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Voice of the Turtle Andrew Dutkewych, Jean-Pierre Morin, Yves Louis-Seize

Allan Pringle

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Andrew Dutkewych, *La table aux quatorze colonnes*, 1987-1988.
Wood, plaster, pigment; 122 x 153 x 305 cm. Photo: Benny Chou

Many contemporary artists have become dislocated from the continuum of history. Obligated to cope with a splintered reality, they employ the mere shards and bones of a language. Their voices are like that of the turtle — “croaks of isolation and alienation issued from within the vault of a defensive armour” (Jerome Charyn, *The Troubled Vision*). An analogous muffled narration sounds from the recent œuvre of Andrew Dutkewych, Jean-Pierre Morin, and Yves Louis-Seize. Frequent allusion to fragmentation/death, and the exploitation of a simulacrum of myth/mythology are aspects of their work issued from within (or into) a protected (i.e. widely accepted) pluralistic milieu.

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Andrew Dutkewych's exhibition at Galerie Christiane Chassey (January 9-30) consisted of three recent sculptures best described as *melancholicus* in temperament. Two of these were large, ominous, black-lacquered, wooden tables raised almost to chest height by the placement of graphite-coloured plaster human heads under each of the legs. In the largest piece, *La table aux quatorze colonnes*, 1987-1988, table legs and inverted heads became upended column shafts and capitals, placed in colonnade-like proximity, blocking ready

access to the space below. The work was ambivalent in character — neither furniture or architecture, decorative or utilitarian. Symbolic intent remained unstated and open-ended — the head, for example, broad-ranging in connotation, suggested wisdom; spiritual life; the sun; various myths relating to Athene and Zeus, Adam, Œdipus, and Pegasus; not to mention ancient Germanic sacrifices to the gods. The number fourteen traditionally stood for justice and temperance; is associated with David in the Bible; and implied delusion, loss, and sacrifice to Pythagorus. The spectator was confronted with the danger of plunging into an abyss of over-zealous interpretation which would, at the very least, function as a tacet to the play of the sculpture's inspired formal notes.

Dutkewych's work possessed a ritualistic dimension that would appear to have sprung from a neognostic immediacy of mind. Mysteries and sanctums were created, access to which was restricted to an initiated few. The precise relationship between the form of *Memory*, 1987 (the second table) and that of the myth referenced in its 'study' drawing entitled *Daedulus and Icarus*, 1986-1987 (a dyptych, also on display) was recondite. Myth, however, has a nostalgic ring, indicative of some meaningful reality hidden in the depths of our psyche; it is that “ceaseless, untiring solicitation... that all men recognize themselves in an image — [The realization of] a universal signifier.” (Barthes, *Myth*



Jean-Pierre Morin, *Célébrations*. Steel; 166 x 94 x 50 cm. Photo: Daniel Rousel, centre de documentation Yvan Boulerice

Today) The juxtaposition of a table shape with a mythological reference not only reiterated/reified the concept of communal experience but further alluded to an escape from a subjective self into a world of ceremonial value.

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Jean-Pierre Morin also veiled the 'reading' of his sculptures in mystique and called forth lost rites of the ancients. Table became altar.

Morin's second solo exhibition at Galerie Michel Tétrault (April 27-May 29) could be measured in terms of continuity and discontinuity, immanence and indeterminacy — perspectives both complementary and partial. The artist continued his career-long penchant for working in ferrous metal and for dealing with themes related to the four elements — air, water, earth, and fire. In this instance, however, components of cast bronze were introduced to enter into formal dialogue with the now-familiar, rough-burnished and patinaed steel. A current fascination with fire as 'the ultimate agent of transmutation' temporarily displaced the other elements. With demiurgic creative force Morin presented a Heraclitean 'Cycle of Fire' in a tripartite staging. Three, triangular-shaped tables each incorporated flame as symbol. A fireshoot broke out from a table-leg (the earth); a torch lay dying on a table top — a flicker in the wind; vanishing and appearing forms united as a table was consumed by fire. The œuvre whispered of human mortality/immortality providing a vision of perpetual destruction and regeneration — vital, shining, *cholericus*.

Once more an evoked ritualistic dimension telescoped the field of interpretation while evading definite narrative line. A reference to sacrifice was the only certainty. Fire was offered up. Laud we the gods.

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Yves Louis-Seize struggled, as will, with the notion of sacrifice, and ineffable knowledge and power. Under the exhibition title *Fragments de l'autre paysage* (Galerie Noctuelle/Michel Groleau, March 5-26), the artist manufactured a sensibility and an environment suspended in an endless state of fugue. The armour of technology has separated us from the rest of the natural world and has positioned us lately in the condition of exiles. Seven steel sculptures, oxidized a *sanguinicus* hue, imploded into the seductive simulacra of industrialized society's own dark, and negative, sign. A psalm tree, a turtle, a serpent, and a mountain range, all fabricated in metal, prophesied some futuristic era where nature would exist only as an artificially constructed 'memory'. Landscape vista's were reduced to weathered sections of steel plate; plant and animal species appeared as hollow (suggesting some former inner life), archetypal shapes — nature as read by a welder from a blueprint. This reductive posturing and utilization of 'raw' industrial material, in combination with an isolated, and matter-of-fact presentation of works, called to mind a concept of 'warehousing' put forward by American author, Richard Brautigan: "The trout stream was stacked in piles of various lengths: ten, fifteen, twenty feet etc. There was a box of scraps... I went up close and looked... It looked like a fine stream. I put my hand in the water. It was cold." (Trout Fishing in America).

Technology of the quantum order has produced human beings who are part metal part flesh. Dutkewych, Morin, and Louis-Seize are such beings. Their 'offerings' are aphonically adjusted for dissipation in Western society's end-of-millennium crisis of identity. The work remains, nonetheless, highly articulate of emotion. *Melancholicus. Cholericus. Sanguinicus*.

Allan Pringle