

FINAL PROOF: 1988 EDITION, CANADIAN WHO'S WHO

SMITH, Gordon A., R.C.A., LL.D.; artist; b. Hove, Eng. June 1919; s. William George and Daisy (Appelbe) S.; ca to Canada, 1933; e. Harrow County Sch., Eng.; Vancouver Sch. of Art (Grad.); California Sch. of Fine Arts; Harv Univ.; LL.D. Simon Fraser 1973; m. Marion Katherine, d. Blair Fleming, White Rock, B.C., 15 Sept. 1941; PROFESSOR EMERITUS, FINE ARTS, UNIV. OF BRITISH COLUMBIA 1982- ; Council mem., R.C.A.; Past Pres., Canadian Group of Painters; rec'd. 1st Biennial Award, Nat. Gallery of Can.; Baxter Award, Ont. Soc. Artists; Centennial Medal, 1967; Queen's Medal, 1977; Allied Arts Medal, Roy. Arch. Inst. Can. 1978; executed murals, Vancouver Civic Theatre; currently working on mural for the new Canadian Embassy, Washington, D.C.; paintings rep. in Nat. Gallery Can.; Toronto Art Gallery, London Art Museum, Queen's Univ., Hart House, Univ. of Toronto, Univ. of B.C., Vancouver and Victoria Art Galleries, etc.; rec'd. Arts Fellowship from Can. Council, 1960; paintings exhibited in Sao Paulo, Brazil 1961; Warsaw, Poland 1962; Candn. Biennial 1963; World's Fair, Seattle, 1963; (one man show), Agnes Lefort, Montreal, 1963; New Design Gallery, Vancouver, 1964; collab. with Arthur Erickson Osaka Worlds Fair 1970; solo exhns.: Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver 1974-75; Mira Godard Gallery, Toronto 1980, 1982, 1983, 1984, 1985; Bauxi

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FIRST PROOF: 1989 EDITION, CANADIAN WHO'S WHO cont.

Gallery, Vancouver 1981, 1983, 1984, 1986; Robertson
Gallery, Ottawa 1986; Vancouver Art Gallery 1987, (46 new
works) 1987-88; group exhn.: The Vancouver Art Gallery
1983; designed Expo 86 poster, Vancouver; Art Advis. Comm.,
The Nat'l Capital Comm., Ottawa 1977-79; Chrmn., Jury for
Sculpture Competition, R.C.A.F. Memorial "Place of
Tribute", Ottawa 1983; rep. Can., Graphic Arts Portfolio,
Prix Nobel, Sweden 1978; rep. Candn. Sec. Biennials in
Yugoslavia, Germany, Spain, France, Norway; works acquired
by Museum of Modern Art, N.Y.; Victoria & Albert Museum,
London, Eng.; served Overseas with P.P.C.L.I., Intelligence
Offr.; wounded Sicily, 1943; Bd. mem., Vancouver Art
Gallery 1985; Counc. Ctte. on the Arts, Vancouver City Hall
1985-86; Anglican; Home: 5030 The ByWay, West Vancouver,
B.C. V7W 1L7.

Approved by *Gordon Almut* Date *SEPT 20* ¹⁹⁸⁸ [89A]

OCT. 1988 - COMPLETED 19' MURAL
FOR NEW CANADIAN CHANCERY, WASHINGTON D.C.

BIOGRAPHY:

- 1919 Born in Hove, Sussex, England
- 1934 Moved to Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada
- 1937 Enrolled Winnipeg School of Art under Lionel Lemoine Fitzgerald
First teaching experience — children's Saturday morning art classes at
Winnipeg Art Gallery
- Started working part-time at Brigdens of Winnipeg
- 1939 Attended Golden Gate Exposition, San Francisco, Calif.
First exposure to major 19th & early 20th century paintings
- 1940 Enlisted Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry —
intelligence officer
- 1944 Wounded in Sicily — returned to Vancouver
- 1945 Enrolled Vancouver School of Art
- 1946 Joined staff of Vancouver School of Art, teaching graphics & design
- 1950 California School of Fine Arts, San Francisco
- 1956 Joined staff of Faculty of Education, University of British Columbia,
Vancouver, B.C.
- 1957 Studied art history, Harvard University, Boston, Massachusetts

AWARDS & COMMISSIONS:

- 1955 First Prize, Biennial of Canadian Art
- 1960 Canada Council Senior Fellowship
- 1961 Baxter Award, Toronto
Prize, Group Exhibition, London, Ontario
Prizes in Vancouver Annuals
Prizes in Victoria Annuals
- 1966 2nd Prize, Winnipeg Biennial
- 1967 Commission, Children's Playground in collaboration with
Cornelia Oberlander
- 1968 First Prize, Canadian Group, Montreal
Prize, 3rd Santiago Biennial Exhibition of Modern Engraving,
Santiago, Chile
- 1970 Canadian Pavillion Commission — Kinetic Umbrellas — in
collaboration with Arthur Erickson, Expo '70, Osaka, Japan
- 1973 L.L.D., Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, B.C.
- 1976 Commissioned to contribute to "Hommage au Prix Nobel" — a suite
of graphics commissioned by the Nobel Prize Committee for
presentation to the Nobel laureates
- 1983 Professor Emeritus, University of B.C., Vancouver, B.C.
- 1988 Canadian Embassy, Washington, D.C., mural commission

MURALS:

- Queen Elizabeth Theatre, Vancouver, B.C.
- Vancouver Law Library, Vancouver, B.C.
- University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario
- Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, B.C.
- Canadian Trade Pavillion, Tokyo, Japan
- Canadian Pavillion, World's Fair 1970, Osaka, Japan
- Canadian Embassy, Washington, D.C., 1988

COLLECTIONS:

- Allbright-Knox Members' Gallery, Buffalo, N.Y., U.S.A.
- Allbright-Knox Purchase for Marine Midland Bank Building, Buffalo,
N.Y., U.S.A.
- Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, Ontario, Canada
- Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, Victoria, B.C., Canada
- Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, England
- Atlantic Richfield Collection, New York, N.Y., U.S.A.
- Bank of New York, New York, N.Y., U.S.A.
- Bay Forest Products Collection, Vancouver, B.C., Canada
- Birmingham Art Gallery, Birmingham, England
- British Columbia Central Credit Union Collection, Vancouver, B.C., Canada
- British Columbia Development Corporation, Victoria, B.C., Canada
- British Columbia Provincial Government Art Collection, Victoria, B.C., Canada
- British Columbia Teachers' Federation, Vancouver, B.C., Canada
- Canada Council Art Bank, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada
- Carnegie Foundation Collection, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, U.S.A.
- Chase Manhattan Bank Collection, New York, N.Y., U.S.A.
- Coopers & Lybrand Collection, Vancouver, B.C., Canada
- Confederation Art Gallery, Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, Canada
- Cummins Engine Company Collection, Columbus, Ohio, U.S.A.
- Department of External Affairs, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada
- First National City Bank Collection, New York, N.Y., U.S.A.
- Gulf & Western, New York, N.Y., U.S.A.
- Hart House, University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario, Canada
- Institute of Charter Accountants
- J.R. Longstaffe Collection, Vancouver, B.C., Canada
- Kunstgewerbemuseum, Zurich, Switzerland
- London Public Library & Art Museum, London, Ontario, Canada
- Markle Foundation Collection, New York, N.Y., U.S.A.
- Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal, Quebec, Canada
- Museum of Modern Art, New York, N.Y., U.S.A.
- National Collection, Smithsonian Institute, Washington, D.C., U.S.A.
- National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada
- National Museum of Wales, Cardiff, S. Wales, Great Britain
- Quaker Oats Collection, Chicago, Illinois, U.S.A.
- Royal Bank of Canada Collection, Vancouver, B.C., Canada
- Saskatoon Gallery & Conservatory Corporation (Mendel Art Gallery),
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada
- South London Art Gallery, London, England
- Toronto Dominion Bank Collection, Toronto, Ontario, Canada
- University of Lethbridge Collection, Lethbridge, Alberta
- Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver, B.C., Canada
- Victoria & Albert Museum, London, England
- Winnipeg Art Gallery, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada

Gordon Smith has exhibited with the Bau-Xi Gallery since 1973.
He is represented by the Bau-Xi Gallery in Vancouver and Toronto.



NORTH VANCOUVER SCHOOL DISTRICT

School District No. 44 (North Vancouver)
Division of Student Program Services
Leo Marshall Curriculum Centre

PRESS RELEASE JANUARY 22, 1991

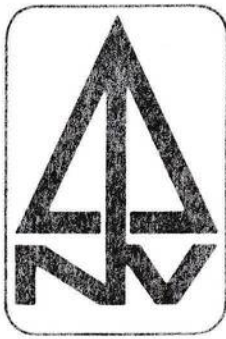
The North Vancouver School District is pleased to announce that well known west coast artist Gordon Smith has donated an edition of 75 silkscreen prints titled "Sea Edge after Goya" to the districts "Artists for Kids" Trust. Gordon Smith joins Bill Reid as the second major patron to support the Trust. The proceeds from the sale of the Gordon Smith prints will be used by the "Artists for Kids" Trust to provide Fine Arts enrichment programs for elementary and secondary students in the school district.

In recognition of the outstanding contribution made by Gordon Smith to Fine Arts education in School District 44, the Board of School Trustees, together with the "Artists for Kids" Trust is establishing the Gordon Smith Visual Art Scholarship.

Gordon Smith, who is one of British Columbia's best known teacher/artists, is being honoured with this scholarship as one of the two founding contributors to the "Artists for Kids" Trust.

North Vancouver graduating students who excell in Visual Art will be able to apply for this scholarship annually.

For further information about the "Artists for Kids" Trust, contact Bill MacDonald, Visual Art Consultant, North Vancouver School District. 987-6667



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Fax 987-8967

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**GORDON
SMITH'S**

1990 Serigraph

"SEA EDGE - AFTER GOYA"

22"x30" Edition of 75

\$350.00 + Taxes

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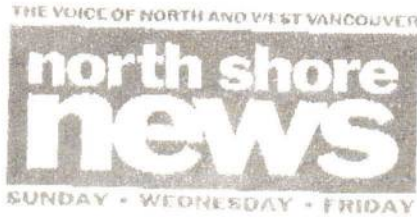
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CONTACT BILL MACDONALD 987-6667
for further information



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GOVERNOR GENERAL'S AWARDS

B.C. artist a gracious winner

Gordon Smith honoured for Visual and Media Arts

BY KEVIN GRIFFIN
VANCOUVER SUN

In the ballroom of Rideau Hall in Ottawa today, her Excellency the Right Honourable Michaëlle Jean will present B.C. artist Gordon Smith with the Governor General's Award in Visual and Media Arts.

In a phone interview Tuesday from his room at the Chateau Laurier in Ottawa, a gracious Smith thanked the Canada Council, which funds and administers the award and the Vancouver Art Gallery for their support. He also praised seven fellow recipients of the same award.

"It's wonderful," he said.
"I can't believe it. All these great guys are so good. I'm still hanging in there. I'm painting every day."

This June, Smith celebrates his 90th birthday.

Works by Smith dating from 1950 to this year are now part of an exhibition at the Vancouver Art Gallery called Western Landscapes.

Smith said he'll be back on the West Coast on Saturday for the official opening of the new West Vancouver Community Centre, which includes a mural installation he made from driftwood called Tangled Beach.

Two years ago, he was awarded B.C.'s Audain Prize for Lifetime Achievement in recognition of his accomplishments in a career spanning more than 60 years as a painter, sculptor and printmaker. His works are in collections that include the National Gallery, the Museum of Modern Art in New York and the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. In 1996, he was awarded the Order of Canada.

Also named as a recipient of the Governor General's Award in Visual and Media Arts was architect Raymond



Rogers Pass No.5 by Gordon Smith

Moriyama, whose first building was a tree house he designed when he was interned in B.C. with his family and other Japanese-Canadians during the Second World War.

Since then, Moriyama's unique architectural vision has resulted in numerous buildings that complement their surroundings, such as the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa, the Canadian embassy in Tokyo and the National Museum of Saudi Arabia.

Smith and Moriyama were two of eight people named Tuesday as winners of the \$25,000 Governor General's Awards in Visual and Media Arts.

The other artists were Toronto's Nobuo Kubota, a multidisciplinary artist known for his Zen-like scul-

tures; John Greer, a Halifax sculptor; Rita McKeough, a Calgary performance and installation artist; and Robert Morin, a Montreal filmmaker.

Two of the award recipients were honoured for their arts advocacy: Kim Ondaatje and Tony Urquhart, both veteran Ontario artists who were instrumental in establishing Canadian Artists Representation in the 1960s.

A ninth person, glass artist Kevin Lockau of Bancroft, Ont., will receive the Saidye Bronfman Award for fine craft.

An exhibition of examples of the work of the award recipients opens Friday at the National Gallery.

kevingriffin@vancouversun.com

CASTING

Twilight sequel finds

AWARDS

Junos go digital for judging

BY DERRICK PENNER
VANCOUVER SUN

\$20,000 on the courier bill to ship packages of CDs to its 300 judges. She



"Painting should be a re-creation of an experience rather than an illustration of an experience."

— Gordon Smith in
Gordon Smith: The Act of Painting

Moments after we arrive at the front door, Gordon Smith invites us in and says: "I'm 88. I'm getting old but I'm still painting, getting a lot of work done."

With that, he gestures to the floor inside the house to a bronze sculpture. He gives it a push and it spins around.

"I just finished this bronze — it looks like the *Willdendorf Venus*," he says, referring to the famous statuette of an Earth Mother believed to be about 25,000 years old.

Then he adds, as if making a mental note of the work he still has to do: "I have to get a new base for it."

For the next half hour, Smith doesn't stop moving or talking. He's full of projects on the go and ideas for new works.

Smith isn't just active, he's youthful and vital in way that you don't find even in people 50 years younger.

I'm in Smith's West Vancouver home to talk to him about being awarded the Audain Prize in Lifetime Achievement.

He's receiving the award in recognition of a career spanning more than 60 years as a painter, sculptor and printmaker. As one of the country's most accomplished artists, with an international reputation, his works are in collections that include the National Gallery, the Museum of Modern Art in New York and the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. In 1996, he was awarded the Order of Canada.

