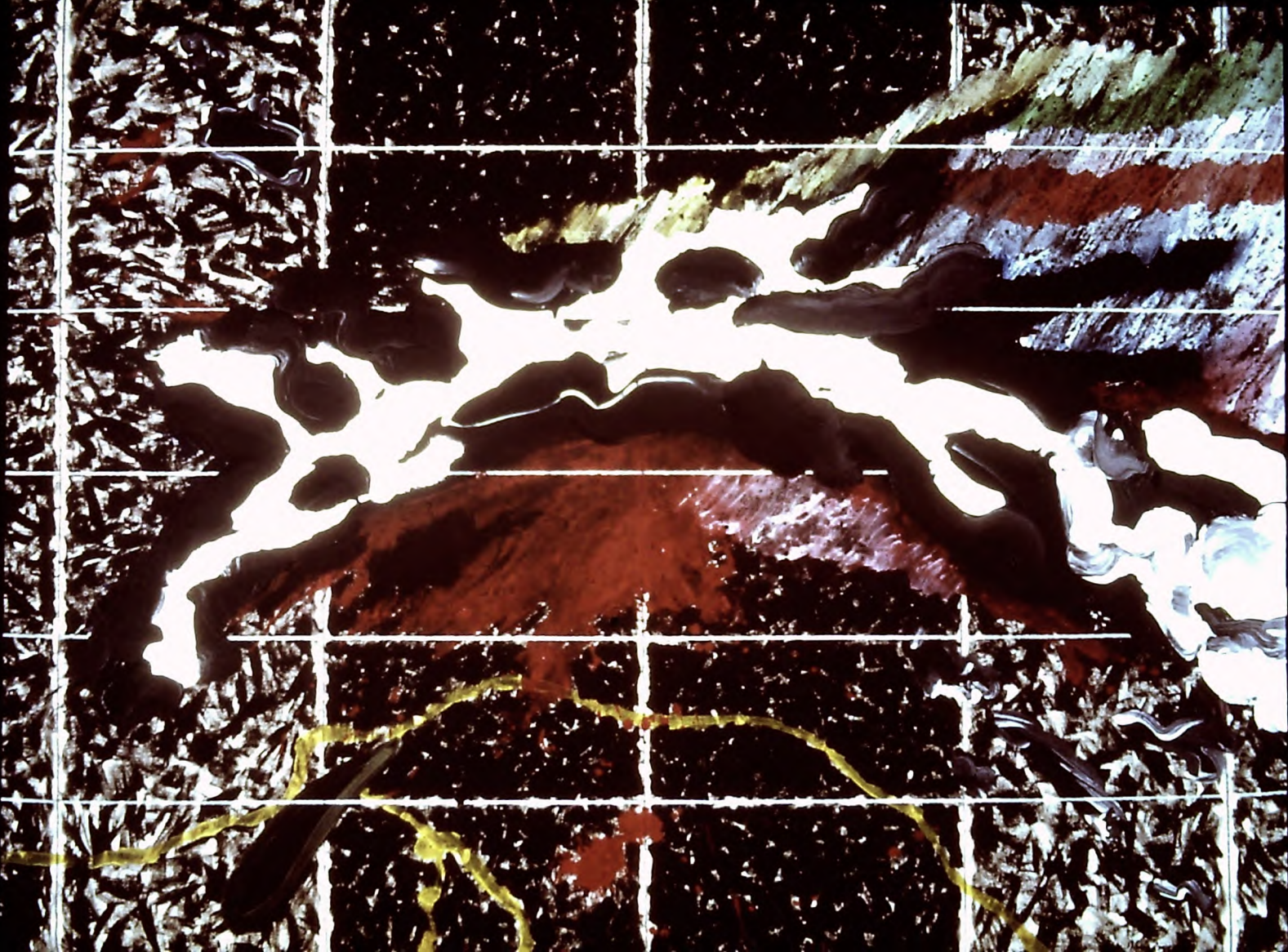


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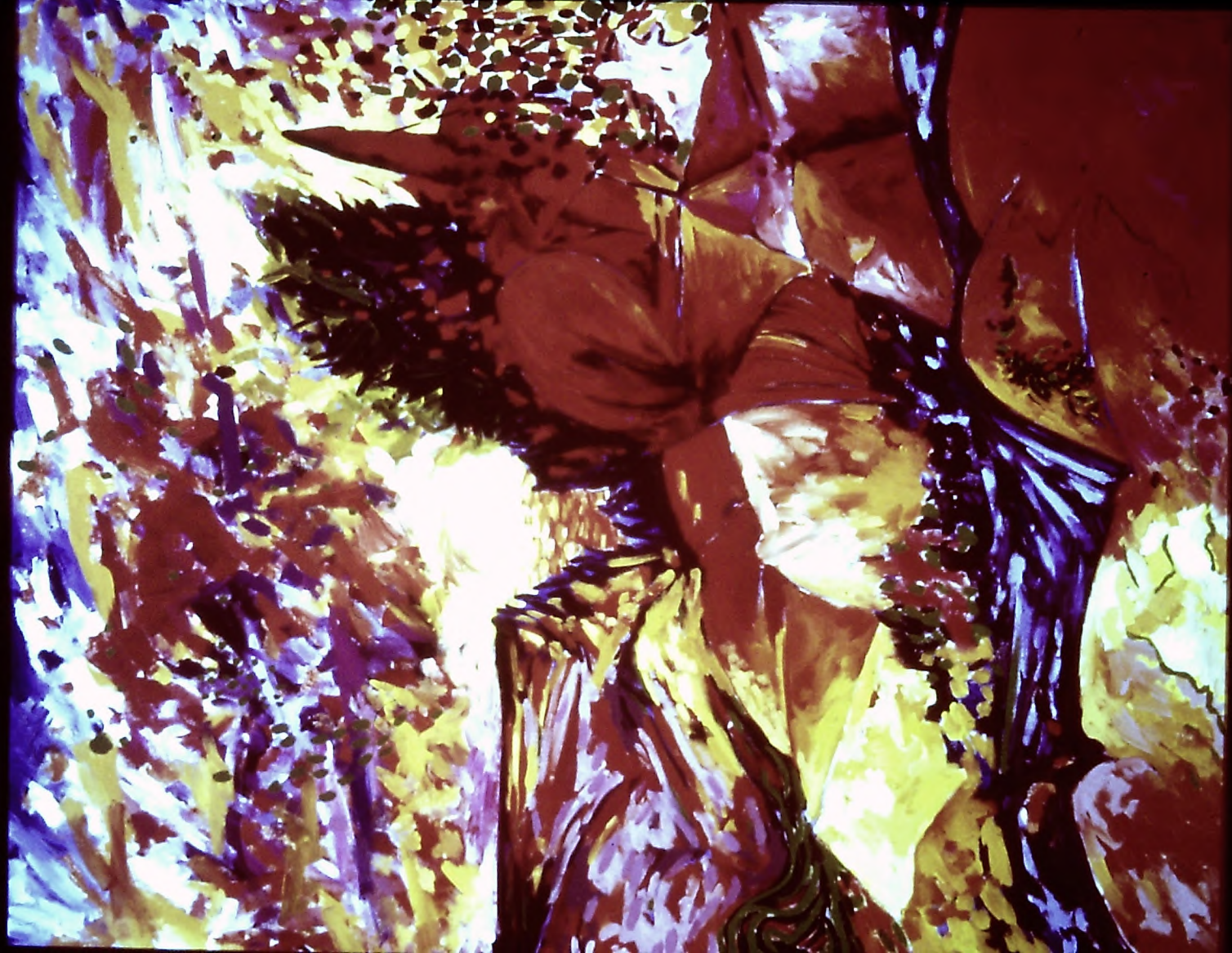


Ron Martin / Bocour Green

CANADIAN CONTEMPORARY PAINTERS  
DESINATEURS CANADIENS CONTEMPORAINS







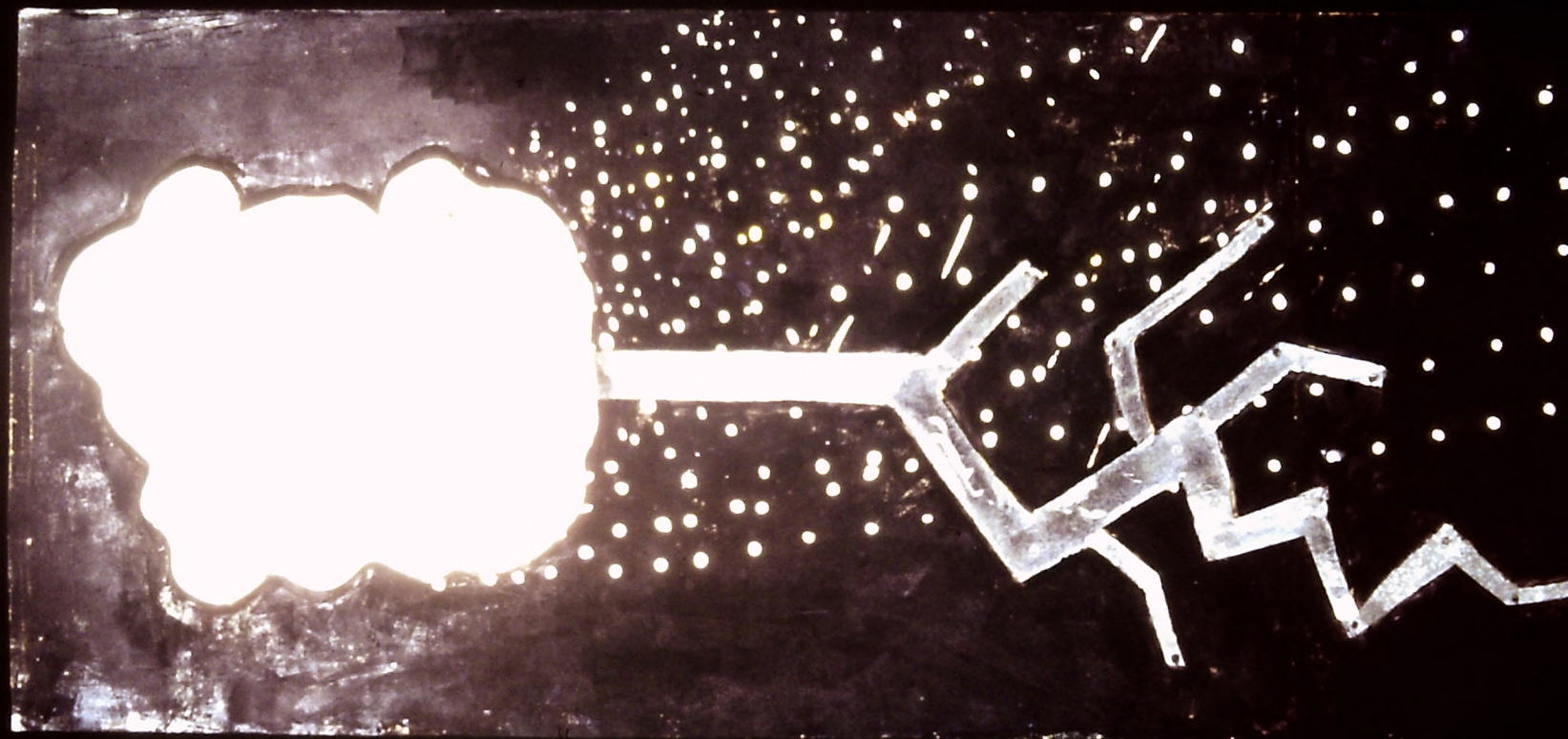




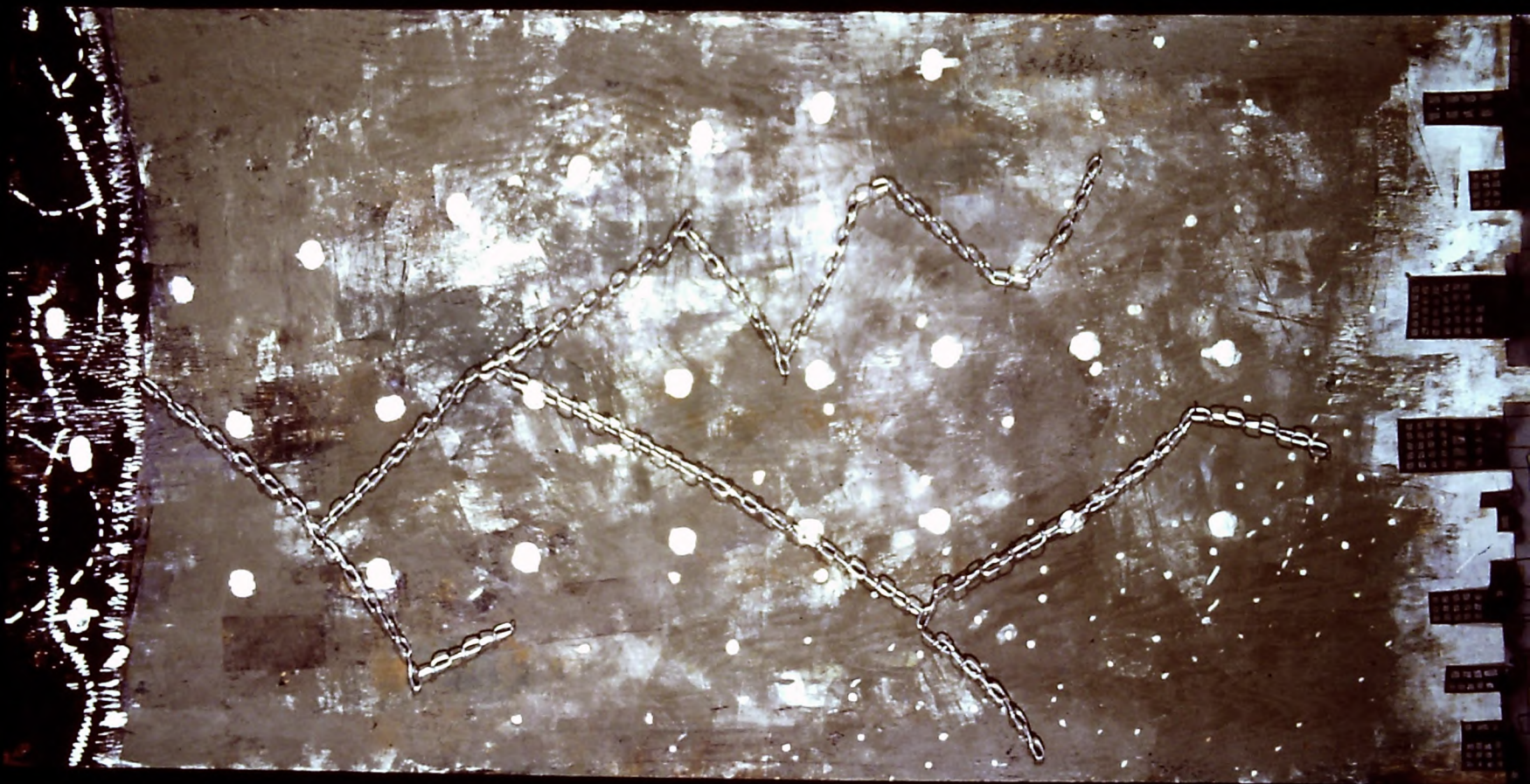
















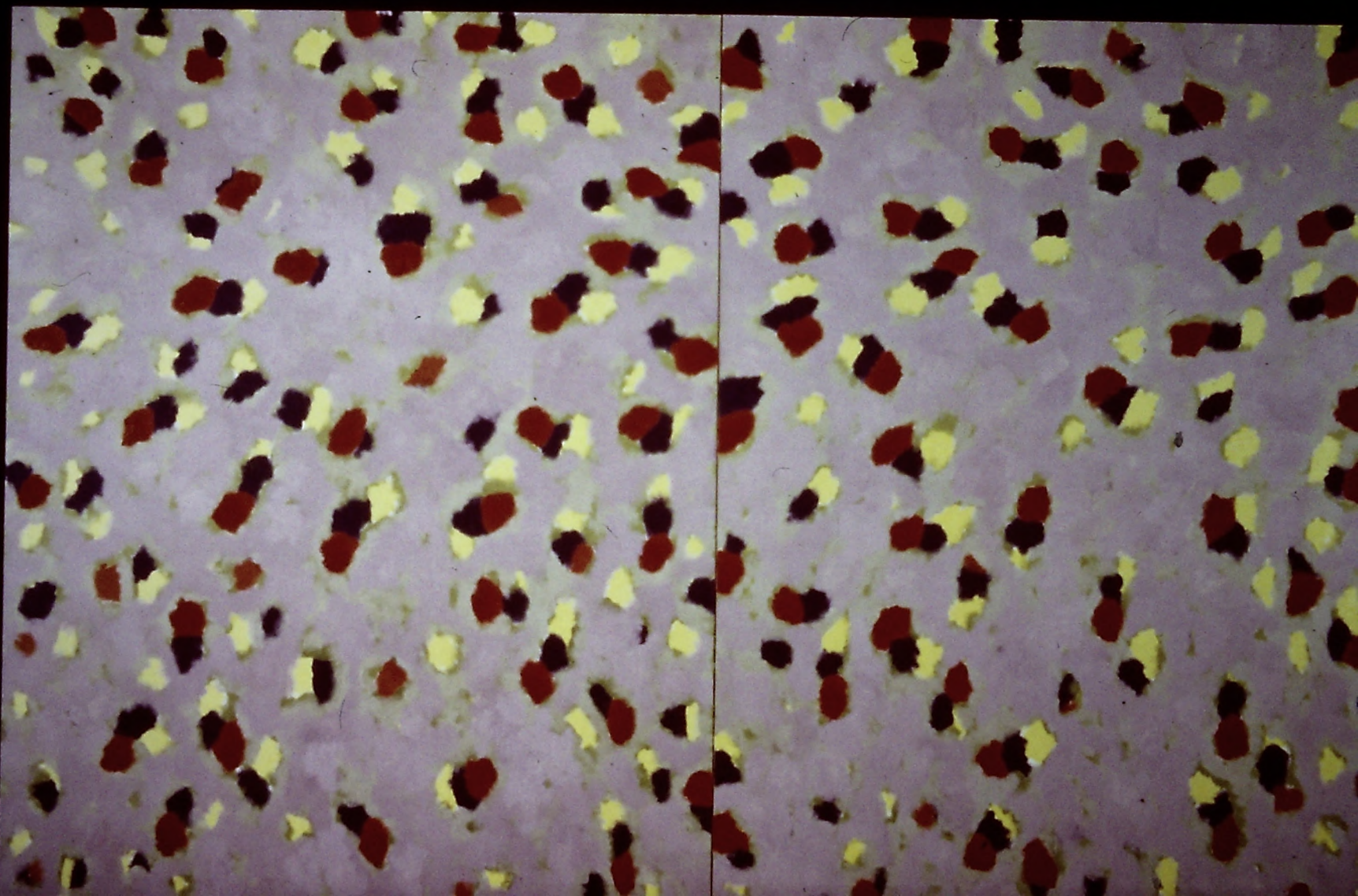




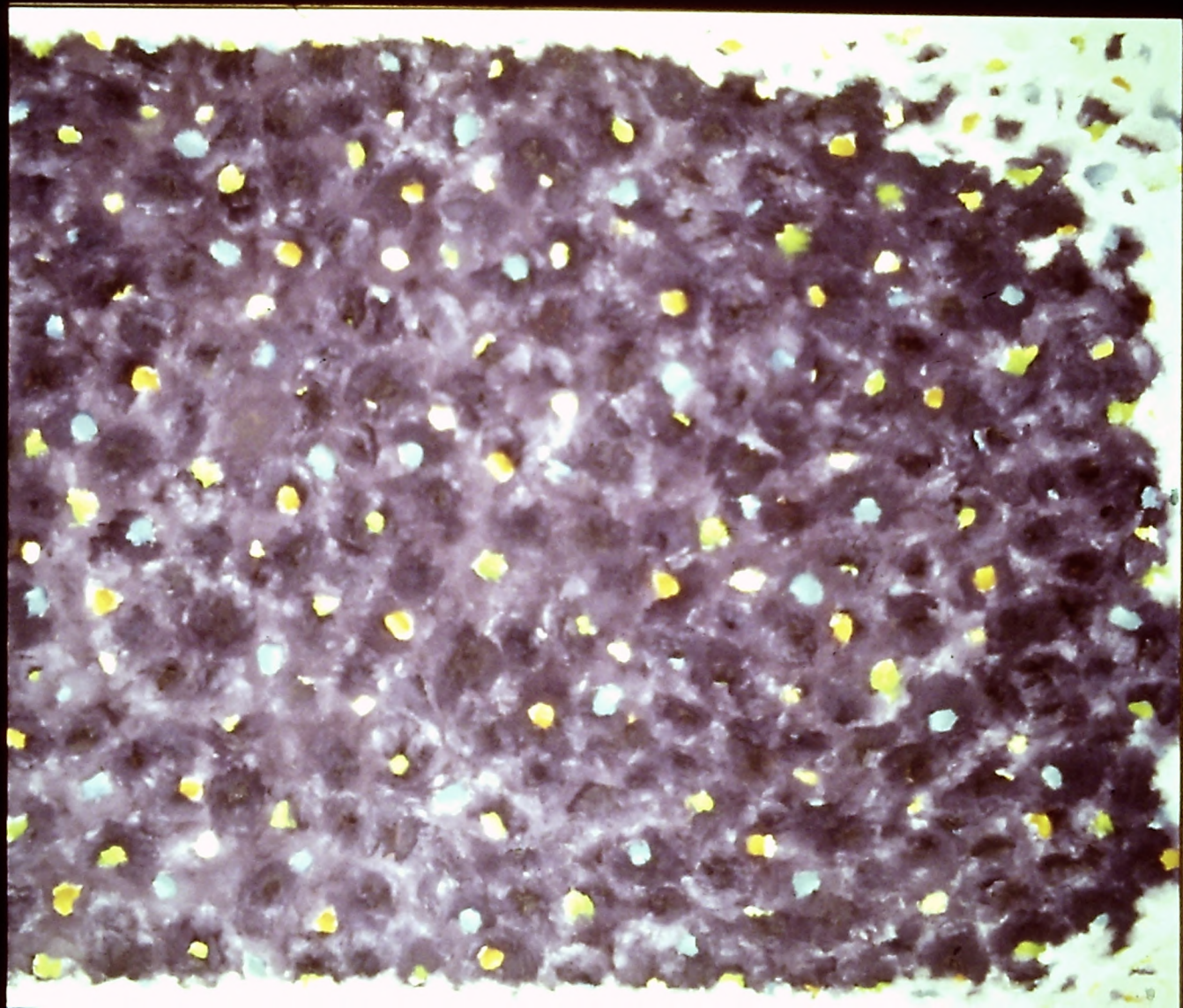




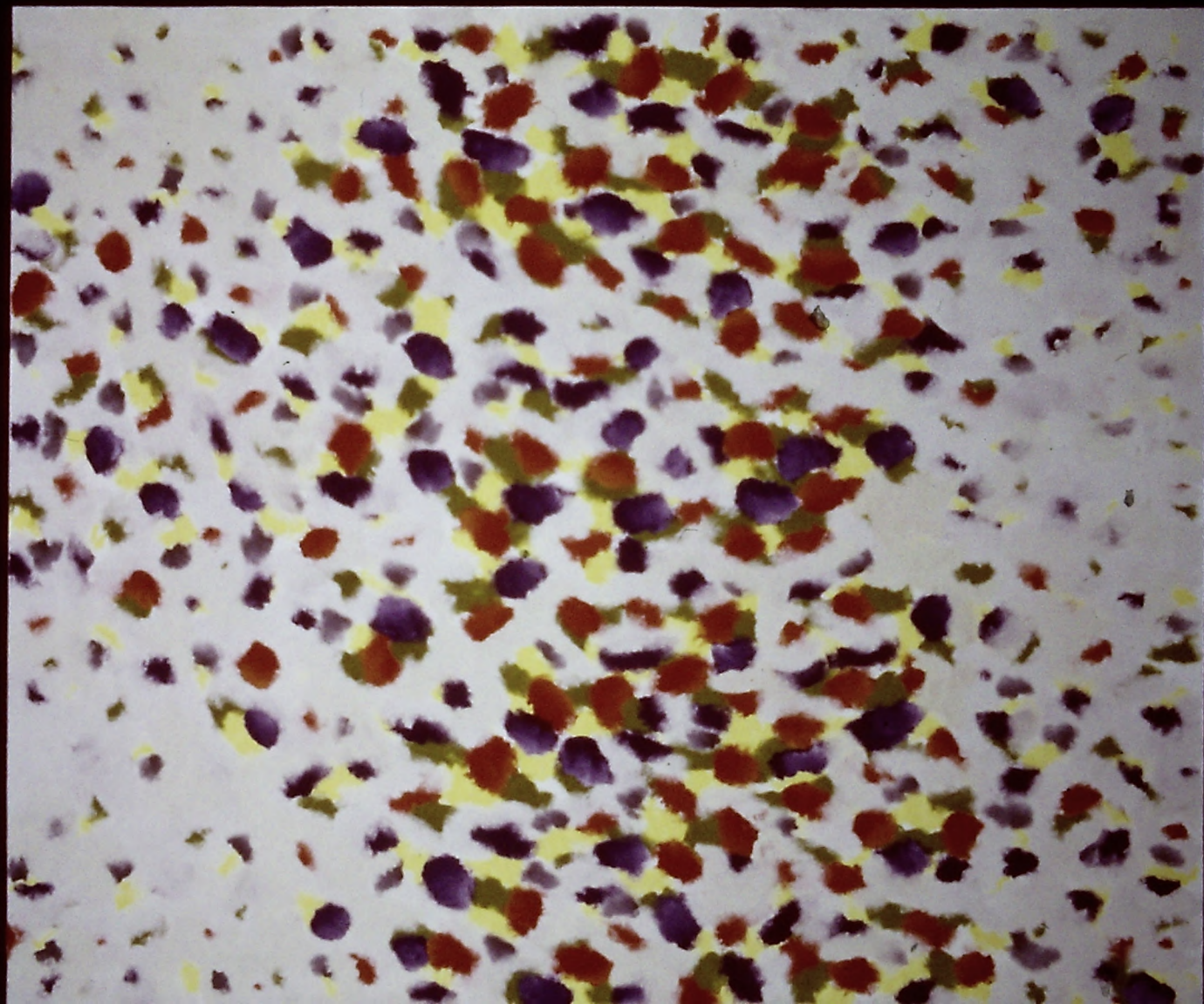




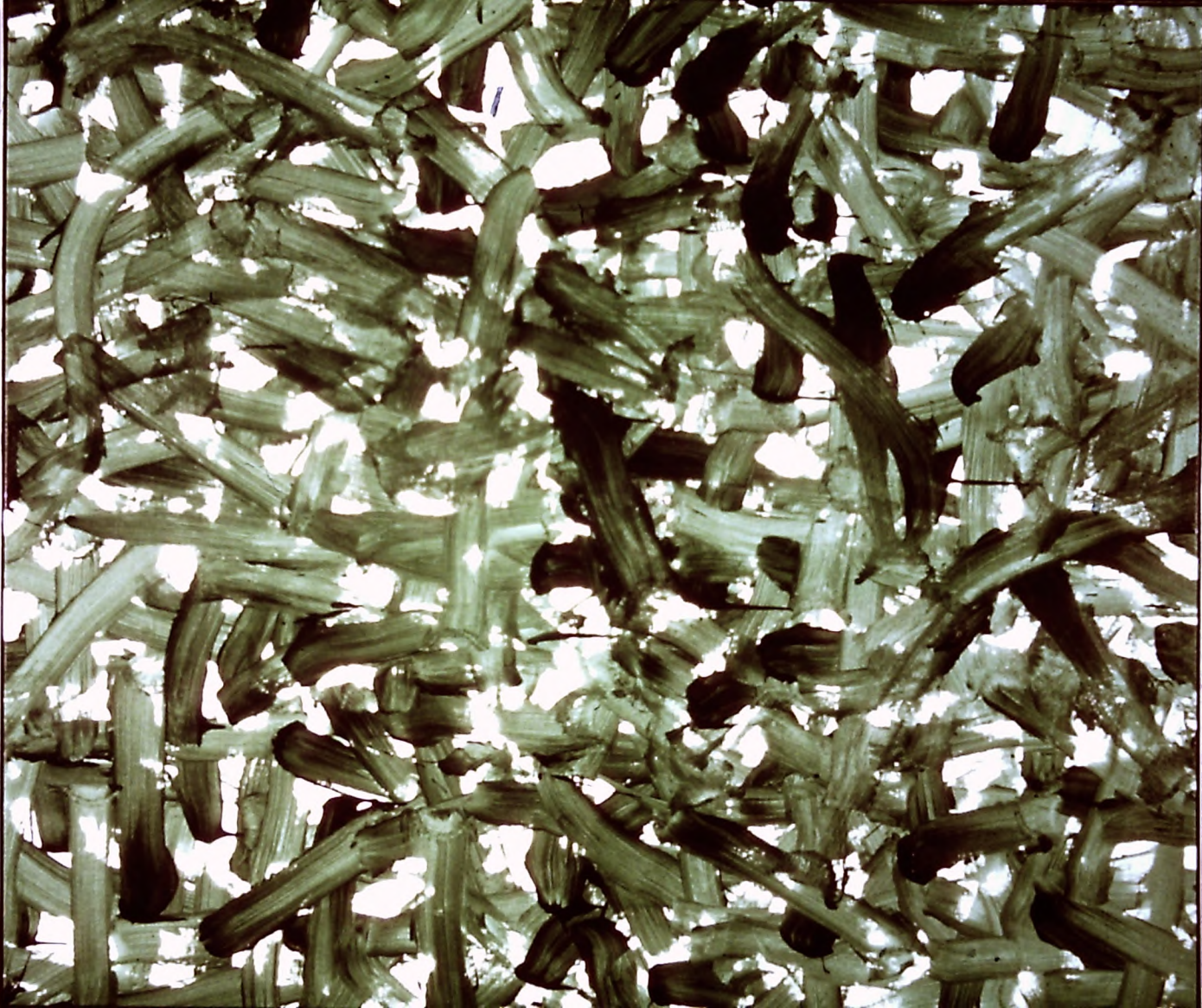




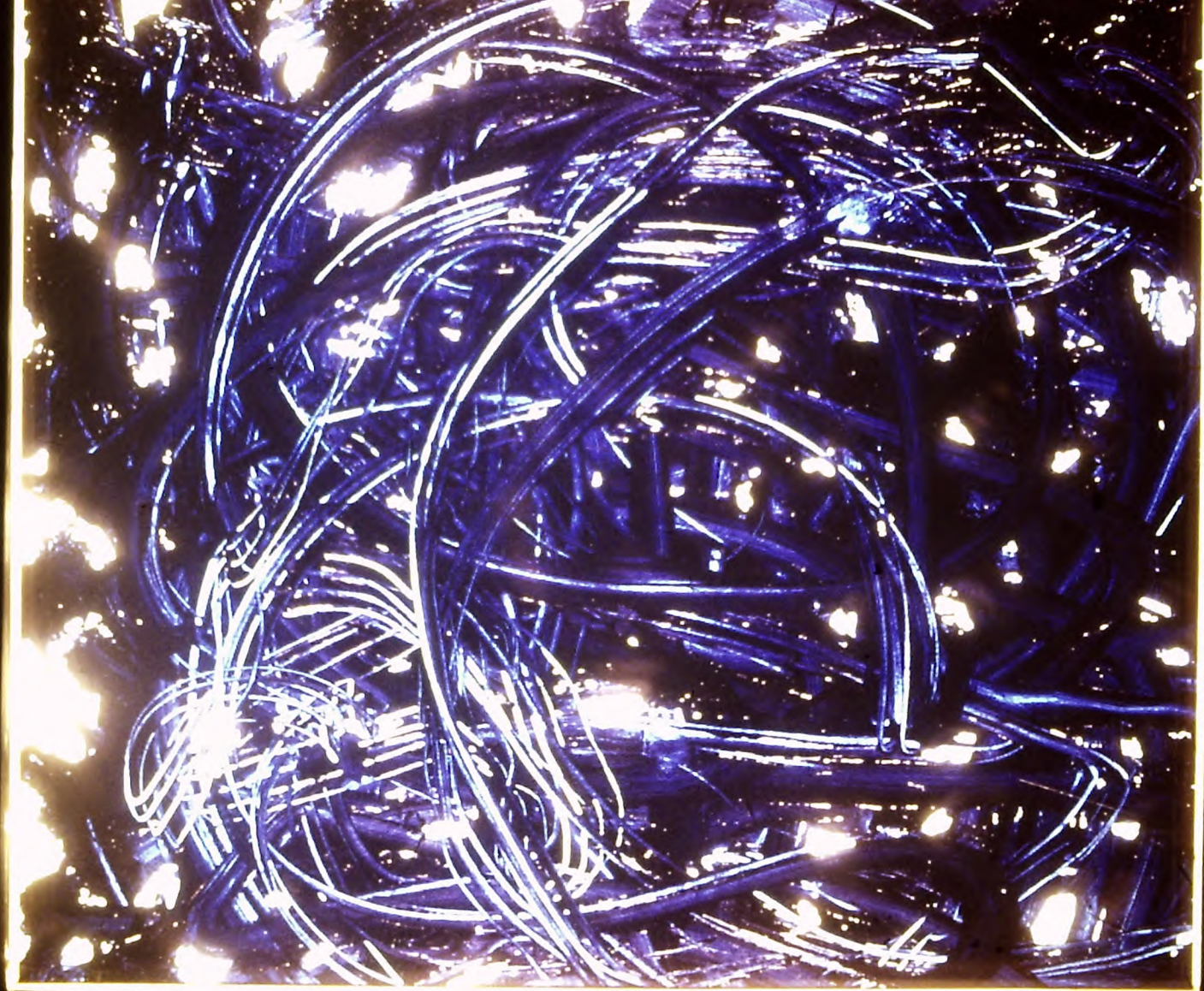






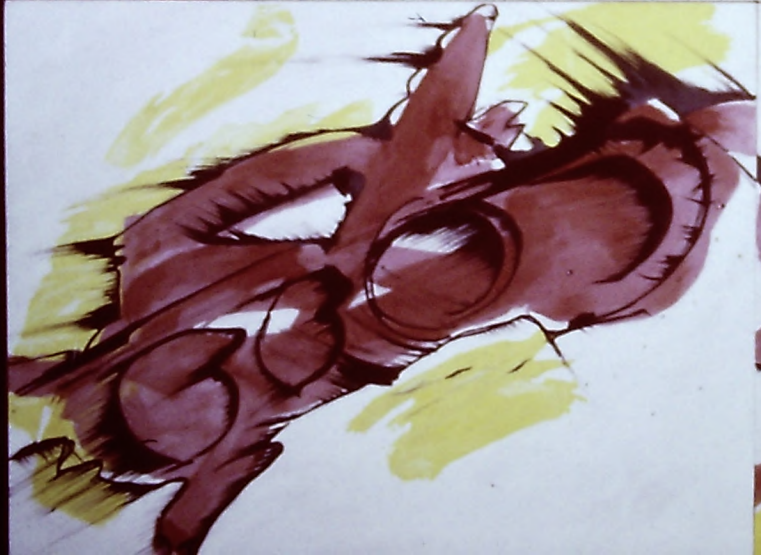




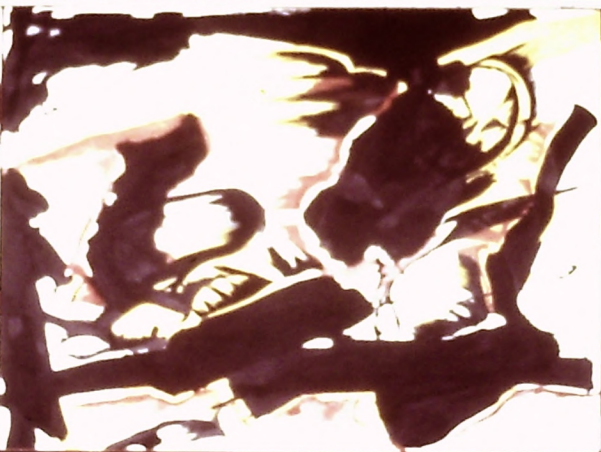






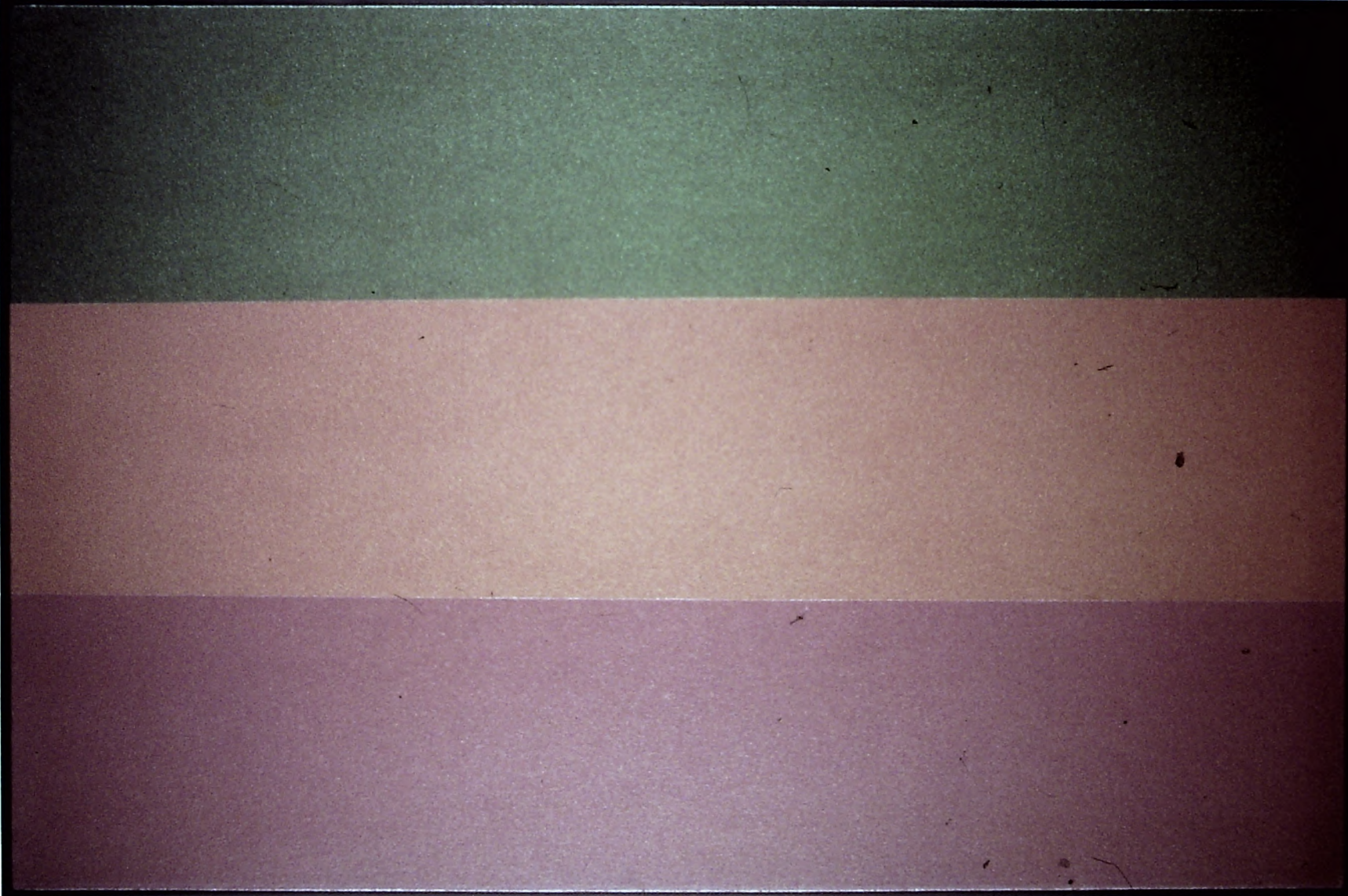






















DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS  
MINISTÈRE DES AFFAIRES EXTÉRIEURES

COMMUNIQUÉ

No: 38  
No.:

DIFFUSION: FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
RELEASE: MAY 13, 1977

CANADIAN CONTEMPORARY PAINTERS

AN EXHIBITION OF WORKS FROM THE CANADA COUNCIL ART BANK,  
PRESENTED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS, CANADA.

The Department of External Affairs announces the departure on an extensive tour abroad of a major exhibition entitled: CANADIAN CONTEMPORARY PAINTERS. The exhibition includes works by seven painters who have proved to be leaders in their field: CLAUDE BREEZE, GERSHON ISKOWITZ, CHARLES GAGNON, GUIDO MOLINARI, PATERSON EWEN, RON MARTIN, and JOHN MEREDITH.

The 21 works are drawn exclusively from the Art Bank Collection. Established in 1972, the Art Bank is administered by the Visual Arts Section of the Canada Council. The purpose of the Art Bank is to recognize and assist contemporary Canadian artists through the purchase of their work, and to expose Canadian art in public buildings across the country. CANADIAN CONTEMPORARY PAINTERS is the first international showing of works from the Bank.

The selection of works for the exhibition was made jointly by the Art Bank and the Cultural Affairs Division of the Department of External Affairs. As stated by Geoffrey James, Head of the Visual Arts Section of the Canada Council, in his introduction to the catalogue: "Beyond any obvious formal similarities, we looked for artists whose work shows a vital, consistent, continuous and personal approach to the practice of painting. The sole limitations were that the work be from the collection of the Art Bank and of a size appropriate for travel."



DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS  
MINISTÈRE DES AFFAIRES EXTÉRIEURES

# communiqué

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This exhibition will open at the Canadian Cultural Centre in Paris on June 16, 1977 and will remain there until August 20. Over the next year it will be seen in major centres in New Zealand and Australia. An extensive tour of galleries in Europe will begin in 1979.

- 30 -

INFORMATION:

Cultural Affairs Division  
Department of External Affairs  
(613) 992-4349 - Ann Garneau, Information Officer

Art Bank of the Canada Council  
(613) 237-3400: Ext 364 - Jessica Bradley,  
Special Projects Officer





DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS  
MINISTÈRE DES AFFAIRES EXTÉRIEURES

# communiqué

N<sup>o</sup>: 38  
No.:

DIFFUSION: POUR DIFFUSION IMMÉDIATE  
RELEASE: LE 13 MAI, 1977

## PEINTRES CANADIENS CONTEMPORAINS

UNE EXPOSITION DE TABLEAUX DE LA BANQUE D'OEUVRES D'ART DU CONSEIL DES ARTS DU CANADA, PRÉSENTÉE PAR LE MINISTÈRE DES AFFAIRES EXTÉRIEURES, CANADA.

Le ministère des Affaires extérieures annonce la prochaine tournée, à l'étranger, d'une exposition importante intitulée: PEINTRES CANADIENS CONTEMPORAINS. Elle comprend des oeuvres de sept peintres qui se sont révélés des chefs de file dans leur domaine: CLAUDE BREEZE, GERSHON ISKOWITZ, CHARLES GAGNON, GUIDO MOLINARI, PATERSON EWEN, RON MARTIN et JOHN MEREDITH.

Les 21 toiles exposées proviennent exclusivement de la collection de la Banque d'oeuvres d'art. Créée en 1972, la Banque est gérée par la Section des arts visuels du Conseil des Arts du Canada. Elle a pour mission de découvrir et d'aider les artistes canadiens contemporains en achetant leurs oeuvres ainsi que d'organiser des expositions publiques d'oeuvres d'art canadiennes à travers le pays. PEINTRES CANADIENS CONTEMPORAINS est la première exposition internationale d'oeuvres d'art de la Banque.

Les tableaux qui seront exposés ont été choisis conjointement par la Banque d'oeuvres d'art et la Direction des affaires culturelles du ministère des Affaires extérieures. Comme l'a expliqué M. Geoffry James, chef de la Section des arts visuels du Conseil des Arts du Canada, dans son introduction au catalogue: "Au-delà de similitudes formelles évidentes, nous avons cherché des artistes dont le travail constitue une approche vivante, cohérente et personnelle de la pratique de la peinture. La seule restriction était que les oeuvres devaient provenir de la collection de la Banque des oeuvres d'art et pouvoir circuler sans danger."

L'exposition s'ouvrira au Centre culturel canadien à Paris le 16 juin 1977 et durera jusqu'au 20 août. L'an prochain, elle sera exposée dans des centres importants en Nouvelle-Zélande et en Australie. Elle entreprendra en 1979 la tournée des galeries européennes.

- 30 -

RENSEIGNEMENTS: Direction des Affaires culturelles  
Ministère des Affaires extérieures  
(613) 992-4349 - Ann Garneau, agent d'information  
Banque d'oeuvres d'art du Conseil des Arts du Canada  
(613) 237-3400: poste 364 - Jessica Bradley  
agent des projets spéciaux



# canada

Programme d'Échanges culturels  
Cultural Exchanges Programme

## CANADIAN CONTEMPORARY PAINTERS

An exhibition of works from the Canada Council Art Bank,  
presented by the Department of External Affairs, Canada  
1977-79

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This exhibition of contemporary paintings from Canada is the first major travelling show of its type to tour so extensively abroad. Other collections arranged by the Department of External Affairs, have introduced Canadian artists: "Canada - Art d'aujourd'hui" was sent to Paris, Brussels, Rome and London in the 1960's, and "Trajectoires" was seen in Paris in 1973. This new sampling of recent art will travel through the Pacific Rim countries and to Europe and North and South America over a period of 2½ years. Before leaving Canada, part of the collection was seen at public galleries in Toronto and Montreal.

The 21 works in the exhibition are drawn exclusively from the collection of the Art Bank of the Canada Council. Established in 1972, the Art Bank is administered by the Visual Arts Section of the Canada Council, a federally-funded grant giving body for the support of the arts and humanities in Canada. The purpose of the Art Bank is to recognize and assist contemporary Canadian artists through purchase of their work, and to expose Canadian art to the general public in government buildings across the country.

In selecting the exhibition, the concern was not to illustrate any particular trend in painting, or to follow a theme, nor even to give equal regional representation from across the country; it was rather to show seven innovative painters who have proved over the last ten years

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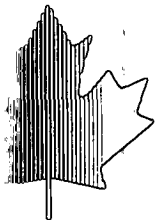




to be leaders in their field: Claude Breeze, Gershon Iskowitz, Charles Gagnon, Guido Molinari, Paterson Ewen, Ron Martin and John Meredith. The paintings are largely non-figurative, apart from the works of Claude Breeze and Paterson Ewen which find their reference in landscape and climate. The artists are all Canadian by nationality, but they address themselves to a universal audience. They are looking into the fundamental issues of visual perception and the nature of painting. While their works may raise eyebrows, they will also raise questions, and that surely is the role of the artists: not to comfort with familiar images, but to challenge with new insights.

CANADIAN CONTEMPORARY PAINTINGS represent one aspect of Canadian art. The ingenuity and the multiformity of the work on these canvases can be found equally in other mediums - sculpture, graphics, conceptual art, cinema and photography. The great strength of Canadian contemporary art is its diversity. These seven painters show a part of that variety.

Cultural Affairs Division  
Department of External Affairs  
Ottawa, Ontario  
CANADA



# canada

Programme d'Échanges culturels  
Cultural Exchanges Programme

## PEINTRES CANADIENS CONTEMPORAINS

Exposition de peintures de la Banque d'oeuvres d'art du Conseil des arts du Canada présentée par le ministère des Affaires extérieures, Canada - 1977-79

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Cette collection d'oeuvres canadiennes contemporaines compose la première grande exposition itinérante du genre à effectuer une tournée aussi importante à l'étranger. Bien sûre, d'autres expositions organisées par le ministère des Affaires extérieures ont déjà fait connaître les artistes canadiens, notamment Canada - Art d'aujourd'hui présentée à Paris, Bruxelles, Rome et Londres au cours des années 60, et Trajectoires montrée à Paris en 1973. Ce nouvel échantillonnage de peintures récentes sera déployé pendant deux ans et demi tour à tour dans les pays de la région du Pacifique, d'Europe et d'Amérique du Nord et du Sud. Avant que la collection ne quitte le Canada, une partie des oeuvres sélectionnées ont été exposées dans les galeries publiques de Montréal et de Toronto.

Les 21 peintres de cette exposition sont tirées exclusivement du fonds de la Banque d'oeuvres d'art du Conseil des arts du Canada. Créée en 1972, cette Banque est administrée par la Section des arts visuels du Conseil des arts, organisme fédéral chargé de subventionner les arts et les lettres au Canada. La Banque d'oeuvres d'art a pour but de rendre hommage aux artistes canadiens, de les encourager en achetant leurs oeuvres et de faire connaître l'art canadien au grand public en organisant des expositions dans les édifices gouvernementaux du Canada.

Les toiles de l'exposition n'ont pas été choisies pour illustrer un style ou un thème particuliers ou pour refléter une représentation régionale proportionnelle. Le but visé consiste plutôt à faire connaître sept peintres originaux qui se sont distingués dans leur domaine au cours des dix dernières années: Claude Breeze Gershon Iskowitz, Charles Gagnon, Guido Molinari, Paterson Ewen, Ron Martin et





John Meredith. A l'exception de Claude Breeze et de Paterson Ewen, dont l'oeuvre traite de paysage et de climat, ils pratiquent l'art non-figuratif. Ce sont tous des artistes de nationalité canadienne, mais ils s'adressent à un public universel, approfondissant l'essence de la perception visuelle et la nature de la peinture. Si leurs oeuvres risquent de surprendre, elles susciteront également des questions, ce qui correspond sans aucun doute au rôle de l'artiste: éviter de bercer le public d'images familières et le confronter avec des idées nouvelles.

PEINTRES CANADIENS CONTEMPORAINS ne représente qu'un aspect de l'art canadien. Le caractère ingénieux et multiforme de ces toiles se retrouve également dans d'autres formes d'art - sculpture, arts graphiques, art conceptuel, cinéma et photographie. La grande force de l'art contemporain canadien réside dans sa diversité. Ces sept peintres nous en montrent un volet.

Direction des Affaires culturelles  
Ministère des Affaires extérieures  
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.



# canada

Programme d'Échanges culturels  
Cultural Exchanges Programme

CANADIAN CONTEMPORARY PAINTERS

PEINTRES CANADIENS CONTEMPORAINS

An exhibition of works from the Canada Council Art Bank,  
presented by the Department of External Affairs of Canada.

Une exposition de la Banque d'oeuvres d'art du Conseil  
des Arts du Canada, présentée par le Ministère des Affaires  
extérieures du Canada.



External Affairs  
Canada

Affaires extérieures  
Canada



CLAUDE BREEZE

- |                                      |        |  |                   |
|--------------------------------------|--------|--|-------------------|
| 1. Spacing No. 5                     | 1974-5 | acrylic and china marker on canvas - acrylique et encre de chine sur toile | 122 x 160.5 cm.   |
| 2. Canadian Atlas: Sunset            | 1972-3 | acrylic on canvas - acrylique sur toile                                    | 149.5 x 121.5 cm. |
| 3. Canadian Atlas: Black Snake River | 1974   | acrylic on canvas - acrylique sur toile                                    | 137 x 198 cm.     |

PATERSON EWEN

- |                                    |      |  |               |
|------------------------------------|------|--|---------------|
| 4. Forked Lightning                | 1971 | acrylic, linoleum, metal, canvas on plywood - acrylique, linoleum, métal, toile sur contre-plaqué  | 244 x 122 cm. |
| 5. Storm over the Prairies         | 1971 | acrylic, metal, fibrous material on plywood - acrylique, métal, matériel fibreux sur contre-plaqué | 235 x 101 cm. |
| 6. City Storm with Chain Lightning | 1971 | acrylic, metal and chains on plywood - acrylique, métal et chaînes sur contre-plaqué               | 244 x 122 cm. |

CHARLES GAGNON

- |  |        |                                 |                   |
|--|--------|---------------------------------|-------------------|
| 7. Marker #8<br>Marqueur #8                | 1973   | oil on canvas - huile sur toile | 147.5 x 172.5 cm. |
| 8. Screenspace No. 2<br>Espace/écran No. 2 | 1973-4 | oil on canvas - huile sur toile | 168 x 229.5 cm.   |
| 9. Steps No. 4<br>Etapas No. 4             | 1968   | oil on canvas - huile sur toile | 173 x 198 cm.     |

GERSHON ISKOWITZ

- |                                  |        |                                 |                                   |
|----------------------------------|--------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 10. Variation on Green #3        | 1975-6 | oil on canvas - huile sur toile | 213.5 x 335.5 cm.<br>(2 sections) |
| 11. Painting in Violet and Mauve | 1972   | oil on canvas - huile sur toile | 228.5 x 198.5 cm.                 |
| 12. Seasons #2                   | 1975   | oil on canvas - huile sur toile | 177.5 x 152.5 cm.                 |

RON MARTIN

- |                  |      |  |                 |
|------------------|------|--|-----------------|
| 13. Bocour Green | 1971 | acrylic on canvas -<br>acrylique sur toile | 214 x 183 cm.   |
| 14. Bocour Blue  | 1972 | acrylic on canvas -<br>acrylique sur toile | 213 x 183.5 cm. |
| 15. Untitled     | 1974 | acrylic on canvas -<br>acrylique sur toile | 214 x 168 cm.   |

JOHN MEREDITH

- |             |      |                                    |                                 |
|-------------|------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 16. Jupiter | 1973 | oil on canvas -<br>huile sur toile | 245 x 306.5 cm.<br>(4 panels)   |
| 17. Japan   | 1972 | oil on canvas -<br>huile sur toile | 183.5 x 732 cm.<br>(3 sections) |
| 18. Manatsu | 1976 | oil on canvas -<br>huile sur toile | 152.5 x 122 cm.                 |

GUIDO MOLINARI

- |   |      |  |                   |
|---|------|--|-------------------|
| 19. Structure Triangulaire<br>Gris-brun | 1971 | acrylic on canvas -<br>acrylique sur toile | 173 x 173 cm.     |
| 20. Brun-violet                         | 1976 | acrylic on canvas -<br>huile sur toile     | 152.5 x 101.5 cm. |
| 21. Vert-brun                           | 1976 | acrylic on canvas -<br>acrylique sur toile | 208 x 175 cm.     |

(frame to frame dimension: 138 feet)  
(running feet: 276 feet)

(cadre à cadre: 42.55 metres)  
(metres linéaires: 85.0 metres)



# The Bank of Beaux Arts

Current assets: \$3.3 million — funded by you

BY BARRIE HALE

It seems hard to believe, but the taxi driver doesn't know where the Art Bank is. Taxi drivers know everything, especially in a smallish company town like Ottawa, and this guy knows all about the row of warehouses on Gladwin Crescent behind the McDonald's on St. Laurent Boulevard. That's out by the National Museum of Science and Technology. There's an Eaton's warehouse out there, and RCA and IBM, but he's never heard of an Art Bank, and what's an Art Bank anyway?

Well, of course, it is that branch of the Canada Council that was given a million dollars a year for five years, beginning in 1972, to purchase contemporary Canadian art and supply it to other government departments on a yearly-rental basis. I say "of course" only out of courtesy, because chances are you haven't heard of it either; most Canadians haven't. My taxi driver is not the exception, he is the rule. There is even a story making the Ottawa rounds that the Art Bank found its name a nuisance when it set up its warehouse out on Gladwin, because every Friday afternoon the employees from other neighborhood warehouses would drop in and try to cash their paycheques.

Finally, we locate the place — and at once it is obvious; surely it is the only warehouse around with an Armand Vaillancourt steel sculpture squatting on the grass in front of it, and we should have spotted it immediately. But I won't apologize. A fairly low profile has been a characteristic of the Art Bank up to now and not to be able to distinguish the place from its neighbors in this row of warehouses is quite appropriate.

Inside, it is a pleasant, well-lit, carpeted, up-to-date office area like hundreds of others, except that everywhere you look there is art. Huge paintings, medium-sized paintings and framed graphics on the walls; tabletop sculpture on the tabletops and floor sculpture on the carpet. I have seen a

number of private, corporate collections of art in my time, but never anything that overwhelms in the immediate way the Art Bank's does — and the Art Bank offices are only a small part of it. Behind the offices lies the warehouse proper and the framing, packing and shipping rooms, high-ceilinged, enormous spaces, all filled up with art. I have also been in the storage spaces of a number of our public museums, but have never seen anything quite like the Art Bank's, and again, this is understandable. Because there isn't anything like it, anywhere. It is the largest collection of contemporary Canadian art in existence; the count in August, 1976, was a total of 6,752 works of art — paintings, graphics, sculpture and photographs — that altogether cost about \$3.3 million. The total expenditure projected for the end of fiscal 1976-77, which is also the end of the Art Bank's first five years, is about \$3.8 million. The rest of the Art Bank's \$5 million (a million a year for five years) will have gone to the costs of running the collection. The staff, which has purposely been kept very small, is even now barely sufficient for the task — travel, framing, insurance, shipping and so on, including the costs of this huge warehouse facility. (The warehouse is protected by an elaborate, sophisticated alarm system and the works of art are protected by insurance wherever they are — at a cost of \$14,000 a year.)

Which is all, so far, according to plan. Luc Rombout, the Art Bank's first director (he left in July, 1975 to become director of the Vancouver Art Gallery), described its function as fourfold: "To strengthen an extremely weak art market; to bring art to a broader public; to purchase art from galleries that had made a contribution to Canadian art; to set an example that could be emulated on all levels of government." The first part of the mandate, then, has been admirably carried out; an expenditure of \$3.8 million over five years will have

made the Canada Council the largest single customer for contemporary art produced by the artists of this country. Some of it has been purchased directly from individual artists, some through established commercial galleries, which have taken their normal commission (about 40 per cent) on the sales. This does not represent an unearned windfall for those dealers. Though the Art Bank has been buying art only since 1972, it has not limited its interest to work produced since then, but has explored the past decade and beyond to acquire notable works that, because of size or some other characteristic, have not been sold, but carried as overhead by various "galleries that have made a contribution to Canadian art."

The rest of the Art Bank mandate — the setting of an example to be emulated by all levels of government and the bringing of contemporary Canadian art to a broader public — has not been as quickly served, for a variety of reasons. The Treasury Board was initially attracted to the Art Bank as an idea, partially because the plan was for the Bank to rent its collection to other government departments at a rate of 12 per cent per year of each work's current fair market value. To promote this, the Board directed all government departments to stop buying art, if they had been, and henceforth to make use of the Art Bank collection. (With a couple of exceptions: External Affairs, with a long history of active interest in the visual arts of this country, continues to buy art for its embassies abroad; the national museums, including the National Gallery, continue to buy art for their collections and the Department of Public Works continues its program of commissioning original art for its new buildings.)

But, "the clientele is a difficult one," says Jessica Bradley, who was a liaison officer at the Bank before becoming, this year, its special projects officer.

"I don't mean that they're difficult people," she says, "but civil servants are not a body of people who would normally go out and choose art for offices. You know, maybe only 2 per cent of our clientele are already regular gallery-goers, and so their response when they walk in here is anywhere from pure amazement and joy to — you know, they don't know where to look, maybe the ceiling. It's intimidating."

Nonetheless, by August of this year, 4,172 of the 6,752 works in the Art Bank collection were out on rental to about 70 government departments and agencies — about 63 per cent of them, in other words. "What amazes me, thinking back over two years," says Bradley, "is what part of the collection is out on rental, and it's the *really good* work. There's something about really good work that speaks for itself, and that's exciting and encouraging. I like that a lot."

Most of the rentals so far have been achieved by a kind of catch-as-catch-can, osmotic, word-of-mouth process, which is fine as far as it goes. But the Art Bank has not yet reached the point where rentals cover the cost of running the collection. It was presumed, though never in fact insisted upon, that the Art Bank would be self-sufficient by the end of its initial five-year period. It won't be.

"It would take a long time for the program to be self-sufficient even in terms of administrative costs, and a helluva lot longer than that to be totally self-sufficient," says Chris Youngs, who, at 32, became director of the Art Bank in July, 1976, after serving for a year as chairman of its advisory selection committee. He doesn't talk much like an Ottawa mandarin, and he doesn't look much like one, in his comfortably worn jean jacket and pants and open-necked check shirt. He doesn't have the history of one, either. Born in Lafayette, Indiana, he attended several universities in the U.S. and Canada, collecting sufficient credits for a degree but never bothering to acquire one, leaving these institutions "because they became disillusioned with me or, usually, I became disillusioned with them." He started the Nightingale Gallery and was active with A Space, both commercial Toronto art galleries concerned with the undiscovered or avant-garde, before moving on to run the Owens Art Gallery at Mount Allison University in Sackville, New Brunswick.

Sometimes, though, he *does* talk like an Ottawa man: "Let's say we've purchased roughly 4 million dollars' worth of art in five years," he says. "Twelve per cent of that is \$480,000. Well, that's nowhere near self-sufficiency, even if we rented everything. I'll tell you what I've projected: if we have a built-in inflation factor of 10 per cent, five years from now we should have stabilized to the point where rentals will cover administrative costs, and we'll have enough income to purchase a million dollars' of art a year."

The question that naturally arises here is *why* should the Art Bank, or any other branch of government, go on buying contemporary art at the rate of a million dollars a year, or *any* rate? If the art market is that weak and needs that much stimulation, why not say the hell with it? The answer goes back to the formation of the Canada Council itself, nearly 20 years ago, to "foster and promote the study and enjoyment of, and the production of works in, the arts, humanities and social sciences." All of the Council's programs, including the Art Bank, are directed to that end, so the answer to the question is, basically, if that end is not desirable, *none* of the Council's programs can be. And

## "The clientele don't know where to look, maybe the ceiling. It's intimidating"

despite yearly sniping from the media and unfriendly MPs who pounce upon any strange request for funds the Council has granted, or has even received. In fiscal 1974-75, the Council spent almost \$22 million to foster and promote the production and enjoyment of the arts in this country, about \$4.6 million of it on the visual arts, including the Art Bank. That is, for people who like comparisons, less than a quarter of what one of our new Aurora search-and-surveillance planes is going to cost.

The Art Bank maintains quality control of its collection in a couple of ways. First, the work to be purchased is selected by a system of juries, whose

constantly changing composition guards against built-in biases and accommodates expertise from all across the country. Selection is limited to the work of full-time professional Canadian artists, people who earn their living, or try to, from their art. (No Sunday painters, please.) So far, the Art Bank has found about 650 artists thus seriously committed whose work meets its standards, or about one in 10 who submit work for purchase. Second, the fact that the Art Bank is not expected to act like a revenue-producing mechanism avoids the very real danger of limiting its purchases to the kind of work it might consider easy to rent to its clients. (For example, the Bank continues to buy contemporary sculpture, even though this has predictably proved to be the most difficult work to find clients for. In the warehouse right now is a piece by Arthur Handy, for example, and a couple more by Nobuo Kubota and Royden Rabinowich — all excellent stuff and all, so far, clientless. It is simply the nature of the medium. As Youngs puts it: "There is a psychological block to it in a lot of people's minds; it takes up more

space than painting, which is only on the wall, so to speak. Sculpture takes in territory, it's *aggressive* in that way.")

These days, the Art Bank is taking steps to raise its profile, through increased activity of its liaison officers and its projects officer — lectures, slide shows and travelling exhibitions intended to encourage further rentals in the branch offices of government departments across the country, to get the collection *out there*, beyond the warehouse and the offices in Ottawa, "to bring art to a broader public."

The Bank is organizing an exhibition, that they will rent to External Affairs, which will be seen in Toronto and Montreal before touring the world for three years. Another exhibition will tour the Maritimes, and this one is a rent-as-you-go show; it will be seen in four cities Down East, then return to Halifax, where it will be dispersed among the Bank's clientele. The Bank has also broadened its rental mandate to include public buildings on the provincial and municipal level, non-profit organizations such as hospitals, and even 10 or 12 selected corporations, "but our purpose there," says Youngs, "is to encourage private collecting.

not just encourage rentals."

This year Youngs will lose Ann Chudleigh, who has been the Bank's administrative officer for about a year and a half. He plans to take over as much of the administration of the collection as he can (in addition to his duties as overseer of the purchases) and to distribute the rest of it among the other staff members. Instead of hiring another administrator, he plans to hire a new education officer — as a kind of travelling salesman? "A lot of the use of this collection has come about through word-of-mouth, which was fine up to a point, but what we need now is a real drive for information distribution. We need ways of making those works of art more than just physical presences to be rented out; we need to deliver some hints, some keys as to what are the real spiritual rewards of having it around.

"So the educational value of this collection is one of the things I'm very deeply concerned with. At the same time, results of it are very, very subtle. The whole program is like that. You will only be able to see the results of it with any reasonable degree of accuracy in about 10 years, and I think that's how far ahead we have to look."



# Unlocking the vault

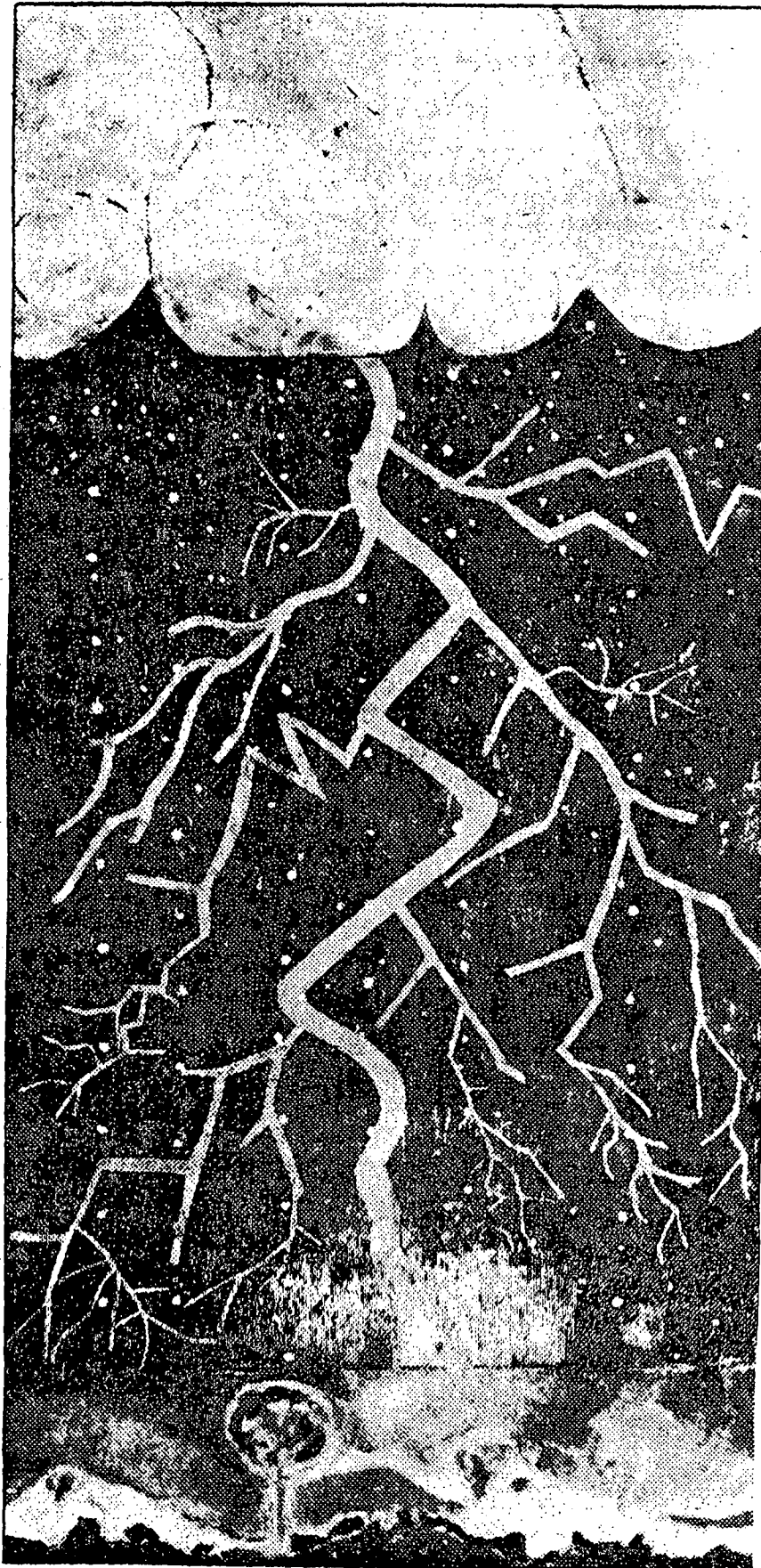
MONTREAL STAR  
NOV 27, 1976

*Georges Bogardi*

IN THE FIVE years since its formation was announced by then-Secretary of State Gérard Pelletier, the Canada Council's Art Bank has spent \$5 million purchasing works by Canadian artists. As of August, 1976, its holdings comprised a total of 6,752 paintings, prints, sculptures and photographs selected from the production of 650 artists — by far the largest collection of contemporary Canadian art in existence.

