

ETC



## The “Dance of Life”

Eva Brandi, *Montreal Telegraph*. May 31 - June 11 2000

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Numéro 52, décembre 2000, janvier–février 2001

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/35710ac>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Revue d'art contemporain ETC inc.

ISSN

0835-7641 (imprimé)

1923-3205 (numérique)

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Citer ce compte rendu

Lammerich, Y. (2000). Compte rendu de [The “Dance of Life” / Eva Brandi, *Montreal Telegraph*. May 31 - June 11 2000]. *ETC*, (52), 40–41.



## ACTUALITÉS/EXPOSITIONS

### Montréal THE “DANCE OF LIFE”

Eva Brandl, *Montreal Telegraph*, May 31 - June 11, 2000

*I see these things not with my external eyes, nor do I hear them with my external ears. I see them rather only in my soul with my bodily eyes wide open, so that I am never overcome by ecstatic unconsciousness, but see these things when I am awake during the day and during the night. The light that I see is not confined to space, it is much brighter than a cloud which bears the sun within it. (Hildegard von Bingen) 141 C.E.*

Strehlow, *Hertzka*, p. 140

**A**n oval, at knee height, in the proportions of the golden section, a third longer than wide. A random set of openings; eight circular holes that vanish into an infinite blackness, cutting through the blade of this oval steely surface, polished to the point of just barely recognizable reflection; a reflecting mirror of forbidden knowledge. The resonance of Eve and the Medusa in Eva Brandl's distanced image constructs a redemptive space – a redemption on the edge of seduction to which the viewer is magnetically drawn, an edge whose potential pulls us into the oval's fluid surface, towards a celestial mapping of reversals; a paradoxical spatial field echoing light, stars and planets in their infinity. The viewer hovering over this universe, is enthralled by the illusion of omnipotence oblivious to

its grounding, a set of barely visible supporting aluminum structures. A cloth, with a scalloped edge patterned in horizontal bands embraces the oval, reminiscent of a medieval pattern lifted from the protective canopy of princely processions. The discreet aluminum supports raise this canopy just above the floor. For the viewer this cloth, of soft red, blue and white cotton prints, shades their eyes and their hearts from the oval's hidden base, an intervention to shield them from the elemental secrets of their existence. The temptation, of course, is to lift this border – this hem so provocatively like a skirt – in the desire to lay bare its projected secrets. And yet the viewer is simultaneously held back by an extraordinary sense of order, its formal strength and resolution colluding in an act of complicity inviting a temptation to awe and wonder. In Einstein's exquisite summation : *the most incomprehensible thing about the universe is that it is comprehensible*.

Somehow *Valse (les trous de ciel)* permits the viewer to stand on the edge of this paradoxically “comprehensibles” universe, straddling question and answer. It can be compared to merging the law of gravity and the speculation of myth. What is clearly brought into play is the precarious position of the body. Traditionally organised around abstract intuitions of mathematics – gravity and logic, the body is here re-organized as a response to its relationship with its sensible – physical specificity constantly reconstituted in every





Eva Brandl, *Valse (les trous de ciel)*, 2000. Brushed aluminium, cloth; 200 x 122 x 50 cm. Photo: R.-M. Tremblay.

particular moment around its points of exterior reference, its points of projection and positioning. Engaged by the coordinates of the oval's interiority and exteriority, and overcome by a sensation of falling into its razor-sharp – fluid contradiction of presence – its reflected light and absence – the infinite darkness of its random holes suspended in the liquid field of that reflection, the viewer's sense of logic is felt rather than understood as inseparable from doubt and salvation – redemption – is connected with deeds. In the same manner, the viewer's sense of the body is mobilized – rather than comprehended by a elision of physical actions and interior states.

This elliptical universe has the reach and grasp of Hildegard von Bingen's thirteenth century vision of a vulva shaped model of the cosmos; a determination of the female voice through the female body. *Valse (les trous de ciel)* also holds, however, an even greater ancient secret in embracing with its shape the prehistoric icon of a goddess, the Venus of Willendorf. Her narrow shoulders, large breasts, wide hips and small feet form a similar oval, one that we have come to associate with being a condition of birthing, perhaps the single most primal condition of the body. The ellipse itself directs the viewer to literally orbit this work, making mental shifts to float free and rise or descend on a whim whose curiosity impels that desire to peer beneath the canope skirt, to search for its forbidden secrets, to plunge hopelessly fearlessly into its abyss.

*Valse...* the dance with these “holes in the sky”, becomes a collision between the familiar and the unexpected. It is indeed the “dance of life” – like Botticelli's renaissance repost to the medieval dance of death – and consequently therefore fraught with opposition. The warmth of the cloth, its colour, softness, worn texture and implicit history – pageantry, are in contrast with the chillingly flawless razor sharp

metal surface. The work's materiality recombines the body, but as an object it embraces as well the body's extensions into the world – the furniture and architecture of our self-projections. We are guided, in other words, into that imaginary dimension between sensation and sense, fact and fiction, history and the present, fear and desire – which is ultimately between believing and knowing.

So well articulated is this dimension in *Valse (les trous de ciel)* that we experience a state of lightness that plays with tradition, as Rajchman in *Construction* puts it, rather than bears it as a burden. It choreographs disparity and connectedness, a multiplicity of interactions, as movement, a space filled with figure and story rather than emptied of it. This dance of sensations, between flight and gravity allows a release from the oppressive opposition of material and immateriality; the viewer is not required to rise above the material. Its context and geometry is not framed by Plato's reductions but by Euclid's demonstrations of a lived experience.

Eva Brandl's implicit intention is to engage each viewer in a play of myths that are both ancient and contemporary. With this, she also inevitably recasts our perception of truth. In Dante's *Paradisio*: *The truth you seek to fathom lies so deep in the abyss of eternal law, it is cut off from every creature's sight*. Brandl shifts this emphasis on truth as unknowable, in a direction defined by the contemporary philosopher Daniel Dennet as having access to the self in all its manifestations. *Valse (les trous de ciel)* constructs a dynamic contradictory space in which our fear of the forbidden garden, or vision, of knowledge co-exists with the permissions we give ourselves, little by little, as we come to believe in our body and its self-determining consciousness.

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