

CONTEMPORARY ART AND THE NON-EXPERT VIEWER:
A study of pre-conceived ideas about art
And René Derouin's educational strategies to address them

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary Art and the Non-expert Viewer:
A study of viewers' pre-conceived ideas about art
and René Derouin's educational strategies to address them.

Manon Douesnard

Modernist strategies for art appreciation are insufficient to help non-expert viewers to understand most contemporary art. A postmodern pedagogical approach to viewing art appears better suited to this undertaking. The artistic practice and pedagogical approach of contemporary artists may help support that path to understanding. This study examines whether or not the pedagogical approach used by artist René Derouin provides valuable assistance to non-expert viewers of contemporary art. In this study the author conducted a series of interviews with non-expert participants about their beliefs concerning art. A second series of interviews was conducted after they experienced contemporary art at the Derouin Foundation where the in-situ installations *Les jardins du précambrien* were displayed. Results of this study show that the non-experts of this research have many recurrent ideas that they associate with art and that these concepts prevent them from appreciating or understanding some aspects of contemporary art. Results of this study also show that the art practice of Derouin significantly helped the non-experts studied overcome some of their pre-conceived ideas, understand and appreciate some aspects of contemporary art. The shift in focus of the participants from an emphasis on the formal qualities of the artworks in favour of the context(s), content and concepts of works of contemporary art was significant. Given their initial difficulties dealing with notions of contemporary art and their subsequent openness to them, this study supports the idea that non-experts can be helped to understand and appreciate works of contemporary art.

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The last 1,054 days would have been like going without light, water and rest if I had been deprived of the presence Gary Carroll. He provided me with constant and comforting support. He organized, supervised and maintained the hardware and software needs of this research. He also dealt with the more demanding needs of the wetware, such as self-doubt.

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The financial assistance I received from the University of Concordia and the Fonds de Recherche sur la société et la culture from the Government of Québec contributed in a significant way to the completion of the data collection and writing of this research project.

Last but definitely not least, to the artist René Derouin, I am in debt for the significant contribution he has made to the whole of the Québec society and beyond, as a socially and educationally engaged artist. He has been an inspiration to pursue research in the relationship between the public and contemporary art.

DEDICATION

This thesis addresses issues about both art and education. Therefore, I wish to dedicate it to the two people who have made the most significant contributions to these spheres of my life.

To my mother, who used to get up early on Saturday mornings to arrange an array of cut out felt shapes; full moons for heads, half-moons for smiles and stars for eyes, so that my sister and I could fall from our beds and into the wonders of art creation for hours on end.

To my sister Chantal, who has always been my librarian and my window on the world of learning and knowledge.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Preconceived beliefs about art may prevent non-expert viewers from appreciating works of contemporary art. As a result of these beliefs, non-experts may avoid art viewing activities or, when engaging in such activities, may forgo the essence of the viewing experience. Postmodern pedagogical strategies to viewing art appear better suited to help non-initiated viewers to understand contemporary art than Modernist approaches. The artistic practice of contemporary artists may help support that path to understanding. This study examines whether or not the pedagogical approach used by artist René Derouin¹ provides valuable assistance to the non-expert viewers of contemporary art.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

As a contemporary artist working with digital imagery and installations, computer software and performance, I have been for years trying to communicate, often with mitigated results, my artistic intentions in a truly meaningful way to non-experts. The objects of my efforts have included close friends, family, and the public at large. In my undergraduate studies in art education, I designed, taught and supervised visual art classes for non-expert adults for two years at the Saturday Art School at Concordia University's Fine Arts Department. As a graduate student I have supervised student-teachers in many community settings where they were in turn teaching art to non-experts. In my capacity as teaching assistant in these settings and, subsequently, as an

¹ At the exhibition *Les Jardins du Précambrien* on the International Symposium site of the *Derouin Foundation* in the Canadian Laurentian mountains.

instructor for the time-based studio class in the Art Education department, I tried to initiate non-expert participants and student-teachers to the practices of contemporary artists and the postmodern concerns of art today. In all of these settings, participants and student teachers had different levels of experience with art making and viewing, ranging from very little to considerable experience. Yet, the majority of the participants knew almost nothing about contemporary art and artists.

Interestingly, what they did hold were myriads of pre-conceived notions about contemporary art and artists. “That’s not art”, “We cannot make that art”, “Who do they think they are?” and “What is it about?” were common comments and questions. Most of their interests in art making and viewing related to formal concerns, and most of their interest about art and artists were related to the early 20th century. There appears to exist a huge gulf between the interests and understandings of non-experts and those of the contemporary art world.

As an undergraduate student, I developed a teaching project involving non-expert adults. This project focussed on non-expert adults’ appreciation of art. It involved calling upon the participants’ prior knowledge and interests so that they could respond to art in a meaningful way. Beyond a need for cognitive knowledge about the art work, the participants expressed an overwhelming desire to feel included in the art world. Participants explained that they did not engage in art making or art viewing because they felt separated from the world of art - contemporary or otherwise: “One of the consequences of this separation [of art from the social aspects of contemporary life] left many ordinary people feeling excluded from what the cultural elite defined as art” (Mullen, p.17).

I spent the summers of 2002 and 2003 as a research assistant to Richard Lachapelle for his research project *L'Étude de la compréhension esthétique des regardeurs non-initiés à l'art contemporain* (Lachapelle, 2001-2005). Working outdoors in a sculpture garden, I became aware of how an informal outdoor ambiance is beneficial to participants engaging in art viewing and response. Late in the summer of 2002, my attention was drawn to an advertisement for an exhibition taking place in the Laurentian forest. The exhibition was called *La forêt enchantée* and was organized by the artist René Derouin and the Derouin Foundation in Val David. Knowledge of this upcoming exhibition led me to ponder a number of questions. Wouldn't it be a liberating experience to engage with art in such a context? Would the general public be interested? How would they respond? How could a contemporary artist foster the interest of the non-expert public with this kind of artistic event?

The research idea for this thesis came to me after viewing the outdoor exhibition *La forêt enchantée* by the artist René Derouin. At the exhibition site, there were many non-experts -- children, adolescents, adults and older adults -- that were all actively engaged in looking at the artwork. They also took part in art making by creating pieces that would later be included in the final installation.

In my thesis research project, I examined the pedagogical approach of René Derouin to see if it can be used as a model for teaching contemporary art to non-experts. I began by looking at some of the lingering influences of modernism and modernist art teaching practices. Are such influences the source among novice viewers for sustained beliefs about their exclusion from the world(s) of art? Are such influences a source of

the conflict between the non-experts' art viewing expectations and the reality of the contemporary art that they encounter?

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

These are the research questions I wished to address: What are non-expert viewers' preconceived notions of art? Do these notions hinder their appreciation of contemporary art? Does the art practice of René Derouin help non-expert viewers to understand or appreciate some aspects of contemporary art? How is René Derouin's approach successful or not in achieving these objectives?

JUSTIFICATION OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

People are almost universally unprepared to respond to the vanguard art of our present age. They are indeed unprepared, almost as if they belonged to an earlier century, to acknowledge it as art!" (Danto, 1996, p.14).

Response to contemporary art is a new research area in the field of art education.

There are few research projects that are in progress or that have been completed on this question [Lachapelle & Douesnard, 2002, p. 42, translated by Douesnard].

Although some academics, philosophers and curators do look at the artist's practice as a source for comprehension of postmodern contemporary art, there is little research that addresses the topic of current art practice as an area of research. "Despite the current interest in postmodernism as a contemporary, artistic, and cultural movement, art education offers few examples of postmodern teaching strategies to challenge the modernist legacy" (Richard, 1998). Yet the "greatest challenge in teaching contemporary art consists in addressing and overcoming preconceived notions about

what a work of art should be” (Lachapelle, 2002).

Contemporary art is widely misunderstood and a frequent source of public debate.

“So many of the questions that define us as a culture have been raised through the art of recent decades, that without coming to terms with our art, we can scarcely understand ourselves” (Danto as cited in Freeland, 2001, no pagination). With this study, I hope to collect new data from non-experts about the criteria they use to define what a work of art is to them. Furthermore, I hope to extrapolate from the practice of the artist René Derouin the necessary pedagogical tools and the bridging language that, as art educators, we could use to bring the non-expert public closer to an understanding of the postmodern art of today.

Therefore, this research is important to the advancement of contemporary art education at the primary, secondary, CEGEP and university levels as well as in museum settings.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

As an artist working with contemporary ideas and materials, I tried with limited results to communicate my artistic intentions to a non-expert public. As an art educator and research assistant, I became aware that most non-experts knew almost nothing about contemporary art and that their art appreciation revolved around formal concerns and art of the twentieth century. These two clues, combined with my previously mentioned experience, led me to consider the lingering influences of modernism's ideals and ideas on non-experts' appreciation of art. I will discuss this first in this chapter. I will also address postmodern contemporary art concerns. I will examine the art practice of contemporary artists as a means for understanding contemporary art. Finally, I will address the career of the artist René Derouin and introduce his art practice and pedagogical approaches. Derouin's educational strategies will be further examined in Chapter 5, where I will analyse and discuss the post-visit interviews which took place after the participants' visit to René Derouin's installation site.

BACKGROUND READINGS

I studied the writings of Clark (1998), of Gablick (1995), and Arthur Danto (1996) among others, for some of the background ideas that define modernism and postmodernism. These readings helped to determine my focus on a theory of inclusion in the postmodern landscape. I extracted the fundamental ideas I wanted to address in this research project and determined the structure of the questions for my interviews and questionnaires.

The characteristics of postmodern contemporary art were isolated to better identify and understand what aspects of contemporary art the non-experts in this study may not appreciate or understand. For this, I have extracted, adapted, and used the writings of Clark (1998) and especially of Faucher (2001). I also relied upon my experience as a teacher and a research assistant. When these concepts were integrated, I was able to develop a hypothesis concerning the gap between the expert and the non-expert with regards to contemporary art.

JUDGEMENTS BASED UPON MODERNIST BELIEFS

I suspected non-experts base a large part of their judgement of art on modernist beliefs. I also suspected such beliefs could be a significant factor in the gap between the non-experts and the artists and their world. To confirm these suspicions, I consulted the writings of Clark, Wolcott, and others in the field.

Modernism did away with history, focussing on innovation of form and matter. “Such artists believed that art existed *in and of itself* [emphasis added] and was purely aesthetic without any function, a philosophy otherwise known as art for art’s sake (Gablik, 1984)” (Wolcott. p,71). The art critic Clive Bell introduced the notion of ‘Significant Form’, which, as the name would suggest, focussed on the form of the artwork such as composition, lines and colors (etc.), rather than on its content. Modernist aestheticians developed what is known as the Formalist theory. Formalists believed that what matters aesthetically are the intrinsic properties of form and that the meaning of each work lies within itself. “Social content, particularly explicit political matter, was demoted to irrelevance, as sullyng the purity or impeding the

transcendence [experiencing form without cognition] of a work (Piper, 1993, p.58).

The idea that works of art were about form and not content became the *defining nature of art* [emphasis added] (Wolcott, p.7).

Clark looks at the phenomenon of modernism using two definitions. In its broadest sense, he defines modernism as “Western humanist ideas developed during the Enlightenment which glorified science and logic (...)” (Clark, 1998, p. 96). In its artistic sense, he defines modernism as a period in early 20th century when artists aesthetically distanced themselves from society. It is useful that Clark looks into the history of modernism back to the enlightenment, as he makes it clear that it is a characteristic of art to evolve. The functions of art, influenced by time and ideologies, change.

Roger Clark’s article *Doors and Mirrors in Art Education; Constructing the Postmodernist Classroom* elucidates the origins of separation the non-expert public feels from art and artists. Clark goes on to explain that the modernists maintained this distance by adhering to modernist tenets such as repulsion for popular tastes, a complete separation from past artistic tradition, xenophobic dismissal of other cultures and deferral to art critics. “Modernist theories of art criticism and aesthetics made ponderous reading for all but a small circle of art elites. This dense critical discourse further distanced the general public from modernist art and elevated the central, but artificial importance of modernist art critics” (Clark, 1998, p. 97) If the novice viewers of contemporary art understand that their knowledge of art has been filtered, it could be a powerful tool for knowledge. They are seeing through the lenses of cultural, political or other forms of power, often personified by the European and

Occidental white males who maintained this distance to further their interests and maintain dominance (Gablik, 1995).

Modernist ideas are still being taught in schools: “Most existing elementary and secondary school art curricula in Canada and the United States are overwhelmingly modernist in terms of both content and intent” (Clark, 1998, p. 9). No wonder non-experts are not prepared to view contemporary art that deals with postmodern preoccupations when, even in the art education think-tanks, these concerns have only recently been addressed: “Ce n’est que tout récemment, vers le milieu des années 90, qu’on trouve enfin quelques propositions de programmes postmodernes parmi les nombreux écrits liés au postmodernisme en enseignement de art” (Richard, 1998, p.30).

Past practices in art education have often valued the study of art for its aesthetic qualities and ability to induce aesthetic experience. These practices were based on modernist theories of aesthetic experience (...). The qualities of a distinctly aesthetic experience were to be enjoyed for their own sake, unlike the material (signs and symbols) of an intellectual experience. Consequently, much current practice in art education is characterised by describing and analysing the elements and principals of design and emotive content of art works (Smith, cited by Wolcott, p.69).

“Evidence of a postmodern approach is more prevalent in the scholarly literature (Clark, Day, & Greer, 1987; Parks, 1989) than in actual practice in the classroom, since formalist theories and practices that characterized the modernist period are still the most popular approach to teaching art.” (Wolcott, p.73).

Modernism is insufficient to teach postmodern art. Postmodernist art must be explained. I agree with Wolcott that we need to use postmodernist aesthetics to

understand postmodern contemporary art; “Modernist theories of aesthetic experience are restrictive because they are inadequate for dealing with much contemporary art. The content of postmodern art is different from that of modernism because it deals with issues of content rather than form.” (Wolcott, p.69).

