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The Art of BILL VAZAN
in the Musée de Lachine
Collection

Land Art in Montréal

Vortexit II (overview),
by Bill Vazan, René-Lévesque Park



Front cover and inside back cover photos of *Vortexit II* (detail): Marc Pitre
Above, and back cover photo of the artist: Ève Katinoglou



Musée de Lachine

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**The Art of BILL VAZAN
in the Musée de Lachine
Collection
Land Art in Montréal**

Dominique Chalifoux
Iris Amizlev

Produced in collaboration
with the Public Art Bureau of Montréal

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Montreal residents have access to cultural institutions all across the municipality, and the Musée de Lachine is a fine example. Furthermore, our resources are efficiently networked to extend the reach of the art and creativity that abound in our city.

In this way, the Musée de Lachine's outdoor sculpture gardens, better known as the Musée plein air de Lachine, found valuable support in the expertise of Montréal's Public Art Bureau, part of the Direction de la culture et du patrimoine. Many works in this imposing collection of large-scale sculptures have benefited from conservation or restoration treatment by the Bureau's team of specialists.

The fall 2010 dedication of Bill Vazan's *Vortexit II* in René-Lévesque Park crowned a rewarding collaboration between the Musée de Lachine, the Public Art Bureau and the Direction des grands parcs et du verdissement. In bringing this project to fruition, they have re-established a stimulating environment for Montrealers in which present-day art has pride of place and a lasting home.

The appeal of the Musée plein air de Lachine lies in the quality of the exhibited works and their artists, but also in the fact that these works are clustered in stunning surroundings. In the borough's riverbank parks, where the sculptures are permanently installed, special initiatives encourage public appreciation. The Musée de Lachine provides onsite labels, educator-led summertime walking and cycling tours, and publications to help residents and visitors understand the artists' intentions.

The fifty sculptures in the Musée plein air, one of southwest Montréal's key attractions, belong to the Musée de Lachine's fine arts collection and are also part of the Ville de Montréal public art collection. The Musée de Lachine contributes to the artists' renown by enhancing and promoting the collection, and the Public Art Bureau's experts now ensure its preventive conservation and restoration. I applaud their concerted efforts, for this new acquisition ensures that Montrealers can again enjoy a major permanent work by a pioneer of land art in Canada, Bill Vazan.

Gérald Tremblay



Mayor Guy Descary's resolve to support the development of the Musée plein air de Lachine and include it in the Lake Saint-Louis shoreline redevelopment plan in the 1980s has brought us a long way. The symposiums held in Lachine, in which Bill Vazan participated, were aimed at making contemporary art part of everyday life for local residents, and they marked our landscape forever. Today, all Montrealers can say that their city is home to one of Canada's largest sculpture gardens, a remarkable museum collection.

Lachine has a long tradition of heritage preservation and artistic initiative marked by the Musée's reopening in 1985. Over the years, the unflagging conviction of our public officials and the dedication of the Musée teams have made it possible to keep up with new conservation, research, exhibition and promotion requirements. Their commitment and passion have served as cornerstones and continue to play a vital role in promotional and presentation initiatives.

This publication confirms that the open-air museum project was well worth the effort. The famous sculpture garden boasts works by some of Quebec's most important artists. *Vortexit II* stands at the heart of René-Lévesque Park, a site commensurate with Bill Vazan's reputation. This recent work by an artist who has carved out an impressive career has quite a story. The aim in these pages is to acquaint the public with the origins of a unique creation and the different aspects of Vazan's oeuvre, to catalogue his works in the Musée's collection, and to provide a glimpse of how the municipal administration and a museum work together to disseminate the arts. Above all, this publication testifies to Bill Vazan's outstanding contribution to the vitality of the arts community.

Claude Dauphin



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Story Rock

René-Lévesque Park, 1986

Bill Vazan produced this work during one of the symposiums that laid the foundation for the Musée plein air de Lachine.

A STRATEGY TO ENCOURAGE PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT WITH CONTEMPORARY ART

For many years, visitors to René-Lévesque Park enjoyed viewing a major work of art by Bill Vazan called *Vortexit*. Today, an enhanced version has taken its place, a work in scale and in resonance with the landscape: *Vortexit II*.

Carrying out this project was of special importance, because it is here, in this waterside park on Lake Saint-Louis, in this vast sculpture garden, that residents and tourists often first come into contact with the fine arts collection of the Musée de Lachine. How do casual visitors come to encounter contemporary art? The beauty of the site draws many people to the cycling and walking paths in the fine-weather season, and the enchanting landscape inspires them to take a tour with a cultural dimension, free of charge. The permanent installation of sculptures along the paths thus favours engagement with contemporary art.

It bears recalling that this is the result of an actual strategy, that the former City of Lachine was a forerunner in showcasing art to a broad public audience. And that the true visionary behind it was Mayor Descary. In the early 1980s, it was he who, along with the Municipal Council, championed the restoration of the Musée de Lachine and the establishment of the Musée plein air, which grew out of three symposiums coordinated by Dominique Rolland. Unlike many other temporary events, these symposiums were aimed at building a permanent collection and making contemporary art a core feature of community life.¹

Now a municipal museum of art, archaeology and history, the Musée de Lachine stands out for its welcoming atmosphere and magnificent site. Its collection of outdoor art grew up and is exhibited in three different areas of the Lachine borough. Fourteen sculptures stand on the Musée's grounds, around the main building and near Maison LeBer-LeMoyné and La Dépendance;² a second

lot of twenty-two large pieces is concentrated in René-Lévesque Park. Another dozen or so are spread around the third permanent exhibition area, installed in riverside parks and on urban sites. In all, more than fifty public artworks are grouped under the name Musée plein air de Lachine.

But it takes appropriate tools to enable the public to appreciate these works, to generate "contact between art and citizen." As in any other permanent exhibition, the works must be identified. Therefore, each sculpture is accompanied by an extended label³ suited to the needs of unguided visitors. The Musée's mission goes beyond promoting art through exhibitions to include an educational mandate in which the visitor is a central concern. To this end, a variety of activities has been developed to encourage meaningful public engagement with contemporary art, particularly with the outdoor sculptures.⁴ The objectives are diverse: introduce visitors to the specific language of sculpture, enable them to identify and appreciate key pieces of the open-air collection, and help them observe differences among the works and working methods. All these learning activities are designed to provide a concrete experience and open new perspectives for the viewer. The labels describe the piece and suggest ways to interpret it, but they also point out other public projects by the artist on view in the greater Montréal area. This approach aims to situate the artist's work in a broader context and to encourage people to lend an attentive eye to their surroundings and, perhaps, make other discoveries.

³ Signs identifying the sculptures were installed in 1999, but free guides had been available to visitors since the late 1980s. These folders contained a map and fact sheets for the 21 sculptures. Sometime after 1992, a new guide with brief descriptions of the then 32 sculptures was produced. In 2001, with 50 works now in the Musée plein air de Lachine, an updated map with more detailed texts was published under the title *Le Musée plein air de Lachine*. Written by the curator Dominique Chalifoux, these texts were based on in-depth research conducted by Frances Moyle. In 2004, an enhanced version in extended label form was installed near each sculpture.

⁴ *Sculpture Challenge*: school group activity; students explore the sculptures on the Musée de Lachine grounds and produce a group artwork; *Sculpture Rally* and *Enjoying Sculpture*: family rallies; *Sculp'tour*: guided sculpture tours for all ages.

¹"From August 7 to September 15, in Parc René-Lévesque, these artists will put the final touches on the last stage of this open air museum of sculptures" (from the Mayor's message in the brochure for the 1988 sculpture symposium)

² Both dating from the seventeenth century.

A striking fact emerges from an examination of the body of outdoor sculpture in the Musée plein air and the 2,000 pieces in the reserve collection: the work of Bill Vazan is a powerful presence in the Musée de Lachine's fine arts collection. Among all these drawings, paintings, sculptures and photographs documenting the recent history of visual arts in Quebec, his oeuvre stands out as emblematic, singular, original, bold and determined. His approach, the scope of his exploration and its anchoring in the artistic material – the slabs of stone, the rock, the land itself – bear witness to a remarkable journey.

As a participant in the 1986 and 1988 Lachine symposiums and the 1992 Salon international de sculpture extérieure de Montréal, Bill Vazan was one of the first artists involved in establishing the Musée plein air. Photography has also been an important part of his career, and his work has been shown at the National Gallery of Canada, notably in the exhibition *The Sixties in Canada*. In fall 2010, the Government of Quebec awarded him the Prix Paul-Émile Borduas, its highest honour for achievement in the visual arts. Now it is our turn to salute Bill Vazan's exceptional contribution to the arts in Quebec and across Canada.

Marc Pitre
Director, Musée de Lachine



3
Story Rock studied
by children on a field trip,
Musée plein air de Lachine,
2003

4

Story Rock, 1986
Sculpture. Granite
2.4 m tall, 28 tonnes
Produced at the second sculpture
symposium, Lachine
Sodip-Art Bequest
Musée plein air de Lachine,
René-Lévesque Park,
SM-1986-004

In the 1980s, Vazan began using sandblasting to engrave small rocks. His first work on a large stone was done in 1986, at the second Lachine symposium. Since then he has engraved other outsized surfaces; one of his boulders stands in Seoul, South Korea (1988), another is at the McMichael Collection, near Toronto, and a more recent piece can be seen at Mont-Tremblant, in the Laurentian Mountains (2003).



5

Story Rock
Top (details): snakes and
footprints pointing towards
the Mohawk Nation territory of
Kahnawake. The figure of an
airplane bears noting.



6

Story Rock
West side (detail): pregnant
woman. Vazan found this
motif at a site sacred to the
Algonquin people,
near Peterborough, Ontario.





7

Vortexit (overview),
as created at the sculpture
symposium *Un lieu*,
Lachine, 1988.
Limestone, 2.66 x 11.20 x 17 m
SM-1988-006

A new work, *Vortexit II*, has
succeeded it in the Musée plein
air de Lachine. A vortex is a
swirling mass of fluid forming
a vacuum at its centre, or a
spinning ring of electric charges
inducted by a magnetic field.



8

Le Navigateur, 1992
Sculpture. Granite
3.05 x 2.45 x 5.86 m
Produced at the Salon
International de la sculpture
extérieure de Montréal
Gift of André Harel,
SM-1992-035-1.2
Permanently installed in
Summerlea Park,
Musée plein air de Lachine

A REPRESENTATIVE BODY OF BILL VAZAN'S WORK IN THE MUSÉE'S COLLECTION

DOMINIQUE CHALIFOUX

Bill Vazan stands out on the visual arts scene, an indisputably leading figure of land art and a pioneer of conceptual art in Canada. His large-scale ephemeral pieces created in far-flung places, his sculptures, massive assemblages of engraved rock inscribed in the landscape and his impressive photographic work have earned wide recognition. And his prolific oeuvre has been the subject of numerous publications. This one, produced in collaboration with Montréal's Public Art Bureau (Direction de la culture et du patrimoine), revolves around the works by Vazan held in the Musée de Lachine collection. More specifically, it focuses on *Vortexit*, created in 1988 and dismantled in 2003, after an accident, and on the creation of *Vortexit II*, which replaced it in fall 2009. Published in conjunction with the dedication of *Vortexit II*, it documents and provides perspective on the new work.

