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## Îlot Fleurie Unfinished Utopia

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## Temporality

We were eager to pursue the reflections brought by such events as *Chambres d'hôtel*. La chambre blanche wanted to investigate further with another aspect of its mandate: the *in situ* and its relations to time. In 1998, for the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations, the center invited artists, art critics and curators to participate to an annual program punctuated by events exploring the theme of time.

The *Métronome* project was scheduled for January 12<sup>th</sup>, 1998, the anniversary date of the center's inception. It was the occasion to launch the program. La chambre blanche invited people who had contributed to its history to participate to an action, from various locations in the world and thus taking place on different time zones. This action was meant to realize a Self-portrait at 9 pm, Greenwich hour, by bringing together portraits by Monica Kin Gagnon, Susan Menzies, Reva Stone, Jocelyne Belcourt-Salem, Doug Frick, Marlene Creates, Pierre Giner, Karen Trenkel, Bernard Villers, Irmeli Kokko and Tari Ito. All of them ending their action by taking a picture of their respective locations, at the moment of the portrait's realization.

A second event, taking place from April 3<sup>rd</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup>, gave a special color to this yearly program. It was the *Premières rencontres en arts visuels*, a collective event outside the walls of the center. It invested many interior and exterior sites, among which the Maison Gomin (the old jail for women), the historical chapel of the Séminaire de Québec, the church Notre-Dame-de-Grâce and a dilapidated space, located at 350, Charest Est Street. For this occasion, La chambre blanche asked ten artists to use time as the main material. It is in this occasion that european artists Anne Barbier, Pierre Giner, Sheila Nadimi and Guillaume Paris, along with artists from Quebec and english Canada, Gilbert Boyer, Murielle Dupuis-Larose, Michael Fernandez, Andrew Foster, Jocelyn Robert and Lyla Rye, have invested these spaces for their works.

In parallel to these events, the residences *in situ* taking place in the gallery were also focussing on the issue of temporality. This program also welcomed the project Vacuum (s) by Bertrand R. Pitt, works done with sand by Mariella Mosler, *Insectarium Welcome* by François Chevalier, some interventions by Neva-Gotthilf, the project *SentienBody* by Reva Stone, to finally end with the trio BGL's project *Perdu dans la nature*.

*Temporalité (Métronome)*, the *Premières rencontres en arts visuels* and the programs of residences *in situ*,

presented at the gallery allowed us to investigate the notion of time in the production and the diffusion of works realized *in situ*. This project also helped us to gather with the public, with event such as the *Premières rencontres en arts visuels*. It was an event outside the walls of the center, investing unconventional spaces for its diffusion, in the heart of Quebec City.

## Sur les toits

In the hopes to stay an active agent in the production and diffusion of installation practices and *in situ*, La chambre blanche presented, from August 31<sup>th</sup> until September 30<sup>th</sup> 2001, an event focussing on the possible relations between art and the urban milieu – outside the walls of the center.

*Sur les toits* pursued this reflection on art and the particularities of spaces which represents it. In the same way as the projects *Chambres d'hôtel* and *Temporalité*, this event has introduced the works in public spaces. It has done a great deal to meet with different audiences by using an unusual space for its diffusion. In this case, four artists have been invited to conceive works *in situ* on building roofs, all located in the Saint-Roch area. It is in respect to this that French artist Nathalie Allard and Alexis Bellavance, and Quebec City artists Florent Cousineau and Odile Trépanier were up for the challenge and eager to confront the limitations imposed by the nature of this kind of space: perspectives, architecture and bad weather included.

For this occasion, Nathalie Allard presented *Les locataires du haut*, a project presenting around twenty flags on which were presented words, phrases and imageries inspired by old engravings. The images and the words decorating the flags were printed with ink sensitive to heat, light and humidity. The flags in banner, rich in colours, would vary according to climate and would punctuate the short trajectory between Gabrielle-Roy Library and La chambre blanche.

