

# **Women Interrupted: An Exploration of the Lives of Selected Women Artists Represented in The University of Winnipeg Art Collection**

Essay by Katryna Barske

*Editorial Note: In the fall of 2021, Gallery 1C03 hosted University of Winnipeg graduate student Katryna Barske in a curatorial practicum which she completed as part of her MA in Cultural Studies (Curatorial Practices). The result of her research project is this essay which considers the life and work of thirteen women artists whose art is included in the University's art collection. This essay and the images within it are protected by copyright. Neither the images nor the text may be reproduced in whole or in part.*

Throughout the Western canon of art history, women artists have often been overshadowed by their male counterparts. Women artists have faced several barriers or interruptions to their careers that may account for this oversight. Through a consideration of selected artists and artworks represented in the University of Winnipeg's art collection, I will analyze the works and careers of women artists 'interrupted' – be that by marriage, motherhood, war, life obligations, and even racism – and examine how these interruptions impacted their careers, how their artistic styles shifted, and what opportunities were gained and lost. Women artists who did not encounter such barriers to their practices will be considered in comparison.

Women artists (and women in general) have historically faced barriers that have impeded their professional growth at greater levels than men.<sup>1</sup> Traditionally, marriage and motherhood would consume a woman's life and hinder her ability to pursue other ambitions outside the home due to Western conceptions on sex and gender roles and priorities placed on women to take care of the home. Additionally, Indigenous ways of being and knowing shifted – traditionally, Indigenous women were highly respected and seen as equal counterparts to men but, over time and with the influence of Western notions on gender, Indigenous women's status slowly began to diminish.<sup>2</sup> Of course art can be practiced in the home and many women artists detailed in this essay kept an at-home studio practice focused on painting, printmaking, and drawing. However, pursuing professional opportunities such as selling artworks, exhibiting, or studying art, was more complex. Overcoming these barriers depended upon having various supports in place. Another barrier for many women artists in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is the impact of war. Some of the artists discussed here joined the armed forces as nurses or telegraph operators, while others had their lives upended by dictatorial regimes or the need to flee to other countries for safety.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sarah McKinnon and Alison Gillmor, *The Light Within: Manitoba Women in Art* (Manitoba: Manitoba Association of Community Arts Councils Inc, 1997), 6.

<sup>2</sup> "Gender and Indigenous Peoples - UN," United Nations, (February 2010), accessed November 6, 2021. [https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/BriefingNote1\\_GREY.pdf](https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/BriefingNote1_GREY.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> Laura White, *Herstory: Art by Women in the University of Winnipeg Collection*, (Winnipeg: University of Winnipeg, 2013), 33; Elizabeth Legge, Caroline Dukes, and Mary Reid, *Caroline Dukes: Concealed Memories* (Winnipeg: Winnipeg Art Gallery, 2008), 35.

While many women artists put their careers on hold to attend to these obligations, some returned to artmaking in mid-life, reclaiming their practices to achieve success locally or even internationally.<sup>4</sup> Whether or not these interruptions stalled their careers or cost these women professional opportunities is debatable, but their impact is certain. Upon returning to their arts practice, these women created works that touched upon feminist issues and often their styles evolved from pre-interruption to post-interruption, likely influenced by time and life experiences.



Elizabeth 'Betty' Dimock – *Sunrise Over St. Boniface*, watercolour on paper, 50 x 34cm, 1961  
Collection of The University of Winnipeg – Gift of the Artist

Betty Dimock (1916-2015) had two passions or careers during her lifetime, that of a nurse and simultaneously as an artist.<sup>5</sup> Canadian-born Dimock studied watercolour at the Pratt Institute in New York as a young woman before becoming a nurse during World War II. Upon her return from war and subsequently losing her hearing, Dimock returned to art school, earning a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from the University of Manitoba School of Art at the age of 63.<sup>6</sup> During this time, Dimock moved from painting watercolours and Impressionistic landscapes to printmaking in a more consistently abstract style, though she referred to herself as a “contemporary Impressionist”.<sup>7</sup> She maintained her artistic practice while nursing, even painting while patients slept, but she came into her own in the 1980s and 1990s after obtaining her degree.<sup>8</sup> While Dimock did not have children, she was a caregiver to both her husband and her patients which no doubt took some time away from her art. In a sense, Dimock’s return to art can be

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<sup>4</sup> Morley Walker, “WAG Exhibit Showcases a Local Artist Who Never Shied Away from Difficult Subjects,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, July 24, 2008; White, *Herstory*, 33.

<sup>5</sup> White, *Herstory*, 17.

<sup>6</sup> White, *Herstory*, 17.

<sup>7</sup> White, *Herstory*, 17.

