



**A CIRCLE OF FRIENDS:
THE DOREEN CURRY COLLECTION**

APRIL 15 - MAY 11, 2013

Western  McIntosh Gallery

Foreword

For over fifty years, Doreen Curry has been a friend of several London artists. As the art librarian at London Public Library, she assisted them with research on various topics related to their art practices. She also attended their exhibitions and purchased their work, ultimately amassing a collection of over forty paintings, watercolours and sculptures. A self-imposed rule to acquire works only from artists she knew personally led to close and ongoing associations. As a result, her collection illustrates the extraordinary artistic activity in London during the period. It is also an important document of her pivotal role as an astute collector of several nationally significant artists who chose to live and work in London. This exhibition celebrates Doreen's recent donation to McIntosh Gallery of her remarkable collection.

Western Department of Visual Arts graduate students Amanda Oppedisano and Karly McIntosh collaborated on an essay examining the relationship between public and private collectors. They also researched and produced the extended labels used throughout the gallery. We thank them and their course supervisor, Dr. Sarah Bassnett, for their enthusiastic response to the project.

Jamelie Hassan's extensive interview offers additional insights into Doreen's connections with the London art community, from the annual Nihilist picnics to international travels with artists.

Special thanks also to Jamelie Hassan and Ron Benner for their key assistance in making this exhibition a reality.

We are especially indebted to Doreen Curry for her active encouragement and support of local artists and for her vision in creating this significant collection for us all to share.

Catherine Elliot Shaw
Curator

Preserving the Vitality of a Cultural Community: A Survey of London Artists in the Doreen Curry Collection

By Amanda Oppedisano and Karly McIntosh

The history of Western University's art collection began decades before McIntosh Gallery was established. In the early 20th century, several generous alumni donated artworks to the University from their personal collections.¹ However, the University lacked a proper exhibition space for the works.² It was Mrs. Wilhelmina Morris McIntosh's donation that provided funding for the construction of a gallery space as well as another impressive collection of art.³ Mrs. McIntosh's endowment was a tribute to her late husband, but it was primarily intended to provide further educational opportunities to the University.⁴ Mrs. McIntosh's initial donation together with continued private donations and later financial assistance from various government funders such as the Ontario Arts Council and the Canada Council for the Arts, led to the ultimate establishment of the McIntosh Gallery as we know it today.⁵

In recent years McIntosh Gallery has returned to a collecting practice that favours acquiring whole private collections. This method ensures the protection of private collections coming into the larger gallery context while allowing for the development of future programming. There has been recent dialogue surrounding the idea of private collections within the public institution. There can be a number of reasons as to why a private collector decides to build a personal art collection. Perhaps it is a desire for recognition or maybe it is a passion for collecting and displaying within the home. It might be a means to get to know the artist personally and support his/her career, or it could be a financial investment. For some, it might just be an unknown drive that fuels an interest we cannot immediately explain. Whatever the reason may be, private collectors play a crucial role in determining what is shown in public institutions. The relationship between the two remains codependent. For the collector, it provides a public forum for others to enjoy commonly unseen works and additional support for the artist. For the public institutions, donated works provide an opportunity to exhibit art that is relevant and thematically coherent, drawing a greater viewership to the gallery. Together, the private collector's relationship with the public institution has a significant impact on not only the local but also the overall art scene.

¹ Catherine Elliot Shaw, *Collective Efforts: 50 Years of Intentionality*. (London, Ontario, McIntosh Gallery, The University of Western Ontario, 1992), 7.

² Elliot Shaw, 8

³ Nancy Geddes Poole, *The Art Of London: 1830-1980*. (London, Ontario: Blackpool Press, 1984), 103.

⁴ Elliot Shaw, 7.

⁵ Ibid, 18.

