

GILLES BÉDARD

FOREWORD

There are many artistic approaches by way of which an artist may express himself in a very personal manner and thus convey not only his milieu but also and mainly his epoch. The Charlevoix region has certainly contributed to the emancipation of the art of Québécois and Canadian landscape painting. Region of exceptional beauty and unequalled luminescence, Charlevoix offers painters inspiration tied to the bucolic scenery where the duality of nature and culture are in perfect harmony.

In fact it is from the second half of the eighteenth century to the first half of the nineteenth that artists began to show an interest in Charlevoix as a place of predilection for their painting. Expeditionary corps and explorers, a few members of the Military school have left us water colours and engravings of topographical works of high quality, which one can still admire these days at the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa as well as in the majority of the great Canadian museums.

In their footsteps have come a goodly number of artists from all regions and of all tendencies. However, landscape painting is not yet widely practiced, for in the middle of the nineteenth century, portraiture is most prized by the era's bourgeoisie. Notwithstanding this, many painters, some minor, are tempted by the Charlevoix region and by 1950-51, following the population expansion and better transportation, we see landscape painting come into its own.

Apart from many artists just passing by, the first to veritably open the road to Baie-Saint-Paul to future generations of artists is Clarence Gagnon, who, since 1903, discovered Charlevoix region. Contemporary to the Group of Seven, which themselves made a few stops in Charlevoix country, Clarence Gagnon has left us a grandiose oeuvre composed of sketches and paintings of the region. Then came from Switzerland René Richard who for more than forty years made his home in Baie-Saint-Paul. His life work, both from the point of view of the quality and of the quantity, has without doubt contributed to the continuing and very much living artistic tradition of his adopted home. Marc-Aurèle Fortin followed in the forties and certainly influenced a good number of his contemporaries.

The marked presence of the above gave birth to a whole generation of artists who, even today, distinguish themselves and make of Baie-Saint-Paul a place of welcome for art lovers and collectors who find, of course figurative works but which by their quality have their place in the ever expanding array of contemporary tendencies.

These historical facts oblige us to consider with respect and admiration the career of an artist deeply rooted and yet so modern in his pictorial approach.

Gilles Bédard inscribes himself in this long line of artists who have been charmed by the beauties of this region where valleys and mountains meld into the majestic Saint-Lawrence River. Through the work of this uncommon artist let yourself be guided in this wonderful world of warmth and colour.

THE ARTIST AND HIS ORIGINE

Gilles Bédard was born in 1954 in Charlesbourg, a suburb of Québec City. The second of seven children born the family he very early manifests a marked interest for drawing. Already at seven or eight years of age, Gilles prefers drawing his surroundings rather than listening to his teachers. He is a young dreamer and finds it almost impossible to concentrate on his schoolwork; he dreams of escape and finds his release and pleasure in drawing.

On the whole Gilles' childhood is a happy one, and despite the family's precarious financial situation, his needs are easily satisfied. Nothing pleases him more than a new drawing pad and brand new pastel crayons. His gather also loves to draw and constantly sketches caricatures of his wife and children that feed Gilles' curiosity and augment his passion for art.

However, his mother is the one who is most encouraging. One day Gilles had drawn the picture of a moose that adorned his pillowcase. His mother was so astonished and amazed by this nascent talent that she at once decided to encourage and support him as best she could, feeling instinctively, then and there that her son had a calling. And so, further bolstered by the praise for his drawings elicited by one of his uncles, who worked for Radio-Canada, after he had shown the boy's work to some colleagues, art became his sole reason for living.

From the child marveling before nature's beauty, Gilles had kept the simplicity and naivety so characteristic of childhood. Dawn slowly revealing its harmonious colours, an exquisite flower, the branch of a tree or yet again, a hazy mist on the horizon still astonish him. For Gilles finds pleasure, to say it mildly, in painting, Painting procures him not only pleasure but is a vital need and an irresistible force to which he happily succumbs.

THE ARTIST IN PROGRESS

As a young man Gilles opts for a career with the Canadian Coast Guard. The icebergs of the great north dazzle him with their brilliance and their limpid luminescence. He is filled with passion and marveled by the transparency and the tints of the blues and the greens of these grandiose spaces. Discovering the grandeur and the profoundness of the Arctic, he sees for the first time the effect of the midnight sun and its light reflected on the ice.

After four years at sea Gilles is more than ever driven by the need to paint. In search of the great spaces that so affected him in the far north he will find them during a trip to Charlevoix. He is twenty-eight years old. Even though the young artist was then painting portraits, it is during this voyage that his taste and fascination for landscape painting takes form.

However the first years of living in Charlevoix prove to be very difficult. In that time gallery owners were reticent to expose young artists. Nevertheless Gilles does not admit defeat and opens a gallery in Baie-Saint-Paul in collaboration with a gallery owner. Unfortunately an other setback hit him. He had to start form zero and decided to return to Montreal. At that time he worked mainly with pastels, a medium which he liked for its soft colours. His very first showing moreover was composed of works in pastels and was held at the Auberge des Gouverneurs in Québec City in 1984.

