

THE CAPILANO REVIEW



the last tear pick
 out of the long
 blue
 aorta
of the sea.

— ZORAN JUNGÍĆ

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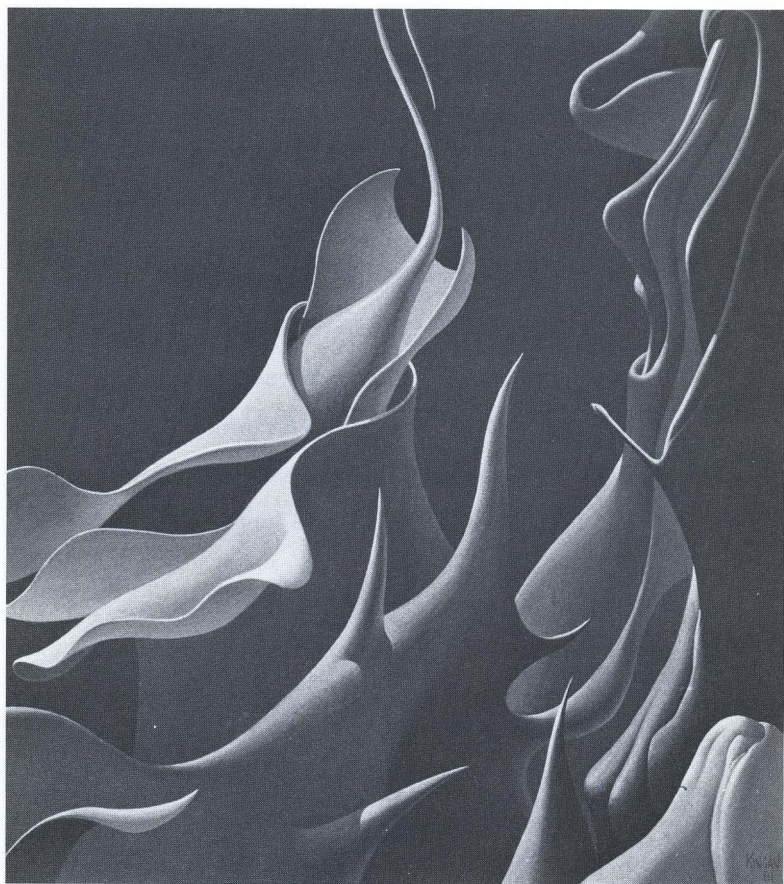
1983

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SURREALISM? B.C.



PREFACE

Although Guillaume Apollinaire invented the word, André Breton provided the most historically significant definition of the noun "surrealism" in 1924. He meant to signify by this word the creative processes he and others were exploring at the time, activities which he defined as the pursuit of "pure, psychic automatism." Surrealism's objective was to express verbally, in writing and by other means, the real process of thought which in Breton's opinion was "thought's dictation, in the absence of all control exercised by the reason and outside all moral preoccupations."¹

André Breton, Max Ernst, Luis Buñuel, Paul Eluard, Salvador Dalí are, perhaps, the most familiar figures in the movement that peaked in the late 30's. It is principally remembered for having supported the production of imagery that accorded with a Freudian view of the unconscious where thought and desire were pure, uninhibited by the censorship of the Super Ego. To fashion this unfettered, often dream-like imagery the Surrealists found useful techniques involving free association, automatic writing, collage and frottage.

During the 30's, Surrealism dominated poetry and painting in Europe and exerted influence upon the work of "virtually every major artist everywhere. . . . Most of the Surrealists took refuge in New York during World War II. . . ." ² According to Vancouver writer Michael Bullock, "With the outbreak of war and Breton's flight to America Surrealist activity became limited to isolated manifestations and publications in various countries. A partial resurgence of organized activity took place after the war, only to fade again with Breton's death in 1966." However, Bullock observed, the 70's saw "a dramatic revival of Surrealist activity in all artistic fields and in almost every country. . . . accompanied by the formation of new groups and the linking of these groups by international publications and exhibitions and by manifold contacts." He thought that these manifestations would reach a climax of sorts at the "Festival of Surrealism," planned for Spring, 1978.³

As early as the late 60's and during the early 70's here, a combined interest in eastern mysticism and hallucinogenic drugs led many British Columbian artists to produce dream-like imagery of a Surrealist nature. The catalogue to the Canadian Westcoast Hermetics exhibition, a show curated by Alvin Balkind at the University of British Columbia's Fine Arts Gallery (1973), offers an excellent survey of these materials. One of the artists who participated in that show, Ed Varney, is associated with the group of artists and writers who now call themselves the Melmoth Vancouver Group, which is the current locus of Surrealist activities here.⁴ In their magazine, *Melmoth*, Michael Bullock has written of their espousal of a shared sensibility:

Members of the . . . Group all adhere to the principles of Surrealism as enunciated in Breton's First and Second Manifestos: essentially the aim of breaking down the barriers between the inner and outer worlds, the world of reality and the world of dream. . . . All the works of the Group, whether verbal or visual, are directed to this end: the attainment of that state of being described as surreality, in which the dichotomies of inner and outer, dream and reality, are resolved in a higher synthesis that subsumes them both.⁵

The group currently includes a melange of artists and writers. They are listed here in the order they appear in John Baturin's photograph, beginning at the left of the top row:

Andrej Somov, Hosea Hirata, Lad. Guderna, Ed Varney & Alexandre FASTER;
Martin Guderna, Ted Kingan, W. D. McKinley, Michael Bullock & Ron Falcioni; Rose-marie Tremblay and Tannia May.

Recently two others — Grace Fong and Donna Tanchuk — have joined Melmoth Vancouver.



Visiting French scholar José Pierre described the activities of the Westcoast Surrealist Group which preceded but overlaps with *Melmoth* in a lengthy article entitled "Le Surréalisme et Le Canada."⁶ Pierre noted that in addition to these admitted Vancouver Surrealists there were other local contemporary artists like Gathie Falk (*TCR* Issues 24/25) in whose works can be detected qualities akin to surrealist traits.

In the community of artists here there are dozens who consciously or unconsciously continue aspects of Surrealist tradition in their visual or written works. Toni Onley describes his semi-representational landscape as "surreal." Jack Shadbolt uses many collage and painting techniques with the expressed desire of liberating his associative powers. Many of Gathie Falk's works actualize the figments of her imagination that invade her daydreams. Al McWilliams' *Ruminations on a Set of Circumstances* contains a chair with legs licked by flame, a fantasy object a Surrealist would applaud (*TCR* Issue 27).

The visual and literary works, the statements that follow allude to a complex situation that can merely be encapsulated in this issue. Ted Kingan and Ladislav Guderna are *Melmoth* Vancouver Group members who validly represent the presence of historic Surrealism in B.C. John Baturin, who has contributed to *Melmoth* magazine, is a photographer who sometimes produces works that have strong Surrealist affinities. Neil Dalrymple is a ceramic sculptor who lives in Victoria, B.C. He acknowledges Surrealism as a peripheral influence on his art, but his art does not fit into any major past or current trend. Barrie Jones has been dealing for years with dislocation imagery that is reminiscent of the principle of the unexpected conjunction of everyday objects that is central to Surrealist thought. This fact, however, does not deny Jones' works a place in the Conceptual Art Category.

The poems of Zoran Jungić that ensue are included to remind the reader that Surrealism is also literary. In visualizing the lines of this poetry, we enter into the realm of the fantastic where the borders between what is real and imagined blur.

ANN ROSENBERG

NOTES

¹ Herschel B. Chipp, Peter Selz, and Joshua Taylor, *Theories of Modern Art* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1968), p. 412.

² *Ibid.*, p. 375.

³ This information is taken from a typescript of Michael Bullock's "Surrealism Then and Now." The exhibition referred to was Surrealism Unlimited, an international show that took place at the Camden Art Centre, London, England, 1978. This exhibit had a Canadian section that included the work of Ted Kingan, Michael Bullock, Robert Davidson and Gregg Simpson. It ran concurrently with another major Surrealist show at the Hayward Gallery in London and in the same year as Other Realities, a survey of Canadian Surrealism produced at the Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Queen's University, Kingston. The latter exhibition travelled to Canada House, London, England and to *Centre culturel canadien*, Paris, France in Spring 1979.

The generality cited concerning the increase of Surrealist activities around the world also applies to Vancouver. The Move Gallery of North Vancouver hosted Westcoast Surrealist Group shows from 1976 to 1979. In 1980 the Move Gallery relocated to 170 Powell Street and its opening exhibition in Fall 1980 included works by Ted Kingan, David Mayrs, Edwin Varney, Ladislav Guderna and his son Martin, Dave Roberts, Gregg Simpson, Robert Davidson, Frances Thenard and David UU. The Move Gallery is now closed.

⁴ In Spring 1982 the Melmoth Group opened its own Melmoth Gallery at #16-1101 Nicola Street, an exhibition space which, unfortunately, Melmoth no longer retains. The participants in its first show were: Michael Bullock, Ronald Falcioni, Ladislav and Martin Guderna, Ted Kingan, Andrej Somov, Frances Thenard, Edwin Varney and Gregg Simpson.

Melmoth, the publication, first appeared in England. A different but similar magazine *Melmoth Vancouver* was published here for the first time in 1980. A third Scandinavian *Melmoth* called *Melmoth in Norden* came next. *Melmoth Vancouver* is published at the University of British Columbia's Creative Writing Department. Its editor-in-chief is Hosea Hirata.

This chain of *Melmoth* publications suggests the international contacts of the local Surrealist group. At an informal meeting with Michael Bullock, Ted Kingan, Ladislav and Martin Guderna this August, I was assured of the friendly co-operation that exists among local members and of their contacts with other groups outside this country, notably with: Phases (Paris); Ellebore (Paris); Dunganon (Sweden); Medusa (Iceland). The English Surrealist group is headed by Conroy Maddox from London.

⁵ Michael Bullock, "The Melmoth Group," *Melmoth Vancouver*, 2, No. 3 (1983), 15.

⁶ Centre de la Recherche Scientifique, *Revue et tracts Surréalistes et de l'horizon Surréaliste en France et dans le monde, 1980* (Tours, France: 1980), pp. 24-28.

A copy of this document is retained by the Melmoth Vancouver group. This article formed the basis for the Canadian section of Pierre's book, *L'univers Surréaliste* that will be released in Paris, September 1983. Pierre was present at the opening of the Move Gallery's first Powell Street exhibition.

Zoran Jungić / THREE POEMS

1

Her marked

eroded

eye cover

closes

echoing

with a metal sound

the gentle skin

of her shadow

fits snugly against the blossoming

face

of a frozen

horse:

those soft winters are

departing

to the sky

and lands

burnt through:

in the broken

jug

ill flowers

tease a

moon's wrinkled

nose:

a dream

slides out

and

sinks

into her lonely

stagnant

world.