The private collection of Doreen Curry on display at the McIntosh Gallery in April 2013 includes forty-two works by fourteen different artists that have been active in the local arts community over the past several decades. Working at the London Public Library from 1947 to well into the 1980s, Curry held a supporting role in the arts community. Many local artists frequented the library to obtain research and source material for their works.⁶ Curry helped them find the resources they needed both inside and outside of the library's collection.⁷ The Central Public Library was a major hub of activity at this time. It was through her job that Curry was able to set the foundation for her friendships with the local artists, of whom she later became an avid supporter and collector. As these relationships developed, Curry was often found visiting their studios and attending their exhibitions in a further effort to support her friends.⁸

Curry's relationships with the artists and the local art scene developed from her friendship with Paterson Ewen. Curry assisted Ewen after he moved from Montreal, helping him to find a studio and introducing him to the London arts community.⁹ Ewen brought a portfolio with him from Montreal, from which Curry purchased several works that formed the basis of her extensive collection.¹⁰ Purchasing those first works provided Curry with the opportunity to support Ewen, not only as someone new to the London arts scene but also as her friend.

Curry continued to collect works from the artists she befriended, including Ron Benner, David Bolduc, Richard Bonderenko, Greg Curnoe, Murray Favro, Kerry Ferris, Dave Gordon, Jamelie Hassan, Doreen Inglis, Ron Martin, Paddy Gunn O'Brien, Royden and David Rabinowitch. Her collecting practice was inspired first and foremost by a desire to support her friends rather than accumulate a collection.¹¹ She bought works only from artists she knew. Stylistically, however, one can note that these artists were all coming out of the Regionalism movement. Regionalism was a phenomenon in London, Ontario that began in the 1960s and flourished throughout the 1970s and 1980s. London was experiencing great physical and social change at the time, as it nearly doubled in size since the 1940s.¹²

⁶ Doreen Curry. Interview by Amanda Oppedisano and Karly McIntosh. London, Ontario, 19 February 2013.

⁷ Ron Benner, email message to authors, 13 February 2013.

⁸ Curry, Interview.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Curry, Interview.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Michael C. Hannay, "Subject and Circumstance." In *The Heart of London Revisited*. (London, Ontario: London Regional Art & Historical Museums, 1993), 18.

While its infrastructure expanded, many older industrial spaces close to public institutions became available for rent to the local art community.¹³ The proximity of these places combined with social factors played an important role in the ultimate development of the city's studio culture.¹⁴

Regionalism is defined by a concern with the local site rather than an emphasis on aesthetic or academic ideas.¹⁵ Artists that were involved in this movement were creating work that rejected sentimentality, decorative elements, imposed standards and external influences.¹⁶ Instead, Regionalists strove to make work that was intuitive, self-taught and embraced complete artistic freedom.¹⁷ The focus was on building a community mindset rather than following traditional artistic modes. The movement itself brought these artists together, and it was this closeness that attracted Curry to the works. Through her initial friendship with Ewen, Curry deepened her relationships with many of the local artists as they formed a supportive and tight-knit community.¹⁸

London artists organized projects together, and often visited each other's studios in order to support each other's work. "There was a strong sense that London was an excellent place to live and work; that it was important to bring exciting artists, writers, performers, film makers, critics and curators to London. It was beginning to have such a strong and vital community of artists and supporters," says Jamelie Hassan.¹⁹ "London was becoming a very dynamic place for a young artist to create work."²⁰ Local artists would exhibit collectively through artist-run centres in addition to institutions such as the London Art Gallery and McIntosh Gallery, providing them ample opportunities to "exhibit their work professionally" in both the public and commercial forums.²¹

The Heart of London exhibition at the National Gallery of Canada in 1968 was pivotal for many of the artists Curry collected. The title itself pointed to not only the geography of the city of London, but also the connection the artists had to the city. There was an exciting relationship between the art that was being produced and the city in which it was being created.²²

¹³ Hannay, 18.

¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵ Chris Dewdney, "Oregionalism: Geocentrism and the Notion of Originality," in *Provincial Essays: Geocentrism and the Notion of Originality*, ed. Jennifer Oille Vol. 1, No. 1 (Toronto: Phacops Publishing Society at the Coach House Press, 1984), 3.

¹⁶ Dewdney, 6.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Curry, Interview.

¹⁹ Jamelie Hassan, email message to authors, 11 February 2013.

