

## Régions

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# Régions: nostalgie ou avant-garde?

D'autres diront ce qu'ont d'original les manifestations artistiques et culturelles des créateurs d'une région qu'on appelait jadis «le royaume de Saguenay». Il sied tout à fait que la série de cahiers que publie *Vie des Arts* comprenne cette région qui a toujours eu la réputation d'être fortement individualisée, pour plusieurs raisons certes, mais, à coup sûr, à cause de son relatif isolement historique. Je voudrais, pour ma part, essayer de dégager très brièvement la signification que prennent aujourd'hui les manifestations et les mouvements régionalistes, et ce, dans plusieurs pays occidentaux. Il me semble, en effet, qu'au-delà de ce qui se passe au Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean et dans d'autres régions du Québec, on peut déceler un phénomène beaucoup plus général que d'aucuns ont appelé un phénomène de mutation culturelle. C'est dire d'emblée que le phénomène régionaliste, loin d'être l'expression d'une nostalgie de ce qui se meurt, se présente, au contraire, comme une manifestation d'avant-garde. Il s'agit d'une rupture, d'une cassure dans le modèle de développement des sociétés occidentales. Naguère, on s'intéressait aux régions pour les comparer aux métropoles, repérer des survivances et montrer comment elles étaient en train de rattraper le modèle des grandes capitales. Aujourd'hui, c'est pour dégager ce que peuvent avoir d'exemplaire les genres de vie et les productions culturelles des régions que l'on s'y intéresse de nouveau. A la limite, les régions font poindre une autre hypothèse de vie, l'alternative qu'exprime le beau titre du livre de René Dumont *L'Utopie ou la mort* ou celle de l'hétéronomie ou l'autonomie que décrivent certains sociologues. Les artistes qui s'expriment ici ne doivent pas être considérés comme des êtres gratuits œuvrant en dehors de la réalité; ils sont, au contraire, plongés de tout leur être dans un milieu qu'ils habitent et dévoilent au monde.

Tout se passe aujourd'hui comme si la relation métropole-régions était en train de s'inverser. Depuis que la société industrielle a imposé à l'ensemble de la vie et de la société sa logique de centralisation et de contrôle, ses méga-machines et ses méga-agglomérations, les grandes métropoles ont étoffé l'imaginaire social; la bonne vie, c'est là qu'elle se vivait; les régionaux et les ruraux apparaissaient un peu comme des attardés qui tôt ou tard *ariveraient en ville*; ce qui n'était pas sans se répercuter sur l'idée qu'ils se faisaient d'eux-mêmes; ils avaient tendance à envisager leur vie comme un

manque de quelque chose. Depuis quelque temps, quelque chose s'est détraqué dans cette relation. Il ne s'agit pas ici de cerner ce phénomène dans toutes ses dimensions mais plutôt de poser certaines questions et d'évoquer certaines hypothèses au sujet de cette brisure dans le modèle de développement qui a prévalu dans nos sociétés industrielles pendant plusieurs dizaines de décennies. Ce n'est évidemment pas d'aujourd'hui que date la critique de nos sociétés mais ce qui semble nouveau, c'est l'épuisement des idéologies et des utopies communistes et tiers-mondistes. Il semble qu'aujourd'hui de plus en plus d'individus et de groupes en sont venus à croire que cet ailleurs et cette autre vie désirés, il faut les imaginer et les créer sur place et dans la vie quotidienne. On commence à se demander si la *liberté* c'est exclusivement celle d'avancer, de fuir en avant ou si elle n'est pas aussi et surtout, peut-être, celle de rester, de s'enraciner, de vivre et de percevoir, comme l'écrit Paul Virilio, «la profondeur d'un lieu, d'un temps, d'un espace...»<sup>1</sup> Les mots et les phantasmes qui nourrissent aujourd'hui l'imagination des plus lucides sont ceux d'écologie, d'autonomie, d'autogestion et d'autorégulation. Plus près de notre propos et du bloc thématique de *Vie des Arts*, on a tendance à associer de plus en plus écologie et région, écologisme et régionalisme. Pourquoi? Il me semble que l'on ré-associe ainsi culture et nature, que l'on se rend compte que les deux sont solidaires l'une de l'autre et qu'à détruire l'une on détruit l'autre parce que c'est la même logique qui est à l'œuvre.

Tant que les sociétés occidentales ont vécu sur l'idée que la nature avait été donnée à l'homme pour qu'il l'exploite toujours de plus en plus efficacement, toute leur vie a été orientée vers une mobilité galopante, sous-tendue par une croissance économique et un développement technologique dont on ne voyait pas la fin. Ce n'est que récemment que l'on s'est rendu compte qu'avaient été sérieusement entamés les stocks de ressources non renouvelables, que les équilibres naturels avaient été rompus et que la pollution croît inexorablement. De là sont nés les mouvements écologiques qui visent à restaurer l'harmonie de l'homme avec la nature. On s'aperçoit vite que ce type de développement détruisait non seulement la nature mais aussi les patrimoines traditionnels et les mémoires collectives, en un mot les cultures. Les parcellisations, spécialisations et divisions qu'engendrent ces

## NOTE

1. *Autrement*, No 14 (1978), p. 240.

