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McLUHAN’S AESTHETIC EXPLORATIONS

By Donald F. THEALL

When Marshall McLuhan succeeded in erasing the imaginary line which many thought existed between the arts and the mass media, he achieved the feat by using the insights of artists and poets who had created the contemporary aesthetic revolution. Ranging through McLuhan’s works the reader discovers references to Dadaism and Surrealism, the Bauhaus, Klee, Kandinsky, Picasso and Le Corbusier — to select only a few of the many names and movements which suggest to McLuhan probes into how modern man can cope with his universe. These artists and their insights are rooted in representatives of other arts, especially writers and critics, like Mallarmé, Veléry, Joyce, Eliot, Pound, and Beckett. McLuhan’s chief inspiration, symbolism, leads to his artistic tastes and to his conviction that the new arts would encompass the new technology, as Mallarmé had attempted to encompass the effect of the mass-produced newspaper and its headlines. His whole commitment to the artist is enmeshed, however, in a historical knowledge and awareness of the arts, vision, verbal and visual alike. He even goes so far as to define the word “artist” itself — “an expert who, without hesitation, predicted the coming of an electric liturgy for electric man.”

We learned recently of the appointment of Canadian professor and writer Marshall McLuhan by Pope Paul VI as special advisor to the Vatican on communications. Once more, following great societies and governments, an appeal was made to the famous expert who, without hesitation, predicted the coming of an electric liturgy for electric man. His short, striking formulae charm vast audiences and have been heard around the world for twenty years. A new sage of the present time who, from his headquarters, the Cultural and Technological Centre of the University of Toronto, fulfills the duties of an original thinker, very personal, McLuhan, enthusiastically followed by some, opposed by others, draws from the arts (poetry, visual arts) the greater part of his thoughts on the evolution of western awareness, and, on the other hand, exerts a predominant influence on many contemporary artists. In this respect, he particularly interests Vie des Arts. Since the authoritative interview he granted a few months ago to Jean Paré for the magazine Forces, as well as the one that appeared in L’Express last year, we have come to ask ourselves certain questions about the thought of McLuhan concerning art, nature and freedom, which our contributors have tried to answer.

McLuhan’s most outstanding contribution to the examination of western thought has been to make him aware of the blind alley in which the present time is at present. The whole problem of formal logic is questioned in a world of sound.

Electrical time is no longer the hour of the analysis of elementary processes, of deductive reasoning. It is that of the simultaneous, therefore of reflection on the sequence and the ensemble of allied problems. The upheaval in the media throws into confusion the idea of environment, the sense of perception, the ability of assimilation and the conception of the arts in general, painting, sculpture, architecture, cinema, which are becoming old forms of art in relation to the new ones, radio, television, video. Are the old forms of art, which seem no longer productive of the avant-garde, sentenced to disappear? Or are they still undergoing bad definitions transformations? Doubtless it is necessary to know what passion will animate the dynamism of the successive changes that the artist sees and which he tries to convey to us. The art of McLuhan examining Art: “A musical house for our clear harmony”, a step toward a new awareness.

(Translation by Mildred Grand)
needed art in motion and the exponents of what was to become a new art, the moving picture, were creating their first major works. The Vanishing Point as metaphor becomes the way to see an entire history. Though the Vanishing Point, McLuhan's book co-authored with the Canadian painter Harley Parker, becomes a way, like Alice's Through the Looking Glass, to move behind the mirror of realism into the world of abstraction but also into a world where a new realism, that of the Pop artist, that of the minimal artist, that of the happening, play their role as well.

What then is the difference between art and other objects and other events or presentations? In one way it does not matter, for the media or everyday objects of one generation may become the art work in the next. Just as McLuhan quips that the old films become works of art in the television set. But art is also most significantly the context of environment, that perceptual act which releases the unconscious potential from the verbal, aural and visual clichés of everyday life. As such it is essential to the total human person and is perhaps the fundamental perceptual act required to save our ecology, which McLuhan maintains has been raised to the level of consciousness where it echoes in our world and therefore to the point when change and growth are at least potentially possible.

**McLuhan and Art**

By Derrick de Kerckhove Varent

To write on McLuhan is to try, after having been gripped by synthesis, to put it at our disposal, but it is above all to describe it. To bring it to the reader as the very aim of all the effort of the reading. It is among the same kind of ideas that Maurice Blanchot points out, by way of foreword to L'Espace littéraire that: A book, even fragmentary, has a centre that attracts it: a centre not fixed, but which moves through the pressure of the reader's being and obsession. It is the space where the text should, finally, reveal transparency in the same way as analysis should reveal synthesis. By dint of reading the work of numerous experts who begin by forgetting the real object of their research to plunge more conveniently into analysis, we end up no longer experiencing the work of art but an increase of information. There are many analyses which are nothing but the practice of an abolished ritual.

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Criticism of McLuhan comes easily because he is a prose poet manqué. He has refused to decide whether he wants to be artist of any kind. Hence the confused and sometimes these distinctions in the world he prophecies cease to exist. He could not argue, however, that his lack of sensitivity to a theory of society which would be life-enhancing and humane is commendable. Yet whatever his weaknesses, and I outlined many in a study called The Medium is the Rear View Mirror, his work is fundamental. In stating before Marcuse or the hippies or the structuralists, the centrality of the aesthetic perception in the life of man in a way immediately relevant to the dilemmas of his own time. Besides, that his work is intrinsically influenced by so many of the phenomena of everyday life, the technological and the everyday object becomes itself a way of validating the importance of the arts, ancient and modern. Among art historians the work of Gombrich, Giedion, Panofsky, Wölflin and many others have been essential to what McLuhan has achieved. Stained glass windows become a way of thinking about the parallels between Gothic Cathedral as multimedia and contemporary multi-media presentations and who can argue that even at a popular level the Czechs did not encompass something of this sort in their Expo presentations.

Perspective becomes an index for thinking about the changing relations of space and time in the Twentieth Century in which a Klee or a Picasso was exploring the newly
KV. — What are the relationships between man and nature?

