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CRITICISM PROBES ITSELF IN FINLAND

By Andrée PARADIS

The theme under study during the last conference of the International Association of Art Critics, *Art in Search of a New World Order*, gave the participants the opportunity of reflecting on the problems of criticism on the subject of cultural identity.

It was a matter of defining the attitude of national and international criticism with regard to the phenomenon of regions and relations – or the absence of relations – that regions maintain with artistic centres or capitals. In strongly structured poles, this goes on due to information assured by the mass media, advertising and the activity of the art market. Regional art is dependent on this, whether it be that of the North-European or North-American countries; bonds are established with centres such as New York, Paris, Düsseldorf, which, it seems, offer no other alternative but to reflect, to repeat ceaselessly, formulas whose content finally shrinks. With the result that we now find in almost all the museums of modern art in the world lifeless works deprived of originality and any inner content, and in which the absence of close relationship between artist and culture denies us a comprehensive vision on the twentieth century.

We tend to confuse national identity, which is closely linked to history and politics, and cultural identity, which escapes these areas and which, according to the important testimony of Michel Morin¹, seeks to create its "own imaginary territory." For lack of this guidance, cultural identity risks being a snare and serving interests that are opposed to it; particularly, it is most often improperly defined. One would certainly like to assign it to its proper place but by its very nature it escapes frameworks. At the base of this extremely complex wish for cultural identity there is the desire to know each other better, to exist for others, and, if possible, to be recognized. There is also, according to René Berger, honorary president of IAAC, a need for individual or collective resistance to a tendency toward cultural uniformity, due to the always growing invasion of technology into our daily life. Finally, art plays an essential rôle in the determination of our cultural identity, not the reverse.

When one thinks of Finland, one demands an image of its artists more than of its political future. The powerful, integrated architectures of Alvar Aalto and those of Eliel Saarinen, who also exerted an influence on American architecture, contribute to this; as do the works of Finland's musicians, Sibelius for example, and those of contemporary composers. One cannot refrain from admiring those young painters who struggle, in spite of exacting criticism, to find the authentic paths of creation; in performance the Jack Helen Brut Group rediscovers the sense of the aesthetic and in sculpture Marino Hartman and Kain Tupper handle the wood of Finnish forests in a masterly fashion. We also recall the art of the Sami, peoples of the far north who, besides, have sculptors famous for their works on reindeer horn

and the works of craftsmen to whom we are indebted for the pure forms of articles of current life, generally decorated with designs and embroidery; we admire the vivacity and beauty of the weaving and the works of the painters who create an imagery bordering on realism and the fantastic, such as Nils Nilsson Skum, who brings to mind the movements of reindeer in vast areas and Reider Säristömmi, the marvelous colourist of glowing red fauna.

The power of criticism is the power of words, but for the critic-investigator there is a responsibility to learn how to better understand the context of a work in order to give it its proper place. We are quick, it is true, to accept the originality of minorities and ethnic groups, but do we use the care necessary for the study of artistic creation in whole cultural regions? This action, which demands as much patience as skill, is obliged to depend on an open system in order to constantly encourage the development of art. The problem of the verbalization of the visual still remains untouched; it is an endless re-beginning that turns the critic not into an interpreter but into a creator stimulated by a work and who says things that the artist would perhaps not say, necessarily. The work also relies on interpretation.

Is criticism an indispensable means of communication to assure the life of the work? In principle, yes. It is *one* of the means when it succeeds in erecting a bridge between art and recipient. In Finland the IAAC meeting was a forum of discussion on the rôle of criticism when art seems to wish to create the field of a new world order. For president Dan Haulica it is necessary first to think of building bridges between cultures without minimizing the difficulties, but while drawing inspiration from the spirit of the Association, which is essentially tolerant, interested in all forms of opinion and expression, and entirely dedicated to participation, respect and understanding.

1. Cf. Michel Morin, *L'Amérique du Nord et la culture*, Montréal, Hurtubise HMH (Coll. Brèches), 1982.

(Translation by Mildred Grand)

THE PAROXYSMAL FIGURATION OF KOKOSCHKA

By Didier ARNAUDET

Even to-day it is truly useful to dwell on the work of Oskar Kokoschka. This painter, born on the first of March, 1886, at Pöchlarn in Austria, was to find himself at the centre of the tragic maelstrom of the first half of the twentieth century that rang the knell of the political, economic and cultural predominance of Europe. His painting, a more or less intensive passage through the beginning of modern culture, carries all the scars of an era marked by cruel disillusionments, talk of war, fascist voracity and concentration camps.

