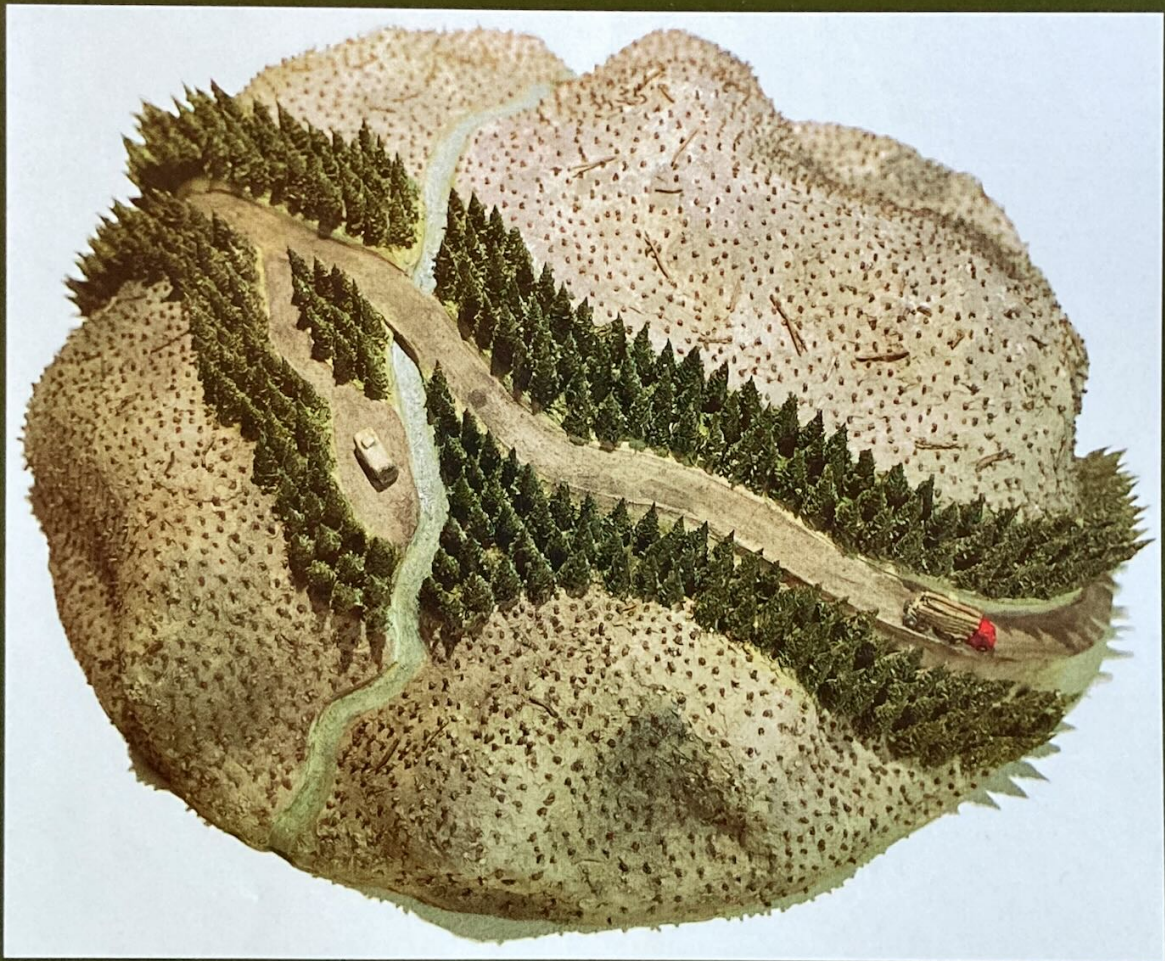


THE CRAFT FACTOR

THE MAGAZINE OF THE SASKATCHEWAN CRAFT COUNCIL • WINTER 1992/ SPRING 1993 • VOL. 17.3 \$3.00





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Craft Exhibitions: *Past, Present, Future*

PAULA GUSTAFSON

For more than two decades the notion of marrying crafts with the fine arts world has been our dream. Now that we've got what we wanted—crafts exhibited in the same manner as paintings and sculpture in art galleries and museums—is it really what we want? I have a sinking feeling that we've behaved like the younger sister who jumped excitedly to catch the bridal bouquet, shouting "Me too! Me too!" She got what she wanted, but in her eagerness to become a bride she didn't stop to think about who she might have to wake up beside each morning.

I've been as shameless as every other crafts-person in wanting to be accepted

into the "real" art world. After all, for many years it was the only game in town. Crafts in the middle years of this century had no status whatsoever. The fine arts were serious culture. By contrast, making things with wool or wood was right up there with maypole dancing and nostalgia for the Old Country. Native crafts were ethnology.

I hope it's not the cussedness of advancing age, but lately I've begun to question not just the artworld bedfellows we've wooed and won, but the bed itself.

First, let me admit my complicity, indeed my encouragement for all the times we denied craft's humble lineage in our

efforts to make our work more presentable. Hoping to catch the curator's and critic's eye, we gentrified our materials, apologized for our fascination with process, and tarted ourselves up to look like sculpture or something called "objects." We even learned artspeak.

Initially, because our wares were not sexy or sassy (remember the era of the oatmeal-glazed mug and earth-toned handspun weaving), we invoked a cult of personalities as both mentors and advocates for the world of craft. We worshipped at the feet of those who had created names for themselves, and we travelled far and wide across the country



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P. GUSTAFSON: "CRAFT EXHIBITIONS: PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE"



ABOVE AND OPPOSITE Two views of the "Kaffe Fassett World Tour Exhibition" at The Canadian Craft Museum in Vancouver, BC. Photos: Paula Gustafson.

to attend their seminars and "touch the hem."

The rise of consumerism in the 1980s, and the concurrent public dismay with much that was going on in the fine art world, fortuitously coincided with the 30-year-old maturity of contemporary crafts making. Suddenly we were sexy and sassy. Better than that, we were highly marketable. After yearning for legitimacy for what seemed like a lifetime, of course we

jumped at the first offers we got. The curators and art dealers put our work up on pedestals, covered them with Plexiglas boxes, and magically we were the makers of art.

Maybe you noticed it too. The day in 1983, or was it earlier, when everyone who worked with clay stopped referring to themselves as potters. Overnight they all became ceramic artists.

The phenomenon swept the nation. Everywhere craftsmen and women discarded honourable occupational titles as if they were dirty laundry and tacked on the artist suffix.

Now we have artists and hyphenated

artists competing for the same hallowed walls and display modules of our museums and galleries, and producing the same sort of written manifestos, explanatory statements, and often disingenuous self-promotional claims.

Where I have the most difficulty with all of this is the overweening intellectualization of crafts. Don't get me wrong; I happily acknowledge the need for well-written descriptions of or information about crafts, and for well considered criticism and analysis—a specialized language is a necessity before we can discuss the subtleties of a technical process or the philosophical grounding for a piece of work—and I take my hat off to those who effectively verbalize their experience of looking at or handling crafts. But here's the rub: most contemporary crafts cannot be discussed in terms of today's post-modern art theory. To try to fit our work into that mould is about as futile as a size 16 figure squeezing into a size 10 dress. Sooner or later, the seams are going to split.

There's a good reason why art theory won't fit. Crafts are not just visual art. Like some macro-organism, crafts spread across the whole range of human experience.

This all-encompassing nature of crafts was partially defined by critic/curator Doris Shadbolt in her introduction to The Canadian Craft Museum's exhibition catalogue accompanying the touring craft show "A Treasury of Canadian Craft":

Much of the art in our technological age has been drawn to mediums that exploit its inventions—photography, video, film, television, the computer—and the kind of transient images they produce and the frenetic and troubled world they reflect. Message-driven and often incorporating written text, this art is primarily directed to the mind. Craft in contrast finds its bed rock in materiality and sensory objectness (clay, wood, fibre, glass, metal, or whatever), in its preoccupation with making and forming processes, and in its frank pleasure in the aesthetic. These are the very qualities that recent art and theory have tended to deny. We participate in craft di-

(continued on page 14)

The Limits of Prairie Populism

LORNE BEUG

Sheila Archer
"Oversite"

Saskatchewan Craft Gallery
September 18 to October 13, 1992

Sheila Archer's exhibition, "Oversite," consists of fifteen low-relief wall disks showing aerial views of Saskatchewan landscapes and four larger-scale, sculptural pieces on pedestals. These keenly-observed, finely crafted, sometimes exhaustingly detailed works are magic spells or benedictions for the protection and preservation of specific, loved sites. As evocations of the power of particular spots they take a natural place in the lineage of Prairie Populism.

The prairie landscape is one of the most interesting observed from the air, the interaction of nature and geometry being played out in endless variations; but the subtlety of the topography, while beautiful, majestic even, is difficult to translate directly into satisfying sculpture.

This problem is compounded by the pressures on sculptors to flatten their work. A whole battery of physical and economic factors converge to squeeze sculpture down into the picture plane. It seems we live in an expanding but rapidly thinning universe where sculpture goes "against the grain." Dealing with volumetric constraints presents formidable challenges to the sculptor; even an artist as talented as Joe Fafard has not met them completely successfully.

