Landon Mackenzie’s Drawings: A Personal and Parallel Journey through Time

By Shannon Moore on November 23, 2015

Landon Mackenzie, *Untitled, (Saskatchewan)* [1994], watercolour on paper, 25.4 x 35.5 cm. Collection of the artist. Courtesy of Gallery Art45, Montreal

Vancouver-based artist Landon Mackenzie describes her upbringing as unusual. In an interview with NGC Magazine, she shared fond memories of her childhood and described the impact of her early life on the development of her professional career.

“I grew up in Rosedale in Toronto in this old house that was in need of repair, so my mother and father covered all of the walls with these huge abstract paintings,” she said. “They were stakeholders in the visual arts scene and often hosted parties with characters that you could read about in Canadian art. I delivered scotch at three in the morning to Harold Town, who was arguing
on the front steps with David Silcox. I learned how to play ‘Chopsticks’ on the piano with Michael Snow, while Joyce Wieland was in the kitchen yapping away with Betsy Kilbourn.”

Born in Boston, Massachusetts, in 1954, Mackenzie studied art at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design and received a Master of Fine Arts from Concordia University in 1979. She established a successful career based on her large-scale abstract paintings, which she produced in tandem with works on paper for more than 40 years. The Kelowna Art Gallery’s (KAG) current exhibition, Landon Mackenzie: Parallel Journey: Works on Paper (1975-2015), aims to highlight Mackenzie’s unique background while profiling the works on paper that, unbeknownst to many, defined a large portion of her artistic career.

Landon Mackenzie, *Man-Curl II (Emma Lake)* [1995], watercolour on paper, 25.4 x 35.5 cm. Collection of the artist. Courtesy of Gallery Art45, Montreal

“The exhibition shows the progression of my work in a way that other shows have not been able to,” says Mackenzie. “The works on paper developed throughout many different stages of my life. They were never preliminary studies to anything – they stood on their own as a parallel practice to my abstract works.”

The exhibition is arranged chronologically, beginning with works produced by artists who were influential on Mackenzie as a child. Black and white etchings completed in her undergraduate and graduate years are on view alongside watercolours on paper and European-style works completed during various residencies in Paris and Berlin. “Every time Landon travels somewhere, she produces a distinct body of work that differs from the last,” said exhibition curator Liz Wylie in an interview with NGC Magazine. “I think that visitors will be impressed by the breadth of her career and the incredible variety of her work.”

Accompanying the exhibition is a comprehensive book that celebrates Mackenzie’s success. Wylie, who attended school with Mackenzie and has had a longstanding artist-curator relationship with her, assisted with the book’s completion. “Landon and I established a chronology for the book that
includes all of the places that she has been and all of her accomplishments, illustrated with paintings and old pictures of Landon through the years,” she says. “I can remember when she looked like a hippie, when we were both so young, so it has been emotional for me.”

A red clothbound notebook (1995) with black and red ink prints is a part of Canada’s national collection at the NGC, as well as a number of Mackenzie’s acrylic works including *Blue Night Voices* (1995) and *Palliser’s Triangle* (1997).

Landon Mackenzie, *City of the Woods (Banff- Neurotree series)* [2012], watercolour on Japanese paper, 45.7 x 70 cm. Collection of the artist. Courtesy of Gallery Art45, Montreal

In addition to her art, Mackenzie has taught at the Emily Carr University of Art and Design for nearly 30 years – inspiring a new generation of artists through her life experiences. “I had kids and a job and I was always in the studio making ambitious work, even though at times there seemed to be no place for it to go. All of these things came together as my life chugged along,” says Mackenzie. “It’s important for aspiring artists to see that you just need to keep at it. Sometimes you don’t have a studio, but there’s always a kitchen table somewhere to get the work done.”

Wylie hopes that the KAG exhibition will expand this message to an even larger audience. “To see someone’s dedication and incredible commitment, through all of the years and all of the bumps in the road, will hopefully be inspiring to visitors,” she says.


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