

Rodovan Kraguly et...
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Jean-Loup Bourget

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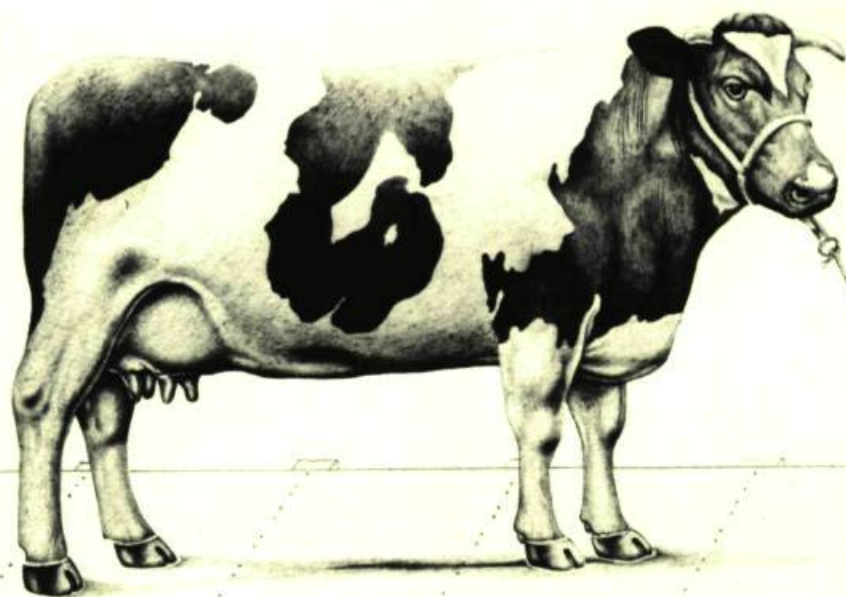
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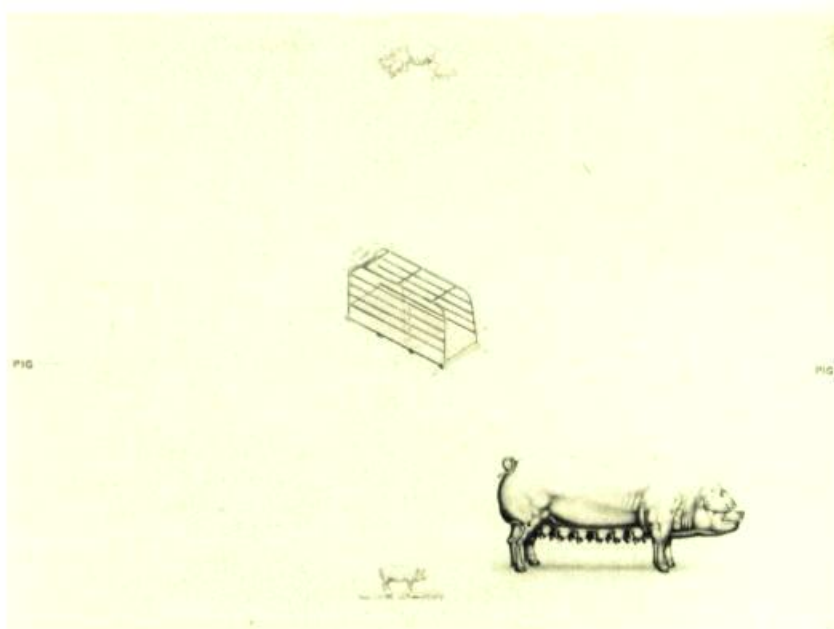
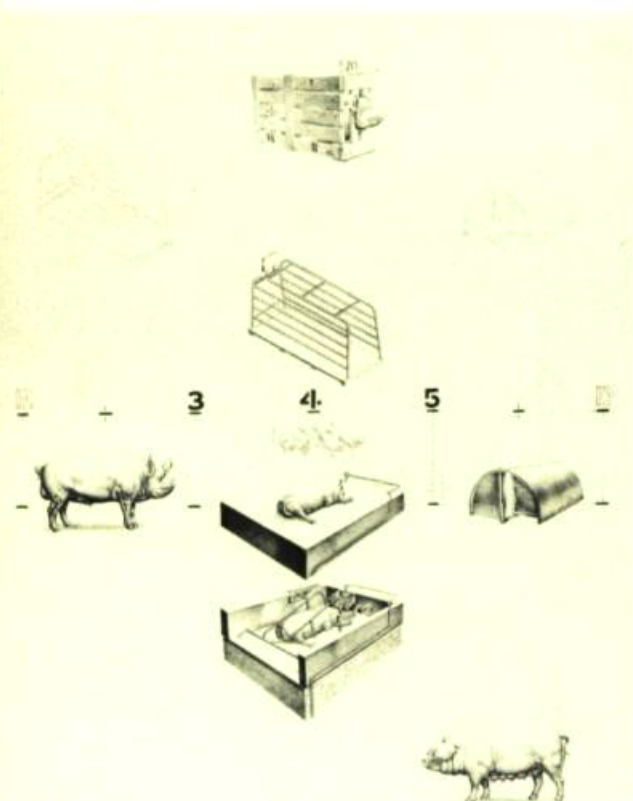
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Jean-Loup Bourget



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1. Rodovan D. KRAGULY
Cow, 1975.
Dessin.
2. Sans titre.
Dessin.
3. Pig, 1975.
Dessin.