After a short tour of the house, a beautiful post-and-beam structure designed by Arthur Erickson, Smith takes me and a *Sun* photographer outside and down a flight of stairs. He opens some doors and we're in his studio, a space full of natural light filtered through frosted glass windows on the ceiling. Unlike in the house, where the clear windows blur the inside and outside and make you feel as if you're in the landscape, the feeling in the studio is all inward-looking, a place for work.

Smith has finished a painting for the Vancouver International Airport and completed a maquette of another for an office building downtown. He points to one wall at an abstract work that looks like the tracings left by randomly orbiting subatomic particles. He said the intaglio print is called *Tangle*.

"I like tangles," Smith says.

Not only does Smith surround himself with his recent works, he also keeps the past close by. On one wall is a photograph of an advertisement from an old Eaton's mail-order catalogue. It shows his first work as a graphic artist, when he was a teenager.

"My first job was airbrushing men's underwear," he said.

Born in East Brighton, England, and raised in the suburbs of London, Smith grew up in a fam-

ily where painting was encouraged. His father, William, was an amateur painter and as a youngster, Smith visited the National Gallery and the Tate, where he was interested in the atmospheric landscape paintings of J.M.W. Turner.

Because of problems at home between his parents, his mother Daisy decided to leave England with Smith and his brother in 1933. They settled in Winnipeg, where Daisy had relatives. Within five years, Smith was enrolled in the Winnipeg School of Art.

Two years later, Smith made the first of two trips to San Francisco, both of which became turning points in his career.

In 1939, he travelled by bus to the Golden Gate International Exposition, where he saw paintings by Picasso, Cezanne and Matisse, as well as by the Group of Seven and Emily Carr.

For the first time, Ian Thom wrote in *Gordon Smith: The Act of Painting*, he realized there was a bigger world of art:

"The range of possibilities for art was much greater than he had perceived, and he began to realize how small the Winnipeg artistic milieu was," Thom wrote.

With the outbreak of war in Europe, Smith joined the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry.

But before joining the regiment, Smith came out to Vancouver on holiday, where he met Marion Fleming. They married in 1941.

During Smith's war years, he initially worked as an intelligence officer. From photographs of beaches that were going to be used as landing sites for troops, Smith made topographic drawings for the platoon commanders. By 1943, he was sent to join in the invasion of Sicily, where he was seriously injured. His right leg was badly shattered, an injury that continues to bother him to this day.

Returning to Canada in January 1944, he headed west to Vancouver and worked in the advertising department at *The Vancouver Sun*, where he was introduced to screenprinting. That same year, he had his first show at the Vancouver Art Gallery.

After the Second World War, Ottawa provided education funds for veterans and Smith decided to use his to study teaching. At night, he attend the Vancouver School of Art, where he met artists and teachers such as Jack Shadbolt and B.C. Binning, who influenced not only Smith but also many other West Coast painters.

In 1951, he made his second trip to San Francisco to study painting at the California Institute of Fine Art. In class one day, the instructor told students to put their canvases on the floor and start playing around with paint.

"It was the best damn thing that happened, it was a real shock treatment," he said. "It was a wonderful experience, something that helped me loosen up my painting."

In *Gordon Smith*, Thom said that the experience fundamentally changed Smith's artistic



ther, as a lery the A.W. approach: the actual paint on canvas, rather than the subject, became his primary focus. Working without images allowed him to investigate the physical qualities of paint.

It took four years but, by 1955, Smith had absorbed all that he'd learned in San Francisco. That year, Smith painted *Structure with Red Sun*, which won the First Biennial of Canadian Painting at the National Gallery. It put Smith on the national scene in a big way.

A year later, Smith joined the new faculty of education at the University of B.C., where he taught for 26 years until retiring in 1982.

Smith has said that he feels he's done his best work since turning 70. Moving toward a freer, more spontaneous approach, Smith developed in a new direction after a visit to Shannon Falls. His paintings, according to Thom, became more abstract and improvisational; structurally, they went from being vertical to horizontal.

"... there has been a record of consistent excellence in Smith's achievement since the early fifties," Thom said. "There is little doubt that his recent work has displayed a greater freedom and vigour than at any time in the past."

Asked about receiving the Audain Award, Smith talks about everyone else but himself and his work.

"The guys giving these awards, are wonderful people: the Shadbolts, the Audains, they have really given to Canada," Smith says. Just like Smith himself.

kevingriffin@png.canwest.com



Award recipient Luanne Martineau's Lubber is hand-sewn and runs about 14 feet long.

Gordon Smith is the fourth recipient of the \$25,000 Audain Prize for Lifetime Achievement in the Visual Arts, a prize created and named after Michael Audain, chair and CEO of Polygon Homes. Audain is chair of the Vancouver Art Gallery Foundation and the Audain Foundation for the Visual Arts.

Also receiving awards are Isabelle Pauwels and Luanne Martineau of Victoria, who are recipients of the 20th Annual VIVA Awards.

Pauwels, a Belgian-born conceptual artist now living in Vancouver, works in several disciplines including sculpture and prints. She also writes screenplays and creates performances.

Martineau is a multimedia artist who blurs the boundaries between high and low art in work, which includes hand-spun and felted wood sculptures.

The Viva Awards come with a \$12,000 cash grant for each artist. The awards were created by Jack Shadbolt, one of the province's most renowned artists, and his wife Doris Shadbolt, equally accomplished as a curator and writer. Recipients of the 32 Viva awards since 1988 include Stan Douglas and Jeff Wall.

A combined awards presentation will take place Tuesday at the Rocky Mountaineer Station. Speakers at the presentation include Don Shumka, head of the B.C. Arts Council, and writer Douglas Coupland, a friend and neighbor of Gordon Smith.

Kevin Griffin

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KEVIN BAER/SPECIAL TO THE VANCOUVER SUN



"THE PAINTER WHO HAS NO DOUBTS WILL achieve little," reads a note on the wall of Gordon Smith's immaculate studio. Be that as it may, the 78-year-old Vancouver artist's labours speak for themselves.

In All Modesty...

His bold, luxuriant canvases have attracted national attention since the 1950s: he is now widely regarded as one of Canada's great modernist painters. Smith received the Order of Canada in 1996, and a 50-year retrospective of his work opens this month at the Vancouver Art Gallery. Somewhat to his embarrassment, he also finds himself feted in a new book, Ian M. Thom and Andrew Hunter's *Gordon Smith: The Act of Painting* (Douglas & McIntyre)—a lavish volume packed with colour prints and the details of a life devoted to art.

The British-born Smith settled here in 1944, rejoining his wife, Marion, after being wounded in the Allied invasion of Sicily. Studies at the Vancouver School of Art



Arthur Erickson and Ron Thom. Characterized by a constant shifting of focus between the abstract and the figurative, Smith's painting developed in parallel to his career as teacher to countless members of the city's artistic community. "It was rather isolated, but I benefitted from that," he says of Vancouver during the '40s

and '50s, at the time arguably the most exciting place in Canada to be an artist.

The Smiths have lived in their West Vancouver home since 1966, when Gordon was

in the midst of his tenure as a UBC art professor. Soft-spoken, modest and unfailingly gracious, Smith credits his teaching background for the self-criticism that compels him to enter the studio every morning. He shows no signs of slowing down: in fact, he's confident that his best work began at age 70. He and Marion travel regularly, and as of late September he was due to hit the West Coast Trail—"or some of it," he adds. Asked if anything still eludes him, Smith replies simply, "A good painting." We beg to differ. —*Nick Rockel*

PROFILE

P H O T O G R A P H E D B Y M A R I N A D O D I S

this
week

Celebrating Mr. Smith

IF Gordon Smith could inspire visitors to the 50-year retrospective of his work at the Vancouver Art Gallery to come away with one impression it is this:

It takes work to appreciate good art just as it takes work to create good art.

"It's a bit too easy these days," says Smith, one of this country's foremost contemporary painters. "People go to hockey games ... but how many will go and listen to a chamber music concert?"

"It requires work to appreciate these things — to appreciate good music, good literature but also good art."

Painting is a way of life for Smith, and for Marion, his wife of 56 years. Together they live near Whytecliff Park in an Arthur Erickson-designed home built for them in 1966. A new studio was added eight years ago. There, Smith paints daily, including Sundays and holidays.

Often he'll call Marion on the phone and ask her to cross the courtyard to give her opinion on a work in progress. She finds it a great responsibility. He acknowledges her contributions to his work in the new book by Ian Thom and Andrew Hunter, *Gordon Smith: The Act of Painting*



Layne Christensen

(Douglas & McIntyre, \$60), which is dedicated: "For Marion: Should there be anything good in the work, it is hers."

The British-born Smith moved to Winnipeg with his mother and a brother when he was 14. In 1944 he settled in Vancouver after being wounded in the Allied invasion of Sicily. Following a year of studies at the Vancouver School of Art, he began teaching there.

His mentors were B.C. Binning, Jack Shadbolt and Lawren Harris. His contemporaries:

Arthur Erickson and Ron Thom.

In 1956 he joined the Faculty of Education at the University of British Columbia, where he remained as a teacher of painting and art history for 26 years.

He did not turn to teaching merely to support his painting, he is careful to say.

"I didn't teach so that I could paint. I taught because I felt it was important."

Helping his students to acquire the skills to paint, sculpt or take photographs was not so important as "teaching kids to have creativity in their lives and also a quality of art in living."

In the 1950s Smith was part of the Art in Living Group, joining Binning and Shadbolt and other West Coast artists, architects, designers and writers who championed an esthetic of good design in everyday life.

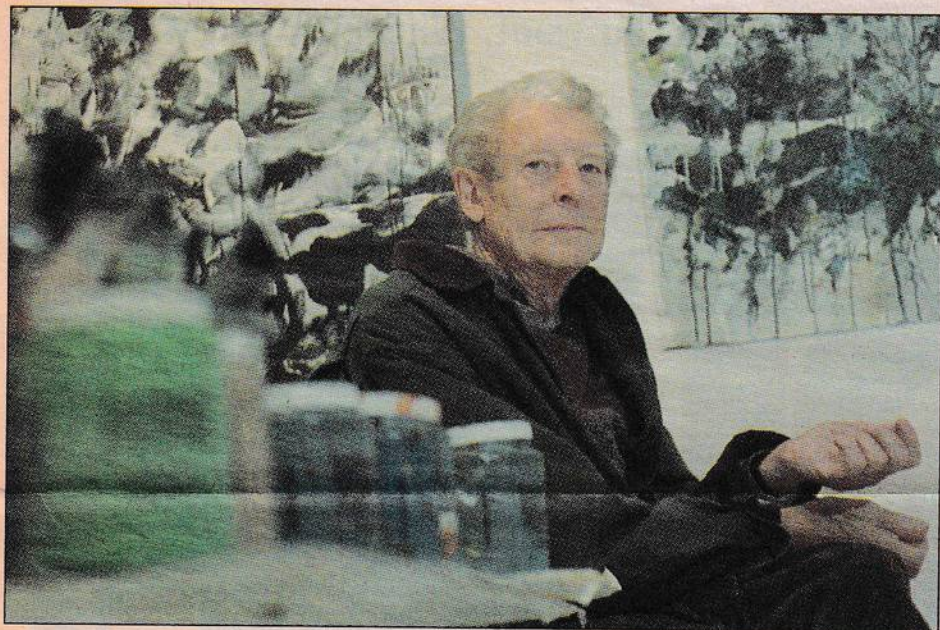
He is fond of saying that he is "a hundred artists deep," for other artists inspire him and he is candid about their influence on his work.

The search for new influences and new directions in art are a constant drive.

Whenever possible, he and Marion tour the galleries of London, Paris and New York in search of the latest artistic talents.

Says Bill MacDonald, a former student of Smith's and founder of the Artists for Kids Trust, of which Smith is a major supporter: "Gordon is enthused by people

See more page 25



NEWS photo Mike Wakefield

LONGTIME West Van resident Gordon Smith is widely recognized as one of Canada's foremost contemporary artists. A retrospective of his life's work opens Sunday at the Vancouver Art Gallery.

GET A JUMP

Doubts drive artistic efforts

From page 23

who have new ideas and who push the boundaries."

Push the boundaries is exactly what Smith wants the public to do.

Though he and Marion both agree that he's produced his best work since turning 70, Smith remains full of doubts and worries.

A note on the wall of his studio reminds him to challenge himself continually. It reads: "The painter who has no doubts will achieve little."

The commercial success of what he and Marion call the "pond paintings" — created after visit to Monet's garden in Giverny, France, and exhibited at the Equinox Gallery on South Granville last year — disappoints him in a way. It was a little too easy. The public could have been

challenged more.

Says Marion: "People love things that are familiar. They don't have to work at it as hard."

Today he takes his cues from the young artists who he says are his "new mentors" — Vancouver photo-montage artist Jeff Wall and London bad boy Damien Hirst — and from children.

"These are the real abstract expressionists, the young children. They're not contrived and they have a basic honesty," says the artist. "It took Picasso 70 years to learn to paint like a child — to have that lack of inhibition, to have honesty and not worry about trying to make it clever or contrived or pretty. I think that's what art is about."

Gordon Smith: *The Act of Painting*, a major retrospective of Gordon Smith's work opens at the Vancouver Art Gallery this Sunday, Oct. 19 and runs to Jan. 11.

