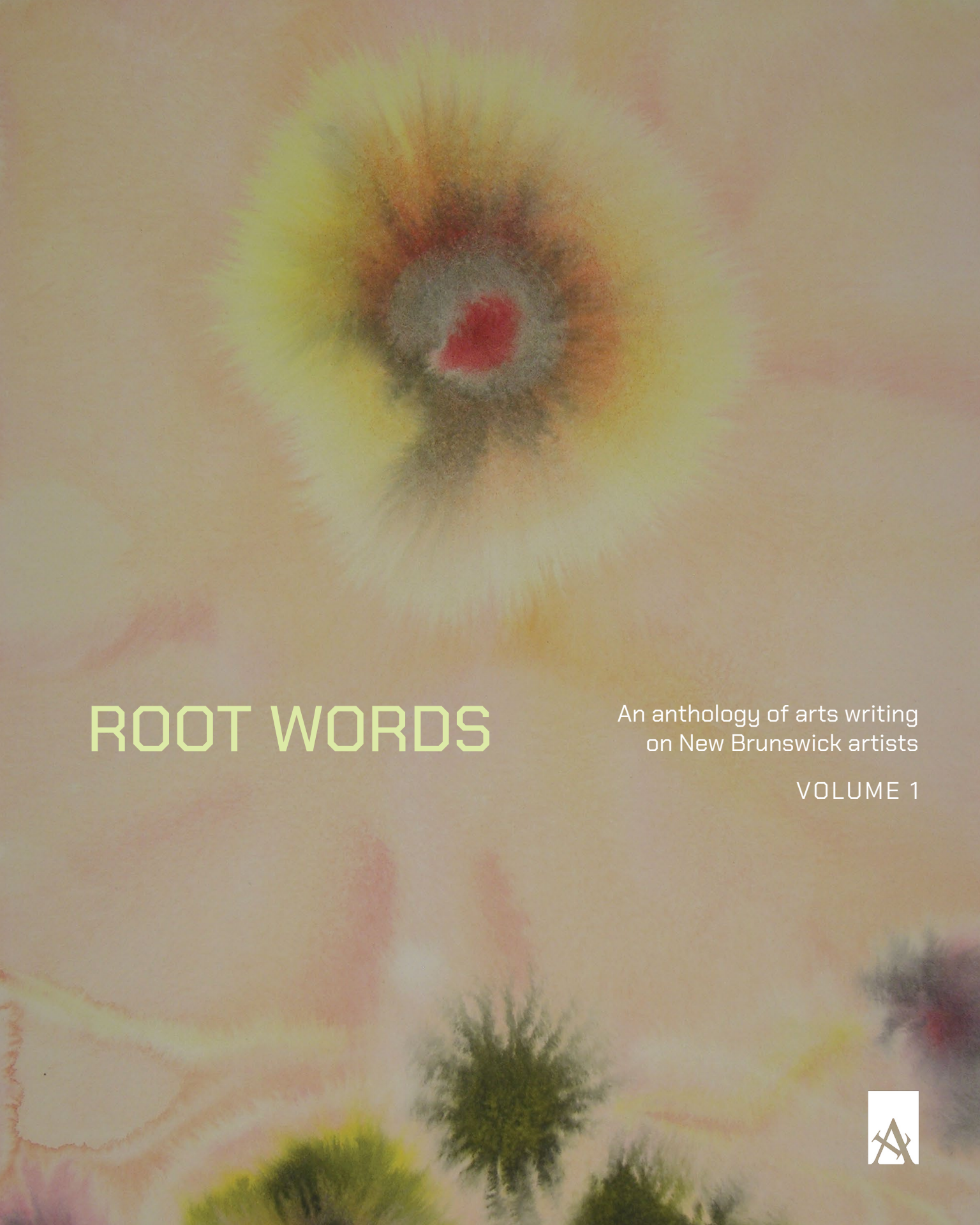


ROOT WORDS

An anthology of arts writing
on New Brunswick artists

VOLUME 1

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INTRODUCTION

Arts Writing is an important element of a strong and healthy arts ecosystem. At its best, it is a bridge between artists and audiences, offering critical insights, amplifying voices, and fostering deeper understanding of the creative practices unfolding in our region. It helps articulate—to the world and ourselves—what makes our work unique, connecting it to broader contemporary movements while grounding it in place, history, and community.

For artists, arts writing brings greater exposure and insight. For audiences, it creates deeper connection and context. And for writers, it offers the chance to develop their craft, translate artistic ideas into accessible language, and build meaningful careers and networks within the arts.

We are storytellers in a region where the arts are vibrant but often underrepresented—both regionally and nationally. ArtsLink NB has sought to nurture this sector through training, partnerships and now by engaging artists and professional writers in examining their vital role in the fabric of our province.

When artists are written about—when their ideas, influences, and innovations are explored in print—they gain new opportunities to be seen, understood, and celebrated. This visibility opens doors, fosters excellence, and shines a spotlight on the creative strength of New Brunswick.

In the first of what we hope will be many volumes, *Root Words: An anthology of arts writing on New Brunswick artists Vol. I* creates space for artists and arts writers to share stories and explore ideas, highlighting the tenacity, resilience, and importance of the arts. This collection of works affirms the excellence of our artists and art writers, and strengthens our creative community by sharing our stories with the world.

Julie Whitenect
Executive Director, ArtsLink NB

FOREWORD

Root words are at the heart of language. Small but powerful units, they function to hold the basic intention of a word and relate it to an interconnected etymological community of deeper meaning. From a single root word, offshoots of meaning can flourish in all directions. For example, art is the root word that gives meaning to artist, artefact, artificial, articulate, and more.

When we set out to publish a book of arts writing, our desire was to plant a seed that could disperse and grow.

Root Words: An anthology of arts writing on New Brunswick artists Vol. I brings together a diverse group of 19 writers from across New Brunswick and beyond whose contributions centre and contextualize artistic practice in this region. A collection of texts by writers at all career stages with varied backgrounds, working across a range of styles and approaches, *Root Words* is many things at once: a celebration of impact, a record of existence, and an outlet to uplift both artistic and arts writing practices. It's both evidence of the inherent vitality of the arts in this region and an acknowledgement that the arts themselves are vital to all New Brunswickers.

The writers included tend to the arts community, across space and time, with a spirit of curiosity, insight, and care, their language an offering that situates artistic practices within the deeper rhythms of this region.

Storytelling and critical inquiry reveal threads of intergenerational mentorship, shared belonging, and the quiet power of the arts to teach, to transform, and to move us. Gently woven, this contextualization invites reflection, relationship, and growth. Through it all is a recognition of the resilience here—the tenacity, the DIY ethic, and the dynamic energy of the artists who contribute such vibrancy to this place we call home.

Amy Ash & Jericho Knopp
Associate Director & Programming Director

RARE BEASTS

The Young Women, the Rug Hunters, and the Unlikely Existence of the Smith Mat

By Chloe Lundrigan

The oldest dated hooked rug was created in New Maryland, New Brunswick, in 1860.

It was a collaboration between two teenaged sisters: Susannah (who designed the image) and Abigail (who did the hooking). The composition features a house, a tree, and some birds, all framed by a floral border. The wool has been hooked through a tightly woven cloth, as burlap was only beginning to become available at that time.[1] It is beautiful, because of course it is, but it is *exceptional* because it still exists.

The origin of rug hooking has been disputed for over a century. The details are muddy and convoluted, and bickered over by academics—the mats were invented by male sailors, or derivative of a Scandinavian craft, or brought here via the British Isles. Most agree, though, that tracing origins is a fool's errand, or at least beside the point. All concur that the practice first flourished among settlers on the land which is now known as the Canadian Atlantic provinces and the North-Eastern United States.

One of the first recognized scholars of hooked rugs was William Winthrop Kent, an architect, world traveller, and Harvard graduate from Maine. He wrote the first widely known book on the topic, *The Hooked Rug*, which was published in 1930. It drew on expertise he gained by participating in collecting trips, a common practice among powerful American men who would travel between rural Maritime farming communities in search of inexpensive rugs to resell. In his notes on the experience, he writes about "finding many women willing to rip their rugs off the floor and hand them over to him" and how "the car groans under the weight of his continually growing cache of tapestries."[2] He comments explicitly on the difference between the places he visited and the modern advancements of his home, the lack of education making him feel as though he was stepping into the past. The power imbalance evident in these outings cannot be overstated; anthropologist Sharon MacDonald has compared them to big game hunting. The upper class could buy rugs; the lower class made them. The development of this kind of local cottage industry to support visitors like Kent afforded some economic opportunity, but it was necessary, not romantic.

Many of these rugs no longer exist, or if they do, don't exist here. They were utilitarian objects, inseparably knotted to women's and girls' labour; made to be used and repurposed when they wore out. They are vulnerable to the same threats as other textiles, conservation-wise. While quilts were often passed down within families, doing so with rugs was uncommon. Moreover, it is difficult to date rugs to the year based on material and motif alone—unless of course, the date is hooked into the object.

During the COVID-19 lockdowns, interest in rug hooking and related textile crafts skyrocketed. For a minute, it seemed like every Instagram influencer had a tufting gun.



Image details on page 10.

That was strange for me; my mum is a talented and dedicated hooker, my siblings and I grew up with rugs, and with the bins of yarn and wool strips that came with them. It's only since moving away from home, oddly, that I've learned how intensely *New Brunswick* that really was.

Our province isn't known for a particular mat-making moment, like the Grenfell mission in Newfoundland, or the Chéticamp rugs in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia.[3] In thinking about the legacies of understudied and underappreciated artists in New Brunswick's past, I can't help but wonder about the Smith sisters, who have been at times reduced to a fun fact in some sort of provincial claim over the technique.

They likely would not have identified themselves as artists. The material culturist in me wants to ask them how they chose their colours, or learned the craft, or what it meant to them, if anything. But more importantly, maybe—what did they talk about? Their time together in their family home was waning—were they worried? Excited? Had they heard the whispers of the colonies unifying? What did they think? When Abigail Smith pulled each loop through her fabric, along lines her older sister drew for her, did she want to be recognized? And if so, did she find that recognition while she was alive? So many women are lost to our historical record in New Brunswick, especially in their creative work. We have many Mrs. John Smiths, died xxxx, but not many thirteen-year-old Abigails.

In folkloristics—the study of creativity in everyday life—we believe tradition is inherently current: people take the information and skills available within their contexts and use them to meet their contemporary needs; they are inherently malleable, diverse, and experimental. In other words, traditions exist not because they were once important to our ancestors (although that's likely true, too), but because they are *still* important to us.

When rug hooking, mechanical tufting, latch-hook, punch-needle, and other terms are used synonymously on TikTok, in brand-new synthetic fibres, on vertical planes instead of horizontal ones, it's easy to be a little surly on impulse. That disconnection from essential household labour ignores the nuance tangled in the methods, ignores the context. But as I've been reminded many times while trying to tease out my feelings on this topic, craft has always been pop-cultural. Now it's Etsy PDFs, but for a while it was Eaton's catalogues. For one reason or another, our decade needs rug hooking, and I'm grateful for the Smiths, their peers, their teachers, and all the people between then and now who've continued the practice and in turn have helped us weather our own storms. ■

1 Fitzpatrick, Deanne. 1999. *Hook Me a Story: The History and Method of Rug Hooking in Atlantic Canada*. Halifax, Nova Scotia: Nimbus Publishing.
2 MacDonald, Sharon. 2001. As the Locusts in Egypt Gathered Crops: Hooked Mat Mania and Cross-Border Shopping in the Early Twentieth Century. *Material Culture Review* 54: 1-16.
3 Sanchini, Laura. 2018. ""We are the rug hooking capital of the world": understanding Chéticamp rugs (1927-2017)." PhD dissertation, Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador.



Abigail (Smith) McDonald and
Susannah (Smith) Bunker,
Untitled Hooked Rug, 1860,
hooked wool on hemp or jute,
81.5 x 139.7 cm
Collection of the New Brunswick Museum
1944.369
Purchased with funds provided by
Christina J. MacLaren and Sophia R. MacLaren



Ethel Ogden,
Chrysanthemums on Open Book, 1895,
oil on canvas,
17.9 x 40.7 cm
Private collection
Photo credit: Roger Smith

I WAS HERE

Ethel Ogden (1869-1902)

By Gemey Kelly

It so happens that whenever I look at Ethel Ogden's *Chrysanthemums on a Book*, I experience a phenomenon I would describe as empathy, an imagined association with the artist, her artistic and emotional experience, and her individuality.[1] The painting seems to say "I Was Here." As do her oil on board studies of the landscape around her home by the Tantramar Marsh. Born in Sackville, New Brunswick in 1869, and living only until the age of 32, Ogden transformed the genres of landscape, still life, and flower painting into personalized statements of remarkable immediacy. I have often wondered why this is so. Certainly, the artist's hand is evident in the vigorousness of her brushwork, and there is an insistence in the work that brings the painterly act forward for me. As I reimagine the moment of artistic creation, I see her there.

Ogden's engagement with her subject matter appears to be mediated by self-reflection. While she almost never painted the human figure, her paintings of flowers laid down on an open book can be read as metaphors for the female body or as acts of self-portraiture. They are introspective, intimations of human thought, feeling, and experience. Interestingly, this is in part because they are also so literal; they are material objects that are simply beautiful.

How did Ogden learn to paint this way, and how did she come to invent her subject? We know that she studied painting with the artist John Hammond at the Owens Art Institution, opened in Saint John in 1885. In 1895, she began her own teaching career at the Mount Allison Ladies' College after the Owens Institution closed and its art collection was transferred to Sackville. The fine arts curriculum at both institutions followed that of art schools in Paris that emphasized copying from the masters—and Ogden did her fair share of this. She had access to the Owens collection of approximately four hundred paintings, drawings, and watercolours by European, American, and Canadian artists, including a significant body of Barbizon work by Louis Welden Hawkins and Blair Bruce. She copied paintings by the American artist Wyatt Eaton, the nineteenth century painter A. Stanick, the Norwegian landscape artist Frithjof Smith-Hald, and her former instructor John Hammond.[2] We also know that she made at least one trip to New York to study china painting, which had become part of the Ladies' College curriculum in 1887.

But none of the paintings that Ogden copied or saw in the Owens collection are convincing as major influences in her work. At the time, landscape painting in Canada showed the influence of British Romanticism, the Barbizon School, the naturalism of the Paris Salon, and the more lugubrious Hague School style. Ogden's work compares to none of these. Nor are they really Impressionist either. Paintings such as her small oil on board of the Tantramar Marsh are bold, employing wide brushstrokes, a very bright palette, and the use of bare board. Evoking the experience of place in the moment—the weather and the effects of the wind on clouds—the oil sketch is fresh and modern even today.



Ethel Ogden,
Tree and Pasture, n.d.,
oil on mahogany board,
13.7 x 21 cm,
Collection of the
Owens Art Gallery,
Mount Allison University,
Gift of M. Jane Railling
in memory of her
grandmother
Clementina Godfrey.
Photo Credit: Roger Smith.



Ethel Ogden,
Cabbage and Corn, n.d.,
Oil on canvas,
37 x 56.8 cm
Collection of the
Owens Art Gallery,
Mount Allison University
Gift of Bob and Sally Black
Photo Credit: Roger Smith



Mount Allison Ladies' College Faculty, 1895-96.
Ethel Ogden, top row, second from left
Collection of Mount Allison University Archives
2008.01/1

Who, then, was Ethel Ogden? Archival information on her is scanty; there are no surviving letters, and she seems not to have kept a diary or a journal. Virtually all her paintings and china painting she kept or gave away as gifts. Today, her descendants have the largest private collection of her work as well as most of the photographs we have of her and her sisters, Greta Submit and Mary Haliburton.

Ogden certainly received no notice as a practicing artist from either her employer—the university—or from the local cultural community. While she and her family were often mentioned in the social columns of the Sackville newspaper, there are no notices of her art in print, apart from a brief commentary on her china painting in the local newspaper. The reception of Ogden as an artist in her time would have been limited by her gender, and further determined by local audiences because of her lack of validation from elsewhere. This compares dramatically with the adulatory attention paid to Hammond in the local press, as the most famous and important artist in the community. Ogden's small, intimate flower studies and en plein air landscapes went unnoticed, eclipsed by Hammond's heroic, large-scale oil paintings executed in the style of British Romantic painter J. M. W. Turner.

Ogden is completely absent from the Canadian art canon. Since her death, art historical and curatorial agendas have only slowly welcomed the study of women artists and local histories.[3] This absence of Ogden in the archival and art historical record points to the challenges now in recuperating her art career, and in locating her work, which was not collected during her lifetime by any public institution, including the Owens. The still life *Cabbage and Corn* was the first painting by her to enter a public collection, donated to the Owens Art Gallery in 1994. The canvas had previously been used, painted side down, as a drawer liner in a private home.

