Vie des arts

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Other Definitions
By Andrée PARADIS

The autumn edition of *Vie des Arts* looks different. It is only a beginning. A magazine that views itself as bearing witness to the multifarious research in progress in the area of artistic creation recognizes the need to harmonize with the tone of the current graphic language, the facets of the phenomenon of artistic productions which this language directly or indirectly influences.

To make a magazine such as ours, keeping in mind its rather unique situation in the North American context, a faithful mirror, and, at the same time, a plea for the future of art, one must take some risks in terms of imagination and fantasy to propose art as a good necessary for the service of men and, in the first place, of the artists who produce it. In a developing society such as we understand it, art is a factor in the growth of the individual. Free art for free men, and an information that is equally free. To inform well is to respect the dignity of the individual, to solicit his participation, his initiative, to have him like and not dread the experience of the work of art.

First an attitude must be taken. Ours is to search for a valid approach to the examination of current positions. Not to refuse the past but to present it in a new light. To be living memory. To use a simple language and question whatever creates confusion and boredom, to combat the defeatist aspect of certain ultra-conservative or outdated ideas, and finally never to forget that formation and information go hand in hand.

The magazine is a product of group work. The people involved have different origins and beliefs. They express themselves freely but in a spirit of lively association. At a time when there is talk of communication and contestation, we want to establish a real communication — in depth — and it seems obvious to us that all true criticism remains an ideal form of contestation. But there is contestation and there is contestation, between destroying to destroy and constructing as men of good will, our choice is made, that goes without saying.

Finally the pulse of a magazine must continually be checked, it beats to the rhythm of all that it reflects. The more art is alive, the more it animates those whose voices it uses.

(Translation by Yvonne Kirbyson)

On Albert Dumouchel
By Jacques de TONNANCOUR

Since last January the death of Albert Dumouchel has made me go back and examine the past often. Albert was a close friend that I thought I knew well, but death makes us discover irreversibly, that from day to day we only lightly touch the surface of people who are close to us.

For example, someone had to tell me when and how I met Albert. I no longer remembered. And yet Dumouchel was not a man to slip but unnoticed. It is my fault, Albert, and not yours !

I recalled all kinds of mental pictures of him, which basically are of only one kind : Albert was goverened by a force which finally always brought together (without necessarily reconciling) his contradictions and his conflicts under a dominant image, under one roof which often blew off from the pressure of his inner turbulence, but which he always set to rights without worrying too much if he were right or wrong.

All his friends, I think, have this impression of him, which was always so striking and which was due at one and the same time to the ram and the bull. The ram according to the zodiac. More like a bull, as far as I am concerned; but a good bull, jovial, not harmful, one that would never have gored anyone. A bull fed on fine herbs !

Deeply rooted in his land owning origins, he was a man of a particular place, (the region of Valleyfield), of a particular world and of a particular attitude towards life and things. And it is through the filter of all that he imbued himself with values drawn from very far away sources without his basic values being in the least upset, diminished, or adulterated.

With his look of a good, simple country priest, wherever he was in the world, in Ljbljana, in Florence, in Vence, or on the shores of the Richelieu, he was identified right away with everything that was true, tonic, and alive. And all that dwelt harmoniously within him not separated, not categorized, and it exalted him to the point where, having made a discovery, it was liable to cause him not to be able to sleep at night. It was in a similar state that one fine clear morning while he was photographing Corsica, rarely visible from Tourettes, his pyjama bottoms slipped off in front of a flabbergasted group, without his even noticing it at the time.

He could experience this frenzied enthusiasm, this trance, when encountering a person, an object, a word, a landscape, or a material, and never did I know the equal of this in anyone else. For example, one evening in August in St. Adolphe in the Laurentians, the whole sky was one immense aurora borealis shimmering and rippling from the north to the south. A sight of a distracting beauty ! Dumouchel, in an immediately psychedelic exaltation, not only saw the aurora borealis as we did, but what is more he also heard them !

An I still wonder if the aurora borealis do not produce sounds, infra or supra, which only Dumouchel could hear. In any case, what seems certain, is that he integrated so quickly a sensation of one order or another, that as soon as the sensation had run through him, it awakened a whole series of sensations. So that the reaction was never simply visual, or auditory, or olfactory, or tactile, but all that at once. He was somatic, pan-sensorial, like a child. And in that I rediscover what seems to me Albert's most essential quality; until the end he retained a child-like soul made more atentive by an enormous and gargantuan power of love tempered by no system or measure of economy whatsoever.

He could have been overwhelming or exhausting for people less extoverted than him; might as well say almost everyone. But his intensity was always quickly contagious. As soon as the first exchanges were made with him, the scope of the other person widened more than usual and he struck an euphoric note in them.

The affection, respect, and veneration that his students felt for him properly reflected the feelings he inculcated in them towards the work to be done; it was not just to execute but to excel. This gift for animation was supported by a complete mastery of the engraver's craft; it confered on him an exceptional greatness as a master creator and thinker.

Being a completely different type of person from him, frugal and linear, rather than torrentially harmonic, I have often wondered how the elements of his expression were able to be recognized, chosen, and reunited in this permanent inner flood. I am still astonished at it while knowing that life is multiform and that each individual has the problems his character presents and the ability to solve them. I know from experience that some fish handle difficulties amazingly well in tumultuous waters, and others do in calm and silent waters. A matter of ecology !

Earlier, I made allusion to Albert's conflicts and contradictions. But ever swimming in this seething, harmonious flood, did he perceive the conflicts in everything that was happening in him ? No doubt. But did he pay attention to it ? In his eyes everything was concomitant and the multiplicity of life was normally composed of affinities and oppositions. I think that he never sought to arrange anything whatever according to the logic that forewarns us against the tumult of life and helps us to find a relative coherence in it. He was not attempting to tame his life. His unconquerable need for confrontation always complelled him to swim in the strongest part of the current even if he had to bear the painfull consequences.

If we know little of his work it is because this very communicative man, always intensively lyrical, had, paradoxically,

a modesty that his explosive exterior did not hint at. He felt that art was an inward act, indeed very private.

The competitive spirit that more than ever tears artists always horrified him. To such an extent that during his last years he had progressively withdrawn from all the exhibition circuits.

Feeling such a defensive attitude growing in him, I experienced a similar modesty with regard to asking to see what he was doing. So I know almost nothing of his production of the last ten years, except for what he told me about it from time to time. And that could be summed up to something like : "You can't imagine, I have gone back to landscapes. And what is more, charcoal too ! It is extraordinary, I no longer know how a tree is made. I have to go out and see. It is amazing what we don't know . . ."

The childlike soul of Albert Dumouchel.

And since his passing, I note that it is amazing what I do not know about this friend who was, however, so close.

Unfortunately, death has closed his eyes on everything that he saw or otherwise felt, and, henceforth, it is in that which he so secretly painted, drew, or engraved, that we shall rediscover Dumouchel.

(Translation by Yvonne KIRBYSON)

The unfinished work of Dumouchel
By Guy ROBERT

It may be useful to recall that it was in 1956, at the age of 52 that Jean-Paul Lemieux took the new direction that led him to his greatest success, and especially which revealed him to us in a completely new light, that of maturity, of the admirable integration of the enduring conquests of the methods of his craft and the constraining force of a gravid sensitivity.

Since 1965 or 1966, I have felt that Albert Dumouchel was on the verge of taking a similar turn, ready to reconcile, in his next works, a certain number of fundamental elements of his plastic language, ready to eliminate other redundant or arbitrary elements. The personalities of Lemieux and Dumouchel were not without some similarities, and they reciprocally declared their sincere esteem. Both were teachers for a long time. In 1934, when he was thirty, Lemieux began to teach; in 1936, when he was only twenty, Dumouchel began his first art workshop. Both were to be influential teachers in the fine arts schools, Lemieux in Quebec city, Dumouchel in Montreal, and their teaching careers continued for about thirty years, in a parallel direction with their careers as artists.

An exuberant nature

The two personalities differ clearly in terms of temperament. Dumouchel was whimsical, fiery, and impulsive; Lemieux, rational, calm, and deliberate. By that I do not mean that Jean-Paul Lemieux is incapable of impulse, indeed even zest; nor that Albert Dumouchel was an incoherent bohemian. It seems to me the two personalities best find accord in the value each one places on authenticity each in his own way however : with Lemieux there is a serene and subtle authenticity; with Dumouchel, a tumultuous and spontaneous one.

I had been interested in Dumouchel's career for a long time and this interest was sustained by a friendship of more than twelve years, and intensified during the last two or three years, when Dumouchel was living in a refuge in Saint-Antoine-sur-le-Richelieu. The first time that we spoke of writing a book about his work was in 1965, when he was preparing his New York exhibition for which he had asked me to write a preface. For some years we had already been discussing collaborating on a comprehensive edition of his prints. But Dumouchel, as usual, blew hot and cold, every so often he reconstructed the universe.

The problem was clear : how to classify this series of storms, how to set up a typology of this chaos ? Albert Dumouchel made fun of my difficulties as a critic, a glass of red wine in his hand, his laugh resounding, his gaze lost in some new and dizzying vision, far beyond the Richelieu or the woods behind the buildings and wheatfields. It was in Rome, where we were travelling with friends in the spring of 1970, that we seriously decided to tackle the project of a little book on his work and also on his life. The project took shape, was completed and was published in hommage to the artist, the teacher, and the friend, by the University of Quebec Press at the end of December, 1970, less than a month before the sudden death of this force of nature.

The point his work had reached

At what point was Dumouchel's work at his untimely death ? Let us summarize its main lines. First, in his more than thirty years of generous teaching, he did two things : he brought warm animation to the world of plastic arts, and he instigated the great interest in print making which he literally founded and propagated in Quebec.

Then his work was also of a dual nature : that of a masterful printmaker, a virtuoso of all the variations of the print, whose reputation was established from Japan to Ljubljana, from Copenhagen to Rio de Janiero; that also of a versatile painter who was equally successful in taking up charcoal, pan, felt pen, watercolour, gouache, oil, acrylic and went as far as making miniatures on 35mm, slide films.

