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Messages Sent in the Medium of Light

By PHILLIP EVANS-CLARK

WHAT should say that summer is all sea, sun and the senses? More than ever, it is becoming the most fashionable season for staging magnificent festivals, dazzling blockbusters and numerous smaller pageants. What is happening now in Montreal is no exception. Sandwiched between the jazz and the cinema festivals, and concurrent with a Miró retrospective, the International Center of Contemporary Art has organized an extensive and somewhat conspicuous exhibition entitled "Lights: Perception — Projection."

This exhibition, on view through Nov. 2, is not only the biggest showcase of contemporary art in Canada, it is also an international event of some magnitude, involving eight countries and 44 artists. Canadian artists, numbering 20, make up the bulk of this group. The United States follows with 10 artists, France with eight, Switzerland with two and England, West Germany, the Nether-

lands and Italy with one each. The show contains numerous and various installations whose common thread is the use of electrical light-bearing devices. Neon, slide projectors, holograms, back-lit photographs characterize the vast majority of the works.

The Center of Contemporary Art is a most original organization. As a nonprofit, independent body, it has a freedom of choice heretofore unheard of in Canada. Situated in the basement of a shopping mall in central Montreal, the center is an unusual, although by no means detrimental, site for art. On the contrary, the barren surfaces of concrete and the neighboring boutiques seem to add to a peculiar atmosphere of conviviality, cultural integration, ease, and a lack of pretention stemming from a sense of coy self-derision.

The center is the dream child of Claude Gosselin, its founder and current executive director. Its function is to promote contemporary art in a fashion that neither public institutions nor private galleries can afford to do. Since 1984, the center has organized a yearly event called the

"Hundred Days of Contemporary Art." In reference to the duration of the exhibition. This year's show, "Lights: Perception — Projection," has been curated by Claude Gosselin himself and reflects his personal taste for installations and his commitment to an art form that draws much from technology.

As the title suggests, "Lights" is a theme exhibition. Such exhibitions are not new and usually end up as irretrievable mish-mashes of loosely related works. Although this show does not fall into such a trap, neither does it propose a new exploration of its subjects and it finally is rooted in an approach that was typical of much art of the 1970's.

This year's exhibition is not short of international art celebrities. The list includes Daniel Buren, Bruce Nauman, Bertrand Lavier, Murray Favro, Keith Sonnier, James Turrell, Chris Burden, Dan Flavin, Christian Boltanski and Giulio Paolini.

But the most stimulating works came from a younger group of relatively unknown artists.

The pair of Kristin Jones and Andrew Ginzel look, move and work like elves and the result is an art that eludes definition. What the spectator sees is a small, rectangular opening in a wall, neatly striped with colored threads (giving the illusion of a glass window) through which one can distinguish objects floating in space, dancing around each other. What one does not see is the complex machinery that produces these effects which involves veils, fans, lights, flames, a room filled with objects hanging from the ceiling, water pumps and other props. The delicacy, the weightlessness, and the beauty of these pieces are unique.

The work of Jones and Ginzel is not only highly technical. It is, after all, a cool universe of radiant colors and materials, but it also gives the feeling of something primeval: a radical beginning, the breath of a new genesis. ■