THE CRAFT FACTOR

THE MAGAZINE OF THE SASKATCHEWAN CRAFT COUNCIL • WINTER 1993/SPRING 1994 • VOL. 18.3 $3.00

BEYOND THE VISUAL

Fine Arts Building, University of Regina
March 11, 12, 13, 1994

THE SASKATCHEWAN CRAFT COUNCIL'S 1994 multi-media conference, Beyond the Visual, will explore issues of expression, function, production, design, and craftsmanship. The conference is co-sponsored by the **DEPARTMENT OF VISUAL ARTS, Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Regina,** which is also providing facilities for the event and the keynote speaker.

The keynote speaker at Beyond the Visual will be internationally-exhibited Montréal potter, **Paul Mathieu,** who will deliver a lecture entitled "The Space of Pottery: An Investigation of the Nature of Craft."

The conference will feature lectures and hands-on workshops with ceramic artist **Victor Cicansky,** glass artist **Dan Fenton,** jewellery-maker **Claudette Hardy-Pilon,** and fibre artist **Karen Selk.** Business workshops focusing on "Effective Display and Promotion" with **Les Sneesby** of Displayco Canada Inc., and "Pricing and Packaging" with **Cecile Miller** will be of special interest to those who wish to improve their marketing methods. Individuals can register for the entire conference, for single days, or just for particular business workshops. Rates are different for SCC members and non-members. The business workshops on Saturday repeat on Sunday; however, the workshops in ceramics, glass, jewellery, and fibre are continuous.

The conference weekend will culminate in a panel discussion, "How Important is Function? How Important is Innovation? How Important is Importance?" Panelists will include Paul Mathieu and other invited guests. Mediating the discussion will be influential Saskatchewan ceramic artist and University of Regina professor, **Jack Sures.**

The **REGISTRATION DEADLINE** for Beyond the Visual is **February 25, 1994.** Registration will be on a first-come, first-serve basis. Participants who register after the deadline will be charged a late fee of $20.00.

THE SERIES OF LECTURES AT THE CONFERENCE, including the keynote address, will be open to the public. Admission to the lectures is free. The lectures are scheduled as follows:

Friday, March 11
8:30 PM KEYNOTE ADDRESS
Paul Mathieu, "The Space of Pottery: An Investigation of the Nature of Craft"

Saturday, March 12
9:00 AM Claudette Hardy-Pilon
2:00 PM Karen Selk, "Sources of Inspiration"

Sunday, March 13
9:00 AM Dan Fenton
2:00 PM Vic Cicansky

For further information about the conference, or to receive a conference brochure, please contact the Saskatchewan Craft Council, 813 Broadway Avenue, Saskatoon, SK S7N 1B5, ph. (306) 653-3616, fax 244-2711.

SASKATCHEWAN CRAFT COUNCIL
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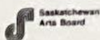

DEPARTMENT OF VISUAL ARTS
UNIVERSITY OF REGINA

The **Saskatchewan Craft Council (SCC)** is a non-profit organization formed in 1975 to nurture and promote the craft community. Craftspeople, supporters of crafts, and the general public are served by the many and varied programs of the SCC including gallery and touring craft exhibitions, craft markets, workshops, conferences, and publications. The SCC is an affiliated member of the Canadian Crafts Council.

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BACK COVER *Liber Minimus III Ruby Serpent* (1989), metal pen nibs, dry pigments, gold leaf, ink, genuine calfskin vellum, 5 cetnimetres in width, by Angela Lucas. One of a series of four accordion-style books. Photo courtesy of the artist.

For the Love of Letters

By Kristina Komendant

When I was handed the original, letter-sized family tree dating back to the early fourteenth century, all I could think of was, what a mess! I looked at my prospective client, then back at the hodge podge of tiny historical text and family names all bunched closely together. I said bluntly, "You could get this done cheaper and more quickly on a computer." He just looked at me and responded, "But I don't want to. I want this done in calligraphy, to be matted and framed, and eventually I will pass it down to one of my sons." Once I understood his strong interest in the project, I agreed to the commission and immersed myself in the work. It proved challenging not only because of the amount of calligraphy and the difficulty of design but also because the information had to be written in Polish, a language with which I was totally unfamiliar. Fifty-four hours later, the 76 x 107 centimetre family tree was completed.

What is special about calligraphy, and why are people still interested in it today, even with the mass availability of computers and printers with a wide array of type faces? The answer is simple for calligraphers: we love to make beautiful letters!

Calligraphy Has a Long and Illustrious History

The numerous letterforms used by contemporary calligraphers evolved over a long period of time and, because of this, calligraphers are linked to our distant past. Before the development of the Roman alphabet in the first century, pictorial symbols and abstract letterforms had been used to convey information and knowledge. The 23-letter Roman alphabet was revolutionary because it provided the most orderly and versatile means of recording language. The alphabet was written entirely in capitals and eventually became the standard form for the written word throughout Europe, providing the basis of our present day letters. The capital letters were often incised into stone with a chisel, and many monumental inscriptions are still visible today such as at the ruins of the Forum in Rome, Italy.

As time went by, lettering tools as well as writing surfaces became more sophisticated and precise, moving from chisel and stone to stylus on wax or clay tablets, to reed and quills on papyrus or animal skins (vellum and parchment), to metal-edged pens on paper. Vellum and parchment were especially

RIGHT *Royal Visit 1986* (1986), metal pen nibs, gouache, gold leaf, watercolour paper, double-stroke and compressed Italic letterforms, by Martin Jackson. Photo courtesy of the artist.
OPPOSITE *Amor Vincit Omnia* (1993), technical pen, watercolours, 90 lb. hot-pressed watercolour paper, Neuland letterforms, 14 centimetres in height, 11 centimetres in width, by Lindley McDougall. Photo courtesy of the artist.

favoured in the Middle Ages by the monks in the "Scriptoria" or writing rooms of monasteries, where books were made entirely by hand. Although preparing vellum or parchment was an arduous process, these materials were unmatched in their toughness, durability, and quality as a writing surface. The softness and velvety nap of the vellum and parchment responded particularly well to the inks and coloured pigments available at the time.

Books produced in the Scriptoria were rare and very precious not only for their religious content but also because of the lengthy production time in their creation. As many as ten craftsmen could be involved in completing a single book. The most important craftsman was the scribe, who would write the text in the style specific to his Scriptoria. The limner or illuminator embellished the pages with painted illustrations and would decorate letters gilded in silver or gold with the addition of coloured pigments, while the bookbinder bound the finished pages together. The preparation of Medieval illuminated manuscripts was unsurpassed in complexity in the history of the written word. Historical examples which still exist today include the Irish Book of Kells from the eighth century and the Gospels of Lindisfarne from the seventh century. Many modern styles of writing and typefaces have been based upon these old manuscripts.

New lettering styles generally echoed the characteristics of the period in which they were developed. The Roman letterforms were majestic in appearance and beautiful in their proportions. The Bookhand letterforms of the illuminated manuscripts introduced small letters along with capitals. The Gothic letterform was noted for its romantic, angular, ornamental character. The Humanistic and Italic letterforms of the Renaissance period achieved slightly different appearance by introducing a slant in the letters, which were often embellished with the addition of flourishes. The Italic letterforms were more compressed than the others and could be written more quickly. The Italic style has had considerable long-term influence on handwriting and lettering design.

When the printing press was invented in the fifteenth century, the tradition of writing and binding books by hand began to wane. Calligraphy did not disappear altogether, though, for scribes were still required to write unique manuscripts and documents not intended for wide distribution. In addition, calligraphic letterforms continued to influence the appearance of other types of handwritten materials and provided elegant models for the mechanical typefaces used by the early printers.

Producing an expressive arrangement of thick and thin strokes and curved forms requires painstaking skill and considerable manual dexterity. The fluid movement of the letters produced by a skilled calligrapher cannot be matched by a computer.

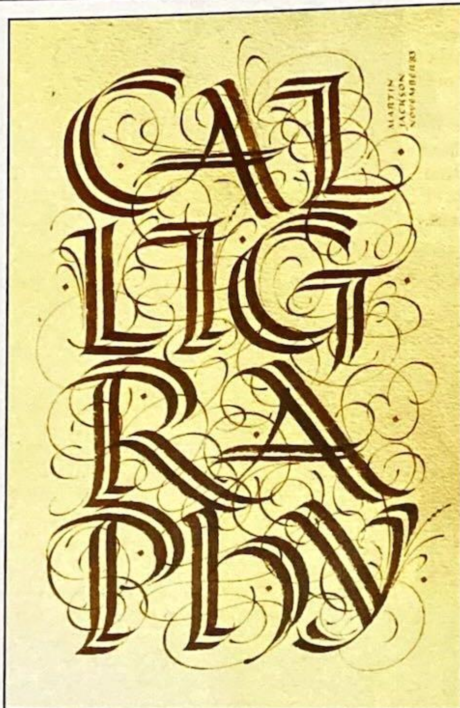
Calligraphy as a Modern Art and Craft

The revival of calligraphy in the twentieth century can be attributed to Edward Johnston of England. Johnston rediscovered the principles of formal penmanship and began exploring writing instruments, their use and preparation. He taught his students that unity, sharpness, and freedom were the essential qualities of formal penmanship. Johnston also established the Society of Scribes and Illuminators in London in 1921, a body of professional calligraphers who continue to produce outstanding ceremonial works. It is a high honour to be elected as a member by the Society.

In the last fifteen years, calligraphy has become increasingly liberal, spontaneous, and adventuresome. One indicator of the vitality of contemporary calligraphy is the large number of international conferences now offered each year. Calligraphy has long been included within commercial graphic design, and practical works for reproduction include bookplates, letterheads, logotypes, wine labels, book and record covers, and greeting card designs. In addition, some of the more skilled calligraphers have designed typefaces widely used today.

Calligraphic letterforms can be produced with a variety of instruments, including metal-edge pens, pointed and chisel-edge brushes, and markers, to name a few. They can be painted, incised, engraved, etched, or printed on many different types of paper, commercial and handmade. Calligraphers love to analyze the form and construction of letters by applying the many tools of the craft. Producing an expressive arrangement of thick and thin strokes and curved forms requires painstaking skill and considerable manual dexterity. The fluid movement of the letters produced by a skilled calligrapher cannot be matched by a computer.

A calligrapher can convey her own words or an author's words in a calligraphic piece. By carefully choosing and arranging letterforms of appropriate weight, spacing, and texture, the calligrapher attempts to convey the unique mood or spirit of the text. The calligrapher's intimate involvement with written words brings the calligraphic piece alive. Since we are all taught to write at an early age, many think calligraphy can be done immediately, without special training. But those who have tried calligraphy will tell you that it's far more difficult than it looks. Dedication and an appreciation of letterform and space, along with a never-ending learning process, are essential in mastering this most difficult art. These factors have been a part of Oriental calligraphy for centuries. Oriental calligraphy places great emphasis on the warming-up exercises, the careful grinding of the ink sticks, and meditation, followed by the spontaneous application of brush to paper. To be able to execute calligraphic forms perfectly, and in a moment's breath, is the practise of an enormous discipline.



was stranded on an desert island and was given a choice of one luxury item to have with him, it would be a calligraphy pen.

Lindley McDougall, the current president of the Bow Valley Calligraphy Guild of Calgary, has been immersed in calligraphy for over eight years. Like Martin, Lindley is self-taught. Although she initially became familiar with calligraphy through books, she credits the classes she took sponsored by the Bow Valley Guild for opening her eyes to the endless design possibilities of calligraphic letterforms. Before this, Lindley, like most people, had thought of calligraphy as little more than "pretty writing."

As a former stained-glass artist, Lindley already had a good understanding of craftsmanship which she could relate to calligraphy. "In stained glass, however, 10 percent of your time is spent on design, with 90 percent of your time going towards doing the craft. With calligraphy," says Lindley, "the reverse is true." In addition to being a writer of articles and letters, Lindley also admits to being a closet poet. So once she began to see calligraphy as a vehicle to revisit authors and poets and bring their writings, as well as her own, to life, it only heightened her interest in it. Calligraphy, she says, has inspired her to explore her creative writing further.

Lindley does most of her expressive work in a form she calls "poem paintings." She feels validated as a calligrapher when she is able to "meld" literature and calligraphy together into a seamless whole. This difficult process is the most creative, satisfying, and adventurous part of her work. Lindley acknowledges that computers have closed the gap by making calligraphic type styles more accessible to people, but she also believes that calligraphy will always be present because it conveys a unique human and artistic quality which computers cannot reproduce.

This past year, Lindley has been actively involved in numerous exhibitions, most notably, "Bookworks '93," a national exhibition of bookworks and gathering of book artists held at Harbourfront in Toronto. She also had two of her calligraphic pieces qualify for "The Art of the Book '93" touring exhibition organized to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the Canadian Bookbinder's and Book Artist's Guild. Lindley sees calligraphy on the verge of a breakthrough as an accepted form of fine art. "The toe is in the water now," she says.

The Best from the West

Two artists from western Canada who possess a genuine passion and talent for calligraphy are Martin Jackson of Vancouver and Lindley McDougall of Calgary.

