

The
CRAFT
Factor



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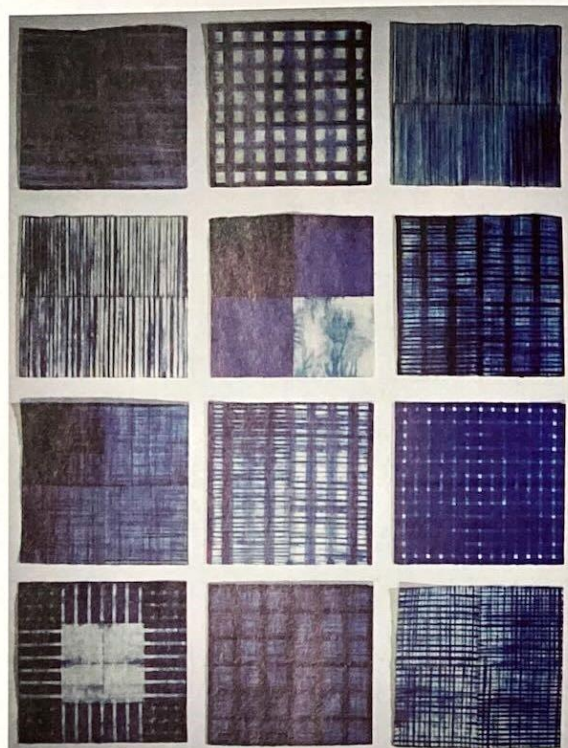
FRONT COVER: Mel Malkin, *Talk*, 2001—clay, raku glaze, stains, raku fired. 36 x 36 cm. Profile on page 11.

INSIDE FRONT COVER: Tanya Norman, a selection of four pieces from her *4 Seasons in 80 Days*, exhibited in the Saskatchewan Craft Gallery, December 15, 2000 to January 21, 2001—board dried obaca paper, various Japanese handmade papers. CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: *Winter Solstice*, *Green Sickness*, *Moldy Cloudform*, *Incendary Dusk*. Approximately 5 x 4 cm. Review on page 2.

BACK COVER: Trent Watts and Miranda Jones, *Kissing Fish*, 2000. A collaboration for *Turned Multiples II*, an exhibition of turned sculptural and functional objects that showed simultaneously in the Saskatchewan Craft Gallery in Saskatoon, SK, the Wood Turning Center in Philadelphia, PA, and the Craft Alliance in St. Louis, MO—wood, plastic, acrylic paint, copper leaf, epoxy putty, and found objects. 15 x 49 x 49 cm. Review on page 15.

Pulp/Fiction

Paper and Fibre Works by Tanya Norman and Suzanne Evans
Saskatchewan Craft Gallery, December 15, 2000 to January 21, 2001,
by Sheila Robertson



Tanya Norman/Sigrid Blohm
Indigo Blues, 2000—indigo
dyed mulberry paper and Irish
linen thread. Approximately
200 x 150 cm.

Derogatory meanings have crowded in, shaping the popular understanding of the word criticism. Originally, it was meant to describe an evaluation, incorporating the gamut of analysis, praise and censure, and suggestions for improvement. However, criticism is now regarded, often as not, as a gleeful word-lashing, an exercise that may be entertaining for readers, but is doubtless hurtful and humiliating for those whose works are under scrutiny.

The more I talk to artists and learn about artmaking, the more respect I have for the creative process, the drive and ability and knowledge that bring a work to being, and the courage necessary to bring it into the public domain.

I'm certain many critics long to have occasion to stand up and cheer for some wonderful creation. More often, we find ourselves glowering at our computer screens, picking at our hangnails and agonizing as we try to find something constructive to say about work that has missed the mark. I sometimes find myself wanting to like a show more. This was the case with half of *Pulp/Fiction: Paper and Fibre Works*, exhibited at the Saskatchewan Craft Gallery earlier this year. Tanya Norman dazzled viewers with the originality and technical prowess of her paper-based works, as well as the sheer number and variety of them. She is meticulous, a consummate craftsperson. In comparison, the few works displayed by Suzanne Evans were rough-edged and unresolved. The

unevenness of the show was both dramatic and disappointing. The two bodies of work should have been complementary. Both artists were showing some collaborations they'd done with others. Both were drawn to textiles, and inspired by traditional art forms and practices. Evans, having studied art at Montreal's Concordia University, had returned to her home province of Saskatchewan and apprenticed herself to elderly quiltmakers in the rural areas. After her art studies at the University of Saskatchewan, Norman travelled to Japan and worked intensively with papermakers using ancient tools and techniques.

At the opening reception for their exhibition, both artists confessed that, on returning to Saskatoon, they'd felt disconnected and uncertain about what direction they should take with their art practices. Each, though, found solace in the traditional craft knowledge passed down to them. The idea of a grid, the basis of quilting, was explored by both women. In addition, both had works that referred to time and the seasons. Yet, because their approaches were so different, there was no real sense of a dialogue between the two artists. Norman makes

objects that appear timeless and enduring, while Evans is more interested in ideas and objects that are transitory. The exception was Evan's strongest piece, an elaboration upon a 100-year-old, ivory-coloured quilt she had purchased in Montreal. With the assistance of an aerial map and a number of quilters, she superimposed on the quilt the topography near Vanguard, Sask. A blue satin ribbon running through the design and spilling onto the floor represented the Notukeu Creek, which flooded the area last spring. It was interesting to think of the physical and emotional layers in this piece: the efforts of the long-ago quilters and the more recent ones.

Evans' more conceptual works did not show well in this gallery, with its emphasis on finely crafted works. In the fall of 1998, I was thrilled to walk around her *Seeded Quilt*, a half-acre project near Humboldt, Saskatchewan, involving a flowering design planted in the traditional "churn-dash" quilting pattern. However, the photo documentation of this symbolic coverlet displayed here failed to capture the unexpected charm of patterns of blue flax and borage flowers, yellow calendula and sunflowers and tawny heads of barley. Nor was it well



Suzanne Evans, *Seeded Quilt*, 1999—
mixed media installation, fabric quilt map, 6 ft. x 3 ft.

represented by another exhibit, a black cloth stretched in a crude, weathered quilt frame. Evans had intended this piece to serve as a journal, recording the development of the seeded quilt, with notes dangling from strings tied to the bottom and layers of stitchery on the top. However, doubtless overwhelmed by the work of her two, linked projects, she fell behind on this diary and eventually pulled out most of the stitches. Little more than a few red Xs remained on the surface. Evans, who now lives in Wakefield, Quebec, is an earnest young artist. She has grand visions, but she lacks focus. While the Vanguard quilt would have made a nice addition to a group exhibition, it was insufficient to carry a two-person show. Ultimately, she simply left too much up to the imagination of the viewer.

Norman, too, linked art and journaling. Her stylized wall quilt was comprised of 80 tiny collages (four examples are shown on the back cover). The abstracted landscapes of handmade paper, called *washi*, represent specific days during her stay in Japan. Each framed work is a separate gem and yet there is a natural flow from the blues of winter to the greens of spring, the reds and oranges of summer and autumn's grey tones.

The second diary-like piece was a set of paper-covered blocks, with colourful collages on one side and text on the other. The text contained notes from Norman's work with

expert papermakers: "The best paper is made by brushing fresh sheets onto wooden boards," or, simply, "Sore back." The blocks could be stacked or rearranged according to the whims of the viewer. The paper is as sensual as skin, and she likes people to touch her works. She covers chairs, tables and everyday objects with handmade paper even though the salts and oils from fingers eventually deteriorate the fibres.

Some of Norman's paper creations involved what to westerners are unusual materials. Her striking blue-toned wallworks were the result of indigo dye and papers wrapped in bamboo sticks to create different patterns: plaids, stripes and quilted effects. A key component of some lamps and cushions was a dye made from fermented persimmon juice. "It's not that great to work with," the artist admitted, "it smells like vomit." Yet it yields a gloriously rich rust shade.

