleet, the employer of the first accredited British journalist in Peking, promised to finance the presentation. As a result 385 newly unearthed pieces of art, valued at £20 million, will rest from September 29 in London's Royal Academy of Arts, representing in chronological context, artistic and technological development from Neolithic times to the Yuan dynasty (1271-1368 AD). In the opinion of Professor William Watson, head of the University of London's Percival David Foundation which houses perhaps the world's finest collection of Chinese ceramics, the importance of the exhibit lies not merely in its intrinsic aesthetic value but in its implications. It is the cream of the first systematic archaeological exploration ever carried out in China. Prior to 1949 any finds, except for the sporadic work by the Academy of Sciences at Anwang between 1929 and 1936, resulted from pilferage and robbery. Essentially undocumented and undated, they were of debatable and problematic value to the scholar. In 1949 the Republic instituted highly scientific and widespread schemes which continued unabated during the Cultural Revolution. The discoveries have filled in gaps — historical, artistic, scientific.

Watson, who is writing the catalogue, was largely responsible for the selection and found the Chinese extremely agreeable. He did not want facsimile pieces of Ming since, from the archaeologist's point of view, excavating Ming is like "excavating Tudor". He considers certain objects of paramount importance. But be warned they are often not the visually sensational — the infinitely delicate porcelains, the fantastic and indeterminate beasts which guarded doors or yielded wine.

In 1968, at Mancheng, Hopei province, the Chinese opened two cliff tombs, each larger than 3,000 cubic meters, belonging to Liu Sheng, Prince Ching of Chungshan of the Western Han Dynasty (206 BC-24 AD), and his wife Tou Wan. Deep within the caverns lay the bodies shrouded in "jade clothes with gold thread" — each vestment wrought from more than 2,500 jade wafers, joined by gold thread through tiny holes, 1mm in diameter, in the 4 corners of each piece. Working with a saw 0.3mm in width, a craftsman laboured perhaps 10 years over one. Literature had alluded to such garments which historians had taken to be simply clothes decorated with jade or "beautiful" garb, the characters for "jade" and "beautiful" being the same. But for the scholar the decorated metal — gilt "hu" a vessel usually made from clay and crouching, ruby eyed panthers — was just as evocative, for it proved that gilded, inlaid bronze had been produced prior to 100 B.C. contrary to thought.

Other finds are of more than comparable historical significance. Shang dynasty (16th-11th century BC) bronzes found in Hunan

**JEAN McEWEN
AND ABSTRACT IMPRESSIONISM**

By Fernande SAINT-MARTIN

indicate that Shang power extended farther south than suspected. Gold and silver objects are extremely rare in China but not so during the Tang dynasty (618-907 AD) and the pieces found in the tomb of Princess Yung T'ai (d. 701) and in the mansion of the prince of Pin (d. 741) — in Sian verified this. The latter site yielded two pottery jugs holding 1,000 items including 200 gold and silver vessels. Similar in shape and design to Sassanian objects found in Iran they are a strong clue to China's relations with other countries during that period.

So too are superb textiles from Sinkiang, along Central Asia's Silk Road, dating from the 5th and 6th centuries AD. The extraordinary weaving techniques incorporating 1,000 warped threads in a single meter of cloth, the elaborate wefts, the designs executed by batique or by knotting the silk in skeins are once again reminiscent of Persian examples and centuries in advance of the rest of the world.

Also from Sinkiang, Turfan, comes a 5.2 meter scroll dated 710 AD (Tang) — the earliest existing copy of the Analects of Confucius (551-475 BC) with annotations by the famous Han dynasty scholar Cheng Hsuan (127-200 AD). Of the five chapters in this particular version only the first and part of the second are missing.

A special section of the exhibit is devoted to purely technological finds. Coming are clay moulds for casting bronze, bronze moulds for casting iron — both processes the reverse of normal procedures — and clay models for the positive moulds from which the negative mould for the final cast was made. But the most exciting is a simple yellow glazed tsun (wine vessel) of the Shang dynasty dating from 1400 BC. Chengchow in Honan yielded this, the earliest known example of porcelain. Feldspathic glaze, used in porcelain manufacture, is based on silica, the same chemical compound as clay. Hence the glaze cannot chip away. But it requires an extraordinarily high firing temperature, 1100 centigrade, and evidently the Chinese, at this very early date, possessed kilns capable of this. Neither feldspathic glaze nor the necessary kilns existed elsewhere and thus a softer glaze, lead based and most perishable, and utilizing a lower firing temperature, was used. Only in 1728 did the Germans "reinvent" porcelain.