The contrast between Archer's earlier horizontal pieces and her newer wall reliefs illustrates many of these problems. The exaggerated curvature and larger-scale topography of the former

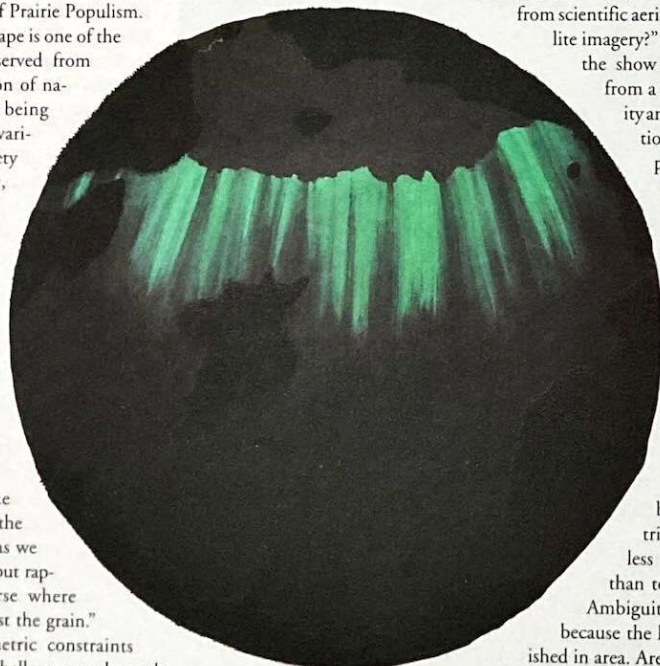
give them sculptural qualities that are suppressed in the wall pieces. In some of these we are left wondering, "Why bother with the third dimension at all, why not just paint the landscape?"

In fact, all the landscapes in the show are painted rather than glazed. It is important to the artist that the works are made of clay, the essence of earth, but this material is obscured by the dry gouache colouring. While this matte surface may be more true to the actual appearance of the landscape, the horizontal works, such as *Eye of the Muskeg*, are visually richer because they contrast these flat colours with glossy areas representing water.

The other disturbing question that arises with Archer's series of wall reliefs is, "What distinguishes these pieces from scientific aerial photography or satellite imagery?" The strongest works in the show are those that depart from a strict recording of reality and express the deep emotions the artist feels for our particular area on the planet through liberties with colour and form.

Baker Lake Midnight does this with compositional tools, moving the window of our sight to select a shoreline that reinforces the mystery of the piece with its bat-wing shapes. The colour, an all-absorbing black broken only by an electric flash of aurora, is also less tied to the landscape than to a mood or emotion. Ambiguity is further heightened because the land mass is so diminished in area. Are we looking down at a reflection of the sky in the lake or up at the sky itself through a fringe of trees on the periphery of our vision?

Natural Beauty is another piece which departs from the strict reality of a scene by editing out the urban context of Moose Jaw's Crescent Park. By setting the park like a jewel in the original



L. BEUG: "THE LIMITS OF PRAIRIE POPULISM"

OPPOSITE *Baker Lake Midnight* (1989), ceramic, gouache, 55 centimetres in diameter, 10 centimetres in depth.

BELOW *Natural Beauty* (1989), ceramic, gouache, 55 centimetres in diameter, 10 centimetres in depth.



grassland of the area the contrast between nature and culture suggested in the title is effectively underscored. The beauty in this case is a most unnatural construction: a geometric composition based on 18th Century European landscape design, with a dredged and cemented river and imported vegetation such as Kentucky Blue Grass.

There Goes the Last Logging Truck (see front cover) is a highly successful piece with its distortion of a logged-out landscape into a convulsed topography, the remaining stumps giving the terrain the appearance of a plucked chicken. This accentuates the message of the work, our ecological oversight, and makes for a satisfying sculptural piece, alive within its volumetric envelope. Over this wasteland is cast the faint but enormous shadow of a raven, the Trickster in Native American mythology and a central character in the oeuvre of Carlos Castaneda, suggesting that the artist may be taking a more metaphysical view of the landscape than is first apparent.

In her artist's statement, Archer comments that the aerial perspective forces us to see the environmental damage that may be hidden from the earth-bound view. However, it is equally true that this distancing can make all the marks of man appear abstract and beautiful. Nonetheless, her dialectical pairing of the

concepts "oversee"/"oversight" in images of real, loved sites is subtly provocative and richly generative of meaning.

Some of the complexities involved in an ecological critique are seen in *Wound—Flin Flon/Creighton*, which depicts the Hudson Bay Mining and Smelting plant and surrounding area. Although this is one of the more incriminating statements in the show, ironically it is also one of the most sculpturally interesting of the wall pieces, with its immense plume of effluents adding a dramatic third-dimension to an otherwise unremittingly low-relief surface.

The work in "Oversite" falls into the tradition of Prairie Populism, but Archer's obsession with detail, while initially allying a wider audience, may ultimately work against the effective delivery of her deeper message about the impact of technology upon place. In this age of urban nihilism and cynicism, it is refreshing to see engaged work grounded in the local and particular such as this. Sheila Archer is obviously an artist with something to say, and considerable skills as a sculptor, evidenced by her earlier works in the show. It will be interesting to watch the evolution of her environmental critique and to see if she can move beyond a sometimes pedantic realism to stretch the wings of her imagination. □

Myth and Machination

BY MIRANDA JONES

Lee Brady

"Myth and Machination"

Saskatchewan Craft Gallery

November 27, 1992, to January 5, 1993

Whenever the term *provincialism* raises its ugly head in quiet Saskatoon, we would do well to think of the work of Lee Brady, work which exceeds much of what is being produced in larger centres both in quality and originality. Brady's latest exhibition "Myth and Machination" is a reminder that Saskatchewan has been home to some of Canada's and the world's finest artists.

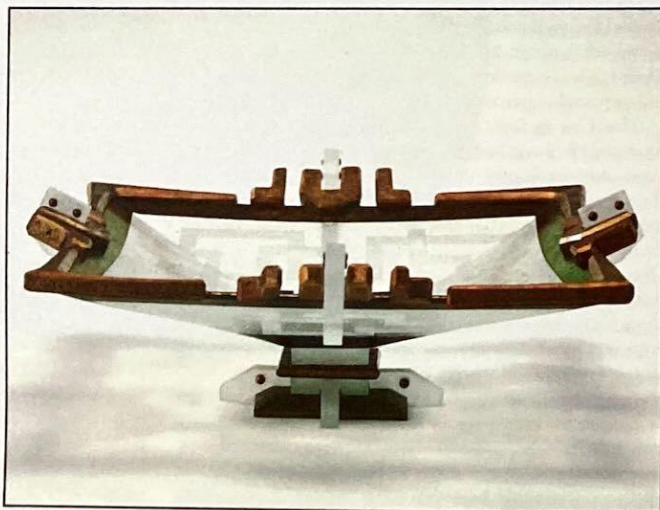
Instead of the borrowed iconography of the Plains Indians, which inspired much of the work in Brady's earlier show, "Sundance Teaching," Brady here uses his own Celtic roots as a starting point for developing new sculptural and graphic forms in glass, clay, metal, and line, and the results are astonishing. While the term *appropriation* still enjoys a certain popularity among art critics, there is nothing, I believe, "illegitimate" about seeking inspiration in the beliefs and rituals of a people whose lives depend on the land with which Brady so closely identifies; however, Brady admits that criticisms arising out of the earlier show prompted him to look more closely into his own family heritage. (Both of Brady's parents were born and raised in Ireland, though Brady himself has never been there.) He enjoyed the sense of whimsy and the decorative complexity of illuminated Celtic manuscripts, and he became interested in Celtic legends as a source of historical and modern metaphor. In adapting these sources to his work in glass, Brady not only achieves a beautiful balance of form and concept, he excites the viewer into wanting to know more about the mythology which inspires each piece.

Sculptural concerns were equally influential in the evolution of forms. Brady has been working in slumped glass for a number of years. These ceremonial vessels are in part a result of wanting to retain the curve of the glass as it softens and slumps in the kiln before flattening against the kiln floor. This necessitated not only split-second timing but the addition of a sup-

port structure—hence, legs! This seemed to coincide with Brady's growing interest in combining other materials, as well as line drawing, with the glass. A Saskatchewan Arts Board grant gave him the time and equipment to explore these interests.

It was on the basis of *Glass Houses* and *Construct—the Conscious Experience* that Brady applied for this grant, and these somewhat restrained and formal pieces seem to reveal the beginnings of the technical and imaginative development of the Celtic series. *Glass Houses*, described by Brady as "a self-portrait of the artist," is a jazzy, fun piece built of harmonious dark shades of fused, slumped, and assembled glass, and carved aluminum. A linear drawing of a human figure contorts to fit the square base of the vessel. One is tempted to interpret this figure as the embodiment of Brady's own creative energy just waiting to free itself of technical confines. This piece displays some of the wonderful intricacies of balancing vessels within vessels prevalent throughout the show.

Treasure of Quelgny uses a similar format. The brown bull of Quelgny, depicted in tortuous curvilinear form, is surrounded by a maze of geometric interlocking trails sandblasted into a sea of clear glass with bubbled inclusions. This is bordered by a complex system of copper-coloured lips and clasps, the geometry of which is repeated in the sturdy base. The overall form is that of an inverted pyramid, its beautifully integrated proportions speaking



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M. JONES: "MYTH AND MACHINATION"



ABOVE *Emain Macha, or "The Brooch of Macha"* (1992), glass, clay, copper, 41.5 centimetres in diameter.

OPPOSITE *Treasure of Quelgny* (1992), glass, clay, metal, 43 centimetres square, 15 centimetres in height.

of strength and power. The much-covered bull was won in battle from Northern Ireland by Queen Maeve of Ulster and the unrest between North and South continues still.

