Vie des arts

Vie des arts

Texts in English

Volume 24, numéro 98, printemps 1980

URI : https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/58858ac

Aller au sommaire du numéro

Éditeur(s)

La Société La Vie des Arts

ISSN

0042-5435 (imprimé)
1923-3183 (numérique)

Découvrir la revue

Citer ce document

(1980). Texts in English. *Vie des arts*, *24*(98), 100–104.

TEXTS IN ENGLISH

THE YOUNG VAN DYCK

By Alan McNAIRN

Before he set out for Italy in 1621 at the age of 22, Anthony van Dyck had earned a great reputation in the very competitive community of Antwerp painters. He had created several remarkably sensitive portraits of Antwerp burghers and had received important commissions for paintings of religious and mythological subjects. There are indeed very few great artists who have had such prolific and successful careers while still in their adolescence. One is constantly astonished at the facility with which van Dyck composed and painted the great number of works dating from the first six years of his career.

Anthony van Dyck was a student of the unremarkable mannerist painter Hendrik van Balen. When he left van Balen's studio in 1614 or 1615 he set up his own shop. The boy artist assisted by two colleagues of about the same age created at least two series of busts of the apostles and Christ. The pictures in these series show that even at the age of about 16, van Dyck had developed remarkable abilities in the technical aspects of painting and had carefully studied the style of the most prominent Antwerp painter, Peter Paul Rubens.

At about the time he was painting the apostle busts, van Dyck also produced two self-portraits. The first of these, in the Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth, in style is close to the work of Rubens. The second self-portrait in Vienna is quite different[1]. The use of heavy impasto in the high lights and the over-all energy and vitality of the painting show that van Dyck was capable of inventive and personal use of his chosen medium of expression. In the self-portrait we obtain a glimpse of a youth who recognized his own extraordinary innate talents and precociousness. The self-awareness of the young artist and his ability to recreate on canvas not only the reality of his appearance but also his own character are evidence of his unusual perception of the human form. It was in the art of portraiture that van Dyck was to gain his lasting reputation.

The young van Dyck created many excellent narrative pictures which have been somewhat overshadowed by the work of his better known elder, Rubens. In the painting *Suffer Little Children to Come unto Me* van Dyck used two distinct styles of painting[2]. On the left side, the figures of Christ and some apostles are conceived in the idealized and sculpturesque style common to Rubens' painting. On the right side, however, in the portrait of the family which may be that of Rubens, the emphasis is on the crisp and lively calligraphic depiction of the surfaces of drapery and flesh. Using quick strokes of a fully charged brush, van Dyck has created a sparkling illusion of texture in which the various hues obtain their optical coherence by their juxtaposition and their form. This apparently effortless brushwork is derived from the study of Venetian Renaissance paintings by such masters as Titian and Veronese.

The *Arrest of Christ* is also a work which obtains its strength from the hasty application of paint[3]. The flickering light of the torch illuminates a small seething crowd of hostile humans led by the traitor Judas. The drama culminates in the passive figure of Christ whose elegant and elongated form looms in the wild garden as one who comprehends peace and awaits the inevitable. The tortured combat of Peter and Malchus in the lower left adds yet more violence to the historical incident. The light and colour and, to a lesser extent, the composition owe much to van Dyck's clear understanding of the art of Titian. It was the brilliant combination of design and surface that attracted van Dyck throughout his life to the paintings of Titian. In this Renaissance Venetian master van Dyck discovered a kindred spirit — one who revelled in the magic of the brush and colour and who could capture the tone necessary for the most poignant rendering of narrative scenes.

Van Dyck's early drawings show his enthusiasm for Rubens and Titian. In a preparatory sketch for the *Crowning with Thorns* the young van Dyck combined some of the volumetric solidity of Rubens' style with a surface design not unlike that of Titian[4]. For this composition van Dyck used Rubens' drawings for his interpretation of the subject and perhaps also had as a source a copy of Titian's famous painting on the same theme.

Anthony van Dyck's study of Italian art and Rubens' painting continued throughout his first Antwerp period. It was after van Dyck was enrolled as a master in the Guild of St. Luke in 1618 that he seems to have officially assisted Rubens. The two worked together not as master and pupil but as colleagues whose mutual admiration was intense. Van Dyck used many of Rubens' sketches as inspiration for his own compositions. Rubens employed van Dyck to help in the execution of a series of tapestry cartoons for the *History of Decius Mus* and in the production of several large canvases for the decoration of the Jesuit Church in Antwerp. When Rubens died several of the paintings in his collection by van Dyck were those that the younger artist had produced during the period in which the two worked together.

It was probably Rubens who advised van Dyck to go to England in the fall of 1620. While the venture proved to be quite unsatisfactory for the young artist, he did, during the few months in which he was in England, receive some important commissions and he established contacts with the most important collectors in the country. Van Dyck returned to Antwerp in February 1621 and remained there for eight months and then moved to Italy. It was again probably Rubens who advised van Dyck to go to Italy, for Rubens had enjoyed a most successful period of study and work there in the first decade of the century.