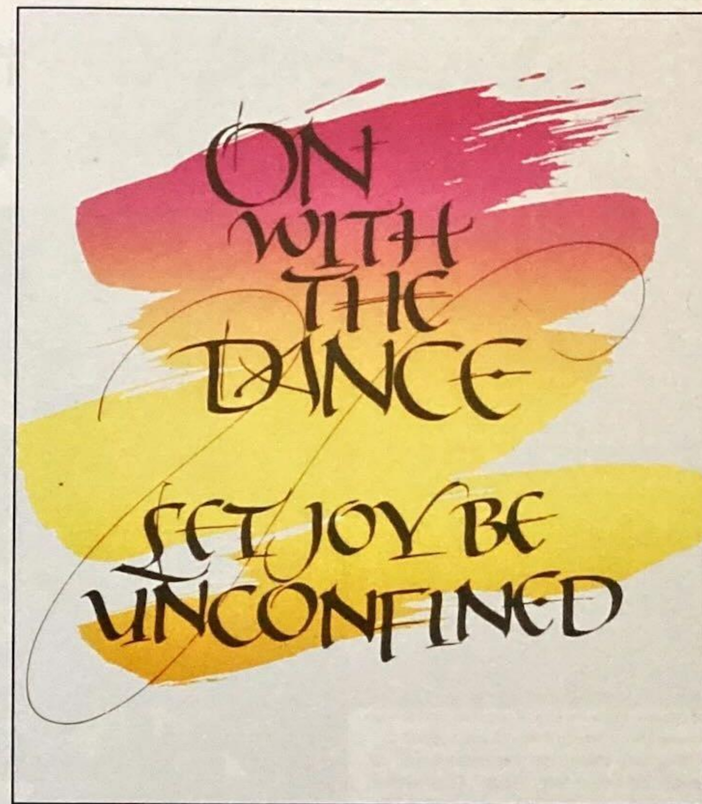
Calligraphy is an all-consuming part of Martin Jackson's life. Martin is a professional calligrapher and commercial artist whose elegant, flourished, Italic letterforms accented with gold gilding testify to his lifelong self-taught discipline in calligraphy. Although Martin is called upon frequently to create unique letterforms for his clients, he says he also has a "need" to make beautiful letters. Even as a boy of fourteen in Sheffield, England, Martin would write in his school notebooks in the Italic style. Advertising agencies and design studios often seek Martin's calligraphic letterforms for logo designs, quotations, special awards, invitations, diplomas, and certificates. These clients appreciate greatly a hand which can convey a unique, emotive feeling. Martin's letterforms can be seen in the Sutton Hill wine label and the Canadian 43-cent, CPR-hotel series postage stamp, among others.

Although Martin is aware, as most calligraphers are, that computers offer lettering styles similar to calligraphy, he feels that the human and personal element is lost by using a computer. Even when writing a personal letter, Martin will use a calligraphic lettering style because he believes in transmitting a warmth and personal feeling in his correspondence. When I spoke to Martin late last year, he shared an interesting anecdote regarding computers. A design firm in Vancouver had experienced a burglary and all of their computers had been stolen. When Martin was contacted by the distraught proprietor to do a calligraphic assignment, he was told that work had come to a standstill because the artists only knew how to work with a computer, not with pencil and paper. A sign of our technological times.

The calligrapher's intimate involvement with written words brings the calligraphic piece alive.

Martin is an active member of the Westcoast Calligraphy Society in North Vancouver, British Columbia. He also teaches workshops across the country and notes that his students both inspire him and keep him on his toes. Martin says that if he

RIGHT *On with the Dance* (1991), Mitchell pen nibs, brush, Chinese ink, free-form capitals, printed on three-colour "split-fountain" background, 20 centimetres in width, 20 centimetres in height, by Lindley McDougall. Photo courtesy of the artist.
OPPOSITE *Calligraphy* (1983), home-made bamboo pen, Chinese stick ink, 90 lb. cold-pressed watercolour paper, double-stroke Italic letterforms with flourishes, by Martin Jackson. Photo courtesy of the artist.



A Calligrapher's Guide to Guilds

For those interested in calligraphy, there are numerous guilds scattered across the country where information, ideas, and enthusiasm for the craft can be exchanged. Here in Saskatchewan, calligraphy is alive and well in communities such as Regina, Saskatoon, North Battleford, Melfort, and, most recently, Prince Albert. None of these guilds is older than eight years and most have between a dozen and two dozen members. The guilds include all levels of skill from the hobbyist to those working more seriously at calligraphy on a part- or full-time basis. The highlight for all of the guilds is the workshops which usually take place over a weekend. These may involve a fellow member introducing a new technique or an out-of-province instructor who has been invited to share her special interests and expertise with guild members. In addition to teaching the mechanics of letterforms, instructors may cover topics such as design, layout, tools, and techniques. Areas of interest taught to complement calligraphy include papermaking, bookbinding, marbling paper, and hand-embossing.

Once novice calligraphers have grasped the basics and have had an opportunity to view professional calligraphy, they begin to see where their efforts can lead and are inspired to continue learning. Once this happens, the allure of calligraphy has taken hold. Calligraphers who do not belong to a guild will make the effort to travel to workshops or conferences near or far to learn new skills. There are many qualified instructors and an abundance of knowledge available to calligraphers in Canada, the United States, and abroad, once they become committed to the training.

The guilds in Saskatchewan are small when compared with those of our neighbours, Albert and Manitoba. The Bow Valley Calligraphy Guild in Calgary is an outstanding example of a club which has grown to become a very professional and successful organization. The Guild, which celebrated its tenth anniversary in 1991, has over 500 committed members and is registered as a non-profit organization.

Much of the success of the Bow Valley Calligraphy Guild rests with Betty Locke, the original driving force behind its creation. It was Betty's love of letters and unlimited enthusiasm which inspired those she instructed initially, through the Department of Leisure Learning in Calgary, to pursue their interest in calligraphy. A strong interest group was then formed, with many other talented and dedicated calligraphers joining, and a published newsletter eventually evolved from two to forty pages. The Bow Valley Calligraphy Guild's strength in numbers is evident in the international calligraphers they are able to sponsor for workshops in Calgary. With exciting projects such as the writing of calligraphic names for 25,000 certificates for the 1988 Winter Olympics and the annual Devonian Gardens Show of calligraphy by its members, the Bow Valley Calligraphy Guild will no doubt continue to maintain a high profile in its community.

Envoi

Calligraphy is here to stay despite modern technology. As with any craft of an older time, calligraphy is being kept alive by those fondly interested in its value and beauty. It is difficult to say whether calligraphy will attain a higher profile in Saskatchewan. Certainly, we can learn a lot from successful organizations like the Bow Valley Calligraphy Guild. With the easy availability of a wide variety of high-quality tools and materials today, calligraphy is exploring new horizons as an expressive art form and is bringing new life to historical letterforms. For those presently involved in calligraphy, the allure will not diminish for the love of letters. ❑

Kristina Komendant has been practising calligraphy full-time since 1990, when she started her home-based business, Kalligraphia by Kristina. She specializes in poems and quotations, business card and logo designs, and indoor signage. Her most challenging projects to date have been an Estonian family tree for her parents, the Polish family tree mentioned above, and a logo design for the Forestry Farm Zoo commissioned by the Saskatoon Zoological Society in 1992. This is Kristina's first article for *The Craft Factor*.

Viewers, Owners, and Objects

By Sandra Flood

In October 1993, I went to the Institute for Contemporary Canadian Craft's inaugural symposium, Making and Metaphor: A Discussion of Meaning in Contemporary Craft, at the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Hull, Québec. I was giving a paper on my research into how, why, and what a sample of nine contemporary craft institutions in Britain are collecting. I found myself in a group of three presenters under the heading "Craft and the Museum." I was particularly looking forward to the third paper in the group. By John Vollmer, a museum consultant and freelance curator, the paper promised to explain "through a series of case studies . . . why it is that crafts, unlike other classes of objects, are able to evoke an immediate response from the public." This statement interested me deeply. It was a view I had heard expressed in relation to craft a number of times from a variety of sources, and it was a view about which I was, I am, sceptical.

For one thing, the statement is full of undefined terms, like "crafts." What crafts? All crafts—contemporary and historical, folk and popular and elite, functional and art craft? What are the "other classes of objects" (in this context in museums)? Which "public"—everyone from stockcar drivers to the members of the local quilt guild? And what is it in craft that might "evoke an immediate response," and why? These were, in fact, a series of questions I had been brooding on for some time.

Any time spent hanging out in craft exhibitions would refute the argument that "crafts . . . evoke an immediate response from the public." Over the last year, I have spent a lot of time in museums and galleries looking at craft. After a while, I began watching other viewers. I watched their butterfly flutter from one object to the next, briefly alighting, faces blank, eyes glazed, come and gone before I had time to read the first brief label or, more rarely and usually in pairs, intently examining each object, pointing and discussing. I must admit that my own interest in the work was not always at the high level I anticipated.

John Vollmer started his case studies with traditional quilts and talked about the viewers recalling quilts they had encountered, owned, made, which in turn evoked anecdotes of their family history and personal experiences. He moved swiftly on to contemporary art craft, works by Dorothy Caldwell, Paul Mathieu, Sarah Quinton, and others. But with these works he did not tell us how viewers had responded; instead, he launched into a descriptive appraisal inviting us, a knowledgable audience involved with contemporary craft through making, research, teaching, or curating, to appreciate what he saw in formal and symbolic terms as significant. Vollmer did not explain this dramatic change in focus from viewer to works. What he appeared to be describing was two different sets of work which talked to different publics in different terms. And this is so. Traditional quilts come out of the folk tradition; that is, they are made by ordinary people without formal training in crafts and are intended for use by ordinary people. The patterns and symbols used are familiar to most people; quilts arise out of common experiences and celebrations; their purpose falls within a narrow range which is both useful and decorative. The contemporary craft we were shown was elite craft, art craft, made by highly-trained professional artists; the work was intended to be seen in formal terms and its source was private, individual, not necessarily easily understood, and even with a specialist audience Vollmer felt the need to interpret.

Craft, then, is a vague term which covers a wide range of objects coming out of different

RIGHT *Hole in the Sky* (1987), wax resist discharge, 1.2 metres in width, 1.2 metres in height, by Dorothy Caldwell. Photo by Dan Myer.

OPPOSITE *Crazy Quilt* (c. 1885), silk and velvet patches, embroidery. Collection of the Saskatchewan Western Development Museum. Photo by Garry Hayes.

traditions and talking to different audiences. My research showed that contemporary craft collections in museums were mainly of elite craft. As a category, elite craft was separated physically and intellectually from folk craft (or traditional craft), which appeared to be seen as rural rather than urban, reinforcing the perception of contemporary craft as divorced from traditional (and working class) practices. Contemporary popular craft, tied to the dominant culture, spread through commercial means (magazines, bought patterns, kits, etc.), and subject to more rapidly changing fashions, was completely neglected, although it was present in historical collections.

"Other classes of objects" in museums can be anything from a dinosaur skeleton to "Visions of Venice from Turner to Monet," to an interactive, working model of a television studio, all of which from my observations evoke high levels of immediate response from their audiences. The clue to the real designation of "other classes of objects" is in the way in which craft works are exhibited as "objects of contemplation," with minimal information, in the same way as paintings, sculpture, prints, and drawings, the elite arts. Therefore, one must conclude that the comparison is between elite craft and elite art, with the former seen as more accessible than the latter possibly because of its references to the functional and the domestic and possibly because its prices are seen, in comparison to prices for painting and sculpture, as still within the reach of a wider section of the affluent rather than only the very wealthy.

The assumption that a museum or gallery craft exhibition is aimed at a broad public may be unfounded. As part of my research, I asked nine British contemporary craft curators whom they thought their audiences were. The primary audience they met, those who came knocking on their door, were "people from the design colleges and schools . . . not average members of the public" and researchers! Beyond that one curator supposed that you "have to have an interest in craft to come and look . . . an elite knowledgable audience." "I don't think," said another, "local people come in to see that [contemporary ceramics]. I don't think they would understand it anyway." What is particularly interesting about this last remark is that the museum is situated in a long-established centre of the ceramics industry and many "local people" are directly or indirectly involved in ceramics production. The remark is a measure of the gulf between ordinary people and contemporary art craft, a denial that the craft object speaks to all. It is also a statement of curatorial expectation that people come to view having knowledge and interest gained outside the exhibition, that the institution is not there to actively promote either.

Finally, what might it be in craft which could evoke a unique and immediate response or, to turn it around, what do people see in handcrafted objects? And are the things which concern the maker the same as the things which concern the viewer or owner? For example, is it important for the viewer or owner that an object is made by hand, with the implication that it carries the imprint of the maker, the idiosyncrasies of the maker's vision and manipulation of materials, even the fame of the maker's name? How important is it that the object is unique, novel even? How important are its formal qualities, the appeal of its shape, texture, colour, and decoration? How important is the degree of technical virtuosity, intricacy, and finish? How important is function and domestic or personal scale to our possibly unique response to craft?

It is surprising how little we know about what things mean to people. In *The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self,* two researchers in the United States, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton, looked at the reasons behind the things people chose to surround themselves with in their homes, things which were especially cherished and important to them. These, of course, covered a wide range of objects, but included among them were a surprisingly high number of "works of art," nearly a quarter of all objects chosen. "Works of art" was a loose category of two and three dimensional objects which included everything from original works by major artists to inexpensive reproductions and mass-produced replicas, to work by family members, including children.

