

# blue ink in my pen

student writings about art

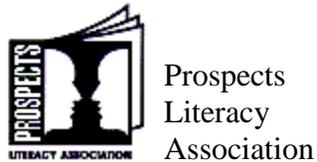
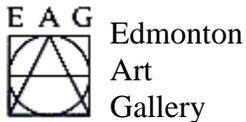
By Prospects Literacy Students:

**Lyle Atkinson**  
**Palmira Baretta**  
**Allison Day**  
**Cindy Gent**  
**Gail Lewis**  
**Tim McCaskill**  
**Candice Smuda**  
**Daniel Stack**  
**Linda Woods**



*September 12 - November 24, 1995*

The Edmonton Art Gallery and Prospects Literacy Association



This project was made possible by a grant from the Canadian Museums Association *Reading the Museum*, funded through the National Literacy Secretariat.



## Foreword

We are a group of adult learners from the Prospects Literacy Association in Edmonton. We first heard about this project in the spring of 1995. We were asked if we would like to learn about art and write about it in a book. We would learn by going to The Edmonton Art Gallery once a week for five weeks. Our tutor was Marie Lopes, the Education Curator at the Gallery. Our regular teacher is Don. He came with us to learn about art.

Our first trip to the gallery was in September. As a group we were excited and curious. "I was mystified about what was to come," said Gail, one of the participants in the project. "I had no clue what to expect." That night we studied a painting called *The Approaching Storm* by Adolph Vogt. We learned about what to look for in a painting, how to describe what we saw, how to focus on specifics. We also learned not to touch paintings!

On our second visit we studied *The Buffalo Stampede* by Frederick Arthur Verner. "That painting was like a nightmare" said Tim. "You wouldn't want to go through something like that too often." On our third visit we were introduced to the camera art of Barbara Astman. Some of us liked her work and some of us didn't. "When I saw it I thought, Geez, I could do that", said Candace.

"It was a new experience for me", said Tim.

We wrote Barbara Astman a letter and asked her some questions about her work. She took the time to write back to us and answer all of our questions.

On our fourth visit we discussed colour. We talked about our favourite colour and why, what colours mean in a painting, how artists use colour in their work, how colour can impact on the way we see things. On the fifth we studied sculpture. We learned to walk around a sculpture in order to appreciate the complete work. Every angle tells a different story.

Now that our five weeks are over we have come together to form this book. We feel that we have learned a lot about art and we appreciate the opportunity that was given to us. It is wonderful to have an art gallery in our community and people like Marie to invite us into the world of art.

*Prospect Writing Workshop Students*



Adolphe Vogt  
*The Approaching Storm*, 1869  
oil on canvas, EAG collection

## **The Approaching Storm**

There can be danger.  
Look for the kids.  
A storm is coming.

Hay piled high on the wagon is heavy.  
Strong horses plodding in the mud  
trying to pull the heavy load.  
The driver presses on.

The lovers don't even notice.

The man on the hay has done this  
before.  
He knows the routine  
and takes everything in stride.

The boy and the dog startle the horses.

They are more lively,  
running down the street.  
Energy spent in action.

Weather can take away everything.

They will survive the storm.



Frederick Arthur Verner  
*The Buffalo Stampede*, 1882  
oil on canvas, EAG Collection

## **The Buffalo**

The buffalo are running from the fire and the smoke and the fire is rolling around the field.

There hasn't been rain for weeks. The buffalo want to get out of the smoke and fire.

The ground is shaking from the buffalo's feet. With smoke in their noses it must be hard to breathe.

The terror in their eyes is fear.

Prairie birds, there must have been thousands or hundreds of them. They nested. Their eggs are not yet hatched.

The man must have courage to draw all those buffalo and then paint them when he got home.

*Linda Woods*

## **Buffalo Stampede**

I wouldn't know what to do if I was there.

It would be a nightmare.

I would go anywhere to get out of the story.

*Tim McCaskill*



Barbara Astman  
*Red*, 1980  
polaroid photograph, Collection of the Artist

## Red

I love all colours

My favourite colour is red! When I order roses I make sure they're red. In flowers, generally I love red. When the sun goes down it leaves a rainbow red in the sky that is beautiful. I like red even on clothes!

I am a baker so my uniform is white. I've worn white for a long time and I like it very much on me. White reminds me of purity, wedding chimes, freshness...

when everything is white it seems so peaceful.