In Montréal, Gilles had a small studio and gave painting lessons until an old friend and former student called. Founder of the Atelier Raphaël situated on St-Paul street in Montréal, Jocelyne Lapointe had had the idea, in 1990, of regrouping artists who often worked together. She invited Gilles to join them. This was the beginning for him of a great adventure which lasted for five years and during which he explored many artistic tendencies. The urban scenes, the nudes and especially abstract painting fascinated him. The artist was moved by a sentiment of a great freedom while practicing abstraction and he continued for more than a year.

Nevertheless and despite the fact that he adored this experience, working in a studio in the company of other artists and open to the public was starting to wear on him. He felt the need to be alone and face to face with his canvas. Moreover he owed it to himself to make a choice : abstraction or figuration? He could not continue doing both at the same time. The call to the figurative will finally win and despite the success quietude of the countryside and the beauty of nature. He knew that only the Charlevoix region that he so loved would fill this need. Since then, he has become conscious of the privileged relationship he has with nature when he paints the landscape. The stress of the city is now a thing of the past. His painting is changing; his colours are more and more vivid and luminous. The happiness he feels is perceptible in his work, his painting will now evolve in the way that he has always wanted it to go. His frequent leave taking of Charlevoix has in a sense been very beneficial because this has allowed him to confirm what he cherishes the most as a life style and as an art form.

In his present work, having reached maturity, the duality between the abstractive and the figurative forms which so tears Québec art apart, has certainly left its mark. We perceive these in the modern art of landscape painting and Gilles Bédard is without doubt a figurative painter of his time.

THE TECHNIQUE

Gilles has tried many mediums, pastels of course but also oil, which he will adopt after arriving in Charlevoix. In effect, the particular pigmentation of oil and the greater possibility of mixing tints will dictate the use of this medium by the artist for approximately ten years. Only after repeated request by art gallery owners will he switch to acrylic paint. Drying far more rapidly acrylic became more practical especially for transportation of the works to the galleries. In addition, this medium gave him the possibility of applying superimpositions of colours much more easily than with oil.

Self-taught, seduced by different bents that, now harmonise, now clash, it is through years of relentless work that Gilles has elaborated a very personal technique in his style which renders his oeuvre most interesting. In addition to a dazzling palette of colours of an unparalleled purity, Gilles "greens" are extraordinary and are recognized by the artistic milieu to be of unequalled beauty. His greens emerge from the light of the morning. It is in effect at the break of day that Gilles takes advantage of the multiple variety of the tints of green. For him this is the best time of day to discover the most lovely and most varied of tints and it is also the moment when the light makes them best come out.

He works with a succession of colours literally throwing masses of them onto the canvas, starting with dark tints and proceeding to very pale ones, which gives his work a quality of relief quite out of

superimposed in order to make stand out the principal subjects which will be much paler than the background. In order to capture the most beautiful tints, Gilles sketches outdoors and finishes the working his studio. However it is in a very spontaneous manner that he will capture a scene that moves him. In short, Gilles' pictorial treatments is natural and spontaneous and light in all its forms is omnipresent and wraps us in its warmth.

THE STYLE

To look upon a Gilles Bédard painting is to admire a unique work of art that resembles no other. Though working in a solitary fashion, Gilles has certainly been influenced, among others, by the work of the Group of Seven but particularly by the Marac-Aurèle Fortin's oeuvre. But beyond this homage to the latter which may often be perceived in the great trees place to the left in the majority of Gilles' paintings, it remains a fact that the work of this artist of luminosity is distinguished by his singular rendering of the Québécois landscape. It is by the gradual elimination of these influences and not conversely, that Gilles has achieved a style of his own.

Gilles Bédard's paintings vibrate with joie de vivre. Dazzling, they speak of bliss. The pleasure that Gilles feels when he paints is perfectly reflected in his work. The hospitable homes are melodious and radiate a feeling of warmth and contentment. Great majestic and proud-like trees frame the landscapes as if to protect the so fragile nature. The calm and serenity radiated by the often-present sheep are a reflection of the artist's personality. The full force of the work of Gilles Bédard may be perceived in the luminous play of light and changing moods.

Bédard's work, having achieved maturity, has become a rare example of luminescence.

THE MAN IN THE ARTIST

In his forty-fifth year, Gilles is an accomplished artist and yet he still retains the innocence of the child, which makes of him such a charming person. Full of passion for everything he does, he gives his all to this work. He loves people and they in turn hold him dear.

For Gilles, participating in a public event is an excellent occasion to meet folks and discuss his art with them. He never hesitates in adding a kind word while signing his paintings... Anything to please.

Gilles' personality may be described as being sincere, whole, devoted and without artifice. Strong of character, Gilles is not one to abandon his principles all the while remaining full of respect for the work of his colleagues and their style and especially the respect of those who appreciate his work is what he holds most dear. He considers that if an artist desires durability he owes it to himself to show respect towards those who support him and allow him to live as agreeably from his art.

Gilles loves life and bites into it. He profits from every moment and savours each instant as if it were the last. When he is outdoors and is painting, Gilles is like a child : it's a celebration and nature soothes what ails him.

Gilles says of life : “Life is a game and work is likewise. Every day is a party... an unending party. It’s like a painting : A canvas is never final.” And for Gilles Bédard art is more than ever a way of life and being, a way of thriving in the game of life.

Sylviane Pilote in collaboration with Jean-Baptiste Bouchard, translated by Robert Marion

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