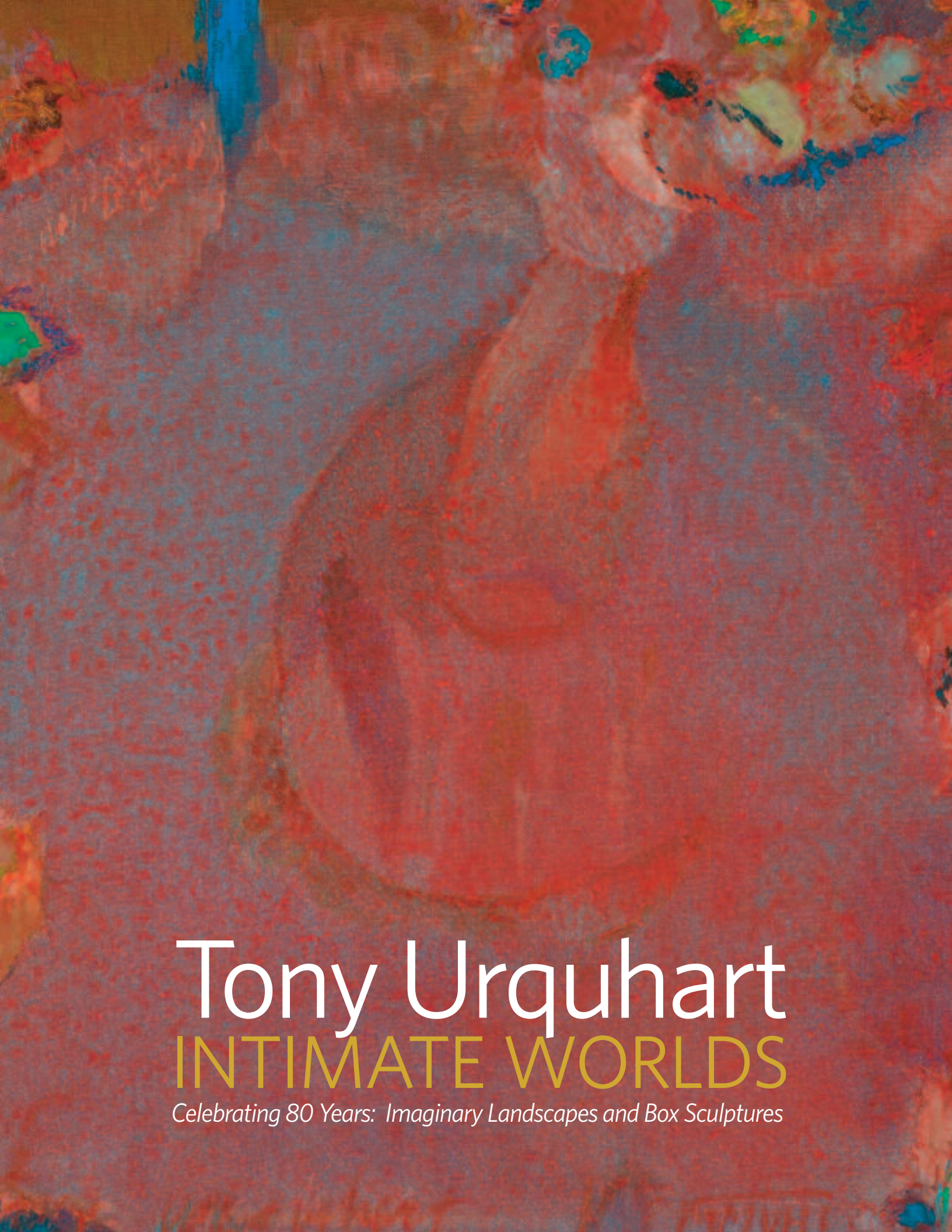

Tony Urquhart

INTIMATE WORLDS

Celebrating 80 Years: Imaginary Landscapes and Box Sculptures

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Cover, *Blue Haze*, 2008, oil on canvas on masonite, 30 ins x 24 ins. Left, *Arbre Etete 8*, 2005, paint and collage on paper, 14 ins x 10 ins.

