

B.C. Binning, cet inconnu

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[See table of contents](#)

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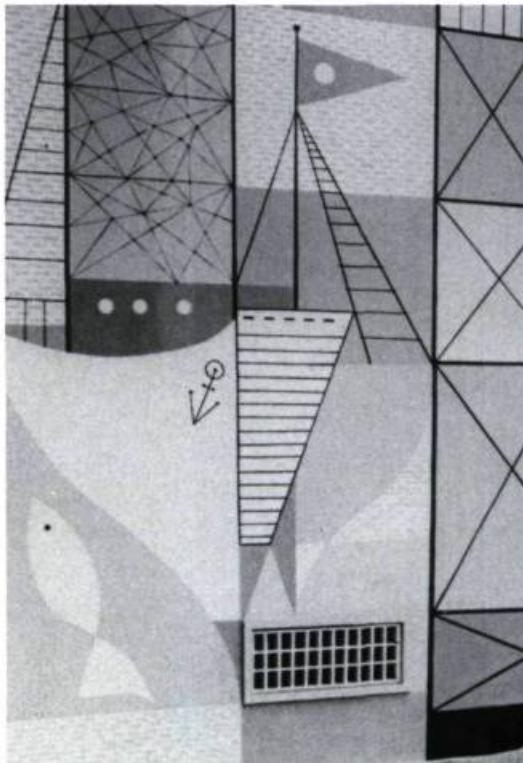
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B.C. Binning, cet inconnu

Dennis SEXSMITH

Rares sont les Canadiens qui savent l'influence qu'a eue Bert Binning, cet artiste qui, sobrement, s'appliqua à susciter des contacts entre les gens, qui ouvrit la voie à une esthétique propre à la Côte Ouest et qui fut si effacé dans ses actions que jamais ses mérites n'ont été évalués dans leur totalité.

De fait, la récente rétrospective itinérante de ses œuvres, qui dura un an¹, ne dit mot ni de l'organisateur ou du mentor, ni de son prosélytisme. En outre, Binning enseigna durant trente-huit ans, dont treize furent consacrés à des fonctions administratives. S'il est reconnu que sa peinture a marqué l'aube du modernisme international à l'ouest des Rocheuses, cet artiste a néanmoins toujours été oublié au profit de Lawren Harris, regardé comme le



chef de file incontesté de ce mouvement. Mais, comme l'explique Abraham Rogatnick, l'un de ses protégés, «Lawren Harris fut un moderniste un peu avant Binning. Cela remonte au début du siècle».

C'est à l'Université de la Colombie-Britannique que l'on peut apprécier la plus belle réalisation de Binning. Le pavillon de la musique, le théâtre Frederic-Wood et le pavillon Lasserre, qui regroupe les beaux-arts, l'architecture et l'urbanisme, entourent un terrain de stationnement vide, où l'Université a toujours l'espoir d'élever un jour un vrai musée, qui viendrait parachever le Centre des Arts Norman MacKenzie. D'autres personnes ont, bien entendu, contribué à faire des beaux-arts et des arts d'interprétation une force de l'U.C.B., mais aucune n'a su, mieux que Binning, mettre en rapport les gens qu'il fallait pour chaque situation.

Cela tenait chez lui du génie. Ainsi, lorsque le groupe Art in Living – dirigé par Fred Amess –, de l'École des Arts de Vancouver, ramena

Richard et Dione Neutra de Los Angeles, en 1946, ce furent Binning et sa femme, Jessie, qui les accueillirent dans leur demeure avant-gardiste. Le dynamique personnage qui se disait le chef spirituel de l'architecture moderne de la Côte Ouest découvrit là une authenticité et une hospitalité qui l'inclinèrent à renouveler ses visites. Au cours d'une semaine de manifestations, Neutra donna deux conférences publiques passionnées et éloquentes sur le besoin d'une architecture d'après-guerre et d'une école où l'enseigner. Ce discours incita l'opinion publique à appuyer la création de ce qui devint la pierre angulaire du Centre MacKenzie: l'École d'Architecture de l'U.C.B.

Pourtant, Neutra a bien failli faire avorter l'architecture moderne à Vancouver avant

Une fois l'École d'Architecture de l'U.C.B. instituée, Frederic Lasserre, le directeur - d'origine suisse -, partisan du concept bauhausien de l'intégration des arts, acquit la conviction qu'il était essentiel de faire une place à l'histoire de l'art et à l'urbanisme. En 1949, Binning quittait son poste à l'École des Arts de Vancouver, pour accepter l'offre du recteur Norman MacKenzie d'enseigner les techniques architecturales et l'histoire de l'art aux étudiants en architecture. Puis, en 1955, MacKenzie proposa à Binning d'être le professeur à tout enseigner de la faculté des Beaux-Arts, qui deviendra finalement l'une des plus considérables du Canada. Binning favorisa chez les étudiants une prise de conscience du Style international et des autres idées de

