

ATT

The Substance of Light

NDP being so closely associated with labour—the labour Movement. I didn't want to do that, I wanted to be free to do what I wanted to do and the minute you allow yourself to be too closely associated with somebody else's agenda, then that becomes confused with your own and -I didn't have an agenda. I just wanted to paint, ...

Most Compelling Style:

I go to Still Life as children go to Lego when they have to learn a new math lesson or something... or they go back to the building blocks that taught them the early things—they go back where they're comfortable. Certainly Still Life gives me great comfort and a—sort of—sense that I can do it, that I can do it. But for me the most compelling images are things like *Service Station*, and ah, *Child With Two Adults*, *Barby in the Dress She Made Herself*—some of the tougher images which were difficult to handle, I mean I would stand there and cry when I did them—difficult psychologically to deal with so-and I think that that shows really, as far as the oil paintings are concerned—that *Service Station* stands as a major, major point in my career. So the courage to do that, to know that I was flirting with an agenda that was not

my own—that suddenly this image was too compelling to just ignore and ...so I wouldn't agree that the most compelling things I've done have been Still Lives. They might be for people who are first introduced to painting because they can relate so easily to them, there's nothing very ugly about them—so they make people accept them, you know, they are acceptable—and they're difficult sometimes to do but it's always something I can do and I know I can do because I just cooked so much!!(laughter)

Success:

I think um... I always wanted to be successful. I had an idea in my life that you needed to be bigger than life, you needed to achieve something that somebody else had not achieved. My father was a politician and all the time I was growing up he kept trying to get elected, and he never could. (hearty laughter) And you know, I'd go through one political campaign after another, after another, until finally when I was in grade twelve he was finally elected and I could see his effort to be a public person and a private person and his desire to change some legal things in this province, and he had an idea of what he wanted to do, but he had to get there to do it. And so—his struggle, and the fact that he didn't sort of win right away—but finally did, and then finally quit-quit the government because he didn't like what it was doing—ah- made me, well it inspired me I suppose... that you could struggle for a long time before you could really get there and that it was okay to struggle for a long time and not get there.

Twenty-first Birthday:

... I felt when I got to be twenty one that I had—that my life was over—that I hadn't been a Mozart. I had never achieved. I had not yet done anything. And so my twenty-first birthday was a disaster for me; because it was the only birthday that I remember that I just didn't want to accept because I had hoped that before I was twenty one I would have achieved something. So I think that from the time I was very young, achievement was... big on the list of wannabes.(more laughter)

Early Outlook:

I suspect I was more critical of the world... for not realizing that I was there. I'm not sure that I was very self-critical(laughing), perhaps not enough. I just kept thinking "Why don't you see what I see?" but then I hadn't done anything-to let people see what I saw...

Plateaus:

... everything is a jump to a new plateau and you can never be easy for very long on that plateau. You-you jump then to the next one—if you can and a thing like this is like a sort of

a....a springboard hopefully to a new...something else—and what it's apt to do retrospective like this, is to finish you off, is to close the circle. And in actual fact, this show does close a circle—starts off with a table full of food and it ends with a table of food, and the table at the beginning is a table that is very happy with children just having left and the tumble of everyday life, and the table at the end is a lonely place setting with nothing on the plate and I—in a way—this show closes a chapter...except for the new things: the little glass houses, the *House Inside My Mother's House*, which is the last exhibition that I did in Toronto, and that hopefully is beginning to open something else for me.

Advising the aspiring (and some politics):

I think it's very important for young people to realize...that...what is presently acceptable by organizations like the Canada Council or-ah, the National Gallery of Canada, anything like that—is acceptable to bureaucrats, and that the world of art has long since left that. And that once it is acceptable to a bureaucracy, it is no longer acceptable to an artist because that's old stuff now and that everybody, everybody has the obligation to look for himself(sic) that is—an artist, if she wants to be successful, really successful cannot try to get into the loop that is now existing—jump through that loop in your own...look to something else. When I was young there was nothing but abstraction, to paint realistically was totally beyond the pale—just out of it—is still out of it, because this is not acceptable to many people... many people like the Canada Council, the National Gallery of Canada—they don't accept this kind of stuff because they're still a hundred years behind...still back there. And they're not as liberal minded as we want Canada to be.

