

thinking that other than religion, upper class Colonial and early Federal Jews were not that different from their Christian counterparts. In talking with a museum colleague, who is Jewish, and who saw the exhibition both in New York and in Baltimore, I learned that he had the same "So what?" reaction. The catalogue has a very different conclusion. These early portraits, as actively and specifically created objects, reflect the desires of the sitters, and consequently their peers, to be part of the greater community, looking like everyone else where, privately, important cultural distinctions in fact remained. In Ellen Smith's words: "The portraits never sat placidly on the walls. They marked the changes, tensions, and the creativity exhibited by the American Jewish community in creating an evolving American-Jewish identity."

In short, the exhibition was beautiful, but needed better labels and introductory panels to explain what we were looking at, and fell short in educating the public as to the importance of the portraits. Fortunately, the exhibition catalogue provides the information necessary so that in the long run, it does serve the purpose of documenting the theories behind the actual show. The exhibition also serves as an important reminder that the European settlement and of the New World and development of American culture was not by Gentile alone. Would I recommend it? Absolutely, but read the catalogue first.

Catalogue: Richard Brilliant, *Facing the New World: Jewish Portraits in Colonial and Federal America* (Munich, 1997) ISBN 3-7913-1863-2, 112 p. \$25.

The Maryland Historical Society also published a small catalogue for the materials specifically from their collections: *Facing the New World. Jewish Portraits and Decorative Arts in Colonial and Federal America From the Maryland Historical Society* (Baltimore, 1998), 32 p. \$14 (if purchased from the MHS, this small catalogue is included in the \$25 for the main catalogue).

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Aislin and Chapleau Caricatures. McCORD MUSEUM OF CANADIAN HISTORY, Montreal, Quebec. 22 May 1997 – 20 September 1998.

Picture this: hundreds of frizzy-haired Jean Charest clones setting out on the political trail; a youngish Pope John Paul II gleefully playing the accordion;

Nelson Mandela, post-apartheid, rolling up his sleeves to wash a huge pile of dirty dishes; Pierre Elliott Trudeau sitting naked on a maple-leaf carpet, sewing up a tattered beaver; Preston Manning sporting a *ceinture fléchée* and playing the spoons. These are just a few of the images that greet visitors to the McCord Museum's tribute to two of Montreal's best and best-loved political cartoonists. Terry Mosher, well known to English Montrealers and to many Canadians as "Aislin," has worked at *The Gazette* since 1972. His syndicated cartoons often appear in other Canadian newspapers and he has freelanced for several important American periodicals, including *Time* (his naked Trudeau was on the cover in 1969), *Harper's*, and *The Atlantic Monthly*. Serge Chapleau, whose caricatures have also appeared in a range of publications, including *Le Devoir*, is probably French-speaking Quebec's favourite political cartoonist. His work now appears regularly in *La Presse*, signed simply "Chapleau."

Aislin and Chapleau Caricatures, curated by Christian Vachon, enjoyed a sixteen-month run at the McCord. It featured nearly 400 examples of the work of these two artists, most of which focus on Montreal, Quebec, Canada, and the world in the period since 1990. Unfortunately, there is no catalogue to accompany the show. Visitors can pick up a spiral-bound 'exhibition guide' at the entrance and are asked to leave it behind when they leave. This guide contains some general information about each of the images in the show, but no sustained effort at interpretation or contextualization.

Political cartoons, of course, are a form of ephemera which have a long history. They have also been part of the McCord Museum's holdings ever since founder David Ross McCord donated his substantial personal collection in 1919. Visitors to the museum who might be expecting serious attention to the history of caricature in Canada, however, will be disappointed. There is a case near the back of the exhibition space that holds several cartoons from earlier times, including one drawn by an officer in Wolfe's army in 1759. But the focus is squarely on the two contemporary cartoonists and their collections. Terry Mosher has been donating his original cartoons to the McCord since 1983. Serge Chapleau, apparently at his friend Mosher's suggestion, decided to give part of his collection to the McCord in 1996, an event which, according to former Executive Director Claude Benoit's statement in a 1997 press release, provided the initial inspiration for the show. This was, she wrote, "a marvellous opportunity to present, side by side, the works of two contemporary caricaturists – one anglophone, the other francophone."

"Side by side," moreover, is a good description of the way the entire show is organized. The caricatures are displayed in exhibition rooms located on the ground floor of the museum, behind the reception desk and the central elevator bay. Access is via passageways located on either side of the elevators. By taking the passage to the east side, labelled *Entrée*, visitors enter a series of rooms dedicated exclusively to the work of Chapleau. Those who choose to

pass on the other side, under the sign labelled *Entrance*, arrive in the world of Aislin. Only at the back of the exhibition space do the two worlds – Aislin’s and Chapleau’s – intersect. Here, visitors can view a limited number of panels dedicated to the ways in which both artists treated the same or related topics. (Perhaps naively, I had expected this to be the whole idea of the exhibition!) In the same area, Chapleau, in a recorded video message on a TV monitor, invites visitors arriving through the rooms devoted to his work to discover what is assumed to be the unfamiliar world of Terry Mosher. Similarly, Mosher’s recorded image provides an introduction to Serge Chapleau for those coming from the other direction – and an invitation to discover his cartoon universe. Altogether this is a much too clever model of Montreal’s linguistic geography.

