Vie des arts

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L'atelier libre de recherches graphiques et la guilde graphique
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L'atelier libre de recherches graphiques et la guilde graphique

Rose-Marie Arbour

Le reportage photographique est de Gabor Szilazi

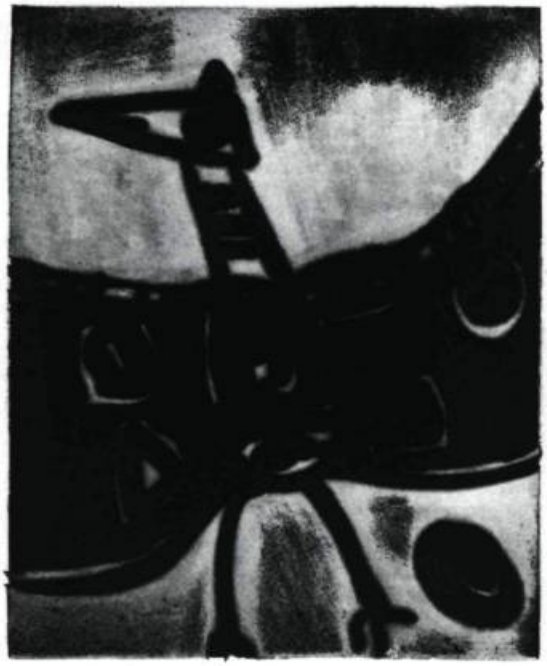
1. Jean-Paul RIOPELLE
Sans titre.

Albert Dumouchel aura vraiment marqué la naissance de la gravure contemporaine au Québec par le biais de son enseignement et de sa pratique à l'École des Arts Graphiques et à l'École des Beaux-Arts de Montréal. Le fondateur de l'Atelier Libre de Recherches Graphiques, Richard Lacroix, a été influencé par lui, comme tant d'autres graveurs québécois, alors que, de 1957 à 1959, il a étudié à l'École des Arts Graphiques sous sa direction. «Ce fut un choc, dit-il. Dumouchel fut une sorte de deuxième père pour moi. De 17 à 20 ans, il m'aida, m'encouragea, me fit découvrir un idéal et trouver foi en moi. C'est très important à cet âge-là.» Quand Dumouchel quittera l'École des Arts Graphiques pour l'École des Beaux-Arts, Richard Lacroix le suivra, à la fois à titre d'assistant et de professeur.

Toutefois, l'influence déterminante sur le plan de la production et de la diffusion de la gravure québécoise fut l'Atelier 17, dirigé par Stanley William Hayter, à Paris[1]. C'est là que Richard Lacroix travailla pendant plus de deux ans, de 1961 à 1963. C'est là qu'il prit conscience des possibilités offertes par un atelier libre expérimental. Dans une interview accordée à Claude Jasmin en 1966[2], Richard Lacroix expliquait comment l'Atelier 17 fut pour lui un remarquable exemple d'organisation.

En 1963, il reviendra à Montréal avec, dans ses bagages, deux presses de taille-douce et des rouleaux encreurs uniques. Une lettre du directeur de l'École des Beaux-Arts, Edmond Labelle, lui proposait de reprendre le poste qu'il avait quitté en 1960, mais le conseil pédagogique du temps ne fut pas du même avis: à l'École des Beaux-Arts, la gravure se pratiquait exclusivement en noir et blanc; Richard Lacroix y aurait introduit les techniques d'Hayter sur la couleur, techniques alors complètement inconnues au Canada. Devant une telle situation, il dirigea ses énergies ailleurs: il s'installa dans l'avenue Querbes, puis dans un atelier de la rue Saint-Christophe avec son équipement (trois presses de taille-douce, une presse lithographique, une presse à relief). Des graveurs lui demandent de travailler chez lui. L'idée d'un atelier ouvert s'esquisse, non en tant que projet utopique mais à partir du besoin même des graveurs. Les discussions vont aboutir à un projet d'*atelier libre ouvert à tous*. Paul Mercier, de l'Aide à la Création au Ministère des Affaires Culturelles, est emballé: il se charge de faire avancer le projet et, en août 1964, fait accorder une subvention de $4500; l'ouverture officielle du premier atelier libre au Canada se fit le 14 septembre suivant. A ce moment, six artistes y travaillaient régulièrement. C'était un atelier expérimental dont le «but est de mettre à la disposition des artistes montréalais ayant déjà une certaine formation dans ce domaine tout l'équipement nécessaire pour les métiers suivants: lithographie, gravure, eau-forte, relief et sérigraphie», soulignait Richard Lacroix en 1965[3]. L'Atelier Libre était ouvert deux jours par semaine, et le coût de location pour chacun était fixé à $10 par mois. Les résultats ne tardèrent pas à se manifester: en mai 1965, la première exposition de l'Atelier Libre s'ouvrait, à Québec, à la Galerie de L'Atelier dirigée par Renée Lesieur. Cinq graveurs y participaient: Huguette Desjardins-Faucher, Pierre Hébert, Richard Lacroix, Henri Saxe et Tobie Steinhouse. La production moyenne pour chacun des six artistes membres avait été de quatre à cinq planches.

1. Par le biais de son séjour aux États-Unis dans les années 40, Hayter eut également une influence déterminante mais directe, cette fois, sur la formation des graveurs américains: «His (Hayter's) impact on American printmaking — the first generative push since Whistler — resulted in the spreading of American art through prints rather than painting» (A. Hyatt Mayor, *Prints and People*, New-York, 1971).
2. *La Presse*, Mai 1966.
3. Le Conseil des Arts se joindra au Ministère des Affaires Culturelles à partir de 1965: l'ALRG recevra ainsi, de chacun de ces deux organismes, des subventions annuelles qui passeront, entre 1965 et 1977, de $6,000 à $11,000.



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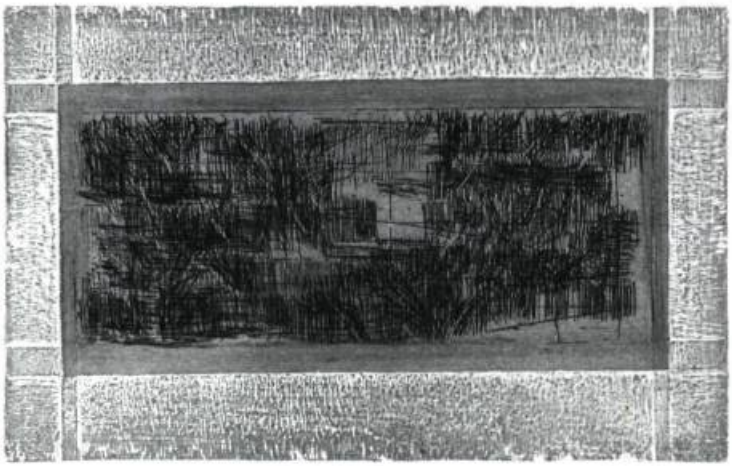

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2. Kittie BRUNEAU
Flip-flop, 1977.

