

Art Price
Métaphysique du métal
Art Price
The Metaphysics of Metal

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Dans un livre qu'il publiait lui-même en 1968, le sculpteur Art Price se révèle comme un poète lyrique. Il est profondément attaché à cette terre qu'est la nôtre. Si l'oeuvre d'Art Price est très répandue, même dans les coins les plus reculés du Canada, l'homme lui-même demeure une énigme, un être difficile à rejoindre. Malgré le volume imposant de son oeuvre, dont la gamme est également variée et vaste, il a réussi jusqu'à maintenant à rester dans l'ombre de celle-ci. Collaborateur de Marius Barbeau et fasciné par les arts indigènes et folkloriques du pays, Art Price en vint à produire des oeuvres un peu trop mimétiques de ces cultures. Bien qu'il se soit libéré de cette influence qu'il subit pendant de nombreuses années,

Pierre-Ed. CHASSÉ

ART PRICE

métaphysique du métal



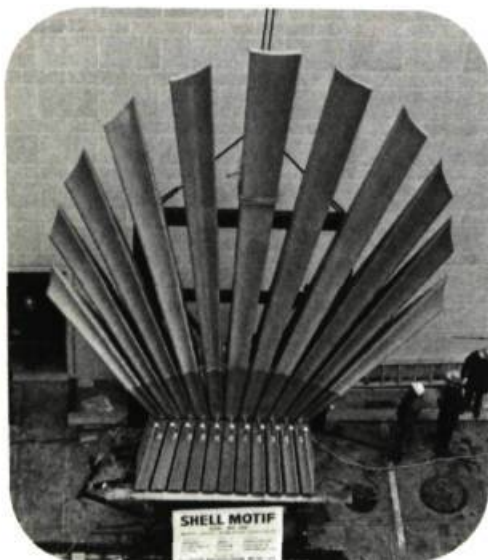
ses oeuvres récentes décèlent encore cet attrait ou cette fascination, mais maintenant avec avantage et dans un style personnel, sans le moindre soupçon d'emprunt ou de plagiat stylistique ou de forme. Une oeuvre très récente que l'on peut voir à l'entrée du nouvel hôtel des Postes, à Ottawa, rappelle, mais seulement pour un très court moment, les totems qui l'occupaient il y a trente ans.

Art Price a tout fait, ou presque tout. Il fut tour à tour dessinateur, décorateur pour le théâtre et le ballet, illustrateur et collaborateur de Marius Barbeau, l'anthropologue et folkloriste canadien, puis caricaturiste, directeur

Roger Roy, soudeur, et Art Price.
(Phot. Andrews-Hunt)



Machine musicale
Structure métallique.
Coll. de l'artiste.
(Phot. Andrews-Hunt)



et réalisateur de films en collaboration avec Norman McLaren et finalement dessinateur et animateur de bandes dessinées et de décors pour le cinéma. Un court séjour à Hollywood l'a convaincu que le Canada offrait une plus grande liberté d'expression que ce milieu. Il revient et, avec sa femme Dalida Barbeau et leur petite famille, s'en va vivre un certain temps en Colombie-Britannique d'où résulte cette longue période d'influence haïda et indienne de l'après-guerre.

Quelques années plus tard, il visite les régions du Nord canadien où il fait de nombreux croquis. L'oeuvre de cette période, tout comme celle de la Colombie-Britannique, constitue en fait un reportage précis de l'ambiance et du milieu dans lesquels Price vit.

