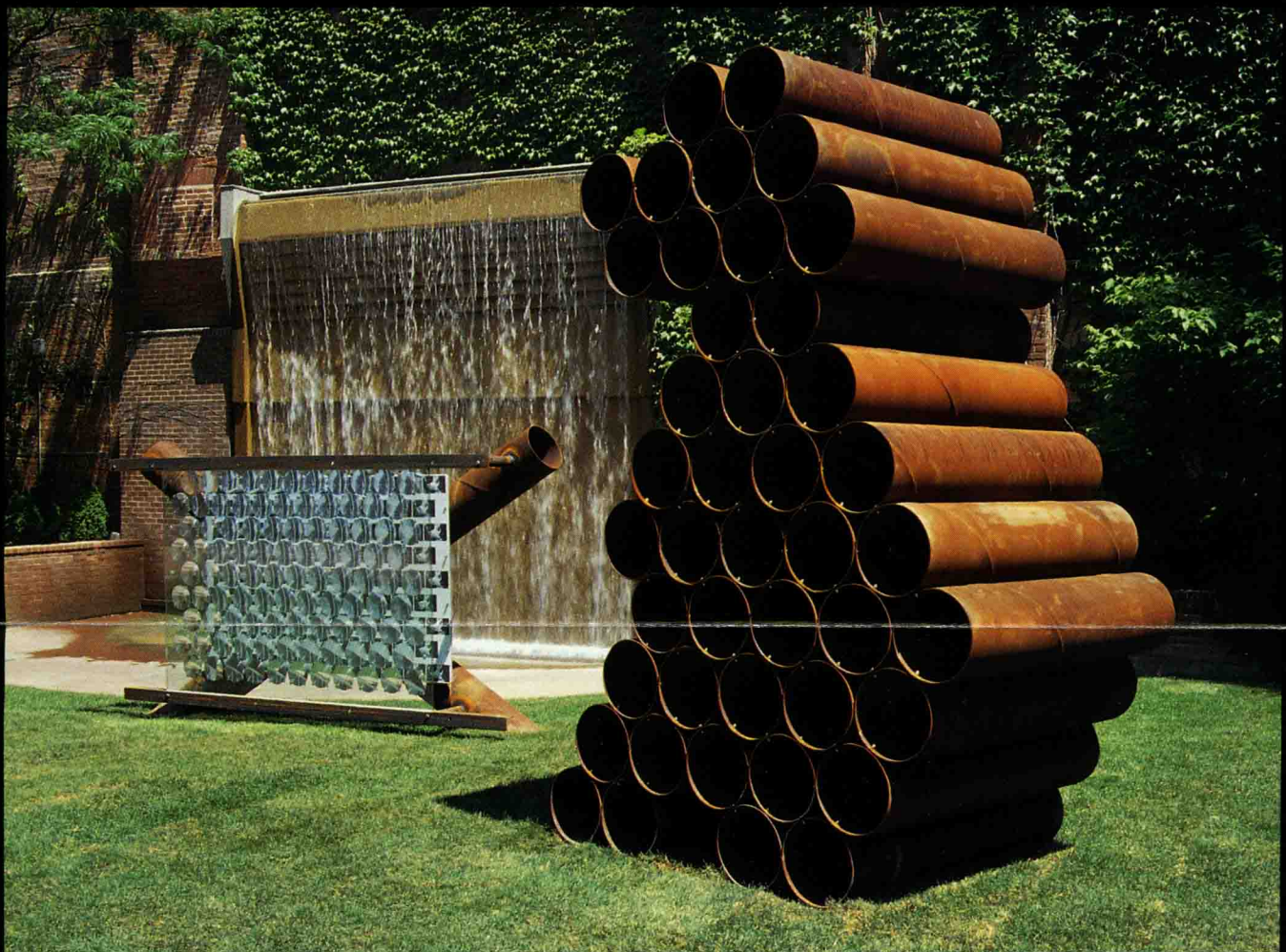


TORONTO SCULPTURE GARDEN

# JERRY PETHICK

JULY 21 – SEPTEMBER 30, 1993



## REMEMBERED ROOM

A CITY OF TORONTO PARK ■ 115 KING STREET EAST

*Remembered Room.* Toronto, ON: Toronto Sculpture Garden, 1993.