3. Antoine DUMAS
Histoire à suivre, 1977.

4. Tobie STEINHOUSE
Far above the snow . . ., 1977.

5. Normand LALIBERTÉ
Picture at an exhibition.

6. Louisette GAUTHIER-MITCHELL
Southern Comfort, 1975.

7. Richard LACROIX
L'Oiseau bleu, 1977.

Mais l'Atelier Libre n'avait pas pour unique fonction de servir les graveurs. L'exposition de mai 1965 permit à Richard Lacroix d'exposer au public le rôle culturel que prétendait jouer l'Atelier Libre. «Il faut, disait-il, trouver un moyen de mettre la gravure à la portée des gens, d'abattre les mythes»[4]. La multiplicité de l'image gravée permet d'en réduire le prix et, par conséquent, la rend accessible à un public élargi. «Nous voulons travailler dans le sens du Bauhaus», affirmait-il, ce qui veut dire ici, rendre l'art accessible au plus grand nombre. Les résultats de cette première année sembleront suffisamment positifs pour que le Ministère des Affaires Culturelles et le Conseil des Arts du Canada subventionnent conjointement l'Atelier Libre à part égale. Le nombre des membres doubla.

Quelques mois plus tôt, l'Atelier avait déménagé au 4677 de la rue Saint-Denis où logeait, depuis l'automne 1964, un groupe appelé *Fusion des Arts* dont plusieurs membres se retrouvaient dans l'Atelier Libre. Il importe ici de faire le point sur les rapports qu'entretenaient l'Atelier Libre et Fusion des Arts. Dans l'esprit de plusieurs personnes, il y a eu confusion, non seulement entre ces deux groupes, mais avec la Guilde Graphique qui allait être fondée en 1966 et s'établirait à la même adresse. Cela tient au fait que les deux groupes avaient, sur le plan idéologique, de nombreux points communs: si l'Atelier Libre avait été ouvert, ce n'était pas parce que la gravure québécoise était inexistante; au contraire, des prix et des mentions obtenus dans de nombreux concours et biennales internationales prouvaient qu'elle était bien vivante. Mais voilà, les jeunes graveurs restaient avec leurs gravures sur les bras et devaient se tourner vers d'autres activités pour vivre. Richard Lacroix avait souligné combien l'équipement était coûteux pour un graveur. L'Atelier Libre résolvait ce problème à la fois technique et financier. Lacroix démythifiait également les techniques de la gravure: «Une matinée, affirmait-il, et un peu d'équipement suffisent pour comprendre la technique de la gravure», tout le reste étant une question d'expérience, de pratique. Il sera donc conseiller technique, non celui qui dirige mais celui qui aide chaque producteur sur le plan des difficultés matérielles. Si la technique de la gravure était démythifiée, le processus même de production l'était également. La *création*, dont la connotation première est le mystère entourant la conception et la réalisation de l'œuvre par l'artiste, être unique et sacralisé, était remplacée par la découverte et l'expérimentation inhérentes aux différentes étapes de réalisation propres à la gravure. Ceci fut expliqué au grand public par plusieurs articles dans les journaux: «La gravure que l'on contemple ressemble au poème en ceci qu'elle nous fait voir en une seule fois — et comme chose définitive — ce qui résulte d'une série d'opérations»[5]. Ce principe de découverte à travers le processus de fabrication de la gravure entraîne celui de l'expérimentation qui ne peut faire abstraction des nouvelles ressources techniques: «De plus en plus, l'art devra compter avec l'industrie. (. . .) Notre atelier veut être une sorte de laboratoire», disait encore Richard Lacroix.

La référence au Bauhaus, dans le cas de l'Atelier Libre, signifiait qu'on voulait rendre l'art accessible au plus grand nombre de gens possible, démystifier le culte de la personnalité de l'artiste, chercher à concilier l'art et l'industrie. Le rapport entre ceux-ci se concrétisait dans l'utilisation de nouveaux matériaux et de nouvelles techniques. Pour les graveurs qui fréquentaient l'Atelier Libre, les possibilités d'application des nouvelles techniques devenaient réelles et s'étendaient à des domaines tels que le livre, l'illustration, l'affiche, etc. Le nouveau rapport entre l'art et le public se matérialisait par la caractéristique même de la gravure qui est d'être un multiple et, par là, d'accéder à un public beaucoup plus vaste. La recherche et l'expérimentation devaient donc s'axer sur le phénomène de communication. L'objet d'art, en ce sens, devait devenir un objet collectif efficace dans tel milieu, en telle occasion. Dans sa chronique artistique de *La Presse*, Yves Robillard indiqua que c'était dans ce sens que l'Atelier Libre entendait démocratiser l'art. La démocratisation de l'art impliquait non seulement l'accessibilité d'un vaste public à la gravure, en tant qu'objet de communication mais aussi en tant que formule d'autogestion propre à une coopérative d'artistes. Ceci dit, il convient néanmoins de mentionner certaines contradictions quant aux principes de base qui animaient l'Atelier Libre. Ainsi, dans le catalogue de présentation de 1965, une interview des graveurs de l'Atelier Libre indiquait partiellement le contraire; le processus de production et de diffusion de la gravure n'influerait pas, pour certains, sur la nature même de l'image produite. Gilles Boisvert disait: «En fait, la technique importe peu. C'est la découverte d'une nouvelle image qui compte. Que l'artiste le fasse en peinture, en sculpture ou en gra-

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4. *La Presse*, samedi 22 mai 1965.
5. Paul Gladu, *L'Art et le beau travail des jeunes créateurs d'aujourd'hui*, dans *Le Petit Journal*, 1er mai 1966.

