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SYLVAIN P. **COUSINEAU** SERGE **MURPHY** YANA **STERBAK**

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SYLVAIN P. COUSINEAU  
SERGE MURPHY  
YANA STERBAK

SMALL WORKS

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Special emphasis must also be given to the generous participation of the lenders—without whom this exhibit could never have been drawn together as we hoped—Lise Bégin and Richard Mill, Jaqueline and Philip Fry, Jean Tourangeau, Michèle Waquant and Jacques Poulin, Michiko Gagnon and the Yajima/Galerie, as well as a collector from Montreal who prefers to remain anonymous. My heartfelt thanks to them all. **F.G.**

Through the activities associated with Maple Leaf Month, the people of San Diego are encouraged to look North and recognize the many associations we share with Canada. The University Art Gallery, through "Menues Menoeuvres (small Works)" is pleased to add an esthetic dimension to our mutual understanding of each other's cultures.

Organized by the Musee d'art contemporain, Montreal, "Small Works" presents the work of three Canadian artists: Sylvain Cousineau, Serge Murphy, and Yana Sterbak. We are proud to present their work for the first time in Southern California. At San Diego State University, the experience will be made more complete as two of the artists, Cousineau and Sterbak, will be in-residence for two weeks during the exhibition. The interaction they will have with students and faculty will enrich us all. Their travel expenses have been provided by the Canadian Consulate General, Los Angeles; the Associated Students, Instructionally Related Activities Funds, has provided their modest honoraria.

The artists, Sylvain Cousineau, Serge Murphy and Yana Sterbak, are to be congratulated for their work and deserve our gratitude for their cooperation with this project. We also thank France Gascon, Curator of the exhibition, for her support and advice.

The original idea for an exhibition of Canadian artists began with Pamela Johnson, Cultural Affairs Officer for

the Canadian Consulate in Los Angeles. She and Ms. Simone Auger, Public Affairs Consul, cooperated with great personal committment at every step in the planning. Their enthusiasm for this project was delightful and infectious; our association has developed into a warm friendship.

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Ms Katia Oliver prepared the English translation of the original French text and Rachael Bernier, for SDSU Press, ably produced the catalogue; patricia Kevershan designed the announcement and oversaw its production. I would also like to thank Linda Speer, my graduate assistant, and Gloria McCarter for their efforts.

DENNIS KOMAC  
Director  
SDSU Art Gallery





## PREFACE

What technology has brought to contemporary artistic production has changed the dominant ideology of the Western world inherited from the 19th century. From now on art, like all social practices, is involved with political, economical and sociological reality.

The role of the museum has similarly been modified. From the elitest institution that it was, the museum, in its present state, has become an institution of confrontation of social practices, which has allowed the artist to occupy a *place* in the society still characterized by class struggle.

On the eve of a new era when profound and turbulent changes are taking place the world over, the artist will undoubtedly have an increased role to play in reconciling such opposites; this exhibition, Small Works, has no other ambition.

ANDRE MENARD  
Chief Curator and  
Acting Director  
Musée d'art contemporain



## INTRODUCTION

The art form practised by these young artists has no name, or at least not a precise name as yet, but it does evoke many other forms which are already familiar to us.

It is an art which brings to mind processes long associated with sculpture and painting: assemblage and collage. The art of installation is apparent in the way certain of the works are displayed in the gallery, or, more precisely, the way in which those works make the gallery space become an integral part of themselves and not just a simple “envelope” for an exhibit. Most of the freestanding works and the three-dimensional works remind us of the traditional art of sculpture, whereas the works conceived on or as flat surface make us think of paintings. Also, several of them are reminiscent of an art form which is less common but has been used, nevertheless, by several artists since the beginning of the century: the assembled object, the found object, the transformed object.

There is certainly no lack of reference, but not a single one suffices or is totally accurate in capturing the essence of the works by these young artists. Not simply or solely painting, sculpture, assemblage, collage, found object or installation, each of the works in this exhibit draws on at least one of these forms, and more often encompasses two or three of them. In order to define these works, it would

be necessary to use composite terms such as “assemblage-collage-painting” or “sculpture-installation” or “object-sculpture” or “object-sculpture-painting.” These young artists blend forms the way others use and blend colors: they weave a pattern from styles and periods of art history as if they were masters of it.

The expert blending of styles and ease of execution make us notice immediately that, despite its spontaneous and homespun appearance, its simple and handmade look and rather guileless use of imagery, this art is not at all naïve. It is based on a critical vision of art history, and there is no naïvete inherent in it. The manipulation of style, the jumps in time, the shuffling and mixing are unquestionably indicative of an intense consciousness of History—History mastered in these works to the point of being treated as a material, to be used as needed.

### **Freedom above all**

This art follows two paradoxical parameters. It looks to the past—through the use of old material in the form of strictly conventional styles, heavy with meaning—but does so in the most inventive fashion, the most liberated and personal one. The freedom of expression which these artists allowed themselves is vast, and can only be measured by enumerating the constraints they chose to ignore. They

refused—as we have already mentioned—to adhere to a limited artistic discipline, even one of their own invention. Neither did they subscribe to the law of stylistic unity and, as their art burst out, they created freely and unexpectedly—so that we can repeatedly revel in the freshness of their work. They also refused to brandish a “message,” as some artists do, in order to defend their position, be it social, artistic, conceptual or otherwise in character. They set themselves apart from all the familiar categories or fashionable topics. Finally, they even refused to adopt a serious or logical air in their work, which, coming from artists who deeply espouse these qualities, shows a great detachment and a total lack of pretentiousness. All in all, they renounced any form of stylistic commitment other than to themselves, and the means of expression they chose was determined only by their own expressive and creative needs.

So far, a name has not been chosen for this art form, which really does not lend itself to denomination, but instead raises much more interesting questions concerning ethics and the artist as a person. What is artistic freedom? Which license can the artist take? Who decides for him? Whose words are uttered when the artist speaks? Who speaks through him? . . .

The three artists in this exhibition live and work in different places—Ottawa, Montreal and Toronto. They have little in common, apart from certain qualities which we shall attempt to discern here and the act of grouping together as three distinct individuals to take part in this exhibition. Sylvain Cousineau, Serge Murphy and Yana Sterbak are not representative of a new contemporary art movement (they are only representative of themselves), but their independence from the main trends and established styles, from everything defined or adulterated, places them at the very core of a contemporary art—more and more prevalent—which sidesteps classifications by

absorbing them and rejects any extraneous evaluation that would suffocate its creativity. It is nothing new in the history of modern art to hear creative freedom invoked or claimed, but those words are usually teamed with provocative behaviour. For example, the freedom of DADA was intended, above all, to shock the bourgeoisie. Here, however, the freedom of the artist (seen in its true form as freedom of creativity—this is to say of choice and combination) is not dominated by any supreme concept—not even of freedom itself. For these artists, art is not a way of promoting concepts (or convictions), even if they themselves adhere to those concepts.

Their art form does not choose to impose itself on the viewer, or at least not in the same way as others have done. Can one not see in the restrained dimensions and underplayed tone of their works, as well as the fragility of some of the pieces, the wish to be retiring and avoid the overbearing? The viewer’s sensibilities are altered: the work is appreciated by moving towards it and because it surprises and charms with an inventive quality which makes it inimitable, never completely grasped or understood.

### **The art of appearances**

Instead of the word “naïve,” which has already been rejected, it would undoubtedly be preferable to use the word “ingenuity” in this context, for all the disarming and eloquent sincerity it implies, along with an underlying hint of secret intent. It is easier to associate ingenuity, rather than naïveté, with deliberate behaviour seeking to convey an effect. While false naïveté is seen as cunning, acted ingenuity is seen as theater and is referred to as strategy. It is strategy rather than deception being brought into play here. Ingenuity describes the way in which the work of art leads the viewer down a path of its choosing, so that it takes control without appearing to do so.

The first strategy revealed in these works is that of keeping

the viewer at the surface level, and making that surface interesting. The fact that this art form does not have a name and escapes existing classifications forces us to use our eye in a more intense visual contact. We discover these works much as an explorer would discover and familiarise himself with a new planet or continent: there are sufficient referents to evaluate differences from existing models, and yet these works are varied enough to warrant a second glance and a closer look at the differences. How is this made? What materials are used?

The materials are the first thing to attract attention. Their diversity is amazing. Yana Sterbak uses needles and thread, plasticine, tape measures, but also cast iron and bronze. Sylvain Cousineau works with found objects, with paint on canvas and wood. The quantity and variety of objects he integrates into his paintings and three-dimensional pieces is boundless. Anything Serge Murphy comes across is likely to reappear in one of his works. His wall pieces consist of anything that can be laminated—paper, cardboard, plastic sheets, slivers of wood, cut-up photographs, etc. In his “Gardens,” using a real exaggeration of collage, he puts the most incongruous objects side by side: an iron, a plant, cotton-wool, and tiny ornamental tigers (“Garden,” illustr. No. 28).

In order to comprehend its full impact, this diversity must be expanded to include the lively and varied colors which distinguish each of the works by the three artists. Only the diversity itself has been emphasized here, and it is then necessary to actually see each of the materials within the context in which it appears. The diversity is then seen not as motiveless, but as based on a remarkable sense of the apposite. The manipulation of the materials also calls for a variety of techniques. Here we see a needle stuck into a wall, or parts of a house retained by friction only (Yana Sterbak); and here a collage covered with black adhesive tape holding it to the wall (Serge Murphy);

there is the silhouette of a boat attached to a metal grating with wire or nailed onto a wooden surface (Sylvain Cousineau). We are not dealing with a frantic search for variety, but rather with the selection of the best means to simply and effectively fulfill the function of holding the object in place, and which expressively and technically integrates itself best in the total work.

The list of materials obviously contains some related to traditional art forms and “grand art,” such as bronze and paintings on canvas or wood. Others fall more within the realm of modern art, such as glued paper, non-precious metals (like iron), and found objects. Others belong in the home or in handicrafts: plasticine, thread, needles, collage, assemblage and building materials. We make these distinctions to show that the artists themselves do not. They move constantly from one medium to the other, when they are not simply mixing them together. Yana Sterbak passes from needle and thread to bronze. For his part, Serge Murphy makes collages which include as many echoes of constructivist compositions as of children’s drawings, and Sylvain Cousineau executes miniature paintings on wooden panels with a style halfway between that of Renaissance artist and handyman.

The format of the works also excites our sense of discovery: the works are actually quite small, but all are different, distinct and autonomous entities with a subjective quality. Their reduced dimensions force the eye to move nearer. Being products of manual work, they demand to be looked at closely, from a hand’s-breadth away. However, their scale is very human and not at all minute or secretive, because everything rises from the surface. As the epitome of surface effect, representation (of familiar objects or fragments thereof) plays a major rôle in these works. The works have such a very strong content of imagery that it permeates the object and acts as a sign. The type of imagery chosen is simple—it consists

of the first and most usual imagery of the lesson of things: a fir tree (Serge Murphy), a boat (Sylvain Cousineau), an envelope, a foot (Yana Sterbak). Not only is the theme simple, but it is treated in such a way that it is immediately recognizable—detached from its background, separated from its environment and presented as a subject. Thus the fir tree is shown as a silhouette, the boat is placed in the center of a flat surface and the shoe, sculpted replica of the real thing, is set in mid-space.

It is easy to see how the works were constructed. There is no high technology here to evade our sight or our understanding. The construction lets us see all the transformations undergone by the materials: cutting-up, collage, superimposition, modelling, nailing, etc. At the same time as we see the results, we can also clearly retrace all the preceding phases of execution, and would even be able to copy the object because the home handyman techniques used are available to all. No secret remains, either at the surface of the object or in its construction.

Diversity, variety, simplicity and clarity ensure a great visibility for the works. Everything is engineered into the work to ensure that it will be seen, noticed and that its component parts (materials, iconographic theme, steps in construction) are themselves brought into sharp focus. Nothing is so complex that the steps in its composition are unfathomable. There is no theme which is not immediately recognizable or which requires previous knowledge. There is nothing which does not come to the surface, either of the object or the level of communication. All the artist's efforts seem to be directed towards the highly visible, which almost tends to confuse the eye. We are somewhat overwhelmed by the huge variety of objects, blendings of style, myriad of colors and all the tiny entities spread out before us.

Caught by the surfaces of all these different objects, we have to scrutinize everything relentlessly and in the

minutest detail. We cannot take any shortcuts, because nothing seems to be repetitious. We try to “understand” these objects, but in reality it is almost impossible to grasp their essence and transform them into familiar models, because it is exactly their remoteness from the familiar which accounts for the uniqueness of each object and gives it an identity. Each object is the result of a specific and unique combination of *this* material, *this* form, *this* image and *this* color.