McL. — In Man’s Presumptuous Brain, Simeons states that our biological heritage, which allows us to adapt ourselves to our environment, has ceased to evolve for more than half a million years. The body is now as evolved as it has ever been, to the least degree of technology. The brain of man has not changed since then. With the invasion of all the technologies, the only way of becoming acclimatized comes from art. Art takes up the task of evolution that nature has abandoned.

KV. — How? 

McL. — The artist reprograms the senses to render us able to survive in the technological environment. Naturally, to survive as human beings. Because man adapted to technologies is a robot-zombie who sleeps soundly.

KV. — And what about nature?

McL. — The artist’s role isn’t any, any more. Since October 17, 1957.

KV. — Ah!

McL. — The launching of the first sputnik. The Russians have transformed the planet into a form of art. As a form of art, the planet puts us back into the situation of the most primitive man: that is, in prearcheological times. Of course, stages of this transformation for man.

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tell you this. Must one howl with the horde because it is right, but lose one’s own awareness and the taste for museums, or else must one fight against it, because I am right, and wait in fear to be eliminated by the mob? Do we have a choice? In the western world, opinions in favour of abortion on request signify from country to country what the new novel has been teaching us for the last twenty years: that the individual human person is dead, absent. Is art concerned with this basic problem? Art takes no moral position, even when it is busy only with making money. It is possible, however, that art should again become religious, that from the source of instructive pleasure it was in the eighteenth century, it should become an instrument of total survival.

Nonetheless, when art is so narrowly integrated into the very conditions of our daily reality, when our attention moves away from the object to concentrate on the sign, when the latter tears our judgment from us, so to speak, instead of inviting it, art strips us of all that makes up our inner and personal self. Art turns against its admirers and sends us on the trail of the new liberty. to-day, we are likely to become aware of all that makes up our inner and personal self. Art turns against its admirers and sends us on the trail of the new liberty.

THE MAURICE AND ANDRÉE CORBEIL COLLECTION

By Laurier LACROIX

...art, at whatever moment in history we observe it, does not express directly the total state of society. It is the prerogative of those who possess power and wealth. The latter order works, appreciate them according to the criteria of their taste and their culture. The life of forms is inseparable...from the history of the intentions formulated by patrons; and these intentions, these tastes, in their turn, are not separated from the social, political and psychic context of the period.” (Jean Starobinski, L’Invention de la liberté, p. 13.)

Maurice and Andrée Corbeil have made public a part of their immense collection of Quebec painting. It has been called the most “impressive” private collection in this field. The canvases were exhibited in Montreal and in Ottawa. As some works had been shown on different occasions, in books or in exhibitions devoted to a few of the artists represented in the collection, it became important that it should be presented, even in a selective way, because it allows us to become familiar with two centuries of painting in Quebec.

Mr. R. H. Hubbard, curator at the National Gallery of Canada, chose to present the painting of the nineteenth century, in preference to contemporary art. This choice, which was necessary, considering the size of the collection, promotes our understanding of old Quebec painting and the excellent history of Fine Art in French Canada.

Maurice Corbeil tells, in an interview printed in the first part of the catalogue, how his collection was born. Two facts came out of his remarks: the spirit in which the collection was developed and the outside help necessary to this end. Marcel Parizeau went to meet artists, such as Pellan (back from Europe in 1940) and Boudreau (before 1942 exhibition). Maurice and Andrée Corbeil also made acquaintance of other collectors active at this time. One can believe that the Corbeils were pioneers in the collecting of traditional art. If they were among the first to buy works of the nineteenth century, their initiative was to be found in a century-old movement, at a time when art collectors and members of the clergy were encouraging Canadian artists with their orders. Historical societies and newspapers were publishing articles, often badly informed, but which Societies and newspapers were publishing articles, often badly informed, but which newspapers were publishing articles, often badly informed, but which newspapers were publishing articles, often badly informed, but which,
The romantic portrait of Toussaint Decarie (No. 14), if it was produced about 1795, shows a remarkable knowledge of the European style, revolutionary and romantic, and of the ideology that it conveys. We had always believed that this ideology had shown itself much later here. The boy wears a very high déchainement, his head is crowned by a black stock. Drawn in an oval, the youth looks at the spectator. The softness of the green tones harmonizes with the mellowness of the touch.

The person of the energetic Mme Ruellan (No. 25) fascinates me. Plamondon, to whom the work is attributed, was in her long hands and elevates the subject in a pose which brings out her round and sensual face where all the members are exaggerated.

Leduc, in the portrait in profile of Guy Delahaye (No. 45) links symbolic elements to his divisionist manner. A man looks at his frontispiece, on which he has placed a long association. Guillaume Lahaise had published Les Phases in 1910, of which a part was dedicated to Leduc. In 1911, Leduc created twenty-six vignettes to illustrate the volume of poems Mignon, allons voir si ta rose… ost sans épines. We do not penetrate the work in its entirety. Beyond him stands out a frieze showing laurel leaves, symbol of poetry, which are joined to a wheel with three spokes, symbol of the crossroads where Guillaume Lahaise finds himself. The latter is hesitating at this time between a career in poetry and one in psychiatry.

The portrait of the energetic Mme Ruellan (No. 81) suggests that mother and daughter have been familiar in Quebec since the Education of the Virgin. The mother holds a little girl standing on her lap. Clothing, hat, furniture: all is in the pretexts to Dallaire for her lap. Furthermore, the boy wears a very high déchainement, his head is crowned by a black stock, drawn in an oval, the youth looks at the spectator. The softness of the green tones harmonizes with the mellowness of the touch.