Emain Macha, or "The Brooch of Macha" is also based on a theme of disunity. The calculated symmetry of the *Quelgny* piece is here replaced by a decadent, curvaceous opulence. Macha, Brady tells us, was part goddess and daughter of Ulster prince Red Hugh. Upon the death of her father, Macha is said to have murdered one brother and married the second for the throne. She then enslaved her nephews and employed them to construct the circular ramparts and trenches of the city of Emain Macha, which she mapped out with the spear of her brooch. This piece looks like a precious copper brooch encircled with iridescent jewels. These "jewels" and the copper clay are as deceptive as the evil Macha herself. The circular shape, symbolic of the city of Emain Macha, is riddled with painted cracks and chinks and is split in two, reminding us of the destructive forces which shaped the city. The halves appear tenuously held together with incised clay handles which connect to a base of arched supporting legs. This piece is unsurpassed in its satisfying integration of theme and execution (no pun intended).

Before the Celts were finally forced to backtrack, their hegemony extended throughout Europe. They borrowed heavily from other cultures, and the resulting interchange of mythologies led Brady to explore the myths of other European countries. In *Fate of Arion—Family Carousel*, Brady adapts ancient Greek mythology to modern times in a beautiful and disturbing linear rendition of the nuclear family. According to Greek mythology, the goddess Demeter turned herself into a mare in order to escape her husband, the god Poseidon. Poseidon then turned himself into a stallion and thereby deceived Demeter into mating with

him. The nymph Despoena and the stallion Arion were born of this deception, and Arion was destined to live in the form of a horse until his death. Brady's "family" is depicted in a circular layout connected by the serpentine form of the father's whip. The father is driven by money which in turn drives his family. The mother wears two masks: one faces her husband and the other faces her children to whom she extends an offering of food. The children are sullen incarnations of the stereotypical boy and girl, each suffering the stress of both their parent's and society's expectations of what is "normal." While Brady's personal symbolism regarding the current state of the nuclear family may not be immediately discernible, the vessel's fascinating detail and structural intricacies draw the viewer into narrative associations of his or her own. The circular layout

is broken by three metal horse-shaped silhouettes which rear their heads above Saturn-like rings of silver and rose glass. Layers of transparent fragility embody the many levels of meaning which can be read into this consummate work of art.

Perhaps the most compelling of the pieces in terms of mythology is the moon trio: *Harpers of the Moon*, *Matronae*, and *Shield of Artemis*. These triangular pieces hover in anthropomorphic splendour above dark glass pedestals towards the back of the gallery, yet one is drawn to them like a bee to honey. Their powerful symbolism is multi-layered also. The three personae of the Moon Goddess—Virgin, Mother, and Crone—appear in the central motif of *Harpers of the Moon*, and in *Matronae* three iridescent glass moons, glowing with a crystalline intensity, house the gargoyle-like heads of the three Celtic moon goddesses, Morggan, Macha, and Bahd. Each goddess presided over rituals which took part under the moon and are thus linked with animals of the night, the cat, the wolf, and the snake, which appear as three monstrous heads attached to serpentine bodies in a central disc. According to Brady, the *Shield of Artemis* refers to the Greek goddess Artemis, sister to Apollo the Sun-god, virgin huntress and goddess of plagues, healing, little children, and suckling animals. This dark piece reminds us of mythical female powers of night, the moon, the abyss, uterine darkness, secrecy, water, and earth.

The triadic moon goddess appears in numerous pre-Christian religions. In Egypt the triangle stood for the female principle, motherhood, and the moon. In Arabia it signified the three lunar goddesses Al-Uzza, Manat, and Al-Lat, the earlier feminine form of Allah. The Greeks and Romans had many triadic versions of female divinity and many symbols to represent them. Furthermore, the arrangement of three triangles suggests a total of nine, a number associated with Fate; hence, in some traditions there came to be nine goddesses of fate, like the nine Morgans of the Fortunate Isles in Celtic myth. Babylonian myths spoke of the "mother of destinies" who determined the fates of men; and folk worship of the female trinity of fate (continued on page 11)

A Joy Forever: Latvian Weaving

BY MIRIAM CAPLAN

Ethnic diversity has become a significant factor in world understanding as political recognition is given to countries struggling for independence. Nowhere is it more apparent how artistic, cultural, and political thought shapes people's lives than in the different nations of the former Soviet Union. With the official policy of *glasnost*, and the abandonment of the myth of oneness, these ethnic nationalities have publicly asserted their uniqueness. For those outside the former Soviet Union, there is a rediscovery of cultures previously known only through the eyes of expatriates or dated textbooks. To Canada's credit, even before Trudeau formalized the concept of multiculturalism in Canadian politics in the '70s, Canadians have been aware of and curious about other cultures. Jane Evans' book, *A Joy Forever Latvian Weaving: Traditional and Modern Uses*, is a timely addition to our understanding of the ethnic culture of Latvia as reflected in its design and use of textiles.

Jane's study began in the mid-1970s, long before the recent political changes in Eastern Europe. It could be said that it was pure serendipity that led to the book. Early on in her weaving career, Jane became intrigued by complicated weaving pattern structures, commonly referred to amongst weavers as "complex weaves." In 1977, Jane wrote to the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) requesting permission to examine their textile collection. At that time, she was doing research on weft-faced weaves for the Guild of Canadian Weavers Masterweaver Certificate. The staff in the textile division of the ROM welcomed her with enthusiasm, pulling out pertinent examples in the store rooms, and then leaving her on her own to explore as she wished. Dorothy Burnham, former curator of textiles, who had curated several outstanding Canadian shows as well as published several highly-respected books on weaving and clothing, gave invaluable advice on the procedure for doing museum analysis of textiles. Perhaps having some premonition about the future, she also advised Jane that should she ever contemplate writing a book, she should just do it rather than think about it. At that time, the advice seemed rather far-fetched.

It was during this random exploration of the textiles in the ROM storerooms that Jane came across her first Latvian blanket.



Jane A. Evans

It was an intriguing weave structure. At first, this discovery was put on the back burner as Jane concentrated on weft-faced weaves in general. But this particular blanket was not so easily forgotten. Her curiosity piqued, Jane tried to learn more. This, however, proved to be a real challenge. The only written information available was in Latvian. Although weaving patterns are in diagrams which can be universally understood, technical information requires a more extensive knowledge of a language. While Jane was able to decipher a bit by reading the Latvian pattern directions with a Latvian-English dictionary in hand, this was obviously not very satisfactory. Somewhat discouraged, but undaunted by this challenge, Jane searched out Latvian weavers living in Canada and the United States. Once

found, these weavers overwhelmed Jane with their generosity. They enthusiastically shared whatever materials and knowledge they had, and strongly encouraged her to write a book about their textile history and their culture. Hours of translation were offered. Questions were answered. Weavings were loaned without question. While many of these people spoke and wrote English well, they hesitated to write an English text on Latvian weaving. They wanted a native English speaker to write such a book. After eleven years, the dream of a book on Latvian weaving became reality with the publication of *A Joy Forever*.

Published in 1991 by Dos Tejedoras Publishers of St. Paul, Minnesota, *A Joy Forever* received two Honorable Mentions from the Mid-west Publishers Association in 1992. The one was for Best How-to Book and the other, for Best Overall Design. The book has also been enthusiastically reviewed in Latvian-language newspapers in North America, Germany, and Australia. In addition, it received a rave review in *Vau*, a respected Scandinavian weaving journal.

Jane's clear, logical, and systematic approach to weaving is reflected in this book. The book is divided into three sections. The first consists of an historical overview of textiles in Latvia up to World War II. Then, there is a comprehensive description of handwoven structures, followed by a final section on possible variations on these structures. Using numerous diagrams, illustrations, and photos, Jane provides a clear understanding of

weave structures from the simple to the highly complex in the context of their social history.

Interspersed with the detailed descriptions of weave structures are highlighted boxes with either anecdotes or step-by-step instructions for a particular project. Technical information is given on yarn, density in reed, types of heddles, and the uses for the particular fabric. Then there are instructional sections separated off from the regular text in boxes, some of which are whole pages, that give directions for reproducing specific patterns. This mixture within chapters of anecdotes, specific historical analysis of fabrics and instructional sections for reproducing the designs makes this book not only fun to read but easy to use.

Jane has written a remarkable book. She provides a seemingly infinite source of information about Latvian weaving as it is known in North America. Jane is meticulously scholarly in her analysis, paying close attention to all details from the definition of terms to the final realization of a pattern weave. Whether giving directions for duplicating the patterns, discussing the intricate details of Latvian weaving, or giving some cultural insight, Jane always conveys an infectious enthusiasm for her subject. The clarity of thought, thoroughness of coverage, and lucid style make *A Joy Forever Latvian Weaving: Traditional and Modified Uses* a significant addition to an understanding of Latvia through its textiles.

A Joy Forever Latvian Weaving: Traditional and Modified Uses by Jane A. Evans. Saint Paul, MN: Dos Tejedoras, 1991. ISBN: 0-932394-16-7 50 colour photos, 104 black-and-white photos, 41 illustrations, 300 weaving drafts. □

(continued from page 9) persisted to Renaissance times and beyond. Even the Celts' sacred shamrock once represented the three divine mothers.