While the work of the young van Dyck and that of Rubens are in many ways similar, there are distinct differences which are the result of the young artist's preferences in painting. Van Dyck was no mere imitator of Rubens. He was always more concerned with the surface of his canvases than the elder master. He could not fully accept Rubens' emphasis on the dramatic spatial recession of compositions. Van Dyck was indeed "a painters' painter". This is quite consistent with his enthusiasm for the art of Titian and other masters of the Venetian Renaissance.

Van Dyck's youthful works, because they are such extraordinarily mature, visually exciting creations, deserve attention, for their power to delight the eye has not diminished over the centuries. They are as vital and rejuvenating to-day as ever.

The exhibition *The Young van Dyck* will be shown at the National Gallery of Canada from September 19 to November 9, 1980. It is one of a series of special exhibitions which celebrate the centennial of the National Gallery of Canada.

1. Anton van Dyck, *Self-portrait*. Vienna, Gemäldegalerie der Akademie der bildenden Künste.
2. *Suffer Little Children to Come unto Me*. Ottawa, National Gallery of Canada.
3. *Arrest of Christ*. Minneapolis, Institute of Arts.
4. *Crowning with Thorns*. London, Victoria and Albert Museum.

THE SPIRIT OF ZEN

By Axel MAUGEY

Madame Hsio-Yen Shih was named directress of the National Gallery of Canada on December 20, 1976. This discreet, efficient, realistic woman who handles the French language well was kind enough to answer our questions. Here are the essential parts of our interview.

Axel Maugey – Is the public familiar with the oriental section of the National Gallery?

Hsio-Yen-Shih – Not really, because one cannot say that there is, properly speaking, an oriental section at the National Gallery. We have only about twenty Chinese paintings purchased during the years or received as gifts; very recently there have been added to our collection thirty-five sculptures from the Southeast — India, Tibet, and Nepal — donated by Mr. Max Tanenbaum. All this is not much, obviously, but this harmonious ensemble, aesthetically valuable, already forms an important base. We hope to augment it thanks to the generosity of other donors.

Unfortunately, as we lack money, we have, so to speak, no purchasing policy in this domain. Well, you know that objects of quality from those parts of the world are expensive. More, the sale of Chinese

works is strictly controlled by the authorities of the country. These two reasons explain in part why the place of oriental art is so limited at the National Gallery and elsewhere in Canada. A third reason arises from the fact that most Canadian universities have only lately begun to encourage non-occidental studies; the United States, on the contrary, have developed their collections since the end of the Second World War; they are often of high quality. It must be said that they have immense funds available . . .

In Canada, except for the Royal Ontario Museum, whose collection is famous, no other museum possesses a department of such value. Much, therefore, remains to be done in this domain, not only at the National Gallery but also in the provinces.

A.M. – Which are the important works of your collection?

H.-Y.S. – In the Hindu domain, or more precisely the South Asian, the Tanenbaum donation comprises, among thirty-five other pieces, four of great style which belong to the empire of the Kouchans of the 2nd century A.D.; these are very rare sculptures. The famous classical period, which goes from the 5th to the 8th century and formed an aesthetic known by the name of gupta, is represented by some ten works that allow us to follow the evolution of the sculpture of central India, particularly that of the regions of Madura and Rajasthan. The other pieces of the collection originate, on the whole, in the medieval period, that is, from the 7th to the 10th century.

If Hellenism fostered the art of sculpture, the creation of gods and the representation of spirits, on the other hand, from the 12th century, with the arrival of Islam, iconoclastic religion par excellence, we face the decadence of the national Hindu art and the dismemberment of the empire into little kingdoms. The pâla-sena syle illustrates this phenomenon well. You know what followed: the English conquest that took place at the end of the 17th century.

In the Chinese domain, consisting, as I told you, of some twenty paintings, it seems interesting to me to recall that the first one was bought in 1914 in New York for 4000 dollars, a tidy little sum at the time. It was sold as being from the 14th century; actually, this Mongol warrior belongs to the 16th century. This painting, which does not really express Chinese taste, was made for the court.

We also own a group of paintings from the 18th century known by the name of eccentrics of Yangzhou; these are important. As much by style as by treatment of subject, they foretell, with a certain number of other works, the modernization of Chinese painting which for a long time failed to recognize occidental art. The most famous among the other paintings in our collection is attributed to Qiu Ying, an artist of the 16th century, which I greatly doubt. It seems, rather, to have been painted in the 18th century. Indeed, this fine neo-classical canvas, representing an emperor of the Han dynasty, is clearly different from the Ming style, in general stronger.

A.M. – This year the National Gallery is celebrating its hundredth anniversary. What aspirations have you on this occasion?

H.-Y.S. – First, I wish that the Gallery would retain its high level of quality and that its reputation should be maintained or even increased on the international plan; next, I desire that the Gallery contribute to making Canadian art known in its peculiar and so distinct cultures. Finally, I would like our collections to be a little better balanced. I believe, particularly, that it would be necessary to strengthen Canadian art . . . and oriental, of course, which seems difficult in the latter case on account of the lack of funds. Fortunately, travelling exhibitions and loans — the Suma Collection is a magnificent example of the possibilities offered to us, as we shall see in a moment — allow us to remedy the most serious shortages. Just think! Our budget has not changed in six years! But you know, as I do, the magnitude of the present crisis. This having been said, in spite of these painful restrictions I remain optimistic.