There will be an exquisite bronze "Galloping Horse", one hoof resting on a flying swallow, from the tomb of Wu Wei of the Eastern Han (25-220 AD) but there will be no painted silks or seated Buddhas. Chronology will follow the Chinese Marxist interpretation; the Primitive Period — the beginning of time to the Shang; the Slave Owning Society — 1027 BC to 475 AD; the Feudal Society — 475 to 1912. The treasures will rest in Burlington House, the site of the first and last comprehensive exhibit of Chinese Art in 1935, the exhibit which opened the eyes of the world to an incredible heritage. This will reopen those eyes and perhaps reveal the reverence with which the Peoples' Republic regards its past.

There is a story current in London, apocryphal perhaps, but highly suggestive. The British Museum, barely recovered from last year's Tutankhamen ordeal, rejected the opportunity to house the treasures. The Chinese were extremely disappointed but were pacified when informed that after all it was the "Royal" Academy of Arts.

It will be necessary some day to examine the problem posed by the difficulty for Quebec in assuming its cultural identity, at a time when it is revealing itself to it under the aspect of the plastic arts which have been nonetheless among the most vigorous and dynamic, since the beginning of the forties. Is it necessary to recall the restrictions first in receiving and assimilating the Automatists before exile stamped some of its representatives and after in giving value to the course of Post-Automatism before this research benefited again from the retroaction of the subsequent developments in international art?

Although the work of Jean McEwen has periodically attracted some critics and collectors by the mirage of iridescent texture and colour, the importance of his work and his development, in Canadian painting, has hardly received an adequate evaluation. Is it not paradoxical that he has been able to put together this fall, at the Museum of Contemporary Art, several series of works of large dimensions from the years 1955, 1962, 1965 and 1966, which for the greater part, were unknown to the Quebec public, having been exhibited rather in Toronto or in New York?

However, the pictorial aim of McEwen was always important and original, that of building up an extension to Abstract Impressionism. Far from stopping at superficial analogies, it is necessary to recognize in painters such as Riopelle, Sam Francis and Jean McEwen the mutual desire to understand and to develop further the evolution of Monet. Nor has the determinant influence which the painting of Monet has had on the developments and repercussions of the School of New York through Still, Rothko, and Newman, been given enough importance.

Pursuing the idea of the explosion of the object initiated by Impressionism, McEwen tried, by releasing the spot of colour which was still significant with Monet, to retain it in an organic structure, non-definable on a plane of symbolic reference, and to produce in this way a painting truly non-verbal, strictly experimental.

His way of painting remains nevertheless personal in that it attempts to bring about a synthesis between systems apparently divergent, but which answered profound needs of his personality. Thus were joined Impressionism's preoccupation with light, the lyricism of Borduas and the structural tendencies which followed Automatism in Quebec. The complexity and the pluralism of its advancement appeared previously in the *Still Life* that he painted in 1948, when he was still a student, in which coloured abstract forms are placed side by side with strongly structured objects. "I have always loved to bring together free forms and geometric forms", McEwen likes to say.

In fact, from the time of the exhibition at Place des Arts in Montreal, in 1953, Jean McEwen already baffled criticism, by presenting a work where, for the first time, there was affirmed in a decisive manner, in Quebec, the concept of surface in the picture of *all-over* structurization, with the help of a fine system of modulation of light, which was opposed to the space in depth of automatist

painting. This assertion of the surface radically destroyed the concept of the object in space, that of rounded forms or of volumes in the depth of a picture. It was demonstrated in the organizing of kernels, clouds, of masses of elements close together, dim or luminous. This was the assumption that, much later, Olitski would take up again in a picture such as *Pink Shush* in 1965, when he wanted to eliminate any idea of forms on a background.

But the paintings of McEwen which followed were never, however, really informal: "If the structures of tridimensional reality have never touched me profoundly," McEwen claims, "I have always had a basic need to reunite a real spatial structure". And in his always very close relationships with landscapes and natural atmospheres, it is through "the lattice of lights and shadows formed by the crossing of light through branches and leaves", that he works out a way of expressing the vibration of colour which is his major concern.

Even if he admires the lyricism of Borduas and is the most vigorous heir of the atmospheric space that the latter gave value to for a long time, McEwen will soon be discontented with a type of spatial structurization borrowed from landscape art in a too realistic way.

In a picture which marks the turning point in his work, *Les Pierres du moulin*, in 1955, McEwen scratches in the thick surface, perforated with blobs of colour, with new and preponderant vertical and horizontal lines, which bind his textures into elements closely juxtaposed. We can, besides, suppose that it is in a meditation on Monet that he will discover in his great monochrome series of the period the fundamental rôle which he will assign to a predominating axial element as structure of pictorial organization. And his way of proceeding by working out *series* based on a same theme offers analogies with the works of Monet. Through his axial structure, McEwen effected a re-erecting of the famous horizon line whose variations and questioning in the *Nymphéas* appeared to critic L. Steinberg¹ as the major problem of Monet. It was through the logic of continuous shifting, of varied treatment of this axial line resting in the vertical that McEwen treated reflections, symmetrical or not, of the left and the right of the picture, the distortions and reflections to which it can give rise. As with Monet, this elimination of anecdotal references engenders a reality where the distinction between what is real and what is reflected is erased.

