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**USES OF THE  
VERNACULAR IN  
CONTEMPORARY  
NOVA SCOTIAN ART**

January 14 to March 6, 1994

Dalhousie Art Gallery





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## Uses of the Vernacular in Contemporary Nova Scotian Art

January 14 to March 6, 1994  
Dalhousie Art Gallery

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and Susan Gibson Garvey

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

WE WISH TO EXPRESS OUR SINCERE thanks to Richard Field, Susan Foshay, Alma Houston, Chris Huntington, Bernard Riordon, and Harold Pearse for giving their time to discuss the topic with us, some at considerable length. We are also very grateful to the institutions and private collectors that have generously loaned works for this exhibition, and to the Canada Council Exhibitions Assistance Program for their financial support. Last, but by no means least, our heartfelt thanks go to the artists in this exhibition, both for their lively contributions to the discussion and for agreeing to lend their work.



## FOREWORD

*Mern O'Brien**Director*

THE IDEA FOR THIS EXHIBITION was born out of a series of letters exchanged between Susan Gibson Garvey and Cliff Eyland while Cliff was living in England in 1992. Both had long expressed an interest in investigating the relationship between Nova Scotian contemporary art and folk art and over a period of a year they carved out a curatorial thesis which would examine the appropriation of the vernacular by a number of prominent artists with connections to Nova Scotia. This is the first in-depth examination of this kind and it presents us with a number of observations including the mutual appropriations between the vernacular and other contemporary artists in Nova Scotia. Given the provocative dichotomy between the two forms of creativity and art production, it is clear that the efforts of these two curators will stimulate further discussion on the deliberate or serendipitous appropriation of cultural idioms by contemporary Nova Scotian artists of all stripes.

We are grateful for the generous assistance of the lenders, artists, dealers, collectors, and art historians who contributed an immense amount of time and energy to this project. In particular, I would like to acknowledge the enthusiastic collaboration, intellectual rigor and collegial support which both Curators contributed towards the realization of this project. In addition, the Gallery's dedicated Registrar/Preparator, Michele Gallant, took on the challenge of gathering, framing, and installing all the works in this exhibition with her usual efficiency and professional aplomb. The invaluable assistance of our Office Manager, Denise Hoskin, has been received by everyone associated with this project. A final note of gratitude must go to The Canada Council whose generous and on-going support of our programs through the Exhibition Assistance Program has made this important exhibition and accompanying catalogue possible.



Collins Eisenhauer, *Woman and Dog Dancing* 1975

polychrome wood, 19.2 x 12.4 x 24.0 cm

Collection: Art Gallery of Nova Scotia; Photo courtesy Art Gallery of Nova Scotia

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INTRODUCTION

*Cliff Eyland & Susan Gibson Garvey*  
*Co-Curators*

THE CURATORIAL PREMISE FOR THIS EXHIBITION is straightforward: we propose to examine the appropriation of the vernacular in contemporary Nova Scotian art practice — specifically, the relationship of so-called folk art to contemporary art produced in Nova Scotia which, to some degree or other, adopts material, methodological, or attitudinal components of “folk.”

The time seems ripe for such an investigation. Folk art has been valorized for such qualities as innocent charm or robust execution in many places and periods, but perhaps never so emphatically as recently in Nova Scotia, where the collection and exhibition of folk art has formed an important part of the provincial Art Gallery’s mandate, and where the Nova Scotia Department of Tourism actively promotes folk art as emblematic of its culture. Throughout modern art history, sophisticated artists have admired and appropriated aspects of vernacular art production (for example, Picasso’s appropriation of African sculptural forms, and Surrealist artists’ admiration for the innocence and apparent disinhibition of art made by children or the insane.) Today, along with quotations from the history of Fine Art, artists borrow liberally from popular culture, kitsch, and ethnographic and folk sources. What is the logic underlying the borrowing of these idioms, the degrees of appropriation, the processes of awareness or denial, evident in sophisticated work which employs the vernacular? What, indeed, is the vernacular? By limiting our enquiry to contemporary Nova Scotian production, specifically in relation to the use of folk idioms, we hope to focus on a microcosm from which appropriate observations might be made that have relevance to the wider topic.

In the course of our research, we interviewed local collectors, curators and dealers who have a special interest in Nova Scotian folk art, and visited and selected works from the studios of artists who clearly owe some aspect of their imagery, sentiment or methodology to local folk idioms. In addition, we decided to select the works of some well-known folk artists (both living and deceased) to include in the exhibition as referents. Now that our research is (at least temporarily) completed, we are less sure which is the referent and which the appropriation, or whether either term is apt. Indeed labels such as “folk,” and qualities such as “innocence,” “sophistication” and “authenticity,” have proven equally slippery (not to mention the tricky notion of “regionalism” that arises from defining an art practice, at least partly, in terms of a province.) Moreover, as co-curators we find ourselves subtly differing on some issues, and, while we are in general agreement regarding the topic, we have not always reached the same conclusion from the same evidence. We hope that the visitors to the exhibition and the readers of this document will find the topic equally engaging, and invite them to draw their own conclusions.

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## USES OF THE VERNACULAR IN CONTEMPORARY NOVA SCOTIAN ART

*Susan Gibson Garvey*

CLIFF EYLAND EXPLICITLY TACKLES NOTIONS of sophistication, naiveté, authenticity and appropriation in his scholarly essay (*page 9*), which also presents an illuminating perspective on historical uses of the vernacular and a critical analysis of the recent folk art phenomenon in Nova Scotia. My immediate task is to substantiate our premise and comment on the visual evidence.

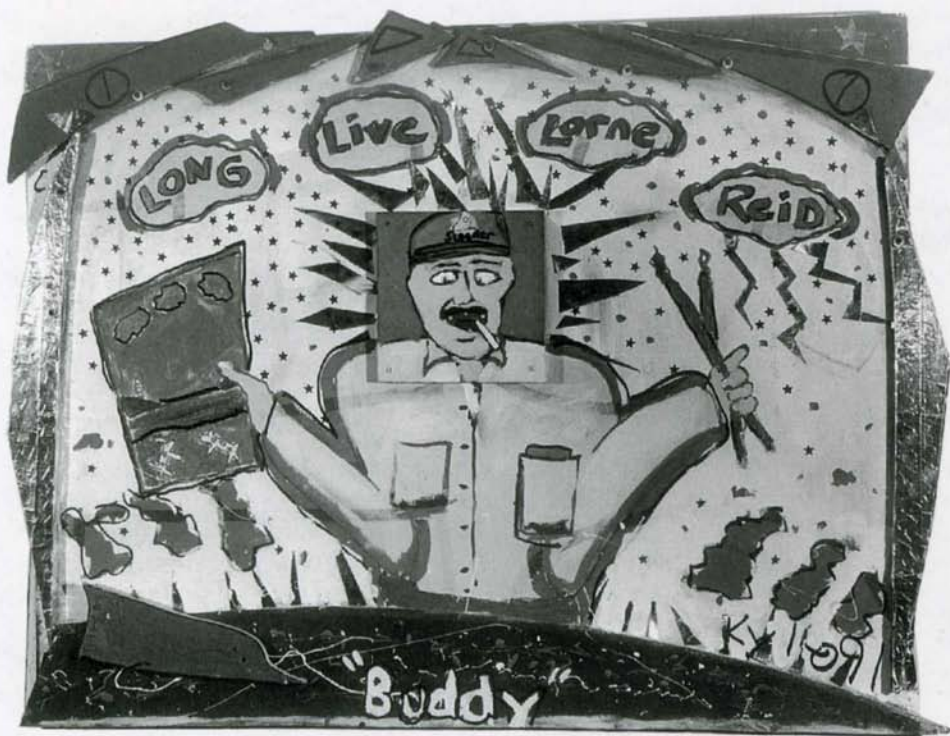
We appear to have chosen a topic which many people interested in the visual arts in Nova Scotia assume to be self-evident. That is to say, while they may or may not have given it much thought, everyone we interviewed (both formally and informally) regarding contemporary Nova Scotian artists who employ folk art idioms immediately recognized what we were referring to, and even suggested similar lists of artists whose work most exemplified this practice. No one said "I have no idea what you're talking about." Which leads us to suppose that there is indeed a *canon*, a group of artists associated with a practice that is generally well-known in visual art circles, if as yet unofficially acknowledged. The artists most frequently cited were Janice Leonard and Eric Walker, both of whom employ *bricolage* techniques and "down home" themes. Gerald Ferguson's more recent works using stencilled imagery were often mentioned, as were Nancy Edell's hooked rugs and the narrative etchings of John Neville. When we suggested that Leslie Sampson's cross-stitch samplers, Charlie Murphy's photo-collages and Kyle Jackson's folkly assemblages could also be considered in this group, there was little disagreement. Other artists were occasionally suggested, but, while our list is not intended to be either exhaustive or exclusive, the above eight may be considered to be representative of the present range of the practice.

Perhaps because their Nova Scotian activities occurred a couple of decades ago and they have long since left the province, Eric Fischl and Tim Zuck were seldom mentioned by those we interviewed. We have not included them in our present selection, but it is worth pointing out that Fischl, in particular, created a significant group of drawings and assemblages that incorporated Nova Scotian vernacular forms while he was employed teaching at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design [NSCAD], and in the mid-seventies Tim Zuck began to make paintings whose simplified forms and areas of bright, flat colour could be directly related to folk art, even if their agenda differed.

It must be acknowledged that all of the "non-folk" artists included in this exhibition evince a range of motivations, methods and motifs in their work, only some of which may be related to folk art, and each artist differs from the others to the extent that more may be said about their differences than their similarities. With the possible exception of Jackson's pieces, none of their works could easily be confused with actual folk art. Nevertheless, each employs the vernacular in ways that are immediately recognizable, and which have, in one circumstance or another, instigated the adjective "folk."

If there is indeed an assumed canon of artists who appropriate folk idioms, there must also exist assumptions about what exactly folk art is — assumptions which Cliff Eyland discusses in his essay. For the purposes of visual evidence, in addition to work by the abovementioned artists, we have included a selection of works by artists who have been firmly classified as folk artists, usually through repeated inclusion in folk art collections, exhibitions, catalogues and similar classifying or interpretative vehicles. These folk art works — carvings by Collins Eisenhauer, paintings by Maud Lewis, Joe Norris, Francis Silver and Joe Sleep, hooked rugs by Ellen Gould Sullivan, Leo Naugler's painted table, and a pair of embroidered samplers from the last century — engage the art of the "non-folk" artists and often raise questions simply by virtue of their juxtaposition.

It will be noted that all the artists in this exhibition create work which may be placed generally in the European aesthetic tradition, and that artists who work in other traditions, or who customarily align themselves with non-western cultural practices, do not appear in our current selection. The reason should become clear when one considers that, while appropriation does indeed occur between many different cultures, appropriation and quotation have been consistently common features of the European tradition in art and are specific techniques in contemporary, or "postmodern," practice. In addition, the very idea of vernacular art (in this case, "folk art") presupposes a non-vernacular art ("high" or "fine art") with which to make comparisons. Many cultures have evolved systems of artistic expression which do not recognise such distinctions, and in which cultural expressions are integrated into daily life in a less hierarchical fashion. In the European tradition, the historic emphasis on mastery and refinement in art, no doubt echoing social hierarchies, has contributed to the separation of "fine" art from the presumed lack of sophistication in vernacular expressions. Despite the modifications wrought by a North American, as opposed to European, setting, and the degrees of social and cross-cultural influences informing contemporary art practice, the artistic expressions of Nova Scotians who work in the European aesthetic tradition still appear to be divided into fine art and folk art. It is the phenomenon of this division, and the borrowings and quotations that bridge it, which prompted our exhibition.



Kyle Jackson, *Long Live Lorne Reid* 1991  
 acrylic and metal tape on wood panelling, 97.3 x 127.7 cm  
 Collection: Soho Kitchen



## Degrees of Appropriation

WHEN KYLE JACKSON MADE his construction *Ferry to Dartmouth* in 1985 his art school friends told him it looked "just like folk art." Soon after, Jackson began working for dealer Chris Huntington, and, through first-hand contact with the range of folk artists in Huntington's stable, participated in the phenomenal growth of the folk art industry. Jackson is art school trained, however, and, despite a tendency to favour a "funk-folk" style, he is quite capable of more complex work, as demonstrated in *Nova Scotia* (1992), in which his painterly treatment of images derived from real estate advertisements (complete with the houses' asking prices) converts the cool notion of property into the warm idea of home. *Long Live Lorne Reid* (1991), his homage to a fellow folk artist (swearing off drink and cigarettes if only God gives him a good painting) suggests a community in which artists cheerfully adopt and exaggerate each other's primitivism.

If we may think of Jackson's relatively unsophisticated appropriations as being closest on the spectrum to folk art itself, then the opposite end of that grey scale must surely be occupied by the work of Gerald Ferguson, whose appropriations are never innocent or uncalculated. Ferguson describes his recent assemblages, in which stencilled imagery is played against the architectural detritus of a bygone era, as "bourgeois hedonism coupled with *memento mori*."<sup>1</sup>

Ferguson began acquiring Nova Scotian folk art almost immediately upon arriving in this province in the late sixties, and has been in the vanguard of folk art collectors for many years. Most of his collection is now on loan to the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia. Only recently, however, has he begun to incorporate folk art idioms into his own painting. Ferguson has borrowed imagery and techniques from many periods and styles in his works, and has not balked at hiring others to do his paintings for him, or at filching wholesale images of, for example, pears from Cézanne, goblets from Picasso and lobster cut-outs from the Clearwater company advertisements. His current use of vernacular idioms, such as the stencilled imagery of "theorem" painting, reproducing the forms of platters, flower baskets, fish and lobsters, continues a preoccupation that first emerged in his *Still Life* paintings of 1989-90. When these images are combined in formal arrangements with salvaged doors, mouldings, and parts of furnishings from old Nova Scotian houses — domestic objects replete with nostalgia but deprived of function — the effect is one of commemorative melancholy. Like Marsden Hartley, about whom he has written so eloquently, Ferguson appears to have become preoccupied with death. He has appropriated motifs and methods from folk traditions that generally celebrate life, and, through various subversions (the predominant use of black paint and regimented imagery, for example), he has drained them, vampire-like, of their innocent vitality. Essentially, these assemblages are ghosts — literal vestiges of real things, and also illusions of things that may never have been there.

For twenty years Ferguson has examined the stereotypes, and deconstructed the strategies, of painting. His recent works continue this agenda. They involve highly sophisticated transitions in which recycled images and objects become commemorative illusions of themselves, and which at the same time declare that painting itself is an illusion, an artifice, that can be constructed to mean everything or nothing.

Like Ferguson, Nancy Edell teaches at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, and makes complex work in which she consciously borrows styles and imagery from global art history. She has picked her way through the variegated garden of world cultures, ancient and modern, garnering motifs from North American kitsch and popular art en route, all of which she incorporates into her prints, drawings, hooked rugs and mixed media works. Early in her career Edell was involved in film anima-

1 All the statements or phrases in quotation marks describing the artists' works originate either from conversations with the artists or from written communications by them.