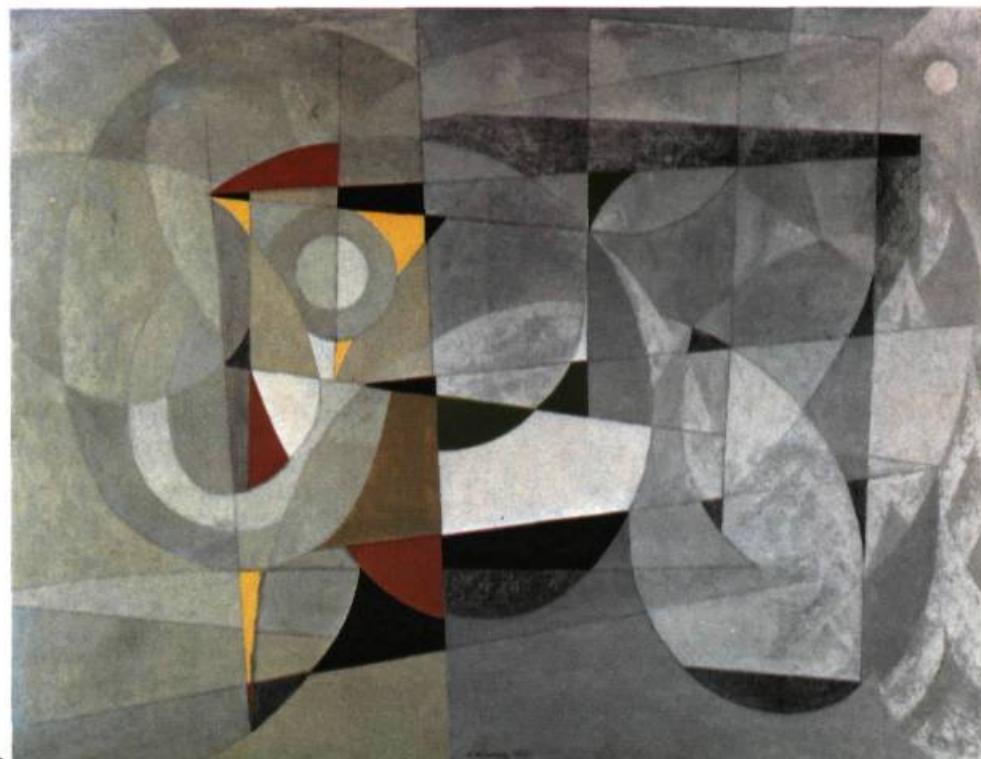
neuse de Seattle, dont la somptueuse résidence avait été conçue par Arthur Erickson.

Il est difficile de dire si le côté architectural de l'œuvre de Binning l'a emporté sur sa carrière picturale. «Ce fut réellement un architecte manqué», déclare le professeur Rogatnick. En fait, les deux grands-pères de Binning étaient du métier, et il aurait pu, lui aussi, s'engager dans cette voie, si ce n'avait été d'une maladie qui l'obligea à garder le lit une année durant. C'est alors - il avait environ treize ou quatorze ans et se rétablissait d'une tuberculose - qu'il se mit au dessin. Et ce qui commença comme un divertissement allait devenir l'œuvre de sa vie.

Peu de peintres ont, à leur actif, un aussi grand éventail de murs et de combinaisons



même que d'amorcer son élan. En effet, un jour que le jeune Arthur Erickson, assis sur le beau tapis blanc des Binning, disait son intérêt pour la profession, Neutra répartit: «Vous fréquenterez donc une école de génie! Le M.I.T.!»² Cette perspective horrifia à tel point le jeune Erickson qu'il s'en retourna préparer une carrière diplomatique, n'envisageant plus la peinture que comme un violon d'Ingres. Ce n'est que plus tard, lorsqu'il vit des photos de Taliesin West, de Frank Lloyd Wright, qu'Erickson fixa son choix: «Si quelqu'un a pu faire cela, je serai architecte.» Ce qui signifiait, naturellement, aller à McGill.



l'heure, ce qui éveilla toute une génération de créateurs.

Ses protégés furent nombreux, du talentueux Wells Coates, qui mourut très jeune, à l'ineffable Ron Thom. Il forma également un jeune historien en architecture, qui faisait partie du personnel, Abe Rogatnick, ainsi qu'un brillant jeune homme de Boston, Alvin Balkind. Ces deux jeunes gens avaient ouvert, deux mois seulement après leur arrivée, en 1955, la première galerie commerciale sérieuse de la ville consacrée à l'art moderne, la Galerie New Design.

Bert Binning donna carte blanche à Balkind pour diriger le Musée des Beaux-Arts de l'U.C.B. Le jeune conservateur répondit par une série d'expositions novatrices. Sa manifestation Pop Art de 1964 fut la première du genre dans l'Ouest canadien, comme l'avait été celle sur l'Expressionnisme abstrait montée par Binning, en 1954. L'exposition Pop Art permit notamment à Binning de nouer des relations avec Mme Bagley Wright, l'importante collection-

de couleurs que cet artiste. Sa composition chromatique pour la sous-station Dal Grauer, réalisée en 1953-1954, introduisait la première touche mondrianesque dans le centre de Vancouver; elle était visible de la rue, grâce à sa structure d'acier et de verre. Dans des ouvrages ultérieurs, Binning atténua ces tons en y mariant un bleu adouci et un vert voilé, qu'il choisit pour l'édifice de la B.C. Electric, puis pour la tour de la B.C. Hydro, construite tout à côté, en 1955-1957.

