

JUAN GEUER

The Ottawa Art Gallery, OTTAWA
Axe Néo-7, HULL

We pretend to know a conclusion that we don't know.

Juan Geuer

There is a tendency to interpret Juan Geuer's work in relation to scientific method but Geuer's spontaneity and willingness to forego conclusions are more consistent with a pure vision. Geuer's ability to implicate the viewer in his vision was evident in his recent simultaneous exhibitions at Axe Néo-7 and the Ottawa Art Gallery where he showed a total of twelve works.

Geuer's parents were both artists involved in the de Stijl movement in Holland. Just prior to World War II they fled to Bolivia where Geuer was raised. After coming to Canada in 1954, Geuer worked for 26 years with the Earth Physics branch of the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources. His experience there as a draftsman and designer of fine instruments makes *Al Asnaan* (one of the ten works shown in "Investigating Chaos" at the Ottawa Art Gallery), a natural progression from his technical to his artistic process. *Al Asnaan* is an interactive seismometer with a laser beam that registers activity in the room by panning the wall. Although it will read major tremours in the earth's surface it will more readily read the presence of a person. This machine, instead of rendering the body obsolete, reaffirms it. The machine, in this case, depends on the body to create its meaning.

Eye to Eye, shown at Axe Néo-7, induces an astounding interpersonal intimacy through a machine, albeit a very simple one. Face-shaped two-sided mirrors are suspended between the ceiling and floor on wires. When two people stand on either side of a mirror, each person sees her or his face reflected but with the eyes of the other person. This bizarre merging



Photo: Jean-Yves Vigneau

JUAN GEUER
Detail: *Eye to Eye*
(1993); Installation

experience begs questions of individual and collective identities. The 36 mirrors in the gallery enable participants to imagine a communal experience, as if the shared experience of only two is too narrow and confrontational.

The experiential moment of knowing, constructed within the triad of self-nature-science, is painstakingly distended in a piece titled *H2O*, also at Axe Néo-7. A laser beam passes through a droplet of water as it gradually exudes from a pipette. The laser projects a tremendously magnified image of the droplet onto the wall behind. The projection seems wild and random and illustrates a phenomenon known as "catastrophe optics." The

identification of particles as they whirl around in their Brownian patterns within the microcosm of the drop connects us with that sense of wonder that served us so well as children in our construction of reality.

Geuer's work at the Ottawa Art Gallery exploits our desire to deconstruct material by reducing highly rational systems into poetic experience. *Loom Drum* depicts 5,500 earthquakes recorded in North America between January 1960 and January 1989. The actual time-span is collapsed into a 15-minute cycle with flashing lights representing locations of earthquakes on a circular screen. The interface Geuer makes between nature and culture and between science and art

creates a struggle for his viewers, leaving us out on the edge. In *The Lord is Cuming*, a grid that is initially visible disappears as one approaches until all that remains is a faint reflection of the self. The order of the original image

gives way to a ghostlike image – to be too close to the work is to lose it.

These works incite construction of meaning through an interaction between the physiological and spiritual. Geuer makes us aware that we have

lost that interconnectedness as we experience an environment mediated by technology. The fact that he uses technology to make his point underlines the irony of his thesis.

Caroline Langill

