

Search for meaning goes deep beneath the skin

All is not merely what it seems on the surface when one regards these intriguing works rooted in symbolism

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SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE

A startling series of oils by Montrealer Richard Morin can be seen at a recently opened and quite promising art venue, Galerie Dominique Bouffard. Morin is a mid-career artist whose past includes doing masks for Cirque du Soleil and apprenticing in stage decor at the Paris Opera.

His intensely, even painfully introspective, quasi-realist art, in which objective world and hallucination forge a unified logic of their own, fits into the symbolist category, a movement fashionable at the start of the 20th century. These days, neo-symbolism, linked with a kind of born-again realism, is all the rage. As for the oddly fresh brand of neo-symbolism in Morin's 12 oils now on view, one goal is to get across the sense that each form has deeper meaning, even if the meaning isn't actually there. Note that art itself has no obligation to perfect moral rectitude.

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In one of Morin's best, most evocative oils, titled *Blanche - Faïence* - the centrepiece is an exuberantly rotund nude woman, her small, bullet-shaped head a mere appendage to the massive body; her bulbous Michelin-man-style layers of skin yield dramatically to the force of gravity. In fact, the earthy - or is it earthy - dermal avalanche appears to taper at the ends; the arms and feet dematerialize, inexplicably transformed into clouds of dust. Another symbolist touch is the yellow ribbon hovering just above the woman's head.

This exhibit, featuring current neo-symbolism of a high quality, is certainly worth a visit.

Richard Morin's solo show, *Alice*, remains on view at Galerie Dominique Bouffard, 1000 Amherst, Room 101, until Dec. 3. Call (514) 678-7054 or see www.galeriedominiquebouffard.com.

For art lovers wishing to go back to the king of symbolism, there's a small show of 17 lithographs by French master Odilon Redon (1840-1916) on view at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. This is one in a continuing series of small shows at the MMFA which are small in number and format only. The rare works by Redon belong ei-

ther to the MMFA or to the National Gallery of Canada.

With its slightly corny title, Odilon Redon's *Haunted Realm*, this show, in a room as small as a large pantry, can be scanned in just a few moments, or it can be an invitation to spend the whole afternoon meditating on Redon's unique take on art and the so-called imagination.

In the MMFA exhibit, we are treated to classic Redon monsters, as in a print titled *Sciopods*, a term referring to a mythical tribe of people having just one giant foot. However, the subject in this print is a hapless creature with a long neck recalling that of a grazing brontosaurus. Certainly Redon's figure stands as an all-out challenge to Darwin and evolution.

In looking at Redon's brooding, shadowy compositions in this show - comprising mainly prints inspired by Gustave Flaubert - we can also see, in our all-seeing mind's eye, Francisco Goya and even the 17th-century master Rembrandt, whom Redon admired.

Odilon Redon's *Haunted Realm* remains on view until Jan. 14 at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Jean-Noël Desmarais Pavilion, 1380 Sherbrooke St. W. Admission is free. Call (514) 285-2000, or consult www.mbam.qc.ca.

For contemporary art on the perilously thin line between intentionally unsightly sights and real sounds, check out the fascinating installations of Montreal artist Christof Migone, whose work is featured both at Concordia University's Leonard and Bina Ellen Gallery, along with other pieces, and at the gallery of the Université du Québec à Montréal.

Cut, a piece in the Concordia show, consists of a blow-up photo of an old-fashioned typewriter and an "audience" of dark, vertical, anorexic totems. These are actually speakers on waist-high posts; they emit low-key sounds, not exactly Mozart, but possibly the nervous clatter of the typewriter.

While taking some true artistic risks in this updated version of late 1970s conceptualism and the notions of the late John Cage, the obviously talented artist has yet to pull his elements together in a convincing, logical - or even convincingly illogical - manner.

Christof Migone's installations remain on view at Concordia's Leonard and Bina Ellen Gallery, 1400 de Maisonneuve Blvd. W., and at the Université du Québec à Montréal, in the Pavillon Judith Jasmin, Room JR 120, 1400 Berri St., until Nov. 25. Call 514-848-2424, Local 4750, Concordia, or 514-987-8421, UQAM.



GALERIE DOMINIQUE BOUFFARD

Top: *Blanche - Faïence* 2006, an oil by Richard Morin.



MONTREAL MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS

Above: Plate 3 from Redon's series *To Gustave Flaubert: The Temptation of St. Anthony*.

Word of the Day

farceur
far-SUR

DEFINITION: a writer or actor of farce

The movie features a famous farceur trying his hand at a serious role for the first time.

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