La maquette de Binning pour sa propre maison, à Vancouver West, avec son toit en terrasse «n'obéissait pas aux normes des polices d'assurance» de 1940. Il harcela sa compagnie d'assurances jusqu'à ce qu'elle renonce à s'opposer à ce qui était jugé comme une extravagance architecturale et lui accorde une hypothèque. Seule la résidence de l'architecte Peter Thornton, bâtie en 1939, constituait un précédent de ce type de construction, annonçant une ère nouvelle sur la Côte Ouest du Canada. (Signalons que Thornton, de même que

1. Bertram C. Binning devant le mural qu'il venait de terminer, à sa maison de Vancouver-Ouest, en 1949. (Phot. Graham Warrington)

2. *Squally Weather*, 1948-1950.
Huile sur papier cartonné: 81 cm 3 x 102,9.
Toronto, Musée des Beaux-Arts de l'Ontario.
Fonds Albert H. Robson.

Peter Cotton, étaient eux aussi intervenus auprès du recteur MacKenzie pour le presser de fonder l'École d'Architecture). Au cours d'une année sabbatique, Binning s'employa à la conception d'une autre maison de Vancouver West, celle de son ami Roy Keay.

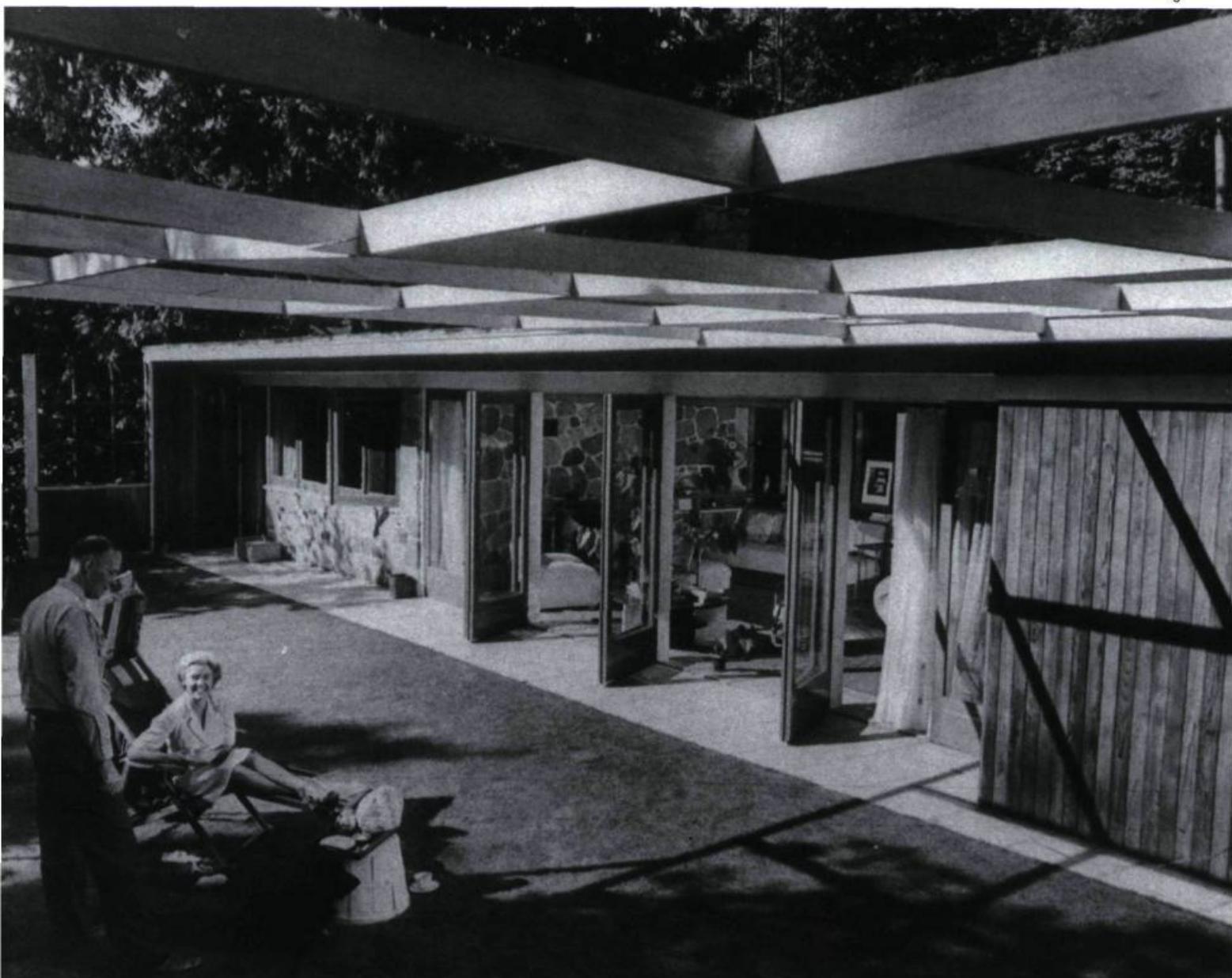
L'esthétique particulière de la maison et du jardin de Bert Binning résultait d'un mélange original d'éléments occidentaux et orientaux. Le bambou, les carillons éoliens et les cerisiers ornementaux – devenus de nos jours des lieux communs vancouverois –, venaient tout droit du Japon. Daniel Wood enseignait à ses étudiants en architecture «qu'une création réussie participe de la découverte de cet équilibre, caractéristique de l'Asie, entre la contemplation individuelle des choses simples de la nature et le plaisir partagé des interactions sociales». Ce message fut le point de départ de ce que nous considérons à présent comme une esthétique propre à la Côte Ouest.

