

TOILE DE FOND

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SIMPLY RED

BETTY GOODWIN

LA DÉRIVE DES SENTIMENTS



Texte: Luc Boulanger

Photo: Jean-François Bérubé

Vu de l'extérieur, l'atelier de Betty Goodwin ressemble davantage à un bunker qu'à un triplex du Plateau Mont-Royal. Mais à l'intérieur, il ne fait aucun doute que nous sommes dans le lieu de travail d'un artiste, avec tout ce matériel soigneusement rangé sur de vastes tables, ces œuvres inachevées qui dorment dans un coin. Ici et là, on remarque des photos, des découpures de presse ou de simples notes sur un bout de papier épinglees aux murs.

Betty Goodwin travaille par associations. C'est un long et capricieux processus, comme la bonification du vin. Par exemple, elle a affiché dans son atelier une reproduction du *Baiser de Judas*, de Giotto. On voit une rixe qui se déroule durant l'arrestation de Jésus. Au-dessus, une photo dénichée dans le magazine *Time* représente une émeute dans les rues de Manille. On jurerait que la scène a eu lieu au même endroit, et au même moment, comme si les gestes violents et absurdes des hommes étaient condamnés à se répéter éternellement. L'artiste regarde souvent ces deux images, en attendant le jour où elle s'en inspirera.

«La création ne commence pas dans l'atelier, dit-elle. Son origine est toujours extérieure. Que ce soient les images transmises par les médias, ou celles perçues dans la rue. L'artiste n'est pas coupé du monde, même s'il s'isole pour créer. Toutefois, je dois

transporter ce monde extérieur dans mon studio, le faire passer à travers moi, le transformer et l'insérer dans une œuvre. Pour *La Mémoire du corps* (sa présente exposition chez René Blouin), mon point de départ a été une photographie d'un bain dans lequel Van Gogh se lavait à la fin de sa vie. Je me la suis appropriée et c'est devenu une image significative pour moi. A force de regarder une chose, elle s'implante en moi. C'est comme si ça pénétrait à travers ma peau.»

La première fois que j'ai vu *Do you Know How Long It Takes for Any One to Reach Another*, à l'exposition *Aurora Borealis*, en 1985, j'ai pensé à un rêve familial. J'ai été saisi par un effet de distance et de proximité, comme si l'artiste avait transcrit les images de mon inconscient. Sur le papier velin, Goodwin représentait le combat entre la profondeur et la surface des corps; le dur désir de rejoindre l'autre et non seulement l'effleurer; notre dépendance qu'aucune blessure n'efface. Mais ces personnages semblaient dire qu'on ne parvient jamais à combler la distance entre les êtres. Ces figures peintes au pastel, à l'huile et au fusain étaient le reflet d'une ardente solitude.

«Si l'œuvre de Betty Goodwin touche

tant de gens, affirme le directeur du Musée des beaux-arts, Pierre Théberge, c'est parce qu'elle parle de façon très moderne de la douleur de vivre, de la fragilité de l'être dans le monde. Elle a peint des personnages presque découpés en morceaux; le corps devient le principal lieu d'affrontement avec le réel. Certains de ses tableaux ont des affinités avec des sculptures de Giacometti, ou encore la littérature de Kafka. Goodwin parle de l'angoisse ressentie devant ce qui nous échappe. De l'homme ou de la femme qui essaie de comprendre comment fonctionne la grande machine de l'univers, et qui, parfois, se sent pris dans une sourcière.»

LE FACTEUR TEMPS

Depuis un quart de siècle, Betty Goodwin explore les zones floues de la détresse humaine. À travers son œuvre riche et varié, on peut voir la fine trame de la vie se dérouler. Aujourd'hui, Betty Goodwin est l'une des meilleures ambassadrices canadiennes de l'art contemporain dans le monde (avec Geneviève Cadieux et Jeff Wall). Reconnue et respectée du milieu, elle est aussi devenue une figure publique en remportant le prix Borduas, en 1986. Le Musée des beaux-arts de Montréal lui a consacré une rétrospective en 1988, organisée par la conservatrice en chef Yolande Racine. Elle a

représenté le Canada à la XXe biennale de São Paulo en 1989. Finalement, l'Université de Montréal vient de décerner un doctorat honorifique à cette artiste qui n'a jamais fait d'études post-secondaires.

À deux pas du nouveau Musée d'art contemporain (où Goodwin fait partie de la collection permanente), la galerie René Blouin présente, jusqu'au 25 juillet, *La Mémoire du corps*, qui nous permet de constater à quel point la créatrice de 69 ans se renouvelle constamment. «Une nouvelle exposition reste toujours un moment décisif pour moi. C'est très important de sortir mon travail de l'atelier, de le mettre dans un autre environnement. Je note les relations que les œuvres entretiennent entre elles durant l'accrochage. Ça apporte un autre point de vue, ça m'apprend de nouvelles choses sur mon travail.»

Dans un entretien paru après sa mort, Francis Bacon confiait que «(...) la peinture est un mensonge, un mensonge à travers lequel il faut essayer d'attraper une vérité, de dire une vérité». Pour Betty Goodwin, c'est beaucoup plus simple. La création est d'abord une réponse à des interrogations, ou simplement une façon de faire face au côté sombre de la réalité. Aux yeux de Goodwin, tout est beaucoup trop vaste et beaucoup trop mystérieux pour qu'on domine aisément les choses. «Depuis Galilée, l'univers a perdu son centre pour en retrouver plusieurs, puis réaliser qu'il n'y en a aucun. Rien ne change. *La Vie de Galilée*, de Bertholt Brecht, pourrait facilement se passer aujourd'hui. Quand tu penses au cycle de l'univers, au Big Bang, à l'émormité des choses, c'est écrasant! C'est stimulant, mais c'est aussi écrasant.»

Le jour de l'entrevue, Betty Goodwin venait de voir un reportage à la télé sur les émeutes de Los Angeles. Elle avait en tête ce gros plan de Rodney King qui, les larmes aux yeux, ne faisait que répéter: «Can we all get along?» Combien faut-il de temps à une race pour en rejoindre une autre?, s'interrogeait l'artiste. Madame Goodwin doutait soudain que son art puisse changer quoi ce soit aux injustices qui pavent la voie du monde. «Or, c'est ma seule façon de faire face au malheur, reconnaît-elle. Je ne militie pas. Je ne fais pas de l'art politique. Mais je tiens à ajouter une notion politique à mon expérience personnelle. Il le faut.»

