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Une autre saison de Léon Bellefleur
Léon Bellefleur

Gilles Daigneault

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LÉON BELLEFLEUR

Huile sur toile; 50 cm x 61.

Bellefleur, lui, demeure dans sa vieille maison canadienne, près de la Richelieu (encore un rêve réalisé), où il a rencontré. La veille, une très violente tempête avait fait rage dans la région et fallait projeter son voisin — un colosse, mais il parle volontiers, simplement, posément. Il n’en est pas moins convaincu que ses commentateurs n’aident en rien (… ou si peu) les gens à pénétrer son œuvre. «Je sais qu’il y a des artistes qui parlent très bien de leur peinture mais, même dans ces cas-là, l’explication est telle que les bâtons ici, c’est là, la plume là, celle qui … que … bref, le peintre a tout dit quand il a fait sa toile. Après coup, c’est aux critiques de jouer.» Ces remarques n’empêchent pas Bellefleur d’adopter un ton critique concernant l’attitude de certains commentateurs qui ne voient pas assez combien il garde son dessin et sa conception du tableau comme une certaine discipline.

Il relevait de trois mois de gravure à l’eau-forte (il faut l’avoir vu lutter avec sa vieille presse) pour lui apporter une dimension rationnelle du dessin mais, paradoxalement, je n’ai jamais manqué de dessiner. «Pourquoi pas? Je n’ai rien bouleversé. Sur le coup, il me suffisait juste de trouver un moyen d’honorer mon métier, d’échapper à ses trop faciles, qui me permettrait de peindre de mon fonds intérieur …» A ce stade, il y a danger «d’embourgeoisement, je sais, de préciosité, de décoration; personne n’est à l’abri de cela (je ne parle pas seulement des peintres) et j’en suis conscient. Je me méfie en quelque sorte de mon métier qui, rendant les choses trop faciles, me permettrait de me perdre complètement.»

Disons plus justement que je connais maintes critiques qui n’apporteraient plus rien ni à moi ni aux autres. Je préfère cependant penser qu’il y a surtout dans cette maîtrise des moyens un énorme avantage pour qui sait conserver sa sérénité. Le besoin que j’ai d’exiger et d’honorer la nature même de mon cheminement profondément surréaliste m’aide à me préserver de l’embourgeoisement. Cette importance aussi de l’enfance … J’y arrivais. La phrase de Baudelaire me revient à l’esprit: «Le génie est l’enfance retrouvée à volonté.» Bellefleur sourit. «Retrouvée? Non, je ne le sais jamais pour de heureusement. J’ai toujours essayé de protéger en moi le meilleur de l’enfance, ce sens de la poésie du rêve, cette spontanéité, cette fraîcheur dont aucune maturité ne saurait se passer.» En l’écouter parler de l’enfance, je comprends que ce n’est pas uniquement par mégalomanie qu’il y vit entouré de plusieurs de ses plus belles toiles …

Depuis 1910, l’art moderne a évolué avec une incroyable rapidité. Bellefleur accepte-t-il d’être classé parmi les peintres traditionnels? «Pourquoi pas? Je n’ai rien bouleversé. Sur le plan plastique, mon œuvre n’est pas révolutionnaire … mais j’ai tellement foulé l’inconscient qu’il n’est pas impossible que des jeunes s’accrochent un jour à moi pour pousser plus loin quelque chose …»

Pour le moment, il n’est pas besoin de rechercher des jeunes pour pousser plus loin le chemin de l’œuvre de Bellefleur. … Il s’en charge très bien lui-même. J’ai hâte à sa prochaine saison.

English Translation, p. 92.
boardroom, and, on account of its large size, is never in the travelling exhibitions of the collection.

Among the entries from the Maritimes, we should note St. John Harbour by Bruno Bobak, artist in residence in New Brunswick famous for his panoramic views of cities in the Koksosnahr, in which we find his delightful colourist's pace. As for his wife Molly Lamb Bobak's English Beach, we see in it a littleipusian swimming comparable to that of the early To- nique, but not rediscovers in it her usual exuberance.

Woman at a Dresser by Christopher Pratt, the magic realist of Newfoundland, is one of his most popular and bewitching canvases, in which we enjoy the delicacy of the drawing and the mellowness of the tints.

Milk Truck and Children by J. F. Rose are two typical paintings, although of average quality, by Alexander Colville, the neo-Scottish head of the Canadian hyperrealist school.

