Big exhibitions are expensive. Too expensive, some people say. This is a point of view. The other attitude consists of questioning oneself on their necessity and of finding the means to bring them about. This is the policy adopted by the two largest museums of the West, the Museum of the Louvre and the Metropolitan Museum, which have just announced a huge program of exchange: works, men, information, exhibitions prepared jointly and presented simultaneously in Paris and in New York. Thus, we shall be able to see, at the end of autumn 1973, the great tapestries of the Middle Ages and of the Renaissance sharing the walls on both sides of the Atlantic and, the year after, it will be the turn of a first-rate exhibition of Impressionism.

The same necessity for interesting a public always more numerous and more demanding is present in the decisions of the National Gallery in Ottawa and obtains for us exceptionally large exhibitions such as that of Fontainebleau, the most important since those of Rubens and the Arts of the Courts of France and England. It goes without saying that other private Canadian museums would also support such programs if they were better maintained financially and morally.

It is not difficult to agree upon the necessity of large exhibitions. The attendance figures of the museums are eloquent. In 1947, a million visitors attended the Metropolitan in New York; in 1972, 3,500,000 visitors were recorded (the same number as at the Louvre). An increase of about five per cent a year therefore seems normal for museums which have a dynamic policy, which do not fear to innovate and which at the same time are concerned with educating and preserving. To democratize, to open the museums to all citizens, these are hollow words if they do not signify the basic purpose; to educate. We realize with regret that our Canadian museums lack personnel in the educational sectors. Only one or a handful of persons have to fulfil crushing tasks. For example, again, the Metropolitan, whose department of education counted four persons in 1967 and which has fifty in 1972. This is not luxury. These people educate in their turn the high school teachers who educate the pupils. And the wheel turns. And the museum is inhabited, alive; it is the place of the enriching experience where we can see, confront, read, reflect, refresh ourselves, write, live. Whether temple or community centre, it matters little, this question no longer exists.

The problem is to assure the life of the museum. The finest collections, the best presentations, information on recent experiments, audio-visual means, television, advertising technique and even the computer, all these are very costly. Large funds, imagination and initiative are necessary for success. Otherwise, we are up against a stone wall and can progress no further.

We can never repeat enough the necessity of developing cultural sectors and the importance of the credits that must be given to them. Culture is a thing which is constructed like a bridge. With as much care, patience and savoir-faire.  

(Translation by Mildred Grand)
du Cerceau, some water-colours of Rubens, some drawings and engravings of Van Thulden and six paintings of Le Primatice or of his studio which copy the themes of the story of Ulisse and Penelope of Le Fréminet, Helen (Bowes Museum, Barnard Castle) and Ulysses and Penelope (Toledo Museum of Art), by mysterious, misty lyricism, bring thoughts of an anticipation of Prud'hon. The principal pieces, which have continued to exist at Fontainebleau, are the Gallery of Francis I with the series of medallions, destroyed in 1785, of which the thirteen frescoes of absurda iconography interwine the good luck and the misfortunes of the reign in the beginning plan of cultural reform, the Chamber of the Duchess d'Étampes, mistress of Francis I, which, by a transparent illusion, is decorated, with the lowest, and the Ballroom, painted under Henry II with mythological frescoes in such a decorative line that the arabesque becomes musical, with the theme of holiday or diversion coming back as left-motif. The paintings of Niccolo del Abate in the Ballroom, spoiled by being painted of in encaustic under Louis XIV, have been restored to their first freshness through the will of André Malraux. The recent restoration has also rid the female nudes in stucco of the Chamber of the Duchess of the sanitary towels in which the prudery of a misused art and promised to disappear.

The second Fontainebleau School will sanction the re-establishment of the unity and the works of peace after the recantation of Henry IV and the granting of freedom of worship to French Protestants by the Edict of Nantes (1598). More notice was taken of it than of the Chamber of the Duchess, and six of the eight compositions of Dubois of Antwerp illustrating the loves of Tancred and Clorinda (about 1605) and, in the Cabinet of Théagène, which became the Louis XIII salon, are still in place, with some changes, eleven of the fifteen pictures of Dubois recalling the loves of Medea and Chariclée. And above all the Trinity Chapel, which Phillibert de l'Orme had finished in 1551, presents almost intact the imposing program of the altar with its altar-piece and its stuccos framing in the ceiling, a renewed vision of that of the Sistine Chapel, painted in oil on plaster in 1508 by the master who had represented the death of Raphael, had been developing in Rome subsequent to the stanza of the Vatican and in the palaces of Mantua and Genoa. Niccolo dell'Abate, a native of Bologna like Le Primatice, who combined in the same manner as his predecessors the instinct of the monumental with the feeling of ornamental writing in the decoration of large works, was in addition a landscape artist. He arrived twenty years after the pioneers, enriched by the exquisite cadences of the Parmesan. On Salvati and on Ruggiero di Ruggiero who followed him, we are reduced to guessing the other a Venetian artist, Andrea de Flora, a changeable term, perhaps masquer of an Emily painter, the son of Niccolo or Ruggiero. After the two Italian waves opened the trench of religious wars, dug even at Fontainebleau around the palace in the form of masts which, under Catherine de Medicis, had transformed the temple of the arts of Francis I into a bastion. The second Fontainebleau School is Franco-Flemish. Between the two Fontainebleau Schools are found Frenchmen of very original talent: Étienne Delaune, a Protestant, who had to flee the court after Saint Bartholomew (1572), designer of the stature of an Ingres, the somewhat stinging presentation of whose works at the exhibition at the Grand-Palais might be regretted, and Antoine Caron, prophet of the surrealists, whose art is the model of this looseness of refinement and cruelty which was in the last of the French Gothic. Of these pictures, representing the entrance of Francis I into Milan in 1515, recently acquired by the National Gallery of Canada, will be one of the pôles of attraction of the Ottawa exhibition, beside the drawing of the same subject lent by the Louvre.

