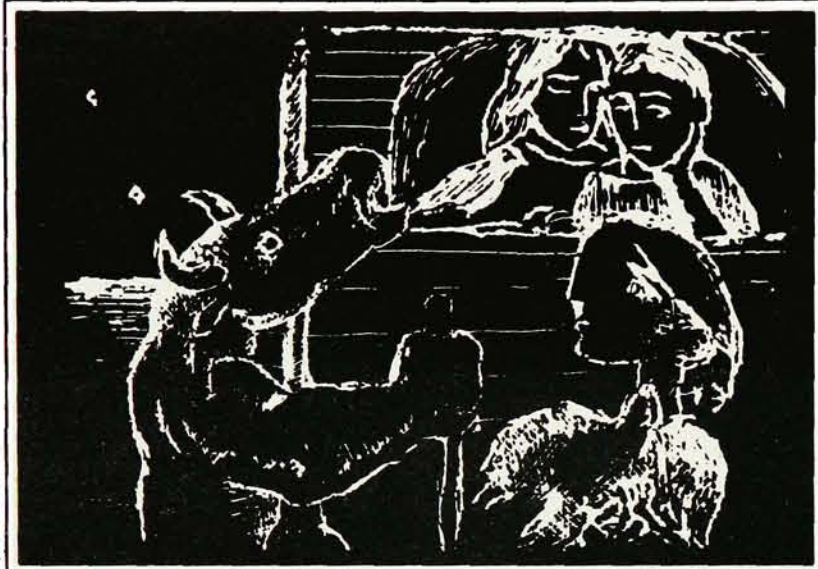




J.W. Morrice



O Picasso
(Tableaux d'une surexposition)

photos: NFB

Art and education in current Quebec art Cinema

by Fay Plant

For Jacques Giraldeau Québécois artist/filmmaker, "art is essential to life in that it reveals to us the presence and power of the creative imagination, which alone can change people and things." "Because," adds Giraldeau, "imagination is more important than knowledge."

Yet in our society, art is not part of every person's life: the world of art is a closed, elite one. As a result, the general public would seem to have little use for art.

Perhaps the major reason for the split between the art world and society is that art requires, as precondition to comprehension, a certain knowledge of the language of art. A vivid illustration of this point is found in a scene from Giraldeau's 1969 film *Bozarts*. A sculptor has created a work that stands in a park. He is present when a high-school class comes to view it. A student complains that he doesn't understand the sculpture, or art. What he does understand, he likes. The artist can't explain. He says it's like having a baby — you give birth and that's it. He concludes that we need a margin of not understanding in life, a comment that only leaves the student puzzled.

Giraldeau, who has been exploring the difficulties of communication between art and society since the mid-1960's, believes the cinematic image can reach an indifferent public and involve them in the world of art. Film is a more accessible method of communication than is art — thus emerge "art films."

However, the problem with most art films is that they are often in the language of the artist and art critic, and therefore speak only to those who already have some knowledge of art. Though art films are, no doubt, made with communication in mind, the question becomes 'communication with whom?'

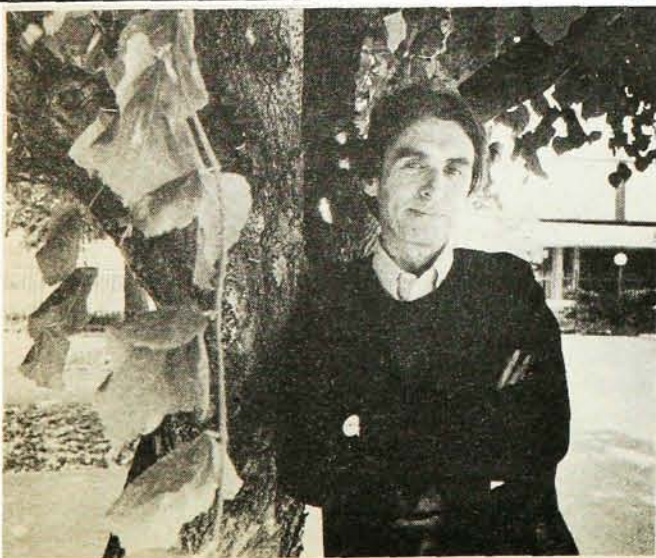
The growing number of art films being produced worldwide is evidenced in the annual International Festival of Films on Art held in Montreal last Nov. 19-24. Now in its fourth year, the 1985 festival featured 110 film and video works. The Festival, says director René Rozon, "has performed an important public service for the better knowledge and appreciation of art."

The motives of those who make and show art films thus seem to be art education. The films do the speaking for the artworks. There were only four Quebec-made art films shown at the Festival last year. But these, along with several other films by Giraldeau, suggest some of the range available of art films today.

If the artist is still alive it seems to be standard to have s/he talk about their work, with the visuals intercutting the speaking artist. A videotape, shown at the Festival, *Georges Dyens: de la sculpture à l'holosculpture*, does exactly that. As an initiation to current sculpture, the sight of the veiny fetuses and deformed women that compose Dyens' work is probably shocking. The artist's lecture is philosophical, and dis-

Montrealer Fay Plant is currently doing graduate work in cinema studies at New York University.

Jacques Giraldeau



Pierre Hébert



cordant music accompanies the holo-sculpture. This is a tape for those who already have an avid interest in current sculpture.

