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Léon Bellefleur

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Volume 21, numéro 84, automne 1976

URI : https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/54977ac

Citer cet article

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Huile sur toile; 50 cm x 61.
Léon Bellefleur a encore pris le large. La première fois, c'était en 1954, et dans les deux sens du mot: il se détachait de ses influences en peinture et partait réaliser un rêve «peu délirant», vieux de trente ans: connaître Paris et vivre en Provence. Cette fois-ci, ce sont ses toiles qui partent lui gagner une reconnaissance internationale, un autre rêve majeur du peintre. Les Anglais, les Américains et les Danois ont été envoûtés par les huiles de notre vieil alchimiste. Bellefleur, lui, demeure dans sa vieille maison canadienne, près du Richelieu (encore un rêve réaliste), où je l'ai rencontré. La veille, une triste nouvelle tempête avait fait rage dans la région et failli projeter son voisin — un colosse — dans la rivière; il me dira au cours de l'entretien: «Le retour de Pellan en 40, c'était pire que l'ouragan d'hier pour les arts plastiques!» Il est resté le même homme sympathique, drôle et sensible (cette précieuse sensibilité à laquelle son œuvre est fidèle depuis près de quarante ans) À peine a-t-il pris un peu d'assurance, mais il est l'homme qui parle volontiers, simplement, posément. Il n'en est pas moins convaincu que ses commentaires n'aiment en rien (... où si peu) les gens à pénétrer son œuvre. «Je sais qu'il y a des artistes qui parlent bien de leurs peintures mais, même dans ces cas-là, l'explication des choses que les huiles dégagent un rationnel qui y... (bref, le peintre à tout dit quand il a fait sa toile. Après coup, c'est aux critiques de jouer». Ces remarques n'empêchent cependant pas Bellefleur d'adopter un ton très critique concernant l'attitude de certains commentateurs qui ne voient pas assez bien dans son œuvre les influences qu'il a eues, notamment surréaliste. Il relevait de trois mois de gravure à l'eau-forte (il faut l'avoir vù lutter avec sa vieille presse pour comprendre que le mot n'est pas trop fort). Pourtant la cuisine complexe, délicate et exquise de cet éden de la métaphysique y en est bien un. «Je tiens à maîtriser tout cela et je crois que je suis dans la bonne voie.» Pour certains côtés, c'est de la métapsique. En voici un peu l'effet: je me sens en harmonie avec elle. En gravure, je peux faire des dessins avec des teintes, une gamme de gris, des noirs,...» J'y arrivais. La phrase de l'enfance retrouvée à volonté.» Bellefleur sourit. «Retrouvée? Non, je ne l'ai jamais perdue, heureusement. J'ai toujours essayé de protéger en moi le meilleur de l'enfance, ce sens de la poésie et du rêve, cette spontanéité, cette fraîcheur dont aucune maturité ne saurait se passer.» En écouter parler de l'enfance, je comprends que ce n'est pas uniquement par mégalomanie qu'il vit entouré de plusieurs de ses jeunes suiveurs un jour à moi pour pousser plus loin quelque chose...»

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, une planche vivante, une richesse, un équilibre indéniables.» C'est lui qui le dit, mais j'hésite à le contredire. Disons plus justement que je connais maintenant mon métier, qu'il y a moins en moins de failles à ce niveau là, que j'arrive de plus en plus facile à résoudre les problèmes, que désormais mes limites sont à peu près comprises de mon fonds intérieur.» À ce stade, il y a danger... «d'emboîtement, je sais, de préciosité, de décoration; personne n'est à l'abri de cela (je ne parle pas seulement des peintres) et l'enfance conscient. Je me méfie en quelque sorte de mon métier qui rend les choses trop faciles, ce qui permettrait de passer mécaniquement, avec les yeux seulement, des toiles, jolies sans doute mais sans âme, où ce que j'aurais dit serait tellement mince qu'elles 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 ferveur. Le besoin que j'ai d'être exigeant et honnête, la richesse, un équilibre indéniables.» C'est toi qui le dis, mais j'hésite à te contredire...

Pour le moment, il n'est pas besoin de rechercher des jeunes pour pousser plus loin certaines aspects de l'œuvre de Bellefleur. Il s'en charge très bien lui-même. J'ai hâte à sa prochaine saison. English Translation, p. 92.
were to believe the old adage, "Vox populi, vox Dei," such a verdict would be painful for those critics who accept art in art only the unusual or the subliminal.

Within its purposely limited framework, the Canadian painting collection graciously 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 uninstructed. 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 draught. Indeed, now that we have found its direction, and very recently, the Dunes, 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 raged in the area and had nearly blown 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 arts!"

