



BEING IN TIME

Celebrating the 138th Anniversary of the Ontario Society of Artists

April 11 – June 6, 2010

Guest Curator: Carla Garnet

Participating Artists:

Ona Alisauskas, Robert Amirault, Valerie Ashton, Nadia Bechirian-Tiseo, Peter Barelkowski, Andrea Bird, Lillian Michiko Blakey, Kelly Borgers, George Boyer, Carmel Brennan, Bruno Capolongo, Ray Cattell, Rita Choy-Ng, Susan Clark, Lynda Cunningham, Pat Dumas-Hudecki, Nancy De Boni, Elizabeth Elliott, Carole Edwards, Jean Eng, Pat Fairhead, Mary Ellen Farrow, Judith Finch, Maya Foltyn, Heather Grindley, Cathy Groulx, Diana Harding-Tucker, Janet Hendershot, Robin Hesse, Kate Hyde, Tara Imerson, Shahla Jamal, Laurin Jeffrey, Linda Kemp, Lila Lewis Irving, Mary Anne Ludlam, Sheila Roberts MacDonald, James MacDougall, Janice Mason Steeves, Vallery Mokrytzki, Robert Montgomery, Ryan Moon Song, Mary Ng, Audra Noble, Mary Pavey, Germinio Politi, Helena Pravda, George Raab, Alejandro Rabazo, Janet Read, Doreen Renner, Asher Sadeh, John Schweitzer, Christina Sealy, Gerald Sevier, Dragan Sekaric Shex, Johanna Skelly, Alice Teichert, Gerd Untermann, Wynn Walters, and Yetvart Garbis Yaghdjian and A.Y. Jackson, Arthur Lismer and Doris McCarthy.

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According to Martin Heidegger, 'being' exists ahead of itself, which means it exists for the sake of itself or as long as it is - accordingly, 'being' constitutes a constant unfinished quality which to this extent lies in its formation; much like a work of art, that even after it is finished, lives on each time it is looked at by a viewer.¹

Notable Canadian painter and past OSA president, Doris McCarthy takes a similar philosophical stance towards the reception of her work when she states, "Every painting that I do is done with passion and love, not only of the subject but also of every step in the process. To me the real question is whether it speaks to you, the viewer, and enables you to share that experience."²

¹ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time: A translation of Sein and Zeit*, translated by Joan Stambaugh, the State University of New York Press: 1996, published in German as *Sein und Zeit (Unveränderter Nachdruck der 15) Auflage* by Max Niemeyer Verlag; found in *Basic Writings of Existentialism*, Modern Library - Random House, New York: 2004

² Doris McCarthy quoted in *Doris McCarthy, Everything Which is Yes*, Doris McCarthy Gallery catalogue, 2004 sourced from Wynick/Tuck February 26 2010 press release for: *Doris McCarthy: One Hundred Years*.

BEING IN TIME, on view at Gallery Stratford April 11th through to June 6th 2010, celebrates the 138th anniversary of the Ontario Society of Artists by taking up as its very theme the existence in Canada of the OSA, a uniquely durable artists society, that remains contemporary over time by embracing the notion of making art itself as a movement towards its own reality.

The exhibition, which is literally brimming with images of figure and ground, using a variety of media, honours the OSA's constant effort to provide opportunities for its membership, to work, exhibit, document, educate and reflect on the natural and man-made beauty found in this province and beyond. It features contemporary abstracts and representations of nature and culture by 61 member artists, which are complemented by the inclusion of exemplary oil and pencil studies by renowned past society members such as: A.Y. Jackson, Arthur Lismer and Doris McCarthy.

Established 138 years ago, (five years after confederation), the OSA has been instrumental in the founding of such organizations as the Ontario College of Art, the Canadian Society of Graphic Arts, the Ontario Association of Architects, the Sculptors' Society of Canada, the Canadian Society of Painters in Water Colour and the Royal Canadian Academy, in addition to the Grange and AGO and more recently the Centre for Contemporary Canadian Art, which grew out of the OSA Millennium Archive Project. The Society, in conjunction with the Art Gallery of Ontario, made a video to commemorate the occasion of its 125th anniversary. This video is presented at Gallery Stratford in 2010 as an illustration of the society's narrative of itself as a 'being' in time, one with past and future aspirations.

From the onset the OSA has carried out its stated mandate of fostering original art in the province by extending the opportunity to participate in juried shows to its membership in important public art institutions across the province and beyond.

