

ART AND MYRA DAVIES

by Ted Goodden

My first assignment for the Gateway and the first interview of my reporting career: find Myra Davies, director of the SUB Art Gallery and find out what's happening.

I'm not so nervous that I forget my Boy Scout training; I arrive prepared with tape recorder, note pad, brochures, pen (pencil in reserve), cigarette behind my ear. I place the tape recorder between us on her office desk with great panache. Immediately it intimidates us both and sits there like a portable barrier to communication for the length of the entire interview. I never quite manage to turn it on though I gesture significantly towards it from time to time. Until this moment I'd never grasped the meaning of a tape recorder. It just sits there cold and lumpen, vaguely clinical, distinctly menacing. I feel like I'm on my first date and have taken along a contraceptive in my hip pocket: it's smart to come prepared but impossible to introduce this thing gracefully into the conversation.

So I scribble in my note pad and Myra doodles on hers; simple doodlings with a recurring motif of circles graduating into spirals. And later, when it comes to reconstructing the interview, I'm

left with a few pages of disconnected phrases, two handouts on the objectives and operations of the Art Gallery and the feeling that it wasn't such a bad interview after all.

True, the transitions from one thought to another are a little shaky but on a higher more doodley plane, they hang together as nicely as circles in a lazy spiral to nowhere in particular.

Myra Davies in Conversation:

On the function of the SUB Art Gallery:

"Art is a product of its environment. To understand art is to better understand your own culture and the world around you."

"Our function is to initiate interest in art, in culture, but we try not to be too academic in our approach for the reason that, at this gallery, we're not dealing mainly with art connoisseurs."

SUB Art Gallery goes are, on the average, composed of a two-thirds majority of university students. The remaining third is evenly divided between faculty and the general public. Last year's total attendance was 59,000. An open book in the gallery draws comments from visitors which the gallery staff combine with periodic questionnaires to gather enough feedback to enable them

to assess public response to their showings.

For the most part, Myra Davies finds a wide divergence of opinions, preferences and suggestions for future displays among the student body. Her own preference is in line with her public policy of furthering interest in contemporary Canadian art, and in this respect she feels that the Alberta Artist's Series is one of the most useful and gratifying programs initiated by the SUB Gallery. Begun in 1968, this program involves four showings a year illustrative of significant developments of art within Alberta. The provincial government has been increasingly generous in lending financial support to this program, which in turn has been of benefit to local artists and the public at large.

On Contemporary trends in art:

In *Future Shock*, Toffler suggests that an underlying motive for the rise of disposable or throw-away art may be an attempt at homeopathic magic on the part of modern artists who, behaving like primitives, try to control the disturbing transience of our society by incorporating that very quality into their art objects. I trotted out this borrowed idea for a reaction from Mrs. Davies. Poetic justice must be at work for she parried with a borrowed slogan from Marshall McLuhan:

"One popular definition of art is, anything you can get away with." She added that "novelty" art may excite an immediate visual interest in the viewer but usually leaves him unsatisfied at a deeper level.

"Happily, the viewer can always move on to another piece of art; but I sometimes wonder, what does the artist move on to?" She made a distinction between the artist who uses novelty art to make a satirical statement on his society and the artist who lacks this detachment but simply "gets on the bandwagon and goes along for the ride."

"I've seen some really good stuff that goes flash and clunk. I've also seen some where the artist appears to be taking himself seriously."

The SUB Art Gallery is planning an incredibly ambitious season this year that will include poetry readings by most of Canada's best poets. More on that and other programs in coming issues of the Gateway.*As for the schedule, you can see it and maybe even get your own copy from the front desk of the gallery. To further enhance your understanding and appreciation of the schedule, the Gateway now offers these Footnotes to the Exhibition Schedule:

1. The exhibition entitled *Da Vinci: Engineer* (October 4 to 29), I'm told consists of a roomful

of operating models of Da Vinci's visionary and playful blueprints, constructed especially for public tours by IBM who make a lot of clever machines in their own right. (Governments included? — your friendly arts editor)

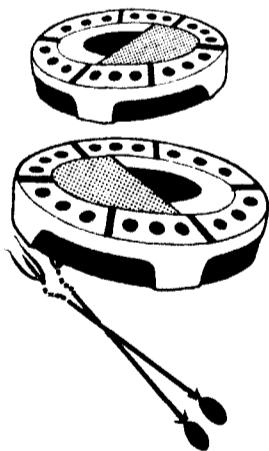
2. Edifying quote from handout entitled *Operation of the Students' Union Art Gallery*: "The Students' Union has recognized the need for an arts centre and has undertaken responsible support. The SUB Gallery is the only recognized professional gallery that we know of that is financed and controlled by students. For this reason, it has been free of the conservative elements of boards and administrators, which are so characteristic of most public galleries in Canada and elsewhere."

3. The handout referred to above makes good reading and maybe Myra Davies would give you one if you asked her. Her office is in the SUB Gallery

* The feature on the poets coming to the university referred to in the above article is, do to some miraculous lay-out work and deadline juggling, available for your reading edification in this issue of Gateway. For the complete story as told by the incomparable Sid Stephen, turn to pages 6 and 7. — Your Friendly Arts Editor.

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Outstanding actors in the city have volunteered their time and talent to portraying their roles.

Writer - John Patrick Gillese - Creative Writing Supervisor, Cultural Development Branch

Director - Alice Polley - Assistant Drama Supervisor, Cultural Development Branch

Choreographer - Wallace Seibert, Professor of Drama, University of Alberta

Set Designer - Dr. Larry Kadlac, Professor of Drama, University of Alberta

Costume Designer - David Lovett, Professor of Drama, University of Alberta

Music - Jack McCreath, Drama Supervisor, Cultural Development Branch

LeRoy Shulz as Narrator
Walter Kaasa as John McDougall
Jack McCreath as George McDougall
Ivor Roberts as Chief Maskepetoon

Others included in the cast of sixty - Gloria Perkes, Drew Borland, Ken Argrell-Smith, Enid Botchett, and Bud d'Amur.