From Pastels to Chisel: The Changing Role of BC Women Artists

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Women have always been artists, but a modern development of art history has been the virtual denial of their equal capabilities.[1] This denial has meant relegation of women to a place within the cultural milieu other than that occupied by men. Language supports this idea: the terms "male artist" or "masculine art" are never used. We simply say "art" and "artist," equating maleness with the standard by which all art is then measured. Modern art history places women artists as the opposite of this standard. So, they are not merely overlooked, but they are used as the negative standard against which male art can be maintained as the positive standard. As Parker and Pollock have noted, the status of one's art work is tied to the status of the maker.[2] Because of women's secondary status in society, their art has been relegated to an inferior place.

On the rare occasion when a successful woman artist is recognized by the art history establishment, she is often treated as an exception or a strange phenomenon. The best Canadian example of this is Emily Carr, likely the only nationally known woman artist. It could be argued that many more people know about her lifestyle than those who would be able to recognize her paintings. Her peculiarities have been given more emphasis than her art. The implication is clear: she is atypical of her sex because of her artistic capability.[3]

The aim of this essay, therefore, is not to continue in the male vein and argue that there have been many "great" women artists in British Columbia. Instead, many women artists, who have been identified as a result of work done in the 1970s,[4] have produced work worthy of examination. Simply because they existed and produced a substantial body of work makes them a valid subject for study. Throughout this essay, why women have been misrepresented and what this treatment indicates about standard art history

Barbara K. Latham and Roberta J. Pazdro, Eds., *Not Just Pin Money*
Victoria: Camosun College, 1984

methodology will be discussed.

John Russell Harper, author of a widely used text on Canadian art history, summarized the development of art in the West:

> The general pattern between 1900 and 1940 is remarkably constant in all four western provinces. First came a few scattered pioneers, usually landscape watercolourists, who were often English immigrants. They worked in some of the larger communities. Art lovers made themselves known. These two groups combined to organize art schools and galleries. Art teachers were attracted from the East, students attended the new institutions, and an atmosphere was created which would encourage the creative surge in the years immediately following the Second World War.[5]

This quotation suffers from a typical phenomenon of patriarchal thought. While its language is non-sexist or inclusive, the content does not include women. In the hands of the patriarchy, women are assumed to be absent unless they are specifically mentioned. Harper's use of language does nothing to alter the status quo. Therefore, this essay will examine what Harper has chosen to omit: women's considerable participation in British Columbia's art. Though there are many women who could have been included in this discussion, the selection has been limited to four: Sister Mary Osithe (1867-1941), Josephine Crease (1864-1947), Ina Duncan Dewar Uhthoff (1889-1971), and Beatrice Lennie (b. 1905). These women are examples of women's presence in each phase of the development of art in British Columbia.

To examine the beginnings of art in British Columbia, one must look to Victoria, the province's oldest permanent settlement. Harper rightly contends that the first artists were primarily English immigrants. However, he ignores the fact that Victoria had a direct female link with French Canada provided by the Catholic Church. The Sisters of Saint Ann of Montreal, who were among the first white women settlers, arrived in the city in 1858. Their initial task was to set up a small school.

Teaching art must have been an established part of the Sisters of Saint Ann's curriculum because the 1858 prospectus for the school included courses in both music and drawing. However, it was noted that: "The Sisters are not prepared for the present to attend to these last two branches, but they hope ere long they will have teachers fully qualified to teach the same."[6] The nuns, who were able to begin offering music courses in 1863, did not rectify the lack of art classes until 1871 when they moved into their handsome brick structure, Saint Ann's Academy. Clearly, Harper overlooked the possibility of genuine artists among the Sisters, yet Sister Mary Sophie Labelle established an art program at St. Ann's long before there were any art schools in Victoria.

The most important talent of the Saint Ann's Academy art program, Sister Mary Osithe, arrived in Victoria in 1897. She taught art from 1897 until her retirement in 1940, with only a few absences for study and travel. Though

Sister Osithe taught art for more than forty years in Victoria, her work remains virtually unknown.

Of the four artists discussed in this essay, Sister Osithe's role is the most difficult to explain in terms of Harper's stages. Not since the Middle Ages has art history recognized artists who are also members of religious communities. Seen as a nun first and as an artist second, Osithe would normally be dismissed as a mere "amateur." Yet the amateur vs. professional argument is really a disguised form of sexism; the amateur label is one of the ways women are assigned a "special" place within art history. As an amateur, she can be summarily dismissed in opposition to the serious professional artist, assumed to be male. One justification for calling Sister Osithe an amateur is that she did not have to support herself through her art. Yet, in the face of her lifetime commitment to art, her years of teaching art and her long-time maintenance of a studio, the artificiality of the term becomes clear. Furthermore, Osithe would have called herself an artist.

Sister Osithe was determined to produce her own art work, a demand that likely would have not been placed on her by the Sisters of Saint Ann, who would have accepted her as an art teacher only. Her art was not produced in the public sphere for a critical audience but, instead, was and has continued to be, valued by the Sisters of Saint Ann. The commitment of her time for production of these works must also have been allowed by the Order, so she had from them lifelong support. Because Osithe created art within the confines of an all-woman environment is no reason to ignore her. Although Osithe did not participate in the Victoria arts community because of the restrictions of her lifestyle, she did contribute to it by teaching hundreds of students as well as local women.

Sister Osithe, born Elizabeth Labassière in Sorel, Québec, received a Catholic education, and then joined the Sisters of Saint Ann. At the time of her first vows in 1894, she was described as "...slight, cultured and sensitive, with a good education in French, a very slight knowledge of English, but with a talent for Art which was to determine her special work in religious life."[7] She studied art in 1896 at the Mother House in Lachine, Quebec, and with the artist Edmond Dyonnet (1859-1954), a staunch defender of the academic tradition, a style from which Osithe's art never varied.[8]

Osithe's studies were interrupted by an urgent call from Victoria for an art teacher. Upon arrival, she found a well-established art department. Her teaching assignment was taken on with great gusto since she expanded the art curriculum to include instruction in charcoal, watercolour, pastels, oils, and ceramic art.[9] Art classes were not only for Academy students, but also for women of Victoria. Students could work in classes or in private lessons.

Sister Osithe organized annual exhibitions of both her students' and her own work, making the school an art centre for the city. The demand for her art instruction caused her studio to expand from one room to three. A second art teacher was hired. She was virtually the head of the first art school in Victoria. In 1913, Saint Ann's Academy proudly advertized that: "The course of instruction in the art studio consists of: Drawings from the Antique, Drawings from Life, Perspective and Art Composition, and Decorative China."[10]

Osithe balanced teaching with the production of her own art. She created admirable works in all the media in which she offered instruction, even in decorative china painting. In her later years, she was able to devote more time to her own work as demand decreased for instruction in the academic style and as opportunities increased to study art elsewhere in the city.