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Tony Urquhart
INTIMATE WORLDS

Tony Urquhart has been creating and exhibiting his fascinating works of art in Canada and abroad for almost sixty years. His first solo exhibition at the historic Isaacs Gallery in Toronto introduced his fabulous abstract paintings to Canada in 1957. By the end of 1958, before his twenty-fifth birthday Urquhart had already won first prize at the Western New York annual exhibition at the Albright Knox Gallery in Buffalo for the oil painting, "Medieval Still Life". Urquhart represented Canada at the prestigious 1958 Guggenheim International exhibition in New York, together with Jean Paul Riopelle, Jack Shadbolt, Charles Gagnon, and Graham Coughtry.

Urquhart's works have always been on the cutting edge of contemporary Canadian art, beginning with his early abstract paintings and continuing in 1965 with the introduction of his first "Box Sculptures". Considered avante-garde, these box sculptures gained the artist accolades on a national scale. Urquhart continues to create these amazing box sculptures today after fifty years. Building on ideas and references acquired during his travels through Europe and Canada, these sculptures emerge as a product of jotting down ideas and drawings in his idea books, then finding inspiration for their physicality and their metaphorical expression in three-dimensional space.

About the Boxes – Tony Urquhart, 2015

After finishing art school in and about 1956, I tried to combine the plastic elements in my painting in as exciting a manner as possible on a two-dimensional surface (things such as colour, shape, dark and light patterns, texture etc.) In 1963-4, on a study trip in Europe, I saw many objects that had great physical presence that I wanted to bring somehow into my art – things like altar pieces, coloured ceilings, heavy gold frames, patterned roof tops, astrolabes, maps, reliquaries – even a scarecrow I passed on a Spanish road. When I returned home I began a series of painted 3-D objects, including a number of boxes, some up to six feet high.

Left, *Pavilion*, 1970 – 2014, mixed media on plywood, 58 ins x 18 ins x 18 ins.

In 1967 after another trip to Europe I began cutting doors in the boxes thus enabling me to work with the inside as well as the exterior. Suddenly, I had a work of art which by manipulating the doors could become larger, change its colour, go from geometric (closed) to organic. Today, I still consider myself a painter, but one who has changed his support (canvas) radically. I have never made a box that was not painted. Within this mode, I have found so much variation that I have been making and painting boxes after close to 50 years.

Tony Urquhart, 2015

"... each one is a small, isolated museum of meditative objects, landscapes and ideas (in that regard, they are rather like-free associative miniatures of the small provincial museums Urquhart so clearly prefers..."

Gary Michael Dault, 2001

Urquhart's sculptures invite the viewer to engage with the artist's ideas, and provide a lens to examine universal human experiences such as birth, death, transition, memorial, ritual, humour, surprise, and revelation. These small worlds, created by Urquhart as intimate spaces of contemplation, provide the viewer with time and space to reflect on ideas.

It was not until 1965 that Urquhart created his first box sculpture. In the exhibition catalogue for Gallery Stratford "Tony Urquhart: Drawings, Boxes and Process" (2001), Gary Michael Dault writes, "... each one is a small, isolated museum of meditative objects, landscapes and ideas (in that regard, they are rather like-free associative miniatures of the small provincial museums Urquhart so clearly prefers..." Dault goes on to describe the unique and interesting pedestals upon which Tony's box sculptures are often displayed: "There is probably no artist since Brancusi who has lavished more thought and care on the pedestal than Urquhart."

There is a hint of performance in these singular creations. The decorated interior walls of Urquhart's sculptures support a stage-like theatre through which the artist expresses his ideas, images, and memories in a finite space that may or may not stage a conscious performance. Some of these box sculptures may commemorate the object or idea and may be better suited closed, similar to that of reliquary objects in ancient cultures. In other examples of his work a box holds ideas,and forms temporarily, as doors may open and close, allowing both the viewer and subject to interact with this surreal space.

To gain insight into the development of his sculptures, one must explore Tony's drawings, which are integral to his artistic process. Urquhart works from preparatory drawings that lead to the creation of both his sculptures and paintings. For Urquhart, it all begins with the drawing. For the exhibition catalogue on his drawings at the Museum London in 2002, and Gallery Stratford in 2001, Urquhart described his artistic process:

I take the art of drawing seriously. In 1963 I applied for a Canada Council grant to study and master drawings in Europe. In 1963 – 1964, I visited the drawing cabinets of the British Museum, the Louvre, the Albertina in Vienna, the Insitut Neerlandais in Paris and the Musee Ingres in Montauban, the latter on four different occasions, enabling me to see all 5,000 or so of Ingres drawings, a circumstance that had a profound effect on my work... thirty years later.

Power of Invention, Drawings from Seven Decades, by Tony Urquhart, 2002, p. 5.