Italian art transplanted to Fontainebleau became international, there, under the influence of the royal and aristocratic milieu and thanks to the transfixion of the norden tradiation about brought about by the French and the Flemish who collaborated with those beyond the Po, and, after the death of the first, Le Primatice took on almost more importance that the scenes which they framed. Fontainebleau decoration does not subordinate the margin to the subject, which multiples further as it centres it. The imagining of the ornamentation is impossible to dissociate from the allusive iconology of the politically-implied themes. Plant, zoological, caricatural, abstract fantasies proliferated like the younger branches of grotesques and moralities of painted gothic manuscripts passed from France, from Flam­ish, or German prototypes, to Italy, with the new beginning of the fifteenth century. The basic element of the decorative cartouches of Fontainebleau: the carved scroll, remains an enigma. It perhaps derives from certain German engravings. But would not the catalysing factor have been the importing of Aztec sculptur­esque structures, which had just been discovered, was not missing from the grotesques. The Indian feather masks are placed beside the grin of the satyrs and besides they had already been sculpted on the tomb of Cardinal Georges d’Amboise, in the cathedral at Rouen, and on the pilasters of the palace of the prince-bishop of Liége.

Fontainebleau decoration, through a chain reaction, set the fashion for all decorative arts: tapistry and the work of goldsmiths, engraved armors, illuminated manuscripts, illustrated books, bindings and enamels. Engraving had been the propaganda means par excellence of the explicit idiom of the mani­erists. The engravings of Dürer had introduced into the art of the High Renaissance in Italy the fateful "cliché" which immediately caused it to deviate toward the anxiety of an unsatisfied spirituality of a rational definition of the image of man and of his world, in opposition to Italy, with Michelangelo. The Indian feather masks are placed beside the grin of the satyrs and besides they had already been sculpted on the tomb of Cardinal Georges d’Amboise, in the cathedral at Rouen, and on the pilasters of the palace of the prince-bishop of Liége.

Almost a third of the expedition of the Fontainebleau School presented in Paris is going to be on view at the National Gallery of Canada from the second of March to the fifteen of April. We must congratulate ourselves that this exhibition, which took ten years of efforts to assemble and study, should take the road not of the United States on the American continent, following the route of very many preceding ones, but that of the capital of Canada, in the spirit of cultural exchange which will unite the countries, from the coast to coast. The first school of painting which was set up in France, at the same time as the first explorations in New France, is coming to visit the friendly nation after a long historical detour. It was inevitable and fortunate that the Fontainebleau School should establish itself in Canada. Devoted to the universal, which is the most authentic French tradition, had a need in the arts of Italian contribution, which represented a form of higher civilization, in order to enter more completely into the current of European renaissan­ce at the time of the invention of linguistic and religious studies had taken in France the stride without precedent since the return of Francis I from his captivity in Madrid.

Fontainebleau, royal hunting lodges in the Middle Ages, offered its favourite climate, its cultural tabula rasa to the artists and its lands. The school of Fontainebleau is a school of mythology. An Olympus of a grace and a fantasy without known ancestors and without posterity came down to bring life to the new walls. An original ideal of feminine beauty became incarnate in the nude bodies of women, huntresses and swimmers, long and pearly, with coiled gilded hair, too much goddesses or too sports-minded to fall into
The commonplace trap of eroticism. And yet it is at Fontainebleau, still more than in Italian engraving and than with Jules Romain, that eroticism received its letters of credit in the history of art, but redeemed by ingenuousness or by a healthy alertness. In an art of the court, the scandals of the court weave the texture. The works which are going to be presented at the National Gallery of Canada are for the most part graphic. They appeal to the imagined reconstruction of their context. But their originality of technique and execution is surprising. The Italians brought to Fontainebleau drawing with red chalk and the wash-tint of red chalk, in pen and in brown-wash. Etching was the medium per excellence of the engravers of Fontainebleau. Fantuzzi handled it with extraordinary verve, often substituting for mytho-political subjects copied from the frescoes of the Gallery of Francis I immense cartographic landscapes, with visionary outgrowths, which cause an effect of unreal escape, crushed, in the middle of giant cariatides, of Herculean terms, of heavy garlands of fruit and of children reproducing the stuccos of the framing. Delacroix asked himself nostalgically what must be the colour effect of the Titians in their freshness. Were the frescoes painted by Niccolo in the Gallery of Ulysses according to the models of Primatice more mysteriously radiant than these wonderful festoons of flesh, as lighted from inside by a night-light, of the drawings of Le Primatice, with the shaky line, a vibration of a string stricken by a divine light? (Translation by Mildred Grand)

ANTOINE PRÉVOST:
SILENCE AND REALITY

By Pierre DUPUIS

The year 1972 marks for the artist his permanent attachment to painting. In a little village of the lower part of the river (at Cacouna, more exactly) where he was living for the last year, Prévost painted about forty canvases, of which about thirty were exhibited in the Morency Gallery last autumn.

The blossoming of the form which his painting reflects is partially explained by his education (town-planning and fine arts). But the astonishing fact remains that he should have reached after a few rough sketches — qualifying them himself as "Sunday painting" — the point of producing coherent and personal works. And this in spite of the almost instinctive comparing which we do, a priori with Jean-Paul Lemieux (whose influence he does not deny, as well as that of Wyeth and of Colville). The awareness he has of this will then favour a thoroughness of his research since different intentions preside at the point of departure.

The material which he uses almost exclusively, today, is water-colour. This limits his work to canvasses of small dimensions: they cause the spectator to look attentively at each detail of the work without, for all that, losing the whole from view. This evidence, which might seem commonplace brings no less, in this case, a major importance: each element being a symbol and, in this frame (the canvas) they are significant each in relationship to the other; this thematic reading promotes the understanding of the work. Thus, Saint Denys. In the water-colour which bears the same name, is deprived of his mitre and has no head. He does not exist, or, if you will, he lives in the appearance which his clothing presents. A return to the years of youth among the Jesuits. His characters are, furthermore, most of the time, without a face (without being), otherwise the faces are blurred, un discernible. By means of them one is referred to the social strata which they symbolize (Les Notables, Le Braconnier, Le Bedeau). This coldness of vital absence joins with the expanses covered with snow as far as the eye can see and with the sky neutralized to the greatest degree. Total uniformity, because vertical forces are silent. Even the protagonists who lead us to suppose, by their position in space, that their view is directed toward other characters (often in a unilateral way) do not communicate: a powerful and nihilistic look. Powerful, when the child (in Le Départ) is going toward the horizon without an exit because it is too immense. Nihilistic, in Schisme, when the bishop looks at the characters and when, in a parallel direction, the distance seems to increase with the group. There is in that a deeper denunciation than that of the hierarchical church, being itself, when all is said and done, a copy of what remains intrinsic in society.

