

ETC



Interview with Yvonne Lammerich

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Number 41, March–April–May 1998

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/440ac>

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Publisher(s)

Revue d'art contemporain ETC inc.

ISSN

0835-7641 (print)

1923-3205 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this document

Parent, S. (1998). Interview with Yvonne Lammerich. *ETC*, (41), 24–27.

ENTREVUE

MONTREAL

INTERVIEW WITH YVONNE LAMMERICH

Sylvie Parent : *The public has come to know your work for its non-objective and very structured, constructed qualities. Can you explain why they have been so important to your work so far ?*

Yvonne Lammerich : Of course, this is a very complex question, and one that I continue to ask myself. Besides obvious artistic and cultural influences, I am beginning to recognize that one of my most fundamental attachments is to the constructive and non-figurative aspects of my work.

Imagine you grow up in post war Germany, as I did, finding yourself very unconvinced and even highly suspicious of any collective philosophies and ideologies, not to mention collective judgements. It was a beginning without social innocence. And it really wasn't possible, as Adorno said, to 'write poetry'. The residual pain and shame that continues to carry over into successive generations eventually drove me away from being able to indulge in my own personal circumstances, and directed me towards more general questions of consciousness in which, of course, my own consciousness is embedded.

What I realize now is that my work has played a very important part in re-building my faith in human potential, by putting me in a constructive mode. It was a conscious decision, but it was also directed by all those other conscious but unspoken voices that have a claim on my survival. I am not saying that it was without deep questions, just the opposite; there are no questions you can invent that you don't ask yourself, and they are the most provocative questions regarding your own consciousness. Somehow, I intuitively came to make a relationship between consciousness and identity. And I tried to find out a way of understanding this relationship within the context of painting.

The second aspect of the question about non-figuration is that I was not interested in either symbolic or mimetic representation, but rather wanted to confront concrete formal problems, like the phenomena of colour and shape, because of their consequent interdependence on internal and external identities. Also, I grew up with abstract visual thinking in a house full of abstract paintings. Non-figurative representation for me was simply a fact in



Yvonne Lammerich, *That what is not*, 1997. Video projections and installation. Photo: Denis Farley.



Yvonne Lammerich, *That what is not*, 1997. Glass engraved and sandblasted. Photo: Denis Farley.

the world. I was also looking for a way of creating a situation where I could carefully observe the consequences of my actions so as to find interesting questions about identity, questions that permitted me to present alternative propositions or models that might help me to understand the complexity and potential involved in the making of any identity.

S. P. : *What was it about painting that kept your interest more than other practices ?*

Y. L. : Over a period of time I came to identify the problems of identity and consciousness with the problems of contemporary pictorial space. In painting, the representation of perspectival space and its subsequent denial — but nevertheless continued presence — is a powerful model of western thought, but I feel an inadequate model for contemporary consciousness. We are slowly moving away from privileging sight, as being the primary sense, as we come to understand the synchronicity of sensations felt within the body in response to experience of the world.

S. P. : *How is your experience of pictorial space different ?*

Y. L. : For me, pictorial space started literally expanding from the painting, forming projections between the viewer and the site. In fact, the painting was left quite blank, just a surface that was one side of a continuity between the viewer and the object. I started to read my consciousness as a punctuation of that continuity. The question I asked was, how do I give witness to this imposition not just conceptually, or as a reflection, but rather how to create an actual model of the phenomenon ?

I equated continuity, historically and formally, with the cartesian grid on which I imposed my body centre. From that center I drew axial extensions in four directions, like my arms or legs, that displaced the grid. And I only punctuated moments on this grid by the material of paint so as to leave other possibilities open to resonate with and be completed by the viewer. That is the basic structure of my paintings.