It is not simply the imagery which compels us to look more closely at these pieces. Their stylish lines and deep colouring speak of darkness and mystery, and the finely-crafted detailing in the glass, the clay, and the metal armatures is as intricate and complex as the myths represented. Disturbingly anthropomorphic, these vessels appear from a distance as insect-like flying machines, poised and ready to take flight. In short, they are pure magic.

In *Queen of Spring* (see back cover) and *Queen of Winter*, the ritual vase does literally take flight, taking all tradition out the window with it. In both these pieces, Brady pushes beyond the point of artistic resolution into a new realm, taking form and function (the ceremonial vessel) into unknown territory. Like winged jellyfish, these erotic twin goddesses of light hover between earth and sky, resolution and indecision. Although temporarily attached to the wall, their actual weight seems to defy gravity, just as their clay wings almost defy their substance to become gossamer wings of silver and gold. (This deception may have been more successful had Brady used actual metallic foil instead of paint.) Their imagery of a mounted female warrior derives more from Tibetan mythology than Celtic, yet the similarities in rendering of form are noteworthy. In both pieces, a bulbous urn-like form is rendered in painted and sandblasted layers of translucent and iridescent glass and flanked by heavily-textured wings of clay. The drawing on each vessel is repeated in two glass overlays, suggesting echoes of meaning. These are strange and intriguing pieces on a journey to somewhere; perhaps Brady's next exhibition will take us there.

A number of other pieces are worthy of mention. The fabulous *Sushi Nemo*, for example, represents Brady's machinations on the eating habits of Captain Nemo, hero of Jules Verne's *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*. What, indeed, did Nemo's sushi dish look like? Was it a nautical wonderland of writhing squid and undulating seaweed captured forever in a sea of riveted glass and metallic lustres? Probably not, but who cares? This piece is a colourful symphony of rich ultramarine, delicate mauve, and iridescent blue-green. It hovers effortlessly above the ground on supports made of glass and aluminum and has silver handles like oriental cut-outs with incised detailing. The detailing is repeated in the end-casing of four matching chopsticks which sit artistically in extensions of the stand. This piece represents a *ne plus ultra* in platter design, but would you dare fill it with raw fish?

The longer I look at each piece in this show, the more I see. Each and every one invites us to enter a different kind of space, a unique microcosm of mythical associations both personal and historical. Some pieces are more successful than others, but when viewed as a group, they overwhelm the viewer with their sensitive design, complex detail, and sheer technical bravado. Brady's consummate skill enables him to incorporate into each piece a wide variety of materials and to transform those materials into a satisfying whole, turning clay into lace and metal, metal into glass, and glass into water and ice. To achieve such metamorphoses requires an intimate knowledge of material properties and a sensitivity which puts Lee Brady at the cutting edge of his field. □



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Valerie Crowther, Goldsmith

BY META PERRY

Valerie Crowther is in her studio, working on a piece of jewellery at her bench. "I'll be right with you," she calls. Visitors must wait until she has reached a point at which she can stop. Goldsmithing is an exacting occupation.

Crowther's studio, at the back of a once-choice commercial building in downtown Regina, is a pleasant surprise. There is an elegance about it, the room filled with a soft light from the windows spanning the east wall. On the wide windowsill is a dried Russian thistle, its tough thorny branches forming a delicate and intricate tangle.

The jewellery Crowther creates in this space is finding its way into gallery gift shops and jewellery retail outlets in Saskatchewan and Ontario. Her rings, pins, pendants, and earrings do not call attention to themselves in display cases, however. Crowther's jewellery is designed to complement the wearer. It is as if the pieces undergo a transformation once they are in place on the wearer. Crowther's creations require human participation in order to achieve their full potential.

The connection between person and piece is basic to craft. Craftspieces, at the same time as they are a delight to the eye, can also be a delight to the touch. Unlike fine art, into which considerations of usefulness do not enter, craft concerns itself with the requirements of use. Whatever the material—woven threads, blown glass, formed clay, or burnished metal—the skill and ability the craftsperson brings to each piece can give added enjoyment and appreciation to those who use it in their day-to-day lives.

Crowther, however, did not originally intend to become a goldsmith. In fact, it is only recently, two decades after graduating from art school, that Crowther is discovering her own voice and how it is that she can best express herself. "I always knew I was an artist," Crowther explains, "but I also wanted to make a living." A graduate of the Sheridan College School of Design and the George Brown College Jewellery Arts Program, Crowther received her training from German, Japanese, and American teachers and, as a result, does not struggle with the definitions of art and craft. "The German teacher, who was a woman, had no difficulty distinguishing. She knew that her work was artistic and beautiful, at the same time as she knew her technique was excellent."

The process of discovering her own technical capabilities and preferred medium also took Crowther some time. Although she is now a trained goldsmith, Crowther actually started out studying pottery. The results were somewhat unexpected. "I found clay too plastic," she says. "Metal gave me the tension I required. To this day, I don't work from wax casts. I need the hardness of the metal to work with directly."



There is no doubt, in looking at Crowther's work, that the artist has an intense desire to be true to her materials. While Crowther readily admits that she is market-driven in much of what she does, her work nonetheless shows a strong tendency to create pieces reflective of herself and her environment.

That environment can exert its influence at any time. Recently, a new high-rise structure went up beside the building that houses Crowther's studio. Through her studio windows, Crowther could watch the site preparations and construction. "I got a lot of ideas when the building was going up. There was a big hole in the

META PERRY: "VALERIE CROWTHER, GOLDSMITH"



ABOVE LEFT Unset, polished stones revealing landscape forms. ABOVE RIGHT Untitled sculptural ring (1977), silver, 3.5 centimetres in height.

OPPOSITE ABOVE Blue Lapis (1990), silver setting, blue lapis stone.

OPPOSITE BELOW Wild Women (1992), copper alloy earrings, 5 centimetres in length. Photos: Gary Robins, Available Light.

ground. There were gigantic tubes, wires, and lines everywhere. I was visually inspired by that, and did some pieces based on those images," Crowther recalls.

Like many artists living on the prairies, Crowther is influenced strongly by the land around her, so much so that the landscape itself appears in the materials—jasper, agate, lapis, and quartz—with which she prefers to work. Crowther searches out stones that, when properly cut and polished, reveal wheat fields, branches, grasses, and horizon lines.

There are more minute organic shapes in her work as well. An elegant blue lapis ring in a silver setting reinterprets a commonly-occurring natural motif. "It has to do with a weed I saw in a field. It had tiny beads all along the stem. When I saw that, I went home and made a pair of earrings like that, and I've been playing with beads ever since," explains Crowther. Interestingly, the same motif also occurs in metalwork. "It's something that happens to metal when you melt tiny bits of wire," says Crowther. "It rolls up into tiny beads."

In the past year, Crowther has begun re-examining pieces she has done at her bench—pieces she had done for her own enjoyment, or pieces that had occurred by accident. These pieces were not ones Crowther could market, because, by her own description, they were "strange, with sculptural qualities—odd pieces that were not smooth and shiny."

One of these "odd pieces" was a silver ring Crowther made several years ago, a ring which seemingly depicts a small figure trying to free itself from a tangle of bars and wire. "I was melting some silver, and when I got part way, I noticed what was happening. It seemed so interesting that I stopped. I left it as it was, and mounted it onto a ring," says Crowther. The resulting piece, in its setting of beaten silver, is like a small sculpture.

Also in the category of small sculpture and odd pieces are Crowther's *Wild Women* earrings. Made of a copper alloy that begins a bright gold colour but tarnishes to a rich darker gold, the small female figures look as if they might have begun their existence as cave drawings or representations of ancient goddesses. Yet they are thoroughly contemporary, embodying a spritely exuberance.

Crowther's attraction to metalwork and goldsmithing connects her to an ancient tradition, a tradition immortalized by the ancient Greek god Hephaistos, son of Zeus and Hera, god of the fire of the forge, the creative flame that is the foundation of all metalwork. Hephaistos was a major deity, like Apollo and Artemis, but he incurred the wrath of his parents, the result of which left him lame.

Hephaistos' metalworking skills enabled him to create things practical and beautiful, earning him renown amongst the other gods. The armour Hephaistos fashioned for Achilles helped the latter defeat Hector at the siege of Troy. Hephaistos' gifts of jewellery were prized by the gods. But the golden throne he crafted, though beautiful to behold, held captive anyone who sat upon it.

The myth of Hephaistos in some respects reconciles the roles of artist and craftsperson, allowing a coming together of the artistic, the magical, and the practical. Jewellery can be seen as an embodiment of this ancient ideal, for jewellery serves not only to adorn but also has practical and spiritual purposes. A pin, for example, can adorn a garment, but it can also serve to secure a garment in place. A ring can be beautiful but can also be a symbol of rank or status.

For Crowther, the myth of Hephaistos "serves to tie together my ideas and to point to something deeper that I need to explore."

Although she has spent the past fifteen years in Saskatchewan, Crowther admits that she is only just discovering where she fits. She has come to know other Saskatchewan goldsmiths but, in terms of her work, has not gotten close to them. For Crowther, there are other directions. "I'm torn between trying to be a business person and being true to my materials," she concludes. Perhaps, with Hephaistos as guide, Crowther will soon find the answers she so ardently seeks. □

(continued from page 5)

rectly, not as symbol. Craft has to do with the body and the body's relation to the material world, and with the complex mind-body relationship that is vital to human wholeness."

Missing from Shadbolt's otherwise eloquent statement is any reference to the spiritual or collective cultural memory, admittedly a difficult aspect to define in terms of crafts, but nevertheless a major source of inspiration for craft making and a function of finished works used for contemplative purposes.