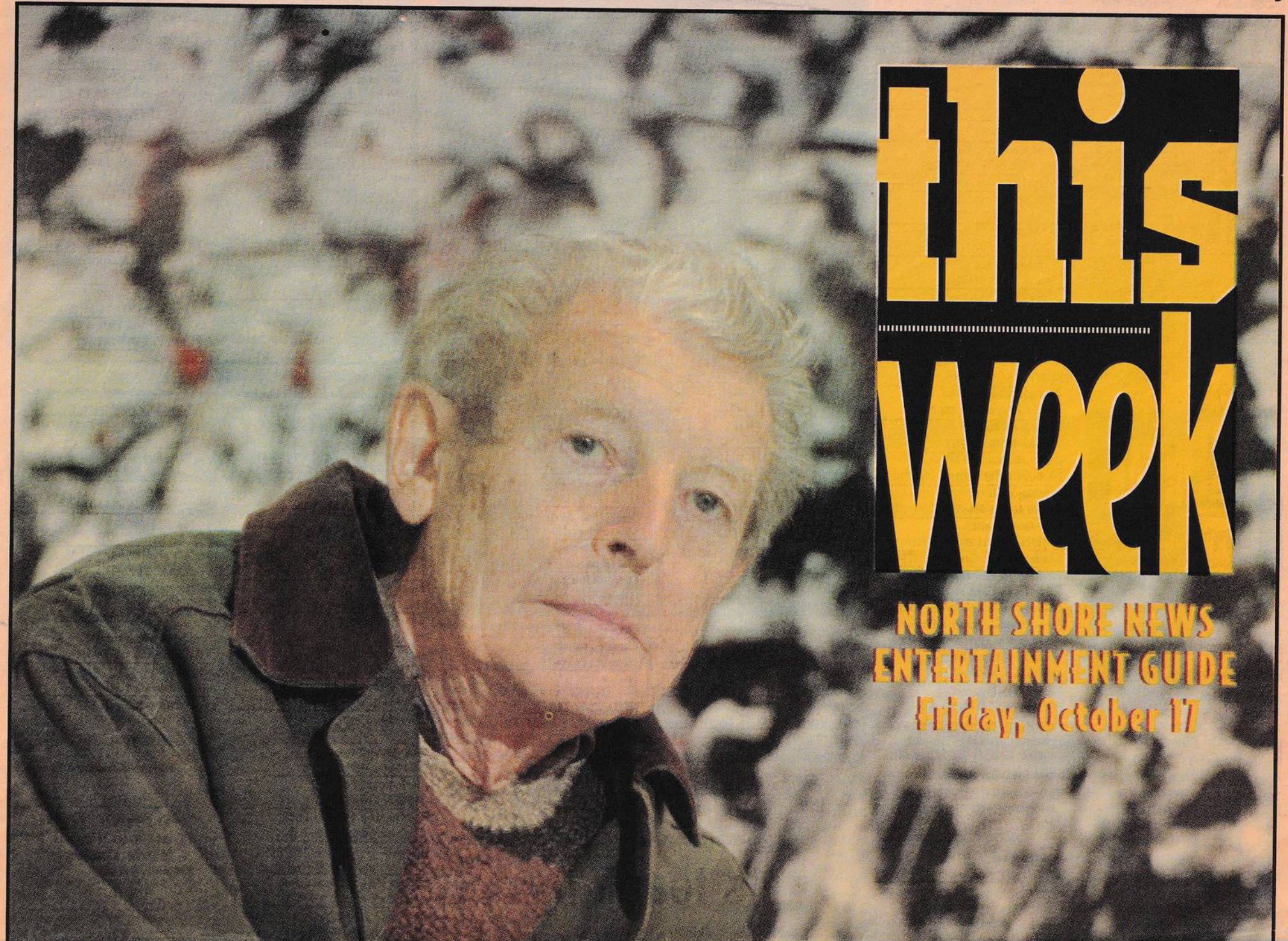


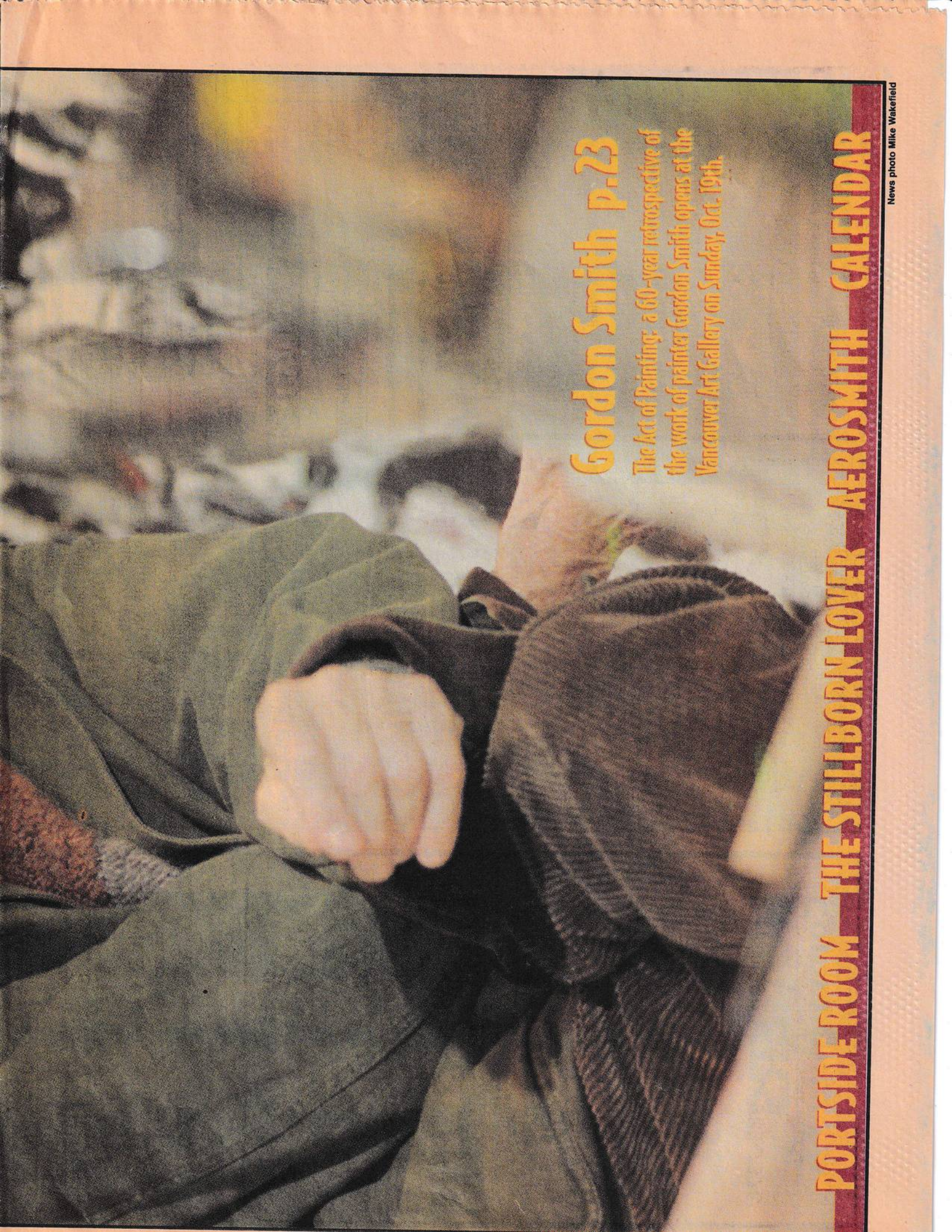
Photo submitted

PORTRAIT of a young artist ... Gordon Smith sketching in England in 1943.

this week

NORTH SHORE NEWS
ENTERTAINMENT GUIDE
Friday, October 17





Gordon Smith p.23

The Act of Painting: a 60-year retrospective of the work of painter Gordon Smith opens at the Vancouver Art Gallery on Sunday, Oct. 19th.

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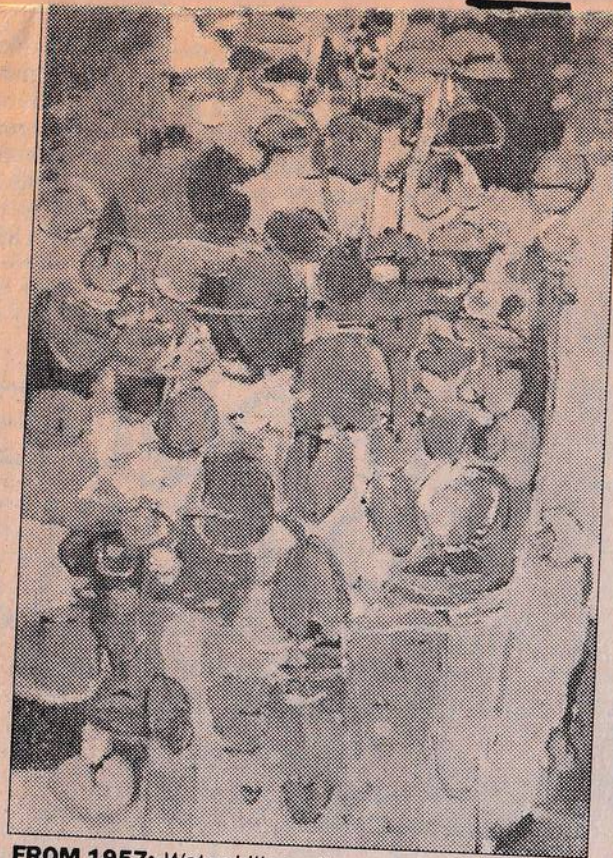
ARTS



FROM 1996: *Pond May IV*, an acrylic on canvas, gives an impressionist's view of one of Smith's favorite subjects.

A retrospective of Gordon Smith's 60-year career shows the maturation of a master painter

MICHAEL SCOTT
Sun Art Critic



FROM 1957: *Water Lilies*, oil on masonite, is an earlier look at the theme of lily ponds.

Like a bead of quicksilver, the long career of Gordon Smith eludes even the best efforts to pin it down. In 60 years of art-making, Smith has never ceased to seek out the new or the surprising. He has struggled across one stylistic breakthrough after another. For all his soft-spoken courtesy, he is famously reluctant to discuss his work, driving would-be biographers and chroniclers to distraction.

To the world at large, Smith is a quiet chameleon, an artist who has reinvented himself not once, not twice, but many times in his career.

Widely respected for his dedicated service as artist and teacher, Smith has few naysayers. And yet there is a whisper, a tiny voice that crops up from time to time — after the honors have been listed, the testimonials delivered, the toasts made — a voice that asks if the constant change of style might not be the dictate of fashion rather than the artist's own deepening vision.

What comes clear in the Vancouver Art Gallery's substantial retrospective is a glimpse of the man's fundamental restlessness, and the anger and tension that must course regularly beneath the courtly surface.

Gordon Smith: The Act of Painting is the por-

■ GORDON SMITH: THE ACT OF PAINTING

A 60-year retrospective.
Vancouver Art Gallery, Oct. 19 to Jan. 11

trait of a man who has never been completely satisfied with his work. In recent years, the self-criticism has softened a little and Smith, now 78, has occasionally admitted he's not unhappy with the paintings he's made since he turned 70.

"Gordon Smith is relentlessly critical when it comes to his own work," observes Ian Thom, who with Andrew Hunter has curated this exhibition for the art gallery. "I hate to think of how much material Gordon has destroyed over the years simply because it didn't measure up."

Gordon Smith: The Act of Painting draws together more than 100 examples of the artist's work: from the Georges Roualt-like stained-glass abstractions of the 1950s and the splattered Expressionism of the mid-'60s to the hard edged geometrics of the '70s and the Giverny-inspired pond paintings of recent years.

It was Smith's explorer's heart that first drew Thom to him. "I like the fact that over the course of Gordon's career, he showed himself as an artist who was determined to challenge himself," says Thom, the gallery's highly respected expert in 20th-century Canadian art.

Please see **Smith, C5**

Art gallery loses big donation

A longtime supporter, lacking confidence in the board, freezes plans for a major bequest.

MICHAEL SCOTT
SUN VISUAL ART CRITIC

A longtime supporter of the Vancouver Art Gallery has frozen plans for a multi-million dollar donation to the gallery, dealing a blow to efforts to restore public confidence in the institution.

The gallery is still reeling from criticism over the board's role in the sudden resignation of director Alf Bogusky and the contentious appointment of a former trustee to assume Bogusky's post.

On Tuesday, Gordon Smith, the dean of West Coast abstract painting and a long-time supporter of the gallery, informed the board of trustees that his plans for a multi-million dollar bequest to the VAG are on hold.

"We have never been so concerned and disappointed with

the current actions of the [VAG's] board," Smith and his wife Marion said in a letter they sent Tuesday to all 23 members of the museum's board of trustees.

"Because of our lack of confidence in the actions of the board we will put on hold all contributions and what had been our plans for future commitments to the Vancouver Art Gallery," the letter said.

In an interview, Smith said those plans included the eventual disposition of his celebrated Arthur Erickson house in West Vancouver, as well as his art collection and other assets. The total amount could top \$2 million.

"If the board keeps on its course, we'd rather distribute

SEE GALLERY, A2



ACTE OF PAINTING: Gordon Smith added levity to his retrospective at Vancouver Art Gallery.



SPORRAN PARTNERS: Yvonne Drinovz and fiancé Jamie Maw flank Jack Webster at reception *chez* Roberta Beiser.

Ice rings over Kits Point

PHIRE WARS . . . Jean Southam's father, forestry tycoon **H.R. MacMillan**, funded Vancouver Museum's adjoining a generation ago.

rior MacMillan Hawley, a patron of the \$8 million Centre in the museum-m complex, which capital campaign director **Michael Harding** showed off to donors and other worthies Wednesday.

As usual, Southam, who attended with husband **Gordon** and family members, had jewelry to

moment — star-sapphire necklace, bracelet and a diamond stone on her ring finger. -clan widow **Pia Shandel** much interest in space mat- tially the possibility of a manoeuvre with 44-year-old **Valeri Korzun**, who said "every night" about his 169 days aboard the subse-

didate **Karen Morgan**, whose co-campaign chair **Terry Power** improperly diverted funds into Tory rival **Kevin Garvey's** campaign, has her name up to contest **Eugene Hodgson** as the federal Grits' treasurer in B.C.

KEEPS ON GIVING . . . Vancouver Art Gallery had major donors in Thursday to preview **Gordon Smith's** retrospective show, *The Act of Painting*.

Fellow painter **Jack Shadbolt** and wife **Doris** arrived to be greeted with the same sort of cultural-icon reverence Smith has been receiving lately.

Smith, who may be Canada's most-acquired artist in corporate collections, greeted me with his thumbs to his ears, extended fingers wiggling, which made me recall his long support of the Artists For Kids program.