In British Columbia, landscape was the dominant theme of art produced by both women and men in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For women, it was more often than not a matter of necessity because they were excluded from classes working from the nude model. With serious study of the figure thus eliminated, women turned to their environment for subjects.[11]

Osithe is an exception to this trend since much of her work focuses on the figure, although it is primarily in the form of portraiture. Some of Osithe's most striking works are portraits of students. In the oil painting *Girl with Navy Tam* (Photo 1), a carefully posed young girl is shown, half length, in a coat with lace trim and a navy tam. The formality of the pose is relaxed somewhat by the girl's casually opened coat. Though the viewer may have the impression that s/he is being presented with the image of a model student of Saint Ann's Academy, a feeling of intimacy is also conveyed. This child is not an anonymous model; instead she is probably a student well known to Osithe and whatever the final intent of the portrait, the child is obviously one for whom she must have cared. Other student portraits were also done, but the reason for them is unknown and sadly the subjects all remain unidentified.

One of Osithe's most important paintings is a large work, entitled *The House of Cards* (PABC), done in 1904. It may have been painted during her 1903-04 visit to Lachine where she continued her study of art. The painting shows a young girl, identified as "Thérèse Allard, aged 6," standing next to a table on which she is building a house of cards. She wears a very proper white dress with a lace yoke, fastened with a blue sash. The artist has made an interesting comment in the painting: the girl's expensive doll is carelessly discarded in favour of a single deck of cards.

Osithe did paint landscapes, the most interesting of which refer to her way of life. In a watercolour entitled *The Rifle Range* (Collection of the Sisters of Saint Ann, Victoria), she shows the cliffs of Victoria's waterfront, but adds an unusual element: a solitary nun, seated on a log, gazing out to sea. Though the title alludes to an earthly world dominated by men, it is juxtaposed with the peaceful contemplative aspect of religious life.

Missionaries Departing for Japan (Photo 2) is a documentary piece rather than the seascape it appears to be. It memorializes October 6, 1934, the date when four Sisters departed for Japan on the steamship *Empress of Russia*. The experience was a particularly moving one for Sister Osithe who wrote of it in a letter to Mother Mary Leopoldine:

> Our gaze still fixed on the majestic liner, we follow sorrowfully the movements of the grand palace, gliding on the sea, taking our dear Mother and our three other Sisters. The event is so solemn! The last notes of our prayer, "Ave maris Stella," die away, and

> behold, like a vision of Celestial Beauty, there is the most glorious sunset I have ever seen! ...On returning home, I have an inspiration to make a reproduction in pastel colours of what I have just seen.[12]

This small pastel contains subtle emotions. Watching the ship, two nuns in black stand on a pier in the foreground with their backs to the viewer. As the ship pulls out, the nuns' silhouette echoes the billows of smoke which pour from the steamer stacks, blackening the brilliant orange and yellow of the west cost sunset. The departing nuns, several years later, would hastily retreat from Japan in order to escape internment at the outbreak of World War Two.

Added to these talents was yet another. Oral tradition among the Sisters of Saint Ann claims that Osithe was the first woman architect in British Columbia, though she was not formally trained. It is said she designed the Little Flower Academy, a school built in 1911-12 in Vancouver, and run by the Sisters. She is also said to have designed, in Victoria, the extension to both Saint Joseph's Hospital and the hospital's Nurses' Residence, both of which were managed and staffed by the Sisters of Saint Ann.[13]

The existence of Sister Osithe and the Saint Ann's program demands expansion of Harper's concept of art in the West to include non-English settlers and early educators. Because Osithe lived, taught, and worked within an all-female environment, her obscurity has been assured until now. In one sense, she is the ultimate negative: she lived and worked in total isolation from Victoria's incipient secular arts community, yet she was still producing "important" art (*i.e.*, figures). However, there is no good reason for Canadians to pretend she did not exist.

While Osithe was quietly providing art instruction to students and women of Victoria, a group of local artists, who likely never would have availed themselves of her services, were founding the Island Arts and Crafts Society. These artists were Protestant members of Victoria's "state set." These women clearly fit into the category of early English immigrants to whom Harper attributed the foundation of the development of the arts in the West. In British Columbia, these artists first organized in Victoria; one of the most energetic and consistently dedicated women was Josephine Crease.

If the amateur painter is defined as one who works in the home, pursues art part time, has limited training and often works in a style that is slightly out of date, then Josephine Crease fits this image more surely than did Sister Osithe. But, even so, the term unfairly reduces our expectations of her as an artist. Due to her upper-class status and conservative style of art, her work has been too easily dismissed as the dabblings of a society lady. It is now time to re-examine her role.

Josephine Crease, fourth of eight children of Sarah Crease (1826-1922) and Henry Perring Pellew Crease (1823-1905), was born in New Westminster, British Columbia, in 1864 while her father was Attorney-General of the colony. In 1869, the family moved to Victoria where Josephine remained most of her life. Sarah Crease, a skilled artist, introduced a love of art to the family. Of all the Crease children who became sketchers and watercolourists and attained varying degrees of mastery of these media, Josephine had the

most enduring interest in art.

The style of art perpetuated by the Crease family is typical of their class and family background. Both Sarah and H.P.P. Crease were of the privileged class and, like most, brought their traditions, artistically and otherwise, with them from the Mother Country. Watercolour landscape which flourished in nineteenth century Britain grew from the topographical tradition into the "picturesque" or the beauty that would look well transcribed into a picture.[14] Because of the isolation of British Columbia, this tradition endured longer here than in Europe.

Josephine Crease's interest in art and especially in the landscape tradition would have been appropriate for a woman of her class since leisured women were expected to be knowledgeable about music and art as part of their education. These were not only signs of gentility, but also these refinements, indicative of a woman's ability to establish a comfortable home, would add to her marriageability. Artistic skills were a further indication of status as it was well known that countesses, ladies and even the Queen were "sketchers."[15] Sketching was also an integral part of leisure activities such as regattas, picnics, camping trips, and walking.[16]

Josephine Crease's art education extended well beyond the skills that would have been required for sketching trips. Taught at home and at Angela College, Victoria, she took private lessons also, on occasion. But her most important opportunity to study art came in 1889-1891 when she and her sister, Susan, were sent to Britain to familiarize themselves with their English heritage.[17] While there, they studied art in the Ladies' Department, King's College, London. Related opportunities included viewing exhibitions and exposure to the latest art trends. Upon her return, Josephine intermittently continued private lessons with artists such as Sophie Pemberton, Josephine Woodward and Samuel Maclure.

A favourite subject of Victoria sketchers has been Mount Baker, a distant snowcapped mountain often visible from the city. Crease produced a fine watercolour of this subject, now in the collection of the provincial Archives of British Columbia, which indicates her perception of landscape. She chose not to paint the wild forests and mountains of British Columbia which most certainly were accessible to her. Instead, she focused on a gentle vista of a tamed landscape which dominates the foreground while the massive Mount Baker gently blends into the atmosphere in the background. It is easy to understand how these gentle, realistic depictions of nature attracted wide appeal. The format of the work, small, tidy and manageable, is characteristic of landscape watercolours in general and was maintained by Crease throughout her artistic career.

