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Jean-Claude Leblond

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La Peinture secrète de Louise Forget

Jean-Claude Leblond

Quand, la première fois, j'ai rencontré Louise Forget dans son atelier parisien, elle était engagée dans la production d'une série de tableaux qui se différenciaient de tout ce qu'elle avait réalisé jusqu'alors. *La Suite parisienne* inaugurerait un nouveau cycle, une étape nouvelle caractérisée par une structuration extrême et rigoureuse de son espace pictural et de l'élément architectonique fondamental: le triangle¹.

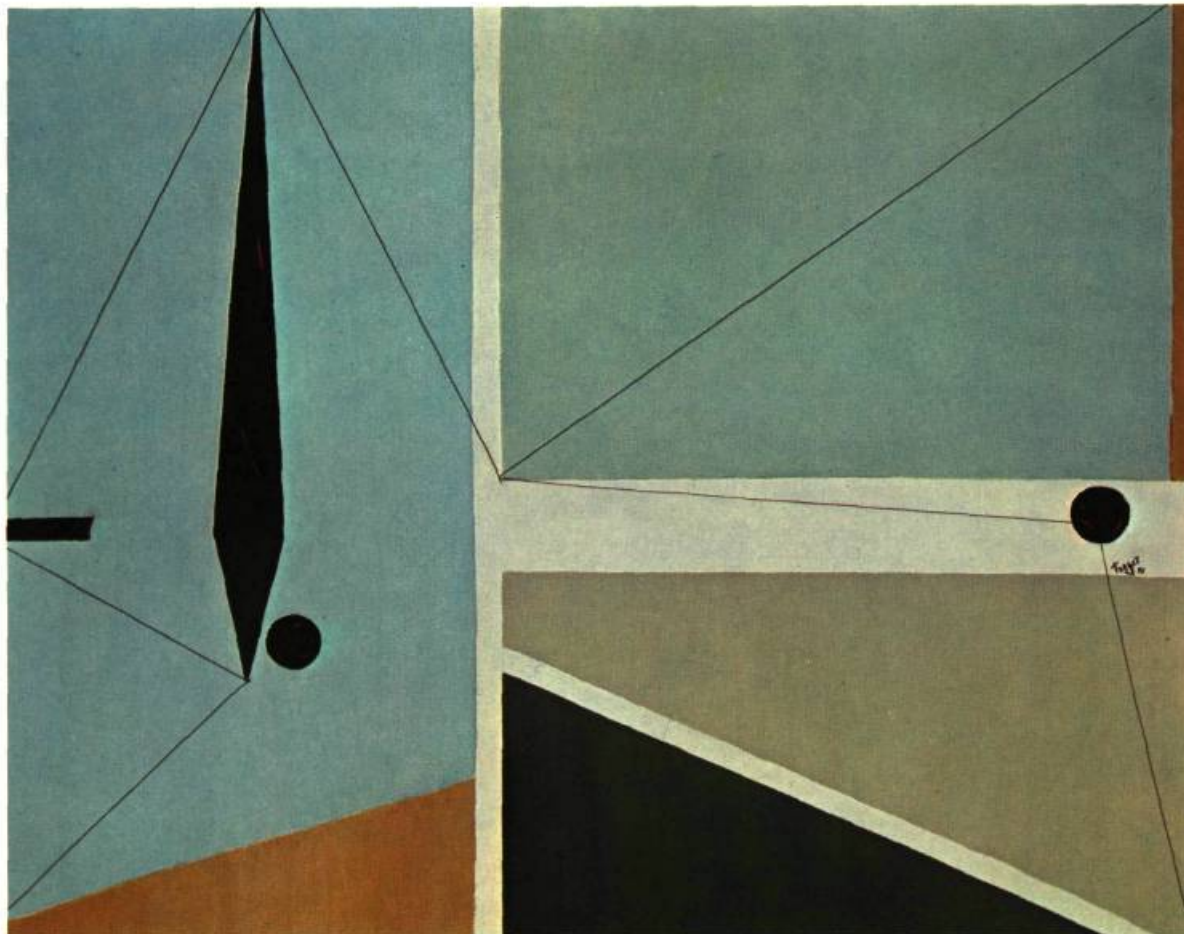
La Suite parisienne

En effet, l'observation d'une de ses toiles nous révèle, au plan de la composition, une répartition de la surface en triangles clairement indiqués à la fois par les masses chromatiques mais aussi par des lignes, segments de droites qui parcourent le champ comme des indices. Le numéro 16 de la Suite nous en fournit un bon exemple. A gauche, se dresse, comme une colonne, une masse étirée, composée de l'opposition de deux