The OSA has always had broad membership, including men and women, painters, sculptors, architects, engravers and designers who have continued to express an interest in aesthetics in nature and conservation. In 1929, the OSA negotiated with the Government to introduce a special clause into all contracts with companies developing water power and lumbering in Ontario, which would give the Government "the power to restrict any unnecessary destruction of natural beauty." Similarly the OSA asked that special attention be paid to "the preservation of trees and the flow of water around large waterfalls" concluding that in this way an artist could preserve not only works of art, but also the very sites of the picturesque.³

A Doris McCarthy oil painting, from Stratford's permanent collection, is showcased here to commemorate the occasion of McCarthy's 100th birthday and as an extra

³ R. F. Gagen "Ontario Art Chronicle," unpublished manuscript on file in the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto; OSA Minute Books, OSA Papers and OSA Presidents' Reports (1894-1972), Ontario Department of Public Records and Archives, Toronto, found on http://ccca.finearts.yorku.ca/osa_org/english/index.html * Courtesy of the Art Gallery of Ontario

supplement to the exhibition, which is premised upon celebrating the OSA's cultural engagement with its own longevity, heritage and its relationship to the natural and cultural world through its membership shows.

McCarthy's 1994 Hooded Hoodoos Dinosaur Park oil painting is a good example of how majestic representations of the uninhabited landscape continue to circulate the myth of nature as a lost garden, a myth, with roots in both Greek and Hebraic streams of western culture, which continue to organize the environmental narrative today.

The empty space in McCarthy's Hoodoos canvas is like much expansive nineteenth-century and early 20th century landscape painting, including that of her OSA peers: Clare Bice (1909-1976), Frank Carmichael (1890-1945), A.J. Casson (1898-1992), Frederick Hagan (1918-2003), A.Y. Jackson (1882-1974), Arthur Lismer (1885-1969) Tom Thomson (1877-1917), J.E.H. MacDonald (1873-1932), and Marion Long (1882-1970), to name just a few, who also created images of unpopulated territories that influence the popular imagination, a longing to view expansive fields of untouched land, water and sky.

These images extend into our contemporary world where a sense of place can be altered by the world wide web, which brings geographically distant locations together instantly, even as the local day to day encounters that inform a sense place-bound identity become more abstract. Our increased consumption of images has encouraged us to translate our experience of nature into forms accessible to the camera. Today most popular representations of nature and by extension outdoor views are organized around the eye.

Therefore it is valuable to note that while the exhibition's inclusion of 20 seemingly unoccupied landscapes extends the story of the garden lost, *BEING IN TIME* also shifts the narrative ever so slightly. For instance whereas OSA artists of 19th and 20th century, previously cited in this essay, depicted the land as pristine, the OSA's 21st century artists on view in this Gallery Stratford group show, have populated their waterways with boats and industry, their fields with wild and domestic animals, their buildings with reflections of the street, and imbued their interior spaces with psychological presence, while like their antecedents, they have continued to use a plethora of media to draw, paint, collage, print, photograph, and sculpt the world around them including real places like their streets, gardens, living rooms, kitchens and working landscapes.

OSA artist Nancy De Boni's painting titled the *Open Door* is a psychological portrait. It depicts what she describes as "the mouth of a decaying house with the light revealing the silent front hall with all its' detritus. An unconscious presence of inhabitants is suggested, laden with scattered meanderings of past lives."⁴ Fellow artist, Lillian Michiko Blakey's mixed media collage *O Canada*, whilst a more typical portrait, is made using ink drawings and photographs on Japanese papers. This piece

⁴ Nancy De Boni, *BEING IN TIME Open Door*, Artist Statement

pictures the artist's Japanese-Canadian born mother's sweet youth in contrast to a rural beet farm where she was interned. By referring to past tragedy Blakey invokes the present day reality of the world's growing stateless.⁵ Equally powerful Shahla Jamal's two Nostalgia paintings do not show the uncertainty arising from current unrest in Iran, rather these paintings present Old Persian objects by combining the effects of slanted line, flat colors and geometric forms.⁶ In contrast, George Rabb's personal experience of the retreating wilderness is reflected in his Rural Reality etching, which shows a section of a huge craggy oak silhouetted against misty windswept pines in the snowy distance, picturing what he refers to as "being frozen in time".⁷

Consequently it is the literal heterogeneity of media, process and content, be it romantic, modernist, environmentalist, regionalist, or agrarian in BEING IN TIME that allows the exhibition to avoid the usual binary of depicting nature as good, and culture as bad or vice versa, and instead the 85 work installation demonstrates that the OSA has an awareness of the links and relationships which exist between the past and the present and natural and cultural world.

Carla Garnet
Guest Curator

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⁵ Lillian Michiko Blakey, *BEING IN TIME O Canada*, Artist Statement

⁶ Shahla Jamal, *BEING IN TIME Nostalgia*, Artist Statement

⁷ George Rabb, *BEING IN TIME Rural Reality*, Artist Statement