Emblème Shell — Motif décoratif pour un édifice à Toronto.
Acier et aluminium; 30' x 20'
(Phot. Shell Canada Ltée)

Ce n'est qu'après ce stade que l'art de Price s'affirme et prend une forme stylistique plus personnelle. Comme Braque et Riopelle bien après, Art Price est fasciné par les oiseaux. A l'époque de la Colombie ou celle du Nord, nous aurions eu des perdrix blanches, le ptarmigan, modelées froidement suivant la formule des Esquimaux, mais aujourd'hui les oiseaux de Price sont ceux de nulle part ou peut-être ressemblent-ils à ceux de notre imagination. Un bronze datant de 1956 et intitulé *Les Oiseaux sur le trottoir* ainsi que *Les Oiseaux de bienvenue* qu'il fit pour l'aérogare de Gander, en 1959, illustrent bien ceci. Encore une fois, comme pour les oiseaux de Braque, malgré le geste précis et la forme élégante et même gracieuse du sujet, un certain élément sinistre demeure. En 1964 ce même élément est présent dans la pièce qu'il fit pour le concours tenu à Montréal pour un monument national et une fontaine intitulée *Not Even a Sparrow Fallen*. Ces formes ailées semblent se débattre frénétiquement contre un défi insurmontable. Tout comme les autres dont je parlais plus haut, cette oeuvre inquiète et nous hante.

Si l'oeuvre d'Art Price commande de plus en plus notre attention, l'artiste avance sans bruit et semble vouloir nous échapper. Comme Zadkine, il laisse son oeuvre parler pour lui. Il a peut-être raison car, si peu loquace qu'il soit, la totalité de son oeuvre vue en rétrospective ne manque pas d'éloquence en nous montrant sans prétention ce long et cahoteux chemin qu'il prit dès 1934, alors qu'il se présente au public en obtenant une première bourse de l'Ontario College of Art. La Société Radio-Canada, au cours des années cinquante, lui rendit hommage en montant un métrage de son oeuvre pour la télévision. Depuis ce temps, Art Price ne chôme pas. Des oeuvres de dimensions monumentales font leur apparition ici et là à travers le pays, de Terre-Neuve à Vancouver.

Mais toujours cette question « Qui est Art Price? Comment vit-il, que

pense-t-il? » C'est un homme charmant, simple, sans prétention aucune, qui a évidemment beaucoup lu et vu, et a su retenir beaucoup. Il abhorre ce qui fait à la mode ou sensationnel autant que le bruit, sauf celui de l'atelier. Peu bavard, comme je le disais plus haut, il écoute et observe. J'ai l'impression que ce mutisme volontaire lui a été grandement utile. Il n'est pas polémiste et, d'ailleurs, il n'en a ni le goût, ni le temps. Il partage ce dernier entre son travail et sa famille. Art Price, c'est un peu notre Zadkine, réalisant de grandes oeuvres mais sans faire de bruit. Chadwick disait de lui lors d'un séjour au Canada: « Surveillez Price, il a de l'étoffe et en devancera plusieurs ». Je n'en doute pas. En attendant, il faut reconnaître qu'il a largement contribué à donner aux édifices et aux ouvrages d'utilité publique une nouvelle dimension esthétique, en les ornant d'oeuvres étroitement conçues et liées à ceux-ci. Il a donné à ces masses de béton, de verre et de métal un élément dramatique. Art Price a fait beaucoup pour identifier cette image du Canada, qui semble nous échapper parfois. Si Price, au tout début, s'exprimait dans un langage qui ne dépassait pas nos frontières, celui d'aujourd'hui est universel. C'est une réflexion de notre temps, de l'homme contemporain, dans cette ère de possibilités et d'aspirations technologiques presque illimitées.

Tant qu'aux projets de l'avenir, Price songe sérieusement à l'exécution de sculptures miniatures en métaux précieux, comme l'or et l'argent. Conçues dans l'esprit de celles qu'avaient exécutées Braque et Dali, il y a quelques années, elles auront toutefois un but bien différent. Ce ne seront pas des bijoux comme les oeuvres de Braque et de Dali, mais bien des sculptures présentées comme telles, malgré leur dimension fort réduite. Si ce projet se réalise, il sera intéressant d'en voir les résultats. Si la formule remonte à l'antiquité, il est tout de même fascinant d'entrevoir ce que cela pourrait donner chez-nous.