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 was called "the young Dali" and "the young Modigliani" whose extreme geometrical simplicity recalls some of Georgia O'Keefe's studies of barns, and the two Ronald Bloores, Hommage to Matisse and especially Triple Sun Pansy, of an infinite delicacy and artistry.

If we note in British Columbia's share the presence of a few "hard edge painters" like Gordon Smith and Bodo Pfeiffer, laurels are due, in our opinion, to Tony Onley (Winter Landscape), to Brian Fisher for his exquisite Hommage a Matisse and especially Triple Sun Pansy, of an infinite delicacy and artistry.

In the room, there is an intriguing contrast, between the two Lemieux, the two Doisneau and Miyuki — the latter medium, one sometimes finds something else with another medium, in the same composition, the intensity of its lines a true coloured whole. I believe the experiment was successful: it was due, in our opinion, to Tony Onley (Winter Landscape), to Brian Fisher for his exquisite Hommage a Matisse and especially Triple Sun Pansy, of an infinite delicacy and artistry.

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eral of his most beautiful canvases...

Since 1910 modern art has evolved with incredible speed. Does Béatrice accept being classified among the traditional painters? "Why not? I haven't overthrown anything. On the plastic plane 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 Béatrice's work... He is attending to it very well himself. I am eagerly awaiting his next production.

(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 holes was 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 contribute to my own concept.

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 the Summer of Love. We had a lot of free time 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 unforgettable days of my life was the opening. It was a very brilliant day, very clear, and the Canadian planes were flying down the Don Valley. It was a spectacular sight.

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, after another..."

C.O. - ...but I think the show, or shows, have been 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 Modern's was more an intellectual. He wanted to do a thinking show about process, and I did too. That's what I've always wanted to do. The subjects have become more and more and more on the thinking process. I think this is the best of the shows.

R.M. - The A.G.O.'s Henry Moore Centre likewise documents his creative process. How struck by the similarities are you?

C.O. - I've always heard about these rocks that he collects and I've always felt that that's what sculptors do - they have a museum of things which attract them in nature which become the subject of their work but different concepts. Everything was fresh streets and in the stores - very urban sources. He's in the countryside, but it is basically, I should think, the same kind of process. You get fond of something - he's claimed, hasn't he, that he really has derived everything from those pebbles and rocks that he's so fond of - and I seem in the same, the same. My Museum contains almost every original object and variations of it.

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've been aware of this man for so long; he's part of the landscape. If I try to come up with 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 Henry Moore centre in order to perpetuate the concept of process?

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 cheapest, and we've been aware of this man for so long; he's part of the landscape.

R.M. - The human figures as such rarely appear in your work. 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 always thought of 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 with abstraction, which I find offensive - even when Moore does it, I like it much better when he sticks to his pebbles. When he goes into the figures it bothers me a little bit. With objects I don't feel that, I don't have that problem, because objects are so open - at least the way I treat them. They're so generalized that somehow that bridges the gap. If I'm able to draw the figure - which I can now and then - I like to do it. I exercise that ability. So, I have a separate category, where I just draw figures when I want to please myself.

R.M. - But why are the realistic figures drawings almost invariably erotic?

C.O. - Well, they tend to be charged with emotion... In my mind, figure drawing has always always been associated with the nude, and I've always accepted the nude literally. In art schools, instead of saying that this is like a statue, I've always said that this is a living person who has taken his or her clothes off and is standing in front of us. It means something; you can't ignore this. The reality of it is there, you can't ignore this. It's a part of the statue, and I'm very urban sources. You don't take proper care of your things... 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 cheapest, and we've been aware of this man for so long; he's part of the landscape. If I try to come up with 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. - Yet both your work and your comments seem much more formal and analytical than they were at the time of the 1967 Toronto show...

C.O. - Well, I finally admitted that publicly. They certainly are. My tendency is, of course, to do a revisionist history - to read back into your own work and say "I was really thinking of this and that," you know; and then, you need someone to straighten you out by remembering some of your earlier statements... It's true that (formal and analytical) development occurred, and it probably occurs for most artists, the more they look at their work and think about it.

R.M. - There are references to Mondrian in your drawings and writings. Is your search for the ultimate basic form a spiritual quest like his?

C.O. - I'm really very interested in that basic form. I have a metaphysical streak and would like to reduce things to very simple forms. It's in my thinking... 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 with that kind of thinking.

R.M. - Which is not, however, to admit that you're a Theosophist?

C.O. - Not in any formal way. It's a kind of informalized metaphysical feeling about things. I have a feeling, a sort of Platonic notion, about the form 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.