If we acknowledge these complex and synergistic layers between the physical, the psychological, and the spiritual, then why, oh why, are we so determined to reduce crafts to the level of precious artifacts? Why do we present them as visual art objects when they are so much more than visual or intellectual? Why do our curators cite ethnic history as a basis for the development of contemporary crafts when you and I both know that more often than not our creative concepts come from some global memory bank that compels humans to transform raw materials into, well, "things."

Why do we want to place the things we make into hushed temples devised for reverent viewing (museums are an 18th Century invention), when by doing so we make crafts vulnerable to the same accusations of elitism and inaccessibility suffered by our fine art friends?

Some crafts, of course, look very comfortable in settings devised for modern works of art. Illusionistic glass sculptures, for example, come alive against the serene backdrop of white gallery walls and well-positioned track lighting. In fact, they are designed for just such a showcase. But what about crafts whose form or scale or material dictate a more intimate, a more domestic relationship with the viewer?

Let's look at three specific examples of craft exhibitions to see if we can't discover what we really wanted all along.

"Patterns: Applied and Implied," organized by the Nova Scotia Designer Crafts Council in 1990, and mounted and toured by the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, will serve admirably as our first example of a curated exhibition of crafts. Frankly, the

exhibition was an embarrassment to the many fine craft artists of Nova Scotia. In my review of the show, which I saw at The Nickle Arts Museum in Calgary, I wrote:

... the greater embarrassment rests with the exhibition's organizers for sending this collection of crafts beyond provincial boundaries. Tour-

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ing the exhibition undercuts the quality standards set by craft artists across Canada who can produce tapestries with straight selvages and even weave, or who do know how to finish and present textiles (not draped over a wire coat hanger).

In her review of "Patterns: Applied and Implied," art critic Nancy Tousley suggested that several of the objects in the show "demonstrate that when craft is pressed too hard for art's sake, the results can be excruciating."

Rather than blame a craft maker for producing an "excruciating" object, or for its poor presentation—after all, we must assume the submissions were each maker's best efforts—let's question the motivation and rationale for exhibitions of this type.

The collaborative process (in this case, two art-related institutions plus a corporate sponsor and the Nova Scotia Department of Tourism and Culture) implied that a variety of objectives had to be served. Promoting standards of craft excellence is not necessarily high on the agendas of bureaucracies concerned with tourism or corporations coerced into supporting the arts. Inevitably, whenever there is a diversity of prime goals, the result is

compromise.

Additionally, the collaborative process itself has its own hazards. Once it is started, once committees are established and funding sources are committed, it is extremely difficult for anyone, however highly positioned, to call a halt. Glacier-like, the project carries its own momentum. If the finale bears little resemblance to the original concept, well, that's called consensus.

The half-dozen jurors for "Patterns: Applied and Implied" faced a different set of trade-offs. Expecting the usual deluge of entries, they were presented with only 128 submissions "of disappointing quality." Selecting crafts for exhibit resulted in a vain attempt to mount an exhibition despite critical judgment.

For our second example, a more current exhibition: The Canadian Craft Museum's "A Treasury of Canadian Craft," now on its way across Canada and then to Tokyo, Hong Kong, and Taipei. This was the big one, the exhibition we were all looking forward to, the definitive measure of the excellence and maturity of crafts in Canada.

How I wish I could describe it in glowing terms! Taken individually, the crafts are remarkable, and occasionally wondrous, but as an exhibition it is not so much curated as collected, and not so much collected as congealed.

If "Patterns: Applied and Implied" failed from lack of enthusiasm, "A Treasury of Canadian Craft" suffers the opposite fate. Viewing it in its inaugural form (the touring version contains less than one-quarter of the 300 pieces in the original exhibition), I couldn't help but be reminded of Templeton the rat's raptures about the delights of scavenged food in E.B. White's *Charlotte's Web*:

"What a night!" he repeated, hoarsely. "What feasting and carousing! A real gorge! I must have eaten the remains of thirty lunches. Never have I seen such leavings, and everything well-ripened and seasoned with the passage of time and the heat of the day. Oh, it was rich, my friends, rich!"

Like Templeton, who "whenever he found a trinket or a keepsake he carried it home and stored it there," "Treasury's"

sole curator, Sam Carter, has a gourmand's appetite and eclectic taste. In this case, the curatorial choices resulted in a crammed-to-the-gunnels gallery where it was impossible to distinguish excellent from merely good work, and where nothing (including the viewers) had enough room to breathe.

"Who wants to live forever?" sneered the rat. "I am naturally a heavy eater and I get untold satisfaction from the pleasures of the feast." He patted his stomach, grinned at the sheep, and crept upstairs to lie down.

Instead of a single curator, would a jury have given us a better exhibition? Perhaps, but only because jurors between them will have a wider range of technical expertise and aesthetic judgment. It's a rare curator who has it all. The best ones are aware of the gaps in their knowledge—and their prejudices—and will consult with other experts before making decisions.

It's probably too obvious to repeat, but quality is the only thing that counts in the long run. Without a clearly articulated idea of what we understand as excellence, no exhibition is going to meet expectations.

What curators and jurors often overlook is not the quality of the work they select, but how their choices will appear to the exhibition's audience. Exhibitions aren't about winning and losing. They're about looking good.

We've all seen shows that assaulted our sensibilities, where we felt visually mugged, not so much from the works themselves as from the imbalance between each object. Cross-media exhibitions such as "Patterns" and "Treasury" demonstrate that it is next to impossible to give honour to wood, clay, glass, metal, textiles, and God knows what else, when each presents a different level of scale, finesse, form, and surface.

As each area of craft making develops its own tangents, single-media exhibitions are running into similar problems. Crayola-bright low-fire glazes upstage the celadons. Tradition-inspired geometric quilts look dowdy and conventional alongside sequined textile constructions. These shows might offer interesting counterpoints, but they are also confusing, particularly to the general public, and disoriented viewers aren't any exhibition's goal.

Does this mean we should have separate exhibitions for each style of crafts? No, but we must make clear what it is we are presenting. A retrospective or chronological survey requires a different presentation than a funky theme show. If jurors or curators don't start their deliberations with a focused approach and some idea of how the pieces might look in a gallery's

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architecture, then they should call in a design or installation consultant to assist them in presenting the show to the public. Even with the finest works to display, good exhibits don't just happen. They are designed (a concept that shouldn't seem too far-fetched for artists).

Omnibus exhibitions intended to showcase crafts made in a region or nation only point up the fact that there is no recognizable identity to regional or national contemporary crafts. These types of exhibitions are collections of unique, individualistic works, not stylistic trends related to geographical zones.

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Truly memorable shows have a thematic or ideological basis, or a "tough" curatorial stance. They're talked about while they're up, they give reviewers and critics something to chew on, and they're remembered as landmarks of the contemporary art history we are developing.

Which brings us finally to the last of our three examples of exhibitions: the "Kaffe Fassett World Tour Exhibition." Based on Fassett's 1989 retrospective at

London's Victoria and Albert Museum—the first ever in that prestigious venue by a living textile artist—this exhibition opened my eyes to new possibilities for displaying crafts. Here's how Angela Murrill described the show's set-up:

This exhibit—glorious, colourful, and, above all, inspirational—shows what happens when someone not only takes the creative path but breaks all the rules along the way.... Suspended from the museum's mezzanine level, his shawls hang like magnificent medieval banners, pulsing with magentas and saffron golds and acid greens. In the main hall is a sleeveless vest in sullen purples and thunderous blues, a patchwork jacket of emerald and lavender and navy, and a grey-blue vest patterned with garnets and pinks like a millefiori paperweight.... There's needlework, too: a lemon-shaped jug and a fruit-printed tea-caddy are a thematically related foreground to a hanging of sun-warmed melons; a photo frame and a sweater, both similarly patterned, are displayed beside a piece of lichen-speckled copper. What makes this exhibit unique is that it shows not only the completed work but also the inspiration behind it.

Up until now I had always held craft—the-verb separate in my mind from crafts—the-noun—the process of making as one thing, the finished product as another. After seeing the Kaffe Fassett exhibition I can't imagine why, especially since most of the questions we get asked about crafts deal with how we've made them. Our techniques, novel uses of materials, and where we get our ideas are always among the first things viewers want to know about our work. Presenting some of the answers within the exhibition display creates multiple levels of understanding for the viewer, as well as a tangible and visually stimulating context for the featured works.

If we would discard some of our cherished notions about art exhibitions in general, I don't doubt that we could come up with many other innovative ways of presenting crafts and (not incidentally) humanizing the gallery experience. □

Eclectic Etchings

MURRAY GRUZA

David Goldsmith
"Eclectic Etchings"

Saskatchewan Craft Gallery
October 16 to November 24, 1992

Eighteenth Century whalers, mammoths from prehistoric times, old pianos, scenes of prairies, the north, and wild-life, all share a common bond in "Eclectic Etchings," a show of scrimshaw by David Goldsmith of Lumsden, Saskatchewan, held at the Saskatchewan Craft Gallery last fall.

Scrimshaw, an art form primarily associated with nautical art, uses polished ivory as the base for delicate carvings and etchings on its surface. In the past, sailors decorated their tools, knives, and swords during the long periods at sea. They often created gifts for their loved ones, including fine hair combs and brooches, toys, and practical items such as ivory "spindles" on which a woman could wind yarn. These 3-dimensional articles represent the traditional form of scrimshaw.