Crease's subject matter was not confined to natural vistas, though they were one of her favourite themes. She also recorded the built environment, and in this category produced some of her most pleasing work. *Victoria, February 1916* (PABC) is a view looking down Government Street after a snowfall. It was based on the view from the studio of artist Margaret Kitto, Crease's friend and colleague from the Island Arts and Crafts Society.[18] Works such as this one are also of archival interest because they document the

changing face of Victoria.

Sketching parties in Victoria not only ventured into the countryside, but also gathered at friends' houses. There are extant paintings of the Crease family home, Pentrelew, as well as other spots such as Cary Castle, the home of the Lieutenant-Governor. Johnson-Dean dates the painting of Cary Castle (Photo 3) from 1880 when Albert Norton Richards was in office.[19] Crease knew and sketched with Ellen and Eliza Richards, wife and daughter of the Lieutenant-Governor. In 1881, Crease painted at least two interior scenes of Government House (Photo 4). This change in subject matter is not as major as it may seem since these paintings are "interior landscapes:" they are as carefully composed as the exterior work and have the same uninhabited serenity characteristic of her landscapes. The works may have also been a logical extension of the leisured woman's interest in comfort and elegance in the private sphere.

Josephine Crease could have pursued art in isolation throughout her life or within the confines of her very talented family, but instead she used her art to move into the public sphere. It must be pointed out, however, that in this sense Crease is not unique. While conventional art historians have identified women artists in the twentieth century only as exceptions or as isolated examples, it is important to realize that Crease was one of many women in Victoria, in North America and in Europe who as the community "arts organizers" laid the foundations of modern art institutions. In this essay, Crease represents all of these women and their work.

The first recorded meeting of the Island Arts and Crafts Society (IACS) was on September 29, 1909; Josephine Crease was among its founding members.[20] Though other attempts had been made at forming an art organization in Victoria, the IACS was the first successful one.[21] The IACS, which had the longest history of any art organization in Victoria, was the most important group until the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria was founded.[22]

The objectives of the club were:

> (a) To bring together artists and those interested in Art;
>
> (b) The holding of Public Exhibitions of Art and Craft work;
>
> (c) To stimulate general interest in Arts and Crafts.[23]

These goals remained consistent throughout the more than forty years of the club's existence. Other activities included the sponsorship of lectures and a sketch club.[24]

The IACS's view of art was essentially synonymous with the British watercolour landscape tradition. This conservative approach is not surprising since the Society was composed of artists like Josephine Crease, who were members of Victoria's British elite and who were frequently affiliated with the Anglican Church, especially Christ Church Cathedral.

The IACS was also affiliated with the female elite of Victoria via the

Alexandra Club. Founded in 1894, it was the female counterpart to Victoria's Union Club, an exclusive all-male domain. Many of the women in the IACS, including Josephine Crease, were also members of the Alexandra Club which was prosperous enough to erect its own building in 1910-11. The IACS held their early meetings and exhibitions there.[25]

Crease who had one of the best attendance records of the group, served on its executive and on the committee that ran the Society's art school and participated regularly in their annual exhibitions. She is typical of women artists such as Maude Lettice and Margaret Kitto who consistently backed the group. Women, as Johnson-Dean has pointed out, formed about seventy-five percent of the original members.[26] Although women were the "movers and shakers" of the group, one never served as president. Always having a man "at the top" coincided perfectly with the conservative nature of the organization.

The most important accomplishments of the IACS were the staging of an annual exhibition and the establishment of an art school, though the former was much more successful than the latter. A School of Handicraft and Design was begun by the IACS in 1913. Crease did not teach at the school, but served on its Executive Committee.[27] The courses offered through the IACS's school included woodcarving, bookbinding, jewelry and metal work, in contrast to the drawing, perspective and ceramic classes being offered at the same time at Saint Ann's. The success of the school is unknown, but the following year, the IACS suggested that the classes be moved to the high school to be run under the auspices of the local school board.[28] Only with the arrival of Ina Uhthoff in the mid-1920s would Victorians once again have an art school.

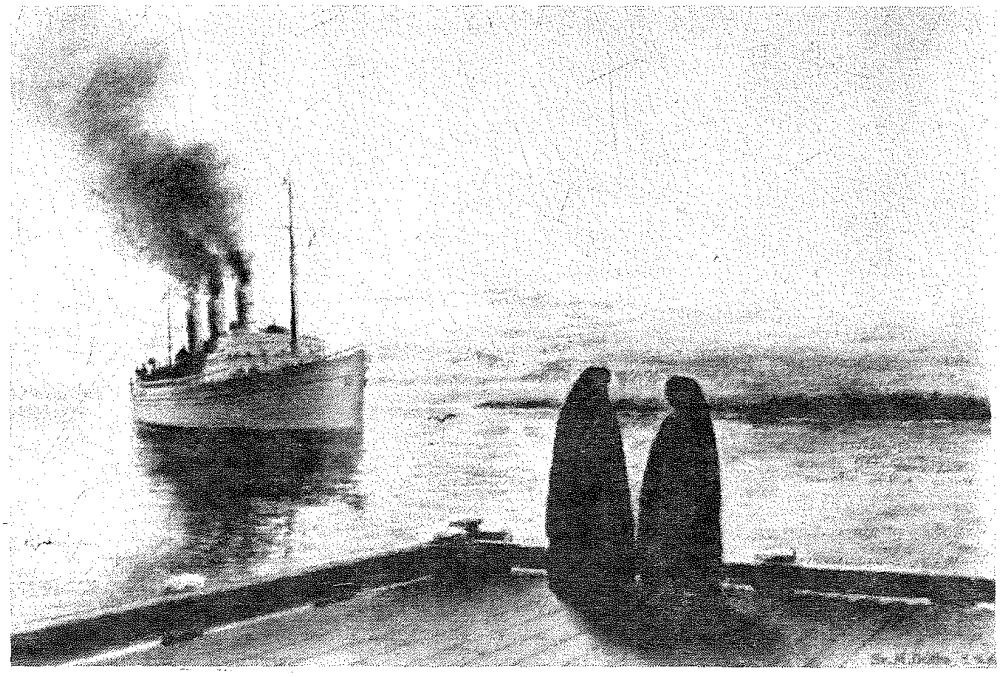
Competing with the IACS were two world wars and a Depression as well as the Victoria School of Art. As well, students were drawn to the new Vancouver School of Decorative and Applied Art, which began in 1925. Other groups in the 1940s talked about establishing a permanent art gallery in the city and attracted their own following. Members of the IACS aged, the group became less influential, and eventually dissolved in 1954.[29]

It has been too easy for art historians to negate the efforts of groups such as the IACS because of their conservative outlook. Yet they provided a real service when there were no other alternatives. Their efforts have been negated further by calling them amateurs. When the image of the male artist as "bohemian" became a central part of the modern "art scene," it contrasted so sharply with the image of these genteel ladies who hosted tea parties between sketching outings that there was no room for their gentility nor their kind of society. These women have also been overlooked in favour of their more progressive contemporary, Emily Carr. The role of these artists and their work as volunteers, despite their role in forming the basis of modern art institutions, became news only on the women's pages of the newspaper where, in fact, they could be ignored.

