

PART 1

THE JOURNEY
OF YOUTH

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Let me introduce myself. My name is Lonnie Paul Pelletier. Almost all of my friends and associates know me as Lon. I am a writer, somewhat of a composer, and a full time painter. Sometimes this is referred to as being an author, a musician and an artist – it's all a matter of perception.

This may not be the only art book written in the first person, however *it is one of the very few of them*. I began this as a novel in 1966. I was attempting to communicate the importance of art as an evolution, and the book didn't look much like this. I've actually begun this book a number of other times. In my first attempts, I used the benchmark of well-known European paintings. When my resulting pages began to unfold as duplications of everything that I had previously read, I set that project aside.

My next attempts saw me using Canadian Art. Not only did many schools of artistic thought appear to be missing, many Canadian artists had simply followed their European counterparts with a lead-time of thirty years being lost in the process. As Canadian painters we are not necessarily imitators, but my project with its focus on the international art scene, made us look that way. Throughout this process of several attempts, I hadn't yet come to realize that what I was trying to say could be demonstrated with my own paintings.

But at last, this idea took hold.

The fact that I am a Western Canadian will become obvious to the reader. Most of our traditional groups of painters have set the bar for Canadian Art as being evocative of Ontario or Quebec. We in Western Canada tend to be loners. Not only does our art reflect our individuality, but it also bears connotations of our rural nature.

I have lived most of my adult life in Vancouver; my education in art took place primarily during my three years of study in Paris, France. However, it must be noted that our character is usually formed at a much younger age. I grew up in northern British Columbia and in central Alberta. Neither environment represented "big city living."

My best early memories are of a log cabin, on the edge of the Canadian Rockies where, for my first years of school, I lived with my maternal grandparents. I have numerous memories of that homestead, set in picturesque foothills, in front of the mountain that had been named by my grandmother. Her name for it was Sugarloaf Mountain, and the name stuck. It has always seemed to me that I was somehow blessed with the chance to experience what life must have been like in a previous century. The scenario was probably reminiscent of the mid-eighteen hundreds.

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The cabin was a cozy home and was warmed by both a centrally located “pot-bellied stove” and by a wood-burning range. The floors were planks, which were always kept washed and clean. Beside the entry door was a wood box that stored the winter supply for the two stoves. At the time, the wood box seemed huge. When it was partially empty, I loved to play in it, and it became many wondrous things – a fort, a castle, a great outlaw’s hideout – just about anything. The chunks of wood often became guns, cannons, or cars or trucks. Living there as the only child in this survival-gear environment, I could name all incidental pieces of wood, to be choices from the world as I then knew it. Later, when I visited the cabin at about age seventeen, I was astounded by the size of this wood box. My formerly grandiose world comprised such small dimensions that I could only find it laughable.

The real point of my log cabin illustration is not to compete with readers who may have grown up in similar circumstances, but to illustrate the fact that life is an adventure of learning, one that is both imaginative and figurative. In later years as I studied in art history courses in Paris, and literally found myself immersed in a curriculum spanning one thousand years, I realized that we all have to begin somewhere. Our mental destinations can complement our early background; they need

not compete with it. The result for me was that the more I studied art, the more I returned to nature.

In the early sixties I thought that I could become an architect. But once I realized that it really wasn’t the job that I wanted, I gave up that goal and bought a one-way ticket to Paris, France. Having worked hard, I’d saved enough money to not be immediately thrown into that newly named group of my peers called hippies, and set out to discover what I might really want to study. I knew that my desire was in the arts, but my interests were somewhere between Interior Design and the world of Dance. At the time, such pursuits sounded rather effeminate, especially in that very red-necked part of the world. In fact, in Western Canada, the Arts section in the newspaper was generally called the “Women’s Section”. I was not effeminate; I am definitely heterosexual, but I did desire a life in the arts. Naturally, this was exactly why I was leaving. At that time in my life, I had worked primarily as a carpenter in construction, so I was used to being around people whose thought patterns were pretty much the opposite of mine.

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It was one of the most astounding discoveries of my life when, at twenty-one years old, I stood before the great works of Cubism, Expressionism and Impressionism – and felt great emotion. Having read a number of books on art history, I was somewhat prepared for the intellectual wonders of that new world, but I had wrongly presumed that the process of understanding art was going to be one of technical memorization. However, the discovery that the subjects treated by my favourite artists were things I could identify with – and the fact that viewing their work resulted in “an evocation of a state of mind” – left me astounded.

After my first visits to the art museums of Paris, I realized that my world had just become much larger. I no longer worried about my “red-necked-but-close” friends back in rural Canada. At last, I had found my world. To this day I often enjoy visiting those first paintings that I viewed, as over the years, they have become my good friends. To this day I often also visit my “red-necked-but-close” friends. To my amazement, they have mellowed in their judgment of the arts world. Fortunately, the broader world has also changed. Perhaps this is partly due to the hippie movement, which, like any movement, contained both good and bad. One of its broad-reaching effects was that individuality became acceptable. It managed to change a paradigm of bigotry and thought. In

Canada, the arts became mainstream; as a result of this, it became acceptable for men to react emotionally to painting and literature.

In the mid-Sixties I began my quest for material success. This meant I had to make some compromise - if I wished to work in the arts. So I decided to become an art dealer. By working for three years, on a full time basis, as an international art dealer, and a total of fourteen more years part time, I established specific personal beliefs about the reality of art in the market place. Some very real reasons kept me from working at it full time. Mainly, my personal income goals could not be achieved from the process. My yearly income from the commercial world of art was never either constant nor completely satisfactory.

Besides, I had decided early on, to never own an art gallery. My observation of the marketing process at art galleries was that it was demeaning to everyone involved. Rather than describe the selling process within these writings, it may be adequate to state that my decision was based on both my academic background and my experience as a trainer of salespeople.

The process of choosing an artwork can also be demeaning for the consumer. Often they are told by art dealers what they *should like*. In only a very few instances could it be successfully argued that a quick and judicious non-personal

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course might help them make better choices. In any case, I preferred to sell at a corporate level, avoiding the façade of retail communication. My corporate dealings included working at the wholesale level in marketing directly to galleries.

My first real insight about the art-marketing scene came in the mid-Sixties. I realized that even though I had either sold or put on consignment nearly seventy-percent of the paintings displayed for sale in all of the art galleries in the cities of Edmonton and Calgary, the sales simply weren't happening. After a year, I still had an inventory available that I didn't want. I saw that the art galleries stayed open only due to their cash flow from framing prints. Not willing to believe that the art scene was completely dead, I went on to other concepts.

I mounted a series of large hotel exhibits in the five largest Western Canadian cities. By using combined banquet halls, I could always advertise that I was "exhibiting in excess of three hundred paintings." Using this process I was able to sell an average of one painting every half hour. Unfortunately, I saturated this specialized market within three years. It had quickly proven to attract a group of individuals who became loyal buyers at each exhibit, however each only wished a limited size of art collection. Later, when other dealers followed, trying to use the same methodology, but with

mass-produced oil-on-canvas product, I set the concept aside.

What did work was the process of selling directly to corporations. I produced and sent out catalogues, followed up with a phone call for an appointment – and sold five thousand and four paintings to one thousand and seven corporations in the space of approximately two years.

Many of the companies I dealt with preferred to lease before buying. The longest of these leases was for a group of twelve works that were leased for a total of eleven years – from 1973 to 1984. Just as I did with all the leases, I phoned at three-month intervals, on each billing date, and suggested that they buy the work outright. It was easy to realize from dealing with these leases that many corporations seemed to prefer to never have to make a decision on art. Leasing allowed them to enjoy the works in their executive suites and offices without the potential embarrassment of a manager having to state that these were his or her personal choice. Purchasing outright would have represented a declaration of their artistic taste. There exists, even at the upper management level, the possibility of intimidation over going public with one's personal taste. Once the eleven years expired, that particular firm simply asked me to pick up the paintings. They were now going to invest in interior design and wall reliefs, in

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lieu of displaying art. I didn't really mind; the paintings had long since been well paid for.

I can safely say that this process also enabled me to help establish a number of meaningful corporate art collections. It allowed me to work not only as a dealer, but also as a consultant. Normally, I would buy the art outright and then sell it to the consumer. By working with an upper management group, or a person delegated as a liaison, I could buy on their behalf and thus create a more meaningful collection for them.

In the case of one large firm that had built ships since the mid-eighteen fifties, I was offered the loan of some of their old photographs. With the help of two other painters, we created new compositions by using details from those photographs. The firm was pleased enough with the results that they created a permanent display space for most of the oil paintings that resulted from our work.

Such was my world of Western Canadian corporate art. This was the same reality that had existed throughout history, where the artist requires a patron. In days of old that patron had been the church or the kings and queens of the day. My experience and study had led me to understand that the new patrons were the corporations. Other art dealers and artists have turned to government, by way of grants - as their patron. It's all just a matter of preference.

Throughout this process of marketing, I remained a painter. It may possibly seem to be a mercenary process, but I would like to draw a parallel to a professional musician. A musician will prefer a genre such as jazz, classical or country. Within that, he or she may prefer a style such as honky-tonk, punk or older rock-and-roll. While it is a given that a professional musician is capable of playing in all styles, it is understood that an amateur probably cannot. I believe that a similar truth applies to painting as an art form.

