

## Christopher Pratt, tel qu'en lui-même...

### Christopher Pratt A Personal Memoir

Michael Cook

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# Christopher Pratt, tel qu'en lui-même...

Michael Cook

Il y a dix ans, en me rendant à un rendez-vous au Service d'Éducation Permanente de l'Université Memorial, je marchais le long d'un corridor antiseptique lorsque je rencontraï un individu à la calvitie précoce, sérieux et d'allure un peu incertaine, qui s'appêtait à quitter les lieux. C'était Christopher Pratt.

Au début de sa carrière, il avait dû faire face au problème que rencontrent plusieurs artistes du vingtième siècle: pour subsister, il devait enseigner. Mais Pratt, artiste né, n'est pas un professeur né. Pour certains, l'enseignement motive et entretient l'acte créateur; à l'époque, c'était pour Pratt une situation insupportable. En effet, pour enseigner, l'artiste doit se sentir en toute sécurité dans son art et, hors de cette sécurité, pouvoir, sans perdre les ressources créatrices essentielles, communiquer les éléments d'art et de style qui ne vident pas l'individu de son pouvoir de création.

Cependant, en 1966, Pratt était encore à la recherche de lui-même et de son art, et enseigner l'empêchait d'atteindre l'un et l'autre de ses buts. Très tôt, il choisit de s'engager dans une vision personnelle, et sa famille l'a aidé et encouragé dans sa démarche.

Ainsi, bien sûr, malgré son magnifique talent de dessinateur, il manquait à son œuvre une force intérieure bien définie. C'était un artiste dont les gens disaient: «Ah, oui! il a des ressources», à la suite de quoi, retranchés derrière leur cocktail, il étaient bien incapables de préciser en quoi elles consistaient.

Je possède un dessin au crayon qui date du début de cette période. On y voit des arbres, tout simplement. Il s'agit clairement d'arbres de Terre-Neuve, de pauvres épinettes et de sapins rabougris défiant avec insolence les éléments.

Pourtant, si l'on considère l'ensemble, l'image offre malgré tout un caractère unique car elle représente davantage un testament personnel qu'un divertissement visuel. Chaque arbre réclame hardiment sa propre vie, sa propre identité. Ainsi, le paysage ne représente pas une réalité observée mais une série d'exposés individuels, chacun réclamant considération à grands cris. Le dessin rate le but mais d'une façon admirable, offrant la promesse d'une vision qui dépasse l'exécution. L'arbre entouré d'autres arbres.

Demandez à Pratt s'il est véritablement un artiste de Terre-Neuve. En yachtman expérimenté, il vous répondra en changeant de cap: «Mais bien sûr, je vis ici.» Je soupçonne pourtant que son incapacité à répondre plus chaleureusement à cette question va au-

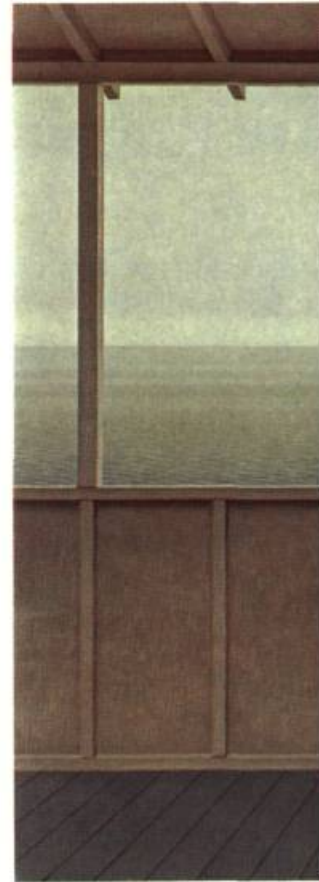
delà d'une opposition naturelle à être catalogué; que le problème se rapporte à une forme particulière de schizophrénie artistique. Comme peintre, il crée des images visuelles venues d'une mythologie orale, son héritage. L'expérience vécue à Terre-Neuve est essentiellement orale et dramatique, et Pratt, artiste et héritier du passé de l'Île, a toujours recréé sa mythologie personnelle sous une forme essentiellement dramatique. Voilà pourquoi il est absurde d'associer Pratt aux écoles réaliste et magique. Quoiqu'il apprécie peu la possibilité d'être catalogué artiste de Terre-Neuve, c'est le limiter que de l'associer à une école ou à un style qui nie l'impression et l'influence du lieu. Il est vrai que l'on peut relier les origines artistiques du style de Pratt à Alex Colville, son professeur et mentor à une époque, et il existe d'évidentes similitudes quant à la discipline et à la technique. Cependant, la comparaison doit en rester là, car c'est le sujet et son approche qui déterminent l'individualité de l'artiste.