The catalogue of the exhibition seems to have been made up in a hurry; one cannot hide too numerous errors under a quite original presentation. The reader who contents himself with a book of pictures will be satisfied: all the canvases are illustrated. For the people who are interested in Canadian art, the price of the catalogue is too high. The director of the Cercle fun by compositions in flat tints from which all textures and effects of depth have disappeared. Out of this frustration, it seems, were born the pictures painted on plywood whose irregular contours are dictated by the specific qualities of the form. A generous form, with sharp

THE MUTATIONS OF SAXE

By Laurent LAMY

Why take an interest in Saxe and his latest exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art last April? Because it is always fascinating to understand the transformation of an artist in order to try to understand how he achieved his most recent works. This survey contradicts the impression of the discontinuous, of leaps and sudden turns left by the memory of solo exhibitions which we have to view in the space of ten years. A retrospective is a look at the entirety of the works that photographs revive for us. It smooths the visible cracks, brings out the connecting thread that binds the works one to the other. (Unless the work reveals itself as being irreparably gratuitous.) It is this link to the interior of a development winding and chaotic in detail but direct and logical in the whole that arouses a sustained and growing interest in the work of such and such an artist, in this case of Henry Saxe.

Saxe began to exhibit in 1961 and already in 1963 he expressed himself a little in the style of Jacques Hurtubise, with whom he was connected through forms and colours: surfaces in diagonals scarcely broken, hard contrasts along abstract landscape art were placed in a third perspective dimension.

From Canvas to Open Work

But it was from 1965 and at the time of his exhibition at the Galerie du Siècle in 1966 that Saxe aroused a very strong spontaneous interest, like a thunderbolt but resisting a view in depth.

The whole language holds the attention by compositions in flat tints from which all textures and effects of depth have disappeared. Nothing exists any more but pure colour on the surface, which reflects back only on itself without possible lyrical interpretation, and asserts a great concern for formal clarity. At that moment the canvas hides Saxe more and more by its rigid sides: his forms not being able to develop freely within the conventional limits of the picture. Whatever may be their soaring, the forms strike against the arbitrary, there exactly where…space begins.

Out of this frustration, it seems, were born the works painted on plywood whose irregular contours are dictated by the specific qualities of the form. A generous form, with sharp
Other works follow, composed of tridimensional modules (hexagons folded in a V) which revolve on one of their sides offering many possibilities of the occupation of space (fig. 6). Three factors consequently have an effect upon the final spatial disposition of the production: the position of one module in relation to another (identical or reversed), the position of the hinge between two modules (on the side or on the end) and, especially, the swirling of each of the modules. The first two factors arise from the decision of the artist, the third from the involvement of the spectator. These three factors not only exist as a totality but are also composed of simple modules. The multiform, almost inexhaustible, paradoxically presents no gratuitousness on account of the coherence of the basic structure. These open structures, placed on the ground, of a rather impressive size compared to the human proportions, are established in abstract terms as parallels with gestures or movements. The fact that they invite manipulation is in keeping with the way they are displayed in suppleness and severity.

The path of Saxe went from simple to complex through the progressive evolution of the module at first as fixed surface (fig. 5), then surface bent to supply an open mobile volume (fig. 6). Then came closed modules, modules within modules and variable inside themselves (fig. 7). Flexibility within flexibility.

In another manner, from 1970 the modules was simplified by the return to the line; a pole of metal whose ends turned back on themselves form loops which allow all the modules to be threaded one inside the other in the manner of a piece of knitting (fig. 8). The pliability thus achieved by Saxe in his composition is almost total freedom of movement in the model at the interior of the ensemble. Paradoxically, the creations formed of tridimensional modules have a variable linear character, at the same time as the works composed of linear modules becomes surfaces with movement in linear movements if one pulls on one of the modules. The whole can change its form to a point such that it is nothing but chaos (fig. 8).

From Process to Work

By personally destroying and disposing his work, Saxe arrived at a limiting point, a place from which he initiated a turning of importance which led him to the productions presented at the Museum of Contemporary Art. A turning which marked at the same time a prolonging of what had gone before but also a very clear change in attitude in relationship to the art lovers, the art world. This last stage prevailed for him until that time: Saxe wrote in Ateliers: "The development in my latest work is the result of reacting contrarily to an earlier series of works", and well: "I now wanted a three-point system as a guide to continue my development of a visual but non-structural linked system."

By choosing common materials, ropes, pipes, wood, stones, rubber, manufactured objects such as a stepladder, a tripod, by opting for the absence of colour and by preserving the essential commonplace quality of his objects and materials, Saxe places himself outside of cultural linked systems. The possibility of the rope not existing as a point of departure, an aesthetic object in the traditional sense, an object previously disputed by lattices, as we have seen.

The observer is therefore involved in a new reading for which Saxe gives a few clues in Ateliers: "The number of materials, slightly modified, without change or procedures in each unit is critical to the total sculpture as a visual structure..."

Indeed, in an ensemble like Three-Point Landing (fig. 9) the fundamental theme is the three-point structure present in the four elements of the whole. A structure rigid and simple in the manufactured tripod, in a more elaborate way in the step-ladder whose first balance Saxe destroys and the finality of the object by adding to it a peg which turns it into a structure with three points of support, in a flat suspended structure which are linked in a space of three real dimensions. The square or rectangular prop which supported these forms has disappeared. Nevertheless the work is still presented as a full, closed surface (fig. 1). Saxe presses further the explosion of the surface by eliminating the support on the inside. Example: this work where an arc of a circle rests on one rectangle and tends at the same time to occupy all the space. From there, right to the coloured surface unfolding truly in tridimensional space, there is only one stage, which Saxe crosses very quickly (fig. 4).

From 1968, his work was expressed in very precise formal arrangements, finished in the sense of objects of art corresponding to a well-developed industrial society, technologically advanced. His language builds up, becomes richer. If one wanted to speed up the road covered, as in the movies, one would arrive at this: an orthogonal surface bursting forth on one, two, three... By planes on an angle which stand out from the picture and lengthen a movement colored in flat tints which comes toward the spectator (fig. 3), he intensifies their perception of the space. From there, right to the coloured surface unfolding truly in tridimensional space, there is only one stage, which Saxe crosses very quickly (fig. 4).

But among these works of 1968, Thisaway already presents a different problem in its surface unfolding truly in tridimensional space, there is only one stage, which Saxe crosses very quickly (fig. 4). A composition of Molinari, Tousignant, Hurtubise. But as for them, this limit of simplification was revealed as also being a point of departure, the first element of a new complexity. From a simple structural a priori, the vertical band of Molinari, the concentric circles of Tousignant, the spot of Jacques Hurtubise, all have been eliminated. Now begins serialization, on works with very complex formula, in a space of three real dimensions. From there, right to the coloured surface unfolding truly in tridimensional space, there is only one stage, which Saxe crosses very quickly (fig. 4).

