



Chard Chénier

EMOTIONAL LANDSCAPES

An exhibition of paintings and drawings

Thursday, June 19th to Tuesday, June 24th

Opening hours: Noon to 6 pm, daily

Vernissage

Thursday, June 19th from 5:30 pm to 8:30 pm

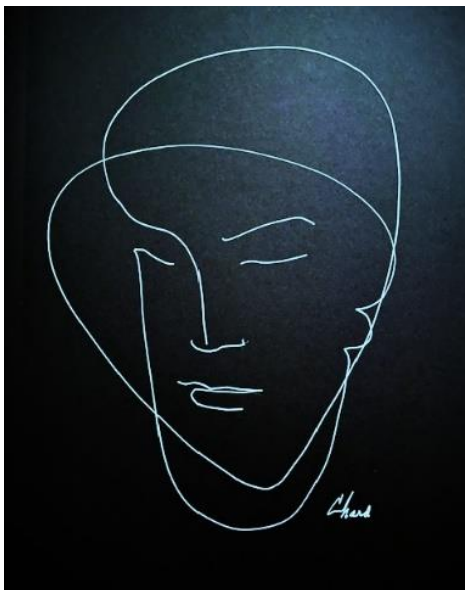
GALERIE ESPACE

4844 St Laurent Blvd, Montreal

(514) 284-6720 (just below St Joseph Blvd)



What makes this exhibition different from my 2023 Retrospective is revelations about how my art connects; seeing 50 years of my art led to new insights.



This varied collection mirrors my state of mind as I approach my 78th year. An emotion-driven collection, I include landscapes, faces, trees, and abstractions influenced by my European travel, literature and the richness of daily life.



In these new works I rely on the guidance of my dreams and daydreams – an intuitive approach towards understanding what gives my life meaning. A personal immediate approach is fulfillment in and of itself. What follows is a transcription of a recent interview where I talk in depth about the process which focuses my art towards passion and intensity at this stage of life.

Chard Chénier

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Anthony Ioannou: Well, today, I have the pleasure of sitting down with Chard Chenier. Chard is an artist based in Montreal whose artworks evoke emotion, movement, dynamism, and exploration. Different places, different feelings, and even in some cases, different dreams.

Anthony Ioannou: So, Chard, we're going to discuss your show, *Emotional Landscapes*, today. I first wanted to talk a little bit about the title, which is Evocative Poet, poetic, and deeply personal. What does it mean to you, and how did it shape how you approached this body of work?

Chard Chenier: Well, I began with some actual landscapes, mountains, valleys, rivers, and slowly delved inwards to express the emotions. Landscapes not only evoke in me, but also what is inside of me when I'm painting. So, the paintings went from pictorial, actual landscapes to emotional landscapes within me. And, you know, we live with all these emotions each day, but we don't have all the words necessary to describe them. But with painting, you can express an emotion that transcends words, so that's how the series of paintings developed into a series of emotional landscapes.

Anthony Ioannou: And building on that idea of emotion, do you find that emotion guides your hand in the studio, or is it gradually revealing itself in the work?

C.C.: well, there's a kind of inner necessity that pulls me into the studio of feeling I don't have words to describe. And as I start to paint, then I, the emotion becomes more real and the painting becomes more real. Each painting is a kind of state of being at that moment in time. In the context of what I'm living through.

A.I.: Let's talk about some of the art in the show. I think we saw it at the beginning, but is there a specific piece in this show that captures the heart of emotional landscapes? Tell us a bit about execution, conceptualization, and bring us into your world.



Chard Chenier: Well, the Painting *Koan*, which we started this interview with, resulted from six studies. I did. Just trusting and experimenting with colour fields and lines, enjoying myself, and having fun. As I developed each piece, I did six of them. And by the time the six were done there was a theme that was emerging of a flight towards some higher destination, which eventually became *Koan*, which shows me as an abstract bird flying down, looking downwards, paying homage to my soul, my psyche underneath that was guiding me to this point. I feel that there's a part of me deep inside that I'm not always aware of, but that influences what I create. And so *Koan* is that. It shows a figure deep underground, pointing upwards, and this abstract bird bowing down respectfully. So that's, I feel that there's a guide within me that guides the art.