Pour Binning, les frontières entre les disciplines comptaient peu, et c'est dans l'attitude des Japonais pour les arts qu'il trouva le bonheur. Il nourrissait, pour l'Orient, une passion qui surprend de la part d'un natif de Medicine Hat. Il doit cette ouverture sur l'Extrême-Orient à sa femme, Jessie Wyllie, et au père de cette dernière, qui tenait un commerce d'importation à Vancouver. De cette passion, naquirent les récents Jardins Nitobe. Kanno-uke Mori, le concepteur, professeur à l'Université de Chiba, fut désigné par le gouvernement japonais. Et si le consul du Japon, M. Munao Tanabe, et le recteur MacKenzie ont œuvré de concert à la réalisation de ce projet, c'est que Binning y joua un rôle de catalyseur en se faisant le porte-parole de l'un et de l'autre, et en agissant en tant qu'intermédiaire entre l'Université et la communauté canado-japonaise, qui se mit, elle aussi, de la partie en coopérant au financement et à l'aménagement de ce parc

aujourd'hui reconnu comme l'un des plus beaux jardins japonais traditionnels à l'extérieur du Japon.

L'introduction des beaux-arts à l'Université dérivait de la vague de prospérité et d'optimisme de l'après-guerre. Le théâtre, la musique, l'architecture, l'anthropologie et les beaux-arts y furent introduits par Norman MacKenzie. Tout comme Binning, il se montrait très favorable à l'organisation de cours parascolaires dispensés par l'Université, préoccupation qui se concrétisa par la mise sur pied des cours d'été de l'École des Arts de l'U.C.B. De 1958 à 1963, Binning recruta, pour donner ces cours, des maîtres modernes illustres comme l'audacieux sculpteur cubiste Alexandre Archipenko.

Les contradictions qui apparaissaient dans les œuvres de Binning étaient à son image: la foi d'un apôtre des techniques de son siècle, conjuguée à la fantaisie et au charme d'une âme



vagabonde. Leur saveur unique vient de ce mélange paradoxalement ressemblant fortuit avec l'œuvre de Ben Nicholson atteste de cette même combinaison d'influences à laquelle tendait le Londres d'avant-guerre.

Binning devint un croisé du modernisme en 1938, à Londres précisément, où il eut pour maître Henry Moore. C'est toutefois sa rencontre avec Amédée Ozenfant, ancien coéquipier de Le Corbusier, qui lui fit découvrir un propagandiste d'une espèce exceptionnelle. Lorsque la guerre éclata, Binning revint à Vancouver, via New-York, où il passa un an à l'Art Students' League. L'isolement où se cantonnait Vancouver et son conservatisme déterminèrent l'engagement personnel de Binning. Le Festival des Arts Contemporains, qui se tint chaque année, en février, de 1961 à 1971, doit ainsi son origine à une série de conférences données le midi et axées sur des conceptions nouvelles dans le domaine des arts d'interpré-

Les échecs de Binning ne furent pas nombreux. Il ne réussit notamment jamais à convaincre Henry Moore, son ancien professeur, de dispenser les cours de vacances de l'École des Arts. En outre, malgré son acharnement, ses tentatives pour sortir le Musée des Beaux-Arts du sous-sol étiqueté de la bibliothèque échouèrent lamentablement. Le fait qu'une rétrospective de ses œuvres se tint en ces lieux, en 1973, lui apparut d'ailleurs comme une cruelle ironie.

Les gens ne voient pas B.C. Binning et Lawrence Harris comme deux personnages allant de pair, même si les honneurs de chef de file des arts, à Vancouver, après la Seconde Guerre mondiale, leur reviennent de droit à tous deux. Ils se sont, l'un et l'autre, entourés de jeunes gens qui cherchaient des solutions nouvelles, et ils étaient également d'excellents amis.

Binning amena le modernisme à Vancouver: les aplats dénudés et purs de ses peintures, la

les joueurs respectent les règles. Les personnes qui savent véritablement tout ce que Vancouver doit à cet artiste sont celles qui l'ont connu personnellement. Voilà pourquoi, si l'U.C.B. édifie un jour ce musée, il est permis de présumer du nom qu'il portera.