POSTMODERN AESTHETICS

Issues of aesthetic quality, originality, content, and modes of interpretation occupy the thoughts and practices of the world of art and philosophy. Within the art world there is pluralism, acknowledging a variety of styles, utilizing pastiche, kitsch, repetition, and appropriation in works of art. In rejecting formalism, postmodern artists rely on allegory, narrative, metaphor, and juxtaposition of unrelated images. They offer art that questions assumptions about beauty, formal relations, originality and self-expression (Wolcott, p71).

If the non-expert bases his ideas and ideals of art on modernist values of form rather than content, he or she is expecting one type of encounter and is presented something else altogether. This can be referred to as “dissonances” (Dubé, 1998) that need to be addressed if there is to be a bridge between the non-expert and the postmodern contemporary artists. Postmodern art is anything but universal. Postmodern artwork tends to be complex and layered, referring to cultural ideas in different contexts that can be both personal and community oriented. Postmodern art reads more and more like a book where cognitive concerns have outgrown formal concerns. “It had once been true that art spoke immediately and directly to the hearts and minds of human beings, without the mediation of interpretation or critical thought” (Danto, 1996, p.14). This is no longer true.

Art Practice of Contemporary Artists

Using the practice of postmodern contemporary artists to teach art appreciation is

possibly a good way to make non-expert viewers understand and appreciate contemporary art. After all, the artist is the first encoder of the artworks. I am listening to a small but vocal and resolute group of people – academics, philosophers, curators and artists - who have chosen to speak directly to their audience about art practice as a means to communicate “what this art itself cares about” (Danto, p.16). Some examples of the artists’ practice as a resource for understanding of postmodern contemporary art are to be found in the works of Moniques Richard (1994, 1998), Linda Weintraub (1996), Anne Wolcott (1996), and Cynthia Freeland (2001).

The Work of René Derouin

René Derouin is an important Canadian artist. His work has been widely exhibited nationally and internationally; Derouin has had over 100 one-person exhibits and his work has been shown in over 130 group exhibits. Some of his most prestigious exhibitions includes: *Équinox* at La Galerie de l’Université du Québec, Montréal, at El Museo Nacional de la Estampa, Mexico City, and the Edmonton Art Gallery Edmonton (1989-90); *Migrations* at Museo de Arte Contemporaneo Internacional Rufino Tamayo and at Musée du Québec (1992); *Fleuve-Mémoires* at Centre d’exposition de Baie-Saint-Paul (1994). He was named special artist to the Biennale Barro de America in Caracas, Venezuela (1995). In January 1999 The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts devoted a retrospective exhibition to his work. He has lectured widely at home and abroad including a presentation at Fine Arts Academy in Reykjavik, Iceland (1994)

Perhaps one of his richest gift to society as a postmodern contemporary artist is his long and unwavering attempt to communicate art to the public. In 1970, he

established Les Éditions Format, Inc., a publishing house dedicated to communication in the visual arts. Pursuing his endeavour to communicate the meaning of his work, he published *L'Espace et la densité* (1993), *Ressac de Migrations au Largage* (1996), *Paraiso: La dualité du baroque* (1998), and *Pour une culture du territoire* with Gilles Lapointe (2001).

René Derouin has been a practicing artist for 40 years. He has also been pondering the role of the artist in society for a very long time. “L’approche public se fait d’abord comme responsabilité sociale de l’art, de l’art dans la société” (R. Derouin, personal interview with Douesnard, November 11, 2002). He has organized five symposia since the creation of his Fondation Derouin in 1995. All the symposia share the same goals : « La Fondation Derouin avec ses symposiums des années passées a voulu concrétiser un art d’intégration sociale, multidisciplinaire et interculturelle » (Derouin, 2002).

Keeping in mind that the first challenge to overcome when attempting to unite the public and contemporary art is to reach the viewing public, Derouin wrote: “L’art contemporain se meurt par manque de public et de communication” (Derouin, *Paraiso : La dualité du Baroque*, 1998, p.12). René Derouin employs many strategies to develop a public for his art. The first one is to invite them to an informal and friendly site : “ il y a manifestement un public pour l’art contemporain, à la condition d’inviter ce dernier dans des lieux de convivialité, et de le mettre en contact avec une démarche et des recherches esthétiques qui communiquent un sens à la réalité” (Derouin et Lapointe, p 209).

Indeed, the site where the Symposia take place is beautiful. The environment of the Laurentian Mountains' nurtures a state of openness, repose and meditation, which is conducive to appreciating art. Poems and information panels are strategically placed to provide information about the nature of the art. Guided tours with the artist himself or with his colleagues further inform the public. Another significant communication strategy for making the art meaningful to the public is to invite them to participate in a workshop. The artwork created by the visiting public in these workshops is then integrated into collaborative installations on the site.

In this chapter I have examined the literature pertaining to modernism as an origin for the separation between the non-expert public and the art world. I have investigated modernist notions -- especially that of the importance of form over content--as a base for conflict between the expectations of the non-expert public and the reality of postmodern contemporary art. I have introduced the idea of looking directly at the practice of contemporary artist for an understanding of contemporary art and René Derouin as an example for doing so. In chapter three (3), I will discuss the research methods that enabled me to investigate what are the notions that non-experts associate with art and if these notions prevent an understanding of contemporary art. I will also define the methods devised to test whether the pedagogical approaches of René Derouin can help novice viewers to appreciate contemporary art.

CHAPTER THREE RESEARCH METHODS

In this chapter I will first consider two different possible data collecting methods for my research: interviews and questionnaires. I will then describe the final research protocol used to complete the data collection: one based on the use of interviews not questionnaires.

CHOOSING AN APPROACH

Which of the two approaches, interviews or questionnaire are better suited to this study?

Interviews

As a research assistant, I have had positive experience interviewing participants. I was able to put them at ease and they forwarded lots of pertinent information. This is one of the reasons why I thought that I would use interviews again. “With a skilful interviewer, the interview is often superior to other data-gathering devices. One reason is that people are usually more willing to talk than to write. After the interviewer gains rapport or establishes a friendly, secure relationship with the subject, certain types of confidential information may be obtained that an individual might be reluctant to put in writing” (Best, 1993, p.251). I had also found interviews to be a flexible tool: the interviewer can adjust or explain his or her questions as the interview unfolds “Another advantage of interviewing is that the interviewer can explain more explicitly the investigation’s purpose and just what information he or she wants. If the subject misinterprets the question, the interviewer may follow it with a clarifying question. At the same time, he or she may evaluate the sincerity and

insight of the interviewee. It is also possible to seek the same information in several ways at various stages of the interview, thus checking the truthfulness of the responses. And through the interview technique the researcher may stimulate the subject's insight into his or her own experiences, thereby exploring significant areas not anticipated in the original plan of investigation" (Best, p.252).

Interview Limitations

As an interviewer one must always be aware that it is possible to lead the participants in a certain direction. This is why I have chosen to use predetermined questions (see interview questions in Appendix I). "The primary disadvantages of the interview are its potential for subjectivity and bias and its higher cost and time consuming nature. Depending on the training and expertise of the interviewer, the respondent may be uncomfortable in the interview and unwilling to report true feelings; the interviewer may ask leading questions that support a particular point of view; or the interviewer's perception of what was said may be inaccurate" (McMillan, 1984, no page).

Type of Interview

I chose to work with a formal type of interview. This is to say that the questions I used were predetermined. "Formal interviews are sometimes called "structured," "semi structured," or "in depth" interviews. They are structured in the sense that the researcher is "in charge" of leading the interview, there is a set time established for the interview, and they are most often recorded on tape. They are semi structured because, although researchers come to the interview with guiding questions, they are open to following the leads of informants and probing into areas that arise during interview interactions. They are in-depth in that they are designed to go deeply into

the understandings of the informants.” (Hatch, 2002, no page).

Nature of the Interviews

The pre-visit interview questions focus on the participants’ past experiences with works of art. The post-visit interviews focus on the participants’ recent experiences with the works of art at the installation site and more precisely, on the possible changes in the attitudes towards the art they have just encountered and the attitudes they held about art in past experiences. (Please refer to Appendix I for the complete interview questions.)

Questionnaires

I also considered using questionnaire as a possible research method. The pre-visit questionnaires direct the attention of the participants to key ideas and concepts about art and give them a range of responses to select from, some of which they may not have thought about before. Because non-experts do not necessarily have words for what they feel or think about art, a questionnaire gives them the possibility to *name* these feelings or thoughts.

Instead of elaborating as they would in an interview, participants, in response to a questionnaire, must give precise answers to precise questions. In a questionnaire, the participant is not influenced to the same extent as he or she would be perhaps when interviewed by the researcher; there is not the same pressure to perform or to please that there might be in an interview. “Questionnaires administered to groups of individuals have a number of advantages. The person administering the instrument

has an opportunity to establish rapport, explain the purpose of the study, and explain the meaning of items that may not be clear. That availability of a number of respondents in one place makes possible an economy of time and expense and provides a high proportion of usable responses.” (Best and Kahn, 1993, no page). Other good reasons for using a questionnaire are that anonymity can be assured (McMillan, p140) and that it is easy to tabulate (Best, p.239).

Limitations of Questionnaires

This study deals with art, a subject for which it is socially desirable to have knowledge about. Participants might want to show that they are informed (i.e. not ignorant about art) and that, consequently, they are giving “right” answers. “Some items provide biased responses because of the social desirability of the answer. Social desirability is the tendency to respond to items so that the answer will make the subject look good” (McMillan, p. 142). Providing a wide range of possible answers may help to avoid this particular bias when working with questionnaires.

Type of Questionnaire

Although an open-form questionnaire may permit participants to give references or to give reasons or to go into more depth (Best, p. 231), for my purposes, the closed-form questionnaire would be better because I am dealing with beliefs; participants don’t necessarily know the source of their beliefs and may indeed not even know that they entertain them. “Even when using the closed form, it is well to provide for unanticipated responses. Providing an “other” category permits respondents to indicate what might be their most important reason, one that the questionnaire builder had not anticipated. Note the instruction to rank choices in order of importance,

which enables the tabulator to properly classify all responses. The (closed form) questionnaire is easy to fill out, takes little time, keeps the respondent on the subject, is relatively objective, and is fairly easy to tabulate and analyse” (Best, p. 231). For my project the closed-form questionnaire would be preferable also because it is much less time consuming than an open form one. Many people find writing for a long time tiring and will not go into much detail. It would be especially true in the case of my study since I would already be asking people to devote an entire day to my research activities.

Focus of the Questionnaires

A pre-visit questionnaire would address past experiences with works of art. The post-visit questionnaire would address the possible changes in the attitudes towards art.

Decision on a Method

I have considered these two approaches for my research. In actual fact I tried them both. Questionnaires were not successful in providing useful information about past or recent experiences with works of art. Since the questions for the pre-visit and post-visit questionnaires remained the same and only the context changed, I was hoping that changes in attitudes about art would be revealed by differences in the answers from the pre-visit questionnaires and the post-visit questionnaires. They did not.

However, the interviews proved far more powerful in revealing participants’ experiences with art both during the pre-visit interviews and the follow-up interviews on the site of the exhibition. For these reasons, only the interview results were retained as data to be used in the study.

RESEARCH PROTOCOL

The objectives of this research project were to determine what, if any, preconceived notions about art are held by non-experts and whether these notions hinder their appreciation or understanding of contemporary art. An additional objective was to determine whether the socially engaged art practices of artists like René Derouin can help non-expert viewers to understand or appreciate some aspects of contemporary art and whether such an approach was successful or not in achieving these objectives.

Research Tool: semi-structured interviews

Grounding of the interview questions

I created a table to document the attributes which non-experts may associate with art :

Table 1, Prediction on Preconceived Attributes. My teaching experience, as well as my work as a research assistant provided a rich, hands-on experience from which to draw my hypotheses regarding non-expert viewers' beliefs about art. These are presented in Table 1.

TABLE ONE: PREDICTION ON PRECONCEIVED ATTRIBUTES

(Listed in no particular order of importance)

1. Art should be immediately available
2. Art takes time to create
3. Feelings of exclusion
4. Talent is God-given
5. Craftsmanship
6. The object should speak for itself
7. Art is created by a genius
8. Art has a consumer function
9. Art is created by someone famous
10. Art is beautiful

The attribute *Art should be immediately available* implies that the message in a work of art is singular and that this message is to be understood almost instantly.

Underlying the concept that a work of *art takes a lot of time to create* is the notion that the extent of work invested in a piece should be apparent in the work of art. This would mean, for example, that a work of art that was easily produced, without too much time and effort, would not be viewed as great art. The *feelings of exclusion* attribute contains two main ideas. The first one is that there is only one “truth” about art and this truth is held by “people in the know” (the artistic elite). Practically speaking, this means that non-experts do not think that they are allowed to make a personal interpretation about the works of art; the truth is held by connoisseurs. The other idea of this attribute is that non-experts think that they cannot be artists, that they cannot create art. In *Talent is God-given*, for the non-expert, talent is understood as being something special for the few, and more precisely, that one is born with talent. In *Craftsmanship*, there is a presupposition that the work of art must look like it took a lot of skill to make. The idea behind *The object should speak for itself* is that the message of the work of art is encoded in the physical form and exterior qualities of the work of art and should be obvious without a need to refer to external information. Non-experts entertain the pre-conceived idea that *Art is created by a genius*. They use the term genius to identify an artist. This is a quality that one must possess in order to truly qualify as a creator of art. Works of art are commodities and the attribute *Art has a consumer function* reflects the belief held by many non-experts that they are worth a great amount of money. The characteristic *Art is created by someone famous* implies that non-experts often look with a positive bias at art that was created by famous artists. They know that this type of art has been deemed to be

good art over time by society. They are more familiar with this type of art, so they can put a name to the art and thus be seen as someone who is knowledgeable about art. The attribute *Art is beautiful* means that art appeals to our senses. Art must be visually and aesthetically pleasing.

Research Site

The research took place on the exhibition site of *Les jardins du Précambrien*, at the site of the Derouin Symposium in Val-David. The site is dotted with sculptures and installations. Three adults were recruited to participate in my study. The site was made available, at the invitation of the artist, for all three participants and myself on August 7, 2004. Before the visit to the site, each participant was interviewed about their previous art viewing experiences (see interview questions in Appendix I). They then toured the exhibition *Les Jardins du Précambrien* at the symposium site. After visiting the exhibition, they were again interviewed, this time about this encounter.

