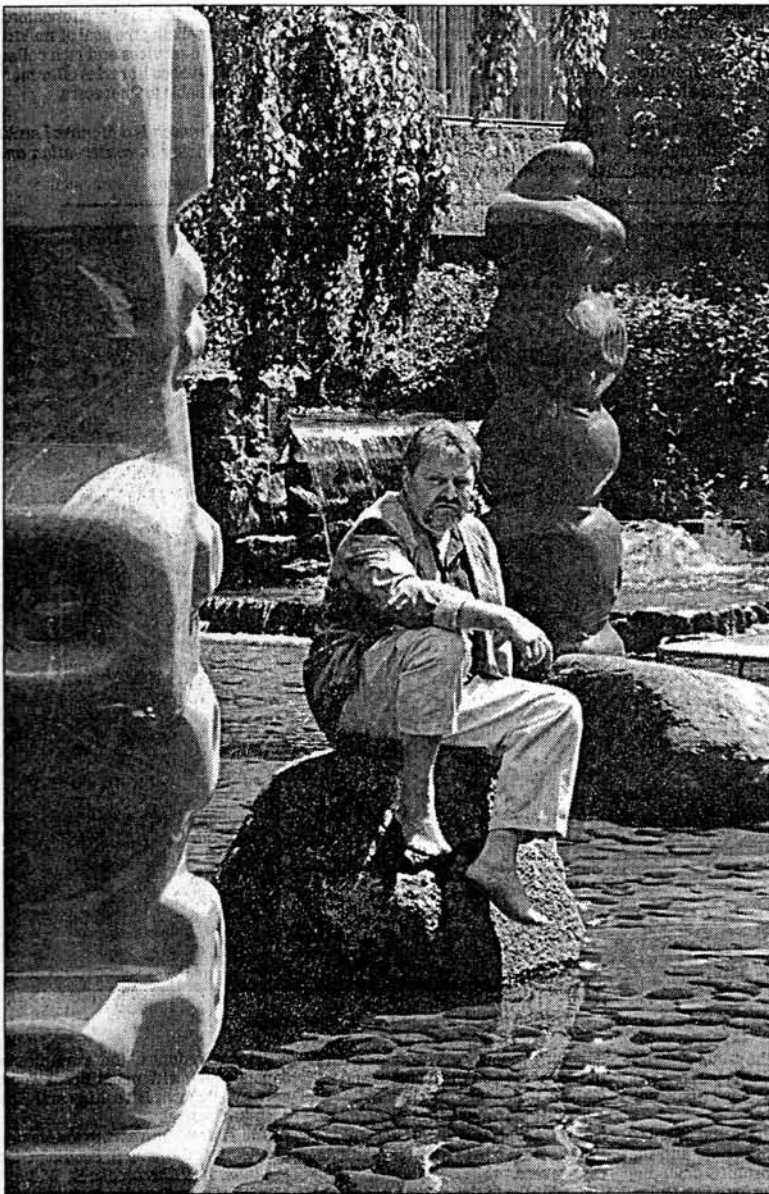


VISUAL ARTS

A sculptor floats his innovative ideas

Schimanszky has big plans for his works, even if he is dispirited by the local market for art



RICHARD ARLESS JR., GAZETTE

Leo Schimanszky with floating sculptures on the rooftop of the Bonaventure Hilton.

Driven is probably the best word to describe Leo Schimanszky. This Austrian-born artist, who lives and works in Hudson, is a ball of energy, galvanized by his surroundings, producing artwork with the pertinence and immediacy of news bulletins.

During the darkest days of last January, as broken hydro pylons littered the landscape and electrical flashes lit up the sky, Schimanszky was bursting with artistic fervour; painting his great Icestorm masterpiece. Right now, he is printing 1998 copies of the original, each copy signed and numbered, to commemorate the date and the event. Part of the proceeds from the sale of the prints will go to the Second Life Tree Fund he set up.

