

TOWNSHIPS WEEK

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An impersonator? Satirist? Cartoonist? Painter?

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Normand Hudon : Unconventionnal artist but not totally eccentric

By Catherine Cheng

Normand Hudon was sketching paintings at the Louvre museum in Paris when a man invited him over for dinner to meet Pablo Picasso.

The Picasso.

"I wore my best suit. I had bought it with the quarters I earned while working as a deck steward in Richelieu. We were about a dozen, and I spotted a small, bald man (then 71) wearing a dirty raincoat."

"I don't like Canada very much," Picasso said to Hudon when Mr. Taillendiel, secretary of The Friends of the Arts of France, introduced them. They conversed at the table and when Picasso left, he told Hudon, "Now that I know you, I like Canada much more."

"Picasso is my idol. He surely is the greatest painter in the world. He revolutionized modern art," said Hudon.

"When you're 20, you want action to take place. You want to change the world."

Hudon, however, didn't wait until he was 20 before hustling things around him.

TEASER

"I had a teacher who had a crew cut and looked like a rat so during our breaks, five minutes before our class began, I would draw a caricature of his head and a rat's tail. The students laughed and when my teacher walked in, he immediately pointed a finger at me and said, 'Hudon, out!' I didn't mind having a detention because I hated maths."

At home, he was quite a teaser too. His parents made wine, and Hudon tricked them by pouring milk into a gallon of wine.

"My mom would punish me by preventing me from drawing, for about an hour — not a severe punishment. She never struck me."

His parents were worried about him, though. His brother was a straight A student but Hudon wasn't. He never ranked first in his class.

Hudon's mom, who was a religious Huron Indian woman,

wanted him to become a priest. But he already had his mind made up; he wanted to live off his drawings.

Normand Hudon began doodling at the age of three, and at four or five, he was already telling his relatives in Montreal he wanted to become a *dessineur* (instead of *dessinateur* which is the correct word for cartoonist).

After failing to complete his classical training with the J suit brothers, he joined the * cole des Beaux Arts de Montr al* and was immediately placed in second year.

Shortly after, he continued his studies at Montmartre Academy under the teachings of Fernand L ger, and came back to Montreal the following year.

Since Hudon alone developed unique skills as a cartoonist and found out he could easily imitate famous personalities, he decided to open his own night club *L'Ardoise*, located near McGill University.

Twice a week he invited various artists, musicians, singers to perform at his club. Hudon would also invite guests, including Maurice Duplessis, Camilien Houde, Maurice Richard, and Gratien G linas. He would imitate them and sketch them before his audience.

Soon after, Hudon entered the world of show business. He improvised much of the work

he did while on 'the Steve Allen Show,' a midnight show — the most popular show before 'the Johnny Carson show' — and while animating the CBC television show *Le petit caf * with Dominique Michel and Pierre Tremblay, Hudon recalls.

He says he improvised in imitating his subjects, sketched, and told jokes. He enjoyed entertaining. He would sometimes ask individuals to draw a line on his board and from it, he would draw something,

anything.

TALENTED

"I've never seen anyone before me nor anyone after me do what I did. I'm not a genius, I'm just talented," said Hudon.

He doesn't know where the talent comes from, since none of his immediate family nor relatives have similar artistic abilities.

Throughout the years, Hudon sketched many celebrities including Marilyn Monroe, Liberace, Zaza Gabor.

While in New York, Hudon was even invited by the famous surrealist painter Salvador Dali to produce an eight-minute video with him.

"Dali sat with a panther on his lap and hands on his cane, and didn't blink throughout the whole filming act. I started off by drawing a fleur de lys because his nose and mustache are shaped like one, and after I finished sketching him, he threw the panther at the camera. It was shown by CBC three times," Hudon said.

"I'm almost as crazy as him. You've got to be, when you're doing this type of work."

Hudon later worked as a cartoonist for *Le Devoir* and *La Presse*. He published seven books, illustrated 20 others, and switched over to painting 20 years ago. Two more of his books will soon be published.

His sense of humour is apparent in his paintings and books. He always manages to make his characters look comical.

"I'm the same guy today at 62 as I was when I was six — a teaser, always a teaser."

"There are so many ugly things in this world, I just try to create beauty."