Ontario is represented by some twenty painters, several of whom are hyperrealists: Ken Danby, D. P. Brown, Willis Romanow, Wim Blom and David Myers. The stars, Kazuo Nakamura (Tokyo), Graham Courey (Dark Road), Tony Urquhart (Near Wickham, Side Road), Michael Snow (Black and White), Kenneth Lochhead (Foot Pile), and John Chambers (Three Sisters, Waiting), offer us specimens characteristic, if not exceptional, of their talent. William Kurelek's Hauling Sheaves, all imbued with the special artlessness of this visionary artist, may, as the painter himself does, be played by; we also admire greatly Jack MacDonald's lovely blue harmony and the precious and delicate tracery of Ralph and Brian Taylor.

The most remarkable works of the painters of the West are, in our opinion, Christine Pflug's Interior at Night with its mysterious vista of the night's image. Her work is inspired by the boldness of its eccentric composition, the immensity and monotony of the prairie. Among the Ontario painters, we prefer Harold Town, the talented and versatile Toronto painter, who appears at its best in Homage to Cubism, of fine texture, and particularly in his superb Sky Panel, where his gifts as colourist and his feeling for the picture are displayed; we also admire greatly Jack MacDonald's lovely blue harmony and the precious and delicate tracery of Ralph and Brian Taylor.

If we note in British Columbia's share the presence of a large number of "hard edge painters," like George Smith and Bode Pfeiffer, laurels are due, in our opinion, to Tony Oylen (Winter Landscape), to Brian Fisher for his exquisite Window, a clever creation and a genuine masterpiece of symmetry, to Donald Jarvis for his flamboyant Winter Figure, and to Jack Shadbolt for his Iceland Memory, in which his gift for poetics, particularly in the chim- mering atmosphere of an oriental miniature.

To conclude this brief evaluation, it is interesting to observe the reactions of the Canadian public to this collection. Its preference goes to the hyperrealists and to well-known names like Jean-Paul Lemieux, Alfred Pellan, Jean-Paul Riopelle, Harold Town and Jack Shadbolt, and among the most popular canvases, ten are the work of hyperrealists, with Alex Colville in the lead; and we find the two Lemieux, the two naive painters Arthur Villeneuve and Miyuki Tanobe and two pictures that illustrate, one about games, Louise Scott's Seriee des Jeux No 1 and the other the holiday atmosphere Mystery Phillips' Adam & Eve & Pinch Me. If we were to believe the old adage, "Vox populi, vox Dei," such a verdict would be painful for those critics who accept in art only the unusual or the subliminal.

Within its purposely limited framework, the Canadian painting collection generously put at the disposal of the public of Canada by C.I.L. has served the cause of art well in our milieu, on the one hand by encouraging our painters, on the other by causing them to be better known, not only by art lovers but also by the initiated. This is an auspicious venture that we cannot praise too much, and of which we would like to see many imitators.

(Translation by Mildred Grand)

LÉON BELLEFLEUR

By Gilles Daigneault

Léon Bellefleur has taken off again. The first time, it was in 1954, and he departed in the two meanings of the word: he freed himself of his influences in painting and left to accomplish a dream that was "a bit delirious," at the age of thirty: to know Paris and live in Provence. This time, it is his canvases that are leaving to earn international recognition for him, another major dream. The work is inspired by the English, and very recently the Danes, have been enchanted by our old alchemist's oils.

Bellefleur lives in his old Canadian house near the Richelieu River (another dream that came true), where I met him. The day before, a very violent storm had raging in the area and had nearly thrown his neighbour — a giant — into the river; Bellefleur would say during the interview, "Pellan's return in 1940 was worse than yesterday's hurricane for the plastic art!"

He has remained the same likeable man, funny and sensitive (this precious sensitivity to which his work has been faithful for almost forty years). He has taken on very little self-assurance, nor does he suffer from the obviousness of his eccentric composition, the immensity and monotony of the prairie. Among the Ontario painters, we prefer Harold Town, the talented and versatile Toronto painter, who appears at its best in Homage to Cubism, of fine texture, and particularly in his superb Sky Panel, where his gifts as colourist and his feeling for the picture are displayed; we also admire greatly Jack MacDonald's lovely blue harmony and the precious and delicate tracery of Ralph and Brian Taylor.

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(Translation by Mildred Grand)
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Since 1910 modern art has evolved with incredible speed. Does Belfleure accept being classified among the traditional painters? "Why not? I haven't overthrown anything. On the plastic plan my work is not revolutionary ... but I have searched the unconscious so thoroughly that it is not impossible that young people will some day follow my lead to go further than I have done.

For now, there is no need to seek young people to carry further certain aspects of Belfleure's work ... He is attending to it very well himself. I am eagerly awaiting his next productions.