### **The game of reality**

Interestingly, the design of certain pieces by Yana Stebak, for example “Iron House,” comes close to the handyman technique of Sylvain Cousineau and Serge Murphy. These two processes, design and home-construction, both contribute to making the materials more conspicuous. By being tossed, pieced and glued together, the materials acquire just as much importance as if they were being treated according to a precise plan. The handyman technique and the design both have the effect of emphasizing the materials, one through absence (by “poorly” executed composition) and the other through amplification (by perfect composition, which amplifies the materials). Both treatments, however, agree on the importance of the material. The materials used in a work are never completely disguised, changed or hidden, and their primary state as materials remains perceptible in the final work. In that sense, the works in this exhibit may be considered as works of material (that is to say, they show *the material as such*). Consequently, they function as collages—collages of a concept and a material (the envelope and the cast iron, the heart and the bronze, the hand and the plasticine, or the cone and the tape measure by Yana Sterbak); collages of different materials on a panel creating a little scene (boats on the ocean by Sylvain Cousineau); two objects joined as one (“Metal stem with a curl,” “Artist’s brush on a lamp base,” also by Sylvain Cousineau); a collage of incongruous objects (“Gardens” by Serge Murphy), and finally, collage in its most classic

form of cut papers (“Landscapes” by Serge Murphy—in which, by the way, the wall of the gallery itself becomes part of the materials in the work, acting as both background and support).

The special effect of collage gives an additional quality to the object thus created. It converts it to an object of necessity, integrated to a sequence of real life—a product of the random and of a unique partnership between a specific material and a specific concept.

The nature of the material, duly respected, indicates the origin of the object, its primary state. The degree to which that origin is defined may be more or less specific. Serge Murphy’s torn papers at least indicate that there used to be a larger sheet of paper. The recycled materials (wooden frames, old wooden boards) used by Sylvain Cousineau point to a previous use of the same objects, without actually stating what that use was. In contrast, the Maxwell House coffee can cut up and used by the same artist leaves absolutely no doubt about its origin, and Yana Sterbak’s dressmaker’s ribbons come for sure from the notions store (assembled here in quantities far exceeding domestic usage).

The persistent presence in the work of the material’s original state creates a sense of displacement, and thereby emphasizes that the material was deliberately searched out, selected, manipulated and integrated into the work. The same persistence shows us the gap between the nature of the material and the use to which the artist has put it and thus tells of a turnabout in its function or a simple transformation. In this way, a metal grating simultaneously becomes the support to which a boat is attached and the ocean on which it is sailing (“Boat on metal grating,” illustr. No. 8) . . . in this way the plasticine used by Yana Sterbak is promoted into the ranks of professional artist’s materials and Serge Murphy’s cut-up papers become works of art on the wall—frescoes. However, the transformation

is never perfectly completed. The metal grating is still a grating, the plasticine makes us think of children’s games and the effect of a fresco does not allow us to forget that it is composed of simple little paper cutouts.

In the final analysis, these works leave us not so much with a sense of the unusual as of the possible, as we watch them seeking to blend fragments of present and past reality into works of art. This process could easily be likened to photography, which is also an art based on, and demanding the participation of reality and therefore is always, in that sense, a “dramatic” art.

### **Story, transformation and invention**

The integration of a conspicuous material into an artwork marks its genesis. The echo of that genesis is the first thread of the story which starts from the work and winds back into its past. In the present, the work tells the story of its past and its origin. The act of selecting and cutting-up of the materials forms the first chapter in the story. The artist’s choice of technique can also contain its own echo, as in the case with Yana Sterbak’s envelope, which is strongly reminiscent of the children’s game that consists of drawing an envelope “without the pencil leaving the paper and without going over the same line twice.”

The work also tells its own story, this time more fictional in tone, by the form it chooses. When Yana Sterbak puts shoes (life-sized) at the entrance to a room, she alludes to (or makes believe) a real presence. By creating something that resembles a shadowbox on the wall, and putting into it some decorative pieces (a mountain, a car, flowers) all ready to come to life, Serge Murphy sows the seeds of a story ripe to unfold. Sylvain Cousineau exposes us to the multiple transformations of his boat—warship, yacht, even spaceship—all equally applicable on a different level and in a different story as an expressionist boat, a pop art boat, an impressionist boat, a new realism boat . . .

In the works of these artists, stories are also formed by everything that presents itself as a series centered around a theme. For example, this appears in the transitive theme of the envelope-house-cube, or the theme of parts of the body (hands, toes, heart, stomach . . . ) by Yana Sterbak, or the theme in the "Garden," "Landscape" or "Small Arrow" series by Serge Murphy. Each series tells a story through variations on a theme.

The different stories thus formed have the freedom of a story created to while away time. None of the stories are unilateral. They have a freedom which is charming. We appreciate the variations much more than the unfolding of the story.

This story—whatever it is—is the history of transformation and motion. In a single picture or object, the story has the special ability to simultaneously expose its succession of episodes, as well as its past and its future. Faced with such a story, we can always make it regress or reverse the metamorphosis. For example, one can return the "ocean" in "Boat on Metal Grating" to its state as a metal grating. The story does not have a set course, but is pure motion and oscillates freely in all directions. The story follows the image which, thanks to the effect of collage, is never perfectly stable, either in the materials used or in the subject matter.

The charm of these objects is largely due to the fact that each is a fresh and unique combination of ordinary recycled materials. The sense of wonder created by the transformation would not be effective if the object were not placed in an atmosphere of the novel and the unexpected. Discovery is a fundamental facet in the perception of these works. That sense of discovery must be renewed from work to work and from series to series in order for their charm to operate. This search for the new, for the simple pleasure of discovery it provides, evokes an image of the artist as a creator of "inventions."

Is a new "tradition of the new" being established? Certainly not, because invention here only nourishes pleasure—it is spontaneous, focussed, self-sufficient and creates its own opportunities. It serves no purpose and contributes nothing to progress, since progress would imply a preferred direction to be followed. This does not exist here: there is only free movement, which neither excludes nor favours any particular direction.

The efforts of these artists to offer an almost excessive visibility, and their willingness to let their art be drawn into the multiple and unforeseeable stories they elicit, leads towards a veritable explosion of the artistic experience. That experience now wants to be open to its past and to everything which steps beyond the accepted boundaries. Liberated from the idea of progress, the artistic experience has lost the nagging desire for the new, and at the same time has regained the idea of invention. It has also opened itself to phenomena which it cannot control and which do not specifically concern it: surprise, intuition, the past, the present, the burden of History . . . It draws its material as much from its past, from the history of art, as it does from other symbolic activities and other languages outside the sphere of the work of art.

Without restriction, the direction taken by these artists puts facts of art and facts of semiology at the same level, and delivers them in an up-to-date and simple translation. We are placed in a new culture where facts of art, existence and communication form an unbroken chain, and each level has to be linked to the next. For this generation, the fact of art has become an integral part of life. This art finds its strength in the use of a vital language, which is outside and beyond any law, and open to all.

FRANCE GASCON  
Curator  
Assistant Director  
for Travelling Exhibitions



## SYLVAIN P. COUSINEAU

*Handkerchief rouge* (Red handkerchief), 1971

*Les Bateaux* (The Boats), 1976-1982

*Théière* (Teapot), 1977; *Gâteau de fête* (Birthday Cake), 1981

*Pot de fleurs* (Flowerpot), 1981

Painted objects, assemblages and found objects, 1977-1981

### **BLENDING, NATURALLY**

A binary image is found all through Sylvain Cousineau's work: the image of a figure on a background (in the pictures) and the image of an object which displays or supports another object (in the sculptures). In his pictures, the image of the small boat on a background of waves, first introduced in his work towards 1976, is the one which occurs most frequently (the teapot, birthday cake and flowerpot are unusual motifs of which the artist wants to show only one example per exhibit). At first the boat was painted, but has since progressed into more solid materials and varied techniques. At first sailing in the waves in a rather realistic fashion, it then appeared to be above the surface of the ocean, seemingly carried by the waves or by clouds, on a metal grating or a simple decorative background of dots or other motif. The situations in which the boat is shown continue to multiply, and the artist continues to invent new ones, without however modifying the relationship between the two components: image (isolated and complete in itself) and background.

The relationship of these two components is even more apparent in the construction of objects such as the metal stem holding a “curl,” the vise squeezing a sheet of metal, the plant stake with a tennis ball headdress, or the lamp base holding an artist’s brush. The respective positions of the two objects imply that one is a physical support or display stand for the other (“this is a tennis ball”—with the innuendo: “look at it”). One object shows off the other, but the idea of such objects being involved in such an action is so unusual that both objects actually stand out. The incongruity of their marriage sends the viewer’s eye from one to the other, and makes each object point up the other. A similar effect is found in “The Blue Bomb,” a bomb to which yellow adhesive dots have been added and which both camouflages and reveals it at the same time.

If the ocean followed the logic of the story in the painted works, it would have been used to enhance the boat. Sylvain Cousineau treats it more like a subject, with neither more nor less presence than the boat. The ocean unites much of the work done by the artist, so much so that all the modern pictorial sciences are seen in it: dots, dribbled paint, lettering, inversions, brush strokes . . . On the other hand, as Philip Fry has pointed out, repetition of the same motif, such as the little boat on the ocean, draws attention to specific features of the image involved. In this case, attention is drawn to the method of construction, which calls on pictorial techniques and styles to the highest degree. The art of painting is utterly present in the painted works of Sylvain Cousineau, as evidenced by the drops of paint forming little drops, the very thick layers of lacquer or the omni-present frames of some of the works.

As far as the artist goes in his work with pictorial conventions, he still has the need to present his objects in a situation which is a natural extension of those objects, so that he pretends not to intervene. He hides behind the “nature” of the objects (in the same way that he camouflages his modern technique as the work of a

handyman). Thus he chooses to depict the boat on the ocean—a conventional situation, and also a very “natural” one. The smoke he adds to the boat and the birthday cake is a very natural extension of the funnel on the boat or the candle on the cake, just as the wisp of steam is a natural extension of the spout on the teapot. In the same way, the “curl” is seen as a natural elongation of the metal stem (and needing no attachment), and the brush fits so perfectly on the lamp base that they might have been made for each other. It is an easy step to find around us objects which are already joined, such as “The Vise,” or even to draw on an object which is represented as such, as is the case with “Dynamo.” Since the dynamo is not joined to anything, it simply reveals the artist and his taste for the object. “Dynamo” reveals the artist’s fundamental desire to hide behind the objects and make them show each other off, by themselves . . . while on the other hand the painted works testify to the artist’s intention of showing painting as a spectacle in itself, as the art of spectacle. **F.G.**

### About Sylvain Cousineau

- Gilles Toupin, "Une photographie en train de s'affirmer," *La Presse*, Montreal, July 31, 1976, p. C16.
- "Mona Nima by Sylvain Cousineau," *Afterimage*, vol. 6, no. 7, Feb. 7, 1979, p. 18.
- René Viau, "Sylvain Cousineau, David Bolduc et estampe japonaise," *Le Devoir*, Montreal, Feb. 6, 1979.
- Philip Fry, "Sylvain Cousineau: Yajima Galerie, Montreal, Jan.-Feb. 1979," *Parachute*, no. 15, summer 1979, p. 56-57.
- Philip Fry, *Sylvain P. Cousineau: Photographs and paintings / Sylvain P. Cousineau: photographies et peintures*. Exhibit Catalog. The Dunlop Art Gallery, Regina, 1980, 57 pages (English version), 63 pages (French version).
- Goldie Rans, "The Mask of Objectivity/Subjective Images: McIntosh Gallery, London, February 4 - March 1, 1981," *Parachute*, no. 23, summer 1981, p. 42-44.

### By Sylvain P. Cousineau

- (untitled), book of drawings, Loft Press, Visual Studies Workshop, Rochester, N.Y., 1973, 40 p.
- Exzéo*, book of drawings and photographs, Editions d'Acadie, Moncton, N.B., 1975, 28 p.

### Other works by the artist

Photography since 1967

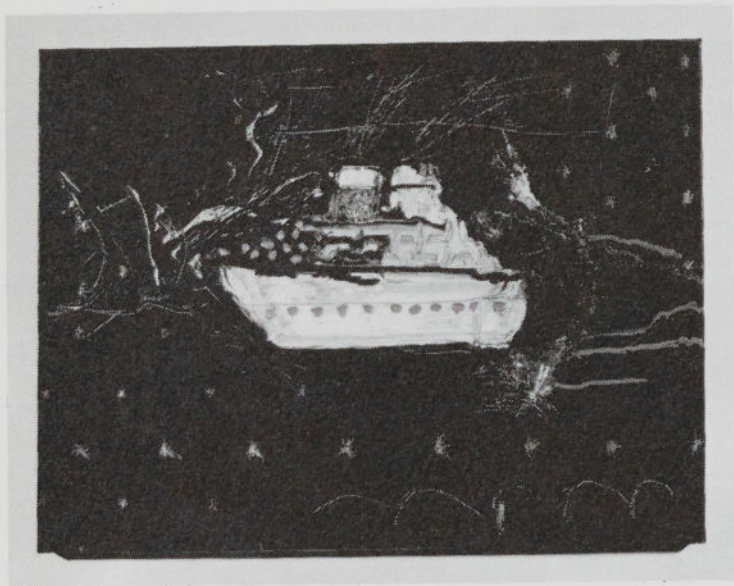
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Studies in Montreal (Collège Loyola, B.A. in communications, 1967-1971) and in Rochester, N.Y., (Visual Studies Workshop, M.F.A. 1972-1974).  
Lives in Ottawa, Ont.