Josephine Crease cannot be dismissed as an artist. She exhibited with the IACS every year from 1919 to 1941,[30] exhibited with the BC Society of Fine Arts and at the Vancouver Art Gallery; she gave sketching lessons and supported herself in part through the sale of her art.

PABC

Photo 1. Sister Mary Osithe, *Girl with Navy Tam, Brown Coat,* n.d. oil, PABC.



Gale Hansen

Photo 2. Sister Mary Osithe, *Missionaries Departing for Japan,* 1934, pastel, Collection of the Sisters of Saint Ann, Victoria.

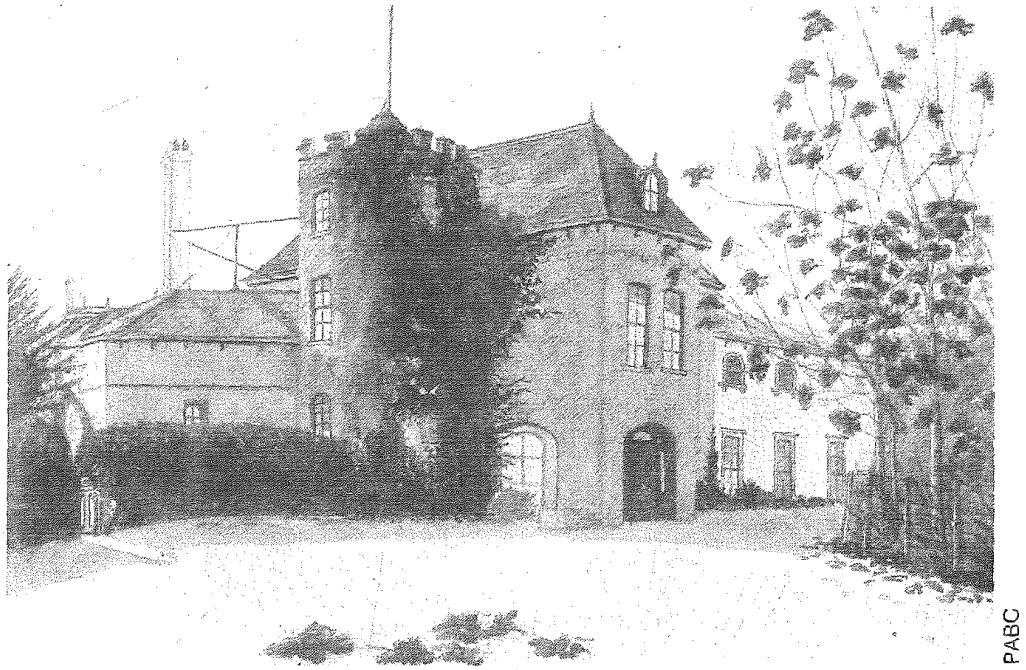


Photo 3. Josephine Crease, *Cary Castle*, 1880, watercolour, PABC pdp 2979.

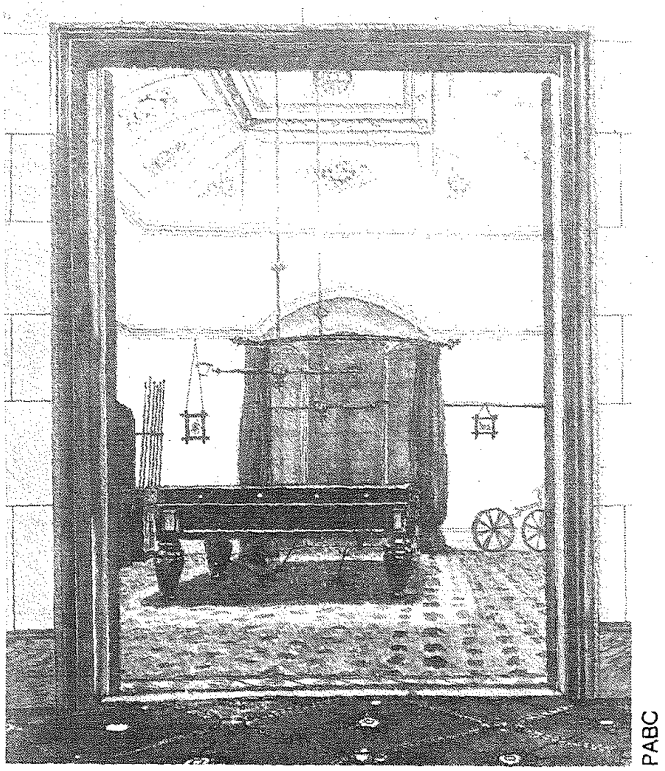


Photo 4. Josephine Crease, *Billiard Room, Cary Castle,* February 1881, watercolour, PABC pdp 2981.

