

Over the last ten years, Sylvain Bouthillette has perfected a kind of alternative folk art which combines the nasty cartoon imagery of punks and skateboarders with the shamanistic search for spirit within matter associated with Joseph Beuys, not to mention a legion of unschooled Québécois wood-carvers. Constructing paintings and sculpture, often from discarded material, he manages to create a wacky but believable world.

Hardly beautiful, his work proposes an aesthetic process of damage and repair. His circus-like repertoire of animals, clowns and coneheads is often complemented by pithy, concrete poetry, with words like "grau" (porridge) or "gras" (fat) tagged onto individual pieces.

"Rigodon," a song associated with two-step country dancing, was the title of Bouthillette's recent show at Oboro in Montreal. The work built upon these principles of dark comedy and *bricolage*, while revealing a more sophisticated touch and the sense of an underlying spiritual search.

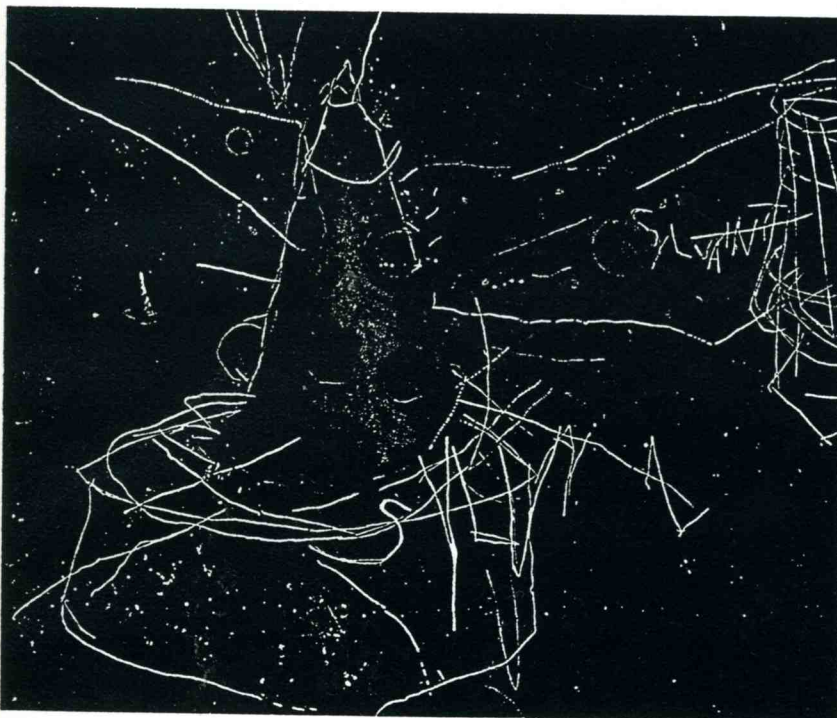
Oboro's generous space allowed Bouthillette to spread out. Overhead skylights enhanced seven enormous painted panels and two wooden animal sculptures. The idea of cosmic consciousness was an important theme in the exhibition, with a number of references to Buddhist practice. In the far corner of the gallery, a beautifully carved rabbit hung suspended from the ceiling, slowly spinning above a mirrored tondo inscribed with the circular Green Tara mantra "om tare touttare toure soha." A tape loop softly repeated another more personal chant: "Sylvain, Sylvain, Sylvain..." Seemingly fallen from the sky, the child-size rabbit figure became the alter ego of the spectator as well as the artist.

For anyone who has followed Bouthillette's work, however, the revelation in the show turned out to be the paintings, especially the six occupying the main room that were painted to look like blackboards. Simple motifs like balls, stars, birds and a ubiquitous polka-dot party hat wrestled for space with single words such as "super," "great," "good," "merci" and, again, the artist's name, "Sylvain," each repeatedly scrawled across the surfaces. The compositions are spacey and elegant like Chinese landscape, counterpointing the dumb wordplay and a noisy variety of technique including chalk, oil, aerosol spray and carved low relief. Like Roberto Matta's proto-graffiti canvases, Bouthillette's new paintings offer galactic spaces and vectoring forms.

The only sour note in the show was a stiff, lifeless caribou head that Bouthillette had placed at the entrance to the main space. The head was well crafted and had a genuine folk-art feel, but it lacked the spirited rhythms that otherwise characterized "Rigodon." Overall though, the exhibition's refreshing presentation of the human ego at play in a theatre of expanding and shrinking consciousness struck a perfect balance of insolence and sincerity. ■

by DAVID ELLIOTT

Sylvain Bouthillette
Deceleration of Sylvain 1999
 Spray paint, oil paint and chalk on wood
 234 x 244 cm
 Photo Denis Farley
 Courtesy the artist



Rigodon

une exposition de

Sylvain Bouthillette

du 10 avril au 9 mai 1999

vernissage : le samedi 10 avril à 17 h

La galerie est ouverte du mercredi au dimanche, de midi à 17 h.



OBORO

un centre d'artistes
expositions
vidéos
conférences
publications
nouvelles technologies
performances
résidences
salon de thé

4001, rue Berri, local 301
Montréal (Québec) H2L 4H2
tél. : (514) 844-3250
fax : (514) 847-0330
oboro@oboro.net
www.oboro.net

Sylvain Bouthillette remercie le Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec et le Conseil des Arts du Canada pour leur soutien à la réalisation des œuvres

OBORO remercie ses membres, les services des arts visuels et des arts médiatiques du Conseil des Arts du Canada, le Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec, le Conseil des arts de la Communauté urbaine de Montréal, Emploi-Québec, le ministère du Patrimoine canadien, le Service de la culture de la Ville de Montréal et le Conseil des Ressources humaines du Secteur culturel pour leur appui.

L'exposition *Rigodon* regroupe le plus récent travail de Sylvain Bouthillette qui poursuit ses explorations du champ pictural par de grands tableaux où s'entremêlent figures animales, cosmos et écritures. Le lièvre, le caribou et la corneille occupent encore dans l'univers formel de Bouthillette un rôle important et animent les ensembles sculpturaux qu'on retrouve dans la galerie. La recherche de l'artiste s'inspire du désir de concilier pratique spirituelle et expression artistique et le récent corpus témoigne de la rencontre singulière des deux mondes.

Sylvain Bouthillette vit à Montréal où on a pu voir son travail depuis une quinzaine d'années lors d'expositions individuelles et collectives incluant *Reclaiming Paradise*, *artifice96* et *artifice98* organisées par le Centre des arts Saidye Bronfman. Il participait aussi à l'exposition collective *De Fougue et de passion* du Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal.

RIGODON

The exhibition *Rigodon* brings together the most recent work of Sylvain Bouthillette. The artist continues his pictorial explorations in large format paintings where animal, cosmos and writing coexist. The hare, the caribou and the crow still play an important role in Bouthillette's formal universe and are present in the sculptural ensembles presented in the gallery. Bouthillette takes inspiration in the desire to reconcile spiritual practice and aesthetic expression, and this recent body of work manifests a singular encounter with both worlds.

Sylvain Bouthillette lives in Montréal. For the last fifteen years we have seen his work in solo and group exhibitions including *Reclaiming Paradise*, *artifice96* and *artifice98* at the Saidye Bronfman Centre for the Arts. Furthermore, his work was part of the group exhibition *De Fougue et de Passion* at the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal.