

## in the galleries



Wind Blowing through Trees, Lower Jemseg.



Cosmos and Fir Trees.



Sunflowers in the Mist.

# A luminous legacy

**Gallery 78, in Fredericton, marks the passing of Dawn McCracken with the retrospective Celebrating a Life. Story by Mike Landry**

By the time I became aware of Dawn McCracken's work, it was too late. The Grand Lake painter had leukemia and died two weeks later, on Jan. 4, 2013. She was in the midst of preparing for a new show, scheduled for October at Gallery 78, the commercial gallery that had represented her since the mid-1980s. She had already completed two new works, and had three unfinished canvases in her studio at the time of her death. I had looked up her work as part of my research into coming exhibitions for 2013. I was immediately struck by the light in her landscapes, the ethereal acutance of her colour and oil. As I am not one to usually be moved by landscapes, my reaction was significant, and I made note to contact her in the fall. I won't be able to talk with McCracken about her work, but I can commune with her work – Gallery 78 has put together *Celebrating a Life*, an exhibition of McCracken's work on display until Feb. 3. "We are just so devastated, really sad," Gallery 78 co-founder Inge Pataki says. "I

really lost a good friend." McCracken was born in Fredericton in 1935. She was educated at University of New Brunswick and studied fine art at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts and at Queen's University. She spent much of her career in New York City, working as production manager of publications for the American Kennel Club, before returning to New Brunswick in the '80s. Along with Gallery 78, McCracken's work was shown in solo and group exhibitions in Montreal, including at Galerie West End Gallery, the Walter Klinkhoff Gallery and the Montreal Museum spring exhibitions. Pataki says she first became aware of McCracken's work after an exhibition at the UNB Art Centre. One work – a graphite drawing of Grand Lake – remained in Pataki's memory strongly for years, so she eventually began representing her. "She was an incredible draftsman," Pataki says. "The atmospheric influence in the part of the world where she lived was amazing. You could look at one of her paintings and you could almost feel the

summer breeze. It was not just painting – there was some tension behind or beyond it." A reclusive, private artist, McCracken had a deep love for the landscape in which she grew up. She was meticulous, devoting much time to each canvas. More than an eye for nature, her paintings rendered her unique perspective on place. "I was in awe of her intellect," Pataki says. "She was very inquisitive, very curious about specific fields – the German philosopher, Schopenhauer, was one of her guidelines. She was an incredible person to be exposed to her conversations. I learned a great deal from her." Beyond her painting, to which she devoted time each day, she also was especially fond of her cats, as well as the country strays she would often take to be spayed. "She was a fabulous gardener, people always commented on her flower gardens," Pataki says. "They were sort of wild, but she had such extraordinary varieties of poppies and wildflowers. She was just full of love and devotion to the place where she lived."



One of Dawn McCracken's last paintings, Field with Apple Trees, 12 noon.

McCracken had an obsessive drive to "get it right," as she saw the world. In a 2010 artist statement, titled "It's Pay-back Time," she considered why this was. "(H)ow did I end up doing this? Why has every leaf, every blade of grass, every pebble, every drifting cloud become so important ... Memory brought the answer. When I was a child growing up here I enjoyed nature in an unquestioning manner, being in it and part of it. Every day brought new images and impressions that could be recalled years later. I came to realize that this was a great gift generously given, and, after a lifetime, I at last began to feel I must say 'Thank you' to whatever it is that the word 'nature' encompasses. Painting these trees



Cat on bench with stone and tiger lilies.

and bushes with care and respect is my attempt to pay the debt, and also to say good-bye." **Mike Landry** is the *Telegraph-Journal's* arts and culture editor: landry.michael@telegraphjournal.com.

# The modern dance

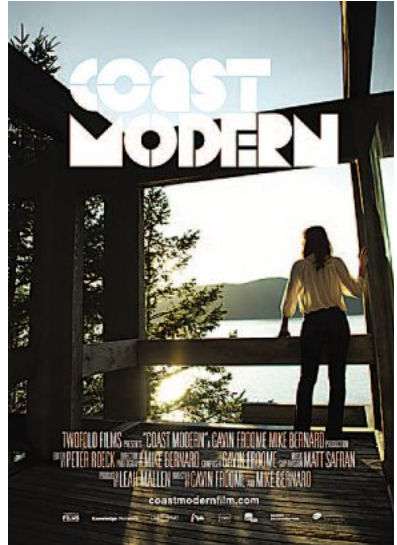


**JUDITH MACKIN**  
design driven



Seattle architect George Suyama is just one of many of the living luminaries of West Coast design and architecture featured in the documentary *Coast Modern*.