It is probably my European training that has made me biased in this respect. The traditional European process of learning to paint requires one to learn about many art movements. Then, only after completion of the accompanying academic studies, will the painter choose his or her favourite genre, and develop a personal style.

This matter of style is something I had to deal with while I worked as an art dealer. When I was handling the works of two hundred painters, I painted in the styles that were unavailable to me as a dealer. I simply "filled in" by painting works in styles that were not yet represented by the work of my clients, the artists.

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I had advertised that all genres of painting were available through me. So, whenever I was presented with the opportunity to sell non-objective works, if I did not have a piece similar to the one requested, I would stand in as the artist. It was in this manner that during my “art dealer period,” I sold over three hundred non-objective works of my own.

I should explain again that this was my personal form of compromise. Some of my associates taught art, and others purchased art galleries. In all of our cases, our first choice would have been simply to paint or sculpt. However, a common denominator existed. We had decided to have a family and preferred to raise our children in a style to which we wanted them to become accustomed. Being a starving artist wasn't among our goals.

I have had many teachers and my world of art allows me to reflect on many mentors. Like many individuals who have acquired training in Europe, I reflect not so much on the instruction doled out by my professors, but rather on what they *taught me to see*. Saying that we can be trained by the greats of art, merely from hours of museum observation, does injustice to the process. It was instruction by my art teachers that taught me how to view these works, and how to learn from them. Having said that, I can now state that the reason many of the definitions of art movements in

this book are of a European nature is that these definitions are deduced from my mentors.

The excitement of sitting in a sidewalk café in Paris in the early sixties and discussing art until three in the morning gave me the feeling of being a part of a more vast world experience:

As we discussed art and the reality of art, I was able to share the constant search for line with Tadao Sumikawa from Japan.

We spoke of the relativity of the universe as shown in the outer world oils (space paintings) of Vila Monasterio from Spain.

I learned about the relationship of texture and form found in the sand-and-concrete works of Ebrin Adingra, an artist from the west coast of Africa. He had just won the first prize at the university. His frescoes had been recognized for the link they made between Cubism and the symbols of his former home in Africa.

I am proud of the fact that these were the people who became my friends in France. However dissimilar their former cultures may have been, their backgrounds were similar to mine.

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We were not searching for any type of elite rather we were searching for the real. Later, as I met individuals who wished to use art pieces to flaunt their sense of elitism, I marveled at the irony. The culture consumers of our era can be just as removed from the reasons for art's existence, as were the former patrons in other periods of history.

The city of Paris was also filled with young females, then my age, from every country imaginable. It was an exciting time to be young, open to new learning and willing to communicate with all other cultures. I was able not only to spend the hundreds of hours of reflection before the masters of both antiquity and contemporary art, but I was able to have intelligent companionship by my side. It would be a terrible understatement to simply say "all of this had created a new form of adventure for me." It was more than a new world – it was as if the planet had changed direction. From my perspective, Western Canada was appearing to be anything but new.

And now finally, almost forty years later, I have returned to the arts. While I was focused on commerce, and as long as my business administration credentials were being used, I felt that I wasn't really involved in the arts. But now my children had not only become adults, they had even completed their desired academic pursuits. Throughout their growing up, I had

continuously reminded them that they should pursue those occupations that would fulfill their own passions. Now, as they reached their twenties, they kept reminding me that it was my turn to do the same. They said that my passions should become relevant again. I finally left marketing entirely and became completely immersed in writing novels, composing music – and most importantly – in painting.

This book is the culmination of everything that I ever wanted to write about art. I hope that I am able to communicate that the process of learning about art, and the process of attempting to find the right line, colour or texture, is something that I find very exciting. My greatest wish is to pass along the ability to look at and *see* art works, especially to those who may not understand how to do that. Though I realize that most of my readers may already have this skill, I know that learning to *see* was the principal lesson I learned from my early European experience.

Over the last few years I have returned to Europe and, as I have previously noted, I experienced a reunion with some of my old friends – the great paintings. It was this adventure then that inspired me to take up a new way of life.

PART 2

THE PARIS
OF EXPERIENCE

In March of 2005, I had returned to the Paris that I had remembered. After picking up my apartment keys, I headed for the tunnels of the Metro. The smell of it washed over me like a tidal wave in slow motion. Any underground system will sustain an environment, and the Paris Metro was no different. This smell wasn't a stench. It was something in the air that felt like warm welcome. At the point of being enveloped in the scented cloud of evocative memory, I felt a specific emotion. It was a sense of fulfillment that came with my realization that – after four decades of staying away, I really was back in the city I loved – Paris.

Spending the next two days just settling in to my apartment was a treat. I took my time getting organized, as I wanted to feel part of the neighbourhood. This was not the tourist's Paris, and I was enjoying it.

“In France, the tip is included in the bill,” the waiter insisted. I had forgotten. After a two-hour walk, in a circle around the area of my new home, I had finally sat down. My initial observations indicated that there had not been a change in forty years – at least not in neighbourhoods like this one. Mine was the twentieth district and it seemed to have remained intact.

French beer was still less in price than imported. All beer was close, or even less in price, than lemonade or a small glass of Coke.

Sandwich Jambon (ham) was still the cheapest item on the menu, and it was still less than the price of a pint of beer. In a world of much change, the basics of French tourism had remained constant. On this, my second day back in Paris, I felt very much assured that I had somehow arrived back at my second home. Home is a place that's stable and familiar, with consistent patterns of behaviour, and all of this about me, I felt, defined home.

My third day was a nostalgic walking tour past classrooms and sidewalk cafés, places I'd known forty years ago, so this was a thoughtful time, with much reflection. I intended to have a drink at what had been one of my favourite cafés on the Left Bank. But to my surprise, the place had been transformed into a very large sushi bar.

I walked past it, heading for a second favourite site. In the sixties, I had obtained two postcards that pictured two alternate scenes of the corner at Boulevard Saint Michel looking up Rue Soufflo towards the Pantheon. One had been taken during the then new age of photography (almost one hundred years prior), and as a black and white photo, it showed the two corner sidewalk cafés fronted with horse drawn carriages. The second coloured postcard showed the same corner cafés – with even the same canopies – but with efficient nineteen-sixties European cars quickly passing. The

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postcards depicted two worlds, over fifty years apart, where not even two World Wars raging through Paris had changed these two cafés and their social ambience.

On this visit however, the cafés revealed themselves as not entirely impervious to the realities of the world. One was now a fast-food pizza place, and the other sported the tacky golden arches of McDonald's. I forced a French thought, as I stood in amazement, and shook my head - *C'est la vie!*

I made the decision that there would be nothing nostalgic about having anything in either a sushi café or a McDonald's, and I continued on my walking tour towards other, more authentic Parisian delights. I didn't allow myself to feel personally slighted. I reminded myself of the cliché, that one can never go back. The crowded streets, so full of students who looked so very young, reminded me that last time here, I must have been much younger too.

Day four, my second trip to the Left Bank, was more fruitful and was less of a shock. I remembered that it had often been written that there were many different dimensions of Paris. The businessman's Paris was different from the sailor's Paris. The fashion industry's Paris did not interact with the tourist's Paris. The students' Paris did, at one time, coincide with the Paris of intellectuals. It was now obvious that the Left

Bank of students and intellectuals had both physically – and spiritually – been taken over by tourism. What I was experiencing within my observation was that change. Nothing that I had hoped to revisit coincided with this tourist's version of Paris. I felt sorry for the students who I couldn't help observing, as they tried their best to “put up” with the massive façade of all these tourists so intent on “experiencing the Left Bank”. I also felt sorry for the tourists, as the Left Bank and all that it represented (especially, intellectually) no longer existed. The culture of McDonald's really had taken over.

Members of the intelligentsia may still be the normal ruling body behind the walls of the Sorbonne. I hoped so; however, I decided to leave any analysis to my observations of the physical life of the Left Bank. I knew that I probably would never visit it again.

Place du Tertre and Montmartre were now places that offered only souvenirs – both in the sense of trinkets, and in the richer, French-language meaning of memories. Even in “my day” of forty years prior, the area had been transitional.

The Impressionist painters and the writers of the area, with their having chosen these other digs and surroundings other than the Left Bank – had then again left, even in the sixties. Before, many art galleries of substance

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had thrived here, but now they lived only in memory. The few remaining galleries had added lesser-priced items to their stock in order to survive the “quick-serve” tourists with their two and three-day itineraries.

Seeing the Paris of business next, gave me hope. It had become a city of scattered high-rise buildings, and was linked to the rest of the world of commerce. The “purists”, as lovers of the original and traditional Parisian beauty, hated the new look; however, the buildings had substance.

They seemed as tangible as the Paris intellectual groups had been in the past. They also reminded me that as a Canadian, I was part of the continent that had replaced the traditional. As a centre of the world of art and architecture, the original Paris no longer existed. Just as distributed database technology and information systems had replaced central mainframe computers, world creativity was now dispersed throughout a widely disseminated system. The new paradigm was not one of leadership and acceptance by an elite creative community in Paris, as it had been in the past. It was now global.