<sup>8</sup> White, *Herstory*, 17.

credited to the loss of her hearing which enabled her to pivot from nursing to art. Freed from the pressures of nursing and earning an income, she was able to create without restrictions and pursued art at full force. Had these economic pressures or obligations not been present in her younger life, she may have explored other art mediums sooner and created an even larger body of work. To Dimock's credit, she "consistently tried to avoid being too strongly influenced by other art or artists"; she was a true trailblazer and steadfast in her independence.<sup>9</sup> An early watercolour, entitled *Sunrise Over St. Boniface* (1961), points to a specific site and was created by Dimock while she was caring for a patient in the Fort Garry Hotel. Dimock portrays the smoke stacks of St. Boniface, further transporting viewers to this particular locale. *Sunrise Over St. Boniface* contrasts with *Sunset* (1990), a lithograph Dimock produced nearly 30 years later. *Sunset* is much more abstract and could depict any location. These two works demonstrate the evolution of Dimock's practice and how she had come into her own as an artist, not tying herself to a specific style or geographic location.



Elizabeth 'Betty' Dimock – *Sunset*, hand-coloured lithograph on paper, 13.3 x 20.9cm, 1990  
Collection of The University of Winnipeg

Dimock was also committed to helping people with hearing loss, shining a light on disabilities and the notion that a disability can spark opportunity rather than being a hinderance.<sup>10</sup> Much of her work is completely absorbing, with many entry points to attract the viewer's gaze and elicit various reactions and readings. *Sunset*, for example, draws viewers in on the left with layers of creeping gold/orange flecks of colour and carries the eye to the right and back again to the blue/reflective surface on the bottom left. Works like *Sunset* convey a universal theme and are open-ended as they permit viewers to draw their own interpretations. In these ways, Dimock made her art and its messages more accessible - strategies that many artists today are conscious to incorporate.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Elizabeth Legge, *Betty Dimock* (Winnipeg: Winnipeg Art Gallery, 1981).

<sup>10</sup> Karen Wade, "Octogenarian Artist's Book 20 Years in Making," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 2003.

<sup>11</sup> Confederation Centre Art Gallery and Museum, *Betty Dimock Metamorphic Ruminations: Recent Work 1981-85* (Charlottetown: Island Offset Inc., 1985).



Rosemary Kowalsky - *Fleur du Mal*, mixed media on canvas, 195 x 127cm, 1988  
Collection of The University of Winnipeg – Gift of the Estate of Rosemary and Cliff Kowalsky

Rosemary Kowalsky's (1920-2006) career was interrupted by the war as well and also by motherhood. Kowalsky, a contemporary of Dimock, dreamed of being an artist from a young age, drawing many pictures for her family and friends. In 1944, she served in World War II as a telegraph operator and returned home to Winnipeg to start her family. It was not until 1969 (at 49 years of age) when she decided to pursue her goal of becoming an artist and enrolled in the Fine Arts program at the University of Manitoba.<sup>12</sup> Kowalsky worked on large canvases, painting scenes from nature in her early years.<sup>13</sup>

Kowalsky's career took off in the 1980s, when she won many awards and exhibited widely. She was most known for her paintings depicting flowers and garden tools which she stated were metaphors for the broader threats of extinction and negotiations of power.<sup>14</sup> Others, however, interpreted these pieces as symbols of women's sexuality and vulnerability, highlighting power dynamics at play between the sexes and violence women have been subjected to, most often at the hands of men. Kowalsky's career shows the evolution of the artist as a young girl dreaming of art, of creating scenes from her garden, and then portraying the stark realities many women

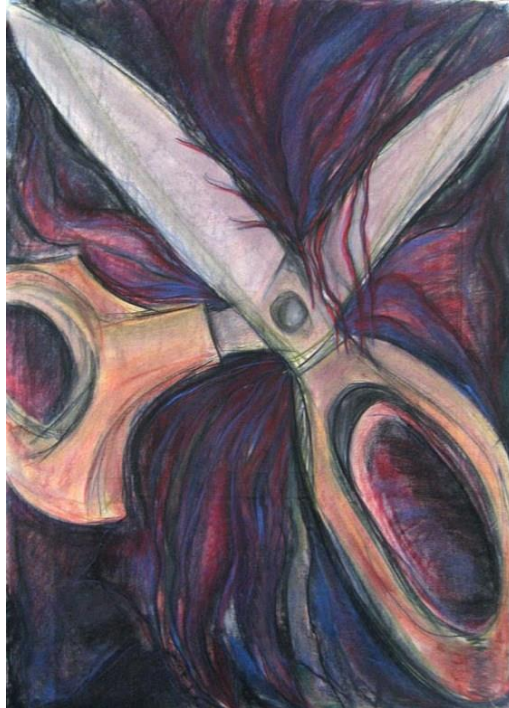
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<sup>12</sup> Natalia Lebedenskaia, *Endangered Species: Rosemary Kowalsky* (Brandon: Art Gallery of Southwestern Manitoba, 14), accessed November 6, 2021, [https://agsm.ca/sites/default/files/brochures/Cata\\_Rosemary%20Kowalsky%20-%20Endangered%20Species.pdf](https://agsm.ca/sites/default/files/brochures/Cata_Rosemary%20Kowalsky%20-%20Endangered%20Species.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> Winnipeg Free Press Passages, "Rosemary Kowalsky BFA," *Winnipeg Free Press*, October 21, 2006, [https://passages.winnipegfreepress.com/passage-details/id-113335/Rosemary\\_Bfa](https://passages.winnipegfreepress.com/passage-details/id-113335/Rosemary_Bfa).

