

## Survey '69 At the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts

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# SURVEY '69 at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts

by William Vazan

From 300 entrants, twelve works by twelve artists were chosen to make up this year's survey show. Instead of last year's incongruous heap of 313 works by 113 artists. The space permits the viewer to see the works better.

David Giles Carter, the Museum Director, announced in the show's slim catalogue that Survey '69 has assumed a new form in that the jury, comprising Andrée Paradis of Montreal, Editor of "Vie des Arts", Lucy Lippard of New York, critic and author, and Ron Bloore of York University, Ontario, artist and teacher, had merely selected the participants with no intention of awarding any prizes because the diversity of philosophies had rendered them nonsensical. Furthermore, he hinted that the Museum will depart from jured solutions for thematic exhibitions. All to the good, as long as future selectors have the courage to continue in this new direction without wavering to favour already well-travelled paths.

Now-familiar names (Molinari, Snow, and Bush) and schools (hard-edge, pop and colour-field painting) are missing from this exhibition—it is understood that some invited artists may have declined any submission—as the jury has opted for lesser known people and seeks an indicator of today's art orientation.

"Nothing" is the word that best describes the first viewing impression and nothing still remains but in a positive sense, after much thought. The spacing allows one to concentrate on one work at a time and to communicate more intimately with it.

Minimalism has been extended to a point near immateriality. Various elements of the works are eliminated in part and attain such a degree of refinement of the negation, that the viewer, in order to complete the void, composes a vision that is his own.

Colour has become an anachronism with Guy Montpetit's acrylic and Henry

Saxe's metal links being its sole vehicles. Montpetit's multicoloured mecano set is a link to the Pop past. His stylized image is of two mechanized society apotheoses flailing their rounded limbs as they reach across the picture's half.

Deception and play motivate Saxe's green and scarlet "X-tree Link". His soft-looking vinyl-coated angled bars are visually illusory but the viewer by looking at them from various angles is able to understand better.

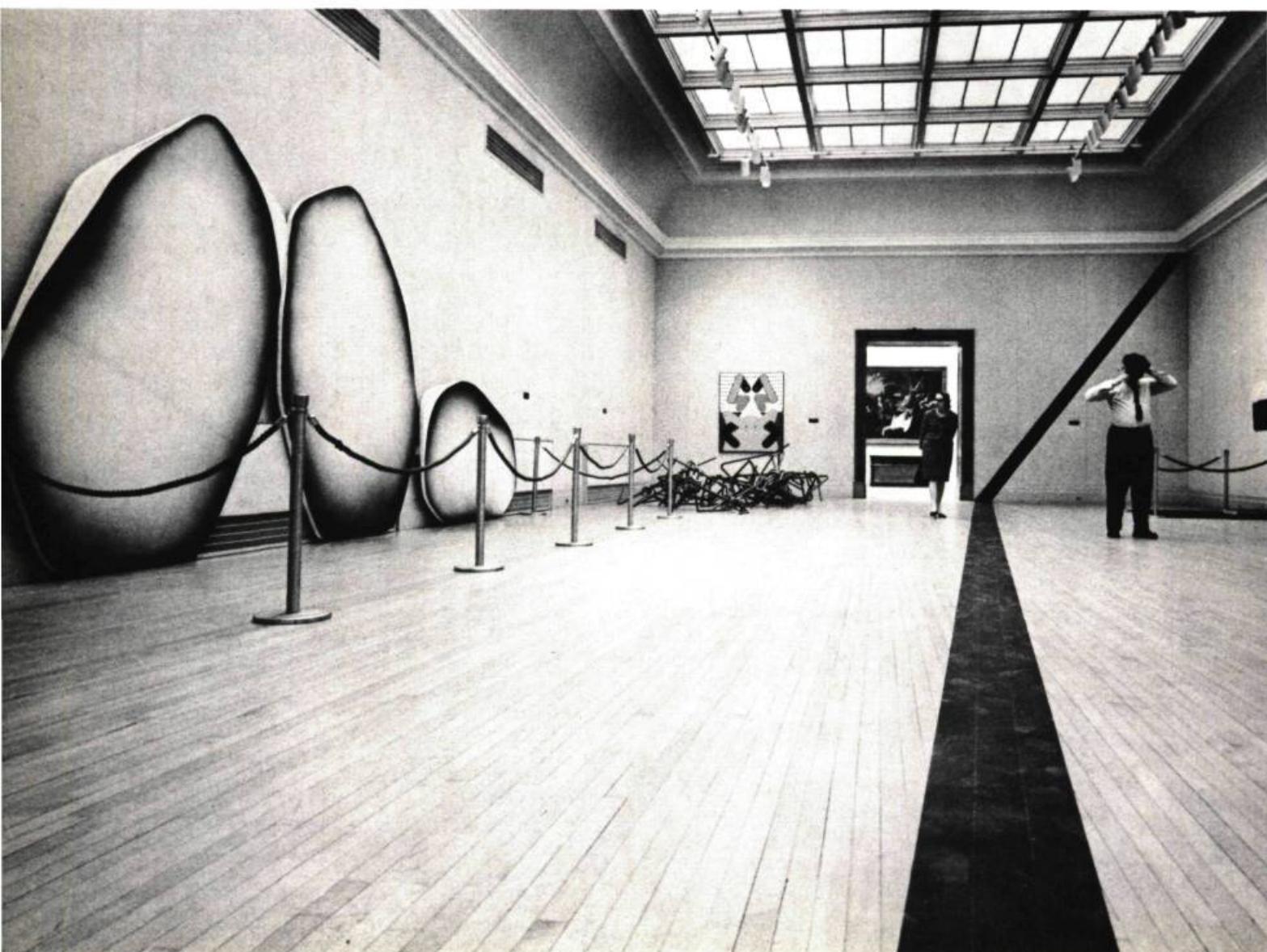
Charles Gagnon's grey brush swathings are near monochromatic and yet his narrow black borders virtually disappear over the painting's edges as we pick up the brisk brush paths, drips and stops. Like an iris adjusting from light to dark and visa versa we notice the colours develop from those shades alluded to.

