PREFACE

Infinite Articulations:
The Artists' Archives at the University of Victoria Libraries

JONATHAN BENGTSON, UNIVERSITY LIBRARIAN

Albert Einstein called the university "a place where the universality of the human mind is revealed."[1] At their best, universities create space for creativity, the investigation of the darkness and of the light in humanity, the probing of what we know and what we think we know, the challenging of accepted wisdom, the affirmation of truths, and the freedom to pursue knowledge for its own sake. All of this activity strengthens and reaffirms our fundamental humanity and our quest to understand the meaning of life. And yet, we are undergoing a period of time in which these foundational functions of the university are challenged by those who would commodify education, who value only the practical application of knowledge, and so who would, intentionally or not, shackle the potentialities of the human spirit to which Einstein refers.

Artists are some of the most important disrupters of those who would wall in what it means to be human. They confront the banal, overturn accepted wisdom, and free the mind. Art makes us laugh, weep, turn away in anger or disgust; it inspires us to greatness, forces us to confront the uncomfortable, shows us the beauty in life. The creative process—the movement from an initial thought to the creation of an artwork—reveals the genius of the human brain. Informed by individual experience and broader context, we are able to conceive of infinite articulations of what art is and what it means. C. S. Lewis once asserted that "the process of living seems to consist in coming to realise truths so ancient and simple that, if stated, they sound like barren platitudes." But the glory of art and of the creative process is that "every generation starts from scratch"[2]—that is, we are able to envisage universal themes through the never-ending process of individual creation. Special Collections and

1 "A Word on the Journey," *The Collected Papers of Albert Einstein,* vol. 14, *The Berlin Years: Writings & Correspondence, April 1923–May 1925*, ed. Diana Kormos Buchwald, József Illy, Ze'ev Rosenkranz, Tilman Sauer, and Osik Moses, trans. Ann M. Hentschel and Jennifer Nollar James (Princeton, NJ and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2015), 470. It was originally published in *Jüdische Rundschau* 30, no. 27/28 in 1925.

2 *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis,* vol. 2, *Books, Broadcasts, and the War, 1931–1949*, ed. Walter Hooper (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2004), 258. Abbreviations spelled out.

University Archives holds collections that offer an invaluable understanding of the artistic trajectory from conception to realization; they are essential to unveiling the truths embodied in every artwork and move us closer to understanding ourselves and our place in the world. It is exactly that artistic journey—and what it reveals about the meaning of the art—that we are committed to preserving in the Artists' Archives at the University of Victoria Libraries.

This is the sixth publication in our award-winning series focussing on the richness and vital impact of Special Collections and University Archives at the University of Victoria Libraries. It is also a departure in format, from a single bound volume to a collected series of interrelated booklets that can be accrued over time as our collections of artists' archives expand.

We hope you enjoy this publication and that it inspires you to further explore the artists' works and delve into our archives.

INTRODUCTION

Accruing Artists' Archives

LARA WILSON, DIRECTOR, SPECIAL COLLECTIONS AND UNIVERSITY ARCHIVIST

The University of Victoria Libraries has engaged in the preservation of the documentary heritage relating to artists connected with the university campus and the Victoria community since the establishment of Special Collections, and then the University Archives, in the late 1960s and early 1970s. This journey to acquire the raw materials of art history arose out of related circumstances and inspirations, including the establishment of a university in a city whose art scene in the 1960s was flourishing in dynamic and experimental directions; the Katharine and John Maltwood bequest to the university (originally Victoria College) of real estate, archives, print material, artworks by Katharine Maltwood, and the couple's fine and decorative art collection, which brought about the establishment of the university's Maltwood Museum and Gallery (now the Legacy Art Galleries); and the development of academic programs in humanities and fine arts supported by print and archival resources.

Whether it is the philosophies that compel or inspire the artist to create, the logistics that go into the making of a work of art, or the relationships between an artist and their personal and professional networks, artists' lived experiences affect their practice. These spheres overlap. Connections exist between art practice and teaching; collusions emerge between art production and writing; collaborations bloom between creators. Living artists may make themselves available to respond to any and all questions posed by a researcher. However, if direct inquiry with the artist cannot be undertaken or is otherwise impossible—and, if fate and circumstances permit—answers to questions and other unanticipated information may be found in an artist's archives (or fonds).[1]

1 According to the archival terminology provided by the University of British Columbia's iSchool (Library, Archival and Information Studies), *fonds* refers to "the whole of the documents that every organization or physical or juridical person accumulates by reason of its function or activity" (https://slais.ubc.ca/files/2014/07/Archival_Terminology.pdf, accessed 16 October 2018). Since *fonds* is a conceptual term that holistically encompasses the entire contents attributed to a creator, we treat it as a singular noun throughout this publication. In contrast, *archives* may be treated as a plural noun if it refers to the different materials within specific fonds or collections or more generally to the holdings in the University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives. It may be treated as a singular noun if it denotes the department within the Libraries or the actual building housing the collections.

Art, aesthetics, and the university were, indeed, linked from the first with the early planners' vision of creating a harmonious modernist public art and architecture program for the new university's campus at Gordon Head, established in 1963. Original sections of the university's student union building include both decorative forms and a large mural by Prussian-born expressionist painter and sculptor Herbert Siebner, "Man and Universe." Elza Mayhew's bronze sculpture *Coast Spirit* (1967) marks the south side of the quadrangle near the library entrance, and major art works were commissioned and incorporated into the design of the Mearns Centre for Learning-McPherson Library, including cast stone bas-relief panels of geometric forms on the building's façade by sculptor George Norris (1963) and the large mosaic work *Source of Sources* (1964) by painter and mosaicist Margaret Peterson, currently located on the ground floor by the main interior stairwell.

Soon after its establishment in 1963, the library's Special Collections became the home to arts-related archival fonds and collections that complemented its rare publications and literary manuscripts holdings. These included the fonds of artist, writer, mystic, collector, and benefactor Katherine Maltwood (first accrual in 1968); a small collection of textual materials of Jack Butler Yeats, artist, writer, and brother to poet W. B. Yeats (first accrual in 1967); and Gisèle Freund's materials related to the 1965 publication *James Joyce in Paris: His Final Years* (accrued between 1963 and 1966). The history of campus design, architecture, and art installation was preserved in the University Archives, which now includes the thematic concept drawings of the campus master plan by San Francisco-based firm Wurster, Bernardi and Emmons; the archived files from early campus art committees and the art gallery; the watercolour presentation sketches of major campus views and buildings by prolific artist and educator Allan Edwards; and university photo services prints, negatives—and today digital files—of original artworks from university holdings by artists such as Peterson, Siebner, Charles Elliott/Temosen-hut, Elza Mayhew, Henry Hunt and Tony Hunt Sr., and William West.

The recent imperative to preserve artists' archives began nearly 10 years ago. Artist and writer Robert Amos was conducting interviews with local artists for his twenty-fifth anniversary feature columns in Victoria's daily newspaper, the *Times Colonist*; these interviews invariably led to the artists reflecting on their careers and influences, as well as their collaborators, dealers, and studio spaces. Amos' project prompted subsequent discussion with University of Victoria archivists about the preservation of our significant local and regional art history. In October 2010, then-University Librarian Marnie Swanson announced that local artists' papers would be formally included as an acquisitions focus of our rare and unique holdings, particularly the archives of historical and contemporary artists with strong links to the university or to Victoria and Vancouver Island and with established national or international

reputations. This purview would also include the archives of artists who had taught at the University of Victoria and/or whose works were a part of the Legacy Art Galleries collections. Appropriately, the announcement was made at an event celebrating the donation of 36 years of letters, minutes, and photographs to the Limners Society archives, the Victoria artist collective that formed in the late 1960s, whose members were closely associated with the campus, and whose histories are part of our archival holdings.

The artists' archives presented in this publication are from this most recent phase of acquisition. Each fonds has its unique story, told through the voice of its creator. Some examples of materials comprising these artists' archives include grant applications, instruction notes, emails and greeting cards, manifestos, sales receipts, shopping lists, sketches, digital drawings, films, business cards, dresses, awards, letters, diaries, exhibit invitations both sent and received, correspondence, CVs, art supplies (including favourite tools), newspaper and magazine clippings, and scrapbooks.

For this publication, the artists selected were chosen with the intention to convey the vison, scope, and growing diversity of our holdings at the University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives. **Sandra Meigs** (1953–) is an interdisciplinary artist, former University of Victoria professor of visual arts, and a member of the RCA (Royal Canadian Academy of Arts), as well as one of the recipients of the 2015 Governor General's Award in Visual and Media Arts. In 2008, Meigs donated her fonds, which consists of 70 centimetres of textual records and graphic material, including articles, brochures, correspondence, essays, lecture notes, notebooks, exhibit posters, photographs, scripts and other writings. **Margaret Peterson** (1902–97) was a painter, mosaicist, and professor of visual art at the University of California, Berkeley. The Peterson fonds was acquired in 2011 via transfer from the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria and consists of five metres of textual records, graphic materials, inspirational objects, and art supplies. **Glenn Howarth** (1946–2009), also a member of the RCA, was a painter, digital artist, and art educator at the University of Victoria. The Howarth material was donated by family members in 2012 and 2017, and it comprises over four metres of textual records, graphic materials, computer disks, and audio-visual materials. **Robin Hopper** (1939–2017), another distinguished member of the RCA and a recipient of the Order of Canada, was a ceramicist, author, educator, and garden designer. In collaboration with University of Victoria archivists, Hopper began arranging his fonds in 2012, with acquisition finalized in 2015; his archives consist of nearly four metres of textual, graphic, and audiovisual materials, as well as mounted examples of test glazes with formulae.

Other artists represented in the Libraries' holdings include two-spirit multidisciplinary artist and educator Aiyyana Maracle; visual artist, filmmaker, and Limner Society member Karl Spreitz; West Coast abstract expressionist painter Jack Wise (RCA); printmaker Judith Foster; landscape and seascape painter E. J. Hughes (RCA); and painter, writer, and collector Robert Amos (RCA), as well as many others.[2] Our archival imperative continues with the mandate to document the diversity of the visual artists in our region, a rich repository to be preserved, studied, and celebrated.

2 Other artists include ceramicist and Limners Society member Walter Dexter (RCA); painter James Gordaneer (RCA); painter Max Maynard; painter, printmaker, filmmaker, and Limners Society member Herbert Siebner (RCA); painter, illustrator, and educator Ted Harrison (RCA); and visual artist and sculptor Robert Wise.

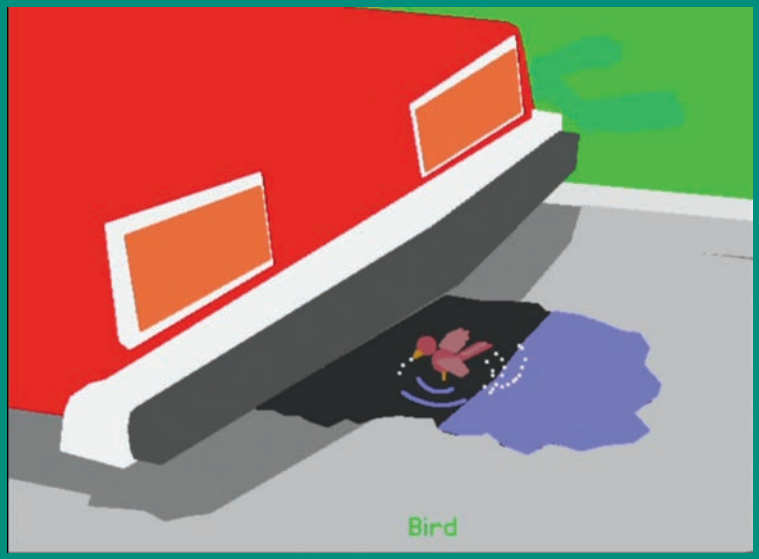
Number 1 in a series of interrelated booklets exploring the Artists' Archives at the University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives

"Machine stitched into a corner of the Canadian modern age flag"

Glenn Howarth's Telidon Art

John Durno

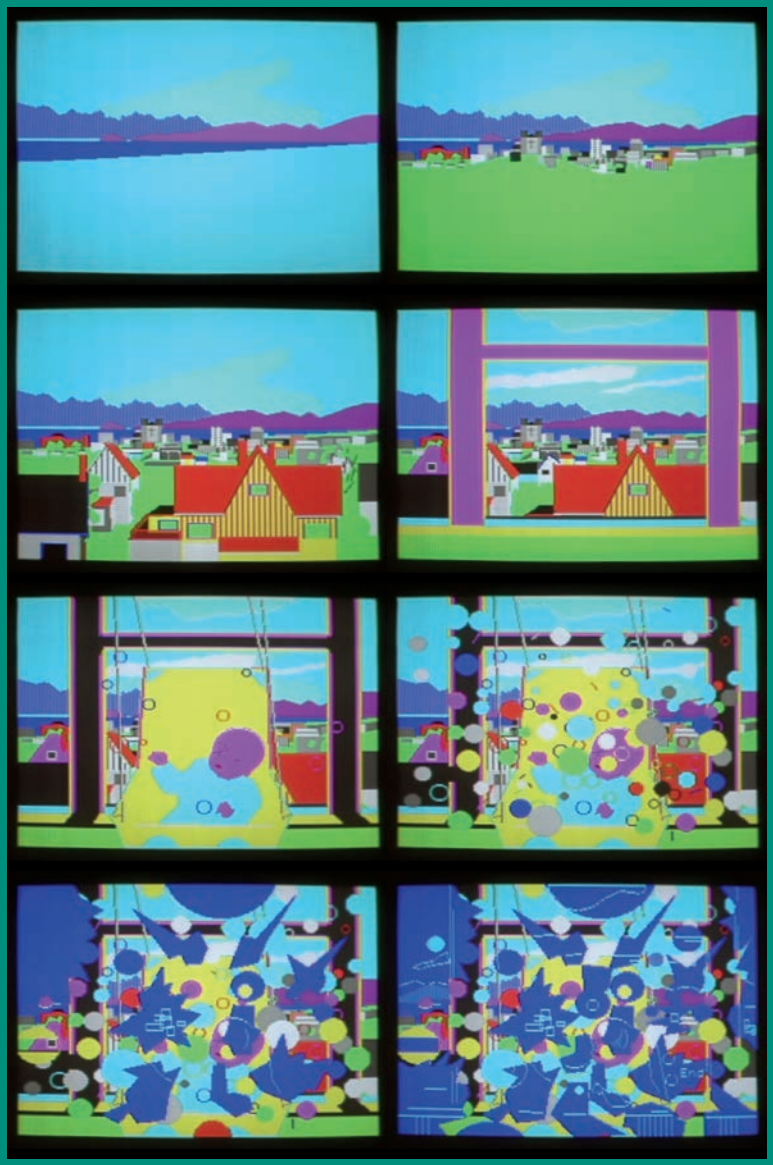
"Starfish3," an example of Howarth's Telidon art.
[Glenn Howarth fonds, AR465, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives. Image courtesy of John Durno.]


Bird

When Victoria artist Glenn Howarth passed away in 2009 at the age of 62, he left behind a wealth of archival material. The youngest person ever admitted to the Royal Canadian Academy of the Arts (RCA) when elected in 1978, Howarth was a prominent visual artist and revered teacher who created a large body of work in media both traditional and new during his lifetime. A substantial donation of his archival material to the University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives in 2012 reflects the range of his work. The Glenn Howarth fonds (AR465, accession number 2012-005) includes ten boxes (3.4 metres) of sketchbooks, criticism, diaries, fiction, letters, video recordings, ephemera, and digital art, the latter consisting of hundreds of computer files on 5.25- and 8-inch floppy disks. These disks hold the innovative digital art that Howarth produced in the 1980s using a Canadian videotex technology called Telidon. The story of Howarth's Telidon art is a story of a medium embraced and then abandoned, of artworks lost and found. This story, the subject of this essay, encompasses the recovery of uniquely Canadian digital artworks so deeply enmeshed in an obscure and long-obsolete technology that they, along with the works of dozens of other Telidon artists, were in danger of being altogether forgotten.[1]

"Bird," an example of Howarth's Telidon art. [Glenn Howarth fonds, AR465, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives. Image courtesy of John Durno.]

1 For example, see Hank Bull, "DictatiOn: A Canadian Perspective on the History of Telematic Art," in *Social Media Archaeology and Poetics*, ed. Judy Malloy (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016). Telidon is not mentioned.



Digital art was something of an anomaly in Howarth's oeuvre. In the early 1970s he worked as a critic, writing art reviews for local newspapers, but by the mid-1970s he had turned to painting, winning national acclaim for a series of psychologically charged, bravura oil paintings. He was a fast-rising star in the Canadian art world, with a succession of shows in prestigious public and commercial galleries behind him that culminated in his election to the RCA. At the end of the decade, however, he ran into difficulties. He was no longer able to finish paintings to his own exacting standard, and his work was not selling well. He got by through teaching, working as a sessional art instructor at the University of Victoria, the Banff School of Fine Arts, and elsewhere.

Howarth re-emerged as a digital artist in the early 1980s. At the apex of this phase of his career, he represented Canada in the 1983 Bienal de São Paulo, both curating and participating in an exhibition of eleven Canadian digital artists working with Telidon. By the middle of the decade, though, he had grown disillusioned with digital media, and he spent the rest of his career working in paint, graphite, and charcoal. As the years went by, his pioneering digital artwork was all but forgotten; biographical sketches written in later years often omitted any mention of it. Even among those familiar with Howarth's work, not much more is generally known of his involvement with digital art than the foregoing minimalistic account. The reasons for his sudden, near-total immersion in digital art-making—and ultimate abandonment of it a few years later—remain obscure. These details emerge only as we examine the artist's letters and other documents in the Howarth fonds.

A sequence of images created by Howarth using Telidon. The images depict the view from Howarth's apartment, beginning with an illustration of the ocean at Dallas Road in the background and introducing more detail in the foreground in each frame: first buildings, then the window frame, then Howarth's baby daughter, and, finally, abstract shapes that cover the scene. **[Glenn Howarth fonds, AR465, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives. Images courtesy of John Durno.]**

~~Telidon is an idea.~~

" At the University of Victoria in Canada where I teach, two colleagues introduced me, ~~to~~ a computer graphics system that captured my imagination. Dr. David Godfrey and Dr. E. Chang programmed the Apple II micro-computer to make Telidon pictures. I knew nothing about computers, nothing about the Telidon language of encoding graphic information; I understood pictures; ~~and that~~ next paragraph I had discovered the electric paint brush I had dreamed of. Using oil paint for eight years, I had become well known and highly skilled; ~~so~~ I painted ~~more~~ slowly and carefully. A single picture required many weeks ~~of work. and~~ With the computer shapes appeared instantly. My best Telidon picture required only four and one half hours of work. With Telidon and the Apple Computer it was possible to ~~think~~ make shape as fast as I could think. While I have always loved pictures, and once loved painting, I now again began

"A National Requirement": Howarth's Introduction to Telidon

It was during a sessional teaching appointment at the University of Victoria in the summer of 1981 that Howarth first encountered Telidon, the technology that would become the focus of his creative energies for the next four years. One of his students invited him to a demonstration of a "new Apple based Telidon computer graphics system,"[2] developed by a team led by Dr. Ernest Chang, a faculty member in the university's computer science department. Impressed with what he saw, Howarth sensed an opportunity. "I knew that the developers of this computer graphics system would need an artist, someone from their own world, for legitimacy," he later wrote: "what I did not understand at the time, was that the technology was Canadian to the extent, like the Candu reactor, that the word Telidon was machine stitched into a corner of the Canadian modern age flag; and that the need for the legitimacy a trained artist could provide was a national requirement."[3]

2 Glenn Howarth to Catharine [computer file], 11 October 1984, box 10, folder 8, Glenn Howarth fonds, AR465, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives. (Editor's note: Spelling and punctuation errors in quoted material from the fonds have remained uncorrected to preserve Howarth's voice.)

3 Howarth to Catharine, 11 October 1984.

Handwritten notes by Howarth about his introduction to Telidon at the University of Victoria, n.d. (Continued on verso side of facing page.) [Glenn Howarth fonds, AR465, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives]

to enjoy making pictures again. Working in the ~~it~~ computer laboratory with two programmers, I am very content as I was in the first five years of studio painting. The programmers whose creativity I respect, tap gently on their keyboards. My machine makes beeping noises and often I laugh each time I ~~make a~~ discover ~~a line~~ something unexpected. The apple computer is like a small sports car which I drive. ~~At first very exciting.~~ If my mood is good ~~except~~ the machine is an extension of my deepest thoughts but if I wish to be elsewhere or I am distracted, nothing works, my editing buffers overload, the system crashes, and I lose pictures ~~I did not want~~ my heart did not want to make. (Very much like my car which when I want to stay home, refuses to start.) As a machine the computer is a tool, and like a craftsman's tools, does fine work only when the artist's loves his task. The machine is an extension

While Howarth's observations may seem curiously hyperbolic now, they would not have read that way in the early 1980s. Telidon is not much remembered today, but in its time it was an object of national pride and international interest. Formally announced in 1978, Telidon began as a federally funded project to build interactive computer networks on a national scale. Although similar systems, generically called "videotex," were being developed in other countries around the same time, the Canadian technology was capable of displaying far more sophisticated graphics than its chunky, bitmapped competitors. For a time, it seemed possible the Canadian-made technology might become the dominant standard in the international videotex space, asserting Canada's role as a major player in the new high-tech arena.

As we now know, that was not to be. For a variety of reasons, including the high cost of the hardware required to create and display its dearth of compelling content, Telidon never gained the widespread uptake necessary to achieve success in the commercial marketplace. Following a series of field trials and experimental deployments in the first half of the 1980s, and its eventual emergence as an international standard in 1983, the project was officially cancelled in March 1985, its funding terminated by the recently elected Mulroney government.

However, during its brief heyday Telidon attracted broad interest across the Canadian cultural sector. Despite the centralized nature of the information utilities that were officially envisioned as content providers for the networks, a variety of writers, educators, artists, technologists, and others saw a potential in Telidon to democratize expression through community access to a new, high-tech channel for publication and interactive communication. Some of that early idealism is visible in Howarth's writings:

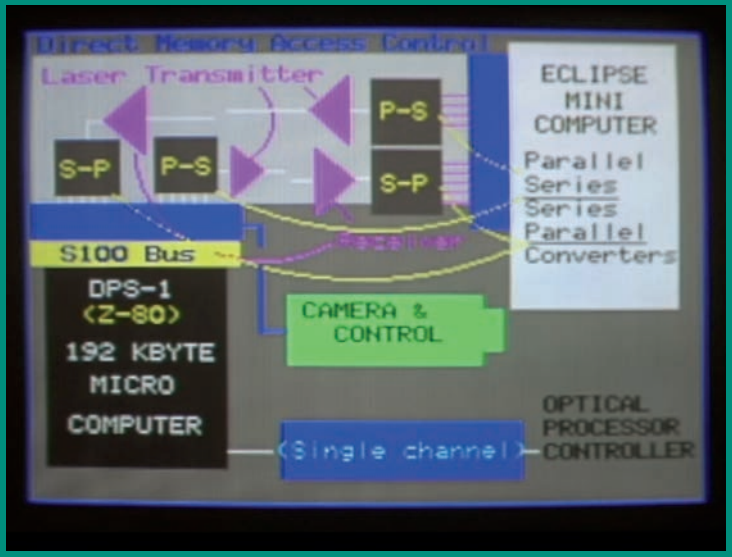

PORTRAIT OF
THE ARTIST'S
SPONSOR
DAVE GODFREY

> As microcomputers proliferate, more artists will become involved, and the immense power of computer technology will be in the service of the imagination. The computer can be used for political control, and it can be used to strengthen and liberate the human spirit. Humanism + the creative imagination must struggle to appropriate computer technology.[4]

Howarth made the transition to computer graphics under the sponsorship of Dr. David Godfrey and Dr. Ernest Chang, both faculty members at the University of Victoria. Godfrey, whose varied and impressive career had by the late 1970s traversed writing (*The New Ancestors*, winner of the Governor General's award in 1970), publishing (co-founder, House of Anansi Press; founder, Press Porcepic), and academia (dean, Department of Creative Writing at the University of Victoria), was a major proponent of Telidon in those years. In the early 1980s Godfrey moved into high tech as the principal and founder of Softwords, a company focussed on computer-aided learning. Following the publication of *Gutenberg Two* (1979), a widely influential collection of essays on the cultural impacts of computer networks that he edited with Douglas Parkhill, Godfrey published and co-edited *The Telidon Book* (1981) with Ernest Chang, who, as noted above, developed the Telidon computer graphics system that Howarth first saw in the summer of

"Portrait of the Artist's Sponsor: Dave Godfrey," an example of Howarth's Telidon art. [Glenn Howarth fonds, AR465, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives. Image courtesy of John Durno.]

4 Glenn Howarth, untitled draft beginning "At the University ...," n.d., box 3, folder 15, Glenn Howarth fonds, AR465, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives.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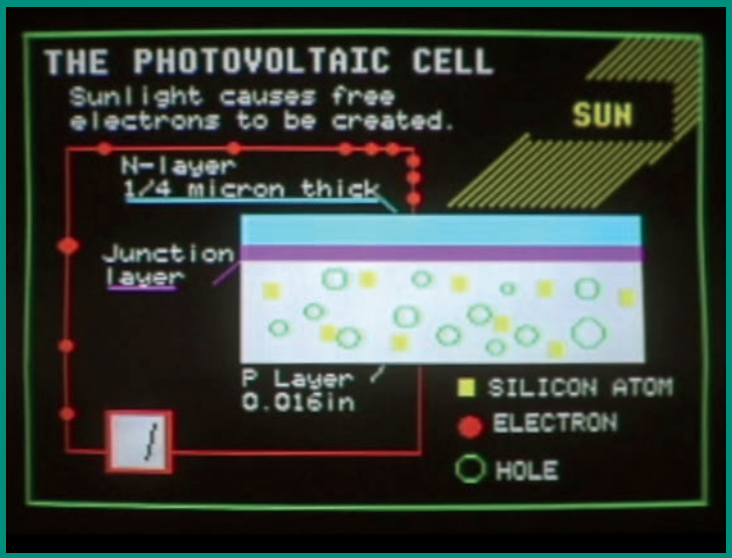
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1981. Without Godfrey and Chang's sponsorship, it is unlikely that Howarth could have made the transition to digital media at this time. In 1982 Telidon was an experimental technology not available in the consumer marketplace. The graphics creation system Howarth used was a prototype being actively worked on by a team of developers. In addition to the Apple II, the system included a drawing tablet, a serial card, and, most critically, a Telidon terminal, a special-purpose computer with the sole function of decoding Telidon files and rendering them on a CRT television monitor.[5]

Howarth's transition into digital art-making was not motivated entirely by the desire to turn the power of computing to humanistic purposes. Coinciding as it did with the birth of his daughter, it was also prompted by a desire for a more regular and remunerative lifestyle: "Since painting and drawing were going poorly and the opportunity arose to work in Telidon computer graphics, I put aside my freedom, dressed in a jacket and tie and did what I thought responsible Father's to be should do, walking down to the office each day, working in full colour with an electric pen."[6]

Along with his idealistic and practical motivations, Howarth was, at least at first, also motivated by the liberating effects of working in a new medium. "I had discovered the electric paint brush I had dreamed of," he wrote: "With Telidon and the Apple Computer it was possible to make shape as fast as I could think. While I have always loved pictures, and once loved painting, I now again began to enjoy making pictures … often I

Above: Cover of *Gutenberg Two* (1979), an influential collection of essays about the cultural impacts of computer networks, edited by David Godfrey and Douglas Parkhill. **[Mearns Centre for Learning - McPherson Library HN107 G87]**

Facing page: Diagrams made by Howarth using Telidon. **[Glenn Howarth fonds, AR465, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives. Image courtesy of John Durno.]**

5 Ernest Chang, *Design Considerations for the Telidon-Apple Picture Creation System*, technical report no. 16, (Victoria, BC: University of Victoria, Dept. of Computer Science, 1982).

6 Glenn Howarth to Jan, 24 May [1982], box 3, folder 14, Glenn Howarth fonds, AR465, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives.

No one knows what Telidon is. A coded series of electronic pulses drives a T.V. screen which I sit in front of, hour after hour, moving points, shapes and colours. I draw with an electric pen, on a magnetized tablet connected to a computer, which codes the elctronic impulses. Line red pops into existence. the line begins begins at xy coOrdinates 94,50 and ends down the screen at 10, 204. The screen is 200 points by 256 points. chromatic pixles dance. the commands bec ome auotmatic, I forget about every world except the one I am creating. In love with amnesia, I forget where I am. Riding the artist's fastest horse, making pictures on the computer.

The studio is a shrine. A complete inventory of artists materials, enough for the year, complete with framing. Vacant, and a plant which now refuses to drink water. The wooden walls are cold, and the varnished floor. The wood fired stove puts out too much heat and to little making the room unsuitable for the carefully controlled environment need by the computor. And the old stair case, that narrow, dark and dirty. clients arriving would be dismayed.

laugh each time I discover something unexpected. The apple computer is like a small sportscar which I drive."[7]

Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of Telidon graphics for a practicing artist arose out of the technological limitations of early 1980s computing. Due to the slow data transmission rates and limited processing power of the day, when Telidon graphics were played back, they rendered incrementally and slowly, shape overlaying shape, until each image was fully formed. Howarth later identified this quality as central to his computer art aesthetic:

> The beauty of these things is ... when I drew them, when I brought the picture back up, they would play back the process of drawing and assembling them. So in a sense, a drawing or a painting became not so much an experience of a single image, but it was like a sentence. The act of making it was extended through time.[8]

He further elaborated on this idea in a draft of a letter to the Canada Council, writing that "the screen holds fascination only so long as the picture remains promising and withholds a recognized result. When the

7 Howarth, untitled draft beginning "At the University...," n.d., box 3, folder 15, Glenn Howarth fonds, AR465, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives.

