

## **JANA STERBAK'S FIRST VIDEO INSTALLATION: *DECLARATION* BEGINNING JUNE 11 AT THE MUSÉE D'ART CONTEMPORAIN DE MONTRÉAL**

Montreal, May 31, 1994. The Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal presents, as part of the Project Series, the first ever video installation by Canadian artist Jana Sterbak. On view in the Banque Laurentienne Gallery, *DECLARATION* is a sparse installation consisting of a video monitor projecting an image of a young man stuttering as he reads from the French *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* (1789). Two armchairs by designer Arne Jacobsen complete the installation and as yet unseen work which raises various questions about man's social and psychological reality.

### **The impossibility of idealism**

According to Sterbak, "The words of the *Declaration*, the space of the museum and the design of the chairs embody an 'institutional idealism' which is, however, countered in the experience of viewers who enter the installation." The discomfort of the viewer is two-sided: he is confronted with the reader's disability and the subtle uneasiness resulting from his presence in a dark and empty space. Sandra Grant Marchand, curator of the exhibition, feels that the spectator "is torn between the idealism of words and the way he relates to the stammering reader."

### ***The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen***

A product of eighteenth-century French idealism, the text is above all the symbol of the fundamental intention of fulfilling the rights of man. Sandra Grant Marchand mentions that "the reading by a stutterer of the 17 articles of the Declaration is the expression of a relentless, persevering act of speech, tolerating the video camera's eye, and overcoming the solemn muteness of the text."

Like a vice around the monitor and armchairs, the empty space of the gallery is a significant element of the installation. "Initially a reference to the museum setting, it immediately elicits an ambiguous tension in viewers who enter it. Also a material, this space where certainties crumble, forms a backdrop for the viewer's vulnerability, a site closed tightly around a wound".

The curator concludes that "with its austere, concise and deeply affecting manner, Jana Sterbak's work points with conviction to the human being's state of distress".