

ETC



Artifice '96 : Contemporary Visual Art Montreal. An Infiltration of the Urban Landscape by Emerging Artists

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Number 36, December 1996, January–February 1997

La « relève » 1

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/35543ac>

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Publisher(s)

Revue d'art contemporain ETC inc.

ISSN

0835-7641 (print)

1923-3205 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Co-curator, *Artifice '96* & Co-curator, *Artifice '96* (1996). Artifice '96 : Contemporary Visual Art Montreal. An Infiltration of the Urban Landscape by Emerging Artists. *ETC*, (36), 12–15.

MONTRÉAL

ARTIFICE '96 : CONTEMPORARY VISUAL ART MONTREAL. AN INFILTRATION OF THE URBAN LANDSCAPE BY EMERGING ARTISTS

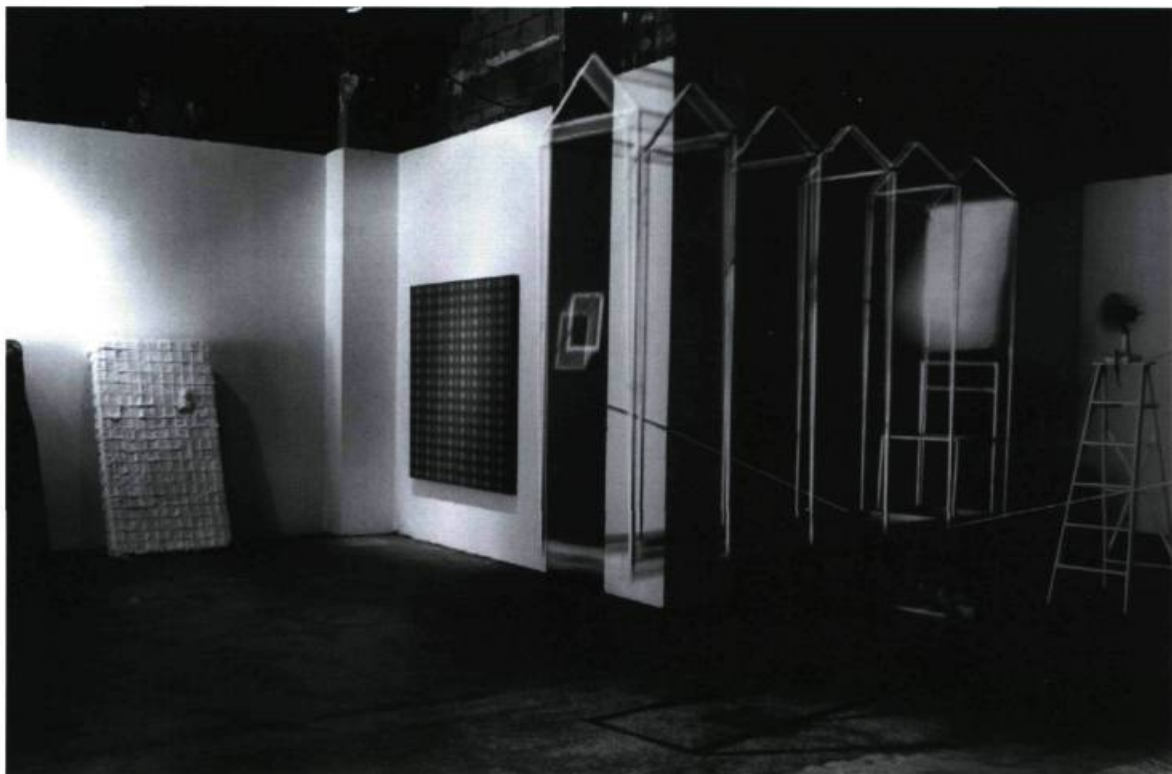


PHOTO : P.T. SIMON

1008, rue Sainte-Catherine ouest. À gauche : Nathalie Grimard, *Série Dortoir : Teddy Bear*, 1991. Au centre, au mur : Allan Switzer, *Untitled 48-1*, 1996. Acrylique sur toile. À droite : Alfredo Abeijon, *Passage*, 1996. Bois, corde, objets enveloppés en papier, tissu, échelle, ventilateur.

While the dialogue of emerging artists may often be clamorous and unruly, there is a degree of experimentation and an attitude of urgency to the work which is rarely apparent among established artists whose productivity has been absorbed into the sanctioned lexicon of art historical and museological discourse.

Curatorial research into the murkier margins of an emerging artistic vocabulary is frequently complicated by unclarified definitions of classification and quality, although such uncertainties are often balanced by the revelation of discovery and opportunities to challenge accepted notions and traditions.

Artifice '96 was a survey exhibition by emerging Montreal artists and targeted to a general public audience in an environment usually associated with commerce and retail. This strategy was intended to simultaneously challenge the ideological and physical structures of contemporary art and mass consumerism.



PHOTO : R.T. SIMON

Au Centre S. Bronfman. Au sol : Andrew Olcott, *The Sofa That Was Once A Seat*, 1996. Corde, résine, bois, reproductions photographiques. Au mur, à dr. : France Choinière, *La cérémonie 1*, 1996. Photos n/b montées à sec sur plexiglass, polymère, structure en acier. À gauche : Bruce Emo, *Untitled*, 1994. Huile, cire sur toile.

Several meticulously planned thematic approaches to the exhibitions, however, were subject to the realities of real estate availability (and politics) on Ste-Catherine street and the rapidly fluctuating number of locations for the show were changing on a weekly basis, almost until the opening date. Unprotected by traditional museological conditions, where academics have flourished in comfort far from the harsh realities of everyday life, the curators and artists of *Artifice* were required to maintain a high degree of physical and theoretical flexibility for survival in the streets. These factors in turn though, generated a level of energy and excitement in tune with the current cultural and urban landscape.

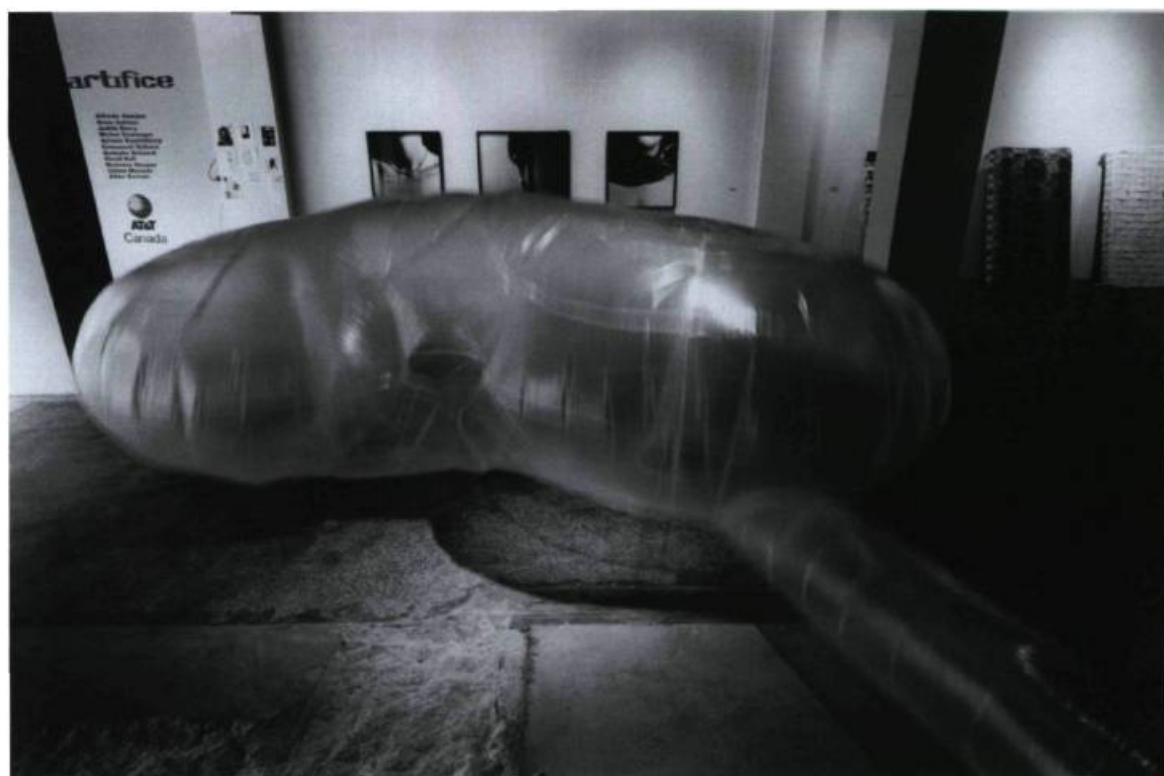


PHOTO : R.T. SIMON

2081, rue Sainte-Catherine ouest. 1^{er} plan : Massimo Guerrero, *Pour travailleurs et travailleuses autonomes*, (détail), 1995. Polyuréthane, tissu, pigment; *Site d'absorption*, 1996. Céramique, plastique, cuvette, bois, huile végétale, vin. À gauche, au mur : Sophie Jodoin, *The Red Series : Portrait of an Unknown Woman*, 1995; *The Solemn Bird*, 1996; *Waiting for a Rose to Die*, 1995. Gouache, latex, fusain sur papier.



2055, rue Mansfield. Au mur : Sylvain Bouthillette, *Fifi*, 1995-1996. Au sol : Lauren Schaffer, *Sans titre*, 1989. Moule en bronze, patine d'urine humaine. Photo : R.T. Simon



1008, rue Sainte-Catherine ouest. Nicholas Hooper, *Even As We Speak*, 1996. Plastique, son, air sous pression. Photo : R.T. Simon



2081, rue Ste-Catherine ouest. 1^{er} plan : Devora Neumark, *word blanket of comfort and care #1*, 1996.
Encre sur papier de soie, fil, chevalet. À droite, au mur : Andrea Szilasi, *NO Foot*, 1995. Collage photographique. Photo : R.T. Simon

The art work then, in this context, and located on street level, was thrust directly into the path of everyday life and audience became as much of a consideration as curatorial theory. (Another concept unfamiliar to many academics). As the thematic arrangements unraveled, the curatorial selection shifted to focus on works with an evocative visual and poetic presence that would not rely on didactic texts and explanations. In other words, almost all structures usually associated with the presentation of contemporary art were dissolved, leaving a direct engagement between viewer and artwork.

This approach, of course, meant artists and artworks were being selected literally up until the last minute. A level of patience and a spirit of adventure were required for participation in such a highly experimental situation.

When several established artists were approached during the preliminary research for the project, the response was generally a deep concern over exhibition conditions, budgetary considerations, time constraints and precise plans – a spirit contrary to the inspiration for the show. Emerging artists were more open to uncertainty and direct participation and, in fact, being of a generation where government subsidies for the arts has been depleted by previous generations, welcomed a spontaneous situation that did not require application forms and long waiting periods.

As the protected environment of the past 30 years for the arts erodes, fresh perspectives and new ideas must be deployed for the survival of the important social, political and cultural issues raised by contemporary artistic dialogue.

It will be up to the current generation of emerging artists to make the transition – a task equally daunting and exhilarating. Hiding in the shadows will no longer be possible.

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