<sup>14</sup> Lebedenskaia, *Endangered Species*.

continue to face today: violence towards them due to their gender. Her art represents the negotiations of power not only between humans and nature, but between the sexes and between vulnerability and strength. One can only imagine the negotiations Kowalsky had to contend with in her own mind in deciding to pursue art and then show her own vulnerability as a woman and as an artist.

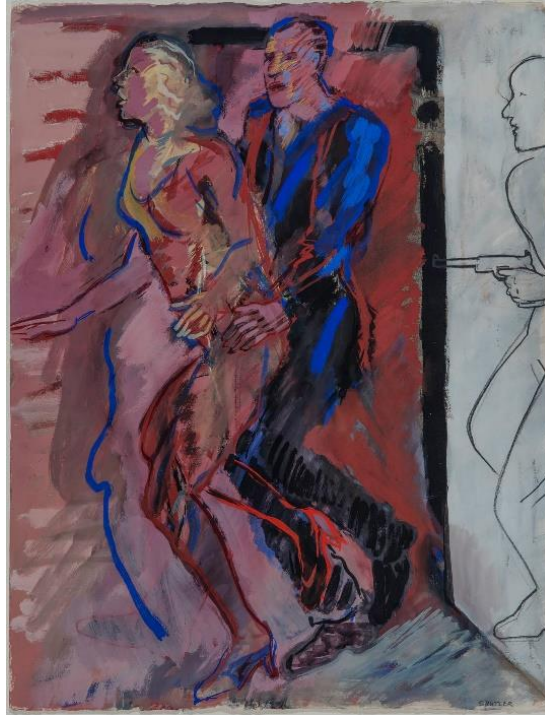


Rosemary Kowalsky - *Fleur du Mal I - Scissors and Flower*, coloured pencil & oil stick on paper, 105 x 75cm, 1985  
Collection of The University of Winnipeg – Gift of the Estate of Rosemary and Cliff Kowalsky

A key work in the University's collection by Kowalsky is *Fleur du Mal*, a mixed media piece that is part of a larger series depicting flowers in convergence with weapon-like gardening tools. *Les Fleurs du Mal* is also the title of Charles Baudelaire's 19<sup>th</sup> century volume of French poetry exploring modernity, decadence and eroticism. Kowalsky's painting evokes a dark and mysterious quality: the pointed, scissor-like petals of the flower seem to be squeezed tight, suffocating the life out of it, all its colours drained.<sup>15</sup> She also employs collage, incorporating portions of women's dress patterns. Does this work symbolize the struggle between femininity and power? Can a woman have both and succeed or must one (or both) aspects suffer? *Scissors and Flower*, part of the same series, portrays this dichotomy plainly with scissors violently cutting away at a wavy flower, which resembles women's hair. Through this series, Kowalsky draws attention to the often gendered associations of gardening and notions of femininity evoked by florals, but turns them on their head by introducing violence, a topic many women shy away from, as if ignored, it will go away. Kowalsky does not ignore this topic; she meets it head-on and gives women an outlet to explore their fears.

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<sup>15</sup> Lebedenskaia.



Sheila Butler - *The National and the Journal*, gouache & mixed media on paper, 65 x 49.3cm, 1984  
Collection of The University of Winnipeg

Contemporary, studio mate, and friend of Kowalsky, artist Sheila Butler (born 1938) also draws on societal and political themes in her art. Both artists explored opposing forces, Butler through figurative drawings and paintings, and Kowalsky through her floral depictions mentioned above in her *Les Fleurs du Mal* series. In Butler's *The National and the Journal*, a nude woman tries to flee from a man holding a gun, while caught in the embrace of a clothed man – it is unclear if this second figure is helping or hindering the woman's attempted escape. Both artists used their work to try and come to terms with violence and power relations between the sexes and likely the artists benefited from working together, talking through philosophies and politics impacting their lives. The importance of female camaraderie extended beyond this friendship for Butler, who co-founded MAWA (Mentoring Artists for Women's Art) in 1984, a space to “encourage and support the intellectual and creative development of women in the visual arts by providing an ongoing forum for education and critical dialogue.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> “History,” Mentoring Artists for Women's Art, accessed December 15, 2021, <https://mawa.ca/about/history>.



Caroline Dukes - *Landscape No.49*, acrylic & charcoal on canvas, 175 x 124.2cm, 1987  
Collection of The University of Winnipeg – Gift of the Estate of Caroline and Alfred Dukes

Caroline Dukes (1929-2003) is another artist whose career was influenced by war. Dukes, who was Jewish, grew up in Hungary where, as a child, she had to constantly be on the move and in hiding from the Nazis during the Holocaust. Eventually she and her mother were found and taken to a ghetto where she barely survived. Upon getting married in 1951 (under the Stalinist regime), Dukes studied art in Budapest where her work was dictated by the regime – artists could only create art that was realist in style.<sup>17</sup> By 1956, Dukes and her young family fled Hungary to come to Canada where she took a hiatus from artmaking to focus on her children. She eventually made a return to art in the late 1960s after studying art at the University of Manitoba.<sup>18</sup>

The interruption of Dukes' career by war, anti-Semitism, and motherhood resulted in stylistic changes to her art, and the time in between her art practice may have allowed her to process and reflect upon traumas experienced in her youth, and channel them into her work. Once out of art school, Dukes continued to work in her studio, time which she clung to amidst her duties as a wife, mother, and grandmother. She was featured in feminist art shows and was the first

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<sup>17</sup> "Caroline Dukes," Concordia University: Art History, accessed December 22, 2021, <http://art-history.concordia.ca/eea/artists/dukes.html>.