This universe of solitude and silence is close to that of Lemieux. But this relationship in his perception of the world (Prévost speaks of "a same sensitivity") is embodied differently in painting. As much by the meditative consciousness with which he paints — should we not see in the angular folds of the garments a logical harmony with the sharp reliefs of glaciers? — as by the surreality which transpires from it (shadows under a sky without sun, for example).

Other elements graft themselves to this theme, but elements which always resolve around the same symbol. In this sense Jeux des enfants possesses, at its source, an ambivalence made up of phenomena of attraction and rejection or, at the least, of a questioning of the innocence of their games. This is not without recalling certain verses of Saint-Denys Gauvreau (whom he knew well):

They have a snare
With an incredible stubbornness
They did not leave you
Before having won you.
Then they left you
The treacherous ones abandoned you
Ran away laughing!

The compositions of Prévost are inscribed equally very well in the romantic universe of Anne Hébert (c.f. Kamouraska). Their common origin determine the similarity of their works — transposed in a different medium.

The awareness of emptiness will influence him to suppress completely the separation between earth and sky. In Les Notables, there is no longer the slightest spacial reference, outside a fence of barbed wire; a plastic requirement first, but, especially, a semiological importance which it is easy to imagine.

In closing, let us speak of the exception which proves the rule: Le Bedeau. This bust, hemmed in a closed environment (a belfry), is completely impersonal. One perceives it as an element of the setting. In this work, Prévost continues in some way the question which he has already raised, to know a dehumanized world like this conflict of appearances and reality. And, through a graph conditioned by his childhood, he reinstates, once more, existing uneasiness. The imaginary carries him away. Poetic work above all.

(Translation by Mildred Grand)

(1) Regards et jeux dans l'espace, in Complete Poems, Fides, p. 49.
AN UNAPPRECIATED PAINTER

By Paul DUMAS

Painters of quality are not always recognized or in style. The opposite proposition, knowing that painters in style are not always good, is perhaps equally true. Meissonier, Bouguereau, Gérome, Détaille, Dulac and Alma-Tadema, so much praised in their time, are much forgotten today. Among the eminent artists of Canada, James Wilson Morrice was recognized only after his death and Ozias Leduc, who died in his nineties, knew fame only at the end of his life, thanks to the enthusiasm of his pupil, Paul-Emile Borduas and Maurice Gagnon, the critic. Such good artists are by nature discreet, produce little, and Maurice Gagnon, the critic. Such good enthusiasm of his pupil, Leduc, Beder, Eldon Greer, who are united under the title of McGill University. They are among these.

The career of Allan Harrison was eventful and woven with contradictions. Of a middle-class family and grandson through his mother of a well-to-do manufacturer, he early chose adventure and emancipated ideas, but did not find satisfaction in this political awareness. A man of taste who believed that perfection is found in simplicity as it should be, he created posters and design of the first rank in the domain of advertising. He was therefore classified, labelled once and for all as a designer, when he was first of all a painter and wished to be and considered himself as such.

Allan Harrison was born in Montreal in 1911. At the age of fourteen, he went to work at harvesting in Saskatchewan and, for two years, he travelled in the West and on the Pacific coast, going as far as Panama and, from there, to Cuba. On his return to Montreal, he found employment in the shop of a sign painter and took evening courses in the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, where he drew from the antique. A small inheritance from his grand mother allowed him to go to New York where he diligently followed the teaching of Kimon Nicolaides at the Art Student League. He also had the opportunity of admiring the exhibitions of Matisse and other great contemporaries, which decided him in his choice of vocation. Back in Montreal, he attended L'Atelier, an art school directed by John Lyman and André Biéler, where he fulfilled the duties of student in charge. In 1933-1934, thanks to a grant he spent some time in Europe and divided this between London and Paris. In London he studied particularly in museums, in the British Museum, at the National Gallery, at the Tate Gallery; he worked at advertising art free lance and took a job as clerk in two art galleries. He met people such as Wyndham Lewis and Louis Marcoussis and, on Sunday, he attended lectures on political science that Harold Laski gave at his home. In Paris, he took classes in sketching at the Colarossi studio and at the Grande-Chaumière and he often went to the Louvre and the Jeu-de-Paume Museum. There he acquired as well a good knowledge of French which he has still retained since that time.

Having returned to Montreal, he found employment for a year as a salesmen at the Scott Gallery, then located in the building which the 400 Restaurant was later to occupy. After a living he took up commercial art. He returned briefly to France in 1938, travelling on foot from Lyons to Marseilles, and brought back several beautiful sketches and water-colours. In 1939, he became, as he puts it, "a Sunday painter", being occupied all week by his advertising work. At this time, he became connected with many artists: John Lyman, Goodridge Roberts, Alexandre Bercovitch, Jean Palardy, Jacques de Tonnancour, Jeanne Rheume, and exhibited for the first time at the Contemporary Art Society founded by John Lyman and would exhibit each following year. In 1946, he spent some time in Brazil where he met Arpad Szentes and Vieira de Silva, who had taken refuge there during the war. He found them again in Paris in 1947-1948 and worked with them. From there, he often went to Rome where he became friends with Pericle Fazzini, Renato Guttuso and Emilio Greco. Back in Canada in 1949, he soon went to New York, where he would remain until 1959 and where, not allowing himself to be absorbed by his advertising work, he would draw with enthusiasm. He lived for some time in Paris, where he found the opportunity of meeting many artists — Franz Kline, the de Koonings and, naturally, Paul-Emile Borduas. In 1956 he returned to France and Italy, attended the André Lhote studio for some months and made excellent sketches in the cities of Paris, Nimes, Carcassonne and of which he exhibited at Agnès Lefort's in 1957.

