

When art heals the soul

By Melissa Rodriguez and Luigi Morabito

Many of us have taken advantage of the pandemic to reconnect with our passions or develop new ones. Thanks to this newfound desire to pursue their dreams many were able to come through this difficult time brought by COVID-19. This is what Chantal Gingras did when she rediscovered painting, while in Florida, far from her relatives and her beloved hometown. Now, she can't imagine her life without it and is putting together a series of exhibitions, as she plans to make painting her full-time livelihood. Spotlight on this Montreal artist who lives in the United States.

The first crush

"My love for painting dates back to my youngest age. As far back as I can remember, the easel, brushes and paint cans were things I often saw in the kitchen of my parents' house on the South Shore of Montreal. There was a permanent smell of turpentine there," says Chantal Gingras. "It was my mom who painted. She loved to paint at night and when we woke up in the morning we were surprised to have a new finished painting to admire. My mother was therefore my first source of inspiration, my first contact with art and painting."

Chantal Gingras' talent for drawing is just as natural as her mother's. It was therefore natural that she turned to the arts during her school years. However, her first artistic outing was modeling. Then, in need of new challenges and more stability, she embarked on architecture and

interior design studies. For her, architecture is also an art form, just another way of drawing

When she finished her studies, she took on another hurdle: moving to Florida, where she still lives today.

The banking and financial crisis of 2008 led her to change her career path once again. Having always worn her heart on her sleeve, she turned towards nursing studies. She still works at the surgery center of Holy Cross Hospital in Florida.

Rediscover your passion

In 2020, with the arrival of the pandemic that had all the consequences that we now know all too well, Chantal found herself isolated in Florida, far from her loved ones who still live in Quebec. Little by little, in order to pass the time, she returned to her first passion: drawing and painting. Forced to stay home, she painted every night, painting became her therapy.

So, she started painting alone in her living room. When the confinement restrictions became less severe and she was able to start seeing friends again, they discovered her art and quickly told her how talented she is. Their encouragement helped her realize that she could start exhibiting and selling her paintings.



Emotions as inspiration

Chantal Gingras' canvases are vibrant and colorful, both her landscapes and her animals, and even more her portraits. She would describe her artistic style as realistic, although she is beginning to discover the abstract. "I'm still in a period of exploration. I try a lot of things; I add gold to accentuate the shiny effect of the paint, I do collages. For now, I'm having fun and that's what matters," Chantal said.

"I really like painting animals, because I love them. I especially like to paint close-ups of their faces, because looking at their eyes allows us to make up a lot of stories. If I mess up the eyes, I've missed my entire canvas."



Chantal also enjoys doing portraits, but, as she explains, being an eternal perfectionist, they have to look like two drops of water to the subject before she is actually satisfied. The eyes, the facial features, the texture of the skin, everything must look like the person it is trying to represent!

Where does her inspiration come from ?

"My inspiration comes from my emotions. Each of my paintings reminds me of an image, at a specific moment. Sometimes even a smell. I'm inspired by what I've been through, what happened to me during the week. And that's what I try to bring to life for the person who looks at my paintings. They must feel an emotion."

It's also an element that makes the sale of her paintings more difficult. "One of my biggest challenges is marketing my art. I still find that a little weird, because I have emotions connected to each of my works. It's like I'm selling a part of myself. So, it's hard to put a price on a painting. I have to go by specifics -the size, the number of details and the difficulty of execution- detaching myself from the emotional side.

What is the process of making a canvas ?

Making a canvas from start to end can seem overwhelming for someone who has never painted. How do you manage to tame the whiteness of the canvas in order to apply the first brushstroke? Chantal explains it to us.

"When I finish working, I take care of my children, I cook dinner. When I'm alone, I settle in, put on some music and let go, I start painting, as easy as that. I paint every day. "

"In order to start a painting, I have to have a subject in mind. Case in point, if I decide to draw a lion I start wondering what is this lion going to do. Will he sleep or attack? And what does it represent? the force, or the nobility? That allows me to decide what colors to choose for my painting."

And the end? How do you know when a painting is finished?

"That, my son can tell you about! Sometimes he says to me as he looks at one of my paintings: "Okay, I think it's done, you can move on to another one!" explains Chantal, laughing. "Personally, when a painting seems finished, I leave it alone for that evening. It's only the next morning, looking at it again, when I decide whether it's finally ready or not. Then, I can add some details, some sparkles. That's the moment when I can really tell if my work conveys what I wanted to capture. If so, I can say it's done."



Are there some canvases more striking than others for an artist?

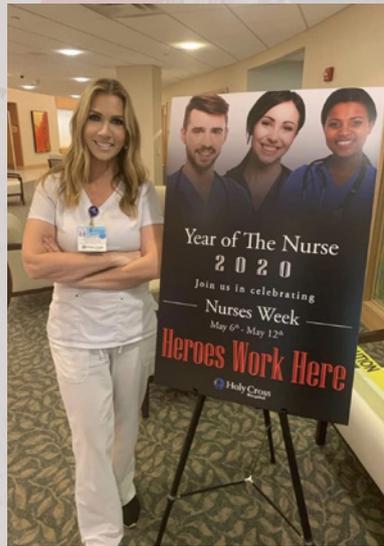


"In the journey of an artist, there is always a canvas that takes you further than the others. For example, when you try something new, but you're not sure if it's good, you always have some fear. A painting can therefore combine two different styles, the old and the new. Also, the day that you do a painting in an entirely new style, it becomes extraordinary. It's like finishing a series. You look back and say to yourself: I've changed, now I'm here. We can therefore see an evolution in my paintings. I am almost embarrassed by my first paintings and it has only been two years since I really started to paint."

Living off your passion

Although Chantal loves her job as a nurse, eventually she would like to be able to devote herself completely to art. Remember, art does good too.

As she wishes to continue exhibiting her canvases, she is also entertaining the idea of offering painting lessons." I would like to show that anyone can start making art, regardless of their background, and that it is not as difficult as it seems. Everyone has "their art" lying dormant in them. All they need to do is get started!"



That's the lesson she wants to pass on to her three sons, ages 15, 18 and 21.

"Every day I try to convey to them the idea that anything is possible. We only have one life to live and we have to listen to ourselves no matter what others might say." She adds, "It's the same advice I will give to anyone else. Obviously, we all need a job that brings bread and butter to the table. However, if you still manage to dedicate a few hours to your passion, that will make you really happy."

In November and December, Chantal Gingras will exhibit her paintings at several art shows in Florida. She will also participate in the prestigious Luxembourg Art Prize, an international artistic competition in Luxembourg.

To find out more about her career, to discover her style, or to purchase her paintings, visit her website: www.chantalgingrasart.com



Chantal Gingras

www.chantalgingrasart.com