<sup>18</sup> Elizabeth. Legge, Caroline. Dukes, and Mary. Reid, *Caroline Dukes: Concealed Memories*, 8.

Canadian artist (along with friend and contemporary, Eva Stubbs), to be featured in an exhibition at the Vaserey Museum in Budapest.<sup>19</sup>



Caroline Dukes - Interior No.10 (Dance), acrylic on canvas, 182.7 x 145cm, 1975  
Collection of The University of Winnipeg – Gift of the Estate of Caroline and Alfred Dukes

Within the University of Winnipeg’s art collection, seven works document the stylistic transition from surrealism to expressionism in Dukes’ work. Produced only a few years after studying with famed prairie surrealist Ivan Eyre, the structured lines and colours of her painting *Interior No. 10* bear a hint of his influence.<sup>20</sup> Gradually, looser brushstrokes with semi-abstracted figures and scenes dominated Dukes’ paintings. She also became interested in existential philosophy and literature, and began to depict religious and political tensions, history, and realities through her art.<sup>21</sup> For example, in *Landscape 49*, one of the pieces from her *Apple Pickers/Apples of Sodom* series, the apple is a symbol of decadence, corruption, and greed reacting against the glorification of self-indulgence.<sup>22</sup> Here, Dukes is pointing to larger societal issues: as a practicing Orthodox Jew, she took issue with decadence, a bi-product of capitalism that is seemingly inescapable in North America.

Dukes’ long-time artist colleague and friend Eva Stubbs notes: “I don’t quite remember why she wanted to change her style. She very consciously went about it and pursued that change...she became a more and more intellectual painter...she went into her experiences as a Jew...”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Terry Weber, “City Artists’ Works Bound for Budapest,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, June 16, 1993.

<sup>20</sup> Legge, Dukes, and Reid, *Caroline Dukes*, 8.

<sup>21</sup> Legge, Dukes, and Reid, 15-17.

<sup>22</sup> White, *Herstory*, 29.

<sup>23</sup> Legge, Dukes, and Reid, 42.





Eva Stubbs, *Self-Portrait With Skulls*, charcoal & conte on paper, 104.8 x 72.7cm, 1999  
Collection of The University of Winnipeg – Gift of the Artist

Like Caroline Dukes, Eva Stubbs (1925-2017) was born in Hungary and had her life uprooted several times due to wars and anti-Semitism. She eventually settled in Winnipeg in 1944 where she enrolled in the University of Manitoba's School of Fine Arts in the 1950s (amid a registrar telling her to stay home with her husband and child).<sup>24</sup> Her arts practice focused on sculpture and she was one of few women sculptors of her time. Although completing her Fine Arts degree in 1957, Stubbs did not practice art seriously again until nearly twenty years later, instead focusing on teaching – her art practice interrupted again, this time by work.<sup>25</sup> Once she was able to resume her own art practice in earnest, she won numerous commissions and continued to teach, becoming a well-known sculptor featured in many exhibitions and collections.

As with Dukes, Dimock, and Kowalsky, Stubbs' style changed upon her full-time return to artmaking, with her early work being more figurative and her later pieces more abstract. Her art embodied her concern for humanity and her interest in history.<sup>26</sup> These abstract expressions, which took the form of sculpture and drawing, held ties to people and family, and even grappled with death. Her charcoal drawing *Self Portrait with Skulls* in the University of Winnipeg art collection is a memorial to those who came before us, serving as a reminder that we all stand on

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<sup>24</sup> "MAWA Spring Newsletter," Mentoring Artists for Women's Art (2018), accessed December 15, 2021, [https://mawa.ca/pdf/MAWA\\_WEBNEWS\\_spring\\_18.pdf](https://mawa.ca/pdf/MAWA_WEBNEWS_spring_18.pdf).

<sup>25</sup> White, *Herstory*, 29.

<sup>26</sup> White, *Herstory*, 29.

someone's shoulders and highlighting the importance of female camaraderie.<sup>27</sup> As a teacher, Eva Stubbs can be remembered in this way as well, having helped pave the way for future generations of women artists to study, practice, and exhibit their art. Stubbs' portrayal of the female body was impactful, substantial – perhaps a symbol of women taking up space and not conforming to gender norms or expectations of shying away but, rather, asserting themselves.



