

# THE CRAFT FACTOR

THE MAGAZINE OF THE SASKATCHEWAN CRAFT COUNCIL • WINTER 1996/97 • VOL. 21.3 • \$3.00





# Saskatchewan Craft Gallery

## Schedule

### IN THE GALLERY

#### "EARLY SASKATCHEWAN WOODWORKERS"

Works from 1890 to 1940 curated jointly by the Saskatchewan Craft Gallery & the Mendel Art Gallery  
November 22, 1996, to January 21, 1997

#### "IN OUR BLOOD"

Mixed Media by  
Stephanie Bowman, Lindsay Embree, Nora Jacek  
January 24 to March 4, 1997  
Public Reception: January 24, 7 to 9 pm  
Artists' Talk: January 26, 2 pm

#### "CONTENT"

Clay by  
Jack Sures & Cara Gay Driscoll  
March 7 to April 20, 1997

#### DIMENSIONS '97 JURING

Gallery closed  
April 21 to May 1, 1997

#### 13 x 2

Student/Mentor Exhibition  
May 2 to June 3, 1997

### SASKATCHEWAN CRAFT COUNCIL TOURING EXHIBITIONS

(Partial Listings)

#### "DIMENSIONS '96"

Annual open juried exhibition of  
Saskatchewan craft  
Jurors: Kaija Rautiainen and Jordan Van Sewell  
Organized by the Saskatchewan Craft Council

Godfrey Dean Cultural Centre  
Yorkton, SK

December 4, 1996, to January 27, 1997

#### "JUST FOR LAUGHS"

Comedy  
Satire,  
Sarcasm  
Parody  
Rosemont Art Gallery  
Regina, SK  
February 3 to March 1, 1997



## SASKATCHEWAN CRAFT COUNCIL

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# The Craft Factor

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**FRONT COVER** Sea Chest, Alder, Birch, metal, acrylic paint, dyes, approximately 24"(w) x 14"(d) x 32"(h). Produced at Conservation and Collaboration Wood Symposium, July, 1996, by Al Bakke, Don Kondra, Grant Kernan, Mike Hosaluk, Gary Knox Bennett, Kim Kelzer, Wendy Murayama, Paul Sasso, Mark Sfirri, Del Stubbs, Reg Morrell, as well as numerous others who participated in carving the fish. The piece was subsequently purchased by furniture maker, Doug Taylor, who finished it to his liking (as shown on cover) and sold it to Connie Wiebe of Saskatoon.

**BACK COVER** Art Deco Series by Susan Robertson from the exhibition "Catcaphony"  
LEFT A Rose By Any Other Name (1996), slab, cone 6 porcelain, polychromatic underglaze, glaze. CENTRE Pause (1996), slab, cone 6 porcelain, polychromatic underglaze, glaze. RIGHT Cosmic (1996), slab, cone 6 porcelain, polychromatic underglaze, glaze.

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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# Conductive to Creation

Collaboration & Conservation Wood Symposium  
Emma Lake, Saskatchewan



ABOVE *Untitled, Box collaboration*, Birch & Alder, acrylic paint, approx. 12"(l) x 8"(w) x 7"(d) by Paul Sasso, Melvin Firmager, John Jordan.

A few hours' drive north of Saskatoon through lightly populated farming land lies Emma Lake. It was here, in pristine native forest, that the Saskatchewan Craft Council hosted its seventh biennial wood symposium. From Friday, July 26, until Tuesday, July 30, 1996, Emma Lake Camp was energized and abuzz with recurring discussions and activity based on *Conservation and Collaboration*—the theme of the event.

The Camp had been built originally for artists and its main studio was converted into a workshop filled with woodworking machinery. A metalworking area was set up under tents in the woods; forges, anvils and grinders could be heard clanging and screeching. Portable classrooms were arranged as a

BY TERRY MARTIN

large art finishing room and a conference room for slide presentations and discussions.

The only thing lacking was a plan for the event. When Michael Hosaluk, the main initiator of the event, was asked what was on the agenda for the first day, he answered with typical understatement, "Nuthin'." Surprisingly, he was not joking. Although the event had some precedents and evolved out of increasingly open-ended events in the past, this was the first with no pre-planned agenda. Within the broad framework of the two theme words, the participants had been lured to the camp with vague promises of a "great time". They were expected to let nature take its course and the work would happen. So

around one hundred furniture makers, glass workers, blacksmiths, woodturners, painters, potters, fibre artists, writers and others settled in to let the creative juices flow.

For many, it was not necessarily clear at the start what was expected. After a friendly introduction on the first night, notable for its lack of distinction between the famous and the wannabees, everyone broke up into those who seemed to know what to do and those who had no idea. Wendy Murayama, California furniture maker, said, "I had some problems identifying who were the resource people and who were the participants. I missed some sort of direction in the beginning and didn't know how to proceed with the collaboration." Gord Peteran, sculptor and furniture maker from Ontario,

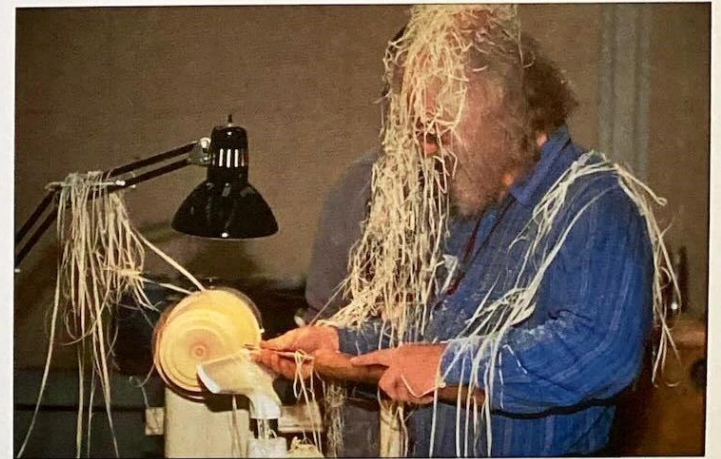
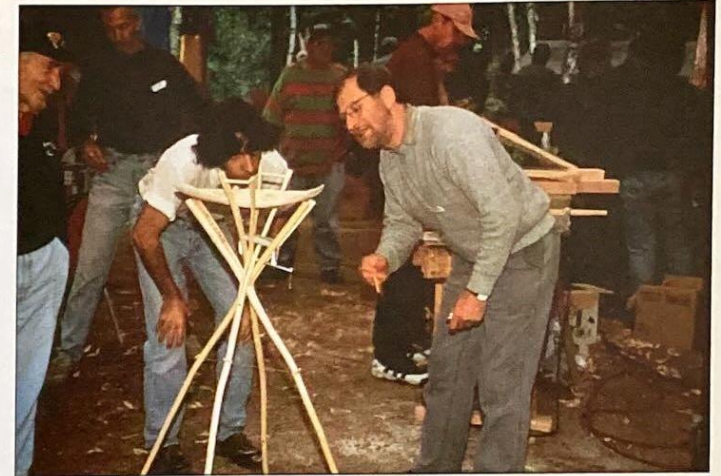
shared some of these concerns. "It worried me a little at first. On the phone I was told collaboration would be a strong element of the conference. I was sceptical, but was told, 'It happens, don't worry, it'll work. Just come'. When I arrived and saw how casual it was, I started thinking, 'This isn't going to work.' I got concerned because I felt sort of responsible to do what I came here to do."

**When Michael Hosaluk, the main initiator of the event, was asked what was on the agenda for the first day, he answered with typical understatement, "Nuthin'." Surprisingly, he was not joking.**

By the morning of the first full day the two groups seemed to have further coalesced—one intent on making as many things as quickly as possible and the other wandering around with bemused expressions, enjoying the friendly ambience but wondering what to do. The busiest people were those who had attended previous events. Del Stubbs, all-round woodworker from Maine, was in no doubt about what he would do. "I've been at Mike's conferences, all of them, since day one. I've watched it evolve and it's a natural progression. This couldn't happen anywhere else. All of us have gotten used to the idea and then you see new people coming in and trying to be instructors. Next time they won't."

John Jordan, woodturner from Tennessee, spoke for many when he said, "Some of us are probably more motivated in this situation than others. I'm sort of in the middle. I'm inspired by all the work going on, but I don't have the direction that I'm comfortable with. When I'm at home working on my own I know where I'm going. Here there's that uncertainty, so sometimes it's a little difficult to jump in. But I like the open format, even though I'm a little frightened occasionally. Being an instructor, I'm so attuned to hearing every little noise that doesn't sound like a perfect cut, or a machine that doesn't sound just so, so... you know ...."

During that first day people could be seen



TOP Gord Peteran and Stephen Hogbin (amongst others doing their own thing) collaborating on their piece *Conversation Conservation*. Photo courtesy of the writer.  
BOTTOM Melvyn Firmager making shavings. Photo courtesy of the writer.

picking up pieces of wood from the ample supply of local timber and wondering vaguely what to do. Others settled in to do their usual tricks, while many just looked—little different from the usual 'sit and watch' events.

