

R E P È R E S

Q U E B E C A R T N O W

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We wish to extend our sincerest thanks to the National Museums of Canada for their financial participation. Lastly, we are pleased to note the interest and enthusiasm shown by the institutions which will be welcoming this travelling exhibition and we thank them for this support.

F.G.
R.L.

FOREWORD

The often exaggerated proliferation of movements, schools and other "isms" since 1970 has prompted us to present a kind of evaluation of present artistic production in Québec as compared with the last decade, obviously circumscribed in a local context, but undeniably included in the international circuits.

The function of the museum today obliges the curator to keep up to date, to make rapid assessments, to be constantly informed about the development of various artistic trends. "Repères", in this sense, tries to shed a different light on what the last ten years were like for art in Québec. Such an exhibition imposes choices and inevitably involves absences. But the Musée d'art contemporain, because of its social function, must pursue its research and never-ending exploration; to make current artistic practices more widely known, other "Repères" must be constantly prepared.

I wish to thank the curators in charge of this exhibition, France Gascon and Réal Lussier, but above all, my sincerest friendship and gratitude go to the artists who, through their strenuous work, remind us that the Museum is first and foremost at their service and that respect for their freedom of expression guarantees respect for Man. Today's world seems increasingly to forget this.

André Ménard
Acting Director

PRESENTATION

The exhibition *Repères: Quebec Art Now* presents an account of recent artistic creation in Quebec by selecting artists who made their mark during the 1970s. Intentionally turned towards a very recent past, and prepared with no trends or disciplines as guidelines, the exhibition focusses on artists who are outstanding by reason of the interest and quality of their research and their capacity for renewal.

The final selection of exhibitors was made after numerous visits to studios and meetings with the artists to find out about their latest works and obtain their comments on their own development.

This exhibition is not retrospective in character; rather, it presents the present approach of these creative artists and brings together a group of works produced during the last two years.

F.G.
R.L.

LOOKING BACK

by Réal Lussier

Art in Quebec now cannot be discussed without affirming certain preoccupations, and thus certain forms, particular to the last decade. Rather than being a comprehensive survey of recent artistic creation, an outline is suggested. In order to determine what is specific to the present, the most important features of the past decade must be indicated. It would, moreover, be impossible to dissociate the work of Quebec artists from major trends marking the international scene, a context in which ascertaining the origin of a particular direction is becoming increasingly difficult. In addition, it must be acknowledged that some of these artists have an international profile.

Bearing these factors in mind, events significant to the Seventies will be highlighted. It must be emphasized as well that the extraordinary artistic burgeoning which took place during the Sixties has greatly influenced recent developments in Quebec art.

Yesterday for Today

Until the end of the Sixties, artistic production in Quebec continues to reflect predominantly "plasticien" and even post-automatist trends. Since Borduas, however, there has been an affirmation of identity and a cultural recuperation in Quebec. Many new directions were taken and almost all areas of

artistic creation testify to great growth from that time on. In particular, Pop Art produced a "new figuration", usually expressed by humorous or satirical means. Engraving was most often the vehicle of expression for this new approach. The art of engraving developed enormously in scope and expertise at that time under the impetus given by Albert Dumouchel. Concurrently, there evolved a new generation of artists who expressed themselves in various collective events of socio-cultural intent, challenging the past with a view to socializing art. Some examples combining artistic disciplines would be events such as *La semaine "A"* and the *Trente "A"*, or happenings by groups such as the *Horlogers du Nouvel Âge* and *Zirmate*. Technological exploration, environments and social action were touched as well by many kinds of multi-disciplinary experiments and collective creations precipitated by the artistic flowering of the Sixties. The creation of *l'Association des sculpteurs du Québec* in 1961, subsequent exhibitions, and representation abroad promoted exciting developments in sculpture. International events such as the *Symposiums* in 1964 and 1965, and *Confrontation 65*, the first such event organized by the A.S.Q., has a stimulating effect on Quebec sculptors. Exposure to a wider audience was assured by the subsequent organization of regional symposia. The exhibition in 1970 at the Musée Rodin in Paris of a

Panorama de la sculpture au Québec resulted from this dynamism and energy.

There was also great development in other areas, particularly conceptual art, kinetic and generative art, and video, during the last years of the Sixties and the beginning of the Seventies.

A Decade

It would seem at first that, since no major movement or school appeared during the Seventies, this was an unremarkable period. It becomes evident, however, that what is important is the disappearance, in fact, of models and ideologies. There is instead the affirmation of the artist's personal preoccupations, and of his freedom of artistic expression. Artistic attitudes were not really disturbed by any particular events, but between 1970 and 1980 there were several exhibitions, collective or individual, which represent important landmarks in the development of the plastic arts.

For very different reasons, two events which took place in 1973 are noteworthy. Although presenting few works of great interest, the exhibition *Les moins de 35* testified to the great number of young artists at work, including as it did over two hundred people. A wish to "transcend traditional

categories of works of art" and to be involved in daily life with a view to modifying the social consciousness was manifest in the exhibition *Quebec Underground*. In addition to these two examples, the exhibition *Périphéries* in 1974 should be mentioned. Although representing artists from a group, it nevertheless proposed new attitudes in Quebec creativity.

Québec 75 signals an important landmark in recent artistic activity. This event presented propositions which infused new life into previous attitudes, and was very controversial; there were repercussions for several months. The activities of certain artists, reflecting the dynamism of the artistic milieu and querying the specificity of plastic expression were made apparent, whatever the initial intentions of the exhibition may have been.

During these years, other factors played a decisive role in the morphology of Quebec's artistic milieu. Among these were the establishment of cooperative galleries such as *Média* and *Véhicule*, and private galleries, which promote art that happens, and provide a venue for confrontation with work by foreign artists. At this time as well the first Quebec periodical dedicated to publicizing diverse trends in contemporary art and reporting new activities, *Parachute*, was launched.

Exhibitions as diverse as *One Hundred and Eleven Drawings from Quebec*, *Corridart*, and *Forum 76* took place during 1976. The first confirmed the authenticity of young artists showing in conjunction with more established colleagues, and at the same time focussed attention on drawing and on its emergence as an autonomous art form. The second, a social and artistic event, united several artists in a collective project, but was unfortunately short-lived. *Forum 76*, an extensive survey of contemporary art, included a large number of artists from both Quebec and other parts of Canada whose work explored and illustrated various avenues of expression.

At this point *03 23 03*, held in 1977, should be mentioned. These first international meetings of contemporary art offered both artists and the Quebec public the opportunity to become acquainted with the most recent artistic developments. The performances which constituted one of the focal points of *Rencontres* featured a variety of supports, reflecting the great diversity of this form of expression. Increased interest in performance art, and increased involvement of young artists was the consequence. As a result of this enthusiasm, the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts and the Musée d'art contemporain organized several important events of this sort within the museum.

Tendances actuelles au Québec, shown at the end of 1978 and beginning of 1979, included recent works by artists who were invited to participate without regard to medium or age, and was divided into the categories painting, sculpture, engraving, photography and video. With the possible exception of photography, this exhibition did not, on the whole, affirm a new dynamism, but rather represented a cross-section of various directions.

Other significant events which took place in 1980 must not be forgotten. The work of some artists who currently dominate the international art scene were seen, in many cases for the first time, in the exhibition *Hier et après. Pluralities* was important as well. Although not taking place in Quebec, it nevertheless made it possible to identify Quebec artistic production. The *Symposium international de la sculpture environnementale de Chicoutimi* testified to the vitality of Quebec's artistic community. This international symposium confirmed the decentralization of creative activity and the possibility of reaching a wide public, offering as well an opportunity for Quebec artists to share their preoccupations and experiences with foreign artists.

Some Questions...

During the last decade, artists have energetically undertaken new practices, raised new questions, proposed a new sensibility. The specificity of art would seem to be the artists' prime concern. They query the act of creation as much as the concept of reality, practical elements as much as visual language in general. But it is still not possible to define particular movements or aesthetics, taking the artistic scene as whole. Because these artists' experiments have taken several directions simultaneously, there can be no question of attempting to identify a certain movement as having dominated artistic production. The most that can be done is to indicate certain tendencies, the result not of a grouping but rather of individuals sharing the same preoccupations, working in the same direction. In fact, these preoccupations partake of a vast international context, just as problems increasingly affecting society do. In art, as in other fields of endeavour, individuals regardless of their location draw inspiration from the same sources, are informed by the same publications, share the same state of mind.

A significant factor in our aesthetic evolution during this period is the affirmation of a new generation of painters. This new painting has its roots in both the automatist and

"plasticien" movements, pursuing the exploration of the diverse components of the painter's vocabulary. At the same time very personal directions are affirmed by conceptual art, which continues to develop in diverse ways. The relation between nature and culture, the natural environment and man-made production, is a focal point for some artists. Those sharing this approach can intervene directly with nature by appropriating parts of it or by leaving their mark, traces of their passing. Their concerns are defined by a reflection on the concepts of space and time, and on their relationship to each other. Other artists are particularly concerned with the phenomenon and analysis of perception; many investigate the realms of desire, dreams, or the imaginary. They seek, by their propositions, to liberate a psychological dimension, which may materialize in mythical space, or may be projected in symbolic objects. Once again, these imaginary flights describe a reflection on time, and on the destruction of time.

By questioning what is known in order to reinterpret what is real, by achieving a closer rapport between "practice" and "theory", artists of the last decade have tried, finally, to establish a more significant dialogue between life and art.

ART NOW: SELECTED VOICES

by France Gascon

I

The Past and the Present

“What is the state of art in Quebec and what is happening now?” That is the main question posed by the *Repères* exhibition. Let us immediately explain the way in which this exhibition responds to this question for that will provide us with a considerable part of the reply.

First of all, *Repères* does not actually answer any question: it merely exhibits a reply which will be drawn from the quality and relevance of the works shown. It will also be noted, from a study of the list of works included in the exhibition, that the question of the present state of art in Quebec is posed through the presentation of recent works of artists who have already acquired a certain standing and have several years' work behind them.

Repères therefore poses this question by turning slightly towards the past, towards artists who have already developed a personal style (there are no newcomers). The reference is to a recent past, however, for no artist included in the exhibition began his career more than ten or fifteen years ago. Because it poses its questions in this way, *Repères* celebrates (all exhibitions, even the most critical, celebrate something) both the perennality and the topicality of artists who have

traversed the 1970s, or some part of them. Hence the retrospective look which predominates in this publication: it acknowledges the fact that the exhibition presents artists who are not identified with any idea, moment or event but with a succession of ideas, moments or events.

These facts already allow us to speculate on the image of the present that *Repères* will be able to provide. With respect to the previous historical context described by Réal Lussier, and to the career descriptions compiled by Josée Bélisle, and to follow these up, it is possible to imagine an infinite variety of scenarios to succeed them: a collective or personal history that continues, stops, restarts, or changes tone, for example, but it would be impossible to think up a scenario which would involve the disappearance of all the previous episodes. And it seems highly unlikely that we would witness a spectacular break, denial or retraction — which would be no guarantee, moreover, of the present character of this production. In this context, past and present are not, and cannot be, conflicting values. The very proposition of the exhibition reconciles them since it retains from the past elements that traverse both past and present. The gesture is no accident: within the galleries of the museum the exhibition reconciles what the artist of today, feeling in no way threatened by the past and

willingly playing with the history of his work, has already reconciled in his own development.

II

The Collective and the Personal

To be really significant, a description of the works assembled here should be quite lengthy, leave the realm of pure “objective” description from time to time and change its viewpoint each time it discusses a new artist. Apart from the pleasure it would give the reader — who would thus see recreated or prolonged in this reading the pleasure he has already derived from his viewing of the works in the museum (moreover, it is one of the greatest pleasures and satisfactions that comes from reading a catalogue: the confirmation or reinforcement of one's own perception, rounded out by details seen but not noted... all the pleasure that is to be found in reliving a mediated event — apart from this, the exercise of describing the works, because it would be long and constantly change its viewpoint, would above all have the merit of proving to us the usefulness and appropriateness of the term “plurality”, often applied to these works and which, even if it did not describe the context of their production, would give a very good idea of it. The term “plurality” aptly expresses the absence of a

single point of view and the resulting fragmentation of the artistic field. Because it is simple and evokes a very concrete and at first sight non-philosophical reality, the word also indicates the resistance shown by these works to theory, a resistance that is probably related to the almost physical impossibility of deducing a single theory from objects of such diverse appearances. Above all, plurality implies the opposite of the monolithism of theories of art which, in the 1950s and 1960s, dominated artistic practice and imposed a single view of art. When it appeared, the term indicated that the time was past when already existing frames of reference could be used for judging works, and also confirmed that we had entered a new era in which each work of art tended to become a self-contained universe whose justification, methodology, causality and impact were specific to that work and therefore had to be constantly redefined. The concept of plurality echoed this confused situation and, by summarizing it, effectively described the value crisis through which we had passed and which had resulted in a multiplication of contradictory and irreducible values which it was no longer possible to enumerate without realizing that they were “plural”.

It must be stressed here how inappropriate the term “crisis” is for the events experienced by art since the 1950s and

1960s: can any more successful outcome be imagined for a value-related crisis than a multiplication of these values? Naturally, this multiplication of values plunged us into a state of instability, but who was really upset by that and who would complain about it except the distressed observer whose customary frames of reference had been swept away. Surely we should rather consider as infinitely desirable the main effect produced by the crisis: a return to the “I”, revealed in a diversification of words, gestures and fields of interest. The crisis had undoubtedly had a liberating impact; it had hastened a process of updating and change with regard to the practice of art, a change free of all external influence. The crisis had impelled the goals of modernism beyond the boundaries that the latter had adopted. Thus, the very concept of plurality, far from sounding the demise of art, sounded only an era in which one or more forms of art defined and ordered the artistic field. The time was over when to say “I am a painter” or “I am a sculptor” covered everything — objectives, method, object and perhaps even the result. The relation that an object formerly had to certain great forms of art was almost totally sufficient to account for it. The situation was just as clear as regards the recognition of styles: a picture that looked sophisticated, was sophisticated, a picture that looked naive, was naive, whereas today, we must often pro-

ceed to a second level of the picture to fully understand it. A naive picture is not necessarily so; on the contrary, it may be very sophisticated. A picture which has all the characteristics of expressionism may be a parody. A picture which has all the characteristics of narcissism may be only marginally so: it has perhaps had recourse to that style because of the fascination exerted by a circular image, by a mirror effect which would only be there, however, as an instrument, to reveal something else. These are extreme cases of post-modernity not illustrated by the exhibition, but which nevertheless reveal a general movement into which the works of the exhibition also fit. For the artists presented here, art has lost the classificatory and regulatory power it formerly had. An idea of art can no longer be adopted without reference to precise objects and intentions. *From the theoretical subject it once was, art has now become an instrument.* This instrument serves to reveal an attitude and a will with regard to the symbolic: in some artists, a desire to appropriate sense (or nonsense), in others a need to criticize the social, technical and artistic forms with which sense has become associated. This presupposes an ethical position and necessarily involves a return of the body or at least its symbolic presence in the work, a resurgence or continued existence of the body, particularly evident in the painters’ art.