Within my excitement of visiting the Centre Georges Pompidou for the first time, I was reminded that I had acquired an incredible training in Art History in this city. A great deal of my knowledge had been accumulated here,

and it is to Paris and its museums that I give all credit. In Paris the building of the Georges Pompidou National Centre of Art and Culture is considered the epitome of revolutionary avant-garde styling. The Museum of Modern Art is on the third and fourth floors and is possibly the largest, or at least one of the largest in the world. For me viewing the quality was important. The Centre is also put forth as providing ongoing forums for debate and intellectual exchange. I suspect it does very well at replacing both the “Left Bank” and the “Montmartre” intellectual and social concepts of old.

As I compared, my personal interpretation of Jackson Pollack’s style seemed to possibly be the exception – one thing I had learned elsewhere. I needed to have more confidence in respect to the styles of Vlaminck, Matisse and Leger. Using specific strokes, which I later observed in the Picasso Museum, I knew I could now be comfortable with myself in the context of my work. I had not left any use of style behind. My works had now included much that I was seeing including the vitality of Mondrian. As a colourist I felt that I was one of “them.” Such is the ego of an artist - without that ego, accomplishments in art would not exist.

I was viewing the “greats” of my world. However, culture and influence may take side roads and odd journeys. After the last paintings

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of the 1950's I could no longer relate to French influence. Still, I am sure this was a positive step in my thought process. It meant that, as related to truly contemporary art, I had become myself. I was not simply influenced by the France of one hundred years ago, nor was I later just following Northern European trends, even though this would have been perfectly normal. I went beyond simply finding New York modern schools of artistic thought to be valid, on to yet another usual part of twentieth century artistic thought.

I suspected that, in art, I had somehow become Canadian – and that this wasn't a negative, but a positive idea. It was here and now at this museum that I was able to ascertain these very positive differences.

Fortunately, I did not suffer much shock at the changes that had taken place in the "Les Halles" District, where The Centre had been built. Old Paris used to have one of the largest farmer's markets in the world, and this had been its location. Along with the number of huge agricultural distribution warehouses was the Parisian lifestyle that went with the market. In many of the small second floor restaurants near this fresh food supply in this very large city, it was considered fashionable to dine at three o'clock in the morning. For students and artists it was not only fashionable but simply logical to dine here, on inexpensive but delicious fresh

sausage, or huge servings of fish and fried potatoes. I had eaten there many times.

"Les Halles" was also known for the beautiful farmer's daughters who would accompany the produce brought in by their families. Unfortunately, some of the more decadent "families" supplied them as prostitutes, and these young women could be found sitting for display on the numerous rooming house staircases throughout the "Les Halles" area. I remembered that when I'd been a student, walking by with my friends, we had seen these girls and realized that they were our age. We'd both identified with them, and felt very sorry for their plight. While we knew that education was not accessible to everyone then, we had hoped that the world would soon change for these girls. I was happy to see that it had. I also knew that most tourists would never realize that the large footprint of the Centre Georges Pompidou had replaced a very negative manmade system that had been decades old.

I marvelled at the multitude of new shops selling CD's, tourist trinkets and the many contemporary versions of the fried potatoes and sausage. "Les Halles" as I remembered it, had been entirely replaced. It was now just the name of a bus and subway stop – a name used in popular fiction, about some other time. My solitary walk criss-crossing the new area was very enjoyable. As in many such ventures,

even in Paris there is no real sadness relating to change.

At the Picasso Museum I had observed another type of nostalgia. It had to do with picture frames. Determining where and how best to present, and preserve, a work of art – how to make it sing in its new surroundings – is one of the pleasures of art ownership. This responsibility is left to the consumer as the owner of the work. I began to notice a specifically European style of presentation. Europe's rich past will always have an influence on interior design there, especially in France. Picasso's works from the 1930's were being presented in the bold and even aggressive designs of early seventeenth century Spanish frames. His analytical cubism was presented in seventeenth century Italian gilded frames. The result of such presentation was unmistakable as a positive metamorphosis involving the total art form.

However, the trend for white box frames around contemporary art will – and probably should, continue - because the painting as art must live its own life, not as merely a decorative piece. It is in choice of frame that an owner's cultural influence or background is the ruling factor. A frame that is baroque in design, as used by a European, has a different connotation than it would in a newer culture, like North America's. In the wrong context, the antiquated

frames become an exaggerated juxtaposition of traditional and modern. Although such a contrast may occasionally “work,” most often it is just quirky, as it seems mostly a presentation of the unexpected. Degas was using painted white frames in the 1880's – for exactly those reasons. On other occasions, as a North American, I had felt uncomfortable with the exaggerated contrast of nostalgia in frames.

It seemed fitting that I would now visit Place du Tertre for a second time. When I'd been here forty years earlier, some quality of art as a creative process had existed in this square. Without the Sunday explosion of tourists, I thought that perhaps I could view art – rather than the slew of terrible paintings I had quickly critiqued on the first visit. Unfortunately tourist “schlock” now completely dominated these oil painting presentations.

The number of painters around the square had not varied over half a century. The styles were also of a certain pattern. About a dozen painters did small street scenes and floral works, in vivid colours, designed to sell. I could only compare their works to mass-produced ashtrays. Another dozen painters did larger street scenes. These were of a slightly better quality, and I'm sure, would find their way onto the walls and into the living rooms of these many frantic consumers. The Paris *street scenes* had evolved to being pastel in colour, rather

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than the darker browns with dashes of primary reds and yellows of previous decades. As always, in evaluating the total group, between two and four painters could actually paint. It would be obvious to those who knew art that this smaller group probably painted elsewhere –and, as I suspected, would then probably paint under a different name, likely their own.

Such was the case of Villa Monasterio, someone I had known in my earlier Paris years. He would paint scenes of wrinkled old men with glowing pipes. Now, two other artists had replaced him with the same (obviously “marketable”) style. Villa had always signed his Place du Tertre works with only his first name. He knew, as we all knew, that no other successful game existed for street painters. Each painter could sell two-dozen “works” per month. This represented a steady income. But even in the sixties, Villa signed his “real” art works with his last name. It was by these more serious works that I was influenced to paint outer space. As an art dealer, I had purchased and sold over fifty of his best works. I had sold these “Monasterios” in Western Canada for up to five thousand dollars. Even adjusting for inflation, it clearly was a successful venture in art for both of us. In 1974 I had given Villa a guarantee of one thousand dollars per month. For that I was to receive a minimum of three works per pay period. We carried on with this

plan for six months, by which time Villa had achieved his financial goal of being able to return to Spain with its much warmer climate. He had consistently complained during winter months in Paris that he was freezing.

The second artist I dealt with was Ebrin Adingra. Originally from what used to be called the Ivory Coast, Ebrin had won the “First Prize of the Beaux-Arts of Paris”. In winning this very prestigious award, Ebrin had shown himself to be more than just a promising young artist. The historic liaison between African works, which had evolved into Cubism, had never been better portrayed. Working on a sand laden canvas, he produced a rock-relief look that was very popular. Both he and Villa had far surpassed Place du Tertre levels of art. They were just two examples supporting my theory that a small minority existed among this larger group who were capable of excelling in art.

On my second visit to the Place du Tertre, I felt that I might never come back. If I were going to ask about my former associates, I knew this had to be the time. I had purposely returned on a weekday so that the numbers of tourists would be down. The Place du Tertre of today is like a country fair. It is a rectangular open space that is surrounded by small cafés and (now) larger restaurants. It could be described as a marketing zoo. It is through a process of bartering and negotiating in many languages,

that hundreds of not very creative works are sold every week. In my past and also as an art dealer, I used to visit just to observe. Despite the way so many of these paintings had been unsophisticated, I knew that most art galleries needed to learn that there was something here that was working. I hated this system and the fact that so many “things” that were just so much oil on canvas were selling under the guise of being art. However, I knew that it provided a cash flow to the painters, which enabled them to paint more seriously elsewhere. I had once been one of those painters.

I approached a gentleman standing behind his easel as he was about the same age as me – and also was painting a landscape that in fact was not that bad. We spoke in French. “Pardon me, I used to paint here some forty years ago – and I would like to inquire about a couple of my friends who were here also.”

“Yes, of course.” He didn’t seem irritated by my asking for free information.

“Two of my friends here were Villa Monasterio and Ebrin Adingra.”

“When did you say they painted here?”

“Thirty to forty years ago.” Because of his age, my statement did not seem ridiculous.

“I’ve only been here about twenty years, but I think that I know Adingra. Was he a black man?”

“Yes. He painted in sand.” I stated this as Ebrin almost seemed to be the only person in the world who painted in sand. That isn’t really the case, but with his tremendous originality of style, Ebrin had captured an ownership of sand painting.

The man motioned to the nearby corner easel. “The lady sitting over there would know. She is the “Grande Dame” of Place du Tertre. She knows everyone that has ever painted here. Come, I’ll give you an introduction.”

I followed him over to two women who were sitting comfortably behind their paintings. Each was looking past their work in order to catch the eye of any tourist who might be contemplating a purchase. “Madame, I would like to introduce a painter from the past. He wishes to inquire about two of his friends who used to work here.” He was introducing me with the flair of a presentation to royalty.