Although the Bank does an increasing amount of business renting art to government offices, most of the collection, especially the more "daring" items, is permanently warehoused in Ottawa. This quasi-seclusion of the works has been the object of a great deal of criticism but it was of course a highly politic — and political — factor in the federal government's approval of the scheme. As Dale McConally once noted in *Artcanada*: "It seems likely that the purchase of art, rather than the subsidy of art, sounded the right chord in the Canadian collective consciousness. Perhaps, 'Bank' had a nicer ring than 'museum'."

... / 2



Paterson Ewen's *Forked Lightning* 1971

While there have been occasional rumblings about "elitism" in the choice of works (a criticism that seems refuted by the fact that the Bank has somehow found 650 artists worthy of support) and about the scheme creating an artificial and largely illusory art market, the Bank is obviously a brilliant success. So much so that former cultural affairs minister Jean-Paul L'Alber, by no means an unquestioning admirer of Ottawa's policies, proposed an exact copy of the scheme for Quebec in his *Livre Vert*.

And *Seven Canadian Painters*, an exhibition of works from the Bank's collection now on view at the Saidye Bronfman Centre, is an eloquent testimonial of the discernment that has been exercised in the choice of works.

The show includes two canvasses each by Claude Breeze, Paterson Ewen, Charles Gagnon, Gershon Iskowitz, Ron Martin and Guido Molinari, and one very large painting by John Meredith. It is part of a larger exhibition that will leave next spring on a three-year tour of Australia, New Zealand, Japan and Western Europe and is the first of a number of projects that will see a wider dissemination of the Art Bank collection in the future. For Montrealers, the show carries an added significance: It is a reminder that such major figures as Ewen, Iskowitz, Martin and Meredith are hardly known in this city — a sign of just how peripheral to the Canadian scene Montreal has been allowed to become.

But this is the only sombre note to be sounded about an exhibition that includes so many important paintings, so handsomely installed by the Bronfman Centre. No one would pretend of course that its thirteen canvasses constitute anything like a survey of Canadian painting. What it does instead is

indicate the diversity and daring still exercised by our artists in a medium that has, throughout this century and time and time again, been pronounced moribund.

In fact, if this exhibition has a theme, it would be the tenacity with which our major painters continue to wrest new and personal solutions from painterly idioms one would have thought exhausted long ago.

The two Molinari canvasses reflect this sense of self-renewal in a most compelling way. *Structure Triangulaire Gris-Brun* of 1972 represents the artist's classic pre-occupation with systems, or rather, with a systemic approach to dividing the surface plane into areas of color whose shape is engendered by the contours of the canvas. In the recent *Vert-Brun*, on the other hand, the color dynamics are entirely liberated from structure. The vertical panels of four different hues exist autonomously and no longer in permutations, they function purely as sensory stimulus instead of being elements of an intricate structure. There is a Matisian sense of *volupté* exuded by this work whose novelty within Molinari's oeuvre will be obvious to those who have seen his current retrospective at the MMFA.

Charles Gagnon is a sort of gymnast who straddles the fence between hard-edge and gestural modes. He makes incursions into the areas of structure and chance without straying too far into either; in *Screenspace No. 2*, the drips and brushstrokes are held in check by the horizontal grid. The entire work

finally rests on the astonishing elegance of Gagnon's touch. This artist raises the notion of good taste to something that approaches being a state of grace.

The show's other participants work in varieties of expressionism. The gesturalism of Meredith's *Japan* vacillates between action painting and calligraphy, that of Claude Breeze flirts with representation, with an overt if unrealistic representation of landscape. And Ron Martin uses the expressionist's idiom to examine and lay bare the mechanics of making a painting — in one green and one black canvas he begins with a given quantity of paint and distributes it on the surface with an orgiastic energy that is, paradoxically, all the more fervent for being divorced from any affective motivation.

It may not be quite fair to deduce this from just two works, but Iskowitz' lyricism, a kind of Abstract Expressionism, while quite thrilling visually, seems overextended in the large formats he uses. His art appears to be an intimist one and there is an uneasy sense of betrayal about seeing them stretched to fit a heroic, public format — it's as if a love note had been blown up and spread across a billboard for everyone to gaze at.

Two stupendous landscapes by Paterson Ewen bring the exhibition to a glorious end. Painted on wood panels that have been gouged as well as overlaid with wood and metal reliefs, Ewen's works display such a delirious and original range of painterly effects that if we ever decide to embark on a search for the Great Canadian Landscape, we'd do well to begin with a visit to Ewen's studio. Best news of all: Ewen will soon have a major solo exhibition, the first in many years in his native city, at Roger Bellemare's Galerie B.



# Even the washrooms are 'art galleries'

By The Canadian Press

At the Canada Council's art bank the women's washrooms display graphics showing a series of babies' bottoms, a corset complete with lacing and some charcoal sketches of female anatomy.

The men's washroom features a purple, red and blue pornographic graphic.

This "art" and its location are said to represent an attempt at achieving a major goal in the art bank's mandate to make art more of an everyday experience. After all, everyone has to use a washroom.

The art bank was begun five years ago to help support Canadian artists. A grant of \$5 million was to be spent over five years on the acquisition of art and on administrative costs. The acquisitions were to be rented to federal government offices in Canada and abroad at a rate of 12 per cent a year.

The art bank was without a full-time head for almost two years after the first director, Luke Rombout, moved west to head the Vancouver Art Gallery but Christopher Youngs assumed the post last July 1.

**Came from Maritimes**

A 32-year-old American, Mr. Youngs spent five years as curator of the Owens Art Gallery at Mount Allison University in Sackville, N.B. and as a lecturer in fine arts and Canadian art history. Last year he was interim chairman of the advisory selection committee for the art bank.

He gave up plans to write on Canadian art to become director because he says he believes that the art bank

represents the least elitist approach to art in Canada.

With more than 62 per cent of the bank's 7,000 pieces rented as of Aug. 1, Mr. Youngs says he is starting to feel good about it.

"There are two major problems," he says. "The majority of the work is treated in government offices in this region and it's not in as public a position as I would like it to be."

About 80 per cent of the art is rented in Toronto, Montreal and Ottawa.

**Displayed at Stratford**

Mr. Youngs says he doesn't object to seeing art in executive offices because a lot of traffic is channelled through there. However, his greatest interest lies in educating the general public. This summer, for instance, 11 sculptures were on display at the Gallery, Stratford, Ont., and

others on the terraces on the National Arts Centre in Ottawa. The art bank, in collaboration with the cultural affairs branch of the external affairs department, is sponsoring a three-year world tour of 26 paintings.

But Mr. Youngs says the education program has difficulties. "An educational program as it relates to visual arts takes about 10 years."

"One problem of the art bank to date has been the lack of advertising. People in Saskatchewan are just beginning to hear about it."

"We'd like \$1.2 million next year to operate on," he says.

(WIRE STORY)-

November 1976

## AT THE GALLERIES

# Art Bank outshines outdated societies

BY JAMES PURDIE

**C**ANADA'S ONCE all-powerful art societies, from the Royal Canadian Academy down to the Society of Painters in Water Color, the Color and Form Society and other special-interest groups, have aged, become limid, so very tired and more than a little passe, like the down-at-heels aristocracy of Europe.

Shows sponsored by a dozen or more of the societies in recent years reflect the loss of focus and direction, the devotion to long out-moded standards, that continues to erode their credibility as arbiters of the visual arts heritage. Since the Second World War, much of their prestige and relevance has been lost to a dynamic, forward-moving commercial gallery structure and their economic influence to an army of cultural officers—\$20,000-a-year government men, whose uniforms are last year's shirts and neckties bought in batches of three at Eaton's semi-annual clearance sale.

The new order has produced a number of benefits, including federal and provincial sources of grant income for new and struggling artists. But it has not yet evolved a system of standards to replace those carried forward from the thirties and still applied in a kind of genteel isolation by the societies.

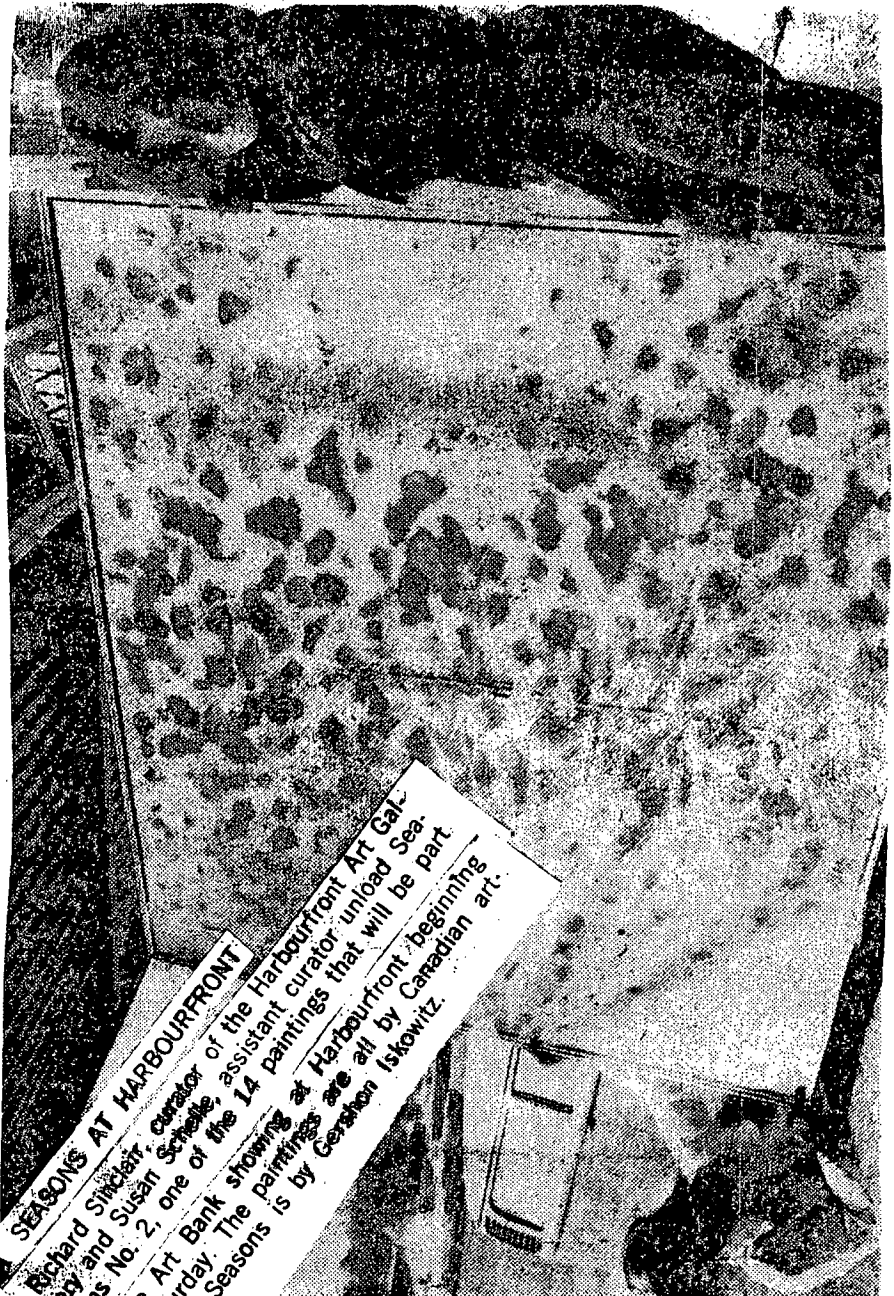
The Ontario Government's Macdonald Gallery has been specializing in the kinds of solid, midstream survey exhibitions the societies used to run. Now the federal Government, in its first exhibition from the Art Bank at Harbourfront Gallery, is establishing the kinds of standards—works of authentic importance to the mainstream of Canadian art—we used to demand from the societies.

Meantime, at Richview Public Library in Etobicoke, the Color and Form Society, a pale shadow of its former self, has mounted a mixed but generally dull and uninteresting survey of paintings, prints and sculpture by its members. With the exception of a few works—those of Osvald Timmas, Sheila Maki and Philippa Faulkner, for example—the show is no more than pleasant.

## ART BANK FIRST

The importance of the Harbourfront show is that it includes 14 major works by seven artists, each a leading influence in his field. They are Claude Breeze, Gershon Iskowitz, Charles Gagnon, Guido Molinari, Paterson Ewen, Ron Martin and John Meredith.

The works on view are the first to be shown publicly from the Canadian Art Bank since it was established in 1972. At least three shows a year from this rich source are promised by the new management at this gallery, and we can expect other policy changes, too.



**SEASONS AT HARBOURFRONT**

Richard Stachew, curator of the Harbourfront Art Gallery and Susan Schelle, assistant curator unload Seasons No. 2, one of the 14 paintings that will be part of the Art Bank showing at Harbourfront beginning on Saturday. The paintings are all by Canadian artists and Seasons is by Gershon Iskowitz.



# And why an Art Bank, anyway?

By Anita Aarons,  
Arts Advisor

This event, with many others to come, is an outstanding first (but definitely not last) opportunity for the general public to see art, in an informal manner, which really belongs to THEM... the taxpayers. Just what is 'Art Bank'? In 1972 the Federal Government allocated \$5 million to form a valuable collection of contemporary Canadian painting, sculpture and graphics (prints) for public distribution. This is a kind of 'bank' of art to be drawn upon and to be placed, not in art galleries, but in public places where the general public might see more easily just



Anita Aarons

what kind of cultural image is being fostered by our vigorous granting system.

Too often films, music, plays and visual art is produced by very creative talent in Canada and never reaches the commercial market. The pity of it is that therefore it rarely, if ever, reaches the "man on the street."

No wonder that he knows little of the growing force of cultural imagery being produced around him.

He knows more about hockey, and hockey players, because the fine art of hockey playing is fed to him daily in large doses through the media — fed to him often by highly trained and skilled observers. No wonder then that the aver-

age Canadian is almost a connoisseur in matters about hockey and can discuss on an international level the finer points of the game.

If the average Canadian were to be fed a daily dose of well-informed news or visual reality in art, opera and theatre, then he or she might be as ardent opera lovers as the Italians or as discriminating a theatre goer as the Londoner.

It takes a long time and lots of exposure at all levels of performance, and especially top performance, to become a truly cultivated society.

The French, for instance, are cultivated in culinary arts, and the general interest in good cooking stems from the lowliest peasant in the fields to

the patron of haute cuisine. The French as a people have earned their right to being called a superior food culture.

Canadians are fast becoming a 'hamburger society' with a 'haute cuisine' of Ken tucky Fried Chicken... God forbid our taste in art become similarly depraved.

Enlightened government policy has given Canadians a choice. Sponsoring art production at all levels, including the highest "highbrow" forms, is wise.

Canadians have the choice of following the 'game' of art from its finer and more difficult points of performance... we must appreciate Olympic performances in arts as well as in sport.

Some cooking is an acquired taste. Not all dishes appeal, but appreciation of standards can be formed within the field of like or dislike. So it is with art... without subjecting oneself to all forms of art, no appreciation can develop. To know 'what one likes' is to limit oneself to 'liking what one knows.'

With these thoughts in mind, the new art programmes of the Harbourfront Gallery will attempt to expose the public to all forms of art and food experiences, multicultural and Canadian contemporary imagery in a "park" atmosphere, for casual and thoughtful enjoyment.

The Art Bank is one of many exhibitions planned to excite, perhaps disturb, maybe please... but above all create awareness in our growing cultural machinery and what it is doing. THE ART BANKS IS YOURS... There will be several other exhibitions drawn from the 'vaults' in Ottawa and placed on view, with information, lectures and directions about how you too can be instrumental in placing works you see and like in places of your own public environment.

Remember — the Art Bank will be open all day, Tuesday through Sunday (closed Mondays) from October 9 to November 7 — the grand opening is on Saturday, October 9 at 3:00 p.m.

HARBOURFRONT NEWS  
Sept. 17, 1976

# Harbourfront News

## The Art Bank is coming the Art Bank is coming!

The Canadian Art Bank, established by the Federal Government in 1972 to give the public an opportunity to see the work of publicly supported artists, has selected Harbourfront to showcase its works in Toronto.


The concept of opening the Art Bank to the public came about as a result of a public meeting of artists and administrators of the Canadian Conference of Arts. When Anita Axonius was first suggested the plan, became Arts Advisor to Harbourfront, she began coordination of Art Bank Officers and Harbourfront to begin several shows in the Art Gallery.

The first Art Bank showing at Harbourfront opens Saturday, October 9, with fourteen

major works by Claude Breeze, Gershon Iskowitz, Charles Gagnon, Guido Mohr, Paterson Ewen, Ron Martin and John Meredith, all leading Canadian artists.

The Gallery hours will be 12:30 to 6:00 p.m. Tuesday to Sunday, with extended hours when Harbourfront has a special event.

Future plans for the Art Bank include at least three shows a year. So far, the major themes of this year's shows are painting (one selected from the Travelling Exhibit organized for the Department of External Affairs), Graphics (selections of which will be available for rent by the public), and a special selection of large and small Art Bank sculpture.



Richard Sinclair, recently appointed curator of the Harbourfront Art Gallery, discusses the Art Bank's display at Harbourfront with Jessica Bradley, Visual Arts Bank Officer in Ottawa.



# Canadian art goes on the road

By Pearl Oxorn  
Visual Arts Writer

In the world of art, the 1970s have yet to be named. The trends toward realism, or the return to the image, characterize many works by contemporary Canadian artists. However, the proliferation of former modes of the '50s and '60s (abstract expressionism, color-field, lyrical abstraction, hard-edge) continue into the '70s, particularly at the hands of artists whose reputations were established through works in these styles which reflect their individual vision and sensibility.

At the request of the department of external affairs, the Canada Council Art Bank has originated a major exhibition of contemporary Canadian painting which is being sent on tour to Australia, New Zealand, Japan and Western Europe. It is the first time an exhibition from Canada will travel so widely. Known as *Seven Canadian Painters* it comprises 26 paintings which range from the non-objective, through the abstract and the semi-abstract, to semi-realist modes of expression.

A selection of 13 paintings from the exhibition can now be seen at the Saldye Bronfman Centre in Montreal until Dec. 10 prior to its departure in the spring on the three-year tour. Each painting is hung so as to take on an added dimension by being in proximity to others with which it interacts environmentally.

Paterson Ewen's unique construction, *Forked Lightning* (1971), conveys the power and dramatic intensity of an electrical storm through the artist's personal use of materials: gouged and painted plywood, which retains its primitive rough quality, and applied angular streaks of metal lightning which crackle against a dark sky. Canvas clouds hover overhead. The minute landscape elements below suggest the vastness of space in contrast with our earthbound environment. Ewen, whose interests are also scientific, explores meteorological and cosmic events, the vigor of which are echoed in the gouged plywood. The sky and the space refer to the new landscape of the space age.

By contrast, Charles Gagnon's *Marker No. 8* (1973), with its subtly modulated grey tones, recalls the broad space of sky on a dreary winter day.

it evokes a sense of calm and contemplation; a kind of serenity prevails. The surface is articulated by subtle uncontrolled drips of paint, lending emphasis to the depth, the emptiness, the infinity of space beyond which engulfs the viewer. Hard-edged borders define the area. With an economy of means the artist has produced a work that holds its own next to the dramatic complexity of Ewen's unusual image of a storm to which it is in proximity.

Gershon Iskowitz, in *Seasons No. 2* (1975) also looks up and is inspired by the softly colored droplets that float above the earth, prismatically reflecting the colors of light from the sun. His lyrical abstractions suggest the desire to be free of earthbound cares as soaring high above the earth, we share the artist's experience of weightlessness. He utilizes all the ingredients of nature: color, space, light, atmosphere, and has said "my paintings are not abstract, they're very very much real. I see those things."

Space is also the concept with which Guido Molinari deals in his familiar language of stripe paintings. He expresses the dynamics of the relationship of color to plane, echoing the structure of the world which the individual continuously experiences in space and time. In *Vert-brun* (1976), the stripes have been widened to become shapes, the colors of which interact, pushing back and pulling forward and quietly eliminating the surface and actually creating space itself.

Claude Breeze's paintings explode next to Molinari's cool calculated statements. His "Canadian Atlas" series is the result of nine trips by car in 4 years from Vancouver to London, Ontario. In the series his highly charged landscapes convey, through the distortion of form and the vibrant use of color, the emotional excitement he derives from his experiences, rather than a naturalistic depiction of the places he saw.

An over-all grid is introduced in *Spacing No. 5* (1974-75) in an attempt to stabilize or bring order to an otherwise chaotic experience of nature. Strange forms float on top of and behind the grid which holds them in place. *Black Snake Line* (1974), but for a cursory acknowledgement of nature in some clumps of grass, looks like a tic tac toe game bent

by the chain lightning in another of Paterson Ewen's constructions, *City Storm with Chain Lightning* (1971) which hangs nearby. Breeze's work is expressive of all the excitement and liveliness that might accompany such an event. A curved stroke slashes its ways across the top, proclaiming the surface and the presence of the artist through his gestural act.

Ron Martin's all-over surface action paintings are part of what has been termed 'Body Art' because each work affirms his existence in the world at the moment of its creation. In *Bocour Green* (1971) by using dramatic swirling strokes of green - the brushstroke given definition by dipping in black - an overall surface of frantic activity proclaims the mood of the artist, the extent of his reach, and all the other particulars of his act.

John Meredith's huge triptych *Japan* (1972) stretches across one wall of a frequently used theatre lobby and reception area, the slashing, uncontrolled brushstrokes echoing the bustle of activity that takes place there. His strong sense of black and white contrasts are enlivened as his forms are translated into contrasting primary colors of red and yellow creating a great sense of energy and movement.

If this collection were to represent trends in Canadian painting in the '70s, giving examples of the various modes of expression with which artists are preoccupied, and not simply to reiterate the personal signatures of seven of its most accomplished artists, some acknowledgement would have to be made, and representation given to those artists who are working within the confines of illusionistically detailed realism, exploring and exploiting aspects of the phenomenal world, be their realism of the magical, high, super, hyper, or photo variety. It would add greater diversity to and constitute an appropriate closing quotation mark for this Canadian statement to international audiences.

The selections from *Seven Canadian Artists* can be seen in Montreal at the Saldye Bronfman Centre, 5170 Cote St. Catherine Rd. until Dec. 10.

## CANADIAN CONTEMPORARY PAINTERS

### EXHIBITION GUIDELINES

#### 1. Selection of Centres

If at all possible, the following criteria should be met by each centre selected for exhibition:

- 1.1 The shipping/receiving facilities must be able to accomodate the unloading and loading of the crates and afford protection from the elements during these operations.
- 1.2 Humidity and temperature control should be provided so that the works are displayed at a constant temperature (which must not be less than 65° F (18° C) nor more than 75° F (24° C) and a constant relative humidity (which must not be less than 35% nor more than 60%).
- 1.3 Lighting systems should provide Ultra-Violet free illumination at a level of 150 lux (14 foot-candles). Maximum illumination should be 300 lux. No works are to be exposed to direct sunlight, even sunlight through windowglass.
- 1.4 Security must be provided against damage to the works of art from vandalism, theft, fire and flood. This would normally entail: the provision of security guards in the exhibition area during all hours of display; a centre which has intrusion alarm systems and/or patrols during closed hours; the provision of fire detection apparatus and fire-fighting equipment; display above ground and an emergency plan for flood protection where floods are probable.
- 1.5 The centre should have a highly experienced curator who can provide a competent condition report on the works both at receipt and at shipment.
- 1.6 The final criteria for approval of loan should be that the centre will designate one experienced permanent staff member to be the Exhibition Coordinator for this show so that responsibility for proper handling and display rests with this person. The safety of the works from the first moment of unloading to the last moment of reloading is entrusted to him.

A centre which meets all or almost all of the above criteria is most likely to be a major or semimajor centre in the country and these should be the first ones approached. A centre which cannot meet any of these criteria should not be considered for exhibition at all unless the works are deemed expendable and of little value to Canada.

#### 2. Condition Reports

Ideally, a condition report is made out by a centre's conservator who is experienced in the assessment and reporting of an object's condition. Because of problems in terminology and subjective interpretation of condition, an experienced Canadian conservator will study each report and advise on appropriate follow-up action when required. However, certain points should be made to any interested centre.

- 2.1 A condition report on each work of art is required from the centre on receipt of the exhibition and again on shipment of the exhibition.

- 2.2 The following four individuals must receive a signed copy of each centre's incoming and outgoing condition reports:
- the Registrar, Canada Council Art Bank
  - the Exhibition Coordinator, External Affairs Department
  - the Exhibition Coordinator at the exhibiting centre.
  - the Exhibition Coordinator at the next exhibiting centre
- 2.3 The condition report must specify the mode(s) of transportation for incoming and outgoing shipments with pertinent names, addresses and way bill numbers.
- 2.4 Each centre applying for the exhibition should be made aware that the condition reports may be used in legal action against a carrier named for damages sustained during transportation. (This might influence their choice of a person to complete the condition reports.)
- 2.5 No restoration work can be done on any of the paintings without prior consultation with the Director of the Art Bank and its conservation consultant. Only they have the authority to decide if a local conservator should treat the work or if the paintings must be returned to Canada.

These guidelines were compiled from a report prepared for the Art Bank by:

G. deW Rogers,  
Conservation Scientist,  
Conservation Division,  
National Parks and Sites Branch,  
Parks Canada,  
Ottawa.



## Peintres canadiens contemporains

### Directives concernant les expositions

#### 1. Choix du lieu d'exposition

Dans la mesure du possible, tout lieu choisi pour une exposition devrait satisfaire aux critères suivants:

1.1 Les installations d'expédition et de réception doivent permettre de décharger et de charger les caisses à l'abri des intempéries.

1.2 L'immeuble doit être équipé d'installations de contrôle de la température et de l'humidité afin que les oeuvres bénéficient d'une température constante (qui ne doit pas être inférieure à 65 °F (18 °C) ni dépasser 75 °F (24 °C) et d'une humidité relative constante (qui ne doit pas être inférieure à 35 % ni dépasser 60 %).

1.3 Le système d'éclairage doit permettre une illumination exempte de rayons ultra-violets, d'une intensité de 150 lux (14 pieds-chandelles).

L'éclairage maximal ne doit pas excéder 300 lux. Les oeuvres ne doivent jamais être exposées aux rayons solaires, même tamisés par une vitre.

1.4 Les oeuvres d'art doivent être protégées contre le vandalisme, le vol, le feu et les inondations. Cela signifie normalement qu'il doit y avoir des gardes de sécurité en service durant toutes les heures d'ouverture, un dispositif d'alarme en cas d'effraction et, si possible, / des patrouilles de sécurité durant les heures de fermeture, un système de détection des incendies et l'équipement nécessaire pour les combattre; de plus, dans les endroits susceptibles d'être inondés, les peintures doivent être placées à bonne distance du sol et un plan d'urgence de protection contre les inondations doit être prévu.

1.5 Le lieu retenu doit avoir un conservateur de grande expérience capable de rédiger un rapport d'expert sur l'état des oeuvres lors de la réception et de l'expédition.

1.6 Le dernier critère déterminant l'approbation du prêt est le suivant: le lieu envisagé doit désigner un membre expérimenté de son personnel permanent pour agir à titre de coordonnateur de l'exposition de sorte qu'il assume la responsabilité de la manutention et de la présentation des oeuvres et en assure la sécurité depuis le début des opérations de déchargement jusqu'à la fin des opérations de chargement.

Les centres qui satisfont à la totalité ou à la plupart des critères susmentionnés sont généralement de grande ou de moyenne importance, et ce sont les premiers qu'il convient de pressentir. On ne doit même pas envisager de tenir une exposition dans un lieu qui ne satisfait à aucun de ces critères, à moins qu'il ne s'agisse d'oeuvres remplaçables et sans aucune valeur particulière pour le Canada.

## 2. Rapports sur l'état du prêt

Idéalement, un restaurateur du lieu d'exposition, possédant de l'expérience dans l'évaluation de l'état d'oeuvres d'art et la rédaction de rapports à ce sujet, est chargé de rédiger un rapport sur l'état du prêt. En raison des problèmes de terminologie et des facteurs subjectifs de l'interprétation de l'état d'un objet, un restaurateur canadien d'expérience étudie chaque rapport et donne des conseils sur les suites à donner, s'il y a lieu. Il convient cependant de préciser certains points à l'intention de tous les lieux d'exposition intéressés.

- 2.1 Le centre choisi doit produire deux rapports sur l'état de chaque pièce d'exposition: le premier au moment du déchargement, le second au moment du chargement.
- 2.2 Une copie signée de chacun des deux rapports fournis par le centre doit être envoyée aux personnes suivantes:
- le catalogueur, Banque d'oeuvres d'art du Conseil des Arts du Canada
  - le coordonnateur de l'exposition, ministère des Affaires extérieures
  - le coordonnateur de l'exposition au lieu où se tient l'exposition
  - le coordonnateur de l'exposition au lieu où se tiendra la prochaine exposition.
- 2.3 Le rapport sur l'état du prêt doit préciser par quel(s) moyen(s) de transport les caisses sont arrivées et sont reparties, ainsi que les noms, adresses et numéros de lettre de transport pertinents.
- 2.4 Il convient de souligner à chacun des centres désirant accueillir l'exposition que les rapports sur l'état du prêt peuvent être utilisés pour intenter des poursuites contre un transporteur trouvé responsable de dommages subis au cours du transport. (Cette précision pourrait les influencer dans le choix de la personne qui rédigera les rapports sur l'état du prêt.)



2.5 Aucun travail de restauration ne peut être entrepris sur une oeuvre sans l'autorisation préalable du directeur de la Banque d'oeuvres d'art et de son conseiller en restauration. Eux seuls peuvent décider si les peintures peuvent être traitées sur place ou si elles doivent être retournées au Canada.

Ces directives sont tirées d'un rapport préparé pour la Banque d'oeuvres d'art par:

G. de W Rogers,  
Expert en restauration  
Division de la conservation  
Direction des lieux et des parcs historiques nationaux  
Parcs Canada  
Ottawa



## GUIDO MOLINARI

1933 | Montréal, Québec

Guido Molinari a étudié à l'École des Beaux-arts de Montréal et à l'école du Musée des beaux-arts de la même ville. En 1955, il ouvre sa propre galerie à Montréal, la Galerie l'Actuelle, consacrée entièrement à l'art non-figuratif, et joue un rôle marquant dans le mouvement plasticien. ■ L'œuvre de Molinari est présentée au public lors des expositions biennales de peinture canadienne au cours des années soixante et, en 1968, il représente le Canada à la *Biennale de Venise*. Cette même année, on retrouve son œuvre à *Canada: Art d'Aujourd'hui*, exposition organisée par la Galerie nationale du Canada pour le ministère des Affaires extérieures, et à *Canada 101*, organisé par le Conseil des Arts du Canada pour le Festival d'Édimbourg. Les toiles de Molinari connaissent également la consécration à l'occasion de grandes expositions internationales axées sur le thème du mélange optique des teintes: *The Responsive Eye*, le Museum of Modern Art de New York, en 1965, et *Op Art and its Antecedents*, exposition itinérante organisée par l'American Federation of Arts, en 1966-1967. Cette année, la Galerie nationale du Canada a présenté une grande rétrospective des œuvres de l'artiste. ■ Guido Molinari habite Montréal et enseigne à l'Université Concordia. Il a bénéficié de subventions du Conseil des Arts du Canada et d'une bourse de perfectionnement Guggenheim. Certaines de ses œuvres figurent parmi les pièces de plusieurs grandes collections, notamment celles de la Galerie nationale du Canada, de l'Art Gallery of Ontario, du Musée Guggenheim de New York et du Museum of Modern Art de New York.

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## GUIDO MOLINARI

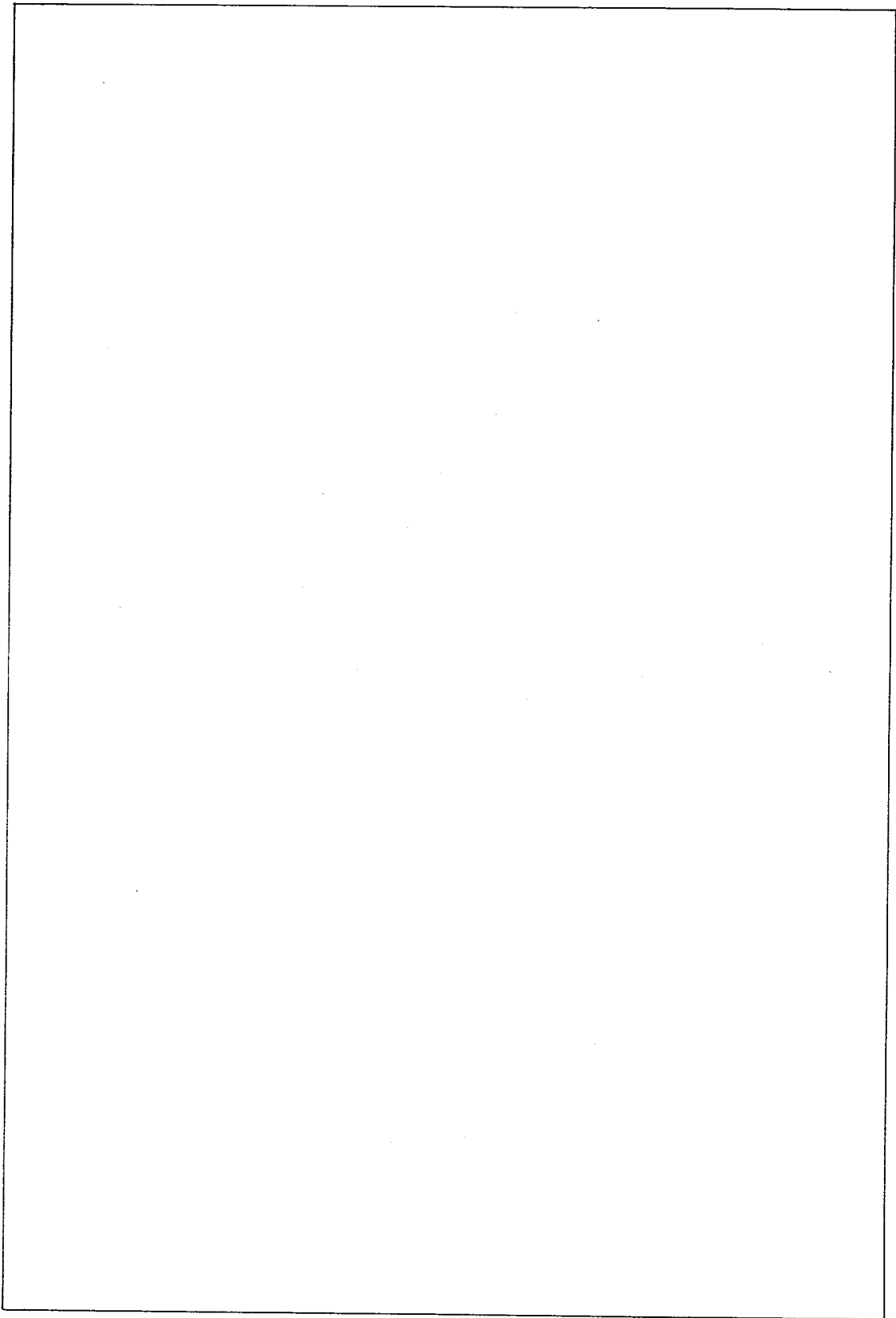
Guido Molinari a étudié à l'École des Beaux-arts de Montréal et à l'école du Musée des beaux-arts de la même ville. En 1955, il ouvre sa propre galerie à Montréal, la Galerie l'Actuelle, consacrée entièrement à l'art non-figuratif, et joue un rôle marquant dans le mouvement plasticien. ■ L'œuvre de Molinari est présentée au public lors des expositions biennales de peinture canadienne au cours des années soixante et, en 1968, il représente le Canada à la *Biennale de Venise*. Cette même année, on retrouve son œuvre à *Canada: Art d'Aujourd'hui*, exposition organisée par la Galerie nationale du Canada pour le ministère des Affaires extérieures, et à *Canada 101*, organisé par le Conseil des Arts du Canada pour le Festival d'Édimbourg. Les toiles de Molinari connaissent également la consécration à l'occasion de grandes expositions internationales axées sur le thème du mélange optique des teintes : *The Responsive Eye*, le Museum of Modern Art de New York, en 1965, et *Op Art and its Antecedents*, exposition itinérante organisée par l'American Federation of Arts, en 1966-1967. Cette année, la Galerie nationale du Canada a présenté une grande rétrospective des œuvres de l'artiste. ■ Guido Molinari habite Montréal et enseigne à l'Université Concordia. Il a bénéficié de subventions du Conseil des Arts du Canada et d'une bourse de perfectionnement Guggenheim. Certaines de ses œuvres figurent parmi les pièces de plusieurs grandes collections, notamment celles de la Galerie nationale du Canada, de l'Art Gallery of Ontario, du Musée Guggenheim de New York et du Museum of Modern Art de New York.

1933 | Montréal, Québec

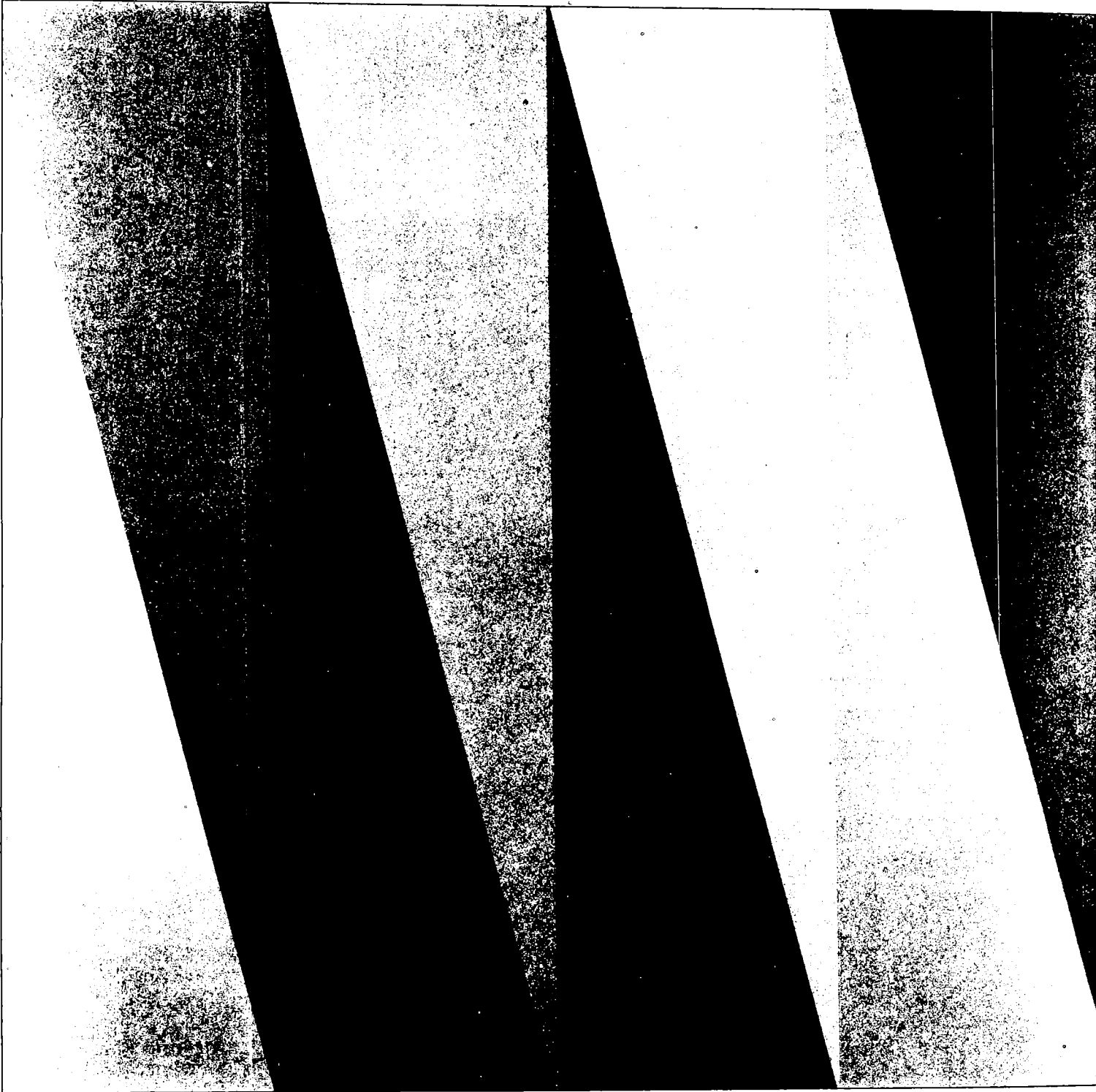
Structure Triangulaire Gris-brun	1971	acrylic on canvas - acrylique sur toile	173 x 173 cm.
Brun-violet	1976	acrylic on canvas - acrylique sur toile	152.5 x 101.5 cm.
Vert-brun	1976	acrylic on canvas - acrylique sur toile	208 x 175 cm.

Guido Molinari studied at the Ecole des Beaux Arts, Montreal and the Montreal Museum of Fine Art School. In the mid-fifties he opened his own gallery, Galerie L'Actuelle in Montreal, devoted entirely to non-figurative art and was a significant force in the Plasticien movement. ■ Molinari's work was included in the biennial exhibitions of Canadian painting throughout the sixties and he represented Canada at the Venice Biennial in 1968. In the same year, his work was included in *Canada: Art d'Aujourd'hui*, organized by the National Gallery of Canada for the Department of External Affairs and *Canada 101*, organized by the Canada Council for the Edinburgh Festival. Molinari's work has also been recognized in important international exhibitions on the theme of optical colour painting such as *The Responsive Eye*, the Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1965 and *Op Art and its Antecedents*, a travelling exhibition organized by the American Federation of Arts, 1966-67. This year a major retrospective of Molinari's work has been mounted by the National Gallery of Canada. ■ Guido Molinari lives in Montreal and teaches at Concordia University. He has received Canada Council grants and a Guggenheim Fellowship. His work is represented in a number of major collections including those of the National Gallery of Canada, the Art Gallery of Ontario, the Guggenheim Museum, New York and the Museum of Modern Art, New York.





■ Brun-violet



(Top/haut)

PEINTRES CANADIENS CONTEMPORAINS  
CANADIAN CONTEMPORARY PAINTERS

MINISTÈRE DES AFFAIRES EXTERIEURES DU CANADA  
DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS OF CANADA

GUIDO MOLINARI

Structure Triangulaire Gris-Brun 1972

173 x 173 cm.

Collection: The Canada Council Art Bank/

La Banque d'oeuvres d'art du Conseil des arts du Canada



GUIDO MOLINARI

## Guido Molinari

b. 1933

Throughout history there have been two major kinds of artistic expression: intellectual and emotional. Some artists paint mainly on the basis of what they think; others, on the basis of what they feel.

Antoine Plamondon and Joseph Légare, for example, were both fine early Canadian artists, though their styles differed greatly. Plamondon's paintings were ordered and disciplined; his work was carefully thought out to express his ideas about life. But Légare's approach was far more emotional. He allowed his imagination to guide his painting, and he encouraged his viewers to follow him.

In our own time Paul-Emile Borduas and Guido Molinari have been leading representatives of these two different kinds of artistic expression. Borduas and *Les Automatistes* believed that art should be allowed to flow directly and freely from the subconscious mind onto the canvas without the conscious mind interfering. By allowing their paintings to develop in this way, *Les Automatistes* felt that they were in touch with the inner spiritual forces of man - forces that relate us all to something beyond the visible world.

But Guido Molinari supported the views of another group of artists who called themselves *Les Plasticiens* and worked in Montreal during the 1950s. In their opinion, art was not a product of the subconscious mind at all, but a carefully thought out, organized arrangement of form and colour.

Molinari was born in 1933 of Italian parents. His father was a musician, and one of his grandfathers was involved in the plaster casting of sculpture. As a result of his background, Molinari was exposed to the arts at an early age, and he knew members of *Les Automatistes* and other Montreal artists. In 1948 when *Refus Global* was published, Molinari was still at school. He was also taking night classes at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, but he found the methods

there too dry and academic. Later he continued his studies at the School of Art and Design at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts for a short time.

The work of *Les Automatistes* interested Molinari, and he experimented with their technique. In order to test their ideas about direct expression from the subconscious mind, he painted several canvases blindfolded. Molinari also tried Jackson Pollock's method of dripping paint onto a canvas and considered Borduas's theory that an almost personal relationship can develop between painter and paint applied with a palette knife.

None of these methods satisfied Molinari's organized and intellectual mind, and by the middle of the 1950s he allied himself with *Les Plasticiens* in their opposition to *Les Automatistes*. *Les Plasticiens*, a group that Molinari never actually joined, drew up the following formal statement of their aims:

*Les Plasticiens* are principally concerned in their work with the 'plastic' facts: tone, texture, form, line, the ultimate unity of these in the painting, and relationships between these elements. . . . *Les Plasticiens* are not concerned at all, at least consciously, with possible meanings in their paintings.

In fact, they were advancing the theories of James Morrice even further than he himself had done. While Morrice believed that a painting is a work of art to be enjoyed for itself alone, he did paint recognizable landscapes. But *Les Plasticiens* claimed that their works had no deliberate relationship with anything outside the painting.

*Mutation Sérielle Verte-Rouge* is an example of what is now called hard-edge painting. It has been said that Molinari started using the technique after watching masking tape being used in car painting to prevent the colours overlapping. But the same type of style was also used at the time by New York

artists, and so it was not actually Molinari's invention.

Like Jack Bush's *Dazzle Red* (p. 208), *Mutation Sérieille* is a painting that depends on the effects of colour. But there are some important and interesting differences between the approaches of the two artists. Molinari used an acrylic paint, applied in brilliant bands of flat colours that look deliberately artificial. Bush, though, has used more subtle oils and in some places has applied his colour with an uneven texture to suggest a sense of life.

In Molinari's painting every band is the same width and every edge is straight; the entire work has a strict mathematical, even mechanical, order. In Bush's canvas the bands of colour vary in width and their dividing line is often an unstable diagonal. Molinari's painting honestly acknowledges the modern, man-made world of technology in which we live. Bush, though, suggests a more natural world, neither even nor constant, in which he can find a state of balance by opposing one force against another.

By making these visual statements, it may seem as though these artists are concerned with meanings outside their subject matter, even though they claim not to be. All real art has meaning. Otherwise it would be pointless and no more than mere decoration. But the meaning of *Dazzle Red* and *Mutation Sérieille* is conveyed by forms, colours, and their relationships alone, rather than by any definite connections with outside objects.

The pleasure that comes from *Mutation Sérieille* can only be felt after looking at the painting over and over again. In doing this, the eye will find ever-changing patterns and rhythms that resound like musical notes, then fade away. The eye groups and regroups combinations of colours that give different effects of their arrangement in space. Some sections, or even individual bands, loom forward;

others fade back. Some combinations of colour seem to soothe the eye, while others vibrate and, like waves of sound, spread outwards from their source.

*Mutation Sérieille Verte-Rouge* is not a symbol for anything; it has no stories to tell or connections to make. Because of this it is a very personal work that must be experienced by each viewer individually.



## REVIEWS:

### GUIDO MOLINARI

Yajima/Galerie

May 5-29, 1976

RENÉ FAVANT

Translated by Michael Greenwood

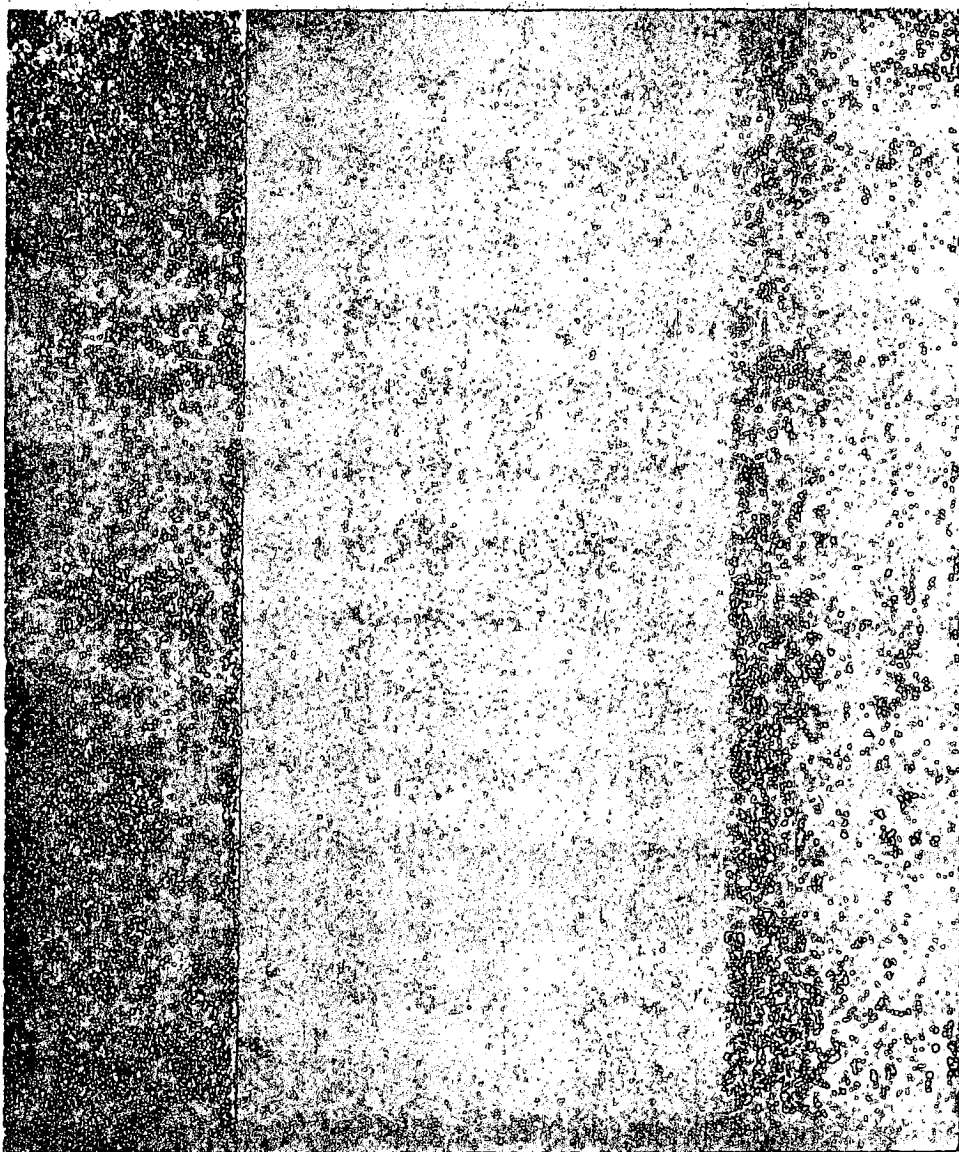
The diminutive Yajima/Galerie offers us a great exhibition: five recent paintings from 1976 in which Molinari again reveals his own particular strength and boldness. Tireless in both theory and practice, Molinari once again tackles the problem of form and color, and their interrelationship, by means of the pictorial device that has almost become his signature: vertical stripes in juxtaposition. But what in other artists may become a personal convention or mere repetitiousness, in the case of Molinari is the sign of a deeply reflective nature steadily building on basic principles. Here, all the former methods of organizing his paintings have changed radically but in ways so subtle as to escape the attention of any but the most observant viewer bent on discovering the fascination of these apparently simple and straightforward works.

The forceful color, increasingly daring and refined in its subtle variations and tonalities, above all commands the viewer's attention (a reversal of the prime role of form in his work). Whether muted or declamatory, the colors are composed either in harmonies (*Orange and Brun-beige*) or in contrasts (*Vert-brun, Rose and Brun-violet*), sometimes opposing warm and cold, or primary and secondary, but never with total consistency, which is why it is difficult to single out any painting entirely innocent of ambiguity and contradiction.

For, with Molinari, color is felt rather than calculated. It proceeds not from the realm of intellect but from perception and sensibility. Though the style may be severe (flat color and hard-edge), the effect is that of an Expressionist painting. Color is the vital force that gives the work its immediate impact and leaves a deep impression on the viewer's consciousness.

But purely sensory response to color is followed up by a more intellectual awareness of underlying structure: the revelation of a distinct new direction in these latest works. If in the earlier works color played the part of a variable in an invariable form (stripes, for example, and checker board patterns) and constituted the "meaning" in terms of permutations and rhythms, here it seems to determine the interaction of form itself. Molinari replaces the modular syntax of the works before 1973 with a more complex "organism." In this latest development, therefore, we discover what lay behind the oblique stripes that were so startling in the works after 1974: a definite wilfulness of composition and a boldly demonstrative approach to pictorial structure that even reinstates drawing itself.

Molinari has reduced the number of stripes, here never more than four, in the interests of a better formal economy. The very slight widening of the stripe (a few centimetres) toward either the bottom or the top creates an asymmetrical division. The stripe asserts its verticality even by the very fact of its irregular dimensions. Thus the



GUIDO MOLINARI

*Vert-Brun*, 1976

acrylics, 82" x 69"

Photo: Gabor Szilasi, courtesy Yajima/Galerie

task of "formalization" through color appears as the be-all and end-all of the stripe, the *raison d'être*, its goal as well as its point of departure, defined by contrast and difference. And so we are made aware of the vertical nature of the composition which, because of the proliferation of stripes and interplay of colors (left-right-left) tended to stress their horizontality, passed unnoticed in the earlier paintings. The stripes' function, as determined by their upright position, is to stabilize the whole field of colors rather than to create an effect of jumpiness with the clash of neighboring hues. Whereas before a color would be deliberately assertive, it is now something stable and concrete, all the more so since the elements of gravity and mass reappear in the shape and line of the present works.

Thus the viewer is led to scan the painting as a whole in search of variations and analogies, and

to discover that it is a space punctuated at regular intervals by denser passages of color and form. This is the almost imperceptible structure that establishes the colors securely on the flat plane of the surface. The shape, inversely related to that of its neighbor, draws the separate colors together into a single configuration and ensures the optical flatness of the entire painting (as exemplified in the schemata of *Vert-brun, Rose and Brun-beige* where the oblique correspondences are stressed in order to bring out the directional emphasis).

These brief observations cannot begin to do justice to the full richness of Molinari's latest paintings but may perhaps serve to give some account of the artist's new concerns and to place them both in the context of and as a breaking away from the main body of work brought together in the retrospective exhibition at the National Gallery of Canada.

## Guido Molinari



*Ma préoccupation structurelle fondamentale pose que la série n'est pas constituée par des objets plus ou moins analogiques, que de fait les quantités analogiques, si elles existent dans la matérialité du tableau, ne peuvent exister dans la perception. Par là, le tableau échappe radicalement à la notion de la notion de quantité pour se fonder à celle de qualité, c'est-à-dire sur l'élaboration d'un système qui permette de multiples autres fonctions. C'est par là seulement que peut s'établir une véritable hiérarchie signifiante fondée sur la pleine réalité des variables des éléments.*

*Il n'existe pas en effet dans la perception d'objets identiques et c'est dans la perception de l'équivoque, de la naissance des multiplicités qu'est donnée au spectateur la possibilité de s'impliquer dans la fonction sémantique du tableau.*

*Cette façon de concevoir la série, à l'opposé de celle de la majorité des artistes qui ont pensé l'utiliser, repose sur la notion d'individuation, d'hétérogénéité foncière de la chaîne des éléments d'une même couleur. C'est en posant la capacité de la couleur à opérer un nombre indéfini de permutations que se constitue, à mes yeux, le ressort dynamique créateur des espaces fictifs qui engendre l'expérience de la spatialité; excluant par définition la notion d'un espace spécifique donné. Ce n'est qu'à partir de la notion du devenir impliqué dans l'acte de perception que la structure s'expérimente et se fonde comme expérience existentielle.*

Guido Molinari is a giant figure on the landscape of Canadian art, as a painter and as the acknowledged leader and spokesman for French-Canadian artists, both in Quebec and throughout the country.

David Thompson, highly respected art critic of the London *Times*, writing in the catalogue for the Canada Council Collection, circulated by the National Gallery of Canada in 1969, said of Molinari's work: "[it] is colour painting that works, not on the nerves, but on the emotions, and a manipulation of colour contrast in which tension and brilliance are remarkably allied to spaciousness and – a quality that only one or two Canadian painters can match – a solid, unhurried grandeur of presence."

There is nothing tentative or indecisive about Molinari's work; for some years now he has produced paintings of mature power and clarity of vision. His *Mutation*, for example (ill. p. 167), is reminiscent of a musical chord, vibrating rich colours in complex juxtaposition with each other. David Thompson, speaking of Molinari's colours generally, says, "The effect is less of the energy of colour than of its resonance and orchestration." Molinari's work is genuinely a triumph of the whole over the parts: the latter are cunningly simple, but have been put together to form a whole of massive integrity and beauty.

The musical references which Molinari calls forth are appropriate: he was born of Italian parentage in Montreal, where his father was a musician. His maternal grandfather had a studio casting figures in plaster, rather like the inexpensive and popular art of that time. Molinari was at ease in the artistic atmosphere and decided early to become an artist.

In 1948, the year of Borduas' tradition-shattering *Refus Global*, Molinari, then fifteen and still in high school, enrolled at L'Ecole des Beaux Arts for night classes. At that time these classes were extremely academic and Molinari found them inhibiting, a precocious, but accurate, judgement. Molinari was fortunate: the comings and goings in the family home included artists – students of Borduas and followers of Les Automatistes, among others – and he had become interested in them while still a child. Before he was in his teens, he remembers, he talked to these men and studied their paintings; he also recalls seeing the first Automatiste exhibit in 1949, an event which made him conscious of the international non-figurative movement.

Like Tousignant, Molinari studied at the art school of the Montreal Museum of Fine Art, where one of his teachers was Gordon Webber. By the time he was seventeen, Molinari had committed himself to personal research and was curious about the Automatiste belief that painting could be done automatically, intuitively, out of the subconscious. Molinari blindfolded himself and painted in the dark in order to explore fully the concept of spontaneous, gestural painting about



which Borduas and his circle talked. In spite of Molinari's conclusion, which rejected the claims of the Automatistes, he produced six important paintings in that style. In the eight month period of experimentation, Molinari also tried the drip technique of Jackson Pollock and the pallet knife application of paint favoured by Borduas. *Emergence* (ill. p. 165) is an example of the latter.

The history of art is littered with the battles of two basically opposed forces, both of which have contributed richly to our visual experience: those for whom painting is an expression of the intuitive, the emotional, the poetic, and those for whom it is cerebral — formal, disciplined, carefully thought out. In the early fifties, that battle was being waged fiercely in Montreal and Molinari was a vigorous participant. Far from wanting to follow what was going on in New York, Borduas and his disciples, adherents of the emotional side of the argument, were antagonistic to it; they found Pollock too mechanical, not poetic enough. Up to the middle of the 1950s Borduas was held in such personal reverence that the concept of automatisme had not been fully aired in the art world. But a show, *Matière Chant*, at the Montreal Museum of Fine Art ended that era; one of the judges of the show, which was the last flowering of automatisme, was Borduas, who had been invited back from New York for the event. Molinari took his stand by refusing to exhibit in the show — a particularly bold action from a young artist, but inevitable for a man who had decided that he had to take a stand in opposition to the automatistes.

From the decline of one artistic idea another, inevitably, rose: in the same year, 1954, came a reaction from a group who called themselves Les Plasticiens and whose works were cool, hard-edged, geometric abstractions. Although not ever a formal member of Les Plasticiens, Molinari found in its output a concept close to his own; in time, after the group had disbanded, Molinari became the acknowledged leader of Plasticien-type painters.

Molinari was then pursuing a type of painting we now call hard-edge. He claims that his inspiration for this came from watching garages paint automobile bodies using masking tape. He also says that this innovation preceded any knowledge of the hard-edge style from New York; e.g., Ellsworth Kelly, who was at that time still in France. In retrospect it appears that the Borduas circle in Montreal and Painters Eleven in Toronto were engaged in "action painting" of a type which became known by its New York practitioners as abstract expressionism, while Molinari and his loosely formed group were well into hard-edge.

Like Tousignant, Molinari had found that there were only two galleries where he could hope to exhibit and one of these was attached to a restaurant. Molinari (with Tousignant and Robert Blair) founded the Galerie l'Actuelle;

at considerable cost to the time he should be devoting to his own work, Molinari acted as director. He says of this period: "We were the atheists of painting," meaning that they were striving for an art based on its own formal values and divorced from spiritual or emotional associations.

Out of the gallery experience, and the contacts it provided with other young artists, Molinari moved firmly into position as a leader of the painting community; for a period, in fact, he was engaged more as an artistic polemicist than as an artist. He is physically suited for the role: though short and slight, he has a mobile body and a strong expressive face with a suitably prominent Roman nose. Sometimes his skin seems alabaster pale and old, at other times he looks surprisingly youthful; what is most impressive however is the sense of presence, of dignity and integrity that he radiates. He expresses himself fluently and pointedly in either French or English and discusses ideas with the greatest of ease in either tongue. Molinari is all of a piece: it is hard to imagine that a man who speaks as he does could paint in any way other than the one he uses.

The man's self control is evident in a consistency of mood — he is articulate and precise whether teaching painting at Sir George Williams University in downtown Montreal or working in his studio in a converted boxing gymnasium in Montreal's gritty north end. In the studio, under brilliant electric lamps, he darts about like some reincarnation of the boxers who once trained there, efficiently pulling from the giant racks which line the dark perimeters of the gym, dozens and dozens of his immense canvases.

Molinari has meticulously catalogued and photographed his output, for he is confident of his place in art history — at the forefront. His estimate doesn't seem unrealistic: no serious show of modern Canadian art, either at home or abroad, had been mounted since 1965 that did not include at least one example of Molinari's work. Among the major foreign exhibits in which he has been represented are the Museum of Modern Art's *The Responsive Eye* (1965), The Guggenheim Fourth International Awards Exhibition held in New York (1964) and the crowning goal of any artist's ambitions, the Venice Biennale (1968).

Molinari doesn't lend himself to artistic comparison shopping; confronting one of his paintings, the viewer isn't tempted to stack Molinari up against someone else. The paintings simply exist to be experienced by the viewer; one reacts to them, in the mountain-climbing cliché, "because they are there."

FOUR DECADES: THE CANADIAN GROUP OF PAINTERS

Paul Duval

p.176

Guido Molinari

Molinari was the first Canadian to apply himself to mastering the close, competitive colour relations that characterize Op paintings. He has explored it for more than a decade, in a variety of stripe, triangular and rectangular arrangements. Born in Montreal in 1933, Molinari began experimenting with abstraction almost upon graduation. His early experiments included a brilliant series of watercolour abstracts in which the colours were flooded, wet-in-wet, into partly accidental patterns. Since he assumed his position as master of the Canadian Op movement, accident has been completely banished from Molinari's creative repertoire. No manual gesture is allowed to show; all is totally smooth, hard-edged and rigorously plotted before execution. From statements he has made concerning his colour theories and working methods, it is obvious that nothing in his studio is unplanned. In his best work, Molinari has graphically revealed the rich chromatic potential of the Op doctrine and, at the same time, clearly shows its limitations as a creative form of expression.

A Dictionary of Canadian Artists

Compiled by Colin S. MacDonald

**MOLINARI, Guido**

b.1933

Born in Montreal, P.Q., the son of Joseph Charles and Marie Mathilda Evelyn (Dini) Molinari, his father a noted musical director, had many artist friends visiting his home which created an exciting background for the boy's youth. From the age of twelve Guido wanted to become an artist. He received his regular schooling at the Sisters of Providence Kindergarten in Montreal (1939-41); the Lady of Mt. Carmel Elementary School (1942-47); St. Stanislas High School (1948-49) Mtl.; and was privately tutored during 1950. His formal art training began evenings at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, Mtl. (1948-50) then he attended the School of Art and design of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts under Marian Scott and Gordon Webber (1951). In his early painting he was influenced by the work of Monet, Kandinsky, later by Russian Constructivists, Suprematists, The Stijl Group and the Automatistes of his home province. His first one-man show was held at Galerie de l'Échourie, Montreal, in 1954. He had by then become interested in a group of artists strongly influenced by Mondrian, in that they were exploring simple geometrical shapes with emphasis on pure colour. He participated in an exhibition with them called "Espace '55" held at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. Fernand Leduc emerged as the leader of this group called "Les Plasticiens" but Rodolphe de Repentigny, art critique for *La Presse* (1952-59), painting under the pseudonym of Jauran was the theorist and founder of the group which included Belzile, Jérôme and Toupin. In 1955 Molinari, with the help of Claude Tousignant and Robert Blair opened a new gallery to provide exhibition space for non-objective painters who had virtually nowhere else to show their work on a regular basis. The new gallery was called "Galerie l'Actuelle" and became a subject of an article by *Weekend Magazine* in 1956. This added publicity (reaching people all across Canada) helped give some impetus to their cause. In 1959 a second exhibition was held at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts under the title "Art Abstrait" which was a collection of work by seven geometric painters who were Louis Belzile, Jean Goguen, Denis Juneau, Fernand Leduc, Guido Molinari, Fernand Toupin, and Claude Tousignant. Galerie l'Actuelle became a focal point for serious abstract painters who in 1956 banded together under the name Association des Artistes Non-Figuratifs de Montréal. In 1960 the National Gallery of Canada held an exhibition of their work in Ottawa under the title "Association des Artistes Non-Figuratifs de Montréal." A catalogue was published for the occasion by Claude Picher who organized the show in his capacity as Eastern Liaison Officer of the Gallery. During those years Molinari was also exhibiting his work in group shows like the Spring Exhibitions of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.



