

## Les arts et la culture

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## LES ARTS ET LA CULTURE

Il est de bonne guerre, dans le monde de l'Art, de diviser les camps en deux: les traditionalistes et les modernistes. Allégrement, d'un côté comme de l'autre, on se bat pour les bons contre les méchants. D'un côté, la tâche peut paraître facile, il s'agit de mieux informer les presque convertis, d'étouffer constamment les inventaires, d'apporter sur les œuvres d'autres éclairages, d'être conscients de la portée de l'Histoire et de «mettre les fidèles en état de grâce»; de l'autre, du côté vivant de la création, il faut avoir le sens du risque autant que l'esprit lucide, être solidement renseigné et s'inquiéter de la notion de progrès qui s'infiltré partout et qui aveugle. Elle implique une idée du nouveau qui, curieusement, va de plus en plus vers l'uniforme, la moyenne et l'anonymat. On le constate dans les centres d'expression contemporaine de différents pays qui offrent à peu près partout les mêmes expériences de créativité. Phénomène non pas seulement attribuable au mimétisme mais bien davantage à une information qui circule aisément. Dans notre civilisation de l'image, il s'agit d'une tentative de destruction de cette image et de ses supports habituels et d'opération de retour à la nature. Ce à quoi s'opposent les protagonistes d'un retour au réel par la voie de l'imaginaire et par le maintien des techniques. Un débat qui dure depuis le début du siècle, illustré par de multiples démonstrations et fournissant à la critique ses controverses et ses incertitudes. Débat qui prend place, il va sans dire, au sein de différentes cultures dont il traduit les caractéristiques.

Sur le territoire bien délimité du Québec, le débat s'inscrit dans une culture qui subit, de même que l'ensemble des cultures mondiales, l'assaut le plus violent de son histoire. L'anticulture n'est pas une simple aventure imaginaire, passagère: elle pourrait nettoyer, purifier; elle paralyse surtout. Avec le résultat qu'on va à tâtons dans les orientations, qu'on attribue, à tort, toutes les responsabilités à l'État, que des idées généreuses de société bonne, de culture de masse font fausse route, «les masses se moquent bien des lumières»<sup>1</sup>. Les masses, peut-être, mais pas l'homme en tant que cellule composante de ces masses: c'est lui qu'il faut viser, c'est vers lui et pour lui qu'il faut reprendre sans cesse la réflexion.

La mise en garde d'un jeune philosophe français de trente ans, Bernard-Henri Lévy<sup>2</sup>, nous rend particulièrement conscients de la gravité de la situation. A la suite du procès qu'il fait des suites de Mai 1968, nous laissant entrevoir les formes de barbarie qui se préparent dans le monde, il nous invite à lutter avec des armes qui sont proprement culturelles: «Les armes de nos musées et le lien de notre solitude.» Considérant l'art comme une des voies de la survie, il fait un appel

fraternel à notre vigilance afin qu'à défaut de refaire le monde, on s'assure qu'il ne se défasse pas.

On oublie trop que l'art est, dans la culture, un principe actif, régulateur, créateur d'ordre à même le désordre, force vitale. On ne le répétera jamais trop et, dans cet esprit, il est important de souligner un texte intelligent qui frappe par son ton nouveau, *Dépayser la culture* de Michel Morin et Claude Bertrand<sup>3</sup>. On y trouve d'importantes distinctions entre la culture et le nationalisme, là exactement où se situe le noeud du problème. Ils font un rappel des sources, de notre insertion dans la culture française, de notre dynamisme nord-américain, autant de questions fondamentales dont dépend la force future de l'expression créatrice.