Nevertheless, in the brief narrative of presence and absence that I have been considering here, Ogden asserts herself to me through her paintings and through the few photographs of her in the Mount Allison archives and family albums. In an 1895 yearbook photograph of the fine art faculty at the Ladies' College, she stands erect, wearing an elaborate black hat and fashionable dress, holding—interestingly—a large chrysanthemum. Her picture is placed next to that of Hammond, head of the fine art department, her senior and much more acclaimed colleague. But Ogden stands out in this remarkable photograph—expressive and confident, enacting an imaginative and creative *presence* in her role as an artist, a teacher, and a woman. ■

1 Canadian art historian Hélène Sicotte theorizes empathy in art as the process by which a viewer, responding to the forms and relationships that characterize an art object, "psychologically relives" the process of artistic creation. Hélène Sicotte, "Walter Abell au Canada, 1928-1944," *Journal of Canadian Art History* 11, no. 1-2 (1988), 91-92.

2 Unidentified Saint John newspaper clipping listing works exhibited by students in the fourth term at the Owens Art Institution in Saint John (likely May 1889), Owens Art Gallery archives. Ogden's copy of A. Stanick's *A Political Discussion* is in a private collection.

3 All the published research on Ogden to date appears in three exhibition catalogues produced by the Owens Art Gallery, Mount Allison University, Sackville, NB: Fredette Frame and Gemey Kelly, *Ethel Ogden*, 1999; Jane Tisdale, *Ethel Ogden & Greta Ogden: Painted Porcelain, 1889-1938*, 2011; and Gemey Kelly and Jane Tisdale, *The Matter at Hand: Paintings and Hand-painted China by Ethel Ogden*, 2018. See also Wikipedia, "Ethel Ogden." 26 July 2024, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethel_Ogden.

ELIZABETH AMELIA MCLEOD (1875-1963)

By Jane Tisdale

Nineteen-year-old art student Elizabeth McLeod shuffled through the snow to begin classes in the new art building on Mount Allison University's campus.

She was one of the first students to enter the Owens Museum of Fine Arts, Canada's first university art gallery. This building, which opened in January 1895 in Sackville, New Brunswick, housed the school's fine arts department for seventy years, and its art collection was used for teaching, as well as for public exhibitions. McLeod studied painting, drawing and China painting, unaware that this new art building would soon become central to her life's work.

McLeod was introduced to art through American museums and galleries, during family visits to New York City. When her American aunts travelled in Europe, they sent postcards to their young niece in New Brunswick, offering wise advice: "...you'd better start saving your pennies so that you can come over here before you are decrepit."[1]

Her father, Robert Trueman McLeod, and other family members had attended Mount Allison University, just a short distance from their farm in Point de Bute, New Brunswick, so it was natural for McLeod to attend the Mount Allison Ladies' College.[2] At the time, Mount Allison was comprised of three institutions—the Ladies' College, the Academy, and the degree-granting College.

Canadian landscape artist John Hammond, head of the art department, encouraged students to develop their skills by studying and copying the plaster casts and paintings in the Owens collection. He also emphasized the importance of art history, a subject which piqued McLeod's interest.

Soon after completing her studies in 1896, McLeod accepted a teaching position in the art department with her former teacher, artist and friend, Ethel Ogden. She continued throughout her life to seek educational opportunities, taking courses in New York at the Art Students' League, the Chase Art School, Columbia University, and with renowned artists Robert Henri, Maud Mason, and Charles Hawthorne.[3] She exhibited her paintings at the Royal Canadian Academy and at the Art Association of Montreal.

An article in the school newspaper reported, "her work clearly shows the source of spirit and skill from which a multitude of Mount Allison students have drawn... and over and above the loveliness of her paintings there is still a greater thing—the genius of a born teacher."[4] However, after her colleague and friend Ethel Ogden died in 1902, McLeod left the school. She returned four years later, when art education was changing and focusing more on vocational work.

The Canadian Handicraft Guild had just opened in Montreal, influenced by the international Arts and Crafts



Elizabeth McLeod (left) with her students, 1912, Collection of Mount Allison University Archives 2008/01/1



Elizabeth McLeod as a student
(central figure at easel), 1895,
Collection of Mount Allison University Archives
2007.07/1157

"As we are far from art centers, we depend on books, reproductions, periodicals and travelling exhibitions."

Movement. Although McLeod's art studies had been traditional, she embraced the 'new subjects' such as leather tooling and woodcarving, and spent the summer of 1909 studying metalwork at Columbia University. In the fall, she returned to Sackville to teach metalwork and jewellery, as well as the fundamentals: art history, design, and China painting.

During this time, she contributed to the development of an Arts and Crafts program that remained on the curriculum at Mount Allison for fifty years. Later, she initiated the Mount Allison Handicrafts Guild, selling fabric and craft work, renting looms, and teaching locals to weave. The Guild exhibited tweed and crafts regionally, nationally, and at the New York World's Fair in 1939.[5]

In 1916, John Hammond retired and McLeod became head of the art department. Over the years, she taught summer school, extension classes, Saturday morning children's classes and evening classes. One student recalled, "Miss McLeod was particularly fond of an enormous book called 'The Grammar of Ornament'"[6]

McLeod was meticulous in her selection of textbooks and publications for her students. "As we are far from art centers, we depend on books, reproductions, periodicals and travelling exhibitions."[7]

In 1924, when an undergraduate program in household science was established at Mount Allison by the university's new president, George J. Trueman, McLeod taught costume design and art structure for the new program.

George Trueman and Elizabeth McLeod were cousins who had grown up together on adjacent farms in Point de Bute. They were an effective duo. Trueman relied on his cousin for advice and insight about the arts, and McLeod appealed to Trueman for assistance with implementing changes in the art department.

At a faculty council meeting in 1929, some faculty questioned whether a course in art appreciation would be "of university standard"[8] however, it soon became part of the general undergraduate curriculum. To enhance her lectures, McLeod used a state-of-the-art projector called a 'magic lantern' or 'stereopticon' that projected brilliant three-dimensional images on the wall.[9]

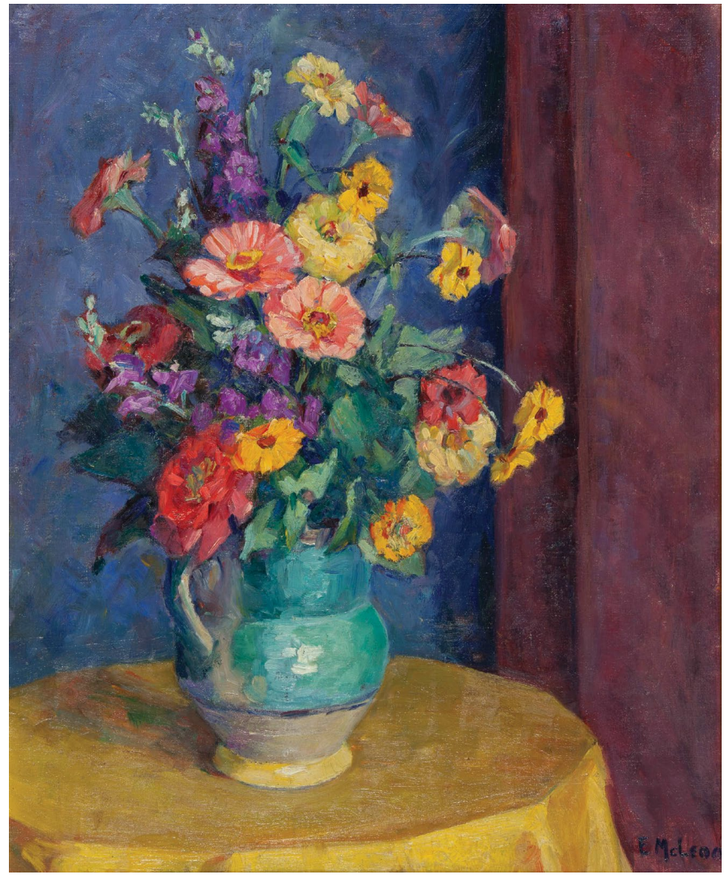
In 1931, the faculty council approved Trueman's proposal "that there be established in the University, a Department of Fine Arts and that a course leading to a degree in Fine Arts be developed."[10] It was the first university in Canada to do so. Ten years passed before the first BFA degree was awarded, but the formal decision in 1931 was far ahead of its time for art education in Canada.

In recognition of her significant and unacknowledged contributions to the initiation of the Bachelor of Fine Arts program, and for a lifetime of dedication to the arts, Elizabeth McLeod was named Professor Emerita and awarded an honorary degree from Mount Allison University in 1954. As she once wrote to her cousin George: "Everything about the college will always be the greatest interest to me, the center of everything to me."[11]

1 Postcard from Eunice McLeod to Elizabeth McLeod, 18 September 1912, Owens Art Gallery Archive.
2 Conversations with Eugenia Trueman Coates.
3 "Deceased" *The Mount Allison Record*, 46, no. 1 (winter 1964): 25-26.
4 "Fine Arts Exhibition of Old Mount A Students," *The Argosy Weekly*, 1 (March 1930): 5.
5 "Mount Allison University President's Report 1939-40," Mount Allison University Archives, 27.
6 Marjorie Bates West interview with Pam Swainson, 21 January 1977, Mount Allison University Archives, 8211.
7 Elizabeth McLeod to George J. Trueman, 9 August 1932, Mount Allison University Archives, 7837/1A/349.
8 "Minutes of the Faculty Council Meeting, 1928-29", (March 1929): 531, Mount Allison University Archives.
9 George J. Trueman to F.P. Keppel, 15 August 1932, Mount Allison University Archives, 7837/1A/349.
10 "Minutes of the Faculty Council Meeting, 1931-33," (12 June 1931): 577, Mount Allison University Archives.
11 Elizabeth McLeod to Agnes and George J. Trueman, 20 November 1938, Mount Allison University Archives, 7837/1A/220.



Elizabeth McLeod,
Hopewell Cape, c.1930,
oil on board,
24 x 33 cm
Collection of the Owens Art Gallery,
Mount Allison University
Photo Credit: Roger Smith



Elizabeth McLeod,
Zinnias, c. 1920,
oil on board,
50 x 40.8 cm
Collection of the Owens Art Gallery,
Mount Allison University
Photo credit: Roger Smith

THE ESSENCE OF JOY

Considering Rothesay painter Catharine McAvity's hard-won, later-in-life art practice

By Kate Wallace

Hazy islands floating in foggy seas. Deep indigo clouds dissolving into cornflower whisps. Simplified rocks. Loose floral forms.

Many of Catharine McAvity's paintings are portals to an abstracted and dreamy place where the world's hard lines and harsh tones dissolve under her brush.

Her work's trademark lightness belies the difficult personal realities that propelled the late New Brunswick painter to embark, well into middle age, upon a professional and prodigious art practice that she continued well into her 70s. The shocking loss of her only daughter, Paddy, in a car crash soon after the young woman's wedding, followed by the mental breakdown of McAvity's husband, was a double tragedy from which art was an escape.

"Things were very difficult," says her son, John McAvity. "That's when my mother went back to discovering her long-lost love of art. It became her life. She was all-consumed by it."

It was a refuge Catharine—Kay to friends—had been preparing, in a sense, all her life.

From childhood, she had an interest and aptitude in art that was encouraged by teachers. Later, at Mount Allison University, she secretly joined art classes alongside her parentally approved enrollment in the secretarial program.

But after her marriage, in 1935, to Patrick McAvity, son of a prominent Saint John family, the focus of her energies became that of so many young women of her generation: raising children, keeping house, hostessing, community work.

Throughout these domestic decades, McAvity moved in an artistic milieu that included friendships with collectors, talented amateurs, and professional painters alike—notably Jack Humphrey, who later taught her.

Humphrey's portrait of Catharine and young Paddy hangs in the front hall of the family property, a handsome old Rothesay home where John now lives. A tour of the rooms provides a retrospective of her career: early experiments in gouache, later ones in collage. On the landing, *Hibernal V*, a two-panel work depicting a wavy horizon of melting blue and pink, turns the staircase corner. In the dining room, the bright swirls of *Carousel*, a large acrylic on canvas, exude joy backed by a quiet sense of control.

A colourist like her friend Humphrey, McAvity was most interested in art's formal elements: line, shape, composition. This interest was fed by the people around her and the work she saw, including the 1966 exhibition *Frankenthaler, Holand, Olitski* at the New Brunswick Museum (NBM). McAvity was taken with the colour stain technique and how the work challenged the traditional pictorial field.



Catharine McAvity,
Sea Bloom III, 1975,
watercolour on wove paper,
57.7 x 39.9 cm
Collection of the New Brunswick Museum
1975.128

Peter Laroque, Head of the Humanities Department and Art Curator at NBM, says McAvity's awareness of art movements was an important aspect of her work.

"She was involved in understanding them, not necessarily reflecting them in her work, but absorbing some of those concepts, and then trying to work on those herself," Larocque says.

The artist Suzanne Hill remembers visiting McAvity's studio above the garage, how she worked flat, laying her paper over a dampened towel to encourage the colour to bleed and bloom, a wet-on-wet technique Hill had never seen before.

"There's this question about the canvas itself, how it reacts to wet and dry and thick and thin paint that can be really exciting," says Larocque. "That aspect interested her."

Sunbury Shores Art and Nature Centre in St. Andrews was another critical source of education and inspiration. Its roster of teaching artists in the late '60s and early '70s included Canadian modernists such as Toni Onley and Kenneth Lochhead, who exposed her to even more abstract work. It was also there that she met Jack Oughton, a biologist and artist who became McAvity's partner in her life's more creative second chapter.

An upstairs bedroom in the McAvity home is the hub of John's "pile management," where he's sorted hundreds of his mother's watercolour works on paper into categories based on quality. In the attic, dozens of rolled canvases await the same process. The responsibility of managing her estate weighs on him, both in the material sense and in relation to her legacy.

His mother bristled at references to being a "Rothesay painter," John says. The term implied dilettantish society ladies who amused themselves by painting pictures of pretty nosegays.

McAvity was not a dabbler. She approached her art with commitment, professionalism, and ambition. Still, along with overcoming biases, she lacked certain credentials, such as a fine arts degree.

"She came through a series of workshops, as opposed to having that little piece of paper," Laroque says. "I think she did suffer from that. And, as awful as it is to say, I think most of the women of that generation just were dismissed."

Those who weren't overlooked (or not as much) and are now part of the New Brunswick canon, such as Violet Gillett and Julia Crawford, had bona fides McAvity did not: professionally trained, they taught art (Gillett literally wrote the book used to teach art in New Brunswick schools until the 1970s) along with their practices.

"They also didn't have a husband or children," adds Larocque.

Despite her late start, underestimated commitment to her work, and lack of a degree, McAvity forged ahead. She was included in group shows at the NBM starting in 1966 when her work was first acquired for the institution's permanent collection. In 1973, she held her first solo exhibition there, primarily landscapes and flowers. Her work is held by a number of public and private collections, including the Canada Council Art Bank, Collection ArtNB, the Beaverbrook Art Gallery, the Owens Art Gallery, and the Confederation Centre of the Arts. In 1976-'77, she was part of Atlantic Journal, a group exhibition at the National Gallery of Canada.

McAvity was an active member of New Brunswick's arts and culture scene. When Suzanne Hill arrived in

"She had a fortitude in the discipline of being an artist...a willingness to go her own way."



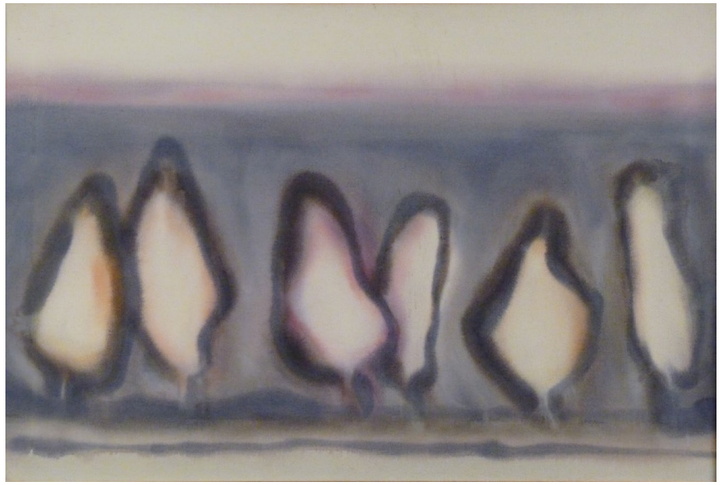
Catharine McAvity, *Garden Riot*, 1974, watercolour on wove paper, 25.4 x 33.8 cm Collection of John McAvity



Catharine McAvity, *Aestival VI*, 1985, acrylic on canvas, 91.5 x 121.8 cm Collection of John McAvity



Catharine McAvity,
Untitled, 1977,
acrylic on canvas,
90.8 x 58.5 cm
Collection of
John McAvity



Catharine McAvity,
Soiree, 1984,
acrylic on canvas,
60.7 x 91.6 cm
Collection of
John McAvity

Rothesay with her young family in the 1970s, McAvity became a friend and mentor. A graduate of Mount Allison's Fine Arts program, Hill was looking to resume her art practice after a 10-year hiatus spent raising her daughters. She appreciates how Kay introduced her to the arts community in which she was enmeshed.

McAvity was among the artists Peter Buckland represented when he opened his first gallery, Windrush, in Saint John in 1981. Along with the "shimmering light" of her best work, he admired her strength.

"She had a fortitude in the discipline of being an artist," he says, "a willingness to go her own way."

In 2010, more than a decade after her death, the NBM presented the retrospective solo exhibition *The Colour of the Seasons: Paintings by Catharine McAvity*.

In the show's catalogue, guest curator Ian Lumsden closed his essay by reflecting on how McAvity wanted to be remembered. As she had told her son, she hoped to be thought of "as someone who painted after the glory days of Jack Humphrey and Miller Brittain and before a new generation reached the scene," he quotes John.

"In this she was correct, except that she was not just a 'someone,' she was a considerable painter," Lumsden writes. In this light, the show served as a posthumous confirmation of Kay's legitimacy and her place in New Brunswick art history.

In 2023, Peter Estey Fine Art, an artist-run art dealership founded by Jay Isaac, a contemporary artist from Saint John, showed several watercolours and two major works on canvas in an online exhibition.

"This exhibition comes at a time when several factors make a re-examination of McAvity's work important," Isaac notes in the essay, including a renewed interest in contemporary landscape painting by a younger generation of international painters and a broader consideration of female artists who were under-recognized due to systemic barriers.

McAvity's work is a "parallel document to the traditional Canadian landscape canon," he writes, a line running from David Milne to K.M. Graham. "These three artists share a lightness of approach while utilizing colour and form to negotiate landscape in an abstract manner."

For Catharine, that lightness helped her navigate both her inner landscape and the way she connected to and depicted the outer world.

"The way I paint is the way I feel," she said in 1985, five years before closing her studio. "I get the essence of the subject, and then I try to simplify."



Henry C. Smith
Adam and Eve and the Serpent, 1991,
carved and painted wood,
Collection of the Confederation Centre Art Gallery
Photo Credit: Gerald Beaulieu

FALL FROM EDEN

The Folk Art of Henry Clayton Smith (1931-1996)

By Terry Graff

I have long been an avid enthusiast of folk art, of the fresh, idiosyncratic visions of self-taught who make work for themselves, steeped in grassroots culture, far removed from academic, cosmopolitan or mainstream forms of artistic expression. My passion for the genre led me to become a collector of folk art and a documenter of unusual yard art. A powerful forum for individual expression and symbolic potency, folk art inspired my own creative development as a visual artist despite many years of formal art school education.

When considering Maritime folk art, Nova Scotia typically comes to mind, as it has aligned the category of folk art with its tourism agenda, actively promoting it as a highly saleable commodity and visual arts ambassador for the province. Indeed, the phenomenon of iconic Maud Lewis (1903-1970) has elevated Nova Scotia folk art to the realm of popular mass culture far beyond the province's borders, while New Brunswick's most notable folk artist, the Acadian farmer Léo B. LeBlanc (1914-1986), is hardly a household name.

As a curator, I enjoy getting off the beaten path and discovering the creative production of unknown artists, or artists little known outside of their own communities. On many occasions, I have been stopped dead in my tracks when encountering surprising folk art in unlikely places. Sadly, many of these artists, who have created valuable Canadian treasures, have faded into obscurity and their work has completely vanished from public view.

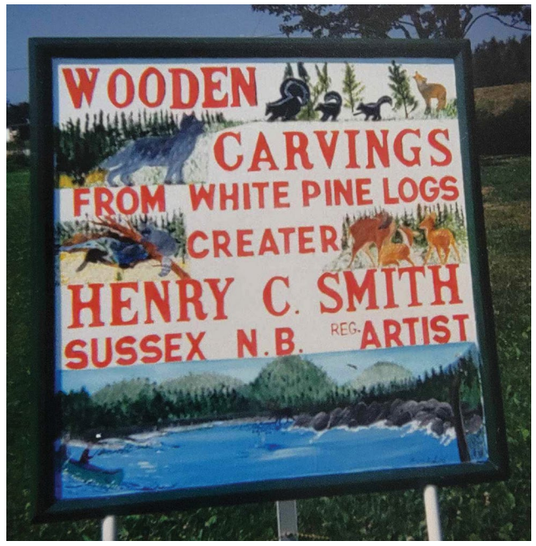
One such artist worthy of rediscovery is Henry Clayton Smith (1930-1996). When we became friends in the early 1990s, he was displaying his art in local high schools. He was also embroiled in a surprising situation that piqued my interest in issues of authenticity, copyright, and the problematic relationship between folk art and mass-produced, commercial culture.

Henry was born in Mechanic Settlement, Albert County, New Brunswick on February 7, 1931, and he started carving at age 7 after receiving a pocketknife for Christmas. A carpenter by trade and later a building contractor, he also served a ten-year term in the army. Upon early retirement due to poor health, he devoted himself to his childhood passion: carving. His subject matter, mostly wildlife and human figures, encompassed the world of politics, local events, Biblical stories, images from advertisements, and mythological beings, such as mermaids and Paul Bunyan. Life-size figures in carved traditional Mi'kmaq dress and regalia reflected his cultural identity and pride in his Indigenous heritage. His father and grandfather were carvers whose knowledge of drying, carving, and treating wood were passed down the generations from their Mi'kmaq ancestors.

When I visited Henry at his home on Mount Middleton Road in Sussex, his front lawn was a showcase for his polychromed sculpture of wildlife (bears, eagles, raccoons, skunks, foxes, weasels, beavers, etc.). His minimalistic approach and emphasis on form over detail served to capture the inherent characteristics of his



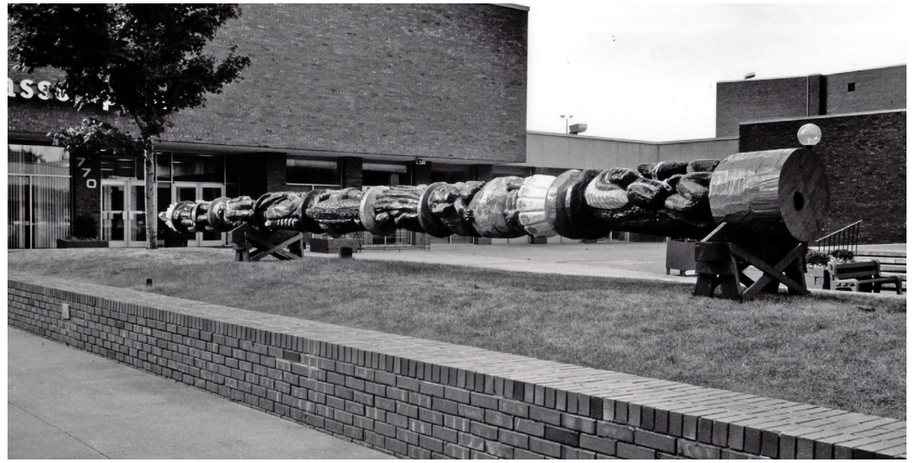
Henry C. Smith at work, n.d.



Henry C. Smith,
hand-painted promotional sign, n.d.



Henry C. Smith,
Fierce Rabbit, c. 1990,
carved and painted wood,
Photo Credit: Gallery 78



Henry C. Smith,
Pole of Life, 1992,
carved and painted
wood. Presented at
Assumption Place,
Moncton,
New Brunswick.
Photo: Bob McLean

many animal subjects. For example, the smooth, flowing lines of his fox sculptures effectively evoke the agile movement and alertness of the creature.

He told me that he was creating the Garden of Eden, a popular archetypal theme in vernacular art that can be interpreted as a fantasy wish-fulfillment, a desire to return to an earthly paradise, a place of harmony and innocence.

Alas, Henry's peaceable kingdom met harsh reality when he learned that three of his carvings (a skunk, a frog and a raccoon) started appearing in concrete form on other people's lawns across Canada. In response, he devised a plan to catch the thief red-handed. I asked him what he had in mind, and he explained that he was going to set a trap by carving a leaping salmon. Curious, I asked, "Why a leaping salmon?" He replied, "Atlantic salmon fly-fishing is popular in New Brunswick. The thief won't be able to resist the bait."

Henry's plan proved effective. Shortly after he had carved the fish and marked it with his signature, a suspicious-looking collector purchased it. He informed the police, who subsequently investigated the purchaser, seizing 400 tons of concrete lawn ornaments from a nearby emporium. Henry was awarded small compensation but became actively involved in learning about Canada's copyright laws, proclaiming: "I want to prove to the world what these people are doing to the poor artist." W5, a Canadian news program, covered the story of his plight, but woefully, Henry passed away on April 7, 1996, before his case could come to a satisfactory resolution.

Henry's most ambitious sculpture, *Pole of Life*, was carved from a 47-foot-long white pine log in 1992 in honour of both his Indigenous heritage and Canada's 125th birthday. That same year, I was co-curator with Luc Charette of IMPACT: Public Installations by Artists of Atlantic Canada, presented in Moncton in conjunction with the Annual General Meeting of the Association of National Non-Profit Artists' Centres and a national conference on the theme of "Contemporary Arts in Canada at the End of the Twentieth Century." *Pole of Life*, was showcased alongside the work of over 50 contemporary artists from the Atlantic. Henry's work attracted over 4,000 visitors, was highlighted as representing the conference in *L'Acadie Nouvelle*, New Brunswick's only French-language daily newspaper, and given a full-page spread in the *King's County Record*.

Henry described *Pole of Life* as "representing my New Brunswick people." Having taken 1,709 hours to create, it comprised ten thematic sections: First Nations, children, the environment, government, homesteads, lumbering, fishing, mining, anti-racism, and peace, symbolized by a dove at the very top of the sculpture. Like his *Garden of Eden*, the strength of *Pole of Life* was its skillful blend of naturalism and stylization and of whimsy and introspection. The vividly painted exaggerated figures and symbolic gestures merged storytelling with artistic expression, testifying to the artist's consummate craftsmanship and deep connection to the medium of wood for communicating his beliefs, values and cultural identity.

Our intention in including Henry's work in IMPACT was to challenge prevailing perceptions of folk art as a second-class citizen of the arts. Prompted by the positive public response to *Pole of Life*, he proposed that the City of Saint John acquire it. According to the minutes of its meeting of February 22, 1993, Common Council thanked the artist for his offer and then advised that "the City of Saint John is not in a position to purchase the *Pole of Life*."

Disappointed, but undeterred, Henry initiated a $25,000 fundraiser towards finding a permanent home for *Pole of Life* and invited the public to both contribute and submit suggestions for where it should be installed. In the end, he erected the sculpture on his own property. Regrettably, however, it went into disrepair following his death and was eventually destroyed by a severe storm.

In the 1990s, in my capacity as Director of Confederation Centre Art Gallery, I acquired Henry's *Adam and Eve and Serpent* (1991) for the gallery's permanent collection, and the sculpture was featured in both the gallery's newsletter *Encounters* and *ArtsAtlantic* magazine. I also recommended this work for inclusion in the monumental 1996 national survey exhibition *Welcome to Our World: Contemporary Canadian Folk Art* organized by the McMichael Canadian Art Collection.

Having achieved national attention for his distinctive artistic vision, Henry's obituary referred to him as "a famous folk artist." Although he created over 300 sculptures during his lifetime, there is very little public trace of them today. Alas, the enchantment and resplendence of his *Garden of Eden* and *Pole of Life* exist only in the memory of those who, like me, had the opportunity to experience them. ■





Henry C. Smith,
Two Foxes, c. 1990,
carved and painted wood,
Photo Credit: Gallery 78



Henry C. Smith,
Pole of Life, 1992,
carved and painted
wood

THE VISUAL ARTS SCENE IN MADAWASKA, NORTHWESTERN NEW BRUNSWICK

An Introduction

By Emilie Grace Lavoie

The Madawaska region of northwestern New Brunswick has long nurtured artistic growth within its community through a strong tradition of intergenerational knowledge-sharing and mentorship. At the centre of this practice are Dr. Paul Carmel Laporte, Claude Roussel, Claude Picard, Yvette Bisson, and Audrey Côté St-Onge. Each artist has made meaningful contributions, both cultivating their own careers and playing a vital role in developing the work of the generations that follow.

The period from 1960 to 1980 is a pivotal era, often regarded as the Acadian Renaissance. The 1960s initiated a significant moment for cultural representation among Francophone and Acadian communities in New Brunswick. Highlighting the contributions of key figures from Madawaska enriches the collective narrative and acknowledges the region's artistic legacy.

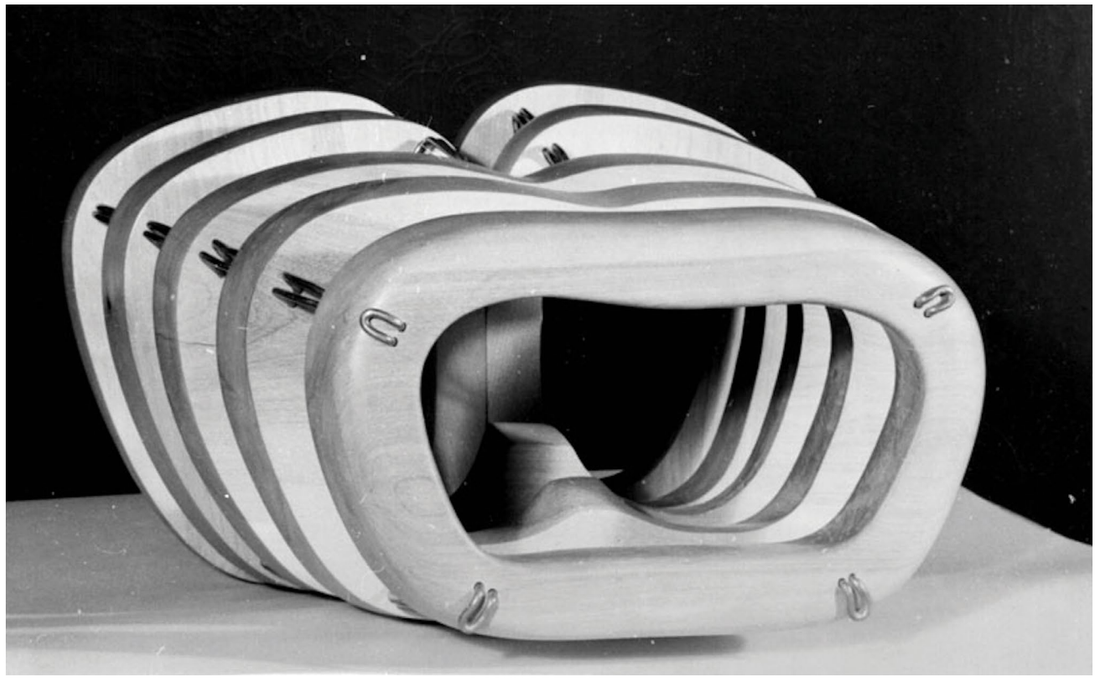
Born in Edmundston in 1930, Claude Roussel is a prominent figure in New Brunswick's Francophone and Acadian arts community, best known for founding the visual arts department at the Université de Moncton, as well as for his public sculptures. Roussel's artistic journey was influenced by Dr. Paul Carmel Laporte, a key figure in his education.

Dr. Paul Carmel Laporte, was born in 1885 in Verchères, Quebec.[1] After establishing a medical practice in the Madawaska region, he distinguished himself also as a businessman and a founding member of various institutions. For forty years, he volunteered as an arts educator, becoming one of the region's first visual arts instructors.

In 1944, during a visit to the Roussel family home, Dr. Laporte recognized Roussel's potential, and encouraged his pursuit of the arts, after admiring a wooden sculpture of a trout crafted by the young artist.[2] Although Roussel did not formally study under Dr. Laporte, their meeting inspired him to hone his artistic skills.

