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Arthur Villeneuve

The barber painter

Arthur Villeneuve, Musée des Beaux-Arts de Montréal : 3 mars-16 avril 1972

Musée du Québec : 24 mai-9 juillet 1972

Vancouver Art Gallery : 8 août-13 septembre 1972

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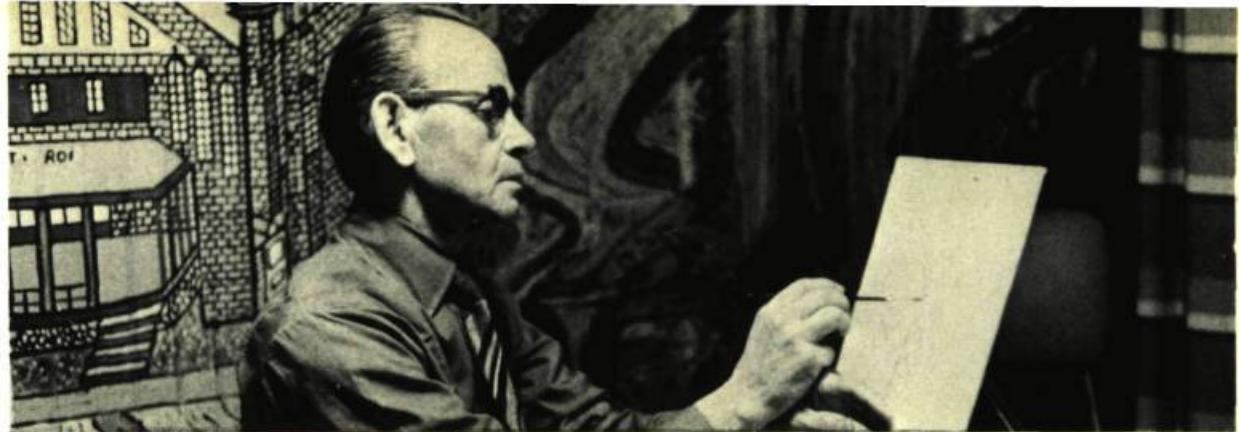
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ARTHUR VILLENEUVE

peintre bonbier

par François GAGNON



Arthur Villeneuve peignant dans une des chambres du deuxième étage de sa maison; derrière lui, ses peintures murales qui couvrent, d'ailleurs, tous les murs intérieurs.
(Phot. Charlotte Rosshandler)

Arthur Villeneuve poursuit, depuis une quinzaine d'années, une exploration si importante et si étendue qu'elle commence à forcer partout le respect. Les choses ne sont pas allées toutes seules, cependant. Nous voudrions raconter comment elles ont commencé.

A partir de 1957¹, Arthur Villeneuve entreprenait de transformer sa maison, mur après mur, sans oublier le plafond, intérieur et extérieur, en ce qu'il appellera *Le Musée de l'Artiste* et qui est une des très surprenante proposition de peinture de notre époque. Prenant le contre-pied des vues habituelles qui donnent à chacun assurance des bornes où s'arrête un tableau et où commence le mur, il peignit toutes les surfaces qui s'offraient à sa portée. Il en résulta une architecture peinte du dedans et du dehors, impossible à circonscrire d'un seul regard, donnant un très juste équivalent du statut du réel dans le mental, où justement il a ce tour circulaire, décousu, favorable aux rapprochements insolites et aux juxtapositions impossibles.

Le 9 août 1959², l'ouvrage étant terminé, la décision d'ouvrir *Le Musée de l'Artiste* au public est prise. La chose est faite dans une manière digne de l'œuvre, avec ce qu'on a alors sous la main. M. et Mme Villeneuve se présentent au conseil municipal pour «inviter chaque échevin et leur demander la collaboration de la cité». Quelques-uns de ces messieurs, encouragés par le mouvement de leur chef hiérarchique, accompagnent le Maire sur les lieux. On imagine leur stupeur. Sollicités d'apprécier ce qu'ils ont sous les yeux, M. Maurice Laquerre, échevin, se faisant sans doute l'interprète de ses collègues, tint un discours dont *Le Soleil* a reproduit le passage essentiel: «... au point de vue artistique ... je ne peux la recommander comme une œuvre de première valeur. Il n'y a pas de nuance, et la ressemblance des sites ou des édifices dessinés est imparfaite.»

Au tour des Villeneuve d'être étonnés, eux à qui des commentaires flatteurs d'artistes de Montréal avaient fait attendre de leurs édiles

des propos différents³. Qui fallait-il croire, des notables de Chicoutimi ou des spécialistes de Montréal? Mais, surtout, en quoi l'absence de ressemblance des sites et des édifices suffisait-il à disqualifier une proposition de peinture? Passe encore qu'on en fasse reproche au photographe, mais au peintre? Ne lui revient-il pas de révéler les sites, non tels qu'ils sont dans la réalité mais tels qu'ils sont dans le mental, quand l'esprit y est intervenu au point de les rendre sinon méconnaissables, du moins transformés à son image?

Le verdict peu éclairé de l'échevin Laquerre ne laissait présager rien de bon pour l'avenir. Pour un temps *Le Musée de l'Artiste* ne suscita au sein de la population de la région, sauf exceptions, que le sarcasme, l'ironie facile, le rire entendu, quand ce n'était pas l'insulte pure et simple et la voie de fait. Le décuage-ment guettait les époux Villeneuve.

