

CANADIAN ART, ARCHITECTURE & DESIGN

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Artist to Collect

Serge Brunoni







above, *J'Ai Vu*, oil on canvas, 30" x 36"
previous page, *Montreal, Sherbrooke Ouest*, oil on canvas, 40" x 60"

right, *Another Time*, oil on canvas, 48 x 36

Calm in the Eye of a Storm

"Art is a hurricane that seeks to break you.
A great artist must know how to bend."

- Serge Brunoni

written by Debra Usher

Serge Brunoni is an artist who dares to surprise or disturb us with his persistence, his fixation even, on a subject or style he pursues with a passion that is never satisfied but remains in a state of perpetual evolution. That is an artist to be watched and it is in this light we find the art of Serge Brunoni.

Brunoni's style is rich and clear. He is forever pushing his use of colour and line to the max, exploring all the possibilities. It is obvious that this is part and parcel of the artist's honesty and simplicity.

He describes himself as having little interest in any grand theory of art or becoming a perfect

technical painter. "Truth in art, if there is such a thing," says Serge, "can only be approached through spontaneity and creativity, along with a solid dose of modesty. I want to explain who I am and how I am, by creating a work of art and sharing its meaning with those who view it. This is an operation that I hope will be beneficial in so far as all communication is mutually enriching."

This Quebec artist always keeps a mental suitcase packed and ready to go; at any time he can happily put up his easel and create the work we have come to know and love him for. At once simple, clean, muted and colourful - and always, always crisp and brilliant.

Serge's appeal comes from his warmth and clarity of purpose, perhaps not a philosopher in the strictest sense of the word, but nevertheless endowed with the palpable sense of harmony and sensibility that characterizes happy people - and creates artists who invariably leave their mark on the world.





Quebec, Rue Ste-Anne, oil on canvas, 20" x 24"

The Beginning

Serge Brunoni was born in Ligny-en-Barrois, France in 1938. At the age of four, he lost his mother and went to live with his grandparents. "I loved my grandparents and this period was among the happiest of my life," he says. "I was raised in a small town of five thousand inhabitants where all the children knew one another. Of course, at that time Lorraine was occupied by the Germans, but a child does not see the hardships and restrictions entailed by the war."

Like all children, Brunoni went to school. "In France, we went to kindergarten at the age of three years. School was rarely fun for me, so I did not put a lot of energy into it! Because I've always loved freedom, I preferred to play in the woods." In school, there was one thing young Serge did like, however. "I spent a great deal of time

drawing. By fourteen years, when I left school, I had made thousands of drawings."

At fourteen, he was off to work in the local factory. "My grandparents had become older, so I then had to work to meet our needs. I committed to one factory, then another and another ... until the military called me."

His dreams were answered in the army. He was posted to Frejus in the south of France where he spent six months before embarking from Marseilles en route to Africa – Brazzaville in what was then French Equatorial Africa. The Lorraine region is reputed to produce fine soldiers. Even as the army met his expectations, so did he meet theirs.

He was reluctant to leave, but his desire for the freedom to pursue further adventures led him to be demobilized in Africa. He was soon hired by The African Society for Topographical Studies and



Cité D'Hiver, oil on canvas, 20" x 24"

Works, then in the process of building a railroad. The Society sent him thousands of kilometres into the jungle. There, in deepest Africa, he was ecstatic to discover the truth and beauty of a country and people that seemed to have emerged straight from the Garden of Eden.

What a joy, what a gift from heaven to experience life in its purest form. For a year and a half he lived what he describes as a "paradisiacal life". After three years in Africa, he returned to France for a holiday. On the eve of his return to the Congo, he was informed that the Society would no longer be working in that country.

Returned to his native Lorraine, Serge took care of his grandmother until she died. After that, boredom set in and with no real job, he went in search of a new challenge. Having experienced the great outdoors in the Congo, Brunoni found Europe too

"narrow," so on August 8, 1963, at the age of 25, he crossed the Atlantic to begin a fresh start in Canada.

He arrived in Montreal with a heart full of hope and five dollars in his pocket. Disappointment awaited. This city was too big, he did not feel at ease! So, he boarded a bus to Trois-Rivières where he lives today. He still talks about Africa. "I've never felt so safe as I did in the jungle," he says. For Serge, that time is filled with wonderful memories.

Canada intrigued him with its different customs and unconditional love for hockey. In 1967, he married a young beauty, Suzette Normandine, and they had two children, Hugh and Nicolas. On Christmas day 1969, Suzette gifted Brunoni a wooden box containing paint tubes and brushes. He painted his first picture in 1970, and in 1972 began painting full-time. Serge Brunoni had finally found his path.