Even if the textures of McEwen's paintings seem to vary next almost infinitely, thickening and hardening under the varnishes, becoming thinner in plays of transparency, they still continue to constitute capillary systems, networks of continuous links, producing a modulation of colour. But the aim is to make the luminous quality of the picture itself shine, under the chromatic layers more or less perforated.

But the most expressive articulation of his pictures is found less in the more and more abstract evolution of his graphisms, which almost make signs of the texture of the elements which he uses, but in the very dialectic of the structurizing vertical at grips with a constant desire for the assertion of verticality and respect for the concept of surface.

Being aware of the strong tension and the firmness that his vertical axis could acquire, which had a tendency to give the picture a cylindrical shape or the ovoid structure of

cubist pictures, McEwen strengthened the periphery by making it play the rôle of echo to the central axis. He tended also, in this way, to go beyond landscape structure as it was still found in Monet's work.

The great vertical around which the balance of the picture plays will enlarge to form a plan, will unfold on the surface, will repeat itself on the border, will unite with orthogonal shapes, in order to assure all the expressive possibilities of the surface. By this dialectic between centrifugal and centripetal balances, McEwen at the same time was drawing near to the problems of Mondrian.

But these multiform perpendiculars keep blurred outlines a long time, offering themselves as a lyrical statement of fundamental underlying structures, firmly intuitive. Far from emerging from the meeting of coloured movements, these lines assert themselves in a contrasting linearity, taken up again in the periphery, masking the mysterious forces which come out of the meeting of the pictorial elements. This oscillation continues between the open form and the closed form, becomes accentuated again with the appearance of planes in flat tints, inserted between two textured panels or framing them in a border, especially in the series of the *Muses*. McEwen describes the reasons for the introduction of these *hard-edge* elements and pure colour as the desire to find a more direct means of expression which the spot of colour or graphism could not be. "For me it is a matter only of joining interior resonances more adequately."

Through this fidelity to his deepest sensitive intuitions, McEwen has produced pregnant works whose repercussions are expanded indisputably by all the recent developments in American Abstract Impressionism.

1. Leo Steinberg, *Other Criteria with Twentieth Century Art*, Oxford University Press, 1972.

(Translated by Mildred Grand)

bare their guts to have their exercises in style admired.

There are also the François Dallaires, solitary workers, concerned, whom the splendor of their craziest visions haunts. One sees them seldom in the milieu; they have a wife, perhaps children, sometimes a job, . . . a life like everyone, after all!

Perched up high on Villeneuve Street, François Dallaire lives in the Greek quarter of Montreal, for want of having found better elsewhere, but also through nostalgia for the Europe which he has just left. Did he really believe he could find again in these streets the delicious charm of the old labyrinthian cities, the languid step of the idlers who pass along these corridors, the café terraces which flourish at each intersection? Cold, filth, the stench of the city besiege his world, an apartment of five rooms shut away from everything, closed against the noise of people and the rumbling of cars.

To go to his home, one must climb to the third floor of an old building. The entrance door opens on an aseptic hall. It leads to the living room furnished with taste: an old cabinet which hides the bar; two armchairs he designed; a rocking chair bought at Sainte-Théodosie; a stereo whispering the music of *Il était une fois dans l'Ouest*; on the walls, pictures signed by Jean Dallaire: three or four canvases in the manner of the cubists and of this painter again, a few of his last works with the primitive charm of children's drawings.

His son François resembles him. He is a man in his twenties, with slow gestures and an absent look. He easily gives the impression of being absent-minded. Rarely does he take an active part in the conversation and he smiles awkwardly when his interlocutor bullies him for his evident lack of interest in it.

When the idea comes to us to ask for his opinion on an event, he answers that he never reads the newspapers, any more than he looks at the news on television.

— Life is already not so rosy, that on top of that I should poison my existence with the news.

Far from leaving him indifferent, human distress, daily field of the media of information, fills him with sorrow and disgust.

— One doesn't take a hundred steps outdoors without seeing some unpleasant thing. How do people manage to live?

Harmless questions have a corrosive effect on the shell of indifference which masks his personality. The best moment of his day: "Finding Paule, my wife, lying beside me, on waking up"; the most disagreeable moment: "Going down the stairs to go to work and discovering the ugliness of early morning"; the people he admires: "those possessed by a passion"; the man he thinks he resembles: "My father. . .", Jean Dallaire, who died alone in a little room in Montmartre in Paris, who roared in his letters that Quebec was inhabited by barbarians.

