

The 100,000 Names of Art

Cliff Eyland

Introduction by John Murchie

Saint Mary's University Art Gallery

3 cards entered under **Vuillard**, behind "Vuillard, Edourd, 1868-1940"
11 cards entered under **Braque**, behind "Braque: the great years"
2 cards entered under **Seurat**, behind "Seurat's Les Poseuses (small version) 1888-1975"
2 cards entered under **Whistler**, behind "Whistler themes and variations: an exhibition"
1 card entered under **Rembrandt**, behind "Rembrandt's Aristotle, and other Rembrandt studies"
2 cards entered under **Kollwitz**, behind "Kollwitz, Kathe (Sshmidt) 1867-1945"
5 cards entered under **Ensor**, behind "New York (City) Museum of Modern Art. James Ensor. Card 2"
1 card entered under **Morris**, behind "Morris, William, 1834-1896"
4 cards entered under **Munch**, behind "Munch und Ibsen"
4 cards entered under **Vlaminck**, behind "Vlaminck, Maurice de, 1876-1958"
1 card entered under **Tiepolo**, behind "Tiepolo: Banquet of Cleopatra"
8 cards entered under **Stella**, behind "Stella since 1970"
2 cards entered under **Rosso**, behind "Rosso, Medaro"
2 cards entered under **Samaras**, behind "Samaras, Lucas"
1 card entered under **Buren**, behind "Buren, Daniel, 1938-"
2 cards entered under **Tiffany**, behind "Tiffany, Louis Comfort"
3 cards entered under **Noland**, behind "Noland, Kenneth"
6 cards entered under **Brancusi**, behind "Brancusi's birds"
3 cards entered under **Redon**, behind "Redon, Olidon"
1 card entered under **Kosuth**, behind "Kosuth, Joseph"
1 card entered under **Darboven**, behind "Darboven, Hanne, 1941-"
17 cards entered under **Mondrian**, behind "Mondrian, the process works"
6 cards entered under **Rouault**, behind "Rouault, Georges, 1871-1958"
10 cards entered under **Kandinsky**, behind "Kandinsky: watercolours"
5 cards entered under **Gris**, behind "Gris, Juan, 1887-1927"
8 cards entered under **Leger**, behind "Leger and the avant-garde"
8 cards entered under **Klee**, behind "Klee, Paul, 1879-1940"
6 cards entered under **Chagall**, behind "Chagall: watercolours and gouaches"
5 cards entered under **Schiele**, behind "Schiele in prison"
1 card entered under **Pearlstein**, behind "Pearlstein, Phillip"
1 card entered under **Dufy**, behind "Dufy, Raoul, 1877-1953"
5 cards entered under **Rousseau**, behind "Rousseau, Redon and fantasy"
3 cards entered under **Malevich**, behind "Malevich, Kazimer Severinovich, 1878-1935, Suprematism"
15 cards entered under **Miro**, behind "Miro, sculptures"
5 cards entered under **De Chirico**, behind "De Chirico, Giorgio"
3 cards entered under **Fontana**, behind "Fontana, Lucio, 1899-1968"
6 cards entered under **Motherwell**, behind "Motherwell, Robert, 1915-"

The 100,000 Names of Art

Selected essays and reviews 1981-1991
with illustrations by the author

Cliff Eyland

With an introduction by John Murchie

PLEASE MARK IN THIS BOOK.

This book accompanies an exhibition of paintings by
Eyland at Saint Mary's University Art Gallery,
13 February to 22 March 1992

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Cliff Eyland attended Holland College, Mount Allison University and the Nova Scotia College of Art & Design. In addition to being a painter and a writer, since 1985 he has been curator of Exhibitions & Resource Centre at the Technical University of Nova Scotia.

John Murchie was a librarian at the Nova Scotia College of Art & Design for almost twenty years. He lives with his wife Gemey Kelly in Upper Sackville, New Brunswick where he is a practicing artist and writer as well as proprietor of Yellow Hill Enterprise, a farm. He has two grown children, Ethan and Isaac Murchie.