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following graduation — was appointed Instructor in Drawing at the School in 1938-39, seeking a broader experience and additional training. Binning went to England for further study. ("The first original modern paintings I saw were in London.") While abroad Binning worked under such eminent artists as Amédée Ozenfant and Henry Moore, and on his return to New York for a period, studying at the Art Students' League under Morris Kantor.

Binning's long and fruitful association with UBC commenced in the fall of 1949 when he became a member of the faculty of the School of Architecture. From that time on, his contribution to the cultural life on the UBC campus is inestimable. Several tangible accomplishments might be cited: founding of the Department of Fine Arts, 1955 (and Head from 1955-58); development of the Fine Arts Gallery; initiation of the Student Union collection of Canadian art (formerly known as the Brock Hall collection); organization and direction of the Festival of Contemporary Arts; and planning (with the late Fred Lasserre) of the Norman MacKenzie Centre for the Arts at UBC. Binning has stated that his basic motivation in all his endeavours was his desire to take the campus "a little richer texture than before".

Binning's rôle as teacher has been an exceedingly influential one. Ron Thom, FRAIC, one of several Binning students who has achieved recognition at the national level, has written the following tribute: "He taught me to see. He taught me to think. He was an irreplaceable teacher whose lessons have lasted."

The Binning influence has, thus, over the years, spread well beyond the confines of UBC and Vancouver. His contribution as an artist and as an architect in Canada was recognized in 1962 when he became the recipient of the Allied Arts Award presented by the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada. In 1966 the artist was Canadian Representative of UNESCO Conference, Tokyo. Further evidence of his increasing influence and standing is the award of Honorary Membership of the Arts Committee, National Arts Centre, Ottawa, 1964-67; and Advisory Panel for the Arts, Canada Council, 1965-67. In 1971 Binning's extensive contribution to the cultural life of Canada was acknowledged when he was designated Officer of the Order of Canada.

It was, however, in the rôle of painter-draughtsman that Binning first received national acclaim, and examples of this aspect of his career were handsomely displayed at the recent exhibition. Recent reflections of the artist are cited rather fully below with regard to the pen and ink drawings of the forties (which for many were the highlight of the show), are perhaps of particular interest: one reaction concerns a recent realization of a strong formal influence for his early style of drawing.

"At one time I was terribly interested in child art. (In 1941-42 I started those Saturday morning classes for children at the Vancouver Art Gallery.) I believe that the teaching of drawing to children provided me with a major source of influence for my drawings. I used to watch them intensely at the way they went about things: I admired the straightforward motivation that they had in doing any statement in visual terms. Their kind of directness was infectious."

The artist was struck, too, on viewing his works, at the documentary value of the drawings. "It wasn't until then this last retrospective exhibition of mine, when I looked at the early drawings with the eyes of an artist, that I realized that I had made some kind of historical record... These places were reproduced with a fair amount of accuracy, and you simply could not find them if you went out to look for them now."

The subjects of many of these drawings are non-existent now — perhaps.

**VIEW OF FISHERMAN'S COVE, 1944.** I think in some ways reflects more than any of this drewings the haphazard, rather jerry-built quality that existed all up and down the coast... the makeshift floats, the hodgepodge of boats, the not always sandy beach, and the not too tidy shore. These things were all characteristic of the scene at that time; but the view no longer exists as such: it's tidied up! Great huge boat parks that they call marinas jam many of our coves."

"ME TOO 1, 1945, was the name of a shrimp boat that used to come into Fisherman's Cove periodically, with a hold filled with shrimp that had been scraped from the Pacific Ocean. The boat fascinated me, and I draughted it many times, but not only that, I also made a model of it. I set out to make it as accurate as possible from the point of view of its gear and its detail (including the elaborate fish net and the stove on deck for cooking the shrimp). I don't think you will find any other drawing of it now — just maybe the odd one still left..."

**SELF PORTRAIT IN SHIP'S CABIN, 1945.** is a very sentimental drawing for me. It shows the interior of Skookumchuck, the little 20 foot sailing sloop which I had in those years and which I built partly by myself. It was a kind of moveable studio. My wife and I would spend a good part of the summer pudding around the coves, bays and little snugs that you find around the coast. Frequently at meal time we would drop anchor and watch life in a little bay... there was always something happening: a small boat fishing; a man furling his sails: some one rowing from one side of the bay to the other; and there were a lot of curious craft around, too... The occasion for this drawing was one of the many days (even in our summers) when it rained, and when there is one rowing from one side of the bay to the other; and there were a lot of curious craft around, too...
as much of my feet as one can! I have a very personal attachment to this drawing, because it recalls for me the boat on which I enjoyed myself so much... and loved so much.

Binning has made statements, too, on the works which followed the early drawings:

"In 1948 when I came to painting in oils, the same kind of preoccupation that I mentioned earlier; the sea and the ships that sail on it. I moved, however, from the particular to the general, and there was no longer any concern for any form of documentary accuracy. In the drawings I was always set off by some particular incident or thing, or collection of things. (In the drawings) things might come on occasion, from a particular experience, but the result was always a generalized statement.)"

"In painting I was aware that if a certain collection of forms were used together, one could get a certain reaction. I once said that the business of serious joy should be one of the main occupations of the artist. I do like joy... I do like order. I think my work plays more of a seascape of the feelings I experienced during summer holidays along the B.C. coast than an actual interpretation of a place. Nothing so much as a reminder that the bigness of shape around B.C. that you can't get away from. I find it pretty overpowering at times. Whether you are looking at the mighty mountain peaks or at the expansive space of the sea there is this tremendous scale. I would imagine that this comes into these works."

