A FEW YEARS LATER

The English edition of this book appeared in 1993, and one of the things it tried to do was avoid relegating the signatories of *Refus global* to the past; to give some account of the work they had been doing in their various disciplines, and of critical commentary received, up to about 1990. That approach was appreciated by the artists, and I believe needs to be continued here. Obviously, a great deal has happened to the remaining signatories of *Refus global* in a dozen years, and much new, important research and publication has been done on the Automatist movement. What follows is a brief account of some recent developments.\(^1\) The bibliography of this French-language edition has been updated to reflect events, exhibitions, and new research, though it does not pretend to be exhaustive.

FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY

August 1998 marked the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of *Refus global*, with the anniversary sparking a great deal of interest in Québec and a burst of activity on the part of cultural agencies, galleries, writers and publishers eager to plan events and bring out books at or near the date. A major federal stimulus was the issue of a set of commemorative stamps reproducing works by Marcel Barbeau, Paul-Émile Borduas, Marcelle Ferron, Pierre Gauvreau, Fernand Leduc, Jean-Paul Mousseau, and Jean-Paul Riopelle (excluding Françoise Sullivan,
presumably because her current reputation as a visual artist was not established in 1948, when she was devoting herself to dance). This commemoration prompted exhibitions in Hull at the Musée de la poste, as well as in Paris (Centre culturel canadien), London (Canada House), and Washington (Canadian Embassy). It was even acknowledged by a colour spread in the *Toronto Star.*
As for other activities generated by the anniversary of the publication of *Refus global*, we might start with what could have been the major event of the year: the exhibition at the Montreal Museum of Contemporary Art entitled *Borduas et l’épopée automatiste*. Unfortunately, it turned out to be anything but an epic adventure. It was based entirely on the Museum’s collection, heavily weighted towards Borduas, with little or no attempt to seek works outside. Certain artists, such as Marcelle Ferron and Jean-Paul Mousseau were badly represented. There was a whole room documenting the restoration of cracking paint on some Borduas canvases, but there was not a single work, early or late, by Françoise Sullivan -- only the famous photos by Maurice Perron of her dance in snow. The Museum didn’t seem to realize that, although interest in the manifesto and the movement has in the past tended to centre upon Borduas (so much so that the first English translations of *Refus global* only included Borduas’ texts and ignored the other four contributors, whose work amounted to more than half the total volume), there is a strong movement among historians to change the focus and give more prominence to other signatories. This reality was not lost on the Montreal newspaper *Le Devoir*, which published a spread of 24 full pages, with articles by a variety of academics and journalists coming at the phenomenon from a variety of angles, with at least some recognition of everyone involved, and with plenty of illustrations. Nor was this change in critical direction ignored by the cultural review *Spirale*, whose “Dossier” section gave a multi-disciplinary and contextual account of the impact of the Automatist manifesto and of the anniversary events surrounding it.

The little museum at Mont-Saint-Hilaire, the village which was home to Borduas for many years, mounted an exhibition in the summer of 1997 entitled *Saint-Hilaire et les*
automatistes, publishing a well-produced, small catalogue with a few colour illustrations of paintings, some “new” archival photographs of Borduas and family, and essentially biographico-geographical essays by Gilles Lapointe and François-Marc Gagnon. The exhibition showed not only retrospective works, but recent creations, including works by Janine Carreau (herself younger than the manifesto) inspired by the automatist poet Claude Gauvreau. This was followed in May of 1998 by a second exhibition, Éternel présent -- 50 ans après Refus global which again showed large, up-to-the-minute works and printed a luxury catalogue. In addition to this activity in Saint-Hilaire, there were widely dispersed exhibitions devoted to individual artists (a kind of compensation for the limited coverage of national and provincial galleries). Most, if not all, of the painters of the group had an individual show somewhere during 1998.5

In December, the Musée du Québec in Québec City opened an important show of the photographs of Maurice Perron, whose pictures of the group and their works from the early forties became the major image-bank of Automatism. The catalogue produced for this exhibition, entitled Maurice Perron photographies, includes large reproductions of more than 100 striking pictures, among them, of course, the “classics”, but also many that have not been in circulation before. Also published in 1998 was a collection of about 50 photographs by Paul-Emile Borduas, who is not known as a photographer and was apparently not proud of this work since he never talked about photography, even with Maurice Perron. The photographs were taken as part of a documentation of life in the Gaspé, sponsored by the Québec government in 1938. Gilles Lapointe situates this assignment in the debates over modernism and cultural conservation going on at the
École du meuble, where Borduas worked at the time. Lapointe does not argue for the
great aesthetic value of the images (there are about 800 in total) but remarks on the
qualities of detachment in the landscapes, the relative lack of human subjects, the
emphasis on contrasts of light and dark. He also points out that, almost immediately after
this summer of 1938, Borduas seems to have turned his back on the sentimental
celebration of rural Québec, looking instead towards international art and Surrealism.6

