

# Claude Langevin

## The Golden Era



*L'église de pierre*, 24 x 30 in, 2011

"At the time, children followed in their parents' footsteps," reminisces Claude Langevin. Like many others, he started his professional career on this principle. Then, with audacity and perseverance, he branched off onto his own path, something few people ever did.

Son of a medical doctor and one of five siblings, Claude Langevin began studying medicine, engaged on a path set by his father and already followed by his eldest brother. "I studied medicine for a year and soon came to understand that it wasn't a career for me. I had been painting since the age of 14, and that was what I loved doing. The news was difficult to accept for my family." To discard such a secure career option for one that was perceived as marginal seemed

like pure folly. But we were in the early 60s, when a wind of freedom and change had started to sweep Québec. Claude Langevin, then known under his real name of Paul Viens, was about to embark on this wave of artistic renewal that celebrated local talent.

Establishing himself as a painter meant a lot of hard work and dedication. He would paint for himself during the day, then, at night, produce works in mass for his cousin's business. "We'd paint thirty works each night and we were timed. Each artist had to execute a specific part of the painting. Just like working on an assembly line! We were paid \$5.00 for each 20X40 painting."

The Montréal visual arts scene during the 1960s consisted of a few galleries on

Sherbrooke Street visited by a select clientele. The public at large did not feel welcome in these places it deemed haughty and elitist. The democratisation of art galleries slowly started with their implementation in shopping centers and by offering a selection of affordable paintings mostly created elsewhere. New players wishing to sell works by local artists then established themselves. Through them, Claude Langevin starts to sell his works and holds his first exhibitions. As these chains of galleries multiply from east to west, the works of Québec artists spread across Canada. His name, changed to Claude Langevin to dissociate himself with his years of decorative painting, starts to circulate. He travels and paints more and more.



*Quelle vue...*, 20 x 16 in



*Reflet d'automne*, 24 x 36 in, 2013

Being a resident of the Laurentians for quite some time and loving the region, it isn't a surprise that nature becomes his favourite subject. The subtleties of light piercing a wooded area kindle a flame in his eyes. "When you start-out to paint, finding a subject takes all of two minutes: it's like a thunderbolt! You get out of your car and set up your easel and that's it. If you can't decide or cannot find a subject to paint, it's that you simply are no longer in the mood."

Known for his wintry rural scenes, he is a master of colour and light. Working in nature versus working in studio has thought him an important lesson: "In studio you are not aware of light variations; you only have your imagination working for you. This observation has transformed my work from being almost monochromatic to highly colourful." From the blue-greys of the start to the thousands of nuances of today, his olden days Québécois villages have conquered the

hearts of art lovers who shout out for more. Influenced by the Group of Seven, he admires Tom Thomson's colours and Clarence Gagnon's rural scenes. Claude Langevin's own visual signature resides in the luminosity of his palette.

To paint on site often requires the use of oil paint, to counter the quick drying effect of being exposed to sun and wind. In any case, he loves the medium's texture and suppleness. "I first cover my canvas with a brown-orange background of my invention. Then it's up to me to decide what needs to show through and what needs to be covered up. This is what gives my work its unique feel." Depicting the atmosphere of a place is, according to him, one of the hardest things to do. "Amateur artists often paint in too much detail. My feeling is that just enough information needs to be given to seize the moment, and that is all." This balancing act, between what to keep and what to subtract,

is a constant questioning. "You can paint your whole life without ever finding a clear answer on the subject."

In the quiet of his St-Jean-de-Matha home, with a view of the lake, he still paints, although no longer at such a frantic pace. "I've been lucky. I've known the good years of the Québec art market. I owned galleries in the beginning and was keenly aware of the change in mentalities. At that time, replacing the Saint Joseph calendar on a wall with a painting was an important decision. Then the 1980s took-off like crazy and people were in a frenzy to buy art. Today, the market is much more difficult. I've been very lucky!"

Claude Langevin is represented by Multi-Art.

**Isabelle Gauthier**



*Poudrière*, 24 x 30 in, 2011