S. BRUNOVI





previous page, *D'Une Ruelle À L'Autre*, oil on canvas, 40" x 60"

Sur La Rivière Glacée, oil on canvas, 30" x 40"

On the Road to Success

Early in 1982, Serge exhibited thirty paintings at the Cultural Center of Drummondville, Quebec, exploring the train-related theme of arrivals and departures and drawing on nostalgia for the bygone era of steam locomotives.

Not only did Brunoni face a unique theme challenge, but the shades of grey he chose to express himself with were not the easiest to handle. Yet, he managed through his talent to create a group of really interesting paintings. Light ochre is very important for the horizons that are so crucial to his theme... the departures and arrivals of trains, and of course, the crowded station platforms.

At the suggestion of friends, the painter contacted the public relations department of Via Rail and once the exhibition was over, he received an invitation to come to Montreal with his paintings. He carried with him the thirty paintings in his series "We always take a train to somewhere ...". Nine of these were retained by Via Rail's Montreal office.

"It was almost an adventure and an exhibition at the same time," Serge describes. "The paintings have been exhibited in a large conference room, which the staff has to pass through in the morning." The purchase by Via Rail was a milestone in his career.

Grand Prize Winner

In 1989, the Grand Prize winner of the Québec Summer Festival in Trois-Rivières was painter Serge Brunoni. He presented his recent works in the exhibition hall of the Caisse populaire Sainte Famille, Cap-de-la-Madeleine. These paintings were divided into two groups.

The first set features dark landscapes or still lifes in pastels, with soft and neat touches. In this series, there are also people, treated in a manner sometimes reminiscent of Modigliani. The works are solid in construction with good balance of colour. Brunoni draws with a hint of audacity that depicts his subjects in an original way.



Montreal, Sherbrooke Quest, oil on canvas, 30" x 40"

The second series is made in an entirely different spirit. These are still-lives made with great blows of a broad brush. The colour is bright and violent, his spectacular effects making them even more dramatic.

It was a remarkable exhibition by Serge Brunoni, who had begun to assert himself as one of Quebec's most successful artists. After his thematic exhibitions, entitled "A Country's Life" and "We always take a train to somewhere ..." the painter walked away with huge success and a transitioning style. He then developed a new pictorial vision, a style less slick and more spontaneous, where the accumulation of brush strokes and stains somehow ended up forming a "picture."

New Direction

Serge Brunoni was headed in a new direction, as seen in his "From One Winter to the Next", a group of some 25 paintings exploring the winter season with a rare happiness. "Back to

the Village", "Refuge", "Lumberjacks", "Road", "Chilly Morning", "Back Hunting", "The Sledge", "Traveler", "Fetching Water", "For the Pleasure": each of these works are comments on winter by the painter, always with the same control over his materials and the subjects he develops.

Yet, still, Brunoni worked in a register of reduced, muted tones. His affection for grey cannot be denied, with a little black and brown here and there, and sometimes a horizon with a shade of pink that glows quietly or the orange flame of a wood fire soberly illuminating his canvas. Discreet and sober are two words that bring us back in thought to Brunoni's "trains." Here again in the winter series, Serge demonstrates a remarkable sobriety. Yet his paintings do not lack lustre – far from it.

There has always been a difficulty in classifying exactly what he is...a figurative painter? Yes. But Brunoni transfigures and stylizes reality, sometimes akin to sketching, particularly in his characters. But



Dialogue, Québec Pl. D'Armes, oil on canvas, 48" x 48"



Montréal, L'Hiver, oil on canvas, 24" x 30"

nothing important is omitted, everything is there – soul and more.

Brunoni's new pictorial writing first developed in his "Trains ..." series. He began working with broad strokes, drawing inspiration from old engravings, but at the same time allowing his imagination free rein. They were essentially figurative paintings without unnecessary details, though the subject is often outlined and perfectly realistic. And, though Brunoni still favoured shades of grey, it should be noted that here he began giving his canvases joy with colour, using copious yellow and green as had not been the case for a long time.

Not only was Serge Brunoni talented, but he also developed a flair for exhibition and continued to interest the public with the quality and themes exploited in his work.

The Country and the Seaport

Brunoni's "living country" is first a country to explore, discover and conquer. He leads us into the forest in the company of pioneers, as we backpack, canoe down rivers and over waterfalls, and sit under tents. Brunoni's characters move throughout a nature the artist has captured in

shades of green and blue-grey.

Known for an ever-renewing style, the artist gives his works heart using acrylics on paper and canvas and colours he had previously neglected in favour of greys, browns and blacks.

Probably inspired by the anniversary celebrations of Trois-Rivières, Brunoni took a look at that side of life and the result is presented in twenty paintings. The seaport is only part of the exhibition, the rest being devoted to Old Trois-Rivières. It also contains representation of St. Joseph's Seminary, another heritage element of the historic city. Worked in flat acrylics, the canvases are still dominated by grey and white with brown introduced here and there. Sometimes just a hint of colour.