Contributors to this print-series program receive 10 "artist's proofs" of their work, which they may sell to help defray their own expenses.

Not Smith. He always gives back the additional prints, and the program of course makes additional money.

As for Smith's personal generosity, "I don't admire things I see in his studio too much," an attendee whispered, "for fear he'll give them to me."

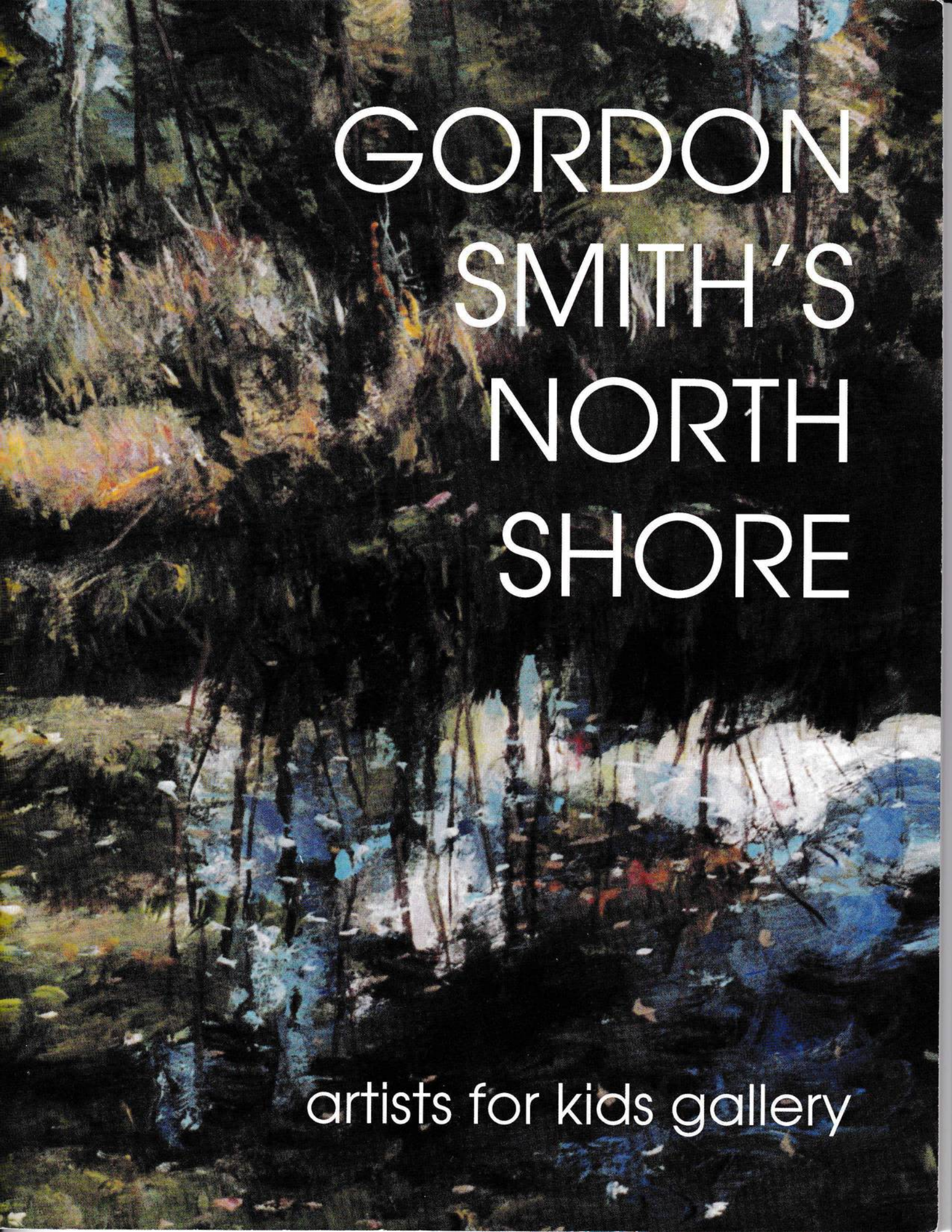


EYEBALLS IN ORBIT: Mir man Valeri Korzun, Pia Shandel at Space Centre.

TALK OF THE TOWNS . . . Running-again Mayor **Philip Owen's** recent anti-crime announcements won't hurt his profile next week when 1,400 mayors and councillors from 169 corporations hit town for

the Union of B.C. Municipalities' annual shindig.

This is the outfit that booed then-municipal minister **Dan Miller** and stonily greeted Premier **Glen Clark** at its 1996 shivaree in Penticton.



GORDON SMITH'S NORTH SHORE

artists for kids gallery

GORDON SMITH'S NORTH SHORE

a teacher's guide



Artists For Kids Gallery

North Vancouver, BC

April 10 - May 13, 2000

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previous page

February Snow, 2000
etching on paper
24 x 31.5"
Artists For Kids collection

Director's Preface

This exhibition marks the work of Gordon Smith in the last ten years and provides a most fitting way to honour his support of Artists For Kids in that time. As we celebrate touching the lives of more than 20,000 children in ten years, we realize our success would not have been possible without the guidance and incredible generosity of Gordon and Marion Smith. Their passion for art education and our continued success is unparalleled and we are forever grateful.

The work in this show is from the Smith's personal collection and represents some of the finest work created by an artist in the prime of his career. This exhibition celebrates the creative process of drawing, painting and printmaking inspired by the local landscape and gives our audiences an understanding of the process of visual abstraction, which is central to Smith's explorations.

The vision for this exhibition most certainly comes from Gordon Smith, but without great teachers, much would remain unintelligible to children. The lessons presented in this catalogue/teacher's guide come from an inspired team of North Shore art educators who, through their excitement at the classroom potential of this great artist, have thoughtfully developed activities that can be used by teachers now and in the future. The quality of these activities illustrate why art is a vital force in the classrooms of the North Shore.

We are indebted to Ian Thom, senior curator of the Vancouver Art Gallery for lending his wisdom to this publication with the essay *Gordon Smith: The Challenge of Artmaking* (p. 8). His insightful comments on the work selected for this exhibition do much to help us understand the depth of Gordon Smith's imagery and quest.

This publication would not be possible without the generous support and contribution of our major sponsor, BC Hydro. We are grateful for their assistance and are honoured they recognize the importance of this endeavour and, all we do. We are also pleased to have the continuing media support sponsorship of the North Shore News in helping us bring Artists For Kids many activities to the community.

We are also grateful for support and encouragement from the Board of Trustees, School District #44, (North Vancouver), the City of North Vancouver, the Corporation of the District of North Vancouver, the North Shore Arts Commission and the West Vancouver Foundation for recognizing the importance of providing quality art education to the children of the North Shore.

Finally, without the incredible commitment of our many, many, volunteers, including Pat Quan and the Friends of Artists For Kids, Sheila Thompson and members of the North Shore Retired Teachers' Association, this venture would not be possible. Thank you all.

Bill MacDonald



celebrating **10** terrific years



THE POWER IS YOURS

BChydro 

A Teacher's Guide to Gordon Smith's North Shore

*"I'm only doing what
artists have always
done, welding image
with paint, so the paint
becomes the image,
the image becomes
the paint."*

-Gordon Smith

Gordon Smith was an art teacher for more than forty years. As an educator he knows the importance of pushing materials and processes with students in order that they can experience the joy that experimentation brings and, ultimately the wonder inherent in creating new images and ideas in their art! This constant development of concepts is central to his teaching and of course, his own work as an artist.

The exhibition Gordon Smith's North Shore presents a variety of images that are part of Smith's constant visual searching and playing with materials. You will notice a range of imagery from realistic to the abstract. Smith gets his visual cues from the local landscape and plays with the endless possibilities they present. Smith is also an avid art historian who, in his research as an artist, is constantly looking and assimilating the art of others, particularly young inspired artists. These underlying forces provide the major themes of the work in this exhibition and the teaching resources developed for this Teacher's Guide.

In 1989, Gordon Smith helped found the Artists For Kids Trust with the late Jack Shadbolt and the late Bill Reid. Each of these giants of the art world believed passionately in the need for students in schools to have quality arts experiences. Gordon Smith has consistently guided and supported our work since that time. He has taught in enrichment programs for elementary and secondary students and has visited endless classrooms encouraging teachers with his boundless enthusiasm. We are forever indebted to his support and belief in the abilities of our young people and our teachers. His contributions of countless prints and paintings to aid our cause has been an endless source of pride and we were pleased to proclaim our permanent collection the "Gordon Smith Teaching Collection of Canadian Art" in 1995.

Now in the year 2000, as a tenth year anniversary celebration, we proudly share with thousands of students and the community the spirit of discovery that is Gordon Smith's North Shore. Smith's work is accessible to students of all ages. His lush colourful imagery is extremely engaging and can be viewed primarily for pure aesthetic pleasure or for the personal experiences it conjures. Smith's art work always provides a launching point to discover and feel a great deal more.

This exhibition catalogue/teachers guide provides lessons for specific grade levels with the intent of encouraging teachers to be inspired by the Smith exhibition and have the necessary tools to follow-up the experience with studio activities for the classroom. Each of the lessons have been designed to help teachers implement and better understand the IRPs of the new BC Fine Arts curriculum. Hopefully this resource will inspire students to draw, paint and make prints in classrooms for years to come. Each of the lesson/units can also be adapted to any level of instruction. Kindergarten teachers can adapt a secondary unit, conversely, secondary teachers should adapt elementary lessons as each theme developed addresses individual aspects of Smith's work. The accompanying set of six 35mm slides and the exhibition poster combined with the images in this publication will hopefully enable the development of Smith imagery in classrooms of the North Shore forever.

Bill MacDonald,
Managing Director

ARTS

Ripples on Smith's ponds

GORDON SMITH

New works

Equinox Gallery, 2321 Granville, until Feb. 12

MICHAEL SCOTT

Vancouver Sun Art Critic

Gordon Smith has been down at his beloved ponds again, looking for truth amidst the lily pads.

Assembling and disassembling the elements of these quiet, watery places, Smith created a landmark series of pond paintings a year ago — paintings that at an obvious level depict the drooping willow branches, reeds, clumps of sedge and lily pads that help to define a pond; but that also disintegrate into particles of abstraction with the slightest pressure.

Now the eminent painter from West Vancouver has gone a step further, still exploring his ponds, a ripple with light and movement, but simultaneously leading our eyes deeper into the idea of the abstract.

In this masterful suite of 11 works on canvas and paper, Smith holds up his kaleidoscope and shows us not only the million shifting lights and colors of natural place, but of our own refracting, coruscating urban lives.

The exhibition begins with a clear link to the work he presented a year ago, a canvas entitled *Pond Painting F.S.V.* Here the notion of a pond is most literally rendered: lazy round lily pads punctuate a pond's surface that ripples with the colors of a sunny day. The blue of the sky and the gauzy cotton of the clouds wrestle together, along with lilac-colored fragments that might be the reflecting shards of a wall.

The depiction is loose but unmistakable.

Stepping off from there, Smith leads us to a place where color subsides. In *Pond*, the eye perceives a scene in black and white, a pond surface frozen in a muddy moonlight. The lily pads are still evident, but only as whorls in a fragmenting ground. Smith, who has one of the strongest senses of color in the world of art, is not really working in black and white: in fact, the black here is the color of tar, with trailing edges that bleed to sepia. But this disavowal of color is something Smith has explored before.

The eye, given a moment in front of the painting, begins to identify small points of color, flashes of moonstone blue or malachite nestling in the watery reeds like birds in stubble field.

Another *Pond* in the exhibition is a truly great painting, a masterpiece perhaps. This one is a large diptych of tremendous physicality. Such energetic painting recalls the work of Jackson Pollock in his prime, when the whole essence of the man seemed concentrated on the canvas. The effort on Smith's part is more even, more lucid than Pollock, but no less potent.

Here a landscape is blocked in along the top of the painting in the manner of Jock Macdonald — patches of dark color scumbled over the canvas — and then unravelled into a symphony of tangled forms and syncopated movement.

The eminent painter has been inspired once again by the delicate beauty and mutability of ponds, suffused with light and movement



Please see *Smith, C6*

Interested in moment of perception



The painting seems effortless, bold, full of juice. So brawny is this manner of painting, that Smith, 78, could easily have his work mistaken for that of a man 50 years younger.

Initially reading as black-and-white, this painting begins to disclose its colors like crocuses in spring. The petals are everywhere and nowhere: Ox blood, lapis, pale peach and dull umber, mint, turquoise and acrid orange.

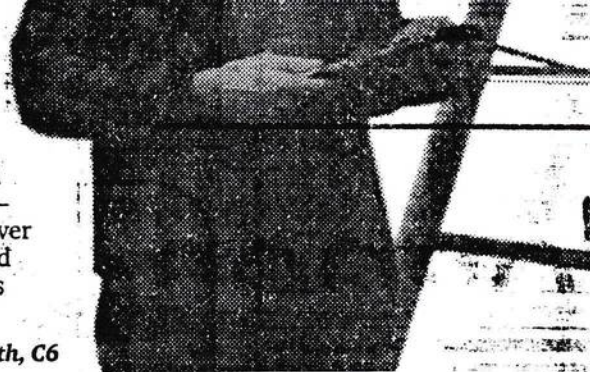
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Interested in moment of perception



UNTITLED '96: one of a number of acrylics on canvas by Gordon Smith currently on view at the Equinox Gallery

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Initially reading as black-and-white, this painting begins to disclose its colors like crocuses in spring. The petals are everywhere and nowhere: Ox blood, lapis, pale peach and dull umber, mint, turquoise and acrid orange.

The work seems to hang in the moment, as if at any moment it might resolve into perfect focus. The eerie feeling is that Smith at 78 has developed senses we do not yet share, that he is showing us an unfamiliar dimension of the world.

In his long and fruitful career, Smith has avoided talking too much about his own work. He doesn't like to tell people how to interpret what they see.

And yet there are a number of qualities that thread their way through much of what he's done. Smith enters into every brushstroke with courage, for instance, an adventurer's non-chalance about what lays around the next bend. He is interested in the moment of perception: the moments when we stand at the still centre of things, even as the cosmic gyre whirls around us.

