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KITTIE BRUNEAU

Decease painter Kittie Bruneau

Éric Devlin, 6 avril 2021



Kittie Bruneau Photo Artus

Kittie Bruneau (born 1929), an extraordinary artist-painter, left us on April 6. After studying at the École des Beaux-Arts de Montréal (1946-49), Kittie Bruneau spent eight years in Paris, where she made her mark in a choreography by Maurice Béjart (1927-2007) on tangible music, *Symphonie pour un homme seul*, composed by Pierre Henry (1927-2017).

During her European stay, she discovered the artists and writers of the Cobra Group (Copenhagen, Brussels, Amsterdam), including Karel Appel (1921-2006), Corneille (1922-2010) and Asger Jorn (1914-1973). These artists model art forms that are not valued by the dominant elite of the moment. The painting of Cobra's members will definitively mark the work of Kittie Bruneau.

Upon her return to Quebec in 1959, she drew the attention of the famous critic Rodolphe de Repentigny (1926-1959), who highlighted her participation in the Concours artistique de la province du Québec with two paintings «where vaguely illustrative forms are treated with enthusiasm» (La Presse, March 13, 1959). A few months later, he noticed his "precise style, full of graphic elements" at the Square des Arts summer event held at Dominion Square (La Presse, 4 July 1959).

In the summer of 1961, she settled on Bonaventure Island opposite Percé. At the time, about 160 people lived on the island before it was transformed into a national park and wildlife refuge by the Government of Québec in the early 1970s. This new environment quickly marked Kittie Bruneau's paintings that she presented in Montreal in the 1960s. This colourful, joyful, sometimes grotesque, but falsely naive and poetic painting will become his trademark.

"My painting reads like a newspaper," she says. Indeed, her paintings are grouped around a few recurring themes such as his Bonaventure Island, the sea and birds, the couple, his numerous voyages, a wild bestiary. At an exhibition in 1981, Kittie Bruneau said: Gaspésie is a land of animals, birds, cats, rats, mice, horses, cows, frogs, lobsters and still many birds. It is the sea, the mauve, the blue, the wicked, the sweet, the wild, the fishing, the fishermen, the nets, the boats, the ladders, the mud, the mother-sea."

As noted by art historian Rose-Marie Arbour, Kittie Bruneau's choices bear witness to "a conception and a sense of nature that was perceived by critics as a means of appropriating a past and a territory, but without any historical or folkloric connotation" (Les arts visuels au Québec dans les années soixantes. VLB Éditeur 1993). His painting was the raw expression of freedom which was totally against the current of modernist formalism which reigned then in the world of art and which is embodied here by Guido Molinari (1933-2004). It would be necessary to wait, many years later, a Jean-Michel Basquiat (1960-1988) or the Street Art to find this narrative way of painting out of conventions.



Kittie Bruneau, Un pied sur la tête

Elsewhere it is also home

Already in 1965, she travels to Haiti and integrates into the cultural life of Port-au-Prince. In the late 1970s, his financial situation allowed him to consider New Horizons. In 1979, she moved to Guatemala and then to Peru. In 1983, she travelled throughout Europe. The following year, she went to Japan to study wood engraving. Also in 1984, she is found in Mexico where the work of ceramics fascinates her. Back in Val-David which is her winter refuge, she creates ceramic masks. Then in 1985, she goes to Nepal and India.

In 1986, she painted on animal skins with her new friends from the Stoney First Nation, northwest of Calgary, where she now wintered. Then new departure for the East, destination China and Tibet. In 1990, it is Morocco and the following year, Myanmar and Thailand. In the 1990s, she returned to India a few times and, at the beginning of the millennium, made about ten long stays in China. Of her many travels, Kittie Bruneau reported signs and colors, but also injustices that she denounces with enthusiasm in her paintings.

But, invariably, every summer, Kittie Bruneau returns to Percé to contemplate Bonaventure Island, the island to her, the island topped with wings of birds. In the summer of 2019, the Musée Le Chaffaud de Percé celebrated Kittie Bruneau's 90th birthday with a retrospective and the screening of an unpublished documentary «Farouchement Kittie» by director Alain Goudreau. This tribute was subsequently presented in the fall in Cookshire, in the Eastern Townships, where Gilles Denis, a businessman very involved locally, restored heritage buildings to hold cultural events.

Bibliographie

1. Éric Devlin (galeriericdevlin.art/la-galerie)
2. kittiebruneau.com/biographie.html