Norman's cushion series reflected her interest in the Japanese language. Inside each one, she placed a Japanese character, representing salutary concepts such as vitality, intellect, wealth, hope and humility. Perhaps there's even one for criticism.

Sheila Robertson is a freelance writer and editor.



Tanya Norman, detail of *Wish Cushions*, 2000—washi dyed with cedar and persimmon and treated with konnyaku, embroidered with persimmon dyed Irish linen thread, stuffed with cotton.

Book Review

Canadian Craft and Museum Practice: 1900 - 1950 by Dr. Sandra Flood
Canadian Museum of Civilization, Mercury Series #74, 2001
348 pages, no illustrations; \$29.95; ISBN 0-660-17838-9
Review by Paula Gustafson



Members of the Balmoral Women's Institute, near Red Deer, Alberta, 1937. Photo courtesy of Red Deer and District Archives.

There's no doubt that Canada has a craft history. But until *Canadian Craft and Museum Practice: 1900-1950* was published earlier this year, the story of craft in Canada was more fable than fact; a definitive history of Canadian craft didn't exist. Thankfully, Sandra Flood has changed all that. The result of three years intensive research, *Canadian Craft and Museum Practice: 1900-1950* authoritatively brings together all available information about the production, distribution, promotion, collection, and perception of crafts in Canada during the first half of the 20th century.

Flood found that the Canadian craft historical record is despairingly absent. "Relevant published material on Canadian twentieth-century craft activity and production is sparse, localized, uneven, and... there are no surveys from which to identify potential source material," she writes in the book's introduction. Besides a dearth of historical records, Flood identifies a scarcity of Canadian-made crafts in museum collections and a profound bias on the part of (mostly male) curators to quietly ignore both the "handicrafts" of (mostly female) Canadian-born practitioners and traditional crafts introduced to Canada through the various waves of immigration.

Early in the book, Flood takes ethnologist Marius Barbeau to task for colouring the definition of Canadian crafts to accord with a political affirmation of Québécois folkloric heritage. His propensity to discuss craft in terms of handicraft, applied art, and folk art laid the groundwork for a stigma that persists into the 21st century. With few exceptions in the published record, Flood writes, the opinions of Barbeau (described in 1945 as "our greatest writer on the crafts") and his colleagues at the Montreal-based headquarters of the Canadian Handicraft Guild "reflects an extraordinarily centralist and arbitrary view. Until WWII this is in part due to a relatively small, predominantly anglophone circle centred in Montreal who with Marius Barbeau in Ottawa [at the Museum of Man] dominated the field.... They use easily accessible information,

quoting the same ideas and small number of makers and organizations. A very limited range of traditional textiles from Quebec and the Maritimes, weaving and hooked rugs, receive primary coverage." For the first half of the 20th century, critical as well as journalistic commentary about craft production outside this geographic 'centre' rarely appeared in books or magazines—a condition that, with only slight improvement, still holds true.'

In the chapter *Museum and Craft Collections*, Flood writes with dismay that many of the earliest collected examples of Canadian-made crafts "suffered damage from fire, water, and neglect in storage. Collections were broken up as museums selected and reselected artifacts reflecting changing discipline categories, fashions and collecting foci none of which centred on the handcrafted object. In the transfer of collections to museums twentieth century handcrafted works, particularly work by studio craftspeople, disappears. Contemporary handicrafts were discarded—"lost", appropriated for private purposes, given away or thrown out—by collecting organizations and museums."

Given the sparseness of documentary material, Flood had to look elsewhere to construct an overview of craft activity across the nation and to develop a definition of what craft meant within the context of Canadian socio-cultural history. She turned to the records kept by craft organizations (extensively, the Canadian Handicrafts Guild and the Saskatoon Arts and Crafts Society), educational institutions such as the Victoria School of Art (the precursor to NSCAD), and government policies and programs influenced by the 1932 Miers-Markham Report and the Massey Report 1949-51. This archival material provides substance to her chronology; however, the narratives of individuals involved in craft making—for instance, Emily Carr's complaint about making "hundreds and hundreds of stupid [clay] objects" to sell to tourists—put a human face on the historical data.

While Carr's own writings and other firsthand accounts can be relied on as reasonably truthful, anecdotal evidence is always suspect, even when it comes from an authoritative source. For instance, Flood cites a reference to a Mrs. Barber which appeared in *A Heritage of Canadian Handicrafts*, a 1967 book edited by Henry Gordon Green and published by McClelland and Stewart. According to Green, by 1941 Mrs. Barber had established a cottage craft industry in Hope, B.C. There she "built up a centre where skilled workers wove woolen and linen fabrics on hand looms." As well, Green writes, "Mrs. Barber taught many different kinds of hand crafts, and created a good trade in genuine British Columbian crafts."

Here the historical record has undergone a measure of well-intentioned but erroneous enhancement; a scenario that Flood encountered over and over again as she attempted to verify facts. In instances where only one source of information is available, she cautions readers about its veracity. In the case of Mrs. Barber, she was a weaver and she did live in a cottage. However, I remember the cottage as being hardly big enough to swing a cat, with floor-to-ceiling cubbyholes crammed with yarns and heaven knows what else. A loom took up centre stage. There was barely room for a single visitor to enter, let alone space for "skilled workers" or organized production of woven textiles for sale.²

More pertinent to Flood's conclusion that there was an "extraordinary high level of women's involvement in all aspects of craft activity throughout the period", Mrs. Barber was an ardent feminist who, among other attributes, was active in federal politics and taught weaving and glove making as a means for women to take control of their own economic futures. Her teaching was primarily through programs sponsored by Women's Institutes—a nation-wide organization that had a profound influence on "women's work" from its founding in 1897 through to the 1950s and which sponsored the publication of Green's book.



Czar, Alberta, quilters showing off their 'Crazy Quilt', circa 1915. Photo courtesy of Glenbow Archives, Calgary, Alberta.

After reading every word of *Canadian Craft and Museum Practice 1900-1950* (including the footnotes that pepper the lower half of each page), I can report that, unquestionably, Flood's text is chock full of valuable information. That said, *Canadian Craft and Museum Practice 1900-1950* isn't an effortless read. To be honest, I didn't expect it would be pleasurable. Except for one chapter which Flood says she updated, the book is her doctoral thesis. As such, it's a diligent, earnest text—not a rousing page-turner. If it has flaws—there is no index, for instance, and I have to admit I never quite adjusted to Flood's idiosyncratic use of the comma—nevertheless, *Canadian Craft and Museum Practice 1900-1950* is a sturdy foundation on which discussion and evaluation of Canadian craft history can now take its rightful place.

Paula Gustafson is the editor of *Artichoke* magazine. She has written extensively about historical and contemporary crafts in Western Canada. Endnotes:

¹Flood's studies were denied funding by SSHRC, the federally-funded agency which supports virtually every type of social sciences and humanities research. Despite the many disciplines on the SSHRC list, there wasn't a category for crafts. It's exactly that lack of a Canadian craft history presence, both at SSHRC and in museum archives and other repositories of Canadian cultural history, which lends a certain irony to the publication of *Canadian Craft and Museum Practice 1900-1950*. Happily, in May 2001, SSHRC awarded Flood a two-year post-doctoral fellowship to continue her research into Canadian craft practice from 1950 onward.

²Childhood impressions are also suspect, so I verified my memories against those of another Hope, BC resident who was an adult in the 1940s. She was well acquainted with Mrs. Barber and provided the additional information about her interests and activities.