C'est au point le plus bas de la courbe qu'intervient un personnage interloquant, M. Bernard Hébert, qui se met en tête d'en changer le cours. Curieux d'histoire des religions et de philosophie, adjoint médical en Alberta, puis «étudiant en théologie chez les esquimaux» (sic) et ensuite

en sciences sociales, employé à la Northern Electric Company, fondateur du Centre Artistique de Verdun, du Centre Intellectuel de Verdun et d'une Société de l'Homme, à Verdun, Bernie, comme l'appelle familièrement le numéro du *Northern News*⁴ où j'ai puisé mes renseignements sur lui, mais qui se faisait connaître sous le pseudonyme de Bernard de Verdun, après un bref arrêt chez son frère Bob, propriétaire de la *Tabagie 500*, à Chicoutimi, visite le Musée de l'Artiste, s'échauffe à la vue du monument, improvise, le soir même, un vernissage, après avoir ameuté journalistes et photographes⁵.

Un journaliste du *Phare*⁶, rapportant une entrevue qu'il avait eu avec Mme Villeneuve, deux ans après, à propos du même événement, a cru très malin de transcrire ses propos en joulal. Je sais, pour l'avoir entendue, que son français est plus subtil que ne le donne à penser la prose qu'on va lire: «L'13 septembre, j'étais après coudre dans ma cuisine quand tout à coup on cogne à la porte d'en avant. J'veais ouvrir. Un homme accompagné d'une dame font leur entrée. «J'suis critique d'art», dit le m'sieur. Bon ou mauvais? Si cé bon entrez, si cé mauvais, dehors. (...) C'étaient m'sieur Bernard Hébert, de Verdun, et Mme Hébert d'O'Keefe. Ce m'sieur là avait demandé à sa belle sœur de Chicoutimi de lui faire visiter queaque chose de rare icitte. Elle lui répondit qu'y avait une maison toute peinturée à Chicoutimi mais qui avaient des gens qui rillent de ça et d'autres qui trouvent ça ben beau. Après avoir visité la maison, y m'a dit que son cœur saignait tellement y avait trouvé ça beau. Je lui ait dit d'ramasser son sang. Vers les six heures du même soir, y m'téléphone pour m'dire que ce soir y venait à sept heures baptiser mon Arthur et vernir la maison. J'lui ai répondu qu'Arthur était déjà baptisé et que la maison était vernie ...»

Bernie ne s'en tint pas là. Revenant à la charge quelques mois après, il obtient d'Arthur Villeneuve une toile de six pieds qu'il emporte

avec lui et promène d'une galerie à l'autre, rue Sherbrooke, jusqu'au moment où il réussit à faire partager son enthousiasme au directeur de l'une d'entre elles, la Galerie Waddington. On a tôt fait de machiner une affaire. Un contrat lie bientôt Arthur Villeneuve au Marchand George Waddington, pour deux ans⁷, et une exposition est organisée dans le mois qui suit la *découverte* de l'artiste par le critique d'art⁸. Il est vrai qu'on se dispute le mérite de la découverte. La *Gazette* l'attribue à Waddington lui-même⁹.

Quoi qu'il en soit, du 28 février au 11 mars 1961, les Waddington Galleries étaient «very pleased to present the First Exhibition of paintings by the primitive artist of Chicoutimi at 1456 Sherbrooke St. West, Montreal»¹⁰. La presse s'empare aussitôt de l'événement. Que dis-je, elle le précède. Dès le 15 janvier 1961, Paul Gladu annonce la découverte d'*«un peintre amateur*», d'*«un talent primitif*», d'*«une force de la race*», qu'il rapproche de Grandma Moses et du douanier Rousseau¹¹. Le 21, c'est au tour d'un chroniqueur anonyme de la *Gazette* de Montréal¹² et d'Albert Tremblay, dans *La Presse* de Montréal¹³, de parler respectivement d'un *«genuine Canadian primitive painter*», auteur d'œuvres *«delightfully naïve*» et de l'*«un de nos grands primitifs*».

Après des déclarations aussi péremptoires, la presse régionale accuse le coup. Le 18 février, *Le Progrès du Saguenay* annonce que l'*«un des nôtres (sera) à Montréal*¹⁴. Le 22, un éditorial du même journal¹⁵ recommande de se réjouir que *«l'un des nôtres*» soit *«présenté comme un artiste au talent génial dans les chroniques d'art de la presse canadienne*». Le même jour, Guy Bouchard, dans *Le Phare*¹⁶, veut sans doute faire amende honorable, mais son style est si étrange que l'affaire ne réussit qu'à moitié. Ainsi il écrit: *«Non pas que nous voulions détruire Arthur Villeneuve! Nous sommes trop humainement ignorants pour ça. Nous désirons (sic) simplement le rendre ridicule et sottement plus bête qu'il ne l'est. (...) A trop*

vouloir le rendre *«fou»* nous construisons (sic) son embryonnaire légende.»

