

Cinq remarques sur Burne Jones Five Notes on Burne-Jones

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Cinq remarques sur Burne Jones

Jean-Loup Bourget

Edward Burne-Jones (1833-1898) est, avec William Morris, le principal représentant de la seconde génération préraphaélite: celle qui, tournant le dos au naturalisme moralisant d'Holman Hunt, s'engage, à la suite de Rossetti, dans la voie du symbolisme décoratif. Considéré à la fin du 19e siècle comme un des plus grands artistes contemporains, Burne-Jones subit ensuite une éclipse. Depuis quelques années, la curiosité pour l'Art Nouveau ainsi que pour ses *sources*, et de façon plus générale, le renouveau d'intérêt pour la peinture d'inspiration poétique ou littéraire, replacent Burne-Jones au premier plan. La Hayward Gallery de Londres va lui consacrer une importante rétrospective¹.

1. LA PASSION DE L'ANTINOMIE

Une des toiles les plus célèbres de Burne-Jones se trouve à la Tate Gallery, à Londres. Il s'agit du *Roi Cophetua et de la mendiante* (1884). Un regard distrait pourrait négliger cette grande machine, peinte dans des tons bruns assez éteints, sans y déceler qu'elle est construite sur une série d'oppositions assez systématique pour être remarquable. D'abord, la double opposition qu'implique le titre même de la toile et qu'explicitent les deux personnages principaux: Roi contre Mendiante, qui s'articule en Puissant c. Humble (ou Riche c. Pauvre) et en Masculin c. Féminin. Mais la disposition des personnages renverse ce rapport et subordonne le Roi à la Mendiante: Bas c. Haut. Quant à l'apparence physique, on peut noter les antinomies suivantes:

Âge mûr c. Jeunesse
Chevelure noire c. Chevelure blonde (contrairement aux indications du poème de Tennyson)
Teint olivâtre c. Teint pâle



Barbu c. Imberbe
Vêtement c. Nudité (bras, jambes,...)
Armure c. Robe

Ajoutons, en ce qui concerne la composition du tableau,

Profil c. Face

A la main droite, la Mendiante tient un bouquet d'anémones, tandis que le Roi a sa couronne à la main:

Couronne c. Bouquet
Pierreries c. Fleurs

contraste qui est aussi celui de

Mécanique c. Organique
Culture c. Nature

La partie inférieure droite du tableau contient un autre accessoire appartenant à la série royale: la lance et le bouclier (Mécanique, Culture). Symétriquement, la partie supérieure gauche a des branchages ainsi que des arbres fruitiers (des citronniers): Organique, Nature. Les deux pages qui lisent de la musique, en haut, à gauche, sont le prétexte de contrastes formels qui ne semblent pas signifiants, mais qui font écho à la texture d'ensemble et aux oppositions entre les personnages principaux:

Cheveux roux c. Cheveux noirs (disposition inverse par rapport au Roi et à la Mendiante)
Vêtement rouge c. Vêtement vert (couleurs complémentaires)

Mais, en-dessous, les oreillers du divan inversent ce contraste:

Oreiller vert c. Oreiller rouge

La lance (en bas, à droite) oppose sa hampe rouge à son fanion vert. Il n'est pas jusqu'à la



1. BURNE-JONES

Phyllis et Démophon, 1870.
Gouache; 91 cm. x 46.
Birmingham City Museum and Art Gallery.

2. *Le Roi Cophetua et la mendiante*, 1884.
Huile sur toile; 291 cm. x 136.
Londres, Tate Gallery.

3. *Clerk Saunders*, 1861.
Gouache; 69 cm. 8 x 41,9.
Londres, Tate Gallery.

4. *L'Amour et le pèlerin*, 1896-1897.
Huile sur toile; 157 cm. x 305.
Londres, Tate Gallery.

courroie du bouclier qui ne soit rouge d'un côté, verte de l'autre. En haut et à droite du tableau sont juxtaposés un paysage (Nature) et un tapis d'Orient (Culture). Trois anémones mauves, échappées du bouquet de la Mendiante, jonchent les marches en répétant le motif Nature (fleurs sauvages) c. Culture (décor très travaillé). Cependant, les bas-reliefs qui *circulent* entre les personnages représentent des *animaux* stylisés, orientalisants, ce qui équivaut peut-être à une synthèse Nature-Culture.

