

THE UNB ART CENTRE

by Lise Elsliger

Leo Tolstoy once wrote of art: it is "a human activity consisting this, that one man, usually by means of external signs, hands to others feelings he has lived through, and that other people are infected by these feelings, and also experience them." In a world of mass production and high technology it is easy to forget the important role that art occupies—and has always occupied—in the lives of men and women. Through art human beings are ca-



Lucy Jarvis - Co-founder of Art Centre, Director 1941-60

pable of expressing their creative talents and of sharing a deeper part of themselves with others. Hence, one can begin to appreciate the importance of the role played by an Art Centre, namely the UNB Art Centre, which celebrates this year its 50th anniversary.

It all began in the summer of 1940 when Pegi Nicol Macleod was on a visit to Fredericton with her daughter. Together with Lucy Jarvis and the President's wife, Margaret Mackenzie, the idea of creating an Art Centre in Fredericton was conceived with the Conservatory—a small white structure situated between the Old Arts Building and Memorial Hall—as the prime location.



Hence, it is in this small building that the first activities organized by the Art Centre were held: classes, literary readings, exhibitions, plays, puppet shows, record concerts and chamber music events. When the program outgrew the observatory's space capacity it was forced to relocate. First, it expanded to the Engineering Drafting Room, then in 1946, along with all University Freshmen Classes, the centre was transferred to a converted army base, the huts at Alexander College (which is the present site of the exhibition grounds), again it moved to the huts in front of the present chemistry building. Finally, in 1962, the centre was moved to its present location in Memorial Hall which was originally intended to be a temporary location, until an

Art Centre would be built on campus. Though Saint-John and Sackville had previously been the centres of art in New Brunswick, the Observatory Art Centre was to become the first university art centre in the Atlantic Provinces. The Observatory itself was one of the first in North-America and its telescope was, for a certain period of time, the largest. From the moment the centre was created, Pegi Nicol Macleod and Lucy Jarvis were to devote much of their time and creative talent to the development of its art programme. Both of these women were full-time painters and had started off together as teachers. Pegi Nicol held her first art class the first week of January 1941 and until her death in 1949, she travelled back and forth from New York to Fredericton each summer to teach classes. Since she knew many people across Canada she was able to establish the proper contacts to bring art work to the UNB campus. "These were days", Director Marjorie Donaldson recalls, "when Pegi could send a letter to the National Gallery, informing them about our new exhibition centre and could expect to be sent a few works". The National Gallery was not what it is today and there were less preoccupations at the time with the necessity of keeping art works in rooms with little humidity and proper heating.

Lucy Jarvis ran the centre and taught children art, and in the winter, taught adult classes. Neither of these women received, at first, any form of salary other than the class fees and it is not until 1946 that Lucy began working on salary. After Pegi's death, there followed a succession of temporary teachers, the first of which was one of her friends, Montreal artist Fritz Brandtner, followed by Alfred Pinsky who was later to become Head of the Fine Arts Department at Concordia University. After 1952, the responsibility for the art classes fell under the jurisdiction of the UNB Department of Education. UNB was one of the first universities to have resident

artist programs, assisted by funds by the Governor General Council. The first of these resident artists were painters Goodridge Roberts (1959-60), Bruno Bobak (1960-61) and Donald Reichert (1961-62). They were not responsible for teaching regular classes. The artists were given studio space and were available for advice. They also gave workshops, public lectures and held an end-of-year exhibition at the new Beaverbrook Gallery. The University of New Brunswick does not have to this day credit courses in fine arts other than courses in Art History given by the History Department and in Art Education given by the Faculty of Education. Non-credit evening classes—such as the painting classes given this term—are available for interested artists.

In 1962, one of the previously mentioned resident artists, Bruno Bobak, became director of the Art Centre. He was assisted in his work during the 1960's by four artists: John Corey, Brigid Toole, present director Marjorie Donaldson and John Shaw. Bobak would be the director of the centre until 1986, after which he continued to work as an artist on campus until 1989. His works were shown in various exhibitions, namely those under the headings of *Bruno Bobak: Selected Works 1943-1980* held at Concordia University and *Bruno Bobak: the Classic Years*, which went to Poland in 1988 and is still touring. In 1985, he was awarded an honorary LLD by St Thomas University and a DLIT from UNB after he retired in 1986.