La substitution du présent au conditionnel — faut-il y voir une coquille d'imprimerie? — obscurcit malheureusement sa pensée. Jacques Bergeron, le même jour et dans le même journal¹⁷, qui croit l'art de Villeneuve sans valeur et qui n'arrive *«pas encore à comprendre les admirateurs de cette peinture insolite*», souhaite quand même *«bonne chance»* au *«figaro de la toile»*, car c'est *«un Saguenéen qui gagne honnorablement sa vie, qui s'efforce de manier le pinceau du mieux possible ...»* Et il ajoute: *«La visite inattendue de Waddington, la semaine dernière, a clos toute discussion.»* *Le Lingot* du 23 février¹⁸ s'appuiera aussi sur Waddington, avec qui il aura une entrevue. *«Le personnage discuté chez nous ces jours-ci dans le domaine des arts»* doit être respecté depuis que *«M. Waddington a bien tenu à souligner que les œuvres de M. Villeneuve étaient de l'art naïf voire même primitif, mais d'une qualité rare»*.

Le 28 février 1961, le *Progrès du Saguenay* faisait paraître une photographie représentant M. et Mme Arthur Villeneuve devant l'autobus qui allait les mener à Montréal pour la grande aventure. Sous la photo, on pouvait lire: *«C'est ce soir que la critique montréalaise portera un jugement sur Arthur Villeneuve et ses œuvres.»*

Elle ne le fit pas le même soir. Mais le 4 mars, trois grands de la presse montréalaise, *La Presse*, *Le Devoir* et *The Gazette* s'étaient prononcés ... pour Villeneuve et ses œuvres. Jean Sarrazin intitulait son article, p. 24, *«Un douanier Rousseau du Saguenay?»*, Yves Lasnier, *«Un merveilleux peintre naïf: Arthur Villeneuve»* et D.Y.P., p. 10, *«Canadian Primitive Painter»*. Le 8 mars 1961, *Le Progrès du Saguenay* battait en retraite: *«L'exposition des œuvres de Villeneuve fut un succès»*, on pourrait lire: *«La critique montréalaise a accueilli avec enthousiasme l'œuvre d'Arthur Villeneuve lui prêtant les qualificatifs les*

plus flatteurs. Presque tous les tableaux exposés à Montréal sont vendus. Si ce phénomène n'est pas une confirmation infaillible de la qualité de l'œuvre de Villeneuve, ceci prouve au moins que le peintre de Chicoutimi atteint son public et que celui-ci éprouve un intérêt manifeste envers ces œuvres dont la création est riche de pureté et de fraîcheur.» Le même article annonçait que le Conseil de la cité de Chicoutimi se portait acquéreur d'une toile de Villeneuve représentant une scène du carnaval-souvenir. La boucle était bouclée.

On ne sait comment les Chicoutimiens en étaient venus à rejeter l'art de Villeneuve, pourtant si incarné dans leur région, témoin la toile achetée par le Conseil. La manière dont il fut réhabilité dans la presse locale et qui, elle, est connue, le donne à imaginer cependant. Le flux vint sans doute d'où vint le reflux. Qui se laisse dicter ses amours a bien pu auparavant apprendre à la même source ses haines. Celle-ci est d'ailleurs bien connue. Celle qui désignait comme fou ce qu'elle appelle maintenant naïf^o, celle qui demandait de brûler ce qu'elle demande maintenant d'adorer... et d'acheter, c'est la Culture cultivée.

Quant apparut, après l'art folklorique des paysans et à la barbe de l'*art-entertainment* des industriels du loisir, un art authentique, mais chez des barbiers, des douaniers ou des facteurs, on commença par le ridiculiser puis on décida de l'exploiter. C'est alors que fut qualifié de naïf cet art qu'on ne voulait voir être pris trop au sérieux parce qu'il révélait, en marge de la classe ouvrière, l'existence d'un immense potentiel créateur chez des individus qui n'avaient emprunté ni la voie des écoles pour se former ni celles des styles reconnus pour s'exprimer. Si le monde ouvrier n'a pas encore ses Villeneuve, ses Rousseau ou ses Cheval, c'est qu'il ne jouit même pas des conditions de vie et de loisir du barbier, du douanier ou du facteur. Même pas cela. Écoutez Yvon Deschamps, vous verrez.

1. «En quelle année avez-vous travaillé sérieusement dans la peinture?», lui demandait Gilles Goyette, qui, lui, travaillait dans le journalisme. «En 1957, répondait Villeneuve, j'ai décidé d'en faire une carrière. Je consacrais plus de cinq heures par jour à la peinture.» Arthur Villeneuve a aussi son mot à dire, in *Le Phare* (Chicoutimi), 30 janvier 1963, p. 7.
2. *Le Soleil* (Québec), 10 août 1959, signale sobrement l'événement.
3. Le Musée de l'Artiste intéresse le Conseil in *Le Soleil*, daté seulement de l'été 1959 dans la documentation Villeneuve. Edmund Alleyn, Stanley Cosgrove et Alfred Pellan sont les
- artistes le plus souvent nommés en rapport avec Villeneuve, dans sa documentation.
4. P.-E. Outzen, Bernard Hébert découvre un peintre primitif, in *Northern News*, 30 janvier 1961.
5. Après avoir peinturé (sic) pendant trois ans. On vernit le musée de l'artiste, in *Le Phare*, 23 septembre 1960.
6. *Le Phare*, 16 janvier 1963, p. 11 sq.
7. A(lbert) T(remblay), Vernissage d'une exposition Ville-neuve à Montréal, le 28, in *La Presse* (Montréal), 17 février 1961.
8. Geo. Waddington est de passage à Chicoutimi, in *Le Soleil*, 16 février 1961.