## What the Makers Made; and Their Comments on the Process

By day two, the tempo had changed. A large table in the centre of the main workshop was being filled with partly-completed pieces and people were getting used to the idea that it was OK to pick up anybody's work and finish it.

Lynne Bowland, glass artist from Saskatoon, was busy working on a two-piece wooden egg. "It reminded me of Faberge's eggs and there was a clock movement sitting around, so I decided to incorporate the clock in it. I made paper hands and cut out holes so you could see the clock inside. The biggest problem is you keep seeing pieces and you can't figure out where they came from, because you can't remember anyone ever doing it."

The maker of the egg was Trent Watts, woodturner from Saskatoon. He seemed to have some idea of the fate of his piece. "I was intrigued by the work of French turner,



Jean-Francois Escoulen, so I used his chuck to make the egg. I think someone is going to put a clock inside it."

Saskatchewan artist and photographer, Grant Kernan, was busy working on someone else's piece and had no reservations about the process. "I'm surfacing a stick of wood which is going to be a table leg. I don't know what the rest of the table is going to look like, but I'm spanking paint onto textured surfaces, scraping and carving away, then adding different colours. This way frees the soul. I'm not afraid to change a piece from minute to minute until it's finished. It's nice to break your preconceptions."

More enthusiasm about the collaborative approach came from Saskatoon artist, Reg Morrell. "I got this butter knife from Mary Thouin. She just asked if I'd finish it for her. I'll burn it, then sand it and wax it. It's neat when people ask you to do stuff."

Melvyn Firmager, from England, had just taken one of his hollow turnings out of the microwave oven. After it developed a large split he gave it to Paul Sasso from Kentucky. "He's going to cut it in half along the split and put it in a box or something."

A first-timer for this kind of open-ended environment was New Zealand woodturner, Graeme Priddle. He took it in his stride. "Yesterday I saw a man walking down the path with a bowl that I'd made and I thought, 'Oh well!'"

The lack of a formal agenda was developing into a make-or-break process for many. David Loewy, Ontario designer and furniture maker, enjoyed the challenge immensely. "It's fantastic! At most of the large conferences you have all the conference groups who do the same things at every event, take notes and never do anything with it other than come back next year to take more notes. But collaboration is certainly not a guaranteed process. You have to let go because what you've made is going to change and there's certainly the risk that it's going to get destroyed. It can be difficult for some people—there are varying degrees of ego and things like that. But I think at the end when everything is out there, it'll be quite impressive."

John Kingsley, a furniture maker from New York, was busy planing and joining a complex gate-like arrangement "I'm collaborating on this piece with Michael Brolly. It's an anatomically inspired wall-hung container for sacred space. I've managed to throw out all my preconceived notions! It's the environment—a combination of it all, with the most amazing level of creative energy I've ever experienced."

Some of those who had held back at first were finally being drawn under the spell.

Tony Boase, photographer/turner from England, sat by the lake sipping coffee and mused on how it was going. "I was slightly wary at first when I talked to Michael Hosaluk about this in England. I wasn't sure if it was just going to be a bunch of mates with a few cans of beer, a couple of lathes and having a good time. I wasn't actually prepared for the level of professionalism and the organization. The whole thing is just so well run. I had visions of everyone queuing up to use 'the lathe', but they've obviously thought it out so well. I think sometimes these things can be regimented—two hours of one chap doing something and then two hours of something else. Here, it's hands-on and there's no pecking order. No one thinks, 'God! On the next lathe to me there's Stoney Lamar! What's he thinking?'"

Although he had been reluctant to join in at first, Doug Finkel, furniture maker from Virginia, was busy planing a large table top. "The legs for this are being done by Michael Hosaluk and Jean-Francois Escoulen. There's another leg, but I don't know who's doing it."

**Despite some initial reservations, almost everybody agreed that the agenda-free collaborative process is an extraordinary stimulus to creation.**

Walking around holding a bronze fish was Graeme Priddle. "I've never got to make a bronze fish before. It's cast off a real fish caught out of Emma Lake. I met a guy named Geoff walking up the path with it in his hand. Ian (Jones) helped me make the moulds and we were up till 3 o'clock this morning casting it. Today, I've cleaned it up and now I'm looking for someone who needs a fish. Leading edge work comes from this sort of thing—seeing something totally radical being done to a piece that you would not normally do." (The fish was later incorporated into a dinner gong donated to the camp kitchen.)

By day three it was very difficult to find anyone with any reservations about how the event was developing. North Carolina turner and sculptor, Stoney Lamar, started to really enjoy himself. "I've kinda loosened up. I did a table that wound up getting painted by three or four different people. It was really a

blast. I recognise the fact that I take my work a little too seriously sometimes. Wendy (Murayama) took the two cross pieces I had made for the table and she knew I wanted to keep it simple. She picked up on that right away. You think you're not saying much, but you've got such high-powered people here, so tuned in that you don't have to say a lot. It came late in the conference for me, but she did the perfect thing!"

Kiyoko Kato, Saskatoon artist, gave a very considered evaluation of the unique Emma Lake process. "You have to be quite mature to be able to focus in this kind of event. There are so many things going on, so you can't possibly focus on them all."

**A Word on Conservation**

There was a lot of talk about collaboration, but did the participants feel the other theme—conservation—was being addressed? Trent Watts explained that he didn't come necessarily because of conservation issues. "I would have come regardless, because I have been to the two previous ones. I think there has been more emphasis on the collaboration, but conservation has certainly been talked about and there is a conscious effort to use local woods. We have some wonderful timbers in northern Saskatchewan. There's been an effort to not use exotic woods from depleted resources of third world countries, so I suppose the conservation aspect has been important."

Ontario artists, Stephen Hogbin and Gord Peteran, attracted a lot of interest. From the very beginning, they had stood out as the most intensive collaborators who obviously took the whole process very seriously. Gord was adamant that he didn't want to let an unknown person finish one of his pieces. "If I've finished thinking about my goal and throw it on a table—you don't know my goal, we haven't discussed what good goal there might be." He described how his collaboration with Stephen started. "I was working on a bone way down near the metalworking tent and they sent me away because of the stink. I came up here and saw what Stephen was doing. At first we kept our eyes on each other—kinda casual. Then, very cautiously, we moved towards each other. Collaboration is extremely difficult, if not impossible. So when we decided we would work together, we were committed. It's quite a simple little piece really, but I think it's more powerful than I or Stephen could have done by ourselves. I would never have admitted that before this."

Stephen described what it was like for a private person such as himself. "I'm surprised, delighted and shocked all at the same time, just because of the intensity of the



ABOVE *Untitled, Wall piece collaboration*, Birch, Fir, Curly Maple, cloth, bleach, dye, approximately 28"(w) x 40"(h) x 6"(d), by John Kingsley, Michael Brolly, Chelsey Kingsley, Del Stubbs, Mary Thouin, Reg Morrell, Tony Bernard, Laurie Afseth.





ABOVE *Untitled, Table collaboration\**, Birch, Poplar, steel, approximately 5'(l) x 2'(w) x 30"(h), by Doug Finkel, Jean Francois Escoulen, Mark Sfirri, Reg Morrell, Stuart Welch, Mike Hosaluk.

experience, I think. There are so many people and a very high calibre of maker involved."

They stood and discussed their creation:

Gord: *The point where this changes into that is important - this turns into 'split' and 'split' turns into 'circle'.*

Stephen: *I think we should round this here.*

Gord: *It's the content that works.*

Stephen: *I don't think we'll lose that.*

Gord: *This is a critical point. We'll make or break it here. At this point we've just stuck two things together.*

Stephen: *I think it's going to work. It's pretty close.*

Gord: *Actually the piece is insignificant. It's the interaction that's taken three days of contemplation that is important.*

Stephen: *Yes, the process is important. We'll see how the product stacks up, but maybe we are involved in a conversation that's going to go on for years rather than just for a few days of intensive experience.*

Gord: *We came a thousand miles from the same province to go through this process!*

In a final artists' statement they described the piece, *Conversation Conservation* (see photo page 5) as such:

"A collaboration is a conversation. There was no agenda of technique or form imposed on the collaborative process. Materials implying hunter-gatherer were selected for their complex psychological qualities as much as for their formal and useful qual-

ities. Discarded antler and forest thinnings became almost frenzied. The work is ambiguous. It alludes to a functional table, but looks like a ceremonial object. It represents fleeting collaborations and ideas brought about by conversation."

### And the Event Wraps Up

As the last day rolled around, activity became almost frenzied. The only scheduled event, an auction open to the public, was the finale. The funds were to be donated to the Saskatchewan Craft Council, so everyone was under pressure to complete their work. People were actually running from the wood shop to the finishing room to get things painted and some had worked right through the night in order to have work completed. Many pieces were bought by the artists, but for the outside public it was a chance to buy name pieces at bargain prices.

