



## Artists of Paris populate book

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By: Ann Grauvogl

Author Melinda Camber Porter can be enthused whether she's talking about French artists or South Dakota wheat combines.

While the farm will never be her milieu, she has ridden the combine in South Dakota fields and married Joe Flicek, a Sioux Falls native.

With those fragile ties, Porter provides a link between South Dakota and the artists and intellectuals who frequent Parisian cafes.

Her book, *Through Parisian Eyes*, is a collection of Porter's interviews with French artists, dramatists, film makers, actors, writers and philosophers. While in Sioux Falls visiting relatives recently, she took time to explain the book and her work for *The Times of London*.

"I like writing about the arts because I think you can get a very clear picture of what's going on in a country through the artists more than the politicians," she says. "The politicians are trying to persuade you. The artists tell you what they honestly perceive. When they do an interview with you, they're not trying to have you on."

A native of London, Porter began writing about the arts while a student at Oxford University. She contacted *The Times* during her university years to submit an interview she'd done with Eugene Ionesco. The editor published the story and asked her to join the staff when she finished school.

She spent nine years in Paris as an arts and leisure writer for the London newspaper. She moved to New York in 1983 to continue her job with the paper and, in July 1985, married Flicek, who she met at the Amnesty International office. He is the son of Virginia and Bob Flicek, of Sioux Falls.

*Through Parisian Eyes* grew from Porter's stint in Paris. She says it allows readers to visit the city without buying an airplane ticket.

"The book tells you what people in Paris are thinking and their concerns. It plunges you into Paris and all the people who create the Parisian environment. It gives you a feeling of being there."

France, she says, is an amazing country because artists are taken more seriously than anywhere else. In France, writers are taken as seriously as Bill Cosby is in America, she says.



“I think the (French) people are really excited by the arts.”

In France, art isn't something for a museum, or something to be in awe of, she says. It's to be lived" and enjoyed.

The difference has been apparent since she moved to New York, Porter says. In New York, art has snob appeal and many New Yorkers patronize the arts, not because they like music, dance or theater, but for mention in society columns.

“It's not like that over there,” she says. “Art is just part of the way they live.”

In her book, Porter has interviewed many of the cultural leaders of France. Beyond their words, she offers background information about their works and personal observations about their style and the interview situation.

Porter's tape recorder jammed the first time she talked to film maker Francois Truffaut. He pointed her to a shop where the machine could be repaired and immediately offered to reschedule the interview for the following day.

Porter spoke to Cost-Garvas about the role of film in society, and discussed women with film maker Roger Vadim, actress Jane Fonda's former husband.

Philosopher Jean-Paul Sarte, film maker Eugene Ionesco and writer Marguerite Duras are represented among the 32 artists and intellectuals Porter included.

The strength of the book lies in the insights Porter's subjects offer about themselves, art and society.

Vadim tells her: “I enjoy beauty and so do other people. I don't see why one should feel bound to film ugly people. But I have often been accused of portraying women as sex objects and this is unfair. In my films and private life, I have, always wanted women to be free, and not only sexually.”

From writer Françoise Sagan: · “When people say that they need to be loved, they often mean that they need to be seen. What people often miss most, when a love, affair breaks up, is the fact that there is no one to watch them and take an interest in them as they brush their teeth, and walk in the door, and make their phone - calls ... that when they die there'll be no echo left of their existence.”

From Ionesco: “Death is our main problem and all others are less important. It is the wall and the limit. It is the only inescapable alienation.”

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