### MOLINARI, Guido (Cont'd)

exhibition of the 'non-figuratifs'; 3rd and 4th Biennial Exhibitions of Canadian Art (1959, 1961) and internationally in such shows as: *Aspects de la peinture canadienne* (Canada House, NYC, 1959); Paris Biennial (Paris, France, 1962); *Geometric Abstractions in Canada* (Camino Gallery & Bleeker Gallery, NYC, 1962); *Twelve Canadian Painters* (touring Africa, 1962); *Canadian Painting* (Speed Museum, Louisville, Ky., 1962); *Contemporary Canadian Painters and Sculptors* (Rochester Memorial Art Gallery, N.Y., 1963); Rental Collection show (Staten Island Museum, N.Y., 1963). He took his first formal teaching job at the School of Art and Design, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, where he taught design from 1963 to 1965. He exhibited in the 5th and 6th Biennial Exhibitions of Canadian Painting (1963, 1965) and was elected an associate of the Royal Canadian Academy in 1964. His oil painting "Simultanéité" appeared in Jerrold Morris' book *On the Enjoyment of Modern Art* (part of a series of books launched by the Society of Art Publications, and McClelland & Stewart, Tor.). Molinari was by now emerging as a major Canadian artist and this was further indicated by his selection as one of fifteen artists to exhibit five paintings each in The Seventh Biennial of Canadian Painting, 1968. It was around 1959 that the forerunners of his stripe paintings first began to appear. In these vertical stripe paintings he feels that he has achieved the effect of anti gravity (a notion he admits is derived from the art of Mondrian) in that there are no horizontal planes to be controlled by height and pressure as he once explained, "If a line runs across the middle of a canvas, it gives the feeling that it is being pressed on both sides. . . ." Having done this he is free to concentrate on creating the interaction of colours in his stripe paintings. Two examples can be seen in the book *Canadian Art Today* where his development is discussed by Pierre Théberge, also another magnificent coloured example in Withrow's *Contemporary Canadian Painting*. Both the National Gallery of Canada and the Art Gallery of Ontario have purchased or acquired some of these paintings (NGC, 1967, 69; AGO, 1963, 1967) and he is represented in many other galleries and collections as listed below. His one-man shows are as follows: Galerie de l'Échourie, Mtl. (1954); Galerie l'Actuelle, Mtl. (1956, 57); Parma Gallery, N.Y. (1956); Galerie Artek, Mtl. (1958); Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (1961); Galerie Nova et Vetera, Collège St-Laurent, P.Q. (1962, 1967); Penthouse Gallery, Mtl. (1962, 1963); Jerrold Morris International Art Gallery, Tor. (1963); East Hampton Gallery, N.Y. (1963, 64, 65, 66, 67); Galerie Libre, Mtl. (1963); Norman Mackenzie Art Gal., Regina, Sask. (1964); Van. Art Gal. (1964); Galerie du Siècle, Mtl. (1964, 65, 66); Edmonton Art Gallery, Alta. (1966); 20-20 Gallery, Lond., Ont. (1967) and others later. He has also exhibited in numerous national and international group shows. He is represented in the following collections: Vancouver Art Gallery (BC); Vancouver Airport; Edmonton Art Gallery (Alta.); Norman Mackenzie Art Gallery (Regina, Sask.); Winnipeg Art Gallery (Man.); Toronto Dominion Bank (Tor., Ont.); Hart House, Univ. Tor.; York University (Tor.) Art Gallery of Ontario (Tor.); Carleton Univ. (Ott., Ont.); Nat. Gal. Can. (Ott.); Dept. External Affairs (Ott.); Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (Mtl., P.Q.); St. Geo. Williams Univ. (Mtl.); Musée d'Art Contemporain (Mtl.); C.I.L. Coll. (Mtl.); Musée de Quebec (Que. City); Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (NYC); Museum of Modern Art (NYC); Walter P. Chrysler Museum (Provincetown, Mass. USA); Rose Art Museum (Brandeis Univ., Bost. Mass.); Chase Manhattan Bank Collection (NYC); Peter Stuyvesant Foundation Coll. (Amsterdam, Holland);

## MOLINARI, Guido (Cont'd)

Kunstmuseum (Basel, Switz.). His awards include: Prize, Salon de la Jeune Peinture (1959); 4th Prize (painting), Concours artistique de la province de Québec (1961); Jessie Dow Prize, Spring Exhibition, Mtl. Museum F.A. (1962); Purchase Award, Spring Exhibition (1962); Purchase Award, First Biennial at Winnipeg Art Gal. Man. (1962); Purchase Award 4th Internat. Award Exhibition at Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, NYC (1964); Purchase Award, Exhib. at Rose Art Museum, Brandeis Univ. (1964); Zacks Purch. Prize, RCA (1964); Grand Award (co-winner with Jack Bush) Spring Exhibition, Mtl. (1965); Purchase Award, Concours artistique de la province de Québec (1966); Third Prize, Winnipeg Show, Winnipeg Art Gallery (1966); John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship (1967); Canada Council Grant (1968). He lives in Montreal with his wife Fernande Saint-Martin, Editor of *Chatelain* (French edition), they have two children. Member: Association des Arts plastiques; Associate Royal Canadian Academy (1964); Société d'Éducation par l'Art; Association des Artistes Professionnels du Québec (Vice-Pres).

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# MOLINARI

## UNE INTRAN- SIGEANTE PU- RETÉ FORMELLE

par Laurent LAMY

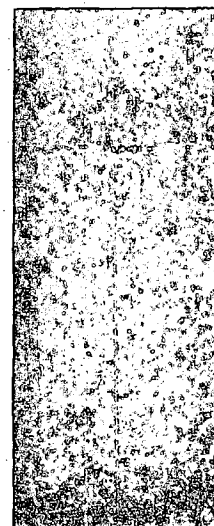
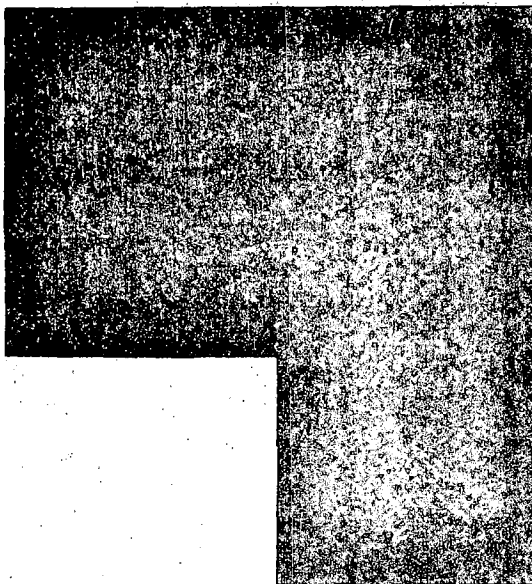
En face de créateurs instinctifs, comme Riopelle ou Hurlbut, qui développent peu la théorie qui sous-tend leur oeuvre, d'autres peintres, comme Borduas et Molinari, éprouvent le besoin de mener, avec autant d'engagement, oeuvre et réflexion sur l'oeuvre. Molinari est à tel point théoricien qu'il est chez lui difficile de saisir, comme chez la plupart des peintres, l'écart perceptible entre l'intention et la réalisation. Ce qui ne veut pas dire que la conscience de l'oeuvre se confonde chez Molinari avec la création et qu'elle l'épuise. Elle la devance en partie, s'exerce au moment de l'exécution et intervient aussi après l'oeuvre.

Peu de peintres, ici, ont autant réfléchi que Molinari sur les problèmes de l'art et connaissent aussi bien que lui la peinture européenne du XXe siècle et la peinture américaine des vingt-cinq dernières années. Réflexion et création se sont donc chez lui nourries l'une de l'autre, dans une dialectique exigeante et constante, qui lui permet de défendre son oeuvre brillamment et orgueilleusement.

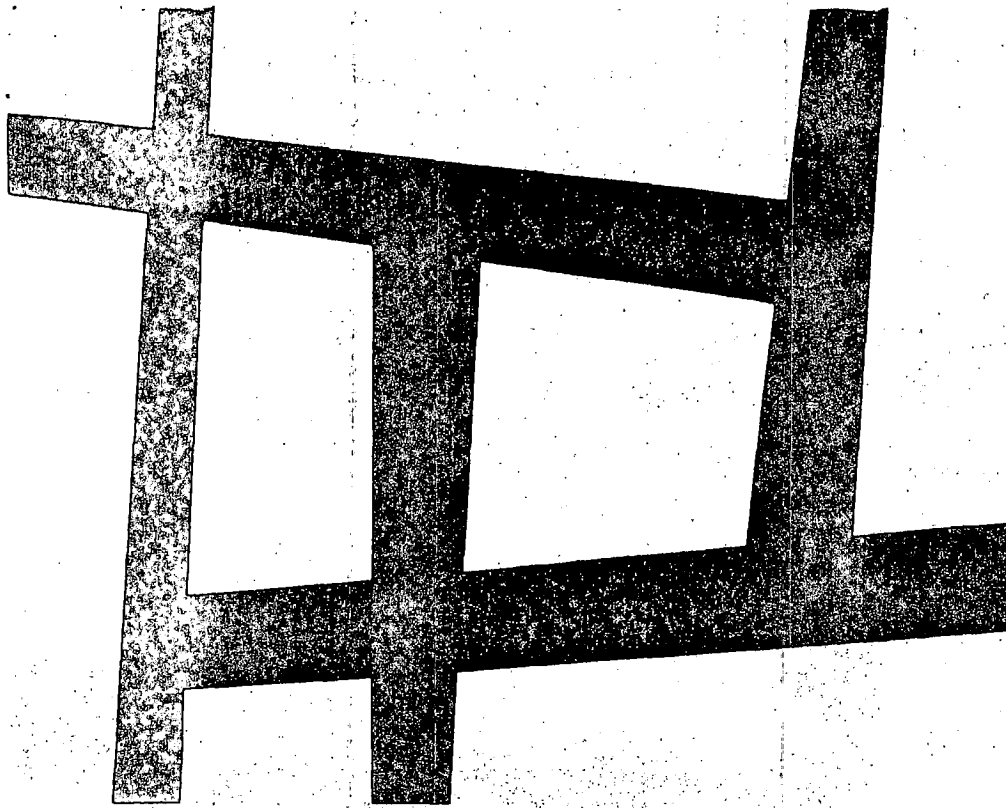
On peut dire que toute sa démarche se situe autour d'une recherche de structure de la surface peinte, dans un projet de découvrir « tout ce qui peut se passer » sur une surface donnée.

Je crois que la compréhension que l'on peut avoir de la peinture de Molinari ne peut venir que de la connaissance approfondie du déroulement de son oeuvre. Surtout connu pour ses toiles récentes à bandes verticales, il est arrivé là par une longue recherche de construction et de simplification sur

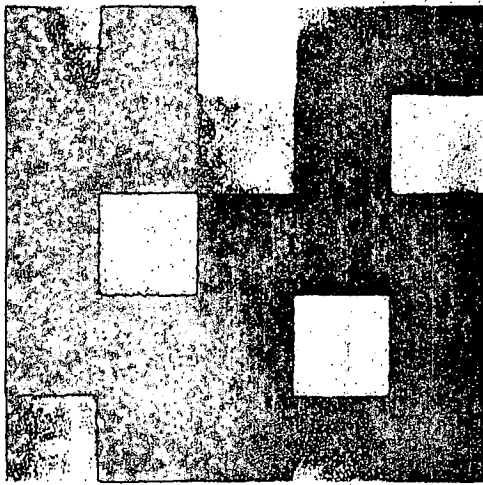
la surface même et par un travail axé sur le dynamisme de la couleur pure. Son oeuvre des quinze dernières années a toujours été fondée sur deux éléments: couleur et surface, qui constituent la structure fondamentale de ses toiles, à partir de la disparition de l'objet quel qu'il soit. La toile renvoie à elle-même et à rien d'autre.







2



3

## UN ITINÉRAIRE MÉTHODIQUE

« Faire du tableau le lieu d'événements énergétiques qui conditionnent une nouvelle spatialité. C'est une révolution structurelle que j'ai toujours tenté de faire, d'abord à travers le graphisme et la réversibilité, ensuite par la mutation chromatique et la sérialisation des événements plastiques. », écrit Molinari en 70 (1).

Comment est-il parvenu à cette conception? Suivons-le! C'est en fréquentant les Automatistes au début des années 50 et à la suite de la lecture de Breton, que l'idée lui vient de peindre à la noirceur. Selon lui, cette façon de procéder respectait davantage la conception de l'automatisme, de

Breton que ne le faisait l'Automatisme québécois. Molinari crée alors du gestuel pur, parent sans doute de celui des tableaux des Automatistes, mais déjà sans objet flottant dans un espace. Pour les « véritables » automatistes, ces expériences « n'étaient pas de la peinture ». Elles constituaient, en tout cas, une réaction contre leur dogmatisme. Le mouvement automatiste avait abouti à une peinture non-figurative parce qu'elle ne figurait rien de connu, mais elle n'en gardait pas moins la notion d'objet dans un espace lyrique. Contrairement à la mode du jour, Molinari passera à l'abstraction, en éliminant l'objet, mais aussi en éliminant les notions de profondeur et de formes sur un fond.

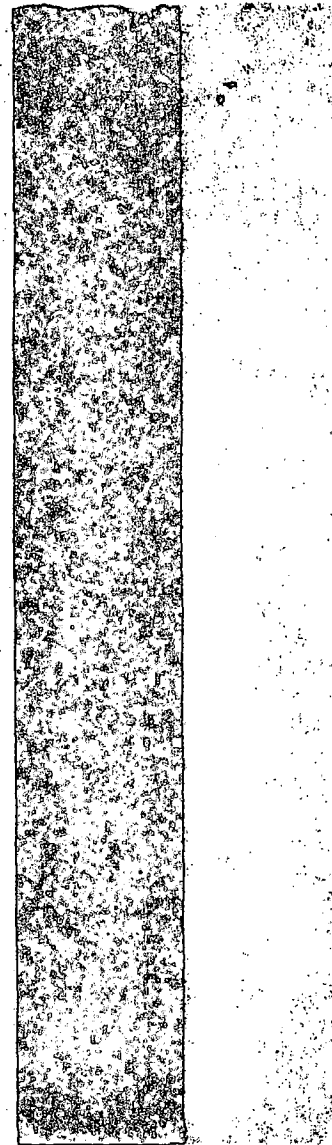
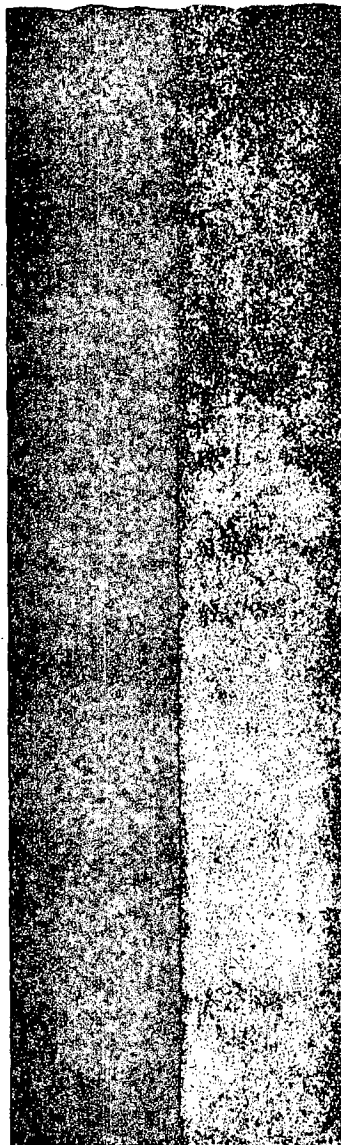
Déjà des toiles de 52-53 dénotent

une ambiguïté du fond passant de l'avant à l'arrière, mais où les éléments s'inscrivent dans un espace relativement plat. En 53-54, des toiles aux formes géométriques proches du carré et du rectangle conservent des traces importantes de matière et de pâte, car les couleurs y sont posées à la spatule d'une façon spontanée, par taches ou pavés, selon une quasi-sérialisation qui réapparaîtra de façon systématique plus tard. L'année 53-54 correspond donc à une période de recherche très abstraite où les couleurs sont pures, où les grands plans colorés prennent de l'importance et où les contrastes se font violents.

Un voyage à New-York, en 1954, fournit à Molinari l'occasion de tenter un peu de *dripping*, mais cette pein-



4



5

2. *Huit-blancs*. 51 po. sur 61 (129,55 cm x 155).
3. *Structure*, 1970. 68 po. sur 68 (172,75 cm. x 172,75).
4. *Collage*, 1961. 28 po. sur 27 (71,15 cm. x 68,6). Collection particulière.
5. *Bisériel ocre rouge*, 1968. 90 po. sur 81 (228,8 cm. x 205,75).

ture, où l'accident a une telle importance, ne convient pas à son tempérament.

Même si la matière est encore présente, c'est en 55-56 que la verticalité pointe comme structure, en même temps que le contact entre les plans colorés se précise. Ces toiles portent en elles, de façon plus ou moins explicite, tous les éléments de la recherche de Molinari.

Parallèlement à son oeuvre, de 1954 à 1957, Molinari joue un rôle d'animateur, comme directeur de la Galerie L'Actuelle. Il présente les premières expositions de peintres peu connus à l'époque, Letendre, Comtois, Tousseignant et d'autres déjà connus, McEwen, Leduc et Borduas. C'est dans sa propre galerie qu'il expose ses pre-

mières toiles faites au *masking-tape* qui, comme ses toiles peintes à la noirceur, font un peu scandale. Encore une fois, des peintres disent que « ce n'est pas de la peinture, encore moins de l'art! »

Dans un parti-pris de rigueur, il peint en 56-57, des toiles en noir et blanc qui le confirment dans son option géométriste. Les toiles de 57-58 sont axées sur la structure oblique où joue le phénomène de réversibilité forme-fond, ou positif-négatif. Suivent des tableaux où existent un rapport entre espaces ouverts et espaces fermés qui accentuent la notion de surface. Il en vient à poser le problème de l'intégration de la verticalité dans un univers géométrique.

A partir de 63, il entreprend, dans

une série de tableaux aux bandes verticales très larges non identiques, jouant sur le parallélisme (*Parallèles noires*, *Parallèles rouges*), une recherche méthodique sur la couleur. Il se rend compte, par exemple, que les couleurs créent une ambiguïté quand elles jouent un rôle de champ: elles ont un rôle rythmiquement plus atténué par rapport à d'autres couleurs qui les dominent. Une couleur peut servir de support aux autres et perdre ainsi l'intégralité d'une véritable verticale.

Éliminant l'opposition verticale-horizontale formant une grille qu'avait conservée Mondrian et qui résultait en des espaces fermés, Molinari ne conserve, lui, que la verticalité et; de ce fait, tout devient couleur.

## UNE RECHERCHE POUSSÉE JUSQU'À L'EXTRÊME LIMITE

Molinari poursuit l'évolution amorcée par Delaunay, Malévitch et Mondrian, qui ont *abstractisé* la peinture en la dépouillant de l'objet, mais aussi en misant sur la notion de surface et de plans colorés géométriques et sur le rapport de ces plans entre eux. Toutefois, dans les tableaux de Mondrian, existait encore une structure à angles que Molinari utilise d'abord, mais qu'il élimine graduellement par la suppression de l'horizontale et le redressement de l'oblique à la verticale. Chez lui, il n'y a plus de ligne. Virtuelle, la ligne n'est plus que la limite des couleurs. La forme disparaît, car les bandes répétées se détruisent en tant que formes. Il ne s'agit plus de rectangles colorés sur une surface mais bien de mutations chromatiques et de séquences rythmiques.

Il supprime la différence dans la largeur des bandes qui donne encore l'illusion d'un champ, par exemple, quand une bande étroite se trouve placée près d'une bande large ou qu'une bande est enclavée entre deux bandes de même couleur. Les propriétés rythmiques de la couleur sont exploitées au maximum, et Molinari obtient, par la couleur seule, une nouvelle complexité en répétant les séquences. Cette sérialisation fait que certaines couleurs deviennent les dominantes qui scandent la toile.

L'intensité visuelle devient éclatante, les juxtapositions de couleurs étant aiguës, sauvages presque (je pense à des jaunes-verts-rouges dans des compositions stridentes). Dans d'autres tableaux, la couleur est lumineusement modulée, vibrante d'inflexions et d'accords presque graves.

Ces dix années, de 1959 à 1969, constituent donc l'étape déterminante dans l'aventure picturale de Molinari, au cours de laquelle se précise sa théo-

rie sur la structure et la couleur. Par la simplification de la structure, il a pu atteindre une grande complexité dans la couleur. Quand il a l'impression de *posséder* la surface, l'espace, il s'intéresse strictement à la couleur qu'il épuise pour ensuite reposer le problème de la surface. Ainsi s'établit presque un schéma de base, un cycle structure-couleur. Sa démarche extrêmement serrée semble parfois piétiner mais finit toujours par déboucher, car il reste prêt à remettre son système en question. Nous en avons eu une preuve lors de sa dernière exposition chez Waddington, en octobre 1971, où il présentait des toiles des deux dernières années.

Dans les tableaux de 70, la construction en damiers établit une multiplicité de rapports de structure. La lecture se fait selon un rapport de 4, ou 6, ou 9, ou encore de 16 surfaces tant à l'horizontale qu'à la verticale ou qu'en diagonale. Par le dynamisme de la permutation, l'œil cherche, chavire, perd sa sécurité, la retrouve par certaines couleurs qui forment une grille de couleurs chaudes qui tout à coup fait place à une grille de couleurs froides, dominant à son tour la composition. En fait, ces œuvres, simples de construction à prime abord (carrés juxtaposés en hauteur et en largeur), sont on ne peut plus complexes dans leur structure et leur perception.

De ces recherches sur le carré, Molinari en vient à couper par la diagonale une surface donnée, recherche vite épuisée car elle ne lui permet de travailler qu'avec deux couleurs.

### UNE ÉTAPE DE SYNTHÈSE

En fait, Molinari est prêt pour un travail de synthèse à partir des éléments qui ont été jusqu'ici la base même de ses recherches: verticales résultant en bandes parallèles, diagonales résultant en bandes obliques parallèles et en triangles. Chacun de ces

éléments circule dans une nouvelle spatialité. Nous voici entraînés dans un jeu de réversibilité et de variantes de lectures. Par la composition en bandes-rectangles coupées par des diagonales, les triangles aux pointes inversées semblent flotter comme des drapeaux. Mais la pluralité des couleurs rend les fonds mouvants et les bandes rectangulaires reculent derrière les triangles, qui, eux-mêmes, jouent à cache-cache derrière les bandes obliques, qui . . . et ainsi de suite. Le voyage spatial auquel Molinari nous convie est pratiquement illimité et impossible à traduire en mots. Il a mis en place, non un univers à 2 ou 3 dimensions, mais une multitude infinie de possibilités dimensionnelles.

Peut-être plus inventif que Vasarely qui ne travaille que sur la notion de tons dans une même couleur et qui procède par dégradés traditionnels pour creuser ou gonfler sa toile, Molinari parvient à créer une spatialité nouvelle, seulement par contraste de couleurs pures.

Sa démarche, strictement intellectuelle, qui refuse avec intransigeance tout pittoresque, n'en renferme pas moins une charge émotive, poétique. Ses œuvres semblent ne solliciter que la rétine. C'est un reproche que l'on adresse couramment aux peintres qui, comme Molinari, exploitent les effets des couleurs entre elles et qui travaillent sur le processus de la perception. Mais la rétine, ne serait-elle point de l'homme même? Et comme toujours dans le cas d'un parcours jalonné d'œuvres importantes, il s'agit d'itinéraire spirituel qui, ici, ne vise pas à nous donner une vision du monde, mais qui participe à l'élaboration d'une nouvelle vision.

English Translation, p. 89

(1) Guido Molinari, *Réflexions sur la notion d'objet et de série* (Conférence J.-A.-de-Sève, 11-12). Montréal, P.U.M., 1971, p. 68.

**Ulysse Comtois  
Guido Molinari**

**XXXIV Esposizione Biennale Interna-  
zionale d'Arte, Venezia  
22 giugno - 20 ottobre 1968**

**Organizzata dalla Galleria Nazionale  
del Canada, Ottawa**

**Commissario onorario: Jean Suther-  
land Boggs**

**Commissario per l'esposizione: Bry-  
don Smith**

**Commissario per il Canada: Joanna  
Woods Marsden**

**Vice-Commissario: Willem Blom**

**Ulysse Comtois  
Guido Molinari**

**XXXIVe Exposition biennale interna-  
tionale d'art, Venise  
22 juin - 20 octobre 1968**

**Organisée par la Galerie nationale du  
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**Commissaire honoraire: Jean Suther-  
land Boggs**

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Smith**

**Commissaire du Canada: Joanna  
Woods Marsden**

**Commissaire adjoint: Willem Blom**

**Ulysse Comtois  
Guido Molinari**

**XXXIV International Biennial Exhibi-  
tion of Art, Venice  
22 June - 20 October 1968**

**Organized by the National Gallery of  
Canada, Ottawa**

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## Introduzione

## Introduction

La selezione delle opere personali di Ulysse Comtois e di Guido Molinari, gli artisti destinati a rappresentare il Canada alla 34esima Biennale di Venezia, è anzitutto il frutto di due considerazioni. Ho voluto da un lato presentare le opere più rimarchevoli compiute dai due artisti fino al febbraio '68, momento della scelta finale; e dall'altro riunire nella mostra quelle opere che rappresentassero compiutamente la personalità dei due artisti.

Mi sono permesso di scegliere delle tele di Molinari e delle sculture di Comtois. Questa divisione che può sembrare arbitraria è facilmente giustificabile dal fatto che Comtois si è dedicato durante gli ultimi quattro anni quasi esclusivamente alla scultura. Durante questo periodo, la sua produzione varia da opere di dimensioni ridotte in legno policromo e in metallo alla colonna d'alluminio di notevoli proporzioni presentata al pubblico per la prima volta qui. La scelta delle sculture di Comtois, in alluminio non-coloristico e laminato fenolico, e le più recenti opere di Molinari, mettono in maggior rilievo il legame stilistico che unisce questi due artisti di Montreal. Le loro opere risultano dalla ripetizione continua di semplici elementi geometrici: Molinari divide le sue tele in una serie di strisce verticali di ugual larghezza; Comtois forgia le sue colonne sovrapponendo blocchi a facce rettangolari o sfere concentriche attorno a un'asse. Nonostante questa austerità formalistica che sembra limitare il campo espressivo, i due artisti realizzano con successo una vasta

serie di effetti diversi. Le strisce colorate di una tela di Molinari non rendono affatto statica la superficie: quelle dei quadri dal 1964 in poi si riorganizzano in un continuo movimento che tende visualmente a nuove composizioni di colori. La continuità delle serie colorate che caratterizza appunto queste tele crea ritmi e contro-ritmi, movimenti di allontanamento e di avvicinamento a velocità variabile che attraversano l'intera superficie della tela.

Nelle sue colonne scolpite, Comtois ricorre alla mano dell'osservatore — e non tanto all'occhio — per cambiare la forma che può trasformarsi con un leggero tocco dell'osservatore in una graziosa curva ondulata oppure in una silhouette asimmetrica e frastagliata.

Mi sentivo un pò a disagio al pensiero che la scelta delle opere di Comtois era magari stata fatta in modo troppo unilaterale, visto che avevo incluso esclusivamente sculture non-coloristiche. Anzi l'artista deve aver capito questo mio dubbio perché mi ha fatto osservare che le superfici d'alluminio delle sue sculture riflettono i colori circostanti e che alla mostra di Venezia questo avrebbe creato una reazione benefica con le tele altamente colorate di Molinari. Questa relazione simbiotica impreveduta dovrebbe dare alla mostra una promettente esperienza di colori.

Brydon Smith  
Curatore per l'Arte Contemporanea  
Galleria Nazionale del Canada

Un double objectif a guidé mon choix dans l'oeuvre des deux représentants canadiens à la XXXIVe Biennale de Venise, Ulysse Comtois et Guido Molinari. Tout d'abord, je voulais présenter de chacun les plus belles réalisations antérieures à la sélection finale de février 1968 et, ensuite, je tenais à réunir une exposition où chacun d'eux conserverait son identité propre.

Bien que les deux artistes se soient illustrés aussi bien en peinture qu'en sculpture, j'ai opté pour les peintures de Molinari et pour les sculptures de Comtois: ce me fut d'autant plus facile que, depuis quatre ans, Comtois se consacre presque exclusivement à la sculpture. Or, durant cette période, son éclectisme l'a fait passer de petites pièces de bois polychromes, et de métal, à la grande colonne d'aluminium qu'il expose ici pour la première fois. La juxtaposition des sculptures d'aluminium incolore et de phénolique laminé de Comtois et des peintures récentes de Molinari met en lumière les affinités de style entre ces artistes de Montréal. Tous deux travaillent par répétition de figures géométriques simples. Molinari divise sa toile en bandes verticales de même largeur et Comtois construit ses colonnes en empilant des blocs rectangulaires ou des disques autour d'un axe. Toutefois, malgré cette sévère économie de moyens, les deux artistes réussissent toute une gamme d'effets. Les bandes colorées de Molinari n'offrent pas une surface statique; depuis 1964, elles

# Introduction

se réorganisent sans cesse en de nouveaux ensembles optiques. La répétition des séries fait jouer sur les toiles les rythmes et les contre-rythmes dans un mouvement de va-et-vient plus ou moins rapide. Dans ses colonnes Comtois s'en remet à la main plutôt qu'à l'oeil du spectateur pour modifier la forme. L'axe autour duquel les éléments évoluent n'étant pas centré dans le cas de la plupart de ces sculptures les transformations possibles sont infinies. Un léger coup de pouce du spectateur et la forme devient une large courbe gracieuse ou une silhouette asymétrique aux arêtes vives.

Après avoir arrêté mon choix, je me suis retrouvé dans un restaurant avec Comtois et Molinari en train de parler de la chanson à succès des Rolling Stones « She is a Rainbow » et de l'accent mis sur la couleur en Amérique du Nord de nos jours. J'étais un peu mal à l'aise, car peut-être avais-je rendu un mauvais service à Comtois en ne choisissant que des sculptures incolores. Comtois a dû s'en rendre compte, car il me fit remarquer que les surfaces d'aluminium reflétaient toute la couleur de l'environnement et qu'à Venise, de ses sculptures réjailliraient les tons vifs des peintures de Molinari. Ce rapport symbiotique non prévu fera vraisemblablement de l'exposition une merveilleuse expérience de la couleur.

Brydon Smith  
Le conservateur de l'art contemporain  
La Galerie nationale du Canada

In the selection of the works by Ulysse Comtois and Guido Molinari for the Canadian participation at the 34th Venice Biennial, two considerations dominated my choice: I wanted to present the most beautiful works the artists had done before the final selection in February 1968; I also wanted to assemble an exhibition in which the two artists would keep their identities.

Although both artists have worked successfully in the mediums of painting and sculpture, I have selected paintings by Molinari and sculptures by Comtois. This arbitrary division was made easier by Comtois having devoted the past four years almost exclusively to sculpture. However, during this time, his sculptures have ranged from small pieces in polychrome wood, and metal, to the large aluminum column exhibited here for the first time. The selection of Comtois' non-colouristic aluminum and phenolic laminate sculptures, and Molinari's recent paintings, has emphasized a stylistic link between these Montreal artists. They compose their works by repeating simple geometric units. Molinari divides his canvases into a series of vertical stripes of equal widths. Comtois builds his columns by stacking one rectangular block or circular disk upon another around an axis. However, within these austere formal limits, both artists achieve a wide range of effects. The coloured stripes in a painting by Molinari do not remain inactive on the surface; the coloured stripes in his paintings since 1964 constantly reorganize themselves

into different optical groupings. Because these stripes are painted in a repeated series, rhythms and counter-rhythms play back and forth at different speeds across the entire picture surface.

In his column sculptures, Comtois relies on the hand, not the eye, of the viewer to change the forms. Because the axis on which the units turn is off-centre in most of these sculptures, the possible arrangements are multifarious. The form of one of his sculptures can become, with a little help from the viewer, a graceful sweeping curve or a jagged asymmetric silhouette.

After the final selection was made, Comtois, Molinari and I were sitting in a restaurant in Montreal discussing The Rolling Stones' popular song, "She's a Rainbow", and the emphasis on colour in contemporary North American life. I felt a little uneasy, realizing that perhaps I had done Comtois a disservice by including only non-colouristic sculpture. Comtois may have sensed this, for he remarked that the aluminum surfaces of his sculptures reflect all the surrounding colour, and that at Venice they would interact with Molinari's colourful paintings. This unanticipated symbiotic relationship should turn the exhibition into a beautiful colour experience.

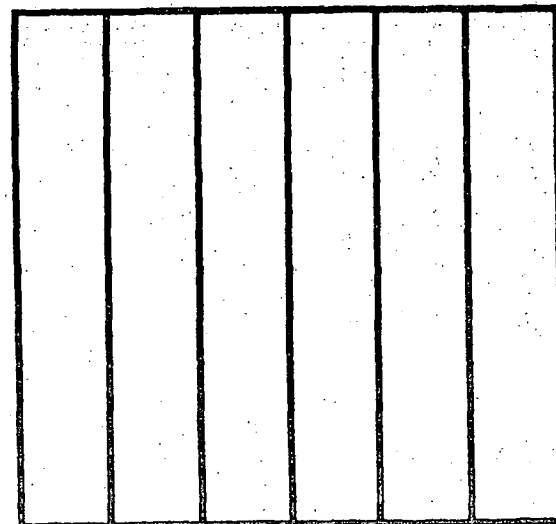
Brydon Smith  
Curator of Contemporary Art  
The National Gallery of Canada

# Guido Molinari

È alquanto difficile, nel contesto delle mie opere, voler spingere certe nuove ricerche oltre un certo limite. Questo altererebbe la qualità delle strisce colorate che rischierebbero di ridursi a dei grandi e larghi rettangoli che non credo poter apprezzare oltre misura. Le mie preferenze vanno al concetto di verticalità e desidero che la qualità vettoriale delle strisce ne venga ulteriormente migliorata. È mio desiderio lasciare all'osservatore la possibilità di percepire in un solo attimo la fine e il principio.

Il me serait difficile d'étendre mes tableaux trop en largeur parce qu'alors la qualité des bandes changerait; elles deviendraient de grands rectangles et je n'aimerais pas trop ça. J'aime le concept de verticalité et je veux que la qualité vectorielle des bandes du tableau soit accentuée. J'aime aussi que le spectateur voie la fin et le début au même instant.

In my work it's difficult to get too spread out, because then the quality of the stripes changes; then, they would be really large rectangles and I would not like that too much. I like the concept of verticality and I want the vectorial quality of the stripes in the painting to be stressed. I also like the viewer to see the end-beginning all at once.



Uno fra i maggiori astrattisti di Montreal, Guido Molinari ha utilizzato dapprima il sistema del « dripping » nell'elaborazione delle sue tele. In seguito la composizione delle sue opere si orientò piuttosto verso le grandi macchie di colori uniformi, applicate con la spatola. Queste opere furono esposte la prima volta nel 1954. Segui nel 1956-57 una serie di venti quadri geometrici astratti, in smalto bianco e nero. Si confermò così la rottura totale con il tradizionalismo locale. E questa austerità di posizione Molinari non la smentirà in nessuna delle sue ulteriori tele bianche e nere.

Nel 1958, l'artista reintroduce colori puri nella sua pittura composta allora di semplici elementi geometrici — il quadrato e il rettangolo — disposti su tutta la superficie della tela. Da quel momento, Molinari accentua viepiù la verticalità delle sue composizioni fino al punto di eliminare, nel periodo compreso tra il 1961 e il 1963, ogni referenza visuale nei rapporti tra forme geometriche, viste sia in sovrapposizione, sia in giustapposizione.

La composizione della sua pittura è oggi alquanto semplice e presenta in pari tempo un carattere analitico e sintetico. Strisce parallele di colori sono disposte sull'intera superficie della tela seguendo, dal 1964 in poi, uno schema ripetitivo. Ogni striscia colorata ha una tonalità oggettiva che, appena la si percepisce, viene modificata secondo i colori contigui che cambiano, essi pure, allo stesso modo. La ripetizione della serie iniziale aggiunge in certe tele un elemento di complessità nel percepire le modifiche di colori. A questa lettura discontinua, per « enumerazione », se ne sovrappone una seconda: l'insieme delle strisce considerate nella sintesi

delle mutazioni cromatiche proprie a ognuna di loro. A quel momento, l'intera superficie si trasforma: le strisce vibrano, ondulano, si staccano dalla tela e effettuano di volta in volta movimenti ascendenti e discendenti, cercando di raggiungere le pareti laterali del quadro. In altre parole, queste mutazioni quasi simultanee distruggono la geometria iniziale lasciando che lo spettatore scopra uno spazio nuovo, situato tra lui e la superficie materiale dell'oggetto, di cui il suo occhio percepisce il movimento. La tela diventa veramente astratta e non è più dipendente dagli elementi formali. È lo spettatore stesso che sperimenta la trasformazione continua dello spazio luminoso e colorato dell'opera. Ognuno degli attimi di percezione si distingue dal precedente e da quello che lo segue creando così una tensione costante tra gli elementi individuali della composizione e l'insieme dell'opera. In dati momenti alcune fra le strisce colorate si trovano all'apice della loro intensità, in altri tutta la superficie si equilibra, diventa monocroma, facendo scomparire l'immagine espressa all'inizio.

La ricchezza dell'arte espressiva di Molinari si spiega sia con il rigore delle sue concezioni, sia per la complessità delle reazioni che egli provoca nello spettatore. L'importanza della sua arte pittorica risiede invece nel continuo rinnovamento delle esperienze, dematerializzando gli elementi plastici fino a farli passare dal campo dell'immagine semplicemente percepita all'immagine sentita.

Pierre Théberge  
Assistente Curatore per  
l'Arte Canadese  
Galleria Nazionale del Canada

L'un des chefs de file de l'abstraction à Montréal, Guido Molinari peignit d'abord des tableaux au « dripping », puis il composa des oeuvres avec de grandes taches de couleurs uniformes, appliquées à la spatule, qu'il exposa en 1954. En 1956-1957, il exécuta une série de vingt tableaux géométriques abstraits, noirs et blancs, peints à l'émail. Ces derniers représentaient une rupture totale avec la tradition locale. Ce parti-pris de rigueur que Molinari affirme dans ces tableaux noirs et blancs ne s'est pas démenti depuis.

A partir de 1958, il réintroduisit des couleurs pures dans sa peinture qui était alors faite d'éléments géométriques simples — le carré et le rectangle — posés sur toute la surface du tableau. Dès lors, Molinari accentua de plus en plus la verticalité de ses compositions jusqu'à éliminer, entre 1961 et 1963, toute référence visuelle aux rapports des formes géométriques entre elles, perçues soit comme superposées, soit comme juxtaposées.

La composition de sa peinture actuelle est simple et elle a un caractère à la fois analytique et synthétique. Des bandes parallèles de couleurs sont disposées sur toute la surface de la toile, selon une organisation qui, à partir de 1964, est sérielle. Chaque bande de couleur a une tonalité objective qui, sitôt perçue, est modifiée par les couleurs qui lui sont contiguës. Et celles-ci sont, à leur tour, modifiées de la même façon. La répétition de la série initiale dans certaines toiles ajoute un élément de complexité à la perception des modifications des couleurs. A cette lecture discontinue, par « énumération », s'en superpose une autre: celle de l'ensemble des bandes



dans la synthèse des mutations chromatiques propres à chacune. C'est alors toute la surface qui se transforme: les bandes vibrent, ondulent, elles se détachent de la surface; elles suivent tour à tour un mouvement ascendant et descendant, elles tendent à rejoindre les côtés de la toile. Bref, ces mutations quasi-simultanées détruisent la géométrie initiale et ainsi le spectateur découvre un espace nouveau, situé entre son oeil et la surface de l'objet mouvant qu'il percevait. Le tableau devient réellement abstrait et ne fait plus appel à des éléments formels. C'est le spectateur qui fait l'expérience de l'espace lumineux et coloré de l'oeuvre et de sa transformation perpétuelle. Chacun des moments de perception diffère ainsi de celui qui le précède et de celui qui le suit dans une tension constante entre les éléments individuels de la composition et sa totalité: à certains moments certaines bandes colorées sont à leur maximum d'intensité, à d'autres c'est toute la surface qui s'équilibre, devient monochrome et fait ainsi disparaître l'image proposée au départ.

La richesse de l'art de Molinari tient autant à la rigueur de sa conception qu'à la complexité des réactions qu'il provoque chez le spectateur. Son importance réside dans la constante remise en question de la nature de l'expérience picturale par une dématérialisation des éléments plastiques que Molinari fait passer du domaine de l'image perçue à celui de l'événement.

Pierre Théberge  
Conservateur adjoint de l'art canadien  
La Galerie nationale du Canada

Guido Molinari, one of the foremost abstract artists in Montreal, first painted by the "drip" technique, and later composed works with large patches of uniform colour (applied with a spatula), which he exhibited in 1954. In 1956-57, he executed a series of twenty abstract, geometric paintings in black and white enamel. These represented a complete break with local tradition. The rigour which Molinari adopted in these black and white paintings has not since been abandoned.

Beginning in 1958, he reintroduced pure colours in his work, which was composed then of simple geometric elements — squares and rectangles — spread over the entire surface of the canvas. From this period, Molinari accentuated to an ever-increasing extent the vertical line of his compositions, to the point of eliminating, between 1961 and 1963, any visual reference to the interrelationships of the geometric forms, whether they are perceived as juxtaposed or as superimposed one on top of the other.

The composition of his work today is simple and at once analytic and synthetic in nature. Parallel bands of colour are arranged over the entire surface of the canvas according to a system which, after 1964, is serial. Each band of colour has an objective tonality which, once perceived, is modified by the colours adjacent to it; these are in turn modified in the same manner. The repetition of the initial series in certain canvases adds an element of complexity to the awareness of colour modifications. To this interrupted perception, this perception by "enumeration", is added another: that of all the bands in a synthesis of the chromatic mutations proper to

each. The entire surface is then transformed: the bands vibrate, undulate, and emerge from the surface. They rise and fall in turn, and strain towards the sides of the canvas. In short, these quasi-simultaneous mutations destroy the initial geometry, and the spectator thus discovers a new space, situated between his eye and the surface of the moving object which he perceives. The painting becomes truly abstract, no longer dependent upon formal elements. It is the spectator who experiences the luminous and coloured space of the work, and its constant transformation. Each visual effect differs therefore from those preceding and following it, in a constant tension between the individual elements of the composition and its overall pattern: at certain moments some coloured bands achieve their maximum intensity; at other times, the entire surface becomes stable and monochromatic, thus banishing the image suggested at the outset.

The richness of Molinari's art is due both to the keenness of his conception and to the complexity of the reactions he provokes in the spectator. Its importance resides in the constant questioning of the nature of the visual experience by a dematerialization of the plastic elements, which Molinari moves from the realm of the image perceived to that of events.

Pierre Théberge,  
Assistant Curator of Canadian Art  
The National Gallery of Canada

BY JAMES PURDIE

Globe & Mail - Sat / March 26/77

**I**F GUIDO MOLINARI could find a way to walk with you through his retrospective exhibition opening today at the Art Gallery of Ontario, he would insist on at least three stops for discussion, argument or explanation.

The first of these would be at the entrance to the exhibition, where three early paintings by the Montreal master of color harmonies declare the terms of reference. The second would be in front of the severe black and white canvas he calls Structure No. 1. The third would be in the space occupied by his drawings and works on paper. These are the stops we made together—and for good reason—while Molinari was installing 50 of his paintings and the 29 drawings that will grace the gallery until May 23. The plain truth is that, without some knowledge of how and why Molinari evolved his deceptively simple system of painting, the casual viewer could mistake his colored stripes, rectangles and triangles for experiments in interior decoration.

Dozens of Toronto viewers will refuse to see any more than just that decorative element, but others will discover the Molinari who has already astonished the world of art beyond Canada's borders by extending the range of all colors into dimensions they have never been able to reach. It's even possible that the information Molinari is uncovering about the properties of color could one day be compared to Vermeer's discoveries about light.

That sort of speculation holds no interest for the painter, though. His concern is with "daring to be a man for whom the absolute was to be authentic." For Molinari, this has always meant a challenge to the status quo in art.

### PAINTING IN THE DARK

He would like you to stop first at the early paintings on the way into the gallery because that allows him to make an opening statement of sorts. This begins with the seemingly uncharacteristic painting he calls Emergence II. The densely organic abstraction was painted by Molinari in 1951 to test claims made by Montreal's Automatiste painters about their ability to incorporate creative forces from the unconscious into their art. He painted it while blindfolded.

When he felt the painting to be finished and removed the blindfold, he found his suspicions about the automatistes—Canada's first group of fully committed abstractionists—were true; they had not broken with formal painting conventions as completely as they had hoped and claimed. This left Molinari to pursue the goal on his own.

After several more experiments with painting in the dark or blindfolded, Molinari discovered what he believes to be a natural order in his art. It revealed itself, even in the first blindfold painting, as a strong vertical weight (of density or color) on the left side, followed by a horizontal development or expansion toward the right.

The next two paintings at the gallery entrance, Juxtaposition 1954 and Emergence 1955,

are directly linked to the blind painting and they form an essential bridge to the structural themes in all the works that follow. You'll see, when you enter the main exhibition area, how Molinari's earliest experiments led him through textures and organic counterbalances of unshaped color masses directly to the vertical stripes and other minimal geometric shapes on which he began to train and discipline colors. He has made them perform as they never performed before.

If Molinari's first stripe, triangle or rectangle is blue, you can expect to see the same blue reappear several colors to the right, but modified in all its vibrations by the colors separating it from the original. And that, essentially, is what Molinari's art has always been about, what he calls "a dialectic of color, light, space." The blue stripe, in turn, modifies the properties of the red, the green, the brown or the yellow, until the range of each is extended. The effect is a tangible change in the properties of all the colors.

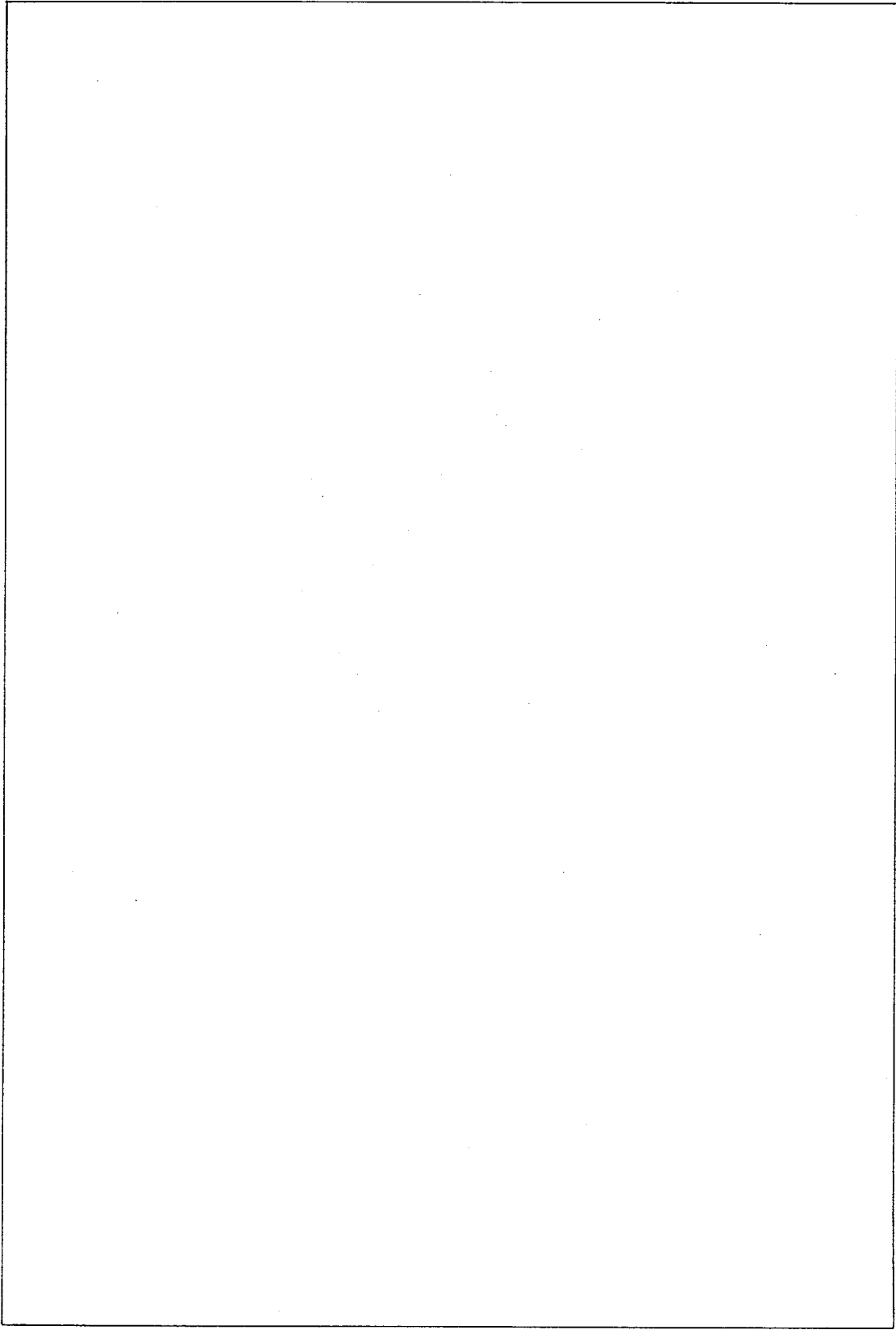
When you get to the drawings—Molinari's third stop, your second if you want to follow the development in sequence—you'll find the same principles at work. The artist thinks of them as monochromatic paintings, whether they're ragged masses of black against white or masses of flowing lines derived from the automatic writing he picked up from the European surrealists in the early fifties.

Molinari says his drawings are not based on the idea of outline or draftsmanship, not made to define a shape—"just another way of creating a vibrant mass. . . In talking about my drawings, I use pictorial terms."

When you arrive before Molinari's 1969 painting Structure No. 1, a plain white canvas supporting two diagonally opposed masses of black, you'll be as close as you're going to get in this exhibition to the artist's current development. It derives from a black and white sketch made in 1956, when Molinari was dealing with complexities of shape and volume rather than color and light.

From 1970 to 1973—the point at which this retrospective exhibition ends—Molinari's paintings foreshadow change. The structural symmetry against which he tensions his color begins to move, turn and lean. Since 1973, his colors have tended to become more subtle and lyrical, and today he is committed to "going back to dealing with the relationships of shape" characteristic of his work in the mid-fifties.

This exhibition, organized by the National Gallery, will travel across Canada after the AGO closing. It should be long remembered as a testimonial to a Canadian painter as important in his own way as the late Jack Bush to the continuing advance of the world's art. Now that Bush is gone, Molinari stands alone as Canada's abstract master of liberated light, space, color and time.



■ Brun-violet

# RON MARTIN

1943 | London, Ontario

Ron Martin a étudié à l'école secondaire H.B. Beal de London (Ontario). Dès 1964, il ouvre son propre atelier dans cette même ville et se consacre entièrement à la peinture. L'année suivante, Martin commence à exposer régulièrement à Toronto, et, à compter de 1971, tous les ans, à la Carmen Lamanna Gallery, Toronto. On retrouve ses œuvres dans trois grandes expositions canadiennes organisées par la Galerie nationale du Canada : *La VII<sup>e</sup> Biennale de peinture canadienne*, 1968, *Le cœur de Londres*, en 1968, et *Boucherville, Montréal, Toronto, London* en 1973. L'Art Gallery of Ontario a présenté récemment la série *World Paintings*, ensemble d'œuvres exécutées par Ron Martin en 1970. ■ Ron Martin est titulaire d'une bourse de travail libre offerte par le Conseil des Arts du Canada. Ses œuvres figurent dans les collections de la Galerie nationale du Canada, de l'Art Gallery of Ontario et de la London Public Art Gallery de London (Ontario).



Bocour Green	1971	acrylic on canvas - acrylique sur toile	214 x 183 cm.
Bocour Blue	1972	acrylic on canvas - acrylique sur toile	213 x 183.5 cm.
Untitled	1974	acrylic on canvas - acrylique sur toile	214 x 168 cm.

Ron Martin studied at the H.B. Beal Secondary School in London, Ontario. He set up his own studio and began painting full time in the same city in 1964. Martin has exhibited regularly in Toronto since 1965 and annually at the Carmen Lamanna Gallery, Toronto, since 1971. His work has been included in three major Canadian exhibitions organized by the National Gallery of Canada ; the *Seventh Biennial of Canadian Painting* 1968, *The Heart of London*, 1968 ; and *Boucherville, Montreal, Toronto, London*, 1973. An exhibition of Ron Martin's *World Paintings*, a series of works executed in 1970, was recently mounted by the Art Gallery of Ontario. Ron Martin is the recipient of a senior Canada Council award. His works are represented in the collections of the National Gallery of Canada, the Art Gallery of Ontario and the London Public Art Gallery, London, Ontario.





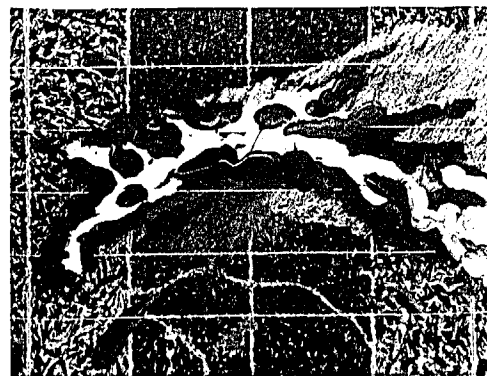
RON MARTIN, BOCOUR GREEN 1971



## CLAUDE BREEZE

1938 | Nelson, British Columbia ■ Spacing No. 5 | 1974-5 | acrylic & china marker on canvas | acrylique et encre de chine sur toile | 122 x 160.5 cm.

Claude Breeze graduated in 1958 from the Regina School of Art, University of Saskatchewan and then moved to Vancouver where he attended the Vancouver School of Art. Breeze was exhibiting his work in group shows by the early sixties and had his first one man show in 1965 at the New Design Gallery, Vancouver. He has since exhibited at the Bau-Xi Gallery, Vancouver, the Jerrold Morris Gallery, Toronto and the Marlborough Goddard Gallery, Toronto and Montreal. ■ Over the past ten years Claude Breeze's work has been selected for a number of major shows including the *Biennial of Canadian Painting*, 1965, *Perspective '67*, at the Art Gallery of Ontario and *Canada 101* organized by the Canada Council in 1968 for the Edinburgh Festival. His work has been included most recently in *Changing Visions: The Canadian Landscape*, a travelling exhibition organized by the Edmonton Art Gallery and the Art Gallery of Ontario. ■ Claude Breeze has taught at the Banff School of Fine Arts and was Artist in Residence from 1972 to 1974 at the University of Western Ontario in London. He is presently teaching at York University, Toronto. His work is represented in collections across the country, including the Vancouver Art Gallery, the Art Gallery of Ontario and the National Gallery of Canada.



Diplômé de la Regina School of Art de l'Université de Saskatchewan, en 1958, Claude Breeze se rend ensuite à Vancouver où il suit les cours de la Vancouver School of Art. Dès le début des années soixante, il présente ses œuvres à l'occasion d'expositions collectives et, en 1965, pour la première fois au cours d'une exposition individuelle, à la New Design Gallery, de Vancouver. Depuis lors, il expose à la Bau-Xi Gallery de Vancouver, à la Jerrold Morris Gallery de Toronto et à la Marlborough Goddard Gallery de Toronto et Montréal. ■ Les œuvres de Claude Breeze sont au nombre de celles qui ont été retenues ces dix dernières années pour plusieurs grandes expositions: Biennale de la peinture canadienne (1965), *Perspective '67*, à l'Art Gallery of Ontario, et *Canada 101*, organisé par le Conseil des Arts du Canada, en 1968, pour le Festival d'Edimbourg. Tout dernièrement, on a pu remarquer son œuvre dans le cadre de *Changing Visions: The Canadian Landscape*, exposition itinérante organisée par l'Edmonton Art Gallery et l'Art Gallery of Ontario. ■ Claude Breeze a enseigné à la Banff School of Fine Arts. Artiste résident à l'Université Western Ontario, de 1972 à 1974, il enseigne actuellement à l'Université York de Toronto. Ses œuvres figurent dans maintes collections canadiennes, dont celles de la Vancouver Art Gallery, de l'Art Gallery of Ontario et de la Galerie nationale du Canada.



## PATERSON EWEN

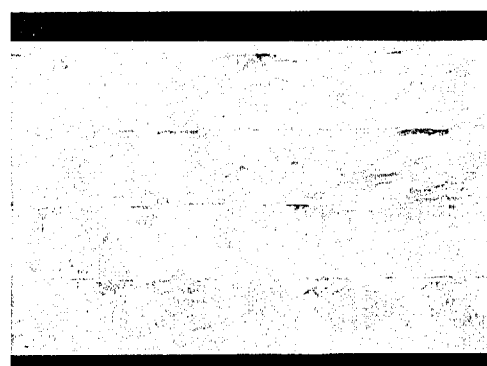
1925 | Montréal, Québec ■ Forked Lightning | 1971 | acrylic, metal, linoleum, canvas on plywood | acrylique, métal, linoléum, toile sur contre-plaqué 244 x 122 cm.

Paterson Ewen commença à exposer vers 1955, après avoir suivi les cours de l'école du Musée des beaux-arts de Montréal. Membre de l'Association des peintres non-figuratifs de Montréal, il participa à l'exposition *Espace 55*, passée désormais à l'histoire. En 1968, on retrouve ses œuvres à la VII<sup>e</sup> Biennale de peinture canadienne, organisée par la Galerie nationale du Canada. Depuis 1968, il expose tous les ans à la Carmen Lamanna Gallery de Toronto et ses toiles sont au nombre de celles que l'on peut voir actuellement à l'exposition itinérante *New Visions: The Canadian Landscape*, organisée par l'Edmonton Art Gallery et l'Art Gallery of Ontario. La London Art Gallery de London (Ontario) offra une rétrospective des œuvres de Paterson Ewen en novembre 1976. ■ Paterson Ewen habite London (Ontario) depuis 1969. Ses toiles figurent dans les collections du Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, du Musée des beaux-arts de Montréal et de la Galerie nationale du Canada.

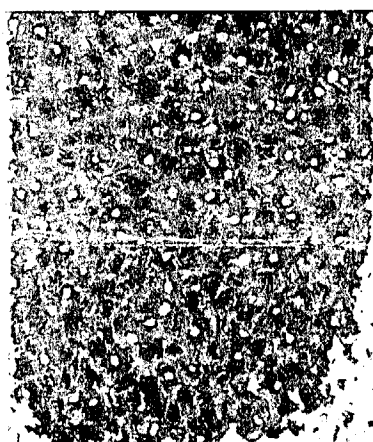
## CHARLES GAGNON

1934 | Montréal, Québec ■ Screenspace #2 | Espace/écran #2 | 1973-4 | oil on canvas | huile sur toile | 158 x 229.5 cm.

Charles Gagnon studied graphic art and interior design at the Parsons School of Design in New York from 1956 to 1959. As well as being a painter, he is also known as a filmmaker and a photographer. Gagnon has been exhibiting in Canada and abroad since 1958. His work has been represented in numerous major exhibitions over the past fifteen years; notably, the biennials of Canadian painting throughout the sixties: *Canada: Art d'Aujourd'hui*, a travelling exhibition organized by the National Gallery in 1968 for the Department of External Affairs and *Canada 101*, an exhibition organized by the Canada Council in 1968 for the Edinburgh Festival. He was commissioned to create the films for the Christian pavilion at Expo 67 and has recently completed a mural for the Lester B. Pearson building in Ottawa. ■ Charles Gagnon lives in Montreal. He has taught film at Loyola College, Montreal and presently teaches film and photography at the University of Ottawa. He was the recipient of a senior Canada Council award in 1968 and 1969. His works are included in the Zacks collection, Toronto, and the collections of the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, the Montreal Museum of Fine Art and the Musée d'Art Contemporain, Montreal.



Charles Gagnon a étudié les arts graphiques et la décoration intérieure, de 1956 à 1959, à la Parsons School of Design de New York. Peintre de son état, il est également connu pour ses talents de cinéaste et de photographe. Gagnon expose au Canada et à l'étranger depuis 1958. On retrouve son œuvre dans bon nombre des grandes expositions qui ont eu lieu ces quinze dernières années, notamment aux biennales de peinture canadienne des années soixante, à *Canada: Art d'aujourd'hui*, exposition itinérante montée par la Galerie nationale du Canada en 1967 pour le ministère des Affaires extérieures, et *Canada 101*, exposition organisée par le Conseil des Arts du Canada en 1968 pour le Festival d'Edimbourg. Chargé de la création cinématographique commandée pour le pavillon chrétien à Expo 67, il a terminé récemment une peinture murale pour l'immeuble Lester B. Pearson d'Ottawa. ■ Charles Gagnon habite Montréal. Il a enseigné l'art cinématographique au collège Loyola de Montréal et, actuellement, il donne des cours d'art cinématographique et de photographie à l'Université d'Ottawa. Il a bénéficié d'une bourse de travail libre octroyée par le Conseil des Arts du Canada en 1968 et 1969. Ses œuvres figurent dans la collection Zacks de Toronto, et les collections de la Galerie nationale du Canada à Ottawa, du Musée des beaux-arts de Montréal et du Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal.



## GERSHON ISKOWITZ

1921 | Kelce, Poland ■ Painting in Violet and Mauve | 1972 | oil on canvas | huile sur toile | 228.5 x 198.5 cm.

Avant 1949, date de son arrivée au Canada, Gershon Iskowitz fut élève des académies de beaux-arts de Varsovie et de Munich, ainsi que du peintre expressionniste Oskar Kokoshka. Il expose au Canada depuis la fin des années cinquante et, plus précisément, à la Galerie Moos de Toronto, à intervalles réguliers, depuis 1964. Ses œuvres figurent parmi celles présentées, en 1965, à la Biennale de peinture canadienne et, en 1972, à *Peinture torontoise 1953-1965*, expositions organisées l'une et l'autre par la Galerie nationale du Canada. En 1972, avec le sculpteur Walter Redinger, il a représenté le Canada à la Biennale de Venise. Les œuvres de Gershon Iskowitz ont une place de choix dans les principales collections du pays, notamment celles de l'Art Gallery of Ontario et de la Galerie nationale du Canada.

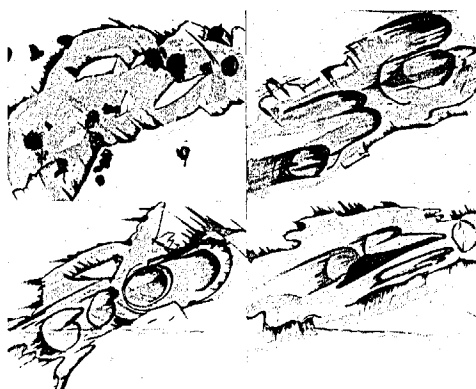
## RON MARTIN

1943 | London, Ontario ■ Dionysos Torn Limb from Limb | 1974-5 | acrylic on canvas | acrylique sur toile | 214.5 x 168 cm.

Ron Martin studied at the H.B. Beal Secondary School in London, Ontario. He set up his own studio and began painting full time in the same city in 1964. Martin has exhibited regularly in Toronto since 1965 and annually at the Carmen Lamanna Gallery, Toronto, since 1971. His work has been included in three major Canadian exhibitions organized by the National Gallery of Canada; the *Seventh Biennial of Canadian Painting* 1968, *The Heart of London*, 1968; and Boucherville, Montreal, Toronto, London, 1973. An exhibition of Ron Martin's *World Paintings*, a series of works executed in 1970, was recently mounted by the Art Gallery of Ontario. Ron Martin is the recipient of a senior Canada Council award. His works are represented in the collections of the National Gallery of Canada, the Art Gallery of Ontario and the London Public Art Gallery, London, Ontario.



Ron Martin a étudié à l'école secondaire H.B. Beal de London (Ontario). Dès 1964, il ouvre son propre atelier dans cette même ville et se consacre entièrement à la peinture. L'année suivante, Martin commence à exposer régulièrement à Toronto, et, à compter de 1971, tous les ans, à la Carmen Lamanna Gallery, Toronto. On retrouve ses œuvres dans trois grandes expositions canadiennes organisées par la Galerie nationale du Canada: *La VII<sup>e</sup> Biennale de peinture canadienne*, 1968, *Le cœur de Londres*, en 1968, et *Boucherville, Montréal, Toronto, London* en 1973. L'Art Gallery of Ontario a présenté récemment la série *World Paintings*, ensemble d'œuvres exécutées par Ron Martin en 1970. ■ Ron Martin est titulaire d'une bourse de travail libre offerte par le Conseil des Arts du Canada. Ses œuvres figurent dans les collections de la Galerie nationale du Canada, de l'Art Gallery of Ontario et de la London Public Art Gallery de London (Ontario).



## JOHN MEREDITH

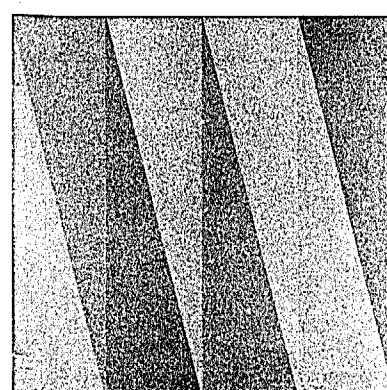
1933 | Fergus, Ontario ■ Jupiter | 1973 | acrylic on canvas | acrylique sur toile | 244.5 x 300.5 cm.

John Meredith a étudié à l'Ontario College of Art de 1950 à 1953 et exposé pour la première fois à Toronto vers la fin des années cinquante. Il expose régulièrement, depuis 1961, à l'Isaacs Gallery, Toronto. En 1974, une grande rétrospective, lancée par l'Art Gallery of Ontario, présente ses œuvres. On les retrouve dans nombre d'expositions importantes, notamment à la VI<sup>e</sup> Biennale de peinture canadienne, en 1965, à la IV<sup>e</sup> Biennale de Paris, également en 1965, à *Canada: Art d'Aujourd'hui*, exposition itinérante organisée par la Galerie nationale du Canada pour le ministère des affaires extérieures en 1968, à *Canada 101*, organisé par le Conseil des Arts du Canada pour le Festival d'Edimbourg en 1968, et à *Peinture torontoise 1953-1965*, présenté par la Galerie nationale du Canada en 1972. ■ L'œuvre de Meredith figure dans plusieurs collections, celles, notamment, de l'Art Gallery of Ontario, du Musée des beaux-arts de Montréal, de la Galerie nationale du Canada, de la Vancouver Art Gallery, du Museum of Modern Art de New York, etc.

## GUIDO MOLINARI

1933 | Montréal, Québec ■ Structure triangulaire gris-brun | 1972 | acrylic on canvas | acrylique sur toile | 173 x 173 cm.