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the finished work entirely occupied the available space in the studio of the sculptor. It also took up the other rooms of the ground floor, bringing about the strange sensation of a dwelling created and arranged exclusively in terms of a work of art, which exists and breathes only by it, a live presence in the heart of everyday life.

The impressive dimensions of the sculpture, 29 feet long, 2 feet high and 10 inches deep, obliged the artist to divide the work in three distinct sections which would be re-assembled only upon arrival at their destination. Moreover, Anne Kahane will go to Pakistan, which pleases her greatly, in order to supervise personally the installation of the sculpture in the entrance hall of the embassy, situated in Islamabad, the new capital of the country. And it will be only at this moment that the artist will really be able to perceive the work in its totality, to evaluate the visual impact and the degree of integration of "The Sea" in the architectural whole, in the setting and the surrounding environment which will be its permanent home.

"We are all born of the sea."

Of an abstract character, this work displays itself in a horizontal fluctuating order, an immense fresco animated by a supple and continuous movement where forms and volumes arise, evolve and transform themselves in space evoking the universe unceasingly recreated by the ebb and flow of the sea. Certain volumes with particularly open contours curve inward in space, diminish and melt imperceptibly in long undulating planes. The blond pine, sometimes white under the impact of light, blends harmoniously with the ensemble of the forms, smooth and gentle to touch like pebbles polished by the waters of the sea. Here and there, crevices, slits and cavities of different forms, carved in the depth of the wood at irregular intervals, break up the flat surface and will create, when the sculpture is fixed on the wall, wells of shadow, caverns of secret life alternating from gray to deepest black. In so doing, the artist inserts, in opposition to the three-dimensional demands of the sculpture, an original graphic language of a subtle refinement which will surely charm the oriental soul. Questioned as to the interpretation and the possible reactions of the Pakistanis with regard to her work, Anne Kahane will reply simply: "They will see it through their own culture."

The sculptor will speak to us at length of the sea, of her preference for the coasts of Nova Scotia, of the perpetual movement of the waves and of their continually changing forms, of stones and shells carved by the action of the water. This world literally fascinates her. "We are all born of the sea," she will say at a certain moment with profound conviction; "it is all that which I wanted to express," and her look rests for a long time on each of the components of the sculpture; a long silence follows, almost tangible. "It seems to me", she suddenly said, "that I see my sculpture today for the first time." Then she had an understanding smile, a fraternal gesture for these forms whose constant possessive presence had not ceased to inhabit her for a single moment during the course of the last six months.

A deep compassion

An important landmark in her career, "The

Sea" proceeds very naturally from the whole of the sculptured work of Anne Kahane, undertaken upon her return to Montreal after her studies (1945 to 1947) at the Cooper Union Art School in New York. From the beginning, she will assign a primary rôle to humans: "Human beings are what is most important to me", she insists. "They are what count the most in my eyes." Thus, a great variety of persons will be represented, during the course of the years 1950-1960, into the most ordinary occurrences: *Rain, The Group, Monday Wash, The Bather, Figures in the Field*; the elementary volumes, the pronounced stylisation of the forms, their initial simplicity will evoke a primitive world interpreted with an innate sense of humour and satire, animated above all by a profound compassion. There will follow other works of more abstract conception — narration, folklore aspect disappear — revealing a progression of an increased severity, condensed into a few essential forms, very bare. An inner dynamism and an expressive intensity of strength will characterise the series of sculptures titled *Fallen Figure* and *Broken Man*, created during the years 1963-1965; they have as their central theme a disjointed body, projected in space, suddenly immobilised in its dizzy fall. Almost all these works were produced in wood, pine and mahogany; the idea of construction, cabinet-making, which belongs specifically to wood, interests the artist greatly. She would like to make furniture and would be pleased to see, over her work-bench, a sign with the inscription "Cabinet-maker."

