

## Two perspectives

# Yves Trudeau, "Parvis et portails" / David Luksha, "Inside The Promised Land"

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# TWO PERSPECTIVES:

Yves Trudeau: "Parvis et portails"

David Luksha: "Inside The Promised Land"

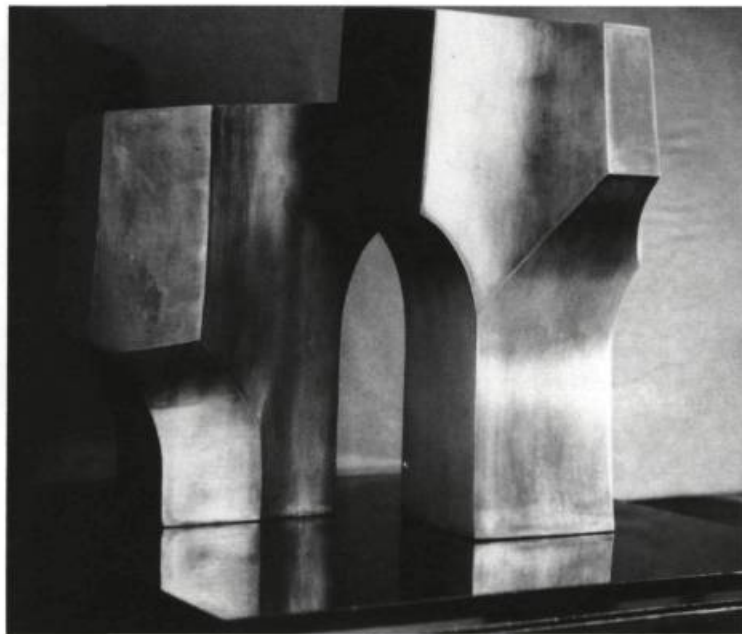
"For although creative men usually live unknown to one another, without influence on one another, a common force seems to drive all those men who ever compensate for a cultural canon at a given time or change a new one. They are all moved in the same direction, though they follow an unknown impulse in themselves rather than any new road charted in advance. This phenomenon is called simply *Zeitgeist*, and no further attempt is made to account for it". Erich Neumann<sup>1</sup>

Presented simultaneously in the two separate exhibition spaces at Galerie Daniel in Montreal during October, the works of Montreal sculptor Yves Trudeau and Toronto artist David Luksha initially appear to express very different concerns, both in terms of form as well as content. It becomes evident upon closer consideration of their works, however, that while the language differs, the issues addressed are remarkably similar.

The painted constructions proposed in Luksha's *Inside the Promised Land* are awesome, massive both physically as well as psychologically. In them, Luksha combines formal academic painting technique with an acute sensitivity to composition and material. Aching barren, the interior architectural landscapes created by Luksha are only occasionally inhabited by one or two anonymous figures. All works are enveloped by a feeling of ritual, of ceremony, of importance. The colours are sombre (deep blues, crimson, ochres, charcoal) and the mood is solemn, mysterious.

The exhibition, *Indide the Promised Land*, consists of twelve works. Of these, five in mixed media on paper are mounted on stretched canvas, evoking a sense of solidity uncharacteristic of works on paper. The seven

painted constructions are large, ranging in size from 24 x 16 x 96" to 96 x 103". Found objects such as discarded antique furniture parts, wooden doors, and even pieces of actual tree trunks are simply added on, ingeniously incorporated with cement, glue, wax, paint. The



Yves Trudeau, *Parvis et portail #3*, 1988. Bronze. 8 1/2"

resulting irregular shapes and textures, enhanced with generous applications of heavy oil paint, create a surface rich both visually as well as spacially.

Of particular interest is *From Below the Threshold*. The largest piece in the exhibition (exceeding eight feet in length) and perhaps the most complex, this work most accurately represents the recent work of Luksha. The human figure is present, yet its importance has greatly diminished since the exhibition of Luksha's works a year ago at the Art Gallery of Hamilton. Constructed in three sections, *From below the Threshold* draws the viewer into its core through a staired entranceway which hangs below the bottom center of the work. The stair-

case image is then transferred into the painting itself, where it curves gently upward. As a result of the much lighter cream colour of this central panel, an internal luminosity emanates. In the second panel, to the right, a painted image of a narrow doorway leads to a corridor. Receding doors create a mirror effect, luring the viewer into some

unknown, obscure realm beyond. The third panel, to the left of the center, remains in the foreground spacially and is unique in that it contains the only reference to the human figure. Two heads, articulately painted, stare pleadingly, at once tormented and peaceful. The gaze of one is fixed upward, head thrown back, while the other glances downward toward the first. The figures, assumedly those of children of some indeterminate age, exude a vulnerability which contrasts strongly with (and is enhanced by) the sense of infinity and weight of the surrounding space.

