

The work of Albert Niedzwiedz



The Albert Niedzviedz Collection

Donated to the Musée de Noyers by his daughter, Michèle Niedviedz, in 2005.

"I am sincerely grateful to the Museum of 'Noyers sur Serein' for welcoming this nostalgic and beloved miniature world to their collection.

My father would be so proud to know that his little troop is kept here in this beautiful village full of history.

He was terribly proud of these little fellows who came from his heart, and whenever he looked at them it seemed like conversation and emotion flowed between them."

My father, Albert Niedzviedz,



Where do all these little clay men and women and their naive dream world come from?

My father, Albert Niedzviedz, was born in Paris on 24 December 1924.

His parents were Polish Jews who worked as tailors on Caron street, near the Place du Marché Sainte-Catherine in the Marais district.

At that time there were many tradesmen and craftsmen from Central Europe living there. Like his father, they were simple and hardworking people with charming accents. My father later enjoyed imitating him with an amused tenderness.

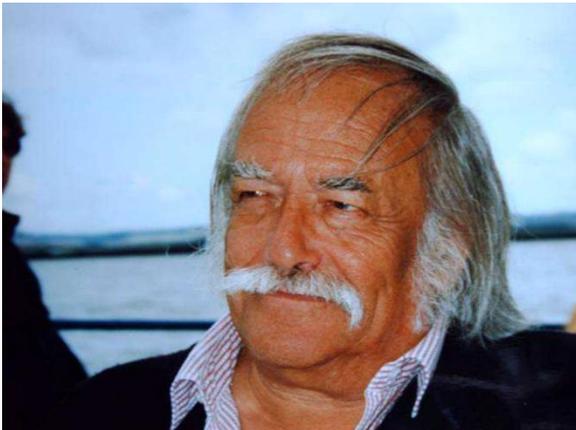
He remembered this lively, warm place and the images remained engraved in his memory forever. For example, the everyday scene of an old grocer in a long apron plunging his arms all the way up to his elbows into a wooden barrel, fishing out large pickles dripping with brine.

Something he found amongst the old peasants of the countryside was the togetherness and colourfulness of hardworking people, who filled him with emotion when he saw them during the holidays. It was the same with my mother and I on the banks of the Loire in Macé, where we would go to get delicious cheeses, fresh eggs and jam on the neighbouring farms, and go around the antique shops which were always full of treasures!



The old peasants and couples who had aged together with time-worn faces, the farm's interior with the enormous range, the clock, the kettle...

My father had such a strong tenderness for all those decimated by the war. He carried an incurable wound deep inside him for deported friends, cousins... As for him and his parents, prostitutes plied their profession near the building where they lived. When they knew that a raid was going to take place in the neighbourhood that day, they would quickly warn the family to hide in their attic. Devastated by war, or by time as were the old peasants - the passing of time is a pain that constantly tormented him.



These people albeit often rather rough, have 'hearts of gold' and are happy to share a freshly baked loaf - that's the way my father saw them anyway, and they made him think of Raimu in Pagnol's films; an actor he loved so much!

He wanted to honour these people in his own way.

Amongst the little characters are lonely, slightly awkward old boys and girls who have not yet had the chance to meet their soul mates. In their loneliness, it is the generosity of others that comforts them.

My father found his soul mate in my mother, whom he called his little fairy. She gave him a touch of finesse.

My father was a tailor, as was his father. My mother, born in 1926, began drawing and painting around 1955. During the 1970s, she discovered a passion for the world of dance. She started drawing backstage at the Théâtre des Champs Elysées, the Paris Opera, the Opéra Comique and in the Franchetti class, where dancers such as Jean Guizeris and Michaël Denard were working. It was during the time of the Ballet of the 20th Century dance company with Jorge Donn that she held a large exhibition at the Théâtre des Champs Elysées in 1973.



It was when he saw her drawing and painting that my father decided to make his own inner world come true.



My father was gruff and had a tormented soul (Niedzviedz in Polish means 'bear'), but he had a 'heart of gold'. The hardness of his mother towards him, the harshness of the war and the difficulties of life in the garment workshops where he worked had ripped him apart.

He later worked in his own boutique and in the early 1980s at age 56, he began to model these clay fellows. He wanted my mother to lend a hand and to use her fairy wand to spark them to life; she added a little colour here and there and used glitter to enchant them.

Looked at by my father with such enchantment, each imaginary character is a word of love exchanged between him and my mother and each is representative of their love story. "The Golden Wedding" shows an old couple kissing.



For him, this would turn into an unfulfilled wish. At the age of 60 in 1986, my mother passed after two years of fighting illness. My father then abandoned his world of clay and colour since he no longer had his soul mate.

The characters that were not yet painted were left grey and lifeless at the back of a cupboard, just like how his heart had become. Those that had received the kiss of love from my mother, were carefully placed on shelves in a large glass cabinet. My father would often look at them with tenderness and they would always bring a knowing smile to his face.



Time has passed since then. On Christmas Day 2004, my father died. He was 80 years old and had battled with illness for 3 years, just like the goat in one of his favourite tales. She battled with a wolf through the night, before sadly being defeated at dawn. My father's little fairy was waiting for him on the other side, that's for sure.



Michèle Niedzviedz

My mother, Yvonne, was born in Paris on 10 July 1925.

Her parents were of Polish Jewish origin, like those of my father, but they had lived in France for longer: my mother was the fourth generation. She was raised by her great grandmother as her mother was divorced and could not take care of her daughter alone.



In the absence of a father, she had an uncle called TITO Henriotti, whom she greatly admired. He was a musician and the composer of the "Chinese Tango". Henriotti gave her a taste for literature and drawing, but curiously never spoke to her about music.

