

*"Few people would want to live with a Mondrian"*

# True art appreciation excludes personal taste

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blue skies and bright colors, but I saw it as white.

E: It's evident that the colours in your work did not grow from a Canadian environment.

P: There's not a Canadian or an American feeling in my work — it's more European. I draw every day, and I think it shows.

E: How do you feel about the recent trend towards process art?

P: I feel that conceptual art is like sexual fantasy. It's interesting, but it doesn't substitute for the real thing. There must be a product. Masturbation is not procreation.

Many of the people in process art can't do anything else. On the other hand if you look at someone like Marcel Duchamp, you'll find that he was a superb craftsman. Anybody who is interested in process art should look at the documentation he made of his life and work.

Most kids today are art magazine educated and that's all they've got. What was done yesterday is known today through the proliferation of art magazines. And what is taught is

that you have to be in vogue to be 'with it'. In today's art world you must be audacious rather than good.

### BASICS

E: Why do you think that students are not being taught the basic skills?

P: Young people do not want any formal discipline today, and institutions are just giving in to them.

E: Does this situation arise because institutions hire artists who excel in their field but are not good teachers?

P: I am for artists being hired as teachers 100 per cent. But the question is — what kind of artists? If a teacher is insecure as an artist, he might end up holding a new and exciting student back because of jealousy.

E: What would you do if you were in charge of an art school or programme?

P: One thing I would insist on is that everyone should draw from the figure at least twice a week.

E: What do you think of an art school such as York's fine art department, which operates within a university where students are also tak-

ing academic subjects?

P: It's a dilettante approach to the study of art. There has to be a deeper commitment. It's true that they learn appreciation but it's like in public school — you took music in public or high school, but did you really learn it? Total submersion is what is really important.

E: In your opinion, are there any good Canadian art schools?

### WASTE OF TIME

P: I don't know of one school in Canada that I can honestly recommend. But I also know that school is not really necessary. For example, you can go and draw from the figure every day, if you want to, at the Three Schools on Markham Street, for example, without registering for a course.

E: Why do you think families are reticent to let their children study art?

P: Unfortunately, the world of art has a terrible reputation for misfits and for whoring around. The artists I know and respect the most in Toronto lead an ordinary, if not ascetic life. Fournier, for example, is a fun-

damentalist Christian and gives 20 per cent of all he makes to the church. In many cases they lead an almost monastic life, because they are too busy creating to have time to fool around. People romanticize and sensationalize the life of an artist.

All people remember about Van Gogh is that he cut his ear off and committed suicide. What they don't look at is the amount of work he turned out in a short period of time and that he didn't have time to lead a 'bohemian life'. People want gossip, and art magazines give this kind of garbage on another level.

Art magazines are guilty of fraudulence and creating modish language. They also create fashions and styles that have no real basis. Students become victims of this, because they want to perform immediately, and they don't have the patience to wait for tomorrow.

### CRITICS ALL

E: How does one develop an analytical and critical approach to the appreciation of art?

P: Personal taste has nothing to do with an appreciation of art — and

that's the first thing people have to learn. You have to understand art to appreciate it. Someone can say he doesn't like a work of art, but he can't say it's a piece of shit if he doesn't understand it.

For example, Mondrian is a giant in the art world but very few people would want to live with a Mondrian in their homes. The impact Mondrian has had on the art world, and whether I like his work or not, are two separate issues.

E: Could not process art be considered later as valuable or as important as the effect Mondrian has had?

P: Process art is negative in so many ways. If young people have any talent they will learn from negative experiences, and if not, it doesn't matter anyway. But all in all, it does take time to evaluate all kinds of experiences. Above all it comes back to knowing the basics.

I did a CBC documentary on Josef Albers, who received an honorary degree from York last year, who is now 87 years old, and asked him, "you have been painting coloured squares for 40 years now, what advice do you have for students?" Albers replied, "You must know how to draw. An artist is someone who, if something comes into his head he can do it with his hand." And I agree; a musician must know his scales; there's no other way to do it.

### HASSLES

E: What particular problems do you have in your own work?

P: One of the battles with painting the series in my exhibition was delineating between design and drawing. It is a very difficult problem to articulate, but part of it has to do with elegance versus awkwardness of shapes. One can draw a nude as an illustration or a drawing. Mostly you just have to feel the difference.

E: How do you approach this particular problem of design versus drawing?

P: I set for myself in each picture the problem that no two areas in any picture should be the same colour. I also attempt to have balance in the paintings, without having any shapes the same outline or size.

E: You also seem to have set a problem for yourself in limiting the size of your paper.

P: Yes. Young people think they have to paint big to paint well. A canvas eight by 10 feet is impressive bare, let alone having paint on it. Large paintings are a fashion that have nothing to do with quality.