In 1905 Kokoschka entered the Vienna School of Decorative Arts. At that time, he was influenced by the spell-binding painting of Gustav Klimt. He became friends with architect Adolf Loos, the defender of functionalism, who was against the ornamental architecture supported by the Secession Group. Thanks to him, Kokoschka met the most prominent personalities of the Viennese intellectual and artistic avant-garde (Gustav Malher, Sigmund Freud, Arnold Schönberg and Karl Kraus). He also discovered the works of Munch and Van Gogh exhibited at the Kunstschau in 1909.

In spite of his admiration for Klimt, Kokoschka refused to involve his painting in a reactualization of the beauty dear to the Jugendstil. In the face of a social and political steadily deteriorating context, he applied himself to denouncing the sombre convulsions of a world on the brink of chaos. *Nature morte au mouton et à la jacinthe*, 1909, anticipates in a striking manner the disaster looming on the horizon. This picture emits a disturbing atmosphere of surrender and decay that foretells the monstrosity of the tragedies inherent in the century which had hardly begun.

Kokoschka revealed the gloomy reality of a sick society in which man was bogged down in a dramatic alienation. This approach placed him on the same ground as that explored by the expressionist groups defended by Herwarth Walden, founder of *Der Sturm*, the magazine and gallery in Berlin. In 1910, the artist settled in Berlin and participated in the "aesthetic subversion enterprise" of German Expressionism that called for the liberating of self and a transformation of society.

If Kokoschka was involved in the expressionist proposals, he nevertheless kept a certain pictorial autonomy. To him, to paint was *to express life*. What makes him different from other expressionists is this *vital* side that he developed in his painting. The violence of his brush stroke always reveals fully a man of experience, which gives to painting what Élie Faure calls "a rather strong flavour". As a portraitist Kokoschka tried ardently to grasp in a sometimes morbid way the



Oskar KOKOSCHKA
Portrait of Albert Ehrenstein, 1913-1914.
Prague, National Gallery

unconscious fears and desires of his models. As a landscape-painter he transformed topographical facts into organic signs of an immense, passionate body. Thanks to the lessons of Van Gogh, Munch and Egon Schiele, Kokoschka unfurled a space filled with rhythms and figures; a space shaken by the explosion of chromatic combustion and the harshness of forms drawn with ferocious haste. He took the risk of clearly explaining the movement of his figures whose vitality is unceasingly reinforced by the sensual impetuosity of colour.

Kokoschka was challenged by Expressionism, Futurism, Dadaism and Cubism. But even if he paid some attention to these artistic movements,

he remained unaffected by modernist logic. Thus, he rejected abstract art, which he considered an "aberration". For Kokoschka, art purified. It was a kind of redeemer. This explains the need to implant painting in a figurative content in which the weight of humans and things asserts itself. Kokoschka questioned figuration in its most abrupt form and without any devotion to it. He probed the human form in its most intimate implications. He refined it without exhausting it. He tormented it in order to grasp only its profound authenticity. But in spite of this formidable vehemence, Kokoschka's pictorial freedom offers more resurrections than exclusions, which is not the case in abstraction.

Alone, Kokoschka was on the edge of systems generated by the avant-gardes of the century's beginning. While taking the means of escaping the traditional yoke of representation, he refused to accept certain corrosive functions of breaches advocated by modern art. Further, his spontaneity adapted badly to the theoretical demands and restraints of modernism. The astonishing specificity of Kokoschka's work lies in a pictorial choice that responds to intellectual and emotional motivations at the same time as to a wish for innovation in the tortured framework of figuration.

On the occasion of the first retrospective in France devoted to the work of Oskar Kokoschka (1886-1980), our contributor Didier Arnaudet obtained an interview with Mme Gilberte Martin-Méry who presented that exhibition under the title *Kokoschka, un peintre hors du commun*. We owe to Mme Martin-Méry, curator of the Bordeaux Museum of Arts, the organizing of several prestigious exhibitions on Goya, El Greco, Delacroix, Kandinsky, the Cubists, Braque and others. Much appreciated for the

excellent quality of her museographic work, Mme Martin-Méry is also well known in Canadian artistic circles. She has even, on two occasions, been a contributor to our magazine.

Didier ARNAUDET— Can you trace the origin of this important exhibition?