As a young girl she became a secretary but was already drawing a lot. She made humorous caricatures of her friends in the style of "Zazous", or Spanish dancers from distant exotic lands.

During the war, she was once stopped in the street by a young militiaman of a similar age. Thanks to her strong presence of mind, she was able to reason her release, and he left her with the words "we'll meet again! ". Although they did not cross paths again, it was a happy fate meaning she was able to meet my father.



While on vacation at Les Sables d'Olonne with a friend, they encountered my father and my father's friend. My father went on to marry my mother, and my father's friend married my mother's friend.

When my father proposed she knew she could count on him, and lean on his golden heart. They were married on 21st August 1948.

I can see now that they were a truly united couple who loved each other deeply. She brought him a certain refinement; an artistic sense that he admired. She was an anxious character, but he brought her strength and reassurance.

There was a lot of poetry and candour within him. He remained a child at heart, which sometimes made him too passionate and too direct in his reactions and in his relationships.

When I was born in 1950, my mother stopped working and became more interested in drawing and painting. She took such pride from being able to buy a pair of stockings with the money from the sale of her artwork!

Around 1955, she met a framer who later earned the title "Meilleur Ouvrier de France" in 1965. He was interested in her artistic ability, correcting her defects and errors. He organized exhibitions in the windows of his shop, and our two families became friends.

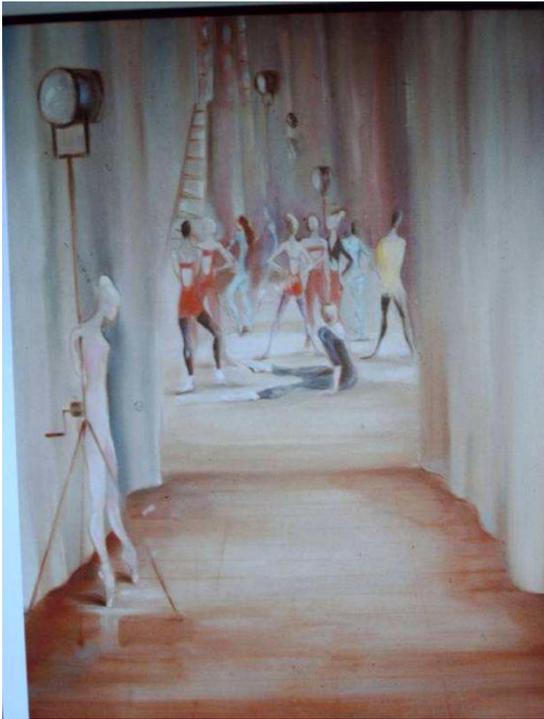
Thus, little by little, painting became her full-time job. She did a lot of things:



- Drawings for publications (there was even a German publisher who flew in on his private plane and commissioned some paintings!)
- She worked with booksellers - and loved it! Eating a sandwich in a café near the Beaux Arts museum at the quai Malaquais, and meeting all of her clients along the banks of the Seine. I often accompanied her, and I could tell she felt as free as a seagull in the sky above the sea.
- She also worked for galleries in Montmartre, at the Palais-Royal. She made lithographs, and later participated in the Salon de la Danse.

In the 1970s, she rediscovered the world of dance that she had always loved. She was able to go behind the scenes and draw at the Théâtre des Champs Elysées. She was filmed there one day for television, sketching dancers who fascinated her. It was the start of a dream come true; a dazzling fairy tale.

She would sit backstage at the Théâtre des Champs Elysées, the Opéra Comique and the Opéra Garnier. She drew the stars of the time: Michaël Denard, Noëlla Pontois, Jean Guizerix, Wilfried Piollet, Rudolf Nureyev, Cyril Atanassof etc., not to mention Mime Marceau, l'Espagne D'Antonio Gades, Georges Donn from the Ballets Maurice Béjart and Roland Petit.



She would go to see them working at the Raymond Franchetti Dance Hall, in Cité Véron. She watched dancers including Nureyev sweat at the barre, and admired the hard work that came across as aerial lightness on stage.

A note she once wrote read: 'I like working in darkness behind the scenes. I put pen to paper, trying to capture the flight, the attitude, the perfection of an arabesque. I try to capture the elusive dancers on stage'.

Sometimes dancers would even come to our home to have their paintings done.



In July 1973, she held a big exhibition at the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées entitled "The Universe of Dance" by Vony Niedzviedz. She presented about 200 drawings, sketches, watercolours and paintings... it was enchanting!

But for various reasons, she gradually moved away from this world of dance, which caused a deep pain within her.

*However, she still drew a lot on holiday; by the sea or in the country, often incorporating my father and me. With her humour she also caricatured the dancers she loved: she drew **fat** dancers in ballerina outfits with big calves sticking out from underneath sheer white tutus, flying in the air with only two small sequined wings!*

Later at the request of my father, she brought life to his little earthen characters: painting a few colours here and there.

In 1985, she fell ill. My father cared for her with the utmost devotion and the greatest pain, refusing to accept this terrible reality. On 14 March 1986, she left this beloved world. She was beautiful and sparkled, with a radiant and tender smile. In her blue eyes shone the little stars of childhood and wonder.

Most of the drawings and paintings were donated to the Library of Performing Arts.



*Musée des Arts Naïfs et Populaires de Noyers
25, rue de l'église
89310 NOYERS SUR SEREIN
Tel.: (+33) 3 86 82 89 09*

*Mairie de Noyers sur Serein
Place de l'Hôtel de Ville 89310 Noyers sur Serein*

*mairie-de-noyers@wanadoo.fr
musee-de-noyers@wanadoo.fr
<http://www.noyers-et-tourisme.com>*



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