

**THE WRITING ON THE WALL:
The Work of Joane Cardinal-Schubert**
Edited by Lindsey V. Sharman

ISBN 978-1-55238-950-8

THIS BOOK IS AN OPEN ACCESS E-BOOK. It is an electronic version of a book that can be purchased in physical form through any bookseller or on-line retailer, or from our distributors. Please support this open access publication by requesting that your university purchase a print copy of this book, or by purchasing a copy yourself. If you have any questions, please contact us at ucpress@ucalgary.ca

Cover Art: The artwork on the cover of this book is not open access and falls under traditional copyright provisions; it cannot be reproduced in any way without written permission of the artists and their agents. The cover can be displayed as a complete cover image for the purposes of publicizing this work, but the artwork cannot be extracted from the context of the cover of this specific work without breaching the artist's copyright.

COPYRIGHT NOTICE: This open-access work is published under a Creative Commons licence. This means that you are free to copy, distribute, display or perform the work as long as you clearly attribute the work to its authors and publisher, that you do not use this work for any commercial gain in any form, and that you in no way alter, transform, or build on the work outside of its use in normal academic scholarship without our express permission. If you want to reuse or distribute the work, you must inform its new audience of the licence terms of this work. For more information, see details of the Creative Commons licence at: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

UNDER THE CREATIVE COMMONS LICENCE YOU MAY:

- read and store this document free of charge;
- distribute it for personal use free of charge;
- print sections of the work for personal use;
- read or perform parts of the work in a context where no financial transactions take place.

UNDER THE CREATIVE COMMONS LICENCE YOU MAY NOT:

- gain financially from the work in any way;
- sell the work or seek monies in relation to the distribution of the work;
- use the work in any commercial activity of any kind;
- profit a third party indirectly via use or distribution of the work;
- distribute in or through a commercial body (with the exception of academic usage within educational institutions such as schools and universities);
- reproduce, distribute, or store the cover image outside of its function as a cover of this work;
- alter or build on the work outside of normal academic scholarship.



Acknowledgement: We acknowledge the wording around open access used by Australian publisher, **re.press**, and thank them for giving us permission to adapt their wording to our policy <http://www.re-press.org>



[STILL] RESPONDING TO EVERYDAY LIFE

BY JOANE CARDINAL-SCHUBERT AND GERALD McMASTER

This interview was conducted by Gerald McMaster with Joane Cardinal-Schubert in 1997 for a retrospective exhibition called *Joane Cardinal-Schubert: Two Decades* organized by the Muttart Gallery in Calgary and curated by Kathryn (Kay) Burns. It was published in a catalogue produced for the exhibition that was “dedicated to the Kainaa People of Southern Alberta.” Another two decades on, we look back again, but in this publication the interview is published in reverse order, which seems more fitting this go-round. This re-ordering plays with the artist’s own rejection of linear narratives and allows one to retrace Cardinal-Schubert’s footsteps and perhaps see new meaning in her words. This is also informed by the artist’s assertion to look back to look forward. Dr. McMaster’s closing comments and introduction to this interview are included successively to give Joane Cardinal-Schubert the final word. (Only if, of course, you read it front to back.) Here, in her own words, Cardinal-Schubert discusses her work and shares how viewers might take her “glancing back” to help walk forward through the themes she presents.

— LINDSEY V. SHARMAN, 2017

Introduction and Closing

On the eve of Calgary-based artist Joane Cardinal-Schubert's retrospective at the Muttart, I felt this was the place to begin "glancing back," as she says, at her life and art. As we will discover in this retrospective Cardinal-Schubert has a close connection and tactile response to her media, as well as a profound connection to her childhood. If we are to believe some Adlerian psychoanalysis that we are conditioned by our "childhood logic," I would suggest that in Cardinal-Schubert's case, this logic forms the basis of her practice. Thus, in this retrospective we can begin to examine the complex and discrete approach to creativity.

– GERALD MCMASTER, 1997

In closing, understanding the idea of a retrospective is a traditional phenomenon in the visual arts [which] frames the life of an artist: it is a trace in their life. For the rest of us, these traces can be as banal as photographs and home movies, which are deeply personal and wrapped in much sentimentality. For the artist, their work operates on a similar level. The difference, however, is that they add thought, opinion, and physical expression. A retrospective allows us to look at their life, it opens the artist's work to various levels of interpretation which we, the viewers, then overlay with our own brand of logic. The foregoing conversation has merely gotten us to the threshold; the rest is up to us.

– GM

GM: Creativity is bringing two or more things together to come up with something interesting, that is why I asked about innovation. Regarding the technical innovations you've made and your experiences of using new materials, I want to ask: have you ever combined something that is very Indian with your knowledge of materials and art to create something that is a Cardinal-Schubert? Is there an aesthetic identity that is yours?

JC-S: I thought of how people used materials in the past and their respect for the natural world. If I look at my earlier work, I was interested in using earth tones. Or, sometimes my ideas come about because I realize how much people don't understand; sometimes it's about some obtuse thing happening, like the Lubicon situation where kids were dying. Earlier I mentioned the muskrats stretched across our wall, in the work *One Little, Two Little, Three Little, Preservation of a Species* (1987), that is how I placed the plaster babies. The combination of plaster and babies had a relationship to seeing the muskrat skins on the wall. In it you will see personal references.