Ce recensement rapide prouve, me semble-t-il, deux choses. D'abord, que la figuration de Burne-Jones fonctionne selon le modèle de l'antinomie; le caractère systématique de cette série d'oppositions ne saurait être fortuit. D'autre part, que ces oppositions n'ont rien de dynamique (c'est d'ailleurs la raison pour laquelle elles ne sont pas immédiatement apparentes). Elles expriment des juxtapositions plutôt que des conflits générateurs d'une éventuelle synthèse originale. Les contrastes formels (composition, couleur) sont présents, mais ont tendance à s'équilibrer au lieu de jurer. De même, les contrastes qu'on pourrait appeler idéologiques: la puissance temporelle, la richesse matérielle sont compensées par une situation de subordination spatiale et morale; inversement, l'élévation compense l'humilité sociale de la Mendiante.

Un coup d'œil jeté à l'oeuvre de Burne-Jones dans son ensemble confirmera sans difficulté cette analyse. Ce qui frappe, c'est d'abord le nombre de tableaux mettant en scène deux personnages. Il suffit de citer quelques titres de thèmes chers à Burne-Jones: sujets religieux comme *L'Annonciation* (qui implique la Vierge *contre* l'Ange, notamment dans la version de 1876-1879, à Port Sunlight) ou *Saint Georges et le dragon* (1868, Walthamstow); sujets profanes comme *L'Idylle* (1862, Birmingham); sujets mythologiques comme *Pan et Psyché* (1869-1874, Cambridge, Mass.) ou *Merlin et Viviane* (1870-1874, Port Sunlight), allégoriques tels *L'Amour et le pèlerin* (1896-1897, Tate Gall.). (Rossetti, de son côté, affectionnait soit les compositions à un seul personnage, soit celles à nombreuses figures.) Un

examen de ces images révélera les mêmes séries d'oppositions que j'ai tenté de mettre en lumière à propos du *Roi Cophetua*, notamment:

— oppositions naturelles

Masculin	c. Féminin
Cheveux noirs	c. Cheveux blonds ou roux

— oppositions spatiales

Bas	c. Haut
Profil	c. Face

— oppositions culturelles

Vêtement	c. Nudité
Cuirasse	c. Haillon

— oppositions symboliques

Terre	c. Eau (ou Air)
Rochers	c. Herbes (cf. <i>Pan et Psyché</i>)

Culture (instruments de musique, livres) c. Nature (branchages, buisson de roses)

— oppositions de couleurs

Il convient aussi de signaler l'opposition fréquente (mais absente du *Roi Cophetua*) du naturel et du surnaturel. Ainsi, dans *L'Annonciation*, la Vierge (Nature) c. l'Ange (Surnature); saint Georges (Nature) et le Dragon (Surnature). Dans *Les Profondeurs de la Mer* (1887, Cambridge, Mass.), une sirène (Surnature) entraîne un simple mortel dans le royaume glauque. Le Chevalier miséricordieux (Nature) s'agenouille devant le Christ (Surnature) [1863, Birmingham]. *L'Amour* (Ange-Surnature) conduit le pèlerin. A la faveur d'une suite de tableaux, l'opposition peut se renverser: c'est le cas dans la suite de *Pygmalion* (1878, Birmingham), où Pygmalion représente d'abord la Nature et Galatée, la statue (Inorganique). Puis, Pygmalion est subordonné à Galatée (Surnature). Mais, dans chaque tableau donné, ces oppositions multiples ne sont pas dans un véritable rapport antagoniste: plus subtilement, elles s'équilibrent, donnent l'impression d'être des reflets dans un miroir ou dans une eau dormante.





5. *Pygmalion*, 1878 — *L'Étincelle divine*.
(Phot. City of Birmingham)

