

## INTRODUCING . . .

*Gino Lorcini*

born — Plymouth, England, 1923  
emigrated to Canada in 1947, now a Canadian citizen

Assistant Professor in the McGill Faculty of Education where he teaches Fine Arts

<b>Exhibitions</b>	1963	1st. One Man Exhibition — Galerie Agnès Lefort, Montreal
	1964	Canadian Sculpture — National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa
	1964-5-6	Quebec Provincial Competition Exhibitions
	1964-5-6	Royal Canadian Academy Exhibitions
	1965	Art and Engineering, Art Gallery of Toronto
		Spring Exhibition, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts
		"Op from Montreal," Robert Hull Fleming Museum of the University of Vermont
	1966	One Man Exhibition — Galerie Agnès Lefort, Montreal
		One Man Exhibition — Gallery Moos, Toronto
	1967	Centennial Exhibition of Quebec and Ontario Artists — Kitchener and Waterloo Art Gallery
	Sculpture '67 City Hall, Toronto	
	The Ontario Centennial Art Ex., Art Gallery of Ontario	
	Constructions 66-7 — National Gallery	
<b>Awards</b>	1965	Jessie Dow Award, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts
<b>Collections</b>		Robert Hull Fleming Museum
		Musée d'art Contemporain, Montreal
		Stewart Hall, Pointe Claire, Que.
		Aluminum Company of Canada
		National Gallery of Canada
		York University, Toronto
		Dalhousie University, Halifax
		Mondev Corporation, Montreal
		Toronto Dominion Bank, Toronto
		Department of External Affairs
		Kensington Industries, Montreal
		Imperial Oil Company, Toronto
		Canada Council, Ottawa
		Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery
		London Art Museum

# Creative Response:

## A Conversation with Gino Lorcini

RECORDED BY

*John K. Harley*

*The following transcript is from a tape recording made at a colloquium held at Glenaladale, Macdonald College, in December 1966. The object of the discussion was first to establish a model of successful teaching for creative response (the model being the practices of Gino Lorcini in Fine Arts classes in the Faculty of Education) and second, to suggest by analogy principles that could be adopted in other fields of teaching where a creative response is expected.*

J.K.H.: Gino, what are you trying to achieve in teaching art? What are you going to have the students do?

G.L.: One of the first things one has to do is to give the students some understanding of the difference between the verbal and non-verbal world. I would say that we are an over-verbal society, that we behave in response to words rather than to the environment, the sensing of the environment. There needs to be a breaking down of the word models.

The word is practically useless for sensing the *non-verbal world* for purposes of drawing and painting.

The world is constantly undergoing change. So that facts that we started out with are continually subject to change, giving us the notion of *process*, the feeling our world is in process — change is all about us. This is not an apple, an A-P-P-L-E, as far as we are concerned; under any change of position or circumstance you have a different event in space-time.

I try to bring in the notion that students are living in a *world of emerging moments*, that each thing is an

event. I believe that society in general tends to think of the world as rather a static thing, or that they are static and the world goes by them.

Under the impact of modern communications, we grow an extra skin, become less sensitive, are "encapsulated," often because we think in terms of end results, that the score is more important than the behaviour. Taken to its logical conclusion, it would seem that all we do with life is try to get to the end of it, instead of living the passage. And it is this living the passage, or being involved with the journey, that is the thing I attempt to get the students to understand. That it is not the end result, but the way there, that is important to them from the point of view of gratification and of growth.

J.K.H.: You want your students not only to be aware of the importance of this, but also to cope with it in some way. What is it you try and get your students to do, now they are coming to terms with "the emerging moment?"

G.L.: Let's make a bridge here with the use of media, getting to know material. The tools of the material may be foreign to them . . . My first approach to the material is one of *play*. Only by play will they get a non-verbal understanding. They must get down to business and explore, so I give them some charcoal, and use music, quite often, merely to get them to make some marks on the paper and it doesn't matter what — the end result is entirely up to them.