*Palmira Baretta*

## Red

What made you choose red on black?

These pictures look like the top of a picnic table.

I like the contrast.

Red is a powerful colour.

*Gail Lewis*



Marc-Aurele de Foy Suzor-Cote  
*Passage de fin d'hiver, Riviere Gosselin*  
oil on canvas, EAG collection

## autumn

the leaves turn orange

red

brown

The leaves in the trees fall down  
because they're dead  
I like brown because it's a beautiful  
colour

*Allison Day*

## Nature Painting

Water flowing in the river, wind of cold winter.  
The colour and the river draws me to this painting.

My favourite colours are white and blue.  
Why? I guess my favourite season is winter.  
If I could ask the artist three questions  
they would be:  
\* How cold must it have been?  
\* Did you have a winter coat and boots? A hat and  
mitts?  
\* Did you know about winter in Canada?

*Linda Woods*

## **Passing Shadow**

Blue sky makes you feel uplifted, tranquil or serene.

The blue water trickling down the stream could mean spring is coming, or the blue sky in winter could mean colder weather is coming. The dark blue sky in the picture could mean a storm is on its way.

Blue mood.

Blue ink in my pen makes me want to write a letter.

*Lyle Atkinson*



Frederic Marlett Bell-Smith  
*Above Lake Louise*, 1910  
oil on canvas, EAG Collection

## **Above Lake Louise**

The green trees are what I like most.  
Green is my favourite colour.  
There is something inquiring about green.

I want to get closer to the trees.  
There is a calming effect.  
For me, I get investigative and curious  
and I want to examine the trees more  
closely.

Green is an inviting colour.  
Up against white mountains  
the trees stand out.

Green is a colour I wish I could touch.

*Gail Lewis*

## **Above Lake Louise**

The beauty of trees and mountains.  
Green is a wonderful colour. Life.

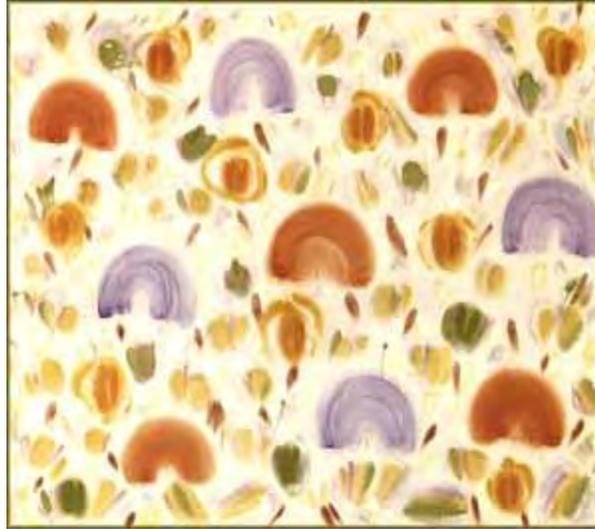
To just sit and enjoy. A look out to see wild  
birds. Maybe an eagle.

The peace is temporary. It cannot last.  
My stay would be for a morning,  
maybe an afternoon.

If I were a writer or a painter,  
my stay would be somewhat longer

The valley makes you wonder where it goes.

*Daniel Stack*



K. M. Graham  
*Waltzing Matilda*, 1977  
acrylic on canvas, EAG Collection

## Waltzing Matilda

confusing  
different  
plums  
lifeless  
beautiful  
dancing  
jump

*Allison Day*

## Waltzing Matilda

Dancing fruits and vegetables waltz  
The waltz is my favourite music  
It seems the fruits and vegetables are  
dancing  
through a beautiful musical waltz

*Linda Woods*

Waltzing Matilda is a painting about  
dancing.  
One step, two step, with the music beside  
you  
playing.

*Tim McCaskill*

## Waltzing Matilda

Four blue heron  
Five red apples  
Upside down pomegranates  
Tulips  
Lots of seeds on the top of the  
ground

*Lyle Atkinson*

## **Chester**

The colours scared Chester  
His feet were like an artist's  
brush.

*Daniel Stack*

Kathleen Graham wants to convey aliveness  
and perpetual motion. She uses colour and  
the  
size of objects to make the picture stand  
out.

There is a swaying momentum or motion to  
this picture. Maybe Kathleen wanted to  
convey  
the way things move.

