

State of the Art January 2, 2016

## A Sound Symposium, new reading material: looking forward to 2016

The Fibre Arts Network held its Christmas sale. Some of the artists were demonstrating their craft—weaving, felting, spinning wool. I bought a scarf from master weaver Vita Plume and a dyed silk scarf from Jacqueline Bourque. I venerate the fibre arts and envy anyone who can create them. My two grandmothers were called professional seamstresses, meaning I suppose they sewed for money. I have an embroidered tablecloth from one, a velvet cape from the other. One aunt made braided rugs, crocheted doilies and knit afghans.

I was intrigued with a description of a Chinese ethnic group, the Diao, 2000 people strong, one of the minorities of the province of Guizhou. It is said of these various Guizhou minorities that “the making of her traditional dress continues to play an important part in a woman’s life. Each tribe’s dress has its own background story which reflects that group’s customs, history and beliefs. Cultural identity is therefore maintained by the making and wearing of the garments.” My daughter-in-law Kimberly has made me some handsome clothes, fashionable yet comfortable. When I wear her dress, I not only feel stylish but loved. She and I are contributing to our cultural identity—the trends, the cloth available, the relationship of mother-in-law and daughter-in-law.

This is the time of year for newspapers to print the best of this or that. Beth Powning’s historical novel, *A Measure of Light*, was named by the Globe and Mail as one of the 100 best books of 2015. New Brunswick got a great bargain when it lured Beth and Peter Powning from Connecticut. Quid pro quo for Connecticut having lured Bliss Carman from New Brunswick.

John Leroux, the Salon’s resident architect, came by for coffee. This past fall I’ve been to two lectures on architecture Leroux organized, both inspiring. He was enthusiastic about my house, “mid-century architecture.” Because I hate the confusion of renovation, it’s pretty much as it was when it was built in 1966. My sloth apparently gives added interest to the house. The window and door trim is of mahogany in its original condition, never painted, it has a cathedral ceiling, the bathroom is small with a vanity around the sink. The materials for the trim is difficult to get now. I’ve lived so long that my house has become a valued antique. This news reminded me of our screw chest, from the Bauer Hardware Store, especially valuable we were told by an appraiser because it was never refinished.

Leroux has written a book on the architecture and history of Mount Allison University, *Vision in Stone and Wood*, with “wonderful” photographs by professor and photographer extraordinaire, Thaddeus Holownia. It’s being published by Gaspereau Press, a creator of beautiful books. I’ve put this on my list of “things to look forward to in 2016.” Leroux’s volumes on the stained glass windows of Fredericton and his massive history of the architecture of New Brunswick are among the treasured books I consult often.

I'm also looking forward to the "Sound Symposium" in St. John's Newfoundland the week of July 8-16. I was on a Canada Council jury in the early 80's when this project requested funding. I was captivated and determined I'd like to attend one year; time is running out. Concerts and workshops are held, but the main feature is a new *Harbour Symphony* composed every other year, "original music written for the horns of the ships in the St. John's harbour," the first one in 1983. "Each *Harbour Symphony* begins with a radio countdown transmitted to the bridge of the ships by the Coast Guard where players stand at the helms of tugboats, trawlers, and ocean-going freighters. At the signal, a giant, floating horn section reverberates off the Southside Hills and through the streets of old St. John's, echoing the soul of this 500 year old seaport."

My daughter Grace was recalling her favourite Christmas TV specials of the 1970's, contrasting them to the specials like "Rudolf the Red-nosed Reindeer" that emphasized Santa Claus. The animated specials she loved in her childhood were "lugubrious", even ending in death, but evoking in her a sense of the mystery of the season, how special it was. Santa Claus and gifts were definitely not the important part. She described these programs in almost mystical terms. Two she remembers with especial fondness are "The Selfish Giant" (from a story by Oscar Wilde) and "The Happy Prince" (from a story by Hans Christian Anderson). Contributing to her numinous perception of Christmas was our neighbourhood's tradition of going caroling with adults and children out late in the cold dark. Recalling the words of the carols, she was struck by their emphasis on silence, dark, peace. Also adding to the awe is a book she had, *The Tomten and the Fox*, by Astrid Lindgren. I've urged her to write about this.