

Claude Langlevin



Previous Page, *La Cariole Verte*, oil on canvas, 24" x 30"
This Page, right, *Le Fjord du Saguenay*, oil on canvas, 30" x 24"

Still Beautiful After All These Years

written by Debra Usher

An artist begins to form his own style when he stops imitating nature and starts interpreting it. At this stage, the distinctive features that identify individual painters are visible in each canvas. Claude Langevin has been creating his own style of art for over fifty years. A self-taught artist to whom painting is second nature, he continues to derive great pleasure from his art. He often finds inspiration driving along the route of the old Laurentian railway to Sainte-Adele, his adopted town where he settled many years ago.

In recent years due to urban sprawl, his surroundings have changed dramatically forcing this landscape artist even deeper into the country in search of inspiration. "When you live in a region for a long time, familiarity diminishes its beauty. You have to keep looking around the corner."

To meet Langevin is to discover a painter and a dramatist. His paintings are like theatre and are pieces that take great care to produce. Langevin has been a landscape painter for many years and during that time he has maintained a burning passion for one thing and one thing only, his native soil.

Each of his images shows a real and authentic glimpse of Québécois heritage and culture. His subject matter could be a place that has been lived in, abandoned or isolated. His houses, mountains and snow covered fields, and the people dressed in multihued clothes, all work together to give the places he paints a soul.

Trying to Follow Footsteps

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

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



right,
Pres de la Chute,
oil on canvas,
16" x 20"

To discard such a secure career option for one that was perceived as marginal seemed like pure folly. But the time was the early 60's when a wind of freedom and change had started to sweep Québec.

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

The Montréal visual arts scene during the 1960's consisted of a few galleries on Sherbrooke Street visited by a select clientele. The public at large did not feel welcome in these places it deemed haughty and elitist. Slowly a change brought about galleries at shopping centers and locations where the general public frequented, offering a selection of affordable paintings which were mostly created elsewhere. Finally galleries wishing to sell the works of local artists emerged and through them Claude Langevin started to sell his work and hold his first exhibitions.

The Landscape School

There is definitely a Canadian school of landscape painting with a specific view that has been stated, clarified and simplified over the years. Like Fecteau, Rebry, Proulx and many other successful artists, Langevin gives nature an image according to our own feelings and convictions. It is not laziness or luck that causes Langevin and others to paint the same elements, which enable one to recognize a national art form.





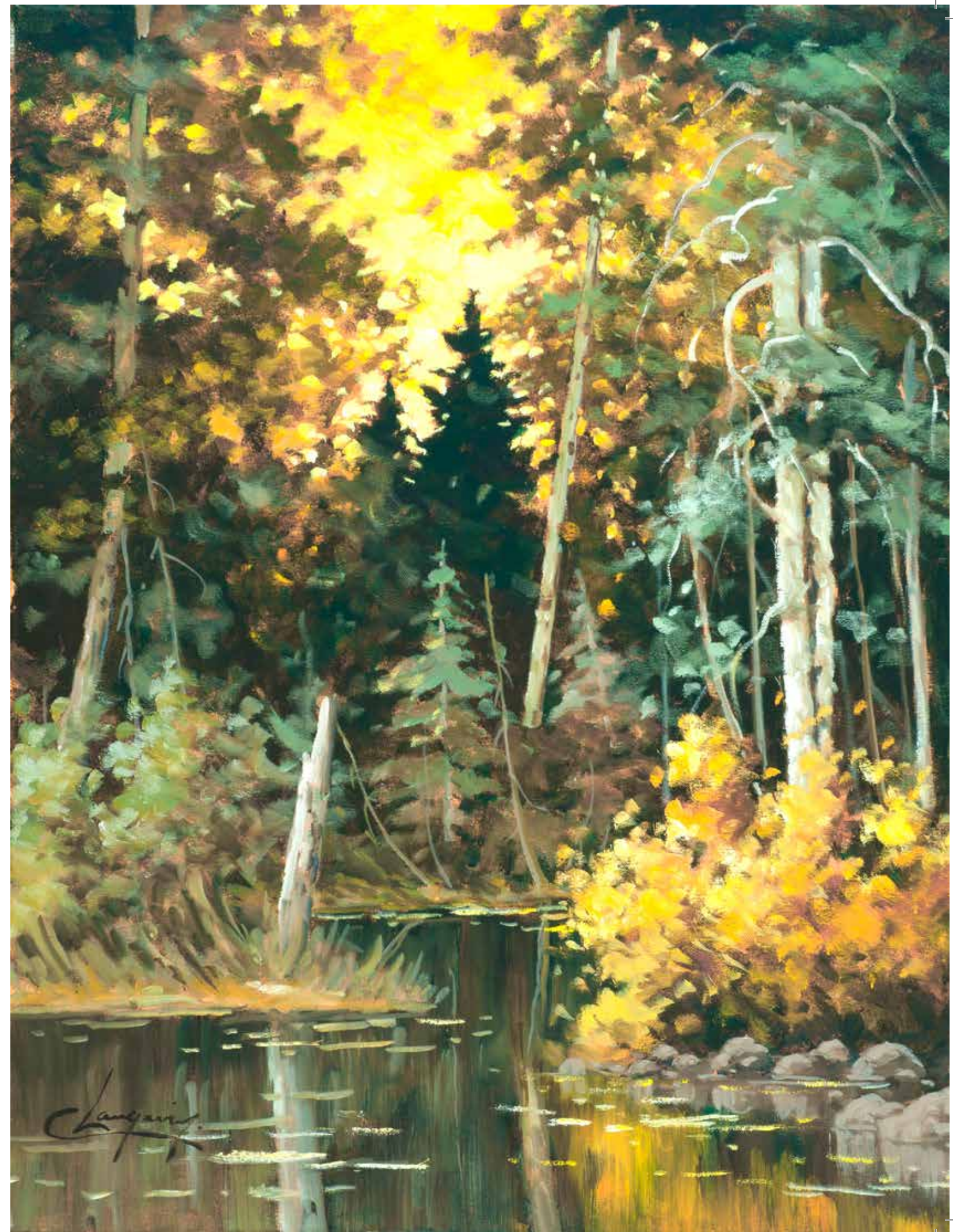
above left, *La Decharge de Ste-Beatrix*, oil on canvas, 20" x 24"
 right, *Sous-Bois*, oil on canvas, 30" x 24"

