

LAUSANNE & VENICE, SUMMER '70:

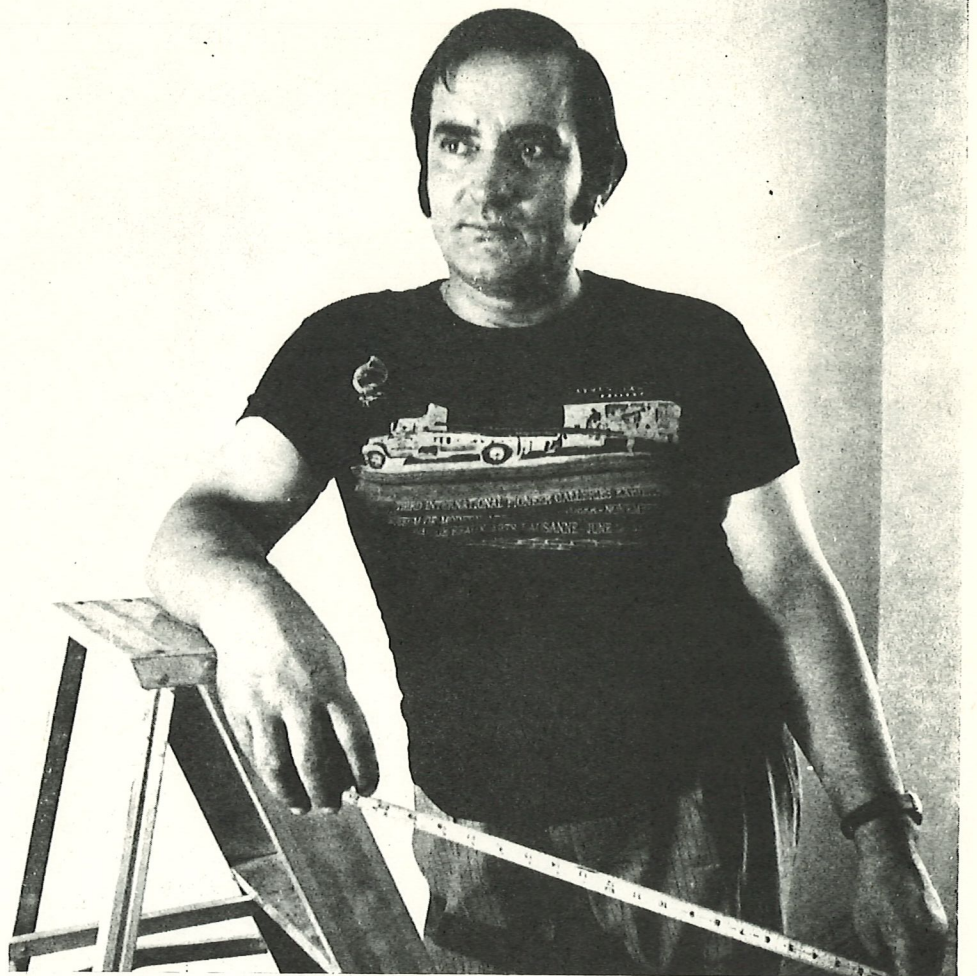
The Crisis of Canada International
ARTS CANADA OCT-NOV 1970

Carmen Lamanna

On June 19 at the Musée cantonal des Beaux Arts of the University of Lausanne, that worldly melée of "advanced" dealers, critics and artists gathered to celebrate the 3e Salon International de Galeries Pilotes: Artistes et Decouvreurs de Nos Temps seemed rather more blissful than blasé. Certainly the table-loads of delectable cheese pastries and good Swiss wines did little to detract from the ambience of the occasion – but that extra sparkle of genuine excitement surrounding a certain sunny cornerful of avant-garde works from across Canada owed nothing to wine or pastry. On that afternoon of his international debut, a totally unknown and totally committed art dealer from Toronto named Carmen Lamanna knew suddenly that he had produced a hit.