What is unusual, however, are the new angles by which the painter shows us our old heritage buildings. Obviously, the artist did not fail to represent the Ursuline Convent, Tonnancour Manor, or St. James Church, but he shows them to us from new perspectives. This is not spectacular in itself, but they have the merit of being startling and new compared to what we usually see.

Obviously, Brunoni was working in the figurative



above, *Noël Au Camp*, oil on canvas, 24" x 30"

right, *Le Temps De Dire*, oil on canvas, 30" x 24"

mode, but the perfect fidelity to nature is absent. He operates with a method and carefully selected topics that suit his talent, and in which the public always finds pleasure. Those looking at the work of Old Three Rivers will discover works that are familiar, but with the addition of a few shades to the typical Brunoni palette.

We find the same phenomenon in his landscapes, which are either straight out of his imagination or drawn from nature, as in the "View of Saint-Maurice".

The Adventure of Life

The creations of Serge Brunoni are both nostalgic and friendly. "I believe in communication," he says. "Just being out among the world itself is a joy, and that is enough for me. My paintings reflect very simply and sincerely the adventure of life."

As far back as he can remember, he liked to draw and admits he has always pursued one goal: to please. Brunoni was never taught to paint, he avoided teachers and schools. Instead, he did his apprenticeship studying the work of other artists and painting on his own. From one painting to the next, a professional artist emerged, giving priority

to his vision and imaginative interpretations to translate scenes before his eyes.

Over the years, Brunoni has earned an increasingly large audience of fans both in Canada and abroad. Despite being a figurative painter, Brunoni's paintings are not technical reproductions. Unlike photographic documents, they are an interpretive communication using shapes and colours to convey the impression of appearances. For this reason, many reviewers have highlighted the instinctive side of his approach and argue that he belongs among the Impressionist movement.

Brunoni's paintings produce a sensation of suspended time. In addition to the picturesque places portrayed, the viewer is invited to feel the movements that have been halted and to gaze closely at characters crossing the street, or walking like flags of light that sway in the wind.

"What I seek to do is evoke an emotion and express a time. In a way, my paintings are like trains, which take viewers on a journey somewhere. I'm just the ticket seller," says Brunoni.

The crowds, the animation of a neighbourhood, this is certainly what attracts Brunoni to scenes of



S. BRUNONI



Marchel, oil on canvas, 20" x 24"

Quebec. The story is always present in the patina, fusing present and past together with spots of colour to animate the scenes. The buildings are not incidental but rather elements that support different levels of the composition.

The work "Porte Saint-Jean" for instance, is engulfed in human animation enhanced by a wide variety of colours and the presence of massive houses lining the street. Quebec's distant military past is shown as part of the daily activity of passers-by.

"Saint-Louis Gate" reminds us of the uniqueness of the 'Old Capital'. In this scene, the houses clamped against one another give an intense vision of Quebec City life. The work speaks of carefree people walking in the streets of Lower Town. Brunoni's paintings serve as true socio-historical documents of our time.





Droit Au Nord, oil on canvas, 30" x 40"



Traditional Canadian Activities

Brunoni has always liked to paint traditional Quebecois activities. Scenes of hunting, trappers and dog sledding inspire him. "For a European, open spaces and the lifestyle of pioneers is just fascinating," he said. Today, it is mainly the streets of Montreal and Quebec that occupy his attention. These streets he represents are always teeming with life.

Hockey also tickles the imagination of the painter. "I'm a big hockey fan, it is natural that I allow myself to paint our national sport." Unlike artists who've chosen to represent street hockey, Brunoni has painted professional hockey. "The atmosphere and action at Canadiens games is a source of inspiration that I could not ignore. I paint what inspires me and a Canadiens game inspires me!"



Lac Des Piles, Mauricie, oil on canvas, 20" x 24"

For more than 40 years, Serge Brunoni has painted the people and places of Montreal. Born in the Lorraine region of France in 1938, his passion for colour began with a set of crayons he used as a child. Since then, Serge has become one of the most sought-after painters in Canada. Celebrated for a bold impressionist style, he captures the movement, poetry and vitality of the urban setting. Serge continues to live and work in Trois-Rivières.

Three major themes can be found in his work: man within the isolation of nature, the city, and railway stations. He paints a story around each of these themes and they complement one another. The city provides a stable, populous environment; the woods a return to self, freedom and appreciation of time; the train a link between the two. The train also evokes the traveler in us all, especially within Serge, who always keeps a train

ready to head somewhere, like a dream machine.

He paints by instinct, each image built around an element he wishes to represent, a starting point from which the rest is created while he is painting. Simplicity is vital to his technique, inspired by that of Cosgrove and especially, Matisse. Completely lucid in his style, Brunoni pushes his colours and lines to the maximum, exploring all the possibilities.

"Nature is made to be the complement of the human beings. I paint people in their activities, I love to communicate through them." The father of two boys, Brunoni has a backyard workshop, paints regularly and enjoys fishing, his favourite sport. "Going fishing, for me, is an essential need. That is the way to enjoy nature."

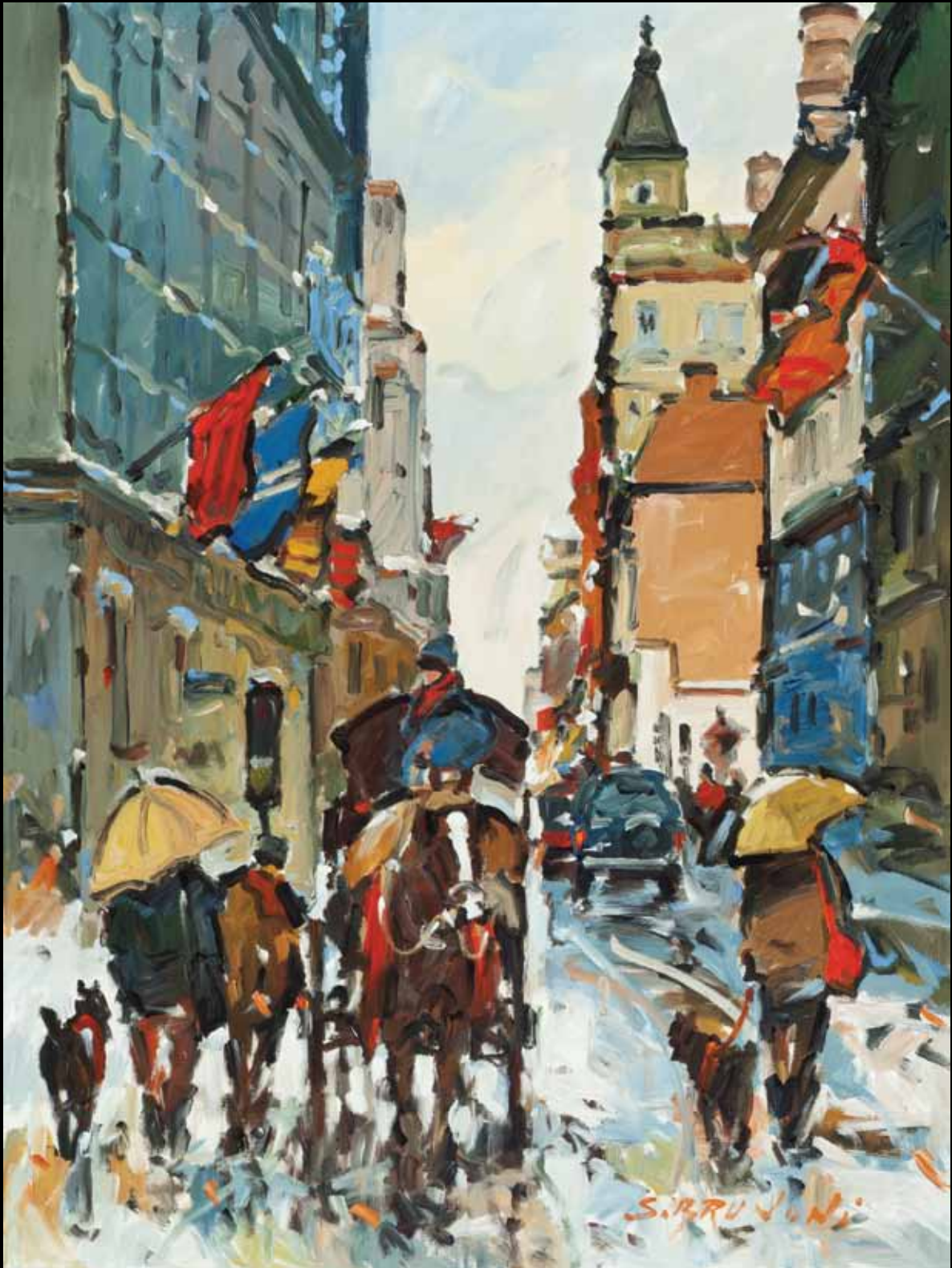
Discover more of the artistic brilliance of Serge Brunoni at www.balcondart.com or www.multi-art.net as well as a list of all his galleries.



Cap À l'Est, oil on canvas, 30" x 26"



SERGE BRUNONI



Serge Brunoni

"Montréal, Rue Notre-Dame Est"

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