Nancy Edell, *Peter and Nancy* 1993  
hooked rug, 65.5 x 96.0 cm  
Collection: the artist

tion, but she started making hooked rugs soon after coming to Nova Scotia. Over the years she has augmented the imagery of this time-honoured folk tradition to include, first, a cast of winged zoomorphic figures attempting flight, trickery and various balancing acts; later, ambiguous figures acting out bizarre sexual politics with masks, glove puppets and saucy erections (her *Home Entertainment* series); and, more recently, "art nuns" — black-robed and halo-ed women diligently creating artwork or pursuing art historical research in archives and archeological digs. The imagery in her latest hooked rug, *Peter and Nancy* (1993) has been strongly influenced by a recent visit to Mexico.

While her rug-making is an obvious folk connection (indeed, she owns several mats by folk artist Ellen Gould Sullivan), Edell's periodic preoccupation with images of sexual display, circus performers and carnival acts finds an echo in a number of other folk traditions: the decoration of carnival structures themselves, for instance, which was for many years folk artist Joe Sleep's occupation and an inspiration for his later imagery; the traditional construction of macabre little wind toys, which often included mechanisms to conceal, reveal, raise or lower parts of the figures; and the pervasive anthropomorphism of folk carvings, where animals are assigned human characteristics (and vice versa). Folk carver Collins Eisenhower's puckish dancing dogs would be perfectly at home in some of Edell's *Home Entertainment* works.

While Edell's rugs undoubtedly contribute to the feminist revival and honouring of traditional women's fibrework, this is not their prime consideration. Nor do class politics (as opposed to sexual politics) play a significant role in Edell's idiosyncratic themes and imagery, even though traditional crafts and folk or primitive idioms are most often associated with the "common people," i.e. the working class. Socio-political considerations do figure prominently in the work of Eric Walker and Charlie Murphy, albeit in very different ways.

Eric Walker began his studies at NSCAD in the late '70s, when the physical manipulation of paint and concrete materials was still subordinate to the manipulation of concepts and the ephemeral gestures of performance and video art. He rapidly became disillusioned with prevailing International styles and started to look for something more "locally based." His childhood fascination with museum artifacts and dioramas, and his memory of Nova Scotian stories and folklore from the volumes of Alistair MacLeod, Thomas Raddall and Helen Creighton, provided the impetus for his early collages. An interest in popular local history led to works which celebrate grass roots initiatives, such as the Co-operative Movement founded by Moses Coady in Antigonish, and the struggles of the labour movement, as in his portrayal of the CN steamship strike in Halifax. Other works, such as *I'll Dance With Anyone, She Said, Even the Devil* (1985), dwell more on local folklore and customs. Such socially-conscious, locally insistent works appear to adopt both the style and sentiment of 19th century folk artist Francis Silver,<sup>2</sup> whose painting *Settlement of Fisheries Dispute* is included in this exhibition.



Gerald Ferguson, *Tulips and Fish with Yellow Door* 1992  
enamel on canvas with wood and cast iron, 136.3 x 245.6 cm  
Collection: the artist

Whether Walker has ever seen this particular piece is not an issue; the didactic, quirky deployment of words and imagery arise from similar preoccupations, not the least of which is grass roots social concern and a belief in the "honesty" of vernacular communication.

Recently, Walker has modified his subject-matter to reflect a more personal, less socio-political landscape. While he acknowledges fellow artist Janice Leonard, whose paintings and collages are quintessentially "local," as his most important artistic influence, he also admires photographer Robert Frank's "beat generation" collages and Paterson Ewen's gouged plywood paintings. "I'm shooting to be as sublime as Paterson Ewen," he says, "But my work gets too heavy with stories and people." Grass roots can bind in more ways than one.

Cape Breton-born artist Charlie Murphy also engages the lives of ordinary people in his robust assemblages of photographs, metal, plaster and paint, but he differs from his colleagues in this exhibition in two significant ways. First, he did not attend art school; he is self-educated in art through such experiences as working with New York photographer Louis Faurer, living close to

2 Barry Lord refers to Silver as a "new democratic painter" in his *History of Painting in Canada - Towards a People's Art*.



artists Robert Frank and June Leaf (whom he acknowledges as mentors), and visiting galleries on study trips to New York and Venice. Second, he says that he actually dislikes folk art, describing it as decorative and pretty, lacking intensity. If his works exhibit a roughness or primitivism, he says, it is due to a concern with anchoring the work of art in common daily experience and not in some academic tradition or in the purely abstract life of the mind. Murphy's earlier works, such as *Aunt Warwi in my Mother's Kitchen* (1983) and *Myself playing Indian* (1983), elicit a direct response through their use of tactile materials and their portrayal of the artist, his friends or relatives in everyday domestic spaces, often spiced with a little self-deprecating humour. However, the pervasive use of mirror images in work from this period suggests a more complicated agenda — one that questions and extends the photographic representation, and plays with contrasts of illusion and reality. The work may seem almost brutally tacked together on occasion, but it displays a sophisticated understanding of visual and pictorial "truths."

Murphy's later works have largely abandoned bricolage and personal story-telling, although he continues to "frame" his photographs in painted patterns that do indeed look folkly, as in *I Smell the Light* (1990) and *Snoopy* (1993). His cropped and repeated images now portray "familiar strangers" — anonymous people seen daily on city sidewalks, cafés, parks, bars and backyards, people whose lives and relationships can be hinted at but never known. Often these are accompanied by images of urban and industrial architecture (particularly from industrial Cape Breton), structures decaying or abandoned, replete with the melancholia of the neglected working class. Thus, he employs the vernacular of ordinary people, addressing their ambiguous existences, often caught between hope and grim reality. As if to emphasize this tension, Murphy paints around the black and white photographs (which have their own stylistic and technical roughness) in vigorous, almost garish, colours and patterns. The bright zig-zag border around the rather depressing images in *Snoopy* could well have been borrowed from a Joe Sleep painting.

If some of the artists in this exhibition employ folk methods and materials, but eschew its sentiment, others, such as John Neville and Janice Leonard, often embrace the folk sentiment, while employing more sophisticated techniques. Neville uses a distinctly non-folk technique — that of etching and aquatint — to memorialize a rapidly disappearing way of life. He treats images of his Hall's Harbour neighbours and ancestors (harvesting dulse, rowing doreys or sweeping fish weirs) with the affection and wry humour of one whose own history is intimately tied to those he seeks to portray. In *World Cruise* (1992), fireworks and cigars celebrate the proposed voyage of a boat as yet high and dry on the wharf — a not-so-unbelievable event in a province where the deserted dream-boats of would-be mariners lie rotting in various harbours. The etching *Flame of Youth* (1992) records the interruption by a stern father of his sons' "fart-lighting" party. It displays the same unabashed humour that characterises Eisenhauer's raunchy dogs and much of Edell's imagery.

Neville is at home in his medium of etching, and his compositions often employ unusual perspective and dramatic chiaroscuro. Art school educated, Neville speaks of his admiration for Goya's etchings, and, while he may not actually intend direct quotations, many of his images seem to make art-historical references — to Hokusai in *The Unexpected Wave* (1990), for example, or to William Blake in *Bentley Mountain* 1925 (1989), and even to Marsden Hartley in *Salmon Supper* (1993). However, those who write about Neville's work more often stress its folkly qualities, probably because the subjects are unequivocally vernacular, and because his drawing tends to be simple — even downright awkward at times — appropriate to the narratives, but in odd contrast to the medium. The result is more complicated than may at first appear, and the peculiar nostalgia that pervades Neville's work arises out of a compelling mixture of sophistication and naïveté.

Janice Leonard's painted plywood evocations of her rural childhood home evoke a similar mixture, tinged with the irony of growing up in, and losing, a place called Paradise. Just as another "Valley" artist, Maud Lewis, painted joyful scenes of animals and people innocently enjoying the charms of rural life, so Leonard depicts the rivers, trees and people of an idyllic past. However, the sentiment differs in one dramatic aspect. In most folk art, the sentiment is celebratory, the vision one of unalloyed delight, but for Leonard and Neville the attitude is commemorative, mourning what is past or rapidly disappearing. Occasionally the nostalgic sentiment is so strong in Leonard's recent work that it slips into a kind of romantic pathos — a memory bathed in golden light, like her view of Paradise Brook in *The Golden Thread of Memory* (1988).

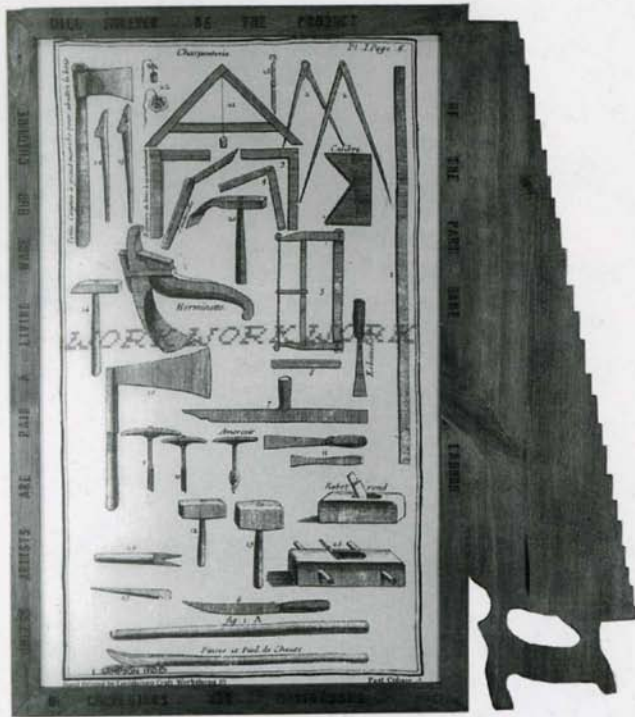
Leonard has always dealt with subjects "close to home," whether these involve local history, as typified by *Belgian Relief* (1980) — a slice of Halifax war history collaged from salvaged materials (the kind of work that directly inspired Eric Walker), or personal history, such as her *Diary* series, which employ actual sheets torn from the diary she wrote in her youth. The relationship of house to home, and the peculiar sentiment that seems to accumulate in the very walls of houses, resonates in pieces such as *Helen Loves Donnie* (1987). This assemblage incorporates actual fragments of wallpaper, wood and linoleum gathered by Leonard during home renovations, and poignantly evokes past occupants. *Log House* (1982) from Leonard's "Dream Home" series, uses scraps of wallpaper to surround the newspaper image of a rural home — a place to dream about, while fixing up a crumbling city dwelling. *Passports Unnecessary* (1987) returns us to the countryside of her Annapolis Valley childhood, but not, this time, with unmodified romance, for the bucolic image of a fisherman casting a fly in a stream is foiled by an ironic text which reads "God made Nova Scotia for the Sportsman."

The juxtaposition of text and imagery is an important feature of the work of Leslie Sampson, who came to Nova Scotia from Philadelphia in the early '80s in order to study for her MFA at NSCAD. On her days off she toured the province and began collecting hooked mats, folk carvings and other works, such as John Neville's etchings, which seemed to provide an "antidote to the engaging conceptualism and art theory at NSCAD... ..In all cases," she writes, "it was the directness that appealed to me. There was a picture or an idea, a memory or a story that seemed worth telling or remembering." How appropriate, then, that her cross-stitch embroidery, *Moses* (1987), pays tribute to the work of folk artist Grandma Moses, the paradigm of naive painting in North America.

There is little that may be termed naive, however, in Sampson's many-layered works, where issues of gender and social politics are encoded in cross-stitched texts that deconstruct the assumptions of their historical counterparts. Traditional embroidered samplers with their customary homilies have been both honoured and subverted by Sampson's choice of texts, embroidered on fabric and engraved into their wooden frames, and often further complicated by the addition of stitched or bas-relief images. Sampson's main preoccupation has been the reclamation of alternative histories, but there are other interesting sub-themes. In *Work Work Work* (1988), a tea towel, embroidered with the words (exhortation or complaint?) "Work, Work, Work," is held by a wooden frame incorporating the shape of a rip-saw and the text "Unless artists are paid a living wage our culture will forever be the product of part time carpenters and waitresses." It is a moot point whether the sentiment of these words is enhanced or contradicted by the texts on the *Moses* piece, which read "If I didn't start painting I would have raised chickens" and "... on one level being an artist is simply holding down a job."

Given the common assumption, on this continent so obsessed by the work ethic, that folk art is more "honest" than other forms of art, these two works by Sampson raise contentious issues, not the least of which is the dichotomy between the often praised simplicity of "labouring with one's hands" that contributes to the appeal of much folk art and craft, and the supposedly less accessible





Leslie Sampson, *Work Work Work* 1988  
 cross stitch embroidery on tea towel, wood frame, 74.4 x 66.9 cm  
 Collection: The Art Gallery, Mount Saint Vincent University  
 Photo courtesy: The Art Gallery, Mount Saint Vincent University

work of abstracting and grappling with percepts and concepts that characterizes much contemporary art. Sampson incorporates both perspectives, balancing opposites to make art that is both physically appealing and conceptually challenging. But then, such a statement may be found to be true of much, if not most, of the work in this exhibition, if we can manage to drop habitual classifications for a moment. Might not the gorgeous drips and splashes on so-called folk artist Leo Naugler's tabletop actually represent a clever appropriation of modernist action-painting?

In Leslie Sampson's *Jeffrey* (1989) the embroidered text reads "The world is made of stories not of atoms." If Eric Walker opts for the stories and Gerry Ferguson for the atoms, is one less "honest" than the other? Or does all art, even the most naive, involve some form of artifice, and all art, even the most deceptive, present some form of truth?

## RED HERRINGS, CLEVER HORSES AND BENEFITS OF THE DOUBT Uses of the Vernacular in Nova Scotian Art

*Cliff Eyland*

IN THE CONTEMPORARY ART WORLD, "Nova Scotia" is short for "The Nova Scotia College of Art and Design," a centre of advanced art practice. In other circles, Nova Scotia is identified with the work of the Maritime Realist school: both Alex Colville and Tom Forrestall are Nova Scotians. Thirdly, Nova Scotia is well known for its folk artists, painters such as Maud Lewis and Joe Norris and carvers such as Collins Eisenhauer and Eddie Mandaggio. One can choose a Nova Scotian art to suit one's taste.<sup>1</sup>

This exhibition is about Nova Scotian contemporary art which uses motifs and methods of the vernacular. Sue Gibson Garvey and I focus on the work of professional artists who have had an art education, but we also include well known examples of Nova Scotian art – paintings, samplers, and sculpture – made since the nineteenth century by artists who were not educated in art schools.

Our use of the term "vernacular" in the title of this exhibition is deliberate, chosen because it seems less misleading than the more familiar term "folk art." J. Russell Harper explains why he uses the term in his book **A People's Art, Primitive, Naive, Provincial and Folk Painting in Canada**:

In speech, regional expressions are termed a vernacular. It seems equally appropriate to speak of the "vernacular" in connection with an art that expresses local ways of life. (Harper 4)

A discussion of folk art is necessary. However hotly the label "folk art" is debated, it can be applied to the nineteenth century artists in this exhibition, as well as some of the more contemporary artists such as Eisenhauer, Lewis, Naugler, Norris, and Sullivan. Both Kyle Jackson and John Neville have been called folk artists, yet the other artists in this show – Gerald Ferguson, Eric Walker, Nancy Edell, Leslie Sampson, Janice Leonard, and Charlie Murphy – are not folk artists by any body's definition, despite their use of folk or vernacular motifs and methods.