²⁰ Benner, *ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Hannay, 16.

London quickly became “a place that was both dynamic and interdisciplinary... [as] it was receiving attention nationally.”²³

Through the strong sense of community, Curry established a closeness not only with the people involved in the local art scene, but also with the artwork being created as a result of it. The attraction and closeness was evident in the fact that the artists were colleagues, and close friends within the larger locale. They would play chess, drink together, and frequent the York Hotel where the Nihilist Spasm Band, whose members included Murray Favro and Greg Curnoe, would often play their handmade instruments. Curry would frequent these gathering places and often travel with the artists, including camping trips with Paterson Ewen, and trips to Mexico and Cuba with Jamelie Hassan in the mid-1970s.²⁴

The sense of a prominent and creative community is ultimately reflected in Doreen’s collection. In January 2012 Curry approached long-time friends, Ron Benner and Jamelie Hassan, with a request to advise her on the future of her art collection. Hassan recalls that, “[Ron Benner and I] both felt very strongly that Doreen’s collection was an important time capsule and should stay together as a collection.”²⁵ By graciously donating her collection to McIntosh Gallery, Curry’s collection, and the history it represents, will be preserved and shared with the London community once again.

For over fifty years, these works surrounded Curry in her home, serving as a physical reminder of her lasting friendships. For Doreen Curry, her collection attests to the fact that sometimes we can stand in front of and look at the artwork, but perhaps the artwork can sort of look at us too.²⁶ Shown publicly for the first time, the Doreen Curry Collection has transitioned from personal memory to a shared public experience. In merging the private and public spheres, this exhibition provides a unique window into the Regionalism movement as an important moment in London’s history, while expressing the personal memories within Doreen Curry’s collection.

²³ Hassan, *ibid.*

²⁴ Curry, Interview.

²⁵ Hassan, *ibid.*

²⁶ Curry, Interview.

Recommended Readings

Dewdney, Chris. "Oregionalism: Geocentrism and the Notion of Originality." In *Provincial Essays: Geocentrism and the Notion of Originality*. Ed. Jennifer Oille Vol. 1, No. 1. Toronto: Phacops Publishing Society at the Coach House Press, 1984.

Hannay, Michael C. "Subject and Circumstance." In *The Heart of London Revisited*. London, Ontario: London Regional Art & Historical Museums, 1993.

Poole, Nancy Geddes. *The Art Of London: 1830-1980*. London, Ontario: Blackpool Press, 1984.



Ron Benner *Red Island from Green Point, Placentia, Newfoundland August 28, 1982*, watercolour on paper, 22.9 x 30.5 cm Gift of Doreen Curry, 2012

Interview: Jamelie Hassan with Doreen Curry

Jamelie: Could you tell me about your early years, your education and when you began working in London at the London Public Library on Queens Ave?

Doreen: I graduated from the University of Toronto in 1946 with BA specializing in music, and BLsc. (Library Science) in 1947. I began working at LPL that same year.

JH: What was your position and could you describe some of your responsibilities at the London Public Library?

DC: I worked in public service, as department head of Arts and Science, for some years. My music background was very helpful in this department as the library's collection included a large collection of recordings and music scores. There was also a very good collection of art books, exhibition catalogues and newspaper clippings, all to do with Canadian art and London in particular.

JH: Was the fact that the art gallery was also located in the same building on the second floor of the Queens Street building relevant for you in terms of your developing an interest and acquiring such a significant contemporary art collection?

DC: It definitely was very influential in developing my interest in art. Getting to know artists like Greg Curnoe and others was a wonderful experience for me.

JH: You have often said that you began seriously collecting contemporary art by London artists because of the friendships you made with the artists in the city. Could you talk about some of these friendships in relation to a few works in your collection?

DC: I was in a position to talk to and sometimes assist these artists in finding source material in the library. It was a wonderful experience. Greg Curnoe in particular, I remember him leaving the library with armfuls of books and records.

JH: You own a number of works by Paterson Ewen over various periods including his early Montreal years. Could you talk about your friendship with this artist and how you came to meet him?