The auction brought in \$16,500 for the Council, even though the bidding was disappointingly low for many of the makers. Steve Loar, New York artist, was shocked at how little one piece he had worked on sold for. "That was a \$4,000 piece!" he protested. Stephen Hogbin, with his usual careful insight, commented, "I just wonder if a commercial occasion is the right way to end. Perhaps we need something more reflective of the nature of the event."

Despite some initial reservations, almost everybody agreed that the agenda-free collaborative process is an extraordinary stimulus to creation. The work sold at the auction was patchy in quality, but despite the short time available there were significant pieces. Of greatest significance was the process of sharing, opening-up, making friends and learning about new ways of seeing. At the least, Emma Lake is a unique and wonderful time spent among friends. At best, it can be a life-changing experience for an artist. But most will remember the activity, buzz of conversation and the prolific output. Many said they would like to see similar events held in their own territory, but there was almost universal agreement that Emma Lake is unique. With Michael Hosaluk, committed support from the Craft Council and a team of dedicated volunteers, it is a difficult combination to match. Not one person, when asked, said they wouldn't like to be at the next symposium.

Terry Martin is an Australian woodturner and writer who attended the Symposium.

\*Apologies to any participant whose name may have been missed in the artist credits. To the best of the organizers' knowledge, names of all persons who worked on the pieces have been included. If additional participants are known, please inform the SCC.

# To Express One's Self in Craft



ABOVE Yvonne Romano at work in her Milden home and studio. Photo by Verna Allinson.

**[Yvonne's] whole house is her studio. The walls and ceilings are festooned with materials in various states of drying. A wide shelf runs around the upper wall of the living room—the storage place for dried plants, both natural and purchased. The yard, both front and back, is one gigantic garden. The back yard also houses the foundation for a greenhouse.**

I remember the first time that I met Yvonne Romano. Or actually, her work.

Isn't it odd how one always knows a person by what they create rather than the individual? But then again, perhaps it isn't so odd. Our work is a natural extension of who we are and what we do. But I digress. Yvonne had a booth at the Saskatchewan Handcraft Festival several years ago when I was the Marketing Coordinator for the Saskatchewan Craft Council. She had the most amazing hand painted silk kimono hanging at the back of her booth. There was a wonderful rhythm to the pattern and colours which danced across the pale silk. This is one of the trademarks that I have identified in all of the works that Yvonne has done since.

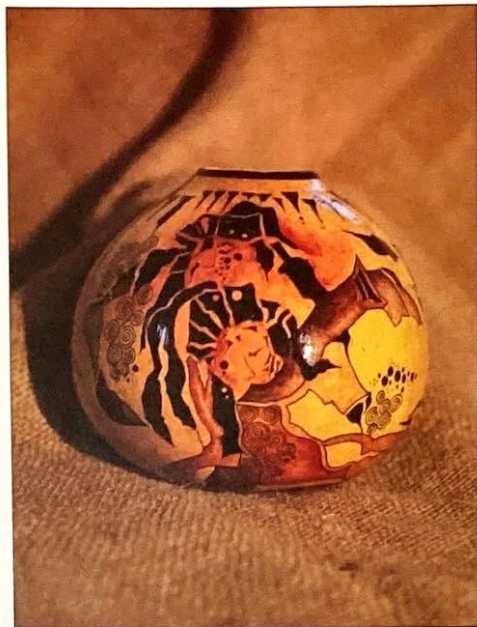
### BY SUSAN ROBERTSON

Born in Detroit, Michigan, she grew up in Kitchener, Ontario. After graduating from high school, she obtained her Bachelor's Degree in Interior Design from the University of Manitoba in 1971. As in much of our discussion about her life, she could not really remember what spurred her to make the decision to pursue this particular avenue for creative expression. While she did admit to having had an unusual art teacher who had a significant impact on her, she is unclear as to why she chose design over art. Why she chose Manitoba was clearer. To her recollection, it was the only University which offered a design program. After leaving school, until 1989, she was

essentially self-employed doing commercial interior design in Edmonton. During this time, she found herself boxed into a high stress position of endless paperwork and no outlet for her creativity. There were no challenges in what she was doing. It was the same interior, over and over. It was at this time that she sold everything and moved to Saskatoon, searching for a new lifestyle.

This time period and the choices she made are vague in Yvonne's memory. What she does remember is the \$10,000 in taxes owed to government as the motivating factor in getting back to work. For about a year and a half, she partnered with Renee Dudderidge in interior design (Saskatoon). She soon rediscovered why she had left this lifestyle and so cast around for some other





ABOVE Gourd, grown, dried (one year); surface: washed, scraped/sanded; interior: scraped and burned out, sanded; finish: hand painted acrylics and inks, urethane; 5 3/4 x 6 1/2", by Yvonne Romano. Photo courtesy of the artist.

way of earning a living (and getting the tax man off her back). This is when she turned to craft.

Silk painting seemed like a natural extension of herself, for she already had many of the skills. Her design training included watercolour painting and her first job had been freehand drafting. "I felt like I had always done it," she recounts. And so, she produced scarves and cards as well as one-of-a-kind pieces. But while the public admired her work, they didn't buy it, she regrets. They were, perhaps, "too much a work of art."

She pursued the silks for two or three years but couldn't make a living at it. Dennis Tkachuk, her partner and husband, had just started making willow baskets, and working with willow appealed to her. This started her off on a whole new venture. Yvonne has always loved working with plants and flowers and has studied herb lore for years. Combining her design knowledge and her love of florals with willow resulted in both an outlet for her creativity and a product that people liked to purchase. It seemed that she had found her place at last.

Around the same time, Yvonne and Dennis moved to Mildred in search of a simpler lifestyle. They purchased a tiny, inexpensive house which was in good shape and which required only a paint job. One of

**Gourds! I remember when she first told me about her plans to work with them. I expected a dried gourd which had been decorated and incorporated into her floral arranging. Boy, was I wrong!**

the two bedrooms was converted to a studio. This room did not hold Yvonne's burgeoning supplies for long! Today, her whole house is her studio. The walls and ceilings are festooned with materials in various states of drying. A wide shelf runs around the upper wall of the living room—the storage place for dried plants, both natural and purchased. The yard, both front and back, is one gigantic garden. The back yard also houses the foundation for a greenhouse.

She took to gathering and growing many of the florals she used in her work, producing decorative wall pieces, swags and ornaments. Her *piece de resistance*, and the work that she most enjoyed doing, however, were the mirrors. They featured a large oval or circular mirror, framed with woven willow and elegantly accented with a splash of colour and texture.

But while things seemed to be finally coming together on the money front, there continued to be an emptiness on the spirituality side. It seemed that once again, she had been caught up in the rat race. She and her husband were doing fifteen shows a year and while they were selling well, they seemed to have no more money in their pockets. They realized that they just couldn't do it anymore. The funny thing was, after backing out of doing many of the shows, their bottom line was essentially the same. Yvonne does ac-

knowledge the Spartan lifestyle that they have adopted. There are many things that she has given up to get to this place in time.

And just where is this place? Well, it is a place of incredible freedom; a time of creativity. A place of harmony. A place of joy in the ability to express one's self in craft. However, Yvonne doesn't know where she is going to go with all this freedom, but she has several concepts and ideas she wants to investigate. She will, as always, because of her love of them, continue working with textiles. She plans to do larger works: wall hangings and quilts.

Recently, Yvonne has been exploring iconography. This art-craft form features symbolic interpretations of religious ideology painted on wooden panels, often heavily incorporating gold leaf. A devoutly religious individual, Yvonne believes that creativity comes out of spirituality. For her, this work combines both. It draws her in and allows the full interaction of intellectual, emotional and spiritual creativity within the bounds of the process. This is a place that many of us have experienced and where we crave to return.

Another area of interest has been a direct benefit of her passion for gardening. Gourds! I remember when she first told me about her plans to work with them. I expected a dried gourd which had been decorated and incorporated into her floral arranging. Boy, was I wrong! The gourd itself is the focal point and background for surface decoration. Again, the rhythm of pattern and colour is outstanding. Images meld and peep out at you, and each look delightfully provides a whole new insight on the work. While I understand that she has technical problems to overcome with regard to drying and preparing the gourds, I cannot help but await anxiously for her to refine this body of work!

Another dream is to run workshops out of Mildred. They (she and Dennis) hope to create an environment which will entice people to come out to Mildred. A 'peaceful life' retreat, if you will. Helping people to use a creative outlet to find their innate spirituality.

While Yvonne states "I've changed radically over the past year. I've turned forty-nine; I've moved in to the second half of my life," she isn't sure exactly where she is going or what she is going to do. What she does know is that she will always produce something. She needs to have a creative outlet; to create something that is exciting. I have no doubt that the future work that we will see from Yvonne will be no less than that, exciting!