Vortexit was produced in 1988 at the third symposium held in Lachine, called *Un lieu* (A place). Unfolding at the heart of René-Lévesque Park, it was unusual in that, unlike most land art, it was made to endure. Land art interventions, which emerged in North America and Europe in the 1960s, generally resulted in ephemeral pieces. The permanence of *Vortexit* was due in large part to the fact that it was taken into the collection of a municipal museum as soon as it was created. Of all the outdoor sculptures produced at symposiums or as public art or for other projects, *Vortexit* stood as a rare example of enduring land art in Quebec or anywhere in Canada.

During the second half of the twentieth century, many large-scale sculptures sprang up in public spaces and on outdoor sites here and elsewhere in the Western world. In Quebec, in particular, they appeared in the wake of pressure by artists demanding a meaningful place for art in society and the recognition of professional status for creators. Land art must be distinguished from other types of sculpture produced from that time on, since it stems from a particular artistic stance, which Iris Amizlev examines in greater detail in the following chapters.

In addition to *Vortexit*, representing this important contemporary art form, the Musée acquired two other works by Vazan for the Musée plein air de Lachine. Although created like *Vortexit* at public events, they are sculptures, not land art. *Story Rock* (ills. 2-6) and *Le Navigateur* (ill. 8) were respectively produced at the 1986 symposium held in Lachine⁵ and the 1992 Salon international de la sculpture extérieure de Montréal.⁶ They are similar to *Vortexit* in terms of their material (granite boulders) and their engravings: the same sandblasting process, the same type of broken dotted or dashed lines, and the same depth of groove, the grooves described by R. Bella Rabinovitch as "inverted Braille."⁷

Also as in *Vortexit*, the engraved motifs reference the boulders' surroundings: on the top of *Story Rock*, the toes of two outlined feet point towards the Kahnawake reserve⁸ on the opposite bank of Lake Saint-Louis. Thus, *Story Rock* both borrows from a repertory of Amerindian motifs and signals the nearby presence of a Native community. As is often true in Vazan's work, the engraved signs echo carvings observed at prehistoric sites. In this case, he has drawn mainly on symbols and patterns seen at the Gavrinis Cairn, in the French region of Brittany, and in southern Ontario. The petroglyphs found in eastern Canada bear witness to a Native presence that stretches back many hundreds of years. But today, all these signs are enigmatic, a language whose meaning has been lost. Vazan speaks about marking the stone and the motifs he chose to engrave on *Story Rock*: "I began with circles, circular things ... I began with a spiral on one side and saw that I could add a second and even a third on the top." ... "Towards the end I also incorporated other lines, signs, petroglyphs from other cultures ... and for me it became like an amalgam of many stories, from the ancient time before civilization ... before writing."⁹

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⁵ Sculpture symposium *L'an II / Lachine, carrefour de l'art et de l'industrie*.

⁶ The first edition of this event, held as part of Montréal's 350th anniversary celebrations. The sculpture was exhibited initially in the city's Old Port, in 1992, and then re-sited in Lachine's Summerlea Park.

⁷ In Louise Poissant and R. Bella Rabinovitch, *Bill Vazan, Landscapes & Waterscapes, Œuvres récentes 1982-87*, exhib. cat. (Montréal: Saidye Bronfman Centre, 1987), p. 20.

⁸ The foot drawings are located on the top of the work and therefore usually go unseen by visitors.

⁹ Bill Vazan in interview with Dominique Chalifoux, December 2004.

Le Navigateur, also sited in a park where the St. Lawrence widens into Lake Saint-Louis, reminds us that the river was the route for Europeans penetrating the new continent. The constellation figures that mark the surface of the stones allude to the stars that guided their navigation.

These two sculptures are independent of the green spaces in which they stand. Unlike *Vortexit*, they were not expressly designed for their present sites. Even though they relate to the area thematically (river, navigation, Native presence), their meaning and positioning are not specific to place. Both could be moved to other locations, just as *Le Navigateur* was transferred from its initial site in Montréal's Old Port. These works are comparable to those by Vazan installed outdoors at the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, Redford Gardens and the Agnes Etherington Art Centre, in Kingston. They are similar in scale, structure and treatment, and represent an important aspect of the artist's oeuvre.

Vazan's broad exploratory approach also manifests itself in the form of drawings, photographs, maquettes and small sculptures, of which the Musée de Lachine holds several examples. These acquisitions, made between 1985 and 2008, constitute a corpus of twenty-seven works¹⁰ intended to effectively document the path of his career. They include a small drawing from 1969, *Ligne Trans-Canada : de Toronto à Fredericton*, four large drawings made in 1985 and three large rubbings taken by the artist from the pillars of *Vortexit* in 2008, before the work was fully dismantled and destroyed.

14

Drawing holds an important place in Vazan's art, including, of course, his colossal land drawings done in places around the world. While the four large drawings conserved at the Musée have more conventional parameters (format, medium, support), they illustrate ideas in development and the way Vazan conceives his major interventions. For example, some of the sketches are for projects he would

¹⁰ Plus three objects related to his art: a signed poster showing the sculpture *Story Rock*, and two items directly related to *Vortexit*, a didactic model and a fragment from one of the pillars of this 1988 work.

like to deploy across four-square-kilometre areas, digging canals and tunnels. Others involve large rock outcrops, with the engraved elements permanently incorporated in the natural site, rather than in quarried stone transported from other places. He brought one such project to fruition by engraving an immense outcrop at Mont-Tremblant (ill. 23), about fifteen years after making these drawings.

The Musée's collection also includes photographic works that demonstrate Vazan's various uses of the medium. The first piece acquired was *Atlantic Coasts Cresting* (ill. 29), a large photomontage¹¹ from 1981 presenting inverted horizons. Composed of thirty-eight black-and-white photographs, it can be related to the "membranes and singularities" cycle that Vazan worked on until 2000.¹²

More recently, in 2007 the Musée received a gift of ten large-scale colour photographs¹³ produced by the artist in the early 2000s. While not a survey project as such, these pictures represent the variety of Vazan's land art and conceptual art interventions. They were conceived from photographic material accumulated over four decades. In 1999, Vazan began sporadically selecting, assembling and juxtaposing images for the series, which also documents the methods employed in his landworks: arranging stones, wood, aluminium foil,¹⁴ drawing on grass with chalk (whitewash), turf cutting.¹⁵ Some of the works were photographed from the ground, at more or less close range, but to reveal the full magnitude of others required the aerial perspective that defines several of the large photos. Vazan acknowledges and underscores this by including the image of a twin-engine plane in some of them.¹⁶ Overall, the series¹⁷ illustrates the breadth of the investigations Vazan has undertaken at home and abroad.

¹¹ The work measures 1.64 x 8.71 m. It comprises 38 photos, each 44.7 x 60 cm, arranged in three horizontal rows, one above the other.

¹² On this subject, see *Bill Vazan. Ombres cosmologiques*, exhib. cat. (Québec City: Musée du Québec, 2001).

¹³ Lambda print on polyester, 152.4 x 127 cm.

¹⁴ Sheets of aluminium foil were used in *Village Inondé + Water Spirit – Longueuil, 1983 + 1985* (ill. 27).

¹⁵ *The Centre of the World (Omphalos – The Navel of the Earth)* created at Barrie, Ontario, in 2003 (ill. 28).

¹⁶ In 1986, Vazan included a small twin-engine plane among the engravings on *Story Rock* (ill. 5) and in a photograph of a landwork produced in Peru, *Windwheel (Remolino #2)*, where the plane is visible as a shadow on the ground. This photo is reproduced on page 54 of *Bill Vazan: A Cosmic Dance. Thunderstones, Wererocks and Shamanic Drawings 1987-1992*, exhib. cat. (Kingston: Agnes Etherington Art Centre, 1993).

¹⁷ See the list of works on page 46.

9

Cut Granite Outcrop (Explosive) (Wedges), 1985

Drawing. Conté crayon on paper
152 x 126 cm
Gift of Serge Tousignant
Musée de Lachine Collection, RD-1991-081

This drawing was done shortly before Vazan made *Story Rock*, which features the same large spiral. He has drawn a network of wavy lines and concentric circular shapes in the whorls and left powdery traces of his fingers on the entire surface. The curved motifs recall the fingerprint-like signs frequently found at prehistoric sites. The title, visible in the lower right corner, reveals the scope of the intended project.



10

Sand Blasted Granite Boulder, 1985

Drawing. Conté crayon on paper
151.5 x 126 cm
Gift of Serge Tousignant
Musée de Lachine Collection, RD-1991-080



In addition to their undeniable artistic quality, these photographs have archival value as documentary evidence of works for the most part ephemeral and often created in out-of-the-way locations,¹⁸ such as the Cambodian village for *Genocide Skulls – Cambodia, 1996-97*. Several of the photographed works existed for only a few days, but their transience was not due solely to remoteness: *World Line*,¹⁹ for instance, was deployed in twenty-five urban centres around the globe yet lasted very briefly. The photograph *Two Worldline Placements (MMFA & AGO), 1971* shows how this work was configured at museums in Montréal and Toronto. Some of Vazan's projects were dismantled, whereas others disappeared owing to the fragility or instability of their material. This is true of the early landworks done in 1968 on the beaches of Prince Edward Island and documented in the large photograph *Mars Crater + Tide measure (Low Tide Works) – P.E.I., 1967-69* (ill. 26). And of those created some years later near the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec on the highly connoted Plains of Abraham, *Pression/Presence (Green version) – Plains of Abraham, Quebec, 1979*, and in areas of Longueuil, *Village Inondé + Water Spirit – Longueuil, 1983 + 1985* (ill. 27).

When a landwork has survived the passage of time, as has,²⁰ in Chicoutimi, the initial onsite creation and the changes it has undergone are documented in photographs. *Outlikan Meskina (Green version) – Chicoutimi, 1980* (ill. 25) captures a moment in the history of sculpture in Quebec, showing the work as produced at the Symposium international de sculpture environnementale de Chicoutimi, and marks an enduring milestone on Vazan's artistic journey.

As a whole, these photographs shed light on Vazan's conceptual work, on the way he views land and time. His inquiry ceaselessly oscillates between the notions of microcosm and macrocosm, and of a timeline that plots the development of humankind and the universe.

Teleportation & Space Squeeze – Montreal, 1971 combines two images, one reproduced from a television screen grab and the other printed from negative film. As the title indicates, Vazan compresses and confronts spaces of totally different scales in this work. The upper image is a view of man's first steps on the moon, a point in the vast sidereal space seen from the comfort of home in a televised picture. The lower image is of large willows on a Lake Ontario beach, near the Toronto neighbourhood where Vazan used to live. The camera lens is aimed at the top of the trees such that the heavens appear in the background. Here Vazan introduces the question of image transmission conditions and the very nature of the image itself: luminous dots, waves, chemical traces, pigments? He scrutinizes our ability to perceive multiple dimensions of reality depending on the capture or detection devices we use and the impact of communication interference.

For the moment, four small stone pieces complete the corpus that exemplifies the artist's work within the Musée de Lachine collection. These granite sculptures from the past two decades illustrate some of Vazan's preferred approaches, such as collecting "found stone" in fields, engraving motifs and, more recently, scavenging cut stone from manufacturer and workshop rejects (*Conform et Urgence*). They also demonstrate the introduction of polished surfaces alternating with engraved or latex-covered untreated surfaces.

¹⁸ Other remote locations like the Egyptian site of *Terrorists' Attack?! – Egypt, 2001*, or remote beaches in British Columbia, *Littoral Spirits – Haida Gwaii, B.C., 1999*, or simply places outside official art hubs.