2

Beauty of the flower dust
heals

and reveals
the reflection
of the sun's blindness

when the bird nests
are flooded by blood
mixed
with the blue hair of the sky

then
war
begins to yawn among the canons
together with the vortex

of iron
feet:

in the armour
overgrown with rocks

over there
where

dead gulls
pray
and with a scream

pick
the last tear
out of the long
blue

aorta
of the sea.

3

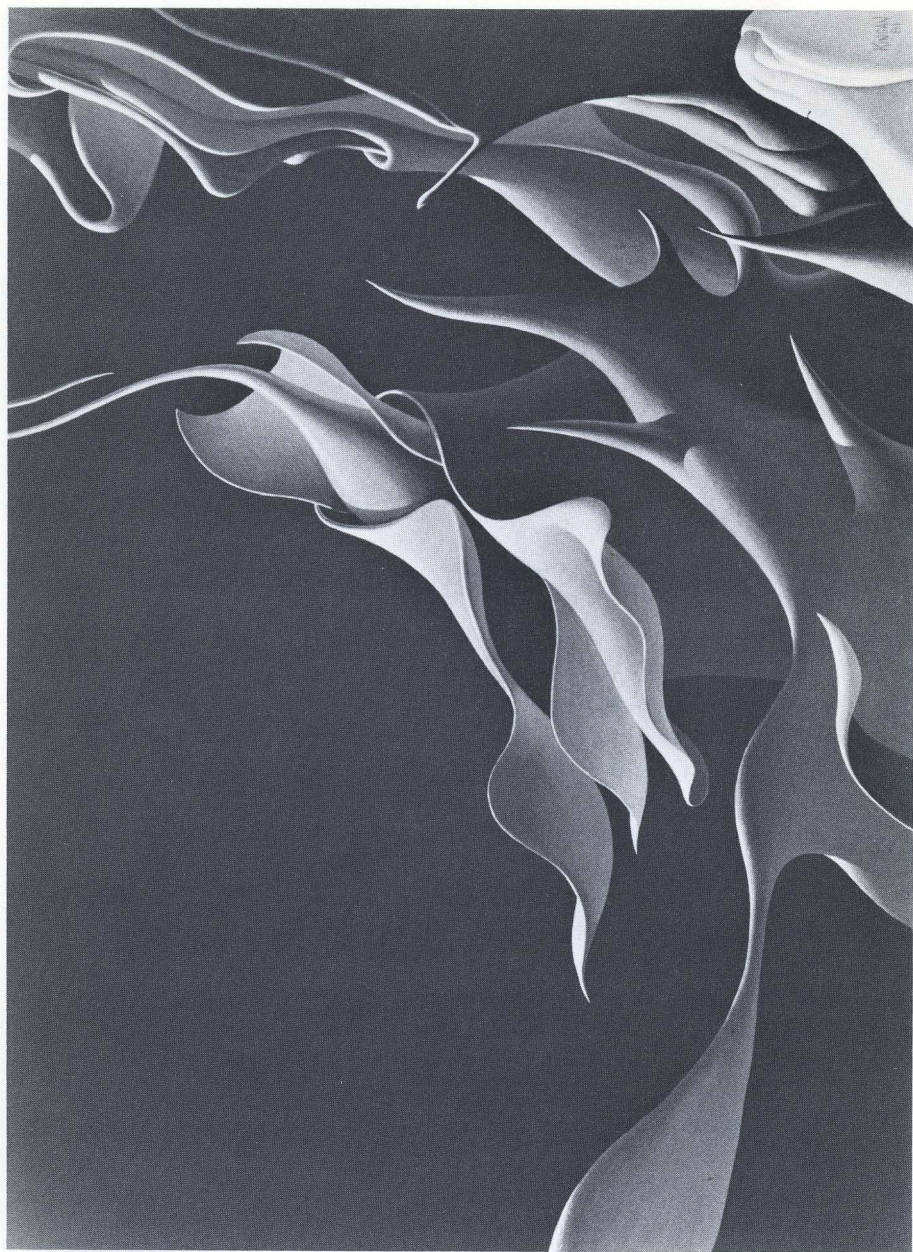
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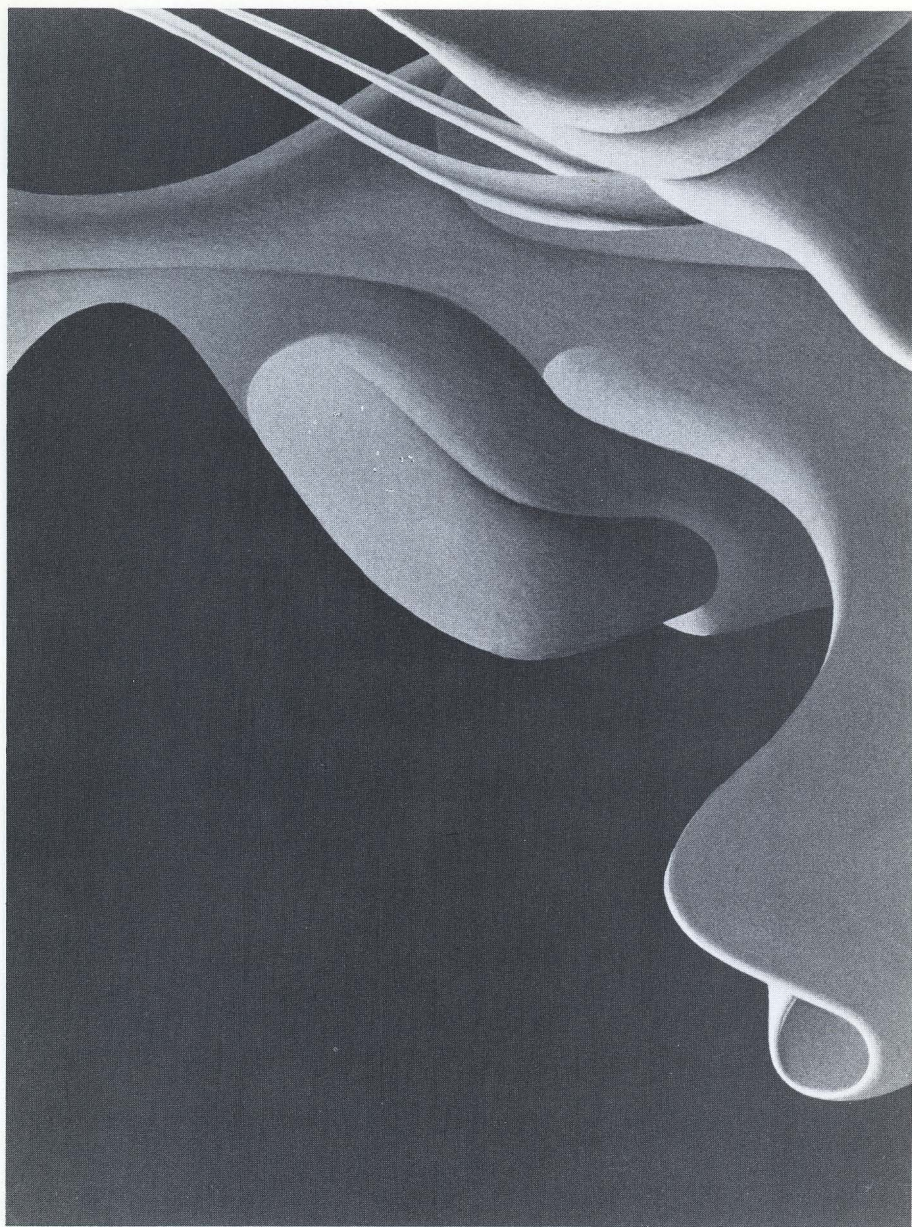
Ted Kingan / STATEMENT

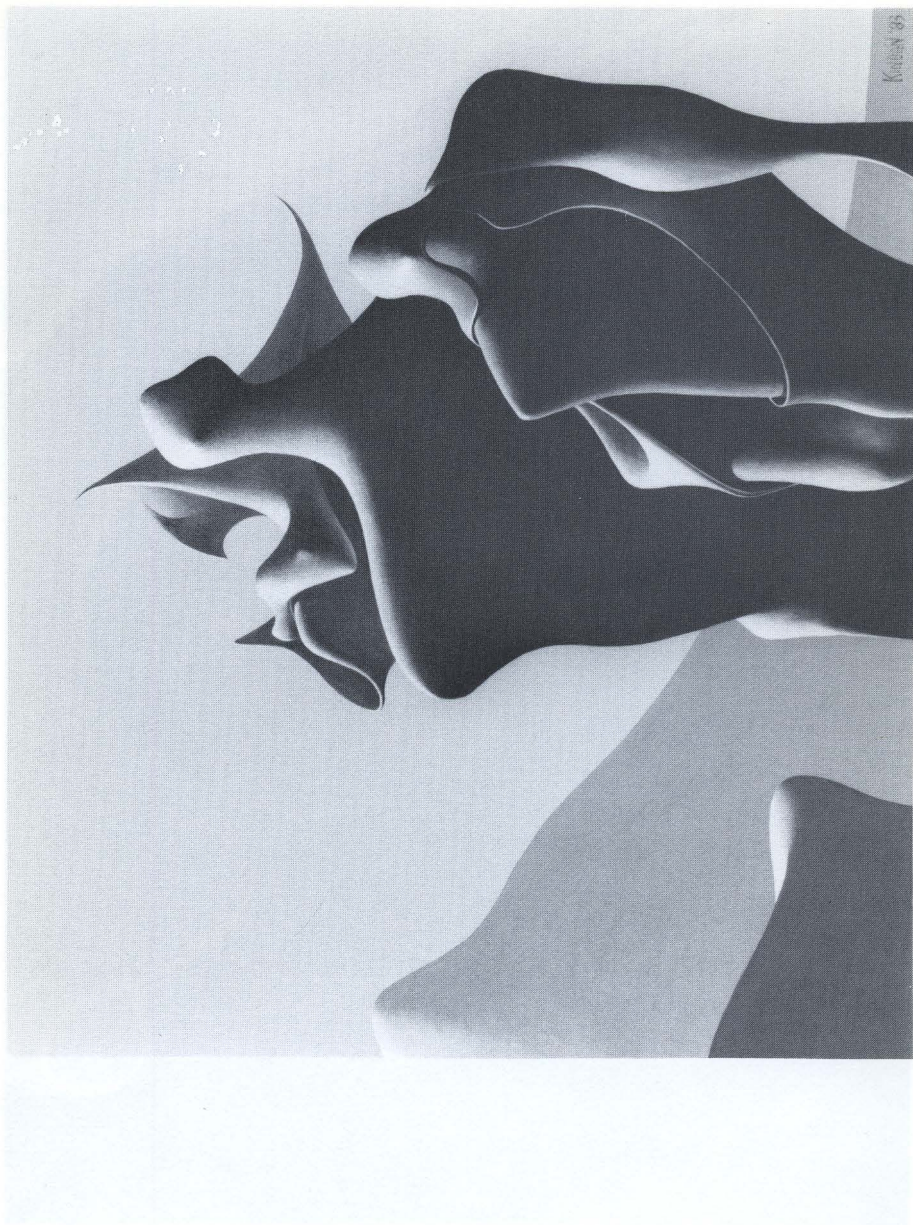
... It is only during the painting process that the forms emerge and eventually define themselves. There is no attempt to predetermine the final configuration. One form provokes another until the various elements reach an idiosyncratic equilibrium and a sense of visual coherence is achieved.

