

Not Without Honour....*Except Here*

By SIMONE COHEN SCOTT

Several Wednesday nights ago, June 22nd to be exact, I attended a launching here in Winnipeg, at the Whodunit Bookstore to be exact, of Celia Rabinovitch's book, "Duchamp's Pipe; a Chess Romance." Actually, the book has been launched in a few places, mostly via zoom. Readers of this paper may even remember that I reviewed her book a while back. (Ed. note: It was actually December 2020, Simone - and your review is on our website at <http://jewish-postandnews.ca/8-features/640-new-book-by-noted-art-expert-celia-rabinovitch-explores-many-themes>.)

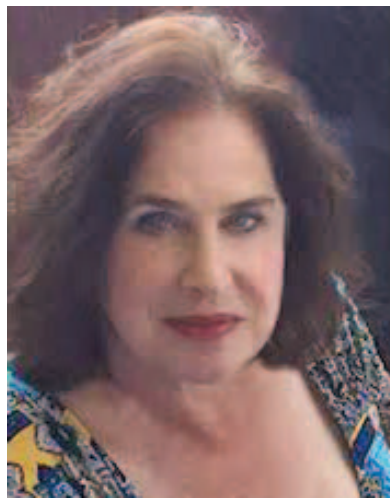
Anyway, the event back in June was delightful. The evening was basically a conversation between Dr. Michael Bumsted, proprietor of the store, and Celia Rabinovitch, internationally celebrated, locally barely known, artist, writer, and cultural historian. They were well-matched, the extremely erudite Dr. Bumsted, educated in Scotland, and Celia, Director of University of Manitoba's Fine Arts Department, 2002-2008; scholar-in-residence at universities in North America, Europe, and Israel; her paintings appearing in art centres throughout Canada and the United States albeit seldom here. His questions about the book were incisive and penetrating, her answers thoughtful, informative, interesting, and amusing. She is a wonderful raconteur and his method encouraged her to tell of the many adventures that went into the researching and writing the book. It was apparent he had read the book carefully and had had fun doing so.

Of course they talked about pipes, but also about bohemian life in various cities throughout two continents during the war-dominated decades of the early 20th century, travelling via tramp steamer, partying with the privileged, barely eking out a living. Histories at several levels are revealed through the medium of chess tournaments, against the backdrop of a not so unlikely friendship, that of George Koltanowski, a passionate chess playing phenomenon who practically breathed the game, (Good heavens, he could play several opponents at once, blindfolded, and win!), and Marcel Duchamps, the sophisticated chess aficionado, who had already made his name initiating a startling genre into the world of art with his 'Nude Descending a Staircase'. The central character is the pipe; it provides the theme connecting the two men who, in fact, spend just scraps of time with each other over the decades-long era their stories cover. Both Bumsted and Rabinovitch are well versed in many aspects of early 20th century histories in several locales. The audience, seated on metal folding chairs in the centre of the store, half-emptied platters of goodies behind them, had their horizons broadened. There was a flurry to buy the book after this presentation.

My own friendship with Celia began through a mutual friend, actress Terri Cherniak. Celia was to spend a couple of weeks as scholar-in-residence at the Israel Museum, lecturing on Dada art, and Terri knew I had an apartment nearby. She put us in touch. We were roommates for two weeks, we hit it off, and a friendship grew. Celia is, to me, a citizen of the world. She has an aura about her that makes one feel something special is going on. She is aware, always, of the spiritual connection between people, their settings, the objects they love, and she perpetuates the idea that the love passes along with the object. This informs her paintings, and this is the story of the pipe. The thread of love connection permeated every aspect of its journey as the gift from Marcel to George and beyond, (George re-gifted it), until finally, because it was Duchamp's pipe, it was auctioned off for tens of thousands of dollars. Perhaps the pipe is laughing now.

A second perspective of the thread of love, binding the souls of the two men, is the game of chess, which accounts for the rest of the book's title, 'a Chess Romance'. One feels as one reads the book that little wisps of *je ne sais quoi* are whirling about in the atmosphere, twirling themselves around your mind, giving it ideas. Of course, anyone familiar with Celia's previous book, entitled "Surrealism and the Sacred: Power, Eros, and the Occult in Modern Art" wouldn't be surprised by this mystic quality. One senses it in her art as well. An unidentified quote sums it up thus: "Her luminous paintings evoke mood, atmosphere, and ambiguity, leading to a sense of the uncanny."

The Whodunit Bookstore has a story too. It was founded as an activity for Michael. Bumsted's father when he retired. As a mystery buff's oasis, it thrived. My own introduction to "Whodunit" happened when I began to winter in Israel; I asked the elder Mr. Bumsted to find me mysteries set there. The several he found for me added greatly to my grasp of the neighbourhoods of the country. Mr. Bumsted was an historian and customers flocked to his evenings of readings and discussions, to hear his stories and to buy his recommendations. Soon Mrs. Bumsted, also an historian, was needed to help in the business.



CELIA RABINOVITCH
Artist, writer, &
cultural historian



MICHAEL BUMSTED
Proprietor of
Whodunit Bookstore

That is when the merchandise begins to reach beyond thrillers. As Mrs. Bumsted would include books for her grandchildren in some of her orders, one day when a few were inadvertently left out on the counter, they were noticed and ultimately sold. It made sense; since people who like books have children and grandchildren - make it convenient for them. So children's books were stocked, and then one thing led to another. When the space next door became vacant, Whodunit expanded to twice the size.

By this time, son (and recent PhD) Dr. Michael Bumsted had returned from Scotland. A career in a book store was not, I suppose, his intention, but hey! It turned out to be a good fit. As the range of books filled the shelves, his eclectic interests were being met. As I've already

mentioned, I was impressed with erudite remarks and penetrating questions with which he drew out Celia's fascinating anecdotes, and the ensuing discussion. If the evening sessions discussing books that he facilitates at Whodunit are as engrossing as the one I attended, you'll see me at more.

A week and a half prior to this event, Celia spoke at the Manitoba Museum about the exhibit she curated there, of photographs taken by Nick Yudell, a first cousin of Celia's once removed. Left in the possession of a family member, they were really a gift to Canada prepared for us by this young photographer - fated to die in WWII as an RAF pilot. Whereas a less sensitive person might have left them in their carefully labelled boxes, seeing how much love went into the taking of these photos, as one artist to another, Celia undertook to prepare them for display, to be shared with the world. At a point when we were together in one of the rooms of the display, Celia confided to me that she had wanted to convey the fact that although Nick's photos feature his own community, which was Jewish, the story he is telling is about the every-man in Canada during the wartime period, that is, a story of patriotic men of courage and of strength. We who were children then, remember them. She surely succeeded; staff and patrons got it. The exhibit, originally meant to end August 1st, has been held over to December 18th.



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