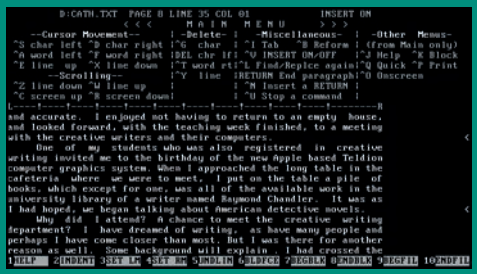
8 Glenn Howarth, lecture [videorecording], box 10, Glenn Howarth fonds, AR465, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives.

Typescript notes by Howarth about working with Telidon, n.d. (Continued on verso side of facing page.) [Glenn Howarth fonds, AR465, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives]

My Telidon work started in a trailer. White aluminum, with an orange hband painting around the top, The computer was in a corner. I had the necessary documentation in my hand, instructing me to run it. All night I had been up with my dog, we were expecting puppies, she was in labour, whining, but responding to comfort. Sleepless, I sat behind a word processor while the Dr. Chang typed my instructions into a word processor. Iate an apple waiting for the print out. I understood nothing, my mind was with a loved one about to give birth. He had to introduce me, numbed and distant to my new employers, who were expecting expertise, when my only computor instruction had been that very morning. My profession had been pictures, oils, and drawings. Also I knoew how to ytype and the computer loked like a typewriter. I learned first simple computor memory. And went with the portable computor out onto the job. I had worked all weekend practicing to get the operation up to speed

final image is understood, the videotex display is complete; should the frame continue growing the effect is boredom."[9]

Howarth's first serious engagement with Telidon took the form of a contract job with JEM Research, a non-profit group developing educational applications for computing technologies. "The computer at first was difficult to learn. I took commercial jobs, anything to make fluent the skill," he wrote of this time.[10] In another document, he described Dr. Chang introducing him to his new employers, "who were expecting expertise, when my only computer instruction had been that very morning."[11] Yet despite what might have been a shaky beginning, his work was a success, earning him personal thanks from JEM's executive director for his "excellent artistic contribution" and "professional approach."[12]



Wordstar file in which Howarth mentions being introduced to the Telidon system for the first time at an event for the Department of Creative Writing. **[Glenn Howarth fonds, AR465, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives. Image courtesy of John Durno.]**

9 Glenn Howarth to Media Arts Jury, Canada Council [computer file], 15 October 1984, box 10, folder 8, Glenn Howarth fonds, AR465, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives.

10 Howarth to Jan, 24 May [1982], box 3, folder 14, Glenn Howarth fonds, AR465, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives.

11 Glenn Howarth, untitled essay beginning "No one knows what Telidon is …," n.d., box 3, folder 14, Glenn Howarth fonds, AR465, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives.

12 W. E. S Tennant to Glenn Howarth, 31 March 1982, box 5, folder 8, Glenn Howarth fonds, AR465, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives.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Eyebrow Types
MEMOPIX SYMBOLS
Eyelid Types
Nose Types
Lips Mouth
graphics tablet

"The Electric Paintbrush": Making Art with Telidon

Most of Howarth's Telidon work was completed during two artist residencies, the first at Godfrey's company Softwords, and the second in the Department of Computer Science at the University of Victoria. The Softwords residency lasted from May 1982 through September 1983, during which time Howarth created hundreds of Telidon images (called "frames") that were combined into image sequences similar to slideshows. Some of these sequences were commercial work for hire, completed under contract to third parties such as the National Research Council and the Ontario Ministry of Education. Howarth created other sequences solely as part of his fine art practice. The second residency took place in 1984, underwritten by a grant from the Canada Council for the Arts. He created approximately 100 Telidon frames during the second residency, none of them work for hire.

Howarth was not the only Telidon artist working in Canada during this period, although he was an early practitioner and possibly the only artist in western Canada deeply engaged with the medium. Dozens of other Canadian artists, primarily from Ontario, Quebec, and Nova Scotia, were also exploring Telidon. Much of this activity centred on the artist-run collective Toronto Community Videotex, of which Howarth became a member. Early on, probably during his Softwords residency, Howarth made contact with other Telidon artists and began to explore collaborative possibilities. This communication ultimately resulted in

Detail of Howarth's Telidon terminal and work station, n.d. [Glenn Howarth fonds, AR465, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives]


Scotch
MEMOREX
Mini
Flexible Disc 1s
MEMOREX
Mini
Flexible Disc 1d
maxell
Mini-Floppy Disk

the show *Canadian Artists and Telidon* at the seventeenth Bienal de São Paulo in late 1983. Co-curated by Howarth, who also acted as Canadian Commissioner in São Paulo during its two-month run, the show included works by eleven artists, including Howarth himself. Howarth's copies of the São Paulo artworks survived on ten 8-inch floppy disks and are included in the Glenn Howarth fonds. The presence of Telidon at the 1983 Bienal—which featured American art star Keith Haring and the experimental art collective Fluxus—anticipated the later works of Eduardo Kac, who created "Reabracadabra" (1985) on a French Minitel videotex terminal, similar to Telidon.

The Howarth fonds contains a detailed report, of uncertain authorship, on the genesis and execution of the Bienal exhibition. Although funding for Howarth's proposal was approved by the Department of Cultural Affairs in April of 1983, bureaucratic delays caused the exhibition to be withdrawn in June. It was saved at the last minute through the intervention of the Photo/Electric Arts Foundation, a Toronto-based media arts organization whose representatives happened to be in São Paulo in August for a Super 8 film festival. Having secured an equipment loan from Special Telidon Marketing at External Affairs, the director of the foundation approached Howarth, who agreed to proceed on a shoestring budget of $10,000 with only two months to go before the exhibition was to open. Howarth and assistant curator Paul Petro overcame these challenges to assemble a well-received show of Canadian Telidon artists that opened only one day behind schedule.[13]

In retrospect it is clear that the Bienal was the high-water mark of Howarth's Telidon career, but he carried on for a while longer. Howarth

Floppy disks holding Howarth's Telidon artwork. [Glenn Howarth fonds, AR465, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives. Image courtesy of John Durno.]

13 Uncredited report on the 1983 São Paulo Telidon exhibition, n.d., box 7, folder 9, Glenn Howarth fonds, AR465, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives.

continued to work in Telidon throughout the following year as a Canada Council-funded artist in residence in the Department of Computer Science at the University of Victoria. During this residency Howarth transitioned to working in the second version of the Telidon protocol, now an international standard called the North American Presentation Level Protocol Syntax, or NAPLPS. His creative output from this year was much smaller than the Softwords residency—fewer than 100 frames—but more nuanced in colour and composition, due to the enhanced capabilities of NAPLPS.

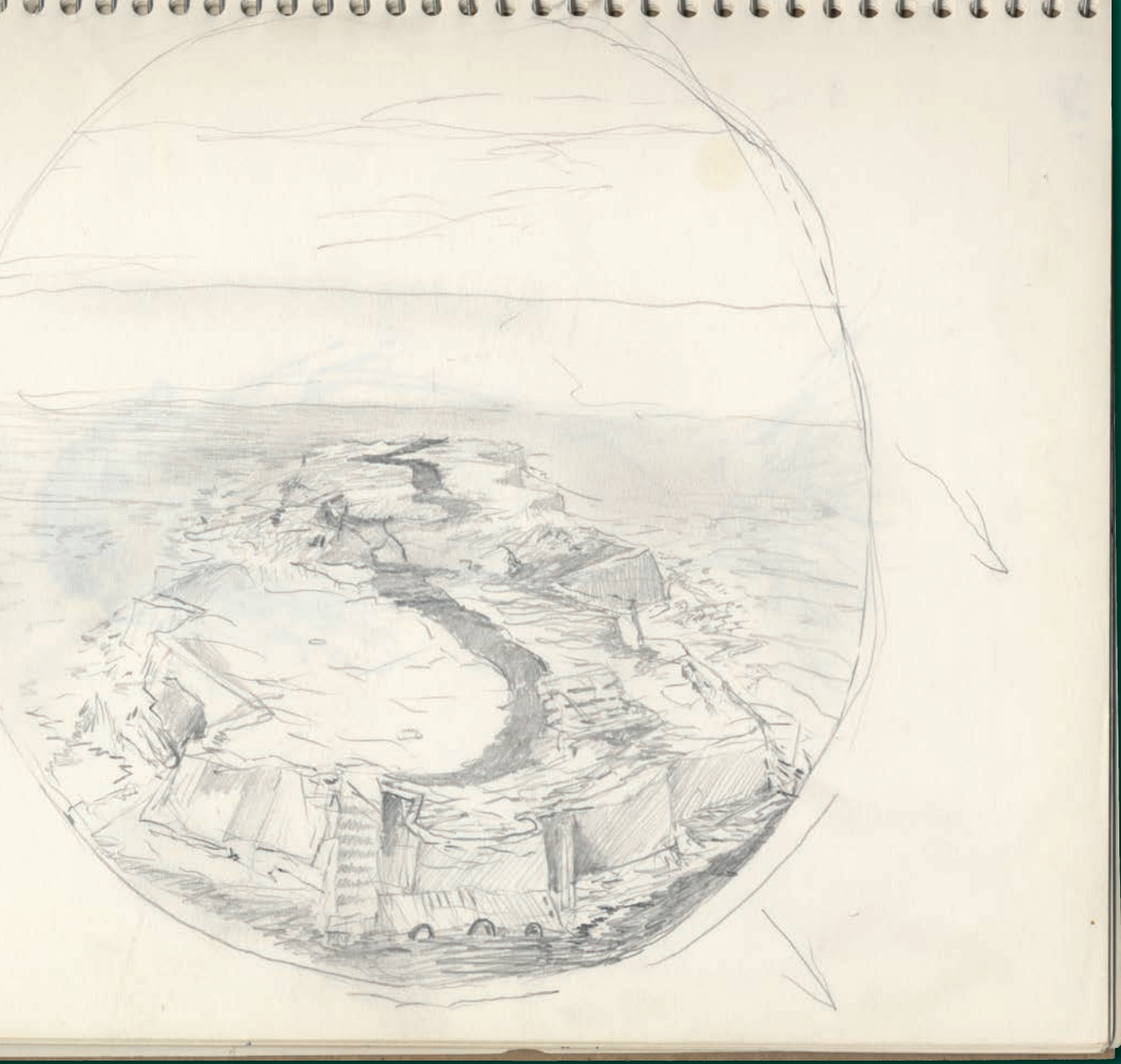
In February 1984 Howarth organized and taught a three-day Telidon workshop at the University of Victoria. A temporary lab in M Hut was assembled using borrowed equipment, including all eight videotex decoders available in Victoria at this time, one of which, Howarth noted, was "an early Norpak, an antique almost 7 years old."[14] Eleven students attended the workshop, ten of whom contributed work to an anthology exhibited at the university's Maltwood Gallery that May. Elegiacally entitled *Farewell to 699,* the exhibition marked the end of Howarth's involvement with the first version of the Telidon protocol.

Shapes Blown Apart: Digital Disillusionment

By the spring of 1984, Howarth was growing disillusioned with digital art-making. In a letter to Paul Petro, he wrote that "my hopes for NAPLPS are

Grid of stills taken from Howarth's NAPLPS artwork. [Glenn Howarth fonds, AR465, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives. Images courtesy of John Durno.]

14 Glenn Howarth, untitled report on Telidon workshop [computer file], n.d., box 10, folder 11, Glenn Howarth fonds, AR465, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives.



greatly diminished. On an ebb tide of Federal money, B.C. Tel dismantled its database.... There seems to be no possibility out here for the media as I understand it."[15] In addition to concerns about the viability of the medium, he was also plagued with technical problems: "During system development, it got so that I would put no effort into the conception of pictures, knowing that the attempt would end with all the shapes blowing apart, knowing also that the picture I made, when the software was changed would not be available for editing by the updated version."[16]

From June through October 1984, Howarth's work was exhibited at the Ontario Science Centre as part of the group show *Artist as a Young Machine*, but by October 1984 he had ceased making digital art altogether. There was a solo show of his Telidon/NAPLPS works at the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria in January 1985, but his heart was not in it. "No plateau has been reached, and no extraordinary effort on my part has been put into the show," he wrote to a friend: "I merely needed the artists fee."[17] Of his return to drawing and painting, he wrote, "there is more satisfaction. Did I tell you the value of these media might be their primitiveness?"[18] The electric paintbrush turned out not to be the paintbrush of his dreams after all.

In truth, Howarth had always had doubts about Telidon. Even as early as his Softwords residency, he had expressed concerns about the apparatus of digital art-making: "The true art might be in the creation of the microchip and in the multilayered systems. Electronics and computer

15 Glenn Howarth to Paul Petro, 2 April 1984, box 7, folder 3, Glenn Howarth fonds, AR465, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives.

16 Howarth to Paul Petro, 2 April 1984.

17 Glenn Howarth to Char, 14 January [1985], box 3, folder 15, Glenn Howarth fonds, AR465, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives.

18 Howarth to Char, 14 January [1985].

Drawing in one of Howarth's sketchbooks, 2005. The sketch shows the characteristic circular canvas that Howarth used for many of his paintings. [Glenn Howarth fonds, AR465, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives]


head on a stick
corpus
Bower - edinburgh
infant have constancies
anatomical basis
Gestault
frog receptors
extrinsic properties
Bell
majority
sensory
motor
negentropy
electro-convulsive
therapy
E.G. Borig
systematized info

design, manufacturing systems, machine language, programming language, and finally like the candles on a birthday cake, my input creating pictures. I am dependent on too much."[19] These concerns were elaborated and amplified in his farewell letter to the medium, "A Letter from Glenn Howarth," published in a catalogue of essays accompanying the 1985 exhibition *Art is Communications* at A Space Gallery in Toronto. "After I read the biography of Alan Turing I turned my computer off," he recounted in the essay, because "in Alan Turing's 1936 paper, Computable Numbers, I would never find expression for my pictures.... It was his computer at the end of my hall; it would be forever dedicated to his universe of parallelism and to the brilliant simplicity of his invention."[20]

At the heart of Howarth's somewhat elliptical argument in the essay is the conviction that the serial nature of computer processing cannot produce images presenting the simultaneous interrelationships of form and colour that characterize traditional visual media. This argument is easier to understand when we recall that the gradual emergence of the finished image was indeed fundamental to the aesthetics of Telidon art. Howarth dated his official return to oil painting to March 9, 1985, three weeks prior to the end of Telidon itself.[21] Federal funding for the Telidon project was formally withdrawn on March 31 of the same year.

19 Howarth to Jan, 24 May [1982], box 3, folder 14, Glenn Howarth fonds, AR465, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives.

20 Glenn Howarth, "A Letter from Glenn Howarth," *Art is Communications*, ed. Paul Petro (Toronto, ON: United Media Arts Studies, 1985), 25.

21 Howarth, "A Letter from Glenn Howarth," 25.

Drawing and notes in one of Howarth's sketchbooks, c. 1980. [Glenn Howarth fonds, AR465, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives]

Report to JEm.

Itg: PCS

.Insert Signpost. The appearance of visual form begins in immediacy. Manipulation of those forms requires a density of human thought in not the present, but the tense.
immediate [illegible] the timed string of form assembly is secondary to the appearance across the visual field; a multiplicity of visual information, is not read so much as apprehended simultaneously

In the I(nsert mode) I forget. A brief scenario:
[illegible] Find rectangle red. [illegible]. NO. NO. NO. NO. Select edit function. I(nsert. Modify. rectangle grey 6 hightlight black. '''' too big[illegible]'''''''' Delete. Modify. rectangle grey 6. """""" Rectangle the right size, but a few pixles off position. Move. Finally it's in place. Refresh, to take the cursor marks off.....And a refresh is inserted in the middle of the string by the operator forgeting the i(nsert mode). A notice on the monitor would help.

Registration pins. Since, registration of the graphics tablet surface changes in relation to the telidon screen forma t with re-magnitization, a movable overlay is required. The present scotch tape is inadequate. Attached to the top surface of the tablet by nylon rivets, two slotted vertical slides, with a nylon wing nut through the slot, a horixontal

"Servitude to Systems": The End of Telidon

Although Howarth made little, if any, digital artwork after 1984, his involvement with digital art continued for a while longer. In the first half of 1986, he took a contract as an instructor of digital picture processing, graphic design, and drawing at Cariboo College in Kamloops, BC. He described his time there as fraught with administrative difficulty, wrangling with a variety of next-generation graphics systems purchased by a predecessor. His resolve to abandon digital art-making did not waver. "There is no desire in me really to continue making pictures on screen," he wrote: "I am surprised at the speed, and the colour capability here, but there is a servitude to systems, to their cost and maintenance, which here involves me in a forest of administration and detailing."[22]

By the summer he was back on the West Coast, employed as an instructor of computer art at Expo 86 in Vancouver, with a focus on the new Commodore Amiga as well as Telidon equipment.[23] It did not go smoothly. In a letter to Tom Graff, the Curator and Special Programs Coordinator for the Canada Pavilion, Howarth expressed his frustration: "Invited to display my existing videotex landscape pictures on the Pavilion database, I found my display files incompatible with Dominion

22 Glenn Howarth to Paul Petro, 19 January [1985], box 7, folder 3, Glenn Howarth fonds, AR465, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives.

23 Dan Kramer to Glenn Howarth, 30 April 1986, box 6, folder 6, Glenn Howarth fonds, AR465, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives.

Report by Howarth to JEM Research, n.d. (Continued on verso side of following pages.) [Glenn Howarth fonds, AR465, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives]

slide, slotted, traveling on the same nut. and on the ends of the horizotal slide, at a standardized hole punch distance two plastic registration pins. The command squares of the graphics tablet printed on a pre-punched tablet of semi-transparent paper, would be in register along with a printed grid of the telidon screen format.

Tablet Screen format: On paper, in tablets used for layout and sketing. Disposable. Two centered light blue axis. and a descending grid pattern which allows a pixle to be located without looking at the screen, but from reading the co-ordinates from the monitor.

Turtle cursor.

Instead of a flashing dot, a straight line with a single pixle gap. the point is found not by twining point-to-point but by negating a line of of points in the surround.

That the cursor rotate by keyboard instruction through 180 degrees. That the cursors last position be the default would be useful for polygon parallelisms, for perspective angles. Failing keyboard instructions, the angle could be pumped on the graphics tablet, in 1, 2X, 4X 8X increments.

directories' database software… when the files were installed, they remained corrupt, fragmented, and were disfigured by blacker than black screen prompts."[24] The Telidon picture creation software provided for him fared no better in his estimation; he dismissed its interface as "chatty baroque."[25] The presence of the Amiga cast the shortcomings of the Telidon technologies into high relief: "it was impossible having used this new Amiga hardware with its high speed interaction and pointer interface, to feel anything but frustration at the unwieldy response of the videotex equipment."[26] It was an inescapable conclusion, one that many Telidon artists were coming to share: the once-promising technology was now obsolete, superseded by more powerful, lower-cost graphics systems making their debut in the consumer technology space. It is worth noting that at exactly the same time as Howarth was struggling at Expo 86, a similar struggle was underway at the 1986 Venice Biennale, where an exhibition of Canadian Telidon artworks had to be cancelled due to technical difficulties.[27]

The last recorded public exhibition of Howarth's digital artworks during his lifetime occurred in March 1987, accompanying a lecture at Toronto Community Videotex shortly before the collective changed its name to Inter/Access.[28] As the 1980s waned so did any lingering interest

24 Glenn Howarth to Tom Graff [computer file], 2 July 1986, box 10, folder 4, Glenn Howarth fonds, AR465, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives.

25 Howarth to Tom Graff, 2 July 1986.

26 Howarth to Tom Graff, 2 July 1986.

27 Geoffrey Shea, "Telidon," *Dead Media Project*, ed. Bruce Sterling and Tom Jennings, accessed May 8, 2018, http://www.deadmedia.org/notes/2/024.html.

28 Glenn Howarth to Paul Petro [computer file], 20 January 1987, box 10, folder 7, Glenn Howarth fonds, AR465, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives.

Text mode. Outline mode for larger text.

Text mode as text. Set cursor, for begining of text line. Move to the keyboard, and do everything, in text, including the colour, k on the keys. It would be quicker than taking xxxxxxxxxxx one hand off the keyboard to pick up the pen. This would avoid the two reaches for the pen, one to set the toggle, if the default colour is grey, or colour if the desired text is to be grey, and another for the shade of colour command.

pen liff

Background mode. With five pictures stacked in background mode, a refresh, I(nsert, modify, move, cause the screen to return to the beginning of the tunnel; and the wait to return to foreground xxxxxx invention is interminable. If the backgrounds could remain stable, and the xxx refresh confined to the xxxxxxxxxxx editor frame, for long assemblange, the xxxxx waiting xxxxxxxxxxx would be reduced.

Machine morality.

The PCS boots to the intital question. Do you wish to edit an old picture? If you do not and wish to make a new one, the creation process begins with a lie. A poor beginning xxx when the artist xxxxxxxxxx says yes. I want to edit a xxx old picture. Perhaps it is truw that in some sense new pictures are conversions of old ones. (create/edit) a picture is xxxxxxxxxxxx accurate.

in videotex, and as the years went by the hardware and software needed to display the artworks became harder and harder to find. By the late 1990s it was generally acknowledged that the Telidon works of Howarth and dozens of other artists could no longer be seen and that the medium was "dead as a doornail."[29] Although the computer files themselves lingered on floppy disks in boxes and filing cabinets, the means to render them as images were thought to have been lost.[30] That state of affairs persisted until 2015, when the University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives began a project to restore Howarth's digital artworks to accompany a retrospective exhibition planned for the following year.

Telidon Regained: The Restoration of Glenn Howarth's Telidon Art

Howarth's Telidon artworks arrived as hundreds of digital files contained on two dozen 5.25-inch floppy disks. The first step in the restoration involved transferring copies of the files to modern storage media using standard forensic data recovery techniques.[31] Examination of the files revealed that Howarth had created works in two different versions of the

29 Shea, "Telidon," *Dead Media Project*, ed. Bruce Sterling and Tom Jennings, accessed May 8, 2018, http://www.deadmedia.org/notes/2/024.html.

30 Shea, "Telidon."

31 See John Durno, "Digital Archaeology and/or Forensics: Working with Floppy Disks from the 1980s," *Code4Lib Journal* 34, 2016.

~~x~~ Drop shadow. Form commanded, ~~xxx a klxxk~~ is copy inserted be hind which ~~xx~~ is dropped one pixle, two o r three pixles, in a chosen colour. The same function could be used for hightlights where the background copy moves upwards ~~xka~~ a pixles; Like the drop shadow ~~xx~~ gives the figure ~~xxdx~~ an illusion of volume.

Integration of multiple frames

Having created ~~one froame, and~~ a series of frames ~~following~~ in overlay, to assemble pictures descrete under separate file names into, one picture, ~~Tkdx~~ would extend disc storage, and the capacity of the show programme directory.

Telidon standard: Telidon 699, the draft version used in Canadian field trials in the early 1980s, and NAPLPS, the mature version used across North America in commercial videotex services and in the Prodigy Online service later in the decade. The NAPLPS artworks were the easiest to restore, as software capable of rendering NAPLPS graphics is still available. In the early 1990s the Nepean, ON-based company Microstar released their NAPLPS software in a massive online shareware repository called Simtel, mirrors of which remain on the web to this day. Howarth's NAPLPS works were rendered using the Microstar program PP3 running in the DOSBox emulator, slowed down to match the speed of mid-1980s PC hardware.

The Telidon 699 works proved more difficult to restore. NAPLPS was not fully backwards-compatible with Telidon 699, so it was not possible to use the Microstar software to render the earlier works. In fact, software capable of rendering Telidon 699 graphics never existed as such, for the simple reason that early 1980s consumer-grade computers would not have been powerful enough to run it. Instead, rendering Telidon 699 required a specialized device called a Telidon decoder. Because Telidon 699 was never widely deployed, not many of these devices were ever produced, and they are now very rare. It was extremely fortunate that the University of Victoria Libraries was able to locate a still-functioning decoder in the collection of the SPARC Radio Museum in Coquitlam, along with a highly capable volunteer, Brent Hilpert, willing to assist with the maintenance and operation of the 35-year-old piece of equipment. During a series of recording sessions in the spring of 2016, Howarth's works were transmitted to the decoder over a serial connection and rendered on its built-in CRT monitor. The output was captured using a video camera pointed at the CRT, its frame rate adjusted to match the refresh rate of the monitor. Although this recording method was


Glenn
Howarth

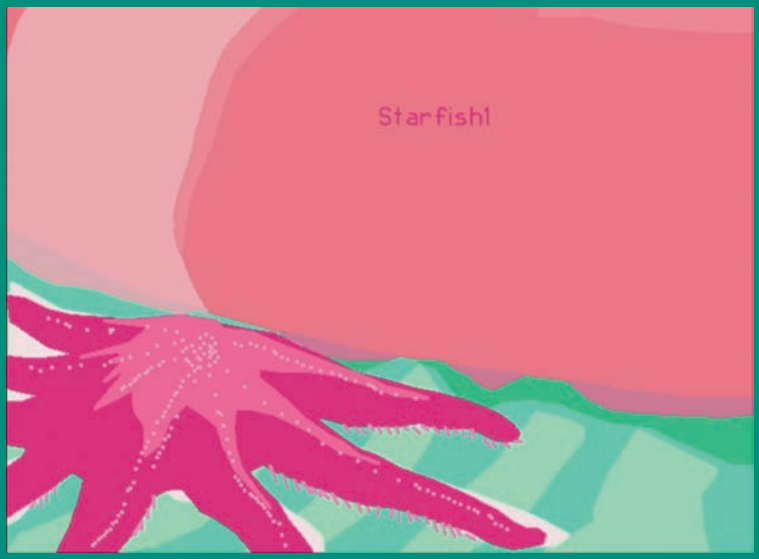
somewhat primitive, it had a certain authenticity: our research indicated that the same method was employed by the Telidon artists themselves back in the 1980s, when transferring their works to videotape.

In all, almost two hours of Telidon graphic sequences were recovered from floppy disks in the Howarth fonds. The restored works are now securely housed as digital video alongside the original image files on the University of Victoria's enterprise storage network. Using a combination of emulation, period software, software reconstruction, and the generous loan of the vintage 1983 Telidon terminal from the collection of the SPARC Radio Museum, it proved possible to make all of Howarth's Telidon artworks viewable once again. Techniques developed for the Howarth restoration work are now being used to restore the artworks of many other Canadian Telidon artists that have since come to light in the collections of Inter/Access in Toronto, Artexte in Montreal, and the personal collections of the Telidon artists themselves. Once thought to have been lost forever, Telidon art is poised for re-evaluation as an important tributary in the development of media art in Canada.

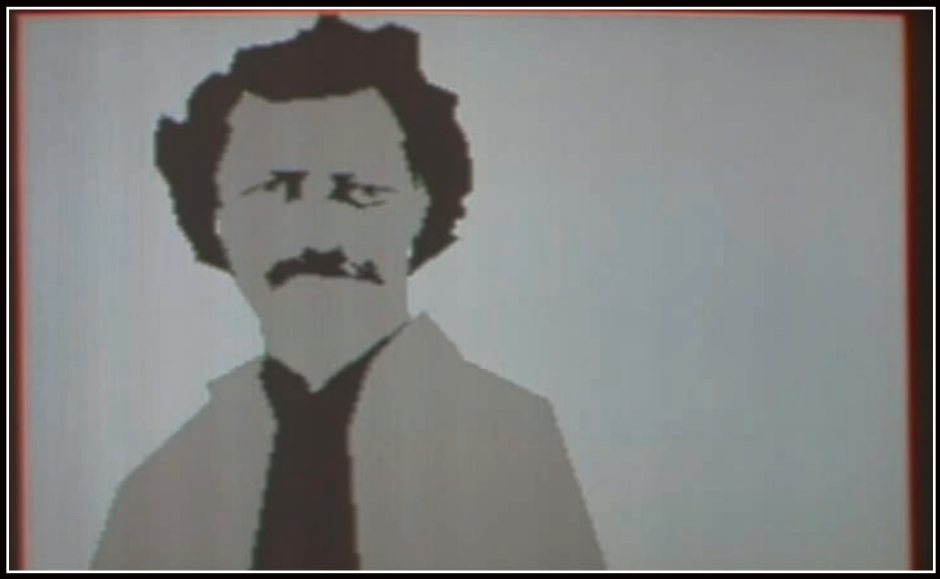
JOHN DURNO is a librarian/technologist with a research focus on early Canadian videotex art. In his current role as Head, Library Systems at the University of Victoria Libraries, he leads the team responsible for building and maintaining the Libraries' computing infrastructure and digital asset management systems.

