

Gallery to Visit Le Balcon d'art



Sarah Fecteau, *Horizon*, 48 x 30 Acrylic on canvas



This year Le Balcon d'art in Saint-Lambert celebrates 25 years of selling and promoting some of the best artists in Canada.

written by Debra Usher

The gallery started in 1985 in a rented space of 500 square feet, representing 25 artists. This was shortly after Bonnitta and Denis Beauchamp's children started school and Bonnitta decided to go back to work part time. However, within two months she was working full time to satisfy customer needs. The gallery now has thousands of square feet and represents over 70 artists, many of them Quebec's finest.

Bonnitta's love of art began as a young girl when she saw a reproduction of a work by Lucius O'Brien. It was love at first sight, she says. Born into a modest British Columbia household, Bonnitta slaved hard one summer to put her



money toward school expenses and a book published by the National Gallery with *Sunset on the Saguenay* by Lucius O'Brien on its cover.

A few years later young Bonnitta moved to Quebec. Once there, she again demonstrated her strong will. She arrived in Montreal without speaking French and enrolled in nursing -- in



French. A week before graduation she met her future husband Denis Beauchamp.

The early years

At the time, Denis had a few galleries and plenty of work. Bonnitta settled nicely into the milieu.

In fact, art soon became her passion, although she chose to put everything on hold while raising two daughters.

In 1985 when Bonnitta returned to the art world, she had passion, determination and a love of art on her side. Success seemed inevitable with Bonnitta's skill and the help of Denis and Multi-Art, the company he was now an agent with, which represented some of the great Quebec artists.

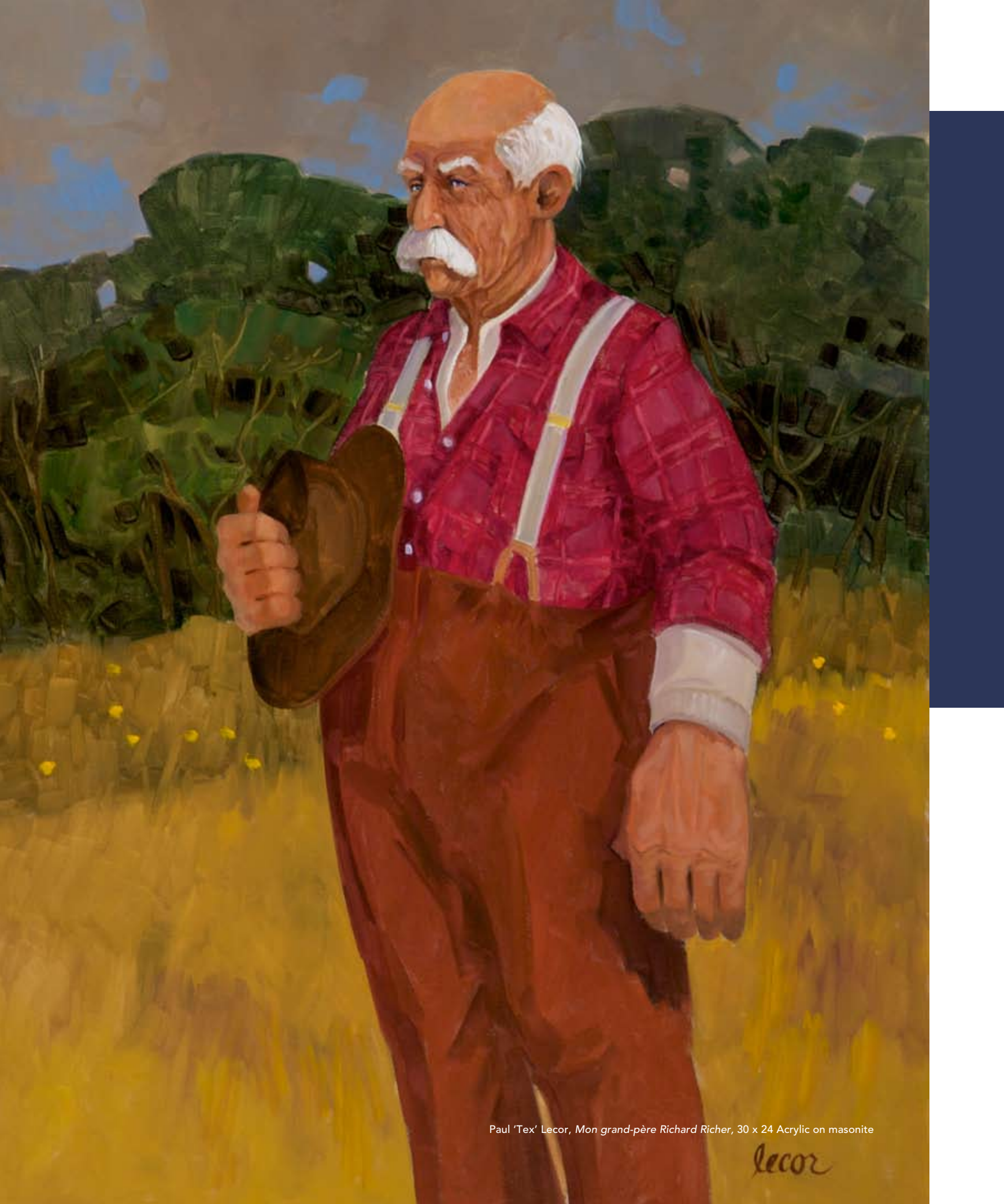
Less than a year after Bonnitta returned to work, the gallery moved to its current location to accommodate growth. In 1989 they added a three-storey addition to the existing structure. In 1999 another two-storey addition was added.