With this decentering which reduces art to a simple instrumental value, the artist's person becomes the pivotal element of the artistic act, the one that determines, motivates, initiates and activates it. The ethical position of the artist becomes increasingly important. He is a centre of decision and no longer merely a relay — through which Art, Painting or Sculpture make their appearance. Modern art has brought out the physical character of the work of art and enlightened us concerning the materiality of both the process and the result. Duchamp has already shown how the artist (in Duchamp's work, as an agent of a fine arts system) was the person who initiated the work of art; performing artists have insisted on the enactment of the work and have closely associated it with the artist's person since the work — in this case the performance — has no existence outside the act and has no material form. The words "motivates" and "determines" should be emphasized here, not so much for the psychological dimension of the work of art that they presuppose (and which might bring back unpleasant memories of "psychologizing" interpretations) but simply because these two words assume that the question of the why is asked of an "I", a "you", a real person and not an abstract entity or causality. It was remarkable, during the visits which were made to studios in connection with this exhibition, to note the number of times and the

sincerity with which the artist referred to this "I": "I believe that...", "I want..." The statement is present but without insistence; in it the artist is merely defined a conviction and *Weltanschauung* which usually concerns only himself and which he wishes to share but not propagate. His "I" is not political in the sense that it is not militant, and it also transcends the expressionist implications of any work. Neither militant, expressionist, narcissist, nor mythical, the "I" referred to in these conversations is claimed for itself, quite apart from any strategy or theatricality.

III

Sense: Omnipresent or Absent

At first sight, the work of Rober Racine is that apparently best suited to an interpretation of art today which would emphasize the return of the "I" and the instrumental role that art has assumed. The art of Rober Racine is experienced in a very personal way which even here in *Le terrain du dictionnaire A/Z* abandons the procedures and requirements of a performance and all the ritual imposed by this art form. The enactment becoming implicit, Racine's recent works now retain solely the result — the very spectacular symbolic charge — which is no longer hindered by the effects, just as spectacular and specific to the performance, that have

been put aside. Racine has abandoned the art of performing to retain only the philosophical attitude that performing gave him the opportunity of expressing. In his first performances, Racine showed a quite unique understanding of this art which helped him not to succumb to the "triumphalist" esthetics which threatens most performances; Racine invested an expenditure of time and energy which gave the impression of pure loss, quite similar to the loss encountered in luxury spending, expenditure which is not for profit or investment, but is only spending for spending's sake. In this way, Racine's gesture was a constant negation of sense. The only sense which emerged from it was the impact of the image created and the dramatic quality of the demonstration which, moreover, revealed on the artist's part a very highly developed and very modern sense of the absurd. Racine exaggerates the image of luxury spending in *Le terrain du dictionnaire A/Z* which implies an extravagant and excessive activity of re-creation but very conscientiously done. Because he is dealing directly with concepts such as sense, nonsense, and the impact of an event, without concerning himself with references to any particular art form, and because his work has to do directly with the philosophical attitude that it stages, Racine may seem not only to support our interpretation, but to illustrate it. Yet this work is not necessarily more "personal" than any

other, for it must be remembered that the “dramatic” art of this performance imposes on us — makes imposing for us — the presence of the artist’s personality. Also, the performance (or its offshoots) requires the artist to have symbolic mastery over the events he is staging. (As René Payant puts it in his “Notes sur la performance” (*Parachute* No. 14, pp 13-15), the artist is in a position of control even when he appears to be vanquished by events). In a certain way, the art of performing makes our interpretation of art today the conditions of one art, the conditions of the art of the performance. The intentions of a performer are of a symbolic order and everything serves his project, including his own person.

In its effects, the work of Irene Whittome might be interpreted as the very opposite of that of Rober Racine. Where Racine creates a total lack of sense, a pure representation which is meaningful only in the uselessness and extravagance of the act, Irene Whittome appropriates for herself symbolic orders (those of time, work, the museum or others of a more personal nature) and shows them in all the objects she creates, assembles, transforms or simply chooses. All the objects are marked (by choice, transformation, situation...), and this mark incorporates them in a symbolic order which makes them meaningful, everywhere and in abundance. The

works of Irene Whittome “overflow” with meaning, for a multitude of processes of meanings are introduced without their rules or limits being specified. If Rober Racine gives us the impression of an absence of sense, Irene Whittome gives the impression of its omnipresence. A comparison between Irene and Rober would be justified because both work directly with objects and within no specific medium. This type of approach on the artist’s part makes *each* of his choices significant since there is no rule to intervene and predetermine this choice. Their works are offered directly to our perceptions without emphasizing any particular point of view. However, Rober Racine’s chosen field, that of representation, makes accessible at least a first level of interpretation. In the works of Irene Whittome, the first level of interpretation is uncertain, for even at this level we hover between the object’s symbolic value and its value as an object (which Irene explicitly posed, moreover, in a 1975 work entitled *Objects trouvés — objets*). Thus, the cross of the *Saint-Alexandre* project can be interpreted at different levels: first of all as being the depository of the material transformations it has undergone; as a witness of the moments and different environments with which it has come into contact; as a pictorial symbol (the constructivist cross); as an architectural sign (it responds to the configuration of the studio), and as a biographical

reference (for it recalls the artist’s graphic work of the 1960s). This cross is also “performing”, in the sense that it is an image which has great presence and impact and which inhabits Irene’s studio rather like a person who might have lived, undergone transformations, changed both in appearance and meaning a number of times and would never succeed in this way in favouring one in particular. Thus, the exhibition of the cross appears as a very complex act which obeys several motivations and introduces us to a private domain where things are not as clearly marked as they might be in the public domain, where meaning always needs to be directed, filtered or made unidirectional. In this respect, it seems highly appropriate that Irene’s latest work takes place in her studio for that keeps intact for her the numerous references associated with it, in addition to accentuating its private nature. In the meantime, it will be noted that the work shown in the museum does not merely reproduce the studio cross. Irene has not been able to resist adding new touches to the document, for instance, the light on the work throughout the day (which represents a full cycle — life-death?) and that of a high suggestive film account, which recalls the heroic, archaeological era of the first black and white films, silent and flickering, projected in make-shift movie-houses, barely transformed for the purpose — as is here the museum’s

service elevator, whose authentic character Irene has kept, thus also revealing another private space, this time belonging to the museum.

IV

Fascinated Attitudes, Critical Attitudes

The presence of the "I" appears in a particular way in artists attached to a single medium. In the works of Pierre Boogaerts, Peter Gness and Serge Tousignant, with regard to both meaning and the object in question — the photograph or sculpture — there is an attitude of doubt that might be described as Cartesian, in that these artists clearly refuse to activate the mechanisms (those of photography and of the perspectivist approach) without simultaneously challenging and decomposing them with the purpose — like Descartes, who became the symbol of such a philosophical attitude — of *at the same time* speaking of the world *and* of the instruments which give me access to it. This attitude is not new in art; it is perhaps newer in that the reality to which the artists refer is both exalted *and* criticized.

Thus, in spite of the critical impact of the works of Pierre Boogaerts (pointed out by the artist in the text accompanying *Feuilles I* and *Feuilles II*), the element of fascination cannot

be removed from them, whether this is the artist's fascination for a subject (for example, in the works on New York), which is reflected in the large number of works devoted to it, or whether it is the fascination created by colour (for instance, the blue in the series *Synthétisation du Ciel*, *Voitures bleues* and *Coins de rue*). This fascination — both ours and his — also has a part in the great physical impact of Pierre Boogaerts' photographic works which are usually presented in the imposing form of series or sets. In these, there is a material presence, an exuberance of medium which can do no other than celebrate, celebrate its evocative power just as much as the power it has to challenge us. The *Feuilles* show the artificial character of the always partial photographic image; they point to its limits. Yet in the way he uses this photographic image, Pierre Boogaerts succeeds in transcending these limits, so that the referent of the image comes through the image with still greater authenticity. The *Feuilles* indicate EVERYTHING — the path taken by the photographer, the direction of his walk, his hesitations, the shape he tried to capture behind his viewfinder, the number of photographs he took, etc. This is then all reorganized by the artist to be made intelligible to the spectator. The criticism Boogaerts makes of the limits of the photograph is an opportunity for him to complete it. As soon as a limit is identified, it is corrected, but

without for a moment sacrificing the magic character of the photograph. *Feuilles* restores to us what usually lies outside the frame. Instead of the image being adjusted by the frame, which is the most common practice in photography, it is the image itself here which determines the frame. It is the image which seems to impose the different frames which seek it out, by accumulation, wherever it is to be found. The elements utilized by the artist in such an operation should be noted: an abstract form (a pyramid in the *Coins de rue* of New York), a natural and organic form here, a colour, a thickness and even a curling of the photographic paper, all qualities of the photograph which are hardest to reproduce and usually excluded by the most common social use of the photograph, namely that of information. It is this use that Boogaerts says he invokes (see his text on *Feuilles*) in his photographs to denounce their limits and prejudices which he considers far too mechanistic.

Less political in their intentions but proceeding from an equally critical approach, Serge Tousignant and Peter Gness address themselves to decomposing the reality of an image and to seeing that both their action on the image and the result of that action are clearly visible. The image is therefore interpreted at the level of an illusion as well as at the level of the deconstruction of this illu-

sion; in the works of Peter Gness, for example, the illusion of a trapezium drawn in neon lights on the sculpture, formed when the spectator stops at a certain viewpoint in front of the sculpture; in the works of Serge Tousignant, the illusion of a drawing which, when examined more closely, shows that it was produced at the key stages of the photographic process: in the subject (drawing traced in the sand), on the negative (perforated), in the dark room (by frame) and, lastly, directly on the photographic paper (torn with a pointed object). Tousignant and Gness both superimpose two systems, Tousignant, those of the photograph and the engraved drawing, Gness, those of sculpture and plane geometry.

In the works of Pierre Gness and Serge Tousignant there is a challenging attitude to the medium which they share with us. They tell us that a second look is necessary, not because the first is misleading but because it is insufficient. By intervening in the constitution of the image, they show us its literal quality and therefore its limits. Clearly, the critique is mainly demonstrative and would be more didactic than critical were it not always to be found at the confines of laughter. By the reactions they provoke, the works stand apart from a whole set of mystifying meanings which have adhered over the years to the language of art or of photography.

These meanings come to grief in a way through the effects of chance, the very obvious string pulling of the artist and even through the complicity demanded by these works which definitely debunk everything, including our adherence. These works exhibit an extremely tonic view of the language of art. The attitude of laughter and defiance it presupposes expresses above all a complete refusal to participate in the ceremonial side of art and a desire to find a voice without counting on any of the grandiloquent effects specific to the fine arts system. Laughter, or rather a knowing smile, implying that one has understood, reintroduces an original, marginal voice which can give free play to the effects of illusion, colour, image — effects of fascination — while challenging the system which supports these effects.

V

Measure and Excess

It would be unrealistic to think that painting can be regarded in the same way that Boogaerts, Tousignant or Gness regard their medium. Painting is not a mechanical process like perspective or photography. Or, to be more precise, the mechanics of it — if painting is to be so reduced — are too simple to be significant. To understand this, one has only to consider the works of the artists of

the Support-Surface group who addressed themselves to demonstrating the mechanics of painting: painting is no longer recognizable, merely a caricature of its former self. Painting is too rich, too meaningful, too finely articulated a language, and with too charged a past to hope that it can be easily diverted from its course. For some years, in contemporary exhibitions of painting, two main attitudes have prevailed. In the first, painting becomes a parody, either by delving into the history of painting (and it then imitates different eras and styles, expressionist with the Germans, primitive with the Italians), or by encroaching on the different social uses of the image (televised, romanticized, photographic) transposed and X-rayed in the language of painting. The second attitude shows a type of painting which no longer reveals anything but surface effects: nuances in texture and colour. This attitude puts emphasis on *bricolage* and the work of the appearances composing the surface and even, in this case, so it seems, gives it its justification. The two attitudes are only superficially contradictory. They show us in fact that a single type of painting has survived the turmoil of the 1970s, one type of painting which blurs its present-day character by turning towards its own history, or a type of painting which becomes fixated on its own effects and on its specificity, namely work on colour and surface. The two attitudes pre-

sent something of a paradox; indeed they imply a regression or fixation which has not been overlooked in all those recent exhibitions of contemporary art in which painting came into contact with “newer” forms of art, communicating an impression of “newness”, a sign of the “health” and “progress” of avant-garde art, a misleading sign perhaps, but one that is always reassuring for the art market as for that of ideas. The second attitude, that of entrusting painting with the task of doing the colour and surface work, is represented in the exhibition, for instance, in the works of Christian Knudsen, Leopold Plotek, Richard Mill and Christian Kiopini, with certain incursions, however, on the part of some of these artists into the history of painting (Plotek), its perspectivist mechanics (Kiopini) and its autodeductive logic (Mill) which does not, however, go as far as resorting to parody.

If people have always — and for longer than the modern era — seen in painting an activity which was considered both a theoretical and a “doing” activity, painting which adopts the objective of immersing itself in surface and colour work thereby renounces theoretical activity and the spirit of moderation, which have always characterized painting, or rather it shifts the theoretical objectives to subordinate them to this “doing” activity. All these paintings share the character-

istic of holding our interest at a first level of perception, where nuances emerge and the eye adapts, where differences are noted and elements composing the surfaces are differentiated. These various activities involve only the purely physical act of seeing. These painters present us with effect-saturated surfaces which hold our eye for a long time. They induce an attitude in us which prohibits any intellectual or other kind of retreat. With this work on the surface these painters ensure the decorative aspect of painting and therefore fall into an excess which seems to us to be at the source of all the immediacy of their production. This exaggeration of the decorative inhibits the hold of theory on the personal experience of the individual. The emergence of the body shown by the importance given to the activities of “seeing” and “doing” combined with the effect of time, creates a complete meaning which is hard to decompose and analyse and therefore resists — in the same way as in the art of the installation or in that of performing artists — all predictions.