For the great majority of people, the "works of art" were not important because of their formal qualities—their beauty, originality, or complexity. They were important because of their relationship to the life history of the owner and as reminders of friends, relatives, and past events. John Vollmer's account of the viewers' reactions to quilts and the extension of their initial responses into personal recollections parallels this. "Works of art" were treasured as gifts from

friends and family, were bought to mark significant occasions, acted as mementos and souvenirs, provoked recollections; as actual or potential heirlooms, they spoke of ties to people and places. They were chosen to complete or enhance the decor. For the upper middle class, who tended to have more originals (for cultural rather than economic reasons), they also could act as status symbols. Respondents mentioned the personal social context of art works much more often than their aesthetic qualities.

Enjoyment seems to be the major sort of experience, the evocation of good times past, the stimulation of pleasant thoughts. When the qualities of a work itself were mentioned, "craft" was a major factor, although whether this related to technical skill or handmade or both is unclear. The utilitarian aspect of objects was one of the least often mentioned, less often than "style," its decorative or fashion aspect. In addition, the researchers found that there was enormous flexibility in the way people attached meanings to "works of art" and the meanings they derived from them. In other words, viewers and owners brought their own experience, knowledge, and intentions to objects and translated them, within certain limitations, into their own terms. The conventional meanings of symbols and images did not necessarily obtain.

It is interesting to speculate what part formal design qualities played for the eighty-four percent of respondents who did not mention aesthetic characteristics, whether aesthetic qualities are implicit in its being a "work of art," whether there is neither a vocabulary nor a tradition of articulating aesthetic characteristics, or whether there truly is a blindness to formal qualities. The researchers themselves were surprised at how seldom aesthetic qualities were mentioned, but Rochberg-Halton in an earlier paper, "The Meaning of Personal Art Objects," suggested that "art works" can be distinguished from other cherished possessions by the fact that the communicative significance comes from the qualities of the object itself, suggesting that at some perhaps unconscious level formal aesthetic qualities are important.

In *Beyond the Glass Case*, British researcher Nick Merriman also found a high value placed on family links, but among people who went to museums on a frequent or regular basis beauty in an object took precedence. Whether the object was well made was of relatively little interest to this group, but it was of more interest to people who generally did not visit museums. This may have some significance where technical skill and knowledge of materials are defining characteristics of craft.

There is a major difference between an owner and a viewer, even if viewing may feed into or at least allow one to fantasize about owning. The viewer has not selected the objects. They are chosen by another, often anonymous, for reasons often obscure and unarticulated, and are presented to be admired as objects of value and interest with-

If there is any special appeal of craft to a wide public, I believe it comes out of this wide experience of making. Craft is truly an art of the people in a way that fine art has not been.

out any guide as to why they are to be valued and in what lies their interest. The viewer is unnaturally distanced, unable to hold or use or view over time the object, which greatly changes one's perception of it.

Knowledge about objects comes in two ways, through formal education and through making. An enormous number of people have experienced craft making as a leisure activity. Two of the nine contemporary craft curators I interviewed ran vigorous workshop and education programs in conjunction with exhibitions. One described an exhibition of contemporary chairs and rag rugs which included a weaving demonstration providing hands-on experience for members of the public. The exhibition was situated in a small shopping mall during the summer festival in a port city. "It was incredibly successful," the curator noted, "[attracting] loads of people who had never been to a museum . . . a lot of amateur woodworkers, people who did a bit of weaving at home, rag rugging is a navy tradition so a lot of men who'd done rag rugging."

If there is any special appeal of craft to a wide public, I believe it comes out of this wide experience of making. Craft is truly an art of the people in a way that fine art has not been. In the past, and the present, professional skilled artisans have made a variety of objects for their working class communities, for the middle classes, and for the wealthy. As part of the domestic economy or as hobbyists, amateur craftspeople, particularly women, of all classes have produced work of the highest order. It seems that many of the things that are of particular concern in contemporary elite craft—a heavy dependence on formal aesthetic qualities, private meaning, uniqueness, novelty, technical virtuosity, the maker's imprint—are subsidiary or of no interest to owners of craft and perhaps to the wider public. The meaning that the maker or artist intends may not be what the viewer reads, and what is important in the work to the maker may be of no account to the viewer or owner. It is possible that at the functional end of the craft continuum, objects are both more open and more limited in the range of intent and interpretation for both maker and viewer. At the art end of the continuum, the meaning of the object may be more obscure and may limit the way in which the viewer or owner can integrate it into his or her personal or social context. ❑

Sandra Flood is the former editor of *The Craft Factor* and has a Master's degree in Art Gallery and Museum Studies from the University of Manchester, England.

Saskatchewan Handcraft Festival

Craft Market
and craft show
Dimensions '94

Friday, July 15
10:00 AM to 8:00 PM
Saturday, July 16
10:00 AM to 8:00 PM
Sunday, July 17
12:00 NOON to 6:00 PM

Admission:
$3.25 for a 3-day pass
Children under 12 free
Seniors' Sunday: $1.75
Free admission to Dimensions '94

Battleford Arena & Alex Dillabough Centre
Battleford, Saskatchewan
A PRESENTATION OF THE SASKATCHEWAN CRAFT COUNCIL
Supported by Saskatchewan Lotteries, the Saskatchewan Arts Board, and the Town of Battleford.

Plundering Art

By Allison Muri

Appropriation, in the vocabulary of postmodern art, is a familiar and admired technique celebrating wit and erudition; however, it is also integral to the term *cultural appropriation*, an offensive act of theft often resulting in the exploitation and marginalization of its victims. Between these two extremes is a vast and murky expanse ranging from entertaining influences to borrowing images or ideas to outright stealing. The question for the artist and artisan then becomes, when does appropriation become plagiarism? When does it cease to be commentary or creative exploration and begin to be piracy and theft?

Contemporary art has been constructed from the images of other people's pasts: the tradition of mainstream art is appropriation. A general survey of art history provides ample evidence of this tendency. Our art history texts discuss the importance of the *kouros*, a form of figurative sculpture which the ancient Greeks appropriated and adapted from the Egyptian tradition. We learn about the Greeks partially through the Roman appropriation of Grecian gods and arts. The world of the Greeks, we come to understand, is important to our own artistic tradition since their mythic figures were during the Renaissance and are today so much appreciated and appropriated in literature and the arts. "Primitive" art, of course, gained significance in Europe in the twentieth century when Picasso and others appropriated masks and sculptures, bringing about a transformation of Western art.

Not far removed from these past appropriations, the trends of what we label the "postmodern" world lean toward an art of fragments, of collage. According to current theory, we perceive our world in fragments. We collect bits and pieces; we reconstruct a whole. Authoritative critics argue that our texts, our art, our very lives, are merely reconstructions of things already said, already constructed, already done—as if this intertextuality is something new to the twentieth century. Andy Warhol is esteemed for commandeering the images of other creators: the famous Campbell's soup can becomes emblematic of *Warhol's* art, *Warhol's* genius; a usurped photograph of Marilyn Monroe is forever linked with his name. Taking images directly from the media that define our culture, from television programs, advertising, Hollywood films, fashion magazines, and so on, has become conventional procedure in contemporary art.

Appropriated images, however, are never torn cleanly from their original contexts, and the artist who appropriates always risks appropriating experience as well as image. Appropriation of experience can include the relatively benign borrowing of techniques and materials as well as the more damaging expropriation and re-presentation of the body, of traditions, myths, or spirituality, or of entire cultures. In this context, the appropriation of images can represent a distressing trespass. Appropriation can also be an act of silencing, and it can be an act of exploitation.

Although the victims of this form of theft are rarely offered compensation or payment, artists do make money from appropriating other people's art, other people's lives. In most cases of gender or culture appropriation, one side, the privileged "artist" who interprets the experience of an "other" from a position of power and

ABOVE *Do Not Touch: Genuine Indian Artifact* (1992), oil paint, porcupine quills, caribou hide, wool fabric, 57 centimetres in height, by Sheila Orr. From the Saskatchewan Craft Council exhibition "Traditional Images/Contemporary Reflections."

prestige, has made money. The other has simply lost—these people have lost their own voices, because someone more powerful is doing the speaking, and they have lost their own images of themselves, because someone more powerful is doing the representing and the interpreting.

For example, the twentieth-century European current of art known as "Primitivism" was based on the appropriation and reinterpretation of African and Oceanic sculpture. Many critics have noted the terrible irony that the original images have been presented as historical artifacts, i.e., museum pieces, while the images re-presented by artists such as Gauguin have been revered as fine art, i.e., gallery pieces.

The aboriginal peoples of North America have had their distinctive traditions, myths, and sacred objects severed from cultural context, appropriated, and interpreted (often misinterpreted) by the dominant, non-aboriginal society. Europeans confiscated indigenous cultural objects, robbed the images of their inherent ceremonial or spiritual functions and meanings, and distorted them into merely visual arts and crafts.

These seemingly disparate historical references converge on the single topic of discussion here, appropriation in the contemporary arts and the artist's responsibility. These acts of cultural theft or appropriated experience are not unfortunate and isolated incidents from our past: artists continue to profit by stealing cultural images.

In 1991, the Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs issued a bulletin warning against selling objects misrepresented as "Indian" or Inuit arts and crafts. Dorothy Thomas, Manager of the Wanuskewin Gift Shop at Wanuskewin Heritage Park, north of Saskatoon, relates that "Indian art" happens to be in vogue now and that it is not uncommon for non-aboriginal artists to attempt to sell items such as dream-catchers. The immediate question is, why? Why would someone who has no personal experience of the symbolism or meaning or cultural context of such objects want to make them? In many cases the answer is, I suspect, money. If "Indian art" is popular and saleable, then there will always be some people who will want to make it regardless of their ancestry.

Both Dorothy Thomas and Carolyn Acoose, an instructor and researcher of Indian Art History at Saskatchewan Indian Federated College in Regina, stress the important fact that First Nations peoples do not believe that art can be separated from life. Thomas mentions further that she does not know of any word for "art" in the languages of First Nations peoples. Copying traditional images to create a style of art which functions merely to hang on walls, to accent the colour of the couch, or to gather dust on shelves, seems to be a further degradation of the original object.

A similar act is crafting figures in the form of simplified and diminished (often doll-like) racial or cultural stereotypes. An artist who, for example, represents the clichéd image of a Canadian Eskimo driving a dog sled risks misrepresenting and distorting the lived experience of contemporary Inuit people. In her catalogue essay for the exhibition "Traditional Images/Contemporary Reflections," Carolyn Acoose describes this method of appropriation in the context of photography:

> The early [white] photographers typically represented First Nations people as a stoic, vanishing race whose way of life had remained unchanged for thousands of years. Such romanticized depictions, however, clearly contradicted the existing reality, for by the time the photographs were taken, First Nations people across North America were wearing European-tailored clothing and living in European-designed housing.

In conversation, Acoose frankly inquires, "Why do these so-called mainstream arts have to refer to First Nations cultures? Don't they have anything in their own cultures that they can refer to?" She explains further that First Nations peoples are "sick to the eyeballs of people interpreting their culture—it's just another way of co-opting the Indian people."

But how do we know when cultural quotations are inappropriate? Is it necessary to revise our perceptions of what makes art? In 1992, a conference entitled Cultural Kleptomania was held in Saskatoon to discuss the issue of cultural appropriation. In her report on the conference published in the photography magazine *Blackflash,* Cheryl Meszaros notes that the participants advocated change:

> Cultural Kleptomania suggested that perhaps we (the primarily white audience) need to learn . . . how to listen, how to engage in acts of healing rather than speaking through our poststructuralist methodologies, our deconstructions and our revisions—white methodologies for white art groupies like me. In the words of Janisse Browning, . . . "Each of us should be learning how we can best contribute to the process of attaining self-determination, community empowerment, and cultural autonomy for disenfranchised people . . . especially if that means stepping aside to make room for the cultural expression of those who have been affected by racial, class, and sexual domination most directly and painfully."

The panel members quoted by Meszaros variously stressed that the artist's creation or definition of the "other" is clearly problematic.

In an article entitled "Other: From Noun to Verb" (1992), Nathaniel Mackey discusses the appropriation and commoditization of "black" music by "white" entrepreneurs in the recording industry and the exploitation of the black musicians who developed big band jazz. Mackey identifies two distinct modes of interaction with other cultures, one positive and one negative:

> Artistic othering has to do with innovation, invention, and change, upon which cultural health and diversity depend and thrive. Social othering has to do with power, exclusion, and privilege, the centralizing of a norm against which otherness is measured, meted out, marginalized.

One example of artistic othering might be Bob Boyer's painted quilt, *The Batoche Centennial,* included in the Saskatchewan Craft Council exhibition "Traditional Images/Contemporary Reflections." The piece is comprised of a slightly water-stained quilt splashed occasionally

with paint, on which the phrase "O Canada our home and native land" is painted and partially obscured. Four Union Jacks stand sentinel around the words. The word *home* in the central panel is encased in a red heart, and four panels off the corners of this central square depict sawlike instruments spattered with red paint. Boyer seems to question our perceptions of what Canada is, what home is, and perhaps most important, what the pioneer tradition (recalled by the act of quilt-making) really means. He also implies that the realm of domesticity represented by the quilt is besmirched, full of pain, violent.