This is the kind of motion, the blurring of a world in motion, that is so apparent in this suite of paintings.

The Vancouver Art Gallery and curator Ian Thom will focus a brighter light on Smith's mastery in October, when they present a major retrospective of his work.

In the meantime, the Equinox Gallery is the best place in town to see that rarest of all artistic commodities: a masterpiece.

SPOTLIGHT

Now

Closing in on the canvas

Gordon Smith's work a remarkable synthesis of natural forms and painterly skills

GORDON SMITH stands in his West Vancouver studio with a piece of paper in his hands.

Christopher Brayshaw

SPOTLIGHT FEATURE

Glued to it, seemingly at random, are cut-up photographs and bits of colored paper.

"It's a small creek I found on Hollyburn," says Smith, pointing out the shape of a tiny waterfall, flashes of sunlight, and the deep, dark green of moss and nearby trees.

The collage is a cartoon, a study for a larger painting. "Of course, when I'm finished, all this will be unrecognizable," Smith adds, and smiles.

Gordon Smith is one of

They are a remarkable synthesis of natural forms and painterly skill. They do not reward passive viewing. In fact, they virtually demand repeated viewings, which constantly evoke new associations between their fragmentary images.

He shows me his brushes, which are thick with crusted paint.

"I love to use techniques I can never fully control. ... Accidents help keep the painting fresh."

Smith's huge canvases, with their blocks of solid color, their splatterings and drips, do not look like landscapes.

Yet, stand in front of them and you find yourself transported: no longer a passive spectator, but deeply involved in the scenes they describe.

To make a collage, Smith photocopies bits of his paintings on a color copier, then splices in photographs, found images, and random strokes of paint.

of Smith's earlier, highly structured paintings.

As we talk, Smith makes frequent allusions to the work of other artists. His enthusiasm for innovative, "tough" painting is infectious.

"I feel both young and older artists today are more concerned with social commentary and do not pander with easy images," he says.

He points to locals Doug Biden, Carel Moiseiwitsch and Gathie Falk as artists whose work takes a tough approach to social commentary and goes on to cite historical precedents for abstract work such as his own.

"Look at (Franz) Hals or later Monet — the closer you get to the canvas, you realize it's just paint, all illusion." He names Francis Bacon and Anselm Kiefer as important influences on his recent work.

Along with his former students Ken James and Bill Macdonald, Smith recently founded the Artists for Kids Trust, which offers original prints by critically acclaimed Canadian artists, with the proceeds going to benefit art education in North Shore schools.

"We made a deliberate decision that was tough, no (bolt) has done a piece like mine, so have (Falk, and Molly (Lamb Bobak))."

Smith's print, *Sea Edge After Goya*, couples the strong horizontal thrust of his *Sea Wall* and *Howe Sound* series of the late '70s



*“The closer you get to the canvas,
you realize it's just paint, all
illusion.”*

Canada's most respected senior artists.

His subjects are drawn from the local coastal landscape, his most recent works evoking Queen

Some collages, with titles like *Caulfeild* and *The Byway*, evoke the view from Smith's front-room window.

Another, *Sea Wall*, is a

Charlotte forest interiors and Shannon Falls near Squamish. And yet, Smith has little interest in simply representing pre-existing forms.

"A painting's paint on canvas long before it's an image," he says.

In the early '50s, Smith studied at the California School of Fine Arts under abstract expressionist Elmer Bischoff, and was exposed to the work of other abstract painters such as Clyfford Still, Willem de Kooning, and Richard Diebenkorn, who believed the act of painting was more important than a painter's faithful representation of a subject.

Most of Smith's canvases can be said to lack a single subject. They are huge paintings — some as large as 10' by 12' — built around a palette of earth colors: the browns and greens of cool dark earth, split by blues as cold and hard as a January sky.

Smith's work, which alludes to New York's arts district through quotation of gallery names, subway graffiti, and Andy Warhol's anemic portrait.

To my mind, these recent collages are more exciting than many

and early '80s with the painterly texture of his more recent works.

Smith's prints and collages are on display at the Bau-Xi Gallery; a suite of larger landscape paintings will be shown early next year.

NEWS photo Cindy Goodman

ALONG WITH his former students Ken James and Bill Macdonald, Gordon Smith recently founded the Artists for Kids Trust.

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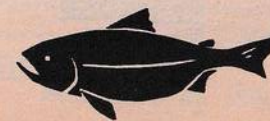


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*New works by Gordon Smith
spring from a remembrance
of a revelatory period in his life*

Paintings from a path not taken

By ROBIN LAURENCE

As Gordon Smith strides about the Equinox Gallery, touring me through his recent series of abstract paintings, his mood is both self-critical and enthusiastic. A legendary perfectionist, he may work for weeks, day after day, on the same painting. His diary, he says, is filled with entries that read, "Re-do, re-do, re-do." So the paintings that have made it to the Equinox (2321 Cranville, through January) have passed

paintings signify a remembrance of aspects of the Second World War and a reinvestigation of a style of painting learned in the war's aftermath.

Although he is hesitant to speak about the associations these works have for him ("They haven't got any great social message" he insists, and then: "They may have meanings to me but they wouldn't necessarily have meanings to others") there are code words, symbols, dates and materials here that allude to a profound passage in his life.

During the Second World War, Smith served as an intelligence officer with the

Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, and was with them when they landed on



VISUAL ARTS

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ing. His diary, he says, is filled with entries that read, "Re-do, re-do, re-do." So the paint-

ings that have made it to the Equinox (2321 Granville, through January) have passed through a series of intense rigors and severe scrutinies. Still, there are a few here he'd like to have back, to "re-do". . .

Over the years, paintings, prints and drawings that have not measured up, not escaped "the white tribunal of his studio" as critic Joan Lowndes once eloquently put it, have been either painted over completely or consigned to the fire. "We can have bonfires in West Vancouver," Smith tells me joyfully, then goes on to describe how beautiful some of his colored prints have looked as they curled and burned in his backyard.

Backyard bonfires notwithstanding, Smith is immensely excited about what these new works represent — their wonderful materiality and the pure and timeless act of painting. At 75, slim and fit, Smith seems equally charged with the past and the present.

His thoughts dash from old friends to new acquaintances, from influential teachers to promising students, from Francisco Goya and Edouard Manet to Joseph Beuys and Jochen Gerz, from the moors and mists of Cornwall to the trees and pools of Light-house Park. This emphatic then-and-now-ness manifests itself in gestural abstractions that are both vigorous and elegaic — of the moment and of a thousand moments past.

In theme and technique, Smith's new

of the Second World War and a reinvestigation of a style of painting learned in the war's aftermath.

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During the Second World War, Smith served as an intelligence officer with the

Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, and was with them when they landed on Pachino Beach in Sicily in 1943.

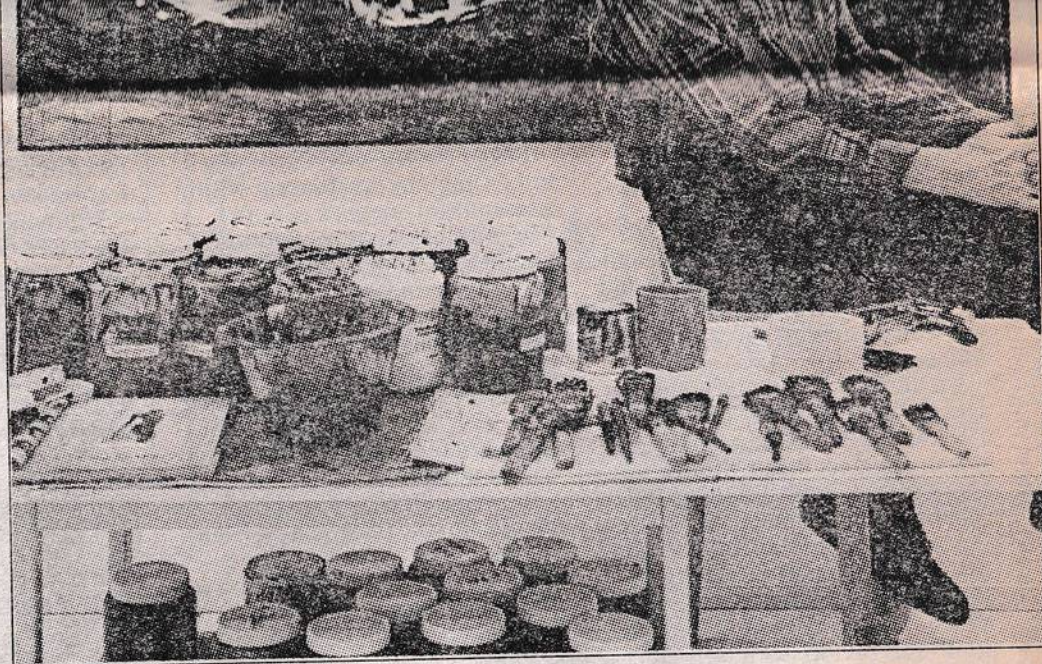
He tells me he has been remembering the extraordinary men with whom he served, and how much he admired them. When pressed, he will also admit to losing close friends during the campaign, to weeping at the memory of comrades killed and wounded.

Smith himself was seriously wounded in Sicily and invalidated home, but says, "I survived it — it wasn't an horrific experience. It was an adventure, a wonderful adventure, because we were so close and I learned so much from these people."

Despite their splashes and bars of color, the searching blackness of Smith's paintings suggests grief and loss to me. Smith, however, is uneasy about my metaphor. He doesn't want me to sentimentalize these works. Nor does he want me to reduce them to the merely personal.

Instead — against a subtle backdrop of evocation and homage — he prefers to talk about their formal and material qualities and the delight he experienced in creating them.

After his war service, Smith settled in Vancouver with his wife Marion, and studied under B.C. Binning and Jack Shadbolt at the Vancouver School of Art. Shadbolt, he says, was a severe and demanding



teacher. "He rejected the RCA [Royal College of Art], he rejected the Group of Seven — he had very strong opinions."

Smith remembers being "devastated" by some of Shadbolt's critiques, but also insists that Shadbolt was "the best teacher I ever had — and probably one of my greatest friends through the years."

The English-born Smith had a difficult time "breaking from" his early training and influences, which included, he says, "the romantic English painters like [William] Blake and [Samuel] Palmer" and the British modernists like Graham Sutherland. (Sutherland's powerful impact can be seen in the early work of Shadbolt and other senior painters of the Canadian West Coast.)

But a significant break did occur, in 1950,

when Smith took an advanced painting course from Elmer Bischoff at the California School of Fine Arts in San Francisco.

Bischoff insisted that his students work in the manner of the American abstract expressionists — large, spontaneous, liberated from the need to represent a subject or make a likeness. He instructed them to build big stretchers, buy gallons of cheap house paint, lay the canvases on the floor and apply the paint with large, sloppy brushes.

Many of Smith's fellow students were appalled and left the course, but Smith's reaction was, "Well, dammit, I've come all this way, I'm going to do this." The process was revelatory. For the first time, he says now, he had the sense of not painting a landscape or tree or figure, but "painting a painting."