Betty Goodwin a mis du temps à percer dans le milieu de l'art. Elle ne parle jamais de son travail d'avant 1970. «Je faisais des géraniums, rien d'important... Mais je me suis acharnée, car je ne pouvais vraiment faire rien de mieux que de dessiner.» En 1970, elle commence à faire des eaux-fortes. Elle présente sa première série de *Vests* en 1972, à la galerie B. Il s'agit d'assemblages et de collages de matières diverses et de tissus montés sur papier fort. L'élément vestimentaire (les gilets) devient une trace du corps, une ombre de la figure humaine, pratiquement omniprésente par la suite. À l'approche de la cinquantaine, elle se sent enfin satisfaite de son travail: elle a trouvé sa vision.

«Ces longues années d'apprentissage lui ont probablement permis d'être plus à l'aise dans son langage plastique, note Pierre Théberge. Il faut dire que l'œuvre de Goodwin est d'une grande habileté, autant par la qualité de la ligne, que par la couleur du dessin.» «C'est une virtuose du dessin, renchérit l'artiste montréalaise et amie de Goodwin, Geneviève Cadieux. Elle a une grande maîtrise des matériaux. Son travail demeure un modèle pour bien des jeunes artistes. D'ailleurs, on a l'impression que c'est fait



par une artiste jeune, tellement il est actuel. Elle nous suspend toujours, d'une expo à l'autre.»

ŒUVRE AU NOIR

Des têtes disloqués, des membres allongés, des corps déformés, des personnages contorsionnés, des êtres en déséquilibre: l'œuvre de Betty Goodwin sondera la terreur et la noirceur de l'existence, ou ne sera pas. De *Porteurs* à *Black Words* en passant par les *Nageurs* ou les *Études pour carbone*, les séries de Goodwin évoquent un passage difficilement praticable, une lutte pour atteindre quelque chose; le long chemin que l'on se fraie au cours de la vie.

En commentant les dessins de la série *Nageurs* (ces êtres dont on ne sait jamais s'ils émergent de l'eau ou s'ils se noient), dans le catalogue de la rétrospective du MBA, le critique **Robert Storr** écrit qu'ils sont parmi les rares œuvres canadiennes à attester, en y contribuant de façon notable, du renouveau d'un art figuratif nourri

d'émotions, de provenance essentiellement européenne ou américaine. Et pourtant, on doit se garder de qualifier de néo-expressionniste l'œuvre de Goodwin (...). On n'en retire pas une impression de crise ou de surcharge perceptuelle, mais plutôt celle d'un mal discret, d'un trouble continu, ambigu et toujours croissant.»

Avec pour lectures de chevet des auteurs aussi sombres qu'Antonin Artaud, Samuel Beckett ou Primo Levi, nul ne se surprendra que pour Goodwin l'existence soit une lutte de tous les jours. Comme eux, elle aborde des thèmes très noirs. Mais ce n'est pas pour sombrer dans la dépression ou se laisser mourir. Au contraire, c'est pour acquérir de la force et puiser de l'énergie. «Ce sont des artistes pessimistes, mais ils ne sont pas négatifs pour autant. Quand je vois des tableaux de Goya, ou que je lis des poèmes de Levi, je ressens encore plus les atrocités de la guerre que dans une photo de journal. Ils ont une telle lucidité face à la condition humaine que cela m'aide plus que tout.»

Et l'autre côté? Les choses plaisantes et joyeuses de la vie ne

sont pas assez importantes pour faire une œuvre? «Non, elles sont très importantes. Je ne pourrais pas vivre seulement avec le côté sombre. Vivre avec les choses plaisantes, c'est merveilleux. Mais la vie est aussi un drame. Et c'est ce côté dramatique que je transporte dans mon atelier. Je peux difficilement expliquer pourquoi. Je ne peux pas analyser ça, me torturer... Je travaille de façon consciente et inconsciente en même temps. Il faut croire que la tragédie humaine est une source d'énergie.»

LA FORCE DES CHOSES

«J'aime quand les choses ont plusieurs interprétations, ma série avec des aimants (*Steel Notes*) évoque plusieurs phénomènes: les magnétismes naturel ou artificiel. L'attraction qu'on exerce sur un individu, ou ces orages qui font perdre le sens de l'orientation aux baleines qu'on retrouve échouées sur les plages. J'ai travaillé avec des aimants parce que cette puissance de retenir quelque chose (être, animal ou objet), de l'attirer vers soi, c'est un des grands mystères de l'existence.»

Essayer de comprendre les mystères de l'existence, c'est aussi vivre avec le temps présent. Betty Goodwin aime chercher le meilleur moyen pour représenter ce qui l'habite. «Une des bonnes choses avec l'art contemporain, remarque-t-elle, c'est la liberté pour un artiste de choisir le médium qu'il veut. C'est peut-être un cauchemar pour les conservateurs, mais pour un artiste c'est essentiel. On ne doit pas se sentir limité, s'en tenir seulement au dessin, à la peinture ou à la sculpture. Avec la technologie, la vidéo, il y a une quantité de moyens disponibles pour exprimer ce que tu veux de nos jours.»

Elle est particulièrement fière d'être reconnue par une institution francophone comme l'Université de Montréal (comme elle l'était pour le prix Borduas), «parce je suis une femme, juive et anglophone. À mon avis, cela démontre la grande tolérance des Québécois. Je me sens totalement chez nous ici. Et mon cercle d'amis est avant tout francophone.»

