

The Café-Bistro

The Café-Bistro is a very special place for people in Europe to get together and talk. It is the place where meetings are held, the site of lively discussions, a tryst for new or illicit lovers, a room for sports or political meetings.

In some countries, it houses the betting offices for horse-racing aficionados, plays host to town meetings, becomes a dance hall at festive periods and even provides a locale where plots are hatched.

The Café-Bistro has come through different eras, modes and styles without losing any of its attraction or charm. It has been enriched by all societies that have embraced it, while remaining the focal point for the discussions and adventures that History has bequeathed.

It has seen tragedies, murders, passionate romances, handshakes and fisticuffs, declarations of eternal faithfulness, betrayals and even revolutions.

There are Café-Bistros for every taste: luxurious, popular, artistic, intellectual, snob or conservative. Some specialized ones have become famous for their beers, their wine, their hot chocolate, their decor, their patrons, the good or foul mood of their waiters...

It is impossible to imagine a large metropolis without Café-Bistros but smaller towns and villages would also not survive long without them. Bistros are funnels into which we can pour out our sadness, the receptacle for our secrets and, if you drop in alone some time, you'll always find a neighbor at the counter or an owner with a sympathetic ear.

They also cater to alcoholics, poets and unsuccessful lovers. Brilliant business deals are hatched there, crazy or whimsical projects are construed, real or imaginary fortunes are exchanged.

It's the realm as much of dreams as of down-to-earth discussions, of criticism as of the works themselves. Great masterpieces have been written there, stupidities declaimed, and forbidden thoughts entertained. It is a theater where the word holds sway, where emotion is revealed as nowhere else: ask a waiter in a cafe in Paris or in Vienna what he has seen of the human soul. He often knows more than the philosophers.

The Café-Bistro is a setting for adventure, a place where people pass, so that in its very essence it is a place where there is life. And it's that essence of life and its intimate relationship with the decor and the people in it that fascinates the artist and stimulates his or her imagination.

But Marie-Josée Ouellet goes beyond the theme of the Café-Bistro. Behind her paintings, behind these decors, we can feel the deep-rooted reasons for the city dweller's love for this locale, so complete, alternately magical or harsh, cold or flamboyant, indispensable for the equilibrium of a city.