I stepped forward and interjected quickly, being as informal as I could, in an attempt to bring a more normal flow to our communication. “Yes, excuse me, but I used to paint here almost forty years ago, and I had friends I would like to inquire about.”

Without hesitation she made a statement that completely threw me off guard. “I remember you. You were a Canadian.”

I looked at her more thoroughly. I also could now remember her. The sixties and

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seventies were all about looking cool – especially in Paris. And now I was remembering her – not as this elderly, grey-haired lady before me, but as a young and vibrant girl. She had been very stylish dressed for that era and she always enjoyed the company of her “fellow” painters. I also remembered speaking to her in some of the following years, in my role as an art dealer. During that period, I had diplomatically explained to her that commercial work such as hers could not be purchased and sold within my process. More specifically, her oil paintings – of flowers on canvas – were definitely not art.

“Who are you wondering about?” As she spoke, it was as if years had disappeared between us and we were simply continuing a former conversation.

“Villa Monasterio and Ebrin Adingra. I had other friends, but I’ve forgotten their names.”

“Ebrin died just last week! He is dead.” She stated this in such a matter of fact way that it shocked me.

The woman beside her spoke up. “He died of cancer – last week - finally.”

I managed to stumble out a phrase or two. French is my second language and with the shock of coincidence, I was not thinking quickly. The coincidence that shocked me was twofold. Firstly, I had just missed meeting him again after all of these years, and secondly, he

had once again been painting at Place du Tertre, like in the old days.

Rose, the first woman I’d spoken to, now explained, “He had been sick for a year and he hadn’t painted here since last spring.”

“Did he still paint with sand?” I remained at a loss for words, but then added, “He had such a great style.”

Rose knew what I was asking. “Yes, he never changed that style in all of those years. Each composition was different though. Sometimes he changed colours – mostly to amuse himself. But he never changed.”

All of a sudden, it was as if I was at a social event and I wanted to be extra complimentary. “His style was very contemporary. I really liked his work. I still hang his paintings in my home.”

“What was your other friend’s name?” The second woman asked. I repeated it, adding that he painted outer space, and that for those works he used his last name. I observed them both, as that fact seemed to trigger some memories.

Rose remembered it all. I was trying to remember if she had been Villa’s girl friend, but the detail wouldn’t come back. She seemed to concentrate, then she replied, “Villa Monasterio went back to Spain about that time. He has never returned – never.”

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“He was Basque.” I stated this, if only to reassure her of my former friendship with him.

“Yes, and you had another friend here – another Canadian. He painted large street scenes. He liked the large canvases.”

“Yes, I smiled widely.” We were reliving our youth.

The second woman sat up straighter. “There are no other painters left from then. Only about four or five of us – from the entire group! About thirty died of cancer. Do you understand – cancer?”

I knew she was asking something more, but I kept my reply simple. “Yes, I understand it well.”

We were interrupted. Both women had customers waiting. Their small calendar art paintings were selling at four times the price of similar works in Canada, and I knew from experience that they could not afford to keep their customers waiting.

I stepped back politely and waited. One of them concluded a successful sale of two works, but the other didn't. We then visited again briefly.

Rose's friend was specific. “The painters from Poland used to be here. Many good artists were here. No one comes from behind the old Iron Curtain anymore. But I remember - you all painted such big works – huge works. Now

only souvenirs are to be found here. There are only terrible tourist works now. Do you remember those times?”

I smiled and I paused and remembered. I also remembered meeting Rose at the café that used to be small. It was on the corner of Place du Tertre, only a few metres from us. Like most businesses here, it had now been enlarged to encompass the two adjoining shops. I could see the white table clothes as the symbol of the much more formal place that it had become.

Rose had reminded me of it. “You and your friend always had a beer on the corner here. It was a hangout for painters then. We all painted.”

I also remembered why her memory was specific. When I met her she was the girlfriend of one of the painters. I still couldn't remember his name, though I knew_it didn't matter. I did recollect that he was a very sarcastic fellow and he was probably hard to get along with. What I remembered about her was that she was pretty. We'd had a series of those meetings we sometimes experience in life, where potential couples meet, while being involved with someone else. I was thinking of how two people can both know that they are interested in each other, but understand that the timing is wrong. I'm sure we were both remembering those far off days in the same way.

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I felt that it was better to leave things the way they were. It had been another time and another place. I smiled at this now-elderly lady and I said my good-byes. This was with the knowledge that even though my stay in Paris would last another two months, I would not visit them again.

The art world of Europe has a hierarchy and they would feel very uncomfortable talking to me, and I to them. They would now consider me an academician and someone who never had to withstand the harsh elements in order to make a living. Even as I had replied to their inquiry of whether life had been successful for me in Canada over the years, I had purposely diminished my statement of that success.

As I then strolled down the streets of Montmartre while being deep within my thoughts, I compared our visit to one that might have taken place at a high school reunion. Our conversation may have been superficial, but it held much meaning for all of us. Those two women and Ebrin Adingra had painted there for the last forty years. That thought made my mind spin. For the two women, and their style of work, it likely seemed a way of life to be expected. Yet I couldn't feel sorry for Ebrin. He had a family of six children. Now he had passed away, leaving probably a large and wonderful family. He had told me about his earlier life, growing up in the tribal warfare of rural Africa.

I knew of the hut where he'd been born. Paris had given him what he had desired in life.

Reflection on success seems in order at the news of anyone's death. He would have painted a minimum of one hundred works per year. Four to five thousand "Ebrin Adingra's" were now hanging in homes, offices and galleries around the world. There is justice and honour, in spite of a lifetime of condescending responses from tourists, and standing in the bitterly cold winter rains of Place du Tertre – all the while painting and selling, selling and painting. We had been there just after the time of great and well known street painters. It had been Utrello's paintings of the street scenes of Place du Tertre, which had made it so well known. And his works could now only be seen in the best of museums.

In my contemplation, I wished that I could visit Villa Monasterio; such is the essence of friendships from the past. The next days would take me back to the history of Paris, however this visit made me feel that in some very small way, I myself was now a part of it.

I was able to visit some other old friends at the Orsay Museum. The old paintings of the Masters have always been friends to many. They speak to us in a natural way. As communication they have been very successful. It also seemed almost eerie. The works I now thought of as "old" were from merely twice

the time span, back to the period of my having painted in Paris. I'd lived in Paris forty years ago, yet many of the Post-Impressionist works were from as recently as only eighty years ago. This is something most of us never think of in our youth – the way we also become a part of history through life's adventure.

As I toured the museums, I followed the development of painting in a chronological order. Like so many other painters, for most of my life, I'd said that my best training was from contemplation before the work of the Masters. Now after so many years of painting, revisiting my "School of the Masters" revealed even more detail to me.

In *La Falaise d'Etretat après l'ouage*, Gustave Courbet had used a particular style to paint rocks, foliage and grass, and even ocean. I understood that I had emulated it over the years. To my amazement I had been painting both trees and soil in the style of Pissaro, as shown in many of his paintings throughout the early 1900's. I had also learned from Paul Cézanne. In *La Maison du pendu Auvers sur-oise* that he painted in 1873, I had used the same methodology of painting rock facing. My roof texture was also often the same as in this earlier work of his.

I had learned composition from Renoir. However, I knew I could never be the colourist that he was. I had painted the water

of seascapes in the manner of Boudin from 1894, and snow in the manner of Sisley in his 1875 painting of *La neige à Marly-le-Roi*. My seascape from Holland had replicated the moon by Manet from *Claire de Lune sur le port de Boulogne*, painted in 1869. Mine were not copies, but they indicated a learned mannerism and technique. I was not a "great," but I was a dutiful student. In most cases, I had long forgotten the source from which my technique had evolved. Like other painters all around the world, we had learned before these works and had then returned to our homelands, inspired.

Other individuals have compared my seascape's blues to the emotion of the blues used by Van Gogh. I always thought that critique to be very naïve. My respect for Van Gogh had more to do with the fact that his works were simply my favourite. When I observed that in fact I had emulated his use of darker blues, I experienced a different emotion – one of feeling very humble. This emotion came from the fact that it seemed almost blasphemous on my part to even compare any aspect of my own works to his.

My trees and grass had been conditioned by Monet from his painting of *Effet de vent*, one of his 1891 works. But the most important realization came to me when I stood before the four paintings of *Cathedrale de Rouen*. As for the technique, I now finally understood

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the processes and methods the style involved. I knew that under-painting was everything when it came to that which we see. In essence, this was the main course of the meal. Using this analogy, the topical painting (that which is viewed as predominate), being the final touch by the artist, could be compared to being the dessert. That final understanding was as important to me as the ability to replicate the other techniques in my own minor way.

While I was writing this, I was completing another book, a novel called *Pelletier Chronicles - 500 Years*. In it, I had attempted to describe some of the horrors of living in the Middle Ages. On this museum visit I found the ultimate evocation.