Guido Molinari studied at the Ecole des Beaux Arts, Montreal and the Montreal Museum of Fine Art School. In the mid-fifties he opened his own gallery, Galerie L'Actuelle in Montreal, devoted entirely to non-figurative art and was a significant force in the Plasticien movement. ■ Molinari's work was included in the biennial exhibitions of Canadian painting throughout the sixties and he represented Canada at the Venice Biennial in 1968. In the same year, his work was included in *Canada: Art d'Aujourd'hui*, organized by the National Gallery of Canada for the Department of External Affairs and *Canada 101*, organized by the Canada Council for the Edinburgh Festival. Molinari's work has also been recognized in important international exhibitions on the theme of optical colour painting such as *The Responsive Eye*, the Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1965 and *Op Art and its Antecedents*, a travelling exhibition organized by the American Federation of Arts, 1966-67. This year a major retrospective of Molinari's work has been mounted by the National Gallery of Canada. ■ Guido Molinari lives in Montreal and teaches at Concordia University. He has received Canada Council grants and a Guggenheim Fellowship. His work is represented in a number of major collections including those of the National Gallery of Canada, the Art Gallery of Ontario, the Guggenheim Museum, New York and the Museum of Modern Art, New York.



Guido Molinari a étudié à l'École des Beaux-arts de Montréal et à l'école du Musée des beaux-arts de la même ville. En 1955, il ouvre sa propre galerie à Montréal, la Galerie l'Actuelle, consacrée entièrement à l'art non-figuratif, et joue un rôle marquant dans le mouvement plasticien. ■ L'œuvre de Molinari est présentée au public lors des expositions biennales de peinture canadienne au cours des années soixante et, en 1968, il représente le Canada à la *Biennale de Venise*. Cette même année, on retrouve son œuvre à *Canada: Art d'Aujourd'hui*, exposition organisée par la Galerie nationale du Canada pour le ministère des Affaires extérieures, et à *Canada 101*, organisé par le Conseil des Arts du Canada pour le Festival d'Edimbourg. Ses toiles de Molinari connaissent également la consécration à l'occasion de grandes expositions internationales axées sur le thème du mélange optique des teintes: *The Responsive Eye*, le Museum of Modern Art de New York, en 1965, et *Op Art and its Antecedents*, exposition itinérante organisée par l'American Federation of Arts, en 1966-1967. Cette année, la Galerie nationale du Canada a présenté une grande rétrospective des œuvres de l'artiste. ■ Guido Molinari habite Montréal et enseigne à l'Université Concordia. Il a bénéficié de subventions du Conseil des Arts du Canada et d'une bourse de perfectionnement Guggenheim. Certaines de ses œuvres figurent parmi les pièces de plusieurs grandes collections, notamment celles de la Galerie nationale du Canada, de l'Art Gallery of Ontario, du Musée Guggenheim de New York et du Museum of Modern Art de New York.



(Top/haut)

PEINTRES CANADIENS CONTEMPORAINS  
CANADIAN CONTEMPORARY PAINTERS

MINISTRE DES AFFAIRES EXTERIEURES DU CANADA  
DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS OF CANADA

RON MARTIN

Dionysos Torn Limb from Limb 1974-5

214.5 x 168 cm.

Collection: The Canada Council Art Bank/

La Banque d'oeuvres d'art du Conseil des arts du Canada



RON MARTIN

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# Body and Soul

The meaning of Ron Martin's paintings  
is largely up to you

CANADIAN MAGAZINE  
March 12, 1977

BY BARRIE HALE

The southwestern Ontario city of London is much like a couple of dozen other small-medium cities in the centre of the continent — there is an up-to-date main drag, and there are also many downtown blocks of huge 19th-century houses still sheltered by big old trees. But London, unlike every other place like it I know of, has also developed a remarkably productive, self-sustaining community of artists whose work matters. The only reason I take the two-hours-plus train ride down there from Toronto several times a year — as do other writers, and museum curators, and various levels of Canada Council and Ontario Arts Council officials — is that those artists are there. The train ride otherwise, after the first couple of trips, is what you make of it. The Ontario landscape out the windows is at once repetitious and seductive, and the eye one casts upon it is wholly subjective, jaundiced or benign, according to one's introspective ambience — which is just fine, because to a large extent so goes one's response to the paintings of Ron Martin, who is a London, Ontario-born and-bred artist, and the reason I am taking this train trip yet again.

The first time I looked, really looked, at Martin's paintings, was nearly four years ago, the summer of 1973. There were 14 of them, all in one room, on the ground-floor of the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa, in an exhibition called *Boucherville, Montréal, Toronto, London, 1973*. There were only six artists in that exhibition, which ran for two months and was organized by Brydon Smith, the Gallery's curator of contemporary art, and Pierre Théberge, its curator of contemporary Canadian art, "in a conscious effort to explore new ground and seek new horizons," as Dr. Jean Sutherland Boggs, then the gallery's director, put it in her preface to the exhibition catalogue. "We purposefully avoided including better-known artists who had already received considerable attention in national and international exhibitions," said Smith and Théberge

in their introduction to the exhibition. "We felt that these six individuals... were doing, during the past year, the most imaginative work of all the artists we visited [across the country]."

In the first room to the left as you enter the gallery, and visible through its big plate-glass windows, were Martin's 14 paintings, each one bright red, all of them of a size — seven feet high by six feet wide. I entered, looked quickly around, and said "Holy ----" uttering the explosive obscenity that is, unfortunately, my usual first response to art that I am immediately attracted to and absolutely flummoxed by.

Fourteen paintings. All of them one color — bright red. All of them about the

size that an individual of medium height, like me and, I presumed, the artist, could reach standing in one place and sweeping an arm from side to side, in an arc, swinging the body. Body paintings, then, and indeed they were all covered with body-strokes, that is to say, with big, sweeping, looping, slashing, scratching, thrusting strokes; the same

vocabulary of gestures in each painting, yet each painting unique, both distinct and discrete from its neighbors. I thought of blood, of course, but not in terms of hemorrhage, in spite of the quantities of paint that had been lavished and ravished upon each virgin canvas, but rather in terms of life-force, a passionate rush. I thought of work and effort, striving and accomplishment — I thought of Clyfford Still's note to Jackson Pollock after seeing some of Pollock's paintings in 1953: "... here a man had been at work, at the profoundest work a man can do, facing up to what he is and aspires to." I thought, after a while, that I had better get to work myself, critic's work, and decide which of the 14 paintings I liked the best, and why... and decided, finally, that sometimes I would like, say, *Bright Red #1*, with its density and almost smug, self-contained air, and sometimes *Bright Red #10*, with its irritating air of being just about to complete itself — when it got around to it. And finally I thought, well

of course this has to do with me, and *my* changes, not with the canvas, because it simply *is*, and not with the artist,

because while he clearly made these paintings while delivering what he felt at the moment of their making, I am simply delivering back to them what they do to me at the moment of my seeing them. I couldn't recall an occasion where the artist's intention, as divined by me and expressed in formal esthetic terms, ever mattered less in my response to and appreciation of his paintings. The paintings *were*, they were alive, and so was I, looking at them — that seemed to be quite enough, and just about all I could stand, in that roomful of bright red paintings.

The train station in London is on a back street, just a minute's walk from the centre of town. If you turn left and walk west for five minutes, you arrive at the old Forrest Furs Building, on the third floor of which (it's a walk-up, of course) Ron Martin lives and works. He is 33 years old and, yes, of medium height, voluble and red-haired. The studio is meticulously neat, living quarters on one side, working area with works-in-progress on the other — big black paintings right now. It is his fourth studio in London since he graduated, in 1964, from Beal Technical School, where he received his only formal art instruction.

"When I got out of school I worked at Silverwood Dairies, the sixth or seventh summer I had worked there," Martin says, "and then I left that. The next year I worked at the Post Office for six months and I painted at the same time — that's one thing, we always worked, always painted, we always did our work. You know, the whole thing about coming home and being too tired, that was no excuse. There was no question of that...."

And seven years later, with the exhibition of a series of canvases called *World Paintings*, at the Carmen Lamanna Gallery in Toronto in 1971,

Ron Martin declared himself, for all who would see, as a *major* Canadian artist — which, if it means anything, means that it became important for people who do such things to analyze, classify and evaluate him. Right away, that led to some difficulty. The *World Paintings* (so called, Martin says, “because I wanted to get the whole world in there.”) are seven feet high by five wide (or eight by six) and the whole surface is ruled into a grid of one-inch squares; within each square are three strokes, an N-configuration set upright or sideways, each stroke being a single color chosen from a palette of eight. Sounds very formal and systematic, no doubt. Nonetheless, the *World Paintings* do not yield to systematic analysis. Patterns emerge in them, but they are irrational, cloud-like formations of tonal values that float over the surface of the painting, undirected by the grid structure. “We have to apprehend the paintings as literal realities open to observation, not as vessels of meaning,” says Roald Nasgaard, curator of contemporary art at the Art Gallery of Ontario, which showed 12 of them last year.

So the viewer, standing before a Martin painting, is acutely aware of three, quite distinct, presences — his own, as embodied by his response to the painting, the painting itself as a self-contained entity, and finally the painter, who made that thing there — for what reason and to what end? “It’s an expression of a certain character,” says Martin,

“the impulse of a character who is acting and reaffirming, constantly reaffirming, his actions. It’s like a guy beating on a drum, and if you can imagine a guy beating on a drum and all those tones *stay*, they don’t disappear, they just stay there and you can hear them constantly, and out of that reaffirmation, that beating of the drum, there’s a differentiation of tones, and out of those [different] tones a pattern arises that’s peculiar to that particular person.

“After the *World Paintings* I did the colored paintings, all different colors . . . using one color, a substance . . . using that within certain traditional structures in painting: canvas, on a stretcher, on the wall — and that’s a vehicle, a convention. Now, the nature of a genuine convention is like it’s an open closet, and the way you move in that permits *you* to come into play. I acted the same way in the grid of the *World Paintings* . . .”

The one-color paintings, the *Bright Red* paintings, and then, a couple of years ago, the first *Black Paintings*, the surfaces of which are so thick and heavy with oozing slathers of paint that they appear to have arranged themselves, rather than having been guided by the hand (or hands, in this case) of the artist. He made his interest in the separation of artist, painting, and viewer quite specific in the title of one of them: *A Face Facing a Face*. And now, in the studio, yet another series of black ones, quite different in appearance from those of two years ago — all of this in London, a medium-sized city much like a couple of dozen others.

“The fact of the matter is,” Martin says, “there are a few people here, like Greg Curnoe, who are in their lifestyle constantly reaffirming their creative powers. They live them, they act them out, and I think as a young artist, when I

**“Ron Martin paints with big, sweeping, looping, slashing, scratching, thrusting strokes”**

looked at his work, this obviously was there, and excited me. I can see that the net result of being able to come in contact with people who are genuine creative artists has been a tremendous help to me as a person.

“I think today, the significance of a painter in London, Ontario, in *Canada*, is that the artists are really demanding of themselves a genuine appreciation for what I consider to be an objective participation in the community, and that is to see what a person is — in a way, an affirmation of the condition of one’s life, the *soul*.”

London, Ontario, Canada. It is maybe one of the few places around where one may unashamedly discuss the status of the soul these days. To my knowledge, there is no esthetic discipline by which the amount of soul that goes into, say, a *Bright Red* painting can be said to predictably elicit a commensurate quickening in the soul of the viewer, but to my mind there must be one around somewhere, because it seems to work that way. It is thoughts like these, while staring out at the unyielding landscape of southern Ontario, that lend a certain beauty to that train trip, no matter how many times one takes it. ©

**“The only true authority in art is the imagination, and the origin of the imagination is the human heart. That’s the whole point. I’m doing this in the world. Genuine freedom is being able to affirm one’s internal nature in the world.”**  
— Ron Martin, 1976

**Ron Martin**  
**World Paintings**

Art Gallery of Ontario

**May 13 – June 13, 1976**



## Preface

With each exhibition of new work Ron Martin adds to his stature as one of the most challenging of younger painters in Canada. The first definitive statement of the course of his thinking was made during 1970 in the *World Paintings*, the culminating dozen of which form the core of the exhibition. Of those shown in public for the first time special attention should be paid to the two additions to the series from 1971 where use of a more weighty paint body carries implications for the shift towards the *One-Colour Paintings*. The watercolours represent various stages of working preceding and during the executions of the *World Paintings*.

It was Ron Martin's special desire that the catalogue should include the text of a taped conversation concerning his thoughts about the *World Paintings* and about the nature of art and creativity in general. According to his request the text has been presented with a minimum of editing.

Special thanks must be extended to Carmen Lamanna and the Carmen Lamanna Gallery who throughout the organization of the exhibition have given unsparing assistance with all details.

R. N.

## Ron Martin

Born: London, Ontario 1943  
Studied: Commercial Art at H. B. Beal Secondary School under Mr. Herb Ariss,  
Mr. John O'Henley and Mrs. M. Cryderman 1960-1964  
Established studio in London, Ontario and began painting 1964  
Represented by the Carmen Lamanna Gallery, Toronto, Ontario

### One-Man Exhibitions

- 1965 Pollock Gallery, Toronto, Ontario  
1966 Pollock Gallery, Toronto, Ontario  
1967 20/20 Gallery, London, Ontario  
Talbot College, University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario  
1969 20/20 Gallery, London, Ontario  
York University, Toronto, Ontario  
1970 Studio, London, Ontario  
1971 Carmen Lamanna Gallery, Toronto, Ontario  
1972 Carmen Lamanna Gallery, Toronto, Ontario  
1973 Carmen Lamanna Gallery, Toronto, Ontario  
1974 Carmen Lamanna Gallery, Toronto, Ontario  
London Public Library and Art Museum, London, Ontario  
Forest City Gallery, London, Ontario  
National Touring Exhibition, The National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa,  
Ontario (cancelled)  
1975 Carmen Lamanna Gallery, Toronto, Ontario  
Studio Exhibition, London, Ontario  
Forest City Gallery, London, Ontario  
1976 Carmen Lamanna Gallery, Toronto, Ontario  
Forest City Gallery, London, Ontario

### Selected Group Exhibitions

- 1964 *Young Contemporaries*, London Public Library and Art Museum,  
London, Ontario  
1965 Two-man Exhibition, London Public Library and Art Museum,  
London, Ontario  
1967 *Centennial Travelling Exhibition*, juried by Bryan Robertson  
1968 *Seventh Biennial of Canadian Painting*, National Gallery of Canada,  
Ottawa, Ontario  
*Heart of London*, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, Ontario

- 1969 Canada Council Travelling Show, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, Ontario and other centres in Canada
- 1971 Canadian Cultural Centre, Paris, France, organized by the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa  
*Contemporary Canadians*, Albright-Knox Gallery, Buffalo, New York
- 1972 *Diversity - Canada East*, Edmonton Art Gallery, Edmonton, Alberta and Norman MacKenzie Art Gallery, Regina, Saskatchewan
- 1973 *Boucherville, Montreal, Toronto, London 1973*, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, Ontario
- 1974 Department of External Affairs Embassy Residence, Switzerland, organized by the Department of External Affairs, Ottawa, Ontario
- 1975 *Carmen Lamanna at the Owens Art Gallery*, Mount Allison University, Owens Art Gallery, Sackville, New Brunswick  
*The Canadian Canvas/Peintres canadiens actuels*, National Travelling Exhibition, sponsored by Time Canada Ltd.  
*Carmen Lamanna at the Canadian Cultural Centre*, Canadian Cultural Centre, Paris, France  
*Vehicule*, Montreal, Quebec  
Exchange exhibition with Forest City Gallery, London, Ontario
- 1976 *Ontario Now*, a survey of contemporary Ontario art, Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery and the Art Gallery of Hamilton  
*The First Dalhousie Drawing Exhibition*, Dalhousie University Art Gallery, Halifax, Nova Scotia

He is represented in the public collections of:

London Public Library and Art Museum, London, Ontario  
McIntosh Art Gallery, University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario  
Centennial Collection, Canada Council, Ottawa, Ontario  
Art Bank, Canada Council, Ottawa, Ontario  
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, Ontario  
Alumni Collection, University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario  
Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, Ontario  
Rothman's Art Gallery, Stratford, Ontario  
London Police Commission, London, Ontario  
Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Vancouver, British Columbia  
Department of External Affairs, Cultural Affairs Division, Ottawa, Ontario  
and in numerous private collections.

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External Affairs  
992-4349

There is a documentary matter of factness about the *Boucherville Montréal Toronto London 1973* exhibition at the National Gallery. One senses it immediately in the precise designation of individual cities in the title (though Saxe has in the meantime moved from Montréal to Tamsworth, Ontario) and in the application of topographical distribution maps both for the poster and for the catalogue cover. It also pervades the design of the exhibition, from the clean layout of the catalogue (and its factual text) to the clear and roomy installations in separate, self-contained spaces of single works or groups of work by one artist. The atmosphere is brisk and tersely confident. One is left with the impression that the curators, Brydon Smith and Pierre Thériège, had before themselves a clearly defined, investigative job which they completed with thorough professional expertise. The exhibition is their report. Its key words, focused upon in their catalogue introduction, are "diagrammatic" and "symptomatic." From among the younger and lesser-known generation of artists they chose six as representative symptoms of the general state of art in the country, Canada, at the moment, 1973. The exhibition is the plotted diagram. The results are eminently exciting and it is regrettable that the show will not be seen outside of Ottawa.

One should not, however, be deceived by this air of matter of factness into believing that the curators' job was not a risky one and their choice not subjective. The multiple one-man show format was followed in order to be comprehensive and at the same time to avoid the much criticized confusion of the encyclopaedic survey with its one man, one work principle. Smith and Thériège took a carefully selective and analytic approach to the problem. One may well wonder, however, to what degree the exhibition is symptomatic of the moment in Canada and to what degree it reflects the sex, taste and geographic location of its organizers. The region lying between Boucherville and London is remarkably small and exclusive in comparison to the whole length of Canada from Halifax to Vancouver, which the curators travelled during the preparation of the exhibition. All six artists are male; five are anglophones and four are represented by Carmen Lamaña. Is this broadly enough representative to be considered symptomatic? Perhaps not, but the curators neither deny their limitations nor apologize for them. Their confidence in their choice is underscored by the National Gallery's liberal purchase of works in the exhibition. Nor, perhaps, are there other jurors in Canada whose authority we would be happier to accept. Whatever critical reservations may arise, the exhibition is of high and even quality

and it indicates the patient diagnosis to be lively, healthy and imaginative, remarkably diverse in his interests and international in his vocabulary.

Apart from the visual and physical evidence of the exhibition the curators, quite correctly, do not attempt to argue further overviews as to the current state or direction of Canadian art. The diversity is perhaps enough of a comment. If one were to deduce a statement of a more generalized sort it would be in the nature of a corollary to the factual character of the exhibition itself. There is a tendency in the catalogue to present the work of art, not at all as a mark of spontaneous oracular outpouring, but as a product of deliberate "hard work." This is true not only of the text, but also of the title-page color photographs preceding each section which show the artist making notes, shifting objects, painting, fiddling with equipment. Each section in turn concludes with a series of photographs of notebook pages, diagrams, working sketches and photographs, and views of the artist at work again, such as the 26 pictures of Ron Martin painting *Bright Red No. 3*.

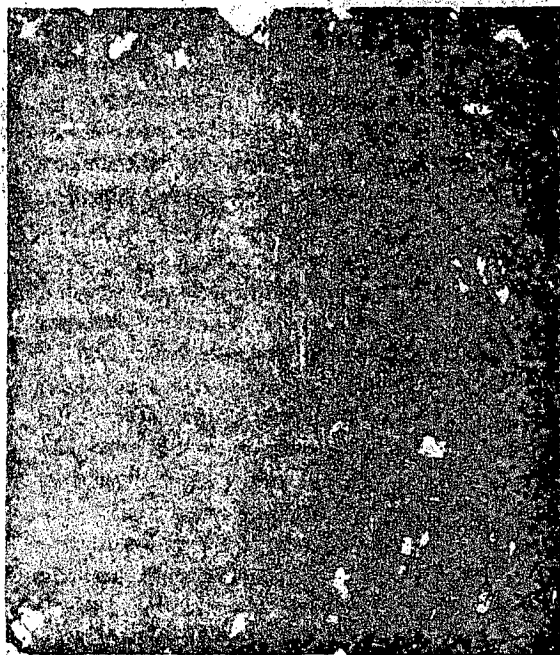
Thus we encounter James B. Spencer, on a step-ladder, small brush in hand, meticulously, bit by bit, copying on a monumental scale a color photograph of a wave crashing onto the beach of Lake Ontario; or Robin Collyer very physically engaged in shifting the individual units of his *Dan't lie, Don't cheat, Don't be afraid*, which most often are pure formal elements, but which may also resemble boxes or benches or other practical objects. When all the positionings and re-positionings have been completed however the original integrity of the individual parts becomes strangely subverted as they begin to establish new and subtle associations with their fellow parts, tentative though they may be, as the eye wanders across the considerable spaces which pervade the grouping. The final interrelationship may seem easy and casual, mysterious, and almost accidental; but it is unalterable, and having decided upon it, as the catalogue documents, Collyer fixes it for posterity with measurements and diagrams and photographs, or with felt templates of the floor area between the units as guides for future installations.

But in this context it is the case of Ron Martin which is most interesting. His 14 large, bright red canvases, closely hung to fill the entire wall space of their allotted gallery, are a splendid multiple revelation of the properties of the color red, not as an abstract entity, but as a specific matter which is fluid and tactile and physically distinguishable from the white of the canvas under-

and brick, tallest element 24 3/4", shortest element 5 1/4"

Photo: E. Kerr for the National Gallery of Canada

## London 1973



RON MARTIN  
*Bright Red No. 3*, May 1972, acrylic on canvas,  
84" x 72"

Courtesy: Carmen Lamaña Gallery



neath. It is curious that in spite of their obvious origin in Action Painting, Martin's paintings retain a strange non-expressionist casualness. Violent brush marks and finger smears resolve themselves into surprisingly easy and rhythmic, centralized images whose rather relaxed presence should, but doesn't, contradict their energetic source. And in fact, Martin's painting, instead of being the result of a surrealistic unleashing of the subconscious, is really a product of rigidly disciplined hard work, involving a number of carefully defined components which limit and control the painting event. The catalogue lists them: a canvas of standard size determined by the reach of the painter's arm; two 150 c.c. tubes of Bocour aquatec acrylic bright red, mixed with gel in three-quarters of a gallon of medium; one type of brush; a maximum time span of 15 minutes; no stopping from start to finish. The inevitable depersonalization and objectification is further underscored by repeating the ritual through a series.

In spite of the physical exertion involved in his work, Martin's reliance on deliberate strategy does not essentially differ from that of Jean-Marie Delavalle, whose six series of slides were produced according to equally specified rules as to placement of camera, type of image, use of intervening screen, filters, focal lengths, lengths of sequences, etc. Although Delavalle offers plenty to observe, he offers little that is sensually titillating and the hour plus required to sit through the 250 or so slides of the six series calls for a little patience; and during the 15 seconds that each image is on the screen, fingerprints, stains, scratches and specks of dust on the slides begin to take on an importance of their own. Nevertheless, surprising things happen within the narrow confines of the experience, provided that one's attention is drawn to the very subtle variations and relationships of focus, color, light or image. The catalogue insists on the slides as a way of getting to know the reality of the environment of Boucherville, but surely they are a lot more about the mechanics of perception as measured by the camera.

The broadest common denominator of the exhibition is perhaps the use of photographs or slides, which form the raw material for the work of four of the six candidates without any of them displaying any interest in photography as such. Delavalle uses his slides directly, cast onto a traditional screen. Murray Favro projects his onto real, three-dimensional, white replicas of objects in his slides. His "projected reconstructions," by re-combining the primary qualities of extension and mass with the secondary, sensuous quality of color, recreate the object, or a sort of ghost of it. This is true at least for *The Table*, and more wittily so for *Light Bulbs* (em-

ploying a film loop), but more complexly so for *Country Road* where light and color tend to dissolve the solidity of mass and extend space toward infinity.

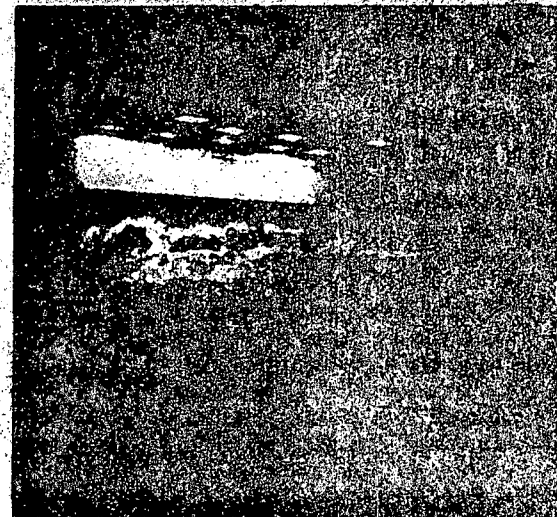
Spencer's method of hand-copying photographs differs little from that of other "photo-realists". It is surprising, however, that despite the, one would think, tedious paint-by-number mechanics of the execution, his four monumental wave pictures are the most romantic and most immediately personal and poetic of all the work in the exhibition. But to say "despite" is perhaps not quite right because the wave image could easily have remained simply banal and sentimental on its own terms. Analogous to Martin's ritualized procedure, Spencer's means – the instantaneous photographic image with its flatness, the mechanical execution and consequent abstraction – objectify and render sublime the emotional associations of the subject matter.

Henry Saxe arranges his photographs in combinations of four to bring out the abstract surface suggestions of the images. The result is a witty play between an affirmative surface pattern and illusionistic depth reminiscent of the perspective corrections of Jan Dibbets. *Sea at 45s* is particularly akin to stills from Dibbets' film, *Horizon Ila*, 1972. The ambiguity of the photographic pieces permeates Saxe's two sculptural groups, *Wind-up* and *Wedge* which, composed of three and four units respectively, with comparable wit echo basic geometric forms, the circle and the triangle, and parody operations like linking, binding, twisting and tying applied equally to rope, wood or metal. In *Wedge*, purely on the basis of the simplest formal similarity, the most complexly constructed units are juxtaposed with such ready-made objects as a tripod and a wryly transformed step-ladder. Behind the humor, however, lurk very real insinuations of terror and violence: the ladder can topple, rusty metal edges can lacerate and poison, sharp and pointed ones can cut like razors, poles can gorge, and ropes are for hanging.

Finally one might, with a little naïve surprise perhaps, remark on how easy it was to make the transition between the diverse media included in the exhibition. There was no perceptible jolt experienced in passing from a painting show to a slide show to a sculpture gallery, or from the non-representationalism of Collyer or Martin to the photographic realism of Spencer or Favro. Similar or analogous problems and intentions were quickly perceived and the old distinctions between categories became insignificant. That this was so was undoubtedly facilitated by the catalogue's emphasis on the "work" aspect of art; but unquestionably it is also due to the shift during the last half decade away from primarily formal considerations to an increased emphasis on the conceptual basis of art.



JEAN-MARIE DELAVALLE  
 Reproduction of one slide from *Blue, Yellow, Red, Green*, July 1972, consisting of 20/35 mm color slides  
 Photo: the National Gallery of Canada



Installation view of the work of James B. Spencer: (left to right) *Wave No 2*, 1972, acrylic on canvas, 108" x 132"; *Wave*, 1972, charcoal drawing, 20" x 130"; *Wave*, 1972, charcoal drawing, 26" x 120"; *Wave No 1*, 1971-72, acrylic on canvas, 108" x 132"  
 Coll: the National Gallery of Canada  
 Photo: E. Kerr for the National Gallery

Installation view of Henry Saxe's *Wedge*, 1971-72, metal, wood and rope; tallest element 132", shortest element 34"  
 Photo: Gabor Szilasi for the National Gallery

# Ron Martin's new paintings

by David Rabinowitch

Ron Martin has recently completed a group of five paintings that sum up his most important ideas about art. Since 1966 Martin has made two-part paintings which embody his feelings about relationships between traditional and modern painting. Affected deeply by Marcel Duchamp's theoretical work, Martin consciously intends to "close" the "gap" between the old art of representation and the new one of abstraction. To achieve this he makes a non-representational image, labelled "conclusion"; the non-representational quality of the "conclusion" immediately places it within the context of "modern" painting. Martin then "transfers" this image onto another canvas and, I believe, equates to some extent this duplication or transferring of the first canvas to the old process of

representation. Since there is no appreciable difference between the two canvases, the "gap" between the object to be represented and the art which attempts to represent it can be seen to be wiped out. It is in this limited and literal sense that Martin sees his two-part paintings as fusing the old and the new.

It is easy to understand how this format could be interpreted as not just an aesthetic one but as one of the simplest models which apply to learning and perceiving. In this context the "conclusion" becomes the simplest model wherein human beings experience and form the "outward world" in order that it become accessible to them. In the same sense the "transfer" (second canvas) would act as the simplest model in which men use knowledge which has previously become acquired by them. Obviously, the above somewhat allegorical interpretation does not necessarily belong to Martin's art. It is only meant to suggest that Martin's two-part paintings have built in metaphysical concerns which draw the mind toward the most complicated problems. One such

problem which is still not clear to me involves the question of how we should understand the word "representation" as it applies to these paintings. To what extent is it to be limited to the "transfer" component of the paintings? Or is there a sense in which "representation" includes, in a continuous way, both the "conclusion" and "transfer"?

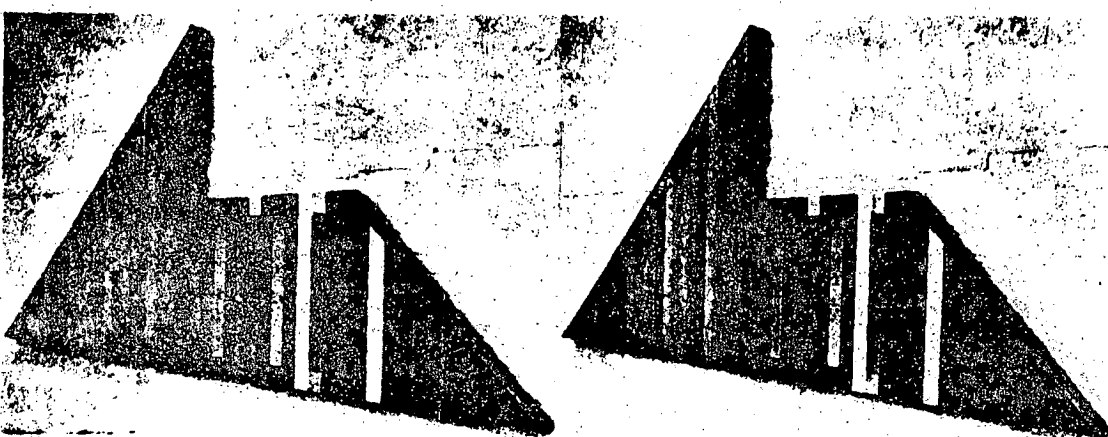
In the new series the "transfer-conclusion" format is still followed; but unlike the earlier paintings which used few colours and simple geometric canvases, these rely upon a great many colours and a complex geometric shape.

The main sequence across the whole surface has two bars and a box of colour as the fundamental unit of the sequence. The bar of colour within the box determines another set of colours called by Martin, "perforations." These are the top and bottom of a group of bars which have been sectioned into three parts.

On top of these sequences Martin lays one more arrangement that is at least as important as the fundamental box-bar unit. This is the separation of the surface

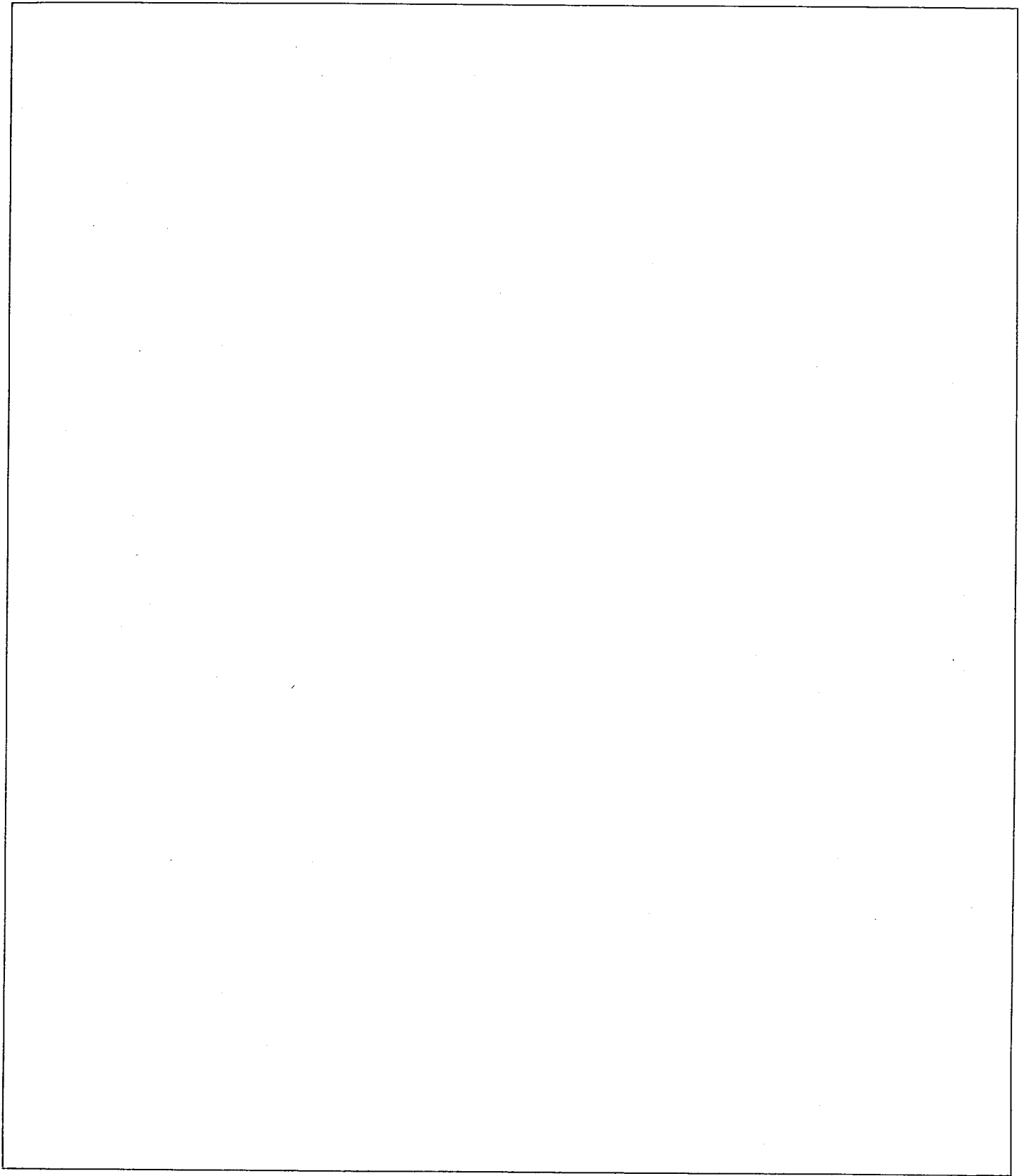
of each canvas into two distinct images. Throughout the whole series, this distinction remains somewhat the same: the left-hand side of each canvas (facing the painting) is muted in comparison with the right side. And this left side is the only thing in Martin's paintings which could remotely be called a "field." The left side is further distinguished from the right in that the "perforated" bar of colour is to be found next to the solid bar whereas in the right side it is placed next to the box; this reversal seems to be bound up with the oppositely inclined planes of the two images. Together with these differentiations of the images there is one more which is the most spectacular: the order of colour. The left-hand image (placed within the large triangle of the canvas) has a perfectly repetitive colour sequence. The right-hand has a sequence with apparently no order at all. I react to this genuinely complex format as a man who is suddenly aware that he is experiencing everything in the world at once.

But now I come to the most difficult job — to write about Martin's colours. It is something which is impossible to conceptualize. The colours are what power all the elaborate staging that I previously outlined. These colours are the most exciting that I have ever seen in paintings. There seems to exist in these vast collections of colours a force which is antagonistic towards stable relationships; every importance is attached to colours as individual things. Martin's paintings are huge storage depots. Everything is deposited as felt. It is very curious.

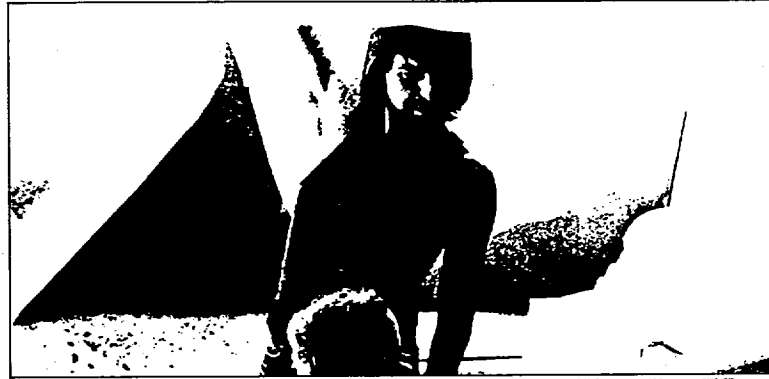


*Conclusion and Transfer No. 3, one concept painting, 1968*

Acrylic on cotton canvas  
(12'3" x 5') (12'3" x 5')  
Stretchers: redwood 1" x 4"



■ **Bocour Blue**



## CLAUDE BREEZE

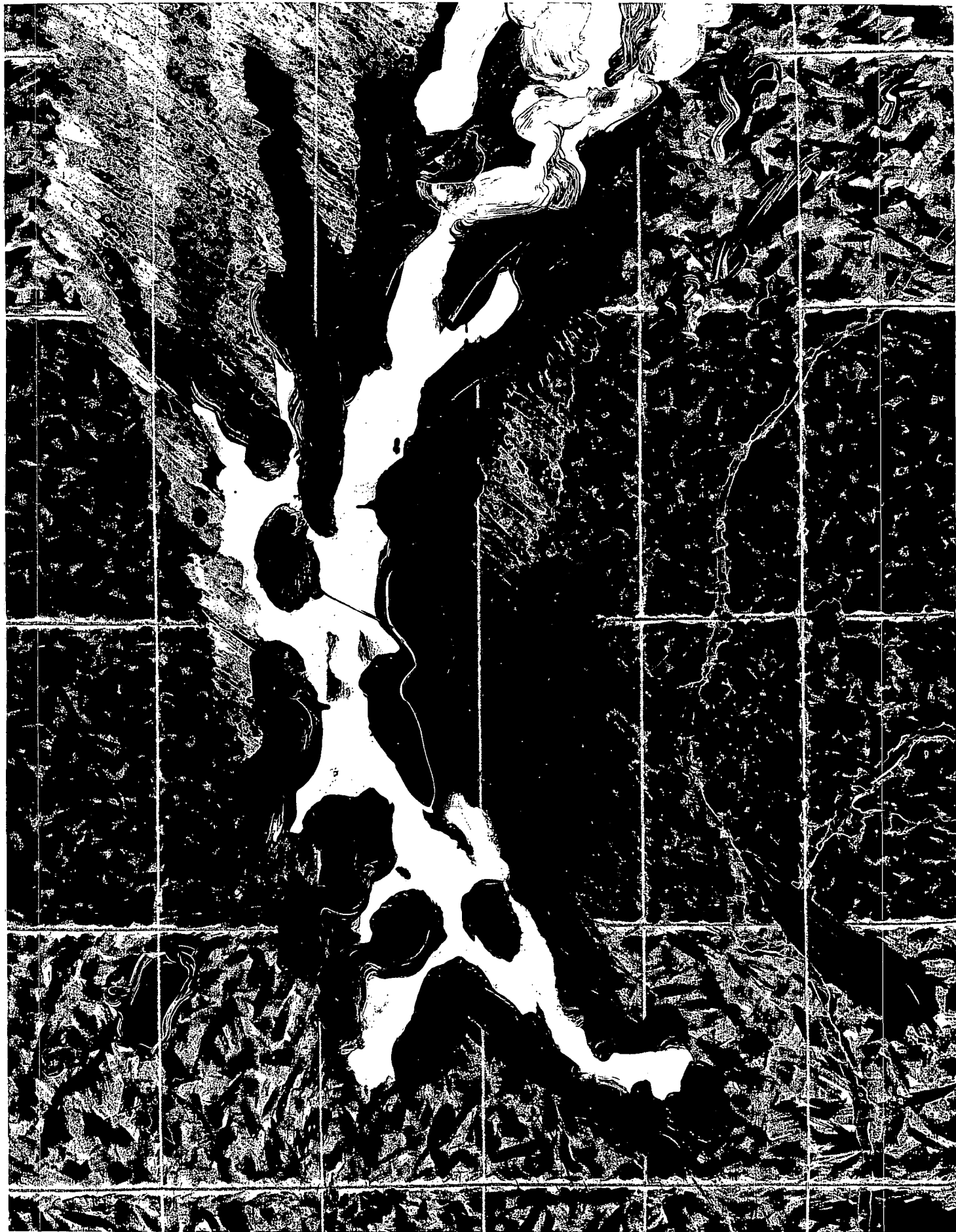
Diplômé de la Regina School of Art de l'Université de Saskatchewan, en 1958, Claude Breeze se rend ensuite à Vancouver où il suit les cours de la Vancouver School of Art. Dès le début des années soixante, il présente ses œuvres à l'occasion d'expositions collectives et, en 1965, pour la première fois au cours d'une exposition individuelle, à la New Design Gallery, de Vancouver. Depuis lors, il expose à la Bau-Xi Gallery de Vancouver, à la Jerrold Morris Gallery de Toronto et à la Marlborough Goddard Gallery de Toronto et Montréal. ■ Les œuvres de Claude Breeze sont au nombre de celles qui ont été retenues ces dix dernières années pour plusieurs grandes expositions: Biennale de la peinture canadienne (1965), *Perspective '67*, à l'Art Gallery of Ontario, et *Canada 101*, organisé par le Conseil des Arts du Canada, en 1968, pour le Festival d'Édimbourg. Tout dernièrement, on a pu remarquer son œuvre dans le cadre de *Changing Visions: The Canadian Landscape*, exposition itinérante organisée par l'Edmonton Art Gallery et l'Art Gallery of Ontario. ■ Claude Breeze a enseigné à la Banff School of Fine Arts. Artiste résident à l'Université Western Ontario, de 1972 à 1974, il enseigne actuellement à l'Université York de Toronto. Ses œuvres figurent dans maintes collections canadiennes, dont celles de la Vancouver Art Gallery, de l'Art Gallery of Ontario et de la Galerie nationale du Canada.

1938 / Nelson, British Columbia

Spacing No. 5	1974-5	acrylic & china marker on canvas - acrylique et encre de chine sur toile	122 x 160.5 cm.
Canadian Atlas: Sunset	1972-3	acrylic on canvas - acrylique sur toile	149.5 x 121.5 cm.
Canadian Atlas: Black Snake River	1974	acrylic on canvas - acrylique sur toile	137 x 198 cm.

Claude Breeze graduated in 1958 from the Regina School of Art, University of Saskatchewan and then moved to Vancouver where he attended the Vancouver School of Art. Breeze was exhibiting his work in group shows by the early sixties and had his first one man show in 1965 at the New Design Gallery, Vancouver. He has since exhibited at the Bau-Xi Gallery, Vancouver, the Jerrold Morris Gallery, Toronto and the Marlborough Goddard Gallery, Toronto and Montreal. ■ Over the past ten years Claude Breeze's work has been selected for a number of major shows including the *Biennial of Canadian Painting*, 1965, *Perspective '67*, at the Art Gallery of Ontario and *Canada 101* organized by the Canada Council in 1968 for the Edinburgh Festival. His work has been included most recently in *Changing Visions: The Canadian Landscape*, a travelling exhibition organized by the Edmonton Art Gallery and the Art Gallery of Ontario. ■ Claude Breeze has taught at the Banff School of Fine Arts and was Artist in Residence from 1972 to 1974 at the University of Western Ontario in London. He is presently teaching at York University, Toronto. His work is represented in collections across the country, including the Vancouver Art Gallery, the Art Gallery of Ontario and the National Gallery of Canada.





(Top/haut)

PEINTRES CANADIENS CONTEMPORAINS  
CANADIAN CONTEMPORARY PAINTERS

MINISTRE DES AFFAIRES EXTERIEURES DU CANADA  
DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS OF CANADA

CLAUDE BREEZE

Spacing No. 5 1974-5

122 x 160.5 cm.

Collection: The Canada Council Art Bank/  
La Banque d'oeuvres d'art du Conseil des arts du Canada

CLAUDE BREEZE



**Claude Breeze**

Né/Born in 1938, Nelson, British Columbia

Studies/Etudes 1958

Graduated Regina College School of Art, University of Saskatchewan

Vancouver School of Art

**Exhibitions/Group/Expositions**

1962 Pacific Northwest Annual, Seattle, Washington

1963 Winnipeg Biennial

Pacific Northwest Annual Seattle

1964 Pacific Northwest Annual Seattle

1965 VI Canadian Biennial

*Focus on Drawing*, Art Gallery of Ontario

Pacific Northwest Annual Seattle

1966 Art in Motion, Vancouver Art Gallery

1967 Prospective '67, Art Gallery of Ontario

1968 West Coast Now, Portland, Seattle, Los Angeles, San Francisco

Survey '68, Montréal

Canada 101, Edinburgh, Scotland

1971 4+3, Paris

1972 *Realism: Emulsion & Omission*, Agnes Etherington Gallery, Kingston, and Art Gallery of Guelph University

**Exhibitions/Solo/Expositions**

1965 "Lovers in a Landscape," New Design Gallery, Vancouver

1966 University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario

York University, Toronto

Carleton University, Ottawa

1967 Jerrold Morris Gallery, Toronto

1968 Jerrold Morris Gallery, Toronto

Bau-xi Gallery, Vancouver

Mendel Gallery, Saskatoon

1970 *Drawings 1962-70* Bau-xi Gallery, Vancouver

*Genetic Problem* Jerrold Morris Gallery, Toronto

1971-72 *Claude Breeze: Ten Years*

Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver

Norman MacKenzie Art Gallery, Regina

York University, Toronto

MacIntosh Gallery, London, Ontario

1973 Marlborough Godard Gallery, Montreal

MacIntosh Gallery, London, Ontario

Art Gallery of Brant, Brantford, Ontario

Bau-xi Gallery, Vancouver

1974 Marlborough Godard Gallery, Toronto

Toronto

London Art Museum, London, Ontario

**Teaching/Enseignement**

1972 Summer Session, Banff School of Fine Arts

1972-74 Artist in Residence, University of Western Ontario

**Collections**

Department of External Affairs

Vancouver Art Gallery

National Gallery of Canada

Art Gallery of Ontario

New Brunswick Museum

Queen's University, Kingston

The Brock Hall, U.B.C.

Mount Allison University

York University

Northern & Central Gas Company

University of Western Ontario

Art Gallery of Greater Victoria

London Art Museum

Brantford Art Gallery

The Mendel Gallery, Saskatoon

Toronto Dominion Bank

University of Calgary

Visual Art Bank

Canada Council

**Awards/Prix**

1964 Canada Council Junior Fellowship

1967 First Purchase Award B.C. '67,

Vancouver Art Gallery

1968 Canada Council Junior Arts Bursary

1969 Canada Council Junior Arts Bursary



# Claude Breeze

b. 1938

## Enjoying Canadian Painting

Patricia Godsell

(General Publishing, 1976)

Cruelty, torture, ignorance, and prejudice are not new vices; they have existed in every country throughout history. In Canada, however, commentary on society and its weaknesses has not been a popular subject in art. Even today it still does not receive much attention from professional artists.

In *Sunday Afternoon: From an Old American Photograph*, however, Claude Breeze is making a raw and violent statement against inhumanity. It is not a 'pretty' picture, and in 1965 when it was painted, it probably shocked many people who felt that 'Art' should be appealing and decorative.

Unfortunately, it is probably less shocking today than it was then — less shocking because violence has since become the most common subject of popular visual material. Being part of a daily diet, images of violent death, torture, and suffering have become more acceptable as facts of life. As a result, the horror that we should feel in viewing *Sunday Afternoon* may be muted and dulled. But Breeze is attempting to shock and disgust us by revealing the true nature of violence. He is attacking violence with violent artistic language.

In *Sunday Morning* (p. 225) Jack Chambers used the theme of childhood and the meaning of Sunday to suggest hope and the renewal of life. In *Sunday Afternoon* Claude Breeze questions whether even hope of renewal is possible. By the afternoon the message of the morning seems to have been forgotten. This couple, their hands tied behind their backs, hang helplessly from a tree. They are being burnt on a funeral pyre made up of hundreds of bodies with arms and hands outstretched as if appealing for help.

In Chambers's *Sunday Morning* there is an idea of repetition and renewal of life through all children; in Breeze's *Sunday Afternoon* there is also an idea of repetition, but one of continuing cruelty and prejudice. Chambers brings a message of hope from the

past into the future; Breeze is expressing his anger and frustration that out of this past and present there seems to be little hope for the future.

There are details in *Sunday Afternoon* that make the painting even more moving. In the bottom right-hand corner there is an inset, similar to the type that often accompanies newspaper photographs of disasters with such captions as 'the victim seen in happier days'. In the top left-hand corner is another suggestion of what might have been. A cheerful yellow road leads up to a green field where a tree stands laden with fruit. There is a blue sky overhead, and everything seems to suggest springtime and innocence, surely an image of the Garden of Eden.

Both details, the inset and the green field, seem to strengthen Breeze's statement that the violent scene need not happen. This is no disaster brought about by fate or chance; it is a deliberate act of cruelty towards helpless victims. This painting is Breeze's plea for compassion and humanity. It would be a mistake to limit the range of his statement by thinking that it represents only the 'racial problem in the United States which could, of course, never happen in Canada'. Cruelty, violence, and prejudice are human problems that can occur anywhere. Breeze has merely chosen this incident as an example, or an image, for all such events.

In fact, Breeze's work belongs to a type of Expressionism that was developed in Germany early in the twentieth century. It was a style that arose when artists began to see a sick and troubled world which had lost all decent human values. This sickness reached a climax with the horrors of the First World War. Violent colours, misshapen figures, exaggerated proportions, and deliberate ugliness were some of the methods the German Expressionists used to convey their strong feelings. Sometimes their paintings were deliberate attacks

on people they felt were greedy, thoughtless, or cruel; at other times their works were expressions of pity, concern, and understanding for the victims.

In Canada, Maxwell Bates and Claude Breeze have both been influenced by the ideas and style of the German Expressionists. There seems, however, to have been no obvious reason or direct influence on Claude Breeze to explain why he followed this particular style.

He was born in Nelson, British Columbia, in 1938 and studied with Brian Fisher at the University of Regina. Among his teachers were Ernest Lindner and Ronald Bloore, whose styles are both very different from his own. In 1959 he attended the Vancouver School of Art and since that time has exhibited widely and taught occasionally.

It is now ten years since *Sunday Afternoon: From an Old American Photograph* was painted. It is worth noting, though, that it was bought by the Department of External Affairs of the Government of Canada. We can hope that it will serve as a reminder that violence and prejudice threaten all men everywhere.

*Canadian Atlas: Prairie Mirage*, Jan-March 1973  
 exhibited Marlborough Godard, Montreal,  
 May-June 1973  
 acrylic on canvas, 42" x 51"

Photo: the artist  
 Coll: private



## CLAUDE BREEZE:

### CANADIAN ATLAS AND THE EXPRESSIONIST LANDSCAPE TRADITION

ROALD NASGAARD

Claude Breeze has called the series of paintings on which he has been working over the last year or so *Canadian Atlas*. If the title implies that these paintings are somehow concerned with landscape, even more specifically with the Canadian landscape, that would be right; but if it further implies that there is something objective or topographical about their rendering of that landscape, that would be far from right. On the contrary, if there at some time were a specific place and a specific time in relation to which the idea for these new paintings was conceived, in their planning and execution both have been far transcended and the original externally motivated experience has been transformed into statements which in successive groups of the on-going series become increasingly direct expressions of subjective feelings and emotions. Margaret Atwood has, of course, commented that nature poetry "is seldom about nature, it is usually about the poet's attitude toward the external natural universe,"<sup>1</sup> but her account of literary modes is hardly adequate to explain the degree of Breeze's visual translations.

The transformation of landscape into sublime and visionary images is certainly not an

unknown phenomenon in the history of Canadian art. In the nineteenth century artists interpreted the Canadian landscape with the poignancy and the grandeur of scale of German Romanticism. In the twentieth there is Varley, who followed Hodler to the highest and loneliest of mountain peaks; or Carr who suffused nature with an all-pervasive vitalist energy; or Lawren Harris, perhaps the most persistent exponent of the visionary, who transcended description of immediate experience in order to distill from nature its abstract universal qualities, its suggestions of eternal meaning and its capacity to embody universal experience. Whoever they are they are part of a long and venerable tradition whose products are sometimes intensely moving, sometimes merely melodramatic. Usually the aim of its practitioners was to come to terms with their experience of a fresh and virgin land, different from Europe and demanding in Harris's words, a "new venture in painting." But their source and their touchstone, inevitably, even for Harris, remained the European tradition and their successes and failures depended on how they learned the lessons it had to teach.

It is the same tradition which Claude Breeze

resumed when he exhibited his first group of *Canadian Atlas* paintings, in Montreal at Marlborough Godard in May-June 1973. Breeze is of a much later generation than the artists listed above; he is perhaps more unconsciously Canadian, his background includes New York as well as Europe and his style is more modernist, but even so it is as a further development of the romantic visionary landscape tradition that his paintings attain their fullest and richest meaning.

In 1972 Breeze camped and travelled from Vancouver to London, Ontario. The landscape idea came about indirectly from this experience and represents a remarkable shift in direction for a painter whose reputation even now rests almost entirely on figure-centered Expressionist imagery thick with social commentary. In contrast, the new series is remarkably personal, whether the individual paintings are violent or lyrical in mood. The 16 paintings of the first group of the series are closest to traditional landscape. Their space recedes towards a horizon line, individual forms evoke images of rocks, trees, water and sky and they have titles like *Prairie Mirage*, *Bow Valley* or *Georgian Bay*

<sup>1</sup> Margaret Atwood, *Survival* (House of Anansi).



*Canadian Atlas: Bow Valley*, Jan-March 1973 exhibited Marlborough Godard, Montreal, May-June 1973, acrylic on canvas, 65" x 53"  
 Photo: the artist  
 Coll: private

*Altarpiece No 2*, 1971, acrylic on canvas and wood, 61" x 39" x 17"  
 Photo: T. E. Moore courtesy Marlborough Godard  
 Coll: private

But otherwise there is little in them that is descriptive or representational. Instead, as in the later pictures by Lawren Harris, the particulars of place are imaginatively transcended: landscapes are transformed into inscapes. If the topography of *Georgian Bay* is almost recognizable where a rough icy blue sea breaks on a rocky shoreline ablaze with searing oranges and reds of autumn, the facture is turbulent, the forms are angular and the colors harsh and heightened with white turning the scene strangely cold and formidable. In *Prairie Mirage* a molten lava river flows between rises of fiery earth under a thick and glowing impenetrable sky. As descriptive landscapes, at best they represent a primeval stage of the history of the earth before the appearance of man, but such an interpretation gives to them a science-fiction aspect which they are without. Others are more lyrical, but in the light of Breeze's preceding

often grotesquely violent and erotic treatment of the human figure, it is not surprising that even when he rejects the figure and turns to a landscape source that it too will yield to comparable Expressionist demands. Yet there is a difference. However excited the *Canadian Atlas* pictures may become, they are never angry or grotesque but persist in remaining exuberant and celebratory psychic poems.

The rejection of the figure and of the taste for the grotesque seem to have been effected simultaneously, just preceding *Canadian Atlas*, in a series of "altarpieces" which also for the first time proffered landscape as independent viable expressive subject matter. The altarpieces each consist of a landscape painting surrounded by a wood frame with a wide border along the top where one or more separate bits of painted canvas are suspended from metal

hooks; below, a base of wood slatting protrudes like a platform, supported by a kick leg. The landscapes are remarkably reticent, almost objective. *Altarpiece No 2*, 1971, looks from a high vantage point across a wide expanse of countryside with a valley in the foreground and a hill rising on one side divided into rectangular areas of tilled fields. It is a humanized landscape, contemplative in mood, with low-key colors and color contrasts. Even the Expressionist blood red fissures which spread across the picture surface cannot quite disrupt the serenity of the image. They link so naturally with the contours of the landscape as to be neutralized by it. In the upper half where they dominate the sky they resemble natural cracks caused by natural stresses revealing wood underneath the painted surface the same color as the frame. The other reminder of the violence of the earlier figurative paintings is the torn piece of canvas hung above from sharply



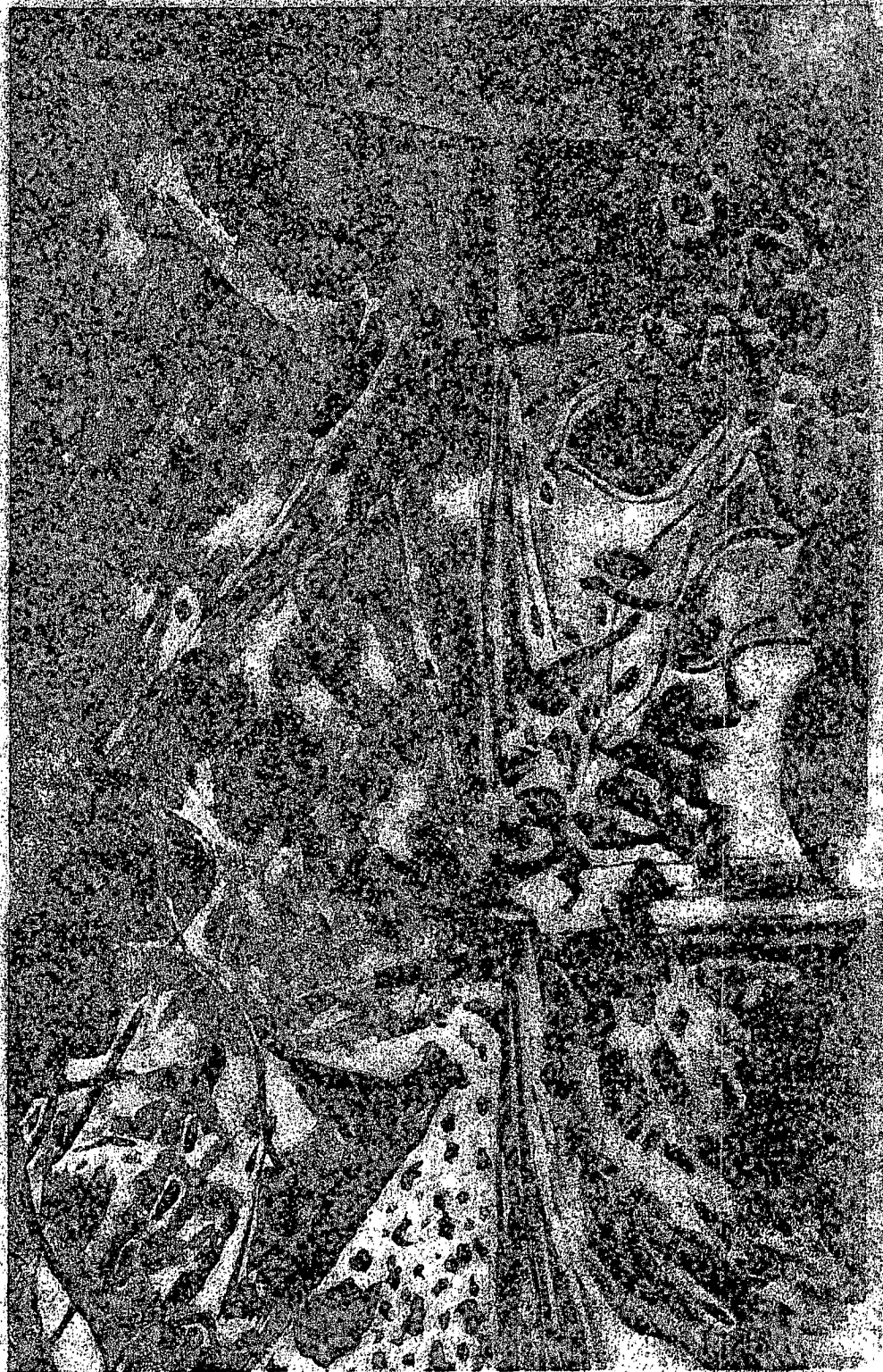
pointed hooks. Breeze has referred to the *Isenheim Altarpiece* in relation to his own altarpiece and the torn canvas may be the last vestigial reference to the violated figure, here to the lacerated flesh of the man on the cross. But the canvas piece is painted blue and becomes subsumed by the tranquil blue of the sky of the landscape. If the comparison to the *Isenheim Altarpiece* is appropriate it is not to the image of the crucifixion in the center of the closed wings, but rather to that of John the Baptist on the right who is calmly translating the human tragedy into spiritual meaning and fulfillment.

Previously it had been rare for Breeze thus to come objectively to terms with individual anguish. He had achieved a comparable aesthetic distancing before in his TV image series in which the device of the TV screen format had provided a broader critical context for the consideration of horrific subject matter. In the altarpieces it is attained by reducing the violent Expressionist figurative imagery to the indirect, almost formal symbols of the fissures and lacerated canvas pieces which in turn dissolve in the color and contours of the landscape image. Concomitantly the landscape, which was often an essential if secondary component of the figurative pictures, is liberated and can become an independent vehicle for expression, which it immediately becomes in *Canadian Atlas: Bow Valley*, from the first group of the series, almost repeats the topography of *Altarpiece No 2*, but the objective features of the latter have rapidly dissolved into painterly colored forms with a life and energy independent of their naturalistic sources. The landscape idea also came about, says Breeze, because of "the feeling that I wanted to be freer again in using paint."<sup>3</sup>

As the *Canadian Atlas* series progresses - it is in its fourth phase at time of writing - it becomes apparent that Breeze is interested in more than a change of subject matter as the expressive vehicle. The first sixteen paintings may be structured like landscapes with illusionistic space and images evocative of natural forms, but the later paintings become increasingly more abstract, and as they do they begin to re-question their concepts of pictorial organization.

Lawren Harris had effected a similar transition - from visionary landscape painting toward purer abstraction - some decades before (though not in a strictly linear chronological way). Such a transition poses a number of problems beyond simply the invention of a viable abstract vocabulary, especially problems of spacial organization, which have turned out to be central issues of twentieth century painting. These are issues which seem at times to have raised considerable difficulties for Expressionist painters outside the mainstream of the French tradition; and Harris was no exception.

From the highly simplified almost schematic Arctic landscapes of the 1930s Harris, with some abruptness, turned to painting a number of

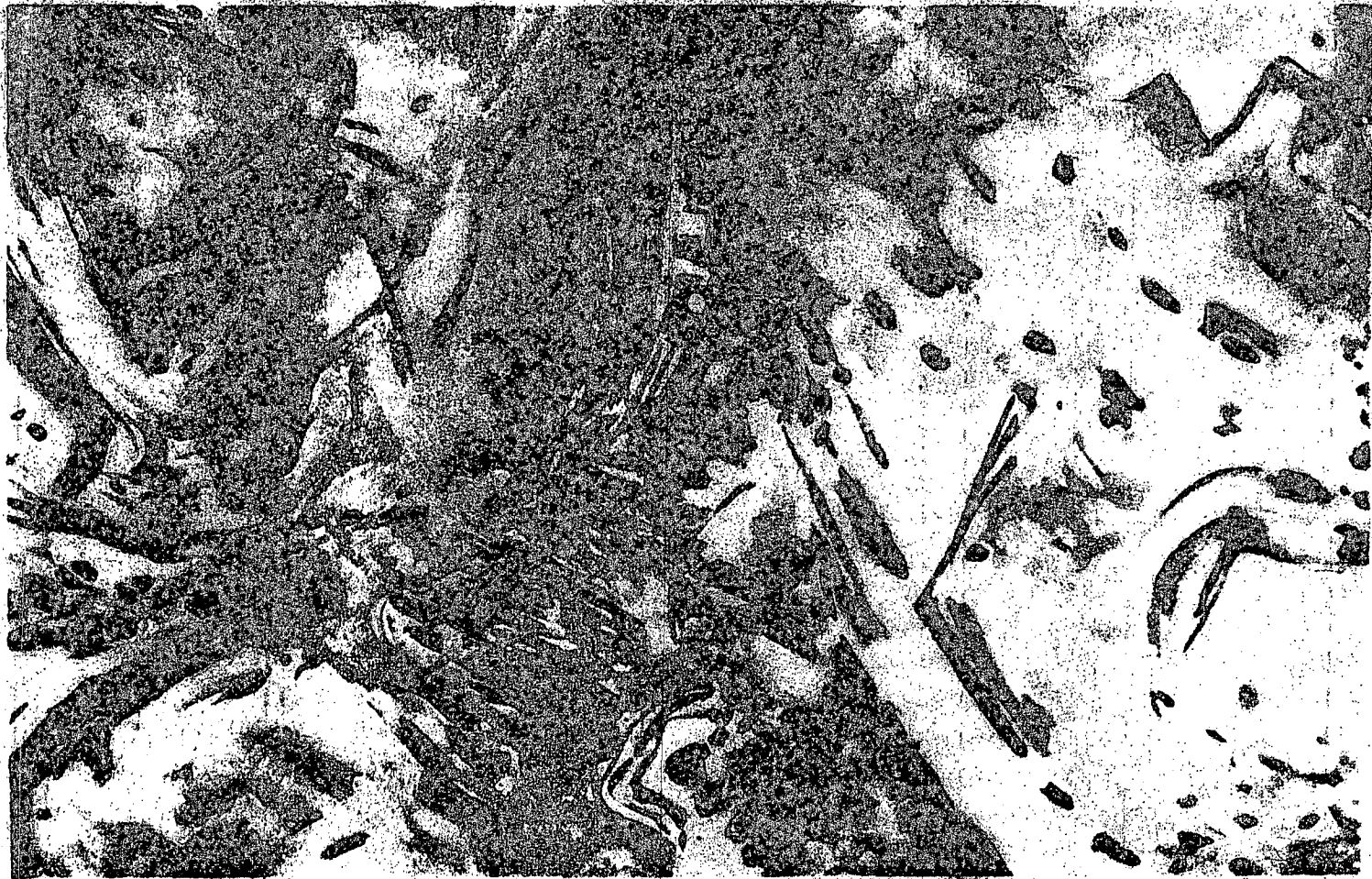


*Canadian Atlas: Journey No 3*, Sept-Oct 1973  
exhibited Art Gallery of Brant, Brantford,  
Nov 1973  
acrylic on canvas, 54" x 34"  
Coll: private

apparently totally abstract pictures composed of interrelated pure geometric shapes. In doing so Harris followed the model of Kandinsky whose writings he had introduced into Canada in the 1920s. But because Harris shared Kandinsky's Expressionist stance which played down formal and aesthetic considerations, the choice, however obvious, was perhaps a costly one.