Susan Robertson is a potter from Outlook, Saskatchewan, who owns and operates A Wrinkle in Thyme Gift Emporium. She is the Marketing Chairperson of the SCC Board of Directors.

# Losing our Roots

BY SANDRA FLOOD

**D**uring the eight years in which I was editor of *The Craft Factor*, I ran, at most, a couple of articles which dealt with the activities of previous generations of craftspeople. I knew nobody pursuing that interest. Recording ongoing craft activity was sufficiently time consuming and we lived with the myth that nothing really worthwhile happened on the craft scene until the advent of the hippie generation in the 1970's. Two years of research into (non-Native) Canadian activity in the first half of this century has dramatically revised that viewpoint.

I came across a reference to the Saskatoon Arts and Crafts Society (1923-1953) in a 1932 report on Canadian museums. Neither the name nor the information were accurate but it led me to the archives of an organization emerging, in 1923, out of the energetic Arts and Crafts Committee of the Local Council of Women. The Society was

BELOW Tapestries and artifacts from the Saskatoon Arts and Crafts Society Show, circa 1951. Photo (reference: S-B2457) courtesy of the Saskatchewan Archives Board.

to market and exhibit craft, and to gain information on, collect and arouse a wider appreciation of crafts in the province. If you think this sounds remarkably like the Saskatchewan Craft Council mandate, you are right. On an entirely volunteer, non-profit basis they ran a successful organization for twenty years until the war changed life on the prairies and the organizers grew tired or moved away.

Their activities started with a bang—an exhibition of old and new craft displayed throughout the Chancellor of the University of Saskatchewan's residence (his wife







ABOVE Hungarian embroidered purse. Photo (reference: S-B2465) courtesy Saskatchewan Archives Board.

was a founding member of the Society). A newspaper account details a range of media and techniques including pottery, stichery, beading, crochet, knitting, weaving, rug making, copper work, basketry and wickerwork, woodwork, bookbinding and illumination. This work came predominantly from people of Japanese, Chinese, Greek, Norwegian, Icelandic, English, Ukrainian, Hungarian and Austrian origin. The work was made in homes, studios and workshops, in Saskatoon schools and the mental hospital at North Battleford. The makers were formally trained, through schooling or apprenticeship, or informally through skills passed on within the family or community. They produced craft for sale as part of the domestic economy or as a leisure activity.

Amongst the pottery displayed was that of Saskatoon school children and "a huge jug made by a Pole."<sup>1</sup> The teaching of pottery in city public schools and an occupational therapy program at the North Battleford mental hospital signalled a growing work force of unmarried women graduates from Canadian art schools, most of

which had craft programs at that time. The "huge jug" may in fact have been made by Peter Rupchan, a Ukrainian, whose work was shown by the Society. He was one of a small number of potters trained in Ukrainian manufactories who were active in the province by the First World War. Mrs. Barber of Regina, a Fellow of the Royal Society of [British] Artists, "particularly expert at enamelling clay with her own designs" was reputed to have fired the first clay (by a non-Native) in Saskatchewan in 1912. The University of Saskatchewan had a Department of Ceramic Engineering from 1921 to 1952 with a variable-speed wheel and a kiln, and employed an English-trained master mould maker who also threw "beautiful hand-turned pottery...He was a Master and a real artist."<sup>2</sup> He probably trained Cameron Worcester who taught pottery and ran 'Art Pottery' in Saskatoon in the late 1930's.

This reported activity is probably just the tip of the iceberg and does not seem exceptional in the West. Medalta Potteries supplied clay, glazes and advice to schools and clubs across the country. The main

**Passing snippets in newspaper clippings and minute books paint a picture of a vibrant craft community, vitalized by highly skilled and trained European incomers. A wide gamut of craft media, techniques and styles were used. I haven't dealt with smithing, jewellery, woodworking and furniture making, or with basketry and straw weaving. What happened to the histories and work of these craftspeople?**

restriction was probably the lack of studio kilns. These could be obtained from the United States, no doubt at great expense, or had to be hand-built.

Textiles were equally diverse and vigorous. The Japanese, Chinese and Greek examples of needlework in the 1922 exhibition were singled out as exquisite. Given the high standards of the day, they undoubtedly were. A time when interior decoration and women's fashions dictated the extensive use of decorative textiles and trimmings coincided with a great coming together of needlecraft traditions through the influx of settlers to Western Canada.

The Society was interested in the retention and promotion of distinctive ethnic traditions. However, in organizing the production and marketing of embroidered linens, predominantly from Doukhobor and Ukrainian communities, accommodation had to be made to the tastes of a mass market in products and, to some extent, colours. Within these constraints, the Society encouraged their embroiderers to work out individual designs. The balance between

conserving old designs, continuing to use them in new circumstances and adapting them to new uses, and the changing interests of craftswomen encountering new influences and materials engaged both the originating communities and the dominant anglo-Canadian culture. The Ukrainian Women's Association of Canada, who established the Ukrainian Museum of Canada, were also energetically collecting historical embroidery designs and encouraging Ukrainian women to continue their traditional skills.

For twenty years the Society exhibited and sold the work of Saskatchewan craftspeople from Montreal to Vancouver and further afield. The payment for embroidery and other textiles was always poor but that income helped sustain some families through the exigencies of the settlement and Drought years. Despite much effort the Society never managed to establish a Saskatchewan linen industry or the cottage manufacture of Kileem rugs.

The prize lists from the agricultural fairs indicate the range of techniques. Between 1908 and 1937 four lists from Watson, Foam Lake and Nokomis itemize embroidery including eyelet, shadow, drawn-thread, solid or French, cross stitch, cut-work Italian and Roman; tatting; beading; filer, Battenburg and knitted lace; patchwork, quilting; rug braiding and hooking, and punchwork; crochet and knitting. The Society noted that knitting, crochet and tatting were unmarketable as they were done by most women. These techniques have been largely neglected by collectors and researchers and denoted by contemporary craft arbiters. From intricately patterned bedspreads, lace trimming and essential garments to the knitted 'tailored' suits and dresses with knitted gores, darts and trims of the 1930's, they have represented a major investment of time and expertise, technical skill and individual expression.

There seems little distinctively rural about this list of crafts. Spinning, weaving and quilting appear as part of both rural and city activities. Weaving, using various techniques, ranged from the functional to brilliantly coloured Norwegian tapestries. Maret Wells<sup>3</sup>, a weaver, wrote from Glenlush to the Society in 1923, "I have two more silk tunics and a skirt length that I could send...the idea is...to make a garment that cannot be bought in an ordinary store...I never make two alike." Saskatoon residents such as Mrs. De Backer, who spent four years learning the lace-making trade in Belgium and a further thirteen years as a lace designer in Brussels and Paris, gave talks and demonstrations to the Society. Sybil

Croll gave a talk on batik, Steve Deverz, a Budapest trained silversmith showed "several beautiful pieces worked in silver and gold" and demonstrated making silver rings from moulds, and Miss Kende who also trained in Budapest, Hungary, and exhibited in the 1922 exhibition was so proficient in art bookbinding and illumination that she was prepared to do it as a commercial venture. The appearance of leather work and gesso<sup>4</sup> in the 1927 Nokomis Agricultural Fair list shows that *Art Nouveau* techniques and media were familiar even in some rural communities.

**My concern about living without a history, or with a history which is the mythologizing of an era, is that we, the craft community, lose touch with our roots.**

Passing snippets in newspaper clippings and minute books paint a picture of a vibrant craft community, vitalized by highly skilled and trained European incomers. A wide gamut of craft media, techniques and styles were used. I haven't dealt with smithing, jewellery, woodworking and furniture making, or with basketry and straw weaving. What happened to the histories and work of these craftspeople? Were they discarded as being no longer fashionable, no longer valued? From the few remnants, the idea that standards are higher now, that work is more exciting, more 'innovative' may not stand up to investigation.

My concern about living without a history, or with a history which is the mythologizing of an era, is that we, the craft community, lose touch with our roots. We disconnect the transference of techniques, skills and ideas. We lose a vivid history of skilled and entrepreneurial craftsmanship, of the ongoing urge to create and make beautiful ourselves and our surroundings. We lose a democratic history which was an integral and enriching part of many people's lives and made our culture what it is.

There is little published Canadian craft history (and negligible funded research) in contrast to Canadian painting and sculpture which commands comparatively massive scholarship, publications, institutions and funding. My research into British craft

collections indicated that ultimately a collection's viability depended on adequate textual support. It is no less true here. We have lost and continue to lose irreplaceable craft archives and collections because they are not valued. In neglecting our past we doom our own efforts to a transitory future, discounted through ignorance, egotism and a short term memory.

Sandra Flood is starting her third year of research towards a Ph.D. at the University of Manchester, England. Her research topic is "Twentieth Century Canadian Craft and Museum Practice. She is based at the Canadian Museum of Civilization.

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all quotes are from newspaper clippings and Minute Books in the Saskatoon Arts and Crafts Society archive at the Saskatchewan Archives Board, Saskatoon.