Like other Montreal painters of the years 1940-1960, Dumouchel passed from the scales of a hesitating figuration to the enthusiastic apprenticeship of the Surrealist language, then soon to the enticements and pitfalls of Automatism, and from there to lyric research of lights, textures, materials and reliefs. In 1960, he was one of the most important members of the Montreal School; he was in good health, was spirited and dynamic, one of the most brilliant exhibitors at our galleries and art museums. There is some confusion about him, caused by this ambiguous need to classify phenomena : we label Dumouchel as belonging to the current of lyric abstraction; in *École de Montréal* I get around the difficulty by placing him at the beginning of the chapter on engraving and calling him a sensualist poet with a Surrealist imagination . . .

From 1964 to 1971, Dumouchel pursued his impetuous voyage; moreover his research was voluptuous. First he made a sudden return to the folkloric and sentimental sources of old family albums, at the time when he had a faithful clientele as a painter of vancases with relief and abstract appearance; then, after having mocked these very likeable relatives, he led off an audacious procession of erotic, sometimes troubling works; similarily, his *Liturgies d'Eros*, a great series of paintings and prints in an atmosphere that very astutely combines American pop art and new European figuration confirms once more the dual nature of the artist; finally, during the winter of 1969-1970, the admirable series *Fusains du Richelieu* where the dawn of a maturity finally won with a great struggle appears through the dizzying storm of more than a third of a century.

A tormented man

Albert Dumouchel was still tormented, especially so during the summer of 1970. Troubled for quite a few years by goitre, he decided to have it removed. If we can never truly separate the artist from his work, we can do it all the less with a man as self-willed and as anxious as Dumouchel. The surgical operation took place in September, and the painful convalescence ended with his sudden death in January, 1971.

Thus the work of Dumouchel was abruptly interrupted, at the turning point of what we can consider to be the dawn or the promise of a profound and capable maturity, which finally allowed the artist to invest the experience of a double apprenticeship of thirty years of fertile teaching and of remarkable works into the execution of more sustained works.

Several signs support this intuition. The enthusiasm of Dumouchel had been deeper, less volubile, for several months. He was seriously attempting to put order into his personal life. The preparation of our little book had obliged him, for the first time, to face his life and all of his artistic production, and to draw certain conclusions and resolutions from that. His lengthy and consuming career as a teacher was coming to an end and his imminent retirement allowed him at last to concentrate all of his energy on his own work. We had finally agreed after more than ten years of plans, to set to work on a major edition of the *Song of Songs* ilustrated with his prints. With an infectious joy he was once more plunged into the magic of his childhood, music, and he sang and played the piano every day and once again took up the violins which his father, a maker of musical

instruments, had fashioned for him.

Fate held something else in store for him.

The vague feeling of the precariousness of all happiness, the extreme frailty of all joy often unleashed in the troubled soul of Albert Dumouchel an irrepressible movement of fear, even of panic, that we could compare to what happens in the upsetting *Poème électronique* by Varèse, who about fifteen years ago was composing the strident symbol of a tragic section piercing the Gregorian peace of the medieval monastery of his mechanical siren, of his Kafskaesque shroud. Dumouchel did not need more to make him climb up to the attic where a few minutes later we could hear him playing Mozart or singing some psalm. When he came back downstairs he preferred to listen to koto or to look for a long time out the window, depending on the season, at the Richelieu, the starry sky, the edge of the woods behind the tilled fields, or the snow flurries which he tried to convince us were frightful storms.

He always needed a great deal of room to move and he needed people. His work, unfinished forever, testifies to this, as does the mark left by his death in those who loved him as he was.

(Translation by Yvonne Kirbyson)

The Magic Paradox of Roger Vilder
By Alain PARENT

Besides his kinetic, or we might say, cyclic works, Roger Vilder offers more ambiguous objects, which only begin to move when they are touched : "Jello", "Please Touch". The surprise effect comes from the apparent hardness, the crystal hardness of these objects. The viewer's surprise in touching the viscosity of the silicone is accompanied by various reactions according to the viewer's temperament. Taken off guard, he sometimes displays his anger at having been fooled, disgust with the stickness, or the sensual joy of caressing (ex : the breast). But facing the dimensions of the other works, these objects seem to us to remain on the level of Dada-like games, the new material adding nothing to Marcel Duchamp's "Please Touch".

The art of movement in Vilder's work seems to be based on a paradox : with perfected technical means, similar to those that kineticians traditionally use in their defence of technology and cybernetics, he opposes the mechanized world by turning it away from its principal function : the repetition of effects. From this there are two main results : a new idea of cycles, a new measuring of time. His best known works, the "Contractions," the "Neons", are based on the principle of non repeated cycles; that is to say that the introduction of an element of chance in the mechanical game forbids the latter's being repeated once in several thousand cycles. It thus becomes practically impossible to see a similar evolution of the work twice in a row. Out of a series of eight neons, none move at the same speed; all turn in the same direction, but it is impossible to see the same group movement twice in a row. The pieces in which two white quadrilaterals on black backgrounds break out of shape independently of each other but at the same time, never reproduce the same geometric figure. The slow breaking up of the quadrilaterals produces effects of false perspective, which adds a third imaginary dimension to these moving tableaux, especially in the case of the largest among them, seen in a dim light. In the canvases entitled "Pulsations", although the speed of the optical meshing may be controlled by the viewer, the cycle is uniformly repeated, but the effect is far from being monotonous, for, according to the speed, the disks group themselves into series to form undulation on the total surface of the painting, undulations which are also infinitely variable, as the disks are covered by metal or painted : in the first case, the metal set overhanging on each disk, creates in the viewer a visual pulsation, which is increased with the painted disks by contrasting colours, each colour having a tendency to regroup in the eye of the viewer into a whole : there is conflict between the two moving colours, from which comes the optical effect.

The notion of cycle is inseparable from that of time, since it is its very essence. Here the time of Vilder's "machines" is exactly the opposite of the mechanical time of the clock, and seems to be an equivalent of human time or rather of the time of nature, which if it obeys the great cycles, never repeats itself twice in the same way. Great art is not to reproduce, but to present equivalences, and Vilder excels in this. His paradox comes from the fact that with mechanical means, those of factories and wrist watches, he resolves the internal contradictions between technique and nature. The element of chance produces transformations, whereas repetition only brings monotony. His objects show that in a world where, according to common acceptance, nature itself is mechanized, the mechanism can become "natural", without for all that, recopying nature. This desire to resolve contradictions goes further; the personal philosophy of Roger Vilder results in the idea of presenting no longer objects but human beings in the natural state, thus breaking every barrier between the world of art and the world itself.

We can find the result of this paradox in the perception of the viewer looking at most of these works. We mentioned earlier that some produce an immediate effect, situated between tactile pleasure and repulsion. The kinetic works do not produce an effect of shock on the surface, but what we might call a magical "insidious" effect. If it is easy to let oneself be captivated by the hypnotic power of moving neons, of "Pulsations", of "Contractions", it is very difficult to leave them.

The power to fascinate seems to reside in the internal contradiction. Thus : contradiction between the crystalline hardness and elasticity of the breast and the Jello, paradox of the neon tubings whose arrangement and movement fascinate the viewer, because, if the curve is the supremely sensual form, the curve or curves in movement, in a "natural kineticism" varying according to certain rhythms, can affect the viewer in the deepest part of himself. In the same way, "Pulsations" in their total effect of undulation have an essential quality of fluidity which it is hard to imagine being produced by an assemblage of metallic pieces. Finally, the viewer caught in the simultaneous but not synchronized workings of the moving quadrilaterals nourishes the secret hope of seeing them inscribed in a parallel direction in each other, for they always seem so close to it. There is humour in this movement which finally consists in breaking the viewer's habit of logical, mathematical reasoning; and the paradox of an impossible geometry in the fictitious black space opposing the habit of the viewer to think in rational terms also produces this magical effect of fascination, of hypnosis, which is rarely found in familiar kinetic works.

Why ? They depend on a deep philosophy which also goes back to abolishing the barriers between art and life, by wanting to have the viewer participate in a game in which he already knows the rules, when these works are the transposition in the most "artistic" way of the more evident manifestations of the modern world : red lights, green lights, city neons, etc . . . On the contrary, the works by Roger Vilder offer the viewer the surrealist game of the diversion from the function of the object; the mechanized world becomes more evocative of nature than its own representation.

In an area where, perhaps more than elsewhere, it is very difficult to create new things, it is astonishing to note the original manner in which Vilder poses the problem of kinetic art. His "magic paradox" earns him the right to be considered one of the best known Canadian kinetic artists, as has been shown by the success of his two recent exhibitions in London and Toronto, in Paris and Ottawa.

(Translation by Yvonne Kirbyson)

Conceptual art, a disturbing change
By Laurent LAMY

Two exhibitions presented under the name "45°30'N — 73°36'W", geodesic coordinates of two areas that housed these two exhibitions (Sir George Williams University, and Saydie Bronfman Centre), took place simultaneously in Montreal last February. Why this name ? Is it a joke ? A whim ? Surely not. It has to do with **conceptual art.** By this title, the artists who organized the exhibition, Gary Coward, Arthur Bardo, and William Vazan indicate that the artist wants to be a witness on a global scale beyond all considerations of nationality, culture and history. Neutral, precise numbers, lacking all emotional connotations, with no reference other than that of the entire network of the geographic system, identify the two exhibitions which complete each other. Certain works were in part in the University building and in part in the Bronfman Centre; for example, seventeen mounds of earth were placed at the Bronfman Centre; every day a pile was transported from this centre to Sir George Williams for the seventeen days that the exhibition lasted.

Although conceptual art raises questions about the entire tradition of art and constitutes a new step with a view to surpassing the state of crisis that painting and the aesthetic object are currently undergoing, the exhibition was largely unheralded save for the important article devoted to it by Normand Thériault in **La Presse.** The exhibition, however, was enriched by outside participation with Dibbets, Haake, Sol Lewitt, and Huebler, men who have been pioneers of conceptual art in New York, London, and Amsterdam.
Today conceptual art is sufficiently established so that it is possible to isolate the art forms which are often related to it and which have a common denominator : the refusal of the plastic work, of the art object. At the time of the Third International Salon of pilot galleries in Lausanne, conceptual art was defined as a "body of research questioning the traditional status of works of art, and notably their character as material objects, and substituting a simple designation, or photographic information, so that the mental attitude and tension of the viewer are themselves central to the aesthetic phenomena".