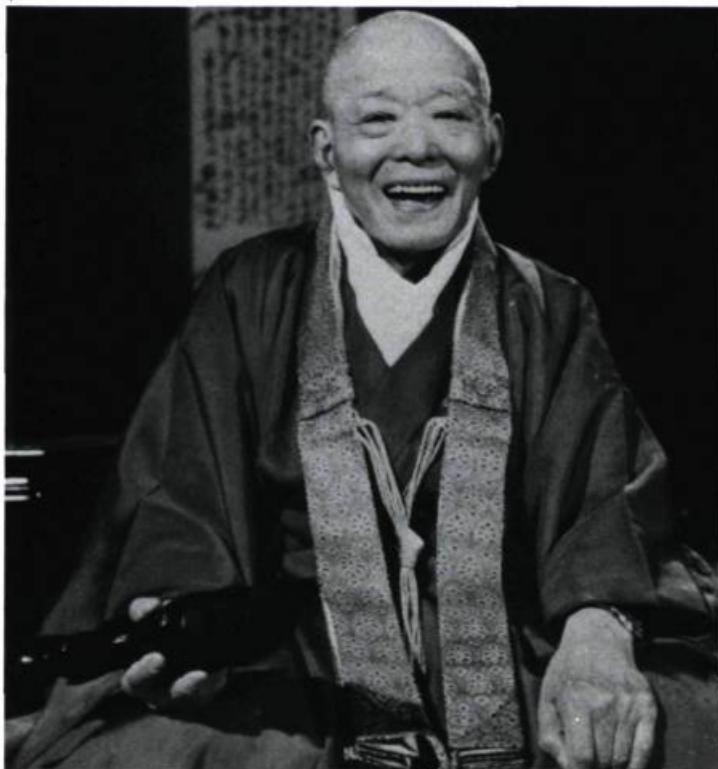
1. B.C. Binning: *A classical Spirit*, rétrospective itinérante de l'œuvre de Bert C. Binning (1909-1976): Musée du Grand Victoria, du 28 novembre 1985 au 2 février 1986; Collection McMichael d'Art Canadien, Kleinburg, Ont., du 1^{er} mars au 30 avril 1986; Musée de Winnipeg, du 1^{er} juillet au 15 août 1986; Musée Glenbow, Calgary, du 1^{er} septembre au 15 octobre 1986; Musée de Vancouver, du 31 octobre 1986 au 4 janvier 1987.

2. N.D.T. — Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
3. Voir aussi un article d'Andrée Paradis, dans *Vie des Arts*, XXI, 83, 79.

(Traduction de Laure Muszynski)

Original English Text, p. 78

4



tation, à une époque où les organisateurs d'événements artistiques ne proposaient que de rarissimes manifestations culturelles itinérantes.

Ces festivals insufflèrent, au cœur du campus, un vif intérêt pour les arts, rassemblant des figures telles que Merce Cunningham, John Cage, Leonard Cohen, Lucy Lippard et Marshall McLuhan. L'année 1965 représenta un tournant décisif pour l'art à Vancouver. Binning et Rogatnick montèrent une présentation multidisciplinaire de la thèse de McLuhan prônant que «le moyen d'expression est le message». Cette extraordinaire opération incita une génération entière à tenter des expériences de toute sorte: Intermedia, Pacific Cinemateque, et même Co-op Radio (CFRO), la première station FM non commerciale du pays.

limitation radicale des couleurs dans certaines des toiles, et le concept d'intégration des arts tel que le concevait le Bauhaus et que le soutenait avec ferveur des personnage comme Ozenfant et Moholy-Nagy en sont autant de preuves. Mais plus qu'un quelconque rudiment de style ou d'approche, Binning inculqua à la jeune génération la volonté et le besoin d'aller au-delà des frontières provinciales, et lui donna la confiance nécessaire pour effectuer cette démarche.

Peu de gens connaissent l'héritage qu'il laisse. Sans jamais viser à promouvoir sa propre réputation, cet artiste déclencha des changements qui semblent désormais inévitables. Bert Binning était tel un arbitre de manifestation sportive dont personne ne remarque la présence: lorsque cela se produit, c'est que

3. Sur leur terrasse donnant sur la mer, au sud de leur demeure, Binning et sa femme, en 1940.

4. Invité par Binning, Kojo Sakamoto, évêque de Kita-Kyūshū, écrit, en 1961, au Musée de Vancouver, son plaidoyer en faveur de la paix mondiale. Cette calligraphie a été donnée au Musée par Mme Binning, en 1986.

TEXTS IN ENGLISH

THE UNKNOWN B.C. BINNING

By Dennis SEXSMITH

Very few Canadians know how influential Bert Binning was. He worked quietly to bring people together. He pioneered a West Coast aesthetic. And he did it in such a modest way that the full sum of his credits has never been calculated.

Exhibitions like the current year-long touring retrospective¹ do not hint at the organizer, the proselytizer, or the mentor. Binning taught for thirty-eight years. He was an administrator for thirteen of these. It is recognized that his painting stands at the beginnings of international modernism west of the Rockies. Yet he has always been overlooked in favour of Lawren Harris as the natural leader of this movement. However, as Abraham Rogatnick, one of his protégés says, "Lawren Harris was modern in a slightly earlier way than Binning. It goes back to the beginning of the century."

Binning's finest creation sits on the University of B.C. campus. The Music Building, Frederic Wood Theatre, and Lasserre Building for fine arts, architecture, and planning, encircle an empty parking lot where the university has always had hopes of completing the 'Norman MacKenzie Centre for the Arts' with a proper art gallery. Other people helped to make the fine and performing arts a force at U.B.C., but no one did more than Binning to put the right people in contact with each other.