The Suma Collection

A.M. – Could you show us this collection that holds a unique place in the evolution of modern Chinese painting?

H.-Y.S. – The exhibition comprises more than eighty scrolls by contemporary Chinese artists; they belong to Mr. Suma, Japanese ambassador to Canada. The diversity of works and styles allows us to divide the collection into four parts: A) Modernism in the great tradition, with painters such as Xu Gu, Wu Chanshi, Huang Binhung, Pu Ru, Zhang Shanzhi and Zhang Daqian; B) Painters having studied abroad, such as Liu Haisu, Xu Beihung, Chen Zhifu, Wang Yachen, Yoa Hua, Zhang Shuqi, Wang Jiyuan and Liang Dingming; C) The Lingnan or Cantonese school of painting, with Gao Jianfu, Huang Shaoqiang and Chan Shuren; D) The modern Chinese painter Qi Baishi, represented here by thirty-four works.

A.M. – Several paintings from the first period seemed especially original to me. I am thinking of the scroll titled *Landscape* (1841) by Xu Gu, fairy-like in its design, almost tachist, indeed even pointillist, so characteristic of the transgressive elevation proper to Chinese tradition; I am thinking of a *Landscape* (1916) by Wu Changshi evoking monastic joys and in which one feels the peace of Buddha; I am thinking of *The Cloud Terrace of Hua Mountain* (1934) by Zhang Daqian, presenting an interior image of time-honoured China; finally, I am thinking of the *Scholar's Retreat* (1932) by Pu Ru, recalling the considerable influence of Chinese classicism; here, the infinity of the landscape responds to man's meditation.

H.-Y.S. – The first work you mentioned, that of Xu Gu, offers a very great historical interest. Its author, one of the important revolutionaries of the 19th century, in fact took part in the famous revolt at Taiping; in my opinion, we must particularly appreciate the eccentric style, without disguise and without softness; if calligraphy is put into the service of the nationalist cause, it does not prevent the expression of a modernism visionary and transgressive at the same time.

Wu Changshi, one of the most famous painters of this period, can be considered a man of transition between ancient and modern China; his painting, although traditional, always remains very personal; it seeks to recreate the great myths of the Chinese people. *The Cloud Terrace of Hua Mountain* by Zhang Daqian calls to mind one of the five sacred mountains of traditional China. These are the mountains that house the sanctuaries of Taoism; from them spring the sources of all mysteries. With this work we are dealing with an excellent technician who had a strong influence on several generations of painters but who, nevertheless, in spite of his undeniable qualities, is lacking in personal imagination.

A.M. – Among the works of the painters who studied abroad, I preferred *The Sabre Dance* (1933) by Liu Haisu, a sketch full of movement, joy and intoxication, and *White Pigeon* by Zhang Shuqi, a fairy-like figure of airy realism where the play of the colours comes from an art that has attained its full maturity.

H.-Y.S. – It may be necessary to explain that in China the sabre dance began in the 2nd century. Originally, of course, real sabres were used; later, scholars changed these ceremonies into celebrations, into exercises and then even into choreography. Zen was always present at such meetings aiming to improve the body and the mind. To-day's judo and karate derive from these practices. Yes, this *White Pigeon* by Zhang Shuqi brims with beauty; and with this artist colours are influenced by European techniques. Chinese palettes use only natural pigments. There it involves a pastel.

A.M. – Among the scrolls belonging to the third period, a picture of incomparable freshness attracted me: this was *Orchid Pavilion* (1929) by Chen Shuren; in such a space, light, beauty and gaiety blend wonderfully; this art seeks to enter into our feelings, thanks to the green colour that contributes to opening the heart's space. Is this painting not essentially feminine? Is its delicate quality not unique? Another scroll, *A Landscape* (1925) by Gao Jianfu, surprised me by the originality of its style. The lofty mountains in it are clearly different from the other peaks drawn by many Chinese painters.

H.-Y.S. – Indeed, *Orchid Pavilion* is worth a pause. What has often struck me, like you, in this picture is the foreign quality of the colours and the discipline that upholds the extreme delicacy of this painting; your surprise on the subject of *A Landscape* by Gao Janfu does not astonish me, for this painter took advantage, perhaps better than any other, of the lessons of occidental painting and especially of those of Japanese technique. You will find in it, besides, certain decorative aspects so dear to the Nipponese style and, particularly, the village above on the left, a genuine miniature, so perfect in design.

A.M. – With your permission, let us close this visit to the Suma Exhibition by choosing a work by Qi Baishi, the modern painter. Obviously, many pictures deserve to be mentioned, but let us keep only the most beautiful one, in my opinion *A Landscape*, dated 1922. Do not these bare, snowy peaks emerging at the centre of whirlwinds and waterfalls encourage the fantastic inspiration that presides at such a creation? How many transformations there are in such a painting!