Participants

Definition of non-expert viewers

I have adopted the operationalized definition of non-expert viewers proposed by Richard Lachapelle in his document entitled *Procedures for Recruiting Study Participants: Étude de la compréhension esthétique des regardeurs non-initiés à l'art contemporain*. According to this definition, non-experts have no professional university level training in visual or fine arts. However, they may have training in art as hobbyists or as amateur artists (Lachapelle, 2001).

Selection of Participants

Three non-expert participants were recruited for this study. To qualify for the study, they had to be willing to spend most of a day on the site of the exhibition of the Derouin Symposium. They also had to be 18 years of age or over, and meet the definition of a non-expert as stated above. The greatest challenge I had to overcome was to find three participants that were available on the same day and at the same time during the 2004 summer holiday season.

The participants were required to visit the site all at the same because the artist, René Derouin would be available only on that day to provide a guided tour to all the participants. I came to realize that visiting the exhibition as a group had two advantages; it would simulate the visiting conditions of a site open to the public and it would facilitate interaction between the participants.

Procedures

Except for the guided tour with the artist René Derouin, each participant took part in individual data collection sessions. There were five distinct phases to the gathering of the data. First, each participant took part in a pre-visit interview, lasting around forty-five (45) minutes. Second, the participant visited the exhibition *Les jardins du précambrien*. The visit and the tour lasted around two (2) hours. He or she then took part in a post-visit interview lasting around forty-five (45) minutes.

Interview Parameters

The pre-visit interview focussed on the participant's past experiences with art appreciation while the post-visit interview addressed the art viewing experience with the exhibition *Les jardins du précambrien* and possible changes in participants'

attitudes towards art. The post-visit interviews took place within one and three weeks of their visit to the site so that participants would have a good recollection of their experience.

As an research assistant for the past two summers I had the opportunity to interview more than twenty (20) participants. I have found that participants are extremely eager to please with their responses; they are especially concerned about giving the “right” answers. So that the participants are guided to give responses that are truly in their own words, I found it important to stress that there are no right or wrong responses, and that I am indeed searching for their honest opinions and thoughts.

Data Analysis

The data analysis is presented in two parts. The first section (Chapter 4) deals with the pre-visit interviews and questionnaires. In this section, I identify what are the participant’s pre-conceived beliefs about art and discuss if these beliefs prevent them from appreciating or understanding some aspects of contemporary art. The second section (Chapter 5) deals with the post-visit questionnaires and interviews. In this section, I analyse whether the art practice of artist René Derouin helps the participants to understand some aspects of contemporary art by comparing the pre-visit and post-visit interviews for changes in beliefs and attitudes about art.

In this chapter, I presented the process taken to determine the research methods to be used in this study. I have also explained the procedures used for gathering the data. In the next two chapters, I present and discuss the results of the interviews.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF PRE-VISIT INTERVIEWS

This discussion addresses the answers to two research questions and the meanings thereof. The questions are: *What are non-expert viewers' preconceived notions about art?* and *Do these notions hinder their appreciation of contemporary art?* For the sake of clarity, I have adopted a specific structure for examining each question. Wherever possible, each identified pre-conceived notion is viewed from three (3) perspectives. First, I present select quotes and insights from the raw data of the interviews. I then place these findings into a theoretical framework. Finally, I explain the gap between the non-experts' preconceived notions about art and the reality of contemporary art practices.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS OF THE PRE-VISIT INTERVIEWS

I concluded, from the pre-visit interviews that the participants had some prominent and recurring ideas that they associated with art. I counted the number of times each of the participants mentioned, during the pre-visit interview, each attribute or belief they hold about art. I then compiled a table (Table 2) of results showing both the individual and the cumulative results. The list of attributes used in Table 2 is based upon those presented in Table 1, as presented in Chapter Three. The list of attributes was then adjusted to reflect the results of the pre-visit interviews.

TABLE 2: RESULTS OF PRE-VISIT INTERVIEWS

Attribute	Participant 1 Clément	Participant 2 Chloé	Participant 3 Nathaniel	Totals
1 Art should be immediately available	0	0	6	6
2 Art takes time to create	0	0	2	2
3 Feelings of exclusion	2	0	6	8
4 Talent is God-given	2	0	3	5
5 Craftsmanship	11	1	14	26
6 The object should speak for itself	5	0	6	11
* 7 Art is created by a genius	7	5	14	26
* 8 Art is created by someone famous	6	5	10	21
9 Art is beautiful	14	10	3	27
** 10 Importance of the materials	10	2	3	15
** 11 Art should be representational	9	0	9	18
** 12 Natural materials or settings	4	0	0	4
** 13 Discovery	5	5	0	10

* these two attributes covered in a single section

** attributes volunteered by participants during interview

Out of the ten (10) attributes that were generated as part of the hypothesis, nine (9) were echoed by the participants. Only one, *Art has a consumer function*, did not arise during the course of the pre-visit interviews and was, therefore, eliminated.

Of the nine (9) attributes confirmed during the pre-visit interview process, two were deemed to have such a low occurrence rate as to be insignificant and were not included in the analysis. These were: *Art takes time to create* and *Talent is God-given*. However, in the course of the pre-visit interviews it became evident that the notion of talent was understood by the participants to mean what is needed to produce craftsmanship. Therefore, the notion of talent itself is included in the discussion of craftsmanship.

Attributes ten (10) through thirteen (13) were volunteered by participants during the pre-visit interviews. These attributes were not included in the original list (Table 1; Chapter Three) as they were not foreseen to be attributes that non-experts would associate with art. Each of the participant-added attributes has been addressed. Given that they were recurrent and contributed voluntarily by the participants, they were deemed to be significant.

DISCUSSION OF PRE-VISIT INTERVIEW RESULTS

Attributes are discussed in the order dictated by the frequency they occurred in the pre-visit interviews. The most frequently mentioned attribute has been addressed first, and so on. No conclusions can be drawn from this order concerning the importance of the attribute, as the participants were not asked to rank their concerns.

Art is Beautiful

When I first started this research, I did not suspect that beauty would be such an important factor in non-experts' association with art appreciation. As the results indicate, the total number of times the participants discussed this characteristic was twenty-seven (27), making it the most prevalent of the attributes. Perhaps the prevalence of this idea stems from the fact that the terms "beauty" and "art" have been used synonymously for centuries. What matters in this context is what beauty means as a response to an art experience for a non-expert participant.

Clément: Certaines de ces sculptures-là, c'était intéressant on avait envie de les toucher et de les caresser tellement elles étaient, elles éclataient de beauté (Douesnard Raw data, 2004, p. 7)

Nathaniel: En tous cas, les couleurs sont exceptionnelles, les traits des personnes (...) je trouve que c'est une des plus belles peintures qui a jamais été faite (Raw data, p.19).

Chloé: Je trouve [la peinture de Dali] merveilleuse parce que il y a une légèreté dans l'œuvre, très grande, il y a une, euh, c'est très très belle, l'œuvre en soit, visuellement, au moins pour moi. Et , ça me passe quelque chose comme l'amour (Raw data, p.1).

Thus, beauty seems to be a response to the exaltation of the senses and to be a pleasurable aesthetic response to art. "We label an object beautiful because it promotes an internal harmony or 'free play' of our mental faculties; we call something 'beautiful' when it elicits this pleasure" (Freeland, 2001, p. 12).

In this study, the most prominent factor in non-experts' appreciation of art is related to beauty; to a pleasurable aesthetic response to art. Yet beauty has been largely dismissed by contemporary artists and critics alike, and replaced by a quest for meaning. So, while my non-expert participants are still actively seeking beauty in a

work of art and responding to art as something beautiful, contemporary art works propose instead provoking comments and insights about art and society.

The brochure [of the conference *What happened to Beauty?*] described a kind of shift in recent artistic direction, from the active pursuit of beauty to its disregard or even repudiation, as artists turned their energies in political rather than aesthetic directions. (...). What accounts for [Beauty's predicament] instead is a kind of cultural convulsion we have been living through, in which beauty seems all at once irrelevant to the aims of art (Danto, 1992, p.2).

About a work of contemporary art Clément comments:

Ça donnait l'impression que le gars y avait commencé à construire une maison pis qu'il l'a pas finie. Tu sais, c'était comme, tu regardais ça pis tu disais...c'est dans mes jambes *pis c'est même pas beau* [emphasis added]. C'est comme heurter une chaîne de trottoir (Douesnard, 2004, Raw data, p.12).

Later in the interview Clément compares his experience with this same work of contemporary art to an encounter he had while on a canoe trip in the Canadian wilderness. In this natural setting, he encountered industrial containers; it was an unexpected clash which disturbed him in a negative way. He says he felt exactly the same way as when encountering the contemporary work of art; out walking in the beauty of nature and encountering something very depressing that made him want to leave.

Related to this idea of beauty in art is the notion that works of art can be understood and appreciated through their formal qualities:

Chloé : Les couleurs aussi, par ce que c'était des couleurs (...) légères, mais aussi en même temps, il y avait de, espèces de, euh, des marques, des contours en un noir qui donnait une perspective, qui donnait euh...un visuel intéressant. (...) Une chose que j'ai trouvé très intéressante dans cette œuvre, c'est l'ombre, qu'il y avait de ce personnage. C'était loin, mais en même temps, il y avait une importance aussi. Ça donnait une impression très belle (...) (Raw data, p.1).

Nathaniel : L'aménagement des couleurs, des teintes, tout ça s'y prête parce que c'est de l'art ça (Raw data, p.9).

Clément : En tous cas, les couleurs sont exceptionnelles, les traits des personnes (...). Je trouve que c'est une des plus belles peintures qui a jamais été faite (Raw data, p.19).

"We respond to the object's rightness of design, which satisfies our imagination and intellect, even though we are not evaluating the object's purpose" (Freeland, p.14). By focussing on the formal qualities of the art works, the non-expert viewer may be at odds with what contemporary art has to offer in the way of form. This is because a lot of contemporary art does not use form as an end in itself. What I mean by this is that, in contemporary art, the meaning of the work is not revealed (necessarily) by the form of the work. Also, with contemporary art, the usual formal language of art-- composition, shape, color, etc-- is no longer the focus of attention.

The non-expert viewers in my study are still looking for traditional formal elements and not finding them. Nathaniel, speaking of a work of art ²at the Pompidou Center in Paris says:

(...) il y avait des matériaux. Ce n'était pas nécessairement des peintures... C'était fait avec des vêtements. Je me souviens, il y avait un escabeau avec une lampe, qui avait été comme mise sur l'escabeau avec une corde...totalemment...C'était pas ridicule mais c'était presque du ridicule. Et c'était mis en exposition !
(Raw data p. 23)

² Unfortunately, the participant does not remember the name of the artist or the title of this work.

Craftsmanship

The number of times the participants mentioned craftsmanship as a characteristic was the second largest of all, twenty-six (26) times. It has become evident to me after analyzing the interviews, that craftsmanship was, to the participants of the study, a tangible expression of talent. Therefore, I realize that I cannot discuss them separately. Craftsmanship and talent are both to mean that a lot of skill is required in making the work of art and that this is evident in the plastic form and formal elements of the work of art. Clément says:

(...) une des chose qui était fascinante c'était la, la précision de la sculpture (Raw data, p.7).

Le fait que ce soit travaillé, bien, travaillé, qu'on sente la main de l'artiste dans ou derrière ça... On sent la virtuosité de la personne qui l'a fait, qui a travaillé là-dessus. On sent la, on ressent la, euh... la dextérité de la personne qui a sculpté les pièces (Raw data, p.7).

Bien que ça doit être assez difficile de faire de la sculpture sur bois, ça doit pas nécessairement être facile de la faire, à la fois la précision, la beauté des formes qui, euh, qui étaient présentées et la sensibilité qui s'en dégageait (Raw data, p.7).

Chloé: ...mais j'ai trouvé les traits infantiles. Je m'attendais à quelque chose de plus (...). Je trouvais pas un bon peintre, ce gars là. J'ai cru qu'il manquait des choses. C'est ça. Je suis restée avec l'impression qu'il manquait des choses, qu'il [l'artiste] manquait de talent (Raw data, p.5).

These excerpts indicate a wider concept of craftsmanship that I had originally expected the non-expert to associate with art appreciation. I originally understood that the non-experts would associate the idea of craftsmanship mostly with the idea that a lot of skill would be apparent in the work of art. However, the interviews reveal that participants also associated craftsmanship with an expression of talent, with the notion of precision, virtuosity, dexterity (manual ability) and the capacity to evoke

sensitivity. The idea of craftsmanship is also present when participants address the lack of these qualities.

The non-experts in my study seem to rely on their pre-conceived notion of craftsmanship to evaluate works of contemporary art. Speaking of works of contemporary art which he saw at the Pompidou Center in Paris, Nathaniel says:

Ça fait assez longtemps (...). Mais je me souviens, je n'en revenais pas. Je me disais, à quelque part, je vais trouver quelque chose qui a au moins, qui au moins représente un talent, que je peux voir un talent et je n'en voyais pas de talent. Je ne voyais pas de talent (Raw data, p.23).

Mais c'est comme je te dis, ça prend du talent faire de la peinture. C'est évident. Mais des montages de structure je le vois pas toujours le talent (Raw data, p.25).

The non-experts in my study are expecting evidence of craftsmanship (an expression of talent) when evaluating a work of contemporary art. This pre-conceived notion can prevent them from appreciating (some) contemporary works of art since contemporary artists, in attempting to convey meaning, will not necessarily rely on the display of craftsmanship to do so. It is evident here, that a conflict is caused by the apparent contradiction between the expectations of the viewer and the experience of actual appearance of the contemporary artwork.

Art is Created by a Genius & Art is Created by Someone Famous

It was anticipated that these two attributes would be clearly separate. During the pre-visit interviews it was evident that the participants had paired them. There were hardly any instances where one was mentioned without the other. Given that result, it was decided to examine them as two parts of a whole.