Another artist uplifted by Dr. Laporte is Claude Picard, born in Saint-Basile in 1932. At a young age, Picard gained national recognition for winning first place in a drawing contest in 1946, launched by the Robin Hood company.[3] The celebration of which not only showcased his talent but also reflected the creative energy prevalent in the region.

Dr. Laporte was instrumental in securing funding for Picard and Roussel's artistic endeavours through social clubs like the Lion's Club and the Richelieus. This support allowed Picard to travel to Europe, from 1956 to 1959, to refine his art in Florence and Rome. He became the first artist in the region to earn a living solely from his art, creating realistic paintings that often depicted themes of Acadian culture and deportation. In addition to his practice, Picard followed Dr. Laporte's example, contributing to the community by teaching drawing and painting classes, fostering the next generation of artists.



Yvette Bisson, *Cosmogénie Jumelée*, 1963, cherry wood and brass rods, 10 x 45 x 46 cm

Dr. Paul Carmel Laporte, 1955,
Collection of Fonds Studio Laporte,
Société historique du Madawaska, Edmundston

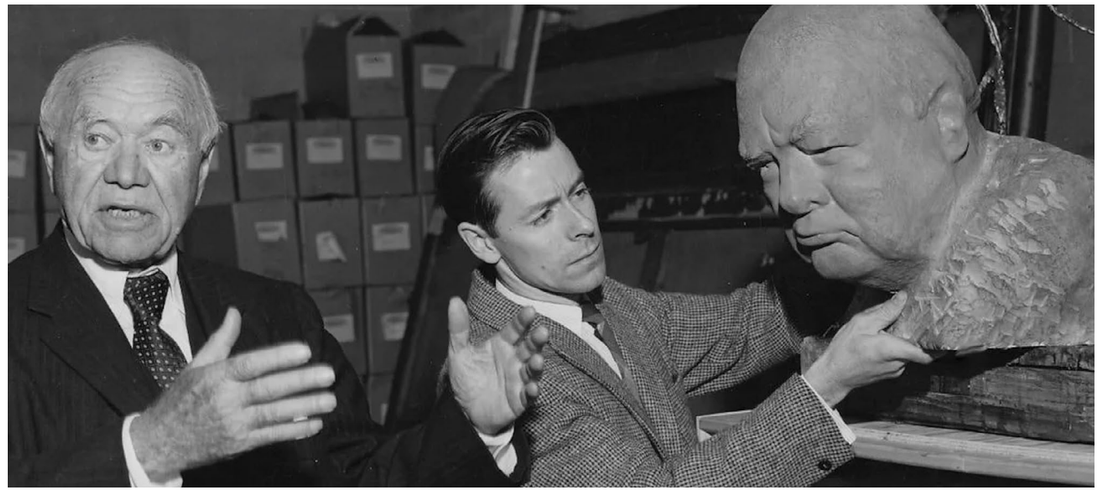




Claude Roussel with his father Denis Roussel, 1945,
holding *La Truite* (1944),
Collection of the Roussel Family



Claude Picard, 1947,
with representatives from
Robin Hood drawing competition,
Collection of Fonds Studio Laporte,
Société historique du Madawaska,
Edmundston



Lord Beaverbrook and Claude Roussel, 1960,
examining *Sir Winston Churchill* by Oscar Nemon, c. 1952,
Photo Credit: Harvey Studios

Roussel, after finishing high school, worked as an office boy at the Fraser pulp mill in Edmundston. In 1950, a company executive took him to Montreal to present his sculptural work to the École des Beaux-Arts for admission, and Dr. Laporte sought funding to enable him to pursue a fine arts education. Upon completing his fine arts studies, Roussel returned to Edmundston with aspirations of establishing a career and starting a family. He taught art at various grade-levels in the region's public schools until a conflict with the school board resulted in the removal of art, music, and physical education from the curriculum—a gap that continues to affect arts education today. After losing his job, Roussel considered various options, including a return to Quebec, but instead was recruited by Lord Beaverbrook to be curator at the art gallery. As curator, he worked to create a vital link between the institution and Acadian culture, providing French Canadian artists with a sense of belonging.

In the late 1950s, Roussel met Father Clément Cormier (academic and founding rector of the Université de Moncton) and initiated discussions around establishing an artist-in-residence program, like the one at the University of New Brunswick. This dialogue led to Roussel's departure from the Beaverbrook Art Gallery and his relocation to Moncton, where he helped establish the visual arts department at the Université de Moncton in 1963. This initiative became a platform for generations of francophone and acadian artists to express themselves visually.

In the 1940s, two academic institutions were founded in Madawaska: Collège Saint-Louis for boys and Collège Maillet for girls. The late 1950s and early 1960s saw significant changes under the government of Louis J. Robichaud, particularly with his "Equal Opportunity Program," which affected the fate of these colleges. Eventually, Collège Saint-Louis and Collège Maillet merged, becoming Collège Saint-Louis Maillet, which transformed into the Centre Universitaire Saint-Louis Maillet in the 1970s, now part of Université de Moncton, Campus d'Edmundston. This transition revitalised arts education in the region with the creation of a visual arts department, alongside the opening of Cité des Jeunes A.-M.-Sormany comprehensive high school in 1972.

At the Centre Universitaire Saint-Louis Maillet, art instructors George Wizier and Roland Breucker, both from Belgium, primarily taught drawing and painting, while Yvette Bisson took on the role of teaching sculpture from the 1970s until the 2000s.

Born in Montreal in 1926, Bisson studied at the École des beaux-arts de Montréal from 1942 to 1947. She worked in Quebec throughout the 1950s and 1960s, gaining recognition and contributing public artworks displayed in venues like the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts and the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal. The artistic milieu of the time was challenging for women, who were underrepresented. For Bisson, moving to Edmundston provided opportunities for freedom and creativity, allowing her to teach full-time while producing art.



Father Clément Cormier, Jean-Paul Morisset (Director of Field Services at the National Gallery of Canada), and Claude Roussel, 1965, at the opening of *Sélection 65*, Collection of Université de Moncton



Claude Picard teaching, 1961, Collection of Fonds Studio Laporte, Société historique du Madawaska, Edmundston.



Yvette Bisson, 1965, Collection of Fonds Gabriel Desmarais, Photo Credit: Gabriel Desmarais

1 *Les sculpteurs : artisans de reliefs, Vignettes historiques*, Toucher du bois, accessed August 27, 2025, https://www.toucherdubois.ca/tdb/vignette.php?vignette=8&page=1&lang=fr&item=92
2 Interview with Claude Roussel, May 18, 2021
3 *Claude Picard : créateur d'émotions, Vignettes historiques*, Toucher du bois, accessed August 27, 2025, https://www.toucherdubois.ca/tdb/vignette.php?lang=fr&vignette=6

Both the arrival of Yvette Bisson at the university level and the new Cité des Jeunes A.-M.-Sormany high school, in 1972, brought artistic development expertise into the region's classroom, as well as numerous artistic initiatives into the wider community. Audrey Côté St-Onge contributed significantly to this era of community cultural development with her teaching throughout the 1940s. Born in 1922 in Rivière-Verte, she co-founded the Madawaska-Victoria Music Festival in 1949, and, in 1975, the creation of the Association Culturelle du Haut-Saint-Jean marked a new chapter in her cultural initiatives. Serving as president for nearly thirty years, she focused on promoting the arts and providing professional opportunities for emerging artists. The association presented diverse performances in music, theatre, dance, and literature, forming a collective of women dedicated to transforming the cultural landscape.

Côté St-Onge enriched her artistic training through studies with renowned figures like Ted Campbell and Pegi Nicol Macleod in the 1940s, Georges Widiez in the 1960s, and Yvette Bisson in the 1980s, as well as attending painting workshops with Molly Lamb Bobak and Roméo Savoie.

Through her work with the Association Culturelle du Haut-Saint-Jean, Côté St-Onge dedicated herself to helping emerging artists transition to professional status, mobilizing essential resources for their projects. Her commitment established a supportive network that nurtures the local arts scene.

Through their work, these key figures paved the way for a new generation of artists such as Luc A. Charette, who, in addition to his own practice, was director of the Galerie d'art de l'Université de Moncton. Charette's frequent collaborator Jacques Martin, who was also a sculpture professor at the Centre Universitaire Saint Louis-Maillet, and Brigitte Clavette, a Sadiye Bronfman Award-winning artist and long-time Studio Head of the Jewellery/ Metal Arts Program at NBCCD, were also influenced and encouraged by Audrey Côté St-Onge and the art teachers at Polyvalente A.-M.-Sormany. Having learned by the example of their predecessors, each of these next-generation artists, with roots in the Madawaska region, actively nurtures the creative practices and careers of those who will follow—and so the cycle continues.



Mathieu Léger, *PERFform 23*, 2023, Galerie Sans Nom, Photo Credit: Annie France Noël

A SECRET THIRD THING

Cultural Venues as Third Places in New Brunswick

By Lindsay Jacquard

If home and work occupy the first and second places in our lives, what takes the third spot on the podium? Where can we go to gather, to relax, to find community and comfort? Third places are our public, informal spaces—but in the decades since the term was coined, we've lost many of our in-person third places to commercialization. However, this can be an opportunity to invest in our cultural venues, turning them into the kinds of community hubs that New Brunswick needs for a culturally rich, socially healthy future.

In his 1989 book, *The Great Good Place*, Ray Oldenburg introduced the term third place, and identified eight important qualities: a neutral ground with no obligation to be there, a levelling place free of socioeconomic barriers, chatting is a main activity, accessibility and accommodation, having "regulars," a low profile that is neither snobby nor elitist, a playful mood, and being a home away from home.

In other words, a third place brings friends together like a concert hall does; it welcomes and accommodates like an arts centre; it provokes conversation like a gallery. When it comes to building community, New Brunswick's cultural venues are welcoming us with arms wide open.

In its 2023 research findings, "Culture is made to share," Hill Strategies identified community engagement as a key area of strength among New Brunswick's arts and culture venues. Most venues surveyed had been ramping up their community engagement with activities like artist talks, workshops, and outreach. These community-rooted practices are essential for fostering connection and conversation. Almost all cultural venues collaborated with other local groups like schools and newcomer organizations, which demonstrates their commitment to being open spaces of knowledge and cultural sharing for all walks of life. Most importantly, cultural venues believed they had a key role in enhancing community wellbeing and supporting intercultural exchange and dialogue.

Nonprofit organizations can struggle with unstable funding sources; however, in this situation the not-for-profit nature of most New Brunswick cultural venues was a boon. Driven by their missions, they were able to focus on creating meaning and impact rather than generating profits—a troublesome issue when it comes to third places.

Though a for-profit business like a cafe or bar can provide a meaningful space for connection and conversation, occupants are customers first and foremost. More and more, commercialized places are using the trappings of third places to drive sales, overtaking true third places entirely. The commercial co-opting of third place theory is often a business tactic rather than long-term investment in community, but there are exceptions to this case.

Haven Music Hall's positioning as a third place is inherently different from other cultural venues, but it's



Linda Rae Dornan, *PERFform 23*, 2023, Galerie Sans Nom, Photo Credit: Annie France Noël

no less valuable to the community. A multi-hyphenate locale in Saint John, operating as a for-profit venue, cafe, and bar, it's also a social enterprise—a business designed to achieve social objectives as its primary purpose, beyond maximizing profits. Haven's mission to provide an inclusive environment for both artists and audiences is key to its role as a third place in the Saint John music scene. With weekly events and performances, and recurring programming like trivia and karaoke, Haven can build rapport with repeat customers who become their regulars. Together, they create a welcoming environment that establishes Haven as a third place.

Having access to third places is important for individual wellbeing, but it's also good for the health of the community. They are the heart, thrumming with life, and they serve as an anchor for social vitality and creative pursuits. The Charlotte Street Arts Centre occupies such a place in the Fredericton arts community. It provides rental spaces for artists, arts organizations, and entrepreneurs in arts, culture, and wellness, but it's more than a dispassionate mall full of vendors—it's a community hub. All together under one roof, you can find a variety of studios, services, and professionals in creative symbiosis. At the core of the Charlotte Street Arts Centre, and the keystone to its success as a third place, is ArtReach. Through this program, it provides barrier-free programming to welcome those who wouldn't otherwise have access to the arts. In this way, it can be the levelling place that Oldenburg describes.

A third place is like a town square, intersecting cultures and communities for common communion. Moncton's Galerie Sans Nom is an artist-run centre, and a pillar in the Acadian cultural ecosystem as well as the broader network of francophone artist-run centres outside Quebec. Though it operates in French, it also translates many communications to English and takes a bilingual approach to its public events, stoking conversation in both official languages. One of Galerie Sans Nom's key values is to encourage social engagement and commentary. It approaches this mission with playfulness and curiosity, and their programming is equally explorative. Biennially, it presents PERFform, a provincial performance art tour organized by its members Mathieu Léger and Linda Rae Dornan, and RE:FLUX, an experimental music and sound art festival, both of which are sure to intrigue and excite audiences. The gallery itself is free to the public, removing the financial barrier between the community and the artworks within and underscoring that third places should be for anyone and everyone.

We each deserve a third place in our lives, and some of the very best are right around the corner—our local theatres, museums, galleries, and social enterprises are waiting to energize and inspire us. By supporting cultural venues such as these, we're developing spaces in our community that allow for the most needed reprieve from our day-to-day lives. In following the link between culture, community, and place, we are led to a better quality of life for New Brunswickers.



Charlotte Street Arts Centre, *Artreach*, Girls+ Rock Camp, Photo Credit: Christina Thomsom



Charlotte Street Arts Centre, *Artreach*, Afro Hip-Hop Dance Class, Photo Credit: Christina Thomson



Charlotte Street Arts Centre, *Artreach*, Fest Forward, Photo Credit: McKenzie Power

SIXTH SENSE

A Legacy of Collaboration in New Brunswick Metal Art

By Maegen Black

Metal Six was born before it was conceived. What began in 2018 as a standalone exhibition at the George Fry Gallery featuring staff and faculty of the New Brunswick College of Craft and Design's jewellery and metal arts program became the eponymous launch of an arts collective who have launched five exhibitions over seven years.

Adopting the Metal Six moniker captured the kismet of proximity between Kristen Bishop, Brigitte Clavette, Kristyn Cooper, Audrée H.St-Amour, Kristianne Levesque, and Erica Stanley and reframed it with intentionality. This troupe of creatives has been bonded ever since, positively impacting the careers of these talented and imaginative metalsmiths.

As the elder smith of the Metal Six collective, Clavette rallies the members, pushing them forward. Having benefitted from her own experience within The Metal Collective, a national group under the guidance of the formidable master silversmith Lois Etherington Betteridge, Clavette is committed to continuing the work of her mentors passing skills down through an unbroken line of metal artists' hearts and hands. This legacy honours the teachers and the leaders who came before in a continuum of craft practice that uplifts artists by creating together as peers.

In this vein, the Metal Six collective shares ideas, critiques work in progress, and experiments with technical challenges—all contributing to the ongoing growth of each member's practice. This safe space to share ideas is a rarity. It is a place to challenge one another and to deliberate technical approaches with the knowledge that each voice is equally valued. Demanding and rigorous critique between professionals who admire and respect each other is a recipe for success.

While the group's first exhibition, *Metal Six*, was a curated selection of their ongoing work, subsequent shows featured new works, pushing the artistic development of its members further, expediting the adoption of new techniques and subject matter. Their invitational exhibition, *Her Metal* (2019) at the Beaverbrook Art Gallery required new creations, each made in response to selected works from the gallery's permanent collection. *Shorelines* (2022) at Sunbury Shores Arts and Nature Centre shifted their inspiration outdoors, to New Brunswick's coastal landscape. More recent shows such as *Pinned* (2023) and the upcoming *Spooned* (2025) focus on a particular type of object. These thematic progressions are firm enough to drive cohesive exhibitions yet loose enough for the members to tease out new directions.

Metal Six is a testing ground to pilot new works, even for its most prominent member. Clavette's gritty, macabre tableaus debuted within the collective's exhibitions before reaching national and international



Brigitte Clavette,
Untitled Knives, 2013,
sterling silver, steel, found object,
and watercolour on paper on wood,
15 cm (each)
Private collection

acclaim amongst audiences in Ottawa, London, and beyond. She uses her position generously to elevate the skills of others by sharing her knowledge, insight, and experience. It is in the good company she keeps that the medium of metalsmithing continues to grow within the region's contemporary arts scene.