In fact I insist that the end result be of no consequence in their minds. Now this may sound very simple, but I find that there is always Mama, or Papa, or husband or wife, up in the back of their minds who is expecting the drawing to *be* something. And this is one of the most difficult things I have to cope with — "what will other People think?"

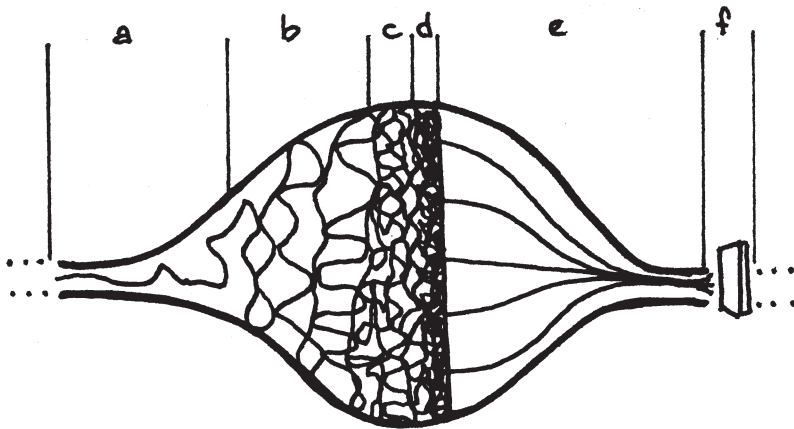
Another similar exploration is to give everybody a ruler, and a pencil. The aim of this will be for them to make some marks on the paper. They have the support of the ruler, they can draw straight lines, and it is quite remarkable what people who have never drawn before can do with just straight lines.

You take the charcoal, break it in two, and let it become a part or an extension of your guts. This instru-

ment must be an extension of yourself — and as comfortable — not a foreign thing that we are imposing our will on.

**HEARSEY:** Are there any intrinsic values? You said that it wasn't the end result but the way there gratifies. The opposite could hold good: the way there could be torture. Do you evaluate only the way there, or what they have arrived at?

**G.L.:** If it is to be creativity, we cannot predict what the end results are going to be. The torture on the way there — this so-called gratifying behaviour brings with it tremendous frustrations. I have a diagram —



- |   |   |
|---|---|
| a. Initiating the Problem                 | — e.g. "I am going to paint, write etc . . ."   |
| b. 1st. Order Involvement                 | — organizing materials, establishing preliminary structure of composition.  |
| c. 2nd. Order Involvement                 | — problems generated by preliminary exploration, intensive interaction with media and subject accompanied by modifications of preconceived notions. |
| d. Problem Climax                         | — point where difficulties appear insurmountable and where the natural tendency is to cling to the "known."   |
| e. Intuitive, Off-Conscious, Insight Zone | — resolution of the problem by giving one's self up to the emerging moment  |
| f. Solution                               | — the product . . . . .   |

G.L.:

This might be considered a problem-solving situation. I have reason to believe that this happens in things other than art. We start off with an aspiration like "I am going to paint, or to plan a trip to Europe, or to write a book." The problem at that stage (a) is very simple. At that stage we have this little nudge here — we can call these things determiners of excitement, involvement, or interest. As we go along we get out the paint brushes, or the maps, or the typewriter, and all of this is relatively easy.

As we develop a problem (I hate the word) we find that certain things happen (b). We say to ourselves: "The lighting isn't so good today, and now what shall I use for material? What am I going to paint? and something's gone wrong with the stretching of the canvas." Then at (c) we seem to go through a tremendous number of obstacles — our internal environment becomes a very involved complex thing. And perhaps some of the things we do at this stage are quite difficult, quite frustrating and not pleasurable, but the overall drive we have, for some reason, makes us go forward.

Now then, things often build up in a problem situation to the point where we decide to throw the ruddy easel out of the window — to cancel the trip, to burn the manuscript. This is the point where there is such complexity, there is such disorganization, there are such mountains of difficulty, that there seems to be a wall (d).