Prairie Inspirations

Saskatchewan Weavers & Spinners Guild
Saskatchewan Craft Gallery, Sept. 29 - Nov. 5, 2000
by Dr. Sandra Flood



ABOVE: June Jacobs, *Spring Morning*, 2000—wool fleece (dyed & plain), yarn, wire, button, velcro; handfelling, embroidery, 14 x 28 x 25 cm. RIGHT: Gail Shutiak, *Baba: Hi! Goodbye!*, 2000—cotton warp, wool, cotton, nylon, acrylic, mercerized cotton, various blends, rags, tapestry, 77 x 50 cm.

In the mid-seventies, when the Saskatchewan Craft Council was founded, a number of craftspeople with an interest in a particular medium also formed associations. Amongst these were guilds of weavers, spinners and dyers, established first in Saskatoon, Regina, and Coronach. These particular guilds were set up to make and maintain contact between weavers (a term I shall use to include dyers, spinners, and others working in associated fibre construction techniques), to circulate information and to arrange workshops at intermediate and advanced levels. Organized by the guilds and/or SCC, a series of workshops were taught by nationally recognized, often cutting-edge weavers.

In June 1991, I went to the first provincial conference hosted by the Regina Weavers and Spinners Guild in Regina. At this conference, representatives from the seven guilds in the province decided that the formation of a provincial association of guilds should be pursued. The Saskatchewan Weavers and Spinners Guild, to which weavers belong individually, was the offspring of these discussions.

One of the highlights of that Regina conference for me was the fashion parade, where weavers RoseMarie Fennell, Marybelle Powers, Mary Volk, and others modeled handwoven, tailored garments, including a stunning silk 'mother of the bride' outfit, culottes, vests, and a tailored wool jacket. The work of provincial spinners, dyers and weavers has resulted in a wide range of articles for use and decoration. The province has been home to some top rank weavers—Margreet Van Walsem, Kate Shook, Ann Newdigate Mills, Kaija Sanelma Harris, Cathryn Miller, Pat Adams are names associated with the SCC. In addition, for a



decade the SIAST campus in Prince Albert offered a professional-level weaving course.

Looking at the exhibition, 'Prairie Inspirations', it was hard to believe that there has been over two decades of workshops, guild activity and exposure to the SCC's exhibition standards. From its beginning, the SCC has been concerned with raising standards. This is done not only to encourage craftspeople to exert themselves to produce the very best of which they are capable (and that is very good in many cases), but also that the public should learn to distinguish between quality craft and the second rate. The SCC also made it clear that more was expected of exhibition pieces than of pieces juried into a market. Exhibition pieces should take conception and execution a step further; they should be the most exceptional and demanding of the maker's work.

Many of the pieces in 'Prairie Inspirations' fell short of that standard in concept and technique. This showed particularly in the plethora of small, mainly rather ordinary scarves. Scarves are market pieces, unless they are exceptionally exciting through size, weight, combinations of materials, complex or decorative techniques, and/or luscious, dramatic or subtle colour combinations. It is true that, to the uninitiated eye, successful handling of technically complex weaving with difficult fibres may pass unappreciated; in that case it is up to the gallery to bring this information to the viewer's notice in terms the uninitiated can understand. This may be the case with some of these scarves but certainly not with the majority.



Shelley Hamilton, *Untitled*, 2000—cotton sewing thread handwoven; twill blocks, 160 x 90 cm.

SCC standards refer to levels of technical skill and knowledge of materials. A number of the works had problems arising from both. Uneven tension, probably compounded by the weight or type of yarn used, caused puckering in a number of pieces. Weft floats were frequently uneven, and texture height varied across a width of fabric. In one piece, loose beating allowed underlying coloured wefts to detract from what should have been crisp cubes of colour. There are examples of basic lack of craftsmanship such as sloppy finishing, uneven edges, poor tailoring, and inappropriate mounting.

SCC standards also refer to aesthetics, and jurors have from day one bemoaned a lack of basic design knowledge, which includes knowledge of colours and their possibilities. A general publicity sheet and the exhibition title suggest that inspiration for the works came from "the subtle beauty of the prairies." Very few pieces even attempt to reflect the extraordinary and distinctive ranges of prairie colours. Insensitive use and banal combinations of colour are a characteristic of too many pieces in this exhibition. It takes much trial and error to get subtle colours from chemical dyes, and sources of good but not prohibitively expensive yarns in adequate variety have been a perennial problem for prairie weavers. Yet careful observation of the prairie, collections of natural material as sources, and experimentation with paints or woven samples to explore possibilities would surely yield the subtlety and beauty of the prairie missing in these pieces.

Jurors have also pointed exhibitors in the direction of books for

wider knowledge of traditions, history and contemporary production in their media. We may see very little of the wider world of weaving on the prairies but the textile field is accessible through many excellent publications, and beyond are the rich mining grounds of contemporary art, design and other media. Little of this easily accessible rich diversity of ideas, techniques and objects is reflected in this exhibition, either through wider exploration of possibilities or through sensitivity to and understanding of highly developed textile traditions such as those involved in the Japanese Kimono, and its contemporary variations. Although where the Japanese kimono fits with 'Prairie Inspirations', except as an overworked contemporary cliché, escapes me; surely we have prairie clothing styles which would give great scope to an imaginative weaver and tailor.

This juried exhibition purports to "provide a survey of the weaving, spinning, dyeing, and felting being done across the province." A survey, in the rigorous sense of the word, it is not. There are too many experienced weavers missing, too limited a range of production. I have been thrilled by the production of Saskatchewan weavers, spinners and dyers. This exhibition, with the exception of a few pieces, was lack lustre and disappointing. My disappointment was compounded by the removal of eight works for a week.

The Saskatchewan Craft Gallery is a gallery, which implies that it shows the very best of craft (unless an exhibition has another agenda, which is clearly posted). It is the one place clearly associated with the SCC, where it presents the work of exemplary craftspeople to the public, amongst whom are our funding bodies. It is a place where the general public comes to see quality craft and where the interested public expects to find the best in current production. In addition, the Saskatchewan Craft Gallery is one of the very few galleries in Canada exhibiting the full range of contemporary craft media. Outside a limited number of commercial galleries, I can think of barely a half dozen in all, most of these also being associated with craft councils. This is in great contrast to the exposure of fine arts through public galleries.

The mandate of the SCC to promote high standards in craft, the expectations of our public, and the extremely limited number of venues in which quality crafts can be exposed and promoted, lay a duty on craftspeople exhibiting in the Gallery. Nothing but the absolute best you can produce, however much it takes in extra thought, time, money and effort, is worthy of exposure in the Gallery. Running a gallery also lays a duty on the SCC as a staffed organization. This includes making clear to exhibitors the standard of work that will be accepted and supporting exhibiting craftspeople to that end. The Gallery is a flagship for the craft community, it is not a little local outfit showing to a strictly local audience. The ramifications of a craft gallery, of supporting standards of excellence, of professionalism in its widest sense, of exhibiting craft, go far beyond the borders of Saskatchewan and affect much more than the activities of this organization and this community.

Dr. Sandra Flood is a curator, researcher, and writer.

Prairie Inspirations: The Process

Saskatchewan Weavers and Spinners Guild Exhibition at the Saskatchewan Craft Gallery
by Madelaine Walker



LEFT: Rena Bartsch, *Summer Birch*, 2000—100% Saskatchewan wool, indigo, other dyes, handspun, hand dyed, hand knit, embroidered, 53 x 76 cm.
RIGHT: Marg Rudy, *Kimono*, 1999—rayon chenille, silk bourette, cotton; handwoven, rainbow dyed, tabby, 160 x 90 cm.

Prairie Inspirations is an exhibition of works by members of the Saskatchewan Weavers and Spinners Guild. This provincial guild is made up of members of the four guilds within the province: Regina, Saskatoon, Prince Albert, and Craik, including affiliated members who live in smaller places.