H.-Y.S. – Qi Baishi is a professional, one of the best, because he perceives artistic elements in all things; these perceptions unceasingly distill freshness. Here we have an artist turned toward Buddha; the many voids symbolize such a desire. I understand your choice, because the spirit of Zen dwells in a painting of this kind; its function is to save the human being from the conventions of religion. This means that illumination comes without effort, since Buddha is in each . . .

Returning to Montreal, I think of the so-warm welcome of Mme Hsio-Yen Shih, her simplicity and her radiance. What counts for her, we can be sure, is the art of the whole world, all those figures of Anti-destiny testifying to a certain permanence of the human nature. Is not the essential aim of this hundredth anniversary to continue to serve creation with the means at hand? And then, let us wager that in the shadows waits generosity . . . perhaps another name for Anti-destiny.

(Translation by Mildred Grand)

. . . ON THE WAY

By François-Marc GAGNON

Of all the aspects of the National Gallery's collection, one of the most difficult, if it is not that of completing it (one never comes to an end in collecting), at least of making it representative of reality, is the foreign contemporary art sector. How can one give, even if only an idea, of the complexity of contemporary art without a typical fauve or cubist painting, without a Russian constructivist work, without some surrealist works, etc.? Even the sector of contemporary American art cannot claim representativeness without a certain number of names and pictures.

Thus it is with great joy that we learn[1] that the National Gallery has just acquired a painting by Barnett Newman titled *The Way I*. If the Gallery has now succeeded, for the last ten years, in following the American art trends, it faces quite another problem when catching up with older periods involved. Pictures are then much more rare, more expensive and more sought-after all over the world by rival institutions. The Gallery already owned a unique Jackson Pollock: the famous *Number 29* that Pollock painted on glass on the occasion of the short film (ten minutes) that Hans Namuth and Paul Falkenberg produced on this artist and his work at the end of 1950 and the beginning of 1951. But Barnett Newman was not represented there by a painting. This lack was a serious one because it deprived us of a prototypical work which has had, in Canada as elsewhere, an altogether preponderant influence. We are indebted to the contacts of Brydon Smith, at that time curator of foreign contemporary art, and to his perspicacity in having made possible the acquisition of this painting. May he find here the expression of our gratitude for his work.

Signed and dated below on the left: Barnett Newman 1951, *The Way I* is a picture of modest dimensions (101.6 by 76.2 cm; approximately 40 inches by 30) and austere colours: dark red at the centre, blackish on the periphery. The black seems to have been painted at two times: a brillant black background first, then a flat dark greenish coat, but uneven and showing in places the lower layer. The red of the central area is restrained and does not really separate this central area from a *background*. We have, rather, the impression of three juxtaposed vertical areas. As the painting does not resort to hard edge technique, we feel the hesitation of the hand in the meeting of the two lateral areas with the central one.

This painting now occupies a wall on the second storey of the Gallery. It is placed close to Jackson Pollock's *Number 29* (1950) and Clyfford Still's *1949 G* (1949), oddly in colours that bring to mind those of Barnett Newman. This arrangement is not by chance. It well indicates the place which, in curator Brydon Smith's mind, Newman's painting occupies in the Gallery's contemporary art collection. As a matter of fact, with the acquisition of the Newman one might say that the National Gallery has just filled one of the most important gaps in its collection regarding the representation of great trends in contemporary American painting. The Pollock marked one of its poles; the Newman reveals the other, and at the same time the Clyfford Still and the Arshile Gorky (*Charred Beloved II*, 1946) take on all their meaning.

The modesty of the dimensions of Newman's painting should not lead us to think it of little importance[2]. According to Newman himself, *The Way I* is the first example of a picture in which he had given up *zip*, the divisions of the pictorial area by narrow vertical bands, to replace them with equal elements, a decision that was going to have great importance for the rest of his work. Indeed, *The Way I* is divided in such a way that half of the pictorial surface is at the centre and the other half, cut into quarters, is carried to each side of this central area. As always with Newman, changes of this kind are first tested in small sizes. Also as always, they are unconsciously anticipated in an earlier painting. In the series of narrow pictures of 1950 that immediately prepare for *The Wild* (1950; oil on canvas; 95¾ in. by 1⅝; Moma Coll.) there is one, untitled (the fourth in the series, in T. Hess' classification; 74″ by 6″), in which the central band is twice as wide as the peripheral ones, according to the plan ¼-½-¼, exactly what would appear the following year in *The Way I*, but in quite another size.[2]

By suggesting that *The Way I* is situated chronologically between *Cathedra* (1951; oil and magma on canvas; 96″ by 17′9″; Annalee Newman Coll., N.Y.) and *Achilles* (1952; oil on canvas; 96″ by 79″; Annalee Newman Coll., N.Y.) Thomas B. Hess makes us understand how this little painting introduces unsuspected potentialities in Newman's work. *Cathedra* is a picture with zip, but *Achilles* is not. In *Achilles* or even in *Ulysses* (1952; oil on canvas; 11′ by 50″, Jaime C. Del Almo Coll., L.A.) zip has given way, either to a central area in the first or to a division into two areas corresponding to ½ and ⅔ of the total surface of the painting in the second. *Prometheus Bound* (1952; oil on canvas; 11′ by 50″; Private collection, N.Y.) goes still further, since the picture consists of only one pictorial area stopping just before touching the bottom of the picture. In a certain fashion *The Way I* shows the course that subsequent paintings will take.

