

ARTS

Abandonment allows real expression

by Daniel Judd

Scorned as an individual, eccentric and rebel during her time, Canada's own Emily Carr has become one of this country's most beloved artists, writers and storytellers.

Part of the vast story that makes up the life of this prophetic yet enigmatic individual was shared this past week during the first of a series of seminars put on by the Graduate Program in Interdisciplinary Studies at York.

Pat Robertson, a graduate of the Women's Studies Department, spoke about the prolific career of Carr, as part of her own research into the larger subject of Women Artists in Canada.

Often overlooked and understudied, Carr was an illustration of the vast contributions that women have made to the artistic scene in Canada.

Both the art and writings of Carr "represent the experience of many Canadians, especially women," Robertson said. "Both her art and writing point to each other, and help to explain each other in a way that makes the body of her life and work far more accessible."

Growing out of what was the Victorian tradition on the West Coast of Canada, Carr was an individual.

Rejecting the accepted notion of motherhood and the traditional role of the woman within that constricting society, she became, according to Robertson, a kind of "emancipated anachronism."

“ Abstracts that peeled down reality through words and paint...central to her art ”

Striking out on her own, she pursued the study of art at school in California.

It was not until she was introduced to landscape painting that she discovered a way to translate her own desires, hopes and fears onto the canvas.

This provided Carr with "new challenges that have proven to be the focus of the later body of her art," Robertson said.

Carr spent much of her life in hardship until she was finally discovered in the 1930s.

During a period she spent in England, Carr was committed to an infirmary, having been diagnosed as subject to hysteria. There, she was being force fed, shocked and given massage therapy.

This frightening episode left a strong impression upon her and was manifested in her later book 'Klee Wyck', an Indian word meaning 'laughing one.'

Described as a "fat, fast and vulgar woman" Robertson said, it was her own abandonment of convention that allowed her to "interpret and express the greater reality of her experience."

It was not until 1927 however,

when Carr met with members of the famous Canadian 'Group of Seven' that she discovered the true source and means to express her own vision of the world around her.

Through extensive communications with the group's unofficial leader (Lawrence Harris), Carr found not only a formal, but spiritual source of inspiration.

Her meeting with the Group of Seven brought about a "tremendous emotional experience" Robertson said, via the power of the Group's "awesome language." It was this experience she said that "fulfilled her search for God."

With only the company of her many pets, Carr became intimately attached with not only the nature of the West Coast, but its' people.

Carr's "relationship with the native people of British Columbia was extremely critical to her work", Robertson said.

Her career became subject to a kind of creative explosion which saw her produce at times up to 50 pieces a day.

It was not until later, when she became too ill to venture out into the B.C. wilds, that she turned to writing.

She shared the same desire for clarity in this pursuit as she did for her painting.

The rules that governed the way she constructed her autobiographical sketches were, according to Robertson, simple.

"To get to the point, and never to use a big word where a small one would do."

A prolific notetaker, Carr described her own journals which later came to make up much of her writing, as "pages to jot me down on."

Consequently, much of her work, both writing and painting, bears witness to the course of her life and that of the people and things around her.

Though Carr stated that she "loved abstracts" with respect to

much of the art that was taking place around her during her life, she was concerned that they appealed to the essence of things.

Abstracts that peeled down reality through words and paint, to reveal a truth sometimes hidden was central to her art.

Without this spiritualism, art simply became meaningless for her.

