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## PARTICIPATING IN THE BIRTH OF A NEW HUMANISM

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By Andrée PARADIS

In the following pages our contributors will speak to you of experiments that concern young sculpture. While preparing this section I happened to reread the admirable dialogue exchanged between President Senghor and André Malraux<sup>1</sup> at the time of an exhibition of African sculpture opened by the French minister during the events of the festival of Negro Arts at Dakar, and I questioned myself on our young sculptors' state of mind. Are they aware of being a living part of the Mediterranean heritage whose passionate defender Malraux is, which has continued, as much through blood as through spirit, on this side of the Atlantic for more than three hundred years of change in cultural habits? On the other hand, are our sculptors sensitive to the wave of freedom brought by African sculpture to European art at the beginning of the twentieth century? And, still more, are they endeavouring to know what is being sought by the artists of the awakening continents? If this is so, they surely find in their investigations familiar accents and queries that resemble their own, as well as an identical need for taking root and a will to be identified in the context of their era.

When André Malraux asked President Senghor: "Was the African who sculpted masks not referring to the supernatural of which you spoke, and not to an aesthetic quality?", the President replied: "The aesthetic quality was the means of expression of his supernatural, as in your Kings of Chartres." And, confident in the creative spirit that he tries to develop and foster in his compatriots, the President added: "Ours hold a dialogue with universal art in a certain way, by a certain route. You are right — our sculptors must not begin to want to sculpt new masks! They must feel at home in universal art in their way, as much as you do. It is necessary that they know that the violence of emotion which is Africa was bestowed on them more than on all others. The masks will die, but Africa will not long accept modern western art. We know that all Nature is animated by a human presence; in the end we shall understand this!"

To strive to perceive this reality is to participate in the new humanism which is opposed to cold speculations, intellectual or other, to the trite adventures of fashion and play; it is to be aware of a new spirit we feel dawning here and there. And what will be the future of sculpture in such a context? Only the sculptor can say, for he alone has the power to discover the mystery, the secret of occult forces. Only he can have a premonition of our needs for metamorphosis. Intelligence and persistence are among his best weapons.

Speaking for myself, I would wish that, thanks to the sculptor, our public places, and particularly our parks, would become a source of inspiration and that the wholly-planned integration of sculpture in these areas would contribute to creating a climate conducive to meditation, where man might feel exalted in his environment. Is a more frequent use of sculptors too much to ask?

1. André Malraux, *Hôtes de passage*, Paris, Éditions Gallimard, 1975.

(Translation by Mildred Grand)

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## THE QUEBEC SCULPTURE COUNCIL

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By Claude-Paul GAUTHIER

The Quebec Sculpture Council is a legally constituted body whose responsibility is to ensure the defence of the social and moral rights of Quebec's sculptors, the distribution of sculpture, the coordination and transmission of professional information, and which

encourages the holding of important cultural events in sculpture in Quebec as well as elsewhere: symposiums, exhibitions, etc.

The Council was formed in spring 1978<sup>1</sup> by a group of Quebec sculptors aware of the major problems of contemporary sculpture and of the artists who are involved in it. Production, dimensions, weight, transport, marketing of formalist works of all trends, non-commercial character of projects, plans and execution of future conceptual and technological sculpture and the difficulty of categorizing temporary *animational* and environmental forms of contemporary art lead the artist to seek other forms of social implication and create new collective opportunities of distribution and of comprehension on the part of the public. At the time of the establishing of government cultural policies, for example, it is possible, if one can make oneself heard, to encourage the cultural involvement of private or industrial organizations and to obtain concrete modifications in the mechanisms of artistic production and distribution, on the judicial, legal and economic points of view.

The Quebec Sculpture Council is going ahead with several short- and long-term projects in order to increase the collective opportunities of sculptors in self-determination, distribution and economic autonomy. Certainly, the best marketing can be carried on only by the artist himself, but it is important that sculptors be able to count on public, parapublic and government funds.

One of the most stimulating collective displays of sculpture is the symposium. Several have taken place in Quebec since 1964, the date of the symposium on Mount Royal in Montreal. During these events, some legal and organizational problems arose. Aware of the necessity of restructuring the norms, the Council set up a study committee which made very definite recommendations on the standards appropriate to assuring the maximum advantage for the artists concerning selection, working conditions, contractual wage arrangements — contract type — and possibilities of access to technological means of construction — contacts with industry — with the general aim of permitting technical and conceptual planning, increasing their frequency and guaranteeing their quality. The committee also established a policy intended to emphasize the dissemination of information on these events.