The Saskatchewan Weavers and Spinners Guild was formed in 1991 to create a connection between these eighty guild members. Skill levels within the membership range from novice to those with many years of experience. Some members received training through workshops or diploma programs such as the one previously offered by SIAST Woodland Campus, or Master Weaver, Spinner, or Knitter study courses.

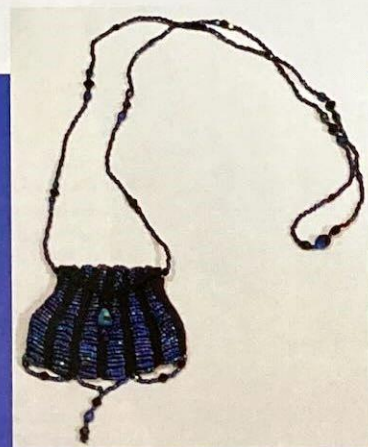
Regular communication between members is maintained through the guild newsletter, *Scattered Threads*. It includes reports from each of the guilds on their activities, individual member's activities, upcoming workshops, challenges, samples and accompanying instructional details of weaving, spinning, dyeing, felting, etc. The four guilds take turns preparing the samples.

The guild holds a weekend retreat biennially. The past three have been held during March at Manitou Springs Hotel in

Watrous. These retreats include a variety of displays, demonstrations and workshops. The members enjoy the time together to share experiences.

Jean King submitted a proposal for an exhibition to the Saskatchewan Craft Council on behalf of The Saskatchewan Weavers and Spinners Guild; it was accepted. It was decided that the show would tour throughout the province with the Organization of Saskatchewan Arts Councils (OSAC). *Prairie Inspirations* was the title and theme chosen for the exhibition, which lends itself to individual interpretations with weaving, spinning, dyeing, knitting and felting using a variety of fibres and techniques.

Annabel Taylor was asked to jury the show with the assistance of June Exelby, Judy Haraldson, Jean King and Heather Menzies. In a guild show, all who submit works will have had at least one piece included in the exhibition. Another consideration is that the selection should reflect the spinning, weaving, dyeing, knitting and felting currently done in the province. This exhibition serves the purpose of educating and informing the public about the diversity in these crafts.



LEFT: Annabel Taylor, *Colour Bytes*, 2000—linen warp, wool weft, handwoven taqueté (weft face block weave), 73 x 125 cm.
RIGHT: Coleen Nimetz, *Aurora Borealis*, 2000—handspun, hand dyed silk, hand knit, 6 x 8 cm.

Twenty-six members submitted a variety of works from which forty pieces were selected. Because the exhibition goes to many smaller centres, it was necessary to limit the number of pieces that any one person could have in the show. The works in the exhibition were created by artists with a wide range of experience: from those who have had very little, to others who are very highly skilled. A group exhibition provides an opportunity for members to learn and gain experience.

There is great variety and contrast in the works that were chosen. Clothing includes everything from garments such as a rag woven jacket and a stencilled kimono, to a bevy of scarves woven or knit in materials including fine silks and sewing thread to handspun wool. Household items range from tea towels woven in

prairie colours to rag rugs, to a variety of wall hangings. Also included are a tapestry and a felted flower. There are teddy bears: one a very miniature bear, dressed in a tiny handknit Fair Isle sweater, the other very large and made of felt. Much of the work in this show is functional and does appeal to the public.

Inspiration for the works in this exhibit came from a vast range of sensations and emotions emanating from the dramatic four seasons we experience on the prairies.

Madelaine Walker is a Saskatchewan weaver.

Mel Malkin's Raku Art: The Plate is Full

by Don Kerr



Mel Malkin in his Saskatoon studio.

Mel Malkin is a creator of wonderful raku plates and sheep. Mel and I have been friends for too many years to count. Somewhere a decade ago I first saw his plates, visited his studio, in a modest warehouse building behind Fairbanks Morse (that houses The Photographers' Gallery and AKA), saw the plates, lots of them, and it was a great experience. To see so many plates at once is to understand Mel's skill and genius. There is no repetition, every plate distinct, and each time I've visited the studio I have the same sense of Mel's inventiveness. He says the plates are "a format that appeals to me. There's a certain sense of familiarity that allows me to experiment." And the experiments go on.

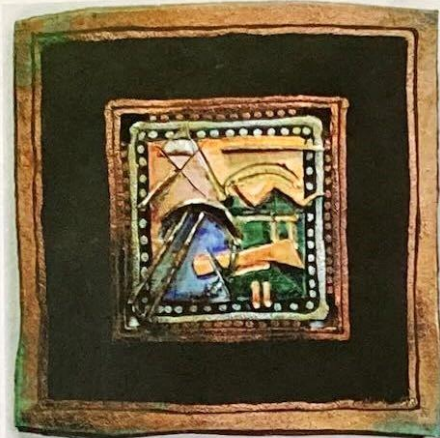
Mel's is a Saskatoon life, born here, educated here, at Pleasant Hill, then at Victoria School and Nutana Collegiate. He'd begun drawing in public school but has no sense of when art struck him. "Friends tell me when they needed a poster they asked me." Mel entered the University of Saskatchewan thinking of Geology, "and that wasn't fun. I went to a party one night and someone there said he was going into architecture and a friend said I should too. I thought about it, and went to Manitoba to the Architecture School, and graduated." It was in Winnipeg that he became an artist. In his first year there he says, "I really started drawing a lot. I took a night class from the art department in figure drawing." In a class called Architectural Rendering, students drew buildings in different media: pen and ink, pastel, water colour and gouache. As well, "you had to submit twenty-five sketches for a summer credit class."

When Mel graduated he returned to Saskatoon as an architect, worked for Kerr, Cullingworth, Riches for part of a year, spent much of 1960 in Europe, returned to work for Tinos Kortes and designed seven schools and a church. He did a year of post-graduate work at Pennsylvania, where one of his instructors was one of America's great architects, Louis Kahn. Back in Saskatoon he worked briefly for Kerr, Cullingworth, Riches again, then joined Clifford Wiens in Regina for a year and a bit, won an award for a TransCanada Campsite and buildings at Maple Creek, now changed beyond recognition by new owners. He opened his own office in 1964, with "no money and one house renovation." He said he came back to Saskatoon because "I knew a lot of people here, and I'd lived in big cities, in New York and Los Angeles and the European cities on my tour there, and Saskatoon had an urban scale I could live with-and if a place didn't have prairie sun and wall-to-wall horizon I didn't want it."

Mel's first passion as an artist was drawing. "I've always liked drawings. They feel so immediate. I go out into the landscape and sit on a hill and draw. On weekends in the Qu'Appelle Valley I went into the landscape and drew. I like the immediacy of it. There's no room in it for making mistakes. Clay is similar in this way. You draw on a plate, put a glaze on it. You can't go back and change it." From the mid '70s to the end of the '80s drawing was his art. In 1983 he completed a BFA in the Art Department at the University of Saskatchewan, and widened his practice to prints, graphite drawings, and pastels. But no oil painting—"it wasn't spontaneous enough for me."



LEFT: *First*, 1991—collection of Elaine Malkin, clay, glaze, raku fired, 26 x 20 cm.
RIGHT: *Bridge Over*, 2000—clay, glaze, raku fired, 41 x 41 cm.



Then came raku. Sometime in the 1980s Mel decided to try clay. He had bought a potter's wheel and other equipment, but there was no place to put it until he and wife Elaine built a house at Katepwa, with a room to set up the clay equipment.

Mel had never worked in clay. He just started. He attended a workshop in Calgary in 1990 and met two people firing raku using an electric kiln. "I thought, I can do that. So I scouted around and found a kiln for \$100 in Fort Qu'Appelle. And I did it." He began doing raku fruit—apples and pears. "Where's the bowl for them?" asked a friend in Fort Qu'Appelle. "I wasn't interested in doing bowls, but I could make a kind of slab and I made some very small ones. When I saw them I thought they had some potential. I started to make the plates a little bigger, a little more complex."