Window of two Worlds

Since 1951, Anne Kahane exhibited her works regularly in Canada and abroad, received the Grand Prize for Sculpture in the Artistic Competition of the Province of Quebec in 1956, participated in the Biennial in Venice as well as in the Universal Exposition in Brussels in 1958 and in Man and his World in 1967; her sculptures are found in several museums of this country, in private collections and in public buildings, such as Place des Arts in Montreal.

A retrospective, grouping her works of the last fifteen years, took place at Sir George Williams University, in 1969. A professor of sculpture at this institution, this new activity gives her satisfaction; teaching encourages varied human contacts which are valuable to her. She will willingly say of her pupils: "They teach me more than I can teach them." Mentioning some great names in contemporary sculpture, Anne Kahane will emphasize particularly the work of Hans Arp; Brancusi and Henry Moore, among others, interest her as well. These affinities will be reflected in a subtle way in her own work.

Two recent works having as theme *The Window* will reflect new preoccupations and orientation. "Is not the window the meeting point of two worlds, the exterior and the interior? It is an interesting world to explore where each will see what pleases him." The sculptor wishes to pursue her research in the silence and the solitude of her studio, apart from short-lived movements and styles. "I love this solitude...", the artist is a being essentially alone", and she will add, "It is often because one does not understand what he is trying to do, and this contributes to his isolation."

(Translation by Mildred Grand)



ART PRICE THE METAPHYSICS OF METAL

By Pierre-Ed. CHASSÉ

Over the past few years Art Price has emerged from a self-imposed seclusion, into one of the major sculptors of our country. One has only to travel across Canada to witness his work either at some of our air terminals or doting some of our public buildings like his most recent one for the new post office building in Ottawa. Although one can still see the impact and the influence Canadian Indian and Eskimo art had on Art Price in the past, what we now see is a much freer expression by the artist. Their conception like their execution is a reflection of that still virgin land which is ours and of its

vastness. He is without question the Canadian artist most closely related to the primitive arts of the country. Like his father-in-law, Marius Barbeau, the well known Canadian anthropologist and historian, the clays of the Haidas of British Columbia like the totems of other Indian tribes of Western Canada fascinated him early in his career. Although their influence was less felt, some of the several birds in flight executed by Art Price over the years show clearly that stages spent in the north had a certain effect on him. Whatever their size, his sculptures always give the impression that they were conceived on a very large scale. This probably explains the reflection of the vastness of the land which he tries and very often successfully conveys. He could be better described as the sculptor of the Canadian wilderness perhaps as Tom Thompson was in his paintings. Neither of them could be properly described as urban artists. Although generally figurative and only a step away from realism, his work conveys, and often with force, thoughts, impressions, feelings and moods very distant from the subject or the form used to achieve this. The subject is strictly an expedient, nothing else. He is somewhat of a perfectionist who leaves nothing to chance. The end product offers little room if any to add or subtract anything.

The road Art Price took from the beginning was a hard one. Painter, illustrator, film director, stage decorator, he came to sculpture gradually. The beginning may seem to some like a form of hesitation. I do not think it was. Circumspection would be a more appropriate word. Looking back at what he has done over the past thirty years, it becomes obvious and clear that Art Price knew what he was doing, what he wanted to do and which path he would follow to do it. From this retiring man, one could not expect sudden impulses or surprising flamboyant gestures. Every approach is rational, properly analysed and never accidental. Spontaneity resides in the conceptual approach but not in the execution which bears clearly the stamp of an artist in absolute command of his material and never the other way around. The great simplification seen in recent works reveals without the shadow of a doubt that every gesture is calculated. This reduction to the bare elements or to the very essence of the subject is not without risks, but with Art Price, the idea or the spirit remains present. It is true that time alone will tell if these works will like all others endure the passing of years, but for what they evoke effectively and the aesthetic qualities which reside in these sculptures, chances are that they will. For a man who is well known not to be very loquacious, the work of the past decade stands by itself as a very eloquent and powerful statement.