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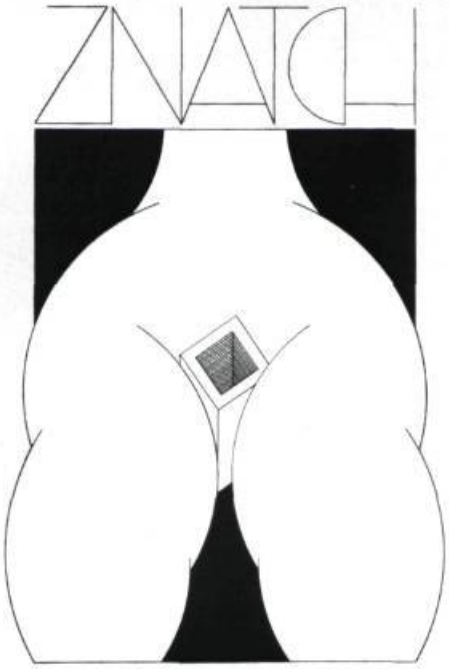

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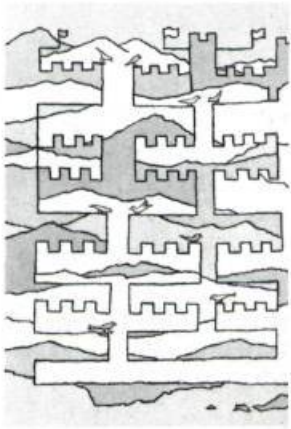

vure, il n'y a que le médium qui change. On ne demande pas si un artiste a découvert quelque chose dans le dessin, et pourtant on découvre toujours par le dessin.» Pour sa part, Marc-A. Nadeau soulignait la différence qui existe entre le public qui s'intéresse à la gravure et celui qui se soucie plutôt de peinture et de sculpture: «La gravure, de par le nombre de personnes qu'il faut rejoindre, peut rencontrer un public différent de celui des galeries.» Donc, en 1965, les graveurs n'avaient pas unanimement établi la spécificité du processus de production de la gravure. Néanmoins, il apparaissait déjà que la démocratisation de l'art ne pouvait se faire sans l'élargissement de la diffusion vers un plus vaste public. S'attaquer au problème de diffusion des œuvres «impliquait la révision de toute la question du marché artistique et du coût prohibitif des œuvres: la Guilde Graphique sera fondée en janvier 1966»[6].

L'Atelier Libre, en tant que lieu de production, ne pouvait en effet logiquement résoudre tous les problèmes des graveurs. En 1965, Richard Lacroix annonçait la nécessité de créer une «guilde de la gravure»: la raison en était la nécessité d'élargir le public, d'amortir les prix des gravures en augmentant les tirages. Il n'y avait pas alors de marché pour la gravure et aucune galerie qui s'en occupait, la vente d'une gravure ne rapportant rien à personne. Pour sensibiliser le public à la gravure, rien ne fut négligé par la Guilde Graphique: décembre 1966 fut le *mois de la gravure*. La Guilde organisa des expositions simultanées en huit endroits du Québec et publia un catalogue. Elle se définissait ainsi: une maison d'édition dont le but était de rendre accessible les œuvres, d'amener les artistes, grands et petits, à réaliser une ou deux planches par année. Son fonctionnement était assuré par une subvention du Ministère des Affaires Culturelles[7]. Le comité de sélection était composé comme suit: un directeur de musée, un critique d'art, un artiste. On invita les artistes à soumettre des projets: «Les artistes sont choisis sans distinction de styles. Seule la qualité de l'image prime.» La combinaison d'un lieu de production (l'Atelier Libre) et d'un lieu de diffusion ne signifiait pas néanmoins que les artistes qui travaillaient à l'Atelier Libre étaient nécessairement diffusés par la Guilde, de même la Guilde pouvait choisir de diffuser un artiste dont les gravures n'étaient pas réalisées à l'Atelier Libre. Le statut de l'artiste, à la Guilde, est le suivant: coéditeur, il participe aux rendements par ses droits d'auteur établis à 12½ pour 100 du prix de détail, ce qui est supérieur au 8 ou 10 pour 100 qu'offrent internationalement les éditeurs. Dès 1964, le Canada avait fait sa marque dans le domaine de la gravure dans plusieurs biennales internationales. La Guilde se donnait comme fonction d'organiser ce marché, alors quasi inexistant malgré la notoriété des graveurs canadiens. Ici, de jeunes peintres, tels que Daglish, Gaucher, Lacroix, Saxe, étaient connus par leurs gravures. «Mais, faute de marché et de vrais moyens de travail, dit Lacroix, beaucoup de bons graveurs se sont orientés autrement.» Il affirmait encore qu'il était faux de

6. Yves Robillard, *Historique de Fusion des Arts* dans *Québec Underground*, Montréal, Éditions Médiart, 1973, tome 1, p. 181.
7. Le Conseil des Arts octroiera annuellement, jusqu'en 1970, une somme égale à celle du Ministère des Affaires Culturelles, soit en moyenne $7000 par année. En 1970, la Banque d'Oeuvres d'Art devait prendre la relève par ses achats à la Guilde. En pratique, elle n'achètera, annuellement, que pour un montant de $900, ce qui équivaut à un achat de $12 par année pour chacun des 70 artistes de la Guilde et à un revenu net pour ces derniers de $3,67.

8. Alfred PELLAN
Bambin, 1974.

9. André MONTPETIT
Fausse affiche, 1976.

10. Jean-Jacques ROUSSIN
#44, 1975-1976.

11. Louis-Pierre BOUGIE
Sans titre, 1976.

12. Sindon GÉCIN
Love Story, 1973.

13. Norman McLAREN
Winter Birds, 1975.

dire qu'en 1966 les gens ne se soucient pas d'*art:* «Il y a actuellement, à Montréal, un marché de la reproduction d'œuvres d'art et de chromos, un marché évalué à $8 millions de dollars par année.» En 1977, la situation, sur ce plan, n'aura fait qu'empirer.

La sensibilisation et l'éducation des jeunes à autres choses qu'à des chromos étaient, en 1966, un des objectifs principaux de la Guilde. «Le gros travail de la Guilde sera donc un travail d'éducation des jeunes. Leur permettre d'être en contact direct avec des œuvres d'art originales. Nous espérons que chaque école aura sa collection de gravures originales comme elle a sa bibliothèque».[8] Pour faire connaître ses objectifs, les activités de la Guilde se multiplièrent: en 1968-1969, elle fut présente dans plus de 150 expositions, particulières, collectives ou itinérantes, au Canada, aux États-Unis et en Europe. Au Canada, la gravure apparaissait, en 1967, comme l'élément principal dans l'ensemble de la production artistique. Une exposition de graveurs canadiens se rendait au Musée d'Art Moderne de New-York; le *Toronto Star* soulignait que de plus en plus d'artistes optent pour la gravure comme médium: «Now the Guilde Graphique de Montréal is serving both as a centre for learning and as an outlet for prints. (...) Printmaking is emerging as one of Canada's major visual art»[9].