### One-Man Exhibitions

- The Photography Gallery, Bowmanville, Ont., 1972  
Art Gallery of the University of Moncton, Moncton, N.B., 1974  
Yajima/Galerie, Montreal, 1979  
*Sylvain P. Cousineau: photographs and paintings/Sylvain P. Cousineau: photographies et peintures*, The Dunlop Gallery, Regina, Sask., 1980 (touring exhibit in Canada)  
Quan Gallery, Toronto, 1982

### Group Exhibitions

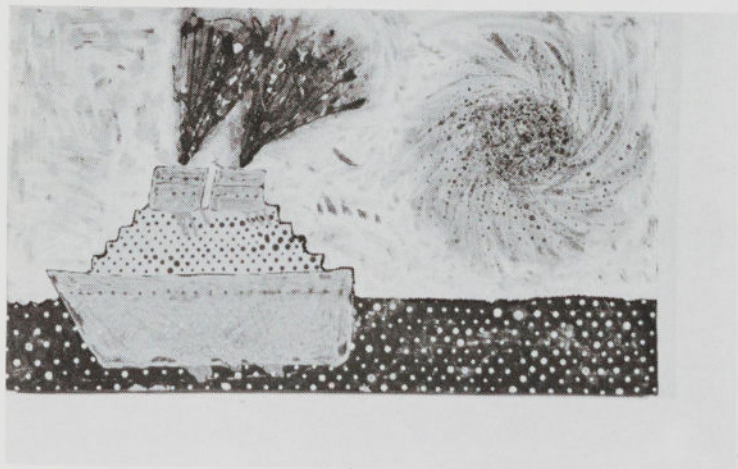
- Galerie Centaur, Montreal, 1971 (also 1972)  
Owens Art Gallery, Sackville, N.B., 1974  
*Six Young Canadian Photographers*, Yajima/Galerie, Montreal, 1976  
National Film Board of Canada, Ottawa, Ont., 1977  
*Tendances actuelles au Québec*, Musée d'art contemporain, Montreal, 1976  
*Aspects de la photographie québécoise contemporaine*, Musée d'art contemporain, Montreal, 1979 (Touring exhibit in Quebec)  
Yajima/Galerie, Montreal, 1981 (also 1982)  
*The Mask of Objectivity / Subjective Images*, McIntosh Gallery, London, Ont., 1981



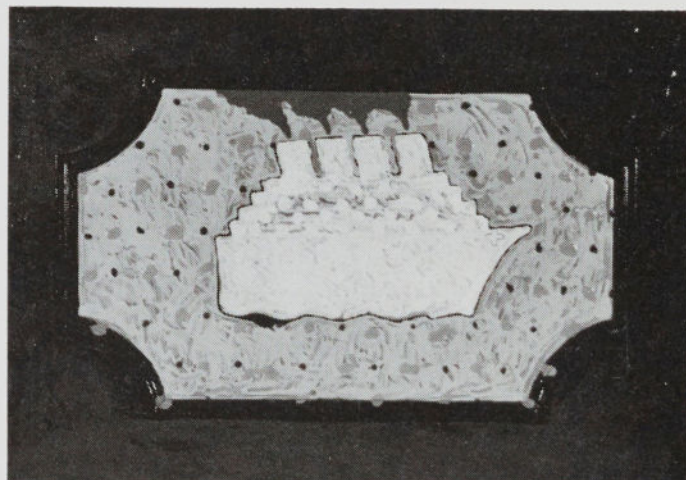
1. *Bateau rouge sur fond noir*, 1971  
Red boat on black background  
Oil on canvas  
46 x 60 cm  
Artist's collection



2. *Petit bateau vert*, 1976  
Small green boat  
Oil on canvas  
12 x 12 cm  
Artist's collection

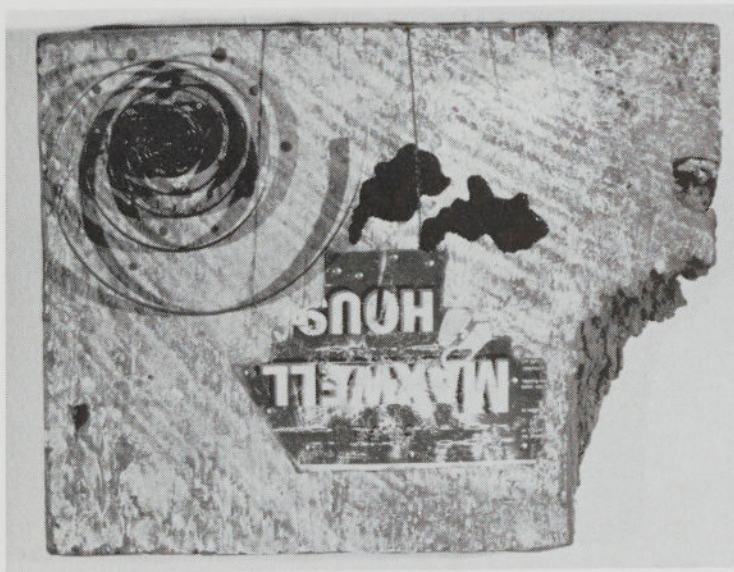


3. *Bateau rose*, 1977  
 Pink boat  
 Oil and thumbtacks on canvas  
 25.1 x 35.3 cm  
 Collection: Yajima/Galerie

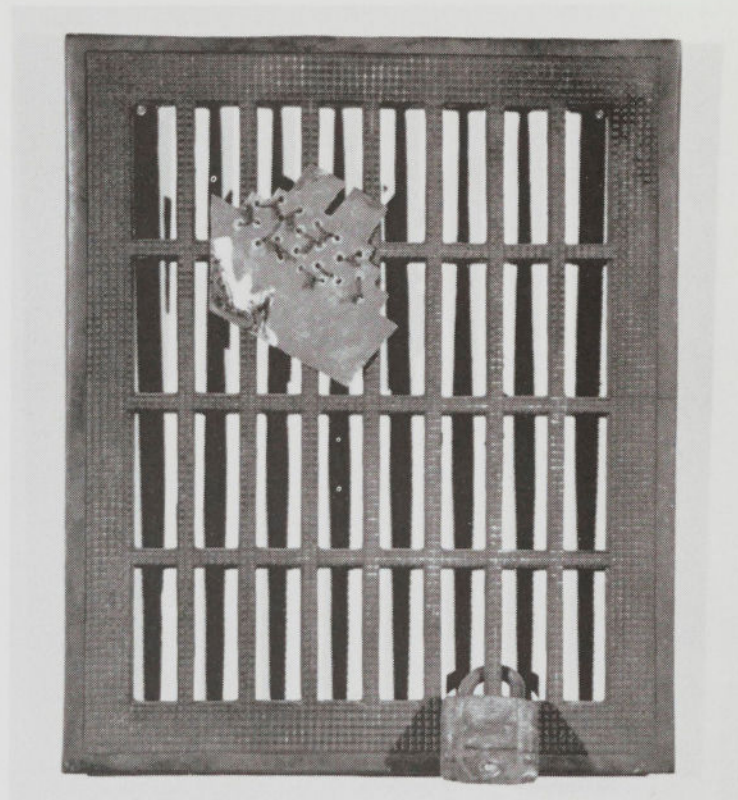


4. *Bateau rose blessé*, 1977  
 Injured pink boat  
 Oil on canvas  
 44.5 x 74.5 cm  
 Artist's collection

5. *Bateau de la Croix-Rouge*, 1973  
 Red-Cross boat  
 Oil on wood  
 51.5 x 61 cm  
 Artist's collection



6. *Bateau Maxwell House*, 1980  
 Maxwell House boat  
 23 x 30.5 x 4.5 cm  
 23 x 30.5 x 4.5 cm  
 Collection: Yajima/Galerie



7. *Bateau sur grille*, 1980  
 Boat on metal grating  
 Metal grating, padlock, sheet metal and wire  
 29.5 x 24.5 x 4.4 cm  
 Collection: Yajima/Galerie



8. *Bateau de tôle avec fumée rouge*, 1980  
Tin boat with red smoke  
Oil, thumbtacks and metal on wood  
41 x 34 cm  
Artist's collection



9. *Bateau sur calepin*, 1980  
Boat on notebook  
Oil and metal on metal  
11 x 38 cm  
Artist's collection



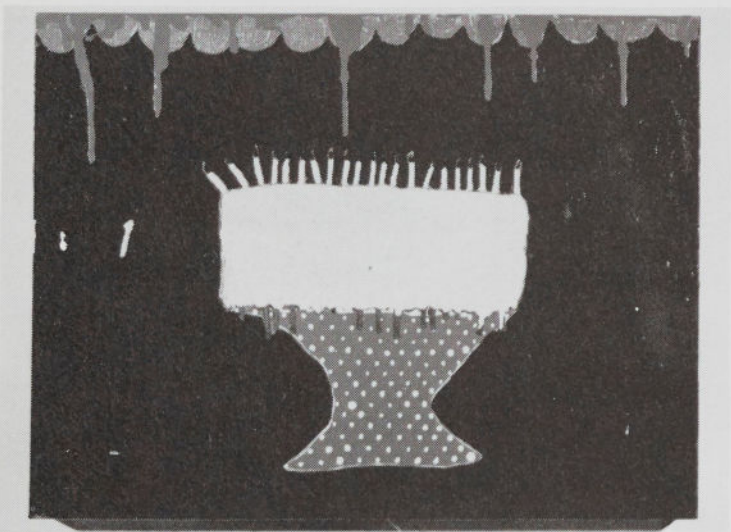
10. *Bateau de métal*, 1980  
Metal boat  
Metal and oil on wood  
22 x 20.4 cm  
Private collection, Montreal



11. *Tbèière*, 1977  
Teapot  
Painting on wood  
22.8 x 28.5 cm  
Collection: Jacqueline and Philip Fry



13. *Pot de fleurs*, 1981  
Flowerpot  
Oil on canvas  
61.2 x 46 cm  
Collection: Yajima/Galerie

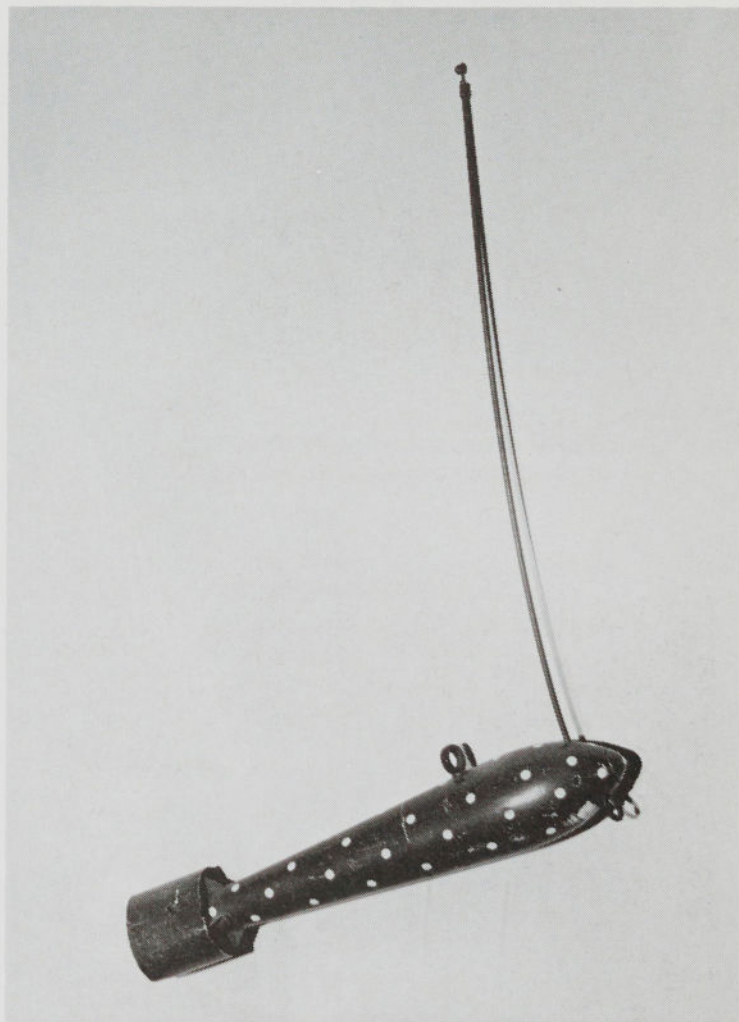


12. *Gâteau de fête*, 1979  
Birthday cake  
Oil on canvas  
46 x 60 cm  
Artist's collection





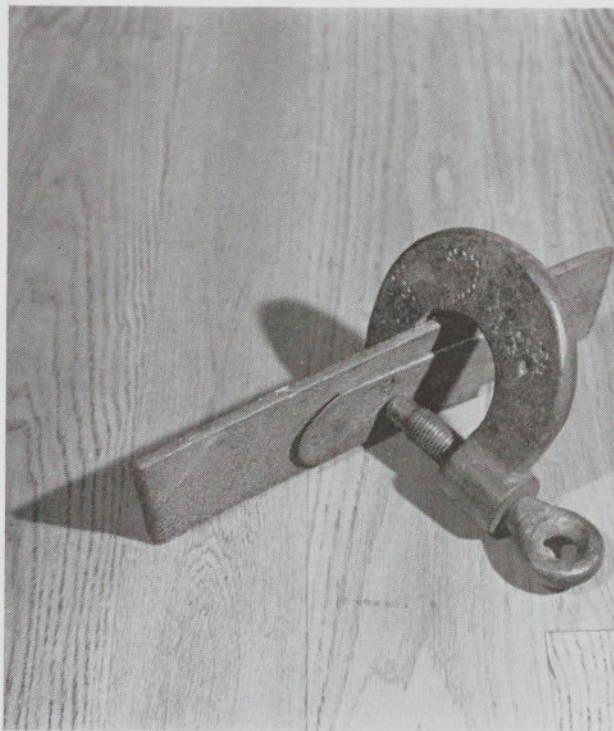
14. *Sonnette*, 1977  
Bell  
Bell and oil on wood  
31.7 x 25.5 x 5.2 cm  
Collection: Yajima/Galerie