The subject of vernacular and contemporary art, folk art and high art is complicated, but can be related to two questions: how does the art reflect an artist's education, background, and social position; and should it be evaluated accordingly? I will let issues of colour and form, regionalism, feminism, class and cash sort themselves out around these questions.

I shall argue for the right of artists to make their own affiliations in their art, regardless of their background. Several of the art educated artists in this show are not simply making, as might be expected from their training, art historical references when they quote vernacular art. Their commitment to the content of their work runs much deeper than the word "reference" would suggest. Conversely, the "folk" artists in this exhibition make their work to a professional standard, sometimes through the direct influence of art world professionals. Very often the professional and the primitive meet half way.

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<sup>1</sup> Marine painting and landscape painting are common in Nova Scotia, but get little attention today. The work of deceased marine painters such as William de Garthe and Jack Gray was once strongly associated with Nova Scotia.



In **A People's Art...** J. Russell Harper established a coherence and art historical respectability to the Canadian study of vernacular art. Writing in 1974, Harper includes every form of non-professional historical art made within the geographical boundaries of Canada in his book, but he does not give any special emphasis to Nova Scotian vernacular art:

Painting in the vernacular spirit began to be less frequent in the older parts of Canada about the beginning of the 20th Century. ... There are two notable 20th Century exceptions to the trend away from vernacular painting. ... An imaginative spark has enlivened painting in some rural francophone communities where convention and propriety have not stifled the soul as they have often done in English-speaking Canada. Likewise, there was an unaffected naturalness among European immigrants who peopled the prairies before and after the first world war. (Harper 9-10)

Also writing in 1974, curator and art historian Barry Lord fails to mention Nova Scotian folk art in his book **The History of Painting in Canada**, although his Marxist leanings gave him reasons to search out such art, which has long been associated with the working classes.

Between them, Harper and Lord make us suspect that the public life of Nova Scotian folk art is recent.<sup>2</sup> Even though Maud Lewis, called Nova Scotia's "Grandma Moses," was featured in newspaper articles and on a national television program called "Telescope" in the mid-sixties, interest in Nova Scotian folk art only began to build as a new crop of art professionals came to Garry Neill Kennedy's re-vamped Nova Scotia College of Art and Design in 1967.

The big curatorial debut of Nova Scotian folk art happened at the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia in 1976,<sup>3</sup> long after primitive, indigenous, vernacular and folk art had been represented in European, American and other Canadian collections, not to mention the Nova Scotia Museum. The Art Gallery of Nova Scotia presented folk art as a living Nova Scotian art, not a dead historical phenomenon.

Since then folk art has become one of many species of Nova Scotian contemporary art. Although some Nova Scotian artists call themselves, or are called, folk artists, the term is odd because it suggests a person who maintains a degree of innocence even after being taken on by a dealer and being regarded by everyone – including themselves – as an artist more or less like any other artist. Child artists become adults, uneducated artists go to school, educated artists attempt to uneducate themselves, the insane get cured, the sane become insane, and art professors become primitives. We assume that a folk artist must change by exposure to the art world, and indeed they do, but how?

One may argue against regarding any contemporary artist as a folk artist, but I choose to use the term loosely. Contemporary folk artists choose their influences, choose to become educated artists or not, and to some extent control the meanings of their work. Of course, there are fundamental differences between a "folk" or "primitive" artist and a "professional" artist. John Berger explains:

[The primitive artist] does not use the pictorial grammar of the tradition – hence he is ungrammatical. He has not learned the technical skills which have evolved with the conventions – hence he is clumsy. When he discovers on his own a solution to a pictorial problem, he often uses it many times – hence he is naive. But then

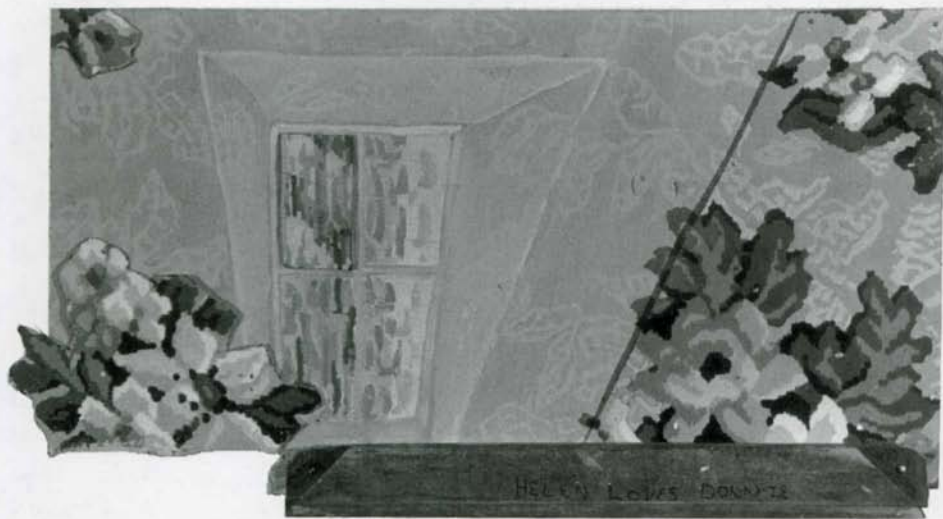
2 It can be called an instance of the invention of a tradition. See Eric Hobsbawm's **The Invention of Tradition**. See also Ian McKay's **Borderlines** article: "Twilight at Peggy's Cove: Towards a Genealogy of 'Maritimicity' in Nova Scotia."

3 Riordon, Bernard et al. **Folk Art of Nova Scotia**. Halifax: The Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, 1976.

one has to ask: why does he refuse the tradition? And the answer is only partly that he was born far away from that tradition. The effort necessary to begin painting or sculpting, in the social context in which he finds himself, is so great that it could well include visiting museums. But it never does, at least in the beginning. Why? Because he knows already that his own lived experience which is forcing him to make art has no place in that tradition. How does he know this without having visited the museums? He knows it because his whole experience is one of being excluded from the exercise of power in his society, and he realizes from the compulsion he now feels, that art too is a kind of power. The will of primitives derives from faith in their own experience and a profound skepticism about society as they have found it. This is true of such an amiable artist as Grandma Moses. (Berger 75)

The labels "amateur artist," "folk artist," "outsider artist," "naive artist" and "vernacular artist" may be attached to a large number of people, anyone but the tiny minority of art-educated artists. Today it can be difficult to distinguish "faux" art from folk art, and "amateur" from "professional" art. Class differences between "professionals" and the "primitives" are not always boldly announced in the work.

The demise of traditional academic training in painting and sculpture in post-war art schools diminishes the visible differences between some "faux" naive and some "real" naive painting. The trend away from traditional drawing instruction in North American art schools has resulted in some genuinely naive painting made by some genuinely educated artists. Several of the artists in this exhibition (Neville, Leonard, Walker, Jackson, Sampson)<sup>4</sup> attended the Nova Scotia College of Art and



Janice Leonard, *Helen loves Donnie* 1985  
mixed media on plywood, 32.0 x 59.4 cm  
Collection: the artist

<sup>4</sup> Charlie Murphy never attended art school, but had the photographer Robert Frank and the artist June Leaf, among others, as teachers.



Design during a period when traditional drawing instruction was not emphasized; one of our artists, Gerald Ferguson, was an art professor then. Drawing was taught, but traditional academic approaches to drawing were down-played. Students who aspired to become painters often learned on their own, and solved problems the way folk artists do.<sup>5</sup> The trend away from traditional drawing instruction was fired by intensely theoretical debates about the relevance of drawing to contemporary life and media: it was not a campaign to enfeeble art students. Nevertheless, it resulted in a generation of artists who could hardly be called "academic" in the sense that they know the basics of painting and sculpture as taught in the old academies. Although elements of anti-intellectualism have always vied with the forces of academic accreditation in North American art schools, and many studio faculty members are themselves militant naïfs, (of course, as Berger makes clear, a self-conscious militant naïf cannot be alienated in the way a Maud Lewis or a Grandma Moses was alienated) the demise of drawing instruction was not a surge toward primitivism. Rather, drawing instruction was the victim of a wide enchantment with media like video, photography, performance and offset printing.

Another technique used by these artists is "appropriation," that is, the practice of direct borrowing from high art, low art, and mass-media sources. Like intermedia art, appropriation art also does not depend on traditional technical artistic skills. Many of the professional artists in this exhibition use appropriation techniques – such as stencilling, collage and photography – to quote vernacular art in their own work. (It is a matter of debate whether in some cases the "primitive" artists in this show are also appropriating vernacular art in their work.)

The upshot of my points about art training and appropriation art is that the nineteenth-century terms "academic" and "non-academic" – used so frequently in discussions of contemporary folk art – are useless without caveats and digressions, some about the demise of traditional artistic skills and appropriation art, and others, perhaps more important, about the primitive tradition in Modern Art itself.

"Professional primitivism" among artists began two hundred years ago when Romanticism sparked a European fascination with primitivism, innocence and naiveté. In Germany Philip Otto Runge painted fantasies of visionary innocence; in France a circle of self-described "primitives" formed under Jacques Louis David; England produced William Blake and Samuel Palmer. The taste for the primitive has long since become deeply embedded in contemporary high art.

In the modern era, colonization and archaeology expanded the terrain of primitivism as it was discovered that human origins went back beyond Classical and Biblical times into a prehistoric age. Professional primitivism – our oxymoron – changed radically by the late nineteenth century.

Since Paul Gauguin's quest for the primitive in Tahiti in the 1890s – and like him – many artists have investigated the primitive by following emotional impulses and by making formal collations. Early this century, Gauguin's work fascinated the young Picasso, and Picasso did some research at the Trocadero ethnographic museum in Paris. Both Picasso's biographer Richardson and the historian Robert Goldwater, among others, note that Picasso and other artists of the Cubist period such as Matisse and Derain, the Blue Rider group, the Dadaists and Cubists, made no rigorous distinctions (for example) between Oceanic and African art.

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5 The former Nova Scotia resident Tim Zuck is an example of a sophisticated artist who decided to teach himself painting.

Picasso and his circle were also not as interested in the distinctions between, for example, the so-called "primitivism" of African art and the "primitivism" of a painter such as the *douanier* Henri Rousseau<sup>6</sup> as they were in the formal qualities of the work and general ideas about primitivism. Many contemporary artists continue to make few distinctions among various kinds of "primitive" work, casually lumping the work of the amateur painter down the street with what was once called "ethnographic" art.<sup>7</sup>

Ever since Henri Rousseau<sup>8</sup> was feted at a satirical banquet of tribute by Picasso and his friends, "folk artists" have been manipulated by artists and curators.<sup>9</sup> Some have done very well by their treatment, some have not. The world of folk art operates more or less like the wider art world, with the same unpredictable stakes for the artist.

The atmosphere of contemporary Nova Scotian folk art is misty with bad faith, and full of reverse pretension. High value is put on an artist's lack of education, isolation and ignorance, as if these qualities were requirements for authenticity, and as if authenticity in art were calculable from the data of an artist's background. Lunenburg's annual Nova Scotian Folk Art Festival has become a Salon in which artists must be "naïve" to qualify.

Yet many folk artists are experts in the materials they use despite their educational background. Not every person without education can make interesting art; neither does a doctorate in studio painting guarantee art of the remotest interest to anyone. The reverse CV, in which a lack of education is highlighted, falsely implies that too much knowledge can inhibit an artist.

In the Third Annual Folk Art Festival catalogue, Directors Ann Sutherland and Zalman Amit explain:

The fact that the individual artists were screened by an expert selection committee assures the public that the works of art offered for sale in the festival are genuine folk art pieces. It also helps the festival to avoid the possibility that folk craft and cottage industry items will permeate the festival.

The competitive element present in the festival will force the artists to strive to produce works of the highest quality and at the same time protect the less experienced artists from exploitation by unscrupulous buyers.

Perhaps the most important aspect of the Nova Scotia Folk Art Festival is the contribution it makes to the promotion of the concept of folk art in general and Nova Scotia Folk Art in particular. It highlights the relatively unknown fact that Nova Scotia folk artists represent one of the highest expressions and the cutting edge of folk art creation in North America today.

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6 Actually he was not a customs man but an employee of the municipal toll services, a *gabelou*. (Shattuck 46)

7 For a recent discussion of the salvage paradigm—the notion that "authentic" traditional cultures must be collected before they disappear — see Hal Foster's *Discussions in Contemporary Art*. For a striking parallel to the situation of Nova Scotian folk art with the art world of contemporary Africa, see Kasfir, *African Arts*, April 1992. For a discussion of recent issues in the related field of "outsider art" see *The New Art Examiner*, Summer 1993. See Thomas McEvelly in *Art in America*, April 1985, for a good discussion of the Museum of Modern Art's "Primitivism" in 20th-Century Art" exhibition of 1984-85.

8 "According to his own statements, he was given advice by the prominent painter Gerome; he refers to another less-known painter Felix Clement, as his 'teacher.' It has remained impossible to determine just how much formal training, if any, he received from these artists. He obtained a copying permit for the Louvre in 1884. In his own eyes, Rousseau had had sound academic instruction; his work shows that he assimilated it in a very limited fashion." (Shattuck 49)

9 "Gauguin told him once that he had been awarded a government commission for a painting. Rousseau went happily to the appropriate office to find out the details and was sent scornfully away." (Shattuck 59)





Janice Leonard, *Passports Unnecessary* 1987  
mixed media on plywood, 41.0 x 32.0 cm  
Collection: the artist

At the 1993 Festival<sup>10</sup>, artists' brochures echoed the festival organizers' criteria<sup>11</sup>. For example, a handout at a memorial booth dedicated to the recently deceased artist Donald Sabean (1947-93) asserts that the artist was "truly naive in every respect":

His art came to the attention of fellow [folk] artist Stephen Outhouse in 1989, when he found him drawing little pictures in coloured crayon on the backs of cereal boxes. After being encouraged to change his medium to enamel paint on prepared boards, he was accepted to participate in the 1991 Folk Art Festival. By the time the 1992 Festival came around there was no doubt that Donald was a folk artist in the true sense, or that the work he was producing at that time was of superior quality.

<sup>10</sup> The *Daily News* reported that 1,200 visitors spent \$45,700 during the one-day festival (Aug. 13, 1993 p.27).

<sup>11</sup> One of the artists in our exhibition, Kyle Jackson, who has attended art school, had his work accepted in the first Folk Art Festival, but never since.

From the moment in the late sixties and early seventies when Nova Scotia professional collectors, researchers and curators such as Alma Houston, Tom Lackey, Bruce Ferguson, Graham Metson, Chris Huntington, Gerald Ferguson, Murray Stewart, Richard Field, and Bernie Riordon began to organize exhibitions of vernacular art and to scour the province looking for work, professional artists, curators, critics, art educators and dealers have largely controlled and directed discussion about it. Retired carnival worker Joe Sleep was launched into the art world with encouragement, advice and paints by Harold Pearse and Ken Pitman; John Houston coaxed along forestry labourer Eddie Mandaggio. Chris Huntington has encouraged innumerable folk artists,<sup>12</sup> and was instrumental in beginning the annual Folk Art Festival. Even Maud Lewis had semi-professional advice given her by Kay and Lloyd MacNeil, who kept ledgers and organized a mail order business for her.<sup>13</sup>

There is a story in psychology textbooks about a horse called "Clever Hans." Clever Hans could communicate, so his master claimed, by tapping out answers to questions with his hooves. Isolating the horse from his owner showed that it was responding to non-verbal cues of which the owner himself was unaware. Is contemporary folk art spirited out of naive artists by art world professionals in a similar way? Many professionals we interviewed spoke about the difficulties of preserving the integrity of folk artists. Does this integrity amount to taking the proper cues without knowing it?