En décembre 1966, Michel Fortier disait: «Pour moi, la gravure, la lithographie sont des techniques qui permettent de développer des qualités différentes de la peinture et me donnent aussi une satisfaction nouvelle et différente»[10]. Et voilà pour les problèmes d'ordre technique. Marc-A. Nadeau disait: «La gravure, de par le nombre de personnes qu'il faut rejoindre, peut rencontrer un public différent de celui des galeries»[11]. Et voilà pour le public visé. Quant à la rentabilité, soit pour le graveur, soit pour la maison de diffusion, elle est nulle. La gravure est considérée comme objet d'art par l'Atelier Libre et la Guilde Graphique, dans le sens qu'elle ne se confond pas avec la *reproduction*. Évidemment, ce choix engendre le statut d'entreprise sans but lucratif, le maintien du statut de l'artiste avec ses caractéristiques, telles le mode de production artisanale et la marque personnelle sur le produit à tous les stades de sa production. La gravure maintient l'idée de rareté de l'œuvre d'art bien qu'elle soit un multiple; les tirages sont forcément limités par le temps mis à les réaliser. La reproduction (affiches, placards) implique au contraire l'abolition de l'unicité de l'image et la multiplication mécanique à tirage illimité. Bref, on ne vit pas de la gravure, et c'est ce qu'a déjà constaté un homme d'affaires de Vancouver qui, ayant obtenu $30,000 du Conseil des Arts du Canada pour développer une entreprise de diffusion de la gravure sous le nom de *Canadian Native Prints*, affirmait avoir tout simplement renvoyé la subvention partiellement entamée devant l'évidence de cette non-rentabilité.

A faire le tour de la question, on s'aperçoit que la gravure engendre, en tant que multiple, un mode de production et de diffusion spécifique et autre que celui de la peinture et de la sculpture. Le public distinct auquel elle s'adresse en principe demande-t-il à retrouver, en gravure, la forme et le style de la peinture? La démocratisation de l'art n'est pas un vain mot: cela veut dire, entre autres choses, que le contenu et la forme d'une production s'articulent sur des valeurs esthétiques, culturelles et sociales également différentes. Analyser et comprendre ce rapport particulier entre le public et les graveurs faisait partie des objectifs de l'Atelier Libre et de la Guilde Graphique: en effet, la coordination entre un lieu de production (l'Atelier), un lieu de diffusion (la Guilde) et un lieu de réflexion et d'analyse de la fonction de l'art (Fusion des Arts) se fit à partir de 1966, et ce, jusqu'en 1970. L'interrogation sur le type d'image à produire pour un public élargi et différent, sur la fonction de l'art dans la société, amorçait alors une redéfinition du rôle de l'artiste. Or, l'on sait les ennuis essuyés par le Groupe Fusion des Arts, dont une bonne partie des membres se retrouvaient à l'Atelier Libre: descentes de police, classeurs de documents saisis en entier et jamais rendus: où il y avait réflexion, il y avait subversion. En 1969, à l'Assemblée Nationale du Québec, on suggéra une enquête sur le Groupe Fusion des Arts en même temps qu'on en demandait une sur le Groupe des Jeunes Canadiens. Parmi bien d'autres difficultés, on peut mentionner la pression économique exercée en tandem: en vue de l'Expo 67, un projet fut commandé au Groupe Fusion pour le pavillon Katimavik; refusé, ce projet réapparaissait pourtant, sous d'autres titres mieux cotés, au pavillon canadien à Osaka, quelques années plus tard. Après tant d'énergies déployées bénévolement pour faire valoir une réalité nouvelle pour les artistes et le public, découragés, les membres du groupe se dispersèrent. Le champ de l'art est clos et se heurte, dès qu'il veut être critique ou rentable, aux préjugés commodes de la subversion ou de la commercialisation — toutes choses dont la pratique artistique est affublée dès qu'elle franchit les barrières du mythe de l'art pour s'articuler sur une réalité concrète. Les artistes renvoyés dans leurs ateliers, le chacun pour soi triomphe nécessairement, l'interrogation sur leur pratique, sur leurs conditions de production, sur le rapport avec le social et le culturel, n'a plus lieu d'exister à titre collectif. Les codes formels propres à l'art pour l'élite peuvent alors être beaucoup plus difficilement transformés car il ne s'agit pas seulement ici de faire accéder à l'art de l'élite un fragment élargi de la société, mais de produire, en fonction de leur situation concrète, des images signifiantes. La sensibilisation à l'art n'est pas une utopie: la demande du public canadien pour les chromos produisait, en 1976-1977, un chiffre d'affaires de plus de 75 millions de dollars. Ces chromos, fabriqués à l'étranger, présentent, pour le Gouvernement, l'avantage de rapporter en droits 30 pour 100 de leur valeur. Or, pas un sou de ce revenu n'est réinvesti dans un secteur tel que celui de la gravure. «Le slogan du *contenu canadien* prôné par Ottawa, dit Richard Lacroix, ne semble jouer que lorsqu'il n'empêche pas les revenus qu'il en retire»[12].

Les questions relatives, non seulement à l'organisation de la production et de la diffusion mais à l'idéologie et à l'économique, sont fondamentales lorsqu'on analyse les situations respectives de l'Atelier Libre de Recherches Graphiques et de la Guilde Graphique, sinon la pratique artistique des graveurs est totalement désincarnée et inopportune si elle occulte ces questions; ou bien, si elle s'y articule, elle est taxée de subversion ou de commercialisation par ceux qui sont inconscients des vrais problèmes qui la sous-tendent. Pour Richard Lacroix, l'Atelier Libre et la Guilde Graphique existent, en 1978, pour les raisons suivantes: au producteur d'art, la gravure offre des possibilités uniques de création d'images et de démocratisation de l'art grâce à la diffusion très grande qui est propre à ce médium.

8. Or, en 1977, quelle école affiche autre chose que de conventionnelles images et de fades reproductions? Une enquête sur l'enseignement des arts plastiques dans les écoles, par un groupe de professeurs de l'UQAM, souligne que seules quelques écoles anglaises privilégiées, comme St. George, affichent des gravures de toute sorte aussi naturellement qu'on accroche des chromos dans les écoles privées francophones. Par contre, dans plusieurs écoles publiques francophones, des productions d'art visuel réalisés par les étudiants sont affichées dans les corridors mais elles apparaissent marginales, car l'ensemble du système scolaire ne valorise pas la formation artistique.
9. Le 20 mai 1967.
10. Propos recueillis et résumés par Y. Robillard. Voir le catalogue de l'Atelier Libre de Recherches Graphiques, 1965.
11. Ibid.
12. Interview, Décembre 1977.

