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14th Symposium international de la nouvelle peinture au
Canada, curator: Yvonne Lammerich; Centre d'art de
Baie-Saint-Paul, Baie-Saint-Paul. August 2nd - September 2nd
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BAIE-SAINT-PAUL
TWO GENERATIONS OF PAINTERS

14th Symposium international de la nouvelle peinture au Canada, curator : Yvonne Lammerich ;
Centre d'art de Baie-Saint-Paul, Baie-Saint-Paul. August 2nd - September 2nd 1996



Lise Boisseau, *À Sara, poupées russes*, 1996. Acrylique sur masonite; 240 x 247 cm.

Baie-Saint-Paul's Symposium directed by Yvonne Lammerich had as its theme : " Suite Mémoire " or, " Continuation Memory ". The ten selected artists (Caroline Boileau, Stéphane Gilot, James Kealy, Yam Lau, Hencer Molina, Patrice Mortier, Natalie Olanik, Ann Onymus, Anna Maria Romani, Iztok Smajs) and five invited artists (Lise Boisseau, David Elliott, Pierre Faucher, Landon Mackenzie, Brigitte Radecki) testified to a growing diversity of generations, cultures, practices and voices active in the development of painting in both Canada and abroad.

I knew of the symposium by reputation but had never ventured out into the " country " to experience its actual unfolding. So, I visited Baie-Saint-Paul for a weekend to get acquainted with the participating artists and discuss their experience of working in a public and collaborative setting. The one month residential framework of the symposium permits the artists to set up a studio area and work on ideas around the proposed theme. Artists live together communally for the duration of the symposium and the studios, set up in a vacant arena, are open to the public five

afternoons a week. This environment appeared to me to be the first stumbling block in developing a productive art environment. To my surprise — this acutely public model of art production was pregnant with the cross fertilization of ideas, exchange, collaboration and discussion.

The resounding highlight of the experience, as retold by virtually all of the participating artists, was the community of artists that such a symposium encourages. Judging from this example, one would have to believe that there is a need, and a lack, of community exchange in art production present in our normal urban lives. That the artists in Baie-Saint-Paul influenced one another, bothered, questioned and applauded the direction in which work developed, is proof of the possibility of collaborative formulation in art. That the artists were themselves surprised by the positive invasion of their solitary routines reinforces my belief that we seek to communicate through art — whether we acknowledge it or not.

The artists of the fourteenth symposium were divided into two categories : those who were invited to guide and mentor; and those who were selected to participate in the





David Elliott, *Benil/Hause for Madeleine*, 1996. Huile et acrylique sur toile; 240 x 240 cm.



Caroline Boileau, *Sans titre*, 1996. Techniques mixtes sur toile; 120 x 60 cm.

program — the idea being that exchanges could bridge two generations of painters. Invited artists were also picked from different backgrounds, cultures and certainly 'schools' of painting. In a time when painting is questioning itself, this eclectic group could be observed as a meta-art-society, a small scale representation of the multitudinous disparities within the world of painting.