He came back to Montreal in 1959, taught graphic art at Sir George Williams University from 1961 to 1965, then drawing and graphic art at the University of Quebec, from 1969 to 1972, where he also gave courses at the School of Architecture at McGill University in 1971 and 1972.

Allan Harrison took part in several collective exhibitions in Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto, Rio de Janeiro and Jerusalem and held solo exhibitions at the Museum of Fine Arts, at the guild of Architects, at the Institut de l'Architecture of Rio de Janeiro (1947), at the Agnès Lefort Gallery (1957), at Macdonald College of McGill University (1957) and at the library of McGill University (1957). Since 1964, he has been painting more and more actively. Allan Harrison recognizes the fact that he is "not a revolutionary painter" and that he has always loved good traditional art, from Corot to Cézanne, from Matisse to Marquet and Vuillard, and, perhaps, due to circumstances, I have always thought that in my case I had to attend to that question seriously. I have spent half my life hating the superficial character of academism and today I deplore the notion that simple decorative compositions are accepted as abstract art. I was preoccupied for years by the problem of the world of three dimensions, I admire the mystery of it which Vuillard had, while still doing away with it partially.

Aside from Vuillard, Allan Harrison admires Giorgio Morandi, Marquet, Manessier, Vieira da Silva, Arpad Szentes and several other painters; he has an eclectic taste and he is faithful to what he admires. His work consists of oils, water-colours, pastels, drawings in charcoal and in ink. Spread over thirty years, it does not at first appear abundant, doubtless because a good part of it is scattered in other countries. Nor has the painter created large-scale works, or a mechanical repetition would make his work recognizable on the spot. The connoisseur who tries to take the measure of the work of an artist likes to know his filiation and to find similarities or points of reference to him. The paintings and the drawings of Allan Harrison are in various subjects but always sober, portraits, interiors, still-lifes, landscapes, the latter painted in Canada, in the United States, in Brazil, in France and in Italy. On account of his cosmopolitanism and the reserved acceptance of his art (Grand McNiss has spoken of the "suave understatement" of Allan Harrison's painting), the painter belongs in the rank of Morrice, still more in that of Lyman, whose pupil and admirer he was.

For Harrison, the subject of the picture is only a pretext: only a point of departure, to create a composition, an arrangement of forms which expresses the shades of his emotion and his personal conception of the harmony of the world.

The refined simplicity and the successful layouts of the commercial artist have been praised. These qualities existed before in Matisse and perhaps due to Vuillard, Allan Harrison admires. Upon occasion, he makes use of light or brilliant colours, black and white. His restrained style brings back the real in some chosen forms, in a few essential lines, he excludes from this any superfluous element. His restrained style recalls that of Corot and of Marquet, two painters he admires greatly. Upon occasion, he may take the contrast between dense shadows and the light of afternoon, the golden lighting of the intimist scenes of Jakob Ochtervelt, the Dutch painter of the seventeenth century. This velvety relief is one of the great attractions of Harrison's art. It has seemed to us so far that his painting, conceived and executed in the light of the
declining day, expressed wonderfully the melancholy feeling of the fragility of things and of time which is passing. Perhaps it translates more simply the nostalgia of lost happiness and of a classic order banished from today's world.

The drawings of Allan Harrison possess the same conciseness as his painting. They say much in few words. A few touches of shadow, a few lines, even if not the line alone, are enough for him to give us the expression of a face or an attitude, the engaging atmosphere of a favourite place. These are, for connoisseurs, choice pieces.

True painters have the privilege of transfiguring by the magic of their brush the most humble objects of everyday reality and investing them with poetry. This change is often the source of keen delight. The feeling of it is of a quality all the more unusual and lasting when its accents have been more subtle and more discreet. Such is the special quality of Allan Harrison's art; he does not expose his secret right away, but his mastery, an accomplice of time, follows the space of a peaceful and ingratiating crescendo.

(Translation by Mildred Grand)
Vasarely: Vibration and Irradiation

By Gilles HÉNAULT

He is called the father of Op Art. For more than forty years he has been taking part in most of the big international exhibitions. In the sixties, he even influenced the style and the design of printed cloth. Last summer, television devoted a major broadcast to him. The Museum of Contemporary Art, in Montreal, had put him in the program of its exhibitions. Recently, the Editions du Grifon, de Neuchâtel, in Switzerland, published a second album of his art in the prestigious series Arts plastiques du vingtième siècle. In the old castle of Gordes, in Provence, he has his own museum. Brief, Vasarely, like him or not, is an artist who counts in our century.

"The stake is no longer the heart, but the retina, the wit becomes a subject of experimental psychology. Sharp black-white contrasts, the untenable vibration of complementary colors, the dazzle of rhythmical networks and of changed structures, the optic kinetic quality of plastic compositions, so many physical phenomena present in our works, whose rôle is no longer to amaze or to plunge us into a sweet melancholy, but to stimulate us and to obtain wild joys for us.

It is Vasarely who is speaking. This extract from one of his texts could be his creed. These lines summarize better than I can the reasoning of the artist.

It was by a long route that Vasarely arrived at this awareness and this orientation. My purpose is not to apologize for this attitude, but to demonstrate briefly its possibilities and its limits.

When one takes the little winding road which mounts toward the Renaissance castle which houses the Foundation at Gordes, the eye does not tire of admiring the fields of vines and the groves of cherry trees which rise to the steepness crowned by the elegant castle itself marks the structured halt of an impetus into time.

On entering the rooms devoted to the works of Vasarely, a sudden rupture is produced; a leap in time which transports us into another age. Here, the twentieth century asserts its presence in a special form. First there is mobility. The works are displayed on panels swept along in a continual and rhythmic movement. Already, art no longer appears to us as everlastingness, but as movement.