My own previous day's viewing of 16 gallery displays from 13 countries – the Japanese pilferings from Paris op and New York pop; the international repetitions of minimal and conceptual art; the dry Dutch tag-ends of constructivism (as especially emphasized in the graphics section, *Rellet des Galeries-Pilotes*, where the derivative deadliness of Hermann de Vries' black-and-white collages were pitted against the stringent liveliness of Guido Molinari's black-and-white serigraphs: an object lesson in muddled-headed borrowing versus inspired application of Mondrian's legacy); these, coupled with certain brave Iron-Curtain attempts to break into the "with-it" bag (notably Polish Tadeusz Kantor's oddly-obsessive white-sprayed-umbrella assemblages and Yugoslavian Slavco Tihec's whimsical *Aquamobile* of bobbing blue-eyed spindles) – had already revealed the show's general level of middle-of-the-mainstream art.

There were, however, certain outstanding individual and/or gallery entries. Paris' Galerie Sonnabend, though scarcely opting for the French avant-garde, put out a lively parade of Castelli classics straight from NYC (the likes of Judd, Morris, Lichtenstein and Twombly) – fine indeed to see, but all so instantly familiar as to lack entirely the impact of *discovery* implicit in the title and avowed intent of this "pilot" exhibition. (Here, Jim Dine's *A Simple History of New York* proved the fascinating exception.) For uniform elegance, fun and bazzazz, New York's Howard Wise and his electro-kinetic show certainly deserved the entertainment medal – even without the rocketing genius of his real star and true innovator, the Chinese artist-scientist, Tsai – whose *Cybernetic Sculptures*, kinetic works activated by sound-produced strobe-light impulses, are delicate machines of vibrating prism-tipped steel rods so responsive that even a hand-clap, a sudden whistle or laugh, can affect the frequency and intensity of their motion. Stunning installation shots of Walter de Maria's *Bed of Spikes* – stainless steel sculpture pre-occupied with the patterned control of random



light – cut through the almost non-stop tedium of Dwan Gallery of New York's continuous big-screen slide-show of earth-process-and-conceptual works. Alain Dufo of Paris' Galerie Lucien Durand exhibited his *Echantillon Nature* – a tri-part bag of perforated pvc containing "samplings" of trees, skies and water – as totally charming as it was strikingly similar to Iain Baxter's "bagged" works of four years ago. Man Ray, represented by Milan's Studio Marconi with a 1970 silver casting of his 1927 dada piece, *Emak Bakia*, seemed agelessly provocative under the same roof with Jim Dine.

But for sheer vigour, variety and freshness – most particularly, in the field of new sculptural ideas – Toronto's Carmen Lamanna Gallery unquestionably came closest to the definition of a "Galerie Pilote."

In his selection of 12 exhibiting artists, Lamanna had primarily chosen the younger innovators, most of them still in their late twenties. In this spirited company, Guido Molinari (37) carried his extra decade like a banner, contributing the classic counterbalance and mature presence of his first-rate mural-

size canvas, *Serial Vert-Bleu* – six broad vertical stripes (green/blue/grey/green/blue/green) subtly reflecting the changes of natural light with a corresponding shifting of tones and shuffling of spatial planes, not unlike a sequence of shutters quietly opening out and closing in on some serene skyscape of the spirit.

On the gallery floor, nicely angled for visual interplay with Molinari's stripes, lay perhaps the most powerful single image at Lausanne; Robin Mackenzie's great trunk of "processed" oak, sliced and serially numbered in ten equal sections, then precisely realigned to emphasize the aching gaps. The hypnotic simplicity and directness of Mackenzie's concept: the physical-psychological tension between arbitrarily separated parts, the straining to re-join, to become whole again – coupled with an almost tragic sense of Nature maimed and manipulated – distinguish this work from several superficially similar log-pieces by the American, Richard Serra (conceived, ironically, at the same point in time, when neither man was aware of the other's work!)