<sup>2</sup> Judith Silverthorne, *Made in Saskatchewan: Peter Rupchan* p. 35

<sup>3</sup> Maret or possibly Maril Wells; Glenlush may have been near Prince Albert. Handwritten letters are not always decipherable.

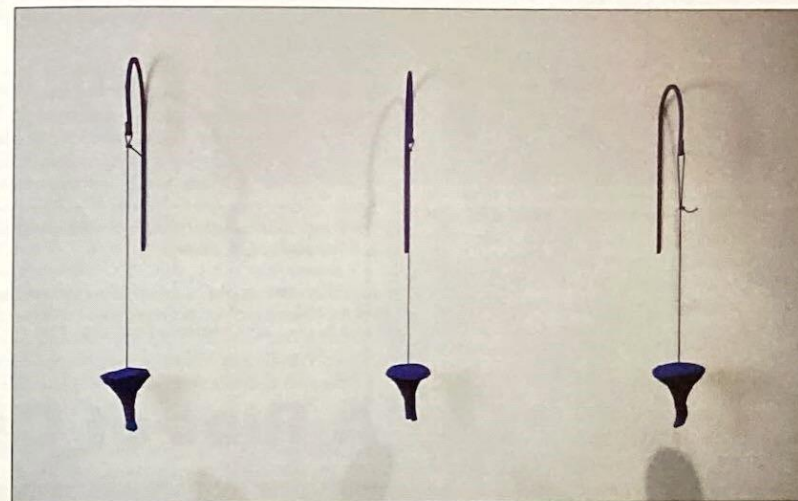
<sup>4</sup> Tooled leather, repoussé copper and silver, and gesso panels were brilliantly exploited by the Glasgow girls, who included Margaret Macdonald, the wife and design partner of Charles Rennie Mackintosh. Her gesso and other panels form an integral part of his interior and furniture designs. Gesso is described as a "rather awkward plaster medium used to show technical skill and draughtsmanship, which could be painted, gilded, and have inset string and glass beads to provide low relief.

Information, particularly about the early part of the century, is sparse, spotty and fast disappearing. If anyone can add any information about subjects in this article or information about craftspeople or craft activity in the period 1900 to 1960, Sandra Flood would be delighted to hear from you, any help would be acknowledged. She can be reached by contacting her:

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# Exhibitions



## Breaking Borders

BY EVELINE BOUDREAU

### "The Blue Show"

Ruth Chambers, Cara Gay Driscoll  
Pat Matheson, John Peet, James Slingerland

Saskatchewan Craft Gallery, Saskatoon  
June 7 to July 9, 1996  
Manitoba Craft Council Gallery, Winnipeg  
August 2 to 31, 1996  
Scheduled to be in Regina in 1997

**W**hen I visited "The Blue Show" at the Saskatchewan Craft Gallery in Saskatoon, I discovered a very welcoming environment, a pleasant atmosphere in which I was able to savour a very special moment. First, I was captivated by the obvious visual effect, but I felt something else was going on. The work of the five artists were united by this effect but it left me wondering, questioning, as I appreciated the individual pieces.

#### What was the Visual Effect?

In our lives in general as in art, we are aware of colours; it is an important carrier of meaning and significance. The earthenware pieces in "The Blue Show" were not glazed, but were all painted the same shade of blue. In ceramic history, per se, there are some specific colours attached to location, time and type of work. But it

**OPPOSITE PAGE** *Trio* (1996), earthenware, latex paint, 58 x 28 x 28 cm, 54 x 26 x 26 cm, 51 x 25 x 25 cm, by John Peet. Collection of the artist.

**ABOVE** *Earthworks #1, #2, #3* (1996), earthenware, steel, rope, latex paint; #1: 117 x 15 x 37 cm; #2: 118 x 18 x 37 cm; #3: 118 x 15 x 37 cm; by James Slingerland. Collection of the artist.

was not a Wedgwood Blue, nor a Bleu de Sevres, nor a Delft Blue—it was what these five artists call "Kline's blue" (after the modernist painter). By choosing to use this fairly dark, mystical matt blue, the group wanted to free themselves of any learned colour responses as well as the rules and assumptions about the use of colour in history. It gave to the exhibition a very refreshing atmosphere. It uplifted my soul.

Used as a common denominator, this one colour—blue—gave to the exhibition a strong sense of installation, rather than individual pieces being put together. But why paint their clay work?

#### Meaning... What Else was Going On?

As the group worked collectively around one hue, they also tested the limits of perceived boundaries surrounding clay as a medium of artistic expression. In their search for a unifying element, the group reflected upon the idea of individuality, one of our basic and important social values. We know of artists' desire and right to develop, foster and strive for their own personality and uniqueness. We cherish and cultivate our individuality daily, both consciously and unconsciously. The group looked back in history at the medieval guilds, when what are now called *artists* were called *skilled workers* and whose work was anonymous. During the Quattrocento period (the 1400's), a fundamental change in attitude towards the skilled workers took place: individualism was born, and the *artist*



was invented. With blue as a common denominator in this exhibition, the artists were willing to underplay part of their personal identity, (relating to the anonymous guild workers). Many artists would not be capable of thinking about such detachment, let alone doing it!

The artists pushed further their questioning by using paint instead of glaze. Here, the Regina artists addressed a common notion of art and craft: art for contemplation and craft for use. In today's version of art history, the clay medium is frequently ignored, not considered "High Art," often relegated to anthropology for the study of the past. The group addresses this dichotomy between art and craft by presenting completely non-functional work in a Craft Gallery, by covering the clay surface with latex paint instead of glaze. They even made the whole question amusing, tongue in cheek. I found this an excellent way of bringing out the debate between those two camps and into a public place. In 1994, the Canadian ceramist, Paul Mathieu, addressed this issue, in his own way, at the Saskatchewan Craft Symposium in Regina, "Beyond the Visual". Mathieu maintains that it is important to expand theoretically on the topic of craft as art, even though today's craft does not easily lend itself to deconstruction by contemporary theory and discourse. He and others insist on using the same semantics as the art critics and art historians in order to bridge the gap between the two solitudes. I personally believe that diverse approaches are necessary if the barriers and exclusionist attitudes on both sides are to be transformed. I was excited to see how "The Blue Show" questioned our assumptions towards art, the security of individualism and the contemporary role of the artist.

#### Each Artist's Work

The pieces were displayed on the wall, on blue pedestals and on the floor, in groupings by each of the five artists in the exhibition. Even though each artist had adapted his or her personal style to fit this exhibition, each artist's work was able to impose itself to the viewer and was easily identifiable. The shape of Pat Matheson's elongated, sculptural wall pieces reminded me of arrow heads. They spoke about his environment, where he lives, and geological layering. For this exhibition, Matheson did not use his usual text writing on clay. His titles are amusing puns on North American history. On a wall flooded with natural light were James Slingerland's abstract hanging planters, *Earthworks #1, #2, #3*. These graceful shapes were displayed to their best advantage on a separate wall where we could see them from both front and side.

John Peet, a very accomplished potter in the functional tradition, presented large vessels in the Greek tradition with *Trio*—three urns which stood elegantly on blue pedestals, as well as his *Bowl #1* and *#2*. For this exhibition, Peet abandoned his usual decorative glazed surfaces. Cara Gay Driscoll's architectural pieces on blue pedestals had a strong presence, pulling the viewers to that extreme end of the gallery. Her hand coiled vessels, which stand inside a fence, are symbolic of physical as well as psychological protection. Inside each piece is a written text that is reflected in the long titles of her pieces. For instance, *Boundary*: "that which marks the extent or limit of anything, as a line which bounds a territory on a map; a fence around a property, or the like, also the limit of itself." Perhaps Driscoll's three pieces in this exhibition, *Barrier*, *Boundary* and *Barricade*, most clearly indicate how boundaries are physical as well as psychological. Her preoccupation with the difficulties of communication is well suited to this exhibition, and for me, summarizes the main discourse of the exhibition.

Ruth Chambers relinquished her usual individual installation presentation to be part of this unified group installation. In Chamber's *Vitality Series*, composed of three hollow forms, the surface is exploited with textured human imprint. The void had a dynamic function and the pieces were a metaphor to body parts: the

huge heart shape for love and passion, the lungs for the ephemeral, and the brain for the conception of ideas. I believe, however, that Chamber's pieces displayed on the bare carpet of the gallery, would have benefited by having a suitable fabric beneath them or another background. In fact, the entire exhibition would have benefited by a complete physical transformation of the gallery. What if the floor, walls and ceiling would have been painted Kline's blue?

#### Conclusion

"The Blue Show" was a unified exhibition and a challenging experience for its viewers. Each of the five artists worked out some compromise in technique, approach and concept. They acknowledged history, but without being limited to the historical notions of the use of clay. I, as a viewer, enjoyed being challenged on the possibilities of clay and observed an innovative exhibition.