Accusations that dealers and other art professionals manipulate the folk artists they represent like so many descendants of Clever Hans's trainer are common, but such accusations not only deny vernacular artists any creative autonomy, they also highlight an unacknowledged double standard in art criticism. Other contemporary artists are rarely asked to account for their work in terms any more analytical than the personal anecdote, and yet we commonly assume that these artists "control" the creation of their work, however much they are influenced by others.

The folk artist is subject to the same influences of patronage as any other artist. At the most recent Folk Art Festival several works – a polar bear carving by Stanley Rector, an Inuit woman carving by Bradford Naugler, an Inuit in a kayak by James Zwicker, and (Antarctic) penguins by Garnet McPhail and Robert Chivers – made one wonder whether the unusual combination in Lunenburg's Houston North Gallery of Inuit and Nova Scotian Folk art had – simply by its existence – a hand in generating the polar references.

Is the "Jackson Pollock" table by Leo Naugler in this exhibition an instance of an uneducated artist making a witty comment on high art? Joseph Sleep's stencil works were once compared by curator Bruce Ferguson<sup>14</sup> to Andy Warhol screen prints. Many Nova Scotians cherish folk art as the characteristic art of Nova Scotia, but art collecting is largely an upper middle class practice, and art professionals enjoy contemporary folk art that fits upper middle-class tastes. Among other things, this taste delights in the irony of the folk artist's often unconscious references to high art and the Modernist primitive tradition.<sup>15</sup>

Not everybody likes folk art. Harold Pearse suggests that the appearance of clumsy workmanship in folk art is distasteful to many middle and working class people.<sup>16</sup> The perceived lack of technical facility in folk art is often equated with the perceived lack of technical facility in abstract painting, and some people reject all contemporary art as being childish.

12 See *Charlie Tanner Retrospective* (Huntington).

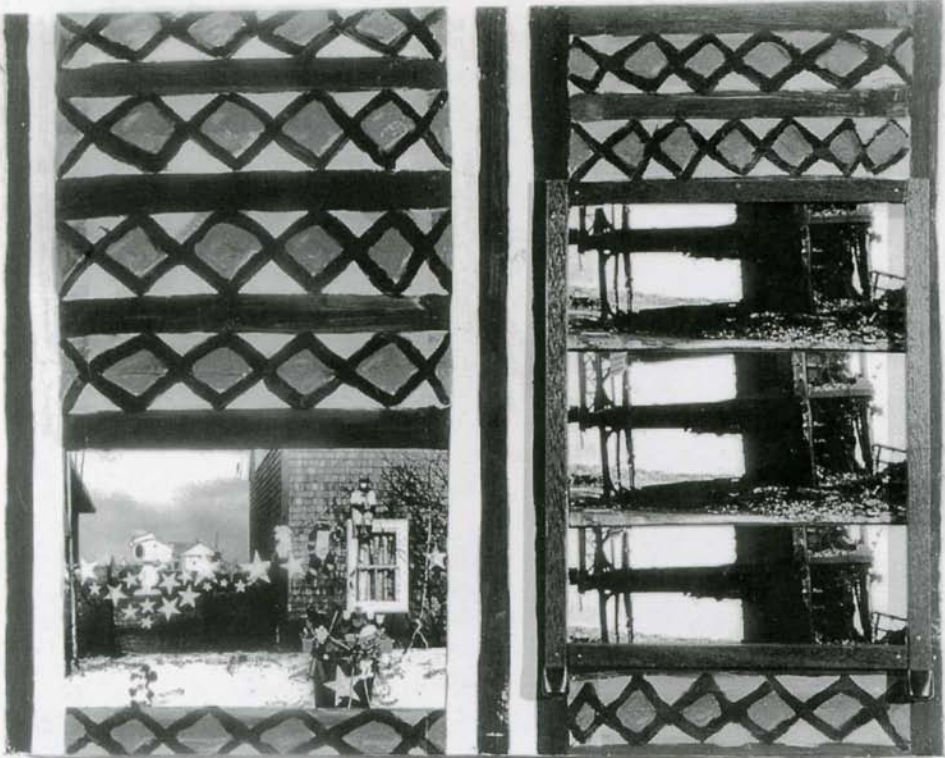
13 "Kay MacNeil's ledger shows that Maud's paintings were shipped to Edmonton, Montreal, New York, London, Belfast, Rotterdam." *Chatelaine*, December 1975, p.91.

14 See Ferguson, Bruce, *Joe Sleep Retrospective*.

15 Picasso's *Still Life with Chair Caning* of 1912 is often cited as the first "collage," but there are innumerable precedents for it in the naive and provincial art of Europe. This is not to debunk his achievement, which was made in the context of Cubist painting.

16 We interviewed Pearse in his South Shore home in 1993.





Charlie Murphy, *Snoopy* 1993  
mixed media on plywood, 61.0 x 78.7 cm  
Collection: the artist

The Nova Scotian folk art industry has been dismissed by others as the conspiracy of a few dealers, gallery directors and canny (however unschooled) artists to profit from the general public's naive notions about naive painting. Folk art cannot exist now, so the argument goes, because the conditions for its production no longer exist. Richard Field thinks of World War II as the watershed, after which the occurrence of folk art is rare:

...hooked rugs, quilts, folk portraits, and weathervanes, were still made after World War II, but the traditional ethnic, occupational, communal and family basis from which much of the nineteenth century traditional folk art drew its inspiration began to wane and die as the complexion of rural life changed. (Field 5)

Field particularly values "authenticity," but outside of outright fraud, "authenticity" is no more at issue in folk art than any other kind of contemporary art – it is a red herring. For Field, "The marketplace has deluded our understanding of folk art, particularly that produced after World War II."

...the question must be asked, once a living folk artist is discovered by the marketplace, is he or she still a folk artist? Most folk artists who are found by collectors or dealers and whose work eventually reaches the marketplace, perhaps to become highly collectable and desirable, usually go through two, and sometimes three, generations of development. The first generation is "before discovery," when the individual is working within his own frame of reference, within his personal environment. Sometimes a transition phase exists, the second generation, during which the folk artist adjusts to his discovery and entry into the marketplace. Work during this period may combine his first generation themes with those now being either suggested to him or influencing him from outside his first generation working environment.

The third generation is "after discovery" when both the artist and his work is recognized by commercial galleries, dealers, collectors and museums. Advertisements for his work are run in major art magazines and he is represented by a manager or gallery owner. But is this person still a folk artist and the objects he is making folk art? (Field 6)

Field's terminology encourages one to attempt to read the states of mind of the artists – their influences and commercial motivations – in the work. The late Stephen Godfrey expressed this attitude succinctly in a piece on the late Nova Scotian artist Lorne Reid:

Folk art can be a self-defeating proposition. Once an artist receives recognition in commercial terms – with dealers, new markets, perhaps multiple editions – he ceases to be considered a folk artist. His success robs him of his claim of being simple and authentic. (Godfrey C1)

Some commercial motivation can be assumed in any living artist: very often an artist's commercial motivations assist the art's discovery. The notion that this is corruption applies a common prejudice about all artists to folk artists. I think this commercial argument is unsound. The American curator Robert Bishop puts the issues in perspective:

Controversy about modern folk art – "primitive" works made by contemporary, self-taught artists – has raged since the distinguished curator, art historian, and dealer Sidney Janis published *They Taught Themselves: American Primitive Painters of the Twentieth Century*, in 1942. Conservative collectors felt that many of the artists described painted only for monetary advancement and that their works were not valid folk art. These critics chose to forget that the greatest outpouring of folk expression – portraiture – was nearly always created for a fee and that the 18th and 19th century itinerant folk portraitist earned his living from his art. (Bishop 8)



Harold Pearce has recently proposed a taxonomy of folk art which has more terms than Field's first-to-third-generation scheme. Pearce attaches the prefixes "Historical," "Classic," "Neo," "Post," and "Pseudo" to the word folk to describe a wide range of work, and then advises that the terms be put back into "the analytical tool kit" so that the work be "savoured in the joyful, untheoretical way in which it was produced." Fine, but as an analytical tool kit such a terminology quickly becomes useless, because the attributes it attaches to art are confused with attributes it attaches to the artists: it depends too much on imagined congruences between the artist and the art.<sup>17</sup> Also, both Pearce and Field's terminologies are needlessly hierarchical, positioning historical over contemporary art; innocence over worldliness; authenticity over conceptual play; and, in Pearce's overview, joy over other emotions.

Both Field and Pearce have had a long academic involvement with folk art, but I doubt whether either of them in the early days of its public emergence could have anticipated the current status of folk art as the (unofficially declared) "official" art of Nova Scotia.<sup>18</sup>

Corporations seem to sponsor exhibitions of folk art willingly and more challenging forms of contemporary work not at all.<sup>19</sup> Avant-garde artists are miffed as self-proclaimed folk artists, replete with business cards<sup>20</sup> and dealers, claim to have sold everything they have ever made. Folk art gets wide public attention, and contemporary folk artists such as Joe Norris, one of the artists in this exhibition, are used in publicity produced by the province's Department of Tourism and Culture. Loving public attention seems to be given the special Nova Scotia Folk Art collection at the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia and the annual Folk Art Festival, while other contemporary art seems only to get press coverage when purchases by public art galleries are called into question. A "Maud Lewis House" (not the house owned and decorated by the folk painter, but a hastily constructed post-modern shed) has been constructed at the provincially funded Upper Clements theme park. Folk art galleries and self-declared "folk" artists have sprung up everywhere just as other contemporary galleries close or are cut back.

Amidst the clamour of many kinds of art made by many kinds of people in a small province, one type seems to have arisen to claim Nova Scotia for itself.

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17 The discovery of new folk artists can still make the news in Nova Scotia. The case of Joyce Colbert, 62, of Dartmouth is a 1993 example. The Art Gallery of Nova Scotia snapped up two of her works at her first exhibition last year (see Elissa Barnard, *Chronicle-Herald/Mail-Star* Thurs. April 8, 1993 p.B4).

18 We have limited ourselves to one kind of vernacular art, that is, work which may be connected with Nova Scotian folk art as it has been established by galleries, museums and dealers. There are several Nova Scotian artists such as Rose Adams and Ellison Robertson who have not been included in this exhibition, but whose work fits the exhibition's theme. There are many Nova Scotian vernacular arts and many traditions with which we haven't dealt, for example, Nova Scotian artist Vita Plume refers to Latvian vernacular art; native artists such as Alan Syliboy continue a Mi'kmaq vernacular; the vernacular traditions of Nova Scotia's Black community and the vernacular traditions of contemporary popular culture itself are not addressed. Contemporary architects such as Brian Mackay Lyons make vernacular architectural references, but that's another kettle of fish.

19 Only "seem": I don't think one could prove it.

20 I have one from an artist named Dan Allen, with the text "primitive folk art" printed on it.



John Neville, *Salmon Supper* 1993  
 etching/aquatint 28/60, 44.9 x 60.1 cm image  
 Collection: the artist

I BEGAN THIS ESSAY with the question of how art reflects an artist's education, background, and social position, and whether it should be evaluated accordingly. This question raises issues of regionalism, ethnocentricity, voice appropriation, and voluntary affiliation: jargon terms used in a wider debate but which are relevant to this exhibition.

Nova Scotian boundaries are permeable. Political boundaries have expanded and contracted over the centuries, and nationalist feelings have waxed and waned, but currently, no nationalist political or cultural movement exists within the exact boundaries of the province.<sup>21</sup> Art motifs and styles are inevitably associated with places, but it is questionable whether any art could express the essence of a vague provincial entity like "Nova Scotia." The art in this exhibition cannot be delimited by the term "Nova Scotian", nevertheless, much of it cannot be fully understood without understanding how its local, formal and historical references are seen within current debates about regionalism.

The crucial flaw in the thinking of traditional regionalists has been to assume that a region is and should be ethnically uniform. The crucial flaw in today's advocates of ethnocentric culture is to assume uniformity in their own ethnic group, a uniformity which includes an idea of a mythical ethnic centre and margins.<sup>22</sup>

21 The nationalist agenda of First Nations is not tied to provincial boundaries, and neither are the cultural aspirations of many Acadians.

22 A recent exhibition of German-Canadian folk art at the Museum of Civilization called **Just For Nice** includes folk artists who were once identified by region (some of these artists appeared in the famous 1976 Art Gallery of Nova Scotia folk art show) but are now identified by ethnic origins.



Traditional regionalism is ethnocentric. In the art world, the dream of a truly isolated regionalism died in the 1940s. Contemporary movements of regional cultural autonomy in art are often compared to the regionalist upsurges of the 1930s, which once opposed the dominance of Parisian Modernism in the art world. Unfortunately, many of today's ethnocentric extremisms are not simply polite promotions of local art in opposition to some dominant centre, but attempts to make monochromatic cultures.

The regionalist revolt against Paris in the 1930s was led in America by, among others, the American muralist Thomas Hart Benton and the critic Thomas Craven; in Mexico by Rivera and Orozco; and in Canada by artists such as Miller Brittain and Frederic Taylor.<sup>23</sup> Many promoted a neo-classical art of murals, prints and easel paintings based on the lives of ordinary people. A similar iconography, neo-classical style and subject matter – put to other ends – flourished in fascist and communist countries at the time. In North America the movement was associated with social democratic forces, but had a pronounced anti-European tinge.

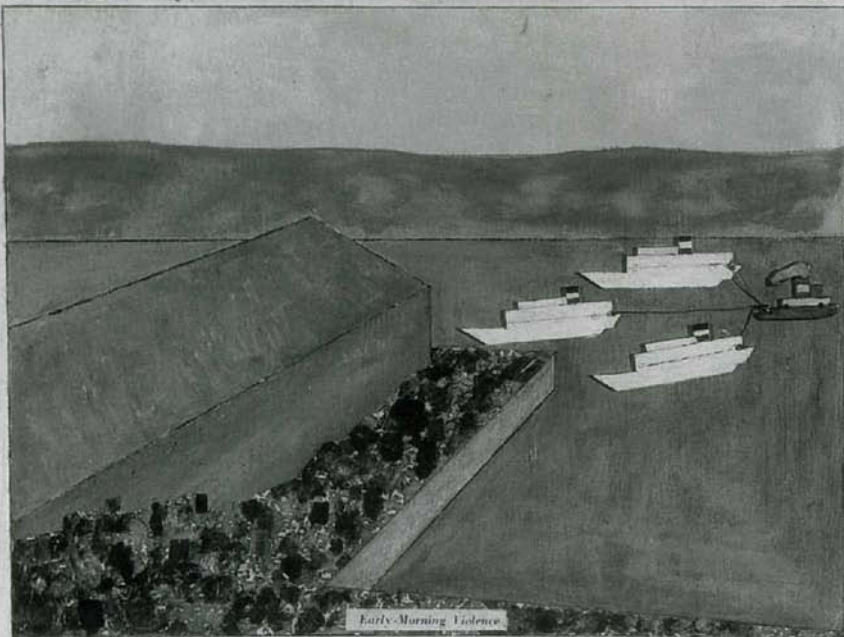
Stylistic echoes of Benton's American Regionalism of the 1930s can be discerned in the contemporary Maritime Realist movement – Alex Colville owes at least something to this neo-classicism – but many of today's regionalists prefer to eclectically quote both high art and various ethnic arts of their region instead of looking to the ethos of the 1930s for inspiration.