DC: I was at an art show in Kitchener where I met Pat's sister who was living there. When she found out I was from London she asked me if I would mind getting in touch with Pat who was just being discharged from Westminster Hospital where he was being treated for a nervous breakdown. I got in touch with Pat and helped him find a studio on Richmond St.

JH: After Paterson Ewen's move to London in 1968 and he set up his first studio in the city on Richmond St. you helped organize a studio exhibition for him. Did you acquire works from that exhibit?

DC: I'm sorry but I really can't remember too much about that exhibition. I think I bought most of the paintings just from Pat, in his studio, not from any formal exhibition. He went to Montreal that first Christmas and brought back a bunch of unframed watercolours and oil paintings. From these I picked out a few and he had them framed for me. This was the beginning of my art collection.

JH: The Richmond St. address was significant because it had formerly been the site of Region Gallery, founded by Jack Chambers. Did you ever visit this early artist-run centre, a precursor to 20-20 Gallery?

DC: I don't remember this gallery, just the 20-20.

JH: Did you acquire work from 20-20 Gallery?

DC: I may have bought some works from there but I preferred to go to the artists' studios.

JH: Could you tell me about acquiring the Greg Curnoe drawing of Owen & Sheila sleeping?

DC: Greg was having a show at the 20/ 20 Gallery. I wasn't able to go because I was working that night. I told Greg this when I saw him in the library and he said just come around to the studio tomorrow. There is one I think you would like. Of course I bought it right away.

JH: You have spoken how you would see many of the artists coming into the library to do research. It seems the library was a pivotal gathering place for many people and that you were very much at the centre of this for some of us with the support and interest that you gave to London's artists. Was this a factor to you in making such a commitment to contemporary art?

DC: Yes, definitely.

JH: You worked with Glen Curnoe, Greg's younger brother, at the London Public Library. You also had close ties to the Nihilist Spasm Band members, including Hugh McIntyre, who was a member of the band and who you also knew from your time working at the London Public Library together. (Hugh looked after the film program and ran the library's film series in the basement auditorium.) I remember seeing you at the annual Nihilist picnics in the early 1970's. Interestingly, you, like John & Shirley Clement, (John Clement, a medical doctor and member of the NSB) also built a major art collection through their friendships in London and in their case, their close proximity to the artist members in the band, i.e. Greg Curnoe, Murray Favro and John Boyle. What was it in you and your way of living on a modest librarian's income that brought you to the decision of giving contemporary art such a significant place in your life?

DC: I was in a wonderful position to meet these artists and often talk to them about their work... I was fortunate to know them before their art became priced out of reach.

JH: Your relationship to the library, visual arts and music in London's community in the late 1960's and 1970's is really an amazing example of the interdisciplinary connections that typified London in this period. Could you comment on this?

DC: Dr. Crouch who was director of the library when I first came to London, was a wonderful librarian who believed that ideas came in other forms as well as books. Hence London was one of the first libraries in Canada to have records, films and an art gallery. Do you remember the film society that he started and that continued for years? And the Western Art League?

JH: Yes, I do remember those organizations at LPL. In terms of other community friendships and gatherings, you were friends with Goldie and Geoffry Rans, other important collectors and supporters of the arts in the city at that time. Could you reflect on your friendship with them?

DC: Yes. I really enjoyed their company and the frequent Sunday barbeques in their back yard. Geoff was an avid gardener and it was always a pleasure to be in his back yard.

JH: By the time Forest City Gallery opened in Dec. 1973 you had already begun to fill the walls of your Queen St. apartment with art works. You collected many of the artists in the FCG collective, including myself, Ron Benner, Greg Curnoe, Murray Favro, Kerry Ferris, David Gordon and Ron Martin. Is there any particular memory you have from that period that you recall in relation to acquiring some of these artists' works?

DC: Perhaps the trip to Cuba in 1974. Tariq was quite small then. All the waiters just loved him and passed him around in the dining room. I also remember you sitting in the sand painting. I have one of those watercolours.