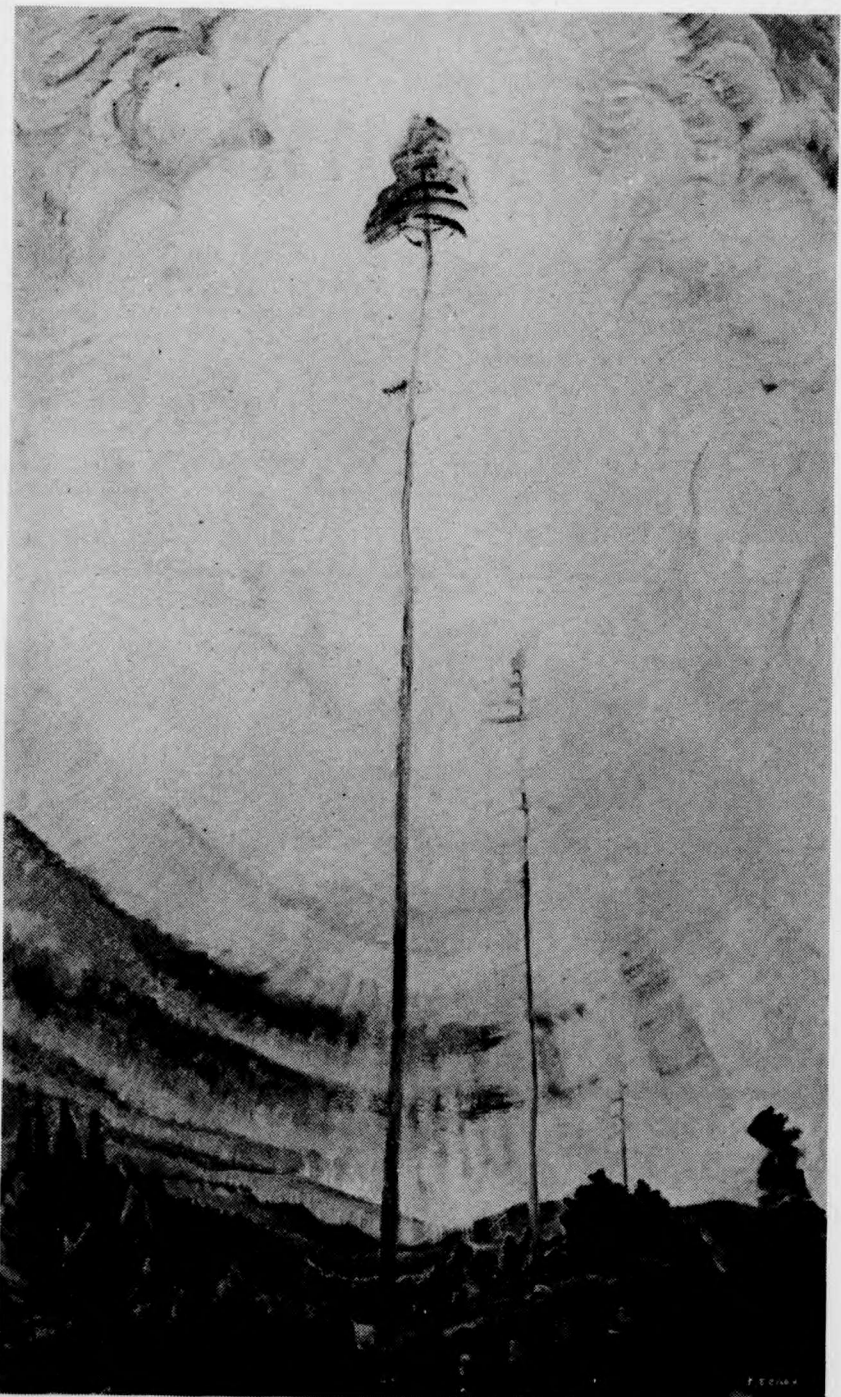
It may be this sense of attachment and spiritualism, felt both for the landscape and our relation to it, that identifies Carr.

If Carr is, as Robertson closed by stating, "the voice of Canada", then one should need only to look to her work to find the source of her inspiration.

Lectures by the Graduate Program in Interdisciplinary Studies are slated to continue on a regular basis, and will include a wide ranging variety of topics.

The next presentation will be on January 17th, and will feature a discussion of Surrealist Feminist Film by M.A. student Susan Lord.

It will be held in the Senior Common Room, Founder's College.



Scorned as Thunder, Beloved of the Sky, 1936, shows Emily Carr's belief of space as symbolic of spiritual energies.

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