

## Texts in English

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THE CHOICE BETWEEN  
A STONE WALL AND A BRIDGE

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By Andrée PARADIS

# TEXTS IN ENGLISH

Big exhibitions are expensive. Too expensive, some people say. This is a point of view. The other attitude consists of questioning oneself on their necessity and of finding the means to bring them about. This is the policy adopted by the two largest museums of the West, the Museum of the Louvre and the Metropolitan Museum, which have just announced a huge program of exchange: works, men, information, exhibitions prepared jointly and presented simultaneously in Paris and in New York. Thus, we shall be able to see, at the end of autumn 1973, the great tapestries of the Middle Ages and of the Renaissance sharing the walls on both sides of the Atlantic and, the year after, it will be the turn of a first-rate exhibition of Impressionism.

The same necessity for interesting a public always more numerous and more demanding is present in the decisions of the National Gallery in Ottawa and obtains for us exceptionally large exhibitions such as that of *Fontainebleau*, the most important since those of *Rubens* and the *Arts of the Courts of France and England*. It goes without saying that other private Canadian museums would also support such programs if they were better maintained financially and morally.

It is not difficult to agree upon the necessity of large exhibitions. The attendance figures of the museums are eloquent. In 1947, a million visitors attended the Metropolitan in New York; in 1972, 3,500,000 visitors were recorded (the same number as at the Louvre). An increase of about five per cent a year therefore seems normal for museums which have a dynamic policy, which do not fear to innovate and which at the same time are concerned with educating and preserving. To democratize, to open the museums to all citizens, these are hollow words if they do not signify the basic purpose; to educate. We realize with regret that our Canadian museums lack personnel in the educational sectors. Only one or a handful of persons have to fulfil crushing tasks. For example, again, the Metropolitan, whose department of education counted four persons in 1967 and which has fifty in 1972. This is not luxury. These people educate in their turn the high school teachers who educate the pupils. And the wheel turns. And the museum is inhabited, alive; it is the place of the enriching experience where we can see, confront, read, reflect, refresh ourselves, write, live. Whether temple or community centre, it matters little, this question no longer exists.

The problem is to assure the life of the museum. The finest collections, the best presentations, information on recent experiments, audio-visual means, television, advertising technique and even the computer, all these are very costly. Large funds, imagination and initiative are necessary for success. Otherwise, we are up against a stone wall and can progress no further.

We can never repeat enough the necessity of developing cultural sectors and the importance of the credits that must be given to them. Culture is a thing which is constructed like a bridge. With as much care, patience and savoir-faire.

(Translation by Mildred Grand)



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FONTAINEBLEAU,  
TEMPLE OF ART

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Philippe VERDIER

The Exhibition of the Fontainebleau School grouped in Paris, at the Grand-Palais, from October 18 to January 15, seven hundred five objects representing the plastic and decorative arts of the French Renaissance with a concentration on drawings and engravings, so valuable because they stake out the origin of the works and emphasize their repercussion and still more because they revive all those which have disappeared. Because, today, programs of decoration imagined at the palace of Fontainebleau by Le Rosso in a period of ten years — he died in 1540 — and by Le Primatice, invited in 1532, then by Niccolò dell'Abbate, right hand of Le Primatice from 1552 and for twenty years, the frescoes of the Pavillon of Pomona, of that of Stoves, of the Low Gallery, of the Room of the Baths, of the Grotto of Pines, of the chamber and of the cabinet of Francis I, have disappeared and can no longer be recalled except through accounts, descriptions and graphic documents. Of the Chamber of the queen, Eleanor of Austria, there remains only the mantelpiece. The cruellest loss was that of the Ulysses Gallery, demolished in 1738-39, thus named because fifty-eight subjects of the story of Ulysses occupied the piers; on a length of one hundred fifty metres, the ceiling was divided into fifteen bays, painted on a background of grotesques, mythological subjects distributed symmetrically in cartouches. All we have to console ourselves for this loss is the *Livre de Grotesques* of Jacques Androuet

du Cerceau, some water-colours of Rubens, some drawings and engravings of Van Thulden and six paintings of Le Primatice or of his studio which copy the themes of the story of Ulysses. Two of these paintings, the *Rape of Helen* (Bowes Museum, Barnard Castle) and *Ulysses and Penelope* (Toledo Museum of Art), by mysterious, misty lyricism, bring thoughts of an anticipation of Prud'hon. The principal pieces, which have continued to exist at Fontainebleau, are the Gallery of Francis I — except the Cabinet, destroyed in 1785 — of which the thirteen frescoes of abstruse iconography intertwine the good luck and the misfortunes of the reign in the beginning plan of cultural reform, the *Chamber of the Duchess d'Étampes*, mistress of Francis I, who by a transparent allusion, is decorated with the story of the loves of Alexander and the *Ballroom*, painted under Henry II with mythological frescoes in such a decorative line that the arabesque becomes musical, with the theme of holiday or diversion coming back as leit-motiv. The paintings of Niccolò dell'Abbate in the Ballroom, spoiled by being painted over in encaustic under Louis-Philippe, have been restored to their first freshness through the will of André Malraux. The recent restoration has also rid the female nudes in stucco of the Chamber of the Duchess d'Étampes of the sanitary towels in which the prudery of a middle-class reign had dressed them.

The second Fontainebleau School will sanction the re-establishment of the unity and the works of peace after the recantation of Henry IV and the granting of freedom of worship to French Protestants by the Edict of Nantes (1598). More notice was taken of it than of the first in the decoration of the castle. There remain six of the eight compositions of Dubois of Antwerp illustrating the loves of Tancred and Clorinda (about 1605) and, in the *Cabinet de Théagène*, which became the Louis XIII salon, are still in place, with some changes, eleven of the fifteen pictures of Dubois recalling the loves of Théagène and Chariclée. And above all the *Trinity Chapel*, which Philibert de l'Orme had finished in 1551, presents almost intact the imposing program of the altar with its altarpiece and its stuccos framing in the ceiling, a renewed vision of that of the Sistine Chapel, which Martin Fréminet painted in oil on plaster from 1608 to 1619. This art is pre-baroque. Under Henry IV the atmosphere changed radically. Sensitivity directed itself toward the romantic: programs were inspired in the *Cabinet of Clorinde* by the *Jerusalem Delivered* of Tasso, and, in that of Théagène, by the *Histoire Aethiopique* (or the loves of Théagène and of Chariclée, which Amyot had translated from the Greek in 1547). On the other hand, the Catholic church had regained control of itself at the Council of Trent (1545-1563). The Trinity Chapel is witness to the new mentality, serious and strong right into the effects of a theatrical mysticism, imposed on religious art by the post-tridentine church. But it also gives evidence of the triumph of Michaelangelo, who had never ceased casting a spell on the Fontainebleau School since the beginning, through the magnetism which he exerted from Florence and Rome, strengthened by the works which could be seen and touched in France: the two *Slaves* of the tomb of Julius II, the engravings of the fresco of the *Last Judgment*, and, at Fontainebleau itself, the marble *Hercules*, a work of youth (about 1492), mounted on a fountain beside the pond, which disappeared after 1714, and is now known only through a drawing attributed to Rubens, and

the *Leda and the Swan*, painted in 1529-30, but already spoiled "by the spitefulness of time" before 1642 (Père Dan: *Le Trésor des merveilles de la Maison royale de Fontainebleau*). At the exhibition of the Grand-Palais the big model of the *Leda and the Swan*, attributed to Le Rosso, was hung beside the *Pietà*, painted shortly after by Le Rosso for High Constable Anne de Montmorency, this comparison presenting sacrilege only by its exterior, since the sensual ecstasy of *Leda*, invested with a cosmic value, is next to death and universal suffering.

The Fontainebleau School was under the control of the Italians, who had arrived in two waves at the head of large enterprises — first that of Le Rosso, of Luca Penni and of Le Primatice, who grafted onto the French stock the Italian mannerism which, since the death of Raphael, had been developing in Rome subsequent to the stanza of the Vatican and in the palaces of Mantua and Genoa. Niccolò dell'Abbate, a native of Bologna like Le Primatice, who combined in the same manner as his predecessors the instinct of the monumental with the feeling of ornamental writing in the decoration of *large works*, was in addition a landscape artist. He arrived twenty years after the pioneers, enriched by the exquisite cadences of the Parmesan. On Salviati and on Ruggiero de'Ruggieri who followed him, we are reduced to guessing the tracks of their passage in France. The Master de Flora, a changeable term, perhaps masks an Emilia painter, the son of Niccolò or Ruggiero. After the two Italian waves opened the trench of religious wars, dug even at Fontainebleau around the palace in the form of moats which, under Catherine de Medici and Charles IX, transformed the temple of arts of Francis I into a bastion. The second Fontainebleau School is Franco-Flemish. Between the two Fontainebleau Schools are found Frenchmen of very original talent: Étienne Delaune, a Protestant, who had to flee the court after Saint Bartholomew (1572), designer of the stature of an Ingres, the somewhat stinky presentation of whose works at the exhibition at the Grand-Palais might be regretted, and Antoine Caron, prophet of the surrealists, whose art is the model of this looseness of refinement and cruelty which was in style under the last Valois. One of Caron's pictures, representing the entrance of Francis I into Milan in 1515, recently acquired by the National Gallery of Canada, will be one of the poles of attraction of the Ottawa exhibition, beside the drawing of the same subject lent by the Louvre.

