

MORAGA

Lifelong friends, artists hold first joint exhibit

By Janice De Jesus
Correspondent

CONCORD » In one's early teens, one's heart is fully open to endless dreams and possibilities.

So say lifelong friends Jacqueline Proulx and Rita Rodrigue. They were ages 12 and 13 when they first met one idyllic summer on a small island village in Quebec, Canada, where they first bonded over their artistic dreams: Proulx fostered an early passion for writing and Rodrigue in painting. They both remember one unforgettable decision that changed their lives.

"I left one winter years later, and Rita was left alone in that town," Proulx said. "So she went to the library where my mom told Rita to move to Ottawa, where I was at university, to be near me."

Rodrigue thrived in the private painting classes she took and the museums she visited there. But it wasn't until after college that they forged two different artistic paths that would lead them to separate places but still bound by their friendship.

Today, the two lifelong friends celebrate their friendship and art in their first joint exhibit, "Impressionism Times 2," running through June 2 at the Moraga Art Gallery.

"I've seen how Rita's art has evolved through the years," said Proulx, who now lives in Walnut Creek. "At one point, my house was full of her paintings."

The gallery show features ceramicist Proulx' latest work and that of expressionist painter Rodrigue, still a Quebec resident.

Proulx shows a variety of vases, bowls and platters, both decorative and functional, revealing her whimsical imagination. Her bowls



JANICE DEJESUS — FOR BAY AREA NEWS GROUP

Walnut Creek artist Jacqueline Proulx works on her art recently at the Red Ox Clay Studio in Concord. She and lifelong friend and artist Rita Rodrigue, of Quebec, Canada, have collaborated on their first joint exhibit, "Impressionism Times

IF YOU GO

What: "Impressionism Times 2"

Where: Moraga Art Gallery, 522 Center St.

When: Through June 2

Info: Visit www.moragaartgallery.com

blend colors and shapes with reds or greens. Also featured are platters and classic vases with grooved and shaped edges. Her porcelain vases are adorned with impressionistic renderings of trees and flowers reminiscent of Monet.

The exhibit is more than just two friends exhibiting work — it's a retrospective of how they once shared similar artistic styles and goals that have evolved over time, Proulx said.

"If we artists are to show

work with somebody who's close to us, someone who's inspired us, then, for me, it would be Rita," she said.

"She's the one who's inspired me the most as an artist. This show is a way of showing who I am, along with my past — the freshness of my youth."

Her big bowls are more than just functional — they tell visual stories of her life, Proulx said.

"By inviting Rita to show work with me, I give myself a treat by returning to my past," she said.

Vivid colors and abstract shapes are the hallmark style found in Ro-



Rodrigue

drigue's paintings that she said "reach out to us in the continuity of our memory of time, life and death."

This exhibit, Rodrigue said, comes full-circle as it celebrates their artists' endeavors then and even now despite the physical distance. As a young teen, Proulx wrote poetry while Rodrigue translated her emotions and dreams into a visual interpretation of reality.

Her nonobjective paintings, using interrelated shapes, colors and textures, effect an array of light and dark moods and feelings, said Rodrigue, who started out painting portraits of her children and other people.

Rodrigue said that no matter what medium she uses, she's been expressing her life's experiences — her

ups and downs — through her paintings.

"It's like I'm telling a story through each of my paintings," said Rodrigue, who's published a book about her life's work.

Even though she lives in Quebec, Rodrigue said she wishes to keep a gallery presence in the Bay Area in the hopes of finding private art galleries to display her work as well as continue to strengthen her bond with Proulx.

"We didn't see each other for several years because Jacqueline moved to the Bay Area," Rodrigue said. "But when we reconnected, I saw that she was the same Jacqueline — we never really changed. Of course, we're both older, but we're still the same people with the same heart, same spirit."

'Impressionism Times 2' at the Moraga Art Gallery

By Sophie Braccini

LAMORINDA WEEKLY, Wednesday, April 4, 2018, page B19

were in college in Ottawa together, one of their most influential professors introduced them to impressionism. Both young women were touched at a deep level with how impressionism represents reality by focusing more on transmitting the feeling a specific scene is evoking than on its actual physical form. Proulx with her ceramics and Rodrigue with her paintings embarked on that road during the first steps of their artistic development.

