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State of the Art

THE BEGINNING OF AN ARTISTIC LIFE

I finished *Even Stones Have Life*, Roslyn Rosenfeld's biography of Lucy Jarvis, enjoying it to the very end. The book has the perfect balance between narrative and quotations from letters, between reproductions and discussions of them. I spent Easter morning finishing the book, a fitting way to celebrate the risen Christ, I thought.

In 1961, when she was 65, retired from the University of New Brunswick Art Centre, Jarvis took a workshop from Oskar Kokoschka in Austria, dramatically influencing her; "transformative, a watershed", Rosenfeld says. Jarvis wrote, "I learnt to drive at 60 so maybe I will be able to paint soon. It seems to be beginning to come." Rosenfeld, discusses the watercolour "Nude", "The figure studies produced during the Kokoschka workshop are remarkable for their freshness and immediacy. The nude from the back is alive with colour, the model faces the upper left, where the yellow light source casts mauve, blue and green shades on her arm, back and inner thighs. She stands amid a gorgeous puddle of blue, which could be a dropped robe—or almost anything." I turn back and look at the watercolour again. The head is green, one forearm is another shade of green. I had not noticed these details on my own. I knew it was wonderful but didn't know why.

I'd been reading the book slowly, but soon I was reading at a snail's pace, wanting to look closely at the paintings with Rosenfeld's illuminations in mind. Because the book is crammed with full-page as well as smaller reproductions, she can illuminate over and over. I warn you: this is no page-turner!

To be able to catch the essence and beauty of landscapes just with slashes of red and pink paint on cliffs and shoreline, or daubs of white representing water lilies, the whole full of life, seems miraculous to me. It all appeared as if Jarvis just took a brush and hacked away, flinging paint every which way. I would then read Rosenfeld's careful clarifications and see how skilled the composition is, how beautifully planned. Seeing so clearly the development of Jarvis' art after 65 is stimulating. Do you think this is possible after 80, Millie Yeomans?

The philosopher Conrad Fiedler is quoted, "The whole artistic process is nothing but a mode of seeing that is not only governed by the eyes, but by the whole man." If this is true, and I believe it is, getting old ought not to be the end of an artistic life, but rather the beginning.

Members of Jarvis' family have been the driving force behind the book and the exhibits as well as the careful custodians of her letters and many of her sketches and paintings. I thank them for their efforts.

I've read that Bruno Bobak was also influenced by Kokoschka. I wonder if there is any significance that both directors of the Art Centre were.

The co-founder of the Centre, Pegi Nichol MacLeod, received many more accolades than did Jarvis, but died young, 45, in 1949. I got out the Arts Atlantic article, "The Essential Humanism of Pegi Nichol MacLeod" by Laura Brandon, who was then writing a biography, published by McGill Press in 2005, *Pegi By Herself: The Life of Pegi Nicol MacLeod, Canadian Artist*. Both Jarvis and Nichol MacLeod were charismatic, stimulating, and kind. The devotion and the art of their acolytes are proof of that.

Here is a news item about another amazing New Brunswick woman artist. On March 30 at the Palais de congrès de Montréal Recognition Award Gala, WhiteFeather Hunter received from the Chief Scientist of Québec an award and trophy designating her as a "star researcher". One of only three chosen for the award, it honours WhiteFeather for her work "growing mammalian tissue on handwoven textile scaffolds." She is a research assistant at Concordia University, and her work combines artistic weaving with biology--bioart. With two Master of Arts in Fine Arts (MFA) degrees, she has studied and taught all over the place—from Maine's Haystack Mountain to western Australia, from Chicago to Nunavut, Denmark to the Klondike. Her first degree was from the New Brunswick College of Craft and Design.

In an email, a writer in our group quoted lines from The Song of Solomon: "For lo, the winter is past...;/the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land." What does the "voice of the turtle" mean? One member found a YouTube link of a turtle quacking. Another explained that the word in Hebrew imitates the sound of a dove, "tur tur"; subsequent translations use turtledove. Brian Bartlett reminded me of his poem, "Variations on *Yonah*", another Hebrew word for dove. Israel is "a country where everything breeds more names than it knows/what to do with."