As The World Turns... / Outre Terre, Centre d'exposition CIRCA, Montréal. September 1\textsuperscript{th} - October 9\textsuperscript{th} 1993

John K. Grande
IRCA's *Outre Terre* show is an eclectic array of responses to questions of cultural identity and norms of artistic practice. In an era of free trade, satellite communication and talk of a global economy these issues are increasingly up for grabs. A feeling of being overtaken by forces beyond our grasp, of an amorphous internationalism, is in the air. These works by Monique Giard, Randy Saharuni, Yves Louis-Seize, Renée Lavaillante and Catherine Widgery are surprising precisely because they seem to stand outside the latest fashions for intellectualizing artistic production. They arouse sensations and feelings through a simple respect for the communicative potential of the materials and media being used.

In a darkened, enclosed room set aside from the other artists’ works, Catherine Widgery’s installation pieces harken back to that era of colonial settlement when the taurological biases of a linear sense of time and place brought confidence to the settler’s mission. The all too quaint literalism that pervades these pieces, linking objects more readily associated with the niceties of the parlour room and the Victorian water-closet, heighten our poetic sense of imagination, while exposing the Romantic bias of the New World mentality, its more primitive superstitions harken back to that era of colonial settlement when the women work with mountains of Rif in Morocco, where the women work with deerskin sewn onto it, the eviscerated carcass of a once living animal and the clawed feet that form its base further echo the overall sense of muted violence.

Renée Lavaillante’s two-dimensional abstract collage pieces are less concerned with objective or cultural definitions of meaning in a literal sense. Lavaillante has brought together a number of exploratory abstract drawings made at different times, reworking them into entirely new horizontal or vertical configurations. By layering varied intensities of darkness and light, she brings a sculptural and spatial dimension to the process of drawing in pastel, charcoal and pencil. Lavaillante’s works are non-objective flights of fancy, less constrained by formalist notions of abstraction, that communicate a deep sense of brooding emotion. In *À supposer que l’on se heurte à quelque chose*, no. 18 (1993), the process of building onto and partially eradicating the formal compositions of each layered sketch brings a paradoxical effect. The compositional angles, gestural markings and tonalities that load the surface plane of the piece have a primal, void-like intensity that draws us inwards at the same time as we become aware of the untouched areas that surround it. Devoid of colour, Lavaillante’s work has the spirit of a two-dimensional installation.

Monique Giard’s *Ailleurs* (1993) is inspired by a visit to the villages in and around the mountains of Rif in Morocco, where the women work with clay as they have for centuries, making pots and other domestic objects. The five free-standing clay figures that make up one part of the piece have bronze appendages, hands and faces that are only partially visible, making these figures seem constrained, almost incapacitated. However, the gestural recreation of their garments suggests the opposite, a subtle bodily movement and a kind of archaic sense of beauty seemingly lost in the Western world. Gathered around a series of miniature facades of houses
placed on the gallery floor, the common domestic buildings one might see in these villages, these figures seem resigned to their place in the world, neither burdened nor entirely aware of their inherent poverty, but instead solemn and resolute. Off to the side, a bronze ballerina pirouettes atop a cabinet while classical Western dance music plays in the background. By juxtaposing these two entirely different elements in her sculptural installation, that of these Moroc-can women who represent a lifestyle of culturally specific traditions and economic dependency and the ballerina who symbolizes the frivolous virtues of our own society’s passi-ve “high art” entertainment cul-
ture, Giard’s Ailleurs causes us to question which is the more meaningful without passing a final judgement.

A comment on the photographic process itself, Randy Saharuni’s Untitled (1993) anatomizes the one-
dimensional character of the photographic medium by extending its visual effect outwards into the actual environment, presenting the photographic effect within the subject even before it has become a photograph. In the centre of this photograph, a field of yellow flowers and grass has been partially flattened by a rectangular
“window” of glass while the border areas remain au naturel.

The steel boat in Yves Louis-Seize’s De l’origine et de la dérive des espèces (1993) is so geometrically precise and the three ceramic forms on burnished logs that surround it so ambiguous they suggest two altogether different levels of experience. The former is a linear, Platonic symbol of conquest of the unknown by rational means, as empirical as experience, can only communicate a deeper understanding of the human dilemma while ignoring our basic need to re-connect with nature.

It is all about control of the human spirit, this superstitious belief that technology can somehow provide us with solutions to the human dilemma while ignoring our basic need to re-connect with nature. An enlarged version of Outre Terre with works by the same artists travelled on to Brussels, Belgium, where it could be seen at the Hôtel-de-Ville de Bruxelles and the Centre culturel francophone de Watermael-Boitsfort, this January.

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NOTES


Electronic mail art recaptures that sense of experiential immediacy in new and interesting ways. In an event at the Vancouver Art Gallery, Bill Baratz, an E-Mail artist, received instant images produced by the natives of the South Pacific island of Raratonga beamed off satellites thousands of kilometres above the earth’s surface. These images were then instantly flashed on a monitor at the VAG, projecting scenes of life in the Cooke Islands while gallery patrons produced images for the viewers at the other end. The interactivity in this form of art is immaterial as it is undivided by time and space. E-mail can be produced anywhere and can challenge old-fashioned concepts of higher and lower denominations of culture, the content of the gallery as site and even physical distance. How does E-mail art really improve the conditions of life on the planet at the primal level?