Italian art transplanted to Fontainebleau became international, there, under the influence of the royal and aristocratic milieu and thanks to the transfusion of the nordic tradition brought about by the French and the Flemish who collaborated with those beyond the Alps in a team spirit which had no follower in France since the communal erection of cathedrals. A symbiosis more than a metamorphosis, which took its place as well in the linear structure of works of art, more pure, more austere than anywhere else in Europe as in the fantastic vitality communicated to grotesques and emblems. The stuccos invented by Le Rosso and by Le Primatice took on almost more importance than the scenes which they framed. Fontainebleau decoration does not subordinate the margin to the subject, which it multiplies further as it centres it. The imagining of the ornamentation is impossible to dissociate from the allusive iconology of the politically-implied themes. Plant, zoolog-

ical, caricatural, abstract fantasies proliferated like the younger branch of these margins of grotesques and moralities of painted gothic manuscripts passed from France, from Flanders, and from England, to Italy, at the beginning of the fifteenth century. The basic element of the decorative cartouche of Fontainebleau: the carved scroll, remains an enigma. It perhaps derives from certain German engravings. But would not the catalysing factor have been the importing of Aztec sculptures? America, which had just been discovered, was not missing from the grotesques. The Indian feather masks are placed beside the grin of the satyrs and besides they had already been sculpted on the tomb of Cardinal Georges d'Amboise, in the cathedral at Rouen, and on the pilasters of the palace of the prince-bishop of Liège.

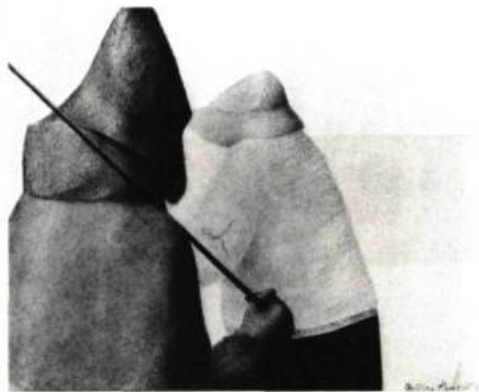
Fontainebleau decoration, through a chain reaction, set the fashion for all decorative arts: tapestry and the work of goldsmiths, engraved armors, illuminated manuscripts, illustrated books, bindings and enamels. Engraving had to be the propaganda means par excellence of the explicit idiom of the mannerists. The engravings of Dürer had introduced into the art of the High Renaissance in Italy the fateful "clinamen" which immediately caused it to deviate toward the anxiety of an unsatisfied spirituality of a rational definition of the image of man and of his environment. The painted enamels of Limoges in which, from 1520, the subject is almost never imagined any more but which is confined within the imitation of an engraved model, copy not only Marcantonio and the Maître au Dé, prolongers of Raphael and of northern raphaelism, but the masters of the Renaissance of the north: Schongauer and Lucas of Leyde.

Almost a third of the expedition of the Fontainebleau School presented in Paris is going to be on view at the National Gallery of Canada from the second of March to the fifteenth of April. We must congratulate ourselves that this exhibition, which took ten years of efforts to assemble and study, should take the road not of the United States on the American continent, following the route of very many preceding ones, but that of the capital of Canada, in the spirit of cultural co-operation achieved between France and Canada. The first school of painting which was set up in France, at the same time as the first explorations in New France, is coming to visit the friendly nation after a long historical detour. It was inevitable and fortunate that the Fontainebleau School should establish itself around the Italian genius. Devotion to the universal, which is the most authentic French tradition, had a need in the arts of Italian contribution, which represented a form of higher civilization, in order to enter more completely into the current of European renaissance at the time when letters, linguistic and religious studies had taken in France a stride without precedent since the return of Francis I from his captivity in Madrid.

Fontainebleau, royal hunting lodge in the Middle Ages, offered its favourable climate, its cultural *tabula rasa* to the artists and its thickets to the dryads and the nymphs of mythology. An Olympus of a grace and a fantasy without known ancestors and without posterity came down to bring life to the new walls. An original ideal of feminine beauty became incarnate in the nude bodies of women, huntresses and swimmers, long and pearly, with coiled gilded hair, too much goddesses or too sports-minded to fall into

the commonplace trap of eroticism. And yet it is at Fontainebleau, still more than in Italian engraving and than with Jules Romain, that eroticism received its letters of credit in the history of art, but redeemed by ingenuousness or by a healthy alertness. In an art of the court, the scandals of the court weave the texture. The works which are going to be presented at the National Gallery of Canada are for the most part graphic. They appeal to the imagined reconstruction of their context. But their originality of technique and execution is surprising. The Italians brought to Fontainebleau drawing with red chalk and the wash-tint of red chalk, in pen and in brown-wash. Etching was the medium par excellence of the engravers of Fontainebleau. Fantuzzi handled it with extraordinary verve, often substituting for mytho-political subjects copied from the frescoes of the Gallery of Francis I immense cartographic landscapes, with visionary outgrowths, which cause an effect of unreal escape, crushed, in the middle of giant cariatides, of Herculean terms, of heavy garlands of fruit and of children reproducing the stuccos of the framing. Delacroix asked himself nostalgically what must be the colour effect of the Titians in their freshness. Were the frescoes painted by Niccolo in the Gallery of Ulysses according to the models of *Le Primatice* more mysteriously radiant than these wonderful festoons of flesh, as lighted from inside by a night-light, of the drawings of *Le Primatice*, with the shaky line, a vibration of a string stricken by a divine light?

(Translation by Mildred Grand)



**ANTOINE PRÉVOST:  
SILENCE AND REALITY**

By Pierre DUPUIS

The year 1972 marks for the artist his permanent attachment to painting. In a little village of the lower part of the river (at Cacouna, more exactly) where he was living for the last year, Prévost painted about forty canvases, of which about thirty were exhibited in the Morency Gallery last autumn.

The blossoming of the form which his painting reflects is partially explained by his education (town-planning and fine arts). But the astonishing fact remains that he should have reached after a few rough sketches — qualifying them himself as "Sunday painting" — the point of producing coherent and personal works. And this in spite of the almost instinctive comparing which we do, a priori with Jean-Paul Lemieux (whose influence he does not deny, as well as that of Wyeth and of Colville). The awareness he has of this will then favour a thoroughness of his research since different intentions preside at the point of departure.

The material which he uses almost exclusively, today, is water-colour. This limits his work to canvasses of small dimensions: they cause the spectator to look attentively at each detail of the work without, for all that, losing the whole from view. This evidence, which might seem commonplace brings no less, in this case, a major importance: each element being a symbol and, in this frame (the canvas) they are significant each in relationship to the other; this thematic reading promotes the understanding of the work. Thus, Saint Denys, in the water-colour which bears the same name, is deprived of his mitre and has no head. He does not exist, or, if you will, he lives in the appearance which his clothing presents. A return to the years of youth among

the Jesuits. His characters are, furthermore, most of the time, without a face (without being), otherwise the faces are blurred, undiscernible. By means of them one is referred to the social strata which they symbolize (*Les Notables*, *Le Braconnier*, *Le Bedeau*). This coldness of vital absence joins with the expanses covered with snow as far as the eye can see and with the sky neutralized to the greatest degree. Total uniformity, because vertical forces are silent. Even the protagonists who lead us to suppose, by their position in space, that their view is directed toward other characters (often in a unilateral way) do not communicate; a powerful and nihilistic look. Powerful, when the child (in *Le Départ*) is going toward the horizon without an exit because it is too immense. Nihilistic, in *Schisme*, when the bishop looks at the characters and when, in a parallel direction, the distance seems to increase with the group. There is in that a deeper denunciation than that of the hierarchical church, being itself, when all is said and done, a copy of what remains intrinsic in society.

This universe of solitude and silence is close to that of Lemieux. But this relationship in his perception of the world (Prévost speaks of "a same sensitivity") is embodied differently in painting. As much by the meticulousness with which he paints — should we not see in the angular folds of the garments a logical harmony with the sharp reliefs of glaciers? — as by the surreality which transpires from it (shadows under a sky without sun, for example).

Other elements graft themselves to this theme, but elements which always resolve around the same symbol. In this sense *Jeux des enfants* possesses, at its source, an ambivalence made up of phenomena of attraction and rejection or, at the least, of a questioning of the innocence of their games. This is not without recalling certain verses of Saint-Denys Garneau (whom he knew well):

They have a snare  
With an incredible stubbornness

They did not leave you  
Before having won you.

Then they left you  
The treacherous ones abandoned you  
Ran away laughing!

The compositions of Prévost are inscribed equally very well in the romantic universe of Anne Hébert (c.f. *Kamouraska*). Their common origin comparing which we do, a priori with Jean-Paul Lemieux (whose influence he does not deny, as well as that of Wyeth and of Colville). The awareness he has of this will then favour a thoroughness of his research since different intentions preside at the point of departure.