La critique reprend enfin ses droits et apprend à mieux distinguer entre la controverse et l'attaque personnelle; elle s'éloigne de la complaisance et plaide pour le territoire imaginaire, les exigences internes de la création et l'appartenance à la culture dont nous sommes issus. Cette position nous éloigne du jargon et des frustrations des alarmistes qui ne voient partout qu'aliénation. Par leur attitude négative, ils sont en grande partie responsables de cette *esthétique impuissante* qui souffle comme un mauvais vent depuis quelques années. Ce n'est pas en imitant la grenouille qui veut se faire aussi grosse que le boeuf qu'on obtiendra l'adhésion de tout un peuple à une aventure culturelle stimulante. Ce qui sera demain source de fierté, le sera par la qualité, la vigueur des contenus, et pas autrement. Nous avons grand besoin, à l'heure actuelle, d'intellectuels qui mettent enfin la culture au-dessus de la politique, d'intellectuels qui soient, selon le vœu de Bernard-Henri Lévy, des métaphysiciens, des artistes et des moralistes.

C'est peut-être de l'angélisme mais nous devrions être nombreux à militer dans ce sens-là et à nous exiler de tout ce qui nous distrait de l'essentiel.

Un de nos collègues<sup>4</sup> a peut-être posé la vraie question, au dernier congrès de l'Association Internationale des Critiques d'Art, à Cologne: «Si nous devons disparaître demain, l'art s'évanouirait-il? Et si l'art s'évanouissait demain, serions-nous appelés à disparaître aussi?»

1. Bernard-Henri Lévy, *La Barbarie à visage humain*. Paris, Bernard Grasset, 1977. 233 pages.

2. Idem.

3. *Le Devoir*, 15 octobre 1977, p. 29.

4. Bernard Denvir, *Les Nouveaux théologiens*.

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# TEXTS IN ENGLISH

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## ARTS AND CULTURE

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By Andrée PARADIS

It is good strategy in the art world to divide the camps in two: the traditionalists and the modernists. On the one side as on the other, we blithely fight for the *good* against the *bad*. On the one side the task can appear easy; it is a matter of better informing those who are almost converted, continually filling inventories, applying other clarifications to the works, being aware of the implications of History and "placing the faithful in a state of grace"; on the other, the living side of creation, we must have the understanding of risk as much as a clear mind, be thoroughly well-informed and be concerned with the notion of progress that creeps in everywhere and which blinds. This involves an idea of the *new which, curiously, goes more toward the uniform, the average and the anonymous*. We see this in the centres of contemporary expression of different countries which offer almost everywhere the same experiments in creativity. A phenomenon attributable not only to mimesis, but much more to information which is easily dispensed. In our civilization of the image, it is a question of an attempt at the destruction of this image and of its usual supports, and also the process of the return to nature. In opposition to this stand the protagonists of a return to the real by way of the imaginary and of the maintenance of techniques. This is a dispute that has lasted since the beginning of the century, famous through many manifestations and providing its controversies and its uncertainties to criticism. A dispute which takes place, it goes without saying, at the heart of different cultures whose characteristics it conveys.

On Quebec's very limited territory, the dispute is located in a culture which is subjected, just as are all world-wide cultures, to the most violent attack in its history. Anti-culture is not a simple, imaginary and passing adventure: it could clean and purify; it paralyzes, particularly. With the result that we are groping in orientations, that we wrongly assign all responsibilities to the State, that the generous ideas of good society and of mass culture take the wrong road, "the masses laugh at lights"<sup>1</sup>. The masses, perhaps, but not man as a component cell of these masses: it is he at whom we must aim, it is toward him and for him that we must unceasingly take up our thoughts again.

The warning of Bernard-Henri Lévy<sup>2</sup>, a young French philosopher thirty years of age, makes us particularly aware of the gravity of the situation. Following the case he makes of the events of May 1968, letting us foresee the forms of barbarism that are brewing in the world, he invites us to fight with weapons that are appropriately cultural: "The weapon of our museums and the bond of our solitude." Considering art as one of the roads of survival he makes a fraternal appeal to our vigilance in order that, failing our remaking the world, we make sure that it does not destroy itself.

We forget too much that art in culture is an active, regulating principle, a creator of order out of disorder itself, a vital force. We can never repeat this too much and, in this spirit, it is important to emphasize an intelligent article that impresses by its new tone, *Dépayser la culture* by Michel Morin and Claude Bertrand<sup>3</sup>. In this text we find important distinctions between culture and nationalism, exactly the place where the crux of the problem is located. The authors recall the sources, our introduction into French culture, our North American dynamism, so many fundamental questions upon which the future force of creative expression depends.