In *Scène de guerre au Moyen Age*, by Edgar Degas (done in 1865) the reality of the Middle Ages is portrayed. Four nude female corpses lie on the ground; with one being trampled by a horse and rider. Four other women stand in various postures of nudity showing their helplessness, while a man on a horse aims his bow and arrow at them. They have no protection whatsoever. The three horses are huge and aggressive, as compared to the frail bodies of the women. The horses seem to be protecting the men as one of them carries loot, and another carries his choice of a woman like a sack. This was truly evocative of the essence of control by the *haves* over the

have-nots. During that era, “knights” in armour consistently carried off whatever they desired from village and rural people. Only a painting could really illustrate that level of helplessness within a system. Later, I would make a reference to it in my novel as it helped evoke the realities of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

On a later visit to the Louvre, I discovered a work called *Pillage d'un Village*, painted by Sébastien Vranck in 1589, which I found to be just as specific. It showed armed men on horses killing both female and male villagers. The unarmed were pleading for their lives, but to no avail. Clothing was already being torn off the dead bodies as loot. Many of the trees depicted were dead – symbols of the vanity of the knights and of death itself. Not that many feet away, Ruben's painting, *Un Tournoi*, was hanging. Even though it was of the same approximate period, it glorified the allure of *knights in shining armour*, and showed them sparring against each other, as if they were evenly matched, and with all the mannerisms of great chivalry. Communication in art is like that – the choice of message is up to the individual painter.

The Louvre is unquestionably one of the most prestigious museums in the world. It is now also the most popular. It is a magnificent building, originally constructed in the 1200's as a fortress, and it would later become a royal palace of great magnitude. The ensuing construction took place over a period of seven hundred years. Its collection is broken into eight main divisions: Oriental Antiquities; Egyptian Antiquities; Greek, Etruscan and Roman Antiquities; Paintings; Sculptures; Objets d'art; Arts of Islam; Prints and Drawings; as well as presentations which cover The History of the Louvre and The Medieval Louvre. To this are added exhibitions that are temporary.

The Paintings are well divided into five categories, with drawings included. They are French Paintings; Prints and French Drawings; German, Flemish and Dutch Paintings; German, Flemish and Dutch Drawings; and German, Flemish, Dutch, Belgian, Russian, Swiss and Scandinavian Paintings. Much of what I perceive about the history of the world comes from the many hours I spent in the Louvre. I am sure that the many weeks and months I passed there during my young twenties have had a tremendous effect on my life. Those changes that took place in my youthful thinking are not something that I will ever be able to properly measure.

Experiencing the new Paris and the *Cité de la Musique* reminded me of my youthful transition from being a rather naïve prairie boy to someone completely immersed in music history. Music – especially my experience of it during the sixties in Paris – had broadened my youthful worldview. Visiting now brought back so much. This new permanent venue is a place of much exchange. It fosters access to culture through concerts, museums and exhibitions, and it reminded me how much of a young person's experience studying in Europe, is about experiencing the history of Europe. It is the academic repertory, addressing all periods from the Middle Ages to the present. This includes modes of expression such as jazz or popular music. For most of us who went through this type of learning process, it was difficult to explain upon our return to North America; it just became one of those non-tangible personal assets.

The Folies-Bergère, where I had worked part-time as a student in the sixties, was now closed with boarded windows. It had existed as a Music Hall since 1869. Where its only importance to me was as a measuring point for calibrating my former Paris, I found its closing more a statement about the change in nightlife, in what used to seem to me to be a very vast community. It was not that anyone would have classified it as representing the fine arts, but it

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was very much live art. Most of the small live performance venues around the city had also closed their doors and it was an indication of the trend.

Relative to painting, there are many art exhibitions in Paris that are peripheral to the museum system. The federal government administers one system, parallel to that of the many municipal governments. Each has their ongoing permanent displays, and from these are drawn exhibitions designed to forever capture the imagination of the public. Art is kept alive by the sorting and resorting of the same paintings, all to be exhibited under different banners in varying presentations.

Upon observing Monet's work at the Musée Marmottan I made some simple notes to myself: "Do a self-portrait showing more unpainted canvas such as Monet did." In his *Impressionism Soleil Levant* of 1873 he painted almost in a monochrome of blue, with the orange sun reflection being so magnificent due to the use of little conflict of other colour. I have also never seen *anything* float in the manner of the subjects of *Monet*. I noted that I needed to use blurred outlines on water, and dark over light, in his manner, in order to achieve that unique floating effect on water. In my notes, I wrote: "Use more pink in my clouds." I left his display feeling that I had a lot of work to do. Such is art. A style is never complete. Art

is always a personal evolution. I also believe that Minimalist styles in art were very much refreshed and influenced by him. He said so much, while painting so little – as no one else could, or even now can do.

The Marmottan Musée was the nicely restored townhouse of Claude Monet and his friends and it is named after the Marmottan family who made it their home. The main floor holds paintings, tapesties, sculptures and furnishings from the 18th century. Upstairs paintings were by Monet, Sisley, Pissarro, Renoir and Morisot. However it is at the basement level where the prized Monet Gallery exists. It is here where the Monet water lilies are hung, with their shades of purple and orchid unlike any colour in the world of art. While here I found it difficult to know how long I should stay. There is simply no logic when it comes to deciding how long might be logical to contemplate such paintings. Nonetheless, I observed and humbly made notes. In the end, it seems I stayed a few hours.

The works of Gustave Moreau, a symbolist of the same period as Monet, reminded me of a number of issues in art. The first is obvious to any viewer of his monumental works: because he didn't need to sell his works, he failed to complete many of them. But the second issue is more important. It is impossible to contemplate his work without realizing the

number of painters that he influenced. The black linear forms of Matisse, the sketch views of Picasso, the harsh colours of Van Gogh – all are a part of his presentation and style. He did not have the same goals as they did, however, with much of his style, he was the first and they followed. It was in the context of seeing these masters imitating other masters, that I saw how learning from each other's works was indeed the ideal. I felt that I could actually be one of that creative assembly of artists. I didn't mean this as any ego-driven assumption of quality, but I believed that learning their methodologies would benefit my personal advancement. The process of simulation of style could help me progress in my own artistic achievements.

Gustave Moreau's former home is now a National Museum, a step above a local municipal one. Within the hierarchy of Paris this fact is significant. Often listed as a forerunner of the Fauvist style, he also influenced Redon, Picasso and Dali. Like the later Surrealists, there is mysticism and fantasy in every canvas.

Touring back on the Left Bank I finally discovered yet another unchanged building, at 4 rue Saint Julien Le Pauvre. Amazingly intact, the Hotel Esmeralda was still the least expensive hotel on the Left Bank. Its ancient, low, dark oak-beamed ceiling gave me a minor sprinkling of my past. I had once lived there for five months. The Medieval look of the quaint

lobby had no comparison - then or now. It was directly across from the Notre Dame Cathedral's anthropology museum and I had walked over from it, upon looking over and recognizing one of my old "haunts". As a hotel, it had a wonderfully traditional Parisian look. The sidewalk café one very short block away was still very much in business. If I desired, I could have booked a room in the hotel, and then sat and had a beer in "my old café", while maybe even forgetting that forty years had passed. I paused on the street for reflection. My rented apartment was more to my liking – and the café was solidly packed from wall-to-wall with tourists. "Maybe next time", I thought.

Having immersed myself in the history of war from the Middle Ages to the present – at the Army Museum – I was able to make the mental transition back to 1900 by spending the rest of the day just across the street in the beautiful gardens and the Museum of Auguste Rodin. The quiet beauty of Rodin's work was an extreme contrast to the armoury of war. Both were very relevant to my research as a writer. However, the word research can be misleading. It is really the experience of the ambiance of the museum, set in a period of time, that transcends, as related to a written novel or document.

Later within the same week, I was able to observe that a specific presentation was being

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made in the “Musée national de la Marine”. The grandeur of Napoleon and other early rulers was well demonstrated throughout the museum in both paintings and artefacts. Many models of ships from the previous four hundred years were also displayed. All were showing the grandeur of the time.

It wasn't until 1857 that Jean-François Millet painted *L'Angélu du soir* and *Des Glaneuses*. Only then did French culture finally refer to the emotions and intelligence of rural farm workers. The *Barbizon School of Painting*, which evoked the state of mind of rural and trades people, had not yet had an impact on seascapes.

There were some larger seascape works by Joseph Vernet, who in pre-revolutionary France had been called “The Painter to the King”. As I had earlier observed, these paintings from the 1700's, presenting the court of kings, were of a biased mentality. The dates of the paintings correlated to and confirmed my observation of non-democratic tendencies and elitism in the art of this period.

It began to appear as if the paintings of lesser sea scenes had never been done in any significant number. I knew that they existed, but they were simply not presented at this museum – as if they were irrelevant. Specifically I began to look for any type of replication of the cargo vessels that had transported so many immigrants

from France to countries all around the world. Such was the evolution of art in France. It was no coincidence that Canadian History, and our culture, had shown a more democratic face to the men of the sea. With this in mind, there could still be a learning process for my own technical understanding.

This visit was not without my usual notes. “All halyards are astern of masts. All stern cabins both with and without balconies cantilever out at the sides. The French war ships of 1850 to 1900 were metal on wood and were never built without a type of battering-ram bow.” No museum trip should be devoid of learning and I felt like I was still a novice in historic maritime art. I also made a note of a 1627 painting by Claude Vignon, *The Claude de Razilly Allegory*, the only painting I knew of representing the 1641 immigration of my family, but one which led to my subsequent replication of ships of the period and type.

