



Pierre Dorion; *sans titre*; 1990; oil and collage on canvas, 213.5 x 213.5 cm. Photo: Louis Lussier

PIERRE DORION
Galerie René Blouin
Montréal

The paintings in Pierre Dorion's most recent show are saturated with memory and evocation. The five main canvases present male figures looking askance or toward objects within the paintings. These objects have a faint hum of recognition and yet are so nebulous that they work more as emblems of thought than of substance: there is a blue orb, an arc, a rectangle, each object resting within the painting like some barely recognizable dream image. These objects give us no historical or biographical baggage and we

must therefore depend upon our own. The men, lifesize, are walking slowly, thinking, sitting, wondering about their world and their exotic relation to it. The paintings are uniformly still, quiet.

In previous work, Dorion has used historical and religious allegory to surround and sometimes swallow up the viewer. The work has covered the walls, the floor, the ceiling — the audience becoming an element of the landscape, the created history (together with Anne Boleyn, Napoleon and a pantheon of religious allusions). A few years ago, Dorion stated that his interest was in "building heavy cultural spaces wherein historical connotations

and processes are constantly scrutinized." In these most recent paintings Dorion ushers us into a much more personal world. We are implicated, by invitation and provocation, in the process of desire and imagination. We are left to our own devices.

The triptych, *Le cœur, le ciel, et la terre*, presents on the left, a figure, head down, arms akimbo; in the middle section, an elongated picture frame, the edges bowed, the background dark; and, on the right, another man sitting at right angle to the viewer and looking back, toward the frame of the central panel. The painting is pure evocation: the viewer must depend upon private set of thoughts and ideas to help com-

pose the canvas. The title directs us: heart, sky and earth — objects so big, yet for which we each have our own private, small definitions, our own select memories. In one sense, this is a painting in which nothing happens: two generic figures and an object sit within the painting. And yet, within that created silence, voices are heard, questions are asked. We construct the scenario, we connect the figures with the frame. There is a sense of dusk within this work — an interior that is clothed in sadness, brooding and loss of innocence.

In the single-panelled, *Sans Titre*, there is a male figure reclining at the forefront of the painting, lying on the earth and looking over his shoulder toward a wooden coloured arc-en-ciel. The painting is a sort of *Christiana's World*, without the romance. Here again, is another invitation to the viewer. Is that arc the twist of lost companions, lost ambitions? It is unfortunately rare for young artists to leave conclusions to the viewer, and yet that is what Dorion does here. There are of course no answers to these questions, yet to awaken them is itself a considerable achievement.

Dorion in turn questions his own ability to come up with definitive answers. A few years ago he talked about small museums and famous artists' studios that "question the legitimacy of my production, which feeds from a reserve of images largely borrowed from the past." Within these most recent paintings Dorion seems more self-reliant, more comfortable with his own contribution. The paintings have been simplified, so that a description of them depends more upon possibilities than on documentation.

In the diptych, *Sants Titre*, a figure, this time standing on the right, his back to us, looks toward an orb of blue light. The orb and the figure are separated yet inextricable. Is that orb some sort of childhood memory? Is it some muted sun, long since vanished? Are these painting much more concerned with questions than with answers?

Many artists try to be evocative, expecting us to clothe their work in our own longings and delusions, expecting that we should come to the work with a wealth of historical bombast and opinion. Dorion gives us instead a gentle nudge, perhaps no more than an innuendo or a warning. Because the distinction between viewer and figure is so tenuous within this work, the paintings (whether we like it or not) invoke us and we invoke them. The works encourage a self-reliance

that is both disarming and accommodating. Within these canvases are memories of other times, other thoughts, other dreams, suggesting that we reacquaint ourselves with our own history. The paintings summon three contiguous worlds: that of the painter, the figures and the viewer.

Our conclusions after looking at these paintings are necessarily opaque, not unlike the colours that Dorion has used: muted ambre, green blue, yellow, all washed with the coppery patina of time. These works evoke a history just preceding ours — far enough away that we can't remember it, but close enough that we've heard its stories. There is a crystalline nostalgia to these paintings — a remembrance, at one remove, of things past. Having always used icons in his work (sometimes the old-fashioned icons of religion and history, sometimes the more familiar icons that find their way onto postcards, stamps and family photographs), he moves in these paintings toward more personal icons, and they are suffused with intimacy and quietude — a relection both on and of the self.

Peter O'Brien