Some more politics...

Well, I have this notion that Canada must remain the Great Liberal North, although I'm a Tory—but I think that even Tories in Canada are Liberal compared to the conservative United States. And I-you know it makes me really proud to be part of a country that has the guts to be liberal.

Political Correctness:

It worries me very much—political correctness worries me to no end because I think it polarizes... people and—people who would ordinarily, naturally accept the notion of what is politically correct without it having a name—because it suddenly gets a name they have to be against it so you're going to get this awful polarization of the ultra conservative against the outrageously liberal and um that is what worries me most about present day...not that you care about that in this interview. (laughing)

The Art of Mary Pratt *The Substance of Light: THE BOOK*

I think that Tom has done a very good job and I think you ought to give Tom Smart an awful lot of credit because he's giving Atlantic artists a voice.... and the work that is

produced in the regions is so major to the core of the country. The work that is produced in the regions when it goes to the centre, that's what makes a country. The centre is forgotten, the centre can't hold without attention to the regions—and so the more they, for instance, try to get rid of the CBC and it's regional offices - the more they eliminate the country. ... You have to have constant input from the regions, culturally, intellectually, all kinds of ways—it just has to come from the regions that's the only point to have a centre - so the stuff can all be collected and then disseminated again. ... Just like an artist collects from the world puts it through a net and distributes it—that's what has to happen in a country.

Home is where your mom is:

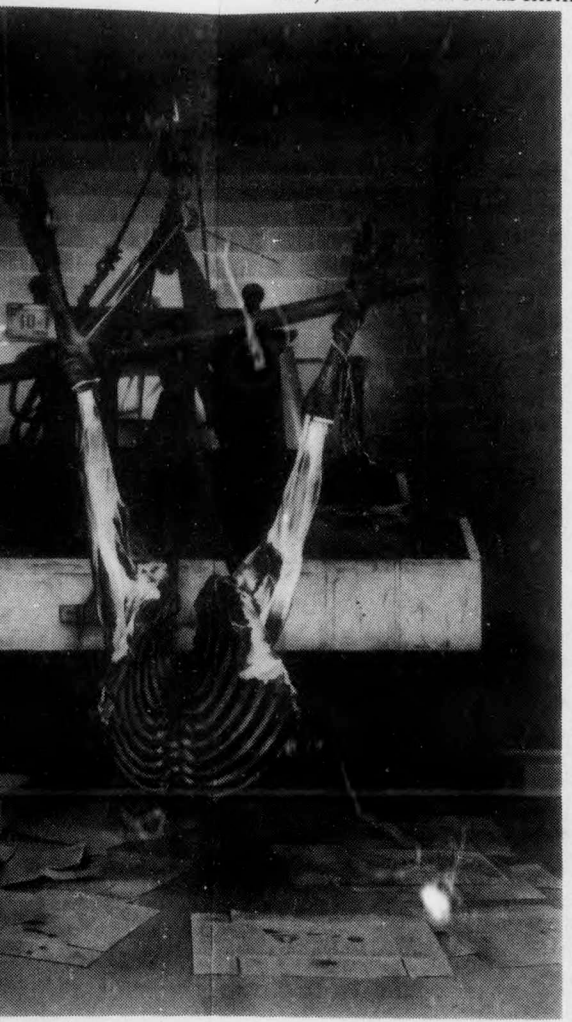
Well, I'm very comfortable in Fredericton this is still home to me. People say home is where your mother is, well my mom's still here (laughter). And I've painted in Vancouver, and I've painted in Saint John's, I've been from one side to the other, and I've painted in Toronto and so I've sort of been around and I think that-guess my home is still Fredericton.



EVISPERATED CHICKENS, 1971
oil on panel, 45.7 x 62.2 cm
Collection of Memorial University of Newfoundland, St. John's



BLUE BATH WATER, 1983
oil on masonite, 170.2 x 115.5 cm
Private collection



SERVICE STATION, 1978
on masonite, 101.5 x 76.5 cm
Collection of the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto



BARBY IN THE DRESS SHE MADE HERSELF, 1986
on panel, 90.8 x 60.3 cm
Private collection