¹⁹ Considered his most ambitious work, "The imaginary line circles the planet in 25 physical segments, passing through 18 countries. The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts is where the line 'touches down' in Montréal. People in each location (including museums, exhibition centres and galleries) are instructed to simultaneously lay a piece of adhesive tape down on the ground using data calculated by civil engineer Ahmad Salahuddin." (From the artist's biobibliography compiled by Claudine Roger, in *Bill Vazan: Walking into the Vanishing Point. Art conceptuel : Conceptual Art* (Montréal: VOX, Centre de l'image contemporaine, 2009), p. 187.

²⁰ In 1986, restoration was needed to reposition the three hundred stones that Vazan had arranged on the ground, in part because snow removal trucks had used the site for access and dumping. Today, the work is hard to see since "grass has partially invaded the installation" – a fact already noted in the 2005 *Répertoire des œuvres d'art publiques au Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean*. The absence of identifying or explanatory signage makes the work all the more unintelligible, as observed by Dominique Chalifoux in spring 2010.



11

Teleportation & Space Squeeze
 – Montreal, 1971, about 2000.

This conceptual art photograph does not refer to a project carried out at a site. It combines a televised image and an image printed from a negative. The play of surface streaks evokes transmission problems and errors, emphasizing the fragility of visual communication.

"Squeezes (scratches) damage the words, the images, the intentions of communication."

Bill Vazan to Dominique Chalfoux, 2010.

Furthermore, the four works reveal a shift from anthropomorphic sculpture (*Green Diet* and *Snake Head*) towards more abstract sculpture. Some of the small pieces that Vazan has produced over the years can be considered works in their own right but also maquettes for potential large-scale pieces. Each, he says, has its own identity. *Snake Head* was shown in the summer of 1992 in the exhibition *A Cosmic Dance* at the Agnes Etherington Art Centre, in Kingston, where it may have been part of the installation *Observed*, composed of fifteen engraved stones of different sizes arranged on a bed of gravel.²¹

Green Diet goes beyond its formal interest to offer a didactic experience. Here, Vazan chose not to remove the latex residue from the work's surface so as to give it a different texture and reveal the creative process.²²

Lastly, the Musée de Lachine's collection was recently enriched with the maquette that Vazan produced for *Vortexit II*, the successor to *Vortexit*. As discussed in the following chapters, *Vortexit II* is a new work, acquired in 2009, but many of its features and the specific context of its creation lead the Musée de Lachine to also consider it a new version of *Vortexit*.

²¹ This installation appears on page 8 of the catalogue written by the curator, James D. Campbell.

²² The residue shows how some areas of the surface are protected during the engraving. Vazan explains that this method (reserving areas with latex) produces clearly defined grooves, as seen on *Story Rock*, whereas engraving without masking produces round-edged grooves like those on *Vortexit* and *Le Navigateur*.

12

Vortexit, portal

(detail), 1988, looking towards the canal

Vortexit was designed in direct relation to the environment. It reflected the movement of water in various ways: on the ground, in the curves of the S-shaped path and on the vertical faces of the double portal erected at the centre of the work, where the stone was engraved with signs. Each of the three pillars of the portal was marked with a different pattern of zigzag, wavy or dotted lines representing water. Vazan related these motifs to the nearby swirling rapids. In addition, the orientation of the path established an axis connecting the waters of the canal to those of Lake Saint-Louis.



13

Untitled, 2008

Rubbing of engravings on east pillar of *Vortexit*
Coloured pencil on Tyveck
224 x 153 cm, RD-2008-008





14

Vortexit, portal
(detail), 1988, looking
towards Lake Saint-Louis

Expressly created for the Musée plein air de Lachine, *Vortexit* differed from most landworks in that it was permanently sited in an area devoted to conserving and exhibiting sculpture.



15

Bill Vazan making rubbings

In an unusual measure for a museum collection, the badly damaged *Vortexit* was destroyed after the artist agreed to create a new but analogous work for the same site.

In November 2008, twenty years after its creation, the artist made rubbings from *Vortexit* before it was completely dismantled and the remains destroyed.

At once artworks and documentary evidence of the piece, these impressions were acquired by the Musée and are held in the reserve collection.



16 and 17
Untitled (2), 2008
Rubbings of engravings
on the centre and west pillars
of *Vortexit*
Coloured pencil on Tyvek
221 x 153 cm, RD-2008-007
201 x 153 cm, RD-2008-006



18

Vortexit II, portal (detail), 2009

As Iris Amizlev explains in the next chapter, Vazan has reprised the motifs engraved on the pillars of the first version of *Vortexit* (1988) and added two others, for a total of five engravings on *Vortexit II*. In the new work, the dotted pattern specifically evokes sprays of water. The two additions represent waves and spirals.



19

Vortexit II, 2009, view of the portal looking towards the canal
Vazan's works frequently have to do with moving, travelling, walking. In conceiving them, he says, "I'm reflecting in a general way, encompassing all traversing and manipulations of land surface."²³

The path that leads through the double portal offers an experience for visitors. Strolling towards one of the openings, they tend to detour around the middle pillar to observe the engraved motifs in a movement that echoes the circular current of a whirlpool. Instead of simply crossing through, they circle around a central axis via the two openings, their footsteps describing a spiral.

²³ "A Conversation Between Patrice Loubier and Bill Vazan, August 29, 2009," in *Bill Vazan: Walking into the Vanishing Point. Art conceptuel : Conceptual Art*, p. 128.



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Vortexit II, 2009,
view of the portal
looking towards
Lake Saint-Louis

VORTEXIT: A MAJOR WORK IN TROUBLE

DOMINIQUE CHALIFOUX

CONSERVE AND RESTORE

Dedicated in September 2010, *Vortexit II* holds a special place in both the Musée's collection and the Ville de Montréal public art collection. It is the latest addition to the Musée plein air, replacing the initial *Vortexit*. Made with average-grade stone in 1988, *Vortexit* had invisibly accumulated the harmful effects of eighteen years of permanent exposure to the elements. In the spring of 2003, a visitor swung from the stone lintel, causing a layer of the slab to separate. The weight then broke the stone and brought it crashing to the ground. Serious damage had been done and the visitor had to be treated for injuries. To avoid other accidents, the Lachine borough's public works department promptly dismantled the components of the central portal. After assessing the situation, the Musée turned to Montréal's Public Art Bureau for support in restoring *Vortexit*.

A more thorough examination was conducted and an outside firm drew up an estimate for the necessary work. But the high cost involved and the prospect of a questionable outcome led the Musée to engage in painstaking consideration of avenues outside the norm for a museum collection. With restoration not feasible, other solutions had to be envisaged. Keep the work in its existing state? Recover the main components for the artist to use in creating a new version or an entirely new work? Each option had to be evaluated in terms of its conformity with the Musée's conservation mandate and the city's interests in regard to its public art collection.

AN EXCEPTIONAL CASE: DESTROY AND RECREATE

After several meetings with Montréal's Public Art Bureau,²⁴ the Musée resigned itself to the fact that *Vortexit* was too damaged to restore and approved its destruction, provided it would be replaced with a new work created by Bill Vazan for the same site. This extreme solution, highly exceptional for a museum,²⁵ was conceivable because the artist was still active and willing to collaborate on the project. The Public Art Bureau and the Musée agreed on a framework of action suited to the museum's collection and set out guidelines for the creation of a new work: same site, same theme, same art form, same scale. With this in place, the Public Art Bureau commissioned Vazan to produce a replacement for *Vortexit* in the Musée de Lachine's collection. The work, which he titled *Vortexit II*, was installed in fall 2009 on the original site in René-Lévesque Park, where twenty-some sculptures are grouped together. It bears noting that, as a result of the merger of Island of Montréal municipalities in 2002, all of the open-air sculptures in the Musée plein air de Lachine are also part of the Ville de Montréal public art collection.

Although the 1988 *Vortexit* was destroyed in November 2009, the Musée's permanent collection holds a few related items, including a fragment of one of the three portal pillars, found on the site after the work was damaged. In 2006, this limestone fragment engraved with grooves was presented in the exhibition *Zone de risque*, which dealt with the special challenges of conserving outdoor sculptures. The show also included a maquette of *Vortexit* produced²⁶ using documentary and photographic records from the Musée and details of the sculpture's dismantled components recorded onsite in 2006. The exhibition was designed to inform visitors about the

²⁴ Which had also commissioned an independent analysis to confirm the land-work's value.

²⁵ As I noted in the catalogue for the exhibition *Crash: Treatment Required* (2009), the Storm King Art Center, north of New York City, faced a similar situation involving the reconstruction of Alexander Liberman's sculpture *Adonai*. Created in 1970-1971 from perishable scrap metal, the piece was in bad shape some twenty years later. To ensure that this example of the artist's early work would endure, the Center refabricated it in 2000, with Liberman's approval. For full details, see *Earth, Sky, and Sculpture: Storm King Art Center* (Mountainville, NY: Storm King Art Center, 2000).

²⁶ The 1:20 scale model was built by Multiversions.

situation and lead them to weigh the issues surrounding the work's conservation. Visitor opinions on the best way to deal with the problem were gathered by means of a straw vote ballot.²⁷

Given the state of this work by Bill Vazan, which option would you have chosen?

Let the sculpture deteriorate naturally, without intervening.

Remove the broken or damaged parts and replace them with new ones engraved by the artist with the original motifs.

Remove all parts of the sculpture immediately, since the stones as currently arranged constitute a distorted version of Bill Vazan's creation.

In collaboration with the artist, reproduce the work as faithfully as possible, using better-quality materials and more effective means of anchoring.

Ask the artist to create a new work on the same site but reflecting his current research.

Other: _____

MUSEUM CONTEXT

Public art gained a foothold around Quebec in various ways. In Montréal, sculpture came to the fore by way of symposiums, first on Mount Royal in 1964 and at the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal in 1965, then in Lachine in 1985, 1986 and 1988 and in Saint-Léonard in 1986. While most of these temporary events left only scattered traces in the province,²⁸ the three successive symposiums held in Lachine were aimed at laying the foundation for an open-air museum and making art a city feature. From the beginning, as part of the municipal museum's collection, the sculptures have enjoyed advantageous care and promotion. And with many of them concentrated in René-Lévesque Park and on the Musée grounds, they afford visitors an exemplary overview of late-twentieth-century sculptural practices in Quebec.

Within the Musée showcase, *Vortexit II* belongs to a corpus of outdoor art related to the history of sculpture in Quebec and presented in a living space that evolves with the seasons. Vazan's works and those of the other artists benefit from the expertise of a conservation department and of an education department that supports their interpretation. Moreover, *Vortexit II*, like its predecessor, stands among works that offer resonance and invite a dynamic reading. By an ironic coincidence, one of its companions in the Musée's fine arts collection is *FUFF #2*,²⁹ a work created by Jean Noël for the *Corridart* event. This composition of ten red banners survived the dismantling ordered by Montréal authorities, but *Stone Maze*, the landwork created by Bill Vazan for the same event, simply disappeared. Thus, today, *Vortexit II* is the only piece of land art in a Montréal-area museum collection. Together with the twenty-six other works by Vazan in the collection, it makes the Musée de Lachine a resource-rich venue for studying and understanding the work of one of the most commanding Canadian artists of his generation. Through his work in the fields of land art, conceptual art and contemporary photography, Bill Vazan has made an outstanding contribution to the development of art in Canada.