15. *La bombe bleue*, 1980  
The blue bomb  
Bomb, yellow adhesive dots and metal stem  
76.5 x 60 x 8 cm  
Artist's collection



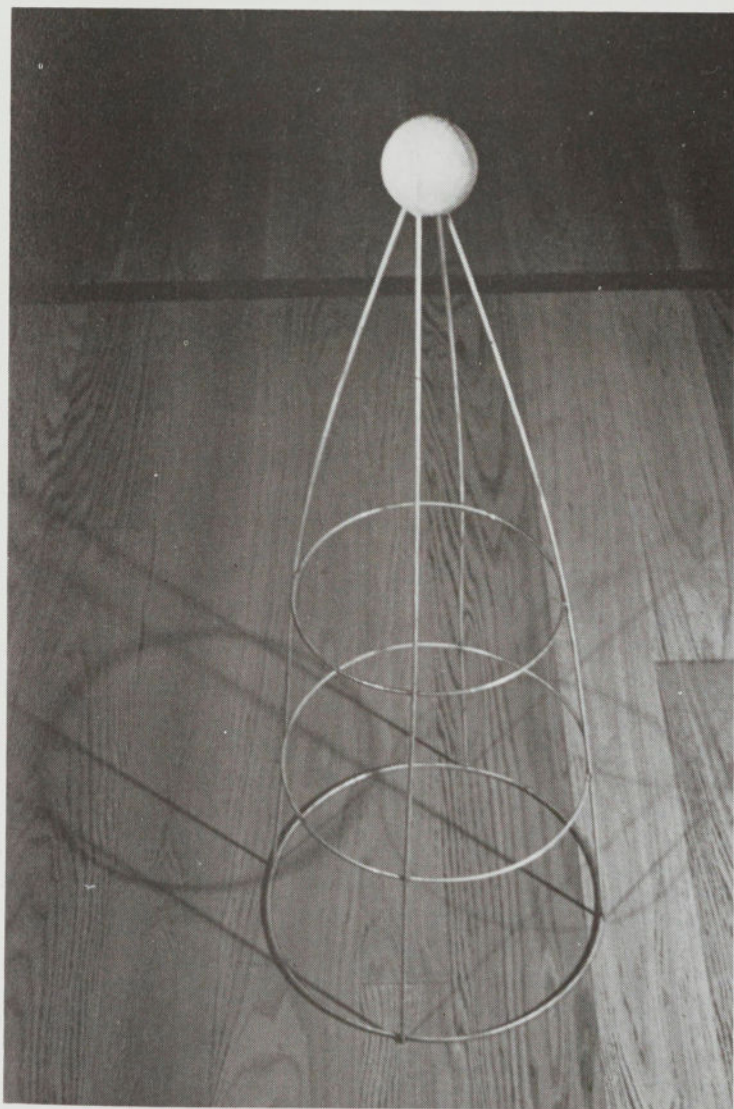
16. *Tige de métal avec frisette*, 1977  
Metal stem with curl  
Metal  
99 x 20.3 x 26 cm  
Artist's collection



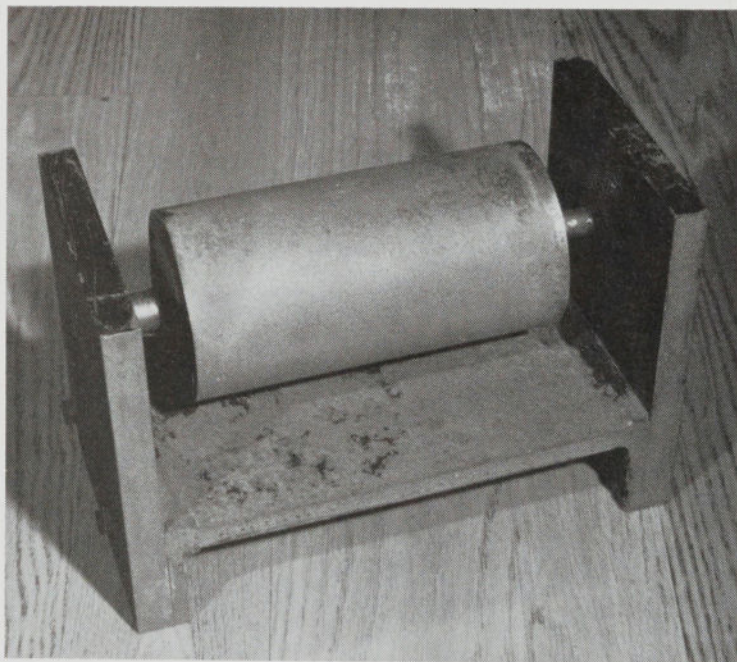
17. *L'étai*, 1978  
The vise  
Vise and piece of metal  
22.8 x 34.5 x 15.8 cm  
Artist's collection



18. *Pinceau*, 1980  
Brush  
Artist's brush and metal lamp base  
73.6 x 27.3 x 27.3 cm  
Artist's collection



19. *Tuteur*, 1980  
Plant stake  
Galvanized metal and tennis ball  
83.8 x 33 x 33 cm  
Artist's collection



20. *Dynamo*, 1981  
Metal  
20.3 x 31.7 x 15.2 cm  
Artist's collection

## SERGE MURPHY

*Les Fléchettes* (Small Arrows), 1977  
*Les Jardins* (Gardens), 1978  
*Sans titre* (Untitled), 1980  
*Les Paysages* (Landscapes), 1981  
*Tormento*, 1982

### **BUILDING BRIDGES**

We do not see collage as the result of an absolutely premeditated act, but rather as the result of “inspiration.” The initial concept of a collage allows for vague areas, or even voids, to be filled in with a stroke of inspiration as the project takes shape. A collage would thus first of all develop out of the materials being used, materials which would have come to the artist by chance or in his daily activities. Any vague idea for a scenario could provide the impetus for a collage and form the guidelines for its growth. Progress on the work would be encouraged by the results obtained: at a certain point in its development, the collage would become its very own source of inspiration, self-nourishing and self-generating. Tied in this way to real time and to the cumulative effect of time—with nothing planned, but nothing forgotten—the collage is never too far from the surrealistic game of the perfect corpse—open to a confusion of the senses caused by the random addition of elements of meaning.

Playing on these random links, Serge Murphy's works are open to the same complexity of meaning. Especially in his earlier works, there is a selection and gathering of symbols with deep meaning, simultaneously explicit and open to interpretation. The garden chair and the blue sky in "Small Arrows" are like very definite actors in a scene which it is impossible to reconstruct but which is none the less real (and dramatic when the scene includes the very theatrical representation of the body of the artist, as in "Untitled," 1980). Just as in a poetic image, the relationship of disparate elements gives birth to an enigma and to a new meaning. The meaning we create remains totally personal and will not be confirmed by the artist or by anyone else. Serge Murphy has never thought fit to explain his images, except in his own writings, where he demonstrates that they are open-ended and that it is possible to expand them and to transpose their effect into another medium, namely writing.

A constant preoccupation is revealed by the themes of the different series. The element of chance—which does play a considerable part in the integration of materials and the construction of poetic images—is counterbalanced by the careful composition. The objects are assembled in a formal body which leaves nothing to chance. It is this common element of composition which creates unity in each series. All the "Small Arrows" take on a vertical form, borrowed from the cross, the totem pole, the fetish and the emblem. The form of presentation which characterizes the series entitled "Untitled" is like the frame on a portrait. Here, as in "Gardens," the very classical and almost solemn presentation (centered, symmetrical, like a monument) is in direct contrast to the commonplace character of the materials or objects used.

In "Gardens," the most incongruous objects are combined in the most emphatic way possible, as if being glorified. "Landscapes" shatter the image of the monument,

centered as it is and flanked symmetrically to the right and the left, and tear the composition to pieces (three pieces—left, right and center). The composition appears to be distended and evokes the horizontal and panoramic effect of landscape. "Tormento" suggests a return to a certain kind of superimposition or composition which is more "primitive" and closer in style to "Small Arrows" than to "Landscapes," but with an exuberant vitality that the more structured "Small Arrows" does not have.

The totem, the framed portrait, the glorified presentation of "Gardens," the "modernism" of "Landscapes," appear to be echo of historically dated styles which Serge Murphy resurrects in collage. The productions (accurately termed so because these works have more affinity with the art of performance than with the art of stage-setting) place three universes next to each other: the universe of art (in the fixed and static forms), the universe of life (in the flow of collage) and the universe of environment (in the materials). Bridges are built between these three universes, which coexist side by side and exchange signals. **F.G.**

### About Serge Murphy

Jean Tourangeau, "Déchets d'oeuvre . . . à l'ouvre / de Serge Murphy," *Vie des Arts*, no. 93, winter 1978-1979, p. 77-78.

Jean Tourangeau, "Actualité: je vais vous raconter une histoire," *Intervention*, vol. 1, no. 4, 1979, p. 23-27.

Michèle Waquant, "Conversation impromptue avec Serge Murphy," *La Chambre Blanche*, Bulletin no. 5, October, 1979, p. 1-2.

Michèle Waquant, "Quelques remarques sur la performance," in the catalog *La Chambre Blanche '78-'79*, 1980

Lucie Bernard, "Franchir les apparences avec Pellerin et Murphy," *Le Soleil*, Quebec, Jan. 3, 1981, p. D-8.

Chantal Boulanger, "Théâtre d'ombre," *La Chambre Blanche*, Bulletin no. 11, August, 1982

### By Serge Murphy

"A l'est de la peinture," *Dérives*, no. 20, 21, 4th trimester, 1979, p. 67-72.

"Au cinéma," *Galerie Jolliet*, Bulletin no. 4, December, 1980, p. 2.

With Francine Saillant (for the text), "Micro-politiques," *Dérives*, no. 27, first trimester, 1981, p. 31-36.

(untitled), in the press communique issued by Galerie Hasart at the time of the artist's exhibition, December, 1981.

### Other works by the artist

Performance, "Peindre ou ne pas peindre en sept tableaux," in *La Chambre Blanche*, Quebec, April, 1980.

Photographic essays, since 1977.

Born in Montreal, 1953

Studied in Quebec (Université Laval, Bacc. en arts visuels, 1972-1975) and in Paris (Université de Paris VIII, Vincennes, Maîtrise d'arts plastiques, 1975-1976).

Lives in Montreal.

### One-man Shows

Véhicule Art, Montreal, 1975.

Galerie de la Tour des Arts, Université Laval, Quebec, 1974 (also 1975)

La Chambre Blanche, Quebec, 1978 (also 1979)

Galerie Jolliet, Quebec, 1980 (with Guy Pellerin)

Galerie Hasart, Quebec, 1981.

### Group Exhibitions

Véhicule Art, Montreal, 1974

*5 étudiants de l'École des Arts Visuels*, Maison des arts La Sauvegarde, Montreal, 1975

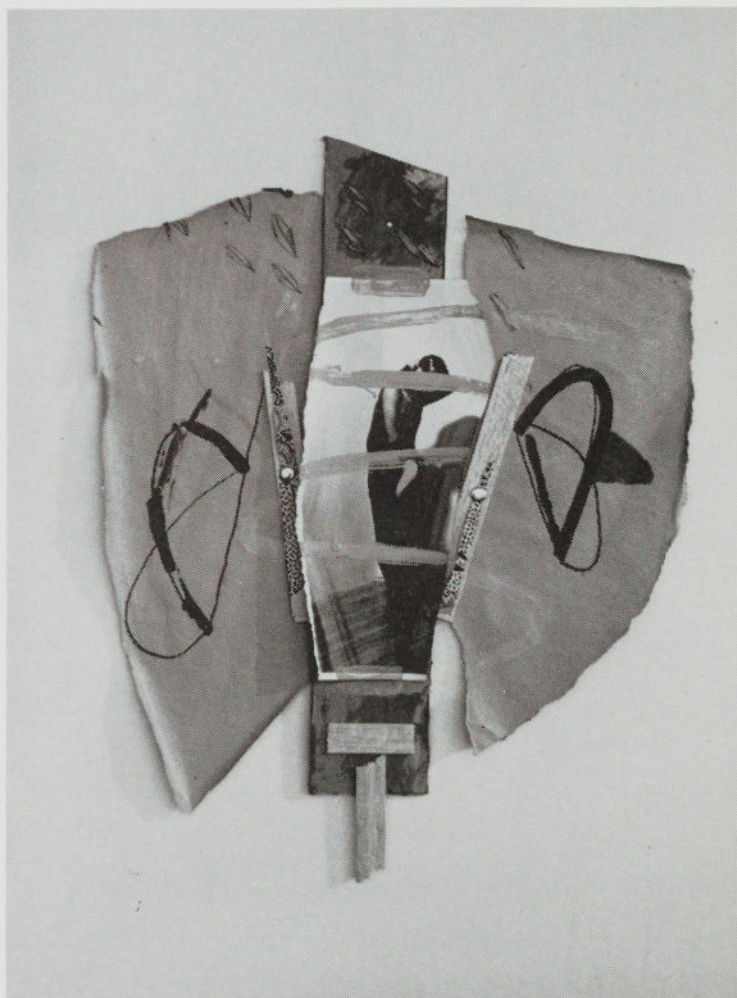
*4 artistes de Québec*, Galerie Optica, Montreal, 1978