Above: Howarth. [Glenn Howarth fonds, AR465, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives]

Facing page: Howarth's studio in Fan Tan Alley, n.d. [Glenn Howarth fonds, AR465, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives]



"Starfish1," an example of Glenn Howarth's Telidon art. **[Glenn Howarth fonds, AR465, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives. Image courtesy of John Durno.]**



Screenshot from Louis Riel, one of Glenn Howarth's Telidon works.
[Image courtesy of Christine Walde.]

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Telidon test screen. [Image courtesy of Christine Walde]

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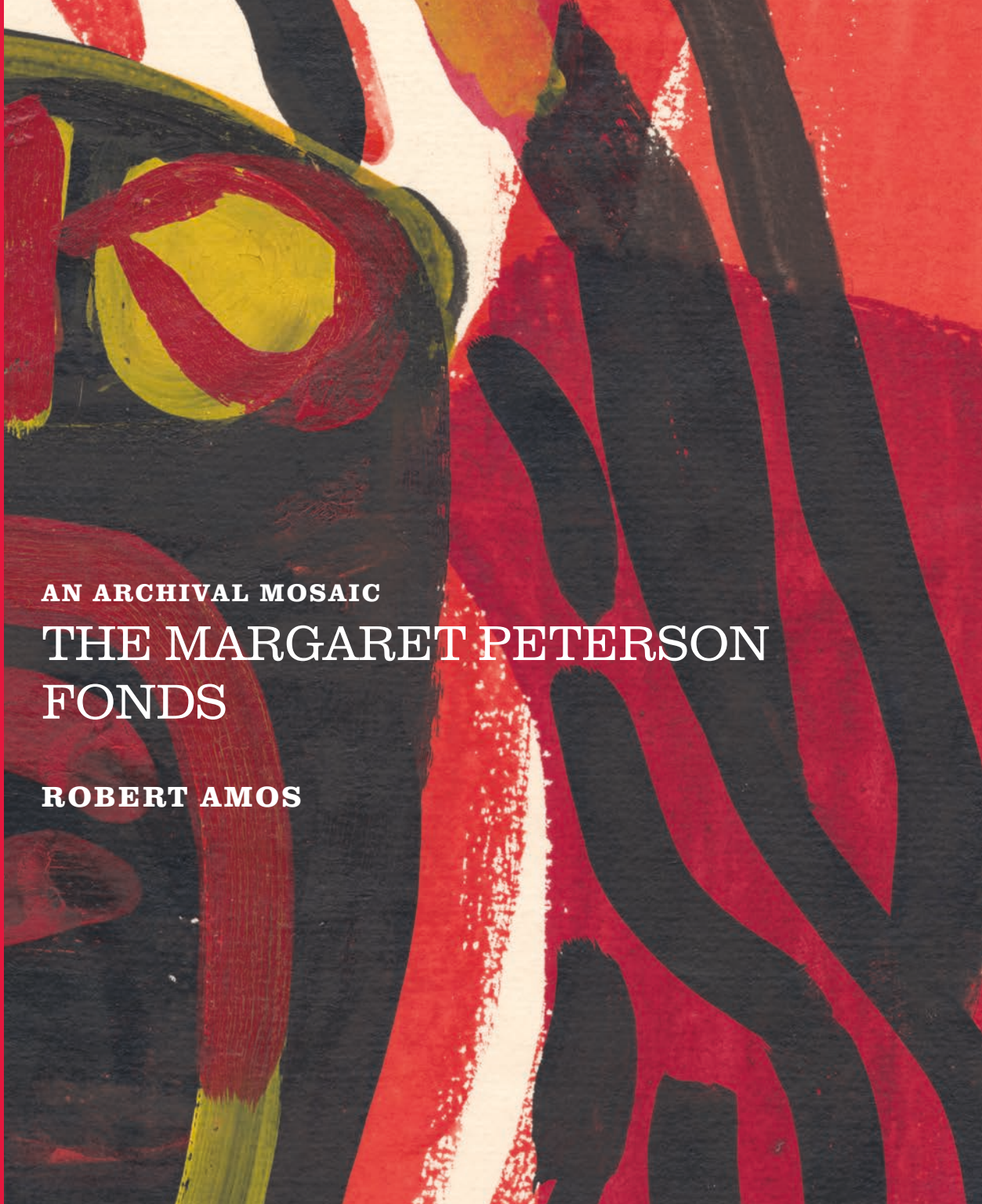


AN ARCHIVAL MOSAIC

THE MARGARET PETERSON FONDS

ROBERT AMOS

Untitled tempera painting by Margaret Peterson, n.d. **[Margaret Peterson fonds, AR445, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives]**

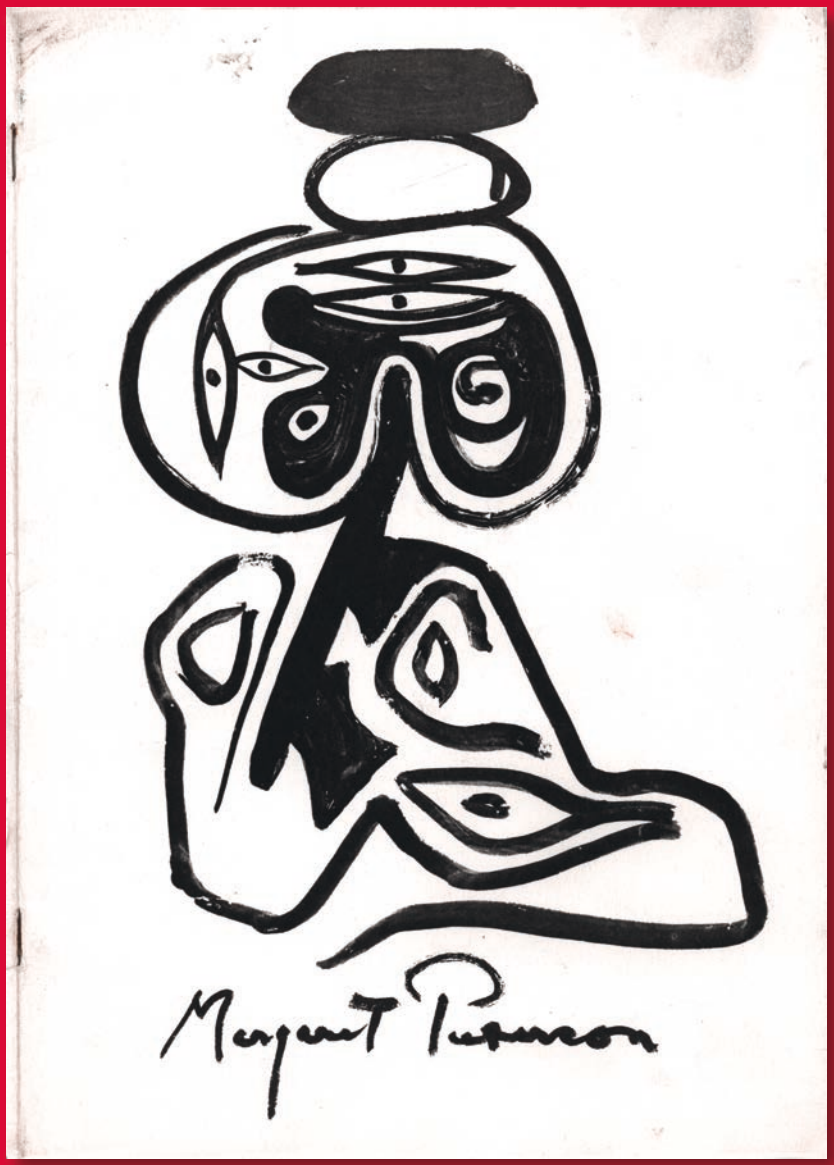
Margaret Peterson

Catalogue for the exhibition *Margaret Peterson: A Retrospective at the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria*, 1978. **[Margaret Peterson fonds, AR445, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives]**. Facing page: Margaret Peterson, 1934. Photograph by Imogen Cunningham. **[Margaret Peterson fonds, AR445, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives]**

AN ARCHIVAL MOSAIC

THE MARGARET PETERSON FONDS

The Gods of Intertidal Waters (1960-61), a painting about 2 × 4 feet, done with egg tempera on a wooden panel and rich with sonorous earth tones, hangs prominently behind the reference desk in the reading room of the University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives. It is by the modern abstract painter and mosaicist Margaret Peterson, one of more than 30 works by Peterson held by the University of Victoria Legacy Art Galleries. Its presence represents an important intersection between art and archives and inspires investigation of the Libraries' rich holdings of artists' archives, including the Margaret Peterson fonds (ar445), which has been part of Special Collections and University Archives since 2010. The archives comprise 16 boxes of textual records, graphic materials, audiovisual materials, and objects. These include sketchbooks, diaries, unpublished manuscripts, newspaper clippings, photographs, financial documents,



Catalogue for Peterson's solo exhibition at the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, 1962. **[Margaret Peterson fonds, AR445, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives]**

correspondence, original artworks, teaching notes, exhibition catalogues, and paints. They provide invaluable context for an understanding of Peterson's artistic practice and philosophy, her politics and personal life, and the critical reception of her work.

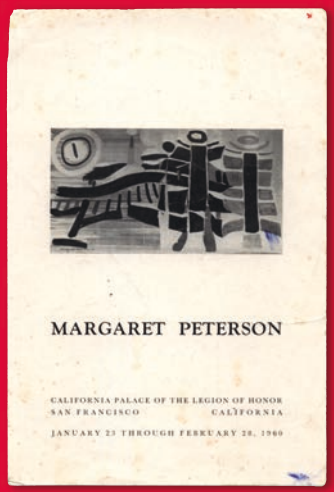
Although Peterson's name is not as well known now, she was an internationally acclaimed artist in the mid-twentieth century, and her work deserves wider recognition. Her art encodes deep mysteries of universal truth through abstracted symbolism, and the unique and wonderful gift she had with colour makes her paintings arresting and instantly recognizable. Deep magentas, earth tones of umber and sienna and ochre, and a range of radiant yellows were chosen for her palette with aplomb, the shades never blended or fussy. She was active in the Victoria art scene for decades and, after I discovered her work in 1977, I began to recognize it in various locations throughout the city. One of her mosaics, *Source of Sources* (1964), occupies a central place in the Mearns Centre for Learning-McPherson Library at the University of Victoria. Another was commissioned as a wall mural for the lobby of the Richard Blanshard Building in downtown Victoria in 1978. In addition to the works held by the University of Victoria, the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria (aggv) holds at least 39 of her paintings and drawings.

Peterson's paintings are also found in many national and international collections, including the art collection at the University of California, Berkeley (where Peterson taught for many years), the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the British Columbia Provincial Art Collection, the Vancouver Art Gallery, the National Gallery of Canada, and Accademia di Belle Arti in Ravenna, Italy.

Margaret Peterson was a major talent, and the opportunity to bring her work to a new audience spurred me to search for her archives, though at first I was unsure if they even existed. In 2010 I discovered them at last, tucked away in dusty boxes in the basement of the aggv . Later, this material was given to the University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives, and I was fortunate to have the chance to work with it closely. So who was Peterson, and how did her archives come to the university? This essay is an attempt to put together the mosaic of the Margaret Peterson fonds.

FROM CALIFORNIA TO VANCOUVER ISLAND

THE LIFE OF MARGARET PETERSON



Peterson was born in 1902 in Seattle, Washington. She enrolled in the art program at the University of California, Berkeley in 1922 and in 1928 became a full-time instructor, a role she fulfilled with distinction until 1951. From 1930 to 1931, she studied with Hans Hoffman and became one of the first abstract painters in California. Sponsored by the Bertha Benecke Tauseg Memorial Award scholarship, she then spent a year studying in Europe with André Lhote in Paris and Vaclav Vytlacil in Positano, Italy. This experience resulted in a solo exhibition in 1933 at the Palace of the Legion of Honor, San Francisco. Her work to that point was strongly influenced by the cubism of Pablo Picasso, but a season in Mexico in 1934 opened her eyes to the power of pre-Columbian art and culminated in a solo exhibition at the Biblioteca Nacional de México under the auspices of Carlos Mérida. She returned to Mexico and Central America to continue her studies in 1943, 1945, 1949, 1951, and 1958.

When she met Canadian writer Howard O'Hagan in 1935, she began a series of summer visits to Canada, staying at Banff and then at Bowen Island. They married in 1937, and her connection to Canada was sealed by a sabbatical year in 1947. They spent it at Green Point on Cowichan Bay (Tl'lulpalus), in a cabin on the shore next to the lands of the Cowichan Tribes, where Peterson observed the Cowichan people

Above: Catalogue for Peterson's solo exhibition at the California Palace of the Legion of Honor in San Francisco, 1960. Facing page: Margaret Peterson and Howard O'Hagan, n.d. **[Margaret Peterson fonds, AR445, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives]**

January 1962, Oakland Bulletin -

Margaret Peterson Victoria

Painting made in 1938 or 9 in reds yellows & browns blues black + violet

It looks dull in black + white.

Margaret Peterson
"Two Women"
1938-9

Friends Give Museum Painting by Margaret Peterson

No one involved in modern art in the bay area when Margaret Peterson was here and taught at the University of California could have helped but be aware of her; most of them were in some way indebted to her intelligent exploration and espousal of cubism and forms derived from primitive art. Now married to Howard O'Hagen, she lives in British Columbia. The museum has never had a painting by her in its California collection. Thanks to the dedicated efforts of Dorothy Grover of Oakland, friends and former pupils of Miss Peterson have raised funds to purchase a major painting for our collection. It is "Two Women," the painting which represented her in the ~~Golden Gate~~ Treasure Island 1939-40 Exposition. Museum friends will be grateful for this important addition to our collection, and especially appreciative of the spirit and the manner in which it was given. The donors: Mr. and Mrs. Carlo Anderson, Mrs. Bernard Desenberg, Miss Mary Dumas, Mr. and Mrs. John B. Grover, Mme. Emile Leautaud, Mrs. Charlotte Mack, Professor and Mrs. Paul Nagdi, Mr. and Mrs. Eugene Richardson, Mrs. Ansley K. Salz, Professor and Mrs. James Shepardson, Mr. Walter Snelgrove, Mr. and Mrs. Dimitri Vedensky, and Mr. Dimitri Vedensky, Jr.

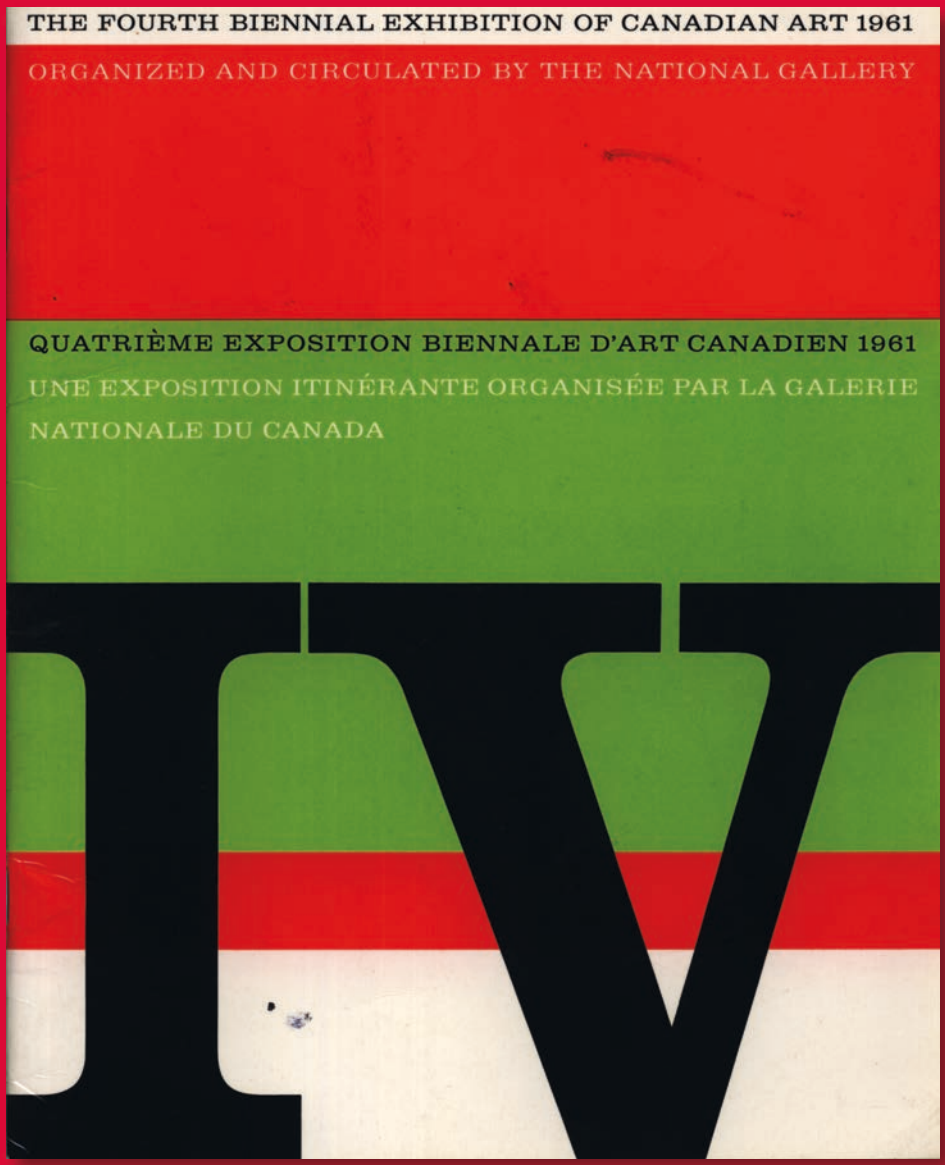
Clipping from *Oakland Bulletin* about an exhibition at the Oakland Art Museum in 1962, which featured Peterson's painting "Two Women." Peterson has written next to the image of the painting, "Painting made in 1938 or 9 in reds yellows and browns blues black & violet[.] It looks dull in black & white." **[Margaret Peterson fonds, AR445, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives]**

practicing what she called "the art rite."[1] She returned in 1948 to the same location for eight months.

In 1950, Senator Joseph McCarthy brought "McCarthyism" to America, and the University of California, Berkeley required all its professors to sign a loyalty oath declaring that they were not, and had never been, members of the Communist Party. Peterson was not a communist, but she believed it was unconstitutional of the school to require this oath of her, and in protest she resigned her long-time post as associate professor of art. Peterson was vindicated when the oath was declared unconstitutional by the California Court of Appeals in 1952, but there was no going back. She left Berkeley for New York where, in 1951, she had a solo exhibition at the Algonquin Hotel. She then travelled to Mexico and Guatemala, and in November 1951 she returned once more to Green Point. From that time on, Vancouver Island was her home.

Colin Graham, who had been Peterson's student at the University of California, Berkeley, was the founding director of the aggv , serving from 1953 to 1974. When she arrived in Victoria, he offered her his support. She had her first solo exhibition at the aggv in 1953, and a number of other shows followed through the years.

1 Peterson frequently used the phrase "art rite" in her writing to refer to a synthesis of dance, music, visual art, and much more in the form of a ceremony capable of elevating the participants to a transcendental oneness with "the ebb and flow of rhythm everlasting in the universe." Peterson associated this rite with early cultures but believed it remained vestigially in organized religion and in the traditions of Indigenous peoples. To quote her (from an unnumbered and undated page from her manuscript notes), "it might be said that the dance was man's effort to commune with the gods. Those gods were the great contradictory rhythms which comprise the universe. As early man personated those forms he cast them in shape of whatever appeared to be magical, then imitated them. In all time it has been the artist, in the beginning the dancer who out of the beauty of the universe, out of the tumult of infinity, out of the ecstasy and out of the torment has compelled through the substance of his medium the synthesis of shocking opposites and so brings about communion with eternal force." In her "Notes on Art," which appears on the back cover of her catalogue for the exhibition *Selections from 15 Years of Painting on Vancouver Island*, she wrote, "in art man attempts to create what is not in order to become what is. Man is mortal. The flame of the sun within him is not self-sustaining and eventually he dies. But the rhythms of art emulate that which is self-sustaining and through their rhythm's mutual contradiction generate new substance and behold, that which is not, is", n.p., box 1, folder 12, Margaret Peterson fonds, AR445, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives.



Exhibition catalogue for the fourth Biennial Exhibition of Canadian Art, 1961. Peterson's painting *The New Star* was part of the exhibition. **[Margaret Peterson fonds, AR445, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives]**

Peterson was heralded as a major artist by local critics and fellow artists well into the 1960s. In 1961, Arthur Corry reviewed her show at the aggv in the *Victoria Daily Times* and remarked that "when an artist creates a style, completely original, one finds not only a talent but a gift bordering on genius. Such a person is Margaret Peterson."[2] *Canadian Art* magazine carried reviews of the same show by both Colin Graham and Tony Emery. Graham called her work an "astonishingly impressive group of egg temperas… . Seen *en masse* her works have a pulsating radiance, disciplined vitality, and a sometimes awesomely disturbing intensity."[3] Artist and writer Ina Uhthoff had this to say in the *Victoria Daily Colonist*: "The work of Margaret Peterson can not be measured by ordinary standards. She is a unique figure amongst painters, outside the normal stream of contemporary art, Canadian or otherwise."[4]

Peterson and O'Hagan moved from Green Point to Victoria and from 1960 to 1963 they lived in a house on St. Andrew's Street where famous local artist and writer Emily Carr had spent her last days. At the time, Peterson was preparing her paintings for solo shows at the California Palace of the Legion of Honor in San Francisco (1960) and the University of British Columbia (1961), as well as for participation in the Biennial Exhibition of Canadian Art (1962, 1963) and the Bienal de São Paulo (1964).

In 1963, Peterson was also granted one of the first Canada Council Senior Arts Awards to study mosaic in Ravenna, Italy. Historically, Ravenna was located at the European end of the Silk Road, and it remains renowned for the art of mosaic. There, Peterson learned to work with fine Italian glass cut into little blocks, known as tesserae, which she subsequently used in the mosaics commissioned for McPherson Library and the Richard Blanshard Building.

2 Arthur Corry, "Artist's Primitive Insight Creates Powerful Style," *Victoria Daily Times*, July 28, 1962, box 1, folder 12, Margaret Peterson fonds, AR445, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives.

3 Colin Graham, *Canadian Art*, September/October 1962, box 1, folder 12, Margaret Peterson fonds, AR445, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives.

4 Ina Uhthoff, *Daily Colonist*, July 22, 1962, box 1, folder 12, Margaret Peterson fonds, AR445, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives.

SYMBOLISM OF THREE CULTURES from Northwest Indian to Mexican to Eastern Mediterranean can be found in new Margaret Peterson mosaic mural erected in University of Victoria McPherson Library. Colorful piece gets preview by education student Nella MacArthur, 1900 Argyle, at entrance to the building, opening for public inspection Nov. 14. (See story page 26.) Miss [illegible] created the mural in Ravenna, Italy, where [illegible] is studying under Canada Council Scholarship. (Times photo.)

Left: Clipping from the *Victoria Times* about the installation of *Source of Sources* in McPherson Library, 1964. **[Margaret Peterson fonds, AR445, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives]** Right: *Source of Sources*, 1964. **[Image courtesy of Legacy Art Galleries]**

During the first six months of 1964, while in Ravenna, Peterson completed the free-standing mosaic panel *Source of Sources* for installation in McPherson Library, which already bore a distinctive sculptural façade of panels created by George Norris.[5] The mosaic was commissioned as one of the first artworks for the University of Victoria, a new arts-oriented university at the time. Its placement coincided with Peterson's belief that art ought to be embedded in civic spaces, particularly in schools, because of the formative effect of the environment on the students:

> *Every school room, every hallway, every playground shapes the pupil and the player. The young heart could be refined with reverence for life, beauty and nature, if our schools and our public buildings were conceived in aesthetic beauty by the combined efforts of our architects and artists and sculptors. If the drab walls of the school halls and the auditoriums were transformed into iridescent fresco and luminous tempera or gleaming mosaic the students would learn directly the greatest knowledge of all.*

With *Source of Sources*, Peterson had the opportunity to transform the halls of an educational institution, to impart that "greatest knowledge."

Colin Graham, director of the AGGV at the time, continued to be a strong supporter of Peterson. He wrote to her on May 11, 1964 to say that "the mosaic sounds most surprising. I've not seen one in earth colours, and I shall look forward indeed to seeing how you have made them 'sing', as I am sure you have."[6]

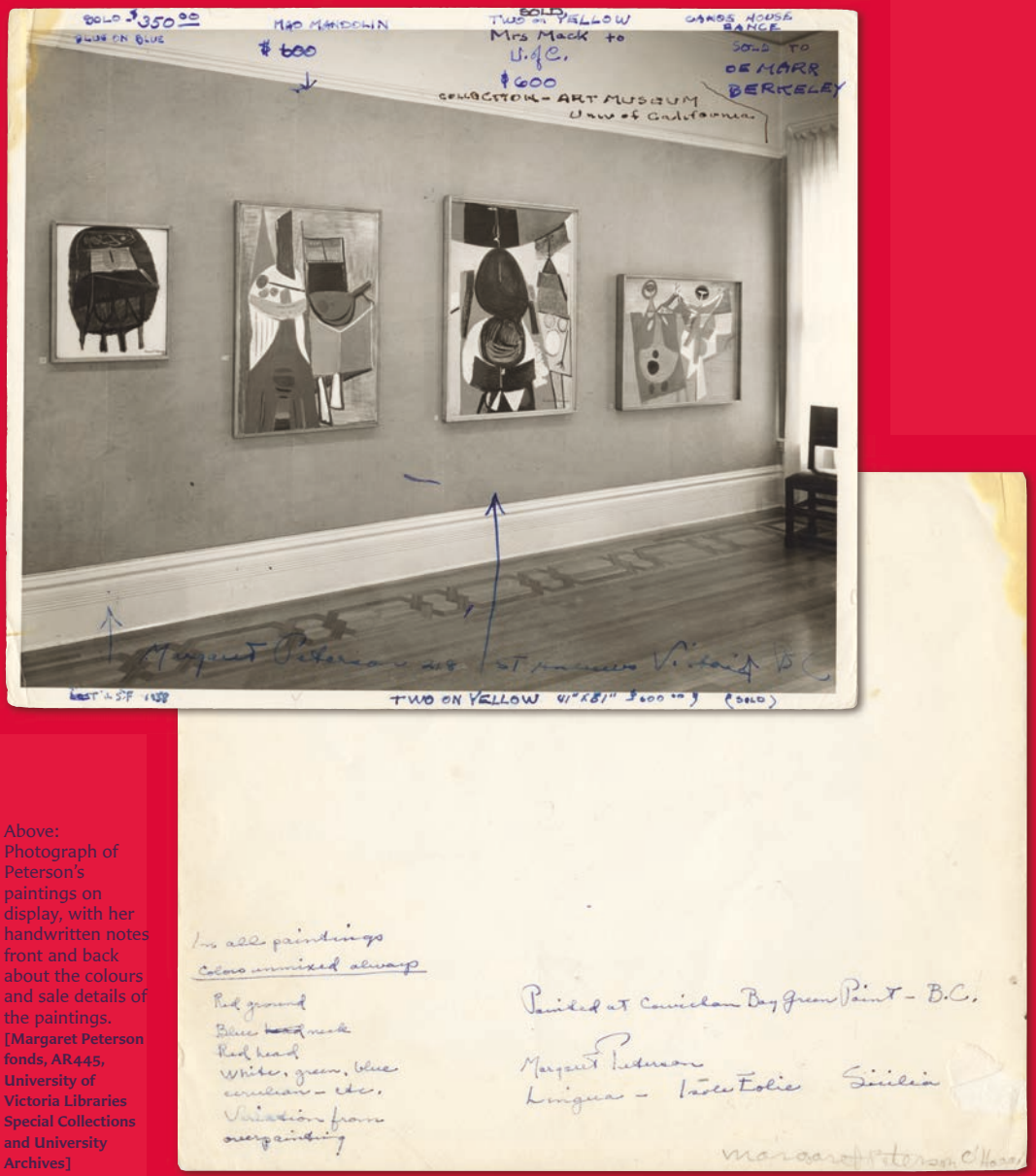
5 Writing in the *Victoria Times* on November 11, 1964, Douglas Hillside wrote, "the glass mosaic, commissioned for $1,700 ('a tremendous bargain' to pleased UVic planners), complements the building's massive concrete exterior panels made by Vancouver sculptor George Norris", box 1, folder 12, Margaret Peterson fonds, AR445, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives.

6 Colin Graham to Margaret Peterson, May 11, 1964, box 2, folder 12, Margaret Peterson fonds, AR445, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives.