Quilts have gained contemporary status through women's reclaiming their traditional work as a significant creative art. The quilt represents "spinsters" crafting their own meaningful place in the previously male-dominated world of art. One might wonder, then, at this male appropriation of woman's traditional craft, especially one that is currently trendy and therefore more marketable. Boyer, however, makes no pretence about his piece: it is not presented as a carefully crafted "quilt"; it is a comment, rather, on what "quilt" represents for Boyer. Accordingly, the title makes reference to the artist's position in the world relative to the traditional quilt.

Lee Brady's 1988 exhibition of stained glass sculpture entitled *Sundance Teaching,* however, hovered very close to Mackey's definition of social othering. This tendency was noted in Matthew Teitelbaum's review:

> Punctuated by moments of formal achievement, *Sundance Teaching* nonetheless retained the feel of an outsider's humanism. . . . Brady's inanimate forms underlined the limitations of art created from outside both personal experience, and a lived understanding of the history and tradition of its subject. . . . It won't do to mythologize or romanticize the past.

Brady relates that the images in his show were influenced by Hyemeyohsts Storm's book *Seven Arrows,* as well as the "Plains Indian philosophies of harmony, peace, living with Nature." Carolyn Acoose, however, comments on "a certain amount of arrogance on the part of outside cultures to take images and adopt them for their own use without understanding them." She cautions that merely reading about a culture does not impart full knowledge or understanding. "There are things written by First Nations people," says Acoose, "that are not accepted within the community because they transgress certain boundaries."

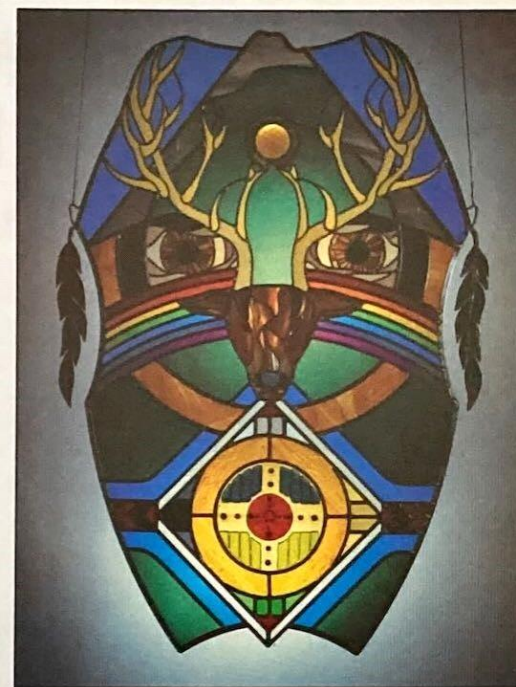
Brady acknowledges that the show involved difficulties. "The review," he says, "helped me to recognize the problems I was having with the entire project." He continues:

> It wasn't necessarily the right thing. . . . Maybe it would have been better if I had showed more of myself, where I stand in relation to those images. There wasn't enough of me in there. . . . I live on this land. I was born on the prairies, so the stories of the Plains Indians were really close to me because they were dealing with elements from nature I'm familiar with. I felt close to it in that way. But I didn't live through their own background, I didn't experience those stories from within the culture.

But Brady emphasizes that he continues to work with certain imagery:

> I do not avoid Native imagery. I am presently working on a two-moon design system; I'm not going to avoid any influence that comes my way. . . . What I did was not entirely their interests, not entirely their style (for example, masks with eyes). I was using their imagery. But you have to use your integrity about how you're using the imagery. . . . It's all part of becoming closer to one another. It's important to try to understand other cultures.

In contrast, Acoose emphasizes that "symbols should be used only in the particular way that they were meant to be used. Some symbols have a sacred or holy connotation to them." She argues that using these symbols is highly disrespectful and "shows the type of insensitivity displayed ever since the first explorers set foot on North America."



ABOVE *Golden Elk Mask* (1987), lead came, stained and fused glass, by Lee Brady. Photo courtesy of the artist.
OPPOSITE *The Batoche Centennial* (1985), oil, acrylic, enamel, quilted fabric, 157 centimetres in height, by Bob Boyer.

So the question remains: what is the artist's responsibility? Can Lee Brady be accused of disrespect because of his attempt to demonstrate his respect? Where do we draw the line, if we choose to draw one? In answer to this question, Brady responds, "I would never try to replicate something from a culture and present it as my own." Carolyn Acoose replies to the same query, "If you think it's going to offend somebody's religion or culture, then don't do it." Probably the simplest answer and, paradoxically, perhaps the most difficult for the Canadian multicultural artist, comes from artist Bob Boyer: "'Why don't people find their own cultural roots instead of borrowing others'?'" (quoted by Meszaros).

It would be easy to conclude, rather simplistically, that we should follow these rules and all will be well, everyone will be happy, no one hurt. Realistically we know that such a scenario is unlikely to occur. However, despite such customary refrains as the necessity of "artistic freedom," it is time for individual artists to give at least some consideration to the implications and consequences of their plundering art. ❑

Allison Muri is a freelance writer from Saskatoon and has been a sessional lecturer in English at the University of Saskatchewan and the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College. Her article, "Paganism and Christianity in Kavanagh's *The Long Hunger,*" was published in the *Canadian Journal of Irish Studies* in 1990. An aspiring creative writer, Allison had her unpublished play *Pelicans* produced for the Saskatoon Fringe Festival in 1991.

Linda Forbes: Stained and Etched Glass

By Jean Fahlman

"I have found what I want to do—glass. I can go on until I die working in glass, trying new things," says Linda Forbes, a Regina glass artist. Forbes makes stained glass panels and does glass etching using a sandblaster and hopes some day to add glass painting and glass blowing to her repertoire of techniques.

When Forbes started working in glass 14 years ago, she thought of it as a creative hobby, but when the hobby began to pay for itself, she bought more equipment and it became a business as well as an artistic outlet. "Now with the economy the way it is," says Forbes, "we need the money. In practical terms I look on it as a business, but in my heart it is not really a business." Though she would continue to work in glass even if her work was not selling, Forbes admits that it is satisfying to know that people like her designs enough to buy them.

Forbes spends an average of eight hours a day working in her home studio, but during busy seasons prior to a show or the annual pre-Christmas sales she sometimes has to work sixteen hours a day. She says that she is always anxious to see the finished product but enjoys every step of the process of creating it.

Approximately eighty percent of Forbes' business is stained-glass items, while twenty percent is commissioned etched-glass items, often business logos on windows or door insets.

Forbes says she has faced the hard fact that most artists cannot make a living from sales of their work and that people generally do not consider art as "real" work. But she admits with a laugh that she enjoys glass art so much that it doesn't seem like work to her either, regardless of the long hours.

"This [glass work] is what I do all day. It would be nice to live as an artist, but most people can't afford that, so we have to produce what people want to buy. At craft sales people often will not pay what the piece should bring. This is an expensive and time-consuming art, but people think if you enjoy doing it it isn't really work that should be paid for," Forbes says with a faint show of exasperation. She also notes, however, that people are generally appreciative of art even if they don't buy it.

Forbes' involvement with glass began while she was living in Uranium City and looking for something creative to do. She says that she has worked in a variety of media, including watercolour, pottery, quilting, needlework of all kinds, and porcelain doll making. It is glass which has captured her complete attention, but she points out that having a multi-media craft interest can be an advantage. She has found, for example, that putting fabric quilt pieces together is quite similar to constructing stained-glass lamp shades and windows.

Forbes began working in glass by picking up a craft book and plunging in, using tools from the garage. "I didn't even know there were special tools available," she says. "I just used pliers and whatever we had. An emery stone knife sharpener was used as a glass grinder. When we moved to Regina and I found the right tools it was like Mecca, but like starting all over again."

Forbes designs her own patterns on graph paper, innovating to please the customer's taste and exploring the inherent limitations of the medium. "I go for the more traditional design ideas and tend to combine subtle colours and clear textures so the pattern speaks for itself," says Forbes.

Forbes thinks that the contemporary explosion of craft and art is wonderful. Though she admits there is some confusion about defining craft in relation to art, Forbes doesn't feel any resentment when someone calls her jewellery boxes a craft. She says that she does make a lot of them, though each one is different.

"I could not live without doing something with my hands," says Forbes. "I am a creative person. I don't care if I am working with

LEFT *Byron* (1992), stained and bevelled glass, copper foil, 44.5 centimetres in diameter, recycled lamp stand, by Linda Forbes
BELOW *Seahorse* (1991), stained glass, glass globs, copper foil, by Linda Forbes, from a design by Glassmith Studios, Winnipeg.
OPPOSITE Linda Forbes working on a commissioned lamp shade. Photo by Gary Robins, Available Light.

glass, upholstering a sofa, or baking bread, I just want to create with my hands. I am also a frugal person, so a lot of what I do is done out of necessity. The more you do, the less you are afraid to try something. I make things I can use, things I can live with. Glass may look like a luxury item, but there is practical application when used for a bathroom window, a door to let more light in, and everyone uses lamps." Forbes displayed her "frugal" nature by showing me a stunning lamp shade attached to a recycled antique brass base she took off "a really ugly lamp."

"I take pride in what I do, and if someone doesn't fall in love immediately with something, I advise them not to take it. I can make them exactly what they want," says Forbes. Although she does her best work when she is designing to please herself, Forbes notes that sometimes she has to compromise her own colour sense to meet the demands of her customers: "The customer decides. I will make what they want. If you make a quality piece at a decent price, you will create your own market. Those who don't will fall by the wayside. That is the way of all business. The customer is important."

Forbes is well-known now in Regina and regularly accepts commissioned work, such as the four foot by four foot stained glass panel she designed, produced, and installed in a Regina home. Forbes also does restorations of old leaded windows or works of art. She says that restorations provide a learning experience as well as a technical challenge, because she has to research the background of each piece while she is repairing it. Prior to replacing the stained-glass windows in an old Eaton package home, for example, Forbes had never heard of those homes. "There is always more to learn," Forbes points out. "It would be boring if there wasn't."

Forbes still occasionally completes prototype designs which don't meet her exacting standards. She used to wonder what to do with them, because she refused to sell inferior pieces, yet she didn't like to simply discard them. She put some pieces out by the garbage one day and they vanished. Now she puts her discards by the garbage and they are gone within the day or she gives them away. "One neighbour admitted she was taking them and thinks they are great. One neighbour is using a lampshade which got broken, but she turns the flattened side to the wall," Forbes says.

Forbes' best-selling items are smaller pieces such as jewellery boxes and sun catchers with pressed flowers between bevelled glass. Small stained-glass windows are also popular. Large-scale commissions are generally the most profitable, but they are not always available. "A lot of artists are not good marketers. I don't really enjoy the selling aspect of my art," Forbes admits.

In addition to attending the major craft shows in Regina, Saskatoon, and Moose Jaw, and the odd smaller show, Forbes rents space in the Strathdee Centre in Regina. She says that she doesn't often put her work into retail stores because the mark up puts the work out of a reasonable price range.

Although the province boasts a large number of skilled glass artists, Forbes says that a lot of major commissions are still awarded to out of province artists and firms: "There are a lot of glass artists, male and female, who are capable of doing those big jobs, but perhaps they are not well-known to the public."

Forbes holds a degree in education and taught school before becoming a full-time glass artist. Her background in education served her well when she taught glass work at the Neil Balkwill Centre. "The more people who know the skill involved in a craft," Forbes says, "the more people who will appreciate the work. I strongly feel that all artistic skills should be shared. There is nothing more satisfying than a hobby." ❑

Jean Fahlman is a freelance writer with a strong interest in crafts. She is President of the Weyburn Writer's Group and serves on a committee of the Saskatchewan Writer's Guild. She lives in Griffin, Saskatchewan.

Making and Metaphor

BY SUSAN CLARK

Imagine a lovely party in a big white wonderful warehouse filled to the brim with contemporary art exhibited so you can walk around, drink in hand, and closely examine every piece! The location was the Canada Council Art Bank. The occasion was the opening reception for the Institute for Contemporary Craft's inaugural symposium, Making and Metaphor: A Discussion of Meaning in Contemporary Craft, held in Ottawa on the weekend before the 1993 Canadian federal election. Author and broadcaster Margaret Visser had just delivered the symposium's keynote address, entitled "The Language of Things," and I was looking forward to an entire weekend of stimulating presentations and informal conversations about craft.

The conference brochure had promised that the conference would "provide a public forum for scholars, museum and gallery curators, educators, writers, and professional artists from across the country to address a range of issues surrounding the phenomenon of craftsmanship in the late twentieth century and its place within the broader context of material culture." The Institute had put out a call for abstracts for proposed papers from anyone interested earlier in the year, offering free travel to the symposium for those whose papers were selected.

Of the eighteen presenters and respondents from across Canada, seven were university teachers, five were museum administrators, one was a Doctoral student, two were Master's students, one had just completed a Master's degree, and one was a craftsperson with an MFA. (This last was Paul Mathieu, who was in Japan at the time and so had arranged to have another craftsperson and scholar read his paper. Saskatchewan audiences will have a chance to hear Mathieu at the Beyond the Visual conference to be held in Regina in March.) Roughly speaking, only about four or five of the eighteen were very active craftspeople, people who share with me the dreams of creating, the ecstasy and deep frustration of working with materials, and so on.

