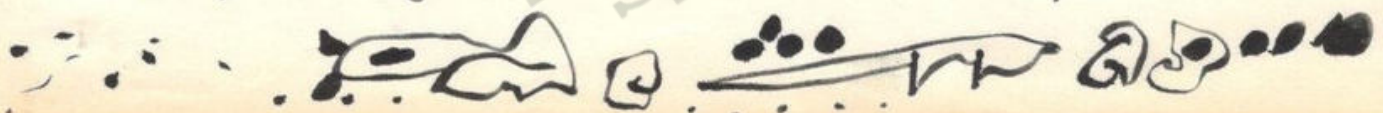


December 30, 1987

Dear Edouard,

How are you? I hope the new year is full of pleasure, a garden of earthly delights for you and Simone. I think of you both often, but unfortunately my thoughts are thwarted by the inertia of my pen. In **NADJA**, Breton wrote: "I envy (in a manner of speaking) any man who has the time to prepare something like a book...." As for me, I envy (in a manner of speaking) any man who has the time to prepare something like a letter.....!! As we head towards the end of the twentieth century, it seems rather backward that we have not devised a better form of communication than the human word = a word that, for the most part, does not seem to know what it is saying. Do we hide more than we say? Is speech or written expression merely a hiccup on the surface of our unique dream? We are often exhorted to read between the lines; but what of the spaces around words, or what about the lines themselves? Lines obviously reveal more than they chew. There are the Zen lines shrouded in mist and the "logograms" of Christian Dotremont. Dotremont is the totemic patron of letter writers. He frees us from being trapped in the dungeon of appearance. Looking at one of his original manuscripts in a mirror + held vertically, Dotremont noticed that his writing showed "correspondances" with oriental script: "The sentence then appeared to me like the ciphers on the cover of of an undecipherable poem.... but how incomprehensible is the comprehensible? Why does my glance sometimes come freely to rest on Egyptian or Chinese texts which I just do not understand? I do understand them in fact; when I read a page of Chinese writing, I am in the streets of Peking." I hope, Edouard, that when you read the pages of my letter, you are in the streets of Yass, the small town where my companion, Rita, and I now live. Or at least in our garden, with its date palms, its grevillea "Ned Kelly", black violas, herbs of all descriptions, and marvellous parrots, galahs, kookaburras and other fauna.



Speaking of Christian Dotremont, about a year ago I read a book on **COBRA** by your friend (I think!) Jean-Clarence Lambert. My understanding of French is not good, so I was glad the book was translated into English. Unlike most monographs where the author tries to prove that he knows more than the artists themselves, Lambert let the artists and poets of COBRA speak for themselves, revealing a looking-glass of unparalleled resilience, which had me mesmerized for days on end. Most people are aware of the major figures like Karel Appel and Asger Jorn; but not many, in the English-speaking world, would know of Alechinsky or Dotremont. To my knowledge, there is nothing of Dotremont available in English, and yet I feel so close to him. I read him and I am walking through forests on the back of a migratory bird. My feet are full of dreams and each step I take (who knows where?) leaves an imprint in the erotic mud out of which a new bird takes flight on the back of which a forest grows in which I am walking. I love his "logograms" which I first saw in **PHASES No 5** (November 1975) a copy of which you gave me when we met way back in 1976. More than words, they are mythic hooks (or hooks of myths) that entice clouds to live underground. They are earthworms that fertilize the eyes. They are traces of ice on the surface of the moons of Jupiter. Or as Lambert states: "the writing does not refer uniquely to the writer enclosed within himself; it is also the manifestation of an imagination which, like all imaginary things, 'tends to become real'."

I am looking again (how many times, now?) at the small catalogue of the exhibition of your drawings at the Galerie Verrière from 1984, in which J-C Lambert wrote a small piece titled "**LE TOTÉMISME AUJOURD'HUI**." I read you (your drawings are full of oracular messages) and I am a jaguar in the streets of Paris, with the smell of urban prey in the air.



Another happy occurrence was the recent publication in English of "THE FIRST BOOK OF GRABINOULOR" by Pierre Albert-Birot. Apparently, even in the original French, they have been unavailable for quite some time. Have you read this? At a time when the UBUs of the world are becoming more & more grotesque, as everyone is subject to the moral (amoral?) propaganda of the two super-powers (more hideous than Alfred Tarry could even have imagined when he invented the "disembraining machine") GRABINOULOR calls out to our instinctual selves and offers images of seduction and warmth, of reverie and action, of erotic excess and passionate attraction, of a freedom not given to us, but freely created by ourselves. TO EACH ACCORDING TO THEIR DESIRE AND BACK AGAIN. To use his own words, Grabinoular strides through life "bravely unafraid of the void provocative of love evocative of certainty."