I left my next re-visit to the *Louvre* for last. Even though many “side” exhibitions were included during this stay in Paris, I had now visited all of the main art museums. Even though the Louvre had been the mainstay of my more “formal” education in Paris, in reality my time there had not followed any formal curriculum at all. What had made it seem formal was the quality of the subject matter. The subject at the Louvre was the entire

evolution of “Civilization”.

While there, I was even so bold to again look for an artist who had influenced me so many years previously. I like to think that it was a recollection of the religious paintings of El Greco that influenced my sky in the painting I did of a Lutheran Church in 2004. I even went so far as to consider that the contrasts of light on dark, or dark on light, from the Rembrandt works, have recurred in my outer space paintings. It was fun, to consider the possibilities. While being both humble and reverent, I was able to enjoy making observations about the techniques they'd used in their antiquated world – techniques I too had learned to manipulate in my own way.

Due to his use of colours, El Greco has always been my favourite Spanish School painter. I once took a very hot and dirty ride on an old bus from Madrid to Toledo, Spain, just to view his works. I returned to his paintings in the Louvre on three separate days, and could only marvel at the way I had unconsciously used his skies; really, it seemed almost unbelievable to me.

I must raise one negative point. Unfortunately, the world of museums has changed for the worse. In fact, it may now be impossible to “study” art in many of the major museums. Tourism all over the world has swelled to such an extent that millions of people now

pass by these art works every year. Even though the herds of people can be clocked at what may seem like a steady stream of five kilometres per hour (I exaggerate), the constant flashing of light bulbs, posing in front of paintings, and endless loud exclamations have changed the art museums that I knew from years ago. Digital photography, where little cost per image is involved, has done more to change the ambience of these great institutions, than anything in history.

At the Louvre, the line-up (for photographs) of the Mona Lisa is without a doubt, the most exaggerated farce in the history of art. Millions of very good reproductions exist of course, with most of them available at nominal costs, but hundreds of individuals per day, attempt to get that “one great shot”. Flash bulbs bounce off of the plate glass like a constant machine gun. At first, I accidentally ended up in the queue for walking by. It seemed as if not a single person merely observed the famous masterpiece, they all just took pictures. On my third visit to the Louvre, I was able to observe the newly renovated room for *Lisa*. Like the queue at a fast food restaurant this line-up was designed to move very quickly. *Once in the museum, one could now get a photograph and be back onto the street in record time!* Just around the corner, in a room that was only a few metres away, were paintings by members

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of the Italian School and seven more works by Leonardo da Vinci, every one equal to the *Mona Lisa*. This room also held works from the Spanish School as well as many other favourites. I wanted to shout, "Hey everybody, Veronese is just over here! Here is *The Wedding Feast*. You know, we call this colour "Veronese Blue", and now you can buy it in a tube!" But I didn't. I restrained myself and did my best to ignore the fiasco. Incredibly beautiful Raphaels were with the other Leonardos and I knew that literally thousands of these tourists would miss them entirely. Instead, I enjoyed the great Raphaels for their absence of any abstraction. The Pre-Raphaelites were correct in using Raphael as their example of the contemporary turning point in art.

Such was my recent study of the Masters. The positive aspect is that these paintings had brought Italian School work into the limelight. In the sixteenth century, there were over five thousand great Italian painters, without even counting their students. Again, that is one of the many mysteries of the *Mona Lisa* painting and its fame. I will also mention, almost as a footnote, that many of Leonardo's portraits have that same expression of mouth. After all, he was a scientist, not a painter. However, this personal discovery was all a part of my former adventure those many years ago.

Another artist whose work I noted at the Louvre was Claude Lorrain. His paintings from the 1640's were distinguished for both their sentimental and richly coloured skies; within the world of seaport scenes, his could be considered second to none. He painted ship's riggings the way I wanted to paint riggings. Could I learn from these paintings from almost four hundred years ago? The answer was a definite and resounding – yes!

From the many paintings of the 1700's I observed a very standard method of painting suits of armour. I had begun taking notes related to my outer space paintings and I seemed to have a practical problem in painting the metal of space ships. In his 1894 painting, *Jeanne d'Arc*, Ingres had enhanced the armour's metal by adding a light brown as under-painting just below his streaking of white. This was yet another lesson from the Masters, and yet another bit of learning that had made my trip worthwhile. I would apply it to my paintings depicting the world of 2100, a future of imagined space life.

ART QUEST

My visit the following day to the Musée d'Orsay made up for the preceding day's photography farce. At the temporary exhibition of the Neo-Impressionists, I was surrounded by hundreds of individuals who were truly contemplating and appreciating the views before them. I made notes as I was now seeing these works with a painter's experience. Forty years earlier, an understanding of these paintings had been above me. To understand a method – whether it is a tennis grip, a golf swing, or the manner in which a violin must be held – the method has to be brought down to a simple level.

Such were my notes:

- The Neo-Impressionists used harsher colours than the Impressionists.
- Use a smaller brush on top of under-painting.
- Keep the composition simple, as best exemplified by Charles Angrand's 1889 painting, *La Seine à l'arbre*.
- Use less than four colours on each colour plateau, by trying a light green, light yellow, mid-blue and a light blue.
- Camille Pissarro used more colours, but never did he use more than four on one subject – again with small brushes.
- Paint frames in a matching Pointillism for Pointillism works.
- Paint after the style of Jan Toorop, in his 1889 piece, *Paysage avec Marsonnie*.
- Be careful as this departure may create a style that appears *Primitive*. The brushes are not that small; for example, they are not like those in a Jan van Eyck work.
- To all of this remember Matisse added lines – try it.
- Do a self-portrait in Pointillism – as a challenge.

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However it was on my third day's visit to the exhibition that I finally discovered and understood *the secret to painting in Pointillism*. The first room of the exhibit held works that had been painted with an undercoat of yellow, after which a pale blue had been added, then finally the beach sand of the landscapes were painted in two light browns or a beige. In the second room, beige was the under-painting. The artists then used light green or light blue dots. The work in the third room used multiple under-painting colours but still then used only four or five colours in total. I had cracked the secret of Pointillism and now had learned what I had been missing. I could now finish a Neo-Impressionistic work that I had left in frustration, lying incomplete in my North Vancouver apartment.

In a previous visit I had compared the Renoirs to popular music. There are singers who are popular due to the fact that their sound can be easily imitated. There are also those who have a unique style and sound that could never be imitated. Renoir was in the latter group.

In all of the temporary exhibitions I visited over the next month, I found that I was in my element. I was surrounded by small groups of knowledgeable people – literally hundreds of them. Pausing before each and every work, they shared their interests with their companions – typically, groups of two or three individuals.

They communicated their pleasure, and mostly, they showed their respect for what was before them. This was the Europe that I had remembered. The influence of this group was everywhere with the exception of the two more well known museums. It seemed that they had left these two centres to the Americans.

I had especially enjoyed my return visits to the Neo-Impressionists. In these works, Cezanne was (almost) all about line. Van Gogh was about colour. Neo-Impressionism is about colour while adding the abstraction of line and therefore the contemplation of it. Line was an abstract inference. By way of their group, I could again identify with the analysis of form along with the rhythm in line.

The Musée d'Orsay had been an elegant railway station of the "Belle Epoque," as it had been built for the 1900 Paris World's Fair. The evolution of art, continuing from the paintings exhibited at the Louvre, is perfectly displayed here as a continuum. For my purposes of both study and pure enjoyment, it is the perfect place in the world, along with its complementing Art Nouveau salons, sculpture, and exquisite architecture.

I made other observations at an individual exhibition of Matisse at the Luxembourg Museum, in Luxembourg Gardens. In his art, Matisse describes so well exactly where he was going. But he does this from the perspective of

already being there. His later works therefore represent a type of Minimalism at its best. Minimalism is both an art movement and a process. In effect, the technique *is* the process. It follows the theory of “Found Objects” – that is, finding relevance in everyday forms, which are then re-titled and displayed within their new context.

His surfaces became flat and his lines became more meaningful. They then evolved into “collages”. By seeing these collages, I understood for the first time the relationship between sculpture and painting on a two-dimensional surface. I was able to do this only with the help of Matisse. His works truly were the link that I needed to help me conceptualize this relationship.

Here I could readily view the evolution of artists who were each using each other’s thoughts – as a unified whole – and evolving onward to Minimalism in communication, while still and simultaneously explaining everything. It had been a century of an evolution of this movement of a group of people, into expressing themselves both individually and as a unified group.

