

René Gagnon

In Harmony with Nature



Premières installations d'Hydro-Québec au grand Barrage Manic-5, 1958

"I do not know whether my paintings are Surrealist or not, but I do know that they are the most honest expression of myself."

– Frida Kahlo

Facing me, the man stands straight as an oak tree. His hands are huge. His hair is shaggy, much as Albert Einstein's. His deep intense eyes reflect the greatest joys as well as the torments of human experience. René Gagnon has been dealing with the hazards of life for all of his 86 years, including 67 years with the demons of creation.

Over the restaurant table, he is showing me the pictures that are included in his book. Here, on a fishing trip with Riopelle, Paul Rebeyrolle and Stanley Cosgrove; another, with Alfred Pellán, taken during an exhibition in Paris. Being cognizant of René Gagnon's creation is, to me, one of life's blessings. Could it be one of the best kept secret of Québec art history?

Marc-Aurèle Fortin, Rousseau, Ayotte and others

While brought about by an extraordinary set of circumstances, René Gagnon's artistic path unfolded straightforwardly. Destined, without much conviction, to take over the family farm in the village of Sainte-Anne de Chicoutimi, his uncle, influential visual art agent René Bergeron, invites the artists he represents to paint the grandiose Saguenay and Côte-Nord regions. Hence, René Gagnon has the incredible opportunity of making the acquaintance of renowned painters Marc-Aurèle Fortin, Cosgrove, Albert Rousseau, René Richard, Rodolphe Duguay and Léo Ayotte in Anse-à-Benjamin near his own village.

"I loved watching them capture the light, often from the same landscape but very differently, each creating highly personal atmospheres. Later, at dinnertime, they auto criticized their work. Discussions about Borduas' abstract avant-garde and Pellán's surrealist figuration also abounded. Me, I made myself very small and listened. Marc-Aurèle Fortin was my favourite. The enchantment in the tree foliage, the luminous harmonies that the grey and black painted supports provided; I loved the freedom with which he transformed elements of the landscape to heighten their expressiveness."

Painting the countryside

"I love this country; it fills me up and the overflow becomes my painting, my artistic expression."

As his father still believed his son would take the helm of the farm, René Gagnon paints at night. Then, no longer able to ignore the evidence, his father resigns himself and gifts him with a box of paint. Not only is the artist finally able to paint enthusiastically, but his love life also flourishes. He gets married and soon enough becomes the father of five children. To cater to his family's needs, he

works at Alcan, a major company in Chicoutimi that produces aluminium, but his desire to paint full time remains constant. Leaving the family clan, he endeavours to find buyers and collectors across Québec. "Then, I left for a New York adventure, where gallery owners propelled me into a world of art and celebrities. I could have had a career and find fortune there, but I came back to Québec for my children, where I led a five stars life without a penny in my pocket."

Then, a new adventure unfolded with a Montréal gallery, followed by travels around the world. In fact, Gagnon can boast of having widely conveyed the immensity of our open spaces and the indescribable beauty of our Québécois landscapes through exhibitions presented in the United States, France, the Bahamas, Morocco, the Philippines, China, Taiwan and Malaysia, which have all garnered uncommon success.

His art and return to Anse-de-Roche

Here is an artistic creation that stems from incessant research favouring the establishment of a community of spirit amongst painters that enthusiastically embrace gestural and lyrical abstraction. We must add, however, that underlying Gagnon's instinctive application of colours with painting knife, is felt the presence of an organizing principle that binds masses and projections, sky and earth. While he resorts to the use of a silk paintbrush to heighten the happy effects of glazes, viewing his paintings, a constantly evolving world comes to mind, where cascades of water trace the earth, the cold and the light with luminescent grooves as perceived by an exceptional visionary artist. Living life as it unfolds, after a lengthy illness; René Gagnon has returned to his Anse-de-Roche estate and is considering a number of forthcoming projects, including a painting of monumental dimensions. The artist and his wife, Claire-Hélène Hovington, will be more than happy to greet you, by invitation only, at the René Gagnon Museum: info@renegagnon.com.

Of dream and landscapes

The biography of the painter, entitled "De rêve et de paysages", is now available. The 200 pages exceptional volume generously includes 48 photographs of the painter's works, citations and clichés of fishing parties with Riopelle, Cosgrove and many others. The work is signed Christine Gilliet who, with minutia and sensitivity, has been able to bring to term this project after gathering, for three years, the souvenirs and words of René Gagnon. To purchase this book, contact the artist by email at info@renegagnon.com or via Galerie 203: 514 439 4203 or 514 261 0899.

Michel Bois



À bientôt, oil on canvas, 18 x 36 in



Le lac des épinettes, 2014