I work on my drawings over fairly long periods-usually from two to six months. I have a cork board in the kitchen where I pin them up so that the back part of my head can see them while the front part is eating or on the telephone. Often it is only a line or two that is added during those months but these turn out to be important to the drawing. Leaving things out of a drawing can often be more telling than putting them in. For this reason I try not to spend a long time drawing from the initial object or landscape-otherwise I produce an illustration, a literal rendering. I often work in series.

Power of Invention, Drawings from Seven Decades, by Tony Urquhart, 2002, p. 5.

The average sculpture takes at least two months from start to finish. For many years I have been keeping idea books, sort of miniature diaries in which I write notes to myself and comments about work or ideas I come across. Most of the books have cheap, often lined or squared paper and are unselfconscious – almost throw aways – and consequently I can try out anything without any technical worries: most are done in ball point pen. These little books contain many two-dimensional and three-dimensional projects that I never do – some because they are not interesting enough and others because I don't have time. However, an idea will start to form, often over intervals of 10 or 20 pages and eventually will be interesting enough to begin "real" drawings on good paper with pen and wash.

Tony Urquhart: Drawings, Boxes and Process, 2001.

All of Tony's artistic processes are interconnected. His drawings are often related to ideas found in his paintings. Tony Urquhart's early paintings were linked with the major developments in contemporary Canadian art.

As early as 1961, Urquhart was described by renowned Canadian art critic, Robert Fulford as "an unusual and natural talent, his draftsmanship was confident and unexpectedly mature, his colour sense was admirable and his imagination showed signs of flowering brilliantly" (*Canadian Art Magazine*, Jan./Feb. 1961, Issue No. 71, p. 54).

Urquhart's larger paintings have always had an abstractionist aesthetic. At first glance, they appear as a rich amalgamation of colour, texture, line and shapes that traverse the canvas, sometimes systematically, other times forcefully, with a heavily gestured expression. However, upon closer inspection one may notice a reference to the natural landscape. Figurative and natural forms can be found hidden in these abstracted landscapes, often with figures unexpectedly spotted in the landscape.

Many of the paintings in this exhibition have a surreal or imaginary feeling to them, leaving the viewer with questions, thoughts, and ambivalence. The smaller oil sketches seem to be derived from the artist's memory of a once-travelled landscape. However, these landscapes do not correspond to a real place of origin. These landscapes are symbolic or imaginary. The small painting "The Pavilions" (p. 18) in the exhibition is a good example of this; the painting provides a dream-like image of random figures strolling at night in and around outdoor structures that we cannot identify. The location is strange, the figures are still, the night is still. The trees are still. Only one lone figure in the corner seems familiar in some way. This figure seems to possess an awareness of this quiet image at night. Perhaps it is a mystery of place and person, a dream of the artist. We see this lone figure in many of Urquhart's painted works, its meaning a mystery of place and person.

In the guide for a travelling exhibition of Urquhart's works, Joan Vastokas writes:

The formal methods employed by Urquhart recall those which literary critics have designated as the most centrally poetic of all stylistic devices: images, metaphor, symbol, ambiguity and archetype. These devices are compounded in Urquhart's compositions by visual, material, and structural techniques that signify transition, transformation, and revelation: A key to Urquhart's interpretation, therefore, is an understanding of the dynamics of metaphor, perhaps the dominant process in visual communication, whereby specific meanings are associated in the viewer's intellectual and emotional responses to the visual qualities of the works themselves.

Worlds Apart: The Symbolic Landscapes of Tony Urquhart, 1988, p. 11.

