

## Richard Savoie The Power of Pastels

For over a decade, Richard Savoie has been using primarily dry and oil pastels.

He starts working from a sketch or photograph and usually draws his inspiration from Québec wilderness or urban scenes.

Richard was born in Moncton, New Brunswick in the late 1950s, so to be discreet; he is in his early forties. The fifth in a family of nine children, he spent part of his childhood quietly, by the seaside. A few years later the Savoies moved to Arvida, in the Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean region of Québec.



Richard's mother discovered her son's talent early and encouraged him. The family later moved again, and Richard finished high school in a Montréal suburb. It was only then that he could spend any time on his first landscape paintings.

One day, around the same time in his life, the teenager found himself in front of a collection of Marc-Aurèle Fortin's watercolours (Fernand Thibault's collection). He was only 17 years old but he knew that he would become a painter. Thibault even encouraged the young artist. Classes with painters Gabrielle Messier and Yolaine Lefebvre would soon follow.



Why pastels? As often happens the reason is practical, even anecdotal. Richard says half-jokingly, "I didn't have enough money to pay for oils so I bought a box of 48 pastels and the rest is history!" He later would attend a vernissage of Horace Champagne's work which made him realize that there was indeed room for pastels in painting.

Naturally there are other reasons to choose this medium. For example, once sealed, the pigments don't change over the years, especially if placed under glass. Moreover, pastels allow one to work quickly, a non-negligible detail.

One glance at Savoie's work confirms that his favourite seasons are fall and winter. Most of his landscapes reveal the end of the day or night. Urban scenes often highlight the fine homes along Montréal's historic "golden mile" as well as in Westmount and the lanes in Old Québec.

Sunset, dusk, nightfall. These are the artist's favourite moments, especially in the snow, in December. A cozy yellow light sparkles in the windows of houses and shops, often identified by their real signs. In fact, viewers familiar with Montréal notice details in Savoie's work. Everyone smiles knowingly at an image of Sherbrooke Street, readily recognizable with the usual taxis lined up in front of the Ritz-Carlton hotel.

Savoie's themes and scenes are contemporary, but the way he treats them lends a certain old-fashioned look to the work. You can almost hear the muffled sounds of the city after a snowfall. You can see passers-by strolling along, at a leisurely pace.

The choice of subjects suggests a certain luxury, a bourgeois calm. Viewers can imagine the warmly-lit homes and well-set tables laden with holiday meals. Some might even feel like knocking on the door and dropping in!



Richard Savoie's works hang in several private, public and corporate collections throughout Canada, Europe and the USA. Some of his 1998-1999 paintings were selected to illustrate a series of Christmas cards for Publi-Tact and Créations pour le Dire. A percentage of the profits of these cards were donated to various charitable organizations.

Since 1986, Richard has held over a dozen solo and group shows in the Montréal region, Calgary, Winnipeg and Victoria. A prolific artist, Richard produces some 200 paintings annually. A new exhibition of his work will be held next November in the Stephen Lowe Gallery in Calgary.