triangles reliés par des vecteurs à des points focaux apparemment fictifs, ce qui crée un ensemble de triangles et évoque nettement une forme architecturale. «J'ai choisi le triangle comme symbole, dira-t-elle, parce que je le retrouvais constamment dans mon champ de vision. Lorsque je marchais et que je pensais à mon tableau, je retrouvais toujours ce triangle, soit vertical, soit oblique, qui était l'apport premier.»

Le centre *stratégique* de cette masse étirée, losange modifié, repose sur une tension introduite par deux éléments horizontaux: un court trait, à gauche, et une masse blanche comme une zone de démarcation, à droite. Le rectangle inférieur droit, séparé par une oblique qui rejoint la structure pour la soutenir, crée à son tour deux masses triangulaires.

Pourtant, le regard ne se dirigera pas spontanément à gauche sur le cœur de l'obélisque mais s'arrêtera au beau milieu de la surface à la jonction des deux



1. Louise FORGET
Suite parisienne N° 16, 1975.
Huile sur toile; 114 cm x 146.
Coll. de l'artiste.
(Phot. Gabor Szilasi)

Maisonneuve is not yet fully known. We know that he was involved in the construction of the fire station, the public baths, the market and the City Hall. These buildings still remain today. In their time, they contributed to giving to Maisonneuve the reputation for being one of the most beautiful municipalities in North America. And while the authorities of Maisonneuve had been working for a "City Beautiful", they had not neglected the health of the residents. In the basement of the City Hall was located a laboratory for sterilizing and pasteurizing milk; trained nurses were also instructing housewives in the best methods for caring for their children. These measures had the effect of reducing the infant mortality to about six per cent, as against forty in other cities of Canada. The same care was exercised in regard to water supply. The presence of the Dufresne family, through the restoration of their house, will be a lasting witness for future generations. Sherbrooke Street once had many such mansions. Most of them have now been destroyed. Those that are left were greatly altered. The Château Dufresne will be the only one restored to its original furnished condition.

A PAINTER OF SPACE: MICHEL MORIN

By Marie-France O'LEARY

Michel Morin's work is the reflection of a daily research beginning with a fundamental, original tone. This tone is in harmony with the cosmos and in each of his canvases there is inscribed a landscape of different and subtle nuances. Morin translates an interior vision, deliberately prepared and pondered. "I feel myself rather close to Zen philosophy. Just as the archer projects himself in the arrow, I pass through everything physical to project myself on the canvas."

Through innumerable colours the canvas develops under the heedful eye of its creator to become his own creation. Uninterrupted continuations in which the artist makes his choice. The dominating picture is the outcome of a series of canvases that have been the pretexts to the final movement.

"Truth is in the interior, Form at the exterior", Confucius wrote several thousand years ago, applying this thought to the domain of numbers. Now, we can perceive the language of painting only through our history; and so it is of Morin's pictures. A gaze fixed on the picture teaches us something about ourselves in so far as we enter into it. "It is by work that our language is formed. It is essential that I find my rhythm and that I explore it and not a language that might have been imposed on me."

For this artist, it is essential to place himself at the interior of the object and of surrounding nature. Because no one perceives his environment in the same fashion as another. Each colour corresponds to a personal vibration. To perceive and express it is to enter into intimate contact with the universe and to open oneself to nature's cycles. "I choose a colour that corresponds to my interior state. This will be the point of departure of my picture, which then develops progressively. I feel that I am guided by an interior force where I control each movement."

Vast spaces in which blacks, grays and whites communicate with each other, melt one with the other and take on their meaning, the manifestation of a universal harmony where we feel the balance of a work. Landscapes blossoming out in half-tints that the eye is unceasingly surprised to discover under different angles. Flashing light of an intimate and awesome nature. "Certainly nature is a source of inspiration. At present man is destroying it. And in the end the land will turn against the one who imposes an ill-fated development on a balanced evolution. It is imperative that persons sensitive to this situation find a solution to improve this state of things. I have chosen to paint. And, doubtless for this reason, I am more at ease in big forms where my interior perception of nature expresses itself more freely."

