



T

IME

FRAMES:

ELDON

GARNET

MONITORS

DISPLAYS

...

...

...

...

...

...

...

...

...

...

...

...

...

...

...

...

...





"All that is intransitory — that is but an image! And the poets lie too much. But the best images and parables should speak of time and becoming: they should be a eulogy and a justification of all transitoriness." From *The Antichrist* by Friedrich Nietzsche, translated by Walter Kaufmann.

Throughout the duration of his 20-year career as an artist and writer, Eldon Garnet has been an eclectic collector of all that is transitory, whether it be the latest dilettante design, the literature currently in fashion or the newest toy manufactured by Macintosh or Polaroid. The fruits of Garnet's labors are the result of tendrils that have embraced most art forms imaginable, including theatre, film, video, fiction, criticism,

performance, poetry, photography, sculpture and holography. Sometimes self-contradictory and almost always controversial, Garnet's work mirrors the social sadism and mental masochism of a schizophrenic contemporary art milieu, mingling a sense of the draconian with the didactic and the dramatic. A true Brechtian at heart, Garnet makes work that is overtly theatrical; at the same time, it alienates and educates. To Gar-

KEN ELLIOTT

net, all that is visual is vanity. His philosophical fascination with the Nietzschean notion of the Apollonian/Dionysian split is revealed by the equal attention he has paid throughout his career to both epic and lyrical forms of art — classic differences examining each other from opposite sides of the looking glass.

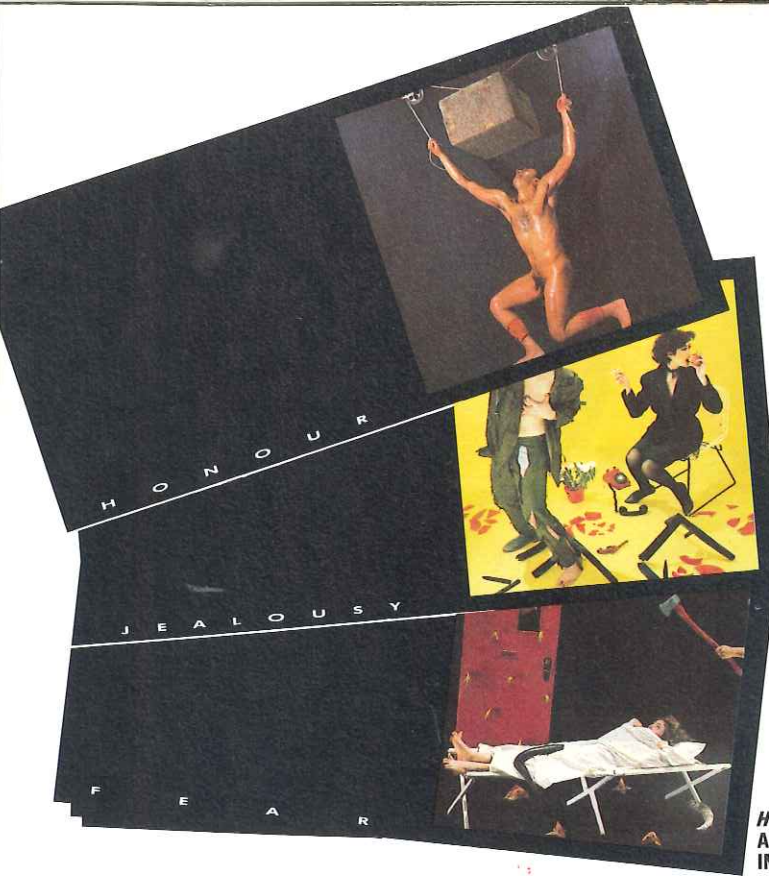
Garnet is primarily identified as executive editor of *Impulse* magazine, an international publication of art and culture

with a loaded literary history, a McLuhanesque format-in-flux and a mercurial mandate. In a country that finds it difficult to recognize the work of one artist, it is easy to see how a man who is many artists in one could be overlooked. *Impulse* has served to centralize the more Renaissance aspects of Garnet's resumé. In fact, his contributions to the magazine — photography, wild theoretical essays, and fiction — have been the magazine's

BRONZE NO. 2 (1988), 3½" x 16½" x 2¼"

one constant. As a series of documents, *Impulse* is a catalogue of cultural dialogues, a diary of diversity the direction of which is determined almost daily by Garnet's creative autocracy.