The works of the four painters show us variations in colour and texture which are gradually revealed by our scanning of the surfaces. These variations are enumerated in Knudsen (who, moreover, uses the pictorial form of enumeration: the polyptych); in Mill, they are organized according to the deductive

logic of the picture decomposed into section; in Kiopini, they are divided into criss-cross movements through interlocked perspectivist grids; lastly, in Plotek, they are deployed between the constructivist and the organic illusionist systems which they link. The variation and its detection demand attention that the work encourages by not allowing us to pass on to another level. We are mobilized in an activity that cannot be converted into theory. The objective of the exaggeration of the surface and the decoration is therefore to put an effective stop to any measure, theoretical or other, and to introduce the body as the *only* measure of this type of painting.

This intention is also that of the sculptor Roland Poulin and was already present in this artist's earlier sculptures, which might explain why he never really recognized himself in the “minimalist” label that was, however, readily attributed to him. In refusing this label, Poulin asked that his sculptures be viewed from the standpoint at which they transcend the minimalist style and its auto-sufficient logic. In *Ombres portées*, this point has opened the widest possible breach in the minimalist esthetic position of the self-contained object and conforms to the simplest idea that can be made of it: the circumstantial conditions of the presentation of the work (light, type of space where the work is shown, relationship to the viewer's body,

the latter's approach) have assumed extreme importance. Similarly, the variations offered by the object itself have vastly increased: no line, no angle, no surface is ever perfectly similar to another or conforms with any hypothetical rectangular plane that they might serve to illustrate.

In the case of the painters, the identity of the work is an accumulation of small exceptions — here, a particular viewpoint, a particular matter, under particular lighting and so on both in *and* around the work — but these exceptions offer no short cut for the spectator who wants to know them all. To represent such a work, one must talk of the fragmentation of a figure into numerous small "events", which are animated by the work: variations in matter, direction, spaces, solids, shadows, light. The fresh importance acquired by the body (the movement we make around the sculpture and which reveals it to us) shows that the sculptor has succeeded in turning the perception of his work into a single moment which cannot be compared with any other situation or even with almost any other representation. If a figure (a representation) subsists, it is retraced in its dismembered state.

In the beginning, we stated that this art was characterized more by the attitudes it revealed and the motivations and choices it

presented than by its objects. Thus, in the work of some of the participants the importance of the symbolic, ethical or critical project transcends the material objects which animate these projects. In others, painters and sculptor, the appearance of the object assumes such importance that it neutralizes any possibility of generalization, representation or, more generally, theorizing about these objects, except to note that they turn the perception of the work into a unique moment which has no equivalent and which is therefore always set apart from what is known, expected or believed. These works confront us with irreducible presences, similar to those equally irreducible desires governing the works of Racine, Whittome, Boogaerts, Gnass and Tousignant and which showed a need with regard to meaning; a need to control or create it, or to identify its conditions. On all sides, Quebec art today is seen to fragment, resist collective movements and labels, and take the measure of individual wishes to show, all things considered, a very great interiority. Moreover, in this respect, a resistance is detectable on the part of these artists to any exaggerated attitudes, as much towards regional, anecdotal or fantasy art (West coast style?) as towards a cerebral, theoretical art, manipulating the codes (East coast style?). These resistances emerge because of a rejection of labels and collective solutions, but also because the

symbolic concerns shown by these artists are more encompassing and precisely because they try reconciliations between the experimental and theoretical part of the work, between the universal and the personal, and between traditional and contemporary aspects of the language of art. The most successful reconciliation accomplished by this art is certainly the one which brings out in the work all the elements for its comprehension; this is shown in the way in which each artist *actualizes* an intention which he tells us about in a language which is his and which he exhibits to us. Because each of these works is a world in itself, there are no presuppositions elsewhere which might have been hidden from our view and might have escaped us. *Everything is there*. But, of course, although everything is there, everything is not revealed at the first viewing; each of these works being a world unto itself, we cannot understand them — as for any complex reality — without spending time with them. That is the alliance that the museum galleries propose.

CONCERNING FEUILLES I AND II, 1981-82

To photograph: grid space and time. Reduce. Make a multiple reality uniform. Flatten this reality which has too much volume. Put limits — barriers, borders — on too big, too vast a reality.

To photograph: make the world banal, refuse differences — especially not discover, first of all recognize. Especially not to be born, not to live. But to enclose a too living, too moving nature. Put it to sleep, sleep too, stop, stop everything, finally die. Reassured.

The photo is made for detail. The more one tries to enlarge the angle of vision, to encompass the landscape by adapting wide angle lenses, the more the landscape recedes. Reality flees the lens. Only diminished details remain, reductions, flashes. Parings in the hollow of the hand.

If Renaissance perspective put us before nature, photography has placed us behind the camera. To photograph: adapt the eye to a way of seeing. Another way of seeing, too old a way, in which one can no longer believe. Cut up into rectangles: closed systems in which we try to live, when in fact they condemn us to regression. Careful, a too reductive vision, borders too narrow, edges too close together. Outlet (?), in any case necessary recoil: refuse to centre the landscape, also refuse to be the centre. Re-read the photo taking into account its margins — of liberty, of reflection. Take account of its margin of error. Be marginalized, absolutely.

* * * * *

To be set aside, to set off. To play. With the camera, play with its (my) power. Also give free play to its (my)

characteristics. Finally, give some play to its (my) framework, loosen it up.

Let the leaves play, let the edges play so that reality no longer comes unstuck (like the corner of a Kodak advertisement), but releases.

To look at. To look at this gaze which evades, which diverts my gaze.

To place myself. Place my view and its view, profit from my course to place my course of action. Walk, make tracks, imprints. With my body, with the camera. Tracks of tracks. Parallelism and decentering.

Slide from one imprint to another, from one rectangle to another. With this look at repetition, rediscover the randomness of prints or leaves on the ground and baffle repetition with cooperation. Counteract the closing of each rectangle with an opening to the others and arrive, finally, at work's end, at the organic form which will disorganize the ordered system imposed from the start by the camera.

Traces or leaves, inside or out, reveal or conceal, superpose or efface: pervert the system, distort its meaning by giving it the most possible meaning — to him who knows only one. Do not fuse or confuse me with its system, do not form me, do not mould me to its fixed concepts. But confound it by rediscovering it, not fragments but an articulation, not an accumulation but a thickness; not a stability but a rhythm; not an order but an organicity; not a reduction but true size; not a domination but a participation, etc.

Pierre Boogaerts 1982

Born in Brussels in 1946, Pierre Boogaerts studied at the Institut Supérieur Saint-Luc et the Académie Royale des Beaux-Arts Brussels. His interests included painting and drawing, but these he abandoned around 1970 in favour of photography, finding the problems of pictorial practice interfered with more all-encompassing esthetic preoccupations: the apprehension — confrontation of the natural and the synthetic. In 1972 he settled in Canada, first in Toronto and then definitively in Montreal, where he has lived and worked since 1973.

Pierre Boogaerts' last paintings (1970) present motifs of stylized banana trees, yellow lines and commercial labels, and foreshadow a series of works based on the theme of reference: various montages and photographic series executed in Montreal between 1972 and 1975, *Plantations jaune bananier/The Banana-Tree Yellow Reference* (Galerie Véhicule Art, Montréal, 1973) and *Références Plantation/Jaune Bananier* (Galerie Optica, Montréal, 1975). Reference to the yellow banana tree implies the association of the colour yellow with the notions of growth, verticality and the exotic, and clearly establishes the synthetic (read not natural) nature of the representation. It refers to mental rather than to natural images, seeking to establish an equilibrium between nature and man-made products. By adding the colour yellow to photographs of objects, and with ten photographs of objects which are already yellow, Pierre Boogaerts gives the image a referential impact on the object's environment (warmth, the light of a certain sort of space). The immediate associations lampstands/palm trees, Bic pens/bananas refer back to the first nature/culture association, and synthesize the contrary notions or organic and inorganic in the coexistence of the

photographed object (the Bic pen) and the drawn object (the palms). This reflection on the synthesizing of human action is developed, beyond textual and literary references, in purely visual terms, in a series of colour photographs of cloudy skies (*Synthétisation du ciel*, Galerie Gilles Gheerbrant, Montreal, 1975), reorganized by the photographic process in precise geometric configurations (square, triangle, cross). The artificial, repetitive motif of the disposition of the clouds counteracts their natural aspect and testifies to the powers of creative intent over the apprehension of reality. Using the groupings and arrangements obtained on prints taken from the film of seventy shots, the artist synthesizes the formal motif, the geometric disposition, the succession of time, the movements and density of masses in a frame (the sheet of contact paper), allowing a double interpretation: global — the schematic rationalization of a natural phenomenon; and sequential — the reappropriation of moments of observation of the sky and clouds. These complex images reduce the components nature and culture to a structuralist equation.

Boogaerts explores and forms mental constructions based above all on ambiguity: the works *New York, N.Y. 1976-1977*, (First part: exterior and reference, Galerie Optica, and second part: interior, Galerie Gilles Gheerbrant, Montreal, 1977) present an organic vision of the archetypal city, envisaged according to mixed and fortuitous visual association. A series of eight groups of twenty colour photographs arranged according to the order in which they were taken testifies to the numerous walks the artist took, first directing his lens toward the ground, then gradually toward the shrubs, the trees, and parts of the sky. These close-ups of vegetation and minerals (lawns,

leaves, pebbles, sand), intact or altered (cigarettes, papers, nut shells), identified and dated, constitute topographical surveys of the presence of natural elements outside the concrete and asphalt frame, and find an additional extension in some ten photographs called "reference (interference)", a play of interior/exterior reflection in the windows of shops, hotels and offices, of trees, plants and flowers, the whole an amalgam of architecture and nature. Ten other photographs, taken in studios of artists living in New York, offer purged, domesticated, tamed visions of nature in a protected milieu, and suggest some formal references to individual practices.

Using a paradoxical perceptual situation which associates realistic documentary photography with conceptual precept, Boogaerts depicts the meeting of nature and culture in aspects of the Utopian city-garden situated at the limits of myth and of reality. Fascinated by the American metropolis, crossroads of the arts and pivot of world economy, the artist superposes on the chosen vision of the moment the concept of screens, perforated by the intense blue of the sky, in the midst of sombre architectonic monolithic masses (slightly under exposed). The *Série écran: ciels verticaux*, N.Y. 1976 (Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels, 1977) and the *Série écran: ciels de rues*, N.Y. 1978-79 (Galerie Gilles Gheerbrant, Montreal, 1979) find expression in the distortions maintained by nature and its image by melting, without opposing, ambiguous portions of nature and culture. Whether it is a question of single photographs of vertical views of the sky between New York skyscrapers, vertiginous gaps, or sequential assemblages of panoramic views begun and ended horizontally to capture the pieces of sky visible between the tops of buildings on the

same street, a rapport is established between the camera-screen and the architecture-screen. Depending on the architectural details (irregular contours of buildings), there are enlargements and contractions of the sky analogous to the opening and closing of the camera's shutter. Assemblage by vertical juxtaposition (light superposition and subtle displacement to achieve a rigorous binding) of rectangular photographs arranged in linear and cruciform configurations and in a T (fidelity to Manhattan's orthogonal grid) cancels gravity's effect, eliminates the form-content relation and, suggesting a formal resonance between New York architecture and the portions of sky which can be glimpsed from its streets, calls into question traditional photographic framing. Placing the nature and culture components on the same plane, by means of the lens, generates a "synthetic" image.

Pierre Boogaerts' referential universe is multiple. In a work done in 1978, *Une après-midi sur mon balcon* (Galerie Marielle Mailhot, Montreal, 1979), he develops a visual and intellectual game gravitating faithfully around concepts of nature and culture, using as a theme a book by Moscovici, *Essai sur l'histoire humaine de la nature*, an essay on man's relationship with his environment. A dozen panels of 61 black and white photographs of the book, of certain underlined passages, of leaves, of the balcony, of light and shade (including that of the photographs) link the narrative content to chronological development and convey a reflection on creation. The two works *GRANDEUR NATURE (ou la nature des média) no. 1, T.V. Jardin* (1977-1978) and *GRANDEUR NATURE (ou la nature des média) no. 2, Fenêtre d'hiver* (1978) affirm by their immediate iconographical reference (jumbled television screens) the impact of photography and television on the evolution and modifi-

cation of contemporary perception. The series *Voitures bleues et ciel au-dessus de chacune d'elles* (1976-1980) (*Pluralities*, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, summer 1980), comprised of twenty vertical diptychs, takes up, with the illustration of a portion of blue sky (top photograph) juxtaposed on a close-up of a blue car (bottom photograph) the favourite nature-culture association. The subject is graded and reinforced by tonal variations of reference-blue (blue-grey or indigo-blue), by the extraction, out of context and non-perspectivist, of the image's components (close-ups), by the reflection of the sky in the glistening surfaces of the hoods, by the analogies of density of matter (the proportion of architectural elements in the sky *versus* the quantity of details on the car) and textural qualities (clouds *versus* painted alterations), in short by the modulations of a formal vocabulary common to cultural and natural interventions. The series *Camera* (1979) celebrates the determining powers of photographic framing by doubling it with the manual framing gesture of the artist. It reiterates in that way the primacy of the camera's eye in viewing today's world.