ART GALLERY of greater Victoria 1953

Above: Catalogue for Peterson's solo exhibition at the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, 1959. **[Margaret Peterson fonds, AR445, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives]**

Left: Photograph of Peterson's solo exhibition at the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, 1953. Peterson has written on the photograph, "ALL shown at New Gallery New York 1951 except 1." **[Margaret Peterson fonds, AR445, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives]**



Above: Photograph of Peterson's paintings on display, with her handwritten notes front and back about the colours and sale details of the paintings. **[Margaret Peterson fonds, AR445, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives]**

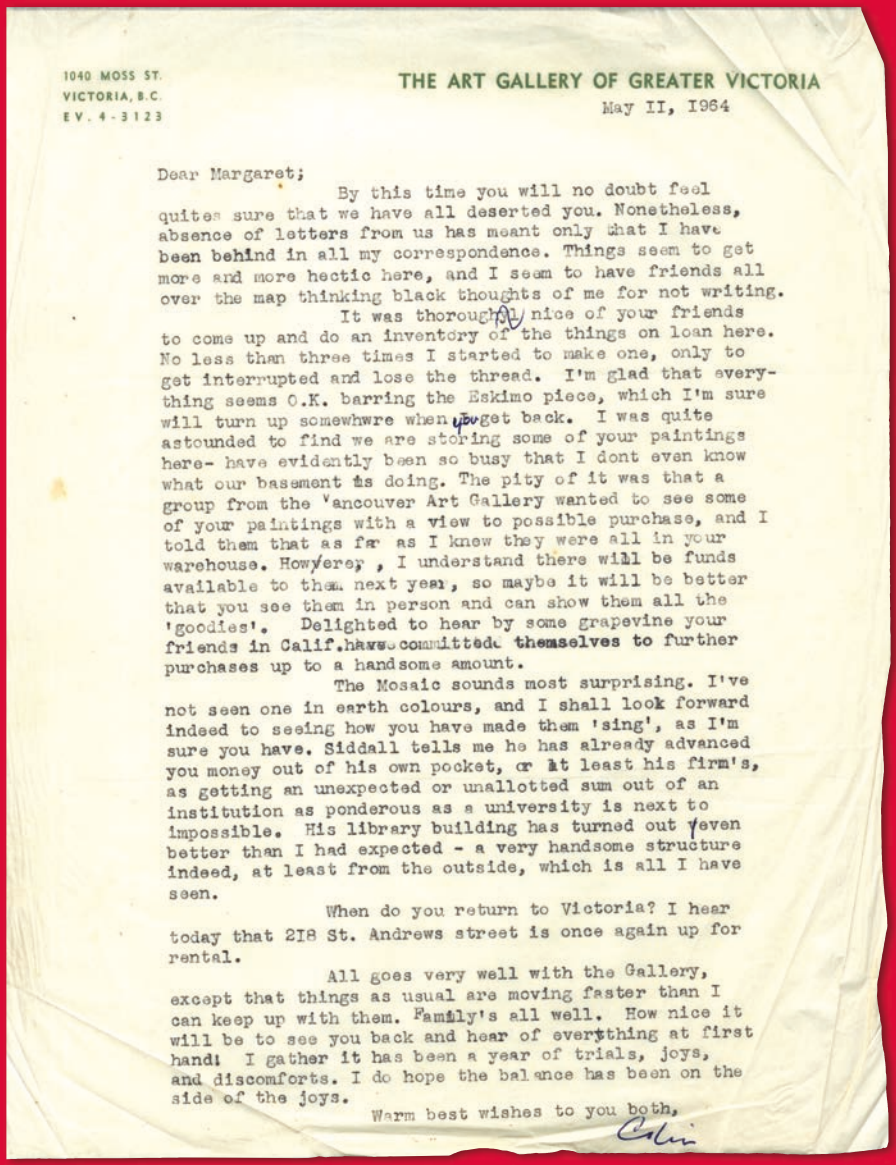
In November 1964 the mosaic arrived in Victoria and was installed in the foyer of the library. Photographs were immediately featured in Victoria newspapers. On November 28, 1964, Robin Skelton, an art lover (and soon-to-be-founder of the creative writing department at the University of Victoria, as well as the future co-editor of the *Malahat Review*), called the mosaic

> *an enormously powerful, yet subtle piece of work. Hinting both at the figure of a guardian and, by use of sweeping curves, at the potency of some magical mandala, it is not merely a decoration, but is an image as carefully adjusted to its function and setting as a Haida housepost in Thunderbird Park. Miss Peterson has never indulged in pastiche; her imagery is her own, and her mythological vocabulary results from a highly personal interpretation and recreation of a universal pictorial language.*[7]

After their time in Ravenna, Peterson and O'Hagan travelled south to the tip of Italy and crossed over to Sicily. They sailed from Messina 30 kilometers north to Lingua, a small fishing village on Salina, one point on a volcanic archipelago called

7 Robin Skelton writing in the *Victoria Times* on November 28, 1964. Peterson herself was concerned that critics were not accurately capturing the significance or intention of her work. Among her papers, Peterson's clipping of this article by Skelton bears a response in her own handwriting, in which she insists that Skelton had misinterpreted her influences. She asserts that her work "had in it some very new and unseen before ideas" and "is not Indian at all", box 1, folder 12, Margaret Peterson fonds, AR445, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives.

Writing to Colin Graham in 1965, she conceded that "I am glad the mosaic has been well-received," but noted that "people send me *Times* news clippings about it," and "the comments seem misleading to me. Are people, especially male English writers," she wondered, "blind"? She deplored what she saw as their lack of critical imagination: "Haven't they enough background or foreground to go beyond one facet of influence to *see* what has been achieved? They sound like housewives—take one pinch of symbol from Indian culture, a cup of Aztec and something out of the eastern Mediterranean (Poseidon doubtless), stir and presto—an M. P. They forget that all of these influences plus everything I have ever seen have gone into my mind and that out of that something new, never to have been seen before, appears—alchemy achieved. They ignore the years of aesthetic problems given to my students *and to myself* which formed in my work.", Margaret Peterson to Colin Graham, January 31, 1965, box 2, folder 12, Margaret Peterson fonds, AR445, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives.



1040 MOSS ST.
VICTORIA, B.C.
EV. 4-3123

THE ART GALLERY OF GREATER VICTORIA

May II, 1964

Dear Margaret;

By this time you will no doubt feel quites sure that we have all deserted you. Nonetheless, absence of letters from us has meant only that I have been behind in all my correspondence. Things seem to get more and more hectic here, and I seem to have friends all over the map thinking black thoughts of me for not writing.

It was thoroughly nice of your friends to come up and do an inventory of the things on loan here. No less than three times I started to make one, only to get interrupted and lose the thread. I'm glad that everything seems O.K. barring the Eskimo piece, which I'm sure will turn up somewhwre when you get back. I was quite astounded to find we are storing some of your paintings here- have evidently been so busy that I dont even know what our basement is doing. The pity of it was that a group from the Vancouver Art Gallery wanted to see some of your paintings with a view to possible purchase, and I told them that as far as I knew they were all in your warehouse. However, I understand there will be funds available to them next year, so maybe it will be better that you see them in person and can show them all the 'goodies'. Delighted to hear by some grapevine your friends in Calif. have committed themselves to further purchases up to a handsome amount.

The Mosaic sounds most surprising. I've not seen one in earth colours, and I shall look forward indeed to seeing how you have made them 'sing', as I'm sure you have. Siddall tells me he has already advanced you money out of his own pocket, or at least his firm's, as getting an unexpected or unallotted sum out of an institution as ponderous as a university is next to impossible. His library building has turned out even better than I had expected - a very handsome structure indeed, at least from the outside, which is all I have seen.

When do you return to Victoria? I hear today that 218 St. Andrews street is once again up for rental.

All goes very well with the Gallery, except that things as usual are moving faster than I can keep up with them. Family's all well. How nice it will be to see you back and hear of everything at first hand! I gather it has been a year of trials, joys, and discomforts. I do hope the balance has been on the side of the joys.

Warm best wishes to you both,

Colin

Letter from Colin Graham to Margaret Peterson, 11 May 1964. [Margaret Peterson fonds, AR445, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives]

the Aeolian Islands. They remained there for the next ten years, supported by contributions from admirers in California and Canada. During this time, Peterson and O'Hagan visited anthropological collections in museums across Europe, and Peterson refined her view of history, filling hundreds of pages with writing under the title *The Origins of the Gods*. Her sketchbooks contain drawings in ink, including images from Sweden (her family's homeland), England (the British Museum), France (the Louvre in Paris), Spain (in particular Málaga), and Italy (Ravenna, Rome, the Vatican, Reggia, and Sicily), often focussing on Romanesque churches. They also travelled up the Nile to stay at Luxor for six weeks.

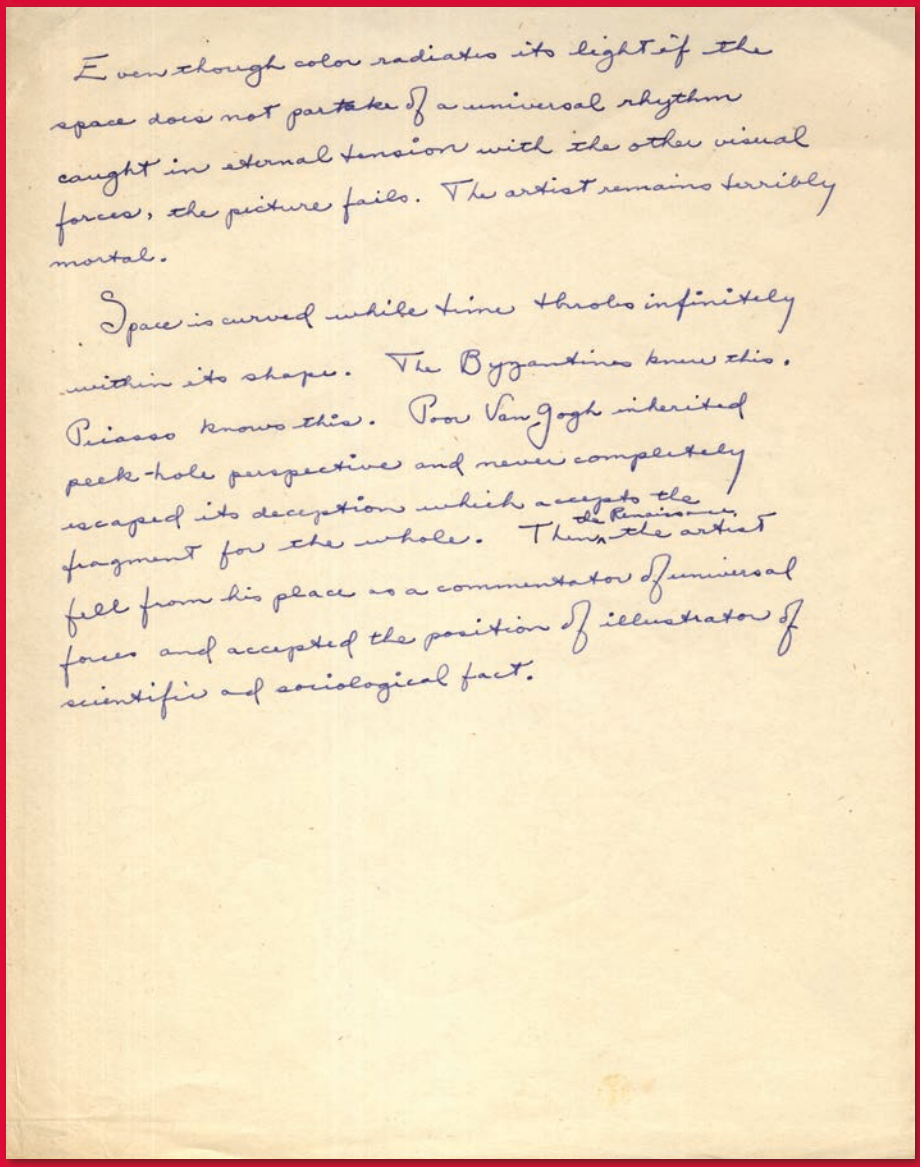
While they rusticated in Italy, Peterson's career continued to thrive in North America. In 1964 the curators at Canada's National Gallery chose ten of her paintings as part of the Canadian entry at the Bienal de São Paulo in Brazil. And in 1965 her friends and supporters in northern California presented her work in a solo exhibition at the American Federation of Arts in Carmel, the legendary art destination by the sea. Eventually, in 1973, Peterson's patrons arranged a solo show of her work at the San Francisco Museum of Art, running from July to September. Fortunately, enough of her work was sold to bring O'Hagan and Peterson back from Sicily to Victoria. They arrived in July of 1974.

In Canada, Peterson continued drawing and painting her totemic imagery. In 1977 she also produced another major mosaic, a full-scale wall mural that she installed in the Richard Blanshard Building, headquarters of the British Columbia Ministry of Health. A statement from the artist about this mosaic was printed in the *Medical's Miniature Messenger*, an in-house newsletter from the ministry, and in it she summed up the difficult of trying to describe her work:

> *It has been said that the arts of painting, sculpture and mosaic (the plastic arts) are incapable of translation into verbal form, otherwise they would have been first stated in verbal form. The mosaic I have just recently completed is no exception to that wise comment. However it does have definite abstracted shapes and forms derived from their seen*


BACARDI

Peterson's paintings on display, n.d. **[Margaret Peterson fonds, AR445, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives]**



Even though color radiates its light if the space does not partake of a universal rhythm caught in eternal tension with the other visual forces, the picture fails. The artist remains terribly mortal.

Space is curved while time throbs infinitely within its shape. The Byzantines knew this. Picasso knows this. Poor Van Gogh inherited peek-hole perspective and never completely escaped its deception which accepts the fragment for the whole. Thus the Renaissance the artist fell from his place as a commentator of universal forces and accepted the position of illustrator of scientific and sociological fact.

Handwritten notes by Peterson about space, time, and art, n.d. **[Margaret Peterson fonds, AR445, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives]**

and invisible natural figures, the sum of which echoes the story of mankind told in a network of contradictory rhythms.[8]

In 1978, while working at the aggv as the director's assistant, I was sent to San Francisco with a big van to collect paintings for a Peterson retrospective exhibition to be held at the gallery. Her best work was being loaned from both private and institutional collections for *Margaret Peterson: A Retrospective*, curated by Colin Graham. When I left on the trip, I knew little about Peterson. With fellow employee Willard Holmes, I picked up paintings from the San Francisco Museum of Art, the Oakland Museum, the Art Gallery of the University of California, Berkeley, and many private homes. By the time we pulled into Victoria, we had a truckload of her artwork, and I was convinced of the beauty of her creations.

It was not until 1983 that I met Peterson herself. She was living in the Hotel Douglas, at the corner of Pandora Avenue and Douglas Street in Victoria. I had gone there to see a showing of her paintings, which were hung in what had recently been a flower shop in the lobby. At 82 years old, she was recently widowed, her health was in decline, and she was no longer a prominent exhibiting artist. Yet she was a formidable character and displayed a profound confidence in her work. Frank Nowosad reviewed the show in *Monday Magazine*, and his difficult in finding the vocabulary to describe the energy and power of Peterson's work is clear. He compares her paintings first to "caged animals in a small room", and then to a growing conflagration, "one painting igniting the next until the whole room seemed to whirl in a firestorm of crimson and black, and symbol and form."[9]

Peterson painted with powdered pigments mixed with a binder of egg yolk, and she painted on plywood panels up to 8 × 12 feet in size. The transcendental themes she

8 Margaret Peterson, *Medical's Miniature Messenger*, British Columbia Ministry of Health, October 1977. Ed. Ann Onnomus. "Concerning Mosaic, Designed and Executed by Margaret Peterson, at the Foyer Wall Opposite Entrance, Richard Blanshard Building", box 2, folder 6, Margaret Peterson fonds, AR445, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives.

9 Frank Nowosad, "Margaret Peterson, High Priestess of Abstraction," *Monday Magazine*, May 9, 1987.

Untitled tempera painting by Peterson, n.d. [Margaret Peterson fonds, AR445, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives]

represented are captured in titles such as *Gods Rising from the Abyss*, or *Birth of the Sun Seen Through the Eye of a Watermelon*, and *The Storm Gods*. A short documentary made in 1987 about Peterson, *Beyond the Sun: A Portrait of Margaret Peterson*,[10] effectively captures the power of her paintings. This film follows Peterson along the streets of Victoria and, memorably, to Cantin's Moving and Storage, a warehouse on the north edge of town. We see the film crew opening crates and releasing her paintings in the dim warehouse. The narrow space between the lockers becomes a chapel, lined with her painted panels. Each is taller than a person and rises above Peterson, seated in a wheelchair and wearing a fur coat. Curving across the end wall on three panels is *Storm Gods* (1978), blazing in magenta, yellow, black and white.

With the attention and support of Colin Graham and his wife, Sylvia, Peterson lived out her last eight years at Resthaven Lodge in Sidney, BC. She left no heirs and little estate except for the rented storage locker stacked with her best and largest paintings. Peterson always named high prices for her work, so very few had been sold in her later years. After her death in 1997, I interviewed Graham, who was the executor of her estate. He told me that he intended to donate her best paintings to galleries across British Columbia and beyond, but ultimately his failing health precluded that.

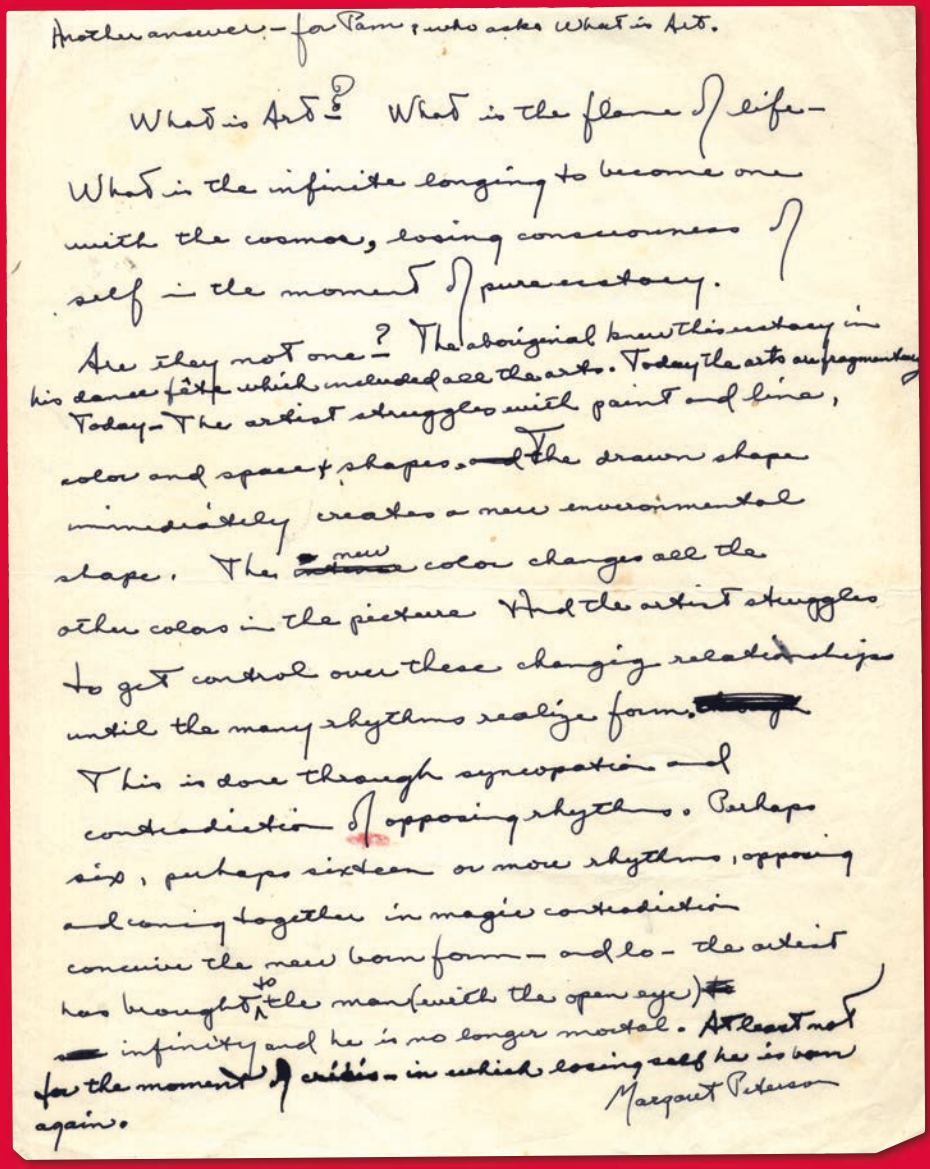
It was more than twenty years later that I again took up the subject of Peterson's life and art. In the meantime, Colin Graham had died. In 2008 I contacted Sylvia, who had been a key figure in the last years of Peterson's life, to ask her about the artist's papers. She could not say what had become of them. She did tell me that Peterson had kept a box of rocks from Sicily, and that during the final move to Resthaven Lodge a number of those rocks were discreetly deposited in the Grahams' garden at Deep Cove.

In 2010 I called the AGGV to ask whether they had any of Peterson's archives. Stephen Topfer, the collections manager, returned my call. "We have three boxes here," he told me. When I arrived to see them a few days later, he smiled and informed me that he had actually found more than three. In a distant corner of the gallery's

10 Rick Therrien, dir., *Beyond the Sun: A Portrait of Margaret Peterson* (1987; Victoria, BC: Auriole Productions and the National Film Board of Canada, 1987), 17 minutes, University of Victoria Libraries, N6549 P457B4.

Untitled tempera painting by Peterson, n.d. **[Margaret Peterson fonds, AR445, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives]**

Untitled tempera painting by Peterson, n.d. **[Margaret Peterson fonds, AR445, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives]**



Another answer – for Pam, who asks What is Art.

What is Art? What is the flame of life – What is the infinite longing to become one with the cosmos, losing consciousness of self in the moment of pure ecstasy.

Are they not one? The aboriginal knew this ecstasy in his dance-faith which included all the arts. Today the arts are fragmentary. Today – The artist struggles with paint and line, color and space + shapes. And the drawn shape immediately creates a new environmental shape. The new color changes all the other colors in the picture. And the artist struggles to get control over these changing relationships until the many rhythms realize form. [redacted] This is done through syncopation and contradiction of opposing rhythms. Perhaps six, perhaps sixteen or more rhythms, opposing and coming together in magic contradiction conceive the new born form – and lo – the artist has brought to the man (with the open eye) [redacted] infinity and he is no longer mortal. At least not for the moment of crisis – in which losing self he is born again.

Margaret Peterson

Peterson's handwritten notes on the question "What is art?," n.d. [Margaret Peterson fonds, AR445, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives]

basement they had been waiting, packed tightly on steel-frame shelving. Prying one box out of the front row, he moved it to a table in his office and wiped off the dust. It had not been opened in a long time. I spent two mornings examining those boxes, each of which contained a miscellany of items. After hours of looking I prepared to leave. "Do you think the university would like them?" Topfer asked me.

SIGNED, SEALED, AND DELIVERED

A PLACE FOR PETERSON'S ARCHIVES

Indeed, the University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives did want them. They already had the papers of Howard O'Hagan, and the university's Legacy Art Galleries had a number of Peterson's paintings. Within three weeks the boxes of the Peterson fonds were on the shelves in the lower-level archival storage of the Mearns Centre for Learning-McPherson Library. Full of newspaper clippings, old magazines, museum catalogues, books, postcards, photographs, letters, drawings, and objects, the boxes contained more than 100 original small paintings on paper and included Peterson's paints in both gouache and the powdered pigments that she mixed with egg yolk for her major works. There was also an Inuit carving, a stone for grinding corn, antique beads, and some small volcanic rocks that she had collected from the beach at Lingua on the island of Salina. Her archives also contained many sketchbooks from this time, full of ink drawings of the rocks she picked up on the beach.

There were masses of manuscript and typescript pages. Over the course of her life, Peterson wrote down her thoughts and imaginings, endlessly crossing out and rewriting them, filling about 10,000 pages. These pages were without order and frequently repetitious, but they were studded with gems of insight. The writings were to be the basis of five books, none of which were ever completed. One shorter essay is entitled

~~Margaret Peterson~~ - Notes on Art

Throughout all time art has imitated the hallowed mysteries. It is the finite door to infinity. It is the imitation of the ebb and flow of rhythm everlasting in the universe. It is a wild thing, untamable, born of man's hungers and his human patterns. It is a need rising out of man's longing for regenesis on earth as well as in heaven.

In art man attempts to create what is not in order to become what is. Man is mortal. The flame of the sun within him is not self sustaining and eventually he dies. But the rhythms of art emulate that which is self sustaining and through their rhythms mutual contradiction generate new substance and behold, that which is not, is.

Today, in a time in which nature is mechanized and art is frequently held in abomination, a new need to restore art to public buildings is awakening. Museums and Art Galleries have fought mass sloth and individual bias to keep art from perishing, as in the middle ages the monasteries salvaged remnants of scientific knowledge. People are being made aware that art is the therapy of the race, without its regenerative force man would perish from the earth.

~~The huge paintings of today~~ is testimony that the artist/painter again cherishes the dream of ~~painting~~ frescoed walls ~~and~~ ~~Margaret Peterson~~ again glorifying the building exterior with the flash of mosaics fire.

~~July 5, 1961~~

The huge mural painting of today is testimony that the artist again cherishes the dream of painting frescoed ~~upon the~~ walls and again glorifying the building exterior with the flash of mosaics fire.

Margaret Peterson

Notes from an unpublished manuscript copyrighted

Peterson's typescript and handwritten "Notes on Art," n.d. [Margaret Peterson fonds, AR445, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives]

My Life with Howard O'Hagan, and another much longer one minutely examines her feelings about the loyalty oath at Berkeley. Her magnum opus, not completed, is entitled *The Origins of the Gods: From Sisiutle to the Seven Headed Dragon*. Reading through Peterson's letters and manuscripts one box at a time, I realized that I was the first person to do so and felt that her spirit was present throughout.

Ultimately, the archives preserve the record of Peterson's artistic practice and philosophy. Over the years Peterson distilled a symbolic language based on a few repeated elements that refer to the masculine and feminine, to the sun and moon, and to the stages of growth through which all things pass. She assembled these symbols in a way that is universal and yet entirely Peterson's own. Through her study of ancient cultures in museums and at ancient sites, Peterson looked for evidence of a universal philosophy of life. She believed that life leads inevitably to death and that death is the portal to rebirth in a different form, as a larva becomes a caterpillar and then becomes a butterfly. She called this process "regenesis." According to Peterson, early civilizations understood the dynamics of the universe through the practice of art and communal celebration.

"Throughout all time art has imitated the hallowed mysteries," she wrote. In her words, art "is the finite door to infinity. It is the imitation of the ebb and flow of rhythm everlasting in the universe.… The rhythms of art emulate that which is self-sustaining and through their rhythm's mutual contradiction generate new substance and behold, that which is not, is."[11]

Since arriving in Victoria in 1975, ROBERT AMOS (RCA) has pursued a career in the arts, first as Assistant to the Director of the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria (1975–80) and then as art writer for Victoria's *Times-Colonist* newspaper (1986–2018). He has published ten books on local art subjects, including *Inside Chinatown* (2009), which won the Award of Distinction from the BC Historical Society, and *E. J. Hughes Paints Vancouver Island* (2018), shortlisted for the 2019 BC Book Prizes' Bill Duthie Booksellers' Choice Award. Amos has worked closely with the University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives since 2010 and was instrumental in bringing the Margaret Peterson archives to the Artists' Archives.

11 Margaret Peterson, "Notes on Art," in *Selections from 15 Years of Painting on Vancouver Island* (Victoria, BC: Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, 1962), n.p. Published in conjunction with an exhibition of the same title, organized by and presented at the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, July 28–August 5, 1962, box 1, folder 12, Margaret Peterson fonds, AR445, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives.