In the Fall of 1998, there was a month-long, highly successful run of Claude
Gauvreau’s play, Les Oranges sont vertes, which is in part a fictionalization of his
relationship with the Automatist group. In 1994, the Théâtre d'aujourd'hui presented La
Reprise, and 1996 had seen a production of the opera Le vampire et la nymphomane,
based on a libretto Gauvreau wrote in 1949. Previously, there had been two stage
productions and a ninety-minute television version of his best-known play, La charge de
l'orignal épormyable. These were major productions, by major companies and major
directors such as Michèle Magny and Lorraine Pintal, with some of Québec's most
brilliant actors, all stimulated by the intensity, and probably also by the difficulty, of the
work. The most recent production of Gauvreau by Lorraine Pintal was in 2004, with the
very challenging L'Asile de la pureté, which actually had a first reading in the hospital
where Gauvreau had been interned. The stage production attracted much attention and
large audiences, many of them young people, and yet all this activity has aroused little or
no interest in Gauvreau's theatre outside Québec, a fact that remains a great mystery and a
great disappointment to me. Perhaps the situation will be helped by some important
changes in the publication of Claude Gauvreau's work, as smaller and more accessible
editions (see bibliography) now supplement the 1500-page *Oeuvres créatrices complètes* of 1971.

The anniversary also stimulated a number of lecture series and round-table discussions devoted to Automatism, mostly in Montréal and Ottawa, as well as academic conferences and events. Notable were a conference in Montréal whose acts were published as *L’automatisme en mouvement*, and another entitled *Les automatistes à Paris*, which coincided with a retrospective exhibition of paintings and documents at the Centre culturel canadien in Paris. The former included a cross-disciplinary set of papers by many of the best known experts on the movement, as well as a number of previously unpublished, very useful documents, particularly letters, by signatories of *Refus global*; the latter included a fascinating account by Ninon Gauthier of the difficulties that French impresario Charles Delloye faced when trying to mount exhibitions in Europe of Borduas and the Automatists, most of the trouble coming from Robert Élie. There were also some useful reprints of historical documents published with the acts of the Paris conference.

And at York University in Toronto, there was a colloquium with academic papers as well as round-table discussions involving Pierre Gauvreau, Jeanne Renaud, Françoise Sullivan, Janine Carreau, R. Murray Schafer and others; with slide shows of artworks and films or videos showing dances choreographed by Jeanne Renaud and Françoise Riopelle; and a concluding night of performances including dances of Françoise Sullivan performed by the York Dance Ensemble and by Ginette Boutin, readings of poems by Claude Gauvreau and Thérèse Renaud, and even a musical setting of Gauvreau's *Jappements à la lune*, composed by Christopher Butterfield, sung by Fides Krucker, and
played by the Contemporary Music Ensemble of the University of Toronto, under Gary Kulesha.  

Not surprisingly, with all this celebration of Automatism going on in Montréal and elsewhere, there were signs of reaction. The most amusing was a little pamphlet, with illustrations of art works, entitled “Cent cibles,” published by art students at l’UQAM on August 9, 1998, inviting people to come to their fiftieth anniversary in 2048. Parodying the Automatist manifesto, it contains a section of definitions from Z to A, including this of *Refus global*: “Nausée authentique. Indigestion mentale entraînant un rejet total de la nourriture psychique contrôlée.” More serious was the twenty-hour series of radio broadcasts (May 4-29) entitled *Du Refus global au village global*, produced by the journalist Jean-Pierre Denis, including archival materials and extensive interviews. By the end of the series, one could detect a strong revisionist inclination to question the originality and reputation of the movement, using some questionable "authorities." Nonetheless, much of the extensive documentation was fascinating. Also fascinating was a revitalization of the old Montréal/Québec, non-figurative/figurative artistic rivalry when Québec historian Philippe Dubé charged that the Montréal celebrations were an occultation that had neglected to mention the context of *Refus global*, especially the contribution of Alfred Pellan and the manifesto *Prisme d’yeux*. This was answered by Ginette Michaud and Gilles Lapointe, deploring such revisionism and arguing that *Prisme d’yeux* could not in any way be seen as equivalent to *Refus global*. And the questioning mood was quick to seize on a film by Manon Barbeau, daughter of Marcel Barbeau, entitled *Les enfants de Refus global*, made through the National Film Board for
release in the summer of 1998. It explored the impact of the manifesto notably on the Children of Borduas and Barbeau, as well as showing Riopelle near the end of his life, turning his head like a tormented bear under the eye of the camera, dismissing almost contemptuously the importance of his career and work. Not surprisingly, some of the other signatories and their children resented the film, and said so in print, for it seemed to tar the whole movement with one brush, giving encouragement to journalists who were quick to see the film as proof of the self-absorption and futility of all "revolution". Much less controversial, and therefore much less commented upon, was the film Manon Barbeau made two years later showing her father and their relationship in a much more serene light. It was here I first heard Marcel Barbeau's fascinating voice music, sounding like a cross between Kurt Schwitters, Inuit throat song, and the blues.