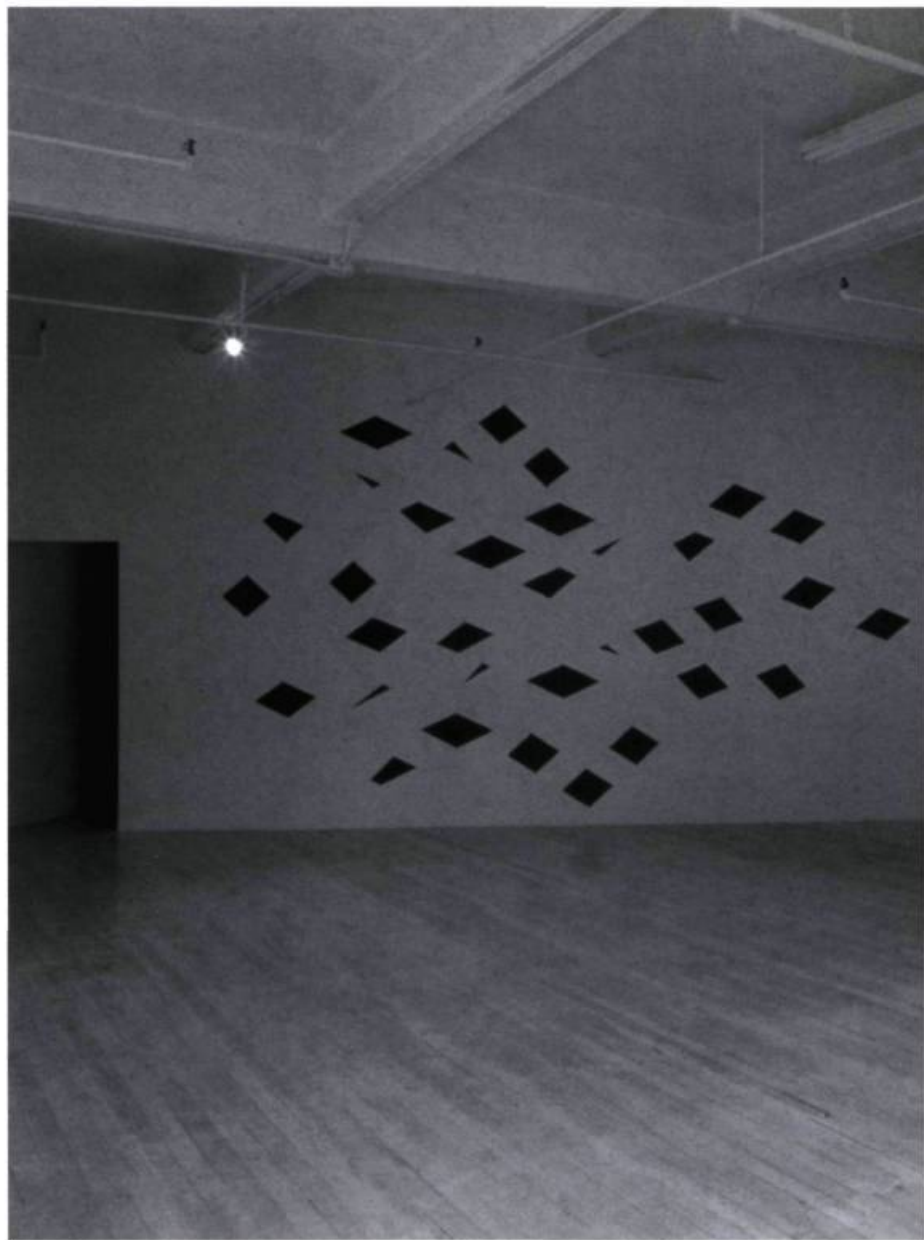
This is partly what made me come to see pictorial space more and more like a radar screen that illustrates successive moments of elements in relationship; whereby the elements are constantly moving or potentially moving parts.

S. P. : *I would very much like to talk about the exhibition at Galerie Occurrence because it seems to me that these moving parts you speak of are somehow integral to the three elements in this exhibition: the projected video as you enter the gallery, the glass work installation, which faces the third element, an important wall-work on the opposite walls.*

Y. L. : You are right of course : as you have suggested, the parts now are no longer different sectors of the displaced grid, but are in fact a number of different practices that fold into each other. In fact, this folding into each other is the pictorial space that I am defining. For example, it is impossible to experience the painting, in the context of that exhibition, without the residual memory of the video or the glass work, etc. For me, the pictorial space has come to mean the field that is created by the architecture that informs the three practices that interact through the viewers sensory and linguistic exchange and by which each becomes defined, understood and experienced.