With *Coins des rues (Pyramides) N.Y. 1978-79* (Introduction and first four parts, Galerie Gilles Gheerbrant, November 1980 — January 1981, and six following parts and conclusion, Musée d'art contemporain, Montreal, December 1980 — January 1981), Boogaerts insistently elaborates a tight overlapping of images and myths related to the perception of nature and of architecture. A shift takes places from the archetype of the urban fabric to the archetype of the architectural element by way of the architectonic symbol of the pyramid, a geometric motif present at all the aerial intersections of New York arteries. Each work is a juxtaposition — superposition of several photo-

graphs preserved intact (altogether about 300 photographs, each part comprising from one to seventeen) and their complex assemblage is the result of the change development of parts (linear, horizontal, vertical, stepped, cruciform, hybrid, dense or fragmented configurations). The prime importance of the series is that it reconciles the narrow, direct view of reality with a process of articulation of visual data in an arrangement of time and space consonant with a coherent physical understanding of the work. From the particular disposition there proceeds a transformation of photographic two dimensionality into a fictive three-dimensionality confronted with the neutralization of the perspectivist grid by the frontal hanging of aerial views. The apparent lightness and fragility of the images confer on the representation characteristics of timelessness, the cosmic telescoping (the blue of the sky) of past, present and future civilizations (formal analogies between pyramid, buildings today and space ship). A commentary on the waste of the photographic image (superposition/redundance) and on what it excludes by its framing procedure (screen-reframing/street corners — gallery walls), the work constantly sways from void to plenitude, from plane to space, and from myth to reality.

J.B.

My point of view, my way of seeing, my vision — comparable to that of almost two billion others — unique, independent, parallel and in innumerable, incalculable directions. My point of view, singular in all its simplicity, complexity, diversity, its experience and its soul, its rigidity, its rigour and its humour, its love and its determination to be expressed and to communicate the originality of its intent.

And yet, this point of view so perfect, so upright, can only have its full flavour if perceived from a single and unique favoured vantage.

Perceived from any other angle, point, distance, height, the interpretation could assume all variations even to disorder, chaos and complete misunderstanding, disaster.

Peter Gnass

Born in Rostock, Germany, in 1936, Peter Gness studied at the Fine Arts Academy in Hamburg. He moved to Montreal in 1957 and enrolled in the Ecole des Beaux-Arts de Montréal, where he remained until 1962. Here he studied painting and was introduced to engraving by Albert Dumouchel. In 1963, a stay in Germany allowed him to master the techniques of engraving with Wunderlich at the Lerchenfeld Fine Arts Academy in Hamburg. His first exhibitions were devoted mainly to painting and engraving, but after 1966 he turned resolutely to sculpture. In 1969 he spent some time at Elliott Lake, in Ontario, to study new foundry techniques. An active member of the Association des Sculpteurs du Québec from 1967 to 1973 (he was to be in turn secretary, vice-president and president from 1967 to 1970), he has taught at the University of Ottawa since 1973. He lives and works in Montreal.

Peter Gness is most interested in working with traditional metals — iron, steel (monumental sculpture, symposium in Alma 1966), copper and bronze (iron, copper and bronze mural, Théâtre Maisonneuve, Place des Arts, Montreal 1967, and zinc and copper sculpture, Expo 67, Montreal 1967). Research on the diverse properties of plastics, plexiglas, and resin, combined with the use of metals, led the sculptor to define light as a fundamental preoccupation. A builder rather than a sculptor, he proceeds by addition; the light, which in the first metal works formed fragmented planes on the outside, is interiorized by the use of phosphorescent pigments added to the resin, resulting in the series *Lumenstructures*, 1968-1970. The luminous effects emerge from the volume in primary forms: square (cubes housing crystals) or rectangular (prisms with rainbow effects) blocks, transparent, coloured spheres and

half-spheres, giant lenses creating, according to their movement and disposition, a system of refraction-reflection, optical illusions and virtual images (Galerie Jolliet, Québec, 1970). The exhibition *Topolog* (Musée d'art contemporain, Montreal, autumn 1970) confirmed a predilection for spherical forms suspended in space and overlapping each other, and dwelt more on visual play than on the preponderance of materials and the importance of masses. This slow dematerializing of the sculptural object by topology, study of continuous geometric distortions, favours formal combinations of three or four hemispheres of coloured and/or transparent plexiglas in rotation around a concave form (an empty half-sphere) generating illusory fields of light in the distorted motifs and duplicated colours. The environment thus achieved becomes for the viewer an impenetrable formal network confounding the real and the virtual. Perfecting and simplifying his technical equipment, Peter Gness pursues his optical experiments by placing the plexiglas spheres inside an enclosed cube (about 2 m), which incorporates mirrors and lighting, achieving thus an infinitive multiplication of spherical reflections, a microcosm engulfing the spectator standing in front of the sculpture (Grand théâtre de Québec, Quebec, 1972). He created the mobile sculptures *Topolog* and *Communitomorphose* for the CBC building in Montreal (1972), did some theater design (Ionesco's *Macbeth*, Théâtre du Nouveau Monde, Montreal, 1973), designed a mural sculpture integrating reflecting surfaces on the walls of the Lasalle metro station (in collaboration with the architect Didier Gillon, 1974-1978), and prepared the plans and specifications for a children's park, le parc Viger (1975-1981).

His work evolving within systems of optical illu-

sion, Peter Gness studied perspective, which taken on a longitudinal axis apprehends space from two vanishing points rather than just one. This *Progression sur deux perspectives* (Galerie Gilles Corbeil, Montreal, winter 1976 and Galerie Jolliet, Quebec, 1976) rests on the elaboration of a series of schematic drawings: two points, each placed at an extremity of the rectangle of paper, break free and proceed toward each other, a network of vectors. From their multiple intersections the planes of certain volumes virtually appear. Gness also explores in pictures with atmospheric backgrounds the interlacing of these linear perspectivist systems. The sculptures, mostly executed in transparent plexiglas and steel, are the result of the artist's speculations on the original model; they present transversal and/or longitudinal sections retained for their volumetric and harmonic qualities. The rational exploitation of these graphic systems gives birth, in vertical sections, to radii, triangles, pyramids and cones in perspective, the direct issue of rigorous mathematical principles (*P2P7* and *Pyramides sur deux perspectives*, wood and plastic, 1975-1976). The sinuous and angular tiers of linear planes (*P2P1*, stainless steel, 1975, and *Progression*, acrylic and steel, 1976) submit to space three-dimensional projections of two-dimensional vectorial assemblages. The constant and reversible transfer from plane to space confers on the objects, by illusion and distortion, pure values of visual information.

Previously applied to sculptural works of small and medium proportions, the same principles govern the linear three-dimensional structures of his environmental sculpture *Progressions* (Musée d'art contemporain, Montreal, autumn 1977), that is: two-dimensional reduction of spatial propositions and spatialization of two-dimensional pro-

positions, alternating affirmation and negation of the concept of volume and a predilection for the frontal point of view. Three successive planes arranged in space (steel cables, aluminum rods and red neon) create a penetrable environment, the effect of depth depending on superposition. The luminosity of the neon underlines the linearity of the contours and the multiple interaction of the planes. The environment is conceived as a folded drawing whose spatial field is reopened from the spectator's point of view. The presentation is completed by a series of drawings and photographs which illustrate in sequence painted highway dividing lines, electric cables and wire fences, and confirm the artist's obsession with line — broken, fragmented, seen frontally and in rhythmic succession.

Peter Gnass constantly queries and renews the dynamics of the structuring of space. The work *Key West* (1978), including a wood and acrylic structure, five drawings and a photograph (*Tendances actuelles au Québec*), Musée d'art contemporain, Montreal 1978-79), enacts a construction-deconstruction of the sculptural object by using planes. This reconstruction of a wharf from a photographic document is used out of context, without referential content, and presents a work of transformation on graphic and three-dimensional planes. The painted yellow trapezium which covers some of its planes is only seen in its totality and its planarity from a singular point of view: a slight displacement and the trapezium sways, fragments, and reaffirms the sculptural volume. The geometric, plane, trapezoidal form results from a double perspective; it underlies reflection on the spatial field and perspectivist space, and confronts painting and sculpture. Gnass suggests progressions which explore the specific nature of

sculpture in relation to drawing and photography (at his studio, 2089 rue Sanguinet, Montreal 1979). After an initial exploration of corners and portions of space deemed pertinent, he executed a series of drawings, photographs and sculptural reproductions, veritable technical cut-outs releasing the spatiality of the object. Circulation about the space thus delimited arises from phenomena of perception which, according to angles of vision, flatten out or reveal masses.

Taking advantage of the Studio du Québec in Paris for the year 1980, Peter Gnass carried out a number of installation projects both temporary and permanent, based essentially on the projection of a polygon (painted, drawn, photographed, traced in colour, light, neon) on a three-dimensional support (existing or constructed, interior or exterior, fixed or mobile). Portions of the object, touched by the use of colour or other process and envisaged according to a precise point of view, form the polygon and level the representation by giving it the quality of a screen; according to all other points of view, they are metamorphosed into a group of fragmented surfaces, and restructure space with coloured markings. Whether it is the drawing of a linear circumference on a hexagonal structure fixed to the wall or on the lintel of a door, the projection of a painted polygon on a building, part of a district or a parked car, or of *in situ* construction for the duration of an exhibition (XX^e Salon de Montrouge 1980, white polygonal projection on wooden fence structure of the municipal road system of Montrouge), or whether it is the creation of temporary installations from an existing architectural structure and found objects (XXXIII^e Salon de la Jeune Sculpture, Bercy warehouses, Paris 1980, white polygonal projection on wood, concrete slabs,

sand gravel) or a permanent installation on a predetermined site (M.J.C. Créteil, 1980, red polygonal projection on building, concrete slabs and wooden structure), Peter Gnass uses a variety of formulas to describe and vary his propositions. The installations *Chantier interdit au public* at the Canadian Cultural Centre in Paris (autumn 1980) and at the Canadian Cultural and Information Centre in Brussels (winter 1981) are functions of the place, structures, and elements on the spot. The projection of a neon polygon on the encircling wall and some tree trunks on the boulevard Raspail in Paris (American Center, Paris, December 1981—January 1982) modulate a luminous outline which is in turn materialized and dematerialized.

J.B.

C H R I S T I A N K I O P I N I

Born in Sorel, Quebec, in 1949, Christian Kiopini studied at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Montreal from 1967 to 1969 and at the Université du Québec in Montreal from 1969 to 1972. He taught plastic arts in Sorel from 1972 to 1973, then at Bathurst College in New Brunswick from 1973 to 1974, and also did some work in graphics. At first interested in sculpture, he abandoned it in 1973 to devote himself exclusively to painting and drawing. He lives and works in Montreal.

Avoiding the minimalist and conceptualist preoccupations associated with the main trends in sculpture in the 1970s, in his pictorial work, Christian Kiopini continued in the stream of automatist and formalist practice. His first pictures, with surfaces treated in a gestural and intuitive manner, have a geometric structure, the arrangement of rectangular forms following points of interest and colour. Bit by bit the application of colour is subjected to a systematization, a pre-established order of superposition, and produces the inversion of the technical process, that is, the initial structuring of the picture governed by an arrangement of rectangles and the subsequent insertion of colours in series (New Brunswick Museum, Saint-John, 1974). The concept of the preponderance of intuition over structure together with the gestural and repetitive application of the strokes of colour suggested to the artist the abandonment of geometric formulations in favour of a squared grid, a division of the canvas into a chequered pattern, and recourse to various modes of chromatic and formal progressions (Galerie Laurent-Tremblay, Montreal, *Processus 75*, Musée d'art contemporain, Montreal, and *Grands Formats*, Place des Arts, Montreal, 1975). The addition of coloured signs to the grid process creates, by overprinting, virtual structures which generate ambiguous spatial fields. The

presentation of the series *Progressions chromatiques 1975-1976*, 20 drawings in different formats, (Musée d'art contemporain, Montreal, 1976) undertakes with analytical, didactic rigour the synthesis of the two major ideological trends in Quebec art: the exploration of the mechanisms of the subconscious and of creative intuition (automatism) and the conscious, logical, rational expression of formal codes (hard-edge painters). The use of series of primary colours following variable vectorial and rhythmic orientations and the simultaneous use of forms — spots — lines constitute the basis of formal, chromatic progressions. The animation of the pictorial field by the artist's unconscious, by means of serializations of pure colour, the systematization and repetition of the original automatist gesture, variations in the thickness of the coloured stroke, and the distribution of coloured areas, reconciles and transgresses an atmospheric space and a formalist surface. The subversion of codes is impressive in Kiopini's work for, playing on ambiguity and contradiction, he evades absolute standardization and imposes a mode of action — reflection on the liberating possibilities of artistic practice.

The synthesis of the serial structure of the grid and the graphic mesh of the motif, following luminosity and directional lines, continues in pictures from the 1976-1977 period (acrylic on canvas and grid of strings stretched and glued to the canvas) (*Luc Béland, Lucio de Heusch, Jocelyn Jean et Christian Kiopini*, Musée d'art contemporain, Montreal, 1977). The gesture, devoid of all expressive connotations and decoded by repetition, is indissociable from the colour, dynamic component investing the surface with a total, non-graduated image. The lateral and diagonal permutations of this dense gestural network take up,

portion by portion, the same data and affirm, in fact, the adequation of the support and the plane. In these compositions, one but divisible, the restrained, opaque colour reduces and blocks the depth by a dense, full atmospheric surface. The works from the period 1978-1979 (*Avec ou sans couleur*, Terre des Hommes, Montreal, 1978, and *Alternance*, Montreal, 1979) take up and accentuate the preceding works: linear geometric structuring distorted by gesture and colour, and the neutralization of colour by the grid. Kiopini then used two canvasses, gluing and superposing on the first, extended on a stretcher, a second, altered by folding, cutting and incision following perspectivist non-illusionist vectors and diagrams. The treatment of colour is modified and varied during the process of the creation of the work: subtle mixtures, controlled gestures, soaking of the canvas, trickles and thick layers. The vectorized, textured, materialized canvas prepares the almost monochrome fields of colour for a course of multiple readings. The different sections of the composition assume hierarchical relationships suggesting a recoil from flatness and dramatization of the pictorial field. The presentation of elements fundamental to painting — structure, space, gesture and colour — based on progressive oppositions and contradictions and a neutrality of additive and subtractive phenomena (*Six propositions*, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal, 1979). The cutting and assembling of laminated canvasses depend on several stretchers and affirm, at first, the materiality of the support. The border-vectors and construction lines project the configuration of a perspectivist system and question the two-dimensionality of the surface. They receive, frame and limit gesture and colour, and alternatively refute the depth of space. The slight variations in chromatic register, gradually becom-

ing uniform and increasingly relinquishing agitated gesture, suggest a monochrome scheme obscuring the effects of optical depth.

