

— *Entre ciel et terre*

The organization of a sculpture biennial raises different questions, principally concerning the historical distinctiveness of the medium and the purport or the objectives that normally characterise this sort of event. Generally, a biennial attempts to reflect the situation of current art and to highlight the art that is being made now. This is often a cause of controversy, especially when ideas differ about the pertinence of one practice or another. It would have been tempting, for this first biennial, to write about the recent history of sculpture, studying the well-known names or those who have deeply marked the artistic scene over the last twenty years. Obviously we have in mind Armand Vaillancourt, Michel Goulet, Gilles Mihalcean, Roland Poulin, François Morelli and several others. It would be a particularly interesting, even an essential idea, to write a history of sculpture, since nothing in this area has been attempted for many years. However, this project would be such a vast undertaking that it cannot be envisaged within the limits of this biennial. If certain important artists are not represented, it is not because of lack of recognition for their achievement.

We have decided instead to suggest a line of research, one, which does not adhere to such a rigid concept as a theme, either defining a particular content or an artistic concept specific to a movement or a generation of artists. Above all, this proposed direction suggests a way of occupying space, which, like the gait or the movements of a person, is easily recognisable yet, is nevertheless difficult to define.

If the history of modern sculpture often appears to emphasize the materiality of things, where the physical space in its tangible being reveals all of the dimensions of reality, both interior and exterior, there also exist manifestations which are less concrete or less readily visible to the naked eye. This is not necessarily limited to microscopic worlds, or to the invisible entities of the beyond, but concerns the unnoticeable phenomena, those that we no longer see because they are always around us. For example, this could be a long-unrepaired crack in a wall, a now unnoticed abnormality that no longer really appears odd or a bizarre idea that permanently inhabits us but which we never dare express verbally.

The title *Entre ciel et terre* which expresses the general idea of this first sculpture biennial, puts particular emphasis on aspects of reality that are neither quantifiable nor determined or else are defined with difficulty. It often deals with matter in suspension as well as atmospheric space, which keeps things in a state of weightlessness. The expression *Entre ciel et terre* means everything and nothing at the same time. It is as much about the medium as the message. It also expresses the boundaries of our habitable space, visually without limits and yet reduced to a few metres of breathable air.

In this biennial we will therefore find soft structures, indeterminate constructions, air pipes, floating objects, forms suspended in time and in space, installations which only show the emptiness between things or their reflections. It is as if we were in the intermittence or the interstices of the moment that opens up onto an over-large space. We can thus feel the passing of an air current, a zone of turbulence or a dead calm, while feeling the same anxiety as when we hesitate on the threshold of a door slightly ajar...

Curiously enough, the use of soft materials, fragile and stretchable like rubbers or plastics, recurs quite often in current sculptural practice. Contrary to the years 1960-70, when plastic was also frequently used for its effects of transparency and for its futuristic air, the present tendency often attempts to show that there is nothing permanent in our contemporary world. Often taking air as a material in its own right, contemporary sculptors propose above all the concept of a changeable and fluctuating reality which can be perturbed at the slightest contact from the exterior. Even though air is an invisible material, it can support a vehicle of several tons and in this exhibition it is often presented as a force of pressure or tension, showing the fragility as much as the power of a thing that appears to be nothing.

Linked though it is to atmospherical reality, the other facet of the governing idea of this exhibition is principally concerned with the effects of suspension in space. Instead of placing the objects on the ground, several artists maintain them between the earth and the sky or betwixt and between in order to create a situation of weightlessness. Yet again, the idea is to create an indeterminate zone between the high up and the low down, while keeping ascending and descending movements in motion. A floating space which neither belongs to terrestrial gravity nor to the celestial universe.

If we were to highlight another common link between all these artistic practices assembled in this biennial, we would have to mention the notion of "desire", in the sense of a forward movement towards something, not necessarily directed towards a precise goal, but at the very least waiting for something. One can therefore see here machines that are brought to life like bodies animated by feelings. Antique, modern and contemporary sculpture has always been imbued with a humanist spirit, due to the simple fact of having to embody ideals about life after death. After all, a sculpture or a tomb is all that remains of the living. The sculptures and the installations presented in this biennial often refer to the contradictory or unreconcilable idea between the ephemeral and the everlastingness of all things. However in contemporary sculpture the strong desire to endure seems to have become ever more fragile.

We mean by sculpture all artistic activity that concentrates its objectives towards justifying an aesthetic or emotional interest by the means of the concrete presence of a tri-dimensional object or by an environmental installation that takes into consideration the physical space of a place. This does not exclude the use of a technology of image-making in so far as the sculptural material does not merely exist as a support for the image. Sculpture is thus approached within the modern tradition, where the formal means prevail over all other subjects, whether of a political or social character. Nothing prevents one making a politicised sculpture but, on the other hand, that does not assume the promoting of a political position through sculpture. However, it is perhaps also in this area that the real crux of sculpture is to be found : which is to lead to a direct (not virtual) confrontation with someone who is there, and who ideally is open-minded, and who asks himself why such an object exists. This is quite a different experience to seeing a projection on a screen since, in this case, there is no longer any question of being situated in a real place. Sculpture incites each one of us to be present even if it is only to realise that we are quite simply elsewhere.

Gaston St-Pierre — Curator