*Daphne Odjig, Nanabajou and His Daughter, screenprint on paper, 118 x 77.5cm, 1975  
Collection of The University of Winnipeg – Gift of Dr. Frank and Mrs. S. Hechter*

An additional disrupting factor for artists is racism. While this is not confined to women artists, BIPOC women have faced the dual impacts or intersections of racism and sexism when contending with the art world. Daphne Odjig (1919-2016), who has been deemed the “grandmother of Indigenous art”, is one artist whose work transcends those intersections.<sup>28</sup> Odjig grew up on the Wikwemikong First Nation on Manitoulin Island in Ontario and created art from an early age, learning from her Potawatomi grandfather and father who carved and painted and

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<sup>27</sup> White, *Herstory*, 29.

<sup>28</sup> Jerry. White, “Daphne Odjig: A Great Indigenous Artist and Humanitarian Has Passed,” *The International Indigenous Policy Journal* 7, no. 4 (September 2016): 3, <https://ojs.lib.uwo.ca/index.php/iipj/article/view/7498>.

shared traditional stories with her.<sup>29</sup> As an adult, she lived in various Canadian cities where she faced racism which resulted in her trying to hide her Indigenous heritage. It was during this time that she began to experiment with various styles of painting, turning to art history books and visits to museums like the Art Gallery of Ontario and the Vancouver Art Gallery for inspiration, particularly the works of Picasso and the Impressionists.<sup>30</sup>

In the 1960s, the Canadian government lifted its ban on the practice of Indigenous drumming and dancing and ceremonial traditions. Odjig's home community quickly reinstated the pow wow and she returned to take part in 1964 as a way to reconnect with her community and heritage. Odjig also organized a group art exhibition during the pow wow and it concluded with then Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson purchasing all of the art on display – including Odjig's work -- for the Federal Department of Cultural Affairs.<sup>31</sup> Odjig's experience at the pow wow prompted a change in her work as she began to blend European and Indigenous art style and content, resulting in flat, flowing, and boldly-coloured images that incorporated traditional stories.<sup>32</sup>

Within a few years, Odjig's career blossomed with solo exhibitions and requests for commissions, inspiring her to commit full time to artmaking and supporting other Indigenous artists. In 1970, Odjig and her husband founded Odjig Indian Prints of Canada Ltd in Winnipeg to sell her work and the work of other Indigenous artists. Three years later, she co-founded the Professional Native Indian Arts Inc. with Alex Janvier, Jackson Beardy, Eddy Cobiness, Norval Morrisseau, Carl Ray, and Joseph Sanchez to seek further opportunities for Indigenous artists. These accomplishments and actions helped cement Odjig's prominence as a strong, Indigenous, woman artist who supported and made space for the next generation of Indigenous artists.<sup>33</sup>

Odjig's silkscreen print *Nanabajou and His Daughter* aptly showcases her signature style. In this piece, Odjig blends cubist forms with flowing lines and flat planes of solid bold colours characteristic of Woodland art. Odjig spoke to this blending of styles:

“Tradition reinforces pride in heritage. But I cannot accept that tradition need limit or define my direction. I do not wish to be overwhelmed by tradition, but rather to be inspired by it, remaining free to pursue my personal visions. By doing so, I am confident that I do not deny the considerable influence of my cultural heritage.”<sup>34</sup>

The combination of styles allowed Odjig to acknowledge her Indigenous culture while also forging her own, unique artistic path. Her print tells part of the story of Nanabajou, a shape-

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<sup>29</sup> Bonnie Devine. *The Drawings and Paintings of Daphne Odjig: A Retrospective Exhibition* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 2007): 137-141, accessed December 3, 2021, <http://odjig.com/profile.html>.

<sup>30</sup> Rosamond Vanderburgh, Daphne Odjig, and Beth Southcott, *A Paintbrush in My Hand: Daphne Odjig* (Toronto: Natural Heritage/Natural History, 1992), 84.

<sup>31</sup> Devine. *The Drawings and Paintings of Daphne Odjig*, 137-141.

<sup>32</sup> White, *Herstory*, 43; Devine, 137-141.

<sup>33</sup> Devine, 137-141.

<sup>34</sup> Vanderburgh, Odjig, and Southcott, 73.

shifting trickster who deceives his daughter into marrying him.<sup>35</sup> By sharing Indigenous stories and traditions through her art, Odjig resisted the racial barriers or interruptions to her career, while also helping open doors for other Indigenous artists. Odjig is a prime example of an artist who practiced self-determination in spite of obstacles that arose.



Kenojuak Ashevak, *My Birds Together*, lithograph on paper, 56.5 x 78.5cm, 1979  
Collection of The University of Winnipeg

Kenojuak Ashevak (1927-2013) is another Indigenous woman artist who endured many hardships and interruptions but persevered in her artmaking. Ashevak's long career originally developed from her sewing skills when she began to do embroidery work as a young woman. Upon having to move to Kinngait, she met government administrator, James Houston, who introduced her to drawing and printmaking, mediums in which she flourished.<sup>36</sup> Ashevak gained prominence as an artist, but her career was interrupted by disease and tragedy. In the 1930s-40s, tuberculosis reached epidemic proportions, particularly amongst Indigenous populations, and in the late 1940s-mid 1950s, Ashevak was taken from her home to a hospital in Quebec for treatment after contracting it. During her years-long hospital stay, two of her children died, heartbreaking news Ashevak only learned upon her return home.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>White, *Herstory*, 43-44.