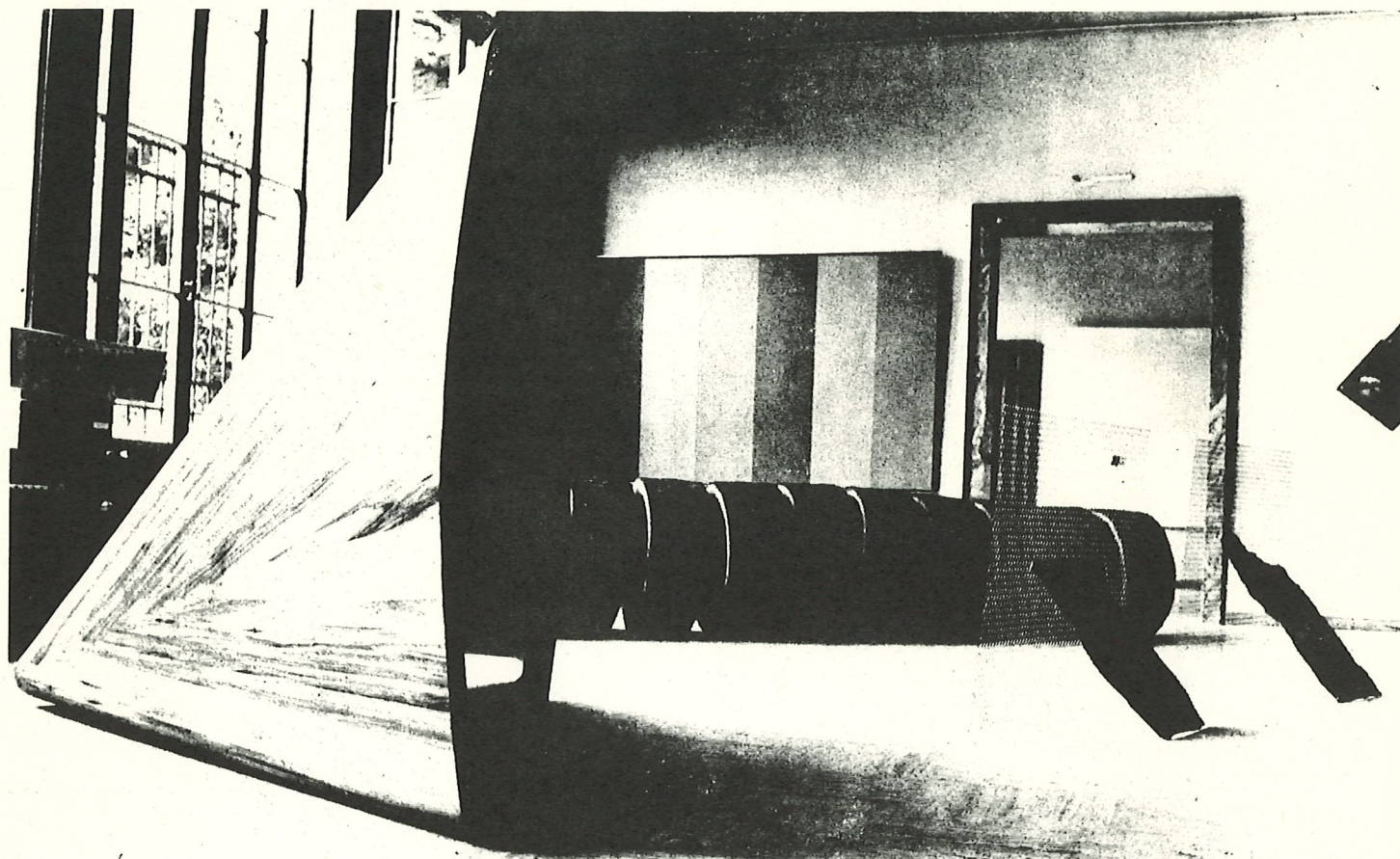
Like Molinari's, Ed Zelenak's work is curi-