This “double-entrance circuit,” touted as “innovative” in the press release, was to me one of the least pleasing elements of the show. The strategy seems to assume that, because of the signs’ language (an old theme for Montrealers) most francophones will enter from one side and most anglophones from the other. Supposing they do and that visitors therefore begin with what is most familiar, the additional assumption that special inducements to venture beyond the linguistic divide are needed struck me as heavy handed and patronizing. The underlying premise, that English and French-speaking Montrealers know virtually nothing about each other despite living side by side, seems an outmoded and somewhat depressing reiteration of the old *Two Solitudes* thesis.

On each side of the elevators, the materials are presented in parallel. Both sets of exhibits begin with a reproduction of the artist’s work space, festooned, in Chapleau’s case, with some of the marvellous marionettes he has created in the image of well-known political figures. The cartoons are then presented in a series of panels, grouped thematically into such areas as municipal affairs, social issues, provincial and federal politics, and the international scene. Most of the panels are comprised of reproductions of four to six cartoons, reduced to editorial page size. Above each panel hangs the original of one or two of the images reproduced in the grouping below. In Chapleau’s case, these are finely crafted pencil drawings – a rarity for cartoonists given the technical constraints which make the reproduction of pencil drawings in newspapers difficult. Each artist’s favourite style of music is piped into the galleries: blues for Chapleau and jazz for Mosher. And at the back of the space are the elements designed to bridge the two cartoon universes: mainly the video screens and joint panels mentioned earlier, as well as a portrait gallery comprised of large blow-ups of cartoons representing the artists’ favourite victims, including Mulroney, Chrétien, Parizeau, and Bouchard.

These are two very good political caricaturists – acerbic, opinionated, technically skilled (this is true of Chapleau in particular), and much deserving of the many awards they have both received. The show, furthermore, provides

food for thought about the role of political cartoonists, and political satire in general within society. It is interesting to note, for example, that both artists have occasionally been accused of transgressing boundaries, usually described as the borders of “good taste.” In 1993, Terry Mosher’s depiction of a wide-eyed Brian Mulroney sprawled unconscious outside his new Westmount home, the apparent victim of a Pierre Trudeau figure blithely strolling away with his walking stick (some thought it was a rifle), elicited a formal denunciation in the House of Commons. Mosher’s particularly unflattering depiction of the *Sûreté du Québec*’s role in the 1990 Oka crisis goaded the provincial police force into issuing a communiqué accusing *The Gazette*, its cartoonist, and the English-speaking media of “disseminating Mohawk propaganda and harbouring an anti-police bias.” Similarly, Chapleau’s sad comment on the tainted blood scandal – a blood-soaked towel hanging on a rack in a public rest room – was deemed inappropriate by his editors when he first drew it in 1992; the piece was published only in 1996, as the inquiry into the Red Cross and the blood system dragged on. When in 1990 he portrayed Jean Chrétien with his mouth fastened on one side with a button, Chapleau was widely accused of playing unfairly on a physical infirmity, much as the Conservatives later did with their infamous television ads in the 1993 federal election campaign. The artist’s version was that he simply meant to suggest that “Jean Chrétien should button [his lip] from time to time.”

This is all quite interesting. But it does not go that far towards creating “a meeting place where humour can serve as the link between two cultures,” as claimed in the press release. Some of these cartoons never were all that funny in the first place. I am thinking in particular of one of Mosher’s stock figures, Quebec culture minister Louise Beaudouin, who is always drawn as a highly sexualized dominatrix, complete with studded collar and Nazi-inspired leather cap and uniform. A little more benign, perhaps, but not much more flattering is Chapleau’s standard portrayal of Canadian heritage minister Sheila Copps; the Hamilton politician is inevitably depicted with a bag over her head. Other caricatures must have been funnier when they were first published than they seem in the context of this exhibition. But despite having lived in Quebec and followed politics reasonably closely throughout the period covered by the show, I found myself often forced to refer back to the exhibition guide – there is very little explanatory text on the walls – to gain a sense of what particular event was being parodied, and why.

Political cartoons are among the most ephemeral forms of cultural expression. To be understood and appreciated, they require a kind of complicity between artist and audience, a shared emotional response to a well established sequence of events. History teachers know from experience that they can be extremely useful for illustrating and enlivening a lecture or a textbook. At the same time, they tend, as comedy, to have a relatively short shelf life: they are unlikely to elicit belly laughs even after only a few months following when

the events to which they refer have occurred, having since then receded from the public's consciousness. *Aislin and Chapleau Caricatures*, then, brings to the public's attention two important collections of political cartoons. The conservation of these documents, which bear a unique kind of witness to important events in recent history, is and should be an important part of the McCord's mandate. But the physical segregation of the two artists' work, the virtual exclusion of other caricatures from the more distant past, the emphasis on humour over substance, and the lack of any real attempt at contextualization, much less interpretation, all place limits on the extent to which these interesting, occasionally amusing images can tell us anything significant about the society in which they were conceived, drawn, published, read, and sometimes chuckled at.

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