Langevin paints subjects that might not attract others – he has admitted his preference for winter and mountains. "Winter offers painters a wider selection of colors than summer does, even warm, bright tones; you just have to look for them!"

The paintings of Langevin are vigorous with strokes, clearly defined patterns abound on the canvas. The contrasts are many and well-marked. It seems the artist knows what he wants, but this spontaneity is illusory. Each

scene is carefully composed and drawn. An atmosphere thriving on warm tones prevails. Langevin manages to put his personal style into a very traditional school of painting.

Like the well-known Group of Seven artists, he begins with the unique reality of the Canadian landscape and presents his own highly personal interpretation using bold colours, imaginative composition and interesting explorations of perspective.







Previous Page
left page, *Quelle Vue*, oil on canvas, 20" x 16"
top right, *Sans titre*, oil on canvas, 20" x 24"
bottom right, *Avec Grand-Maman*, oil on canvas, 16" x 20"

This Page
left, *Un autre journee qui s'acheve*, oil on canvas, 24" x 30"

Nature Always has a Painting

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

Because of the ability that winter provides to play with light and contrast, Langevin is particularly fond of painting winter scenes. At the same time, he likes to paint all four seasons, each of which allows him to produce well differentiated work.

Known for his wintry rural scenes, he is a master of colour and light. Working in nature versus working in studio has taught him an important lesson: "In the studio you are not aware of light variations; you only have your imagination working for you. This observation has transformed my work from being almost monochromatic to highly colourful." From the blue-greys of the start to the thousands of nuances of today, his olden days Québécois villages have conquered the hearts of art lovers who shout out for more. Influenced by the Group of Seven, he admires Tom Thomson's colours and Clarence Gagnon's rural scenes. Claude Langevin's own visual signature resides in the luminosity of his palette.

To paint on site often requires the use of oil paint, to counter the quick drying effect of being exposed to sun and wind. In any case, he loves the medium's texture and suppleness. "I first cover my canvas with a brown-orange background of



left, *Feerie Automnale*, oil on canvas, 24" x 30"

my invention. Then it's up to me to decide what needs to show through and what needs to be covered up. This is what gives my work its unique feel." Depicting the atmosphere of a place is, according to him, one of the hardest things to do. "Amateur artists often paint in too much detail. My feeling is that just enough information needs to be given to seize the moment, and that is all." This balancing act, between what to keep and what to subtract, is a constant questioning. "You can paint your whole life without ever finding a clear answer on the subject."

Connected to the Land

Langevin's style has been constant throughout his career, even though his mediums have changed. Until the beginning of the 1980s he used acrylics, and then he switched to oils. During the process he has never changed his technique. But one thing is certain, in spite of the fact that he has remained faithful to his picturesque countryside, his work evolved in one important way – it is always changing and never monotonous, like the world around us.

We can also feel the connection between



right, *Le Refuge*, oil on canvas, 20" x 24"

Claude Langevin and his home in his artwork and the stories he tells. Although the artist has traveled a great deal throughout this world, having lived elsewhere in a quest for places to paint, the road has always directed him back to his native land.

A true nature lover, he is inspired when he returns to his roots. Sketchpad in hand, he explores the regions every nook and cranny. Following in the footsteps of admired artists such as Tom Thompson or Clarence Gagnon, he loves to work outside, spontaneously reproducing scenes of nature and his native land.

"One must go outside. Nature does not deceive. Nothing clashes in nature, no matter what the season. Colors, tints, nuances, the whole palette is used. Painting on the spot is still the most faithful way to judge the beauty which surrounds us," says Claude.

His powers at their peak, Claude Langevin is self-confident and content of the course he has taken. His experience permits him to say: "With time, we learn to interpret what we see, to refine it and preserve what we like most in the structure as well as in the colors. We learn to make the most



left,
Entre Amis,
 oil on canvas,
 24" x 30"

of this magic moment when everything comes together to make a good painting. To wait or to come back later will not give the same result."

Still Beautiful after all these Years

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

And for us, the art lover, we too have been lucky for the paintings of Claude Langevin still entice us to explore his view of the landscape and get lost in their luminosity and colour.

Claude Langevin is a man, who like a singer, wishes to express himself by his paintings and proclaim his affection for his land and his people. ♦♦

Claude Langevin is represented by Multi-Art and to view his work please visit the following galleries:

Multi-Art

St-Lambert, QC
www.multi-art.net
 450.466.8511

Bright's Gallery

Blue Mountains, ON
www.brightsgallery.com
 705.445.4999



top left, *Soir de Tempete*, oil on canvas, 20" x 24"
bottom left, *Après le Souper*, oil on canvas, 20" x 24"
top right, *Office du Soir*, oil on canvas, 20" x 24"