In 2008 they added yet another addition to offer a gift boutique for art supplies and art objects. With thousands of square feet for offices and gallery space they also have a full basement for frames and overstocked artist books.

Initially, the gallery displayed works from artists represented by Denis. However, over the years the agency has represented the work of



Marie-Andrée Leblond, *Boy of Summer*, 30 x 24 Mixed media on canvas



Paul 'Tex' Lecor, *Mon grand-père Richard Richer*, 30 x 24 Acrylic on masonite



Gaston Rebry, *Au coeur de l'action*, 24 x 30 Oil on canvas

dozens of Quebec artists. One third of those artists were discovered by Bonnitta and have become legends in Quebec art.

The Balcon d'Art provides ample proof that hard work pays. It now is one of the largest and most influential galleries in Montreal. It promotes Quebec artists and has been instrumental in establishing a market hold for Quebec artists in Canada and around the world.

Unusual policies

The gallery is unique in how it treats their clients.

"We have always treated our clients with the same respect and thoughtfulness as someone who is invited into our living room,"

says Bonnitta. "Our exchange policy is also unique. A painting bought in our gallery can be exchanged within 12 months if the client finds one they prefer. We offer advice and are knowledgeable in our domain. Children are welcome and encouraged to draw their own art and give their critiques." This is not the usual atmosphere found in some galleries.

The gallery keeps a children's table with crayons and colouring books. It allows the children to draw and colour while the parents look around. There are two columns near the reception desk which are usually covered with these drawings.

Elementary schools are invited to the gallery



Lise Labbé, *Les enfants du village*, 36 x 36 Oil on canvas



Marc Galipeau, *La musique au Coeur*, 30 x 30 Acrylic on canvas



Leo Ayotte, *Untitled still life 1957*, 24 x 28 Oil on canvas

three to five times a year. The gallery strives to teach the children that art is open to everyone. Many of the children return to the gallery with their parents because they loved the experience and speak to their parents about how cool it was to visit an art gallery. At this time, the children are invited to sit on the floor and draw their favourite paintings.

Vast selection of paintings

One of biggest advantages for Balcon d'art is the fact that it is located in the same building as Multi-Art and therefore has access to the large selection of paintings.

"We can simply go upstairs and then the clients are in Ali Baba's cave of treasures," says Fay. "In all, the companies have over 4.000

paintings come through their doors a year. That gives the Balcon d'Art clients a lot of choice. The other galleries which work with Multi Art Ltée need to go on their website to show the clients the paintings they have access to, but we are fortunate enough to go up a flight of stairs to show them."