*Gail Lewis*



Alfred Laliberte  
*Dollard*, n.d.  
cast bronze, EAG Collection

## A Soldier's Day

*His name is Pierre. He is a French cavalryman. His mission is to command his troops. He is twenty one. He has been the commander for two years. It is a clear day with puffy white clouds. The terrain is kind of rough. The battlefield is filled with bodies. The battle had raged the night before. Pierre is a farmer in university studying agriculture. He is married to a young blonde named Kimberly. They met on the French Riviera. They have two kids, twin boys named Louis and Phillippe...*

(co-written by *Allison Day, Gail Lewis, Lyle Atkinson, Tim McCaskill, Linda Woods, and Palmira Baretta*)

...In the battlefield a lot of the soldiers lost their lives. Pierre was hurt in the shoulder, Pierre had always loved his country and he was fit to be a captain. For him to lose the battle was like to lose his life. He tried very hard to be a strong soldier. But at this point he asked God to pray with him and protect his wife and children. *Palmira Baretta*

... He thought he had come to the end of his life. He was thinking about his family back in France - his wife and his two boys and how they would manage the farm without him.

Help came and he lived.

*Lyle Atkinson*

... Pierre was unable to take control of his troops that day. He was the only one who knew what to do when the battle started between the French and the English. When the battle was over, the English came first.

*Tim McCaskill*



## Afterwords

The first thing that all new writers must do in order to write clearly and truly is to convince themselves that they have something to say. Until they do that, they will write without conviction, or clarity, or spirit.

When we began this project, we met with the learners in the Prospects Writing Workshop who wanted to take part, and we told them that we wanted to hear their opinions about the art we would be looking at. They all said the same thing: "We have nothing to say."

This book is documentation that they had plenty to say.

Through the art, and through the skillful and supportive hand of Marie, they discovered a new and wonderful world, and they wrote about it. They shared their thoughts, their feelings and their perspectives. They chose personal favourites and explained why; they shook their heads over things that did not appeal to them, and when on occasion I would say, "I thought you had nothing to say about this?", they would laugh and say "That was before".

Prospects students came into this project to learn more about art, and they leave with a book of their own writing under their arms, and the knowledge that they do indeed have something to say.

For a writer there is no greater discovery.

**Don Trembath, *Writing Instructor***  
**Prospects Literacy Association.**

It's rare that a public art gallery gets to really take on the role of a forum. The students from Prospects turned The Edmonton Art Gallery from a place to look at art into a place to create by looking and talking - intertwining visions, thoughts, feeling, and meaning, using words as their tools. For five weeks the gallery became a place for envisioning - a creative lab where students tried to puzzle together meanings by writing through them. Paintings, sculpture and installations served as inspiration and were in turn enriched by the developing ideas of those who examined them.

This project was about writing and imagining. It continues to be about belonging - for Linda who is now taking art classes, for Daniel who has decided to look for a space to exhibit his photographs, for Tim who plans to get the people in his workplace organized for a drawing class, for Allison who now knows more about gallery security than most of the staff here, for Candice who understands the artists struggle through her own struggle to be a writer, for Gail whose careful words brought so many paintings to life, for Palmira whose energy kept us writing, for Cindy and Lyle who enlivened these gallery spaces with their ideas, observations and laughter.

Keep on looking. Keep on writing.

**Marie Lopes, *Education Curator***  
**Edmonton Art Gallery**



## Special Thanks to:

Jenifer McVaugh and the CMA Reading the Museum Project,  
and Maureen Sanders, Director of Prospects Literacy  
Association

Project Coordinator: *Marie Lopes*

Editors: *Don Tremblath, Marie Lopes and Jenifer McVaugh*

Design: *Jenifer McVaugh and the Prospects Writing  
Workshop Students*

Art Photography: *Harry Korol*

General Photography: *Rachel Sanders*

Printing: *Sunrise Printing Ltd.*

The Edmonton Art Gallery is a registered non-profit organization funded in part by grants from the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, and Alberta Lottery Fund beneficiary, the Art Associates of the Edmonton Art Gallery, the Canada Council, the City of Edmonton, the Edmonton Community Foundation, Holly Ball Benefit funds, the Museum Assistance Programme of the Federal Dept. of Canadian Heritage, and the Presidents Circle, all of which we gratefully acknowledge.



The Edmonton Art Gallery  
2 Sir Winston Churchill Square  
Edmonton, Alberta  
Canada T5J 2C1