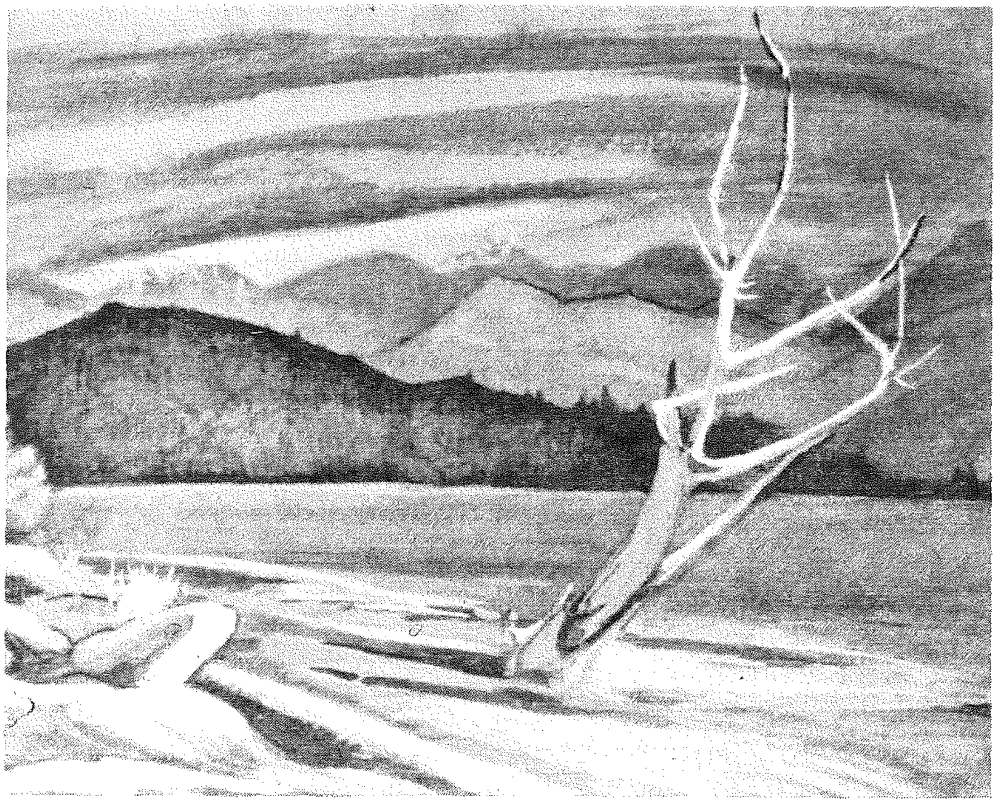


Photo 5. Ina Uhthoff, *Wild West Coast, Clacquot Island Spit,* 1939, watercolour, Art Gallery of Greater Victoria.

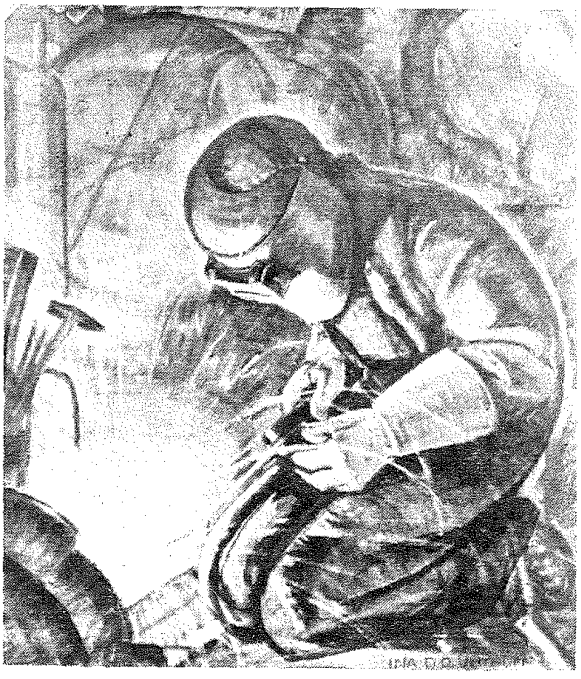


Photo 6. Ina Uhthoff, *Girl Welder,* 1944, oil, Private Collection.

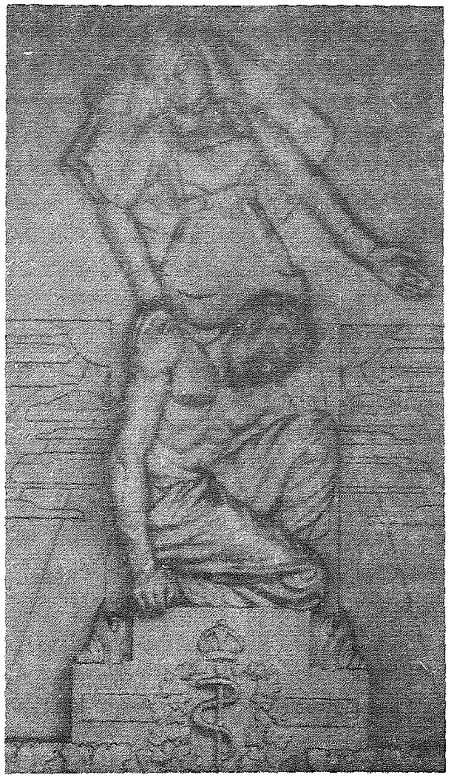


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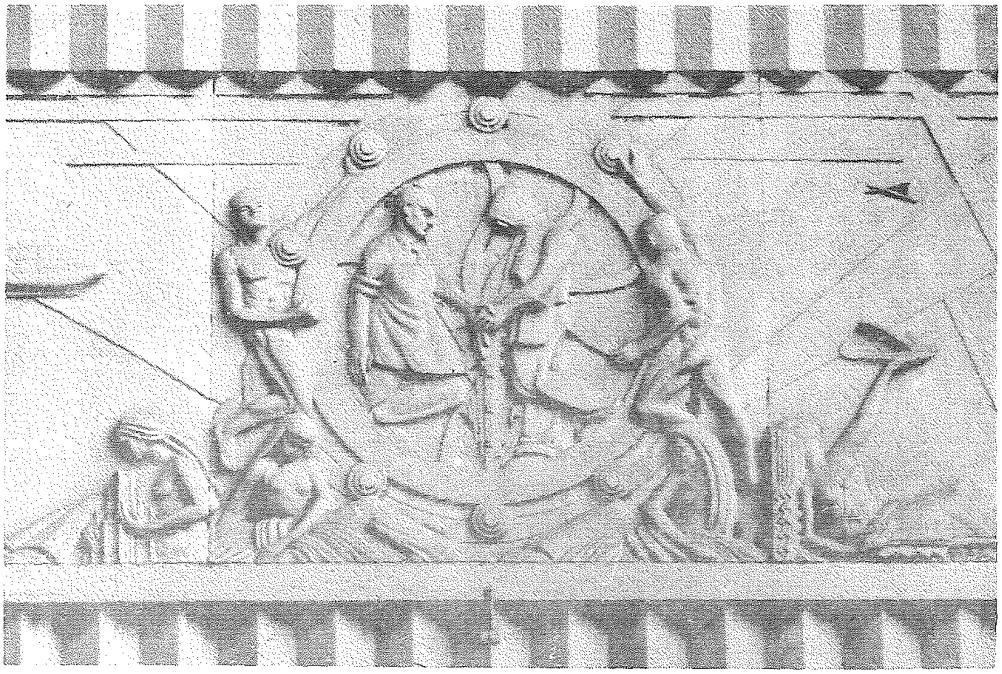
Photo 7. Beatrice Lennie, Relief, Shaughnessy Hospital, Vancouver, 1940.



Gale Hansen

Photo 8. Beatrice Lennie, Relief, Labour Temple, Vancouver, 1949.

The third phase in the maturation of art in the West, as identified by Harper, is the founding of art schools and the attraction of teachers from the East. In the case of British Columbia, the art teachers to whom Harper refers are Frederick Varley and J.W.G. Macdonald, who subsequently attained national fame. By placing his emphasis on the "big names" of Canadian art, Harper disregards the participation of others whose work was vital to this development and who were recognized locally or provincially in their own day. Not surprisingly, those overlooked include women. Harper's thesis must be revised to allow for the art instruction provided by people such as Sister Osithe in the cultural hinterland of the West. Furthermore, it also requires revision to include the work of Ina Uhthoff (nêe Campbell) who can be identified with the changing role of women artists in the twentieth century: she cannot be discounted as an amateur who painted just for pleasure and pin money. Instead, she must be acknowledged as a full-time artist. As is the case with Sister Osithe and Josephine Crease, Uhthoff should be considered more than an "obscure" British Columbia artist.