Faisant partie du village universel, Pratt ne se limite pas dans le choix de ses sujets à son environnement immédiat, deux récents tableaux, *Lake Ontario* et *Station* le prouvent. Néanmoins, il y concentre la même intensité dramatique qui nourrit sa vision. Une intensité localisée. Son art constitue un rare exemple d'art consommé allié à une vision particulière uniquement réalisable par l'intérêt et la connaissance, même si elle est parfois inconsciente, d'un lieu particulier à un moment précis de son histoire. Une intensité si grande, alliée à la maîtrise de la technologie du temps, constitue le processus du génie.

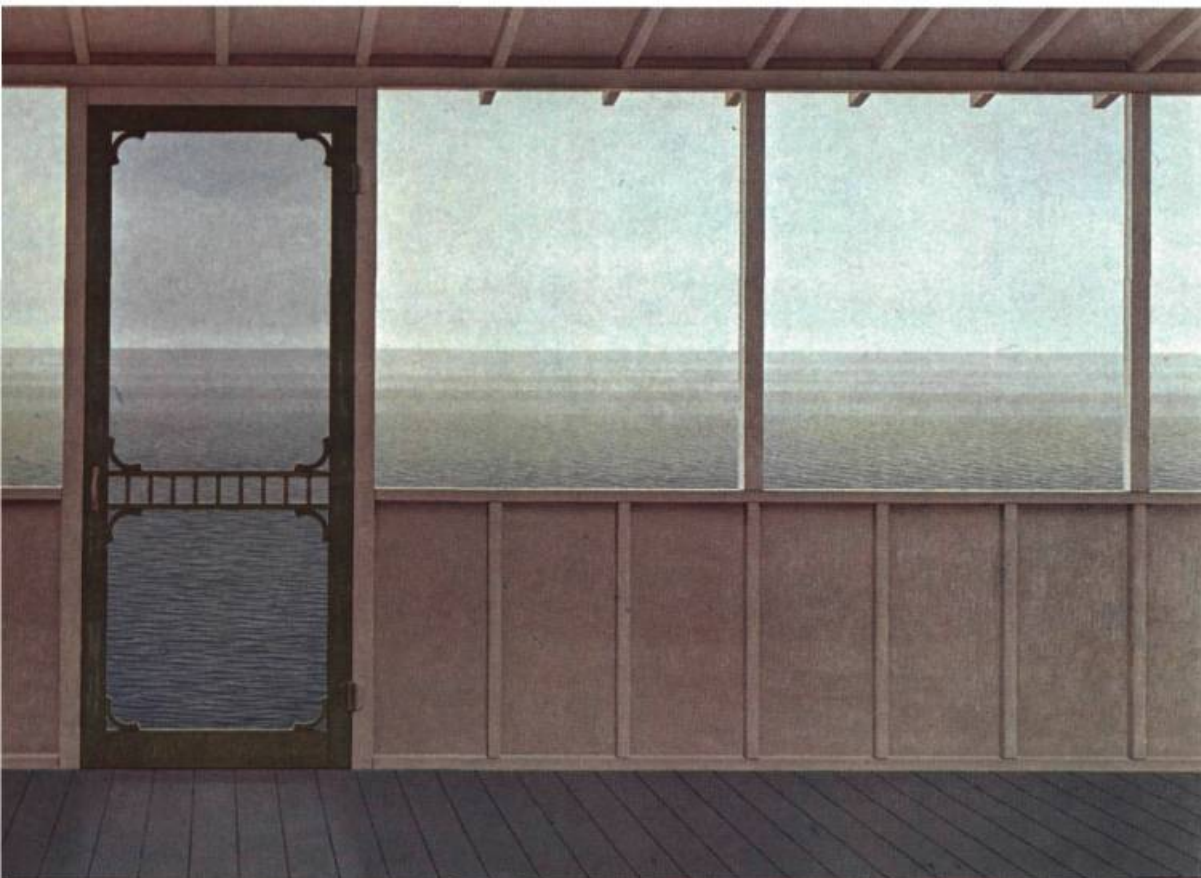
Les éléments de sa vision? L'isolement, la dignité, la perfection, le détachement, la furie. Étudiez bien n'importe lequel de ses paysages, *Cottage, Coley's Point* ou *Shop on an Island*, par exemple. Primitifs, isolés, revêtus d'une immense dignité, ils peuvent, à première vue, apparaître simplement comme des artefacts évidents et familiers, tendrement recréés jusqu'à un état de grâce. Mais, ce faisant, on oublie l'environnement extérieur, la mer et, dans *Coley's Point*, le ciel qui se reflète dans la porte.