English Translation, p. 88

the climate at the School, the spirit which animated Dumouchel's studio at the period when he had known it. Certainly, at Graff they would be doing something other than at the School, even on the technical plan, but at Graff one often finds again the ambiance that reigned around Dumouchel at the School of Fine Arts.

How can the production be characterized which came out of this milieu? It is perhaps a bit soon to say. A few general characteristics, at least, can be discerned. The techniques were traditional. Richard Lacroix and Serge Tousignant practised etching. Robert Savoie and Tobie Steinhouse would specialize in colour-etching. Gilles Boisvert was more at home in serigraphy. Furthermore, his pop theme lent itself more to this medium. Janine Leroux-Guillaume would excel in etching and wood-engraving, Gilbert Marion in lino-engraving, Peter Daglish, Huguette Desjardins-Faucher, like Dumouchel himself, in lithography. From the point of view of style, this generation of engravers also took advantage of the kind of absence of inhibition that movements like the new figuration in Europe and Pop art in the United States had just created on the artistic scene. "Anything goes". There was no longer a need to be abstract in order to be *modern*. One could be figurative without appearing out of date. Dumouchel is an example of this. His best lithographs are often figurative, even nostalgic, arising from his childhood memories or from his intimate life. Pierre Ayot, Gilles Boisvert and Michel Fortier, whose childhood was closer, would seek a similar subject in the present. Others, like Serge Tousignant, Françoise Bujold, Huguette Desjardins-Faucher followed, in engraving, the action and lyrical painting at which they had arrived under their teachers at the painting studios. Tobie Steinhouse and Robert Savoie have already established their vocabulary in this same vein. Europe, more than the United States, remained the important pole of attraction.

The proof of this can also be seen in the sojourns in France or in England that mark the life of most of the young engravers of the period. The generosity of the Canada Council gave each the opportunity of making his little pilgrimage to Paris, to Stanley William Hayter's (Richard Lacroix from 1961 to 1964; Robert Savoie from 1963 to 1964; Tobie Steinhouse in 1961-1962; Barry Wainright from 1962 to 1964): to Desjobert's (Roland Giguère from 1957 to 1963; Léon Bellefleur in 1958-1959): to Lacourière's (Janine Leroux-Guillaume in 1959): or to the Slade School of Fine Arts in London (Serge Tousignant in 1965; Peter Daglish from 1963 to 1965). All came back slightly disappointed and doubtless subscribed to Richard Lacroix' opinion reported by Jacques de Roussan in the little monograph he wrote on him in 1967. "Lacroix knows whereof he speaks when, after living two and a half years in France, he says that perhaps the significance of modern France in the international domain of art is exaggerated (. . .) As an engraver, he has stated that in fact he had nothing to learn in the matter of technique." This mattered little. It was not a question of exiling oneself from Quebec as in the time of the automatists. Urgent, numerous tasks awaited them at home.

In this brief panorama of engraving in Quebec from 1958 to 1965, we have not yet mentioned Yves Gaucher's work. We purposely kept his contribution for the end because, on many points, it contrasts strongly with the others. Yves Gaucher would not stagnate at the School of Fine Arts. He spent two years there (1954 to 1956) before Dumouchel appeared. The courses did not attract him. Already, in 1957, he had his first exhibition at the Galerie L'Echange and, in 1959, he won first prize in the engraving section at the Young Painting of Montreal Salon. His first engraved works were innovative from the technical point of view. He worked on laminated papers and achieved astonishing results in relief. His first images have no connection with the abstract lyricism and the action painting that predominated everywhere at that time. Soon the verticals that existed strangely with his square forms with rounded corners opened a new path for him. He discovered Webern's music and, without losing the knowledge gained until then, in 1963 he created the famous series, *Hommages à Webern,* which are also impressions in relief on laminated paper. The faintly biomorphic forms of his previous works were eliminated. There remained only the right angle, the vertical or horizontal lines, the black or white squares, in low or high relief. Parallel to this research, Gaucher's career has been dazzling. His work was noticed at the Fourth International Exhibition of Engraving at Ljubljana in Yugoslavia (1961), at the Seventh International Exhibition of Engraving at Lugano in Switzerland (1962) and in Japan in 1962 and 1963. He was also represented at the First Biennial of Prints held at Santiago, Chile, in 1963 and at Grenchen, Switzerland, in 1964. This list is not complete. Gaucher's adventure contains its own lesson. It reminds us of the importance of individual work and liberty, in creation. In this significance it brings a necessary complement to the message of Dumouchel, who believed more in the stimulating atmosphere of the group, in collective ambiance. In time, it will be possible to better discern the importance of the period with which we have dealt, in the development of art in Quebec.

(Translation by Mildred Grand)

L'ATELIER LIBRE DE RECHERCHES GRAPHIQUES AND LA GUILDE GRAPHIQUE

By Rose-Marie ARBOUR

Albert Dumouchel really marked the birth of contemporary engraving in Quebec through his teaching and practice at the Graphic Arts School at the Montreal School of Fine Arts. Richard Lacroix, founder of Atelier Libre de Recherches Graphiques, was influenced by him, like so many other Quebec engravers, when he studied at the Graphic Arts School from 1957 to 1959 under Dumouchel. "It was a shock," he says. "Dumouchel was a kind of second father to me. From the age of seventeen to twenty, he helped me, encouraged me, made me discover an ideal and find faith in myself. This is very important at that age." When Dumouchel left the Graphic Arts School for the School of Fine Arts, Richard Lacroix followed him, as assistant and professor.

However, the determinative influence in the matters of production and the dissemination of Quebec engraving was Atelier 17, directed by Stanley William Hayter in Paris[1]. It was there that Richard Lacroix worked for more than two years, from 1961 to 1963. It was there that he became aware of the possibilities offered by a free experimental workshop. In an interview with Claude Jasmin in 1966[2], Richard Lacroix explained how Atelier 17 was for him a remarkable example of organization.

