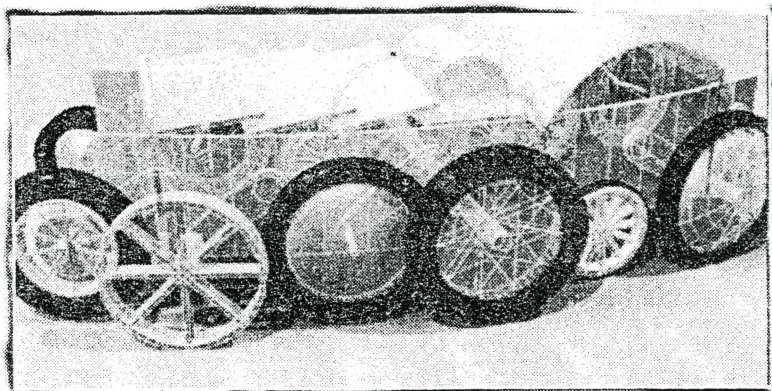


HISTORICAL GROUNDING

ART

Only the
message flies
with Robert
Saucier

MARCUS MILLER



Techno à go go, gone

Walking into the small gallery at Circa triggers a curious robotic vehicle that's attached to the post in the middle of the room. A strange-sounding voice reads newspaper headlines as the vehicle slowly spirals its way around the post. When the cable that connects it to the post is completely wound up and it can't move any farther, it simply reverses direction, unwinds and spirals the other way – over and over and over again.

This installation, *still can't fly*, brings together the anachronistic technological models of the artist's 80s' pieces, and the otherworldly look of his more recent work. The overwhelming

profusion of references, meant to confound historically entrenched myths and rigid truths, has been pared down to an analog of futility.

A beautiful little thing, the vehicle is an odd amalgam of renaissance-like invention and high-tech design. Cool, precisely finished, steel components make up a purpose-built, curved body that rides on an inexplicable number of wheels. Actually there are 12 of them (far too many for a vehicle this size); they are all different, and they all overlap. As can be expected from this artist, the finesse of workmanship is impressive, but in this relatively humble piece, it doesn't overwhelm.

Apparently both of Saucier's

grandfathers were blacksmiths, and having grown up in New Brunswick, he had the opportunity to use the old forge behind the farmhouse, making all kinds of things that had no immediate purpose.

Obviously his skills and interest in making were established and coddled from an early age. A UQÀM graduate, he first gained notoriety in the 80s with work characterized by its ambitious scale, almost fetishistic attention to detail and the insistent use of outmoded technological icons. Models of old locomotives, ships, dirigibles, famous buildings and mediaeval armour all made their way into room-sized installations that looked like

visions dreamt up by demented model railroaders.

More recently however, his work has dropped its model-like aspect, as well as its direct references. A new family of distopian machines emerged in the 90s, the exact pedigree or purpose of which was highly ambiguous. Still fabricated with an astonishing degree of craftsmanship, they did however, retain their multi-layered complexity.

In *still can't fly*, the profusion of parts and metaphorical links that always gave Saucier's work a stupefying baroque density has given way to a more minimal approach. Here, you don't feel as if there are reams of details to sift through before the bigger picture emerges. You walk into the room, the

machine starts moving/talking, and you get it – all at once.

This isn't to imply any sacrifice of effect, or meaning, or even of ambiguity. In fact, a greater clarity and force seems to be the result. The critique of technology, previously accomplished through its reduction to outmoded models and the contradictory layering of historical paradigms, emerges here as clear statement of human and technological folly. The instantaneous apprehension of the constituent parts resolves itself here, in a meditation on the Sisyphean character of our existence. ■

still can't fly, Circa,
372 Ste-Catherine W, #444, until May 15