Each member of the Metal Six collective was once a student of Clavette's. Their individual connections began in this top-down fashion, transferring knowledge from professor to pupil. These relationships matured over time, transforming into colleagues, peers, and friends. Combined, the collective brings together over 120 years of experience, an impressive body of knowledge in a specialized field, all pointed toward the creation of work that is technically sound and conceptually beguiling.

The collective's steady commitment to creating new work buoys the artistic opportunities of its members. A recent example is Erica Stanley's first solo show, *Brink of Extinction*, hosted by the Saint John Arts Centre in 2024. First developed as a contribution to the collective's activities, this collection of sculptural works was refined through a residency at Fundy National Park during Craft NB's 2022-2023 *Beneath the Surface* program. The consistency of the collective's activity provided accountability and support to see this vision through, with Stanley parlaying these initial works into a full solo exhibition highlighting the plight of the Atlantic Right Whale. Shaped by Metal Six's support, her work is a haunting and compelling call to honour and protect these endangered creatures, appallingly decimated by climate change and human action.

The collective provides not only the opportunity for career advancement, but incubates and nourishes aesthetic development as well. Both Audrée H.St-Amour and Kristyn Cooper have expanded their repertoire through acts of joyful experimentation. By removing the constraints of custom design work and focusing primarily on sculptural exploration unfettered by market trends, Metal Six permits members the freedom to create for no audience but themselves; yet this approach has also drawn in new viewers. H.St-Amour's abstractions collage natural and artificial materials together in delirious harmony, remodelling flotsam and jetsam into a distortion of what is considered 'precious'.

Cooper's forays into small-scale hollowware mark a departure from her earlier work, which consisted of pristine lockets and heirloom jewellery deeply rooted in personal experience and the beauty of wearable art. These new explorations have culminated in a congregation of curiosities, unfamiliar in form or shape. In many cases her materials are unrecognizable as metal to the untrained eye. Using gesso-coated copper and pigments, she stretches the boundaries of metalsmithing. It is an approach that alludes to Cooper's reverence for humble materials, placing "value on things that have feeling and meaning," rather than the opulence of pristinely polished precious metals.



Kristianne Levesque,
I Am, 2018,
sterling silver, copper, brass, agate,
Photo Credit: Drew Gilbert



Erica Stanley,
Echo, Echo, Echo, 2019,
copper, enamel paint,
91.44 x 304.8 cm
Installed at The Beaverbrook Art Gallery
alongside *Echo* by Joseph Drapelle, 1980

Kristen Bishop and Kristianne Levesque round out the collective as the two members who balance full-time careers outside of the arts in addition to producing distinctive high-quality work. Though their output is more infrequent, it is no less valuable or intriguing. Bishop credits the collective with keeping her engaged despite the many distractions of a career beyond the arts, stating, "I am always creating in my head. I have many ideas. I love building and creating. I need more of it in my life. It is really important as to who I am."

Both artists lean toward a more sombre tone in their work. Levesque's sense of devotion to New Brunswick's biodiversity is evident in the gamut of symbolism she employs, from the overbearing power of a tidal wave to the delicate feathers of a bird's wing. Stylistically quite different, Bishop's deeply tactile work also references the strength and presence of the natural world. Her rough, raw textures and surface treatments defy expectation, honouring and elevating the wood, stone, and minerals of the rugged coastal landscapes of Atlantic Canada.

Metalsmithing is no simple feat. It takes years of practice, access to extensive equipment and the kind of technical coordination that only comes with a deep understanding of the material. There are no shortcuts, as this art form requires keen knowledge and familiarity to shape a substance that can only be manipulated with nuanced force; it takes precision, patience, practical knowledge, and conceptual prowess.

There is an undeniable power within a group of talented women creating unconventional, expressive bodies of work; theirs is a vital ecosystem within the arts, and society at large. The collective artistic empowerment shared amongst these passionate, industrious women is innovative and rare—more precious the materials they employ. In a world that purports to admire women, all the while continuing to devalue and dismiss their experience, this dynamic collective unapologetically elevates one another, making space for themselves, each other, and those who follow in their footsteps.



Audrée H. St-Amour,
Memory Series 1-6, 2022-2023,
sterling silver, copper, gemstones,
powder coating, natural and found materials,
Photo Credit: Drew Gilbert



Kristyn Cooper,
Orb Curious & Tower, 2021,
copper, gesso, pigment, pearls,
various sizes
(4.4 - 8.3 cm
in height)
Photo Credit:
Drew Gilbert



Kristin Bishop,
Treasure #1, 2021,
silver, brass, wood,
29.8 x 17.7 cm
Photo Credit:
Drew Gilbert

HEARTS ON FIRE

The Transformational Power of Woodfiring Ceramics

By Alison Gayton



Ghita Levin,
Woodfired Birds, 2023,
stoneware, wood ash,
10.16 x 8.89 cm

One of the many things that can go wrong with ceramics is that they will explode if fired too quickly. Computer kilns use conductive coils set in grooves through soft brick walls which heat up incrementally with the magic of electricity. “Set it and forget it” features have reduced the struggle for vitrification to one of affordability and space alone.

Comparatively, the ancient tradition of woodfiring is grueling work. It takes collaboration and has sustained communities of ceramists for thousands of years and continues to encourage togetherness among those who could easily fire their ceramics in an electric kiln alone in their basement. In contrast to the solitude and predictability of electric firing, at the end of a woodfiring, those involved have overcome so many hazardous scenarios together that they are deeply grateful to one another.

Ghita is a potter based in the estuary bogs of Baie Verte, New Brunswick, about 20 minutes from Suzanne Babineau, an Acadian potter based on the coast, in Cap Pelé. Ghita started making pottery as a highschooler in Ottawa in 1971; Suzanne, in 1999. In 2020, they designed and built the anagama we fire today, Ghita’s fifth woodfired kiln. An anagama is a single chamber outdoor, high temperature kiln, originally designed in Japan. Kilns vary in size according to the capacity of the community. Japanese dragon kilns can be up to 300 ft long, snaking up the side of a mountain, and may take a week for a team to woodfire.



Alison Gayton,
Woodfired Vase, 2023,
10.16 x 6.35 cm,
porcelain, wood ash



Ghita Levin,
Woodfired Pitcher, 2022,
stoneware, wood ash,
20.32 x 12.7cm



Suzanne and Jen stoking the
kiln at peak temperature, 2024
Photo Credit: Alison Gayton



Gita and Suzanne waiting against the heat to unload the kiln, 2023,
Photo Credit: Alison Gayton

“...I am the same person, but I look at things differently. I always feel like I am just scratching the surface.”

At 15ft, Ghita’s anagama is her smallest kiln yet. When she started woodfiring in the ‘80s it was a struggle to fire her 25ft anagama on her own. Although she had a variety of helpers come and go, she says that “Suzanne arrived by 2006 and was steady.” For Ghita, Woodfiring is a bonding experience between people, as fortifying for a relationship as a road trip. In 2023, we started firing together as part of a mentorship through artsnb and ArtsLink NB, and I have loved her work since I started in clay at the turn of the century.

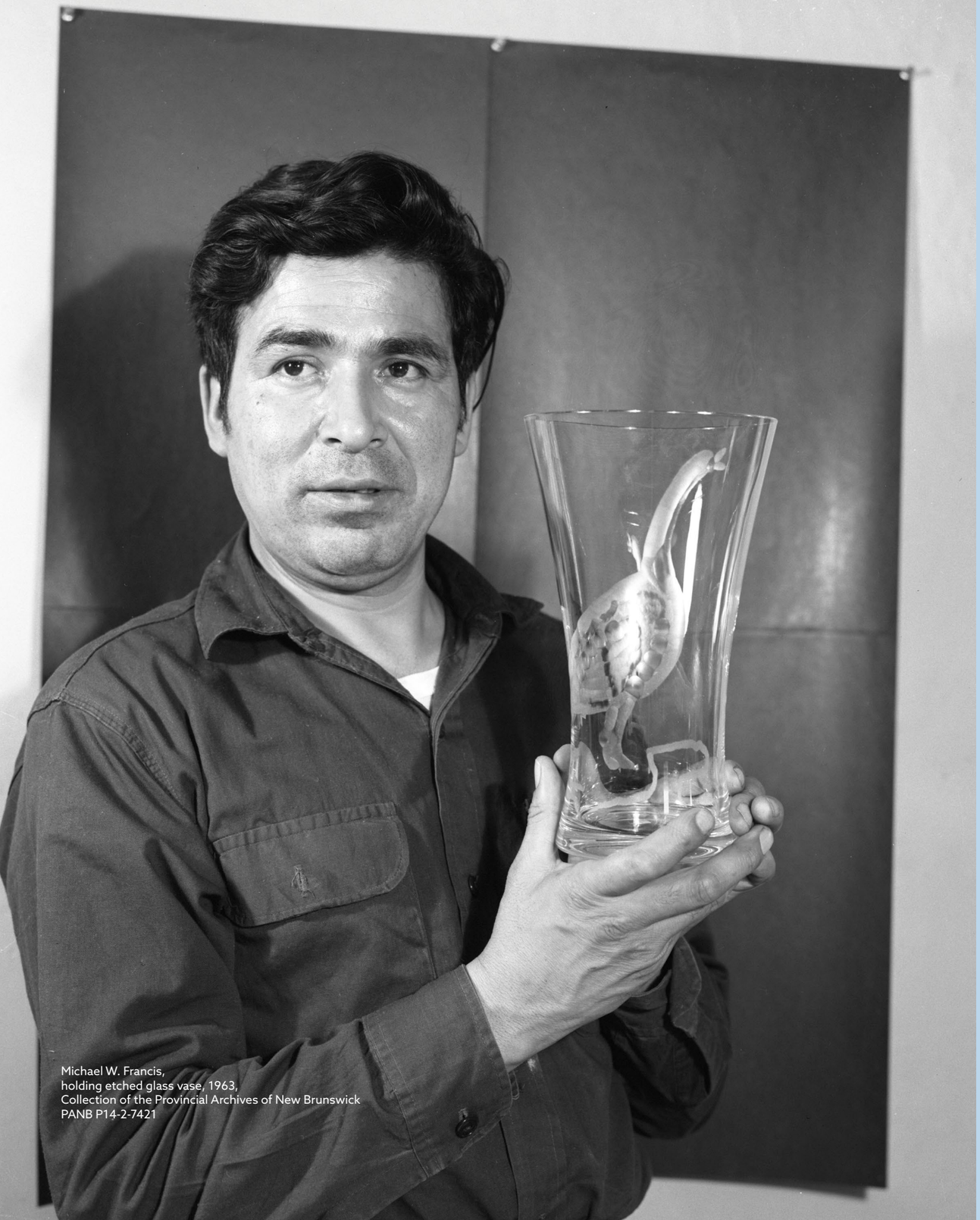
Ghita’s work in woodfired clay is geological transformation made visible and tactile. In appearance, each piece is swept with delicious directional drifts of glassy slate snow, melting into amber alongside bare flashes of gold. Suzanne says, and I agree, that firing and working with Ghita is a grounding experience. “She brings such a zen calm with wisdom in clay,” Suzanne says of Ghita and “her humility is so welcoming.” Suzanne, who led our firing in May 2024, reminisces about her own growth, commenting “the firings are automatic now, but looking back, I’ve learned so much; I am the same person, but I look at things differently. I always feel like I am just scratching the surface.”

A firing always starts with us trying not to stoke too fast through the first 600 °C, because we know things that are fired too quickly explode. By the peak of the firing, around 1300 °C—when fire starts blasting out of every hole, especially the chimney, and the shrieking, sizzling crackles calm to a howl—it is time to stoke.

Wearing long sleeves with bulky fire-proof gloves, steel-toed boots, and various bandanas, the stoker removes two half-glowing red stoke hole bricks, eyes wincing at the heat suddenly looking back at them. Grabbing the iron, they stir up the effervescent and sintering 4ft bed of coals, while another person passes the stoker 3ft spruce sticks, two at a time, about seven times over. To maximize temperature, the radiant roaring firebox needs a full volume of fresh wood. This causes dark smoke to blow back at the stoker, oxygen-starved and reeking of carbon monoxide, it claws at the stoker’s hand. The firing takes place outside through an entire night and into the next day. It’s done in 8-hour shifts, in between which participants can take a little rest in the off-grid cabin.

Dee Olinglass, a fellow mentee, joined us in May 2024 for her first woodfiring. “The process itself is a part of the value I get from the work,” Dee said of the experience. Suzanne described the value of experience well when she said, “We are all alone in our caves working when we come out to share with people who actually care about the niche things that we take so seriously.” Woodfiring together advances ceramics—the entire community—by sharing the flame.

Embedded in the work of these two master ceramicists, in their minds and their hearts, is the transformational power of woodfiring. By inviting people in, they sustain a future for New Brunswick ceramics. And, in sharing the knowledge of how to fire without electricity, Suzanne and Ghita are also securing a future for ceramics to outlast the grid, while transforming the community in the process.



Michael W. Francis,
holding etched glass vase, 1963,
Collection of the Provincial Archives of New Brunswick
PANB P14-2-7421

PERSONAL FREEDOM OVER INSTITUTIONAL OPPRESSION

Mi'kmaq Artist Michael William Francis

By Starlit Simon

Michael W. Francis was a brother to my Mi'kiju (grandmother) and my beloved great uncle. He was born in 1923 on the beaches of what was later established by colonial Canada as Kouchibouguac National Park in 1969. They grew up living in the woods, on beaches, islands, and along train tracks in camps made by their father and grandfather. Mike's father and grandfather also hunted, trapped, fished, and harvested foods and medicines. A freedom and mobility that would eventually end when Mike and his siblings were taken to Shubenacadie residential school in Nova Scotia.

Transcripts of Mike's reflections express that while his family grew up underprivileged and sometimes neglected, they had their personal, cultural, and linguistic freedom up until the age of 12.[1] From then until he was 16, Mike experienced an institutional oppression at residential school that left him and fellow students feeling like shells and statues.[2]

Mike's art career started as a bargaining tool in residential school. The scrutiny and harshness would ease up if he entertained the classroom by drawing Disney characters on the chalkboard. It was art in exchange for respect, a sliver of kindness in a harsh environment.

Later in life, and across Canada, his art brought him significant recognition. His work is included in research documents, films, CDs, books, and galleries; he is regularly referred to as a Mi'kmaq artist, musician, and storyteller from Elsipogtog First Nation (formerly Big Cove).[3] In particular, he found artistic notoriety in the 60s through the Micmac Indian Craftsmen operation.[4]

His artwork represented the Mi'kmaq legends that he and his siblings grew up learning from their grandfather's storytelling.[5] These legends often explained the landscape and unique qualities of Mi'kma'ki (the land of the Mi'kmaq) and held cultural, linguistic, moral, and metaphysical significance, offering clarity into Mi'kmaq worldviews.

His illustrations of Mi'kmaq legends were silkscreened onto hasti-notes and calendars, etched into porcelain and glass, and woven into tapestries. Mike would hold art lessons and workshops at the Micmac Indian Craftsmen operation in Big Cove, where community members helped manufacture fine crafts emblazoned with his designs; these works were then distributed across North America.[6]

This innovative artistic production ran between 1962 and 1967 and was a source of long overdue cultural awareness and celebration. However, the Shubenacadie Residential School that Mike and his siblings had attended was still functioning[7] and the Indian Day School in Big Cove was also still in operation.[8] Bans on potlaches had been lifted in 1951[9] and the right to vote for First Nations people in Canada had only transpired in 1960.[10]



Michael W. Francis,
The Legend of Gloosecap's Departure, 1963,
silkscreened hasti-note,
10 x13 cm
Collection of the Provincial Archives of New Brunswick
PANB MC1254-MS4-E



Michael W. Francis,
presenting his artworks at NB Craftsmen's Council exhibition, 1963,
Collection of the Provincial Archives of New Brunswick
PANB P115-5820

"His work reflects the environment in which he grew up and the stories and legends told by his grandfather and other elders..."

The socio-political landscape for Indigenous people was beginning to improve, and yet things were easily set back. In 1967, the government pulled support for the Micmac Indian Craftsmen operation, and a fire soon after sealed its fate in closing for good. The freedom of cultural expression that had been established and recognized across the nation would come to a halt and become only a fond memory for the community. That is, until the recent revival of artifacts coined "Wabanaki Modern," which included an exhibition, book, and film in 2022.