2. LE SOMMEIL

L'univers de Burne-Jones est caractérisé par ses antinomies figées. On a souvent remarqué sa prédilection pour le thème de la Belle au bois dormant (1870-1873, Ponce, Porto-Rico, et 1870-1890, Faringdon), ou le fait qu'il s'identifiait au *Roi Arthur endormi à Avalon* (1881-1898, Ponce, Porto-Rico). Dans la suite du *Buisson d'églantines*, illustrant le premier thème, les chevaliers, le roi et ses courtisans, la princesse et ses suivantes, sont pris dans la gangue de la végétation. Leurs corps ont les mêmes poses d'apesanteur que les ronces qui les entourent. Encore une fois, les armures, les couronnes, les pierreries, les tissus précieux s'opposent à la floraison des églantines — ou la reflètent? Triomphe de la Nature sur la Culture? On a davantage l'impression simultanée d'une différence et d'une

harmonie également fondamentales entre ces deux ordres, complémentaires comme le masculin et le féminin ou comme le rouge et le vert. Médiévale, peuplée d'instruments de musique, la Culture que dépeint Burne-Jones n'a rien pour heurter une sensibilité qui se juge mal accordée à son temps. Le sommeil qui fige ensemble les églantines et la cour de la princesse est le moyen d'arrêter le temps, de nier l'Histoire. En ce sens, la peinture de Burne-Jones, elle aussi, est moins un *rêve* qu'un sommeil. Contrairement à ceux de Fuseli ou de Goya, ce sommeil n'est agité d'aucun cauchemar. D'autre part, la peinture de Burne-Jones n'a jamais évolué.

3. L'ÉROTISME

L'érotisme de Burne-Jones est indéniable. La Mendiante, face au Roi Cophetua, a les

yeux cernés, exerce une fascination trouble. Mais cet érotisme est d'essence contemplative et non active. *L'Escalier d'or* (1872-1880, Tate Gall.) multiplie par dix-huit la même silhouette de jeune fille vêtue à l'antique, aux formes sveltes, graciles, sans hanches, au visage érotique à cause de l'ombre qui mange les yeux. Le charme vient aussi, bien entendu, du nombre des filles et de leur caractères sororal, comme dans les contes de fée: pluriel singulier... Confirmation du caractère figé, et à la limite interchangeable, des antinomies de Burne-Jones: il peint de préférence la jeune fille, l'adolescente, l'éphèbe, l'hermaphrodite.

4. LA SOCIÉTÉ INDUSTRIELLE

On aurait pourtant tort de croire, en raison de tout ce qui précède, que Burne-Jones n'est pas un peintre de son temps. Sans parler du fait que la *part du rêve* peut n'être que l'envers de la société industrielle (à cet égard, l'immense popularité du peintre à son époque est éloquente), il faut rappeler que Burne-Jones (et William Morris) sont victoriens dans la mesure même où ils ont tenté d'échapper à ce qu'ils considéraient comme le mercantilisme et le philistinisme de leur environnement. En d'autres termes, leur passion pour les arts décoratifs, le vitrail, le mobilier peint, la tapisserie, la céramique, ... les montre, en véritables victoriens, soucieux des rapports qu'entretiennent l'art et l'industrie. On fera bien, avant de s'aventurer dans un développement de plus sur leur *idéalisme*, d'observer qu'ils ont été, en un certain sens, *matérialistes* dans leur *pratique*, qu'ils n'ont pas craint de prendre le mot «art» dans l'acception qu'il a dans «arts et métiers.» C'est aussi en ce sens que Burne-Jones, selon le mot de Lord David Cecil, n'est pas un «visionnaire» comme Samuel Palmer.

5. L'INFLUENCE DE BURNE-JONES

L'influence de Burne-Jones sur l'Art Nouveau tient à la fois à son vocabulaire formel et à son souci d'unir plus étroitement l'art et l'industrie. Le sujet a été surtraité, et je me bornerai à signaler quelques points précis. D'abord, l'excellent ouvrage de Martin Harrison et Bill Waters, *Burne-Jones* (Barrie & Jenkins, Londres, 1973), qui consacre son chapitre final à l'influence exercée par l'artiste, ne mentionne pas Carlos Schwabe. Il semble pourtant clair qu'une allégorie comme *Le Mariage du poète et de la muse* (1901-1902) dérive directement des *Profondeurs de la mer*. Elle est bâtie sur le même système d'antinomies figées (on peut d'ailleurs imaginer que ce système, particulièrement en évidence chez Burne-Jones, devrait en fait être étendu à bon nombre de peintres symbolistes; je ne sais si le procédé est caractéristique de l'allégorie en général, ou s'il exprime le rapport antagoniste mais *impuissant* qui liait ces peintres à la société industrielle triomphant à leur époque). D'autre part, certains dessins du *Livre secret* (1885... , British Museum), par exemple *Ciel et vagues*, constituent un de ces ponts nombreux par lesquels le symbolisme s'achemine vers l'abstraction. Enfin, un rapprochement s'impose entre *L'Escalier d'or* de Burne-Jones et le *Nu descendant un escalier* de Marcel Duchamp (1912). Mais, pour Duchamp, il s'agit de reproduire le mouvement, que Burne-Jones a passé sa vie à nier.