— Before he left again for Europe — I was very young at the time — my father often used to take me to his studio. There he let me play with his paint-brushes. When he left, it was as if I fell into a great void. I no longer knew what to do.

From these far-off years, François Dallaire retains of his father the image of a vulnerable man, tender, sensitive, a sort of sacred monster to whom everything was permitted, including dying of hunger in order to devote himself to his painting.

— With him gone, I followed my brother to the Applied Arts.

By instinct, François Dallaire would perhaps have opted for the Beaux-Arts, but everything in his life combined to make him reject this choice. For four years he devoted himself to industrial design — in which he excelled — before going to Europe to take up studies in graphism.

Whether he paints or produces a graphic we find in his works the same purity of line, the same simplicity of execution. The few critics, come to view the works of this young beginner at the gallery of the Society of Professional Artists of Quebec last February, noted especially the influence of graphism in Dallaire's work. At the time when the pictures exhibited last winter were painted, François Dallaire was still completely unaware of graphism.

There emerges from his painting a desire to run counter to the Ontario Woman, Pepsi, Je me souviens. "Look," he tells us, "you are thus." And yet where François Dallaire exposes a certain manner of living, the spectator discovers the tragedy of this way of being.

All the canvases shown at the time of this exhibition are dated from the end of the sixties. He excuses this long silence by asserting that his studies and, now, his work as a graphist, have taken all his time.

François Dallaire, do these reasons really explain your silence? And of what importance, besides, since you love Paule above everything; since in spite of your own doubts, your own agonies, you gather beauty in every place in order that our mornings may be less gray; since one day, if a few hours of real freedom remain to you, you will express in the solitude of your studio our most foolish dreams, our greatest hopes. . . Go in peace, François Dallaire!

(Translation by Mildred Grand)

GO IN PEACE, FRANÇOIS DALLAIRE!

By André BASTIEN

Graphist, industrial designer and architectural draughtsman, François Dallaire is, in addition, a painter whose works have been exhibited recently in Montreal: at Casa Loma, with the *Mains de 35*, and at the gallery of the Society of Professional Artists of Quebec.

I found that what I had desired all my life was not to live — if what others are doing is called living — but to express myself. I realized that I had never the least interest in living, but only in this which I am doing now, something which is parallel to life, of it at the same time, and beyond it (Henry Miller, Tropic of Capricorn).

There are worldly artists, princes of the *ego-trip*, masqueraded in preposterous ideas which serve them as talismans against boredom. With many cries and oaths, they call themselves still capable of taking flight and

PIERRE GENDRON: DELIBERATE ACTION PAINTER

By Pierre DUPUIS

Born in Montreal, he studied at the École des Beaux-Arts. After working in graphism in an advertising art studio, Gendron pursued the pictorial research previously undertaken outside his academic concerns and then went to France (1958). He would later return there in order, this time, to go deeply into lithography. In the meantime, he participated twice in the international exhibitions at Lugano (Switzerland) and at the Paris Biennial, in 1961. He now teaches at the Cégep of Old Montreal.

On the occasion of the opening of a new gallery in Saint-Sauveur-des-Monts (Studio 23), last winter, Gendron presented his latest works, dated from 1970 to 1973, to the public of the Montreal area.

What do these creations reveal to us if not the desire to perpetuate pictorial tradition called Abstract Expressionism? However, sensitive to the ambiguities possibly raised

by all-inclusive terminology, let us try to characterize his work, which reviews fifteen years of painting.

Today he uses acrylic (gesso/masonite) and attempts through it to geometrize the forms in the pictorial space by always allowing, in other respects, the same forms to stand out from the background. This technique is in the nature of the spontaneous but free gesture, connecting it at the level of the *finished product* with the creations of Nicolas de Staël. In 1964, a comparison was being drawn between the works of these two painters. Beyond the fact that things have not changed so much in the matter of criticism (the best studies of scientific character are always fed from the same sources, from the same purposes) it is nonetheless true that Gendron himself acknowledges having willingly returned to the style for which he had a fondness at that time.

The spots of colour are encircled and get tangled up more or less confusedly according to the way in which the painter places his colour in flat tints, uses the superimposition of colour (glazing) or gives the clarity and transparency of water-colour to the canvas. As the forms are grouped in such a way, they are often arranged in relation to a cruciform diagram and/or the drawing is inscribed according to a system of parallels. The colours are repeated, are strengthened by contrast, are held together by the juxtaposition of the tones (dark-pale). We perceive the works as they are constructed; that is to say that the multiplication of vanishing points in *staircase* form promotes a free penetration of the view through the composition until the moment when there appears a remarkable canvas from which emerges a struggle (it is perhaps exaggerated to qualify it as symbolic) of the elements which compose it. . . Gendron willingly admits, as does Kandinsky¹, to the power of an interior necessity.