Christian Kiopini pursues his pictorial adventure by becoming more involved in the analysis of schemas of perspectivist representation. The large pictures of 1980 (The Ydessa Gallery, Toronto, 1980, and symposium of painting in La Rochelle, France, 1980) approach, in their creation and their scale, ideas of painted objects and architectural elements. The superpositions of canvasses, attached to the initial canvas and cut out and arranged according to geometric motifs, go beyond their preliminary abstraction and approach an architectonic thematic development. Colour, at first seemingly monochrome and uniform (transparent layers and rough texture), modulates in subtle nuances and confirms a latent illusionism. In the modular paintings with fragmenting configurations of 1981 (drawing back from the traditional rectangular format) (the Ydessa Gallery, Toronto, 1981), Christian Kiopini juxtaposes perspectivist and architectural illusions in an open geometry embracing the viewer. The calculated and disjointed organization of the panels in auto-deductive forms is in equilibrium with the surface play of the oblique vectors and monochromatic variations. This colour space dissociates gesture and colour, and imbues the painted form with new content.

J.B.

C H R I S T I A N K N U D S E N

Born in Vorup, Randers, in Denmark in 1945, Christian Knudsen emigrated to Canada in 1957 to settle in Montreal. He studied fine arts at Sir George Williams University (1967-1970), with a particular interest in painting, serigraphy and photography. He brought back countless photographs from his trips to Europe, North Africa and the Middle East in 1972, and Japan in 1973. Artist in residence at the Art Workshop of Loyola College in 1973, he has taught at Concordia University since 1974. He currently lives and works in Montreal.

From the beginning of the 1970s, Christian Knudsen's pictorial approach can be seen to be analytical, isolating and reorganizing in terms of tonal values and colour (white, black, yellow). This approach stems from painting and photography, and even in the early works, plays of transparency and reliefs, he makes use of mixed techniques, canvas cut-outs glued to masonite panels, acrylic paintings, photographic emulsions, adhesive tape and pencil sketching (Pinell Gallery, Toronto, 1970, Gallery 2, Sir George Williams University, Montreal, 1971, Les Galeries de Photographie du Centaur, Montreal, 1973). Use of the geometric grid, which underlies and organizes space, allied to the use of the photographic image, structures a pictorial dialectic exploring the tensions between the dynamics of composition, the relations between the formal sequence and the surface, and the photographic content of certain elements (Gallery 1 and Gallery Weissman, Concordia University, Montreal, 1974). The photographic emulsion process, applied directly to the canvas, and used as one of the elements of pictorial technique, is established as an essential and complex component. Apart from allusions to referential contents (reminiscences, souvenirs, portions of faces, parts

of the human body), the photographic image contains a visual density rich in textures, modulations and variations of light and shade, of solids and spaces (for example, *Ancestors 1A/73*, 1973 *After Uzuki Canadian Jobber*, 1974, *P'ti Bone/and Classical Connection* 1974). These plane structures of the painted and photographed image imply simultaneous perceptions, polarized by stylistic and technical aspects, and vacillating between the natural and the formal (*Québec 75*, Musée d'art contemporain, Montreal, 1975). Large abstract paintings, born of a geometry of lines, surfaces, and planes arranged and painted in three colours, black, white and yellow (and according to their chromatic values) are subjected to the introduction of photographic images in half-tones, grey tonal variations creating the blurred contours of the coloured sections and generating a certain process of autodeterioration of the work due to the instability of the chemical process of emulsion fixation. This painting, with its mnemonic and formal qualities, in a sense re-evaluates the expressive possibilities of pictorial abstraction.

During the 1976-1977 period, Christian Knudsen's work fell into delineated zones of coloured expanses with rectilinear edges, portions of untreated canvas, segments of photographic images, textured variations in monochrome, gestural explosions, all conspiring in the process of the creation of the work, and foreshadowing subsequent compositions in diptychs and triptychs. The progressive abandonment of the photographic image in favour of a single process, and of the resultant perceptual and structural grid, characterizes subsequent works (Galerie Mira Godard, Montréal, 1977). Large assemblages, collages, mixed media (masonite panels, cardboard, paper, erasing tape, screws and plexiglas — notice the disappearance of the prim-

ed canvas) explore gesture and geometry and emphasize the contrasts of surface materials (*Kite/77*, 1977, and the *Sutton Series*, 1977). The division into two equal parts (a few centimetres apart) establishes a complex system of relations and tensions between the reciprocal, lateral, and superposed components (transformation of forms, of tonalities and textures, permutations, play of angles, recall and opposition). The apparent simplicity of the creation of these flat surfaces subjected to an orthogonal grid discloses a complex approach to order and to structure. The gestural, expressionist disposition of the coloured planes (always black, white, yellow) finds equilibrium in the very play of oblique vectors and geometric planes. Each component of the diptych is screwed down, at once fixing and breaking down the support, the surface and the pictorial layer, and stabilizing the dynamics of the work in contradictory zones (*For Suzy Lage*, *Christ Knudsen and Robert Walker*, Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver, 1978, and Mira Godard Gallery, Toronto, 1978). The three diptychs shown at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts in 1979 (*Six propositions*) depend above all on the placing of the different elements in opposition, the use of contrasting, uniform colours (red/yellow, red/white; notice the introduction of red, enlarging the chromatic range) and the appearance of certain allusions to the perspectivist system (a grid background covered by a geometry of arcs and angles). The reading of additive and subtractive traces establishes a narrative space centred on the materials and their properties.

The bipartite and, more recently, tripartite composition (Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Kingston, 1981) of Christian Knudsen's drawing-paintings assumes a traditionally didactic function related

to the iconic quality of the portions sealed and screwed down under plexiglas, the materials, treatment and colours of industrial make, exactitude and precision of execution confirmed by the signature stamp (after 1977, on the support, identification of the support and of the surface). The lyricism of the coloured surfaces (white, amber, red and yellow in tonal variations), controlled by a play of shadows (nuances of green and black) and of linear and curvilinear vectors (contrasting colours, graphite, incisions exposing the superposition of pictorial layers) make up the sum of rational and intuitive processes and juxtapose minimalist and abstract expressionist trends (Mira Godard Gallery, Toronto, 1981, Sir George Williams Art Galleries, Concordia University and Galerie Art 45, Montreal, 1982). Through the planarity of a rigid orthogonal grid (squared on masonite, peripheral screw, transparency) confronted with the resurgence of gesture and colour (black) within increasingly elaborate compositional structures, Christian Knudsen explores universal polarities, in work which is the result of its process of elaboration.

J.B.

R I C H A R D M I L L

Born March 2, 1949 in Quebec City, Richard Mill studied at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts de Québec (1968-1970), and at Université Laval (1970-1971). Since 1973, he has taught at École des arts visuels of Université Laval. Primarily interested in painting he lives and works in Quebec City.

Richard Mill's pictorial practice has, since its beginnings in 1970, reformulated the theoretical foundations of the teaching of painting (Galerie Jolliet, Quebec, 1970). Affirming planar particularities in monochromatic and neutral (grey) paintings, he inscribes and delineates the surface by means of vertical margins, light tonal variations. With the series of large black paintings begun in 1973, Mill systematically explores minimal units of planarity, horizontality and verticality within reductive reorganizations showing the characteristics of the support and of each of its parts (Galerie Jolliet, Québec, 1973, and Galerie Véhicule Art, Montreal, 1974). Black, the non-colour less filled with cultural implications, worked on smooth surfaces and covering up to the stretcher-frames, reconfirms the art object in its materiality, rejecting all referential or expressive allusion. The object-paintings, whose contents are summed up in the description of their plastic components (immediate perception), linear and formal geometry (e.g. white horizontal bands circumscribing a black surface, white rectangle in the middle of a black square, beige angles-vectors repeating the support's form, a motif deduced from the format or directing it) subjected to the precision of technical means (hard-edge surfaces), testify to the rationalized approach in pursuit of the very essence of the act of painting.

The progressive relinquishing of the hard-edge approach from 1975 on, the omission of colour

Painted on the stretcher and the appearance at the periphery of several centimetres of untouched canvas confer on the black surface the quality of an image-figure. Certain gestural traces, in neutral tones (grey, brown, dark green) establish the play of textures on the surface and prefigure the energetic sweeping movements of works from 1976 (Galerie Jolliet, Quebec 1975 and Galerie Curzi, Montreal, 1976). The crumbling of the horizontal border-bands, above and below, and of the vertical ones left and right, the superposition of horizontal gestures (horizontality of the writing confronted with the verticality of repetition) and the play of obliques of irregular bands (reversible zig-zags) and diagonal tiers, the whole subjected to a severe chromatic reduction, suggest the frontality of an image exposed to visual and virtual tensions. The large formats of 1977-1978 introduce new pictorial elements, cross, grid, (wide pale strokes), and an increasingly animated treatment of ground-surface (Galerie Jolliet, Quebec, 1977, and *Mill: 1973 à 1977*, Musée d'art contemporain Montreal, and Musée du Québec, Quebec, 1978). Colour emerges subtly, in traces of blue, green, yellow and red, from these pictorial fields lightened by tachism, splashes, and contrasting vectors. The primary and tightly knit, cruciform and chequered structures vitalize the pictorial space and, by their immediate dependence on the line — colour relation, inscribe a critical and reflective proposition in the tradition of modernism and beyond. At the same time, Richard Mill experimented with photography. Questioning the photographic image, he did some experimental works involving a black opaque setting (Galerie Curzi, Montreal, and *La Chambre Blanche*, Quebec, 1978).

In the works from 1978-1979, a delicate equilibrium is established between an expressive

gestural communication, a play of strokes and a unified surface concept, and a constructive gestural language, with vectors derived from the shape of the painting (in harmony, parallel, or disruptive; diagonal) (*Tendances actuelles*, Musée d'art contemporain, Montreal, 1978, Galerie Jolliet, Quebec, 1979, and *Six propositions*, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal 1979). Large, textured, speckled grounds, in faded colours (beiges, pinks, mauves) herald the evolution of colour, at the same time reducing the effect of depth by the accumulation of coloured strokes in the same chromatic registers. The superposition of simple geometric figures, bands drawn in the contrasting colour, contain the expressive impact of the gestural texture in the simultaneous perception of the total surface and of its decomposition into figures, gestures and colours. The importance of drawing in the transformation of Richard Mill's painting is evident in the elaboration of varied formal structures (diagonals, triangles, arcs, semi-circles and quadrants), and denotes a more explicit subjectivity (*Richard Mill: 5 tableaux récents*, Canadian Cultural Centre, Paris, 1979, and the Cultural and Information Centre of the Canadian Embassy, Brussels, 1980, Galerie Jolliet, Quebec, and Yajima Gallery, Montreal, 1980, *Le dessin de la jeune peinture*, Musée d'art contemporain, Montreal 1981). The traces of the production process, evident in the work, establish a narrative space which goes beyond the formalist voice. The large arcs housing T-square vectors (bridge), the arched gestures reinforcing the movements of colour, more strident, temper the overlapping of dense and marked, subtle and controlled zones. The overflowing by light-colour of the decomposed structure in formal rhymes animates an unequally variegated and dynamized surface (lines, spots, areas, brush, paint-brush, hand, oil acrylic), and

carries direct allusions to abstract expressionism (Galerie Jolliet, Quebec, 1981).

In a recent exhibition of his works, (Galerie Jolliet, Montreal, 1982) Richard Mill abandoned the preceding gestural expressionist approach in favour of a schematized reorganization of familiar geometric forms (horizontal rectangles, trapeziums, triangles, arcs, half and quarter circles) juxtaposed in coloured registers (with dissonances controlled by black), planar chromatic zones and varied textures (dullness, brilliance, trickles). From this formal grammar, with liberated edges (reappearance of the canvas), emerges a frontal hierarchy which gives free rein to the deductions of each of the parts.

J.B.

N.E.P. began as a parody and a pleasure, but before long it became a great deal more puzzling and difficult. It went its own way finally to the present conclusion, the parody being relegated to the title. (Nepman was a pejorative term applied to Soviet citizens who made their careers during the period of the New Economic Policy of 1922-1928.)

La Fontaine des Aveugles is one of those paintings I would have sworn I could never conceive before I actually saw it complete. Since then, it's turned out to have been an extreme example of a subsequent tendency. The title is drawn from a prop in Debussy's Pelléas et Mélisande.

The Lighthouse Invites the Storm is, of the three closest to the mainstream of my work in the last three years. Its title is a tribute to the poet Malcom Lowry.

Leopold Plotek

Born in Moscow, U.S.S.R. in 1948, Leopold Plotek emigrated to Canada in 1960 and settled in Montreal. He studied fine arts at Sir George Williams University from 1967 to 1970. His professors included Roy Kiyooka and Yves Gaucher. His first interest was painting, and in 1971 he studied at the Slade School of Fine Arts in London, under Will Townsend. He now teaches in the Fine Arts Department at Concordia University in Montreal.

Leopold Plotek pursues a dense and reflective pictorial approach. As early as 1971-1972, challenging the traditional rectangular or square format for painted works, he abandoned the stretcher as a support, cut the canvas, and painted according to the resulting shape. The works shown in 1972 and in 1974 at Galerie Véhicule Art (Montreal) partake of the tradition of spatial explorations of American expressionist painting in the 1960s. Using bright colours without following definite tachist or geometric schemas, the artist described, on irregular canvasses or in mixed technique drawings, abstract compositions with flat surfaces confronted with certain perspectivist suggestions. Then (Galerie Weissman, Sir George Williams University, Montreal, 1975), using the advance or recession of various coloured planes, he explored, in a series of unsupported canvasses with irregular contours (cut out and torn), complete or partial geometric forms (triangles, trapeziums, semi-circles, bands), sometimes defined by precise edges, sometimes dissolving in lassitude into untouched zones. The overlapping and superposition of coloured portions and segments of canvas free of pigment create an ambiguous space, whose dynamic structure overflows the simple geometric interactions. The support-surface relation is in fact favoured among

others by the method of direct application of the colour on the canvas (canvas soaked with enamel). Rejecting seductive or playful aspects, Plotek dwells on tensions between the diverse possibilities of apprehending the work. A progressive return to the peripheral rectangular configuration (parallelogram, trapezium) and a reduction in the importance accorded the preliminary folding of the canvas to deduce internal and external forms reveal the element of colour in the development of a painting which would defy the medium (*Québec 75*, Musée d'art contemporain, Montreal 1975). The subtlety of colour and tonality resides in the application of successive layers of oils and eliminates pure colours as well as white and black. The alternating of the untouched and the painted in the treatment of the canvas affirms materiality and objectivity and rebuffs traditional preoccupations relative to the pictorial space (Galerie Optica, Montreal, 1976).