No one at Balcon d'art is paid on commission so they never pressure the clients. I visited the gallery recently and can attest to the warm family atmosphere in the gallery. From the time Bonnitta's daughter Natalie Beauchamp made me my first cappuccino and started telling stories, I was hooked. The family and staff not only love art and the artists they represent but have long-term friendships with their clients. The enthusiasm of both Natalie and her sister Fay is

contagious and their knowledge of the artists they represent and the art world in general is fascinating. You find yourself wanting to buy something. I know this because I am now the custodian of some extremely beautiful works of art by two of their esteemed artists.

Unique Gallery Positioning

"A very unique aspect of the gallery is our expositions," says Fay. "We open our doors at noon and the sale of the artwork starts at 1 p.m. We never pre-sell any of the works and our clients line up for hours in advance to better their chances of getting their painting. It is not unusual to see clients show up in the middle of the night with a Thermos of coffee, a folding chair, blanket and good book. They take their place in line as a

teenager would for concert tickets, waiting for us to arrive at noon to give them their number."

Natalie, who now runs Multi-Art, tells the story of an amazing moment in 2007 for the show of André Bertounesque. Their first client had arrived at 12:00 a.m. the day before the show and waited 25 hours in front of the gallery to make sure he was first in line. Clients continued to arrive through the night and the early hours of the morning. By opening, there were well over 100 people in line. It was a magical moment when client number one was allowed into the show room to put his red dot on his chosen painting, she says. He received a huge round of applause by everyone at the gallery.

The client who waited so long to claim his painting now has a unique story along with a



André Bertounesque, *Untitled* 2003, 40 x 30 Acrylic on masonite



Claude Langevin, *Percée de lumière*, 24 x 30 Oil on canvas

great painting to share with the next generation to own the painting.

Many of the clients returned several times during the 10-day show as the chances of seeing a collection that wonderful by André Bertounesque again were unlikely as the artist had passed away September 2005 -- over a year and a half before the show.

Customer Service Focused

Another thing the gallery does which is different is that they still post invitation cards to their clients, while so many other galleries rely on less personal e-mail messages. Staff is often invited to the client's homes as guests.

The gallery's primary product is original paintings and sculptures, but it also carries limited edition prints, greeting cards, art books



Nicole Laporte, *Rang 4 -vs- rang 7*, 20 x 24 Oil on canvas



John Little, *Rue St-Christophe*, 12 x 16 Oil on Canvas

and magazines, high-end vases and glasswork, easels and much more. Personalized services include custom framing, evaluations, restoration, advice and gift registry.

Le Balcon d'art represents over 70 Quebec and Canadian artists including Normand Hudon, Léo Ayotte, Albert Rousseau, Marc-Aurèle Fortin, John Der, Marie-Andrée Leblond, Serge Brunoni, Paul 'Tex' Lecor, Martin Blanchet, Lise Lacaille, Marc Galipeau, Claude Langevin, Gaston Rebry, Serge Brunoni.

Staff includes Fay Beauchamp, Stefano DePalo, Sylvie Pérusse, Dany Pétrin, Bonnitta Beauchamp, Natalie Beauchamp, Martin Bernier and Sara Darville-Trottier,

The Beauchamp family and staff remains faithful to Bonnitta's original mission of

demystifying art. Viewers can find out about the art on display and often meet the artist at the gallery. The staff encourages ownership through deferred payment programs.

The future looks very good for Le Balcon d'art with daughter Fay now running the gallery and daughter Natalie at the helm of Multi-Art.

"Fay has implemented new technology but has kept the personal touch that made Le Balcon d'art so special," says Bonnitta. "We plan to continue doing what we have done but in a more modern way without jeopardizing the quality of service."

You can visit Le Balcon d'art at 650, rue Notre-Dame, Saint-Lambert, Quebec, Canada or telephone 450.466.8920 or go to www.balcondart.com.



Gilles Labranche, *Rue St-Paul, Vieux Québec*, 28 x 22 Acrylic on canvas