At the beginning, his academic education leaned toward illustration, and he expressed himself in this way. Then little by little he gave a personal touch to the forms that he developed while geometrizing them as far as the automatic movement. Finally he gradually rejected plastician and automatic influences.

What was being said, at that time, to speak of his work: "I have said, Gendron with his drawing, is waging a fierce battle with forms, carving masses, trying to encircle the very unreal of reality."

(Cl. Jasmin, in *La Presse*, 30/9/61.)

"What should be said also of Pierre Gendron, transformed, who seeks new paths, it seems to me with great nervous strokes, possessed by the desire of finding an outcome."

(Jean Sarrazin)

The temporary displacement has in no way changed his work in depth. On the contrary, the stylistic cross-checks of yesterday and to-day are answered in time and, in one case as in the other, Gendron contemplates pictorial creation according to the same type of standard, in accordance with a language that nothing has been able to change. Although the motifs may newly have been geometrized, the idea predominating creation has kept the same tangent; the forms have settled down, but one feels through them a visual relationship which supports the colour.

A contemporary of Borduas, his work equally possesses identical concerns at the level of expression without, however, finding the same cry at the heart of his painting. The abstraction mastered by Gendron (half-way between lyricism and geometric exact-

ness) can thus be considered as a look toward the past through a giant mirror formed from an illusion just as immense. Why paint to-day?

1. *Du Spirituel dans l'art*, Coll. Méditation.

(Translation by Mildred Grand)

THE DRAWINGS OF SIMONE AUBERY-BEAULIEU

By Robert MARTEAU

After twenty years spent in very diverse countries, Simone Aubery-Beaulieu recently renewed her connection with Canada through an exhibition of drawings at the Galerie de Montréal. In spite of her long absence, interrupted by visits to Percé, Simone Aubery-Beaulieu is not unknown here in the field of plastic arts. Having studied for four years at the École des Beaux-Arts in Montreal, she received the Prize of the Province of Quebec in 1949, exhibiting at the same time at the Cercle Universitaire on Sherbrooke Street in Montreal. If her marriage with diplomat Paul Beaulieu was at the origin of her numerous trips, it was in no way opposed to her first vocation, and it was with a never-denied ardour that Simone Aubery-Beaulieu devoted herself to her craft.

She had met Fernand Léger in New York during the war. She met him again in Paris in 1946, where she attended his studio. In Paris again, she made the acquaintance of André Marchand, with whom she worked and to whom she is linked by a friendship of thirty years. And it happened sometimes that she went to Varengueville, where Braque received and advised her. After Paris came London; she became acquainted next with Boston, and Beirut, where she lived for six years, beginning there to tackle abstraction at a time when the desert and Arab characters were fascinating her. She left the Middle East for Brazil, where she felt the impact of the tropical forest, of its luxuriance, and of the effervescence of life, all things whose surging her drawings reflected. There was New York, then Paris again, Lisbon where she took up once more and developed themes initiated in Brazil. During a sojourn in Washington, she met Saint-John Perse, whose English poems Louise Varès translated while she herself illustrated *Le Poème à l'étrangère* and made several portraits of the poet, of which one was to appear in the *Saint-John Perse* in *Poètes d'aujourd'hui*. Furthermore, encouraged by Saint-John Perse, Simone Aubery-Beaulieu was going to devote herself assiduously to poetry.

As it is rather unusual to-day to see an exhibition of drawings, I asked Simone Aubery-Beaulieu if, with her, graphic work really is more important than painting. Not in the least, it seems to her, and she thinks

that painting and graphism can be carried on at the same time by reason of the profound difference that exists as much in their development as in the way of approaching them, still more, certainly, since drawing remains an indispensable discipline from which painting benefits. Just as she needs to write, Simone Aubery-Beaulieu needs to draw a few hours each day, free-hand, on large surfaces. What does she use? Tar which a little turpentine changes to a clear sepia tone, India ink, . . . For what does she have a fondness? Ivory-black used with a paintbrush or a felt pen.

— I have always had a passion for the drawings of Rembrandt, Delacroix, and Modigliani, which I was able to view in Paris, at the Katia Granoff Gallery.

She says also:

— The abstract is a temptation, but I feel that I am profoundly figurative, bound as I am to this memory which chooses and preserves the most precious part of what one loves.