The exhibitions at the Galerie Yajima (Montreal) in 1979 of a series of paintings (oils) and drawings (pastels on acetate), inspired by Arnold Schönberg's suite *Pierrot Lunaire* and by reminiscences of a trip to Italy, established a return to the stretched canvas and, still following monochrome planes, conveyed certain referential content. Large paintings, almost square in shape, exhibit stylized, coloured expanses (reds and greys) in a play of arcs, arches and curves, suggesting architectonic allusions. The saturated treatment of colour brings to the surface subtle contrasts between texture and uniformity, sudden edges and fluid contours, plane in positive — negative alternation. The darkening of chromatic values (quasi-opaque), allied to the graduation of forms, refutes all atmospheric space and depth of field and dictates a two-dimensional reading of a work with new

cultural connotations (by title and motif, references to music — Chopin, Schönberg — to history — Renaissance, humanism — literature, architecture). This predominance of referral to a piece of architecture, a memory, an experience, is seen to be fundamentally ambivalent: the geometric ideograms of the large chromatic surfaces are confronted with modernist affirmations of the plane, the external referential reality being subjected to a formal two-dimensional treatment short-circuiting representation (the four paintings exhibited in *Six propositions*, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 1979). Leopold Plotek's drawings (*Le dessin de la jeune peinture*, Musée d'art contemporain, Montreal, 1981) constitute a working tool, a means of reflection and of projection. They juxtapose the graphic motif on the pictorial surface in a reappropriation of autobiographical content not foreign to certain figurative elements.

Leopold Plotek's recent works (1980-1981) (*Vox humana*, Galerie Yajima, Montreal, 1982, and *Peinture montréalaise actuelle*, Sir George Williams Art Gallery, Concordia University, Montreal, 1982) remain faithful to a primary preoccupation with colour, whose registers extend from sober and sombre (the browns, burgundies, violets, blues) to acid and percussive (the oranges, pinks, turquoises, blacks). Articulations, by the hierarchic overlapping of geometric planes subverted by a system of curves and arabesques, propose a central motif (enlarged detail, closer view point, engulfing form), which reformulates the form-matter dichotomy and evokes notions of content. The synthetic assemblage of masses of colour, with delicately worked surfaces where semi-transparent upper layers create oppositions between brilliance and dullness, texture and uniformity, rests on unexpected angles and reintroduces

the corner, reminder of the corner of the painting, of the corner which frames, surrounds and delineates. Recourse to the monumental hieratic and vertical scale suggests a new pictorial space with variable field and depth. As for the referential content, it may be taken as multiple, critical, cultural, historic allusion, but above all as auto-reflective and discursive.

J.B.

R O L A N D P O U L I N

Born in St. Thomas, Ontario, in 1940, Roland Poulin has lived in Montreal since 1944. He studied at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts de Montréal from 1964 to 1969, beginning with painting, and passing on progressively to reliefs and integrated art projects with Mario Mérola in 1969; since the 1970s he has devoted his time exclusively to sculpture and drawing. He taught sculpture at the Ecole des arts visuels at Université Laval, participated in the founding of the contemporary art review *Parachute*, and currently lives and works in Montreal.

Roland Poulin rigorously and systematically explores the notions of light and perception time, as well as the relationship of the work to the representational space. The luminous plexiglas sculptures of 1970 articulate, in acute angles, transparent planes on which the sculptor directs a white light to isolate these structures at the sharp edges of the ambient obscurity (Maison des Arts La Sauvegarde, Montreal). He worked briefly with neon and then began the development of light structures with laser beams. These immaterial structures (I Musée d'art contemporain, Montreal 1971, II Maison des Arts La Sauvegarde, Montreal, 1972, III Musée du Québec, Quebec, 1973, and IV Galerie III, Montreal, 1973) trace in space a network of luminous bundles reflected on the wall surfaces by mirrors, visible through screens of smoke and alterable by the viewer who, by his presence, cuts into or modifies the beams. These red rays (helium-neon) in geometric configurations stem from pure energy and illustrate the concept of the dematerialized object-sculpture simultaneously exploiting light, space and time. Set up outside galleries and museums, ephemeral events may punctuate the presentations. Roland Poulin is also interested in the execution of utopian projects using possible forms of energy conversion.

Then in 1974-1975, while remaining faithful to his initial approach the sculptor abandoned costly and spectacular materials in favour of cardboard and plywood, wire netting, plates of glass, clay and graphite with which he made juxtaposed elements issuing from a strict materiality and physicality. Refusing all illusion and all reference to the known, the sculptures become alternately space and volume, playing on opacity, transparency, density, roughness, etc. Poulin works with gravity; he neither erects nor constructs, but places down flat squares of plywood covered or not with netting, spread out on the ground in serial horizontal developments (*Véhicule Art*, Montreal, 1974). The repetitive nature, the subtle surface qualities owing to minimal manipulation and the variable combinations of materials, alternating and superposed (clay and netting, glass and netting, cement and netting boxes, etc.) reveal concepts of basic unity, of sequence and of infinity, and underline the importance of the spatial relationships maintained between the viewer and the sculptures. Poulin favours a scale in accord with the human body, which looks on and moves about, involved in a multiplicity of viewpoints.

Roland Poulin's formal vocabulary becomes increasingly reduced as the sculptures shown at Galerie B in 1976 prove. These linear sculptures, wooden (cedar) beams blackened with creosote and placed on the ground, are made up of a juxtaposition of elements with rigorous mathematical relationships and deliberate intervention by means of sections and displacements. The use of pieces more or less similar to models in series available commercially (4" x 4" or 4" x 8" beams of variable length) confirms a wish to refine the work of art and facilitates understanding of the functional relationships of the elements. However, this

standardization is not absolute, and gives way to great autonomy of experimentation, modification and arrangement in the studio.

The 1977 sculptures present an ambiguous structural aspect, in which the equilibrium of the masses — cement beams confronted with real or virtual triangles suggested by planks of plywood — is in a sense derived from surface treatment, the composition of the wood soaked with kerosene approaching the porous and sombre tone of the concrete. Rejecting the simplistic and the obvious, the sculptor calls on extremely elaborate compositional schemas. The outdoor work for *Art-park 1977*, with its four creosoted pine beams (12" x 12") arranged as a trapezium on two untreated beams, is transformed into an optical square by the subtle correction of perspective, the unevenness of the ground, and the dynamics of void and matter. In 1978, 1979 and 1980, emphasis was placed on the periphery, and the presence of a central void, seen as a square or a triangle, becomes primordial. The projection of shadows and the absence of light focussed in this way creates an accumulation of contradictions suggestive of multiple interpretations. Proceeding from a system of binary oppositions (peripheral mass/central void, shadow/light, horizontality/verticality) the sculptures are apprehended in a complex way: right angles and aberrant angles, barely discernible bevellings of the cement beams, subtle displacement, immovable and precarious equilibrium. Speculation is open and plays on the perception and memorization time of the work. With a concentrated formal vocabulary based on slightly distorted geometric propositions, the sculptor refutes the notion of volume in favour of that of mass, the concrete, heavy, compact, concentrated and sombre, affirming dense materiality. Starting

with elementary, even archetypal forms (square, triangle), each portion of the sculpture is placed on the point at which, by the circularity of the work and the viewer's peripheral vision, a subversion takes place and the circumferential motif appears truncated (for example by slight oblique variations in the regularity of the beams) and the internal configuration (the void) in conformity with the intended model. Without really modifying the scale of the sculptures (1.50 linear metres per unit), the beams tend to become like low walls, and a series of sculptures executed in 1980 on the theme of Ourobouros (the serpent biting its tail) illustrates, by beams of variable length and volume, the inclusion of a second structure within the first one, more or less square, rather trapezoidal. The spiral-square illusion-allusion confounds the initial simplicity of the work. Natural lighting reaffirms the immanence of shadow in the central void, which in more recent works (1982) is transformed into a corridor, cut off within an open configuration. The equilibrium of tensions between the various components of an impossible over-lapping is resolved by a judicious application of shadow and light, the light underlining the opaque surfaces of the massive planes set up at right angles, the shadow accentuating certain interior angles and the displacement of the low quasi-parallel walls. Roland Poulin's sculptural practice is manifestly reflective and deductive. It is generated by its own parameters, evolving and changing with rigour and invention.

In tandem with his sculptural production, Poulin has maintained a continuing interest in drawing. As well as the almost systematic presentation of his drawings, in his one-man exhibitions, he has also participated in shows devoted exclusively to drawing (*III Dessins du Québec*, 1976, *The Second*

Dalhousie Drawing Exhibition, Halifax, 1977, *50 Canadian Drawings*, Beaverbrook Art Gallery, 1977). His drawn propositions are varied and do not depend on the illustration of his sculptural approach. With their large serial cardboard surfaces, perforated and covered with wax and graphite (1975), and with his studies of twin cruciform vectors (1977) and his experiments with format, Poulin attempts to imbue the two-dimensional surface with a complex accumulation of information. He breaks with inherent flatness and reinstates a certain illusionist space where, by grouping the drawings two by two, he introduces fluctuating, complementary motifs according to a different scale. The coexistence of two sheets of paper and the stratification of elements is arranged by collage and cutting out, retreat, concealment, addition, work on white and black, the opaque, the transparent, planes, void. The binary compositional schema is consonant with the simultaneity and alternance of perception, and suggest the idea of breaches, of a corridor.

J.B.

LE TERRAIN DU DICTIONNAIRE A/Z
1980

Details

Since 1979 my goal has been clear: to create the Parc de la langue française or French language park, an exterior, permanent place where all can wander amid the whole vocabulary of the French language. The ground then becomes a living and natural topology where reading is integrated into a precise language sequence: words and their expressive power.

The work shown here, LE TERRAIN DU DICTIONNAIRE A/Z 1980, in the direct result of the work I did on Flaubert at the National Gallery of Canada in 1980 in the exhibition Pluralities.

LE TERRAIN DU DICTIONNAIRE A/Z 1980, shown for the first time in the autumn of 1981 in New York at P.S.I., is first and foremost a text: a visual and ethnographic essay revealing a long labour of cutting out and transferring. Carried on over an entire year (1980-1981), this writing on luminous separation highlights a different way of treating a text; a reality. By this method of cutting out and separating, the work is here dissociated from its own definition. It thus leaves its past, its history and its family, to join on the same single level a society of other individuals with a similar bearing, that is, standing up.

With LE TERRAIN DU DICTIONNAIRE A/Z 1980, words have stood up.

This group of cut-out words which can be seen here contains all the available entries in the 1980 edition of Le Petit Robert: about 60 000. Thus there are about 60 000 cut-out

words which have been planted in alphabetical order. Some have clearly been distanced (from A to Bouillotte),¹ the others (the compact group in the centre) are in a compiled position (nearly 55 000).

Why?

One might wonder why such a project should be undertaken. Several replies to that are possible. As far as I am concerned, the most essential is the simple pleasure of working.

Cutting out these 60 000 odd words and dates was for me a veritable writing session. A writing in light where, by means of pen-knife, the multiple clefts of cutting out propelled the separation of tenuity to the level of enumeration. By this transfer of an incision to its language situation, the non-printing writing of this cut-out gesture acquired the ultimate passion of being both complete and not there. It is, so to speak, the circumference of the word via its initial identification. Passing from the Robert dictionary page to the one LE TERRAIN DU DICTIONNAIRE A/Z represents, the word and its year of origin move from a private space to another (one could say gigantic) space to change position: from lying down to standing up. They go from reflection by joining in this concept which I call private giantism.

To cut up reading by writing of this sort is to expand the site of knowledge to multiple different perceptions. It is to attempt an opening, in the first sense of the term, in the very heart of a living, complex code.

Here, in this work, the dictionary may be seen as a disconnected whole. That is to say a visible group composed of two distinct parts: sources and informative ramifications. But equally a transformation of the material which by that very fact alters its import; the quest.

All these hours (from eight to ten a day) spent cutting out, attaching, then cutting out again, finally to plant a word and its date in a new page, all that marks and perfects language. It makes it concrete, material; touchable. In doing all this work, I retranscribed all the entries from Le Petit Robert without having formed a single letter. A new calligraphy thus happened, giving voice to spacing rather than to diffusion; to the circumference by way of the contour. The above-mentioned transfer took place by means of detached words. On the other hand, it is a transfer which here only takes into account words and not their definitions, this constituting a second work: LES 2130 PAGES-MIROIRS.

Thus LE TERRAIN DU DICTIONNAIRE A/Z 1980 is the first part of a series including LES 2130 PAGES-MIROIRS as well. On the one hand there are the words alone, and on the other their respective definitions.

For this exhibition I decided to show only the first part, LE TERRAIN DU DICTIONNAIRE A/Z 1980. Subsequently, after LES 2130 PAGES-MIROIRS are finished, it will be possible, and it is desirable, to show the two parts: LE TERRAIN DU DICTIONNAIRE A/Z 1980 surrounded by LES 2130 PAGES-MIROIRS.

De-silence

Of all these words which want to take the floor (since they are standing) and which one can almost go around, it must be remembered that in this position they establish reading and its enumeration. One can thus speak of the narrative unlocking of reason, since the impact of what is presented here is kin in all respects to the passions of knowledge and memory: accumulate the better to efface.

And then, if the course of the eye has no speed but manifestations of the imaginary, one must here, in front of this work LE TERRAIN DU DICTIONNAIRE A/Z 1980, forget conventional habits and passions and only stick to the strict elaboration of a sole endurance: the concentrated work of clarity.

Degrees of permanence are always proportional to densities of adherence.

*Rober Racine
October 1982*

Born in Montreal in 1956, he currently lives and works there. A multidisciplinary artist, he has been active since 1973, publicly executing his compositions for piano, reading his poetic texts, and participating in gestural and sonorous events. He took art history and film courses at the Université de Montréal in 1978. A designer and producer of installations and performances, he regularly publishes articles on dance, literature, action-performance and installation in various art reviews, cultural magazine and journals (*Parachute*, *Propos d'art*, *Arts Canada*, *Virus Montréal*, *Trafic Le Devoir*). As well, he gives lectures and papers on his work in general and the collaboration involved.