«Au commencement Dieu créa le ciel et la terre. La terre était un chaos, et il y avait des ténèbres au-dessus de l'Abîme. Et l'esprit de Dieu planait au-dessus des eaux. Et Dieu dit: «Que la lumière soit et la lumière fut.»

Le mythe de la création d'après la Genèse émeut et terrifie à la fois dans son abstraction. Pourtant l'artiste est poussé, comme dans un rêve ou dans un



1. Christopher PRATT  
*Cottage*, 1973.  
Huile sur carton;  
67 cm 3 x 121,9.  
(Phot. T. E. Moore)



cauchemar, à y répondre, pour vouloir la création d'un nouvel univers personnel ou pour se désespérer de ce qui a été créé.

Pour Beckett l'ère de la noirceur nous enveloppe à nouveau, et le rêve de la création est une farce obscène, la séparation permanente d'un être infini dans le temps et l'espace du dégoûtant univers réel environnant.

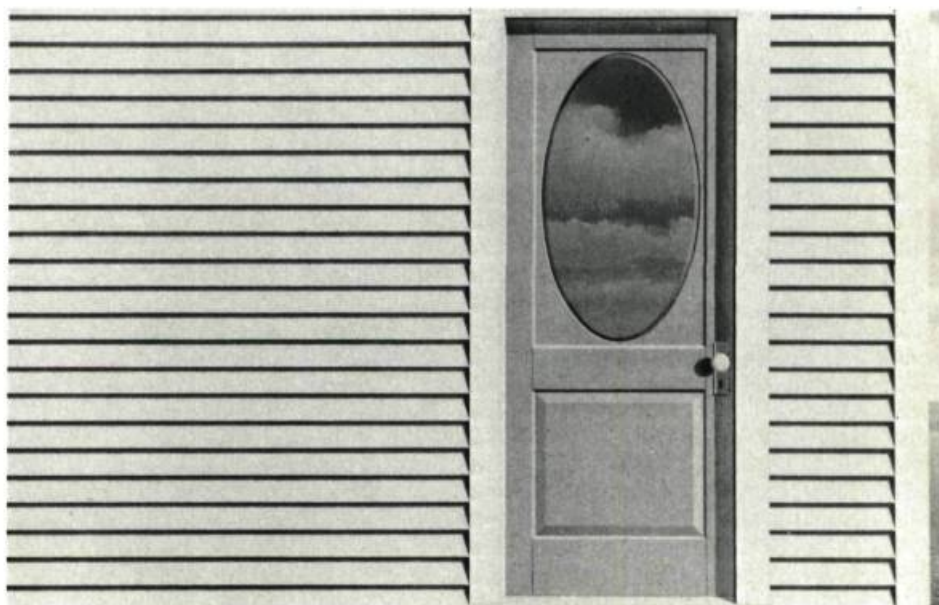
Dans *Endgame*, Hamm dit à Clov: «J'ai connu un aliéné qui croyait que la fin du monde était arrivée. Il faisait de la peinture et de la gravure. Je l'aimais bien. J'allais le voir à l'asile. Je le prenais par la main et l'entraînais vers la fenêtre. Mais regarde! Là! Tout ce blé qui lève! Et là! Regarde! Les voiles des haren-guiers. Toute cette beauté. Il m'arrachait sa main et retournait dans son coin. Épouvanté. Il n'avait vu que des cendres.»

L'auteur atteint une version finale brutale, vide d'humanité, admettant pourtant la nature de la mort et de la pourriture, la conclusion logique à l'absurdité de la souffrance.