Facing the blank page, she loves this emotion and this trembling which go before the gesture, the line left by her which cannot be corrected. Of course, she worships Japanese painters, on account of the aim at the essential, the union of sudden violence and extreme refinement, the interior violence that subjugates ceremonial. It is true that with one stroke, controlled and spontaneous at the same time, Simone Aubery-Beaulieu knows how to make the beach vibrate where a secret magnetic force guides her. What attracts her is the sensitive core from which emanates carnal and abundant life which she knows how to make throb before our eyes, whether it be a matter of the half-breeds of Rio, the leaves of the coral tree or the walnut trees of Brazil. Her art is not baroque: generous, it joins spontaneity to precision. Simone Aubery-Beaulieu does not find her strength in spontaneous choice, but in the profound taste for promoting a blossoming, as of a flower growing in the woods, for what is stronger and more deeply buried than will. Black, white: and yet colour is present there thanks to that vital force by which the figure is shown on the surface. Nothing exotic, naturalistic or realistic: it is simply the mysterious and perpetual reality of life. Black and white: the only two colours, perhaps.

— Was it not with black and white that Borduas fulfilled himself best and most intensely?, asks Simone Aubery-Beaulieu.

Loyalty presides at her work. With Simone Aubery-Beaulieu there is the sense of the way and the search. She also knows that severity, instead of restraining, exalts the source where the work is unceasingly reborn.

(Translation by Mildred Grand)

**CLAUDE MONGRAIN:
WEIGHTS, TENSIONS, MEASURES**

By Luc BENOIT

There are obvious facts in art as elsewhere. And the work of Claude Mongrain which, with that of J.-S. Champagne is witness of a new sculpture in Quebec, is among them.

I allow myself to digress here to note the link of relationship which seems evident to me between these two sculptors. By different processes, it goes without saying, their research is found at the level of the phenomenon of perception, even if it entails *neglecting* the completed object in order to do this. This *negligence* is still stronger, indeed total, with Claude Mongrain.

In the research of Claude Mongrain, it would be useless to hope for the *completed object*, beautiful and ready to be exhibited, if I may express myself in this way, simply because his point of departure IS NOT the material, NOR IS IT the finished product. Neither is the point of arrival.

His development IS NOT aesthetic, NOR is his research formal.

"All I do," says the sculptor, "is set up a situation and then take it apart. I systematically analyse simple physical situations, without scientific claims. It is a matter rather of reducing the physical properties of the objects present to their simplest form, without respect to colour, texture, the form of the elements or of the whole, but especially taking into account (essentially) the *relative* arrangement of the things and their interaction."

We will therefore not be surprised (or if so, only a little, anyhow) at finding a glass gallon jug filled with water hanging from a rope, adjoining a long piece of wood of six feet which balances it. Between the two elements, a frightening contrast.

The finished product no longer having any importance, research centres on the material, its environment and the action produced on or by another material. This is done by calculations of weight, angles, measures. Thus, *Situation I*, made up of six sections of two-foot wood, hanging and joined by rings; between these rings, a scale measuring the tension of one element upon the other. The stronger tension is exerted above, produced by all the elements below. This tension is *legible*, as is the angle of each piece of wood indicated by a horizontal red line: seventeen degrees for the first, seventy-two for the last, etc.

It is also possible to trace the mathematical curve of the situation at hand by tangents or measurements of degrees.

In *Situation I*, the raw material is wood; it could as well have been bags of sand as in another montage, or yet bottles of water.

Because they are able to be manipulated and are movable, the sculptures which Claude Mongrain calls rather *Situations* lead to experimentation by the spectator. "All I wish is that the viewer be conscious of what is going on and that he take the time to do it."

Persons are needed to challenge this awareness and to make us pay attention to the elements and to the world which surrounds us. It will only be the more beautiful for this.

Claude Mongrain is among those people. They are rare.

When one knows Claude Mongrain, one is not astonished to see him come back from

a hike of four hours on snowshoes or to meet him on a bicycle in Quebec or elsewhere. One understands his research still better, then.

I was almost going to forget to mention that he was born in Shawinigan but lives in Montreal. He studied there at the École des Beaux-Arts from 1966 to 1969 with Jean-Pierre Boivin and Ulysse Comtois. The following year, he continued in sculpture, at the University of Quebec in Montreal, with Henry Saxe.

In 1968, he participated in the creation of a children's park at Orford, at the J.M.C. Centre.

In 1970, he exhibited with the graduates at the Pavillon des Arts of the University of Quebec in Montreal. One of his sculptures (in steel) won for him a bursary from E. T. Greenshield Memorial Foundation, which gave him a trip of investigation across Europe. He returned there the next year and visited a part of France and Italy by bicycle.

Among other exhibitions, let us mention the one at the Museum of Contemporary Art, *Jouets d'artistes* in 1970; another group showing at Galerie Joliet, in Quebec, in October 1972; the exhibition of the *Moins de 35 Ans* in Montreal in February 1973 and, recently, at the Galerie Média as well as at La Sauvegarde, with a group of artists.

