saintly vision

by Jason Zigelstein

On October 11, I went to the exhibition of the works of Patrice Remia, presented by La Maison de la Culture at Glendon College. Having never been to this gallery before, I was pleasantly surprised by both the gallery (an intimate room without being too suffocating) and the exhibition.

Remia's works are done on canvas or plywood in acrylic, and are all related thematically to the Saint Sebastian tradition. Often depicted as a young man pierced by arrows, Remia draws upon the association of the saint/martyr with protection against the Great Plague. Remia pointed out that we ". . . have our own plague in this century . . .," and that perhaps we need to call upon this saint once more.

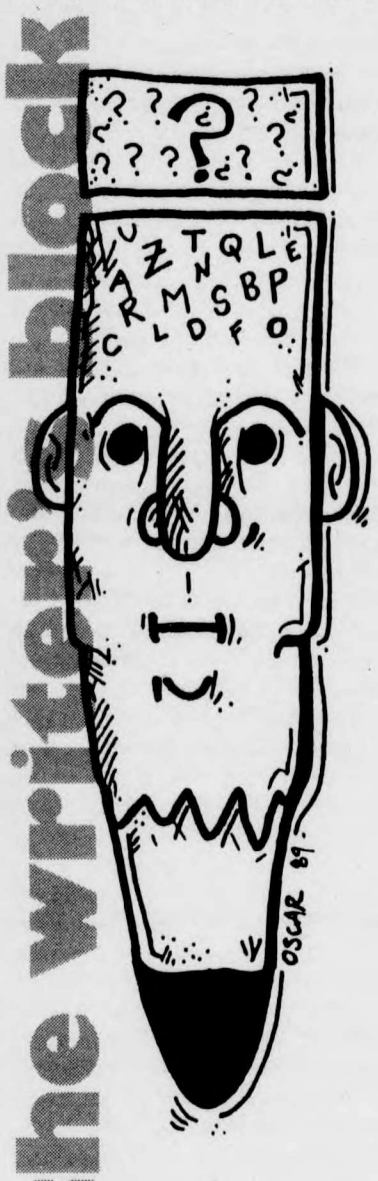
By tapping into the St. Sebastian tradition, the artist also brings into his work his perceptions on martyrdom and the Sacred Body. These works, Remia said, are not depictions of the saint but inspired perceptions. In the triptych, "St. Sebastien," the artist's inspiration led him to affix two large shirts flat against the plywood. These shirts are "pierced" by indecipherable phrases and words in French and are barred off by a long piece of flat wood. Across the triptych, the colours one immediately notices are the splashes of yellow and red covering the shirts. This is probably the only familiar connection one could make with the traditional depictions of the saint.

Remia explained that, in a certain sense, our clothes and even our skin are metaphors for the human body and that they, like art, have an existence of their own. This fascination with metaphors for the human form is seen throughout the works. When asked about his interpretation of the tradition, Remia replied that one can, and should, find one's own perception. His work has its own ideas and ". . . is a complete world . . ." unto itself.

The exhibition runs until October 26 at Glendon Hall.

Georgia Amar at Glendon Gallery. See next issue of Excalibur *for a review of her "Installation."*

the writer's block



Ira Nayman is a York student with vast experience as a writer. Ira has written numerous newspaper columns as well as dabbling with CBC television and radio.

by Ira Nayman

I once attended a performance of selected scenes presented by students at Earl Haig, a fine arts high school, because my sister was studying acting there. The pieces were pretty much what you'd expect from high school performers (except for the one in which my sister performed, which was, of course, brilliant). One scene revolving around a group of friends in the '60s bopped along unmemorably until a couple of references to local Toronto landmarks were made. The audience was, at first, surprised, then delighted.

More recently, I attended the premiere of a film called *Palais Royale*. The movie was a so so thriller/comedy, but what stands out in my mind is that the largest applause of the evening was for a shot of a TTC streetcar (which undoubtedly pleased Matt Craven and Kim Catrall, the film's stars to no end). These two incidents are reminders that in any work of art, people like to see themselves, Canadians as much as anybody.

There is no doubt in my mind that art, including the so called popular arts, provides and reflects the identity by which countries are held together. Through art, people can recognize and develop a national set of ideals, common goals, a common set of moral standards and a "language" with which to define these concepts. This is especially true in Canada, where, in the absence of a unifying mythology, regional differences constantly threaten to tear the country apart.

In film and television, the goal of telling Canadian stories has, for the most part, been in conflict with economic imperatives. Canada isn't considered a large enough market to sustain a native film and television industry; thus, Canadian works in these media have had to be sold to other markets, particularly the United States. Invariably, this has meant stripping the works of any discernible Canadian content (references to Canadian social issues, personalities or even streets; in short, what makes these works worthwhile to us). To sell to Americans, our popular art had to look American.

The logic of this position is as inexorable as it is completely incorrect. Americans churn out their own popular art at a phenomenal rate; in the competition that follows, the last thing Americans want is another film or show that looks and sounds like what they already have too much of. In television in particular, even successful Canadian shows are marginalized by being telecast out of prime time (*Night Heat*) or on alternate networks (*Anne of Green Gables*) like PBS, HBO and MOUSE.

Yet, there are many examples of Americans, and others, being hungry for recognizably extra-national popular art, for its novelty if nothing else. Allow me to offer two examples.

Canadian literature is becoming recognized around the world (and parts of America) as containing a unique and valuable style and content. Margaret Atwood, Timothy Findley, Michael Ondaatje — the list of Canadian authors gaining acceptance internationally seems to grow daily; and, they have achieved this success *without giving up what makes their works Canadian*.

Or consider your favourite British television show. *Upstairs, Downstairs*; *Sherlock Holmes*; *Yes, Prime Minister*; *Spitting Image*; *Doctor Who;* The Prisoner (does anybody remember *The Prisoner*?); the list of British television shows that have had some success in North America seems endless (feel free to add your own favourite). Yet, all of these programmes were made for a British audience; I know of no instance where a show was altered to suit North American (or other than British) sensibilities.

The perceived conflict between art and commerce, in this instance, seems entirely counterproductive; creating works that satisfied our national audience would seem to give us a better chance to sell such works abroad. This is not a trivial concern; media like film and television will likely perform the same service in the information age of the 21st century that the railroad provided in the industrial revolution of the 19th century: uniting Canadians (as well as others) into single nations.

If we don't learn to use our media to tell each other our own stories, we may end up knowing more about people in other countries than people in the next province, making us a cultural colony, a nation in name only.

All of us, even artists, have a part to play: support Canadian artworks. Go to see Atom Egoyan's *Speaking Parts* instead of Steven Soderbergh's *sex, lies and videotape*. Watch *Street Legal* instead of *L.A. Law*. Read a Benny Cooperman mystery by Howard Engels instead of Agatha Christie or Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Not only will you be doing your country a favour, but you will probably be surprised to find yourself having a good time doing it.