The awareness of emptiness will influence him to suppress completely the separation between earth and sky. In *Les Notables*, there is no longer the slightest spacial reference, outside a fence of barbed wire; a plastic requirement first, but, especially, a semiological importance which it is easy to imagine.

In closing, let us speak of the exception which proves the rule: *Le Bedeau*. This bust, hemmed in a closed environment (a belfry), is completely impersonal. One perceives it as element of the setting. In this work, Prévost continues in some way the question which he has already raised, to know a dehumanized world like this conflict of appearances and reality. And, through a graph conditioned by his childhood, he reinstates, once more, existing *uneasiness*. The imaginary carries him away. Poetic work above all.

(Translation by Mildred Grand)

(1) *Regards et jeux dans l'espace*, in *Complete Poems*, Fides, p. 45.



## ALLAN HARRISON, AN UNAPPRECIATED PAINTER

By Paul DUMAS

Painters of quality are not always recognized or in style. The opposite proposition, knowing that painters in style are not always good, is perhaps equally true. Meissonier, Bouguereau, Gérôme, Detaille, Dulac and Alma-Tadema, so much praised in their time, are much forgotten today. Among the eminent artists of Canada, James Wilson Morrice was recognized only after his death and Ozias Leduc, who died in his nineties, knew fame only at the end of his life, thanks to the enthusiasm of his pupil, Paul-Émile Borduas and Maurice Gagnon, the critic. Such good artists are by nature discreet, produce little, and are sparing of their exhibitions in art galleries; often they carry their easel and their sketch-book toward far-away horizons, the public of their country forgets them or does not recognize them and the younger critics do not even know their name. It is the privilege of connoisseurs to find them, to rediscover them or to remember them. Jori Smith, Jack Beder, Benoît East, William Armstrong, Allan Harrison are among these.

The career of Allan Harrison was eventful and woven with contradictions. Of a middle-class family and grandson through his mother of a well-to-do manufacturer, he early chose adventure and emancipated ideas, but did not find satisfaction in this political awareness. A man of taste who believed that perfection is found in simplicity — as it should be — he created posters and *design* of the first rank in the domain of advertising. He was therefore classified, labelled once and for all as a *designer*, when he was first of all a painter and wished to be and considered himself as such.

A Montrealer, Allan Harrison belongs to this little group of artists faithful to what is real who, after Morrice, have fought academism and have defended the cause of living art: John Lyman, Goodridge Roberts, Philip Surrey, Stanley Cosgrove, Jori Smith, Jack Beder, Eldon Greer, who are united under the vague label, Montreal School.

Allan Harrison was born in Montreal in 1911. At the age of fourteen, he went to work at harvesting in Saskatchewan and, for two years, he travelled in the West and on the Pacific coast, going as far as Panama and, from there, to Cuba. On his return to Montreal, he found employment in the shop of a sign painter and took evening courses in the *École des Beaux-Arts*, where he drew from the antique. A small inheritance from his grand mother allowed him to go to New York where

he diligently followed the teaching of Kimon Nicolaïdes at the Art Student League. He also had the opportunity of admiring the exhibitions of Matisse and other great contemporaries, which decided him in his choice of vocation. Back in Montreal, he attended L'Atelier, an art school directed by John Lyman and André Biéler, where he fulfilled the duties of student in charge. In 1933-1934, thanks to a gift from his family, he spent some time in Europe and divided this between London and Paris. In London he studied particularly in museums, in the British Museum, at the National Gallery, at the Tate Gallery; he worked at advertising art free lance and took a job as clerk in two art galleries. He met personalities such as Wyndham Lewis and Louis Marcoussis and, on Sunday, he attended lectures on political science that Harold Laski gave at his home. In Paris, he took classes in sketching at the Colarossi studio and at the Grande-Chaumière and he often went to the Louvre and the Jeu-de-Paume Museum. There he acquired as well a good knowledge of French which he has still retained since that time.

Having returned to Montreal, he found employment for a year as a salesman at the Scott Gallery, then located in the building which the 400 Restaurant was later to occupy for many years, and to make a living he took up commercial art. He returned briefly to France in 1938, travelling on foot from Lyons to Marseilles, and brought back several beautiful sketches and water-colours. In 1939, he became, as he puts it, "a Sunday painter", being occupied all week by his advertising work. At this time, he became connected with many artists: John Lyman, Goodridge Roberts, Alexandre Bercovitch, Jean Palardy, Jacques de Tonnancour, Jeanne Rhéaume, and exhibited for the first time at the Contemporary Art Society founded by John Lyman and would exhibit each following year. In 1946, he spent some time in Brazil where he met Arpad Szenès and Vieira da Silva, who had taken refuge there during the war. He found them again in Paris in 1947-1948 and worked with them. From there, he often went to Rome where he became friends with Pericle Fazzini, Renato Guttuso and Emilio Greco. Back in Canada in 1949, he soon went to New York, where he would remain until 1959 and where, not allowing himself to be absorbed by his advertising work, he would draw with enthusiasm. He lived for some time in the famous Chelsea Hotel and he had the opportunity of meeting many artists — Franz Kline, the de Koonings and, naturally, Paul-Émile Borduas. In 1956 he returned to France and Italy, attended the André Lhote studio for some months and made excellent sketches in the cities of Paris, Nîmes, Carcassonne, Rome and Venice, which he exhibited at Agnès Lefort's in 1957.

He came back to Montreal in 1959, taught graphic art at Sir George Williams University from 1961 to 1965, then drawing and graphic art at the University of Quebec, from 1969 to 1971. He also gave courses at the School of Architecture at McGill University in 1971 and 1972.

Allan Harrison took part in several collective exhibitions in Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto, Rio de Janeiro and Jerusalem and held solo exhibitions at the Museum of Fine Arts in Montreal (1945), at the Institution of Architecture of Rio de Janeiro (1947), at the Agnès Lefort Gallery (1957), at Macdonald College of McGill University (1957) and at the library of McGill University (1957). Since 1964, he

has been painting more and more actively.

Allan Harrison recognizes the fact that he is "not a prolific painter", and he adds: "I know also that I am not a revolutionary painter and that I have always loved good traditional art, from Corot to Cézanne, from Matisse to Marquet and Vuillard, and, perhaps, due to circumstances, I have always thought that in my case I had to attach more importance to quality than to quantity. I have spent half my life hating the superficial character of academism and today I deplore the notion that simple decorative compositions are accepted as abstract art. I was preoccupied for years by the problem of the world of three dimensions... I doubt it little now. I admire the mastery of it which Vuillard had, while still doing away with it partially."

Aside from Vuillard, Allan Harrison admires Giorgio Morandi, Marquet, Manessier, Vieira da Silva, Arpad Szenès and several other painters; he has an eclectic taste and he is faithful to what he admires.

His work consists of oils, water-colours, pastels, drawings in charcoal and in ink. Spread over thirty years, it does not at first appear abundant, doubtless because a good part of it is scattered in other countries. Nor has the painter created large-scale works, or acquired mannerisms whose mechanical repetition would make his work recognizable on the spot. The connoisseur who tries to take the measure of the work of an artist likes to know his filiation and to find similarities or points of reference to him. The paintings and the drawings of Allan Harrison are inspired by various subjects but always sober, portraits, interiors, still-lives, landscapes, the latter painted in Canada, in the United States, in Brazil, in France and in Italy. On account of his cosmopolitanism and the reserved accent of his art (Graham McInnis has spoken very justly of the "suave understatement" of Allan Harrison's painting), the painter belongs in the rank of Morrice, still more than in that of Lyman, whose pupil and admirer he was.

For Harrison, the subject of the picture is only a pretext, only a point of departure, to create a composition, an arrangement of forms and colours which expresses the shades of his emotion and his personal conception of the harmony of the world.

The refined simplicity and the successful layouts of the commercial artist have been praised. These qualities existed before in his painting and are still found in it. The painter brings back the real in some chosen forms, in a few essential lines, he excludes from this any superfluous element. His restrained style recalls that of Corot and of Marquet, two painters he admires greatly. Upon occasion he makes use of light or brilliant colours, but he generally prefers the relationships of duller tones, minor chords. Setting himself a new problem with each picture, he does not repeat himself and seldom takes up the same theme twice. A painter of the second half of the day, he likes the contrast between dense shadows and the light of afternoon, slanting and raw, and from this he gives a special smooth texture to the forms placed on his canvases. This precious tactile quality is found in his interiors as in his landscapes; it is very noticeable in *Intérieur, rue Crescent*, whose transparent *chiaroscuro* recalls the golden lighting of the intimist scenes of Jakob Ochtervelt, the Dutch painter of the seventeenth century. This velvety relief is one of the great attractions of Harrison's art.

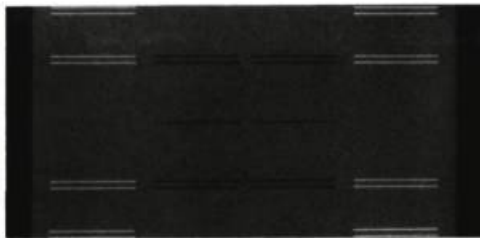
It has seemed to us so far that his painting, conceived and executed in the light of the

declining day, expressed wonderfully the melancholy feeling of the fragility of things and of time which is passing. Perhaps it translates more simply the nostalgia of lost happiness and of a classic order banished from today's world.