Another fact offers great possibilities for sculptors: the law on the integration of works of art in public buildings, which stipulated that one per cent of the budget of those buildings should be applied to the installation of works of art integrated into architecture<sup>2</sup>.

The Quebec Sculpture Council has created a study committee composed of sculptors Charles Daudelin and Pierre Granche among others, which has submitted precise recommendations to the different levels of government: municipal, provincial and federal.

The following are a few examples of its recommendations:

- Dissemination of information on contracts (open competitions);
- Extension of the 1% law to all ministries, state boards, public or semi-public bodies supported by grants (CEGEPs, school commissions, etc.) and to all buildings renovated or salvaged by these same bodies, to municipalities, etc.;
- The presence of sculptors at preliminary studies of architectural projects;
- The modification of clauses in contracts in such a way as to assure, for example, the further maintenance of the works, pegging of the price of materials, full respect for the author's right of the artist, maximum protection of the artist with relation to responsibilities incurred, etc.

Another aspect of the development of sculpture in Quebec is marketing and distribution. The Quebec Sculpture Council stresses exhibitions, supports and encourages the initiatives of the milieu in this sense, as much on the national level as on the international, in collaboration with the governments concerned, in such a way as to publicize the important works of contemporary Quebec sculptors. It is entirely logical to enter Quebec creations in the international field of the sculpture market and cultural exchanges between countries.

Many studies have been conducted on the socio-economic situation of sculptors (and artists in general), particularly by UNESCO and Statistics Canada. They show, as clearly as possible, that "three artists out of four in Canada are obliged to take another job, while eighty out of one hundred of them earn less than \$5000 from their art"<sup>3</sup>.

Such is the individual situation of the sculptor. To attempt to remedy it, it is important that the artists come to grips collectively with their involvement in decision-making powers so as to arouse a collective interest in sculpture and increase the opportunities of direct commitment through the right of official say in planning of urban and rural development, in order that they may give a concrete, involved and contemporary meaning to their work, with a view to endowing sculpture with a cultural, social and human sense other than only an ostentatious dream.

1. The Quebec Sculpture Council, like those of Painting and Engraving, has the goal of ensuring for all artists in the visual arts an effective representation. Since the discontinuance of the activities of the Quebec Association of Sculptors in 1974, sculptors had been deprived of any official representation. (Mr. Gauthier is president of the QSC.)
2. The 1% law, entitled law for the *embellishment* of public buildings. The word "embellishment" does not apply to the different aspects of art expression and, in consequence, should be changed.
3. Cf. an article on *Le peu de revenu des artistes* which appeared in *La Presse*, Montreal, on May 14, 1979.

(Translation by Mildred Grand)

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## THE EXPRESSIONISM OF PHILIP SURREY

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By Gilles DAIGNEAULT

A long time ago, criticism did not really know what to believe about Philip Surrey's work. Indeed, as early as 1942, in the catalogue for the *Aspects of Contemporary Painting in Canada* exhibition that he had organized for some American cities, Marcel Parizeau had classified Surrey among the non-classifiables, on the fringe of three groups of duly labelled Quebec painters. Later, writers cheerfully contradicted one another on the subject of this artist; now they termed him an illustrator, certainly attractive, but whose images were more meaningful for the small history of Montreal than for the great history of art; now — for instance in the catalogue for the retrospective that the Musée d'Art Contemporain put on for him in 1971 — they regarded Surrey as an abstract painter, "much more than Riopelle or Borduas, who are actually important non-figurative landscapists". In short, it is with difficulty that the public can count on informed criticism to help it interpret this work.

In what concerns him, Surrey very clearly states that he is preoccupied only with composition, with "design", as he says. And yet he is otherwise neither surprised nor offended by the attitude of those who see only the anecdote in his pictures. "That's normal . . . Look at the number of people who read novels only for their story!" He acknowledges that the subjects he paints interest him, but for the quality of the lights which envelop and transfigure them much more than for their "human interest". This last element comes far behind all the others when the artist enumerates, in order of importance, the points that capture his attention during the execution of the picture.