Janice Leonard, Eric Walker, John Neville, Kyle Jackson and Charlie Murphy refer to local or family history in their work. (In vernacular art circles, the genre is called "memory painting.") All except Neville use assemblage, collage and text in ways which are firmly rooted in this century's high art tradition, but which are also connected to earlier sources in vernacular culture. Walker's debt to the nineteenth-century ex-voto style paintings such as those of the Nova Scotian artist Francis Silver is fully acknowledged by the artist, but one could just as easily speak about Walker's work in terms of recent photo-text art (both Walker and Charlie Murphy began as photographers). Leonard's use of wallpaper can be seen as having its roots in cubist collage, but these works are also a straightforward presentation of vernacular taste in Nova Scotian interior decoration, since the wallpaper in some of her works was literally ripped out of the walls of the working-class houses where Leonard lived. A work like Leonard's *Belgian Relief* (1980) might also be interpreted as using Dada collage à la Kurt Schwitters to portray an event which happened in Halifax – the Halifax Explosion – in Kurt Schwitters's time (1917). Gerald Ferguson's assemblages of black fish silhouettes and antiques are melancholic, almost funereal evocations of extinct Nova Scotian culture which recall not only the high-art "combine" paintings of Rauchenberg, the box assemblages of Jasper Johns, and the screen prints of Andy Warhol, but also the nineteenth-century motifs and stencil techniques of "theorem painting." Leslie Sampson's use of samplers to convey feminist messages can be easily related to a very wide history of needlework by women, a history discussed and analysed in Rozsika Parker's *The Subversive Stitch*.<sup>24</sup> The art of Sampson and Nancy Edell also has affinities with a huge corpus of work by contemporary feminist artists. Edell's references range across the history of art, but her inspiration in hooked rugs such as those of Ellen Gould Sullivan is a specific link she acknowledges with the Nova Scotian vernacular. (Of course, rug-hooking itself was ubiquitous to colonial North America, not just Nova Scotia.) The work of Kyle Jackson, Leo Naugler, Joe Norris, Maud Lewis, Joe Sleep, and Collins Eisenhauer can be easily related to historical folk art and naive painting from many other places: the proportional gaucheries, the humour, and loud colour of these works connect it to Nova Scotian art, traditional vernacular art, and twentieth-century high art.

23 We won't get into Canada's Group of Seven for the moment.

24 Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch*. London: Women's Press, 1984.

# CSU - SIU CLASH 1949



## CN STEAMSHIP STRIKE

Eric Walker, *C.S.U.-S.I.U. Clash* n.d.  
mixed media on plywood, 33.8 x 41.8 cm  
Collection: Robert Bean

None of the attempts by artists in this exhibition to recover history, or to use Nova Scotian vernacular references are attached to any program of exclusivity or separatism, but rather rest on strategies of voluntary affiliation.

Most professional artists tend to cite well known artists rather than unknown artists in their genealogies of affiliation.<sup>25</sup> Often these well known artists are their teachers, but because contemporary art schools make available most of their staff to students in one way or another, the "studied with" genealogy is often meaningless. Why favour genealogies of affiliation based on unknown vernacular artists rather than on one's teachers? Eric Walker told us that his education has given him "permissions" to explore any kind of art, to affiliate with whomever he liked — even his "own" Nova Scotia vernacular tradition.<sup>26</sup> Such "permissions" raise the spectre of voice appropriation. What right do professional art-educated artists have to rummage through the vernacular arts? Who has the right to tell certain stories?

<sup>25</sup> Edward Said addresses genealogies of filiation and affiliation differently in *The World, The Text and The Critic*, but I owe something to his thinking. By "genealogies of affiliation" I mean picking and choosing among disciplines and historical movements in order to make an historical succession for oneself, to make genealogies of reference, taxonomical tracings.

<sup>26</sup> A positive aspect of the Folk Art Festival's academy system is that folk artists look to other folk artists for inspiration, perhaps even appropriation. Examples are the previously mentioned influence of Outhouse on Sabeau, and the oft-cited influence of Eddie Mandaggio on the Naugler brothers.



Recent accusations of voice appropriation – denials of the right to voluntary affiliations – have been made by First Nations artists, artists of colour and others. A debate about fundamental creative rights – the right of anybody to imagine anything – has ensued, and a backlash against what began as a strategy to empower marginalized groups has been growing. Alberto Manguel characterizes “what its detractors call ‘cultural or voice appropriation’”:

The belief of these detractors is, first of all, that there is such a thing as the “voice” of a group; second, that if there is, it can be appropriated. They believe that the heterogeneous complexity of any human group acquires, by virtue of a label, a common denominator which they perceive as the group’s essence, what Goebbels called the *Rassengeist*, or “spirit of the race,” a sort of metaphysical quality promised to only a chosen few. They further believe that this quality can somehow be snatched up by a usurping outsider. This fantastical nonsense, reminiscent of tales of sword and sorcery, would be merely foolish and elitist were it not also profoundly racist – as well as intrinsically ignorant about artistic creation. (Manguel A7)

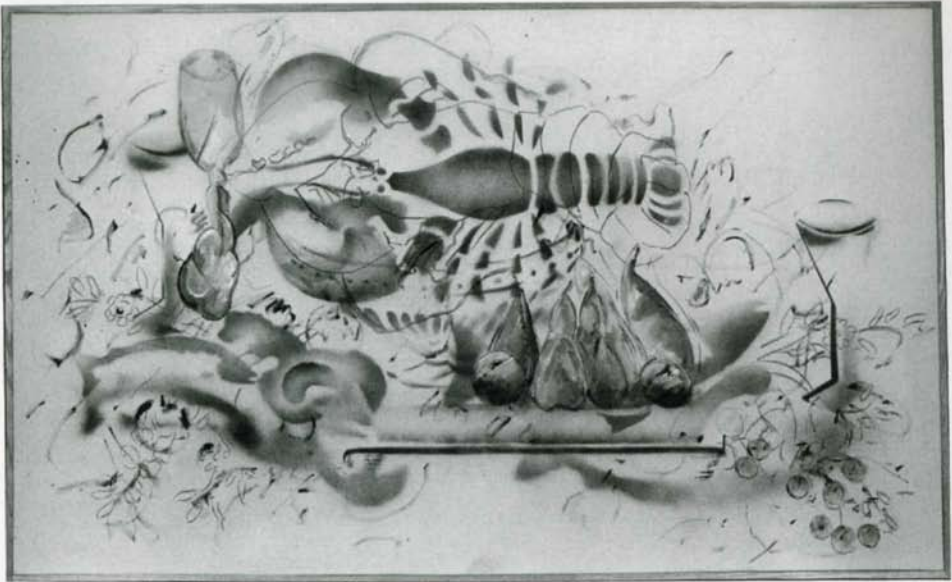
Manguel does not explain why some minority voices are more attractive to the majority than others, nor does he allow for sensitively made voluntary affiliations by majority artists which might be appreciated by minority artists. In statements which have accompanied past exhibitions, many of the art educated artists in this show have carefully justified their uses of the vernacular by reference to personal background, gender, and location rather than their academic background. None have been arrogant about their creative rights, despite the permissions they may feel training has given them to do whatever they like.

I assume that most of the living artists in this exhibition desire (as a minority) to reach at least the level at which their artistic voices encourage the flattery of imitation, if not appropriation.

The work in this show which has feminist content, particularly that of Leslie Sampson, seeks to revise the traditional assessment of European vernacular work by women. Sampson’s references to “voice” are not proprietorial in the sense that only women can do feminist work: rather, she is driven to do this work for reasons having to do with her own social situation as a woman. Like Sampson, other artists in this exhibition also seek to re-value vernacular art. Sampson:

I use the form of cross-stitch embroidery samplers to revalue women’s artistic production – artifacts overlooked or dismissed as “low” art precisely because they were made by women in the home. My work is a reappraisal of embroidery’s service to ruling class ideology, especially the use of sampler verses. Traditionally the embroidered text promoted abstract ideals of femininity for women (which were often at odds with their actual life experience) or put all emphasis on the afterlife. The quotations I choose are imbued with an active voice of resistance. (Sampson)

Similarly, Walker and Neville would have no objections to their stories being told by anybody: however, few but working-class Nova Scotians like themselves would have an interest in doing so. It is also unlikely that an artist of a different background would be interested in making a life’s work, as Janice Leonard has, of mythologizing her Nova Scotian roots.



Gerald Ferguson, *Still Life with Platter, Lobster and Fruit* 1989  
conté, enamel and acrylic on canvas, 85.5 x 141.6 cm  
Collection: the artist

Other artists in this exhibition have followed more complicated routes to the vernacular. For example, Gerald Ferguson, originally from the United States, came to Canada as an art professor at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design. He was one of the key professionals involved in the collection of Nova Scotian folk art in the early 1970s, and his collection is currently on loan to the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia. Until 1987, he was also involved in almost all of the college's many incarnations as an institution, and his art has incorporated many media and strategies over the years. As a curator he put together an exhibition catalogue about Marsden Hartley's Nova Scotia experience which is the most authoritative text on the subject.<sup>27</sup> Ferguson's involvement in Nova Scotian art as an artist, collector, curator and teacher has made him like a small planet with an outsize gravitational field. But his quotation of Nova Scotian vernacular art in his own work is a fairly recent aspect of his artistic life, and one which does not coincide with his education and background, but with a long process of voluntary affiliation which has proceeded by stages: first an academic interest in Nova Scotian vernacular, then a collector's interest, and then an artist's interest.

The pattern of Ferguson's involvement with the vernacular can be seen in many other artists in this exhibition: the art school education, the curiosity about local traditions, and then personal identification as a voice tunes itself to the vernacular.

<sup>27</sup> See Ferguson, Gerald.



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## GETTING THE DUCKS IN A ROW

### Decoys, Dupes & Rogue Penguins

*[The following dialogue is extrapolated from a recorded discussion  
between Cliff Eyland and Susan Gibson Garvey in September 1993.]*

SGG: Do you recall why we wanted to work on this exhibition?

CE: I think we both had personal reasons, including a long-term interest in the topic. For me, one reason is that I rarely get the opportunity to deal with Nova Scotian art in general, as opposed to individual artists.

SGG: I think we both started with certain kinds of assumptions about contemporary folk art and its relationship to contemporary art in general, and as our research for this exhibition progressed we've been concerned to modify those assumptions. For example, we began by thinking that we might be able to construct some kind of grey scale — a taxonomy — to account for the degrees of appropriation between artists. But we rapidly came to the conclusion that this wasn't going to work, because, while we could imagine the two ends of a scale, the gradations between these extremes were complicated by too many factors. The scale became a useless analytical tool. You cite two specific taxonomies in your essay — Richard Field's and Harold Pearce's — but you are evidently dissatisfied with them too.

CE: Well, I think taxonomies in general don't work, even though it's a common impulse to try to construct them. The general problem with taxonomies in art is that they end up looking like biological taxonomies — they start to construct a morphology of art as if art develops the way biological forms do... People try to link various kinds of art by linking morphological characteristics — as if somehow art thinks alike because it looks alike. So that's a mistake, I think — collating all the formal similarities. A lot of people think that's what art is about — that is, what it looks like — but if you're involved in art that's never the whole story. So taxonomies encourage people to focus on superficial similarities, and they also encourage one to confuse qualities in the art with qualities of the artists. Of course, it must be said in their defense that both Field's and Pearce's taxonomies of folk art are basically pedagogical — they just want to sort things out for people...

SGG: The thing about Pearce's taxonomy that does work for me is that it includes art school educated artists who use the folk idiom in some way, so it does seem closer to the idea of a continuum of artistic preoccupations rather than suggesting some kind of irreconcilable difference between folk and other kinds of art.

CE: Pearce's pedagogical model permits him more easily to explain the work, but such models can make the work appear simpler than it is. Unfortunately, these models also encourage classification schemes which quickly expand into an infinite number of categories.

SGG: Doesn't art history do that too?

CE: I think connoisseurship did that. In a way, art historians like Bernard Berenson detected minute distinctions among paintings in order to make incredibly complicated taxonomies of real and imagined artists. I can think of many other attempts to do that, but I shouldn't load all that baggage on Field and Pearce.



SGG: One of the other things I thought was reasonable about Pearse's taxonomy was that it included the notion of change and growth in a folk artist's work. I always thought it rather odd that people think a folk artist shouldn't change and grow like other artists, but should remain naive and innocent for ever. This links up with some of your comments regarding the annual Lunenburg Folk Art Festival. You imply that this Festival has actually created a folk art market—

CE: I think that's good.

SGG: — and that without the Festival every year there wouldn't be all these new folk artists walking out of the woods carrying their sculptures — excuse me — carvings.

CE: As the work gets discovered it adapts itself to certain standards, I think. We've heard story after story about that.

SGG: Are you saying there is a standard?

CE: The standard is defined by the taste of the people — the professionals, because they usually are professionals: artists, dealers, media people — who buy the work. In a sense they collaborate with the artists who make it.

SGG: But it becomes a bit of a set-up doesn't it? We saw how Don Sabeau wasn't considered a *real* folk artist until he moved from using coloured crayon on cereal boxes and started to use the recommended enamel on board. But if in the past we have valued, say, Kurt Schwitters' collages of detritus picked up off the streets, or even a folk artist like Joe Sleep's felt tip pen works on cardboard shirt boxes, why shouldn't we value Don Sabeau's crayons on cereal boxes? It appears that there's a certain use of materials that's now recognized as "folk art" and it's not oil on canvas or crayon on card, it's enamel on board; and it's not sculpting in plaster or stone or whatever, it's taking a chain saw or a hunting knife and hacking away at a lump of wood. And that's folk art. But that's not a standard, really, it's a stereotype.

CE: Yes, you could call it that. This stereotype has rapidly become identified with Nova Scotia, at least in the minds of many people — *characteristic* of Nova Scotia, while other forms of contemporary art are not considered so characteristic. But the real context of any local art is a wider scene and includes other artists from other areas who make similar work or are driven by similar concerns. So the identification of Nova Scotia with folk art can be questioned. For example, the special Nova Scotia Folk Art Collection at the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia often comes up in a controversial way in discussions I've had with other artists. Perhaps artists make too much of it, but then one must ask: what are the criteria for inclusion in a collection? Or for inclusion in the Lunenburg Folk Art Festival? And how do you judge something like naïveté?

SGG: We never really discovered what the criterion for judging folk art was. Some of the professionals we interviewed seemed to suggest that one could instantly recognise whether it's a genuine piece of folk art or not.

CE: We know there can't be instant recognition, mostly because of the games we know our artist friends play as they make work. We know that there's nothing self-evident in contemporary art, even folk art.