The idea that the art they enjoyed is created by a genius was often (26 times) and clearly communicated. Nathaniel, speaking of works of art he saw at the Louvre says:

Tu es dans un autre monde ou l'art a été a son apogée, en tout cas c'est ce que je pense, dans ce temps là avec des génies (...) (Raw data, p.20).

Ça prends des génies pour faire ça. Y'a pas d'autres mots. Y'a des gens qui ont du talent mais y'a encore plus, y'a des gens qui ont du génie. Ça prend du génie pour arriver à donner une telle expression à ces peintures (Raw data, p.20).

The pre-conceived idea about genius can prevent a non-expert from understanding and appreciating a work of art of contemporary art. Nathaniel continues:

À un moment donné y'avait une chaise qui était là, il y avait un soulier sur la chaise, y'avait de la peinture qui avait été lancée sur un côté de chaise et y'avait une espèce de structure. Je ne sais pas là. Je ne vois pas le génie là-dedans (Raw data, p. 20)

For Nathaniel, geniuses are able to represent subjects with ultimate realism, sensitivity, and passion. When these qualities are not present in a work of art, he is still looking for this expression of genius. This is truly a stunning example of an attribute which a non-expert associates with art. The apparent absence of genius as defined by the viewer prevents him or her from understanding some aspects of contemporary art. The topic of representation will be further developed when discussing the attribute *Art Should be Representational*.

When talking about art they enjoy, participants name specific artists such as: Rodin, Michelangelo, Salvador Dali, Vermeer and Picasso. Participants mentioned famous artist frequently, in all 23 times. While most of the artists that participants referred to were famous, all of them were male. It must be noted that I cannot conclude from the

data that the pre-conceived notion of fame would prevent non-experts from appreciating works of art by non-famous artists.

Art Should be Representational

Participants often commented how they enjoyed works of art that were representational. They did this for a total of eighteen (18) times. They seemed to especially enjoy high realism. In any case, it was important to them that the work of art accurately and clearly reflect visible external reality:

Clément: ...ce qui est fascinant c'est ce qu'il a réussi à traduire par certaines de ses sculptures là. On a l'impression vraiment, qu'on a une personne devant nous. On a une personne qui ressent quelque chose quand on regarde la sculpture (Raw data, p.7).

Nathaniel: ...c'est une création d'une telle intensité et d'un tel réalisme (...) le corps humain, tu fais juste déplacer un bras, pis c'est pas du tout la même affaire.(...) C'est ça que ces peintres là [peintres de la Renaissance] réussissaient à faire : les ombres, les jeux de lumières, c'est extraordinaire. Pour moi, c'est le summum de l'art ça (Raw data, p. 20)

Non-experts continue to use the idea of imitation (i.e. memetism) as a canon for art appreciation. The theory of imitation is one of “the most persistent of all theories of art” (Freeland, p. 31). It basically advocates that art should be an imitation of nature, of human life and action. “Distinguished art historian E.H. Gombrich (...) described the history of Western art (mainly painting) as a search for progressively more vivid renderings of reality. Innovations aimed at more perfect semblances. New theories of perspective in the Renaissance, and oil painting with its greater tactility and richness, enabled artists to achieve an increasingly convincing ‘copy’ of Nature” (Freeland, p.35).

Nathaniel: les peintres dans ce temps là donnaient tellement d'expressions dans leurs peintures, *et c'est la grande différence avec les peintres contemporains* [emphasis added]... c'était cette expression des corps en mouvements des muscles et des mains, on pouvait même exagérer la grosseur des muscles, mais c'était, c'était réel parce qu'on pouvait exagérer sur cet aspect là du corps, l'anatomie humaine (Raw data, p. 19)

Researcher : Est-ce que tu peux me la décrire cette œuvre-là qui ne te touchais pas du tout ?

Clément: C'est des lignes superposées qui sont mises une par-dessus l'autre pis à côté de l'autre. (...) C'était une œuvre abstraite oui (...) qui venait chercher strictement rien en moi (Raw data, p.5).

Clément: Euh, c'était une forme de sculpture abstraite aussi. C'est comme euh, c'est comme du béton armé courbé là. Je vois pas vraiment...Moi ça vient pas me chercher. Ça captive pas mon intérêt, ça traduit pas une sensibilité pour moi (...). Ni beau, ni intéressant...euh, y'a rien la dedans qui me surprenne, m'étonne, me captive (...). C'est de l'art abstrait j'imagine... (Raw data, p. 5).

Nathaniel: Je pense que c'est le contemporain, le gros défaut du contemporain c'était trop abstrait pour les gens (Raw, data, p. 24).

Yet again, we find that these non-expert participants are expecting one thing, representation (with a high degree of realism) and are being offered something else all together. Contemporary art that is abstract seems to leave them cold, because they are not trained to decipher the formal qualities of abstraction but also because they experience great difficulty in finding an entry into the work of art.

Importance of Materials

Participants mentioned, a total of fifteen (15) times, that they did not enjoy the materials used in contemporary works of art:

Nathaniel: Mais, George Pompidou, j'ai vraiment pas aimé ses assemblages de metal, de tissus, de matières différentes (Raw data, p. 25).

Clément: Je peux pas te le décrire mais je trouve ça à la fois, pas beau, inutile, et cet espèce de béton qui sortait de ça (...) avec le froid, ça va

commencer à craquer. Ça va être encore plus laid. Attends que l'herbe commence à pousser là –dedans. C'est pas intéressant (Raw data, p. 12).

Clément: [Une expérience avec des matériaux d'art contemporain] c'est comme quand j'étais tombé avec mon canot près de Yellowknife dans une petite clairière pis tout ce que tu avais c'était une espèce d'entreposage de tonneaux de fer là rouillés avec des petites marques « produits dangereux » dessus... (Raw data, p.13).

Non-expert viewers often have a spontaneous aversion to contemporary materials.

Other research has revealed this. “ Au cours des années, nous avons eu l'occasion d'observer les réactions des adultes face à l'art contemporain. Ceux-ci sont souvent décontenancés par ces œuvres, révoltés par leur *matérialité* [emphasis added]. Ils les jugent sévèrement et ne leur trouvent aucune valeur esthétique » (Émond, 1999, p. 164). During Richard Lachapelle's study « Le regardeur non-initié et l'art contemporain public » (2001-2005), several participants frequently expressed their aversion to contemporary materials. They expressed repulsion at rust and at the use of industrial materials, such as concrete. During the pilot project for this study, I asked Antoinette what she thought about materials used in the work of contemporary art *Aux armes citoyens* by the artist Vaillancourt, displayed in the show *C'est ma place publique* , in 2004 at the Monopoli Gallery in Montréal. She answered:

(...) ça a l'air de la poubelle. Tu sais quand ça, des matériaux recyclés, des empilements de choses. Tiens, un empilement hétéroclite de chaises ou de vidanges. Y'en avait un d'ailleurs, dans les années soixante. Y'en avait un qui avait fait un bloc avec énormément de vidanges qu'il avait ramassées dans une rue, je sais plus si c'était à Moscou, une grande ville et ça représentait en fait tout ce qui était dans la rue comme emballage, comme chose brisées, comme objets de consommation(...). C'est de la vidange. *Je vois pas l'art là-dedans [emphasis added]*. Je vois un ramassis de vidange. (...) Mais qui n'est pas une oeuvre d'art parce qu'elle n'est pas fabriquée. Elle est ramassée de choses fabriquées par des industries (Douesnard, Raw data for pilot project, 2004, p.11).

The pre-conceived notions about materials used in contemporary art strongly hinder the ability of the viewer to understand works of contemporary art. Contemporary artists rarely use traditional materials. They use industrial materials, organic materials as well as found and recycled ones. Most importantly they often use materials *symbolically*. For example, garbage as decay or, the more famous, meat as human flesh, in Jana Sterbak's *Vanitas, Flesh Dress for an Albino Anorexic* (1987) which caused such a public controversy when it was shown at the National Gallery of Canada in 1991. Non-experts seem unable to interpret the symbolic value of the work because they cannot overcome their repulsion to the types of the materials used by contemporary artists.

The Art Object Should Speak for Itself

The assumption that the object of art should not require explanation falls squarely into the now established and preponderant dichotomy between the expectations of the non-expert and what contemporary art offers. This attribute was mentioned eleven (11) times by the participants during the pre-visit interviews.

Et c'est en même temps peut-être la seule chose qui va soit faire que je vais me désintéresser de cette forme d'art là [art contemporain], est en même temps là. C'est qui faut qu'on te l'explique pour que tu puisses voir de quoi. De ce que l'artiste parlait. Et en d'autres termes, on se pose toujours la question : « Est-ce qu'il faut qu'on me l'explique parce que c'est compliqué ou il faut qu'on me l'explique parce que finalement l'œuvre forme pas assez un tout pour pouvoir *s'expliquer d'elle-même* [emphasis added](Raw data p. 35).

Here Clément has identified one of the problems that non-experts have with contemporary art. The non-expert does not know that the “subject” or content of the work is not necessarily self-explanatory. He relies upon his belief that art should be

more complete and therefore speak for itself. When it does not, he blames the artist or his work of art for not being “good enough”;

...je me demande toujours, est-ce que le but d’une exposition c’est de nous expliquer c’est quoi qu’on doit voir? Ou est-ce que c’est par la qualité du travail qui a été effectué ? *Que la chose se révèle d’elle-même* [emphasis added]. Ça revient toujours à ça pour moi (Raw data p. 35).

Speaking of the works of art by the artist Riopelle ³, Nathaniel says:

C’était une espèce de tapisserie de coups de pinceaux. C’est tout. (...) Si il y avait eu un guide... Mais c’est ça qui est dommage. Si il faut que ça te prenne un guide pour pouvoir embarquer dans la peinture, automatiquement tu crées comme un, pas une barrière. Si tu veux que les gens soient sensibilisés à ton œuvre, il faut que ça soit accessible (Raw data, p.28).

Nathaniel was very disappointed with his visit to the *Centre Pompidou* in Paris. I asked him if he thought a guided tour would have made a difference. He answered:

C’est certain que ça aurait donné une dimension différente. Ça aurait donné, c’est sûr, sûr, sûr. Une visite guidée aussi. Euh, que j’aurais peut-être dû prendre. Mais il y en a pas toujours selon les différentes expositions (...). Mais parcontre si tu as besoin d’une explication, d’une visite guidée pour comprendre à chaque fois là tu te détache en fait, tu te détache un peu du peuple tu te détaches du...c’est ça je fait partie du peuple, tu te détaches de cette compréhension que les gens ont besoin d’avoir, OK ? Pour justement, comprendre l’art. Faut qu’il y ait une compréhension (Raw data p. 24).

From these comments, we can see that there is a pre-conceived idea that, somehow, the work of art should speak for itself. Even with the possibility of a guided tour, of access to the information that could render the works of contemporary art accessible, does not alter the participant’s idea that the fault lies with the work of art. Another explanation of why the work of art isn’t understood is that the viewer is not skilled enough to read the work:

Pour le regardeur non initié, les premières expériences avec l’art contemporain sont souvent difficiles et mêlées d’angoisses. C’est sans doute à cause d’un

³ Unfortunately, the participant did not mention which work in particular by Riopelle he was referring to.

manque de correspondance entre ses attentes préalables et ses perceptions immédiates de l'œuvre devant lui. Cet écart important, signe d'une lacune dans les habiletés du regardeur, met en évidence son besoin de formation (Lachapelle, 1992, p.43)

Feelings of Exclusion

In the pre-visit interviews, both Nathaniel and Clément commented about their feelings of exclusion from the world of art for a total number of eight (8) times. The feelings of exclusion they entertained were characterized by their own inability to make art.

Nathaniel: Mais je ne serais jamais capable de faire une peinture comme Gérico ou Michel Ange a fait (...). Pourtant... en tout cas, je me considère pas comme artiste du tout (Raw data, p. 24).

Clément : On sent l'artiste derrière et y'a toujours ce sentiment là de se dire, cette personne là le fait et il y a peu de personne qui réussiraient a le faire aussi bien (...). C'est de dire j'ai vu quelque chose *que moi je pourrais pas faire* [emphasis added] (Raw data, p. 8).

These comments seem to indicate that their pre-conceived notion of exclusion would prevent these participants from creating or even try to create a work of art. We will see in Chapter Five that this characteristic is significant for this study since the artist René Derouin encourages visitors to make art as part of his pedagogical approach. The topic becomes more prominent in the post-visit interviews.

Some forms of contemporary art have evolved especially so that the members of the audience are actively engaged in the creation of the works. Performance artists, for example, often include their audience in the making and in the shaping of the event. Many non-experts have not been exposed to such type of contemporary art and can therefore not entertain the idea of themselves as creators.

Art Should Be Immediately Accessible.

This attribute was mentioned six (6) times. Because postmodern art is not only about form, its appearance does not always give immediate clues to its message. It may use subtle suggestions, metaphors, allegories, etc, to hint at its layered complexities. This is Nathaniel describing his experience with some works of contemporary art at the Centre d'art contemporain Pompidou in Paris:

Quand je suis arrivé là j'étais totalement ouvert, au même niveau que lorsque j'étais au Louvre. (...). Mais cette exposition là en particulier d'œuvres contemporaines, de structures, de montages(...) J'avais beau essayé de comprendre ce que les artistes essayait de prouver...Pour moi ça valait pas grand-chose. Pour moi, ça me faisait pas rien (...) ou il a voulu en venir avec tout ça finalement. Et peut-être ça aurait changé mon opinion. C'est certain que l'artiste, c'est lui qui l'a crée, c'est lui qui est capable de dire qu'est-ce qu'il pensait lui, dans quel mood il était quand il a fait ça. (...). On aurait peut-être fait des liens. Mais quand tu es comme pris, c'était quasiment pris *hors context* [emphasis added]...(Raw data, p.25)

We will see in Chapter Five how the artist René Derouin brings context and therefore understanding of the works of art to the participants during their visit at the exhibition site. We will also look at some research that comments on the topic of context. In Chapter Six we will revisit the idea of context and to see how determinant it is for the comprehension of some aspects of contemporary art.