"The Optional Modules were large works made up of modular units which could be assembled according to a variety of choices. I suppose they came about in several ways. One, certainly, was the architectural idea — the idea that one can work in a more fluid and three-dimensional way than just with square or rectangle paintings. (I've always been very close to architecture — in my family and in my associations both friendly and professional, I've always been involved in buildings — with architects and by myself in an almost avocational way at times, in executing murals and in the capacity as consultant in matters of color and design.)"

"Another thing that was involved with the modules was that I felt that the total impression was more than the sum of its parts, that one looks at the whole."

"The beholder wants to be part of art and to participate in it. He wants to be active."

"These works were executed during a sabbatical year: I began working in the spring and continued through the summer — working in the studio, going on trips, looking at different things. It was a strange thing that when it was coming to winter — the colourful days changed to grey — my paintings, too, changed to grey. (I was acutely aware of the seasons.) From then on the rest of the modules were all in grey.

"These were the main steps, then: firstly the drawings, then the paintings of ships themselves, then the seascapes, followed by the emblematic Motifs, and from there into the Optional Modules..."

"I left the B.C. area..."

"The Seascapes of 1950 moved further in the direction from the particular to the general. I had got rather tired of all the detail of boats at this time — even in their more abstract and more general aspect. The sea itself became my main concern — its mood and expansive character. In BLACK ISLAND, I have simply tried to synthesize the main essences that make up this 'landscape-seascape'. It was a matter of trying to get the balance of forms right... in color I tried to do more than what the Fauvists were doing — of actually changing the colors to get in some total on the canvas a combination of colors that might bear little relationship to the blue sea and the green mountains, but would give the intensity... and I strengthened tensions in space in order to add breadth to the expe-
The "Royal" Academy of Arts.

So too are superb textiles from Siniang, along Central Asia's Silk Road, dating from the 5th and 6th centuries AD. The extraordinary weaving technique incorporating 1,000 items including brocades in single pieces of cloth, the elaborate woffs, the designs executed by batique or by knotting the silk in skeins are once again reminiscent of Persian examples and centuries in advance of the rest of the world.

Also from Siniang, Turfan, comes a 5.2 meter scroll dated 10 AD, the earliest existing copy of the Analects of Confucius (551-475 BC) with annotations by the famous Han dynasty scholar Cheng Hsuan (127-200 AD). Of the five chapters in this particular version only the first and part of the second are missing.

A special section of the exhibit is devoted to the ceramic finds. Coming are clay moulds for casting bronze, bronze moulds for casting iron both processes the reverse of normal procedures — and clay models for the positive moulds from which the negative mould for the final cast was made. But the most exciting is a simple example of porcelain. "A Shang Dynasty vase with a yellow glazed tsun (wine vessel) of the Shang period (1728 BC to 1027 BC), a clay mould for casting bronze, bronze moulds for the positive moulds from which the negative mould for the final cast was made."

Although the work of Jean McEwen has periodically attracted some critics and collectors by the mirage of iridescent texture and colour, the importance of his work and his development, in Canadian painting, has hardly received an adequate evaluation. Is it not paradoxical that he has been able to put together this fall, at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Paris, an exhibition devoted to his works of large dimensions from the years 1955, 1965 and 1966, which for the greater part, were unknown to the Quebec public, having been exhibited rather in Toronto or in New York.

However, the pictorial aim of McEwen was always important and original, that is building up an extension to Abstract Impressionism. Far from stopping at superficial analogies, it is necessary to recognize in painters such as Riopelle, Sam Francis and Jean McEwen the mutual desire to understand and to develop further the evolution of Monet. Now, the dominant influence which the painting of Monet has had on the developments and repercussions of the School of New York through Still, Rothko, and Newman, has been given enough importance.

Pursuing the idea of the explosion of the object initiated by Impressionism, McEwen tried to create a zone of shock between the landscape and the hanging of the picture, the distortions and reflections of the picture, the distortions and reflections which follow Automatism in Quebec. The complexity and the pluralism of its advance­ ment appeared previously in the Still Life of the painting which marks the turning point in his work, Les Pierres du moulin, in 1955.

But the most expressive articulation of his work remains nevertheless personal in that it attempts to bring about an synthesis between systems apparently divergent, but which answered profound needs of his personality. Thus were joined Impressionism's preoccupation with light, the lyricism of Borduas and the structural tendencies followed Automatism in Quebec. The painting of Monet has had on the developments and repercussions of the School of New York through Still, Rothko, and Newman, been given enough importance.

In fact, from the time of the exhibition at Place des Arts in Montreal, in 1953, Jean McEwen already baffled criticism, by presenting a work where, for the first time, there was affirmed in a decisive manner, in Quebec, the concept of surface in the picture of all-over structuration, with the help of a fine system of modulation of light, which was opposed to the space in depth of automatist painting. This assertion of the surface radically destroyed the concept of the object in space, that of rounded forms or of volumes, the depth of a picture, it was demonstrated in the organizing of kernels, clouds, of masses of elements close together, dim or luminous.

This was the assumption that, much later, Olitski would take up again in a picture such as Pink Shush in 1966, when he wanted to eliminate any idea of forming axial structures.

But the paintings of McEwen which followed were never, however, really informal: "if the structures of tridimensional reality have never touched me profoundly," McEwen claims, "I have always had a basic need to re unite a real spatial structure". And in his abstract and free forms, the structures of tridimensional reality, it is through "the lattice of lights and shadows formed by the crossing of light through branches and leaves", that he works out a way of expressing the vibration of colour which is his major concern.

Even if he admires the lyricism of Borduas and is the most vigorous harmon of the atmospheric space that the latter gave value to for a long time, McEwen will soon be discontented with a type of spatial structuration borrowed from landscapes art in a too realistic way.