In 1963 he returned to Montreal with two copper-plate engraving presses and some unique ink rollers. A letter from Edmond Labelle, director of the School of Fine Arts, offered him the opportunity of again taking the position he had left in 1960, but the educational board of the time was not of the same opinion: at the School of Fine Arts, engraving was being done exclusively in black and white; Richard Lacroix would have introduced Hayter's techniques in colour, which were at the time completely unknown in Canada. In the face of such a situation, Lacroix directed his energies elsewhere: he moved to Querbes Ave., then to a studio on St. Christopher St. with his equipment (three copper-plate engraving presses, a lithographing press, and a relief press). Engravers asked to work with him. The idea of an open studio took shape, not as an Utopian project but out of the very need of the engravers. The discussions would culminate in a project for *a free workshop open to all.* Paul Mercier, from Assistance to Creation at the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, was fired with enthusiasm: he took it upon himself to develop the plan and was instrumental in obtaining a grant of $4500 in August 1964; the official opening of the first free workshop in Canada took place on the fourteenth of the following September. At that time, six artists were working there regularly. It was an experimental studio whose "aim was to put at the disposal of Montreal artists already having a certain education in this domain all the equipment necessary for the following métiers: lithography, engraving, etching, relief and serigraphy", Richard Lacroix stated in 1965[3]. Atelier Libre was open two days a week, and the rent for each artist was set at ten dollars a month. Results were not long in appearing: in May 1965 the first Atelier Libre exhibition opened in Quebec at the Galerie de L'Atelier, directed by Renée Lesieur. Five engravers took part: Huguette Desjardins-Faucher, Pierre Hébert, Richard Lacroix, Henri Saxe and Tobie Steinhouse. The average production for each of the six artist members had been four or five plates.

But Atelier Libre did not have only the function of serving engravers. The exhibition of May 1965 allowed Richard Lacroix to show the public the cultural rôle that Atelier Libre intended to play. "It is necessary," he said, "to find a means of putting engraving within reach of the people, a means of destroying the myths"[4]. The multiplying of the engraved image permitted reducing the price and consequently made it accessible to a greater public. "We want to work in the way of the Bauhaus," he declared, which here means to render art accessible to the greatest number. The results of that first year seemed positive enough to lead the Ministry of Cultural Affairs and the Canada Council to agree to subsidize Atelier Libre jointly in equal shares. The number of members doubled.

A few months earlier, Atelier had moved to 4677 St. Denis St., where, since autumn 1964, there had existed a group called *Fusion des Arts,* several of whose members also belonged to Atelier Libre. It is important here to point out the relationships between Atelier Libre and Fusion des Arts. There was some confusion in the minds of several persons, not only between these two groups but with Guilde Graphique that would be founded in 1966 and be located at the same address. This arises from the fact that on the idealogical level the two groups had many points in common: if Atelier Libre had been opened, it was not because Quebec engraving did not exist; on the contrary, prizes and mentions won in numerous competitions and international biennales prove that

it was very much alive. But there it was: the young engravers remained holding their engravings and had to turn to other activities to make a living. Richard Lacroix had emphasized how costly equipment was for an engraver. Atelier Libre solved this problem that was technical and financial. Lacroix also demythified the techniques of engraving: "One morning," he said, "and a little equipment are enough to understand the technique of engraving", all the rest being a matter of experience and practice. So he would be a technical counsellor, not the one who directs but the one who helps each producer in the matter of material difficulties. If the technique of engraving was demythified, the very process of production was, too. *Creation*, whose first connotation is the mystery surrounding the conception and production of the work by the artist, a unique and consecrated being, was replaced by the discovery and the experimentation inherent in the different steps of production belonging to engraving. This was explained to the general public by several articles in the newspapers: "The engraving we contemplate resembles a poem in that it makes us see in one single time — and as a definite thing — what results in a series of operations"[5]. This principle of discovery through the process of production of engraving entails that of experimentation which cannot be separated from new technical resources: "More and more, art will have to reckon with industry. (. . .) Our studio wishes to be a kind of laboratory," said Richard Lacroix.

The reference to the Bauhaus, in the case of Atelier Libre, meant that they wished to make art accessible to the greatest possible number of persons, to demystify the cult of the artist's personality, to try to reconcile art and industry. The connection between these was put in concrete form in the utilization of new materials and techniques. For the engravers who attended Atelier Libre, the possibility of application of the new techniques became real, were applied and were extended to areas such as books, illustrations, posters, etc. The new relationship between art and the public materialized in the very characteristic of the engraving, which is to be a multiple and, through this, to reach a much wider public. Research and experimentation therefore had to be centred on the phenomenon of communication. The objet d'art, in this sense, had to be a collective object effective in such a milieu, upon such an occasion. In his column on art in *La Presse*, Yves Robillard showed that it was in this sense that Atelier Libre intended to democratize art. Democratization of art implied not only accessibility of engraving to a vast public, as the object of communication, but as the formula of self-administration proper to an artists' cooperative. This having been said, it is still suitable to mention certain contradictions in the basic principles that animate Atelier Libre. Thus, in the 1965 presentation catalogue, an interview with Atelier Libre engravers partially indicated the contrary; the process of production and of distribution of the engraving would not, for some of them, influence the very nature of the image produced. Gilles Boisvert said: "In fact, the technique is of little importance. It is the discovery of a new image that counts. Whether the artist makes it in painting, sculpture or engraving, only the medium changes. One does not wonder whether the artist has discovered something by drawing, and yet one always discovers through drawing." For his part, Marc-A. Nadeau emphasized the difference between the public interested in engraving and the one concerned rather with painting and sculpture: "Engraving, on account of the number of persons whom one must reach, can encounter a different public from that of the galleries." In 1965, therefore, engravers had not unanimously established the distinctive quality of the process of the production of engraving. Nevertheless, it already appeared that the democratization of art could not be accomplished without the increase of dissemination toward a vaster public. Attacking the problem of the distribution of works "implied the review of the whole question of the artistic market and the prohibitive cost of the works: Guilde Graphique would be founded in January 1966"[6].