Today, years later, the two friends are in what Proulx call the "Times 2" of their artistic expression, and what they are presenting at the Moraga gallery is the different products that started to grow in close proximity.

Proulx lived most of her life in Québec, and did not become a full-time artist until she took early retirement. She built her first ceramist studio in her Montréal condo, before purchasing a home on the beach on the Ile d'Orléans where the artistic community flourishes. When her son moved to California, Proulx started spending six months of the year here, until she became a grandmother and decided to settle in the East Bay for good. She says she found at the Moraga Art Gallery an open, friendly and supportive community of artists where she feels at home.

She is now delighted to practice her art at the Red Ox Clay Studio in Concord where she can work with a gas kiln that allows

for experimentation at very high temperatures. What she presents at the Moraga Gallery are delicately decorated and evocative ceramic pieces that are true to her love of impressionism. She recalls a recent trip to Monet's house in Giverny. The extraordinary feeling of evanescent yet eternal beauty coming from nature that she felt there is what she impresses on the clay, and shares with others.

That path down Giverny's alleys is not exactly that of Rodrigue. Earlier year's work of the renowned artist where still imbued with impressionism, but her later work as presented at the gallery has evolved toward abstraction.

Rodrigue is one of those few artists who have been able to live off their art from the start. She has a solid group of followers-collectors all over the world who appreciate and invest in her creations. The pieces presented at the gallery are striking and evocative mixed media conceptions. Each piece evokes a 3D totem, presenting different layers of photography, drawings, and plastic material. The visual effect plays with reflections, drawing the eye of spectators from a general vision of the piece to exploring the details of the intricate creation. Rodrigue says of her works that the image is transformed from the second to the third dimension – from the temporal to the atemporal.

Rodrigue has been featured



in solo and collective exhibitions numerous times in Canada, and abroad at the Museum of Modern Art in Seoul, South Korea, at the Fremantle Museum Arts Centre in Australia, and at the Galerie Art-Tournelle in Paris, by Rita Rodrigue as the Gallery La Aduana in Barranquilla, Colombia.

The show, which also includes the gallery's 13 member artists and several guest artists, runs until June 2. The gallery is located in the Rheem Shopping Center, at 522 Center Street, Moraga. Its hours are Wednesday through Sunday from noon to 5 p.m. For more information, visit www.moragaartgallery.com.

The Moraga Art Gallery always showcases interesting local artists, and once in a while, offers the unexpected pleasure of an international discovery. This is the case with the current exhibition, "Impressionism Times 2," which

showcases local artist of French-Canadian origin Jacqueline Proulx, along with a friend from her past, internationally recognized Canadian artist Rita Rodrigue, for their first Bay Area exhibition.

When Proulx and Rodrigue

SUR LA LIGNE INFINIE

Engaging Work

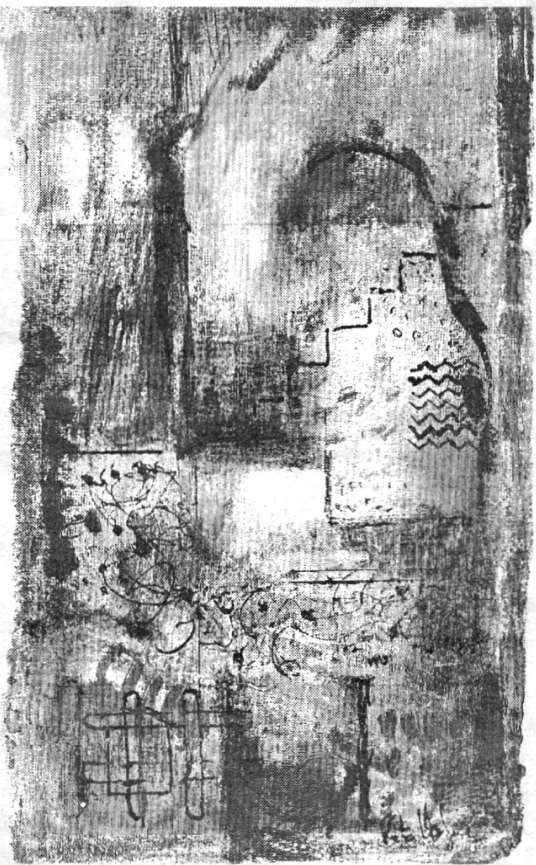
Thankfully, the Café Gallery at Fremantle Arts Centre was empty when *X-Press* viewed works by visiting Canadian artist Rita Rodrigue. There is something decidedly uncomfortable about attempting to engage with an art exhibit that is viewed between two heads bent in sipping café latte and eating snowpea sprout salad.