²⁷ The votes did not weigh in the decision but showed that visitors shared the Musée's position.

²⁸ In some cities, the works are concentrated and exhibited in parks, as in Alma's Falaise Park.

²⁹ Three segments of this work were shown in the exhibition *Accrochage*, held at Musée de Lachine in fall 2003.



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Stone Maze, 1976,
created in Montréal at the
intersection of Sherbrooke
and Amherst streets for
Corridart and dismantled the
day before the event.



22
Vortexit II, 2009, side
view with detail of the
outer-face engravings,
René-Lévesque Park,
Musée plein air de
Lachine.

A NEW WORK: VORTEXIT II

IRIS AMIZLEV

Bill Vazan has left marks of his artistic interventions all over the world. Since most of his works, made in situ, are ephemeral, *Vortexit II* is a rarity in the region of Montréal.

Vortexit II has a powerful presence among the artworks in René-Lévesque Park, its massive form melding with the idyllic setting. Its location in a park encourages visitors to appreciate the natural beauty of the surroundings while enjoying the work itself. Consequently, physical sensations associated with the outdoors – the sounds, sights and scents of nature – are incorporated into the viewing experience, thereby involving multiple senses. The natural elements of the site interact with Vazan's work and enhance it.

According to Willoughby Sharp's description of what he called "Earth Art"³⁰ and "a new kind of sculpture" that appeared in the late 1960s, *Vortexit II* displays typical characteristics of land art, including large scale, exterior location, site specificity, use of natural materials, an environment that one is encouraged to explore actively and an interest in the form of prehistoric sites.³¹ It is also a classic work by Vazan, incorporating large stones and engravings, along with other characteristics related to land art, which will be examined in greater detail in the next chapter.

Vortexit II is a site-specific work. Not only is it an integral part of the landscape, but also it alludes to the nearby water, highlighting its importance in Quebec's and Canada's history, as it was waterways that enabled European settlers to navigate inland once they reached North America. Both the structure of *Vortexit II* and its engravings, derived from the whirlpools and currents of the Lachine Rapids, represent the movement of water. The engravings depict water in five ways, while the work's overall form refers to the vortex movement of water. It is also consistent with Vazan's interest in

physics: the passage embodies a vortex, while the title refers to fluid mechanics. Vazan further notes that the form pertains to a theory about the origins of water on earth: "Meteors – comets brought water to our planet on spiralling – elliptical – spherical paths,"³² which the shape of *Vortexit II* emulates.

Its imposing size and structure make evident that the large, open S configuration is meant to be entered, walked through and experienced physically. A gravel path bordered on one side by upright slabs of granite invites and guides people into a sinuous open-sided passageway. The slabs increase in height towards the central section, where two lintels placed horizontally on top of the three pillars make a portal. With each step, the view of the work changes, and viewers can get a sense of the whole structure, including the engravings.

For Vazan, the central portal symbolizes a womblike cocoon, alluding to a primitive ceremonial passage: "The ritual sense of portals will suggest a coming into and going out of an immersion in a fleeting baptism of our mainly water condition. Dualities of here and elsewhere, chaos and repose, memory and release, place and displacement."³³ Sauntering through the piece, we sense a tension between horizontal and vertical lines, as well as a dichotomy and balance between the lightness of open space on one side versus the monumentality of stones on the other. Likewise, in the middle, the contrast between the oppressive and cumbersome weight of the lintels against the airiness of the sky seen beyond them, along with engravings of fluid surges and swells, gives an impression of a light and non-invasive enclosure.

As we enter *Vortexit II* and depart again, it is a place to ponder our connection to the world, shared memory and the completion of a cycle: "The work is a spiral that morphs into other dimensions via human perception ... Think of the work as one dimension less than its full number of dimensional reality that impinges on our limited perceptions."³⁴

³⁰ Of the many terms used to label this artform, "land art" became the most popular. The term "earthworks" is used to describe the artworks themselves, made within and with the earth and its components.

³¹ Willoughby Sharp was curator of the first museum exhibition of earth art, at the Andrew Dickson White Museum of Art, Ithaca, New York, in 1968 and wrote the introduction for the catalogue, *Earth Art*, Nita Jager, ed. (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University, 1969).

³² Bill Vazan, letter to the author, February 9, 2010.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ This comment, made by Vazan in conversation with the author, is inspired by British schoolmaster and theologian Edwin Abbott Abbott's conjectures in *Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions* (1884), a satirical novella about a two-dimensional world and the nature of dimensions, as well as by recent theoretical research in quantum physics.

REFERENCES TO PREHISTORY

Vortexit II's formal similarities to megalithic remains, including the engravings, are striking. Even its size is congruent with some of the ancient counterparts it makes reference to. Vazan acknowledges the connection: "*Vortexit II* might look like Stonehenge, but it has another kind of purpose ... It is not the same intent."³⁵ Vazan has long had a profound interest in and knowledge of prehistoric sites, and has travelled all over the world to visit archaeological remains. Here, in North America, the layers of history are thin in comparison to other continents that were inhabited at an earlier stage, and though there are remnants of Amerindian cultures, megalithic relics are lacking. A work like *Vortexit II* provides a layer of prehistoric references and adds a layer of memory to the foundation of our landscape. And while it is a modern rendition of an ancient manifestation, it nevertheless links us to ancient times and persistent primal sensibilities.

Vortexit II looks like a dolmen that has been dissected. Its lintels are laid out at the centre of the S curve, and thus only the work's core recalls the look of a "traditional" dolmen: dolmens are usually enclosures covered by stone slabs to form a rooflike structure. These references to European prehistory also reminds us of a time when humankind had a harmonious relationship with the environment. Vazan's choice of stone as a medium is related to a collective concern among land artists. Using natural materials or those found on site is not only a means of returning to nature, it reminds us of our prehistoric ancestors, who used natural (though not necessarily local)³⁶ materials for their monuments. So, *Vortexit II* is compatible with a growing trend towards environmentally friendly endeavours that also form a connection with prehistory and trigger a sense of nostalgia in viewers.

VORTEXIT (1988) and VORTEXIT II (2009)

Vortexit II can be considered a recreation, with slight modifications, of its predecessor, *Vortexit*, made by Vazan on the same site in 1988. Conceived with a related intent and character, *Vortexit II* is as original as the first version, and most of the differences between the two are subtle and not necessarily even discernible. The formats are similar, except that *Vortexit II* has a tighter S curve. The orientation on the ground is also altered to a small degree, owing to a city bylaw that protects nature by requiring that sufficient distance be maintained from nearby trees. The most noticeable difference is that *Vortexit II* is slightly shorter but more massive and compact, composed of seventeen stones versus twenty-three. The stones are also thicker and blockier, whereas those of *Vortexit* were narrower and jagged. Moreover, the stone is of a different type and coloration:³⁷ *Vortexit* was made with limestone, whereas granite was used for *Vortexit II* in order to ensure greater stability, durability and subsequent protection from natural and manmade forces.

Vortexit included three engravings, presenting a dotted pattern, zigzags inspired by Amerindian and African motifs, and undulating forms. *Vortexit II* has five. Three are the same as in the previous work, although this time, the dotted pattern is interlaced with veins of granite to evoke spray. The other two engravings depict an Oriental wave and spirals of Assyrian influence. Vazan explains that "As with the nearby *Story Rock*, the 'universal' petroglyphs are not of one type, but of an amalgam of particulars, representing more than a few approaches."³⁸ The engravings of *Vortexit II* were created by sandblasting lines of holes in the stone, a technique adopted to reduce the physical strain involved in the full cutting seen in *Story Rock*. This method functions effectively inasmuch as our brain eliminates the space between the holes to perceive a continuous line.

³⁵ Discussion with the author, March 9, 2010.

³⁶ Some of the stones at Stonehenge were transported 380 kilometres to their present location.

³⁷ The limestone forming *Vortexit* was predominantly brownish and matte, whereas the granite of *Vortexit II* is slightly bluish and lighter in colour, with a scintillating effect.

³⁸ Bill Vazan, letter to the author, August 25, 2009.

RATIONALE FOR RESTORING VORTEXIT

Motivation to restore or recreate *Vortexit* was high after the damage it suffered in 2003. It was unique in Vazan's production, as well as one of the most prominent and valued works in the collection of the Musée de Lachine. *Vortexit* was vital within Vazan's oeuvre for many reasons. The most obvious is its imposing size, due partially to Vazan's participation in the symposium *Un Lieu*, in 1988, which provided him with a budget and access to land for a permanent piece. *Vortexit* thus became the tallest, most massive, imposing and complex three-dimensional work Vazan had made until then.³⁹

The engravings were another aspect that distinguished *Vortexit* from Vazan's other land art.⁴⁰ Time-consuming and physically strenuous, engraving granite by sandblasting is rarely considered for artworks that are destined to deteriorate or be dismantled. Since most of his land art is temporary, engravings are generally absent. Moreover, when the artist makes land art, he is usually in distant, secluded locations, without access to sandblasting equipment.⁴¹

In the context of Vazan's production, *Vortexit* was also remarkable in that it combined several interests within one artwork, including history, prehistory, symbols and physics. However, the most significant aspect was that it was one of the few works of land art by Vazan in existence, further amplifying its worth. Of the four other remaining works, *Calendrier des saisons* (1975) in Terrebonne has been damaged and no longer functions as a solar calendar. Therefore, besides *Vortexit*, there were only two intact works of land art by this artist in Quebec, the others being *Outlikan Meskina* (1980) in Saguenay (Borough of Chicoutimi) and *Réduire* (2003) at Mont-Tremblant.⁴² It was also the only land art in Montréal and in the Musée

de Lachine's collection. Given that Vazan has been living and working in Montréal since 1957, it is fitting that one of his foremost artworks subsists in this city.

Moreover, it is uncommon for people to have a chance to see land art, because it is traditionally located in remote sites that are often difficult to find.⁴³ Therefore, most people see this artform through visual documentation, such as photographs, films and illustrations in books and magazines. *Vortexit* provided the luxury of comfortable viewing conditions. Located in Lachine, about thirty minutes from the centre of Montréal, it was easily accessible, with various tourist attractions and facilities nearby.

Other cities house land art, but they are few, especially in Canada. In the United States, Carl Andre's *Stone Field Sculpture* (1977) in Hartford, Connecticut, and Robert Morris's *Grand Rapids Project* (1974) in Grand Rapids, Iowa, are examples of earthworks that exist within urban environments and are maintained by government funds, offering both local residents and visitors the opportunity to appreciate land art. Few art establishments have land art in their collection.⁴⁴ As one of only two museums to possess a work of land art by Vazan, it was essential that the Musée de Lachine restore *Vortexit*.

Finally, this unique work aligned Vazan with his contemporaries making land art in other countries. When Vazan installed *Vortexit* in 1988, Michael Heizer had finished his well-known *Effigy Tumuli* (1983-1985) in Buffalo Rock State Park, southwest of Chicago, Illinois, a few years earlier. Like Vazan's references to water in *Vortexit II*, Heizer's earthworks of animals indigenous to the region (a catfish, water strider, frog, snake and turtle) relate the artworks to their site.

³⁹ Vazan had made horizontal works covering a larger surface, usually ephemeral, but this was his tallest construction. However, relative to works by American land artists, it was not a remarkably sizable work.

⁴⁰ Along with *Réduire* (2003) in Mont-Tremblant, which is discussed in a subsequent chapter.