JH: Could you tell me about how you came to commission Ron Benner to do the large tar Mexican painting for you?

DC: There was a tar painting in the Under the Volcano restaurant that I liked. I spoke to Ron about it and the rest is history.

JH: Do you remember the year Ron did that painting? Also was it for a specific wall when you moved into your new house?

DC: Sorry I can't remember the year. Yes I think it was for that specific wall in the living room.

JH: There are a number of international trips that you took with artists, including the 1974 trip to Cuba and to Mexico in 1977. Could you recall, if any significance, the trips had to any works that you acquired?

DC: I have one lovely watercolour by you that dates back to a trip to Cuba.

JH: I want to raise the other major significant influence in your life and that is to your life-long passion for music, your playing the harpsichord, and the history of the harpsichord built by John Bright for you in 1976. Could you comment on this major acquisition in your collection?

DC: The story about the harpsichord is weird. I was involved in a bicycle accident back in 1976. Ironically a back doctor hit me and he was charged with careless driving. With the settlement that I received I decided to get something I really wanted and so I ordered the harpsichord from John Bright in 1976.

JH: How did you come to decide to commission me to do the painting on the harpsichord? Do you recall?

DC: I think I liked your work and got the idea that since harpsichords were traditionally decorated in the 17th and 18th centuries I would ask you to paint the lid of the harpsichord (not insinuating that your art was just decoration). That's how it came about it.

Email interview Feb. 2 - 15, 2013



kerry ferris *Untitled (Landscape)*, n.d.
Watercolour on paper, 38.1 x 45.6 cm, Gift of Doreen Curry, 2012

List of Works

Ron Benner

Citlaltept/ Star Mountain, Orizita, Mexico
1976-1977

Acrylic and tar on plywood
121.9 x 180.3 cm

Gift of Doreen Curry, 2012

*Red Island from Green Point, Placentia,
Newfoundland Aug. 28, 1982* 1982

Watercolour on paper, 22.9 x 30.5 cm
Gift of Doreen Curry (forthcoming)

*As Dark as the Grave Wherein my Friend is
Laid* 1975

Black and white photograph and tar
between plexiglass, 50.8 x 38.1 cm
Gift of Doreen Curry (forthcoming)

David Bolduc

Untitled Abstract 1968

Watercolour on paper, 63.9 x 44.3 cm
Gift of Doreen Curry, 2012

Richard Bonderenko

Untitled Abstract (Hearts) c1970

Watercolour on paper 59.3 x 74.8 cm
Gift of Doreen Curry, 2012

Untitled Abstract c1970

Watercolour on paper, 45 x 45 cm
Gift of Doreen Curry, 2012

Greg Curnoe

Cherry-Pop Collage #5 Nov. 18 1964 1964

Mixed media collage on paper,
35.6 x 45.7 cm
Gift of Doreen Curry (forthcoming)

*Owen and Sheila, Monday Morning, April 19,
1970* 1970

Ink on paper, 44.5 x 57.2 cm
Gift of Doreen Curry (forthcoming)

Pangnirtung Aug. 18 1971 1971

Watercolour on paper, 12.7 x 20.3 cm
Gift of Doreen Curry (forthcoming)

Adult Education Mar. 31 1978 1978

Watercolour and pencil on paper,
12.7 x 17.8 cm
Gift of Doreen Curry (forthcoming)

Paterson Ewen

Untitled Still Life 1949

Oil on canvasboard, 50.8 x 61.0 cm
Gift of Doreen Curry (forthcoming)

Untitled Laurentian Scene 1950

Watercolour on paper, 26.7 x 36.8 cm
Gift of Doreen Curry (forthcoming)

Untitled Laurentian Scene c1950

Watercolour on paper, 26.7 x 36.8 cm
Gift of Doreen Curry (forthcoming)

Untitled Laurentian Scene c1950

Watercolour on paper, 48.3 x 63.5 cm
Gift of Doreen Curry (forthcoming)

Abstract 1957

Oil on canvas, 45.7 x 55.9 cm
Gift of Doreen Curry (forthcoming)