Rodrigue's work intrigues from a distance and invites us to come close to fully appreciate the visual intricacy of each composition. This artist is adept with many materials and processes. Her compositions consist of rectangles of richly textured handmade paper, decorated with coloured wash, collage, ink marks and hints of imagery, then framed collectively in either pairs or groups of up to nine, to form composite exhibits.

This work has a sense of other worldliness about it. Colours melt into each other, symbols are suggested while faces, half-drawn figures or recognisable objects float over the rough surface and through the soft washes. Half circles are interpreted as cathedral domes or crescent moons while full circles become celestial orbs or the earth as seen from afar. Meanwhile the French titles (Rodrigue is from Quebec) only add to the mystique for the uninitiated.

Although these abstract compositions are imbued with mystery, the artist does well at keeping the viewer well grounded with her attention to detail. And when she draws the figure, it is in the classical manner. One black line is executed with a pen nib (or perhaps a fine brush) giving it a character of its own as it defines the volume and contours of the subject. I would love to see more of this artist's drawings, especially her figure work.

Despite the enigma of the imagery, these exhibits communicate on different levels. Some viewers will respond to the work on an intellectual



From Sur La Ligne Infinie by Rita Rodrigue

level, *Triple Lignes* is one example. In this composition, each of the nine separate components are complete designs in their own right, yet they come together as a harmony of parts to produce a satisfying whole. Other viewers will relate to the emotional suggestion of exhibits such as *Liaison Secrete* where the more abstract of the two components can be interpreted as a couple embracing. Then there is a spiritual reading to many of the works as they suggest a communing with nature or echo man-made edifices for worship.

All in all, this is a fascinating exhibition and if you need to peer over someone's lunch to better view the work, just say *excuse moi*, and enjoy feasting your eyes.

—JUDITH MCGRATH

THE MUNICIPAL CHRONICLE

Corporate Services

***On the occasion of
the Journées de la Culture***

UNVEILING OF THE BENCH SCULPTURES ALONG THE CORRID'ART

On Sunday, September 30, accompanied by members of the public, the artists and many active workers in the arts and cultural sectors, Aylmer Mayor Marc Croteau unveiled seven new bench sculptures along the Corrid'Art, which extends from Wilfrid-Lavigne Boulevard to the banks of the Ottawa River. In response to the recommendations made in Aylmer's Cultural Policy in 1998, a first unveiling took place last year on Principale Street, where three bench sculptures were inaugurated.

The seven new works of art are – like their three older siblings – both artistically innovative and highly practical, part of a tradition that began several years ago with the benches that decorate the Parc de l'Imaginaire. As he went along the Corrid'Art, the Mayor paid tribute to the seven artists who created the new bench sculptures: Rita Rodrigue (Flûte de banc), Martine Gilbert (Objet de réflexion, de force, d'unicité, d'équilibre), Marie-Hélène Giguère (banc@rêver), Jean-Yves Vigneau (La Faille du temps), Cairn Cunnane (Ondes), Sylvain Charette (Tractus) and Annie Thibault (L'Arche).

In his remarks, Mayor Croteau urged Aylmer residents to visit the Corrid'Art and enjoy the originality of the urban furnishing it displays. He also thanked the members of Aylmer's Cultural Committee, and hailed the volunteer involvement of the members of the selection jury, the work of the Cultural Division and the municipal services that saw to the installation of the benches, and of course the artists themselves, for the excellence of their work, their commitment and their dedication to making a reality of this open-air art gallery. The stroll along the Corrid'Art concluded at the Symmes Inn, where the members of the public had a chance to chat with the artists while musicians from École secondaire Grande-Rivière played and refreshments were served.