Peterson in front of her paintings on display, n.d. **[Margaret Peterson fonds, AR445, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives]**

Above: Peterson, c. 1984. Photograph by Curtis Lantinga. **[Margaret Peterson fonds, AR445, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives]**. Following page: Untitled tempera painting by Peterson, n.d. **[Margaret Peterson fonds, AR445, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives]**

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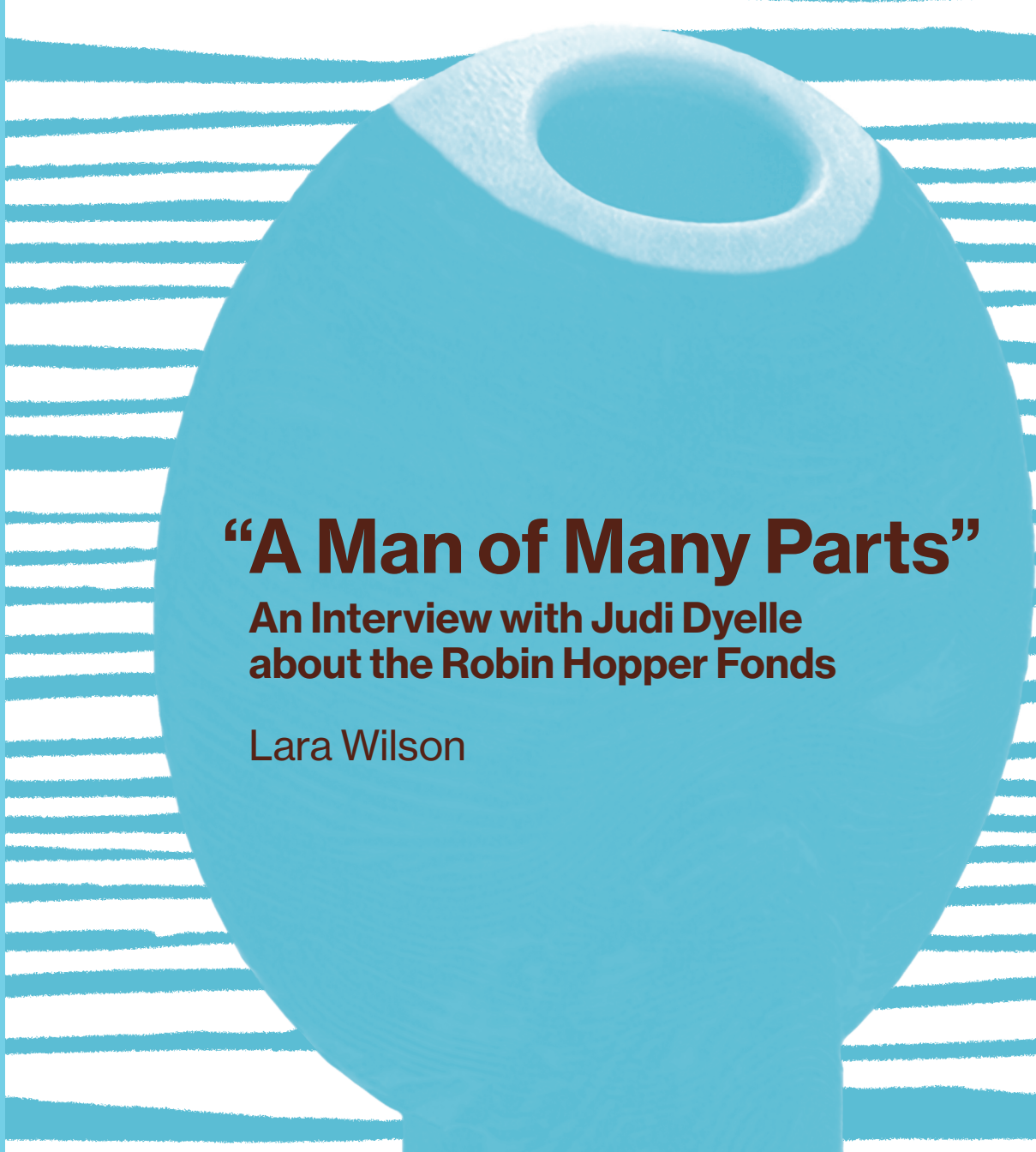
Back cover: Untitled tempera painting by Peterson, n.d. **[Margaret Peterson fonds, AR445, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives]**

THE ARTISTS' ARCHIVES
Special Collections and University Archives
University of Victoria Libraries

Number 3 in a series of interrelated booklets exploring the Artists' Archives at the University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives



"A Man of Many Parts"

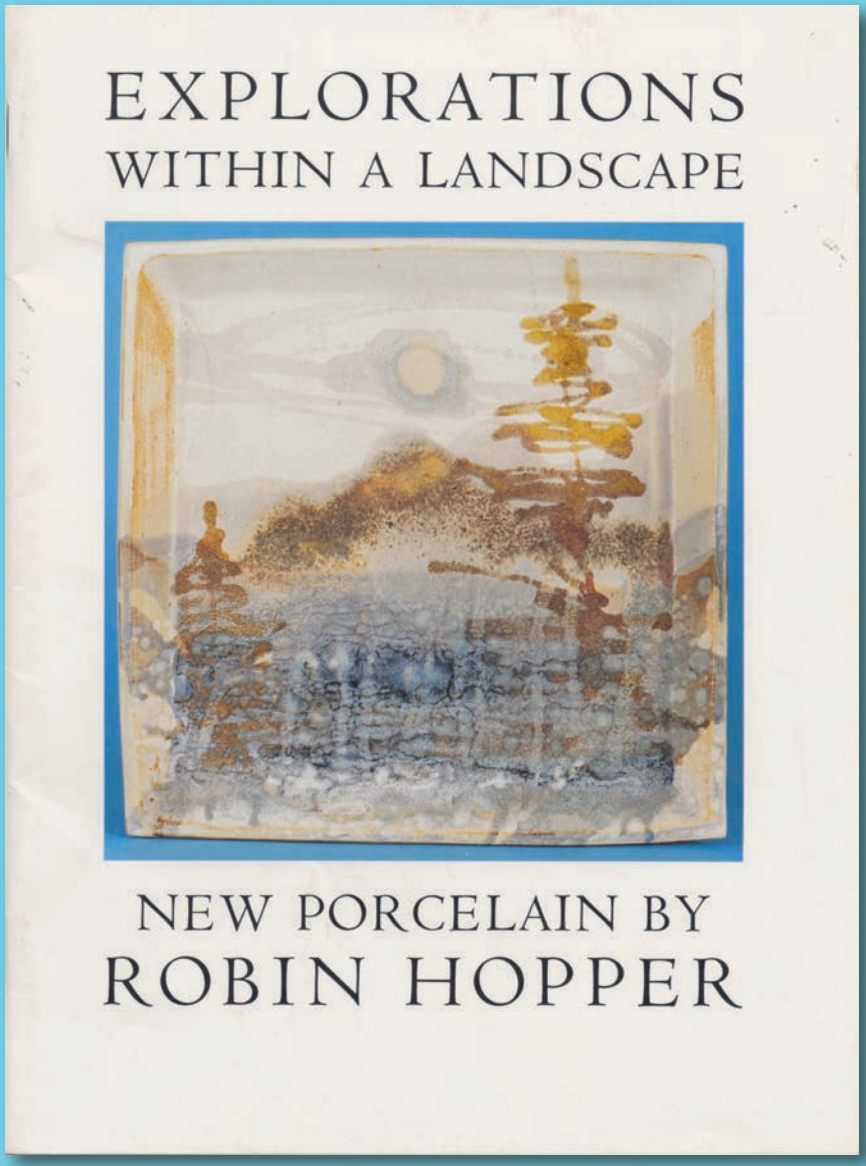
An Interview with Judi Dyelle about the Robin Hopper Fonds

Lara Wilson

Ceramic maquette that Hopper submitted for the Glenn Gould Prize. [Robin Hopper fonds, SC516, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives]

Robin Hopper in his studio, 1980. Photograph by Jim Ryan. [Robin Hopper fonds, SC516, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives]

Photograph of slab bottle, submitted as part of Hopper's winning application for the 1977 Saidye Bronfman Award, Canada's major prize for excellence in fine crafts. Hopper was the first recipient of the award. [Robin Hopper fonds, SC516, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives]

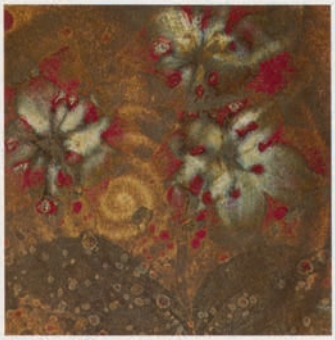


Catalogue for Hopper's solo exhibition at the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria in 1978, which was part of his national touring exhibition *Explorations within a Landscape*. [Robin Hopper fonds, SC516, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives]

orm #1

49 and 51 *Forest Forms #2 and #4*

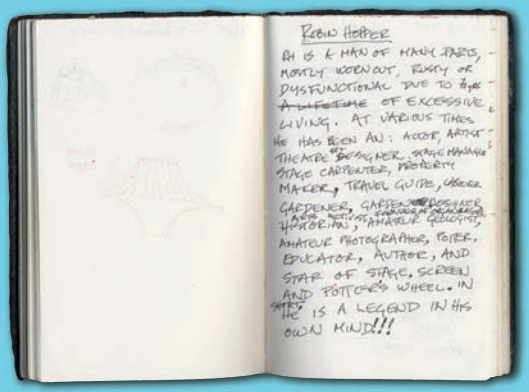
7 *Plate — Kamloops Landscape*



6 *Plate Hibiscus* (detail)

5 *Slab Bottle — Olympic Mists*

“A Man of Many Parts”: An Interview with Judi Dyelle about the Robin Hopper Fonds



In one of his many slip-stained journals, renowned potter and ceramics scholar Robin Hopper (1939–2017) described himself as “a man of many parts.” His archives, which he donated to the University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives in two stages in 2013 and 2014, demonstrate the range of his extraordinary and eclectic talents. Hopper, an internationally recognized ceramicist, author, educator, and garden designer, was the first recipient of the Saidye Bronfman Award, a Member of the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts, and a Member of the Order of Canada for his contributions to art and scholarship. Acclaimed potter Judi Dyelle, who was married to Hopper for many years, graciously agreed to be interviewed for this publication about her late husband’s career and legacy, as well as his process in preparing his archives for donation. University of Victoria Libraries Director of Special Collections and University Archivist Lara Wilson (LW) sat down with Judi Dyelle (JD) at the artists’ home and studio in Metchosin, BC on 17 September 2018.[1]

1 The interview was transcribed from an audio recording and has been edited for clarity and coherence with the permission of Judi Dyelle. For improved readability, edits and corrections have been made silently.

Robin Hopper and Judi Dyelle, n.d. [Image courtesy of Judi Dyelle]

LW: I wanted to begin by asking you how you came to know Robin.

JD: Well, that was interesting. Robin had just arrived from England in 1967, and he was in charge of the ceramic program at Central Technical School in Toronto, which was a special high school that focussed on the arts and had a huge ceramic program. I had just returned from Japan and moved into an old house that was, I guess, about a block and a half away from the school. So I went to the school and said, "I'm here, and if you need a substitute, I can be there very quickly." So I substituted for Robin. There were many times when he, I wouldn't say got sick, but he lived just across the street from the school, and sometimes he felt that he would like to do some work—he was always maintaining a pottery business at the same time as teaching. Anyways, when he called in saying "I'm not coming in," then off I went. I also taught the summer classes that were there, so I was always in contact with him. But then he was asked to set up the clay and glass department at Georgian College in Barrie, so he and his family moved up there. I was about another year in Toronto, and then my first husband and I and the kids moved to Vancouver. I then moved to Montreal, and that's where I met Robin again. He was the first recipient of the Bronfman Award. The Bronfmans are from Montreal, and the school where I taught had a wonderful gallery, and that's where they wanted to have exhibitions of winners of the Bronfman Award. Robin came to Montreal and was surprised to see me there.

LW: So, did you work together in that time?

JD: It was several years after that that Robin came to live with me in Montreal, and it was interesting because it was a bit complicated for him since he was used to having all kinds of facilities from being in schools and having established his own pottery business, whereas I was teaching at this school where I only had access to their equipment, and in my own house I only had an electric kiln and a small studio space. So he started to do some experimenting, and that's where he first started to do *terra sigillata*, like the large plate on the cover of *Making Marks*. That is a very prominent piece, and it was a style that he became very well known for. *Terra sigillata* is a very fine slip that's put onto the porcelain and

Robin Hopper in his studio, n.d. Photo by Rolf Bettner. [Robin Hopper fonds, SC516, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives]

burnished, and it's like velvet. The first piece is in the showroom. I have an archive of his work up there, which are teaching pieces. They all have orange dots on them because they're not for sale. You know, he touched so many people throughout his life that you get collectors or other potters who come and say "Oh, it's so great to see his work," because a lot of potters, they're not that diversified, but Robin was. He was extremely diversified and had so many styles and series that he went through, so it's nice to be able to show people that. He was very productive, and when we were both working, it was fun when people would come in the shop and ask, "Oh, how many potters are in here?" "Two." They were quite blown away that there were so many styles, so many glazes. Robin was always testing out new techniques. When he lived with me in Quebec, he was invited to Baie-Saint-Paul, which operated a summer residency with a gathering of artists in all different media. And I don't know if you know of Robert Jekyll—who is a very well-known stained glass artist back east—but he was there at that time. Robert got Robin to help him understand how to fire old woodblock prints onto glass. Robin was continuing to experiment with *terra sigillata*, and he was putting it on Italian tiles. This was all completely new to him. But that's what Baie-Saint-Paul was all about, having artists go and do things they'd never done before.

LW: Can you tell us a little bit about the ceramic substrate tiles that Robin was working with toward the end of his career?

JD: Well, that's the last thing that Robin was able to do. Especially since he didn't have any strength anymore to make pots. Robin was introduced to the tile years ago when he was teaching at the summer school.[2] He did a glaze and colour development course. This gentleman came up from California to take Robin's course, and he had these little baseball cards. They were the size of a playing card, and on one side was a decal of Pete Rose, the famous baseball player, and on the back side was

2 In 1984, Robin and Judi co-founded the Metchosin International Summer School of the Arts (MISSA), which is still offered every year at Pearson College UWC in Metchosin, BC.

Terra sigillata plate by Robin Hopper, from the personal collection of Judi Dyelle. [Image courtesy of Lara Wilson]


CONTE
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another decal with the information about him. And Robin said, "Well, I know all about decals, but what the heck is it on?" The guy threw it on the floor, and it didn't break, even though it was as thin as can be. The gentleman explained that they were examples of this tile that had been designed for NASA by Coors, the beer company. People just crack up when they hear Coors did that. But they had this research department that was very involved in pharmaceutical glass and ceramics, so NASA had approached them because they wanted a thin, very heat-resistant material to go on the heat shield of the rockets.

Robin loved painting on his work, and with a ceramic vessel or form, they're vertical and you can really only fire it once – unless you're doing an overglaze enamel or something at a much lower temperature – and you can't fire it a couple of times at the same temperature, otherwise the glaze starts to run and you wind up with it stuck on your kiln shelf. But with these tiles lying flat, you can just keep building up your glaze surface – it's like painting because you're doing layers. So you can say, *okay*, or *I don't like that layer*, or *I can paint over it*, where you can't do that on a pot. So Robin was absolutely thrilled to be able to do this.

He finally just started to test them with his glazes and thought, *wow, they really take the glaze beautifully* because of the whiteness, because of the translucency. So he called the company and he said, "Do you have bigger ones?" And they said, "Oh, but they're very expensive." And he said, "Well, it's a ceramic industry. There has to be seconds." And they said, "Yes," and he said, "Well, what do you do with the seconds?" And they replied, "Well, landfill," and we thought, *oh my god*, you know, because they're not going to break down. It was ridiculous. So Robin said, "Could you send me some?" So they did. And they were next to nothing; I think they were just happy to get rid of them. He did an 8.5 x 11 piece and had it framed and mailed it back to them, and they were like, "Oh my god." You know, because they're industry, they're not thinking about art. They were just blown away, and so he started doing more and more work with it. He probably filled the first room of the shop three times over with framed pictures, and people just loved them. We got very upset because, you know, they pay $300 for a small piece, and

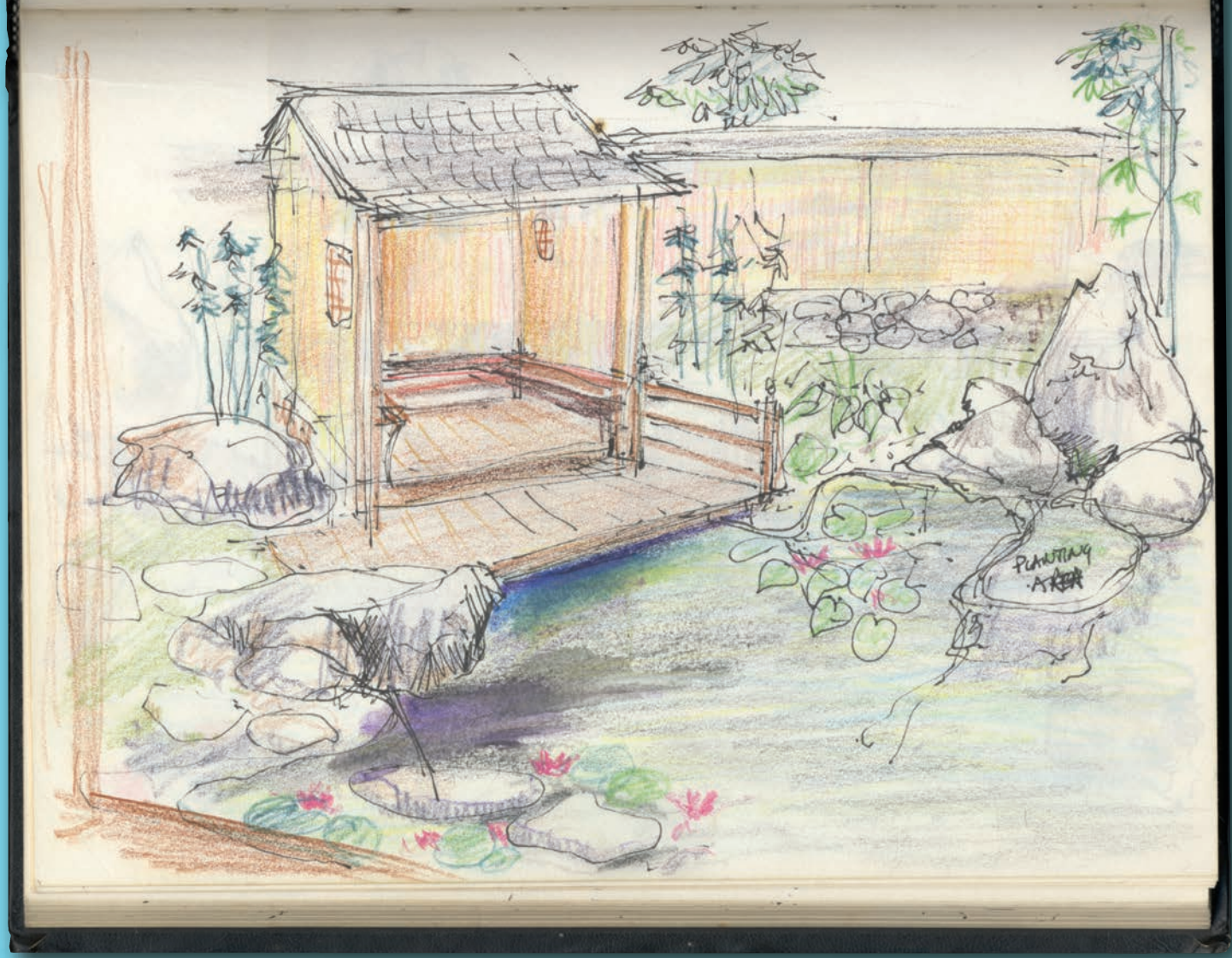
Painted ceramic substrate tiles from the personal collection of Judi Dyelle. [Image courtesy of Lara Wilson]

we were thinking, *but what about the pots?* Anyways, it was wonderful for Robin because it was another outlet. And potters never expect to find anything new because ceramics is the second oldest art form there is. Basketry was first, and then clay. So it's all been done. For Robin, it was always just different ways of working with the materials, but to have this completely new product was a delight.

LW: We talked before the mic came on about the importance of your home garden for Robin. I'm wondering if you could return to that as a source of inspiration. Robin's archives certainly reflects to some extent the work on the garden.

JD: Well, with Robin being from England, most Brits tend to love gardening, so when he first came to Canada it was very frustrating because he was living in the snow-belt areas, and gardening was tentative. You know, there could be a flurry of something great and then, bang, the frost or heavy snow would wipe it out. So when he arrived on the island, having a garden was ideal because he could have things going all year round, and he always made sure that there was something blooming throughout the year. He always joked that the only tool you needed was a machete because things could grow so quickly. Most potters – because you're working from home, and it's a very labour-intensive, time-consuming occupation – have surrounded themselves with inspiration through plants and flowers and trees, and so developing this garden was very important to Robin. He always referred to it as his best work of art. It was interesting to see how the garden evolved over time because it isn't like you bring in a landscape architect and, bang, you've got this instant garden. No, it was us. Us looking at how the light was, the microclimate; there's a whole bunch of little tiny factors. The plantings that went in around this area had to have a lot of variety of texture and pattern because that's what inspired Robin, and also the colour. Coming from back east, and seeing all the colour that you'd get in the fall there, when you come here, it's green, green. And so the best plants for colour were the Japanese maples, and we both had this liking of Japanese gardens. Our garden has influences of Japanese gardens, and the plantings are more Japanese, like the irises and the maples and some of the other big-leafed plants.

Garden of Robin Hopper and Judi Dyelle in Metchosin, BC, n.d. [Image courtesy of Judi Dyelle]


PLANTING
AREA

LW: And as you were developing the garden, were reference books – books on gardens, on Japanese gardens – were those important to you?

JD: We have a huge library – of garden books, books on oriental ceramics and art and design, you name it.

LW: And you went to those resources for inspiration?

JD: Oh, gosh, yes. The two of us as teachers, we were constantly researching. Neither one of us had time to go back to school, and even if we did, would it be giving us what we really wanted, and for what we were doing, at that time? When we lived in Montreal, we went to New York, and we went to the Strand Bookstore. It was like we'd died and gone to heaven, and then we asked ourselves, *how do we get all these books back?*

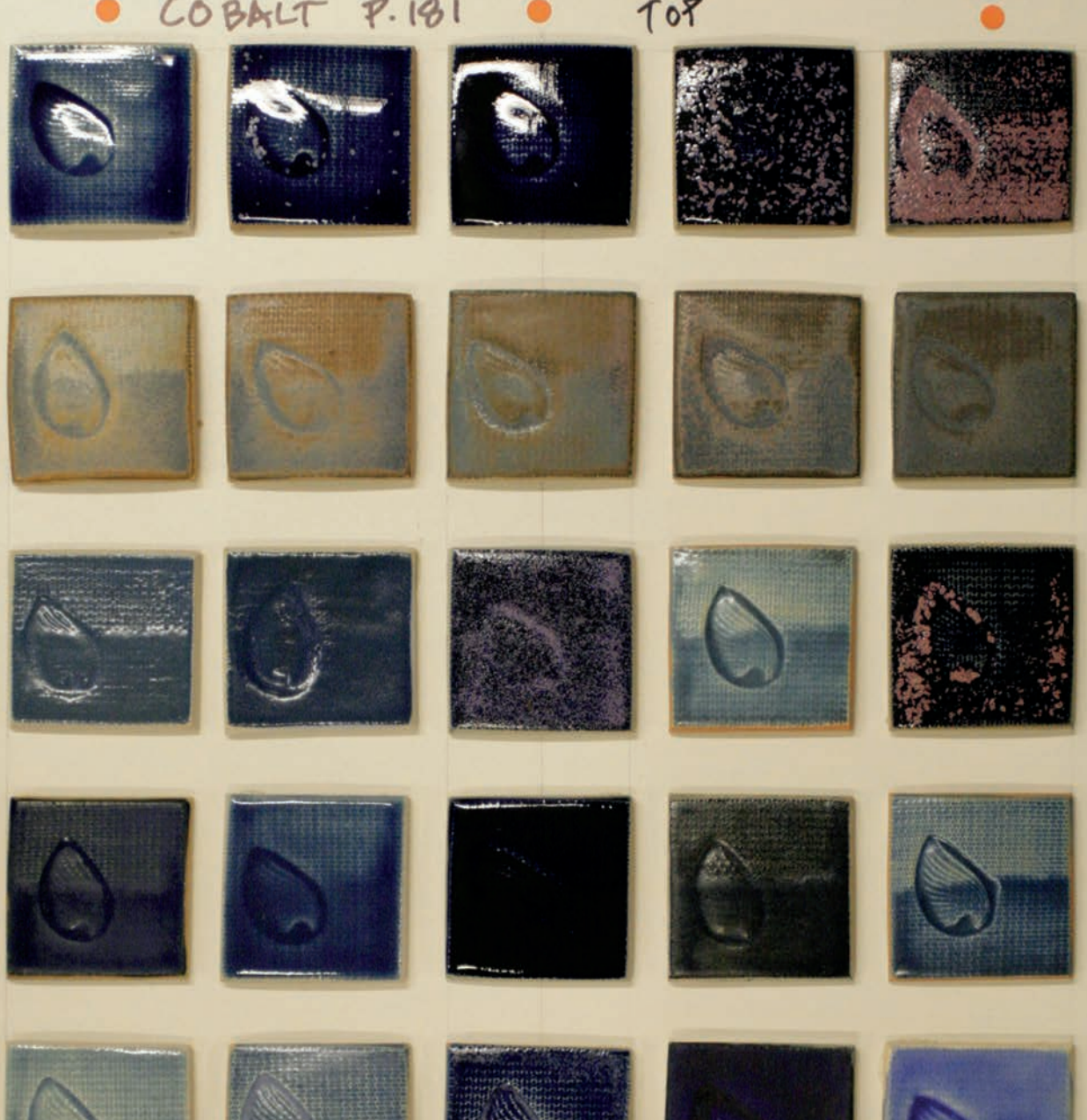
LW: So you were artists and collectors.

JD: Oh, yes.

LW: I was thinking last week about the timeline of the archives coming to UVic. And I looked through my electronic calendar, and I saw that we came to see you in September of 2012. When did Robin start thinking about his archives as an entity, as a thing?

JD: I don't know that he thought specifically about the archives, but we have these collections that we wondered what to do with. We have a phenomenal ceramic collection, we have all these books, and then all of his work. So… then you think, *well, you're just a potter. Who's going to really care?* And I think it was Robert Amos who we'd run into at some point, and he was doing somebody else's archives or gathering and working with archives, and Robin suddenly thought, *oh!* You know, because it hadn't occurred to us. I think you asked earlier why we considered the University of Victoria. Well, we hadn't considered anywhere; we were just happy to see that there was a place. It's the same with the ceramic collection. I would love to be able to have it in a prominent place, but no place would take it. Canada's so small and has such a limited number of galleries and museums that take ceramic art. The Gardiner Museum doesn't take things. The Canadian Clay and Glass Gallery doesn't really take things.

One of Hopper's sketchbook designs for the garden at his and Dyelle's home in Metchosin, BC, n.d. [Robin Hopper fonds, SC516, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives]


COBALT P. 181
TOP

LW: All the more important that you've retained these key pieces of Robin's, so people can see a body of work here. Who do you think Robin hoped would consult his archives?

JD: Oh, various artists and researchers, because he was a teacher first and foremost. Very, very important, the continual giving of information. And, toward the end of his life, it was just absolutely amazing. During his last year he sat in this chair, forever, on Facebook – I don't know how many followers he had, but it was thousands – and he would suggest to people, "What would happen if you did this?" And then others would ask, "How would I take care of this?" It was a constant teaching thing, back and forth. He kept his audience, which was incredibly important to him.

LW: Could you tell us a little bit about the glaze tests that Robin used for teaching and research?

JD: I always joke that they're holding the house up, like underneath is a crawl space with all of the test tiles! The reason that those ones are organised is because they were the best and the most instructive. Of all the glaze recipes, all the temperatures, you know, these were excellent examples of what could be done.

LW: Did he hope that folks would gain technical knowledge from the information?

JD: Oh, heavens, yes. I mean, that was part and parcel of the books. These tests basically were done in order for him to do *The Ceramic Spectrum*. And all the years that he taught at the summer school, that's twenty-five years of continual tests with hundreds of students. He would take fifteen students each year, which was more than what they usually wanted, but there was such a clamouring for his class. It took a lot of work for him to prepare because he didn't say, "This is the class, and everybody does this." No, people came in, and some wanted to work in oxidation, and others wanted to work at cone 6, and some others were looking for how to use greens or work on reduction-firing at cone 10 – everyone was individual. So there were fifteen separate sets of testing that the people would do, and then they'd all come together in the end to exchange information. At Pearson College there's a big bench area around the pool, and the students would lay out all their tests. They

Wooden board with cobalt glaze tests by Robin Hopper. There are 13 boards with samples of different glazes – including lichen or reticulation, iron, shino, nickel, and manganese – in the archives. Glaze tests were a fundamental part of Hopper's research and teaching. [Robin Hopper fonds, SC516, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives]

1985.

	NAME	INTEREST.	TEMP ATMOSPHERE.	COLOR RANG
1	JOAN JW WARREN	ENAMELS OR LOW FIRE COLOR. HIFIRE FOR CARVED PIECES.	018 Δ10 OX + RE.	MULTI COLORS L KARL + URSULA SC
2	WENDY WG GRARD	IMPROVING GLAZE FIT. BRIGHT COLORS. ENAMELS.	Δ10 R.	PINKS, PURPLES, G STAINS IN GENERAL BLUES.
3	PAT PF FORST.	GLAZE COLOR.	Δ10 R.	YELLOWS + LANDSCAPE COLORS.
4	JOAN JT TODD.	UNDERSTANDING GLAZE + COLOR. + COLORED CLAYS	Δ6-9 OX. (6) Δ6 FV + F.S.	RED, PINK, VIOLET, GREEN, GOLD.
5	ALICE AH HALE	FUNCTIONAL GLAZES + CRYSTALLINE ~~GLAZES~~.	Δ9-10. O+R.	WHITE. WARATAN. BLUES. RED. CRYSTALLINE BLUES.
6	VANGE VM MCNAUGHTON	GLAZE - CLAY EFFECTS.	Δ9-10 R.	GREY, BLUES, YELLOWS TANS - BROWNS, BLUE CELADONS.
7	PHYLLIS PS STARLING.	EXPLORATION. UTILITY. COLORANTS.	Δ6 OX. (6)	PINKS MAUVES VIOLET CELADONS. WATER COLOR EFFECTS:
8	CARYL CL LYONS.	GLAZES TO COMPLETE A FORM	Δ10 RED. + LOFIRE + RAKU.	SEMI MATT BLACK, WHITE GREY GREEN (ORANGE-RED)
9	DIANNE DS SEARLE	INCREASE UNDER-STANDING	GLAZE RANGE 06.	GREY ROSE-PINK + BLUE TO GREEN VARIATIONS.
10	JIM JR RYAN.	SLIP GLAZES WITH COLOR (RAKU) SINGLE	Δ6 OXIDATION (6)	COLOURED CLAYS. BLUES GREENS PINKS YELLOWS TURQUOISES BROWNS+

would be gradated and numbered, so folks could go around and look at the results. And there were a few times that we went, "Oh, never figured that out." So it was a learning process for us too.