But it shows this in another manner, revealed by Thomas B. Hess' subtle exegesis. According to him, one would find in some of Newman's paintings allusions to the Jewish mystique. Thus, in spite of its Latin title, *Cathedra* would allude to the theme of the Throne that, in the Bible, designates the place (ha makom) of the divine revelation. In this painting, the place is represented by the perfect square that appears somewhat misplaced on the right between two vertical zips. Very conscious of divine transcendence, the Jewish mystique does not aspire to the unio Deo (communion with God) like that of the Christians. It aspires to being able only to stand at the door (*The Gate* is also the title of a 1954 painting by Newman), while veiling its face in front of the Presence. The experience is not without danger, for it is said that one cannot see God without dying. This does not make it less fascinating. Further, it is necessary to find the path that leads to the door from which one can contemplate the place (ha makom). The furnace red of the central area in *The Way I* could not better signify this ambivalence of the road that leads to God. The seeker of God can entirely burn away there.

This exegesis seems to us to illuminate the picture from the interior as much as it seems to us necessary that it be pursued to explain the coherence of the whole in Newman's themes. Why is *The Way I* followed by *Achilles*, who, after all, is only a Greek hero? Newman has said that, in this picture, the red central area is Achilles' shield, the extraordinary work of art forged by Hephaestus which Homer described in detail. Like the Jewish mystique, Achilles goes forward on the path of danger, since he is preparing for battle. Is this not true also of Ulysses, whom his long and complicated journey led to places more and more dangerous as much for the soul as for the body?

But the theme of *Achilles* reveals another dimension to us. The Greek hero is covering himself with a finely sculpted shield, therefore with a work of art. And so, when Newman goes to the sources of the Jewish mystique as to those of Greek mythology, it is less for themselves that he does this. Rather, he seeks there metaphors of artistic creation and of the destiny of the modern artist. Like his old imitators, Newman was trying to penetrate into the *depths* of the human psyche, but could reach them only by signs and forms and, therefore, as through a veil.

1. See *Annual Bulletin I* of the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, 1979, p. 89.
2. For the remainder of our report our main reference is Thomas B. Hess, *Barnett Newman*, New York, Museum of Modern Art, 1971.

(Translation by Mildred Grand)

WROUGHT IRON COOKING AND FIREPLACE UTENSILS

By Richard J. WATTENMAKER

In the Winter 1971-72 issue of *Vie des Arts*[1] appeared an article on the acquisition by the Macdonald Stewart Foundation of a collection of approximately two thousand wrought iron utensils assembled by and formerly belonging to M. Hotermans in Paris. A portion of this extraordinary resource was first exhibited in 1971 at the Palais des Arts, Terre des Hommes and subsequently imaginatively installed in the Montreal Military and Maritime Museum, Ile Ste-Hélène. In 1975, the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, organized a traveling exhibition of sixty-three pieces selected from the reserve collection, tapping only a small number of the remaining treasures of the Macdonald Stewart Collection.

A considerable number of objects in this collection served as points of reference and study by a brilliant and dedicated French scholar-teacher, Raymond Lecoq (1913-1971). Professor Lecoq, beginning in 1950, devoted two decades to research on all the various types of household objects made of iron and had completed, just prior to his untimely death in 1971, manuscripts for two major volumes on the history and development of wrought iron in France from its Gallo-Roman origins to the early part of the nineteenth century. Madame Lecoq, the author's highly knowledgeable aide in his investigations, was able to arrange for the publication of the first of these two volumes, *Serrurerie Ancienne: Techniques et œuvres*, in 1973. Complications over its distribution kept this comprehensive study out of general circulation until 1978 when it began to receive deserved acclaim for its distinguished scholarship. For example, the *Bulletin de la Société des Amis de la Bibliothèque Forney* (Paris) in April 1978 described *Serrurerie Ancienne* as a "texte d'une grande qualité pédagogique . . . une véritable synthèse des réalisations des maîtres d'œuvres depuis l'âge du fer. M. Lecoq a réussi un exploit rare: une parfaite correspondance entre le texte et l'image, qui se complètent l'un l'autre et se mettent en valeur." Lecoq's work thus creatively builds upon and extends the great tradition of such 19th and early 20th century Frenchmen as Havard, Liger, Frémont and D'Allemagne.