1. Tenue du 5 novembre 1975 au 4 janvier 1976, l'exposition ira ensuite à Southampton (24 janvier-22 février) et à Birmingham, ville natale du peintre (début mars-début avril).

As I have said above, Jean-Paul Jérôme is first a plastician. In this regard, he is truly a painter of synthesis. He gathers together in his work all the attainments of so-called abstract or figurative art. Certainly he exhibits a powerful originality. At first sight, even, he seems not to have any roots. However, he really belongs to a group of artists among whom we might mention Braque, Gris, Matisse, Mondrian, Malévitch, Magrelli, Léger or Mortensen (whom he knew in Paris). With regard to the pictorial, having been marked by the colouring of the Flemish, he was able to understand the work of Mondrian, who *cleaned* space. Although he painted only in flat tints, he was able to avoid the decorative that Kandinsky mistrusted so much. The depth of Jérôme's spirituality is such that he is able to do without too present or too much emphasized a material. He reconciles dull tones and forms without ever calling on the material to support him. A painter like his friend, Fernand Toupin, who is the opposite of Jérôme, casts aside forms and lines to such a degree that he needs only a little material impregnated with light and shadow on a white surface, hardly making use of colour, for the shock to be produced. There are no painters more complementary, who by themselves alone present to us the two poles of contemporary painting.

Jérôme's imagination brims over. He is full of creative force, possessing his craft like no other. Yet, he never needs to *seduce*. This difficult art, sometimes discordant, is the antithesis of seduction! In this sense Jérôme enters painting by the narrow door. He makes no concession. No one has a more innocent look. He has the severity of Uzac tracing grooves or sculpting slate. These are artists who respond to Desire, who listen only to the secret eye. If we did not know what painting is, we would have to turn to Jérôme. Nowhere is there more freedom and authenticity. It must be said that there is no common ground between the language of words and this production, these surfaces where music prevails over everything. To tell the truth, one can communicate nothing of this universe. How can one seize water in his fingers, or the sun through his eyes? No painting, however close to nature, submits more precisely to its own laws, which are of another order. Painting obeys only its need to exist. Thus it demands neither subject or objects. It has a hunger for space, for tonalities, for harmony and for movement. It can only give itself up to the contemplation of forms and allow itself to be struck by illumination. A great deal of innocence is necessary in a painter in order that all the possibilities should appear. The painter must be in a state of waiting for possibilities. And when we meditate on one of Jérôme's pictures with fresh eyes, we see that everything is possible. In such a painting, it is life itself that always palpitates, always *alive*, in an infinite space.

(Translation by Mildred Grand)

FIVE NOTES ON BURNE-JONES

By Jean-Loup BOURGET

Together with William Morris, Edward Burne-Jones (1833-1898) is the principal representative of the second-generation Pre-Raphaelites, those who rejected Holman Hunt's moral-

istic naturalism in favour of the decorative symbolism practised by Rossetti. Burne-Jones' reputation as a leading artist reached its height at the end of the 19th century and subsequently declined. In more recent years, the fashion for Art Nouveau and the research into its origins, as well as the general revival of interest in painting inspired by poetry and literature, have reestablished Burne-Jones as an artist of the first rank. A retrospective of his work is to be shown at the Hayward Gallery, London¹.

1. The Love of Opposites

One of Burne-Jones' most famous canvases is at the Tate Gallery in London. It is *King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid* (1884). Painted in rather muted shades of brown, it might well escape the eye of the casual visitor, inattentive to the systematic series of oppositions in its basic structure. Firstly, the title itself implies a two-fold opposition which is made explicit by the two main figures: King vs. Beggar Maid. This again has the double articulation of Powerful vs. Humble (or Rich vs. Poor) and Masculine vs. Feminine. But the actual position of the characters in the picture reverses this relationship and makes the King subject to the Beggar Maid: Low vs. High. In terms of physical appearance, the following antinomies may be observed:

