

cover, given his poor opinion of the painter's figurative works. More in keeping with the sentiment of the exhibition would have been one of Lyman's own pictures. Of the many examples that could be cited to indicate Lyman's progressive views is the interesting fact that in 1937 he wrote in *The Montrealer* on the A.A.M.'s unjust acceptance procedures for the Spring exhibitions, suggesting a two-jury system instead. But it was not until eight years later through the insistence of the C.A.S. that the museum acknowledged the fairness and logic of his proposal.

But Lyman's liberalism was probably more of a guiding principle than an internalized emotional response and this may go far in explaining his diminishing role within the C.A.S. However Lyman's attitude to and his notion of his position within the Society has yet to be fully revealed.

In conclusion Varley's exhibition and catalogue have finally given the Contemporary Arts Society the attention it rightfully deserves. It is a tribute to his energy, enthusiasm and insight. And now it is left to the rest of us to build upon this very solid base.

Sandra Paikowsky

DESSIN ET SURREALISME AU QUÉBEC

Réal Lussier

Catalogue accompanying an exhibition organized and circulated by the Musée d'art contemporain, Montréal.

40 pages, 31 ill., \$2.00

Despite scholarly interest in Québec Surrealism and its ramifications over the past decade, the Surrealist drawings created by Montréal's avant-garde artists during the period 1943-57 have received little attention. *Dessin et surréalisme au Québec* is a welcome publication on the subject and the first to attempt an overview of Québec surrealist drawing *praxis*.

Published in conjunction with a travelling exhibition of thirty-one drawings by seventeen artists organized by the Musée d'art contemporain, the catalogue is divided into four parts: an essay by Réal Lussier, artists' statements, plates, and a list of works in the exhibition which includes biographical information about the artists. Its value is threefold: the reproduction of little known work; a synoptic history of the movement and its artists, incorporating the findings of recent scholarship; and a published record of fifteen works from the museum's collection. Both its text and plates must be considered in future discussions of Surrealism in Québec.

While the importance of *Dessin et surréalisme* in the literature is incontestable, it suffers from limitations in content and format. In many ways, the publication typifies the catalogue style of smaller, younger Canadian museums for Canadian material, sharing both its strengths and weaknesses. Because of government cultural policy, these institutions place more emphasis on collecting, displaying and dispersing art works than on documentation, research and interpretation. One of the advantages of this policy is the ability of the museum to create interest in unknown

aspects of Canadian art. Through exhibitions, the museum acts as a catalyst for further, more concentrated study. The major disadvantage is that when little known work forms the subject of the catalogue, both the essay and the list rely on existing, rather than original, research. As with many of its counterparts, the paucity of original research in *Dessin et surréalisme*, coupled with weak documentation, results in serious implications for the orientation and nature of the interpretation as well as a restricted base for subsequent scholarship.

The essay by Réal Lussier is divided into three parts. It begins with an introductory statement in which Lussier defines Surrealism in the Québec context as "non-limitatif, ouvert" and delineates two axes, automatisme and poetry, within which Québec Surrealist activity occurs. Lussier's recognition of diverse Surrealist philosophies at the outset enables him to present a much needed non-partisan discussion of the movement in the sections which follow.

Unfortunately, the generalizations about drawing contained in the introduction do not go far enough. Comments about drawing being experimental work, quickly executed, revealing the original intent of the artist can, and have, been applied to all forms of drawing. No attempt is made to define the distinguishing characteristics of Surrealist drawing or of Québecers working in this mode. While Lussier's reticence to focus on the issue of drawing reflects the lack of literature on the subject, it is the major weakness of the essay.

In the historical overview which follows, *Parcours historique*, initial exposures to Surrealism and subsequent coalescences into several factions are traced. Masterfully condensing a wealth of information, Lussier presents a balanced interpretation of the period, including the importance of book illustration and theatre décor. Much of the information was first contained in Henri

Bourassa's *Surréalisme et littérature québécoise* which inspired the content in this section of the essay. Because the information on art in Bourassa's book is subsidiary to the discussion of literature and spread throughout the lengthy text, it is not as lucid nor as accessible as Lussier's presentation.

While Lussier's reconstruction provides a broad context in which the drawings can be placed, he does not attempt a history of Québec Surrealist drawing itself, either in this section or in the concluding segment of the essay, revealingly entitled *Surréalisme pour liberté*. Rather, each of the drawings in the exhibition is discussed in an order determined by the chronology of the works, carefully chosen to correspond to the period in which each artist was most active in Surrealist circles. As such, however, only the historical development and the issues presented by the works included occurs.

Given Lussier's admirable desire to discuss each work equitably, he grapples well with the uneven literature on the subject, treating the work of lesser known artists generally and engaging in more detailed analysis where more is known about the artist or the drawing. The philosophy of each artist is characterized before commenting on the style and imagery of the drawing. Once again though, the Surrealist-versus-drawing orientation of the essay limits consideration of the works. Little is done to situate the importance or role of drawing or the works chosen in the oeuvre of the individuals included, nor are the drawings, as drawing, discussed.

