On the Cover

Portions of the following are taken from an interview with the artist on January 19, 2007.

Cityscapes comprise a genre in the world of art. Some artists, such as Richard Estes, paint the city in a photorealist style, while others, such as Mark Lagüé, use a more impressionistic style, capturing the city in broad strokes. City images and people who are not posing appeal to Lagüé, who has said that “on an abstract level, the shapes that come from people in a city environment appeals [sic] to what I consider beautiful” (Lague, n.d.). It was said of Estes that “when an artist paints from life, in this instance the city, he not only sees the city, he experiences it” (Gray, 2007). Readers of the American Psychologist can experience San Francisco in the work on this month’s cover as a prelude to experiencing it in person at the APA annual convention in August.

An urban artist, Mark Lagüé has lived his entire life on the edge of a major city, Montreal, Canada. He is one of six siblings and the only artist in the family. He doodled a lot as a kid but grew up involved in sports, and some of his early artistic attempts were caricatures of hockey players. It was not until he took an art course at the end of high school that he realized he wanted to pursue art.

Lague earned a bachelor of fine arts degree in design at Concordia University in 1988. His early goal was to be a commercial artist. After spending 14 years in the animation industry doing highly detailed background design, he eventually realized that he wanted to do work that was far less rendered. He considers his years in animation as “art boot camp.” While it was somewhat limiting, it gave him practice with different media and styles.

Lague admired the broad shapes, vivid colors, and bold brush strokes of such classical artists as Rembrandt, Edgar Degas, John Singer Sargent, and Winslow Homer. Among the more contemporary artists he admires are Charles Reid, Frank Webb, David Leffel, Richard Schmid, and Ken Auster (Lague, n.d.). However, a looser form of painting went against his natural tendencies, so he began a long, arduous process of retraining himself that, according to him, used up a lot of paper. But as his artistic skills matured, he began to use two or three brush strokes to define what he used to do with a thousand strokes of the pen.

Once Lagüé had come to paint the city almost exclusively, San Francisco was on his short list. He had heard many people describe it as their favorite North American city. The drama of the hills, the bay, and the bridge rival the visual excitement of New York City, which he has painted a number of times. Some other cities he has put on canvas are London, Rome, Paris, Philadelphia, Montreal, and Toronto. One snow scene he did of a Canadian city sold almost immediately at an art show in Phoenix, Arizona, where the temperature was topping 100º.

Lague starts his work in a city with hundreds of digital photographs, which will form the core scenes and supply the light, shadows, shapes, and reflections that go into his images. In February 2004, he decided to give himself a trip to San Francisco as a 40th birthday gift. On his first day in San Francisco, there was a near-monsoon rain, so several of the paintings from this trip, one of which is Rainy Day, Chinatown on the cover of this issue, are rainy day scenes. Rain softens and blurs the image, yet the vibrant color of Chinatown is still evident. The streetcar tracks and the hill in the distance confirm that this is San Francisco’s Chinatown.

The Asian concept of “less is more” would not seem to fit the painting Rainy Day, Chinatown, since it is packed with detail—just as any street in Chinatown is. In fact, the crowded bustle of Chinatown, which is the reality there, shines through. However, as is quite typical of Lague’s body of work, this painting “gets more with less” as the painter would say, in terms of the style of painting. Blocks of color create the street, the cars, and the signs. Unlike Richard Estes’s rather sterile cityscapes with no people present, this street in Chinatown has people scurrying along under their umbrellas.

It is interesting that Gestalt psychology interested Lagüé while at Concordia. In fact, he says that psychology was his favorite nonart course. With each succeeding painting of a city he builds a unified experience of that city, and all his cityscapes taken as a whole create a psychological configuration of The City.

REFERENCES


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