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See table of contents

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TEXTS IN ENGLISH

HUMANE CULTURE AND UNESCO

By Andrée 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 academic language. The discussions raised many questions outside of the themes and introduced many problems that could not be thoroughly examined in so short a time. But all thought in common on the means that would permit surmounting the difficulty of communications 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 away from the concrete, it seems that 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 Takao 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.

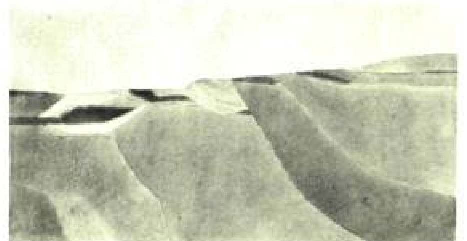
The infinite simplicity of his recent work (especially the black paintings and drawings) emphasizes the fact that Tanabe's work cannot be easily slotted into a regionalist categorization and must be examined within the context of modern abstract painting. If, however, Northrop Frye, writing about Canadian 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 landscape 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 Onley 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 on 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 painterly 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, and the works from this sojourn are strangely prescient of his later painting.

Like Mondrian in Holland, half a century earlier, Tanabe painted the dunes. Struck by the endless vista, the energy of the sea, the simplicity and immutability of the horizon line which defines the experience of the coast, Tanabe sketched and painted.



Takao TANABE

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, "divid[ing] 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*[2], to describe Tanabe's Danish landscapes as impressions of nature, a series of paintings "qui forment des séries évoluant progressivement vers l'invention pure et simple". With great perception, De Repentigny realized that Tanabe had begun to create "une autre sorte de réalisme, qui est la représentation du processus de la vision lui-même, décomposé en ses événements les plus minimimes, les plus évanescents" and found in his work the possibility of "des visions entièrement neuves".

In 1959, Tanabe spent a year in Tokyo studying sumi-e[3] 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 state which the sumi-e artist requires to penetrate ever deeper into the heart of his subject in order ot 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 of painting. Paradoxically, 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 subtlety 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 a 1959 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 the solution was already inherent in his paintings of the mid-fifties – 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"[4] 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 [they were] an impossible subject to paint. In 1972, I thought I was able to cope with the challenge of the big prairie."[5] It is important to recognize that Tanabe saw challenge not 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, an extension of that "interior land" of which Tanabe had spoken earlier. Within the flatlands and foothills of the prairies are contained both the artist's childhood experience of the west coast shoreline and the history of Japanese landscape art. As Ron Bloore's paintings speak of Byzantium as much as of the expansive space and unusual light of the Prairies; as Tony Onley's bleak rock and seascapes speak not only of the West Coast of Canada and the Arctic but of his childhood memories of the sea-enclosed, primordial rockscape of the Isle of Man; as Otto Roger's fields of colour speak more of a universal experience than a particularized prairie space, so Tanabe presents us with a landscape which speaks of the nature of the experience of space.

Tanabe's first prairie landscapes (ca. 1972) are the logical outgrowth of his hard edge geometric paintings. Brightly coloured and complicated, they sometimes suggest a patchwork quilt in which discreet broad shapes of flat colour are carefully balanced to establish a harmony between the two-dimensional surface and the suggestion of a deeper space. Experimental at first, they are vaguely reminiscent of Diebenkorn's "Ocean Park" series but they lack his sophisticated control of a shallow cubist space. Within a year, Tanabe's complicated colour play is gone, as are the references to geometric abstraction and cubist space. Tanabe has discovered what he sought in the single line of the horizon, to which everything else is pinned. Its markedly linear quality anchors the painting activity to the surface. It is handling of paint, colour and texture rather than complicated planar relationships that will define spatial relationships in Tanabe's future work.

The exhibition of twenty-six paintings on the theme of "The Land" organized by the Norman Mackenzie Gallery in the fall of 1976 confirmed the strength of Tanabe's vision. There is a growing resilience about the paintings that seems to result from the artist's loosening of formal preconceptions and the introduction of a more intuitive, more painterly and, later, even gestural handling. The horizon line of the Danish coast finds new definition in these images as the lateral edges of the canvas are annihilated by the apparently infinite extension of the horizontal landscape (recalling at times Monet, Pollock or even Kenneth Noland and Gene Davis).

While most of Tanabe's paintings are horizontal in orientation he also experiments with the vertical format and we realize how much we have come to rely on the concept of lateral extension. (In these vertical works, it seems as if we are presented with an isolated part of a wider composition and we are forced to re-orient our thinking towards the vertical succession of bands of space.) Since 1973, the horizon line has remained the insistent axis in Tanabe's painting, forcing the viewer to acknowledge both the artist's source in nature and the possibility of an infinitely continuous space. This formal device is also largely responsible for the description of Tanabe's paintings as metaphysical landscapes. The simplicity of many of the works combined with the atmospheric handling of paint and the lack of reference to the accidental or particular detail suggests, on occasion, a spiritual source. Yet Tanabe's painting seems more directly involved with matter than with metaphysics. It is the experience of land and sky, the essence of the land that moves Tanabé.

Amongst the most abstract and the most powerful of Tanabe's work are his graphite drawings of the last few years. Constantly pushing towards total abstraction, the works are as subtle in the relationship of tonality and texture as those of Tanabe's sumi-e masters or Ad Reinhardt's black canvases. In these works the act of drawing and the content of the work are one: material and mind merge.