The display, contrary to traditional retrospectives, does not go from the oldest to the newest. It is reversed. We work our way up to the origin. The conducting thread is a composition which we rediscover even in the first works, a grouping learned from the Bauhaus and which will arrange itself right through the years, passing through the disposition of stones and through geometric abstraction, through the checkered board and photography, through the positive-negative of black-white, to form-colour union and to the system of transposition which will later form the alphabet and the syntax of his recent work.

Vasarely is in all that evidence of fidelity. One feels that projection does not come about by chance and that research builds up from an art which could be taken for a craft to an art centred on science and technology. Besides, the artist becomes aware of it as his creation develops. His Notes brutes, of which he has written a monograph, establish this route. Thus, in 1950, he writes "Scientific popularizers have the great merit of working out a Common language which makes the things of the world and of the universe understandable to us if not exactly, then at least intuitively. To feel things in a new way, to examine them with the eyes of the mind, it is not essential in a world necessarily partitioned to establish osmosis, to shatter the obscure, to allow the confirmation of a movement approximately identical in all the sectors of human activity."

This way of seeing was to lead him to a coded art of which the artist is simply the designer, but which is executed by assistants before being carried out by computers! They have cried sacrilege, hoax . . .

Vasarely answers, in 1960: "The star artist or the solitary genius are so many anachronisms; only groups of seekers, collaborating with the same principle, can truly create." That was the aim of the Group for Research in Visual Arts of the artists of the Denisa René Gallery, a group which would dissolve after a few years of work in common. After that, these artists became either stars or solitary geniuses. It does not seem that Vasarely has abandoned this fate.

This does not ignore the fact that he has exercised, by his art and his thinking, a considerable influence on the artistic orientation of a whole generation. His ideas are essentially generous. In 1961, he notes, "How far we are from 'art for the sake of art' — plasticity is food, due to all as the same right as knowledge, song or vitamins." Whence come its struggles for social art, for the polyhromatic city, for form-colour unity usable by all like a game of checkers or chess, for multiples, for the integration of the arts and their democratization. However, all considered, this is hardly new. It is a long time since the integration of the arts into architecture was achieved in cathedrals, since graphic arts and, even, sculpture or tapestry produced multiples and since the buildings of certain countries have been polychromatic. In other respects, the snare of production-consumption does not always act in favour of true democratization, which is not necessarily a synonym of uniformity and multiplication.

In the purely plastic domain, Vasarely revolts especially, as do many other contemporary creators, against the artisan aspect, accidental and even inspired, of the work of art. He wants it to be, on the contrary, a simple plastic joy for the eye, an accomplishment of scientific knowledge, a discovery of the structure of the real.

What interests him is the elaboration of a coded system which allows an incalculable number of permutations starting from simple elements like the circle and the square (with all their variations towards the oval and the parallelogram) and the contrasted use of black-white or complementary colours. He thus obtains, as in chess, an almost infinite series of moves or possible games which come into being in as many different works which are yet similar. It is at the interior of this reasoning of unity and contradiction that he develops the accomplishment of his work. If he does not win every time, he invents necessarily, because by definition he cannot, while transforming one of the elements, obtain two absolutely symmetrical results.

It will be said that chance, in informal works, produces the same diversity and this is true. But what is completely different, in a planned or structured work, is the gestalt for the fuzziness of outline, for the psychic impulse which relates to the soul, one substitutes the pure plasticity which first produces a visual shock before reverberating in the brain which must recombine the whole according to an almost mathematical process. From this there would, therefore, result a mental pleasure, and one which is at the same time more transparent, since the work does not offer intuitive mystery, but a sort of critical route which allows us to understand how it is made and why we feel pleasure in seeing what is presented to us (if there is pleasure). In fact, the lag operates from contemplation to the simple delight of a plasticity which appears as an enigma to be deciphered. Some would say that it is a matter here of a morose enjoyment. "What a bore", a painter said to me who is the exact opposite of Vasarely.

And yet, there is, in these works tending toward the negation of poetic effectivity, a certain attraction which arises from the irradiation and the vibration of coloured surfaces. From the ratios of light, from the capricious, unexpected or aggressive geometry of blacks and whites, from moving grids, in brief, from colour and form which speak a purely plastic language.

(Translation by Mildred Grand)
LEARNING TO SEE: THE PHOTOGRAPHIC ACTION GROUP

By René ROZON

Habit veils observation. After a certain time, one no longer sees his environment, no more than the people who animate it. Reality becomes dreary, uniform, monotonous. Only the appearance of an extraordinary element — be it a thing, a person or an event — manages to bring us out of our apathy. Nevertheless, it was this reverse step which the Groupe d’Action Photographique (GAP) was to take.

But at first did this group come about spontaneously? Not completely. Let us quickly go over a story which is very simple. Three young Montreal photographers — Michel Campeau, Roger Charbonneau and Serge Laurin — were working separately, each in his way, until the day when chance united them. They realized then that they had purposes in common and created the GAP in October, 1971. Shortly after, three other photographers of the metropolis — Claire Beauchamp-Cham­pagne, Pierre Gaudard and Gabor Szilasi — shared the same tastes, joined the developing group and, in February 1972, the GAP was formally set up.

Now, what is this common purpose which unites them, in spite of different personalities? It is inherent in their method of work which consists of capturing man and his environment alive, without disguise, without alterations, without idealization. They draw from the everyday, from the usual life of ordinary people and their environment, the basic material of the film. Ingredients which normally belong to mediocrity. However, to judge by the results of such a procedure, nothing is further from the commonplace.

It was a wager, and the GAP has succeeded in this feat: to begin with the ordinary in order to rehabilitate it in our eyes. Because, by means of their photographs, we rediscover the real, the most basic real, that is to say the most essential: Life or this sense of life which we have forgotten, refuted or lost. By taking on the everyday, GAP has brought it forth, has given it a dynamic dimension, as witnessed by its many achievements.

