

## La chambre blanche

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## LA CHAMBRE BLANCHE

Founded in 1978, La chambre blanche is a center for artists dedicated to diffusion and experimentation in field of the visual arts. Its mandate is articulated on a reflection dedicated to practices in installations and *in situ*, according to four topics: diffusion, production, documentation and formation. Its residence programs, its laboratory for creation on the Web and its documentation center are the driving force of this reflection.

### Artists Programs, in residence, *In situ*

Since 1982, the center has developed its program of artists in residence. It was created by the collectives' desire to offer new contexts for creation. This program, the first of its kind in Québec, comes out of a reflection devoted to installation practices and *in situ*. It is different from other centers. It not only offer a space for work and residence for artists, but it gives a space to be invested by a creative process in order to realize a project. The way we understand being in residence translates in this rare occasion offered to an artist to question the nature of artistic work as such, its emergence and its reception. The artists are welcomed to work in the center's space or outside. The selected projects integrate installation practices and *in situ* approaches. During the six weeks spent in residence, the selected artist is invited to conceive a unique and ephemeral work realized in the contexts of a true laboratory *in vivo*. In fact, the public is welcome to assist to the realization process of each projects created in residence.

### Artists Programs in Residence for Web Productions

Since 2000, La chambre blanche applies the notion of *in situ* in the context of cyberspace. The center conceives virtual space as an unavoidable path of exploration, and, with the laboratory dedicated to web creation, proposes to artists in visual arts and media arts a new and different way to see their artistic productions. The Labweb is available for artists who want to pursue their reflection in this creative context. Open to multidisciplinary practices, the laboratory hopes to give access to resources allowing artists to create works on the web and/or interactive works. Residences for production have a duration of six weeks. They are offered to professional artists, so they can realize projects in *art réseau*

or Web art, both of which valorizing an investment in a virtual space. The produced works are posted on our Internet site.

### Documentation Center

The documentation center of La chambre blanche exists since the creation of the collective. It is open to the public at large and offers a service of document loans to members and a personalized research service, including a database easily accessible on the Internet. Thanks to a system of exchange and donations, we receive all new books. We also subscribe to more than 25 reviews and magazines to make sure that we have all the pertinent information in the domain of art actuel.

### Room for Education

Since 2007, to be sure that we maintain the development and our expertise in the new medias, La chambre blanche is in charge of a room solely allocated to training. This room annually offers classes to gain expertise in the new medias, for artists of the community which hope to explore this new language and challenge their experimentations.

### Féministe toi-même, féministe quand même!

Elaborated by Isabelle Bernier, Francine Chainé, Chantale Desgagnés and Nicole Jolicoeur in 1984, this project wanted to raise awareness about women artists and their oppression in the visual arts milieu, and question more particularly the stereotypical ideas concerning their practices. The program of events was scheduled from the month of February until June of 1984. It included two collective exhibitions and a Conference.

The call for dossiers was clear, La chambre blanche hoped to "put forward the works of women artists persisting in practices considered non-significant by our culture, not really *in* or frankly *tacky*. The center opened a dialogue with women artists around the fact that their practices were stereotypically accused of infantile sentimentality, viewed as gossipy, mythomaniac, narcissistic, romantic, naïve, amateuristic, artisanal or coming from an old fashion feminism". Following the circulation of this call for papers within Canada, the United States and Europe, many projects were proposed. Twenty-six were selected to create two collective exhibitions. These exhibition were opened from February 14<sup>th</sup> until March 18<sup>th</sup> and from April 24<sup>th</sup> to June 3<sup>rd</sup> 1984.

The conference included a round table discussion monitored by Nicole

Jolicoeur. The discussion topic were: "Women artists exhibitions" why organize them and which angle should we take to do so? Which diffusion strategies artists should take in the future? The artists and cultural agents Diane-Jocelyne Côté, Lise Nantel, Bérénice Reynaud and Joane Roy were invited to change the topics. The conference was punctuated by film and video presentations, the event ending by a performance by Sylvie Laliberté and Nathalie Derome. And the conference ended with the following conclusion: the situation of the women artists was not transformed in an important way, over the last 15 years.