Comme Montréal, Betty Goodwin fêtera l'art contemporain ce week-end, dans ce musée tout neuf qui ouvre enfin, au cœur du qualidrilatère culturel de la métropole. Mais, plus tôt que tard, elle quittera le bain de foule, pour retrouver la solitude de son atelier. Loin des regards indiscrets, elle s'attardera longuement sur une image insolite, observera la richesse de la lumière, puis se lèvera brusquement pour plonger dans le travail. Il faut créer. ●

Galerie René Blouin: jusqu'au 25 juillet
Collection permanente du MAC: dès le 28 mai
Voir calendrier Arts visuels

Living Arts

THE BOSTON GLOBE • FRIDAY, MARCH 22, 1991

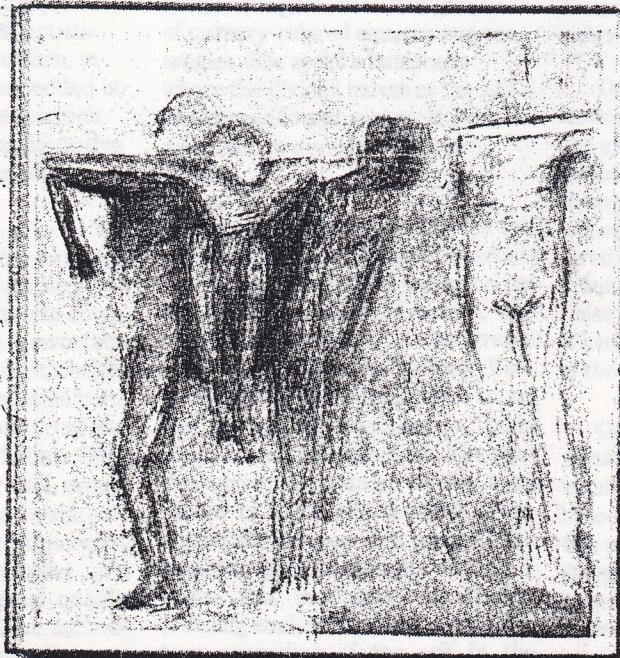
Drawings at Brandeis ask profound questions

By Nancy Staben
SPECIAL TO THE GLOBE

Art Review "The Contemporary Drawing: Existence, Passage and the Dream," the poetically titled exhibition that recently opened at the Rose Art Museum at Brandeis University, is the most ambitious show of its type in the Boston area in recent memory.

While the Museum of Fine Arts has brought us drawing shows of individual artists (Jim Dine, Ellsworth Kelly, Joseph Stella) and the Boston Center for the Arts annually hosts a drawing show of area artists, nothing of the scope and breadth of the Rose show has been previously attempted. The Rose has once again, with characteristic intelligence and integrity, filled an important gap in our visual literacy.

DRAWINGS, Page 80



Betty Goodwin's "Porteur," at Brandeis' Rose Art Museum.

Drawings at Brandeis ask vital questions

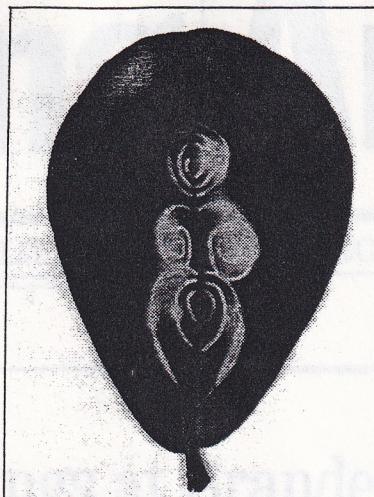
■ DRAWINGS

Continued from Page 73

The 11 artists in the Rose show run the gamut in age, origin, media and style. Although many now live in New York or Los Angeles, their birthplaces range from Montana to Montreal to Morocco, and their vantage tends toward the universal. This is no assemblage of wunder-kids; most are mature artists in their 40s, 50s and 60s, with proven track records, but little star status. And although the term "Contemporary" is part of the title, this is not a show of trend or fashion. The art world's current thrust toward multiculturalism, which apprehends the world through the fragmented prisms of race, class, ethnicity, gender or sexuality, is (with the exception of the artist Ana Mendieta, whose works date from the early '80s) entirely absent.

Instead, we have a show that tackles profound philosophical questions — the meaning of self; the capacity of the self to locate a place in the world; the individual's relationship to technology and mass culture; and the nature of time, timelessness and universality. The artists channel their thoughts through the medium of drawing, a mode that sometimes serves as preparation for another final product (painting or sculpture), but that here acts as a fully developed discipline. At the same time, drawing here retains its unique capacity to directly manifest artistic conception. And conceptualism, in the sense that the idea embedded in form is paramount, is the common denominator here, linking figurative and abstract work in a cognitive chain.

The show is divided between figurative works in the upstairs gallery and (overt) conceptualism downstairs. The tone of the downstairs gallery is set by Gillian Theobald's "Diary Project," an installation composed of more than 220 charcoal and ink self-portraits created since 1982, which, hugging a corner wall, create a giant (10-foot-by-25-foot) grid pattern. The work is at once obsessive, ruthlessly honest, captivating and numbing. There is a factual quality here, a quantification of the individual's existence over time. By surrounding the self with the self, Theobald raises the nature of the individual's relationship to the mass; ironically, in this drama she plays both



Ana Mendieta's untitled mixed-media drawing on a leaf, which is part of the Rose Art Museum exhibit.

parts. Although the self is wrenched from a recognizable context, it is recontextualized in a landscape of its own making. By becoming its own family and creating its own ongoing sense of place, it nullifies the anxiety of the self's aloneness. The use of the gallery corner, with its associations of shelter, reinforces the concept of a self-created psychological harbor.

Louisa Chase's vibrant ink and watercolor drawings share this dualistic factual/intuitive modality. Chase pairs Gorkyesque biomorphic scribbled figures and trees with Mondrian-esque geometric configurations of primary-colored squares and rectangles. She seeks a landscape where the divided halves of the self — its expressive and analytical parts — may unite in a single unimpaired identity.

The notion of connecting the self to a nurturing landscape reverberates in Ana Mendieta's works on paper, bark and leaves. Mendieta, who died in 1987 at age 37, emigrated from her native Cuba to New York as a child, in 1961. The desire to regain a homeland surfaces in "Body Tracks," where Mendieta dragged her arms and hands, which were coated in blood and tempera paint, across the surface of the page. The resulting gesture, fanning out in a V shape, has the quality of prayer, pleading and celebration, a momentary grounding of the self in the "home" of the paper. Similarly, Mendieta's goddess and fertility figures connect the artist to a lost ancestral past.

CONTEMPORARY DRAWING: Existence, Passage and the Dream
Vija Celmins, Louisa Chase, Hanne Darboven, Agnes Denes, Elsbeth Deser, Jacob El-Hanani, Kendra Ferguson, Betty Goodwin, Ana Mendieta, Gillian Theobald, Christopher Wilmarth
Organized by Susan Stoops
The Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, Waltham, through April 28

While Mendieta's compound anguish and joy leaps off the page, the ovoid shapes of Christopher Wilmarth (who also died in 1987) pulsate with a quiet — but no less urgent — organicism. In the mixed-media "Breath" series, inspired by seven poems of the 19th-century symbolist Stephane Mallarme, the oval shape (which might be figure, head or zy-

gote) vibrates within the space of the paper, which once again assumes a metaphorical context for the individual's place in the world.

