

CARMEN LAMANNA
GALLERY



THE CARMEN LAMANNA GALLERY

AT

THE OWENS ART GALLERY

Karl Beveridge

David Bolduc

Ian Carr-Harris

Robin Collyer

Paterson Ewen

Murray Favro

Robert Fones

General Idea

Mary Janitch

Robin MacKenzie

Ron Martin

David Rabinowitch

Royden Rabinowitch

Reinhard Reitzenstein

Colette Whiten

Shirley Wiitasalo

Edward Zelenak

The Carmen Lamanna Gallery
Toronto, Ontario

January 6 - January 25, 1975

The Owens Art Gallery
Mt. Allison University
Sackville, N. B.

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It is generally assumed that an art gallery is either developing an image or trying to hold on to one. An image, however, can often become something which is fixed and thus ultimately restrictive and limiting. By and large, an overly defined image refers either to the past (a dependence on an established reputation) or to an imaginary future (a search for an art historical justification). I have always felt that the best image a gallery can have, if indeed it needs one at all, is one of diversity — the kind of diversity which is created out of a series of separate and distinct choices made by an individual personality, in this case that of an art dealer. I believe it is only when the entire personality is engaged that an art dealer can be wholly responsive to experiences and perceptions not previously considered to be within the domain of art. I prefer a gallery which is characterized by a personality rather than a well defined body of precedents or preconceptions, because only the former makes constant evolution possible.

The aesthetic which is at the core of the gallery's principles and goals, and which determines the variety of the art it shows, is therefore intended to be personal and not institutional or academic. This means that I am ultimately responsible for what is shown at the Carmen Lamanna Gallery. This aesthetic also defines my role as an art dealer in relation to the overall development of the national culture. I exhibit what has value to me personally on the assumption that it may have value for others — as individuals.

Because the Gallery's aesthetic develops out of personal choices, it functions, in one sense, as a very immediate kind of criticism. And criticism, as such, seems best when it offers, not a definition of "modernism" or an anticipation of future art, but a provision for personal response. It would seem natural that one should match the artist's individuality with an aesthetic response, just as individual and personal on the spectator's part, whether he is a visitor or a student, a collector or a critic. Thus the Gallery hopes to provide its public with an opportunity to deal directly with art as a genuinely contemporary activity. To put it another way, my concern is primarily with the innovational quality of art and thus, with its existence in the present. The artists at the Gallery are working now; the response of the viewer must be equally immediate.

This direct involvement with the previously unexperienced perceptions which are an essential part of this art "in the present tense" is, however, not intended to be an educational process in the accepted sense of the word. That would be a contradiction because I have no desire to bring one generalization, "the public", in contact with another generalization, "modernist" or "advanced" art.

What the artists at Carmen Lamanna have in common is, paradoxically, also the basis for their unquestionable individuality. More than anything else it is a specific energy, an intense, ongoing intellectual engagement, a unique way of questioning external reality that is inseparable from the artist's whole personality.

These artists are by nature drawn to certain areas of pure experience which they continue to explore throughout their creative lives. They possess both the strength and clarity of mind to question constantly and rigorously the common assumptions which cause most of us either to take those areas of experiences for granted or even to overlook them completely. What is especially stimulating for the viewer is that the questions and issues these artists raise are never resolved once and for all in a single work but are restlessly re-examined and reformulated. So fundamental are the issues in fact that they can never be finally answered. They persist as essential aspects of the ongoing human situation.

Murray Favro, to cite only one example, has long been concerned with isolating the image that we have of an object from the actual physical object itself in order to, in effect, call into question the identification we automatically make between the two under normal circumstances. His "projected reconstructions" — of which the *Synthetic Lake*, now in the collection of the National Gallery of Canada and the *Van Gogh's Room*, exhibited here, are the most recent manifestations, systematically extend his preoccupation with our perception of things

by themselves to that of things within the contexts of their particular environment. Favro has an irrepressible fascination for constructing objects from start to finish (or up to the point he has decided to stop). Since the time of his first show at the Carmen Lamanna Gallery in 1967, up to and including the present work, Favro has however deliberately avoided crafting his pieces to the point where they would take on a theatrical illusionism. The distinctly hand-made quality in all of his works serves to accelerate the tension between what a thing is as a real object in space and what it represents. In a way, the *Van Gogh's Room* offers still another brilliantly imaginative dimension to his work to date by effectively reversing the terms of the traditional relationship between a painting and the thing(s) it represents.