*L'Objet fugitif*, La Chambre Blanche, Quebec, 1979

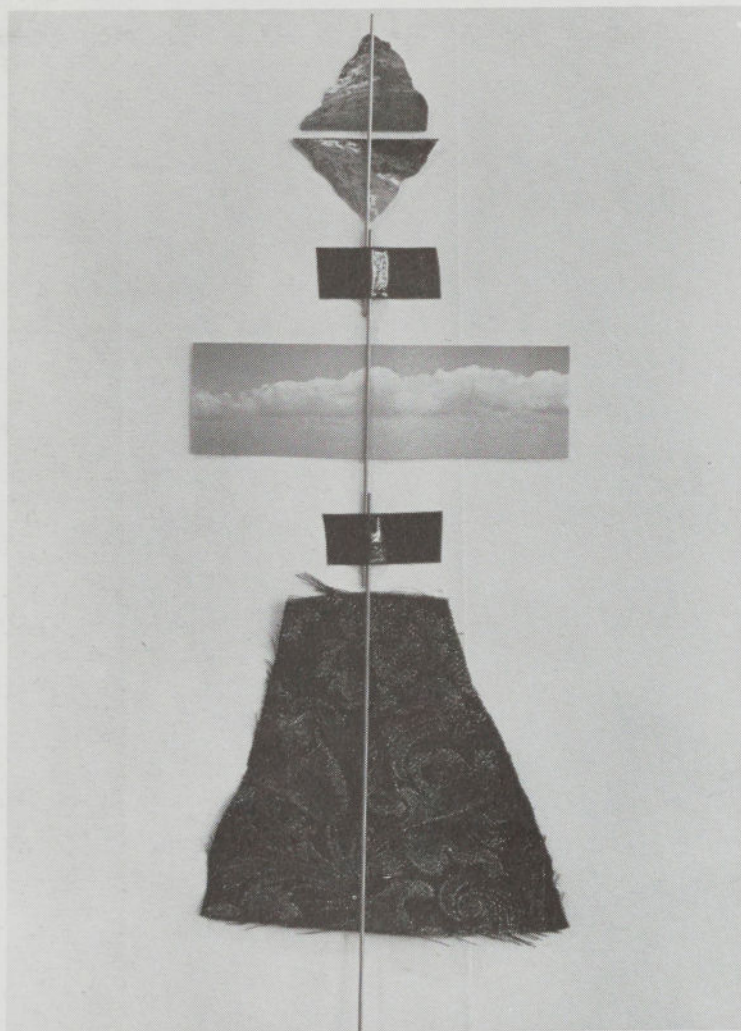
*Vacances '80*, La Chambre Blanche, Quebec, 1980



21. *Fléchette*, 1977  
Small arrow  
34 x 20 cm  
Collection: Jean Tourangeau



22. *Sans titre*, 1980  
Corrugated paper, acrylic on paper, felt, lead pencil, balsa  
47 x 38.5 cm  
Artist's collection

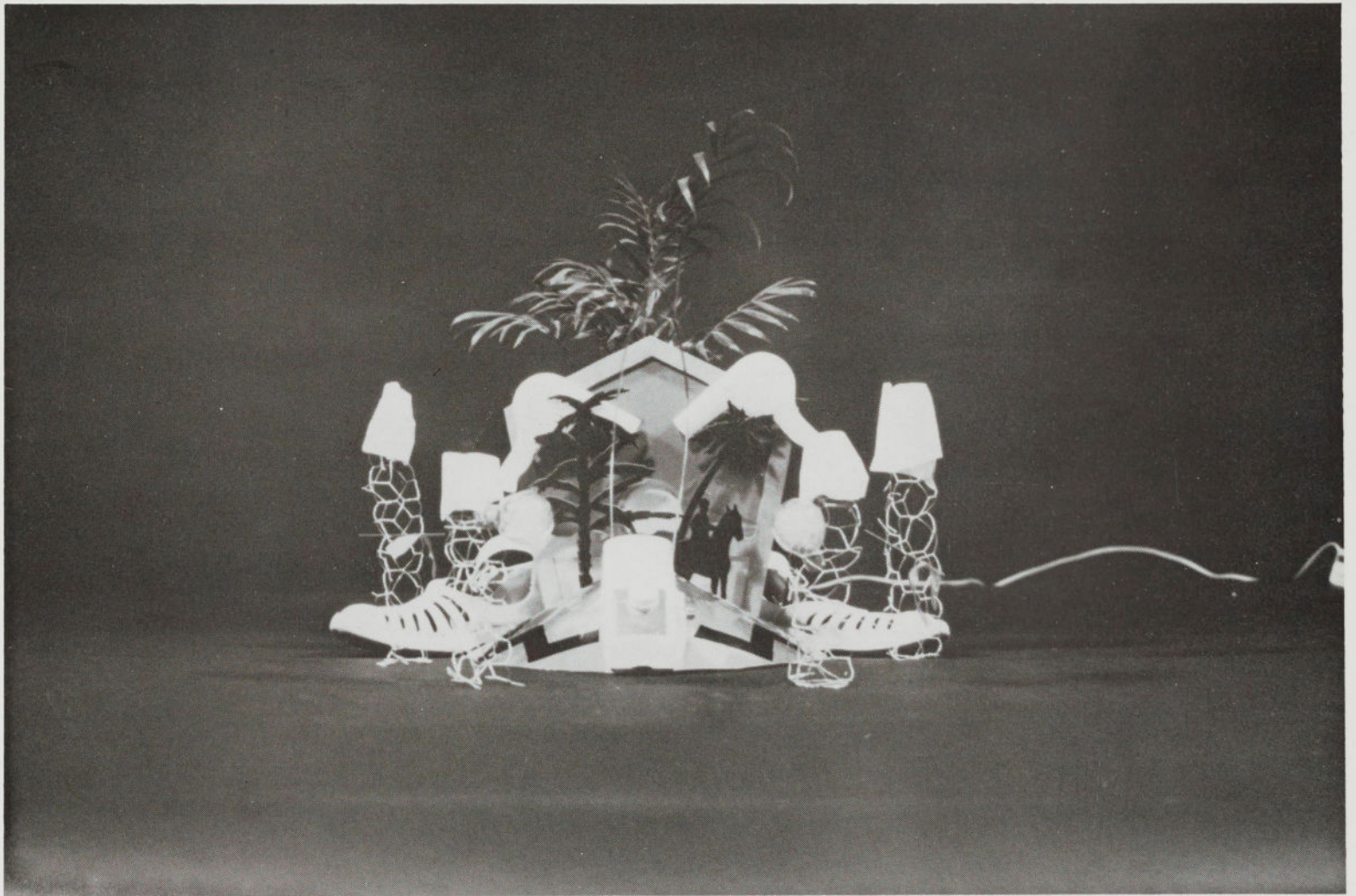


23. *Fléchette*, 1977  
 Small arrow  
 Metal stem, adhesive tape, postcard and fabric  
 38.5 x 14 cm  
 Collection: Michele Waquant and Jacques Poulin

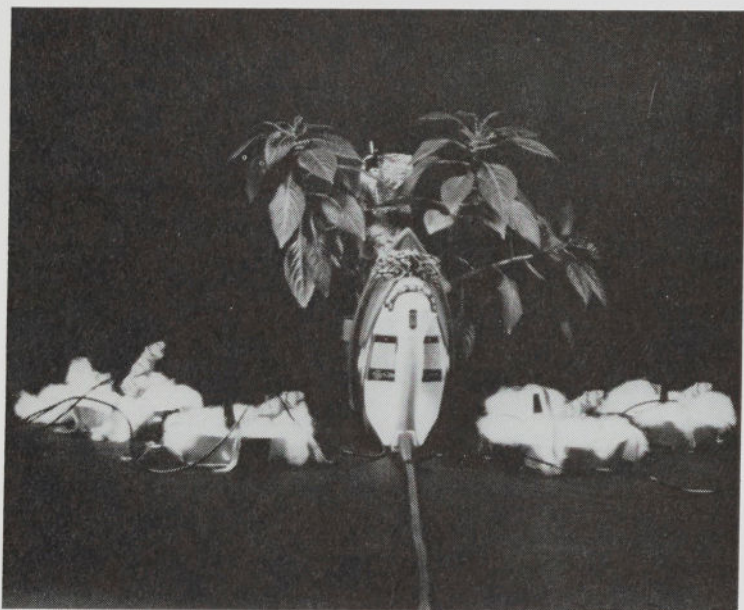


24. *Fléchette*, 1977  
 Small arrow  
 Metal stem, adhesive tape, wrapping paper, feather, fabric  
 and photograph  
 40 x 10 cm  
 Collection: Michele Waquant and Jacques Poulin

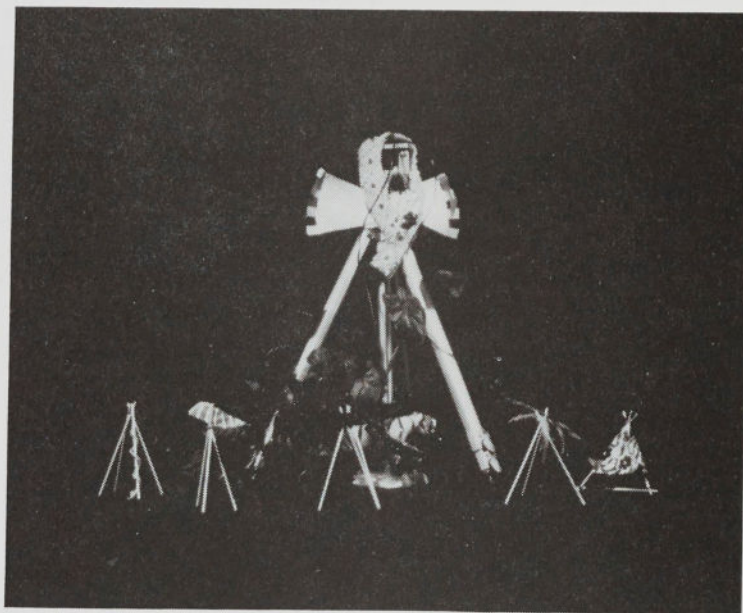




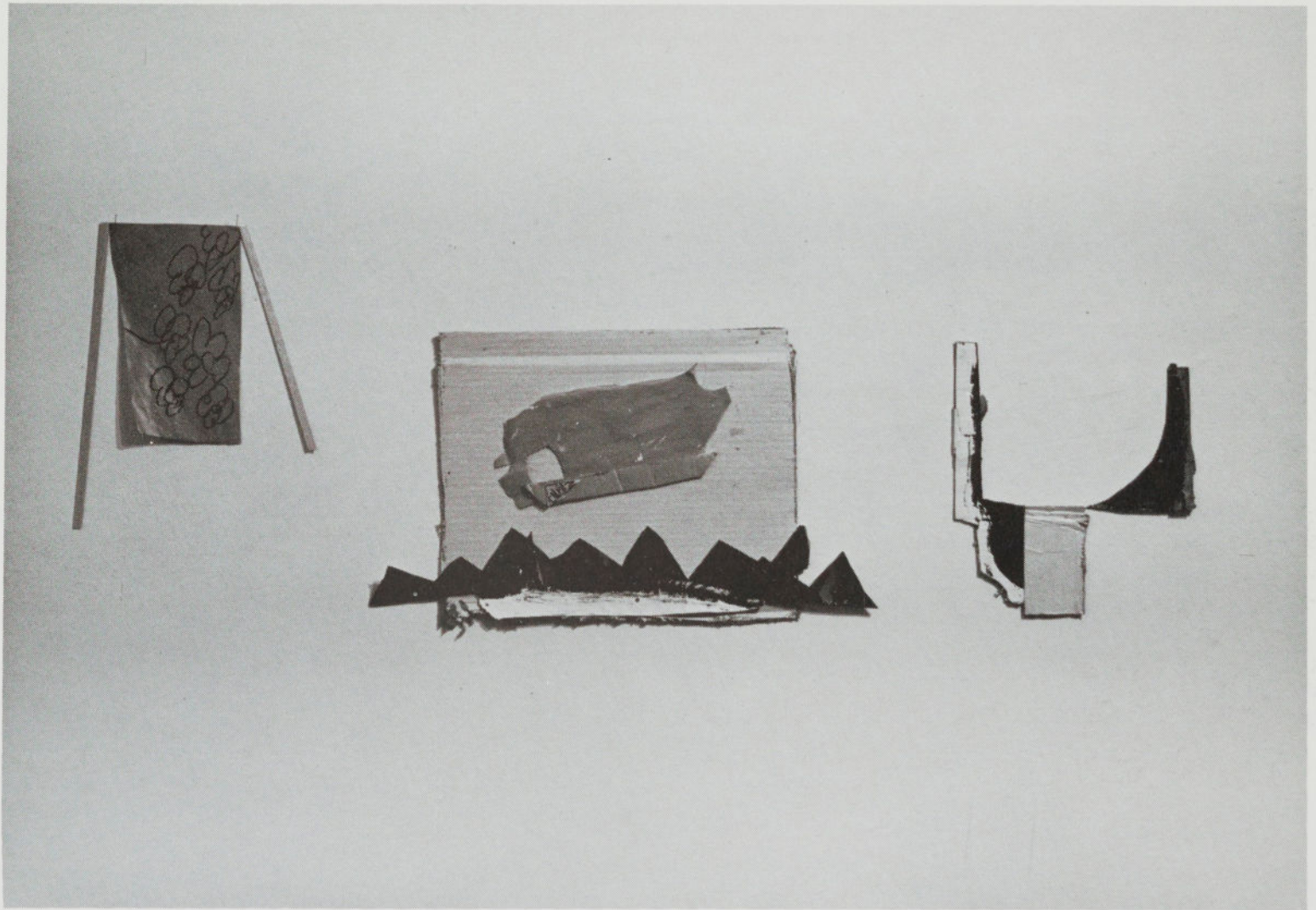
25. *Jardin*, 1978  
Garden  
Cibachrome photograph of an installation  
27.9 x 35.6 cm  
Artist's collection