<sup>36</sup>“Kenojuak Ashevak,” Inuit Art Foundation (2017), accessed December 15, 2021, <https://www.inuitartfoundation.org/profiles/artist-info/bio-citations/Kenojuak-Ashevak>.

<sup>37</sup> Linda Caldwell, “TB Diagnosis Once Meant a Lonely Confinement Patients Sent Hundreds of Miles from Home to Recover from Illness,” originally published in *Windspeaker*, Vol 11, issue 22 (1994), accessed December 15, 2021, <https://www.ammsa.com/publications/windspeaker/tb-diagnosis-once-meant-lonely-confinement-patients-sent-hundreds-miles-h-2>.

Though her life was shaken by hardship, Ashevak persisted in drawing. Her art largely portrays animals – most notably owls – with *Enchanted Owl* being one of her most well-known prints. Ashevak loved art making; it was her life purpose and a means to support her family financially. She was a role model for women and her perseverance and passion for art shines through the darkness that clouded her life.<sup>38</sup>

In her lifetime, Ashevak became a renowned printmaker, the recipient of many awards and honours, winning the Governor General Award for Excellence in Visual Arts. She was also the first Inuit artist to be inducted into Canada's Walk of Fame.<sup>39</sup> Even with all of this recognition, Ashevak remained humble and created countless works of art, many of which found their way into public and private collections, including the University of Winnipeg. *My Birds Together* is a colourful print depicting three birds and shows off Ashevak's playful style. The lines and colours flow with ease, the print is balanced and provokes a sense of joy. Perhaps because of Ashevak's difficult life, she felt compelled to create works that inspired delight and a sense of play, or perhaps through her art making process, she was able to release and work through some of that pain.

While the 'interruptions' in Ashevak's life did not prevent her from making and selling art (Ashevak was a prolific artist her entire life, even during her hospital stay), one could argue that the interruptions fueled her production. Regardless, Ashevak persevered and became one of Canada's most well-known artists and is internationally recognized and celebrated.

Upon their re-entry to the art world, a number of the above-mentioned artists were incredible advocates for each other. As many of these women faced similar challenges in their arts careers, they bonded, formed friendships and navigated the art world together. Some joined art clubs or helped found artist-run galleries like the Winnipeg Sketch Club, Site Gallery or New Warehouse Gallery, rented studios together, learned from one another, and were all-around supporters of each other.<sup>40</sup> These bonds helped the artists develop their skills, make connections in the art world, and increase confidence to continue their practice and exhibit.

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<sup>38</sup> "Kenojuak Ashevak," Inuit Art Foundation.

<sup>39</sup> "Kenojuak Ashevak," DORSET FINE ARTS, (2014), accessed December 15, 2021, <https://www.dorsetfinearts.com/kenojuak-askhevak/>.

<sup>40</sup> Morley Walker, "Artist Dukes Remembered for Her Large-Scale Paintings," *Winnipeg Free Press*, June 10, 2003; McKinnon and Gillmor, *The Light Within*, 8, 14.



Annora Brown, *Summer Afternoon*, oil on masonite, 118 x 171cm, 1952  
Collection of The University of Winnipeg – Gift of the Class of 1929

The friendships, mentorships, and encouragement women artists found in one another also helped advance many of their careers, as was the case with Rosemary Kowalsky and Sheila Butler, mentioned earlier. Annora Brown and Jessie Doris Hunt are another example of a female friendship that benefited their arts careers. These artists met while teaching at Mount Royal College where Brown was a mentor to Hunt. Their friendship resulted in the University commissioning Brown to paint *Summer Afternoon* for its collection.<sup>41</sup> An essay by Sarah Brereton details their relationship and this work in more depth. Encouragement fostered between the women artists boosted their careers and also supports the notion that there is room for many female artists, whether in art school, exhibitions, or in studio/gallery ownership.

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<sup>41</sup> Sarah Brereton, "Annora Brown's Summer Afternoon," The University of Winnipeg (2015), accessed December 15, 2021, <https://www.uwinnipeg.ca/art-gallery/art-collection/annora-browns-summer-afternoon.html>.



Eleanor Bond, *French Breakfast*, hand-coloured lithograph on paper, 56 x 76.2cm, 1984  
Collection of The University of Winnipeg

While many women artists had their careers interrupted due to varying reasons, this was not the case for all women artists working in similar time periods. Some women created, exhibited, and sold works continuously and will be touched on here in comparison. Eleanor Bond (born 1948) is one such artist who forged her own path for her entire career. Upon graduating from the University of Manitoba with a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree, Bond steadily created works inspired by her travels. Bond taught art at Concordia University in Montreal – her artmaking career intermittently interrupted by day jobs.<sup>42</sup> Her work largely features urban landscapes that “hover between utopian/hopeful and dystopian/hopeless visions of the future.”<sup>43</sup> This futuristic style could perhaps be a symbol of the freedoms Bond enjoyed through traveling and pursuing her art career free of interruptions such as child-rearing. Bond could dedicate herself more fully to her career and create works that explored her visions of the future, troubling though they may be. One of these visions can be seen in the University’s collection: *French Breakfast* is a still life of breakfast foods displayed on a table -- the act of eating a meal as a family is no longer an activity in Bond’s post-apocalyptic visions.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> “Eleanor Bond,” MacKenzie Art Gallery (2020), accessed December 15, 2021, <https://mackenzie.art/eleanor-bond/>.