The lack of attention paid to what, ostensibly, is the subject of the catalogue obscures the relevance of a detailed examination of drawing in clarifying the distinctions between the various groups of Surrealists in Québec. We are left with the physical evidence that drawing was important but remain uncertain as to how and why. We wonder why only

one drawing by Borduas was included; why Pellán's drawings vary so in style; why Daudelin, a figurative artist, can be classed among the abstract Automatistes; why artists involved with the Automatistes illustrated poetry; why so many of the drawings are executed in ink; why some artists preferred colour?

The avoidance of the issue of drawing is tied to the lack of detailed research on the drawings themselves and is reflected in the inclusion and exclusion of certain types of information in the catalogue entries and artists' statements, both of which reflect the Surrealist as opposed to drawing emphasis found in the essay. In the entries, biographical information about the artists is more extensive than notations on the drawings. Provenance, bibliography, detailed media description, signature notation and discussion of related works are omitted. Consideration of these factors would assist in determining theory and practice and their inclusion would have saved future scholars considerable work. Questioning the artists about drawing as well as Surrealism would have been equally helpful.

Many of the deficiencies of content in *Dessin et surréalisme* can be explained by a conflict between generalist and scholarly tendencies, as well as uncertainty about the purpose of the catalogue. The same is true of its format. The quadrupartite arrangement of the catalogue's material reflects a current trend and dilemma in catalogue publication: the desire to find a format and content which provides the public with a reasonably priced, easily read (often interpreted as not too academic looking or sounding) guide to and record of the exhibition and, at the same time, one which serves the needs of the specialized scholar. While the aim of serving the public is commendable, comprehensible and fashionable on the part of institutions whose funds derive primarily from taxes, few publications

of this type successfully meld the opposing ingredients of summary and detailed approaches, and in- and non-exhibition use. The result is usually a hybrid, combining features of the standard art book and the traditional catalogue, stressing aspects of one or the other. As a result, the format of many exhibition catalogues usually presents problems for both types of reader and both types of situation. Ultimately, the problem of format raises questions regarding the goals of publications and exhibitions.

Dessins et surréalisme separates essay and catalogue text, enabling the viewer to obtain immediate and specific information about the art works in the exhibition and biographical data on the artists in a sequence and time span that is not overly taxing. While this aspect of the catalogue is laudable, aside from the condensed artists' biographies, the entries provide only the information contained in the labels — artist, title, date, medium and collection. One is forced to ask if both the viewer and the reader would not have been better served if the commentary on specific works contained in the essay under *Surréalisme pour liberté* would have been more appropriate in the entries, accompanied by the artists' statements. Conversely, the viewer might obtain this information through expanded label text.

The separation of data on an art work into various sections of the catalogue and the scanty labels in the exhibition raise the issue of diminished accountability for printed information. If text is presented in a manner that makes verification with the information contained in the art work or elsewhere in the publication difficult, errors and omissions are not as noticeable and dialogue is restricted to the few who will take the time to study the publication. This comment applies not only to the text arrangement in the publication under discussion but also to the separation of text and plates.

In *Dessin et surréalisme*, the plates are grouped together following the essay and artists' statements but before the list of works. While the viewer does not require a reproduction, the reader does. The illustrations are of good quality, visually documenting the chronology and diversity of technique, process, imagery and media found in Québec Surrealist drawings. Confusion, however, arises when attempting to correlate essay text or catalogue entries with the plates. Page numbers for illustrations are not given in the essay. The entries are arranged alphabetically, the plates chronologically, with no explanatory note given. Identifying the correct catalogue number from the illustration is equally problematic. The number beside the plate is the page number; the catalogue number is located beside the caption at the top of the page. Collating information in the various sections is overly time consuming and frustrating.

The dilemma of plate placement is symptomatic of the problems of the multipurpose catalogue *cum* book and the choice of plate location is an indication of the orientation of the publication. Usually, some form of double duty approach is taken with the plates sandwiched between commentary and fact sections as here. This mode recognizes that the plates may be useful without the text. An alternative is the relegation of the plates to one section, either in-text in the essay, divided by chapter or accompanying each entry. Both methods pose collating problems.

Sometimes, a more holistic approach is taken with the plates included in the essay and the entries serving as captions. While such a treatment responds to the general and specific nature of the material included, it is, at the least, awkward as a tool used while attending the exhibition, though it does provide the opportunity for "viewing" comparative material while viewing the exhibition. The disadvantage of the holistic format for the non-exhibition reader oc-

curs when descriptive text is included in the entry/caption. It vies for attention, breaking the reading flow of the essay commentary.

As problems occur with all existing formats, perhaps *Dessin et surréalisme* should not be overly criticized in this respect. The solution to the difficulties seems to lie in redefining the purpose of many current exhibition catalogues.

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PLURALITIES/1980/ PLURALITÉS

En collaboration
Ottawa, Galerie nationale du Canada
1980
131 pages, 120 illustrations en n. et b.
\$19.95

Faire le mort

Une exposition terminée, reste le catalogue. Les oeuvres passent, les écrits demeurent. *Pluralités 1980* a laissé des traces: regrets pour certains de ne pas en avoir été; déception pour d'autres quant à leur participation; critiques imprimées; articles à venir; un document, ce catalogue, qu'il nous faut maintenant commenter.

Dans un article publié en 1975, Louis Marin cernait ainsi les fonctions du catalogue d'exposition:

«(Il) possède une valeur d'usage dont le statut est ambigu: en effet,