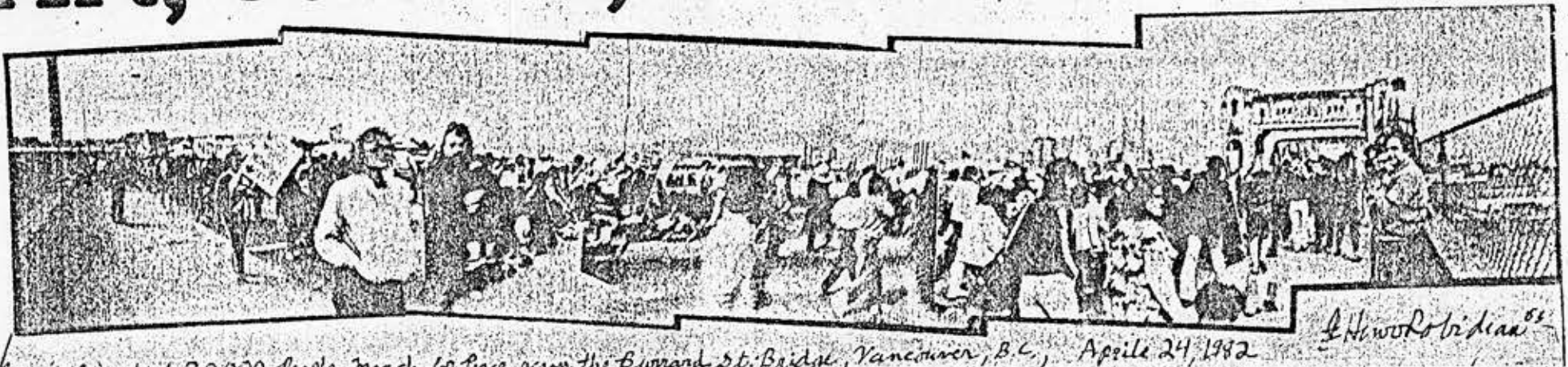


Art, Culture, and Fun



Giant Crowd of 30,000 People March for Peace across the Burrard St. Bridge, Vancouver, B.C., April 24, 1982

Henri Robideau's BIG Ideas

by Molly Shinhat

"October 12, 1983. Giant crowd of 70,000 people (the largest mass demonstration in B.C.'s history) march a second time against the Socred's So-called 'restraint'. In front of the Hotel Vancouver the fluffy-sweater hip capitalist flat-top entrepreneur Socred convention delegates come face to face with the plaid shirt working class minority disabled single parents on welfare unemployed."

Is the title of a photograph ten feet long and one and a half feet high. It is one of fifteen black and white "giant photographs" taken by Henri Robideau on exhibit from now 'til Oct. 21 at Dazibao Gallery.

Robideau calls himself a giant photographer because it "sounds scientific," adding that he thought it would give him "some real importance in the world." He initially got interested in giant things while growing up in America. Fourteen years ago he moved to Vancouver from Berkeley, California and started to photograph.

At his conference at Dazibao on Sept. 30, he said that in the past he has taken "some stupid pictures." A classic example would be a photograph of a drawing of a football field with 2 teams, made up of dead bugs, meticulously arranged on it. Another would be the pair of photographs titled "Bubble gum in action"—two of his children chewing gum—and "bubble gum at rest"—bubble gum stuck to the bottom of a chair.

In 1972 he began work on a series of photographs of his wife Jeannie. Most of these focused on her daily life: Jeannie talking to local politicians about setting up a daycare centre, Jeannie mowing the lawn, Jeannie in shorts doing a cheesecake pose on the washer and dryer, and so on.

"My photography has always dealt with things that have a sense of

humour," says Robideau. The funniest photograph is "There have been times when Jeannie has supported me," a photograph of a broadly smiling Jeannie carrying an equally broadly smiling Robideau. The photograph obviously is a cute reference to what Robideau concedes can occasionally happen when he pays off the giant expenses that result from making giant photographs. As a continuation of this, in 1976 he took nude photographs of Jeannie while she was pregnant.

Robideau explains that he took these family photographs, because he wanted to photograph something that other people could relate to. The series on Jeannie was the first work he exhibited. At this point, too, Robideau began to use text in conjunction with his photographs, at first "probably because it was trendy, but later I started to like it, so I kept on doing it."