<sup>43</sup> Robert Enright, “The Comfort of Edges: Working the Calm Bewilderment,” *Border Crossings* 15 (1996), 12.

<sup>44</sup> White, *Herstory*, 35.



Wanda Koop - *Sightline - Blue Line*, acrylic on canvas, 124.5 x 246.3cm, 2001  
Collection of The University of Winnipeg – Gift of the Artist

A contemporary of Bond, Winnipeg artist Wanda Koop (born 1951) also paints large works, often landscapes that blend realism with abstraction, also inspired by her travels. Koop found success early, exhibiting at the Winnipeg Art Gallery while still a student at the University of Manitoba and has not slowed down, creating many series of works and exhibiting internationally.<sup>45</sup> While her own career was not interrupted by motherhood, war, racism or teaching, Koop did face criticism (mostly from her male art instructors). She was told she was “taking up too much room” in regards to her large-scale paintings – an early and painful revelation that ambition in a woman artist could provoke resentment, even antagonism from her male colleagues.<sup>46</sup> Thankfully, Koop did not listen to these sexist comments and continued to create massive works, “consuming space for over four decades.” She has gone on to be recognized as a member of the Order of Canada, founder of Art City in Winnipeg (a space for inner-city youth to create art) and co-creator of the Rotterdam Apartment Cooperative to help Canadian artists live and work in the Netherlands.<sup>47</sup>

Within the University’s art collection, *Sightline – Blue Line* by Koop is representative of her large landscapes with her signature use of a perspectival disruption, in this instance, a blue cross-hair at the centre of the work. Here, Koop depicts a winding coastal scene, exploring human sight and the technologies that enable it.<sup>48</sup> It is interesting that while Koop’s career has not been ‘interrupted’ she often ‘interrupts’ her own work with symbols or abstract markings, distracting from our view of her landscapes and thus challenging simplified or straight forward interpretations of them.

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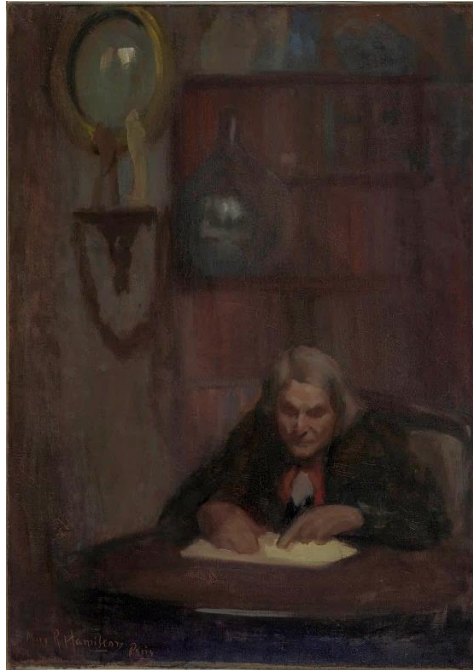
<sup>45</sup> Wanda Koop et al., *Wanda Koop: On the Edge of Experience* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 2010), 15.

<sup>46</sup> Koop et al., *Wanda Koop: On the Edge of Experience*, 15.

<sup>47</sup> “Wanda Koop,” *Wanda Koop*, accessed December 15, 2021, <https://www.wandakoop.com/about>.

<sup>48</sup> Madeline Bogoch, “Wanda Koop: Sightline-Blue Line,” The University of Winnipeg (August 2018), accessed December 15, 2021, <https://www.uwinnipeg.ca/art-gallery/art-collection/wanda-koop-sightline-blue-line.html>.





Mary Riter Hamilton, *The Philosopher*, oil on canvas, 90.2 x 63.5cm, 1911  
Collection of The University of Winnipeg – Gift of Mrs. Georgina Robinson Reid

Mary Riter Hamilton (1868-1954) had an interesting career which began in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century after her husband passed away unexpectedly, leaving her a widow at 28 years old.<sup>49</sup> Hamilton was self-financed and traveled the world studying and exhibiting watercolours, selling works and teaching to get by. After World War I, Hamilton painted the battlefields in France and Belgium and was invited by the French government to exhibit her work in the Grand Opera, works that are now in Library and Archives Canada in Ottawa.<sup>50</sup> Presented with exciting, global opportunities, Hamilton was a working woman artist and trailblazer of her time. It was rare for a woman at this time to pursue her own career, and her sense of independence can perhaps be seen in *The Philosopher* in the University's collection. In this oil painting, a lone person sits at a desk in front of a bookshelf, reading. They are older, presumably an academic and, like the artist, the sitter seems to be navigating their field alone or with very little company.

