



The artist
Photo: Gabor Szilasi

CHARLES GAGNON: the compleat artist

HUGO McPHERSON

Charles Gagnon – born in Montreal in 1934 – is a *rara avis* in modern art, because he is involved in many media; he lets them overlap freely, and he does them all with great sensitivity and distinction – painting, drawing, film, photography, product and environmental design, postage stamp design, etc. And in addition, he is an excellent teacher. A potpourri? Never.

What holds this phenomenal man together is a philosophical and broadly religious sense of being. Media, he argues, are “just to be used.”

Too many people are interested in the hardware of the arts; and “software” (the carefully planned material aimed at an audience) has now become a four-letter word.

He sums this up in a very simple way: “I am interested in refining my receptor.” The main line for an artist is to *express* a vision, in whatever medium – to express images of “the cosmos.” In this sense the artist is a philosopher. He is not interested in the public or in other people’s ideas: *that* situation means being trap-

ped in a conformist world; and unfortunately the artist is stuck in a society that has no use for philosophers or artists.

Thus, Gagnon feels a freedom to express his consciousness in any form that comes to him. He is close to Zen thought, and the idea that in art “La matière chante” – a beautiful phrase. Québec art, in these terms, is too intellectual; such theories as those of *Les plasticiens* are not on the route. And Abstract Expressionism is at best a kind of ego trip.