When he began photographing giant forms in 1973, he would shoot single frames only. In 1975 he began taking two photographs of each form: a long shot showing the context it was in, and a close-up focusing on the form itself.

After taking a year off to teach in 1980, he took the first of the panoramas that are constructed the same way as those in his current show. The idea of using this technique came to him while he was trying to solve a problem: how could he represent the energy of painter Susan Scott? He ended up taking single photographs—in her studio—with her in each one that comprised a 360° interior view. Presented singly, the photographs would lose much of the impact that they have the way Robideau presented them, as a single photograph. He cut away the edges of the photographs, matching the backgrounds in each, and then pieced them together.

Using the same technique, Robideau took photographs of Jeannie cutting his hair and shaving off his beard. In one of the single frames, he holds a "before" photograph; in another, he holds pictures of himself as a child. In this ten foot long photograph, even though everything takes place in the same space, Robideau plays with showing different things and different pieces of time in different frames. It's a concept that Robideau says he would like to pursue.

All of his recent work has been done using a 35mm camera with a slightly wide-angle lens (35mm). Each frame is printed in a 16 x 20" format. When pieced together, the shapes of the images vary considerably. Robideau says he never knows when he's shooting what the shape of the final image will be but he always has a feeling for it. He tries to get as many photographs of a scene as possible, so that he will have a choice for each segment of the final panorama.

Taking different pictures of the same scene does not always mean that the same exposure will be good for each shot. Robideau has matched his densities quite well however. The only photograph in the show in which he has not is "Giant Pysanka (Ukrainian Eastern Egg)..." He used to worry about such inconsistencies, but now says that, within reason, he will print it and show it anyway. Even though he shoots with TRI-X (400 ASA) and develops it in D-76, the grain in his photographs is quite small considering the size of the enlargements. As a result of this and the use of a 35mm lens for increased depth of field, his prints are quite sharp with plenty of detail visible.

The final panoramas first take shape on small 5 x 7" work prints that Robideau splices together. He apparently gets quite nervous when it's time to do the same with 16 x 20" archivally processed prints. He tries to match up at least one plane throughout the entire image. This is usually the background since foreground elements, unless they are inanimate, appear to move faster because they are closer to the lens. Because of this, it could be hard to find a reference point in the foreground of a photograph that can also be found in a subsequent frame.

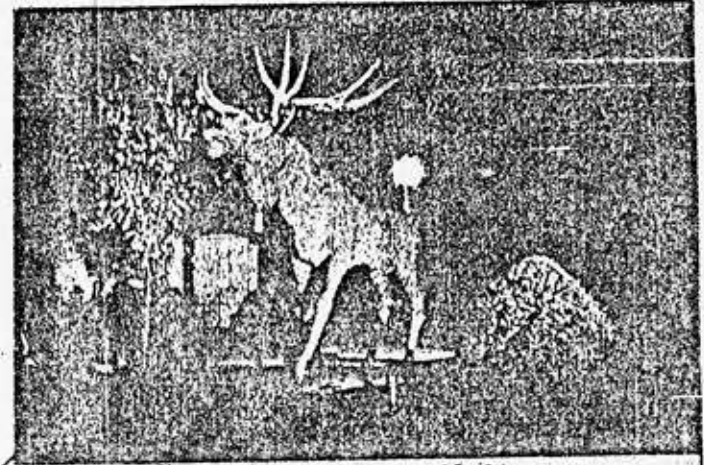
Robideau cuts the prints by placing two, one on top of the other, on a light table and checking where they match best. He rarely, if ever, cuts a straight line perpendicular to the edges of the photograph, although each line-cut is straight. Usually the cuts zigzag all over the place.

In some of the photographs, this

cut can create relationships which did not exist in either photograph before. In "Giant Crowd of 30,000 People March for Peace..." for example, in the first frame Robideau has cut just around a woman. Flush with the left edge of the second frame, Robideau included a man carrying a child. Viewed as they are, spliced together, the two people appear to be a couple, when in fact they are not. This happens again between the second and third frames where people pushing prams end up

The cost of making images this large is enormous. Robideau estimates that to archivally print, mount and then frame one panorama, could cost him anywhere from \$200 to \$400. Despite this "I would love to do them bigger than I do them now," he says. To save on costs, he intends to do them on resin-coated paper and to pin them on the walls of the gallery where he will exhibit next.