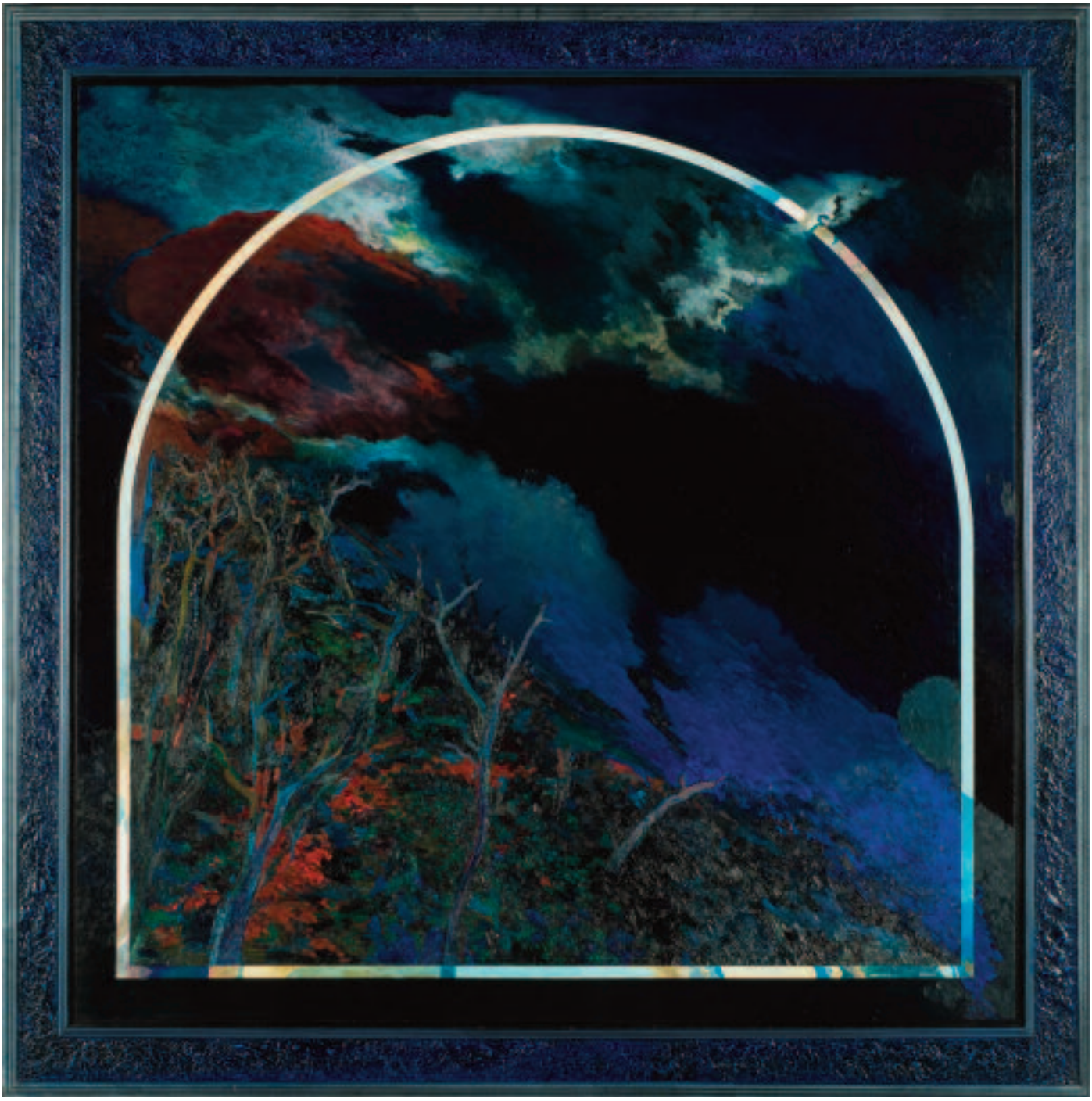
Tony Urquhart's paintings over the last sixty years have always possessed a deep richness of content, colour, forms and meaning. Many of the paintings remain mysterious and challenging, products of a brush guided by the hand of an artist with a dazzling colour sensibility and visions lingering at the borders of reality and fiction.

Urquhart's works have been exhibited with a historically significant generation of abstract artists in Ontario, such as Michael Snow, William Ronald, Kazuo Nakamura, Dennis Burton, Richard Gorman, John Meredith and Joyce Wieland. Through his career in the visual arts, he forged early and important relationships with notable artists from London, Ontario, including Jack Chambers and Greg Curnoe – two artists who have left a significant mark on Canadian art of the twentieth century.

Tony's imaginative works always leaves us with an afterthought, a joyful revelation that we may have just discovered something new, a truth or question about our society or about ourselves that we have yet to contemplate in precise terms. His work compels us to dig deeper into our thoughts, to re-examine ideas or beliefs that we may have fixed in the past. His work offers opportunities to question the fundamental meanings and purposes of art, by crossing boundaries previously held to be sacred or forbidding.