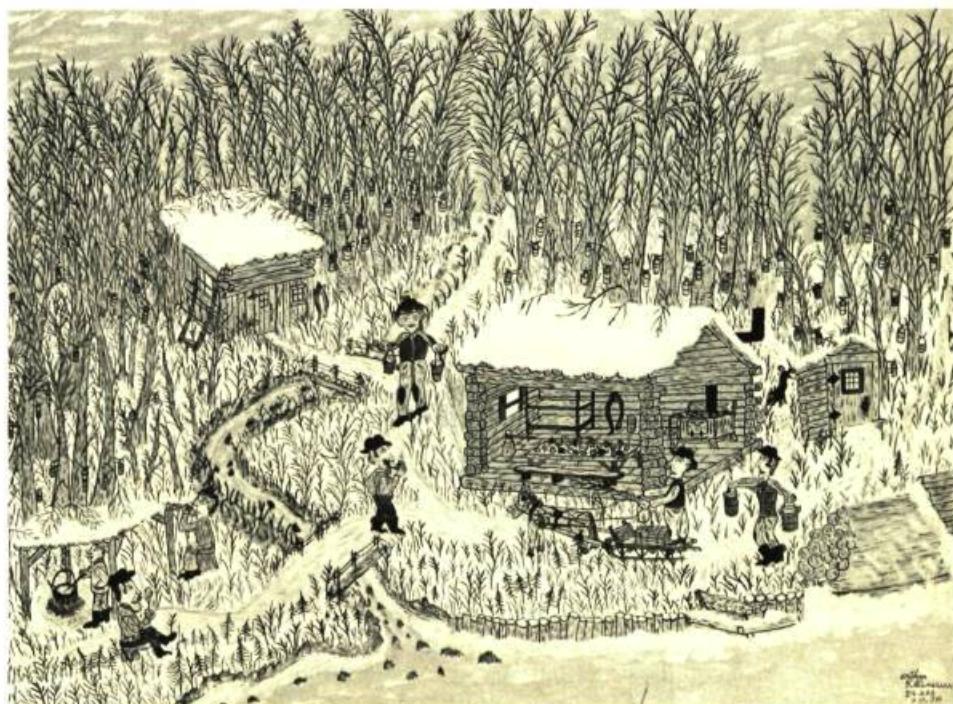
EXPOSITION ARTHUR VILLENEUVE

Musée des Beaux-Arts de Montréal :
3 mars - 16 avril 1972

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24 mai - 9 juillet 1972

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8 août - 13 septembre 1972

Arthur VILLENEUVE
La Cabane à sucre, 1966.
Huile sur carton.
30 po. sur 40 (75 cm. x 100)
Chicoutimi, Coll. Dr Emile Bertho.



9. Arts Notes, in *The Gazette* (Montréal), 21 janvier 1961. En réalité, M. Claude Picher, alors agent de liaison pour l'Est du Canada de la Galerie Nationale avait décerné, dès avril 1959, le second prix de peinture à Arthur Villeneuve, lors d'un Salon du Printemps organisé par le Comité des Arts et Métiers d'Arvida. Cf. Bert, Duel entre peinture naïve et savante?, in *Le Lingot* (Arvida), 30 avril 1959, p. 10.
- Arthur VILLENEUVE
Adam et Ève au paradis, sous l'oeil de Dieu, 1966.
Huile sur toile;
30 po. sur 40 (75 cm. x 100).
Chicoutimi. Coll. Dr Émile Bertho
10. Selon le libellé du carton d'invitation.
11. P. Gladu, Arthur Villeneuve: une force de la race. Le peintre-barbier dont on commence à parler...» in *Le Petit-Journal* (Montréal), semaine du 15 janvier 1961.
12. Art Notes, in *The Gazette*, 21 janvier 1961.
13. Albert Tremblay, Un Chicoutimien a passé avec succès du blaireau au pinceau, in *La Presse*, 21 janvier 1961.
14. Un des nôtres à Montréal, in *Le Progrès du Saguenay*, 18 février 1961.
15. Magella Soucy, Le peintre-barbier de chez-nous, éditorial du *Progrès du Saguenay*, 22 février 1961.
16. Un peintre... Arthur Villeneuve, p. 14.
17. Dans le faisceau du Phare: «Bonne chance, figaro de la toile.»
18. DNC, L'art naïf et le peintre Arthur Villeneuve.
19. Dans les trois courts articles du 4 mars de la presse montréalaise que nous avons cités plus haut, les termes «naïf» ou «primitif» reviennent six fois.

English Translation, p. 93



But it was her only love. When she left school, she obtained a position drafting at Marine Industries in Sorel. "I was the only woman. That was in 1951." Among all the beginners it was she who had the smallest salary, she remembers this discrimination.

A year later, by not going out and by making sacrifices every day, she had some rather slender savings. But she was pursuing her dreams, one of which was to go to Europe to study. She arrived in Paris and she enrolled in three schools: painting, drawing, stained glass. Stained glass windows especially interested her. So she made a trip to Chartres. This went on for almost five years. However, in the meantime, one spring she decided to go abroad, perhaps to rest. By hitch-hiking, she reached Greece where she was to spend eight months.

"Everyone there was embroidering, weaving. The women were working wonders with wool. They had such fine, ancient techniques. Like Penelope, but I was along on the voyage! I began tapestry."