The drawings of Allan Harrison possess the same conciseness as his painting. They say much in few words. A few touches of shadow, a few lines, even if not the line alone, are enough for him to give us the expression of a face or an attitude, the engaging atmosphere of a favourite place. These are, for connoisseurs, choice pieces.

True painters have the privilege of transfiguring by the magic of their brush the most humble objects of everyday reality and investing them with poetry. This change is often the source of keen delight. The feeling of it is of a quality all the more unusual and lasting when its accents have been more subtle and more discreet. Such is the special quality of Allan Harrison's art: he does not expose his secret right away, but his mastery, an accomplice of time, follows the space of a peaceful and ingratiating crescendo.

(Translation by Mildred Grand)



**YVES GAUCHER:  
REVERIE OF THE ABSOLUTE**

By Michel RAGON

Yves Gaucher is typically the kind of painter whose work one either likes or does not like, but concerning whom it is difficult to write. The painting of Gaucher is also impossible to photograph, since it is impossible to tell about it. To challenge the problem of the reproduction of his works, the catalogue of his exhibition at the Vancouver Museum, in 1969, opened with a studio photograph where six large *neutral paintings* were shown; that is to say, with forms and colours not set by the film, *erased paintings*, since they were not able to be reproduced.

Leaving after the name: Yves Gaucher, a few blank pages to the free disposition of meditation or dreaming of the reader is equally tempting. But if Gaucher is always at the limit of the almost nothing, of what is almost without colour, of what is almost without form, there is nonetheless something, some colour, some form on his canvases. And now I have been given the difficult task of trying to translate this into words.

Yves Gaucher is connected with Hard-edge, with Suprematism, with Monochromism. He sometimes makes us think of a Rothko who might be geometrical, of a Barnett Newman who might be clear. That is, that he places himself, in technique and in expression, completely at a pole opposite from that of Rothko and Newman. But in the reverie of the absolute, they meet. Yves Gaucher is a painter of restraint, a quiet painter. His canvases are big beaches of meditation. If one does not like it, one finds that it is all empty. If one likes it, one is invaded by it, possessed by it. Personally, I like the painting of Yves Gaucher very much.

To say how he works can clarify his work. In his studio he has three or four canvases upon which he paints at the same time, resting from one by working on another, taking advantage of the changes of scale, using a same range of colours. Each painting is taken up repeatedly, to thirty coats of paint one upon the other, without the result giving an impression of material. He stops only when the three or four canvases on which he is working at the same time are *ripe*; only when he, the painter, has in any case the impression of maturity, of not being able to go any further, of having reached his limit.

The work particular to Yves Gaucher begins in 1963 with his engravings on Webern. Strange engravings, at the same time in intaglio and in relief, which were to give the artist a serious reputation as an engraver, leading him to become professor of engraving at Sir George Williams University in Montreal.

But since Gaucher became a professor of engraving, he no longer engraves. Just as, after having written a great deal, he no longer writes. The silence of the virgin canvas has entirely taken possession of him.

It is in 1962 that he becomes aware in Paris of what the music of Webern is. As others have had their vision of the world upset after seeing a Cézanne exhibition, Gaucher, after his encounter with Webern's music, is no longer the same. Quite naturally, he attempts to transpose the dodecaphonic musical language into painting. He even works in the electronic music laboratory of McGill University. But he quickly perceives that transposition is impossible and that one achieves only relative equivalences.

Failure? No. Because Yves Gaucher emerges transfigured out of these experiments, out of this confrontation with the musician who is without doubt the most difficult and the most perfect of the twentieth century. In 1965 he works at square pictures, presented in the shape of diamonds, on the point of one side, and in which appear only yellow geometric lines. In 1966, a painting, eloquently titled *Silences*, is all blue with green and gray bars (the gray becoming maroon through its nearness to the blue). In 1967, Gaucher creates a last coloured painting, very large, of a brilliant yellow, in which thirteen little rose and blue bars play their chamber music. But after this bold stroke, Gaucher devotes himself to gray. Big gray pictures, painted with a roller. Some of these gray paintings are huge (4 metres by 3). Thin little white bars are the only interruption which occurs on these monochromatic surfaces.

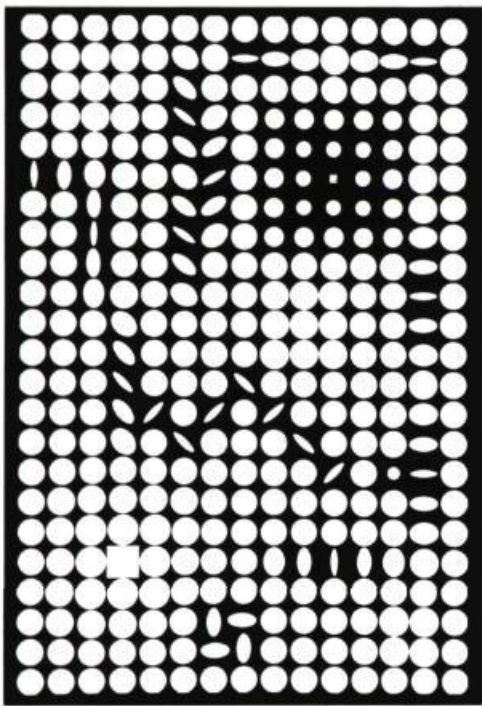
In 1969, he again questions everything, a large red picture being produced at the end of the year. After this new painting which breaks away from his usual work, the forms which appear on his paintings are only horizontal. These bar-lines are lengthened so far as to divide the picture into three parts. Gaucher plays on the theme of the two tones divided by a white line. Some pictures are composed of five parallel tints, from white to gray, on a bluish background. Three lines, two gray; two lines, three gray. An optic illusion is formed, a space rhythm. Colour, although not very strong, finishes, in the later canvases, by becoming invading, possessive. All the more encompassing since it is extremely unobstructive. It is the separation of tones or of colours which divides the canvas, not the line-bars reduced to a simple white harmony.

From his engravings on the theme of Webern's music, Yves Gaucher achieved his effects by a process of reversal and turning back. Later, he came to the opposite of symmetry. Now his painting is more equivalent to problematical music.

Such perfection in pictorial language is possible only with the great slowness with which Gaucher works; but also by reason of his exigency. A week after finishing his pictures, he goes on to cruel destructions. To such an extent that his exhibited production is extremely limited.

No titles for his recent works. Nothing which seeks to attract the spectator. Some Quebecers believe that they find *northern grays* in the painting of Gaucher. This is a way of attaching oneself to a naturalism which here seems to me beside the point. Indeed, Yves Gaucher, if he works in Montreal, could as well be elsewhere. His painting is beyond time and place, as can be that of Mallarmé, Webern and John Cage.

(Translation by Mildred Grand)



**VASARELY:  
VIBRATION AND IRRADIATION**

By Gilles HÉNAULT

He is called the father of Op Art. For more than forty years he has been taking part in most of the big international exhibitions. In the sixties, he even influenced the style and the designing of printed cloth. Last summer, television devoted a major broadcast to him. The Museum of Contemporary Art, in Montreal, had put him in the program of its exhibitions. Recently, the Editions du Griffon, de Neuchâtel, in Switzerland, published a second album on his art in the prestigious collection *Arts plastiques du vingtième siècle*. In the old castle of Gordes, in Provence, he has his own museum. In brief, Vasarely, like him or not, is an artist who counts in our century.

"The stake is no longer the heart, but the retina, the wit becomes a subject of experimental psychology. Sharp black-white contrasts, the untenable vibration of complementary colours, the dazzle of rhythmical networks and of changed structures, the optic kinetic quality of plastic compositions, so many physical phenomena present in our works, whose rôle is no longer to amaze or to plunge us into a sweet melancholy, but to stimulate us and to obtain wild joys for us."

It is Vasarely who is speaking. This extract from one of his texts could be his creed. These lines summarize better than I can the reasoning of the artist.

It was by a long route that Vasarely arrived at this awareness and this orientation. My purpose is not to apologize for this attitude, but to demonstrate briefly its possibilities and its limits.

When one takes the little winding road which mounts toward the Renaissance castle which houses the Foundation at Gordes, the eye does not tire of admiring the fields of vines and the groves of cherry trees which rise to attack the steepness crowned by the elegant construction. In the valley, one's gaze deciphers not only the modulated space of one of the beautiful corners of the Provençal country, but also, on account of the different buildings and the arrangement of things, as a true arrangement of the tiers of the centuries. The

castle itself marks the structured halt of an impetus into time.

On entering the rooms devoted to the works of Vasarely, a sudden rupture is produced, a leap in time which transports us into another age. Here, the twentieth century asserts its presence in a special form. First there is mobility. The works are displayed on panels swept along in a continual and rhythmic movement. Already, art no longer appears to us as everlastingness, but as movement.

The display, contrary to traditional retrospectives, does not go from the oldest to the newest. It is reversed. We work our way up to the origin. The conducting thread is a composition which we rediscover even in the first works, a grouping learned from the Bauhaus and which will arrange itself right through the years, passing through the disposition of stones and through geometric abstraction, through the checkered board and photography, through the positive-negative of black-white, to form-colour union and to the system of transposition which will later form the alphabet and the syntax of his recent work.