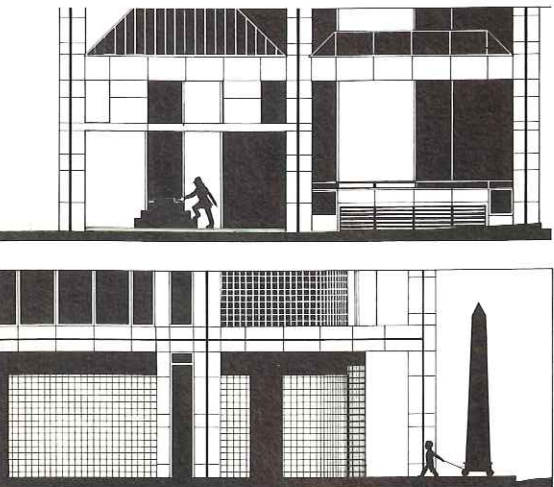
Garnet's work finds some of its origins in his background. At York University, where he obtained an M.A. in English literature, he specialized in the study of Canadian poetry and in 1974, as his the-



**ANXIETY FROM
THE CAVES SERIES
(1984)
CIBACHROME, 40" X 40"**

**HONOUR, JEALOUSY AND FEAR
AS THEY APPEAR
IN THE BOOK CAVES (1985)**

**SUBMISSION DRAWING
(LEFT) BY CHARLES BEAMISH
FOR THE PUBLIC SCULPTURE AT
THE METRO TORONTO
POLICE HEADQUARTERS (BELOW)**



KEN ELLIOTT



sis, he edited a critical anthology of 13 published but relatively unknown poets. With a characteristic eye to the future, he published poetry by b.p. Nichol, Joe Rosenblatt, Daphne Marlatt, Victor Coleman and Frank Davey. The thesis/anthology was published as a double issue of *Impulse* magazine.

The same year, Garnet took over the magazine from novelist Peter Such, a move that meant a drastic deviation from

the small periodical's literary past. Garnet made an immediate break by devoting the whole of his first issue in 1975 to the work of photographer Fletcher Starbuck. This cultish collection was a precursor of the pastiche of heroes and anti-heroes who have come to decorate the pages of Garnet's mini mobile museum with their faces, words and images — such international presences as John Lydon, Russ Meyer, Jean Baudrillard,



FROM HEAVY INDUSTRY
(1987), CIBACHROME, 40" X 40"

Louis Blanchot, Paul Virilio, Matt Cohen, Bob Colacello, Buckminster Fuller, Angela Carter, Ondine, Iggy Pop, Patti Smith, Opal L. Nations, Michael Snow, Andy Warhol, John Waters and J.G. Ballard.

From the beginning of Garnet's tenure, *Impulse* was a bit of a wild card. It has been produced as a microfiche, an artist's monograph, as super-8 film, as a record. Under the direction of artist and art director Carolyn White, it has won several international design awards and has developed a stable of contributors that has included Sylvère Lotringer, Philip Monk, George Whiteside, Shelagh Alexander, Barbara Astman, Brian Boigon, Christopher Dewdney, Nancy Johnson, John Bentley Mays, David Buchan, Edward Slopek, Geoff Pevere, Judith Doyle, Ross McLaren, Deborah Samuel, General Idea, Andrew J. Paterson and William Burroughs.

The heavy theatricality that has characterized the look of the *Impulse* cover photographs is probably due in part to Garnet's obsession with the more Genet-like aspects of the theatre. If his preoccupation with unknown poetry could be described as a lyrical, Dionysian pastime, his lengthy epic poem *BREBEUF: A Martyrdom Of Jean De*, which was published by Press Porcépic in 1977, represents an interest in Apollonian structures. A project that underlines Garnet's basic duplicity when it comes to form, *BREBEUF* chronicles, via poetry and the use of negative-image photographs, the story of a 17th-century missionary living among the Huron Indians. *BREBEUF* was the inaugural performance at

Toronto's Music Gallery in 1977, although ironically, it was a production without music.