"Fredericton" by Don Reichert, 3rd Resident Painter at the Art Centre

The present director, Marjorie Donaldson, is no stranger to the development of the Art Centre. Though she had originally enrolled in chemistry at Mount Allison University, her first love was always painting and she transferred into the fine arts program in her second year. At the age of fourteen, she had helped Pegi Nicol paint a mural for the Carleton County Vocational School in Woodstock. She worked at the centre during the summer of 1945 then for a year in 54-55. She then be-

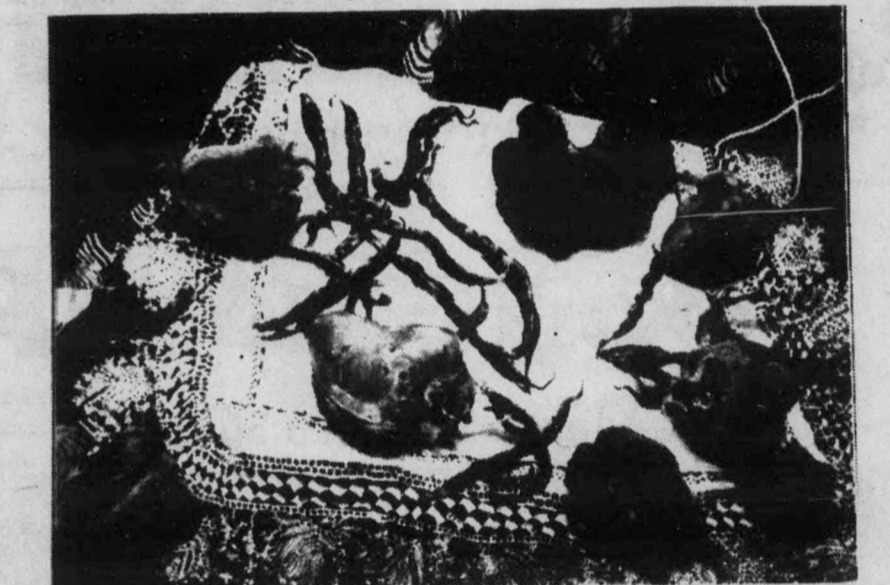
gan working part time at the centre until 1971 when she became full time curator. Donaldson was awarded an honorary LLD by St Thomas University in 1985 and took over the position of director in 1986 when Bobak retired. She will be retiring this year and after a period of rest she will be devoting her time to her painting.

The Centre has in its possession a large collection of around 1200 paintings, primarily from N.B. artists, which are presently on loan all around campus. Roughly half of these acquisitions were donations, and the other half from artists and collectors. In the last years, fine arts have become the major concern of the centre. A variety of art exhibitions are held each year, usually changing once a month.

The Centre also holds annually a New Talent Exhibition (presently under way) which displays UNB and St-Thomas University student talent. The exhibit is organized in conjunction with the Creative Arts Committee and awards prizes to the best works in the fields of visual arts, poetry, short fiction, and music composition. Submissions will be on display at the centre from March 10th to the 17th and the results of the judging will be announced at a reception held at the centre on Sunday March 18 from 2 to 4 which the gen-



eral public is more than welcome to attend. Presently on display at the Centre: Norman Ryall



"Place" by Anne Hale, former UNB History student

Native of Vancouver, Ryall has spent most of his life living in St-Andrews, N.B. His works are photo-realistic paintings and drawings of birds, a la Robert Bateman. The term photo-

realistic is commonly used to describe works which represent reality in the way a photograph might. The completion of such works require of the artist a concordance between the hands and the eye—a certain harmony of artistic expression—that is not easily at-

tainable. From a fist-size bluebird to a two feet tall owl gawking at the observer through golden eyes, from a falcon standing majestically perched on a rock, to a bald eagle, open beaked and shrieking Ryall is capable of captivating the realistic quality of wildlife while maintaining a quality to his work that is quite his own.