3

«J'ai grandi dans la ferme de mes parents, au fond de la Bosnie, et j'ai passé beaucoup de temps à m'occuper des vaches, des cochons et des moutons. Tous les jours, au printemps et en été, j'emmenais les animaux dans les pâturages et je restais avec eux, et, en hiver, je leur apportais à manger dans leur étable.

«Cette vision à la fois proche et prolongée de la nature cyclique de la vie — l'accouplement, la gestation, la naissance, et la mort, l'interdépendance des animaux et la mienne propre avec les saisons — m'a fourni une grammaire de la perception.»

Ainsi parle Radovan Kraguly, malicieux Paysan du Danube (soit dit tout à fait métaphoriquement, car, si l'on regarde une carte, on s'aperçoit que la Bosnie est située assez loin de ce fleuve; néanmoins, l'administration austro-hongroise de la Bosnie-Herzégovine, et surtout Sarajevo, ont lié dialectiquement cette province yougoslave et la capitale viennoise). Même à Londres où il vit depuis 1962, il éprouve suffisamment le besoin de garder le contact avec la terre pour pousser des racines jusqu'en Pays de Galles et y posséder une ferme. Il a donc le loisir de continuer à observer les vaches, les moutons, les bouledogues, les cochons surtout, qui semblent lui être mascottes, totems qu'il ingurgite, païenne eucharistie, idoles qu'il brûle, qu'il fait rôtir à petit feu. («Le 9 décembre 1974, Radovan Kraguly a acheté un cochon de lait chez un boucher. Le même jour, il en a fait un moule de résine qui a été par la suite coulé en fibre de verre. Le 10 décembre 1974, onze personnes ont mangé le cochon de lait rôti. C'était délicieux!» — Martine Erussard et Paul Hammond).

Ces mêmes auteurs ont déjà, à juste titre, souligné que «pour Radovan Kraguly le totem

existe toujours». Le totem pourtant serait davantage sanglier (des Ardennes, gaulois, etc.) que cochon? Il est indéniable que, dans les dessins de Kraguly, la présentation centrale et de profil des cochons les totémise, fait d'eux, avec leur masse de lard et leurs dards brandis, des étendards. Les cochons sont des dieux païens humiliés, aujourd'hui grotesques quoique encore un peu inquiétants, car ils sont pris dans des caisses et des cages qui les guillotent, pesés sur les balances d'une économie de marché, posés en trio, leurs pieds fourchus mal assurés, sur un radeau qui tanguent, allongés sur un lit d'opération, confrontés, impuissants, à des épures, à des chiffres, à des labels. (De même, sur la couenne maflue, on voit insollement se déployer l'encre violette entre les soies, estampillage industriel qui châtre et rend dérisoire l'animal débordant de vie, de sexualité, le monstre primitif.) Kraguly réveille le cochon qui sommeille en nous.

On pourrait dire, pour rassurer l'esprit, que Kraguly se situe au carrefour de l'hyperréalisme et de l'art conceptuel. Hyperréalistes, ses dessins méthodiques, minutieux (mais d'une minutie qui n'a rien de mécanique, car les dates qu'il indique avec soin témoignent de leur croissance organique); cependant, ils ne doivent rien à la photographie. Conceptuels, dans la mesure où ils sont légendés, où le signe linguistique y est présent? On pourrait de plus signaler que Kraguly est l'ami, et le compatriote, de Velickovic, se demander gravement s'il existe, au sein du style international contemporain, un courant slave du Sud; hasarder que le conceptualisme naît tout naturellement de la confrontation de cultures et de langues diverses, voire disparates. Toutes ces catégories ne sont elles-mêmes que cages, grilles, balances,

fléaux, quadrillages policiers, lits de Procuste où coucher l'évidence de dessins qui ensemble dérangent et font jouir. Ces catégories ne sont qu'une machine-Olida à débiter et à mettre en boîte le cochon dégénéré en porc.