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FOREWORD

It is with great pleasure that we present Cliff Eyland's exhibition *The 100,000 Names of Art* at Saint Mary's University Art Gallery. Cliff Eyland has been an extraordinary and unique addition to the Maritime arts community for more than a decade. He has made a special contribution and given us fresh insights, not only as an artist but also as a writer, as this catalogue will attest. He also works as a curator at the Technical University of Nova Scotia.

This is not our first opportunity to work with Cliff Eyland at Saint Mary's University. In 1990 he wrote an essay for the *Chris Woods: Afflictions and Cures* exhibition and performed at the opening as a member of the band The Babbies Upstairs.

The creation of the works on the wall and the writings in the catalogue are the first two features of this exhibition. The third is a symposium entitled *Artist / Writer?* which Cliff has organized as part of the exhibition. The symposium will bring together several artists who write and have been written about. The members of the panel will be the artist/writers Marlene Creates, Dennis Gill, Barbara Lounder, Michael Lawlor, Andrea Ward and John Murchie who will also act as moderator.

I would particularly like to thank Cliff Eyland for the time he has spent on the production of this exhibition. As well, I would like to thank Ken Aucoin and Kim Truchan for organizing the exhibition, John Murchie for his insightful essay, and Horst Deppe for his design assistance. I would also like to give a special thanks to Greg Jones and XEROX Canada Ltd. for their assistance and generous sponsorship of this exhibition, as well as The Nova Scotia Department of Tourism and Culture and the Canada Council for their financial support.

Leighton Davis
Director/ Curator

TOWARDS A LETTER OF APPRECIATION

by John Murchie

We¹ met, as I recall, when you entered the Nova Scotia College of Art & Design's elevator. We were going up. You wanted to go down. Well, it has always been one of your endearing qualities to go in different directions. Now, more than ten years later, you are, among other roles, an alert curator and writer, a productive artist, and an activist in the ongoing convolution of our culture(s). That someone wishes to publish your writings and exhibit your art comes as little surprise. That you have convinced a jury of your peers to give a dollar and a private sponsor to help as well comes, perhaps, as a bit of a surprise, all things considered today. But good for all of them. Good for you.

You were solitary before you became famous. And Fame, when it came, made you if anything still more solitary. For Fame, after all, is but the sum of all the misunderstandings which gather about a new name. There are a great many about you and it would be a long and difficult task to elucidate them. Nor is it necessary. They surround your name, not the work which has far outgrown the sounding greatness of the name and is now nameless, as a plain is nameless or an ocean, the name of which is found only on maps, in books or in the mouths of men, but which, in reality, is only vastness, movement, and depth. The work of which we are to speak here has been growing for years and grows every day like a forest, losing no hour of time. Passing amongst its thousand manifestations, one is overwhelmed by the wealth of discoveries and inventions it embraces, and instinctively one looks for the two hands from which this world has come.²

Before you became famous you were a student at the College of Art & Design where I was a librarian. One day you asked me, somewhat ambiguously, if you could use the public card catalogue in an art work/exhibition you were planning. One of my very first experiences at the library some ten years earlier -- eg. twenty years ago now -- had been Robin Peck's rearrangement by size of a portion of the book collection. We had discovered this sculpture one morning. I was, obviously, appreciative of your collaborative etiquette.³ I agreed.