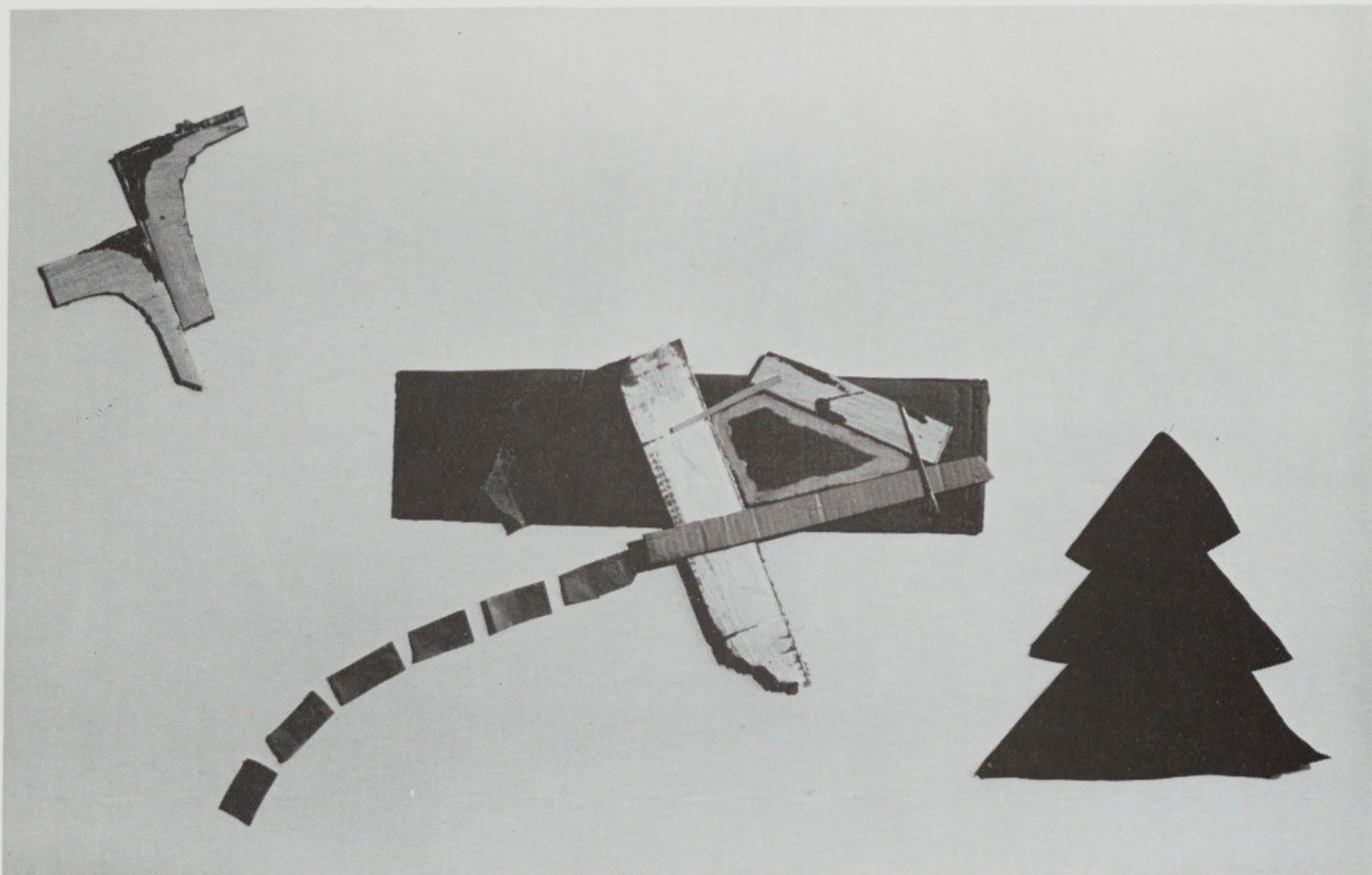
26. *Jardin*, 1978  
Garden  
Cibachrome photograph of an installation  
27.9 x 35.6 cm  
Artist's collection



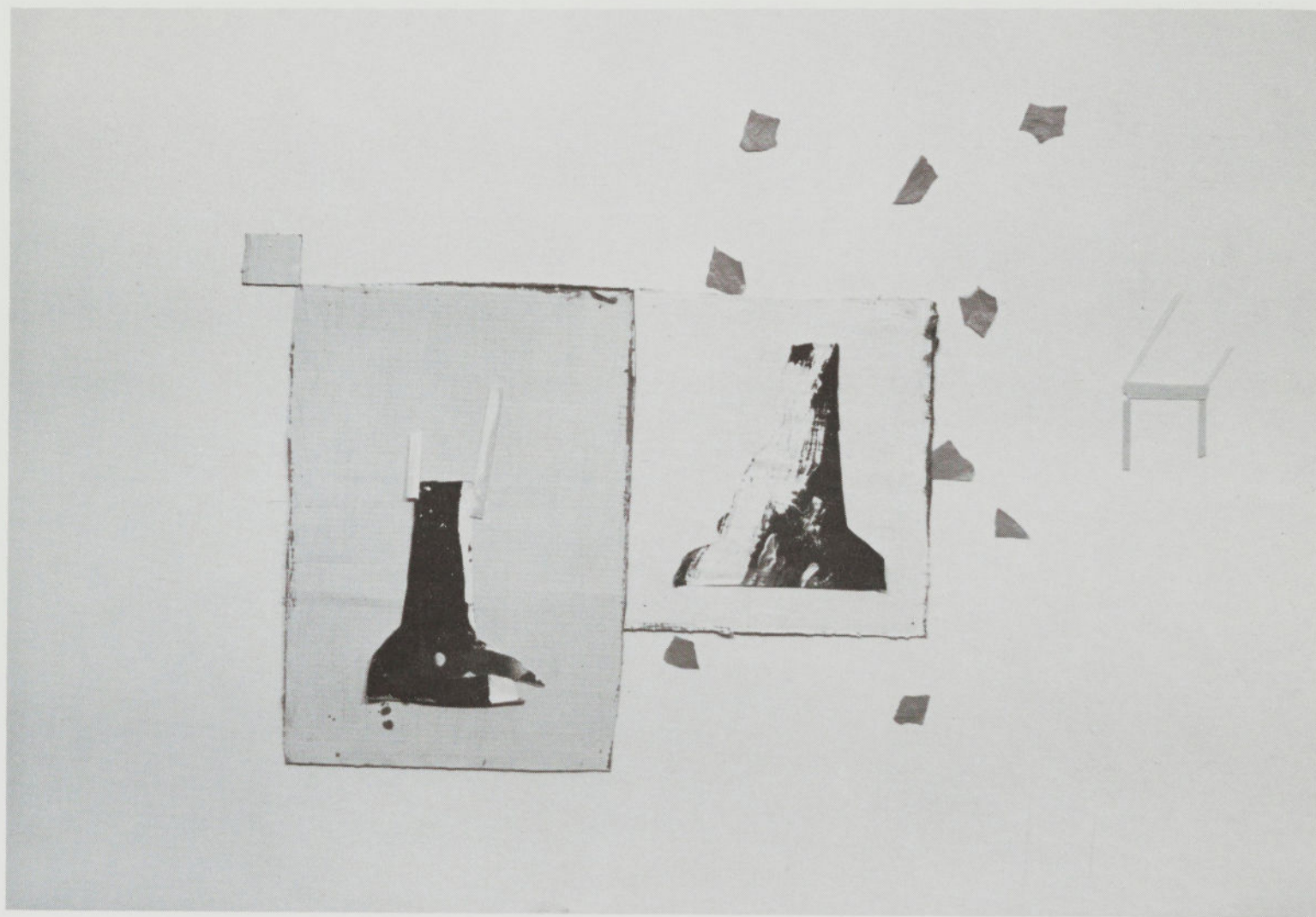
27. *Jardin*, 1978  
Garden  
Cibachrome photograph of an installation  
27.9 x 35.6 cm  
Artist's collection



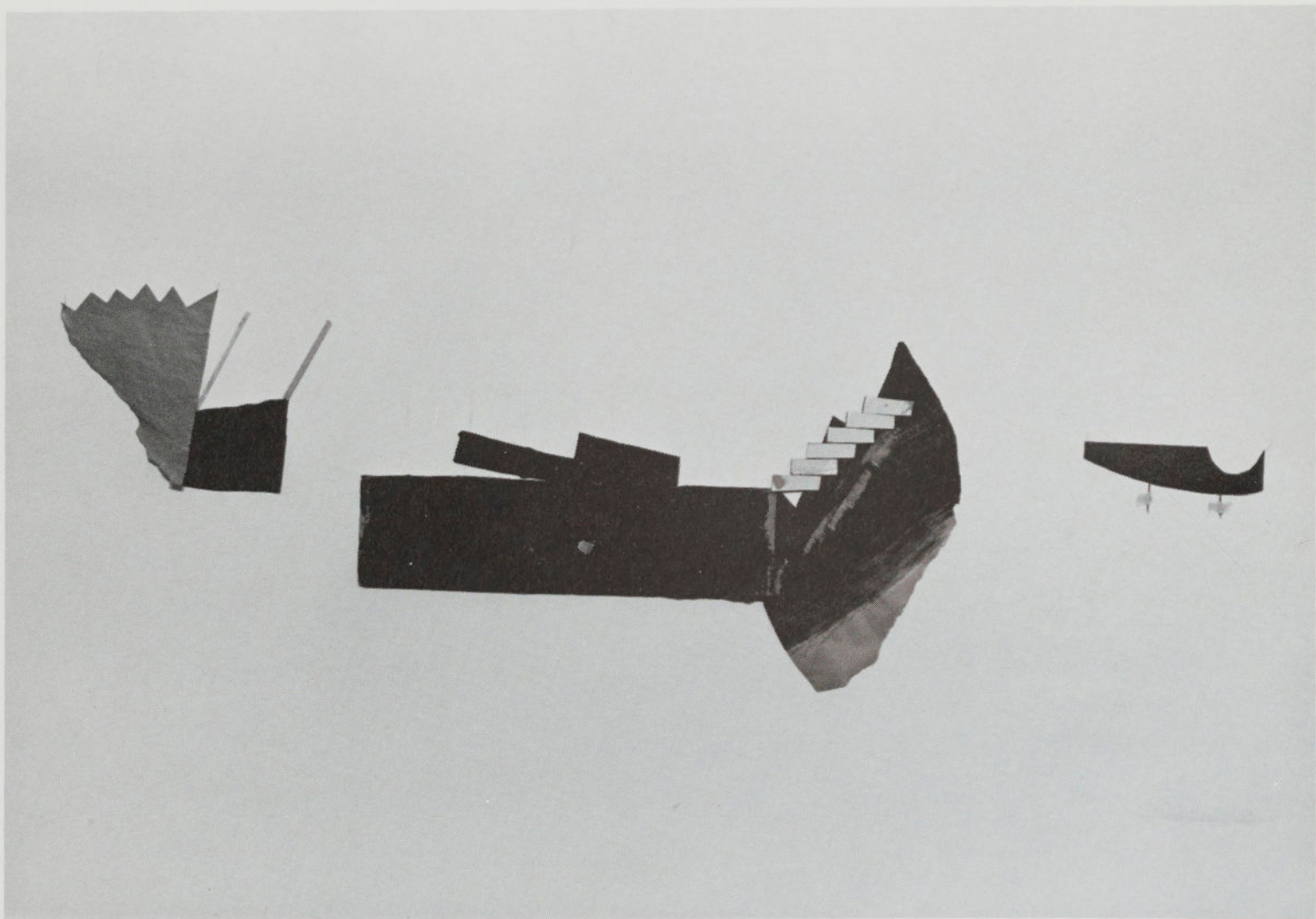
28. *Paysage*, 1981  
Landscape  
Corrugated paper, wrapping paper, acrylic, latex litho and balsa  
53 x 124 cm  
Artist's collection