There is in all that evidence of fidelity. One feels that projection does not come about by chance and that research builds up from an art which could be taken for a craft to an art centred on science and technology. Besides, the artist becomes aware of it as his creation develops. His *Notes brutes*, of which some are quoted in his first monograph, establish this route. Thus, in 1959, he writes "Scientific popularizers have the great merit of working out a *Common language* which makes the things of the world and of the universe understandable to us if not *exactly*, then at least *intuitively*. To *feel* things in an exact way is already to *know* them a little. Is it not essential in a world necessarily partitioned to establish osmosis, to shatter the obscure, to allow the confirmation of a movement approximately identical in all the sectors of human activity?"

This way of seeing was to lead him to a coded art of which the artist is simply the designer, but which is executed by assistants before being carried out by computers! They have cried sacrilege, hoax . . .

Vasarely answers, in 1960: "The *star* artist or the *solitary genius* are so many anachronisms; only groups of seekers, collaborating with scientific and technical disciplines will truly create." That was the aim of the *Group for Research in Visual Arts* of the artists of the Denise René Gallery, a group which would dissolve after a few years of work in common. After that, these artists became either stars or solitary genii. It does not seem that Vasarely has escaped this fate.

This does not ignore the fact that he has exercised, by his art and his thinking, a considerable influence on the artistic orientation of a whole generation. His ideas are essentially generous. In 1961, he notes, "How far we are from 'art for the sake of art' — plasticity is food, due to all as the same right as knowledge, song or vitamins". Whence come its struggles for social art, for the polychromatic city, for form-colour unity usable by all like a game of checkers or chess, for multiples, for the integration of the arts and their democratization. However, all considered, this is hardly new. It is a long time since the integration of the arts into architecture was achieved in cathedrals, since graphic arts and, even, sculpture or tapestry produced multiples and since the buildings of certain countries have been polychromatic. In other respects, the snare of production-consumption does not

always act in favour of true democratization, which is not necessarily a synonym of uniformity and multiplication.

In the purely plastic domain, Vasarely revolts especially, as do many other contemporary creators, against the artisan aspect, accidental and even *inspired*, of the work of art. He wants it to be, on the contrary, a simple plastic joy for the eye, an accompaniment of scientific knowledge, a discovery of the structure of the real.

What interests him is the elaboration of a coded system which allows an incalculable number of permutations starting from simple elements like the circle and the square (with all their variations towards the oval and the parallelogram) and the contrasted use of black-white or complementary colours. He thus obtains, as in chess, an almost infinite series of *moves* or *possible games* which come into being in as many different works which are yet similar. It is at the interior of this reasoning of unity and contradiction that he develops the accomplishment of his work. If he does not win every time, he *invents* necessarily, because by definition he cannot, while transforming one of the elements, obtain two absolutely symmetrical results.

It will be said that chance, in informal works, produces the same diversity and this is true. But what is completely different, in a planned or structured work, is the gestalt: for the fuzziness of outline, for the psychic impulse which relates to the *soul*, one substitutes the pure plasticity which first produces a visual shock before reverberating in the brain which must recombine the whole according to an almost mathematical process. From this there would, therefore, result a mental pleasure, and one which is at the same time more transparent, since the work does not offer *intuitive mystery*, but a sort of critical route which allows us to understand how it is made and why we feel pleasure in seeing what is presented to us (if there is pleasure). In fact, the lag operates from *contemplation* to the simple *delight* of a plasticity which appears as an enigma to be deciphered. Some would say that it is a matter here of a morose enjoyment. "What a bore", a painter said to me who is the exact opposite of Vasarely.

And yet, there is, in these works tending toward the negation of poetic affectivity, a certain attraction which arises from the irradiation and the vibration of coloured surfaces from the ratios of light, from the capricious unexpected or aggressive geometry of blacks and whites, from moving grids, in brief, from colour and form which speak a purely plastic language.

(Translation by Mildred Grand)



**LEARNING TO SEE:  
THE PHOTOGRAPHIC ACTION GROUP**

By René ROZON

Habit veils observation. After a certain time, one no longer sees his environment, no more than the people who animate it. Reality becomes dreary, uniform, monotonous. Only the appearance of an extraordinary element — be it a thing, a person or an event — manages to bring us out of our apathy. Nevertheless it was this reverse step which the Groupe d'Action Photographique (GAP) was to take.

But at first did this group come about spontaneously? Not completely. Let us quickly go over a story which is very simple. Three young Montreal photographers — Michel Campeau, Roger Charbonneau and Serge Laurin — were working separately, each in his way, until the day when chance united them. They realized that they had purposes in common and created the GAP in October, 1971. Shortly after, three other photographers of the metropolis — Claire Beaugrand-Champagne, Pierre Gaudard and Gabor Szilasi — sharing the same tastes, joined the developing group and, in February 1972, the GAP was formally set up.

Now, what is this common purpose which unites them, in spite of different personalities? It is inherent in their method of work which consists of capturing man and his environment alive, without disguise, without alterations, without idealization. They draw from the everyday, from the usual life of ordinary people and their environment, the basic material of the film. Ingredients which normally belong to mediocrity. However, to judge by the results of such a procedure, nothing is further from the commonplace.

It was a wager, and the GAP has succeeded in this feat: to begin with the ordinary in order to rehabilitate it in our eyes. Because, by means of their photographs, we rediscover the real, the most basic real, that is to say the most essential: *Life* or this *sense* of life which we have forgotten, refuted or lost. By taking on the everyday, GAP has brought it

forth, has given it a dynamic dimension, as witnessed by its many achievements.

Because GAP is a very productive group, if one judges by the sum of its work at the end of its first year of existence, marked by exhibitions and by projects both in common and individual. By displaying its works in the very locations which inspired them — at the french-fried restaurant *Chez Georges* and at *La Grange de Séraphin* tavern, in November 1971 — confronting the regular customers of these establishments with the reflection of their own image, the GAP has adequately fulfilled its rôle of individual and social awareness. The GAP also exhibited in more official places during the course of the summer of 1972: in the picture gallery of the National Film Board in Ottawa, as well as participating in the *Montreal, plus or minus?* exhibition in the Museum of Fine Arts in Montreal (on this subject see the article titled *La Ville au musée* in *Vie des Arts*, No. 69 (Winter 1972), pages 29-33). Finally, last December, the Museum of Contemporary Art, in Montreal, devoted a special exhibition to GAP. With regard to individual projects, let us mention the principal ones accomplished since the beginning of GAP: photographic displays devoted especially to workers (see *Image 10*, published by the National Film Board, October, 1971) held at LaFontaine Park (see, on page 32, our photographic reproduction illustrating *La Vie au musée*), and to the inhabitants of Charlevoix (see *La Région de Charlevoix* in *Vie des Arts*, No. 62 (Spring 1971), pages 46-49). As for collective projects, let us consider that of Opportunities for Youth which consisted of photographing different aspects of life at Disraeli, a small rural community of the Eastern Townships, whose documents will be gathered into a volume to be published under the title: *Disraeli, a Human and Photographic Experiment*; and a second project presently under way, entitled *Montreal as it is*, with the collaboration of the Montreal group PhotoCell, which intends to compile an important photographic documentation on the city of Montreal, a project which could eventually develop into the creation of a photographic agency for the urban community.

These are, as we can see, numerous activities, but never detrimental to the quality of the work. The GAP contains six names, six names to remember, because they are guarantees of talent. Let us open our eyes, in our turn, and, with the sight of these images which we are offering to you, let us bring ourselves out of the boredom which threatens us more each day. Then only shall we realize, like the GAP, that the everyday commonplace is a myth, that it exists nowhere for the person who knows how to see. And if in any case one were to be mistaken, if there were everyday dullness, just the same one would have at least to admit, thanks to the GAP, it remains an inexhaustible source of discoveries, that it hides and encloses unsuspected wonders.

(Translation by Mildred Grand)



**SAM TATA:  
AN ARTIST SEEN BY ANOTHER ARTIST**

By Geoffrey JAMES

Asked by Queen Victoria whether he felt his livelihood endangered by the new medium of photography, the fashionable French miniature portrait painter Alfred Chalon replied, in memorable Franglais: "Ah, non, Madame, photographie cannot flatter." Poor Chalon. It soon became apparent that photography was indeed an ideal way to *flatter les bourgeois*; and the first to suffer were the minia-



turists. The threat to the older art came not from the small daguerreotype, whose unique, silvered image was as delicate and inviolable as a butterfly's wing, but from later negative-positive processes, which had the advantage of being cheap, repeatable and retouchable. Once given the embalmer's power to cover up the blemishes of the human face, photographers did not hesitate to cater to their sitters' vanity. The results, almost invariably, were an abomination.