Alexis Bellavance invested the roof of the building CDTI, located at the angle of Saint-Vallier and Dorchester Streets, with his project *Mémoires terrestres*. The idea was to reach the imperceptible. The artist installed huge flutes meant to make the noise of wind audible. This tool would transmit the caption of wind on the Internet and on the radio. On another side of the building was presented a blueprint in the biggest format representing the image of a man that let himself go against a receptor. This image, like the sounds produced by the flutes, would mark time as ephemeral...

The pedestrians who used Saint-Hélène Street were surprised by Florent Cousineau's work. Thanks to a tool placed on the roofs of the « Ateliers de roulement à billes », the rain could run freely on the little street connecting la Couronne and Dorchester Streets. A road sign would invite the pedestrians to take an umbrella, in order to protect themselves from the imminent showers.

Finally, the project proposed by Odile Trépanier played with the idea of the chinese lantern. The lantern has an intern mechanism that moves with the wind, while projecting on its structure a multitude of vegetal forms. The light and the animations produced by *Le catalyseur* were almost imperceptible during the day. Located at the top of the public elevator building which connects the Upper and the Lower City, it is in the evening that this work would shine, and become relevant for the people passing by.

*Sur les toits* was temporarily present in the daily lives of Quebec City's citizens. It presented works *in situ*, in the most unconventional manner. Anybody regularly walking in the Saint-Roch area could notice the interventions realized by artists and look differently at these roofs of building they know so well. *Sur les toits* was also inclusive of internet surfers by offering the diffusion of these works in real time, accessible on the internet site of La chambre blanche. ■

## ÎLOT FLEURIE

### UNFINISHED UTOPIA

Since its founding, the îlot Fleurie has had many lives, fought many battles. We have to remember that until 1991, while the city did not care about this area, citizens and artists took the initiative to arrange a vacant lot that was considered dangerous. The place soon became a beautiful garden where pathways, gardens and flowers would reflect the spontaneous creativity of a collective. This organic space, full of imagination and solidarity, had started this movement of revitalization of the neighborhood. Very close, the city had somewhat walked into someone footsteps. In 1997, the scenario became a nightmare. L'îlot Fleurie was forced to give its space to the real estate developers. The organization had to establish a strong balance of power with citizens. Following a poetry manifestation, pacifist civil disobedience and contentious negotiations, the îlot Fleurie obtain

a new lot. At the time surrounded by fast roads and a parking lot, it gave up its interest in community gardens which became an autonomous entity. The îlot Fleurie gave all its time to the creation of urban events. In 2000, after few years of difficult restructuring, a new group was created and took control of it with the support of Quebec City. This new team, composed mostly of women, worked to make sure the place would flourish and stay lively. Following the *Plywoodstock* days, *Émergence* became an artistic event of national scale happening every year. The îlot Fleurie could therefore welcome many artists from all generations. After the remarkable coming of sculptors such as Bill Vazan, Henri Saxe, Don Darby, it would be time for young people like Laurent Gagnon, BGL and the sœurs Couture to animate the spaces during *Émergence*. In 2001, when the Summit of Americas took place, the îlot Fleurie proclaimed itself the "free and pacifist zone of resistance". It welcomed thousands of activists who came to eat, paint, sing, dance and use the bathrooms.

It was viewed as the general quarters of activists. While the city had supported the initiative in this occasion, the îlot served as a security and sanitary base. It was a place to rest from the frustrated population choking from gas and lies alike. The îlot Fleurie made a fire 30 meters high and a concert of the most memorable impulsive percussions: hundreds of people played for hours, tapping on gates and road signs from the Lower to the Upper City. As a space to gather people, the îlot Fleurie pursued its cultural activities in this sense: *Solstice des Amériques*, *Festival de l'humour noir*, *Journée autogérée*, poetry in the open air, etc. Recognized and appreciated by many, the îlot Fleurie obtained the status of center for artists. Indeed, the îlot Fleurie became the utopic space *par excellence*, because of its conjunction of art, the social and communities. It became an island of creative and green resistance in the middle of reinforced concrete.