Only one presenter, Michele Hardy, a Clothing and Textiles graduate student from the University of Alberta, showed slides of her own work. She spoke of craft as a way of knowing that is experiential, intuitive, and aesthetic, as well as intellectual. Former editor of *The Craft Factor*, Sandra Flood, who had recently completed studies towards a Master's degree in Art Gallery and Museum Studies at the University of Manchester, England, presented a paper entitled "Museum Collection of Contemporary Craft in Britain."

The Institute for Contemporary Canadian Craft is a non-profit organization committed to furthering "the understanding of the history, practice, and value of the creative

production of handmade objects in Canada." The symposium, as the Institute's inaugural project, was definitely in line with its philosophical commitment, but perhaps too ambitious. The program was too broad for one weekend, though I can understand the desire to bring a group of participants from all across Canada up to a certain level of knowledge so that the Institute can begin working at its major project objective, which is "to break through the traditionally informed audience boundary and reach a new audience."

Many of the conference sessions were fascinating, but I will concentrate on just two: John E. Vollmer's "Encounters with Narrative" and the closing summary by Marjorie M. Halpin. The first was of strong personal interest to me because I work with fibre, and the second had the strongest impact on me.

John Vollmer runs the consulting firm Vollmer Cultural Partnerships, has worked as a curator with the Glenbow and the Royal Ontario Museum, and has recently been appointed interim director of the Textile Museum. In his presentation, Vollmer examined the connection between objects on exhibit and the viewer and argued that, with fibre, the work, the maker, and the viewer are linked through a narrative rather than a dialectical connection.

According to Vollmer, the implicit narrative in fibre functions as a link between fibre art and viewer at three levels. First, the materials and techniques reveal the maker's mark. Second, the subject matter suggests a story, literally or figuratively. And third, the story suggested by the object arouses our memories, collective experiences, and imaginative capabilities, inviting us to bring into play personal and subjective associations and narratives.

ABOVE *Full Moon* (1987), wax resist discharge, 274 centimetres in height, by Dorothy Caldwell. Photo by Dan Myer.

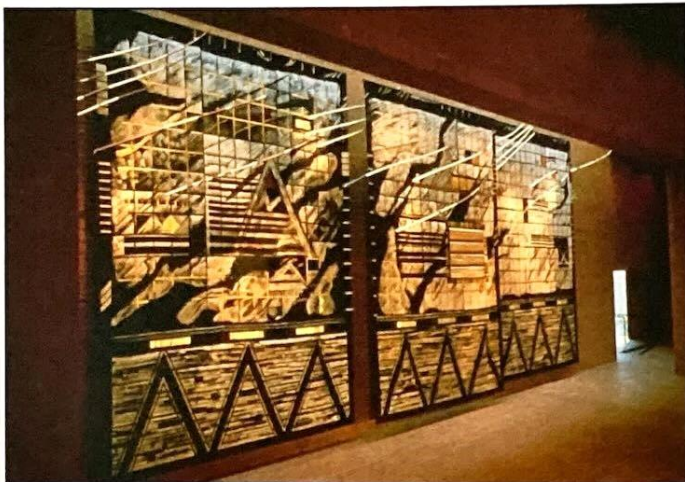
OPPOSITE Dorothy Caldwell working on *Landstat* (1986) at the Red Deer Arts Centre, Red Deer, Alberta. Photo courtesy of the artist.

Vollmer went on to suggest that behind every consideration of fibre lies a paradigm of fibre's relationship to human existence, and it is that underlying paradigm which predisposes us to a narrative engagement with fibre. Vollmer noted that some fibres allow us extended reach (e.g., cord), while others expand the body and the human biosphere (clothes, tents, sails) or comfort and adorn (throws, wall hangings). To illustrate the levels of narrative engagement, Vollmer used slides, first of an historical quilt, and then of the work of contemporary artists, Jennifer Angus, Dorothy Caldwell, Sarah Quinton, and Kai Chan.

In closing, Vollmer suggested that in light of questions such as "What role should museums and galleries play when presenting contemporary craft to the public?" and "What are those of us who work within the programming perimeters supposed to do in the first place?" it is imperative that we learn how to appreciate the connections that already exist between makers and viewers.

Marjorie Halpin presented the symposium summary and closing remarks. An Associate Professor of Anthropology and Curator of Ethnology at the University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology, Halpin did an excellent job of the very difficult task of drawing some relationships among the diverse presentations that had been delivered over the weekend. She had had an opportunity to review all of the papers in advance and had prepared a written summary at that time.

Halpin began by saying that to think "craft" in a contemporary context is an act of either a radical or a sentimental consciousness, noting that both had been evident at the symposium. She drew some comparisons with William Morris, who lectured and wrote about the relationship of medieval makers to their work. Halpin pointed out



ABOVE *Landstat* (1986), wax resist discharge, by Dorothy Caldwell. Photo by Nelson Vigneault. Collection of the Red Deer Arts Centre, Red Deer, Alberta.

that Morris's themes of pleasure in the work and its trivialization in industrialized society still hold true today.

Halpin's reference to Morris was particularly appropriate given that the National Gallery had just opened the exhibition, "The Earthly Paradise: Arts and Crafts by William Morris and His Circle from Canadian Collections" in Ottawa that weekend. It seemed strange to me that none of the other presenters made serious reference to Morris, his work and context, his theories, or the curious fact that National Gallery was exhibiting historical craft when it doesn't exhibit contemporary.

On the themes of pleasure in the work and it's trivialization, Halpin asserted, "We now understand they are the two sides of the same coin of a patriarchal culture that fears and feminizes crafts as expressions of delight and sensuality of working with the material world." She then used this distinction to link and make sense of the diverse set of papers that had been delivered over the weekend.

Halpin pointed out that many of the symposium papers had as a subtext the idea that craft must reassert its uniqueness, undertake new ventures, and rethink its pedagogy to survive and flourish. She speculated that "our ability to think, valorize, and craft the material world might be moving into a new paradigm, one that requires a separation from the abstract language of art criticism. . . . The theory-dominated cerebral climate that dominates today's art will change sooner or later, and then there will be a powerful reactive response and a reaffirmation of the importance of crafts will be at the centre. But only if we have a language other than artspeak."

In contrast to "artspeak," Halpin talked of the profound knowledge of materials and the properties of matter illustrated by the crafts, primarily made by Native women, that had been included in the controversial exhibition, "The Spirit Sings." To illustrate her point, Halpin took about five minutes to list all of the materials used in the works in the show. She then talked of intuitive knowledge of materials in contrast to scientific knowledge.

Halpin went on to describe briefly the activities at the University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology, which now include First Nations residencies where First Nations people are allowed special access to the museum for their work. Her comments were among the very, very few references to the relationship between craft and ethnicity made during the symposium.

Halpin didn't shy away from addressing the issues raised by Paul Mathieu's paper, which had made interesting use of Michel Foucault's distinction between a "utopia" and a "heterotopia." Following Mathieu, Halpin emphasized Foucault's notion that heterotopias desiccate speech, stop words in their tracks, contest the very possibility of language at its source, and dissolve our myths.

Semiotics had been introduced by Michel Paradis from the Université du Québec, Montréal, and Halpin took this as a license to argue for the relevance of the theories of Paris-based critic and literary theorist Julia Kristeva. Kristeva's work is influenced by the psychoanalytic theories of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, and only in the past few years have her major writings been available in English translation. Because her writing offers a lot to feminists and students of cultural processes, Kristeva is trendy to quote in or out of context. In November 1993, for example, critic-in-residence at the Mendel Art Gallery, Joan Borsa, made passing reference to Kristeva in her Critic's Lecture. To her credit, Halpin made a serious effort to present some of Kristeva's ideas for the benefit of those unfamiliar with her work.

Halpin explained that Kristeva examines the way in which the body's unconscious drives and rhythms manifest themselves in language, which she defines as the domain of representation, position, judgement, and grammatical and social constraints: in short, the domain of the ego or what Kristeva calls the "symbolic." But the unconscious or the "semiotic" is too powerful to be controlled completely by the symbolic. The semiotic is always excessive; it continually undercuts and fractures the symbolic, manifesting itself in our everyday social and cultural performances and, more pertinently, in the nonrepresentative and nonsymbolic aspects of art and craft. Halpin suggested that we need to think both about how the unconscious affects the way people make crafts and about how the way crafts are made affects the unconscious.

Halpin concluded her summary with a reminder that "human beings are incarnate beings, and crafting and transforming our environments are also acts of self-cultivation and self-transformation. Every skilled practitioner of a craft knows this already, and I think that's why you do it."

I am certain that many readers will wonder about the relevance of Halpin's remarks. However, I am also certain that all craftspeople wonder at some point about why they make what they make; in other words, they wonder about the "metaphoric" or nonliteral aspects of making. Halpin's presentation was a valuable outcome of the symposium because it leads us away from the "us versus art" tendency that often crops up in discussions about craft. ❑

Susan Clark is a fabric artist and librarian in Saskatoon. Examples of her work can be seen in the Saskatchewan Craft Council touring exhibition, "Craft Council Highlights." She attended the symposium in Ottawa at her own expense.

Textile artist Dorothy Caldwell, whose work illustrates two articles in this issue of *The Craft Factor,* lives in Hastings, Ontario.

The Executive Director of The Institute for Canadian Craft is Rosalyn J. Morrison. For further information, write: The Institute for Canadian Craft, 40 Dennett Drive, Agincourt, ON M1S 2E7, ph. (416) 291-9418, fax (416) 291-3457.

Exhibitions

A Question of Presentation

BY SANDRA FLOOD

The Regina and Area Potter's Guild
"Five Years in the Making"
Saskatchewan Craft Gallery, Saskatoon
September 17 to October 19, 1993

The Regina and Area Potter's Guild exhibition "Five Years in the Making" was, as a gallery exhibition, pedestrian. Fifteen exhibitors, many of whom are familiar names to the Saskatchewan Craft Gallery's audience, presented a selection of work consisting mainly of vessels, ornamental rather than functional, many small in scale and with a high proportion of raku ware.

Jack Sures' confident, lidded pot, *The Big Bang* (1992), concentrated the sexual pun of the title in the tiny animal which formed the lid's knob. The pot dominated the exhibition both by its commanding size and by its central position in the window bay. It was not, however, one of Sures' most masterly or graphically complex works. Don Chester exhibited two more of his long line of torn, gouged, asymmetrical raku platters; again, to my mind, not the most subtle or original he has produced.

The delicate and skilled control of a drawing of trilliums in low-key colours activated the interior of a large bowl by Erna Lepp. The shape and weight would make the bowl satisfyingly functional; the design made it interesting enough to be purely decorative. The bowl was fatally flawed by two obvious breaks in the glaze on the rim. The flower decoration of Christine Fraser's *Orchid Bowl* (1991) was, in contrast to Lepp's, stiff; the black centre circle is defined by white and black rings which detach it from the encircling orchids, making it look like a saucer awaiting an exotic cup. Fraser's tall vase showed a very different, totally confident use of complex shapes and colours moving smoothly around the vessel's form.

Jeanne Elliot's *Faces in Solitudes* (1993) was a strongly individual piece that seemed different in effect and intent from other works. A bronze-coloured bowl built of thin slabs textured on the exterior to suggest flowing hair and garments from which emerged crisply modelled female faces, the whole looked rather Art Deco in style, if not in finish. The bowl was poorly placed on a low pedestal, presenting to the viewer the interior which was totally undeveloped and uninteresting. To examine the detailing of the faces, the viewer had to crouch. Unfortunately, raising the bowl would not have solved the problem, for it would have brought into view the unconsidered and aesthetically crude attachment of the base slabs and walls.

For an exhibition "five years in the making" as the title seemed to imply, it was a disappointing performance. The Guild, in cooperation with the University of Regina, has organized numerous workshops with well-known potters. This exhibition showed little evidence of the exciting directions being explored by contemporary potters. Visitors, while I was in the gallery, drifted in, viewed briefly, and left silently. In general, the work did not have the presence, technical excellence, or visual interest demanded by a gallery exhibition. This appeared to indicate three alternatives: either the exhibitors did not understand the demands of a gallery exhibition; or they were not prepared to meet those demands (with the inference, perhaps, that the Saskatchewan Craft Gallery is not an important enough venue); or they did not intend to produce gallery art. Leaving aside the first two alternatives, which each raise very different issues, let us look at the third. If one noticed and took the trouble to read the brief and tiny wall text, it stated that the Guild members had "a range of experience and background" and that the selection of work was diverse in terms of "technical expertise and aesthetic intent." The question that then arises is, should this varied standard of work be shown in a gallery, which generates by its means of presentation different expectations?

I believe it should.