By way of example, here is what the Montreal artist William Vazan proposed at these exhibitions of conceptual art : in 25 different cities around the world, angles were drawn with 4" black tape. The two sides of the angle each pointed towards two other cities situated near the first. So for a day a zigzag line was made in space that united 25 world museums, a virtual line, obviously. The angles were calculated by an engineer, considering the roundness of the earth. Even if the line is not complete physically and visually, its existence is real in our minds. It is neither more imaginary or real than a border between countries, than air corridors, than the sinuous or rectilinear lines of roads or the trajectories of satellites. Does this line not give us an idea of space, as traditional perspective did, and even better yet ? In another "production", Vazan united eight Canadian museums from the Pacific to the Atlantic.

Spatial discontinuity fascinates Vazan who tries to give space an existence beyond the normal dimensions of perception. No doubt it is in this desire to enlarge the field of perception, to contain the artist's work in a mental activity and limit it to the latter reality, that resides the positive and innovating aspect of conceptual art.

The information, which is self-evident, is integrated in a narrative process that constitutes the work. The documents which render an account of it, the typed page, the sketch, most often photos, intervene only as the established facts necessary to communication, and as simple support of the idea. By that very fact, the artist's point of view is changed and the reader-viewer should adopt this viewpoint if he wants to take part in the new awareness. Beginning with the documents, the viewer retraces the artist's path. The structure of art is indeed questioned : in terms of intentions, the artist seeks more to perceive than to express himself; the work now consists of an idea; the viewer only has to act as an onlooker. He is called on by the artist to understand the relationships between the elements coming from the world, a sort of password. Depersonalized in the established facts, successfully finished by computers, airplanes, cars, and photos, the work is presented as anonymous, even if it is signed, because, beyond the initial conception, it bears no mark of the artist at all. Using the most modern techniques, conceptual art recovers and explores time as one of its primary elements, in the same way as space or language. The work does not refer to a subjective time, like Tinguely's machine which self-destructed according to its own planned duration, but to a referable, objective time. Thus the seventeen piles of earth deposited at the Bronfman Centre on the first day of the exhibition corresponded to the seventeen days of the exhibition. Time is one part of the work, as are earth and the distance between the piles and the two exhibition sites.

Starting with realities that escape us but which are no less real the artist seeks to enclose the concepts : Paul Woodrow has us "see" a mile of string in its entirety, Harold Pearse, the road from Vancouver to Montreal, by photos taken about every 300 miles at gas stations; on the back of the photos are indicated the stops, the quantity of gasoline and the price : a map of Canada shows the stages along the road.

This art, without artistic production, lives only from ideas, and is confounded with the theory which manages to consume it. The theory is no longer only anticipation of the work or awareness after the work, it "is" the work.

If we do not consider the search for predecessors useless, we would have to go to various sources to discover the relationships of conceptual art. We shall recall the cubists whose work was a document testifying to mental research and whose interest concentrated on perception. The idea of investigation of the field of consciousness is also inscribed in the surrealist theories. Recently minimal art which is related very closely to space, has sensitized us to the concept. But the affiliation remains incomplete, difficult to pin down, as it is for Dada, a revolutionnary movement : conceptual art is not the simple contestation of a previous art form, as geometrism was in relation to gestural, for example, or pop which was a healthy reaction against aestheticism.

At each turning in the evolution from the impressionists, with the geometricists, the minimal, pop, new realists, one asked oneself, "is it art ?" The content varied, the forms were renewed. The work remained beyond stylistic choice. With conceptual art it is a question of a change. The structure of art is changed by the project of the artist, by his point of view, by the process of information and not only the content. Its specific nature no longer allows this art to be confounded with poor art, ecological art, environment and art of the event. Like conceptual art, all these forms of art refuse the traditional routes and the sanctification of the work, whether it be signed Picasso, Rauschenberg or Warhol; in all these cases, it has given rise to commercialism, has been assimilated by the system which makes authors demigods, but gods in terms of dollars.

Primarily an art of reaction, poor art uses original materials : water, earth, or the most depreciated materials, beams, string, cardboard, hay, stones, coal, and even dogfood. In opposition to Partridge who went beyond the nail, Hurtubise, neon, Micheline Beauchemin, nylon, the adherents to poor art merely show; they use the isolation of the material to remove the viewer's mask, to rid him of the pollution which ruins his vision, and put him back in touch with a cold, hard, truth.

In ecological art, the artist creates directly in nature, digging trenches, tracing forms in fields, colouring the sea, etc., and thus arrives at changing the environment.

All these expressions constantly raise the question, "it is art ?" Why not take up the affirmation of Schwitters : "Everything I come up with is art, since I am an artist", a declaration that Donald Judd significantly echoed at the exhibition "45°30'N — 73°36'W" : "if someone says his work is art, it's art."

Before denying these forms of art and conceptual art in particular, it is perhaps good to remember that the most turbulent movement of the century, Dada, was one of the most fertile. No doubt it did not lead to works in the usual sense of the word — to the great censure of merchants of canvases, moreover — but its spirit is still alive today. The richness of conceptual art will perhaps not reside in works either, but in the affirmation of an awareness of the

radical transformations that took place in the world, in the outcome of upsets that have already occurred in artistic creation, and in its capacity to influence the creative process.

As such we can no longer put it aside. At the most can we regret that in Quebec, contrary to what exists elsewhere in the world, in Bern, Paris, Turin, Düsseldorf, Toronto (Carmen Lammana Gallery), neither ministry nor gallery is interested in the valuable contribution it can make to our time.

(Translation by Yvonne Kirbyson)

Adrien Hébert in a new light
By Jean-René OSTIGUY

To do hommage to the Montreal painter Adrien Hébert (1892-1967), we could limit ourselves to the study of only one of his numerous works whose historic and artistic interest could not be disputed. It is a work that would be practically unknown, if it were not for the reproduction of it made by the magazine *L'Action Universitaire* in 1935[1]. Marius Barbeau confirms an oral tradition when he mentions that the *Port of Montreal*, 1928, is a part of the collection of the Havre Museum, but very few Canadians could identify this painting[2]. Fortunately, the photo that we are using here bears the following inscription on the back : "Adrien Hébert — Elevator No. 2, Montreal — Width 3 ft. — Height 3½ or 4 ft. — Painting acquired by the Havre Museum, France — Act. Universitaire." A label of the National Photogravure, followed by a classification 5 inches wide and 86.5 diagonally confirms it is certainly the photo that Adrien Hébert was sending the editors of his article. The stamp of the photographer Marc Vaux, of 114 Rue de Vaugirard, in Paris, means that the canvas was photographed in Paris, probably at the time of the artist's exhibition at the Bareiro Gallery in 1931.

The painting is signed but not dated, perhaps it may be on the back ? It is impossible to know since the Havre Museum states it does not own a work by Adrien Hébert. The canvas is now considered to be lost. There is one quite like it in Montreal, a rough sketch, an unfinished painting, although it is signed and dated lower right, Adrien Hébert, 1928. It measures exactly 45" x 36". An etching dated 1929 also deals with the same subject. The last two documents let us follow the evolution of a composition to the degree of perfection sought by the artist and suggest a later date than that proposed by Marius Barbeau. The first document even gives an idea of the colour of the lost canvas.

But in itself, this simple photograph invites the observer to a powerful use of space. Two cargo-boats of which the first is crowded with dockers occupy the foreground. Derricks, hatchways, steamer funnels, and trestles animate the surface of the canvas, evoke burning blacks and warm tones. The enormous and majestic mass of the grain elevator supports the foreground. The clouds in the sky rhyme perfectly with the smoke and vapours coming from the ships. This is the work of a man who appreciates mechanized work and business; who understands the great port city of which he is a citizen. Marc-Aurèle Fortin (1888-1970) dealt with similar subjects without ever approaching this rugged and animated idea. In his work, the vapours, smoke and clouds will always only tell fairy tales.

Like Albert Marquet whom he approaches here, Adrien Hébert avoids abstraction and does not want to establish anything on principle. However, he knows the art of the cubists; his friend the French painter André Favory who was influenced by Metzinger during his youth surely spoke to him of it. Hébert is satisfied to be a witness, to give "his point of view" in a style which does not seem at first glance to add much in the way of renewal to pictorial tradition, but which, at any rate, is inspired by a new spirit. Let us listen to him defending his position and explaining his aesthetics :

"Why do you not paint Canadian subjects ? I was asked, at the time of an exhibition I had in Montreal. By nature I am rather calm; however, my patience has limits. This is what I replied. Is the Port of Montreal Canadian or not ?... Most people ask for Canadian subjects; the meaning of this is rather restricted for them; it excludes first, any manifestation of modern life... Are there only virgin forests in Canada ? Are there only sleepy villages ? Is the entire Canadian population asleep and waiting for the end of the world ?... The Belgian poet Emile Vaerheren wrote marvelous verse about the industrial life of Belgium. Did the composer Honegger not compose Pacific 2, 3, 1 ? And to mention one of our own, Robert Choquette admirably expressed the beauty of the locomotive. Why should a painter also not have the right to be inspired from these works ?..."[3]

In writing these lines, Adrien Hébert summarizes the position he adopted as early as 1923. Before that his works had remained very eclectic and were not numerous; they included especially landscapes of Gaspé executed in a post-impressionistic style. The point of view of Adrien Hébert in 1935, if we recall that he summarizes an old attitude more than he announces some new programme, shows us that the roots of Montreal artistic modernism are deeper and more varied than has ever been thought. It is not a question of seeing in Adrien Hébert a revolutionary or a prophet, but of recognizing how, with a wisdom that should be respected, he was able to bring a unique testimony to Canada at the beginning of the twentieth century.

When all around him were turning to the countryside or the virgin forest, he chose to paint the life of the metropolis. He keeps the harbour activity and mechanized work foremost in his thoughts, but he describes well and sometimes elevates to the level of an ikon, the avenues of urban traffic, the work areas of the artist, blacksmith, writer; he depicts the sporting activities of city dwellers, does not fear to compare modern productions with the past. The retrospective exhibition of the National Gallery says all this very well. Thanks to it we have rediscovered a Montreal painter who has been unknown too long. In this article we have presented everything we could about a lost painting and an article unknown to researchers.

NOTES

(1) See Adrien Hébert, *Un point de vue*, Action Universitaire, Vol. I, No 5, (April 1935), p. 10-11.

(2) Marius Barbeau, *Painters of Quebec*, Toronto, 1946; p. 22.

