

Jean-Paul Jérôme in Review: Hard-Edge Heaven

Galerie D'Este, Montreal Sep 4 to 21 2008
by Isa Tousignant



Jean-Paul Jérôme *Les Relais Futures* 1996

“Meanwhile, across town” is how I’m tempted to start any article about things going on in Montreal’s Westmount neighbourhood. Not because it’s far from the city centre—certainly not, it takes 15 minutes to get there by metro from anywhere in the downtown core. Rather because in terms of art, it encompasses a certain amount of an alien otherness for me: moneyed, exclusive commercial galleries that contrast with the Belgo Building and Saint-Laurent scenes.

Amidst that landscape of saleable oil *paysages*, appetizing *corps exquis* and portraits of equine grandeur lies Galerie d’Este, a relatively new kid on the block. The fare breaks with the neighbourhood norm; within its walls on Greene Avenue there is a carefully chosen selection of contemporary works by artists that have warmed the cockles of owner Mark Liebner’s heart. Though generally figurative,

the range of work is wide and includes names like Jean-Pierre Ruel, Angela Grossmann, Sophie De Francesca, Ángel Mateo Charris, Zhang He, Paul Bourgault and Susan Szenes. Some artists are young; and some, like Jean-Paul Jérôme, whose retrospective there ended on September 21, are legendary.



Jean-Paul Jérôme *Silhouettes* 1971

Jérôme (not to be confused with another influential Montrealer, Frère Jérôme) was born in 1928 and is remembered for being among the founders of Quebec's Plasticiens movement in 1955 alongside Jauran, Louis Belzile and Fernand Toupin. As eloquently expounded in the catalogue text by François-Marc Gagnon, the movement came on the heels of the Automatistes as a call to return art's focus to form (colour, shape, texture and line, otherwise known as the plastic elements) in order to achieve transcendental meaning. Jérôme's exploration of that principle took a variety of forms—the very gestural, muted and tonal paintings of the 1970s contrast sharply with the hard-edge, primary-colour paintings of the mid-80s on. The entire range was on view at Galerie d'Este.

As a sucker for hard-edge art my preferred period is the one that spanned from the 1980s to the artist's death in 2004. The 1990s were a particularly fruitful decade, producing such grandiose works as 1991's *Un monde de la sixtine*, which has the impact of a church window and the palette of a Robert Delaunay. Great slashing diagonals in white contrast with vibrant orange and blue circles and half-circles in this arch-shaped work. It is a moving example of the pervasive and very personal spirituality Jérôme injected into his work. He was a formalist, but for him, form equaled transcendence.



Jean-Paul Jérôme *Sirènes des rois* 1988

What Galerie d'Este wanted to achieve with a career-spanning show like this was to reposition Jérôme's work to a place more deserving of his importance within Quebec's canon. Jérôme was a reclusive, solitary artist, often overshadowed on the scene by his brasher, younger counterparts. Despite that, his formal and philosophical experimentations were significant, and his works, as this exhibition demonstrated, were the product of a focused, passionate and intelligent creator. (1329 ave Greene, Montreal QC)

- www.galeriedeste.com



Jean-Paul Jérôme *La Ronde Marine* 1987