While Mike was multitalented, at times he insulated his skills from the Western art world. I suspect he wanted to avoid its elitism and pretension, and desired to distance himself from earlier experiences of using his artistic talent to entertain others while at residential school. He was driven by peace and freedom, which he prioritized over a presence within the art industry. Even after gaining national recognition for his work, he remained true to his values and was comfortable declining invitations and turning down events that would honour him and his work. On one such occasion, he matter-of-factly explained: "I can't go to meet the Queen. I don't want to meet the Queen anyway. I just keep away from her."[11]

Mike's story is one of personal freedom and resistance to institutional oppression by colonial Canada. From his birthplace being turned into a national park to the restrictions placed on Indigenous people through the Indian Act, and the systemic limitations of economic growth and prosperity for people on reserve, he witnessed many injustices.

Even still, Mike would stress that his life was not unique, and that many Mi'kmaq had gone through similar hard times. His community was dear to him, and he continued to teach art and tell stories within the community, and with researcher Franziska Von Rosen, who met him where he was at, whether it was setting up a camp on a remote island called Ekta'nuk, or at his kitchen table with his dog Shep at his feet and a fresh tin of tobacco by his side.[12]

"His work reflects the environment in which he grew up and the stories and legends told by his grandfather and other elders," said Von Rosen. "But again, Mike emphasizes that he did not want to be confined, not by the reserve and not even by art. Personal freedom and mobility were more important than public recognition and financial success." ■

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11 Rosen, F. v. (1993).
12 Rosen, F. v. (Director). (1991). *River of Fire* [Motion Picture].



Michael W. Francis, *Glooscap's Summer Home – PEI*, 1963, gouache on paper, 38 x 56 cm.
Collection of the New Brunswick Museum 1980.62.7.2.

ALL OF THE ARTISTS I KNEW WERE OLD

By Victoria Hutt

Rachel MacDonald[1] is the first artist I remember meeting. She was a retired nurse, and my dad, an electrician, was at her house to fix something; I was tagging along. Her face was all smile and her white hair looked soft. But it is her living room I can still walk through in my mind. It was a garden—of flowers on watercolour paper. They were hanging framed on the walls, leaning on chairs, in stacks of paper on tables between paintbrushes.

I had the luck of being raised by parents who have artists' souls. It was expressed in ways deemed appropriately industrious, characteristic values developed through generations of poor Irish and Danish immigrants that have shaped our communities and established fine craft as a cultural legacy of rural New Brunswick. We fell asleep to my mom practicing piano; she collected musicals, sewed and knit for us, and refinished furniture. My father was always designing well-crafted solutions for the project of the day. He sang deeply and beautifully, and suggested ideas like portraits in Old Quebec.

The aging artist who painted our portraits seemed like he belonged to the city. I imagined he lived in a fancy apartment with a window that opened over the street and drank his morning coffee at sidewalk cafe tables. I wonder now if he could afford to live in the city. Did he bus in from a cheaper outskirt? Did he paint tourists on days off from his real job?

I never thought about it at the time, why artists were all gray haired. Usually retirees, stay-at-home moms whose kids were grown, or men who had time to tinker because someone else made supper. There were a few exceptions, but most held other jobs and were artists secondarily—creatives when time and life permitted.

Many were teachers at Carleton North High School. An English teacher, Weldon Matthews wrote and directed community theatre.[2] Peter McLaughlin, the music teacher, who *was* the music department. He hummed when he walked, and walked like he might break into conducting a band at any moment.[3] My art teacher, Susan Galbraith, who suggested I go to NSCAD; I didn't know what NSCAD was.

Decades later, I heard writer and activist Ann Brennan[4] recount lying down in the woods in despair, struggling with her role as a woman and mother of six. I had just read Mary Pratt's biography, whose trajectory mirrored Ann's path of homemaking; raising children—and husbands—before being able to make time for her art practice. Art was something squeezed into the margins between life and work, a luxury only possible through privilege or sacrifice.

Ann has built walking trails, a stone circle, and labyrinth on her property in Johnville, north of Florenceville-Bristol. (The irony of bringing stones back to a field that generations of family had worked to clear was not lost



Rachel MacDonald,
Daisies, 2023,
watercolour



Jenna Ross,
pottery wheel demonstration, 2024
Florenceville-Bristol market



Jenna Ross,
Wheelthrown Stoneware Vase,
2002,
ceramic



Rachel MacDonald,
Cherry Blossoms, 2023,
watercolour



Portrait of Ann Brennan,
writer, 2024

"...That is what everyone wants. Everyone deserves their story told."

on her farmer husband, but his love and support for her reigned.) The stone circle pattern reflects the circle of Venus, symbolizing love and honoring expressions of creativity, and the labyrinth is an ancient symbol of wholeness, a meandering but purposeful path, representing a journey to our center and back into the world. As I walked behind Ann in her stone circle, I realized I was literally walking in her footsteps, the footsteps of so many women. How were we—40 years later—still facing the same barriers?

Jenna Ross, 39, is breaking the mold by making a living as a full-time artist in rural Carleton County. She crafts wheel thrown and hand built functional pottery, and is integral to the River Art Centre[5] pottery program, leading a growing community of students. Even so, Jenna hesitates to call herself an artist, highlighting the pervasive barrier faced when claiming that identity. Jenna found her way to the wheel slowly, over several decades, learning from a handful of teachers through intermittent weekly classes, along with significant self-study. She recalls being inspired young, by watching a potter who would work in her parents' antique store. Like many artists, teaching and other gig opportunities are crucial for her finances; only the Christmas market season brings her close to the goal of full-time production work.

Jenna credits both the art centre's supportive community and a self-employment benefit program as crucial steppingstones for her career. Though not art-focused, the entrepreneurial kickstart program offers support during the initial business development phase, with acceptance based on business plan submissions. This program provided Jenna with minimum wage for a year, enabling her to take the risk of pursuing a dedicated artistic career.

The importance of community is not lost on Ann, either. To her, writing embodies community and connection. She sees her role as a writer to be curious about her story. She wants—needs—to get to know the story, to love the story. Writing it down and sharing it with community is an act of love. Ann shares, "When you sit with the story and people, you feel the contentment of belonging and sharing. That is what everyone wants. Everyone deserves their story told."

Ann's first published work, *The Real Klondike Kate*, was a biography of Katherine Ryan from Johnville, who became the first female member of the North-West Mounted Police Force. Ann fit in her research when she could, at archives when on business trips and over coffee with neighbours. It took her over 20 years to publish the book. She thought, "If Kate could make her journey, I can too."

Ann continues to inspire generations of artists from her farm, regularly hosting a circle of friends, colleagues and students who gather to speak to the future.

1 Rachel MacDonald, a founder of the annual Paint the Heartland festival in Hartland, Canada, is a watercolour artist known for her florals, birds, and nature themes.
2 Weldon Matthews chaired the New Brunswick Drama Festival, Canada's largest and oldest scholastic theatre festival, active since 1953.
3 Following retirement, Peter McLaughlin would continue nurturing music by launching Second Wind Music Centre. He co-coordinates Carleton Victoria Arts, a volunteer organization presenting touring performances since 1979.
4 Ann Brennan, B.A., M.A., D.Litt. Honorary Degree, University of New Brunswick, is a writer and activist.
5 The River Art Centre & Studios is an annex of the Andrew & Laura McCain Art Gallery, a non-profit, community Art Gallery operating on the banks of the Wolastoq River in Florenceville-Bristol, New Brunswick.



Alana Morouney,
Early Spring, 2022
8 varied kites,
new, recycled, and
hand dyed nylon fabric,
polyester thread, leather,
wooden dowels, wire,
dimensions variable,
installation view,
Struts Gallery
Photo Credit:
Lucas Morneau

RELINQUISHING CONTROL

The Key to Institutional Inclusion in the Arts

By Kate Giles

Inclusive programming has become expected of institutions like museums and galleries in order to correct the historical exclusion of artists from Western arts institutions, whether due to race, gender, ability, social class and so on. The same goes for diversifying art audiences through engagement opportunities. But does the tendency to separate and focus on specific identities inadvertently uphold exclusionary practices?

When interpreted through an institutional lens that is fundamentally defined by Western imperialism, EDI quotas can easily become a performative function. This risks overlooking complexity to the point of harm, by introducing a demand for hyper-visibility that recognizes identity categories through a set of observable criteria and requires disclosure as a condition of participation. To create genuinely diverse spaces, it's crucial to confront Western legacies as the forces behind both institutional exclusion and practices of inclusion.

Can institutions find a way to retain selection processes that elevate disenfranchised communities without relying on contextualization that requires and reinforces identity disclosure? Recognizing contradictions can be productive; it allows us to hold conflicting truths which is essential when working within a system we seek to reform.

Pushing for arts programming that prioritizes experience and experimentation over a resolved, finished product might not only provide a way forward in inclusion, but it could also expand access to the arts, especially in regions like New Brunswick, where rural isolation and limited arts education create barriers that position art as luxury rather than necessity. A practice of imperfection—recognizing the flaws in our systems, and understanding that we will make mistakes, too—can disrupt and expand the way we understand both art and inclusion, allowing us to learn from every attempt at connection.

The categorizations of able-bodied or disabled are too often expected to be observable, permanent states. It's true that positioning identities can facilitate an understanding of needs, culture, and identity, but paradoxically, the need to acknowledge vulnerable bodies by observable standards, also leads to omitting those whose difference is not sufficiently visible.[1] Visibility, in this sense, is determined by the predominant culture and becomes a criterion to the validity of an individuals' experience. Genuine inclusion will not be achieved until the fluidity and nuances of identity are not just accepted, not just written about in museum text or gallery catalogues but built into the methodologies of cultural institutions.

Initiatives like *Art in Mind*, a group exhibition organized annually by the Canadian Mental Health Association of New Brunswick (CMHANB) and hosted by Sunbury Shores Art Centre, are a step in the right direction, as they avoid a demand for visibility and disclosure. Though the show involves artists who have a relationship with disability, *Art in Mind* explores how artists address mental wellness through creativity rather than focusing



Melissa Gauthier,
The Blue Horses, 2023,
2 and 3-ply wool yarn,
specialty yarns, wool fabric,
86.36 x 34.29 cm,
installation detail,
Struts Gallery,
Photo Credit:
Lucas Morneau

on disability. The structure of inclusion is carried out through artist autonomy: unrestricted participation, optional self-identification, and unedited statements written by the artists that are displayed as wall text.

As always, there are contradictions within the success of these initiatives. If the predominant opportunity for artists who identify as disabled are shows like *Art in Mind*, have we really generated access or equity? The importance of creating dedicated spaces for underrepresented artists cannot be understated; but, if artists do not have opportunities to show work outside of a disability context or show alongside non-disabled artists, at worst it suggests their identities are being used as an attraction and at best it reinforces broader patterns of exclusion. If access is only increased by designating separated spaces, institutions lose the opportunity to develop structural change that fosters complexity and nuance.

Artist-run centres (ARC) and small, community-oriented galleries, like Sunbury Shores Arts and Nature Centre, may have more success navigating representation within the visibility/hyper-visibility conundrum. The ARC structure is built to decentralize decision making and prioritize member autonomy.[2] As crucial sites for experimentation and growth, ARCs embrace the process, allowing artists to retain their agency.

Living is Easy, an annual series at Struts Gallery, the ARC in Sackville, provides members with use of the gallery for professional development or artistic exploration. Alana Morouney's *Living is Easy* project, 2022, brought viewers in to look at kites she had made, then invited them outside to fly kites borrowed from the gallery. This created an experience with art that was easily accessible for viewers as the project had multiple modes of engagement. Meanwhile, Melissa Gauthier's *Living is Easy* project, 2023, included rug hooking sessions. The artist invited the public to learn and practice rug hooking with her, facilitating an opportunity to create in community, defying the authoritative filtering and interpretation of art often prescribed by larger institutions.

An open invitation, without the expectation of creating complete, polished, or traditional artworks, reduces barriers. This is important for communities with limited time, access, and energy, or for whom entering a traditional gallery space may not be comfortable, such as disabled bodies, low-income communities, physical labourers, as well as general working-class communities that are prevalent in rural New Brunswick.

Expanding and shifting to fluid, ever-evolving narratives will always be challenging because the institutional systems we inherited were created to maintain control. If we want to work ethically within the paradoxes of institutions, we cannot strive for perfect actions or expect to create a perfect framework that everything must fit within. Arts institutions of all sizes must hand autonomy over to the artist, invite process into the gallery, and continue working knowing that we will make mistakes and learn from them. ■

1 "Disability and the Politics of Visibility." Art Papers. October 1, 2018. https://www.artpapers.org/disability-visibility/.
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The Canadian Mental Health
Association of New Brunswick,
Art in Mind, 2022,
group exhibition view,
Sunbury Shores Arts and Nature Centre



The Canadian Mental Health
Association of New Brunswick,
Art in Mind, 2020,
group exhibition view,
Sunbury Shores Arts and Nature Centre

STEPPING OUT

Expressing Identity Through Fashion

By Sara J. Chamberlain

The easiest way to dismiss an artist's work is to scoff and say, "I could do that." With fashion, it takes a different form: "it's just clothes." But as Tracadie-based drag designer Peach says, "the clothes we wear change our attitude about ourselves." Despite the allure of fast-fashion brands that sell cheap, trendy items, there is an art to choosing clothes that don't just fit your body and personality, but also represent what's important to you. I asked three Acadian designers to talk about wearing their art on their sleeve.

With a long list of clients which include Drag Race stars and Cirque du Soleil, Peach spends weeks making outfits that have been described as wearable art. "I've always said my medium is a sewing machine and makeup," she says. She makes the outfits for her troupe, the Spice Drags, who re-create Spice Girls shows and have been performing in Montreal for the last 10 years. "I'm a huge fan of the Spice Girls. They used to thrift their own costumes, it was flyé[1] and unique to each of them." It takes skill to make matching outfits that still express individual style.

Another designer expanding the meaning of clothing is Nat Haché, a multi-faceted artist living in Moncton. Nat's known for their quick-change costumes, one of the best ways to express a dramatic shift in a character's narrative (one notable creation involved outfits that zipped from the roaring '20s to the swinging '70s). "Costumes are a great way to explore identity," they say. "On the stage it tells the audience who they are looking at." And in real life, it tells people who they're talking to. When asked what outfit they would love to wear out, they said "I'd love to do a big historically accurate gown, a lot of frills, a lot of textures, take up space."

This is a trend we are seeing in designers; queer artists are stepping out and taking up the space they deserve. Mattie Leblanc, known for her role as both an actress and designer in the movie "Y'a une étoile," stood on a four-wheeler in a long flowing white gown and became a glamorous country-girl icon for many smalltown LGBT kids in New Brunswick. Her gowns are what brought her back to the home stage; after going viral for one of her outfits at Toronto Pride, she was invited to the Moncton Drag Ball. These were never costumes to her: "It was so feminine, so camp, it felt free." she said. "That was my coming-out outfit."

When asked why they like designing, they had a laundry list of reasons. Most fashion labels have limited sizing that feels too tight in one area and too loose in another. Self-expression doesn't follow trends. Thrifting materials brings the thrill of the hunt and gets the creative juices flowing. Sewing was a skill a family member taught them. Mattie describes her mom as being the coolest for making clothes she liked, no matter what anyone else said. In Peach's words, "people in fun clothing can be themselves and leave their comfort zone more easily. We've all felt more powerful because we felt beautiful/handsome in an outfit."

There's a freedom in allowing yourself to wear what makes you happy. In today's world, there's also a comfort in knowing who made your clothing. It's a nice change from what Nat calls generic fast fashion. "We have to shop inexpensive these days, right? And online shopping is easier, but I don't want to just put something on my body—I want it to mean something." ■

1 Flyé is Acadian slang for "fly," and refers to something that is eccentric, funky, and fun.



Peach,
Photo Credit: Jean-Sebastien Senécal



Mattie LeBlanc,
Photo Credit:
Molly Ilse



Nat Haché,
Photo Credit:
Jessica Haché



Ji Hyang Ryu, *Guardian*, 2023, oil on canvas, 91.4 x 121.9 cm
Photo Credit: Kevin Frenette

BRIDGING CULTURES ON CANVAS

By Shalini Tewari

Ji Hyang Ryu's artwork reveals an interplay between her Korean roots and her life in Canada—one that has profoundly shaped the evolution of her artistic journey.

Working primarily with oil, charcoal, ink, and watercolour as her foundational mediums, Ji gradually moved away from these traditional materials as her style evolved through self-experimentation. She describes her use of mixed media as liberating, offering more versatility with which to express cultural harmony. By blending realism with cultural symbology and abstracted elements, her work embodies a balance between Korean and Canadian influences. As seen in *Korean Canucks*, where traditional Korean scenes are paired with distinctly Canadian items like Tim Horton's coffee, she presents her identity in a way that is both deeply personal and widely accessible.