For those who wonder what kind of a man Art Price is, the answer is relatively simple. He is a polite and charming man who goes his own way without fracas. He abhors noise except that of his studio, where he spends a great deal of his time. He has little time for polemics or empty arty discussions. The hours of the day which are always too few for this artist are shared between his family and his work which will keep him busy for years to come for there is still a great deal to be said. If he is not very talkative, he is a very keen observer as well as a patient listener. He is well read and can sort out the valuable from the rubbish. He reminds one of Zadkine, the great European sculptor.

Like him he seems to move silently with works mushrooming from one ocean to the other, perhaps silent and looming at first, but soon standing firmly against the Canadian background proud and somewhat defiant. Like Zadkine, he has a deep sense of space and height, using the earth as well as the sky to give a feeling of mobility to his work. Well aware of the relation that must exist between the architectural and the sculptural for works intended for public buildings or similar projects, his work is conceived bearing this in mind. Like Paolo Soleri, the structures of the future intrigue him, and it is clear that he has given it some thought. From what he has done recently, it would appear that he agrees that the functional can and should have aesthetic qualities as an essential condition in its conception or design. With a reputation which is reaching further and further with time, Art Price has done and is doing far more for the Canadian image than we have given him credit for so far. It is Lynn Chadwick who told me not so long ago: "Look out for Price, he will outlast and outgrow a great many." This he may well do. In the meantime we must recognize that he has contributed significantly to transform the generally mundane, large-sized public buildings or utilities into something more aesthetically dramatic.

If some of his early work seemed conceptually confined within a national context, that of more recent years is clearly addressed to a much wider public, well beyond our boundaries. It is a modern language in which the parochial has no room. It seems to be a fairly accurate reflection of this era where the technological accomplishments and its accelerating progress would have shattered the wildest dreams of the thirties. It is also a projection of the contemporary man's way of thinking, of unlimited possibilities. It is not easy to say it and it takes courage to do so. Art Price obviously has it. Regarding the future, although this has not been finalized yet, Art Price is looking into the possibility of executing sculptures in precious metals such as gold and silver. Somewhat similar in concept to those created by Georges Braque and Salvador Dali some years ago, these will be done on a relatively small scale. They will differ from those of Braque and Dali as they will not be conceived and intended as jewelry but strictly as miniature sculptures standing on their very own. Should the project materialize, it should be interesting to see the results.



THE GEOGRAPHY OF BILL VAZAN

By Gilles TOUPIN

The limitations which the artists of former times knew are henceforth abolished. There are no more boundaries, no more preconceived ideology; only a great forward-looking force which takes root in the very mysteries of creation and of man. Art is chaos, and its expansive consciousness makes of it without ceasing, during the course of its historic evolution, the anarchy of chaos.

When I look on my work table at the photographs of the many facets of the work of Bill Vazan, it appears evident to me that this artist continually explores the universe. There are postcards which he has sent me, the book of the *Ligne mondiale*, photos of works of exterior and interior, summaries of videographic achievements, etc. All means are good for him to attain knowledge and dreams... These different tangents of the work of Vazan could make us believe that he is on the lookout for a style which he has not yet found and that his paths of exploration with contradictory appearance, which go from the picture painted on an easel to a form of conceptual art, present no personal identity. This is not the case. His progress has no nonsense about it but possesses, on the contrary, certain unifying principles which we shall try to outline.

Three years at the College of Art of Ontario, one year in Paris where he attends the École des Beaux-Arts without much conviction, to prefer later to hitch-hike through Europe, his return to Montreal in 1962 where he rediscovers in a hospital bed, after ten years of abstention, the joy and the need of creating. A few water-colours, some drawings, will lead him in 1963 toward those oil paintings furrowed by threads of iron like fields of chains which already unconsciously reveal certain structures organization which remind us of bird's eye views. In 1964, small black structured signs on a white background suggest, this time, mock-ups of urban planning as if it were a matter of real