(Translation by Mildred Grand)

**JEAN-SERGE CHAMPAGNE:
SCULPTURE IN TWO PERIODS**

By Luc BENOIT

Born in Montreal, Jean-Serge Champagne studied at the École des Beaux-Arts, concentrating on sculpture, with Ulysse Comtois and Henry Saxe, from 1966 to 1969.

We note his participation in several exhibitions and group works. In 1968-1969, he collaborated in the creation of a children's park at the J.M.C. Centre, at Orford.

We find him again at the exhibition of the graduates at the Pavillon des Arts de l'UQAM, in 1970, and at the Provincial Competition, the same year. In 1971, he took part in a showing of the Bronfman Foundation, at the Museum of Fine Arts in Montreal. The following year, he was in Quebec with five other artists, at Galerie Joliet. Since the beginning of 1973, we have seen his sculptures at the exhibition of the *Moins de 35 Ans* at Galerie Média and at La Sauvegarde in Montreal.

In his studio on Rachel Street, there is wood everywhere: planks of pine, plywood, laths of all sizes.

It was perhaps because he found metal too cold, too rigid as a material that Jean-Serge Champagne decided to work in wood. Doubtless also, because this material better served what he wished to do, and his not very academic way of doing it.

Here the material is used raw (a board

is a board), without artifice or camouflage.

Sometimes the wood is moulded, sometimes it is bent. In this precise case, a stretcher, a rope, sometimes a vise used to exert pressure or to hold together the different pieces of wood, become an integral part of the finished product. This product, most of the time, remains raw, without shellac or paint. "I have nothing to hide: if I need to make notches so that the wood will curve, I make them and they remain visible. There are no tricks, no mysteries in what I do."

"I could have chosen something else, plastic, for example. But then, it would have seemed to me like manufacturing things; while with wood the sculpture explains itself and the understanding of it becomes easy. By shellacking wood, one can give the impression that it is something else. Why not name things as they are?"

"The important matter is to do what one has to do. The finished product is of little consequence: it is only a point between what has been done and what remains to be done. But without having produced it, I would never have understood what is inherent in it. It is in the moments when I *create* that it is effective. From whence comes the importance of making gestures, because it is a step toward freedom. It is to eliminate restraints, to have access to joy."

"And one does not have to justify his gestures. It is enough to be available in the face of things."

Jean-Serge Champagne had placed six planks six feet long side by side on two trestles. The farthest was horizontal; the next, a little hollowed at the centre as if under the weight of a load and the others, bent more and more, as if the invisible weight were heavier.

At first glance, one does not know much of what is happening. To begin with, one perceives the fact, and it is only afterward that the phenomenon of understanding occurs.

The wood is raw and the notches are apparent. There are no deceptions, that is what it is. Yet it would have been possible to make the nicks disappear by plugging them. Then to fill the joints and paint the plank to give it an appearance other than that which it really has. We are: 1) facing the material such as it is, 2) observing the manner of doing and 3) examining the result.

The fact (absence of deception) is still obvious in these long pieces of wood, *two-by-fours*, which, in places seem crushed, slit by the rope which has been tightened around them. The pieces have simply undergone several cuts of a saw at their centre, which then allowed their being tightened and tied together, thus producing the desired effect.

There again we are aware of the piece of wood in its entirety, as if nothing had been taken from it. And it is only at the second period that the comprehension of the object occurs.

The same thing is true for this long chest of twelve feet, made of one single piece of two-by-four, a handle and hinges as for a real chest. It was cut in two along its whole length to allow it to be opened. Once the chest is open, one realizes that the section of wood was completely hollowed out (and not cut and again put together) to contain a piece of wood as long, but of less thickness and width.

It is again in two periods that perception occurs, on condition of being present and available.

The sculpture of Jean-Serge Champagne proves that it is still possible to work in a material (which some would have believed old-fashioned, if not out of date) in a new and interesting way.

The result, as far as I am concerned, is a fortunate one. Much more, it witnesses a new sculpture in Quebec.

(Translation by Mildred Grand)

VIDEOGRAPHY: TOWARDS A NEW CULTURE

By Denise DIONNE

Vidéographe on Saint-Denis St. in Montreal is an organization which has as its aim the promoting of the use of the half-inch portable magnetoscopic system (closed-circuit television). Vidéographe lends the equipment and allocates the budgets necessary to the production of videograms.

Montage modules are available twenty-four hours a day. Vidéographe has its own sound studio, and an animation module has just been perfected.

The videograms produced are exhibited at Video-theatre, a hall which can accommodate up to one hundred fifteen spectators. The showings, on six twenty-four inch screens hung at the center of the hall and placed in a circle, are daily and free.