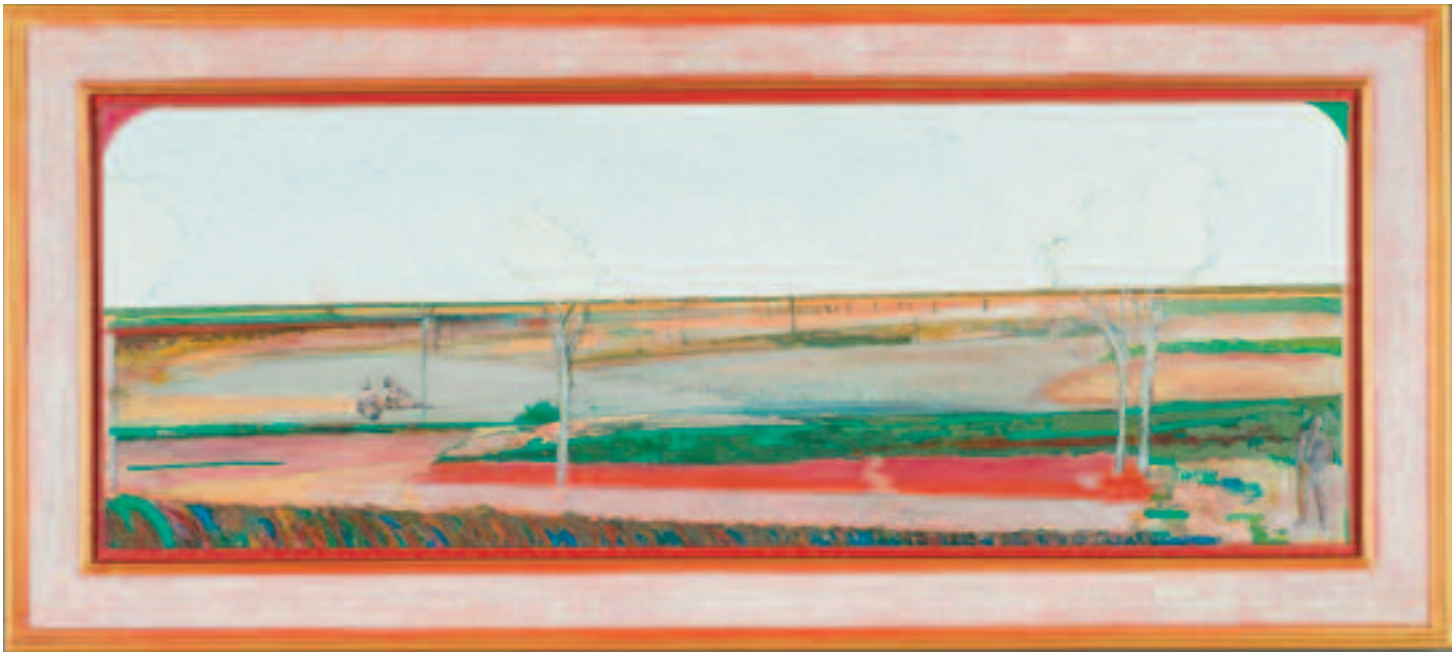
Urquhart's work has been recognized in Canada as truly special and original, having played a crucial role in the development of contemporary art in Canada. At 81 years old, Tony Urquhart continues to follow a unique path of creation and expression, in a language that is uniquely his own, through an art form that can be explored and enjoyed by all who have the good fortune to cross paths with it.

Bolus, 2004, mixed media on plywood, 60 ins x 10 ins x 10 ins.



My Garden Without Me, 2003, oil on masonite, 41.5 ins x 41.5 ins.

Barn Box, 2005, mixed media on plywood, 58 ins x 10 ins x 10 ins.



Painting With White Sky, 2000, oil on masonite, 12.75 ins x 36 ins.

Half A Man With Dotted Line,2001, oil on masonite, 9 ins x 20 ins.

Heart Box, 2010 – 2012, mixed media on plywood, 58 ins x 11 ins x 12 ins.

Cascade, 2014, mixed media on plywood, 77 ins x 25 ins x 25 ins.

Arbre Etete 5, 2005, paint and collage on paper, 14 ins x 10 ins.

Venetian Wallpaper 111, mixed media on wood, 2011 – 2012, 32 ins x 14 ins x 14 ins.

Arbre Etete 14, 2005, paint and collage on paper, 14 ins x 10 ins.

Wellesley Pond, Morning Sun, 1994, oil on masonite, 9 ins x 48 ins.

The Pavillions, 1999, oil on board, 8.5 ins x 36 ins.

Nine People on a Mountain, 2000, oil on gessoed watercolour paper, 10.5 ins x 21 ins.