Plan de la rivière du Saguenay et de ses environs par A. Larue, d'après les données fournies par Pascal Taché. Gravé par Smillie le Jeune, 1827. Montréal, Bibliothèque Nationale du Québec. (Phot. Gabor Szilasi).



By Marcel RIOUX

### ART AND REGIONALISM

By Andrée PARADIS

Is the art of regions a regionalist art? How can we define a regionalist art? These are the questions that have arisen during the surveys made in the region of Chicoutimi and Lake St. John among groups involved in plastic arts, as also occurred a few months earlier during those undertaken in the Sherbrooke area for the preparation of our preceding issue.

Regionalist art as conceived to-day reflects an always thorough relationship to a milieu which is due not only to an accident of birth but which is truly a place where one lives, where immediate and surrounding nature feeds the eyes and the imagination, where the appeal to expression is urgent. Formerly isolated and protected, the art of regions has inspired an intimate art, a realist art largely dominated by the need to interpret the landscape and a naive art on which we shall do a thematic study in the near future. In it we shall stress the important contribution of the naive painters of the Saguenay and Charlevoix, the Villeneuves<sup>1</sup>, the Bouchards and the Bolducs. The art of regions is presently characterized by its freedom of expression and by its concern for participation in the interrogations that preoccupy the artists of all parts of the world.

The recent establishment of universities in the regions has contributed to the creation of a new social and cultural climate. On the one hand, the university is in the process of rediscovering one of its most ancient functions, which is to be a centre of spiritual influence, intellectual and artistic as much as scientific. The age of political expansion is perhaps over, finally. And the university will regain its vocation in culture and civilization.

On the other hand, art is always the first medium to inform us that there has been something changed. Its new orientations seem positive to us. Due to the presence of universities and colleges, the artist of the region is well informed. He tries to integrate better with the community and his need to communicate becomes evident. He freely confesses that he is more influenced by New York than by Montreal, Quebec or Toronto. But in the libraries documentation is not only North American, it is accompanied by a good selection of European publications.

In this spirit, it is necessary to stress the important rôle of a cultural agent such as the Lending Library of the Saguenay-Lake St. John which serves sixty-five municipalities of the region, from Tadoussac to Chapais and which, besides circulating books, films, records and educational toys, also lends without charge works of art to homes. The Library's director, Jean-Marc Bourgeois is never short of projects: at present, in collaboration with the René-Bergeron Foundation, he is organizing a collection of engravings and serigraphs by artists of the Saguenay-Lake St. John, the promotion of which he plans to assure. There is no doubt that such an activity and such a sense of animation inspire an awareness in which contradiction exists, but what is particularly impressive is the will to express themselves without restraint, to advance toward a thought that seeks to take form.

To these artists who are working so close to us I leave this reflection by Bernard Noël: "The world could be the open book of the world's thought, but habit shuts our eyes and makes us not be in the world. The thinker wishes to awaken the gaze, but for that purpose he must rewrite the book of the world"<sup>2</sup>.

1. See the article by François-Marc Gagnon in *Vie des Arts*, Vol. XVI, No. 65, pp. 38-41.

2. Bernard Noël, *Magritte*, Paris, Éditions Flammarion, 1976.

(Translation by Mildred Grand)

Others will relate what is original in the artistic and cultural manifestations of the creators of a region formerly called "the realm of Saguenay". It is altogether fitting that the series of sections published by *Vie des Arts* should include this region which has always had the reputation of being strongly individualized, for several reasons, of course, but assuredly on account of its historically relative isolation. Speaking for myself, I would like to try to bring out very briefly the meaning that regional manifestations and movements take on to-day in many western countries. Indeed, it seems to me that, beyond what is happening in Saguenay-Lake St. John and in other regions of Quebec, we can perceive a much more general phenomenon of cultural mutation. This definitely means that the regional phenomenon, far from being the expression of a nostalgia for what is dying, appears, on the contrary, as an avant-garde manifestation. This is a case of a rupture, a break in the model of development of western societies. A short time ago, people were interested in regions in order to compare them to metropolises, to discover survivals and to show how they were in the process of overtaking the model of big cities. To-day people are involved there for the purpose of bringing out what pattern there may be in the types of life and the cultural productions of the regions. To an extreme, the regions are fostering another notion of life, the alternative expressed by the fine title of René Dumont's book *L'Utopie ou la mort* or that of the heteronomy or the autonomy described by some sociologists. The artists who express themselves here must not be considered as gratuitous persons working outside of reality; on the contrary, they are completely immersed in a milieu that they inhabit and which they reveal to the world.