A.I.: That's fascinating. Koan is a beautiful piece, and I especially love the colour palette you used in Koan and the conceptualization of that series of paintings. Building on that idea and the idea of symbols in your work, is there a recurring form or gesture you see in your artwork as a personal vocabulary? Are there things that you go back to? Did you try to experiment more with different symbols within this show? Emotional landscapes?

C.C.: Well, interestingly, you know, I grew up on the prairies, and the wind was always an invisible but beautiful presence that shaped everything around me and all my life. I've seen the wind shaping leaves, waves. And, the movement and the, the lines and the colors that were generated by the wind be were really fascinating to me. And you'll see when you go through the show, there's always movement everywhere. And I'm very aware of the idea that the wind is like, the Mystery of, of the Life Force that goes through everything and it's there, but we don't see it. And so that's a really recurring series of lines, shapes, and forms that you'll see throughout the whole exhibition.

A.I.: And what's changed? How have you been preparing for this particular show? I know we mentioned that you are in a bit of a transition period in your career and painting. So, tell us a bit about what's changed in the preparations for this show.

C.C.: Well, the first thing is that I had a 50-year retrospective two years ago, which gave me a pause to contemplate what I had done over 50 years. The result was a deeper trust in my intuition, a more panoramic visual experience, and the trust that the emotions I'm pouring into it would connect with others. That was a big leap in terms of personal faith in what I'm doing. It helped me feel freer, more relaxed, and, in a way, more detached. This time around, I was more of a spectator watching everything unfold.

A.I.: As you mentioned, are you finding that with this particular show? At that point of change, how are you staying open to those changes without losing the essence of your artistic voice as you create your work?

C.C.: Well, I think it's because my my approach is fundamentally atavistic. It's not ideological. I'm not following any school of thought. I'm following my basic human instincts to try to create something, beautiful, that has real balance to it. And I'm trying to get through what's real about being alive and how beautiful the Mystery is. I try to stay true and allow the mystery to remain.

A.I.: Now we're going to pivot ever so slightly, and we're going to discuss something that we both love: travel and travelling. And you have travelled quite a bit in the past couple of years. What shifts in your creative thinking when you're immersed in that new place versus when you're thinking about it later in your studio, back at home?

C.C.: Well, there are so many different experiences in Italy, Spain, and Israel. But the prominent one that sticks with me is having seen some Neanderthal sculpture, perhaps only three inches tall but quite ancient. It was quite similar to Brancusi's work and beautiful. You could imagine someone thousands and thousands of years ago creating this in isolation. There was an artist who had that pure aesthetic. Even then. It gave me an idea of the universality of how profound and deep the human connection is beyond time. So, there's a kind of timelessness that comes out of travel, and you see, oh, all these empires come and go. But even thousands of years ago, people were creating great things.

C.C.: When I was in Italy, I saw the Etruscan Museum, and I saw the joy and the stunning beauty of their bronze sculptures. I realized, you know, we think we're so innovative and we're so amazing in this century, but this has been going on for countless years of creativity and personal commitment in art.

I felt a bond. When I came back to Montreal, I realized, hey, I'm not only connected to these other countries; I'm connected to other artists who have been contributing to human civilization for centuries. That's what's changed a lot, compared to not having travelled at all.

A.I.: And building upon that, have there also been any authors, any essays, or poets that have left lasting impressions on your practice? Are there certain literary people or figures that you return to? Anybody new that you've discovered?