LW: I was looking at some of the sketchbooks today. They were working sketchbooks, and there didn't seem to be a self-consciousness about the possibility of acquisition later on – this material was there because he needed it.

JD: Yes. We would go anytime that we could to various museums. That's where a lot of the sketches came from because he was referencing various periods of something. A lot of what's in his books has to do with art history. It's an area that isn't taught in the ceramic field much anymore. Used to be. And the same with design. They just want students going in, making pots, or most of the time it's conceptualising stuff, which is…you know, they're not getting to the fundamentals. And Robin was always about that, that you have to have the fundamentals first. Then you can go play with installations.

LW: As I recall, there are slides of historic pieces in the archives too.

JD: Yes. We gave a lot of lectures. Certainly when we came here, we weren't teaching in a school per se, but we were invited out to do presentations and lectures. When Robin would do workshops in the United States particularly, there was always a keynote presentation. And it always had reference to historical things because you need to know where you're coming from, to see how things are evolving and developing. The way he got into writing was because books on those topics weren't there. When I was in art school, I think there were two books on ceramics. Now there's a plethora of all kinds of stuff, but at the time Robin's writings were very important, particularly the glaze book. He had written articles – he loved writing, he was an excellent writer – and had written articles for a ceramic magazine, but he never received any feedback. But he kept on writing. Then there was this American couple, and they had been involved with the Chilton Publishing Company, which published car manuals and things but also had a division for art. And this gentleman was working with them, and he

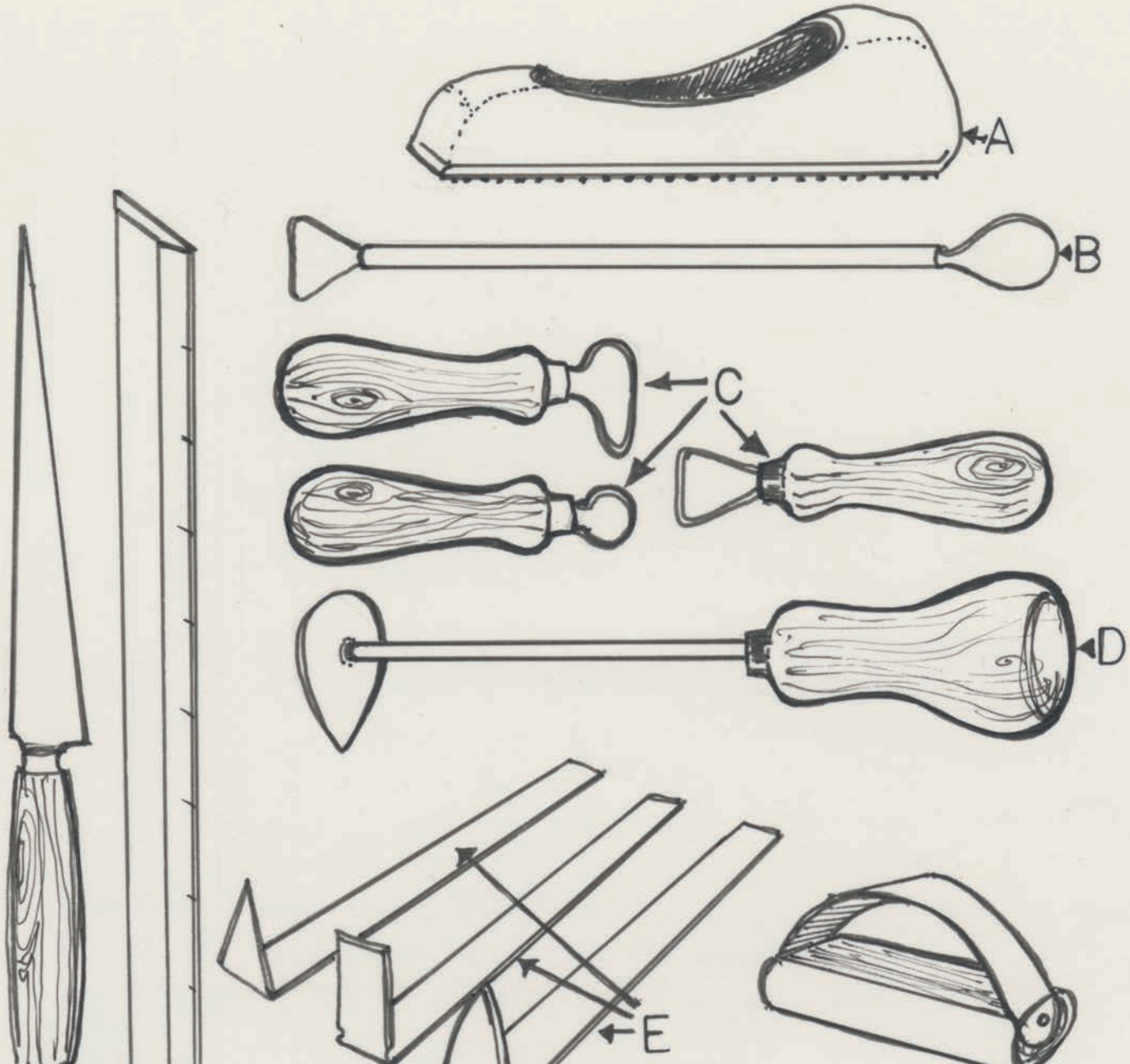
Robin Hopper's notes for a 1985 glaze and colour development course at the Metchosin International Summer School of the Arts (MISSA), founded by Hopper and Judi Dyelle in 1984. The notes show Hopper's pedagogical dedication in catering his courses to the specific interests of his students. [Robin Hopper fonds, SC516, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives]

approached Robin and said, "You should write a book." And Robin said, "Why?" – because, you know, no one was paying attention to the articles – and the gentleman said, "Well, you'd be surprised." So that was why Robin decided to do *The Ceramic Spectrum*, because he felt research on glaze development was so lacking. It's still lacking. What was most important was that Robin was able to put the information out in a simplified manner. He wanted to break it down so that people wouldn't be afraid of it. Because most people will say, "Oh, I don't know how to make glazes, I don't know what to do." And it's hard for people when they're first getting involved in glazes because what you see liquefied in the bucket is not what you see once it's fired. I do a celadon glaze; in the bucket, it's charcoal grey. For students it's very complicated.

LW: If you can cast your mind back to when Robin was getting his archives in order, what was that process like for him here, and for you?
JD: Well, actually, it was more his eldest daughter who helped him with that because I was busy with other things. And he seemed to be in a rush to do stuff. I don't know whether he felt there was pressure. He had this funny thing. He was one of six children; he was the youngest, and there was only one sister, and the rest were brothers. They all died, I think, around the age of 70 to 71, and he kind of figured that's when he was going to go. And I kept saying, "I don't think so. I've taken good care of you. You'll be fine." But there was that drive that certain things had to be accomplished.

LW: When I first spoke with you and Robin, I think we talked about the different activities of his life as a framework for organizing his archives. Was he comfortable with that?
JD: Yes, I think he was happy that there was an interest in his archives because, like I said earlier, you don't figure that anybody's going to pay attention to a potter. When you look across Canada, there's so few potters that have been recognised. There's a lot that are fantastic, but society just doesn't put them on the same level as other artists, and when you think of all the education that both of us have had, why shouldn't we be recognised? There's that whole thing of craft versus art: it's a "vessel." You even have to be careful about

Hopper lecturing at Hillsdale Pottery, his studio in Ontario, 1975. [Robin Hopper fonds, SC516, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives]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how you name things to go across the border. You can't say that it's a "vase" or a "bowl" because then it goes into another category where it's going to be taxed. And so we just give the pieces names – it could be anything, "series such and such" – in order that they don't pay attention. Because it could be a totally non-functional bowl, but it's still a bowl. That's one reason that we only sold our work here. Because then we could interact with the buying public. We could teach them. So many times you'll put a piece into a gallery or a shop where they know nothing about it. So, again, as educators, it was important that we did that and started Fired Up![3] and the summer school. If you don't have an educated public, they're not going to buy the pots.

LW: Is there any memorable thing that Robin chose not to give us in his archives?

JD: Not that I can think of... oh, yes, his bugle. Which would have been lovely to go! He'd take it to the summer school, and they would hide it, but that did not deter him. He'd get a garden hose, and put a funnel in one end, because he always carried a mouthpiece, so there was no end of it. So if you want the bugle, it's hanging on the wall.

LW: We always find that the three-dimensional enlivens the archives. Thanks, Judy.

JD: You're welcome.

JUDI DYELLE is an Associate of the Ontario College of Art and a recipient of the Lieutenant Governor's Medal of Excellence. Early in her career, Judi won a Canada Council Grant that allowed her to study ceramics in Japan and work with porcelain for the first time, the clay that remains her chosen medium to this day. For over fifty years, Judi has taught pottery in Canada and the United States and has experimented widely with form and colour in her own art, producing pierced, cut, and textured pieces as well as developing glazes in colours designed specifically to enhance the forms of her work. Her work is held in public and private collections in North America, China, Korea, Japan, Australia, Denmark, Iceland, Germany and England. She also operates 'Chosin Pottery, the studio that she and Robin Hopper established in Metchosin, just outside Victoria, in 1984.

LARA WILSON is the Director of Special Collections and University Archivist at the University of Victoria Libraries. She holds a Master of Arts in History in Art from UVic and a Master of Archival Studies from UBC.

3 Fired Up! is an annual ceramic art exhibition established by Robin and Judi in 1986.

Artwork for Hopper's book *Functional Pottery: Form and Aesthetic in Pots of Purpose* (1986). [Robin Hopper fonds, SC516, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives]

Left: Ceramic substrate tile from Judi Dyelle's personal collection. [Image courtesy of Lara Wilson]

Above: Hopper throwing a pot, 1976. Photograph by Elizabeth Dingman for *Craftsman*, the magazine published by the Ontario Craft Council from 1976 to 1980. [Robin Hopper fonds, SC516, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives]

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On the back cover: Front endpaper from portfolio about the CBC series *Hand and Eye* (1982–84), which highlighted prominent artists working in different art forms and featured an episode with Hopper called "Glorious Mud." The endpaper has an imprint of Hopper's hand. [Robin Hopper fonds, SC516, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives]

THE ARTISTS' ARCHIVES
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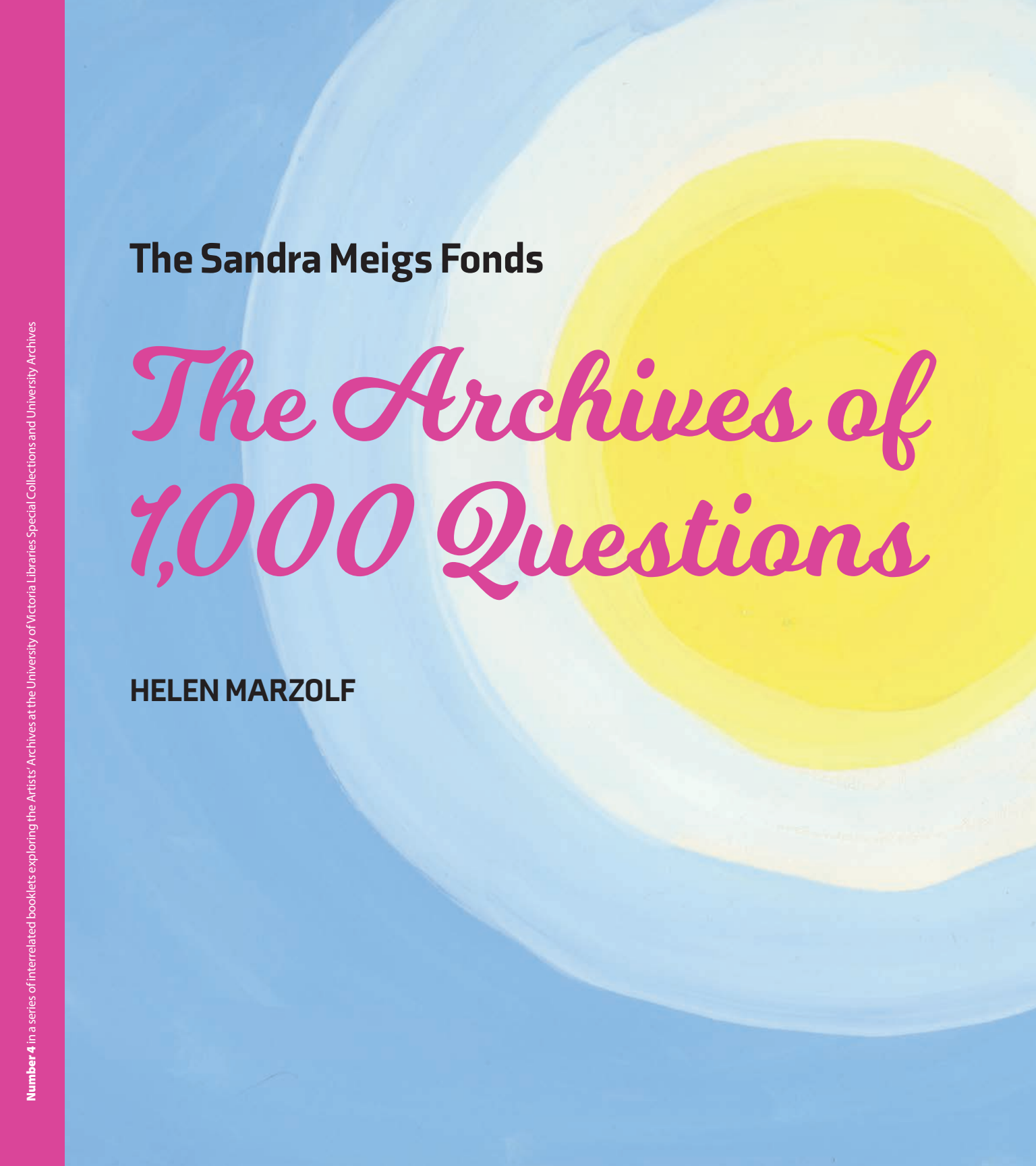
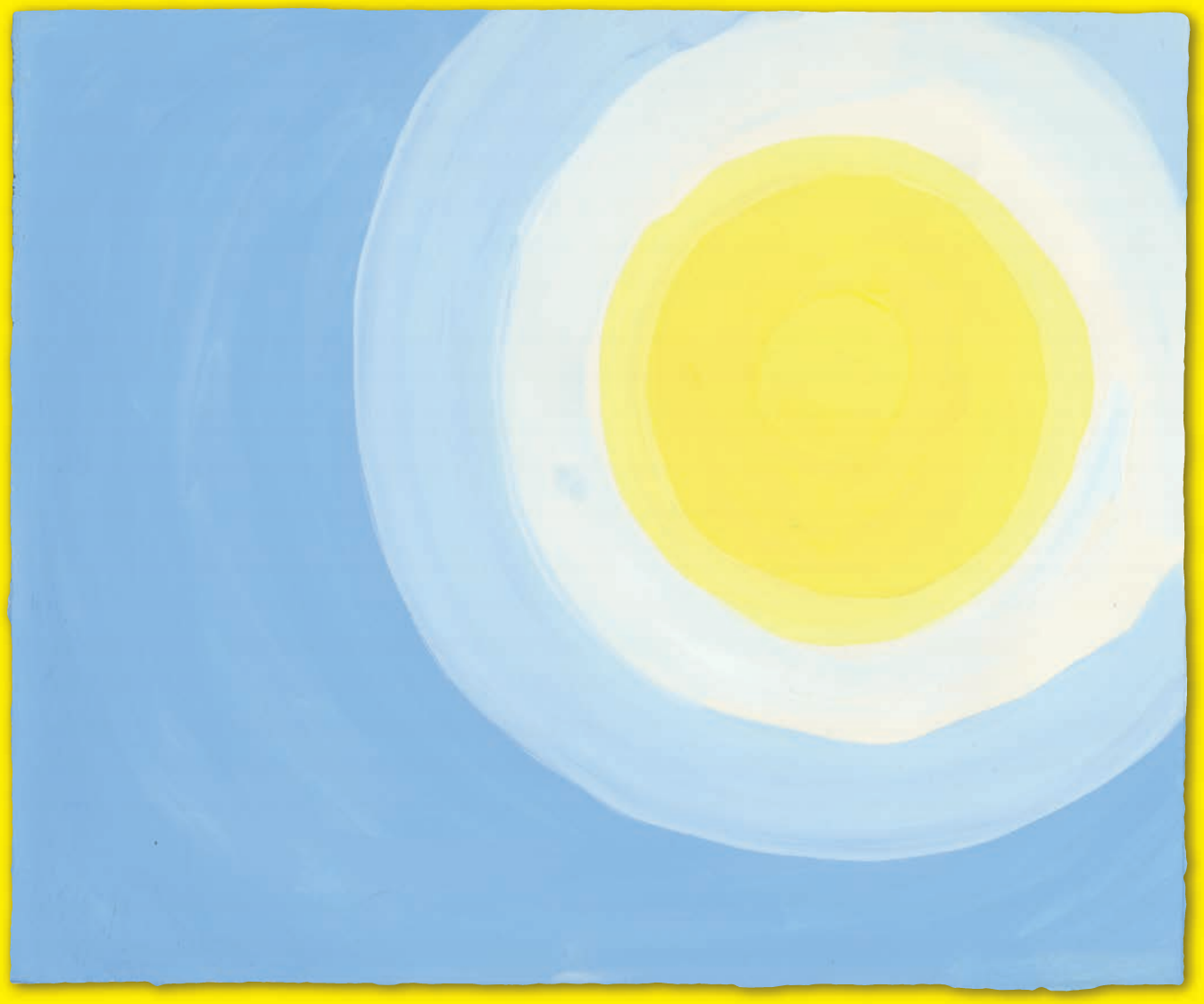


The Sandra Meigs Fonds

The Archives of 1,000 Questions

HELEN MARZOLF

Number 4 in a series of interrelated booklets exploring the Artists' Archives at the University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives



Original drawing for planned Angel Eyes *artist's book, gouache on Arches paper, 1989.* [Sandra Meigs fonds, AR138, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives]

(text as it will be used on paintings)

I own a pearl necklace.
I like cats, expensive perfume,
and flouncy floral fabrics. I have had a
wide variety of sexual experiences.

SENSITIVITY

I like to sit under a tree
and watch the clouds sail over me.
In the scheme of things on high,
I am but a little fly.

REST

There isn't much I can do about it.
I really don't care anyway.
I just hope no one finds out.

SECRET

The baby has a very high fever.
She just lies there like a sack.
Even when I pick her up,
she doesn't respond.

SICK

It is all below.
Snow covered rooftops,
chimneys puffing with smoke,
white moonlit hills, and trees
glistening with snow lumps.

DREAM

15 total
(4 others missing)

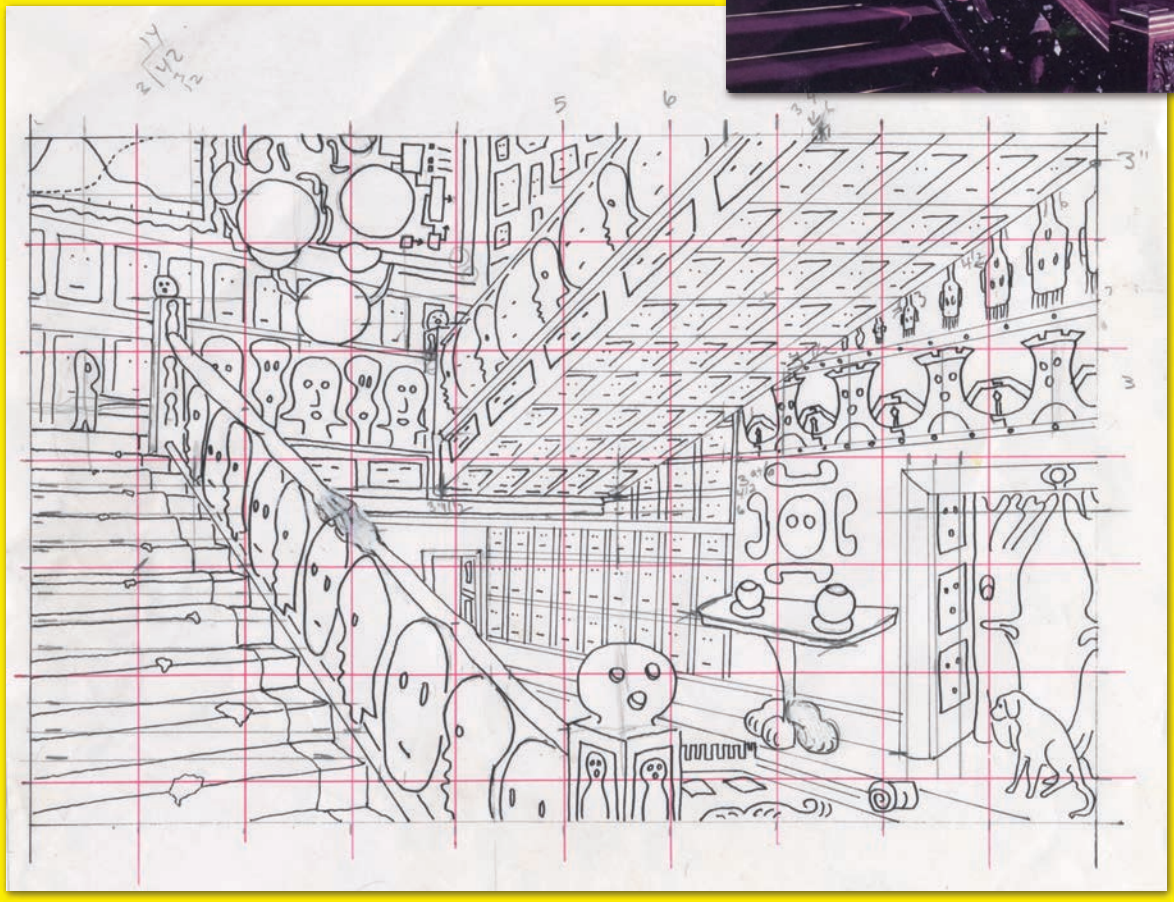
The Archives of 1,000 Questions

ARTIST SANDRA MEIGS BURST ONTO THE CANADIAN ARTS SCENE to immediate critical attention in the 1970s. The late critic John Bentley Mays, who reviewed *The Maelstrom* in 1980, was captivated by Meigs' forceful installation—"it nearly scared me to death," he later admitted. He eventually acquiesced to its experiential demands. In his review, Mays tracked a play-by-play: "You grope for a rational peg … you feel even more separated as you try to gather up the fragments of your life … You are pinched by its weight," concluding with a perceptive note: "At last, however, the piece stops, but without ending; is silenced, but without disclosing anything more than the unspeakability of it." Mays articulated the intensity of Meigs' earliest works, and he also identified a persistent characteristic of her transformative art: that is, it communicates on intellectual, multisensorial, and psychological levels. Her art is "problem-seeking" rather than "problem solving."[1] An aura of mutability permeates the Sandra Meigs fonds in the University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives, where researchers encounter the residual fragments of the generative mix fueling Meigs' art production between 1970 and 2007. The fonds also offers insights to Meigs' teaching practice, her advocacy for artists, and her contributions to professional and academic dialogue. In a larger sense, Meigs' papers sample the preoccupations of Canadian art during this period, the changing approaches to post-secondary arts education, and the vagaries of arts economies.

Although I worked with Meigs in 2013, when we presented *The Basement Panoramas* at Open Space, an artist-run centre in Victoria, BC, I was unfamiliar with her early installations in Halifax, New York, and Montreal. Her first projects were shown in multiple venues: unusual for an emerging artist. Like other artists and curators dispersed across Canada, I knew Meigs' works through reproductions and essays in journals and catalogues. The country's most erudite critics wrote at length, exploring the nuances

1 John Bentley Mays, "The Thinking Person's Artist: Sandra Meigs Follows Tradition of Philosopher/Painter," *National Post* (1 September 2001): E3. See also Mays' earlier review of Meigs' work, "A Harrowing Ride through Sandra Meigs' Maelstrom," *Globe and Mail* (12 April 1980): E11. Meigs' notebooks sample her early dialogue with Mays.

Example of text to be used on paintings in the series Canadian, 1995. [Sandra Meigs fonds, AR138, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives]



of Meigs' unruly art.[2] Even in reproduction, Meigs' imagery and innovative presentation strategies astonished me with their intensity and beguiling strangeness. The gaps in my understanding of Meigs' production became abundantly clear as I delved into her papers in the University Archives. The fonds revealed the vast reach in Meigs' work, which coalesces as an amalgam of her evolving theoretical investigation, an embrace of vernacularity, a perceptive engagement with the land and landscape, all bound together with the materiality of her practice and the obvious joy she derives from making art. Meigs dynamizes her art by exposing her lived experience with a scary candor. Her powerful feminine voice inhabits the testosterone-inflated big top of art history with a satisfyingly barbed edge.

A Persistent After-Itch

Not surprisingly, the fonds has a lived-in intimacy, a token of the studio maybe. It contains notebooks, lecture notes, and correspondence interspersed with quick drawings, dog-eared exercise books, candy wrappers, foot-printed sketches, phone numbers, calendars, to-do lists, and class evaluation notations. The stream of sketches, often syncopated to text, suggests an urgency to render a fleeting insight or image, often in fluid and fugitive ballpoint pen—reinforcing a sense of immediacy. Meigs' journals are alive with forceful handwritten prose in varying registers: diaristic, narrative, poetic, expository, authoritative, and persuasive. The cumulative effect is one of intention and curiosity, propelled by a feral imagination.

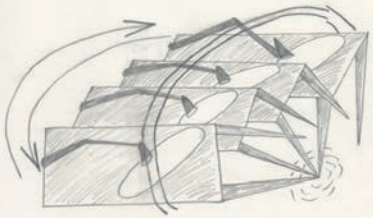
The autobiographical dimension of Meigs' art pulls us into skirmishes of love and sexuality, loneliness, careless social moves, grief, pleasure, confusion, wildness and danger, both real and imagined. Her website explains that Meigs "derives the content of her work from her own personal experiences, and develops these to create visual metaphors related to the psyche."[3] No simplistic, uncompounded confessional reportage here, however. Meigs has a honed ability to conjure imagery both familiar and disquieting, triggering an experiential jolt that lodges a persistent after-itch in the viewer's emotional DNA.

Even in Meigs' first works, she follows the barest whiff of imaginative speculation, elaborating covert intimacies that most of us keep to ourselves. For example, *The Crocodiles* (1976), a proposed artist's book comprised of delicately rendered images crawling with crocodiles, later appeared as a component of the installation *The Pale*

Postcard from the Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian National Design Museum of the grand staircase at the Andrew Carnegie Mansion (2001, photograph by Andrew Garn) and, based on this photo, Meigs' sketch for What the Inside Sees, *2007.* [Sandra Meigs fonds, AR138, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives]

2 In addition to John Bentley Mays, other award-winning critics and curators have written insightfully on Meigs' work, including Lisa Baldissera, Louise Dompierre, Blake Gopnik, Robin Laurence, Sarah Milroy, Philip Monk, Diana Nemiroff, Yolande Racine, Richard Rhodes, Nancy Tousley, Elke Town, and R. M. Vaughan.

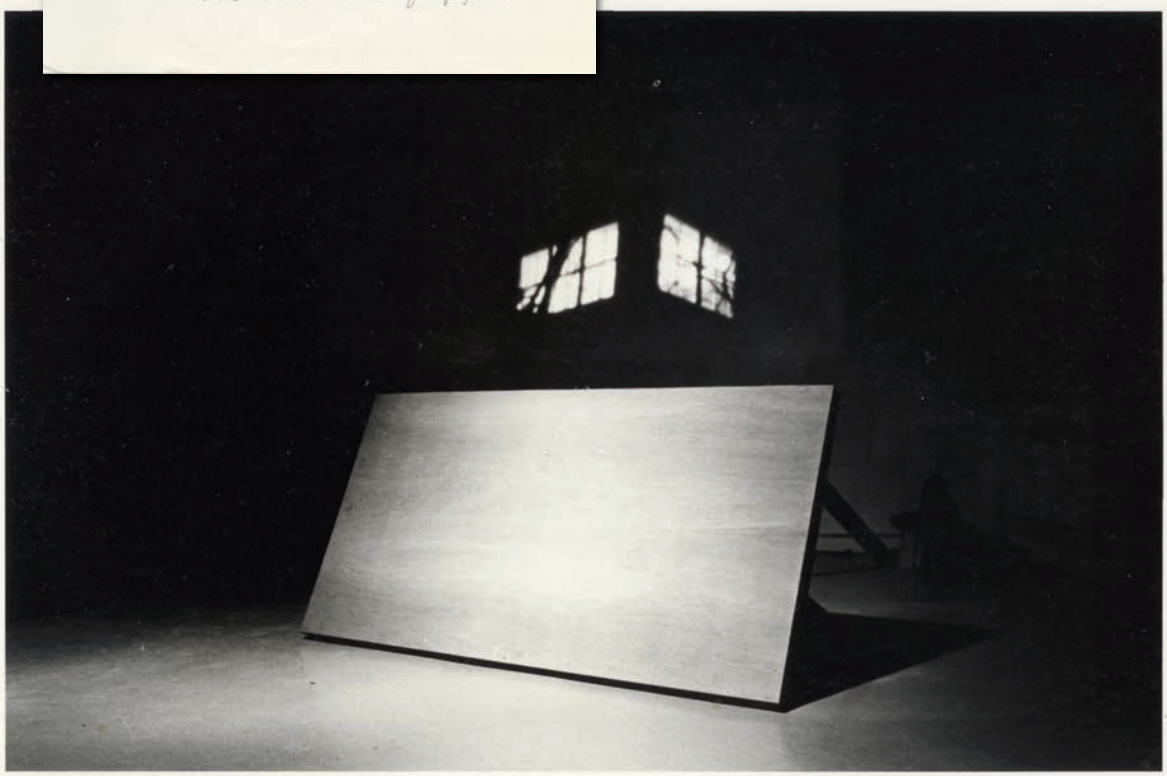
3 "About Sandra Meigs," Sandra Meigs, accessed November 29, 2018, https://www.sandrameigs.com/about.



flipping table with lamp

the table will be propelled with 2 motors, one on each side, and ropes and pulleys.