Maturity	vs. Youth
Dark hair	vs. Blond hair (contrary to the evidence of Tennyson's poem)
Olive skin	vs. Fair complexion
Beard	vs. Smooth-skinned
Clothing	vs. Nudity
Armour	vs. Dress

In compositional terms, we may add:

Profile	vs. Full face
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The Beggar Maid has a bunch of anemones in her right hand, while the King is holding his crown on his knees:

Crown	vs. Bouquet
Precious stones	vs. Flowers

a contrast which is also that of

Inorganic	vs. Organic
Culture	vs. Nature

The lower right-hand corner of the painting contains a further royal accessory: the spear and the shield (mechanical or cultural). Symmetry is obtained by the branches and the fruit (lemon-)trees in the upper left-hand corner: organic, Nature. The two page boys reading the musical score (above left) provide formal contrasts which seem unimportant but which echo the texture of the whole and the opposition between the two main characters:

Red hair	vs. Dark hair (the colours of the King/Beggar Maid relation are inverted)
Red clothing	vs. Green clothing (complementary colours)

Below, however, the sofa-cushions reverse this contrast:

Green cushion	vs. Red cushion
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The spear-shaft (lower right) is red in opposition to its green pennant. Even the strap of the shield is green on one side, red on the other. Above right, a landscape (Nature) and an Oriental carpet (Culture/Civilization) are juxtaposed. Three purple anemones from the Beggar Maid's bouquet lie scattered on the steps, repeating the Nature motif (wild flowers) vs. Culture (the very elaborate décor). At the same time, the bas-reliefs 'moving' in and out between the figures represent stylized animals, oriental in inspiration, an indication perhaps of a synthesis between Nature and Art.

This rapid examination would appear to

establish two things. Firstly, it seems clear that Burne-Jones' figurative technique functions according to a basic antinomy, a series of opposites, which far from being fortuitous, is quite systematic. Furthermore, that these oppositions are in no way dynamic (which also explains why they are not more immediately apparent). They express juxtapositions, rather than the conflicting elements of a potential synthesis. The formal contrasts are present (composition, colour), but instead of clashing, they balance each other. The same is true of the quasi-ideological oppositions. Temporal power and material wealth are, as it were, counter-balanced by moral subordination expressed in terms of space. Conversely, the Beggar Maid's "elevated" position compensates for her lowly rank.

A look at Burne-Jones' work as a whole provides ample confirmation of this preliminary evidence. At the outset one is struck by the number of pictures centred around two characters. A selection of the titles given to the artist's treatments of some of his favourite themes will illustrate this: religious subjects such as *The Annunciation* (implicit are the Virgin and the Angel; cf. in particular, the 1876-79 version at Port Sunlight) or *St. George and the Dragon* (1868, Walthamstow), profane subjects such as *The Idyll* (1862, Birmingham), mythological subjects like *Pan and Psyche* (1869-74, Cambridge, Mass.) or *Merlin and Vivien* (1870-74, Port Sunlight), allegorical ones, for example *Love and the Pilgrim* (1896-97, Tate Gallery). (Rossetti, on the other hand, tended to prefer either the one-figure composition or the very "peopled" one.) A study of these pictures shows the same series of oppositions which were pointed out in the case of *King Cophetua*:

— Natural oppositions	
Masculine	vs. Feminine
Dark hair	vs. Blond or red hair
— Spatial oppositions	
Low	vs. High
Profile	vs. Full face
— Cultural oppositions	
Clothing	vs. Nudity
Breast-plate	vs. Rag
— Symbolic oppositions	
Earth	vs. Water (or Air)
Rocks	vs. Grass (cf. <i>Pan and Psyche</i>)
Culture (musical instruments, books) vs. Nature (branches, rose-bushes)	
— Colour oppositions	

The frequent opposition (but one absent from *King Cophetua*) of the natural and the supernatural should also be noted. Thus, in *The Annunciation*, the Virgin (Nature) vs. the Angel (Supernatural). In *The Depth of the Sea* (1887, Cambridge, Mass.), a siren (Supernatural) drags a poor mortal down into her green and watery kingdom. The *Merciful Knight* (Nature) kneels in front of Christ on the Crucifix (Supernatural), [1863, Birmingham]. Love (Angel = Supernatural) guides the pilgrim. In series of paintings, the oppositions can be seen to be reversed: in the *Pygmalion* series (1878, Birmingham), Pygmalion initially represents Nature and Galatea is the (inorganic) statue. Then Pygmalion is made subject to Galatea (the Supernatural). However, in each individual picture, these oppositions are not ones of real antagonism. In a subtle way, they complement each other, like mutual reflections in a mirror or still water.