Breaking through the walls

Artist Rita Rodrigue offers her truth in colour

By SCOTT VERITY STEVENSON

AYLMER

The striking, rich colours of Rita Rodrigue's pastels and watercolours have a certain darkness to them, but the painter speaks only of beauty and inspiration.

"To really touch people you have to create something of beauty and truth," she said during a private exhibition of her work last week.

Darkness may have a beauty of its own, but it does not rule in the paintings of Rita Rodrigue. The common theme in her work, which spans a lifetime, is freedom and liberation. Many of the subjects are nudes; and birds frequent the background, even foreground. Rodrigue calls it "a liberation of one's inner voice."

That is how she describes an ideal art form. "Every person has the right to express something of themselves." The best expression comes from the soul,

and that will be the most moving for people to see. "Not a plastic beauty, rather a force from the soul."

"It's therefore very important that when we work we try to find our own internal truth," Rodrigue says.

That's what she teaches her students – not technique, but how to use their own imagination. "I want people to find their own paths of creativity – and colour is always the medium to express it," she says. "We all have the capacity to seek out our imagination – art begins by unlocking the soul."

Rodrigue has been painting since the age of four. More recently, she became a full-time painter in 1965, and has exhibited across Quebec, from Imagier Gallery in Aylmer, Calligramme in Ottawa to Montreal and Quebec City. She won first prizes in the Ottawa Art Association in 1977 (pastels)

and 1978 (watercolours) and taught at the Collège de l'Outaouais until budget cuts got the better of her position.

Now, continuing 17 years of teaching, she gives private courses from her home in Aylmer. Groups of 10 studying for six or seven hours on weekends have consisted mostly of adults, but she may start teaching youth later this year.

The teaching process for her is mostly one of allowing students to freely express themselves with colours. She said that in her own work, it can sometimes take a year to finish one particular piece, while others are finished in a matter of hours.

"You must have a confidence; let your inside guide you," she says. "Students must be patient; they have to want to discover."

See *INNER*, page 4;



Artist Rita Rodrigue (right) and Carol-Ann Gingras, who held a private exhibition for the artist last week.

From page one;

In that sense, Rodrigue says the subject should not necessarily be representative of an exterior reality – "not to copy nature, but to be inspired by it."

live in a downtown core with only concrete around you."

Breaking through the concrete in our world, and the inner walls in herself, Rita Rodrigue speaks a message of truth and beauty through her paintbrush.



2 OTTAWA REVUE, June 3 - 7, 1983

It took two years and much studying of the scriptures

Rodrigue captures the 'Song of Songs' in watercolour

by Roger Amoroso
Assistant Editor

The *Song of Songs* is one of the most beautiful love poems ever written. This ancient Oriental composition stands on its own as a work of art, with aesthetic qualities and a richness of expression that are as enthralling today as ever they were. The origin and particularly the meaning of the Song has for hundreds of years defied the most erudite biblical scholars and theologians.

Some of the confusion derives from the need to explain the presence of such a frankly erotic creation in the pages of the sacred Scriptures. Finding the uninhibited intimacies of the poem a trifle too disconcerting, scholars, divines and sages have looked for justification in mystical and allegorical interpretations.

The work not only spoke quite unabashedly of physical love, but it made no direct reference to God and there was an apparent lack of ethical teaching in it. The decision to preserve it in the Jewish and Christian canon was finally due not to its universally admired poetic beauty, but to the acceptance of it as an allegory or parable of God's love for Israel, or for the Church, or for the soul that venerates the Creator.

There are many other theories about the meaning of this book of the Old Testament — the drama, wedding feast, love song and fertility rite theories, for example — but all that really concerns us here is an extraordinarily beautiful exhibition of watercolour paintings by Quebec artist Rita Rodrigue at La Galerie L'Estampe in Hull that runs until June 15.

Her subject is *The Song of Songs*, and I can think of no more beguiling pictorial interpretation of this great poem than Rodrigue's graceful representations. It matters little whether viewers think the book is an allegory of the relationship between the divine and the human, or whether the Song is simply a poem about human love: the paintings of Rita Rodrigue — like the Song itself — can be enjoyed for their beauty, their passion and their exquisite craftsmanship.

