TEXTS IN ENGLISH

HUMANE CULTURE AND UNESCO
By André PARADIS

In this World Communications Year it is well to remember that UNESCO is a body concerned with the development of humanity through education and culture. An international UNESCO conference was held at Ottawa from August 15 to August 19, Canada having been chosen as location. This meeting was among the celebrations of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Canadian UNESCO Commission, which was attended on this occasion by some thirty experts from disciplines as varied as philosophy, theology, history, literature, anthropology, sociology and the natural sciences. The cultures of Africa, America, Asia and Europe were represented and some observers had the privilege of participating in the discussions.

The object of the meeting was considerable, as it is each time it is a matter of advancing ideas in the domain of human relations. The theme bearing on cultural universals and on transcultural values was discussed in a cordial atmosphere not lacking in emotion but always tempered by respect for the diversity of cultures. Without respect for the diversity of cultures marks an advance, how­ever modest it may be, in the object of the meeting. The discussions raised many questions outside of the themes and introduced many problems which have not been thoroughly examined in so short a time. But all thought in common on the means that would permit surmounting the difficulty of communica­tion among cultures marks an advance, however modest it may be. At present, it seems es­sential to free the conditions of planning from a philosophy of values which is compatible with respect for the diversity of cultures. Without claiming to define culture, although many persons support UNESCO’s very open anthropological defi­nition, “in its largest sense, culture can be considered to-day as the ensemble of the distinct­ive spiritual and material, intellectual and emotional characteristics that distinguish a society or a social group. It encompasses, beyond arts and letters, life styles, fundamental rights of human beings, value systems, traditions and beliefs”, and speakers have wondered whether there might rather be reason for seeking something in common in all the cultures of humanity. Our efforts ought, then, to be directed toward this common denominator, that all culture intends to be human and to allow the flourishing of man and that the numerator remains the specific trait of the different cultures.

An important distinction was brought out while speaking of values and universals. Common characteristics (like the need for food, protection, relaxation) would not simply be cultural in nature, but rather biological, which leads to establishing the fact that the line of demarcation between biology and cultural matters is not as clear as has been believed up to now. Likewise, the habit of language and aesthetic aspiration are common structures of great importance, but they belong to abstraction. If, as has been suggested, we ought to seek transcultural symbols in order not to move across, it is the relationship between the art and the literature that convey the cultural constants found in all countries–love, courage, beauty–would be valuable assets to aid in the search for the human base of all culture. But again it is necessary to understand each other on this notion of the humane, the interpretations of which vary according to cultures.

This allows professor Jean-Paul Audet, of the Université de Montréal, president of the confer­ence, to explain that the phenomenon of culture is an entity, like the humane phenomenon itself. Its universality is a basic fact, as is its continuity across space and time.

The participants were troubled then about the method or the means to be taken in order that the constants, such as the good, the true, the beautiful, should be considered as normative or descriptive. Some participants favoured an a priori method, others stressed the necessity of proceeding a posteriori. Examination of the two methods leads us to conclude, if we use the a priori method that favours the interpretation of constants as previous conditions in all cultures, that it is necessary to go deeply into those condi­tions. The a posteriori method will rather look for the constants where a convergence of cultures is found. We must therefore deepen those con­vergences. The methods are not exclusive of each other; they should also complete each other. And what is of equal importance, they ought to be interdisciplinary, intercultural and self-critical.

We have added that the most efficient method should depart from the status quo offered by present reality: the dominant culture in to-day’s world is that of science and technology associ­ated with Western culture. Other cultures are not secondary but tributary to this scientific-technological milieu.

Only in a few months shall we know the rec­ommendations contained in the report of the conference, prepared by professor Raimundo Panikkar of the University of California according to the instructions of the members, when UNESCO decides to make it public, but from the interventions we can already anticipate the points of agreement that will arise and which will provide food for research in the future.

Here and now we can imagine that there exists, for all those who believe in peace and transcultural harmony among men, the necessity of assuring respect for all humane culture in the spirit of the Charter of the Rights of Man and of seeking always to know better the culture of others through the interpretation of facts accord­ing to criteria appropriate to the respective cultures. (Translation by Mildred Grand)

TANABE AND THE LAND
By Joyce ZEMANS

For the last ten years Taikoo Tanabe has painstakingly evolved a personal vision in works which have been labelled his “prairie” land­s­capes. Yet Tanabe is not a regional landscape painter in the traditional sense.