Before I realized I was interested in a thing called art, I had been interested in making things. A certain amount of this came from watching my dad. He was always building things. When I look back at it now, I realize that not everyone lived that way. Later, when I started making art, I remembered how these ideas helped me creatively. I wasn't interested in doing something someone else had done, that is why I never understood art history or understood a lot about other artists' works, who seemed to be more interested in re-making something that had been done before. For me, if I wasn't doing something innovative or seeing something in a new way, I didn't want to do it! For me, the whole process is about the discovery and excitement of working. This is just to say that my everyday experiences have a lot to do with what I make.

GM: With your own experiences, do many of these ideas come naturally?

JC-S: I think it has a lot to do with the first six years of my life like remembering a lake with water lilies, the animal life, and my dad's trap lines around the lake.

He used to stretch muskrats across boards and tack them in long rectangles along the wall. As a kid, I was curious of how the hides had been scraped, their smell, colours, and fur. Those moments are still important for me.

GM: If it's the case that we don't know the outcome of a work, let me turn to the idea of innovation. Are there some things you've done that should be pointed out?

JC-S: I think the most interesting thing I found is that I have absolutely no adherence or any sort of respect for the traditional use of materials. I cross disciplines. I've tried all media. Sometimes when I can't quite express an idea, those cross disciplines become really important to me. My biggest innovation, I think, is getting a chance to work with students, of working, showing, and questioning them about creativity. By gathering various materials I've shown them how to create something that brings them to a point of emotion. I love the challenge of innovation, especially using materials differently.

For me, walking down the street and noticing something becomes a frozen moment and combines somewhat with what I'm doing or experiencing. The way I found this out one time, was walking through a park in early August and seeing green shimmering leaves. I took a photograph. Suddenly I realized what Impressionism was! Everything I was taught, all the Impressionists whose works I looked at, the things I saw in Japan [Impressionist works], in that sudden moment everything came together and made sense. Only sometime later did I develop the photo. Another moment was when I went to Waterton park, where I photographed a bear through a cracked window. Still another moment was when I was working on some pictographic drawings. In a presentation to some art students, I showed them a slide of a work I had done. It was a pictograph and bears. I noticed the park, Waterton Park, and the Milk River. I was then able to tell them how my work came from those experiences. They were able to understand how I work.

GM: It's like you're getting a clearer picture now?

JC-S: One keeps adding to the information and being informed. If I don't continue being informed, if I don't keep being interested, if I don't keep finding out about things, I wouldn't be doing it. I'm so interested in the process of making a work. For me that is the most wonderful part because I don't know anything when I start.

GM: So you can return to ideas over and over again?

JC-S: Yes, or I re-address ideas, because they simply come up in my life. For example, the same things I was concerned about when I was a kid still come up in my life now.

GM: That's what I mean by themes, so that, in opposition to linearity, you're dealing with ideas that jump around.

JC-S: I believe in chaos theory, chaos as the natural order of things, which I see in my work.

GM: Have you and the curator put some guidance into the selection for the viewer?

JC-S: Absolutely not. The idea of the retrospective and linear presentation wouldn't work with me as I found out from looking at my own work. I really work in this huge circle with many little spin-off circles.

GM: Certainly when you're creating, you're not creating for anybody but doing it for yourself; but, when the works are on display, you can't do anything about it. The viewer will look and decide for themselves what to interpret.

JC-S: I agree, that's what I want to happen.

GM: You talked about your work being a mirror, I might call it a looking glass, where the viewer looks into your work, whereas the mirror reflects ideas. In the twenty years of work, are there themes you and the curator selected you felt were important for the viewer?

JC-S: I'd like to address the idea of the looking-glass and mirror. The thing about a retrospective isn't the act of looking

back but a glancing back; because, it is just a quick glance, I don't need to look, because I'm already carrying all that stuff with me when I work. When we're talking about the looking-glass, it's like taking a really long look or a studied thing. It's not that way with me. I'm not trying to get that involved; I'm not trying to take over how people look at something; I'm putting in a small bit of how I feel about something. My work is coded, a coded visual vocabulary that satisfies me inside where no one can get to. It's important for me to have that kind of language in my paintings, so the viewer will not get it. All I want to do for the viewer is to create a glance. I don't want to interfere with their memories or how they feel about the situation. I only want to create the beginning so that they can escape to that mental video-tape that carries all the important information. I try not to overlap into their sensitivity or personal memory.

GM: A retrospective is a looking back with a perspective of today, seeing where you've come from, and seeing in the works what you were thinking at the time, you take the audience through a trip. How often does that happen?

