



## ARTS & LITERATURE AND NATURE

In this issue, the ALAN section presents a celebration of the Arts and Literature from an inclusivity lens. It includes reviews of works by artists working beyond societal barriers to express their art. “Painting on walls: Maud Lewis, a Canadian folk artist,” presented by John McLennan, is somewhat of a tribute to Maud Lewis, the Nova Scotian painter who lived with disability. She, however, went beyond the constraints posed by physical disability to become one of Canada’s most celebrated artists. In the write-up, “Confronting Eradication: David Wojnarowicz and the radical aspiration of art,” Alan Patrick Garrigan introduces the work of David Wojnarowicz, a revolutionary artist who questioned the status quo of social sensibilities. Finally, Lind Grant-Oyeye highlights the role of Eleanor Milne, Canada’s first female Dominion Sculptor, in carving the country’s history. Eleanor Milne’s artistic journey is chronicled in the fictionalized book “The Carving of Canada: A Tale of Parliamentary Gothic,” by Scott Munroe.

### Painting on walls: Maud Lewis, a Canadian folk artist

I had not heard of Maud Lewis before watching the biopic “Maudie”. Maud is described as one of Canada’s premier folk artists. She hailed from Nova Scotia and some of her works are on display at the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia including a restoration of the famous little house she lived in, a focal point in the biopic: <https://artgalleryofnovascotia.ca/maud-lewis>.

This film captures Maud’s steadfastness and joy in her artistic pursuits despite her many adversities including severe rheumatoid arthritis, family challenges, and poverty. Despite this, she is not portrayed as a victim to be pitied. Rather, the portrayal might even provoke some jealousy given the extent of commitment to, and contentment with, her chosen vocation.

There were many things I loved about this film. One was the depiction of the developing relationship between Maud and her husband, Everett Lewis, within their small austere house, using, at times, sparse dialogue. This was

interspersed with stunning landscape shots (although apparently there was some controversy that the film was shot in Newfoundland rather than Nova Scotia; <https://www.halifaxexaminer.ca/province-house/epilogue-maudie-take-4/>).

I particularly enjoyed her using the bare walls of their home as a canvas. This evoked a memory from when I was growing up, being taken aback one day when my mother decided to paint a large multicoloured sunset scene on the white wall in the small entrance hallway of our home. “You are allowed to paint on the walls!?” I would have been a wee bairn at the time and can imagine my Scottish grandmother disapproving but remaining silent. When I finally owned my first home, I encouraged my children to similarly consider the bare white walls of the house as canvas (to my wife’s chagrin).

Even if you are not in agreement with painting on walls, you may find this portrayal of a Canadian artist of interest. It won many awards including the 2016 People’s Choice Award at the Vancouver International Film Festival. Maudie was released in 2016 and was directed by Aisling Walsh. It stars Sally Hawkins and Ethan Hawke. Checkout the official trailer at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wCZ\\_guQTGNw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wCZ_guQTGNw)

Clips of the real Maud Lewis are found here: <https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/761637443808/>

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### Confronting Eradication: David Wojnarowicz and the radical aspiration of art

Born in New Jersey in 1954 and emerging out of New York’s East Village art scene, David Wojnarowicz was a complex, authentically punk, and explicitly ideological artist. His influence ranged from Kia Le Beija to David La Chappelle. His work included diatribes, diaries, poetry, comic books, monologues, visual art, and songs (1). Many of Wojnarowicz’s art pieces from his illustrious career spanning three decades are archived at New York University’s Fales Library and Special Collections, curated by Marvin

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Taylor. Wojnarowicz developed the unconscious dimension of human experience in his art.

A series of public controversies and cultural battles erupted in the 1980's and early 1990's around politics and sexuality, illness and representation, and Wojnarowicz was at the centre of these sociological 'sex wars'. Wojnarowicz confronted the HIV/AIDS panic of the 1980s including policies such as "The Presidential Commission on the HIV Epidemic" which essentially criminalised HIV/AIDS. However, some gains have been realized, such as the United States' Supreme Court Obergefell versus Hodges 2015 ruling that Americans have a constitutional right to marry who they love (2), and today's new generation of pre-exposure prophylaxis medications that have made it possible to reduce the risk of HIV infection. However, other ongoing social challenges such as mass deportation, transphobia, unemployment, homelessness, environmental crisis, and the pandemic all evoke the timelessness of Wojnarowicz's "resistance art".

