

PORTRAIT / FEATURE

Rendre sa dignité à l'être humain

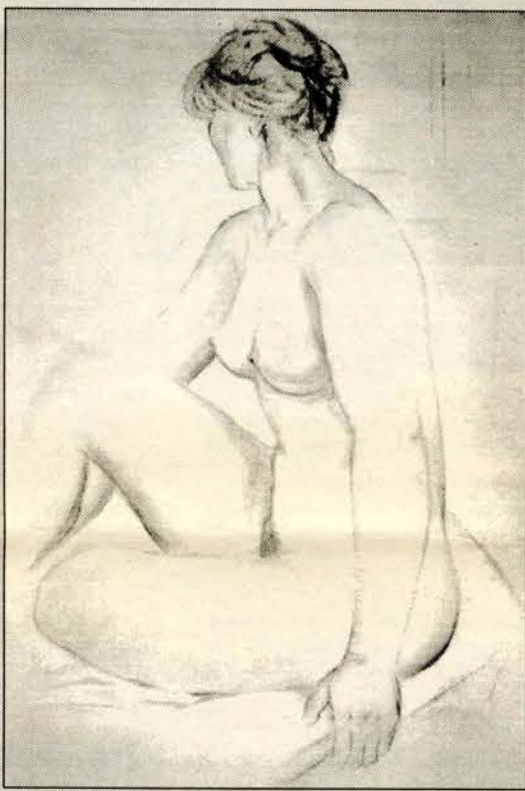
PAR JEAN-SYLVAIN BROCHU

Tout artiste s'inspire de l'univers qui l'entoure pour élaborer son œuvre. Par sa production personnelle des plus époustouflantes, Louis Muhlstock (né en 1904) est sans nul doute un digne interprète de la beauté du monde. Artiste-peintre de renom, il est né à Narajow en Galicie (territoire maintenant rattaché à la Pologne). Lorsque sa famille immigrait d'Europe centrale pour venir au Canada, il est âgé de sept ans. Après des cours du soir au Monument National et à l'École des Beaux-Arts, il se rend à Paris en 1928 et devient l'élève du réputé professeur Louis-François Billoul. De retour au pays, trois années plus tard, il s'installe sur la rue Sainte-Famille.

Manquant de ressources pendant la Grande Dépression des années 1930, il se débrouille du mieux qu'il peut pour poursuivre sa démarche artistique. Il dessine alors sur du papier d'emballage avec du fusain, moins dispendieux que la toile et la peinture à l'huile. Les chômeurs et les sans-abri qui se retrouvent au Fletcher's Field (l'actuel Parc Jeanne-Mance) deviennent ses modèles vivants. Même dans ces moments critiques où l'être humain perd un peu de sa dignité, Louis Muhlstock sait comment la lui rendre. «Pour moi, il n'y a rien sur cette Terre que nous habitons et dans l'espace qui nous entoure qui soit insignifiant. Chaque chose et toute chose ont leur raison d'être.» Ce qui explique sa volonté de tout peindre et de tout dessiner, autant en ville qu'à la campagne: la flore laurentienne, le paysage du Mont-Royal, les maisons condamnées ou abandonnées de la rue Saint-Norbert, etc. Durant la Seconde Guerre mondiale, il se rend dans les chantiers navals du Port de Montréal et à la Canadian Vickers, pour observer et dessiner l'effort de guerre.

Aujourd'hui, le peintre de la rue Sainte-Famille demeure toujours actif. Depuis 1980, il s'intéresse particulièrement à la peinture non-figurative; à de

nouveaux thèmes et variations qu'il nomme *Inscapes* (ou *Paysages intérieurs*). Il est considéré comme l'un des plus grands dessinateurs de nus au Canada. Son œuvre est présente dans plusieurs collections canadiennes, autant privées que publiques. Louis Muhlstock a été nommé Officier de l'Ordre du Canada, a reçu un doctorat honorifique ainsi que la médaille du Centenaire. Le Musée du Québec lui consacra une exposition-rétrospective en février 1995, qui se transportera ensuite dans d'autres régions du pays. Un rendez-vous à ne pas manquer. ♦



Nue assise, fusain, 1979.