⁴¹ It should be noted that when Vazan incorporates engravings into sculptures, he works offsite most of the time, transporting his works to their destined location after completion. There are a few exceptions to this practice. Both *Story Rock* and *Réduire* were engraved onsite.

⁴² *Outlikan Meskina* is located in an urban park under the jurisdiction of the city of Saguenay, and *Réduire* is in the collection of the Musée du Bas-Saint-Laurent, Rivière-du-Loup.

⁴³ There are many accounts of people driving for hours and searching for land art, often in vain. Americans Calvin Tomkins (author and art critic) and Virginia Dwan (patron of land art, as well as owner and curator of the Dwan Galleries in New York and Los Angeles) were unsuccessful after spending ten hours looking for Walter De Maria's *Las Vegas Piece* (1969) in the Tula Desert of Nevada. The work consisted of four shallow cuts made with a bulldozer: two a mile long and two a half-mile long (Calvin Tomkins, *The Scene: Reports on Post-modern Art* [New York: Viking Press, 1976], pp. 141-142).

⁴⁴ The Dia Art Foundation in New York is well known for its commitment to the preservation of land art. Two legendary works are under its guardianship and maintenance: Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* (1970) and Walter De Maria's *Lightning Field* (1977), in the middle of the desert in Utah and New Mexico, respectively. Dia is also funding ongoing projects, including James Turrell's *Roden Crater* in Arizona and Michael Heizer's *City* project in Nevada, both under construction since 1972. Another renowned earthwork, Michael Heizer's *Double Negative* (1969-1970) in Nevada, belongs to the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, through a gift of Virginia Dwan.

British artist Chris Drury created works that have a conceptual affinity with *Vortexit II* as well. The conical structure of *Fire Cairn* (1989), in the wilderness of Colorado, was designed to harbour fire, but Drury's recurring chambers, shelters and baskets are spaces intended to be penetrated, comparable to *Vortexit II*. Although Vazan's work is not as enclosed and all-encompassing as Drury's works are, their viewers take part in a parallel experience, passing from one space to another, penetrating a transitory realm within the artwork and contemplating the tranquillity inherent in these shelters. Viewers can interpret the experience according to their own perception.⁴⁵

As for visual similarities, Vazan's work shares the formal trait of vertical stones with the work of other land artists, including Richard Long, whose *Sahara Line* (1988) consisted of a line of upright stones (though Long's was straight rather than S-shaped). While Vazan developed a distinct formal and conceptual vocabulary, his land art (both ephemeral and permanent) corresponds to the works of several fellow land artists.

⁴⁵ The need for viewer involvement has been a feature of land art since the beginning, and the creation of enclosures that can be entered is a recurring formal and conceptual pursuit, seen for example in Robert Morris's *Observatory* (1971), Alice Aycock's *Maze* (1972) and Richard Fleischner's *Sod Maze* (1974).



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Réduire, 2003

Stone with sandblast engraving,
12.24 x 15.30 m, Mont-Tremblant
Musée du Bas-Saint-Laurent Collection

In 2003, in an interview with the Musée de Lachine's curator, Vazan explained the inscriptions on his 1985 drawings. For example, the title *Cut Granite Outcrop (Explosive) (Wedges)* (ill. 9) describes an approach to working on an exposed rock formation, a support very different from cut stone transported from a quarry. A project like this, said the artist, was a long-standing dream.

He was finally able to carry it out at Mont-Tremblant. Making his first permanent mark on the land, he engraved not on relocated stone but directly on the vast rock surface, "on the surface of our country," as he says.

VAZAN AND THE PERMANENCE OF HIS LAND ART IN QUEBEC

IRIS AMIZLEV

Little of Vazan's land art in Quebec has resisted the transformation and ultimate effacement of time. In Montréal, it is in Lachine that the eloquence of this artist can be appreciated in its full measure.

During the 1960s and 1970s, theories relating Stonehenge, the Nazca lines and other prehistoric remains to astronomy were publicized in the mainstream media.⁴⁶ Many land artists responded to these theories by incorporating formal and conceptual references to megalithic and other prehistoric sites into their art: *Vortexit* and *Vortexit II* are examples. In fact, Vazan was among those interested in archaeoastronomy as well.⁴⁷

TERREBONNE

Calendrier des saisons, a public commission constructed in front of the Terrebonne post office in 1975, functioned like an ancient calendar. The composition included a circular area of gravel in the centre, with six poles radiating from it leaning on large boulders. Although the work still existed during the summer of 2010, it had not been maintained and was partially dismantled. Among other things, the poles had been removed.⁴⁸ These originally served as markers pointing in the direction of the sunrise and sunset on the day of the equinoxes and solstices. This contemporary rendition of a rudimentary calendar allowed viewers to follow the seasons, the way megalithic earthworks and other ancient sites marked the seasons.⁴⁹

MONTRÉAL

Composed of 250 boulders arranged to form a labyrinth, *Stone Maze* was also conceived as a solar calendar,⁵⁰ aligned to the sunrise and sunset at the solstices. Four stones just beyond the work's periphery formed an X (or cross) that greeted the sun on the first day of summer and the first day of winter. *Stone Maze* was constructed for *Corridart*, an outdoor exhibition on Sherbrooke Street that was to accompany the 1976 Summer Olympics. Situated on the corner of Amherst Street, this piece, as well as others in the exhibition, was destroyed by mayoral edict soon after its installation.

By aligning works to celestial phenomena, artists allude to prehistoric remains that mark the passage of time on a seasonal scale, calculating time according to the position of the sun and moon. Experiencing artworks that record time at a slow and natural pace, we return to a reverential relationship with the environment.

⁴⁶ Among the more sensational of these theories were Gerald S. Hawkins, "Secret of Stonehenge," *Harper's Magazine* 228 (June 1964): 96-99, presenting the famous megalithic stone circle in Wiltshire, England, as an ancient astronomical observatory; Eric Von Daniken, *Chariots of the Gods* (New York: Bantam, 1971), which declared the Nazca lines in Peru to be runways for extraterrestrials; and Alexander Marshack, "Exploring the Mind of the Ice Age Man," *National Geographic* 147 (January 1975): 64-89, explaining how notations on Upper Palaeolithic animal bones represented lunar calendars. For more scholarly sources, see for example Gerald S. Hawkins, *Stonehenge Decoded* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1965) and Alexander Thom, *Megalithic Sites in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), on astronomical and mathematical treatises regarding megalithic sites.

⁴⁷ This connected Vazan with his contemporaries who were also aligning their works to celestial phenomena, such as Robert Morris (*Observatory*, 1971, rebuilt in 1977, in Flevoland, Holland), Nancy Holt (*Sun Tunnels*, 1973-1976, in the Great Basin Desert near Lucin, Utah) and Michelle Stuart (*Stone Alignments/Solstice Cairns*, 1979, Rowena Plateau, Columbia River Gorge, Oregon).

⁴⁸ It was abandoned after the relocation of the post office in 2009.

⁴⁹ Installed in an urban setting, *Calendrier des saisons* was not identified by any descriptive label, so people were not necessarily aware it was an artwork. Nor did they understand how it functioned. Institutions responsible for maintaining public artworks usually choose to identify them. Most land art created in remote locations, however, remains unidentified.

⁵⁰ Vazan aligned two other works astronomically. *Sun Zone* (1977-1978), his land art at York University in Toronto, was a spiral drawn with chalk on turf and thirteen blocks of granite aligned to the solstice and equinox sunrises. *Temps* (1988), a public artwork made for the Jean-Grou School in Rivière-des-Prairies, measures time differently. It consists of a stainless steel tower shaped like a skeletal step-pyramid with a hole on top and four dispersed stones. At noon, the sun shines through the tower's hole and casts a moving white spot on bronze plates (pilfered since construction), which function as markers on the ground, to create what astronomers call an analemma (the plot of the position the sun on the celestial sphere at the same time of day throughout one year) and record the passage of time. One year's cycle describes a figure 8, the sign of infinity. The engravings on one of the stones nearby are related to the notational theory formulated by archaeologist and scholar Alexander Marshack, mentioned above.

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Outlikan Meskina (detail),
Rivière-du-Moulin Park, Saguenay
(Chicoutimi borough).

At the time it was created, this
major work comprised 300
granite rocks spread over an area
measuring 2 x 70 x 89 m. In May
2010, while documenting Vazan's
landworks, Dominique Chalifoux
noted its condition and found it
overrun by vegetation.



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***Outlikan Meskina (Green
version) – Chicoutimi, 1980,***
about 2000

Photograph. Lambda print on
polyester, 152.4 x 127 cm
Gift of the artist, RD-2007-013



SAGUENAY, BOROUGH OF CHICOUTIMI

Vazan is also interested in Amerindian cultures,⁵¹ along with other American artists like Michael Heizer and James Pierce, who referred to the forms of the Adena and Hopewell mounds in their earthworks.⁵² Vazan made *Outlikan Meskina* (Map for Caribou Hunt) in 1980, his largest permanent work in Quebec in terms of surface area. Conceived for the Symposium international de sculpture environnementale de Chicoutimi, it is located in Rivière-du-Moulin Park.

Seeking subject matter pertinent to the Saguenay region, Vazan turned to local Native cultures for inspiration. He researched the history of the Montagnais and Naskapi, and visited villages of First Peoples' tribes. The topic he selected was a Montagnais custom known as "outlikan meskina," whereby cracks in a burned caribou shoulder blade were interpreted to help determine which routes would lead to a successful caribou hunt. According to where and how the cracks were dispersed, they could represent hardship, plenty and the location of game.⁵³

Situated in a field, *Outlikan Meskina* consists of stones placed in a network of lines, their course directed by this native custom. Although the cracks in bones referring to a hunting path are negative space, Vazan designed a reverse representation. Rather than cutting into the land, he produced positive, three-dimensional placements of large granite stones. His interpretation transposes a native practice into an artistic rendition that invites viewers/participants to enact a physical performance by walking, running or jumping to follow the arrangement of the stones and the contour of the site.⁵⁴

MONT-TREMBLANT

Réduire (2003) is not as conducive to viewer involvement but is still designated as land art. Made for a contemporary art event, *La Ligne du nord*, this work is a site-specific boulder at the foot of Mont Tremblant in the Laurentians. Vazan engraved this outcropping of rock in situ. The linework produced by removing matter from the boulder through sandblasting represents the ski trails at Mont Tremblant. The boulder's massive form echoes the mountain's grandeur, though on a smaller scale. Indeed, the title refers to this double reduction. The engravings are visible upon approaching the mountain on foot or reaching the summit by gondola.

For Vazan, the opportunity to engrave a stone in situ was the equivalent of marking the surface of the earth, thereby linking *Réduire* to some of the earliest earthworks, such as Michael Heizer's displaced earth in *Nine Nevada Depressions* (1968) – nine earthworks dispersed across hundreds of kilometres of Nevada desert – and Walter De Maria's *Las Vegas Piece* (1969) – trenches cut by bulldozer over a five-kilometre area in the Tula Desert of Nevada. Rather than creating negative space on a horizontal surface in the desert,⁵⁵ Vazan fashioned hollows on a mountain's rock face, achieving a vertical version of impressions on the land. *Réduire* and *Vortexit II* are Vazan's only extant land art to include engravings.

⁵¹ As noted by Dominique Chalifoux earlier, *Story Rock* is a prime example of a sculpture infused with Amerindian pictograms.