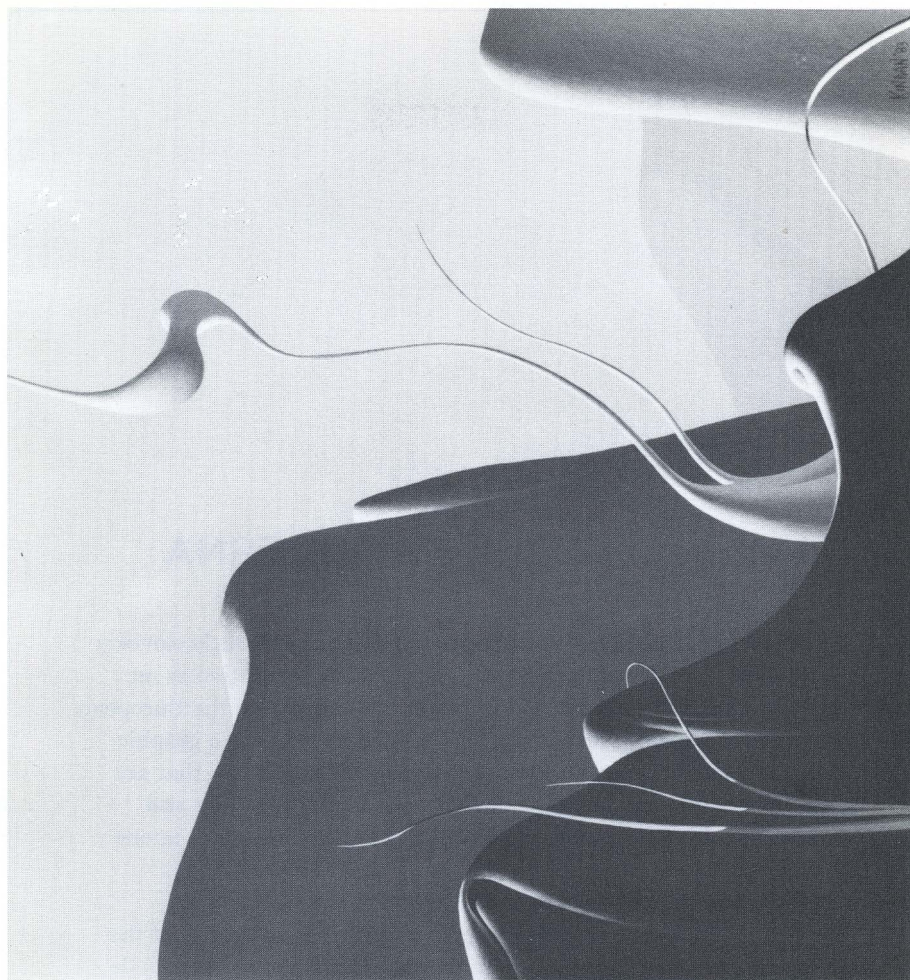
Since my method involves both a conscious and an unconscious manipulation of images and materials, it cannot be understood as "pure psychic automatism," the terms used by André Breton to define surrealism in his First Manifesto in 1924. True automatic drawing or painting precludes any intervention of the conscious mind and the results will not necessarily possess traditional aesthetic values, whereas in my own work there is an obvious degree of deliberateness. My aim is to achieve a felicitous balance between the spontaneous blossoming of form and the need for visual explicitness. The task is to integrate these two opposing imperatives into as eloquent a totality as possible.

It is only through the act of painting or drawing that I am able to liberate and subsequently encounter the preternatural images which materialize with a slow spontaneity. Although the viewer may assume that I am principally concerned with the appearance of the finished work, the truth is that I gain even more pleasure from the actual process. ...







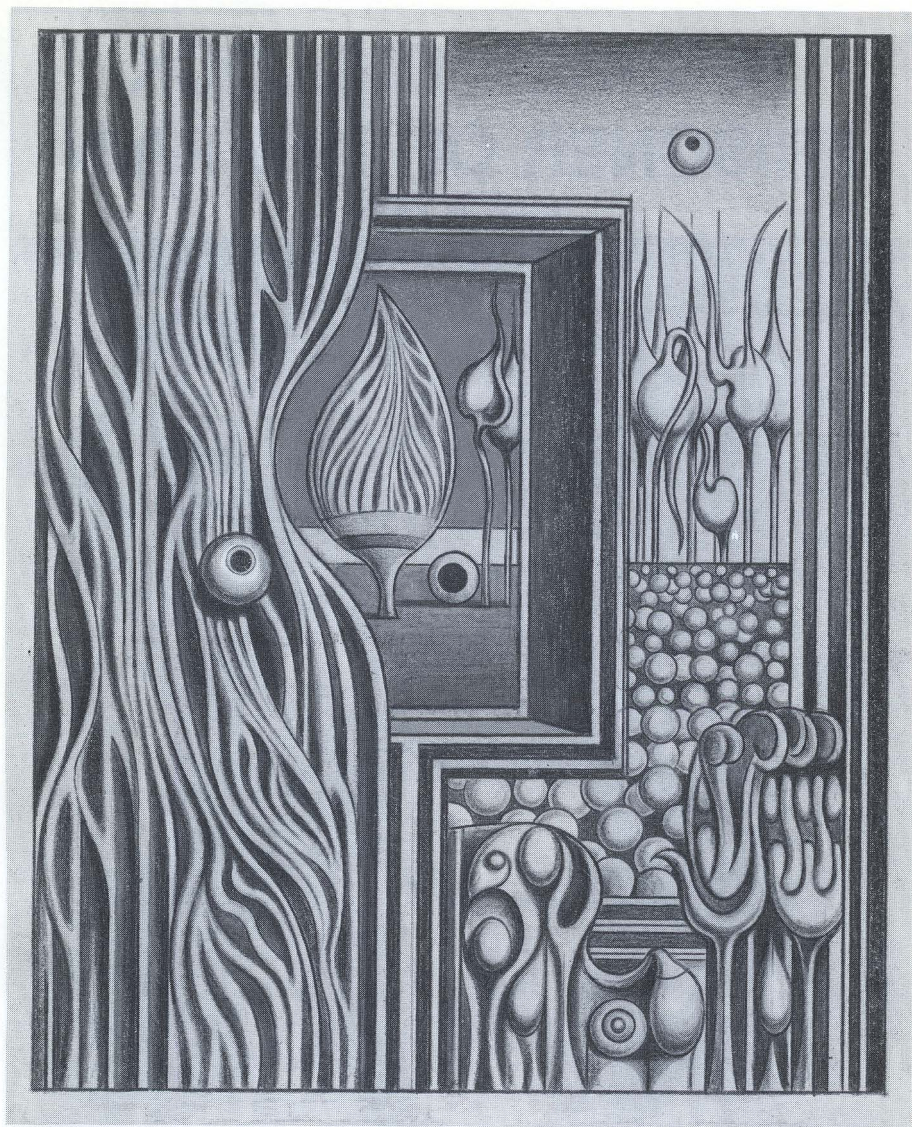


Ed Varney / LADISLAV GUDERNA

... When Guderna came to Canada from his native Czechoslovakia in 1968, he had already achieved a considerable reputation as an artist in Europe. Although his affiliations had been with the European Surrealist movement, he has used his exceptional skill as a graphic artist, as well as a painter, to move his imagery into forms that are both innovative and, at the same time, capable of reaching and disturbing a broader public than most artists who only work in one medium.

In Vancouver, he has been associated with the Vancouver Surrealist Group and with Intermedia as well as with several of the younger artists such as Anna Banana, Rick Hambleton, Michael de Courcy, Gregg Simpson, his son Martin, and myself, all of whom are concerned with exploring a multiplicity of art media forms. . . .

Guderna . . . has used Mail Art as an extension of his participation in other media forms such as painting, drawing, collage and printmaking. He has made stamps, postcards, booklets and a variety of other forms which include both a surreal sense of image juxtaposition and a mock-historic sense of self-historification. He is able to blend the humorous and the serious with wit and sensitivity. His work is multifaceted in that it is concerned with colour, graphic clarity, internal dramatic structure, and the interplay of ideas which move between a keenly observed realism and a just as accurately observed dreamworld. . . .



MICHAEL BULLOCK

PRISONER OF THE RAIN

POEMS IN PROSE





鮮紅的女人

布邁恪超現實小小說選

周兆祥譯





John Baturin / STATEMENT

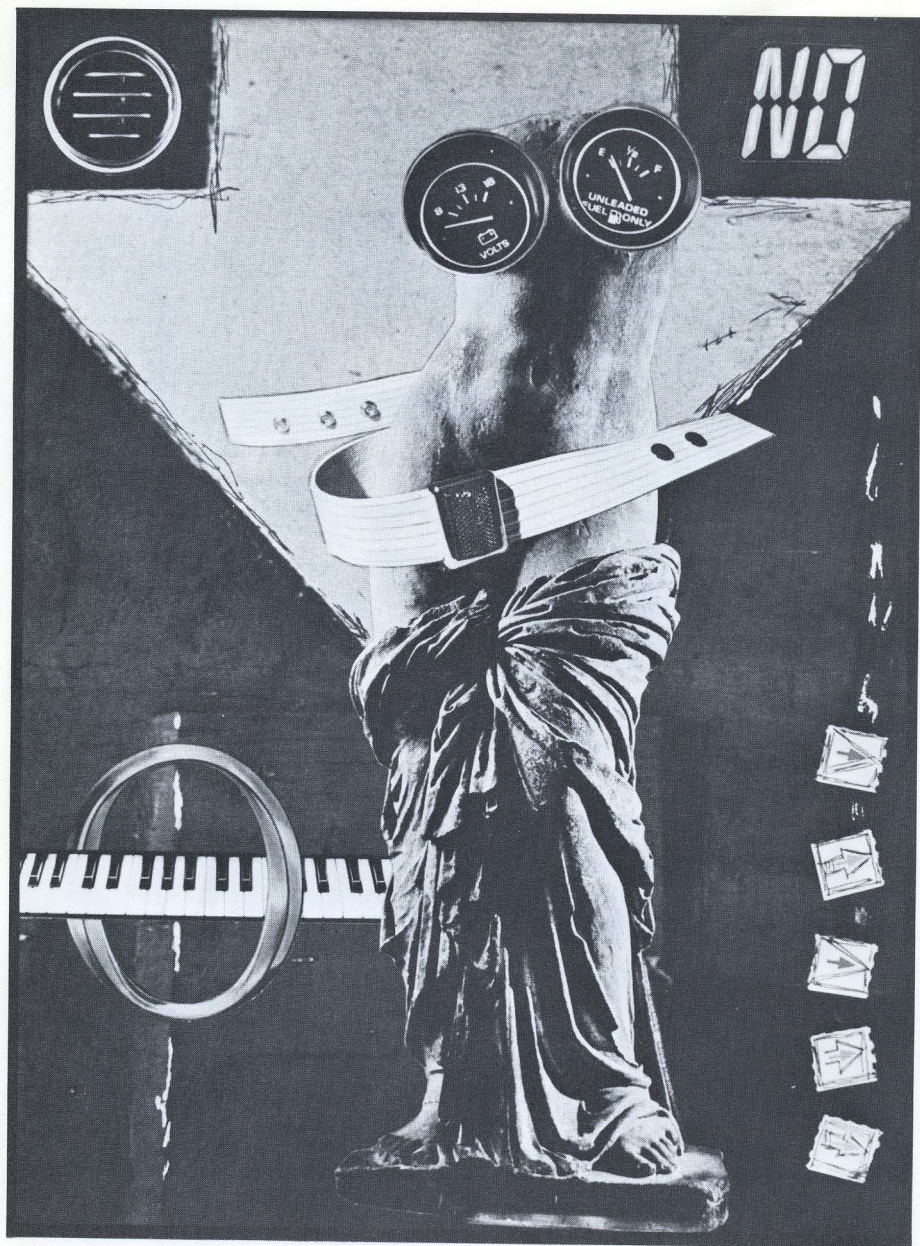
... "Tickle Your Ivories" says things. The series makes statements and claims. It proselytizes, preaches and dictates. It comments on violence and sexuality and the destruction of creativity. It stands on its pulpit and shouts down at you. ...