There are long and strange roads in finding one's destiny, one's most intense feelings, and unhappiness too. And one's soul. And the reason that we exist for a certain time, so short a time, comparatively a few seasons.

She returned to Paris in 1957 with tapestries and windows. She won the first prize for stained glass windows at the Palais des Beaux-Arts.

In 1958, she returned home. More determined and now certain of the art form that inspired her. She rented a small room on St. Matthew street. "I went to people's homes to teach painting to earn my bread on which I chewed sparingly to buy wool. I was very depressed. I recall it as a very difficult period. I was neither funny nor sociable. I also found a job in the costume department at Radio Canada but I regretted every hour away from tapestries."

In 1959 she held her first one-woman exhibition at Denyse Delrue's. She will never forget it, not because it was such a success, but because it was an important step. Proof that she could go even further.

Two years later, the Arts Council granted her a bursary. She left again. Destination: Japan. Because of their immense looms, Japanese craftsmen have developed special, very advanced techniques. She was also fascinated by the country. "I was dreaming of tapestries as big as cathedrals, as large as our rivers. I so wanted to give importance to this art. Of course, I am exaggerating! However, I learned that in Japan, one could create immense tapestries, and that is what was most important to me. In 1966, I returned to Japan to draw, to execute the model for the theatre curtain of the Opera House of the National Arts Centre. It won the first prize. Near the end of 1967, I went to Kyoto where with Kawashima Orimono and local craftsmen, I was able to create this tapestry which is 45 feet long by 200 feet wide, and weighs 4,000 pounds. I stayed there 17 months, working from sunrise to sunset. That will no doubt remain the major work of my life..."

She says this with a certain nostalgia. I can imagine why. After the excitement of constructing such a great work into which she put so much research and work, in which she invented the tapestry of the future, she needs some new challenge. Someone who has had a great love will always find another.

And the world

But, knowing Micheline Beauchemin, the important work is always the one of today, of tomorrow. It is enough to learn the anguish and idealization she experiences considering her next work, her surprise at inspiration.

I picture her on that autumn morning, on her farm at Grondines, galloping on her Canadian bred mare called "Tsuli" (moon lady), a lovely mare with a shiny black coat. Very late the previous evening, she had finished a tapestry and seemed exhausted. But when she returned from her ride with her cheeks glowing, she was a different person. After lunch she settled down to the loom, chose wool in iridescent colours of the forest in autumn, and worked until evening. A few months later, returning to her home, I saw the tapestry. It was a hymn to the human heart.

In short, she has discovered new continents in tapestry. She has left on a sailboat, bound for the unknown and the infinite. "No one can stop the march of art, no more than they can stop the march of time", wrote Maiskowsky.

Micheline Beauchemin is at the helm, and the perspectives of her course are changing.

(Translation by Yvonne Kirbyson)

Arthur Villeneuve — The barber painter

By François GAGNON

For nearly fifteen years Arthur Villeneuve has been pursuing such an important and extensive exploration that it is beginning to command respect everywhere. However, this order of things did not come about by itself. We would like to relate how it all started.

Beginning in 1957¹ Arthur Villeneuve undertook to transform his house, one wall after another, not forgetting the ceiling, the interior and the exterior into what he called "The Artist's Museum"; this is a very surprising art proposition these days. His viewpoint opposed the usual approach which assured everyone of borders where the picture stops and the wall begins; he painted all the surfaces that were within his reach. The result was an architecture painted inside and outside, impossible to take in with a single look, giving a fair idea of the part reality plays in the mental world, an architecture whose circular, disconnected course favoured unusual rapprochements and impossible juxtapositions.

On August 9th, 1959² as the work was completed it was decided to open "The Artist's Museum" to the public. This was done in a manner worthy of the work, with what was then available. Monsieur and Madame Villeneuve appeared at the municipal council to "invite all the aldermen and ask them for the city's collabora-

tion". A few of these gentlemen, encouraged by the actions of their leader accompanied the Mayor to the house. We can imagine their amazement. When asked to give an appreciation of what they had seen, Monsieur Maurice Laquerre, alderman, acting no doubt as an interpreter for his colleagues made a speech the substance of which was reproduced in the *Soleil*:

"...from an artistic point of view (...), I cannot recommend it as a first class work. It has no nuances and the likeness of the sites or buildings drawn is imperfect."

It was the Villeneuves' turn to be astonished, the "flattering comments" of "Montreal artists" had led them to expect different remarks from their town councillors.³ Who was to be believed, the notables of Chicoutimi or the experts of Montreal? But especially in what way did the lack of a likeness of the sites and buildings suffice to disqualify a proposition for painting? Such a reproach might be made to a photographer, but to a painter? Is the painter not supposed to reveal sites not as they were in reality, but such as they are in the mental world, when the mind has intervened to the point of rendering them if not unrecognizable, at least transformed according to its image?

The rather unenlightened verdict of alderman Laquerre left nothing good to be foreseen for the future. For a time the "Artist's Museum" aroused no reaction among the population of the region with the exception of sarcasm, easy irony, and laughter when there were not pure and simple insults and acts of violence. Discouragement lay in wait for the Villeneuves.