⁵² These mounds, also called "effigies" and "tumuli," are compacted earth modelled in various shapes, mostly geometric but sometimes biomorphic. The Adena (dating from the first millennium BCE) and Hopewell (from 300 BCE to 600 CE) are two cultural subgroups of the mound-building tradition. Mounds can be found throughout the Ohio River Valley and south of the Great Lakes in the United States.

⁵³ For a detailed description, see naturalist and Canadian government official Napoleon A. Comeau's *Life and Sport on the North Shore of the Lower St. Lawrence and Gulf* (Quebec City: Telegraph Print. Co., 1954), pp. 264-266.

⁵⁴ Vazan made several works in which the format and disposition of stones invite physical interaction, such as *Stone Maze* (discussed above), *Maayan Baruch Man (Natufian Culture)*, (1983-1984), consisting of 223 basalt boulders in an Upper Galilee, Israel, kibbutz and *La dorsale Atlantique* (1984). The latter was composed of two works separated by the Atlantic Ocean. The work in Lévis, Quebec, was the positive part, with 111 granite boulders arranged in lines. The negative section featured trenches cut in St-Malo, France. When images of both parts are joined together, they form a fish spine.

⁵⁵ Carl Andre's *Cuts* (1968), a horizontal sculpture with rectangular cuts of various dimensions making hollow trenches in a surface, was among the precursors for Heizer and De Maria's earthworks.

THE ADVENT OF LAND ART

Land art originated simultaneously in Europe, Canada and the United States in the latter 1960s; it peaked in the seventies but continues to be made today. As mentioned above, the most common terms associated with this artform are “earthworks,” referring to manifestations of earth and its constituents, and “land art” (or “environmental art”) designating the artform itself.

The choice of exterior locations liberated artists from technical constraints of size and mass. Their creative energies led to unique works using the sun, water, sand, snow and other natural phenomena as mediums. Most of the classic, monumental earthworks in remote locations were made during the early days of land art. Since then, the artform has evolved to encompass various tendencies that blur the distinction between land art, public art and art in situ.

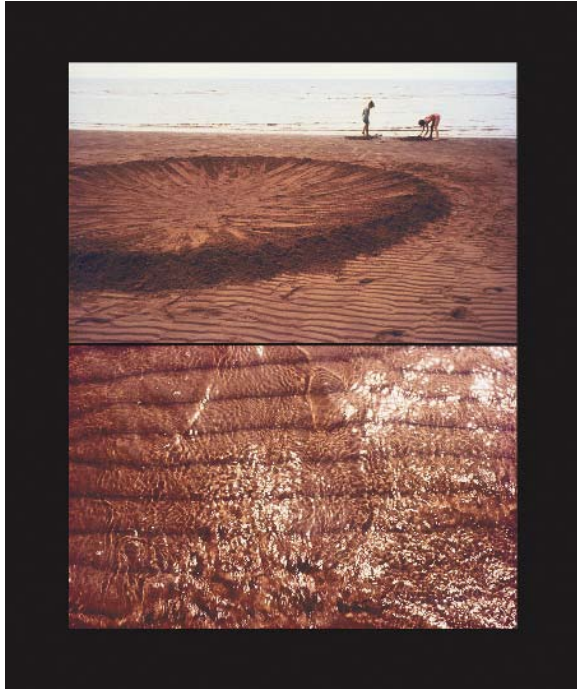
Artists conceived this revolutionary artform in response to various circumstances during the 1960s.⁵⁶ In relation to other art movements, land art shared formal pursuits with minimalism through their mutual interest in simplified forms and large scale. After the subjective manifestations of Abstract Expressionism, minimal artists sought a means to focus on pure form, devoid of emotional interpretation. Land artists extended this concept by taking their works outdoors, obliterating restrictions of size and generating a dichotomy between the coolness of pure form and sensitivity to nature. Land art also shared conceptual art’s rejection of the commodity status of art and an emphasis on ideas rather than objects/products.

Meanwhile, ecological awareness was emerging during the 1960s. Land artists reflected this concern by using exterior locations and natural materials. Some responded by making subtle manifestations on or in the land; others created invasive interventions, while still calling attention to nature. Land art in Europe and Canada tended to be smaller, subtler and less intrusive in the landscape than the characteristically larger, more imposing works of its American counterpart.

Making ephemeral art was also congruent with the desire to return to nature: allowing materials to erode back into the landscape was an act of respect. The choice of material and form affects permanence and is directly related to the duration of a work’s existence. Sand washes away with the tide, ice and snow melt, plants and grass grow, trenches fill in and water levels fluctuate in lakes and quarries, erasing works. The vestiges of ephemeral works sometimes take years to vanish. If not left to fade away naturally, they might be dismantled if their creator or another individual with the authority so chooses. Those constructed for temporary events are removed or destroyed after the event comes to an end.

Galleries and museums were unable to exhibit this new artform during its emergence, and obviously people cannot see ephemeral works that have vanished. While these factors opposed traditional practices and the conventional system of the art world, land artists were not acting out of hostility. Their objectives were to break away from norms and compose artworks in the land while opening new avenues and forming a unique relationship with the art establishment.

⁵⁶ For a thorough description and analysis of the historical, cultural and artistic circumstances that led to the emergence of land art, see Suzaan Boettger, *Earthworks: Art and the Landscape of the Sixties* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2002).



26
**Mars Crater + Tide
 Measure (Low Tide
 Works) – P.E.I., 1967-69,
 about 2000**
 Photograph. Lambda
 print on polyester
 152.4 x 127 cm
 Gift of the artist,
 RD-2007-016



27
**Village Inondé + Water
 Spirit – Longueuil, 1983
 + 1985, about 2000**
 Photograph. Lambda
 print on polyester
 152.4 x 127 cm
 Gift of the artist,
 RD-2007-010

PHOTOGRAPHY AND DOCUMENTATION

Photography plays a vital role in the documentation and dissemination of land art. Since the artform's remote locations and consequent unavailability for exhibition reserve land art for the few willing to travel to the site of a specific work,⁵⁷ most viewers see this art second-hand, through images.

Photographs not only provide testimony of the existence of these works but can also record how they are transformed over time, documenting another important characteristic of land art. Some pieces are gone in seconds, such as Richard Long's water drawings on the desert floor in Algeria (1988); others last for several minutes or hours, including those that are taken apart by the artist after being photographed; and some change while left exposed to the elements, disintegrating slowly until they disappear.

Due to the immense size of many earthworks, aerial photography becomes a necessity to record an entire artwork in a single image, and many of the iconic images of land art are taken from the air.⁵⁸ The view from above is not only more complete, it provides a vastly different perception.

IN EUROPE, THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA

In addition to the European and American pioneers already mentioned, Alice Aycock and Dennis Oppenheim of the United States are also associated with the inception of land art. We should also mention artists active now who are further contributing to the constant redefinition of land art, such as Chris Drury, Andy Goldsworthy (both British) and Nils-Udo (Bavarian).

In Canada, several artists have incorporated aspects of this artform into their repertoire since the mid-1960s, but none have pursued land-based projects exclusively or extensively. Colette Whiten (Toronto) made a snow work of a cut-out human form (*Snow Sketch for February*, 1975), and Marlene Creates (Portugal Cove, Newfoundland) made ephemeral artworks in and on the land between the late 1970s and mid-1980s. Pierre Bourgault Legros (Saint-Jean-Port-Joli, Quebec) and Dawn Dale (Gatineau) both worked briefly on land-related projects, making *Dessin sur l'eau* (Drawing on the Water) (1986) and *Snake Path Outaouais* (1993), respectively. Pam Hall (St. John's, Newfoundland) has explored site specificity, using the landscape since 1987, while Lance Belanger and Kitty Mykka (Vancouver) collaborated on a project for *Shore/Lines*, a land-related symposium in Barrie, Ontario, in 2003. However, the only Canadian artist who has been consistent in creating land art for over forty years is Bill Vazan.

⁵⁷ The reward in actually visiting earthworks is the chance to experience them physically, seeing all their angles, components and surroundings.

⁵⁸ Among the many artworks documented from the air are Heizer's *Isolated Mass/Circumflex (No. 9 of the Nine Nevada Depressions)*, 1968), De Maria's *Las Vegas Piece* (1969), Dennis Oppenheim's *Directed Seeding – Cancelled Crop* (1969), Smithsonian's *Spiral Jetty* (1970), Robert Morris's *Observatory* (1971, 1977), and Vazan's *Pressure/Presence* (1978-1979) and series of ground drawings in Nazca, Peru (1985-1986).



28

Centre of the World – Barrie, Ont., 2003, about 2003

Photograph. Lambda print on polyester
127 x 152.4 cm

Gift of the artist, RD-2007-011

Most of the many landworks that Bill Vazan has created since 1980 have been sited in hard-to-reach natural spaces or away from recognized art venues.

Being vulnerable in such unprotected places, they have disappeared. While fully assuming the ephemeral nature of his landworks, Vazan has photographed them.

And by incorporating the pictures into his art, he has given the works a degree of permanence.

CONSIDERING THE WHOLE TERRITORY: ARTWORKS IN THE LAND

IRIS AMIZLEV

Bill Vazan's early land art consisted of ephemeral earthworks made in Quebec, Canada and abroad. These were a natural extension of his conceptual art, and initially he oscillated between the two artforms. His first land-based art was drawings in which he conceived some fantastical – and conceptual – interpretations of works on the land.

Vazan's production of land art shares certain aspects with other artists, especially Andy Goldsworthy and Richard Long. For all three, creation is an intimate affair. They travel alone and are autonomous. Functioning outside administrative constraints, they work freely, unencumbered by societal norms and the need to obtain consent for their interventions. When Vazan approaches his projects, he has specific plans to carry out and, with few exceptions,⁵⁹ works unimpeded. There are few limitations, except for his physical capabilities. Vazan often hires assistants (or, if working near Montréal, enlists the help of students from UQAM, where he has been teaching since 1978). This enables him to create large and complex compositions that are physically strenuous to make.⁶⁰

EPHEMERAL ARTWORKS

Vazan's explorations with land art were initiated during family vacations in Maine and Prince Edward Island in 1967-1969. Made from sand, the resulting series of ephemeral earthworks were transformed by the tide and ultimately reclaimed by nature. At that time, Vazan had been working on geometric paintings with illusions of the third dimension. On the beach, his formal exercises in painting were transposed into sand (and later, other mediums). The earthworks of geometric configurations, with furrowed lines and raised circles, combined a painter's approach to linearity and the appearance of hard edges.

*Mars Crater and Tide Measure (Low Tide Works) – P.E.I., 1967-69,*⁶¹ made in 1968 on a beach in Paul's Bluff, Prince Edward Island, featured a circular sand formation with raised edges and lines radiating from its centre.⁶² Circles figure prominently in land art⁶³ and are a recurring form in minimalism and megalithic remains as well. Vazan has continued making circles in various materials, including paint on grass (*Pressure/Presence*, 1978-1979), driftwood (*Native Village*, 1989) and a combination of horizontal and vertical driftwood and branches (*Still Stands*, 2000).

Vazan pursued his examinations with various materials to make ephemeral works. *Marche solaire, pendant une éclipse du soleil. Le 7 mars 1970*, in Maisonneuve Park, Montréal, and *Summer Square in an Autumn Beach* (1970) in Plattsburg, New York, were both accomplished by walking and leaving imprints on snow and sand, respectively. The earlier work was more gestural, with no defined contours limiting the artist's energy, whereas on the beach, the form was contained by the linearity of a square.