The artist grew up in a small town in Quebec, one in a family of eight, of whom five showed an inclination for art. "We were a poor family," she says. "We lived in the country with not too much culture or art around us. We didn't have many books." But her parents were sensitive and caring people who encouraged their children to express themselves. "They always let us cry and laugh and paint and do what we wanted to do," she says. "They gave us freedom."

Still, she knew nothing of the formal theories and practice of art. She knew only that she could draw and needed to draw more than others. She came to the city to find some answers, and she found Henri Masson. When she arrived at his studio she was nineteen. "I felt like a little girl," she says, "very innocent, with nothing in my mind."



Quebec artist Rita Rodrigue and piece
from series of watercolour paintings
on the Song of Songs at Galerie
L'Estampe, Hull.





About three years ago, she borrowed a bible from her mother. It was filled with illustrations of the biblical art. Perusing the bible with a friend, she came upon *The Song of Songs*. As it happened, her reading of the lovely poem coincided with certain changes that had been taking place within her. She felt that painting had become "just like a picnic", she wasn't saying what she wanted to say. "I was painting only what I saw," she says, "not what I was feeling in my heart."

Earlier she had experimented with the female form as an outcrop of nature. Now the Song, with its repletion of natural images and extravagant orientalisms, inspired her to further explore this new dimension. Ten months went by before she actually decided to paint *The Song of Songs*. It took her another six months to read, research and understand the book. She sought the advice of a theologian from the Dominican Fathers in Ottawa.

He loaned her a book of exegesis from which she took voluminous notes. Still the project eluded her. Illness, a lack of money, assorted problems got in the way. She decided to hold a retrospective of her work. Of 120 pieces, she sold 84. After finding the appropriate way to illustrate the book, she finally started to paint.

At first she thought she might do the paintings in a precise historical manner, using the costumes, forms and one-dimensional approach of the period. But after three or four works in that style, she abandoned the idea. It was simply too onerous to render accurately the clothes and styles of 3000 years ago. Says Rodrigue: "I didn't feel it was my work. I didn't feel it was personal enough. And it was a handicap to do it in just one dimension."

Working eight to ten hours a day, it took her two years to complete the series. She was constantly dissatisfied, constantly revising, doing sketch after sketch, sometimes as many as 38 for one painting. "It is such a beautiful story and I wanted to do the best I could," she says. "But I realized it would kill me if I started over again."

Rita Rodrigue has a strong beautiful face, at once radiant and ravaged, like a mother after a difficult childbirth, to which she compares the pain and satisfaction of her endeavor. In depicting selected excerpts from *The*

Song of Songs, she accepted the Love Song theory ascribed to it by certain scholars. But she enlarged the man-woman duality to include the whole spectrum of organic nature.

In her interpretation there is not just a human-centred love, but the love of all living things in nature. Far from adopting an academic approach, the artist has simply allowed the poem to possess her spirit, and to let its language and imagery sink into her consciousness. The style is her own but the essence and atmosphere of the story remains intact.

The viewer needs only his or her senses open and awake to see the lovely Vale of Urtas — traditionally identified as the setting of the story — and the voluptuous Shulamite, the central character through whose eyes the story of expectation, fulfillment and ultimate abandon is told.

You can see something of Masson's influence in the artist's tense economy of line and form, and the dancing suppleness of movement and rhythm. Each painting is filled to bursting with images — human, animal and vegetable. The style is vaguely reminiscent of the Pre-Raphaelites in its luxuriance of colour and symbol, and in its stylized decorative borders. There is a great deal of colour, but the colours are cool and restful, conveying the grand effect of languid blues, greens, violet and wine.

Humans forms are so subtly integrated into the forms of the natural world that they make one continuous arabesque of entwining erotic patterns. Curiously — though in keeping with her vision of cosmic harmony — the artist found it more difficult to paint the human figure separate from the natural world. Curious but not surprising in an artist who discerns human and glandular forms in the bark of a tree or the petals of a flower.