Two years later, La chambre blanche launched the publication *Féministes toi-même, féministe quand même!*, with the mandate to offer a better understanding of the discrimination processes towards women in the visual arts milieu. In the text « À l'ombre de l'art contemporain » Isabelle Bernier mentions that at the moment where the event was presented by La chambre blanche "there was the exposition *Via New York* at the Musée d'art contemporain. It was an overview of the new tendencies in the painting art scene in New York City. And on the twenty-four artists selected, *Via New York* did not include any women". Unfortunately, this fact can find some echo in today's world.

Before reaching any conclusion, as an exercise, I would propose to calculate the number of individual exhibitions dedicated to women artists on a yearly basis and presented by any museums. You can also, when you will visit a museum, count the numbers of works by women in permanent collections. Although *Féministe toi-même, féministe quand même!* happened 20 years ago, it is fair to admit that the problems explored at the time are still relevant today.

### Chambres d'hôtel

In order to mark the beginning of festivities around the 15 year anniversary of La chambre blanche, it was important to conceive an event that would reaffirm the founding principles of the residence *in situ*, as understood by the center. *Chambres d'hôtel* was a landmark project in the events program. It was scheduled from January 10 until January 31 1993. It was conceived with 15 artists creating residences *in situ*, in 15 rooms located in 14 hotels in Quebec City.

In the hopes to reach a public that is not really familiar with this kind of art and to offer new contexts for creation to artists, some members

of La chambre blanche proposed to use the hotel room as a space for diffusion. It was a most stimulating idea. Indeed, this space would not only secure the passage for visitors, it would also represent a space for non conventional modes of diffusion, with of contingencies such as the atmosphere that the furniture in place would suggest, the curtains, carpets and all the content of the room. The hotel room was at the opposite of the neutral, empty clean spaces usually accommodating art exhibits. The call for proposition would ask artists to elaborate a project that would relate to this unconventional space. It wanted them to question this private/public space in their proposals.

To cope with the contingencies of such space, some artists have chosen to keep the furniture of the room. They were going as far as integrating the atmosphere in place when they decided to occupy it. For instance, Marlene Klassen and Claudie Gagnon have both used the room as a framework for a *ready-made*. Florent Cousineau kept his room intact, choosing instead to give, by interest, the place to his friends. They were free to occupy the room for one night, and see what the traces of their time there would become.

In an completely opposite manner, some artists (Patrick Altman, Michel François, Jeffrey Norgen and Guy Pellerin) preferred to empty their room of its content in order to create a free space. They could then take possession of it. As an example, Guy Pellerin's room at the Château Frontenac was entirely free of its furniture, to the exception of a lamp and a chair to be used by the person welcoming the visitors. There was a display shelf on which was disposed a drawing book. In this drawing book, the artist had represented the various objects and furniture that had captured his attention, objects that were in that very room. Patrick Altman also emptied the room of its content, allowing the work to occupy the whole space, the floor included.

Between these two extremes, artists such as Michael Davidson, Françoise Girard, Michel Goulet, Shelagh Keeley, Evelyn Mitsui, Karen Pick, Mario Scattoloni and François Vallée chose to preserve and integrate the bed – the core of the room – in their proposals.

The event *Chambres d'hôtel* was a huge success and is considered a milestone for La chambre blanche. The intensity and the pertinence of works realized by participating artists have allowed us to demonstrate the importance of establishing residences in the production of works *in situ*.



## Temporality

We were eager to pursue the reflections brought by such events as *Chambres d'hôtel*. La chambre blanche wanted to investigate further with another aspect of its mandate: the *in situ* and its relations to time. In 1998, for the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations, the center invited artists, art critics and curators to participate to an annual program punctuated by events exploring the theme of time.