Rober Racine's aims are multiple, and touch on several aspects of the world of perception. The presentation of *Tétràs I* (Galerie Laurent-Tremblay, Galerie Véhicule Art, Musée d'art contemporain, Montréal 1978) constitutes the first section of a tetralogy, a multidisciplinary project involving gesture and sound and featuring the number 4.

Starting with a square in which there are four figures (gestural diffusers), four sound tracks (sonorous diffusions) and immobile objects (the viewers belong to this category), Racine proposes a numerical progression via a system of punctuation, permutation and interaction. The apprehension of a spatial field structured by elastics connecting the various parts (floors, ceiling) of an installation determine the argument of the action-performance *Dérouler, Dérouler, Dérouler...*, this word (unroll) being uttered in six different languages by the designer-performer (*Hors-Jeux*, Musée d'art contemporain, Montreal 1979). At the whim of traces within the installation, the artist unleashes its mechanism of destruction. Recourse to perfor-

mance, this body language which joins visual, spatial, purely formal temporal propositions, affirms the richness of ephemeral and unreproducible experience.

Rober Racine systematically undertakes the execution of projects of great scope whose starting point and conception prove to be relatively simple and brief. The public, solo, and complete performances of Eric Satie's *Vexations* (Galerie Véhicule Art, Montreal, November 1978, Judge Moisan's home, Arthabaska, December 1978, Music Gallery, Toronto, January 1979, Western Front Gallery, Vancouver, May 1979, Spoleto, Italy, summer 1981), of variable duration, from 14 to 19 hours, testify to the obstinacy with which, by the accumulation and repetition of facts and quasi-minimal gestures, the concept's essence is circumscribed. In the present case, it is a question of executing the same musical motif 840 times in order to arrive at the achievement of a final, inevitable silence. A musician and composer, Racine sees in this concept-pretext the perfection of an exemplary sonorous environment, which he underscored with a theoretical and mural environment (copy of the score of *Vexations* / theoretical preparation and preliminary execution).

The installation *Décomprendre le sourire d'une perle* (Musée d'art contemporain, Montreal, December 1979 — January 1980) created a monumental undulating and vibrating grid, a metaphorical allegory of the sea and poetry, starting with a hyperbolic curve imprisoning space, two birds already caged, and poems not to be read. The performance *Marteaux muets* (*Événements du Neuf*, Montreal 1979 and *Festival de Performance, International symposium of environmental sculpture*, Chicoutimi, summer 1980) gave evidence of

affinities and deep bonds with literature. Recourse to elementary geometric structures and to long processes of execution were confirmed as constants in Racine's work.

To celebrate the centenary of the death of the writer Gustave Flaubert, whose work, he confesses has an obsessive fascination for him, Racine undertook a vast project in his honour (begun in 1979 and spread over eighteen months), an effort of visual decomposition with a linguistic base, *Gustave Flaubert 1880-1980*. The transcription in chronological order of Flaubert's works follows the cycle of recopying already begun with the theoretical mural portion in conjunction with the execution of *Vexations*. The quotation of all of Flaubert's second novel, *Salammbô* (in *Pluralities*, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, summer 1980) takes place in three phases. The first celebrates, on the one hand, in the copying of the work, the pleasure of the act of writing and visually retranscribes the text by a methodical process of counting the words, phrases and paragraphs. The quantification of the text gives rise, by numerical and geometric conversions, to the establishment of graphics, a playful digression from the work of repetitive copying, and prepares for the second phase, the construction-installation of a staircase, the proportions of the risers and steps of which are in all ways consistent with statistical data, and correspond to the structural analysis of each chapter. The third phase involves, in a performance lasting fourteen consecutive hours, the public reading of the entire novel, experiencing the physical form of *Salammbô* by the slow and gradual ascent of the staircase: one step per chapter, an architectural image of literary progression. In this way Racine reiterates the sort of test which Flaubert imposed on all his texts and com-

pletely exposes, in decoding it, a long and arduous process of writing, suggesting a correspondence between Flaubert's work and Racine's: the reappropriation of the container of one then becomes the content of the other, the whole, by the compilation and application in space and time of the mathematical data inherent in the work (graphics, architectural designs and installation).

This exploitation of cataloguing and classification, analogous to the activities of *Bouvard et Pécuchet* (Flaubert's last novel in which the two copyists reproduce the *Le Dictionnaire des idées reçues*), heralds, spread out over a period of ten to fifteen years, the final stage of the copying cycle, that is, the complete retranscription of the whole dictionary of the French language. Pursuing the rigour and amplitude of his previous productions, Racine proposes to explore, following the simultaneous levels of representation (writing, performance, installation), the concept of the dictionary by way of the alphabetical and analogous method of the *Robert* dictionaries, the *Grand* and the *Petit*. *Le terrain du dictionnaire A/Z, essai visuel et ethnographique du Robert, 1980* (P.S.I. room 201, New York, autumn 1981, and *Repères: Quebec Art Now*, Musée d'art contemporain, Montreal, autumn 1982) and *Dictionnaires A* (Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, spring 1982) constitute the result of two years of work, and are an integral part of an anticipated series of presentations/exhibitions, an historic essay entitled *DICIONNAIRE A/Z*.

The presentation of *Dictionnaires A*, concentrating on the group of words beginning with the letter "A" in the *Grand* and *Petit Robert*, is arranged following the typographic layout of page 65 in the 1979 edition of the *Petit Robert*: precise

references for spatialization of the writing and for the specially favoured content of the exhibition by way of certain key words, "analogie, anamorphose, analyse". A system of quotations and references give visual and textual order to schemas of representation, and subtend the five parts of the presentation: *Pages-miroir* (autumn 1980, minute icons with incised, cut-out, inscribed word-references, essentially the pre-word-stelae), *Dictionnaires, Introduction* (witnesses to the action-performance presented at Galerie Motivation V, Montreal, autumn 1980, and Bordeaux, France, autumn 1980, and preliminary phase of public education), *Lectionnaires alphabétiques* (four reading rooms for viewers/readers, housing reproductions of paintings from the permanent collection of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts), *Scriptorium* (huge space for the observation of Racine's writing and imagination, interior landscape analogue to the *Parc de la langue française* project and *Lieux cités/cités* (eight areas of quotation, sculptures/stands with open dictionaries, nailed to words from page 65). The treatment of the dictionary as the microcosm of a multi-dimensional universe accessible to spatial and temporal incursions continues in *Le Terrain du Dictionnaire A/Z*, model for the eventual *Parc de la langue française*, a real geographic decentralization in a place concurrently cultural, touristic, and didactic.

J.B.

Notes:

PHOTOGLYPHS: *Photographic engravings
Inscriptions on photographic filmbase or
bases to define the parameters of
intervention at the three possible levels of
manipulation in photography:*

- *First in the photographed subject, in the
setting, in time.*

Memory-trace

- *Then in the actual photographic base, in
the paper, in the printed photo.*

Real trace (permanent) which connects
and restores the space and the present
exterior context of the work.

(Photographed past juxtaposed with
photographic present).

- *Finally, in the photographic negative,
intermediate medium and space,
recovered as an autonomous
photographic entity and as a visible
component of the work.*

Non-place trace

Serge Tousignant, 1982

*Looking at this sequence from the comics in the
weekend paper, I see that I am not the only
primitive to make traces on the ground to make
myself understood.*

S.T., Lac Foreau, summer 1981

Born in Montreal in 1942, he studied at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts de Montréal, 1958-62, then worked and studied engraving and lithography in the open studios at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts de Montréal under Albert Dumouchel's direction. In 1965-66 he received the Leverhulme Canadian Painting Scholarship, which allowed him to stay in London and to do advanced work on painting and lithography at the Slade School of Fine Arts and University College of London. He travelled a good deal, in Europe, Morocco, Mexico, Guatemala and New York, and has taught visual arts in the Art History Department of the Université de Montréal since 1974. He lives and works in Montreal.

Serge Tousignant's work is characterized above all by the diversity and originality of his productions: engravings, paintings, sculptures, drawings, folded paper works, photographic works, and environments transformed by the use of mirrors and video. The early works (1962-65) are marked by exploration in engraving (etching and then lithography) and in painting of an abstract tachist sort, first approaching European lyrical abstraction, and then closer to American abstract expressionism, a gesturality imbued with automatism, conserving figurative and calligraphic vestiges. A certain structuring of surface appeared in his painting from 1965 (London) to 1967 (Montreal), large gestural splashes of dense, flat colours, governed by the introduction of chevrons, squares, grids (*Trame Bleue, Trame verte* 1966), and paintings on frosted aluminium grounds, the surface a mirror with superimposed grid already suggesting a fictive three-dimensionality. The forsaking of painting in favour of folded paper, the execution of three-dimensional objects, and the beginning of work with a photographic base characterizes the work of the next five years, in which Tousignant

constantly put together concise formal propositions and mechanisms of visual illusionism. *Les sculptures et papiers pliés* (Galerie Godard-Lefort, Montreal 1968) are based primarily on the application of vivid colours to elementary forms, and on the concept of alternation between two and three dimensions by the suggestion of illusory perspectives. Sheets of paper, monotonal, serigraphed, folded and superimposed, alter their planes and modify their structures by the opposition of saturated colours and the play of geometric vectors. Certain works on acetate and aluminium paper, transparent and reflecting surfaces, vary the formula and arise from the same proposition as do the series of sculptural pieces in painted metal (industrial finish) and in plexiglas: simple geometric forms (spheres, cubes, cones, pyramids) in polished steel and/or plastic impose their own reflections and extensions from the confrontation with powerful illusions of their formal harmony. By simple tricks with mirrors, the volumes interpenetrate and penetrate the walls of the floor, their reciprocal colours transferring from one module to another. These phenomena confound the viewer with a double significance: exploration of visual perception, and reflection on the art object. Clarity of purpose generates artless works, pure allusions to phenomena of optical illusion (*Pinces vertes Guillotine, Exit, Mouvement dégressif rose, Modules jaunes*, 1967). This systematic pursuit of formal possibilities and the transformation of colours by means of reflecting surfaces is underscored by a playful quality, implying the active participation of the viewer in a work such as *Duo-Réflex* (Musée d'art contemporain, Montreal 1970), a series of mirrors arranged in space following a definite determining outline, according to the viewer's mobility and field of vision, their variabilities (possible transfer of personalities),

the objects and the environment. The essentially evolutionary work depends on its own construction-deconstruction.

More than the renewal of sculptural form, it is the apprehension of perceptual space which is of concern to Serge Tousignant, as testified by a series of 37 works, drawings, serigraphs and photo-montages, variations on the cube (*Dessins-photos*, 1970-74, Musée d'art contemporain, Montreal 1975). *Les transformations cubiques* (pencil drawings, 1970) and *Frottis* (in pencil, 1971) reaffirm the artist's interest in the surface, and re-introduce ambiguity of perception in the appearance of form by negation and by the artificial play of shadow and light. The use of photography as an art process implies referential concepts, and predisposes to an explorative and reflective approach. Work on the cube does not call on the creation of objects, but rather on the creation of images, elements and forms illustrating various possibilities of perception from a studio corner photographed at different angles and with different lighting (1973). The series *Ruban gommé sur coins d'atelier* (1973-74) reappropriates the motif of the corner: by the addition of a drawing of the vectors of a cube glued to the ceiling and the adjacent two walls, the drawn corner becomes a cube floating in space, and vice-versa. All the work dwells on the volume-surface relationships and on the play of planes, by the creation of a serial and sequential space (varied and modular combinations of the same image) and the presence of the reducing grid, creating perspectivist space of each of the images. As well, by introducing the concept of temporality (by means of sequence) and by posing the problem of content (abstract, illusory cube-corner, *versus* referential element, studio corner, door frame) aesthetic reflection is ordained. The

works, *Hommage à Magritte* (model 1969-1970, completion 1972-1973, *Périphéries* (Musée d'art contemporain, Montreal 1974), *Hommage à Léonard* or *Mona* and *Laissez faire les sphères* (1975, *Québec 75*, Musée d'art contemporain, Montreal 1975), bear witness to the critical and reflective aspect of Tousignant's approach. *Hommage à Magritte* (mirror-window placed on an easel, reflecting a green line changing to red, and a black line reminiscent of the clarity of chromatic bands of 3D objects) transforms the image by the juxtaposition of illusion and reality. *Mona* (a reproduction on painted wood of the famous work arranged on the ground in four panels and reconstituted in space by means of the camera lens, with the viewer moving within and through the work) and ... *les sphères* (seven blue plexiglas spheres of different sizes equalized by the lens) present, by their immediate dependency on the camera's definition, essentially auto-referential characteristics. Apart from allusions to art history, apart from an iconography of the known and perversions of humour, these works depend on an abstract formal composition in accord with their means of production, the association of realist and conceptual notions by the twofold treatment of reality.

In *Environnements transformés* works are grouped (1975-1977) which assume the representation of material elements and of urban and rural landscapes, reproduced, out of context, by photography and offset printing. Tousignant highlights motifs particular to the environment he has chosen, the pointillism of rows of shrubs (*Environnement transformé No. 1, Dotscape*, 1975), the rayonism of parallel and converging furrows in cultivated fields (*Environnement transformé No. 2, St-Jean-Baptiste, P.Q.* 1976), the regular grooves of certain architectural elements (*Environnement*

transformé No.3, Terrace Outremont, 1976). He submits these formal configurations to the repetitive use of the motif and, regrouping them in series, he neutralizes, by grid and design, the effects of perspective. He exploits the relationship and visual interactions of analogous elements by extracting them from their reciprocal connotations, thus undermining with a highly conceptual rigour the realism of the image. Analysing the schemas of representation by the placing of photographic sequences, Tousignant proposes a formal interpretation of objective reality indissociable from a double perceptual phenomenon: first apprehension, overall and abstract, of the work's structure, and second apprehension, modular, referential, spatial and temporal. *Paysage géométrique* (1977, the exhibition in space of a square formed by the branches of a tree), *Dessins de neige et de temps* (1977, photographs of a road swept by blowing snow, photographs of snow falling in front of a brick wall, the accumulation of snow on a sheet of paper photographed at regular intervals), *Géométrisations scolaires* (1978-1980) and *Dessins solaires* (1980) (photo-montage of geometric drawings — squares, triangles, diamonds, straight lines — in the sand, created by the varied placing of sticks planted in the ground), *Géométrisations* by corporeal intervention in large elastics bands, all these works call directly on natural factors, figurative elements, considered in rational terms to derive the plastic functions from them. The camera invests the natural element (shadow, light, snow, sun, tree, earth) with the creative function of signs, images of nature and of art as signs. This inversion of roles, within the natural order and the imaginary order, contributes to the establishment of a formal dynamics based on the repetition of the image (each on subtly altered by chance, nature or the artist), the har-

mony of tones and arrangement of motifs. Vision subjected to the camera's methodical grid, assemblage (pictorial synthesis) and signs (analytical decoding) restore the function of language. This recourse to the two-dimensional fixing on photographic film of random drawings and small spatial configurations testifies to the Tousignant's wish to attempt all genres, and to go beyond them in order to encompass the plastic concept.