In the exuberance of images, in the elegant swirling lines, all is delicacy, all is tenderness, but with just enough sensuality to evoke the pagan divinities of a distant past. The artist sums up her message this way: "I live in the country and I enjoy that feeling of closeness to nature. When I come to the city I feel something is missing. I want people to feel that something beautiful is sometimes forgotten." □

Although Masson was stern and rigorous in his teaching, he believed implicitly in her talent and encouraged her to persevere. He also taught her to simplify, always simplify, form and colour, a lesson again emphasized by her next teacher, Roger Lariviere, himself a student of Masson.

Rodrigue studied for four years with Masson, and in all studied for ten or twelve years.



Watercolor by Rita Rodrigue

Watercolors bear gentle charm

By Nancy Baele
Citizen correspondent

What better time to have an exhibition based on the *Song of Solomon* than spring when the sight of growing things and the sun's warmth make blood and sap rise. Rita Rodrigue's large pen and ink watercolor works are illustrations of the *Song of Songs* that unparalleled paean of sensuality replete with sights and smells of the physical world.

Lush images of precious metals, rich flocks of sheep, the perfumes of myrrh, frankincense and aloe are fused with the attributes of the beloved in the *Canticle of Canticles* and it is these images that Rodrigue illustrates with stylized fidelity.

She has chosen to insert each

Art review

Rita Rodrigue

Galerie l'Estampe, 101 rue Victoria, Hull
Until June 15

watercolor within a narrow border which reiterates the background and also incorporates the text handwritten in black. The works depend for their effect on the many lines in pen and ink which sustain a flow of modishness reminiscent of '20s Vogue models.

Each composition is completely filled with color — turquoises, golds, purples and blues. And the result is an interpretation which leans more to a dulcet, fairy-story tenderness than the strong carnal pulse of the poem. The sights,

sounds, smells which make the universe a physical extension of the lovers in the *Song of Solomon* are alluded to in a paler way by Rodrigue's borders which encircle the central image with vines, birds, apples and petals.

She is consistently true to her own interpretation. Faces emerge like plant babies from foliage, sheep are linked to the people who tend them and an elongated figure is cradled in a crescent/moon shape. Rodrigue may occasionally echo Chagall in her lover-figures, but generally they are simply signposts in the full landscapes, adorned with literal graphic images of the verse.

Her rococo style with its emphasis on pleasing artifice has an easy charm.

Value of experience shows in contrast between artists

By Robert Smythe

It's Sunday afternoon, and Aylmer's Galerie l'Imagier is a popular stop for the Outaouais' hip young francophones out for a drive. Yesterday they were taking in a recently opened two-woman show by Rita Roderigue and Gisele Bouvier.

Both are local artists, sharing a common love for bright pure color. Roderigue, the more experienced of the two, exhibits 20 pastel drawings and water-color paintings. Her work is assured, unhesitating and lively.

The pastels — portraits, still-life and landscape, are

ART

drawn with a constant and heavy pressure, biting into the rough, colored paper with a flickering energy.

Studies of young women, posed in chairs against a background of rhythmic parallel lines, are very sweet pieces. *Melanie*, a little girl in a dotted pinafore and red stockings, slouches forward with determination, pinning her legs together to keep from squirming.

Like the other portraits, strongly warm and cool lighting is cast across the sitter's face, where the

pastel pencil has scrubbed back and forth to produce the densest application. Rarely are any passages smudged or blended: The artist wants to keep the medium as thick and rich as possible.

For the still-life works there is less need for a single central focus, and more overall decorative pattern revels in lush color for its own sake. *Le temps des cerises* is a table-top scattered with kitchen gear and glossy red cherries. The choice of a cherry-red frame is clever.

Perhaps the most abstract pastel is *Jardin de rocailles*, where the rock garden's blossoms and bare spots are lyrically arranged in a staccato of hot pink on a neutral mossy rocky ground.

As for the small pieces by Gisele Bouvier, on display in the gallery's second room, to say that it is the artist's first public exposure, and that her work is a series of highly developed color-pencil and felt-pen doodles on paper with no coherence whatsoever, is sufficiently caustic.

La Galerie l'Imagier, at 7 Front Street in Aylmer, has very limited hours: 7 to 9 p.m. Wednesday through Friday, and 2 to 4 p.m. on weekends. The current show remains there until October 16.

The Ottawa Citizen
Sept. 19, 1977