

Thursday 18 April 2002
AWA Woman of the Year AWArD
Bente Roed

Thank you for that generous introduction.

As you know, I have THE best job on campus, and now I also have the gift of being named AWA Woman of the Year along with Diane Wilson Cox; to be included in the circle of AWA AWArD recipients is a humbling experience. My deepest thanks.

The first quarter of 2002 was difficult for me in terms of my personal and family life, so this honour is doubly treasured.

I wish to thank my generous nominators and the selection committee for choosing me. I also wish to recognize my fantastic – past and current - colleagues Laura Connell, Grace Wiebe, and Marg Wilson: they make my UTS work joyous.

I have had marvelous supervisors and mentors who have guided me and nurtured my change and growth, among them are Mary Hamilton, Alan Meech, Amy Zelmer, Dianne Kieren, Doris Badir, Lynn Penrod, and Anne Marie Decore – I have been fortunate, indeed.

I treasure seeing so many friends and colleagues here this evening from different parts of the University; my two sons and Brenda; friends from the dinner group that we began in 1987; the book club, which Marise Parent initiated in 1997; and friends who are non-labeled, but are simply friends.

I was asked to “orient this talk toward the subject of women role models...” Some of you know that in my non-UTS life, I am an art historian and art writer. So I decided that from that life I could share some women and their images with you.

Making a selection for tonight was difficult. I began by making many long lists, crossed out names, and reordered, then more ruthless elimination, since we don't have 18 hours together.

I finally narrowed it down to a select few 20th century women artists whose art and/or life have nurtured me. The images also disclose my eclectic taste! (Slides incorporated in talk, but not here).

Mary Pratt (b. 1935)

Her depiction of everyday objects, which she imbues with sensuous qualities, has made me appreciate the familiar and savor the beauty of ordinary things in life.

She has made me relate to aluminum foil in a new way, well beyond its mundane use.

Emily Carr (1871-1945)

Another Canadian, and an eccentric one who, in isolation developed a strong spiritual style. Here is a mid-1930s self-portrait.

She sensitively re-interprets native Indian artistic remains and her BC forests. Her images are haunting and filled with pulsating and dynamic energy.

Kathe Kollwitz (1867-1945)

Here is her self-portrait, like Carr's from the mid-1930s, they are contemporaries, but that's where the similarities end.

Kollwitz was a socialist, feminist, and pacifist German artist, married to a family doctor and losing her son and a grandson to World War I and II, respectively.

Her bold, powerful and emotional images examine humanity's search for comfort and peace during or in spite of poverty, disease, terror, and death. This last image dated 1902 is entitled *Revolt*.

Frida Kahlo (1910-54)

A feisty Mexican artist who uses her paintings to explore and dramatize her personal physical disability and our shared womanhood in bold, graphic, and often disturbing images. She often includes herself in her paintings.

Kahlo partly displays her country's artistic tradition, partly the modern international style in her art. She is one of the few artists to depict the act of childbirth as seen in the small work, *My Birth*, 1932 where she used oil on sheet metal, 12 ½" x 14".

Selected Inuit Women Artists

I selected images by Kenujuak, Oonark, and Pitseolak to illustrate the accomplishments of Inuit women artists. I admire these artists who in mid-20th century adapted materials and techniques that were not originally part of their culture and created exciting works.

Their art exhibits traditional story telling components through simplified images. Their unique use of space with the placement and depth relationships invites us to reexamine traditional composition patterns.

Georgia O'Keeffe (1887-1986)

This is how she looked in 1960, 73 years old! In a 1923 catalogue introduction she explained

... one day seven years ago I found myself saying to myself – I can't live where I want to – I can't go where I want to go – I can't do what I want to – I can't even say what I want

to -. *School and things that painters have taught me even keep me from painting as I want to.*

I decided I was a very stupid fool not to at least paint as I wanted to and say what I wanted to when I painted as that seemed to be the only things I could do that didn't concern anybody but myself... I found that I could say things with color and shapes that I couldn't say in any other way – things I had no words for.

She selects natural objects, such as the land, clamshells, flowers, painted on a large-scale 2 ½' x 3', and bones for her sensual and abstracted images. Bold, direct imagery that engages our intellectual and sensory perceptions. What a woman, what an artist!

Lyndal Osborne (b. 1940)

My last selection is Lyndal Osborne from our University. She exemplifies how artists are actively engaged in searching and growing, so the next-image or sculpture-to-be will be better than the one just completed.

Osborne depends on nature and found objects for her 2- and 3-dimensional works, primarily prints and installation pieces.

She may manipulate the object's shape, size, or colour. She may display the object in isolation or mass them. Like many other women she likes to order, arrange, and visually present the objects as seen in *Nature of Matter*, 1996, *Tableaux for Transformation*, 1998, and *Tracing Tides*, 2001.

What do I admire in these artists?

- I admire their creativity, curiosity, and search for understanding
- I admire them for being trail blazers
- I admire their determination to pursue their art, often under difficult and non-supportive conditions
- I admire works that create new styles or exhibit different visual interpretations of the known, whether humanity or nature
- I admire the imagination, analytical skills, and insights the artist unveils for me, the viewer
- I admire how they celebrate life through their art, and
- I admire artists' courage to reveal their inner selves to us, the audience.

Ezra Pound said: *The artist is the antenna of society.* I agree.

I have learned from these – and other - artists; they have given me new insights, have made me think and reflect, have stimulated me, and have made me appreciate the imagination, beauty, and energy that human beings are capable of creating and sharing. What riches they have given us!

I will conclude with this happy Inuit image, entitled *Joyfully I See Ten Caribou*. This is how I felt when you presented me with the AWA Award of Woman of the Year. Many thanks for the recognition.