But Schimanszky is first and foremost a sculptor, and his oblique, tactile, abstract pieces echo the work of the great English artist Henry Moore. Chunky, voluptuous forms, at once solid and delicate, invite the touch.

Unlike Moore's sculptures, infused with a quietly powerful, almost spiritual force, Schimanszky's works breathe and undulate with playful energy.

Several of his recent pieces are on display in a particularly exquisite setting – the rooftop gardens of Montreal's Bonaventure Hilton. These are his floating sculptures, an original idea of which Schimanszky is very proud.

Bobbing on the surface of the sparkling water, a small (30 by 20 centimetres) fibreglass sculpture welcomes the visitor. Bright red, Relaxation is a simplified, almost abstract female form, a splash of colour against the verdant backdrop.

Farther along, a larger version of the same figure floats calmly beside a small waterfall, turning this way and that in circular meditation.

The waterway takes a turn, and two totemic sculptures emerge majestically among the trees. Positioned in the middle of a small pond, the alabaster white Upright Masculine Figure and the bright red Upright Feminine Figure stand sentinel over this pastoral scene.

More than 3 metres tall, they define the space, a little alien in their flawless smoothness, their geometric bodies like some stylized, giant toys. Ducks swimming in the pond have adapted to these awkward newcomers and paddle between them fearlessly. The ripples they create break up the sculptures' reflection into shimmering patches of colour.

Schimanszky has grand plans for his floating Adam and Eve. For some time, he has been working on a project that will see the construction of 3-storey-high versions of the two fibreglass sculptures to be towed from port to port in a sort of floating exhibition.

"Because Schimanszky is bringing a message to the world, I bring a message of peace," the



DOROTA KOZINSKA

artist explains enthusiastically. All he needs is \$3 million.

Only \$3 million?

"That's nothing," he says. "Christo gets \$200 million from his sponsors."

The allusion to the Bulgarian-born Christo, who wrapped a dozen Florida islands in plastic, as well as the Reichstag building in Berlin, is apposite:

Schimanszky's other mega project involves wrapping a 70-square-metre painting around the Hilton in Vienna.

The work that will serve for this purpose is an enlarged version of his exuberantly colourful painting, Mega City. This 3.5-by-1.2-metre acrylic on canvas, displayed in the lobby of the hotel, is bursting with movement and energy. It, too, carries a message.

"I'm known as the bridge-builder," Schimanszky says. "This painting has got three, four cultures in it, different religions – everything brought together on one canvas."

To look at Mega City is to travel through a magical, utopian landscape, filled with a variety of buildings, church and mosque spires, undulating, floating bridges, skyscrapers rising against a sky aglow with three suns.

Tiny figures populate this fantastic metropolis, playing instruments, conversing in groups, popping up in the myriad windows. Multicoloured fish swim here and there, linking the human habitat with nature.

"Any painting I do, but especially about cities, must have fish in it," Schimanszky insisted. "Because my rivers are not dead, my rivers live."

The ecological message is not all the artist is trying to convey. Equality of the sexes, symbolized by the two totemic floating figures, is also woven into this bright tapestry; it is represented by a female pope perched atop one of the spires.

Mega City is bristling with activity. The whole is constructed from bright patches of colour, overlapping, interacting panels resembling the work of Austrian artist Christoph Kiefhaber.

Schimanszky is an accomplished and dedicated artist, very much in the European tradition, which sees art – and culture generally – as the basis of any civilization.

He travels to Europe regularly, and makes most of his living from selling his works abroad. Like many other Montreal artists, he is deeply troubled by poor sales here.

Floating sculptures bob on the waters of his pond in Hudson waiting for buyers, while canvases pile up in the studio. But he is undaunted.

"I do exactly what I feel. I do exactly what I see," he said. What's next on the agenda? Why, City 2000, of course!

✦ Leo Schimanszky, sculptures and paintings, at the Bonaventure Hilton until Oct. 15. Call 878-2332. Schimanszky is represented in Montreal by Galerie Bernard Desroches, 2125 Crescent St. Call 842-8648.