This was his genius. When Fred Amess' Art in Living group at the Vancouver School of Art brought Richard and Dione Neutra from Los Angeles in 1946, it was Binning and his wife, Jessie, who took them home to their own trend-setting residence. There, the fast-moving, self-proclaimed messiah of modern West Coast architecture discovered an authenticity and hospitality which would bring him back several more times. During a week of events, Neutra gave two rousing public lectures on the need for modern post-war architecture and a school in which to teach it. These stimulated public opinion in favour of the creation of what became the cornerstone of the MacKenzie Centre: the U.B.C. School of Architecture.

Neutra almost killed modern architecture in Vancouver before he got it off the ground. The young Arthur Erickson sat on the Binning's sheer white rug and expressed an interest in the profession. Neutra responded, "Well, you'll go to a school of engineering! M.I.T.!" This prospect so horrified the young Erickson that he went back to preparing for a career in the diplomatic corps, putting aside his painting as a hobby. It was not until Erickson later saw pictures of Frank Lloyd Wright's Taliesin West that he decided, "If someone could do that, I'm going to be an architect." Which, of course, meant going to McGill.

Once the U.B.C. School of Architecture was in place, the Bauhausian idea of the integration of the arts convinced Frederic Lasserre, the school's Swiss director, that art history and town planning were necessary. Binning gave up his job at the Vancouver School of Art to accept MacKenzie's invitation to teach architectural design and history of art to the architecture students, in 1949. By 1955, MacKenzie invited Binning to become the one-man Fine Arts Department that eventually would become one of the largest in Canada. Binning fostered an awareness of the International Style and other current ideas, which launched a generation.

His protégés would be many, from the talented but short-lived Wells Coates to the unerring Ron Thom. He nurtured a young architectural historian on the staff, Abe Rogatnick, and another bright young man from Boston, Alvin Balkind. These two men had opened the city's first serious commercial gallery for modern art only two months after their arrival in 1955: the New Design Gallery.

Binning gave Balkind a free hand to run the Fine Arts Gallery at U.B.C. and his young curator responded with a series of ground-breaking exhibitions. Balkind's 1964 Pop Art exhibition was the first in western Canada, as Binning's of Abstract Expressionism had been in 1954. The Pop Art exhibition drew on Binning's contact with the important Seattle collector, Mrs. Bagley Wright, (whose palatial new home had been created by Arthur Erickson).

It is hard to say if Binning's architectural side may have surpassed his career at the easel. "He was really an architect manqué," says Prof. Rogatnick. Both of his grandfathers were architects and he might have become one too, except for a year's illness which confined him to bed. It was then, at about the age of thirteen or fourteen, while recuperating from TB, that he took up drawing. What started as an amusement became his life's work.

Few painters designed architectural murals and colour schemes to the extent that Binning did. His colour pattern for the Dal Grauer Substation, 1953-54, introduced the first Mondrian-esque accent to downtown Vancouver, visible from the street through its glass and steel-box frame. This scheme was later softened to blend with the off-blue and misty green which he chose for the B.C. Electric, later B.C. Hydro, tower which was built beside it in 1955-57.

Binning's design for his own flat-roofed house in West Vancouver broke the 'insurance barrier' in 1940. He dogged the insurance company until they gave up resisting this architectural oddity and granted a mortgage. Only architect Peter Thornton's own residence of 1939 predates it as the first of a new design era on the Canadian west coast. Thornton and Peter Cotton also were instrumental in pressing President MacKenzie to establish the School of Architecture. Binning designed another West Vancouver house, for his friend, Roy Keay, while on sabbatical one year.

The aesthetic behind his own house and garden was a new mixture of west and east. From Japan came the natural bamboo, wind-chimes, and ornamental cherry trees, now almost a Vancouver cliché. Daniel Wood has characterized this lesson to his architectural students: "that good design comes from finding the Asian balance that exists between a private contemplation of nature's simplicities and the public enjoyment of social interactions." This message was a starting point for what we now regard as west coast design.

Boundaries between disciplines meant little to him and Binning found happiness in the Japanese attitude toward the arts. He developed a passion for the Orient which one does not expect in a native of Medicine Hat. His introduc-

tion to the Far East came through his bride, Jessie Wyllie, and her father, who had an importing business in Vancouver. His passion led to the creation of the new Nitobe Gardens. This collaboration between Mr. Muneeo Tanabe, the Japanese consul, and President MacKenzie, came about because Binning told one what the other was thinking. The designer, Prof. Kanno-suke Mori of Chiba University, was selected by the Japanese government. Binning acted as the go-between for the university and the Japanese-Canadian community, which pitched in to help finance and build what now is recognized as one of the finest formal Japanese gardens outside of Japan.

Fine arts came to the campus on the post-war wave of prosperity and optimism. Theatre, music, architecture, anthropology, and fine arts were introduced by Norman MacKenzie. He and Binning shared a high estimation of extension courses. The U.B.C. Summer School of the Arts grew out of this concern. In the years 1958 to 1963, Binning recruited renowned modernists to give master classes, figures such as Alexander Archipenko, the pioneer Cubist sculptor.

The contradictions in Binning's work were the contradictions in the man. His work wed the faith of an engineering age to the whimsy and delight of an errant spirit. Its occasional resemblance to the work of Ben Nicholson testifies to the same combination of influences which were focused in pre-war London.

