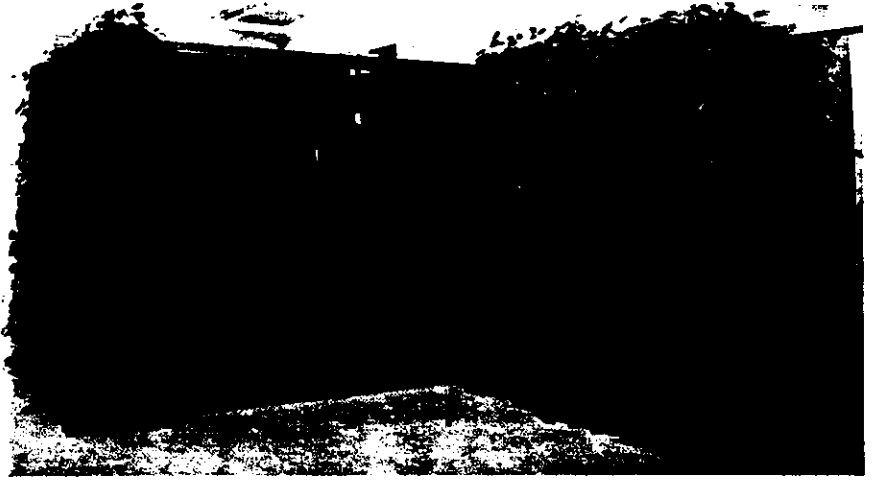


a compelling monument to totalitarian banality: have the North Koreans been contacted?

From Pyongyang chic to Paris chic: the second part of *Cent jours* was a monumental retrospective of the French artist Jean-Pierre Raynaud that came to Montreal from France via Houston and Chicago. The thing is that no matter how much the show travels, Raynaud's art does not travel well beyond France or, more precisely, beyond the smug confines of a certain Parisian sensibility that mixes the intellectual flightiness of the literary salon with the pedantic intellectualism of the Sorbonne. Raynaud touches all the fashionable bases of the postmodern twilight: death and censorship, religion and consumerism, terrorism and decay, nature and culture. In other words, he cruises the same territory as Baudrillard, dressing the philosopher's snooty pessimism in impeccable constructions of white ceramic tile and clinically designed splashes of primary colour.

The show was chillingly beautiful — Raynaud's visual language is much more accomplished than Baudrillard's writing style — but there was not a single piece that felt true or felt as if it mattered. His early conceptualist pieces (e.g. his gravel in manufactured containers) only remind one of how much one misses the earthiness of Robert Smithson and early Vito Acconci; the more recent Raynaud reminds us how good Christian Boltanski is. Boltanski talks about death, but also about life; Raynaud's clinical prissiness is a mortician's art.

Visions 91, the concluding section of *Cent jours*, consisted of installations by 10 young Canadians who are little known on the gallery circuit. Curator Sylvie Parent — herself only 31 — has said that no ideological motive guided her choice of artists; she made a "subjective" choice, based on "quality." Nevertheless, the installations did have things in common. First of all — and this always happens when *Cent jours* invites young artists — the works tended to be over-produced, loaded with special effects and lit for



Dan Graham, *Hedges and Two Way Mirror Glass Labyrinth* 1991
87 x 113 x 272 in.
Courtesy: Centre international d'art contemporain de Montréal

maximum drama; this is, after all, a big chance and nobody wants to go undiscovered. Lucie Lefebvre's *Salle d'urgence* and Alain Païement's *Chantier*, both photo-constructions, suffered particularly badly from overkill. These usually subtle artists opted here for such theatrical wizardry that one half expected the cast of *Aïda* to appear at any moment.

The other unifying thread — and this must have been a function of the curator's "subjectivity" — was a touch of the university, though not the Sorbonne this time. Instead, this gathering of work brought to mind one of our own graduate seminars in, say, "Gender and Identity." A lot of the expected issues were raised: the social status of women (Lorna Brown),

the anguish of the Third World (Lani Maestro), the female nude subjected to the male gaze (Kelly Wood), tribal cultures subjected to the colonialist's gaze (Panya Clark).