In Betty Goodwin's large mixed-media drawings of figures in distress, the individual enters a social context. In "Porteur," two figures hoist a third on their backs, while a headless fourth figure materializes on the right. Despite their physical intimacy each seems locked in a private world, destined to perpetual misunderstandings and failed connections. The Sisyphean effort required for human communication is summarized in another work's title: "Do You Know How Long It Takes for Any One Voice to Reach Another?"

Despite the conceptual bent downstairs, there is still much for the eye to feast on. Particularly gorgeous are Vija Celmins' graphite drawings of oceans and galaxies whose small fields of water and clustered stars act as meditations on the infinite. Without self-consciousness these inspire universal questions: Where, and who, are we in relation to the universe's vastness?

One answer lies in Agnes Denes' remarkable vision of compressed humanity. In a devastating drawing based on Pascal's theories, Lilliputian stick figures (there are nearly a staggering 10,000 in the drawing), all seemingly alike, form an elegantly ascending pyramid. Astonishingly, up close each tiny figure reveals a distinct identity. It's a mind-boggling image, which incisively pits numb conformity against the irrepressible and unique human spirit.

The surprise may be gone but Goodwin's work endures

BY JOHN BENTLEY MAYS
The Globe and Mail

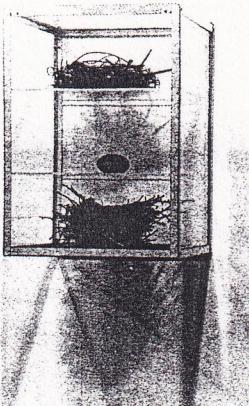
Betty Goodwin: new drawings and steel constructions, at the Sable-Castelli Gallery (33 Hazelton Ave.), to Dec. 23.

Astonishing when gallery-goers first caught sight of it a few years ago — sudden as a summer electrical storm in the mountains, abruptly brilliant, thoroughly unexpected — the drawing of Montreal artist Betty Goodwin is astonishing no longer. We now know her hanging men and drowning men, the black vomit and blood and the ethereal washes of dawn color in this art of bodily suffering — the anxious, unmistakeable line that can ponder as easily as punish, strip away illusions like a whip or suddenly turn into a kind of exquisite, metaphysical handwriting. The recent works on paper in this show, for the most part, are new instances of these old themes and strategies. We know Goodwin: she is the maker of the most beautiful Expressionist drawings since Joseph Beuys — our Cy Twombly, only better in her way; but also our Goodwin, finally unlike anybody else on earth.

If the initial surprise of her expressive drawing is over, however, so be it; the work endures. The pitch of her witness to the dolors of passionate existence, her exemplary ironies in the face of mortality — always the important things about her art — are not diminished in these recent drawings, turned out in the steady lope of a mature career. The show should be seen for its great beauty. But fans of Goodwin's work who are unfamiliar with her magisterial installations — shown in Berlin, Montreal and Ottawa, but never in Toronto — will be interested in the three steel objects, especially the one titled *Room* (1988). Like most of the drawings, this heavy, small work is a model of modern consciousness itself, in its isolation, need and defiance.

Some news from Sable/Castelli and Galerie Rene Blouin, Goodwin's Canadian dealers. In May, a solo show of her recent works opens at the Kunstmuseum in Bern, Switzerland, and may tour. Also this spring, she will be featured in a touring group show premiering at the Neuberger Museum in Purchase, New York. Included in this exhibition of major drawing projects are Brian Hunt and A.R. Penck. In 1991, Goodwin will have a one-person show at the Williams College Art Museum, located in western Massachusetts.





Betty Goodwin, *Nests and Stone No. 2*, 1991, mixed media, 14 1/2 x 10 1/2 x 10 1/2".

can all be recontextualized as a power chain (natural, industrial, political, military, nuclear, ideological), which also signifies a transition from a prewar-regulated economy to a postwar society of the spectacle. Similarly, Mallinson's use of a recurring horizon line acts as a formal continuity between vignettes, reiterating the cone-of-vision perspective of traditional landscape painting as the dominant visual template for the frieze as a whole. What seemed to be a pictorialism of filmic flow is now revealed to stubbornly cling to the pictorial language of 16th-century painting. In true Nietzschean fashion, Mallinson transforms history into art, only then to disclose and celebrate art as deception and lies.

—Colin Gardner

MONTREAL

BETTY GOODWIN

GALERIE RENÉ BLOUIN

This tightly orchestrated exhibition of Betty Goodwin's sculptures, working drawings, multimedia constructions, and prints made between 1965 and 1991 is an addendum and update to her 1987 retrospective at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. Virtually none of the figurative references (dark, partially obscured images of the human form) from Goodwin's *Swimmer*, 1982-85, and "Carbon" series, 1986—the large-scale drawings on vellum, Transpagra, and Geofilm, for which she is best known, are present here. Those depictions of implied tragedy, reminiscent of Goya, seemed the prod-

ucts of an unwavering eye for the detached state of the human condition. The continuum of works in the present show—formative, exploratory and inspirational—voice the same concerns but do so using the sheer physical impact of their tactility and composition.

Vesti, 1974, and *Tarpaulin No. 10 (Passage for a Tall Thin Man)*, 1976-91, simply present weathered objects, the surfaces of which are worn by the passage of time, with tiny, innocuous elements (staples, patches, pins, and color pigment) attached like esthetic stitches—synaptic devices that act simultaneously as chance elements and mnemonic scars.

Steel Notes XXV (The Absence of Signals), 1991, is a work in an ongoing series Goodwin began in 1989. A slab of metal, suggesting a piece of armor that cannot be pierced, has a distinctly phallic form welded to it that resembles a circuit breaker. Foreign elements—fingernails painted gold, delicate locks of hair, and erotic markings of color—make the piece less an apologetic to Minimalism than an apotheosis of the physical, tactile nature of the materials themselves. These male and female elements coexist only on the surfaces of the pieces, as if by necessity. Their physical connections seem more intuitive and archaic.

In *Steel Room No. 4*, 1991, a metal box stands on four extended legs; its only connection to the outside is a metal pipe that leads to the floor. *Distorted Events No. 1*, 1989-90, a figure hanging above a dense black image of a chair, painted in tar on aseptic white tiles, calls to mind the work of Leon Golub. One gets the distinct feeling, not only that an act of violence has been perpetrated against

human nature, but that this atrocity itself has been devoured by the media. Goodwin states, "Media images numb you to the point where the media find more extreme images, extreme to the point where it becomes madness." The visual ambiguity of the piece reaffirms our own uncertainty as to which is worse—the act of physical violence itself or the unstated effects of communicating it through the mass media.