The artists would scratch fine lines onto the polished ivory with the tips of their knives or specially constructed tools. After inscribing the drawing into the ivory, they rubbed the surface with an ink or darkening agent. Removing the excess by lightly buffing the surface would reveal the image carved into the ivory. India ink was most commonly used, giving a black image against the warm colour of the ivory. Scrimshaw dates back over two thousand years, when the Chinese imported vast quantities of ivory from Russia. In the 18th century, North American whalers, often at sea for extended periods, carved on whales' teeth, bones, and walrus tusk, to pass the time.

Today, ivory is a very rare material. To continue the art form and maintain a respect for the balance of nature and endangered animal species, modifications and new sources of material have been sought. David works entirely by hand on old piano keys, antler, fossil mammoth ivory, and other exotic materials such as tagua nuts grown in Brazil. This allows him to preserve the art form, yet spares the endangered tusk-bearing species.

"Eclectic Etchings" is primarily a show of two dimensional work, framed and displayed on the wall. There are several

three-dimensional objects displayed as well. David's ivory-handled knife with its strong bold image of a grizzly bear incorporates function and ornamentation in a manner true to traditional scrimshaw. The fine and delicate lines etched onto a miniature turned vase of exotic Brazilian tagua nut is a contemporary application of scrimshaw. David's painstaking work on old piano keys uses both vertical and horizontal rectangular formats. The simplest of his designs illustrate a few cattails with a v-line of geese flying in the distance. Another simple yet effective theme is a lone prairie elevator or country scene.

One of the most successful images is an etching of a *Loon Family* gliding on still water near some reeds. This horizontal work achieves the boldness of the loons by repeating dark lines enhancing their feathers and shadings. Raising the ivory slightly off the dark green background and matting with the same colour in an enlarged opening gives the work a three dimensional jewel-like presentation.

Other piano key pieces, particularly the smaller and simpler designs, are enhanced by a floating effect using a second piece of glass. The metal frames on these seem cold and harsh in contrast to the warmer, softer ivory keys. In general, the use of natural wood frames lends a sense of harmony and balance to the work, marrying the materials and enhancing the lustrous quality of the ivory.



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M. GRUZA: "ECLECTIC ETCHINGS"

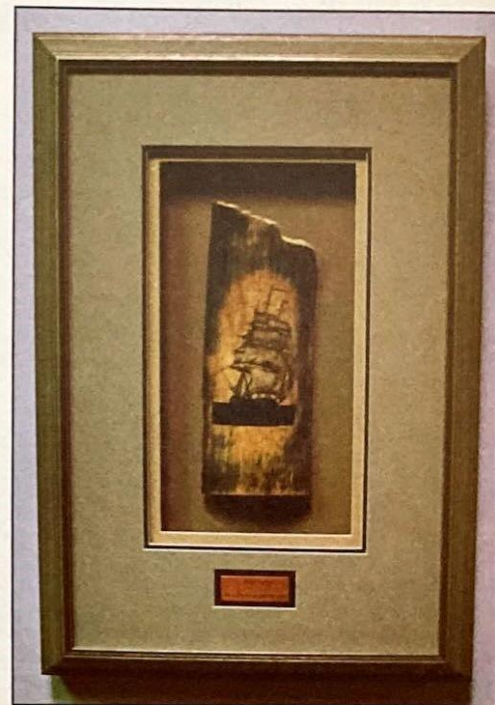
In my opinion, the most exciting work in this show was the scrimshaw done on 10,000 year old mammoth tusks. Whereas the piano keys were predictably uniform, rectangular, and flat in appearance, the mammoth tusk pieces varied in shape and thickness, having slight curves and irregularities both on the interior surface and exterior edges of the piece. The three-dimensional effect was further enhanced by showing the edges and varying thickness of the material. This helped to create a sense of mass and dimension that the piano keys lacked. Whereas piano keys are generally uniform in colour with a slight veining and little variation in tone, the mammoth tusk is a rich, ecru ivory colour bordering on tan, variegated with shades ranging from green to brown. These colours, the irregularity of size and shape, individual imperfections, and larger surfaces allow David to create larger scenes which incorporate the naturally-aged colour of the mammoth tusk. The rich tones of the deep wood frames helped to add another element to the works.

The largest piece in the show is *Full Sail Adventure*, a vertical mammoth tusk with beautiful shading of light brown and green tones. Only part of the surface is polished. On this smooth surface David has inscribed a wonderful sailing ship at full mast. The image recalls etchings of sailing ships found on book plates, and antique prints. The water is represented by a series of parallel wavy lines which end flush on both the left and right sides of the piece. This treatment, however, lends itself more to a rigid book page format than to the interesting shape of the tusk. The boldness of this scrimshaw is based on the thick lines inscribed into the piece, which then hold more ink and form dark bold lines. *Full Sail Adventure* catches your attention from across the gallery and can be viewed from a distance, which is unusual for a scrimshaw. The framed work creates a feeling of looking at an antique piece that was created long ago and reminds us of the traditional nautical themes that scrimshaw is famous for.

David's subjects are generally not nautical in nature but instead portray scenes of the prairies, northern Saskatchewan, wildlife studies, lakes with cattails, tall stands of spruce, and pioneer homesteads.

In the piece *For My Dad*, we see a dramatic portrayal of a loon with wings outspread. This scrimshaw again features thick black lines, here outlining the loon's feathered back and outspread wings. With such intense thick lines, the black of the outspread wings takes on a beautiful glistening appearance. Once again, the larger format, irregular shape, and beautiful colouring of the mammoth tusk serve to enhance the setting for this loon on a quiet northern lake. The slightly curved surface of the tusk set into the deep frame brings a special realism and quality to the piece, giving the loon the appearance of taking flight from the water.

The piece titled *Prairie Clouds* represents an early pioneer homestead set in a panoramic prairie landscape. The success of this piece stems from the incorporation of the prairie design with the natural shape and discolouration of the ivory. The discolouration in the upper half of this ivory forms billowing clouds across the prairie sky. This piece works very well. The artist has combined both subject and medium in a delicate union.



ABOVE TOP *Prairie Clouds* (1992), mammoth tusk, 21 centimetres in width.

ABOVE BOTTOM *Full Sail Adventure* (1992), mammoth tusk, 24 centimetres in height. Photo: courtesy the artist.

OPPOSITE *For My Dad* (1992), mammoth tusk, 14 centimetres in width.

To conclude, David has employed a nautical art form and modified it to the prairies. He has taken what was traditionally a three-dimensional art form and developed it as two-dimensional. David's style of scrimshaw, with its bold dark lines, makes his two-dimensional work viewable from a distance, yet invites the viewer to come closer and examine its detail. I would encourage David to introduce more variation in his thickness of line to create images with more dimension and spirit. With a wide range of materials and a variety of subjects, sizes, and prices, David's work has a broad appeal. This was a show worth seeing, and David Goldsmith is an artist to watch. □

Installing Difference

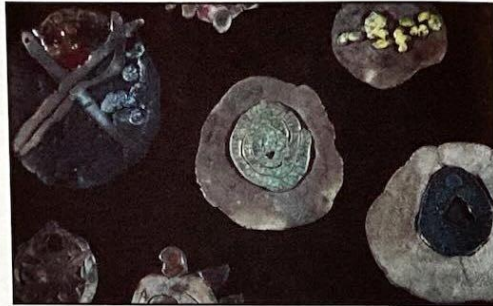
BY GREG BEATTY

Ruth Chambers
"20 Vessels/179 Circles"
 Dunlop Art Gallery, Regina
 August 24 to October 4, 1992

Within the context of contemporary Western culture, a rigid division has developed between the practices of fine art and craft. While this division is based in part on aesthetic and conceptual considerations, it also reflects a legacy of discrimination in which certain forms of cultural production have been arbitrarily excluded from the dominant narrative of art history. Although this discrimination finds its most offensive expression in the deliberate exclusion of work by women and ethnic minority artists, it also extends to those artists who do not work with culturally sanctified art materials such as paint, marble, and bronze.

Located in the east and west display cases of the Dunlop Art Gallery in Regina, Ruth Chambers' ceramics installation *20 Vessels/179 Circles* worked to subvert the distinction between fine art and craft. Chambers' intent was not to "elevate" ceramics to the realm of fine art but rather to challenge the existing hierarchical system of criteria governing notions of artistic value and quality by juxtaposing two radically different forms of ceramic practice.

The east display case contained a selection of twenty spherical ceramic vessels, each carefully mounted on one of five vertical black wood shelves. The vessels, each about the size of a bowling ball, were press-moulded using a coil construction technique and then smoke-fired at a low temperature using a variety of raku glazes. In highlighting the familiar form of the vessel, Chambers alludes to a craft tradition dating back to the dawn of human history. Indeed, given the vessel's importance to the domestic and ceremonial life of virtually every non-nomadic society, scientists have long considered the design and decoration of a culture's pottery to be a key indicator of its level of political, economic, and social development. But because Chambers' vessels contain no specific historical references and retain only a marginal ability to function in that they lack handles, spouts, and stable bases, their traditional identity as symbols of sustenance, comfort, and celebration is subverted. Instead, by focusing



on the formal properties of the vessel, such as surface texture and the relationship between exterior and interior space, Chambers invests the vessel with an inherent meaning which enables it to function as a self-contained sculptural object. The trans-cultural nature of Chambers' gourd-shaped vessels is further reinforced by the circular and spiral-shaped decorations impressed in the clay as part of the moulding process. These geometric forms, traditional symbols of life, the world, and inner human experience, have been used by countless cultures throughout history.