When I encountered Ji's work, I felt an immediate connection. Growing up in New Brunswick in the 1980s, I often felt a sense of displacement that I couldn't quite trace. With little diversity at that time, differences in skin colour were evident, though I didn't connect the early exclusion I felt with racial biases and prejudice until later in life when I encountered more explicit forms of racism.

Ji makes visible the journey of reconciling one's cultural layers to acknowledge the depth of identity beneath the surface. Through her practice, she foregrounds her experience of living within two cultures, capturing the tension and beauty of existence in a liminal space. By blending personal reflection and cultural conversation, Ji invites viewers to witness her inner journey while sparking recognition in those who share similar, layered experiences of cultural identity.

A former healthcare worker, Ji was confronted with the painful realities of racial discrimination in the workplace during the COVID-19 pandemic. Initially, she felt an impulse to express the darkness and sadness the experience stirred within her. Instead, she chose to respond in a way that would uplift rather than break her spirit. Also a mother, she opted to channel the energy into her work to rise above prejudice and inspire resilience in her children. Through her paintings, she subtly conveys the pain of encounters with racism without dwelling in it, focusing on healing and empowerment rather than despair. Ji's work invites viewers to engage thoughtfully, ask questions, and feel a sense of connection beyond surface-level perceptions.

Connecting with artists like Ji, who explore themes of displacement, identity, and beauty, feels deeply meaningful—a reflection of my own journey and artistic practice. Rather than allowing experiences of racism to lead to isolation, Ji offers a path toward reconciliation and resilience through her artwork, inviting others to reflect on their identities to bridge the gap between cultures and find harmony within complexity.

Ji's visual narratives display the tension between rootedness and transcendence, creating a powerful space where identity is both deconstructed and

rebuilt. As she uses her art to explore her sense of self, Ji inspires me to reexamine my journey toward belonging—one of reconciling the cultural divides that have shaped my perspective. By illuminating the potential for art to bridge personal healing and communal restoration, Ji hints at a "third space" of cultural coalescence that foreshadows a world where cultures flow together as fluidly as paint on her canvas. In *Sugar Camp*, she depicts Koreans in traditional garb enjoying the beloved Canadian ritual of frozen maple syrup, further blurring cultural boundaries and celebrating the harmony between distinct traditions.

Ji's work is a call to future generations to stand proudly in their identities, be unafraid to ask questions, and delve into deeper conversations that lead to education and the dismantling of prejudice. Through her art, Ji aims to show her children, and all young people, that pride in one's identity can foster a self-assurance that can shield hurt. By contributing to this ongoing dialogue, she hopes to help create a future where no one faces discrimination based on ignorance or misunderstanding.

For Ji, art is a lifelong journey, where each piece adds to a larger narrative of cultural belonging and personal empowerment. Contributing to both the artistic landscape and cultural dialogue of New Brunswick, Ji's work serves as a pathway for others navigating identity in a diverse, evolving community. Through her work, she reflects the potential within each of us to transform pain into beauty, foster connection through diversity, and—even in the face of adversity—find a sense of place and purpose. ■



Ji Hyang Ryu,
Hiding (in my skin), 2022,
oil on canvas,
70 x 91.4 cm



Ji Hyang Ryu,
Dragon Lady, 2023,
oil on canvas,
91.4 x 132.08 cm



Ji Hyang Ryu,
Sugar Camp, 2022,
acrylic on canvas
91.4 x 61 cm
Collection of the
Canada Council
Art Bank
23/4-0037
Photo Credit:
Kevin Frenette



Ji Hyang Ryu,
Korean Canucks, 2022,
acrylic on canvas,
91.4 x 61 x 3.8 cm
Photo Credit:
Kevin Frenette

THE TIES BETWEEN US

Public and Private Performance in a Disconnected World

By Gina C. Grant

In theatres, galleries, museums and the like, observation is expected. Performers can rely on the promise of an audience's attention (notwithstanding the inevitable presence of a cell phone's light among seats). Performances in the public sphere are less regulated, as are their audiences. There are more risks; interferences of the human and environmental kind are all possible, and for the most part, sincere engagement is welcomed.

For Darryl Tracy, a dancer and choreographer based in Toronto, the concept of risk is what makes a public performance stimulating. "I personally have always been drawn to chance and also allowing the audience or participants to be more involved in their own experience," he says. "In stage work, there is an ability to control the experience and somewhat direct the eye through lighting, positioning of a focus. Often, in site-specific [works], the participants can move about. You have other elements to consider with site-specific, other potential sounds, sights, energies."

Such elements include the shifting boundaries between performers and audience, public and private, chance and control. Sarah Power, independent dance artist and artistic director of Connection Dance Works in Saint John, finds this shift intriguing. "Smaller theatres can feel like a public space, as they are intimate—you can see your audience, they become part of your work," she says. The shift Power describes increases in site-specific works. She explains that "In public spaces, because of the intimacy, I often feel like we (the audience, passersby, fellow performers) are all going into an adventure together, even if the audience doesn't realize this."

The adventure Power describes happens annually under the creation of the Community Movement Project, as part of the Saint John Contemporary Dance Festival. Presented by Connection Dance Works, the Community Movement Project is described by the company as a "community-based endeavour aimed at inhabiting spaces in Uptown Saint John with 15-20 dancers/movers, all moving in harmony and sharing an improvised-based score … where audiences can witness a collective language being formed before their eyes."[1]

Darryl Tracy guided the Community Movement Project in 2024 in collaboration with First City School of Dance and accompanied by percussionist Ian Gibson. What ensued was the *Bricks and Mortar Dance Project*, an ensemble of approximately 20 dancers of all ages and abilities moving and creating through the spaces of uptown Saint John.

Collective engagement in the public sphere might allow us to be more content with the comfort of our day-to-day experiences; to practice presence and attention as we participate. What if we learn to view the world through the lens of our experiences with art and performance?



Saint John Contemporary Dance Festival
Community Movement Project, 2024,
Guided by Darryl Tracy
Photo Credit: Michael Ryan Mohan

The company Berceurs du temps allows the participant to be held, quite literally, in their travelling audiovisual installation titled *Lulling Time / Bercer le Temps*. Featured in 2024 during Third Shift, Saint John's Free Contemporary Art Festival, the project invites you to "travel aboard a rocking chair" through the sounds and memories of other people. As you rock forward and back, the chair initiates a recording from one of 2500 pre-recorded lullabies in over 100 languages. *Lulling Time / Bercer le Temps* pulls you inward and outward simultaneously. The rocking chair's motion draws you back to infancy as you take in your present surroundings, lulled by the song, story, or memory of a stranger. An intimate moment one might otherwise only experience with a caregiver takes place in the public sphere, an intermingling of time and worlds.

In these works, the line separating performer and spectator blurs, maybe dissolves. What if we let this blurred line become our teacher, one that allows us to both sit with ourselves and connect to our everyday surroundings. Could it be a guide to reestablishing our role within the public sphere as a collective, and not merely a passerby?

From my window seat on the second floor of the Saint John Free Public Library's Main Branch, I can gaze out over Market Square's atrium, the boardwalk, Harbour Passage, Port Saint John and Ihtoli-maqahamok—also known as the Gathering Space.

At low tide, people descend the port's steps, taking care to notice the sheen of certain edges leftover like love notes from the previous high tide. They look around themselves, stepping carefully among the rocky surface, each step a small permission to connect with the earth. When high tide comes, they share a little secret, a pact. They existed in a space that cannot currently hold them, and that is special.

The scene illuminates and broadens my point of view. Narratives express themselves, as long as I look for them. I allow the line between myself and my surroundings to blur, shift, and reveal my own place within the story. ■

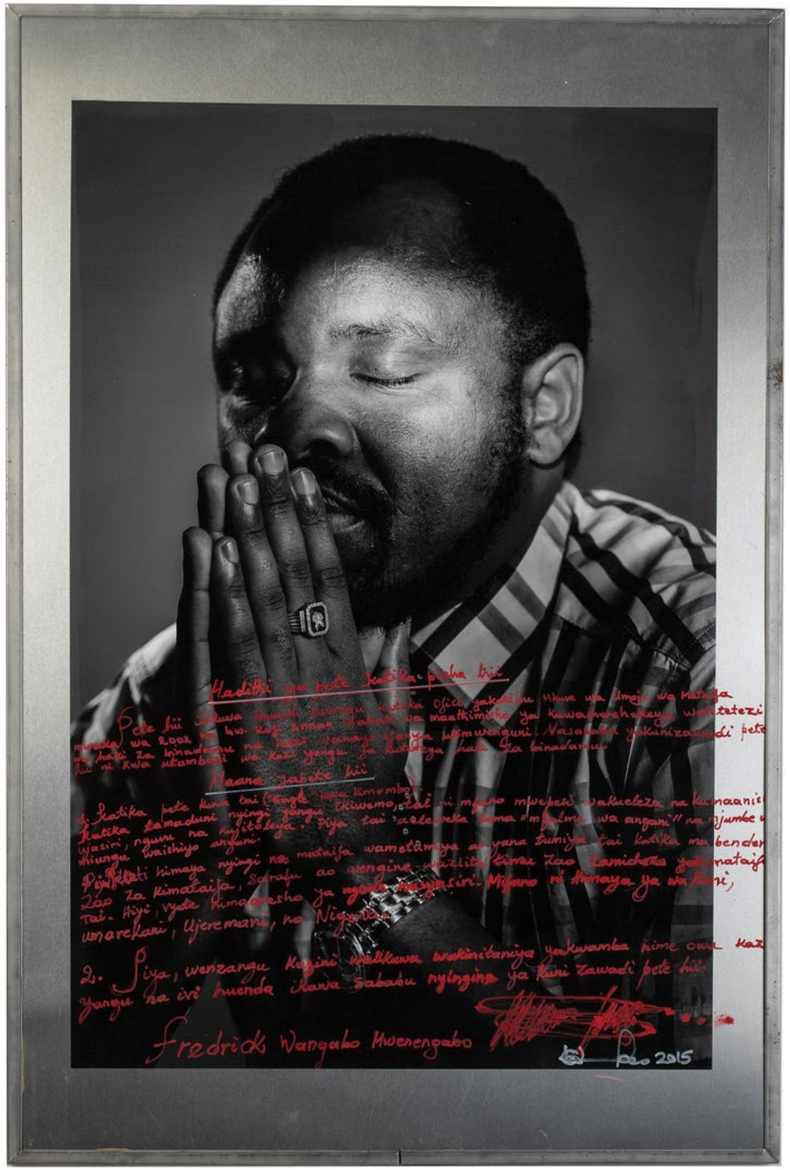


Berceurs du Temps,
Lulling Time/ Bercer le Temps,
documentation of viewer
engagement and participation,
Presented by Third Shift, 2024,
Photo Credit: Lorne Power

1 Connection Danceworks [@connectiondanceworks]. July 24 2024 *"Community Movement Project is a series of..."* [photograph]. Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/p/C9AiVnZv6lh/



View from Saint John Free Public Library, 2025
Photo Credit: Gina C. Grant



Gary Weekes,
Frederick Mwenengabo, 2015
giclee print, tin, MDF, aluminum,
Text Handwritten by Sitter
60.96 x 91.44 cm

A CONSTANT FLOW OF INSPIRATION

The Work of Gary Weekes

By Hillary LeBlanc

Gary Weekes moved to New Brunswick in 2007 from England, having spent years honing his craft as a photographer and artist. He expected to find a vibrant arts scene in New Brunswick—what he didn't know is that he would be paramount in its growth.

When he first moved to New Brunswick, Weekes was focused on commercial work, with the photographic business that he started in the UK. He explains that the "fine art world of photography, painting, drawing" and so on weren't on his radar. Despite visits to the Beaverbrook Art Gallery and other art spaces in town, Weekes explains that the photography being shown "didn't resonate" with his style of work."

While working as Head Instructor of Photography at the Center for Art and Technology, in Fredericton, Weekes invited a Fine Art Photographer and Instructor for the New Brunswick College of Craft and Design to speak to his class. He remembers this talk as "the ember that piqued [his] interest."

Weekes' first solo exhibition debuted at the Fredericton Public Library, in 2015. Fast forward to 2024, and he opened a second solo show in the same space that welcomed him with open arms when he was still navigating the New Brunswick arts scene as a newcomer pursuing his love of art.

For his first exhibition at the Fredericton Public Library, Weekes decided to show two distinct bodies of work: *History on our Hands* and *Icescapes*.

History on our Hands is a portrait series of Frederictonians with an emphasis on the rings they wear, and the stories imbued within them. Each sitter wrote a story directly on the photograph under their portrait. Weekes became interested in rings for their significance, stating "those who wore rings knew the histories of every single ring on every single finger (or toe)—whether it was lost, stolen, donated, gifted, or just purchased while thrifting." He goes on to explain "because their stories were handwritten on my work, the Library was the perfect place for this exhibition."

Shown concurrently, *Icescapes* is a series of dioramas made from chunks of ice collected by Weekes in his neighborhood during one of his first big Winters in NB. The artist explains that the miniature worlds of *Icescapes* "were made to feel like real arctic scenes, lit to create vast wastelands of sea and ice, devoid of any humanity." Weekes created these works while "trying to understand and make sense of the long winters in [his] new home."

Weekes describes *History on our Hands* and *Icescapes* as "two very different bodies of work," and acknowledges that both are "a huge departure from [his] regular realm of work."

Over time his approach evolved, becoming more expansive as he moved away from "pretty pictures" and toward "thoughtful imagery." In March 2024, Weekes debuted a solo show entitled *Beachcomber* at the UNB Arts Centre, which he felt was extra special as he had been teaching photography at the university for

some time. The artist describes *Beachcomber* as "his most ambitious solo exhibition to date—using; canvas, concrete, epoxy resin..." He goes on to discuss the importance of the connection between image and idea, explaining how "having [his] images printed directly on fabric encapsulated by thought provoking narratives," allowed him to 'level up.'"

Works from *Beachcomber* were later featured in the group show *Estuaries*. Curated for the Owens Art Gallery in Sackville, by Joanna Joachim, *Estuaries* opened in October 2024. Within the exhibition Weekes' works were "intertwined harmoniously with those of the other artists" whom he hadn't met before *Estuaries*.

Weekes second solo exhibition at the Fredericton Public Library, *Yes! Call It a Comeback!* was a "way of reintroducing [himself] to the library after starting [his] Fine Art journey 9 years before." The exhibition launched in July 2024 and Weekes was the first artist to be offered the entire library as exhibition space, allowing him to show more work.

Having a professional art exhibition at a public library "opened the discussion about [art]work in public spaces," along with criticisms around "whether showing work in spaces such as [a library] somehow devalues the art and artist." On the contrary, Weekes saw it as an "opportunity," both "to say thanks to the library for getting [him] started and also as an affirmation that [he] can fill a large space with interesting work and a variety of works."

As a multi-disciplinary artist Weekes enjoys cross-pollinating approaches with a combination of video and still photography, along with different ways to print and to display his work. Of his process, the artist says "whether it's printing on fabric, using sewing machines, concrete or epoxy resin to tell my stories, I enjoy the complexity of it all. I love the way different parts of my brain are used to complete certain sections of my finished work." This approach, he feels, has also allowed him to grow as a father, brother and friend.

Weekes embraces the evolution of his practice and appreciates the constant flow of inspiration over treating photography as a purely commercial venture. With the personal mantra 'out of confusion, comes clarity,' Weekes is present, ready to accept the ideas that come to him from all directions, as he carries out his creative work. ▪



Portrait of Gary Weekes
Photo Credit: Thandiwe McCarthy



Gary Weekes,
History on Our Hands.
installation view, 2015,
Fredericton Public Library



Gary Weekes,
Alces Americana #2, 2019,
giclee print, powdered gypsum and plywood,
38.1 x 38.1 cm

REALIZING THE REAL

The Work of Theresa MacKnight

By Jennifer Pazienza

Season after season, year after year, Saint Andrews, New Brunswick artist and art educator Theresa MacKnight shows up and paints. Deeply rooted in relationships, community connection, and environmental concern, her practice is responsive, intuitive, and intentional. Strengthened by ongoing figure drawing and colour study, MacKnight creates intimate visual narratives that are rich in wonder and awe, beauty and destruction. Whether painting landscapes *en plein air*, still lifes and interiors, animals captured by nighttime trail cameras, or models staged and photographed in situ then recomposed in her studio, MacKnight reveals the heart and soul of her subjects. Originating in childhood, a love of space and geometry also shapes her practice. Taken together, it is an approach to painting that provides her with the poetic, conceptual, and practical means for making sense of art and life.