Nest, a seminal monotype-and-collage piece from 1965—a beautifully lyrical work painted in swirls of aqueous blue and incorporating pieces of natural fiber—represents a miniature bird's nest. While less visually lucid, an etching and ink drawing from 1973 presents the same nest motif in duplicate, beneath which we read, "A small cozy retreat or place of residence, a haunt, a place of habitual resort; a snugger. The abode of anything evil, baneful; as in a nest of rogues; a nest of vice." A recent Plexiglas-box piece titled *Nests and Stone No. 2*, 1991, contains two structurally homologous but integrally different nests. The first, made of inhospitable wires and nails, is separated by a smooth rounded stone from the second, which recreates the spontaneous architecture of a bird's nest out of natural materials.

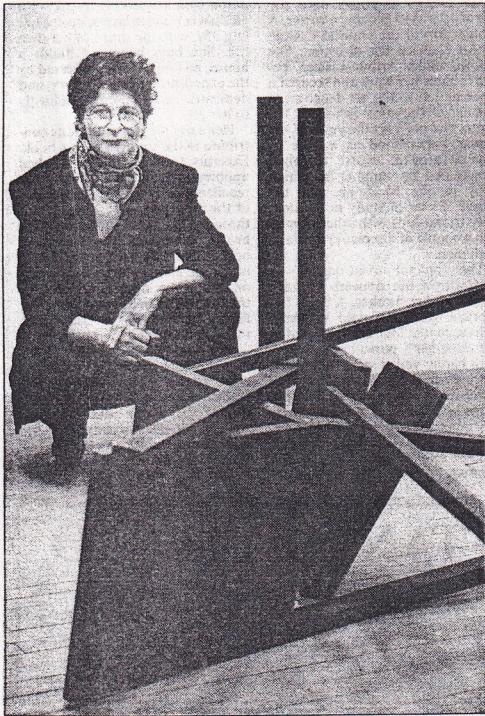
By introducing a mnemonic variability of elements and establishing fragile connections between them, Goodwin's work clearly addresses our painful, dispossessed state of being—our failure to communicate. These material indices suggest that if indeed our civilization's loss of intimacy is its principal failing, it is one that is largely self-induced, a symptom of our compulsive, media-saturated

condition. This show gives us a much better idea of the contiguous primal, intuitive forces behind the conceptual face of Goodwin's art.

—John K. Grande

Versatile Betty Goodwin keeps breaking new ground

'Distorted Events' series conjures up some gut-wrenching sensations in the viewer



Betty Goodwin's trademark angst-ridden figures aren't seen in her new sculpture, but they make their presence felt.

Gazette, Allen McInnis

Betty Goodwin, long considered to be one of Canada's more original and forceful contemporary artists, just keeps getting better.

Instead of relying on an easy, complacent route and repeating work that has won her so much praise in the past, Goodwin suddenly plunges into startlingly new directions as her latest work, now at the Galerie René Blouin, shows.

And this kind of relentless risk-taking is a sure sign of a great — not just a good — artist.

Goodwin is taken aback at the very notion that there might be a temptation to rest on past laurels and carry on with familiar work. Such an idea is utterly foreign to her thinking: for her art is all about stretching further and reaching deeper into the darker aspects of the human condition.

Great burrower

"I'm usually a great burrower," Goodwin explained in an interview, as we sat surrounded by her most recent work. "I try — I hope I try — to get to the essence of something. But I think when you reach something, you just always want to go further... And every time you have an exhibition, you want to push forward."

Besides, she continued, the drive to keep on growing, exploring and changing springs from within, from her own values, concerns and feelings. It has nothing at all to do with external factors.

"That's where the pressure comes — from my own self, not from the outside," she explained. "And I even hate to say it, but it gets harder not easier. It gets fuller, richer, but it doesn't get any easier."



ANN DUNCAN

ART

So in what new directions has Goodwin pushed herself this time? Towards steel bars, obstructions, and mangled chairs. These are the recurring images in her series of works — Goodwin always works in series — most of which she refers to as "Distorted Events."

Three of the works in this remarkable show, which opened last week, are of twisted, black chairs that have been painted on gleaming, white tiles. In less competent hands, this choice of material alone could seem gimmicky, somewhat contrived.

But with Goodwin, these tile "paintings" conjure up a gut-wrenching sense of torture chambers, inquisition cells, death camps, even hospitals, places of pain that have been designed with clinical precision for an easy clean-up after a bloodletting of some form or another.

Only one of the works contains one of Goodwin's trademark, angst-ridden figures. Still all the human pain, suffering and anxiety that could have transpired in Goodwin's imaginary rooms can be *felt*, simply through the contorted positioning of the chairs and the strange combination of tough materials.

The chairs have been painted in a

dense, rich, thick tar, which further sets off the hard, cold, pristine nature of the tiles.

Why chairs? Because, Goodwin replied, "chairs are an essential part of our existence... We live with only three basic elements of furniture — chairs, tables, beds."

Chairs can, at times, represent comfort and security, such as a favorite chair we curl up in at home, she said. But Goodwin's chairs are full of cruelty, despair, the ultimate torment in human suffering — "a kind of chaos," is how she put it.

Powerful

Her powerful steel sculpture of a disintegrating chair that sits on the floor of the adjacent gallery pushes these illusions even further.

And she also proves, once again, that there is virtually no form of expression in the visual arts that she can't master, whether it be printmaking, installations, sculpting and her mainstay — drawing.

In other works in this show — her first solo since she represented Canada at the Sao Paolo Biennial last fall — Goodwin paints a single menacing bar across her figures, a bar that echoes the shapes of the legs of her chairs.

Just as in her Swimmer series, where her people seem mired and imprisoned in the water, these figures are blocked, stuck, impeded by the bars.

"These are obstructions on many levels, and you don't always know where obstructions are coming from," she explained. "But often, they get you in the back."

In another work, Black Screen, Goodwin paints — again in tar — a large black rectangle hovering ominously over a figure that is crumpled at the bottom of the

work.

As with the bars, the rectangle could be interpreted many different ways, on many different levels.

It could viewed as a weight or a void, a rigid, hard-edged counterpoint to the fragility of the figure. Goodwin's art is often loaded with such dualities.