(3) Excerpts from the article already quoted.

(Translation by Yvonne Kirbyson)

A brief chronology of Adrien Hébert, R.C.A. (1890-1967) :

1890—Born in Paris on April 12. Son and brother of the sculptors Louis-Philippe Hébert (1850-1917) and Henri Hébert (1884-1950).

1904-1910—Studies at the Monument National under Edmond Dyonnet and Joseph Saint-Charles; at the Art Association of Montrael under William Brymner.

1912-1914—Studies at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris. On returning to Montreal, he taught at the Monument National before going to the Catholic School Commision. (From 1915 to 1954, he exhibited twenty nine times at the Salon du Printemps and was often a member of the jury).

1916—Exhibition at the Saint Sulpice Library in Montreal. He collaborated on the magazine *Le Nigog* in 1918.

1923—Visit to France where he acquired a new assurance since his production increased in number and quality. On his return he worked a great deal in the port of Montreal and painted a good number of portraits.

1938—A serious auto accident cost him the loss of an eye.

1950—Occupied the paternal studio situated at 34 Labelle street.

1956—Retrospective exhibition (1926-1956) in the Hélène-de-Champlain restaurant.

1963—Demolition of his studio on Labelle street.

Marcelle Maltais
An interview by Marie-France O'LEARY

Q. — Marcelle Maltais, many people, looking at your current paintings, wonder what is the reason for your return to figurative art.

A. — There is no question at all of a *return to the figurative. No more than* there is question in the history of painting of a radical transition at a given time from the figurative to the abstract. There is simply painting. I have been saying this for some time : the figurative-abstract duel dates back several decades. Perhaps it was necessary to simplify, define and label everything when the new experiments of the XXth century were begun. Now everything overlaps. This is the era of synthesis, everything is possible. And painting especially is again possible.

Q. — There has, however, been a transformation in your painting. How did this evolution take place ?

A. — I had been doing research since 1964, a year in which I only drew. I started using colour again in 1965, then in 1966 came the 'fragmentures' (collages), in which I thought I saw ten years of future painting. But how could I find the equivalent, in painting, of these intersecting planes, these 'graphic-colour' dualities, and these irregular forms ? The paintings of 1966-67 thus used the 'fragmentures' as a structural basis and are non-figurative lyrical pictures, more vivid, more varied in planes, and increasingly complex, with necessarily less and less unity. A robin first timidly appeared in a collage at the end of 1965, then in the painting inspired by the collage. There were one or two others in 1966. Then a last one in 1967, the 'Robin in Winter', a contemporary of the Brasilian birds collages, a few complex large paintings in the spring of 1967, and a collage for a future painting, 'Montreal'. There followed a few drawings in Sardinia, at the Moulin d'Andé, a trip to Canada, and a return to Paris. Finally, in January 1968, the painting 'Montreal', a transition canvas. Then came the crisis, complete darkness. I continued to work as a matter of form. But since that day, that is near mid-February in 1968, until mid-August in Greece, I destroyed almost everything.

And all at once, in the most unexpected fashion, I saw ! And there was light !

Q. — Can you describe this flash of light ?

A. — One morning I began, in the simplest way in the world, a small landscape of Hydra from my window. I finished it easily. A natural birth. I know the day it happened I rediscovered a "vision" of the world by painting these views of Hydra. *Which are perhaps more abstract than my previous paintings.* I do not think I am making a mistake on that point in any case.

And, thinking about painting again, I understand many things better. I place Velasquez, Matisse, Uccello, Van Gogh, Vermeer, Bonnard in a different point of view : light. Painting is light.

Q. — *But what does this light mean to* you as a painter ?

A. — Light to the painter is what language is to the writer : the means, the unity of existing communication. Thus to appreciate a canvas (figurative or non-figurative) one must ask if the light is right, beautiful, vibrant, not make a stumbling block of, or linger over the subject, which may or may not be anecdotal, which may or may not be important. Everything is in the light which bursts or does not burst from the canvas. Everything is in the thought, the acute awareness, the eye of the painter, and not the application, as skilled as it may be of the latest fashionable doctrine.

Q. — And do you think it is necessary to have recourse to the landscape to convey this light ?

A. — The need for living landscape as a starting point is a discipline of the proper light. I do not paint this roof, this tree, this stone, I paint the light on this roof, tree, stone. For the landscape contains all the possible planes of all the possible 'fragmentures' and everything is bathed in a single and unique light, the light which is life, which is colour, and *this light is varied and different on each* plane, whether it is part of a roof, a side of a rock, a tree. The landscape is the outline-guide which nothing can replace, to arrive at an encompassing, complete light. The risk is great, for what is more complicated, more impossible than conveying light faithfully in all its effects without tricks on a flat canvas, in planes of flat and pure colour. That is the only true adventure of painting. It is dificult, infinite, and exalting.

Q. — The only true adventure of painting, what do you mean by that more precisely ?

A. — True painting should encompass all the technical experiences, including op, which is basically the end result of the theory of "pure painting" but which is not painting. For the work should be more than a searching visual research, it should be a re-creation of the world, the expression of man at his ultimate point of awareness and sensitivity.

Painting is not : 'expressing oneself with forms and colour'; painting is 'conveying light'.

Q. — Through your painting are you not returning to past conceptions ?

A. — *I am not trying to paint 'the old* way'. I want to recompose my vision of the world according to the skills that I have acquired in the last 15 years, skills of composition, technique, colours, structures, etc. The knowledge that I now have of painting makes me want to magnify the world, 'transfigure' it, abstract its luminous elements in a total purity; that is *to say, I wish to serve pure colour,* without varied effects, effects of thickness, without recording the weakness of my personal subjective moments. My 'transfigurative' painting is no doubt well ahead of the current period. For, the experiments of 50 years are over; it is time to make a synthesis, fill the gap, the void of these last years (a remarkable pictorial poverty) and to paint ,paint with the acquired knowledge of these 'fifty years of abstract art'.

Q. — Then what becomes of the artist's mission ?

A. — His only mission is a re-creation of reality, not by 'realist' (or so-called realist) art but by *concrete* art, that is to say, art that retransmits existing structures in the work, art that reconstructs, reinvents the world, instead of reconstructing and reinventing the subjective "me" of the artist. This whining concept of me-the artist-and-my-anguish is over. The only true artist is the one who, of course, feels this anguish, but overcomes it to reach a serene objectivity which allows him, due to his artistic sensitivity, to convey the beauty, structures, songs and the light of the world in which we live, the world which understands, bathes and *envelops us.*

Q. — What is your ambition, what do you wish to attain with your painting ?

A. — In my painting I would like to enlarge the vision of the world. Recreate it according to my imagination, to make it more perceptible to others, and through a greater vision of the world, arrive at a better understanding of man, who is a part and an awareness of the world.

Q. — Is all art communicative, according to you ?

A. — Art does not have the right to be uncommunicative, for it is essentially communication. No art is hermetic. Work that is closed-in (or purely technical research) is hermetic and, thus, hermeticism should also be surpassed to reach art. Artistic research ceases being sterile when it becomes communicative to everyone, that is to say when it becomes the expression of the world — universal — instead of only being an expression of self.

Q. — What *are your immediate plans ?*

A. — Due to a grant from the Arts Council, I am going to paint Manicouagan this winter. In the spring I shall exhibit in Brussels, then in October 1971, in the *Canadian Cultural Centre in Paris.*

(Translation by Yvonne KIRBYSON)

Fafard
By David ZACK

There are enough art writers who also paint and sculpt. Joe Fafard isn't one of them, though he does write as well as make sculptures of painted plaster, glazed clay, now and then metal, sometimes with a shoe, a purse, or a necklace delicately inserted in the composition.

In February of 1970 Fafard prepared his first and only piece of writing about

art, for a symposium of art students and faculty at the University of Saskatchewan, Regina, held in the drinking rooms of the Kings Hotel for a full weekend.

Fafard worked on his writing for an intense evening, longer than he spends on many a sculpture. He called it "Stud". "Stud" was published by the Lady Bessborough Press, a continuing project of Saskatoon's resident art writer, Clyde McConnell, and has been reprinted since. It tells of the artist's early voyage toward the art world, in grade school and high school, and at college, at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg and later at the University of Pennsylvania in the States, where he really learned what art's about. And how to paddle his canoe up the proverbial creek: "The graduate school was situated closer to Mecca where the names in the canoes paddled between the banks built by the wordmen. The teachers there travelled often to the Mecca and possessed much more precise tools for determining one's chance of catching up to the lead canoe and beating it or joining it. Stud was far behind, but many trips to the Mecca on his own allowed him to soak up quickly the various dialectics that act as catalyst in the process of art making. The farts he picked up from the lead canoes by the time he graduated were still quite fresh. Everyone he spoke to agreed this is what freedom smells like."

At Pennsylvania, Fafard was doing large carved wooden figures, also welded steel, some of it painted bright.

He returned to Saskatchewan to teach. Returned? Fafard was born, September 2nd, 1942, about two o'clock in the afternoon, in the tiny prairie village of St. Marthe. Since 1860 St. Marthe has been inhabited almost solely by his relatives. Joe Fafard is one of twelve brothers and sisters born in a log cabin suitable for an American president. It's now used to store the summer tractor in though the upstairs still shows traces of Fafard family occupancy. The low walls are covered with hundreds of pages from 1940's magazines, showing Shirley Temple and MacKenzie King. The stairs are painted like Dubuffets.

So he learned about village politics, also the politics of the farm. Pecking order, if you please. And going to high school in the big town 15 miles from home, he discovered young what it is to come from a farm, speaking French, and face the big world. He thrived: "The faith that our hero had in the theories proposed to him by such learned men allowed him to apply himself diligently to his tasks and he became a very good student, the best, if not just one of the best. This gave everyone as well as himself a great deal of pleasure. His family was pleased; the profs were pleased. Here was someone who understood and believed what they were talking about. He would be a credit to the school, he would go on to graduate school, he would eventually teach at a university and propound the ideas that have so liberated art."

But what about Fafard the artist, out there paddling to beat the lead canoe (his people were included in the Realism(e)s show in Montreal last year; he's had fine shows finely received at the Moose Jaw Art Museum and the MacKenzie Gallery elsewhere; more to the point he's producing some twenty works a month and continually evolving . . .) ? ? ?