The influence of recent work (especially the black paintings and drawings) emphasizes the fact that Tanabe’s work cannot be eas­ily slotted into a regionalist categorization and must be examined within the context of modern abstract painting. If, however, Northrop Frye, writing about Canadian literature is correct in suggesting that “Everything that is central in Canadian writing [for our purposes, read art] seems to be marked by the imminence of the natural world”1, then Tanabe is equally one of the inheritors of the contemporary mantle of that Canadian tradition.

For the Group of Seven in the early part of this century in Canada, it was clear that landscape, immersed in overtones of transcendentalism, represented the source of national pride and the symbol of national potential. For subsequent generations of Canadian artists, the impact of the land has remained inescapable but its significance is less obvious. The landscapes has influenced works as disparate as the expressively carved and gouged dramas of Pater­son Ewen, the metaphysical colour fields of Otto Rogers, the ecological quilts of Joyce Wieland and the filmic, photographic site pieces of Michael Snow. Few of these artists attempt to record a specific region or to inspire patriotism on the viewer’s part, yet there has been much em­phasis upon the importance of site in discussion of their work. Artists such as Gordon Smith or Tony Oney are labelled west coast painters; and Tanabe is classified as a prairie artist (although he has spent a greater part of his life in British Columbia than on the prairies and currently lives in Vancouver Island). For many, in fact, Tanabe has become the ultimate prairie artist–har­monizing the insistent duality of earth and sky, but the question must be asked: Is the notion of a new prairie art anything more than a romantic fallacy? What in fact is Tanabe’s art about and how does it fit within the context of “Canadian” art?

A brief history seems essential at this point to discover how Tanabe came to construct his paint­ery world. Born in Seal Cove, British Columbia, in 1926, the son of a commercial fisherman, Tanabe spent his summers in fishing camps on the Skeena River. At the age of eleven he moved to Vancouver; at sixteen he was interned as a Japanese-Canadian. At art school during the post-war years in Winnipeg, he discovered the work of Josef Albers and of the abstract expressionists. In 1951, he spent a year in New York City, a student of Reuben Tam and of Hans Hofmann. He frequented the Cedar Bar, met Guston and Kline and revealed in works from this period, like Fragment II (Monster), a familiarity and ease with the abstract expressionists’ ap­proach.

From 1953-55, he travelled through Europe on an Emily Carr Scholarship. His drawings from Italy are those of a young western-educated artist, overwhelmed by the experience of the Re­naissance–documentary and literal in interpre­tation. In Denmark he was drawn to the coast, like Mondrian in Holland, half a century ear­lier, Tanabe painted the dunes. Struck by the endless vistas, the energy of the sea, the simplic­ity and immutability of the horizon line which de­fines the experience of the coast, Tanabe sketched and painted.

On his return to Canada, Tanabe completed a series of “white paintings”–lighter, looser, more open than the works of the past–they were based upon the freely interpreted dark line Tanabe had observed on the Danish coast, “div­iding the land from the sky” and the contours of the dunes sighted during the rainy winter of 1954. Works like Portrait of an Interior Place – A Divided Landscape (ca. 1955), led Rodolphe De
Repentigny, writing in La Presse, to describe Tanabe's Danish landscapes as impressions of nature, a series of paintings "qui forment des séries évolutant progressivement vers l'invention pure et simple". With great perception, De Repentigny realized that Tanabe had begun to create "un autre sort de réalisme, qui en est la représentation du processus de la vision lui-même, décomposée en ses événements les plus minimes, les plus évanscents" and found in his work the possibility of "des visions entièrement neuves".

In 1959, Tanabe spent a year in Tokyo studying sumi-e painting and calligraphy. The process of simplification and serialization that had begun on the Danish coast was fortified in the repetitive approach, the technical and emotional restraint and the contemplative spirit which the sumi-e artist requires to penetrate ever deeper into the heart of his subject in order to create the traditional monochromatic black ink landscapes.

Between 1959 and 1962, Tanabe spent three years in eastern United States. Renewing his interest in landscape art, he painted in the fields of Pennsylvania and in the Hudson River Valley, birthplace of America's nineteenth century landscape school, and moved to New York City. It was at this time that Tanabe seems to have confirmed his identity as a Canadian.