The rectangle could also be viewed as either full or empty. "When I see it as empty, there's a choice as to what you fill it with. It becomes enigmatic... When it's full, I see it as threatening, dark and dense like a black hole."

Why is there always so much darkness in Goodwin's art?

"Because," as she explained in the handsome, highly intelligent catalogue produced for her Sao Paolo show, "of the times we live in and the media, we are bombarded with information about cruelty.

"Yes, it is an issue that I have needed to deal with in whatever way I could. I don't necessarily think I am going to have an effect on all these inhumane situations going on, but it is the only way I can cope with the fact that it is happening and that I know about it."

That is why much of her recent work belongs to the "Distorted Events" series, events such as last year's massacre at Tiananmen Square in Beijing.

"This was the seed that started so much of the 'people power' in Europe," she explained.

"For me, I have to deal with these things. I have to make a small mark concerning these events." And what a profound and utterly moving mark that is.

Betty Goodwin's show continues at Galerie René Blouin, 772 St. Catherine St. W., fifth floor, through June 5.

GALERIE RENÉ BLOUIN

372 OUEST, RUE STE-CATHERINE, CH.501
MONTRÉAL, QUÉBEC, CANADA H3B 1A2
TÉL: (514) 393-9969 FAX: (514) 393-4571

September 23rd, 1992.

Mr. Bill McDonald
Artists fro Kids Trust
North Vancouver School District
810 West 21 st Street
North Vancouver BC
V7P 2C1

Dear Bill,

I apologize for the delay in sending you the enclosed material. Things sometimes get out of hand. Thank you for reminding me.

I included a good slide of the work you have duplicated if needed and a b/w print for your dossiers. The framer has assured me that the piece will be ready before October 10th. Therefore, it is now possible to arrange transportation to Vancouver. The guys at the Vancouver Art Gallery can help you on that one. If you need, I can try to do so from the end. Let me know. As long as specialized art transportation companies are used, the piece does not need to be crated. Wrapped properly, it will arrive safely.

I saw Betty last night. She is toying with a number of ideas. One would involve etching and although the "motif" would still be the "tub", it would be different from the larger piece. However, it is a stunning image of "thickly layered" tub and a delicate figure floating above its orifice, like above a crater. It would be no problem to do an edition of 30 prints using this approach. The second approach involves using the exact same image that served as a departing point for your piece. However, this would be a more "mechanical" approach and would involve some costs. Each print would cost about 45.00\$ to produce... That comes to about 1,200.00\$. Quite frankly, I don't know yet what would give the best piece. If you agree, we will let Betty work a little more on the ideas before a decision is taken.

Finally, I have asked her to give me the reference for the sound. She will fax me today (she says so...). As soon as I have the material, I will get back to you.

Don't hesitate to call if there any problem.

All the best,

René Blouin
René Blouin.

Bodies and blood

Betty Goodwin depicts profound inner landscapes

It is, on the surface, a hauntingly beautiful landscape. In the hazy glow of a sunset, crimson mountains stretch across a dark and densely textured sea. But within this mixed-media work by Montreal artist Betty Goodwin lies a disturbing underworld. The sanguine hills, on close inspection, assume the shape of a bloodred human body floating, facedown, in murky waters. The figure may be drowning, limbs entangled in masses of seaweed. Or perhaps it is a swimmer, pushing forcefully through the currents. Ultimately, *Nerves No. 14*—part of *Signs of Life*, a major exhibit of Goodwin's work that recently opened at the Art Gallery of Windsor—transports the viewer to an inner landscape imbued with the pain and suffering of human life. But despite its often bleak imagery, Goodwin's art is strangely exhilarating. "The works are sombre in that one feels the fragility of life and a sense of mortality," says curator Jessica Bradley. "But I called the show *Signs of Life* because there is always a reaching for the vitality of things."

Signs of Life is a powerful collection of 33 mixed-media works, drawings, sculptures and a major installation by Goodwin who, at 72, is one of Canada's most outstanding artists. The subject of a travelling retrospective in 1987, she represented Canada at the Venice Biennale this year and, in addition, won the \$25,000 Gershon Iskowitz Prize, an annual Canadian award for sustained artistic excellence. The exhibit travels to the National Gallery in Ottawa at the end of February, where it shows until May 12. Meanwhile, Betty Goodwin: Icons, a show of more than 70 of the artist's small-scale drawings, is at the MacKenzie Art Gallery in Regina until Jan. 28. While the Regina show spans the past two decades, *Signs of Life* focuses on new projects from the past five years.

All the works—drawn from two of Goodwin's latest series, *La mémoire du corps* (Memory of the Body) and *Nerves*—are strong, moving statements on their own. But viewed together in *Signs of Life*, they appear to be connected, each a variation on a theme that Goodwin has explored in her art over the

past three decades. That theme is summed up by the Samuel Beckett quote appearing in several of the show's drawings: "It is the inner space one never sees, the brain and heart and other caverns where thought and feeling dance their sabbath."

Goodwin's pieces evolve in the act of drawing, her main medium of expression. "I don't have a blueprint in my mind," says Goodwin. "A work starts with the seed of an idea and in the process of working it reveals itself more thoroughly." For many of the drawings in *Signs of Life*, Goodwin drew with graphite,



Nerves No. 14: beneath the skin with the urgency of a surgeon

pastels and oil stick on Geofilm, a translucent mylar that she chose for its resilience and skin-like quality. Smudges, eraser marks and bits of masking tape left behind become part of the imagery, suggesting bruises and wounds in some of the exhibition's drawings. "The works themselves are so alive," says Bradley, "in that one really feels her process—the layering, the backing away, the crossing out, the starting over again." Much of Goodwin's work is black and white. And when she resorts to color, Bradley notes, the artist does so mainly "for dramatic effect. The images carry the meaning of the work."

Goodwin uses the human figure as a metaphor in inventive, expressive ways. In the *Nerves* series, she has gone beneath the skin with the urgency of a surgeon, seeking the nerve centre, the source of inner life. In

three sculptures titled *Spine*, for example, the artist has transformed steel rods and plaster into stark columns resembling fragments of backbone, bristling with nerve-like wires. "They are not illustrations of a spine," says Bradley, who recently joined the Art Gallery of Ontario as curator of contemporary art. "They give more a sense of the spine as a life centre of the body." In another, multimedia work, *La mémoire du corps XX*, one of the finest pieces in the show, a network of black, vein-like tree roots appears to vibrate on a shimmering bloodred background. The piece is like a supernatural X-ray, allowing the artist to portray and illuminate the elusive pulse of life.