J.B.

Log-book *What has changed the most in my life is the passing of time, its speed and even its orientation. Formerly every day, every hour, every minute was inclined in some way toward the day, the hour, or the minute that followed, and all together were taken in by the intent of the moment whose provisional inexistence created a sort of vacuum. Thus time passed quickly and usefully, more quickly if it was spent more usefully, leaving behind it an agglomeration of monuments and detritus called my history. Perhaps this chronicle which I had embarked upon would have ended after millennia of catastrophes in coming full circle and returning to its point of origin. But this circularity of time remained the secret of the gods, and my short life was for me a rectilinear segment whose two ends pointed absurdly to infinity, just as nothing in a garden of several acres reveals the sphericity of the earth. However, certain signs teach us that there are keys to eternity: the almanac, for example, whose seasons are an eternal return to the human scale, and even the modest round of the hours.*

For me, the cycle has now shrunk to the point where it blends with the moment. Circular movement has become so rapid that it is no longer distinguishable from immobility. One would say, consequently, that my days have straightened up. They no longer tilt into one another. They stand upright, vertical, and proudly affirm their intrinsic value. And as they are no longer differentiated by the successive stages of a plan in the process of being carried out, they are so similar to each other that they are exactly superimposed in my memory, and I seem to re-live the same day incessantly.

Michel Tournier, Vendredi ou les limbes du Pacifique, Paris, Éditions Gallimard, Collection Folio, 1982, pp. 218-219.

(Quotation chosen by Irene Whittome.)

Born in Vancouver in 1942, she studied painting, drawing and sculpture at the Vancouver School of Fine Arts, 1958-1963, and lived in Paris from 1963 to 1968 where she worked at the Hayter studio (1965-1968). She came back to Canada in 1968 to settle permanently in Montreal, where she has since lived and worked, teaching drawing and engraving at Concordia University.

In the course of her studies in Vancouver, Irene Whittome drew large insects and is fascinated by the world of bio-organic forms (publication of *The Book of Insects*, Vancouver Art Gallery, 1963). Her stay in Paris was marked by the investigation of gestural and informal art, by production of a large number of drawings, and by the mastery of etching technique. After her return to Montreal, she continued her study of engraving at André Jasmin's studio, and showed a growing interest in papers, and ravaged, incised, perforated, waffled surfaces. Images arise, governed by the introduction of repetitive elements, which establish the primordial notion of structuring by grid. Beyond the recall of identical elements, already the process of accumulation is manifest. Technically, to the traditional engraving processes are added alterations of mounting and exterior elements (for example little knotted strings), which interrupt the two-dimensional character of the surface. The last exhibition devoted uniquely to etching goes back to 1971 at the Art Gallery of Sir George Williams University. Afterwards she used rather lithography, photography, offset and drawing (the four works on paper, *The Times They Are a Changing I to IV*, 1972, in which the artist, starting with a banal motif, for example a peanut or the eye, illustrated a serial structure implying sequence, modification and temporality).

Concurrently, since 1969 Whittome has rummaged in refuse and garbage in search of objects which can be used, formal or referential reminders. She meticulously assembled her findings in a first series of «boxes», co-habited by natural and man-made found objects. The presentation of these works in 1973 at the Galerie Martal (Montreal) constituted a decisive moment: putting into windowed boxes, using repetition, accumulation and quotation, from this time preside over the work's direction. These boxes, hung frontally on the wall, alone or grouped together, present a heterogeneous inventory: *Egg* 1969, *La vieille boîte* 1969-1970, *L'œil* 1970, *La dame, la corde et les deux sacs* 1973 are so many compartmentalized amalgams governed by contrasts of materials (glass/cotton wool, chrome/gauze, cord/plaster, yellow nylon cord/string), unexpected manipulations (photographs in plastic bags, moulded plaster bags in plastic bags), symbolic codes and physical bonds (cords, strings attaching certain elements). Discarded, purchased or reproduced materials re-live after being treated, glued, suspended, compressed. From these wasterelements apparently without connotations emerges the imaginary, with great evocative and unifying force. Certain motifs or themes are manifest, the most convincing being that of the eyes, namely the left eye in the *Portrait de jeune fille* by Petrus Christus, circa 1450, photographed by the artist in 1964, and subsequently reproduced many times (first of all in the *Narcisse* serigraphy which depicts the eye in question eighteen times). Recourse to photography and to mechanical reproduction methods (offset) is a fundamental step in the process of making Whittome's works: landmarks/indications, material to be taken up, modified, altered, reappropriated by drawing and

other means in order to acquire specific plastic values.

Irene Whittome's work is basically auto-reflective, developing and self-critical according to themes recalled and brought forward, but it is also a commentary on and challenge to all art history by its content (quotations, references, found objects) and by its form (autonomous objects, their placement in space on the wall and the ground, the examination of material. In 1973-1974 the artist began to make her own paper, the boxes lengthen, (*112 dans 1*, personalized micro-universe), frontality is affirmed, tactile qualities are added to visual ones. In 1975, the dimensions of the boxes increases, become monumental, the assemblages abandon representative connotations and testify only to the artist's intense work with the materials (wood, latex, string). The palette brightens, white dominates, there still subsist some coloured portions, plastics, wood shavings, hay. *The White Museum I, II, III and IV* at the Galerie Espace Cinq, and *The White Museum V* at the Musée d'art contemporain (*Québec 75*), Montreal, in the autumn of 1975: this work consists of a series of long vertical boxes, white and with windows (factory-made containers) housing wooden poles enshrouded with cording and string, flanked by flat slabs of moulded paper, latex and painted wood. The imagined, autonomous objects, evocative of the fetish or mummy, are the result of the obsessive practice of winding, of repetition and of accumulation. Whittome plays on the natural state and altered states, she investigates primary and essential structure, she imposes her vision concerning the simplicity and the complexity of creative processes. She appropriates space of representation, reflection and conservation which is the museum, by integrating

the two dimensionality of the same objects prolonged on the ground outside the boxes. The isolation behind a window of objects which are enveloped, dissimulating their original material, suggest a symbolism confirmed by the heraldic verticality of these serial structures.

With the series *Paperworks* (Yajima/Galerie, Montréal 1977, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, 1978 and 1979, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 1980), Irene Whittome explores the world of writing through its various calligraphies and typographies. By a slow and patient reorganization of codes, she builds up graphic systems concealing the known and readable and suggesting the study of textures. An imposing amount of technical information (bibliography cards, bills), scholarly information (course notes), literary information (personal letters), mathematical information (logarithm tables) is offered to the viewer-reader bemused by the complexity of schemas of representation: each card, form, paper page covered over with familiar signs (letters, numbers) is put up, stuck with pins, glued on grid or graph paper; certain surfaces are whitened or blackened with encaustic, lines and columns are crossed out, coloured, scratched. A veritable panoply of universal knowledge, set in a tapestry of pins, framed behind windows, these works ensnare and appropriate space and time, divide and regularize the abstract and the infinite.

On the occasion of her exhibition at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts in the fall of 1980, Irene Whittome showed pieces and installations bearing witness to her production during the years 1975-1980. Apart from *The White Museum I and II* and the series *Paperworks II*, two other large groups were featured: *Vancouver* and *La salle de classe*. From

the sculptural object, simple and massive in appearance, to the meticulous, repetitive assemblages, each element of the work rests on introspection and the exploration of collective memory.

Vancouver is a monumental installation, a metaphor of earth and water for a city opening on to the ocean. As well as being an obvious reference to the artist's place of birth and upbringing the ensemble shows a succession of volumes on the ground, void and mass, open and closed, standing and lying down, alternation of positive and negative spaces. Familiar forms (constructed masses, man-made and/or found objects, recycled), a tower, a pseudo-chair, a cart, a dolly undergo a long labour of transformation of materials (essentially bricks of laminated cardboard and planks of wood). Whittome, in her studio-laboratory, imprints her mark, engraves, incises, and oxidizes old copper plates (relics of her past as an engraver), remodels previous works (the *Linhay Devon Totems*, 1977 structures of bound plywood, become encaustic-covered sarcophagi), and uses slow techniques for the application of encaustic (coloured pigments mixed with wax and gasoline) to attain colour registers approximating the patina of time (browns, greys, whites, turquoise green). Related to both geographic terrain (volumes and colours of imaginary landscape) and archeological site (dolmens, menhirs, archaic structures), *Vancouver* is explored in accordance with the artist's personal time, the narrative time of execution of the work and the mnemonic time of the history of the world.

La salle de classe is seen to be a prolongation of the installation carried out by the artist at P.S. 1 in New York at the end of 1979 (*Model One-Work at*

School/Classroom 208). Project Studios One is in fact a former school, now unused, where the classrooms have become open spaces in which artists may work. Initiation room par excellence, *La salle de classe* (desks, black-board, slates, ink pots, rulers) evokes the functions of the mind and the educational institution. A whole referential world connected with learning and apprenticeship is submitted to Whittome's managing passion; with the grid motif, graffiti and western world.

The Whittomesque universe is based on the ritual principles of repetition, accumulation, ordering and serializing. By creating artifacts of contemporary civilization, the artist attempts to delineate traces of the imaginary and bear witness to archetypes of the collective unconscious. In this sense, the works *Encaustics 1980-Encaustiques 1980* (Yajima/Galerie, Montréal 1980), panels with black and white registers representing the cross and the square, and integrating into the work the backing of the wall and light, as well as a recent installation *The Window is The Place from Which Light Enters the Room* (Birmingham, England, spring 1981), herald new horizons.

J.B.

List of Works

1. Pierre Boogaerts
Feuilles I, 1981/82
38 colour photographs
226 cm x 466 cm
2. Pierre Boogaerts
Feuilles II, 1982
59 colour photographs
288 cm x 385 cm
3. Peter Gnass
Mon point de vue, ma vision, 1982
wood, metal, hardware and neon
162.5 cm x 195.5 cm x 317.5 cm
4. Peter Gnass
Proposition d'une projection peinte en forme de polygone — 120 ave. Danièle Casanova — Yvry sur Seine, 1980
lead pencil and acrylic on paper
80 cm x 120 cm
5. Peter Gnass
Projet — projection d'un polygone — Square Albert Schweitzer, Paris 4, 1980
lead pencil and acrylic on paper
80 cm x 120 cm
6. Peter Gnass
Projet de projection, 43 rue Vielle du Temple, Paris 4, 1980
lead pencil and acrylic on paper
80 cm x 120 cm
7. Peter Gnass
Projection d'un polygone perçu de la rue Geoffroy- L'Asnier, Paris 4, 1980
lead pencil and acrylic on paper
80 x 120 cm
8. Christian Kiopini
Untitled, 1981
acrylic on canvas and plywood
243.9 cm x 365.8 cm x 91.5 cm
9. Christian Kiopini
Untitled, 1982
acrylic on tarlatan and plywood
213.4 cm x 182.9 cm x 91.5 cm
10. Christian Knudsen
Tre, 1979/80
mixed techniques on masonite panels
183 cm x 366 cm
11. Christian Knudsen
Untitled, 1981
mixed techniques on masonite panels
124.5 cm x 278 cm
12. Richard Mill
Untitled (290), 1981
acrylic, oil and varnish on canvas
167.6 cm x 167.6 cm
Coll. Galerie Jolliet, Montréal
13. Richard Mill
Untitled (294), 1981
acrylic and oil on canvas
167.6 cm x 167.6 cm
Coll. Galerie Jolliet, Montréal
14. Richard Mill
Untitled (302), 1982
acrylic and oil on canvas
199.4 cm x 245.1 cm
Coll. Galerie Jolliet, Montréal
15. Leopold Plotek
N.E.P. (March of the Nepman), 1981
oil on canvas
200 cm x 183 cm
16. Leopold Plotek
Fontaine des aveugles, 1981
202 cm x 182 cm
17. Leopold Plotek
The lighthouse invites the storm.
1981
oil on canvas
230 cm x 181.4 cm
18. Roland Poulin
Ombres portées, 1981
alumina cement
42.5 cm x 133 cm x 133 cm
19. Roland Poulin
Untitled # 5-82, 1982
charcoal and paper mounted on paper
93 cm x 129 cm
20. Roland Poulin
Untitled # 8-82, 1982
charcoal, gouache and paper mounted on paper
93 cm x 129 cm
21. Roland Poulin
Untitled # 9-82, 1982
charcoal, gouache and paper mounted on paper
93 cm x 129 cm
22. Rober Racine
Le terrain du dictionnaire A/Z, 1980
model
16 cm x 853.4 x 731.5 cm

23. Serge Tousignant
Permutation tracée en arc, 1981
4 colour photographs
56 cm x 251.5 cm
24. Serge Tousignant
Présences, 1981
3 colour photographs, photogram
155 cm x 66 cm
25. Serge Tousignant
Photoglyphes convergents, 1981
3 colour photographs
53 cm x 183 cm
26. Serge Tousignant
Photoglyphes multidirectionnels No. 2, 1981
3 colour photographs
52 cm x 183 cm
27. Irene Whittome
901/le 4 juillet 1982
film 16 mm, b. & W.
(vidéo transcription for the travelling version of
the exhibition)



Gouvernement du Québec
Ministère des Affaires culturelles
Musée d'art contemporain