Dunce, 1991, mixed media on plywood, 32 ins x 15 ins x 15 ins.

Arbre Etete 19, 2005, paint and collage on paper, 14 ins x 10 ins.

Still Life, 2004, mixed media on plywood, 29.5 ins x 15 ins x 15 ins.

Arbre Etete 11, 2005, paint and collage on paper, 14 ins x 10 ins.

Flower Cage, 2008, oil on canvas, 50 ins x 32 ins.

The Fall of the Flowers, 2007, mixed media on plywood, 81 ins x 15 ins x 18 ins.

Najac 3, 2009, oil stick over aquatint and etching on paper, 18 ins x 15 ins.

Reflections with Broken Line 1, 2001, oil on matt board, 4 ins x 18 ins.

Reflections with Broken Line 2, 2001, oil on matt board, 3.75 ins x 16 ins.

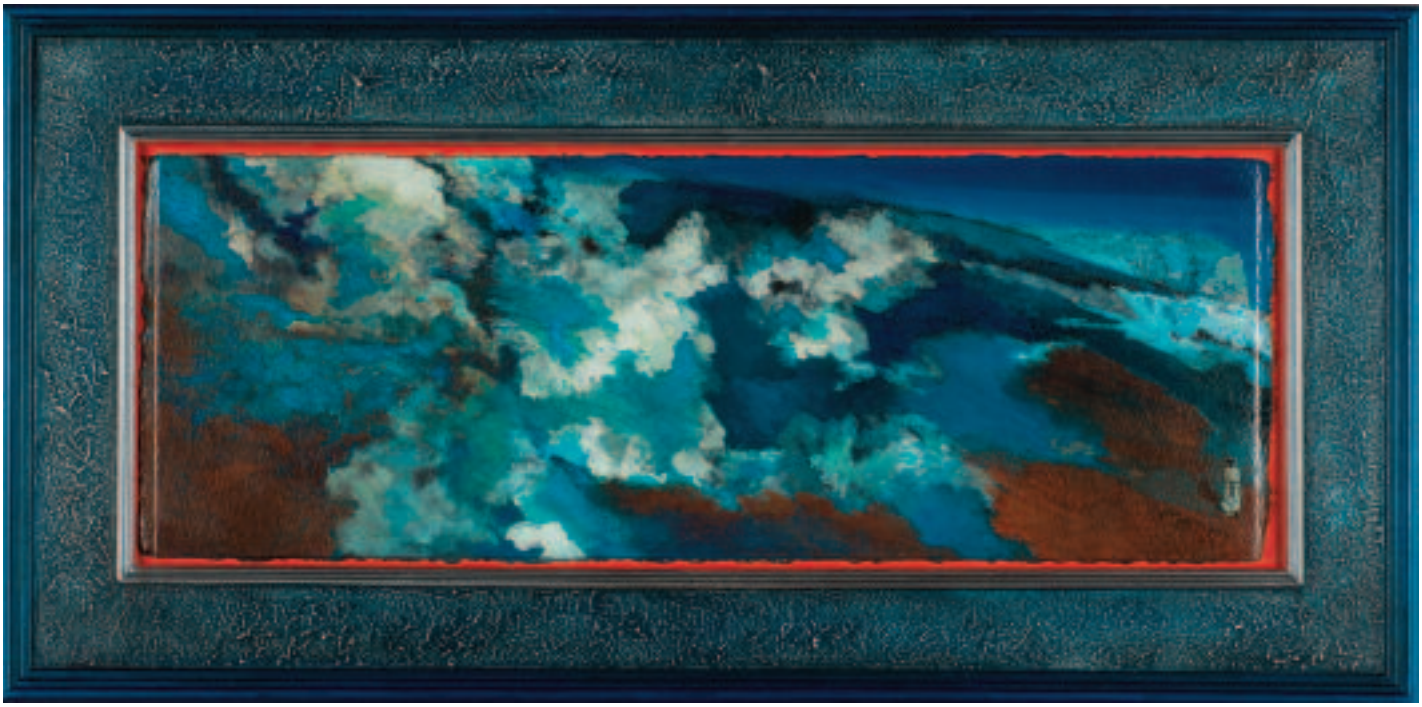
Reflections with Broken Line 4, 2001, oil on matt board, 3.5 ins x 15.5 ins.

Dark Flowers, 2008, oil on canvas on masonite, 30 ins x 24 ins.

Deep Woods, 2003, oil on board, 16 ins x 20 ins.