Part 1: Lausanne

by Dorothy Cameron

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Installation view (left to right)
David Rabinowitch, Iain Baxter, Guido
Molinari, Robin Mackenzie, Karl
Beveridge, Jean Noel (partial).



ously deadened by most artificial lighting, and consequently he too has seldom looked better than at Lausanne. Of course, where Molinari's preoccupation in painting is with the *reflection* of light as coloured plane, Zelenak's preoccupation in sculpture is with the *infiltration* of light as revealed form. So here, absorbed with summer sunlight, the convoluted interior of his cool-domed translucent polyester wall-relief began to glow with its own kind of squirming visceral life.

The Rabinowitch twins each happily contributed his most successful sculpture to date: David's hulkingly elegant *Basswood Tube*, its ovoid yawn and finely-laminated striations somewhat suggestive of a bolder, more brutal Pevsner; and Royden's exquisite, *Joan's Apple Turnover*, a candy-wedge-with-a-razor-edge, in delicious high-gloss pink-lacquered steel. Karl Beveridge's *B69212* was the first of his works I have really enjoyed, having found much of his previous efforts "minimal" to the vanishing point, and "systematic" to the point of simple tedium. Here, four rectangular steel scrims (almost, but not quite, upright) had been set in direct apposition to four large

torn tilting flakes of galvanized iron – creating the uncanny illusion of momentary weightless suspension, like wind-blown leaves against fences.

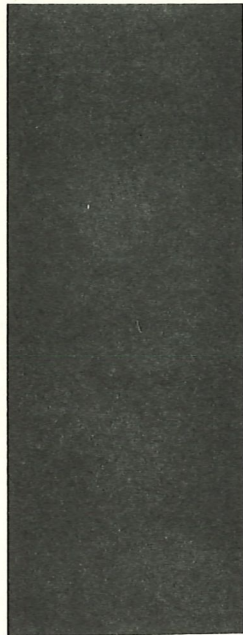
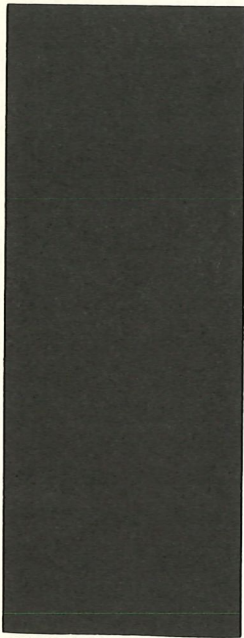
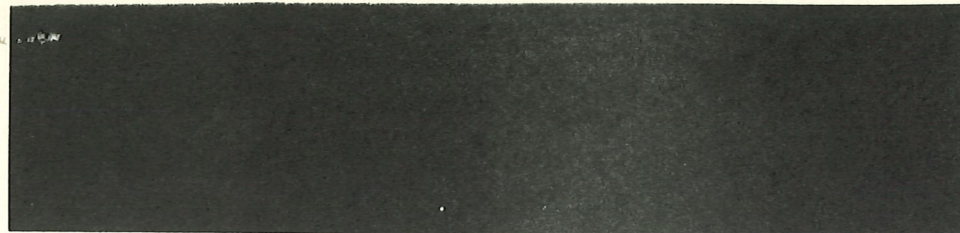
Two wall-reliefs of jig-saw neatness, Jean Noel's *Overexpansible Rouge* of slick bright blown plexiglas, and David Bolduc's rather puzzling hanging fence (or was that a mini dance-floor up there?) of meticulously inlaid wooden strips – both unquestionably contributed to the total installation effect of variety, colour, texture and high craftsmanship – but little else. In fact, within the context of this "advanced" show, Noel's decorative substitute for the true originality and crackling wit of his *Eggspandibles* amounted to downright deprivation.

Iain Baxter's contribution was also unfortunate: a set of aluminum letters to spell out the word *A-L-U-M-I-N-U-M* (hardly a profound "conceptual" joke). It was impossible to resist a nostalgic twinge for the inflatable pvc cloud of yore, or to stifle that moment of childish fantasy which saw it once more afloat, like a happy zeppelin, over Canada's corner at Lausanne.

