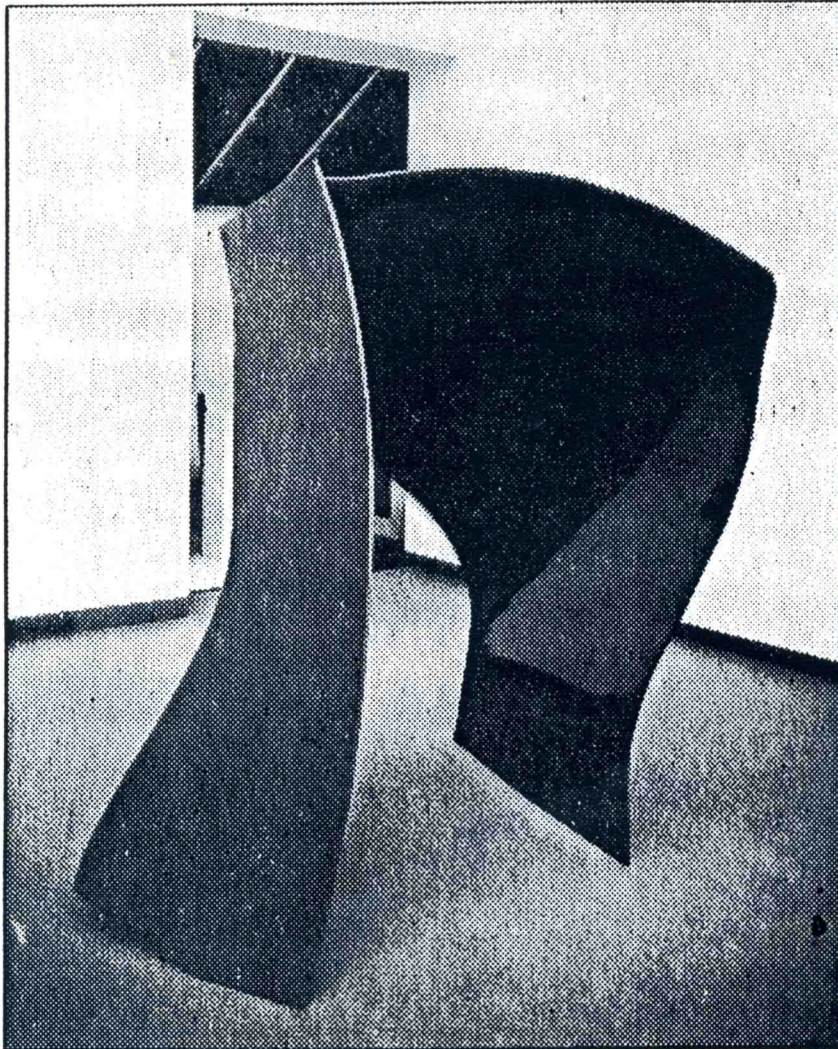


Forum 76

Georges Bogardi

SIX YEARS have passed since the last Survey show organized by the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts — much too long a time to be without a comprehensive review of new art produced in a country where creative artists are not concentrated in one center but scattered across

an area so vast that only the most peripatetic lover of art can claim to have even an approximate picture of the latest trends and developments. Of course, we have had the Canadian Canvas survey and Olympic extravaganzas like Spectrum and Mosaicart in the meantime, but these panoramas were all handicapped in some way: The first by a timid, middle-of-the-road selection of paintings only, the latter two by a



Togiak 1974 by Robert Murray

palpable lack of artistic purpose — they existed, finally, because the money was available.

The MMFA's FORUM 76 is frustrating in much the same way. Deputy director Leo Rosshandler (who resigned this week) and curator Germain Lefebvre assembled 149 works by 110 Canadian artists but seem to have made little effort to shape the exhibition to the particular needs of the Montreal public. An example: Torontonians David Craven, who is possibly the most interesting young painter in the country, is represented by one work, the same number he had in Canadian Canvas and Mosaicart. He has never had a one-man show in this city. Meanwhile, there are two Hurlubise canvases in FORUM 76 and of course it's nice to see them, but this Montreal artist can hardly be said to suffer from under-exposure in his hometown. An opportunity to inform Montrealers (the show will not travel) has thus been lost.

Even in terms of a shallow, panoramic survey, the exhibition has major gaps. Only 14 of the 110 participants work outside Quebec and Ontario: The vigorous Prairies scene has been all but ignored. And no survey that excludes seminal figures like Molinari, Gaucher, McEwen, Gagnon plus artists like Goodwin, Poulin, Dean, Mongrain, Noel and Whittome, to mention only Montrealers, can be said to be comprehensive or even competent.

To accentuate the positive, FORUM 76 does have a certain freshness and a capacity to surprise, something that previous surveys have lacked. The show's organizers have done a formidable amount of work: They sent out invitations to 5,000 artists, went through 1,200 replies, visited studios across the country and reportedly did their best to persuade Montreal artists to participate.

That this last effort was in vain in so many cases is a symptom of the alienation that has come to exist between the MMFA and a significant sector of the Montreal art community. One of the most urgent problems the new director will have to address himself to is this pervasive mistrust. (As one artist put it recently: "They don't just hang paintings in the Museum — They lynch them.")

As it so often happens with Canadian exhibitions not organized by the National Gallery, the catalogue is the weakest component of FORUM 76. Its introduction is confined to a narcissistic retelling of how the show was organized and, amid the implied self-congratulation, forgets about the art. Astonishing-