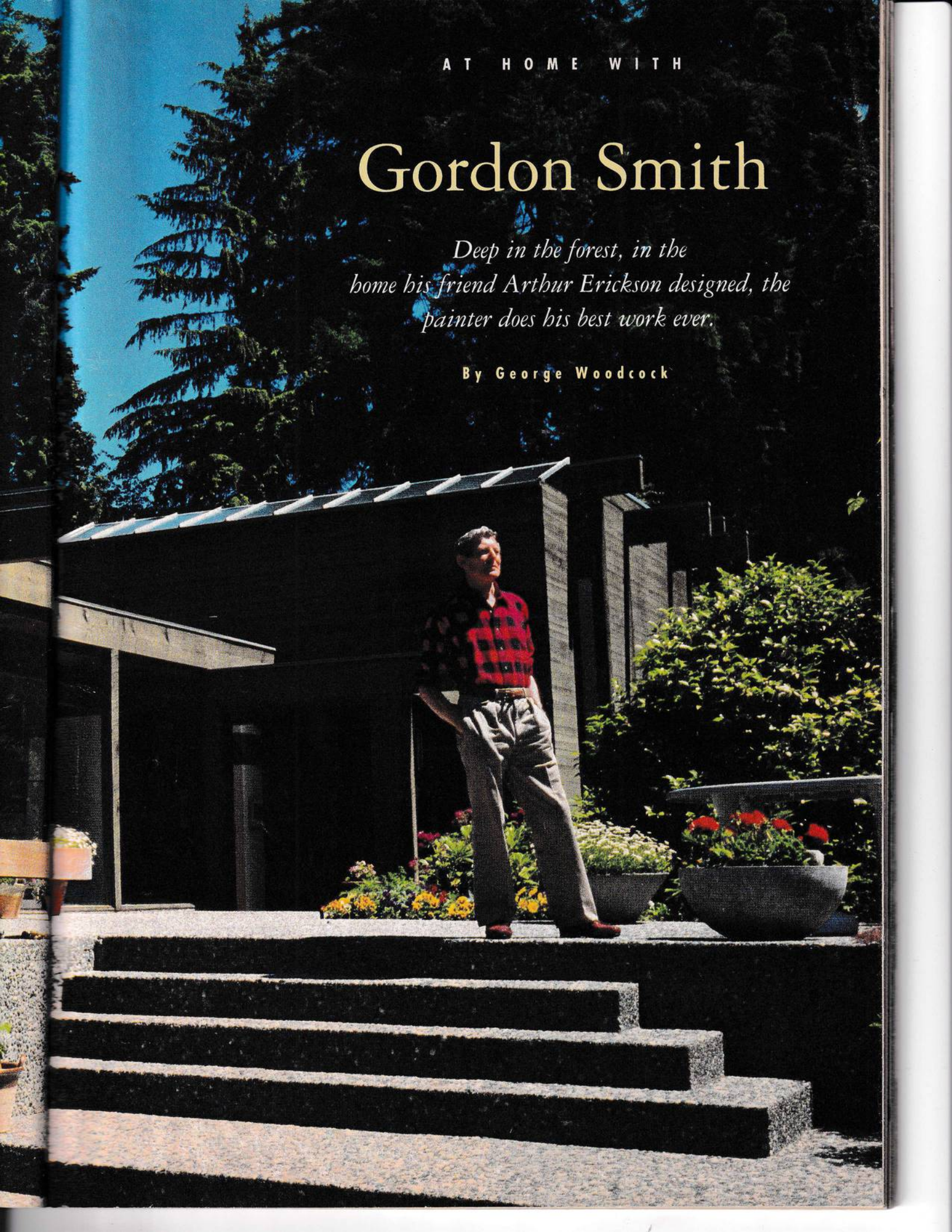
Smith brought his "funny black paint-

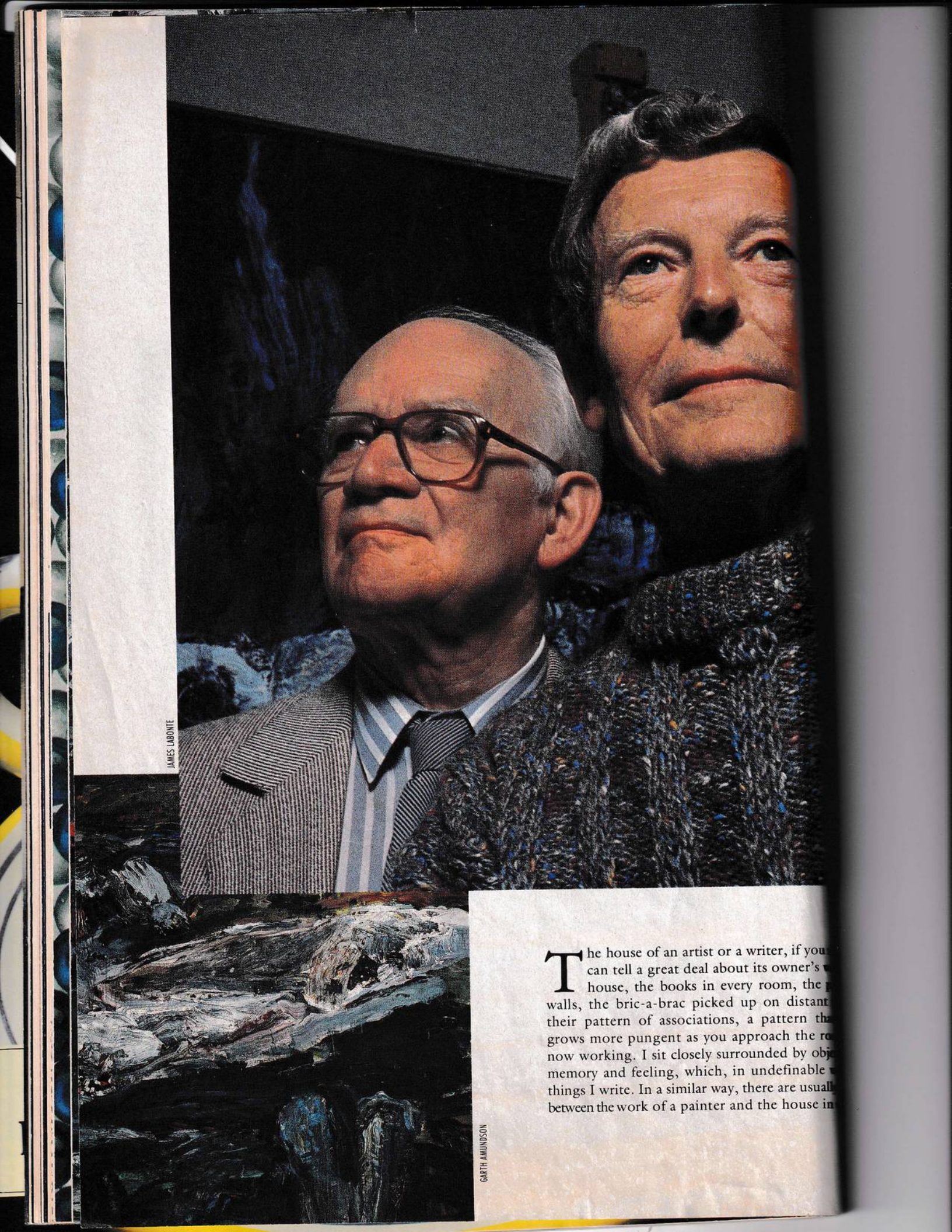
AT HOME WITH

Gordon Smith

*Deep in the forest, in the
home his friend Arthur Erickson designed, the
painter does his best work ever.*

By George Woodcock



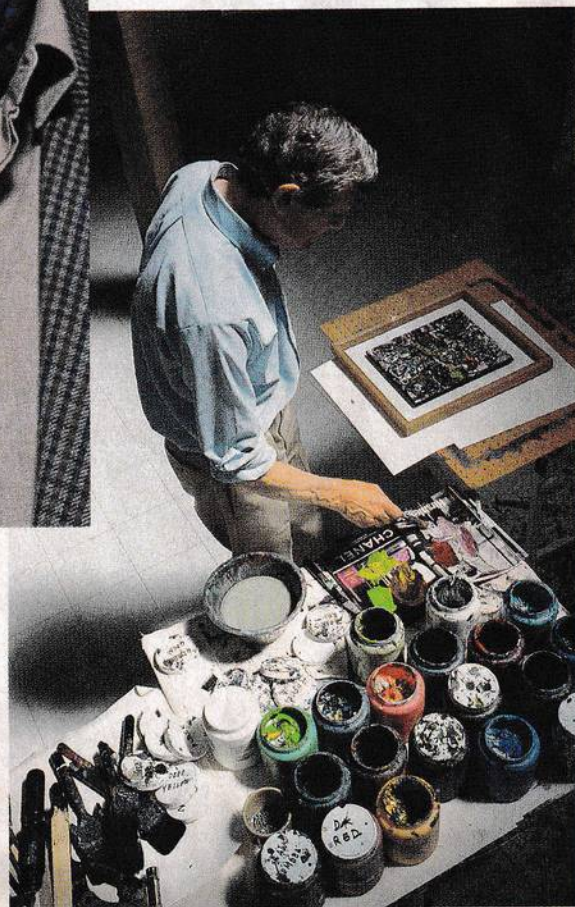


JAMES LABOVITE

The house of an artist or a writer, if you can tell a great deal about its owner's house, the books in every room, the walls, the bric-a-brac picked up on distant travels, their pattern of associations, a pattern that grows more pungent as you approach the room now working. I sit closely surrounded by objects of memory and feeling, which, in undefinable ways, shape the things I write. In a similar way, there are usually strong connections between the work of a painter and the house in

GARTH AMUNDSON

*Chance always
intervenes in the lives
of successful
artists, as if it were the
pattern of destiny.*



And so, while this article on Gordon Smith, one of Vancouver's finest painters, begins with his house, it is not really about architecture or domestic design. It is an enquiry into the habitat of the artist and the changing nature of his work, which are related in the same way as the song of a bird and the place where it sings.

When I visited Gordon Smith and his wife Marion recently, I went to one of those marvelously concealed enclaves that still exist on the verges of West Vancouver. It was just beyond Lighthouse Park, a little impasse of a lane appropriately called The Byway, where the Smiths' house reclines on its bed of virgin rock in the

Top, left to right: George Woodcock, Gordon Smith and Arthur Erickson. Opposite left: Sea Drift I. Above: Smith in his studio: "Painting should be a re-creation of an experience."



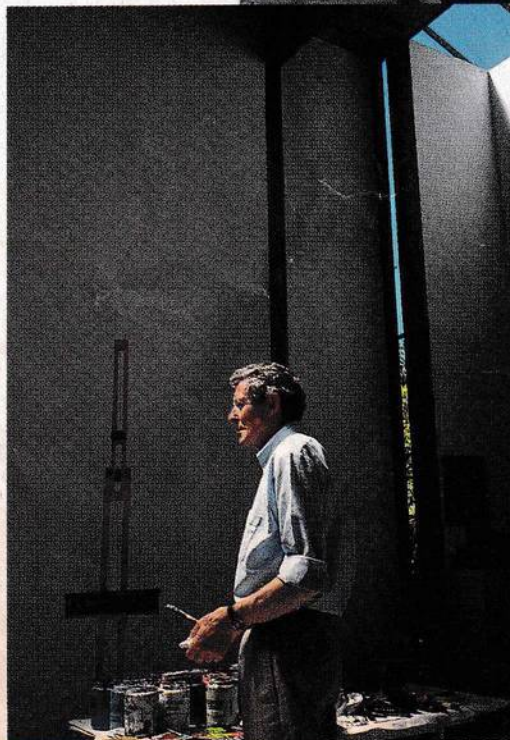
The house, perched on outcrops of rock, is built around an inner courtyard, where a fishpond teems with carp. Inside, one is always aware of the surrounding vegetation and the tall trees beyond.



midst of high, second-growth woodland with glimmers of sea between the trees.

It was not a first visit. Gordon and Marion have been friends of my wife Inge and me ever since we came to live in Vancouver in 1953. Then, we had settled near Jack and Doris Shadbolt in a primitive cabin on the still-wooded slopes of Capitol Hill in North Burnaby, and in the Shadbolts' house we had met many of the Vancouver artists who have since become national names, including Gordon and Joe Plaskett, John Korner, and Molly and Bruno Bobak. Later, my wife had gone to study pottery at the Vancouver Art School on Hamilton Street, where Gordon was teaching.

Though he was 34 when I met him, and now he is 70, Gordon seems remarkably little changed. Still the same open, Anglo-Saxon good looks, with the lines a little sharpened and the hair a little grayer, and still with the same engaging and rather boyish diffidence that has always impressed those who have encountered him. Many years ago, Lawren Harris, the great Group of Seven painter, whom Gordon knew, remarked on the "balance of robust creative power and humility" in the younger painter's work, and shortly afterwards Joe Plaskett, who is one of Gordon's best contemporaries, declared that "Gordon Smith is a humble painter, and humility is the essential attribute of an artist. Humility is receptivity. It is capacity to learn."





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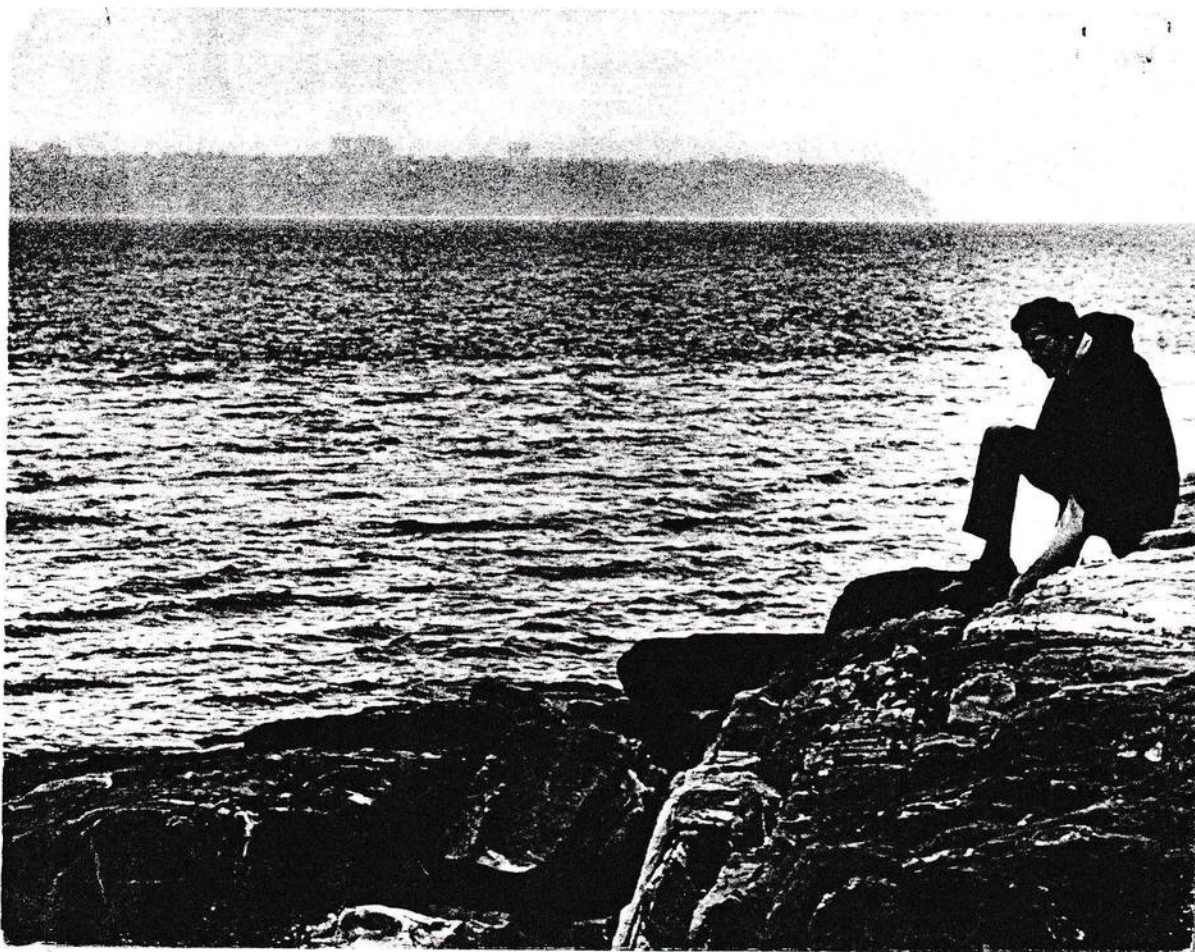
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GORDON SMITH was born in Hove, Sussex, in 1919. As a child living in the countryside south of London, he was encouraged to paint by his father, a part time landscape artist in the English Romantic tradition of Palmer, Constable, and Turner. He moved to Winnipeg with his family in 1934, at the height of the Depression. There he attended the Winnipeg School of Art and worked as a commercial artist at Brigidens. He served with the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry during World War II, and after the war settled in Vancouver with his wife, Marion.