Painting is a difficult adventure, and Morin must daily take up his choice: "Every day, I go on. But I also have the right to live according to this choice. Now, we are incessantly confronted with the play of a system in which the artist becomes a commercial value. How to reconcile these contradictions? I do not believe in undertaking two crafts at the same time; for me, this is unthinkable. What to do? Are we continually called upon to be divided between our livelihood and our creating?" These are questions that have been for so long without answers. One day, perhaps, this community — hoped for by so many — will be formed, where art will be integrated into the daily life of everyone!

During his career Morin has touched lightly on all artistic disciplines, and his research originates from several stages. From 1965 to 1970 he worked at the Ciba laboratory on different techniques of impression on fabrics. During this period, also, he carried on research on ceramics in the North Hatley Studios and worked with American potter Kent Benson. Solo as well as group exhibitions are evidence of this research where little by little the painter discovered his reality. From 1970 to 1976 he produced serigraphs, acrylics, inks and gouaches, which led to a private exhibition in Paris, to a joint exhibition with Canadian and Avignon painters and, finally, to this recent solo exhibition in Montreal, where the painter's expression is asserted in all its maturity.

"Facing my work, I commune with myself. A daily ritual in which I always rediscover my rhythm. I meditate until I feel ready. I concentrate my energies: the picture comes to life."

A slow preparation during which the canvas woven in the mind is executed spontaneously. A language that is formed and always newly created because it is open to spatial dimensions. A direct and moving means of communication. A projection of waves on magnetic fields that stretch to infinity, since everything that lives is movement of a little-explored field of awareness.

In a series of drawings, Morin, playing with colours, calls upon the symbol of the circle that we rediscover, structured, allied to yin-yang figuration, elements of a whole that we cannot isolate, complementary aspects of the Universe. Harmony, rhythm, Morin conveys to us an exact dimension of space-time, and no part of the drawing can be dissociated from another. This involves a form of expression different from pictures, which allows us to be confronted with respects ostensibly opposed to the canvas, but perhaps created as a prelude to vast spaces, the origin of the artist's reflection. Drawings are of prime importance in the evolution of Morin's work, and, if he tends to produce architecture of larger size, we must first enter

into contact with them and live the luminous emotion that is released by them: intense vibrations of the four seasons of man, agony and joy, the search for the Holy Grail always present in each of us.

Morin's canvases are related to the currents of the history of mankind's painting when the painter remains a pioneer in areas whose exploration is constantly renewed. From his perception he draws the substance of his canvas, which he produces beyond external appearances. In this way he instigates associations that enrich each element of his picture while bringing forth a new meaning conveyed by a concentration of each moment.

(Translation by Mildred GRAND)

ON THE SECRET PAINTING OF LOUISE FORGET

By Jean-Claude LEBLOND

The first time I met Louise Forget in her Paris studio, she was engaged in the production of a series of pictures different from anything she had created up to that time. *Suite parisienne* ushered in a new cycle, a new stage characterized by an extreme and strict structuralization of her pictorial space and the fundamental architectonic element: the triangle¹.

Suite parisienne

In fact, the observation of one of her canvases reveals to us, at the level of composition, a distribution of the surface in triangles clearly indicated at one time by chromatic masses, but also by lines, segments of straight lines that cross the field like signs. Number 16 of this *Suite* gives us a good example. On the left rises, like a column, a drawn-out mass composed of the opposition of two triangles linked by vectors with obviously imaginary focal points, which creates an ensemble of triangles and freely calls to mind an architectural form. "I chose the triangle as a symbol", she would say, "because I constantly found it in my field of vision. When I was walking and thinking of my picture, I always encountered this triangle, whether vertical or oblique, which was the initial step."

The *strategic* centre of this lengthened mass, a modified lozenge, rests on a tension introduced by two horizontal elements: a short line on the left and a white mass like a zone of demarcation on the right. The lower right rectangle, separated by an oblique line that joins the structure to support it, creates two triangular masses in its turn.