Atelier Libre, as a place of production, could not, in fact, logically solve all the problems of the engravers. In 1965 Richard Lacroix announced the necessity of creating an "engraving guild": the purpose was to broaden the public, to reduce the price of engravings by increasing the number of copies in a printing. At that time there was no market for engraving and no gallery involved with it, the sale of an engraving bringing no benefit to anyone. Nothing was neglected by Guilde Graphique in its efforts to awaken the public to engraving. December 1966 was *engraving month*. The Guilde organized simultaneous exhibitions in eight localities in Quebec and published a catalogue. It defined itself in this way: a publishing house whose aim was to make works available, to lead artists great and small to produce one or two plates a year. Its operation was assured by a grant from the Ministry of Cultural Affairs[7]. The selection committee was composed as follows: a museum director, an art critic and an artist. Artists were invited to submit projects: "Artists are chosen without distinction as to style. Only the quality of the image is important." The combination of a place of production (Atelier Libre) and a centre of distribution, however, did not mean that the work of artists who worked at Atelier Libre was necessarily distributed by the Guilde; likewise, the Guilde could choose to distribute the work of an artist whose engravings were not produced at Atelier Libre. At the Guilde the status of the artist was as follows: as co-publisher, he shares in the profits through his copyright, fixed at 12½ per cent of the retail price, which is better than the 8 to 10 per cent internationally offered by publishers.

From 1964 Canada made its mark in the field of engraving in several international biennales. The Guilde took on the task of organizing this market, almost non-existent at the time in spite of the fame of Canadian engravers. Here, young painters such as Daglish, Gaucher, Lacroix and Saxe, were known for their engravings. "But for want of a market and true possibilities of work," said Lacroix, "many good engravers orientated themselves otherwise." He also stated that it was wrong to say that in 1966 people were not concerned with art: "There is presently in Montreal a market in reproductions of works of art and chromos valued at $8 million a year." In 1977, on this matter, the situation has only worsened.

The sensitizing and the education of the young in other things besides chromos were one of the main objectives of the Guilde in 1966. "The great task of the Guilde will therefore be a work of the education of the young: to give them the opportunity of being in direct contact with original works of art. We hope that each school will have its collection of original engravings in the same way as it has its library"[8]. To publicize its objectives, the Guilde increased its activities: in 1968-1969 it took part in more than 150 exhibitions, private, group or travelling, in Canada, the United States and Europe. In Canada, engraving appeared in 1967 as the principal element in the ensemble of Canadian artistic production. An exhibition of Canadian engravers went to the New York Museum of Modern Art; the *Toronto Star* stressed the fact that more and more artists prefer engraving as a medium: "Now the Guilde Graphique de Montréal is serving both as a centre for learning and as an outlet for prints. (. . .) Printmaking is emerging as one of Canada's major visual arts"[9].

In December 1966 Michel Fortier said: "To me, engraving and lithography are techniques that allow the developing of different qualities of painting and also give me a new and different satisfaction"[10]. And that is it for problems of a technical order. Marc-A. Nadeau said: "Engraving, by reason of the number of persons who must be reached, can find a public different from that of the galleries"[11]. And that is all for the public affected. As for profitability, whether for the engraver or the distribution house, there is none. Engraving is considered an objet d'art by Atelier Libre and the Guilde Graphique, in the sense that it is not confused with *reproduction*. Obviously, this choice gives rise to the condition of an enterprise without a lucrative purpose, the preserving of the status of the artist with his characteristics such as the style of craftsman production and the personal mark on the product at all the stages of its production. Engraving upholds the idea of the rarity of the work of art although it is a multiple; printings are necessarily limited by the time invested in producing them. Reproduction (posters, placards) implies, on the contrary, the abolishment of the singleness of the image and the mechanical multiplication in an unlimited printing. In brief, one does not make a living from engraving, and this is what has already been realized by a Vancouver businessman who, having obtained $30,000 from the Canada Council to develop an enterprise for the distribution of engraving under the name of *Canadian Native Prints*, said that he had simply sent back the partially used up grant in the face of this non-profitability.

Looking closely at the matter, we perceive that engraving, as a multiple, gives rise to a specific method of production and distribution different from that of painting and sculpture. Does the distinctive public to which it is addressed in principle demand finding in engraving the form and style of painting? The democratization of art is not an empty word: it means among other things, that the contents and form of a production are centred on aesthetic, cultural and social values equally different. Analysing and understanding this special relationship between the public and the engravers was a part of the objectives of Atelier Libre and the Guilde Graphique: in fact, the coordination between a place of production (the Atelier), a place of distribution (the Guilde) and a place of thought and analysis on the function of art (Fusion des Arts) took place beginning in 1966 and continued into 1970. Interrogation into the type of image to be produced for an increased, different public, into the function of art in society, then initiated a redefinition of the artist's rôle. Now, we know the troubles encountered by Fusion des Arts, a good majority of whose members were also members of Atelier Libre: police raids, seizure of whole files of documents never returned; where there was thought there was subversion. In 1969, at the National Assembly of Quebec, an inquiry into Fusion des Arts was proposed, at the same time as one into the Company of Young Canadians. Among many other difficulties one might mention economic pressure exerted at the same time: for Expo '67 a project for the Katimavik pavilion was ordered from Fusion des Arts; although refused, this project reappear-

ed under other, more acceptable titles, at the Canadians pavilion at Osaka a few years later. After so much energy voluntarily expended to bring about a new reality for artists and the public, the discouraged members of the group dispersed. The field of art is closed and, as soon as it tries to be critical or profitable, it comes up against the convenient prejudices of subversion or commercialization — all things in which artistic practice is rigged out as soon as it crosses the barriers of the myth of art in order to centre on a concrete reality. Artists having been sent back to their studios, the principle of everyone for himself necessarily takes over, and questioning on their practice, on their conditions of production, on relationship with social and cultural matters, no longer has reason to exist on the collective level. Formal codes proper to art for the elite can then be transformed with much greater difficulty because it is a matter here not only of giving access to elitist art to a greater section of society, but of producing, in terms of their concrete situation, significant images. Sensitizing to art is not a Utopia: in 1976-1977 the Canadian public's demand for chromos produced a revenue of 75 million dollars. These chromos, manufactured abroad, offer for the government the advantage of paying thirty per cent in ad valorem tax. Now, not one cent of this money is reinvested in a sector such as engraving. "The slogan 'Canadian content' preached by Ottawa," said Richard Lacroix, "seems to be valid only when it does not interfere with the government revenue from the taxes that are generated"[12].

The questions relative not only to the organization of production and distribution but also to ideology and economics are fundamental when we analyse the respective situations of Atelier Libre de Recherches Graphiques aand Guilde Graphique, otherwise the artistic practice of the engravers is totally immaterial and ill-timed if it hides these questions; or else if it operates on them it is accused of subversion or commercialization by those who are unaware of the real problems that underlie it. For Richard Lacroix, the Atelier Libre and the Guilde Graphique exist in 1978 for the following reasons: for the producer of art, the engraving offers unique possibilities in the creation of images and in the democratization of art, due to the very wide distribution peculiar to this medium.