S. P. : *You mention this idea of the fold that I know has been important in your work; could you please explain and expand on this ?*

Y. L. : The fold was a wonderful discovery. After I had established the basic method of displacing the grid by the axial shifts, I was curious what would happen if I started to introduce aspects of each area, in other words shifts in the grid, to all the other areas, so that they were no longer just connected at the centre but in fact are laterally also interrelated. To my surprise and delight, I saw the grid give the impression of folding. The grid's continuity was not only shifted and ruptured, but appeared to disappear and reappear. It initiated that whole conversation of absence and presence. To anyone making a facsimile of a



fold this is pretty elementary, very different, however, from making a fold out of a proposition. This observation made me think very hard about the relationship of continuity and its rupture in consciousness. It permitted me to picture consciousness as moving from something known across something continuous that we cannot see, or know, towards something new that we are naming.

It also gave "illusion" a different signification, from being something synthetic and so pejorative, to in fact being an integral part of the construction of the consciousness.

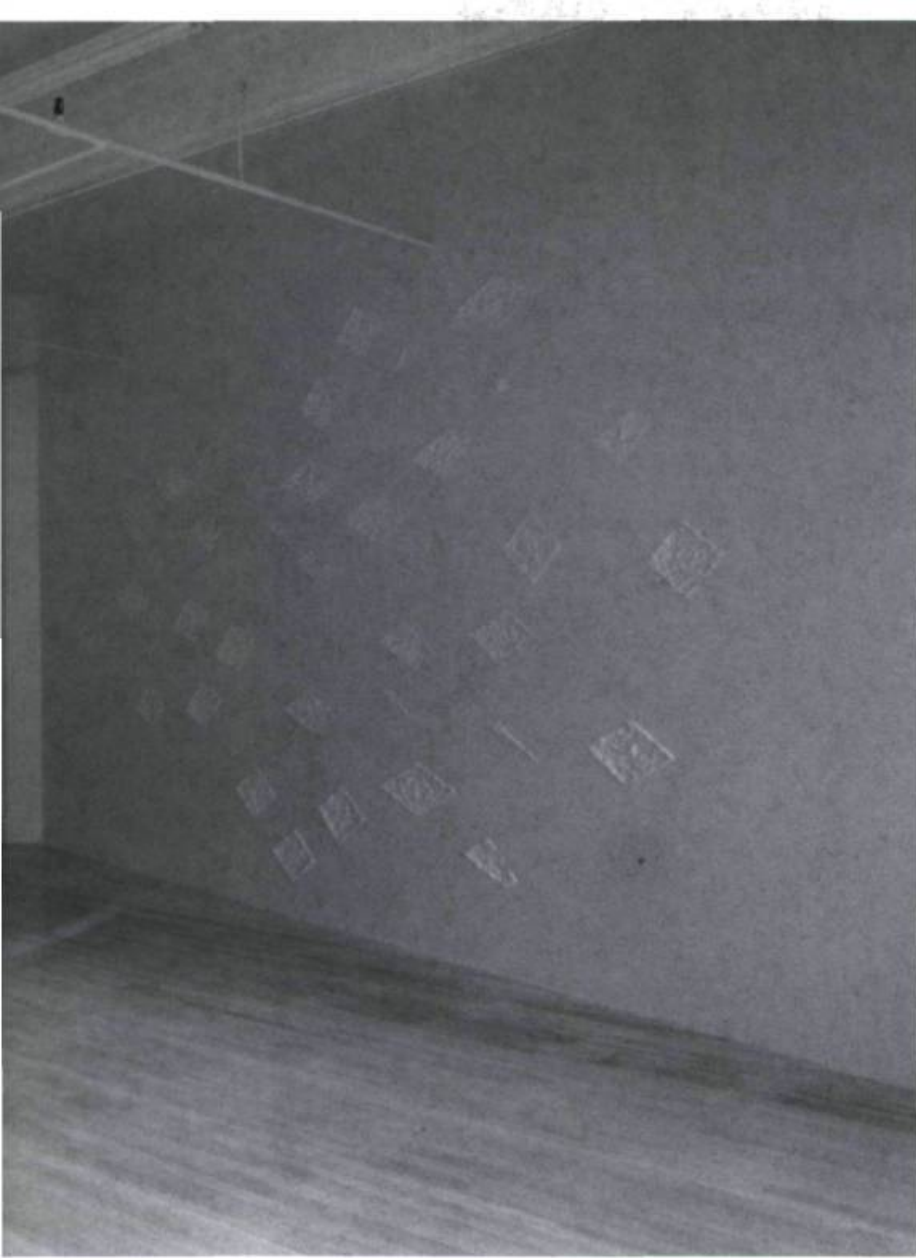
The fold came to mean the necessary surplus of continuity, the excess of potential, and in that potential, always new possibilities or strategies for survival.