How does a plate take shape from first to last? The first stage is to make and fire the plate. Mel buys Plainsmen clay from Redcliffe, Alberta, just outside Medicine Hat—the clay that was used for Medalta pottery. He cuts a slab, works it flat by hand, then passes it through a slab roller he sets at 3/8 of an inch. He uses a rolling pin and a scraper to consolidate the clay, removing any imperfections in it. He does that on both sides, then uses a template of cardboard to cut the shape he wants, rectangular in this case. He pencils the date and number of plates prepared that day on the back, so each has its own reference. He prints his own signature on the front at this stage.

On the inside of the template he cuts a small L-shape into each corner to help define the centre. He paints the surface with 'slip,' which is the same clay body mixed with water, to give the surface of the clay a smoother texture. He sets the clay on a cloth, moves it to a sling, a wooden frame with a canvas stretched over it. He centres the plate on the sling so it hardens with a uniform shape, slightly concave at the centre, which Mel says gives the plates extra strength when fired. They dry for a week to ten days. Then he stacks them vertically in a kiln and fires them to a firing temperature called cone 07. "When I set up the kiln I put in a ceramic cone that holds up an arm. When the cone collapses, or bends, the bar falls and releases the arm that shuts off power to the kiln." The cone collapses at the right temperature. All this is

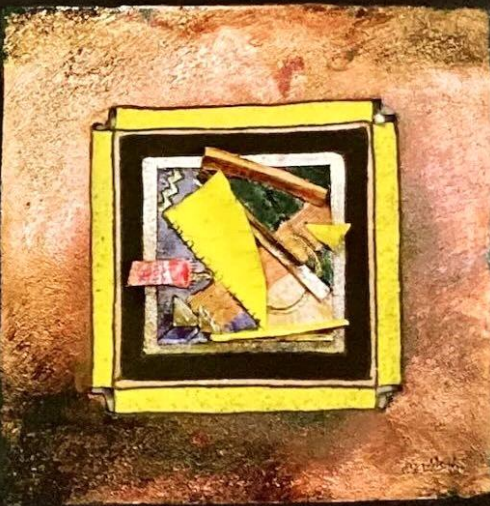
probably old hat to a potter but it's all news to me.

When the plates are finished in their off white colour Mel begins stage two, the process of design. He's made sketches in the small notebooks he's used for years, landscape designs, plate designs. He draws in them at any spare moment, sometimes consciously, sometimes absently, while watching TV for instance, "idling at night." The sketches themselves are sometimes the basic design—as they are for the three dimensional pieces Mel is now doing. Sometimes they're a kind of memory to leaf through, "often a starting point for a piece."

Mel says design comes easily to him, partly because of his experience in architecture. Once he's at work on a plate there are no hesitations. "I don't worry about what I will do now. I just do it." He draws the design in wax—which will melt in the firing, leaving unglazed black lines, which, Mel says, separate the colours, help emphasize the design, and outline the form.

For instance, in one handsome plate, with two pears and an apple—Mel reusing his first raku productions—the thin black lines outline the fruit, the table edge, and the legs. The black lines are there but hard to see because the brilliant colours and form are so much more visible and palpable. In another piece, which I had seen Mel design earlier, a series of arcs with coloured lines inside them—and which Mel says is based on a Maori design—the black is much more visible. He also waxes thin borders around some of the plates. He likes black. "Black is a wonderful neutralizer. It lets colour sing."

Mel sometimes writes colours on the design, sometimes not. After the design is made he applies the liquid glaze with a syringe, working steadily. He uses stains mixed with a clear glaze to expand the colour range, and has designed glazes so they all fire at the same temperature. In the two hours I first interviewed him he completed three plates, that Maori one, one of his many landscapes, and a plant design, which I thought would be the least interesting of the three, until I saw it completed two weeks later, an elegant design and rather quiet in colour. I thought it wonderful—and bought it.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Each piece is made with clay, raku glaze, stains; raku fired. *Grid*, 1995—36 x 37 cm. *Quilt*, 2001—40.5 x 41 cm. *Yellow Sail*, 2001—40 x 41 cm. *In The Garden*, 2001—41 x 41 cm.

The third stage is the firing of the plates in the kiln at Katepwa, and Mel can do as many as forty plates in a day. As the glaze starts to melt in the kiln, he removes the plate red hot and puts it in combustible material—shredded paper and sawdust—which burst into flame. He slaps a metal lid on it, and the fire, trying to burn, takes the oxygen out of the glaze, so metallic elements are drawn to the surface and that gives raku its particular metallic surface. The process is fast. "It's only in the kiln for half an hour, so I can see results quickly. I can do a lot in a day once I've prepared them." It's this firing process that is typical of raku.

Mel is also a raku shepherd, whose sheep came about "as an accident." He wanted to make an articulated wooden dog. It was to be about the size of a small table and the perfect pet. You wouldn't have to feed it, or kennel it when you traveled. Of course it wouldn't bark to protect your place but you can't have everything in an art dog. Mel was looking through a book of Eighteenth-Century engravings for dogs when he came upon these funny-looking sheep, with fur down to the ground and "little wee heads and large bodies so I thought I could make them out of clay." And he did, and his kids liked them and he made more—"and the more you make the better you get." He had a few around the house and a woman visitor called the Assiniboia Gallery, on her own, and they phoned wanting to sell them. So Mel became the raku shepherd, and makes hundreds a year now. "I do them six, eight, ten dozen at a time. Yet each is individual." The English scientist who cloned Dolly "was given a couple of them when he was lecturing in Calgary." And the sheep, made for his kids, have now traveled around the world.

Making the plates and the sheep was one thing, selling them another. Mel gained exposure by going to craft markets, in Saskatoon, Regina, Calgary, Edmonton, Vancouver, Toronto, Ottawa. His work is now represented in twenty-five galleries, from Ottawa to Victoria. He has a show in Toronto in July, at the Show of Hands Gallery on Eglinton Avenue, which will feature him and one other artist. He'll ship about forty works there. It's been a good gallery for him. But the more galleries he shows in, the more "it's like a business, making sure you're paid, making sure you have product for the galleries, and that they are still operating." That's why there are so many works in his studio.

Mel's plates have gone through a number of stylistic changes in his decade as a raku artist. His first work was in black and gold or black and white, with separate pieces of clay rolled together, and the division between the pieces was the main design element. He has gradually increased the size of his plates, from ten by ten inches, to twelve by twelve, which were the first of the plates I saw. Now they're about sixteen or seventeen inches square (though not all the plates are square—he has created a variety of shapes.) The plates have become bigger because the dealers and "I wanted them larger," though he says "scale has nothing to do with quality." The scale "is right for the way they are used," on tables or on walls. When Mel began firing unified plates, his designs were geometric, often with a zigzag or Calabash design, "common to a number of primitive societies, though I started to do them before I consciously knew the source."

Mel's major change has been to a recognizable subject matter,

fruits, plants, landscapes—still lifes Mel calls them. That change came by accident, Mel liking some of the fragments, "lovely fragments," from cracked plates. Then came the conscious creation of tiles, maybe six by six inches to form the centre of the plates (they're fired separately and attached by silicone). "When I started using tiles as images I moved out of the geometric and found the new imagery was unrestricted." One new technique was to attach tiles to a wooden surface—medium density fibre board—painted black, and there's that black again, "making colours sing." His most recent style has been a return to the abstract, only now the tiles are three dimensional and materials sometimes extend an inch from the surface. His first three dimensional work was more modest, lines gouged into the clay and often filled with colour.