Eveline Boudreau is a ceramist living in Saskatoon and currently studying at the University of Saskatchewan.

Mathieu, Paul, "The Space of Pottery: An Investigation of the Nature of Craft," *Making and Metaphor: A Discussion of Meaning in Contemporary Craft*, ed. Gloria A. Hickey, p. 26 - 34, Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1994.

## A Riot of Cats!

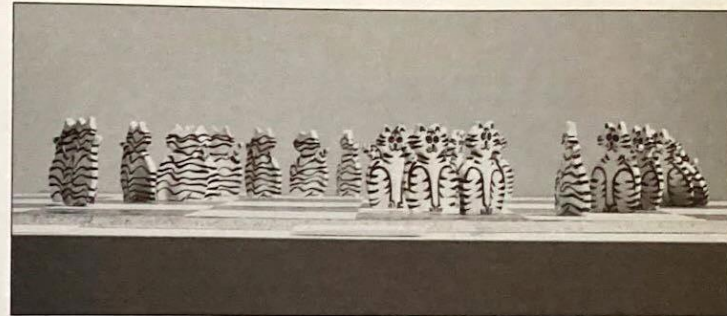
BY ELAINE AULIS

Susan Robertson  
"Catcaphony"  
Saskatchewan Craft Gallery, Saskatoon  
July 12 to August 13, 1996



OPPOSITE PAGE *Fat Cat* (1996), handbuilt, cone 6 porcelain, acrylic paint, by Susan Robertson.

RIGHT *Domnicats* (1996), slab, cone 6 porcelain, polychromatic underglaze, tile, wood, by Susan Robertson.



Sue Robertson has made her first foray in the sculptural arena and the result is a delightful tickling of the senses. The title of this exhibition is a play on the word *cacophony*. Webster's Dictionary defines the word as "a disagreeable sound or discord of sounds," and "Catcaphony" showed how seemingly unlike cats can, in their individual discordance, become a symbiotic, unified whole. It has been said that sculpture should elicit a response from the viewer, and this exhibit has done just that.

These sculptural cats are a natural progression from the mantle cats and cat plates that are a part of Robertson's repertoire of handbuilt, functional pottery. Her first encounter with the clay medium was sculpting a small porcelain dancer. It was an experience of immediacy that elicited a strong emotional response. Sue Robertson has had cats come in and out of her life, but does not consider herself a "cat person." So, the question remains—why cats? Why not dogs, or even cows? Well, one certainly cannot be ambivalent about these felines. You either love 'em, or you hate 'em. They definitely possess strong individual personalities; something that just isn't the same with dogs. I was intrigued by the title of this exhibit. Just how many variations could there be on a cat theme?

Upon entering the gallery to take a closer look, a flurry of adjectives popped into my mind. Here was a riot of colour; a boisterous display that appealed to cat lovers and non-cat lovers alike. Cats come in all shapes, sizes, and colours. Here were three dimensional canvases—each cat a mini theatre in the round.

There were twenty-four cats on display, and every one possessed a unique personality. Each had a title. All of the pieces were in medium fired porcelain, and colour was the dominant element enhancing the design. The making of the cats employed a variety of handbuilding techniques, including the use of molds, slabs, extended pinch, coils, and extrusions. Methods of decoration included glazes, underglazes, acrylic paint, air brushing, wax resist, and oxides. What became apparent upon closer scrutiny was that some of these cats were in groupings. They were the *Katz*, *Art Deco*, *Angle*, and *Painted Series*. It's tough to describe these feline creatures without referring to their titles, and naming each one was quite a serious business. This was a family affair, and Robertson's daughter helped in the process. Their naming brings an element of whimsy, and exhibits a wonderful sense of humour. The titles are a play on words, and prompt the viewer to sometimes do a "double take", and take a closer look.

Let's begin with the *Art Deco Series*, (see back cover) as they are most reminiscent of Robertson's mantle cats. Their basic cat shape provides a perfect backdrop for a variety of underglaze colours that create expressions that can't help but raise the corners of one's mouth into smiles and chuckles. The most effective of these was



a cat called *Pause*. The racing stripes indicated that, as with all cats, he was very sure of foot; but his expression was one of pure astonishment at having been halted very abruptly.

*Domnicats* was just plain old fun. Remember what it was like to see dominoes falling in perfect synchronization at the flick of a finger? Here were over twenty miniature black and white striped cats lined up in a tempting curve on a black and white tiled playing board, just waiting for that itchy finger.

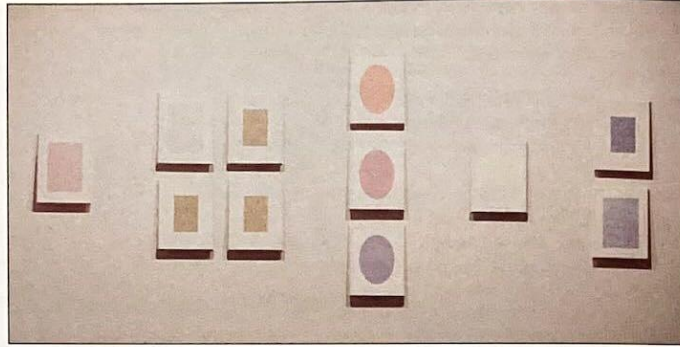
Of the three wall pieces in this exhibit, *Van Cat* was a spoof on Vincent Van Gogh's self portrait, showing the famous artist minus an ear. *Van Cat's* ear was not entirely gone, so the analogy was a bit obscure, but the colour and texture of this piece paid tribute to Van Gogh's style of painting. The coils were extruded and textured, and colour was used to create movement. *Lionesque* was quite tactile in texture. The very obvious use of fingers to manipulate the clay into a fiery mane surrounding slanted eyes, broad nose, and downturned mouth captured the true essence of wildness. Here was a jungle beast to be admired at a distance. The use of manganese oxide in the surface decoration was a wise choice.

The *Katz Series* consisted of three black and white striped cats. The smallest one was titled *Despondent*. Here was a very sad cat indeed, standing with arms held tightly at his sides, head cast down, legs close together. His stripes were painted with black underglaze, and the lack of a finishing glaze seemed to reinforce the feeling of sadness. His cousins were much larger in comparison. *Just Hangin'* sat on the display box with one leg dangling over the edge. *Catchin' the Rays* reclined leisurely, with head supported by his arm, legs crossed, tail coiled in mid flip. They were painted a shiny white with black stripes. Their names remind us of things we never seem



**RIGHT** 1996 Installation of hand-stitched cloth samplers and computer-generated paper drawings mounted on angled wood panel, by Wendy Peart. Photo courtesy of the artist.

**OPPOSITE PAGE** *Tree Up Against the Wall: Shield of Protection for the Green Growing Blanket of the Whole Earth* (1996), Cotton, willow and abaca fibre, birch, cedar, poplar, mixed media, 77 x 130 x 18 cm, by Oriol Dancer.



to have enough time to do, and their stripes reinforce lifestyles that are sometimes restrictive and uncomfortable.

Now, who would have thought of triangular cats? The *Angle Series* were slab built, and decorated with underglaze, wax resist, and glazes. They were not my favourite, only because to me cats imply a sensuous, voluptuous roundness that these guys lacked. But they made up for it in personality. *Licorice* was the only monochromatic piece, and wax resist was used to create a depth of colour in its shiny black coat. *What About Bob?* had a quizzical air, and upon closer look, he was missing his tail. Then there was *Fric, and his evil twin Frac*. They reminded me of two famous characters from *Alice in Wonderland*—Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dum. The use of polychromatic underglazes and glazes enhanced the angularity of their mirror images.

The piece that displayed the most spunk was a floor installation called *Catastrophe*. It was definitely the most aptly named, because it consisted of a giant-sized litter box with the remains of a huge, white porcelain cat. Certainly an enterprising endeavour, it made the best of a very bad situation. What had happened? Well, the poor thing had blown up in the kiln, and rather than throw it out, *Catastrophe* was created. (My own daughter referred to this as a great big kitty litter disaster!)

Holding court in the centre of it all was a fat, round, very orange cat wearing a very broad grin. Could it be Garfield? No, but *Fat Cat* certainly reminded me of the famous comic strip cat we've all come to love. Here sat a smug, satiated creature. He certainly was the centre of the most ambitious and numerous grouping of cats.

The *Painted Series* consisted of a variety of richly-painted felines. *Poppycok, Floribund, Majesta, Wild Thing, and Peacock* were vibrant tapestries, inspired by the Balinese cats of Linda Burch. The largest in this group was called *Black Cat in a Bed of Roses*. Two luminous yellow and green eyes gleamed from its black body, and it was decorated in stenciled roses. This cat reminded me of the Queen of Hearts from *Alice in Wonderland*. This series showed how colour provides an almost infinite variety of possibilities.

"Cataphony" certainly elicited a response from the viewer. This humorous, witty, whimsical exhibition made people smile, chuckle, and sometimes laugh outright at what they saw. Sue Robertson has succeeded in her leap of faith into the sculptural arena. She has integrated form, colour, and texture to create an agreeable, and quite pleasurable experience from what initially presented itself as a cacophony of cats.