To-day everything is happening as though the metropolis-regions relationship was reversing itself. Since industrial society imposed its logic of centralization and control, its mega-machines and mega-agglomerations on the ensemble of life and society, large urban centres have given body to social imagery; it was there that the good life was lived; persons of regional and rural areas appeared somewhat like old fogies who sooner or later would catch up; which had repercussions on the idea they had of themselves; they were inclined to view their lives as a lack of something. For some time, something has gone wrong in this relationship. We are not concerned here with examining this phenomenon in all its dimensions, but rather with asking certain questions and evoking certain hypotheses on this break in the type of development which has prevailed in our industrial societies for several decades. Obviously, the criticism of our societies does not date from to-day, but what seems new is the weakening of ideologies and communist and Third World utopias. It appears that to-day more and more individuals and groups have come to believe that this desired other place and this other life must be imagined and created where one is and in everyday life. We are beginning to wonder if liberty is exclusively the freedom to advance, to rush forward, but if it is not also and particularly, perhaps, the freedom to remain, to take root, to live and to perceive, as Paul Virilio wrote, "the depths of a place, a time, a space . . ."<sup>1</sup> The words and phantasms that to-day feed the most lucid imagination are those of ecology, autonomy, self-management and self-rule. Closer to our subject and to the thematic plan of *Vie des Arts*, we are inclined to associate more and more ecology and region, ecologism and regionalism. For what reason? It seems to me that in this way we re-associate culture and nature, that we realize that the two are interdependent and that in destroying one we destroy the other because the same logic is involved.

As long as western societies existed on the idea that nature had been given to man so that he might exploit it always more and more effectively, all their life was oriented toward a galloping mobility, upheld by an economic growth and a technological development with no visible end. It is only recently that we have realized that the supply of non-renewable resources had been seriously depleted, that the balance of nature had been destroyed and that pollution is increasing inexorably. From this have arisen the ecological movements that aim at restoring man's harmony with nature. We quickly see that this type of development was destroying not only nature but also traditional heritages and collective memories — in a word, cultures. The fragmentations, specializations and divisions engendered by these kinds of living demand controls and coordinations on the part of states and the large enterprises that turn individuals and groups into robots and isolate them from nature,

from their peers and from their past. This is the logic of merchandise — that of uniformity and equivalence — applied to man, having become as interchangeable as merchandise itself. The great western ideologies that have spread over the whole world share the same options concerning economic growth and technological development.

In a number of countries the people are realizing more and more that beyond criticizing American-style capitalism or Russian-style communism, it is necessary to enter determinedly upon the *creating* of new social forms and, above all, a new social image. And it is here that the regions enter the picture — those regions on which the big levelling machines have left some humus — and the arts which are, by their nature, the mine of new possibilities.

It is very evident that neither the regions nor the arts contain right away all the answers to our concern and to our contemporary anxieties. But we can state that where a certain cultural density continues to exist — a harmonious way of living with nature, one's peers and oneself in the continuity of history — and creators who go beyond the social image that advertisers of all stamps wish to impose, there reside possibilities which, through numerous mediations, indicate the way toward a new life.

1. *Autrement*, No. 14 (1978), p. 240.

(Translation by Mildred Grand)

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### THREE TEMPERAMENTS, THREE CONSTANTS

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By Roger SARRAZIN

How shall we identify artists who work in a geographically remote region like ours? How do they respond to the great urban movements: conceptual art, minimal art, hyperrealism, social intervention art...? Recent meetings with three of them whom I had known for a long time soon made me understand that manifestations of art must be perceived in themselves and not according to ready-made definitions or those from elsewhere. Gatién Moisan, Jean-Guy Barbeau and Suzanne Tremblay are, in their own way, artists whose first characteristic is not to reject what they see but, having entered upon a unique procedure, to continue in it. In this sense, they are firmly individualists working outside the trends in fashion and create no problem about this for themselves!

#### Gatién Moisan — Reason First

Those who have seen Gatién Moisan's recent productions are impressed by the subjects with which he deals and by his uncommon way of treating them. The most astonishing paradoxes dwell in his pictures. While the themes suggest timelessness, movement, even weightlessness (*Lévitation, J'entre dans la zone couleur, Promenade géométrique, La Course inutile, Le Combat*)<sup>1</sup>, it is nevertheless a sensation of the halting of time, of immobility, that possesses the viewer.

What does this come from? Without wishing to repeat Gilles Daigneault's excellent explanation on Moisan's purposes and development<sup>2</sup>, there is some value in re-examining the elements of his images.