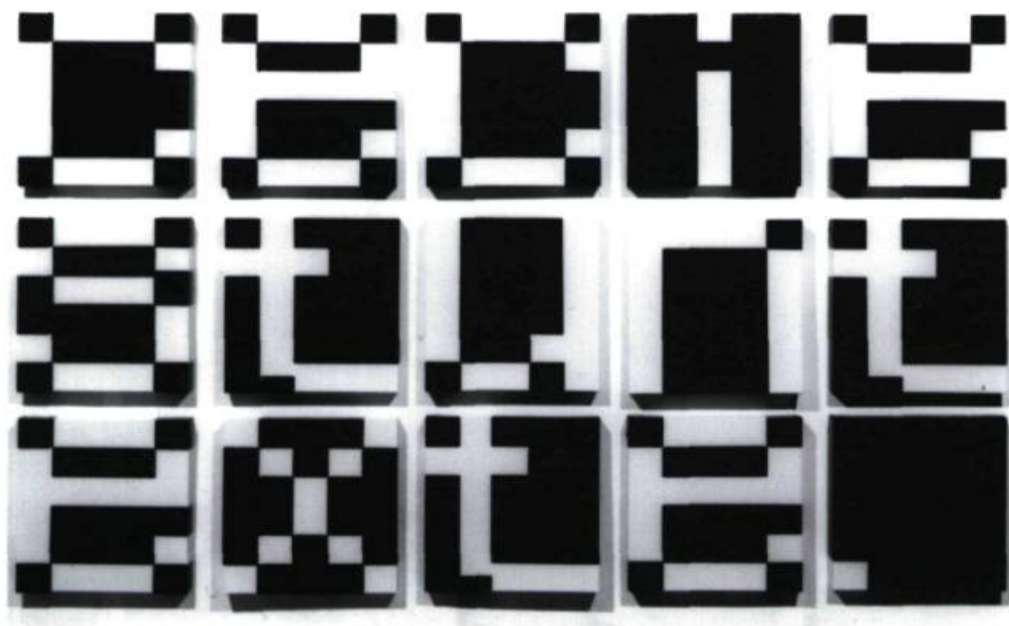
The invited artists ranged so dramatically in styles, philosophies and techniques that it would be difficult to make a generalization on their all-encompassing direction for the symposium. Rather, it is as individuals and signifier of possibilities within art discourses that their influence is apprehended and disseminated.

Lise Boisseau's work can be described as a progression of certain variables within the canon of *Québécois* painting seen in historical figures such as Paul Émile Borduas. The materiality of paint, its planar dimensionality and the admixture of pure abstraction and spatial definition contribute to a 'polyphonic' representation. The work produced during the symposium elicited an attentive flexibility on the part of the viewer and maintained a playful ambivalence toward the problematic of pure representation in painting.

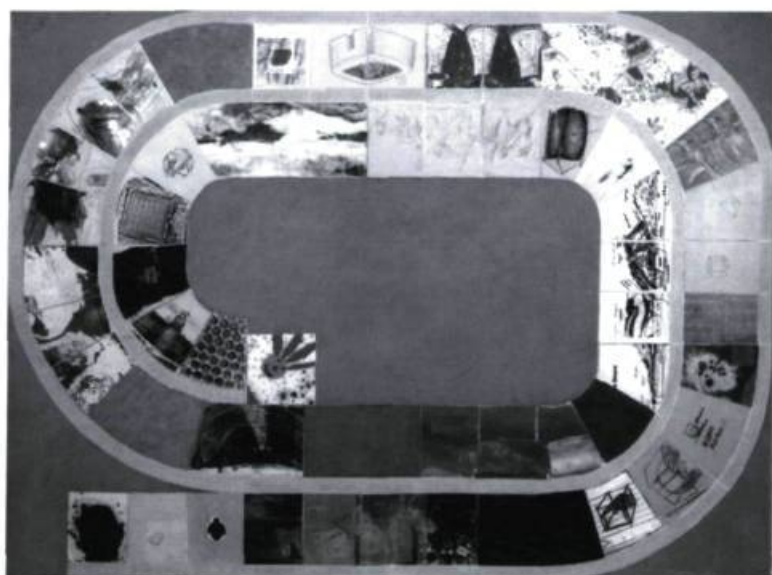
David Elliott's work, at the other extreme, was a delightfully sentimental re-appropriation of his familiar roster of graphically painted symbols such as : cats, birds, candles, clowns, couples, moons and galaxies. His work fuses the atmospheric childhood necessity to understand objects with a crisp, clear and monumental composition. This results in the binding of the eternally magical within the real and essential of everyday.

Originally from France, Pierre Faucher's *œuvres* are contingent on their contextualization and the vacillation between levels of interpretation. While working on one focal work during his stay, a traditional painting, he also created an interior 'garden' comprised of chairs, plastic lawn ornaments, cut flowers in water and a house made of popsicle sticks. His garden/installation welcomed all visitors and seemed to be made of good social use during my visit, serving as a point of repose, a mini oasis, for the public and artists.

Cartography and the Cartesian grid lied at the heart of Vancouver based Landon Mackenzie's production. She created elaborately textured map-like landscapes which were also reminiscent of tapestries and other labour intensive art forms. These elegiac works captured the weight of



Ann Onymous, *Sans titre*, 1996. Acrylique sur toile.