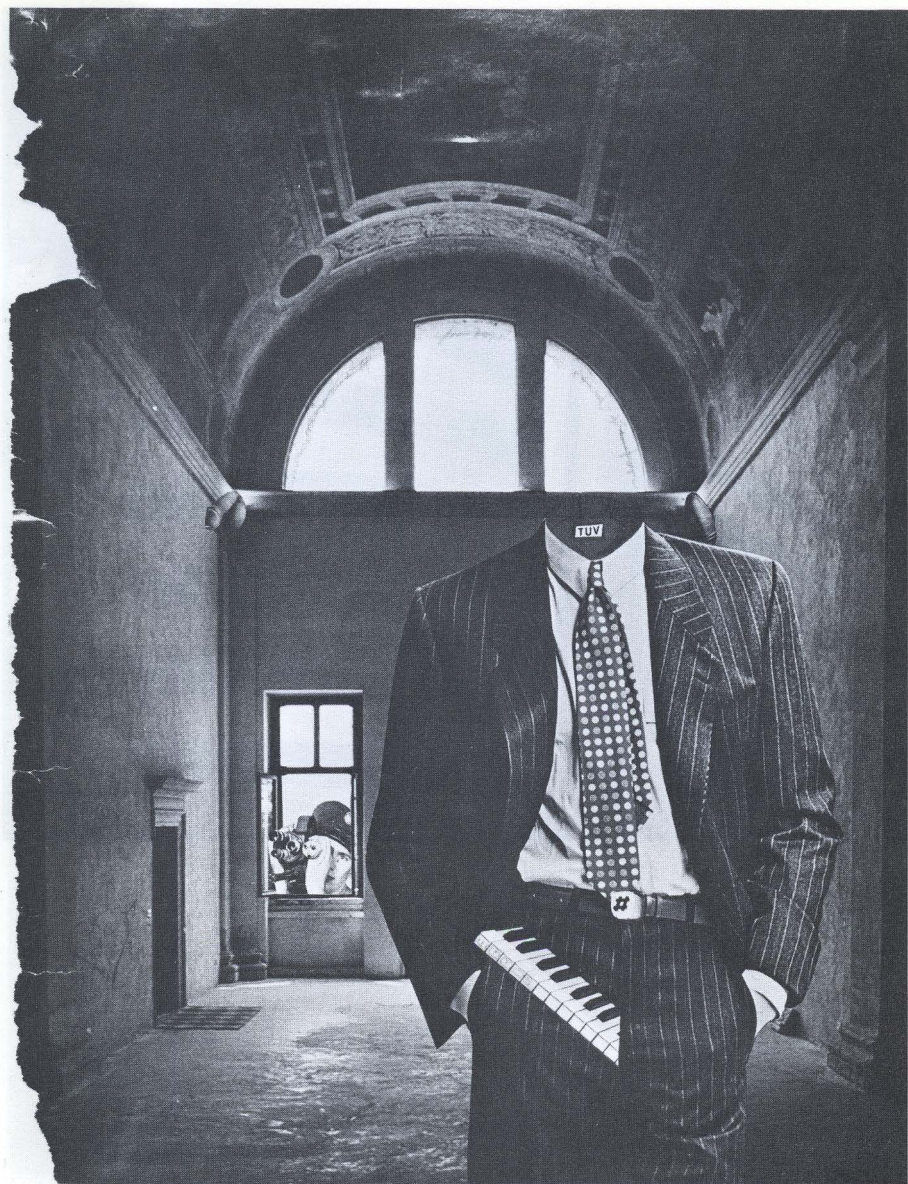
I'd like the people to respect the work on its own merits as imagery. Hell, I'd love them to love the work, but I don't expect it or expect anyone to correctly analyse or to totally understand. I don't expect to shape or to mould or to form or to twist. I can't. I never know what I'm going to say until after I've gone and said it.

I do the work because I like to do it. The meanings are so much verbiage after the act. That is not to say they are not true to me. The works and their meanings both reflect my psyche, my problems, my questions and my solutions. I think ... I am speaking about typical artistic introspection. You might best understand it as ME, Me, Me.

I suppose ... I am trying to say ... that I do NOT want you to really understand me. I do the work. I'm involved. I'm happy. My life is not all me. It's enough.











Neil Dalrymple / STATEMENT

As a small boy in school, I used to make dragons . . . out of clay. This . . . interested the teachers and I received much encouragement in the subject of art.

Today the dragon is often a focal point for my themes. Why I have always had a dragon/beast fascination all my life, I can't say. I also make hawks, eagles and salmonoids. . . .

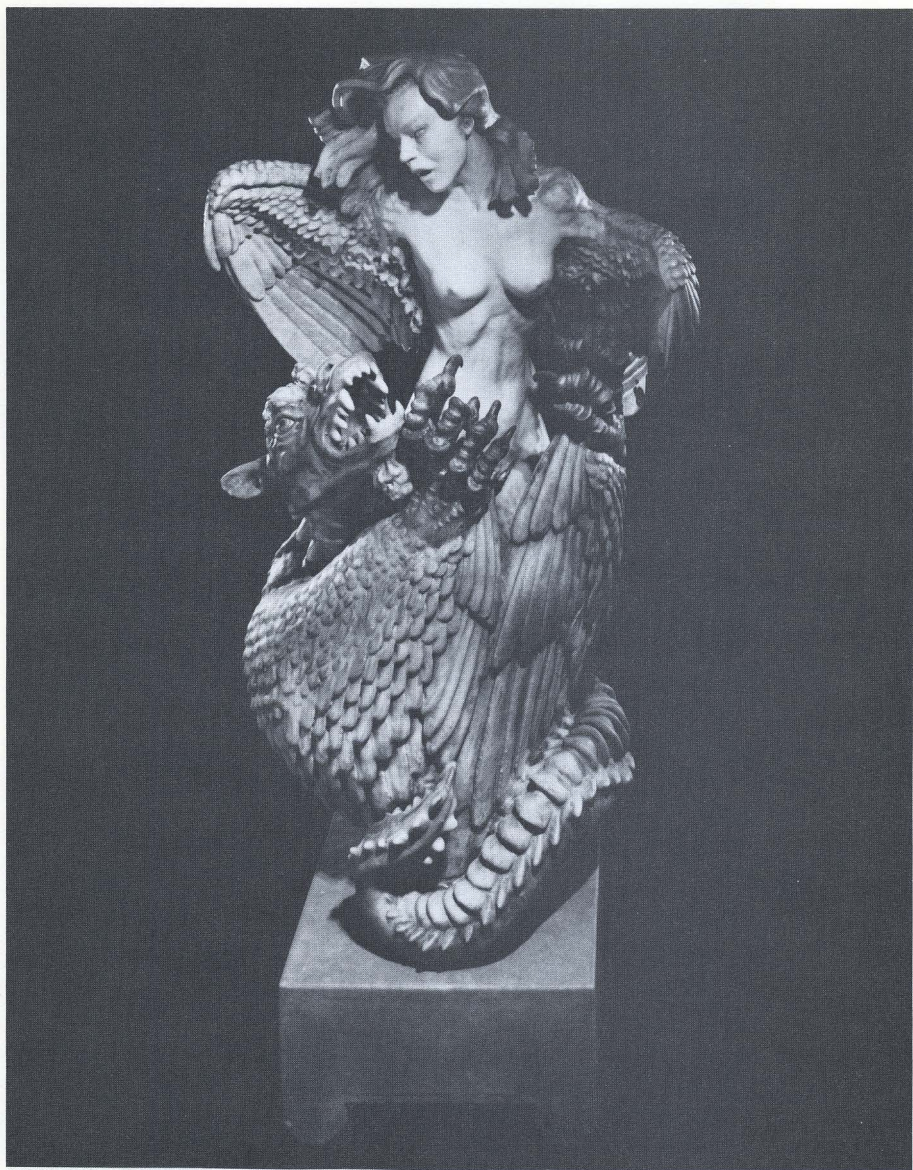
I often find myself wanting to make beings and creatures from the spirit world and from another dimension. . . . Through them I find a way of expressing human emotions and carnal activities . . . some of these sculptures have strong erotic elements.

For most of my life I lived in North Wales. I try to flavour my work with Celtic feeling. The Gothic Cathedrals of Europe and England are fantastic places. I like the gigantic towering arches, roofs and pillars, together with all of the stone carvings and decoration and the figures. In my work, I try to get a feeling for the Gothic past.

As a river fisherman, I have an interest in wildlife and I combine this interest with my fantasy work. Eagle-winged figures, water nymphs emerging from the mouths of trout are recent subjects.

My work is Romantic and its strangeness lends it a Surrealist appearance and yet it would not fit in with mid-Century Surrealist works. Some of it is certainly weird stuff and I just can't categorize it. I would call my style Anglo-Celtic, Gothic, Romantic Surrealism.











Barrie Jones / STATEMENT

Pacific Salmon Series I (four large cibachrome transparencies, on view in the new Vancouver Art Gallery's first exhibition) and *Pacific Salmon Series II* (reproduced here) were photographed in the Vancouver city landscape between 1980 and 1982.

Each photo is a record of "staged" real-time events. The fish was thrown literally through the viewing frame of the camera. Each image seen here exists uniquely as a photograph and could never be seen this way by the eye.