Le groin des cochons est un pénis gonflé et plissé; à la recherche de quelle truffe, ou de quelle pomme? (cf. les gravures de Kraguly à la manière noire, où une paire de pommes a forme et fonction de sein); le cochon tout entier, aérodynamique et enflé de semence, de même — et qu'il s'agisse d'une truie ne change rien. (On remarquera d'ailleurs que les multiples mamelles alignées de la truie, rappelant la Louve du Capitole, en confirment le caractère totémique.) Ce cylindre d'énergie est au cœur de l'espace blanc, d'un vide multidimensionnel qui concilie avec humour les perspectives les plus contradictoires, ainsi que le plus ou moins d'épaisseur charnelle du rendu, qui va du trop-plein vital au cordeau des constructions intellectuelles.

Radovan D. Kraguly est né en 1935 en Bosnie (Yougoslavie). Peintre, dessinateur, graveur, sculpteur, enseignant, il s'est fixé (provisoirement?) en Grande-Bretagne en 1962. 1975-1976 le verra de retour en Yougoslavie, à Belgrade. Il a reçu plusieurs distinctions (dernières en date — 1975 —, la médaille d'or du Conseil de la Gravure yougoslave, et un prix international à Graphica Creativa, en Finlande) et a participé à de nombreuses expositions, collectives et personnelles. En 1975 (janvier-février): Galerie Hécaté, 21, rue du Bac, à Paris. Prévisions pour 1976: en mai, la Galerie d'Art (12, place de la Réunion, Mulhouse, Alsace) et une galerie londonienne (à déterminer).

paintings', each composed of three sections approximately three feet wide. The first part of each painting is left unmodified and a hand-lettered statement to that effect appears on the top edge of each nine-foot vertical section. The second section of both paintings contains a cutting or folding modification. A detailed description of what has been done also heads this part of both paintings. The third section contains a drawing modification and again a detailed description is included at the top. In this way a random system is subjected to a systematic form of modification or as in the artist's own words: "Pollock meets a Sol Lewitt type of linguistic system".

The centre of the Gallery was occupied by an assemblage of four by four underlay sheet plywood supported in part by two parallel walls. They were placed with some pieces rising slightly from the floor at different levels unattached by hardware and as vulnerable as a house of cards.

Lindblad does not permanently join the components of his floor sculpture. He leaves his sections of plywood untampered with. The material itself seems to impose its presence upon the viewer as an ironic monument to what a machine does to a piece of wood. Plywood exists as a manufactured product having its sources in a natural organic substance that is fragmented and processed. Forty-eight pieces of technologically modified natural wood forming a corridor that gradually inclines from the centre.

The acetate wall-pieces in this exhibit were all of the same size (approx. 5 x 5) and appear to be an extension of the paper shadow works of a 1973 exhibition. Tension caused by rolling the material and storing it in this manner is a common factor here. This tension existed in his water-colour paper shadow pieces at the earlier Dalhousie exhibition. The corners curled in almost the same manner when it was stapled to the wall in the centre of four sides. The shadows cast by the curled corners of the 5' x 5' paper were outlined on the paper with crayon. This resulted in a form of shadow drawing. This element is played down to some extent with this recent exhibition. Shadows are now reflective light patterns dutifully outlined in some areas at the edge of the installation. This time they are marked in chalk outside the dimension of the surface. There is a material transition here, from traditional water-colour paper to the synthetic plastic. Both retain the natural tendency to curl, and the same element of natural tension remains. The change from traditional material such as water-colour paper is not to be overlooked since it seems to follow the artist's particular concern with materials. Lindblad seems to diabolically use conventional material unconventionally and to impose formalistic elements to newer materials. He imposes a kind of reductive formalism to not only the material he is using, but also to the environmental facts of its location. This can be evidenced in a piece such as the one described. It occupied two walls of the large rectangular room. The visual effect of this piece as a whole is that of a glimmering invisible plastic panorama, stretching the length of the gallery. But for the flood-light reflection on the curled surfaces of the material, it would go unseen against the oatmeal burlap walls at first glance. Each individual section has been altered by successive cuttings. This cutting element in his work also originates in a previous art habit of his. In other exhibitions this method of cutting parallel or crossing lines on the face of the material is evident. In the past, that has been canvas, paper, or toilet

tissue. This artist is a purist in regard to materials. When he finds a material he wishes to work with, it is often for certain inherent and implied qualities within the material itself. For this reason he seems hesitant to deface his surface by the conventional methods of drawing lines. Cutting seems the purist form of line, the only alternative for a pure alteration of the surface.

Each separate square sheet of acetate has a cut line which is successively longer on each sheet from left to right until it seems close to separating the single sheet into two sheets. When this threatened to happen to a cut from the top, it would change then to a cut line from the bottom and from both sides. As each line progressed the acetate curled back upon itself forming interesting "V" troughs that seemed to have a symphonic aura about them. Expanding and diminishing, this was the effect if one followed the collage at close range along the length and width of the gallery.

Other works shown in this exhibition included a wall and ceiling assemblage of torn canvas strips. The shadows from the frayed edges of the material cast shadows that were outlined in pencil on its surface. These were altered occasionally throughout the duration of the exhibit and notations were made on the canvas concerning these changes.