I might add that all of Mel's subject matter, from the beginning, is still present in his work, the landscapes from his earliest passion in drawing, the fruit from his earliest experiments with raku, the geometric designs from his first major raku style, and the new bas relief abstractions. He's left nothing behind. When I asked about influences he said many painters were important to him, but what about other raku artists, I asked. He said people tell him there isn't anyone else doing what he does, though he has one kind of relationship with earlier artists. He'll steal from anyone, including Paul Klee in two new designs he'd just completed the third day I talked to him. "I steal from everywhere. I read a lot of books, a lot of periodicals. I feel no qualms about stealing from someone else. I was given permission to do that by Louis Kahn at Pennsylvania. We worked on projects he had in his office." He said, point blank, "if I see any good ideas from you I'll use them." Mel may borrow, or steal, design ideas but he makes them new in his own way.

Mel may be doing his most provocative work today which is overtly abstract, but I think all his work has an abstract or formal element, even subject matter so recognizable as the landscapes. It's not just that their point of view is strange. We're way above looking down, or the landscape is tilted up, so its forms are clearer. The horizon line is there but relatively unimportant. It's colour and design that are central. Mel's landscapes are never mimetic. Skies are peach, or gold, even blue sometimes, only it's a ferocious blue-sapphire blue. Fields are green—Victorian green—brown, yellow, like a silver and gold only raku could produce. The design looks like sky and a set of fields but I think Mel follows rules of colour more than rules of the visible. He says that's partly because of the medium. "Glaze colours are stronger, more intense than I would use in paintings or drawings, and they're less subtle because the medium doesn't have graduations in it."

These are all aesthetic plates of course, objects entirely of art, craft yes because there is so much of the technical in the making—and if that isn't right nothing works—but you can't eat off these plates, and each plate is its own plate, like no other, and so many of them wonderful, Mel's inventiveness at work every day. I better stop now. I'm talking myself into buying more.

Don Kerr is a writer and professor at the University of Saskatchewan.

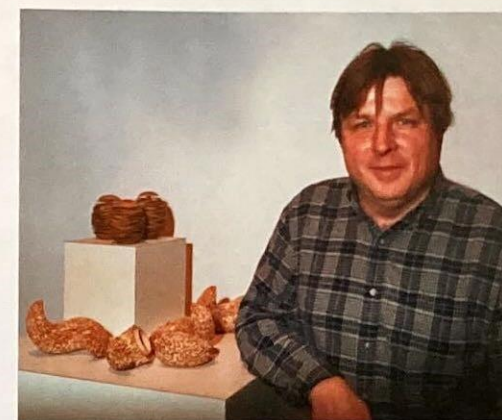
Lathes Make the World Go 'Round

Review of Turned Multiples II

by Sheila Robertson



LEFT: Graeme Priddle, New Zealand, Shell Form—mulga, 10 x 15.2 x 10.2 cm. RIGHT: Michael Hosaluk, one of three curators, Canada, Family, 2000—maple; turned, cut, carved, bleached and burnt; small-10 x 14 x 10 cm, larger-11.4 x 19 x 14 cm. Photo by John Perret



Turned Multiples II, on view at the Saskatchewan Craft Gallery March 2 to April 15, 2001, was an international exhibition in every sense of the word. The curators were Michael Hosaluk, of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Merryl Saylan, of the United States, and Hans Weissflog, of Germany. Each one selected about 15 far-flung lathe-turning artists, who chose their own submissions. As a result, viewers were able to get a sense of contemporary woodturning in France, Germany, North America, Australia, Japan and other countries. Even the woods the artists used were diverse, many of them little-known here. Have you ever heard of mulga, or Western Australian sheoke? What about bubinga, or Western chinquapin? Lathes may not make the world go around, but they are obviously turning everywhere around the world, and to good effect.

There was yet another international aspect to this ambitious, encore exhibition. The artists made series or multiple pieces, in order to show similar objects simultaneously at three venues. In addition to the Saskatchewan display, a Turned Multiples exhibition was taking place at the Craft Alliance in St. Louis, Missouri, and at the Wood Turning Centre in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The majority of the works were for sale and, with the status of these accomplished woodworkers, they commanded high prices. Many are worth several thousand dollars... U.S. dollars.

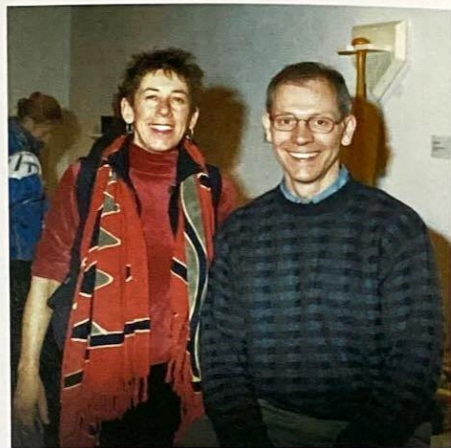
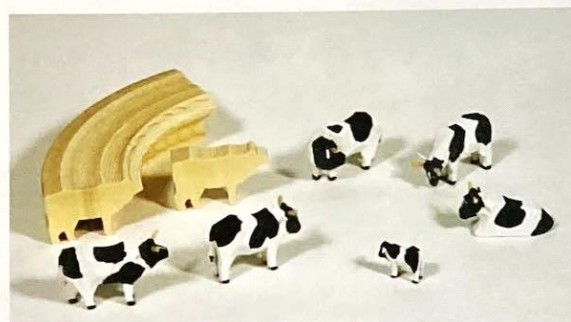
Hosaluk, a renowned sculptor, furniture maker, and woodturner who was recently elected to the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts, chose artists whose works tend to be not obviously fashioned on the lathe. He gravitated toward furniture makers, because he said he "wanted to get away from the norm of turning, where everything looks like it came off the machine." In

truth, it was often hard to discern which segments of the wooden works had come anywhere near a lathe. This was the case with George Peterson's mute and muscular sculpture, carved from charred oak. On one side, he worked a large X motif using a chain saw. On the other is a spiral pattern created with a lathe. As a result, the piece has two disparate personalities.

By definition, "multiples" has to do with more than one segment or part. Given the theme, I expected the participants to make series of nearly identical objects and divide them amongst the three exhibitions. However, it was obvious from the website containing images from the entire show that the artists had expressed several different interpretations. Some turners showed three dissimilar objects, some created series for each venue, and some devised works that were essentially triplets. Still other artists used common elements, to link otherwise unrelated objects.

Trent Watts and Miranda Jones, both of Saskatoon, collaborated on a single work, a mobile incorporating multiple parts. Watts turned the five, suspended wooden fish and Jones, a painter and illustrator, transformed them into fanciful, rainbow-coloured creatures. She used a range of materials, including plastic, acrylic paint, copper leaf, epoxy putty and found objects. How disappointing that the mobile was sent to one of the U.S. shows instead of appearing at the craft gallery.

In contrast to this frivolous creation, Jory Ulrich was showing unfinished oak bowls that were Zen-like in their seductive simplicity. Each unadorned vessel was as organic looking as a wasps' nest. Saskatoon's Niel Stoutenburg (shown on the next page), who also created the web page for this unique show and sale,



TOP: Betty Scarpino, U.S.A., *Nest/Egg Vessel*—ash, ebonized, liming wax; Egg—ash, bleached, LEFT TO RIGHT 2.7 x 9.6 cm, 16.5 x 9.6 cm, 9.0 x 5.7 cm. Photo by Zach Hauser
 LEFT: Sven Reichel, Germany, *Kuhherde*, 2000—turned, carved, painted wooden cows. Photo by Zach Hauser.
 RIGHT: Miranda Jones and Trent Watts on opening night at the Saskatchewan Craft Gallery Photo by John Perret

participated in a collaboration with San Francisco artist Yuko Shimizu. He didn't know how she would choose to handle his several flat, lidded jars until they were returned for display. The distinguishing feature of all his curly maple vessels was a delicate, handle capping each lid. Shimizu's decoration, in milk paint and acrylic paint, was based on patterns of concentric circles of stripes, checks and triangles, so the pieces looked a bit like giant tops.