The Museum of Zadkine, a not-so well-known Russian sculptor, was an example of some thing more rare in the art scene. As a cubist, his sculpture was very exceptional and his works were from the same era as Picasso and Braque. What I viewed was a house that

had been converted so that its main floor now resembled what could be called a museum. The house was in an alley that seemed to be squeezed between two modern apartment buildings. No admission was charged, but I found a reason. The owners of his works made their income from selling copies of his biography and picture postcards of his work. If they had charged admission, I thought they could be accused of misrepresentation, as the number of works on display was under thirty and most of those were of carved wood. Ossip Zadkine didn’t work with a conventional chisel as other sculptors did, but rather he used a hammer and saw. The resulting figures were Cubist, and evidenced the mixed styles of Leger, Dubuffet and Modigliani. While I was visiting Paris, the Paris authorities were in process of “closing them down”. The museum seemed to be open due only to the dedication of the staff. While I was there, the authorities told the staff that I was to be the last visitor until they obtained at least one of the necessary permits. Interestingly enough, they had managed to be listed in one of the more reputable guidebooks of museums in Paris. In fact, it had been from one of them that I had obtained their address. I felt glad that I’d found the place, and really enjoyed the works that I did see.

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The following comprise my personal “Top Ten List” of Paris Museums that were available during my most recent visit. These are the museums that hold the art that I have always returned to visit. They house my “old friends,” those works of the Masters. Years ago many of the museum names and locations were quite different, however the specific collections have remained the same, and they are now exhibited in the following venues.

1. Musée national d'Orsay – Impressionism
2. Centre Georges Pompidou – Contemporary Art
3. Musée du Louvre – Works up to 1848
4. Musée du Luxembourg – Temporary Exhibitions
5. Musée Rodin – primarily the sculpture of Rodin
6. Musée Picasso – Included are other works
7. Musée du Marmottan – The works of Monet
8. Musée du Grand Palais – Temporary Exhibitions
9. Musée de Carnavalet – Temporary Exhibitions
10. Musée de la Musique (Cité) – 900 instruments

All of the “top ten” museums have temporary but meticulously planned exhibitions within their premises. It is not possible to list these, as each exhibition offers a varying collection of painting and sculpture. Of course, personal interests of the viewer will always dictate their enthusiasm for undertaking the adventure each museum presents. I found that all of these museums required at least two or three days of repeated visits. I also did not list addresses or specifics; I leave that to the travel writers. The museums change constantly as renovations are ongoing.

My second temptation was to translate the names to English, however this is the Parisian list of permanent art work. To change it would be to change the experience. I have also not made reference to the fabulous experience of architecture in Paris. All of these museums are incredible buildings, either as historic or contemporary references of beauty.

My personal experience has included the same type of national displays in what is now a list of forty-five countries, and that list keeps growing. These travels have been planned as destinations in the world of great art. To imagine, as an example, having contemplated Van Gogh without including the experience of the Van Gogh Museum, in Amsterdam, would be impossible. The same is true of the German contemporary painters, whom I most enjoy

finding and contemplating when they are displayed at their best, in their home German cities. My writing here also has not made any attempt to concentrate on periods other than my focus on the present one hundred years of modern change.

There are well over fifty main museums in Paris. Each is of great interest to many individuals, as we go through life with our many and differing tastes. Paris is only one art destination, but it's a great one!

In the 1840's Balzac wrote: *"In Paris there are certain streets which have fallen into as much disrepute as a man branded with infamy; there are also noble streets, straightforwardly decent streets and young streets upon whose morality the public has not yet formed an opinion; there are murderous streets, streets more ancient than the most aged dowagers, respectable streets, streets which are always clean, streets which are always dirty, working-class, industrious, mercantile streets. In short, the streets of Paris have human qualities, and their physiognomy imprints certain ideas in us against which we are totally defenceless . . . These observations, which would be incomprehensible outside Paris, will doubtless be seized upon by those men of learning and reflection, of poetry and pleasure, who, wandering within the city walls, feast on the delectable enjoyments it offers from morn till night; by those who find Paris the most delightful*

of monsters: a pretty woman at times, at others a miserable old hag; as freshly minted as a new coin here, as elegant as a lady of fashion there . . . Paris is still the same monstrous miracle, an extraordinary assembly of movement, machines and thoughts, the city of a thousand novels, the brains behind the world.

Such was the Paris of almost two centuries ago to the well-known writer known to most people as simply Balzac. After living in Paris a number of cold winter months, I can say that completely independent of this, and without any knowledge of a similar metaphor, I wrote the following in 1966: "Paris is like a sophisticated and grand old whore – beautiful from a distance, but wretchedly ugly when viewed closely in detail." The only other thing that I can say in comparing myself to the life of Balzac is that the girl I wrote this to, who happened to live in then very conservative Western Canada - immediately dumped me and stated a reference to my creative writing. Where this was consistent with the life and thoughts of the famous Balzac, at the time I felt I had an allied (though dead) compatriot.

Thus I present my insistence that we be ourselves in art. Without individual communication of that which we believe, or that with we seemed compelled to focus upon, there is no art. It could be only a handicraft.

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One thing was certain as I toured the new Paris of this twenty-first century. The city was no longer spotted with art galleries flaunting their newly found creations. The Paris art galleries that I had known were from the past and galleries were now almost non-existent. The art that I did see in galleries was tired. It was from the past and seemed to be the same as when I had left the city forty years earlier. A booklet called *Envue* listed the temporary art exhibits that were now being held in libraries of each of the quarters of the city. When the government is the only supporter or patron of the arts, it is a sure sign that the arts are not flourishing. To think that art was thriving in Paris in the twenty-first century would be very naïve. It seemed that nothing in art in Paris, France, was exciting now.

As a secondary stop for the day, I visited an advertised arts and crafts market at the foot of the Montparnasse tower. Upon arriving and observing, my first emotion was excitement, and the immediate thought that, “They had moved.” Just as it had been forty years before among the artists who exhibited at *Place du Tertre*, there seemed to be a handful of painters who were actually creating art – and I seemed to have found the place where they had located themselves. A number of the sculptors were very good, as were two or three of the contemporary painters. They were selling their works for the

same price as the tourist souvenir “terrible stuff” at Place du Tertre. I like to believe in art being attainable directly from the artist, and available at a price that’s not impossible for a salaried consumer. I’m not a socialist, but it just seems sensible. Direct selling of unique works does exist, as it should – even in Paris. I was happy to hang out there for a few hours.

The market was called the “Marché de la Creation” and it had a nice feel to it. Here were approximately one hundred and twenty artists, each with their own stall. By each having an organized display space, the presentation was superior to Place du Tertre. The greatest strength of the presentations was the incredible contemporary sculpture as a mix.

In visiting the Fine Arts Museum in Chartres, I was reminded of the Place du Tertre’s level of painting during the 1960’s. Both Soutine and Vlaminck were being displayed there. I knew that Vlaminck as well as Maurice Utrillo had been Place du Tertre street painters who had “made good.” They were both colourists and for that reason I identified with them considerably. The landscapes of Vlaminck were very specific. His technique, colour and use of the palette knife had dictated a familiar style which had been replicated often, as was commonly done in other Place du Tertre street paintings by the many painters there. The use of colour and texture could not have been more

identical unless the goal had been to copy, which it wasn't. The goal was simply to provide emotional beauty – as in using blues similar to those in a Vlaminck painting. Thousands of these paintings now hang all around the world. In many cases the owners of these street scenes are not aware of what the artist was communicating or even trying to replicate. They are simply enjoying them, which is great.

On yet another weekend, I discovered a second, “Marché Parisien de la Création”. It was larger and it seemed more successful than the other. The paintings here seemed superior to any other of the Paris presentations. These painters could have been presented in the local art galleries, or quite possibly, they would be presented in the finest galleries in the future. This market was just off Place Bastille on Boulevard Richard Lenoir. Both markets advertised themselves as presenting contemporary art, and they both did that well. The first took place each Sunday, all year round, and the second was each Saturday, all year as well.

In all art marketing, there has to be an entry level. There also has to be that balance where the art consumer can find, and be the patron of, the rising star. These two locations provided that possibility. I felt exceptionally pleased that it still existed.

Firstly, no two human beings are similarly gifted in sensory capacity, in

intelligence, in the ability to conceptualize abstraction, or in a talent for appreciation of fantasy. The ability to appreciate art may be linked to the ability to think abstractly, which in turn is said to be precisely what education develops. Appreciation of music, drama, dance, or painting is inconsistent. A passionate music lover may have not developed a visual taste. Drama lovers can be totally illiterate about music and vice versa. Despite historical assumptions, there has never been a single, all-purpose cultural elite group who define the sense of a general arts appreciation.

Secondly, the existence of a broad, amateur-based movement in the arts reinforces professionalism by building the cultural public, not only quantitatively, but also qualitatively. It makes it possible for the individual to gain skill and taste, at their personal choice of speed, as he or she ascends towards connoisseurship. It keeps a public interested in the arts, while creating education by initiating discussions. It is consistently building art appreciation, while heightening aesthetic sensitivity.

Thirdly, the creation process within any of the arts involves not merely financial analysis of cash flow, but encourages a series of complex social arrangements and motivations that make it possible. For this reason, the benefits of art cannot be restricted to an affluent few.

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Art is always in need of culture consumers; however, both the financial and mental variances of all of the existing consumer levels need to be satisfied. According to this premise, even Place du Tertre “tourist works” might conceivably be justified. However, the main reason that they cannot be justified as art is that they do not live up to the definition of art as “an evocation of a state of mind;” thus, they are left defined as handicraft at best.