2. Sleep

Burne-Jones' universe is characterized by his fixed antinomies. Attention has frequently been drawn to his love of the Sleeping Beauty theme

and to his self-identification with the *Sleep of Arthur in Avalon* (1881-1898, Ponce, Puerto Rico). In the *Briar Rose* series which illustrates the Sleeping Beauty motif, the knights, the king and his courtiers, the princess and her companions are enclosed by the vegetation. Their bodies have the same weightlessness as the thorn-bushes which surround them. Once again, the armour, the crowns, the jewels and the rich materials contrast with the wild roses in flower — or does Nature reflect the sumptuousness of the former? Is it her triumph over Civilization? The impression is one rather of simultaneous difference and harmony between the two orders, each equally important and as complementary as the masculine and the feminine elements, or as the colours, red and green. Medieval, alive with musical instruments, the society depicted by Burne-Jones contains nothing to offend a sensibility out of tune with its own time. The sleep which moulds together the wild roses and the princess' court is the way to stop the march of time, to deny History. In a sense, Burne-Jones' painting itself is a sleep, rather than a dream. Contrary to the works of Fuseli, or of Goya, this sleep remains untroubled by nightmares. Conversely, it is a work which shows no real evolution.

3. Eroticism

We are constantly aware of a definite erotic element in these paintings. The Beggar Maid gazing past King Cophetua with her ringed eyes has a certain disturbing fascination. But it is an eroticism which is essentially passive. Eighteen times, the slender silhouette of a young girl in ancient dress descends *The Golden Stairs* (1872-1880, Tate Gallery), gracile, long-limbed, with sensuous hollows around her eyes. Of course, as in fairy-stories, the sheer number of these sister-figures accounts for part of their charm, being plural and singular at the same time. Once again, we find confirmation of the static, almost interchangeable, quality of Burne-Jones' oppositions: he prefers to paint the young girl, the adolescent, the ephebe, the hermaphrodite.

4. The Industrial Society

In spite of what has been said, it would be wrong to think that Burne-Jones was not a painter of his day. Apart from the fact that the dream aspect is the necessary reverse of the industrial society (witness the painter's extraordinary success in his own life-time), it must be remembered that Burne-Jones (and William Morris) are Victorians inasmuch as they tried to escape from what to them was a mercantile and philistine environment. In other words, their love for the decorative arts, stained glass windows, painted furniture, tapestries and ceramics indicates that they are real Victorians with a concern for the relationship between industry and the arts. Before enlarging on their idealism, it would be as well to point out that they were, in the practice of their art, materialists. Their understanding of the word "art" was that implicit in the term "arts and crafts". It is in this sense that Burne-Jones was not, as Lord David Cecil has put it, a "visionary", as was Samuel Palmer.

5. Burne-Jones' influence

Burne-Jones' influence on the Art Nouveau movement can be ascribed partly to his formal technique and partly to his efforts to bring about a greater understanding between industry and the arts. The subject has already been dealt with very adequately, and I shall limit myself to a few brief remarks. Firstly, the excellent

book by Martin Harrison and Bill Waters *Burne-Jones* (Barrie and Jenkins, London, 1973), devotes a final chapter to the influence exerted by the artist but fails to mention Carlos Schwabe. It seems nevertheless evident that an allegory such as *The Marriage of the Poet and the Muse* (1901-1902) is directly inspired by *The Depth of the Sea*. Its structure shows the same system of fixed oppositions (moreover, although this system is particularly evident in Burne-Jones' work, it might prove a fruitful basis of analysis for other symbolist painters). It is difficult to say whether the technique is typical of allegorical painting in general, or whether it expresses the particular powerless antagonism of these painters towards the industrial society). In addition, some of the drawings in the "Secret" book (1885 . . . , British Museum), *Sky and Waves*, for example, constitute one of the many links between symbolism and abstraction. Finally, a comparison seems called for between *The Golden Stairs* by Burne-Jones and the *Nu descendant un escalier* by Marcel Duchamp (1912). Duchamp, however, aimed at reproducing movement, whereas Burne-Jones spent a lifetime denying it.