A number of the works made reference to games or toys. Mark Sfirri, a leader amongst the Philadelphia woodturners, was showing a beautifully crafted, miniature baseball bat. Sven Reichel contributed a display that demonstrated how the lathe was used traditionally in German villages devoted to toymaking. Individual animal forms such as goats and cows would be sliced from a shaped "loaf," just like slicing a log of cookie dough. The cut pieces were then sanded and painted individually. Christoff Guterman fashioned tops of various materials, including acrylic and African blackwood. One of these is a "drawing top," so named because, as it spins, ink or paint from a reservoir spatters out, leaving a trail of the top's travels.

In a similar vein were Andy Buck's whimsical toilet plungers. With their vivid, painted stripes and decorative handles, they look like wacky croquet mallets more than humble household tools. This artist likes to take traditional tools such as rakes and shovels and

turn new handles for them. The plungers, he wrote, reminded him of "a ceremonial mace or sceptre and, of course, the throne."

Ostensibly a child's pull toy, Michael Broly's work featured unexpected imagery. There were smiling red lips attached to the string, and the lathed wheels took the form of breasts. A gallery attendant mentioned a viewer had complained about the "adult" content, but, arguably, there is another way of looking at it. Anyone who has observed a nursing infant will realize mom's breasts are playthings as well as a source of sustenance.

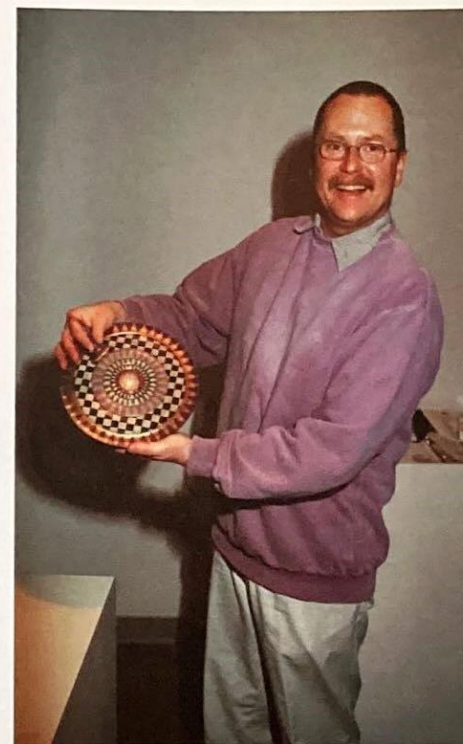
As Broly noted in his artist's statement, he has "spent an entire career avoiding doing multiples." For these exhibitions, then, he decided it was not necessary to make more than one of the same finished product. Instead, each of his pieces incorporated multiple components. A standout for me was William Moore's *Pea Pod Cup*. Setting off the simple vessel, made from African blackwood, was a large copper handle, oxidized to a turquoise shade. Enfolded in the handle was a row of peas, fashioned from boxwood. The interplay of dark wood, creamy wood and turquoise was very appealing.



William Moore, U.S.A., *Pea Pod Cup*, 2001
 African blackwood, boxwood, copper, 10 x 10.8 x 7.6 cm

I was also drawn to William Leete's sculpture, caught within a freestanding, asymmetrical white frame. The central image was an assemblage of fragments of a shallow pine bowl. The abstract form contained the tension of concave versus convex, unfurling versus enclosing.

In his artist's statement, Leete explained that he began with a single, undulating wave form which he cut in half and manipulated in various ways. He said he chose these elements because of their obvious associations with parts of the human body and with plants. Leon Lacoursiere's tiny ebony goblets were wondrous. Their elongated stems, appearing like lo-o-o-ng drips of chocolate, were only 1/2 inch in diameter. It must have taken a deft touch and enormous patience to turn them.



Niel Stoutenburg, holding *Circus 2000*—a collaboration with Yuko Shimizu, U.S.A.—curly maple, milk paint, acrylic paint, 14.7 x 26.7 cm.
 Photo by John Perret

Paul Sasso made a trio of related sculptural objects and proceeded to decorate them very differently. The painted wood evoked both metal and plastic, regal sceptres as well as ice-cream cones. He called these delightful pieces "tropes," from the Greek expression for a turning or a trophy. Sasso considered all these nuances as he worked. "I found myself applying all of the tropes' various meanings, with a twist, during the production of these little 'trophies,'" he wrote. He sees them as "trophies of the artmaking battlefield, exotic tropical fruits and, most certainly, little figures of speech." Sasso's trophies were a fitting emblem for a very engaging exhibition.

Sheila Robertson is a freelance writer and editor.

A Mad Tea Party IV: A Review

Saskatchewan Craft Gallery, Jan. 26 - Feb. 25, 2001

by Risa S. Horowitz



Entre Anne et moi, 2000—mixed media, mylar, sheer fabric, teapot, wood frame.

As a reviewer, I try to find out what excites or frustrates me in a work of art; I found Saskatoon ceramicist Eveline Boudreau's installation *A Mad Tea Party IV* interesting in its attention to questioning the lines drawn between craft and art.

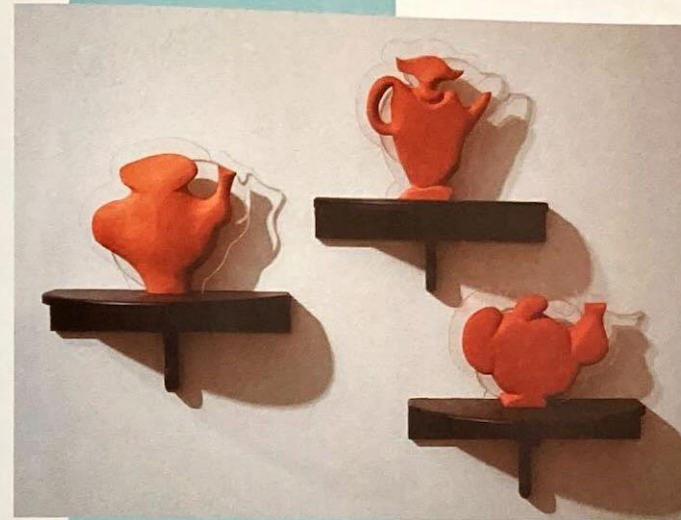
A Mad Tea Party IV is a work filled with idealism and hopefulness. The work is about women, how women relate to one another, and how women go about finding common ground. More specifically, the work is about the artist, how she relates to women, and how she hopes women can find common ground.

A Mad Tea Party IV is based on conversations Boudreau has had with women friends and acquaintances, expressing a sensibility that the world can become a better place through such dialogue. In her artist's statement, Boudreau describes using "the teapot as a symbolic vessel to talk about communication among women,

encompassing two main ideas: conversation and comfort." The components highlight the possibility of easy dialogue, while limiting such dialogue to just that: a possibility.

The largest component of *A Mad Tea Party IV* is the set of 35 wall-mounted ceramic pieces, titled collectively "Entre Nous," which have been formed by hand to resemble teapots. The pieces have the natural tone of terra cotta, appearing unfinished, raw, in progress, evolving. Not one of the forms is a functional teapot: none are vessels, but rather solid forms, a device which Boudreau has used to explicitly draw this work away from the utilitarianism of traditional ceramic crafts.

Boudreau describes "Entre Nous" as representing conversations to come, each piece associated with the names of women in her personal telephone directory. The pieces are lovely, and reminiscent



Entre Nous, 2000—installation of 35 ceramic pieces, no. 5, 6 & 7; clay, wood, plexiglass.

of Henry Moore's *Reclining Nudes* or Picasso's *Demoiselles*. I found I wanted to lay my hands on the pieces, run my fingers over their curves, shape them myself as if the clay was still soft. Boudreau presents these pieces honorifically on shelves, so full of potential, yet stopped short of realization in that the clay has hardened. Thus the conversations symbolized by them become a fantasy, a wish, an idealized hope for the future stopped short.