Saskatchewan does not have the population or wealth base to support a craft council composed entirely of academically-trained, professional, elite craftspeople whose standards, aims, and requirements are particular to that group. The guilds are much more representative of the range of talent, craft education, commitment, and reasons for making craft that make up the Saskatchewan Craft Council's membership. *Hobbyist* and *amateur* are neither dirty words nor necessarily in conflict with the Craft Council's aims of encouraging and recognising higher standards of technique and design. The guilds are also more representative of the knowledge levels and interests of our audiences—members, potential members,

ABOVE (LEFT TO RIGHT) Untitled vessel (1993), reduction fired, cone 10, 12 centimetres in height, by Rita Schubert. *Dragon Flies at Dusk* (1991), raku fired, 25 centimetres in height, by Sandy G. Dumba. Untitled vessel (1993), raku fired, 21 centimetres in height, by Doug Ganshorn.

ABOVE TOP *Red & White Trilliums* (1993), porcelain, wheel-thrown, copper stains and oxides, 8 centimetres in height, 35 centimetres in diameter, by Erna Lepp.
ABOVE BOTTOM *Faces in Solitudes* (1993), handbuilt, cone 6, oxidation glazes, 16 centimetres in height, 20 centimetres in diameter, by Jeanne Elliott..

buyers, interested supporters, and those whose interest we would like to attract. The Craft Council under one umbrella rightly shows a variety of work. It needs to be very clear about the various reasons for its exhibitions and the demands that these reasons make on how work is presented. In this case, the Craft Council has done the Regina and Area Potter's Guild, its members, and its potential audience a major disservice. It has presented the work in the same way that elite craft is presented—with no information beyond the maker's name, the title of the work, its date of making, its size (why, when the object is in front of you?), and the bare minimum of information about materials and/or techniques. The introductory wall text gives two sentences of information about the Guild, and a juror's statement which is actually the key to understanding the exhibition but leaves more questions unanswered than answered.

A gallery exhibition which positively supports and promotes a guild has to put the work in an appropriate context and provide information which prevents misunderstandings and communicates adequately with its audiences. This exhibition had two sentences of information about the Regina and Area Potter's Guild—these did not clarify my (and others') misapprehension of the title, which seemed to suggest that the exhibitors had been preparing for this exhibition for five years, with the inferences that they were aiming to produce gallery work and that this was a selection of the best of those limited-aim pieces. The title, I am told, refers to the inauguration of the Guild five years ago, an initiative taken in response to the closing of the Extension Pottery Studio of the University of Regina. The introductory text could have provided a fuller explanation of the genesis and *raison d'être* of the Guild. It could also have been at least ten times as large so that it attracted attention from a distance, immediately clarifying the nature of the exhibition.

The information on the gallery labels assumes that you know about the maker, the object (its history, genesis, where it fits in with other works of a like nature, etc., etc.), relevant materials and techniques, and approved canons of current taste. Labels of this type can be a subtle way of separating the knowledgable from the ignorant, insiders from outsiders, and most of us (myself included) end up a lot of the time amongst the ignorant. For example, the name on the label implies that you ought to know who that person is. In the case of Van Gogh, you probably do; in the case of Doug Ganshorn or Rita Walker, you probably don't. The wall text said that Guild members have a wide range of experience and background, but no attempt is made to link that information to names. A ring binder or wall boards with a page about each member giving a biography, a photograph, and a couple of sentences about what they get from the Guild would have begun to inform and, more importantly, involve the viewer. This material would answer such reasonable questions as: What am I looking at—work by an experienced professional who has an acknowledged talent and a track record to match, work by a beginner just mastering basic techniques, work done as a leisure activity, work done for the market? Would I feel comfortable joining the Guild, what kind of people are involved, what level of expertise do I need, what does the Guild offer?

The inconspicuous wall text also suggested that the work was diverse in "terms of technical expertise and aesthetic intent." I found myself standing in front of a great many pieces wondering about their "intent," about why they were made and what was their envisioned purpose. This is not self-evident with ornamental pieces as opposed to functional pieces. Was this maker trying a new technique, a new glaze, acquiring basic skills, making a production piece, a present for his Mum? A couple of sentences, not an artist's statement, placed beside each piece would have given insight into the maker's experience of making and meaning in all its diversity at the guild level. It would have enabled the work to be looked at with different, more informed, and, despite the formality and distancing of the gallery setting, perhaps more friendly eyes.

An exhibition of this kind is as much about the whys and hows of making, the makers, and the guild, as about craft as art or technique, and as such it needs the support of additional material to make it sensible. The Saskatchewan Craft Council needs to be aware of how it exposes its members and their work to public scrutiny and to re-examine its very limited exhibitions strategy. ❑

Sandra Flood is the former editor of *The Craft Factor* and has a Master's degree in Art Gallery and Museum Studies from the University of Manchester, England.

Established in 1987, the Regina & Area Potter's Guild currently has about 45 members. The president is Bernie Zaharik of Regina. If you are interested in becoming a member, please call Bernie at 584-1741 or write the Regina & Area Potter's Guild, 1101 Shannon Road, Regina, SK S4S 5K3.

Don Kondra's Moveable Feast

By Trent Watts

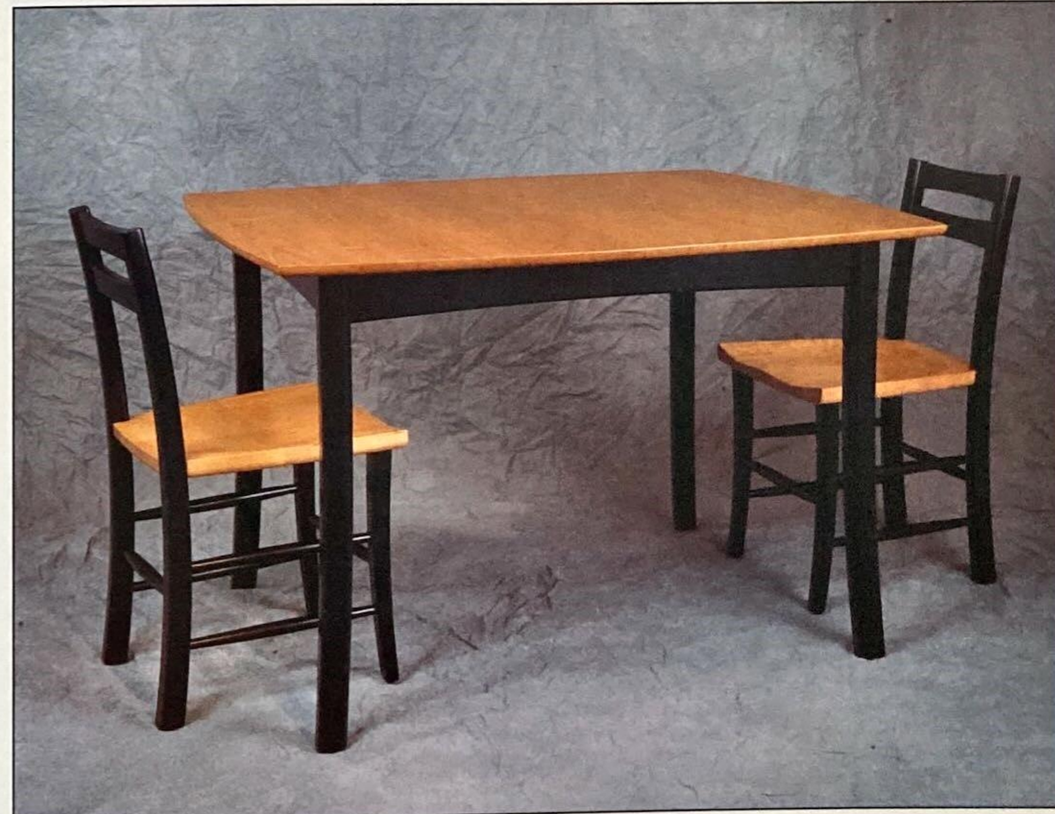
Don Kondra
"Contemporary Furniture"
Saskatchewan Craft Gallery, Saskatoon
October 22 to November 23, 1993

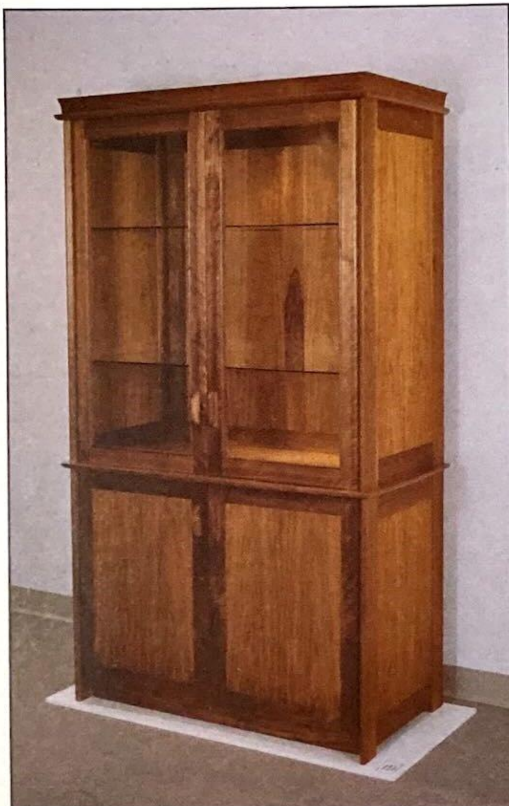
Don Kondra's stature as a prominent Saskatchewan woodworker has been confirmed numerous times over the last few years. He has been a consistent participant in the Saskatchewan Craft Council's annual "Dimensions" show, twice winning the prestigious "Premier's Prize" for the outstanding entry, and last year received a Saskatchewan Arts Board grant to produce the work in his recent show, "Contemporary Furniture." The artistic and technical elements of the work in this show provided ample evidence that Don continues to explore new horizons in woodworking. By combining unique design ideas, first class materials, and flawless construction techniques, and bringing together natural wood finishes with modern, coloured lacquers, Don produced a collection of fine furniture that was a feast for the eyes.

Warm brown cherry with a deep lustre; the swirling grain in crotch walnut; deep black, vibrant fuchsia, and crackled lacquers; book-matched grain patterns and polished brass: all jumped out to vie for the viewer's attention. Since this was a three-dimensional display, occupying mainly floor space, the addition of framed photographs of the artist's work on the gallery walls added to the visual appeal of the exhibition. Every piece had some striking element, ranging from the contrast of black lacquer and natural cherry on the *Table and Chairs* (1993) to the spectacular walnut burl veneer of the *Blanket Chest* (1988). But initial visual impact of the show soon gave way to a subtle feeling that something else was happening here. It didn't take long to realize that you can hardly find a straight edge or a 90-degree angle anywhere in Don's furniture. Grain orientation has a great impact on the visual appeal of wood. By rounding over edges, or adding subtle curves to a straight piece of wood, Don was able to elongate certain changes in the direction of the wood fibres, thereby emphasizing the natural undulations of the grain in some types of wood, making reflected light dance and play off the surface in an interesting way.

The cherry *Stereo Stand* (1993) exemplifies Don's idiosyncratic combination of curved elements and traditional woodworking join-

BELOW *Table and Chairs* (1993), cherry, Saskatchewan birch, black lacquer, table 117 centimetres in length, by Don Kondra.





ABOVE *China Cabinet* (1993), walnut, curly walnut veneer, 188 centimetres in height, by Don Kondra.

ery. Standing on a solid wood base, the piece has handmade tambour doors with vertical slats that open to reveal smooth sliding drawers to hold CD's and tapes and shelves to hold stereo equipment. The top has curved edges that extend slightly past the end supports and line up with the base, giving a sense of balance. Don has made his own cherry-veneered material to finish the curved back of the cabinet, giving it the same attention to detail as the rest of the cabinet. Examining the ends of the stand reveals the use of stave construction as practised by a cooper. The cooper trade goes back to antiquity where it grew out of the need to make round barrels with bulging sides for the brewing industry. Don has used traditional coopering techniques to angle the edges prior to gluing up the cabinet end boards, producing a solid, stable, curved surface which can easily be faired to give a rounded surface. The use of such techniques has resulted in an extremely solid, beautifully-designed, functional piece of furniture.

When re-sawing the cherry boards that make up the top of the *Stereo Stand*, Don included a sliver of lighter coloured sap wood in the centre. Many woodworkers attempt to obtain cherry stock that has only the darker heart wood. Don's placement of the lighter sap wood provides a splash of contrasting colour which serves as a focal point for the design, concentrating the viewer's attention while formally tying the horizontal and vertical elements together.

One of Don's goals in the work for this show was to design a line of "knock-down" furniture that would allow production-oriented construction with no hint of a knock-down appearance. Knock-down furniture typically uses mechanical fastening devices to hold melamine coated medium density fibreboard (MDF) at 90-degree angles. Evidence of Don's success in this venture can be seen in the *China Cabinet* (1993) and the *TV Cabinet* (1993). Both cabinets have handmade solid wooden door pulls, solid walnut edging on veneered panels, handmade tambour doors, and wooden fasteners to hold the glass doors in place. Standing over six feet high, both cabinets also have a top cabinet portion with a cornice on the uppermost crown, supported on a base with door access to the cupboard below. The *TV Cabinet* has a sliding, rotating platform behind the tambour doors which can be rolled out for television viewing or returned to the cabinet and the doors pulled closed. The curved sides, the angled cornice on top, and the subtle round-over of all the edges certainly *do not* say, "I am a knock-down piece."