In the spring of 2007, the need to move and the brutal displacement of works of arts started the breaking down of the îlot Fleurie. It almost destroyed it. To start an organization is sometimes difficult. To maintain it is even harder, especially when the work is done by volunteers. When an organization has almost 20 years of history and we don't count nor the imposing numbers of citizens that worked for its success, nor the works they created, its disappearance is painful and its dissolution is complex. It is indeed the challenge that the îlot Fleurie was facing. It had no space to



maintain its activities in this gentrified area that some commerce owners like to call the "new" Saint-Roch. On May 30<sup>th</sup> 2007, the *ilot Fleurie* held a general assembly in order to vote for a "new" administration council. The latter had the mandate to close the organization. But it has a few battles to win before closing. Practically, the organization has to give up all it owns, or at least, what is left. It has to make sure it protects the sculpture that survived the destruction of neighboring highways.

Of the fifty sculptures that comprised the *ilot Fleurie*, almost 20 were saved. Few of them were severely damaged. These are today viceroyal issues of the "new" *ilot*. More importantly, they impose an urgent and profound reflection on the place of public and living art in the heart of the old Capital. During the summer of 2007, the committee in charge of saving the sculpture has the concrete support of the Eco quartier organization which hoped to adopt few of them. A young artists named Nathalie Côté, coordinator of one of the *Chantier urbain*<sup>1</sup>, refuses to give up on the arts. She proposed to add the integration of some sculptures to the mandate regarding the planning of the park Notre-Dame-de-Grâce. At this moment, seven or eight sculptures are about to be saved, but their survival is still uncertain. Lost in the city's bureaucracy, they might be destroyed by the machines (the *Robe engoulevant* by Jean-Louis Émond) or to be robbed (*Le Dragon du millénaire*, by poet and sculptor Hugo Chouinard, works usurped in June 2007). The City of Quebec is giving money for the removal of some works, but it will not be held responsible. The *ilot Fleurie* has to finance their restoration, while the City itself has cut the fundings since 2004. Again, to install works, procedures have to be followed in order to obtain the permission from the different parties involved. The committee meant to save the sculptures has to confront bureaucracy. Worse, nothing ensures that these works will be restored and reinstalled elsewhere. When the *ilot Fleurie* will be gone, who will make sure that they are protected? In some cases, the works of the *ilot Fleurie* seem to be all in peril in long or short terms, except if a "new" protocol is signed with the City, the artists and the "new" people in charge. This is a lot for an organization that has been hurt and is tired. Its administrators have given a lot already, not to mention that it is hard to get new and solid newcomers involved.

The *ilot Fleurie* remains the space of unachieved utopias. The challenges were herculean. We have

to remember the desolation, brutal and stupid, of the ramps of the highway ending up in a wall under which it had established a refuge. We also have to remember the *Géant Vert* done by the painter and sculptor Louis Fortier: a work of titaneseque proportion wanting to convey the idea of a vegetation with human forms and as high as urban pillars. We can only hope that the "new" *ilot*, in its ultimate battle against David and Goliath, will be able to convince municipal authorities that public arts are indeed pertinent. For 17 years, the *ilot Fleurie* has been supported by many volunteers. Let's hope that before it gives up, it will be able to honor all people involved in the revalorization, appropriation, planning of the territory and the organization of assembling events. At the entrance of the caravan which, until recently, served as a space for meeting and work, could'nt we read this message: "Beware, zone of hope"? ■

#### Note

- 1 This program gives summer jobs to young people. It is dedicated to the planning of exterior public spaces. Despite the success of this endeavor which has given it a prize, the City of Quebec has abandoned this social and community based project to offer, in 2008, contracts helping the revitalization to private companies.

## LA BANDE VIDÉO

Founded in 1977, La Bande Vidéo is a center in research and creation in the media arts. Our engagement seeks the development of research activities, production and diffusion, to support and accompany artists and offer equipment rentals. La Bande Vidéo has also coordinated, for the last 17 years, *Vidéaste recherché-e*: the very first festival solely dedicated to newcomers in the media arts.

Our organization participates to the emergence of the video culture. It gives an important place to artists and their research projects creating original body of work conjugating content, images, and aesthetics of presentation. By stimulating creation and exchange between authors, we hope to renew the discourse and the video practices in order to make sure the medium evolves while respecting its particularities and differences. La Bande Vidéo is also a motivator by helping artists to find the necessary funding to pursue their personal projects. It also offers them tools of production, promotion and diffusion of their works. It encourages them to reflect on it.