SGG: Of course people don't want to be deliberately deceived. They don't want to be told that a piece of so-called folk art is by a naive artist when it's been made by a sophisticated artist, any more than they want to buy a piece of so-called Inuit sculpture that has actually been made by a white art school graduate.

CE: But if they are fooled, then they are fooled. They can't tell the difference.

SGG: I'm uncomfortable theorizing about art without the visual evidence in front of us. It's easy to theorize without the visual evidence but often the evidence refutes the theory.

CE: I don't think so in this case: the theory that it is possible to be fooled cannot be refuted by "visual evidence."

SGG: Yes, but that's deliberate fraud. I would suggest that in the case of every artist we've included in this exhibition, with the exception of the folk artists themselves, of course, it's very clear from the visual evidence itself what they're about — whether they're quoting, borrowing, and so on. I mean you would never seriously confuse Gerald Ferguson or Janice Leonard with folk artists. Perhaps the only artist in this exhibition who is really borderline is Kyle Jackson, whose work sometimes could be confused with that of a folk artist.

CE: I agree. The point about fraud has to do with the wider issue of authenticity and folk art — an issue which was brought up in one way or another by almost everyone we talked with. We know the works we have chosen are genuine, and that there's no reason to mistake any of the art school educated artists we include in this exhibition for folk artists. With Jackson the issue turns on people's perceptions and misperceptions of him and the work.

SGG: I think the clues are usually there in the visual evidence. In most cases you *can* read these clues in the works themselves as to when they're quoting and so on. In general, it's a question of faith — or bad faith — in that we expect the contract between an artist and their public to be one of trust—

CE: Well, for this work you do.

SGG: No, you expect it from any artist. For instance in a performance piece you have to have the trust of your audience or they're going to walk out halfway through... they have to have the trust to go with you perhaps for several hours, to have the patience to know that something's going to happen that's going to be worth the effort... I think performance art requires a great deal of trust, self-exposure, faith. But at the same time all art work depends on trust to a certain extent. I don't mean that artifice is not involved. It's not that illusions and deceptions aren't often part of the artwork, in fact some art is precisely about illusion, but you trust you are not going to be deliberately defrauded. There was a suggestion among some people we talked to that some recent folk art was actually fraudulent —

CE: Hmmm, I don't know if I can go along with the trust idea. But it does go back to our discussion about fraud and various levels of deception and misreading. It is possible that you can be fooled, you can make an error. I think I try to include that possibility as part of my assessment of any work. I mean it's always part of my speculation about a work that I could completely miss it, for whatever reason, whether the issue of fraud is involved or not. There's always the chance that you've completely misapprehended something. The possibility of deception keeps you humble.

SGG: That's the perennial terror of all who write about art. I too worry that I may have missed it entirely. But that's not the same as thinking I may have been defrauded.

CE: True, but it's the same result.

SGG: You mean if it walks like a duck and quacks like a duck it's a duck?

CE: If it never was a duck, you calling it a duck doesn't make it one.



SGG: I must say this adds a whole new meaning to the idea of a decoy (that paradigm of folk carving)! But I wonder if the fraud issue isn't qualitatively different from what we're talking about here, in relation to folk art.

CE: Well, it becomes a very interesting issue in folk art, given that issues of authenticity are so frequently raised in discussions of it. Perhaps the issue is more to do with the people who make the work than the work itself. A fraudulent Matisse drawing is not as interesting to me as an encounter with someone who tries to convince themselves and me that they are a folk artist by outlining their reverse CV — their *lack* of artistic training. Often it's not so much a matter of outright fraud, it's more a case that you can never be really sure what's going on. You can never be sure that a work like Leo Naugler's "Jackson Pollock" table isn't quoting a Jackson Pollock.

SGG: We would have been just as surprised if he had told us yes he quoted or no he didn't.

CE: Recently, I went to a non-artist friend's place and sat on the deck while he was firing up the barbecue and I said "Where'd you get that Howard Hodgkin deck table?" because it looked like Howard Hodgkin had painted it, and he said "I don't know anything about Hodgkin, I just slapped the paint on." And then my friend Peter came along half an hour later and without prompting said "Hey! a Howard Hodgkin table!" My business person friend had obviously never seen or heard of Howard Hodgkin and was taken aback. Two artists made exactly the same comment about a table. Of course, someone could be mean to us and say that we've only got only a limited set of references we trot out — we're so predictable...

SGG: There's truth to that all right... I mean in constantly relating things to the obvious. For instance, the moment you start gouging plywood, well, you've got to be emulating Paterson Ewen. But in relation to this show, I think we're being more responsive than that. I mean, it's not an invention of yours, or an invention of mine, that the folk references are there. There were repeated confirmations among those with whom we talked — a general consensus... No-one said "I don't know what you mean."

CE: Yes. As you say, there's some kind of canon formation going on, at least among the people we talked to. So I think what we're doing, if I've got this straight, is we're examining a canon of work that has been formed and pointing out some of the ambiguities, some of the problems.

SGG: And by examining that microcosm, I think — well, maybe you can never say it means anything more than the microcosm — but perhaps Nova Scotia art is a special case of the general.

CE: Structurally it has the same mix and problems as many other regions, a question we don't address in this show. It would be interesting to have regional scholars from elsewhere discuss the common strategies of regions, including the identification of folk art in many regions. When I visited Scotland recently I was struck by how the New and Old Scotland have similar problems. Perhaps it's time to set up a computer network. But to discuss Nova Scotia the network would have to extend around the world. The work and the people are spread out everywhere.

SGG: Yeah, if you're interested in Celtic literature, for example, you don't all congregate in one place and say this where Celtic literature is. I'm intrigued by the fact that the best collection of the work and memorabilia of Samuel Beckett happens to be in Texas, not in Ireland, France or England, which are the obvious places and the ones with which he has the most connections.



Charlie Murphy, *I Smell the Light* 1990 (detail)  
mixed media on plywood, 122.0 x 182.9 cm  
Collection: the artist

And here at the Dalhousie University library, for instance, we have a Kipling collection that attracts scholars from all over, but there's no connection between Nova Scotia and Kipling except that someone who collected Kipling papers, publications and memorabilia happened to be here for a time and left his collection to the University, and the collection attracted other Kipling gifts and got built up that way.

CE: And *that's* local culture!

SGG: That's part of the wrinkles of history. But it's not what you expect to find.

CE: But you know you expect to find the same wrinkling — if not wrinkles — everywhere.

SGG: We tend to think that art collections are built up through careful selection from a focused mandate. But often a collection is the product of the strangest of circumstances and choices. I don't think it's any more bizarre, actually, for the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia to collect folk art than any other thing to be collected, speaking on a purely objective level.

CE: I think it's worth noting that the province's folk art collection and Lunenburg's annual Folk Art Festival unconsciously seem to follow the model of the French Salon — the nineteenth century Academic model, with criteria for inclusion and exclusion (even if it's hard to pin down exactly what those criteria are). Inevitably this encourages envy and rebellion among those who are excluded.

SGG: Well, whenever anything is established someone has to come along and debunk it. If you establish an Academy of Nova Scotia folk artists, then of course you have to have a *Salon des Refusés*.



CE: Yes, like that artist — Frank Carson — who set up his work outside the Folk Art Festival in Lunenburg. You could see him as the Courbet of the Nova Scotia folk art world (in his actions, if not in his abilities), setting up his own show in the parking lot. He makes work in every folk art style imaginable, and his work quotes all the canonical Nova Scotia folk art figures, from Maud Lewis to Joe Norris. He was obviously refused admittance to the “Academy.”

SGG: On the basis of not being naive, I would imagine!

CE: I don't mean that we should be jumping to Mr. Carson's defense, as if he should be admitted into this “Folk Art Academy.”

SGG: I would be most unwilling to... I think we are just raising questions.

CE: It's amazing that they haven't been asked before.

SGG: Oh, I think they have, I just don't think they've been gathered up in quite this way.

CE: I guess we ought to recognize that in Nova Scotia the art world operates by word of mouth much of the time, through gossip and other means. Very often the gossip never makes it into print.

SGG: Also there's a reluctance to disturb the status quo. I mean, if folk art becomes the goose that lays the golden eggs for a lot of people, who's going to debunk — well, not folk art itself, but its manipulation?

CE: Well, it's strange, because we have seen that the people who buy folk art are mainly professionals. We can't talk about professionals taken in by the work as if someone were being conned.

SGG: No, in fact quite the reverse. They might recognize something in the work that non-professionals don't recognize. I mean you could say that in fact they're the ones best suited to being able to recognize... You could also say it's a kind of patronization — in both senses of the word. In your essay you imply, whether you mean to or not, that there might be a kind of conspiracy to create a Nova Scotian folk art tradition where there might not have been one.

CE: This happens by default, I think. You have a department of culture, an art gallery and a tourist agenda that plays itself out. By a kind of default it will define what Nova Scotian art is. It's quite innocent in a way, that one kind of art has been seized on for promotion, and it is inevitable that once you have a provincial art gallery with provincial jurisdiction and provincial money it will create a provincial art through patronage, according to more-or-less demographic (if not democratic) thinking. It's not a conspiracy, it's just that the admixture of federal and provincial agencies produces a bizarre amalgam that is official “Nova Scotian Culture.” The fact is that most contemporary art in Nova Scotia — and there are hundreds of different kinds — can't be identified as Nova Scotian culture as easily as folk art can be.

SGG: Yes, there's no reason why, for example, Nancy Edell should be considered Nova Scotian rather than, say, Mexican or Babylonian, if we go by her references alone.

CE: Exactly. The regionalist surge in the 1930s had many artists around the world painting in the same neo-classical way. The regionalist surge today is different. It has to do the world over with ideas of ethnocentrism at one extreme and the fight against global corporate culture at the other. So I guess the fear I have of promoting “regional art” has to do with my fears about ethnocentric culture.

SGG: And you see Nova Scotian folk art as promoting this?



Nancy Edell, *Home Entertainment - Leopardskin and Alsatian* 1985  
oil paint, conté and cut-out on paper, 50.4 x 65.6 cm  
Collection: the artist

CE: Well, ethnicity wasn't much of an issue in the first Nova Scotia folk art show in 1976 (at the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia). By contrast, the recent exhibition about German Canadian folk art called **Just for Nice** (at the Canadian Museum of Civilization) asserts some of the same work according to the ethnic origins of the artists. So artists from various places in Canada are regarded according to their ethnic background and German-Canadians across the country are brought together.

SGG: The proposal has been the *spirit*, hasn't it, the proposal has been not the motifs, although they can be lumped together in a certain kind of way, the proposal has been that they all share the same spirit.

CE: But what kind of "spirit" are we going to find in "German-Canadian" folk art, for example? The words "spirit" and "German" in one sentence makes me uncomfortable...

SGG: I was thinking more about the general case, rather than the particular. The proposal that it isn't the motifs — the hearts and flowers, the birds, pussycats, animals, rural scenes and fishermen that recur and recur — but the more subtle and difficult suggestion to deal with is the idea that there is a certain kind of *spirit* which identifies something as folk.

CE: But what constitutes this spirit?



SGG: The official descriptions usually suggest it is the uncomplicated joyful attitude towards experience, the delight in the humble daily round, as in Maud Lewis' work. The spirit is not the fact that she lives in a shack, that she's poor and crippled with arthritis, it's the joy of the little paintings of deer and butterflies dancing in the windows and the celebratory aspect of the good things in life. We moved towards that idea when we discussed why some folk art seemed to be more celebratory, while the non-folk art tended to be more melancholy — commemorative rather than celebratory. Bernie Riordon suggested that what people are really buying when they buy folk art is a little bit of paradise. That's rather romantic. I don't know if Eisenhower's little dancing dogs with erections are bits of paradise — although they do have a certain... appeal.

CE: Yeah, there's an undercurrent of strange sexual imagery in this show which indicates we haven't touched all the bases.

SGG: Well there have been several well-known folk artists who make carvings of women — nudes — and they strike me as making parodies of the art historical nude. Are they actually doing that? Do they know that the female nude was valorized in European art for centuries as the ultimate thing to paint or sculpt? Or are they just interested in the figure — you know, you could trace it through the primitive, the fertility figures, Venuses and so on. Or you could just say they're dirty old men... I don't know if there are many women folk artists who carve female nudes.

CE: I don't know if there are that many folk art women carvers period. There was one in the folk art festival, but she received little attention.

SGG: In this regard, there are a number of issues that we've barely touched on, and that we'll have to leave for other researchers to take up. But the nude women thing leads me to wonder if all folk art isn't simply a parody of fine art — a message from the underprivileged to the privileged. Of course, that presumes some knowledge of fine art, or a sense of a fine art stereotype on the part of the folk artist, in order to parody it — something that the customary definition of primitive artist might preclude. That's one thing you've focused on quite prominently in your essay — I mean the class issue.

CE: It's what (art critic and historian) John Berger speaks about. He says that the solutions offered by museum art have never been relevant to the primitive artist's life. Primitive artists discover power in making art, and they aren't often influenced by sophisticated artists even when they get the chance to visit museums. Berger suggests that the alienation experienced by folk artist can't be educated out of them.

SGG: Do you think folk artists generally feel alienation?

CE: I think Berger means it in the Marxist sense. It's not an emotional quality. And you could argue with him in several ways — for instance you could question the way he sets up professional versus primitive as a class difference. But the case of the amateur middle-class artist whose art may resemble that of a primitive is another issue. One can call the middle-class or upper-class person a professional artist or amateur, depending on many factors, including their commitment to the work, but calling them a "folk artist" based on the look of their work would be silly.

SGG: It's interesting to look at Charlie Murphy's work in this context, because Murphy is the only "non-folk" artist we've included in this show who hasn't had art school training per se (although he has had professional influences from artists and museums, and encouragement from grants and awards). The thing I wanted to point out, though, is the fact that he says he began with a deliberately rough look, using images of ordinary people, in order to emphasise a kind of commonality. He says he was hoping to touch the common people with his work... There's I kind of Marxist thing here, I think — making art about the people for the people. He's definitely talking about the working class and the kind of aesthetic he thought they would respond to. Ironically, he found that they reacted to it just like they would to any art — to "fine" art — as being simply out there, beyond them. So whether it's folksy or sophisticated they have the same reaction.

CE: Murphy's a good example because obviously he is a professional artist. I've always thought he has an urban sensibility, even if he does live in the Cape Breton woods. He uses photos he's taken in urban settings, and I've always been intrigued by the connection Murphy's art makes with urban punk movements. When you talk to him about his work, he says: "I can't paint, I just slop the paint on." When you look at his prints it's obvious that he doesn't make pristine prints either. His subject matter can be pretty punk too. Sometimes I think of Murphy as being in the mould of what is called Outsider art... I suppose you could go through all the artists in this show and find something that marks each of them off as radically different.