Now the second volume of Lecoq's systematic contribution to the understanding of the material culture of France, *Les Objets de la vie domestique — Ustensiles en fer de la cuisine et du foyer, des origines au XIX^e siècle*, has been published[2]. As with Lecoq's previous volume and also his earlier books on ferronerie, posthumous articles and works on other subjects[3], this handsome edition is illustrated with drawings by the author as well as with photographs taken by him which comprised an extensive personal archive extending to more than 9000 individual items. In *Les Objets de la vie domestique*, Raymond Lecoq illustrates in both drawings and photographs, more than seventy-five examples which are now in Montreal, discussing many of these objects in the text. Thus his book has a special attraction for Canadians above and beyond the growing worldwide interest in understanding the everyday practical activities in the life of the common man in earlier times. It is to this very end that such recent studies as *Arthur Tremblay, forgeron de village* and *Le Forgeron et le ferblantier* have been directed and published in Québec[3]. The Musée National des Arts et Traditions Populaires in Paris has provided an important centre for similar approaches to the study of French culture. Suzanne Tardieu, maître de recherche au Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) and herself the author of important studies of this type, has written of the author in her preface to *Les Objets de la vie domestique:* "Je garde le souvenir de l'esprit ouvert, curieux, de ce travailleur isolé qui, patiemment, réunissait tout ce qui — et même au delà — était l'objet de ses préoccupations. Il accumulait les notes, il entassait les références. Rien ne lui paraissait étranger à son domaine . . . Il exploitait toutes les sources possibles . . . il détectait tous les travaux qui pouvaient avoir été écrits sur les objets de métal."

Les Objets de la vie domestique comprises thirty chapters divided into five main sections of differing length: *Généralités; Production du feu; L'âtre; La cuisine; L'éclairage*. Tracing the history of fireplaces and kitchens from prehistoric times, the author marshals the essential — often sparse — relevant documentation available and combines modern archeological discoveries with his own firsthand investigations of pieces in the Musée des Antiquités Nationales, au château de Saint-Germain-en-Laye. Representative chapters include typological and morphological studies as well as inquiries into the etymological derivations of the names and terms for objects often known by different designations in various regions of France. Thus, for example, under the subheading "Les Accessoires de soutien" in the first section devoted to l'Âtre, we learn that the modern word "chenet" has as its origin "chienet" or "petit chien". In the Lyonnais the term "chien de feu" is used; "quenet" being the Norman variant. Lecoq lays the groundwork for each of his discussions in a similarly detailed, but never dry, manner. "Nous avons vu, au chapitre *Chenets*, que les chenets et les landiers étaient souvent confondus dans les inventaires. Dans le Bordelais et la Gascogne, on les nomme *landey*; en Bretagne: *lander*; dans le Limousin: *landiei*; *andiei* étant le trépied qui supportait la cuve à lessive; *ander*, dans le Languedoc désignait le chenet; *landi* était usité dans le Mâconnais. Les landiers sont parfois nommés "chapelles" . . . (p. 62). The author cites early inventories to document his commentary. Exhaustive self-contained essays on subjects such as the tournebroche are so comprehensive as to constitute short monographs in themselves.

Lecoq's approach is always based upon his intimate knowledge of the utensils. They are always his primary sources and the research embodied in the book reveals this on every page. Intimately familiar with, and gleaning supporting evidence drawn from the early chroniclers — visual and written records of terminology and usage such as inventories, prints, early technical treatises, guild regulations and illuminated manuscripts — Lecoq eschews piling up unnecessary literary documentation; rather he deploys it judiciously to set the stage for his prodigious examination and elucidation of mechanisms, types and changes in style. Where appropriate he refers us to data published by Viollet-le-Duc, Victor Gay and Henry-René D'Allemagne as well as Diderot, to name but a few of his secondary sources. Avoiding quaint legends — of which there are no small number emanating from the mythology associated with Vulcan and his successors — and trusting to the hard facts of his observations, Lecoq by no means relies exclusively on his distinguished predecessors. His own discoveries are modestly embedded in his texts. Although the author's death precluded preparation of a critical bibliography such as that given in *Serrurerie ancienne*, nevertheless the serious reader will be able to locate the sources cited by Lecoq throughout the text.

Lecoq's amalgamation of technical expertise — he understood the blacksmith's métier and also that of the locksmith — scholarship and love of the material provides us with a rare balance of perspective in what could have been either a technical manual, a mere pictorial compendium or a compilation of sources, all of which already exist in abundance. The aesthetic sensitivity of a man of action in the field as well as museums and museum reserve collections, antique dealers, auction room and flea market, informs his every observation and is neatly reflected in his cautious judgements as to such aspects as specific origin and dating. He is straightforward and incisive — nowhere is found the spirit of dogmatism, either as to type, date, origin or function. Here is Lecoq introducing his discussion of the crémaillère under which classification he goes on to identify four distinguishable varieties, all of which he examines and copiously illustrates: "Pendant longtemps, la cuisine fut le lieu des réunions familiales, et l'on y recevait également les invités. On comprend le soin que l'on apportait à embellir les ustensiles qui en devinrent la parure. Le crémaillère justifiait sa place d'honneur par son décor de volutes, fleurs de lis, coqs, trèfles, cœurs, fortes incisions gravées sur la tige; ce, suivant les époques, les provinces ou les sentiments de ceux qui offraient cet ustensile. C'est un des rares objets que, par tradition, on laissait pendre dans la cheminée lorsqu'on abandonnait sa demeure. Dans certaines provinces, on la considère encore comme un ustensile sacré, et elle conserve de nos jours tout son ancien prestige: *pendre la crémaillère* reste le symbole de la prise de possession du foyer." (p. 197).