1. Through his stay in the United States in the forties, Hayter also had a determinative but direct influence on the training of American engravers: "His (Hayter's) impact on American printmaking — the first generative push since Whistler — resulted in the spreading of American art through prints rather than painting." (A. Hyatt Mayor, *Prints and People*, New York, 1971)
2. *La Presse*, May 1966.
3. The Arts Council would join the Ministry of Cultural Affairs from 1965: in this way the ALRG would receive from these two organizations annual grants which would go from $6,000 to $11,000 between 1965 and 1977.
4. *La Presse*, Saturday, May 22, 1965.
5. Paul Gladu, *L'Art et le beau travail des jeunes créateurs d'aujourd'hui*, in *Le Petit Journal*, May 1, 1966.
6. Yves Robillard, *Historique de Fusion des Arts*, in *Quebec Underground*, Montreal, Éditions Médiart, 1973, Vol. I, p. 181.
7. The Arts Council would allot annually until 1970 a sum equal to that granted by the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, an average of $7,000 a year. In 1970, the Art Bank took over by its purchases from the Guilde. Actually, it would buy, annually, only to the total of $900, which amounts to a purchase of $12 a year for each of the seventy Guilde artists and to a net revenue for each of $3.67.
8. Now, in 1977, which school displays other than conventional images and full reproductions? An investigation by a group of UQAM professors into the teaching of the plastic arts in the schools emphasizes the fact that only a few privileged English schools, like St. George's, exhibit engravings of all kinds as naturally as chromos are hung in French private schools. On the other hand, in several francophone public schools visual arts productions created by the students are posted in the halls, but they appear marginal because the whole school system places no value on education in art.
9. *Toronto Star*, May 20, 1967.
10. Statements collected and summarized by Y. Robillard. See the Catalogue de l'Atelier Libre de Recherches Graphiques, 1965.
11. Ibid.
12. Interview, December, 1977.

GRAFF, A CENTRE OF GRAPHIC CONCEPTION AND . . . A LITTLE MORE

By Bernard LEVY

Auctions of contemporary art works are blossoming out all over in Montreal. It seems that the movement (because it is one) was begun by Graff a little more than two years ago. *Mardi Graff auctions* attract a crowd of amateurs that each time is more numerous (two or three hundred, difficult to estimate). These are *young* buyers (from thirty to forty years of age). Naturally, they are animated by the prospect of acquiring quality engravings at an affordable price (generally less than one hundred dollars).

It is also partly due to the money from the auctions that it has been possible to entirely reconstruct the building which houses Atelier Graff. It is easily understood why the artists of the gallery have not been much in evidence in the last two years, the period of renovation. This has not been true in the last few months.

Certainly, auction sales and exhibitions have contributed to publicizing Atelier Graff and its artists. But Graff is more than simply a gallery. As Pierre Ayot, the director, explains, this is fundamentally a centre of graphic conception and, perhaps, already a bit more — a genuine little cultural centre.

It all began in 1966. There was a strike at the School of Fine Arts. In order to continue working, the students and the professors of the class in engraving set themselves up *temporarily* at 848 Marianne St., thus creating Atelier Libre 848. It was a cellar: but *underground* art was not yet in fashion . . .

At a fee of $15 a month, the students could take the courses given at Atelier; they could also use the presses. After the strike, Atelier Libre did not close: a contribution of $15 a month allowed one to become a member. Between 1966 and 1969 a first nucleus of some ten artists formed around Pierre Ayot. Among these were to be noted Tib Beament, Lise Bissonnette, Gilles Boisvert, René Derouin, Madeleine Morin, Francine Simonin, Serge Tousignant and Robert Wolfe.

It was necessary to quickly determine an orientation for this group and choose a name that better suited its new definitions. It was René Derouin, it seems, who suggested the name which is well known to-day: GRAFF. It best answered the general definition that had been retained: centre of graphic conception.

More than a Workshop

In fact, Graff does not intend to be considered a workshop devoted exclusively to engraving, although among many artists and visitors it is particularly identified as such. The members work on visual expression under other aspects: photography, advertising, posters, objects, etc. Graff also presents itself as a training centre where courses are given: the sessions last twelve weeks ($140), with four hours per class, one evening a week. The groups are restricted to twenty pupils. This activity allows certain artists to live or to survive. But who are the pupils? Is there not competition with the establishments where graphic arts are taught? For Pierre Ayot, Graff does not compete with the University of Quebec, the CEGEP's or the professional schools. "At the Atelier," he says, "we are concerned with initiating the people who want to better know the techniques of engraving (serigraphy, etching, lithography, lino-engraving, etc.). We offer improvement courses or complementary courses to young artists who already have a general education in plastic arts but who prefer to express themselves through engraving; they come to us to learn methods which they do not yet know. This apprenticeship lets them avoid disturbing the artists working at the gallery, by perpetual and too-elementary questions." We also find among the pupils who attend Atelier persons who are simply curious, who, far from seeking to obtain course credits, wish to quickly learn basic techniques. We meet, too, artists happy to discover certain recent tricks of the trade, results of original research on technical matters. And finally, among the students we find journalists, art critics, future curators of museums, . . .

But, in any case, Graff is a studio-gallery. "This is not its only raison d'être," Pierre Ayot insists. He explains: "Graff is not, for example, a gallery that lives from the sale of exhibited works; Graff intends rather to give an opportunity to artists by offering to present their production publicly. On this plan, we do not hesitate to take certain risks by exhibiting *experimental* pieces which are found nowhere else. We do not take any profit on sales. In fact, we ask engravers to give two copies of each of their prints to the Gallery." In the eyes of Pierre Ayot and the members of Galerie Graff, the fact of presenting an exhibition should be seen as a sort of complement (a necessary complement, surely) to the work of the artists. "To introduce young artists, we organize exhibitions in which appear works of engravers who are *old* and who, as they are more known, serve as *movers*. In this way they attract a public that has the pleasure of finding them and of discovering or following new talents at the same time."

What is Graff's public? Judging from the lists of purchasers (particularly those drawn up at auction sales) the profile of the *customer* is as follows: a young woman or man (from thirty to forty years of age), who acquires works on personal taste (and is neither a collector nor a speculator); who, not being very well-off, chooses engravings whose price is much below $100; who is francophone.

If there have been few exhibitions in recent years, it is because it has been necessary to throw down the building at 963 Rachel St. and then to entirely rebuild it; an operation that has taken two years. This work has been carried on due to grants from the Arts Council ($36,000) and to the proceeds from auction sales ($40,000).