The dead artist seems to offer more variation for the art film. The classic historical approach provides voice-over biographical information on the artist, illustrated by the artist's work and perhaps some photos or old film footage. Occasionally interviews with people who knew the artist are included.

J.W. Morrice, an NFB film made to accompany the Montreal Museum of Fine Art's recent retrospective of the Canadian painter's work, takes this historical approach. It's a brief film that situates Morrice in history, recounts his life and explains his work. The visuals are composed of Morrice's paintings and some photographs. Classical music adds atmosphere. It is, however, principally Morrice's lovely work that makes this film an enjoyable one for someone with relatively little knowledge of art.

Clarence Gagnon (1881-1942) is similar in its approach. Because it is longer than **J.W. Morrice**, **Clarence Gagnon** is able to explore the artist's life and work in more detail, focussing on Gagnon's love of rural Quebec — Les Éboulements and the Lower St. Lawrence in particular. The viewer is kept well supplied with information, some of which is in art jargon. If there are a few too many shaky zooms, what makes this film work are Gagnon's delightful paintings and etchings.

Other filmmakers take a more creative approach to art films, attempting to capture the spirit of the artwork. NFB animator Pierre Hébert's **Ô Picasso (Tableaux d'une surexposition)** is such a film, made on the occasion of the 1985 Montreal Museum of Fine Art's Picasso Meeting in Montreal exhibition. Hébert takes Picasso-type images and alters them in an often ironic manner. The result is a somewhat amusing portrayal of Picasso and his art in the playful avant-garde essence of the artist himself. The film is divided into eight parts, each dealing with themes in Picasso's work: women, war, Spanish nationalism, peace, the circus, the bullfighter, etc. A knowledge of Picasso's oeuvre definitely makes this film more intelligible. Hébert's contortions of Picasso's acrobat would mean little if one hadn't seen the original. The soundtrack is as experimental as the images — we hear voices in the museum, strange music and various sound effects. Not a film for the uninitiated.

Gilles Carle's **Ô Picasso** mixes a variety of approaches, creating a somewhat experimental art film. Carle combines interviews, documentary footage, quotations in an unconventional manner, producing a film that would be difficult for the neophyte.

Jacques Giraldeau has made a number of art films. **Bozarts**, 1969, explores the art system (galleries, museums) and its rapport with the public. **Bozarts** is a collage of footage dealing with the lack of communication be-

tween art and society. It's experimental in form: interviews with people on the street and with experts, are combined with documentary footage and quotations: passages are read from the founding text of Quebec modern art, Borduas' **Refus global**. Dialogue is unsynchronized at times. This film preaches to the converted. It's long, wordy and intellectual. But perhaps it's a call to others in the Canadian art world — about the necessity of art education.

Faut-il se couper l'oreille?, 1970, features several personalities from the art world discussing the social role of the artist. It's full of intellectual art jargon and so has little appeal for those outside the artistic sphere.

La Toile de l'araignée, 1979, shows artists at work, and exposes different creative processes, physical and mental. It somewhat demystifies the artistic process by explaining it. The subjects of this film, to which there are five parts, are obscure Quebec artists.

As he followed the distribution of his last film, the animated short, **L'opéra zéro**, Giraldeau realized that the world of animation, like art, is a closed one — "such films play to a very elite audience. To the general public animation is synonymous with Walt Disney.

To introduce people to the world of animation Giraldeau decided on a fiction film that combines real footage with animation. After much collective brainstorming, he wrote the script for his current project, the hour-long, tentatively titled, **Image par image**. (See *On Location*, this issue.)

Marc, the main male character — young and unemployed — develops an attraction to the visual arts. He works as a commercial painter for awhile. He begins to notice the visual aspects of everything — even of his current job as a chimney-sweep. One day, at the Redpath Museum, he discovers animation that is different from what he's seen on television. He also meets Julie, the beautiful stranger whom he chases throughout the rest of the film.

Marc's preoccupation with the visual deepens. One morning he wakes up and looks at his hand which, through animation, has become distorted. Strange things happen: Marc's shoelaces continually untie themselves. Reality and Marc's imagination mix. He sees Julie in a film and follows her, finding himself inside a projector. He becomes part of the filmic image, eventually returning to his origins under the pen of Julie, the animator. Marc is then released from Julie's drawing table to finally take on real life.

Image par image, within its fictional form, is an instructional film that introduces its audience to animation that is more art-oriented than that produced by the large American and Japanese studios. As well, the film explores the interrelationship between the various visual arts.

Image par image is unique among current Quebec art films in its attempt to make art education accessible and fun. Giraldeau has taken a vital step towards lessening the communication gap between art and the public.

CASTING CALL

AGENCY

Talent Showcase

9 BLOOR STREET EAST
TORONTO M4W 1A9
TELEPHONE (416) 960-6088

Diane Borowiec



Dawn Robertson



Natalie Olhovskiy



Brian Lia



Lynne Richardson



Lillian Starr



SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT

We are now capable of booking up to 1000 extras in a two-hour notice through Computer Casting. Available to members only.

Bruce Carpenter



Kevin Pohl



Melanie Sadler



Tim Johnson



Heidi Grant



Paul Jameson



Audition space available with Video Equipment. Videos available on our Principle people.