OTHER RESEARCH AND PUBLICATION

Michel Désautels published in 1997 a book-length series of interviews of Pierre Gauvreau, the title of which echoes Gauvreau’s hugely popular historical téléroman, *Le temps d’une paix*. The book gives a summary of both his broadcasting and painting careers, including stills from television programmes as well as colour illustrations of paintings. One of the great virtues of Jeanette Biondi's *Le jeune homme en colère: Biographie de Pierre Gauvreau*, published six years later, is that she shows the importance of Gauvreau as a publicist and polemicist for Automatism, for living art, and for a change in consciousness throughout Québec. Based on extensive research, her book uncovers dozens of newspaper articles, letters, other documents never published before,
painting a detailed picture not only of Pierre Gauvreau, but of his brother Claude and their entire context, familial, artistic and social. There is new information here on the manufacture of *Refus global*, on the reaction to its publication, on contacts with Paul-Marie Lapointe, and most poignantly on the eventual hospitalizations and death of Claude Gauvreau. There is also a great deal of information here on Pierre Gauvreau's career in television. Notably written outside the academy, Biondi's biography is a serious work of research which happily fills gaps in information found the book you are now reading, and others.

Patricia Smart’s *Les femmes du Refus Global*\(^1\) has a great deal to say, indirectly, about Pierre and Claude Gauvreau, but it proceeds from the observation that seven of the fifteen signatories of the manifesto were women, most of them now distinguished in their fields of visual arts, dance, literature and design, who nonetheless have received much less study than their male counterparts. She devotes a chapter to each of the women signatories, with illustrations of the artworks of Sullivan and Marcelle Ferron, while making her point that the Automatist movement, while it may have been the best game in town for the women concerned, was not entirely free of sexism. Thus, in one of the most original and fascinating chapters, she studies Muriel Guilbault (whom Claude Gauvreau obsessively made his tragic muse) as emblematic of many women of the time and place, who desired the liberty called for in *Refus global* but were restricted by the stereotypes imposed on them, not only by their society and even their lovers, but by themselves.

The three-volume *Écrits* of Paul-Émile Borduas (see bibliography) is a fine example of the serious scholarly work being done on him in Québec. If Riopelle has the greatest international reputation among signatories of *Refus global*, there is no doubt that
Borduas has a huge stature, certainly in Québec and probably in Canada as a whole, firmly based on his role as mentor and writer. Gilles Lapointe's analysis of Borduas as a letter writer in *L'envol des signes* examines the connection between his visual and verbal expressions, arguing that, despite his reputation as an awkward writer, which he himself fuelled, Borduas was very conscious that his letters were a crucial expression of himself that he could use to examine, and exalt, his painting. He expected them to be published and, in fact, cultivated his literary image.\(^\text{15}\) Lapointe's chapter on Robert Élie has a particular interest because of the light it sheds on Élie’s role in what happened after the manifesto, when many of Borduas’ friends and contemporaries deserted him. Knowing that he was a friend of Borduas, and even the author of a book about him, I could never understand why Élie would publish a long and unctuously critical essay “Au dela du refus” in *La Revue Dominicaine* in 1949. Lapointe’s research suggests that the essay was part of a clerical/political effort, involving Borduas’ wife as well, to discredit the manifesto, and this happens to fit with recent findings by Ninon Gauthier (see above), which suggest that Élie was not cooperative in efforts to disseminate Borduas’ work.

Of enormous value to study of the early years of Automatism is François-Marc Gagnon’s new “Chronique.”\(^\text{16}\) Focussing on a limited period of time, this book gives far more detailed information than we have had to date, and publishes in their entirety a number of articles and letters which have been difficult or impossible to find. Gagnon seems particularly interested in bringing back into memory some of the painters who were minor figures in the early history, such as Roger Fauteux and Charles Daudelin. The long section on Riopelle in New York has plenty of new information, and I find very interesting Gagnon’s analysis of Riopelle’s withdrawal from Surrealism, along with the
specific information he gives on Riopelle’s connections with various “surrealizing”
groups and magazines such as Rixes and Phases. Gagnon also gives a detailed account I
Fernand Leduc’s interest in Raymond Abellio (see also Thérèse Renaud's Un passé
recomposer, discussed below), the first sign of Leduc’s turning away from the philosophy
of Refus global. Gagnon's book, and the early part of Jeanette Biondi's biography of
Pierre Gauvreau, provide an especially vivid portrait of the 'forties and 'fifties in
Montréal, probably because they are both solidly grounded in newspaper articles.

But certainly the most ambitious publishing project has been the catalogue
raisonné of the works of Jean-Paul Riopelle, undertaken by Yseult Riopelle.\(^\text{17}\) Few such
catalogues have been published in Canada, and certainly none of this magnitude. It will
make available quality reproductions of the full extent of Riopelle's work, an audacious
answer to the tomes published in other countries on Picasso, Miro and others. The first
volume, published in 1999, includes production up to 1953, divided into three genres:
oils, works on paper in various media, and sculpture. The second volume, covering from
1954-1959, was published in 2004. Six more volumes are projected, which will take us
up to 1992. There will also be a supplementary volume devoted to prints. The first two
volumes include very useful illustrated chronologies, as well as articles by a variety of art
historians and critics, and this practice will no doubt continue in the future. Among the
many things I learned from the first volume is that a gouache dated 1947, which I
attributed to Riopelle in the 1993 edition of Egregore and included in the colour section,
is probably not authentic, hence the substitution of another work in this edition.
The quality of Yseult Riopelle's books may indeed encourage similar publications on the other painter signatories of *Refus global*. In fact, Ninon Gauthier has completed an extensive *catalogue raisonné* of the works of Marcel Barbeau, covering his painting up to 1971 and his sculpture to 2000. It exists, for the moment, as a doctoral thesis and I have only seen its extensive bibliographical documentation, but in the near future it should find a publisher for wider distribution, not only increasing our knowledge of the extent of Brabeau's production, but hopefully stimulating a much-needed major exhibition of his work in Canada.

**IN MEMORIAM**

There have been five deaths of signatories of *Refus global* since the nineties: of Jean-Paul Mousseau in February, 1991; of Bruno Cormier in June, 1991; of Maurice Perron in February, 1999; of Marcelle Ferron in November, 2001; and of Jean Paul Riopelle in March, 2002. Preparations for a Mousseau exhibition were under way shortly after his death, and eventually resulted in an inspiring retrospective exhibition at the Musée d'art Contemporain from January 24 to April 27, 1997, an exhibition showing the full breadth of Mousseau's artistic activities, summed up in the catalogue by Francine Couture:

*Rappelons, enfin, que Mousseau a été de tous les fronts de la modernité culturelle. En se définissant comme chercheur en arts visuels, coloriste architectural, scénographe ou designer d'environnement, il s'est inséré dans divers réseaux de collaboration artistique qui ont été, en grande partie, responsables des*
transformations culturelles survenues dans les années cinquante et soixante et qui alimenteront les décennies suivantes. . . À ce souffle de modernité -- envers lequel elle s'était tant engagé lors de sa présence parmi les automatistes -- Mousseau a donc su être globalement présent.\textsuperscript{19}

Friends and colleagues of Bruno Cormier prepared a two-volume collection of his writings, and of tributes to his work as a forensic psychiatrist. Few of his colleagues in psychiatry had known of Cormier's connections with the Automatist movement, nor of his passionate interest in painting, but a moving tribute by Pierre Gauvreau placed his friend in the context of Montréal in the thirties and forties, and emphasized that "Le role de Bruno Cormier et celui de Ruby, sa femme, ont été determinants dans la conservation des œuvres de cette époque. Beaucoup de musées canadiens doivent à Ruby et Bruno Cormier de pouvoir aujourd'hui montrer les œuvres acquises par eux, alors qu'elles étaient rejetées par les 'connaisseurs' et ridiculisées, et que les institutions les ignoraient carrément. . . . Ils furent un point de rencontre, de convergence susceptible de rassembler les signataires du manifeste et de maintenir entre eux une solidarité vive et lumineuse, en dépit des années nombreuses à s'accumuler depuis le 9 août 1948."\textsuperscript{20}

Maurice Perron lived to see "Mémoire objective, mémoire collective," the retrospective exhibition of his photographs mentioned above. The exhibition marked a welcome change in attitude toward the efforts of this modest man. In the first place, he was given full credit for documentary treasures that had been used too often without his consent and even without credit. In the second place, his work was recognized for its
own artistic merits, as in this commentary by Nathalie de Blois:

Ne délaisant que rarement la "valeur d'usage" de la photographie qui est de témoigner, Perron dote son œuvre d'un sens esthétique hautement personnel, cherchant constamment des angles de prise insolites, jouant des reflets dans les glaces, usant de la lumière pour créer de forts contrastes et tirant profit d'effets visuels particuliers nés d'accidents techniques, tels les "hasard objectifs" que sont les superpositions. Lieux de connaissance et de mémoire, les clichés de Maurice Perron expriment une vision personnelle qui englobe les qualités particulières d'une époque et d'un milieu. Son œuvre atteste d'une sensibilité aux structures formelles présentes dans la réalité mais révélés uniquement au regard qui sait voir.21

Marcelle Ferron also lived to see the retrospective exhibition and catalogue devoted to her by the Musée d'Art Contemporain. The exhibition ran from June 2 to September 10, 2000, and covered a wide chronological range. In a strikingly pretentious and sometimes ignorant review for the Toronto Globe and Mail, Blake Gopnik actually complained that the exhibition was "sprawling" and needed editing,22 but I would have liked to see even more, especially more of the works on paper done in Göteborg, Sweden, in 1956, which, to my knowledge, had not been exhibited previously. Also, the exhibition might have been less discrete, giving more evidence of the humour, dynamism, and sheer joie de vivre of "La vieille folle," as her brother, the writer Jacques Ferron, had called her since her twenties. This is the voice that comes through in
Marcelle Ferron's *Esquisse d'une mémoire: propos receuillis par Michel Brûlé.*

This memoir is not the place to get an objective, detailed historical account, but it gives a sense of the wonderful energy of the woman, and of the Automatist group which was so important to her.