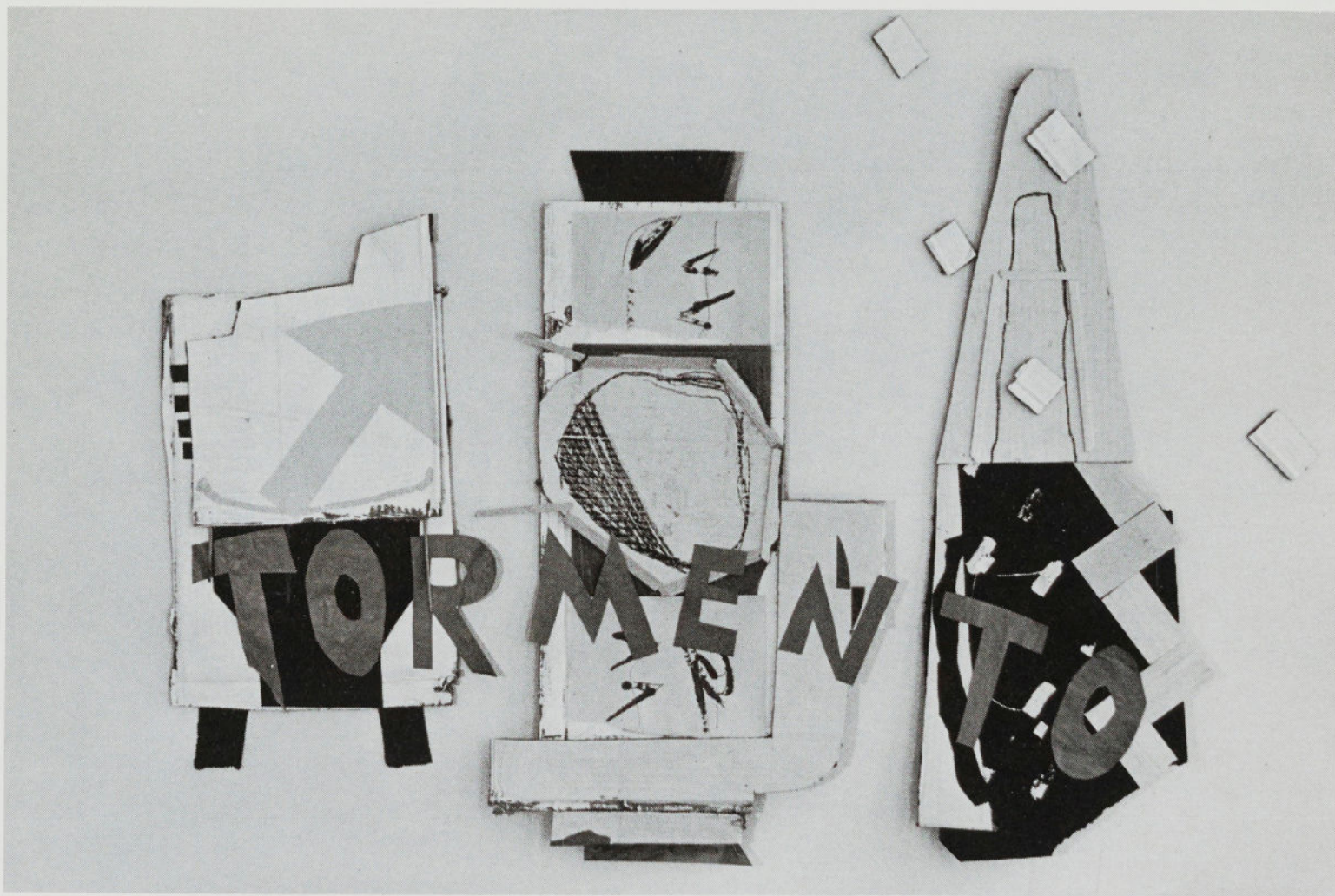
29. *Paysage*, 1981  
Landscape  
Corrugated paper, wrapping paper, acrylic, latex and balsa  
89 x 135 cm  
Artist's collection



30. *Paysage*, 1981  
Landscape  
Corrugated paper, wrapping paper, acrylic, latex and gougeon  
85 x 125 cm  
Collection Lise Bégin and Richard Mill



31. *Paysage*, 1981  
Landscape  
Corrugated paper, wrapping paper, acrylic, latex, balsa,  
acetate and masking tape  
62 x 188 cm  
Artist's collection



32. *Tormento*, 1982  
Corrugated paper, tar paper, sand paper, stationery,  
wrapping paper, pre-pasted wallpaper, acrylic, latex, aerosol paint,  
litho crayon, adhesive tape, acetate, balsa, gudgeon pin, lead pencil  
88 x 119 cm  
Artist's collection

## YANA STERBAK

*Lead Sphere*, 1979-1980

*Measuring Tapes*, 1979

*Iron House, Design, Envelope, Thread Cubes*, 1980

Sculptures in plasticine: *Two pairs of shoes, Feet, Hand*, 1981

Sculptures in bronze: *Toes*, 1981, *Five Hearts*, 1982;  
rubber moulding: *Stomach*, 1982

### FASHIONING IMAGES

The question is not formalist: how can one relate to people and move them with sculpture? Part of the answer is formalist: through the use of every means of expression available to the sculptor—motifs, materials and techniques—and their relationship with each other. The rest of the answer is less formalist: by choosing materials which are particularly evocative, such as thread, needles, plasticine, tape measures . . . materials which bring to mind children's games and domestic activities; by using color to distinguish surfaces, varying them and changing them—in order to dye rather than to give surface coloration; by choosing subjects—a hand, a foot, a stomach and a heart—which, in life size or replicating the original as closely as possible, create a certain uneasiness that would probably not be aroused if the subjects were reproduced in two dimensions, flattened and made lifeless by a few pencil strokes on a piece of paper.



The house of cast iron illustrates Yana Sterbak's technique: the image is inherent in the material. The placement of the component parts dictates the shape of the house, like the line at the base of a pyramid shows where the roof begins and the wall ends. Nothing exists except that which was already inherent in the material, and the form of construction as interpreted by the artist. There could be an echo here of aphorism, dear to the heart of the minimalists, and indeed this experience could pass for a kind of minimalism if it did not violate that creed by establishing a close psychological bond between object and viewer. The defenders of minimal art feared such a line of communication above all, and did their utmost to avoid it.

In her works, Yana Sterbak uses just one, or at the most two materials. The matter, placed in space, takes the form of a cone, a cornucopia, a house, an envelope or of a hand, a foot, a heart and a stomach. The very visible process of the material's transformation contains elements of hidden potential: that of the game (the game of a rolled-up measuring tape which is playfully pushed up at the center or the game of drawing an envelope without lifting the pencil or going over the same line twice); that of challenge (the challenge of the card house—"will it stand up"—as seen in "Iron House" and "Envelope," both of which are constructed from separate sections and held together only by gravity and the interaction of the various segments); and finally the idea of progressive movement (shown in the way "Thread Cube" rotates around its own axis, and the bronze heart in "Five Hearts" which becomes more and more deformed by pressure from the artist's hand).

The compact and simple works by Yana Sterbak come close to the concept of sculpture defined as a tri-dimensional zone, dense in material and meaning. The most recent works accentuate the effect of density inherent in this sculptor's style, and equally present in the theme and the formation. These works are the result of modelling (and an ensuing molding) and are single entities. The world from which this work stems is simplified and made more understandable because it is now made up of "extracts" from a body, a limb or an organ. Through the artist's choice, this world has also gained a deeper meaning and lost its neutrality.

Yana Sterbak's works affect an almost insolent independence in the gallery: they fend for themselves without recourse to artful presentation, and appear directly on the wall, the floor or a shelf. The very airy presentation which the artist prefers for her works reinforces their solidity. Yana Sterbak's works are small and spaced apart from each other because in their true dimension, which will be sensed by the viewer, they were much larger and required all this surrounding space as a sign of the respect they commanded. Spaced apart, they would be seen from a distance; as they are tiny, the observer must come close to see them. The act of approaching the works becomes a ceremony through which, little by little, the objects are unveiled. F.G

### About Yana Sterbak

Virginia Nixon, "Women's Bookworks—something new for all," *The Gazette*, Montreal, Oct. 4, 1979.

John Bentley Mays, "Yana Sterbak's sculptures chart modern art's off the wall issues," *The Globe and Mail*, Toronto, June 7, 1980.

Rick Rhodes, "Yana Sterbak, YYZ, Toronto, June 9th to 21," *Vanguard*, vol. 9, no. 8, Oct. 1980, p. 26-27.

Virginia Nixon, "'Fil' designs are creative," *The Gazette*, Montreal, Nov. 22, 1980.

### By Yana Sterbak

"Jonas Mekas: an interview by Yana Sterbak," *Parachute*, no. 10, spring 1978, p. 21-24.

"Mark Gomes, Untitled Winter Works: Harbourfront Art Gallery, Toronto, May 23 to July 26, Isaacs Gallery, Toronto, June 9-29," *Vanguard*, vol 8, no. 6, August 1979, p. 27-28.

"Murray McDonald: Mercer Union, Toronto, July 30 to Aug. 11," *Vanguard*, vol. 8, no. 8, October 1979, p. 31-32.

"Betty Goodwin, Marcel Lemyre: 4005 Mentana, Montreal, December to February," *Vanguard*, vol. 9, nos. 5-6, spring 1980, p. 38-39.

"Howard Fried: GAP, Toronto, February, March 1981," *Parachute*, no. 23, summer 1981, p. 44-45.

Born in Prague, Czechoslovakia, 1955

Studied in Vancouver (Vancouver School of Arts, 1973-1974; University of British Columbia, 1974-1975) and in Montreal (Université Concordia, B.F.A., 1975-1978).

Lives in Toronto

### One-woman Shows

*Drawings*, Pumps Art, Vancouver, 1978

*Small works*, YYZ, Toronto, 1980

*Travaux récents*, Galerie Optica, Montreal, 1980

*How Things Stand Up*, Main Exit Gallery, Vancouver, 1981

### Group Exhibitions

Vancouver Public Library, 1974

Galerie Powerhouse, 1975

Galerie Optica, Montreal, 1978

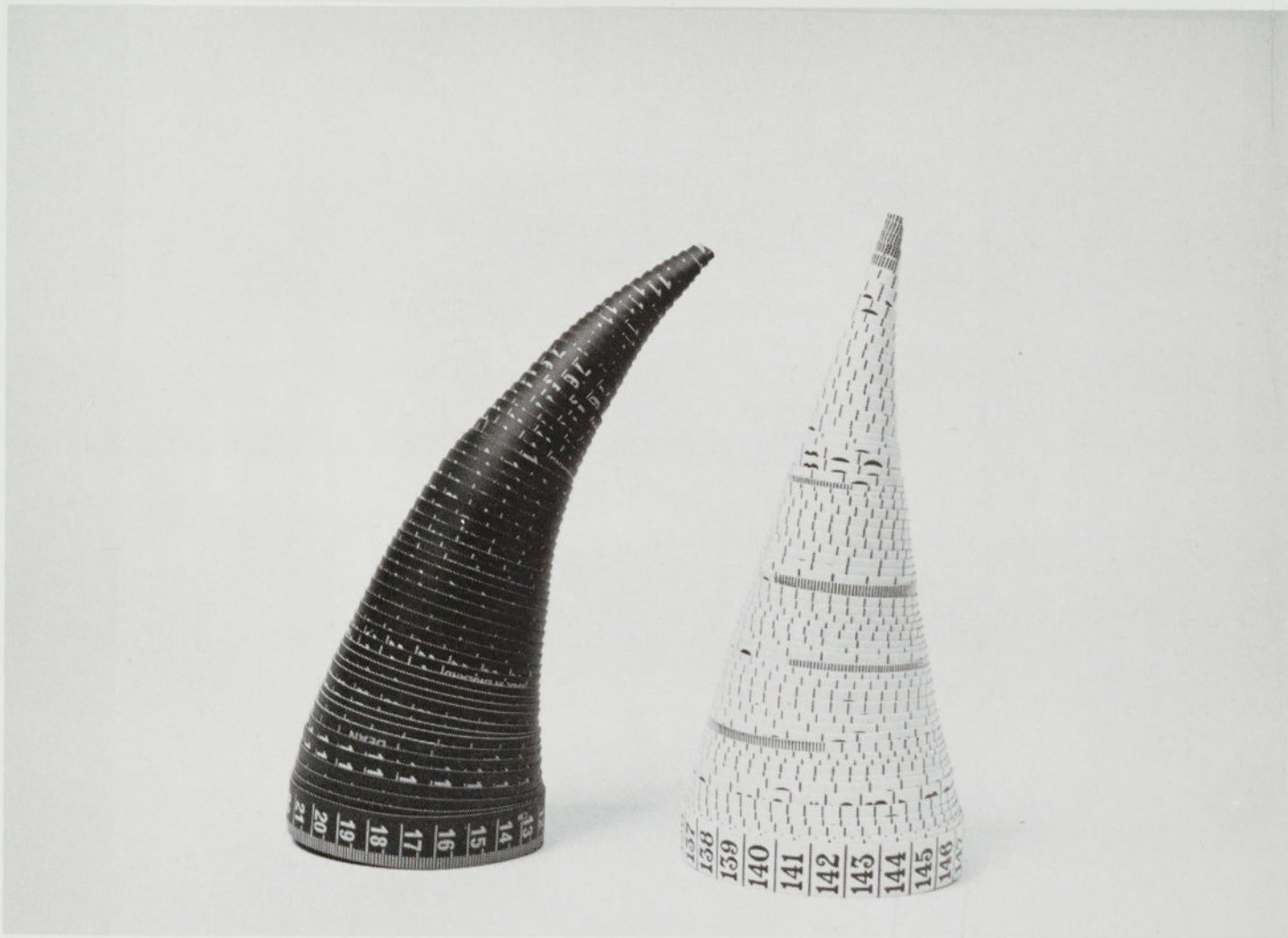
*Locations*, Mercer Union, Toronto, 1979