Binning became a modernist crusader in London in 1938. There he studied with Henry Moore, but it was his contact with Amédée Ozefant, Le Corbusier's sometime partner, which set before him the prototype of this particular kind of zealot. He returned to Vancouver at the outbreak of the war, after a further year spent at the Art Students' League in New York. The Festival of Contemporary Arts, held every February from 1961 to 1971, grew out of an earlier series of noon-hour lectures. This focused on new ideas in the performing arts in the years when promoters provided a thin diet of touring cultural acts.

The Festivals galvanized interest in the arts on the campus, bringing together figures such as Merce Cunningham, John Cage, Leonard Cohen, Lucy Lippard, and Marshal McLuhan. Nineteen sixty-five was a turning point for art in Vancouver. Binning and Rogatnick staged a multi-media presentation of McLuhan's thesis that "the medium is the message". The impact of this extraordinary performance inspired an entire generation of experiments: Intermedia, Pacific Cinemateque, even Co-op Radio (CFRO), the country's first non-commercial FM station.

Binning's failures were not many. He never lured his old teacher, Henry Moore, to instruct at the Summer School of the Arts. He tried harder and failed more miserably in the fight to raise the Fine Arts Gallery out of its cramped library basement space. He regarded the installation there of his own 1973 retrospective as a cruel irony.

People do not think of B.C. Binning and Lawren Harris as a pair, although the two must share credit for leadership of the arts in Vancouver after World War Two. Both surrounded themselves with young men and women who were looking for new solutions. They were also excellent friends.

It was Binning who brought modernism to Vancouver: the clean, stripped down, flat field in his paintings; a radical reduction in colour in some of these; the unification of the arts as envisioned by the Bauhaus and vigorously promoted by figures such as Ozefant and Moholy-Nagy. But more than any element of style or approach, he instilled a younger generation with an urgency to reach beyond provincial boundaries.

Then he gave them the confidence to do so.

Few know of his legacy. Never one to promote his own reputation, the changes Binning brought about now seem inevitable. He was like the referee in a sports event whom no one notices. When that happens, you know they are doing a good job. The people who do know how much Vancouver owes him are those who knew him personally. That is the reason why, if U.B.C. ever builds that art gallery, there is little doubt whom it will be named after.

1. "B.C. Binning: A Classical Spirit", B.C. Binning (1909-1976) Retrospective Itinerary: Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, Nov. 28/85-Feb. 2/86; McMichael Canadian Collection, Kleinburg, Ont., Mar. 1/86-April 30/86; Winnipeg Art Gallery, July 1/86-Aug. 15/86; Glenbow Museum, Calgary, Sept. 1/86-Oct. 15/86; Vancouver Art Gallery, Oct. 31/86-Jan. 4/87.

THE WORLD OF CAROLEE SCHNEEMANN

By Udo KULTERMANN

In the context of Performance Art of the last two decades the name Carolee Schneemann stands out as one of the artists, who, by means of her pioneering achievements, symbolizes the total development of this newly created art form. It is significant that finally a woman is as important as male artists in a given medium. The transformation of art expression incorporated in her work is one from a male-dominated to a female-oriented, from static art to a dynamic art which requires personal involvement.

Schneemann's performances in the early sixties are demonstrations of a view of the world by means of a new art form, which appropriately fulfilled the ambition of the artist, as she articulated it candidly: "Rhythm in my work is polyphonic, corresponding to physical intensification – blood, nerves, breath, muscle – an interdependent physiological perception of spaces filled with movement, reflected light, broken edges, shifting planes, colours in balance and tension. Dropping, breaking, tearing, spilling, glutting materials introduce forms of randomization grounded by rhythm which re-define my expectations of physical structure."

These words from an interview with Ted Castle in "Artforum" of November 1980 give evidence that a female art was established, one that closely related the life of the artist and her sensual feminist perception of reality. After early collages and assemblages, and after her participation in events with artists such as Claes Oldenburg and Robert Morris, and following her first independent environment "Eye-Body" of 1963, her work came to full maturity in "Meat Joy" of 1964. In "Eye-Body" elements of the old and the new were still combined, including forms of assemblage, environments and happenings. In "Meat Joy" of 1964 an exciting interaction took place with human bodies in an imaginative, partly dream-like sequence of movements with specific inherent meaning. The human body and a multitude of food and objects were brought together in a carefully planned and executed physical choreography which included psychological and erotic relationships. The totality of all the immediate motivations within a group of participants created a new encompassing form.

In this work Schneemann synthesized elements of other art forms of the times: Oldenburg's environments and environmental theatre, Brakhage's pioneering films, dance experiments and participatory theater. The action was a celebration of the carnal, constituted by nude bodies in combination with food, noise and movement. The goal was the identification of form and content in a newly established medium from a female perspective.

The international success that was established by "Meat Joy" in 1964 reinforced from a historical perspective Carolee Schneemann's position as one of the leading performance artists. A sequence of several other related and expanding works was to follow: among them the film "Fuses" in the same year producing an authentic documentation of love-making, the performances "Water Light/Water Needle" in 1966 and "Thames Crawling" in 1970, many of them first performed in Europe.