The deaths and funerals of Marcelle Ferron and Jean-Paul Riopelle provoked reactions in Québec which were fascinating in the way they stirred up long-dormant issues. Since both were important public figures, their funerals drew crowds of people, including dignitaries, which required some pomp and circumstance, and consequently a suitable venue. The decision was therefore made to hold the ceremonies in Catholic churches, which became a matter of public debate, especially in the case of Riopelle, since he was not only a signatory of *Refus global,* of which the anti-clerical message was notorious, but also made clear his continued support of that message throughout his life. For both funerals, sympathisers were torn between their desire to honour their friends and respect the manifesto. A glance at Chapter VI of this book will help explain why. The public reaction to the manifesto in 1948 by such figures as the Dominican Hyacinthe-Marie Robillard or the Jesuit Ernest Gagnon, not to mention young Liberal-Catholics such as Gérard Pelletier and Jacques Dubuc, writing in *Le Devoir,* was quite scathing. It may be amusing, now, to look back at Pelletier's patronising attitude, especially concerning the younger Automatists, at his conviction that people such as Riopelle had no future, at his smug assumption that the "surrealists," however well intentioned, were hopelessly misguided. A half-century later, it was no accident that three friends who had been very close to Riopelle (Pierre Gauvreau, Madeleine Arbour, and Françoise Lesperance-Riopelle), publicly stated their refusal to attend the funeral. All three had
signed with him in 1948 open letters rebutting Dubuc and Pelletier. What astonished me was that the columnists in Le Devoir of 2002 (see bibliography, section A) were no less patronizing, and no more full of insight, than Gérard Pelletier had been. Actually appropriating phrases from Refus global, they argued that the protesting signatories were out of touch with current reality in Québec.

EXTENSIONS

Despite such debates, and at times despite the ravages of Chronos, the living signatories of Refus global carry on working. Pierre Gauvreau suffered major setbacks to his health beginning in 1995, but they have only temporarily interrupted a pace of work that would intimidate younger and healthier men. Within months of a serious bypass operation, he was painting again and working on the script for his newest téléroman, Le volcan tranquille. Jeanette Biondi gives a complete account of this period and especially of the acrimonious rupture between Gauvreau and Radio Canada that brought an end to his long career in television. The positive side of this dispute is that, freed from a demanding schedule of writing, the painter (and gardener) had more time. Painting, in fact, was actually a physical relief from discomfort caused by his illness.

The style of Gauvreau's painting also changed. Whereas in the early nineties, brush-applied acrylic was his common medium, often on very large canvases, with some spray-painted effects to provide highlight and contrast, by the turn of the century, spraying was the dominant technique, usually involving stenciling, with brush marks used for accent, on usually smaller surfaces. It is probably no accident that Riopelle and
Gauvreau were experimenting with this technique at a time when both needed to work in a less physically demanding way, and when they had renewed their friendship, seeing each other at fairly regular intervals. But the effects they have gotten from the technique are quite different. In Riopelle, the ghost of figuration was seen, for example, in his evocation of bird and animal life. François-Marc Gagnon describes these figures, usually showing white through darker surfaces, as "negatives" or "absences," a description that seems particularly apt in the very imposing "Hommage à Rosa Luxembourg" (usually read as an elegy for Joan Mitchell) with its spectral shapes of birds, geese and cranes evoking a kind of hecatomb. Gauvreau's use of domestic objects for his stencils, often lace (dentelles) or fabric, doesn't encourage this kind of referential reading. At times, the materials suggest a certain fragility, but this is often in ironic contrast to the subject as inferred by the title, as in the very fine series, Les insoumis; but in general, the result is a completely abstract, highly complex surface, especially when there is layering of colours, an astonishing depth of field, full of exuberance and a seemingly endless capacity for invention.