The internationally renowned architect Arthur Erickson has described Gordon Smith as "an extraordinary colorist, one of the most exciting and sensitive in Canada." In fact Smith's art has moved through many phases, from figurative to abstract, from hard edge to color painting.

He frequently takes his 30' sloop, Juno, out from her West Vancouver moorage to explore the colors and moods of the Gulf Islands, and is now best known for the semi-abstract seascapes derived from the observations, sketches, and photographs of his sailing experience.

The Trincomali Channel series, *Before the Storm*, *Sky Clearing*, *Sun Pools*, and *Afternoon*, reproduced by Artcore Publishing as art cards and prints, represent his atmospheric seascapes at their lyrical best.

The artist's original paintings and prints may be seen at the Bau-Xi Gallery, Vancouver, and the Mira Godard Gallery, Calgary and Toronto.

Order of Canada

Two WW men honored

BY LAYNE CHRISTENSEN

Community Reporter

WHEN Gov. Gen. Romeo LeBlanc announced 72 appointments to the Order of Canada earlier this month, North Shore residents were proud to hear the names of two of their own.

Among the nine B.C. appointments were veteran writer and broadcaster Peter Stursberg and artist and art educator Gordon Smith.

One detail that may have escaped the news announcements is that the two Caulfeild area residents share more than a postal code. They enjoy a friendship that spans more than 50 years, a bond which began overseas during the Second World War.

Smith was an intelligence officer with Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry. Stursberg was a war correspondent for *Maclean's* magazine and the CBC.

"He was writing columns on Canadians in Sicily," recalls Smith, who just happened to end up in one of Stursberg's reports when he was injured during the landing at Sicily. A photograph of Smith "lying wounded on the battleship" reappears in Stursberg's account of the war years, his 13th book, *The Sound of War*, published in 1993.

Smith has followed Stursberg's career over the years, as a foreign correspondent for *London's*

Daily Herald, later as CBC's United Nations' correspondent, and as an Ottawa-based writer and commentator.

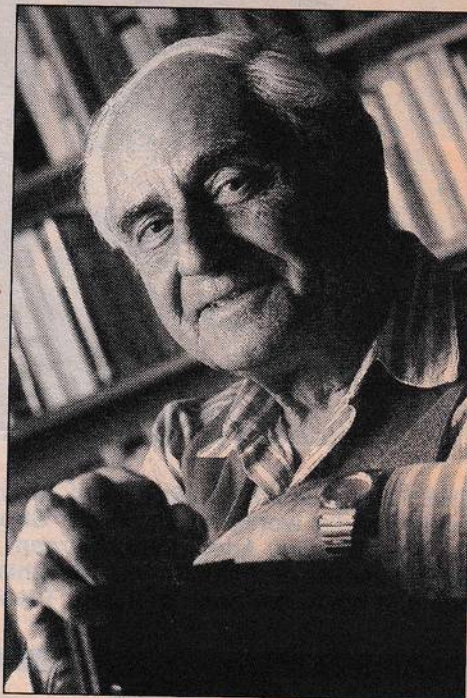
Stursberg, in turn, has collected several of Smith's paintings.

That the two men, 53 years after their first meeting, should find themselves neighbors and recipients of the same high honor is "such a coincidence," says Smith, now 77.

"It's really very nice," he says with simple grace.

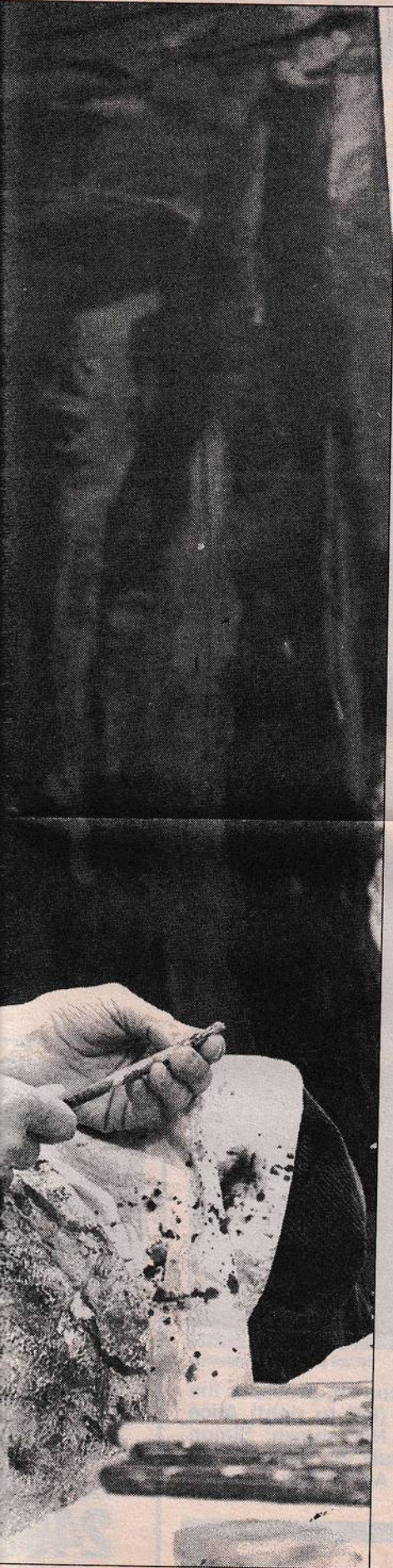
As for Stursberg, the semi-retired octogenarian says he's pleased he'll be in the company of his great friend when the Governor General makes the official appointments at Rideau Hall next November.

"I'm delighted that there will be someone I know at the investiture."



NEWS photo Mike Wakefield

PETER Stursberg... recognized for his contributions to print and broadcast journalism.



NEWS photo Cindy Goodman

the Artists for Kids Trust honored for encouragement of young talent.



NEWS photo Cindy Go

GORDON Smith... retired UBC art professor and founding patron of the Artists for Kids Trust honors his contribution to the arts community and for his support and encouragement of young talent.



DAN SCOTT

GORDON SMITH: agreed to look like a painter

Portrait of an artist in a fine residence

By EVE JOHNSON

THE painting studio is the only room in Gordon Smith's celebrated Arthur Erickson-designed house that doesn't have a view over trees and water toward the city. In this studio, its bare, whitewashed walls rising to a 20-foot ceiling, a view would constitute clutter.

1941, had grown up. Smith took a job silkscreening advertisements for The Vancouver Sun, and went on an educational blitz. In two years, he finished high school, first-year university and his last year of art school.

His teachers at the Vancouver School of Art included Jack Shadbolt and B.C. Binning. His classmates were Peter Aspell, Don Jarvis and

Smith is undoubtedly the eldest of B.C.'s senior painters, a group that includes Jack Shadbolt and Don Jarvis, his long-time friends and co-creators of a West Coast tradition of landscape-based abstract painting.

He is probably the most self-deprecating as well, the most driven to working and re-working canvases. The paintings in his show at the Bau-Xi gallery through Sept. 28, haven't been blank canvas since 1982.

When The Sun photographer arrives, Smith agrees to look like a painter. He slips a framed canvas out of its frame and lays it on the drop sheet on the floor.

He flips the tops off several jars of acrylic paint, dips one of his wide, house-painting brushes in pink and wipes it over the paper, then adds yellow and then blue. As the photographer shoots, he loads the brush and lays swaths of paint over a grey area at the top of the canvas.

He tidies up when the photographer leaves, then casts an eye over the results.

"I think that's better," he says. His accent is very British and very polite.

Smith, 65, was born in Hove, England. His father, who had a London milk route and then a corner store, was an amateur watercolorist who taught his two sons to paint.

When Smith was 15 the family moved to Winnipeg. He enrolled in the Winnipeg School of Art and by 19, had a job at a commercial art firm painting "women's corsets and men's long underwear" for the Eaton's catalogue.

In 1939, he rode the bus to San Francisco's Golden Gate Exposition, and saw his first modern art — Marcel Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase* and several Matisse's.

With the outbreak of war, he enlisted in the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, went overseas in '42 as an intelligence officer and "was blown up" in Sicily. He came home with a severed nerve in his right leg.

Home was now Vancouver, where his wife Marion, whom he married in

Lawren Harris held musical open-houses which young artists and musicians were encouraged to attend. Gordon and Marion went, and so did Arthur Erickson.

The Smiths' first West Vancouver house was Erickson's first residential commission. Their current residence, known in architectural books as The Gordon Smith House, is regarded as one of Erickson's best.

Smith came to West Coast abstract expressionism through a summer at the California School of Art with San Francisco painter Elmer Bischoff in 1950. He learned to paint big and to work with the canvas on the floor, a method he still uses for the freedom it gives his brush.

"We borrowed that very free kind of painting," Smith says. ("We" refers to such contemporaries as Shadbolt, Jarvis, and Tak Tanabe, whose heavily painted '50s abstracts aren't nearly as distinctive as their mature work.) "We used it in our landscapes, but tidied it up, which was unfortunate."

By the end of the 1950s, Smith was teaching color theory at UBC and doing hard-edged, geometrical color studies in paintings and silkscreen prints.

From 1968 to 1970 he painted steadily, but destroyed everything he painted. Hard-edge painting no longer satisfied him; it was time for another change of direction.

In the summer of 1970, he painted every day. By fall he had our canvases that he wanted to keep: the first of what has become quintessential Gordon Smith painting.

They are colorscapes more than landscapes, horizontal masses of color with diagonals that lead the eye over the canvas.

Over the past 14 years, his palette has become more vivid, influenced by trips to Egypt and the Bay of Fundy. His brushwork has grown increasingly active.

The new paintings at the Bau-Xi continue the trend. The mastery of color is wide and absolute; the brushwork wilder and more expressive.

of Monaco and her hus-

e African race

OPINION

The Vancouver Sun • Saturday, July 6, 1996

Eminently Canadian *British Columbians*

Earlier this week, Gov.-Gen. Romeo LeBlanc announced 72 appointments to the Order of Canada. What follows are the nine B.C. appointments.

COMPANIONS

John Lang Nichol, Vancouver

A founder of the Movement Disorder Institute at the University of British Columbia and active with the Lester B. Pearson College of the Pacific.

OFFICERS

Rosemary Brown, Vancouver

A social activist and the first Black woman elected to political office in Canada; served for years as a member of the British Columbia legislature and is now the Chief Commissioner of the Ontario Human Rights Commission.

David Strangway, Vancouver

President of the University of British Columbia, an internationally respected scientist and senior academic administrator.

MEMBERS

Evelyn Mary Atkinson, Vancouver

Well-known for her Kitsilano community volunteer efforts and in particular for her persistent efforts to preserve the historic steam locomotive that pulled the first passenger train to Vancouver.

Christopher Richard Barnes, Victoria

A scientist, professor and research leader whose influence and academic leadership have enabled the University of Victoria to develop one of Canada's most successful



ARTIST, TEACHER MENTOR: Gordon Smith of West Vancouver has taught at the University of B.C. and is a founder and patron of Artists for Kids Trust

research institutions in the field of earth sciences.

Robert Davidson, Richmond

An artist in wood, silver, gold, bronze and paint whose work has joined the past to the present and extended the rich traditions of Haida art into the future.

Gordon Smith, West Vancouver

A major contributor to the development of the fine arts in Canada. A retired art professor at the University of B.C. who has greatly influenced the careers of many students and enriched the arts community through his support and

encouragement of young talent as a founder and patron of the Artists for Kids Trust.

Percy Starr, Klemtu

Creator of a prototype of sustainable economic development based on self-sufficiency and cooperation between aboriginal and non-aboriginal peoples.

Peter Stursberg, West Vancouver

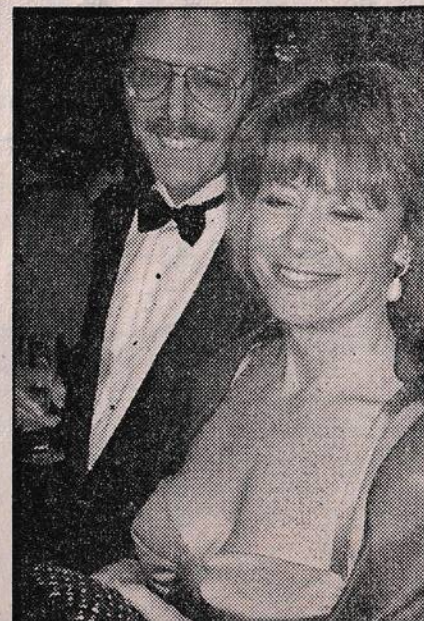
A prominent Canadian print and broadcast journalist who has worked as a foreign correspondent, newspaper editor, television newscaster and commentator and author. □

VSO hits a high note, again, with Lovers' Ball

AMAZON & CLYDE... Parrots squawked on their perches Thursday outside the Hotel Vancouver's Pacific Ballroom, where the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra's sixth-annual Lovers' Ball got off with the lightheartedness if not the minimal costuming appropriate to its Brazilian Carnaval theme.

Clyde Mitchell gave the downbeat for the orchestra's flight through **Freedman's** *Conga from Les Oiseaux Exotiques*, no doubt happy at learning he will stay on his own perch as the VSO's resident conductor.

VSO general manager **Ron Dumouchelle** and board chair **Ron Stern** told Mitchell — and Maestro **Sergiu Comissiona** later confirmed — auditions for his job are over, and he'll



ON GOLD AND PONDS... "So courageous," artist **John Koerner** said Wednesday as his contemporary and friend **Gordon Smith** opened a show of big acrylic works at **Liz Nichol's** Equinox gallery. "His paintings relate to **Monet's** watercolors but are done in a totally different way."

As expected, longtime University of B.C. teacher Smith's cool studies of lily ponds sold like hot cakes, with only a three-by-five metre work having no red dot on its \$42,000 tag by night's end.

As Vancouver Art Gallery chief **Brooks Joyner**, Community Arts Council founders **Mary Roaf** and **Elena Wait** and others feted the shy Smith, Artists For Kids Trust managing director **Bill MacDonald** and teacher-sculptor **Wing Chow** called him the little-known "catalyst" for such



Malcolm
PARRY

TOWN TALK

Le Crom and **Joseph Scheffer's** *churrasceria*-style dinner of lamb, veal and beef, Stern told attendees the Comissiona orchestra's level of playing means "we truly have a city that is complete in its international status."