On his return to Canada, Tanabe took up residence in Vancouver, and in a series of brightly coloured works influenced by his New York experience, translated his landscape vision into hard edge abstract symbolic forms. The subtext of the white paintings and the evanescent landscape form of 1954/55 are nowhere evident in the paintings of the late sixties. Nor is the impact of his Japanese sojourn which had initially resulted in 1959's Vancouver exhibition of sensitive delicate sumi-e works. The hard edge abstract shapes and bold colours of the New York School prevail and the results include a series of decorative somewhat derivative canvases and several commissions for murals and banners for which the style was most appropriate.

At this point, Tanabe seems to have recognized the dialectic in his work; in his attempt to integrate the cross-currents of east and west, the formal abstract emphasis of his recent work and the intuitive restrained approach of his sumi-e painting, he turned to nature and to the Prairies in particular. In retrospect, we can see that this was the solution which was both inherent in his paintings of the mid-sixties - in those paintings based loosely on his experiences of the Danish coast. Removed from the immediate impact of nature and influenced by formal abstract developments, Tanabe had begun to evolve a new and personal artistic language - he called the paintings of this period "my interior landscapes" and it is evident that their source lies not only in nature but in the artist's inner eye.

Of his new paintings, he later said: "I narrowed it down to the Prairies and the flatland because I had travelled across them in the fifties and I had thought about a subject that I could paint. In 1972, I thought I was able to cope with the challenge of the big prairie." It is important to recognize that Tanabe saw challenge not only in the romance of a particular place but in the formal problem which his subject presented. The prairie landscape became the artistic metaphor for space, and in the paintings of this period "my interior landscapes" and it is evident that their source lies not only in nature but in the artist's inner eye.

His new paintings, he later said: "I narrowed it down to the Prairies and the flatland because I had travelled across them in the fifties and I had thought about a subject that I could paint. In 1972, I thought I was able to cope with the challenge of the big prairie." It is important to recognize that Tanabe saw challenge not only in the romance of a particular place but in the formal problem which his subject presented. The prairie landscape became the artistic metaphor for space, and in the paintings of this period "my interior landscapes" and it is evident that their source lies not only in nature but in the artist's inner eye.

Of his new paintings, he later said: "I narrowed it down to the Prairies and the flatland because I had travelled across them in the fifties and I had thought about a subject that I could paint. In 1972, I thought I was able to cope with the challenge of the big prairie." It is important to recognize that Tanabe saw challenge not only in the romance of a particular place but in the formal problem which his subject presented. The prairie landscape became the artistic metaphor for space, and in the paintings of this period "my interior landscapes" and it is evident that their source lies not only in nature but in the artist's inner eye.

Of his new paintings, he later said: "I narrowed it down to the Prairies and the flatland because I had travelled across them in the fifties and I had thought about a subject that I could paint. In 1972, I thought I was able to cope with the challenge of the big prairie." It is important to recognize that Tanabe saw challenge not only in the romance of a particular place but in the formal problem which his subject presented. The prairie landscape became the artistic metaphor for space, and in the paintings of this period "my interior landscapes" and it is evident that their source lies not only in nature but in the artist's inner eye.

Of his new paintings, he later said: "I narrowed it down to the Prairies and the flatland because I had travelled across them in the fifties and I had thought about a subject that I could paint. In 1972, I thought I was able to cope with the challenge of the big prairie." It is important to recognize that Tanabe saw challenge not only in the romance of a particular place but in the formal problem which his subject presented. The prairie landscape became the artistic metaphor for space, and in the paintings of this period "my interior landscapes" and it is evident that their source lies not only in nature but in the artist's inner eye.
pointed in 1971 to the faculty of the Department of Art at the University of Calgary. During the first half of the seventies, he exhibited often, including one-man shows at the Mendel Art Gallery (1971) and the Chicago Institute of Modern Art (1973). Since then, he has concentrated on research into the constructed relief as a medium, including study trips to the Soviet Union, the United States, Western Europe and Great Britain, as well as the development of his ownuvre. His research has resulted in a monograph entitled The Evolution of the Constructed Relief (Calgary, 1979). The Nickel Art Museum of the University of Calgary is organizing a retrospective of Kostyniuk's work this year, on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of his art. A 104-page monograph on his work has been published to coincide with the show, which will also be staged in Lethbridge, Medicine Hat and Regina. It will no doubt be ignored, for the most part, by the Canadian art world.

Ron KOSTYNIUK Relief Structure, 1963. Enamel on wood, 47 cm x 36,2.