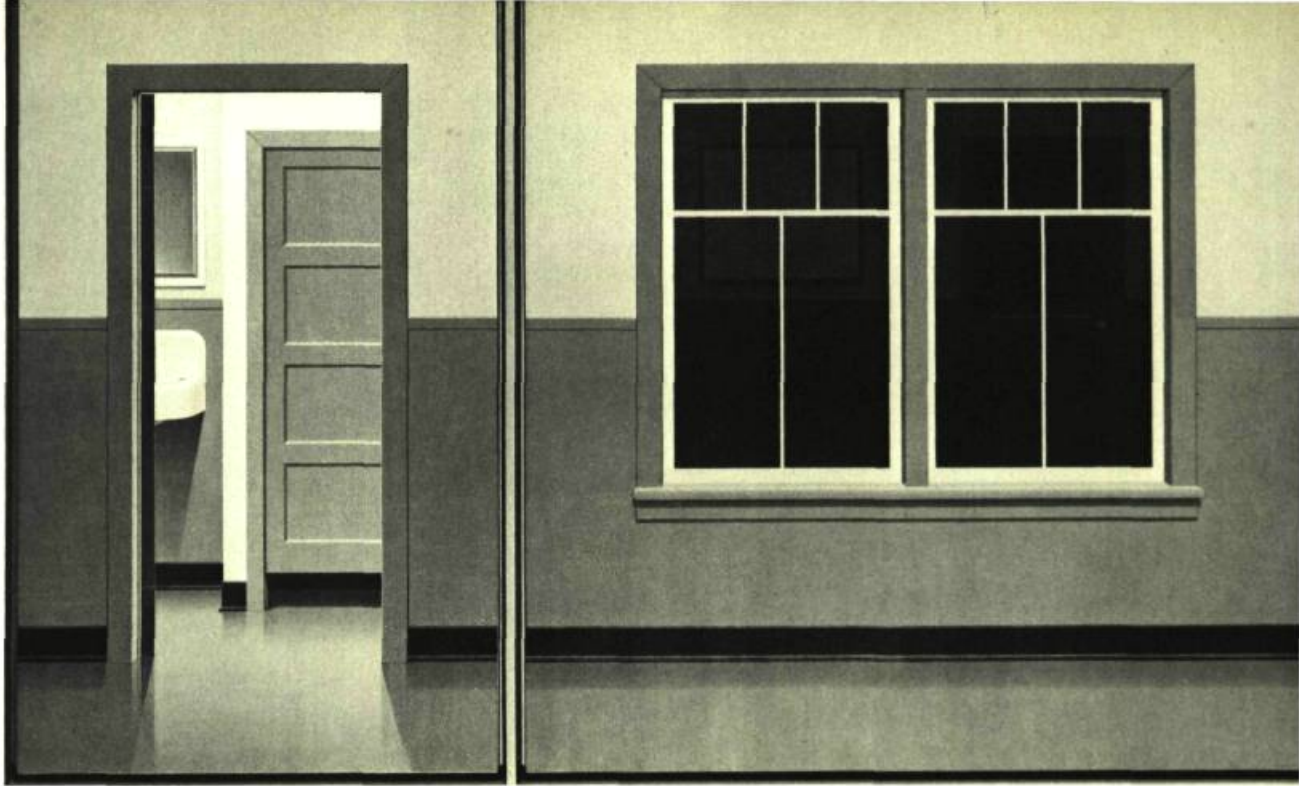
«J'aime l'ordre. C'est mon rêve. Un monde où tout serait silencieux et immobile et chaque chose à sa place dernière sous la poussière.» (*Endgame*).

J'ai fait ces commentaires car on peut parfois trouver chez Beckett, peut-être plus que chez tout autre artiste de toute discipline, une vision parallèle à celle de Christopher Pratt.

Revenons aux tableaux. Cette mer grecque, ce ciel égéen sont la source de la création. Les créations elles-mêmes, éternelles et abstraites, se tiennent en bordure du temps, parfaites et pourtant inhabitées, une vision de l'ordre que l'indignité de la mort et de la pourri-



2. *Coley's Point*, 1973-1974.  
Huile sur carton;  
66 cm x 106,6.



3. *Station*, 1972.  
Huile sur masonite;  
83 cm x 133,3.

ture n'a pas atteintes. Cependant, la comparaison faite, je dois maintenant l'atténuer jusqu'à un certain point car, si au théâtre les personnages de Beckett ayant énoncé leur vision désolée ne nous laissent rien sauf des possibilités sans espoir plus néfastes les unes que les autres, l'œuvre de Pratt, par la nature de la forme elle-même, nous conduit à une beauté terrible. Les possibilités d'entrevoir la perfection nous apparaissent comme des artefacts d'une force et d'une forme immenses, des objets tangibles capables de nous soutenir contre l'implacable force destructive du destin. Ou de Dieu.

Ce sentiment se manifeste le plus fortement dans les tableaux intitulés *The Sheep* et *Parish Hall*. Le mouton est un animal sale et peu intelligent, un symbole un peu confus du christianisme. De plus, la propriété déforme et fausse les édifices. Ils perdent leur identité comme structures et deviennent le symbole des gens et de leur histoire subséquente. Cependant, si l'on pouvait ramener ces images à notre conception du paradis terrestre alors sûrement nous pourrions entrevoir un nouveau et non plus une abstraction triste et parfaite, comme le démontre Dylan Thomas:

«(as) it must have been after the birth.  
of the simple light  
in the first spinning place, the spellbound  
horse walking warm  
out of the whinnying green stable  
on the fields of praise.» (Fern Hill)

On nous présente le mouton avec toute la dignité de sa première création, et la salle paroissiale est un temple qui attend la présence du prêtre pour lui permettre d'exister.

Si j'ai cherché à souligner cet apparent paradoxe, celui des éléments contrastants de l'artiste qui possède un point de vue particulier, c'est parce que j'ai constaté que la démarche de l'artiste s'oriente de plus en plus dans une direction.