Photo: Clément Schreiber

Giving People Back Their Dignity

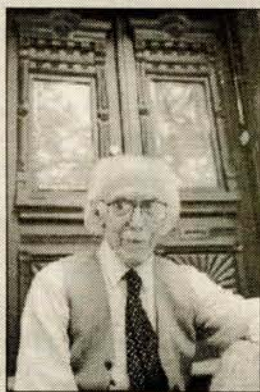
BY JEAN-SYLVAIN BROCHU

The universe is a never-ending source of inspiration for the artist involved in the creative process. Louis Muhlstock (born in 1904), with his amazing personal production is certainly a worthy interpreter of Earth's splendor. He was born in Narajow, Galicia (territory now linked to Poland). He left Central Europe with his family for Canada at the age of seven. After following some evening courses at the Monument National and at the École Des Beaux-Arts, he went to Paris to learn more about painting and drawing, especially under the guidance of Louis-François Billoul. Three years later, when he came back, he settled on Sainte-Famille street.

During the Great Depression of the thirties, lack of resources made creating and selling art difficult. Wrapping paper and charcoal replaced paint and canvas. The unemployed and homeless people on Fletcher's Field (now Parc Jeanne-Mance) became his live models. Even where humanity had lost some of its dignity, Louis Muhlstock knew how to give it back. "For me, there is nothing on this Earth which we inhabit, and in the space that surrounds us that is insignificant. Anything and everything has its reason for being." This explains his drive to paint

and draw virtually everything, whether in the city or in the countryside: the laurentian greenery, Mount-Royal's landscape, the abandoned and condemned houses of Saint-Norbert street, and so on. Louis Muhlstock also did a series of drawings on Second World War workers' efforts on the dockyard in Montreal's port and at the Canadian Vickers. He is also well known for his nudes.

Today, the painter of Sainte-Famille street has moved from figurative painting to non-figurative, towards new themes and variations, which he refers to as *Inscapes*. Many of his drawings and paintings are included in public and private collections throughout Canada. In recent years, he received the Centennial medal, an honorary Doctorate degree, and the Order of Canada. In 1995, the Musée du Québec will present a retrospective travelling exhibition of his work. An event not to be missed. ♦



Louis Muhlstock.

Photo: Clément Schreiber

Neighbourhood Joujouthèque
Recycling Pleasure

BY ISABELLE RIVEST

Tired of seeing the toys your child asked for so frantically pile up, unused, shortly after they were bought? "It's normal," says Diane Mathieu, director of the Hochelaga-Maisonneuve joujouthèque. "Toys are essential to the intellectual and social development of children, but after they have been 'played-out', it is natural for a child to go on to other things."

Unfortunately, all these toys can get very expensive. That's why, 17 years ago, Mathieu started a public toy lending counter in her home. But, the neighbourhood needs quickly outgrew her small resources so she organized a fundraiser in order to rent space on Adam street. The sale of children's drawings brought in \$2000.

Today, it is hard to imagine joujouthèque's modest beginnings. The ground floor has thousands of toys waiting for young borrowers. There is a dressmaking workshop on the first floor where they make costumes for children's school plays. Summer camps for 6 to 16 year-olds are held every year since 1982.

A child's development is the central concern at the joujouthèque: "As borrowers, youngsters have to learn that they don't own the toys they bring home," she says. They must learn to share. "For the 2 to 4 year-olds, it can be quite difficult to understand." This is why toys that children typically get attached to, like Teddy bears, are not available. As well, the joujouthèque refuses donations of war toys.

"Toys," says Mathieu, "are the epitome of overconsumption. They are made to be bought, broken, and replaced. Our work is very valuable because we recycle the toys in order to give as many kids as possible a chance to enjoy them."

Nevertheless, the educational and social value of the joujouthèque is not recognized at the municipal, provincial, or federal levels. The organization functions without any financial assistance other than government make-work programmes. It owes its success to the dedicated volunteers that go door to door gathering toys. It is so successful, even the Adam Street location is now too small. They opened a workshop nearby in 1992 to handle the overflow. The "Luciole" repairs toys for borrowing or for sale at bargain prices to help finance the project.

And there's certainly no lack of imagination when it comes to organizing fund-raising activities: bingos, day-care at public activities, strawberries and ice cream sales, etc.

Over the years, the joujouthèque has collected a fair amount of toys of historic value and Mathieu has now set her sights on opening a museum. She would also like to see all the various activities of the joujouthèque come together under one roof. With a track-record like hers, it's only a matter of time...

Anyone interested in starting a joujouthèque project in the neighbourhood can contact Clément Schreiber at 844-6917. ♦

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