Ina Campbell, born in Kirn, Scotland, grew up in a prosperous family in Glasgow. She obtained a diploma from the Glasgow School of Art.[31] In 1913, she visited friends in the Kootenay area of British Columbia where she met Edward Joseph Uhthoff, whom she married in 1919. After World War One, they settled in Crawford Bay in the Kootenays.[32] In the mid-1920s, she left her husband, established herself in Victoria and sent for her two children. By 1926, she had established the Victoria School of Art.

Although the ultimate fate of the IACS School of Handicraft and Design is unknown, one can assume that it had disappeared by the 1920s. Therefore Victoria's lack of an art school was of concern to some local residents, among them John Kyle (1871-1958), trained as an artist, who was then Director of Technical Education for the BC Department of Education. In his *Annual Report* for 1924, items identified as being of an "immediate and pressing" nature included the establishment of an art school in the City of Victoria.[33]

Kyle's vision of the school was not unlike the one founded by the IACS, a group in which Kyle was a member and of which he became president. He described his vision of such schools as

> ...centres for educating the taste of craftsmen [sic]. Most of the failures in the manufacturing of local products may be traced to a certain crudeness in production and the standard of taste must be improved.[34]

Kyle's view must have also been influenced by his legislative mandate, the 1915 *Technical Education Act* which promoted the training of people for gainful employment.

In 1924, Uhthoff became an art instructor for the summer school for teachers run under the auspices of Kyle's department and continued this work intermittently throughout the 1920s and 1930s. If she did not meet Kyle at the outset, she was later to form an association with him that was important for the Victoria School of Art.

Kyle's concern regarding the lack of an art school in Victoria resurfaced

after the opening of the Vancouver School of Decorative and Applied Art in 1925. In his 1926-27 *Annual Report*, he hoped that Victoria would soon be able to follow suit for "...public appreciation of both art and music in the Capital City is very pronounced."[35] He believed that a school would be met with a great response.

It is then interesting to note that in the 1926 *BC Directory* the Victoria School of Art, with Uhthoff as principal, is listed for the first time. Whether or not Kyle reinforced the idea cannot be established at this time. But one cannot help but speculate that Kyle, Uhthoff's friend, may have encouraged her in this endeavour.[36] After 1926, Kyle no longer lamented the lack of an art school in Victoria in his annual reports.

The original curriculum for the Victoria School of Art is not known, but in 1939 Uhthoff taught courses in the following: drawing, painting, design, nature form, composition, clay modelling, pottery and historic costume.[37] Some of the courses, such as illustration, commercial art and lino-block printing were of a more commercial nature, of which Kyle would have approved.

Though Uhthoff was operating her own flourishing art school, her connection with John Kyle and the provincial Department of Education did not cease. In the late 1930s, likely 1937, the Technical Education Division, in an unprecedented move, incorporated Uhthoff's school into its program. The reason for this action is unknown, but Kyle, as Director of Technical Education, must certainly have been involved since the move was otherwise unlikely, given the courses offered through Technical Education which emphasized manual training, domestic science, agricultural education and mining. However, this move gave the art school credibility and prestige as students who completed first year could transfer into second year at the Vancouver School of Art.[38]

The Victoria School of Art is listed in the *BC Directories* until 1944, but the war certainly curtailed its activities and led to its demise.[39] Once the school was closed, Uhthoff returned to private teaching. Aside from having single-handedly run an art school, raised two children as a single parent, and worked at her own art, Uhthoff guided the local arts community as an energetic organizer.

The IACS had established a means of bringing together artists with similar viewpoints and provided them with an opportunity to exhibit their work, but they never focused on establishing a permanent art gallery. The responsibility for doing this was taken on by the local branch of the Federation of Canadian Artists, formed by Mark Kearley, Ina Uhthoff and others in 1944.[40] This group attracted some of Victoria's more progressive artists and with a powerhouse like Uhthoff involved, the group soon attained their goal. In 1946, Victoria's first permanent art gallery, The Little Centre, opened. The Little Centre became the Art Centre of Greater Victoria; the prime responsibility for its administration fell to Ina Uhthoff, who worked indefatigably towards its success.[41] When the Arts Centre began its permanent collection, its first purchase, most fittingly, was a painting by one of their major supporters, Ina Uhthoff. The oil painting, *Sunflowers* (Art

Gallery of Greater Victoria), was purchased for one hundred dollars from a jury show of local artists.[42]

After an art school and an art gallery, what could be next? Uhthoff had a penchant for not only identifying the needs of the local arts community, but also for taking them on herself. Now that Victoria had a gallery, it needed an art reviewer. In the 1950s and well into the 1960s, Uhthoff was the weekly arts reviewer for the Victoria newspaper, *The Daily Colonist*.

Not only is Uhthoff's work as an art teacher and arts organizer overlooked today, so is the art that she produced and exhibited throughout most of her life. Though Uhthoff exhibited with the IACS during the 1920s and 1930s,[43] her style of art is more a part of twentieth century modernism, especially when it is compared with the work of Josephine Crease. The stylistic differences can be clarified by comparing Uhthoff's *Wild West Coast* (Photo 5) with a Crease landscape. Crease shows a tamed wilderness: one that echoes the pastoral beauties of Britain, whereas Uhthoff, like her contemporaries Emily Carr and Max Maynard, struggled to depict the unaltered quality of the west coast, painting the forms for their own beauty and expressive qualities.

One of Uhthoff's brushes with modernism occurred when the American artist, Mark Tobey, came to town. Invited by Emily Carr, who met him in 1922, he taught classes at Uhthoff's studio.[44] It is believed that after studying with Tobey, she began to experiment with non-objective art.[45] Though many examples of her abstract work exist, they are not among her best.

Uhthoff's interest in modernism "went public" when she exhibited in the "Modern Room," held as part of the 1932 IACS annual exhibit. The room was the idea of Max Maynard who became IACS vice-president on the condition that it be established.[46] Seven artists, including Uhthoff, Carr, Maynard and Shadboldt, participated.[47] Uhthoff only showed one work, *Cedars*, in the Modern Room. She maintained her connection with the IACS old guard, however, by also showing five works in the more conservative part of the exhibit. The IACS never repeated this experiment.

A fascinating work, *Girl Welder* (Photo 6), was shown in a 1944 exhibit at the Vancouver Art Gallery entitled, "British Columbia at Work." The purpose of the exhibit was to show British Columbia's contribution to Canada's struggle against "the forces of Fascist aggression."[48] *Girl Welder*, done as a war record, shows a kneeling woman, with her face masked, welding. The sparks and white light of the torch provide a focal point for the work while the background is indicated by simple geometric shapes that verge on abstraction.