In his most innovative and heroic period - the half decade or so preceding World War I - Kandinsky's forms and colors, even when most arbitrary in relation to realistic description, provide a number of cues which evoke the feeling of landscape and establish a traditional illusionistic space even when that space is liberated from gravitational law. As Greenberg

<sup>3</sup> All quotations from Claude Breeze are from a letter to the author: London, January 2, 1974.



*Canadian Atlas: Journey No 8*, Sept-Oct 1973  
 exhibited Art Gallery of Brant, Brantford,  
 Nov 1973  
 acrylic on canvas, 34" x 54"  
 Photo: the artist.  
 Coll. private

writes, the "allusions to nature do almost as much as anything else to secure the unity and coherence of the individual picture. Lightly modelled shapes hover, and purely linear motifs circulate within an illusion of 3-D space, that except for its shallowness is almost pre-Impressionist."<sup>3</sup> When Kandinsky's formal language lost its allusion to natural forms and became purely geometric and universal in its associations he neglected to develop a comparable pictorial structure to contain the new language in a formal tension capable of superceding the tension which previously had existed between the abstracted forms and their allusions to nature. Geometric symbolic forms may be related to one another in the later pictures, but they float with no resistance in an illusionistic space, seemingly arbitrary in relation to picture surface and shape. The effect is inevitably melodramatic and the reason why could have been found in the book which was to become almost the official guide to Der Blaue Reiter Expressionist aesthetics, Worringer's *Abstraction and Empathy*, first published in Munich in 1908. Here Worringer explains with some persuasion the necessity for eliminating 3-D space in painting dealing with geometric abstraction.

Simply put, space, consequently illusionistic space in painting, partakes of the flux and change of temporal existence and therefore cannot be reconciled with universal and concrete abstract symbols which strive "to impart to things a value of necessity and eternity."<sup>4</sup> Hence the need to elevate the depiction of space to the idealistic plane of a purely aesthetic context. Worringer explains the solution from the history of art: "Avoidance of the representation of space and suppression of depth relations led to the same result, i.e. restriction of the representation to extension vertically and horizontally."<sup>5</sup> This was also the lesson of Cubism and Mondrian.

Harris's geometrical abstractions from the late 30s and onwards may be the first totally abstract pictures in Canada, but their problem, like Kandinsky's, is that they are inconsistently abstract. Interlocking symbolic triangles and circles hang suspended in a space indicated by receding blue waves, by a distant horizon or by atmospheric perspective. They succeed no more than the later Kandinskys, though it must be admitted that neither Kandinsky nor probably

Harris would have accepted so formalist a criticism because it would have sounded irrelevant to their Expressionist purpose.

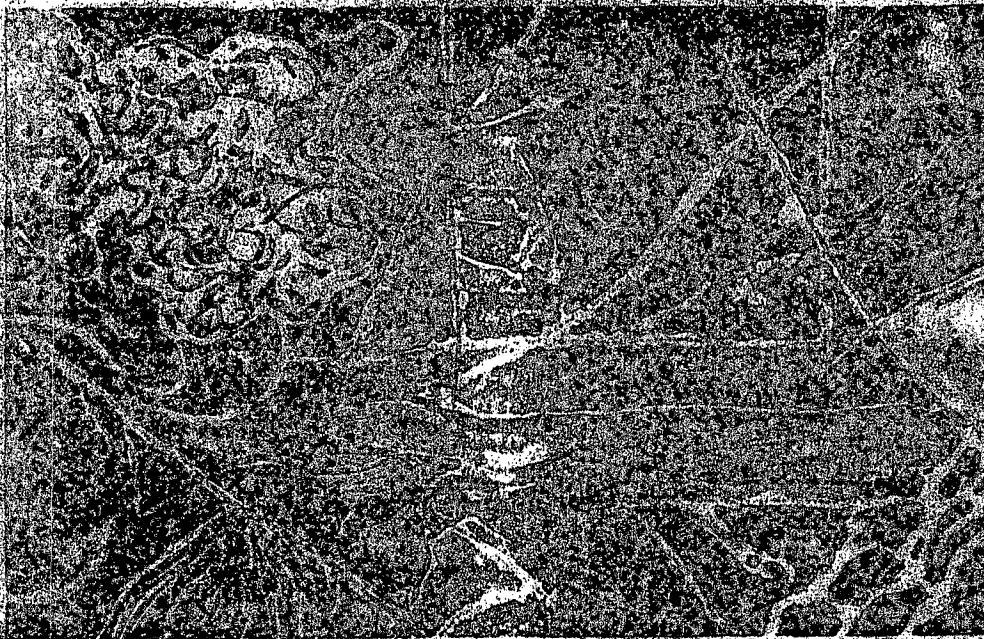
The preceding may seem an excessively long digression in the context of painting in the 1970s by Claude Breeze, but it is not. Harris's evolution toward abstraction began from a base remarkably similar to Breeze's - note also the resemblance of visionary landscape paintings like Harris's *In Memoriam to a Canadian Artist*, *Northern Image* and a number of "abstractions" from the 1950s to the first sixteen paintings of *Canadian Atlas* - and thus can stand as an interesting foil to that of the younger artist. What is of crucial importance is that Breeze's evolution took place not only after the event of the Der Blaue Reiter group but also after that of the Abstract Expressionism of the New York School - though in the next series of *Canadian Atlas* paintings, subtitled *Journey*, exhibited at the Art Gallery of Brant in November 1973, characteristics of both earlier groups are in evidence. In fact the very best of the *Journey* works are curiously reminiscent of Der Blaue Reiter painting - especially of the late Franz Marc pictures - in their pure, richly prismatically

<sup>3</sup> Wilhelm Worringer, *Abstraction and Empathy* (New York International University Press, Cleveland, 1967), p. 43.

<sup>4</sup> Worringer, p. 30.

<sup>5</sup> Clement Greenberg, "Kandinsky," *Art and Culture*





*Canadian Atlas: Journey No 10*, Sept-Oct 1973  
 exhibited Art Gallery of Brant, Brantford,  
 Nov 1973  
 acrylic on canvas, 34" x 54"  
 Coll: private

colored forms moving in a shallow space, evocative of landscape, but minus Marc's cubo-futurist jagged rhythms (e.g. *Canadian Atlas: Journey Nos 2 & 8*). If they are unlike Der Blaue Reiter painting it is in their unfocused all-over articulation which is continuous and not dependent on the jostling of discrete and independent forms. Of the ten *Journey* pictures, those just described incorporate all the best features of the first sixteen *Canadian Atlas* paintings and yet are quite different because of their shallow uninterrupted spacial continuity and their increased abstractness. They pose no formal problems because their organic vocabulary operates logically in an illusionistic space.

from the *Broken Highway* series, Aug-Sept 1973  
 ink on paper, 10" x 18"  
 Coll: private



Nevertheless they tend to be read across the surface in a modernist way rather than into depth, a fact explained by Breeze's new approach in painting the *Journey* group. The first group was painted in the traditional way of stretched canvas on an easel. *Journey* was executed on unstretched canvases laid out on the floor, by walking around the canvases individually, and from one to another, working on several simultaneously. Only after the paintings were three-quarters finished were they stretched and placed on the easel. The same procedure also governs the painting of subsequent *Canadian Atlas* works.

Other pictures in the *Journey* group are more frankly surface declarative and organized on a grid of horizontals, verticals and diagonals sometimes framing areas of flat color which resist being read as anything but regularized, literal flat color shapes (e.g. *Canadian Atlas: Journey No 10*). This would be alright if other parts of the same pictures did not persist in being evocative of illusionistic space inhabited by advancing and receding organic forms. It is as if the pictures want to be read in two ways at the same time - vertically, in depth as traditional illusionistic space, and horizontally as "pictures-as-a-tray" like modernist painting since Synthetic Cubism. Other pictures, in an analogous way, by implying an all-over reading as well as suggesting a horizon line, also do not quite resolve themselves spatially. In a way their spatial disjunctions are comparable to Lawren Harris' since both are a consequence of a confrontation between the demands of modernism and those of illusionism - precipitated in the case of Harris by the introduction



*Canadian Atlas: Pearly Channel*, Nov 1973  
 exhibited Bau-Xi Gallery, Vancouver, Dec 1973  
 acrylic on canvas, 54" x 34"

Photo: the artist  
 Coll: private



*Canadian Atlas: Shout Dance*, Nov 1973  
 exhibited Bau-Xi Gallery, Vancouver, Dec 1973  
 acrylic on canvas, 54" x 34"

Photo: the artist  
 Coll: private

of universal abstract geometric symbols into a Renaissance space, and in Breeze's, in a more practical way, by his decision to shift his plane of operation from the easel onto the floor. Perhaps because Breeze's spatial problems are more a consequence of strategy than of metaphysics they are more temporary. In fact the *Journey* group also contains the solution, as evidenced by *Nov 27-8* discussed above; and if some of these works have formal problems, they are redeemed by the expressive exuberance of color and gesture.

The spatial issues of the paintings are dealt with simultaneously in several series of drawings from 1973, primarily executed with color felt pens. The *Banff Postcards*, done from actual postcards, are essentially abstracted landscapes; *Pacific Window* deals with the reconciliation of a frontalized pattern over a landscape image; and *Town's Corner*, a homage of sorts to Harold Town's *Tyranny of the Corner*, confronts the

problem of a purely pictorial space by locking two or four of the corners of the picture image securely to the surface and to the framing edges. The resulting composition is unfocused and centrifugal, while the space between the corners remains shallow and parallel to the picture surface. In a small format this drawing series provides the ingredients for the success of the best of the *Journey* pictures and for the third group of the *Canadian Atlas* series exhibited at the Bau-Xi Gallery in Vancouver in December 1973 and for those included in the Marlborough Godard exhibition in Toronto in April 1974. The subject matter for the latter group of paintings derives to considerable degree from yet another drawing series, *Broken Highway*, which in turn, in Breeze's words, "relates to seeing old bits of overgrown highway as you whiz by on the new one."<sup>6</sup> (All the drawings were executed at Bowen Island, B.C., August-September, 1973.)

After *Journey* any vestigial references to the horizon line, as well as any declaration of literal flatness disappear and space is consistently realized. It is still evocative of landscape space, as many of the colors and forms elliptically refer to natural ones, but it is a very shallow space hovering just below the picture surface and containing painterly forms according to the "picture-as-a-tray" format (and only occasionally split open by deeper channels which seem to echo Harold Town's *Great Divide*). However this may be, the implications of

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Margaret Atwood, *Surfacing* (McClelland and Stewart, Don Mills, 1972), p. 14: "The new road is paved and straight, two lanes with a line down the middle. . . . At intervals the old road crosses: it was dirt, full of bumps and potholes, it followed the way the land went, up and down the hills and around the cliffs and boulders. . . . The old road billowing along at a distance through the trees (ruts and traces already blurring with grass and saplings, soon it will be gone). . . ."





*Canadian Atlas: Green Sweep*, Jan-March 1974  
 exhibited Marlborough Godard, Toronto,  
 April 1974  
 acrylic on canvas, 48" x 72"

Photo: T. E. Moore, courtesy Marlborough Godard.  
 Coll: private.

working horizontally on the floor are fully exploited in an across-the-surface continuous extension of the images for overall articulation. "Surprisingly," says Breeze, "one of the hardest decisions was to give the painting its final position on the wall. In the future I might like to consider leaving this decision to the person hanging the painting."

Within these essentially pictorial spatial conclusions Breeze is free to exploit to the fullest his Expressionist use of color and forms executed with the free painterliness of Abstract Expressionism. In the very recent *Canadian Atlas: Great Divide* the diptych format suggests a new solution toward formal control of coloristic abandon which in some of the later paintings approaches day-glo intensity. Because of their busyness, some of the paintings display a perhaps excessive *horror vacui* and seem only with some difficulty to be able to contain an overload of rich, heavy color forms crossed and recrossed by rapid, sometimes eccentric calligraphy. This abundance may be disconcerting in the context of the more common large-scale uniform shape of other recent color painting. But a comparison

with New York School derived color painting does not assist in understanding Breeze. No doubt, as has been suggested above, he has learned a lot from the Abstract Expressionists, however indirectly. Nevertheless, regardless of how formalist the above discussion has been, his concerns are less formalist and less aesthetic than theirs and, to reiterate, more in line with the non-French, romantic tradition of Harris and the German Expressionists. It would be a mistake, however, to stress any immediate relationship, especially with the latter. The direction from Munich is too diffused by the 1970s. Nor does Breeze share the theorizing tendencies of Kandinsky and Harris, but as with them it is on a delicate balance between nature and abstraction that success hangs. This is how Breeze himself speaks about the background and impetus for *Canadian Atlas*:

"When I paint I do not think of anything, anyone, or any style. Rather I like to feel that those thoughts or references are buffed in my subconscious. With the *Canadian Atlas* paintings I have a feeling of doing something new. I have a feeling of freedom. I am just putting paint on canvas."

## CLAUDE BREEZE

### Contemporary Canadian Painting

William Withrow (McClelland and Stewart, 1972)

A concerted look at Canadian war art makes it clear that war, like most things, has an almost pastoral quality for many Canadian painters. In contrast to the war art of other countries, that produced by Canadian artists has (with notable exceptions) missed the point. "War is heck" seems to be their motto: they choose to ignore its horrors and prefer instead to concentrate on the quaint villages of France or the abstract patterns formed by rows of camouflaged trucks.

This uncritical serenity is an established part of Canadian art as a whole; our leading artists have, for some reason, traditionally shied away from social commentary; for years our galleries have been hung with mile after mile of bland, tasteful landscapes, a few pleasant portraits, and even fewer anecdotal paintings, all refined and in good taste. What has been largely missing is any gutsy sense of the pain or ugliness that is some part of life.

Claude Breeze is a distinct exception to the genteel mainstream; his paintings pulsate with the agony of existence seen against an erotic counterpoint.

The art production of the period under discussion is mainly abstract, where there is no "subject" as such; without a discernible "subject," of course, there can be little direct social commentary in works of art. But there have been a number of highly professional Canadian artists who have resisted the twentieth-century abstract "academy" and who pursued the less fashionable route of figurative art (among them Colville and Chambers, pages 57-64 and 129-36). But Breeze is not just a figurative artist; his paintings are thick with content, feeling and social commentary. His work is uniquely un-Canadian in the way it always expresses an editorial position that is often disturbingly provocative and, until recently, almost always violent.

The violence of Breeze's imagery and the nature of his subject matter come from a very personal view of the world; there is nothing in either his background or in the work of his teachers to explain it. He was born in Nelson, B.C. in 1938 and educated at the Regina School of Art at the University of Saskatchewan. It's hard to believe that he shared with his close friend, Brian Fisher (pages 201-8), the same group of distinguished teachers: Art MacKay, Roy Kiyooka (pages 89-96) and Ron Bloore (pages 81-8). He studied as well under the much-respected "magic realist of the west," Ernest Lindner, but Lindner's gentle studies of nature give no clue to Breeze's strident, journalistic realism.

Ron Bloore remembers him as a belligerent, truculent student, aggressively fighting to maintain his individuality and quarrelling with the school curriculum. Nonetheless, he graduated with a B grade. Despite his battles, Breeze seems to have suffered through the derivative stage common to most young artists. His principal influence for some time was the English expressionist painter Francis Bacon, as *Hopscotch* (ill. p. 197) makes clear.

After graduating from the Regina School of Art in 1958, Breeze spent a year

at the Vancouver School of Art, and settled in downtown Vancouver. By the early sixties, he was beginning to develop his own style, more especially exercising his own unique choice of subject material, as in *Sunday Afternoon: From an Old American Photograph* (ill. p. 199). Its form stems from German expressionism, which has been only a minor influence on Canadian painting, although it has had adherents in the faculty of the Ontario College of Art and elsewhere, among artists scattered across the country, including the strongly influential Western painter, Maxwell Bates.

Breeze's strength has been his ability to bring together the German expressionist style and a subject matter which is particularly suited to that style. In the beginning, his ability to combine the two was less sure than it is now; the figures of his paintings were out of harmony with the background. Breeze considers his *Hill Raja's Dream* pivotal to his work; in it he himself began to see the difficulties of the road he had chosen.

Like the background to *Sunday Afternoon*, *Hill Raja's Dream* shows the influence exerted on Breeze by Persian miniature painting; the all-over patterns evident in his work, as well as the Oriental rendering of space in which objects at a distance are not seen in Western-style perspective but are placed above those which are closer. Some of the tension of Breeze's work comes not just from its themes of sex and violence but from the uneasy mix between German expressionist, pop art colouring, and Oriental space. By the time Breeze completed his *Lovers in a Landscape* series, he had fully mastered the problems of integrating form and content; one of this series (ill. p. 198), was painted in 1965 and is now in the Art Gallery of Ontario collection.

In about the same period Breeze became interested in pop art and particularly in the work of de Kooning; Breeze, while working on *Lovers in a Landscape*, was also doing another group, *Ruby Red Lips Blue Eyed Baby* which, though not pop art in style, was decidedly pop art in content. It is important to keep in mind that Breeze, while influenced by a variety of other kinds of painting, still brings to his work his own highly individual approach and talent.

By the mid-sixties his work was being accepted in exhibitions outside Vancouver, beginning with the National Gallery Biennial of 1965; in 1967 he burst upon the Toronto scene with a one-man show at the Jerrold Morris Gallery, was included in the *Perspective '67* show at the Art Gallery of Ontario, the Canadian Group of Painters exhibit in Montreal and, finally, won the first purchase award in *British Columbia '67* at the Vancouver Art Gallery. By the end of the centennial year, Breeze was established as an artist of national stature.

The following year, Breeze came to international attention in an exhibition, *West Coast Now*, shown in both Los Angeles and San Francisco; he was also represented at the Edinburgh Festival in the exhibit *Canada 101*, and at an

exhibition in Chicago dealing with civil liberties. In that same year his work was first purchased by the Canada Council for its own collection.

Claude Breeze is a muscular, stocky, highly physical man who has always lived in the casual, outdoors manner of the West Coast. In 1969, Breeze moved to the Vancouver suburb of North Surrey which, though only a half hour's drive from downtown, is situated in a lush rain forest. His home is cottage-like, using the local materials and overlooking a spectacular view. Much of the house is wood, emphasizing its relationship to the forest in which it nestles. For a period, Breeze worked as a medical artist and his experience drawing from cadavers may account for his eerie treatment of the human figure, with its particular emphasis on body parts. He now supplements his income from the sale of his work by doing a little teaching when, in his words, "I need the bread."

In the year of his first great national prominence, 1967, Breeze solved the pictorial problem which had been evident in his work till that time, a problem as old as art itself; the relationship of figures to their background so that they meld into a whole. Even some of the Renaissance masters had difficulty making the people in their compositions appear as natural, integrated elements in the environment, rather than cut-outs pasted onto the surface of a painted backdrop. In a series, *The Home Viewer*, Breeze used the familiar shape of the tv screen as a framing device in which the figures and background were fused into one indivisible whole.

In 1968, Breeze had spent the summer painting in the area of Horseshoe Bay, northwest of Vancouver, using shaped canvases and a spray gun for the first time. The result was a new series he called *Island*; the experience probably was one factor in his decision to move to North Surrey.

For a year after arriving there, Breeze devoted much of his time to renovating the old cottage in which he now lives and he produced no paintings in that time. Once he started again, his paintings showed, in the words of Barry Lord's article in the August-September 1971 *artscanada*, "... [Breeze's] growing awareness of the landscape around him."

Claude Breeze has been secretive about his most recent art, which is said to be lyrical and less violent than in the past, and his right to privacy, while he works through these new changes, whatever they are, must be respected; in keeping with this need, Breeze has decided not to make a verbal statement.

Whatever the nature of his most recent work, on the basis of his past performance one can be sure that he will continue to be a "high risk" artist, willing to chance his recognizable image in an effort to expand and improve his expressive means. Using these means, Breeze has said a great deal about man's relationship to his fellows and to his environment, statements which are at one and the same time profound and universal.



## A Dictionary of Canadian Artists

Compiled by Colin S. MacDonald

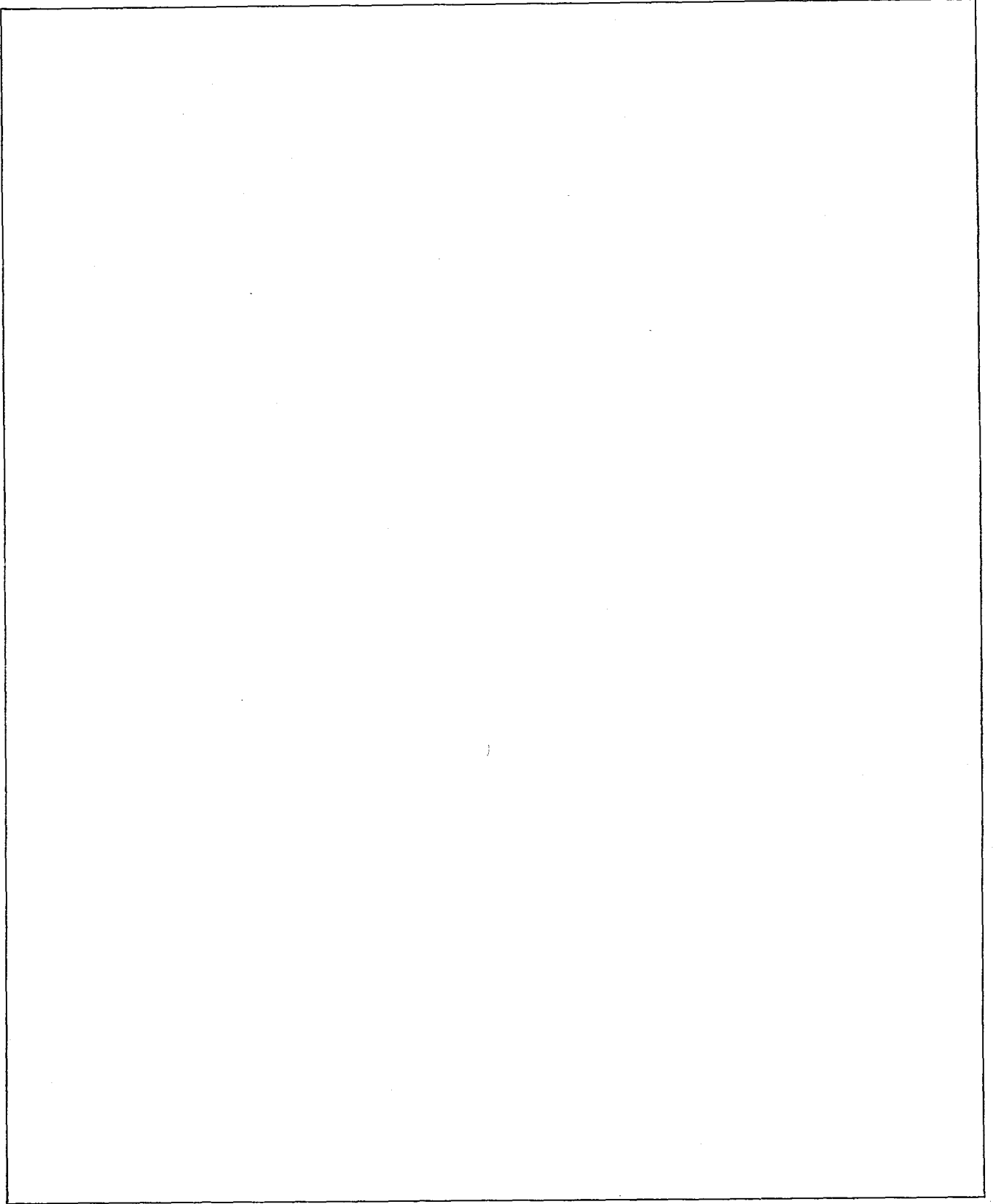
### **BREEZE, Claude**

b. 1938

Born at Nelson, B.C., he moved to Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, where he received his education and early art training under Ernest Linder. Linder had insisted on good draftsmanship, a quality which Breeze has retained in his present work. After his study in Saskatoon, Breeze attended the Regina College where he received direction in his work from Arthur McKay, Roy Kiyooka, Kenneth Lochhead, and Ronald Bloore. He returned to British Columbia where he spent a year at the Vancouver School of Art in 1959. He has won many awards including the Korlick Scholarship in 1953, 1954; I.O.D.E. Scholarship, 1956; Reeves Painting Scholarship, 1957; Canada Council Junior Fellowship, 1964. He held his first one man show in 1965 under the sponsorship of Vancouver painter Jack Shadbolt. Viewing this exhibit 'David Watmough' of the *Vancouver Sun* commented, "Hitherto my knowledge of his work had been confined to individual canvases such as the Hill-Raja's Dream, now purchased by the Vancouver Art Gallery, or his Persian River, his painting currently appearing in the sixth biennial at the National Gallery. But now, with his Lovers in a Landscape series, the full range and power of the Breeze imagination as it concentrates upon and distills the grotesqueries of our time, comes fully into play." Watmough went on to note the similarity of Breeze's work to the work of Francis Bacon. Bacon, too, had been concerned with the violent events which he found recorded in modern media of films and photos. In this vein Claude Breeze focused his attention on the issue of racial hatred brought home to him by an old American photograph of two negroes who had been lynched. Their clothes were ragged, indicating their hopeless state of poverty and the whole scene suggested to Breeze the paradox of the whites in a supposedly Christian society committing this atrocity. Breeze went ahead with a series of sketches until he had developed a drawing that expressed in his own way, his protest to society for allowing racial hatred and injustice to continue. He transferred his ideas to canvas and created a painting 101½" x 66" showing a negro man and woman hanging from a tree. From the bottom of the painting a mass of flames burns symbolic of the flames of hell. One can detect the shape of hands in the fire which Breeze explains are the hands of the white men who have done this deed. The painting was featured in the first issue of *arts/canada* (formerly *Canadian Art* magazine) where a large reproduction of it appears on Page 17 and a full discussion of it by Barry Lord on Page 16. A record also a feature of this magazine, carries a discussion about the painting and a general background of the artist as he talks with *arts/canada's* editor, Barry Lord. Breeze titled his painting "Sunday Afternoon" (from an old American Photograph). This work was purchased by the Canada Council in 1966.

#### **References**

- Vancouver Sun*, Tuesday, September 7, 1965 "Breeze Grows In Power, Stature" by David Watmough.  
*Arts Canada*, January, 1967, "Sunday Afternoon" by Barry Lord  
also see  
*London Free Press*, November 12, 1966 "Looking At Art" by Lenore Crawford  
*Globe & Mail*, Toronto, Ont., December 24, 1966 "Claude Breeze's shockers strip skin off the Sick Sixties"





# JOHN MEREDITH

1933 / Fergus, Ontario

John Meredith studied at the Ontario College of Art from 1950 to 1953 and began to exhibit in Toronto in the late fifties. He has exhibited regularly since 1961 at the Isaacs Gallery, Toronto. In 1974 a major retrospective exhibition of Meredith's work was circulated by the Art Gallery of Ontario. His work has been represented in a number of major exhibitions including the sixth *Biennial of Canadian Painting* in 1965, the *Quatrième Biennale de Paris*, 1965, *Canada: Art d'Aujourd'hui*, a travelling exhibition organized by the National Gallery of Canada for the Department of External Affairs in 1968, *Canada 101*, organized by the Canada Council for the 1968 Edinburgh Festival, and *Toronto Painting*, 1953-1965, organized by the National Gallery of Canada in 1972. ■ Meredith's work is represented in many collections including those of the Art Gallery of Ontario, the Montreal Museum of Fine Art, the National Gallery of Canada, the Vancouver Art Gallery and the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Jupiter	1973	oil on canvas - huile sur toile	245 × 306.5 cm. (4 panels)
Japan	1972	oil on canvas - huile sur toile	183.5 × 732 cm. (3 sections)
Manatsu	1976	oil on canvas - huile sur toile	152.5 × 122 cm.

John Meredith a étudié à l'Ontario College of Art de 1950 à 1953 et exposé pour la première fois à Toronto vers la fin des années cinquante. Il expose régulièrement, depuis 1961, à l'Isaacs Gallery, Toronto. En 1974, une grande rétrospective, lancée par l'Art Gallery of Ontario, présente ses œuvres. On les retrouve dans nombre d'expositions importantes, notamment à la *VI<sup>e</sup> Biennale de peinture canadienne*, en 1965, à la *IV<sup>e</sup> Biennale de Paris*, également en 1965, à *Canada: Art d'Aujourd'hui*, exposition itinérante organisée par la Galerie nationale du Canada pour le ministère des affaires extérieures en 1968, à *Canada 101*, organisé par le Conseil des Arts du Canada pour le Festival d'Édimbourg en 1968, et à *Peinture torontoise 1953-1965*, présenté par la Galerie nationale du Canada en 1972. ■ L'œuvre de Meredith figure dans plusieurs collections, celles, notamment, de l'Art Gallery of Ontario, du Musée des beaux-arts de Montréal, de la Galerie nationale du Canada, de la Vancouver Art Gallery, du Museum of Modern Art de New York, etc.





PEINTRES CANADIENS CONTEMPORAINS  
CANADIAN CONTEMPORARY PAINTERS

MINISTÈRE DES AFFAIRES EXTERIEURES DU CANADA  
DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS OF CANADA

JOHN MEREDITH

Jupiter 1976

245 x 306.5 cm.

Collection: The Canada Council Art Bank/  
La Banque d'oeuvres d'art du Conseil des arts du Canada

JOHN MEREDITH

## Introduction

JOHN MEREDITH: FIFTEEN YEARS

Art Gallery of Ontario

Exhibition organizes and catalogue

written by Maria Fleming

(October 1974 to June 1975 - on tour to  
galleries in Ontario, British Columbia and Manitoba)

This exhibition offers a limited view of the work of John Meredith from 1958 to 1973. It is not a retrospective; it lacks the necessary comprehensiveness. There are major pieces that could not be included because of space limitations. Here, emphasis is on examples of various phases of his development since his first one-man show, January 14-25, 1958.

The development of Meredith's work over this fifteen-year period is marked by evolutionary progression, rather than by critical change. But while the works, if seen together, anticipate, overlap and recall each other, they should not be considered as following a predetermined course.

It is essential to separate the distinctiveness of Meredith's work from formal theories, so that instead of attempting to apply already formed criteria, one accepts it on its own terms. Art for Meredith has always been a total commitment, independent of style or fashion; and in the panorama of contemporary Canadian art, his work is unique.

A belief in the human presence as the ultimate subject of painting informs his work. Whether in the figure-like allusions of the early works or the psychological impact of those of 1962-64, in the probing "mindscape" of the latter half of the sixties or the formal exuberance or gestural force of the pictures of the seventies, the content is human. The paintings formulate questions; they offer introspections on "presence." The abstract imagery with its many connotations and the facture, or workmanship, with its irregular softness of line and modulated paint handling reveal themselves as private, concentrated and individual—rather than as the aggressive, extrovert and public stance one may associate with Abstract Expressionism, to which his work has been linked.

John Meredith, who for professional purposes has used only his given names since 1951,<sup>1</sup> was born July 24, 1933, the son of Stanley Smith, a market gardener, in Fergus, Ontario. The family soon moved to Brampton and Meredith's father worked as a machinist in an aircraft factory nearby. Meredith recalls being interested in drawing and painting as a child and deciding, when in grade 3, to become an artist. He worked at a variety of jobs, including two years in the aircraft factory, to earn money for art school tuition fees. Enrolling in the Ontario College of Art, Toronto, in 1950, he studied with such teachers as Jock Macdonald, Carl Schaefer, and Eric Freifeld until 1953, commuting the while from Brampton. His brother, William Ronald, who also dropped the family name, had graduated in 1951; but then, as later,

Meredith's course was his own. At the College he was quiet and studious, not the rebel that Ronald had been. He recalls Carl Schaefer's support as well as Jock Macdonald's encouragement.

Apart from brief periods in Toronto, Meredith continued until the early sixties to live and paint in his parents' home in Brampton and to work sporadically at odd jobs. He had little social contact with the art world. His brother had moved to New York in 1955, and although he visited Ronald in New York three or four times;<sup>2</sup> he seems to have found the scene both stimulating and overpowering. In the early sixties he moved into Toronto, and for some time shared a studio with Richard Gorman. His present studio is still in the same building.

In appearance, Meredith is said to look like his mother—small-boned, slight, nervous, but with unusual stamina and energy. At times brooding, even despairing (as suggested in Barry Callaghan's poem), at times enjoying with a child-like sense of wonder the colours of a scene, or with passionate intensity classical music or jazz, this man and his work are full of seeming paradoxes—anxiety and delight, sensitivity and boldness, spontaneity and structure.

Meredith has always resisted explaining his art, saying "when the painting is finished, that is the statement,"<sup>3</sup> and referring to the essential "mysterious quality" that defeats explanation. Yet he has described his aim in general terms:

I attempt, through painting, to express and give visual existence to my thoughts, feelings and intellectual reactions to things within and outside of me. I try to portray my subconscious reactions to colour, form, beauty, power, etc., to develop new ideas, and to expand them through experimentation.

This statement indicates a concern with experiential rather than theoretical knowledge, with the kind of understanding which may be called instinctive. Meredith defines the subconscious as "inner man." He describes it as the largest and most essential part of man, involving not only his innermost thoughts and emotions, but also his soul. The evidence of his work suggests a wider reference—that the subconscious or "unconsciousness," as described by Erich Fromm, represents man in his universal, primordial and nascent aspects. "It represents the plant in him, the animal in him, the spirit in him..."<sup>4</sup>

Meredith's work from the late fifties through the late sixties shows an increasing multiplicity of allusions ("What I strive for in my paintings is not to say one thing, but to say many different things"), and, over a period, a metamorphosis of form, whereby an abstract stripe can take on first vegetal and then human connotations. The works of 1958-59 present a strong sense of a standing, growing force, and the slightly bulging off-centre stripe can be said to develop into the more figure-like spectres of 1961. But in many works of 1961 the early abstract stripes also seem to become curved and swaying plant-like groups and then to develop into those strange three-pronged shapes of 1962, which in *Bengal I* (cat. no. 6) take on anthropomorphic and ritualistic allusions.

His language of images—personal, invented not learned—has spontaneity and conviction. Forms develop and recur over a number of years; then yield to or expand into related images. But one should be wary of interpretations; for while the associations one makes may catch a glimpse of an image in the artist's mind or hand, they may equally be a super-imposition by one's mind on the presented forms.

The language of forms is interlocked with that of colour, design, rhythm and scale, at times to reinforce, at others to contrast or modulate. Thus the three-pronged shape of *Eden* (cat. no. 5) and *Bengal I* recurs, becomes tripartite design in *Trio* of 1962,<sup>5</sup> *Journey* of 1964 (cat. no. 8) and finally in the triptychs of 1966 (cat. no. 10) and 1972 (cat. no. 19). The crudely irregular line of *Bengal I* relates to a similar irregularity of its seemingly symmetrical design. At the same time, the bilateral quality of this design; tending to draw the viewer's eyes to the sides, is opposed by the frontality of the image. This is also true of *Eden*, though in a subtle way.

Simplicity, frontality and scale of composition are combined in *Crusader*, 1964 (cat. no. 9) with a scale of colour, an escalating, pervasive redness. Though the surface shows traces of underpainting,<sup>6</sup> it is sufficiently undiversified in quality that variables of handling are replaced by variables in perception. As in a number of works through 1962-66, for example *Frisco* (cat. no. 7), emphasis is on the capacity of colour to work through contrasts of pure hue. Using complementary or nearly complementary colours, Meredith creates surface patterns that jump and dance, and secondary patterns of after-images which both support and compete with the original pattern.

In his early works colour tended to be dark and melancholy, and tonal in use, and the worked and scraped pigment had the quality of matter. In the

works of 1962-66 brilliant colour is used to optical, psychological and often symbolic effect. The colour symbolism is not programmatic but instinctive, as his knowledge of what colour can do is empirical and not academic. Although, of course he knows through training the principles of colour use, his decisions seem to be made on a subjective basis. Through the late sixties colour, although still strong, is somewhat softer and the canvas becomes materialized into a modulated layer of thinly brushed paint.

A very close relationship exists between Meredith's paintings and his drawings. Since the spring of 1966 he has used the procedure of "squaring up" to make coloured ink studies the basis of his paintings. The study, taped or tacked to a board on a small easel beside his canvas, would be covered by a clear plastic sheet modularly marked in ink in proportions relating to the canvas. The latter was similarly "squared" but with a free-hand painted grid. Sometimes traces of these grids were left on the paintings (for instance, on *Karma*, cat. no. 13, *Toshiro*, cat. no. 20), partly because the effect was visually satisfying, partly because of the translucency of colour sought in the area, and partly as a record of the process of painting. But while he adopted "squaring up" as the conventional means of transposing drawings into paintings, a formal interest in the grid and an almost compulsive use of drawing in paintings is apparent in earlier work.

In the late fifties, when he was still working directly on the canvas, Meredith began to fill pages with exploratory ideas in pencil, about twenty to a page. These are private works, investigations of non-verbal thoughts on paper, like notes in a diary. An idea will be looked at in different ways, references will appear on other sheets, and sometimes a number of the images will be combined in a painting. In 1964, these sheets of visual notations appear in pen and ink instead of pencil and continue, though with decreasing frequency, into the 1970s.

There exists such a notation for the central form in *Empress*, 1961 (cat. no. 4); likewise the six framed images in *Journey*, 1964 (cat. no. 8) are to be found in a sheet of pencil studies (cat. no. 23)—for instance, the three frames on the left in the second row of the drawing become the upper row of frames in the painting. These black images and frames, moreover, read as painted drawings. In *Bengal I*, 1962, Meredith's rough, awkward line begins to develop wispy ciliated edges, a distinctive feature of his paintings after 1966. He recalls that he had first used this linear device in an ink drawing of the mid-fifties, and





detail (cat. no. 4)

those strange "twigs" of colour sprouting from the jungly stripes of *Empress* would seem to anticipate its use in painting.

A coloured pencil drawing of 1963 (cat. no. 21) not only contains ideas for a 1964 painting<sup>7</sup> but demonstrates his interest in the grid itself. It becomes a way of dividing the page, of directing the viewer's reading of the page, of establishing a sense of measured time. Although it is as free-hand as the images, it nevertheless provides visual contrast to them and a visual anchor for them.

Meredith admits a fascination with movies and the possible influence of their constructive use of frames. Over the years, the grid or framing device and reference have persisted; they are evident in the triptych of 1972, *Japan* (cat. no. 19), where the physical divisions work as line and force a sequential reading from left to right. In the study for this work, where the individual parts are mounted close to but separated from each other, analogies to movie stills are even stronger. Finally, the grid assumes its own place on the canvas in a very recent work, entitled *Grid*. (*Brown on Red*) of May 1974.<sup>8</sup>

Pen and ink drawings, largely executed for their own sake, have been part of his work and thought process since the mid-fifties. In these, he explored and developed the technique of smudging the still-wet line, sometimes softening and slowing the line, blending it with the ground; sometimes in early work suggesting ambiguous modelling; sometimes giving a jagged electric quality, a sense of movement, or even of speed, lengthening into streaks of shadow which interact with and even cross each other.

About 1964 Meredith began to embellish his black ink drawings with coloured inks, applied with both brush and pen. "Inks are brighter and more transparent than watercolours." Then in *Seeker*, the triptych painted March-June 1966, which he has since dedicated to his parents, he decided "to try to put my drawings right into paintings." For this work there exist the sheet with two coloured ink studies (cat. no. 29), a small pencil sketch, and a pen and coloured ink drawing for the left panel (the latter two, collection of the artist). There are also echoes in *Seeker* of some coloured inks of 1965, for example, *Untitled* (cat. no. 25). A comparison of the studies with the final painting indicates how loosely Meredith was working at this time, strengthening colour and clarifying design while increasing the complexity of relationships and variety of motifs.

For the next eight years Meredith used coloured ink studies, which he came to approximate

closely in his paintings.<sup>9</sup> Sometimes in the studies he consciously worked towards a painting; sometimes he thought of them as ends in themselves, returning later to select from amongst them. There is in the exhibition (cat. no. 28) a study which, at the urging of a friend, he employed as the basis for a painting three years later, but this lapse of time is unusual.

Meredith has the gift of translating the character, spontaneity and speed of a one-inch flick of the wrist to a large brush stroke, retaining nuances of tone and sensitivity of contour. Indeed, the scale has been achieved by that most aristocratic means—detail, and thus reveals a sensibility more often expressed in European than in American draftsmanship. Visual complexity, whether of paint modulation or of detail, involves the viewer in the internal surface in an intimate way, while the size of the canvas forces him back in order to comprehend the structure. In their scale, the artist moves from the spontaneous record to a representation of his reaction to the image.<sup>10</sup>

What becomes evident is that drawings are painted, and paintings are drawn. Meredith's art refutes exclusive distinctions.

Seeker, in its tripartite and symmetrical basic structure, has obvious analogies to a winged altar-piece. The motifs, coming from his drawings, are more numerous, more varied and generally smaller in scale in relation to the size of the canvas. Although emblematic in structure and generating a sense of direct address, the work retains some of the latent kinaesthetic movement found in most of his drawings. The imagery, working on several levels, combines with colour, rhythm and scale to confront the viewer with the myth of man's "search," with and in himself.

Circles, wheels, enclosing bands or ribbons are related and recurrent motifs. The circular mandala-like image, which appears in 1966, coincides in essence with them and springs, according to Jung, from primordial interest in the psychic or inner structure. *Atlantis*, 1966 (cat. no. 12) with its visceral and cosmic analogies, its dark richness and sense of spontaneous yet carefully structured colour and design, suggests the dualistic aspects of man and the world—of variety and unity, of the external and internal. *Karma*, 1967 (cat. no. 13) is quiet and obsessive, subtle and mysterious; it becomes a means toward contemplation and concentration. At this time Meredith denies knowledge of Eastern images and colour.<sup>11</sup> Perhaps the suggestions come through his ability to absorb the visual scene at a glance and from casual exposure to such sources as the Royal Ontario Museum, publications on oriental art and exhibitions

of Indian miniatures. With reference to *Seeker* and *Ulysses* (cat. no. 15), it has been observed that "their tucked and stitched qualities connote an attachment to the tapestry and apparel of Oriental culture."<sup>12</sup> Certainly the search to reach man's inherent nature, erotic and mysterious, and the transformative power of the subconscious, have archetypal elements in common with Eastern thought.

Meredith's most recent show, December 1973, indicates not only a manifest interest in oriental culture,<sup>13</sup> but also an increasing looseness of colour and movement anticipated in that powerful painting of 1971, *Untitled* (cat. no. 18). The works of 1972-73 combine grand movement and delicacy of motif. In some, there appear new qualities of directional thrust and jostling masses; in others, counteracting flowing forces. They are large—*Japan* and *Toshiro* are epic in scale and character—emotional in colour, large of rhythm yet subtly uneven in saturation or densities of paint. The thrusting masses bespeak Abstract Expressionism, but the paint handling differs; it is thin, even translucent in places, and the forms are often like broadened extensions of his line or like distensions of those black nodules deployed across drawings such as cat. no. 31.

Although there is a sense of spontaneous facture in his work, an appearance of paint applied rapidly, his approach is considered and slow (he speaks of having ideas at the back of his mind, sometimes for years); it is the result of more than two decades of painting, continual absorption of visual stimuli, and constant mental play with images. After the immediate impact of the painting, the realization grows that careful structure and loving handling of paint are paramount elements. Also apparent is the basic rationalism of his method and the consistency of his development.

Meredith's course has been a lonely one, feeding on the northern habit of inwardness. The originality and inner life of his forms, the obsessive yet fluid sense of pictorial rhythm, the colour combinations, primitive and exotic, or subtle and sophisticated, the preoccupation with grasping inner reality, all combine to give his work a compelling power—a power now awkward, now spontaneous, always singularly individual.

MLF  
September 16, 1974

## Footnotes

1. Through 1956, his paintings are signed "Meredith Smith."
2. He was in New York in June 1957 for Ronald's first show at the Kootz Gallery, and probably in 1958 and 1959.
3. All quotations come from a series of conversations between the artist and the writer in the spring and summer of 1974.
4. Erich Fromm, D. T. Suzuki, and Richard de Martino, *Zen and Psychoanalysis*, New York, 1960, 106.
5. City Savings and Trust Co., Vancouver.
6. Such signs of a painting's history Meredith readily accepts. This "everything shows" aesthetic is an important aspect of Abstract Expressionism that also survives in process-oriented art.
7. *Pierce Arrow*, collection of Mr. and Mrs. Avrom Isaacs, Toronto.
8. The Isaacs Gallery, Toronto.
9. For example, *Painting '66*, August 1966 (cat. no. 11) and its study (cat. no. 30); *Karma*, 1967 (cat. no. 13) and its study (cat. no. 33); *Ulysses*, 1968 (cat. no. 15) and its study (cat. no. 34); and *Japan*, 1972 (cat. no. 19) and its study (cat. no. 36).
10. A few complex coloured ink studies, such as that for *Karma*, took about two weeks to complete. Thus in these, as in the oils, the appearance of spontaneity is in actuality the product of slow and concentrated execution.
11. The unusual colour combinations of *Eden* and *Frisco* have an oriental subtlety and even sensuality.
12. Exhibition catalogue, *49th Parallels: New Canadian Art*, John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Sarasota, Florida, 1971; Introduction by Dennis Young.
13. The titles of several works of this period (1972-73) are of oriental inspiration, and may recall Japanese movies which impressed Meredith in the fifties. By the seventies he had also become interested in Japanese music. As he has never travelled, his viewpoint, of necessity, is western.

THE  
JOHN  
MEREDITH  
POEMS  
UNTITLED

Unsigned\*

1

when I am alone I think of dying.  
I am most alone when I sleep.  
I cannot sleep: sleep is submission to fear, so I paint.  
everything I paint is not anything you  
or anyone else can know: my paintings are the mystery iceberg  
of my past, but there is a way of knowing the mystery.  
it is the future.  
it would be nice to think of my paintings as my children,  
as my roots, but it is not true.  
I have no roots.  
if I had children I would have roots: but  
I have no woman (all my women die, always, just before  
Christmas): roots are the future and not the past.  
my paintings are themselves, they are oriental.  
they are me. I am not oriental.  
they are me.  
they are a hole in unconscious space, filled with stars and me.

2

I never dream. I walk in the streets. I don't  
see anything. there are trees, trees, like piano  
keys: white and black, thousands, and without leaves,  
and more trees.

I am sometimes an elephant, sometimes a rhinoceros, alone,  
in the trees.

I don't feel guilty about anything.

I don't feel hatred of myself.

I don't feel that I love myself.

I live with myself, inside the forest of trees, where  
there are no birds, there

is no sound, no sun, no one else, but warm (if  
you cut the bone of my arm — the clean slice —

and count the rings, there are  
thirty-nine, count the years, some men count their toes,

they have eleven, one extra. I have

one friend, but he is not in the forest that is in the trees.

when the forest disappears I will disappear.

I do not want to live alone but I am alone.

I never dream). I take tranquilizers.

3

a U is a U and not a you.

an O is an O and not the zero of emptiness.

my signature is only a selection by someone else  
of letters: — I draw my name out of a well of lines (you

will never find the beginning or end . . . ) (

4

behind the leaves, my mother, of the lily of the valley, dead.

I had a premonition, one day

she was pinned against her chair by the sunlight. I am secretive.

I did not tell her;

she has since turned half-over in her grave watching

my other women, but, women

are not cruel. I have only been unlucky (the karate champion  
who became a cop and threatened to arrest me for assault, but  
left and put a parking ticket on some unknown overnight windshield  
by the side of the road); she was one of two snake

eyes I rolled (the other

— two in her bed, then four, then six,

and a long sienna field and a cliff, and on the beach, between  
the stoneface and the water, a cobra, poised, a man could  
die there); but,

I didn't: de Kooning said — it is more important to be a man

than to be a painter. I am a painter, ruthlessly.

I am flesh and bone with a brush in my hand.

my mother, that afternoon in the sunlight, said: don't drink,  
paint hard.

well, I am not perfect.

5

I do not dance, but only by myself in the dark,  
the way some people sing in the shower: — I have no shower,  
so I never sing.



6

I am a non-Protestant,  
fantastically non-. I have three non-  
Catholic Catholic friends: being sometimes  
a clotheshorse-dandy, I have elected myself  
as their Pope (one afternoon I opened my porch  
window onto the tin roof square; there was  
one pigeon, one broken deck-chair, and an opposite window  
with the green shade drawn) non-practicing.

7

I always keep cut fresh flowers: thick  
heads of summer born in the glass-house: in the  
radiator heat, the shag leaves collapse first,  
like men hanged before their time.  
I think I am someone living before  
my time: watching — and when  
I'm at last born into my time,  
there'll only be time to say goodbye.

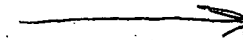
8

blood on my hands, pieces of eight  
words: — bones, of the body, of chairs, are brittle (they  
collapse like old-movie break-away furniture); I've  
always been nostalgic for what never was (Bogart  
and Lauren, seedy elegance, immortal  
under the propellor fans of North Africa) — peace.

I walk: . . . 3 miles, seeing nothing: only  
the getting to where I am going. I'm afraid of these  
things ( . . . fame  
has become Barnum show biz; and Napoleon  
is only Bailey seated on a celluloid horse on a celluloid hill  
saying celluloid words . . . ) the last which is not a word but a  
beginning: Help.

## Selected Bibliography

## List of Exhibitions



### One-man Exhibitions:

The Gallery of Contemporary Art, Toronto, 1958, 1959

The Isaacs Gallery, Toronto, 1961, 1963, 1965, 1967, 1969, 1973

Blue Barn Gallery, Ottawa, 1965

### Selected Group Exhibitions:

*Annual Spring Show*, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 1961

*Sixth Biennial Exhibition of Canadian Painting*, 1965, The National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa

*Quatrième Biennale de Paris*, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1965

*Painting in Canada*, Canadian Government Pavilion Expo '67, Montreal

*Nine Canadians*, Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, 1967.

*Canada: Art d'aujourd'hui*, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris, 1968; Galleria Nazionale de Arte Moderna, Rome, 1968; Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels, 1968; Musée Cantonal des Beaux-Arts, Lausanne, 1968

*Canada 101*, Edinburgh International Festival, Edinburgh, Scotland, 1968.

*Canadian Artists '68*, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto

*Tenth International Black and White Exhibition*, Lugano, Switzerland, 1968

*Eight Artists from Canada*, Tel-Aviv Museum, Israel, 1970

*49th Parallels: New Canadian Art*, John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Sarasota, Florida, 1971; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, Illinois, 1971

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Paris. Musée National d'Art Moderne. *Canada: Art d'aujourd'hui*, 1968

Sarasota, Florida, John and Mable Ringling Museum. *49th Parallels: New Canadian Art*, 1971

# John Meredith

b. 1933

Ulysses, 1968, oil on canvas  
72" x 96" (183 cm x 244 cm)  
The Vancouver Art Gallery



John Meredith has said, 'Art should always be a mystery. It isn't possible to totally explain any work of art, anyways, since it is this mysterious quality which makes art so beautiful.' In fact, he treasures the mystery of painting so much that he once protested to an interviewer, 'Don't try to explain it all away.'

Meredith's paintings are among the most difficult of any to discuss, since their style is unique. He works in images, shapes that for him are the visible

forms of feelings, ideas, beliefs. All of these unite in his art; they spread out like drops of oil on water into patterns of intense personal meaning.

But, since art exists for the viewer as well as the artist, we must see if it is possible for us to understand such highly personal imagery. Does the artist give us the clues we need to share in his part-dream, part-thought, part-feeling world?

Because each of us has a different personality and set of experiences, the direction of our minds and

feelings will differ too. As we have already seen, Abstract Expressionist painting depends on the power of images that affect each viewer in particular ways. Shapes, colours, lines, spaces, and their relationships to each other are the only means an Abstract Expressionist has to make suggestions. But we the viewers must reach out to meet him, trying to overcome the distance between his mind and ours, and trusting that he is leading us into a new and valuable experience.

What are the clues Meredith gives us in his painting to help understand it? First there is its title, *Ulysses*, which is the Roman name for the Greek hero Odysseus. In the *Odyssey*, an ancient poem by Homer, Odysseus (Ulysses) travels through the world, facing many trials and adventures on his voyage home. Though the *Odyssey* is an exciting story, it is also an allegory for a man's personal trials in the world.

Meredith's title, then, gives us a clue that this painting can be seen as a man's journey outwards from his own little world into an outer world, and finally into the spaces of the universe. The titles of other works by Meredith show his concern with the idea of man's search for himself and the meaning of life. Two of his works are entitled *Journey and Seeker*, while another, entitled *Atlantis*, recalls the mythical land lost under the sea and sought for thousands of years.

But after the artist offers us his title, he leaves us to explore the painting and make our own connections. Sometimes his works have no title, and then we are left entirely alone with his forms, his colours, and his very personal use of line.

Many of Meredith's paintings are based on circles, a symbol of unity and eternity in many Eastern religions. We know that Meredith is very interested in Eastern thought, and particularly the idea of union between man and the universe.

Ribbon- or flame-like shapes are another favourite design of Meredith's, and he uses sharp V-shaped angles and waving, rippling forms to contrast with each other. But the most characteristic feature of his style is a distinctive 'nervous' line. Sometimes almost shaky, other times like lightning flashing across the canvas, it is energetic and imaginative, though seldom quiet and soothing. In his later works his lines have become textured, with little hairy fibres bristling off them, so that they occupy space and depth instead of remaining flat.

Meredith's colour is often rich and usually used to strengthen the meaning of his forms. Here, for example, the blue suggests the colour of the sea and sky on Ulysses' journey home. But whatever colours Meredith chooses for his themes, he intends them to assist the meaning, and not to be used as accepted artistic rules.

John Meredith's actual surname is Smith. But he and his brother, William Ronald, another well-known Canadian artist, chose to use only their given names professionally. The Smith family was not wealthy, but the father, being talented in drawing himself, encouraged his sons with their art.

Meredith was born in Fergus, Ontario, and at the age of eighteen he enrolled in the Ontario College of Art in Toronto. There he studied under Carl Schaefer and Jock Macdonald. Macdonald, an Abstract Expressionist, encouraged Meredith to develop his own individual style. Indirectly, Borduas and *Les Automatistes* had a similar influence upon him.

Of all artists painting in Canada today, John Meredith is one of the most unusual. He is a loner in his life and in his art. His world is a private one, and the greatest compliment we can pay him is to allow his paintings to speak for themselves.

# John Meredith: fifteen years

THEODORE ALLEN HEINRICH

If ever we have produced a painter more averse to self-exposure than John Meredith, he has been too modest to catch my eye. Underpublicized but not wholly unnoticed, the inauguration of a travelling exhibition of a highly selective choice of his works painted or drawn over the last 15 years was significant among the events at the October opening of the rebuilt Art Gallery of Ontario.\* Not that Meredith has ever been anything but eye-catching, from his first tentative yet distinctive

\*The exhibition is also travelling to: Samia Public Library and Art Gallery, December 6, 1974-January 1; Rodman Hall, St Catharines, January 10-February 2; The Vancouver Art Gallery, February 8-March 1; London Public Library and Art Gallery, March 7-30; The Winnipeg Art Gallery, April 18-May 25; Windsor Art Gallery, June 10-29.

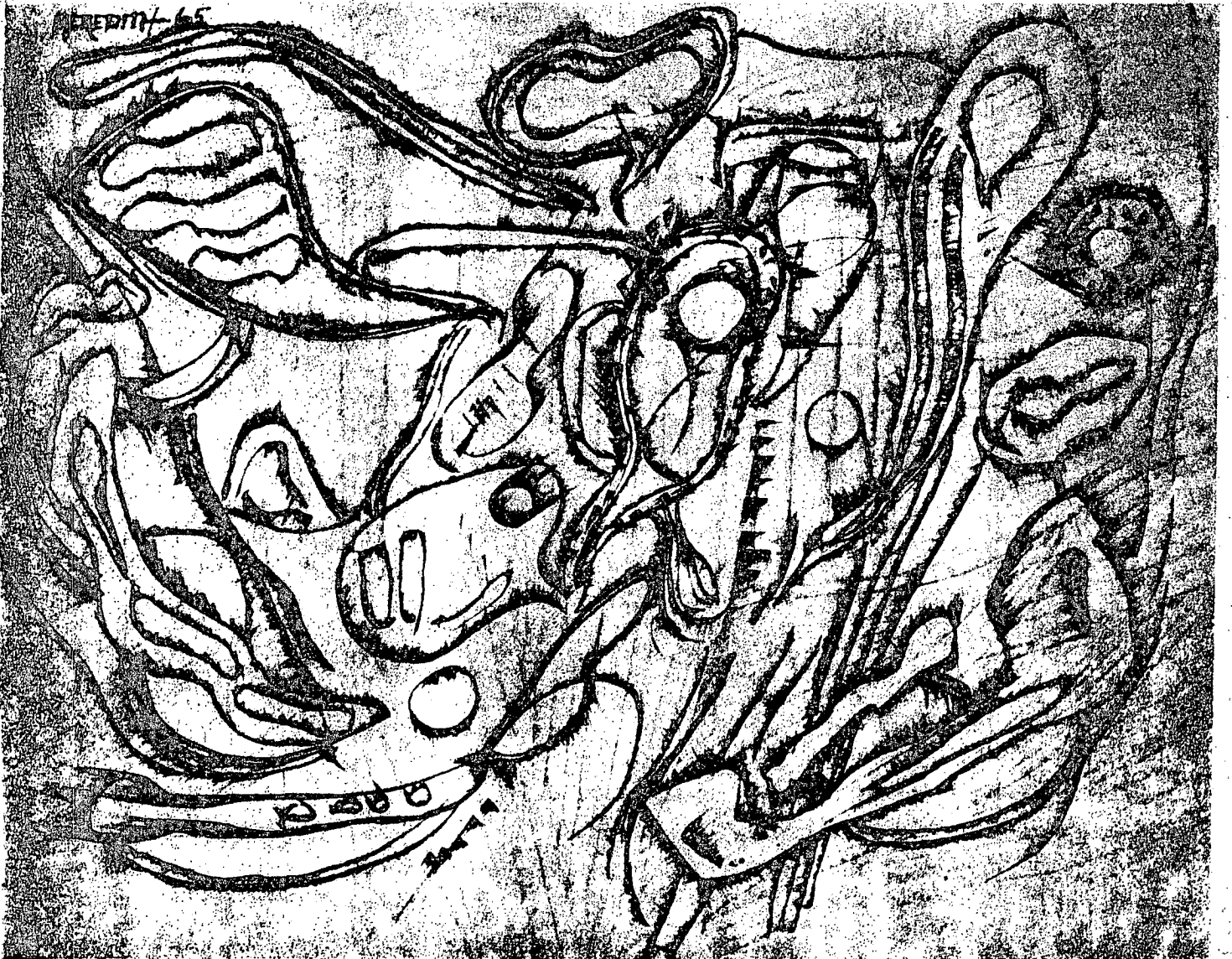
Photos: courtesy The Isaacs Gallery unless otherwise noted.

public appearance in 1958. That was at the long-gone Gallery of Contemporary Art of the Kernerman brothers on Gerrard, in the heady days when there and a little later at Avrom Isaacs' new talent was busting out in almost every succeeding show.

Meredith was then already five years out of the Ontario College of Art, where he had been a quiet but good student, particularly helped by Jock Macdonald, and had meanwhile been working in considerable isolation in Brampton. We were at that time allowed some information about him, for example that he was the much younger brother (seven years younger) of our then comet William Ronald, that their parents were remarkably sympathetic to painters in the family, but that, being called Smith, all parties were averse to the young men becoming known as a set of latterday Smith Bros. One of the

most conspicuous features of those early canvases was a surprisingly aggressive signature designed, if irritatingly, to make his professional name register. It did, rather because the painting was so interesting, so unlike his brother's and so truly individual.

These canvases were for some years dark and brooding. If he was looking outside himself for guidance, it was to neither Toronto nor New York. One felt that perhaps one eye was curious for a while about the techniques, not the imagery, of two Montrealers of exactly his own age, Guido Molinari and Jean McEwen. As he is not a traveller except in his own mind and seems to absorb stimuli without being at all conscious of their specific sources, this may not signify. The early stripes remain significant for their insistent painterliness, for their determination to assume organic rather than mathematical



Untitled Drawing XV, 1965, ink on paper, 13½" x 16½"





*Empress*, 1961  
oil on canvas, 39 1/4" x 40"  
Coll: National Gallery of Canada

connotations, for their jutimation of the function of lines as manifestations of force, however vagrant. They are also still striking for their insistent suggestions of almost secret motions and rustlings, of curtains or grasses or even nightskies about to part. These perhaps culminate with the National Gallery's *Empress*, 1961, where hints in several slightly earlier paintings turn at the center of this into intimations of a figure, a figure that seems to be trying to burst its way out of a papyrus swamp. The stem-strips are all bursting into curious filaments that will gradually become a hallmark of Meredith's drawing and painting style throughout the following decade, and the repeating curves of so much later painting are

also clearly stated here.

Things very soon began to open up for him and his palette moved to the most brilliant saturations imaginable, though first and at intervals for some years afterward, he liked to pair, multiply or contrast simple variations of a trident-like figure in black on, say, a yellow ground. These figures could be read according to one's own fancy as Vishnu symbols, as X-rays of tulips or as the skeletal hands of marsupials. These "tridents" seem to have begun the release of a large vocabulary of private but interesting symbols and simultaneously a disciplined effort to develop a syntax for their sensible presentation. This could now and then take on surprisingly baroque guises.

In the way of non-twinned brothers who have sometimes an affinity for similar data but interpret them quite differently, the orb exploited by Ronald appears as a circle in Meredith's work in 1964, to be developed in a series of brilliant inventions sustained over a long period. Some have called this a mandala and there is actually a painting of 1967 called *Karma*, but it is already present in the dazzler called *Crusader* (Op' mightn't have exhausted itself so fast had it had a fraction of the energy and freedom crackling here) and is paramount in such major works as *Atlantis*, 1966, and *Ulysses*, 1968. The circles can disintegrate into fans and ribbons or become minor accompaniments to ciliated floating shapes that look like huge cut gemstones. The insistent point about the paintings of the years 1958-68 as they look in this show is how ripe they have grown.

The general symmetry and the settled imagery began, however, to give way to new ideas. There was for instance (not represented in the show) a series of large color-field paintings on which a line of contrasting hue wandered as apparently vagrant as an illuminated ion coursing across a cloud-chamber. Then a new but energetic restlessness announced itself in such paintings as a large untitled canvas of 1970 dominated by a lattice-like form. This next shattered itself into amorphous, strongly spiked forms apparently moving at great speed and these quickly abandoned all straight lines or defensible angles.

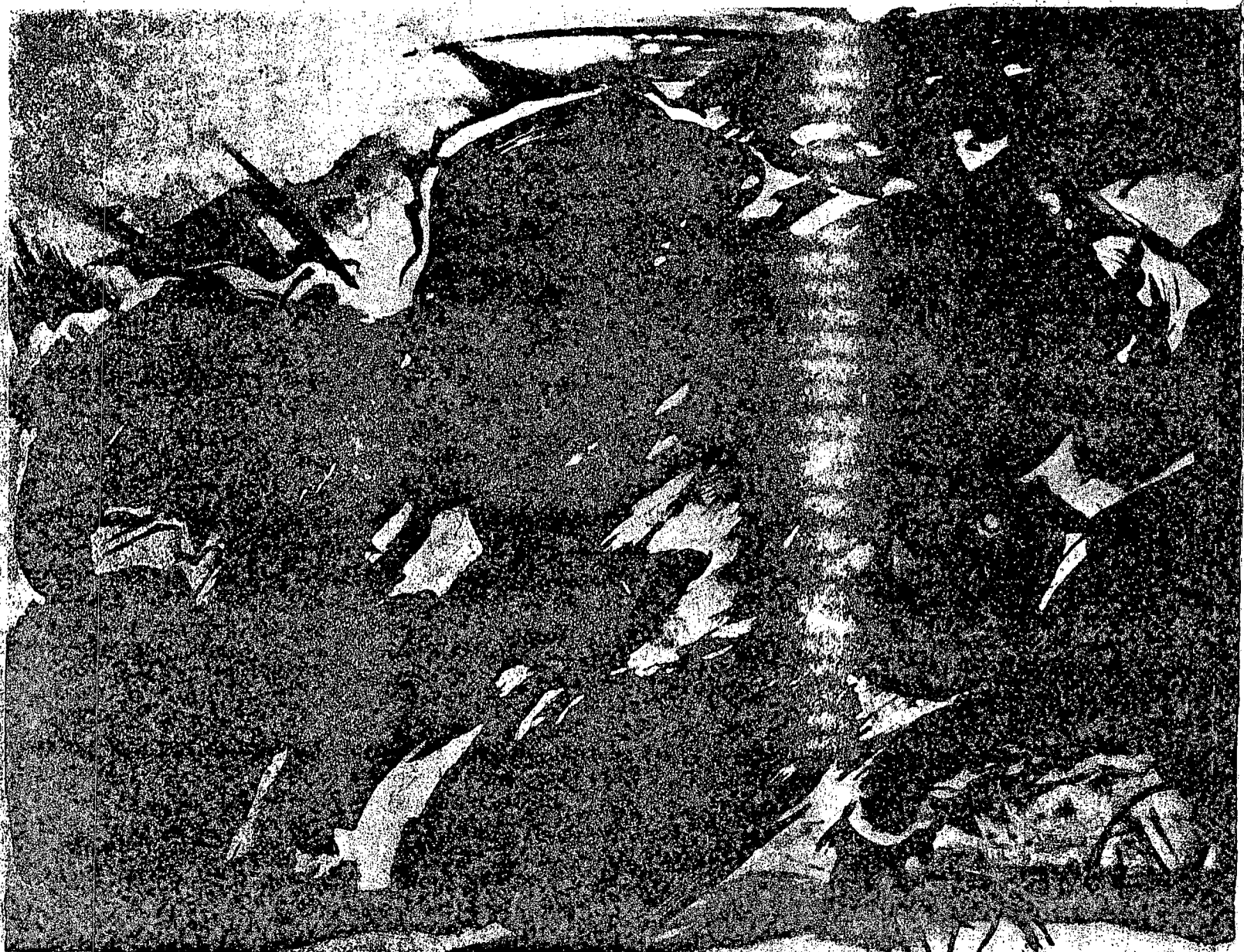
The paintings of the last three years are immense. They tend to employ only two but two richly modulated colors (note that Meredith has throughout stuck to old-fashioned oils which he can use with the translucency of watercolors and a plasticity impossible with acrylics) together with menacing clouds of black on white ground. *Japan*, 1972, is a false triptych which suffers somewhat from disjunctions where there should be none. *Toshiro* (1973: the titles are arbitrary) is more satisfying for containing the whole of its explosive force within a single frame. The force of imagery here is both cataclysmic and ambiguous, partly cosmic, partly sexual, partly the devastation of solar explosions, partly the irrelevance of fragments of wheels. But this freedom is exhilarating. One feels a development something like that experienced in moving from the dense textures and self-obsessive, unresolved solemnities of a Berlioz to the serious clarities of a Mozart prepared to face up to greater mysteries than those imposed by his more conventional libretti. I certainly don't mean by this apparently unhistorical statement to imply retrogression. Anyone who listens to late-hour radio programs will follow my sense.