The constant visual element in all the photographs, the fish, is, ironically, the least real or substantial element. Its irregular visual imprint is the most unpredictable variable. The fish becomes the link between the water, land and the air.

Perception of time is important to the work. The four seasons provide the structure and logic for the images as a series. The intrusion of the fish as a specific occurrence contrasts with the year-long cycle. The simultaneous overlapping of the "timeless" scenes with the fleeting image of the fish creates a "meaningful coincidence."

I like to combine image-making with image-taking by layering dislocated images and events with cultural symbols and visual clichés. This creates tension and humour and prevents the images from being viewed in a predictable way.

This series combines the form of the scenic snapshot, the familiarity of the advertising image, with the accessibility of the snapshot thereby removing each photograph from any of these conventional associations. I use the photograph to accumulate images as memory does.









IMAGES

TED KINGAN

Untitled, 1981, gouache on board, 17 x 23.5 cm.
photography: Dave Harper

Untitled, 1981, gouache on board, 10 x 12.5 cm.
photography: Dave Harper

Untitled, 1983, gouache on board, 15 x 17.5 cm.
photography: Dave Harper

Untitled, 1983, gouache on board, 16.5 x 17.5 cm.
photography: Dave Harper

LADISLAV GUDERNA

Illustration for Michael Bullock's *Scarlet Women*, 1983, drawing, 14 x 11.5 cm.
photography: Ed Varney

Cover for Michael Bullock's *Prisoner of the Rain*, 1982, collage/drawing, 23 x 15 cm.

Illustration for "Flatiron," in *Prisoner of the Rain*, 1982, collage/drawing, 21 x 14 cm.

Cover for Michael Bullock's *Scarlet Women* (to be published in Hong Kong), 1983, collage, 18.5 x 14 cm.

Sequence 5, 1982, silkscreen & chalk, 35 x 25 cm.

JOHN BATURIN

These photomontages are from the *Tickle Your Ivories* series. Most are in colour. They were made between 1982 and the present. The sizes vary from 12.5 x 7.5 cm to 80 x 70 cm. *photography*: John Baturin

NEIL DALRYMPLE

Rock Dragon, 1982, painted clay, 42.5 cm high.
photography: Robert Destrube

War Maiden, 1982, painted clay, 62.5 cm high.
photography: Robert Destrube

The Whisper, 1982, painted clay, 50 cm high.
photography: Robert Destrube

Mars & Venus, 1982, painted clay, 62.5 cm high.
photography: Robert Destrube

Dragon Dance, 1982, painted clay, 47.5 cm high.
photography: Robert Destrube

technical note: After the sculptures are bisquited Dalrymple spray-paints them white and then carefully applies and rubs off other glazes which will create subtle patinas of green, purple, *etc.* A matte glaze is then sprayed overtop which in the final firing will allow the other oxides to burn through when taken to the temperature of 1250°C.

BARRIE JONES

Pacific Salmon Series 11, (*Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter*), 1980-2,
photographs, scale as shown. *photography*: Barrie Jones

technical note: These are not photomontage images. Rather the fish was flung in front of the camera, the moment the scenic shot was taken.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

The poems of ZORAN JUNGĆ were translated by the author from *Ispovesti Oslepelog Oktopoda* (Confessions of a Blinded Octopus) which was published at Svjetlost, Sarajevo, 1981. Although he is a graduate of the Creative Writing Department at the University of British Columbia, Zoran finds writing in his native language increasingly enjoyable. He has published his own works in Yugoslavia and the works of many Canadian authors in translation.

TED KINGAN first exhibited as a Surrealist in England in 1948. That show included works by Desmon Morris and others. Since coming to Canada over twenty years ago, he has participated in many group shows here and abroad, and only a few of these have had a Surrealist context. Ted teaches in the Studio Art Program at Capilano College. He is an excellent card magician.

LADISLAV GUDERNA was born in Czechoslovakia. He has exhibited internationally in one man and group exhibitions before and after emigrating to Canada in 1968. In addition to maintaining his connection with Surrealist groups around the world, Ladislav keeps in touch with a vast number of artists through the medium of Mail Art. He is a graphic artist who has illustrated books like Michael Bullock's *Prisoner of the Rain*; he publishes his own Surrealist journal called *Scarabeus*.

ED VARNEY is, among other things, a Correspondence artist. His work will be published in a forthcoming issue of *TCR*. The excerpts from the statement on Guderna were taken from a 1982 Mail Art catalogue.

A folio of JOHN BATURIN's work will be published in *Art Direction Magazine*, New York, November, 1983. John is an artist and illustrator whose images have appeared in many North American publications, including *Vancouver Magazine*. He is working on a fascinating series of photographic portraits called "Unknown Vancouver Artists."

NEIL DALRYMPLE immigrated to Canada from Wales in 1973. He came in order to pursue his own direction in ceramic sculpture and to live near the wilderness, one source for his imagery. He has exhibited mainly in and around Victoria, B.C. From 1977 until its recent closing, the Kyle's Gallery was his dealer.

BARRIE JONES is an artist whose work has been exhibited in Montreal, Ottawa, Vancouver and in San Francisco. His art has been reviewed in *Vanguard*, *Vancouver Magazine* and in *TCR* (Issue #11). *Pacific Salmon Series I* will be in the inaugural show of the new Vancouver Art Gallery, October 15, 1983. Barrie is currently working on a series of large-scale, hand-coloured photographs called *Floating Figures*.

ANNE McLEAN is a Montreal writer who has published one book of poetry "*Lil*," as well as a number of short stories that have appeared in *Canadian Forum*, *Fire Weed*, *Branching Out*, *Room of One's Own*. She is currently revising a novel and planning a new fiction.

RICHARD NASTER moved to Vancouver after graduating from the University of Toronto in 1982. He has spent the last decade alternately attending university and working in bookshops. This is his first major appearance in print.

ERRATA for Issue 28

Lola Lemire TOSTEVIN's name was misspelled throughout as Tosterin.

Audrey Thomas' novel, *Latakia*, was given as Laetikia in the Notes on Contributors.

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Anne McLean / NINETEEN SEVENTY-FIVE

Jean-Paul was haranguing her about politics again.

"Stop it!" she pleaded, and covered her ears with both hands but he kept on talking, so she tickled him. He was standing up against the kitchen door and just as she attacked his sensitive ribs he jerked both his arms back to catch her hands, and drove one elbow through the glass of the door.

"*Merde.*" The pieces fell musically. He examined his elbow for cuts. She ran to get the mercurochrome.

When the cold weather came he covered the hole with a piece of cardboard and some tape, and promised her he would fix it "next weekend."

When spring arrived she tore off the cardboard and let the wind blow through the kitchen. "It's wonderful to have ventilation without needing to open a window for it," she said.

He ignored the remark, smacking as it did of her southern Ontario sense of humour — without caring if it really did. It was a part of her he preferred to ignore. He buried his face in a book on the State by Althusser.

It was the same when the doorbell broke. He spent an evening designing a beautiful sign that said "Knock hard. *Frappez fort*, S.V.P." and attached it to the doorframe above the buzzer. But it didn't occur to him to look at the wiring. The thought of all those interweaving threads irritated him. She claimed they had fewer visitors after that.

He said, what did it matter? If it protected them from the women in her consciousness-raising group, he was all for leaving the doorbell permanently out of commission. She looked up from her sewing to say something sarcastic and stopped.

He was smoking a Gitane, curling his lips round it to draw in a puff, letting it dangle from his lower lip as he smiled at her. He had beautiful limp hands with long square-tipped fingers, and heavy-lidded eyes, very San Paku. He was the kind of man women feel few qualms about stealing from their girlfriends. She felt lucky that so many of the women she knew now called themselves lesbians.

"Pig," she said. He laughed, making the sound of a pigeon in his throat. She knew he was about to protest that he loved women.

"You know I think women are . . ."

"Untapped reservoirs of human potential." She finished it for him, with his own accent and a rotating motion of the hand. He got up and walked past her to the kitchen, sauntered back a moment later with a can of beer. He looked at her out of the corner of an eye; he had learned that to argue with her did no good, only made her more defensive and self-righteous. Ideas also failed to move her: he'd discovered early on that it was no use telling her that he didn't believe in monogamy on "political grounds," because she believed in it wholeheartedly and unquestioningly, on passionate grounds. He hoped it was only a matter of time before her outlook broadened sufficiently to admit that his vision was the only correct one. He was patient. Whenever he felt compelled to give in to his natural instincts he was careful afterwards to lie, to protect her feelings.

He changed the subject. "I've made a breakthrough with the neighbours," he said. "The woman next door. I've found out she has a very highly developed class consciousness . . ."

"You mean the one with the retarded son?"

"I don't think he's retarded."

"The kid who moons around the alley all day, stroking his guinea pig? You can't call that normal. He's at least 15. Sometimes he peeks in the window when I'm undressing."

"That's normal."

She hated when he laughed and looked at her like that. Presumptuously intimate, as if he knew all about her. She made a face at him.

"She's invited us to dinner sometime," he said.

"Oh no," she groaned, knowing she was bringing them dangerously close to another fight.

The neighbourhood was his great passion, his current project, a crowded, parkless, working class *quartier* almost without trees. He had insisted on their living there.

"You'll get used to it," he'd told her last August when they found the place, a three-and-a-half-room flat with no frig or stove, no heater, for 60 dollars a month. At first she'd been fearful. Her French was the most basic; she was blonde and unmistakeably English. She wasn't sure that she wanted to live in one of these shabbily little brick buildings which she had always found so charming — from the outside. The staircase was slippery in winter, crowded with neighbours' children in summer. Her first act had been to hang up thick lace curtains, inherited from her grandmother, on the door and the front window, so the family across the street couldn't see into the place from the balcony where they sat most evenings.

A few doors away was a Turkish bath owned by a well-known ex-wrestler, B  b   Tremblay. For the first few weeks she'd been afraid to walk alone outside after dark. She'd told Jean-Paul the grocer overcharged her because she was an *anglaise*.

"Wait," he'd said. "Once they get to know you, you'll be accepted."

At night she spied on them from her desk at the front window, the fat women with straight black hair glued to their heads in the heat, the stocky men with their quarts of beer, feet up, watching television beside open kitchen windows.

She often wondered, even now, why he would never let her just be, why he had to force her to live here. He had never loved her just for herself, for the little things she did for him, the daily domestic sacrifices. How she'd learned to cook with wine, just to please him! From the day they'd met he had set about grooming her to be worthy of his Master Plan. He had pushed her to the wall with his logic, his interminable analysis. He left her no choice, she had to disappoint him. How else to bring him back to his senses.

He was sitting listlessly at the desk, playing with the fringe of the lace curtains, staring at something in the street. She saw it was her moment.

"I've found a job," she said.

He turned his head slowly, as if he hadn't quite heard her correctly.

