

*Vaste et Vague* Artist Centre  
Carleton, Quebec

## **Why create?**

Lectures by writer-philosopher Pierre Bertrand  
Given in Gaspé and Carleton, Quebec, in October 2004

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Resource person for the lecture project

The *Vaste et Vague* artist centre is the only venue in the Gaspé to promote and present contemporary art and to serve as a place where ideas can be exchanged and challenged. The centre provides considerable room in its programming for artists with an inter-arts practice. These artists often need interaction with the surrounding community in order to carry out their projects.

Most of the artistic practices featured in the centre's programming echo the writings of Pierre Bertrand. For many years, this philosopher has thought about the origins of the creative drive. He describes the act of creating with great sensitivity: "*The act of creation should take us by surprise, come upon us like a strong wind blowing in from the sea, completely outside our will, like an act of grace.*"<sup>1</sup> Pierre Bertrand was invited to give some lectures in the Gaspé. We wanted to offer our artistic community and the general public an opportunity to deepen their understanding of inter-arts practices by taking into account the contexts in which they take place. The rationale of a symposium was first used to prepare this series of lectures and encounters with the Gaspé community. However, what at the outset was intended to be used only as a premise for an event quite simply turned into an event in its own right.

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<sup>1</sup> P.Bertrand, *Logique de l'excès*, Les Herbes Rouges / essay, 1996, p.74

*Why create?* This is what Mr. Bertrand suggested to us as the title of his lectures. “What’s the use of it?” And “what’s the use of a human being?” the philosopher extrapolated. Creation makes it possible to transform what is. Artists have an opportunity to change chaos into cosmos. The philosopher made us realize that the object that we see exhibited is not a creation, but the result of a creation. The act of creation is not an end in itself. What one offers to be seen is only an infinitesimal part of a process. The analogy of the cloud illustrates the philosopher’s point: a cloud is not a finite object; it is something that is constantly mutating. What can be seen at a particular point in time is different from what is available a moment later. That is how creation occurs in the here and now. *It is a way of grasping and incorporating reality.\** The act of creation is not to reproduce nature, but to *act* like nature.

What does it mean to have a creative attitude? What does it mean to learn from what is happening? Creation means to be in contact with what is. What we are is the starting point of the act of creation. Why are we so lacking in creativity? Probably because we claim that we already know. We do not question enough or we simply accept what others discover on our behalf. We imitate them or we imitate nature. Creation, in Pierre Bertrand’s view, should emanate from our own vision, our own perception of reality. We must stop comparing ourselves with images and models. Let’s stop wanting to be what the other is. Let’s just be. Creation does not encourage imitation, but rather other creations. *Do creators know ahead of time what they are going to create? Do writers know in advance what they are going to write? Painters what they are going to paint? No, because the act of creation reveals something new.* What we need to retain from these statements is the crucial importance of spontaneity, that little voice inside ourselves. Can we call it intuition? The philosopher prefers to talk about the intelligence of the body.

This form of intelligence is practiced through perception that does not need intellect because it operates through sensitivity and passion. Creators open themselves up to life, to what is happening at the very moment, because perception always takes place in the moment itself. That is why artists learn how to create on the basis of what they are and what they experience. In this way, creators trust what they create because what they create comes from themselves. With great finesse, our speaker made us aware that negative states happen to us when we start to want something. *We become frustrated when we want something. Let’s imagine what would happen if*

*the energy spent in comparisons, conflict and, as a result, in suffering was released. What creations could then be produced!* Artists are often challenged by questions from other people who ask: What's the use of that? *What's the use of a rose?* retorts our philosopher. What is beauty then? If something is visually beautiful, would it not be because it possesses a certain presence? *The splendour of the rose is evident, regardless of whether it is seen or whether it is alone. While the shining beauty of a rose may eventually be reflected in someone's gaze, its beauty first shone in itself and was a light for itself.* Genuine creators do not need to create to please, but because they simply *must* create. It is through the urgency and power of their act of creating that they will succeed in transmitting the inner beauty of their works – not the beauty that is given to be seen but that which is given to be received.

In this regard, we believe that this thinker's visit to our region helped nourish our ideas and clarify certain misunderstandings that are often generated by the works that we present in our centre. We think that the people who took part in these meetings will share this idea that was repeatedly raised by our guest: creating is very simply a way of living intensely in the here and now.

\*All the quotations in italics in the rest of the text come from the talks given in October.