During this period, Garnet was also involved with his performance troupe, L.C. Foote, putting poetry in an art context by performing skits that were ad-libbed around gallery installations. It was the use of a stable of co-conspirators that distinguished these early performance pieces from his later projects such as *I Shot Mussolini* (shown at the Venice Biennale in 1986), which dealt with the displaced narrator and in which the artifice of the theatre is replaced by artificial intelligence implied by the use of computer-generated graphics.

By the end of the '70s, however, Garnet's focus on the experiential nature of theatre and performance shifted and he became involved in art forms, such as film, that represent time-based histories. He was especially attracted to the crude and garish aesthetic associated with super-8 filmmaking, and after making two films in 16mm black and white, he produced *Einstein's Joke*, a super-8 color film sound-synched in German and dubbed in English. He went on to co-produce *Winning* with Ross McLaren in 1979, but went back to 16mm in 1984 with a film entitled *The Political Error*, an analysis of group dynamics through a game of dirt baseball in which the interjection of an extra player destroys the system.

Garnet's show at A Space in Toronto in 1975 was a visual matrix of his interests. *All Dulled Out In Tartarus*, an installation/performance piece, was a quasi-representation of the Greek garden

in hell, featuring barbed wire and a computer-generated "road" of common words used in everyday language, accompanied by loud, sporadic music and with a performance piece on the hour. Having developed by this point an almost J.G. Ballard-like fascination with the idea of travelling as it relates to culture, Garnet also published his first artist's book, *Spiralling*, definitely the most overtly Hegelian of his projects. The result of his magazine fetish, *Spiralling* was a 36-page fold-out book of maps, texts and photography that depicted 24 bleak, abstracted, black-and-white photo-moments snapped out of car windows at measured equal distances during a trip from Toronto to Edmonton.

Garnet's large-format black-and-white studies of motion culminated with *Blurs*, a solo exhibition at the Isaacs Gallery in 1977. *Blurs* bore some shreds of the fabric of his early work. The photography functioned like film stills from cinema vérité and Garnet, like Fletcher Starbuck or Diane Arbus, made use of the stolen moment, the first-person narrative and a sense of immediate gratification implied by the "breathless" use (in the Godardian meaning) of obscure angles and subject matter.

In 1981, Garnet put together *Cultural Connections*, a series of personal and environmental images accompanied by a text that storybooked the tale of one young woman's coming of age. An amorality play, this narrative was the first of Garnet's anti-allegories. The most schizophrenic and transitional of all his projects, *Cultural Connections* was an almost religious study of the relationship between reality and theories of randomness, distinguished by its use of the three-dimensional, two-in-one image process sometimes found on tacky postcards.

The following year, Garnet exhibited *Privacy*, a landmark exhibition that defined the photographic aesthetic he would then refine for the next five years. *Privacy* was distinguished, first of all, for its overtly theatrical subject matter, which featured the artist's long-time model and friend Robert Stewart in various seedy situations. The visual posturing of these photo-tableaux was similar subtextually to the brothel represented in Jean Genet's *The Balcony*, in which a

lack of social communion strips people down to their animistic lowest common denominator. These examples of "faux-tographie" (the Godardian term for false photographs) were accompanied by a fable about a cat and an old man and were framed in aluminum siding analogous to windows, so that the glimpses offered into each secretive mise en scène implicated the viewer in the role of voyeur.

As a sister series to *Privacy*, Garnet also shot a smaller series of photographs called *In Trouble*, an orgiastic exploration of psychological horrors that featured human beings facing the immediate sense of threat offered by such Edgar Allan Poetics as reptiles, rodents, axes, levitation and the sense of claustrophobia brought on by the theoretical slaughterhouses of his blood-red rooms.

Garnet's next project, *Caves*, was paralleled by *Allegory: To Speak Other Wise*, a written adjunct to some of the ideology he was sending up in a less than traditional manner with *Caves*. It functioned in some ways as a justification for the controversy caused by the exhibition of *Cultural Connections*, *Privacy*, *Caves* and later *Emblems of Circumstance* and *Heavy Industry*. "The allegory's intrusion into the plastic arts could be called a harsh disturbance of the peace, and a disruption of law and order in the arts," Garnet wrote. "Like Brecht's plays, allegory demands an alienation to be effective. It is not a personal, particular representation, but rather a general intellectual series of evocations."

Caves, which was exhibited in Buffalo, Toronto, Montreal and New York in 1983, was a series of 10 allegorical photographs, tableaux of familiar faces from Toronto's Queen Street West grapevine. The participants were frozen in postures emblematic of the Seven Deadly Sins revised into 10 darker aspects of human nature — pride, anxiety, desire, jealousy, fear, envy, rumor, vengeance, selfishness/generosity and honor. The macabre nature of these photographs alluded to the classical tradition of allegorical tableaux. The photographs were placed in a labyrinth of drapery, hung by tension wires and illuminated by a light for only 30 seconds before being plunged into a Platonic darkness, once again placing the viewer in the position of helpless voyeur. Each photograph was comple-

mented by a soundtrack of noises such as alarms, sirens and the buzzing of locusts.

Garnet solidified his notion of representing "a general intellectual series of evocations" with *Emblems of Circumstance*, exhibited in 1985. In *Emblems*, he stripped his allegorical depictions of the human presences that had previously created dramatic conflict in his work. In these photographs, an Orwellian sense of threat is evoked through the placement of bizarre objects and the use of rodents, fish and reptiles trapped in Pavlovian models for social control such as the labyrinth and the treadmill. *Emblems of Circumstance* was also marked by its use of black metal framing devices that tipped the image forward, in a sense imposing on the viewer these nightmares from the deepest, darkest part of mankind's psyche.

Since 1985, a sense of social realism has been creeping into Garnet's work. His recent photography derives its drama from the perversity of modern life instead of the extreme situations contrived for *Caves* and *Emblems of Circumstance*. *Heavy Industry*, shown in 1987, examined the role of the male in society by dedicating itself to the iconography of power as represented by the role of the male executive. Garnet placed the Kafkaesque image of a man in a suit carrying a briefcase in such dark psychological contexts as under water or wrestling with himself in a blood-red arena. The show was complemented by enlarged newspaper portraits of real corporate executives.

In 1987, Garnet received two public sculpture commissions, one for the exterior of the Metropolitan Toronto Police Headquarters and a commemorative sculpture of the Chinese railroad workers. It is with these sculptures that we see the concrete evidence of Garnet's new-found sense of social realism, which at times seems almost to border on camp. The recently completed and very controversial sculptural installation that graces the outside of the police headquarters is a triad of larger-than-life-size bronzes on three different sites. The first is of a young boy pulling a wagon on which sits a granite obelisk; the second is of a policewoman with a trowel and a walkie-talkie constructing a pyramid-

shaped pedestal; and the third depicts an Everyman bearing a burden of books and blocks. The piece, with its semiological freemasonry (the obelisks and pyramids) and its aspirations to illustrate utopian fantasies, plays with the idea of public art as propaganda. Garnet's piece commemorating the Chinese railroad workers has a similar utilitarian flair. The railway trestle/gateway, to be installed in 1989, is flanked by a Stonehenge-like arrangement of three-metre-high boulders split down the centre and placed a shoulder-width apart, positioning that is typical of the sense of threat that identifies all of Garnet's work.

Garnet has just finished a series of small bronzes, trophies totemic to businessmen's postures, which were shown at the Cold City Gallery in Toronto in January 1989 under the title *First Edition*. His current major project reverts back to the Hegelian language that identified his earlier work. *Today Tonight Tomorrow* is an approximately three-hour videotape and a 500-page book of stills, taken from 24 hours of television on 10 different channels and intercut structurally with documentation of a day in the life of a businessman. Essentially a journey, *Today Tonight Tomorrow* is a work that once again crystallizes Garnet's obsession with the synchronicity found in random material.

For Garnet, all fiction is friction. One of his self-portraits from *Caves* shows the artist as Sisyphus (in *Honour*), hoisting his burden by means of a pulley and tension ropes. It is an image that possesses the same ambivalence that has been a trademark of the permanent truths that he has aspired to represent throughout the long haul of his illustrious career.

FROM EMBLEMS OF CIRCUMSTANCE
(1985), CIBACHROME, 20" X 40"