In a picture which marks the turning point in his work, Les Pierres du moulin, in 1955, McEwen scratches in the thick surface, perforated with blobs of colour, with new and preponderant vertical and horizontal lines, which bind his textures into elements closely juxtaposed. We can, besides, suppose that it is in a meditation on Monet that he will discover in his great monochromatic series of the period the fundamental rôle which he will assign to a predominating axial element as structure of pictorial organization. And his way of proceeding by working out series based on a same theme offers analogies with the works of Monet. Through his axial structure, McEwen effected a re-erecting of the famous horizon line whose variations and questions in the Nymphéas appeared to critic L. Steinberg as the major problem of Monet. It was through the logic of continuous shifting, of variations of an axial line resting in the vertical that McEwen treated his symmetrical or not, of the left and the right of the picture, the distortions and reflections to which it can give rise. As with Monet, this elimination of anecdotal references engenders a reality where the distinction between what is real and what is reflected is erased.

Even if the textures of McEwen's paintings seem to vary next almost infinitely, thickening and hardening under the varnishes, becoming thinner in plays of transparency, they still continue to constitute capillary systems, net works of continuous links, producing a modula­tion of light, that McEwen realized in the luminous quality of the picture itself shine, under the chromatic layers more or less perforated.

But the most expressive articulation of his pictures is found less in the more and more abstract evolution of his graphisms, which almost always interact with the external elements which he uses, but in the very dialectic of the structurizing vertical at grips with a constant desire for the assertion of verticality and respect for the concept of surface.

Being aware of the strong tension and the firmness that his vertical axis could acquire, which had a tendency to give the picture a cylindrical shape or the ovoid structure of...
cubist pictures, McEwen strengthened the periphery by making it play the rôle of echo to the central axis. He tended also, in this way, to go beyond landscapes structure as it was still found in Monet's work.

The great vertical around which the balance of the picture plays will enlarge to form a plan, will unfold on the surface, will repeat itself on the border, will unite with orthogonal shapes, in order to assure all the expressive possibilities of the surface. By this dialectic between centrifugal and centripetal balances, McEwen at the same time was designing the open form and the closed form, periphery, masking the mysterious forces of colour or graphism could not be. "For me the picture plays will enlarge to form a plan, will unfold on the surface, will repeat itself on the border, will unite with ortho­
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1. Leo Steinberg, Other Criteria with Twentieth Century Art, Oxford University Press, 1972. (Translated by Mildred Grand)
THE DRAWINGS OF SIMONE AUBERY-BEAULIEU

By ROBERT MARTEAU

After twenty years spent in very diverse countries, Simone Aubery-Beaulieu recently renewed her connection with Canada through an exhibition of drawings at the Galerie de Montreal. In spite of her long absence, interrupted by visits to Perce, Simone Aubery-Beaulieu is not unknown here in the field of plastic arts. Having studied for four years at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Montreal, she received the Prize of the Province of Quebec in 1949, exhibiting at the same time at the Cercle Universitaire on Sherbrooke Street in Montreal. If her marriage with diplomat Paul Beaulieu was at the origin of her numerous trips, it was in no way opposed to her first vocation, and it was with a never-denied ardour that Simone Aubery-Beaulieu devoted herself to her craft.

She had met Fernand Léger in New York during the war. She met him again in Paris in 1946, where she attended his studio. In Paris again, she made the acquaintance of André Marchand, with whom she worked and to whom she is linked by a friendship of thirty years. After this she went to Varengeville, where Braque received and advised her. After Paris came London; she became acquainted next with Boston and Beirut, where she lived for six years, beginning there to tackle abstraction at a time when the desert and Arab characters were fascinating her. She left the Middle East for Brazil, where she felt the impact of the tropical forest, of its luxuriance, and of the effervescence of life, all things whose surging her drawings reflected. There was New York, then Paris again, Lisbon where she took up once more and developed themes initiated in Brazil. During a sojourn in Washington, she met Saint-John Perse, whose English poems Louis Varès translated while she herself illustrated Le Poème à l'étrangeté and made several portraits of the poet, of which one was to appear in the Saint-John Perse in Poèmes d'aujourd'hui. Furthermore, encouraged by Saint-John Perse, Simone Aubery-Beaulieu was going to devote herself assiduously to poetry.

As it is rather unusual to-day to see an exhibition of drawings, I asked Simone Aubery-Beaulieu if, with her, graphic work really is more important than painting. Not in the least, it seems to her, and she thinks that painting and graphism can be carried on at the same time by reason of the profound difference that exists as much in their development as in the way of approaching them. Still more, certainly, since drawing remains an indispensable discipline from which painting benefits. Just as she needs to write, Simone Aubery-Beaulieu needs to draw a few hours each day, free-hand, on large surfaces. What does she use? Tar which a little turpentine changes to a clear sepia tone, India ink, ... For what does she have a fondness? Ivory-black used with a paintbrush or a felt pen.

—I have always had a passion for the drawings of Rembrandt, Delacroix, and Modigliani, which I was able to view in Paris, at the Katia Granoff Gallery.

She says also:

—The abstract is a temptation, but I feel that I am profoundly figurative, bound as I am to this memory which chooses and preserves the most precious part of what one loves.

Facing the blank page, she loves this emotion and this trembling which go before the gesture, the line left by her which cannot be corrected. Of course, she worships Japanese painters, on account of the aim at the essential, the union of sudden violence and extreme refinement, the interior violence that subjugates ceremonial. It is true that with one stroke, controlled and spontaneous at the same time, Simone Aubery-Beaulieu knows how to make the beach vibrate where a secret magnetic force guides her. What attracts her is the sensitive core from which emanates carnal and abundant life which she knows how to make throb before our eyes, whether it be a matter of the half-breeds of Rio, the leaves of the coral tree or the walnut trees of Brazil. Her art is not baroque: generous, it joins spontaneity to precision. Simone Aubery-Beaulieu does not find her strength in spontaneous choice, but in the profound taste for promoting a blossoming, as of a flower growing in the woods, for what is stronger and more deeply buried than will. Black, white: the two colours, perhaps.

Was it not with black and white that Borduas fulfilled himself best and most intensely?, asks Simone Aubery-Beaulieu.

Loyalty presides at her work. With Simone Aubrey-Beaulieu there is the sense of the way and the search. She also knows that severely, instead of restraining, exalts the source where the work is unceasingly reborn.

(Translation by Mildred Grand)
Claude Mongrain: Weights, Tensions, Measures

By Luc Benoît

There are obvious facts in art as elsewhere. And the work of Claude Mongrain which, with that of J.-S. Champagne is witness of a new outlook on sculpture.