No matter how satisfying the development of a promising artist is, nothing, at least for me, can compare with the excitement of encountering the mind, ideas and work of an exceptional young artist for the first time. It is there that one is shown something, in the way of experience about oneself or the world, never seen before. Because I believe nothing can ever match the exhilaration felt when discovering new knowledge I continue to look for other artists who can provide it. The most recent as well as the youngest artist to join the Carmen Lamanna Gallery, Mary Janitch, is just such a case in point.

Janitch establishes a total involvement with a piece in its 'happening'. She lives with objects before they are assembled and as the works grow they become a part of her everyday living. *Sleeping Place II Tree*, 1972-73, for example was her bed for a while. In the process her sensitivity allows her to notice all those things which usually go unseen by the average person. She can be involved with a certain section of a piece without any preconception of its final purpose. What counts is the immediate dialogue between her and the object in question. The original reasons and mood of the section, once it is completed and in place, may be forgotten, yet they are not forgotten: they are absorbed in the completed piece. The realm of awareness which Janitch is concerned with in her work is the period of transition between waking and sleeping. It is towards the exploration of such intangible experience that she harnesses her subtle sensitivity, her incredible imagination and her considerable artistic ability.

The most important aspect of truly contemporary art is its capacity to free itself from the past. The work is so unique and deals so completely with the present that not even the artist can pin it down in traditional ways. When the artist talks about what made him (her) do the piece, he (she) does not speak of even recent past art. To deal with this kind of work is not to deal with matters of style but with specific pure external facts we otherwise would have overlooked.

One can understand the work only if one can recognize that the experiences with which it deals are those which are a part of our daily reality although it is a previously unexamined part. It has a special significance for our time because the individual fact it is concerned with could have never been handled in the past. Only from the present moment are we able to cope with and define it. As a fact it is made valid by its incorporation into present experience.

To a large extent, our individuality and personal adjustments depend on how well we understand the world around us. Basically we each confront a common set of facts, situations and experiences which we must understand and deal with in our own personal way. Genuinely contemporary art brings these facts and experiences

into the open, isolating and clarifying them. When we "enter" such contemporary works we are made to think and see along the lines adopted by the artist, and to cope actively with his new identified chunks of reality.

When I observe young Canadian artists such as those represented in this exhibition, as well as others not connected with the Carmen Lamanna Gallery, I realize that we are only now entering a period when Canadian art and artists readily stimulate international interest and are frequently accorded international acclaim. There is a movement in Canada of such unquestionable innovation and genuine originality that Canada no longer has any need to look to other established art centers — for direction or for standards. The genius is still virtually untapped.

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The Carmen Lamanna Gallery opened its first exhibition in June 1966 with a presentation of a group of Canadian artists including several well known figures and, more importantly, a number of theretofore unseen and unsupported younger artists. The present exhibition stands as a development of the direction taken almost nine years ago: to search out, foster and expose new movements as they were being created.

International acknowledgement of the Gallery's efforts in recognizing young artists whose directions lie upon the frontiers of the avant garde was extended in 1970 when the Carmen Lamanna Gallery was the first Canadian gallery to be invited by the Musée cantonal des beaux-arts and Musée des arts décoratifs to participate in the *Salon international des Galeries pilotes* (3e Salon) in Lausanne and in the Musée d'art moderne de la ville de Paris.

On a national level the Carmen Lamanna Gallery has received support from the National Gallery of Canada — highlighted in 1973 by the extensive inclusion of the Gallery's artists in *Boucherville Montreal - Toronto - London*. The Owens Art Gallery now further extends recognition by an exhibition which not only includes all the artists presently in connection with the gallery, but also reconstructs in Mount Allison its actual Toronto space. Rather than giving an air of fixity to that space, I hope that its transportability will reflect some of the flexibility with which I try to operate.

I would like to express my gratitude to all those artists who have pursued the very difficult task of creating a personal language without which, needless to say, neither the past exhibition nor the present one, nor the Carmen Lamanna Gallery would have, in any way, been possible.

Secondly, I would like to thank for their support the visitors to my gallery, from across Canada or from abroad, whether they have come just to look as individuals or whether they have come in their capacities as curators, collectors or critics.

Finally may I state my deep appreciation to Chris Youngs, director of the Owens Art Gallery, for his conception of the idea for the exhibition and for his realization of it.

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We wish to express our gratitude to the Canada Council for their assistance with this exhibition.



