

State of the Art-Nancy Bauer-Salon TJ-Saturday, June 11, 2016

I am happy to have the drama of the gallery replaced by the handy

Terry Graff, the director of the Beaverbrook Art Gallery, has been posting photos of his paintings and constructions on Facebook. Recently he posted drawings he made when he was a child. He's been drawing birds all his life. The similarity in the two passions--young and adult--is thought-provoking. He writes, "I drew all the time as a kid and won a bicycle in an art competition when I was 6 years old. I drew a jack-in-the pulpit, and they showed it on TV in 1960. We had a black and white TV back then, and I remember thinking how strange my drawing looked without colour." A startling use of colour is present in both the child and adult. I haven't seen any of Graff's art work, just photos of it. They intrigue me, and I hope someday to see them in person.

It's been said that our imaginations are awakened by the time we are seven years old. Many of my seminal memories were of incidents before my seventh year. A predisposition to literacy is also established by then, and that means parents should read to their children before they go to school. My daughter-in-law read Shakespeare sonnets to my grandson when he was a month old.

This early proclivity must be true for music and art as well. We know it's true for craft—a child's love of making sand castles, combining twigs, piling up pretty rocks. The Daily Gleaner sold ends of rolls of paper so that my children had large pieces to paint on, weren't confined in their art. Roslyn Rosenfeld's biography of Lucy Jarvis, *Even Stones Have Life*, demonstrates how important Jarvis and her art centre were to Fredericton children, not only in their art appreciation but in their lives generally.

I attended the re-opening of the renovated Beaverbrook Art Gallery. I usually avoid such occasions because standing is difficult, but I was so curious that I made an exception. Some of the renovations were to accommodate handicapped people like I am. Happily, tables and chairs were set up in what is now called the Orientation Gallery so I could sit while one of the docents, my friend Diane Reid, brought me goodies. I dropped a cheese ball on the new floor, but it didn't seem to stain it.

Other docents and some staff members greeted the guests as did director Graff and the chair of the Board of Governors, Allison McCain. Many artists were there: Stephen Scott, Karen LeBlanc, David McKay, Anne Leslie, and Peter Gorham were some I saw. The actual opening of the exhibitions will bring out more.

When I first stepped into the building, I was surprised by how ordinary it now looks. The dramatic pit that held the famous Dali is gone, so that the illusion that the McCain Gallery is on

a far high promontory is missing. What that means practically is that four sets of stairs have been replaced by one short set. Once up that, you can move freely from the gallery on the left, to the McCain Gallery, to the newly-named Harriet Irving Gallery and beyond. I for one am happy to have the drama replaced by the handy. There'll be drama aplenty when the addition opens next year.

In the gift shop of the gallery I bought the second issue of their magazine "Billie", handsomely produced, full of coloured plates. An article by Edgar Allen Beem, the first Sheila Hugh McKay Foundation critic-in-residence, is an overview of his travels to the studios of the province's artists. As he confesses, he knew nothing about our artists even though he has been the chief arts journalist in Maine for many years. He has an interesting take on us. "To an American outsider, the separate but equal status of Francophone and Anglophone communities, which leads to dual school systems, hospitals, and arts organizations, looks like a situation the province—and especially its artists--should be working to overcome." He would have been even more surprised if he had come before the 1980's when there was little communication between the two artistic communities. He was impressed with one of my favourite artists, Stephen Scott. "The combination of Scott's keen eye, deft touch and emotional sensitivity to the visible world led me to purchase a dark, brooding watercolour he had painted of apples on a bough from a Fredericton gallery. "

Beem makes many comparisons between this province's art scene and Maine's. "Sparsely populated, culturally divided, decentralized, and lacking the tourism and summer residents that help subsidize Maine's art market, the New Brunswick art scene is nonetheless vibrant and vital, home to a full range of painters, sculptors, photographers, videographers, installations and performance artists, creative professionals who can hold their own with the best artists anywhere."

The theme of the magazine, "Inside/Outside"--the local and the global--gave me much to ponder.