Three large airy forms are presented by David Gordon. His two-dimensional surfaces are spray-painted ochre and

black towards the sides with some of the edges unpainted and set off from the spray by a sharp contour. Unfortunately the stanchions prevent the spectator from moving in closer to feel fully the proportions and the pulse of expanding and contracting field forms. The eye is drawn to the side to see a shift in space and form; this movement is then arrested by the repeated unpainted edge. It is then drawn back to the center of an ambiguous space and finally, reverts once again to the side to seek tangible elements of the composition.

Although Daniel Solomon's "The Grass is Greener" is closest to what we normally perceive, his concern is the question of reality. He juxtapositions and contrasts a paper-plastic grass mat, natural sod and the acrylic mirror painting of the two in reverse on the wall above. Which is more real? "None of these" is his reply.

Other artists continue to answer in





the same vein. Robert Jack's two part suggestion of a double cross visual pun gives way to a spatial ambivalence between the unpainted cotton duck crosses and the violet stained square corners. Between the two is a narrow secondary cross edge opaquely painted with abrupt transitions between the gradations of shades and tints. The result is that besides creating the tension of a shallow window pane image that moves in and out, the painting's surface tapers to flattened corners.

Michael Morris' neutral coloured work only appears as a painting. His loose edged painted stripes have given way to photo-reproductions of charcoal drawn tubings, with one small area printed 16 times providing the wall-paper opaque black and white perspex, and shallow mirror insets reflect frustratingly incompletely the viewer and room. All is reminiscent of the interior wall decoration of the cinema of the 30's in its palatable decadence.

Light and object are revealed from near transparency to full tan opaqueness by Peter Kolisnyk's six foot high free-standing plexiglass wall. The view beyond, as well as being fragmented by the closely positioned right-angled ribs, is completely hidden as the viewer circles to the ends.

Transparent vinyl draped over 14 foot lengths comprises Ian Wallace's floor piece. His forms also show a concern for the minimal. The taut vinyl streaks' light, reflected from the above skylight and gallery lights, emphasize and accelerate the length, and destroy the natural B.C. wood form underneath.

Carl Beveridge's floor spread of a translucent polyethylene sheet and steel rods invites the viewer to participate in their placement or removal. Although superficial, the forms have more than their visible elements and activate the space above. Force and restraint is felt as the rods hold down the sheet and floor from a pull to vertically.—

N.E. Thing Co's "Talk" was meant not even to be identified in the catalogue and thereby add to its mystery. At certain points on the gallery's walls, small tags inform. "Please ask any museum guard for the N.E. Thing Co. work, and he will tell you. Thank you." Nothing exists but the thought.

The jury has been aware of a shift beyond the minimal: hard-edged, squared, frontal objectivity has moved to a mannerism of extremes. Reduction, elongation, elimination, and ephemerality are disintegrating the object. Concern is more with concept and thought; it is not a negative attitude but an answer to this without turning to litter art or objects of value.

The exhibition has revealed that our attitude should be one of continual expectation. We should insist that the current Montreal commercial galleries and established groups neither ignore nor abuse these new preoccupations with intangible reality.

*Page ci-contre: De gauche à droite: David Gordon, Guy Montpetit, Henry Saxe (au sol), William Vazan, Daniel Solomon. Photo Richmond Jones, Montréal.*

*Ci-dessous: Au premier plan: Ian Wallace; au fond, de gauche à droite: William Vazan, Peter Kolisnyk, Iain Baxter.*