CC.: Well, there are so many, but, I find, Thomas Tranströmer, the Nobel Peace Prize winner in Literature. I love how he approaches ordinary moments from a unique, personal, and poetic angle. And so, when I create, I try to be. I reach out for something more transcendental, beyond my everyday perceptions in the bubble I live in in North America. I'm looking for something that goes deeper than that to previous centuries. So that's an influence. Van Gogh's letters made a big impression on me because of his sensitivity and commitment to his art. I try to persevere with him as an example.

A.I.: I like that you love Van Gogh's letters as well. Um, so I can relate to that. Um, before we wrap things up, we'll return to another series, A beloved series.

A.I.: One of my personal favourites. *The Callidroptics*. Tell us how that came about? What were some of the questions or some of the instincts that drove those initial *Callidroptics* and how do you see the *Callidroptics* growing?

C.C.: Well, I started in the seventies in Vancouver trying to develop a universal language, pictorially. So, I was looking at calligraphy and figured I would, drop ink as if it's a calligraphy, but try to create figures and see what would happen. Because what I liked about that approach was that I had to let go of trying to be so much in control of everything. And have a, a kind of a pivot point where, yes, it was chaotic, but it was also, a chaotic that had some emotional and higher level by dropping ink.

C.C.: I was communicating beyond myself with that, without trying to control it. So it is like calligraphy, but they're bodies. And they're not super controlled. Then after that, I manipulate them slightly to put some human emotion in it. So, I like the idea that it was accidental, but with some unconscious intent I would understand later.

A.I.: You talk about manipulating these bodies. How do you manipulate them? Is it with a kind of, almost a paintbrush? Do you move the paper ever so slightly? What goes into those manipulations is that everything feels so calculated when you look at them, but to hear that they're more of a dropping and a letting go. That's so, it's fascinating.

C.C.: Yeah. Well, I try to find different shapes to go with and tweak the lines a little bit. They take a good 24 to 36 hours to dry. Because they're very thick when they drop down, the ink. And I use very high-quality paper to produce them. So, I have to leave it alone, which is another element.

C.C.: As it dries, I study it and see, well, maybe I can take a brush and emphasize a line to add some nuance to the emotion of the gesture that the figure is making. After that's dried, I add touches of color to accentuate motion and emotional meaning. So I'm always working with, without being afraid.

C.C: In other words, it's fearless, doing it, and then you have to be bold in manipulating it. And that's what makes it interesting. it's completely carefree and at the same time it's calculated and, there's a lot of aesthetic final details that bring it to life.

A.I: Yeah, that's wonderful. I mean, we're, we're sitting in this, we're sitting in a room surrounded by your artwork, and I think that's a great kind of way to bring everything back to the present. The work that's going into emotional landscapes is very dynamic, and that dynamism, I think, is a representation of where you are in this magical career that you have had that has spanned decades. I think it's safe to say 60 years. Yeah. I think it's safe to say. Yeah. And it's so interesting to hear you talk about your practice and the different aspects of that practice.

A.I: I'm just wondering, where do we go from here?

C.C: Well, I'm working on some pieces that may add into the show at the end. I have a strong believer that you have to take risks in what you're doing. And so, I'm taking further and deeper risks - trying to go further from what I have based on thus far, beyond what I've already learned.

It's always a learning process. So, where it's going now is more of a desire to put more meaning, with a great... I can't even put it into words... It's like... more intensity, more passion. More *feeling*. I think that's what matters when you go to see an exhibition, you don't want to see an ideology or a theory of art or a school of art. You want to *feel* something. And I think that's what I'm always working towards, is to create something that people go and say, it touched them – because your heart is thinking, your mind is feeling., This is what I hope the work does. And I think that this body of work definitely captures that.

A.I: Thank you so, so much for sitting down with me today.

C.C: Thank you, Anthony,

A.I.: Thank you for talking about your artistic practice and what we have coming up. Emotional landscapes will be on view at Gallery L'Espace from June 19th to June 24th, 2025. We hope to see you all there. Come down, meet Chard, and pick Chard's brain. I know I love picking Chard's brain. Thank you again.



I serve the larger story I am meant to embody.