

Lise Labbé

« It`s a small world after all »

Can you keep a secret? You have probably seen this artist's work before without knowing who created those cute faces. You have probably passed by this artist's residence cum studio in the Laurentians countless times. Well, the truth is that Lise Labbé lives and works in a magnificent spot where the river takes a deep breath and lazily mirrors the sun. The location inspires tranquility, and the home, warm and welcoming, reflects the owner's personality.

A self taught artist, Lise Labbé has 30 years of experience. She certainly remembers starting out in a genre that few painters dare to attempt: painting children, their activities, as well as their innocence, joy and sorrow.

Not surprisingly Lise admits to scribbling and doodling in her school notebooks. She enjoyed her childhood in the Rosemont countryside during the forties and fifties. When in primary school, teachers sought out little Lise to decorate the classroom with her art work for Christmas or Easter. As a youngster and teen, she also created greeting cards for various groups. It seems her future career was clear already at an early age.

Lise Labbé experimented with various genres. Portraiture and still-life, before giving in to her love of children and their special universe. Even though she has only one child, a son, her house was always full of his friends. The gang loved coming to play and eat cake while telling her their little secrets. The palpable honour and tenderness in Labbé's paintings stems from her careful observation of youngster's innermost feelings; otherwise, the faithful representation of children's gestures and attitudes would be impossible.

The dusky skies in a painting of a hockey match catch the viewer's eye while the funny boy-hating girls in *Not Them!* Provoke a grin or two. Upon looking at the youngsters in *Not Them!* The viewer is not sure whether a fight will break out or an innocent crush is about to bloom. Equally endearing is the dance lesson in which the new girl has her leg high up on the ballet bar. The titles says it all: *Who is she?* This newcomer will upset their little world. Will she be a rival or a friend?

Lise Labbé's paintings are like snapshots from a story, rather like one of the 24 frame per second sort that fly past in a film. Something happened before and something will happen afterwards. This life like quality infuses Labbé's paintings with a certain spontaneity.

The artist describes her research as a trip down memory lane. She recalls her childhood as one of a gaggle of kids hanging around the snackbar owned by her father. She remembers the Kik Cola, Orange Crush and Grapette ads on the interior and exterior walls. Looking for the atmosphere of that period, Lise returns to her past haunts and hunts down photographs of houses and shops. She combs through flea markets in the hope of finding the old item that she wishes to paint as precisely as possible. Lastly, just to keep her imagination alive and innovative, she seeks out new ideas from her friends, relatives and colleagues.

Lise Labbé is a happy woman whose paintings enchant many viewers and collectors. What better reward for her efforts could she want? The recognition of her work enables her to live quietly, surrounded by the murmur of the river and the cries of joy from the children in her paintings.

By depicting a period humorously through her own eyes as if a child again, Lise makes each painting a tribute to childhood.

The words of a children's song come to mind: "It's a small world after all!"

Michel Beauchamp

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