

The Entertainers

The fine art of making beauty in small things

By Carolyn Fouriez

The electric blue aura heightens the dazzle of pink and red blooms, in rust earthen pots. The geraniums sit on a brown wooden stoop, framed by a grillework that sparkles with light. An exotic setting? A tropical clime? "No", says Bernie Poulin, "I took a rather humble, ordinary home on Lasalle Boulevard and found the beauty in these flower pots.

The owners questioned my interest." Many of us lack the artists' interest in or vision of "ordinary" things. Poulin finds and interprets for us, the beauty in flower pots, old gas pumps and "ordinary people."

"Geraniums" is but one of the stunning pieces in Bernie Poulin's new exhibition at La Galleria. There is "Late Night Movie and Popcorn", in which a young

child munches away, totally immersed in the television set whose black and white glare bounces off his coverlet and skin tones. In "Top War", the boy crouches, totally absorbed in the battle of red, green and orange tops on his dresser. "Mark's Dream" shows a sleeping child protected by the tiny "benign" gnome, while a little fairy, with turquoise wings, "beautiful but dangerous", sits on the bed. The child's dream of "fairyland" floats above him, murky, mythic, phantasmagoric. A rare portrait of Poulin's wife Marie, is in the collection - blue turbaned head resting on the couch.

"Ramsey Lake Morning", rendered in the misty light of dawn, is a "mood painting" that suggests the dimly-outlined yacht club, boats neatly moored on the island's shore. Another object in which Bernie finds a unique beauty is "The Old Pump" with its wood grains cracking, its shadow stark against the cold wall. A painting within a painting, "My Critic" depicts a boy trying to decide what the artist's canvas, an abstraction of blues dripping on red, is all about.

A recent departure in Bernie's work is in his use of "prisma" coloured pencils. "Balloon Man" delineates every crease in the fat man's

blue, rumpled suit and red-striped shirt from which his round belly protrudes as he slumps on a green and orange bench. His hand clutches the multi-coloured balloons, one with a yellow cat's face, that drift above him. "Balloon Man" has had the distinction of being the only Canadian work chosen, along with 15 other artists' work in this medium, for the Berol, U. S. A. Inc., catalogue. Berol is the company that manufactures these coloured pencils. The catalogue will number 200,000 copies and "Balloon Man" may be used in the advertisements in American Art Magazines. Bernie is justifiably proud that his work is now recognized outside of Canada and that the magazine editor commented that "they had never seen coloured pencils used in that particular way."

The technique is incredibly effective. Bernie says that "it was used in court drawings because it is quick. Kids use it. It gives a beautiful texture, a free, fluid type of drawings in which the colours are rich." Another in this medium, recognizable to Sudburians, is "Popcorn Man". Dino's popcorn, finely detailed within a true relic of the kind seldom seen anymore, is immortalized in bright yellow and red pencil. Again, in "Com-



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petition Strain", the folds and texture's of the boy's thick cotton judo suit are sharply realized. And of course, there is the poster of the "Northern Life Delivery Boy", pausing to rest before continuing his route. Poulin, as you may know, creates the cartoon child "Mig" for Northern Life. Mig's comments are authentic, recorded by Bernie from the comments of children with whom he has worked. Despite his busy schedule, Bernie manages to teach a class at Laurentian University in Special Education.

What else is Bernie Poulin doing these days? He continues to paint commissioned portraits. He intends to teach adult

art classes again in January, one in French and one in English. He is considering another children's art class in May. Two French songs which he composed will be published, with his own illustrations, in a book entitled "The Anthology of Franco-Ontarion Literature", to be released this Spring. He is doing a mural at Hanmer's Ecole-Secondaire, for the school's 10th Anniversary. The mural, he says, "will be an abstract piece in which I will play with exploding glass and wood, a different medium and a way of expression that will relate more to kids." This work will begin in the new year and is funded by an OAC grant.

Although individual, original paintings by Bernie will hang in "La Galleria", this present exhibition may be his last full one in Sudbury for two years. He is solidly booked for out-of-town exhibitions, including Bermuda, Timmins, Amos, Quebec and, he

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hopes "Windsor, because I would like to go back home, to be accepted on my own home ground." One of Bernie's drawings "Ti-Jean Baptiste", chosen by the Maison de Francophonie in Quebec, is presently on tour in 20 cities in Canada. It will then tour 12 countries in Europe.

In addition to his print "Do Re Mi", Bernie is publishing a limited edition (300) of "Blueberries", a stand-out in last year's show. These, together with his posters of the paper boy, will be on sale at La Galleria, along with his originals. There are 35 new works in all.

For Bernie Poulin, who set out to be a "full-time" artist and took the risks incumbent in that decision, the results have exceeded his expectations. To view these results and to see "the beauty in ordinary things", visit La Galleria. The show runs from November 20 to December 21. Gallery hours - Tuesday to Friday 11 am to 5 pm, Saturday 10 am to 4 pm, Sunday 12-4 pm. Closed Mondays.