Perhaps the most unexpected development in Pierre Gauvreau's work involves a recent obsession with the cadavre exquis, a composite work developed according to the rules of a Surrealist game. Each participant provides part of a drawing (or one word of a sentence, in the verbal variety) which is then continued by others, each unaware of what previous contributors have done. In the earliest versions, the technique usually involved one sheet of paper, folded into sections, with line and colour from the previous drawing extending over the fold. Crucial elements in the game are multiple authorship and "blind" participation. In the late nineties, Pierre Gauvreau and Janine Carreau began
taking this game very seriously, involving friends of various ages and from various fields, developing new ways of playing, cutting boards of various shape into sections for two or more players who work independently, in many different media. The sections are then re-assembled according to an order set by the participants, the results being unpredictable and often astonishing in their unity. This formula also frees the cadavre exquis not only from its common biomorphic design, but from the need for its participants to work together on one surface. In general, the game allows for a de-sublimation, a democratisation, a social form of art-making that obviously appeals to Gauvreau, so that he, with Janine Carreau and a host of friends, have been responsible in the past ten years for well over a hundred collaborative works. At the same time, he has been as productive in individual works as he has ever been in his life, with frequent solo exhibitions in large and small galleries, public and private, around the province, most recently in the City of Gatineau.

What I would call Françoise Sullivan's "mythical work" continued after 1993, culminating in the sculptural environment she conceived for the Earth Sciences (correct name?) building of the Université du Québec à Montréal. This is a very large work constructed in stone, suggesting mountainous landscapes over two stories and along the halls of the entrance to the building, with figures (including the goat-man seen in her cretan cycle) etched in polished marble. This is the latest in a distinguished series of very large public works by signatories of Refus global, further evidence of their impact on the city of Montreal. At about the same time as she was working on this project, however, there occurred a radical shift in Sullivan's painting. She began working on rectangular
canvases (as opposed to the round or irregular, un-stretched canvas surfaces of the late eighties and early nineties). What's more, these paintings were monochromatic, often but not exclusively in primary reds, blues and yellows, with subtle variations of shade and texture provided by brush strokes moving across the surface in a variety of patterns. It was as if Sullivan, so often undervalued as a painter, were re-asserting her commitment and establishing her credentials. The result is work vibrant in colour and yet with a quality of great serenity. Many of these canvases measure four by three meters, some composed to form diptychs and triptychs. These were first shown at the Galerie Lilian Rodriguez and at UQAM, and later in an impressive exhibition at the Morre Gallery in Toronto, in 2004. When the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Montréal finally held its major exhibition of Sullivan's work in 2003, there were certainly examples of earlier works in sculpture and painting, but this show was anything but retrospective in mood, presenting many very recent paintings in the new style, most of them large, including a set dedicated to recently deceased fellow-artists (Marcelle Ferron, Jean-Paul Riopelle, Jean McEwen, Yves Gaucher, Patterson Ewen, etc.), friends, and relatives. These large works dominated the imposing stairway and hall leading to the exhibition -- a bright punch in the eye of time. Surprisingly, the Museum's catalogue did not include any text on this recent painting, so it was fortunate that Louise Déry and Monique Regimbald-Zeiber happened to publish at the same time their luminous book, *Françoise Sullivan: la peinture à venir*. Francoise Sullivan, it should be mentioned, has been honoured with the Prix Borduas and with the Governor General's award.

Since Marcel Barbeau and Fernand Leduc have lived most of the past dozen years
in Europe, showing in Canada only rarely, I have seen comparatively little of their work. One could hardly say they have been fairly represented by the large, public museums and galleries in Canada. Fernand Leduc can at least look forward to a major retrospective in Québec City (see below), but Barbeau, to my knowledge at this writing, has no such prospect, and thus it seems no accident that the two films by his daughter, mentioned earlier, end and begin with an identical scene: the painter exploding with rage at what appears to be another rejection by his home country. But having begun that way, *Barbeau, libre comme l'art*, goes on to show him preparing for an attractive exhibition devoted to him at the Musée du Bas-Saint-Laurent in Rivière du Loup in 1999, walking the shores of the St. Laurence, reminiscing about New York, enjoying the ambience of Paris where he and his wife now have an apartment and studio, thanks in part to the generosity of that City. In both the film and her text for the 1999 exhibition, Ninon Gauthier talks about her husband as mercurial, always on the move, and that quality shows in the two styles recently co-existing in Barbeau's work. Movement is not so obvious in those paintings I would describe as most impressionistic, where small strokes of colour are laid over or alongside larger areas, all fairly muted in tone, with a rather stable, all-over quality, though with a feeling of varying depth; but it is very strong, paradoxically, in the (usually larger) more "hard-edged" paintings, where plates of brilliant colour sail across the face of the painting and/or move in and out, depending on the way their angles come together. And that same quality of movement is transmitted by his wonderful painted steel sculptures "qui obligent presque à danser avec elles," as Ninon Gauthier says in the film, after which we actually see a solo dancer moving in and around one of the large pieces set on grass outside the museum. Another scene in Paris
shows a half-dozen Barbeau's canvases laid out on the ground in a park area beside a canal, while dancers move among the paintings, passersby watch, and a singer intones a kind of "explorien" voice music not unlike the performances by the painter himself, sometimes solo, sometimes with a band accompaniment, which are in effect the soundtrack of the film. This leads to the observation that a full study needs to be made on the presence of music, movement, dance, and performance in the artwork of Marcel Barbeau. Not only do his creations and their titles constantly evoke music and dance, but the artist himself has collaborated with musicians and dancers in the making and exhibition of his work since the early years of his career. That, of course, is perfectly in tune with the spirit of *Refus global*.