Because GAP is a very productive group, if one judges by the sum of its work at the end of its first year of existence, marked by exhibitions and by projects both in common and individual. By displaying its works in the very locations which inspired them — at the french-fried restaurant Chaz Georges and at La Grange de Sérésin tavern in November 1971 — confronting the regular customers of these establishments with the reflection of their own image, the GAP has adequately fulfilled its rôle of individual and social awareness. The GAP also exhibited in more official places during the course of the summer of 1972: in the picture gallery of the National Film Board in Ottawa, as well as participating in the Montreal, plus or minus exhibition in the Museum of Fine Arts in Montreal (on this subject see the article titled La Ville au musée in Vie des Arts, No. 69 (Winter 1972), pages 29-33). Finally, last December, the Museum of Contemporary Art, in Montreal, devoted a special exhibition to GAP. With regard to individual projects, let us mention the principal ones accomplished since the beginning of GAP: photographic displays devoted especially to workers (see Image 10, published by the National Film Board, October, 1971) held at LaFontaine Park (see, on page 32, our photographic reproduction illustrating La Vie au musée), and to the inhabitants of Charlevoix (see La Région de Charlevoix in Vie des Arts, No. 62 (Spring 1971), pages 46-49). As for collective projects, let us consider that of Opportunities for Youth, which consisted of photographing different aspects of life at Disraeli, a small rural community of the Eastern Townships, whose documents will be gathered into a volume to be published under the title: Disraeli, a Human and Photographic Experiment; and a second project presently under way, entitled Montreal as it is, with the collaboration of the Montreal group PhotoCell, which intends to compile an important photographic documentation on the city of Montreal, a project which could eventually develop into the creation of a photographic agency for the urban community.

These are, as we can see, numerous activities, but never detrimental to the quality of the work. The GAP contains six names, six names to remember, because they are guarantees of talent. Let us open our eyes, in our turn, and, with the sight of these images which we are offering to you, let us bring ourselves out of the boredom which threatens us more each day. Then only shall we realize, like the GAP, that the everyday commonplace is a myth, that it exists nowhere for the person who knows how to see. And if in any case one were to be mistaken, if there were everyday dulness, just the same one would have at least to admit, thanks to the GAP, it remains an inexhaustible source of discoveries, that it hides and encloses unsuspected wonders.

(Translation by Mildred Grand)

SAM TATA: AN ARTIST SEEN BY ANOTHER ARTIST

By Geoffrey JAMES

Asked by Queen Victoria whether he felt his livelihood endangered by the new medium of photography, the fashionable French miniature portrait painter Alfred Chalon replied, in memorable Franglais: "Ah, non, Madame, photographie cannot flatterer." Poor Chalon. It soon became apparent that photography was indeed an ideal way to flatter les bourgeois: and the first to suffer were the minia-
turists. The threat to the older art came not from the small daguerreotype, whose unique silvered image was as delicate and inviolable as a butterfly's wing, but from later negative-positive processes, which had the advantage of being cheap, repeatable and retouchable. Once given the embalmer's power to cover up the blemishes of the human face, photographers did not hesitate to cater to their sitters' vanity. The results, almost invariably, were an abomination.

It is something of an oversimplification—though one which contains some truth—to say that the best photographic portraits have been taken when the photographer goes in search of the sitter, and not vice versa. In the history of the medium, a remarkably large proportion of the most memorable portraits have been made not by commercial practitioners but by inspired amateurs or by photographers who have earned their living outside the studio. Consider a few examples. The first great body of portraits was executed by a Scottish painter, David Octavius Hill, a technical primitive whose photographs were made largely to be used as aides-mémoire. Julia Margaret Cameron, whom I consider to be the strongest of the English Victorian portraitists, was also an amateur and a primitive: she was a wonderfully eccentric and effusive lady who took up photography in middle age and with an enthusiasm (for friends) that, perhaps out of exhaustion, yielded up little pieces of their souls. Of the French 19th-century portrait photographers, the greatest, Nadar, was admittedly thoroughly commercial. Yet even Nadar was selective about whom he photographed. As a republican he refused to take the portrait of anyone connected with the French court. And as a reformer caricaturist he realized that he could never satisfy the vanity of women, so he never photographed them. (Fortunately he excepted the very beautiful Sarah Bernhardt and the very talented George Sand.)

The list can be extended endlessly: Alvin Langdon Coburn's enthusiastic pursuit of Edwardian literati, Alfred Steiglitz's intense portraits of his friends, August Sander's extraordinary collective portrait of the German people. Perhaps the point can be pushed too far. But it does suggest that one of the reasons we admire the portraits of Sam Tata. Tata is by profession a photo-journalist, and as such he is frequently asked by editors to photograph the famous or the passingly notorious. But the pictures here were made by choice. They are part of a continuing, personal collection of portraits of Quebec artists—a term that Tata rightly interprets broadly. They are unpretentious photographs, quiet and deceptively simple. Without obvious stylistic flourishes and carried out with the simplest of means, they yet bear an unmistakable autobiographic stamp—Tata's model. Henri Cartier-Bresson has called "a certain identity." Where the police photographer can make any man look like a criminal and where Yousuf Karsh can make any man look important, Tata allows his subjects to speak for themselves. To dwell on the individual merits of the photographs would be superfluous, for the photographer's work finds full expression in reproduction. Perhaps the best thing one can say about these pictures is that they admirably achieve Tata's own aim of "showing what people look like and how they live." It may seem a modest goal, but it is one that has been the basis for many of photography's most lasting images.

**Paul Delvaux:**

**TIME IN SUSPENSION**

By Xavier Marret

Paul Delvaux was born in Antheit, in 1897, in the district of Liège, a dreamy country of glacial colours, with immense horizons furrowed by rails, bristling with aerials and lamp-posts which give off a bleak light at night.

Timid and repressed, he lived in a family circle until the age of thirty-one, a fact which had many consequences on his work. He lived under the domination of a mother who put him on his guard by teaching him the equation, "Woman = danger," which would later reveal his obsessions. From 1920, he studied at the Beaux-Arts in Brussels; in order afterwards to give free rein to his passion for painting, with greater mastery.