This is a very crucial point in creativity. But if we persist, if we can go through this at the point where things appear to be worst, if we can push through this wall, it seems that there is almost a void, often a suction, a pulling through something vacuum-like here (e) into the end result where we realize order (f). You see, (e) is the unknown point, perhaps we could call it the point of catalysing, where the unknown part of us, the intuitive, the off-conscious, pre-conscious, sub-conscious — I don't know what label you'll want to put on it — this is also the gratification period, the enlightenment, the "peak experience" Maslow has called it — here (e) is where *human-ness in totality* takes over, here is where unification comes, here is where the *realization* comes after a confrontation. This is why I mentioned gratification, but it is inevitably preceded

- by or intertwined with frustration.
- J.K.H.: How do you evaluate students at the end of the year? To what extent is it based on their skill in handling the material, to what extent is it based on their success in coming to terms with "the emerging moment," and on realizing statements of their own? How do you manage this problem?
- G.L.: Officially, or unofficially?
- J.K.H.: Unofficially, and I think what we want to know always, is what you do with the people who don't succeed?
- G.L.: If there is a total involvement with the material and the subject at hand, then I do not believe that there can be a higher learning behaviour. *The criterion is complete involvement with the totality at hand.*
- J.K.H.: This would mean that you would pass a class if this process occurred once in the term?
- G.L.: Well, at that point in space-time, if you are talking in our old thinking of "pass" and "fail," then I would pass the lot at that point. Now, if I walk out of here and I go and kick somebody in the shin or I break a store window — do I pass as a moral human being at that point in space time? (J.K.H.: "No.") So it is very difficult to say that a human being passes or fails.
- J.K.H.: Are you saying that really you have no answer to this problem? If we're asked for passes and fails, we can't do it?
- G.L.: What happens in practice, we go through all the work the individual has done through the term to see what development has taken place, and actually you can see what has happened to the individual — on a one-to-one basis. You also know how they behave in class — again, one-to-one behaviour.
- J.K.H.: Once they've done your course, you're contented — "satisfactory?"
- G.L.: Well, if they are better human beings behaviourally as a result of the experience they have gone through. And if this doesn't happen it's not a case of their "failing," it's a case of myself "failing."
- J.K.H.: So the only person you could fail conceivably was one who had never taken part, and even then you are saying you would blame yourself rather than him.
- DUNCAN: How does the student measure his own success? How does he know? Is there any way in which he can tell

he has succeeded?

G.L.: This is a very complex thing because people will react to their own work in many different ways. We are not supposed to think of anything that we have done, "It's good." Students have to learn to recognize an accomplishment. One of them will say, "Oh I think this drawing is terrible." In this situation I would have them review their term's work. "Well, bring out your folder," I say. And they take a look into their folder and we compare the recent work with their earlier efforts. Then they say, often to their surprise, "This one is not so bad after all." In this way they can see growth for themselves.

I must point out that this is a complex problem; that they can't bat 100% all the time, they can't always improve with *each* work; that something that is creative or something that is human cannot be programmed for development. If you can impress upon them that they are their own standard, and they are in competition only with themselves.

HORTON: Do you meet at all the other side of the problem, the student who is too easily satisfied with his own work?

G.L.: This happens with the student who doesn't become involved — quite often with students who have had experience before — and I've found that these are easily taken care of. Rather than fight them or take them up on things, I will encourage them and appear to look upon their work with a little awe. But it is not long, if they have any sensibility at all, before they will see development in the students around them. Then a little introspection invariably occurs and they change their attitudes.

HORTON: Do you find that insight invariably comes with involvement?

G.L.: Yes, almost always. (On being pressed) There is no *always*. The only absolute is that there's no absolute.

My aim is for me to teach them to become their own critics, so that they will not need someone like myself in as short a time as possible. If each time they look at their own work for criticism they can find one thing that they can modify, they are well on the road to being self-actualized people.