At this low point, there intervened an interlocutor, Mr. Bernard Hébert, who took a notion to change the course of things. Interested in the history of religions and philosophy, medical assistant in Alberta, then a "student of theology among the Eskimos" (sic), then engaged in social sciences, employed at Northern Electric Company, founder of an Art Centre in Verdun, an Intellectual Centre, and a Naturalist Society in Verdun, Bernie, as he is familiarly called in the issue of the *Northern News*⁴ where I got my information about him, but who introduces himself under the pseudonym of Bernard of Verdun, after a brief stop at the home of his brother Bob, proprietor of the Tabagie 500 in Chicoutimi, visited the "Artist's Museum", and became excited at the sight of the monumental work. He improvised a preview exhibition that very evening, after having assembled journalists and photographers.⁵

A journalist from the *Phare*⁶ reporting an interview that he had with Madame Villeneuve, two years after, about the same event, thought it was very clever to transcribe into joulal (TR: uneducated speech) the remarks of Madame Villeneuve. I have heard her speak and I know that her language is more subtle than the following prose might lead one to think:

"Well on September 13th, I was after sewing in my kitchen when suddenly there's this knock at the front door. I go

to open up. Some man with a lady comes in. 'I'm an art critic' says the man. Good or bad? says I. If it's good, come on in, if it's bad, stay out (...) Well, it was Monsieur Bernard Hébert, of Verdun and Mrs. Hébert of O'Keefe. That fellow had asked his sister in law in Chicoutimi to show him somethin' unusual in these parts. She told him there was a house all painted up in Chicoutimi, that some people were havin' a good laugh over it, and others thought it was pretty nice. After he visited the house he told me it was so nice it broke his heart. I told him to keep cool. About six o'clock that night, he phoned me to tell me he was comin' out that night at seven to baptize my Arthur and open the house. I told him Arthur was already baptized and the house was opened..."

Bernie did not stop there. Returning to the attack a few months later, he obtained a six foot canvas from Arthur Villeneuve, which he took with him and showed from one gallery to another along Sherbrooke St. until he succeeded in sharing his enthusiasm with the director of one of them, the Waddington Galleries. They quickly made a deal. A contract soon bound Arthur Villeneuve to the art dealer George Waddington, for two years', and an exhibition was organized for the month following the "discovery" of the artist by the art critic.⁹ It is true that the credit for the discovery was disputed. The *Gazette* attributed it to Waddington himself.¹⁰

However that may be, from February 28th to March 11th, 1961, the Waddington Galleries were "very pleased to present the First Exhibition of paintings by the primitive artist of Chicoutimi at 1456 Sherbrooke St. West, Montreal"¹¹. The newspapers immediately took over the event. What am I saying, they preceeded it. Back on January 15th, 1961, Paul Gladu announced the discovery of "an amateur painter" of a "primitive talent", of a "talented French Canadian" that he likened to Grandma Moses and the douanier Rousseau.¹² On the 21st, it was the turn of the anonymous reporter of the (Montreal) *Gazette*¹³ and Albert Tremblay in *La Presse* (Montreal)¹⁴ to speak respectively of a "genuine Canadian primitive painter" the author of "delightfully naive" works and "one of our great primitives".

After such peremptory declarations, the regional press acknowledged a hit. On Feb. 18th, the *Progrès du Saguenay* announced that "one of ours would be in Montreal".¹⁵ On the 22nd, an editorial in the same newspaper¹⁶ recommended rejoicing that "one of ours" was to be "presented as an artist of a brilliant talent in the art chronicles of the Canadian press". The same day Guy Bouchard in *Le Phare*¹⁷ wanted no doubt to make honourable amends, but his style was so strange that the matter was only half successful. Thus he wrote:

"Not that we want to destroy Arthur Villeneuve! We are too humanly ignorant for that. We simply want to make him ridiculous and foolishly sillier than he is (...) By wanting too much to make him appear 'crazy' we are building (sic) his embryonic legend."

Perhaps some misprint obscured his thought. The same day, and in the same newspaper¹⁸, Jacques Bergeron, who believed the art of Villeneuve worthless and who "still does not manage to understand the admirers of this unusual painting", wished "good luck" anyhow to the "figaro of the canvas", for he was a "Saguenay citizen who is honourably earning his living, who is trying to handle the brush in the best way possible...". And he added: "The unexpected visit of Waddington last week has ended all discussion." The *Lingot*¹⁹ of Feb. 23rd also relied on Waddington with whom it had an interview. The "personage in the field of the arts we have been discussing these days" must be respected because "Mr. Waddington insisted on emphasizing that the works of Mr. Villeneuve were of naive indeed even primitive art, but of a rare quality".

On February 28, 1961, the *Progrès du Saguenay* published a photograph representing Monsieur and Madame Arthur Villeneuve in front of the bus which was to take them to Montreal for the great adventure. The caption read: "Tonight the Montreal critics will pass judgement on Arthur Villeneuve and his works."