Less chauvinistically, he introduced ball chair **Nezhat Khosrowshahi** and co-chair **Starr Dalton** (spouse **Bill** heads the Hongkong Bank of Canada), who with **Hiroko Ainsworth**, **Aline Dobrzensky**, **Heidi von Pfetten**, **Darlene Spevakow** and others nailed down Finning and 24 other sponsors and benefactors, among them jeweler **Toni Cavelti** and wife **Hildegarde**, whose son-in-law **Kim Jow** is working on his own costly setting. He's the agent for the late **Frank Griffiths** and widow

ing audiences, sponsors, students and others with the cheerful energy that has made the orchestra many friends.

Following chef **Robert**

STEMS TO STERN: painter Gordon Smith (left) and Leon Tuey at Equinox gallery; VSO board chair Ron Stern and Pamela Richardson (right) at Lovers' Ball

Emily's West Vancouver waterfront estate, which is listed for \$9.85 million.

The tide of decolletage which once washed over our town's grand affairs has receded — possibly reflecting a sales decline in pendant *bijoux* — but bare-necked **Pamela Richardson** kept the style going while waltzing to **Ivanovici's** *Waves of the Danube*, as did Lt.-Gov. **Garde Gardom's** wife **Helen** with four-strand pearls over a rose-pink silk gown that belonged to her mother, **Eileen Mackenzie**.

Maynards chappie **Barry Scott** rattled off a fund-raising auction, Mitchell and the orchestra hit the *Vancouver Sun*-sponsored beano's subtheme with the younger **Johann Strauss's** *Morning Papers*, and attendees left through the hotel's construction-zone lobby knowing they, Scott, Mitchell, the orchestra and even Comissiona will be there Feb. 13, 1997 to do it all again.



MONEY ON THE WALL . . . Dining at Lumiere Thursday was boyish **Vincent Lee**, 40, who launched

Hongkong Bank of Canada private banking here in strong-dollar 1984, and is ruefully remembered by those who didn't take his tip to dump their piggy-banks into yen bonds.

Now a Hong Kong arts publisher and gallerist, Lee was here with globally contracted sculptor-painter **Yankel Ginzburg**, with whom he is opening galleries in 10 Pacific Rim cities.

Earlier, the duo inked a lease on the 170-square-metre former American Express office at 1040 West Georgia, and should be selling art by mid-April.

With Metromedia mogul **John Kluge**, Russian-born, Israeli-raised Ginzburg co-founded the Washington-based Fund For Democracy & Development, which he says has raised \$240 million for social and economic programs in the former USSR and provided 40,000 tonnes of foodstuffs.

For his own nourishment Thursday, Ginzburg, who is friendly with **Mikhail Gorbachev**, **Boris Yeltsin** and numerous U.S. politicians, chose lamb chops and Stolychnaya martinis.

colleagues as **Jack Shadbolt**, **Bill Reid**, **Toni Onley** and most recently **Terry Ryan** of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-op, whose \$80,000 donation of prints will go on sale March 4 to support the trust's programs for children.

Also there, UBC fine arts and music grad **Jeanette G. Lee** has returned from years of studies and shows in Europe and Japan, and will open **Michael Bjornson's** Third Avenue Gallery with her sculptures March 7.

Smith seemed extra fond of Group of Sevens **Lawren Harris's** former "Chinese houseboy" **Leon Tuey**, who quit teaching art at John Oliver Secondary to become one of Canada's top financial analysts with — you guessed it — many works by pal Gordon Smith on his walls.



TURN ON THE LIGHTS . . . Whatever may be going on at the Georgia Hotel, choreographer **Jack Card**, who first danced at the late **Isy Walter's** Cave Supper Club in 1952, is this close to announcing a late-summer opening for the 600-seat Cave Supper Theatre.

Card says he owns the Cave and Isy's titles, and the "honest-to-God show-room for adults" won't be on Hornby Street but down Yaletown way.

Weekend Sun, Saturday, September 27, 1997

ARTS INTERVIEW

*A stunning new book and a major retrospective show underline the accomplishments
of one of Canada's most prominent and influential artists*

Gordon Smith — life in the abstract

AN,
of Books
midway through a new painting, Gordon Smith will often buzz his wife Marion from his studio and ask her to step across the courtyard of their West home to give her opinion of the work

comes and she doesn't say anything, says, 'Oh, I haven't got my right glasses,' Oh God and I say, 'Get your right glasses well, and I know then — well — that it's terrible.'
t just because she wants the best for

wants the best for art, not for me. It's don't get angry, but I get so down, frustrated, I think I'm on the right track, and then it and says, 'well' And half an hour later, she's right on. She doesn't say that's anything; but I know darned well"
onse? "I might destroy the whole thing whole thing but I start painting again

every successful man, they say, is a with a vision. Marion and Gordon Smith married 56 years; in the new book by and Andrew Hunter on his life and *Gordon Smith: The Act of Painting* (Douglas and the Vancouver Art Gallery, 160 the dedication reads: "For Marion: re be anything good in the work, it is

ree of us sit talking in the living room



tive works he found parallels with the photo-montages of Vancouver's Jeff Wall) and Parisian gargoyles to London's current shock-horror fave, Damien Hirst ("a real rebel"). He comes back from those trips fully refreshed "and I want to paint right away — I get stimulated and want to start all over again."

But as Thom puts it, "when he speaks of being 'a hundred artists deep' he speaks not of subject matter but of technique — a use of color, a texture, a brush mark. All of these things are, however, but a point of departure for him. Smith's paintings are always a synthesis of many influences and sources, but in that synthesis he creates his own language."

It is a language that is constantly in flux, but one in which certain elements are standard: particularly, the belief that the act of art is paramount. That is to say, subject takes second place to painting.

He is often associated in the public mind with outdoors imagery, and he readily agrees that "my feelings and themes are largely derived from nature, the sea, rocks, trees, the things I live with." But he constantly tries to steer himself away from the narrative, the "pretty." Both the original studio in the Erickson house and a larger one he later added are deliberately designed to exclude any visual access to the outdoors. Painting, he says, should be "a re-creation of an experience rather than an illustration of an experience."

There is also the matter of the act of painting itself, the beauty of a pen or pencil line, the mark of the brush — "So what I've been doing now, when I look at a landscape I use the colors as a starting

... or as sitting in the living room
... all glass and light and bleached
... at Arthur Erickson designed for them
... rise above the ocean, she admits that
... ways felt "a terrible responsibility" in
... to Gordon about his work.

... only about one part, or one thing,"
... and I don't say it lightly, and I always
... be 100-per-cent wrong"

... says that," Gordon interrupts, "and
... damn well that she's right."
... regarded as one of Canada's most promi-
... influential artists, he is, at 78, a self-ef-
... of great generosity and gentleness – a
... rather sing the praises of other artists
... about himself (though Marion, who
... best, thinks his modesty is a form of
... ion).

... n to pontificate on the function of art,
... ne of abstraction, or any of the Great
... hat you'd expect a grand old man of art
... to address, and he smiles, and offers a
... sentence or two, then gracefully slides
... c on to safer ground.

... are we able to piece together as the two-
... rsation flows?

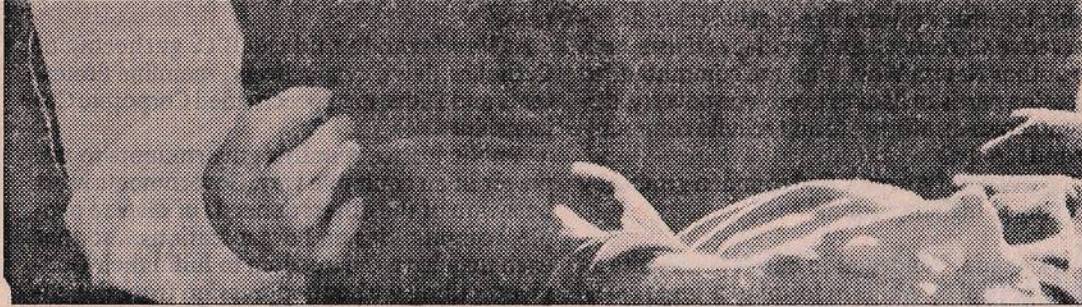
... he believes it's important that we in-
... ne experience of art into our daily lives.
... s he was part of Vancouver's Art in Liv-
... which stressed the significance of good
... everyday life: "You became aware of the
... at in, the teapot you poured from, and
... our house."

... s artist colleagues all helped build each
... ses, Mennonite style: "Jack [Shadbolt]
... e drawers for his kitchen; Doris [Shad-
... nge [Woodcock, wife of writer George]
... concrete. They weren't built very well
... get built."

... sistence on the importance of individ-
... pression – an insistence that has shaped
... philosophy as a teacher of art – leads him
... relief in the importance of art in the
... What's important is "making people
... t in living, having an open mind about

... e may be, but he's also scathing about
... travel with their minds shut – visitors
... h home who'd ask "Do these big paint-
... on comment on the way that "nothing
... the collection of mugs he and Marion
... ed from potter friends.

... greatest scorn is reserved for teachers
... force students in preordained direc-
... remembers, in his teaching days, men-
... colleagues the names of whichever
... currently infamous for their experi-
... d they'd say, yes, but that's not art ... I



MARK VAN MANEN /Vancouver Sun

Marion and Gordon Smith in the garden of their home in West Vancouver.

felt so frustrated at times. Even well-meaning people now, they'll say, 'I liked your painting then.'"

But a moment or two later he's saying: "I think it's indulgent, making paintings, I really do. Marion was a social worker and the work she did for 30 years was doing something, so important, so important. Not just helping people: doing adoptions ... I was just indulgent." And off the topic we slip.

His has been, in a sense, a lifetime of trying to shake off old habits by trying on new ones. He was born in England (he and Marion visited the family's terraced house in East Brighton last month, and he was delighted to discover that the garden shed his father built as a studio for his watercolors is still standing) and moved with his mother and brother to Canada when he was 14.

At art school in Winnipeg he was taught to draw; but he seems to believe that his Winnipeg background (he also worked for a time for a firm called Brigden's as an illustrator of department-store catalogues) left him stylistically crippled: "I'm so constipated with my painting – it's what Marion calls Brigdenizing."

In 1944, discharged from the army after being severely wounded in Sicily, he came to Vancouver, and under the influence of Jack Shadbolt and others at the Vancouver School of Art found he had to unlearn everything from Winnipeg – "My knowledge of art was very little ... I was overwhelmed. I didn't even know how to stretch a canvas. I felt a phoney, but I did it, and I learned quickly."

In 1951, he went to San Francisco and was jolted into abstract expressionism – "I know this is old hat now," he told Thom, "but at the time it was absolutely new and a revelation. It was a wonderful experience, something that helped me loosen up my painting." Not surprisingly, the work he created under those influences was hardly welcome in Vancouver. His teachers told him it was a waste of time – "but, Gordon, at least you can turn the canvases over."

Abstract painting is like listening to music. A Bach fugue, for example ... It has to be listened to several times to be appreciated. The listener must be ready to "give" a little and try to understand it.

— Gordon Smith, in an interview
in *The Vancouver Sun*, 1956.

One of the great virtues of this beautiful book (one of the most beautiful of the season, the latest in a seemingly endless series of international-quality art books produced and printed in Vancouver) is the way it clearly shows, in its range of reproductions and in Thom's insightful analytical biography, the stylistic extremes to which Smith's involvement with painting has taken him.

At 78, he still has a child's openness to new experience. His self-description – "one hundred artists deep" – is quoted several times in the book; when I mention it, he chuckles and amends the figure to 150. He's referring, modestly again, to the way he has always been open to the influence of others. "What I do is, quite honestly, I borrow from the artist and try to make it my own."

That doesn't mean copying. As you leaf through the years in this book, it's easy to spot all manner of styles, experiments, approaches, and Smith is candid about his eagerness to soak up everything he can, new and old.

He and Marion just returned home, for instance, from one of their periodic European art immersions that had them scouring Paris and London for everything from Gericault (in whose giant narra-

... look at a landscape I use the colors as a starting point. Then it's this balance between the act of painting and the subject, but sometimes the act becomes more important than the subject – and I find that absolutely fascinating." He calls that "the looseness of paint."

An example of his unwillingness to produce "easy" art: the dazzling series of pond paintings that he did last year after a visit to Monet's garden at Giverny in France. It was his most commercially successful show, but he was perturbed at the paintings' success: "They became a little bit too easy for the public to respond to them – they responded to them because they recognized them."

So he moved away from the seemingly realistic renderings of water and lilies and grasses, bleached out all the rich greens, and produced a series of abstracted black-and-white paintings in which the pond references were far less easy to discern.

Perhaps it isn't surprising that such a restless, questing spirit would be less than satisfied with his output. But he sincerely believes that he has done his best work in the past five years or so – "If I was evaluating my work for the Canada Council I wouldn't give grants for those early works. I really think not."

For all his self-deprecation, he couldn't imagine life without art. "It's something that you have to do. If I couldn't do it, I would want to die. I think there is nothing more: it is something that goes on and on. If I'm away, in London, I'm painting at night. I have to be making this: it isn't a question of finishing something, it's a question of doing something. It's a compulsion.

"I just have to be there in my studio: I don't say it's working, but it's wonderful – though it's something you can get so frustrated with. You work all day, and you think that's okay, and you get up the next morning and you think, that's terrible, and you start all over again."

Yet through it all his optimism shines: here as clearly as anything, we have a statement of belief in the potential of art-making, an insight into why.

"I feel that what I'm doing today and what I'm doing tomorrow is going to be the best – you just keep hoping. I don't play golf but I imagine that if you play golf you just want to go on getting better and better. On this, you just keep hoping that something will really come off.

"I've never had anything really that's come off, never, really, never. Never. I always look at it and think it's not right yet, it's not right yet. And you just wonder ..." ◊

A major retrospective of Gordon Smith's work, Gordon Smith: The Act of Painting, will open at the Vancouver Art Gallery Oct. 19 and run to Jan. 11.