Paradoxically, in several works Goodwin explores the human body through its absence. Many years ago, she discovered an old *Paris-Match* photo of a sitz bath used to calm Vincent van Gogh in his final days at a sanatorium. She pinned the picture to the wall of her studio in an abandoned factory in east-end Montreal, which she and her husband, Martin, a 74-year-old retired engineer, had converted into a home and work space. Now, Goodwin has transformed that crude bathtub image, suggestive of a womb or a tomb, into a powerful symbol of life and death.

The empty tub—suggesting, she says, "a memory of the body"—is enlarged to mural-sized proportions in a dramatic painting called *La mémoire du corps VI*. The red outlines of the tub appear to glow through dirt and soot on a tarry black background, provoking—through the impact of the image—an inexplicable sense of awe at the mystery of existence.

The most straightforward piece in *Signs of Life* is *Distorted Events*. A large, heavy steel plate is engraved with thousands of serial numbers, suggesting a monument to those who died in the Holocaust. An ordinary, heavy-duty shovel hangs at the front and centre of the work, assaulting viewers with the stark reality that millions of people died and were buried. When asked about the origins of the work, Goodwin is evasive. "It is absolutely very difficult for me to talk about what my inspirations are," she says. "It's not even an inspiration, it's more like a piece of weaving that comes together from many experiences. I live in the world today and I guess it gets connected." But Goodwin resists any attempt to trace the desolate imagery of her work to cataclysmic events in her own life, including the death of her only son in 1976. All she will allow is that art is "how I cope with what is going on."

SHARON DOYLE DRIEDGER in Windsor

ART REVIEWS / *Betty Goodwin and John Massey are two artists concerned with those states that elude words, the inexplicable anxieties, the melancholy temptations*

Plumbing the depths of the unsayable

JOHN BENTLEY MAYS
Visual Arts Critic

WHILE marred by the odd weak piece, the group of new works by Montreal artist Betty Goodwin now on view at Galerie René Blouin, in her home town, may well be the most subtly involving small show she has ever created.

The 13 works here — most of them drawings in oil, pastel and pencil on translucent, paper-like film — record Goodwin's recent meditations on her enduring, timeless topics: mortality and transience, and the chronic spiritual illness and alienation that is, for many, the experience of daily life itself.

In this display, Goodwin speaks of these matters with imagery of two kinds. The controlling motif in the more intimate pictures here is human bone, sketched anxiously on agitated grounds of grey or fleshly colour. These bones, often jointed like the inner structure of a leg, have been elongated until each one becomes almost too long, frail, twig-like. If Goodwin has frequently dwelt upon the frailty of flesh, in the most thoughtful of these new works she touches the bodily parts we imagine to be our sturdiest ones, reminding us that their fate, like the rest of the body, is to become old and infirm, and finally to snap.

As in virtually everything this gifted artist does, the atmosphere of the bone works is haunted with menace, ominously medical. The bones are not the bleached, dry segments of skeleton we see in museum displays, or the splinters some churches preserve in sumptuous reliquaries — both largely lacking in either menace or affect, in my experience. Goodwin's bones seem to have been freshly defleshed, still moist. Like an operating room's cloths and sheets after the surgery, the drawings are stained and blotted with blood.

Perhaps because it comes so directly from the artist's heart, and affects our own vulnerabilities, such dwelling on mortality brings with it definite dangers, chief among them a kind of lazy, sentimental melancholy. Goodwin has let this off-

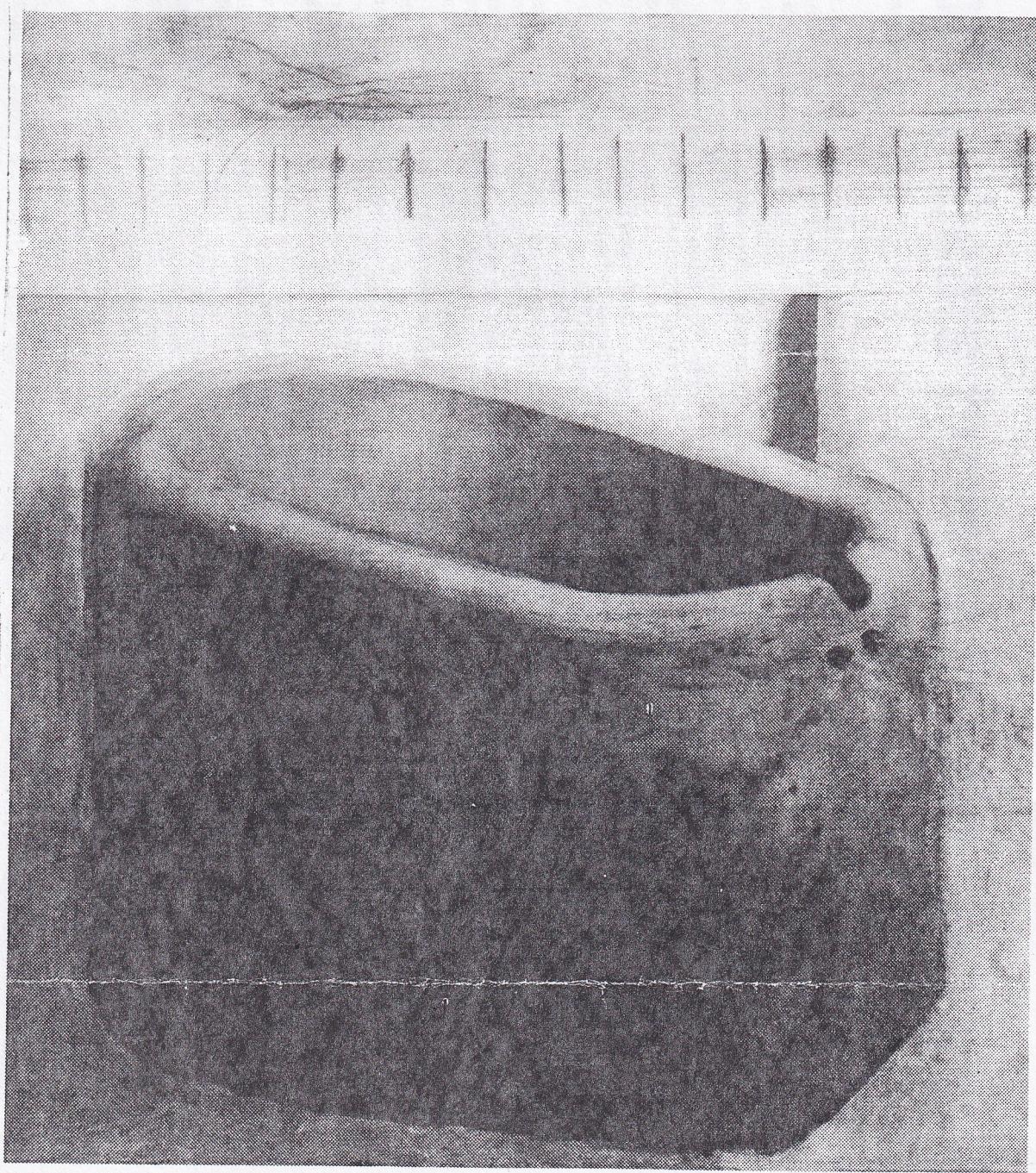
putting softness seep into a couple of the bone drawings. This criticism cannot be made, however, of the other, spiritually darker suite of images here, depicting tubs.