Elaine Aulis is a potter from Saskatoon. She is on the Saskatchewan Craft Council Board of Directors.

## Tradition & Technology

BY GREG BEATTY

Wendy Peart  
"Busy Work"  
Neutral Ground, Regina  
May 25 to June 8, 1996

**R**ight wing commentators would have us believe that the market is an ideologically neutral forum for determining value. But given the great inequities in wealth distribution that exist in our society, and the non-coincidental manner in which wealth accrues to those with business acumen, there can be no doubt that ideological factors do enter into the market equation. In "Busy Work," Regina artist Wendy Peart presents a selection of 81 hand-stitched cloth samplers and computer-generated paper drawings (each mounted on an angled wood panel) that examine this issue, with particular emphasis on the gendered value of labour.

At first glance, computer graphics would seem to have little in common with more traditional imaging technologies. But printmaking, photography, even Pointillist painting from the 19th century, all possess the same pixelated visual structure as digital images. "Busy Work incorporates two distinct technologies," says Peart, "the aged process of stitchery and the modern practice of computer graphics. The works were developed in relation to each other and merge into familial groups based on formal qualities like colour, shape and pattern."

Both sets of cloth and paper images consist of ovals and rectangles that reference the face and hand. By juxtaposing them on the gallery wall, Peart generates several binary associations: past/present, female/male, human/machine. In historical terms, samplers were stitched by teenage girls as part of their domestic training. Because they inculcated in the girls the feminine "virtues" of passivity, patience, obedience and conformity, they have been identified as instruments of patriarchal oppression by some feminist theoreticians and artists—most notably, Roszika Parker and Leslie Sampson.

With their heavy reliance on traditional stitches (cross-stitch, lazy daisy, French knot, etc.) and staid decorative motifs such as the

alphabet and numbers zero through nine, samplers were a strongly derivative form of craft. Yet in transferring their patterns to cloth, girls were required to perform relatively sophisticated mathematical calculations. In contrast with each drawing, which took approximately forty-five minutes to complete, Peart spent five hours on each sampler. According to the labour theory of value, this should invest the samplers with greater intrinsic worth. But in our technology-obsessed world, slick graphic images are privileged over hand-crafted ones. Peart reinforces this irony by adopting an installation strategy that emphasizes the common pixelated visual format of both media. As with the samplers, it's possible to draw a distinction between the design of a graphic software program and its subsequent execution. While predominantly male software programmers are well-compensated for their work, the menial line-by-line checking of computer code is often done by poorly paid female Third World workers in the equivalent of silicon sweatshops.

In preparing for "Busy Work," Peart began stitching her samplers in January. She describes the process, whereby her hand and eye learned to work together in perfect synchronicity, leaving her free to do other activities such as converse with a friend or listen to music, as very meditative. At the same time, the repetitive nature of her task did result in muscle strain in her hand and forearm. But this strain, which in the modern context of a computerized office is known as carpal tunnel syndrome, only heightened her emotional commitment to the project. "Both my grandmothers did wonderful needlepoint and embroidery," she notes, "and as I sat there I couldn't help but think of them. Near the end, it actually became quite addictive. If I went a day without working I became restless."

In executing both sets of images, Peart initially relied on traditional stitches garnered from a reference book and standard designs contained on a basic software program. But as her project progressed, she began inventing her own stitches and designs. Of major concern to Peart in the former process, as it would have been to her grandmothers and other pioneer women in their own needlework, was to economize on thread by making the back weave on the cloth's underside as efficient as possible. Since this weave was not ordinarily visible to viewers, it was not considered integral to the artisan's aesthetic vision. With the latter design process, Peart would start by creating a small pattern on her computer, then enlarge it to fit the allotted oval or rectangular space using a cut-and-paste technique. To the extent that this technique allowed her to assemble a drawing in piecemeal fashion, she found it analogous to quilt-making.

By mounting the samplers and drawings on angled panels, Peart encourages viewers to read them as coded text. And, in fact, narrative and thematic connections do exist. In one four panel series, for example, the delineation of a solid orange oval becomes progressively more diffuse as Peart moves from ink to thread, while another two panel set places a blue rectangle with an inverted "square bracket" stitch above a second blue rectangle with the same stitch rendered vertically.

From a distance, the hand-stitched and laser-printed images appear indistinguishable. But upon closer examination, we discover that the former possess a much more intriguing surface texture. This discrepancy—which was accentuated by a minor problem with the adhesive Peart used to fix the drawings, so that some of them partially separated from their panels—may be read both as a denigration of the standardization technology imposes on humanity, and a revalidation of stitchery as an artistic medium.

Greg Beatty is a Regina visual arts critic and columnist (Eclectica Etcetera) for the Regina Leader Post. He is a frequent contributor to *The Craft Factor*.



## Transformation, Meaning and Material

BY RICHELLE D. FUNK

"Paper....  
Dreams, Passages, & Translations"

Oriol Dancer  
Eroca Ellingham  
Kristina Komendant  
Monika Wildemann  
Martha Cole

Saskatchewan Craft Gallery, Saskatoon  
September 20 to November 19, 1996



heal:

"to restore or be restored to health; to restore or be restored to friendly relations, harmony, etc."<sup>1</sup>

It seems that the world has discovered the healing powers of Art. What the general public is realizing is, when you make art you tap into the inner most recesses of your heart, mind and subconscious. As you do this, you are forced to confront yourself, your connections to others and the world. I believe that this is the starting point for all healing journeys—those that occur in, and outside of, art.

The artists in the exhibition "Paper....Dreams, Passages and Translations," are on this path. Martha Cole, Oriol Dancer, Eroca Ellingham, Kristina Komendant and Monika Wildemann use a wide variety of paper mediums to explore the relationships between art, the earth and healing.<sup>2</sup>

transformation:

"to alter or be altered radically in form, function, etc; to convert (one form of energy) to another form."<sup>3</sup>

The essence of healing is transformation. This is most obvious in the work of Oriol Dancer and Monika Wildemann.

Oriol Dancer talks of wanting to capture the story of nature as a way to acknowledge the source of her art, the daily existence of the land and her attempts to maintain a healthy relationship with it. She gathers her natural materials as she walks through her environment and brings them together in her work<sup>4</sup>. *Tree Up Against the Wall, Shield of Protection For the Green Growing Blanket of The Whole Earth* is a large cast taken from a dead Jack Pine tree whose trunk was marked by worms. The linear patterns of the worm holes are exceptionally calligraphic and it is easy to imagine the spell of protection these lines are meant to evoke. I immediately had a strong reaction to this work because of its scale—it would easily cover my five foot frame. The form of a tree and the creatures that lived in it have created material for Dancer, who then assembles these materials to create a metaphorical shield for the viewer's body—a shield which clearly draws the connection between man's fragility and dependency on nature.

Monika Wildemann also believes that each of nature's creatures holds a valuable lesson.<sup>5</sup> She started with the dream image of a bear rolling in the grass and the sense of freedom and peace the bear represented. Then, using recycled paper, Wildemann intuitively started building up the symbolic forms of a bear head cradled in two arms.<sup>6</sup> The result is a mask-like sculpture, bold in its simple use of natural colour and shapes, literally telling the viewer to embrace nature. As the title, *Sheema, My Love, Sheema*, would suggest, nature should be respected and loved because, as in this work, we are intimately connected.

meaning:

"the sense or significance of a word, sentence, symbol, etc."<sup>7</sup>

The act of transformation is a search for meaning. Often this requires connecting to history, either by re-writing it or finding a personal connection to it. Eroca Ellingham's search for meaning, and thus the meaning for her work, begins with her research into ancient matriarchal cultures. The Chevron Symbol, the central motif in *Chevron Symbol: The Power of Illumination to Teach Spiritual Clarity*, is a pre-semarian character used in a seemingly peaceful society.<sup>8</sup> The original meaning of the symbol has been lost over time, but the viewer is drawn to this work because of its ambiguity. Ellingham has amplified this attribute by layering thin

veils of deep blue, brown and black handmade paper. The edges of the symbol look like a wound because of the torn-like edge. When artists begin to physically work with a symbol, they embed their own meaning to it, which is exactly what the viewer of this work does when confronted with it.

In Martha Cole's bookwork, *On this Day*, the viewer, in interaction with the work becomes a part of the meaning. A small discreet sign invites the viewer to open the book to a single page. On each of the pages are simple *commandments* such as "Examine your demands on others" and "Find the time" which one is then meant to apply in daily life. Everything about the construction of this book emphasizes its interaction with *you*, the viewer. From the substantial covers made from wood-board and soapstone dust, to the tactile wheat-pasted coloured pages, you are exceptionally aware of being seduced by the work. It is in this seduction—the simplicity of each page's meaning—that you realize that healing is a step-by-step process that need not be complicated and can be full of beauty.

material:

"the elements, constituents, or substances of which something is composed or can be made."<sup>9</sup>

The success of transformation and the ability to arrive at meaning depends to a large degree on one's knowledge of material. For Kristina Komendant, the knowledge of where her material came from—high quality rag paper traditionally used for calligraphy—inspired the creation of *Rags to Riches*.<sup>10</sup> This framed piece features a small rag dress collaged onto a sheet of rag paper.