Gilberte MARTIN-MÉRY— In 1948 Kokoschka was the guest of honour at the Viennese Biennial, which devoted a pavilion to him. It was at that showing that I rediscovered this artist who offered so much pent-up passion, rapturous emotion and hope for a better world. It gave me a real shock, and I still feel the memory of a sudden and yet lasting emotion. Later I went to the Cologne Museum and saw *Le Grand Théâtre de Bordeaux*, a wonderful canvas. When I produced the *L'Art du Canada* exhibition, I found one of Kokoschka's paintings in a Canadian collection at Vancouver. It was *L'Église Notre-Dame*. At that time, I thought that these two pictures Kokoschka had painted during his stay at Bordeaux in 1925 ought some day to be together in Bordeaux itself. After the painter's death I was able to meet Mme Kokoschka. She was interested in my project and gave me her approval. From that time, I became absorbed in the subject and worked steadily to organize this exhibition. Mme Kokoschka has kept valuable documentation, particularly letters and cards, which ensure the proper dating of canvases and water-colours. Access to her personal records enabled me to become familiar with unpublished articles and recollections and was very useful in research made more difficult by the absence of French publications.

D.A.— This exhibition seems to try to examine all the aspects of Kokoschka's oeuvre. On what is it centered?

G.M.-M.— Naturally, this exhibition offers paintings—about sixty—but also drawings, water-

colours and lithographs. Thanks to Mme Kokoschka, for the first time models will be shown of décors for operas (*The Magic Flute, Orpheus and Eurydice, The Masked Ball, ...*). This was sufficient to fill a room. The exhibition is organized around the different periods that marked the evolution of Kokoschka's art. The years 1909-1916: Vienna, Berlin, the expressionist adventure and the portraits in which the artist seized, sometimes like a *medium*, the basic personality of his models. 1917-1923: the break with Anna Mahler and the myth of the doll. 1923-1933: the travels, when he gave in his pictures a sociological and psychological image of the cities and landscapes he passed through. 1934-1938: when, fearing German expansionism, he moved to Prague. The Second World War: he took refuge in London. And finally the last years: he developed to the highest degree his technique of coloured fragmentation, combined with increasingly important research into luminosity.

D.A.— In your opinion, who was Kokoschka? Expressionist? Humanist? A conservative revolutionary?

G.M.-M.— He was first of all a great humanist. In him there is an extraordinary research into brotherhood. Kokoschka threw pure colour on canvas in the manner of the Fauves and the Expressionists, but he worked at it so much that he drew another substance from it. He was outside of time, place and the era; in a word, Kokoschka is a painter above the average. He was a man who had suffered. And a man who has suffered can say everything, sing everything, understand everything. That is why, to-day, Kokoschka retains a strong presence.

(Translation by Mildred Grand)

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THE IMAGINATIVE CONCEPTIONS OF LUC ARCHAMBAULT

By Herbert T. SCHWARZ

Lean and graceful with sensitive brooding features, dark brown eyes, cool, appraising and penetrating, Luc Archambault looks like one of his studies in black and white...He might well have stepped off an 18th century portrait of a nobleman. And he behaves like one too. He keeps very much to himself, has a great deal of personal dignity and an absolute conviction in himself and his art.

His personal charisma is something quite amazing to behold. In the last few years he has dispensed with exhibitions in private galleries, but rents a few rooms in downtown Quebec, or perhaps a vacant office space, or even part of a vestibule in The Grand-Théâtre, in the city, calls it La Galerie d'un jour and thousands, literally thousands, of people come to view his work. A



Musicians
Ink and water-colour: 48 cm x 60.
Coll. Foucault, Dijon. (Phot. Yves Martin)

great social occasion not to be missed by anybody. He has in fact become a Quebec public figure and thoroughly enjoys this interaction between himself, his art, and the public, but refuses to be drawn into the community, and he is always trying to escape its collectivizing influence by deliberate new creations. This approach to art influences his further activity, of which constant experimentation, avoidance of mediocrity and the acceptance of change are seen as its most vital components.

At first glance his paintings may appear to be deceptively simple, but they are in fact highly sophisticated, a product of a vivid imagination and mature thought carried out with great technical dexterity and fluidity of line. His capacity for unifying space is quite remarkable, and so is his colour sense; usually no more than three basic colours predominate. In his earlier paintings strong blue and black on white were typical; lately he has been unfolding in yet another direction with much lighter tones of pink, gold, white and ochre.

From time to time he has an overpowering urge to express himself in a large format, and his murals are so huge that there is simply no room to accommodate them. Once the painting expresses his underlying idea, he frequently leaves it unfinished, considering any unnecessary detail simply superfluous.

It is utterly impossible to delve into the magnitude and variety of his creations within the scope of this article; his sketches, paintings, murals for the theatre at the Bois de Coulonge, book covers, illustrations for the 375th anniversary of Quebec commissioned by the city fathers, restaurant posters, prints and his ceramics are too numerous to mention. The latter transport us into yet another area of his creativity.

His art is a reflection of his personal consciousness, phantasies, sensualities, dreams: the world as he sees it, full of symbolism, with the sensuous, erotic and surrealistic components, simply and beautifully interwoven. The prevailing mood is that of suspense and tension which immediately attracts our attention and curiosity.