Fafard seems to have been gripped by two main concerns. One is to show people in the art game, art teachers, museum people, critics, strong artists, even art students. To show them, as they live. Clear. With Gallic insult. After all, this is the highest form of compliment, based as it is on understanding born of friendship.

The other takes him back to the farm. Fafard makes animals about as much as people portraits. In the Regina Invitational this year he showed a ceramic sheep and a goat, both intensely realistic, both as metaphorical as Burne Jones "Scapegoat". And an extensive series of different sized dead cows growing out of a decomposing one he saw and photographed on the old Indian camp up the hill from St. Marthe two summers ago. A fine full sized well varnished papier mache cow with ceramic horns and hooves. The subtlety in these works is expressive, also technical. Fafard has made himself a master of glaze technique and ceramic sculpture, though he never took a ceramics course in school. The cows glow in green and purple, red and brown. They merge over into rabbits and flowers, their heads verge on skulls and on human faces. Fafard's animals aren't surrealistic. Intensely expressive of humanity, rather. Some of his people are a bit more than expressive. These are usually ones he looks at with the primitive or farm boy's bias, as strange, somehow a bit more, or maybe less, then human. Or maybe just very human. Fafard is a Virgo, suspicious but more than suspicious. Pure in his concern for truth, true observation that is.

Fafard first approached his portraits of the Regina art scene in plaster. It is these plaster people portraits, life size or nearly life size, that have been most seen and reproduced to date. They have a lot of presence.

When Fafard showed his portrait of Russ at the Burnaby Art Gallery, last Fall, a Vancouver newspaper critic called it a prairie long hair. Russ Yuristy has hair below his shoulders and gold rim glasses. You can see his eyes twinkle before you can tell the length of his hair. You have to know Yuristy, as Fafard does and I do, to see how close the likeness, is. But Fafard has caught something beyond a likeness, and beyond a type.

The portrait of Jed's different, for sure. This is a mustachioed man with his chin in his hand, a bit beaten, looking for a different life. And sure enough, after Fafard made Jed Irwin in plaster, Jed quit his job running the art gallery at the Regina library and moved with his wife Ann to an apple orchard in British Columbia.

Hettie, one time wife of the Regina sculptor Rick Gomez, is the most forthright creation in this series. In plaster she seems bare breasted, but Fafard has painted on a skirt and equipped her with real purse, necklace and shoes to show she's wearing a see-through blouse. Before Fafard finished Hettie's portrait she departed Regina. A year later, after she'd seen herself in newspapers, ARTS CANADA, and at two shows, she met Fafard again. 'You bastard", she greeted him, smiling as she said it.

Among the plasters art gallery and art writer people are least assertive. Maija Bismanis, internationally unrecognized art historian of the Regina faculty, is in blue jeans and a sweatshirt, a meek appealing figure beside the artists in the same group. But none of the group lacks character. Joe's portrait of his son Joël, done before the boy was three, makes him an artist as much as a child. And of course Joël is just that, painting, drawing and making ceramic sculptures beside his father through the day and into the night.

Plaster art people wasn't Fafard's final answer. He spent a while doing photographs. Made the series of the dead cow on 35mm color slides, then developed it in clay. Made Roman style busts of friends not conventionally seen as artists: Larry a mechanic; Ali, noted philatelist; Burt the commissionaire. Did a half-hour film about a lady who lives on the prairie near St. Marthe, tending goats and expressing a philosophy of grass-like growth and moss-like acceptance. Bought in kiln for his mother, whose 12 children are now all past babyhood, and encouraged her to produce funky ceramic sculptures of friends, neighbors, local henhouses. She now works almost as much as her artist son, at making art.

Also, Fafard got an all girl class to sculpt a local town in clay, complete with copulating pets and programmes on TV screens. An all boy class to create a ceramic parade. And encouraged his wife Susan, who comes from a Mennonite community in Manitoba, to resume her student involvement with clay. She now works in her own style, a sort of German naivite compared to Joe's Gallic sophistication. Susan Fafard sticks to her immediate family so far, but not entirely. When Joe feels she's influenced a work, he signs it Fafards instead of his virtuoso signature Fafard.

And in the process of all this Joe Fafard found his group, his resolution, the masterpiece which must be a rung on the ladder to wherever this artist is going. Where might that be? Perhaps the work gives an idea.

This series of well over 20 highly glazed ceramic portraits of Reginese art people began with a portrait of David Gilhooly, about a foot high. Gilhooly came to teach in Regina for two years last year, from California. He was deeply involved in the Funk Art thing there, and of course the beginnings of Nut Art. Here was a man in prairie Saskatchewan who'd been written about in innumerable art magazines around the world, had more than fifteen one man shows, been in several hundred group shows, all by the age of 26. Gilhooly's very natural and full of vigor, besides having received every accolade the San Francisco art scene can offer short of electing a man mayor. The only thing Gilhooly lacks is reverence for local custom. His African beasts in clay and his intricate mythology of frog Greeks,

Egyptians, Atlanteans, Americans, Canadians, was the kind of stimulus every art school needs, but no art school can stand for long. Next year Gilhooly will be guest artist at York University, Toronto. He leaves behind in Regina a flourishing new movement of prairie ceramicists, northern Nut artists. Joe Fafard gilded Gilhooly so he shines like Midas, and put horns on his head. The horns of the ram, as Gilhooly was born in Aries. Then Fafard made Gilhooly again as a pink frog, singing to a bunch of small green frogs in his arms, all smoking joints.

Then he made a pair of Russ Yuristys, one a dour intellectual sitting devilishly despondent on a wood stool. The standing one is the new Russ, turning out a new landscape filled with mushrooms every day, with angel's wings and a blue beard.

Fafard was also perceptive enough to sculpt this writer in two versions. We still speak occasionally, hissing French phrases heard mainly in the back alleys of St. Marthe.

He portrayed Ted Godwin (Ted has been painting tartans for over ten years now and if the Scots ever discover him he'll be rich as a buttered scone) with a clumsy claw in commemoration of Godwin's untiring efforts to get rid of Gilhooly, which of course succeeded. Another local painter, Art McKay, a philosopher on the brink who goes in for brown, got made with his head sticking pink out of a white toilet with real chrome hardware, right hand sorting the turds, left pointing accusingly at the artloving viewer.

Terry Fenton, distinguished assistant to the director of Regina's Mackenzie gallery, critic of abstract art for ARTS CANADA and even ART FORUM, painter of watercolors; Fafard portrayed him fag in one hand, crooked pencil in the other, dragging on the ground writing : "I have the spiffiest office in the Art Museum". On his back is a green bird with tongue flapping out like a Jules Olitsky painting or Superman's cape, an allusion to the effect on Fenton of the visit of a New York critic with a name similar to Green Bird, several years ago. The Terry portrait is facing forward, with his feet shuffling backwards, the same direction the bird is talking.

More : My wife Maija, another California Nut, with her arms supporting the beasts she paints and our dog Woof coming out of her heart. Don Chester, a serious local abstract painter and college wrestler, in a highly colored abstract wrestler's outfit. Frank Nulf, assistant dean in charge of all the arts on the Regina campus and Canada's only Ph. D. in fine arts (from Iowa), looking brown as Gamel Abdul Nasser with his neck almost broken, it pains so. Jed Irwin's wife Ann, now departed with her husband to the idyllic Pacific commune, swollen pregnant with her dress lifted to reveal a Bikini. The child's healthy.

There are at least ten more, just as sharp and well glazed.

Well, you can see beginnings of what Fafard's concern with portraiture has brought him to. He moved a bit beyond the art world proper to portray a judge and prosecuting attorney he had to face to defend himself against charges of illeagally parking outside the art school one day when he was loading clay into his station wagon, a mature Vauxhall, the only car he's ever owned. The prosecutor, known for his attendance of cocktail parties but very serious about his career (the parking tickets amount to two dollars) is shown with the crest of a rooster and a giant white hand sticking out of his doughy stomach. But where would the art world be without outside politics to provide abrasive stimulus ? The judge is very black and very small. And there's Regina's most noted art student, Dick Kruse, who's been in attendance unregistered since 1962 at various universities throughout the world. Fafard saw fit to present him with a pure chrome motorcycle and plastic guitar, and to remove his legs, all in a pile an inch high. Since the portrait was completed Kruse has completed a real playable plastic guitar, filling it with human organs. So Fafard's made a world, which is what many artists are out to do.

André Elbaz's Collages
By Jean AMBROSI

For the true painter, the creator of structures who is master of his palette and certain of his touch, the art of the collage requires what amounts to total amnesia. Very few among the great masters have known how to abstract from their acquired techniques the necessary elements. Matisse himself could not keep his distance from an over-facile draughtsmanship. At most, he was able to lay aside his palette. His collages added to the web of his art but he was unable to escape the entrapment of the basic warp.

André Elbaz, an artist of less than forty years, emerges from his artistic formation. Draughtsmanship, colour, and composition are his juggling tools. His sensibility evolves on a new plane. He denounces the consumer society which weighs upon him and it comes to pieces, like a construction game which goes back in its box. The overused and yet all-powerful symbolism of advertising is exposed and its nakedness becomes laughable; a frightening enemy shed of its armor becoming a puny being overthrown by a snap of the fingers.

Once the spectator comes in contact with this series of collages he experiences within himself the twisted advertising games which attempt to overpower us. Then, a kind of rage against oneself enters into the conscious. How could such crude artifice intrude into our minds, so easily take its effect, and continue to prosper with such impunity ? A desire to cry out and attack as Elbaz has done overcomes us, if only to regain our own voices, but we are left with empty words that speak the orderly and sterile language of mere intellect. We are moved far beyond the strict rememberance of the fragments presented in spite of hastily disposed barriers.

Aestheticism is a kind of fencing which encircles any work of art. Its established structures reassure and please. Through them we are alienated from the work itself, but the collage speaks to us; its force engulfs all abstract conceptions and its peaceful cry is prolonged. Then to escape is a re-birth. Elbaz's collage speaks anew. No talent before him has dug his raw material out of such an intimate environment. Young master painters or sculptors plunder easily into the concreteness of the commonplace. At most they force a new insight upon us. The precious reference would remind us of Warhol or Johns. Forgotten by the author in the bottom of a Moroccan polychrome trunk, the first works of this genre in black and white date back to Elbaz's childhood about 1952.