Only half a century ago art galleries could be spotted around Paris in incredibly large numbers. I’d discovered that only a few art galleries now remained on the Left Bank and Montmartre; these were shamefully tourist level in their presentations. Still, I believed that there must still be a place where, within a couple of blocks in area, two-dozen or so art galleries could survive. Thankfully, such a place does exist, on Rue de Pas de la Mule and the abutting Place des Vosges. At Place des Vosges I finally discovered the commercial art galleries that I’d presumed I would find somewhere. Conveniently, it is only two blocks from the “Marché Parisien de la Création” at Bastille. I somehow felt justified as a painter that consumerism in art was alive and well in one of the corners of Paris. I was possibly one of the last to discover this, even as the English-speaking market swarmed with the business of those thousands of hungry-for-art buyers.

From my observations of popular styles within the paintings that seemed to be selling, I made more notes:

- Do a collage with music notations showing.
- Use a brown stain varnish on a few landscape works.
- Paint a few inferred nude figures using lines.
- Use more Matisse-style highlighted drawing.
- Paint a few non-objective works on wrinkled, crumpled-up canvas.
- Use gold highlighting on vivid-colour abstraction.
- Use silver metal rods in Constructivism mode, creating wall sculpture.
- Do Linear Cubism study of country fields (green trees, orange and yellow fields, five colours or less), with much texture.
- The three most important popular items in Parisian painting seem to be, texture, texture and texture.

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In accompaniment to this were the same artists and their colleagues from around France, displaying and selling through what was billed as the “Grand Marché d’Art Contemporain.” In English this translates as the “large market of contemporary art.” These were presentations by the artists within tent kiosks set up in rows. There were as many as 480 artists in each market, but these markets only existed for five consecutive days, twice per year. These were what had finally taken any of the remaining better artists away from Place du Tertre, in Montmartre. They also seemed to be well used by young art school graduates.

In perusing the old addresses of the Left Bank in detail, I finally found one corner where I could see signs of two-dozen art galleries. It was the intersection of the three streets of rue Mazarine, rue Jacques Callot and rue Guénégaud. The rest of the detail is that none of these commercial galleries were open more than three days per week, and even then, only for limited hours. Some were only arranging private showings, the rigid marketing concept of “by appointment.” Even though they were selling exquisite works, their intention was only to display to qualified buyers. The level of patience required of anyone needing to return at an appointed hour was certainly going to exclude all but the most interested consumer. In the brief time I spent walking about, I observed

many international buyers trying doors, voicing their dissatisfaction at the process, and walking away expressing their disbelief at not being able to buy anything instantly.

The first point these consumers of art may not have recognized is that the galleries were no longer economically viable. If they had been staffed as in any normal retail outlet outside of Paris, it would have created a negative cash flow.

Secondly, and on the positive side, was a deeply ingrained notion that had been brought forward from the past two centuries of French Salon Painting. Given the traditional European-based perception that elitism is that which most individuals seek or strive towards, the French gallery owners seemed to presume that they were providing something of a service. This was an overview that the potential consumers from North America had simply not understood. Most non-French would feel awkward ringing the bell to arrange an appointment. It was assumed by the gallery owner, that once inside, the client could be more relaxed in a private showing. Along with this follows the presumption that their relationship with the work could be different and more intimate than in a more public process. What was being offered was the opportunity of feeling more special, and being treated more personally, while enjoying the works of art.

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However, this merely illustrates one of the cultural differences between North American and European thought. Unfortunately, it is the French artists who suffer for their lack of contemporary marketing methodology.

I learned that the Beaux Arts University Expositions of student paintings, traditionally held in their large library auditorium, were now held only once each year. The focus was on works oriented more to the architectural field. Other art colleges had replaced the antiquated Beaux Arts and there were now seven hundred and fifty art schools listed in France. They offered programs in Applied Art, Graphic Arts, Beaux-Arts, and Multimedia. No longer was the prestige of the ancient university an advantage when weighed against the contemporary end production of each student of painting.

I reminded myself of how fortunate I had been to have actually experienced the ambience, and to have felt myself a part of the old Paris – that Paris of the painters and writers of the first part of the twentieth century! With this had come the traditions of Parisian life, with its varying styles of ambience delegated to each individual part, or quarter, of town.

It was also easy to realize that without a doubt I had been part of the last generation to ever “dress up” in order to walk comfortably down the once beautiful Champs Elysées. Just as the artist’s ease within a once-great city

which welcomed creativity had disappeared, the uniqueness of the area surrounding the Champs Elysées had been unmistakably diminished. This glorious main street known all over the world as being from a time of the wonderful French architecture of the “belle époque” had become an almost seedy environment. The once elite storefronts had become a series of stores that were selling sunglasses or inexpensive clothes, along with the ever-present fast food restaurants. Many young couples now arrive hourly in hopes of viewing the former world of the Champs Elysées. Cheap trinkets and other paraphernalia are offered in a kiosk selling style, in lieu of a world that existed only half of a century ago.

Understanding and coming to personal terms with the death of the *Paris of the Arts*, was very similar to the grieving process relative to the death of an old friend. As someone dies, someone else is born. The arts are very much alive and well now in other cities, and throughout other countries. What I had formerly experienced was the last phase in the life of old Paris. Like revering an old friend, I was humbled that I had known that period of its life.

I had now lived in Paris again, revisited my favourite museums, contemplated life’s changing themes, and had arrived at a few seasoned conclusions. I finally found myself

sitting and resting – taking a break only a few feet from the oldest zoo in the world. It hadn't changed – however, ironically, perhaps it was one thing that really *needed* change. As I sat down during one of those relatively quiet times for Paris, I relaxed and finally realized I was feeling fulfilled. In those same gardens stood the antiquated Museum of Palaeontology. Once, I had even made more notes to myself there. I'd had a plan to paint some outer space paintings that would include dinosaurs within the landscape. I'd noted that I'd need to pay attention to the detail that their accented teeth were part of their skeleton. This wasn't any major earth-shaking note; it was just a painter's observation of detail.

This area where I was sitting was called the Jardin des Plants, and I just sat enjoying the natural ambience of this end of the day. As I observed my colleagues, I realized that many of the grey-haired individuals sitting around me, may well have been the same people I had sat near at the area's sidewalk cafés so many years ago. Life is about choice. I knew I could sit here or at other similar spots, and watch and enjoy the beautiful flowers, gorgeous shrubberies, and the beauty of the setting sun – or that I could get up and go onward to enjoying more of the adventure in art that this world has to offer. I chose the latter.

As if to amplify my feelings, my visit to the Pavillon de L'Arsenal the following day concluded with the perfect setting. Here the city of Paris was presenting its past, present and future, as it related to Urban Planning. The Pavillon had become a centre of information and the "Exposition of Urbanization and Architecture of Paris." Models of the old city were there, as were the present statistics. The future of Paris was presented both in model form and with computerized projections. I doubt that Paris will ever be the futuristic centre that the models seem to present. Historic Paris is still evident and always will be. However, the combination of its past with this unique space age architecture, will once again give it an individual flair. For that, as a city, it will once again become unique to the world. At least that seems to be the shared goal of its city planners.

On the way to the presentation, I happened to pass a foreign couple who were rather loudly proclaiming their frustration at not being able to quietly walk together, in a romantic setting, along the banks of the Seine. What seemed like thousands of people had crowded about them, visitors trying to capture the magic of a Paris that has passed into antiquity. We all had pursued that – whether it was the writer's Paris that endured up to the fifties, or the turn of the last century "à la Belle

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Époque.” The strolling couple would have been astounded by the projections for the future of only 2035. The models showed a tremendous building growing up the banks of the Seine – a very large commercial community.

Later, I did meet others who were more than content to just stroll in the existing Paris. Their more positive remarks, as they really enjoyed the beauty of the day, reminded me that the nature of Paris is in “the eye of the beholder.” Those who came to be enchanted still often seem to find what they are looking for.

This architectural presentation had been not just about the fact that mega high-rise projects were about to be built; it was about the facts relative to the use of the banks of the Seine. The “quiet” riverbanks were about to become beautifully designed contemporary structures. Concrete, glass, and the shining metal look of the next century were consistent with these approved construction projects. Being France, and more specifically being Paris, ever changing art was very much a part of this town plan concept.

As if to amplify my own feelings, I thought of the Paris street scenes of almost half a century ago. I concluded that I would focus on my outer space paintings – and the very optimistic future of art.

In saying my good-bye to Paris, I made a symbolic trip to the Luxembourg Gardens, on the Left Bank. It was here that I had spent much time with my international circle of friends so long ago. I had left these gardens to begin a family and to pursue a career that would support a certain lifestyle.

I had now completed that cycle and could now leave Luxembourg Gardens to become the painter and writer that I had wanted to become in the first place. This second cycle was more about creative freedom. It was potentially about the next one-third of my life. Paris could again be left behind and simultaneously stay a small part of me.

Whether created in the tropics, in our northern terrain, or by imagination within the outer universe, I knew my art would always have some reflection of that which initially trained and impressed me in Paris, so many years ago. I had now reflected on my training ground, and even relived a bit of it – and with that I had found contentment. In all of this, it was now time to get on with my life – it was again time to paint as a Canadian.

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