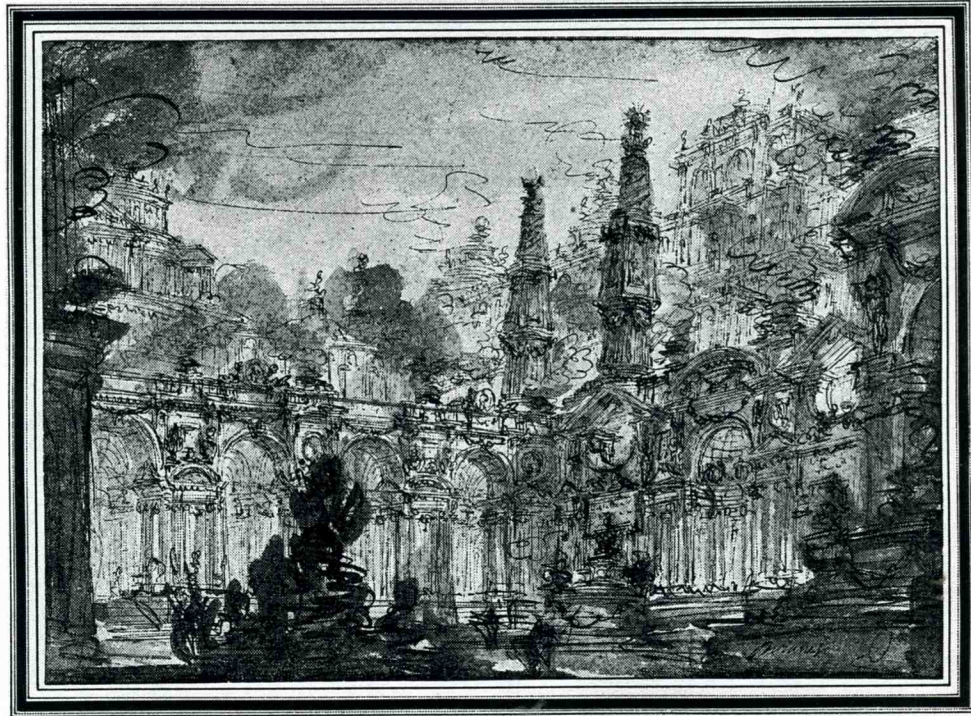


PERSPECTIVES ON SPACE-MAKING

Exploring Rome: Piranesi and His Contemporaries, Canadian Centre for Architecture (CCA), Montreal. August 17 1993 - January 4, 1994. Michel Daigneault, *Abstraire l'Abstrait*, Galerie Christiane Chassay, Montreal. August 21 - September 12, 1993



Giovanni Battista Piranesi, *Fantastic Monuments*, 1747-1750. Pen, brown ink, brown wash over graphite underdrawing on cream laid paper; 19,8 x 27,7 cm. Collection: Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montréal.

Representing space in two dimensions is one of the fundamental challenges of the visual arts and while the scope of contemporary art is rapidly expanding, reflecting on such a basic issue can help give greater meaning to the current artistic debate.

Two recent exhibitions in Montreal dealing with subject matter from different disciplines and separated widely in historical time were nonetheless remarkable for their similarity of approach to the problem of pictorial space-making. At the Galerie Christiane Chassay, Montreal painter Michel Daigneault showed sixteen new abstract paintings and at the Canadian Centre for Architecture, the exhibition *Exploring Rome: Piranesi and His Contemporaries* presented an impressive collection of drawings, etchings and watercolours by eighteenth century artists and architects.

The idea that a display of contemporary art might have a lot in common with an exhibition drawn from a period of art history raises some interesting questions about the terms avant-garde and contemporary. Montreal critic Ricardo Castro underlined his appreciation of this idea by opening a review of the Piranesi exhibit with a citation by Benedetto Croce: All history is contemporary history¹.

Ironically, it is arguable that the Daigneault exhibit was the less avant-garde of the two shows: while formalist abstraction remains marginal, it has nonetheless developed a distinguished history over nearly a hundred years. Those choosing abstraction today must assume a position relative to these traditions and, in this sense, Daigneault's work can be read as an attempt to revitalize an established artistic territory left somewhat neglected by the recent preoccupations of contemporary art. By contrast, much of the work of the eighteenth century artists represented in the Piranesi exhibit, including among others Hubert Robert, Richard Wilson, Fragonard and Robert Adam, was genuinely innovative. The eighteenth century was an era of profound social change in the Western World: a series of dramatic events that radically transformed art, economics, politics, and science took place within a condensed period.

The CCA exhibit, organized with the cooperation of New York's Pierpont Morgan Library and private collectors, was an ambitious undertaking that allowed for complex readings on many levels. Using Rome and Venetian architect Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720-1778) as points of reference, the display celebrated the exchange of ideas and influences between different artistic disciplines during the

