

Gagnon thinks of his own work as highly analytical. The apparently random drips on his canvases are *destiny*. A painting is not an *event*, as Jackson Pollock may have thought; it is a conception in which destiny plays its irrevocable role. Gagnon, in short, is constantly torn between formal structures and the incalculable forces of destiny. These tensions – a dialogue between formal structures and absurdities – are his deep subject. As he puts it: "The tightrope of elegance: how do you walk it without falling off? . . . That's what real life is about, anyway."

These tensions, and this somewhat painful demand for freedom to respond as a *self*, have led Charles Gagnon through a remarkable career. He is indefatigable. In 1962, for example, he was represented in exhibitions in Spoleto, Italy; Canadian painting touring Africa; Galerie Denyse Delrue, Montreal; Louisville, Kentucky; Albright-Knox Gallery, Buffalo; Musée des Beaux Arts, Montreal; Jerrold Morris

Gallery, Toronto; Western Canada Art Circuit; Rochester, N.Y.; El Arte Actual de America Y España in Madrid, Barcelona, Paris, Brussels, London, Amsterdam, Berlin, Munich.

After working with a staff of 40 on Expo '67 projects for the "Man the Provider" pavilion (Agriculture), and other Expo projects for Hydro Québec, I.B.M., and the Christian pavilion, he decided to go to Japan for a period of rest and self-recollection.

On his return, he came to Loyola University in Montreal. But his work has continued unimpeded. In 1968 he perhaps became the first of Canada's streakers in an auto-portrait in which he runs across one of his own compositions. He finds teaching very tiring; the CEGEP's (Community Colleges) send on students who are only job-oriented, while in his opinion the real *universitas* should be "a totally useless, mind-expanding thing," not a trade school. Consciousness and self-awareness are not four-

letter words. But Gagnon believes that small groups *can* accomplish mind-expanding things. Our need is to work in small groups, and to stop spelling "university" as "factory."

But what of the spring show at Marlborough, Godard, Montreal – Gagnon's first exhibition in five years? He has limited himself to oil on canvas, and oil pastel drawings on paper. The works are very muted and contemplative in contrast to the fine, bold green and black-white canvases which he used to show at the Jerrold Morris Gallery. Essentially, these new works are concerned with the formal problems between ordered spaces (usually horizontal) and the incursions of color and freely brushed painting that threaten the straight lines, or bring the two elements into low-keyed, harmonious relations. A second theme places a vertical oblong within a second oblong, and allows the exterior oblong to challenge the interior space.

The result in every case is a kind of dynamic



CHARLES GAGNON

*Splitscreenspace*, 1974, oil pastel on paper, 22" x 28"

Photo: Gabor Szilasi