(Translation by Mildred Grand)

CLAES OLDENBURG IN TORONTO

By Roger MESLEY

In April and May 1976 the exhibition Oldenburg: Six Themes was shown at the Art Gallery of Ontario. The evolution of the geometric mouse, three-way plug, bag ends, clothes-pin, typewriter eraser, and standing mitt with ball has been documented by the 317 items exhibited. Oldenburg came to Toronto for six days to oversee the exhibition's installation, to give a lecture on his work, and to attend the AGO opening. This was his first visit to Toronto since the 1967 Dine-Oldenburg-Segal exhibition. At that time, he had proposed a colossal drainpipe monument for Toronto's waterfront.

Roger Mesley - When did you first realize that the CN tower had become Toronto's colossal monument, and what was your first reaction?

Claes Oldenburg - I felt quite surprised. Sometimes I have the feeling that I'm tuned in to certain things that are going to happen, which may not be very difficult to be tuned in to, but I didn't really know there was going to be a tower. I think I saw it first in an airline's magazine, or advertisement of some kind for Toronto, and I said, "My God! There it is!" You know. Actually I felt left out. I felt as if I hadn't been consulted ... as if I hadn't had a chance to include my own creation.

R.M. - You were in Montreal in 1967 to install your Giant Soft Fan for Expo; was there ever a proposed colossal monument for Montreal?

C.O. - The fan was my version of a colossal monument ... I never got into Montreal very much ... I was on the island there and kept pretty occupied. It was a terrific time because it was Expo and all the artists were there, and you could go into all the exhibits just by yourself, without having to stand in line. You could ride those trains all by yourself. I think that one of the most unforgettable days of my life was the opening. It was a very brilliant day, very clear, and the Canadian planes were flying up and down the river ...

R.M. - How did the concept of Oldenburg: Six Themes originate? (Oldenburg explained that he viewed the 1969 New York retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art, the 1971 Pasadena Art Museum exhibition, and the present show as "a continuous retrospective ... one show, but six different concepts")

C.O. - ... but I think the show, or shows, have being getting better, clearer. The Modern's show was just a sort of collection of things without much thought behind it ... The Pasadena show had a point of view, showing how the object developed into the monument, and the other, the A.G.O. has organized it, is quite an intellectual. He wanted to do something about process, and I did too. That's what I've always wanted to do. The subjects have become more limited and the focus has been more and more on the thinking process. I think this is the best of the shows, the most unified. I would like to approach art. I love drawing, I would like to have a place to put all your things? You'd think, the same kind of process. You get fond of something - he's claimed, hasn't he, that he really has designed everything from those pebbles and rocks that he's so fond of - and I seem to like to change. I'm always thinking of some sort of parallel. I'm always thinking of some sort of unifying principle. If I was to devote myself to one of his most beautiful canvases ...

R.M. - Of what significance has Moore's work been to you as a sculptor?

C.O. - I've always been aware of Moore. He's been the big sculptor, along with Calder and Picasso, and we're aware of this man for so long; he's part of the language. I do a lot of references to other artists and very often I feel that I make references to him - sort of unconsciously, because you've been so aware of his particular type of mass.

R.M. - Would you like an Oldenburg centre like the Moore centre in order to perpetuate the concept of process of the present show?

C.O. - Who can deny that it would be pleasant to have a place to put all your things? You'd have more room than at home. I think that's a problem with a sculptor, especially. He gets crowded at home. You don't take proper care of your things ... I think the (one-artist) museum is the future. Many artists have had museums. Sometimes they've been kept up well and sometimes they've disintegrated. ... I would object to (such an Oldenburg Centre). It's really the way I would like to approach art. I love making drawings, because you can see the thinking process, the source of their imagery. I pick mine up on the street and in the stores - very urban sources. He is in the countryside, but it is basically, I think, the same kind of process. You get fond of something - he's claimed, hasn't he, that he really has designed everything from those pebbles and rocks that he's so fond of - and I seem to like to change. I'm always thinking of some sort of parallel. I'm always thinking of some sort of unifying principle. If I was to devote myself to one of his most beautiful canvases ...

R.M. - The human figures as such rarely appears in your work, save in the "pornographic" drawings. Why is that?

C.O. - I use the object because it's a nice free way of bridging the gap between representation and non-representation ... It's a shame that those tendencies are separate and run parallel. I've been working on some sort of unifying principle. If I was to devote myself to the figure, I feel that one has to represent the figure rather precisely for it to be significant ... There have been so many attempts to combine the figure, I feel very happy when I go to Holland, because it's a country where everything really is reduced to vertical and horizontal, it's a very peaceful sensation. Chicago's that way too — the vertical-horizontal. I feel an affinity for that kind of thinking.

R.M. - Which is more, however, to admit that you're a Theosophist?

C.O. - Not in any formal way. It's a kind of informal metaphysical feeling about things. I have a feeling, a sort of Platonic notion, about the source of the underlying appearances, and that may be because I was at one point influenced by being raised as a Christian Scientist, and their thinking runs along that line — that appearances are just a mask.