Incidentally (and the word does apply, I'm afraid), the Musée National des beaux-arts du Québec showed seven collages by Marcel Barbeau, as part of a larger exhibition of a group including Mousseau and Leduc, from June to October of 2005. These works were done in the 'sixties and, according to Ninon Gauthier, mark a turning point in Barbeau's work when he moved away from Automatism towards what is often (reductively) called his minimalist period, where he was experimenting with colour optics and rhythm, in larger canvases.

To my knowledge, the basic direction of Fernand Leduc's painting has not changed radically since the 'nineties. He speaks eloquently of its development in interviews with Lise Gauvin published in 1995; of the gradual movement from automatism to the microchromies (117); of how landscape, locality and light affect his...
painting (101); of the impact of impressionism and the colour theories of Chevreul (123); of certain artists, such as Canaletto, who have moved him over time (108-9); and of how the microchromies explore his own theories of colour, working with the transparency of acrylic:

Devant les premières microchromies, je me suis donc rendu compte que telle qualité de couleur, le vert émaraud par exemple, était parfois froide parfois chaude. Il y avait ainsi un vert plus chaud, plus jaunâtre par exemple, et un autre plus bleuté. Quelle que soient les couleurs que j'ai employées au départ, la résultante totale est une qualité de lumière unique -- que j'appelle microchromie -- avec toujours cette autre qualité qui vibre à l'intérieur. J'en ai conclu que la température est la qualité essentielle de la couleur, de la lumière. . . . On peut y travailler des années (124).

In these same interviews, Leduc explains that he usually works in acrylic, but has also used oil pastel, "Tout à coup, j'ai découvert des gros pastels secs, qui sont d'une beauté, d'une volupté tel qu'on a envie d'en manger. Ils ne sont faits que de colle et de pigment. C'est très beau comme couleur. J'ai donc voulu faire de grands pastels" 108). The first of these I recall seeing were at the Galerie Graff in Montréal, in 2001, during a shared exhibition between Leduc and his daughter Isabelle. They are clearly related to the microchromies in that the first impression is the same: of a nuanced monochromal surface that somehow "moves." Patiently looking, one sees shapes and hues emerge from beneath the surface layer, just as with the acrylic, but the pastel works show their
impressionist roots more clearly in that the layering is not flat and uniform. The monochrome effect is achieved by the juxtaposition of different-coloured strokes eventually adding up to the desired value. Although the surface is matt, there is a very subtle movement of light across it. Since the Musée des Beaux-arts du Québec intends to hold a long-overdue major retrospective of Fernand Leduc's work in 2006, the Canadian public will have the opportunity to see some of these effects, so difficult to describe and almost impossible to capture satisfactorily in photographic reproduction.

PROBABLY NEED A LITTLE MORE HERE

Seven of Fernand Leduc's exquisite pastels are indeed reproduced in one of the recent publications by Thérèse Renaud: N'être. The pun on naître in the title celebrates the birth of a grandson, but the texts, more generally, continue the investigations seen in her earlier work of être et n'être, of love, the self, the passage of time, with further meditations on her life with Fernand Leduc. The section entitled "Paris, ville lumière," for example, is a poetic reminiscence of her first days in the city, in November of 1946, before Fernand Leduc joined her. It was shortly before this, of course, that she published Les sables du rêve, the small book of surrealist-oriented poems that has since taken on the stature of a classic, republished twice in 2001: in Imaginaires surrealists, an anthology of experimental texts published by the literary review Les Herbes Rouges (also including a re-edition of Suzanne Meloche's Les aurores fulminantes); and in Les songes d'un funambule. The latter includes a set of "variations ludiques" on some poems from Les sables du rêve, rewritings from the retrospective of 55 years, as well a series of quite minimalist, broadly philosophical poems, in stark contrast to her first ones, under the heading "La mer en soi." In her most recent book, Un
passé recompose: Deux automatists à Paris, Temoignages 1946-1953, Thérèse Renaud brings together passages from works already published (notably from the collection of Fernand Leduc's letters, Vers les îles de lumière, from the Entretiens with Lise Gauvin, and from Thérèse Renaud's earlier memoires) as well as fragments from unpublished letters by Thérèse Renaud to "mon amie Margot" and others. It is a kind of montage, a remarkable document, continuing her process of desublimating the history of Automatism by showing at least part of its domestic context, the tensions between and within the families of members of the group, as well as continuing respect and love. John Porter writes in his introduction, "Si l'auteure n'est pas toujours tendre pour les autres, elle ne l'est guère plus pour elle-même" (12), and this work continues what I described in 1993 as "surely . . . one of the most complete portraits of an artistic couple to be found anywhere" (see Chapter 10). But Un passé recompose hints at something else: a collection of unpublished letters by Thérèse Renaud that, if and when they are made public, could be of real importance to our future understanding of the history of the Automatist movement.