Discovery

When I first started this research, I was looking for characteristics which I imagined would hinder the appreciation of contemporary art. I took this approach in the hope that I could eventually propose solutions to them. I did not expect that a characteristic of the art viewer's experience could actually help in the understanding of contemporary art.

Discovery was an attribute volunteered by the participants in the pre-visit interviews. It was discussed twelve (12) times. During the pre-visit interviews, with Chloé and Clément, there is a sequence in their interaction with some works of art, which is first surprise and then discovery:

Chloé: Moi j'aime beaucoup que je sois surprise avec l'œuvre. C'est ça que j'aime.(...) C'est l'intelligence de l'auteur je crois, c'est comment il met les choses dedans je crois (Raw data, p. 4)

When asked about an exhibition that he enjoyed⁴, Clément responded:

Cette fameuse exposition là à Québec des artistes québécois, je m'y attendais pas du tout. (...). Je suis resté surpris. Je suis retourné une couple de mois plus tard (...). Ça traduit une époque que je ne savais pas. Je ne savais pas qu'ils avaient cette expertise là. Et j'ai appris à apprécier cette salle-là parce que peut-être qu'un moment dans ma vie j'ai voulu prendre plus conscience ou ça m'a faite prendre conscience, un, qu'il y avait des belles choses qui se faisaient ici, y'a deux cents ans et que je ne connaissait pas du tout... (Raw data p. 15)

For Nathaniel, there is an apparent openness to discovery:

Quand je me donne la peine d'aller voir une exposition (...) tu [meaning himself] es tout à fait ouvert à ce que tu vas voir et sans t'attendre à ce que ça soit comme ça. (...) Tu veux apprendre, tu veux chercher des choses. Je m'attends à *découvrir* [emphasis added] (Raw data, p.8).

These excerpts show a disposition for learning through discovery when experiencing art: "With regard to the process of learning (...) [discovery learning] refers to the unique individual experience by which concepts evolve in the mind of the learner rather than being transmitted ready made...discovery is a process of search and

⁴ Clément is referring to works of art he saw during an exhibition of merchant ship figureheads at the Musée des civilisations in Québec City.

selection. (Tamir, P. 1994, p.1538). Discovery learning is advantageous because “it is more meaningful” and because “the student discovers the very principles which connect the information” (Tamir, p.1538). Also, it “enhances motivation, interest, and satisfaction” as well as “the development of intellectual capacities, information and problem solving skills” (Tamir, p. 1538)

Natural Materials and Settings

This is the last of the attributes addressed spontaneously by the participants. A characteristic which participant Clément volunteered during his pre-visit interview is that of natural materials and settings. This occurred four (4) times. As much as Clément was repulsed by some materials found in contemporary works of art such as concrete and rusted steel, he seemed delighted with the use of natural materials:

Researcher : ...c'était important pour toi que ce soit un matériau naturel ?

Clément : Oui, parce que ce n'est pas un matériau que tu crées pour faire quelque chose, c'est (...) un matériaux que tu prends dans la nature et que tu euh, que tu as le défi de créer à partir de, de ce que la nature t'as donné, et de l'intégrer à son environnement tout en lui donnant une forme avec les caractéristiques qui sont propres au matériau (Raw data, p. 7).

Clément : Je préfère les matériaux...est-ce qu'on peut dire qu'on préfère les matériaux naturels aux autres ? (...). Bien jusque dans la mesure où un matériau est naturel, oui, je vais peut-être préférer ces matériaux-là aux autres (Raw data, p.14).

Clément also thought that a natural setting could be favourable to art viewing:

J'aimerais ça un jour aller, il paraît que les jardins du Luxembourg y'a plein de sculptures ? (...) je pense que l'art se marie bien avec la nature (Raw data, p. 12).

We will see in Chapter Five that this characteristic is significant for this study. This is because the artist René Derouin uses natural materials in natural settings as part of a strategy to get non-expert viewers to approach contemporary art.

In this chapter I have reviewed and discussed the implications of the results of the first research activity: the pre-visit interview. Now, in the next chapter, I will present, in relation to the same art viewing attributes, how my study participants responded after having visited the research site-- *Les Jardins du précambrien*—and having participated in a guided tour of that site with the artist, René Derouin.

CHAPTER FIVE

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF POST-VISIT INTERVIEWS

In Chapter 4, we saw that non-experts have certain pre-conceived ideas about art and that some of these ideas prevent them from appreciating some aspects of contemporary art. In this chapter, I will examine and discuss the results of the interviews conducted with the participants, following their visit at the Derouin Foundation site. Throughout this discussion, I will endeavour to answer the following questions: Have some of the pre-conceived ideas entertained by the non-experts changed? Does the art and educational practice espoused by René Derouin help non-expert viewers to understand or appreciate some aspects of contemporary art? How is René Derouin's approach successful in achieving these objectives?

First, I will describe the guided tour that the participants undertook at the site of the symposium, starting with the visit to the artist's studio. Then I will talk about our excursion to the principal site of the exhibition *Les jardins du précambrien* and finish with a presentation of the visit to the collaborative studio on the grounds of the exhibition site. In this studio, visitors create works of art that are included in the in-situ exhibition. Finally, I will present participants' comments about the limitations of both the tour and the site.

THE GUIDED TOUR

René Derouin started the tour with the interior of his house. This put the participants at ease, and enabled them to build a personal rapport with the artist. It also had the

advantage that Derouin could start explaining the philosophy underlying his work, a philosophy that was also evident in the surroundings of the house:

Nathaniel: Juste sa maison, il nous a expliqué comment il avait construit sa maison et tu comprenais tout à fait où il voulait s'en aller et tout à fait ce qu'il voulait faire. Pis sa maison était le reflect de ce monsieur là, tout à fait. Donc c'était... les beams qui étaient agencés comme ça (...). J'ai vraiment admiré ses œuvres à lui (...) des sentiers et tout ça représentent un peu ce qui se passe sur son terrain (Raw data, p. 54)

On the walls of the living room and dining room, there were many aesthetically pleasing works, mainly woodcut prints, which, although abstract, could be seen to represent the surrounding landscape once this was explained (please refer to figure 1). The experience with these first, very accessible artworks, paved the way for understanding the more conceptual works that followed on the site. The visit to the artist's studio increased the artist's credibility in the eyes of my study participants because they witnessed decades worth of sustained art making.

Outside, the in-situ installations are scattered across the forest that surrounds the Derouin dwelling. The pathways, which Derouin has been transforming for decades, are organically designed to follow the geography of the terrain. The glacial age rocks were not removed but are instead highlighted. The trees were cleared away to make just enough space for the walking trails. The curbs in the pathways, which wind up and down the terrain, regulate a slow and rhythmic walk that leads up to the artworks. These are harmoniously integrated into the setting (please refer to figure 2). Derouin briefly addressed each work. Included in the description are the history, purpose and media of the work. The tour ended at the communal studio which is located in the forest, a stone's throw from the installation. There, the study participants were shown the tools, the studio set up, and the art works created by hundreds of

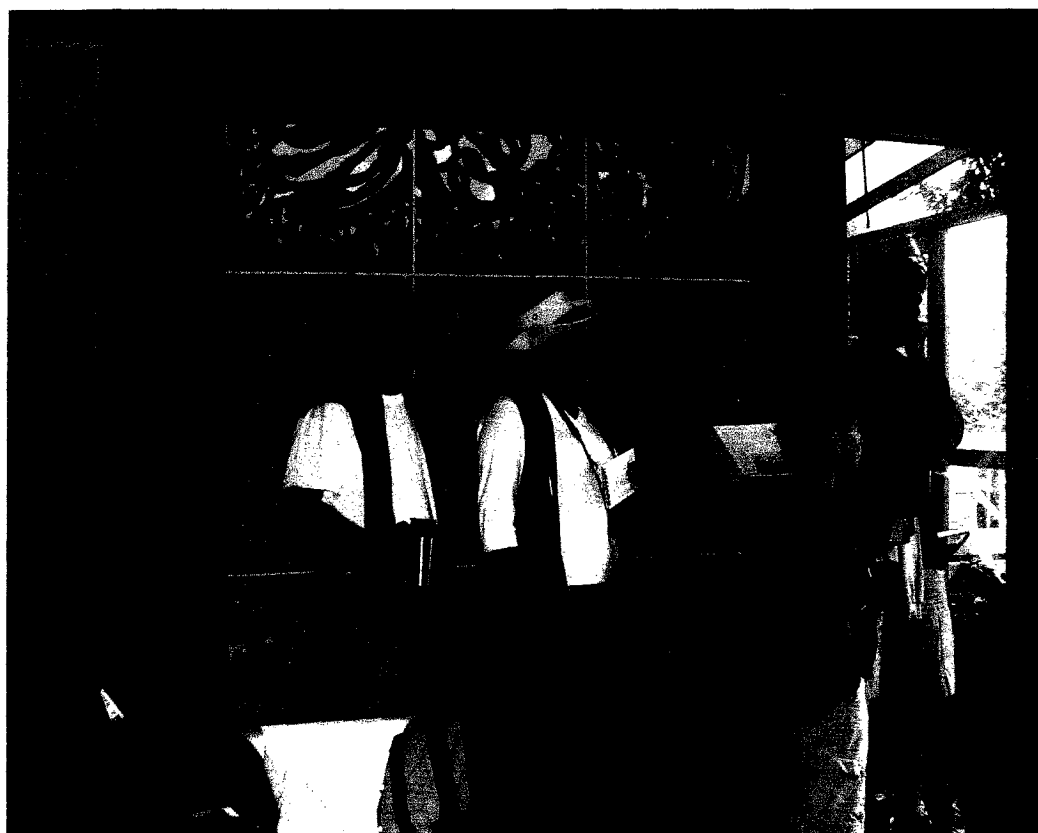


Figure 1: study participants in front of René Derouin's woodcut *Fragments de territoires*, *La Minerve*, 2001



Figure 2: René Derouin, *Installation temporaire* avec poème de Gaston Miron, 2003

visitors like my study participants, who have visited the symposium in previous years. From a display of photographs we could see that the clay pieces the visitors had created here, were then fired and integrated into various installations on the site (please refer to figure 3 and 4).

DISCUSSION OF POST-VISIT INTERVIEW RESULTS

Art is Beautiful

While visiting the various installations on the site, participants were still looking for beauty, for a delight of the senses and they were finding it. They were finding it in the natural environment and also in the works of art which evoked a pleasurable aesthetic response. This time though, the notion of beauty was not a deterrent to understanding others aspects of the contemporary work of art, but a stepping stone in that direction. The study participants were experiencing the qualities of the works of art but also understanding the *content* of the works of art. For example, Clément talks about his first encounter with the work of art *Installation collective du public*, 2003 (please refer to figure 5):

...j'ai trouvé ça très intéressant. Entre autres les figurines, les petites figurines installées dans des mondes qui sont distincts. J'ai trouvé ça le fun d'autant plus que les figurine étaient magnifiques, ça aide beaucoup. C'est sûr que ça donne une crédibilité (Raw data, p. 37)

Here Nathaniel explains his understanding of this same work of art:

Mais pour parler des œuvres en particulier, il y en a une, y'a un rocher, c'est une petite île, on voit que ça se passe là. Et on se retranspose un peu plus loin et c'est nous qui se trouve à être sur ce petit rocher là, ça nous entoure, c'est comme un nid. Ça aussi c'était très intéressant (Raw data, p. 46)

Here, the notion of beauty is used as a lure to get the attention of the viewer. Once this is accomplished, the participant is metaphorically speaking "reeled in" for further investigation as to the meaning of the work of art.



Figure 3: Clay birds created by visitors to the site, which became part of the collaborative installation on the site of the Symposium. *Installation collective du public*, 2003



Figure 4 : The artist René Derouin showing some of the numerous visitors who make clay fish. These pieces were included in the collaborative work for the in-situ exhibition of La forêt enchantée exhibition during the Symposium of 2003.

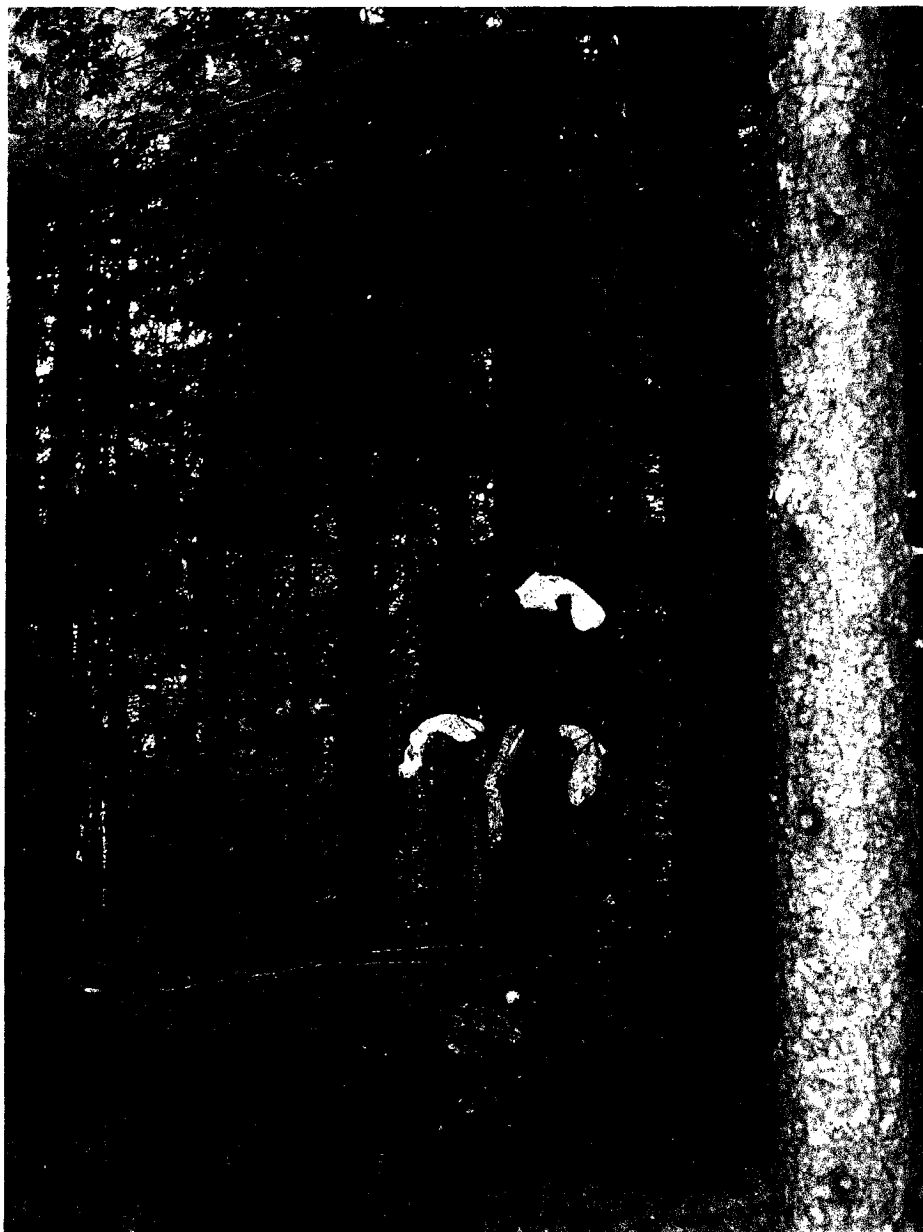


Figure 5: René Derouin, *Installation in-situ* avec poème de Hélène Dorion, branches peintes en bleu et céramique, 2003