They didn't that night. But on March 4th, three greats of the Montreal press, *La Presse*, *Le Devoir*, and the *Gazette* had spoken out... for Villeneuve and his works. Jean Sarrazin entitled his article, p. 24, "A douanier Rousseau of the Saguenay?", Yves Lasnier, "A marvellous naive painter: Arthur Villeneuve", and D.Y.P., p. 10, "Canadian Primitive Painter". On March 8th, 1961, the *Progrès du Saguenay* beat a retreat. Under the headline: "The exhibition of Villeneuve's works was a success", one could read: "The Montreal critics enthusiastically greeted the work of Arthur Villeneuve describing it in the most flattering terms. Almost all the canvases exhibited in Montreal were sold. If this phenomenon is not an infallible confirmation of the quality of Villeneuve's work, this proves at least that the Chicoutimi painter is reaching his audience and that the latter is experiencing a manifest interest towards the works whose creation is rich in purity and freshness." The same article announced that the council of the city of Chicoutimi had acquired a canvas by Villeneuve representing a scene of the memory-carnival. Things had gone full circle.

We do not know how the citizens of Chicoutimi came to reject the art of Villeneuve which was such an embodiment of their region, as the canvas bought by the council attests. The manner in which he was rehabilitated in the local press, which is known however, lets us imagine it. The ebb and the flow come from the same place. He who lets his likes be dictated, has previously been able to learn his hatreds from the same source. This source, moreover, is well known. It is a cultivated culture that designated as mad what it now called naive²⁰, that asked people to burn what it now asked them to adore... and to buy.

When, after the folkloric art of country

people, and in the face of the "entertainment-art" of the leisure industrialists, an authentic art appeared, but appeared among barbers, customs officers, or postmen, people began by ridiculing it, then decided to exploit it. It is thus that this art we did not want to take too seriously was called naive because it revealed, arising out of the working class, the existence of an immense creative potential among individuals who had bypassed both schools in which to be trained, and recognized styles in which to express themselves. If the working class does not yet have artists like Rousseau or Villeneuve or Cheval, it is that it does not even enjoy the living conditions or leisure permitted the barber, customs officer or postman. Not even that. Listen to Yvon Deschamps, you will see.

(Translation by Yvonne Kirbyson)

NOTES

- (1) "In what year did you seriously work at painting?" asked Gilles Goyette, who worked in journalism himself. "In 1957, answered Villeneuve, I decided to make a career of it. I devoted more than five hours a day to painting". "Arthur Villeneuve also has something to say" in *Le Phare* (Chicoutimi), Jan. 30, 1963, p. 7.
- (2) The *Soleil* (Quebec) of August 10, 1959, soberly signals the event.
- (3) "The Artist's Museum interests the council" in *Le Soleil*, dated only summer 1959 in the Villeneuve documentation. Edmund Alleyn, Stanley Cosgrove, and Alfred Pellan are the artists most frequently mentioned in relation to Villeneuve in his documentation.
- (4) P.E. Outzen, "Bernard Hébert discovers a primitive painter" in *Northern News*, Jan. 30, 1961.
- (5) "After having painted (sic) for three years. The Artist's Museum is previewed" in *Le Phare*, Sept. 23, 1960.
- (6) *Le Phare*, Jan. 16, 1963, pp. 11 and foll.
- (7) A(lbert) T(remblay), "Preview of a Villeneuve exhibition in Montreal, the 28th", in *La Presse* (Montreal), Feb. 17th, 1961.
- (8) "Geo. Waddington visits Chicoutimi" in *Le Soleil*, Feb. 16, 1961.
- (9) "Art Notes" in the *Gazette* (Montreal), Jan. 21, 1961. In reality, Monsieur Claude Picher, then a liaison officer for eastern Canada for the National Gallery, back in April 1959 had awarded the second prize for painting to Arthur Villeneuve, at the Salon du Printemps, organized by the Arvida Comité des Arts et Métiers. Cf. Bert, "Duel between naive and schooled painting?" in *Le Lingot* (Arvida), April 30, 1959, p. 10.
- (10) According to the wording on the invitation card.
- (11) P. Gladu, "Arthur Villeneuve: a talented French Canadian. The barber painter that we are beginning to talk about..." in *Le Petit Journal* (Montreal), the week of January 15, 1961.
- (12) "Art Notes" in *The Gazette*, Jan. 21, 1961.

- (13) Albert Tremblay, "A Chicoutimi man has successfully passed from the shaving brush to the paint brush" in *La Presse* Jan. 21, 1961.
 - (14) "One of ours in Montreal" in the *Progrès du Saguenay*, Feb. 18, 1961.
 - (15) Magella Soucy, "Our painting barber", editorial in the *Progrès du Saguenay*, Feb. 22, 1961.
 - p. 14.
 - (16) "A painter... Arthur Villeneuve", p. 14.
 - (17) In the *Phare*: "Good luck to the figaro of the canvas".
 - (18) D.N.C. "Naïve art and the painter Arthur Villeneuve".
 - (19) In the three short articles of March 4th in the Montreal press that we mentioned earlier, the terms "naïve" and "primitive" appear six times.
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A brief survey of the design question

By Denise COURTOIS

In cooperation with the firm of Jacques Guillon/Designers Inc.

There is a plaque of an elegant simplicity on the wall which supports the vaulted main entrance at 305 Youville Square, in old Montreal. Across a paved courtyard, ringed with old stone walls, on the second floor of a house dating back to the French regime and recently renovated, there are offices whose walls of tinted glass, rugs, furnishings, and lighting, blend the intimate and the functional. Just what we would expect from the occupants, associates who are four in number like the immortal musketeers. The Musketeers of Design. White horse? Grey horse? They are from all companies, as are the contracts which are as varied as their diverse backgrounds.