Thérèse Renaud's writings, along with the work of scholars such as Patricia Smart, are some necessary help in redressing the imbalance of commentary on the ephemeral art of dance and its relationship to the movement. Thérèse Renaud writes in Un passé recompose of her sister Jeanne and of Françoise Riopelle, both of whom continue to be given minor roles by historians of Automatism, and yet have had major roles not only in the history of dance in Canada, but in the general cultural scenes of Canada and Quebec. They have been directors of major dance companies in Montréal,
have both taught and developed cultural programmes at UQAM. The co-owner of a gallery that was well-known for its multi-media exhibitions, Jeanne Renaud later in her career worked for Québec's ministère des Affaires Culturel, as well as for the Canada Council. In 1989, she received the prestigious Prix Denise-Pelletier for her contribution to Québec culture.

((MORE HERE ON FRANCOISE RIOPELLE IF POSSIBLE))

In sum, it seems even more clear to me now than it did in 1993, that "the people associated with Automatism form a kind of network involving all the arts, a network which has had an immense impact on the culture of Québec since World War II" -- an impact which continuing to this day.

AND THÉRÈS'S SISTER JEAN RENAU

---


3 I suppose one shouldn’t complain, since the National Gallery in Ottawa merely put some of its collection on display and didn’t even bother to mount a special exhibition.


5 Two exhibitions I was able to visit were Éclatement de rouge, a show of Françoise Sullivan's recent, astonishing red monochromes at the gallery of l'Université du Québec à Montréal, and in September, a very good chronological view of Pierre Gauvreau's work.
at the Galerie Jean-Claude Bergeron in Ottawa. An exhibition of works on paper by Fernand Leduc took place in March and April at the D&E Gallery in Toronto, while Marcel Barbeau had a fall exhibition entitled Mastering the Accidental at the Churchill College Art Gallery in Cambridge, England.

6 Paul-Émile Borduas, photographe (Montréal: les 400 coups, 2000).

7 L’automatisme en mouvement, sous la direction de Gilles Lapointe et Ginette Michaud, numéro spécial d’Études Françaises, 34, 2/3 (automne-hiver 1998); Les automatistes à Paris, sous la direction de Lise Gauvin (Montréal: Les 400 coups, 2000).

8 No printed record of this event exists, but it was recorded on film and later transferred to six DVDs, finally edited to a set of three. Among the memorable instances is a moving reminiscence by R. Murray Schafer concerning the death of the late Pierre Mercure, a musician who collaborated with members of the Automatist group.

9 "Quand le culte occulte," Le Devoir, 8 juillet 1998; "Refus global: occultation ou révision?" Le Devoir, 18-19 juillet 1998. Dubé’s side of the debate carries on into Marcel Baril, Figure énigmatique de l’art québécois (Québec: Les Presses de l’université Laval, 2002), see especially p. 151-153. The contributors to this book, much like Marcella Maltais in her Notes d’atelier (Québec: Éditions du Beffroi, 1991), complain of the oppression of non-figurative art, curiously reversing the power dynamics as described in the early chapters of this book.

10 See the bibliography for a selection of articles in Le Devoir, La Presse, The Globe and Mail and elsewhere between March 11 and August 8. The best interpretation of the film and the controversy it provoked is in Ginette Michaud’s "Les enfants de Refus global by Manon Barbeau: From Official Commemoration to Memory as Mourning Process" in Quebec Studies 27 (Spring-Summer 1999): 105-17.


16 Chronique du mouvement automatiste québécois, 1941-1954 (Montréal: Lanctôt...
Editeur, 1998).


19 Mousseau, Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, 1996, p.55.


24 Le jeune homme en colère, see especially the last chapter and the documents p. 442-467.

25 A high point in this development was the immensely lively 1995 exhibition of cadavres exquis, "Célébrer la vie," organized by Janine Carreau during an international conference on cardiac emergencies held in Montréal not long after Pierre Gauvreau's bypass operation, at the request of his doctor. More than 150 collaborative pieces were shown – paintings, sculptures and mixed media – done by various people, ages eight to eighty, some well-known artists, others completely unknown or else well-known in other arts.


28 Incidentally, this suggests a major point of distinction between Fernand Leduc's microchromies and Françoise Sullivan's recent monochromes: Sullivan seems to begin with a basic colour and then modify the surface with strokes in a warmer or cooler shade; Leduc lays on acrylic or pastel strokes in progressively differing shades until he arrives at the surface colour he wants, and the movement seems to come from beneath the surface.