

**Review of *Drawing Field #02*:** La Chambre Blanche, Quebec, Canada 2008/09

***Reflections of Québec.***

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Towards the end of November, on the banks of the Saint Charles River, a yellow, luminous halo emanates from the Saint-Roch outdoor swimming pool. From up high on the premonitory, the curious may have wondered about the origins of this unusual phenomenon, produced by an installation created by the Australian artist James Geurts, during his residency at La Chambre Blanche artist-run centre.

In the main pool, three luminous yellow sources, placed at different points, light up a frozen rectangular interior. Over the course of a several weeks, the installation evolves with the variations in climate. The spots, which gradually become covered with snow, create unexpected sculptures and drawings in the ice through the heat that they emit. Through his placement of three lamps on the ice, James Geurts transforms the rectangular pool into a yellow, vaporous cavity, scattered with calligraphic forms. The curves and the excavations created on the surface of the carpet of snow offer a hypnotic spectacle to passersby, a sense of the sublime emerges through the luminous sculptural relief.

At the intersection of Land Art and Minimalism 1) this installation is paradigmatic of the work produced by James Geurts in Québec; time and the ambiance of luminosity intervene, playing a pivotal role in the construction of the art work. James Geurts transforms his chosen site into a moving body, permeable to variations in time and climate.

In the context of his residency in Québec, the artist used the gallery space at La Chambre Blanche to develop this notion of an evolving and multi-form approach to site-specific art. The work, entitled *Drawing Field #2*, evolved in the course of the artist's exploratory walks in the city. Geurts paid particular attention to the presence of water, to the confluence and flow of the rivers in Québec City. The Saint Lawrence and Saint Charles rivers, the outdoor pool at Saint-Roch and the headland at Pointe-à-Carcy constituted points of departure for his thinking about the installation.

For a number of years, James Geurts' practice has explored the movement of water, placing it in parallel with bodily fluids. His impressions of Québec, which he perceived as an organism in resonance with the human body, were retranscribed through sketches that he presented in his installation in the gallery space.

James Geurts' *Drawing Field #2* presented itself as a whole, a body in which water, air and light circulate. Within this body, traversed by energies, the works placed in the four corners of the gallery function as living organs that are interrelated, transforming the space into an evolving mass.

Throughout his residency, the artist invested La Chambre Blanche in its globality: he lived above the exhibition space and, through his impregnation of the site, rapidly established a connection between his room and the gallery space. He played with geographic separations, manifesting elements of his thinking, which filtered through the walls, floors and doorways. His installation coursed through the building, through the internal gallery spaces, and externally.

*Drawing Field #1*, one of the works placed on the gallery floor, consisted of a small basin linked to three tubes. Two of these tubes ran from water sources at La Chambre Blanche: one from the shower of the artist's accommodation above the gallery, and the other from the sink in the gallery. The third tube ran from the basin to a space outside of La Chambre Blanche, above the entranceway. In the basin, a mirror reflected the variations in light created by the movement of water onto an adjacent wall. The fluid that ran through the tubes, which passed through the basin, emerged/rejete outside, where the artist had set-up a wooden structure, creating the illusion of a waterfall.

As a metaphor for the conjunction between different waterways, this section of the installation could also be viewed as a corporeal entity, a sort of stomach regulating the bodily fluids. It echoed the pool at Saint-Roch, serving as a model of this full-scale work created a few hundred metres away in the city.

Another of the works in the gallery, placed directly opposite the basin, referred explicitly to the diving board in the Saint Roch pool. It consisted of a wooden board, covered with a photograph, which seemed to emerge from the wall and extend into the exhibition space. Suspended discretely in the space, the board was lit with a blue neon, accentuating the surrealist atmosphere of the object, and creating geometric shadows on the adjacent walls. A luminous halo emanated from each of the works installed in the gallery, and as a whole, they created a distinct atmosphere.

Similarly to Dan Flavin, James Geurts uses neon light in an essential way, to create a strong sense of variations in luminosity, of dynamics that transform space. Mario Merz, who also often employed neons in his sculptures, explained how he created: "a very distinct perceptory experience that accords objects a tactility and a subtle auratic quality."<sup>2</sup>) This sensation was present in the works by James Geurts' at La Chambre Blanche: the use of light enabled him to accentuate the presence of certain elements of the installation, notably the drawings that he made whilst exploring Québec City, which were transposed into the space. A number of the sketches, including *Spectrum of Colours*, were made on two large sheets of paper which were assembled together. Placed behind a video projector (whose fan blew gently onto the sheets), the drawings created a 'cushioning effect', lit up from beneath by two neons. This arrangement seemed to complete the dimensionality of the work, animating it, as though it were a form of subtle respiration.

James Geurts works primarily with drawing, reflecting emotions that he experiences through his contact with atmospheres and landscapes, such as those encountered in his walks through the city. A group of drawings, entitled *Chemical Drawings* and created using Polaroid photographs, were projected onto the wall or scaled-up and presented on plexiglass. These abstract images, which are made by manipulating the photographic images as they are drying, evoke lunar landscapes of incredible colour. James Geurts filmed the chemical changes of one of these photographs, and once projected onto the wall, this film plunged the installation into an atmosphere of timelessness.

The installation, and the drawings, can be appreciated and understood as elements that are linked by fluid movement. The works respond to, and reflect back at, each other, through light and the dynamics that traverse the space, as with *Electric Drawing* (a line of neons attached to the ceiling, traversing the gallery from one extremity to the other). There is an invitation, that of allowing the spirit to be carried by the flux that regulated the installation. Moving by means of tubes placed on the floor, the dynamic lines in the exhibition space seemed to pierce through the gallery's walls.

In the course of his artist residency, James Geurts fully invested himself in the exhibition space and its surroundings. He succeeded in erasing the geographic limits of the gallery, transforming its walls into filters of his drawings. The subtle atmosphere of the work invited the spectator to play with the limits of their own interpretation, to allow themselves to be transported by the universe of this artist and to look at the city in a new light.

1) The installation displayed some of the characteristics of Andy Goldsworthy's work with water and ice. The use of modulating light sources, revealing aspects of space, strongly evokes the work of Dan Flavin. For example, *The Diagonal of Personal Ecstasy (The Diagonal of May 25, 1963)*, a work consisting of a single yellow neon attached to the wall of his studio at a 45-degree angle, prompting a re-reading of the space.

2) Françoise Ducros, *Mario Merz*, Paris, Flammarion, 1999, p.170.