Jacques Guillon, who opened the office about fifteen years ago "aware of a need to fill a vacuum existing in Canada where no industrial design was being done by designers in participation with industry, as in Europe and the United States", trained as an architect, as did one of the associates, Roger Labastrou. The two others came with different experience, that is graphism for Laurent Marquart, and industrial design for Morley Smith.

The firm got going gradually in the physical as well as human sense of the word. While setting up a well-administered office, adapted to the changing demands of the market, for which each associate was responsible, the four men searched for the best formula to work and to develop together. They think they have found it in the last three or four years. Even if it is the individual experience of any one of them that brings in a contract, they discuss it as a team, they each express their ideas, sometimes there is lively discussion, and they finally reach the best solution for the client.

In the production stage, as meets the needs of the project, all of them or else, two or three of them, watch over the production, backed up by the work of about a dozen draftsmen and studio employees. When it is a question of a prototype, it is executed either in the offices of Guillon and Associates or in the client's, accord-

ing to the case.

In spite of its manner of proceeding, the Guillon-Labastrou-Marquart-Smith team is not, does not intend to be an anonymous team. It makes itself known in terms of the individuals who make it up, and numerous contracts are won because so and so is a part of the team. In the course of 1971, the firm made an advance study of the means of transportation between Montreal and the future airport at Sainte-Scholastique, due to the presence of Morley Smith, known for his work on Montreal metro cars. The post office, which never grants contracts to a firm but to individual graphists, entrusted to Laurent Marquart specifically, the creation of two stamps, now issued. The knowledge of architecture and related fields that Jacques Guillon and Roger Labastrou have, often brings the team to participate in projects concerning housing and urban life in general, projects, moreover, in which other knowledge available within the partnership is also of use.

The productions of Jacques Guillon/Designers Inc. are too numerous to be listed, but we can judge of their diversity by mentioning a few projects large and small, which this office handled, and gave their special touch, in the last four or five years: Furnishings for Habitat 67 and for the National Arts Centre in Ottawa; a model showing the forms and functions of the brain at the Universal Exhibition, long and detailed work executed in close collaboration with a brain surgeon; graphic symbol of the Montreal Metro and its varied applications in stations and their entrances; suspension, exterior aerodynamics and interior arrangement of the metro cars: seats of fibreglass, fitted with cushions that can be removed by pressing on a button and replaced by other standard cushions, while the old ones go to the workshop to be fitted with new covers — that was unheard of for a public transit system; the air and space pavilion for Man and His World 1969; design of the lampposts of Nuns' Island; symbol for the conference of industrial designers in 1967; exhibition display of the promotion-presentation of the new airport, in three rooms/three plans: photographs, slides and diagrams, plans and results; study of the criterion of judgement for the design of a high speed train; plan for the suspension system of a dual function locomotive, for passenger trains and goods trains; signs to promote Canada in Europe; composition of fabrics, introduced by Design Canada; symbols and initials and their applications to the exterior graphic image of an association, league, factory, shop, professional corporation; schematization of the architectural plans of the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Montreal and, for the same building, the ladies and gentlemen signs for the lavatory doors; etc., etc.

All these projects have brought the four associates a solid reputation, medals, joys, frustrations, and a common conception of design, expressed in the following interview. Professionally, all four see themselves as "technicians endowed with a certain psychology and possessing skills in administration and commercialization which always see man as the starting point of a production".

Viewpoint on design and designers

expressed by Jacques Guillon, Roger Labastrou, Laurent Marquart and Morley Smith.

What is design?

A word used at random! Designers have been trying to agree for a long time on a definition, without success. Let us say that it is a process of creativity which can exist in a lot of professions, which considers the aesthetics of form with a practical application; its objective is to serve well the receiver of the product, of the object, of the service: man. Yes, it is a whole made up of three parts: man, function, and form. An inseparable whole. Does beauty not arise by itself from the design which most fulfills its function of serving people? The best airplanes in the world, the Concorde, and the Tupolev, are also the most beautiful.

And who is the designer?

There again, no unanimous decision may be reached. It is a complicated profession, constantly engaged in its own research. There are general designers like us, and there are also specialists, who are designers in the strictest English sense of the word, who research either function or form, or both, but in a restricted and specialized field. If they research aesthetics without there being some question of innovating or radically improving function, it is more fitting to call them stylists. There are also those who are searching for a style with a sole view to selling, by exploiting the taste, if not the bad taste, of the public, and they dare to call themselves designers. That's funny!

How do you conceive the 'true' designer?

He is endowed with an imaginative, inventive, and even intuitive mind. He possesses a technical knowledge of materials in general and particularly of those with which he may be called upon to work. He keeps himself up to date on developments in a lot of fields. He has a social conscience and a deep understanding of man.

He is not an inventor. He is not an artist. His role is not to create something in itself, but to create for man, by understanding, if not guessing at the profound desires and inner aspirations which go further than fundamental needs. First he must provide for the basic need, obviously. The designer should keep sight of the *quality of life* without ever departing from the real world.

You each have a specialty, how are you also general designers?

We are general designers because our field of action is vast and diversified, as opposed to the specialist in a factory, who always deals with the same product, often without being able to modify very much what already exists. In a large project, we become one of the cogs of a team of many disciplines in which design intervenes in a general way in everything that affects man, in order that the product or the service remain in harmony with man while it effectively fulfills its role and function.