Natural Materials or Settings

We saw in Chapter 4 that a natural setting is a favourable environment for non-expert viewers to engage in art appreciation. This is consistently true of the experience of the participants in this research project as regards the exhibition site *Les jardins du précambriens*. All three participants stated that the natural environment was one of the aspects that they enjoyed the most during the touring of the exhibition. As Nathaniel puts it: “D’abord, définitivement le contexte, c’est-à-dire le contexte dans la nature. Y’a pas personne, je pense qui peut détester ça, Ça commence bien » (Raw data, p. 45). « Je trouvais que c’était une faveur qu’on donnait à l’artiste de s’exprimer dans ce context là [de la nature environnante]. Le contexte est idéal » (Raw data, p. 47). Chloé says : « Ce que j’ai le plus apprécié c’est le, c’était l’environnement, c’était dans une forêt. Ça c’est la première chose » (Raw data, p.28).

Regarding the artwork themselves, they are often integrated with the natural environment as is the case with the work *Installation in situ*, 2003 (please refer to figure 6). This is an aspect of the exhibition that participants enjoyed very much: Chloé says: “La deuxième chose [qu’elle a le plus apprécié], c’est que les œuvres, en fait elles sont intégrées avec la nature » (Raw data, p. 28).

Clément: Peut-être que l’environnement, pris individuellement, ou les œuvres prises individuellement, n’auraient pas eu cet impact là. C’est vraiment la fusion des deux ensembles qui provoque l’intérêt et suscite la réflexion (Raw data, p. 35)



Figure 6: René Derouin, *Installation in situ* avec fil, plomb, céramiques et poème de Marie Lapointe, 2003.

Importance of the Materials

In her pre-visit interview, Chloé had difficulty relating to a contemporary work of art⁵ because the artist was using, instead of paint on a palette, the palettes themselves as materials for creating the work (Raw data, p.5). But when she encountered Sonia Robertson's *Tendre les regards* (2002), a work of art created with unconventional materials at the Derouin installation site, she was able to appreciate it. This work of art was created using glass lenses suspended between tree trunks by strings. The glass lenses were at eye level and you could get as close to them as if you were actually wearing the lenses. They were all of different prescription strengths, so that looking in each one gave the viewer a different representation of the surrounding reality (please refer to figure 7). Was it the setting? Was it the symbolic yet literal aspect of the media? Was it the environmental subject? Perhaps it was a combination of these elements that made the work accessible:

J'ai trouvé les matériaux très originaux. Dans cette œuvre-là, avec les matériaux, on pourrait, à travers les lentilles, regarder peut-être une dimension différente (...). On pourrait voir l'environnement d'une façon différente avec les lentilles (Raw data, p.2)

While experiencing this artwork, Chloé was exposed to an aspect of art on which many contemporary artists work: that of changing our perception of reality so that we, as viewers, can acquire new visions and new understandings of the world.

In his pre-visit interview, Clément admits being repulsed by contemporary art works that use industrial materials such as the concrete normally used for making sidewalks. In relation to the actual work of art he was discussing at the time, he also admitted to preferring natural materials such as the wood that was used for the construction of a ships' figureheads,

⁵ The participant does not remember the name of the artist or title of the work because the art work was produced live during a summer art fair in the city of Montréal.



Figure 7: Detail of in situ work by Sonia Robertson, *Tendre les regards*, 2002

the actual art work he was discussing at the time. Yet, when we discussed the importance of the materials he saw used in the in-situ works at the Symposium (such as windows) he declared materials to be just a tool to work with, important *to create the essence* of the work. When asked what he thought of the materials of the artworks at the Derouin Symposium site he said:

Clément : J'ai aucune réflexion là-dessus [the materials used] parce que chaque œuvre est particulière en soi. Il y avait toutes sortes de matériaux qui étaient utilisés et, euh, je ne pourrais pas, euh, un matériel, c'est juste un outil de travail. C'est rien d'autre que ça. C'est pas tant l'outil qui est utilisé mais la finalité que l'outil va revêtir, une fois qu'il va devenir pièce, une fois qu'il va être objectivé par la personne qui travaille avec, c'est vraiment, ce qu'elle va représenter.

Researcher : Donc, le sujet de l'œuvre devient plus important ?

Clément: Oui. L'outil c'est juste un moyen de travail. C'est rien d'autre que ça (Raw data, p. 36)

The Object Should Speak for Itself

Since Clément now has access to the content of the artwork, the materials do not seem as important to him. But how did he gain this access to the work of art? “ Si on me l'avait pas expliqué pourquoi ça a été fait, je ne l'aurais pas vu. Si on ne m'avait pas expliqué, pardon, je ne l'aurais pas vu » (Raw data, p.35). « Quand on me l'a expliqué, j'ai trouvé que c'était vraiment intéressant » (Raw data, p. 36).

When the guided tour conducted by René Derouin arrived at the work *Cabane à Julie*, Hélène Escobedo, 1996 (please refer to figure 8) he explained to the participants the history and origin of the piece. It was created a few years ago, for his young daughter to have her own playhouse in the forest. When the ground on which it stood became part of the exhibition site for installation works, the artist Escobedo asked to work with the remains of the playhouse to make it into an in-situ piece. Perhaps fuelled by

this introduction and evocative history of the new piece *La cabane à Julie*, Clément seemed certain and bold enough to make his own additional interpretation, proposing a possible future scenario for the piece: “ The trees will grow and the glass windows will explode”[Douesnard, personal communication, 9 August, 2004].

In his pre-visit interview, Nathaniel admitted not being able to enter or appreciate the works of contemporary art that were proposed to him at the Pompidou Center for Contemporary art in Paris. He stated: “Je pense que c’est le contemporain, le gros défaut du contemporain c’était trop abstrait pour les gens”(Raw data, p.24). He told me that at the Pompidou Center for Contemporary art there were no explanations about the artworks whatsoever. But that at the site of the Symposium, the presence of the artist and the fact that you could ask him question made a difference in his capacity to understand the works of art (Raw data, p.48)

Some of the artworks were accompanied by writings from poets. This is another strategy Derouin uses to help viewers enter the works of art. He invites another discipline such as poetry to accompany the works of art.



Figure 8 : Artist René Deroui and participants in front of H  l  ne Escobedo's (Mexico) *La Cabane de Julie*, (1996). In-situ installation with windows from the Angus Shops. Symposium Int  gration aux lieux par la Fondation Derouin.

Nathaniel : On pouvait dénoté le travail de chacun des artistes avec un peu d'explication et d'imagination. On pouvait vraiment comprendre la mise en scène à partir du poème (...) (Raw data, p. 46)

Poems are effective for their evocativeness and for suggesting avenues for reading the works of art. I find this a particularly effective way of engaging non-experts in viewing art. Poetry sparks ideas, suggests similarities and differences and fuels the imagination. Imagination can be an important tool for understanding some aspect of contemporary art:

“In order to symbolically interpret the materials used in art objects, the use of imagination, on the part of the viewer, is essential. Imagination is required to go beyond what is immediately apparent in the work in order to formulate hypotheses about the possible meanings of the materials in relation to the subject matter of the work of art” (Lachapelle, 2002, no page)

Feelings of exclusion

In the pre-visit interview, Clément entertained feelings of exclusion concerning his capacity to create works of art : “On sent l’artiste derrière et y’a toujours ce sentiment là de se dire, cette personne là le fait et il y a peu de personne qui réussiraient à le faire aussi bien (...). C’est de dire j’ai vu quelque chose *que moi je pourrais pas faire*” (Raw data, p. 8)”. Yet when he visited the exhibition site, he encountered a poem that provoked a desire to write one himself:

Researcher : Est-ce que tu aurais aimé ça avoir un papier pis un crayon pis pouvoir participer à faire ton propre poème ? Est-ce que ça t’as donné le goût de créer entre autre ? De pouvoir créer ta propre...

Clément : Oui, c’est intéressant, ça stimule ça. Ça donne envie de ça. (...)
« Dans mon rêve silencieux tu plantes ton pieux » (Raw data, p. 39)

Cément’s thoughts on the subject of exclusion were also directed at the way Derouin successfully guides the general public who visits the exhibition to create in the on-site

studio (please refer to figure 3 and 4):

Je comprends ce qu'il veut faire et je dois dire que j'ai du respect pour les efforts qui sont mis là-dedans. C'est pas toujours facile de à la fois susciter l'expression et y mettre des balises (...). Ça prend un caractère à la fois éphémère et diversifié pour que la création des personnes qui ne sont pas des créateurs, c'est-à-dire le public puisse s'exprimer (...) Tu veux intéresser une personne dans quelque chose dans lequel, à la base, elle n'est pas une pro (...). Si je veux susciter quelque chose au sein de cette personne-là je vais lui donner des sujets distincts, d'années en années. Je vais mettre des balises différentes pour garder son intérêt et lui permettre d'avoir du plaisir à le faire (...). (Raw data, p. 39)

In the pre-visit interview, Nathaniel discusses a work of contemporary art from the Pompidou Art Center: "C'était pas ridicule mais c'était presque du ridicule. Et c'était mis en exposition ! Moi, une exposition de même, je serais capable d'en faire, je crois. Mais je ne serais jamais capable de faire une peinture comme Géricô" (Raw data, p. 23). Somewhere between creating something "ridiculous" and creating a "masterpiece", Nathaniel seems to be able to reconcile himself with the possibility of creating a work by using natural materials, in the image of what he has seen as entirely possible at the installation site:

...Finalement, ça me faisait penser à lorsqu'on était très jeune, Louvetaux (...). Dans une certaine mesure on créait quelque chose à partir d'un emplacement (...). Ça me faisait un peu penser à ça. On étaient pas des artistes, on faisait ce qu'on pouvait et puis, un petit bivouac avec des roches. Et encore là sans détruire(Raw data, p.47).

Both Clément and Nathaniel were reconciled to the possibility of becoming creators.

The use of natural materials in natural settings introduced Nathaniel into the realm of the creators.

Clément even started a poem! We will see later that Derouin uses different disciplines as a way to engage different audiences.

Craftsmanship

In the pre-visit interviews, participants focussed on the formal qualities of the works of art. Craftsmanship and talent (these included the notions of precision, virtuosity, dexterity, manual ability and the ensuing capacity to evoke sensibility) were important standards by which to judge a work of art. In their interviews, conducted after visiting the exhibition, the participants rarely mentioned these qualities about the artworks. Rather they became much more concerned with the messages about the environment, and their new visions of the world. This is to say that they became more interested in understanding the concepts, content and context of the works of art than in looking at and experiencing the qualities previously associated with craftsmanship or talent:

Clément: Je suis une personne extrêmement difficile à convaincre. (...) Ce qui est important c'est qu'il y a une image qui m'est restée dans la tête. Pis l'image c'est ce que tu peux faire avec ton environnement. Pis comment tu peux, avec ton environnement, sans le modifier, comment tu peux le rendre plus intéressant. Plus beau. Pis comment tu peux voir des choses autour de toi, comment tu peux redécouvrir des choses que tu connais, comment tu peux les découvrir et les redécouvrir d'une façon nouvelle (Raw data, p.45)

Art should be representational

Now, I will talk about two of the attributes that were volunteered by the participants. Before the visit to the Derouin symposium, as indicated in his pre-visit interview, Nathaniel was mostly concerned with the ability of the artists to render with vivid realism such things as the human body and human emotions. In his post-visit interview he seems inclined to consider other purposes for art. Nathaniel tells us how Derouin helped him achieve a more conceptual vision of a particular art work:

Pour parler des œuvres en particulier, il y en a une, y'a un rocher, c'est une petite île, on voit que ça se passe là. Et on se re-transpose un peu plus loin et c'est nous qui se trouve à être sur ce petit rocher là, ça nous entoure, c'est comme un nid. (...) Ça aussi c'était très intéressant.. Là il [Derouin] nous a

expliqué : Là vous- voyez, ça nous explique le phénomène. Là au lieu de toujours regarder par terre, ça nous dirigeait vers le haut. (...) il nous avait expliqué, ça nous explique, nous montre la verticalité. Parce que effectivement, on avait l'occasion de regarder vers le haut au lieu de regarder vers le bas. Alors, lui [Derouin] avait expliqué dans ses termes d'artiste, qu'on était porté à regarder vers le haut et c'était tout à fait vrai de la manière que les éléments étaient agencés, les matériaux, naturels et synthétiques – il n'y en avait pas beaucoup de synthétiques – et c'était tout à fait vrai. Ces commentaires étaient justes (Raw data, p. 46)

Again, the interconnection of the works with nature, and the explanations of the artist converge to present other ways of seeing for the non-expert viewer of contemporary art.