The table is to be included with the film projection



"The Maelstrom" 1980 A Space Toronto film installation Sandra Meigs photo: L. Fromer

Omnipresent Persistence (1978). One or two of the images of crocodiles are rendered in x-ray vision that reveal, in their reptilian torsos, a reclining figure of a girl dressed in jeans and a shirt. This floating figure, who looks a little like Meigs, emerges occasionally in the fonds. Who is she and what does she signify? In *Purgatorio, A Drinkingbout* (1982), Meigs takes us into the alcohol-infused tragi-comedic rituals of socializing and mating in the seventies. Meigs' congested *Purgatorio* is a melancholic, anonymous place, where her incisive drawings fuse legacies of Dante and country singer Hank Thomson in a series of vignettes from intertwined narratives.

A decade later, Meigs' drafts of the poetic text for *Baby* (1994), intoned by the deadpan voice of a young mother who has accidentally dropped her infant over a precipice, originate in the parental anxiety that has visited sleep-deprived parents of all generations. At that time, Meigs was a new mother, responsible round the clock for her baby daughter. Composer Bob Becker was struck by the country and western cadence of *Baby*. Meigs' text inspired his composition *Cryin' Time*. In his response, he abridged Meigs' words in his composition to "play even more on this ambiguity."[4] Another artist's book, *Suicide Portraits*, is a two-voiced dialogue that becomes increasingly disconnected, page after page, while the repeating images become larger and larger, as if filling a dead air space between the two voices, a no-go zone in this implied relationship. Meigs created *Suicide Portraits* (1996) after the death of her brother, around the same time she was developing *Dummies* (1997).

While Meigs consistently refers to her personal experience in her art, she characterized her work as deconstructive argument in a 1985 panel discussion: "The question is only a personal one for me at this point: was such and such a work successful in its pursuit of deconstructing an activity and way of knowing normally taken for granted?"[5] Meigs' philosophical proclivities surfaced in an earlier 1974 performance series, *The Dogwatch Works*, while she was a student at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design (NSCAD). I became curious about three one-page texts that I discovered in box 1, folder 2 of the fonds: they proposed dog as deity. Initially, I did not know what they were, dog-god treatises or god-dog poems or what? When I identified them as part of *The Dogwatch Works*, I drifted into the library stacks where, in Garry Neill Kennedy's NSCAD chronology, *The Last Art College: Nova Scotia College of Art and Design 1968–1978* (2012), Meigs' recollections clarified the performances—a bit. She recalls the three part performances as:

Above: *Original drawing of the flipping table in* The Maelstrom, *1980.* [Sandra Meigs fonds, AR138, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives]

Below: The Maelstrom *installation at A Space in Toronto, ON, 1980. Photograph by L. Fromer.* [Sandra Meigs fonds, AR138, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives]

4 Lyrics for "Cryin' Time," adapted by Bob Becker from Sandra Meigs' *Baby* (1994), box 2, folder 48, Sandra Meigs fonds, AR138, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives. Becker changed the word 'baby' to 'you' and dropped or edited a few stanzas.

5 Meigs' lecture notes for the panel discussion "There's No Figuration Like New Figuration: What's New In Critical Illusion?," organized by the bilingual arts journal *PARACHUTE*, Toronto, ON, 1984 (box 1, folder 27, Sandra Meigs fonds, AR138, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives). Meigs was one of four panelists together with the critics Douglas Crimp and John Bentley Mays, and art historian René Payant.

To veil a beauty is a cultural reference (Veiled Sultans) - but further eludes to what beauty is itself - hidden, or non-existence, a thought only, it cannot be explained (as ugliness can): It is a mixture of parts, or - a perfect oval face/a face equated with some non-organic thing (an oval), or else "as beautiful as Raphael's Madonna (after an art work, like an art work). — And so, when one says "She was so beautiful that she should wear a veil" One is already aware of the meaning or (actually the non-meaning) of the word "beauty."

As — perhaps The Elephant Man is so beautiful that he should wear a veil.

The Elephant Man is so horrid that he has to hide his body behind a cloak and mask, else he be mobbed by the crowd and seized by the police.

The Elephant Man is so beautiful that he has to hide behind a veil. (No more need be said)

— Contract-Narratives

Narrative: merchandise (Question raised by every narrative): What is the narrative "worth"? Here, the narrative is exchanged for a body (a contract of prostitution); elsewhere it can purchase life itself (in The Thousand and One Nights, one story of Scheherazade equals one day of continued life); and elsewhere, in Sade, the narrator systematically alternates, as in a gesture of purchase, an orgy for a dissertation, in other words, for meaning (philosophy is equivalent to sex,

(Ulysses) - Epic: Brechtian awareness

During Dogwatch No. 1, a person continuously occupied a large empty room on the second floor of a building at the Nova Scotia College of Art, to wait for a dog. At no time was the room left unoccupied, or the person inalert. Dog food was placed on the floor to attract a dog, and a window on the first floor was left open so that a dog could have entered the building. [Various texts and objects were taped to the wall.]

During Dogwatch No. 2, I was waiting for a dog in a large, empty room on the second floor of a building at the Nova Scotia College of Art. [Various texts and objects were placed on the wall.]

On the preceding day, I had an ad placed in the local newspaper which read:

> *Public Announcement, DOGS WANTED, all dogs wanted on Saturday, March 30th, 1974 at 1890 Hollis Street, gallery, Halifax 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM. BRING YOUR DOG*

At the end of 8 hours, 6 dogs had come.

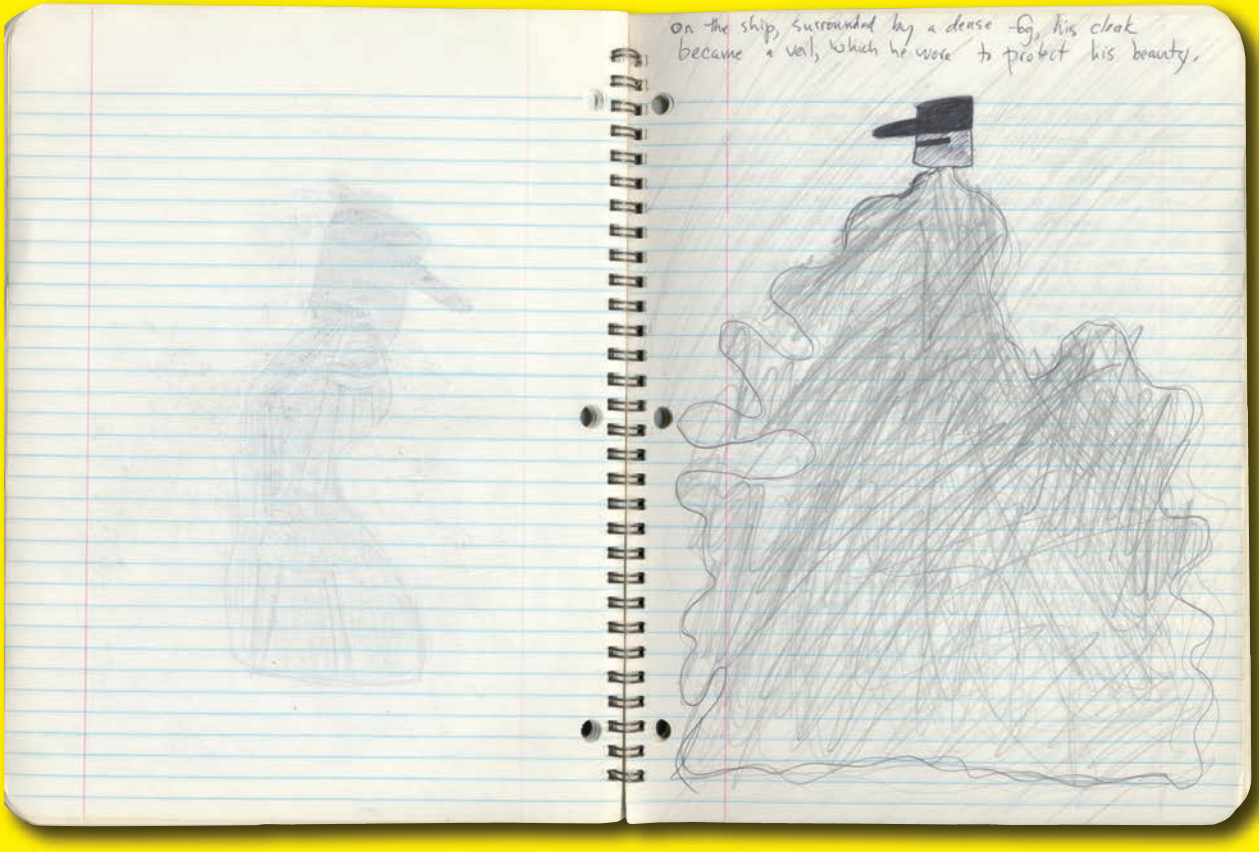
During Dogwatch No. 3, I was in a room continuously waiting for a dog. The room was on the ground level of a building at the Nova Scotia College of Art, with a door which opened directly on a street. To assure that waiting was fulfilled, I tried to prevent a dog from entering by hiring a person to act as a guard outside the door. They stopped all dogs from entering. If a dog did enter, I was to have ended the waiting. [Various texts and objects were placed on the wall.]

At the end of the second day a dog had not come.[6]

Meigs' descriptions of this absurdist set of durational actions posed new questions: were they a gloss on *Waiting for Godot*, or a response to the strangely inevitable waiting games within institutional settings, or were they simply about waiting for a very, very special dog that may or may not be a deity? *The Dogwatch Works*, with its sly humour and a parodic seriousness, is a brilliant example of a facet of NSCAD's ethos

Some of Meigs' handwritten notes about the Elephant Man for the film A Dense Fog, 1976. [Sandra Meigs fonds, AR138, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives]

6 Garry Neill Kennedy, *The Last Art College: Nova Scotia College of Art and Design 1968–1978* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012), 253, 254, 271. Meigs refers to objects placed on the walls in her recollections. In a telephone interview with me on 30 October 2018, Meigs described the objects as pairs of gloves sewn together at the wrist openings and pairs of socks sewn together at the opening of the sock. Meigs also "prepared The Dogwatch Works in documentary form" for the 1985 exhibition *Four Legs Good: The Dog Show* at the Art Gallery at Harbourfront in Toronto, Ontario. Concordia University shares images of *The Dogwatch Works* online.


On the ship, surrounded by a dense fog, his cloak became a veil, which he wore to protect his beauty.


They carried me upstairs.
I was terribly frightened.
Screaming with fear.

at that time. Meigs was at the college at the height of its influence and notoriety: her experience informed the humorous and rigorous approach that would characterize her work in the years afterward.

Following her Bachelor of Arts degree, Meigs pursued graduate studies in philosophy at Dalhousie University, while maintaining a studio practice and exhibiting.[7] She claims *Artforum*, a critical journal focused on contemporary art, initiated the lateral move to philosophy. While at NSCAD she struggled (as did a sizable percentage of the art community) to decode the dense articles in *Artforum*. A future researcher will analyze how the Dalhousie years influenced Meigs' art. However, Meigs subsequently found herself less stymied by *Artforum*'s convolutions. Her studies in analytic philosophy may have tempered her artist's proposals and statements, always cogent and succinct, yet punctuated with enticing kinks, gaps, or turns that spark curiosity. She later repudiated the analytic philosophy that preoccupied her studies at Dalhousie University. Her notebooks track her transition to the Frankfurt School, beginning with her research into the nature of criticism as an integral aspect of art production.[8] In addition to balancing several media in her installations, Meigs integrates theory into project configuration.

Her notebooks also include analyses of other artists' and writers' works. For example, among her 1976 notes and drawings for *A Dense Fog* (1977-78) and *The Pale Omnipresent Persistence* (1978)—a mix of quotations from and commentary on works by Flaubert, Balzac, tabloid reportage of a Hollywood murder, Baudelaire, de Sade, and Borges—there are extensive notes concerning Joseph Merrick, a.k.a. the Elephant Man.[9] Meigs' interest in the Elephant Man narrative, which predated David Lynch's film (1980), was focused on the costume worn by the outsider protagonist to hide the grotesque effects of neurofibromatosis: "The Elephant Man Story—a man, human soul, recluse, solitude; yet a creation. His cloak was a creation and he was able to *create* events (reaction in the crowd). He *creates* a scene. 'This costume, worn by a bent man hobbling along with a stick, probably the most uncanny that has been designed.' The Elephant Man creates a *scene*."[10] Meigs was fascinated by the ambiguity of Merrick's veiled presence, and her text for her film *A Dense Fog* is a brilliant twist on the Elephant Man

Above: *Drawing and text, part of Meigs' notes for the film A Dense Fog, 1976.*
[Sandra Meigs fonds, AR138, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives]

Below left: *Pencil drawing, c. 1980-84, with the text: "They carried me upstairs. I was terribly frightened. Screaming with fear."*
[Sandra Meigs fonds, AR138, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives]

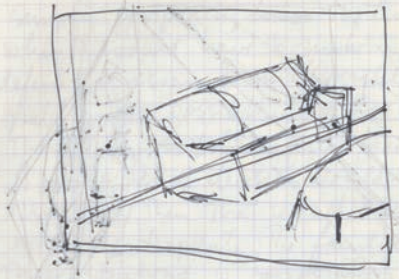
Below right: *Untitled drawing, 1976. When she was seventeen, Meigs drew this image of a constricted architectural interior. It is a tiny, tightly wound drawing. Its inky molecules seem ready to combust.*
[Sandra Meigs fonds, AR138, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives]

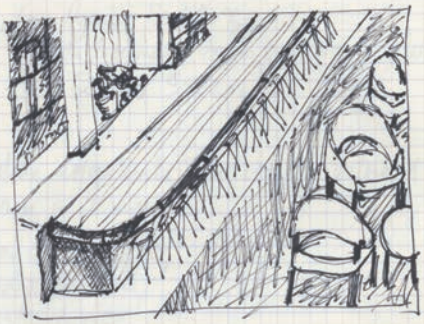
7 Four of Meigs' term papers, as well as her MA thesis, entitled *Universalism and Respect for Persons*, all completed during her time in Dalhousie University's Philosophy Department, are included in her archives. Meigs' thesis examines the nature of respect for persons—not a surprising topic for Meigs given the idiosyncrasy of her emerging art practice (box 1, folders 12, 10, and 13, Sandra Meigs fonds, AR138, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives). During the 1970s, Dalhousie's Philosophy Department was highly regarded.

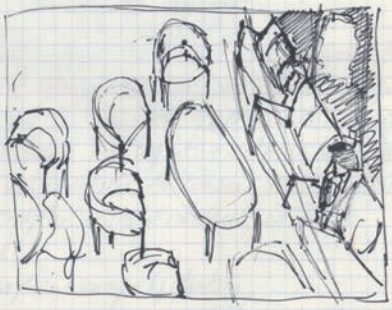
8 Notebooks from Paris, 1976, and Berlin, 1980, box 1, folders 5 and 14, Sandra Meigs fonds, AR138, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives.

9 Sir Frederick Treves, *The Elephant Man and other Reminiscences* (London: W. H. Allen & Co. Ltd., 1980).

10 Notebook from Paris, 1976, box 1, folder 5, Sandra Meigs fonds, AR138, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives.







Aphrasia: Caught in the Act
An Introduction to
Purgatorio: A Drinking Poem

Handkerchief in the Opera
The Bar Picture
I was walking, walking talking
Trap. Trap - You need a cat trap.
Gently lay.
Where he found the handkerchief,
Then told a false story. A mean story.
A deadly story.
It would mean her death.
And he knew it would.
Don't believe a word spoken in vanity.
Cover reality. You're in a fantasy.

And don't even know that you are crazy.
Seek it a better word.
I remembered all those things about my
mother. When I was small.
I knew her then. I don't know her now.
Something went wrong the day she got
rid of my dog.
There are many other things too. And I
keep forgetting that part of it was my fault.
Do I feel guilty for that? Perhaps that's
why I hate her, out of my own guilt.
Movies aren't salvation.
Things can be said in other ways

narrative. Later, in *The Basement Panoramas* (2013), Meigs' veiled figures, the "ghosts in golden robes," would clatter and spin within the installation, disrupting and soothing the contemplative spaces of her painterly installation.

Meigs' preoccupation with criticality drew on the work of Theodor Adorno, whose ideas on form were of interest to Meigs, and perhaps confirmed her way of choreographing art works as arenas for interpretation. Theorist Gillian Rose parses Adorno's views about the form of the essay: "Adorno says much less about how the essay should examine a work than he does about how it should proceed itself … [his] style as an 'anti-system' … creates conditions under which an object becomes visible anew."[11] Meigs' art is similarly concerned with how scenarios, experiences, and sensory data of contemporary art stimulate insight or spark questions rather than forming an airtight conclusion; like Adorno, her art is intuitively constructed as opposed to architectonically argued—it is an essayistic form.

"A Double Order of Meaning"

Inasmuch as Meigs structures her work theoretically, blurring boundaries between the personal and intellectual, she avidly embraces pop culture as a fecund source of imagery and reference. Comic figures—Popeye, Woody Woodpecker, Tweety Bird clones, and other figures—make cameo appearances. It is tempting to think of her pop-inflected imagery as a device to disarm viewers. But in fact, Meigs understands popular culture as a potent force in cultural ecosystems: "I was brought up on cartoons … and I'm sure they affected my psyche somehow," she says. "So my interest in my art is to expose that machinery, whatever it is, rather than to cut it out."[12] Meigs was among the first generation in North America to view the world through the screen (television, then the personal computer, now phones and devices). Meigs' art traces a historical shift in contemporary art's imagery with strategies that embrace multimedia, abrupt juxtapositions, appropriation, and commercial design and materials. Her notebooks, for example, are a casual inventory of images, designs, and characters she borrowed from packaging, popular science magazines, TV commercials, magazine design, film references, and comic books.

Not all of Meigs' references to pop culture are so literal. Often her work has the "feel" or "look" of popular formats. However compelling they are ultimately found to be, Meigs' paintings have, upon first impression, been variously characterized as vulgar,

Small ballpoint sketches of the installation Purgatorio, A Drinkingbout, *1980.*
[Sandra Meigs fonds, AR138, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives]

11 Gillian Rose, *The Melancholy Science: An Introduction to the Thought of Theodor W. Adorno* (London: Verso Books, 1978, 2014), 19-20. Meigs' papers include references to Rose, an authoritative secondary source.

12 Tousley, "Strange Enchantment," *Canadian Art* 14, no. 4 (Winter 1997): 45.

YYZ

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The Room of 1,000 Paintings

(paintings for Popeye)

by

Sandra Meigs

September 2-21, 1986

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Opening: September 2 8PM

~~11-5 Tues-Sat.~~

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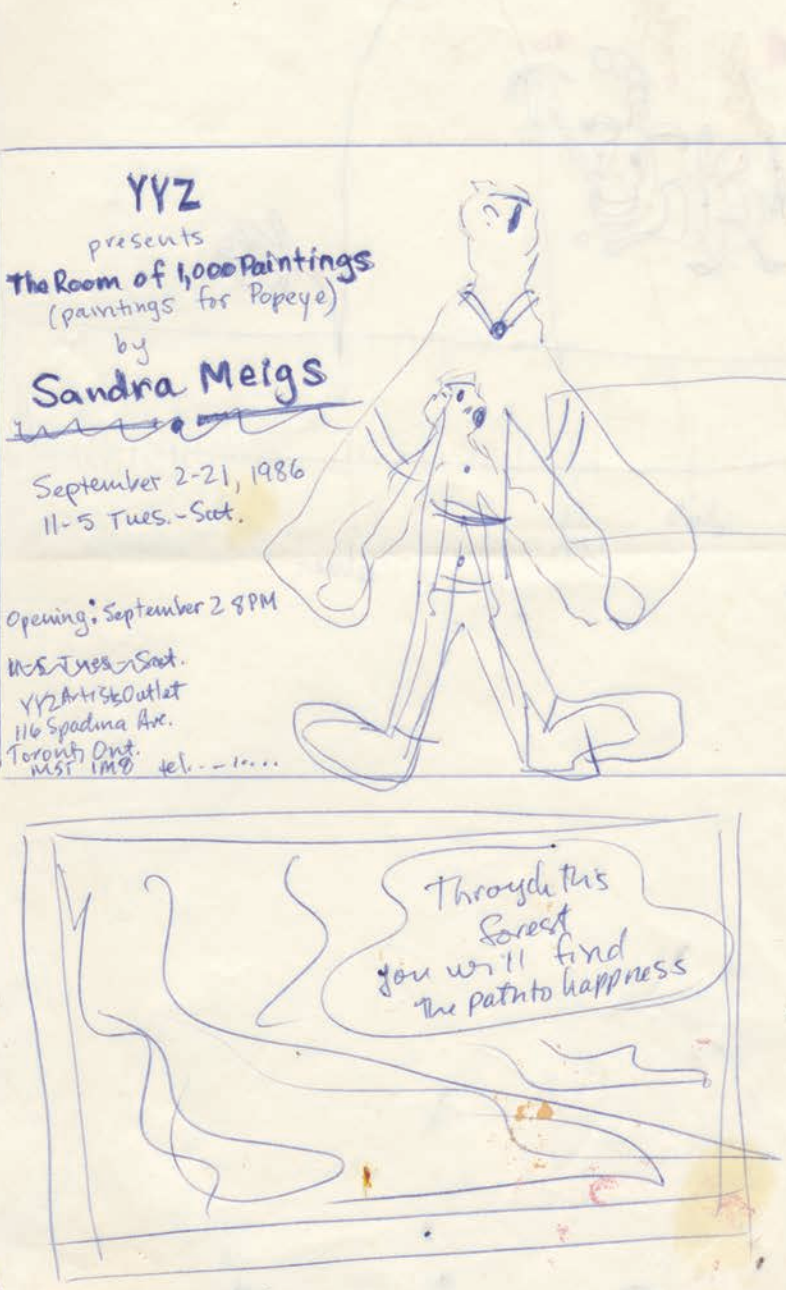


quotidian, or "exquisitely, agonizingly crude and direct."[13] In the catalogue to an exhibition of works by Meigs held at the Power Plant in Toronto in 1990, curator Louise Dompierre, discussing the complexities of *Love Muscle*, unpacks Meigs' ingenious pop culture strategy as

> *one of encroachment, deliberately defying so-called proper cultural and social notions. Operating both on the fringes and within the realm of popular culture, Love Muscle's dialectic draws on the relationship between image and language, narrative and non-narrative form, high art and its vulgarization. Always, whether on a formal level or at the level of its theme, the work implies a double order of meaning: one order interpenetrating the other, binding yet allowing each the possibility of surfacing and being present within the presence of the other.*[14]

In addition, pop culture has often informed Meigs' lighting plots (such as the picture lights above paintings), as well as her framing, labeling, and titling. In the multi-panel *Angel Eyes* (1988), Meigs flanked a self-portrait with a series of multi-species images: a green mosquito, a chick in a plaid tam-o'-shanter, a Persian kitten, a wormy-snaily creature, and a red horse. The horse is a popular visual trope, whether illuminated in tattoos, film posters or, in this case, leaping into the image from an off-stage, imaginary paint-by-numbers kit. Meigs engineered the panels to lean over viewers, lighting *Angel Eyes* with theatrical lights and supporting it on vinyl-covered cushions. The title must have conjured Torontonian Jeff Healey's hit cover of John Hiatt's *Angel Eyes* in the imaginations of visitors, cloaking Meigs' imagery with its eighties sound, further complicating the work. Instead of relying on an integrated monocular vision, *Angel Eyes* afforded its viewers a sweeping imaginative arena.

Meigs' Psychogeographies

Meigs orchestrates multiple tracks in her installations, designing liminal architectures to unseat and disrupt how we see and, ultimately, how we think about what we see, hear, and read. She engineers around parallax, a phenomenon of perceptual fissures and slippery perspectives generated by multiple or destabilized vantage points. The multiple panels of *Angel Eyes*, for example, form a panorama, a format typically associated with landscape, a psychological landscape in this case. Meigs' notebooks

Meigs' drawing for the invitation to A Room of 1,000 Paintings, an installation where a human scale, three-dimensional Popeye presided, 1986. [Sandra Meigs fonds, AR138, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives]

13 Gary Michael Dault, "Chasing Truth through the Looking Glass," *The Globe and Mail* (6 June 1998): C14.

14 Louise Dompierre, "Questioning Visual Art Symptoms and Modes of Representation," in *Sandra Meigs: Pas de Deux* (Toronto: Power Plant, 1990): 11.






reveal a profound connection to land and an assured engagement with the problems of landscape painting.

One of Meigs' psychogeographies, *Purgatorio, A Drinkingbout*, is anchored by a diorama, which was painted by a contracted scene painter. In subsequent works, Meigs decided to take on this painterly task herself. She came to realize the medium was "a potent vehicle for personal expression."[15] Meigs mimicked the museum diorama, a cultural geometry that we accept as a "neutral" backdrop to the diagrammatic tableaux of museology's histories, science, and biology. But one-point perspective is anything but neutral: it is tethered to the acquisitive European gaze, a *horror vacuii*-infused politic that shrink-wrapped the land as potential resource or terrifying wilderness. Meigs builds putatively inert visual forms—such as landscapes—into her works, and then twists them to loosen the façades to reveal underlying political, social, and cultural apparatus.

Meigs is an acute interlocutor of the land, responding to it, receiving from it, tuned to the "thisness" of biomes of variegated textures, botanical and anatomical details of trails and pathways of unseen forces inhabiting the land. Rather than topographical description, her notebooks annotate Meigs' inner life with a land-based reference toward what is living, invisible, or extinct. Her landscapes are places of wordless dreams, histories, terrors, and narratives, micro and macro. In several projects, such as *Baby* (1994), *Canadian* (1995), and *Reckless Days* (1997), Meigs' imagery relies on muscular landscape chunks, rendered with paint moving in big masses reminiscent of lava, or coagulated biomatter, or glaciers, relentlessly fluid.

The Business of Art

Approximately a quarter of the Meigs fonds is concerned with professional activities outside the studio: correspondence with her dealers and museums, teaching materials, advocacy, reports, and notes for public lectures. Throughout her career, Meigs has managed an ambitious practice. Her projects are monumental, complex, and demanding. The fonds attests to her skilled oversight of the business aspects of an active exhibition schedule while attending to market opportunities. Artists' managerial labour is under-recognized and under-accounted. Aside from creative time in the studio, artists prepare exhibition proposals, oversee logistics of installation, promote their work, maintain inventories, and correspond with curators, dealers, collectors, and students. In most arts careers, revenue generation is an ongoing challenge. Meigs supported herself during the early years of her art practice by working other jobs and

Original drawings for planned Angel Eyes *artist's book, gouache on Arches paper, 1989.* [Sandra Meigs fonds, AR138, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives]

15 Blake Gopnik, "Putting a New Face on Painting" (Toronto: *The Globe and Mail*, 8 September 1999): C10.

running her own upholstery business, Velvet and Vinyl, as well as winning grants, receiving artists' fees for juries and lectures, and earning income from her own sales and occasional commissions. After 1993, Meigs' full-time position as a tenured faculty member at the University of Victoria provided a stable income. But in effect, she carried on with two jobs—as artist and teacher—in addition to managing a household and raising a child. Her lecture notes from "The Measure of Success" could be required reading for every emerging artist.[16]

In her professional correspondence, Meigs is business-like and proactive, communicating directly with curators to organize installations in museums, public galleries, and artist-run centres. She prepared detailed installation plans to ensure her work was presented on *her* terms. In the case of her groundbreaking installation *The Maelstrom* at A Space in Toronto, her notes include a drawing demonstrating the workings of the "flipping table."[17] Later, she went so far as to prepare an installation guide for *The Scab Picker* at the Art Gallery of Ontario, a major museum with a professional installation team.

The majority of artists struggle to find markets for their work. By Canadian standards, Meigs has been successful in this regard. She has worked with dealers since Ydessa Hendeles invited her into her prestigious gallery in 1980. The archives hold correspondence with dealers subsequent to Hendeles: Galerie Chantal Boulanger (Montreal), Trépanier Baer Gallery (Calgary), and a slim selection of early correspondence with her current dealer, Susan Hobbs (Toronto). The Galerie Chantal Boulanger folder is the most comprehensive, detailing the artist-dealer relationship, the diplomatic communication required to negotiate financial arrangement regarding sales, shipping logistics, draft agreements, and inventory arrangements. Meigs was especially attentive to detail and proactive in this relationship (which followed closely on the break with Hendeles, with whom she parted ways in 1985), informing Boulanger early on about her emerging projects, many of which were multidisciplinary installations that required construction, specialized lighting and sound, and other labour and budget-intensive components. Meigs provided ample notice to allow the gallery to assemble resources, materials, and crew.