In *The Fawn Woman*, two mysterious female nudes with flowing hair, top hats and animal extensions to their bodies, stare at one with their almond-shaped eyes, while a standing male nude looks on...The sketch has a strange and haunting, dreamlike quality. In *The Corridor*, a naked boy and a girl face each other, in a long bare corridor. One can feel the rising tension between them. In *B.G. In*, a nightmarish figure flees towards the window. It conveys in one a feeling of anguish and blind terror.

The Surrealists, with their deliberate acts of defiance against conformism, their continued efforts to shock and mystify society, sought some unorthodox, strange ways along which the mind might escape from its captivity.

In the art of Luc Archambault, undeniably there is this strong surrealist element; it appeals to his vivid imagination and feeling for phantasy. But even with his very traditional paintings, in which he portrays great human loneliness, longings, tenderness and love, there is no conscious effort to please his public. Like a number of great artists before him, he is only trying to communicate through his art, to establish a bond between himself and his viewer; and although this may be only a temporary manifestation it produces satisfaction which implies a spiritual unity between the artist and the recipient. At times this spiritual unity between the artist and the public transcends his art.

In an unprecedented city-wide exhibition called *L'Art aussi*, held in the winter of 1982, all the major shopping centres, hotels, bars, restaurants, book stores, boutiques, craft shops, cobblers, doctors' and lawyers' offices, exhibited a profusion of Luc Archambault ceramics, sketches, paintings and murals. The whole city of Quebec became his personal gallery, the people identifying themselves with Luc Archambault the artist and his art, his desperate struggles to keep on going with his work, his need to be himself,

PROPOSAL INVITATION ATHABASCA UNIVERSITY

Facilities for Athabasca University are under construction in the town of Athabasca. Proposals are invited from artists in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, and British Columbia for the following competitions.

- One major exterior three-dimensional work.
Budget: \$40,000.00
- One large scale interior three-dimensional work.
Budget: \$12,000.00
- One large scale interior work spanning two stories.
Budget: \$10,000.00
- One medium sized interior three-dimensional work.
Budget: \$8,000.00

Inquiries are invited from artists working in a variety of media who wish to participate in these competitions. Application deadline is **October 11, 1983**. Address inquiries, requests for application form, and information package to: *Art Acquisition Committee, Athabasca University, 12352-149 Street, Edmonton, Alberta T5V 1G9*

and his art which so uniquely bears the stamp of his originality. He has in fact become a genuine folk hero amongst the young of Quebec, a potent catalytic force which, like that of the avant-garde singers, musicians, poets and writers, inspires new generations.

And to-day his art is reaching outside the boundaries of Quebec. He has represented a group of young Quebec artists at the Grand-Palais in Paris, and this spring he has held yet another exhibition there, and when that venerable M. Arnera looked at some of the photos of Luc Archambault sketches he remarked: "Oh yes! These I must do, now bring me the originals"... A remarkable accolade from that master printer of Vallauris, who collaborated so closely with Picasso⁽¹⁾.

Luc Archambault is emerging as one of the most imaginative and gifted Quebec artists.

1. Luc Archambault is presently working on a series of lithographs to be called *A Tribute to Pablo Picasso*.

UNIVERSITE CONCORDIA



Doyen Faculté des beaux-arts

L'Université Concordia recherche des candidats au poste de doyen de la Faculté des beaux-arts. L'entrée en fonction se fera le 1er juin 1984 pour un mandat de cinq ans renouvelable. L'actuel doyen prendra sa retraite en 1984 et ne pose donc pas sa candidature.

La Faculté des beaux-arts décerne les grades suivants: BFA; MA in Art Education et MA in Art History; MFA in Studio Arts et Ph.D. in Art Education. Ses disciplines comprennent les arts plastiques, l'enseignement de l'art, la thérapie par l'art, l'histoire de l'art, le cinéma, le design, la photographie, la sculpture, la céramique et les fibres, le théâtre, la musique et la danse. En 1982-1983, l'effectif se composait de 1100 étudiants à temps complet et de 1200 étudiants à temps partiel. La Faculté compte à peu près le même nombre d'étudiants anglophones et francophones.

Il est essentiel que le titulaire du poste puisse participer en français à des réunions, notamment avec des représentants du gouvernement et d'autres universités.

Les candidatures ou les propositions de candidatures, accompagnées de renseignements biographiques, doivent être adressées avant le 1er octobre 1983 au président du Comité de recrutement, M. John S. Daniel, vice-recteur à l'enseignement, Université Concordia, 1455, boulevard de Maisonneuve Ouest, Montréal (Québec) H3G 1M8.