

A beautiful trip into the 'sky of one mind'

GALLERY GOING
GARY MICHAEL DAULT

If the beautifully hectic paintings of Montreal artist **Sylvain Bouthillette** — now at Toronto's **Clint Roenisch Gallery** — seem almost violently addictive, each of them a turmoil of stuff, it may be because of the artist's fervently held beliefs.

Bouthillette is a Buddhist, for one thing. He is also an alumnus of a former punk band called Bliss (in which he played bass). He loves the music of jazz saint John Coltrane. And he admires the life and works of the late German artist and shaman, Joseph Beuys (another art saint). It's a fervid and festive mix, and it comes out in his paintings in a sort of graphic cataclysm that lives up to the huge magenta letters emblazoned across the gallery's front window: "Everything is Beautiful."

The paintings are chalked, sprayed, scratched, scraped, gouged and, apparently, clawed in to being on what look like blackboards (but in fact are fields primed with blackboard paint) — a homage to Beuys and his famous

transcendental chaktalks. The imagery Bouthillette employs is drawn from a visual vocabulary he has worked out for himself over the last few years: birds, stars, tigers, bears, bees, whirling spheres (or planets) and peculiar cone-shaped, dunce-cap-like configurations, usually plopped rakishly and hat-like onto ball-shaped objects, which are invariably painted white with red spots, like snowballs with the measles.

Private though this imagery might at first seem, it doesn't feel all that private, given the immediacy, the almost overwhelming presence of Bouthillette's pictures. You feel lost in space in each one of them. You feel lost in the far reaches of mind and imagination too. Each of Bouthillette's paintings reminds me of a poem by his fellow Buddhist (well, sort of a Buddhist), Jack Kerouac: It's one of the choruses (#211) from *Mexico City Blues* where the King of the Beats celebrates "All the endless conception of living beings / Gnashing everywhere in Consciousness / Throughout the ten directions of space / Occupying all the quarters in & out, / From supermicroscopic no-bug / To huge Galaxy Lightyear Bowell / Illuminating the sky of

one Mind. . ."

Whew. But that's what the paintings are like — the sky of one mind. And a mind willing and eager and determined to share. In a painting like *A Love Supreme*, for example, there are certain wild ambiguities. What's that big tiger doing there floating in space (an extremely active space, graphically speaking), gnashing everywhere in consciousness? Well, my Buddhism's a tad rusty, but I think the vast, light-year animal is a kind of warrior-spirit guide, no? Anyhow, it's a commanding being and something to cling to in this otherwise airless sea of crackling outlaw energy.

"A lot of my work is intended to be explosive, to force its presence on you," the artist reported to Clint Roenisch, his Toronto dealer. He named *A Love Supreme* after the famous Coltrane recording, he says, because while "you can hear his saxophone playing as a form of aggression," it was, for Coltrane, rather "a message of love and spiritual height . . . the creating of a spiritual tension that keeps you up there and really focused. There's a quality of presence that you can't ignore, and I want my work to have that quality. Not to blast you in the head, but to tell you, hey, look at

me and let's see what can happen." What I say is, you look at these new paintings by Sylvain Bouthillette and a lot can happen.

Prices on request. Until Oct. 31,
944 Queen St. W., Toronto; 416-516-8593.

VISUAL ARTS



Sylvain Bouthillette's A Love Supreme: 'A lot of my work is intended to be explosive, to force its presence on you.'