Stéphane Gilot, *Sans titre*, 1996. Collage sur toile; 240 x 300 cm.

time and the mutability of 'vision' through history, change, culture and other translations.

Brigitte Radecki's *œuvres*, on the other hand, were by far the most quiet of the lot and demanded a coalescence of observation and meditation on the part of the viewer. The diptychs and triptychs were composed of activated canvases, filled with spiraling lines and combined with the dark uniform canvases. The textuality of the lines, their allusion to language, action and communication, contrasted with the stark solidity and static form of their uniform counterpart.

The participants were equally diverse in their approach to painting, memory and time. Caroline Boileau investigated the limits of the series in a production that took to task the time invested in multiplying a head-like form and investing it with subtle differences and modulations of texture, transparency and linearity. This daily practice of building on a series comprised the focus of time/memory which embodied her work.

The labyrinthine work of Belgian artist Stéphane Gilot proposed a reflection on history, representation and the configuration of architectural space. His canvas could be interpreted as a game board where the viewer was elicited to play into the work and follow a loose trajectory of various 'home' structures. The metaphor of home, being in constant change, can also be applied to post-modern sense of belonging.

A mural theme was the departure point for Vancouver based James Kealy. He built on the monumentality of historical painting by creating a work that evoked the community of the symposium participants. The figures were based on photographs taken of the other artists and in many ways this was the most representational attempt at figuration and narration — a difficult agenda in this post-modern era. Kealy succeeded in illuminating an urgency for the figure and human reflection/scale.

Toronto based Yam Lau's painting installation, by far the most conceptual and misunderstood by the visiting public, was composed of a photograph and angled 'mirror' plate. It spoke of reflection and interpretation in art — the photograph representing a local landscape painting as seen through the grid of a window. He further developed this theme by incorporating picture postcards and a small landscape painting done in the local style. This reflection and kaleidoscopic translation of landscape, local style and its limits/potential engendered the paradox in painting and representation.

Argentinean Hencer Molina's painting stem from the surrealistic tradition of evoking spaces which are barely habitable and leave only a residual trace of human existence. His work represented an eerie spiraling staircase at the bottom of which could be seen the ray of light emanating

from, perhaps, an open door. Beautifully painted it attested to the possibility for painting to contain atmosphere and to transport the viewer into another environment.

Technology was at the forefront of Patrice Mortier's work which was based on a video taped performance of him drawing and was then multiplied into serigraphs and created into a wall series. This dark freeze framed video image series of the French artist added another layer to our conception of time, of transformation and material translation.

Natalie Olanik, in contrast, chose to research local quilt making customs and incorporate her findings, as well as her interpretation of these customs, within her work using collaged cloth, string and images. By letting the history live through her work she permitted a hybrid culture to take form — one which is neither local nor indigenous to the artist.

Ann Onymus expanded painting to include the technological transformation of image making as well as the role of language in interpretation and visual cognition. His series of computer styled letter paintings spelt out "ceci est un texte" (this is a text) and at once negated its interpretation as text/painting — exemplifying the liminality of interpretation/representation.

Anna Maria Romani's lyrical work was a kind of garden of the senses. She offered the viewer a trajectory within her standing works which could be circled and perused from all sides. The rich abstract textural and colour schemes offered an embodied and acutely physical presence of the painter at work and evidenced the body in motion.

Radically different both in content and materials to the symposium community was the work by the Slovenian artist, Iztok Smajs. His patterned shelter, erected at the end of the arena space, displayed a wallpapered series of computer and digital representation. It was a symbolic communication tower where people could come and revel in his abstract environment.

One of the primary problematic of painting today is its relation to the image and how it may set itself within the framework of representation without being bound to it. In an era of simulacrum, painting takes on a new and significant conundrum which is its role of representing its representation. The artists involved in the fourteenth painting symposium in Baie-Saint-Paul attested to the vitality of painting and to its polymorphous possibilities both through community and exchange.

VALÉRIE LAMONTAGNE