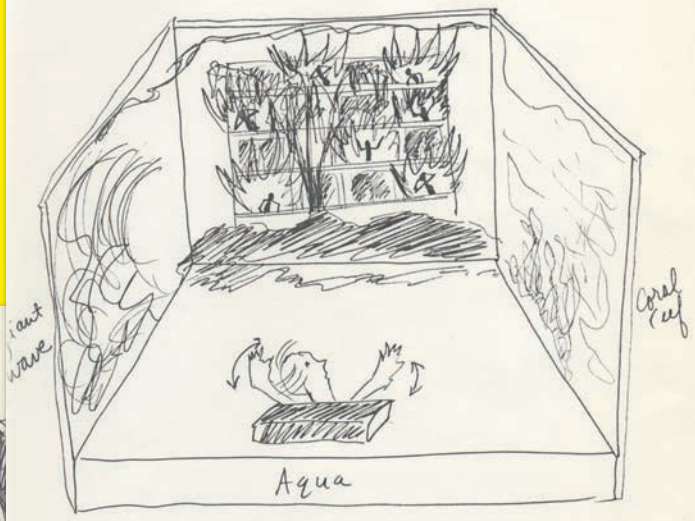
Alternatives to the artist-dealer relationship were few: artists could act as their own agent or market their work through a collective. Meigs became involved with the collectively managed Grace Hopper Gallery, comprised of about a dozen mid-career Toronto artists who banded together to propel a hybrid venture to exhibit and market their work. The group's aspirations and dynamics, its plans and priorities, and its

Gridded photograph of Meigs, used as a model for one of the paintings in the installation Angel Eyes *(1987), and an original drawing based on that photograph for a planned* Angel Eyes *artist's book, gouache on Arches paper, 1989.* [Sandra Meigs fonds, AR138, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives]

16 Lecture notes for Visual Arts Ontario seminar series "The Measure of Success," November 1984, box 1, folder 27, Sandra Meigs fonds, AR138, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives.

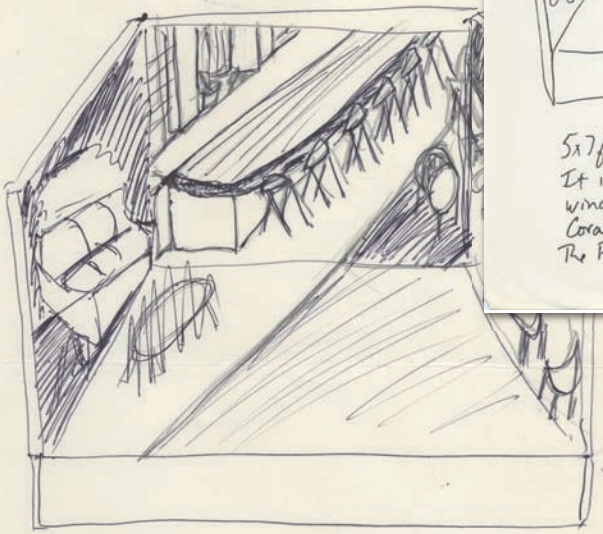
17 Diagram of the "flipping table" in *The Maelstrom*, 1980, box 1, folder 13, Sandra Meigs fonds, AR138, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives.

Stage I: Underwater, Apartment House on Fire
With Prompt-Box and Prompter



5x7 ft 3 sided box with set paintings.
It is all underwater. The island is red. People look out from their windows which appear to be on fire. Giant wave to left.
Coral Reef to Right. Water Blue
The Prompt-Box. The Prompter Pops in and out.

Stage II: Bar



struggles are detailed in the minutes of the group's deliberations, drafts of an operating agreement based on Cold City Gallery, reports on the search for affordable space, bank statements, and drafts of the responsibilities of a future employee. The group consisted of artists at the height of their careers, whose studio time was valuable. Achieving lift-off for the Grace Hopper Gallery would have required a huge investment of administration and oversight; maintaining a gallery would not have been feasible for the collective. Ultimately, the Grace Hopper Gallery folded. However, the inaugural exhibition in 1989 was an exhilarating experience, and the entire venture was a sweet visionary idea, and, arguably, a precursor to the "pop-up."

Meigs' Pedagogy

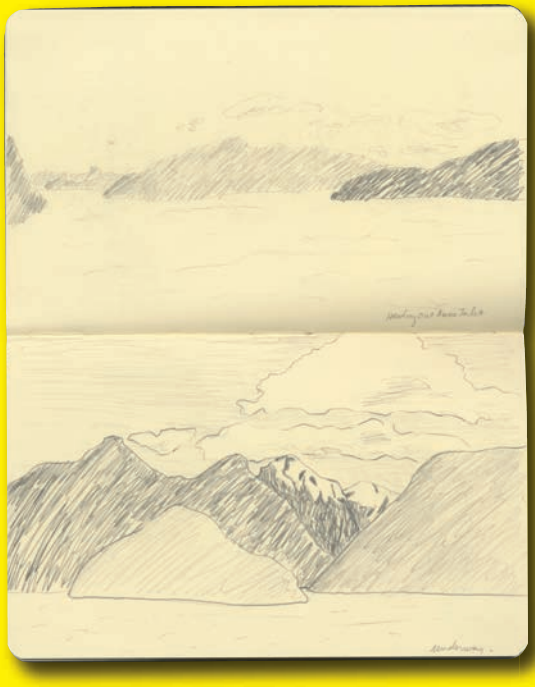
> *"That era of my teaching was the best ever. The classes were really fun and the students were game ... in the earlier years I did a more base project where I had each student bring in the largest random object they could get there and put it in the gallery. So the objects took up the bulk of the floorspace then we had to put all their paintings on the walls around it and critique them. It was a brilliant show!"*[18]

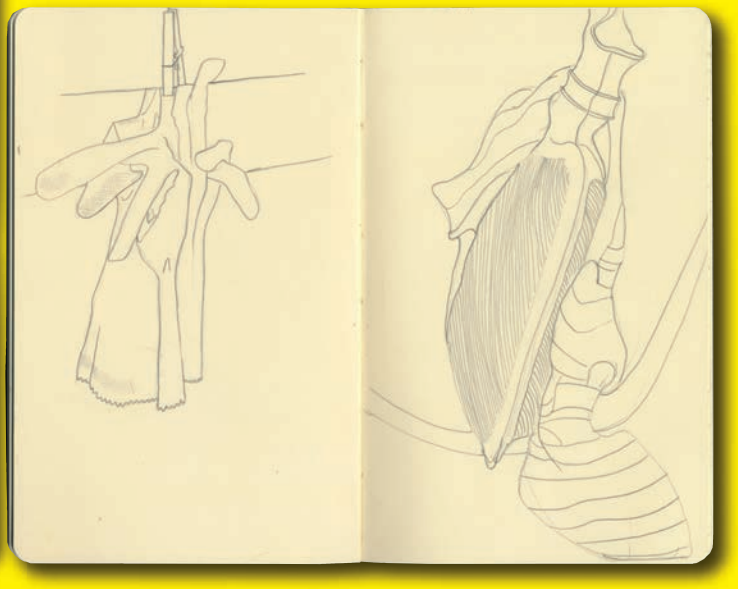
Meigs began her teaching career in the fall of 1979 as a teaching assistant at Dalhousie University, and she continued teaching until 2017, when she retired as full professor at the University of Victoria.[19] The fonds includes selected course proposals and class outlines, undated lecture notes and references, and plans for class projects. Her notebooks also include ideas and references to her teaching. Meigs' lecture notes are compiled by topic and source, according to the preoccupations of her practice, theoretical and media preoccupations, and pedagogy. At the same time, Meigs emphasized craft in her teaching, especially in painting and drawing. She brought her predisposition to multi- and interdisciplinary ventures into her teaching practice. In terms of her teaching preparation, Meigs was ecumenical: her slide lists demonstrate a breadth of references, historical and contemporary, and she inspired students to research diverse areas, including popular culture, film, advertising, posthumanism, and media. Bringing life events into the learning culture was part of Meigs' approach to teaching, too. Her course outlines introduce pragmatic matters: artists' rights and remuneration, copyright, health and safety. When she scheduled the make-up class

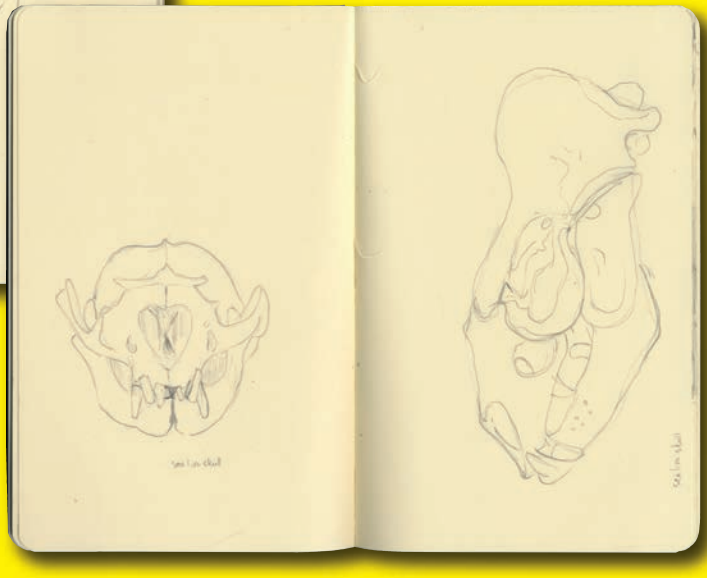
Sketches of the diorama in Purgatorio, A Drinkingbout, *1981.*
[Sandra Meigs fonds, AR138, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives]

18 Sandra Meigs, email message to author, January 20, 2019.

19 Meigs taught at Dalhousie University (1979-80), York University (1981-84), Ontario College of Art, the University of Toronto (Scarborough), and the University of Victoria (1993-2017). Meigs was Departmental Chair of the Visual Arts Department at the University of Victoria from 1997 to 2002.







following a strike at York University, for example, she screened films *Union Maids* (1976) and *Blue Collar* (1978).[20]

Meigs' fonds constitutes a case study for research in adult education or post-secondary arts education. In her teaching, she was influenced by Adorno's approach to education, and she asked her students to read, analyze, and think deeply in order to emphasize critical dialogue, a crucial skill for artists to effectively articulate and theoretically position their artistic production.

Diverse Re-tellings

Although Meigs spent twenty-five years in Victoria, her art is thinly represented in local public collections: the University of Victoria has two works in its collections, and the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria owns *The Newborn* (2001), a series of eleven paintings. The significance of Meigs' fonds for future researchers and artists, historians, and collectors lies in the concentration of documents from her early career. The fonds is a portal to Meigs' thinking: "Those notebooks or journals were really important to me because I found everything so exciting and had no one to tell except the pages."[21] Meigs' self-reflective notebooks were crucial during her early career. For most artists this is a formative and fragile time, and it makes sense that Meigs would place her papers in a university. What make Meigs' archives so compelling is the depth, surprise, and diversity of Meigs' preoccupations as she develops each project.

In a recent interview, Meigs referred to the generative power of one of her paintings: "I worked like crazy for two years but, really, it felt effortless. In this one, I was generating energy. And to me, that's an energy-generating machine."[22] I think Meigs' responsiveness and alacrity as she creates work is at the artistic core of her entire career's work; it permeates the fonds. Meigs is an artist jazzed by life's subtle questions. One of her projects was built in response to her observation: "I am interested in what happens when we 'read' an image without really looking at it."[23] Of course, most of us navigate the world in exactly this way, relying on habit and what we think we know. Meigs' genius lies in messing with this little-travelled scotomatous zone, activating unknowing and confusion as states of fecundity where idea, insight, or synthesis might germinate.

Sketches completed during a trip Meigs took in 2007. They demonstrate how Meigs interpreted her travels with both conventional landscapes (distant view), portraits (thumbnail sketches of others, unidentified), small studies of a sea lion skull, and close-ups of domestic objects such as rubber gloves and a hot water bottle. [Sandra Meigs fonds, AR138, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives]

20 Course materials, c. 1984-85, box 1, folder 36, Sandra Meigs fonds, AR138, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives.

21 Sandra Meigs, email message to author, January 20, 2019.

22 Murray White, "Sandra Meigs' journey back to joy," *The Toronto Star* (15 November 2017): n.p.

23 Artist statement, 1995, box 2, folder 1, Sandra Meigs fonds, AR138, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives.

Late afternoon, headed out from Hot Springs to Echo Point. The captain and crew put up the sails, trying to catch the wind. The spinnaker was readied. Finally the spinnaker - vivid orange + red stripes - sunburst - billowed out and pulled the ship - nearly 5 knots of speed. The Zodiak was launched with several photo enthusiasts + crew and circled around the ship, snapping her in glorious sail.

Overtired from the activities - I napped till 8. Dinner Roasted Chicken w. cranberries + blueberry sauce. Chocolate torte dessert.

After dinner, singing on deck led by the captain Ian and first mate Steve. All gathered round and many songs were sung. Jen on the salad bowl drumming.

Meigs is usually referred to as a painter, but her approaches to art making are interdisciplinary. From her earliest installations, Meigs' work has involved, to a greater or lesser degree, film and video; writing, literature, and text; music and sound; architecture and spatiality; and performance. Meigs' strategies and working method are effervescent, perambulatory, and surprising, a touchstone for anyone of inter-, trans-, or multidisciplinary preoccupation.

In addition, the fonds contributes to our understanding of the contexts within which Meigs operated: the politics and economies of arts communities and changing approaches to arts education at the post-secondary level—a demanding, complicated, and changeable discipline. As a prominent agent in the national arts community, Meigs was, and is, a leader and innovator who has contributed to and shaped communities both locally and nationally.

In her notes from a 1985 lecture, Meigs discusses the potential changeability and unreliability of narrative: "The value is in their unreliability: those peculiarities which make each telling unique."[24] Her first-person metaphors spark a response in the minds of her viewers, whether an internalized reinvention, speculation, or other imaginative foray. The Sandra Meigs fonds—like her continuing art practice—will generate diverse re-tellings and continue to reshape imaginative terrains and journeys.

From 2005–17, HELEN MARZOLF was the Director of Open Space, an artist-run centre that presents visual art, new music, media arts, literary readings, and interdisciplinary projects. In 2013, Open Space hosted Sandra Meigs' installation *The Basement Panoramas.* Prior to Open Space, Helen was Director/Curator of the Dunlop Art Gallery (1991–2001) in Regina. As a writer, Helen has contributed to publications by the Mendel Art Gallery, the University of Saskatchewan (Saskatoon), the Mackenzie Art Gallery (Regina), Open Space (Victoria), and Carleton University (Ottawa).

Sketch and notes completed during a trip that Meigs took to Echo Point in 2007.
[Sandra Meigs fonds, AR138, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives]

24 Meigs' lecture notes for the panel discussion "Painting and Narrative," University Art Association of Canada, November 1985, box 1, folder 27, Sandra Meigs fonds, AR138, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives.

The Western Gothic

CORRIDOR OF PALEONTOLOGY

dark interior painted earthy + texture of cracked earth

DREAM CORRIDOR

interior painted flesh colored + sand texture stucco dark red

Oh my darling Clementine

DREAM IMAGES:

The Archaic meets The modernage ~~in phantasmagoria~~

Supressed dialogue.

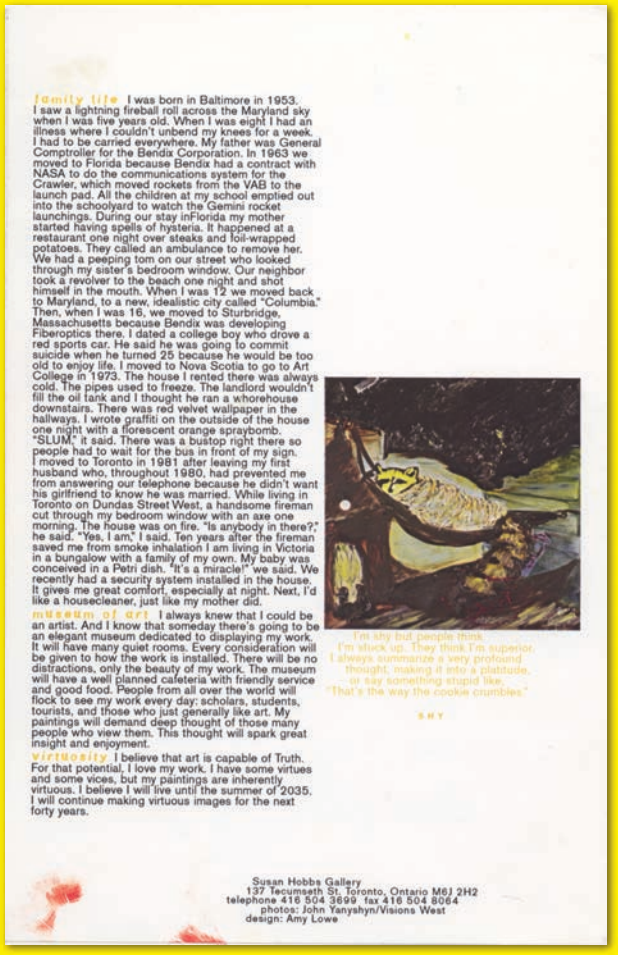
CORRIDOR OF MODERN DREAMS

CORRIDOR OF DREAMS

Facing page: *Sketch of the diorama for Western Gothic, 1984.* [Sandra Meigs fonds, AR138, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives]

Above: *Postcard announcing Meigs as an independent agent. The back reads, "Sandra Meigs is pleased to announce that she is now the sole representative of her own work." 2006.* [Sandra Meigs fonds, AR138, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives]

Below: *Meigs' brochure for her upholstery business, Velvet and Vinyl, n.d.* [Sandra Meigs fonds, AR138, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives]



This spread: *Brochure for* Canadian, *1995.*
[Sandra Meigs fonds, AR138, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives]

Overleaf: *Exercise teaching students how to deconstruct a TV advertisement from Meigs' course materials, c. 1984–85.*
[Sandra Meigs fonds, AR138, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives]

a pearl necklace.
nsive perfume, and
l fabrics. I have had 2
sexual experiences.

ENSITIVITY

My art career has started to take off.
They want my work in different
places all over the world. It is
being written about in important
magazines. My dealer calls me
at least twice a week.

CAREER

The baby has a very high fever.
She just lies there like a sack.
Even when I pick her up,
she doesn't respond.

SICK

There isn't much
I can do about it.
I really don't care
anyway. I just hope
no one finds out.

SECRET

It is all below.
Snow covered rooftops,
chimneys puffing with smoke,
white moonlit hills, and trees
glistening with snow lumps.

DREAM

f he finds the dishwasher carton
f empty bottles, he'll know
drinking problem. So I keep
ement door locked. "It's too messy
o go down there," I say.

DRINKING

I have immense hatred for Donna.
It is festering like a boil.
I want justice.
I will never forgive her.

HATE

I'm shy but people think
I'm stuck up. They think I'm superior.
I always summarize a very profound
thought, making it into a platitude,
or say something stupid like,
"That's the way the cookie crumbles."

SHY

I am very happy.
I have the baby I've been
wishing for. Peter and I both
have jobs and enough money
for everything we need.

BABY

I like to sit under a tree
and watch the clouds
sail over me. In the scheme
of things on high,
I am but a little fly.

REST

Wednesdays for lunch,
his apartment after.
, then go to pick up
aby at daycare.
knows.

AFFAIR

The baby says, "I love Santa."
She plays with two pieces of
mandarin orange saying, "I love you,"
one to the other. She makes a bed
for them and covers them each
with a piece of toilet paper.

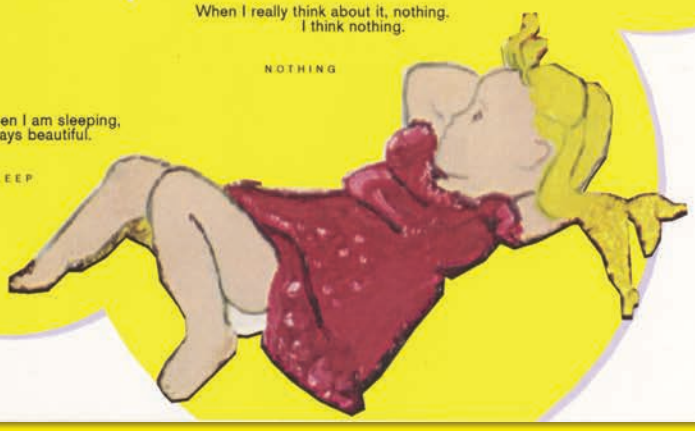
LOVE

When I really think about it, nothing.
I think nothing.

NOTHING

When I am sleeping,
I am always beautiful.

SLEEP



We are in danger.
There are strange obstacles
in the road. We will use cunning
strategies to get us through.
We will be better for it in the end.

ADVENTURE

Assignment

P.I Make a second by second analysis of a 30 sec. Commercial. Using index cards. Draw image in order to note to yourself the implied meaning on both specific and symbolic levels.

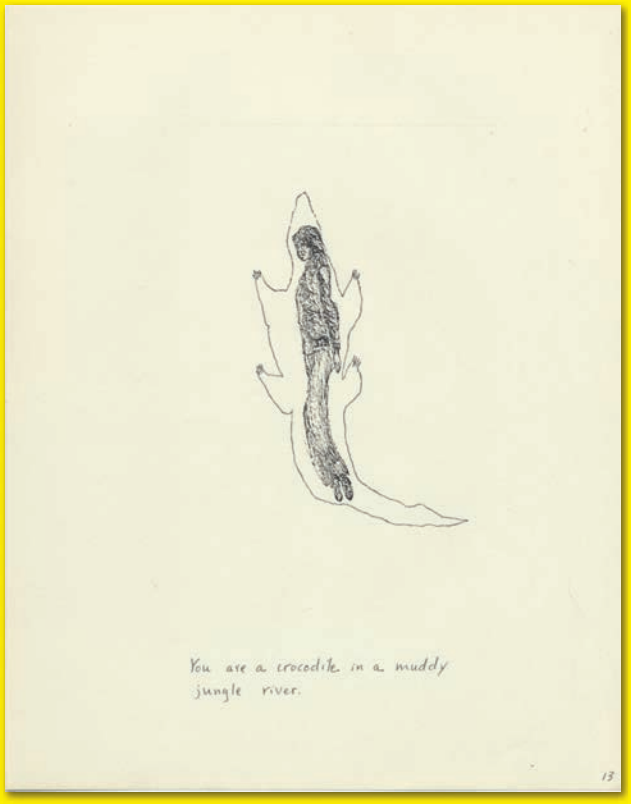
P.II Review your own cards. Review class as whole.

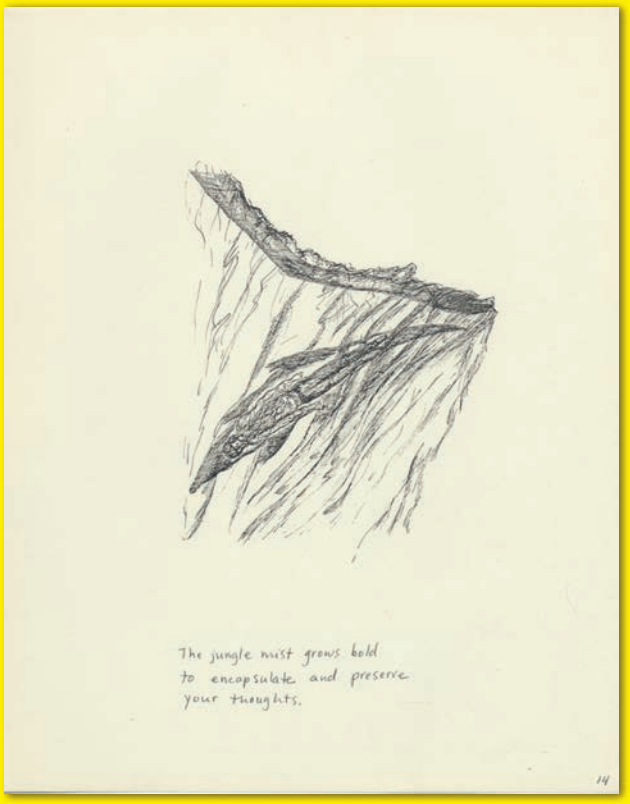
P.III Extract one symbol from the Commercial. Construct your own image which conveys this symbol, and which also conveys the meaning of the symbol in cultural terms.

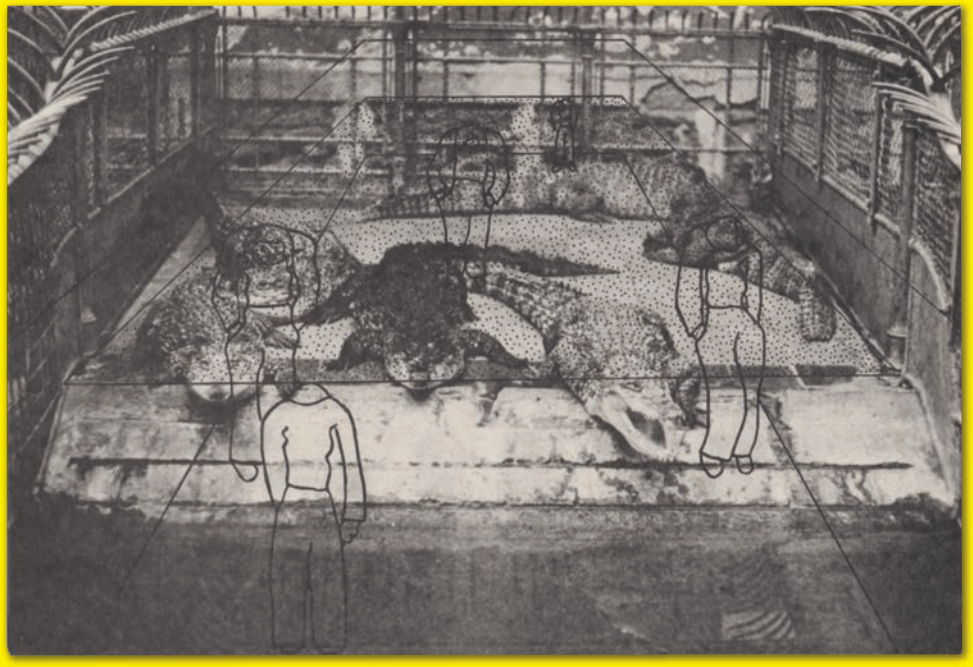
[E.g. A white sheet as cleanliness. Cleanliness as goodness, this goodness as moral goodness, a middle-class concern, doing the right thing for

Society, a family well-organized.]

This can be done in any form at all.
And is due Monday at beginning of
class.







Above: *Dry-point images from the mock-up of the proposed artist's book* The Crocodiles, *1976, which later appeared as a component of the installation* The Pale Omnipresent Persistence *(1978).* [Sandra Meigs fonds, AR138, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives]

Below: *Postcard for* The Pale Omnipresent Persistence, *1979.* [Sandra Meigs fonds, AR138, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives]

Facing page: *Artist statement, 1995.* [Sandra Meigs fonds, AR138, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives]

Journal (Working Title)

Each painting is 20" X 20". The paintings have a heavy build up of Burnt Umber oil colour. The images are constructed with the paint and a clear oil medium called Oleopasto. It has the same consistency as oil paint, but it doesn't have any pigment. The images are mostly interiors and landscapes. Text from a page of a fictional journal is presented with each painting on a small yellow sphere at the bottom of the frame. The sphere floats out from the bottom on a discreet metal armature.

I am interested in what happens when we "read" an image without really looking at it. I am interested in the point of recognition, and the turning back and forth from the recognition to the construct of the image. The journal text also plays with construction and recognition. The writing represents an everyday, trivial experience, but it uses these to construct an understanding of someone. In both the visual and the literary, there are many pieces missing in the illusion.

Now, I'm not sure why I'm using the Burnt Umber colour. I've tried other colours (red, blue, yellow) and they don't work as well. Some of my choice of brown has to do with the idea of feces. (I am the mother of a 2 year old.) That's a very childish idea and I don't know how significant it is. This brown also looks like chocolate. It also looks like mud. It also looks rich and fatty. Something goes on in manipulating the material qualities of the paint and in blending it with the colourless material. It's part of the construct. At times I build up the surface so it has mass and weight. At times I then colour the texture of that surface with tracings of other colours. Sometimes it looks like something, sometimes it doesn't.

It is only March. I have about 4 months to work out the rest of my ideas about the work. I know that in this work I am trying to stay loyal to the individual paintings, rather than trying to consider the work as a whole. That is somehow significant . I think, in the same way, when you keep a journal you are loyal to each page, to the moment, rather then to the book as a finished thing.

Sandra Meigs, March 15, 1995

sketch for McIntyre Ranch paintr

Gouache sketch for McIntyre Ranch painting, 52" × 84", 2006. [Sandra Meigs fonds, AR138, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives]

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Back cover:
Packaging for Popeye candy cigarettes and Easter egg wrappers, which served as inspiration for Meigs' exhibition Room of 1,000 Paintings, *1986.*
[Sandra Meigs fonds, AR138, University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives]