

SUR LA LIGNE INFINIE

Engaging Work

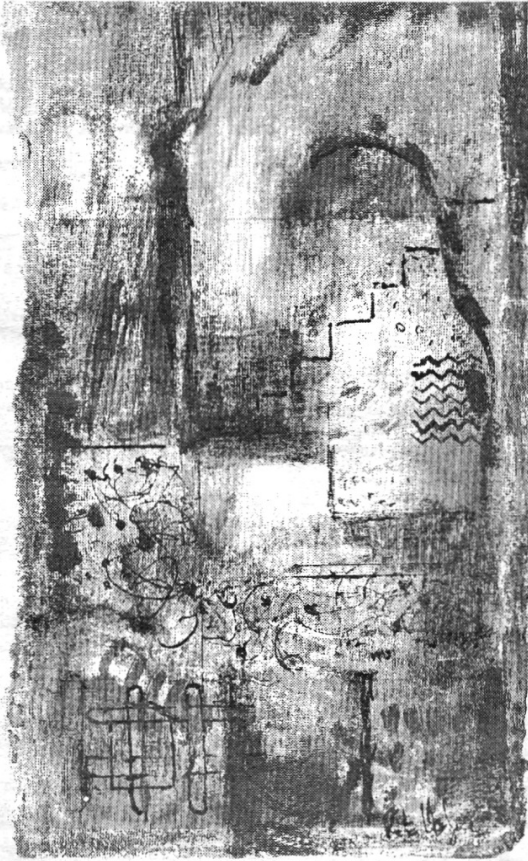
Thankfully, the Café Gallery at Fremantle Arts Centre was empty when X-Press viewed works by visiting Canadian artist Rita Rodrigue. There is something decidedly uncomfortable about attempting to engage with an art exhibit that is viewed between two heads bent in sipping café latte and eating snowpea sprout salad.

Rodrigue's work intrigues from a distance and invites us to come close to fully appreciate the visual intricacy of each composition. This artist is adept with many materials and processes. Her compositions consist of rectangles of richly textured handmade paper, decorated with coloured wash, collage, ink marks and hints of imagery, then framed collectively in either pairs or groups of up to nine, to form composite exhibits.

This work has a sense of other worldliness about it. Colours melt into each other, symbols are suggested while faces, half-drawn figures or recognisable objects float over the rough surface and through the soft washes. Half circles are interpreted as cathedral domes or crescent moons while full circles become celestial orbs or the earth as seen from afar. Meanwhile the French titles (Rodrigue is from Quebec) only add to the mystique for the uninitiated.

Although these abstract compositions are imbued with mystery, the artist does well at keeping the viewer well grounded with her attention to detail. And when she draws the figure, it is in the classical manner. One black line is executed with a pen nib (or perhaps a fine brush) giving it a character of its own as it defines the volume and contours of the subject. I would love to see more of this artist's drawings, especially her figure work.

Despite the enigma of the imagery, these exhibits communicate on different levels. Some viewers will respond to the work on an intellectual



From *Sur La Ligne Infinie* by Rita Rodrigue

level, *Triple Lignes* is one example. In this composition, each of the nine separate components are complete designs in their own right, yet they come together as a harmony of parts to produce a satisfying whole. Other viewers will relate to the emotional suggestion of exhibits such as *Liaison Secrete* where the more abstract of the two components can be interpreted as a couple embracing. Then there is a spiritual reading to many of the works as they suggest a communing with nature or echo man-made edifices for worship.

All in all, this is a fascinating exhibition and if you need to peer over someone's lunch to better view the work, just say *excuse moi*, and enjoy feasting your eyes.

—JUDITH MCGRATH

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