The west display case, on the other hand, contained 179 brightly-coloured ceramic disks mounted in a seemingly random pattern directly on the glass of the display case. Fashioned intuitively through the use of a rolling pin, with bits of clay added and deleted by hand, these ragged disks stood in stark contrast to



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the more carefully modelled vessels in the east display case. By inserting a significant element of chance into the creative process, Chambers recalls flexible working methods often associated with the production of non-representational art. An obvious parallel would be Jackson Pollock's well-known drip paintings, which were dependent to a large extent on the random application of paint to the canvas. Presumably, the size of Chambers' disks were limited by the initial size of each ball of clay; however, by using a rolling pin to flatten the clay, Chambers allowed several creative variables to remain beyond her control. While Chambers' initial interest in the disk shape was inspired by children's experiments with clay, the shape also evokes the notion of enclosure or protection.

In mounting the vessels in the east display case, Chambers placed each one in a slightly different position on its shelf, thereby allowing the viewer to study the same basic form from 20 different angles. In doing so, she mimics the type of exhaustive exploration of subject matter and theme often considered to be a hallmark of fine art; indeed, artists such as Joyce Wieland, who has worked in paint, film, fabric, and installation, have often been criticized for producing a body of work that is too diverse to merit serious critical attention. In addition, by allowing the viewer to explore the same vessel form from a number of different perspectives, Chambers attempts to recreate the experience of touching and handling a ceramic vessel. But this experience, identified in ceramic criticism as the "kinaesthetic of the vessel," is negated by the presence of the glass display case. Serving as a protective barrier and framing device, the display case limits the viewer to a strictly visual relationship with the vessels. Within the context of feminist art criticism, a voyeuristic relationship between the viewer and the art object has been linked to systems of domination associated with patriarchal culture. By simultaneously reinforcing and negating the kinaesthetic quality of the vessel, Chambers subverts the privileged, "objective" position traditionally ascribed to the viewer, here suspended between physical involvement and intellectual contemplation of the art object.

As with the press-moulded vessels, the disks reflect Chambers' interest in exploring multiple variations of the same basic form. By gluing the disks directly to the glass, Chambers again disrupts



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ABOVE "20 Vessels," detail, moulded clay.
 OPPOSITE ABOVE "179 Circles," detail, hand-built clay.
 BELOW AND OPPOSITE *20 Vessels/179 Circles*, ceramics installation. Photos: Michael Rankin.

the privileged position of the viewer which arises from the static presentation of objects behind a physical barrier. In this instance, the disks appear to have been thrown against the glass in an effort to break down the barrier. In addition to disrupting the voyeuristic gaze, the disks also comment on the critical relationship between process and representation. Given the crude nature of their design, it is difficult to believe that the disks were the intended result of a deliberate creative process. Instead, we are invited to consider the possibility that these disks have been altered through some act of violence, flattened against the glass in frustration or anger.

In comparing the two sets of ceramic objects, one is struck by the diversity of both their design and installation within the display cases. The vessels, with their controlled form and linear presentation, represent the type of orderly thought proc-

esses we associate with the classification of information in a library. This association is underscored by the presentation of the vessels in a well-lit display case complete with a white cloth background containing trace images of surface decoration from other, larger vessels constructed by Chambers. The trace images, which recall the two-dimensional fine art practice of drawing, reinforce the sense of history and memory which prefaces Chambers' interest in the vessel form.

The chaotic design and distribution of the disks, on the other hand, suggests a less rational, more intuitive thought process. A reliance on intuition, while often looked upon with suspicion in our society, can of course lead to unexpected discoveries which would not have been possible through a strict adherence to logic alone. Furthermore, the random distribution of the disks, which is reinforced by the presence of a darkly painted backdrop evoking notions of primitive energy and mystery, also contradicts the concept of hierarchical order which plays such an important role in establishing and maintaining systems of domination in

patriarchal culture. Of course, it is precisely this tendency to classify and separate which leads inevitably to prejudicial distinctions based on gender, ethnic, and cultural difference and is responsible for the division between art and craft in the first place.

Given the long history of clay as a medium for the production of utilitarian objects, it is inevitable that the discussion of technique should figure prominently in ceramic criticism. But because viewers of Chambers' exhibition were limited to a strictly visual sensory experience in which protective layers of glass prevented close examination of the work, technical considerations were not of paramount importance. This had the effect of making Chambers' installation strategy the focus of the exhibition, allowing her to explore a range of aesthetic and conceptual issues. In devising her strategy, Chambers effectively adapted her work to a unique exhibition environment, constructing separate installations which engaged the viewer in a critical dialogue concerning the position of ceramics within post-modern artistic practice. □

E. PHILIPS: "SITUATING PHOTOGRAPHY"

(continued from page 22) of the work in the show.

The "100 Years" exhibition featured work by Stephane Beauchamp, Hamish Buchanan, Dik Campbell, Daniel Collins, Nina Levitt, Christopher McFarlane, Donna Quince, Susan Stewart and David Williams. The work ranged from gelatin silver prints to mixed media using found images. Some of the photos had text superimposed on them by the artist.

Dik Campbell's photographs exemplify the kind of work exhibited in the show. His black and white photograph, *Fear the Gentleness* (1992), has that phrase imposed on a close-up of two men kissing. The text reinforces the image's intent, which is to confront the viewer with a forbidden image.

There is no reason, reading the SCC Standards Guidelines, that Campbell's photograph could not be shown in the SCC Gallery, except for the sentence under SCC Markets that reads, "Good taste must be kept in mind by both the photographer and the judging committee."

"Good taste" is, of course, as subjective as what makes a joke funny. But what does good taste have to do with excellence in craft or art?

The answer to this question is fairly self-evident. The Photographer's Gallery supports photography that is not commercial. The SCC has a strong market component; craftspeople do not pretend that the commercial aspect of their work is

unimportant. They want to make a profit. And some images are naturally more saleable, especially in the kind of venues set up by the SCC, than others.

Campbell's work is explicitly political as well as sexual, challenging the viewer's assumptions about the nature of homosexuality. If craft is something "made in a skilful manner" (the Oxford Reference Dictionary), then Campbell's work qualifies. But it's safe to say he did not design his photos with a view to selling them at the Saskatchewan Handcraft Festival.

Another example from the show, Susan Stewart's *Dragon*, made me wonder if there was a place for feminism in craft. This photograph is a black and white silver print of a lesbian wearing a mask. The woman looks questioning at the viewer; the overall impression is one of power, and perhaps of menace. The piece is one of several lesbian portraits in a series which is obviously feminist—the subjects all question, in their attitudes and appearance, the traditional role of women in society.

Stewart's work is unlike images usually seen at SCC markets. The SCC Gallery, however, has exhibited feminist work. Susan Andrews Grace's 1989 exhibition of fabric art, "Inside/Out," for instance, was unmistakably feminist. It may be that realistic representation in general, and photography in particular, is perceived as somehow "more real" and more politically explosive, and therefore more liable to give offence, than is something further re-

moved from images of ourselves, such as Grace's work.

The "100 Years" exhibition featured a variety of photographic materials and techniques. But for the most part, photographic technique was equal or even secondary to the content of the work. Some call this kind of art, RIGHT IN YOUR FACE. That is, the images are confrontational, making issues, whether of sexual orientation or nuclear disarmament, unavoidable. The work is both political and personal, but it is not usually very subtle.

Photography is ubiquitous in the western world. Between the time we get up in the morning and go to bed at night, we have seen a plethora of photographic images, from the billboards we see driving to work to the ads in the daily newspaper. Fine art photography is just a small part of a very big and complex discipline. It is no wonder, then, that we may be more suspicious, more critical of photographs and what effect they might be trying to have on our ideas and on our way of life. For this and many other reasons, any institution interesting in promoting photography must clearly define what kind of photography it wants to exhibit.

The Craft Council Gallery does exhibit photography, although some images, such as those in "100 Years of Homosexuality," would probably not be acceptable. In fact, the range of acceptable subject matter in general seems to be quite narrow. But this does not mean that the

SCC is somehow morally remiss. Every organization must be governed by some kind of guidelines. Without a strictly defined focus, the SCC would not only flounder for lack of a rudder, but would sink due to lack of funding, because arts funding organizations also use strict definitions in deciding who and what to fund. Only in an ideal world (with a booming economy) could this be otherwise.

Philosophically, the divisions between the SCC and institutions that focus on "art" as opposed to "craft," are quite pronounced. The world of visual arts continues to be quite hierarchical, even though the content of that hierarchy has changed dramatically since the Renaissance. Work that is highly saleable is more likely to be considered craft; work that has no commercial aims, and is the stuff of very esoteric "artspeak," an industry dominated by a relatively small group of critics and curators, has the most prestige. Somehow the taint of the marketplace continues to make craft undervalued in terms of status.

But what is there to choose, after all, between a Dorothy Knowles landscape and a weaving by Kaija Sanelma Harris? In terms of real value—the satisfaction the viewer feels faced with complexity of formal design and the beauty of the overall effect—the two are different but equal. At the other end of the scale, a painting of a pink sunset over a blue mountain, only one step removed from paint-by-number, is no more art than is a badly crocheted owl.

