

ON THE COVER

Mythical Bridge by Jimmy Perron

This issue marks the transition to new editorship, including cover art editing, at American Psychologist. Portions of the following are based on an interview with the artist and his wife Gabrielle Coulombe on September 17, 2021.

The cover image comes from an artist in the Charlevoix region of Canada's French-speaking Québec province. Charlevoix is north and west of Maine, where the Appalachians slope down to the St. Lawrence River. On the opposite bank, they rise up again with forest, scattered lakes, and small towns. The Isle aux Coudres, the Island of Hazelnut Trees, where Jimmy Perron was born and raised, lies a few miles offshore. No ordinary island, it bears the imprint of the universe, having been formed, along with the adjacent mainland, by a meteor strike from outer space.

There is something celestial, if not meteoric, about *Mythical Bridge*. A crowd of shapes, some bird like, others suggesting stars or snowflakes, floats through shafts of light over the hard white ground. They seem bound for an unseen destination somewhere above and beyond the blue night with its pale moon. The composition has a vertical momentum, and the colors are cool but mixed with hints of golds, greens, and even reds. A bridge joins places, or thoughts and differences, spans rivers and obstacles and provides passage and travel. So what is being joined or traversed here? Perhaps it is fantasy and reality, or the frozen earth and a living sky, or an island, and a distant shore or perhaps it is the way to another, better world. *Mythical Bridge* evokes a Québec winter with its ice and snow but also a winter of the imagination, with magic and celebration swirling in the frosty air.

Growing up on an island in the St. Lawrence, Perron knew long winters and isolation. There were few other children and few opportunities to travel and see different places. So, he learned to travel in his mind and create imaginary places inspired by what he saw, felt, and heard locally. The Charlevoix countryside, its mountains and river, and climate with four distinct seasons, has always had a strong presence for him. No people anticipate spring more eagerly than Québécois or find greater enjoyment in summer and in the last warm days of fall. But there is something special about winter here, at least for Perron. Unlike the "snowbirds," Canadians who flee annually to Florida, he has no wish to escape. He finds drama and mystery in nighttime landscapes and clarity in the way the human form contrasts with the whiteness of snow as

the weather presses people to go indoors and inside themselves.

Perron is self-taught, trained originally as a cabinet maker, and describes his approach to art as "automatic" and "instinctive" rather than deliberative and analytical. He works with acrylic paints on board, adding in collage with rice paper glued to the surface. Artists he admires include Québec based Renée Richard, Jean-Paul Lemieux, and Clarence Gagnon as well as Europeans Max Ernst and Marc Chagall. Accordingly, elements of both Expressionism, where distortion and exaggeration of "objective" reality are used to convey emotion and Surrealism, where fantasy reconstructs or undercuts this reality, are detectable in his paintings. He gains inspiration not only from the land, but from its people, and from remnants of their past that endure into the present. Perron has boyhood memories of being fascinated by a rotting shore hulk, the relic of the island's vanished boat-building tradition. Now he seeks to revisit and preserve these local pasts in his art.

Living on an island has always required solving problems of access and communication with the mainland. Water and ice, at once obstacles and opportunities, gulfs to cross and the means to cross them, draw Perron's creative eye and recur across many of his works. For example, ice canoeing is centuries old in the region. Essential for survival in the 1600s, it is now a competitive sport along the St. Lawrence and figures in some of his paintings. Downstream from Québec City, the river does not freeze over completely and becomes a jagged field of ice broken by channels of open water. Teams of canoeists partly drag, partly paddle their heavy vessels across the wide and treacherous river in a race from one shore to the other. Once the sole means of transportation in the long winter months, it remains a rough and exhausting physical and mental challenge. Perron abstracts and arranges images, memories, and artifacts drawn from this living history and then adds his own personal associations to create pictures. Taken together, these elements allow him to feel part of the natural and social worlds his ancestors inhabited and to imagine the lives they led. This month, *Mythical Bridge* allows us to do the same.

 R. Walter Heinrichs
Art Co-Editor