

**SAMUEL ROY-BOIS**  
**LET US, THEN, BE UP AND DOING, WITH A HEART**  
**FOR ANY FATE; STILL ACHIEVING, STILL PURSUING,**  
**LEARN TO LABOR AND TO WAIT.**  
JUNE 13 TO AUGUST 24, 2008

The lyrical title of Samuel Roy-Bois' new installation for the Contemporary Art Gallery comes from the last refrain of the American poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's sonnet, *A Psalm of Life: What The Heart Of The Young Man Said To The Psalmist* (1838). The inspirational tone of the poem is summed up in these last lines, which urge the reader to literally "be up and doing." Like the meaning of most of Longfellow's poems, the gist of *A Psalm of Life* is immediately accessible and fairly direct: people must strive to move forward, "to act, that each to-morrow / Find us farther than to-day." The poem celebrates working, in particular, the work of artists. Life is not for dying, but to pursue art, which can transcend time: "Art is long, and Time is fleeting."—————

Longfellow was one of the most popular poets of his time with his work being widely disseminated through magazines and in newspapers; he was a populist, which led to his unprecedented success and was also used as a criticism against him. He was commonly considered a sentimental writer, and there is no doubt that his singsong writing style blended with his inspirational topics made Longfellow a romantic. This inspirational romanticism is essential to Roy-Bois' new work. In particular, it is Longfellow's idealized notion of art and his use of the journey as a metaphor for how life should be lived that makes his writing pertinent to Roy-Bois' new work.—————

The poetic title also functions as a distraction. It has kept me from describing Roy-Bois' new installation. In fact, I feel that to describe it would take away from the experience of the piece. I can say that like many of his large installation works, it sets the viewer in motion, or more accurately, makes the viewer aware of their movements. In the past he has asked art audiences to crawl, climb or squeeze in, or has simply guided them to walk across a raised floor that in response amplifies the sound of one's footsteps, or to walk in circles to look into the window of a rotating room. The artist's simple directions ground the body of the viewer in space and in relation to material reality, and keeps them moving down a path on a scripted journey. But for this

new piece, the journey is more articulated and filled with romantic notions of mystery and discovery. With a precision of means, a slight incline, a few turns, low lighting and a series of irregular triangles, in a small space, Roy-Bois has created a tangible journey that has many of the clichéd characteristics of a fantastic adventure. The combined elements create a narrative that is familiar to childhood fairytales, which are repeatedly played out into adulthood through an endless array of popular adventure films and video games. The basic plot sends the hero on a quest into the unknown far from home in search of a talisman that saves lives, maybe the world, or more greedily brings personal riches. No matter how divergent the details are within each story, a mystery always needs to be maintained in the true spirit of discovery.—————

Roy-Bois has built a trek into the unknown in search of the unknown. But of course, like the immeasurable number of popular adventure stories, it is just a representation. In taking this passage, the risks are limited and don't go beyond the regular perils of venturing into most contemporary art galleries. Yet the pleasure of suspense is still an important factor. So here, in this text, I feel I shouldn't tell you more than there is a treasure at the end of the path. But how long can this mystery be upheld? Have I already revealed too much? And how integral is maintaining an element of the unknown to understanding the work? Is this desire for sustaining some level of suspense a metaphor for experiencing art?—————

It is the experience of seeing that is privileged in this work, in all of Roy-Bois' works. Roy-Bois rarely gives the viewer a whole image to rest on or in. There is no sweet spot from which to experience the work. As in *Satellites* (2006), where two built rectangular rooms, each with two large plate glass windows, rotate clockwise so the viewer can never simultaneously see inside both forms or view the structures as static wholes. As each room spins, they block parts of the other from view. The sculpture *Shallow Island* (2005), functions similarly. It has a defined outside and inside which look and feel

very different. The inside is a highly finished room with whitewash walls, wall to wall carpeting and track lighting, while the outside form remains unfinished, with the framing exposed, the walls unpainted and the entire room hoisted up on pieces of miscellaneous furniture. In *Let us, then, be up and doing...* Roy-Bois again creates a severe divide between inside and outside. Even though they are part of the same experience, they read more as separate pieces, or distinct events along the journey, rather than a unified whole. —————

For this new work, Roy-Bois takes this division of sum and parts further by fragmenting the structural plane. The inside is built as an uneven surface that bends into pocks and folds to form slight turns. The uniform structure sharply shifts in direction, size and pitch. It can never be seen from any one point in its entirety, and its outside is completely concealed from view. This fragmented plane is echoed in another sculptural element, which glows, luminous, at the end of the journey, but here the form is laid visible as a whole. —————

Many of the elements in the exhibition are hidden or obscured, but this visibly handmade sculpture is displayed to be found and offered as a reward for taking the journey, and for striving forward toward something. It registers like Longfellow's inspirational urging, "We can make our lives sublime." It is the goal of the quest laid bare, signaling a tangible end. The goal has been reached and in finding this last element a sense of absolute achievement for the viewer and finitude in the object. The object will always sit at the end of the journey and it

will always be its goal. I feel I must remind you that, like the numerous popular adventure tales and treasure hunts, Roy-Bois' journey is a representation and as such, the ending can last forever. —————

*Jenifer Pappararo*

#### BIO

Originally from Québec City, Samuel Roy-Bois is currently residing in Vancouver. He acquired his BFA from Université Laval in Québec (1996) and a Masters Degree in Fine Arts from Concordia University in Montréal (2001). His installations have been shown across Canada and internationally; his solo exhibitions include *Divertissements*, Point éphémère, Paris (2007); *Improbable and ridiculous*, Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, Montréal (2006); *Faire l'indépendance*, Quartier éphémère, Montréal (2005); *The Monologue* (Contempt and seduction), Eyelevel Gallery, Halifax (2005); *Fractures mortelles*, Galerie de l'École des arts visuels, Université Laval, Quebec (2004); *Le monologue*, Galerie Articule, Montréal (2003); *J'ai entendu un bruit, je me suis sauvé*, Or Gallery, Vancouver, 2003; and *Les printemps obsolètes*, site-specific project in Montréal (2001). His bibliography includes *Burrow*, exhibition catalogue, Oakville Galleries (2007); "Light magic: the measured structures and time-based illuminations of Samuel Roy-Bois," *C Magazine* (Summer 2008); "Samuel Roy-Bois," *Modern Painters*, New York, (September 2006); "Le dehors de l'architecture: sur quelques installations de Samuel Roy-Bois," *Spirale Magazine*, Montréal (Fall 2006); and "Samuel Roy-Bois: Improbable and ridiculous," *DAMn*, Bruxelles (July/August 2006).

#### ARTIST TALK

Thursday, July 24, 7pm

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The Contemporary Art Gallery is generously supported by the Canada Council for the Arts, the City of Vancouver and the Province of BC through the BC Arts Council, the BC Gaming Policy and Enforcement Branch and the BC Arts Renaissance Fund which is administered by Vancouver Foundation. We are grateful for the support of The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Vancouver Foundation and our members, donors and volunteers.