

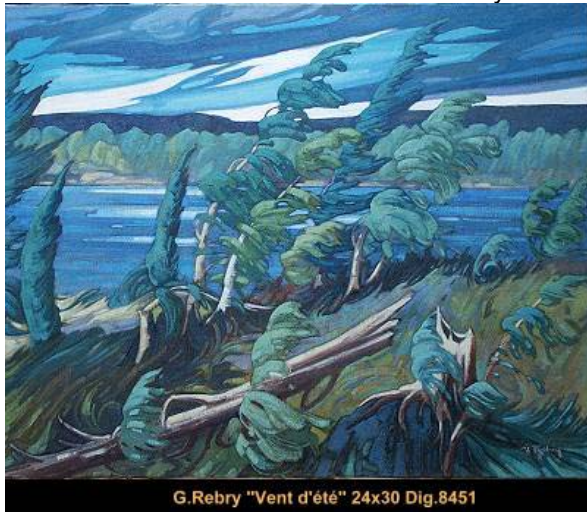
## Gaston Rebry

Total commitment to nature

While Québec has become a secular society in recent decades, you might sometimes think the opposite. Céline Dion's career took off after she sang for the Pope at Jarry Park, Lucien Bouchard paid a memorable visit to the Vatican soon after resigning as Premier, and Gaston Rebry's media kit features a photo of His Holiness Jean Paul II admiring one of his paintings, presented as a gift by none other than Jean Chretien.

Rebry's talent is well-affirmed in the arts community, as exemplified by his participation with Québec's Institut des Arts figuratifs. Definitely a nature painter, Rebry "Loves nature, lives in nature and paints nature".

Saint-Elie de Claxton, near Shawinigan (where he's been living for several years), is a long way from Wevelgem, near Kortrijk (Courterai) in West Flanders, Belgium. The flatlands of Flanders, its grey weather and low clouds, aren't at all like the four seasons of Québec, in the heart of the Mauricie. This native Belgian, now a well-entrenched Canadian, came here when his sister, already in Canada, invited him in 1953 after the death of their father. Becoming a full-time painter was likely one of the farthest things from his mind. He was 20 years old, had left school at the age of 14, was a graduate in drawing from the Académie de Menin and an ardent cyclist.



His early work career included jobs ranging from tree-cutting at Lac Saint-Jean to harvesting tobacco in Ontario and then travelling all over Québec with a car-trailer selling porcelain knick-knacks. He'd stop and paint amid his own bazaars, selling his first paintings to furniture dealers. Ten years later he began painting full-time.

His style evolved, from people and urban scenes to painting trees, forests, rivers, mountains and sky. Gaston Rebry paints in his studio because he doesn't like to paint outdoors, with all that snow, rain, wind and mosquitoes! He loves nature though, and does his sketches outdoors, then brings the creative act

indoors. "A painting must be made with respect for the person who will buy it." He says. His paintings depict nature before the arrival of the first Europeans, even before the aboriginals. A pure, clean, vegetal nature, a paradise where sky, water and forest reign.

Water is the central theme, with every lake being different. Each tree or mountain is unique. Observe changes in Rebry's style in recent years, with faster brush strokes, and more stylized forms. From memory he can paint landscapes he has seen several days earlier, reworking, adding, completing a scene, preferring fall and winter scenes to summer's uniform greenness.

He is mainly influenced by the impressionists: the *Group of Seven*, Tom Thomson, Marc-Aurèle Fortin, Léo Ayotte, and others. Today Rebry's works are in some of the country's largest corporate collections, and in many galleries in Québec, Ontario, the Prairies and western Canada, with some 20 individual exhibitions to his credit. In an interview published a few years ago in a daily newspaper of Trois-Rivières, Gaston Rebry said "I love to paint and I'm happy to have done so for some 20 years. I hope to keep good eyes and arms to continue paintings till I'm 90. That would make me happy."