Elbaz acts on the level of subconscious language. He reorganizes the multi-faceted words that advertising so carefully orders for its particular aims. All his raw material is taken from actual ads. By this expedient advertising is undressed. Its true message rings in our ears and its language takes on the willed Elbazian meaning. The direct language of a sensitive artist; a calm voice, assured and vibrant, tells us that we are fooled. Elbaz is superbly gifted in his implacable revolt for communicating the message of delivrance which he discovered. Only the artist foresees the heavy implications in the innocent sounding advertising message. He takes it apart, destroys it, and returns it to us in the shape of a dream. These dreams, given form and sometimes narrated, to which are attached swarms of associations, simultaneously liberate each of us according to our unique perception.

Sometimes, following the will of a white page, Elbaz ignores the call to destruction and lets himself slide into the dream. The publicity then acts as no more than a pretext and colour tones take on primary importance. A simple, unassuming, almost invisible composition envelops the raw material. We could easily interpret and intellectualize upon the meaning of this page which is conceived in a dream-world for all of us but the lasting factor is the unerring intuition of the artist. The educated mind scrutinizes each of the elements of the dream in search of authenticity-elements which are thoughroughly catalogued in scholarly books - thus, the cultural thirst is quenched and a deep world of wonders opens to the speleological mind.

Past the obvious fads, each one of us releases his share of personal pulsations among the plentiful bounty offered by the artist. The malicious and undifferentiated slavery which clings to us like a plague bursts and disappears. Elbaz leads us to the end of the road through his art. The last steps are left to the self.

(Translation by the Author)

Francesca Vivenza
By Jean-Loup BOURGET

Born in Rome in 1941, Francesca Vivenza has lived until 1970 in Milan. In the favourable setting of a decentralized Italy with a unique tradition of dedication to the arts, she has already had fourteen exhibitions which have made her name familiar to art-lovers. Hence the North-American scene (to-day Francesca Vivenza lives in Toronto) presented her with a challenge — a challenge in more than one sense of the word. Toronto, as we know, is not always well-disposed to those painters, whether European or not, who work outside of directly fashionable movements, lyrical or (above all) geometric abstraction.

Geometric abstraction often contains a quality of reassurance, and nothing is more removed from such an aesthetic than Vivenza's painting which has been reared on European expressionism. At the same time the artist has benefited by her stay in Toronto : she has had before her eyes a kaleidoscope of visual impressions and strange sensations. It is this very meeting, on the one hand of a sensitivity formed in the European pictorial tradition, and, on the other, of a rich North-American subject-matter which is of interest here. The originality of this encounter derives from the fact that the material is not restored in a literal way by the artist. On the contrary, it has been transformed by the strangeness in the spectacle itself as seen by the observing individual. Where pop-art is content with truncated quotation, Vivenza's painting appears as a deciphering of the North-American reality.

Direct acquaintance with Vivenza's canvases will bring the names of Ensor and Nolde to mind. It is perhaps not essential but nevertheless interesting to confirm that the latter are the artist's favourite painters.

But these paintings are anything but imitative. Certainly, there is an echo of Ensor in the grotesquely funereal masks presiding at the **Halloween** dance; elsewhere it is simply the frankness of their colours, their innocence which can extend to violence, which conjure up the work of Nolde. It is a kinship of gesture rather than of subject, or even of form. (Here we are thinking more particularly of the three **Bridesmaids** in their blazing heliotrope gowns topped by scarcely human faces.)

It is important to specify that by "expressionism" we mean not just a style but a conception of painting which is common to Nolde and to Ensor, to Kokoschka and to Jack Yeats, and which Vivenza shares as well. The paradox of this expressionism is that it refuses the imaginary. Imagination's romantic or symbolist flights are rejected. In contrast to these, it is the vision which holds pride of place, and always a vision of reality. Thus we have an art which is simultaneously visionary and real. It starts from the outside world and ends at a spiritual truth, whereas Munch's art is characteristic of the reverse approach : that of recreating a universe from personal phantasms.

Vivenza's subjects are accordingly the usual material of realist, if not anecdotist, painters. The ensemble of eleven canvasses which make up this polyptych of Toronto in 1970, **Chez Trudeau,** testifies amply to this effect. It is a geography which has been experienced before becoming imaginary. The smaller paintings are framed by two vertical panels. The first of these is **Yonge Street,** the North-American street par excellence, with its row of shop-fronts, its side-walks peopled by hippies dressed like Indians — the 'new' Indians, as the anthropologist Leslie Fiedler has shown. On the other side, **High Park** (the **Bridesmaids)** incorporates the perhaps more British aspect of Toronto, the public gardens which serve as platforms for spontaneous, inspired orators and as refuge for eccentric 'characters', a little crazy, a little disturbing, but nonetheless likeable.

These two themes which are struck up on either side are continued and diversified on the two centre levels. Here, the motif of the shop-windows, implicit in **Yonge Street,** is developed. It is obvious that it fascinates Vivenza, probably because of the conflict between its cultural tenor (windows of the year 2000, with their stupendous bargains galore) and its pictorial texture (polluted windows smutty with dust). So we move on from the famished-looking chickens and the eggs at the European market of **Kensington** to **Hercules'** filthy window-pane and then to **Media-One-Stop's** window. The latter two are further high places of that peripheral society which mockingly sports military gear and which sells and reads **Guerilla.** Remember that Vivenza herself defines the artist's role as that of a 'wise spy' within society.

The 'garden'-theme developed shows us the musician **Angels** and the **Witch** with her electric light-bulb hat, more antiquated than terrifying. As the painter says, the brutal note sounded by the **Halloween** panel recalls October 1970. Masked politicians are holding a press-conference in front of Death's microphone. Finally, a philosophical comment makes itself felt. **Progress** is the reflection of a high-rise mirrored in a high-rise, which in turn ... The narcissism of to-day's New World has its correspondent in **Demolition for Progress** where we watch nineteenth-century brick buildings disappear, just as we see the age of Louis XIV being tucked away in Watteau's famous work.

Borrowed from reality, all these motifs are transfigured by a composition which plays freely on oblique lines, on reflections and superimpressions. The viewer is forced to recover an innocence lost to him but natural to the painter's eye. In spite of the stylization of the human forms, the trap of caricature is avoided, and the essential ambiguity of the 'grotesque', with its hidden face of anxiety, revealed. At the same time, the gamut of colours weaves a living texture, not a fabric, but a tissue of flesh.

This polyptych seems to us to be of great interest in that it changes the pictorial art-work back into a public and 'social' phenomenon in the noblest sense : concerned with the community of men. Vivenza's painting, highly accomplished as it is as oil-painting, nevertheless tends towards the fresco. In this way the painter can defy speculators and professional collectors. Vivenza has already had the opportunity to produce a small fresco for an Italian school. Let us hope that further opportunities of this kind will be offered to her, where her talent and her taste for colour, her feeling for life which is joyous and serious, neither sentimental nor farcical, would flower.

From Fresco to 'figurative narration' there is but a step as the practice of the Primitives has often demonstrated. Here we are dealing with a vast area which is being explored at the moment by our contemporary artists. Many forgotten works of this kind by other Primitives are being re-discovered, for example from the 19th century (Moritz von Schwind's **Cinderella**).

The danger inherent in 'figurative narration' is to make concessions to the anecdote, to naive symbolism, to the over-explicit message. Vivenza avoids these pitfalls in her series of four paintings which is somewhat reminiscent of Gauguin (the **Where do we come from ?...** in the Baltimore Museum). The first canvas shows us the lovers' meeting, the second, their loving. The title of the third is **Waiting.** Few painters know how to treat, as does Vivenza, without indiscretion or maudlin affectation, the expectation of the pregnant woman. In contrast, one might mention the deliverate indiscretion of Klimt's **Hope,** counterbalanced by his Byzantine style. In the fourth painting it is a skeleton-baby which the young lovers proudly rock. The brown tones and the decorative patterns of the series express a poetry of acceptance of life and of death which is the condition of life. Here we have the opposite of a poetry of resignation.

A last word on Vivenza as a graphic artist. The majority of 'viewers' can scarcely suppress a certain surprise on finding that the drawings carry the same signature as do the paintings. In speaking of them, we could in fact repeat, but in reverse, what we have already said. Minute in detail, wholly placed on the side of the imaginary, Vivenza's drawings are fantasies like those of the Manierists. They lend themselves rather to individual scrutiny and contemplation than to public presentation. Technique, the **maniera,** seems to speak louder here than the artist's conscious personality. The overlapping of Indian ink and ball-point pen reminds one of the Frenchman Lunven's efforts.

The literary inspiration of these drawings, based on a theme from Shakespeare's **The Tempest** has been a pretext for leafing through books of geological interest and for the resurrection of unknown flora and fauna. The pen freely seeks equivalents to poetic (and verbal) imagery, tracing corals and madrepores where the outline of the female form is also to be seen. It is just because there is no obvious resemblance between the canvasses and the drawings that they

are by the same artist. The imaginary element of the drawings is opposed to the visionary in the paintings as is the palm to the back of the hand.

Recent exhibitions of paintings and drawings by Francesca Vivenza :

March 1971, Toronto (Edward Johnson Building). Oil-paintings : **Chez Trudeau; Life and Love;** and drawings : *The Ocean Will Come,* from Shakespeare's **The Tempest.**

June 1961, New York (Kottler Galleries). Drawings on the theme of T. S. Eliot's **The Waste Land.**

(Translation by Eithne Bourget)

André Biéler painter and sculptor
by Pierre-É. CHASSÉ

A retrospectiv of Biéler's past fifty years as a painter has recently toured Canada

Eight years ago I had the pleasure and the privilege of meeting André Biéler for the first time at his home in Glenburnie only a step away from Kingston. The Biélers live in a warm and lovely house surrounded by stately pines through which the gentle winds of early autumn whisper softly breaking the stillness of the countryside. On arrival we were greeted by madame Biéler, a gracious and charming Montrealer whose endearing smile and welcoming words would disarm the most taciturn man. Although Biéler was born in the country of Klee and Giacometti, he has thoroughly identified himself as a Canadian ever since his arrival here as a boy in 1908. If Guy Biéler, who was executed by the Gestapo during the French occupation, holds a prominent place in our gallery of war heros, André is equally prominent amongst the greatest of our artists. He is a very profound man and a deeply human one who is looked upon with sincere affection and the highest of respect. He is an ageless man whose evolution never ceased and for whom the years seem to give more dexterity and growing energy. As the years go by, his work emerges with renewed freshness and its evocative power grows stronger and stronger.