**Catalyst of Magritte and De Chirico**

For a long time, Delvaux sought his course, in search of his identity. During this slow development of the work, it came about that his first canvases had Post-impressionism as their pole of attraction, then little by little his pictures revealed a certain expressionism, a faith which he quickly renounced (Maternité, 1930). The discovery of Surrealism, in 1934, in the midst of a captivating, personal collection of portraits of realist painters he found a prophetic language which combined, moonlight which hangs over the all-powerful reign of the mineral and punctuates the striking character of his compositional elements into his world, the preoccupation with the encompassing nude enigmatic women move about slowly in the streets, distorting their gestures which, suddenly suspended, show a certain choreographic amplitude (La Belle du coucher, 1945). Of course these women are immobile, taking fixed poses, hieratic as if turned into statues; they are seated on absolutely rigid chairs, reclining on sofas, lascivious, their limbs sometimes twined with clever draperies (La Voix publique, 1948); or again taking root in the true sense of the term in Femmes arbres, 1937. At this juncture, sensual vocabulary is fixed: women move about slowly in the streets, flowers and foliage often appear on the very flesh of women, a symbiosis which raises them to the rank of ancient divinities. The faces are devoid of emotion, the eyes absent, the look is lost in emptiness where, if it comes upon an object. It seems not to perturb or preoccupy, but as if turned into statues, enigmatic. The artist does not neglect to show the pubic tuft which crowns the sex.

The graphic arrangement is strict. Delvaux uses a smooth cold paste: the use of the flat stroke gives to his preconceived model of framework a freshness; but always a transparent, evocative of luster. The relationship of the body curves and the sharp lines of the outline, the illusion of space, the transfiguration of the body. The composition, the harmony of the architectural motif and the architectural motif which makes the picture into a painting. The range of colours of their fragile bodies is drawn with a disconcerting sureness, the range of their chiseled and tense forms is drawn with a disconcerting sureness, the range of their chiseled and tense forms is drawn with a disconcerting sureness, as if there were a whole scale of chromatics contrasting with the light, the transparent quality of the eyes and the opaque waters of the sea often present in the background (Les grandes sirènes, 1947). The severity of the form, the academism of the style and the mastery of the subject, like colored notes of notes, come together towards the unity of the work.
Introverted Men

These creatures, nymphs or goddesses, in the course of their wandering, pass, full of the explicit physical charm of women, in front of men dressed in the most severe fashion, nose plunged with austerity in a newspaper, absorbed in the observation of tiny objects which they scrutinize with a perseverance without apparent result (*L'Entrée de la ville.* 1939). By all evidence, it is not on technique and means that we must question ourselves but rather on the meaning of this painting, the implications of the signs of which it makes use.

Death and Sexuality

First of all, Delvaux translated a state of reverie, a contemplative state and a sort of fanciful relation to which we are all attached. On the other hand the artist stigmatizes the lack of communication between people, due to their futurity, to their sterility and above all to the forbidden. All people are in a state of expectancy whose object we surely do not know, if it is not vague probabilities, vague promises of sin which we lend to their imagination and which the theme of death subordinates, often recalled by the appearance of skeletons in the midst of them (Vénus endormie, 1944). The forbidden linked to death is one of the most contemporary themes. One can quote Georges Bataille on this subject: “If in essential forbidden matters we see the refusal which the human being offers to nature (the body) viewed as a corruption of life energy and as an orgy of destruction, we can no longer make a difference between death and sexuality.”

In the pictures of Delvaux women poses and creates a feeling of distance and even of absence; the attitude of man is refusal, he rears in order not to follow the movement which attracts him. Nonetheless, one can calculate on these persons the idea of a becoming taking place in a hidden temporality which, in the end, does not systematically close the pictures. It is a matter of a time of stopping and not of a last immobility.

(Translation by Mildred Grand)

Freudian Themes

All these scenes centre our reflections on the creative undertaking and semiology; they assume a network of references to the equivalence of basic idea and form. Jointly with the simple perfection of the design, the portraits of Delvaux are fed by mental reservations of a psychological kind, moral and perhaps psychoanalytical to a greater degree. The return to the subconscious is fulfilled by means of Freudian themes. The exercise of this painting seems to have exercised little by little a libidinous fantasy, the inward fears and the Oedipus of its author.

Speaking the language of linguists, we find at the level of the significant combinations of lines, gestures, attitudes, stiff as they may be, which call upon the meaningful level which is the communicability of human beings, their solitude, their dreams and their imagination. Delvaux has never done anything but reflect through different environments a same beauty as he brings to the world. In *Formes et significations*, Jean Rousset tells us that “the artist of genius marks himself by a revealing monomyth; typical phrases, identities of structure are the signs of his creative originality, being the disjointed fragments of a strange universe.” Always the same work, therefore, under different figures, combined in variations which allow the same themes to be recognized, transformed and adorned.

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GEORGES BRAEM:
CLOSER TO DELVAUX THAN REDON?

By Pierre PARET

I knew Bernard Palissy: he was called Georges Braem. That was about fifteen or sixteen years ago; he was living on the quai des Chartrons, in Bordeaux, on a fourth storey in this paradise which is the incommunicability of human beings, their solitude, their dreams and their anticipation. Delvaux has never done anything but reflect through different environments a same beauty as he brings to the word. In *Formes et significations*, Jean Rousset tells us that “the artist of genius marks himself by a revealing monomyth; typical phrases, identities of structure are the signs of his creative originality, being the disjointed fragments of a strange universe.” Always the same work, therefore, under different figures, combined in variations which allow the same themes to be recognized, transformed and adorned.

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By all evidence, it is not on technique and means that we must question ourselves but rather on the meaning of this painting, the implications of the signs of which it makes use.
He lives from his painting and paints his life, thus he does a great deal of work: about thirty canvases a year, worth ten thousand francs each. He works for two or three days. He only shows those that say something, on the condition that they do not speak to just anyone. Those who found his art too racy and vulgar far, were people envious of him, and several of them were crushed when about ten of his works— including a colour cover appeared in full pages in *Plexus*. It is not certain that God welcomed those people into His paradise, if He only acknowledges His own. — I followed good advice. I was told that if you should sell canvases on auction to boost my selling price. It is easy: you put one or two canvases up for auction. Friends acting as 'barons' buy the bids go up, buying paintings for two or three times their worth, and, when the operation is finished, you pay the auctioneer's fees, and give them back the money of the bid. It has also been said that my pride would be my downfall and that, instead of neglecting social events, I would have to shine up to a few people of good position, I would rank among the first.