Discovery

We saw in chapter 4 that the newly identified attribute of discovery favoured non-experts' appreciation of art. This idea is further reinforced by their accounting of the experience they had during their visit at the installation site

Researcher : Ayant en tête ton expérience des installations des jardins du précambrien, qu'est-ce que tu as le plus apprécié et pourquoi?
Clément : Je pense que c'est la surprise. On ne s'attend pas à ça. On ne s'attend pas à un montage comme ça. On s'attend pas à, euh...C'est surprenant. C'est tout simplement surprenant. Euh, l'organisation de l'espace. La façon avec laquelle y'a une interaction entre plusieurs disciplines artistiques surprend. Surprend et séduit en même temps (Raw data, p.34)

Surprise and discovery lend great appeal to the learning process! René Derouin uses these as a pedagogical approach to ignites the interests of participants. However, he leaves to the participants themselves the joy of the surprise and the ownership of the understanding that results. As Clément puts it :

Les explications de l'artiste M. Derouin permettent de comprendre comment sont organisées les choses et le but des choses, pourquoi c'est fait ainsi et en même temps, c'est pas tellement une explication. L'explication est juste minimale pour te permettre de rêvasser sur le reste. Donc te permettre finalement de pouvoir de toi-même d'essayer de...Il fait juste finalement donner le petit déclic pis c'est ton cerveau qui fait le reste. Pis ça c'est intéressant parce que finalement ça te permet d'imaginer toutes sortes de

choses. Et je crois que c'est ça aussi le but que chaque personne puisse donner sa propre dimension à la chose.(...) Ça stimule à ce moment là une liberté de pouvoir un peu voir là-dedans ce que tu veux voir (Raw data, p.41).

As a participant-observer during the tour, I noticed that Derouin used clear and simple language easing the participants into a discovery of the works of art: "L'art est déjà en soi quelque chose d'assez compliquée, non? C'est déjà assez compliqué une démarche d'artiste. La complexifier dans sa communication, c'est de ne pas vouloir communiquer avec personne (Douesnard, personal interview with René Derouin, November 11, 2002)

OTHER ASPECTS OF CONTEMPORARY ART

In this part of the chapter, I wish to address additional points that surfaced as a result of the visit to the *Jardins du précambrien*.

Ephemerality

There are other aspects of contemporary art which were not explored in Chapter 4 and which the visit of the exhibition *Les jardins du précambrien* allowed the participants of this study to discover. Perhaps the most significant one is the notion of ephemerality. This is a recent idea pertaining to Western post-modern contemporary art. We can think of the piece *Un paysage dans le paysage – Le paysage comme tableau vivant* (1993-1996) by artist Larivée, displayed at the Métis Gardens in Rimouski. In this work she uses moss which she lets grow as part of the site of her artwork. The moss is laid on rocks in the middle of a river and is permitted to grow as spring arrives and decay as the summer ends. It is a notion that greatly contrast with the more common notion of permanence; where the duration of the work of art is of outmost importance. For example, museums spend fortunes and considerable time to

maintain works of art. Another example of this notion is how famous artists seem to attain immortality through their artwork.

I would have expected participants to be less comfortable with the idea of impermanence. Yet the intertwining of art and nature and Derouin's expressed philosophy that life and art are a reflexion of the ecosystem(s) seems to have a positive effect. Clément comments : "Des choses intéressantes avec les œuvres c'est le mariage entre l'œuvre et la nature, fait qu'elles vivent toutes à des moments différents" (Raw data p.38). Nathaniel considers :

C'est le reflet de la nature. Une forêt ne reste jamais...de toute façon la forêt évolue, alors ce que tu fais est appelé à évoluer avec la forêt. Ça fait juste démontrer comment la forêt se comporte (...) donc les œuvres on vieillies avec la nature (Raw data, p.48).

Multi-disciplinarity :

Multi-disciplinarity is also an aspect of contemporary art highlighted by the exhibition. It's also a strategy used by Derouin to engage the viewers with the artworks. Participants disclosed that it added a dimension of interest and generated generated new ideas and interpretations:

Clément: Le but en soit [de l'exposition] c'est de montrer une multidisciplinarité et une multiplicité des choses et que ce n'est pas tellement de s'arrêter sur ce qui sur le coup m'a peut-être moins intéressé, mais a quelque chose que j'ai pensé ensuite et qui va générer des idées nouvelles (Raw data p.38).

You may recall that Nathaniel had difficulty finding a way to access the meanings of the installations at the Pompidou Art Center : "Oui, c'était une installation (...). Je suis sorti de là et je me suis dit je ne reviens plus jamais ici" (Raw data, p.24). Based

on his comments in the post-visit interview, he now seems to have acquired a capacity to appreciate some aspects of contemporary art such as multi-disciplinarity and interactivity:

Je pense que développer l'art à travers ce système là qui est plus une forme de participation plutôt qu'une juste création (...). Il fait travailler plusieurs artistes. C'est pas juste lui. A partir d'un poème, à partir d'un endroit. Un artiste va faire quelque chose et les gens viennent l'écouter. (...) Y'a beaucoup d'interaction. (...). Je n'ai jamais visiter une exposition comme ça avec tant d'interaction Donc c'était intéressant, c'était très très très nouveau. (Raw data, p.47).

Comments about the site

The summer this research took place, the site of the symposium was closed to the general public so that René Derouin and his team could prepare for an even more ambitious symposium for the following year. We were lucky to be invited for a private visit, although it had already been a year since the last symposium and the winter and spring had ravaged many of the works of art on display. To entice participants to come, I had sent e-mails of one of the installations in its glory days, not knowing that what they would actually see of it during the visit was the boxes in which it was stored.

It is not surprising therefore that throughout the visit, remarks about the state of the site and installations abounded:

Chloé : [le site n'a pas répondu à ses attentes] à cause des œuvres qui n'était pas tout à fait installées. (Raw data, p. 32)

Clément : Il faut dire que quand on est arrivé la plupart des pièces étaient déjà rangées (...). Ça serait de voir le tout en ébullition pour voir ce que ça donne (Raw data, p. 39)

Yet it seems that, because of this, the participants appreciated even more the explanations provided by Derouin and use the occasion to practice their imagination:

Nathaniel : Puis comme je t'ai dis, il nous expliquais beaucoup que bon, c'était comme ça, malheureusement a eu [l'hivers] a fait des ravages. Une chance, il [Derouin] a comme compensé si tu veux pour, euh, pour ce qui était pas là. La présence de l'artiste c'était très très appréciée (Raw data, p. 48)

Nathaniel : Le fait que l'œuvre soit démolie, un peu. Il fallait imaginer, c'est évident. Ça nous faisait travailler un peu plus que si l'œuvre était là et tout ça. Fallait imaginer, avec les propos de l'artiste (...) On était toujours en train de travailler comme tel et on passait d'une œuvre à l'autre comme ça (Raw data, p. 49)

Comments about the Guided Tour

Most of the participants enjoyed the tour despite the deteriorated conditions of the works installed a year before. One of the participants wished for more information from the artist:

Chloé : J'espérais plus de lui. Dans le sens d'expliquer les œuvres. Plus de amour ? Je ne sais pas. Plus de passion pour les œuvres. J'espérais plus d'explication sur chaque œuvre. J'aimerais un peu plus. Pas seulement l'explication de l'œuvre mais comme si il pouvait verbaliser leur interprétation sur l'œuvre. Et ça je trouve que ça serait très riche à mon avis (Raw data, p. 2)

This comment probably reflects the fact that Chloé doesn't realize she too has a right to interpret the work of art ! With prolonged, varied and repeated exposure to art, she may, in due time, rely more on her own interpretations.

Availability of the Workshop

Because our visit did not occur during a regular symposia, no art workshop could be organized for the participants of this study. I witnessed in previous years what visitors accomplish during such workshops. They are shown how to make clay figures which are fired and integrated into various installations on the site of the exhibition. The participants of my study missed the opportunity to participate in this way in the

creation of a collaborative work of art a chance to become creators and to be an integral part of the collaborative work of art.

Researcher: il y aurait pu y avoir une activité artistique (...). Qu'est-ce que tu aurais penser de le faire toi-même ?

Chloé: Ah ! Ça aurait été merveilleux. Ça serait merveilleux, bien sûr. Parce que en plus, que tu vois l'exposition, tu fais quelque chose (...). Tu vraiment fais un petit peu, tu réalises une œuvre. C'est intéressant.

Researcher : Et tu le vois aussi.

Chloé: Au moins avoir une idée comment c'est fait (Raw data, p.32).

Luckily, there will be many more symposia at the Fondation Derouin to come in future years. Perhaps, Chloé will finally get the chance to participate in such a workshop.

In this last chapter, there were many dramatic changes in the participants' attitudes about art between the pre-visit interviews and the post –visit interviews

Before this second interview, many of the attributes that participants associated with art hindered their understanding of some aspects of contemporary art. This changed during the visit at the site. There, beauty became the gateway to comprehension; the natural materials were not a barrier. The explanations by the artist Rene Derouin made the works very accessible; the participants learned many new concepts about contemporary art. In the pre-visit interviews, participants were more interested in the visible and formal qualities of works of art. In the post –visit interviews, there was a definite shift in the preoccupations of the participants; they become interested in the concepts, contents and context of the works of art.

The next chapter I will give a summary of the changes that occurred and discuss the guiding reasons for these changes.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, I will present the conclusions of my findings. First, I will give a summary of the prominent attributes addressed by my participants in the pre-visit and post visit interviews. More precisely, I will focus on the changes between the pre-visit interviews and the follow up interviews and address why and how these occurred. Secondly, I will reconsider my research questions based on the results of the study. I will then link my findings with some of the existing literature on the subject of postmodern art interpretation. Finally I will propose further research based on René Derouin's educational strategies.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Beauty

The non-experts in this study have many preconceived ideas about art and these do prevent them from appreciating some aspects of contemporary art. In the pre-visit interviews, beauty was identified as such a significant factor that, in many instances, its presence was an essential requirement for enjoying a work of art. On the site of the *Jardins du précambrien* Symposium, they were looking for and finding beauty in the works of art but they were also starting to engage with the *content* of the works of contemporary art. This is something all participants reported having difficulty doing before their visit to the Symposium. Derouin uses beauty as a magnet and as an effective pedagogical approach to get the attention of the viewer. Once this is accomplished, the participant is drawn in for further investigation as to the meaning of the work of art.

Settings

The natural setting of the exhibition *Les jardins du Précambrien* was the most appreciated feature of the participants' experience. However, having selected perfect surroundings, Derouin goes one step further and proposes works that are integrated into this environment, making the intimate relationship between the of the work and the environment the second most appreciated feature of their experience:

Clément: Peut-être que l'environnement, pris individuellement, ou les œuvres prises individuellement, n'auraient pas eu cet impact là. C'est vraiment la fusion des deux ensembles qui provoque l'intérêt et suscite la réflexion (Raw data, p. 35).

Materials

In the previous chapters, we also saw that some participants were repulsed by the use of industrial materials and, at times, confused by the use of non-traditional materials. In many cases, this repulsion was strong enough to prevent them from approaching the works of art. The non-experts in this study often seem unable to go beyond a basic concrete understanding of the materials; they experience difficulty in interpreting materials in a symbolic way. Derouin helps non-experts circumvent this problem in order to access the content of contemporary art by proposing works of art made with natural materials integrated with the environment. Importantly, he also proposes materials whose symbolic values are accessible, such as, for example, the windows in *La Cabane à Julie*, and the optical lenses for the piece called *Tendres regards*. I can conclude that, for this study, contemporary works of art set in a natural environment and contemporary works of art that are integrated in a natural environment stand a better chance of being approached and appreciated by the non-expert viewer.

Context

Yet the determining factor for appreciation is an access to the content of the work of art through information about its context(s). The preconceived notion that the work of art should speak for itself was shared by all of the participants at one point or another. This belief encouraged my non-expert participants to fall back on the idea that works of art are not good or that they are incomplete if they cannot convey their message immediately. Clément had a previous encounter with contemporary works of art in a natural setting. He thought that his visit to *Les jardins du précambrien* would be similar: another beautiful setting dotted with works of contemporary art to which he could not relate. But, this time, Derouin's contextual explanations made a huge difference. He could understand the pieces and even found some of them really interesting (Raw data, p.35).

Nathaniel also found that the explanations of the artist and the fact that he could ask him questions on the spot made a big difference between rejecting a work of contemporary art and really appreciating it:

C'est la grosse différence là [entre le Centre d'art contemporain Pompidou et le site du symposium]. Là tu peux lui poser des questions à l'artiste (...) Là tu comprends vraiment ou il veut en venir et qu'est-ce qu'il a fait (...). La présence de l'artiste c'était très très appréciée (...). C'est presque idéal (Raw data, p. 48).

For people with little experience in art viewing, I find that it is a tremendous advantage to be able to ask questions about the origins and meaning of the works of art: "The focus groups Summary Report (on museum experience) lists a variety of reasons why visitors claim they did not get as much out of their museum visits as they had hoped. The major obstacles listed included lack of orientation to the contents of the museum, insufficient information (e.g., about the artist's life and about the

particular work's iconography, art history, cultural context, and technique)" (Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p.6).

Exclusion

Throughout the tour of the Symposium site, Derouin used multiple inclusive approaches that work to alter feeling of exclusion often experience by non-experts viewers. He first chose to bring the participants into his private world, his house and his own studio, thereby building a personal rapport with the participants. There, he showed them traditional, more accessible, works of art, prints, ceramics, paintings and wood carvings that he had created over the last 50 years. The artist's life-long career as well as his ability to create accessible works of art won him the participants' trust. They could now advance to more complex terrains, literally. Before the visit to the exhibition site, Nathaniel and Clément entertained feelings of exclusion about art. More precisely, they believed that creating a work of art themselves was completely beyond their reach. This belief was altered significantly during the tour of the site. For Clément, it was Derouin's strategy of using another discipline, that of poetry, which enticed him to write a poem. For Nathaniel, it was the accessibility of the natural materials. All participants stated that they would have liked to create a ceramic piece in the collective art workshop if this had been possible. The more access points there are to works of contemporary art, the greater the chances that non-experts will be able to relate to them, on some level, and to actually appreciate them.