In retrospect, it was one of those decisions from which there is no regret.⁴

You proceeded to standardize the art reproductions in Arnason's *History of Modern Art* into library-sized 3x5" slices and filed them in the card catalogue in the appropriate⁵ places. Thus, for some time the normally strictly utilitarian source of information, the card catalogue, took on local colour as the oddly

¹It has been a puzzle, more than writing almost always is, trying to provide some justice for you. Then, perambulating around on another matter I read your essay on Charlie Murphy in which you begin by quoting from Tobias Smollett's *Humphry Clinker* which, of course, reminded me of Laurence Sterne and his perambulations and, as well, of the whole 18th Century British novel and the early attempts at realistic fictive prose renditions of culture and society. An early realistic strategy had been to present the action of the novel in the form of a series of letters. Like autobiography, presumed and faked in *Robinson Crusoe*, a distinct air of reality was gained to the enterprise. Perhaps it will work here.

²This seems somewhat more rhetorical, Cliff, than I care to have it and not really sounding like my voice. It comes no doubt from your suggestion that I read Rainer Maria Rilke on Rodin. I did. It's useless in its oldworldness.

³In honesty, Cliff, I was also aware of the horrific art library confrontation in England which resulted in a chewed *Art and Culture* by Clement Greenberg. I was not prepared to run the risk of being one day a scandalous art historical footnote. I didn't know you well enough.

⁴This may be presumptuous, as are so many curatorial assertions about contemporary artmaking. There is no regret from my point of view. You may have some as, for instance, you continue to be confined and defined by the spatial and dimensional potentials of a 3 x 5" format.

⁵"Appropriate" by your standard, not necessarily the Library's, since we never went through the normal "revision" process which, technically, would be required in catalogue filing to reduce to a minimum the odds of an error. As you might imagine, if you thought about it, one filing error could mean a book intellectually "lost" to the public with the possibility of compounding further error as other cards are "correctly" filed incorrectly around the card in question. Without wanting to create a labyrinth here, you might well understand, as well as know, that Borges was a librarian.

cropped images of Modern Art peeked out unexpectedly. Your reductive logic scrambled Arnason's myopia and ours as well; at the same time you put the scissors to a Kafkian bureaucracy insofar as a library represents such in the minds of many. We controlled more of the cards, however, and were then in the process of "closing" the catalogue⁶ in favour, ultimately, of a state of the art electronic catalogue. It seemed to me then that your art -- as wily and funny, as pointed as it was -- no matter, it was the work of a luddite more than anything else.⁷ One sensed more the presence of a Ned Lud than of a Jacques Derrida, more British working class than French bourgeois.⁸ The work now resides in the basement of 5163 Duke Street along with the thousands of cards from the old catalogue, the basement of what was once a prosperous commercial bank and is now the catacomb of an art college library. All of this may be but an example, Cliff, of the ancient adage *ars est celare artem*? -- one of the tremendous strengths of your work -- your art, that is.⁹

"Representation" is a term whose stock rises and falls in company with the term "bourgeois." Representation is seen as the ideological means by which the nineteenth century bourgeois declared its social constructions a natural order and thus legitimized its class rule which continues today. Art's own formal reductions, as part of a general critique of representation, were seen as allied to the struggle against the bourgeois appropriation of presence in the conventional, and the material in the ideological. Today, only work that registers representation in a critical way, that presents it in the form of a critique, is allowed. Even the name "work" displays itself opposed to the mere immateriality and non-productivity of representation. To make use of representation without these scare quotes is suspect.¹⁰

Yours must be among the most sustained and reduced reductions of the modernist critique; or, perhaps, rather a critique of the critique. I suspect actually that your reductionism has its real origins more in practicality as I look at the cruddy, little, Duchampian-like black attaché case which you gave me with *all* of the paintings -- a hundred plus -- you intend for the exhibition.¹¹ For you there were to be no truck loads of art and major crates to disseminate your paintings. That practicality in an ecologically fragile world must have been one source, as well as the other realities which confront the wish to make intelligent, non-utilitarian things, not the least of which reality is the tradition and burden of past production. How does anyone make anything intelligent, or intelligible, today?