I allow myself to digress here to note the link of relationship which seems evident to me between these two sculptors. By different processes, it goes without saying, their research is found at the level of the phenomenon of perception, even if it entails neglecting the complete object in order to do this. This negligence is still stronger, indeed total, with Claude Mongrain.

In the research of Claude Mongrain, it would be useless to hope for the completed object, beautiful and ready to be exhibited. If I may express myself in this way, simply because his point of departure is NOT the material, NOR IS IT the finished product. Neither is the point of arrival.

His development is NOT aesthetic, NOR is his research formal.

"All I do," says the sculptor, "is set up a situation and then take it apart. I systematically analyse simple physical situations, without scientific claims. It is a matter rather of reducing the physical properties of the objects present to their simplest form, without respect to colour, texture, the form of the elements or of the whole, but especially taking into account (essentially) the relative arrangement of the things and their interaction."

We will therefore not be surprised (or if so, only a little, anyhow) at finding a glass gallon jug filled with water hanging from a rope, adjoining a long piece of wood of six feet which balances it. Between the two elements, a frightening contrast.

The finished product no longer having any importance, research centres on the material, its environment and the action produced on it by the material. This is done by calculations of weight, angles, measures. Thus, Situation I, made up of six sections of two-foot wood, hanging and joined by rings; between these rings, a scale measuring the tension of one element upon the other. The stronger tension is exerted above, produced by the elements below. This tension is legible, as is the angle of each piece of wood indicated by a horizontal red line: seventeen degrees for the first, seventy-two for the last.

It is also possible to trace the mathematical core of the situation at hand by tangents or measurements of degrees.

In Situation I, the raw material is wood; it could as well have been bags of sand as in another montage, or yet bottles of water.

Because they are able to be manipulated and are movable, the sculptures which Claude Mongrain calls rather Situations lead to experimentation by the spectator. "All I wish is that the viewer be conscious of what is going on and that he take the time to do it."

Persons are needed to challenge this awareness and to make us pay attention to the elements and to the world which surrounds us. It will only be the more beautiful for this.

Claude Mongrain is among those people. They are rare.

When one knows Claude Mongrain, one is not astonished to see him come back from a hike of four hours on snowshoes or to meet him on a bicycle in Quebec or elsewhere. One understands his research still better, then.

I was almost going to forget to mention that he was born in Shawinigan but lives in Montreal. He studied there at the École des Beaux-Arts from 1960 to 1969 with Jean-Pierre Boivin and Ulysse Comtois. The following year, he continued in sculpture, at the University of Quebec in Montreal, with Henry Saxe.

In 1968, he participated in the creation of a children's park at Orford, at the J.M.C. Centre.

In 1970, he exhibited with the graduates at the Pavilion des Arts of the University of Quebec in Montreal. One of his sculptures (in steel) won him a bursary from E.T. Greenshield Memorial Foundation, which gave him a trip of investigation across Europe. He returned there the next year and visited a part of France and Italy by bicycle.

Among other exhibitions, let us mention the one at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Jouets d'artises in 1970; another group showed at Galerie Joliet, in Quebec. In October 1972; the exhibition of artists de 35 Ans in Montreal in February 1973 and, recently, at the Galerie Média as well as at La Sauvegarde, with a group of artists.

Jean-Serge Champagne: Sculpture in Two Periods

By Luc Benoît

Born in Montreal, Jean-Serge Champagne studied at the École des Beaux-Arts, concentrating on sculpture, with Ulysse Comtois and Henry Saxe, from 1960 to 1969.

We note his participation in several exhibitions and group works. In 1966-1969, he collaborated in the creation of a children's park at the J.M.C. Centre, at Orford.

We find him again at the exhibition of the graduates at the Pavilion des Arts de l'UQAM, in 1970, and at the Provincial Competition, the same year. In 1971, he took part in a showing of the Bronfman Foundation, at the Museum of Fine Arts in Montreal. The following year, he was in Quebec with five other artists, at Galerie Joliet. Since the beginning of 1973, we have seen his sculptures at the exhibition of the Minis de 35 Ans at Galerie Média and at La Sauvegarde in Montreal.

In his studio on Rachel Street, there is wood everywhere: planks of pine, plywood, laths of all sizes.

It was perhaps because he found metal too cold, too rigid as a material that Jean-Serge Champagne decided to work in wood. Doubtless also, because this material better served what he wished to do, and his not very academic way of doing it.

Here the material is used raw (a board is a board), without artifice or camouflage.

Sometimes the wood is moulded, sometimes it is bent. In this precise case, a stretcher, a rope, sometimes a vise used to exert pressure or to hold together the different pieces of wood, become an integral part of the finished product. This product, most of the time, remains raw, without shellac or paint. "I have nothing to hide: if I need to make notches so that the wood will curve, I make them and they remain visible. There are no tricks, no mysteries in what I do."

He could have chosen something else, plastic, for example. But then, it would have seemed to me like manufacturing things; while with wood the sculpture explains itself and the understanding of it becomes easy. By shellacking wood, one can give the impression that it is something else. Why not? But then things are not so simple.

"The important matter is to do what one has to do. The finished product is of little consequence; it is only a point between what has been done and what remains to be done. But without having produced it, I would never have understood what is inherent in it. It is only after that the point is effective. From whence comes the importance of making gestures, because it is a step toward freedom. It is to eliminate restraints, to have access to joy."

"And one does not know much what is happening. To begin with, one perceives the fact, and it is only afterward that the phenomenon of understanding occurs."

The wood is raw and the notches are apparent. There are no deceptions. That is what matters most. But there have been possible to make the ticks disappear by blowing them. Then to fill the joints and paint the plank to give it an appearance other than that which it really has. We are: 1) facing the material such as it is, 2) observing the manner of doing and 3) examining the result.