The paintings are accompanied by sixteen drawings in pencil or the colored inks favored for their brilliance by this artist. They, at any rate those that are directly related to paintings, bring us to a most peculiar ambiguity in the work of John Meredith which I for one do not

pretend to understand. This is an ambiguity of scale. Since he habitually works out every detail of a large composition in advance in line, in color and *in petto*, this is important. It has always seemed to me that there are essential differences between studies and final works that are easily recognizable and therefore readily explainable. With Meredith this is usually but mysteriously not so. It is virtually impossible from a photograph, for example, to know whether a work under examination is eight inches wide or eight (or 18) feet. Normally this would matter to a disruptive degree. With Meredith it doesn't usually matter at all which means, again paradoxically, that the natural scale of his highly introspective art is monumental and that the physical size, be it no more than a thumbnail, is irrelevant. This should be a comfort for those of his non-corporate admirers who do not have unlimited wall space.

A final word. I respect Meredith and his deep need for privacy too much to have sought an uninvited interview, for which reason everything said here is external and subjective on my

own part alone. Two people who know him well have done all that need be done for the present. What they have to say about this fine painter and beautiful man is printed in the exemplary AGO catalogue produced for the travelling exhibition. Here may be found the essay at once factual and critically sensitive that appears too modestly over the initials of Marie Fleming and a group of eight remarkable poems that appeared unsigned a year ago in the quarterly coldly called *exile*, together with color plates of eight paintings. These poems read like dazzling bursts of self-awareness and oblique bits of autobiographical revelation and seemed at the time to be by the artist. They are in fact by Barry Callaghan, who clearly knows him profoundly. They have the insight and weight of a Hazlitt for once un-prolix and writing poetry instead of only occasionally winged prose. I urge anyone interested in Meredith and the springs of his exceptional if occasionally unsteady sensibilities to read them and the essay before next looking at his paintings. He remains a seeker and his best is still to come.



## JOHN MEREDITH

### Contemporary Canadian Painting

William Withrow

(McClelland and Stewart Limited 1972)

"Art," says John Meredith, "should always be a mystery. It isn't possible to totally explain any work of art anyway, since it is this mysterious quality which makes art so beautiful." It is suitable comment from an artist who uses uncomplicated techniques to create works of great originality and mystery.

Meredith's paintings are as accessible to the uninitiated viewer as they are to the most knowledgeable historian because his art is the least derivative of that included in this book and because Meredith himself has no program of explanation for it. His work is among those things that simply exist and are to be experienced. A good example is *Untitled Diptych* (ill. p. 151), the focus of which is a mandala-like form, which looks like the seal of some mystical society, surrounded by cabalistic markings. Meredith himself, however, professes little knowledge of the mandala, although it has become a popular sign in the counter-culture, with its Oriental and philosophical connotations and its Jungian application as symbolic of the effort to reunify the self. But Meredith has come to it less intellectually, more instinctively, and shows little interest in investing his work with meanings borrowed from other spheres of human thought or activity. This attitude is as true of his other works; Meredith paints from his viscera, not from his head.

This may help explain why he has remained singularly uninfluenced by the work of other Canadian artists, an astonishing fact when one considers that he is the younger brother of William Ronald (pages 105-12), a man who was a mover and maker in Painters Eleven and in the artistic revolution which shook Toronto in the late fifties.

John Meredith was born in 1933 in the town of Fergus, Ontario, and was interested in drawing and painting by the time he was in grade three. He left school as a youngster and went to work in an aircraft factory; in 1950, with the blessing of sympathetic parents, he enrolled in the Ontario College of Art in Toronto, where he studied until 1953. His teachers included Carl Schaeffer, Eric Freifeld and, most important, Jock Macdonald (pages 17-24), who encouraged him to go his own way artistically. Although he has a solid grounding in drawing the human figure (the core of the O.C.A. curriculum at that time) and feels that such a background is useful to any artist, he showed little interest in it.

During his years at the college, when his brother, William Ronald was becoming a highly articulate leading figure of the Toronto art scene, Meredith pursued his own lifestyle, living in Brampton and commuting to Toronto for classes. He had little social contact with Painters Eleven, a group he considers to have been in the generation before his own; by the time Meredith began to exhibit, Painters Eleven had disbanded. Both brothers have dropped the family name, Smith, and each uses his given name only, for professional reasons.

Meredith believes that, if he has been influenced at all, it is by Borduas and Les Automatistes and even that was not a stylistic influence but rather brought about a change in attitude, a kind of release that helped him find his own personal language of expression.

His first exhibition, in 1958, was at the Gallery of Contemporary Art in Toronto; two years later he joined the group, jocularly known as Isaacs' Allstars, who show at the Isaacs Gallery. He has had five one-man shows at the Isaacs since 1961.

In the years since then, he has been included, in Canada, in the National Gallery's Biennial (1965), and in every major survey show mounted to the present day; internationally, he has been represented in a group show at Buffalo's Albright Knox Gallery (1963-64), the International Biennial in Paris (1965), the Gallery of Modern Art, Paris (1967), the *Nine Canadians* show at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston (1968), *Canada 101* in Edinburgh in the same year and in the Tenth International *Black and White Exhibition* in Lugano (1968) and *Eight Artists from Canada* in Tel Aviv (1971).

Meredith regards 1962 as particularly important in his artistic evolution; in that year he produced *Bengal* (ill. p. 149) which, to his mind, is a key work. In it he transferred a drawing technique to painting; the blurring of the ink line which was to become his unique trademark intrigued him for some years and in *Bengal* he moved it for the first time from drawing to painting. From 1964 on it became his signature.

Meredith's technique is painstaking and of great interest: he does his work first in the form of small drawings, which he has collected over the past fifteen years; he selects one of these and then enlarges it (his canvases often exceed eight feet in size) almost without change in what he calls the most "traditional manner possible," graphing the small sketch and the large canvas. This method releases him from the problem of form so that he can throw all his energies into the challenge of colour. The astonishing and delightful mystery of his work is that, despite its meticulousness, it has the spontaneity and excitement of art created in a single burst of inspiration.

Meredith's unique imagery is spontaneous and comes purely from his unconscious. Because his work is perhaps the most original of that of any Canadian artist, critics have pressed him to discuss its origins. In an interview with Barry Lord of the National Gallery of Canada, he finally protested: "don't try to explain it all away." He does, however, say that the style which has grown out of his pen and ink sketches lends movement to his paintings; although this style was initially uncalculated, its artistic exploitation continues to give him pleasure. What he does with these forms is not accidental; the inspiration may

be seemingly non-intellectual, but the manipulation of them on the surface of the canvas is directed by a keen visual mind.

Meredith has remained a loner. In the days when Isaacs' Allstars made the nearby Pilot Tavern the scene of endless talk and argument about art, Meredith continued to live in Brampton, staying there till 1964. He now lives completely as an artist, making his home in his studio, a large single room over a store on Toronto's Spadina Avenue, near the garment district. Quiet and shy, hesitant in articulating his ideas, he has never taught and never been active in the art associations that continually mushroom. Although he lives a relatively isolated life, Meredith has no sense of rejection, having built up over the past eight years a loyal following of people who have consistently appreciated and purchased his work. He sees this rather lonely life style and his singlemindedness as accidental and not self-imposed. Asked about the future, he says in his gentle way that he is quite content with things as they are.

He does, however, talk about possible changes in style, towards a more open and free compositional structure. This is evident in comparing *Untitled, 1971* (ill. p. 152) to *Seeker*, (ill. p. 150), which was painted in 1966.

The current trend towards artistic and intellectual nationalism doesn't interest John Meredith, perhaps because he is a universal rather than a national or international painter; his work is as accessible to a Laplander as to a Vancouverite.

Conversely, however, he feels that national environment has had a part in shaping his work, though he is unable to explain it further than that. He simply believes that he would be a different kind of artist, in some undefined way, if he lived in France rather than in Canada.

John Meredith continues to be one of this country's most intriguing and idiosyncratic young painters; art critics and writers from all over the world are invariably forced to turn in on the work itself, leaving both them and the artist to wonder what it's all about.



A Dictionary of Canadian Artists

Compiled by Colin S. MacDonald

**MEREDITH, John (John Meredith Smith)**

Born in Fergus, Ontario, the son of Mr. & Mrs. William Smith, his father moved to Fergus from Stratford during the depression years and made his living by raising vegetables and selling them directly to individuals at their homes.<sup>1</sup> The family then moved to Brampton where John attended the district high school and did realistic drawing and painting.<sup>2</sup> He entered the Ontario College of Arts, as his brother William Ronald had done several years earlier. There he became interested in abstract and non-objective art through Jock Macdonald and began his first serious explorations in this direction which progressed during his three years at the College (1950).<sup>3</sup> After his studies in Toronto he found a job with the Brampton *conservator* in which his cartoons appeared.<sup>4</sup> It was around this time that he decided to use his Christian names for his full professional name to avoid confusion with many other Smiths. His brother had changed his name for the same reason. While still living in Brampton he held his first one-man show in Toronto at the Gallery of Contemporary Art in 1958, then in 1961, held a solo show at the Isaacs Gallery when *The Toronto Star*<sup>5</sup> noted, "Meredith's vertical stripes bend, curve, merge, then pull apart again in patterns that are repeated over and over. In their midst, human figures appear, as if only for a moment. The result is exotic, rarely, oddly convincing. The paintings are hard to evaluate or even understand individually. Collectively, seen as a show, they give the impression of a rich, various, sometimes brutal and always absorbing mind at work. Meredith, who is 29 years old, has exhibited occasionally over the last few years, and he had a one-man show at the Gallery of Contemporary Art in 1958; but his work has never looked so strong as it does this week." In 1963 Meredith moved to Toronto and held a second exhibition at the Isaacs Gallery in which Elizabeth Kilbourn<sup>6</sup> in her review concluded with the remarks, "... you may also see with literally new eyes." It was perhaps a deft remark which essentially applies to his work today. A third show at

### MEREDITH, John (John Meredith Smith) (Cont'd)

the Isaacs Gallery was reviewed by Harry Malcolmson<sup>7</sup> as follows. "Meredith is a painter's painter. His work makes no external references to nature or to the commercial world or to style vogues. It is concerned solely and exclusively with the solving of formal painting problems. In this exhibition, Meredith introduces linear, lasso-like shapes and ladder shapes into a painting space, and then by daringly original color juxtapositions charges the shapes with painting vitality." His other solo shows include Blue Barn Gallery, Ott. (1965); Isaacs Gallery (1967, 69). It was about this time that Barry Lord<sup>8</sup> wrote a definitive article in *artscanada* on Meredith in which he explained that the artist first produces a coloured ink drawing with pencil, of the design he is to make into a full size painting by making squares over the original design and transferring the design to larger squares drawn on the larger canvas. Some of his canvases are eight feet square and larger. Lord also explained how Meredith produces his various effects and concluded his article as follows, "Meredith isn't comfortable with interpretations of his work as an extension of abstract expressionism or anything else, although his uses of colour and line are evidently firmly rooted in the discoveries of Pollock and Gorky. A long time coming to recognition as a major painter even in Toronto, he has now reached the comfortable stage of selling paintings directly from his studio, and at last is regularly included in Canada's international shows. But he is not anxious to be understood: A consistent son of the age of heroic individualism in art, he values his uniqueness, as man and painter. 'Don't try to explain it all away,' he advised me." The most recent discussions of this artist appear in William Withrow's<sup>9</sup> *Contemporary Canadian Painting* (1972), and Paul Duval's<sup>10</sup> *Four Decades* (1972). His important group shows include: Montreal Spring Show (1961); Detroit Cultural Centre (1963); "Canadian Art Today", Univ. Waterloo, Ont. (1963, 64, 65); Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York (1963, 64); Sixth Biennial Exhibition of Canadian Painting (1965); International Biennial, Paris, France (1965); Tenth Winnipeg Show (1966); "Canadian Art of Our Time '67", Winnipeg (1967); "Nine Canadians", Inst. of Contemporary Art, Boston (1967); "Canada '67", Union Carbide Bldg., N.Y. (1967); "Eight Artists from Canada", Tel-Aviv Museum (1970); "Toronto Painting, 1953-1965", NGC, Ott. (1972) and others. Meredith is represented in the following collections: Vancouver Art Gallery; Norman Mackenzie Art Gallery, Regina, Sask.; Willstead Art Gal., Windsor, Ont.; University of Waterloo, Ont.; Art Gallery of Ontario; Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Queen's Univ., Kingston, Ont.; National Gallery of Canada, Ott.; The Canada Council Collection, Ott.; Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Mtl., P.Q.; Confederation Art Gallery & Museum, P.E.I.; Museum of Modern Art, NYC; and the private collections of Mrs. Samuel J. Zacks, Tor.; Mr. & Mrs. Avram Isaacs, Tor.; Jessie & Percy Waxer Collection, Tor.; Mr. & Mrs. Edward Levy, Tor.; Dennis Reid, Ott.; Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller, NYC; and many others. In 1968 he married Ursula Keller of Toronto.<sup>11</sup>

#### References

- <sup>1</sup> *North Kent Leader*, Dresden, Ont., Dec. 28, 1967 "Mostly Gossip" by Hugh Templin
- <sup>2</sup> *Conservator*, Brantford, Ont., Jan. 23, 1958 "Can Fathom Abstract Art If In Right Perspective" by Dave Billington
- <sup>3</sup> *Artscanada*, April, 1969, No.s 130/131 "John Meredith: Painter" by Barry Lord P. 16

<sup>4</sup> see

**MEREDITH, John (John Meredith Smith) (Cont'd)**

<sup>5</sup> *The Toronto Star*, Ont., Oct. 28, 1961 "Meredith"

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, Feb. 2, 1962 "Art and Artists" by Elizabeth Kilbourn

<sup>7</sup> *The Toronto Telegram*, Tor., Ont., Feb. 6, 1965 "Painter's Painter. 5 Sculptors" by Harry Malcolmson

<sup>8</sup> *sec.*, P. 22

<sup>9</sup> *Contemporary Canadian Painting* by William Withrow, M. & S., Tor., 1972, P. 147-152

<sup>10</sup> *Four Decades. The Canadian Group of Painters and their contemporaries 1930-1970* by Paul Duval, Clarke, Irwin, Tor., 1972, P. 17, 147, 151, 154

<sup>11</sup> *The Toronto Telegram*, Ont., Dec. 26, 1968 (photo of Meredith & his bride with brief caption)

see also

*Sixth Biennial Exhibition of Canadian Painting, 1965*, NGC, Ott., P. 33

*On the Enjoyment of Modern Art* by Jerrold Morris, M. & S., Tor., 1965, P. 71

*Painting In Canada* exhibit organized by Barry Lord, Can. Pavilion, Expo '67, Mtl.

*Painting in Canada/A History* by J. Russell Harper, Univ. Tor. Press, 1966, P. 391

*Great Canadian Painting/A Century of Art* selected paintings by Elizabeth Kilbourn, Frank Newfeld; Text, Ken Lefolli; Research by Wm. Kilbourn, Marjorie Harris, Sandra Scott; Weekend Magazine & M. & S., Tor., 1966, P. 110

*Canada art d'aujourd'hui*, Lausanne, Switzerland, 1968, Catalogue by NGC, Ott. 1968

*Agnes Etherington Art Centre*, Queen's Univ., Kingston, Perm. Coll., 1968 by Frances K. Smith, No. 94

*The Canada Council Collection-A Travelling exhibition*, NGC, Ott., 1969

*Eight Artists From Canada*, Tel-Aviv Museum, NGC, Ott. 1970, Nos. 17, 18, 19, 20

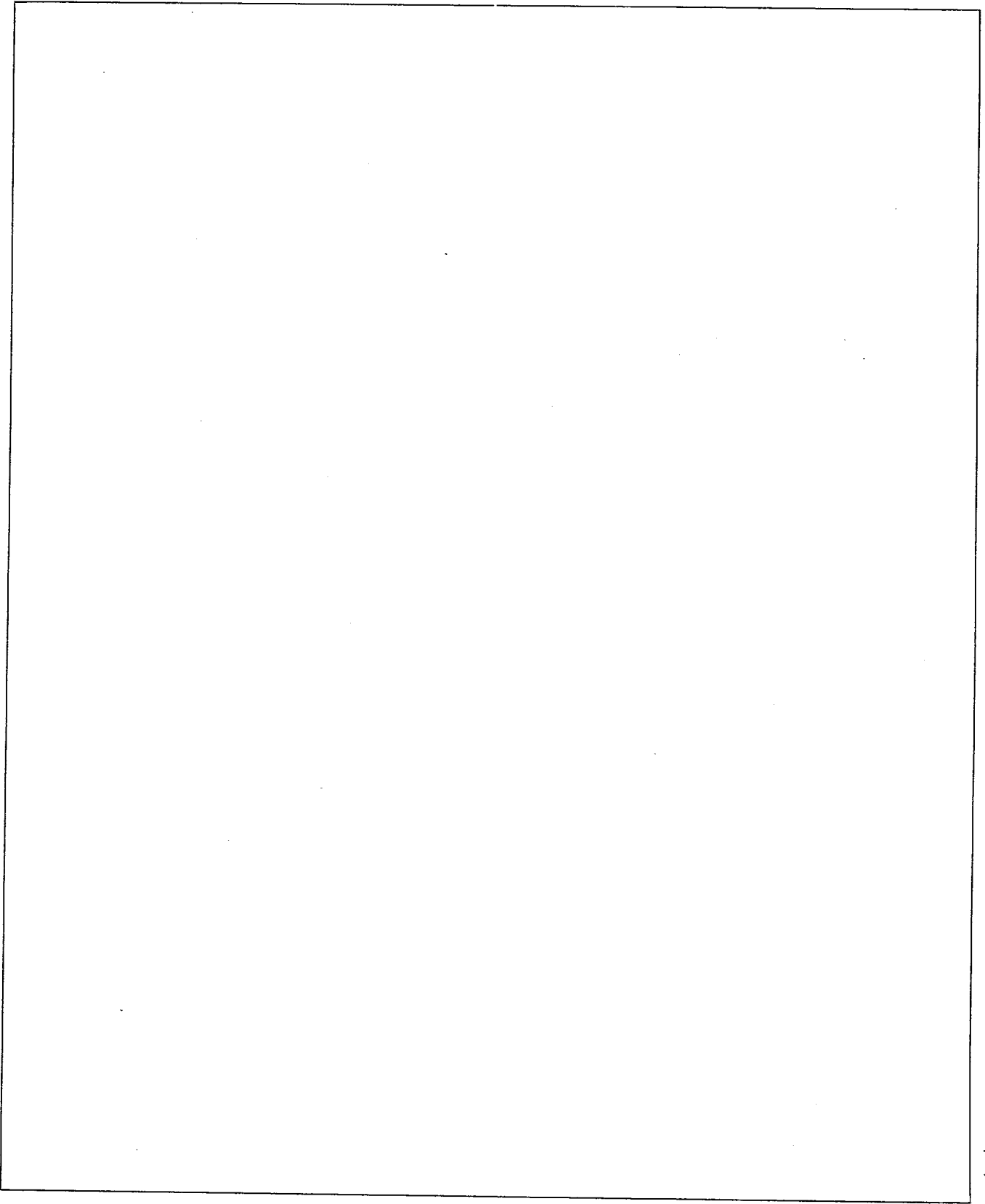
*Canadian Art Today*, Ed. by William Townsend; Studio International, 1970, P. 41

*Art Gallery of Ontario/The Canadian Collection* by Helen Pepall Bradfield McGraw-Hill Co. of Can. Ltd., Tor., 1970, P. 303

*Toronto Painting, 1953-1965*, Exhibition selected and organized by Dennis Reid, NGC, Ott., 1972, Nos. 38, 57, 58, 59

*ArtsCanada*, Feb., 1970, Nos. 140/141, "John Meredith, The Isaacs Gallery, Tor., Nov., 1969", P. 52 by Barry Lord

*Ibid.*, Oct./Nov., 1970, Nos. 148/149 "Drawing reconsidered" by John Noel Chandler, P. 51



1925 / Montréal, Québec

PATERSON EWEN



Paterson Ewen began to exhibit in the mid-fifties after attending the Montreal Museum of Fine Art School. He was a member of the Association of Non-Figurative Painters of Montreal and participated in the now historic exhibition *Espace 55*. In 1968 he was represented in the *Seventh Biennial of Canadian Painting*, organized by the National Gallery of Canada. He has exhibited annually since 1968 at the Carmen Lamanna Gallery, Toronto, and is represented in the currently travelling exhibition *New Visions: The Canadian Landscape*, organized by the Edmonton Art Gallery and the Art Gallery of Ontario. A retrospective of Paterson Ewen's work is to be mounted by the London Art Gallery, London, Ontario, in November 1976. ■ Paterson Ewen has lived in London, Ontario since 1969. His work is represented in the collections of the Musée d'Art Contemporain, Montréal, the Montreal Museum of Fine Art and the National Gallery of Canada.

Forked Lightning	1971	acrylic, linoleum, metal, canvas on plywood - acrylique linoleum, métal, toile sur contre-plaqué	244 x 122 cm.
Storm over the Prairies	1971	acrylic, metal, fibrous material on plywood - acrylique, métal, matériel fibreux sur contre-plaqué	235 x 101 cm.
City Storm with Chain Lightning	1971	acrylic, metal and chains on plywood - acrylique, métal et chaînes sur contre-plaqué	244 x 122 cm.

Paterson Ewen commença à exposer vers 1955, après avoir suivi les cours de l'école du Musée des beaux-arts de Montréal. Membre de l'Association des peintres non-figuratifs de Montréal, il participa à l'exposition *Espace 55*, passée désormais à l'histoire. En 1968, on retrouve ses œuvres à la VII<sup>e</sup> Biennale de peinture canadienne, organisée par la Galerie nationale du Canada. Depuis 1968, il expose tous les ans à la Carmen Lamanna Gallery de Toronto et ses toiles sont au nombre de celles que l'on peut voir actuellement à l'exposition itinérante *New Visions: The Canadian Landscape*, organisée par l'Edmonton Art Gallery et l'Art Gallery of Ontario. La London Art Gallery de London (Ontario) offrira une rétrospective des œuvres de Paterson Ewen en novembre 1976. ■ Paterson Ewen habite London (Ontario) depuis 1969. Ses toiles figurent dans les collections du Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, du Musée des beaux-arts de Montréal et de la Galerie nationale du Canada.





(Top/haut)

PEINTRES CANADIENS CONTEMPORAINS  
CANADIAN CONTEMPORARY PAINTERS

MINISTRE DES AFFAIRES EXTERIEURES DU CANADA  
DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS OF CANADA

PATERSON EWEN  
Forked Lightning 1971  
244 x 122 cm.

Collection: The Canada Council Art Bank/  
La Banque d'oeuvres d'art du Conseil des arts du Canada

P A T E R S O N      E W E N

**PATERSON EWEN RETROSPECTIVE**

**NOVEMBER 5 to 29, 1976**

**London Art Gallery  
305 Queens Avenue  
London, Ontario**

## **PATERSON EWEN, R.C.A.**

**Born:** Montreal, Quebec, 1925

**Studied:**

1948 - 50 Montreal Museum of Fine Arts



**Selected Group Shows:**

- 1955 Espace 55, Montreal
- 1956 25 Painters of Today, Montreal
- 1957 Association of Non-Figurative Painters of Montreal (A.A.N.F.)  
Galerie L'Actuelle, Montreal
- 1959 Painters Eleven Invitation, Park Gallery, Toronto  
Brooklyn Biennial Watercolour, Brooklyn Museum, N.Y.  
20 Artists from Montreal, Here and Now Gallery, Toronto
- 1960 Formelle Lyrique Group, Stable Gallery, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts  
Aspect of Canadian Painting, New York  
Little International U.S.A. Tour
- 1961 Association of Non-Figurative Painters of Montreal travelling exhibition  
organized by the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa
- 1962 Spoleto Festival, Italy
- 1963 Painters of the Gallery, Galerie du Siecle, Montreal
- 1967 Panorama of Painters from Quebec, Musee d'Art Contemporain, Montreal
- 1968 Centennial Purchase Exhibition  
Seventh Biennial of Canadian Painting, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa
- 1969 3-Man Show, London Public Library and Art Museum, London
- 1970 Rothman's Art Gallery, Stratford  
30th Annual Western Ontario Exhibition, London  
Canadian Painters, Man and His World, Montreal
- 1971 Pie in the Sky, Toronto
- 1974 Canadian Canvas, travelling exhibition circulated by Time Canada Ltd.  
A Response to the Environment, Rutgers University, U.S.A.  
Contemporary Canadian Art, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto
- 1975 Contemporary Canadian Art, DeCordova Museum, Lincoln, Mass.
- 1976 Changing Visions: The Canadian Landscape. A travelling exhibition organized  
by the Edmonton Art Gallery and the Art Gallery of Ontario  
Ontario Now - A survey of Contemporary Art in Ontario. Kitchener -  
Waterloo Gallery/ Art Gallery of Hamilton  
London Painting Now, London Art Gallery  
17 Canadian Artists: A Protean View, Vancouver Art Gallery



**One Man Shows:**

- 1955 Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Gallery XII  
1956 Parma Gallery, New York  
1958 Parma Gallery, New York  
Galerie Denyse Delrue, Montreal  
1960 Galerie Denyse Delrue, Montreal  
1961 Galerie Denyse Delrue, Montreal  
1962 The Montreal Society of Architects  
Galerie Denyse Delrue, Montreal  
1963 Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Gallery XII  
Galerie du Siecle, Montreal  
1968 Retrospective, Dunkelman Gallery, Toronto  
1969 Carmen Lamanna Gallery, Toronto  
1970 Retrospective, 20/20 Gallery, London  
1972 Carmen Lamanna Gallery, Toronto  
1973 Carmen Lamanna Gallery, Toronto  
1974 Carmen Lamanna Gallery, Toronto  
1975 Forest City Gallery, London

**Special Awards:**

- 1957 2nd Prize, painting, Concours de la Province de Quebec  
1958 1st Prize, Laurentide Festival  
1961 Purchase Award, Spring Show, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts  
1971 Senior Canada Council Award

**Collections:**

National Gallery of Canada, Oshawa, Ontario  
Musée de la Province de Québec, Québec City, P. Q.  
Montreal Museum of Fine Art, Montreal, P. Q.  
Sir George Williams University, Montreal, P. Q.  
Musée d'Art Contemporain, Montreal, P. Q.  
Brandeis University, Waltham, Massachusetts  
Amsterdam Civic Museum, Amsterdam, Holland  
Toronto-Dominion Bank, Toronto, Ontario  
Kitchener-Waterloo Gallery, Kitchener, Ontario  
London Art Gallery, London, Ontario  
Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver, British Columbia  
Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, Ontario  
Canada Council Art Bank/Banque d'oeuvres d'art du Conseil des Arts du Canada

## Paterson Ewen

Considering the amount of attention that has been given to Paterson Ewen's work during the last few years, it is interesting to note that, despite his earlier recognition in Montreal, it has only been since 1973 when he had his fourth one-man exhibition in Toronto that the Ontario art establishment has begun to acknowledge his importance. In 1969, reviewing Ewen's second one-man exhibition in Toronto, Barry Lord wrote that he was "still hardly known to the Toronto art public," an observation that was slightly modified to "he's still somewhat unknown" by another reviewer in 1972.<sup>1</sup> At any rate, it is obvious from the number of times the recent works have been shown and discussed, that they are known and respected, and that it is time to show a sampling of his early work.

Despite the varieties of image with which he has been preoccupied, despite the different techniques he has used for painting, there are qualities which, characterizing all the work, suggest the consistency of Ewen's stance as a painter. Rejecting theory-based painting, he has chosen to deal with immediate, intuitive visual decisions in his work. The result is that the paintings, even when they are figurative, stress self-signals (they find their meaning in the way they are, in what they look like). George Kubler wrote that self-signals are "mute existential declarations of things;"<sup>2</sup> these paintings are declarations of themselves.

In 1948, when Ewen left McGill after having studied for two years in a general arts programme, to study painting at the school of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, the Montreal art world saw the founding of the *Prisme d'yeux* group around Pellan, the dissolution of John Lyman's Contemporary Art Society following the election of Borduas as president, and Borduas' publication of the *Refus Global*. Montreal was writing its own art history, and it was proving to be the most important chapter in the history of contemporary painting in Canada.

Ewen studied with Goodridge Roberts from 1948 to 1950. As a student, Roberts had read Roger Fry and in 1948 was still committed to a painting that expressed sensitive, significant composition. The traditional subjects—still life, figure studies, landscape and interior scenes—were used as the raw material from which the artist developed a cosmic sense of order through measured brush strokes, colour harmonies and intuitive design. The model of Roberts' painting provided the strategy by which Ewen approached

his own work, a strategy reinforced by his response to works by Rembrandt, Goya, Cezanne, Bonnard and the other masters he saw in Ottawa and New York.<sup>3</sup> While his early works are rooted in the tradition of post-impressionist and early modern figurative painting, they nevertheless display a roughness that acknowledges the limitations of the tradition and prophesies ways his work will be developed.

The attitude and work of Borduas and the Automatistes stood at an opposite pole to Roberts' restraint; however, Ewen became interested in them and by 1950 had begun participating in discussions held at Borduas' studio at Saint-Hilaire. That year he exhibited his work with theirs at an *Exposition des Rebelles* held to protest the decision of the jury for the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts' Annual Spring Exhibition. The jury had rejected all works by Borduas and the group around him,<sup>4</sup> confronting issues that undoubtedly were aesthetic, for the Automatistes' work had an energy that approached abandon, developing as it did more from the spontaneous expression of unconscious realms of the mind than from the reasoned decision of eye and hand; but the issues were also intellectual, for the *Refus Global* had released political and moral matters into the realm of art.

Stimulated by the discoveries of the Automatistes and the Abstract Expressionists, whose work he saw in New York, Ewen began to experiment more aggressively with the manipulation of form and colour, and soon found that the figurative element was unnecessary for his painting. His work began to spring directly from a personal search for a type of painting that would bring together his knowledge of the figurative and automatiste traditions, allowing the freedom of gesture without forfeiting the order of composition. That concern seems illustrated by most of the works from 1955 to 1958.

From 1959 to 1970 Ewen's works developed through series, each series issuing from different preoccupations and each having internal variations. Such generalized notions as "freedom of gesture" or "order of composition" can be understood in the early work, but become impossible to relate to the series works. Even the words of the phrases are given new ramifications.

It could be argued that "gesture" is important to the *Untitled 1962* (Cat. 19) inasmuch as texture, a function of gesture, is used to form the compositional device. But texture, the same colour as the ground, operates as drawing; it results more directly from the action of the eye than the hand. Gesture is, in fact, peripheral to the major concern of the work,

which relates more to the notion of developing form from paint instead of colour than to the significance of action. On the other hand, gesture is crucial to the *Black Out* series (Cat. 14) for it produces the furrows and ridges of a saw blade being run across the surface and the lumps of pure colour squeezed from the tube, left on the surface to dry, that give the work a rawness diametrically opposite the lyricism of the *Untitled 1962*. Texture is again used as compositional strategy but here it is the directness of the activity it records rather than its relationship to composition that determines its importance.

The later works in the *Life Stream with Time Intervals* (Cat. 27, 29) series were painted by establishing the colour of the ground, choosing the second colour instinctively and then, as Ewen describes it, "standing back, looking at the canvas almost as if I were playing a football game, and then attacking it with tape, running it from one end of the canvas to the other, as quickly as I could, and then running a second piece of tape alongside that and splitting it up into the dashes that run through the colour field."<sup>5</sup> In these works gesture becomes a function of the intellectual process that determines the parameters of its spontaneity. This sense of gesture stands in contrast with what is seen in the earlier *Stream of Life* (Cat. 12), where the image itself, a broad, orange band, slanting across a black form on the white ground, is a visual metaphor for movement.

It is impossible to generalize about Ewen's use of gesture because it is a quality that has a different meaning in each of the series. Each series produced vital, convincing work that cancelled the assumptions of earlier work. He destroys the myth that the serious artist devotes his career to the pursuit of a single body of concerns, allowing his work to chart the changing sensibilities of painting during a period of rapid innovation. Although his progression, from figurative paintings of European derivation through quasi-automatic paintings which yield increasingly to the order of geometry until, in 1965, the gesture of painterly action is replaced by the manipulation of tape, can be observed, the work develops along a meandering path along which the observer is asked to pause to look at the individual paintings.

In 1968 Ewen moved to London. Here, the work of several younger painters involved the use of mixed media to portray interests located outside of art. Where Surrealism had been a source for Borduas' work, Dada, Surrealism's source, had influenced the development of art in London during the 1960's. Responsive to the work he found here as he had been responsive to the work of the Automatistes, in 1970 Ewen rejected the

abstraction that had been his preoccupation for fifteen years, as well as the machine-clean surfaces that his hard edge work demanded, and began to experiment with completely new techniques of painting.

First, he made two works by dipping pieces of felt in paint, using them to print dots on white canvases—*Traces Through Space* (Cat. 30). The halting lines traced by ragged dots parody the fast lines and precise dashes of the previous year. He had thought of the *Life Stream with Time Intervals* series as representing "some sort of phenomena, as traces of something going through space;" these new dot paintings even more strongly suggested "an imagery that touched on the sciences," leading him to submit to what he calls his disease for old illustrated dictionaries and encyclopedia and laymen's books on the physical sciences in the search for subject matter. Soon he had painted a series of rough works on canvas that showed such physical phenomena as rain, clouds generating electricity, an artesian well, and a drop of water skimming across a heated surface.

Although liberated by these new figurative works, Ewen found canvas and stretchers and brushes to be limiting and decided to make a woodcut, gouging lines to represent a *Solar Eclipse* (Cat. 35) in a sheet of plywood. He realized almost as soon as he began the work that he was doing the work, not a block for a print. Experimentation with technique of painting expanded to include experimentation with materials, resulting at first in three wood and metal constructions (*Thunder Chain*, *How Lightning Worked in 1925*, and *Rocks Moving in the Current of a Stream*) and leading to the incorporation of various materials in the gouged plywood panels.

During the early 1970's rumours were circulated about the death of painting by people who could not accept the superficiality of the Modernist aesthetic. In a tremendous burst of energy, Ewen began to play with everything he had learned about painting, developing a strategy for work that allowed "constant decision making; real, intuitive decision making because you come up with more or less random effects that are beautiful in themselves."<sup>6</sup> The surfaces of the paintings on wood are crowded with decisions made. The wood is a material for drawing in with a router and on with paint and felt markers, and a surface for painting on (the image) and over (runs of paint), while the added materials, completing their function as image, are restored to their essence as things.



Paterson Ewen, painting for himself and for painting, following his own course, always youthful in his thinking, changing like twentieth-century man, producing works whose roughness places them in the world of things, speaks of the whole person through his work. Painting is returned to its tradition.

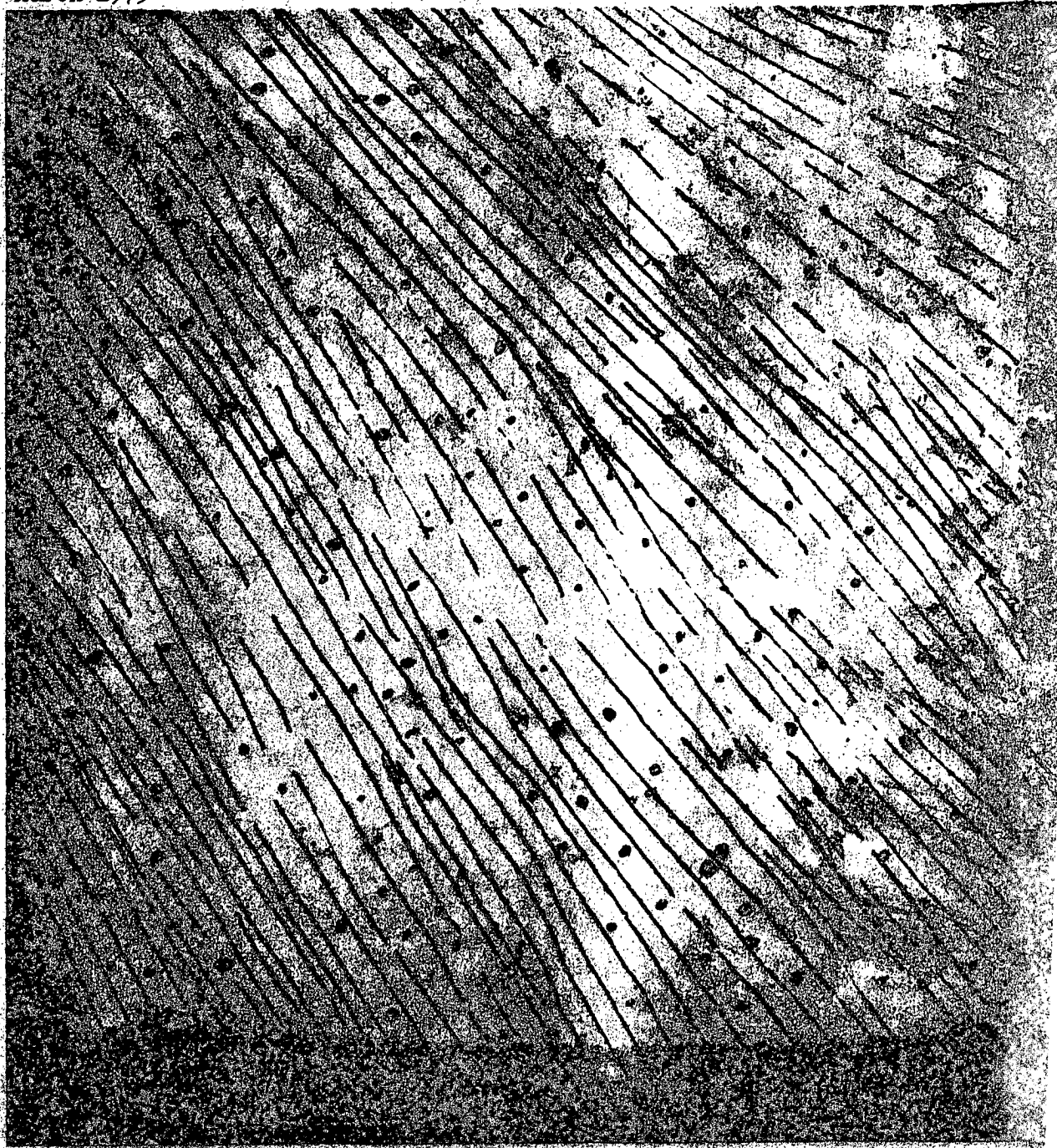
ROBERT MCKASKELL

London, Ontario

October 13, 1976

#### NOTES

1. Lord was writing in *artscanada*, no. 138/139 (Dec. 1969), p. 60; the second reviewer, Merike Weiler, wrote for the *Toronto Star* (Jan. 18, 1972, p. 28).
2. *The Shape of Time*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962). p. 24.
3. Ewen's other teachers included Arthur Lismer and Marian Scott and, earlier, he had been in John Lyman's course at McGill. During the summer of 1949 he and fellow students John Fox and Don Barrett rented a cabin near Fourteen Island Lake where they were joined by Roberts for sketching forays in the Laurentians. *Fourteen Island Lake, Number 5* (Cat. 3) is from that summer.
4. Ewen's work was accepted for the Spring Exhibition. He graduated from the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts programme that year.
5. All quotations are from a series of taped conversations we had this spring.
6. An interview with Ewen about his recent work is published in "Paterson Ewen: Rain," by Nick Johnson, in *artscanada*, no. 196/197 (March, 1975), pp. 40-45.



*Rain Over Water*, 1974  
 acrylic on plywood,  
 96" x 132 1/4"

## Paterson Ewen

### RAIN

NICK JOHNSON

Photos: Henk Visser  
 Courtesy Carmen Lamanna Gallery

*When I went to the Carmen Lamanna Gallery to see seven new paintings about weather by Paterson Ewen and looked them all over and settled on one big white grey one called Rain Over Water I thought about drawing and about landscape painting briefly and about rainy days and this or that rain. Then I knew it was rain and felt my feet on the ground. I thought a long time about this painting and the others, saw earlier paintings, had a very good time one evening with Ewen in his studio in London, Ontario, and always came back to rain going up down and sideways. Rain Over Water is a painting so heavy Ewen couldn't lift it without his son's help and so big that to work it with the wild machine called a router they put it down flat and he kneeled in the middle and couldn't see all of it at once and had just to think rain.*



the center of the whole thing that's going on and hold it together. When I move to one side and feel it tipping I must be careful to shift my weight back and stretch out my arm as far as I can. And in this very exciting and very physically demanding process, the machine is very noisy and dangerous at 25 thousand revolutions a minute, I have to be quite careful not to get my clothes caught or gouge the side of my knee. Then towards the end I probably jumped off, shut the machine off, turned the machine on and standing up put in those last few streaks that are there to one side.

JOHNSON: You drew that low horizon and sort of outlined this place and then did all of the gouging before you began painting?

EWEN: Yes, once finished the gouging, the first thing I did was roll on the sky with darker grey paint. Then I did the water and then I did the islands. The sky was too dark so I rolled it over again with white. At the last minute I changed the water. That is how I remember it now.

JOHNSON: This wood weather work began about four years ago when you said you were sick and tired of strict paint and canvas work. Your paintings previous to that time were narrow one-color lines crossing one-color canvases, some of them called *Lifestream*. But you didn't just stop and start all over again so how did it begin and what began?

EWEN: At that point I was sick of canvas and stretchers and paint and sort of sick too of the

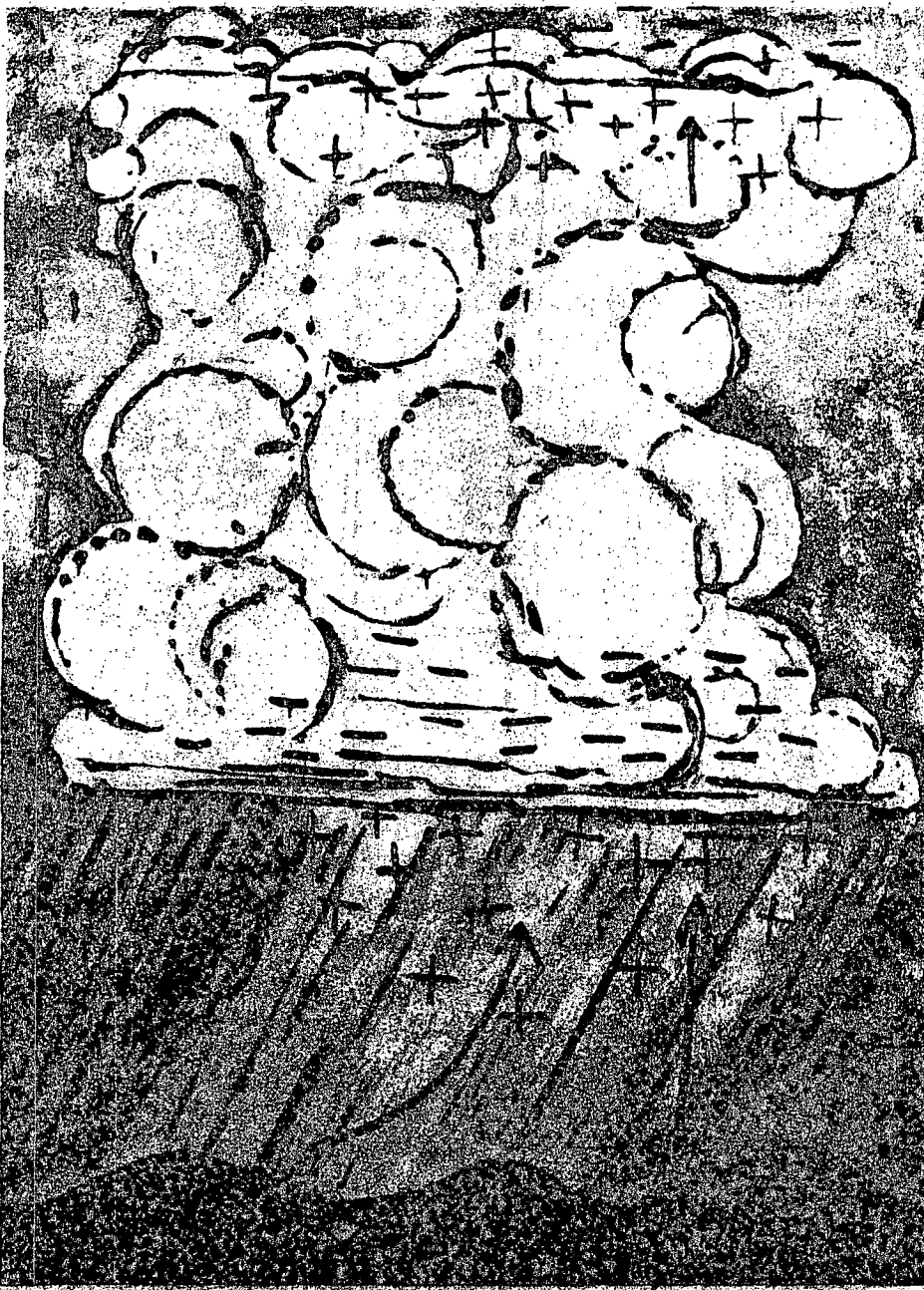
art market and thinking about when and where I would show. I really felt like just playing instead and I thought I was making an anti-art gesture in the formal sense with those last paintings. Daubing rows of dots on plain canvas with felt. But then somehow this turned out feeling to me like traces of things moving through space and this is what first suggested the idea of phenomena. Looking back on the earlier paintings of lines I thought those too were like traces or vibrations in space. So I began reading. I got all kinds of amateur books and old text books about phenomena. How rain falls and how lightning works, clouds, eclipses and waves. I began to get the feeling as I read that what we usually call the more simple things are immensely complicated so I just accepted my limitations and put down the parts of these happenings that were for me fun to do. My first idea was to make a great big woodcut print. I got a four by eight piece of plywood and hand gouged out something, an eclipse or some rain, I don't know which came first. But then as I was doing this and as I was painting in the gouges and as I was rolling it over with a printer's roller I realized that that was the work, and that's how it happened.

So I began to really paint pictures again as opposed to just formal minimal art. I actually began to paint pictures again and say well I don't care if the art world doesn't like it I can't go on doing formal painting so I think I'll do some things that are really fun which I enjoy doing otherwise I will have to stop painting and

EWEN: You have to remember that up on two saw-horses about four feet high it is a platform. So first I stood by this eight by eleven foot platform of plywood and I made the horizon and I put in the islands and a few of the waves. I may or may not have left them final. This very elemental magic marker drawing included almost none of the sky. This much I could do while standing beside it. Then I got up, and up on all fours in the middle of this platform, I went to work. All over the whole thing I grooved into the wood with the electrical router, changing the bit as I felt the grooves should be larger or smaller. And keeping in mind at this point now what it is I want in terms of direction and velocity and proportion I have to put myself in



Lollipop Rainfall, 1973  
mixed media on plywood,  
96" x 66 1/4"



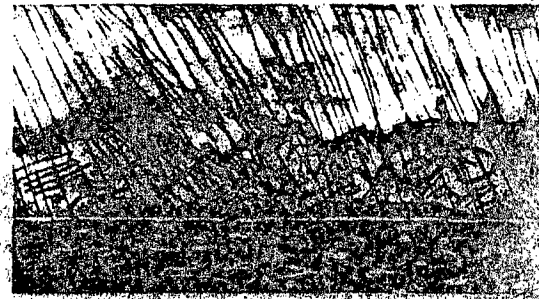
*Thunder Cloud as a Generator #1, 1971  
acrylic on canvas, 84" x 60"*

I never really felt that I wanted to stop painting.

JOHNSON: It is amazing how that came about. Those early lines had a secret and you dug it out. They really were life-lines. Still this could have led you in other directions, to other subject-matter and less earthful ways of dealing with it. Have you always been interested in cosmic phenomena and weather and was this a beginning that had been coming for a longer time?

EWEN: Yes I think so and there are several things mixed in there. My father came over from Abergail when he was 17 years old and he spent eleven consecutive years in the far north with the Hudson Bay Company before he came back down to civilization. So as a boy I heard his stories of northern Canada and Indians and Eskimos and I guess I always had this almost romantic attitude to the space up there. I always tell myself that when I take a long holiday I will go to the tundra. The other thing was that as a boy my ambition was to be a geologist. Some boys are going to be firemen but I was going to be a geologist. And when I was older I went to McGill to study geology. But I think in a lot of fields education starts or used to start at the wrong end. I thought we were going to begin talking about mountains and rocks and I was very excited and there was a blackboard and a man standing up there telling us to memorize the following formula for the specific density of some mineral. I really had no interest in that and I quit the course and pretty soon with enough of that and things like it I began to draw, and I became an artist. But it was only when I did the minimal work that looked like phenomena that these things came to the surface.

*Science and art, meteorology and Ewen. A diagram from a typical weather textbook: little clouds sitting above the curved earth speckled with tiny black plus and minus signs and with colored arrows pointing up and down around them. Children's marks about feelings about clouds, an old philosopher's invocations of something invisible, poets' wordless words about something about weather, wonder about weather? Ewen's earlier weather paintings make use of this ambiguous language of meteorology, but inside out. Where such weather diagrams are concrete*



*Coastal Trip, 1974  
set of three pieces, acrylic on  
plywood, each: 24" x 96"*



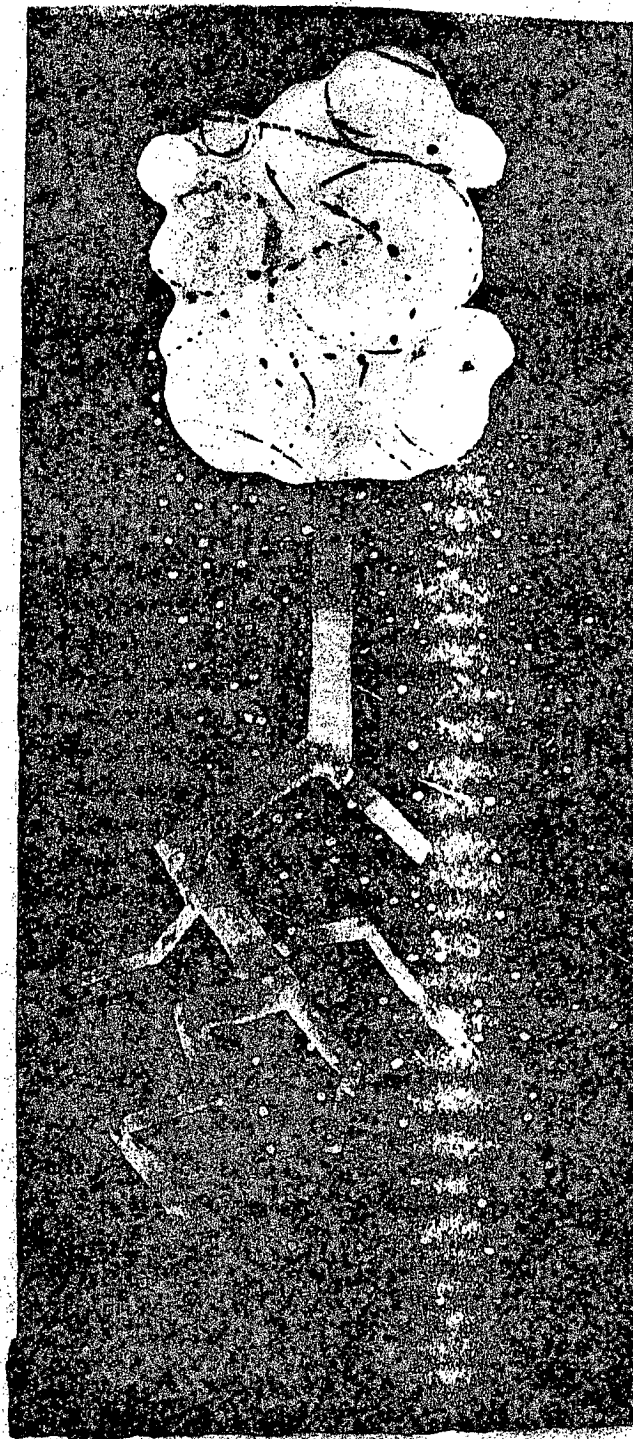
about remote forces and evoke more, the weather paintings evoke scientific description and are concrete about more. Their cross and dash and arrow signs and thunderheads and lightning all work oppositely. To deny any remoteness of the power, declare weather close, to celebrate weather. What the work of the scientist divides and subdues and distances the work of the artist makes whole and wild and close. This is the ecology of poetry.

JOHNSON: What is that stuff at the bottom of *Storm Over the Prairies*?

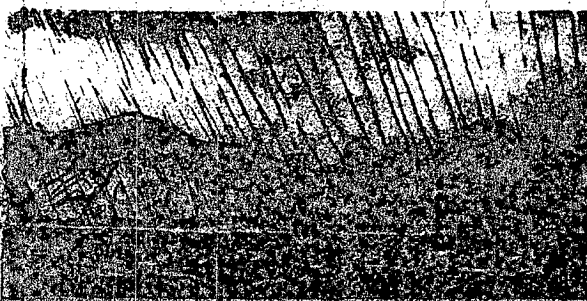
EWEN: Coco-matting is the stuff at the bottom of *Storm Over the Prairies*. It is very thick and has a nice rubbery back to it and I bought it off the roll but I've never seen it since for sale like this. That was very much my approach, and still is, to sometimes buy the materials before I know what I'm going to do with them. I wander around hardware stores. I saw that matting and said well I have to have some of that so I bought some and it hung around the studio until I of course realized that it was brown grass, prairie for this painting. That cloud up there is a piece of plywood and over the piece of plywood is glued a piece of battleship linoleum and into that I grooved the marks. This cloud is bolted onto the base plywood and the black dots you see, some are put there by my gouging and some of the dots are actually black bolts. The lightning is galvanized iron.

JOHNSON: When did metal begin?

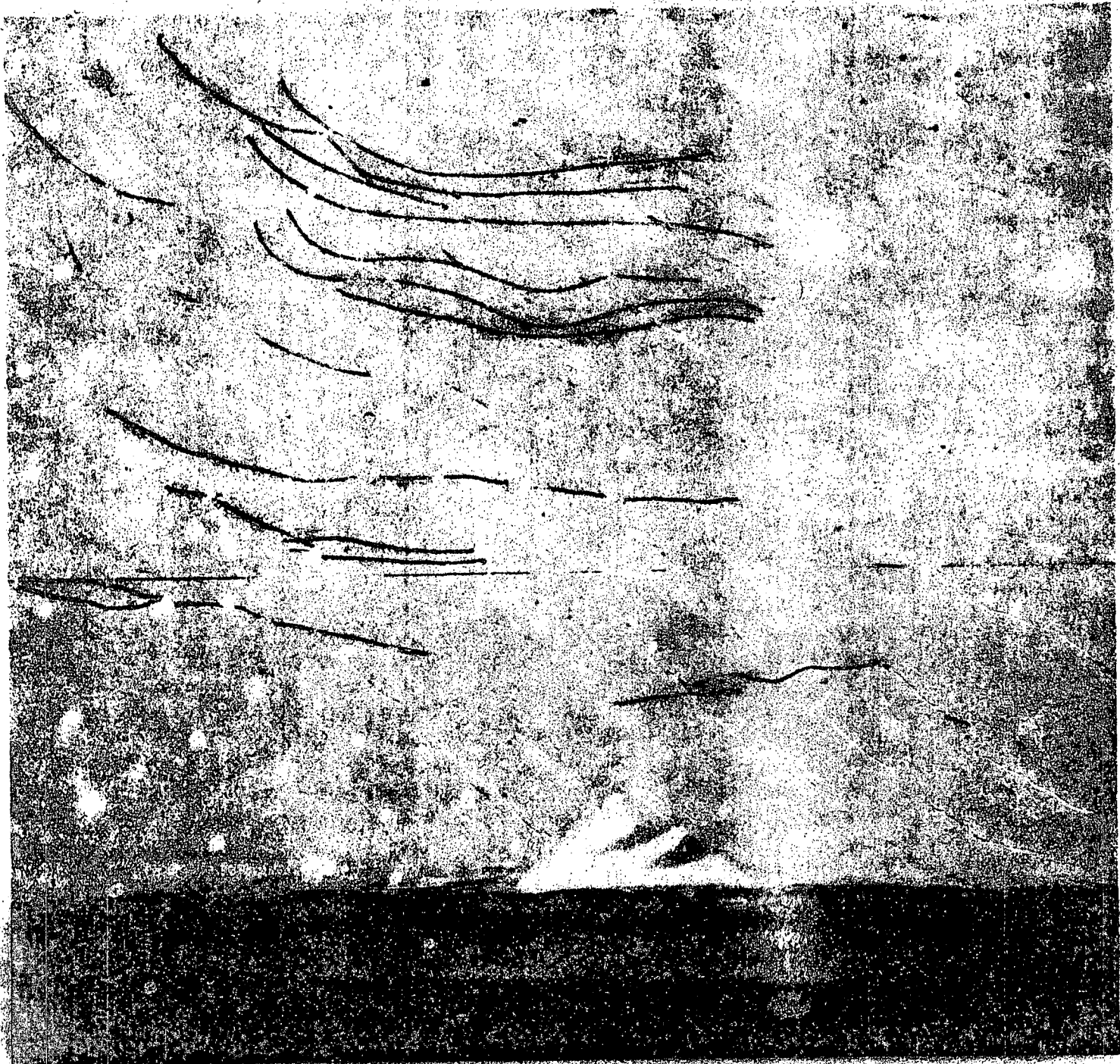
EWEN: Metal first came in when I did this piece called *How Rocks Move in the Current of a Stream*. I needed something that looked and felt like water but I didn't want to paint it on. I wanted to have something laid on and I thought of galvanized iron. I made the rocks out of plywood and linoleum, again following a bit of amateur research. The larger rocks depending on their shape either skid or roll on the bed of the stream, the medium size rocks pelt through the stream and the small rocks are suspended in the flow of the stream. That was one of the first metal pieces I did, along with a thunder piece, a very crude piece, just a combination of metal and wood and heavy chain



*Storm Over the Prairies*, 1971  
acrylic and metal on plywood,  
92" x 40"







*Iceberg*, 1974  
acrylic and aluminum on plywood,  
90" x 96"

that looks like weather. A little yellow square that looks like a piece of weather, and another orange colored square that looks like a piece of earth, and then an expanse of metal that is just space and then a heavy rusty chain and you pick up the chain and drop it and it makes a sound like thunder. This is where I began to use metal, and then it became radiation in paintings showing the curve of the earth, and then it was lightning in thunderstorm paintings.

*Remembering those early paintings of U-shaped lines on regions of color. Strong basic painting, all its own rules of its own, full of the rising forming power of the artist. An "outer space" gathering of strength as Ewen said. There was fertile ambiguity in those down dipping lines that seemed traces of something, premonitions of down pulling gravity and earth and*

*this seemed to take over. First phenomena and then weather and for the sake of these happenings and having fun doing them art seemed unimportant for a while. Back to beginnings, all kinds of beginnings and how urgently and concretely Ewen took this on, dealing with, clarifying primitive realities through weather. One piece of plywood to be like weather, another for earth, some steel for space, an old chain for thunder. Chain, cut-out iron, wood, paint, linoleum, saws, hammers, nails, rough gouging writing - lists of first words, basic poetry. The configuration too of these stormy storm paintings, Storm Over the Prairies, City Storm with Chain Lightning. Power bundles of weather in middles of dark skies, ambivalently afflicting or fertilizing down on small hills, toy city skylines. Such handmade weather, earth finding weather. Icons of weather.*

JOHNSON: In the new paintings there are some small pieces of metal, as hail in *Hail on Coastline* and ice in *Iceberg*, but there are no chains, no coco-matting. It has come down mostly to plywood and paint made to work in great sympathy by a great deal of gouging. Down to this coalescence to use the meteorological term for the forming of rain in clouds up to the point of falling. What do you think brought this about?

EWEN: All of the pieces in the first exhibition at Carmen's of this more or less ecological work, phenomena pictures, were hand gouged. But then a friend in Toronto said, I have an electrical router and why don't you try that. I was a little suspicious, I still had the old almost academic idea - well, I don't know about machinery you know. But he said borrow my router and try it and if it suits you you can buy it. Which is what happened. As soon as I started to use it I found that by this method of kneeling down with it I could really draw quite freely with it. And that is how the next exhibition came about, the recent exhibition of weather coastline paintings.

JOHNSON: Coastlines. Were you thinking of particular coastlines when you did these works?

EWEN: The coastlines of the new paintings I got from a very peculiar book. It is a Japanese marine book and it is tied together with string like shoelaces. And I like to see people come up and look at the coastline pieces and say, oh, that's certainly the coast of British Columbia,

or that so looks like the coast of Nova Scotia. In fact I have always since I was a boy had a penchant for things Japanese. There was a coincidence. We happened to meet the secretary to the Japanese ambassador one time when he was in Montreal, and he came to dinner at our house. And he brought gifts for each of us. Something for my mother, chocolates for my sister I remember, and whiskey for my father which was very appropriate, and appropriate though I didn't realize how much, he gave me a book on Hiroshige. You know we have different books when we are boys and this is one I liked a lot and kept going back to. It deals with coastlines and with islands and with rain. And you know the Japanese artist's method was to go out into the rain or to observe a tree or a bird or a flower or a wave but he would never try to depict it then. He would simply observe it and when he had captured enough of it in all levels of his being, then he would go back and do it.

So it has all sort of come around, the phenomena part and the weather part and these early loves and interests. And I think this brings us about up to date with my new paintings. They are more weather as such. And in terms of materials I think you can write it down mostly to that large sheet of plywood worked upon with the router. Kneeling in the middle of the painting with that gouging machine. It was like an exercise, a physical exercise in almost an oriental position. This being in the center of the work instead of standing up opposite it is so much a part of the process. Although this only

struck me after I found myself doing it.

JOHNSON: Yes that must be a reason for the sense of space, I mean of earth, of troposphere. Of a place where there is rain.

EWEN: Yes it is rain coming down on the expanse of the water, on the islands, it is also coming at you at various velocities and densities, up as well as down. I enjoyed that one.

JOHNSON: We have hardly mentioned the other new paintings such as that long scroll of rain, *Coastal Trip*, and *Hail on Coastline* which is really much different.

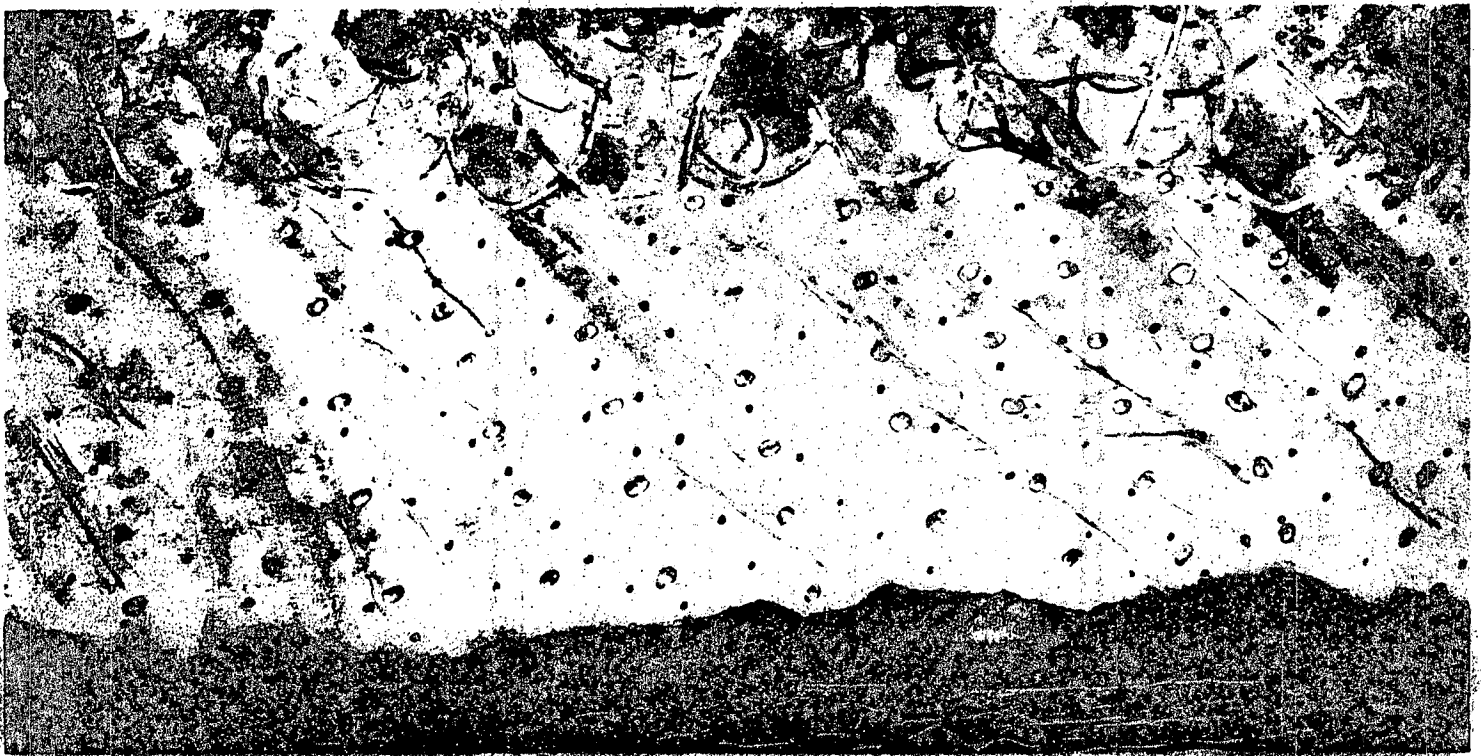
EWEN: Yes it has a strange serenity. As if you could stop the hail process and look at it and examine it.

JOHNSON: But that is more like hail.

EWEN: Yes it is more what hail feels like because hail is of course concentric circles.

JOHNSON: Yes it is an onion I read.

*Rain Over Water with its big white grey painted rain making sky and grey ocean and brown ochre islands of rain receiving earth is rain. Its green blue line is the horizon of rain. It is the dark slanting gorges cutting sky into strips, cutting dark into light, of rain, the writing of rain. Rain falls and spreads on your forehead, right then, before it becomes something else, the beginning and growing rain. It is rain dark as it comes and light with your perception of it, the knowledge of rain. Rain full from its coalescing fall and filling you with rising, the power of rain. It is initiation rain, rain of the song: I want rain. It is the word rain and it is rain.*



*Hail on Coastline*, 1974  
acrylic and aluminum on plywood,  
65" x 120"

A Dictionary of Canadian Artists

Compiled by Colin S. MacDonald

**EWEN, William Paterson**

b. 1925

Born in Montreal, Quebec, his interest in art began after his discharge from the Canadian army at the close of the Second World War. He attended McGill University in 1949 where he studied under John Lyman and in 1950-1, he took classes at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts under Goodridge Roberts, William Armstrong and Jacques de Tonnancour. He was influenced in his early work perhaps more by Roberts and Armstrong but later became fully obsessed with the challenging and alluring work of the Automatistes who had been inspired by the leadership of Paul Emile Borduas. In 1961 Dorothy Pfeiffer<sup>1</sup> noted his work as follows, "Ominous and somber, yet paradoxically painted in intense, rich, color, the thickly modelled, prodded, plastered and raked expressions of Canadian artist, Paterson Ewen, as seen at Galerie Denyse Delrue, transfix one's almost awed attention . . . To my mind, Paterson Ewen's brilliantly demonic paintings add an archaic echo to the 20th Century's clamorous unrest and fear . . ." In 1956 The Non-Figurative Artists' Association of Montreal was founded and Paterson Ewen became a member. As its President in 1960 he wrote the introduction for the Association's exhibition catalogue<sup>2</sup>; the showing was at the National Gallery of Canada and was organized by Claude Picher who was at that time the Gallery's Eastern Representative. In his recent non-objective work he has employed the media of oils, water colours, tempera and pastels. He held a one man show at the Galerie du Siècle in 1966. His awards include the Prix des Laurentides, 1957; Second Prize, Province of Quebec Painting Competition, 1958; and in 1964 received a Senior Arts Fellowship from the Canada Council. He is represented in the permanent collection of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts and the Provincial Museum of Quebec. His wife Françoise Sullivan is a dancer and choreographer and they live in Montreal.

