Tour de Pise

Sylain P. Cousineau

1949-2013.

Cousineau is one of Canada’s well known French Canadian artists. He exhibited his work regularly since the mid seventies. The most familiar objects, if presented in a particular way and examined with fresh eyes, often seem to possess an altered significance, to be charged with new meaning. This simple fact, which reflects the dynamics inherent to all creative endeavour, takes on a singular force and heightened relief in the work of Sylvain P. Cousineau.

This artistic practice has been evolving steadily over a period of more than forty years. Technically speaking it is rich and varied (photographs, paintings, assemblages), and it is expressed in a tone and spirit of remarkable consistency.

Cousineau’s essentially figurative painting focused initially on four apparently innocuous themes or motifs – a ship, a vase of flowers, a teapot and a birthday cake – that the artist has reworked over the years from different perspectives and according to different moods. The use of certain formal devices, also recurrent and frequently highly connotative (drips, brushstrokes, dots of colour), imbues the work with a powerfully reflective dimension, while also endowing it with a marked emotional charge.

Marlow Stainfield-Cousineau

Marlow has channelled his father’s artist ability in an uncanny way. Marlow is the artist involved in recreating the installation, lending his “father’s touch” to the piece for an authentic Cousineau endeavour.

Pisa Installation:

The Tower of Pisa, exhibited at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Montreal, 1995, is an amazing monumental installation. This piece to be re-framed to create 2 semi-circles that can be mounted either together as it’s originally intended central column or separately against a wall. (2 (2x11ftx8ft) (wood, metal, canvas, oil paint, acrylic painting, styrofoam, wood, synthetic grass, park bench)

Musée D’Art Contemporain de Montreal, June 14 to August 6, 1995

This work, which can occupy an entire room or as a relief, reproduces the tower and its immediate environment so that any visitor entering the enclosure has the impression of stepping into a painting depicting the building and its surroundings, made of a structure covered with painted canvas, towering in the space it reaches from floor to ceiling. Only the first two storeys have been reconstructed, this can create the impression that the tower continues through the upper floor as it did in the museum exhibition. The tower is also notably perpendicular. It is the false floor that is built tilted.. The walls around the structure are painted to suggest an Italian sky, and the clouds are positioned in such a way as to create variety of perspective effects.

The installation’s large size – unusually large in the context of Cousineau’s work – relates to another enormous painting of the Titanic (nearly nine metres wide) executed by the artist in 1989. In these two works, the monumentality (both physical and historical) of the subjects depicted is associated with the notion of weakness: the image of a ship that was believed to be unsinkable and a tower that is in danger of falling. “I painted the titanic because it was big and because it sank when it wasn’t supposed to – like a huge joke at the expense of humanity and its ambitions. The tower seems to me a perfect complement to this idea. It is fragile because it leans, and in this state it is an error that we cherish because it is far more beautiful leaning than if it were straight. And maybe, in some way, this fragility makes us more humble.”

In this installation, whose sloping floor slightly unbalances the spectator, the combined effects of a confrontation between illusionistic and real space actually create the impression that it is the surroundings that are on the point of toppling over.

The Proposal

Project Manager: Donna Stainfield, Installation: Marlow Stainfield Cousineau.. The Venetian sky would be re-painted by the late artist’s son, Marlow Stainfield-Cousineau. DJStainfield@rogers.com