"I've decided I want to work as a topless waitress for a while, and work on my dancing. I auditioned last week, and they liked me."

She had expected him to shout at her, to run to the bookshelf and drag out all the feminist pamphlets he'd been giving her for her birthday and International Women's Day for the last two years, but instead he stared at her coolly.

"Is this really you talking?" he asked. "Or have you taken some kind of drug that's made you forget everything you've learned?"

She felt a tightness in her stomach, a real excitement at this, her first really open defiance.

"You paralyze me," she said, wondering if her voice sounded whining. He was chewing on his fingernail, watching her. "All this concern with the neighbours is just a cover for doing nothing. You've been out of school a year now. You're going nowhere."

He looked out the window, accustomed to these sudden personal attacks. She always resorted to them, they were her only weapon. He was preparing one of his careful responses, but she wasn't finished.

"You do nothing but think and read and talk to your friends. It's depressing to live like this. Maybe you think it's romantic not to have any furniture, to be stuck here miles from downtown and not be able to afford metro tickets, to have to pedal around on that bike you borrowed from Schonberg."

He stood up and his eyes were tired, as if they'd looked for too long at a horizon where nothing appeared. He walked out of the room.

"Schonberg called yesterday," she shouted after him. "He wants the bike back."

Before he left the flat by the back door (because it was not what she wanted, he thought to himself), he turned — she was standing in the hallway — and gave her a long smouldering look, with eyes that contained the whole indelible history of their fights, a film that one day he would play back to her. He clattered down the stairs, throwing his cigarette butt to the ground, and unlocked the bicycle from the hydro pole where it was chained.

Then he paused, thought better of it, leaned the bike against the side of the building and climbed slowly back up the stairs. Maureen was in the bedroom putting on make-up, the new little jars scattered over the table. Garish, he thought, but he said nothing. She pretended to ignore him, to be that absorbed in the operation.

Secretly he loved to see her look at herself in the mirror, especially when she thought he was asleep or not watching: how she used to study her body, from different angles and poses — sometimes with nothing on but a ragged pair of his jockey shorts. In the beginning he had devoted a lot of time to helping her overcome her coquettish, charm school seductiveness, telling her he liked to see her in her natural state. It disturbed him to see her reverting suddenly like this.

"Tell me," he said, coming up behind, putting a hand on her shoulder. "This strip club you're going to be working in — is it unionized?"

He saw her face in the mirror, ugly with contempt. She gathered the little bottles, the brushes, the bits of cotton, rushed with them into the bathroom and locked the door.

He looked at himself in the mirror, searchingly. He had said the wrong thing. He tilted back his head and narrowed his eyes. He pulled in his stomach muscles, studied himself from the side. He should run around the block, he hadn't done that for a week. Important to stay in shape now — in five years he'd be thirty. Then it wouldn't be so easy. He looked around the room for his sneakers. The last time, the street children had cheered when he came round the final lap, red in the face, dripping sweat. Clear they thought he was crazy for running on such a hot day. Today was another.

He sat down and began shuffling through some photographs on Maureen's table. He was in most of them, the centre of her world, not smiling, with his head thrown back often: the way he liked to see himself in the mirror. She was good at composition, but in some ways she still hadn't learned to handle a camera. He felt her portraits were two-dimensional. Here, for instance: she had made him look self-absorbed, dry, indifferent. But he knew he was not like that.

She was out of the bathroom now, fussing around in the next room, taking dishes from the drainer and putting them into the cupboard. He called to her from the bedroom.

"What's the name of this place, this club?"

"Why do you want to know?"

"I think I have a right to know."

There was more clattering of dishes. "It's called the Pussycat," she said. "But I don't want you coming there, do you understand?"

He laughed. He was about to say it wasn't his type of hangout. Then he remembered Schonberg's bicycle, standing downstairs, unlocked, and he ran down without saying good-bye, leaving the front door banging slightly in the wind.

He pedalled out into the traffic and let it pull him east toward his friend Schonberg's house, though he knew instinctively that Schonberg would have little to say about this latest twist in his life with Maureen. Schonberg would smile his sickly little smile and shrug his shoulders. "Defeated, my friend, by the mysteries." Schonberg resorted to poetic evasions more and more, recently. "The lowest form of capitulation," Jean-Paul would call it. "Right in the tradition of the Jewish *vendu*." But these days Schonberg always smiled weakly. He'd lost the desire to think combatively, to fight. Sometimes Jean-Paul was disgusted at this betrayal of their friendship. And sometimes, looking at Schonberg, he couldn't stop himself from seeing him as a relic of a time that was already over, dead: as the watered-down survival of a race which had never belonged here, had always been parasitic, foreign, aloof. And seemed more so lately, as its presence faded.

Schonberg was in his study, listening to music. His desk was stacked with newspapers and magazines, books on economics.

"The bicycle?" he said. "No, I don't want it back. Keep it for a few more weeks."

Jean-Paul lit a cigarette and walked over to the bookshelf, skimming across the titles for something new. The section on Africa seemed to have expanded. He inhaled thoughtfully, reached for one of the books, a paperback on armed struggle in Angola. The author, French, was well known to him.

"Still flirting with the Trotskyists?" he asked, balancing the book on his palm, ironic. The question hung in the air flatly, so ritualized by now that it didn't need an answer. Schonberg turned away to change the record.

"How about Brahms?" he said and Jean-Paul said, "How about Wagner?" Schonberg laughed and made a face as if he smelled something bad. They both remembered the time, two or three years ago, when Jean-Paul had worked so hard to seduce Elana, using his Wagner records. A week later Schonberg had tried Brahms, with better results.

"I hate Brahms." Jean-Paul was at the desk now, looking out the window at the little house opposite — one of those old brick farmhouses that were at least a century old, which still survived in certain neighbourhoods. It gave him some sort of satisfaction to be able to look at that house through this window every time he visited Schonberg. "How's the article going?" he asked.

Schonberg shook his head. "It's not. I can't get the unions to co-operate with me." There was a silence. They both looked out the window.

"And how is Elana?"

"She's in the courtyard, working on the garden."

"I said how is she, not where is she."

"She's fine." He was looking at a framed photograph on the wall — a scene from the Algerian war. "How's Maureen?"

Jean-Paul was just on the point of sinking back in a chair and pouring out the whole story: that things were going unusually badly, that Maureen was threatening to do something really insane this time, when he heard Elana's voice from the hallway near the kitchen, and stopped. Information never stayed long in Elana's possession — she would have felt selfish, keeping news to herself. She would see it as her duty to pass it on to half her female acquaintances: "the women's community," she called them. In her eyes, when one individual's sanity wavered, the whole network was weakened. What anyone suffered, was everyone's duty to know about.

There she was, her ample body taking up half the doorway, her dark hair done up in little pigtailed. She always looked ridiculous in sundresses. It was Maureen who had pointed that out to him.

"I see you've brought back the bicycle," she said, and Jean-Paul was overcome with gratitude that fate had saved him from this woman two years ago, at a time when he must not have been in his right mind. She walked over and gave Schonberg a little kiss, which he accepted with nervous resignation. He seemed on edge these days, had become evasive, talked little. His hairline was receding more. Even Elana was worried, and had brought the problem up at her women's discussion group one evening during a lull in the conversation. But the group was going through a new phase of polarization: half the members announced that they were opposed to wasting meeting time talking about men. They told Elana to stop letting her boyfriend drain all her energy — why didn't she take karate instead, do something "for herself?" Elana hated when her group gave her advice, since she was by far the most politically evolved of any of them, and one of the founding members. She'd come home that night and complained to Schonberg, saying she was thinking of quitting and joining a Marxist study group instead. His eyes had lit up. He said it was an excellent idea; she was too advanced for the other women anyway, and it was time she outgrew her feminist stage. She accused him of paternalism and ever since they had been arguing about it often.

Now she lifted up the hair that Schonberg had carefully combed downward to hide the line of retreat. She kissed him again right at the shiny top of his forehead, and smoothed the hair down. She never had anything to say to Jean-Paul, so she turned and went back to the kitchen. "We're having supper early," she called to Schonberg. "I've got a committee meeting tonight."

The two men sat at opposite ends of the room for several minutes without speaking. Then Schonberg said, "You know, women are in an enviable position these days, Jean-Paul. They're optimists. They have energy."

Jean-Paul looked amused. "I don't know about that," he said, and was on the point of springing his incredible news on Schonberg, now as a sort of ironic footnote to it all, but he wasn't sure how to present it.

He felt that somehow he was being forced to take a new perspective on everything. Suddenly nothing seemed quite the same. He had lived with a woman for two years, as a student, and now as an unemployed graduate. He had assumed he knew her, but apparently he did not.

He had assumed a certain sequence of events would materialize in their lives, according to a logical pattern of change. Independence would come. He would have a job in some phases of the reconstruction. But maybe he had been wrong. Maybe there was no orderly evolution, no forward progression. In one afternoon she had regressed them both five years, dropped him ten floors, taken away his faith in the future. And here was Schonberg, admitting (without saying it directly) that he was a beaten man. It seemed everyone was on some different place on a large wheel, and when it turned you held on and prayed that when it stopped you'd have some place to stand.

He looked again at Schonberg. "My friend," he began, "how would you react if the woman you were living with suddenly announced she was going to do something that in your mind was completely contrary to everything you ever . . ."

Schonberg was watching him tiredly, as if he hadn't followed. Jean-Paul shook his head. "Oh nothing. Married life." He touched Schonberg's shoulder before he went out, wondering if they would have anything to talk about in the future. He left the bicycle on the back porch and walked home. The windows of their flat were dark, Maureen had gone to work — and rather than climb the stairs to their front door he decided to keep on walking. He turned west at the corner and headed downtown. It was half an hour before he realized where he was going, and then he was only a block or two away.

He found the street and saw the neon sign that said "Pussycat," over a logo of a woman with pointed ears and a long forked tail. The interior of the place was done in black and red, the lighting was red. It looked worse than it needed to. He thought he saw Maureen, standing by one of the tables. But the girl turned round and she was much thinner than Maureen. He thought of leaving but then he caught sight of her near the back. While she was ordering drinks at the bar he sat down at an empty table in her section.

She wasn't pleased to see him. She stopped a few feet from his chair, put a hand on her hip. The little tray on which she carried drinks was balanced at her waist. A silver cord attached to the tray encircled her neck so she could manage the tray with one hand and count change with the other. She was wearing a tiny pair of sequin panties and nothing else.

"Vous voulez quelquechose à boire?" she asked, indicating with a nod toward the door that he should get up and leave quietly.

He leaned forward in his chair, fixing her with that penetrating look he always used to such advantage in their arguments.

"You look absurd in that costume," he said.

She turned her head to see if the barman was watching.

"We're not allowed to talk with customers. What are you drinking? Make it quick."

"Why can't you be sensible?" he said. "These people are gangsters. You don't know anything about this kind of work. You're going to make a fool of yourself. You're too clumsy to be a waitress."