According to Biederman, "...in the past the artist 'imitated' the results of nature-art; today the new artist (i.e. the Structurist) 'imitates the method of nature-art'. Thus ... the new reality-level from which the artist can now abstract is the Structural Process level, the building method of nature and no longer the macro-level, the form-results of nature". This statement has constituted the central program of the Structurist movement, and has been the impulse behind Kostyniuk's work as well. Thus, Kostyniuk's publications contrast his own work visually with examples from the natural world. What exactly is meant by the production of art following the structural processes found in nature, however, remains unclear to me. Structurists (Kostyniuk included) often use the mathematical equivalents/descriptions of the spiral, the "Golden Section" and the Fibonacci Series (found in nature with the nautilus shell, e.g.), in the production of their work, but this has so much to do with the structural process involved in the growth of a nautilus shell as Piet Mondrian's 1944 painting "Broadway Boogie-Woogie" has with the urban development of New York City. What the Structurists do in such cases, rather, is make use of mathematical descriptions of a phenomenon found in nature. According to the 1983 monograph, Kostyniuk's various series of works were based on different patterns of organization found in nature; on cellular structures, for example, in the case of his work of the sixties. With the seventies, Kostyniuk turned from the microscopic to the macroscopic level for inspiration, as evident in the "Winged Form" series (based on moths and butterflies), the "Dancing Stick" series (inspired by grasses moving in the wind) and the "Crystalline" series. Indeed, in the "Crystalline" series, each piece is based, in colour as well as form, on specific and identified mineral types. Thus, an inspiration of form as opposed to one of structural process is certain, and the assertion that the work is non-mimetic is less than accurate. The mimetics, which was conceptual in the case of the orthogonal planes-as-cells in Kostyniuk's work of the sixties became generic in the case of the "Winged Form" and "Dancing Stick" series, and more specifically so (i.e. specific to varieties of minerals) by the time of the "Crystalline" series. The more recent "Crystal in Landscape", "Horizon" and "Foot-Hills" series continue the mimetic trends of the past. It is interesting to note that in their work both Kostyniuk and Bornstein have moved from works built up of elements (orthogonal planes) with only conceptual equivalents in nature, towards actual abstractions from landscape-types (Kostyniuk's "Horizon" and "Foot-Hills" series, and Bornstein's "Sky-Earth-Summer" series). Though probably not identical in the process of their production, these recent landscape-inspired works are closely related to Van Doesburg's and Art van der Leck's orthogonal abstractions of the late teens.

The discrepancy between theory and practice in the work of the Structurists reflects the fact that Canadian Structurism is changing, a further sign of its vitality. Its adherents, very conscious of the historical position of their work, tend to cling to precepts which, on further investigation, may have been less than clear or accurate to begin with. All this has little bearing on the value of the work itself, however. Kostyniuk's reliefs are stunning in the purity of their form and colour (the two being inseparable in his work), amazing in the technical virtuosity of their execution, and, to me at least, moving in their positive orientation to the world. The relative isolation of these artists amid the physical beauty and socio-political stability of the heart of North America may explain their quest for their art in part at least, but it does not necessarily imply a lack of awareness of, or concern for, the more unpleasant realities of our planet any more than a lot of the amorphous angst visible in today's trendy art necessarily entails a really constructive will to improve on things. Indeed, given awareness of the way things are, an art such as Kostyniuk's probably does more to strengthen the positive elements of our psyches than does the art of fashionable fear.

2. The Structurist has been produced by El Borstein (who teaches at the University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon) since 1946, and is both published and financed by the University of Saskatchewan at Saskatoon.
3. See, e.g. the biography in the catalogue Charles Biederman, London, Arts Council of Great Britain, 1969. It was Biederman's Art As the Evolution of Visual Knowledge (Red Wing, Minn. The author's edition, 1948) which started Structurism as a movement.
4. Biederman was born in Cleveland, studied in Chicago and lived from 1942 to 1959 in Red Wing, Minnesota. El Borstein was born in Milwaukee, and studied there before he assumed his position at the University of Saskatchewan at Saskatoon.
7. The Structurist organization of the planet any more than a lot of the amorphous angst visible in today's trendy art necessarily entails a really constructive will to improve on things. Indeed, given awareness of the way things are, an art such as Kostyniuk's probably does more to strengthen the positive elements of our psyches than does the art of fashionable fear.