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See table of contents

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PARC TICIPATING IN THE BIRTH OF A NEW HUMANISM

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 Malraux1 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 endeavoring 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 idle 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 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?


(Translation by Mildred Grand)

THE QUEBEC SCULPTURE COUNCIL

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 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, the context, future cultural conditions, non-commercial character of projects, plans and execution of future conceptual and technological sculpture and the difficulty of categorizing temporary animalistic 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 establishment 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 appropriate to assuring the maximum advantage for the artists concerning selection, working conditions, contractual wage arrangement, and possibilities of access to technological means of construction — contacts with industry — 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.1

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.), to public buildings renovated or salvaged by these 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 the price of materials, full respect for the author's right, the maximum protection of the artist in 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 council's members, in 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 earn less than $5000 from their art".2

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 endorsing sculpture with a cultural, social and human sense other than only an ostentatious dream.

1. The Quebec Sculpture Council, "The situation of sculptors (and artists in general), particularly by UNESCO and Statistics Canada.
2. "Three artists out of four in Canada are obliged to take another job, while eighty out of one hundred earn less than $5000 from their art."
THE EXPRESSIONISM OF PHILIP SURREY

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 explicitly 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 landscape-painters". 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 anecdotie 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. As he developed it became clear he was the kind of natural artist 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 attracted 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.

Jeffrey Spalding's Metaphors of Order

By Eric CAMERON

Consider these two facts: — One, that institutional art-buyers, academic job-givers and public grant-awarders 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 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 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. A few years back, when first living in Montreal, the likenesses 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. It 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 attracted 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 the additive projection of coloured lights rising to a full screen as blank as the black paintings. The only indications 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. At the same time, however, he did a video version. He elaborated his colour formula, admitting the existence of the possibility of a visual reversal in the reading of the image cor­responding to a theoretical black. The ambivalence was nice in that it offered the name paintings, and the changing horizontal bands are myste­rious suggestively 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 black square canvases. 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. He elaborated his colour formula, admitting the existence of the possibility of a visual reversal in the reading of the image corresponding to a theoretical black. The ambivalence was nice in that it offered 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 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. The final version is the result of the elimination of the top layer. Sometimes the removal accidentally penetrates several layers and then there can be quite strong contrasts of tone and colour. In this 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 in the act of being rubbed off, of being dared. The process of abrasion guarantees a virtual impoverishment to the final result, a powdery palor 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 the symbolic value of the black square. In these versions the black square 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 per­pective 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 in translation with the surface. The resolution of private tensions within a structure of order takes on the character of a universal metaphor.