The work at Dazibao was done during several trips within Canada,



Giant Moose, Dryden, Ontario, 1982.

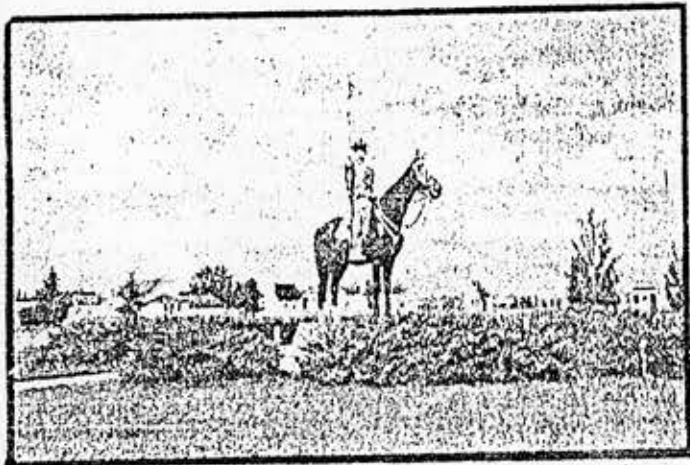
pushing other people's children in other people's prams.

This technique of making panoramas makes the photographs much more personal and subjective, as opposed to the use of single frames separately or the use of a panoramic camera. Robideau makes decisions which would never have to be made if he used one of these techniques. He has published a limited edition (1500) of eighteen postcards of single frames taken from panoramas. While they give the viewer an idea of his work and of the subjects themselves, they lose much of the freshness and uniqueness that is inherent in the way in which his panoramas are made.

the most recent being a trip by car from Vancouver to St. John, New Brunswick. On his travels, Robideau sometimes finds out the stories behind the giant objects, although he admits that "as far as my data bank goes, I'm not very scientific about it." Partly this is because he usually travels with his family, the members of whom are invariably telling him, while he is taking pictures, to "hurry up and get back in the car!"

An interesting phenomenon that Robideau has discovered is that this kind of "monumental or architectural form" is a "dying thing" in the United States. He has found that in the United States, "they're from another era, but in Canada they're still

Continued on page 10



Giant Mountie & Horse, N. Battleford, Sask., 83.



Giant Fish, Nipigon, Ontario, 1982

...BIG THINGS



Giant Nickel, Sudbury, Ontario, 1982.

Continued from page 8 building them. It's not a thriving art form—but at least they're still building them now." In Canada Robideau has found and photographed a giant nickel, a giant thermometer, a giant moose, a giant roast chicken, a giant sasquatch, a giant mutant hitchhiker—the list goes on. Unfortunately not all of his wonderful photographs of these objects are on exhibit.

Half of the photographs in the show are of these rather bizarre giant things, "Giant Jesus and the dinosaurs," and "Giant Wawa Goose," for example. The other half is made of political things, "Giant Batch of light bulbs adorn Parliament Building, Victoria, B.C. February 3, 1982. How many politicians does it take to change a light bulb? None—They're all in the dark," for example.

In a recent interview when asked to comment on the connection between these two types of work, Robideau replied that "the main part of me is a sense of humour. It's hard to actually make a jump from the

giant things to these political things. And it's also hard for me as a person with a sense of humour to get into things that are very politically rigid, like ideological things."

Robideau has photographs in the show that are not really "giant" objects. In "Giant Waste of the taxpayers' money, obsolete military hardware coming in low over the Courts of St. James shopping mall and apartment complex..." the plane is no bigger than it should normally be. Robideau uses objects of this sort to make a political statement.

Primarily this comes from a wish to document "the giant waste" for example. It also "comes from feeling," says Robideau. "Like my giant things. They come from a sense of humour which is a feeling. It's an emotional thing. The political things come from my feeling that what's being done is wrong."

Henri Robideau's PanCanadian Giant Anthropological Survey continues at Dazibao Gallery, 4060 Boul. St. Laurent, Suite 104, until October 21st.