

Vanguard, September 1982

**Lyse Lemieux**  
**open studio**

Vancouver  
June 13 to 17

The motif of the schoolroom is curiously absent in the history of the fine arts. If it has been used it is usually aligned with a political statement, such as in Victorian photographs. Lyse Lemieux's installation, entitled *Chez les Soeurs Blanches*, is based on the schoolroom but makes direct reference to her own childhood experiences and is thus a personal exploration rather than a political one.

The installation takes up the entire space of Lemieux's studio. In the middle section of the room hang twelve glass cutouts of school tunics, attached to the ceiling by fishline. Over the right breast of each of these cutouts is hung a plumbline, which is painted gold. Underneath the cutouts is spread, (in an area covering approx. 10 x 9') a green dust cleaning compound. At the end of the studio are placed three upright gyproc panels, framed with aluminum edging, and covered with graphite strokes. The floor of this section of the piece is painted a slightly different colour than the rest of the studio floor. Between the glass cutouts and the panels is placed a stool.

Lemieux has maintained a dialogue between the precise and measured and the impetus of her work (her childhood experiences). This precision withholds any sense of nostalgia, or an escape into an idealized, "child-like" vision of the past. Rather, one senses a process of self examination

discovery. There is also an absence of any written language in the piece. Lemieux has, however, made an allusion to intellectual measurement through her inclusion of the plumbline.

It is through allusion that Lemieux has avoided pure conceptualism. The work operates more on the level of contraries. Some of these contraries are precariously placed. For example, the metal plumbline is hung directly beside the fragile glass cutouts. To walk between these cutouts one would feel like the proverbial bull in a china-shop. Lemieux solved this problem by defining the cutouts' "territory" through the cleaning compound which is spread beneath it.

Another contrary found in the show is the graphite drawings on the gyproc panels. Each of these three panels has been worked and reworked with innumerable graphite sticks. The result appears very much like a blackboard, but one layered with expressionist strokes. This more loose method of expression is then opposed to the precision needed to handle the cutouts. One could also say that the layering of marks is an idealized version of the history of the blackboard, i.e. if neither the students', or the teachers' marks were erased.

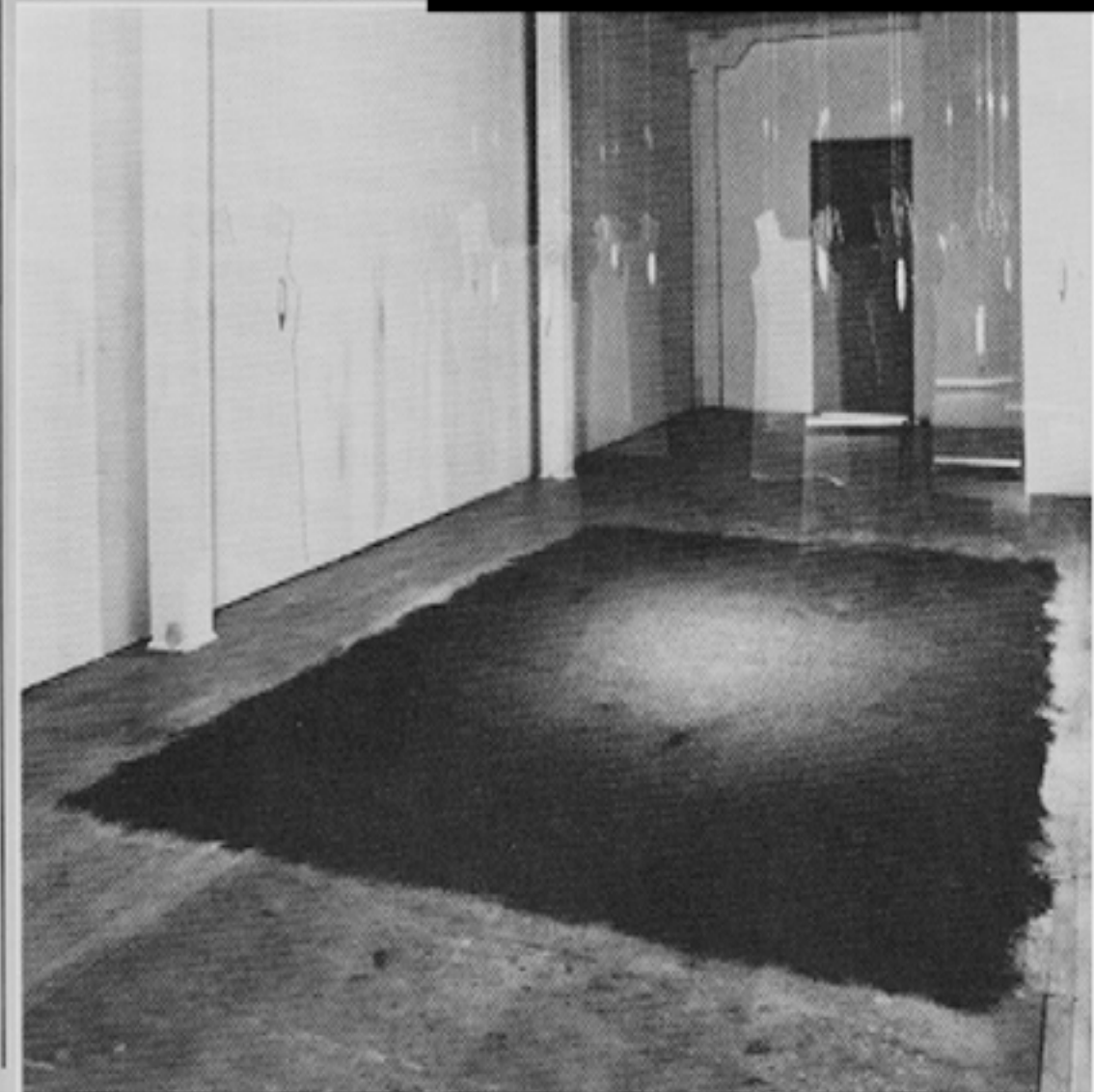
Although Lemieux has chosen the subject of the schoolroom she has not overemphasized its more formal aspects. The grid system on which the ordinary schoolroom is based is subtly indicated by Lemieux through the arrangement of the cutouts. Further, these cutouts are made of glass and are transparent, another factor which negates strict formality. The only connection between the conformity of the classroom, i.e. the identical desks set in rows, and her piece, are the stenciled cutouts of tunics. However, this element appears to be more autobiographical; her experiences of Catholic schools includes the wearing of uniforms. With this idea in mind one can see why Lemieux has not chosen to develop the use of language in the piece. Words arranged on a page are again based on a grid system, a formality which was explored by Irene Whittome in her installation *La Salle de Classe*, (Vanguard Feb., 1981).

Through this predominance of the

autobiographical, Lemieux has also avoided any direct political statement regarding the classroom. The classroom could be considered very much as a factory, which for the most part, places restrictions on the imagination. However, above the blacker aspects of the education system Lemieux has maintained a sense of humour. The best example of this is the invitations to the show which are printed on replica copies of her first grade report card.

Lemieux considers this installation as only one in a series describing her school years. The dedication and craftsmanship that were evident in this work can only make one anxious to see what Lemieux will present next.

Andrea Kunard



Review by Andrea Kunard  
Vanguard magazine, 1982