Representation

The idea that art's function is to represent reality is strongly entrenched in the minds of non-experts. It not only prevents them from appreciating some aspects of contemporary art but it will often prevent them from engaging with or even stopping

to look at a work of art that is non-representational. Before the visit to the exhibition site, Clément and Nathaniel mostly appreciated works of art in which the artists had rendered with vivid realism human features and emotions. Before their visit, all participants focussed on the formal qualities of the works of art and especially on the craftsmanship of the works. The integration of the art works within the site, the convivial setting, and the explanations provided by the artist Derouin enabled all participants to make an important shift in their approach to the works *from an emphasis on the more obvious, surface qualities of the work of art in favour of the deeper hidden meanings of the work of art.*

Discovery

We saw in chapter four that the participants of this study displayed and used a natural disposition of discovery to appreciate works of art. During the visit to the site, Derouin uses this natural disposition as a learning device so that the viewers can further investigate the more hidden meanings and complexities of contemporary works of art. The use of discovery learning is advantageous for the understanding of contemporary art where motivation and problem solving skills are required.

REVIEW OF THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

I will now reconsider my research questions, based on the results of this study. The first question of this study was: *What are non-expert viewers' preconceived notions about art?* It emerged clearly from the pre-visit interviews in chapter four that the non-experts of this study do have many recurrent, and sometimes deeply rooted, ideas that they associated with art. All but two were significant either in terms of number

of times they were mentioned and or significant in terms of the difficulties they carried for non-experts to be able to understand or appreciate contemporary art. Nine of these pre-conceived ideas matched my hypothetical ideas (Table 1). Many other attributes were spontaneously volunteered by the participants and some of these turned out not to be hindrances, but instead, provided assistance for the understanding and appreciation of contemporary art.

Do these notions hinder their appreciation of contemporary art? Most of the pre-conceived notions did hinder and sometimes even prevent non-experts' understanding or appreciation of contemporary art. What was revealed by the pre-visit interviews is that there is a preponderant dichotomy between the expectations of the non-expert and the realities of contemporary art: non-experts are expecting something and are given something else all together. What the results of the pre-visit interview demonstrate is that non-experts experience difficulty in finding a point of entry into the works, and that they lacked the skills to do so. They must be helped. In answering the next question we will see that they can be.

Does the art practice of René Derouin help non-expert viewers to understand or appreciate some aspects of contemporary art? The art practice and the pedagogical strategies of Derouin do help in a significant way non-expert viewers to overcome their pre-conceived ideas, and understand and appreciate some aspects of contemporary art. The most importance occurrence in the post-visit interviews is the shift in the focus of the participants from an emphasis on the more obvious, surface qualities of the work of art in favour of the deeper hidden meanings of the work of art.

How is René Derouin's approach successful or not in achieving these objectives?

Derouin's approach is very successful in that he has managed to suggest many points of entry by which the non-experts can begin to understand and appreciate some aspects of contemporary art. By using multiple strategies (such as poetry) he gives numerous and varied chances to the non-experts to engage with and appreciate works of contemporary art.

Postmodern Theory of Interpretation

The non-expert viewers in my study needed to be encouraged to go beyond the surface qualities of works of art in order to comprehend and appreciate some of the deeper meanings of the works. By providing a context for works in the *Jardins du précambrien*, the artist René Derouin encouraged my participants to undertake this sometimes complex task by identifying potential points of entry for exploring the meanings of the works of art. Through their involvement in a didactic process led by the artist, my participants began to construct their own responses.

As Arthur Danto (1980) proposes in his Postmodern Theory of Interpretation, I argue that viewers should also attend to the less apparent qualities of a work of art. In this theory, Danto suggests that viewers seek to understand not only the elements that constitute the work of art (as opposed in Modernist theories) but also the contexts that relate to the work of art, such as its place in history, in philosophy, in art theory, in its own culture as well as in global culture (Wolcott, p.74). This is, I believe, how the viewer can connect with as many of contemporary art's complex and layered meanings.

Danto affirms what this research shows: that interpretation is a bewildering process to many novice viewers. “It had once been true that art spoke immediately and directly to the hearts and minds of human beings, without the mediation of interpretation or critical thought” (Danto, 1996, p.14). This is no longer true. With contemporary art “aesthetic understanding is far closer to intellectual action (cognition) than to a mode of sensory stimulation and calls for an aesthetic stance as something that has to be *constructed* [emphasis added]” (Wolcott, p. 74).

For novice viewers to understand and eventually appreciate works of contemporary art “interpretation must be grounded in reasons and evidence, and should provide a rich, complex, and illuminating way to comprehend a work of art” (Freeland, p. 150). As we have seen in the case of one of my participants, Clément, being able to formulate an interpretation changed his aversion into comprehension. “Sometimes, an interpretation can even transform an experience of art from repugnance to appreciation and understanding” (Freeland, p. 150).

As the following excerpt shows, non-experts can understand that the context of a traditional work of art may provide clues to how it should be interpreted:

(...) Il y a une peinture en particulier qui m'accroche énormément c'est « La dérive » de Gericault. (...) C'est une œuvre absolument exceptionnelle de gens qui sont sur un radeau en pleine mer. La mer a vraiment l'air effrayante, l'eau, c'est sombre, c'est noir, mais il y a une lueur d'espoir parce que justement c'est un espèce d'élan vers la délivrance qui est au loin. C'est sombre comme sujet aussi, les couleurs sont sombres. Je ne sais pas à quelle époque ça a été fait mais, ça a certainement été fait à un endroit où le peuple crevait de faim (...). Il y avait certainement quelque chose avant la révolution française c'était le cas en tout cas et avant la révolution française (...). Y'a peut-être eu un lien là-dedans (...) (Raw data, p.19)

An efficient approach to understanding contemporary art might be to compare the importance of context in traditional and historical works of art with contemporary works of art. Contexts to be considered include the social climate, the political realities, the time period, the artist's preoccupations, the use of symbolism, iconographies, and the influence of art theory.

By providing contexts for the works of art on the site of *Les jardins du précambrien* Derouin enabled participants with the gift of interpretation. The only other time Clément had visited a site with contemporary art (and although the site was natural and beautiful) he was left feeling uninformed about any aspects of contemporary art. But this time he left with interest and understanding. When Nathaniel visited the centre Pompidou in Paris, he was left clueless about the meaning of the contemporary works of art on display there. His experience at the Derouin Symposium provided an experience rich in meaning and interpretation.

Further Research

We have seen that many of René Derouin's educational strategies help non-expert viewers address and alter some of their pre-conceived ideas about some aspects of contemporary art. In further research, could these strategies be used by art educators in other contexts such as schools or museums to initiate and to further the teaching of contemporary art? Could René Derouin's strategies be successfully applied in different contexts?

One of the strategies used by Derouin is to use different artistic disciplines such as poetry and music to appeal to visitors' different interests and to use such interests as a starting point for understanding and appreciating a work of art

Chloé : ... je suis sûre d'une chose très intéressante c'est que, de faire l'intégration entre la poésie par exemple (...) parce que c'est comme une œuvre pluridisciplinaire (...). Même l'intégration avec la musique par exemple. L'artiste, René, nous a dit par exemple qu'il y a des concerts et ça c'est une expérience (...) tri-dimensionnelle (...). Tu utilises plusieurs perceptions sensorielles, perception sonore, perception visuelle, donc je crois, à mon avis (...) enrichissent l'expérience (Raw data, p.28).

The idea that different types of sensory experiences can lead to more in-depth and complex understandings of the work of art could be a subject for further research. I would propose further research that uses physical interaction as an added sensory experience to see if other kinds of understanding about the works of art occur. More specifically, I am proposing research that focuses on the unique features of the contemporary art installed outdoors at the Jardin de Métis garden in Rimouski. The in-situ installations in this new setting are interactive in nature: the participants are able to touch, smell, move within and travel through them, thus undertaking a multi-sensorial learning experience. The main objective of such research would be to investigate whether experiential and other types of sensory learning have a positive impact on non-experts' understanding of contemporary art.

In Conclusion

Given the participants' initial difficulties in dealing with notions of contemporary art and their ensuing open-mindedness to them, it gives me reason to think that art educators should continue their endeavours in this area of study. The results of this research give me great hope that we can indeed find ways to help non-experts viewers

further their understanding of contemporary art. Nathaniel, who was extremely reticent about contemporary art, had this to say after visiting the exhibition *Les jardins du précambrien* and touring it with Derouin: “*L’art évidemment n’a pas de limites* [emphasis added]. C’est vraiment une recherche de vouloir aller plus loin dans ce que tu fais, dans l’art. Le concept [de Derouin] est vraiment innovateur » (Raw data, p.46). Clearly, this is evidence that learning has occurred.

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APPENDIX I

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Pre-visit interview

Question no 1:

Quel genre d'oeuvre d'art apprécies-tu le plus et pourquoi?

(Penses une expérience passée avec une ou plusieurs œuvres d'art)

Sous questions:

a) Est-ce que tu as eu, récemment, une expérience agréable avec une oeuvre d'art?

b) Quelles étaient les caractéristiques de l'œuvre qui t'on plu ? (Le sujet de l'œuvre ? les caractéristiques physiques de l'œuvre, comme les couleurs, les textures, les formes, les matériaux ?)

Sous questions:

d) Comment t'es-tu senti/e ?

Question no 2:

Quel genre d'oeuvre esst-ce que tu n'apprécies pas et pourquoi?

(Penses une expérience passée avec une ou plusieurs œuvres d'art)

Sous questions:

a) Est-ce que tu as eu, récemment, une expérience désagréable avec une oeuvre d'art?

b) Quelles étaient les caractéristiques de l'œuvre qui t'on pas plu ? (Le sujet de l'œuvre ?, les caractéristiques physiques de l'œuvre, comme les couleurs, les textures, les formes, les matériaux ?)

c) Quelle a été l'effet de l'oeuvre sur toi? (Cela t'a fait penser ? Cela t'a rendu curieux/se ? Elle t'a fait te souvenir de quelque chose ? Elle t'a fait penser à quelque chose?)

d) Comment t'es-tu senti/e ?

Question no 3:

Est-ce que tu t'attends à quelque chose quand tu regardes une oeuvre d'art? (Un certain sujet ? Une œuvre figurative (c'est-à-dire que tu reconnais ce que c'est, ce n'est pas une œuvre abstraite) ? Est-ce que tu t'attends à être dans un contexte ou un endroit particulier comme un musée ? Est-ce que tu recherches certaines caractéristiques physiques comme des couleurs, des textures, des formes ou des matériaux ?)

Sous questions:

- a) Est-ce que tu vas voir des oeuvres que tu connais un peu d'une façon ou d'une autre? (par exemple des œuvres d'une certaine époque ou par un/e artiste en particulier ? Pourquoi ?
- b) Peux-tu penser à une occasion où tu ne t'attendais pas à voir quelque chose mais où tu as été agréablement surpris/e quand même? Comment ?
- c) Peux-tu penser à une occasion où tu t'attendais à voir quelque chose et que tu as été déçu/e?

Post-Visit Interview

Question no 1:

Ayant en tête ton expérience des installations du Jardins du précambrien, qu'est-ce que tu as le plus apprécié et pourquoi?

Sous questions:

- a) Quels aspects de l'expérience as-tu appréciés et pourquoi?
 - 1) Le sujet des oeuvres?
 - 2) Les caractéristiques physiques des oeuvres, comme, par exemple les couleurs, les textures, les formes, les matériaux?
 - 3) L'effet ou l'impact des oeuvres sur toi?
 - 4) Le tour guidé et/ou les discussions avec l'artiste?
 - 5) L'environnement (dans la nature)?
 - 6) La dimension sociale du travail de l'artiste ou de l'oeuvre?
 - 7) D'autres aspects?
- b) Quelle a été l'effet des oeuvres ou de la visite sur toi? Cela t'a fait penser? Cela t'a rendu curieux/se? Cela t'a rappelé quelque chose? Cela t'a fait comprendre quelque chose? Cela t'a fait te souvenir de quelque chose? Comment t'es-tu senti/e?

Question no 2:

Ayant en tête ton expérience des installations du Jardin du précambrien, qu'est-ce que tu n'as pas apprécié et pourquoi?

Sous questions:

- a) Quelles aspects de l'expérience n'as-tu PAS apprécié ?
 - 1) Le sujet des oeuvres?
 - 2) Les caractéristiques physiques des oeuvres, comme, par exemple les couleurs, les textures, les formes, les matériaux?
 - 3) L'effet ou l'impact des oeuvres sur toi?
 - 4) Le tour guidé et/ou les discussions avec l'artiste?
 - 5) L'environnement (dans la nature)?
 - 6) La dimension sociale du travail de l'artiste ou de l'oeuvre?
 - 7) D'autres aspects?

b) Quelle a été l'effet des oeuvres ou de la visite sur toi? Cela t'a fait penser? Cela t'a rendu curieux/se? Cela t'a rappelé quelque chose? Cela t'a fait comprendre quelque chose? Cela t'a fait te souvenir de quelque chose? Comment t'es-tu senti/e?

Question no 3:

Qu'est-ce que tu t'attendais à voir en venant à cette exposition? (Par exemple, comment pensais-tu qu'allait être l'artiste ? Comment pensais-tu qu'allait être l'environnement ? Comment t'imaginais-tu cette expérience ? Comment t'imaginais-tu les œuvres d'art ?)

Sous questions:

- a) Est-ce que le site, l'artiste, l'exposition ont répondu à tes attentes ?
- b) Dans quelle mesure est-ce qu'on a répondu à tes attentes ?

Question no 4:

En général, comment juges-tu ton expérience avec cette exposition ?

Sous questions:

- a) Est-ce que les informations que tu as reçues et les activités auxquelles tu as pris part étaient utiles ou intéressantes ?
- b) Par exemples :

- les panneaux dans la forêt
- le dépliant
- l'exposé de la mission de la fondation
- les explications de l'artiste
- le tour guidé
- (l'activité artistique)
- du temps passé à réfléchir
- une interaction ou une discussion avec d'autres participants ?