S. P. : *You have said that the fold is the result of the interrelationship and interdependence of the parts. Can you be more specific about the interdependence of the video projection, in which a wave creates a column of water, the glass installation with the sandblasted drawing of a column, and the two wall works, one black and one white, that radiate out from a column ?*

Y. L. : About a year before I had the exhibition, I looked at the architecture of the gallery and found the

octagonal columns to be the most interesting aspects. Then I went to Newfoundland, where I had a studio right on the ocean, to observe the idea of water as a liquid continuity; the waves breaking but always rejoining that continuity. I taped a lot of water and, of course, waves. Since the surface of my paintings had a vertical relationship to my body, the whole ocean became vertically projected in my mind, and the wave an active vertical body, not a projected landscape. Of course, video is for me one of the most liquid mediums, and in fact, more the subject than the wave. Water and its wave helped me to speak about video. The direct relationship to the architectural column is, of course, part of it.

The engraved column, whose parts are distributed over three different panes of glass, is another way of speaking about continuity and consciousness. There is only one point, at a particular height and distance, where all the lines of the column come together. The viewer corresponds, in fact, to the axis in the painting, in their connecting the continuity of the column by moving their view to the 'right' point. It's like seeing continuity, or brushing by, for an instant, to catch a glimpse of the possibility of a whole. The column of



Yvonne Lammerich, 1997

water is also always in a state of becoming and undoing.

Again, the wall works are large grid constructions whose diagonal, axial shift or displacement of the grid gives the impression of wave motion. The material of the paint, however, is no longer on the surface but is rather imbedded in the wall while also touching the surface to create an uncertainty about the location of both the surface, and the material. The white wall and, mirroring it, the adjoining black wall form the spectral compass pivoted on the gallery column that acts like the centre of the painting in the context of the architecture. The video and the experience of the glass piece strongly recall the materiality of the painting.

Of course, I am naming only some of the obvious relationships that I have made. However, their intention is to extend through many more possible connections than can be stated in any given moment. The exhibition at Occurrence represents the integration of parts that connect, both laterally and at the centre, creating the perception of multi-dimensional folding, and making me aware of another kind of space.

The reason why I am now integrating specific images and no longer just abstract elements essentially means that

I have no invested claim to particular forms of representation. I want to be free to have access to the elements that become relevant to the exploration of my ideas.

S. P. : *For my last question, I would like to address this new conception of space you speak about. Does that change the way you understand painting ?*

Y. L. : Yes, pictorial space has come to represent for me the conditions of change by 'exchange'. Indeed the latin preposition 'ex' means of space, out of, from, up, above-down, of time, etc, so a painting object feels to me much more fluid, not a fixed surface of frozen moments, but simply a possibility within continuity like the radar screen. This is very different from my previous conception of painting. So, in fact, paintings are becoming very different potential objects for me.

INTERVIEW BY SYLVIE PARENT