It happened upon *Coast Modern*, a film on modernist architecture, while online. This impressive independent documentary is the creation of directors Mike Bernard and Gavin Froome. In the interest of introducing "the pioneers" of West Coast modernist architecture, and their iconic homes, it takes the viewer on a tour along the Pacific North West coastline from Los Angeles to Vancouver. If it has a principal message, I suppose it's that the relation between what's outside a home, and how an individual home relates to that environment, is crucial to the aesthetics of the interior and the psychic well-being of its occupants. Over the course of this beautifully rendered survey, some of the best minds in architecture are introduced – Ray Kappe, Henrik Bull, Pierluigi Serraino, Michael Folonis, Dion Neutra, Barbara Bestor, legendary photographer Julius Shulman, and writer, designer and artist Douglas Coupland. Each luminary shares their expertise, philosophy and experience with what now constitutes three generations of modernist architecture. Among the first generation of early modernist homes examined is Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater (1935, Pennsylvania) and Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye (1928, Poissy, France). Next is the post-Second World War era, in which Arts & Architecture Magazine's editor, John Entenza, conceives a radical idea aimed at a newly-affluent generation. Entenza publishes blueprints for nine economical, affordable and efficient prototypical modernist homes – the most well-known being *Case Study House #22* by Pierre Koenig. Finally, we are introduced to the '80s by Douglas Coupland, the celebrated author of *Generation X*. For Coupland, at least in terms of architecture, that decade of McMansions, and Gordon Gekko



*Coast Modern* is a documentary examining the history of modernist architecture, from a West Coast lens.

declaration, "Greed is good," was notable both for its excess and its vulgarity. For a relative novice to the wonderful world of architecture, two parts were of particular interest. Matthew Soules, a Vancouver-based architect and professor at University of British Columbia, offers a historical account of modernism – by the 1960s, corporate entities and institutions had totally embraced modernism in the areas that we "worked in, travelled through and studied in." As a result of this robust public embrace, modernism became attached to, and critically associated with, institutionalism. The unhappy and unintended result was a backlash when it came to domestic architecture; home became a retreat. The second takeaway came in the form of architect George Suyama's call to action at the film's conclusion. The founding partner of Suyama Peterson Deguchi Architects, in Seattle, says, "Most of us try to do too much with our space and our environment. We are living in a situation of over consumption and over stylization. If we could pull back and live with less things and live with an idea of purity of how we live, people could start to appreciate what they have around them without having to go out and continually purchase things." You can find *Coast Modern* at: knowledge.ca/program/coast-modern. **Judith Mackin** runs punch inside, an interior design company, and Tuck Studio, 40 Autumn St., Saint John: @judithmackin, @tuckstudio or judith@judithmackin.ca.

# Hybrid moments

**Fredericton poets Corenski Nowlan and Jordan Trethewey take to visual art. Story by Shannon Webb-Campbell**

Poets Corenski Nowlan and Jordan Trethewey have taken their words from the page to the wall, as *Hearts and Pills*, a hybrid art exhibition opening Jan. 17 at Annex Gallery, in the Fredericton Playhouse. "This is something that both of us always wanted to do," Nowlan says. "It feels like a natural extension of what we normally do as writers and self-publishers who tiptoe on the visual art line. "It's challenging. The best we can hope for is to inspire someone else to make their own art, or write a poem. Motivating others to be creative is the whole point of the Vagabond Trust. It's what we do." Trethewey and Nowlan first met during their academic years at St. Thomas University, in 2000. Like most students who leave their coffee-shop writing days behind, they experienced a lull post graduation, and yearned for community. Trethewey founded the Vagabond Trust, a writer's collective, in 2007, with the help of Ryan Griffith. Nowlan attended the first meeting, and the biweekly event grew into a national network. "I had previously only written a handful of stage plays, poems and stories. I wanted to brave new territory, which, for me, was a novel," Trethewey says. "I knew I would need all the help I could get, from like-minded writers, who were determined to not let their passion become just another weekend hobby." Nowlan and Trethewey's exhibition, *Hearts and Pills*, features five poems from each poet. "It is not a conventional art show. You don't just stand at a distance and look at the pretty pictures on the wall," Nowlan says. "You have to get up close with our art. You have to read it. The poems are part of the art, but the art is the frame for the poems. "Some of the pieces are audience interactive. Touching art is very taboo. In *Hearts and Pills*, you're encouraged to touch our art. You can't get the full experience otherwise." "The idea (for *Hearts and Pills*) emerged from zine culture. Old-school, do-it-yourself, cut-and-paste collages," Nowlan says. "I started making zines in high school,



Corenski Nowlan, left, and Jordan Trethewey are shown with their work, *Hearts by Nowlan and Pills by Trethewey*, from their poetry/art exhibition now on display at the Annex Gallery in the Fredericton Playhouse until Feb. 27. PHOTO: LORRIE NOWLAN

and have continued to do so for the past 13 years." For Trethewey, who came to zine culture later, poetry has always been inherently visual. "Writing poetry is an extremely visual experience for the poet," Trethewey says. "We try to paint pictures with the most appropriate text at our disposal. Corenski and I came up with the idea for this exhibition when we discovered both of us had specific visual ideas for certain poems in our catalogues." Gallery-goers can take home a tactile part of the exhibition. Nowlan's long-standing zine *Mind Bloating*, issue No. 27, contains all 10 poems featured in *Hearts and Pills*. But you'll have to find the complimentary zine hidden in a secret spot at Annex Gallery. **Shannon Webb-Campbell** is an award-winning writer, photographer and journalist. She hangs her hat in Halifax: twitter.com/shannonwc.