Over this multi-layered cotton rag surface is a section of text, in elegant calligraphic script, which was published in a Boston newsletter in 1769. The passage asks the reader to save rags for paper-making and the production of books; and thus, the dissemination of knowledge can continue. The seemingly simple collage of text and material literally constructs the meaning of this work. Paper, although commonplace, has real value in our lives. It is the carrier of ideas, religious beliefs and expression. Even the last technological revolution, the computer, has not eradicated the use of paper and it remains the most significant conveyor of communication we have.

My only disappointment with the exhibition was in its installation. There were over 30 works of art in this exhibition; and in this exhibition space, it was too much. In an attempt to 'see it all' the viewer only takes a cursory look at each work in the exhibition and never really gives the works the contemplation they deserve and need in order to be successful. I believe that in consultation with the artists, Stephanie Bowman, the juror of this exhibition, could have

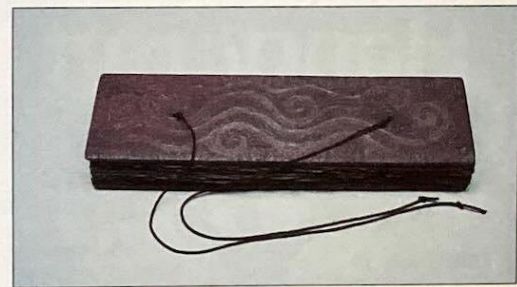
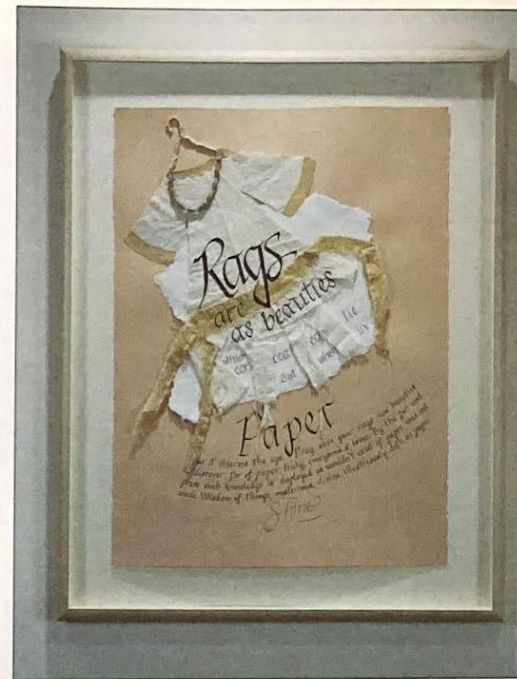
OPPOSITE PAGE:

TOP LEFT *Chevron Symbol: The Power of Illumination to Teach Spiritual Clarity* (1996), Cotton, flax, recycled fibres, aqueous dispersed pigments, earth pigments, 27 x 35cm, by Eroca Ellingham.

TOP RIGHT *Rags to Riches* (1996), 90 lb. Stonehenge watercolour paper, linen and cotton fabric, recycled paper, marbled paper, beads, cotton linter, coloured and gold gouache, acrylic paint, compressed Gothic letterforms 56 X 54 cm, by Kristina Komendant.

BOTTOM LEFT *Sheema, My Love, Sheema* (1996), Recycled paper, methyl cellulose, flour, earth pigments, pencil crayons, 62 x 40 x 33.5 cm, by Monika Wildemann.

BOTTOM RIGHT *On This Day* (1995), Palm Leaf Book Arches 300lb. watercolour paper with wheat paste colour for text pages, coloured pencils, wood board with soapstone dust medium for cover, 57 x 16 x 7.5 cm, by Martha Cole.






eliminated one or two works from each artist and still have maintained a strong voice for each artist in the show.

The lure of the sacramental object is not in the high degree of technical skill realized in the work. The seduction is in the knowledge that these creators master technique in order to equal the depth and beauty of their beliefs. The meditative repetition of creation creates an arena of action and thought. When the works have been finished the result is a document that records and initiates response. The works in this exhibition lie somewhere in this realm; they are an attempt through material and its transformation to bring meaning to a community outside of themselves.

Richelle D. Funk is a multi-media artist and writer currently living in Saskatoon. Most recently her mixed media bookworks appeared in the travelling group exhibition, "Beyond," organized by A.K.A. Artist-Run Centre.

<sup>1</sup> Collins English Dictionary 3rd Edition (Harper Collins Pub., Glasgow, Scotland, 1991)  
<sup>2</sup> Exhibition Press Release (Saskatchewan Craft Council, Saskatoon, SK, Sept, 1996)  
<sup>3</sup> Collins English Dictionary 3rd Edition (Harper Collins, Pub., Glasgow, Scotland, 1991)  
<sup>4</sup> Interview with the artist, October 6, 1996.  
<sup>5</sup> Interview with the artist, Sept. 22, 1996.  
<sup>6</sup> Stephanie Bowman, Curator's talk, Sask. Craft Gallery, Saskatoon, SK Sept. 22, 1996.  
<sup>7</sup> Collins English Dictionary 3rd Edition (Harper Collins Pub., Glasgow, Scotland, 1991)  
<sup>8</sup> Interview with the artist, Oct 8, 1996.  
<sup>9</sup> Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary (Thomas Allen & Son Ltd., Markham, ON, 1990)  
<sup>10</sup> Interview with the artist, Oct 2, 1996.



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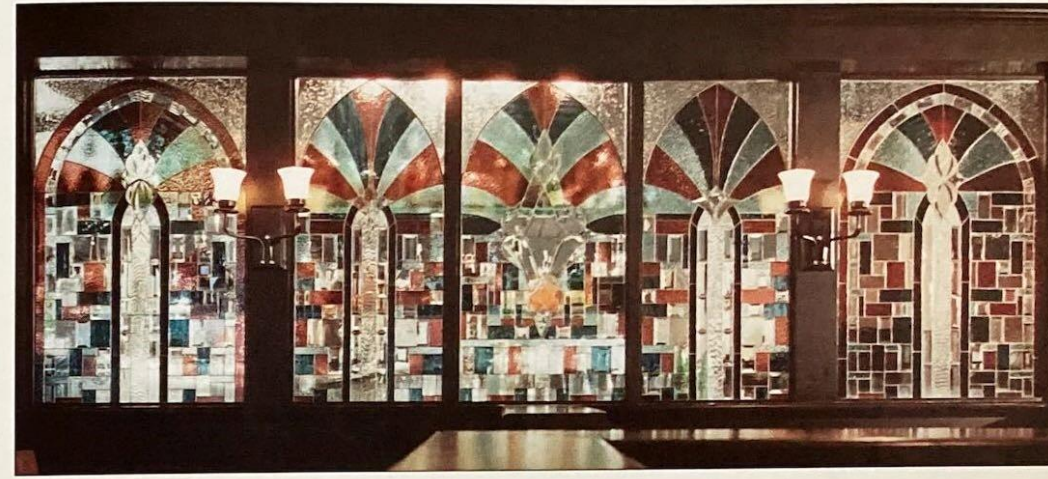
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TOWN OF  
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**D. LYNNE EDWARDS,**  
 Black File Glass  
 Untitled, 5-panel fixed room divider - 12 ft. x 47 in. - installed between bar and restaurant (wall height: 13 feet of which 12 feet are glass).  
 Materials: glass, bevels, foil, solder, lead, zinc; copper foil & leaded glass windows.  
 Commissioned by Planned Commercial Interiors for Epicurean Cafe & T4's Lounge, F & T Building, #1- 340 Third Avenue North, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. Installation February 1995.



**DOUG TAYLOR**  
 Stereo Cabinet (1996)  
 Painted M.D.F., epoxy patty, approximately 98 cm(h) x 42 cm(l) x 68 cm(w)  
 Agent: Brian Manz  
 Urbane Gift & Decor  
 Regina, Saskatchewan  
 Purchased by Murray Westerland Spring, 1996.

Craftspeople are invited to submit professional quality photographs (8" x 10" glossy prints - black & white or coloured) illustrating their commissions for private and public installation. Include identification: title; dimensions; materials/techniques; client; date installed; exact location on site; gallery, agent, interior designer or architect involved. Those works chosen for publication will be featured on the Commissions Page in upcoming issues of *The Craft Factor*. For more information, contact: Leslie Millikin, Editor, *The Craft Factor*, SCC, 813 Broadway Ave., Saskatoon, SK S7N 1B5, (306) 653-3616; fax 244-2711.





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