"Molson's?" she glared. "Coming up in a minute."

She whirled round and stubbed her foot on a chair. He laughed. She went and hid behind a lineup of customers at the bar. A minute or two later she came back with his beer, set it on the table in front of him. "You're just a piece of shit," she said. "That's a dollar twenty-five. Pay now."

"I wanted an O'Keefe." But he fished in his pocket for the money. Her eyes kept darting nervously to the bar. "If you knew what it does to me to see you like this," he said, and his glance dropped involuntarily to her breasts. He thought, "She's really pretty."

He drank his beer while she covered the other tables. He didn't take his eyes away from her for a moment, and he watched the customers' faces when they ordered drinks, to see if they looked at her face or at her body. If one of them touches her, he thought, there's going to be trouble. But none of them did. She stayed in the other section for so long that he got tired of looking for her in the dark. He relaxed a bit in his chair, and began looking at the other girls. They were Maureen's age or younger, most of them. A couple of them were as attractive as Maureen, but most, he thought, were not. One girl caught his eye particularly: small, vivacious, probably Québécoise. She laughed with the customers, seemed to enjoy the work. She looked as though she belonged here.

He began to relax a little. He studied the other men more carefully. He noticed they were more ordinary than he had first thought. He saw a group of college students in one corner. Some older men seemed on their way to night shift jobs — they looked and acted like regulars.

He ordered another beer. She brought it quickly this time, refusing to look at him. “When do you get off work?” he asked.

She laughed. “They all ask me that.”

She hurried to another table. He saw her joking with these men, and was unsettled to see how easily she handled herself. He leaned back in his chair and began to imagine how he would feel coming here every night. If his life became *that*, what would it be like? Was he so different from the other men here? Were they voyeurs, or did they come from ordinary motives — boredom, loneliness? He imagined Schonberg here, and it worked. He could picture him in a few years, sitting over by the jukebox. He laughed. It was a new idea and it almost made sense. A haven for defeated intellectuals. The only one who didn’t fit was Maureen: he didn’t want her to be part of the joke, the occasion of it all.

He drank two more beers and left after midnight. The metro was not running because of an explosion in one of the tunnels, so he walked home again. It took almost an hour and then he was too tired to have a shower, too tired to do anything but fall into bed.

At four he heard a cab door slam and Maureen’s footsteps climbing the metal staircase.

He would never forget how she slipped into the bed with him that morning, very quietly, believing he was asleep. It was humid and the sheets were damp; her skin was moist from her bath. She pressed close to him, putting her lips against his shoulder, and began to cry. There was a new quality about her body, a tension, a hardness, which he felt when he held her. It had never been there before, he realized with surprise. He would never quite manage to make it go away.

LIFE ON THE ROOF

The other day Harold Krassner was sitting in my kitchen and, as usual, I was feeding him some combination of beans and rice, and doing my best to ignore him. As usual, he was watching me through his thick little glasses and working his jaws in that deliberate, conscious way he has of chewing. And looking just like the balding little gossip-monger that he is and always will be.

I was thinking that my kitchen needed a bit of paint. Tongues of green enamel hung down the wall above the stove, thickly coated with the grease of previous tenants.

"Who were these previous tenants?" asked Harold, as if it interested him profoundly.

"I don't know," I said. "Spaghetti worshippers." It wasn't long since I'd managed to scrape up the last traces of their rituals.

"More beans?" I asked, breaking our train of thought. Harold eyed me strangely. With Harold I always have the odd impression that he wants something from me.

As I heaped his plate full of beans, I couldn't help thinking (and not for the first time, either) that Harold is an eloquent example of science gone wrong. With his astounding memory bank, he knows exactly how to manipulate facts and half-truths about his friends, in order to uncover more facts and half-truths about their friends, and their friends' friends. In his quest for greater and greater unities (as he calls them), he especially gravitates to weak little individuals whom accumulated resentment has made loose in the tongue.

In his spare time he designs and builds chemistry sets.

"What do you think of all the fires recently?" he asked suddenly. He was trying to engage me in an exchange of neighbourhood gossip in the hope of catching me off guard and inducing me to reveal something interesting and *Verboten*. But fires — what is there to say about them. Fires are a way of life around here. In fact this neighbourhood is slowly burning to the ground, building by building.

"What do you mean, what do I think about the fires?" I retorted.
"What is there to think?"

"Well," said Harold, "some people are saying the fires are just a passing fad, that the landlords are only going through a phase, setting fire to their buildings in order to work out the frustrations of being landlords. In a few years, they say, they'll have found something else to distract them."

"So?"

"So, what do you say?"

"I say, don't blame the landlords."

"Don't blame the landlords? Blame the tenants, then?"

I could see that he had his heart set on an argument.

"Don't blame the landlords," I repeated. "They're only the middlemen. Oh, they may be the ones who call up the professional arsonists. They may be the ones who, at a low level, start the ball rolling. But behind them there's a prior cause," I said, "greater than any landlord, at whose existence we may only shyly hint."

"I hope you're not talking about Divine intervention," said Harold Krassner.

"I am not," I said. "I'm no religious fanatic. But even a fool could see it's our way of life around here that's causing all the combustion. Take our friends for example. Failures in every sense of the word, but for this neighbourhood, average characters. Their houses could burn down fifty times over and they still wouldn't know how to control themselves. Or take Valerie . . ."

I saw him suppress a shudder of excitement when I mentioned that name. I stopped.

"Yes?" he ventured. "What were you going to tell me about Valerie?"

He looked down at his hands, which were neatly folded beside his plate.

"What makes you ask that?" I said.

"Oh, nothing." He smiled, in his feeble, dishonest way. "I see that in a letter to her a couple of years ago, you said she was going to ruin everyone's life with her double-dealing."

I didn't recall ever having said that.

"You've been reading my letters to Valerie?" I said. "Where did you get hold of them?"

"She handed them over of her own free will. She thought they might help me to understand you."

It was just the sort of thing Valerie will do, after talking for hours about how much she values loyalty in friends.

"I think you'd better leave, Harold," I said. "I'm starting to feel very aggressive toward you."

"Why?" he asked, putting on his little woollen hat (I don't know why he wears it in this weather). But he didn't get up from the chair.

"Leave," I said.

"Why?" he said, as he hurried out the door.

It's strange that even a short little visit from Harold Krassner is enough to set my nerves on edge for the rest of the day.

A firetruck shrieked past the window. I always cringe when a firetruck goes by. Moments later there was a knock at my back door.

A woman was standing there, smiling brightly. A little too brightly. She was panting as if she had just been running hard. That wasn't like Valerie. I let her in, knowing I was making a terrible mistake. But sometimes I can't help myself.

Another firetruck came screaming by, and Valerie's smile seemed to twist like something screwed on. She burst into tears and collapsed in the chair which was still warm from Harold Krassner's recent presence.

"Andrew's back from the boats," she sobbed.

I've never liked that mountain-climber, Andrew. He is the loud, sea-faring, masculine type, and every time he comes home from the boats, something stupid happens.

"Well, that's nice," I said. "After two months you must be very happy . . ."

"It's not nice," she said, flashing me a nasty look. "He got home unexpectedly and saw Harold Krassner's undershirt dangling from the bedpost. He bought a knife and he says he's going to stab Harold and burn my apartment down."

"What a funny coincidence," I said. "Harold was here only fifteen minutes ago. In fact he just went home."

"What was he doing here?" she demanded.

"Oh, just the usual things. He was eating and trying to pry information out of me."

She seemed not to hear. She was listening to the firetrucks. She jumped up and ran to the door.

"Those firetrucks are probably headed for my apartment!" she screamed.

When Valerie screams like that, it makes me want to scream. But for me, screaming is a last resort only. I save it for attacks, assaults, and when small animals cross the street in front of cars. So instead of screaming my response in Valerie's face, which is what I felt like at that moment, I tried to say something reasonable.

I said, "When did you last see Andrew?"

She was putting on her coat. "Half an hour ago in the restaurant!" she screamed, grabbing a hold of my arm. "Let's get going!"

"No, let's sit down and think a minute," I suggested. I could see she found this approach very boring. "Let's be rational," I said. "He can't be going to burn the place down. Why would he? He lives there. His mountain climbing equipment is there."

"It's much too late now to start thinking!" she shouted. "I already tried to calm him down. I threw my wine in his face in the restaurant, in front of the waiter. But you can't reason with him when he gets like this. He's capable of anything."

She was helping me into my coat.

"I think you're making a mountain out of a molehill," I panted, as we raced along.

It was a windy night. Our clothes flapped against our bodies as we ran, and the wind rustled in the plastic-covered windows of burned-down buildings. On either side of the street the stores and garment factories were silent and dark, and newspapers blew along the sidewalk like dirty white cats.

As we ran I remembered the time I spent the night in Valerie's spare room, as a favour to her because she always complained of feeling nervous alone in her apartment at night. Andrew chose that occasion to come home from the boats. I remembered crouching in the bedroom while he yelled "Open up, you bitch!" during one of their wild fights, in which she locked herself in the bathroom. I remembered how he had chopped down the bathroom door with his mountain climbing axe.

Andrew is the direct, physical, outdoorsy sort. He dislikes Valerie's friends and calls us "a bunch of anemic intellectuals." He thinks we are intellectuals, for some reason.

"You have no idea how jealous he is," Valerie was saying. "And he's been living with those sailors and learning how to use a knife."

That Andrew.

She was also worried about Harold. "I just hope he'll have the sense to run around to the alley and lock himself in his apartment."

"How could he know he was supposed to do that?" I asked. "He has no idea that Andrew is coming to stab him."

"Just keep running," ordered Valerie. "Your pessimistic talk could ruin everything."

We had arrived at her door. There were as yet no firetrucks parked on the street or in the alley.

"He must be in there," she whispered, meaning Andrew.

Harold and Valerie both live above a photography store beside an old tombstone maker. You can walk out of Valerie's back door across the roof of the store, and right into Harold Krassner's kitchen. Their dwellings are so close together that if a fire were to start in Valerie's apartment, Harold's would burn to a crisp in no time. And *vice versa*. In fact this fateful proximity was the cause of their liaison in the first place.

We stood on the sidewalk, gazing straight up at the window, where a light was burning brightly. Perhaps Andrew was now crouching, up in that room, just a bit beyond the windowsill, brandishing his pack of matches. Perhaps Harold's apartment, hidden behind Valerie's, was already a roaring inferno. After five minutes of gazing up thinking about all this, my neck began to hurt.

But Valerie said she had a plan. The only hope as she saw it was for both of us to go up to her apartment together and talk Andrew out of his destructive rage. I didn't relish the thought, but out of loyalty I agreed to her plan. She unlocked the first door, the street door. I followed her up the stairs. She unlocked the second door, the one that opened into her kitchen. We paused as it swung open and banged against the gas heater.

"Andrew!" she called sweetly. Her voice travelled through the empty apartment.