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<sup>49</sup> Angela E. Davis and Sarah M. McKinnon, *No Man's Land: The Battlefield Paintings of Mary Riter Hamilton* (Winnipeg: University of Winnipeg, 1989), 7-9. Also see Kathryn A. Young and Sarah M. McKinnon, *No Man's Land: The Life and Art of Mary Riter Hamilton* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2017).

<sup>50</sup> Davis and McKinnon, *No Man's Land*, 7-9.



Alison Newton, *Market Stalls*, watercolour on paper, 25.4 x 30.5cm, date unknown  
Collection of The University of Winnipeg

Alison Newton (1890-1967) was an artist who was able to pursue her career during a time when most women would have been encouraged to stop working. Upon marrying in 1916, Newton went back to school to study in the Fine Arts program at the University of Manitoba, working under L.L. Fitzgerald and Alex Musgrove, and even undertaking private lessons with W.J. Phillips. Throughout the early-to-mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, Newton exhibited locally and across Canada, becoming known for her watercolour scenes depicting people going about their everyday lives. Newton's continuous career greatly benefitted from the encouragement she received from her husband and instructors to continue her studies and painting. A painting in the University collection, *Market Stalls*, highlights her talents and use of colour and loose lines, depicting either Old Market Square in Winnipeg, Manitoba, or the market stalls in Gonor, Manitoba. Seemingly innocent, domestic scenes such as *Market Stalls* reflect on the common duties assigned to women at the time: shopping, preparing food, doing housework/chores.<sup>51</sup> It is interesting to wonder if Newton felt more comfortable or took interest in these scenes because she was a woman, capturing moments her male counterparts may have ignored. Through her art, Newton shared her view of the world and had an influence on the Manitoba art scene, where she served as President of the Manitoba Society of Artists.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Kadi Badiou, "Alison Newton Market Stalls," The University of Winnipeg (August 2017), accessed December 15, 2021, <https://www.uwinnipeg.ca/art-gallery/art-collection/alison-newton-market-stalls.html>.

<sup>52</sup> Badiou, "Alison Newton Market Stalls".



Lorene Squire, *Off the Coast of Baffin Island*, B/W silver print, 21.5 x 28cm, 1938  
Collection of The University of Winnipeg

Another woman artist whose career took off in a time and field dominated by men is Lorene Squire (1908-1942). As a young, American photographer, Squire had her work reproduced in nature magazines and was a published author with her book, *Wildfowling with a Camera*.<sup>53</sup> In the mid-late 1930s, she was contracted by the Hudson Bay Company to document travels across the Canadian arctic aboard their ship, *Nascopie*. Squire was the first female photographer to get this commission, and her work was published in many issues of the HBC magazine, *The Beaver*, including on its cover.<sup>54</sup> Tragically, Squire was killed in a car accident while on assignment for *Life* magazine and died at age 34.<sup>55</sup> In her short career, Squire was an accomplished photographer, leaving behind over 3,000 negatives and a few hundred prints in the HBC archives alone, as well as four photographs in the University's collection. What is most interesting about Squire is the mark she made as a young female photographer in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century; to be sought out by a company such as Hudson Bay Company to document the harsh landscape of the Canadian arctic is an incredible opportunity. Squire's short career may have also benefitted from remaining unmarried and not having children to care for and, had the accident not claimed her life, there is no doubt Squire would have gone on to accomplish even more in her career.

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<sup>53</sup> Rachel Alpha Hurst, "Lorene Squire's Psychological Landscapes of Colonial/Modern Gender in the Canadian North," *History of Photography*, Vol. 40, no. 4 (2016): 413–31, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03087298.2016.1249211>.

<sup>54</sup> Hudson's Bay House Library, "Keystone Archives Descriptive Database," *Archives of Manitoba*, accessed December 22, 2021, [http://pam.minisisinc.com/SCRIPTS/MWIMAIN.DLL/125216380/1/2/4199?RECORD&DATABASE=DESCRIPTION\\_WEB\\_INT](http://pam.minisisinc.com/SCRIPTS/MWIMAIN.DLL/125216380/1/2/4199?RECORD&DATABASE=DESCRIPTION_WEB_INT).

<sup>55</sup> Hurst, "Lorene Squire's Psychological Landscapes".

Women artists, whether their careers were ‘interrupted’ or not, deserve recognition in the canon of art history. The artists highlighted above each have their own unique stories and life experiences to share through their art, which stand out from male artists of the time. It is through these works of art that a more complete story can be told of historic events, art history, and women’s rights, simply by including the distinctive perspectives of their female-identifying creators. These women artists persevered and created art despite obstacles that impeded their practice such as war, familial obligations, sexism, and racism. As much as these interruptions may have impacted their careers, the influence of these interruptions on their art is just as noteworthy. Women artists whose careers were not disrupted in the same ways further enrich the canon of art history and have strong voices and works that continue to influence future generations of female-identifying artists.

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