Untitled Red, Yellow, Orange on Black 1967

Pastel on paper, 67.6 x 48.3 cm
Gift of Doreen Curry (forthcoming)

Life Stream 1968

Acrylic on canvas, 152.4 x 127 cm
Gift of Doreen Curry, 2012

Zig Zag 1968

Acrylic on canvas, 58.42 x 45.72 cm
Gift of Doreen Curry, 2012

Untitled Landscape-Beaver Valley July 1969
1969

Oil on canvasboard, 22.9 x 30.5 cm
Gift of Doreen Curry (forthcoming)

George Lake, Killarney Ontario July 1969
1969

Oil on canvasboard, 25.4 x 30.5 cm
Gift of Doreen Curry (forthcoming)

Moon 1975

Watercolour on handmade paper
49.5 x 49.5 cm
Gift of Doreen Curry (forthcoming)

List of Works

Murray Favro

Untitled (Corvair) n.d.
Ink on paper, 37 x 30.1 cm
Gift of Doreen Curry, 2012

kerry ferris

Untitled (Landscape), n.d.
Watercolour on paper, 38.1 x 45.6 cm
Gift of Doreen Curry, 2012

Untitled Goose n.d.,
Watercolour on paper, 47 x 61 cm
Gift of Doreen Curry, 2012

Dave Gordon

Green Cloud 1976
acrylic on shaped plywood, shaped carpet
39.4 x 56.6 + 12.7 x 63.5 cm
Gift of Doreen Curry, 2012

Cuba Mar. 1995 1995
Watercolour on paper, 50.8 x 38.1 cm
Gift of Doreen Curry (forthcoming)

Paddy Gunn O'Brien

Mediterranean Scene 1950
Oil on canvas board, 43.5 x 51.1 cm
Gift of Doreen Curry, 2012

Heidi, Nov. 11 1960 1960
Graphite on paper, 30.1 x 37.0 cm
Gift of Doreen Curry, 2012

Jamelie Hassan

Cuba, Mar. 2, 1974 1974
Watercolour on paper, 47.5 x 62.9 cm
Gift of Doreen Curry, 2012

Heart Cushion 1974
Watercolour on paper, 40 x 47.6 cm
Gift of Doreen Curry, 2012

Untitled Jungle Landscape 1976
Acrylic on wood, (lid for harpsichord)
irregular shape, overall: 238.8 x 94.6 cm
Gift of Doreen Curry (forthcoming)

IRAQ, May 1979 1979
Watercolour on paper, 78.1 x 61.1 cm
Gift of Doreen Curry, 2012

Shedden Pond 1981
Watercolour on paper, 30.8 x 41.0 cm
Gift of Doreen Curry (forthcoming)

China Scene (Postcard Series) 1981
Clay and handpainted glaze 16.5 x 11.4 cm
Gift of Doreen Curry (forthcoming)

Cape Breton Summer 1985
Watercolour on paper, 50.8 x 35.6 cm
Gift of Doreen Curry (forthcoming)

Dorene Inglis

Icon n.d.
Mixed media on board, 30.6 x 21.3 cm
Gift of Doreen Curry, 2012

Trees n.d.,
Oil on board, 31.3 x 27.9 cm
Gift of Doreen Curry, 2012

Ron Martin

World Watercolour #68, May 1970 1970
Watercolour on paper, 82.2 x 62 cm
Gift of Doreen Curry, 2012

Fully Developed and Determinate 1969
Watercolour on paper, 77 x 58 cm
Gift of Doreen Curry, 2012

David Rabinowitch

Drawings of Pieces Made Before 1969 1971
Coloured pencil and graphite drawing
66.2 x 88 cm
Gift of Doreen Curry, 2012

Royden Rabinowitch

Untitled (Wooden Cone, Football, Discus)
n.d.
Installation 80.5 x 57.2 x 45.1 cm
Gift of Doreen Curry, 2012



Paddy Gunn O'Brien *Mediterranean Scene* 1950
oil on canvas board, 43.5 x 51.1 cm, Gift of Doreen Curry, 2012

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