1. From Nov. 5th 1975 to Jan. 4th 1976. The exhibition will then go to Southampton (January 24th - February 22nd) and to Birmingham, the artist's native city (March to April).

(Translation by Eithne Bourget)

RON KOSTYNIUK — STRUCTURES

By John W. GRAHAM

Set in a century of turbulent changes in every facet of man's endeavours, it is not surprising that the lack of direction and cohesive expression should be reflected and made manifest in equally diverse, disorderly, and frequently nihilistic art. The one consistent, orderly, though inconspicuous development in the visual arts which has managed to thread through the pervading influences and distractions has been, and continues to be, the constructed relief.

The constructed relief evolved in the late thirties from the two dimensional kinetics of Piet Mondrian's paintings through the work and theories of the American artist Charles Biederman who moved from the vision of Neo-Plasticism into the active and perceivable field of physical relationships of three dimensions. By defining and manipulating elements projecting from the ground plane, he achieved a reality between painting and sculpture, not unrelated to kinetic art, in which spatial and temporal relationships require both the artist and the viewer to participate.

In his notes on *Structurist Vision*, Eli Bornstein states that actual light, colour, space and structure, the parallel elemental qualities in nature, burst forth to displace their static frontal representations with dynamic multi-dimensional realities. It is this sense of ordered reality in union with nature which leads him to explain that a child may stand before a structurist relief or a flower and respond simply and directly to the visual reality of both without distinction.

And so it is with the work of Ronald Kostyniuk. Drawing upon his background in biology and an empirical approach to nature, he re-

jects rigid mathematical formulae in the ordering of his colour-forms, relying instead upon his intuitive sensibility. As one examines his work, it becomes apparent that he develops his colours and forms simultaneously; the relationships of the one with the other are too completely integrated to have been imposed one upon the other.

In order to focus attention upon the formal characteristics of the colour-forms, he avoids any indication of the inherent nature of the materials with which the work is executed. The materials become irrelevant, so that it is neither possible nor necessary to identify them. All the forms and surfaces are meticulously refined, and all the colours with their matte finish are so much a part of the forms that there is no sensation of arbitrary application or subjective distraction.

Gradually, he has moved beyond viewing the ground plane as the definitive limit of specific formal relationships. His later pieces actively engage the planar ground surfaces in the three-dimensional manipulations. As a result of his use of surface modulation, rotation and skewed inclination, he eliminates the connotations of positive and negative, on-off, figure-ground responses. The projecting elements are no longer separated by the spaces between them, but rather, are held together by them.

At times, we are led to a conscious awareness of the effects of squeezed space between extended parallel planes, and of the impact of contrast and opposition where the axial directions of the individual colour-forms are arranged in contrary directions to one another. The manipulation of the surface of the ground plane may set up a spatial radiation of tipping and tilting not unlike the concentric ripples in a pond or the flurry of leaves in a breeze.

One of the characteristics of man's evolving patterns is the apparent recurrence of cycles, which has led to the oft-repeated comment that things have come full circle. It is a misleading impression, however. Things do not stand still, but transform progressively, season by season. The circle is not a circle, but a spiral, unwinding in a shifting and inconsistent manner. In this context, it is useful to remember that Mondrian moved to his non-representational compositions through an increasingly conscious abstraction of the landscape, only to return again, shortly before his death, to the portrayal of aspects of the real world stimulated by the excitement of the rhythm and patterns he encountered after he came to America. It is also this quality of parallelism or analogue that links Ronald Kostyniuk's work to the latter-day development of Mondrian and the quality that he has advanced forward across a new threshold through the idiom of the structured relief. It is the deliberately ordered arrangement of the parts which stimulates the recollective memory.

In his own words, Ronald Kostyniuk's prime concern is the creation of visual analogues to nature's created forms, interpreted and translated into a nonmimetic art of geometric form and colour interaction. Working within a difficult and reductive idiom, it would be relatively easy to fall into the trap of slavish or narrow and legalistic adherence to formal pattern interpretation of Structuralist principles. However, in recognizing and accepting the fact that the processes and growth structures in nature are not universal but filled with adaptive variations, he has been free to work within the relief ethic to achieve a vital rather than sterile contemplative expressive style.