At the entrance of the location, a "vidéothèque", containing on cassettes the videograms already produced, is accessible at all times. A copy service assures the distribution of the videograms outside the organization.

Some time ago, Vidéographe set up Selecto-vision in collaboration with community television. The subscribers to a private cable system have been able to order the broadcasting of the videograms of their choice, a list of which they had received earlier. Three experiments in Selecto-vision were carried out at Beloeil, Gatineau and Mont-Laurier.

Let us remember that anyone, without previous experience, can present videogram projects on any subject at all.

In a year and a half of operation, Vidéographe of Saint-Denis Street has produced about sixty videograms ready for viewing at any time at its location. The organization is

now subsidized by the Ministry of Communications of Quebec and is assured of survival until spring of 1974. It is known that equipment and funds are at the disposal of whoever presents a project which is accepted by the board of selection. Once this stage is accomplished all latitude is allowed to the producers of the tape.

What has been done so far in videography? Up till the present, five hundred projects have been presented and about sixty have been accepted and produced. It is to be noticed that concerns of a social or political order are underlying or explicit in almost all the videograms. Journalism, sociology, or anthropology serve as framework for the messages transmitted. There are very few equivalents in video to what is known as *film d'auteur*, and very little fiction is used in expressing ideas.

Actual events, recorded directly, are used as basic material. Situations are set up where the camera becomes a sort of confident (according to Jean Rouch's expression), and the videotape, by an instantaneous use of group viewing, becomes an *illumination* of the circumstances.

This quality of the videotape (instant recording), to which the lightness of the equipment is joined, was immediately exploited. About twenty productions centre around persons who explain their place in life in front of the camera (people twenty years of age, youths, separated women, old persons, etc.)¹, their personal relationships (loneliness, homosexuality)² or else their relation with the system.

The videotape also serves as a useful instrument of reflection on broad social occurrences. An analysis has been made of the significance of the October incidence³ and of the rôle of the mass media⁴ during that period. The controversies raised by the project of the Sainte-Scholastique airport⁵, the conflict at La Presse⁶, the battle of wood at Cabano⁷, also aroused some interest. But the rare pearl of this type of production is certainly the video carried out by Émond and Lavigne on the Soma affair. *S.O.S. Soma* was set up and produced by persons involved in this struggle. From that, one can no longer define the camera as being a peeping and indiscreet eye, but rather a confidant and sharing ear.

The possibilities of new visual experiments have not been much used. They still make a little live film in 16mm. A few productions have played with the feasibilities of visual electronic effects in the medium. *Réaction 26*, *Métamorphoses*, *Lumières, formes et sons* and *Libidante* work with overprinting, with doubling and with the shifting of the image.

It is to be noted that a subject like eroticism is very well suited to this kind of formal treatment (for example, *Libidante*).

Ethnology and Quebec or Amerindian anthropology occupy a separate category. The traditions and the legends of the Quebec habitant or of the Amerindian are dealt with in it. Let us mention here the originality of the production *Continuons le combat*, where through the description of a modern rite, wrestling, Pierre Falardeau symbolically presents to us the forces present at the heart of our society and subtly incites us to pursue the fight.

Following the thought of McLuhan, who asserts that a new technique salvages the old ones, the videotape is also used as medium for other arts. Whether it be theatre, sculpture, marionnettes, electronic graphism or music⁸, we deal with this type of production.

The present concerns about general themes such as the system, the environment and society are approached in different manners in *Système*, *m'aimes-tu*, *L'Accroc*, *L'Environnement*, *c'est toute*, *Zloczow* and *Objectal*. One of the solutions generally offered to the ills of our society, the experiment of communes is presented in six different forms: a commune of forty-two persons on a farm at Rawdon, the Krishna Group of Montreal, the Maison du possible, in Sherbrooke, where social medicine is practised, the musical Groupe Expédition, the couples' commune at the Château, and, finally, the fifteen staff members of the P'tit Québec Libre, share their experience in turn¹⁰.

Some other productions have as subject the Salon de l'Auto, the St. Lawrence Boulevard, the new Pierre Vallières, Edgar Morin, children and, even, the production of a videogram.

So videography is healthy in Montreal. The variety of the fields covered, as well as the pungency of the titles, gives the proof of its vitality.

Consequently, the technique of the videotape offers the possibility of new experiments in group communication. The light and relatively inexpensive material permits a greater accessibility. The chief problem remains, however, to differentiate itself from ordinary television, which excels in broadcasting information directly at the moment it occurs, and the cinema of recent tradition which has involved itself in recording the present for posterity. What is left, perhaps, for video is to be the witness of what happens after the occurrence, to be the instrument of collective thought after the event. *S.O.S. Soma* is the best example of this.

For footnotes see French text.

(Translation by Mildred Grand)

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