J.K.H.: We should not present bodies of critical theory to our students? We should not give them structures by which

one may assess a piece of work in writing for example, including various terms and systems of analysis? We should let them develop on their own?

G.L.: I would say this. I trust that I am familiar with their problems, that I have gone through their problems, that I am still going through problems that parallel theirs.

I have to work myself in order to be sensitive to their problems. The difficulties and frustrations that I have at my level, whatever it is, are equal to theirs, providing that they are as interested in what they are doing as I am. The individual who is teaching will be aware of what is loosely "right," but will use a tangential approach, not an authoritarian "Why don't you put that there?"

HEARSEY: Do they understand what problem they are working with? It seems to me that a lot of these people, however involved they are, will never really get through that barrier of yours (d). They will perhaps substitute for what they imagine their earlier teachers or their parents or their husbands think has to be representational, the fact that you think they shouldn't paint or draw representationally, and then they'll be driven back on themselves, and make their paintings — to try and please you — neither representational nor anything else. Isn't there some way that you can help them in this development?

G.L.: Well, we have built in here the representational work which does act as a stabiliser until we can get rid of sufficient of our old thinking — but it's going to take a little while to do that. This can be used as a reference point for them as far as development or accomplishment. They like to see that they have done a still life that looks as though the pot will hold water. But you cannot have total agreement with twenty people; but once you have a majority agreement and things are swinging, then you find that they will get more gratification and grow more quickly by working in areas that are unknown.

For instance, working with colour with music. I would say as a generalization, the overall intensity of involvement in this problem is far greater than any other, they find it more difficult to begin than any other, they are not too sure they are happy with the end result — but on discussion, not all, but about 90%, will



say they have had an experience which they felt was extremely meaningful.

**HEARSEY:** This seems to me to be starting with an abstraction in a way. And I was thinking only as I can in the analogy of words, that words grow always from a concrete to an abstract use. They start — all our abstractions did — with a concrete and definite meaning, a utility; and then if they get too abstract and too vague and too cliché we push them back into their original use. Is there any similarity with what you are wanting to do with art students? So that they have some terms of reference, one with another?

**G.L.:** The terms of reference are built into the whole. They grow out of the curriculum — if you want to use the word — because we are not dealing only with abstraction. We listen, we touch, we sniff — in other words, we explore senses other than sight and we use methods that are *not representational* in order to put an idea across.

The thing that the abstraction gives is a shutting off of the attitudinal set, of the coming to a situation — “I know that this is expected — it’s got to look like this, etcetera, etcetera.” Well, they are just not in a position, from the point of view of skill, to meet their own anticipations. People want to draw like Rembrandt in ten easy lessons.

**ADAMSON:** You said you would evaluate your class by the creative activity that’s going on. Later on you mentioned growth. I’m not quite sure how you relate the two.

**G.L.:** Growth in its larger sense is a result of an attempt to find symmetry or order. But I don’t believe absolute symmetry exists. Function would cease unless there were a degree of asymmetry in the system . . . Growth takes place when you attempt to bring order out of chaos, and the creative person is attempting to do this, consciously, all of the time. He will never get complete or absolute order. He will attempt to find another kind of order, and once this is found it will open the road to perhaps another more complex type of order. So that growth in terms of development of works of art is, I think, consistent with growth as a human being.

We have to go through difficulties in order to have this gratification. It comes back to this; this could be life itself. Many people stay in a void, they die a walk-

ing death, you see them all over the city. Now, involvement must create difficulty. There is no comfort in growth. You look at nature, you see this seething mass in a garden, things coming out of the earth, winds blowing, there is violence there; we must have violence within us for growth. Unless there was some hope of order it would be a completely chaotic situation.

But it's a phasic thing, and I think the development of the artist and the creative individual is a phasic thing. That here at this stage (c,d) we are undergoing ferment; we come to order (e,f); once we get to this state of order (e), if we stay too long it becomes uncomfortable. One can imagine that to be clothed in a mound of cotton wool would be the most relaxing thing; you find the perfect place in a downy bed — but how long can you stay exactly there? There is a need once we come out of here (f) to repeat the process.