SGG: Well, whether we're talking about sophisticated artists or folk artists, the situation is always more complex than expected. Folk art itself isn't always as simpleminded or simplistic as some expect it to be. I mean, the Naugler table—

CE: Absolutely. When we asked Leo Naugler about it he was completely non-committal. He tends to describe his work the way Carl André or Richard Serra would have described their minimalist and post-minimalist work in the early seventies: André might say "this work consists of twenty five boiler plates on the floor." Folk artists, too, can be astonishingly literal in their comments about their work. When Naugler was given a microphone on stage and asked to describe his paintings at the Folk Art Festival, he simply stated the work's dimensions and what paint was used, and that was that. As he spoke I thought about art smart artists who say dumb Andy Warhol things about their art. Of course, this is an example of the professional's fascination with the unconscious references a folk artist makes. We delight in talking with people who we assume don't know as much about art as we do. I mean, it's funny we are so fascinated with the idea that people can't know things. Folk artists are often accused of being knowingly sophisticated in a way they really aren't. One could assume that because of the media and satellite TV nobody can be naive any more, but we know that's not true.

SGG: Now I'm a little confused by that statement. After all, you've gone to some trouble elsewhere to say the opposite — that some folk artists present themselves as more naive than they really are. Another time you seem to suggest that there's little real distinction between folk art and other kinds of art, and to say that the folk art label is somewhat specious, because an artist is an artist and who they choose to quote or not quote—

CE: But the orientation of the primitive or folk artist is different. And of course their means are so often different from the means of professional artists.



SGG: I think it's not in the means, but in the ambition or pretension. I know this gets into the tricky area of trying to attribute motivation, or read an artist's intention into the work (when has that ever stopped a zealous curator?), but I think it can be tackled in the following way. One of the things that both the art collector and the general public most valorize about folk art is its apparent lack of pretension. Equally, an accusation frequently levelled against more sophisticated art by the same public is that it appears to be pretentious. But what is pretension and how is it detected? In an early issue of [the photography journal] *Aperture*, Lisette Model describes the humble snapshot as "having no pretense or ambition" and therefore being somehow innocent and uncomplicated aesthetically, while sophisticated photography is evidently more problematic.

CE: So...

SGG: If we think of the snapshot as technological folk art, then we may see a parallel in the relationship between snapshots and photographs and between folk art and more sophisticated art. Basically they use the same means (a camera and photographic processes) but they differ in their ambitions and in how those ambitions get fulfilled. It seems to me, then, that pretension is a quality resulting from the ambition evident in the work itself. Judgement comes into play here, of course, since pretension is a quality arising from a perceived lack of success in the work itself, and that perception may depend on the viewer's own sophistication or willingness to see, and on the context in which the work is encountered. Still, there may well be circumstances where an unsuccessful piece of folk art would be considered pretentious, while a very sophisticated work can still be unpretentious, precisely because it successfully fulfills its own evident ambition. Considerations of critical expertise aside, people only use the term "pretentious" when a work fails to convince.

CE: That's right. And an artist like Naugler is very skillful — he knows how to make what he wants to make.

SGG: And nobody "just makes art." Even if they say they do. Art always comes from somewhere. This is where you can't always take an artist's word for it. I don't mean to deny their stated intentions, but rather to emphasise that art doesn't happen in a vacuum — even the presumed vacuum of the untrained artist's head. I think this is a different approach to regionalism — that there's always a context, but it's not necessarily a coherent, consistent context where all the same work is done by the same people for the same motives. But there always is a context.

CE: And part of that context is the cherished notion that there is an authentic art which represents Nova Scotia and that the folk artist is the medium for this "art of the people." And that these artists can become polluted by outside influences, become somehow less pure...

SGG: We'd be here all night if we were to discuss the broader context of "pollution from outside influences," but we could cite the example of pre-Columbian art, and whether we can ever know what it really was, because there's a good chance that some of what we think is pre-Columbian art was actually made in response to the first few years of the early explorers'/invaders' interest in pre-Columbian art—

CE: Inuit art is another example. Something that is thoroughly complicated by being adopted into the Nova Scotian situation. In fact it's a mess, a delightful mess. To be encouraged, of course.

SGG: You mean the way current folk artists in Lunenburg have begun quoting Inuit art?

- CE: Well we both noticed it, and thought it quite strange, at the Folk Art Festival — how there were sculptures that quoted various Northern idioms. And the penguins, too — the artists who quoted those didn't get it quite right, because of course penguins come from Antarctica. The Bradford Naugler carving of an Inuit woman was quite spectacular.
- SGG: And is that the "local" influence? What is the socio-cultural context of a Lunenburg artist making a piece of folk sculpture of an Inuit woman?
- CE: It's gotta be the Houston North Gallery (in Lunenburg), a gallery that many of these folk artists may never have entered, but all know through friends at least. They know what the criteria of the gallery are — its very unusual combination of Inuit art and Nova Scotia folk art.
- SGG: Well they both make sense in terms of what someone's notions of vernacular art might be. They also make sense in terms of the idea (outlined in your essay) of "voluntary affiliation." It seems to me that this is a crucial concept in the discussion, for it is something that every artist may employ without prejudice, whether folk, ethnic, primitive, sophisticated, fine, high, low, outsider or whatever... that is, choosing one's affiliations, not being assigned them from what others perceive ought to be one's affiliations. I also like your adaptation of Said's notion of genealogies of reference. We could say that many of the artists in this exhibition provide genealogies of reference for each other — they collect each other and often acknowledge each other's influence — Leonard and Walker are a case in point, because they not only collect each other, but also own examples of work by other artists in this exhibition — Jackson, for example (who also collects work by other folk artists). We note that both Ferguson and Sampson collect folk art, and Sampson has collected Neville, who in turn (like Edell) owns folk art mats by Sullivan —
- CE: And that's why we're showing them together... But if this group show breathes in this work as a canon, how is it going to breathe it out again, I wonder?
- SGG: I hope it doesn't set it in concrete.
- CE: Well, yeah. There are few shows of this kind, and perhaps our presentation is going to harden some people's ideas about the art, which is unfortunate. Although if people are able to look at Joe Norris next to Charlie Murphy in a more complicated way after this then maybe we've done something.



## LIST OF ARTISTS & WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

ARTISTS ARE LISTED alphabetically. Notes on Eisenhauer, Lewis, Naugler, Norris, Silver and Sullivan have been extrapolated from *Nova Scotia Folk Art—Canada's Cultural Heritage*, curated by Bernard Riordon, 1989, for the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia. Dimensions are in centimeters, height x width x depth.

### Nancy Edell (1942- )

Nancy Edell was born in Nebraska, and studied art at the University of Omaha (BFA 1964) and filmmaking at the University of Bristol (1968-9). Her animated films have won prizes in various film festivals (1969-1980). Since 1980, she has lived and worked in Nova Scotia, teaching part-time at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design and exhibiting her work in solo and group shows throughout North America. She has received several Canada Council grants and her works are included in public and private collections. Her recent solo exhibition, *Art Nuns*, was organized and toured by the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia.

*Peter and Nancy* 1993  
hooked rug, 65.5 x 96.0 cm  
Collection: the artist

*Art Nun Portrait I* 1993  
hooked rug, oil over  
acrylic on plywood  
3 pieces, each 32.0 x 32.0 cm  
Collection: the artist

*Art Nun Portrait II* 1993  
hooked rug, oil over  
acrylic on plywood  
3 pieces, each 32.0 x 32.0 cm  
Collection: the artist

*Home Entertainment – Tea Time* 1985  
charcoal, conté and cut-out on paper,  
57.0 x 76.2 cm  
Collection: the artist

*Home Entertainment –  
Leopardskin and Alsatian* 1985  
oil paint, conté and cut-out on paper,  
50.4 x 65.6 cm  
Collection: the artist

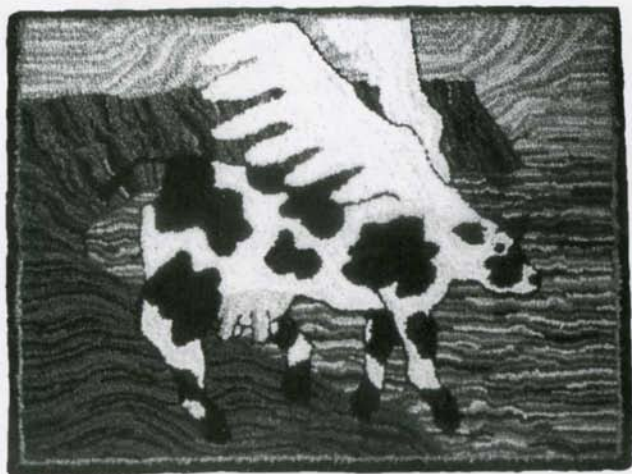
*Blomidon Cow* 1981  
hooked rug, 62.0 x 84.0 cm  
Collection: The Art Gallery,  
Mount Saint Vincent University

### Collins Eisenhauer (1898-1979)

Collins Eisenhauer was born and died in Lunenburg County, Nova Scotia. Jack of all trades, he wanted to be a painter as a child, and sold illustrated postcards, but at age thirteen he began working to help out his family. He started carving in 1964, small objects, including cats, dogs, lovers, and Adam and Eve, and life-size figures, such as Colonel Sanders, and his self-portrait. His carvings are in the collections of the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, the Canadian Museum of Civilization, and private collections.

*Woman and Dog Dancing* 1975  
polychrome wood,  
186.1 x 18.5 x 16.0 cm  
Collection: Art Gallery of Nova Scotia

*Fiddler and Two Dogs Dancing* 1975  
polychrome wood,  
19.2 x 12.4 x 24.0 cm  
Collection: Art Gallery of Nova Scotia



Nancy Edell, *Blomidon Cow* 1981  
hooked rug, 62.0 x 84.0 cm  
Collection: The Art Gallery, Mount Saint Vincent University  
Photo: The Art Gallery, Mount Saint Vincent University



Collins Eisenhower, *Fiddler and Two Dogs Dancing* 1975  
polychrome wood, 19.2 x 12.4 x 24.0 cm  
Collection: Art Gallery of Nova Scotia; Photo: Art Gallery of Nova Scotia

## Gerald Ferguson (1937-)

Born in Cincinnati, Ohio, Gerald Ferguson came to Canada in 1968 to teach at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design. Long-time teacher, collector and occasional curator, Ferguson has received numerous awards including a Canada Council "A" Grant. His studio work has been exhibited locally, nationally and internationally, in numerous solo and group shows, and is represented in both private and public collections, most notably in the Art Gallery of Ontario, the Museum of Modern Art, New York, the Glenbow Museum and the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia.

*Tulips and Fish with Yellow Door* 1992  
enamel and acrylic on linen and wood  
136.3 x 245.6 cm  
Collection: the artist

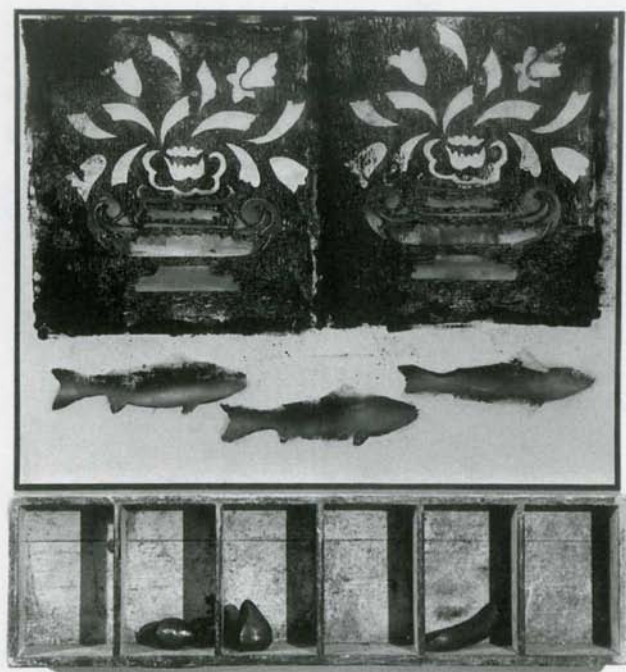
*Flowers and Fish with Board* 1992  
enamel and acrylic on  
canvas with wood  
88.4 x 149.9 cm  
Collection: the artist

*Tulips and Fish with Yellow Box* 1992  
enamel on canvas with wood  
and cast iron  
119.6 x 114.4 cm  
Collection: the artist

*Flowers and Fish with Board* 1992  
enamel and acrylic on canvas  
with wood  
100.2 x 91.0 cm  
Collection: the artist

*Still Life with Platter,  
Lobster and Fruit* 1989  
conté, enamel and acrylic on canvas  
85.5 x 141.6 cm  
Collection: the artist

The above five works courtesy of the  
Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto



Gerald Ferguson, *Tulips and Fish with Yellow Box* 1992  
enamel on canvas with wood and cast iron, 119.6 x 114.4 cm  
Collection: the artist



## Kyle Jackson (1960 -) · Maud Lewis (1903-1970)

Born in Toronto, Kyle Jackson was encouraged to experiment with art at a young age by his artist mother. He moved to Nova Scotia in 1984 and attended the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design from 1984-86. In 1987 he worked at Chris Huntington's Wild Goose Gallery, where he became familiar with many kinds of folk art. His own work has been displayed in group shows in Nova Scotia and in the Soho Kitchen restaurant, which he co-owns. Jackson's work is also represented in private and public collections.

*Ferry to Dartmouth* 1985  
acrylic/varnish on wood,  
35.7 x 82.7 cm  
Collection: Tom Roussell

*Long Live Lorne Reid* 1991  
acrylic and metal tape on  
wood panelling  
97.3 x 127.7 cm  
Collection: Soho Kitchen

*Nova Scotia* 1992  
oil on canvas, 56.5 x 146.5 cm  
Collection: the artist

*Helicopter Rescue* 1991  
mixed media on plywood  
and particleboard  
32.0 x 40.6 cm  
Collection: Janice Leonard and  
Paul Fraser

*Halifax Skyline* 1992  
mixed media on plywood,  
57.6 x 142.4 cm  
Collection: Gordon Laurin

Born in Yarmouth County, Nova Scotia, Maud Lewis was severely deformed and partially crippled by polio as a child. She began selling her hand-drawn Christmas cards shortly before her marriage in 1921. When she could not afford boards or paper, she painted on cookie sheets, her cast iron stove, and the walls and doors of her tiny house. After her marriage she and her husband lived in Digby County, where she died in 1970. Her work is represented in many public and private collections.

*Untitled (summer scene)* c. 1950  
oil on board, 29.6 x 35.9 cm  
Collection: Art Gallery of Nova Scotia

*Family and Sled* c. 1960  
oil on pulpboard, 31.6 x 35.4 cm  
Collection: Art Gallery of Nova Scotia

*Oxen in Winter* c. 1963  
oil on pulpboard, 28.5 x 30.5 cm  
Private collection



Maud Lewis, *Untitled (summer scene)* c. 1950  
oil on board, 29.6 x 35.9 cm  
Collection: Art Gallery of Nova Scotia; Photo: Art Gallery of Nova Scotia



Kyle Jackson, *Nova Scotia* 1992  
oil on canvas, 56.5 x 146.5 cm  
Collection: the artist

## Janice Leonard (1952-)

Born and raised in the Annapolis Valley, Nova Scotia, Janice Leonard studied at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design (BFA 1981) and presently lives and works in Halifax. In 1988 she received a Canada Council "B" Grant. Her work has been shown in solo and group exhibitions in Halifax, and is included in Canadian public and private collections. Her most recent solo exhibition was **The Golden Thread of Memory, a Romantic History of Paradise, Nova Scotia**, organized by the Dalhousie Art Gallery in 1991.

