

communiqué /press release**For immediate release*****Departure for Katsura: Irene F. Whittome at the CCA***

In the CCA's octagonal gallery, hallcases and Shaughnessy House

From 9 December 1998 to 28 March 1999

"We can see the katsura on the moon with our eyes, but we cannot touch it with our hands."

Montreal, 9 December 1998 — The Canadian Centre for Architecture presents the exhibition ***Irene F. Whittome: Departure for Katsura*** from 9 December 1998 to 28 March 1999, in the museum's octagonal gallery, hallcases, and Shaughnessy House. Yasuhiro Ishimoto's photographs of the Katsura Palace near Kyoto served as the point of departure for this encounter between Montreal artist Irene F. Whittome and the CCA. The exhibition is based on the interrelationships that emerged among the CCA collections, the public spaces of the museum, and works created for the occasion by the artist.

According to a Chinese legend well-known in Japan, a giant *katsura* tree was planted on the moon, inspiring the proverb "We can see the katsura on the moon with our eyes, but we cannot touch it with our hands." This saying celebrates the quest for an absolute and is a fitting epigraph for this exhibition, which encourages us to pursue a search for identity and for the ideal we all carry within us.

Stemming from a desire to bring together supposedly distant worlds, the exhibition sets up a series of encounters: an encounter between an artist and a museum, with its spaces and collections; sustained encounters involving concepts, sites, objects, symbols, and emotions; and anticipated encounters between the works presented and the public who are invited to immerse themselves in the artist's meditation-inducing environments. It was in 1996 that Whittome and art historian Laurier Lacroix began exploring certain facets of the Canadian Centre for Architecture's collections. Through meetings in the library, in the collections of

photographs, drawings, and prints, and in the archives their focus drifted slowly towards Katsura, the 17th-century imperial villa near Kyoto.

In addition, regular visits to the galleries allowed them to grasp the distinct features of the museum's spaces, and explore their dynamics, volumes, and symbolic qualities. It was important to understand the building as a whole and also to establish connections between the exhibition galleries and Shaughnessy House. In her choice of subjects and strategies, Whittome sought to bring out the evocative and contemplative power of each work she created, regarding the site as an integral part of her installations. This procedure is typical of the artist, who believes that a work of art is formed through time, from existing materials and objects, whose energy and meaning she rediscovers and renews.

There are numerous parallels between the artist's world and certain religious and cultural phenomena rooted in ancient North American Indian rites or Buddhist practices in India and Japan. The tortoise, egg, and book are vectors often employed by Whittome who, like an anthropologist of the imagination, is forever in quest of fundamental signifying forms. Stemming from representations based on numbers, these elements are reformulated in the context of the museum and its architecture. The signifying resonances of the spaces of the CCA have been integrated in such a way as to form the basis for a kind of universal language.

In her approach to the interpretation of architecture, Whittome relies on a symbolic language of homonymous forms, "ideograms" common to many cultures but which admit different levels of meaning a kind of syllepsis in which both the literal and the figurative senses of a term are used in the same syntactic construction. With the apparent meaning often the most superficial, the viewer must proceed by association to discover further levels of meaning. Through processes of adaptation and translation, the natural forms of the tree, egg, and tortoise, or of such rudimentary constructions as the basin or the column, are transformed when represented on an unfamiliar scale or associated with numbers and materials that are foreign to them. The interrelationship of these forms and their presentation in a museum, where they are juxtaposed with images showing their use in different cultures, creates new avenues of interpretation and understanding.

Inspired by the symbolism of the structures and functions of certain rooms within the Canadian Centre for Architecture and nourished by her exploration of the collections of photographs, drawings, prints, and books, Whittome has created an itinerary that allows the public to discover or rediscover several facets of the institution as revealed in the octagonal gallery, the hallcases, and in certain rooms in the Shaughnessy House.

Whittome is thus continuing her research into the significance of the museum and collections, a rational and spiritual quest revolving around the notions of accumulation and assembly and using metaphors drawn from natural phenomena. In the octagonal gallery, illuminated by saffron panels, Whittome has placed a pool of water, underscoring the themes of purification and contemplation; the wood trim in the tearoom forms a casing for the eternal tortoise, bearing on its shell a tree trunk, symbol of creation; the stupa placed in the Sottsass room suggests cosmic unity. All of these elements, which punctuate the visitor's path, point to a convergence of symbols.

Through photographs of the Katsura villa made by Yasuhiro Ishimoto in 1953 and 1981–1983, photographs of pre-Columbian sites in Mexico taken by Désiré Charnay in 1858–61, and others taken in India a few years later by Samuel Bourne and Lala Din Dayal, as well as conceptual drawings by German architects Hans Scharoun, Paul Goesch, and Bruno Taut—all members of the early 20th-century utopian group *Die gläserne Kette* (Chain of Glass)—this exhibition presents various aspects of the CCA collections selected for their relation to the artist's works.

Born in Vancouver, Irene F. Whittome studied in her native city and in Paris before moving to Montréal in 1968. A faculty member at Concordia University and a multidisciplinary artist, Whittome has numerous installations and public commissions to her credit. Her works have been the object of over 35 individual exhibitions in Canada, Europe, and the United States, including one at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts in 1980 and another at the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal in 1997. In 1992 she received the Prize for Artistic Excellence from the Gershon Iskowitz Foundation, and in 1997 she was awarded the Prix Paul-Émile Borduas by the Quebec government.

Laurier Lacroix, Professor in the Department of Art History at the Université du Québec à Montréal, is the guest curator of the exhibition.

Booklet

A bilingual booklet entitled ***Irene F. Whittome: Departure for Katsura*** will accompany the exhibition. It includes an article by curator Laurier Lacroix and a project by the artist created specially for the publication. Comprising 36 pages and a dozen black-and-white photographs, it will be available at the CCA Bookstore for \$9,95.

Thursday Evening Films, Weekend Family Workshops and School Program

In the spirit of this exhibition, the CCA has organized various activities for a wide range of visitors. The *Architecture of Japan*, a four-part film series presented in association with the Cinémathèque québécoise, will be screened at the Paul-Desmarais Theatre on Thursday evenings at 6 pm from 26 November to 17 December.

Family workshops are also offered on weekends from 12 December to 28 March. This program is designed for children aged 3 to 12 (accompanied by an adult) and includes a special visit to the exhibition, followed by a workshop in the Shaughnessy House in which parents can assist their youngsters in creating their own work. Reservations begin 18 November : 514 939-7026.

An educational program entitled *Art Meets Architecture* has been designed for primary and secondary school student groups. Offered from 13 January to 26 March, this program allows young people to explore the relationships that exist between architecture, contemporary art, and contemplation. It includes a tour of the exhibition followed by a creative workshop aimed at stimulating both the students' perception of space and their creative potential. School reservations: 514 939-7002.

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