A solitary child by choice, she absorbed the magic and mystery of natural and built worlds around her maternal grandparents' homestead in rural Bonny-River–Second Falls, New Brunswick. There, she observed family, friends, and neighbours living in tune with the seasons: fishing and planting in spring, felling trees in summer, harvesting and hunting in fall, cutting and stacking wood for winter warmth. She witnessed hardships and joys of rural life, including mishaps of kerosene fires and folks coming together in efforts to rebuild. Around kitchen tables with steeping pots of tea on cookstoves, stories were shared; stories of interdependence, of listening to the environment, and of learning to survive.

In her compositions, subject treatment and material expression, MacKnight's realism—embodied, pragmatic, and dreamy—evokes the poetic imagination she first experienced in the landscape of her childhood.[1] With an enlightened sense of space and an awareness of self and others in shared contexts, she orchestrates her palette to reflect the sensations of seasonal living. The dance of opposites between colour and tone, light and dark, warm and cool highlights her reverence for recreating colour temperature to inform atmosphere, depth, and mood. In her unvarnished approach to realizing the real, space, poetry, and paint-handling define her artistic identity. Common objects are illuminated in MacKnight's paintings revealing the vital role they play in living day to day, season to season. Recurring themes of light, windows, and fire contribute to a discreet dynamism and subtle storytelling. In *The Woodpile*, for example, a well-worn corn broom, familiar to many New Brunswickers, conveys its enduring value and hints at a distant kinship with the tools of MacKnight's chosen trade. Marked by sun and firelight, the double pane window creates tension between exterior and interior palettes. Her father's satchel, jacket, folding chair, cap, and neatly stacked logs, warmed by memory, ignite the imagination suggesting the primal need for shelter and security.

In *Lucy After the Fire*, MacKnight depicts a piebald doe, whom she refers to as Lucy. Easily recognizable with her mostly white body, Lucy is a local celebrity in her small coastal town. MacKnight recounts that the work was sparked by the "aftermath of an unfortunate fire at



Theresa MacKnight,
Teapot, 2024,
oil on linen,
27.9 x 35.5 cm



Theresa MacKnight,
In Residence, 2023,
oil on canvas,
121.6 x 153.4 cm



Theresa MacKnight,
Lucy After the Fire, 2023,
oil on canvas,
76.2 x 101.6 cm



Theresa MacKnight,
painting at Mersey River, Kejimkujik, 2023,
Photo Credit: Stephen MacKnight

a campground in an area shared by deer and humans." She goes on to explain "It was a specific event, but I wanted to portray a universal, 'in-between' narrative that is at once destruction and life."[2] Lucy is depicted with a questioning gaze in the rosy glow of smoldering embers or sunset against cool damp air, yet the immediacy of the artist's interplay of drawing and painting and the geometric elements keep this work, a hybrid landscape and portrait, from slipping into sentimentality.

From the series *To Sunbury Shores with Love*, in *Cycles* (2024) MacKnight ponders the 60 year old institution's early emphasis on natural history in the context of recent changes influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic. With its view to the outside world, a window streaming soft winter light enlivens a bleached out skull. Its bone-dry surface echoes the cerulean blue of a framed moth while a potted plant's diaphanous chartreuse backdrop symbolizes the transformation of green from a medieval marker of illness to a contemporary representation of health and well-being. *Cycles* shows MacKnight's ability to turn seemingly simple subjects into reflections on living, growth, and survival.

In a world where movement and spectacle hold sway, her imagery infused with the merits of slowing down and living a well examined life champions stillness and sustained attention. MacKnight invites viewers into an intuitive, disciplined personal vision—where realism, passion for environmental care, and the complexities of daily life within and among multi-species ecosystems intersect. Whatever the subject matter, Theresa MacKnight's paintings transcend their specificity and foster contemplation, the foundation for all meaningful personal and social action.

1 Bachelard, Gaston. 2014. The Poetics of Space. London, England: Penguin Classics.
2 MacKnight, Theresa. 2023. @theresamacknight: Instagram.



Theresa MacKnight,
The Woodpile, 2023,
oil on canvas,
76.2 x 101.6 cm



Theresa MacKnight,
Cycles, 2024,
oil on canvas,
40.6 x 50.8 cm,
Private Collection



Annabelle Babineau as Barbra Wire,
Faces, 2024
recycled textiles and drag make-up,
Photo Credit: Lance Kenneth Blakeney

FACE TO FACE

Barbra Wire Quilts Queer Community

By Gemma Marr

I first saw Barbra Wire's *Faces* quilt in the lobby of the Beaverbrook Art Gallery on July 19th, 2024. A drag show had just finished, and there was something magical in taking in the different shapes, sizes, and styles of the faces in the quilt, illuminated as they were by multi-coloured lights on a make-shift dance floor. I found myself trying to place the faces: were they people I knew? Could I identify them by the shape of an eye, the lipstick colour, or the roundness of a cheek?

Barbra Wire is the textile artist drag personae of Annabelle Babineau, a queer Acadian woman whose multidisciplinary art practice explores her intersecting identities. Pushing against linguistic and heterosexual homogenization in New Brunswick, Babineau's work speaks against long held silences both about and within her community. Her drag, crochet, quilting, and more are an assertion of the self as unapologetically queer and unapologetically Acadian, which confronts a lack of representation in New Brunswick's artistic canon.

Faces comprises 36 squares, each imprinted with a face-full of drag make-up, smudged and blurred in the act of removal. To create the quilt, Wire gave out face wipes at the end of her shows and queens pressed their faces into them to remove their make-up. Each wipe was stored in a binder until she had collected a year's worth. She selected 36 residual faces—hers and those of other New Brunswick drag queens—and sewed each wipe onto a piece of white quilting cotton, spraying it with an acrylic sealer to set the image.

Wire then selected old costumes to deconstruct and place around the squares. The yellow strips, located primarily in the centre of the quilt, came from her first outfit, while the leopard print is from S.D. Vintage in Moncton, a well-known safe space for members of the queer community. The snaps and buttons of the original garments remain in the quilt, adding layers of texture and meaning for those who may recognize them from Wire's performances. Meaningful textiles from locations throughout the province frame the drag queens' faces who turn their gaze upon the viewer and the institutions where the quilt is shown.

With cotton batting for the inner layer and old sheets for the backing, Wire quilted the layers together into a haptic mashup of colour, print, and image that speaks both to her own development as a drag artist and to queer community.

The quilt is a montage, a literal patchwork of queer expressions, spaces, and objects for the viewer to witness and be witnessed by. During a conversation about the quilt, Babineau shared that she's lost track of faces over time. While some are easy to identify by a moustache or a wide mouth, others mix, mingle, and shift, losing individual status to become part of a collective queer assembly.

This melding of individual practice alongside a kind of collective mission has long been part of quilting. In her seminal piece, "Quilts: The Great American Art,"

"By weaving together images of drag queens, a group currently under attack in this province and elsewhere, Wire's quilt is part of this legacy. The patchwork of faces speaks to the viewer, saying: *We are here.*"

Patricia Mainardi explores legacies of quilting in the United States, examining how the creativity, skill, and vision of settler women has been overlooked by art historians. She explains, "In designing their quilts, women not only made beautiful and functional objects, but expressed their convictions on a wide variety of subjects in a language for the most part comprehensible only to other women." Although quilting could have been done alone, collaboration among groups of women became part of the process. This collective practice informed other areas of life; for example, women would use patterns associated with political groups to assert their own beliefs.[1]

Quilters in New Brunswick fall into community with such movements. Dressmaker Fannie Parlee, who constructed the "Confederation Quilt," used silk and velvet pieces left over from gowns she made for ladies attending the balls and galas of the Charlottetown Conference in 1864.[2] Through her stitched mosaic of women's garments, Parlee marked a significant moment, reminding us that this historical event involved a gathering of women, a counterpoint to the oft-told story of the Fathers of Confederation.

Quilting also bears a legacy as a platform for coded methods of communication. According to an educational panel for Tomlinson Lake Hike To Freedom, outside Perth-Andover New Brunswick, quilts were infused with secret meaning for those travelling the Underground Railroad. The panel notes, "It was quite common for owners of safe houses to use quilts and quilt patterns to communicate with those seeking a safe place to hide or get supplies."[3]

Likewise, in the late 1980s the NAMES project Memorial AIDS quilt was designed to communicate the realities of the AIDS crisis. In the years following, thousands of community AIDS quilts were created, including in Moncton, to remember those lost to the crisis and ensure this loss would not be sidelined from community histories.

By weaving together images of drag queens, a group currently under attack in this province and elsewhere, Wire's quilt is part of this legacy.[4] The patchwork of faces speaks to the viewer, saying: *We are here*.



AIDS Blanket,
in memory of Yvon Roy
(1957-1999),
textile created by Sylvie
and Claudette, c.2000,
Collection of Provincial
Archives of
New Brunswick,
Ensemble Moncton Fonds,
PANB MC4290/MS5/C



Frances (Fannie) Parlee,
Confederation Quilt, 1864,
made of scrap textiles
Collection of Kings County Museum
1979.028
Photo Rights: CCI image 69835-0086
© Government of Canada,
Canadian Conservation Institute



Annabelle Babineau as Barbra Wire,
Business Woman, 2024,
Photo Credit: Lance Kenneth Blakeney

Babineau's embodiment of Barbra Wire, and in particular her personae's textile work, marks an important moment in the province's political landscape; while she was creating the *Faces* quilt, those in key positions of power were working to eliminate rights for members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community.[5] The piece also offers an interesting reflection on ideas of legacy and longevity. It cannot be washed, as the sealant is likely not strong enough to stop the make-up from washing out. It is also possible that the make-up will fade or distort over time.

For me, this potential impermanence feels striking in contrast to the assertive quality of the quilt as it is now, which speaks to the importance of being present and fighting together against complacency. It is a reminder that recognition and rights come from an ongoing refusal to be hidden from view, a process that may change shape over time but never cease. Ultimately, Babineau sees her work as both a love letter to the province and what she calls a "help us letter" to New Brunswickers; it is celebration of the possibilities afforded to members of the queer community in this beautiful place and, at the same time, a cry for support as the reality of life here becomes more difficult. ■

1 "Quilts: The Great American Art." *Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany*, edited by Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, Harper and Row, 1982, pp. 330–46.
2 Wright, Julia. "Historic quilt stitches together Confederation story." *CBC: New Brunswick*, November 17, 2016. https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/new-brunswick/confederation-quilt-restored-1.3855102
3 Tobin, Jacqueline L., and Raymond G. Dobard. *Hidden in Plain View: A Secret Story of Quilts and the Underground Railroad*. Anchor Books, 2000.
4 "*Drag Storytime Moncton Library Protest*." CBC News, 11 Mar. 2023, https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/new-brunswick/drag-storytime-moncton-library-protest-1.6776085
5 Canadian Civil Liberties Association. "Policy 713." CCLA. Accessed September 28, 2025. https://ccla.org/major-cases-and-reports/policy-713/

WE DON'T HOLLYWOOD

The Art of Living with the Land

By Rachel Bryant

I'm standing with Gina Brooks and Susan Sacobie on the shore of Miramichi Lake in the unceded and unsurrendered Wolastoqey homelands where Wolastoqewi Mothers and Grandmothers are—for the second year running—thwarting an industry working group's plan to spray Noxfish Fish Toxicant II into a major waterway. I've arrived late on a weekday with a Rubbermaid tote filled with bacon and eggs for the land protectors.

Everyone's uneasy, waiting for news from lawyers about an injunction, and I'm rambling on about how *interesting* it is that if Gina or Susan paddled out onto the water in canoes, no one could legally stop them, but if I did the same thing, I'd be immediately reprimanded or maybe even arrested by my government. Our treaty rights and responsibilities are different, we agree, rooted in different relationships—these grandmothers with the fish, the frogs, the insects, the trees, the zooplankton, the food web. Mine with these grandmothers. And *Wolastoq Nil Naka Nil Wolastoq*, as the shirts and hoodies say—these women *are* these waterways, and these waters are them.

When I ask Gina about Wabanaki art, she tells me about traditional economies and says that settlers, today and historically, hold pieces, or even entire collections, of her people's art in their institutions and homes because her people were hungry.

I think of Tomah Joseph's wonderworks, the incredible narrative scenes etched on winter bark and sold to tourists and collectors in Maine throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—sold to feed the people. Meanwhile, their knowledge kept alive by letting it dwell for a time, a century, in someone else's house. Decorations gathering dust.

For months I think about what this all means, about hunger and what it does to people, listening, all the while, to Gina's stories about selling art when she's needed to raise funds quickly; about selling baskets to get her partner through law school; about carrying her father's fiddleheading baskets to market in Fredericton, tying them to her bicycle before riding across the Carleton Street bridge, woven ash splints bouncing gently against the frame.

When I ask Gina about her own art, she talks about sitting securely in her grandfather's canoe as a young girl, her father ably steering, tools and supplies packed tight all around her. I can tell that these memories make her feel held by her family, supported in her work and her ways. "My grandfather's canoe sits on the wisdom of water," she says one day, and I write it down so that I won't forget this poetry. "It's a vessel of knowledge. It holds and carries sacred items and stories. It's my storytelling basket." She shows me the places where her stories come from, and it teaches me how to look for my own stories—which I begin to share, first with



Gina Brooks,
The Gathering, 2019,
acrylic on canvas,
119.4 x 61 cm

her and then with others, whenever I can, determined now to show this grandmother that I'm teachable, that I'm learning, that I'm changing, that this love isn't wasted on me. She tells me that she makes art so that when her children and grandchildren and great grandchildren go looking for themselves, they'll find her.

Everyone's out here decolonizing, and there's a significant demand for Gina's time and attention, especially once she puts herself out there publicly as a founder of Caribou Club, a land-based arts, education, and recreation site in Tay Falls.

Gina and Susan are routinely invited to visit schools and organizations across New Brunswick with pre-prepared kits that students can start and finish within the four walls of a classroom. Gina quietly bristles at these invitations, gently explains, when asked, that Wabanaki art is always about direct connection to land, about picking the right materials in the right season, listening to the frogs and the wild roses, hands in the dirt.

She says that when she doesn't harvest her materials herself, it's not her art, and she refers to any work that delegates this task, any forfeiting of direct connection and relationship to other parties, as *Hollywooding*, a phrase that soon takes on a life of its own between us.

Gina builds a sauna beside her home and laughingly calls it her Hollywood sweat lodge. I immediately begin to note applications of Hollywooding within the context of my own professional life, where I am often treated as an intermediary by other settlers. Many either can't or won't forge their own friendships with Wabanaki people, seemingly finding it easier, for whatever reason, to deal with me. But we don't Hollywood, and these grandmothers are always with me now.

Gina begins to visit me in Menahkwesk—to come to my house for dinner, to bring me or my family gifts, to talk and plan, to get ice cream, to share. I'm always asking if she wants to do this or that, if she wants me to take her somewhere, if she wants me to show her something, anything at all. The history of this area is deep and incredible, and though I've always got another idea for how we could pass the time together, we're standing in my driveway when she finally says, "Listen, if you and me are going to spend time together, we gotta figure out how to do nothing. We can't just be going all the time."

There's a wood stove working hard in the corner of a bright workshop, and on top of the stove simmers an iron pot filled with what looks to me, when I peer inside, like soggy brambles. It's the fall of 2022, not long after the latest Miramichi Lake protection, and the space smells faintly of the Doublemint gum my grandfather always kept in his pocket and of fresh earth. Gina is talking quietly as she moves around her space, pointing out all that she notices, or wants me to notice, telling me what and how and why these things are. She has so much art stored away, and she shows me some of it, huge paintings done on canvas or silk or plywood, carvings and etchings and so many baskets. She's finally ready to share with everyone, she says—she wants to help everyone understand what it means to be here together after all this time.

There's a tall, unfamiliar tool near the stove—it's what two hockey sticks triangulated from a rough wooden base might look like. I'm aware that I just don't have the knowledge or the contexts I need to make sense of what I'm looking at. But it's a root splitter, Gina says as she mimes the motion of splitting spruce root from the pot on the stove with her hands. She has so many tools, she says, passed down to her from her father, and she's learned how to incorporate these tools and traditions into her artistic practice over the course of many years by going to the land day after day; by trying things that don't work and changing course; by slowly building up her own understanding; by listening to the tools and the materials themselves to receive and remember connection and purpose.

And I don't know what it all means yet, but I can't help but feel like I'm being taught how to live here.



Gina Brooks,
The Hunter Dance, 2019,
birch bark, spruce root,
ribbon, deer antler,
45.7 x 24.1 cm



Gina Brooks,
Menahkwesk, 2022,
birch bark, spruce root,
sweetgrass, linen paper,
17.8 x 25.4 cm

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