L'autre jour, en entrant chez lui, dans cette maison où je me suis rendu à l'occasion au cours des dix dernières années, située près de la rivière Salmonier, dans un cadre indifférent — un paysage harmonieux, pres-

que rural à la façon anglaise — je m'étonnais de voir que l'intérieur de la maison était devenu la prolongement de l'une de ses toiles. Il donnait l'impression d'espace, d'ordre et de lumière, aménagé avec une méticulosité abstraite pour le rendre habitable. Puis, plus tard, en regardant ses derniers travaux dans son petit atelier aéré, j'ai retenu en particulier *Cape St-Mary's* et *Lake Ontario*. Il est peut-être trop simpliste de dire que le choix du phare symbolise la démarche de l'artiste vers la clarification de sa vision du renouveau. Et pourtant, dans *Lake Ontario*, l'idée s'impose avec beaucoup de force.

On y retrouve tous les messages, la vision parfaite du ciel et de l'eau et, au milieu, l'objet parfait, le bateau. Pourtant, il s'échappe de la cheminée du bateau une traînée de fumée remorquant les saletés de la vie d'un bout à l'autre de l'univers.

J'ai dit plus tôt que Pratt était un artiste de son temps et de son lieu d'origine. Terre-Neuve possède un environnement élémentaire, et son histoire, élémentaire, est aussi turbulente que celle de n'importe quel état grec. Il est impossible pour un artiste qui vit ici d'éviter les anciens problèmes métaphysiques et physiques de l'humanité combattant pour imposer une dépendance envers un univers aveugle et sans merci. L'art de Pratt reflète cette démarche. Tout d'abord, on voit des arbres qui réclament à grands cris leur identité dans l'œil de la tempête et de son calme meurtrier, sachant qu'un geste ou une création entraînerait le chaos, puis, sortant du paysage ensoleillé de *Lake Ontario*, une fumée noire. Je crois que ce procédé illustre son rejet de l'abstraction finale, la scène vide du monde, et sa lancée dans une autre démarche qui va permettre au poète personnel et à l'artiste visuel de ne faire qu'un.

A titre d'ami et de confrère artiste, je suis émerveillé et rempli de joie. L'art s'intéresse à la vie et non à la mort, et, dans sa démarche persévérante vers le sentier cyclique de la perfection, Christopher Pratt la glorifie.

(Traduction Marie-Sylvie Fortier-Rolland)

English Original Text, p. 89

D'origine anglo-irlandaise, Michael Cook vit à Terre-Neuve depuis 1966. Il est, à la fois, auteur, acteur, directeur de théâtre et professeur à l'Université Memorial de Saint-Jean. Il a écrit de nombreux textes pour les programmes de théâtre anglais de Radio-Canada. Il est également critique au *St. John Evening Telegram* et rédacteur à la *Canadian Theatre Review*.

and the elongated diamond are marked by a graphism, a writing that allows the soaring existence, beyond formalism, of lyricism.

Born of constructivism, this "interior landscape", as the artist defines it, remains the reflection of an environment. Because it is actually a matter of urban landscape, of a personal interpretation of an "essentialized" place, reduced to a particularly minimal form in which, in relation to graphism, only the framework would exist, but where colour intervenes as essential emotional adjunct.

"I would like", she says, "to succeed in achieving a balance between an architectural conception of a composition and the gestural spontaneity of the paint-brush." One can understand this statement if one glances at Louise Forget's earlier production. To the severity of *Suite parisienne* is opposed the lyricism, the gestural quality of *Cycle des grands soleils*, which comprises, besides *Suite mexicaine* produced in 1966, a *Suite espagnole*, an Italian one and, finally, *Suite provençale*.

### Les Grands soleils

It is fitting now to go back in time and to follow, along the thread of the years and the cycles of production, the artist's trajectory that spreads over twenty-five years of work but also of silence and discretion. Louise Forget, now back in Montreal, has hardly begun to be noticed or to display the abundance of her production.

At first, her painting was figurative; a pretext for understanding, for assimilating the relationships of shadow and light in foliage. The change to abstraction took place, however, only gradually and evolved toward a form of automatism that retained the same formal preoccupation at the interior of a sort of Cycle of Foliage which would end only the artist's sojourn in Mexico in 1966 and the beginning of *Cycle des grands soleils*.

This sudden approach is characterized by a genuine explosion of light in an earthy chromatics applied in wide areas that allow limitless spaces to show through in their interstices, perspectives released from the figurative limits. Here, graphism has, as it were, disappeared. This new, more atmospheric dimension of her work would be continued in Europe in a *Suite espagnole* that would assert unusual relationships with contemporary Catalan painting. The surface of the picture is organized according to a tense, emotional, violent graphism that shatters and breaks the rhythm of the warm Mediterranean air.

From a stay in Tuscany she drew *Suite italienne* or *Arno*, in tribute to the river that crosses the city of Florence. Here the atmosphere is more autumnal, heavier, more fleeting, too, and perhaps more hermetic. A light graphism insists less this time on infinite spatial opening. It already foretells the approaching orientation of Louise Forget's painting toward the architectural structuralization of the Parisian series.

But it is certainly in *Suite provençale* that Louise Forget attains the completion, the stylistic and conceptual fullness of *Cycle des grands soleils*. The whole surface explores the force of light on a burned land. The puff of air that would disturb the composition seems ready to intervene at any moment. Impressionist painting also gave this sensation of evanescence and fragility that the least little breeze might trouble.

More sparkling than the Italian series and infinitely less violent than the Spanish one, *Suite provençale* is the image of a contentment,

an impermanence, in the Far East meaning of the term. The melting action of light creates a kind of timelessness, an indifference to human relationship, a mystic of "luxury, calm, delight" which is still not Epicurean, but which comes rather from an existential attitude of meditation and respect.

### The Mediterranean

Some persons believe, and I am among them, that there are Centre of the World places, locations more favourable than others to certain types of activity. The Mediterranean world is one of these privileged places. Threshold of the western world, original womb of civilization. And Louise Forget's *Cycle des grands soleils*, it seems to me, confirms this sensation that the elements air, earth and water make in the same body, in a feeling inexpressible, indescribable, at the side of time.

For Louise Forget, whose development is going on very slowly under present criteria, sensitivity concerning the environment, permeability in the face of the atmosphere of a place form the basis of a work that, beyond painting, borrows the many passages of plastic expression. Here we have stopped at only her painting, but much could be said as well about her engraving. Her water-colours, also, which further express the fluidity, the fleeting quality of air, while her collages thrust still further forward the research into new structures, new architectures, with the ultimate aim of attaining the synthesis, the fusion of geometry and poetry.

1. Last spring, Louise Forget exhibited her *Suite parisienne* at the Canadian Centres in Chicago and Boston.

(Translation by Mildred Grand)

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### CHRISTOPHER PRATT — A PERSONAL MEMOIR

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By Michael COOK

Ten years ago, walking down an antiseptic corridor, about to take up an appointment with the Extension Service of Memorial University, I met somebody about to leave it.

Prematurely balding, intense, a little insecure, it was Christopher Pratt. He had confronted early in his career the problem facing many 20th century artists. To survive, he had to teach. But Pratt, though a natural artist is not a natural teacher. There are some whose creative energies are motivated and sustained by the teaching process but for him, at that time, it was an impossible situation. To teach well, one has to be secure in one's art and, out of that security be able to impart, without loss of the essential creative energies, elements of craft and style which do not drain the self of the power to create.

But in 1966, he had met the challenge neither of himself nor of his art, and to teach was to deny the fulfilment of either. He chose early to commit himself to a private vision, and in this decision was aided and abetted by his family.

Significantly, his work then, apart from a superb sense of draughtmanship, had no articulated core. He was an artist of whom people said: "Ah, yes, he has potential", but then, taking refuge behind cocktail glasses, were

unable to determine exactly what that potential was. I have an early pencil drawing from that period. It is, simply, of trees. They are unmistakably Newfoundland trees, poor scrubby spruce and fir waving defiantly at the elements.

But there is, after one takes in the whole — something unique about that picture after all, for the picture is not so much a visual recreation as a personal testament. Each tree is crying out for its own life, its own identity. The landscape, then, is not an observed reality, but a series of individual statements each crying out for recognition. And thus the picture fails magnificently, containing the promise of a vision greater than the realization. The tree, surrounded by other trees.

Ask Pratt if he is, very specifically, a Newfoundland artist and, like the experienced yachtsman he is, he will jibe and come round on another tack; will tell you: "Well, of course. I live here." But I suspect that the reason he is unable to respond sympathetically to that question is more than a natural reluctance to be type cast; that the problem relates to a peculiar form of artistic schizophrenia. As a painter, he is creating visual images out of an oral mythology, his inheritance. The Newfoundland experience is essentially oral and dramatic, and Pratt, artist and inheritor of the Island's past, has always re-created his private mythology in an essentially dramatic form. That is why it is nonsense to equate Pratt with schools Realistic and Magic for, just as he is sensitive to the possibility of being stereotyped as a Newfoundland artist, it is equally limiting to place him with a school or style that negates the impression and influence of place. It is true that the craft origins of Pratt's style can be linked with Alex Colville, his one-time teacher and mentor and there are obvious similarities in terms of discipline and technique. But there the comparison must end, for ultimately it is the subject matter and the approach to it that determines the individuality of the artist.

As a member of the global village, Pratt does not limit himself to subjects taken from his immediate environment — two recent pictures, *Lake Ontario* and *Station* illustrate this but, nonetheless, he brings to bear upon such subjects the same dramatic intensity that informs his vision. And it is a localized intensity. His is a rare example of consummate craft allied to a singular vision which can only be realized by attention to, and knowledge of (even if unconscious at times) a particular place at a particular time in its history. Such intensity allied to the mastery of the technology of the time constitutes the process of genius.

What are the lineaments of his vision? Isolation. Dignity. Perfection. Detachment. Fury. Examine any of his exteriors... *Cottage*, *Coley's Point*, *Shop on an Island*. Pristine, isolated, vested with immense dignity, it is easy at first to see them casually as obvious and familiar artifacts lovingly recreated until brought to a state of grace. But that is to ignore the exterior environment, the sea and, in *Coley's Point*, the sky also, reflected in the door.

"In the beginning God created the Heavens and Earth. The Earth was without form and void and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters. And God said: "Let there be light", and there was light."

The creation myth from Genesis is at once moving and yet terrifying in its abstraction, but the artist is drawn, as in dream or nightmare, to respond to it, either to will the creation of a new and private universe or to despair at that which has been created.

For Beckett, the darkness is come again, and the dream of creation is an obscene joke, the permanent separation of an infinite being in time and space from the disgustingly real, surrounding universe.

"I once knew a madman," says Hamm to Clov in *Endgame*, "who thought the end of the world had come. He was a painter and engraver. I had a great fondness for him. I used to go and see him in the asylum. I'd take him by the hand, and drag him to the window. Look. There. All that rising corn. And there. Look. The sails of the herring fleet. All that loveliness. He'd snatch away his hand and go back into his corner. Appalled. All he had seen was ashes."

The writer moves towards a final, ruthless vision, one void of humanity, yet, granted the nature of death and decay, the logical conclusion to the absurdity of suffering.

"I love order. It's my dream. A world where all would be silent and still and each thing in its last place, under the dust." (*Endgame*).

I make these comments because perhaps in Beckett more than any other artist, in any form, one can find at times a parallel vision in the work of Christopher Pratt.

To return to the paintings. That Greek sea, that Aegean sky are the genesis from which creation springs. And the creations themselves, timeless and abstract, stand on the rim of time, perfect, yet uninhabited, a vision of order unsoftened by the indignity of death and decay. But having made the comparison I now have to undo it to some extent for, whereas in the theatre Beckett's characters, having articulated their bleak vision, leave us with nothing save the muddy stirrings of alternatives that themselves would be doom-laden, Pratt's work brings us, by the nature of the form itself, to a terrible beauty. The possibilities of a longed-for perfection stand before us as artifacts of immense strength and moulding, tangible things to hold up against the implacably destructive will of fate. Or God.

Perhaps nowhere is this more manifest than in *The Sheep*, and *Parish Hall*. The sheep is a dirty and rather unintelligent beast whose principal image is as a rather confused symbol of Christianity. And ownership warps and confuses buildings; they lose their identity as structures and become symbols of people and their subsequent history. But if one could bring them back to our consciousness in an Eden state, to bring them to us, in Dylan Thomas' words:

"(as) it must have been after the birth of the simple light

in the first spinning place, the spellbound horses walking warm

out of the whinnying green stable on to the fields of praise." (Fern Hill),

then, surely, the possibility of renewal, and not a bleak and perfect abstraction, is also present.

The sheep is brought to us with all the dignity of its first creation, and the Parish Hall is a temple, waiting for the Priest to confirm it in its ordinance.

If I have laboured to make the point of this apparent paradox — the opposing elements of this artist's singular point of view, it is because, recently, I have detected an increased emphasis in one direction.

Walking into his house the other day, that house which I have visited on and off for the past ten years, set beside the Salmonier River in an uncharacteristic environment — for the setting is gentle, almost rural in the English sense — I marvelled at how the interior had been transformed into an extension of one of his pictures. There was space, order, light, meticulously arranged, abstraction with a living

purpose. And later, looking through his most recent work in the airy cell of a studio I considered particularly *Cape St. Mary's* and *Lake Ontario*. Perhaps it is too simplistic to suggest that by the very choice of a lighthouse, the artist had begun to move towards a clarification of the vision of renewal, but, in *Lake Ontario* the idea asserts itself with great force.

The codas are all there, the perfect vision of sky and water, and central to it the perfect object, the boat. But drifting from the stack, trailing the smudge of life across the Universe, is a stream of smoke.

I stated earlier that Pratt was an artist of his time and place. Newfoundland is an elemental environment, with an elemental history as turbulent as that of any Greek state. It is not possible for any artist living here to avoid the ancient metaphysical and physical problems of humanity struggling to assert a dependency against a blind and pitiless Universe. Pratt's art has reflected this process, moving from trees crying out for identity into the eye of the storm and its murderous calm, knowing that to move, to create, would bring chaos, but coming out then into the sunlight of *Lake Ontario* — the smudge of smoke. I think the process illustrates that he has rejected the final abstraction, the empty stage of the world, and is embarking on another journey which will allow the private poet and the visual artist to fuse and melt into one.

As a friend and fellow artist I marvel, and am full of joy. Life, not death is the proper business of art, and in his continued drive for the encyclical path of perfection, Christopher Pratt celebrates it.

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### THREE VIDEOTAPES BY NOEL HARDING AND THE VISUAL ILLUSION OF NARRATIVE

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BY Eric CAMERON

Noel Harding was a television camera-man before he was a video artist, and a group of early works emerge as an abstraction of the craft of television production. Those effects of camera work and sound recording that provide embellishments of mood, accent and pace are isolated from the habitual context of documentary or dramatic content and achieve a structural self-sufficiency through an awareness of the coordinating presence of the camera itself. Three tapes from 1973, *Kathy's Room*, *Clouds*, and *Table and Chairs* are probably the best of the group and they share a common structural solution: the camera in a single fixed position whence it variously pans and scans its environment, hunting out the poignant or emotive image. Add to the fixed view-point regularity of camera movements and the fact of repetition, and the formula is complete, but resolution depends on more subtle responses to specific situations.

*Kathy's Room* is the earliest and also the most complex. The camera sits in the middle, and in the early part of the tape it winds regularly round the room. The setting has a certain oddity about it, a sparse youthful taste that might well be a bold response to youthful lack of funds: a single potted plant that can yet be made to yield a sense of horticultural opulence when the camera fixes tightly on it; against the

window in the opposite wall, the date in large, bold figures looking more like a road sign than a calendar; pictures leaning against the wall, not hung up; old-fashioned radiators underneath the windows; and the plainest double divan bed without head board or blankets, but with heavily crumpled sheets and pillow-cases. There are no curtains. Generally, it is a very bare room, with plain white walls and ceiling — and that is crucially important. As the camera slowly swings up into a corner, the tedium of confinement (even a sense of desperation) may ensue; but as it turns, the simple juncture of wall and ceiling refuses to signify in three dimensions and momentarily regresses to a pattern of flat shapes that tip from left to right into the adjoining corner — in full three dimensions again.

In other episodes the camera may point directly at the ceiling or wall, but what we see is not a bare wall, but a bare screen. Because of its position in the centre of the room, the camera is never able to encompass more than a fragment, and this results, at once, in the neutralising blanks, and also in the sense of overcharged meaning in the claustrophobic framing of the fittings of the room. Later, the use of the zoom-lens exaggerates this effect. The camera peers through a window at the bare branches of distant trees, but then the focus shifts to the surface of the glass that now becomes an impenetrable barrier. The focus continues to change and all goes hazy. When the trees are clear, the bars of the window frame melt into nothing. The totality tells us that a knob on the camera is being turned, but each stage independently might indicate a state of psychological tension, evoke the crisis of a drama that is never specified. Eventually Kathy's dog appears — and then Kathy, glimpsed through the open door or sitting in the lengthened evening shadow of the window frame.

Sound is important. The regular beat of a metronome overlays the slight and intermittent noises of the room, the creaking of the camera's own cables, the muffled dialogue of Kathy's indistinguishable words, a telephone that rings sending the camera spinning out of focus.

There is an extraordinary sense of time throughout, and of the human significance of its passage, but no plot: just a continued conjuring up of imminent narrative potentialities that never condense about a story line. As darkness closes in, the lights are switched on, along with the 'automatic gain control' which compensates electronically to restore the original light level. The fading light of an early evening landscape seen through the dark silhouetted grid of the window frame gives way to well-lit mouldings in full relief set with equal theatricality against the fuller darkness of approaching nightfall: the moods are equally strong but contradictory. The lights are switched on and off several times; there is no escaping the mechanistic basis of the transformation. Elsewhere abrupt cuts from one detail to another suggest a critical turn of fortune, but in relation to no events in particular. The subject of the piece is implied human situation and incident (replete with several layers of symbolic overtones) but it coheres rather at the level of process — and in terms of a purely aesthetic balance of emotional flavours that constitute its ultimate formal values.

*Clouds* centres on the most outrageously sentimental of television fantasies, the pretty girl in a sunny summer afternoon-in-the-garden landscape; from its idyllic recesses, over and over again, she comes towards the camera. There used to be a girl in a television commercial who ran through just such a landscape with