Looking through your major paintings I am struck by what always strikes me in your art -- your virtuosity. In no small measure I mean your drawing and painting skill, but mostly I mean the breadth of your interests and investigations. Your usual presentation of your work as seemingly smaller parts of a

⁶That is library argot for discontinuing the catalogue as a current source of bibliographical information which, in this instance, meant throwing it out altogether.

⁷See your 1984 review "Artists Talk About Technology" for some support of this view.

⁸Although granted you are, and were, as acquainted with and open to *the* issues as any practicing artist, and more so than most.

⁹I have subsequently found that Robin Metcalfe describes his sense that one of your exhibitions was "calculated to avoid detection" [*ArtsAtlantic* Spring 1986]. Two years later he changed his mind somewhat about the propriety of this when he notes that "Rick Salutin has commented, in *Marginal Notes*, that one can become too fond of acting on the periphery. As clever and insightful as Eyland's marginalia undoubtedly are, one wonders what he might achieve were he to turn his hand to writing the book" [*ArtsAtlantic* Fall 1988]. My guess is that this observation would not make sense to you as it does not to me if for no better reason than that we know G. K. Hall can take 3x5" cards and make a book.

¹⁰Again, Cliff, I am sorry but I seem to lose my true voice momentarily here. It isn't your fault this time but probably mine from too many hours pouring over YYZ's collection of Philip Monk's writings *Struggles with the Image: essays in art criticism* (1988) in an attempt to hoe a straight critical line of thought.

¹¹One of the small ironies, of course, is the extreme uneasiness I felt walking around Halifax with this case full of art. Someone might assert that it is ephemeral because it doesn't look like real art which is really just a reflection of our loss of any sense of genre. An Elizabethan sonnet may have been small but not without meaning and value.

larger whole often distracts a viewer from approaching each individually, and sometimes from seeing the extent of your representation. Yet in whatever presentation, the wondrously exhilarating strength of your work lies in your assertion that every part of the world is as accessible to aesthetic perception as any other part -- a strength which is not mitigated by any manner of heart-on-the-sleeve sensibility of I'm o.k./you're o.k. or some tortive mutation thereof. Like a good library, your art is full of representations far too numerous to be wholly explored, of curious intelligence overflowing.¹²

I am tempted to say, Cliff, that *like every painter worthy of the name, you paint the truth about history and the world as it is. That history includes the universal rejection of abstract art -- and the post-modernist failure to create an art as sheerly authoritative as what they have renounced. It includes the abandonment by artists of the old avant-garde's anti-bourgeois ethical stance -- and the absence(so far) of a cogent post-modern response to the insatiable consumerism of North American society.*

Tempted, yet I am uncertain of its truth.¹³ To speak of "painting the truth" might mean something if you were a war artist or an illustrator. The painter *qua* artist does something else and something quite simple -- creates value; and the values you create arise not from rejections but from selections -- the selections of what interests you in the world -- libraries, abstract art, portraits, landscapes, architecture, other art, and, of course, miscellaneous.¹⁴ Not very selective, really, but then I have argued that your strength is in your virtuous openness to the world. And your seriousness. If asked to simply characterize you, most people would centre on your humour, your willingness to joke and laugh.¹⁵ Yet I am always taken aback by your sudden withdrawal from our conversation as you centre your thoughts seriously on a matter.¹⁶

Only today have I looked through the reviews of your work which you sent me.¹⁷ They are supportive without exception. But none of them, I think, really tries to grips with the question of what your art is, although there is an inappropriate tendency to view it as "idiosyncratic." There are long histories of miniature painting, for one. There is the long history, albeit only recently acclaimed, of appropriation by one artist of other artists' art. There is the tradition of cumulative art practice in artists as diverse as Arman and Spoerri in one respect and Richard Long in quite another. And so on. What you do is so clearly not *naïve* although perhaps more fortuitous than not. Your fortune is having discovered, by whatever means, a field upon which to play. Your strength of character has been to continue sustained play. Your art is to play and the strength of your art is nothing other than the breadth of your interests. I mean by *play*, of course, the sense of amusing oneself but also the sense of freedom. I do not mean play as horsing around or indulgence, although those

¹²It does seem to me that some such description of your art and activity is more to the point than, say, Charlotte Townsend-Gault's suggestions about your "musing on the organization of knowledge" [*Vanguard* March 1984]; a suggestion based on a misunderstanding of library's epistemology.

