

Noces de Cana : Yves Blais and Violette Michaud

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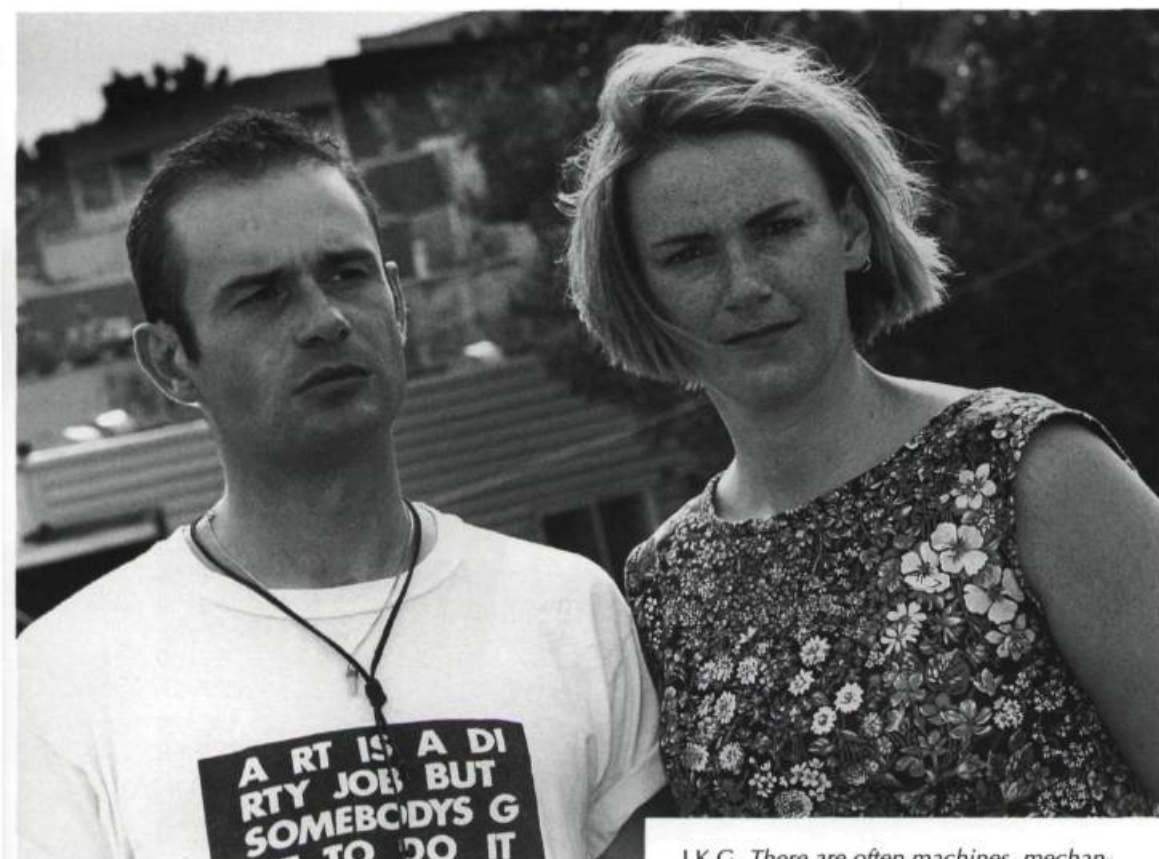
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Violette Michaud and
Yves Blais, *Noces de
Cana*. Photo: Roland
Doya.

Noces de Cana

**Yves Blais
Violette Michaud**

Interview by
John K. Grande

J.K.G. There are often machines, mechanical gadgets in your work. In your last exhibition *La Loge* at CIRCA you had that film loop—an inversed image of yourself in a sort of mirror or screen, taped phone sex messages in three urns behind it, a sewing machine and a manikin dressed in leather being mechanically whipped. Quite a scenario!

Y.B. We like to express technology without expressing it with the technology itself. It's just like an image of the technology. Like in *La Loge* we wanted to give it a virtual reality look with that character in leather mirrored by the inverted image in front of the sewing machine. Someone who is in front of the mirror that is not a mirror. An omnipresent image.

Like *Big Brother* in 1984?

Y.B. Yes, but you could give it many dimensions, though the man looks like a transvestite removing his false eyelash, or a psychiatrist.

V.M. I like the image. The connection between the sewing machine that represents fashion, clothes and this beautiful person in leather.

Is it a caricature of sexual stereotypes?

Y.B. We didn't want it to look simply transvestite. That's too cliché! The movements are repeated endlessly and we don't really know why. One can also make reference to the Surrealists—to Bunuel's *Un chien Andalou* though we only realized it after. A friend from the National Film Board who helped us set up the show told us that

the mechanical rhythms of the sewing machine inspired the invention of the early film camera—the repeated mechanical rhythms are similar.