This having been said, Surrey also has some obsessions, not pictorial but very human, that warp his vision of the images he encounters in the city and urge him to stop at certain ones which are dim (when they are not clearly oppressive). And the long formal work of which Surrey speaks so freely and which so much delayed the appearance of his pictures in their final form seems to aim only at preserving and, paradoxically, at accentuating the spontaneity of this first ambiguous impression. "Everything is planned in my images; nothing is left to chance or counts on accident", Surrey would say; his attitude calls to mind that of a Daumier or, especially, of a Degas. So we must not resent the fact that spectators linger on the contents of Surrey's works and on their emotive capacity; all the artist's art invites them to this, and I believe he does not object to this kind of communication that also basically impassions him.

In this view, Surrey's plastic offerings are not far from those of the Brücke Expressionists whose uneasy quality of colours, as well as forms now too angular, now too sinuous, expressed a certain nostalgia for a lost paradise, a malaise of being (when this was not explicitly anguish or neurosis). Now, during our conversation Surrey would speak frequently of his fundamental pessimism, saying that it is very difficult in our day to be lucid and optimistic at the same time . . .

On this matter, there is one thing that occupies a special place in the artist's imagination and which he often uses to express what he resents most: the automobile. "At present," he says, "we are going through not the atomic age (at least as long as each person does not have his own reactor!) but certainly the automobile age." Recent pictures like *The Highway* and *The Trophy* show how Surrey transforms simply disagreeable spectacles — such as a stag lying on the hood of a hunter's car or a small animal crushed on a highway — into powerful images symbolic of the human condition; elsewhere, he depicts an automobile threatening three girls or motorcycles from

which *hippies* flee, which plastically condemn the stupid aggressiveness of the "male"; and finally — a wink at the history of art — it happens that Poussin's horses or a bull by Goya do not escape Surrey's *idée fixe* and are ingeniously transformed into always-destructive hurtling cars. And one day a friend would tell him that it was impossible to paint cars!

Let us keep in mind that if this warping of the real, of which the pictures of the automobile are a good example, brings Surrey close to Expressionism, the meticulous work of reflection on painting that he carried on from the first impression makes him very different from the painters of the German school, who were often supporters of direct expression. Thus, while plastically stressing the feelings that gave rise to the painting, the pictorial work and particularly the sometimes very visible structure make them in some way bearable (instead of aggravating them as with the Expressionists), and everything occurs as if the artist told the viewers that Painting exists to console each of them in the difficult periods of life, the very ones that often evoke Philip Surrey's images.

(Translation by Mildred Grand)

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## JEFFREY SPALDING'S METAPHORS OF ORDER

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By Eric CAMERON

Consider these two facts: — One, that institutional art-buyers, academic job-givers and public grant-awards are now and henceforth the arbiters of success of survival. Two, that art continues to be made by artists and not by committees. It may follow that the pattern of the new artist's career will be rather different from the popular stereotype of the romantic loner — and it may follow from that that to-day's artist will tend to be the sort of person who can adjust to the new career pattern. But there remains an inevitable tension between the institutional basis of patronage that creates the general climate of art values and the demands on individual energies and inspiration that bring art finally into being. With the right artist this tension, in itself, may be a force to sharpen sensibility and give a new vision to the new art. Jeffrey Spalding is a case in point.

Having two master's degrees to his credit, a growing body of art writing and experience as a gallery curator and college-teacher and administrator, he emerges at 26 as perhaps the most intellectually disciplined young artist in Canada. And yet it is also true that he is a natural artist. Since the days when he first did drawings of Yogi Bear and Huckleberry Hound there has never been a time when he was not painting or drawing or making videotapes or something. As he developed it became clear he was the kind of natural artist whose own native temperament would lead him towards the academic life, whose spontaneous allegiances would be to systemic painting, minimal art and conceptual art, and whose own work at its highest level of fulfillment would epitomize principles of reason, order and intellectual clarity. This is not to say that he escaped the tensions of the situation. On the contrary, he knew both the joy in mess, mimicry and pretty colours that first attracts the child to crayons and paint-box and, alongside it, a growing adult commitment to structural and formal restraints that he came to hold with the force of moral principle. It is because both aspects were internalized that they emerge in his art with the poignancy of passions in conflict.