In Wojnarowicz, we ought not be afraid to imagine art outside the realm of traditional American museum narratives of art and history. *Arthur Rimbaud in New York* is one of his most well-known pieces. Wojnarowicz photographed three friends and lovers, Brian Butterick, John Hall, and Jean Pierre wearing an Arthur Rimbaud mask. His series is deliberately opaque, developing an "aesthetics of curiosity". Between 1978 and 1980, Wojnarowicz visited nearly 500 locations in New York for the exhibition. The mask image itself is a reproduction of an Etienne Carjet portrait (3). This mask representation has been linked by David Breslin to the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas, who, states that the appearance of the human face "orders and ordains us", calling upon the subject into "giving and serving" the other (2). It is "the most basic form of human responsibility".

Levinas apprehends the face as containing an infinitude wherein the face has the innate capacity to "demand justice", constructed as "a vital living presence" (4). Bergo Bettina develops Levinas's postulation further, stating, "The face, in its nudity and defencelessness, signifies: "Do not kill me." (4). Any exemplification of the face's expression, moreover, carries with it this combination of resistance and defencelessness: Levinas speaks of the face of the other who is "widow, orphan, or stranger." The transcendental encounter of the face relates to pathos and, as Levinas states, "care for the other" (4). Wojnarowicz forces us "to consider the full weight of the thought, action, and responsibility that the encounter demands" (4). His work, particularly *Rimbaud in New York*, situates the need to redress a footnote to a desperate and ruinous period in American history.

## References

1. For a review of the exhibition of *Dear John Pierre Delage* see a review in the New York Times at <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/05/arts/design/wojnarowicz-ppow-gallery-art-delage.html>.
2. Breslin D, Kiehl DW. David Wojnarowicz: History Keeps Me Awake at Night, Whitney Museum of American Art; Distributed by Yale University Press, New York, 2018
3. Vitale A. Our Rimbaud Mask, Ugly Duckling Press; 2018
4. Some of these points about the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas are drawn from writings of Brigham University's Bruce Andrews. See. <http://faceofother.blogspot.com/2007/03/meaning-of-face-of-other.html?m=1>

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## "The Carving of Canada: A Tale of Parliamentary Gothic"

Eleanor Milne, Canada's first female dominion sculptor, was born on May 14, 1925, in Saint John, New Brunswick, and died in Ottawa, Ontario, on May 17, 2004. Milne was the only female candidate amongst twenty males who had applied for the position of lead sculptor. She studied anatomy and medical sciences at McGill University before proceeding to London England's Central College of Crafts and Arts (1). As the dominion sculptor, she worked on Parliament Hill. My introduction to Milne's work occurred during a significant period for women.

March has been designated annually as Women's History Month worldwide. It is a period for reflection on women's historical and contemporary contribution to society. In addition to the public focus on women and their achievements, I was in contact with the first female Dean of Memorial University, Newfoundland, regarding an interview for JCACAP. My preoccupation with the role of women in society may have influenced my choice when offered a selection of used books during a stay at a hotel in Nova Scotia. I chose *The Carving of Canada* by Munroe Scott (2). Scott explains that the book was initially planned as a biography of Eleanor Milne but was later transformed into a fictionalized format, paying tribute to Milne's career. Four main characters: Old one, Girl, Boy, and Youth, take the reader through a mythical and philosophical plot based on actual events. The characters present different perspectives. Old one serves as the voice of wisdom. For example, when asked about the center of the universe, Old one suggested the universe, perhaps is an idea, with the mind as the center (p. 12). Questions such as what makes a country are raised, with answers suggesting a nation is mainly about the people and not the physical place. Art becomes the communication

medium, transporting the reader through the various stages of Canada's formation seamlessly moving into modern times. Photographs of Milne's carvings from her work on Parliament Hill accompany fictionalized retelling of historical events.

*The Carving of Canada* is a tribute to one of Canada's iconic figures. It also alludes to the role others in society play in the experience of individuals from marginalized groups. Milne faced various obstacles during her term as the Parliament Hill sculptor. However, the men who worked alongside Milne handed her the tools she needed for her work. They were portrayed as collaborative, not as adversaries or taking over the process. As an advocate for my clients, I

ponder the role of society in supporting marginalized groups for success. Advocates sometimes face the dilemma of balancing passivity with the risk of taking over. Scott's book, however, effectively shows a situation where an individual from a marginalized group is allowed to take charge of their journey with active support from those around them.

## References

1. Breakthroughs M. Eleanor Milne [Internet]. Workers' History Museum. 2022 [cited 8 April 2022]. Available from: <https://workershistorymuseum.ca/eleanor-milne/>
2. Scott M. *The Carving of Canada*. Manotick: Penumbra Press; 1999.