Andrew's skis and mountain climbing ropes were in their usual place beside the space heater. Nothing had been destroyed, and Andrew did not come bounding toward us to stab us to death. But there was a feeling of Andrew in the place, like fresh, dirty footprints.

We sat down in the kitchen to think matters over.

"Well," said Valerie, "all I can say is, I'm sure I turned the lights out before I left with Andrew this evening."

That could mean only one thing: that Andrew had come back here to get his knife, and left again without remembering to turn the lights off. Which suggested to me that Andrew was probably next door now, stabbing Harold as a dark prelude to burning Valerie's apartment down.

But neither Valerie nor I felt like stating the obvious. It seemed so much more pleasant to go on sitting there, like the old friends we were, and let the men sort things out for themselves next door.

"I'm sorry to be dragging you into this," said Valerie.

"Forget it," I reassured her. "I know you can't help it."

There was a pause as we savoured our years of friendship and the many episodes just like this one. Then a dark thought crossed my mind.

"Valerie," I said gently. "Why did you give my letters to Harold Krassner to read?"

A hint of a smile played over her lips.

"You know I can't refuse that man anything."

I understood that she viewed her relationship with Harold as somehow sacred.

"But don't you think it was an obscene betrayal of our friendship?" I added, as an afterthought.

"I hadn't considered it from that angle," she admitted.

"Why not?" I snapped. I was feeling petulant and double-crossed. "You've become one of his patients, I suppose?"

The instant I'd said it, I was sorry.

"He was helping me with my problems," said Valerie, hurt and defensive. "He's such a good listener. But he was starting to find out too much."

"So you put him on to me!" I felt a weak surge of outrage.

"You know the only thing that distracts him is information," she said.

I sighed, and sighed again. I was too exhausted to argue.

"Isn't it time we went next door?" she asked, in a soothing voice. I found myself agreeing to her auxiliary plan, which was as follows:

I would go around to the alley where Harold Krassner lived. I would break down Harold's front door while Valerie crossed over through her back exit and broke down his back door. Her idea was to create as much excitement as possible, in case Andrew had not yet stabbed anyone, but was still intending to.

When I reached Harold's porch in the dark smelly alley, I found a small light burning above his door. I could just make out a little poem scrawled in black ink on the plywood above the lock: Someone was threatening to send a pack of crows after him. Hanging separately by a piece of string was a tiny legless plastic doll with a man's head and one arm, and another note in stilted handwriting which read, "Harold you shall die." I gathered that a couple of his other patients had been by while he was out.

I hated resorting to brutality but I knew I had to. I grabbed the doorknob with both hands and threw my weight against the plywood door. It didn't give a centimeter. So I banged on it with both fists and screamed for whoever was inside to open up.

"OPEN UP! OPEN UP! OPEN UP!"

When the door swung back I was surprised to find myself face to face with Valerie, who was smiling the same bright smile she had in my kitchen. I knew it could mean only trouble.

Harold and Andrew were both seated behind her, at Harold's table, drinking tea. Valerie motioned me to the centre of the room. I grinned at them all.

"Oh, hello Andrew," I said casually. "Back from the boats, are you?" I felt dizzy. I noticed Harold Krassner's face was blank and expressionless, although his eyebrows had escaped his control and seemed to have risen an inch above his glasses. His forehead was all bunched into tight little wrinkles between his brow ridge and his little woollen hat.

For a second or two time stood still there in Harld Krassner's kitchen, with its crummy overstuffed sofa leaking kapok on the floor and its glassy rows of vitamin jars and brewer's yeast containers, and its looming ancient appliances which Harold had painted a dull black.

And its half-finished chemistry sets, lying everywhere on shelf and floor.

Then suddenly Valerie came to life beside me, and screamed.

"I SMELLED SMOKE A MINUTE AGO IN MY APARTMENT!"

My horror was tinged with the old admiration as she burst into tears and jumped across the kitchen at Andrew. She threw herself on him and slapped his face very quickly. His glasses sailed across the room and landed on the gas stove.

"My glasses!" he shouted, blinded. "You bitch!"

He unfolded his incredible height from the chair and tried to grab her but she kicked him.

She used the opportunity to fly out the back door and across the roof to her apartment.

I picked up Andrew's glasses and handed them to him gingerly. I felt more than grateful that they were not broken. I thanked God that they were not broken. He put them on without a word and bolted out the door to the alley where his car was parked.

"I'll be back!" we heard him shout, or some such empty threat, before he roared away into the night.

Harold and I crossed the roof and went next door to comfort Valerie.

"I'm sorry," she said, when she was calmer. "I always lose my head when I smell smoke."

I sniffed the air just to make sure. I couldn't smell any smoke. But Harold was reassuring.

"Don't worry," he said. "Studies have shown that your chances of dying in a fire are only slightly higher than your chances of being struck by lightning."

This statistic made Valerie feel much better. For an instant she beamed at Harold with a degree of admiration I had rarely seen in her eyes before. It was an intimate moment for them, and I was bitterly conscious of my irrelevance in it.

All the same, I had to ask.

"Valerie," I said, "why did you lie about the smoke?"

She laughed suddenly. She laughed so strangely and for such a long time that I began to feel uncomfortable.

I excused myself and said I had to be going. It's getting late, I explained. I edged away from her where she was standing against the wall in the hallway, beside Andrew's hooks, ropes, and other climbing gear, laughing as if she would never stop.

Harold was still wearing his uneasy little smile. He had not yet taken off his hat. As I moved toward the door he blinked at me once or twice, behind his thick glasses, and began to giggle silently.

"Odd," I thought, groping my way down the dark staircase to the bottom. "Very odd. You'd be inclined to think they engineered all this just to amuse themselves."

In a second I was back standing in Valerie's empty kitchen.

"There's something I'd like to ask you," I said. Someone nudged open the bedroom door a crack.

I swallowed hard. "Did you," I said, "did you arrange all these events just to humiliate me?"

"Humiliate you?" I heard Valerie's giggle in the background, but Harold's voice oozed with genuine concern. "Humiliate you? We're your *friends*!"

"I know," I said. I found myself fighting back strange emotions and a desire to destroy them both. "I know you're my friends. But why are you always dragging me into your distasteful private debacles. You act as if I were blind or deaf or invisible, or not quite human in your estimation."

I paused. There was silence in the bedroom. I was standing with my lips near the crack in the door.

"Of course," I went on, "I can appreciate how you must feel, living so crowded together here. Passion always fidgeting in the backs of your minds, like rats in the walls, and all that. But why involve me?"

A pregnant silence.

"I who know nothing of real pain . . ."

No answer.

"I never asked for the privilege of holding the matches you're always tossing into the tinder of your stupid, overgrown lives."

Stillness in the bedroom. Then all of a sudden, a burst of applause. Then Valerie came running out the door in her flimsy slip and threw her arms around me.

"That was a wonderful speech you just made," she gushed. "Very eloquent. You finally admitted you're one of us."

I felt a complicated impulse to sob joyfully and also to recoil in disgust.

Harold Krassner came out too, smiling brightly, still wearing his hat.

"Yes, at last you've joined the human race!" he exulted. "You've confessed your deepest feelings. What you said was really classic!"

"What do you mean?" I said. "Every word of it was true."

"You pathetic little schizoid," said Harold Krassner. "You've described your problem to a T. Chronic impotent spectator. That's you. What a breakthrough! Valerie and I are so pleased!" He held out both his arms and came running forward to embrace me.

"Don't touch me!" I screamed, springing back toward the water heater.

"It's all right," he said. "I've seen so much human failure over the years, by this time I'm immune to it."

"No you're not!" I shouted. "You're a carrier!"

I hurtled past them both and flung open the door.

"And don't imagine, Harold Krassner," I shouted up at them while I crashed down the stairs, "that you'll ever spend another night at my place as long as you live!"

I heard the echo of their insane laughter long after I had slammed the downstairs door and disappeared up the street.

Richard Naster / FIVE POEMS

rousseau's dream.the begatting of the beast.

lurking i
behind tradition
obscured
by palm in this foreground.
you're distracted
by oranges monkeys afro-lilies and such.

plenty of time
to adjust my helmet
and smoke
skulk
load papa's gun.
pointing poison through the fronds.

this is not disney
petit battement
pink plush.

flatline.between visits.

oozing palms and this ragged mind of desire
a shadow-play from an ivory time.
in a white room
the sweep-hand buries the bulges and creases of little pledges.
i follow the spiral
of a cigarette on the ceiling, dripping
like the line of neck and buttock
and common need before dawn.
to fall backward
through enchantment
into pursed nectar lips
laced about my neck
tight and dragging.
lunging at shadows.
a moist kiss tolling in a mirror
reflects back frail suns.
shimmering deep in the walls and spreading.

archaeology

an arm is reaching up through the sand.
i dust your smile
kiss your swollen fingers.
you were once too beautiful to remember.

our mothers raised gentle sons.some lions.
some shed skins, some dive.
the lake is motionless,bleached.
you are stranded on a reef.
i see your lips move.

your steam has curled between my flesh and shadow
like the first snowfall
or a virus.
we are drowning or playing.
taking in water.
you are on the beach.waving.

some have skins that glisten like prisms.
yours is hair and loam.
you were not meant for swimming.
you are narrow in this body.
my tongue lies on the table.blue.



for the record

you have become this photograph.

the coal wind balanced on your back,
the calendar's diminishing eye
wedges you on an axis
between cycling chimps
and a lyrical escape,
follows you to an edge
where you look forward to history.

frozen.
there is no photo-finish.

necks and wire taut in your hair
gather in an arcane vocabulary
while i stare you down,
your icaran shuffle and its warm algebra.

crap-shoot.nothing to lose.

this burnt and brawling season
turned collar and flapping wheel
is a banquet of pallid magic,
a bouquet delivered by pirates
courting nervous ambition.

naked we shiver down
soiled and smeared with holiest intentions.
a drive with the top down in the rain.

our captains plead with us for vindication.
or pseudonyms
for a lullaby cradled patiently
between romance and soft massacres.
for a moment.

this is a rendezvous
where voices declare summer-love,
beat their breasts to pulp
assuring each that signing on
is more than just another flag aflutter.

tongues enfold luscious fruit.
we try to be manly behind our lips
and endure as best we need.
but as devoted to history as moist act
we are not watching.
we are a crime and its confession.

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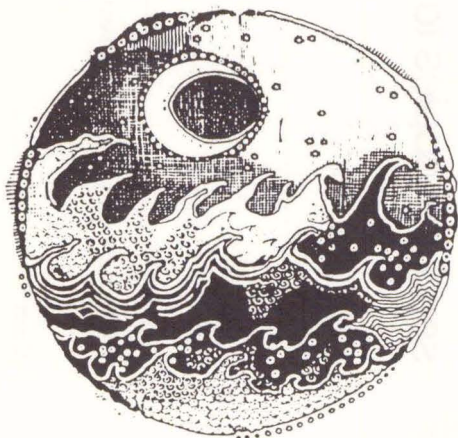


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