*Work in progress*

# REMEMBERED ROOM

*A critical analysis  
by Barbara Fischer,  
independent curator and writer*

Jerry Pethick's work of the past twenty-five years or so has been

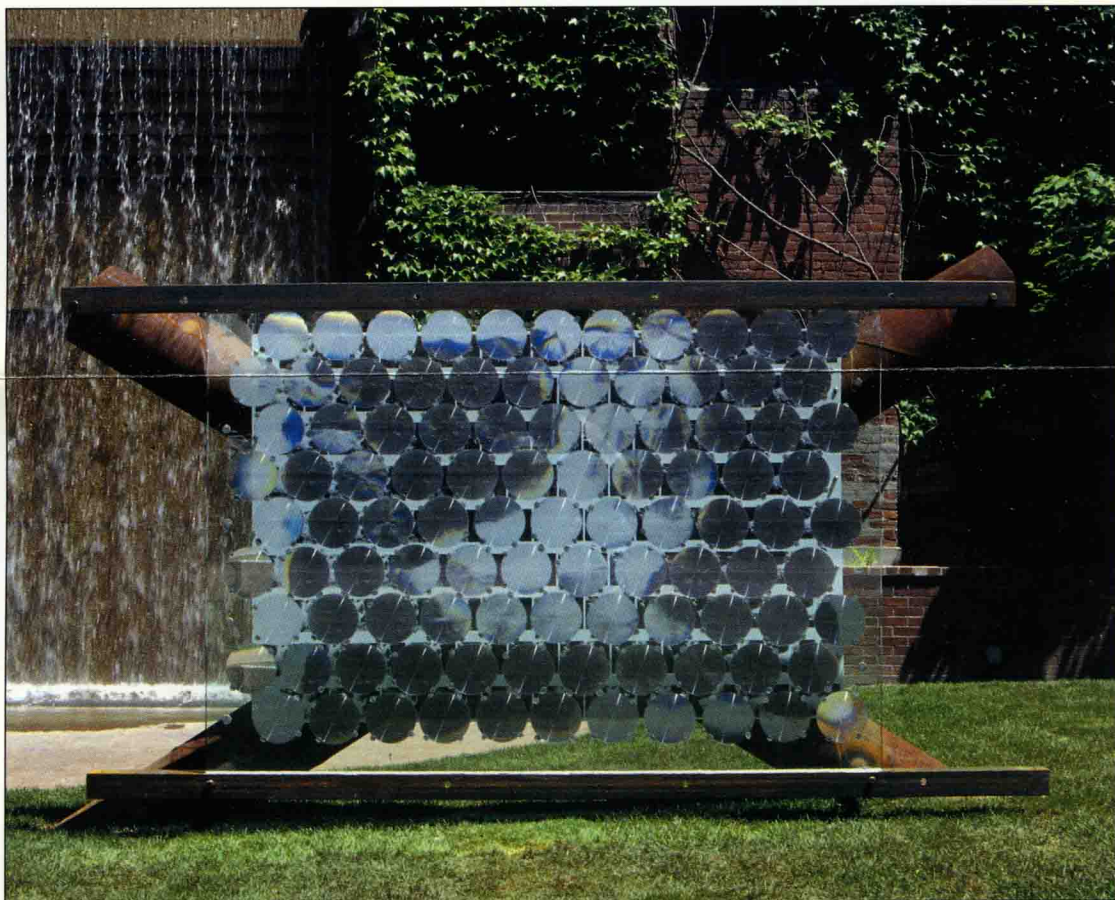
concerned with the refiguration of space and the dematerialization of objecthood. More particularly, as sculpture, his work has been a material exploration of the dematerialization of visual reality. One might even say that, in this way, his work has broached the threshold of virtual reality of what is upon us as far as vision, voice and memory are concerned. What is sometimes referred to as a 're-structuring', is in reality the convulsion experienced as a result of the cyber-revolution, the absorption of all reality within the continuous organic field of electronic information networks.

At first glance, however, the new work for the Toronto Sculpture Garden seems to be a more archaic project. As its title suggests, it is about memory, the sculptural realization of a 'remembered room'. Archaic, then. But also of the future! For, it is through the idea of a 'remembered room' that one first encounters the possibility of an imaginary, immaterial and yet strangely real space, a space that is perhaps as much remembered as it is desired, existent as it is beyond the physical, material world. If the one is memory, the other is virtual reality. The former is space remembered, the latter space projected. Both share the fact that they are not actual, but may be experienced as though real. Perhaps one could say that both are 'virtually' real (the stress being on the virtuality of that reality).

In **Remembered Room**, as in earlier works, the place where this peculiar past future or future's past is actually played out, as in many of his most recent works, is a pixel-like arrangement of lenses mounted in front of a grid of photographs of a waterfall (Qualicum Falls, BC). The Fresnel lenses (which are

grooved, flattened plastic lenses) recall something like Dürer's perspective trellis, or some other visual apparatus (photo-camera, film camera, stereoscope, etc.) that occupies a position of 'intermediary' or extension of the human eye in relation to the world. Almost like a hologram, but one that exceeds the limitations of that medium, the lenses create a simulacrum of the cavernous space of the waterfall, as immaterially real as when one remembers something (suddenly and vividly) or as it may be the future's *historical* dream, the dream of creating rooms from memory in 'virtual reality'.

