

Sharon Mark

To be or not to be ... Naive!

If painted by a child, naïve art offers few surprises. If painted by an adult, naïve art puzzles less experienced viewers who have trouble seeing its value.

Whatever your opinion of this art form, the following question comes to mind: what is the artist's vision? What makes the buyer consider that particular painting a must-have? And is naïve art really possible as we approach the new millennium? Of course the very existence of this genre offers a new, different vision that remains an enigma to many viewers.

Enchantment and surprise. These are frequent reactions to Sharon Mark's work. Mark, introduces herself as a painter of naïve art. One glance at her paintings soon confirms that she belongs to this very school of artists.

Who exactly are these artists? More or less consciously, they capture their surroundings in a fresh, spontaneous way, as if through a child's eyes. Their vision of the world often betrays a deep need to preserve what still exists or once existed; in other words, to establish a sense of permanence in daily life. The creator of naïve art expresses that need in paintings that transport us to places now little known or, rather, known to a previous generation. The same paintings reveal a conscious choice – to not be overly scientific in interpreting life. There is also a desire to please and be liked.

This form of art requires viewers and collectors who share those feelings. Of the buyer of naïve art fears change and the unknown, yet can see things from a child's perspective. Naïve art thus provides a marvellous, unconventional world that sweeps them up and away.

The reputation of this art form grows with every passing year. Thanks to the some visionary gallery owners who display naïve art, sales of works by both Canadian and foreign artists keeps rising.

Sharon Mark's paintings draw upon a rich imagination plus her knowledge and love of country like. Several works give a bird's eye view of villages and towns that she has known; these are not landscapes, but rather composites of enduring, crisp memories. She prefers acrylics on canvas or sometimes on hardboard. Her drawing is clean, her colours, bright. The details stand out, while the viewer's eye travels easily over the levels and many details that make up the work, for example; house, trees, paths, and characters.

Mark's works exude a quiet happiness. There is serenity rather than mystery. Her foreshortened perspective and detailed treatment of certain surfaces, as well as the summary dismissal of others, make her canvases treasure-troves of candid freshness

Frank and fresh, her works reach the goal of naïve art. She admits having been influenced by the famous American, Grandma Moses, but does have her own visual approach. She tries to make others enjoy and share her vision, her optimism and inner joy. Mark strives to create Canadian naïve art through local

scenes or she simply presents what she likes small pleasures for her or those around her.

Born in Ormstown, in 1955, Sharon Mark grew up surrounded by the countryside of southwestern Québec. She soon found herself part of the artistic community already shaping the heritage of that region. A self-taught artist, she paints landscapes on various surfaces and on objects that decorate daily life. She joined a group of artists in the Hemingford region and has had her works exhibited since 1986. In fact Sharon Mark's paintings have been shown at the Musée Marcil, Saint Lambert; Burlington, Ottawa, Québec City; Mont Tremblant, La Malbaie, Saint Jean-sur-Richelieu, and North Hatley. Since 1992, her work has been permanently displayed in galleries. On a par with Kupesic, Jost, du Poirier Dragan and Iacob, Mark belongs to the wonderful world of naïve art. As a citizen of this enchanting world, her delicate sense of humour stands out and perhaps softens the rigour of some of her paintings.

As Arthur Villeneuve a naive painter from Québec's Saguenay region, once said: "Our eyes are too often open, to keep them shut." Fortunately, artist Sharon Mark never shuts hers.

Paul Gladu
Translation: Kathy Radford
Magain'Art winter 1998-1999