

Image de l'art contemporain An Image of Contemporary Art

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IMAGE DE L'ART CONTEMPORAIN

Au Mexique, l'art contemporain est lié à l'évolution d'un contexte historique et social unique en Amérique. Principal foyer de l'Amérique précolombienne, le Mexique a conservé l'esprit créateur qui a animé le caractère des cultures anciennes. On commence seulement à connaître et à mesurer l'influence des hautes cultures indiennes qui l'on façonné et qui lui ont laissé le colossal héritage d'œuvres architecturales, sculpturales et picturales qui comptent parmi les trésors de l'art mondial.

En pleine effervescence, l'art mexicain d'aujourd'hui s'est inscrit, au début du siècle, dans le courant de la modernité. L'écho de la grande révolte de l'art du 20^e siècle n'a pas tardé à atteindre le Mexique. Mais l'artiste mexicain a su préserver farouchement son indépendance. Il s'intéresse peu aux écoles et fait une œuvre entièrement personnelle. D'où la grande variété d'expressions, le dédain des modes éphémères et l'enracinement dans les valeurs authentiques et la vitalité des symboles.

Comment ne pas être étonné, en particulier quand on vient du Nord, par l'utilisation de la couleur chez les peintres mexicains. Envahissante, exubérante, elle demeure la valeur dominante de l'expression. Les artistes mexicains sont conscients de travailler dans une société de plus en plus technicienne, mais ils se souviennent qu'hier encore ils étaient des paysans, des artisans, des bâtisseurs. L'étroite relation de l'artiste mexicain contemporain à son milieu, même s'il vit pendant plusieurs années à l'étranger, éclaire la réalité de ses œuvres. Avoir connu dès la plus tendre enfance l'impact de l'art précolombien laisse une empreinte indélébile, mais l'attrance du monde, l'esprit de conquête et d'espace nouveau, le besoin de rejoindre les grandes voies universelles sont manifestes et font partie du défi artistique.

Nous avons eu le privilège de préparer, depuis près d'un an, la matière du numéro actuel en étroite collaboration avec la revue *Artes Visuales* et, tout particulièrement, avec Carla Stellweg, alors directrice de la Revue, et avec José Carlos Gonzales, son coordonnateur-administrateur. Grâce à eux, nous avons pu rencontrer des artistes, des critiques d'art mexicains et des représentants du monde de l'édition, visiter des ateliers et des galeries d'art. A la suite de ces consultations, nous fûmes convaincus de l'intérêt qu'il y aurait à préparer un cahier spécial sur l'art mexicain d'aujourd'hui où certaines tendances et expériences, qui nous ont paru importantes, seraient portées à l'attention de nos lecteurs. Le peu d'espace dont nous disposons limite nos inventaires. Nous nous sommes tenus à la peinture et à la photographie, tout en espérant avoir une autre occasion de rendre hommage aux sculpteurs et à la vitalité de l'art multidisciplinaire.

Il nous reste à remercier nos collègues mexicains, nos collaborateurs spéciaux et nos traducteurs de leur coopération, de même que le Directeur général des Affaires Culturelles au Secrétariat des Relations Extérieures, Señor Rafael Tovar y de Teresa, de l'accueil aimable que nous avons reçu au Mexique. Notre reconnaissance la plus vive s'adresse au Ministère des Affaires Intergouvernementales du Québec pour l'assistance qu'il nous a accordée afin que nous puissions établir des contacts avec nos collègues mexicains. J'aimerais souligner, en particulier, la collaboration soutenue que nous avons reçue de Luc Vachon à toutes les étapes du projet, sans oublier l'aide sympathique du Délégué du Québec à Mexico, Henri Dorion, ainsi que celle du Conseiller en coopération, François Le Duc.

Enfin, au moment où les relations Nord-Sud sur le plan économique et social sont à l'ordre du jour, il nous semble opportun de rappeler que les relations culturelles doivent aussi trouver voix au chapitre, et nous sommes particulièrement heureux d'avoir pu poser un geste dans cette direction.

Andrée PARADIS

By Marie RAYMOND

AN IMAGE OF CONTEMPORARY ART

By Andrée PARADIS

In Mexico contemporary art is linked to the evolution of an historical and social context unique in America. Chief centre of preColumbian America, Mexico has preserved the creative spirit that animated the character of the ancient cultures. We are only beginning to know and measure the influence of the old Indian cultures that formed it and that left to that spirit the immense heritage of architectural, sculptural and pictorial works that are among the treasures of world art.

In full ferment, Mexican art of to-day was established at the beginning of the century in the current of modernity. The echo of the great art revolt of the twentieth century soon reached Mexico. But the Mexican artist knew how to strongly preserve his independence. He is little interested in schools and carries on an entirely personal work. From which arises great variety of expression, disdain for transitory styles and implanting the authentic values and vitality of symbols.

How should one not be astonished, particularly when one comes from the North, by the use of colour among Mexican painters? Invasive and exuberant, it remains the predominant value of expression. Mexican artists are aware of working in a more and more technological society, but they remember that yesterday still they were peasants, artisans and builders. The close relationship of the contemporary Mexican artist with his milieu, even if he lives abroad for some years, illuminates the reality of his works. Having known from earliest childhood the impact of preColumbian art leaves an indelible mark, but the attraction of the world, the spirit of conquest and new space, the need to join broad universal paths are evident, and are a part of the artistic challenge.