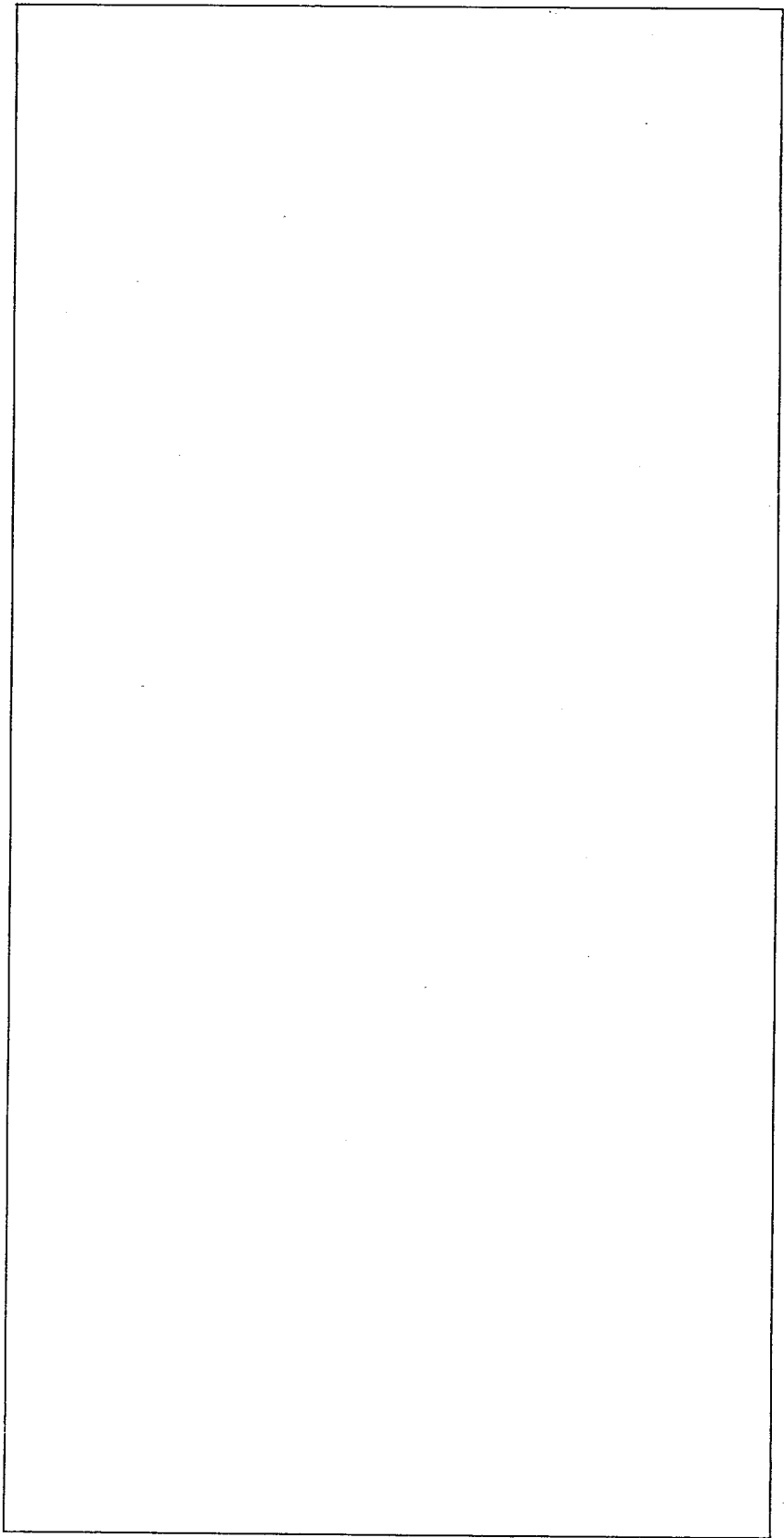
**References**

<sup>1</sup> Document from artist

<sup>2</sup> *The Gazette*, Montreal, Nov. 25, 1961, a review by Dorothy Pfeiffer

<sup>3</sup> *The Non-Figurative Artists' Association of Montreal, 1960-1 exhibition catalogue*, prepared by Claude Picher who organized the exhibition.

<sup>4</sup> *Montreal Star*, Feb. 24, 1964



■ *Forked Lightning / 1971*



# GERSHON ISKOWITZ

1921 / Kelce, Poland

Prior to his arrival in Canada in 1949, Gershon Iskowitz studied at the Warsaw Academy of Fine Art and at the Munich Academy of Fine Art, as well as with the Expressionist painter, Oskar Kokoshka. He has exhibited in Canada since the late fifties and regularly at Gallery Moos, Toronto, since 1964. His work was included in the sixth *Biennial of Canadian Painting* in 1965 and the *Toronto Painting 1953-65* exhibition in 1972, both organized by the National Gallery of Canada. In 1972 he represented Canada at the Venice Biennial with sculptor Walter Redinger. Gershon Iskowitz's works are in major collections across the country, including those of the Art Gallery of Ontario and the National Gallery of Canada.

Variation on Green ≠ 3	1975-6	oil on canvas - huile sur toile	213.5 × 335.5 cm. (2 sections)
Painting in Violet and Mauve	1972	oil on canvas - huile sur toile	228.5 × 198.5 cm.
Seasons ≠ 2	1975	oil on canvas - huile sur toile	177.5 × 152.5 cm.

Avant 1949, date de son arrivée au Canada, Gershon Iskowitz fut élève des académies de beaux-arts de Varsovie et de Munich, ainsi que du peintre expressionniste Oskar Kokoshka. Il expose au Canada depuis la fin des années cinquante et, plus précisément, à la Galerie Moos de Toronto, à intervalles réguliers, depuis 1964. Ses œuvres figurent parmi celles présentées, en 1965, à la Biennale de peinture canadienne et, en 1972, à *Peinture torontoise 1953-1965*, expositions organisées l'une et l'autre par la Galerie nationale du Canada. En 1972, avec le sculpteur Walter Redinger, il a représenté le Canada à la Biennale de Venise. Les œuvres de Gershon Iskowitz ont une place de choix dans les principales collections du pays, notamment celles de l'Art Gallery of Ontario et de la Galerie nationale du Canada.





TOP ↗

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CANADIAN CONTEMPORARY PAINTERS

MINISTÈRE DES AFFAIRES EXTERIEURES DU CANADA  
DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS OF CANADA

GERSHON ISKOWITZ

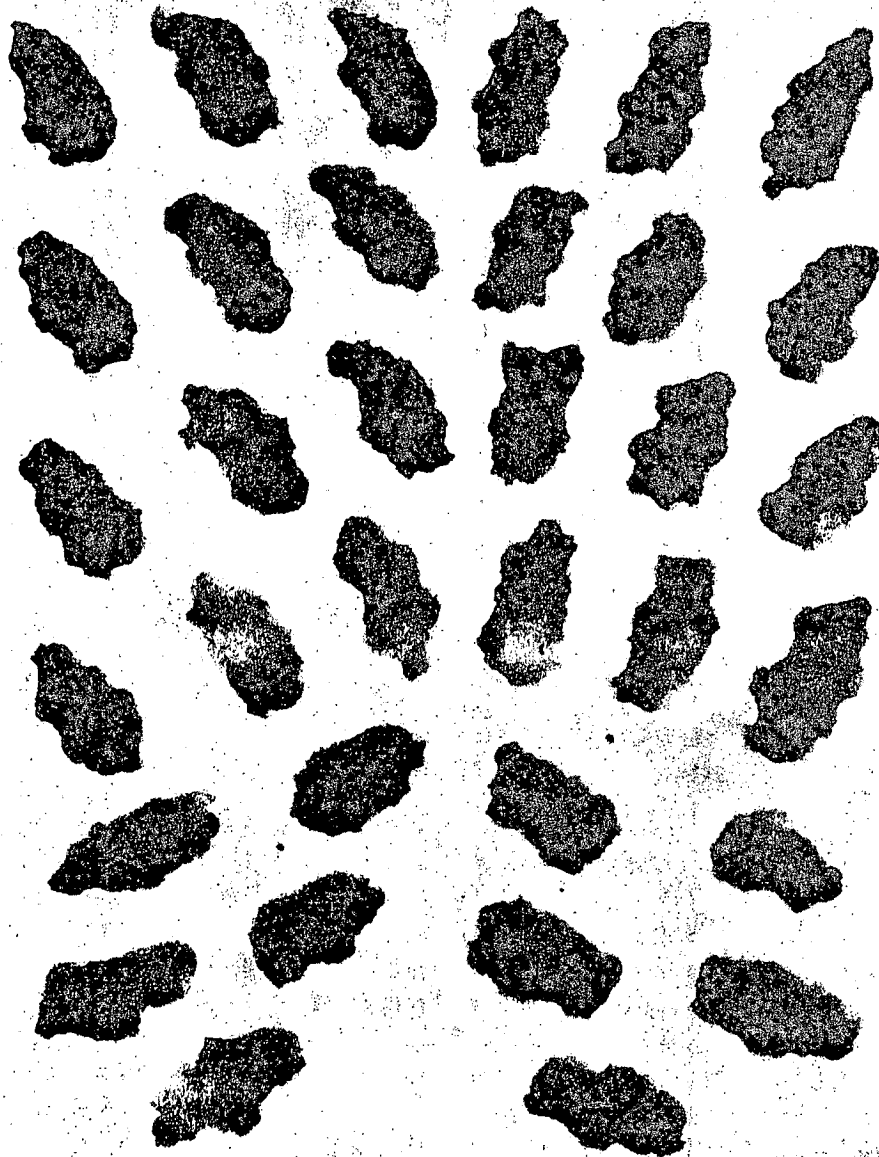
Painting in Mauve and Violet 1972

177.5 x 152.5 cm.

Collection: The Canada Council Art Bank/

La Banque d'oeuvres d'art du Conseil des arts du Canada

GERSHON ISKOWITZ



GERSHON ISKOWITZ  
*Autumn Landscape No. 1*,  
 1967  
 oil on canvas, 70" x 55"  
 Coll: Gallery Moos,  
 Toronto  
 Photo: Courtesy  
 Gallery Moos

GALLERY MOOS, MAR. 24-APR. 12, HART HOUSE, U. OF TORONTO, MAR. 24-APR. 15

## Gershon Iskowitz

ROALD NASGAARD

There is no problem in identifying Gershon Iskowitz' new, forceful, large scale and robustly colored paintings at Gallery Moos with the earlier lyrical and muted Impressionistic landscapes of a decade ago, more recently seen in *Toronto Painting: 1953-1965*. The same hand, eye and mind are clearly present in the artist's use of softly melting patches of color across the surface of the canvas, and in his dedication to landscape motifs. The observation sounds facile, but is meant to indicate that, in this instance,

however much premises remain the same, results are strikingly different. If the pictures of the early 60s are retiring and apparently dreamily passive in the rendering of observed nature, those of 1972 and 73 are joyously affirmative reconsiderations of the experience of nature, internalized and translated into pictorial language.

The bridge between "the Toronto Look" years and Iskowitz' most recent work at Gallery Moos is his simultaneous exhibition at Hart House which consists

essentially of those pictures exhibited, with considerable triumph, at the *Venice Biennale* in 1972. The latter is retrospective in nature showing a range of work from 1967 to 1972 and thus provides helpful insight into the sort of problems confronted in those intervening years, the solutions to which become manifest in the latest pictures.

The two *Autumn Landscapes* (Nos 1 and 4) from 1967 seem important milestones. They largely abandon the atmospheric haze



GERSHON ISKOWITZ  
*Triptych, 1967-70*

oil on canvas, center 120" x 60", sides 108" x 55"  
 Photo: T.E. Moore, courtesy Gallery Moos,  
 Toronto

to concentrate on an arrangement of large, colored patches - orange in No 4 and dark blue in No 1 - on a pale grey-blue ground. The patches animate the surface by receding (No 4) or advancing (No 1) while remaining tied to their ground by mediating smaller patches of yellow and green. Without the titles one might overlook the landscape source of these pictures and focus on their purely abstract concerns, were it not for the apparent organic, non-abstract analysis of the fan-like pattern of the patches. These two pictures propose a new concentration on the tension between representation and pure picture making.

*Triptych* (1969-70) precedes the *Uplands* series which formed the core of the Venice I now the Hart House exhibitions. Its mid-arched altarpiece format with wings in perspective, its radically flattened landscape image with an à-la-Friedrich suggestion of the lyrical sublime, and its overtones of symbol-implying, freely floating forms point to a struggle to find new solutions to the presentation of an *andachtig* confrontation with the landscape.

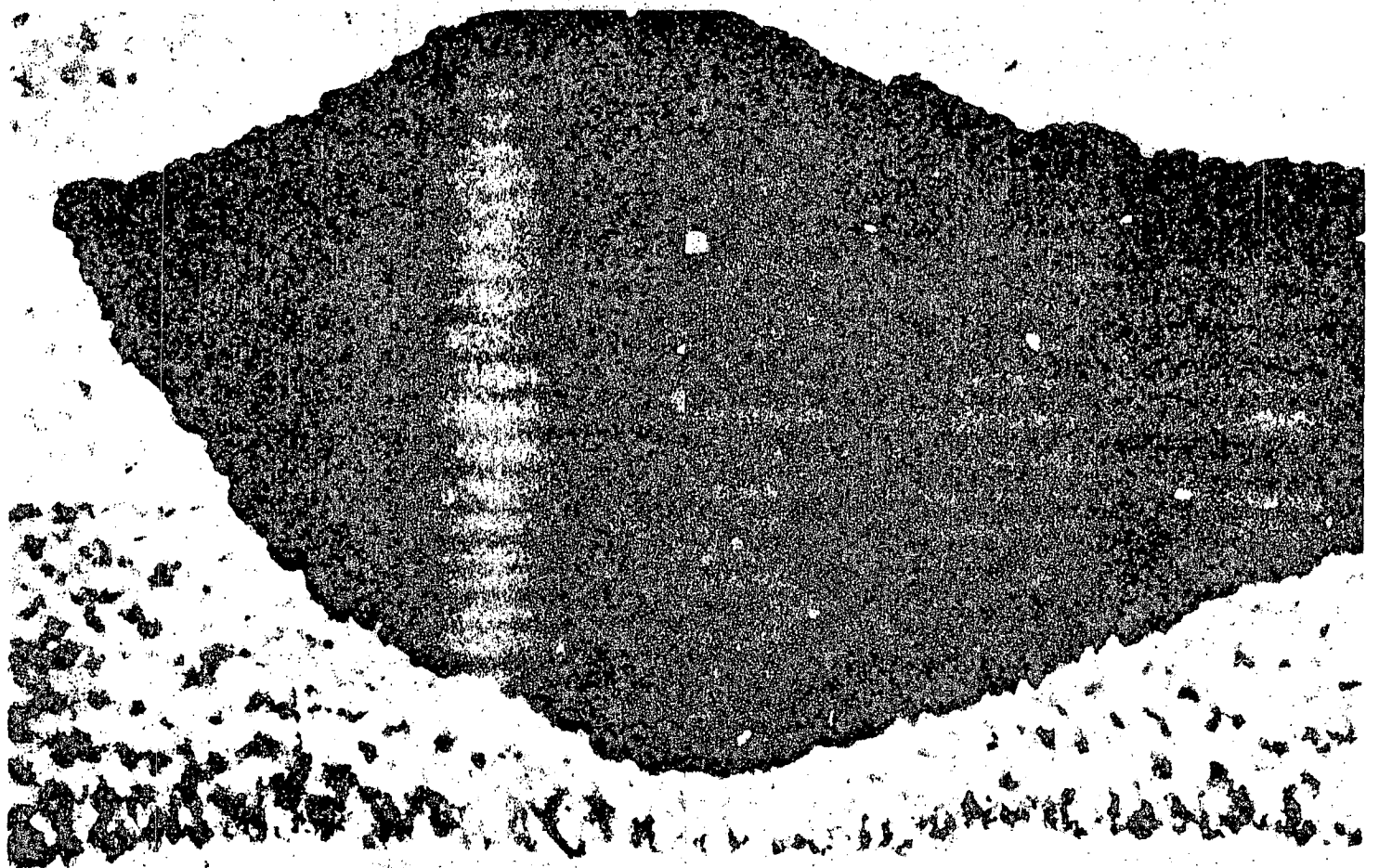
panamic landscape views of the *Uplands* series (B, C, D, G, H and K are exhibited), across which hover more intensely colored ominous shapes which, however much they depend on natural light and color phenomena, are now the product of imaginative distillation of immediate experience into painterly forms. But landscape space decidedly persists throughout these pictures, reminding us of their source in lofty experiences of the northern landscape sun from a helicopter or from rocky heights. It recedes across an expanse of water, indicated by a series of horizontal brush strokes (or by indications of reflections in *Uplands H*), to be stopped by a horizontal band of mist-shrouded trees extending in a straight line from edge to edge. Above rises a vast sky, forming the third of three bands each of which is rendered in enlarged Impressionist color patches of predominantly pastel hues (pink and pale green) whose

suggesting a state of contemplative reverie reminiscent of landscapes of the mid-60s.

This mottled application is carried over into the large central forms which hover above the landscape, either floating freely, or attached to one side, or suspended from above like curtains. Though the color patches of the landscape tend to be brushed into those of the foreground form, the background-foreground distinction prevails; on the one hand because of the intenser, darker colors of the latter, and on the other, through its consequent greater materiality.

The increasing materiality is most strongly affirmed in the third and shallowest layer of depth in the pictures, which really coincides with the surface. It is accentuated, as in *Uplands B*, by freely floating dyads and triads of color-patches of pure blue, red, orange, green or lilac (with the occasional shift in hue, as from red to orange). These are almost hard-edge, asserting their solidity in contrast to the immateriality of the scene behind. When scattered across the canvas they measure the





GERSHON ISKOWITZ

*Uplands II*, 1972

oil on canvas, 95" x 144"

Coll: Canada Council Art Bank, Ottawa

Photo: courtesy Gallery Moos, Toronto

illusion of the receding landscape.

The space experience of the *Uplands* series then hovers between modernist pictorial space and the traditional space of landscape painting. Insofar as the color-patch tends to play the double role of surface affirmation and atmospheric depth description the immediate source is Impressionism. Insofar as the landscape space is inhabited by freely floating abstract forms – products of the visionary or of the creative process whose reference point is imaginative experience rather than direct sensory impression – it is reminiscent of the dream space of abstract Surrealism. Curiously, or perhaps inevitably, it is the more abstracted presences which take on the most material reality, while the marks of direct visual experience fade off into memory. Peter Mellen writes of Iskowitz' response to his excursion into the North, "these experiences are internalized and might not appear in his paintings for months or years." (*arts-canada*, Oct/Nov 1971, p. 52.)

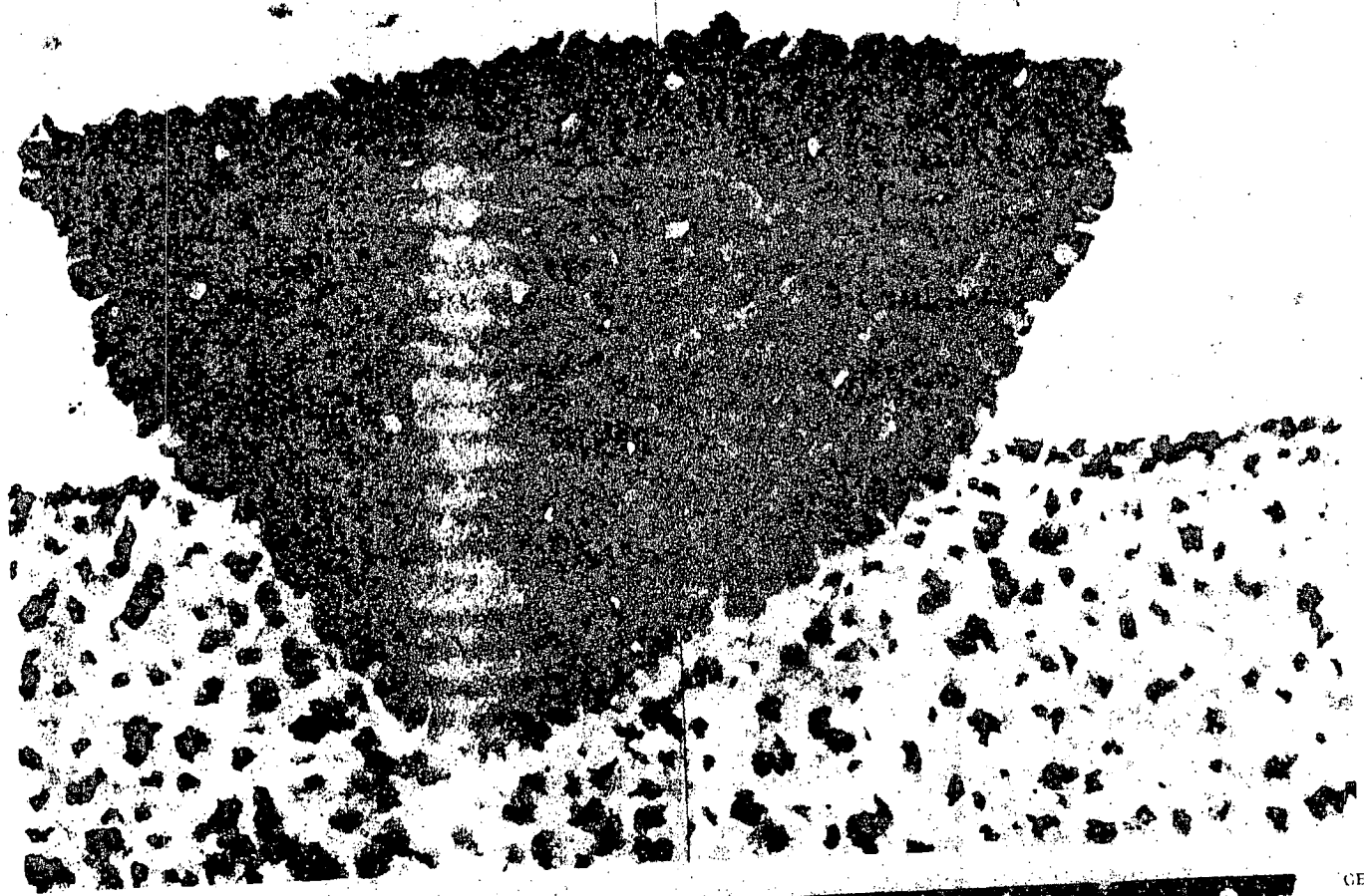
The pictures are powerful and impressive, but there remains a tinge of doubt which is perhaps a result of being too

intent on looking for formalist, in addition to primarily lyrical, meaning. But the pictures themselves suggest a search for purely pictorial form in a modernist sense which contradicts the 'lingering landscape' space. Insofar as the foreground forms tend to let go of their surface anchorage to float in deep space rather than across the picture surface, and insofar as they lose contact with the picture edge and hover independently, they tend to demand symbolic interpretation beyond purely visual meaning, much as do the color-patches and wriggly shapes in *Triptych*. Because of their landscape context they become animate presences which evoke a more dramatic response.

*Uplands II* – which because of its central, gloriously red form predicts the most recent work – would perhaps have been a stronger picture had it been composed of

only the right half of the diptych. In it the lilac-tinged sky, the greenish foreground and the red shape are securely anchored on the framing edges and retain their full formal integrity. In the left half the wooded landscape recedes deeply into space behind the red form and the picture tends toward the representational. Then there is the diptych format itself which in the entire series breaks the continuity between right and left, contradictory in relation to landscape space but affirmative in favor of formal surface composition. And concentration on the latter, as we know from Rothko, Still and Newman, in no way precludes devotional or lyrical expression.

Also prophetic of the work exhibited at Gallery Moos, and perhaps the most beautiful picture at Hart House, is *Painting in Lilac*, 1972 which is much less apparently a landscape, without denying its landscape origins. It is composed of a mottled curtain, predominantly lilac, spotted with orange and green, suspended centrally from the upper edge. The pale, greenish ground gives little sense of background but acts rather as a foil to the vibrancy of the



curtain whose colors burn with a Morris Louis intensity.

This is the principal format of the recent pictures: a curtain of color suspended from the top edge of the picture set off by a paler surrounding ground. Some suggest their origins as half diptychs: from the *Uplands* series with the curtain at one side; others have the curtain centrally placed; and in others it crosses the bottom edge with pale borders only on the sides. As in *Uplands II* intensely colored spots of yellow, orange, red and green dance across the variegated but essentially monochrome curtains, recalling the early optical works of Poons; but their free arrangement betrays their organic origins. (A few retain the variegated colored cuttains of *Painting in Lilac*.) The merest hint of a horizon line occasionally suggests landscape space, but it is not powerful enough to bend the space inward. Curtain and ground inhabit a common space and assert themselves as formal and pictorial evocations of the landscape experience. These are expansive and affirmative pictures, handsome, serious and joyous.



GERSHON ISKOWITZ  
*Uplands G*, 1971  
oil on canvas,  
100" x 140"  
Coll: Cemp Ltd,  
Montreal  
Photo: courtesy  
Gallery Moos,  
Toronto

GERSHON ISKOWITZ  
*Spring in Green*, 1971  
oil on canvas,  
90" x 75"  
Coll: Gallery Moos,  
Toronto

FOUR DECADES: THE CANADIAN GROUP OF PAINTERS

Paul Duval

p.175

Gershon Iskowitz

Free, lyric non-figurative painting is well represented...by Gershon Iskowitz...Iskowitz bases his soft-edged, floating shapes upon nature. As a landscape painter, he has moved gradually from an almost impressionist approach to his present canvases in which the presence of the land is echoed only in the luminous, sun-shot colours that softly contain his suspended forms.

Polish-born Iskowitz came to Canada from Europe in 1949, after spending several years in German concentration camps. His first works shown in Canada, at the Moos Gallery in Toronto, were bitter studies of prison life under Nazi domination. But his discovery of the lake country north of Toronto released a completely fresh creative vein within him, and his art changed from tragic reportage to works that reflect delight in the simple facts of sunshine, green trees and blue water.

A Dictionary of Canadian Artists

Compiled by Colin S. MacDonald

**ISKOWITZ, Gershon**

b. 1921

Born at Kielce near Warsaw, Poland, the son of a writer, and one of four children, he wanted to become a painter when he was only six. At 16 (1937) he entered The Warsaw Academy of Artists and a year later he was accepted by the Cracaw Academy of Fine Arts.<sup>1</sup> His studies were ended when the Nazi army overran Poland in 1939.<sup>2</sup> Iskowitz and his brothers were placed in forced labour gangs and by 1942 his whole family was living in a ghetto at Kielce. Then his father, mother, one brother, and sister were taken away for "resettlement" and he never saw them again (they were gassed to death at Treblinka). In 1943 he and his remaining brother were shipped in cattle-cars to Auschwitz where his brother was killed. Iskowitz survived and was transferred to the camps of Dachau, Mjdanek and just before the camp was liberated by the American army at Buchenwald.<sup>3</sup> He fled a work party as it was beyond the wire fence and was shot by a guard as he took cover in the nearby bush. The bullet struck him in the leg and he was left for dead. He was so emaciated that when his body struck the ground he fractured his hip. Later that day his fellow prisoners managed to bring him back to the camp and put him in bed.<sup>4</sup> Then the Americans arrived. After a long period in hospital Iskowitz recovered and went on to study at the Munich Academy of Fine Arts where he won a scholarship in 1948 (for a years study in France and Italy).<sup>5</sup> He arrived in Canada in 1949 and settled in Toronto where he has established himself as an artist. While in the concentration camps he made sketches on brown wrapping paper and hid them from sight. Describing this period Kildare Dobbs<sup>6</sup> noted, "This painter had none of that self-defeating pride that answers evil with silence; as the minstrel-boy in the song tore out the strings of his harp that they might not sound in slavery, Iskowitz made himself a witness." These drawings were reproduced in *Saturday Night* with Dobbs' article.<sup>7</sup> Iskowitz has exhibited his paintings in one man shows at the following galleries, Hamilton Art Gallery (1957); Vancouver Art Gallery (1957); Greenwich Gallery, Tor., (1958); The Hayter Gallery, Tor., (1957, 1958); The Here & Now Gallery, Tor., (1960, 1961); Dorothy Cameron Gallery, Tor., (1963); and at the International Cinema, Tor., (1963) when Luba Eleen<sup>8</sup> noted, "Gershon Iskowitz formed his attachment

### ISKOWITZ, Gershon (Cont'd)

to water colour during his shockingly tragic early years as an artist when he secretly painted episodes of horror from his experiences at Buchenwald and Auschwitz. Water Colour is evidently still his premier mode of expression influencing and dominating his use of the other media. One can observe a steady development of technique over the years. His most recent work emerges as the logical outcome of his early experiments painting in transparent layers of water colour; in subject matter there is a sharp and understandable break with the past . . . Although the artist lets the technique he uses create his images, he is obviously working with memories of the northern landscape in mind. In one blue-green study, the irregular edge formed by the moist blending of two layers of colour suggests the jagged line formed by pine trees outlined against the horizon at dusk." She also commented on his drawings as follows. "The artist covers the surface of the paper with little marks, seemingly distributed at random, like strewn leaves - now concentrated, now spread out. These marks gradually coalesce into the time-honoured elements of the Canadian countryside - fields with ploughed furrows, conical pine trees, and so on . . . one cannot help wondering whether he will continue his successful preoccupation with landscape or, as one or two examples of his present work seem to hint, he will carry forward and assimilate an earlier interest in the human figure and the expression of strong emotions." In 1966 an exhibition of his work was held at Gallery Moos, Yorkville, Toronto, when Harry Malcolmson<sup>9</sup> provided an excellent text for his catalogue. Gershon Iskowitz is a member of the Canadian Society of Graphic Art (1956) and exhibited his canvas "Autumn Images" at the Sixth Biennial Exhibition of Canadian Painting, 1965.

#### References:

<sup>1</sup> National Gallery of Canada Information Form rec'd July 2, 1958

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> *Saturday Night*, Tor., Ont., March, 1966 "From The Ranks Of Death" by Kildare Dobbs, P. 28

<sup>5</sup> see <sup>1</sup>

<sup>6</sup> see <sup>4</sup>, P. 28

<sup>7</sup> see <sup>4</sup> (P. 29-31)

<sup>8</sup> *Canadian Art*, Vol. 20, No. 6, Art Reviews P. 318 "Gershon Iskowitz at the International Cinema, Toronto" by Luba Eleen

<sup>9</sup> *Gershon Iskowitz* by Harry Malcolmson, Gallery Moos Ltd., Tor., Feb. 17 to March 2, 1966 see also

*Canadian Art*, Vol. 21, No. 2 "How 20 Canadians Draw the Line" by Arnold Rockman, P. 85

*Ibid*, Vol. 23, No. 2 "Canadian Art Today" by Dorothy Cameron P. 59, 52



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## PRESS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release  
January 9, 1977

### GERSHON ISKOWITZ: FIRST NEW YORK EXHIBITION

Polish born artist GERSHON ISKOWITZ will have his FIRST ONE-MAN EXHIBITION IN NEW YORK at MARTHA JACKSON 521 West 57th Street February 5- March 5.

Iskowitz's paintings are a distillation of the colors and forms witnessed in nature. Fascinated by the phenomenon of light interacting with the northern terrain of his adopted home, Canada, Iskowitz goes so far as to employ airplanes to enable him to experience the overall patterns of nature.

Iskowitz converts the color and movement he has witnessed into dabs of brightly colored paint capturing the joy and effervescence he finds in the Canadian landscape and in life itself. He explains, "I see those things . . . the experience, out in the field, of looking up in the trees or in the sky, of looking down from the height of a helicopter. So what you do is try to make a composition of all those things, make some kind of reality. . . ."

Iskowitz's love of his medium, oil applied with a brush, is revealed by his lavish use of thick swirls of paint; the physicality of which enhance the movement and fluidity he is so dedicated to.

Gershon Iskowitz has had numerous exhibitions in Europe and Canada. This will be his debut exhibition in New York.

#####

# GERSHON ISKOWITZ

by Peter Mellen

All photos by the author unless otherwise indicated

I'm high. I'm really high. Way up there – floating free. Completely free! Next to me a friendly Chagall-like figure. The two of us high in the blue-mauve sky, floating over the land. A warm smile, a twinkle in his eye, “Hey! How come it took you so long to get here?”

Time to come down. A long way down. I look back up at the sky. It's a Gershon Iskowitz sky. Patches of blue showing through mottled clouds, a shimmering mosaic of color. I remember Gershon saying, “All the colors I use are from nature – the blues, the greens, the reds, the browns, the golds . . .”

It's 10:30 a.m. I know that Gershon is asleep, with the traffic roaring by his Spadina Avenue studio in Toronto. I know that last night he will have worked all night, as he always does, applying another layer of color to a small painting he has been working on for the past five weeks. He will get up around two o'clock, have some food, walk over to Yonge Street to see some galleries or some friends. Perhaps he will drop into Gwartzman's on Spadina, where he buys his materials, then across the street to Grossman's for a beer and a few jokes with John MacGregor or some of the younger artists who hang out there. By eleven or twelve he will be back in his studio ready to start work again. Night after night.

It's difficult not to over-romanticize Gershon Iskowitz's life, particularly when you

Kielce, Poland, in 1921, he began to draw and paint when he was about nine years old. Coming from a poor family, he could barely afford to buy watercolors or paper. When the Germans invaded Poland in 1939, Gershon was 18 years old. He was put to work in forced labour camps. He escaped. He was caught. He escaped again. He lived in unheated shacks, with the temperature often down to 20 degrees below zero.

“My whole attitude changed. I was a very delicate fellow. I think that in circumstances of survival you get harder – not just physically – but mentally too – in order to survive.”

In 1942 he was sent to Auschwitz. One of his brothers was sent there with him, but didn't survive. His father, mother, sister, and another brother were sent away for “resettlement,” and he never saw them again. After more than a year and a half at Auschwitz, he was transferred to Buchenwald, where he later tried to escape. Shot in the leg, and left for dead – because he was so emaciated – his friends brought him back to camp. The Americans liberated Germany shortly after, and it took nine months in hospitals before he recovered his strength.

If survival of this ordeal was not enough of a miracle, it is even more amazing to discover that he managed to continue painting during most of this period. He was

by painting their portraits. He sketched his friends and life at camp, knowing all the time that if he was caught it would mean immediate death.

“Why did I do it? I think it kept me alive. There was nothing to do. I had to do something in order to forget the hunger. It's very hard to explain, but in the camp painting was a necessity for survival.”

It is impossible to relate these experiences without wondering what effect they have had on his life. Gershon is conscious of them – as he is of being Jewish – but he also accepts them, and considers them to be a part of himself. He is neither bitter nor sentimental. If anything, he has gone beyond them to a full and joyful awareness of life in the present. In fact, Gershon would much rather talk about other things.

When I met him, I expected to find someone who was tortured, shy and introverted. But as we laughed, told stories, knocked back shots of vodka, and talked about everything but art, I realized how wrong I had been. When I told him of my naive expectations, he jokingly said, “Do you want me to cry for you?”

There is a child-like enthusiasm about Gershon. He likes to laugh, to have fun, and be with friends. He enjoys his food, his dates and his work. He has no romantic illusions about his life as an artist, no desires to be famous or to revolutionize the art world. His life is not about his art.





A portion of Gershon Iskowitz' studio.

Gershon Iskowitz  
Detail of *Hunger*, 1951, pen and ink, 19 1/4" x 12 1/2"

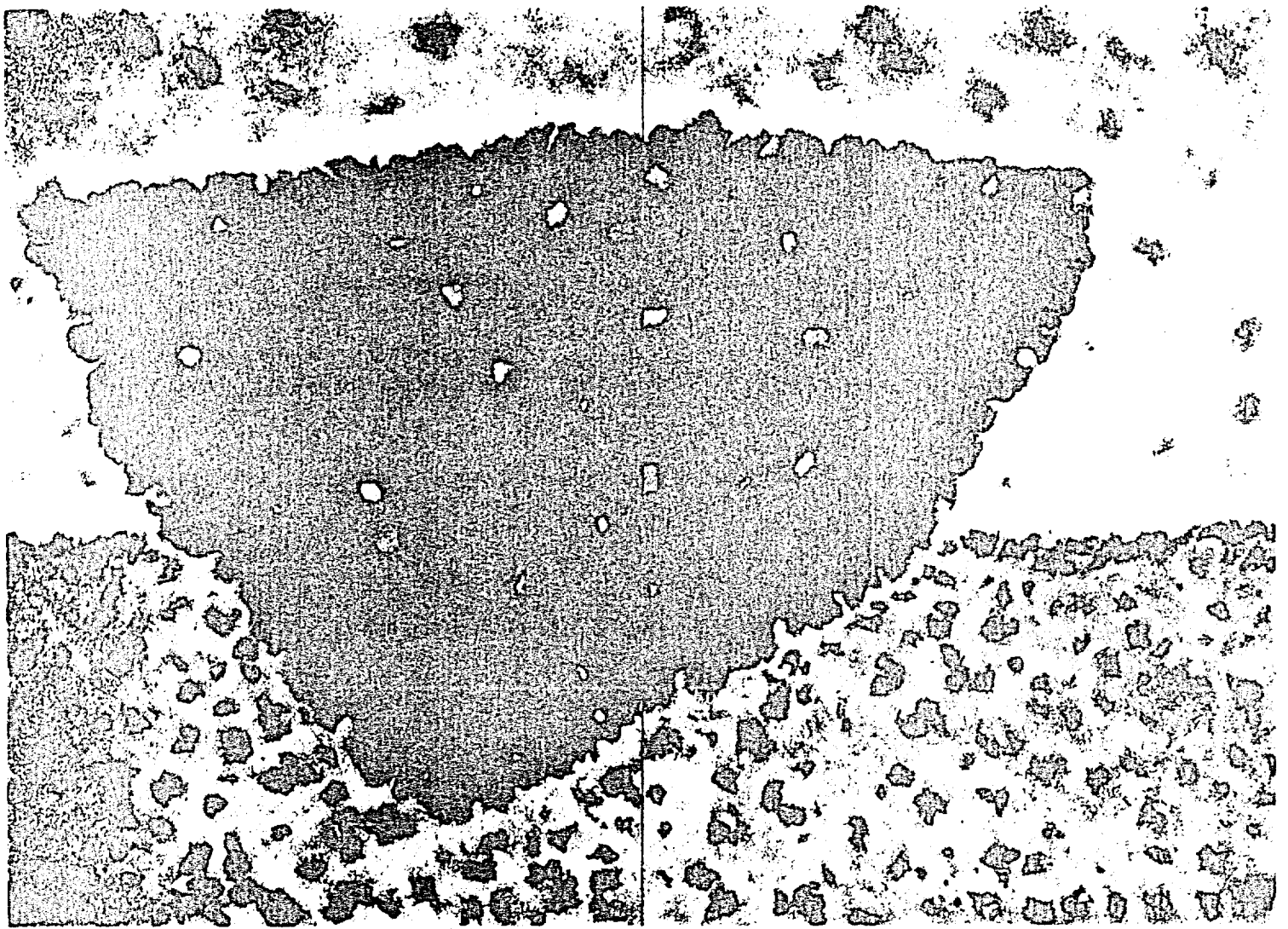


city. It all shows in his studio on Spadina Avenue, where he has lived for the past ten years. A long room with a skylight. One end partitioned off for sleeping. Canvases carefully stacked against the wall. Paint tubes neatly laid out in long rows. Everything in its place. Nothing superfluous.

"All my life I've been searching. I don't give a damn about society. I just want to do my own work - to express my own feelings, my own way of thinking. Painting is just an extension of myself. It's a plastic interpretation of the way I think. It's just me."

Gershon doesn't like to talk about his paintings. They are not easy to talk about. Intuitive and spontaneous, they appeal totally to the senses. They express a transcendental state which defies rational analysis. Because of their large scale and tremendous subtlety of color, reproductions are next to useless: they must be experienced physically.

Gershon's paintings are about nature. They contain all the basic elements of nature: color, space, light, atmosphere, growth. And you can find in them the same moods you experience before nature: peace, serenity, joy, awesome power, and even fear. They are also of the North, an area he knows well. Although he used to sketch before nature, he now just lets the landscape act upon him. His ideas may come from a helicopter ride over the northern landscape or a long afternoon



spent on a rocky promontory overlooking a lake. These experiences are internalized and might not appear in his paintings for months or years.

When they do reappear, they take on a new reality – that of Gershon's inner world. Sometimes there are glimpses of nature – views down towards the hills and lakes from the sky, or views through the trees up into the sky. Details of shore and horizon can often be distinguished through a soft haze of transparent colors. At other times, blobs of resonant, vibrating colors float by like leaves in the wind. In some, strange, mysterious shapes seem to hover over the landscape, like a magic tapestry of color, or a threatening wall of water.

“My paintings are not abstract. They're real. They're very, very much real. I see those things.”

There is still another level at which his paintings may be experienced. After looking at them a long time, colors begin to fluctuate. Some come rushing out at you, others pull you into the depth of the painting. They appear to come alive before you, glowing with vibrant luminosity. Real space becomes infinite space – space through which you can float weightlessly.

The paintings go beyond any reference to the landscape and become an expression of pure color and space, of a universal experience. As David Bolduc said, “They are like weird galaxies, like Star Trek gone mad.”

Gershon would never use these words to describe them. The only clue lies in the way he works. Although he paints every night, he never knows what will happen. Relying on his intuition, he applies first one color, then another. If he feels they don't go well together, he tries another color, then another color, until it satisfies him. Night after night this process goes on, during which he often applies up to 30 layers of color to get the effect he wants. At one point the blues may predominate, a week later the reds. Through these endless transformations the painting slowly emerges, as if it had a life of its own.

“There's no explanation. I don't even know myself how the painting will come out. I'm just like innocent. I start a painting like when I was born, and have to face life for the first time.”

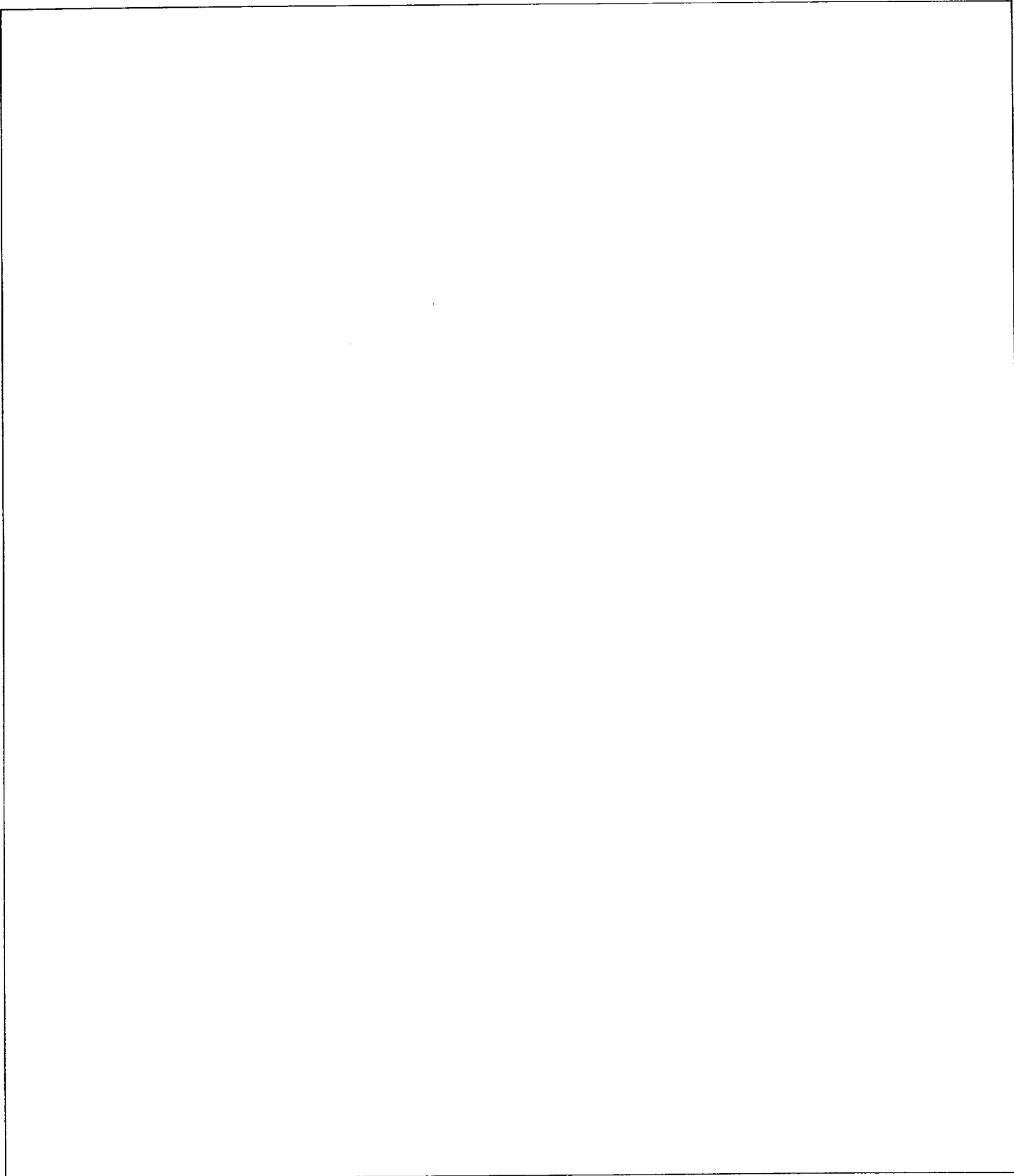
Gershon Iskowitiz has been working in Toronto for over 20 years, as long as Harold Town. But how many people have

1 Gershon Iskowitiz  
*Uplands, Series G*, 1971, diptych, oil on canvas,  
100" x 140"  
Photo: Eberhard Otto

2 Gershon Iskowitiz  
*Uplands, Series E*, 1971, diptych, oil on canvas,  
95" x 140"  
A detail of this work is shown on the cover.  
Photo: Eberhard Otto

3 Gershon Iskowitiz  
*Uplands, Series F*, 1971, diptych, oil on canvas,  
95" x 140"  
Photo: Eberhard Otto

heard of him? It comes as no surprise to discover that three of Canada's most promising young artists consider him to be one of the most important painters working in Canada today. David Bolduc, John MacGregor and Dan Solomon are all close friends of Gershon's, and have learned a great deal from him. They have great admiration for Gershon as a man and as an artist. They resent the fact that he has received so little recognition. Gershon, however, would be sure to laugh and say, “Do you want me to cry or something?” He is somehow far above it all – floating through the azure sky like one of the prophets in a painting by Chagall.







# CHARLES GAGNON

1934 / Montréal, Québec

Charles Gagnon a étudié les arts graphiques et la décoration intérieure, de 1956 à 1959, à la Parsons School of Design de New York. Peintre de son état, il est également connu pour ses talents de cinéaste et de photographe. Gagnon expose au Canada et à l'étranger depuis 1958. On retrouve son œuvre dans bon nombre des grandes expositions qui ont eu lieu ces quinze dernières années, notamment aux biennales de peinture canadienne des années soixante, à *Canada: Art d'aujourd'hui*, exposition itinérante montée par la Galerie nationale du Canada en 1967 pour le ministère des Affaires extérieures, et *Canada 101*, exposition organisée par le Conseil des Arts du Canada en 1968 pour le Festival d'Edimbourg. Chargé de la création cinématographique commandée pour le pavillon chrétien à Expo 67, il a terminé récemment une peinture murale pour l'immeuble Lester B. Pearson d'Ottawa. ■ Charles Gagnon habite Montréal. Il a enseigné l'art cinématographique au collège Loyola de Montréal et, actuellement, il donne des cours d'art cinématographique et de photographie à l'Université d'Ottawa. Il a bénéficié d'une bourse de travail libre octroyée par le Conseil des Arts du Canada en 1968 et 1969. Ses œuvres figurent dans la collection Zacks de Toronto, et les collections de la Galerie nationale du Canada à Ottawa, du Musée des beaux-arts de Montréal et du Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal.

Marker ≠ 8 - Marqueur ≠ 8	1973	oil on canvas - huile sur toile	147.5 × 172.5 cm.
Screenspace No. 2 - Espace/écran No. 2	1973-4	oil on canvas - huile sur toile	168 × 229.5 cm.
Steps No. 4 - Etapes No. 4	1968	oil on canvas - huile sur toile	173 × 198 cm.

Charles Gagnon studied graphic art and interior design at the Parsons School of Design in New York from 1956 to 1959. As well as being a painter, he is also known as a filmmaker and a photographer. Gagnon has been exhibiting in Canada and abroad since 1958. His work has been represented in numerous major exhibitions over the past fifteen years; notably, the biennials of Canadian painting throughout the sixties; *Canada: Art d'Aujourd'hui*, a travelling exhibition organized by the National Gallery in 1968 for the Department of External Affairs and *Canada 101*, an exhibition organized by the Canada Council in 1968 for the Edinburgh Festival. He was commissioned to create the films for the Christian pavillion at Expo 67 and has recently completed a mural for the Lester B. Pearson building in Ottawa. ■ Charles Gagnon lives in Montreal. He has taught film at Loyola College, Montreal and presently teaches film and photography at the University of Ottawa. He was the recipient of a senior Canada Council award in 1968 and 1969. His works are included in the Zacks collection, Toronto, and the collections of the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, the Montreal Museum of Fine Art and the Musée d'Art Contemporain, Montreal.



(Top/haut)

PEINTRES CANADIENS CONTEMPORAINS  
CANADIAN CONTEMPORARY PAINTERS

MINISTÈRE DES AFFAIRES EXTERIEURES DU CANADA  
DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS OF CANADA

CHARLES GAGNON

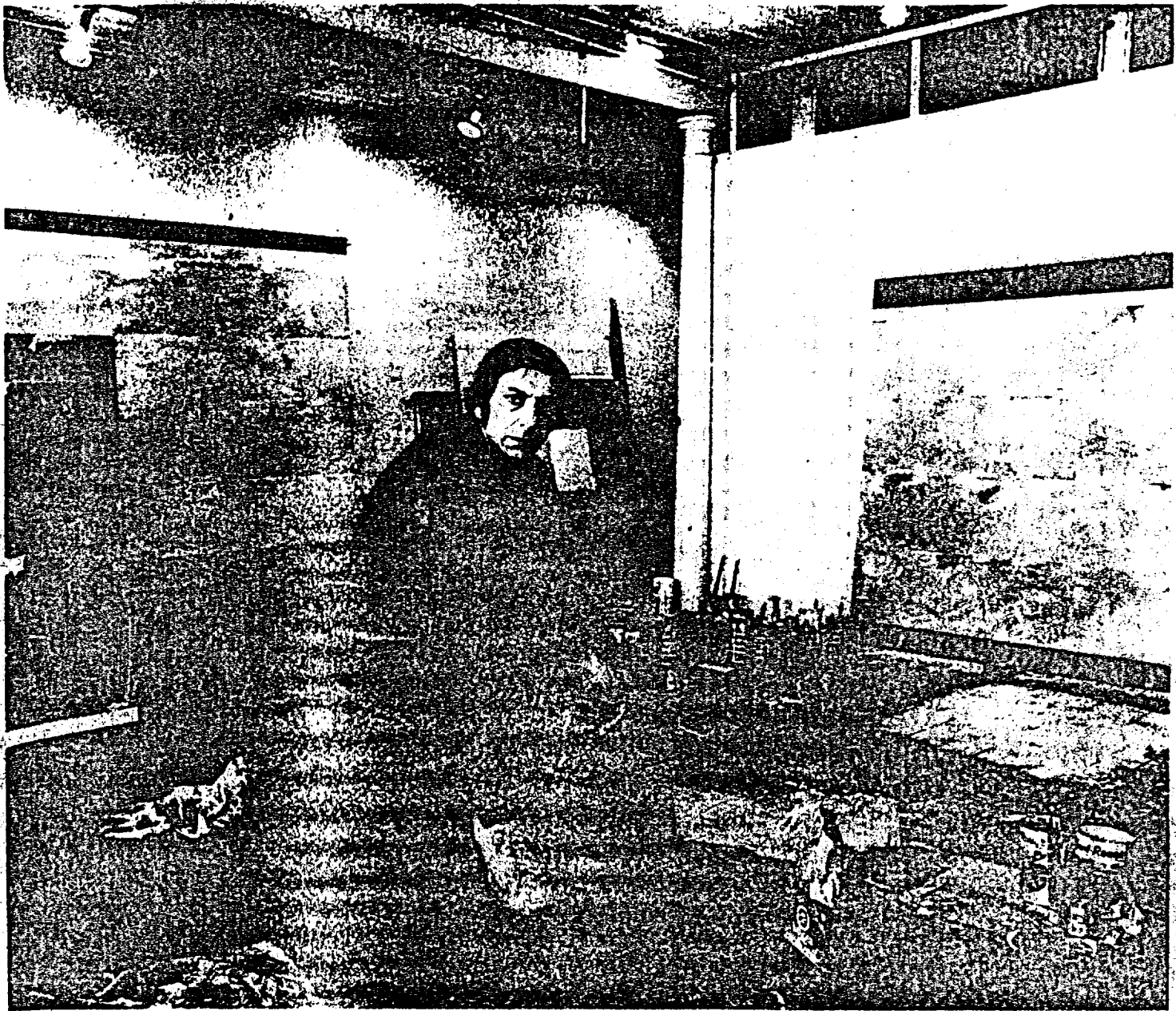
Screenspace No. 2/Espace écran No. 2 1973-4

168 x 229.5 cm.

Collection: The Canada Council Art Bank/

La Banque d'oeuvres d'art du Conseil des arts du Canada

CHARLES GAGNON



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.



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"

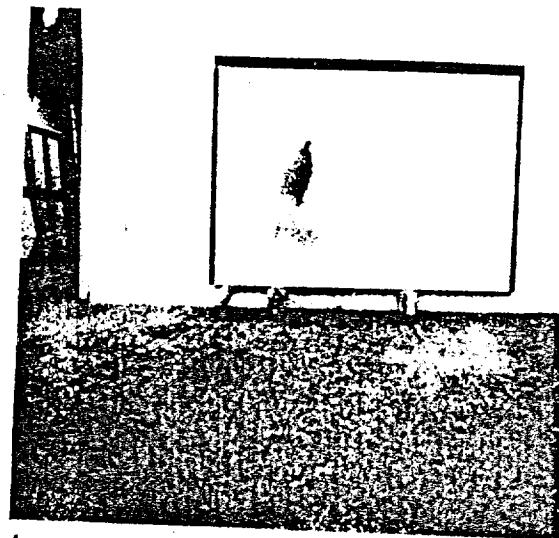
Photo: Gabor Szilasi

equilibrium, because neither force triumphs. The subdued colors - black, blue, gold, off-white, hints of buried red - suggest at once great vitality and a kind of composure. Perhaps this is what Gagnon means by the frail line between elegance and disaster. The oil pastel drawings are particularly impressive, because they reveal a technique of drawing and brushwork that I have not seen before. The emphasis is not on technique, but one feels that Gagnon has explored in a very sensitive way the subtle possibilities in which oil pastel can be used on paper. Such work is cons away from the coloratura excursions of Georges Mathieu and certain other Action Painters.

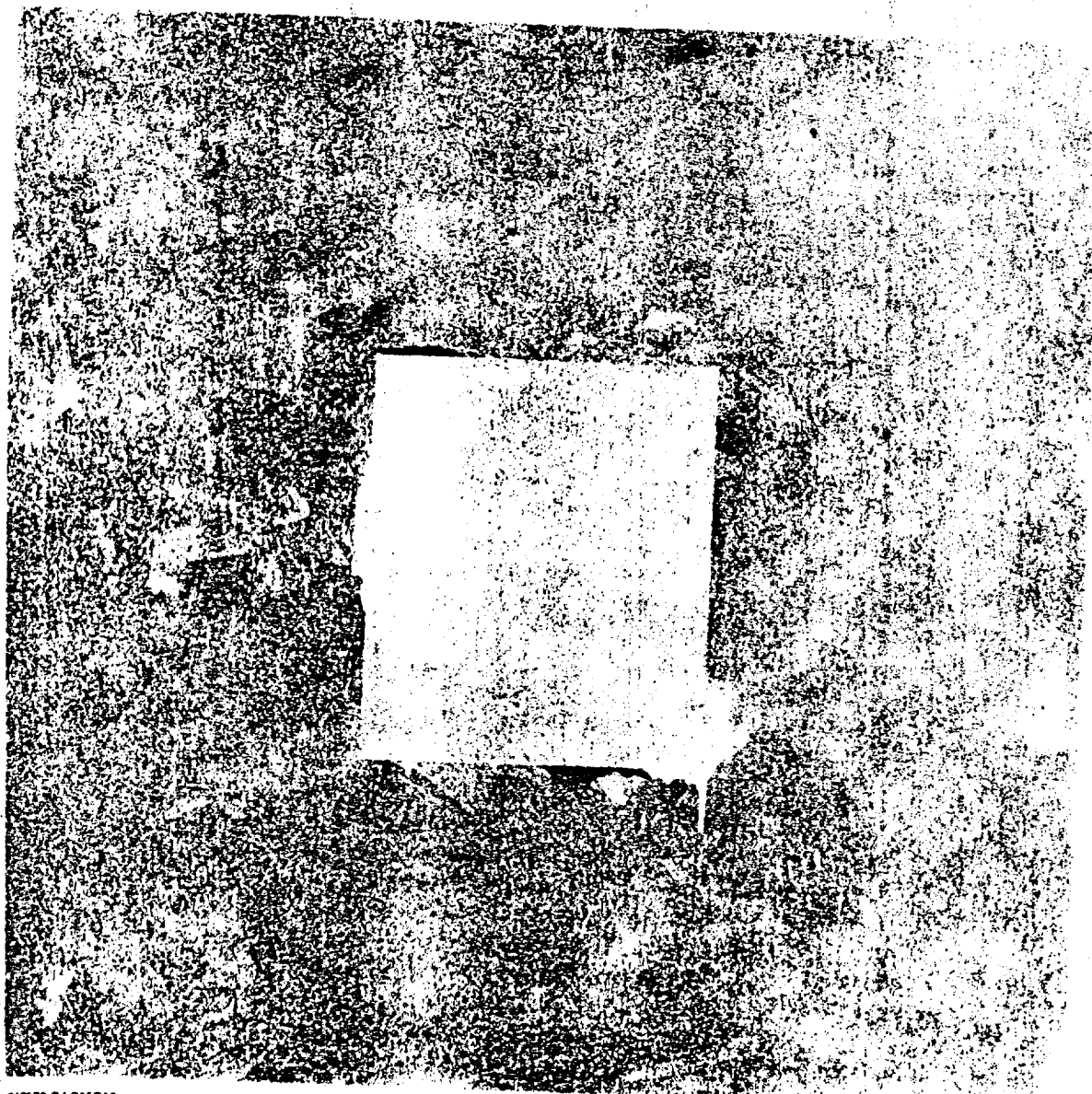
Once more with feeling. Charles Gagnon has done much work in film and photography. Some of this will appear in the next issue of *artscanada*, which is devoted to photography. But it should be said that some time ago he began a film on Yves Gaucher, which came to

include footage on Guido Molinari, and Jean McEwen, plus sounds of a Rosary service, images from nature, etc. The original title was to be *R-69* - Yves Gaucher's title for a reel painting. The new title is *R-69, Two Years Later*. With additional sound and images, it may run for two hours; but who knows what transformations may occur in the editing process?

To conclude. Charles Gagnon is a master of many media. His exhibition at Marlborough-Godard is but one comment on what Keats said of Shakespeare: he must live "a life of allegory." Gagnon's latest project is a 40' oil on canvas mural, a memorial to the late Lester B. Pearsall in Ottawa's new External Affairs building. It will be in a quiet area, "removed from the bustle of the main inquiry desk," and it will include words of the late Prime Minister, whose humanism Charles Gagnon will surely understand.



*Autoportrait et 'Etapes II'*, 1968, a photograph by Charles Gagnon



CHARLES GAGNON

*Cominante Extérieure*, 1973-74,  
oil on canvas, 48" x 48"

Art: Gabor Szilasi

A Dictionary of Canadian Artists

Compiled by Colin S. MacDonald

**GAGNON, Charles**

b. 1934

Born in Montreal, Quebec, he studied graphic art and interior design at the Parsons School of Design, New York, and painting at the Art Students' League under Paul Brach. He returned to Montreal in 1960 where he held his first one-man show. His work was shown in the Fifth and Fourth Canadian Biennials. His recent work tends towards geometric abstraction combined with action strokes. He has exhibited in Montreal at the Galerie Artek (1958), Salon de la Jeune Peinture (1960), "Montreal Painters" at Bishops University (1960), Galerie Denyse Delrue (1961) (now Galerie Libre); Salon du Printemps Musée des Beaux-Arts (1961) (1962) (1963) (1964) (1965 Hon. mention), two man show at Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (1963), Galerie Camille Hébert (1964); in Toronto at the Jerrold Morris International Gallery (1962), "Ten Montreal Painters" at Hart House (1963); Spoleto, Italy "Festival des Deux Mondes" (1962); in Africa "Festival Contemporary Painting" (1962-3); In the U.S.A. the International Exhibition Washington Square Gal. N.Y. (1964); Tokyo, Japan at the International Trade Fair (1965); Columbia in South America at the First Salon of Pan-American Painting; Europe with "El Arte Actual de America Y Espana" shown at Madrid, Barcelona, Paris, Brussels, London, Amsterdam, Berlin, Munich (1962-64). His work can be seen at Galerie Agnes Lefort, Montreal. He is represented in the National Gallery of Canada, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Sir George Williams University, Canadian Government (Trade & Commerce Dept., and External Affairs); private collections of J. Hirshhorn (N.Y.), S. Zacks (Toronto), G. Bronfman (Mtl.). He lives in Montreal.

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*Vie Des Arts*, Number 44, Automne, 1966 "L'Age Nouveau De La Peinture Canadienne" par Jean René Ostiguy, P. 19 (See P. 21 for ill., text in 23, 24)

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par Normand Thériault

# CHARLES GAGNON

"Pourquoi je fais des tableaux? Je n'ai jamais très bien compris. Le secret. Le son de la balle dans la finale de "Blow-Up" et toute l'atmosphère du film. Explorer, découvrir. Il y a aussi le Zen: "Si deux mains qui se frappent ensemble font un bruit, quel bruit produit une seule main?" C'est là toute ma recherche".

Même lorsque Charles Gagnon parle de ses tableaux, il laisse toujours planer dans l'atmosphère quelques valeurs mystérieuses. Et il dira certainement à un moment donné: "Mes tableaux sont religieux". Mais en même temps, comme il l'a déjà dit dans le passé: "J'ai délaissé l'intellectualisme pour découvrir des hommes en chair et en os, qui vont en pique-nique, mangent des hot-dogs, mâchent de la gomme et vont chez le barbier. Je suis étonné et je me sens bien" (article de Claude Jasmin, dans "Canadian Art", no 78).

Car sa peinture a été le lieu d'une ambiguïté apparente: d'un côté, le souci d'une interrogation qui le faisait se rapprocher de la mystique orientale, d'autre

part, une volonté de transmettre le quotidien le plus habituel ou le plus banal.

Ce double aspect de sa recherche picturale lui a fait produire une œuvre typiquement américaine. Quand il symbolise la réalité en s'appuyant sur une longue réflexion, il procède d'une démarche qui est le propre de l'art contemporain (naturellement, ce n'est pas ici une pure vision picturale, à la Mondrian), mais lorsqu'il tente d'intégrer dans ces images les éléments qui les font, il est alors très près de la peinture de type pop caractéristique de l'art américain.

Il est d'ailleurs normal de faire ce rapprochement à son sujet. De 1955 à 1960, il a séjourné aux Etats-Unis, étudiant à la New York University et à la New York School of Design. Il avait opté pour ce séjour dans la métropole américaine, après la lecture d'un article du "Time" sur l'art des USA: les œuvres de Robert Motherwell que l'on y reproduisait l'avaient emballé.

De ses œuvres newyorkaises, il donna un exemple lors

de l'exposition à la Galerie Artek au début de l'année 1959. Ses toiles se rapprochaient parfois de l'art de Sam Francis, avec ces fonds où la touche marquait chaque partie de la surface. On parla aussi, à cette occasion, d'"Ecole de New York"; surtout devant les coulis de peinture qu'il étalait sur ses toiles. Mais la critique, regrettant ces "influences", sentait quand même sa valeur et voyait un possible univers personnel.

Gagnon le précisa dans les expositions qu'il tint en 1960 et 1961, chez Denyse Delrue. Il tentait alors de représenter le réel. Et l'on peut même dire qu'il fut figuratif: un tableau, comme "Valley", est un paysage tel que le conçoit la tradition, car on distingue sur la toile une maison, des arbres et la ligne d'horizon qui se tient dans la partie supérieure. Et tous ces tableaux étaient des paysages, compris dans un sens plus général, cette fois.

La nature y était violemment décrite, dynamisée par des bandes de couleur (soit en s'opposant au reste du tableau, lorsque statiques, soit en l'animant par une

structure propre à créer le mouvement, comme dans "Waterfield", où elles ont la forme de chevrons). Et dans plusieurs des toiles de cette production, des formes noires, amorphes, où toujours le regard converge. Elles nous font comprendre le grand rôle que tient l'image, ou mieux encore, l'allusion directe à la réalité, quand on sait qu'elles représentent le fœtus: sa femme était alors enceinte et toute la vie du couple s'en trouvait transformée.

Même sa symbolique pouvait utiliser des formules consacrées: "Shooting Gallery" reproduit à la main les symboles de l'écriture, avec un "s" et un "2". ce sont là des souvenirs de collage. Dès 1960, "Landscape Collage" inclut des textes et des lettres imprimées. (Il a souvent fait appel aux techniques du collage: à l'origine des premières œuvres où il basera le tableau sur un carré de couleur pure, se trouve un collage et une composition basés sur une reproduction du tombeau que fit Michel-Ange pour la famille des Médicis).