The later development of Carolee Schneemann went into a new phase with "Up To And Including Her Limits" of 1973, in which, again, bodily energy was examined and transformed into an artistic form. The life and the body of the artist remained in the center of the event: hanging from a rope for extended durations, the artist swung in various limited directions, noting the area she was able to reach by marking the floor and walls with chalk. Several other female performance artists later used this action as a model for their own works. The character and limitation of female energy was the theme, and physical and psychological elements became a unity.

In "Interior Scroll" of 1975 this line of development was taken to its most radical consequence. The body of the artist herself became a source of information, the physical and the literary were literally merged: standing on a stage the artist read from a scroll which she slowly pulled out of her vagina. Vagina and womb no longer were only symbolical sexual attributes, but zones of information, "interior knowledge". In her book "More Than Meat Joy" of 1979 Schneemann interpreted this event: "I saw the vagina as a translucent chamber of which the serpent was an outward model; enlivened by its passage from the visible to the invisible, a spiraled coil ringed with the shape of desire and generative mysteries, attributed of both female and male sexual powers."

The work of Carolee Schneemann in its totality has constituted one of the most fertile art manifestations of our time. By transcending the traditional media of painting and sculpture, she explores, according to an imaginative thematic realm, the possibilities beyond established borderlines of art. The result of her achievements is the distinctive expression of a female sensibility, that, while independent from male domination, still incorporates many of their values. Using the body of the artist in a new form of personal involvement Schneemann has been able to communicate precisely and mysteriously her view of the world. By means of her art the contemporary public has been led into previously unknown territory, discovering a world of promising and yet undefined fascination.

VIRTU 2

by Gloria LESSER

"Virtu", as the catch-all leitmotif, expressive of "objects of beauty and quality, collectively", a phrase and concept cleverly chosen to embrace a broad spectrum of objects and ideas, ventures unsuccessfully to communicate and associate with any interests on any grounds, confusedly accosting the collector, the manufacturer and the befuddled consumer.

The current international vogue of design delirium, inspired and generated by Postmodernist experimenters, has stimulated a spate of design exhibitions in American and European museums, commercial and school galleries, department stores and cultural centres. Innovative communication/marketing approaches in the

promotion of household and office products are another by-product of public interest in design.

In 1986, the Centre International de Design opened as part of Le Cours le Royer in Old Montreal, to assemble design professionals, manufacturers and distributors. Plans call for a resource centre, library and hall to provide for symposiums, etc. Simultaneously, Le Centre Infodesign Bonaventure has re-opened in its new incarnation as a reference centre. Activities focus on the cultural/educational/promotional aspects of design, and represent both profit and non-profit factions. This enterprise is aided by Canadian government Regional Industrial Expansion grants, under their "Think Canadian" program to inspire consumers to buy Canadian goods¹.

At the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa, in postwar 1947, the National Industrial Design Committee was inaugurated to promote the improved design of Canadian merchandise to stimulate sales. While a history of the organization is too complex to summarize here, Design Canada, later named, installed Design Centre branches, first in Toronto in 1964 and at Place Bonaventure in Montreal in 1967. Both dismounted in 1970 soon after they had opened, due to the difficulty of affecting the general public to appreciate design. Tenants in showrooms on Place Bonaventure's D Mart have been relocating steadily since the 80's period. Now, can two new Montreal Design Centres, duplicating services, succeed, where their predecessors had failed?

Nonetheless, it is within these precise precincts and contexts, as in Toronto's recently opened Design Centre Gallery, where *Virtu 2* works were on view through November 1986, that experimental decorative art can theoretically function appropriately, rather than in a museum setting. When *Virtu '85* was held at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs de Montréal, a greater status was automatically conferred to the mediocre works on view. It should be established, however, that the *Virtu '85* and *Virtu 2* competitions of residential design, circulating in the guise of exhibitions, function primarily in contextual relationship to Canadian industry and the consumer, rather than the artistic or design milieus, to whom they are ostensibly addressed.

Virtu 2 showcases 21 works, winnowed from 190 entries, selected by a more stringent jury than the prior *Virtu '85* show, but the submissions themselves once more broadcast the notion that Canadian judges, still soft on the philosophical pursuit of Canadian design, are resolved to encourage efforts to keep that community alive, motivated and functioning, despite the general low level of quality of the works.

That this is a worthy goal cannot be disputed. However, the objects of "Virtu" do not even exemplify the competition categories planned, to include lighting, seating, tables, cabinets, floor/wall coverings and accessories. With such uneven representation in scope and variety, analysis of designers' works, or yearly design trends, is problematic. Actually, whether any real kind of "forum" for the interchange of ideas can flourish under circumstances surrounding competitions, rather than, for instance, on a corpus of scholarly work in the Canadian design field, remains to be seen.

Since many of the designers had previously exhibited in the *Virtu '85* show, an impression which lingered was that of a tight little network of Ontario craftsmen at the helm of contemporary Canadian design, an ambiguity constituted precisely by the contest format itself, coupled with the fact that some Ontario works had been exhibited elsewhere. Here, I refer to Gord Peteran's poorly-proportioned, top-heavy *Secretary*, and Michael Fortune's *dining Chair*². In addi-