Eight of the one hundred and fifty works in the show were selected as a gift for the city of Odessa by the National Council for Canadian Soviet Friendship who had adopted Odessa as Vancouver's sister city.[49] One of the eight was *Girl Welder*. Other plans for these works included having them reproduced by the Wartime Information Board for display in factories, union centres and libraries.[50] The end of the war halted the plan which might have made *Girl Welder* a nationally known symbol of women's contribution to the war effort.

Ina Uhthoff exemplifies the changing role of women artists in the twentieth century. Formally trained, art was her full-time occupation. She was quick to identify and remedy the artistic needs of Victoria: an art school, an art gallery and an arts reviewer. In spite of her progressive attitude toward art, her work is ignored in favour of her male contemporaries.

Even Ina Uhthoff's work and that of many other dedicated artists could not keep Victoria as the focal point of the arts in British Columbia. Vancouver, which had its own early art organizations, not unlike those in Victoria, really became the centre of activity from the 1920s onward. Just as Ina Uhthoff was establishing the Victoria School of Art, the Vancouver School of Applied and Decorative Art opened its doors. This event coincides with Harper's view of the final phase of the development of the arts in western Canada. The stage was set for local talent to be trained in large numbers within the province. Naturally, women, now mostly forgotten, had a major role in the new art school. The school's principal, Charles Scott, hired Grace Melvin and Kate Smith Hoole as two of its first instructors. In the 1920s, many women who had begun to think of art as a serious career choice rather than a pleasant pastime enrolled in the Vancouver School of Art. Among them were Irene Hoffar Reid, Vera Wetherbie[51] and Beatrice Lennie. Any of these women, or the many others who were active, could serve as as an example of the proliferation of women artists in this period.

The collective accomplishment of artists in the 1930s and 1940s transcends their individual importance. They ended British Columbia's isolation as an outpost of Canadian art and set the stage for art's post-World War Two blossoming in the West. Unfairly, the names of men, such as Jack Shadboldt, emerged in this era to remain our legacy while the women artists remained obscure.

Beatrice Lennie, born in Nelson, BC, was a member of the original class of the Vancouver School of Art in 1925. She studied under the eastern transplants F.H. Varley and J.W.G. Macdonald. Charles Marega instructed her in her specialty: sculpture.[52] After graduation, she continued her studies at the California School of Fine Arts, San Francisco, but was back in Vancouver by 1933. In that year, Varley and Macdonald left the Vancouver School of Art to form the BC College of Art. The pair invited Beatrice Lennie to be the school's sculpture and modelling instructor.[53] Two of Lennie's colleagues from the Vancouver School of Art, Vera Wetherbie and Margaret Williams, were also on staff. The school, a short-lived experiment, closed in 1935, but Lennie's participation indicates her early recognition by her fellow artists.

In a sense, Lennie's choice to specialize in sculpture and to tackle large architectural commissions was a real challenge to the maleness of the art world. Traditionally, only men became sculptors, while women, if artistically inclined, expressed themselves in one of the more genteel media, such as watercolour or chalk. Lennie commented on how women sculptors were viewed:

> They think of women "tiddling" with pretty little figurines and vases, when actually sculpturing for a

> living is a hard and demanding life. I spent six months in the workshop of a construction company and the union men were shocked. They never dreamt an artist worked so hard.[54]

An artist and contemporary of Lennie's, J. Delisle Parker, must have been struck by the "masculine" nature of her work since he reassured the reader of his 1947 article that in spite of her work, she was "entirely feminine in aspect and character."[55] He concluded with a comment on her self-effacing qualities in order to imply that she graciously accepted her secondary status in the art world.

Though essentially unknown today, Lennie's sculptures continue to grace Vancouver's buildings. One such work was her commission for the Shaughnessey Military Hospital in 1940.[56] Like many public commissions in this era, the design tended to be conservative and Lennie fell in line with this tradition. She cut two large bas-relief panels to flank the main entrance of the hospital. Each panel contains a pair of figures: on one, a male physician lifts a wounded male soldier and, on the other, a nursing sister encourages a soldier to rise (Photo 7). The work is competently handled and likely suited its purpose well.

In 1949, Lennie installed another major public work at the new Vancouver Labour Temple (Photo 8). The piece, measuring seven by thirty feet and weighing over six tons, represented "the ideals and activities of modern labour in allegorical form."[57] A symbolic wheel of industry serves as the focal point of the composition.

Lennie obtained many architectural commissions in the 1930s and 1940s, most of which were conservative in nature. The project for which she appears to have been given the most freedom in her design was undertaken for the Hotel Vancouver. Her work there began with a request to do mouldings and fireplaces for the new hotel and expanded in 1939 to include a commission for a panel, twelve feet tall, done in steel, brass and chromium.[58] The work, no longer extant, is indicative of the sculptor's capabilities when asked to do something "new and modern."[59] The highly stylized piece is indicative of Lennie's capabilities when allowed to break loose from traditional realistic sculpture. The success of this work led to commissions for others for the hotel, but they were abandoned when war was declared.[60]

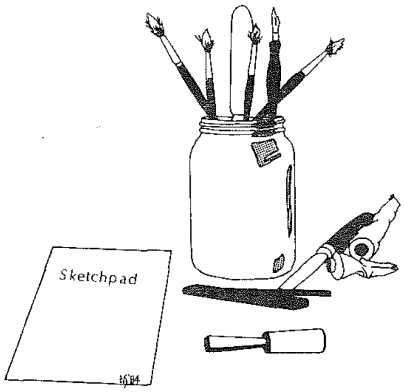
The expense of producing sculpture in traditional media such as stone and bronze can limit experimentation and force sculptors to work primarily on commissions. Lennie was able to create some more experimental works, such as *Repose*, that appear to have been uncommissioned.[61] *Repose* depicts a comfortably reclining female figure whose form is simplified and massive.

As surely as women played an integral part in setting the stage for the development of art in British Columbia by establishing art schools, arts organizations and galleries, then just as predictably they were part of the emerging locally trained talent. Beatrice Lennie and her contemporaries are examples.

Women artists have been lumped together by virtue of their shared gender.[62] Even within the limited sample discussed in this essay, some

similarities emerge like the lack of men in these artists' lives. Osithe was a celibate, Crease and Lennie never married, and Uhthoff was divorced. They all possessed tremendous dedication to their art and were able to continue producing it in spite of teaching responsibilities and involvement with other arts activities. However, their differences become apparent when their artistic styles and attitudes are compared. They might not, in fact, have even liked each other's work. Once these artists have been identified, the best way to then study them would be within the context of their own contemporaries and artistic movements.

The question that is more important than the individual achievements of these women artists is why they have been misrepresented and ignored and what this treatment reveals about art history. The first step is a compensatory one; that is, women must be removed from the negative role assigned them in art history to a more positive one. Once it is understood how women have contributed to and influenced the discipline, the focus can then be shifted from the individual to the broader analysis of women's position in culture.[63]



Footnotes

1. For a complete examination of this idea, see Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981).

2. *Ibid.*: 69.