For about a year, we have had the privilege of preparing the material for the present issue in close collaboration with *Artes Visuales* magazine and very particularly with Carla Stellweg, then director of the magazine, and with José Carlos Gonzales its co-ordinator-administrator. Thanks to them, we have had the opportunity of meeting artists, Mexican art critics and representatives from the publishing world, and of visiting studios and art galleries. As a result of these consultations, we were convinced of the interest there would be in preparing a special section on to-day's Mexican art, where certain trends and experiments which seemed important to us would be brought to the attention of our readers. The small space available to us limits our scope. We have restricted ourselves to painting and photography, while hoping to have another opportunity to pay homage to sculptors and to the vitality of multidisciplinary art.

It remains for us to thank our Mexican colleagues, our special contributors and our translators for their co-operation, as well as the Director General of Cultural Affairs at the Foreign Relations Secretariat, Señor Rafael Tovar y Teresa, for the gracious welcome we received in Mexico. Our keenest gratitude is offered to the Ministry of Intergovernmental Affairs of Quebec for the help given to us in order that we might be able to establish contacts with our Mexican colleagues. I would like to emphasize particularly the untiring co-operation that we received from Luc Vachon at every stage of the project, as well as mentioning the friendly assistance of the Delegate of Quebec at Mexico City, Henri Dorion, and that of the Councillor for co-operation, François Le Duc.

In conclusion, at the time when North-South relations on the economic and social plan are the order of the day, it seems opportune to us to remember that cultural relations must also have their say and we are especially happy to have been able to take a step in that direction.

(Translation by Mildred Grand)

It was in 1959 that the Bank of Canada became interested in the idea of creating a national currency collection. Upon consultation with numerous institutions and Canadian cities, the project met with enough interest and collaboration to encourage a real impetus in just a few years. The bank designated as depository and administrator of what has to-day become one of the most important collections in the world was also commissioned to make this collection accessible to the public. It comprises some hundred thousand coins, tokens, old or modern bills from different countries and regions in Canada, as well as the wonderful substitutes in use before the appearance of real currency. Accumulated during the course of years, these acquired, donated or loaned items form the prestigious base that has allowed curators and advisers in numismatics to choose presentations for the museum¹. When elaborating plans for its new premises², the Bank of Canada chose to house the collection in its first permanent building, which has remained externally intact. The gray granite façade is of classical inspiration, the doors are of oxidized copper ornamented with copies of six ancient coins and two amphora, replicas of vases used in ancient Greece to conserve oil and grain. Set back, two higher towers now raise on each side their slender mass with transparent surfaces and in the lightly tinted glass are outlined the neo-gothic silhouettes and verdigris roofs of the neighbouring buildings.

The entrance to the Museum³ is opposite, on the prompt-side, enclosed in a vitreous framework that resembles a large luminous cage with a pool of water reflecting trees and plants. A little apart, but closer to the movement of the pedestrians who see it as they go, rises a Stone of Yap, a kind of round flat menhir perforated at the centre like a doughnut. This huge disk could be an immense sculpture of modernity, but it is in fact a symbol of wealth used for a thousand years and more as a medium of exchange among the people of the Carolines. It is commonly thought that its origin goes back to the wish of a tribal chief who admired the full moon and wanted to find something on earth equal to it in shape and size. All the minuscule stones of Yap were taken from rocks hidden in the caverns of the Palaos Islands; they had been worked and then pierced to aid in transporting them by raft for a long distance. Placed along paths and around bamboo or thatched-roof huts, they owed their value and importance to the labour of those who had worked on them; their names and histories were known to all members of the community and were honoured by them. The presence of this millennial coin, reamed by the hand of man in a crystalline calcite and which so easily resembles a work of art, does not seem strange in the setting of the new architectural complex where the resources of the present and those of by-gone days are combined in a fortunate manner.

The instructive rôle of the Museum is added to-day to its classic vocation of being the guardian and the reflection of civilizations. This place, traditionally the depository of artistic values, has acquired a new dimension since it became in an almost systematic way a locale for instruction; all the educational services which are at present attached to it bear witness to this very day. It is in tune with this view that the creators of the décor and the display of articles have ordered and supervised the explanatory texts, planned the use of space and created the whole disposition of presentation at the Currency Museum. Their production applied itself to assuring the co-ordination of the history of human factors, interior architecture and design. They have chosen to interpret these objects displayed in such a way as to cause one to discover that one does not really understand their meaning unless one begins by realizing the motivations of the men who variously chose them, then modified them by forging them with their own hands until they succeeded in giving them the distinctive forms and marks whose meaning is universally recognized. This approach follows the lode of history; it begins with the statement of the order of exchange that is at the origin of legal tender and proceeds through evolution, at the heart of which are inscribed the artistic stages travelled by various civilizations. A theatrical ambience, given by the lighting, the choice of colours, the repetition of the square motif to unify the different methods of exhibiting and the constant presence of the medium of the hand as dramatic factor of communication, has contributed to resolving the major problem, which consisted of creating a living atmosphere around artifacts that are, for the most part, of small size. Photographic arrangements joined to concrete elements such as the copy of a Tang horse, a head of Buddha, the capital of a column of the Middle Ages, the reproduction of a fur counter from the Hudson's