In the exhibition *Parvis et portails* by Yves Trudeau an air of calm, controlled strength prevails. Reference to such paramount structures as the sequential

variations of Stonehenge and Medieval gothic architecture are clearly evident. Of his work, Trudeau explains: "The works presented in *Parvis et Portails* draw their inspiration from Gothic architecture, and more particularly the spaces around buildings, their faces, as well as their entranceways: doors, posters, portals". While Trudeau's works of the 1960's, the "Fer et bois" series foreshadowed this preoccupation with the arch, it was discarded during the more recent series "Murs fermés et ouverts" and only now, two decades later, is fully developed.

The exhibition consists of some twenty works: twelve sequential bronze sculptures, three free-standing pieces in welded steel and

seven works on paper. The new bronzes, averaging approximately 12" in height, each consist of two separate pieces which, when placed together, form an arch. They were created to be manipulated by the viewer. The elegant polished surface of these works contrast dramatically with the angular geometric rectangles of the black, highly polished plexiglass bases. In some, deeply coloured patinas cover the entire smooth metal piece, whereas in others a richly textured surface contrasts with sharp planes of polished bronze. The dense metal and the severely geometric lines of the outer edges provide a foil for the delicate curves of the interior arches themselves. Defined only by the negative space between two adjacent sections, the arches are open, fragile, elegant.

Three freestanding relief works in welded steel, while respecting the theme *Parvis et portails*, diverge somewhat in style. In the largest, measuring 20 x 16 x 5", a gothic arch is repeated rhythmically inside a cathedral like structure. In another, a mood of fragility is created by the irregular shape of the exterior edges. This piece, the smallest of the three, seems exposed, unprotected, vulnerable. In a highly contrasting third piece, a massive vault-like door remains closed, as if just slammed shut for the last time, leaving the viewer with a sense of finality, of permanence, of time eternal. The cut, raw edges of the heavy steel joined by solder recall the crude technique normally associated with industry. A striking paradox is thus created by the juxtaposition of medium and message!

Accompanying the sculptures is a series of works on paper, consisting of four works in lead pencil and three pastel and charcoal works on arches paper 40 x 26". Meticulously executed, the drawings capture and develop the formal aesthetic proposed in the free-standing works. Gothic arches, soaring spires and intricate internal spaces in each piece create a visual environment which mirrors the three-dimensionality of the sculptures. The merge of these two disciplines (sculpture and drawing) and the inherent duality (bronze and charcoal, weight and weightlessness, dark and light) seems to unify the exhibition. It emphasizes the exact qualities inherent in the *Parvis et portails* theme and subject. Is not a portal itself, particularly an arched portal, the physical embodiment of the concept of duality?

The extreme contradictions in the work of the two artists described above are numerous. Luksha is young, an artist from Toronto, presenting his first solo exhibition in a Montreal gallery. Trudeau, contrastingly, represents one of the most prominent forces in Quebec sculpture, celebrating this year his anniversary of thirty years of work and exhibitions. Luksha's large scale, passionate, expressive works, constructed using objects discarded by others, provide a direct antithesis to



David Luksha, *Time and Place*, 1988. Mixed media construction. 92" x 42". Photo: Jeremy Jones. Photo courtesy of Galerie Daniel

the elegant controlled, formal works in cast bronze proposed by Trudeau. Here, where the ponderous outcry of youth parallels the quiet understatement of experience, one perceives twenty years. Twenty years of searching; twenty years which separate yet unite. For despite the apparent dissimilarities in their work, Luksha and Trudeau share a great deal. Previously unfamiliar with the work of the other, both artists speak of transition; from exterior to interior, from below to above, from now to then. Portal and passageway are both theme as well as symbol of transition and of the steps necessary to achieve it. Somehow this

congruence in the worlds and insights of Luksha and Trudeau reassures. Both artists, despite their language and vantage point, are concerned with thresholds, with beginnings and endings, where in order for one to gain, one must experience (and accept) loss. Passage, transition, evolution. Transcendence. The juxtaposition of such commonalities in the works of these two artists both reveals and affirms a *Zeitgeist* for which no account has yet been made.

1. Erich Neumann. *Art and the Creative Unconscious*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J. 1959. p.99