3. *Ibid.*: 26.

4. For example, see E. Theodore Lindberg, *Vancouver School of Art: The Early Years, 1925-1939* (Vancouver: Emily Carr College of Art, 1980); Maria Tippett, *Contemporaries of Emily Carr in British Columbia* (Burnaby, BC: The Simon Fraser Gallery, Simon Fraser University, 1974); and Maria Tippett and Douglas Cole, *From Desolation to Splendour* (Toronto: Clark, Irwin and Company, 1977).

5. John Russell Harper, *Painting in Canada: A History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977): 314-315.

6. *Prospectus*, St. Ann's School, Victoria, 1858.

7. *Necrology of the Sisters of St. Ann*, 1938-1943: 297.

8. Edmond Dyonnet was born in France in 1859 and emigrated to Canada in 1875. Soon afterward, he travelled to Italy to study art. Upon his return to Canada in c. 1890, he worked as a painter and teacher in Montreal. He primarily painted portraits in oil and is said to have exerted a considerable influence on the graphic arts in Montreal.

9. Sister Mary Margaret Down, *A Century of Service: 1858-1958* (Victoria: The Sisters of Saint Ann, 1966): 138.

10. *The BC Orphan's Friend*, 1913: 140.

11. Dorothy Farr and Natalie Luckyj, *From Women's Eyes: Women Painters in Canada* (Kingston: Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Queen's University, 1976): 2.

12. From a letter from Sister Mary Osithe to Mother Mary Leopoldine, dated October 6, 1934. Archives of the Sisters of Saint Ann, Victoria, British Columbia.

13. Down, *op. cit.*: 138.

14. E.W. Manwaring, *Italian Landscape in Eighteenth Century England* (New York: F. Cass, 1925): 185.

15. Christine Betts Johnson-Dean, "The Crease Family and the Arts in Victoria, British Columbia," unpublished MA thesis, University of Victoria, 1980: 32. Johnson-Dean has done the pioneering work on the Crease family and the Island Arts and Crafts Society. Without her thorough work, this essay would have been much more difficult to prepare. I am grateful to her for generously allowing me to use her research.

16. *Ibid.*: 42.

17. *Ibid.*: 94.

18. *Ibid.*: 407.

19. *Ibid.*: 271.

20. Island Arts and Crafts Society, Minutes, September 19, 1909, PABC.

21. When the organization was founded in 1909, it was called the Island Arts Club. In 1919, the name was changed to the Island Arts and Crafts Club, and finally in 1922, it became the Island Arts and Crafts Society. For the purposes of this essay, it will always be referred to as the Island Arts and Crafts Society.

22. Johnson-Dean. *op. cit.*: 158.

23. Island Arts Club, Membership Rules, 1910, IACS Minutes and Miscellaneous Papers, PABC.

24. Johnson-Dean, *op. cit.*: 164.

25. *Ibid.*: 13. See also the pamphlet, Alexandra Zacharias, ed., *A Salute to Victoria's Female Tradition: Their Institutions and Their Homes* (Victoria, BC: Camosun

College, 1984): 7.
26. Johnson-Dean: 56.
27. *Prospectus*, School of Handicraft and Design, 1913-14, IACS Miscellaneous Papers, PABC.
28. IACS Miscellaneous Papers, PABC.
29. Johnson-Dean, *op. cit.*: 504.
30. Index to the Island Arts and Crafts Society Exhibitors, 1910-1941, Paintings, Drawings and Prints Division, PABC.
31. Marion B. Appleton, ed., *Who's Who in Northwest Art* (Seattle: Frank McCaffrey, 1941): 70.
32. From a recorded interview with John Uhthoff, son of Ina Uhthoff, April 11, 1984, Victoria, British Columbia. Sound and Moving Image Division, Acc. No. 4134:1, PABC.
33. *Public Schools Annual Report, 1924.* Province of British Columbia: T-77. (Sessional Papers, PABC.)
34. *Ibid.*
35. *Public Schools Annual Report, 1926-27.* Province of British Columbia: 57. (Sessional Papers, PABC.)
36. Uhthoff interview.
37. *Daily Colonist*, March 26, 1939, third section.
38. *Ina D.D. Uhthoff Memorial Exhibition* (Victoria: Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, 1972), no pagination.
39. Uhthoff interview.
40. *Art Gallery of Greater Victoria: A History* (Victoria: Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, no date): 1.
41. Uhthoff interview.
42. *Daily Colonist*, November 21, 1950. It is of interest to note that the Arts Centre did not have a permanent location until another woman, Sara Spencer, donated her home for this purpose in 1951. The Art Gallery of Greater Victoria is still located in the former Spencer home at 1040 Moss Street.
43. Index to Island Arts and Crafts Society Exhibitors, 1910-1941, Paintings, Drawings and Prints Division, PABC. Uhthoff also showed in the annual exhibition of the British Columbia Society of Artists at the Vancouver Art Gallery and held exhibitions in her studio.
44. Maria Tippett, *Emily Carr: A Biography* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1979): 160.
45. Edythe Hembroff-Schleicher, *The Modern Room* (Victoria: Provincial Archives of British Columbia, 1981): 12.
46. Tippett, *op. cit.*: 199.
47. Hembroff-Schleicher, *op. cit.*: 11. The three other artists who exhibited in the Modern Room were Edythe Hembroff, Ronald Bladen and John Macdonald.
48. *The Province*, January 20, 1945: 3 (magazine section).
49. *Ibid.*
50. *The Province*, January 3, 1945: 9.
51. Vera Wetherbie later married Harold Mortimer-Lamb and their daughter is the artist Molly Lamb Bobak.
52. Colin S. Macdonald (compiler), *A Dictionary of Canadian Artists* (Ottawa: Canadian Paperbacks, 1971), V. 3: 809.
53. BC *College of Arts Limited: Illustrated Prospectus*, 1934-35, no pagination. (Fine Arts Division, Vancouver Public Library.)

54. As quoted in the *Vancouver News Herald*, November 8, 1954.
55. J. Delisle Parker, "Beatrice Lennie: A Sculptor of the West," *Canadian Review of Music and Art*, V. 5, No. 6-7 (1947): 23.
56. *The Province*, December 21, 1940: 20.
57. *Ibid.*, May 14, 1949: 44.
58. *Ibid.*, December 21, 1940: 20.
59. Lorna Farrell-Ward, "Tradition/Transition: The Keys to Change," *Vancouver: Art and Artists, 1931-1983* (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 1983): 28. A reproduction of the work appears on page 27.
60. *The Vancouver Sun*, October 23, 1954: 5 (magazine section).
61. A reproduction of *Repose* can be found in Parker, *op. cit.*: 22.
62. Parker and Pollock, *op. cit.*: 44.
63. *Ibid.*: xvii.

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