Another fashion is the trend to 'tough colours' which are often nothing but ugly colours. What they do is sell a reaction against pretty paintings and pretty colours.

E: Is it difficult to maintain your integrity about art as a dealer?

P: I'm constantly on the brink of financial disaster because I display things I believe in. I also display art which I feel reflects a catholic taste. Just look at some of the exhibitions coming up: De Kooning now, and soon Stanczak, Albers, and Callaja.

E: Has the fact that you are a dealer helped your art?

P: If anything, it has been a detriment. I probably see more art than anybody in Toronto, between travelling, and people bringing their work to me. I am always worried that unknowingly I will be influenced by other artists' work. I was very happy to find that my show wasn't like anybody else's.

## Graffiti evening

It's Graffiti American style this weekend, Friday, Saturday and Sunday at 8:30 p.m. in CLH-L. Shell out that measly \$1.50 (general) or \$1.25 (Bethune) and you're all set for a nostalgia trip.

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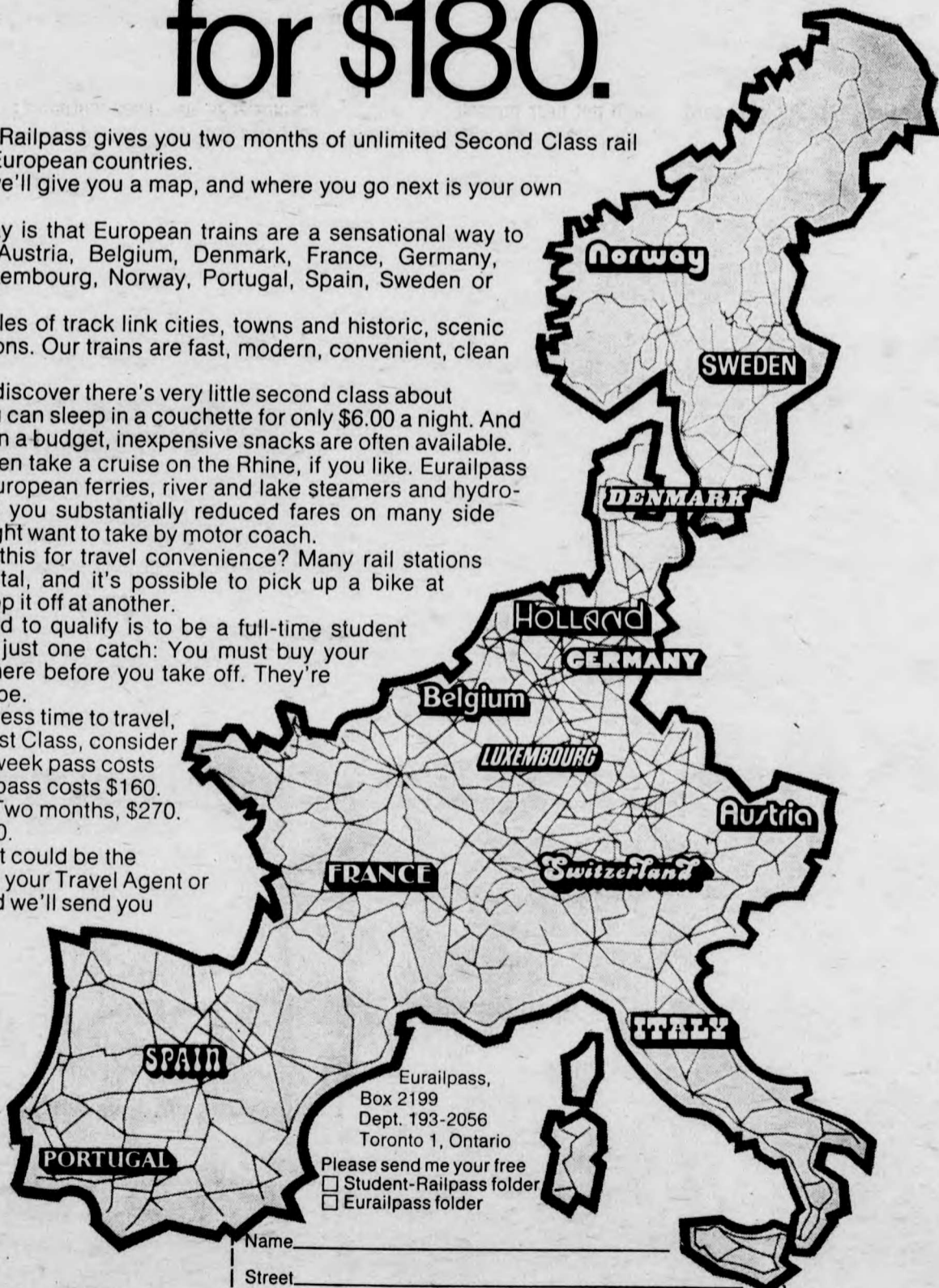
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