Surrealism also made reference to the machine—the mechanisms of the unconscious. Freud gave reason to things that may not have any reason... the evolution of psychology paralleled the development of industrial society and that's not just an accident. By giving a reason one creates a human problematic in a world of machines whereas machines don't have problems. They either work or they don't. Your work has been called post-visionary. How do you see it?

Y.B. We work a great deal from intuition. It's fun to recuperate objects, working and adding elements in the process. I think we have a very personal vision. We've created our own universe... very *Noces de Cana*. It deals with society's image and how we see society, its hobbies, its games, its sexuality, its nature, its organization, its hierarchy. It all has to do with the organization, the schematic. Like a private viewing, a loge in a theatre, but the main emphasis is on sexuality. One learns a lot about a society through its perverse practices.

One thinks of the films of David Cronenberg—the accent on technology and machines in his films... This new market of perversity played out in a technological scenario—it's the latest Hollywood style—our unspoken and unconscious fears made recognizable through gadgets and gizmos. But for Cronenberg technology is both the cause and the saviour.

Y.B. When we exhibited *Baby Foot* (at Entrée Libre à l'Art Contemporain, in 1990), named after a European table game, our intention was to put the spectator into a game of which he is not entirely aware of at first. The adult enters into a game—so refers to sport or hobbies, to money, hierarchy. It is also a sexual game: the men and women are placed in long rows like sports teams and each team has a goaler.

As an adult one creates conceptual defenses vis-à-vis these stereotypes. These male and female bodies look pre-formed,



like they've been manufactured in molds. You have to walk between these displays like in a department store or a labyrinth. It's like Michelangelo with a sexy techno-twist.

Y.B. The bodies are wrapped in leather and you can't see what's inside, like a sausage skin or a sarcophagus. We play with the effect of the mirror. It's the game of stereotypes like sado-maso. but we're not sado-maso. These scenarios question how we're controlled by these mechanisms of the social order.

V.M. Very sensual—a bit *brut*, but sensual.

In *L'heure du Thé* (exhibited at Dare dare gallery, in 1992) you took the same themes of sexual stereotypes—except that the absence of the body became a paraphrase for presence.

Y.B. I have noticed one thing. Wherever we exhibit our works, even if they don't entirely understand them, people are attracted.

Did you try non-gallery spaces for showings your works?

V.M. Yes. We put one piece titled *What ever happened to Coco Chanel during the War* in the window of the Boutique Scandale on Blvd. St-Laurent. It represented the body of a woman with a dog passing through it.

Y.B. Many people stopped to look at it and liked it. You have to try other venues that are less sterile than the gallery space, where people can be less self-conscious.

What was your earliest work about?

Y.B. As a student, I made a film called *The Pregnant Transvestite*, filmed at Concordia. It was done in a 20's black and white style and took 6 months to make. It was about a pregnant clown with an aureole like Fig Newton who committed suicide at the end of the film. It was presented once and people loved it. They laughed and it was in demand but I lost it on the Metro. Someone must have kept it or thrown it out... the beginning and end of my film career.

What was the original idea of *Noces de Cana*? A collective?

Y.B. The name *Noces de Cana* comes from the Bible, the weddings of Canaan. It's catchy. Violette's sister thought of the name. *Noces de Cana* was the first miracle, when Christ made water into wine. I like the images of the weddings of Canaan where Christ married many people. A social event. Violette and I wanted to work together and eventually we began making vases. They were like anatomical scenes of men with circuits imprinted on them, Greek vases, amphoras, the continent of the body, the body as a continent.

Forms that recalled ancient archetypes, still classical but with electronic age allusions. Buisson Ardent (1990) won you 1st Prize in the exhibition *Dans 10 ans l'an 2000*. Its theme is taken from the Bible as well. The passage where God appeared to the prophet Moses. The body of a sheep is Biblical too but it's hardly Holy here. The sheep has no legs, the form is ambiguous

and it hangs suspended on springs like a piece of meat. The metal structure that surrounds it constricts the viewer's perception and forms an enclosure. Could this be what's behind all this fashion and manipulation?

Y.B. It's a bit like a bungalow—a mega-park. Children climbed on these forms suspended on springs and played with them. It's also very sexual as well. It's like a circus.

Do you think design will open up to the arts? Is it possible to take an old style and integrate novel imaginary aspects?

Y.B. I love design. We would like to make furniture, old gothic beds with metal sheets, all engraved in acid with micro-circuits imprinted on them.

Neo-baroque, like *Liberace* with his golden vest and the candelabra?

Y.B. That's a bit bourgeois. Baroque assimilated.

What projects do you foresee in the future?

Y.B. We would like to do another version of *Baby Foot* in Paris in a very large exhibition space where they do fashion shows.

V.M. And to work in Mexico and make enormous cows with big bodies. ■

Noces de Cana, La loge, 1993. Mixed Media. Photo: Team Art Visuel. Courtesy of CIRCA, Montreal.