He does anyway, without having wasted his time. To say that he lived in solitude, was nothing but an exaggeration. What is admirable about him, is the constancy with which he pursues his calling, without ever turning away from it. He had obstinacy and a will to succeed. Doubts too, of course, but the assurance that one day he would reach the point where his art would finally flourish.

**A distressing change**

When I knew him he was painting like Rouault. Then, gradually freeing himself from inevitable influences and developing in skill, he executed somewhat bold works which tell clearly bourgeois.

Perceiving a path where fame is joined by material success assures his security. He was finally beginning to earn a living, but this success which was relative after all, left him uneasy.

After having taken a break from his work, he returned to it without worrying about the good advice which he heard about himself. He saw a culmination in this painting which hereafter was put aside and repudiated.

The time for new research had come. To finish it successfully, he needed solitude, peace, and serenity. The lands of the interior offered the right atmosphere for this return to his roots, this plunge into silence, this voyage to the depths.

For four years, almost nothing was heard of him, and the works of this period attest to a perturbation in which memories clashed with rather confused promises. In this lengthy period of silence, change occurred.

During this time of introspection where he willingly gave up the clientele he had so much difficulty getting, during these years when he again knew the difficult times of his youth, he had never had a thought to return to the manner of painting whose dangers he knew.

Then there was an explosion. The surrealist, the revelation came to him when he understood that each person carries within himself a baroque and strange world, marked by social obligations, a rather unexciting world. There are things one says and things one does not say. He will try to express the latter.

— In reality one is what one does not say.
— He will thus paint life, such as it exists behind the façade, an irrational life, elusive, baffling, the life of the dream, the subconscious, and the instinct.

— Does surrealism not pay a large part in your work?
— If you mean as a school, no. If you take the term in the sense of sur-realist, which means beyond reality as well as within the unavowed onirico-reality, then yes, it does.
— Then you run the risk of scandal?
— I accept all risks; living is a risk. I say living and not existing. As for scandal, I think it is the self-protecting reflex of people who are made ill precisely by the fear of living.

Ingres danced with joy...

The universe you paint, as opposed to that of the 'Redon', of Magritte or Tangy, to whom you are closely related in pictorial quality, abounds in nudity.

— This is because I think that the nude embodies the individuality of the travesty of society's trumpery, whose weight smothered him. He is thus completely freed from his phantasms and inhibitions. More than a matter of imprinting, the habit of painting it, painting it, makes me glad to belong to the species. Ingres did not think otherwise when seeing his models arrive dressed as Eve, he began to dance with joy.

Do you consider that eroticism, of which you are sometimes accused, is a stimulant?

— I am sure that eroticism is a value of progress (let us not forget the word eroticism comes from Eros, god of love). I think that it is just as important to use it as it is not to exploit it. It is as respectable to see it flaunted everywhere as to keep it hidden away. It is a fiery force that one must be able to control to go fast and far.

**More like Delvaux than Redon**

— You live in the south west of France, but you are of Flemish origin, and for the last two years you have been making lengthy excursions in the region of Anvers, which has produced a certain something in your art. It is perhaps mainly a pictorial quality that places it in the great Nordic tradition. Do you believe in the influence of race?

— The individual is always the result of heredity, I bear the mirages and phantasms of my race, this liking too for what is foreign. You live in the south west of France, but you are of Flemish origin, and for the last two years you have been making lengthy excursions in the region of Antwerp, which has produced a certain something in your art. It is perhaps mainly a pictorial quality that places it in the great Nordic tradition. Do you believe in the influence of race?

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There is an idea which has been occupying the mind of the public for some years, at least in great part, and which seems to me timely to de-mystify. I am often asked what is happening in art in Montreal with this innovation which hopes, almost begging, for an immediate approval: “Since Borduas and since the plasticians, there is nothing more, is there?” It is very evident that, for those who do not follow the Montreal scene each week, the absence of movements toward very precise ideologies and toward heroic social problems seems to be a symptoms of total apathy. And yet the art of groups does exist among us; it exists under this ideology which consists of not having any, in the plastic sense of the term. It is at the very heart of this pleonasm which a historic sequence of Land Art, Conceptual Art or Process Art, new awareness of the Quebec creators of the life, which does not even have the pretention official and recognized fifteen years late, other either the art of the plasticians is made claiming this right to communication. Now because at the moment it appeals to no historic sense of the term. It is at the very heart of apathy. And yet the art of groups does exist week, the absence of movements toward very least in great part, and which seems to me

The Option of the Groupe Véhicule

By Gilles Toupin

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There is certainly no need to mention that a system of educative dissemination, similar to that of the Groups Véhicule necessitates financial resources. Up till now the group has been able to count on the help of the Canada Council. As the cooperative centre has a non-commercial aim, it seems to me normal and greatly to the credit of this state organisation to support this social enterprise. The cultural and conservative power exercised by the commercial system of galleries is finally offset (in part, certainly, because the effort of Véhicule would need to be repeated by many other persons) by a freedom of exhibition. The system of alternative jury made up of three members of whom one is outside the group permits, even if it is not perfect, many young artists to exhibit for the first time. Véhicule is in its introductory phase, it will expand, without doubt, if it is definitely allowed to continue its work. Not only will it be able to become an important point of reference at the level of its immediate territory, but it will be able to stretch its tentacles over the world scene. It is thanks to immersion in research movements in the whole world that we will have the option of recognizing and identifying our roots.

By establishing itself as to space, Véhicule, by its aims, becomes a sort of source of energy. The flood of artists frustrated by the inadequacy of a system will find in it a beneficial exit; it is an alternative.

(Translation by Mildred Grand)