The key to the construction of Don's knock-down pieces is the extensive use of vacuum-veneered panels, dowel pins to secure joining pieces, and indexing jigs to ensure the holes for the dowels are properly aligned. Once the indexed dowels are in place, the pieces can be assembled with ease. This means a large cabinet can easily be moved and assembled in an otherwise inaccessible space. Subtle curves are accurately and repetitively made by fastening the final piece to a jig with the appropriate curve and moving it along a guide bearing on a router or shaper. The use of hidden fasteners to hold the top half of the cabinet to the bottom adds to the beauty and simplicity. By manufacturing his own veneered panels with a vacuum press, veneer, and MDF as a substrate, Don has found a way to greatly increase the types of wood available for large-panel construction beyond those available as commercial plywood. When combined with solid wooden frames, these panels will last for generations, in spite of changes in temperature and humidity.

One of the most visually-pleasing pieces is the *Table and Chairs*. The table, which seats four people comfortably, with one leaf to extend the seating to six, has four legs that curve in two dimensions as they sweep up from the floor to fasten to an apron which supports the top and stabilizes the piece. The table top made of American Black Cherry with small cluster burls scattered throughout the grain contrasts nicely with the black lacquered Saskatchewan Birch legs. The curves on the table legs and the edges of the table top are aesthetically pleasing. The chairs echo the same curves and use the matching design concept of a natural cherry seat with black lacquered legs and back. The seats of the chairs are particularly enticing, with the deliberate placement of the growth rings in the cherry creating elliptical swirls that seem to invite the viewer to sit down and check the fit of "seat to seat." The chair construction is very solid, and although the backs are much lower than many chairs, comfort is not compromised. Traditional woodworkers may frown at colouring natural wood with paint or lacquer. However, it would be difficult to argue that this piece does not catch your attention.

The choice of crotch walnut and exotic hardwoods, combined with a delicate, elegant shape, make the *Hall Table* (1989) particularly striking. Overall, the table is approximately thirty-six inches high, forty inches long, and twelve inches deep. The long, delicate, dark walnut legs support a walnut top with an narrow Macassar Ebony inlay paralleling the edges. A frame supporting the top holds two symmetrically placed drawers that give the piece a sense of balance and depth appropriate to its size. Every inch is polished and finished, including the walnut drawer bottoms and sides. By using curves in two dimensions as the legs sweep up to support the main body of the table, Don was able to make the base larger than the top while preserving a delicate overall design. Although rectangular

cubes of maple burl with spiky projections on the front had been used as drawer handles in the original construction, the artist soon realized that this needed to be softened with the addition of a four-sided, open-front walnut case to protect the individual opening the drawer from injury.

Collaborative work by Don Kondra, Jane Evans, and Mike Hosaluk, created an eye-catching *Bench* (1993) just large enough for one person to sit comfortably upon. Curved sides extending up past the seat both provide a sense of confinement prevent the individual from sliding off the end. This is an interesting piece, as each artist worked in isolation with only a general idea of what the others might produce: Don constructed the wooden components; Jane wove the seat covering; and Mike finished the wooden elements with elaborate paintings and carvings. Jane's green, red, black, and white seat covering makes the *Bench* one of the most colourful pieces in the show. The intense colours and interesting carved textures of Mike's fish and snake designs blend in well with the seat. If I were buying a piece for my home, I would probably choose one of Don's more traditional pieces. However, as a piece in a gallery show, the *Bench* adds a useful dimension.

Much work went into the design of Don's two asymmetrical side tables, both of which employ a similar design. The top is large enough to hold a morning's worth of files as you try organize your day and a comfortable height at which to stand and sort your mail. One end of the top is supported by a solid walnut-veneered MDF panel, while the other is supported by ten vertical pieces fastened at the top and pierced two-thirds of the way down with a horizontal brass rod to make them more rigid. The brass rod is fastened to a short shelf attached to the vertical end piece, giving the whole piece visual and structural stability. The overall effect of the two pieces is quite different even though the design is similar. The walnut *Side Table* (1992) is closer to traditional woodworking in that the walnut wood grain is visible in the finish, while the lacquered *Side Table* (1993) goes beyond the traditional by painting the wood over with brightly-coloured lacquer. The lacquered table was made after the walnut table and carries the design further by adding elements, colours, and textures that lead the eye around the form.

The work in "Contemporary Furniture" once again confirms Don as a leading Saskatchewan woodworker. His exploration of new horizons in woodworking, unique design ideas, collaborative work, and flawless construction techniques have produced a show with lasting appeal. ❑

Trent Watts is a Saskatoon-based woodworker and current President of the Saskatchewan Woodworkers' Guild.

Taking Tea with Anne McLellan

By Sandra Ledingham

Anne McLellan
"Tradition and Tea"
Saskatchewan Craft Gallery, Saskatoon
November 26, 1993, to January 4, 1994

The title of Anne McLellan's exhibition, "Tradition and Tea," both had an alliterative ring and suggested that the works in the show would explore various historical ceremonies surrounding tea. The exhibition consisted of a central group of works on a large white platform surrounded by pedestals holding a variety of tea services and individual tea pots. The size, placement, and dynamism of the central group drew the viewer instantly. Moving closer, one discovered from several title cards that the group in fact consisted of several distinct installations, *Installation #1* through *Installation #6*, exhibited along with several smaller objects, some found, others created, some as pieces standing apart from the installations, others as part of them. If you watched the video produced by Shaw Telecable that ran concurrent with the show, you would also have discovered that McLellan refers to the installations as "tea totems." The only other information available was a short artist's statement that spoke in general terms about the main theme of the show and McLellan's approach to making. What was also needed, however, was more specific information/insight/clues as to "the historical, cultural, or personal perspective" of each piece.

The diversity of the objects included in the exhibition tended to divide one's focus. I found my perception switching back and forth between the intellectual process of the installations and the primarily visual focus of the tea sets.

ABOVE *Catch Them While You Can* (1993), earthenware, glaze, found objects, by Anne McLellan.
LEFT View of the group of six installations (earthenware, glaze, found objects) included in the exhibition "Tradition and Tea," by Anne McLellan.

ABOVE *Coffee with Bob* (1993), earthenware, glaze, wood, by Anne McLellan.

The tea sets are McLellan's usual technically-accomplished, delightful, functional teapots and cups. *Catch Them While You Can* (1993) is a wonderfully witty teapot and cup set, consistent and balanced, with McLellan's oft-found movement within the thrown forms. The inclusion of fly fishing hooks in the display case was an inspired touch, lending extra visual elements to reinforce the whimsical theme.

Like *Catch Them While You Can*, the tea sets *McLellan Pattern* (1993) and *Garden Party* (1993) effectively display Anne's ability with form and surface in her functional objects. In *McLellan Pattern*, we find a wonderful detail in the feet of the pots where the artist has cut up into the foot to make an irregular foot ring and has decorated the surface with a black line following the form—the kind of surprise that delights us when we stumble upon it.

Coffee with Bob (1993), another tea set, will lure and inspire the music aficionado. The set features cup handles shaped like musical symbols and notes. The bowls of the cups have a spiral movement and are decorated with a complementary spiral surface design in black and white. One wonders, however, why the theme of musical symbols does not carry through more obviously in the tea pot handle and lid knob to make the set truly consistent.

Serpent Tea (1993) and *I'm Not Such a Little Teapot* (1993) are McLellan's only major departures from her majolica pieces, produced by painting colourful metal oxides on a white earthenware glaze. The two pieces feel a little incongruous because of their subdued uniform dark glazes.

Serpent Tea, a service consisting of a tea pot, four cups, and a tray, doesn't display the strong forms we have come to expect from McLellan, and the diversity in design elements tends to undermine the serpent theme. The handles on the cups, the tea pot, and the tray, for example, are all different. The serpent handles twining around the cups make use of line as a very formal element. But neither the handles of the tea pot nor the handles of the tray are serpent-like, nor are they consistent with any other elements in the piece. In fact, the tray has no serpent elements at all but instead features a leaf pattern on its rim with a large void in the centre. I found myself wanting to see the serpent theme exploited more generously, trimming the tray and being incorporated more boldly into the teapot. The interiors of the mugs carry some of the lyrical movement of McLellan's usual style because of the loose brush strokes of white slip. However, the overall green glaze on the dark earthenware clay elsewhere, minus the white slip, loses that lively movement.

The central installations symbolically tour us through several centuries, many continents, sundry sayings, a profusion of political and cultural references, and an array of rituals associated with tea. Because most of the totems use similar elements (thrown cylinders, tea pots, tea cups, boxes, and bowls), discerning the intent of the individual installations becomes puzzling. One searches amidst graffiti and various icons trying to glean some clues. Here, more descriptive or evocative titles would have helped viewers to unearth some of the intended meanings of the pieces.

Installation #1, if one digs a bit, unravels a poetic notion about "the taking of tea." Various adages painted on the sides of the piece reveal some interesting premises, reminding us of the central place that tea has occupied in human history. The adages invite us to consider the conversations that have taken place over a cup of tea ("what a part of confidante has that poor teapot played since the kindly plant was introduced among us") and the famous people who have experience tea's restorative powers ("what sick bed has it smoked by"), as well as the stereotypical weepy women who have drowned their sorrows in tea ("what myriads of women have cried over it to be sure").

McLellan's "tea totems" are a rigorous and complex undertaking, both technically and conceptually. Their have the style references of some of ceramics' senior artists: Bob Arneson particularly, as well as early Peter Voulkos, John Mason, and Paul Soldner. The totems have the colour, spontaneity, and humour that defined the "Funk Movement" of California ceramics, brought to Regina Campus ceramics in the 1960s by David Gilhooly.

Within McLellan's six installations, there is an amplitude of potential meaning/layering/references to each specific theme regarding tea. In fact, the installations hold so much potential significance that they would do much better standing alone so that the viewer could move around each piece and seek out all that it has to say. They each cry out for their own space. Separating the pieces would also have helped to clarify the poignant links between the installations and the various industrially-produced objects that sat next to them.

McLellan has plucked some wonderful poetry and phrases from a variety of sources and each conjures up ideas that demand the accompanying forms embellish their content. *Installation #3* consists of a cylindrical tube, a square box with a sort of four-legged table balanced atop, presenting five sinking tea cups, a black tea pot and cup and saucer on it. The text written on the cylinder presents several phrases, "no taxation without representation," "Boston Tea Party," "Stamp Act," but "you can't make your shimmy shake on tea—1919 Ziegfield Follies Tea Dances" conjures up the most vivid potential. Combining such singular themes with appropriate forms would have crystallized each composition, producing a heightened impact.

The virtues of regularly celebrating one's life with tea are suggested to us in *Installation #4*. This piece achieves a certain Japanese serenity but is a bit *excited* by the five plus other pieces presented alongside it. However, the use of raw clay and sober glazes transports us, perhaps, to a Japanese Tea Garden, inviting us to consider tea's ability to elevate and enlighten us spiritually. The graffiti reads: "Since the divine path is a way that lies outside this most impure world shall we not on entering it cleanse our hearts from earthly mire? Sen No Riky."

Food for thought. Or shall we say, a potent blend to rejuvenate body and soul. ❑

Sandra Ledingham is a ceramist and instructor in the Applied Arts Department, Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology (SIAST), Prince Albert. She is also a sessional lecturer in ceramics for the Extension Department of the University of Saskatchewan, a founding member of the Saskatchewan Craft Council, and a periodic contributor to *The Craft Factor*.

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SECONDHAND HISTORY

[*continued from page 26*]

More than any other factor, it is craft's inbred inferiority complex that has led to some of the more outrageous ideologies being propounded by current experts on craft. Postmodern art theory, which is reluctant to ascribe value to form, decoration, choice of media, or manual skill, is one of the worst aesthetic prejudices of this or any other century. Theorizing about the "meaning" of crafted objects without considering their materiality or the techniques involved in their creation—focusing on the idea as having more value than the object—is romanticism, not reality. A ceramic pot, for instance, can be unequivocally utilitarian and, at the same time, aesthetic bliss. This duality (which is not necessarily contradictory) allows the pot to be read/experienced on not just two but a multitude of social, historical, cultural, even spiritual levels. The folly of doctrinaire thinking when it comes to crafts is that it prevents the holding of dissimilar "truths."

Oversimplifying or ignoring some of life's more prosaic realities has led academics to strange conclusions about how and why our crafts history has evolved as it has done. Craftspeople in the 1960s and 1970s did often choose to live and work at a distance from urban centres, but (except for certain young Americans who needed to maintain a low profile) the reasons were logical, not political. In those days, fire marshals panicked at the sight of smoking kilns and red-hot glory holes. Then, as now, rents were cheaper in rural areas. And setting up small-scale production requires a combination of living and studio space not often found in cities divided into residential and industrial zones.

As for Skelton's disparaging comments about a general lack of personal discipline and standards of craftsmanship, a quick review of the biographical notes on the participants in "MAKE(māk)," the 1971 crafts exhibition sponsored by the Canadian Guild of Crafts, confirms that over 90 percent of the 119 artists had two or more years of formal training and, in many cases, extensive exhibition and teaching records.

In contrast to Skelton's political rationale, Rosalyn Morrison would have us believe that contemporary craft history, or at least the Canadian glass art component, has progressed in an orderly fashion, from teacher to student, without crossovers with other media. In *Canadian Glassworks 1970-1990*, Morrison claims that "Canadians have retained a certain studied isolation from outside influences, even given the accessibility of the American market and its tendency to dictate artistic trends."