As to Lamanna's choice of artists themselves, I regret only two, both of whom happen to be painters. Milly Ristvedt – Women's Lib forgive me – showed up like a pretty little girl trying to compete with a gang of tough boys; her pastel polyhedron was quite predictably the wallflower of the show. Damaged and dated, the green-striped shaped-canvas by Jerry Santbergen served only as a sad reminder of over-promise unfulfilled.

Meanwhile, out in the garden, Henry Saxe's crazy linked construction of 21 two-foot units of angle-bent (five bends per unit) green-vine vinyl-coated 1½" steel pipe, its 20 oval links the colour and texture of sweet red pepper rinds, cavorted along the rim of a poolful of nineteenth century bronze nereids like a beanstalk gone mad – a wild, hilarious work, peculiarly at home in that water-tinkling leafy setting.

As should have been expected, the June 19th response of non-Canadians to the Lamanna Gallery entry at Lausanne was precisely on par with their June 22nd response to the Mike Snow opening at the *Venice Biennale*: incredulous enthusiasm.



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1 Guido Molinari's *Noir Ascendant* 1956.

2 Installation view showing the work of Robin Mackenz; Guido Molinari, Jean Noel (partial).

3 Herman de Vries collage, 1970.

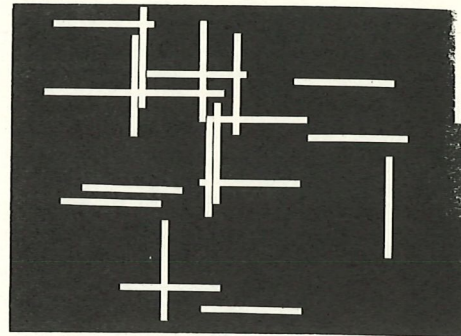
4 Walter de Maria *Bed of Spikes* 1969 progression of 9 across stainless steel 3½" x 7'-1" x 15" high
Courtesy: Dwan Gallery, N.Y.

5 Alain Duflo's *Echantillon Nature* 1969.
Courtesy: Lucien Durard, Paris

6 Tsai *Cybernetic Sculpture #4127*, 1969 stainless steel, stroboscopic light/electronic feedback control system 4' high x 2' wide x 1'-5" deep
Coll: Addison Gallery of American Art, Andover, Mass

7 Man Ray's *Emak Bakia*, 1927-70.
Courtesy: Studio Marconi, Milano

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Incredulous? What else? Considering our particular history of governmental art-promotion, why should a sophisticated international audience have come prepared to see works of such quality from Darkest Canada? As representative of *artscanada* (and incidentally, as sole Canadian press representative) I actually found myself forced to fight for press-kits both at Lausanne and Venice, since the very existence of this magazine, on display at neither exhibition (even though the *Biennale* features a shop selling art periodicals of the world) was doubted. Predictably, the Canadian Pavilion's entire quota of Snow catalogues was exhausted on opening day.

2

Such irritating details simply emphasize the crisis of Canada International. At this moment when the best of this country's art justifiably stands at the threshold of world recognition (and a much-needed world market) – what we urgently require NOW is a Canadian Government Art Information Service for the dissemination, national and international, of constantly updated data directed at all news media, public and commercial galleries, universities and other agencies of public communication. (Data such as news releases, films, lecture slides, black-and-white photographs and colour transparencies for publication purposes, exhibition catalogues, brochures, art publications, periodicals, and posters.)

Without government support through *sustained* international public relations for Canada's major talent, even this summer's extraordinary individual efforts by Carmen Lamanna at Lausanne and Commissioner Joanne Marsden at Venice could be undermined, and two first-class exhibitions of Canadian art could be as quickly forgotten as they were instantly admired.

["Part 2: Venice" will appear in the next issue.]