¹³It sounds as though I have slipped again into another voice in all likelihood from re-reading my collected writings of John Bentley Mays.

¹⁴The organizational categories which you sent along with the paintings. Are there others? And, are these stable or on another day might they be different? Does it matter either way? You have stated in private correspondence that any suggestion of "some overarching scheme" to your production is "non-existent."

¹⁵This is another one of those authorial/curatorial presumptive constructs to help tell the story which I am making up.

¹⁶Certainly, I do not mean to allude to some "laughing on the outside/crying..." cliché but rather more to roughly agree with Susan Gibson-Garvey's observation that "the endearing naughtiness with which [you carry] out [your] project often masks the seriousness of [your] intent" [*Tenth Dalhousie Drawing Exhibition* (1990)]. Although the notion of "endearing naughtiness" may be cloying - it is to me - it nevertheless does direct attention to that element in your work which makes it move beyond a delimiting specialized peer audience. The element, of course, is humour: an element too seldom encountered in our high and official culture as you note yourself, for instance, in your 1987 review "Sean McQuay."

¹⁷And here perhaps is the best empirical evidence I have about your art, at least insofar as one's art is connected to one's personality, genetic structure, soul, psyche, something. Not only did you possess and send a full and ample c.v. but also copies of all your writings, cartoons (back to the 70s and from Alberta and P.E.I.), photocopies of articles on libraries, reviews, notices, flyers -- several large manila envelopes worth of stuff but giving no evidence of organization. It is the content, the accumulation of intellectual property, not its organization which interests you in the library.

are the slight semantic shifts which are potential in both the word and the art. With the word we usually figure it out by the limited context of its use. The art is a little more difficult and finally will likely have to await the cumulative and complete *Oeuvres* and, god help us, a *catalogue raisonné*.

My guess, Cliff, is that the issue of *audience* is the most profound contemporary art issue. Who looks and who reads? Our friends and loved ones,¹⁸ of course. Perhaps not even our friends always. Who would read this or your collected writings? While reading/proofing your writings for *The 100,000 Names of Art*, I came to recognize that what I liked generally about them was *your* voice even though at times it was irritating and that *your* reflections on the work in question invariably were peppered with insights about all kinds of art and art-related issues. There was the deliberate creation of a parenthetical persona who found the really important things to be aside from that which was the centre of focus. The insights may or may not fit a cogent, or even coherent, pattern. There is a quality to your writing of listening to you speak out loud in a room which might only have you present. I mean here to emphasise the quality of the *personal* and the *possessive* all the while knowing that there is indeed an audience out there.¹⁹

Whoever the audience is, it seems to me that the form of our art and of our writing "had better be prepared to commit piracy on any technique that will float and carry content" as Brian Fawcett argues.²⁰ In your manner, I trust that you are leading the way, Cliff.

Good for you ■

Halifax, Nova Scotia/Upper Sackville, New Brunswick
June 1991/January 1992

¹⁸I will take this opportunity to thank my audience for her patience and help with all my work, Gemey Kelly.

¹⁹"One images himself addressing his peers I suppose. Surely that might be the definition of 'seriousness?' I would like, as you see, to convince myself that my pleasure in your response is not plain vanity but the pleasure of being heard, the pleasure of companionship, which seems more honorable." Those words, Cliff, were originally in a letter from the British poet Charles Tomlinson to his friend the American poet George Oppen who suggested a division in to lines of verse for a collaborative poem titled "To C.T."

²⁰*Cambodia: a book for people who find television too slow* (New York, 1989), p.61.