Irish Hill, 2003, mixed media on plywood, 25 ins x 14 ins x 14 ins.

Dark Painting with Hedges, 2004, oil on board, 14 ins x 32 ins.



Mountain Scene with Clouds, 2001, oil on watercolour paper on board, 8 ins x 22 ins.

Strong Box 1, 2013, oil on canvas, 37 ins x 42 ins.

A Strange Bouquet, 2007, oil on canvas, 50 ins x 34 ins.

Tony Urquhart
BIOGRAPHY

Born in 1934 in Niagara Falls, Ontario. Tony Urquhart received his Bachelor of Fine Arts degree at the Albright Art School, at the State University of New York, Buffalo in 1958. He also attended the Yale Norfolk Summer School in New Haven. Urquhart became the first artist-in-residence at the University of Western Ontario, London, in 1960. He became full professor of Fine Art at the University of Waterloo (Ontario) in 1972, teaching drawing, painting and printmaking. He also served periodically as the head of that department until his retirement in 1999.

Shortly after the late Jack Chambers created CARFAC (Canadian Artists' Representation/Le Front des artistes canadiens) in 1968, Chambers enlisted Kim Ondaatje and Tony Urquhart in the cause of defending the rights of professional artists. For many years, the three crossed the country, meeting with artists and representatives from galleries and museums to establish a fee structure similar to the one used by actors and musicians. Their legal and financial victories marked an ideological turning point by placing the artist at the heart of cultural policy debates. Neither Ondaatje nor Urquhart had any training in cultural affairs administration – they were developing their own artistic careers.

Curator and a member of several juries, Tony Urquhart was named to the Order of Canada in 1995. He lives in Colbourne, Ontario. He is the winner of 2009 Governor General's Award in Visual and Media Arts, for his role as co-founder of CARFAC. He has an extensive exhibition history and his works can be found in major museums, public galleries and private collections across Canada.

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2013 Winchester Galleries Ltd, B.C, Tony Urquhart, Retrospective, 2013

2010 *Ambiguous Geographies*, Stewart Hall Art Gallery, Pointe-Claire, QC

2009 Moore Gallery, Toronto, ON, 2009, 2006, 2004, 2002, 2000, 1998, 1987

2008 Thielsen Gallery, London, ON, 2003, 2001, 2000, 1990

2002 *Power of Invention, Drawings from Seven Decades by Tony Urquhart*, Museum London, ON, Art Gallery of Newfoundland and Labrador, Kitchener- Waterloo Art Gallery, ON

2002 *Les Revenants and Long Shadows: Early and Recent Paintings,* University of Waterloo Art Gallery, Waterloo, ON, McLaren Art Centre, Barrie, ON

2001 *Tony Urquhart: Drawings, Boxes and Process*, Gallery Stratford, Stratford, ON, Thames Art Gallery, Chatham, ON, Gallery Lambton, Sarnia, ON

2000 University of Lethbridge Art Gallery, Lethbridge, AB

1997 Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto, ON, 1993, 1991, 1990

1992 *Souvenir*, Glendon Gallery, York University, Toronto, ON

1992 *Cells of Ourselves*, Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery, Kitchener, ON, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, MB, Mount St. Vincent Art Gallery, Halifax, N.S., Memorial University St. John's, Newfoundland, NL, Grimsby Art Gallery, Grimsby, ON

1992 *Dialogues of Reconciliation: The Imagination of Tony Urquhart*, Art Gallery of San Antonio Art Institute, Texas, Mary Porter Sesnon Gallery, University of California, Santa Cruz

1991 *Cells of Ourselves*, Rodman Hall, St. Catharines, ON, Tom Thomson Gallery, Owen Sound, On, Art Gallery of St. Thomas, St. Thomas, ON

1988 *Worlds Apart: The Symbolic Landscape of Tony Urquhart*, retrospective, London Regional Museum and Art Gallery, London, ON, The Art Gallery of Windsor, Windsor, ON, The Hamilton Art Gallery, Hamilton, ON, The Mackenzie Art Gallery, Regina, SK

1987 Bau-Xi Gallery, Toronto, ON, 1981, 1978

1978-1980 *25 Years: Tony Urquhart Retrospective,* Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery, Kitchener, ON, Art Gallery of Windsor, Windsor, ON, York University Art Gallery, Toronto, ON, Gallery Stratford, Stratford, ON, The Hamilton Art Gallery, Hamilton, ON, Art Gallery of Brantford, Brantford, ON, Thames Art Center, Chatham, ON, Confederation Art Center, Charlottetown, PE, Memorial University, St. John's, Newfoundland, Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, Halifax, NS, University of Victoria, Maltwood Gallery, Victoria, BC