It is something of an oversimplification - though one which contains some truth - to say that the best photographic portraits have been taken when the photographer goes in search of the sitter, and not vice versa. In the history of the medium, a remarkably large proportion of the most memorable portraits have been made not by commercial practitioners but by inspired amateurs or by photographers who have earned their living outside the studio. Consider a few examples. The first great body of portraits was executed by a Scottish painter, David Octavius Hill, a technical primitive whose photographs were made largely to be used as *aides-mémoire*. Julia Margaret Cameron, whom I consider to be the strongest of the English Victorian portraitists, was also an amateur and a primitive; she was a wonderfully eccentric and effusive lady who took up photography in middle age and who so badgered her renowned sitters (and friends) that, perhaps out of exhaustion, they yielded up little pieces of their souls. Of the French 19th century portrait photographers, the greatest, Nadar, was admittedly thoroughly commercial. Yet even Nadar was selective about whom he photographed. As a republican he refused to take the portrait of anyone connected with the French court. And as a reformed caricaturist he realized that he could never satisfy the vanity of women, so he never photographed them. (Fortunately he excepted the very beautiful Sarah Bernhardt and the very talented George Sand.)

The list can be extended endlessly: Alvin Langdon Coburn's enthusiastic pursuit of Edwardian literati, Alfred Steiglitz's intense portraits of his friends, August Sander's extraordinary collective portrait of the German people. Perhaps the point can be pushed too far, but it does, in a roundabout way, suggest one of the reasons why I admire the portraits of Sam Tata. Tata is by profession a photojournalist, and as such he is frequently asked by editors to photograph the famous or the passingly notorious. But the pictures here were made by choice. They are part of a continuing, personal collection of portraits of Quebec artists - a term that Tata rightly interprets broadly. They are unpretentious photographs, quiet and deceptively simple. Without obvious stylistic flourishes and carried out with the simplest of means, they yet bear an unmistakable autographic stamp - what Tata's mentor, Henri Cartier-Bresson, has called "a certain identity". Where the police photographer can make any man look like a criminal and where Yousuf Karsh can make any man look important, Tata allows his subjects to speak for themselves. To dwell on the individual merits of the photographs would be superfluous, for the photojournalist's work finds full expression in reproduction. Perhaps the best thing one can say about these pictures is that they admirably achieve Tata's own aim of "showing what people look like and how they live". It may seem a modest goal, but it is one that has been the basis for many of photography's most lasting images.



PAUL DELVAUX:  
TIME IN SUSPENSION

By Xavier MARRET

Paul Delvaux was born in Antheit, in 1897, in the district of Liège, a dreary country of glacial colours, with immense horizons furrowed by rails, bristling with aerials and lamp-posts which give off a bleak light at night.

Timid and repressed, he lived in a family circle until the age of thirty-one, a fact which had many consequences on his work. He lived under the domination of a mother who put him on his guard by teaching him the equation, "Woman = danger", which would later reveal his obsessions. From 1920, he studied at the Beaux-Arts in Brussels, in order afterwards to give free rein to his passion for painting, with greater mastery.

#### *Catalyst of Magritte and De Chirico*

For a long time, Delvaux sought his course, in search of his identity. During this slow development of the work, it came about that his first canvases had Post-impressionism as their pole of attraction, then little by little his pictures revealed a certain expressionism, a faith which he quickly renounced (*Maternité, 1930*). The discovery of Surrealism, in 1934, would be for him a way out thanks to which he would assert himself. Among the surrealists he found a prophetic language which would take the rôle of catalyst in his painting. The discovery of René Magritte and, especially, of Giorgio de Chirico set him ablaze; he grasped a pictorial model in his contemporaries. Then his enthusiasm was without restraint; he began the spell-bound period of his painting in which gravity and fervour were combined. Nonetheless, he would still place himself at the edge of Surrealism, because there is an evident devotion to solitude in Delvaux.

When one applies himself to reading the pictures of Delvaux with vigilance, a nocturnal idealism and a mystique of the dream are revealed; it is a whole *poetry of the image* that one succeeds in deciphering. Now we must define the field of the possible approaches of this painting and take inventory of his world, of his syntax which calls upon signs (mirrors, lamps, the plays of perspect-

ive), of his themes which are always the same, orchestrated with a poetry which is a therapy of the mind of its author. Due to the setting, Delvaux will never stop introducing us to the mysteries of the city where his childhood was spent. He sets up lamp-posts, electric and telephone wires, rails, level crossings, trains which continue to call forth departure towards a mysterious destination, the nameless journey to a lost country. In the city, he seeks tremendous perspectives: esplanades, palaces, temples of Greco-Latin architecture; we discover an omnipresence of pavement, whose contact is icy under the feet of the passerby. The painter also paints middle-class interiors whose doors open on a familiar and out-of-date setting; one finds in them furniture without distinction, brass lamps which rest as well on mantelpieces as on the tiling of the floor or even directly on it, in the middle of streets fit for escape (*Les Lampes, 1937*). A whole closed world of objects deprived of frivolity and attraction is offered to us, objects whose relationships with their surroundings are peculiar, at the least.

#### *Women Statued*

With Delvaux, the movement of thought, a constant element at grips with the materials of the setting, creates an environment permeated by dreams and anxiety where the skies of night or of metallic blue twilight are combined, moonlight which hangs over the all-powerful reign of the mineral and punctuates the striking character of his compositions (*Le Temple, 1949*). In the midst of this encompassing setting, nude enigmatic women move about slowly in the streets, distorting their gestures which, suddenly suspended, show a certain choreographic amplitude (*La Belle du couchant, 1945*). Or else these women are immobile, taking fixed poses, hieratic as if turned into statues; seated on absolutely rigid chairs, reclining on sofas, lascivious, their limbs sometimes twined with clever draperies (*La Voix publique, 1948*); or again taking root in the true sense of the term in *Femmes arbes, 1937*. At this juncture, sensual vocabulary joins itself to that of plant life; with Delvaux flowers and foliage often appear on the very flesh of women, a symbiosis which raises them to the rank of ancient divinities. The faces are devoid of emotion, the eyes absent, the look is lost in emptiness where, if it comes upon an object, it seems not to perceive it; the breasts are heavy, the hips wide, the prerogative of a perfect femininity; further, the artist does not neglect to show the pubic tuft which crowns the sex.

The graphic arrangement is strict. Delvaux uses a smooth cold paste; the use of the flat stroke gives to his preconceived model of woman a petrifying nature but not less evocative of luster. The relationship of the body curves and the sharp lines of the architecture motivates the pleasure which this painting provides. The lines of these female bodies are drawn with a disconcerting sureness, the range of colours of their flesh varies from rosy to gray; in it there is a whole scale of chromatics contrasting with the intensities of light, the transparent quality of the skies and the opaque waters of the sea often present in the background (*Les grandes sirènes, 1947*). The severity of the form, the academism of the style and the mastery of the subject, like coloured notations, come together towards the unity of the work.

These creatures, nymphs or goddesses, in the course of their wandering, pass, full of the explicit physical charm of women, in front of men dressed in the most severe fashion, nose plunged with austerity in a newspaper, or absorbed in the observation of tiny objects which they scrutinize with a perseverance without apparent result (*L'Entrée de la ville, 1940*). What impresses us in these persons is this intentness of mind on futile things. While loitering, some seem to be preaching in the desert, to converse with several others on illusory subjects or to devote themselves to disconnected remarks. Sometimes one of these men strangely resembles the painter himself, as in *La Ville endormie, 1938*; placed at the edge of the picture, perhaps he is questioning himself on the obscure fate which will be that of these actors confined in a rôle of dramatic inwardness. One of the types one meets the most often, notably in *Les Phases de la lune, 1939*, is Otto Lidenbrock of Jules Verne whose illustrator was Édouard Rion, from whom Delvaux borrowed the model without the slightest alteration. Curiously enough, only a nude adolescent shows himself awkwardly, with an emphasized innocence of manifest anxiety, in the midst of all these adults who are paying no attention to each other (*L'Aube sur la ville, 1940*). No relationship is created between the male and female persons, if it is not incidentally a tip of a hat or vague gesture on the part of these *automata*, one might say, considering the restraint of emotion which they feel at the sight of the woman exposed to their view. Each of these persons, men and women, lives separately an individual life.

The joining of a masculine and feminine structure is unceasingly deferred, with a few near exceptions. Although there is a relatively *hardened* look of the *described* people, a whole theatre of gesture is decanted under the paint-brush of Delvaux and in his art of representation as much as that of the visual transcription of a poetic state. We think of the plays of mirrors in which women look at themselves, of processional marches, of movements which precede flight, of Sapphic embraces: *Les Demoiselles de Tongres, 1962*, or yet of the embracing of a marble bust of a man by an impassive woman in *Pygmalion, 1939*. We can observe in this connection that the female ideal of Sacher-Masoch appeals to an essential coldness. "Corps de marbre", "Vénus de glace", "Femme de pierre", are the favourite words of Sacher-Masoch and his characters willingly fulfil their apprenticeship with a cold statue under the light of the moon (quoted by Gilles Deleuze in *Présentation de Sacher-Masoch*).

#### Freudian Themes

All these scenes centre our reflections on the creative undertaking and semeiology; they assume a network of references to the equivalence of basic idea and form. Jointly with the simple perfection of the design, the portraits of Delvaux are fed by mental reservations of a psychological kind, moral and perhaps psychoanalytical to a greater degree. The return to the subconscious is fulfilled by means of Freudian themes. The exercise of this painting seems to have exorcised little by little a libidinous fantasy, the inward fears and the *Oedipus* of its author.