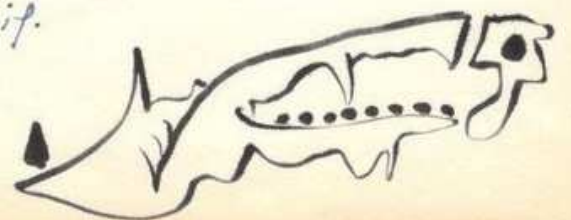
Another happy occurrence (for me, anyway) is that I am drawing a lot more lately. I was going to describe them as experiments but this is nowhere near the truth. The word "experiment" implies some premeditated plan. I have tried different types of paper to find which is the best suited to my drawing and have settled, for the present, on "calligraphy" paper. But as for the drawing = I really have no idea what is in store. The drawn line has a mind of its own. It is inspired, no doubt, by a polar bear's footprints in the snow (my totemic animal). And there are images that have not revealed their substance. Are the black forms shadows, or are they luminous tears in the fabric of appearance? I almost inevitably return to the image of "footprints" = as if my drawings are landscapes viewed from an enormous height = like aerial photographs. But how high, how far must I travel to see these nomadic steps? In my nomadic reveries, I step in time with the heart beat of the Dogon tribe of Africa. Have they not mapped the orbit of a star, Sirius B, a star which is not visible to the naked

eye? But what if the eye is split in two? What stars are visible then? If I return (from what journeys?) to the image of "footprints", "tracks", "orbits", I also see bones, the bones of ancestors, the bones of mythical beings who left imprints of their bodies in the shifting sands the shifting snows. The bones and footprints interweave a dreaming tapestry of those who lived with one step beyond life "bravely unafraid of the void provocative of love evocative of certainty."

When I finished one of my most recent drawings, in a state of exalted laziness, I casually leafed through THE COLLECTED POETRY OF AIMÉ CESAIRE and fell upon this poem which perfectly captured the spirit of the moment.

J'AI GUIDÉ DU TROUPEAU LA LONGUE TRANSHUMANCE

Marcher à travers des sommeils de cyclones transportant des villes somnambules dans leurs bras endoloris
croiser à mi-pente du saccage des quartiers entiers d'astres fourvoyés
Marcher non sans entêtement à travers ce pays sans cartes dont la décomposition périphérique aura épargné je présume l'indubitable corps ou coeur sidéral
Marcher sur la gueule pas tellement bien ourlée des volcans
Marcher sur la fracture mal réduite des continents
(Rien ne sert de parcourir la Grande Fosse
d'inspecter tous les croisements d'examiner les ossements
de parent à parent il manque toujours un maillon)
Marcher en se disant qu'il est impossible que la surtension atmosphérique captée par les oiseaux parafoudres
n'ait pas été retransmise quelque part
En tout cas quelque part un homme est qui l'attend
Il s'est arrêté un moment
le temps pour un nuage d'installer une belle parade de trochilidés
l'éventail à n'en pas douter à éventer d'or jeune
la partie la plus plutonique d'une pépite qui n'est pas autre chose
que le ventre flammé d'un beau temps récessif.



I have decided to share the title of the poem with my drawing. But, wait a minute!! Here I am talking about my drawings as if you are already acquainted with them. I will shortly be sending you two of my drawings, as a gift to you and Simone. I hope you will like them.

Once before we discussed the idea of exchanging our work. But, like our correspondence, this idea drifted into the upper atmosphere. Perhaps, if you and Simone like these drawings, you would like to exchange something of Simone and yours. I would treasure them like a crystal ball seeing into an imaginary future.

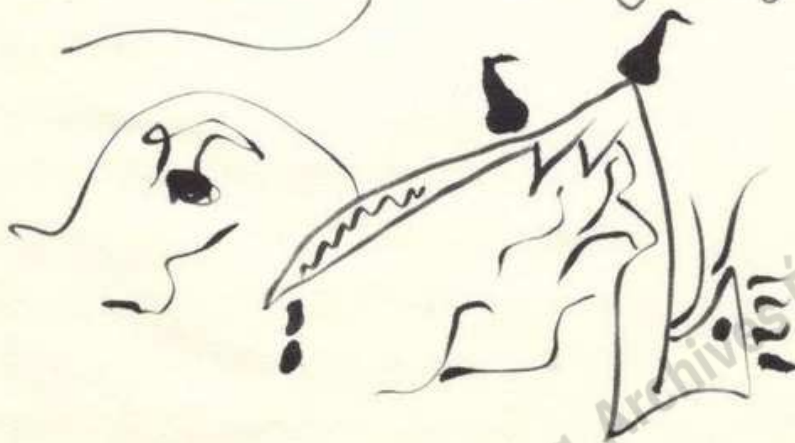


I hear you are organising a PHASES exhibition in Le Havre in March. Is it organised around a specific "theme"? How many artists will be involved? If you think they will fit in this ~~menagerie~~ menagerie of smoking signs, you are welcome to exhibit my drawings. Is it too late?



I have spoken long enough. I hope this letter finds you well and in the best of health. If you are not too busy, please write soon....

My warmest greetings to you + Simone,



Michael

MICHAEL VANDELAAR

44 MONT ST.

YASS

NSW, 2582

AUSTRALIA

P.S. For your own information, I was born in Adelaide, in 1957. My first exhibition was MARVELLOUS FREEDOM in Chicago in 1976 ~