However, one's gaze will not spontaneously be directed to the left onto the heart of the obelisk, but will be arrested right in the middle of the surface at the junction of the two white zones: horizontal and vertical. Afterwards, it will travel to the periphery, along lines placed there to direct the reading, to simplify it, one might say. A curious vision placing lower down a sphere that establishes the farthest ultimate point in this perspective by opposing to it, on the extreme right, another sphere which marks the closest point, and the whole composition is organized between these two focal points.

Another detail. When the picture has been executed in flat tint, the two focalization points

and the elongated diamond are marked by a graphism, a writing that allows the soaring existence, beyond formalism, of lyricism.

Born of constructivism, this "interior landscape", as the artist defines it, remains the reflection of an environment. Because it is actually a matter of urban landscape, of a personal interpretation of an "essentialized" place, reduced to a particularly minimal form in which, in relation to graphism, only the framework would exist, but where colour intervenes as essential emotional adjunct.

"I would like", she says, "to succeed in achieving a balance between an architectural conception of a composition and the gestural spontaneity of the paint-brush." One can understand this statement if one glances at Louise Forget's earlier production. To the severity of *Suite parisienne* is opposed the lyricism, the gestural quality of *Cycle des grands soleils*, which comprises, besides *Suite mexicaine* produced in 1966, a *Suite espagnole*, an Italian one and, finally, *Suite provençale*.

Les Grands soleils

It is fitting now to go back in time and to follow, along the thread of the years and the cycles of production, the artist's trajectory that spreads over twenty-five years of work but also of silence and discretion. Louise Forget, now back in Montreal, has hardly begun to be noticed or to display the abundance of her production.

At first, her painting was figurative; a pretext for understanding, for assimilating the relationships of shadow and light in foliage. The change to abstraction took place, however, only gradually and evolved toward a form of automatism that retained the same formal preoccupation at the interior of a sort of Cycle of Foliage which would end only the artist's sojourn in Mexico in 1966 and the beginning of *Cycle des grands soleils*.

This sudden approach is characterized by a genuine explosion of light in an earthy chromatics applied in wide areas that allow limitless spaces to show through in their interstices, perspectives released from the figurative limits. Here, graphism has, as it were, disappeared. This new, more atmospheric dimension of her work would be continued in Europe in a *Suite espagnole* that would assert unusual relationships with contemporary Catalan painting. The surface of the picture is organized according to a tense, emotional, violent graphism that shatters and breaks the rhythm of the warm Mediterranean air.

From a stay in Tuscany she drew *Suite italienne* or *Arno*, in tribute to the river that crosses the city of Florence. Here the atmosphere is more autumnal, heavier, more fleeting, too, and perhaps more hermetic. A light graphism insists less this time on infinite spatial opening. It already foretells the approaching orientation of Louise Forget's painting toward the architectural structuralization of the Parisian series.

But it is certainly in *Suite provençale* that Louise Forget attains the completion, the stylistic and conceptual fullness of *Cycle des grands soleils*. The whole surface explores the force of light on a burned land. The puff of air that would disturb the composition seems ready to intervene at any moment. Impressionist painting also gave this sensation of evanescence and fragility that the least little breeze might trouble.

More sparkling than the Italian series and infinitely less violent than the Spanish one, *Suite provençale* is the image of a contentment,

an impermanence, in the Far East meaning of the term. The melting action of light creates a kind of timelessness, an indifference to human relationship, a mystic of "luxury, calm, delight" which is still not Epicurean, but which comes rather from an existential attitude of meditation and respect.

The Mediterranean

Some persons believe, and I am among them, that there are Centre of the World places, locations more favourable than others to certain types of activity. The Mediterranean world is one of these privileged places. Threshold of the western world, original womb of civilization. And Louise Forget's *Cycle des grands soleils*, it seems to me, confirms this sensation that the elements air, earth and water make in the same body, in a feeling inexpressible, indescribable, at the side of time.

For Louise Forget, whose development is going on very slowly under present criteria, sensitivity concerning the environment, permeability in the face of the atmosphere of a place form the basis of a work that, beyond painting, borrows the many passages of plastic expression. Here we have stopped at only her painting, but much could be said as well about her engraving. Her water-colours, also, which further express the fluidity, the *fleeting* quality of air, while her collages thrust still further forward the research into new structures, new architectures, with the ultimate aim of attaining the synthesis, the fusion of geometry and poetry.