To begin with, the immensity of the rocky décor and the sky is fascinating. This holds no surprise, since for some years this painter has daily faced the fjord of the Saguenay, more than two miles wide at Sainte-Rose-du-Nord. When the background of the picture is not completely filled by this décor, geometrical spaces complete it, especially in the water-colours. The terrestrial or aerial space thus created is occupied by one or several giant humanoids fixed in their motion; sometimes animals, just as unmoving, accompany them. Superimposed lines or geometrical figures mark out portions of space or remind the spectator that nothing is left to chance and that these compositions demonstrate a development that is not only rational but also systematic. Besides, the artist freely explains himself on this. He does not expect that his development will be found easy or pleasing and describes it himself as "intellectual". To him, it is the plastic result that counts, ... and he reasons first.

#### The Golden Number

It is therefore not surprising to realize that since 1963, when he completed his studies at the Quebec School of Fine Arts, Moisan got into the habit of working in a very methodical way. From that time,

all his productions (even the water-colours) have been executed from a master sketch and numerous preparatory studies. All the compositions are planned according to the golden number. Doubtless his admiration for the techniques of the masters of the Renaissance or their successors (we think particularly of Poussin, Constable, Cézanne or ... Dali) led him to focus on this method of working.

The glance that we have taken at the sketches (the artist's preparations) reveals his manner. By way of illustration, we have chosen a page of preparatory work and a finished water-colour titled *La Chute d'Icare*. For his pictures he freely makes use of photographs (rocks, rivers), anatomical illustrations or a wooden mannequin, and detailed studies.

Moisan's geometrical approach is convincing. Spatial relationships are accurate ... but we find ourselves wondering if they do not produce too static a climate, slightly too aseptic through calculation, even if the colours and the textures sometimes leave an impression of great warmth. Is it perhaps that the atmosphere affects the viewer more immediately than the means employed?

#### The Presence of Man

The presence of man in the universe, even hidden behind his supermen, however, is constant with Moisan. From 1963, man appears on his student's ceramics, stylized as in the Grecian geometrical period. He continues to be seen in the geometrical paintings after 1965, but he is imprisoned in limited spaces and always as *abstract*. The humanoid seen in the paintings produced before last August appeared since 1974, when the painter moved to Sainte-Rose-du-Nord.

What will become of this philosophical research in Moisan's plastic universe? The last time we met him, at the end of July, he was a happy young father getting ready to move into a big studio whose construction he had just completed. He showed us large works divided into one, two or three panels, in which figures of more human morphology were the main subject and formed the link between the parts. Already, although they were only begun, we discerned an atmosphere in which plasticity was counterbalanced by the inner quality of the figures, as if Moisan wished to place man and his inner world in a physical milieu previously exploited in his earlier productions. We wager that the act of proceeding to larger works will also lead to an increased spontaneity of touch!

#### Jean-Guy Barbeau — Poetry Above All

Modern schools develop aesthetic theories. An unknown artist will renew painting by painting.

This statement, recorded in one of the exhibition booklets kept by Jean-Guy Barbeau<sup>3</sup>, professor and artist-painter of Chicoutimi, has been taken by him at the same time as an avowal and a declaration. An avowal in the sense that he does not concern himself with fashion or criticism and, still less, with the avant-garde. A significant declaration that, for him, art is particularly the occasion of a renewed everyday action: that of taking up his brush and painting in his little studio.

Behind him he has a diversified background: fine arts course at Quebec, a year of specialization in stained glass at Arts and Crafts in Detroit, Michigan, additional courses in the plastic arts at the University of Quebec at Chicoutimi. His experience is impressive: advertising and commercial art, interior decoration, professor of plastic arts, many mural productions and, notably, stained glass in Quebec and abroad. Aside from having won American and Quebec prizes, he recalls nostalgically an important solo exhibition at Warsaw, where he had been invited by the Ministry of Culture and the Arts<sup>4</sup>.

Even if he does not deny certain ties (pastiche executed humorously and which are reminiscent of Dallaire, his former professor, of Pellán or of Picasso are evidence of them), Barbeau lives in the present. A philosopher and also a scoffer, he is more inclined to talk about his professional interests than about his past. And so we are not going to linger on his earlier works, but rather take a look at his recent production: acrylics and small gouaches.

#### A Second Signature

The canvases in acrylic are not all produced in flat tints. Some are completely different: their ranges of colour are more extensive; the material is sometimes worked to a greater degree. The atmosphere of *L'Homme au petit cheval gris* (Coll. of Mme Germaine Lajoie) is very different. The picture titled *Les trois snobs de Trois-Pistoles* reveals Barbeau's qualities as a graphic artist and a colourist. The composition is incisive and balanced, the lines supple and refined. The figures are stylized in the typical fashion of his present pictures. The space is defined by three levels on which the three