Speaking the language of linguists, we find

at the level of the significant combinations of lines, gestures, attitudes, stiff as they may be, which call upon the meaningful level which is the incommunicability of human beings, their solitude, their dreams and their anticipation. Delvaux has never done anything but reflect through different environments a same beauty as he brings to the world. In *Formes et significations*, Jean Rousset tells us that "the artist of genius marks himself by a revealing monotony; typical phrases, identities of structure are the signs of his creative originality, being the disjointed fragments of a strange universe." Always the same work, therefore, under different figures, combined in variations which allow the same themes to be recognized, transformed and adorned.

At a time when exploration of new techniques and new means of expression are uninteresting ideas for Delvaux, one can ask himself how this painting can please.

By all evidence, it is not on technique and means that we must question ourselves but rather on the meaning of this painting, the implications of the signs of which it makes use.

#### Death and Sexuality

First of all, Delvaux translated a state of reverie, a contemplative state and a sort of fanciful elation to which we are all attached. On the other hand the artist stigmatizes the lack of communication between people, due to their fertility, to their sterility and above all to the *forbidden*. All people are in a state of expectancy whose object we surely do not know, if it is not vague probabilities, vague promises of *sin* which we lend to their imagination and which the theme of death subtends, often recalled by the appearance of skeletons in the midst of them (*Vénus endormie, 1944*). The forbidden linked to death is one of the most contemporary themes. One can quote Georges Bataille on this subject: "If in essential forbidden matters we see the refusal which the human being offers to nature (the body) viewed as a corruption of live energy and as an orgy of destruction, we can no longer make a difference between death and sexuality."

In the pictures of Delvaux woman poses and creates a feeling of distance and even of absence; the attitude of man is refusal, he rears in order not to follow the movement which attracts him. Nonetheless, one can calculate in these persons the idea of a *becoming* taking place in a hidden temporality which, in the end, does not systematically close the pictures. It is a matter of a time of stopping and not of a last immobility.

(Translation by Mildred Grand)

## GEORGES BRAEM: CLOSER TO DELVAUX THAN REDON?

By Pierre PARET

I knew Bernard Palissy: he was called Georges Braem. That was about fifteen or sixteen years ago; he was living on the quai des Chartrons, in Bordeaux, on a fourth storey that the rats themselves had deserted. From windows that looked out over the boat-houses of the port, we watched boats leaving and dreamed of journeys.

Thus we felt less keenly the biting cold that became increasingly aggressive as we went further towards the inside of the house. (My wife owes her worst chills to our prolonged stays in this paradise, but she will never admit it.) After a brief respite, invisible shafts of cold soon stung our ears and we went off in search of a piece of furniture.

— Not that one: the kids put their toys there.

— What about that chest?

— Why not?

It was old, rickety, worm-eaten, we found all manner of fault with it, we had to make a fire, the children's teeth were chattering, ours too.

The fire served two purposes, first, heating, always a relative and short-lived heat, and cooking.

We did not roast suckling pigs on charcoal as in Polynesia, we were content with a coarse milk soup. When the chairs and cupboards began to run out (I forgot to mention that the aunt who was putting her nephew up in this unrentable apartment, had had the lack of conscience to furnish the immense rooms with everything she had not the courage to get rid of and which, in fact, was not worth much), they were replaced by old newspapers. When the andirons were exchanged for five or six kilos of bread, they were replaced by two racing bicycle handlebars salvaged from the scrap heap.

Braem was going through his *Bateau-lavoir* period. He did not like having a rough time for the sake of it, but he did not compromise. He wanted to paint and he would paint, whatever it cost him.

The apartment, although it began to look more and more deserted, was no less of a *caravansary*. Friends passing by stopped off at this place where it was authorized for nomads to stop, ate what they found, spent a few nights and disappeared forever.

#### A beardless Van Dongen

In Bordeaux, a lethargic city where, to be important, one must have a house of one's own, go to church on Sunday, and wear a fedora, paintings were selling badly. The Chartrons<sup>(1)</sup> hardly appreciated this tall fellow who looked like a beardless Van Dongen, and strolled about in the middle of winter in blue jeans and a turtleneck pullover. How could these rather insensitive middle-class people have understood that Braem preferred poverty to an ill-paid job in their badly heated offices? They said he was lazy because he turned down employment that would have turned him from his calling. A hasty judgment that prevented easily alarmed conscience from being upset.

One day a merchant marine commander of a generous nature, asked him to carry his wood up from the basement to the third or fourth floor of an apartment building that obviously had no elevator. When the work was finished, with a gesture of compassionate simplicity, he slipped him a ten francs

coin — at the time, charwomen were being paid twenty francs an hour — which Braem returned to him with a few well-chosen words.

I knew him to be a candle maker, a projectionist, a decorator of candy boxes, and goodness knows what else? It never lasted very long: just whatever was needed to bring home a few loaves of bread, to buy some colours and possibly, to pay off a debt.

Today, everyone will say they never doubted he would be a success, but how many of us were there who believed it at the time?

Now, he owns, on the basin of Arcachon, a "real bargain" house which he set up — or upset — the way he liked. He built himself a cosy studio, warm and well lit, watched over by a cat and a turtle-dove. The studio is HIS room. You can find everything there, even a bed with tough springs and one of those little braziers used at the turn of the century in the Landes (TR: area in Southern France, below Bordeaux) to smoke swarms of bees and force them to leave the trees and be gathered. Pinned to the wall, between two canvases, is a cluster of photos of nudes, as lovely as statues, and more lifelike than reality.

That is where he dreams, paints and smokes his pipe. Silence is indispensable: only the birds perched under the roof, between the beams, have the right to speak. And so does the fire, which tells tales of the time when the tree trunk was a quivering sapling, scarcely taller than the green grass sea. At night elves danced a round in his honour and joining in, the moon cast yellow beams on the ballet in which a young girl indulged, an Ophelia or an Yvonne de Galais, nude and immaterial, holding in two fingers a white egg beaded by the dewy freshness of dawn.

The pipe goes out and silence enlarges the room where a Rhenish burgh now stands facing a red hill overlooking the river. From the top of her rock, a blonde Lorelei sings to a fisherman dazzled by her death song . . .

Braem has left for the unknown and enchanted land, but always, the carnal aspect of life commands attention, rejecting obscenity and giving new dimensions to an eroticism that is his alone.

What have I not heard about this painting that offends those who cannot paint, shocks those who cannot see — especially see into themselves.

— I hate uproar, internal combustion engines, crowds, mottos, and verbiage.

He also detested humming machinery, pawnbrokers, the smug rich, and advisers. But he liked real bread, wild plants, large houses that sprawl in the sun, trees that have lived long, the fogs of the harbour, and large bowls of milk.

He thinks that if a picture can be explained it isn't good and that people who are always trying to understand are those who will never be able to feel. Thus, he has few friends. He believes that the work must surpass the workman, and that if work is worthwhile in the long run, it is always worthwhile. Mainly for the satisfaction it gives.

He lives from his painting and paints his life, thus he does a great deal of work: about thirty canvases a year, worth ten times more than those of artists who do two a day. He only shows those that say something, on the condition that they do not speak to just anyone. Those who found his art too racy and vulgar fare, were people envious of him, and several of them were crushed when about ten of his works — including a colour cover — appeared in full pages in *Plexus*. It is not

certain that God welcomed those people into His paradise: he only acknowledges His own. — I never lacked good advice. I was told I should speculate in auctions to boost my selling price. It is easy: you put one or two canvases up for auction. Friends acting as "barons" make the bids go up, buying paintings for two or three times their worth and, when the operation is finished, you pay the auction fees, and give them back the amount of the bid . . .

It has also been said that my pride would be my downfall and that, if instead of neglecting social events, I were to shine up to a few people of good position, I would rank among the first.

He does anyway, without having wasted his time in hypocritical politeness and in kowtowing. What is admirable about him, is the constancy with which he pursued his calling without ever turning away from it. He had obstinacy and a will to succeed. Doubts too, of course, but the assurance that one day he would reach the point where his art would finally flourish.

#### *A distressing change*

When I knew him he was painting like Rouault. Then, gradually freeing himself from inevitable influences and developing in skill, he executed somewhat bold works which today he calls bourgeois.

Persevering in a path where fame is joined by material success assures his security. He was finally beginning to earn a living, but this success which was relative after all, left him uneasy.

After having taken a break from his work, he resumed it without worrying about the *good advice* heaped upon him by those who saw a culmination in this painting which hereafter was put aside and repudiated.

The time for new research had come. To finish it successfully, he needed solitude, peace, and serenity. The Landes offered the ideal atmosphere for this return to his roots, this plunge into silence, this voyage to the depths.

For four years, almost nothing was heard of him, and the works of this period attest to a perturbation in which memories clashed with rather confused promises. In this lengthy period a slow but definite change occurred.

During this time of introspection where he willingly gave up the clientele he had so much difficulty getting, during these years when he again knew the difficult times of his youth, he never had a thought to return to the manner of painting whose dangers he knew.