1. Last spring, Louise Forget exhibited her *Suite parisienne* at the Canadian Centres in Chicago and Boston.

(Translation by Mildred Grand)

CHRISTOPHER PRATT — A PERSONAL MEMOIR

By Michael COOK

Ten years ago, walking down an antiseptic corridor, about to take up an appointment with the Extension Service of Memorial University, I met somebody about to leave it.

Prematurely balding, intense, a little insecure, it was Christopher Pratt. He had confronted early in his career the problem facing many 20th century artists. To survive, he had to teach. But Pratt, though a natural artist is not a natural teacher. There are some whose creative energies are motivated and sustained by the teaching process but for him, at that time, it was an impossible situation. To teach well, one has to be secure in one's art and, out of that security be able to impart, without loss of the essential creative energies, elements of craft and style which do not drain the self of the power to create.

But in 1966, he had met the challenge neither of himself nor of his art, and to teach was to deny the fulfilment of either. He chose early to commit himself to a private vision, and in this decision was aided and abetted by his family.

Significantly, his work then, apart from a superb sense of draughtmanship, had no articulated core. He was an artist of whom people said: "Ah, yes, he has potential", but then, taking refuge behind cocktail glasses, were

unable to determine exactly what that potential was. I have an early pencil drawing from that period. It is, simply, of trees. They are unmistakably Newfoundland trees, poor scrubby spruce and fir waving defiantly at the elements.

But there is, after one takes in the whole — something unique about that picture after all, for the picture is not so much a visual recreation as a personal testament. Each tree is crying out for its own life, its own identity. The landscape, then, is not an observed reality, but a series of individual statements each crying out for recognition. And thus the picture fails magnificently, containing the promise of a vision greater than the realization. The tree, surrounded by other trees.

Ask Pratt if he is, very specifically, a Newfoundland artist and, like the experienced yachtsman he is, he will jibe and come round on another tack; will tell you: "Well, of course. I live here." But I suspect that the reason he is unable to respond sympathetically to that question is more than a natural reluctance to be type cast; that the problem relates to a peculiar form of artistic schizophrenia. As a painter, he is creating visual images out of an oral mythology, his inheritance. The Newfoundland experience is essentially oral and dramatic, and Pratt, artist and inheritor of the Island's past, has always re-created his private mythology in an essentially dramatic form. That is why it is nonsense to equate Pratt with schools Realistic and Magic for, just as he is sensitive to the possibility of being stereotyped as a Newfoundland artist, it is equally limiting to place him with a school or style that negates the impression and influence of place. It is true that the craft origins of Pratt's style can be linked with Alex Colville, his one-time teacher and mentor and there are obvious similarities in terms of discipline and technique. But there the comparison must end, for ultimately it is the subject matter and the approach to it that determines the individuality of the artist.

As a member of the global village, Pratt does not limit himself to subjects taken from his immediate environment — two recent pictures, *Lake Ontario* and *Station* illustrate this but, nonetheless, he brings to bear upon such subjects the same dramatic intensity that informs his vision. And it is a localized intensity. His is a rare example of consummate craft allied to a singular vision which can only be realized by attention to, and knowledge of (even if unconscious at times) a particular place at a particular time in its history. Such intensity allied to the mastery of the technology of the time constitutes the process of genius.

What are the lineaments of his vision? Isolation. Dignity. Perfection. Detachment. Fury. Examine any of his exteriors... *Cottage*, *Coley's Point*, *Shop on an Island*. Pristine, isolated, vested with immense dignity, it is easy at first to see them casually as obvious and familiar artifacts lovingly recreated until brought to a state of grace. But that is to ignore the exterior environment, the sea and, in *Coley's Point*, the sky also, reflected in the door.

"In the beginning God created the Heavens and Earth. The Earth was without form and void and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters. And God said: "Let there be light", and there was light."

The creation myth from Genesis is at once moving and yet terrifying in its abstraction, but the artist is drawn, as in dream or nightmare, to respond to it, either to will the creation of a new and private universe or to despair at that which has been created.