As a guide for those seeking knowledge of the interaction of the objects and human activity, Lecoq is a pathfinder. His classifications are often subtle and minute, thus attributing to the good sense of our forebearers the multiform distinctions in what at first appears to be a simple everyday household utensil. Indirectly, Lecoq's analyses confirm that in general humankind was then much more intimately in contact with its environment and more aware of the physical exigencies of life than since the mid-nineteenth century, when the industrial revolution introduced mass production on a broad scale, specialization and the concept of "labor-saving efficiency". Lecoq takes us into the kitchen and shows us in detail the intimate workings of this human awareness. He objectifies for us how our ancestors cherished a sense of unity with their indigenous surroundings and at the same time held dear what was man-made. Life was based on direct personal experience and individual trial and error, and this equilibrium between necessity and inventiveness, this empirical objectivity, left the inspired craftsman free to experiment within a broad range of human values. Unpretentiously created in response to specific needs, these utensils were frequently ingeniously adapted to the unique peculiarities of the particular fireplace for which they were forged. Lecoq reveals to us both aspects — the practical and creative spirit of the blacksmith — as he graphically presents in words, drawings and photographs the evolutionary process by which this experimentation often refined the necessities of life into dignified and beautiful works of art.

In his brief avertissement, the author writes: "Chacune de ces créations, en particulier les plus humbles, que se transmettaient de père en fils les gens de condition modeste est demeurée vivante, car l'utilisateur aussi y a laissé son empreinte. La patine des manches témoigne de leur emploi quotidien, l'usure d'un cuilleron ou d'un fourchon, consécutive au frottement contre le fond des récipients, nous dit si ce fut un gaucher ou un droitier qui s'en servit. Tournez ces pages, elles évoqueront pour vous les joyeuses agapes d'une époque révolue et un art de vivre oublié que nous révèle parfois encore un objet surgi du passé."

Raymond Lecoq was a natural teacher. We may discern from the above passage the good humour and humanity which infused his

passionate quest to learn and transmit the secrets of these utensils. Being unsentimental, he was ever-conscious that the objects exemplify facets of creativity as surely do any other products and that we may gain through their study more than mere anthropological facts but truly a special appreciation of the psychology and culture of our ancestors. The gentle intensity, conviction of purpose and insight with which Raymond Lecoq pursued his investigations resulted in a solid achievement which has enriched the fund of knowledge for students and scholars alike in many fields.

1. Cf. Michel Lessard et Huguette Marquis, *La Collection Macdonald-Stewart*, Vol. XVI, No. 65, p. 20-23.
2. Paris, Berger-Levrault, 1979. 318 pp.; ill. with 780 drawings and 300 photographs by the author, 10 colour plates.
3. *Ferronnerie ancienne*. Paris, Éditions Massin, 1961; *Fer forgé et serrurerie*, Paris, Éditions G.-M. Perrin, 1962; *Sept études sur la serrurerie antique*, in *Techniques Industrielles*, No. 89 (Nov. 1977). Paris, Centre National de Documentation Pédagogique; *Les Bamiléké, une civilisation africaine*. Paris, Présence Africaine, 1953.
4. F. Dubé and B. Genest, *Arthur Tremblay, forgeron de village*. Québec, Ministère des Affaires Culturelles, 1978; J.-P. Hardy, *Le Forgeron et le ferblantier*. Montreal, Les Éditions du Boréal Express (Coll. Histoire Populaire du Québec, 1979). See also *L'Art du serrurier et du ferronnier — Serrurerie traditionnelle européenne*. Montreal, Musée des Beaux-Arts, 1978, en collaboration avec le Centre d'études sur la langue, les arts et les traditions populaires des Francophones en Amérique du Nord.

BILL FEATHERSTON'S RECENT PAINTINGS: THE MACHO-MYTHOLOGY

By Arthur PERRY

The millworkers in Squamish, B.C., are a tough, fun-loving lot. Much of their entertainment is both physical and violent; it can entail the purposeful demolition of their cars, or the brawling, teeth-loosening contact of non-professional hockey. Their world is one built on the macho-myth, on brute strength, and on all-male bull-aggression.

Squamish is a small town that is kept going by its pulp mill. The forty-five mile drive from Vancouver envelopes the viewer in one of Canada's most spectacular stretches of expansive coastal cliffs and dotted gulf islands. Driving the long sloping descent into Squamish towards the climbing columns of mill smoke is an unparalleled vista of sea and rugged West Coast landscape.

The town itself reflects the mill and its workers: small wood-frame houses, a pool hall and the central drinking spot, The Chieftain. The cars in Squamish belong to the pre-energy crisis period — Cadillacs, Buicks, Meteors — the heavy American beasts of mucho-macho steel. They're old too, usually from the mid and late sixties. Yet all are kept spotless with continual body work and engine know-how.

Another notable point of Squamish is its large number of heavily chromed motorcycles; Harleys and Triumphs are everywhere. The overall feel to Squamish's physicality is one of brute strength and powerful streetware. It's no place for introversion or weakness.