A collage of colourful woodcuts, laminated to form a large single piece, was in direct contrast to the other works shown. These prints were almost primitive in nature with modular abstract designs deeply embossed in reds, greens, yellows and blues. They represent another side of this artist's involvement with more traditional material and content.

RADOVAN D. KRAGULY

By Jean-Loup BOURGET

"I grew up on my parents' farm in a remote part of Bosnia and spent much of my time tending cows, pigs and sheep. Each day in spring and summer I took the animals out to the grazing fields where I stayed with them, and in winter carried food to the stables where they were housed.

This close and extended vision of the cyclical nature of life — conjugation, gestation, birth and death, the inter-dependence of the animals and myself with the seasons — provided me with a grammar of perception."

Thus Radovan Kraguly, of Danube peasant-stock and mischievous wit (Danube in a metaphorical sense that is, as a glance at the map will show that Bosnia is quite a distance from the river; however, the Austro-Hungarian administration of Bosnia-Herzegovina, and particularly of Sarajevo has established a dialectical link between the Yugoslav province and the Viennese capital). Even in London, where he has been living since 1962, Kraguly's need to keep in touch with the soil has led him to set roots as far away as Wales where he owns a farm. In this way, he is free to continue his observation of cows, sheep, bulldogs and above all, of pigs, which seem to be his mascots, totems which he swallows greedily in a pagan eucharist, idols which he burns by slow-roasting ("on December 9th 1974, Radovan Kraguly bought a suckling pig from a butcher. On the same day he made a resin mould of the pig which was later cast into fiberglass. On December 10th 1974, eleven people ate the

roast pig. It was delicious!" — Martine Erusard and Paul Hammond).

The same authors have already rightly emphasized that "for Radovan Kraguly the totem animal still exists." But would not the totem take the form of a boar (of the Ardennes, Gallic, etc.) rather than of a pig? Certainly, in Kraguly's drawings the central position of the pigs in profile turns them into totems, their mass of fat and their pointed darts into standards. The pigs are humiliated pagan gods, grotesque now, if a little disquieting, for they are captured in cases and cages which guillotine them; they are weighed on the scales of a market-economy, poised three by three with shaky cloven feet on wobbling planks, and laid on the operating table, impotent in the face of blue-prints, numbers and labels. (In the same way, insolent violet ink-marks run between the bristles on the heavy creases of their pig-skin, castrating industrial stamps which mock the animal's overflowing vitality, the sexuality of the primitive monster.) Kraguly arouses the pig dormant in us all.

If reassurance is needed, Kraguly might be described as standing at the cross-roads of hyperrealism and conceptual art. Of course, his methodical, meticulous drawings are hyper-realist (however, this attention to detail is far from being mechanical — witness the careful dating which traces the organic development of these works). They owe nothing to photography. Conceptual, perhaps, since they bear captions, the linguistic sign? It might be relevant to mention that Kraguly is Velickovic's friend and compatriot, and one might seriously wonder if there is a southern-Slav movement within the contemporary international style. Is conceptual art the logical outcome of the confrontation of different, and even conflicting, cultures and languages? All these categories are themselves no more than cages, bars, seals, flails and police cross-ruling, mere Procu-stean beds to contain the evidence of the drawings, at once disconcerting and pleasurable. These categories are only Olida sausage-machines which cut up and can the pig, the pig degenerated to pork.

The pig's snout is a swollen, puckered penis; what truffle, what apple is it sniffing out? (c.f. Kraguly's series of mezzotint engravings, in which a pair of apples has the form and function of a breast); the pig itself, aerodynamic and swollen with seed, what does it seek? — No matter if the pig is a sow. Moreover, it should be noted that the sow's rows of multiple teats are like the she-wolf of the Capitol, a further example of the totemic strain. — This energy-packed cylinder constitutes the core of the white space, of the multi-dimensional vacuum. In it, highly contradictory perspectives are humourously related to each other, as are the varying thicknesses of the flesh represented. A range extending from the overabundance of vitality to the thin line of intellectual constructions.

Radovan D. Kraguly was born in 1935 in Bosnia (Yugoslavia). Painter, draughtsman, engraver, sculptor and teacher, he settled (temporarily?) in Great Britain in 1962. In 1975-76, he will be in Yugoslavia (Belgrade). He has obtained several awards (the most recent — 1975 —, the Gold Medal of the Yugoslav Council of Engraving, and an international prize at Graphica Creativa, in Finland) and has participated in numerous exhibitions, both collective and individual. 1975 (Jan.-Feb.): Galerie Hécate, 21 rue du Bac, Paris; Plans for 1976: May, la Galerie d'Art (12 place de la Réunion, Mulhouse, Alsace); and a London gallery (to be decided).

(Translation by Eithne Bourget