I cannot see that any situation that is creative could not be conducive to growth.

DUNCAN: We've run into this problem in the creative movement field. Someone who has taught in physical education will say, "But the child needs to know what he is trying to do." And so if you say the objective is to stand on his head, he knows if he can stand on his head or not. How does the student really know if he is achieving?

HORTON: Someone somewhere has a standard of design or for design. And how does the student come to recognize what these limits are? Are they purely arbitrary ones in terms of a particular instructor, or is there something in the discipline that is a standard of good design?

G.L.: Well, if you have individuals in creative movement and this is their idea of balance (demonstrates an awkward pose, toppling), at this stage, you might refer them to some other form of balancing. Or they will see about them somebody else tackling the same problem arriving at any number of kinds of balance.

HORTON: Wouldn't your technique be to give the student a good push?

G.L.: No, I'm not so sure.

WALL: Do you want to give the person the experiences of many sorts of design and then that student makes his

- own decision as to what is right (G.L.: "Yes, yes.") It is not an external standard, what society believes is acceptable, because if you just go along there, we'd all follow the same path.
- HORTON:** Well, I think this is what we're talking about — the difficulties of doing this especially for people who are oriented to a very specifically designed goal.
- WALL:** But I don't think there is this external standard. I don't think I should tell my students, "That is not acceptable."
- ADAMSON:** But as teachers we live in a very dichotomous situation, almost "two solitudes." We have the external world that has very firm standards, and if we agree with your method of teaching, which I do, we are thinking in terms of individual standards which the students find for themselves, and we are caught between these two different kinds of standards.
- G.L.:** Well, which is the most important to you? Is it what goes on out there, or is it the way we relate to what is going on out there? It's time the ego was given its head; it's time the ego was nurtured and not suppressed by convention, the constrictor of the ego. To unfold the new, one must go beyond the bounds of here-to-fore accepted structure.
- GILL:** I think there must be a limit to all this though, because surely if we are involved in an urban civilization we must have some rule of law in order to prevent chaos.
- G.L.:** Your rule of law, I believe, will come about . . . if the individual is given the licence to make himself a whole human being then he will respect others, which is what it comes down to, doesn't it? Respect of material — this is something we might have gone into — if you learn to respect material I believe you get a transfer and you will respect other things.
- HORTON:** I think what we're really shying away from here is the terrible responsibility that this places on the teachers.
- G.L.:** The responsibility — because the teacher, let's face it, is working in a world that is safe. Education seems to be security oriented, but nature and life are a state of insecurity. The mark is something secure. If you've got 95% in all your subjects, boy, you're secure! But

take a look at the number of people who have come out of such a situation with 90%, 95%, or 100% and have come to terms with life in its asymmetrical relation. A lot of very "bright" people have a tremendous amount of difficulty corresponding to a world of reality that of its nature is *not* a matter of 90% or 100% in terms of standards like that.

There is always the unexpected. To come to terms with the unexpected, the emerging moment, then we have to tick in a similar fashion. We have to be a little unpredictable.

HAINES: But you have implied that self-acceptance is the starting point for security in all expressive media, haven't you?

G.L.: You have summed up all that I have to say. Thank you.

HAINES: It seems to me that what I've gotten out of what you've said is something to do with perception and something to do with self-acceptance, and something to do with looking at the product to see what the process has been rather than looking at the product as a product — in any expressive medium, whether it's literary or artistic or dramatic. And would I be right in saying that your basic premise with your students is first to establish the perception and the self-acceptance, and then the growth and the movement and the process begin?

G.L.: It becomes very natural.

HAINES: And if you've done these things in the first place and reinforced them, then as the floods come and as the static moments come, then the movement reinstates itself, reconstitutes itself, it's a self-motivating thing from then on.

G.L.: Self-motivating, self-generating.

HAINES: For ever and ever, whether you're there or not . . .