Every work in one way or another turns on the attempt to cope with the residue of more primitive emotion that constantly demands to be taken into account. In succession come periods of justification, negation, denial and concealment. In their detailed working out each represents a progressive lifting of symbolic meaning towards the surface of consciousness.

The first day I met him he was talking about the trichromatic theory of colour. The gist of it is familiar to anyone with colour T.V. There are three basic colours, red, green and blue; twiddle the knobs to generate all the rest. His version attached itself to the intermediary hues that complement yellow with blue-green and purple-red. If you want it to sound more esoteric you can say "cyan" and "magenta". In 1969 two jargon words from colour physics pay lip-service to the intellectual inferiority complex of conceptual art.

A series of paintings equates the three component hues with the sides of triangular canvases. Double bands of colour cross in three directions. They may be dispersed so that the colour fills the space in the corner, leaving the opposite side blank, or vice versa. A total of eight patterns emerges, and the eight triangles can be fitted together in any order to open up a vastly greater permutation of effects in combination. It provides a justification for bringing together the brightest colours in the artist's palette and the whole has a nice jingly-jangly sort of exuberance. The project is significantly original in two respects. Colour is made to yield a calculable and intrinsic logic in its mode of organization, and form is made subservient to the rational of colour. Moreover, the logic of the system is visually as well as verbally convincing. It is on an emotional level that the piece may be criticized for failing to engage the deeper reasonance of real-life experience.

Together with these works in the period of justification I would include his 'name' paintings and the first videotapes. As time went on, he elaborated his colour formula, admitting the existence of hidden meanings by using combinations of stripes to encode the letters of the alphabet. The unit is a block of three stripes side by side. It allows twenty-seven permutations of the three colours, one for each letter and one over for spaces between words. Stripes crossing stripes on 18" square canvases gives sixteen three-stripe units, just enough for his own name, and later several of his family and friends. The notion of personal identity secreted within the impeccably formal arrangements of colours is indicative of his sources of motivation but it is kindest not to look too hard at the paintings themselves. About the same time, however, he did a video version. As he did not have access to colour cameras, he divided the screen into bands of black, white and 'snow'. There are again twenty-seven possible permutations and again he equates them with letters of the alphabet. In succession they spell out a message explaining the principles of its own encoding. The self-enclosure of the system (the ironic interface of the cryptographic and the cryptic) has always seemed to me both formally and emotionally more satisfactory than the name paintings, and the changing horizontal bands are mysteriously suggestive of silent landscape. When the so-called 'snow' appears low down it may read as rippling water, in the upper zone as a heat haze. The timing of the changes is regular, but sensitively judged. The whole emanates a certain reticent power.

The transition from justification to negation came about through reexamination of the implications of the triangular paintings, and with it his art achieves an intensity of expression scarcely hinted at before. In the triangles, he had calculated each effect of overlapping hues and mixed a separate colour to match it. The result was ambivalent. The colour system could be read equally plausibly in terms of the additive projection of coloured lights rising to a full white, or as the subtraction of superimposed filters taking it down to a theoretical black. The ambivalence was nice in that it offered the possibility of a visual reversal in the reading of the image corresponding to a changed theoretical interpretation. However, the price was that his painting came out as an illustration of theory, when the reality on which that theory was based lay at the tip of his brush. Paint itself changes light in the manner of just such filters.

The trouble may have been that he did not really believe his text books. The theoretical "black" where all three colours overlap is in fact rendered with a not very dark purple. There may have been aesthetic reasons for preferring that colour, and it is true that there are technical difficulties in dealing with the reality of paint. If the layers are fairly thick it becomes more opaque, so the top layer predominates; if it is thin enough to eliminate that problem it is likely to be so pale the washes may neutralize the effect of individual hues but only accumulate the tone of a weak grey. However, if the same colours are built up through a hundred and fifty washes the result is an utterly impenetrable black. In the first pieces, Spalding had to accept some variations in density that revealed what had taken place and suggested a pictorial depth magnifying the minute scale of the physical layering of the paint. With practice it all became bland and uniform. Only the drips falling over the edge of the canvas gave the clue to what had taken place and to the brilliance of component hues. He soon discovered that two complementaries would work just as well as a three-colour structure: cadmium orange and ultramarine blue; red, green and blue-violet; magenta and green.