But, more even, it is as sculpture that Pethick's work partakes in the future possibility of virtual reality, that is, in the creation of, and play with, immaterial yet tangibly real volume, which, as Jerry Pethick himself has said, "gives perceptual volume a presence of its own, malleable and usable as other tangible material....." If this is evident even in the Sculpture Garden's own 'virtual' (artificially re-created, mechanically controlled) waterfall, it is most of all evident in the large, industrial pile-up of steel tubes which, upon entering the Garden, seem overwhelmingly solid, impenetrable and massive, and then, suddenly, when seen from the side, turn into the entirely disembodied, immaterial and hollow, almost insubstantial outline of a vastly enlarged sitting dog.



*Photo Array, 7' high x 9' long x 2' wide*



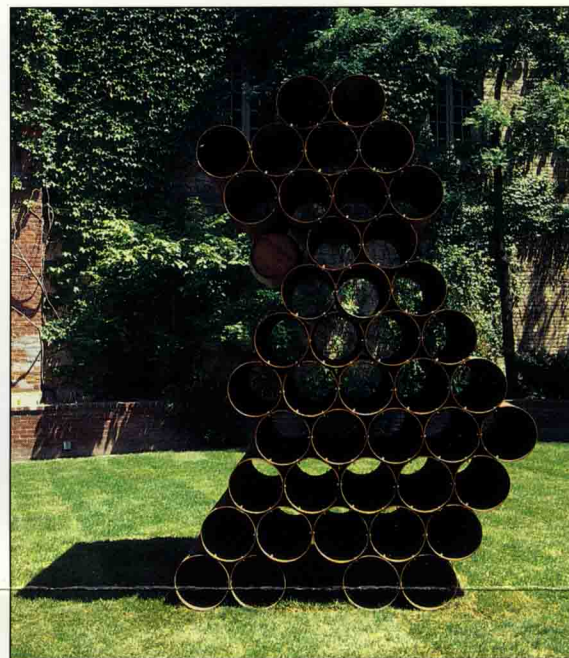
Like turning stone into water, or images of the mind into reality, this sculptural conceit expands the notion of what constitutes the proper material of sculpture which is, by definition, not the immaterial. Also, through its repeated pattern of stacked, round, hollow volumes, the pile of steel tubes makes clear reference to the repeated rounds of the array of Fresnel lenses and through that reference reminds us that sculpture, as well, is a means of making the immaterial virtually real.

In this and other ways, all of the components of Jerry Pethick's **Remembered Room** partake in the play with transmutational substance: between the virtually real and simulated waterfall, between real water and virtual space, between solid tubes and empty volumes, and between sculptural objects and immaterial spaces. Like the view through the veil of lenses, Jerry Pethick's sculpture in its entirety invites us to the threshold of an imaginary space in which everything seems possible, indeed, in which all dimensions are possible: a fantastical, non-existent, 'free-dimensional' gravity, "a seamless universe, where one could pile up in heaps musical notes and select small winds to drift through the memories structured by intent, and [where] gravity could be convinced to hold the song upside down..."<sup>1</sup> All but dislodged from the laws of gravity and perspectival space, it is a space where even "men are free to play."<sup>2</sup>

But, Jerry Pethick's work probes deeper the fantasy of virtual reality. If it does not heed a direct warning, it rumbles with an ominous tone and plays out the double edge of its ambiguities. If one catches a glimpse of this in the mutation of the steel tubes – their turn from a tank-like, immutable opacity into a dematerialized, screen-like tubular volume – it is given substance, most of all, with the figure of the dog itself. With its barrel around the neck it might be a friendly St. Bernard, like the one that rescues people buried under the snow, or the one on TV that delivers Contact C when you're sick in bed. But, as with any of 'man's best friends' or guardian dogs, it depends on what side of the fence one is on. Here, the vast, oversize scale lends the figure a threatening appearance, one that one might not want to be in the way of once it starts rolling.



Above, detail of Dog; right, Dog, 10.5' high x 6.5' long x 4' wide



There is another reference, however, one that I wouldn't have known had Jerry Pethick not pointed it out to me. An old logo of RCA Records once featured a dog listening to an old fashioned phonograph, or, as it also became known, a dog 'listening to his master's voice'. In **Remembered Room** the dog is placed to appear as though it is listening to the sound of the waterfall, which indeed one can hear amplified if one puts one's ear to one of its steel tubes. If the artificial waterfall of the Sculpture Garden stands in for the phonograph (which is not an absurd parallel if one considers that the 'volume' of water, and thus its sound level, can be controlled), then one might also wonder, what of the master's voice? To what drummer, to what master, does the imagination listen? And, is the remembered room, finally, what one would call one's own ... or perhaps that of the media, including for instance the radio, which Marshall McLuhan once called 'the tribal drum' ... "a mighty awakener of archaic memories, forces, and animosities"?<sup>3</sup>

Perhaps we have arrived again at the beginning then: in

**Remembered Room** what has been interwoven perceptually and materially in sculpture is that peculiar interface between memory and virtual reality, mythical history and modern communications media, the future and the past.