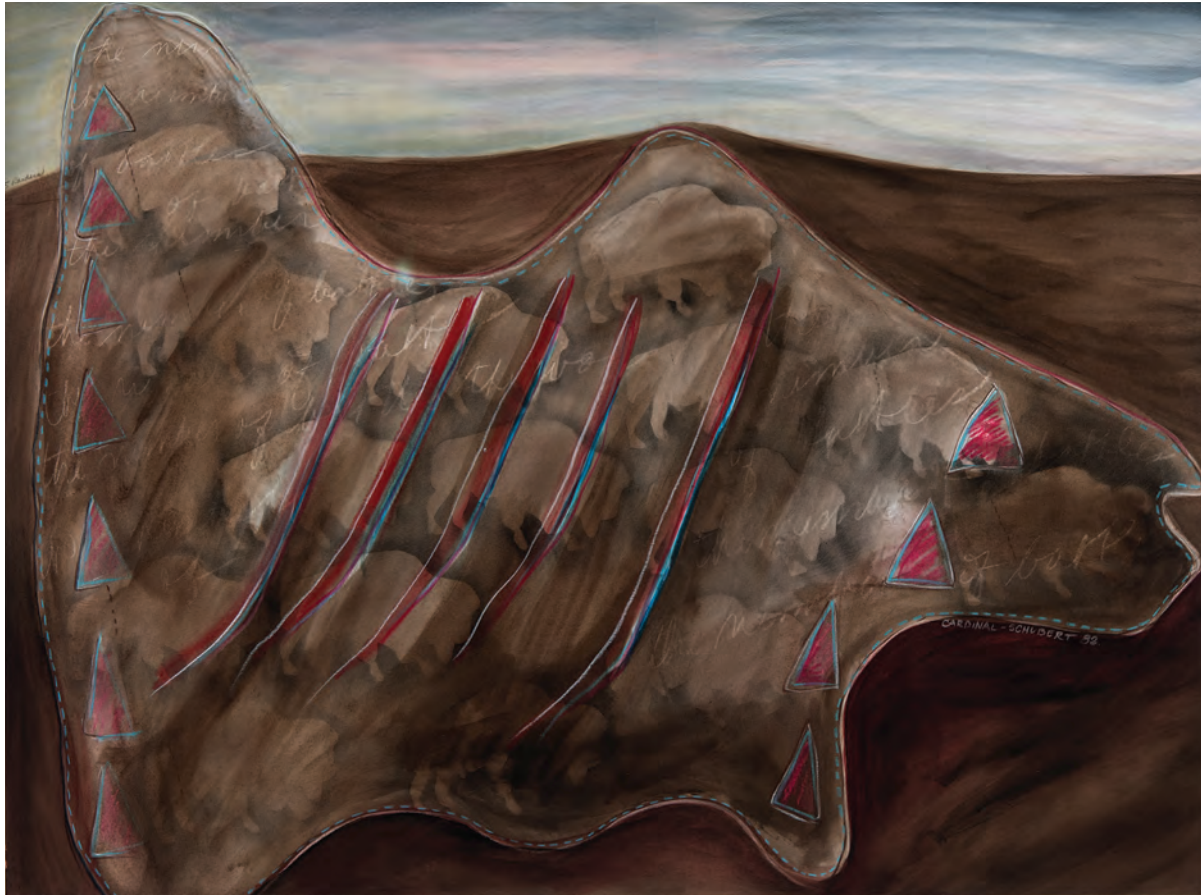
JC-S: A retrospective is a Western European idea of what happens within an artist's lifetime. When I worked as a curator I had a problem with art being created for the under-thirty crowd. I never did fit in. I didn't go to university until I was thirty. I didn't start creating serious pieces until I was thirty, thirty-five. You know, some things I made as a little kid informed me more than my work now. A retrospective is something I do all the time as I work; I'm always looking back. The knowledge of when I was little and the way I look at the world is included in what I'm doing now. I don't feel that being a certain age is unconnected to an earlier age; I've set it aside because I'm too old. I'm the same person I was when I was two. I think that is why people look at me and think that I'm a lot younger than I am. I don't have a sense of what I should be; I just am!

In my work, I'm trying to create a mirror for people to look into, to make people feel the way I do, which is to be personally concerned with a lot of things. We live in a world where we understand it by language and by the things that are out there. What I try to do is take some

of those things and put them together in a visual context, to create a kind of reference to memory.

Gerald McMaster: What do you think about having this retrospective of your work?

Joane Cardinal-Schubert: I think it's interesting it originates in a city which, for the most part, has totally ignored me (laughs). It originates with the one public gallery that showed me in 1977 as one of its first artists and then went on to show my work in the context of eight other group shows over the past twenty years, I'll get to look at paintings I haven't seen for a long time, to see them juxtaposed against new works. It's really a good learning experience and valuable to see where I've been. It's not often we get that chance to recall a lot of work and to revisit concepts.



61. *5 Raiders*, 1982
 58.42 x 78.74 cm
 23" x 31"
 Oil pastel on paper
 Collection of the Juniper Hotel, Banff



62. *Grandfather Red Horse Rattle*, 1994

59.9 x 91.2 cm

32.5" x 36"

Oil on canvas

Collection of the Robert McLaughlin Gallery; purchased with the support from the Canada Council for the Arts, Acquisition Assistance Program, 1998



63. *Dreaming of Ghost Dance Shirts*, 1995
 153 x 121.9 cm
 60.25" x 48"
 Acrylic on canvas
 Fulton Family Collection