What, then, separates the photography submitted to and exhibited by the SCC from the photography in this exhibition? The work of photographers who are members of the Craft Council, Courtney Milne being a notable example, tends to be very decorative. Photographs by SCC members are sometimes nostalgic and are frequently landscapes, but they are rarely controversial. But Courtney Milne's photographs, those in his *The Sacred Earth* book, for instance, are undoubtedly political. They speak of the holiness of nature and, by extension, of the necessity to preserve the environment. But homosexual rights are not the *cause celebre* that environmental issues have become. Most people agree, at least in principle, that it is good to protect and cherish nature.

A photographer, like any artist, has an audience in mind. Anyone wanting to

appeal to a very large audience would avoid the self-referential, the highly academic. This does not mean that a photographer who is not part of the "art" scene, someone shooting an ad for whisky, for instance, produces "simple" work; but that photographer must use a visual vocabulary that is accessible to many. And a photographer who has both a commercial

"... these distinctions are often decided, not by the institutions that exhibit the works, but by artists themselves, who choose to work with or without commercial intent, with or without reference to the more controversial political issues that confront our society today."

and an artistic component to his or her work might even make distinctions between audience and market. An audience can be reached through an exhibition (no purchase necessary), while a market must be reached through the exchange of money for goods.

The traditional means of separating art from craft has been that the latter features a strong functional element. This may have applied, historically, to photography and printmaking. Printmaking began as a means of mass-producing images for books and newspapers, and was only supplanted in this function by the genesis of photography in the nineteenth century. Now, of course, photography is often "functional" as a means of selling products and illustrating books, among a host of other uses.

Non-fiction is in some ways analogous to craft in the visual arts. In the writing community, non-fiction was until recently not considered for arts funding at either the provincial or the national level (except perhaps through the Explorations Program of the Canada Council). Non-fiction was considered more functional, as a means of communicating information and ideas, without the "high art" appeal of poetry or prose; and furthermore, it was possible to make a decent living through non-fiction. For these reasons

literary writers and the arts bureaucracy didn't want to fund non-fiction writers.

Now, however, the lines have been redrawn, and both the Canada Council and the Saskatchewan Arts Board will fund non-fiction. Slowly non-fiction has gained recognition as a legitimate literary form. In other words, fine writing is fine writing. Words used in an original and evocative way constitute a literary art, and like "creative writing," non-fiction writers require a healthy reserve of talent and discipline.

And a similar trend can be found in the visual arts. The traditional hierarchy, with painting and sculpture at the top, has been gradually undermined from below. The arts have changed dramatically over the last one hundred years, and the conventional hierarchy of the arts is no longer tenable. This doesn't mean that there is no longer a hierarchy, but that it has become increasingly difficult to categorize the arts in reference to media.

The big difference between the literary and the visual worlds is that there is a lot more money at stake in the visual arts, especially if crafts are included. The literary world has never been as rigidly hierarchical as the visual arts (as Gertrude Stein said, "a book is a book is a book is a book"). The literary arts have always been on a more level playing field, at least as far as the different genres are concerned. But while a few disciplines, such as film, video, and performance art, have joined painting and sculpture at the top of the heap, the visual arts in general remain unmistakably hierarchical.

In conclusion, photography has a definite, if closely defined place in the Saskatchewan Craft Council's mandate. It may be that the shows like "100 Years of Homosexuality" can be likened to pure science, while craft is closer to applied science. But these distinctions are often decided, not by the institutions that exhibit the works, but by artists themselves, who choose to work with or without commercial intent, with or without reference to the more controversial political issues that confront our society today. This is not to say that craftspeople cannot deal with difficult issues, just that they have to judge carefully the risks involved, and address them in a way that suits both their media and their market. □

Situating Photography

By ELIZABETH PHILIPS

In the Photographers Gallery exhibition, "100 Years of Homosexuality," curated by Doug Townsend, October 16 to November 16, 1992, the issues of sexuality and gender are addressed through photographic images of men and women in the context of their sexuality. The artists represented in the exhibition are all homosexual, and the content of their work in some way deals with what their sexual orientation means to themselves and to society.

I would like to consider this exhibition as a starting point for discussing photography as it is included in the Saskatchewan Craft Council's mandate.

My first response to the juxtaposition of the two institutions was that there was little to be said on the subject, that obviously the Photographers Gallery is quite different from the Craft Council Gallery in what it displays and what it hopes to accomplish. But on second thought, after reading the SCC's Standards Guidelines, seeing the exhibition at the Photographers Gallery, and thinking about the history of photography, the distinctions between the two venues became much less obvious and more arbitrary.

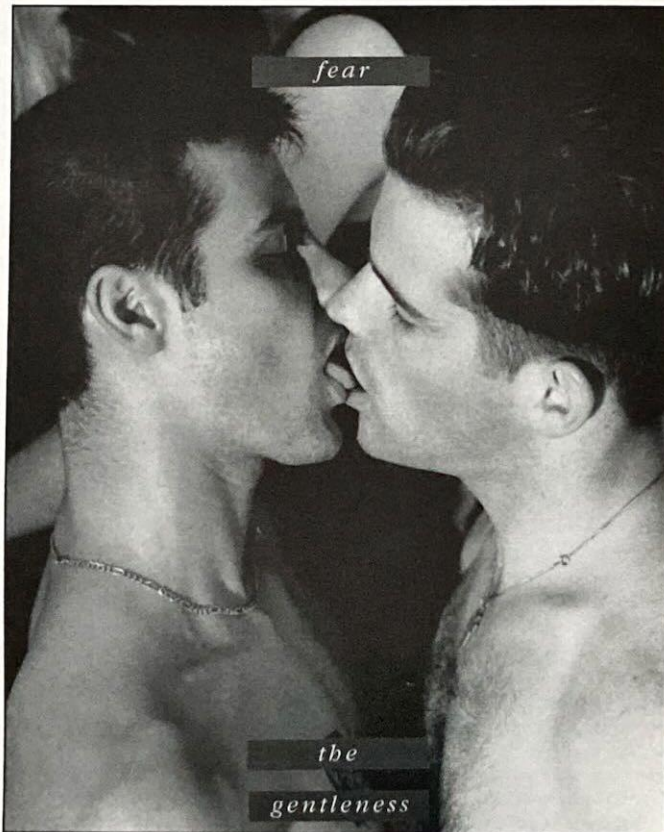
I am left with several questions, which I will try to answer, though not, I am sure, conclusively. If, as is stated in the SCC Standards Report brochure by Marlene Zora and Catherine Miller, "art" and "craft" are interchangeable, then why are photography and printmaking included in the SCC's mandate while painting is not? If only certain kinds of photographs are eligible for inclusion in SCC shows and markets, then what kinds of work are acceptable and why? Is it reasonable for arts organizations to continue to try to make decisions about what art is, and what craft is, based on the media used?

The question of art versus craft is one

that has been around almost as long as the Sistine Chapel. But the debate is one that needs to be reconsidered periodically, as the political and economic climate in Saskatchewan, and in Canada, shifts and changes. This discussion is intended as a philosophical look at the questions that arise when comparing the kind of photography exhibited at the two venues. I do not pretend to expertise in the area, nor do I

think that the goals of these two very different institutions should be the same. I don't intend to review "100 Years of Homosexuality" per se; I will examine a couple of pieces in the exhibition as a means of raising questions, and to give readers some idea (continued on page 20)

BELOW *Fear the Gentleness* (1992), silver print, by Dik Campbell.



Saskatchewan Craft Gallery

SCHEDULE

IN THE GALLERY

MICHAEL HOSALUK

"Faces/Places"

February 12 to March 23

**"TRADITIONAL IMAGES/
CONTEMPORARY REFLECTIONS"**

Organized for the Year of Craft

Curated by Carolyn Acoose and Douglas Bentham

March 26 to May 3

"EARTH, AIR, FIRE, & WATER"

Handmade-House Member Group Show

with

"ISOLATION"

Newfoundland & Labrador Travelling Exhibition

May 14 to June 27

SCC TOURING EXHIBITIONS

"IN PLACE: CRAFT FROM SASKATCHEWAN"

The Canadian Craft Museum, Vancouver, BC

February 10 to March 28, 1993

"THE ECCENTRIC VESSEL"

Curated by Susan Whitney of Regina

Estevan National Exhibition Centre, Estevan, SK

February 15 to March 22

Rosemont Gallery, Neil Balkwill Centre, Regina, SK

April 1 to May 1

Swift Current National Exhibition Centre,

Swift Current, SK

June 2 to 30

JOINT SCC/OSAC TOURING EXHIBITION

ANNEMARIE BUCHMANN-GERBER

"Beyond Boundaries—Painted Tapestries"

Grand Coteau Centre, Shaunavon, SK

February 18 to March 4

Godfrey Dean Cultural Centre, Yorkton, SK

March 8 to 27

R.M. of Lakeside #338 Office, Quill Lake, SK

April 4 to 17

Library/Civic Centre, Quill Lake, SK

April 25 to May 8

Humboldt Public Library, Humboldt, SK

May 16 to 29

Wadena Public Library, Wadena, SK

June 6 to 19

YEAR OF CRAFT EXHIBITIONS

"A CONTINUING HERITAGE"

Ukrainian Museum of Canada, Saskatoon, SK

March 26 to May 8

Opening Reception: March 28, 2 to 4 pm

"PRAIRIE PATCHWORK"

Saskatoon Western Development Museum

April 9 to May 30

The Saskatchewan Craft Gallery gratefully acknowledges these exhibitions, organized by their respective institutions to coincide with "Traditional Images/Contemporary Reflections."



SASKATCHEWAN CRAFT COUNCIL/GALLERY

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