The fact (absence of deception) is still obvious in these long pieces of wood, six-by-fours, which, in places seems crushed, slit by the rope which has been tightened around them. The pieces have simply undergone several cuts of a saw at their centre, which then allowed their being tightened and tied together, thus producing the desired effect. The observer of the wood is the wood in its entirety, as if nothing had been taken from it. And it is only at the second period that the comprehension of the object occurs.

The same thing is true for this long chest of twelve feet, made of one single piece of two-by-four, a hard lime, and hinges as for a real chest. It was cut in two along its whole length to allow it to be opened. Once the chest is open, one realizes that the section of wood was completely hollowed out (and not cut and again put together) to contain a piece of wood as long, but of less thickness and wider.
The sculpture of Jean-Serge Champagne proves that it is still possible to work in a material (which some would have believed old-fashioned, if not out of date) in a new and interesting way.

The result, as far as I am concerned, is a fortunate one. Much more, it witnesses a new sculpture in Quebec.

(Translation by Mildred Grand)

**VIDEOGRAPHY: TOWARDS A NEW CULTURE**

By Denise DIONNE

Vidéographe on Saint-Denis St. in Montreal is an organization which has as its aim the promoting of the use of the half-inch portable magnetoscopic system (closed-circuit television). Vidéographe lends the equipment and allocates the budgets necessary to the production of videograms.

Montage modules are available twenty-four hours a day. Vidéographe has its own sound studio, and an animation module has just been set up.

The videograms produced are exhibited at Vidéothèque, a hall which can accommodate up to one hundred fifteen spectators. The showings, on six twenty-four inch screens hung at the center of the hall and placed in a circle, are daily and free.

At the entrance of the location, a "vidéothèque", containing on cassettes the videograms already produced, is accessible at all times. A copy service assures the distribution of the videograms outside the organization.

Some time ago, Vidéographe set up Selecto-vision in collaboration with community television. The subscribers to a private cable system have been able to order the broadcasting of the videograms of their choice, a list of which they had received earlier. Three experiments in Selecto-vision were carried out at Beloeil, Gatineau and Mont-Laurier.

Let us remember that anyone, without previous experience, can present videogram projects on any subject at all.

In a year and a half of operation, Vidéographe of Saint-Denis Street has produced about sixty videograms ready for viewing at any time at its location. The organization is now subsidized by the Ministry of Communications of Quebec and is assured of survival until spring of 1974. It is known that equipment and funds are at the disposal of whoever presents a project which is accepted by the board of selection. Once this stage is accomplished all latitude is allowed to the producers of the tape.

What has been done so far in videography? Up till the present, five hundred projects have been presented and about sixty have been accepted and produced. It is to be noticed that concerns of a social or political order are underlying or explicit in almost all the videograms. Journalism, sociology, or anthropology serve as framework for the messages transmitted. There are very few equivalents in video to what is known as film d'auteur, and very little fiction is used in expressing ideas.

Actual events, recorded directly, are used as basic material. Situations are set up where the camera becomes a sort of confident (according to Jean Rouch's expression), and the videotape, by an instantaneous use of group viewing, becomes an illumination of the circumstances.

This quality of the videotape (instant recording), to which the lightness of the equipment is joined, was immediately exploited. About twenty productions centre around persons who explain their place in life in front of the camera (people twenty years of age, youths, separated women, old persons, etc.), their personal relationships (loneliness, homosexuality) or else their relation with the system.

The videotape also serves as a useful instrument of reflection on broad social occurrences. An analysis has been made of the significance of the October incidence and of the rôle of the mass media during that period. The controversies raised by the project of the Sainte-Scholastique airport, the conflict at La Presse, the battle of wood at Cabano, also aroused some interest. But the rare pearl of this type of production is certainly the video carried out by Emond and Lavigne on the Soma affair. S.O.S. Soma was set up and produced by persons involved in this struggle. From that, one can no longer define the camera as being a peeping and indirect eye, but rather a confident and sharing ear.

The possibilities of new visual experiments have not been much used. They still make a little live film in 16mm. A few productions have played with the feasibilities of visual electronic effects in the medium. Réaction 26, Métamorphoses, Lumibres, formes et sons and Libidante work with overprinting, with doubling and with the shifting of the image. It is to be noted that a subject like eroticism is very well suited to this kind of formal treatment (for example, Libidante).

Ethnology and Quebec or Amerindian anthropology occupy a separate category. The traditions and the legends of the Quebec inhabitant or of the Amerindian are dealt with in it. Let us mention here the originality of the production Continuons le combat, where through the description of a modern rite, wrestling, Pierre Falardeau symbolically presents to us the forces present at the heart of our society and subtly incites us to pursue the fight.

Following the thought of McLuhan, who asserts that a new technique salvages the old ones, the videotape is also used as medium for other arts. Whether it be theatre, sculpture, marionettes, electronic graphism or music, we deal with this type of production.

The present concerns about general themes such as the system, the environment and society are approached in different manners in Système, m'aimas-tu, L'accroc, L'Environnement, c'est toute, Zlozow and Objectal.

One of the solutions generally offered to the ills of our society, the experiment of commons is presented in six different forms: a commune of forty-two persons on a farm at Rawdon, the Krishna Group of Montreal, the Maison du possible, in Sherbrooke, where social medicine is practised, the musical Groupe Expulsion, the couples' commune at the Château, and, finally, the fifteen staff members of the P'tit Québec Libre, share their experience in turn.

Some other productions have as subject the Salon de l'Auto, the St. Lawrence Boulevard, the new Pierre Vallières, Edgar Morin, children and, even, the production of a videogram.

So videography is healthy in Montreal. The variety of the fields covered, as well as the pungency of the titles, gives the proof of its vitality.

Consequently, the technique of the videotape offers the possibility of new experiments in group communication. The light and relatively inexpensive material permits a greater accessibility. The chief problem remains, however, to differentiate itself from ordinary television, which excels in broadcasting information directly at the moment it occurs, and the cinema of recent tradition which has involved itself in recording the present for posterity. What is left, perhaps, for video is to be the witness of what happens after the occurrence, to be the instrument of collective thought after the event. S.O.S. Some is the best example of this.

For footnotes see French text.

(Translation by Mildred Grand)