Detail of Photo Array

Footnotes on back cover

All photographs W.N. Greer, except 'Work in progress', by Jerry Pethick.



**J**erry Pethick, born in 1935 in London, Ontario, was educated in London, England, at Chelsea Polytechnic and Royal College of Art. He lives and works in British Columbia.

#### Selected Solo Exhibitions

- 1993 Cliff Michel Gallery, Seattle
- 1992 Centre international d'art contemporain de Montréal  
Galerie Brenda Wallace, Montréal  
The Power Plant, Toronto
- 1991 Southern Alberta Art Gallery, Lethbridge
- 1989 Cliff Michel Gallery, Seattle
- 1988 Grace Gallery, Granville Island, Vancouver
- 1986 49th Parallel Centre for Contemporary Canadian Art, New York City
- 1985 Crousel Robelin BAMA, Paris
- 1984 Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver
- 1983 Canadian Cultural Centre, Paris

#### Selected Group Exhibitions

- 1989 *Canadian Biennial of Contemporary Art*, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa
- 1986 *FOCUS-Kanadische Kunst von 1960-1985*, 20 Internationaler Kunstmarkt '86, Cologne, Germany

- 1984 *Reconstituted Elements*, Open Space, Victoria
- 1982 *Mise en scène*, Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver

#### Public Collections

Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto  
Seattle Arts Commission, Seattle  
Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver  
Arts Council of Great Britain, London  
Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris  
Metropolitan Art Museum, Amsterdam  
Canada Council Art Bank, Ottawa

#### Selected Bibliography

John K. Grande, *Sculpture*. Nov./Dec./92  
Henry Lehmann, *The Gazette*. Sept. 26/92  
Marie-Michèle Cron, *Le Devoir*. Sept. 12/92  
Jocelyn Lepage, *La Presse*. Aug. 15/92  
John Bentley Mays, *The Globe and Mail*. Aug. 8/92  
Barbara Fischer, *C Magazine*. Summer/92  
Gary Dufour, *Canadian Art*. Winter/91  
Billy Little, *Capilano Review*. Fall/89  
Ron Glown, *Artweek*. Nov. 30/89  
Regina Hackett, *Seattle Post Intelligencer*. Feb. 20/84  
Scott Watson, *Traces of Discovery*. Vancouver Art Gallery/84

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#### Footnotes

1. Jerry Pethick, *Jerry Pethick – Material Space* (exhibition catalogue), Southern Alberta Art Gallery, Lethbridge, Alberta (1991): 32
2. "When you walk through your life every day, the border between what's really out there and your internal experience of it is a very fuzzy border. But when you put on virtual reality clothes, something very striking happens. For the first time there's a sharp, clear boundary between the outside – what's generated by the system – and the inside. You're floating like an angel inside this other system

and that's you. That's your experience... I think that's why you see playfulness in people who are normally not playful at all... businessmen, military men... inside a virtual reality system they are playful." Jaron Lanier, designer of new realities, quoted by Teresa Carpenter in 'Slouching Toward Cyberspace', *Village Voice* (New York) 21 March 1991: 36

3. Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, Mentor, New American Library, New York and Scarborough (1964): 267

The **Toronto Sculpture Garden** is operated by the City of Toronto Department of Parks and Recreation. The Garden was developed through the sponsorship of the Louis L. Odette Family, the City of Toronto and the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Culture. The site was designed by the Architecture and Urban Design Division of the City's Planning and Development Department, in association with the Department of Parks and Recreation.

Exhibitions are funded and administered by the non-profit L.L.O. Sculpture Garden Foundation and are coordinated by the Garden's director, Rina Greer.

A volunteer Art Advisory Board, appointed by the Foundation, selects work for exhibition. Current members are Don Bennett, Carlo Cesta, Robin Collyer, Allan MacKay, Louis Odette, Christina Ritchie, Malcolm Ruby, Susan Schelle, Alan Tregebov and Loretta Yarlow.

The work in this exhibition may be purchased directly from the artist or through the Sculpture Garden. The Foundation does not benefit financially from any sale.

*Open daily, free of charge, from 8:00 a.m. until dusk.*