Or at least tubs is what the artist calls these receptacles — though they reminded this reviewer less of his Jacuzzi than of vats for holding corrosive industrial chemicals, hydrotherapy tanks in which the victims of crippling diseases are soaked, or in which agitated mental patients are forcibly calmed.

Tubs and similar props have often been used in the art of the past, as settings suggestive of sensuous experiences widely ranging from languorous pleasure and lechery, to medical relief, to unspecified horror. But I do not recall a more sadly shaded, ambiguous, grief-tinged use of tubs in art than in Goodwin's pieces featured here. They are at once healing devices (as they are in the works of Joseph Beuys) but also vessels stinking of deadly fluids and solvents. The dribble of bloody liquid through the drain holes of one tub is quite enough to plant in the viewer's mind the vaguely fearful thought that this vat may have been the one used to dissolve the flesh from the bones in Goodwin's other pictures.

But I am unfortunately making all this work sound more macabre than it is. Goodwin's interest is not in depicting specific nightmares, or depicting a chamber of horrors; like all her art, these pieces reflect a delicate, vulnerable sensibility, and a way of working that is always more evocative than sensational or explicit. In this show, we find ourselves inside those quiet, tense states that are virtually inexpressible in writing — inside the dull ache of loss, the thick but inexplicable anxiety, the temptations to melancholy's insidious pleasures.

Galerie René Blouin is at 372 Ouest, rue Ste-Catherine, Montreal. The show continues until July 25.



Untitled (detail), by Betty Goodwin: at once healing devices and vessels stinking of deadly fluids.

Goodwin beats tyranny of cool and shows emotion

HENRY LEHMANN
SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE

For the last three decades it has seemed that personal feelings and art have parted ways.

Ever since Andy Warhol declared he'd rather be a machine than a human, the trend has been to ironic, chickly unemotional surfaces that mock the whole notion of open self-expression.

Except for the deadly seriousness of some art which espouses social causes, much of contemporary art has submitted to the tyranny of cool.

All of which makes the huge success of Betty Goodwin's art career the more astounding. Goodwin's theme, one that runs unabashedly through all her art, is feelings — not the little twinges we experience now and then throughout the day, but the primal feelings that on some level propel our every movement.

Hope, despair, longing, loss — these are the issues many current artists consider too big for our age of trivial pursuits, and these are the subjects explored in Goodwin's sculpture and drawings, on view at Galerie René Blouin.

Many artists avoid dealing with anything too deep, of course, because in the wrong hands subjects such as despair turn easily into pretension or even farce. And it must be said that on occasion in the past Goodwin's semi-abstract figures, their stylized torsos characteristically bent to convey existential angst, have come close to that thin, hard-to-define line separating sincerity from emotional melodrama.

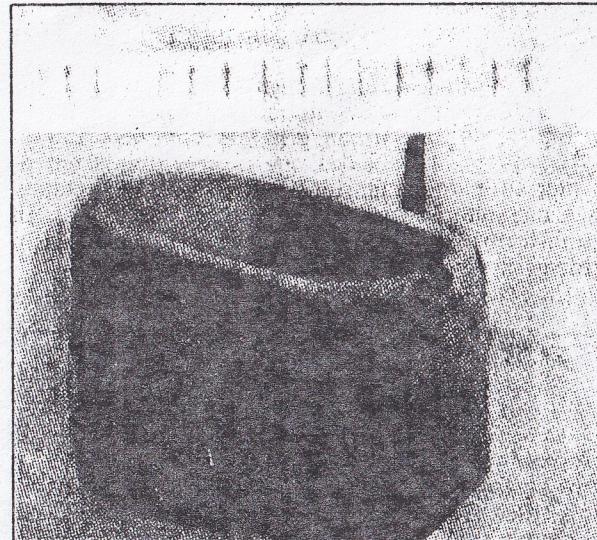
But even the attempt to deal with that angst, which most of us can only joke about, is courageous. And more often than not — especially in the current show — Goodwin comes through with flying colors.

Titled *La Mémoire du Corps*, the nine mixed-media drawings and one sculpture focus on fragments of the human body and on a large bathtub, which is the dominant focal point of most of these works. But these aren't symbols of happy sensuality. These objects,

vious, sugar-coated beauty, but instead to a subtle, muddy, mesmerizing, almost terrifying variety.

■ Betty Goodwin's work continues at Galerie René Blouin, 372 Ste. Catherine St. W., Tuesday through Saturday, noon until 5:30 p.m., until July 25.

After seeing the Goodwin show, take a few steps



Goodwin's tub: a brutal bluntness in the shape.

looming almost ominously, speak of loss and the wrenching heartlessness of time. These tubs are based on a photo Goodwin found of a washing facility at St. Rémy, one of the mental institutions in which Vincent van Gogh spent time shortly before his death.

In a Goodwin drawing, such as the stunning piece titled *La Mémoire du Corps I*, we are struck by the brutal bluntness of the shape of the tub, here not so much a vessel for the removal of dirt as it for the scrubbing out of that thin, ineffable residue of consciousness we alternately refer to as soul and being.

If these works are about loss, they are also about the philosophical notion of becoming, in which there is no present, just the immediate future. But, above all, these works are about that oddly old-fashioned thing in art — beauty. Of course, here we aren't referring to ob-