



spring collection. Montreal, 1991.
photo: E. Dumont

Carl's work expresses a desire to reintegrate art into community. He searches for a symbol with which to generate dialogue, and a forum within which to do so. The choice of rejected materials to make the work, is hopeful.

The artist realizes the idealism in his agenda. But regardless of his intimidation by the "disintegrated sense of community that characterizes our urban environment, and the alienated sense of art and the artist within that non-community" he has attempted to "focus on issues and materials that form a sort of 'common currency' within these fractured, polycentric social environments. Searching for unifiers within the widening disunity that we have come to accept as (post) modern Canadian life."

Carl's actions are analogous to putting a message in a bottle and sending it out to sea. The desire for a response is evident, and the optimism of the sender is manifested in his recognition of the potential for transformation and creative thought in the public realm.

Liane Davison, March 1993

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JAMES CARL

1960 born, Montreal, Canada.

Education

- 1992 B.A. McGill University, Montreal.
- 1990 Diploma Central Academy of Fine Art, Beijing.
- 1983 B.F.A. University of Victoria, Victoria, B.C.

Exhibitions

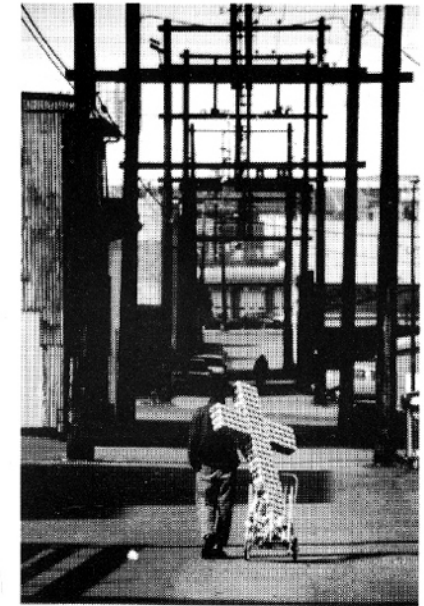
- 1993 grunt gallery, Vancouver. solo.
- 1992 Galerie Clark, Montreal. two man.
- 1991 "Les Jardins Imprevus" various locations in Montreal. group.
- 1991 "Spring Collection," a public sculpture. various locations in Montreal. solo.
- 1990 "Border Patterns" Central Gallery of Fine Art, Beijing, China. solo.
- 1983 Helen Pitt Awards Exhibition. Robson Square, Vancouver. group.
- 1983 Maltwood Gallery, University of Victoria, B.C. group.
- 1982 MacPherson Library, University of Victoria. group.
- 1982 "Re: Constructivism," Open Space Gallery, Victoria. group.

Awards

- 1993 Canada Council Short Term Grant
- 1992 Japanese Canadian Culture Centre Award
- 1992 Canada Council Travel Grant
- 1989 Chinese -Canadian Graduate Scholar Award
- 1982 B.C. Cultural Fund Senior Study Grant
- 1982 Heather Cragg Scholarship, University of Victoria
- 1982 Presidents Award, University of Victoria

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frontspiece: redemption, street detail. Vancouver 1993
photo: J. Langille



public works

JAMES CARL

april 6 - 24 1993

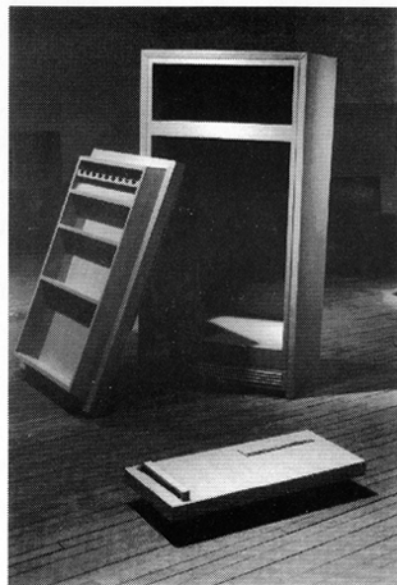
opening tuesday april 6 8 pm

grunt

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repossession, street detail. Montréal, 1992.



repossession, gallery detail. Galerie Clark, Montréal, 1992.



paumes de terre, detail. Montréal, 1991

“...now sing
Recover'd Paradise to all mankind...
And Eden raised in the waste wilderness”
Milton, Paradise Regained

“If there is no certain salvation in emptying the
bottle, at least there's redemption for the empty
bottle.”

James Carl

The back alleys of every community exhibit the fears and desires of consumer culture: un-negotiated truths about consumption, abandonment, waste and disfunction. They are sites of failure; refuse. James Carl chooses this potent site as the source of his materials and subject of his work.

Irony, contradiction and humour are tools that Carl uses to confront the agonies and ecstasies of life in an urban environment. Common, almost invisible materials and activities of city life are made conspicuous. His intent is to disrupt assumptions about specific sites and replace these with new critical perspectives: interventions into the public realm made with the desire to generate dialogue between users and inhabitants and “to develop or re-establish a meaningful, accessible place for art.”

A lone figure, dragging a shopping buggy that cradles a

crucifix made of empty beer cans down a back alley evokes an ironic image of urban salvation. In this recent performance/sculpture the figure of the ‘dumpster diver’ is transformed from a scavenger surviving on the fringe and refuse of consumer culture, into an anti-hero whose labour and sacrifice is not incidental. The title of this work is apt: “Redemption”. The artist describes the piece as a reflection upon “the corporate/economic/political expropriation of what has historically been considered the territory of religion or philosophy: renewal, redemption, return.”

In “Repossession” (1992), perfectly scaled replicas of appliances such as a washing machine, t.v., stove and fridge were constructed from their salvaged packing boxes, exhibited, then placed with other trash on the street, awaiting garbage pickup. These works replicated the form and enacted the eventual future of all commodities: abandonment. A sense of death, failure and mute impotence hovers around these effigies, whether in the gallery or on the street. Carl refused to sell the cardboard appliances - returning them instead to the public domain from which they were originally salvaged, and from which they derive the larger part of their meaning.

These interventions into the public realm began with a series of pieces entitled “paumes de terre” in Montreal in 1991, created as part of a group exhibition of

“unforseen urban gardens”. Carl chose the site of a busy auto thoroughfare to create a space for contemplation. A small metal box, attached to a steel lamp standard, contained a set of headphones, the kind that protect workers from the sound of heavy machinery. With the headphones buffering the relentless urban cacophony, the user's visual experience was enhanced. The constant high speed commuter travel and the tangle of cement overpasses became subject to a renewed moment of visual confrontation. The half-conscious inter-urban pedestrian flow was arrested. Returning day and night to lock and unlock the boxes, the artist assumed a role of community worker, ensuring the availability of these sites of audio-relief/visual-anguish, while mocking the repetitions and drudgery of the surrounding activity.

In Montreal, spring thaw reveals an inescapable index of the winter's casual waste. Among the debris in the streets are innumerable windshield washer antifreeze bottles. Carl used these as ‘building blocks’ in the construction of an igloo. This humorous sculpture, entitled “Spring Collection” was transported on foot to a number of public sites and was accompanied by a performance where the artist served glasses of a blue beverage, resembling anti-freeze. Like “redemption” this work addressed issues of renewal, forgiveness, adaptation and the solicitation of response from the local community.