The *Métronome* project was scheduled for January 12<sup>th</sup>, 1998, the anniversary date of the center's inception. It was the occasion to launch the program. La chambre blanche invited people who had contributed to its history to participate to an action, from various locations in the world and thus taking place on different time zones. This action was meant to realize a Self-portrait at 9 pm, Greenwich hour, by bringing together portraits by Monica Kin Gagnon, Susan Menzies, Reva Stone, Jocelyne Belcourt-Salem, Doug Frick, Marlene Creates, Pierre Giner, Karen Trenkel, Bernard Villers, Irmeli Kokko and Tari Ito. All of them ending their action by taking a picture of their respective locations, at the moment of the portrait's realization.

A second event, taking place from April 3<sup>rd</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup>, gave a special color to this yearly program. It was the *Premières rencontres en arts visuels*, a collective event outside the walls of the center. It invested many interior and exterior sites, among which the Maison Gomin (the old jail for women), the historical chapel of the Séminaire de Québec, the church Notre-Dame-de-Grâce and a dilapidated space, located at 350, Charest Est Street. For this occasion, La chambre blanche asked ten artists to use time as the main material. It is in this occasion that european artists Anne Barbier, Pierre Giner, Sheila Nadimi and Guillaume Paris, along with artists from Quebec and english Canada, Gilbert Boyer, Murielle Dupuis-Larose, Michael Fernandez, Andrew Foster, Jocelyn Robert and Lyla Rye, have invested these spaces for their works.

In parallel to these events, the residences *in situ* taking place in the gallery were also focussing on the issue of temporality. This program also welcomed the project Vacuum (s) by Bertrand R. Pitt, works done with sand by Mariella Mosler, *Insectarium Welcome* by François Chevalier, some interventions by Neva-Gotthilf, the project *SentienBody* by Reva Stone, to finally end with the trio BGL's project *Perdu dans la nature*.

*Temporalité (Métronome)*, the *Premières rencontres en arts visuels* and the programs of residences *in situ*,

presented at the gallery allowed us to investigate the notion of time in the production and the diffusion of works realized *in situ*. This project also helped us to gather with the public, with event such as the *Premières rencontres en arts visuels*. It was an event outside the walls of the center, investing unconventional spaces for its diffusion, in the heart of Quebec City.

## Sur les toits

In the hopes to stay an active agent in the production and diffusion of installation practices and *in situ*, La chambre blanche presented, from August 31<sup>th</sup> until September 30<sup>th</sup> 2001, an event focussing on the possible relations between art and the urban milieu – outside the walls of the center.

*Sur les toits* pursued this reflection on art and the particularities of spaces which represents it. In the same way as the projects *Chambres d'hôtel* and *Temporalité*, this event has introduced the works in public spaces. It has done a great deal to meet with different audiences by using an unusual space for its diffusion. In this case, four artists have been invited to conceive works *in situ* on building roofs, all located in the Saint-Roch area. It is in respect to this that French artist Nathalie Allard and Alexis Bellavance, and Quebec City artists Florent Cousineau and Odile Trépanier were up for the challenge and eager to confront the limitations imposed by the nature of this kind of space: perspectives, architecture and bad weather included.

For this occasion, Nathalie Allard presented *Les locataires du haut*, a project presenting around twenty flags on which were presented words, phrases and imageries inspired by old engravings. The images and the words decorating the flags were printed with ink sensitive to heat, light and humidity. The flags in banner, rich in colours, would vary according to climate and would punctuate the short trajectory between Gabrielle-Roy Library and La chambre blanche.

Alexis Bellavance invested the roof of the building CDTI, located at the angle of Saint-Vallier and Dorchester Streets, with his project *Mémoires terrestres*. The idea was to reach the imperceptible. The artist installed huge flutes meant to make the noise of wind audible. This tool would transmit the caption of wind on the Internet and on the radio. On another side of the building was presented a blueprint in the biggest format representing the image of a man that let himself go against a receptor. This image, like the sounds produced by the flutes, would mark time as ephemeral...