It is as if the tiny area where all three colours overlap in the triangles had spread to fill the whole surface of large square canvases. There is an inversion of one's normal anticipations that the surface will reveal the subject enclosed within a neutral surround. We expect the complexities of paint layers will yield at least a modicum of virtual space, but that expectation is confounded. The

surface is as resolute in its virtual flatness as any that has ever been painted. It has a slight, less than semi-gloss that denies even such depths as might lurk within its single uniform hue. When several paintings are seen together the blacks differentiate themselves by the subtlest secretive innuendo.

There is no doubt that Jeff Spalding's black square canvases take their permission from the black square canvases Ad Reinhardt was painting as much as ten years before, but Spalding's works advance the logic of the argument, edge just a little closer to the precipice of meaning where the last trace of pictorial suggestion slips over into a purely literal reading of the object. Moreover he eliminates the arbitrariness of Reinhardt's residual colour distinctions and the applied geometry of his minimal trisection of the field. The format is simplified, too, by the elimination of the frame. And yet the anticipation of the possibility of a frame that will conceal the drips over the edge has the effect of relegating them to a subordinate position; these do not disrupt our normal orientation towards the front surface of the painting. From that principal viewpoint the image presents an utterly undifferentiated uniformity which yet yields a sense of pure pictorial potentiality. Ad Reinhardt once said that artists should be judged by what they refuse to do. Jeffrey Spalding's black paintings share with Reinhardt the ability to communicate the mystical aura of renunciation of unseen meanings that have been held back. They are at once pictures of everything and nothing.

In the black paintings one feels the effort needed to keep the human basis of emotion out of sight beneath the surface. Contemporary with them is a videotape that reads almost as a primer to the symbolic implications of what has taken place. He made it by holding the camera of a portapak lens up on his knee and spitting at it. The saliva rapidly blots out the image of his face, leaving the screen as blank as the black paintings. The only indications of continuing activity are ripples as each new spit-ball splashes into the pool of liquid. It is not necessary to force the equivalence of paint and spit. The achievement of each surface is equally the act of a physical human body. But whereas the videotape literally illustrates the self-obliteration of material human presence, the paintings sublimate the animal aspects of human action and project it to a level of ideal transcendence. The black paintings renounce not only specific pictorial content, but also the sensory delight in the constituent colours that negate each other across the entire surface and the sensual pleasure of manipulating paint that loses its fluid character everywhere except in the drips spilling over the edge.

The black paintings represent an emotional peak. The theme of personal denial is more explicitly spelled out in Spalding's next series of paintings and this frankness reduces the tension. Accordingly, there is a reduction in scale and also a more austere material base as two-foot-square masonite boards replace four-foot canvases. The procedure is to build up two or three layers of different colours and kinds of paint, and then to remove the top one by some means of physical abrasion, emery cloth, steel wool or liquid sandpaper. Sometimes the removal accidentally penetrates several layers and then there can be quite strong contrasts of tone and colour. In a way these paintings read much more like conventional modern art. They may not be as challenging as the triangles or blacks, but they identify the motivating impulses more clearly. The removed paint often had a low-level vulgar appeal for him: the gloss of black or white spray enamel. The process of abrasion guarantees a virtual impoverishment to the final result, a powdery pallor that offsets the increase in visual content.

The removals in one way represent an extreme of self-denial but they simultaneously readmit internal differentiations within the surface image. A still more recent series eliminates them again but allows a greater variety of colour and acknowledges its symbolization of personal and intimate feelings. The base is again masonite board. Each day for a month he paints the surface completely with a colour mixture that reflects his mood, his response to the events of that particular day. At the end of the month he adds a layer of neutral grey. Only the suggestion of crossing vertical and horizontal textures gives a hint of the accumulated changing directions of the brushwork on alternate days. Traces of the concealed colour break through in tiny specks around the edge of each board, symbolizing a narrative of concealed events.

The physical layering of paint has now come to equate with a psychological layering of meaning. In looking back from the perspective of the new work the earlier series gain an added dimension of personal experiences in dynamic interaction. The degree of abstraction does not give access to specific details, but one senses the generalities of the human situation incapsulated within the art. The resolution of private tensions within a structure of order takes on the character of a universal metaphor.