1977 Nancy Poole's Studio, Toronto, ON, 1972-1975

1975 Richard Demarco Gallery, Edinburgh, Scotland

1974 Edinboro State College, Edinboro, Pennsylvania

1972 University of Waterloo Art Gallery, Waterloo, ON

1972 The Isaacs Gallery, Toronto, ON, 1971, 1961-1969, 1959, 1957

1970 *Tony Urquhart, Reunion*, (retrospective), London Public Library and Art Museum, London, ON

1960 Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2009 Governor General's Award in Visual and Media Art, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, ON

2006 *Transforming Chronologies*, Museum of Modern Art, New York

2005 *Art of the Sixties*, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa

1998 With Michael Snow, The Moore Gallery, Toronto, ON

1995 Korean/Canadian Exchange Exhibition, Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery, Kitchener, ON, Hart House, University of Toronto

1993 *Heart of London Revisited*, London Regional Museum and Art Gallery, London, ON

1993 T*he Crisis of Abstraction*, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, ON, Norman Mackenzie Gallery, Regina, SK, Glenbow Institute, Calgary, AB, Hamilton Art Gallery, Hamilton, ON

1992 *Painting from 1960 to the Present*, Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery, Kitchener, ON

1985 Art Bank Sculpture, National Art Centre, Ottawa, ON

1985 *Then and Now* (Zacks Collection), Agnes Etherington Art Center, Queen's University, Kingston, ON

1985 *Save Life on Earth*, Yugoslavia and other Countries

1984 *The Hand Holding the Brush – Self Portraits by Canadian Artists from Robert Hind to Michael Snow*, London Regional Museum and Art Gallery, London, ON

1983 *Regionalism in London Art in the 1960s*, McIntosh Gallery, University of Western Ontario, London, ON

1978 *Six Artists: The Creative Process with Robert Harris, Alex Colville, John Gould, John Macgregor and Lynn Donahue*, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, ON

1977 *Changing Visions – The Canadian Landscape*, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, ON

1976 *La Boite*, Musee d'Art Moderne de la ville de Paris, Paris, France

1975 *Urquhart-Bates*, Maison Culturelle, Paris, France, Canada House,London, England

1974 *Present Company*, Art Gallery of Ontario, Inaugural Exhibition, Toronto, ON

1973 Drawing Biennale, Lugano, Switzerland

1972 *Toronto Painting 1953 – 1965*, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, ON

1968 *Canadian Artists '68*, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, ON

1967 *Heart of London*, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, ON

1967 *Expo 67*, Canadian Pavilion, Montreal, QC

1965 *19 Canadian Painters*, J.B Speed Art Museum, Louisville, Kentucky

1964 *Art of the Americas and Spain*, Marid, Barcelona, Rome, Paris

1963 *Biennale de la Jeunesse Paris*, Musee d'Art Moderne, Paris, France

1962 *Recent Acquisitions*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY

1958 Guggenheim International, New York

1958 *Pittsburgh Bicentennial International Exhibition of Contemporary Painting and Sculpture*, Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

COLLECTIONS

The National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, ON

The Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, ON

The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY

Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal, QC

Museo-Civico, Lugano, Switzerland

The Robert McLaughlin Art Gallery, Oshawa, ON

The Winnipeg Art Gallery, Winnipeg, Manitoba

The Victoria and Albert Museum, London, England

The Art Gallery of Vancouver, Vancouver, BC

The Art Gallery of Victoria, Victoria, BC

The Mackenzie Art Gallery, Regina, Saskatchewan

The Art Gallery of Hamilton, Hamilton, ON

The Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN

The Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery, Kitchener, ON

The Canada Council Art Bank, Ottawa, ON

The Art Gallery of Windsor, Windsor, ON

University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, ON

University of Western Ontario, London, ON

University of Waterloo, Waterloo, ON

University of Guelph, Guelph, ON

Queen's University, Kingston, ON

Hart House, University of Toronto, Toronto, ON

Concordia University, Montreal, QC

Museum London, London, ON

The Hirschorn Gallery, Washington, DC

Art Bank, B.C. Government

The Confederation Art Gallery, Charlottetown, PEI

Lambton Art Gallery, Sarnia, ON