Bill Featherston has lived in Squamish for a number of years now. As an artist his rôle is the antithesis of his buddies in the pool hall and The Chieftain bar. Yet Featherston's image has never been one of an aesthete. His presence and manner is pure mill town. It has taken Featherston over half a century to cultivate the gruff hard-nosed persona he carries around, and only in Squamish could he really expect to give it full breathing room.

The mill workers are Featherston's people. Back-slapping, swearing, and continually drinking beer, Featherston has become as much a part of Squamish as its famed sandy-coloured stone used for West Vancouver fireplaces. As mentioned, the mill workers enjoy themselves by being tough, and one of their eccentric means of venting their mill-fever is to don the rôle of bikers: they become the Squamish Tribesmen, an organized gang of romantically-minded meanies who invade the American southwest. It's a violent outlet of aggressive energy with which they build up a peer structure of power and fear.

In his exhibition at the Vancouver Art Gallery (April 20 to June 3, 1979), Bill Featherston presents a number of large canvases dealing with the mill workers' multi-lives. In works such as *Les Enfants au Paradis*, 1979, we see the candid view of a Tribesman as he downs a canned beer amidst a gala of motorcycle chrome on a California desert. In this work, any sense of power is arrested. The bikes rest idly against the open landscape. What Featherston does, and does so well, is to humanize the social facades built up around people. In other words, we see the Tribesman in this painting as an 'enfant', as a child playing at being tough. This is not a moment of violence, even if the skull logos on the heavy bikes point in that direction. What Featherston's art is attempting to show in all his views of the Squamish workers is their assumed mythic rôles and their tough-guy affectations. The Tribesmen are not shown as romantic heroes or malicious villains, but rather they are seen as merely temporary toughies in the rôle of bikers.

The same is true for Featherston's series of *Demo Derby* paintings. These same mill workers, when not biking their way into America, are bashing into each other in gaudy painted cars. The fascination of these men is their rôle shifting. At one time they will deck themselves out with horrific skull insignia, at another time they will climb into cars painted with images of Cap'n Crunch or Loony Bird cartoons, and at still another time they will put on hockey uniforms at two o'clock in the morning and attack each other with sticks and flying elbows. Their lives are a series of segmented lives, all of which are masquerades for brutal warfare in the name of entertainment.

Featherston's paintings of half-crazed mill workers racing around a dirt track with steel I-beams welded to their doors and chains holding down their trunks are paintings of action, compared to his Tribesmen paintings that are paintings of introspection and thoughtful silences. The Tribesmen paintings expose the human side of the tough guy as exemplified by the cinematic rôle of Marlon Brando's *Wild One*, while the *Demo Derby* paintings point to the aggressive gladiator spirit of Charlton Heston's *Ben Hur*: both rôles are macho, and both rôles allow the protagonists to prove their virile lust for danger and excitement.

Featherston views the powerful playfulness of these men as equivalent to the force and aggression shown in Norman Jewison's *Rollerball*. Like the players in *Rollerball*, when the mill workers get into uniform (hockey, biker or the dirt track variety), they become instantly mean. The game becomes a patsy for the violence. Featherston's hockey paintings are clutterings of uniforms and bodily contact: they are not single heroic acts. Unlike Ken Danby's famed *In the Crease* (from which Featherston lifted the title for his own hockey paintings), Featherston is not into romanticizing or creating Canadian icons. His desire is to capture some of the sloppy unprofessional exuberance that goes under the name of hockey in the early morning hours at Squamish.

Being a mill town, Squamish loves its logs. The demo-derby's track is ringed with logs and sawdust fills the track. It is the logging festival, though, that gives the mill workers the best chance to affront the logs they work with daily. In these festivals, participants climb towering poles of stripped Douglas fir; they saw and axe their way through countless feet of timber to beat the stopwatch.

In the logging world is a man of mystic proportions. His name in Ron Hartell. Hartell is the undisputed master of the axe. Everyone in the small B.C. towns such as Campbell River, Quesnel, Sooke and Squamish knows Hartell. To the mill workers he is the real life equivalent of Brando's biker or Heston's Ben Hur; he is the bruising lumberjack who comes to town, levels logs in record time, then leaves before the chips are cleaned up. Wherever he goes there is excitement and a sense of raw untamed theatre. Featherston's painting of Hartell is one of his best. Where he usually moves away from heroes, Featherston has joined the mill workers in their praise of this logging champ. Hartell is their champ and not a media image whom everybody knows. Though he is virtually unknown in large urban centres such as Vancouver, in the small towns he visits Hartell is a true superstar and Featherston has captured the reason why in a remarkable image of low-keyed colour, realist modelling and the power of abstract patterning. The sense of intense concentration and bodily dynamics pulls the viewer into a personality that recalls the energy of Bernini's *David*.

Bill Featherston's art is bothersome to many observers. They see his attention to 'lower class' workers as a patronizing bit of social realism or quasi-dedication to the 'real' people in the name of art. But Featherston is nothing but sincere in his intrigue and love for his Squamish friends. What fascinates Featherston is not the chance to *study* their lives, but rather the chance to *experience* their lives.

The subject of Featherston's art is image and façade. It is rôle and persona. It is an attempt to join in the workers' intense ability to affront all that is weak and listless with a violent life-plan of macho expression.