The pedestrians who used Saint-Hélène Street were surprised by Florent Cousineau's work. Thanks to a tool placed on the roofs of the « Ateliers de roulement à billes », the rain could run freely on the little street connecting la Couronne and Dorchester Streets. A roadsign would invite the pedestrians to take an umbrella, in order to protect themselves from the imminent showers.

Finally, the project proposed by Odile Trépanier played with the idea of the chinese lantern. The lantern has an intern mechanism that moves with the wind, while projecting on its structure a multitude of vegetal forms. The light and the animations produced by *Le catalyseur* were almost imperceptible during the day. Located at the top of the public elevator building which connects the Upper and the Lower City, it is in the evening that this work would shine, and become relevant for the people passing by.

*Sur les toits* was temporarily present in the daily lives of Quebec City's citizens. It presented works *in situ*, in the most unconventional manner. Anybody regularly walking in the Saint-Roch area could notice the interventions realized by artists and look differently at these roofs of building they know so well. *Sur les toits* was also inclusive of internet surfers by offering the diffusion of these works in real time, accessible on the internet site of La chambre blanche. ■

## ÎLOT FLEURIE

### UNFINISHED UTOPIA

Since its founding, the îlot Fleurie has had many lives, fought many battles. We have to remember that until 1991, while the city did not care about this area, citizens and artists took the initiative to arrange a vacant lot that was considered dangerous. The place soon became a beautiful garden where pathways, gardens and flowers would reflect the spontaneous creativity of a collective. This organic space, full of imagination and solidarity, had started this movement of revitalization of the neighborhood. Very close, the city had somewhat walked into someone footsteps. In 1997, the scenario became a nightmare. L'îlot Fleurie was forced to give its space to the real estate developers. The organization had to establish a strong balance of power with citizens. Following a poetry manifestation, pacifist civil disobedience and contentious negotiations, the îlot Fleurie obtain

a new lot. At the time surrounded by fast roads and a parking lot, it gave up its interest in community gardens which became an autonomous entity. The îlot Fleurie gave all its time to the creation of urban events. In 2000, after few years of difficult restructuration, a new group was created and took control of it with the support of Quebec City. This new team, composed mostly of women, worked to make sure the place would flourish and stay lively. Following the *Plywoodstock* days, *Émergence* became an artistic event of national scale happening every year. The îlot Fleurie could therefore welcome many artists from all generations. After the remarkable coming of sculptors such as Bill Vazan, Henri Saxe, Don Darby, it would be time for young people like Laurent Gagnon, BGL and the sœurs Couture to animate the spaces during *Émergence*. In 2001, when the Summit of Americas took place, the îlot Fleurie proclaimed itself the "free and pacifist zone of resistance". It welcomed thousands of activists who came to eat, paint, sing, dance and use the bathrooms.

It was viewed as the general quarters of activists. While the city had supported the initiative in this occasion, the îlot served as a security and sanitary base. It was a place to rest from the frustrated population choking from gas and lies alike. The îlot Fleurie made a fire 30 meters high and a concert of the most memorable impulsive percussions: hundreds of people played for hours, tapping on gates and roadsigns from the Lower to the Upper City. As a space to gather people, the îlot Fleurie pursued its cultural activities in this sense: *Solstice des Amériques*, *Festival de l'humour noir*, *Journée autogérée*, poetry in the open air, etc. Recognized and appreciated by many, the îlot Fleurie obtained the status of center for artists. Indeed, the îlot Fleurie became the utopic space *par excellence*, because of its conjunction of art, the social and communities. It became an island of creative and green resistance in the middle of reinforced concrete.

In the spring of 2007, the need to move and the brutal displacement of works of arts started the breaking down of the îlot Fleurie. It almost destroyed it. To start an organization is sometimes difficult. To maintain it is even harder, especially when the work is done by volunteers. When an organization has almost 20 years of history and we don't count nor the imposing numbers of citizens that worked for its success, nor the works they created, its disappearance is painful and its dissolution is complex. It is indeed the challenge that the îlot Fleurie was facing. It had no space to