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PETER MARTIN, GAZETTE

Marina Gavanski-Zissis, who immigrated to Canada at age 8, poses at Second Cup café where her paintings are on display. She sees St. Laurent Blvd. as "the meeting of East and West, young and old, poor and rich. This is exactly what Montreal is."

The Main attraction

Artist from Sarajevo finds hope, inspiration on St. Laurent Blvd.

IRWIN BLOCK
The Gazette

The worst seems to be over in former Yugoslavia.

The cafés on lower St. Laurent Blvd. are full of beautiful people, squeezing lime into their Bloody Caesars.

And Marina Gavanski-Zissis is painting again.

Her oils on canvas, essays on the nude human figure, are beacons of love and hope for all humankind.

They have become the focal point of many a conversation at what is arguably the hippest Second Cup in Montreal. And last night she added some new paintings at her vernissage.

At the corner of St. Laurent and Guilbault St., the Artist on the Main explained the circumstances that led her to quit painting for three years.

From 1992 to 1995, when former Yugoslavia fell apart, Gavanski-Zissis was unable to paint. She was shattered by the horrors of the ethnic wars and subsequent bombing of Ser-

bia. "The bombing was the straw that broke the camel's back.

"We all felt that we were personally being bombed, that we were the worst people in the world, that everyone hated us.

"We live here in Canada but part of us is back in the country where we come from," said Gavanski-Zissis, a Serb who lived in Sarajevo before immigrating to Canada at the age of 8. In the 1980s she returned as an adult to complete a five-year, fine-arts degree at the University of Belgrade.

BACK TO ART

Gavanski-Zissis, 44, said she went back to her art after realizing there was little she could do to help her compatriots in Europe.

She then rented a second-floor loft and got back to her first calling.

Being on the Main has been a big help. "This is the meeting of the East and the West, of young and old, poor and rich. This is exactly what Montreal is and what Sarajevo was before the war. It's the heart of the city.

"The vibrations rise up and filter into my

studio. Even though I paint in silence, I can feel them coming."

Inside the café, A Hard Day's Night by the Beatles was on the speakers as Gavanski-Zissis explained her mood in creating portraits of men and women in states of love and repose.

"They are paintings of hope. I was looking for something beautiful and hopeful and the most beautiful thing I could think of was love.

"There are many kinds of love and in these paintings I focused on real relationships, two people who really love each other, deeply."

A three-part series called Paradise Lost, started before the bombing, is a foreboding of horrors to be. Then come the paintings that speak of rebirth.

A vision of hope is evoked by a work called Ballet Cosmique.

"In spite of the fact we may be pulled into a black hole, we have the strength to dance our own dance," she said.

✦ Gavanski-Zissis's *Through Emotion* exhibition is on at Second Cup, 3695 St. Laurent Blvd.