And then there was an explosion. Erotic surrealist: the revelation came to him when he understood that each person carries within himself a baroque and strange world, marked by social obligations, a rather unavowable world. There are things one says and things one does not say. He will try to express the latter.

— In reality one is what one does not say.

He will thus paint life, such as it exists behind the façade, an irrational life, elusive, baffling, the life of the dream, the subconscious, and the instinct.

— Does surrealism not play a large part in your pictorial process?

— If you mean as a school, no. If you take the term in the sense of sur-realism, which means beyond reality as well as within the unavowed oneiro-reality, then yes, it does.

— Then you run the risk of scandal?

— I accept all risks; living is a risk. I say living and not existing. As for scandal, I think it is the self-protecting reflex of

people who are made ill precisely by the fear of living.

#### *Ingres danced with joy . . .*

— The universe you paint, as opposed to that of a painter like Magritte or Tanguy, to whom you are closely related in pictorial quality, abounds in nudes . . .

— This is because I think that the nude embodies the individual rid of the travesty of society's trumpery, whose weight smothered him. He is thus completely freed from his phantasms and inhibitions. More than that, a fine nude is beautiful . . . Seeing it, painting it, makes me glad to belong to the species. Ingres did not think otherwise when seeing his models arrive dressed as Eve, he began to dance with joy.

— Do you consider that eroticism, of which you are sometimes accused, is a stimulating value?

— I am sure that eroticism is a value of progress (let us not forget the word eroticism comes from Eros, god of love). I think that it is just as important to use it as it is not to exploit it. It is as regrettable to see it flaunted everywhere as to keep it hidden away. It is a fiery force that one must be able to control to go fast and far.

#### *More like Delvaux than Redon*

— You live in the south west of France, but you are of Flemish origin, and for the last two years you have been making lengthy excursions in the region of Anvers, which has produced a certain something in your art — perhaps mainly a pictorial quality — that places it in the great Nordic tradition. Do you believe in the influence of race?

— The individual is always the result of heredity, I bear the mirages and phantasms of my race, this liking too for what Péguy, whose origins, however, are different from mine, called "work well done". The first thing that we must require of a painter, is to be a painter and the best painter he can be.

More like Delvaux than Redon in his view of woman, we also find, in Braem's work, a tendency to be a miniaturist . . . on a large scale, and this love of completed work that gave intimacy and denseness to his canvases that are open onto infinity as well as those of strange scenes, condensed in geometric areas or filling universes, whose walls or skies seem to be listening.

The time has now past when, in the house on the quai des Chartrons in Bordeaux, straws were drawn to see what furniture would be burned to heat the milk soup and give, at the same time, a bit of warmth to the large rooms overlooking the almost deserted port.

Braem's painting is now well established, at least in the opinion of some people whose naturally equivocal prudishness does not turn away from elementary truths. Far from stimulating these doubtful complexes which afflict precocious old people, his surrealist scenes and psychological landscapes give out boundless peace and serenity.

Consumed by the turbulence of cities, the fever of speed and hammering of noise, our age aspires to this kind of peace and serenity more each day.

(1) The Chartrons, who were castigated by Mauriac in *Préséances*, are the inhabitants of the Pavé des Chartrons: an area formerly set apart for rich people, today generally impoverished, but that continue to live in the manner of their ancestors of the XVIIIth century, whose ways they have conserved.

(Translation by Yvonne Kirbyson)



### THE OPTION OF THE GROUPE VÉHICULE

By Gilles TOUPIN

There is an idea which has been occupying the mind of the public for some years, at least in great part, and which seems to me timely to demystify. I am often asked what is happening in art in Montreal with this intonation which hopes, almost begging, for an immediate approval: "Since Borduas and since the plasticians, there is nothing more, is there?" It is very evident that, for those who do not follow the Montreal scene each week, the absence of movements toward very precise ideologies and toward heroic social problems seems to be a symptoms of total apathy. And yet the art of groups does exist among us; it exists under this ideology which consists of not having any, in the plastic sense of the term. It is at the very heart of this pleonasm which a historic sequence (which, at the least, will become historical because at the moment it appeals to no historic past) is arising little by little and is claiming this right to communication. Now either the art of the plasticians is made official and recognized fifteen years late, other creators have come forth to form in the emptiness a new artistic reality, pulsing with life, which does not even have the pretention of naming itself as such but which none the less continues to exist in spite of mockery and general lack of understanding.

We would not be able to catalogue the new awareness of the Quebec creators of the Groupe Véhicule under arbitrary labels of known international movements such as those of Land Art, Conceptual Art or Process Art. Among them there is a little of all that but, especially, a diversification of research which prevents their regrouping under a same category. The art of a Tom Dean, for instance, in this blunt retranscription of certain social stereotypes — especially when it newly marks in a sort of establishment certain newspaper clippings, clippings typical of the spirit of a society — establishes a process of communication with direct annotations. André Dutkewich with his works of minimalistic thought is on another track. Suzy Lake with her banquets in process explores the action of man in the course of time and the changes which he brings about on things. In another con-

nection, the sculptor Kelly Morgan raises strange relationships between the different nature of natural elements. With wood, he fashions savage forms, sensual and queer. He uses the photographic method to give the appearance of stone to other wooden forms. Gunter Nolte works directly in the space where he decides to set up his work. His way of working is joined in a certain sense to that of the *happening* without, nonetheless, containing the element of collective participation. For example, he will spread liquid colour on a floor covered with vinyl. The natural action of the liquid on the floor will build up in itself a fascinating plastic outline. Serge Tousignant creates sculptures which treat problems of illusion in different ways. Sometimes, by means of a simple gummed tape applied to the wall of a room, he carries the setting of the work of art into the frame of the everyday. Bill Vazan, with his topographical work, uses the geographical facts of the planet, at a level as much practical as conceptual, to bring his research to fulfilment. For her part, Milly Ristvedt continues to work on the traditional surface of canvas without, in any case, her work being considered essentially traditional.

Without mentioning the work of Gary Coward, Jean-Marie Delavalle, François Déry, Dennis Lukas and Henry Saxe, it is possible here and now to state from this more than summary review that the Groupe Véhicule does not exist in order to defend a very defined plastic ideology. Even if, in general, the spirit of the research tends to become grouped under a questionable awareness of the traditional data of art as discerned by the official networks of diffusion, the existence of the Groupe Véhicule is justified according to much more practical aims. It was, however, important to be, somewhat, acquainted with the creative activity of the members of the group. The fact of knowing who are exactly those who spark such an undertaking clarifies its objectives in one way or another. The implied spirit in the creative research of the members of Véhicule is not used for the purposes of cultural control. One cannot, however, deny that they are inscribed at the heart of a new creativity here. And as the group, in spite of its being open to all forms of art past, present or future, wishes that the dissemination of "art which questions the norms already established" should come about it offers itself as a support of this new creativity.

It is of the first importance not to interpret falsely the goals of Véhicule. I therefore allow myself to quote the text which exactly defined the aims of the group: "We would like to offer a centre without a financial goal and without political aims, directed by and for artists, which by its very structure of functioning, would remain open and available to all the forms of art in evolution; and which would be an active and vital place for artists and the public. We want this place to go far beyond being of advantage to the artists of the group. In so far as the initiator of this project, it is evident that each of us would use the place from time to time but we also want this place to serve as large a group of artists as possible, which would allow us to reach a greater public.

We believe that with the structures of functioning which we have established we can: a) offer exhibition space to a great number of artists in visual art in Montreal and the rest of the country, which would be of use in strengthening the lines of communication

among artists and between artists and the public; b) integrate the works of people of other discipline (music, poetry, dance, theatre, etc.) which also need a locale different from existing institutions; c) give a greater priority to the needs of each artist in what concerns the space and the time for their exhibitions, which present institutions do not or cannot do; d) contribute to the education of the public at large on the subject of art, by inviting schools, universities, artistic groups and the public to visit the premises; by working actively with them; and by giving them the most possible information concerning the internal and external activities of the place; e) create an environment, a comfortable place for artists and public, which would promote dialogue between the different forms of art and their respective publics."

There is certainly no need to mention that a system of educative dissemination, similar to that of the Groupe Véhicule necessitates financial resources. Up till now the group has been able to count on the help of the Canada Council. As the cooperative centre has a non-commercial aim, it seems to me normal and greatly to the credit of this state organisation to support this social enterprise. The cultural and conservative power exercised by the commercial system of galleries is finally offset (in part, certainly, because the effort of Véhicule would need to be repeated by many other persons) by a freedom of exhibition. The system of alternative jury made up of three members of whom one is outside the group permits, even if it is not perfect, many young artists to exhibit for the first time. Véhicule is in its introductory phase. It will expand, without doubt, if it is definitely allowed to continue its work. Not only will it be able to become an important point of reference at the level of its immediate territory, but it will be able to stretch its tentacles over the world scene. It is thanks to immersion in research movements in the whole world that we will have the option of recognizing and identifying our roots.

By establishing itself as to space, Véhicule, by its aims, becomes a sort of source of energy. The flood of artists frustrated by the inadequacy of a system will find in it a beneficial exit: finally, an alternative.

(Translation by Mildred Grand)