⁵⁹ Unlike Heizer, De Maria and Holt, who worked on rented or purchased land, Vazan often works in secret and, as a result, must intervene quickly, with the potential of undesired consequences. See Bill Vazan, "Prison in Paradise," *Canadian Art* 22, 3 (Autumn 2005): 110-115.

⁶⁰ Robin Hutcheon was his assistant for *Vortexit II*. For works in remote locations, he hires people from the area to help him.

⁶¹ Also called *Forme de sable à marée basse*.

⁶² Other significant works from this series include *Travail à marée basse* (1968) and *Forme positive-négative* (1969), both illustrated in Gilles Toupin, *Bill Vazan* (Québec City: Musée du Québec, 1974), pp. 11, 14. The latter has also been called *Sand Form #8*; see David Burnett and Pierre Landry, *Bill Vazan: Ghostings* (Montréal: Centre d'information Arttexte, 1985), p. 31.

⁶³ Circles have been popular in land art since its beginning, with Richard Long's *Turf Circle, England* (1966) and Dennis Oppenheim's *Branded Mountain* (1969), and continue to provide formal possibilities for many others creating earthworks. Among land artists, Richard Long is renowned for exploring this form most consistently in a range of materials.

CROSSING SPACES, LEAVING TRACES

Made during a solar eclipse, *Marche solaire, pendant une éclipse du soleil. Le 7 mars 1970* was as conceptual as it was land art. Vazan transformed a pristine and clean snow field into a jumble of footprints within 5,000 steps, stopping to take a photograph every 500 steps. The end result was a chaotic ensemble of traces on snow. Other early works in snow were more controlled, such as *Snowmaze/Digital Whorl* (1971-1974) and *Spiral Man* (1971-1973), in which Vazan also used his feet to leave petroglyph-like inscriptions in snow. Their forms – a maze and a spiral – refer to primordial forms recorded on the surface of the earth by the Nazca culture in Peru.

These works share affinities with Richard Long's legendary artwork *A Line Made by Walking* (1967), in England, created by walking across a field of grass and leaving an impression of a straight line – a method that Long has been using throughout his production. Generating an artwork through the simple act of walking, by using the feet as tools, frees the artist to create whatever form is desired, as long as the surface is passable and can take an impression. Vazan used this method for earthworks on beaches in Malibu, California (*Chinese Landfall*, 1985), and El-Jadida, Morocco (*Shipwrecked*, 1991), where he furrowed distinct images in the sand with his heels.

Turf cuttings, although ephemeral, require more planning and time to produce. *The Centre of the World (Omphalos – The Navel of the Earth)*, made in Sunnidale Park, Barrie, Ontario, in 2003 (for the symposium *Shore/Lines* mentioned earlier), was a turf cutting. An omphalos is an ancient Greek religious stone, the most famous one, at the archaeological site of Delphi, being considered the centre of the world. These stones are decorated with knotted nets in relief, a design that Vazan transposed onto a planar surface. He was able to control the work's appearance for a short period of time, but the grass grew, the piece changed, and the cuttings eventually disappeared.

THE SPIRIT OF PLACE

The choice of materials depends on what is present at a given location. Often, the medium is part of the ground, and a work is so well integrated into the surroundings that it looks camouflaged, for example *Wind Tumble* (1989),⁶⁴ a limestone and granite arrangement of small stones placed upright to form a geometric pattern of straight lines in Rose Creek, Montana.

As he does with engravings, Vazan often relates a work's subject matter to the site. Recalling an archaeological site in disarray, *Native Village* (1989), in Ucluelet on Vancouver Island, was a circular formation of wooden beach debris near a lake, combining horizontal and vertical pieces of wood. While the contour was a circle (with empty sections, leaving the brain to reconstruct the missing parts), some areas had an unfinished appearance, evoking ruins. In fact, the artist sought to represent demolished structures in a demolished community, perhaps to imply that this territory belonged to the First Peoples before the Europeans arrived and changed their fate. With time, the work became further disassembled, as the natural elements – especially ice and snow – shifted its components, amplifying the appearance of an abandoned village, until the debris became scattered all over the beach, as it had been before the artist's intervention.

⁶⁴ Richard Long's works often create a similar effect by using the same material as their surface, as in *A Line in Ireland* (1974) and *A Line in Australia* (1977).

WATER: THEME AND FACTOR OF CHANGE

Canada in Parentheses, both conceptual and land art, was carried out on August 13, 1969, in collaboration with Vazan's friend, the conceptual artist Ian Wallace. At Vazan's request, Wallace drew a large crescent in sand at Spanish Banks in Vancouver during low tide while Vazan drew another in Prince Edward Island. Thus, on beaches at opposite ends of the country, the two artists simultaneously drew opening and closing parentheses, thereby placing Canada between brackets until the tide effaced the work.

Water has been a consistent medium and recurring theme throughout Vazan's output. As we have seen, his initial earthworks, made with sand, were erased by water, as were his beach furrows. Since then, he has used rocks in and near water to create stone placements, including *Karst Map Trap* (1985) in Yangshou, on the Li River in southern China, *Crusty* (1990) in Port Daniel, Gaspé; and *Third Finger Point to Holding the Globe* (1992) on a beach in Haifa, Israel. Vazan's repertoire also featured works with water as the subject. Such was the case with many drawings, sculptures like *Le Navigateur (Navigator)*, and land art, including *Village Inondé + Water Spirit – Longueil*, 1983 + 1985 and both versions of *Vortexit*.

Vazan is not alone in his fascination with water. Robert Smithson made *Spiral Jetty* (1970), *Broken Circle* (1971) and *Amarillo Ramp* (1973) in water. Long's *Reflections in the Little Pigeon River, Great Smoky Mountains, Tennessee* (1970), Christo's *Surrounded Islands* (1983), and Nils Udo and Goldsworthy's delicate sculptures of rocks, leaves and flowers were all made in water, among many others.

PERSISTENCE OF A PRACTICE

Ephemeral works are precursors to the engraved stone sculptures Vazan has produced both out of doors and indoors since the 1980s. Resisting the ravages of time and encroachment of nature, permanent works highlight and reinforce the human component their creation depends on, remaining as testimony of the artist's interaction on or in the land.

Vazan approaches his art methodically while displaying a gentle sensitivity to nature that permeates his oeuvre. The frequent references to geology, archaeology, anthropology, history and astronomy, among other disciplines, enrich his corpus and endow him with the status of cosmographer, as indicated by Paul Heyer and reiterated by James Campbell.⁶⁵ And we, as viewers, are invited to journey into the rich and fecund psyche of this creator.

Vazan has achieved national renown for the land art he has produced throughout his career, and no other Canadian has worked in this form over such a long period of time. In the context of this persistence, *Vortexit II* recreates a particularly seminal work. Moreover, the fact that in constructing it Vazan applied various approaches from his three-dimensional corpus – spreads, heaps, compositions on the ground, assembling and engraving – makes *Vortexit II* a synthesis of his works in the land. As a consequence, it is in Montréal that we can appreciate the full potential and maturity of Vazan's investigations as we walk into and through this artwork.

⁶⁵ Normand Thériault and Paul Hayer, *Bill Vazan: obras recientes* (Buenos Aires: CAYC, Centro de Arte y Comunicación, 1975), p. 3; James D. Campbell, *Bill Vazan: A Cosmic Dance, Thunderstones, Wererocks and Shamanic Drawings, 1987-1992* (Kingston: Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Queen's University, 1993), p. 11.

BY WAY OF CONCLUSION

DOMINIQUE CHALIFOUX

Even knowing that Bill Vazan's career spans more than four decades, that he has roamed the planet and left marks in many places, it is endlessly fascinating to observe his commitment, his unflagging inquiry and his rigorous methods. And yet ... "Who's going to read all this?" he recently asked while entrusting me with one of the voluminous notebooks he has filled with details of countless journeys, notes on places visited, photos and sketches since 1975. I am convinced that these diaries will yield a wealth of information for understanding his work, for discerning its origins, for comprehending the ways and directions in which it has developed.

Engaging with the landscape and conveying the world's physical reality and complexity have certainly been central concerns in Vazan's explorations. Many of his works present illusionary spaces while revealing the reverse of the represented, and necessarily fragmented, realities. In framing our vision of the landscape, Vazan points to that which lies beyond the image.

The large photomontage *Atlantic Coasts Cresting*, held in the Musée's collection, exemplifies this desire to upend the conventional viewpoint and summon all that transcends the given references. Here, at the centre of the work, two horizons appear to touch. The sky above the New York skyscrapers and the sky above the Moroccan city of Agadir. A gaze cast, east to west, west to east, from the opposite shores of two continents bordering the Atlantic. This work turns the mind to that which is not in the picture.

Adopting the artist's chosen standpoint, viewers must situate themselves in the three-dimensional reality. Around them – and behind them, if one were to draw a line between the coasts – extends the curve of a sphere, of the planet Earth. And there is a space, space itself, infinite and unbroken, perceptible only in fragments, of course, and impossible to render with the two-dimensionality of a photograph. The viewer knows that, between the two cities, there lies a vast, albeit unseen, expanse of water. The viewer also knows that, behind the camera's lens, behind the photographer, there lies the immensity of the continents, the roundness of the earth and the surrounding sidereal space, stretching in every direction. But the void, says Vazan, is just an illusion. It is central to many of his works, since it contains all potentialities: it brims with emotions, directions, ideas, nascent reflections, things taking shape and others collapsing. In the void, anything is possible.

Atlantic Coasts Cresting poses the equation from the limited perspective of the viewer confronted with expanded, intellectual knowledge of the landscape and with concrete, physical experience of the places. The artist's avowed aim is to insinuate himself into the interstices. Among other things, this piece leads us to recognize the illusory nature of the image and of our immediate reality, to confront the pitfalls inherent to the limits of our perception, to representation, to image manipulation. In the works in which he evokes the curve of the horizon, putting places in parentheses, or in which he composes images of globes, Vazan addresses all these aspects and tirelessly brings us face to face with the complexity of the universe and time.



Atlantic Coasts Cresting, 1981

Photograph. Photographic emulsion on
paper mounted on cardboard

1.64 x 8.71 m

Gift of Jocelyne Trotter-Nolet

Vazan's land art interventions and photographic approaches have multiplied since his first walks in the snow and early land drawings, for he remains an artist on the lookout, a seeker, an explorer on the fringes of possible worlds, lost civilizations and contemporary societies.

Other artists follow similar lines of investigation using a variety of technological means, but Vazan combines anthropological and historical concerns with scientific considerations. His art reflects human perceptions from prehistory through to the latest scientific theories. He inventories and expresses the diversity of human experience across the ages.

For his sustained production and rigorous approach, Bill Vazan was recently awarded the Prix Paul-Émile Borduas. This publication, produced in collaboration with Montréal's Public Art Bureau, is intended to raise awareness and appreciation of his art based on the corpus held by the Musée de Lachine. Our aim in examining the twenty-seven pieces in the collection, including the three large sculptures on permanent exhibit in the Musée plein air de Lachine, is to promote a major body of work in which *Vortexit II* holds a special place. This landwork condenses multiple elements of Vazan's thinking and art, so much so that, more than twenty years after producing the initial version, in 1988, he chose to recreate it. In so doing, he has recognized the completeness and quality of the concept. For our part, we recognize this new work as exemplary and representative of the artist's entire career. Moreover, it constitutes a journey in and of itself, one that all Montrealers are invited to experience.