Mais collages et utilisation d'objets antérieurs aux tableaux connaîtront leur sommet dans son œuvre à l'occasion de l'exposition à la Galerie XII du Musée des Beaux-Arts en 1962. Il offrait alors des sculptures-composition où s'entassaient boîtes de conserve, boutons, bouchons, pages de publicité, tubes de dentifrice, miroirs, etc. . . Il y avait dans ses œuvres

l'idée de l'objet trouvé qu'avaient contribué à répandre les tentatives en ce sens de Braque et Duchamp.

Cependant, l'intention s'était transformée: il ne s'agissait plus seulement de "prendre possession" d'objets aimés ou "admirés", ou encore de ramener l'art à un univers du quotidien. Pour Gagnon, et surtout par l'utilisation de boîtes-fenêtres (on pourrait dire de "pharmacies avec une vitre"), il voulait signifier son attachement au quotidien qu'il trouvait même beau. En plaçant derrière des vitres ces objets dérisoires, il voulait forcer le spectateur à "admirer" ces productions courantes du monde contemporain, de la même façon que celui-ci admire les "trésors" de mondes révolus, comme lors d'une visite à la section égyptienne ou chinoise de n'importe quel musée.

La démarche était différente pour le poste-récepteur de radio dont on voyait seulement l'intérieur qui était aussi exposé. De loin, le spectateur avait l'illusion d'une quelconque sculpture, illusion accentuée par les reflets qu'occasionnait la couche de peinture dorée. Mais lorsqu'il s'en approchait, il découvrait l'apparenta supercherie. Cependant, la surprise n'était pas encore complète: car un système interne d'enregistrement faisait entendre à intervalles donnés de la musique digne de tout bon poste récepteur.

Il voulait ainsi forcer l'éventuel spectateur à une réflexion sur les objets de son univers et lui montrer

comment la réalité valait pour elle-même la peine d'être explorée. La démarche créatrice chez Gagnon n'avait pas pour objet une connaissance plastique, mais un approfondissement de la réalité environnante.

Cette recherche prit une autre formulation dans les œuvres qu'il exposa en 1964 à la Galerie Camille Hébert. Elles étaient volontairement tachistes et laissaient plus que jamais une grande part au geste. De plus, le coloris y était vif et le fameux "vert Gagnon" dominait dans la majorité des toiles.

On pouvait croire à une évolution radicale, mais il suffit d'entendre Gagnon nous parler de "précipice" en désignant la bande de couleur moins dense qui se glisse et coupe complètement la masse du vert, comme dans "The Gap". La structure du tableau peut encore évoquer le paysage, avec toujours une haute ligne d'horizon, mais où la nature est devenue sauvage et dure, de roc.

Cependant ses tableaux étaient plus que jamais basés sur ce "besoin de s'accrocher à un coin du tableau", comme le lui avait déjà dit Jean Cathelin, dès 1960. De ce coin, montaient, pyramidiquement, des bandes alternées de couleur pâle et foncée.

Apparaissait aussi le principe de composition que l'on retrouve dans ses plus récentes toiles: la bande de couleur, souvent noire, qui enferme la forme intérieure et clôt le tableau. Cependant, dès 1959, Jacques Folch ("Via des Arts", printemps 1959) parlait, à propos de "Nude in a heunted Bed", de "toile-fenêtre".

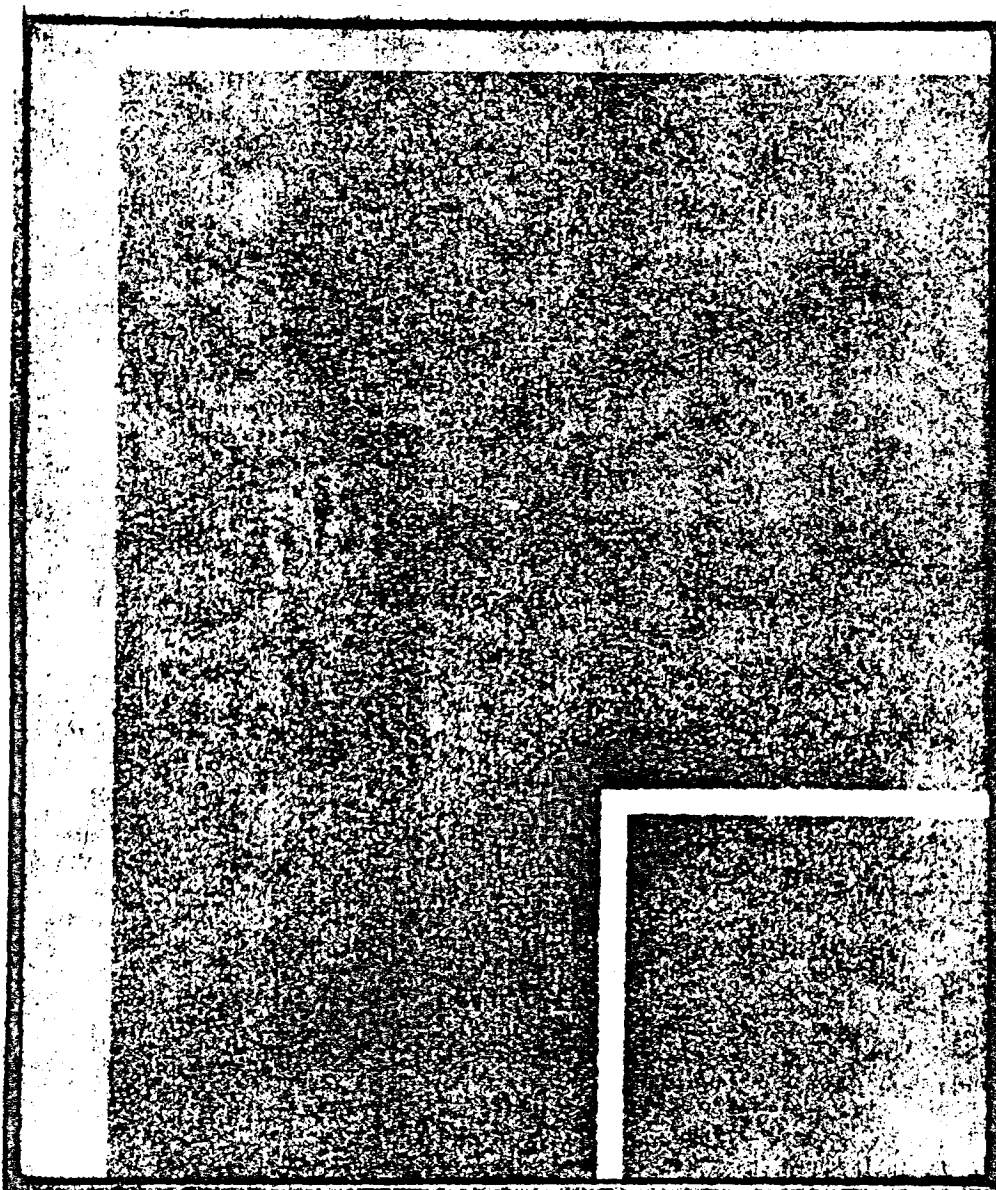
Cette idée de fermer le tableau par une bande qui ne se pose ordinairement jamais sur plus de trois côtés, Charles Gagnon l'explique facilement: "J'ai toujours été fasciné par une fenêtre fermée. Elle nous permet à la fois de se tenir à l'extérieur du monde tout en nous invitant à nous y plonger. Il y a là comme l'appel du précipice: finale mais emballante aventure, dont personne ne peut nous donner ou nous expliquer la sensation que procura la chute".

D'ailleurs, l'appel au vertige est vraiment présent dans les toiles de 1967 ou 1968 qu'il présentait, soit au Musée d'art contemporain, soit à la Biennale, soit à "Canada 101". Le spectateur ne sent pas un mouvement qui se ferait à la surface du tableau, mais c'est lui-même qui se promène par le regard sous la surface presque blanche qui lui est offerte.

A son souci de rendre la réalité, Gagnon a toujours été fidèle. Mais il y a eu transformation: présentement, il ne vise plus à une transposition. Son art s'attache au mouvement même qui crée la vie et ce que la toile offre, c'est une expérience similaire, mais condensée, d'une possible réflexion sur le monde.

Le spectateur n'est pas invité seulement à regarder cette réflexion chez le peintre: on lui demande, non de participer, mais de trouver lui-même ses voies de lecture dans le tableau. Aucun chemin universel n'a été tracé au préalable, car la toile, à l'image du monde, laisse à l'individu la liberté que naturellement il possède. Mais, à la différence du quotidien, il se trouve placé face à un monde privilégié, où il entre directement en contact avec le mouvement: il lui est alors possible de reprendre la même démarche que celle du peintre.

Le spectateur peut aussi arrêter son regard à une partie donnée du tableau, et y demeurer le temps qu'il le désira: avec le mouvement, il retrouve sa contrepartie qui est l'attachement à un objet immobile. Et le rythme déjà obtenu par la démarche antérieure est conservé, à la différence que ses résultats ne se voient plus dans un geste extérieur à l'homme. C'est l'homme lui-même qui est finalement recherché et le tableau est une occasion d'y parvenir.





"Un tableau ne peut pas être refait, parce que le geste qui l'a fait était particulier à l'instant de la création", nous dit Gagnon.

Cette nécessité du contact personnel avec l'objet à fabriquer suffit à expliquer pourquoi, des autres médiums qu'il a abordés dernièrement, il aimera le cinéma et goûtera peu la sérigraphie.

Avec le cinéma, il entre directement en contact avec les objets de l'environnement et il doit être continuellement présent. Car chaque image doit être choisie, cadrée, tournée, sans compter le long moment où l'œuvre prend forme lors du développement et du montage.

De son film le plus connu, "Le huitième jour", conçu spécialement pour le pavillon chrétien à Expo 67, il en dit peu de choses aujourd'hui: "Le film voulait surtout montrer aux gens que toutes les guerres de ce siècle ont été identiques, qu'on en sait les causes et les malheurs, et que, malgré tout ça, nous sommes encore incapables de les prévenir. Le schéma du montage voulait insister sur le temps, qu'on ne remarque finalement jamais. Les gens étaient étonnés

Et l'on peut parler de contemplation, ou, du moins d'attitude contemplative. Toute la peinture de Gagnon va dans ce sens. Et dès les débuts de la réalisation: lorsque le peintre applique les premières touches de couleur. Le médium, l'huile, a été justement choisi parce qu'il permettait un long contact entre le peintre et la toile. Réaliser un tableau pour Gagnon, c'est "vivre avec" pendant deux ou trois semaines. Sans compter le temps où le tableau se concevait par des dessins, des collages, ou encore, par le dernier tableau.

Ce long dialogue entre l'œuvre et l'auteur donne à celle-là son originalité et en fait une œuvre unique.

de voir que, de la guerre de 1914 à celle du Vietnam, chaque année qui couvre l'intervalle avait reçu sa part. Pourtant, n'était-ce pas ainsi que le temps déroulé pouvait se mesurer?"

Pour son dernier film, encore au stade du montage, il ne sait pas encore s'il va le terminer: "Il me semble que tout ce que j'avais à y apprendre a été appris". Ne reste-t-il pas à le communiquer?

Mais il demeure toujours emballé par le cinéma. Ce qui ne vaut pas pour la sérigraphie. Une série de planches devrait être en vente durant l'hiver à la Galerie Godard-Lefort. Elle a été conçue pour que le dialogue avec le spectateur se réalise lorsque ce dernier tourne les pages en feuilletant l'album. Il pourra voir une évolution qui tend vers un rapport de plus en plus direct des masses mises en relation.

Chaque sérigraphie, prise individuellement, vaut surtout par ses qualités plastiques obtenues par les masses de couleurs appliquées également sur toute la surface. Mais Gagnon ne reviendra plus à cette technique: "C'est un médium trop "froid". Le rapport avec le spectateur ne s'établit qu'à partir des seules

qualités plastiques. C'est beau, mais il manque quelque chose". Cependant, ses sérigraphies relèvent d'un univers différent de celui qu'on retrouve dans ses tableaux.

Cet univers de contemplation, de dialogue physique et sensuel, que le spectateur établit avec le tableau, et en son intérieur, on pourra être tenté de le situer, de l'intégrer à l'histoire de l'art.

Gagnon dira lui-même de sa peinture qu'elle est "surréaliste". Mais des peintres surréalistes, il n'aimera que Magritte. Cette affirmation est cependant normale, car le surréalisme y prend le sens "d'accession à une réalité autre". La conception est très près de celles qu'avaient l'Action Painting ou l'Automatisme, mais nettement différente de celle qui expliquait l'art de Tanguy ou de Dali, où le tableau est la réalisation d'une réflexion ou d'une image qui lui est antérieure.

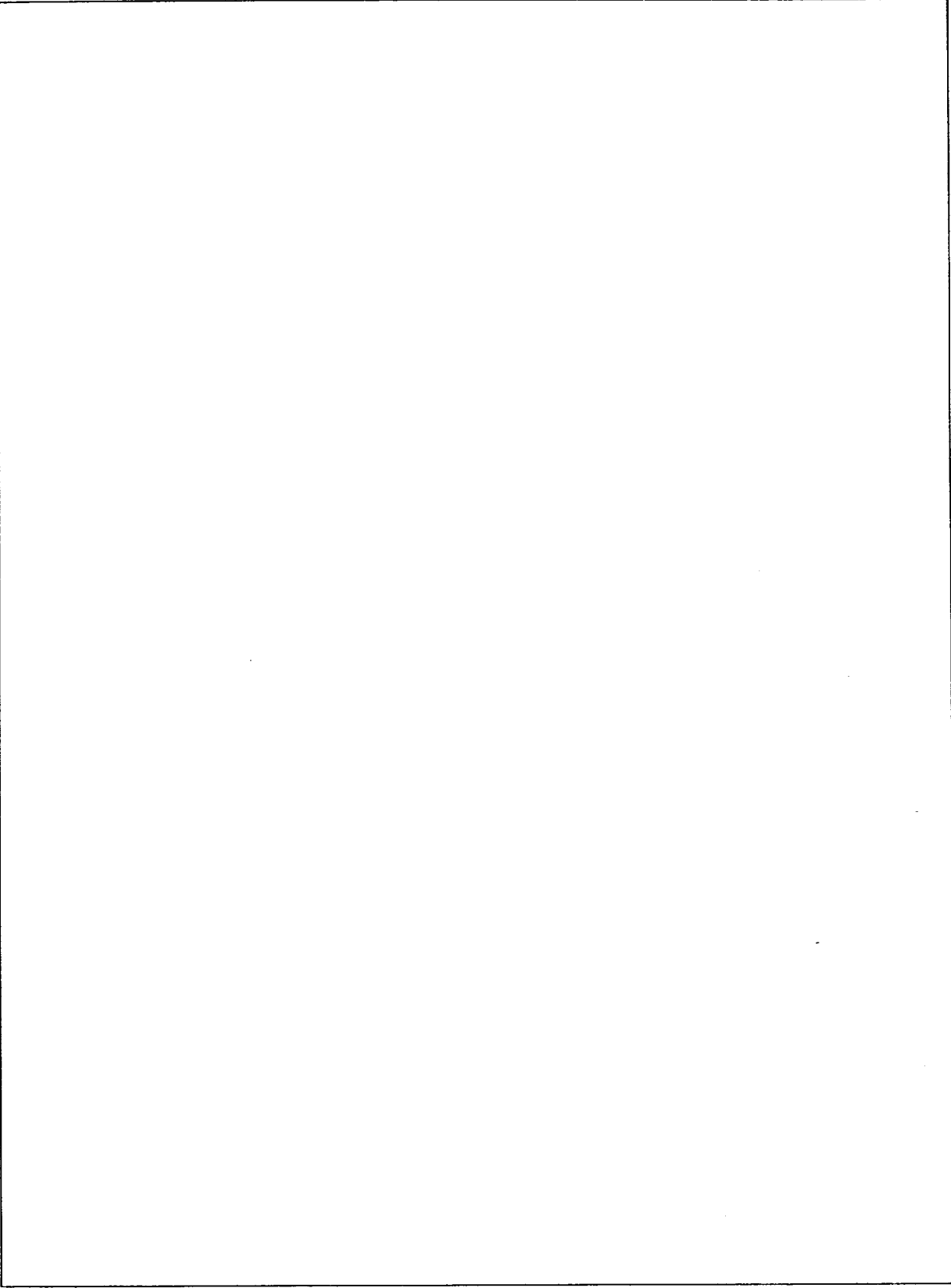
Chez Gagnon, le tableau pourra être la consécration d'un moment donné (des toiles de la production de 1964 s'intituleront "The third day", "6 août p.m. II"). Mais cet instant, mis en forme, deviendra pour le peintre et le spectateur l'occasion d'un départ vers de nouvelles réalités, vers de nouveaux départs.

Les dernières œuvres surtout justifient cette affirmation. Au plan formel, elles sembleront cependant se rapprocher du "Plasticisme" montréalais. Pourtant, elles diffèrent en plusieurs points de cette peinture.

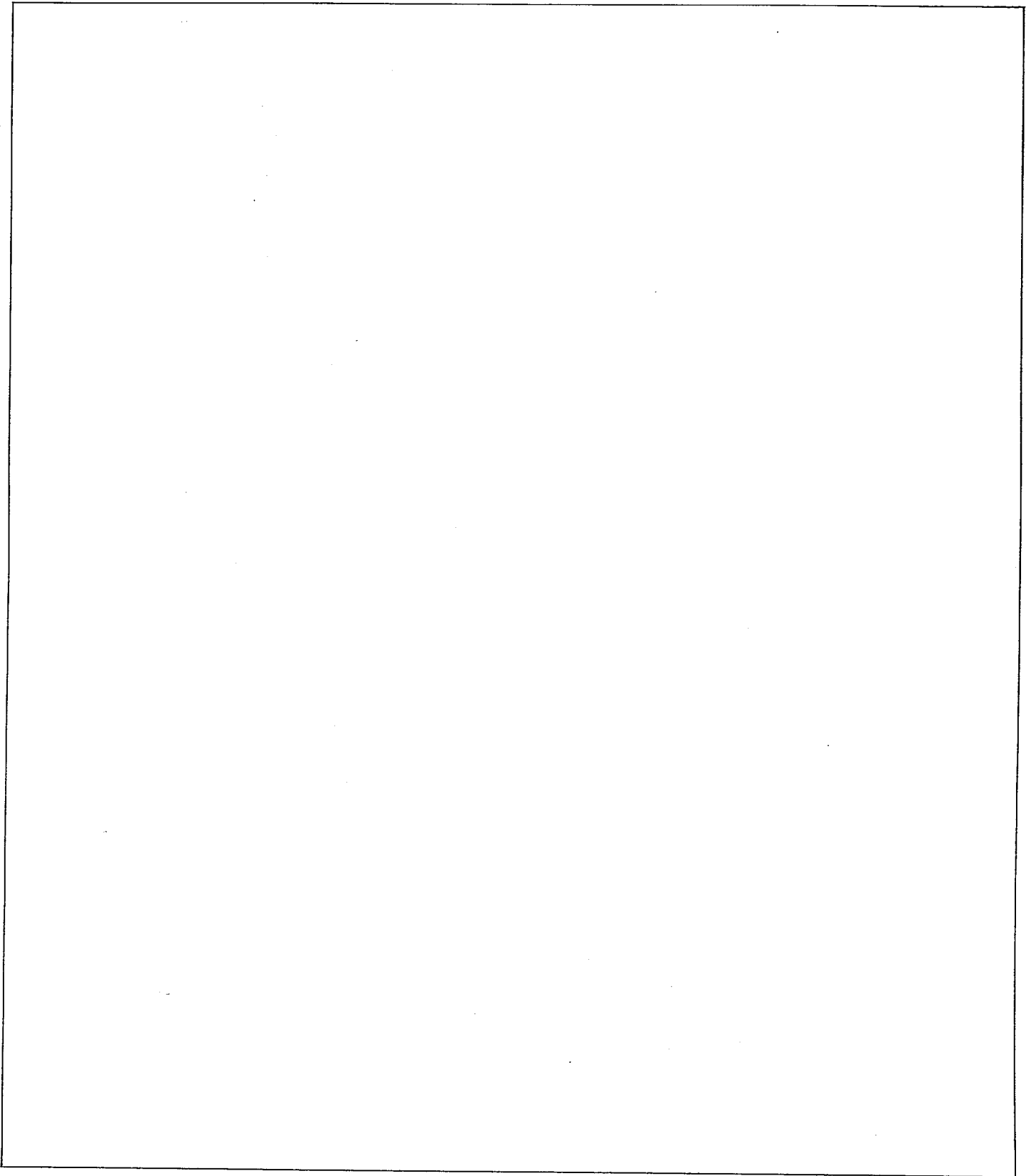
Le jeu du fond et de la forme non définis entre eux, qui se crée par la bande noire qui cerne le tableau, rappelle cette même double relation caractéristique des toiles de Molinari: mais le choix des couleurs fait ces deux peintures totalement indépendantes. Gagnon travaille essentiellement à base de noir et de blanc, alors que Molinari expérimente d'abord les possibilités du coloris.

Cette réduction au maximum des possibilités de la gamme des couleurs le rapprochera de Gaucher, avec ses dernières toiles monochromes et identiques de fond avec les minces bandes-signes blanches. Mais dans ces toiles, comme dans celles de Molinari, le regard du spectateur joue dans un espace qui se situe au devant de la toile. Chez Gagnon, au contraire, l'espace est à l'intérieur, ou derrière la toile.

Cette peinture pourra ainsi paraître traditionnelle. Mais elle est avant tout une symbolisation du monde, qui nous permet de plonger à l'intérieur de la réalité et d'y vivre.

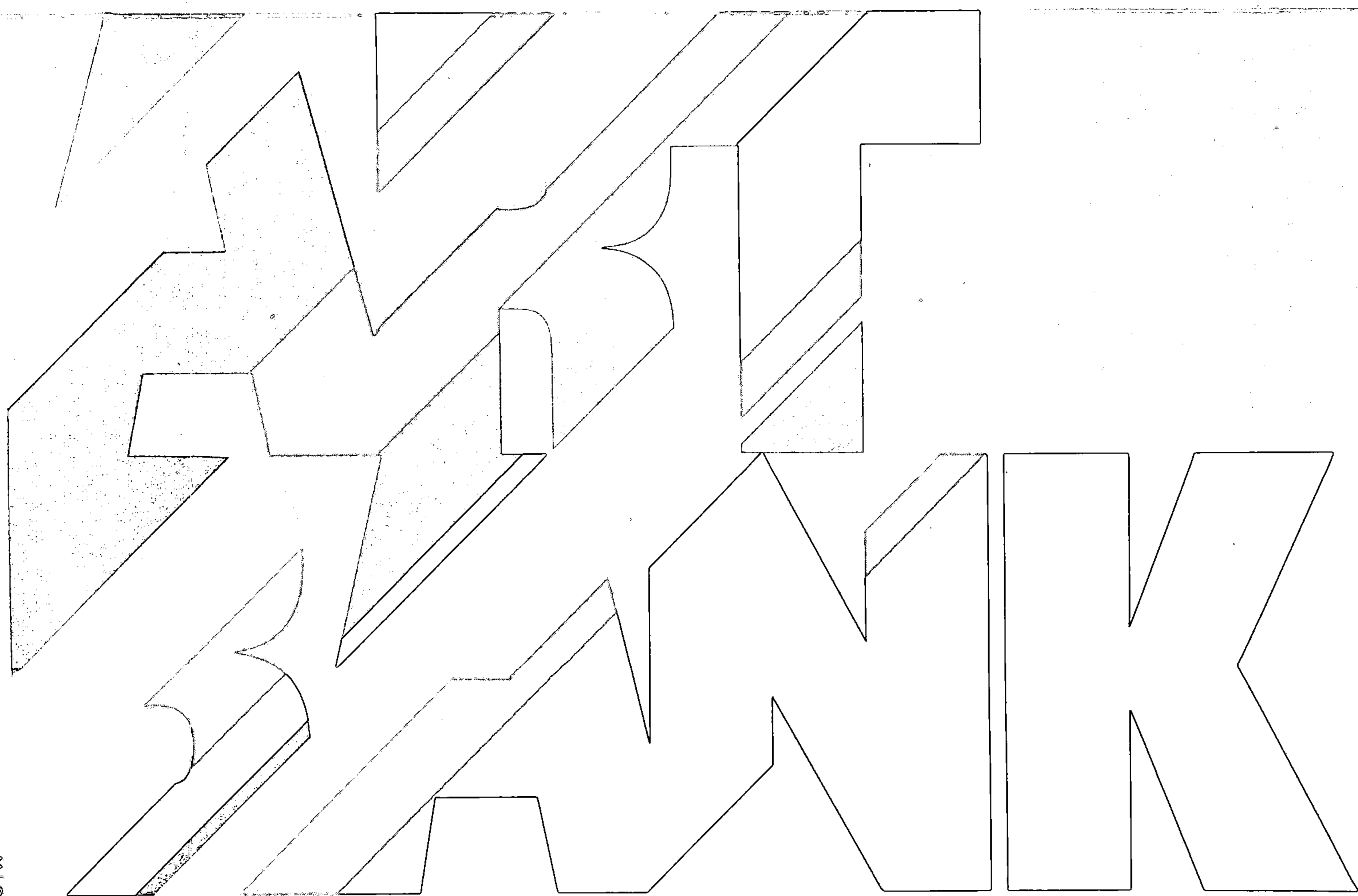


■ Screenspace #2 / Espace / écran #2



■ Seasons No.2

# The Canada Council Art Bank



51A

Over a five year period which began in 1972, the Federal Government has allocated \$5 million to the Canada Council to build up a collection of contemporary Canadian art.

The purpose of the Art Bank is to assist Canadian artists by purchasing their works and to give Canadians an opportunity to enjoy contemporary Canadian art, through the rental of these works to Federal Government departments and agencies in Canada and abroad. The Council hopes that the Art Bank will encourage private collecting and serve as an example that corporations will wish to emulate.

The Council is responsible for the purchase, distribution and administration of the collection, which presently comprises over 5,000 works in all visual arts media, including 700 paintings and 200 sculptures and hangings. Approximately two thirds of the works are graphics (prints, drawings, and watercolours). At present, the Bank has acquired the works of more than 600 Canadian artists; both well established artists and those in the earlier stages of their careers are represented in the collection, which attempts to present a cross-section of current activity in Canadian art.

Selection of works for acquisition by the Bank is made by constantly changing juries appointed on an "ad hoc" basis and composed of artists, curators, private collectors, and other knowledgeable individuals. Works may be purchased directly from artists, through commercial galleries or from exhibitions in public art galleries.

#### Artists

Works purchased for the collection must be by professional Canadian artists, that is, by individuals who are earning their livelihood in the visual arts. Artists may submit up to 20 slides or photographs of their work for consideration by a selection committee which meets monthly in Ottawa; slides and photos are returned to the artists after the meeting. Correspondence with the Art Bank should be sent to the Council's postal address, while unframed graphic works (prints, drawings, and watercolours) may be shipped directly to the Art Bank warehouse at 2279 Gladwin Crescent, Ottawa, Ontario for presentation to the Advisory Selection Committee. A list including the title, medium, dimensions and price of each work, as well as biographical information, should accompany all submissions to the committee. No application form is necessary.

Submission of slides or works may result in one of four decisions by the committee: that work be purchased or not recommended, that a studio or gallery visit be made by a selection committee or that work selected from the slides be sent to the warehouse for further consideration.

#### Rental

Works of art may be rented by Federal Government departments and agencies to enhance public areas, conference rooms and the offices of individuals who have frequent contact with the public.

Whenever possible, a Liaison Officer from the Art Bank visits the department and consults with a designated individual to assess departmental requirements. Representatives from the department are subsequently invited to view and select works at the Art Bank, which is located in Ottawa. Each work is documented with 35mm slides, descriptive information and a biography of the artist.

The yearly rental fee is 12 percent of the total cost of the work; this fee includes costs of framing, transportation in Canada, insurance, installation and maintenance. Works are rented for a minimum period of one year, and the rental contract may be renewed for up to three years. Longer terms for rentals may be negotiated on an individual basis.

Annual rental fees range from an average of \$15.00 a year for graphics to anywhere from \$50 to \$1,000 for paintings and sculptures. Fees must be paid out of the Furniture and Furnishings budget of the department as directed by the Treasury Board (Treasury Board Directive No. 712247, May 23, 1972). Responsibility for installation, insurance and maintenance is assumed by the Art Bank.

#### Galleries

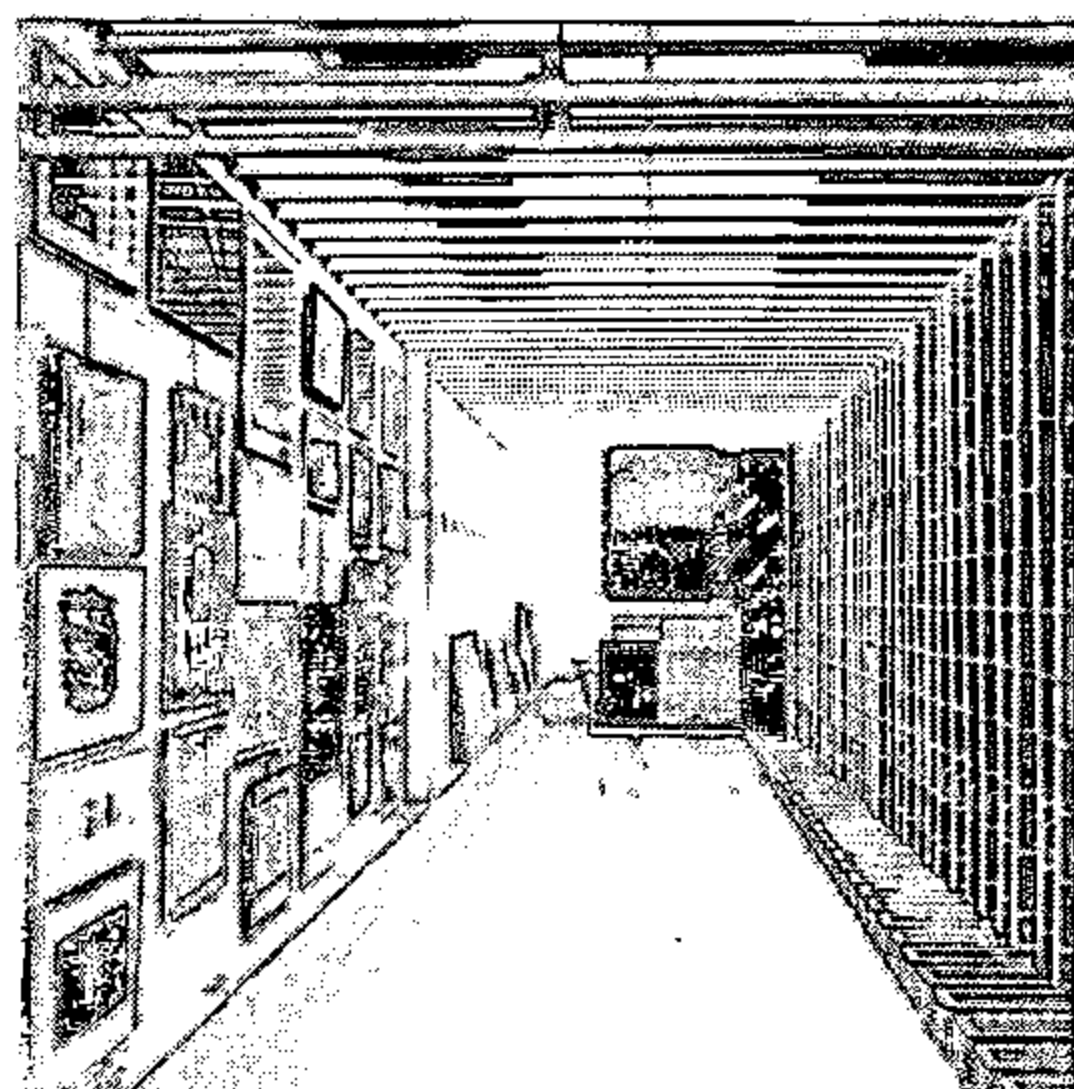
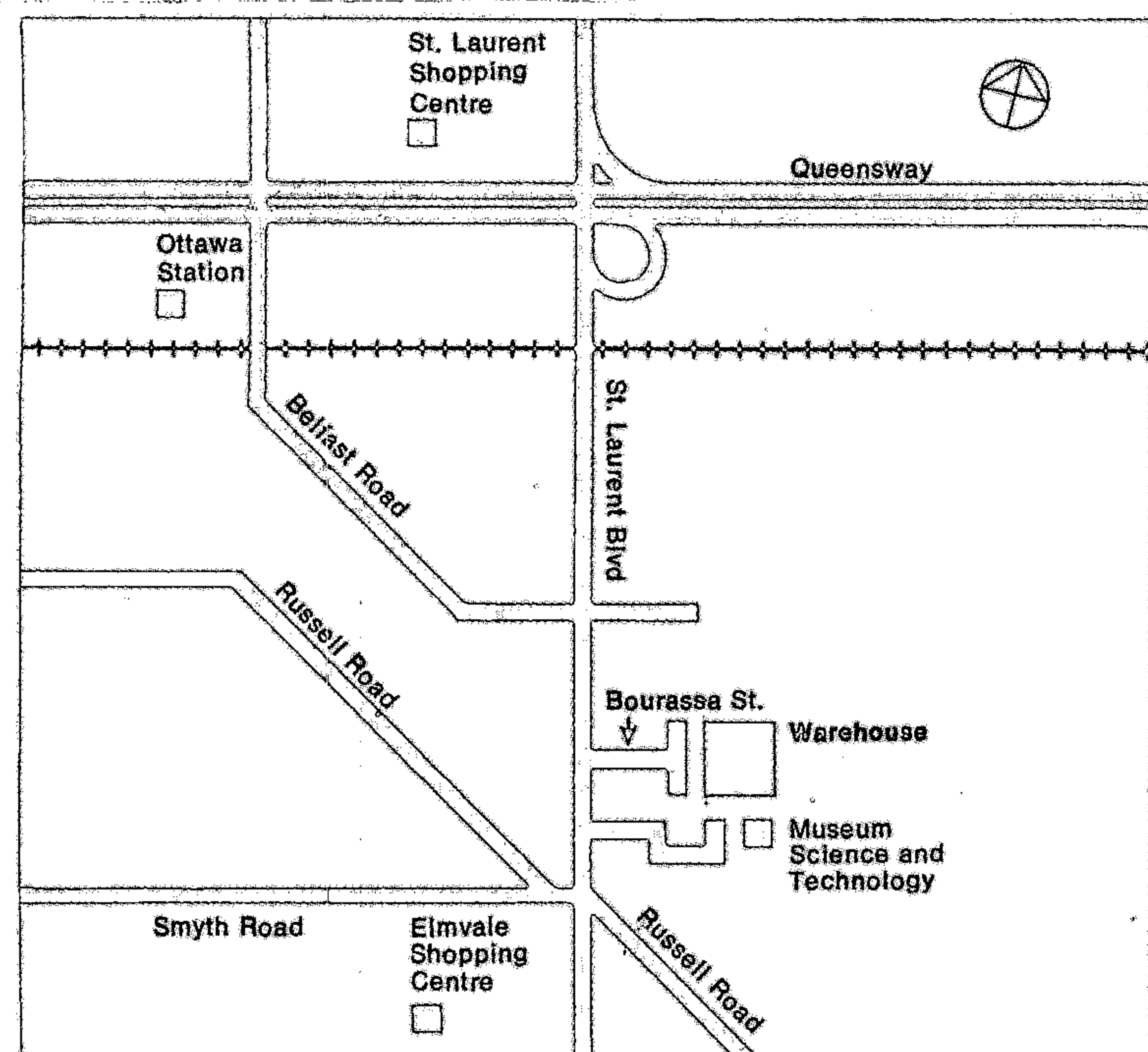
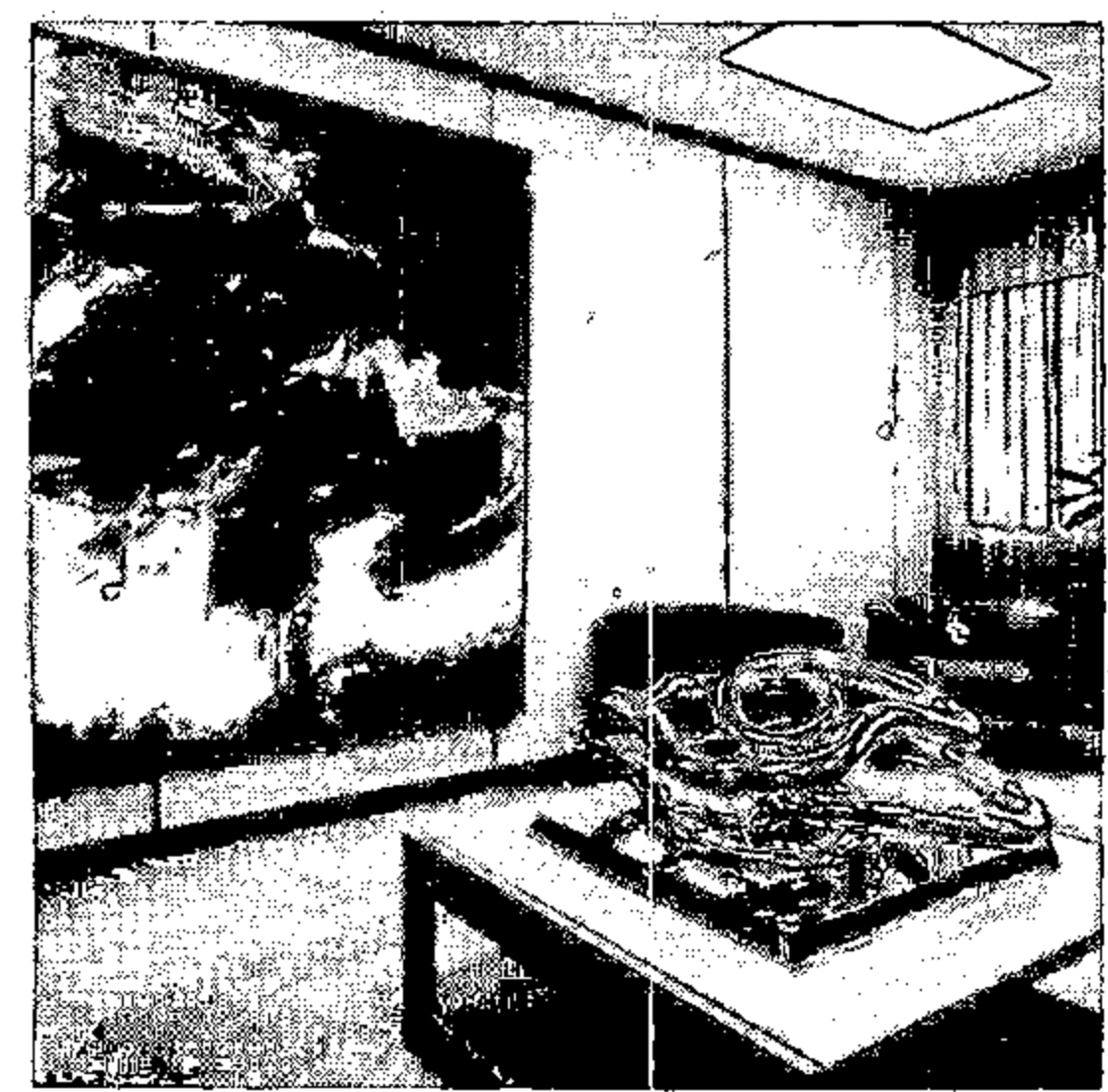
The Art Bank would appreciate receiving up-to-date information on exhibitions, as well as price lists, visual documentation and other relevant material.

#### Enquiries

All enquiries should be addressed to:

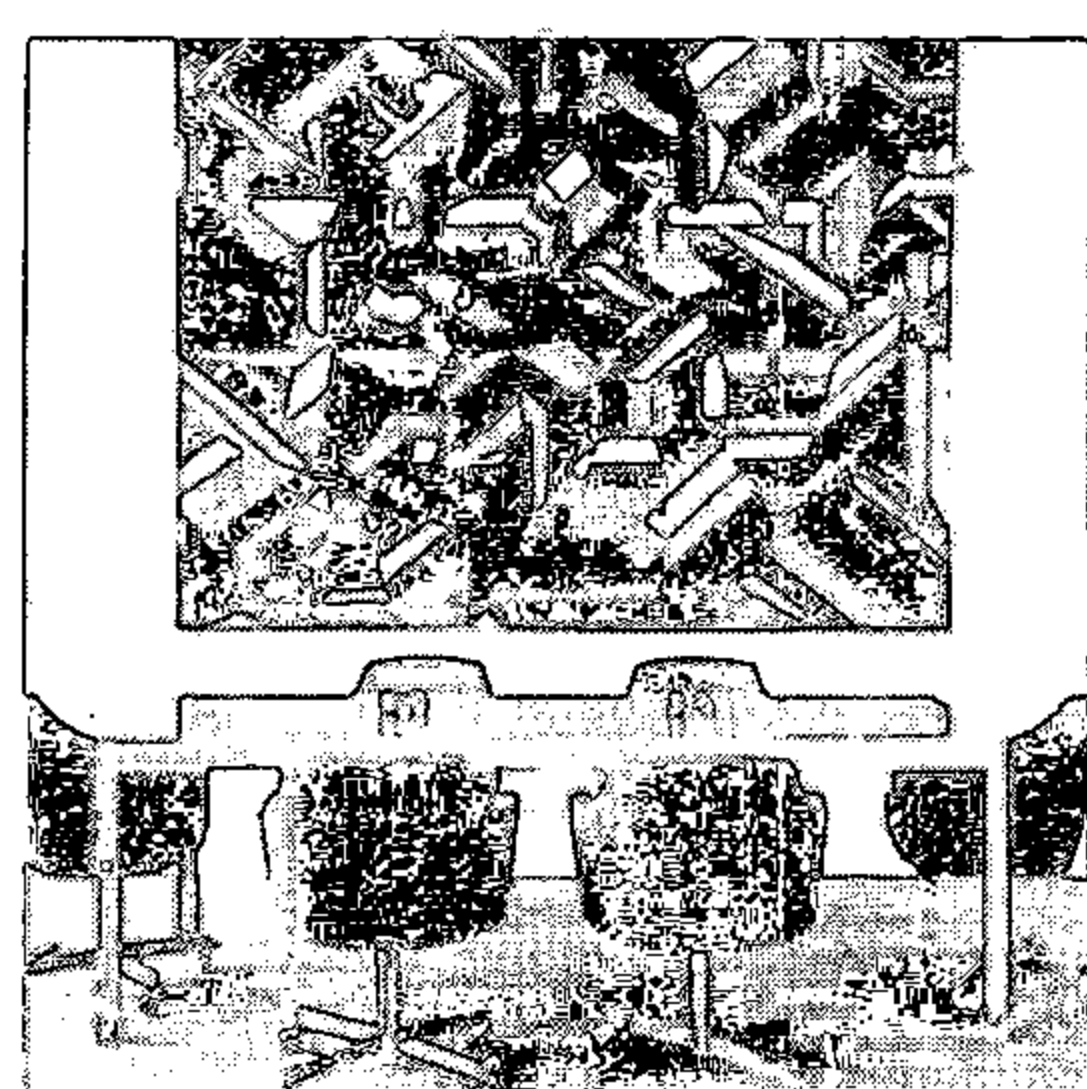
Art Bank  
The Canada Council  
P.O. Box 1047  
Ottawa, Ontario  
K1P 5V8

(613) 237-3400



Photos: Barbara Otte

Art Bank Warehouse  
2279 Gladwin Crescent, Ottawa





# BANQUE D'ŒUVRES D'ART

En 1972, le Gouvernement fédéral décidait de mettre à la disposition du Conseil des Arts, sur une période de cinq ans, une somme de cinq millions de dollars pour constituer une collection d'œuvres canadiennes d'artistes contemporains.

La Banque d'œuvres d'art a reçu pour mission d'encourager les artistes canadiens en achetant de leurs œuvres et en louant ces œuvres aux ministères et organismes du Gouvernement fédéral au Canada et à l'étranger, afin que les Canadiens aient l'occasion de les admirer. Le Conseil espère que la Banque d'œuvres d'art stimulera la constitution de collections particulières et donnera un exemple que les grandes sociétés voudront suivre.

Le Conseil est chargé d'acheter et de distribuer les œuvres et d'administrer la collection. Celle-ci se compose à l'heure actuelle de 5.000 œuvres représentant tous les arts plastiques, y compris 700 peintures et 200 sculptures et tapisseries. Environ les deux tiers de la collection sont des œuvres graphiques (gravures, fusains et aquarelles). La Banque possède actuellement les œuvres de plus de 600 artistes canadiens parmi lesquels on retrouve aussi bien des artistes dont la réputation est faite que des artistes qui débutent dans leur carrière, selon une distribution aussi représentative que possible de la production artistique canadienne contemporaine.

La sélection des œuvres dont la Banque fait l'acquisition est confiée à des jurys constamment renouvelés, nommés au fur et à mesure des besoins. Ces jurys comprennent des artistes, des conservateurs, des collectionneurs particuliers et divers autres connaisseurs. L'achat des œuvres se fait soit chez l'artiste lui-même, soit par l'intermédiaire de galeries commerciales ou à l'occasion d'expositions dans des musées d'arts.

#### Artistes

Ne sont admissibles à la collection que les œuvres d'artistes canadiens de profession, c'est-à-dire de personnes qui vivent de leur travail artistique. L'artiste peut présenter jusqu'à vingt diapositives ou photographies de ses travaux à l'examen d'un comité de sélection qui se réunit une fois par mois à Ottawa: diapositives et photos sont renvoyées à l'artiste après la réunion. Toute correspondance avec la Banque d'œuvres d'art doit être envoyée à l'adresse postale du Conseil, mais on peut expédier directement les œuvres graphiques non encadrées (gravures, dessins et aquarelles) à l'entrepôt de la Banque d'œuvres d'art au 2279, Gladwin Crescent, Ottawa (Ontario) où le comité consultatif de sélection en fera l'examen. Il faut joindre à tout envoi une liste complète indiquant, pour chaque œuvre, le titre, les matériaux ou techniques employés, les dimensions et le prix. Une notice biographique doit également accompagner l'envoi. Il n'y a aucune formule à remplir.

L'examen des diapositives ou des œuvres elles-mêmes conduit le Comité à l'une des décisions suivantes: acheter ou écarter, charger un comité de sélection de faire une visite d'atelier ou de galerie, ou demander qu'une œuvre choisie à partir d'une diapositive soit expédiée à l'entrepôt pour y faire l'objet d'un examen.

#### Location

Les œuvres d'art sont mises à la disposition des ministères et organismes du Gouvernement fédéral qui peuvent les louer pour les exposer dans des lieux publics, des salles de conférence et les bureaux de fonctionnaires qui traitent fréquemment avec le public.

Un agent de liaison de la Banque d'œuvres d'art s'entend avec un représentant du Ministère pour déterminer ses besoins. Le Ministère charge ensuite une délégation de rendre visite à la Banque d'œuvres d'art, à Ottawa, pour y faire son choix. Chaque œuvre est accompagnée de diapositives 35 mm, d'une notice descriptive et d'une biographie de l'artiste.

Le loyer annuel s'élève à 12 p. 100 du coût total de l'œuvre; ce montant comprend les frais d'encadrement, de transport au Canada, d'assurance, d'installation et d'entretien. Les œuvres sont louées pour un minimum d'une année avec possibilité de renouvellement jusqu'à trois ans. Il est possible dans certains cas de négocier une location à plus long terme.

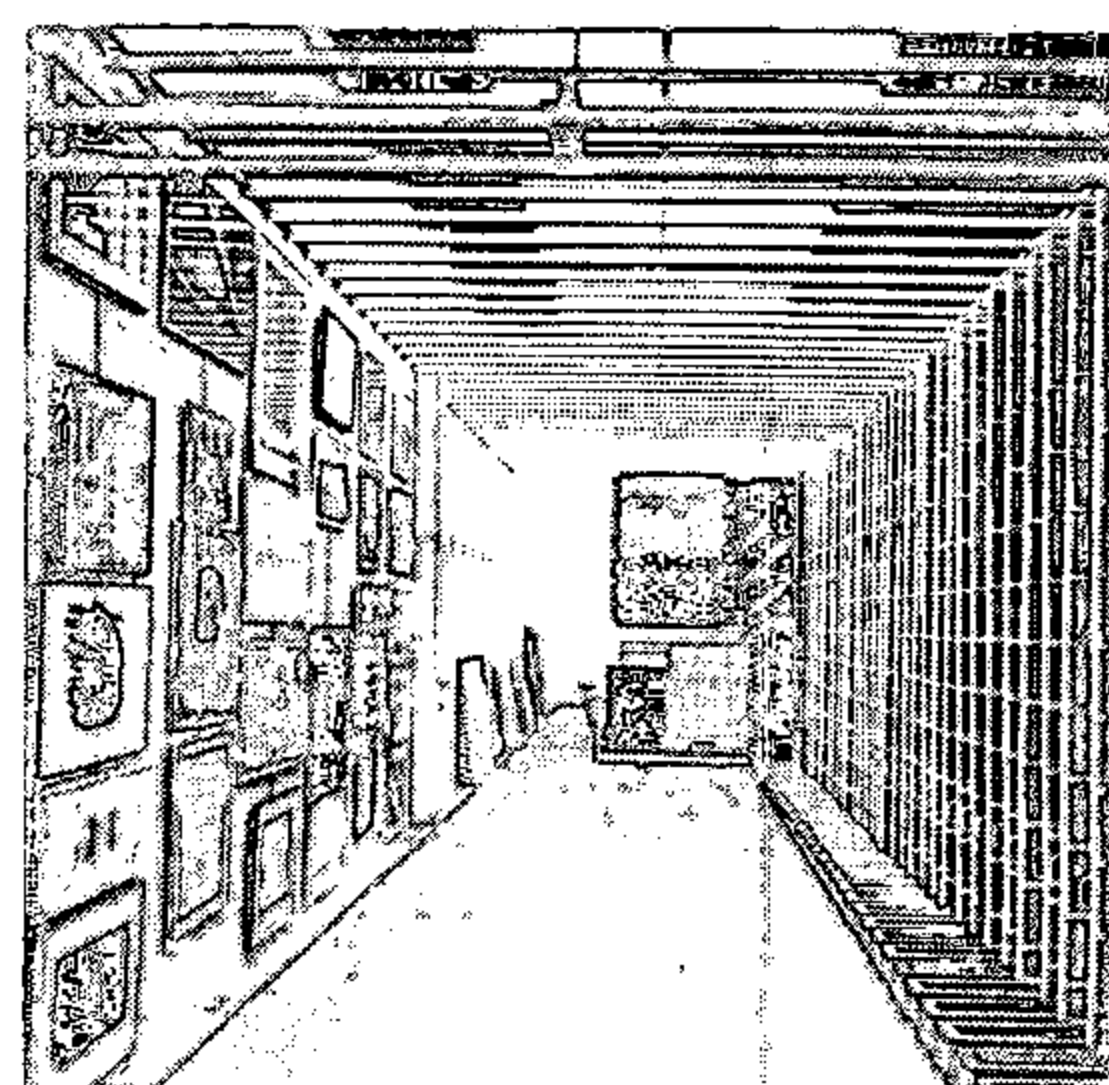
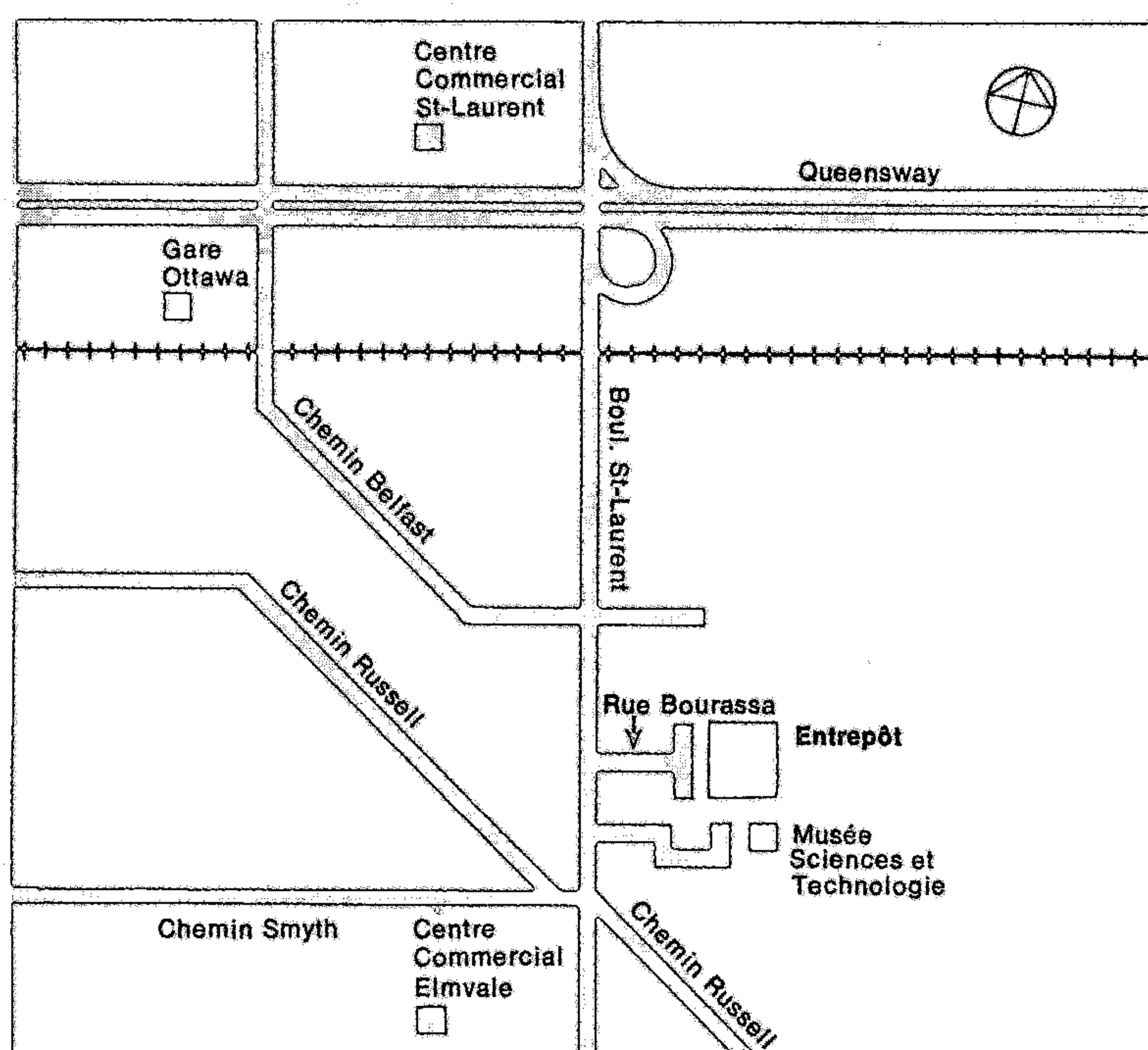
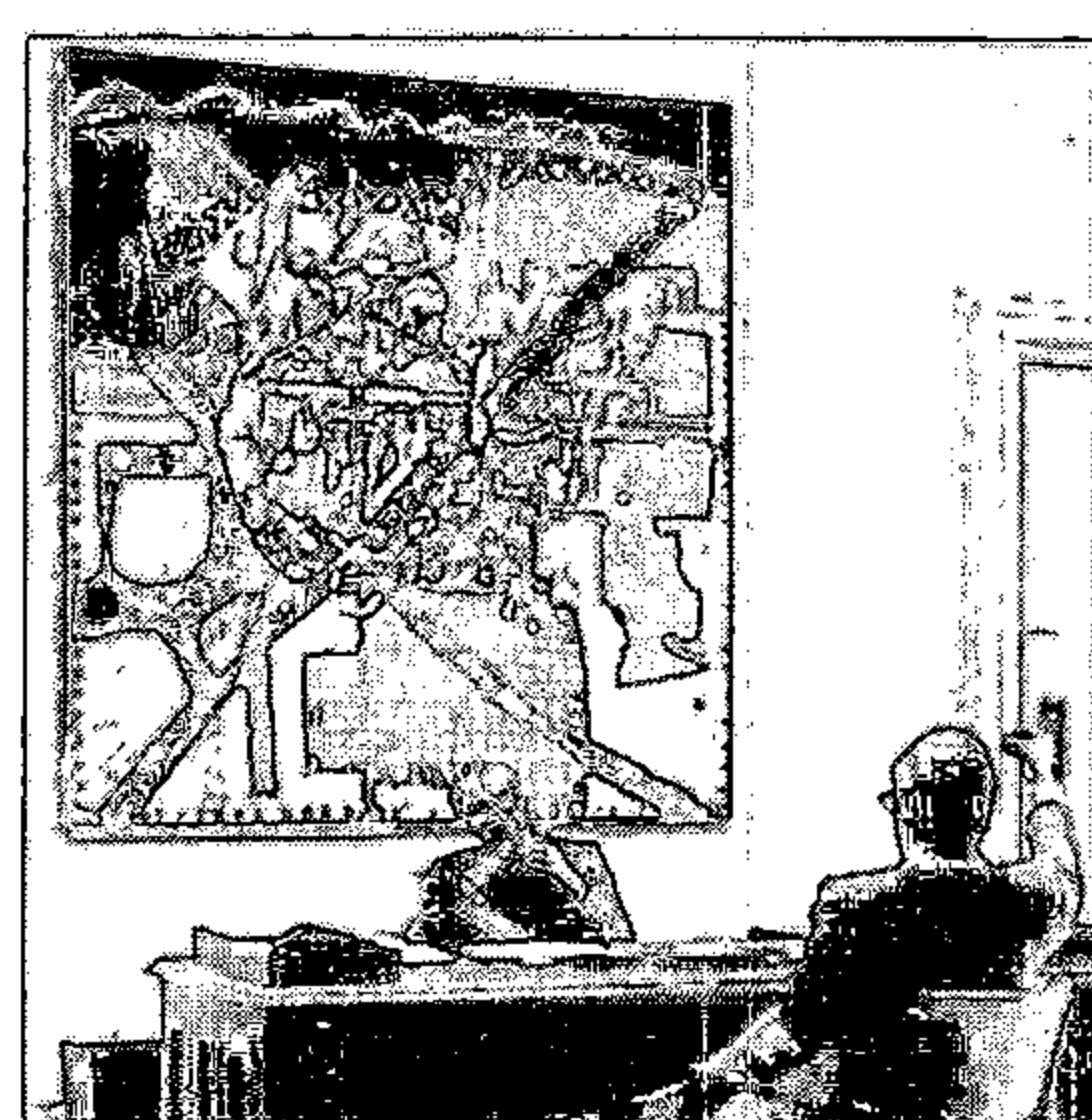
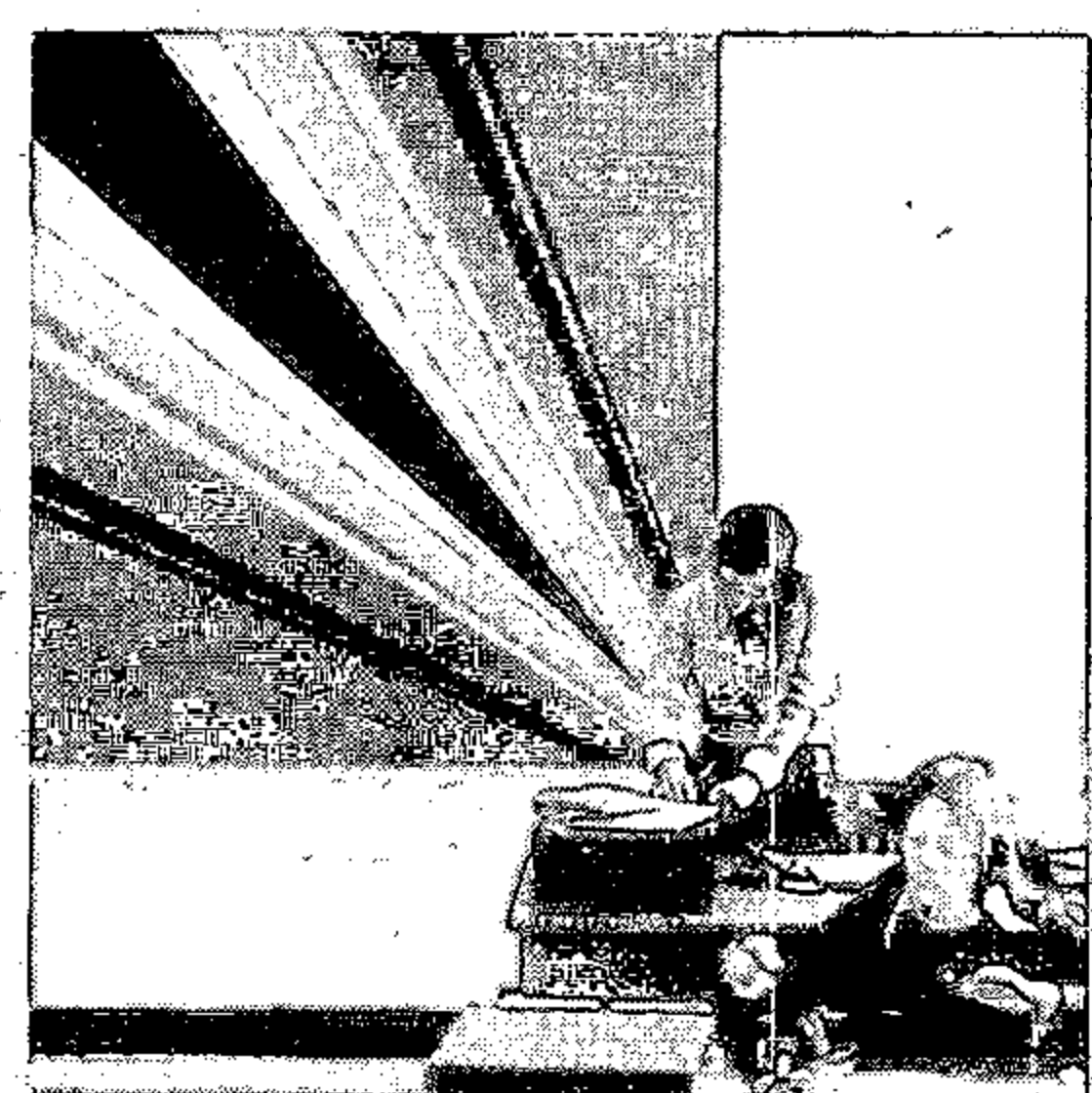
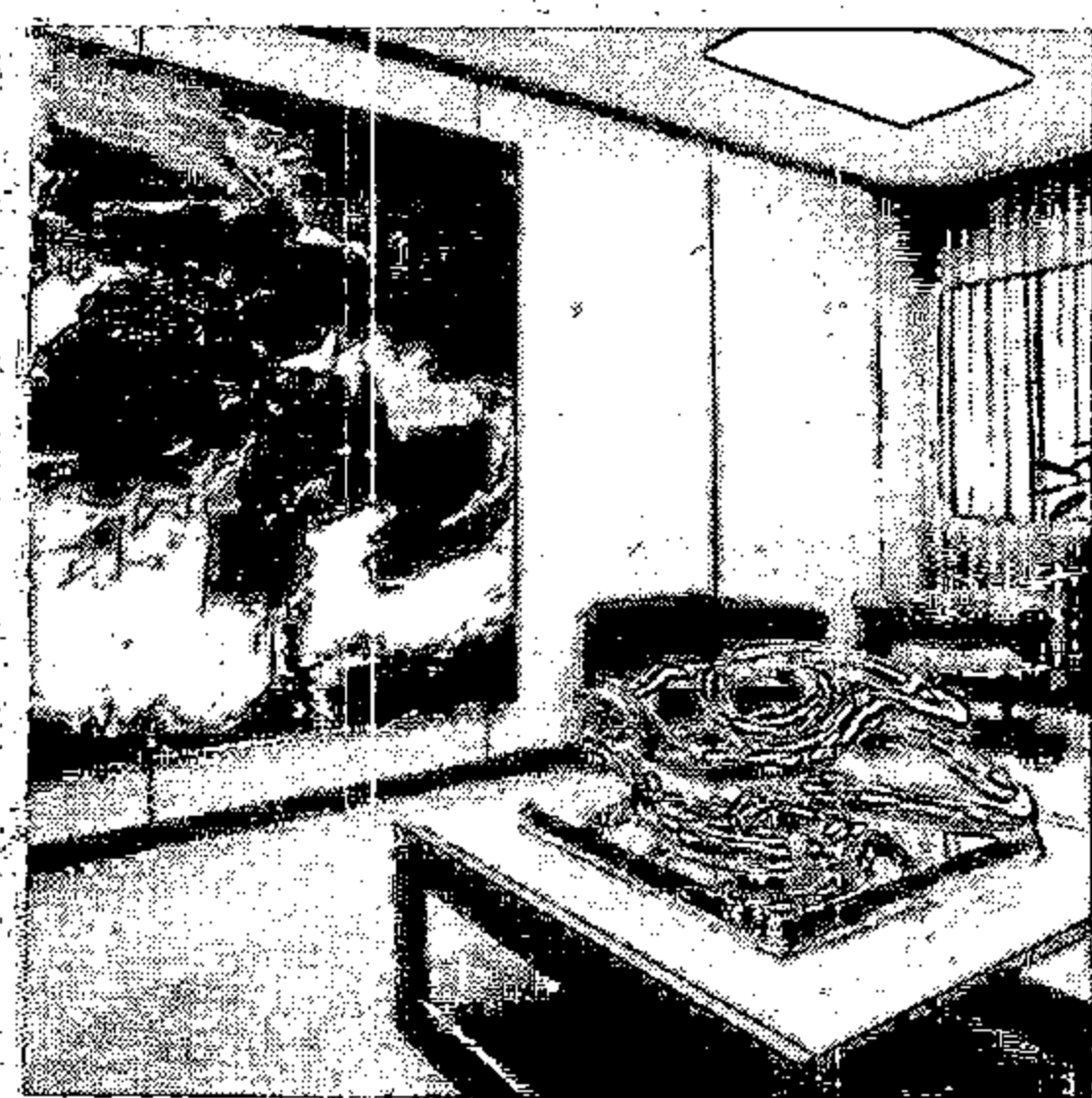
Le loyer peut être de l'ordre de \$15 par an pour les œuvres graphiques et varier de \$50 à \$1.000 pour des peintures ou sculptures. Le loyer doit être déduit du poste Meubles et fournitures au budget du Ministère, conformément aux instructions du Conseil du Trésor (directive CT n° 712247, 23 mai 1972). La Banque d'œuvres d'art se charge directement de l'installation, de l'assurance et de l'entretien.

La Banque d'œuvres d'art recevra avec plaisir les avis d'expositions prochaines ou en cours, les listes de prix, prospectus et autres documents utiles qu'on voudra bien lui envoyer.

#### Renseignements

Banque d'œuvres d'art  
Conseil des Arts du Canada  
C.P. 1047  
Ottawa, Ontario  
K1P 5V8

(613) 237-3400



Photos: Eberhard Otto

Entrepôt de la Banque d'œuvres d'art  
2279, Gladwin Crescent, Ottawa