In 2006, La Bande Vidéo opened a space for exhibition located at

620, côte d'Abraham. This gallery was devoted to the presentation of a regular program of works of independent media arts, in order to give the public access to new forms of artistic practices. Also, we offer programs of residence-exhibition and of residence for production helping an artist to present his or her work in public, in one of the production studios at La Bande Vidéo. In the contexts of these residences, La Bande Vidéo offers all the necessary equipment to the artist, editing and workrooms and facilities, human resources and relevant services to realize the project. La Bande Vidéo is a member of the cooperative Méduse, which regroups ten organizations working in the visual, media and multidisciplinary arts.

### Neige sur neige

Conceived and orchestrated by Henri-Louis Chalem and produced by La Bande Vidéo, *Neige sur neige* is an aesthetic concept assembling original work production around the theme of snow and their diffusion, outside in an urban park. Asked to participate in the street, the public is invited to assist to projections, to get warm by a wood fire while tasting some broth, coffee and maple products prepared on site.

Initiated in the winter of 1996, it happened yearly until the year 2000. This event, to say the least friendly, wanted to be a popular gathering all about the video. The theme of the snow was presented to few artists coming from different practices. They were asked to produce a short video. They were sculpting snow to make the projection screens, in the heart of the various cities they visited. The snow was the best choice to make sure to get the largest public. It also offered a variety of ways or methods of diffusion, different than the ones we usually encounter in traditional diffusion networks of video, such as galleries, museums or festivals.

While respecting the creative endeavor of artists, this form of diffusion served to make video accessible to a public composed of regular citizens walking by on the street. The contribution of these creators, painters, sculptors, was also essential to plan the spaces. Furthermore, a radio program on Radio Basse-Ville presented the concept while inviting the population to visit the site. The infrastructure welcoming the public, the fact that works were ephemeral, the playful character of the group made *Neige sur neige* an outstanding event, which has expended rapidly. From one edition to the next, centers for artists dedicated to the video were invited to co-produce and diffuse the event in

their own cities. Also, a tour diffused the event in the whole province, in English Canada and as far as Europe.

The publications of catalogues of criticism of this event offered a unique reflection and act as a long-term memory of sort.

### Vidéaste recherché-e

A major festival for the newcomers in cinema and video in Quebec, *Vidéaste recherché-e* is a contest for all semi-professional videomakers in the province of Quebec.

*Vidéaste recherché-e* is a screen for Quebec newcomers in the worlds of cinema and the video. It represents an open door to the industry for the new generation. Indeed, many artists have taken advantage of what *Vidéaste recherché-e* offers. Ricardo Troggi and Francis Leclerc, two cinema authors, and the collective Philactère Cola (on Télé Québec) are amongst the laureates and participants of previous editions.

This festival supports and encourage independent videographic productions of all forms and venues: animation, fiction, documentary and new images (experimental videos, installation and cds, web art).

*Vidéaste recherché-e* stimulates the creation of works and establishes a meeting point for creators of all regions with great productions centers. It also gives a place to launch and diffuse their works. It allows them to learn about professional practices of distributions.

Presented for the first time in 1990, *Vidéaste recherché-e* has received a constant support from the arts and culture sectors in Quebec since its inception. A place for videographic diffusion was indeed in need and was nowhere to be found in Quebec's art milieu. With a reputation that has now reached all borders in Canada and elsewhere, *Vidéaste recherché-e* has acquired an experience that gives it credibility in the province and a success, which continues to encourage video creations in Quebec.

### « Cités, citoyennetés, citoyens »

On September 20<sup>th</sup> 2007, La Bande Vidéo sent a delegation of Quebec artists to Santiago, Chili, under the commissionerhip of Claude Bélanger, to participate in the eighth edition of the *Bienal de Video y Nuevos Medios*, opened from October 2<sup>nd</sup> until October 28<sup>th</sup>, 2007.

Manon de Pauz, Martin Bureau, Jean-François Côté and Murielle Dupuis-Larose did a residence in creation in Santiago. A residence, which has seen the production of works that was presented with the