Vortexit II is a piece of land art that the Musée de Lachine and Montréal's Public Art Bureau are privileged to conserve and make accessible to everyone.

Ligne Trans-Canada : de Toronto à Fredericton, 1969
Drawing. Ink on paper (map)
73.6 x 57.1 cm
Gift of the artist, RD-2006-021

Atlantic Coasts Cresting, 1981
Photograph. Photographic emulsion on paper mounted on cardboard
1.64 x 8.71 m
Gift of Jocelyne Trottier-Nolet, RD-1993-034-1.38
Shown in the exhibition *Sculpteurs : les envahisseurs d'espace*, Musée de Lachine, April 4-September 2, 2001

Granite Outcrop, as City Spread, 1985
Drawing. Acrylic and Conté crayon on paper
152 x 126 cm
Gift of Serge Tousignant, RD-1991-078
Shown in the exhibition *Échos*, Musée de Lachine, June 29-December 18, 2005

Moss Growth and Water Flows, 1985
Drawing. Conté crayon on paper
156 x 126 cm
Gift of Serge Tousignant, RD-1991-079
Shown in the exhibition *Échos*, Musée de Lachine, June 29-December 18, 2005

Sand Blasted Granite Boulder, 1985
Drawing. Conté crayon on paper
151.5 x 126 cm
Gift of Serge Tousignant, RD-1991-080
Shown in the exhibition *Échos*, Musée de Lachine, June 29-December 18, 2005

Cut Granite Outcrop (Explosive) (Wedges), 1985
Drawing. Conté crayon on paper
152 x 126 cm
Gift of Serge Tousignant, RD-1991-081

Story Rock, 1986
Sculpture. Granite
2.44 x 2.20 x 2.40 m
Sodip-Art Bequest, SM-1986-004
Permanently installed in René-Lévesque Park, Musée plein air de Lachine

Vortexit, 1988, destroyed in 2009
Sculpture, land art. Limestone
2.66 x 11.20 x 17 m
Centre des arts contemporains du Québec à Montréal Bequest, SM-1988-006
Permanently installed in René-Lévesque Park, Musée plein air de Lachine, from 1988 to 2003, damaged and dismantled in April 2003

Green Diet, 1991
Sculpture. Granite
48.3 x 33 x 28 cm
Gift of the artist, RD-2007-020

Le Navigateur, 1992
Sculpture. Granite
3.05 x 2.45 x 5.86 m
Produced at the Salon international de la sculpture extérieure de Montréal
Gift of André Harel, SM-1992-035-1.2
Permanently installed in Summerlea Park, Musée plein air de Lachine

Snake Head, 1992
Sculpture. Granite
45.7 x 35.6 x 33 cm
Gift of the artist, RD-2007-021

Conform, 1995
Sculpture. Stone
27.9 x 61 x 12.7 cm
Gift of the artist, RD-2007-022

Village Inondé + Water Spirit – Longueuil, 1983 + 1985, about 2000*
Photograph. Lambda print on polyester
152.4 x 127 cm
Gift of the artist, RD-2007-010

Teleportation & Space Squeeze – Montreal, 1971, about 2000*
Photograph. Lambda print on polyester
152.4 x 127 cm
Gift of the artist, RD-2007-012

Outlikan Meskina (Green version) – Chicoutimi, 1980, about 2000*
Photograph. Lambda print on polyester
152.4 x 127 cm
Gift of the artist, RD-2007-013
Shown in the exhibition *Crash: Treatment Required*, Musée de Lachine, April 1-October 19, 2009

Littoral Spirits – Haida Gwaii, B.C., 1999, about 2000*
Photograph. Lambda print on polyester
127 x 152.4 cm
Gift of the artist, RD-2007-014

Two Worldline Placements (MMFA & AGO), 1971, about 2000*
Photograph. Lambda print on polyester
152.4 x 127 cm
Gift of the artist, RD-2007-015

Mars Crater + Tide Measure (Low Tide Works) – P.E.I., 1967-69, about 2000*
Photograph. Lambda print on polyester
152.4 x 127 cm
Gift of the artist, RD-2007-016

Genocide Skulls – Cambodia, 1996-97, about 2000*
Photograph. Lambda print on polyester
152.4 x 127 cm
Gift of the artist, RD-2007-017

Pression/Presence (Green version) – Plains of Abraham, Quebec, 1979, about 2000*
Photograph. Lambda print on polyester
152.4 x 127 cm
Gift of the artist, RD-2007-018

Terrorists' Attack?! – Egypt, 2001, about 2001*
Photograph. Lambda print on polyester
127 x 152.4 cm
Gift of the artist, RD-2007-009

Centre of the World – Barrie, Ont., 2003, about 2003*
Photograph. Lambda print on polyester
127 x 152.4 cm
Gift of the artist, RD-2007-011

Urgence, 2003
Sculpture. Engraved and polished granite
43 x 5.1 cm
Gift of the artist, RD-2007-023

Maquette for Vortexit II, 2008
Acrylic, foam, assorted materials
12 x 76 x 80.5 cm
Purchase, RD-2008-005
Shown in the exhibition *Crash: Treatment Required*, Musée de Lachine, April 1-October 19, 2009

Untitled, 2008
Rubbing. Coloured pencil on Tyveck
201 x 153 cm
Purchase, RD-2008-006

Untitled, 2008
Rubbing. Coloured pencil on Tyveck
221 x 153 cm
Purchase, RD-2008-007

Untitled, 2008
Rubbing. Coloured pencil on Tyveck
224 x 153 cm
Purchase, RD-2008-008

Vortexit II, 2009
Sculpture, land art. Granite
2.71 x 5.69 x 22 m
Commissioned by Ville de Montréal for the Musée de Lachine Collection, SM-2009-100
Permanently installed in René-Lévesque Park, Musée plein air de Lachine; dedicated in September 2010

* Each of the ten photographs is a unique work, but three of them, *Terrorist's Attack?!*, *Outlikan Meskina* and *Pression/Presence*, exist in one or two other versions, with colour or image variations.

The date in the title indicates the year the landwork was created and the photograph was taken. The large prints exhibited were printed more recently, at different times.

Bill Vazan is a leading figure of conceptual art in Canada and a pioneering practitioner of land art. For the past forty years, he has explored the links between human culture and nature. Drawing on anthropology, archaeology, geology, geography, history, cosmology, physics and other disciplines,⁶⁶ he probes humankind's relationship with the cosmos. Vazan's keen awareness of place and space is as manifest in his drawings, photographs and sculptures as in his land art. As the embodiment of this singular focus, the landwork *Vortexit* (1988) appears in the catalogue *Territoires. Le Québec : habitat, ressources et imaginaire*, published in 2007 by the Musée de la civilisation, Québec City.

Numerous catalogues, books and journal articles have been devoted to Vazan's art, in Canada and abroad. In 1983, the American author and art critic Lucy R. Lippard deemed his works important land art, describing them in *Overlay: Contemporary Art and the Art of Prehistory* as "large-scale drawings on the land."⁶⁷ In 2002, John Grande profiled Vazan in an article for the American journal *Sculpture*.⁶⁸

Vazan's photoworks have been widely shown in exhibitions such as *Cosmological Shadows*, produced and circulated in Canada by the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec.⁶⁹ In 2007, another aspect of his work was examined in a solo show⁷⁰ curated by Marie-Josée Jean. This exhibition led to the important monograph *Bill Vazan: Walking into the Vanishing Point. Art conceptuel : Conceptual Art*, published in 2009 by VOX, Centre de l'image contemporaine.

Vazan's use of the photographic medium includes documenting the landworks he has created at points around the globe. This practice, common among land artists, serves to extend the life of these often ephemeral works and make them known beyond their remote or distant locations.

Vazan has exhibited in numerous solo and group shows, among them *Point de vue : René Payant*, presented at Maison des Arts de Laval in 2007, and *Rythmes urbains*, circulated by VOX to venues on the Island of Montréal in 2007 and 2008. His oeuvre is vast in scope, and his role in defining conceptual art in Canada is unmistakable, as seen in the exhibition *Traffic. Conceptual Art in Canada 1965-1980*, touring to five Canadian institutions, in Edmonton, Halifax, Montréal, Toronto and Vancouver. In fall 2010, Bill Vazan was awarded the Prix Paul-Émile Borduas for his outstanding contribution to the field of visual arts.

⁶⁶ See Louise Poissant, "Un pied sur le terrain, un pied dans la galerie", in *Bill Vazan, Landschemes & Waterscapes*, p. 35.

⁶⁷ Lucy R. Lippard, *Overlay, Contemporary Art and the Art of Prehistory* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), p. 154.

⁶⁸ John Grande, "A Conversation with Bill Vazan, *Cosmological Shadows*," *Sculpture*, vol. 21, no. 10 (December 2002). <http://www.sculpture.org/documents/scmag02/dec02/Vazan/Vazan.shtml> (accessed June 12, 2007).

⁶⁹ Presented in Québec City September 27, 2001-January 6, 2002, and at Kelowna Art Gallery, March 1-April 14, 2002; Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography, Ottawa, May 17-September 7, 2003; and Centre d'exposition de l'Université de Montréal, October 29-December 19, 2004.

⁷⁰ Held May 5-June 23, 2007, at VOX, Montréal.

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Musée de Lachine

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The Musée de Lachine is open 11:30 am-4:30 pm, Wednesday to Sunday from April to November and Tuesday to Sunday in the summer.

The Musée plein air de Lachine is open daily from sunrise to sunset.

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THE PUBLIC ART BUREAU manages a collection of more than 300 artworks exhibited in the Montréal area.

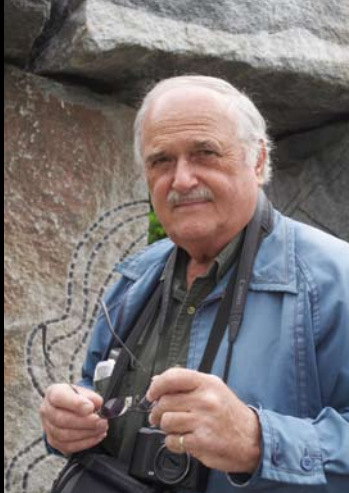


***Vortexit II* is installed in the Musée plein air de Lachine**

The name Musée plein air de Lachine encompasses fifty outdoor sculptures spread along the riverbanks in the Borough of Lachine. These large-scale works are part of the fine arts holding of the Musée de Lachine Collection. The open-air museum grew out of three sculpture symposiums held in Lachine, the first in 1985. Bill Vazan participated in two of them. About twenty of the works created at these events were taken into the Musée de Lachine's permanent collection. Since then, other sculptures have been added through the generosity of donors, making the collection what it is today.

The Musée de Lachine also displays the fine arts collection in its galleries, presenting early, modern, contemporary and present-day works in temporary exhibitions. The Musée's collection includes twenty-seven sculptures, drawings and photographs by Bill Vazan.

For program details, visit the Musée's website at <http://lachine.ville.montreal.qc.ca/musee>.



Artist Bill Vazan inscribes his visions on paper and on the land. All of the mediums he uses serve to establish an expanded view of the world. Aerial photographs of his works compellingly convey the distance, the global perspective, the transcendence of physical and temporal scales.

In fall 2010, Bill Vazan was awarded the Prix Paul-Émile Borduas by the Government of Quebec in recognition of his outstanding contribution to the visual arts. The dedication of *Vortexité II* offers a fitting occasion to take a close look at the career of this prolific artist and his works held in the Musée de Lachine Collection.