"Entre Nous" is placed in contrast to "Entre Anne et moi..." and "Entre Marie et moi..." pieces which describe actual conversations the artist has had with these women. The pieces mirror each other in construction. Behind doorframes over which translucent silk has been stretched, large pieces of canvas present fragments of Eveline's conversations with Marie and Anne have been transcribed. Resting on plinths, in front of each doorframe, sit finished, glazed and fully functional teapots.

The conversations transcribed in "Entre Anne..." and "Entre Marie..." are quite distinct. The tone of voice carried to the texts reflects the interests of each woman, their disparate backgrounds, and the issues which seem most prevalent in their lives. Boudreau's conversations with Anne centered on issues of child abuse, celebrations of women, in particular the crone, and "breaking the silence." The artist's conversation with Marie include such issues as women's roles within the academy, and the need for a stronger independence of mind and encouragement of girls.

Both conversations were exclusionary; they describe men as the cause of women and children's suffering and men's sexual abuses of children while excluding women's abuses of children, be they sexual, physical or psychological. One of the women, either Marie or Eveline, expressed that "some people need that special push, especially girls." I found myself wanting to enter into their conversation and ask, "why aren't boys deserving of that special push also?"

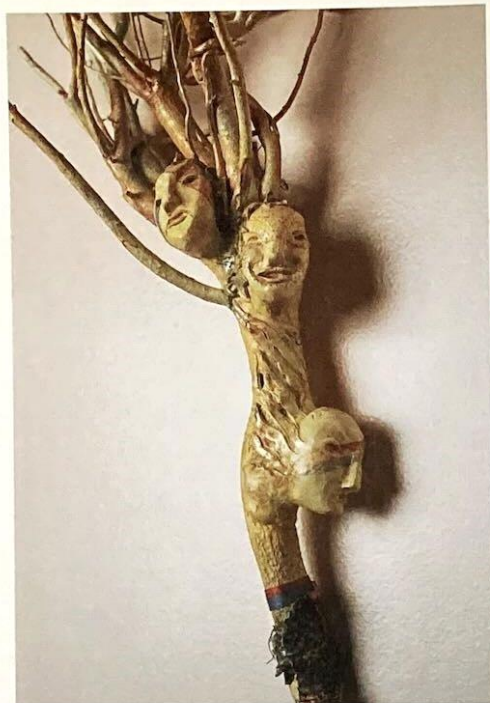
These conversations set up the feeling that conversations the artist might share with other women in her directory would follow similar themes. They suggest the idea that women's conversations always revolve around women's issues to the exclusion and denigration of men, rather than about, say, movies, politics or the daily news.

Boudreau offers these works to include the viewer in a dialogue, yet the viewer is consistently restrained from actually participating. The door frames inhibited my ability to comfortably view the texts, which are not presented as narratives, a necessary means that Boudreau uses to make obvious the distinction between dialogue and the second-hand experience of it. The conversations dichotomize inclusion and exclusion, and are relayed to the viewer to enable her to feel privy to but outside of nonetheless.

Boudreau does offer the viewer two invitations to participate. Viewers may enter their names into Eveline's new address book, and to "Sit and Visit with a Friend"—in an area with AstroTurf and deck furniture. In her statement, Boudreau writes, "viewers are invited to take time to sit and converse, to become, for a moment, a comfortable part of this Tea Party." Despite such a warm invitation, or perhaps because of it, I admit I did not accept. I also did not see any teacups in the vicinity.

The most interesting aspect of *A Mad Tea Party IV* is the way in which my feelings of exclusion from the conversations presented are parallel to the art/craft dichotomy, and this enables the works to function well within the framework of conceptual art installation. As compared to traditional crafts, I cannot make a purchase of one of Eveline's teapots to take home and use. In this case, I am pleased to see such a skilled artisan as Eveline Boudreau frustrate and challenge the boundaries of her craft.

Risa Horowitz is a freelance writer.



LEFT *The Muses of Air*, detail
 RIGHT: L to R, *The Muses of Air*;
Euterpe, Polyhymnia, Urania
The Muses of the Word;
Clio, Calliope, Erato
The Muses of the Stage;
Thalia, Melpomene,
Terpsichore.
 Photos by Gary Robins

In mid-1999, I had the privilege of serving as the Acting Executive Director of the Saskatchewan Arts Board. I am especially grateful for having stepped in to the Saskatchewan Craft Gallery in Saskatoon that summer, for it set me on a path the fruitage of which I continue to enjoy each and every day.

My foremost interest on that trip was the acquisition of Anita Rocamora's *Seapod* for the Board's Permanent Collection, since it had just then been honoured with the inaugural Jane Turnbull Evans Award for Innovation in Craft. Of course, taking in the rest of the Dimensions '99 exhibit was a splendid experience—but I was absolutely gripped by Leah Perlett's *Laughing Sirens of Trees*.

My father, the late Zenon Sametz, was a socio-economist—a pioneer in public policy development in Canada. He was also a respected artist and produced numerous three dimensional objects exploring themes derived from classical and first nations mythologies. Likewise trained in the social sciences and the arts, my

sister Roberta and I share his view that we have much yet to learn about ourselves from the wisdom of antiquity.

That September, I approached Leah with a proposal to create a work inspired by the nine muses of Classical Mythology—to realize an idea that I, completely bereft of any skill in the visual arts, had no capacity to undertake independently. While feeling the need to be reasonably suggestive of my intent, I was sensitive not to be overly prescriptive. This was to be Leah's work, and I had no pretense of a collaborative effort.

I provided base textural references concerning the muses from Bullfinch's *Mythology* and other sources, emphasizing that in their role of "inspiring mankind" there is a certain established stability or inherent need for human expression and search for knowledge.

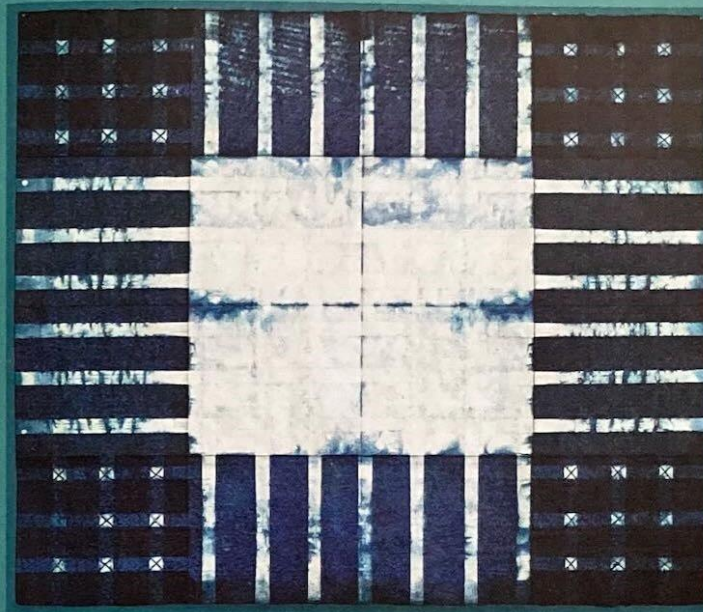
Peter Sametz

INVITATION

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c o m m i s s i o n



ABOVE: Tanya Norman/Sigrid Blohm, detail of *Indigo Blues, Frame*, 2000—accordion pleats clamped with bamboo stick in two directions 4 x 4 dips, 45 X 45 cm. RIGHT: Paul Sasso, U.S.A., #2 *Trope: Trope Royal*, 2001—acrylic on poplar, basswood & magnolia, 32.5 x 12.7 x 12.7 cm.



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