But crafts did not spring full-blown from the sociopolitical unrest of the 1960s, nor was the crafts movement isolated from outside influences. The nature of the crafts revival was more organic than either Skelton or Morrison propose. For example, when Bob Held initiated Canada's first glassblowing program at Sheridan College in 1969, he brought with him not just an MFA in ceramics from the University of Southern California but also the gutsy, abstract-expressionist ideas of Peter Voulkos, Paul Soldner, John Mason, and other American avant-garde ceramics artists. Their work in clay, which shattered Bauhaus standards of fine craftsmanship and shifted function into form, had a major impact on Canadian glass art during the 1970s. In fact, Held's large blown glass bottles and vases still bear the imprint of this early influence.

The development of glass art is just one incident in the complex, often contradictory, evolution of a Canadian crafts revival that was neither homogeneous nor monochromatic. Generalizations can be made that British crafts evolved from a more ingrained tradition than did North American crafts, or that Canadian and Australian crafts initially lagged behind those in the United States, but we must never forget that craft has always operated not only on the macro level of society but also on the micro level of the individual. We have seen and no doubt will continue to see a disorderly crossover of influences and ideas between individuals and regions. As always, charismatic artists like Voulkos and today's glass art superstar Dale Chihuly will inspire students and spawn imitators. Established institutions will continue to attempt to enforce certain definitions of art and craft, canonizing some works while marginalizing others. And trade, travel, and immigration will continue to add new flavours to the mix.

To argue, as Skelton does, that "craft artists aligned with the hippie counterculture . . . appropriated many ethnic craft forms and techniques without any corresponding attempt to gain a full understanding of the cultures themselves" denies the cultural cross-referencing that is intrinsic to the long, rich history of crafts (and virtually every other learned activity). Interestingly, only recently has hybridization—the revitalizing movement of ideas and objects—been politicized into the negative term *cultural appropriation*.

As craftspeople, we have learned a lot in thirty years, but while we have been busy creating a new craft aesthetic we have overlooked our own history. Now it is being told back to us, second hand, in terms we hardly recognize. ❑

Author's bio (full-disclosure, PC version): Paula Gustafson is a Vancouver-based, middle-aged, heterosexual female of Irish/Ukrainian heritage, who, despite a non-abusive childhood and few antisocial addictions, maintains an unrepentant intolerance for whiners, cheaters, the self-righteous, instant coffee, and errant skateboarders. After thirty years of active involvement as a craft artist and arts administrator, she has recently, by some inexplicable twist of fate, turned into the visual arts critic for *The Georgia Straight*.

Secondhand History

By Paula Gustafson

Two recent events have left me feeling as if all the air is being sucked from the crafts history I have been a part of for thirty years. The first wave of paranoia occurred during Rosalyn Morrison's simplistic, linear description of the development of glass art in Canada (inexplicably given during a panel discussion at the International Tapestry Symposium in Vancouver, September 17 to 19, 1993). The second happened about a month later when I was offered a preview look at a deliberately provocative article about Canadian craft prepared by Michael Skelton, the British-educated design historian who, at the time, was Curator of the Canadian Craft Museum.

Normally, I would welcome any and all commentary about crafts. There have been so few attempts to document the Canadian experience that everyone's contribution is needed. But because craftspeople are mainly producers of objects and rarely writers or theorists, we have left the door open for academics like Morrison and Skelton to speak for us. The problem is that these people, though well-intentioned, are now defining a contemporary crafts history that bears little resemblance to the experiences of the people who created the Canadian crafts movement.

I know that time constraints often force conference presenters to drastically simplify complex subjects, but I am still not sure how Morrison, who is the Executive Director of the Institute for Contemporary Canadian Craft, could discuss contemporary glass-blowing as a linear progression of "glass programs in colleges and universities" when, in fact, most West Coast glass artists learned their skills in small, private studios or intense workshops at the internationally acclaimed Pilchuk glass school in Washington state. It would be easy to dismiss Morrison's version of our glass art history as typical central-Canadian ignorance about the west, but her interpretation belongs to a more insidious kind of wrongheadedness. Academics prefer their histories to be neat and tidy, categorized and rationalized. That's fine when they are dealing with broad cross sections of humanity or big chunks of historical time. Contemporary craft history is the story of idiosyncratic individuals and small, dynamic, and relatively short-lived communities of artists. But even if Morrisson had done her homework of West Coast glass artists, first-person accounts cannot be compounded into generalizations.

Skelton's pronouncements on crafts history are likewise the result of reading too many scholarly books and not spending enough time developing a face-to-face familiarity with North American craft artists. In his unpublished paper, Skelton, who recently left the Canadian Craft Museum for a position with the British Columbia Design Council, writes that "the 1960s will be remembered as a decade that ushered in a flurry of ill-conceived and naive objects, not just because more people were making things by hand (in and of itself a good thing) but because no one seemed to know the difference between the excellent and the atrocious."

> **Admittedly, the rebirth of craft making had its overindulgent moments—the late 1960s and early 1970s were also heady times for musicians, poets, would-be farmers, and anarchists—but Skelton's dismissive sweep reduces an entire generation of craftspeople to the level of mindless abdication.**

According to Skelton, "one could become a craft artist in the 1960s and '70s merely by (a) changing your name to 'moon unit,' (b) setting up a studio located as far away from civilization (and customers) as humanly possible, (c) making macrame pot holders shaped like owls, and (d) foregoing years of discipline."

Admittedly, the rebirth of craft making had its overindulgent moments—the late 1960s and early 1970s were also heady times for musicians, poets, would-be farmers, and anarchists—but Skelton's dismissive sweep reduces an entire generation of craftspeople to the level of mindless abdication.

Skelton seems to think that ethical principles, value judgments, and personal integrity were thrown on bonfires along with bras and the Stars and Stripes. "To speak of discipline, standards, and excellence," claims Skelton, "was ideologically suspect because, for certain factions, those evaluative terms reflected an exclusionary cultural elitism and a social hierarchy in conflict with the establishment of an egalitarian utopia."

Were craftspeople that highly politicized? The ones I knew (and who are now, two decades later, masters of their crafts) were dedicated, hard-working, and (probably overly) sincere. If some of them waved placards in protest marches, or crossed the border into Canada because they refused to comply with the aggressive war mentality of the United States government, they brought the same level of conviction to developing their skills in clay, fibre, or glass.

It is the academics who insist on aligning the contemporary crafts movement with particular political ideologies, not the craftspeople who initiated the renaissance. Bill Hunt, the potter who edits *Ceramics Monthly*, has pointed out that the art establishment, blinded by its infatuation with postmodernist, issue-oriented, political art, and its need to maintain careers based on aesthetic expertise, cannot be depended upon to present an accurate account of crafts history. "Nearly everyone, from collector to dealer to artist to art historian to college art professor to elementary school teacher to museum curator, has been groomed to be in bed with . . . fundamentally ridiculous ideas of the current art world, and few have engaged in a personal revolution to change them," Hunt wrote in "A Brave New World for Crafts," published in the March 1988 issue of *The Crafts Report*.

Hunt warned that it takes a lot of courage to go against the grain of a system which refers to craftmaking either as a left-leaning protest movement ("peasant" art, the step-child of the Industrial Revolution, functional ware for the masses—take your pick) or as a kind of activist "victim art" (craft as the awkward, undervalued orphan of the art world). [*continued on page 25*]

Saskatchewan Craft Gallery

Schedule

IN THE GALLERY

Manjari Sharma
"Masks: Symbolic, Mythical, Contemporary"
February 18 to March 29, 1994
Opening Reception: Friday, February 18, 7-9 pm
Artist's Talk: Sunday, February 20, 2 pm

Gallery Closed: "Dimensions '94" Jurying
March 31 to April 2, 1994

Wendy Parsons and Zach Dietrich
April 8 to May 10, 1994

Bonnie Houston
May 13 to June 14, 1994

Jane Kenyon and Wayne Cameron
June 17 to July 26, 1994

"Dimensions '94"
July 29 to September 6, 1994

SCC TOURING EXHIBITIONS

"Dimensions '94"
Annual open juried exhibition of Saskatchewan Craft
Jurors: Michael Hosaluk and Lou Lynn

MacKenzie Art Gallery, Regina, SK
May 27 to June 26, 1994

Saskatchewan Handcraft Festival, Battleford, SK
July 15 to July 17, 1994

SCC TOURING EXHIBITIONS (cont.)

Saskatchewan Craft Gallery, Saskatoon, SK
July 29 to September 6, 1994

Godfrey Dean Cultural Centre, Yorkton, SK
September 15 to October 31, 1994

JOINT SCC/OSAC TOURING EXHIBITION

"Craft Council Highlights"
Featuring work by
Stephanie Bowman (paper),
Susan Clark (fibre), David Goldsmith (scrimshaw),
and Basil & Glenda Ramadan (glass)

Estevan National Exhibition Centre, Estevan, SK
February 1 to 23, 1994

Broadview Library, Broadview, SK
March 1 to 23, 1994

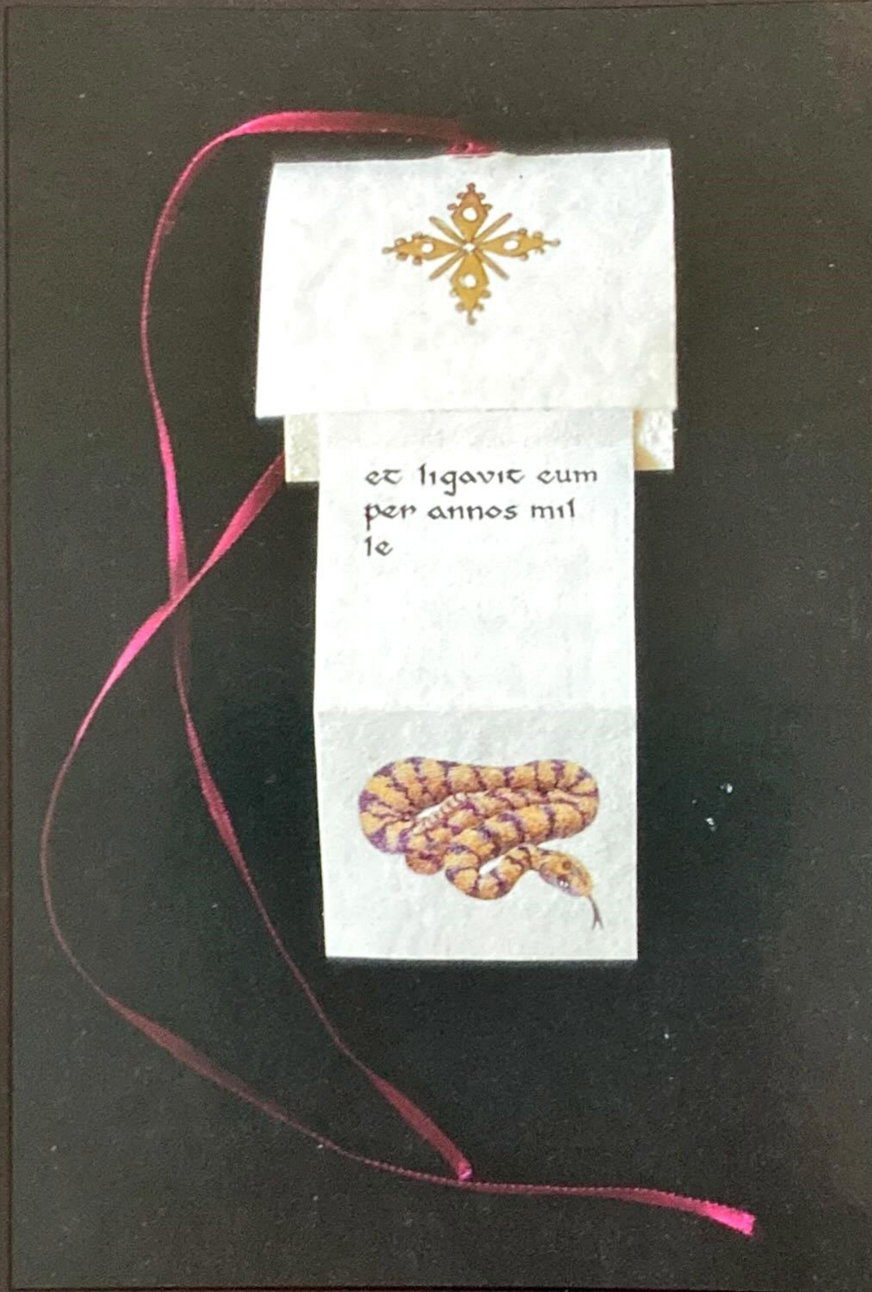
Godfrey Dean Cultural Centre, Yorkton, SK
April 1 to 23, 1994

Fort Qu'appelle Library, Fort Qu'appelle, SK
May 1 to 23, 1994

R.M. of Lakeside #338 Office, Quill Lake, SK
June 1 to 23, 1994

Wadena Public Library, Wadena, SK
July 1 to 23, 1994

Saskatchewan Craft Council/Gallery
813 Broadway Avenue, Saskatoon, SK S7N 1B5 1-5 pm daily (306) 653-3616



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