*Bookworks*, Galerie Powerhouse, Montreal, 1979  
(touring exhibit)

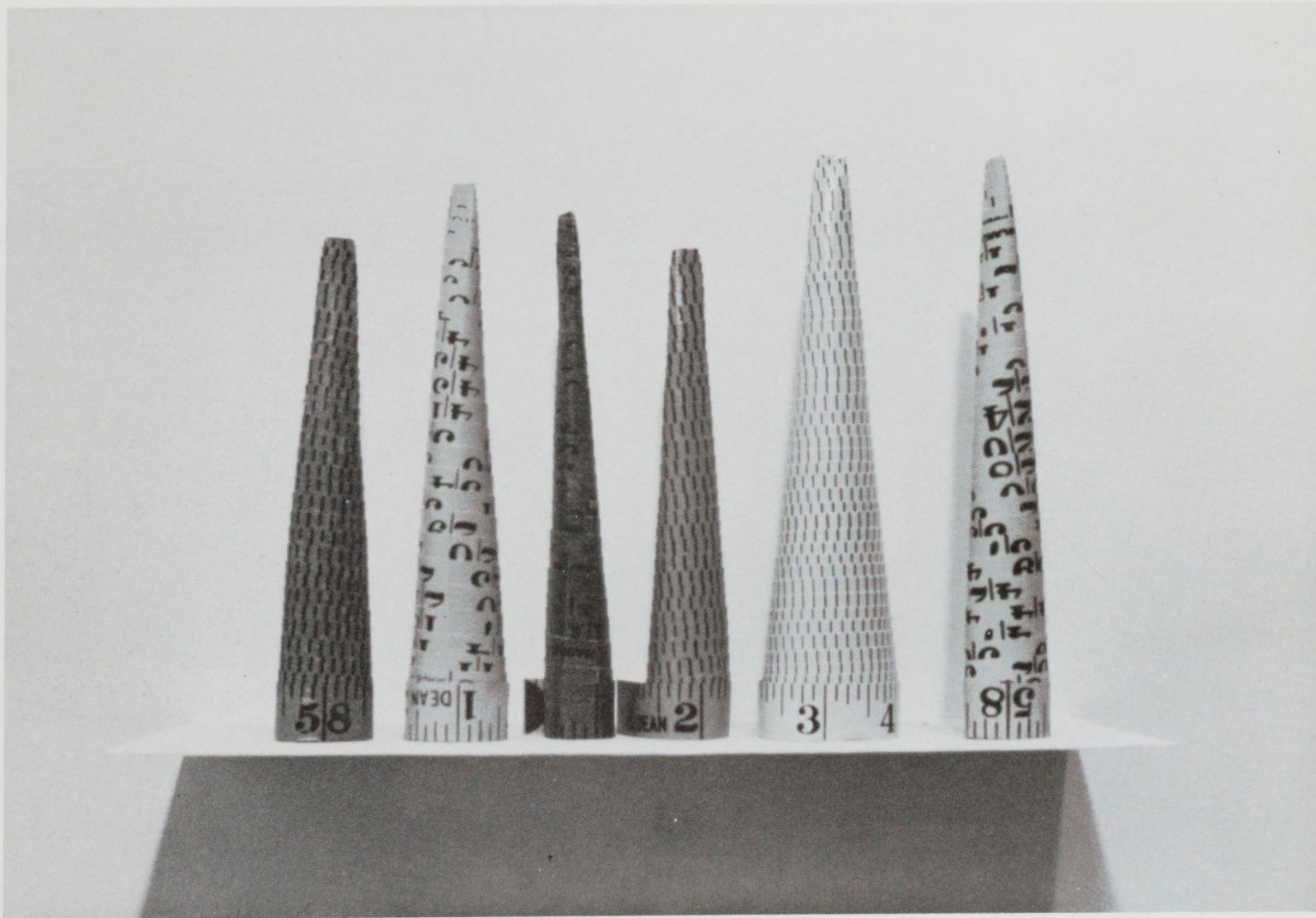
*The New YYZ*, YYZ, Toronto, 1981

*Books in Manuscript Form*, Mercer Union, Toronto, 1981

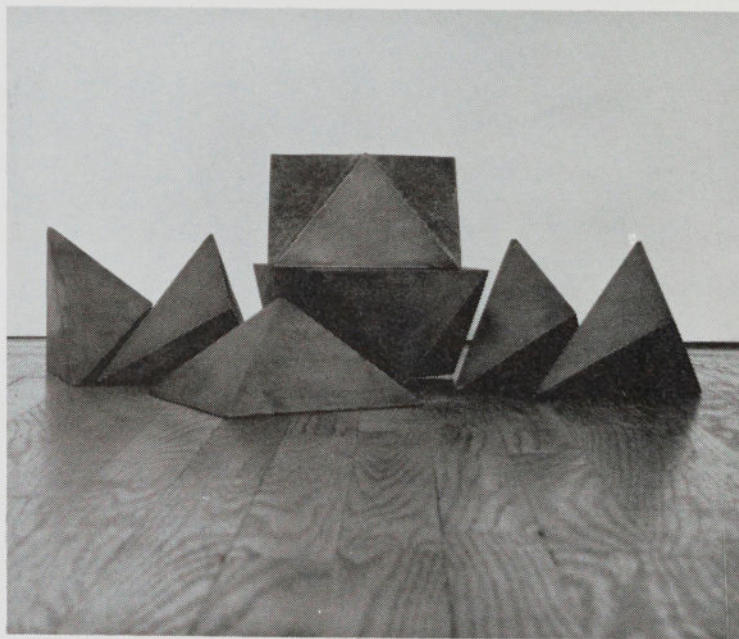
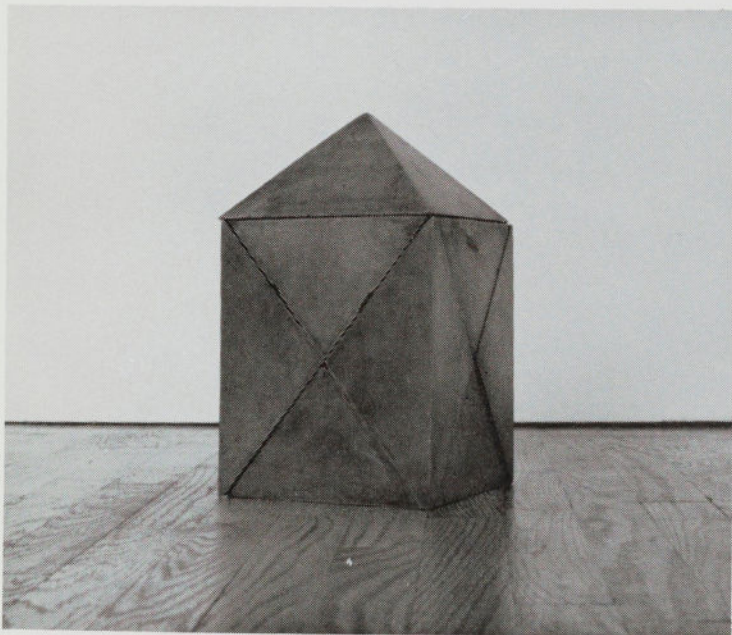
*Directions: 4 artists*, S.L. Simpson Gallery, Toronto, 1982



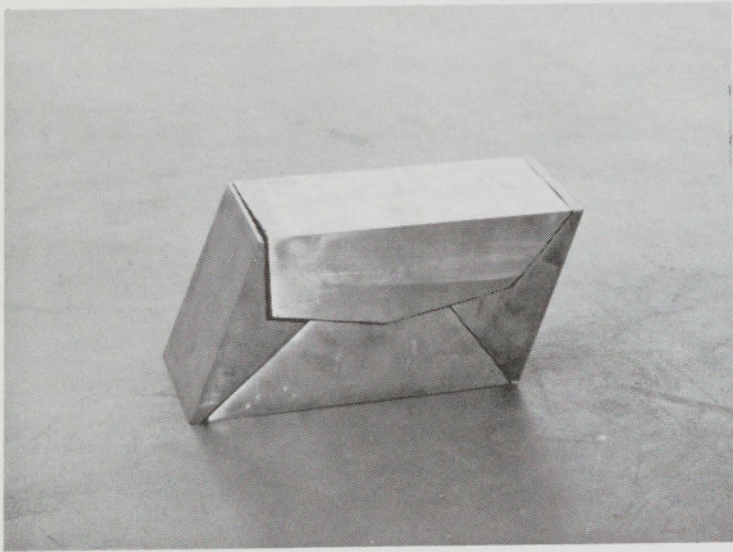
33. *Two Measuring Tapes*, 1979  
Measuring tapes and glue  
20 x 8.1 cm in diameter (each)  
Artist's collection



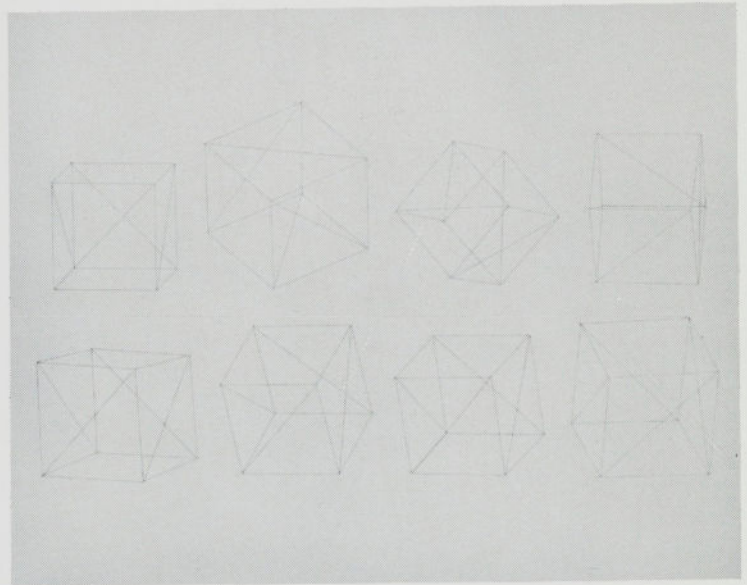
34. *Six Measuring Tapes*, 1979  
Measuring tapes and glue  
12.1 x 2.6 cm in diameter (each)  
Artist's collection



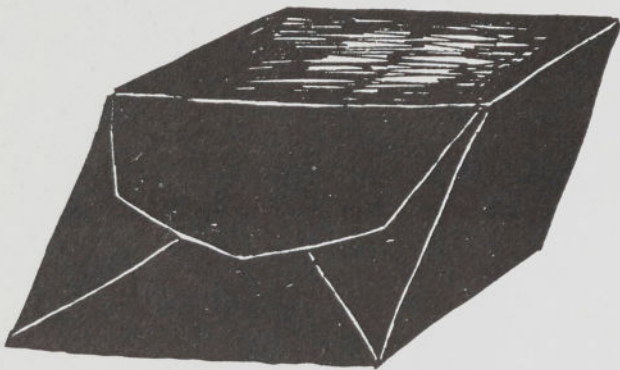
35. *Iron House*, 1980  
Cast iron (aluminum for the Touring Exhibit version)  
17.5 x 15.15 cm  
Artist's collection



36. *Envelope*, 1980  
Cast iron  
27.8 x 13.6 x 12.6 cm  
Artist's collection



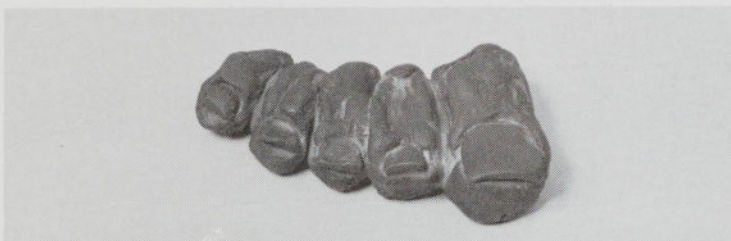
37. *Design*, 1980  
Ink on paper  
20.3 x 25.4 cm  
Artist's collection



38. *Thread Cubes*, 1980-1981  
Sewing needles and thread  
16 x 16 x 3 cm (each)  
Artist's collection



39. *Two Pairs of Shoes*, 1981  
Plasticine  
18 x 23 x 4.5 cm (each pair)  
Artist's collection



40. *Feet*, 1981  
Plasticine and acetate  
15 x 17.5 x 20.5 cm  
Artist's collection

41. *Toes*, 1981  
Bronze  
10 x 5 x 3.1 cm  
Artist's collection

42. *Hand*, 1981  
Plasticine and acetate  
18.1 x 15 x 4.5 cm  
Artist's collection





43. *Stomach*, 1982  
Molded rubber  
20 x 14 x 14 cm  
Artist's collection



44. *Five Hearts*, 1982  
Bronze  
9 x 12.1 x 8.5 cm  
Artist's collection



SMALL WORKS