Criticism finally takes up its rights and begins to better distinguish between controversy and personal attack; it moves away from complaisance and pleads for the imaginary territory, the internal demands of creation and adherence to the culture from whence we came. This position

separates us from the jargon and frustrations of alarmists who see only alienation everywhere. On account of their negative attitude, they are largely responsible for this *ineffective aesthetics* that has been blowing like an evil wind for some years. It is not by imitating the frog that wants to make himself bigger than the ox that we shall achieve the acceptance of a whole people to a stimulating cultural adventure. What will to-morrow be a source of pride will be such through quality and the vigour of contents, not otherwise. We have great need at present of intellectuals who finally place culture above politics; intellectuals who are, according to Bernard-Henri Lévy's wish, metaphysicians, artists and moralists.

This may be exaggerated idealism, but there should be many of us to fight in this sense and to exile ourselves from everything that distracts us from what is essential.

One of our colleagues perhaps put the real question at the last International Association of Art Critics conference at Cologne: "If we were to disappear to-morrow, would art vanish? And if art vanished to-morrow, would we be called upon to disappear too?"

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1. Bernard-Henri Lévy, *La Barbarie à visage humain*. Paris, Bernard Grasset, 1977. 233 pages.

2. Idem.

3. *Le Devoir*, October 15, 1977, p. 29.

4. Bernard Denvir, *Les nouveaux théologiens*.

(Translation by Mildred Grand)

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## GUY MONTPETIT'S RECENT MURALS

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By Guy ROBERT

What point has Guy Montpetit reached?

He is in fine shape, in the serenity of the family and country life he leads in his studio-home at Val-David, where I spent a very pleasant day with him in mid-September, 1977.

This Laurentian village, a little more than an hour's car ride from Montreal by the Laurentian autoroute, presents not only a famous show-place, La Butte-à-Mathieu, or La Sapinière, a famous hotel, but there are also to be found at Val-David more than fifty artists and craftsmen who live and work there. Apart from the village on Windmill Island, two houses designed in co-operation with architect Pierre Mercier stand separated by a little pine-grove, a kind of natural meditation garden in the Japanese style, with its bare rocks among slim trunks on a carpet of pine needles; the North River wends its wayward course upon the sonorous screen of its humming, and the squirrels scamper back and forth between ceramist Alain Tremblay's studio-home and painter Guy Montpetit's.

In mid-September, the young maples were already flaming amid the primeval flamboyance of the vegetation and amazing scurrings of rocks along the river under Montpetit's windows, while the infant twins prattled and nibbled relentlessly at maman Danièle's leisure.

In the artist's studio I saw three new pictures, of an intense light and an impressive maturity; on tables and other furniture, the pleasant jumble of works on hand, among which stood out the scale model of a chapel which will be completed by the time the present article appears.

### An image-maker of actual experiences

Decidedly, Guy Montpetit is in top form, and it would be very interesting to examine in detail the stages of his development during the last fifteen years. He has accomplished this rarity in the hubbub of present-day art: developing a coherent and personal plastic style, immediately identifiable, but whose syntax remains open to numerous inflections and transformations, thoroughly capable, consequently, of eliminating the monotony and the barrenness that stultify the careers of so many other artists.

Montpetit goes forward, methodically and resolutely, and his explorations seem to lead him from discovery to discovery, while his language affirms his mastery without, nonetheless, surrendering either his spontaneity or his inventive resilience. Much might be said of the series that regroup a large part of his works, like that of the *Temps de vivre*, exhibited at Paris in 1974 and at Toronto in 1975, or those of *Sex Machine* and of *Où êtes-vous donc*, shown at Montreal and Quebec in 1970, or yet again those titled *Deux cultures, une nation, il ne faut pas mourir pour ça* and *All you need is love*; however, I would like to emphasize briefly here another dimension of Guy Montpetit's plastic