

Quebec Triennial: A look to the future with echoes of the past

BY JOHN POHL, GAZETTE VISUAL ARTS CRITIC OCTOBER 7, 2011



At the Quebec Triennial, artist François Morelli creates flags whose central emblems are the marks made by the sole of his shoe.

MONTREAL - Modernism, and the belief that art can change the world for the better, is still alive if the artists chosen for the Quebec Triennial are any indication.

The Work Ahead of Us, the subtitle of the Triennial at the Musée d'art contemporain, was Vladimir Tatlin's call to artists to help create a better Russia after the 1917 revolution. Grier Edmundson, one of the many young artists in this second Quebec Triennial, borrowed the title for his version of Tatlin's Monument to the Third International. And the contemporary art museum's curators, after months of visiting studios and selecting more than 50 artists, realized that The Work Ahead of Us also expressed the themes and current practices of Quebec artists – although Edmundson's contribution to the Triennial doesn't include the sculpture of that name.

Tatlin's statement implied a belief in the future, but today, it is more of a question, said the museum's chief curator, Marie Fraser. "It's impossible to believe we are going to better times," she said. "But many artists are looking to the past, returning to Modernism" for inspiration.

Charles Stankievecch revisits

Jules Olitski's Instant Loveland from 1968, which the artist claimed was the first non-objective painting. To make his version of Olitski's "purple cloud," Stankievecch went to the Arctic. "Our experience of

nature is sublime, and there is something sublime in the video of a smoke grenade exploding into the white landscape,” she said.

Sophie Bélair Clément has reconstructed El Lissitzky’s “proun room,” the little gallery the Russian artist built in the 1920s as the ideal space to show his abstract, geometric paintings. The room is considered one of the first examples of installation art, Fraser said. So Clément’s art work is both a re-enactment of an installation and a conceptual work on the idea of exhibition space. (Although the proun room is left bare, the museum is hanging a real El Lissitzky work on a nearby wall).

The re-enactment of an event in art history and the rethinking of exhibition space as an “object of knowledge” – rather than a place to discuss the artwork on view – are defined in the catalogue’s glossary of current practices, which includes names of artists working with those themes. With essays about artists, whether chosen for the Triennial or not, the catalogue is a reference book on contemporary Quebec art. Interestingly, the essays about established artists not in the show discuss the groundwork they did for the young artists that were chosen. At least one of the artists – Julie Favreau – is still a student, working on a master’s degree at Concordia.

Steve Bates’s installation pairs a concertina musical instrument with barbed concertina wire. The concertina plays sounds produced by visitors moving through the galleries. “Sound is a kind of freedom,” Fraser said. “You cannot stop sound as you can stop people.”

Olivia Boudreau provides a “pure experience of time” in videos in which nothing happens, Fraser said. Boudreau shows a sauna that periodically disappears from sight in a cloud of steam. As the steam dissipates, we are challenged to perceive changes in the group of women sitting on benches.

There is relational art, in which artists like Massimo Guerrera mobilize the creativity of the non-artist. And there is performance, as embodied by François Morelli, who creates flags whose central emblems are the marks made by the sole of his shoe during walks in which one foot is wrapped in cloth.

There is also a Lynne Marsh video playing in the Place des Arts walkway, Rafael Lozano-Hemmer’s interactive light show in Place des Festivals and a series of Wednesday evening performances. And on Saturdays at 2 p.m., artists will be in the galleries to meet with the public. There are tours on Wednesday evenings and weekends and workshops on Sundays.

The first Quebec Triennial in 2008 was a delight; this one seems likely to pick up where it left off. As always, art like this demands contemplation. The effort is often rewarded with eureka moments.

The Quebec Triennial continues until Jan. 3 at the Musée d’art contemporain de Montréal, 185 Ste. Catherine St. W. Information: www.macm.org.

For the graphic artist Lino, the work ahead is to continue using images that connect to emotions. Images, he says he still believes, can change the world. Whether or not that’s an attainable goal, it’s not for lack of trying by this fount of soulful creativity born Alain Lebrun, but known as Lino.

Ideas and images gush onto a few canvases, more posters and the pages of his graphic novels in his exhibition at the UQAM design centre. Words, loosely hand-lettered but legible, spill across his images. His poster for the Festival d’Avignon, a theatre festival, looks like an advertisement for an air show, but

suggests the explosion of words and ideas that is the festival.

The exhibition includes a recreation of Lino's studio space, complete with his real work table. All his knick-knacks are here, somewhat protected from theft by clear plastic barriers. Lino said he hasn't noticed anything stolen, but said that almost every day, people add an item or two to his shelves.

To see works by Lino, go to www.agoodson.com/lino.

Expo Lino continues until Oct. 30 at the Centre de design de l'UQAM, 1440 Sanguinet St. Info: www.centrededesign.com.

If Lino the free-spirited artist has his opposite, it might be Robbie Cornelissen, who makes huge, intricate drawings in pencil of fantastical architecture and interior spaces. Cornelissen follows in a line of artists whose stars include Piranesi and M.C. Escher in creating spaces that cannot exist, yet entice the viewer into exploring them with drawings that are hypnotically beautiful.

Robbie Cornelissen: *With Love from Crazy Horse* continues until Oct. 22 at Art Mûr, 5826 St. Hubert St. Information: www.artmur.com.

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