André Biéler is an erudite but his knowledge owes nothing to the overfed human computer who can only feed back facts and things that too often have never been exposed to the briefest analysis. What Biéler says in his paintings as well as in his sculpture — for he is also a sculptor, a fact almost unknown by the public — is said with eloquence and elegance without ever being melodramatic or anecdotical, two traps which so many artists have walked straight into. Biéler's pictorial and sculptural work is both positive and solid, but never pretentious.

Each new formula begins only after a thorough analysis and a complete understanding of the element to be used. The result being that the successes vastly outnumber the failures. If necessary, the work of Biéler can be divided into several periods although the evolution has been constant without experiencing breaks of any kind. The first period could be called "folkloric" — a word I loathe — and, although individualistic and original, it was above all figurative and one must remember that during the twenties and thirties such names as Pellan, Borduas, Toowne, Bush and Riopelle were unknown and the Canadian public was reluctant to accept anything new or unfamiliar. Art was considered to be frivolous and an unnecessary luxury. We were provincial, prudish, and dull, which is perhaps understandable of a people which was just starting to stand on its own two feet. Fortunately, during the same period Biéler escaped to Europe where he studied with his uncle, Ernest Biéler, a very well known artist in Paris as well as in Switzerland, and later with Maurice Denis and Paul Sérusier. He also met Lurçat with whom his son Ted worked later on in 1953 and with Zadkhine who after seeing a sketch pad of Ted, who was only fourteen then, accepted him in his studio.

Upon his return to Canada in 1926, he settled on the Island of Orleans, at Sainte Famille since it offered him the nearest milieu where man was in full command of nature and nature did not detract from life and man. This led to innumerable sketches, many of which are little masterpieces which he fortunately kept over the years. Looking back on his work in a chronological order, one can easily see an increased assurance in the choice of subjects as well as in the use of material. Strangely enough his work does not reflect the influence of either Sérusier or Denis. In Canada, while Morrice, Carr, Milne and the members of the Group of Seven were gaining recognition, Biéler goes on seemingly unaware of their existence. If his evolution at times appears to be moving forward slowly, it is nevertheless constant and positive, free of any outside influence. In 1930, André Biéler moved to Montreal where he met Jeannette Meunier, whom he married the following year. Since she was an artist in her own right, they both continued to work in their respective studios for a while. It is shortly after this, that Biéler's second period, so to speak, begins. His work is much freer and shows an element of sheer joy and happiness where one can easily detect the presence of his wife, this wonderful woman who completes him and shares his ideas and thoughts which she understands so thoroughly. She has been this sort of companion ever since. In 1936 they moved to Kingston, where André became the dean of art. They have lived there ever since, although making extensive trips across Canada and abroad. At Queen's University, in his new chair, André Biéler soon became professor, promoter, lecturer, and, above all, the champion of the arts, and revealed himself very quickly as a truly convinced and convincing apostle of that faith which only animates the true artist. In spite of his increased activities, he did not neglect his own work and continued to paint. His work seemed to gain more power and although still figurative it was becoming obvious that Biéler was saying somthing in the abstract if only through its power of evocation. Some of the sketches and the paintings of that period show clearly that the artist has a very profound understanding of life and the miseries of war. These paintings are full of energy and movement and turbulence. The war and Guy Biéler's death had a lot to do with this. What may appear at times as humorous at first glance is soon replaced by an underlying element of sadness and nostalgia, for André Biéler is a man of very deep feelings and emotions and not necessarily funny at all. He continues to experiment all the time coming out with works where it is obvious that the artist subdues the technical aspects of his work and the materials he uses to suit what he has in mind. Sometimes he eliminates and simplifies leaving only the essentials. This, however, is to return to his original formula, but with always improved results.

Never satisfied and very inquisitive, he soon decided to invent a new press which he calls "The Twelve Pines Press" in order to force and shape paper and other similar materials into three-dimensional pictures that are both pictorial and sculptural in their relief form with outstanding results. This method was so effective that Richard Lacroix used more or less the same process for his excellent plastic work called "Pitounes".

Perhaps remembering his discussions with Zadkine in 1953 or due to the influence of his son Ted, one of our very best sculptors, Biéler decided to turn to sculpture with extraordinary results. He tackled this medium with enthusiasm. When I saw his first sculptures, I was simply speechless, for there in front of me stood some of the finest sculptures I had seen in a long time in Canada. There was one in particular, which is now in my collection, which impressed me very much. It was a standing form which looked half human and half bird, not unlike some of the things Manzu did for his doors of the Vatican, but definitely better and more powerful. There was something sinister about it which was perhaps only toned down by the golden finish of the sculpture. It reminded me of George Braque's sinister black birds of his last years although it had no resemblance whatsoever to them. I think it is very unfortunate that Biéler should have decided to take up sculpture so late since it is obvious that however small the number of sculptural works he has done so far, they constitute a very important and significant part of the totality of his work.

In 1970, Bélier went back to the island of Orleans to paint another of his parish processions in acrylics, but this time with extraordinary vigour and a touch of frenzy rarely seen in the past. This marks a new return to the figurative but in simplified form where movement and energy and a surprising amount of turmoil emanate from the painting. It also possesses a spiritual quality unequalled in this last "Procession at Sainte-Famille" there is a great deal of poetical charm regardless of the vigorous treatment of the canvas. There is humour but also a certain amount of sympathetic understanding of the life and the human beings which make The Island of Orleans.

Entretien avec Helen Frankenthaler
Par Shirley RAPHAEL

La plus grande ambition d'Helen Frankenthaler — qu'elle réussit d'ailleurs à réaliser dans ses inoubliables tableaux — est de marier dans une même oeuvre d'art la joie intérieure et la discipline extérieure.

Barbara Rose, célèbre critique d'art américaine, considère Helen Frankenthaler comme l'une des principales figures à paraître, au cours des deux dernières décennies, dans le monde de l'art international.

Flood (Inondation), peint en 1967, est l'un de ses meilleurs tableaux et il atteste de la maturité de son travail. Mlle Rose, dans le numéro d'avril 1969 d'*Artforum,* écrivait : « Pour différentes raisons, *Flood* est une oeuvre importante, parce qu'elle réaffirme la maîtrise de Frankenthaler en matière de propositions. Elle est tout ce que l'art des années 60 n'a pas été ... libre, spontanée, extravagante, romantique, voluptueuse, aérée, gonflée d'une joie de vivre totale. Et elle contient une note de grandeur solennelle qui annonce la maturité de style d'une grande artiste qui a derrière elle une longue expérience et qui ouvre un nouveau chapitre dans un style encore riche d'une réconfortante vitalité, mais d'une vitalité enrichie par l'expérience. »

L'art d'Helen Frankenthaler produit un effet particulier : après y avoir été exposé, on se sent plein de vie et en affectueuse harmonie avec le monde entier. C'est un art qui attire comme un aimant ... Une fois, à l'Institut d'Art de Chicago, j'ai vu une oeuvre plus ancienne de Frankenthaler, baptisée *Santorini.* Il s'en dégageait un tel mystère et une telle puissance que je suis retournée la contempler plusieurs fois, essayant d'analyser le pourquoi de cette attirance. Peut-être étaient-ce les couleurs, sombres comme la nuit, mais toujours est-il que cette image ne m'a jamais quittée.

Chaude personnalité

Depuis 1952, Mlle Frankenthaler est connue comme l'une des artistes les plus représentatives de la génération qui a succédé à celle de l'Expressionisme abstrait. Son sens si personnel de la couleur et le lyrisme de son style ont éveillé un intérêt profond chez les critiques, et l'on considère que sa méthode de travail par taches fortement colorées est en grande partie à l'origine de l'orientation prise par la peinture contemporaine de cette tendance.

Mince comme un roseau, grande, vêtue avec élégance ,elle est âgée de 42 ans, parle d'un ton tranquille, réfléchi, et vous serre la main de façon énergique.

D'être femme ne l'a pas du tout desservie. Dès ses débuts, lors de sa rencontre avec celui qui l'a le plus influencée, Jackson Pollock, elle a été prise très au sérieux. Quand je lui ai demandé ce qu'elle pensait des autres femmes artistes qui protestaient au Whitney et de l'article du magazine *Art News* consacré aux artistes du sexe féminin, ainsi que de Louise Nevelson et Georgia O'Keefe, citées, dans des journaux pour avoir dit que le fait d'être femme les empêchait grandement d'être prises au sérieux, elle a répondu qu'elle n'avait nulle envie de discuter du sujet parce qu'elle n'avait jamais été dans ce cas, qu'elle n'avait jamais eu de difficultés parce qu'elle était femme. Son oeuvre rejette ce qui est doux, charmant, joli. Ce qui n'est pas facile pour une femme peintre. Donc, peut-être exprime-t-elle ses sentiments dans ses travaux.

Sérieuse

L'artiste se révèle comme une personne sérieuse, réfléchie. Autant que possible, et de toutes les façons, elle aime être vraie. « Je suis peintre ... et mes tableaux sont l'écho de l'état général de ma personne; ce sont les poteaux indicateurs de la direction que je prends. Tout le monde, j'espère, connaît des moments de retour vers l'enfance jusqu'à l'heure du tombeau. Dans la vie, il faut se sentir bien en vie, au contraire de certains êtres qui vivent mais se sentent morts."

« De nos jours, tant de choses sont désagréables, terribles même. Il faut partager tout sentiment de spontanéité, de joie, de foi dans la vie. Cela peut se faire en fabriquant quelque chose, en montrant quelque chose ou en disant quelque chose. Le tout, c'est d'être au diapason des sentiments et de l'esthétique, et de laisser de la place pour du nouveau. »

Très active

Mlle Frankenthaler est une personne très active, mais qui ne suit pas une routine établie. Elle est mieux à son aise quand elle travaille librement ... Elle peut enseigner, faire des conférences, être prise ensuite d'une rage de peindre; puis, elle s'arrête et fait quelque chose de tout autre. Elle organise son travail mais ne s'en tient pas à une routine quotidienne de 10 à 17 heures.