Kandinsky has said that the artist must create new worlds and Tanabe has used the familiar prairie image to do just that. In his cosmogony, issues of time, place, experience and emotion are re-examined and reconstituted. Clearly, it is not the transition from flatland to foothills, the presence or lack of particularization of place, or the introduction of atmospheric skies that represent the significant characteristics within Tanabe's work. "The Land" endures and each of these elements represents an artistic device for further exploration.

Tanabe's real achievement lies in his ability to synthesize formal means and content and, through masterful manipulation of light and shade and tonal control, to create powerful visual statements that speak of the essence of the experience of space. Evolution is not so much from complex to simple as towards an increasing potency of the image. Parochial concerns of nationalism are foregone in works that address the collective experience in their archetypal nature. The compositional unity of Tanabe's mature paintings speaks to a larger unity. Tanabe has forged the personal style which De Repentigny foresaw, "creating another sort of realism" – not a record of place but one of the aesthetic experience.

Takao Tanabe is not the painter of a region or of an idealized landscape, his subject is not the politics of ecology or national pride: though his landscapes are empty, man is present in his response to the vast spaces that represent not only the Canadian but the universal experience. For Tanabe has painted the experience of the land.[6]

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1. Cited by George Woodcock, "Terror and Regeneration: The Wilderness in Art and Literature." *Wilderness Canada*, ed. Borden Spears. (Toronto, Clarke Irwin) 1970 p.81.
2. Rodolphe De Repentigny, "Un Jeune peintre de l'Ouest livre quelques aspects de son travail," in *La Presse*, December 9, 1955.
3. A sort of wash – a drawing made with ink.
4. Quoted by Roslyn Nudell, *Winnipeg Free Press*, Nov. 16th, 1977.
5. *Toronto Daily Star*, 1959.
6. In 1983, Tanabe exhibited at the Mira Godard Gallery in Toronto (May 7-25) and at the Robertson Gallery in Ottawa (November 12-21).

THE STRUCTURISM OF RON KOSTYNIUK

By Oliver BOTAR

"Whatever happened to Structurism?"[1] you may ask. The simple answer is: "It is both thriving and ignored the way it has always been". It thrives in the sense that its few adherents continue to practise it with the perseverance and devotion born of genuine conviction. In Canada, Eli Bornstein continues to produce the internationally-recognized journal *The Structurist*,[2] and, due to his presence at the university and that of his former students living there, Saskatoon remains a centre of international importance to Structurism. This year a retrospective travelling exhibition of Bornstein's structurist art was organized for the Mendel Art Gallery in Saskatoon. That Structurism continues to be ignored is illustrated by the appalling lack of critical response to the Bornstein retrospective. A quick look at the career of Charles Biederman, the founder of Structurism, should demonstrate that little has changed in this respect since Biederman made his first reliefs in 1936.[3]

Firmly grounded in North American Structurism's mid-western roots[4], but not as closely associated with Bornstein, is Ron Kostyniuk.[5] Kostyniuk, born at Wakaw, Saskatchewan in 1941, studied education and biology at the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon, where he first came into contact with the idea of the constructed relief and where he made his first relief in 1963. After teaching high-school biology, Kostyniuk enrolled at the University of Alberta to study art. He later received both Master of Science and Master of Fine Arts degrees from the University of Wisconsin, after which he was ap-

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 own œuvre. 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".[6] 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 as 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.[7] The mimesis, which was conceptual in the case of the orthogonal[8] 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 "Foothills" 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.[9]

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 beauty 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 the practice of 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.

1. On the origins of the term and the movement, see, e.g. Michael Greenwood, "Relief Structures," *Artscanada 202/203* (winter 1975-76), pp. 33-36.
2. *The Structurist* has been produced by Eli Bornstein (who teaches at the University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon) since 1960, 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. Biedermann was born in Cleveland, studied in Chicago and lived from 1942 on at Red Wing, Minnesota. Eli Bornstein was born in Milwaukee, and studied there before he assumed his position at the University of Saskatchewan at Saskatoon.
5. In *Vie des Arts*, see John W. Graham's "Les Structures de Ron Kostyniuk", xx, 79, pp. 49-51.
6. Biederman, *Art as the Evolution of Visual Knowledge*, p. 390
7. Kostyniuk: (Structurism is) "...an extension of man's understanding of his world translated into a non-mimetic art of geometric form and color interaction." in *Relief Structures 1972-1977*, Calgary: University of Calgary Art Gallery, 1978, unpaginated. Biederman did not make the claim that Structurism is non-mimetic. For example: "The Inventive and Mimetic factors are never found isolated from each other throughout man's entire history of art; the problem always was a matter of *degrees* and *kinds* of Mimetic and Inventive behaviour. This is still true as regards (Structurist) art..."(*Art as the Evolution of Visual Knowledge*, (p.309.)
8. Despite assertions to the contrary, there is no *a priori* reason why Structurism should use orthogonal forms. This usage remains a style (c.f. "De Style"); one historically-based in the work of Mondrian and the Russian Constructivists. The British Structurist Anthony Hill, in his "On Constructions, Nature, and Structure" (in Stephen Bann, ed., *The Tradition of Constructivism*, New York, The Viking Press, 1974, (pp. 268-276) raises the question of why it is *orthogonal* planes that are used by the Structurists in their works, but he simply does not answer it.
9. See, e.g. Theo van Doesburg, "From 'Nature' to "Compositions": Observations on the Development of an Abstract Painting," *The Structurist*, 11, 1971, p. 26-31. Compare this with David Geary's "A Process of Vision," *The Structurist*, 17-18, 1977/78, p. 34 for work being done to-day in Saskatchewan using the same method.

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