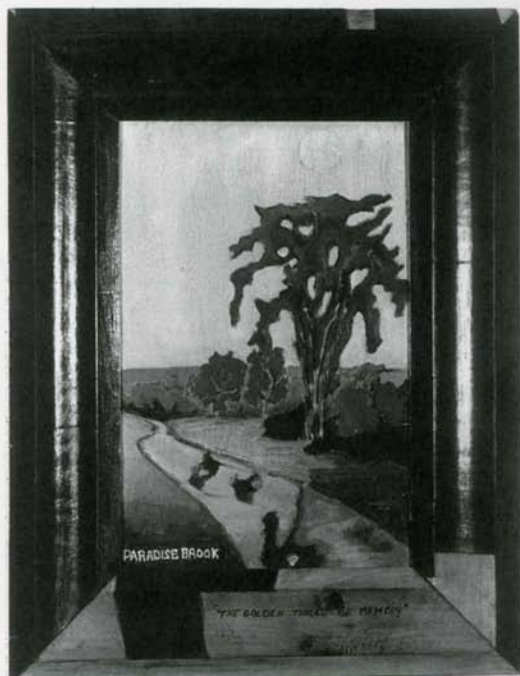
*Log House* 1982  
(from *Dream Home* series)  
mixed media on plywood,  
43.5 x 53.0 cm  
Collection: the artist

*The Golden Thread of Memory* 1988  
mixed media on plywood and  
found frame  
66.0 x 50.5 cm  
Collection: the artist

*Belgian Relief* 1980  
mixed media on plywood  
29.0 x 92.0 cm  
Collection: the artist

*Helen loves Donnie* 1985  
mixed media on plywood  
32.0 x 59.4 cm  
Collection: the artist

*Passports Unnecessary* 1987  
mixed media on plywood  
41.0 x 32.0 cm  
Collection: the artist



Janice Leonard, *The Golden Thread of Memory* 1988  
mixed media on plywood and found frame; 66.0 x 50.5 cm  
Collection: the artist



## Charlie Murphy (1946-)

Charlie Murphy was born and raised in Sydney, Nova Scotia, studied biology and physical education, and has worked as a school teacher in Nova Scotia and Manitoba. His interest in art was encouraged by the artists Robert Frank and June Leaf, and he continued his self-education through travel to New York and Venice, with the assistance of two Canada Council grants. Since the early 1980s, his works have been exhibited in solo and group shows across Canada, and he has received a further Canada Council Award and several grants from the Nova Scotia Department of Culture and Tourism. His work is represented in Canadian public and private collections.

*Myself Playing Indian* 1983  
mixed media on particle board  
66.0 x 71.1 cm  
Collection: the artist

*City Gardener* 1986  
mixed media, 106.7 x 76.2 cm  
Collection: the artist

*I Smell the Light* 1990  
mixed media on plywood  
122.0 x 182.9 cm  
Collection: the artist

*Snoopy* 1993  
mixed media on plywood  
61.0 x 78.7 cm  
Collection: the artist

*Aunt Warwi in my Mother's Kitchen* 1983  
mixed media, 70.5 x 67.5 cm  
Collection: Margaret Hamilton



Charlie Murphy, *Myself Playing Indian* 1983  
mixed media on particle board, 66.0 x 71.1 cm  
Collection: the artist

## Leo Naugler (1955-)

Born in Lunenburg County, Nova Scotia, Leo Naugler worked for the Department of Highways as a woodsman, and as a general fix-it man. Other members of his family also make carvings and paintings and, like Leo, have been influenced by the work folk artist Eddie Mandaggio. Naugler also worked in an autobody repair shop, and has incorporated the materials and processes of autobody repair into his art work, which is represented in public and private collections.

*Table* 1990  
polychrome wood  
90.0 x 150.0 x 74.0 cm (see cover)  
Collection: Virginia Stephen

## John Neville (1952-)

John Neville was born and raised in Hall's Harbour, Nova Scotia, and was educated at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design (BFA 1976) and at the Centre de gravure contemporaine in Geneva, Switzerland. From 1976 to the present, he has operated an etching studio in Hall's Harbour. His etchings and drawings have been exhibited in group and solo exhibitions throughout the Atlantic provinces and, recently, in Toronto and New York City. Neville has received two Canada Council grants, and several other awards, and his work is included in public and private collections.

### *Sweeping a Fish Weir* 1986

etching/aquatint

56.2 x 75.7 cm paper

44.6 x 60.3 cm image

Collection: the artist

### *Bentley Mountain* 1925 1989

etching/aquatint 22/100

56.3 x 75.6 cm paper

44.9 x 60.1 cm image

Collection: the artist

### *The Unexpected Wave* 1990

etching/aquatint 4/7 A.P.

56.5 x 75.8 cm paper

44.7 x 60.4 cm image

Collection: the artist

### *Flame of Youth* 1992

etching/aquatint 17/50

56.6 x 76.0 paper

44.9 x 60.1 image

Collection: the artist

### *World Cruise* 1992

etching/aquatint 28/50

56.6 x 76.2 paper

44.9 x 60.5 image

Collection: the artist

### *Salmon Supper* 1993

etching/aquatint 28/60

56.3 x 76.0 cm paper

44.8 x 60.5 cm image

Collection: the artist



John Neville, *The Unexpected Wave* 1990

etching/aquatint 4/7 A.P.; 56.5 x 75.8 cm paper, 44.7 x 60.4 cm image

Collection: the artist

## Joseph Norris (1924-)

Born in Halifax, Joe Norris painted as a child, when bedridden with pleurisy. After a heart attack ended his fishing career in 1973, he began painting and selling his work from his fish shack in Lower Prospect. He also painted on furniture, chests and mantelpieces. He is now one of the better known Nova Scotia folk artists and his work is included in many public and private collections.

### *Cove Scene* 1975

enamel on board, 52.6 x 72.8 cm

Collection: Art Gallery of Nova Scotia

### *Chest* 1975

polychrome wood, 186 x 43 x 25 cm

Collection: Art Gallery of Nova Scotia



Joseph Norris, *Cove Scene* 1975

enamel on board, 52.6 x 72.8 cm

Collection: Art Gallery of Nova Scotia; Photo: Art Gallery of Nova Scotia



## Sampler-makers

### Isabella Heseltine Askrigg (1839-?)

Little is known about Isabella Heseltine Askrigg except her birthdate (1839) and the date she embroidered this sampler (1851) as a memorial to her dead brother.

### Sophia Eliza Brown (c. 1816-1891)

Sophia Eliza Brown lived and died in Windsor, Nova Scotia. Unmarried herself, she was connected through family marriages to the Allison family of Horton.

*Sampler* c. 1826  
silk on linen, 44.6 x 42.9 cm  
Collection: Nova Scotia Museum

### Leslie Sampson (1959-)

Born in Manchester, Connecticut, U.S.A., Leslie Sampson was educated in Philadelphia (BFA 1981) and at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design (MFA 1983). She continued to live and work in Halifax throughout the 1980s, and presently lives in California. Sampson has exhibited her works in solo and group exhibitions throughout Canada, and also in Lublin, Poland, and Cambridge, Massachusetts. Her work is represented in public and private collections.

*Moses* 1987  
cross-stitch embroidery  
55.1 x 85.1 cm  
Collection: Maureen E. Shebib

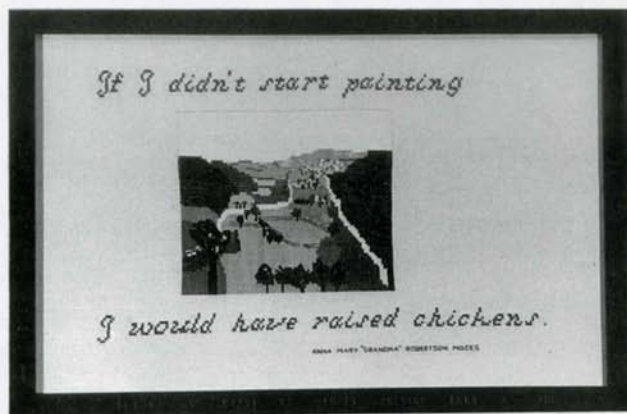
*Nanna* 1987  
cross stitch embroidery;  
wood carving: 108.1 x 72.5 cm  
carving: 11.3 x 21.3 x 42.5 cm  
Collection: the artist

*Jeffrey* 1989  
cross stitch embroidery;  
eight small wooden chairs  
84.0 x 91.0 cm  
Collection: the artist

*Work Work Work* 1988  
cross stitch embroidery  
on tea towel; wood frame  
74.4 x 66.9 cm  
Collection: the Art Gallery, Mount  
Saint Vincent University



Isabella Heseltine Askrigg, *Sampler* 1851  
wool on linen, 41.9 x 45.7 cm  
Collection: Nova Scotia Museum  
Photo: Art Gallery of Nova Scotia

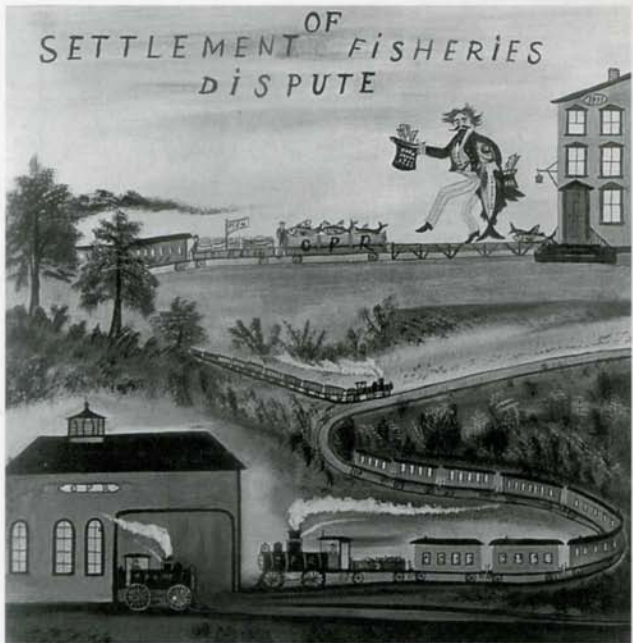


Leslie Sampson, *Moses* 1987  
cross-stitch embroidery, 55.1 x 85.1 cm  
Collection: Maureen E. Shebib

## Francis Silver (1841-1920)

Born da Silva in Portugal, Francis Silver was a sailor who eventually settled in Hantsport, Nova Scotia, and worked as a cooper, gardener and coachman for E. Churchill and Sons. He covered the walls of the carriage house, harness room and basement of the Churchill house with layers of paintings. Later, he painted on sailcloth, making ship portraits, landscapes, social and Biblical scenes, and political cartoons.

*Settlement of Fisheries Dispute* n.d.  
oil on canvas, 101.6 x 107.0 cm  
Collection: Chris Alexander



Francis Silver, *Settlement of Fisheries Dispute* n.d.  
oil on canvas, 101.6 x 107.0 cm  
Collection: Chris Alexander  
Photo: Art Gallery of Nova Scotia

## Joe Sleep (1914-1978)

Born at sea, between England and New Brunswick, Joe Sleep grew up to be a fisherman, odd-jobs man and, later, jack-of-all-trades for the Bill Lynch Carnival. He began to paint while in hospital in 1973 at the suggestion of a nurse and social worker, and was also encouraged by friends who taught at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design. His subjects included the waterfront, the carnival and his cat. He died in Halifax in 1978 and his work is now included in many private and public collections.

*Carnival With Animals* 1977  
latex and felt marker on masonite  
91.5 x 122.0 cm  
Collection: Art Gallery of Nova Scotia

*Untitled (horses)* 1976  
poster paints on matboard  
55.8 x 73.7 cm  
Collection: Dalhousie Art Gallery

*Untitled* 1974  
felt marker on paper, 93.0 x 142.0 cm  
Collection: Dr. Harold Pearse



Joe Sleep, *Carnival With Animals* 1977  
latex and felt marker on masonite, 91.5 x 122.0 cm  
Collection: Art Gallery of Nova Scotia; Photo: Art Gallery of Nova Scotia

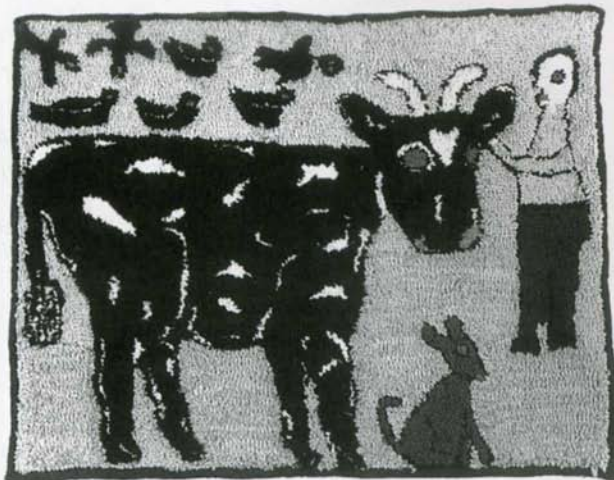


## Ellen Gould Sullivan (1907-)

Ellen Gould Sullivan was born in Black Rock, Kings County, Nova Scotia, and presently lives in Hall's Harbour. She learned her mat hooking from her mother. Family tradition emphasised geometric hooked rug patterns, but she works almost entirely in the pictorial mode, drawing on the Bible, children's books and the animals around Hall's Harbour for subject matter.

*Buck at Night* 1978  
hooked mat, 87.0 x 97.0 cm  
Collection: John and Joyce Neville

*Man Leading Cow* 1979  
hooked mat, 67.0 x 95.0 cm  
Collection: John and Joyce Neville



Ellen Gould Sullivan, *Man Leading Cow* 1979  
hooked mat, 67.0 x 95.0 cm  
Collection: John and Joyce Neville



Eric Walker, *Helen Creighton, a legacy for us* 1985  
mixed media on plywood, 39.5 x 59.9 cm  
Collection: Dr. Pauline Gardinor-Barber

*Pig* 1980  
hooked mat, 45.0 x 44.0 cm (irregular)  
Collection: Nancy Edell

*Hooker* 1987  
hooked mat, 48.0 x 62.0 cm  
Collection: Nancy Edell

## Eric Walker (1957 -)

Eric Walker was born and raised in Nova Scotia, and educated at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design (BFA 1984). From 1986-88 he worked on various projects for Picture Plant films, and in 1989 worked as co-ordinator of Eye Level Gallery, Halifax. His studio work has been exhibited in solo and group shows in Halifax and in Lublin, Poland. He has received several short-term and "B" grants from the Canada Council and his work is represented in private and public collections. He presently resides in Ottawa.

*Geizer's Hill/Link with the Future* 1982  
mixed media on plywood  
28.0 x 36.0 cm  
Collection: Janice Leonard and Paul Fraser

*I'll Dance with Anyone She Said, Even the Devil* 1985  
mixed media on plywood  
43.0 x 54.0 cm  
Collection: Janice Leonard and Paul Fraser

*C.S.U.—S.I.U. Clash* n.d.  
mixed media on plywood  
33.8 x 41.8 cm  
Collection: Robert Bean

*Helen Creighton, a legacy for us* 1985  
mixed media on plywood  
39.5 x 59.9 cm  
Collection:  
Dr. Pauline Gardinor-Barber