Comme elle dit, « créer est toujours une lutte; on a toujours des doutes quand on essaye quelque chose de nouveau ». Elle a conscience de courir autant de risques aujourd'hui qu'au temps de ses débuts (pour un peintre tachiste, si le résultat trahit l'intention il faut jeter le tableau). Et, même à présent, après tous les hommages admiratifs qu'elle a reçus, il y a bien des moments où elle doute d'elle-même et se sent prise d'un sentiment d'insécurité.

Mais, elle aime essayer des choses nouvelles. Ainsi, elle a conçu un décor pour un ballet d'Erick Hawkins donné au théâtre Anta de New-York, le 9 mars dernier. Elle aime beaucoup travailler à grande échelle et en profita pour parler de bannières.

Elle a toujours fait de grands tableaux ... son plus grand ayant été peint pour le Pavillon américain à l'Expo 67 de Montréal. Il mesurait 16 pieds ½ sur 33. Un agréable défi, mais tout un problème de réalisation ! Elle pouvait seulement voir l'oeuvre par morceaux, et jamais dans son entier, au fur et à mesure que l'ouvrage avançait. Il lui fallut louer un vieux cinéma et engager une équipe pour constamment rouler et dérouler la toile afin qu'elle puisse y travailler.

A propos de succès

Mlle Frankenthaler ne se sent pas célèbre, même si elle aperçoit de ses tableaux un peu partout où elle va.

Quand je lui ai demandé ce qu'elle éprouvait à l'idée d'avoir eu des rétrospectives au Whitney de New-York et au Whitechapel de Londres, à l'âge de 40 ans, elle a répondu avoir été à la fois surprise et très encouragée.

Selon elle, il n'est pas nécessaire pour un artiste d'être une vedette. Car alors, on se préoccupe trop de son moi et on se met à créer de façon non productive. La peinture se doit de révéler le caractère même du peintre. Sans qu'il puisse, non plus, en détacher l'amour pour les autres êtres.

« Il n'y a ni règles ni programmes qui soient justes ou faux. Toute action comporte sa magie. Tout syndrome est difficile. En chaque être, le subconscient travaille sans cesse; mais parfois, ce subconscient est plus libre d'agir. »

Les diapositives de ses travaux de la fin de 1970 révèlent d'addition de lignes, faites aux crayons de couleur, au crayon-feutre, au crayon, ... à tout ce qui lui convient le mieux.

Grande artiste, elle est également vraie en tant qu'être humain. Elle possède la joie de vivre et sait la partager.

(Traduction de Denise Courtois)

Helen Frankenthaler est venue à Montréal, en février, à l'occasion de son exposition particulière dans une galerie montréalaise et afin de donner au Musée des Beaux-Arts de Montréal une conférence intitulée Parlant de peinture avec Helen Frankenthaler.

Magnelli (1888-1971)
By Jacques LEPAGE

There is no scientific study devoted to the almost simultaneous emergence of new phenomena in different places and situations. Yet it is common to see in the objective as well as speculative or artistic disciplines, discoveries being made within a very short period whose similarity is disturbing. In this way non-figuration appeared in the same period in countries as dissimilar as Czarist Russia, Holland and Italy, the Central Europe of the Hapsburgs, and France. The tidal

wave that broke, from the death of Cézanne to the eruption of Dadaism, upset not only art and taste, but challenged the interpretative structures of esthetic-ism. Picasso, Schwitters, and Marcel Duchamp, these three names establish the break with traditionalism. At the same time, non-figurative painting appeared. Artists like Malévitch and Magnelli, the Delaunays, Kandinski, Kupka, and Mondrian come to the same conclusions, not knowing of one another, separated by sometimes hostile traditions, endowed with apparently incompatible temperaments.

Magnelli has told us[1] of the isolation in which he lived in Florence during the years 1913-1914, when he produced the first of his works in which figuration disappeared : no reviews, no reproductions, no contacts. If his relations with the Futurists were friendly, they were disturbed by the lack of understanding of Marinetti's group towards growing non-figuration. By their adherence to epidermic modernity. Now we must remember that Magnelli who began to paint late, self taught — he liked to say — had fresco painters for masters : Giotto, Paolo Uccello, Masaccio, and Piero della Francesca. His last figurative works reveal this transposed influence; it may be seen in "Théâtre Stenterello No. 3", which is reproduced. The Arezzo frescoes revealed to him "composition in a surface", made him understand, he said, "the interplay of empty and fully occupied space". Beginning with Piero della Francesca, he felt that his art, his pictures, "would always tend towards the architectural". He rediscovered flat tint and removed the anecdote from the anecdotal. He was not far from thinking that the taste for movement's taste, for machinery, proper to the Futurists, was regressive.

That was happening in 1914. After a brief stay in Paris, Magnelli returned to Florence, where he was at the outbreak of the war. The studio that Apollinaire had kept for him in the French capital was never to be occupied. What is more, meeting the friends of the poet, Picasso, Léger, Juan Gris, did not change his mind. "One had the feeling that art should return to creation instead of being an imitation of something. Even cubism, which is magnificent, which is formidable, saw its creators start from an idea of reality; they distorted the object, they transformed it; they wanted to see its four sides. Whereas, for my part, one fine day I wondered *is it possible that I must make some sort of character when I can have the freedom to create a canvas according to the forms that I need within the rectangle of the canvas.* And then I completely removed all that was real, even imagined, and I created canvases, the first abstract canvases."[1]

For forty years painters were to exploit this change in art that would be the great adventure of the first half of the century. Magnelli, like other inventors of non-figuration, would see his work plagiarized for the benefit of followers, who often did not go beyond fraudulent imitation. That matters little. Imitation gives way as quickly as styles. There remain only those who have added to the development of knowledge. Magnelli is eminently one of those. A plastician, he constructed his work strictly, felt repugnance at facility, built with the sobriety of his masters, the fresco painters. It is useful to relate these characteristics to the work of Malévitch in Russia. We note that towards 1909, the creator of Suprematism painted oils with a concision akin to those of Magnelli in 1913. Both, thus seem to reach constructivism by a similar evolution, by the purification of forms, as it were, by a classic approach contrary to Kandinsky, who reached the informal by expressionist lyricism. The route followed by Mondrian was different again, an imperturbable logic led him to an absolute geometricism by the deepening of a formal vision.

But the most uncompromising men sometimes have unexpected repentance. First Magnelli abandoned his haughty serenity : the war came to an end, and was over. Enthusiasm exalted him. A more sensual effusiveness was manifested in his compositions, a tumultuous song overwhelmed him. The end of hostilities liberated in him a generous taste that overexcited colour, impassioned form, which to this point had been so strict. He called a "lyric explosion" the work of this warm period, a relaxation that preceded a questioning of the very meaning of the work of art. Magnelli was to hesitate in the exploration of the possibilities opened by his own approach : he experimented by applying to his research the work of the Futurist, Cubist, and Surrealist painters, without ever giving in to their formulation. A powerful temperament kept him from adhering to whatever was not his fundamental intuition. He experienced these teachings, then moved away from them.

In 1928 he reached an impasse : he stopped painting. With difficulty two years later, he began to draw again, and was reconciled with painting by discovering in Carrara, the language of unpolished marble : with their transfiguration into a series of canvases "Les Pierres", lyricism made a last appearance in the work of the Tuscan painter. Beginning in 1937, the creative tumult was mastered, Magnelli's work reached a state of serenity that even the upheavals of the second world war were not able to shake.

"If one wants to produce something absolute, one must be able to choose what is necessary to realize this vision".[1] As early as 1912-1913, Magnelli deliberately crossed the threshold of tradition, breaking it. He directly created his own language, reinvented a new plastic vocabulary, which the Renaissance and its after-effects had hidden. His choice was definitely made shortly before the second world war, and his work, henceforth, was to join in with the non-figurative trend which held general attention until 1955-60. Without merging with it however. Among the constructivists he remains on the fringe, keeping his distance towards geometricism. A suppleness of form which is not softness, assures his freedom. "The straightest straight line is that produced by the maximum straightening of the curve, ready to bend back."[2] This remark by Closon applies exactly to Magnelli's works. If the rhythm is architectonic in its discretion, it is shaded with a sensiitivity which suits an ambiguous structure. The strength, the firmness of the construction bring daylight to this poetic dawn.

This pictorial language new in its apparent treatment, was related by the obscure routes of heredity, the places he lived, the Tuscan landscape, and Florence, to the sources that Magnelli knew all about : Uccello, Piero della Francesca. We could even go beyond that and follow Arp who thought that "the black, brown and blue of Magnelli's canvases made one think of the colours of frescoes of the first Cretan eras. His works could furnish an equivelent of these majestic and serene decorations". Crete, the Etruscans, Florence . . ., we go back through the ages; recurrent, Mediterranean classicism emerges, more absolute than in the rational renovations of Antiquity. The chromatic as well as plastic equilibrium of Magnelli's compositions participate in this perenniality of a world full of wisdom.

The first Italian non-figurative painter in the sense that we understand that today, Magnelli settled in France in 1939. In the post war period when there were exhibitions of the first "New Realists" Salon of 1939, of Drouin (1947), of Denise René (1949), Magnelli's position became considerable in Europe and in the United States. In 1950 he took part in the Venice Biennial; then all the national museums and the international biennials offered him their galleries. Michel Seuphor wrote, "the most important event of the new post war period was the appearance of Alberto Magnelli.. When the war was over, Magnelli's star rose. He soon became the most important abstract painter in Paris".[2]

With his death, the last man (Sonia Delaunay being quite alive) of the initiators of the new art foreseen by Apollinaire passed away. His kindness, his gracious humour, were mediating between the elders, the explorers of virgin lands, and the generations which, successively, were to profit from their adventure, one of the most original known in the history of art. Magnelli surely occupies a prominent place which history reserves to those who change it.

NOTES

(1) Interview with Alberto Magnelli, by Jacques Lepage, published in part in "Les Lettres Françaises" on March 12, 1964.

(2) Cf. Catalogue "Alberto Magnelli" edited on the occasion of the itinerant exhibition of his works in 1970.

(Translation by Yvonne Kirbyson)

NOTE TO OUR READERS

We deeply regret that circumstances beyond our control prevent our not providing translations of the four following articles on La Danse au Québec, Robert Savoie, Beaulieu de Montparnasse and La Collection Zacks. We trust our readers will understand and accept our apology for this inconvenience. — The Editor.