

Marguerite Bourgeoys at the Shrine of Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré

A Modern Look at a 17th Century Woman of Commitment

All along the Saint Lawrence River, that remarkable gateway to North America, there are tributes to the builders and outstanding figures who have left their mark on the country. Just across from Île d'Orléans, at the Shrine of Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré, the paintings in the Immaculée Conception Chapel, situated in the basilica's basement, constitute an inspiring history lesson. Here, Marguerite Bourgeoys has just been attributed a place, a place of choice.



The decoration of the chapel walls was undertaken about thirty years ago. In 1985, the painter, Frédéric (Louis-Gilles Doyon, 1938-1993) was commissioned to produce seventeen paintings for the shrine. Because of terminal illness, he was only able to complete five, among them was Mary with her parents, Joachim and Anne. The artist, Marius Dubois (1944 –) continued the project. During the 2000s, he was responsible for creating works in memory of Bishop de Laval, Marie de l'Incarnation, Catherine de Saint-Augustin, Kateri Tekakwita, Father Frédéric, and Brother André. The paintings by Frédéric and Dubois can be found in the nave of the chapel.

Pierre Lussier (1945 –)¹ was asked to decorate the first arch on either side of the choir ambulatory. In 2012 and 2013 respectively, he completed the works depicting Marguerite

¹ His accomplishments are many. See his biographical notes at <http://www.pierrelussierpeintre.com/en/biographie.html>. In order to appreciate Lussier's remarkable drawings, examine carefully his wonderful work enclosed in the three-volume series entitled *Histoires*

d'Youville and Marguerite Bourgeoys. The unveiling of the painting in honour of the latter was held on June 7, 2014.



In representing both the foundresses of the Sisters of Charity (Grey Nuns) and of the Congrégation de Notre-Dame, Lussier demonstrated talent and inspiration. His triangular compositions with their main characters placed in the centre of the work draw our gaze into the rich and captivating subject matter. Hence, his painting shows Marguerite Bourgeoys surrounded by Amerindians (a woman, a man and a boy all in a proud pose) curious about what she is teaching, and by Canadians (a boy, a girl and a young woman) demonstrating affection and admiration toward the sister. Marguerite's expression portrays her joy in being a teacher and her love of others. There is no trace of condescension, no sign of superiority of one civilization over another, of one social class over another. She is truly the woman of commitment we have come to know through her *Writings*.

naturelles du Nouveau Monde by Pierre Morency, which he illustrated during the 1980s and 1990s (Éditions Boréal). Pierre Lussier demonstrates an uncommon ability to draw nature's soul. Twenty years later, he has not lost his touch.



In the somewhat darkened corridor of the ambulatory, the artificial illumination placed at the base of the painting sharpens the colours. It is, however, the luminosity provided by the artist which magnificently highlights every detail. We are struck by the painting's dimensions (4.86 m par 2.40 m) and by the humanity which it conveys. Most certainly, visitors are moved by it.

Undoubtedly, Mother Bourgeoys is very pleased to be in this chapel with the Blessed Virgin, whom she has always offered as a model. To be in close proximity to Mary's mother and in the company of other pioneers of the early Church in Canada must also be agreeable to her.

Along the river on the way back to Quebec City the road passes the former Château-Richer Convent². This is another example of a mission begun over three centuries ago which – despite its having to adapt to changing times – continues to this day. By paying tribute to Marguerite Bourgeoys and the Congrégation de Notre-Dame, this is precisely what we wish to recall at Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré.

Denys Chouinard, retired CND archivist
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² Today, the building houses the Côte-de-Beaupré interpretive centre. A recreated classroom from yesteryear (3rd floor) and a virtual exposition (History of the Old Convent) recall the mission fulfilled by the sisters of the Congrégation in Château-Richer. Website consulted July 21, 2014: <http://www.histoire-cotedebeaupre.org/permanentes.php>