All this was very edifying, of course, but it was also disturbing to watch artists so young adhere so conscientiously to all the politically correct clichés of the academic class. A bracing exception here was Robert Windrum's series of delicate cloths embroidered with profanities and rough, gay-porno imagery. Windrum's work is funny, angry and sad. It is also slight but at least it offered a few moments of irreverent relief in an exhibition that came to feel like a hundred days of marking term papers.

Georges Bogardi

KINGSTON

SARINDAR DHALIWAL

Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Kingston

The lush, exotic works of Sarindar Dhaliwal are at once an exuberant celebration of imaginative flights of fancy and a careful culling of past memory and experience. Through the use of vibrant colour, shimmering surfaces, poetic text and a profusion of organic imagery, Dhaliwal has cultivated a private garden that is both intimate and accessible. In its abundance and vitality, one senses a pro-

found joy in the act of making work, a mood of ripeness and fulfillment which is rare in contemporary art practice.

The artist draws on a diverse cultural heritage, patching together its fragments into quilt-like mixed-media works on paper and three-dimensional installations. Born in the Punjab state of India, Dhaliwal was raised in England, where she studied



Sarinder Dhaliwal *Rendezvous Between an Angel and a Blackbird* 1991
Mixed media on paper, 60 x 50 in.
Photo: Ron Irvine

at a small conservative art school in the mid-seventies. Her failure to master the Western conventions of perspectival drawing, her preference for sculpting in fabric rather than traditional materials and her distaste for the chill prevailing winds of minimalism all served to mark her as an outsider. For the past decade she has worked in relative isolation in Kingston, Ontario, and she continues to display a distinctive sensibility.

A potent source of inspiration has been the intensely autobiographical work of the Mexican artist Frida Kahlo, to whom Dhaliwal pays tribute in her mixed-media work on paper, *Oscar and the Two Fridas*. By bringing together two vivid votive-like portraits of Frida and a black and white photograph of Oscar Wilde, and festooning the surrounding spaces in flo-

ral and vegetal abundance, the artist has two heroes from radically different cultures meet in a kind of tropical paradise of the mind. In another work on paper, *Rendezvous Between an Angel and a Blackbird*, Dhaliwal adopts the guise of a jaunty bird in a cherry tree confronting a golden-haired angel of Italian Renaissance origin. Here, Western and Eastern influences are tentatively reconciled in a lively collage of jewel-like patches of colour and organic and architectural motifs.

Dhaliwal's most ambitious and confident works are her installations, the relatively new medium offering an ideal avenue of escape from the more problematic restrictions of conventional painting and sculpture. In *Putting Off the Washing Up & Mending*, everyday materials are

reclaimed and reworked into a stunning esthetic order. Against the backdrop of a large glossy black rectangle painted directly onto the wall of the gallery, Dhaliwal mounted several hundred swatches of brightly hued silk embroidery thread arranged around Cibachrome photographs of the plates of mixed pigment used in her painting. Framing the composition were the precisely stencilled names of regions of the sea surrounding Great Britain. When she lived in England, the artist would often hear radio weather forecasts, with the names of Dover, Thames, Hebrides and so forth repeated like a litany. In her small, housebound world, they cast a romantic spell which she has preserved and amplified in the work.

In the floor piece entitled *Punjabi Sheets #2*, the artist fashioned a nostalgic tribute to family ties and to a cultural heritage from which she has been removed by time, geography and her own rebellious nature. On 16 pieces of slate, which lay on the floor like commemorative markers, she charted the complex web of relationships that exist within the traditional extended Indian family, and for which there are no precise Western equivalents. Beside each of the slate markers she placed a coconut shell filled with powdered pigment in rich hues of crimson, ochre and black. The work made a poignant statement about belonging and displacement in the immigrant experience, and about the partial redress of loss through the work of art.

Dhaliwal's work makes no attempt to comment on contemporary culture and largely eschews critical theorizing. She employs her art to individual, and perhaps rather old-fashioned ends: to bring harmony to the disorder of daily life and fulfillment to unrealizable dreams. But the absence of irony and the self-absorbed nature of the work constitute on the whole a strength rather than a weakness. Drawing from a deep well of motivation, she brings forth a harvest that is both visually compelling and poetically evocative. Gillian MacKay