

National Gallery of Canada
Library and Archives

The Maquette
for *True*
Patriot Love

by Joyce Wieland

Exhibition 24

6 September –
22 December 2006

Among the treasures in the collections of the National Gallery of Canada Library and Archives is the maquette for the book Joyce Wieland (1931–1998) made to accompany her 1971 exhibition, *True Patriot Love*, the National Gallery's first solo exhibition by a living female Canadian artist. (Fittingly, the exhibition opened on 1 July.) The artist unbound a copy of *Illustrated Flora of the Canadian Arctic Archipelago* and, using the printed page as a support, she added marginalia in both official languages and pinned, glued, sewed, or paper-clipped photographs, thread, and dried flowers to the pages. The original book is sometimes apparent, sometimes completely obscured; a number of pages are left untouched. Its scrapbook appearance recalls a housewifery compendium, including notes, remedies, tinting and dyeing techniques, and recipes for cooking and preserving, along with the odd tipped-in memento.

True Patriot Love served as the exhibition catalogue. The fragmentary texts and images, placed on top of the pages of a botanical report reveal a pantheistic vision of Canada and convey the artist's fears for the ecological survival of this northern land. Wieland saw Canada as a manifestation of the female force and sought to create work that articulated her vision for a country whose nature is to nurture its people. In some of her works Wieland used forms traditionally associated with women, such as quilts, wall hangings, and embroidery, thereby honouring the role of women making art.

Wieland's rephotographing details of works that were included in the exhibition was a means of achieving a deliberately dense and grainy quality, reclaiming each work as a separate entity and freeing it to take on a life of its own. She borrowed techniques from film-making, such as close-ups, fades (in and out), shifts in angle and scale, and jump-cuts, superimposing the resulting images on the pages of the book.

Certain images – snow, snowdrifts, and prints of snowshoes – appear intermittently throughout; some photographs are placed alongside details of recent work such as *Arctic Day* (1970–71), which consists of 160 cushions of delicate coloured-pencil drawings of arctic flora and fauna. The drawings have an ethereal quality, as though seen through a mist, alluding to the vulnerability of the Canadian North's ecosystem.

Details of stills and script excerpts from Wieland's movie *True Patriot Love: A Canadian Love, Technology, Leadership and Art Story* are laid out over a number of pages [5, 6, 10]. The title was later changed to *The Far Shore* (1976), a political fable loosely based on a story about Tom Thomson.

Although Wieland's book foreshadows loss and tragedy for the country, it is replete with the artist's whimsical sense of humour. One page [3] illustrates two small pictures of the artist and Pierre Théberge, the exhibition's curator, taking turns holding magnifying sheets over the face of the other. Playful renderings of Canadian symbols also figure prominently. For example, the title page [1] is partly covered with a black-and-white photograph of a quilt bearing the English lyrics to "O Canada," each letter stuffed and appliquéd on the work. The white-on-white background creates a ghostly or snow-like impression. The national anthem turns up again in an embroidered version [11] with lip prints forming the words. In homage to one of Canada's enduring heroines, Wieland appears dressed in period costume as the patriot Laura Secord, re-enacting Secord's celebrated nineteen-mile walk through the snow to warn of an impending American attack during the War of 1812 [12, 13].

Ever mindful of the spirit of collaboration, the artist acknowledges in handwritten form everyone who contributed to the exhibition and catalogue [16]. The published catalogue, a facsimile of the maquette, is rebound in maroon boards with an embossed gilt title on the front cover, replicating its earlier incarnation as a botanical report [17, 18]. A cloth Canadian flag is attached to the inside front cover and a pocket at the back contains a blank map of Canada, a pamphlet that includes an exhibition checklist and an essay by Regina Cornwell titled "The Film[s] of Joyce Wieland," and a folded broadsheet of an interview with Joyce Wieland by Pierre Théberge (with Michael Snow, Wieland's husband at the time, as interpreter). The accompanying material in the back pocket reinforces the book as exhibition catalogue without detracting from the artist's work.

True Patriot Love, as book and catalogue, was a courageous gesture on the part of the artist and the National Gallery of Canada. Although several earlier exhibitions at the Gallery had involved artists in the design and the content of their catalogues (James Rosenquist, Dan Flavin, Greg Curnoe, and the N.E. Thing Co., for example), this catalogue is different because it was made as a work of art by the artist rather than conceived as a book documenting the artist's work. *True Patriot Love*, an extension of the exhibition in book form, testifies to the dauntless pioneer spirit in Joyce Wieland.

Peter Trepanier, Head, Reader Services
In collaboration with Frances Smith

Further Reading

Conley, Christine. "True Patriot Love: Joyce Wieland's Canada." In *Art, Nation and Gender: Ethnic Landscapes, Myths and Mother-Figures*, edited by Tricia Cusack and Síghle Bhreathnach-Lynch, 95–112. Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2000.

O'Brian, John. "Anthem Lip-Sync." *The Journal of Canadian Art History / Annales d'histoire de l'art canadien* 21 (2000): 140–51.

Sloan, Johanne. "Joyce Wieland at the Border: Nationalism, the New Left and the Question of Political Art in Canada." *The Journal of Canadian Art History / Annales d'histoire de l'art canadien* 26 (2005): 80–107.

Checklist

1–16 Pages from the maquette for *True Patriot Love / Véritable amour patriotique*.

1 Title page

2 pp. 2–3

3 pp. 6–7

4 pp. 16–17

5 pp. 60–61

6 pp. 66–67

7 pp. 84–85

8 pp. 92–93

9 pp. 110–11

10 pp. 118–19

11 pp. 142, 144

12 pp. 190–91

13 pp. 194–95

14 pp. 198–99

15 pp. 210–11

16 pp. 218–19

17 A.E. Porsild. *Illustrated Flora of the Canadian Arctic Archipelago*.

Illustrated by Dagny Tande Lid. 2nd ed. Ottawa: National Museum of Canada, 1964.

18 Joyce Wieland. *True Patriot Love / Véritable amour patriotique*. Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1971.

I've always wanted to do a book. When the opportunity presented itself to do a catalogue for my exhibition at the National Gallery of Canada, Pierre Théberge encouraged me to make my book. I had done some collages. I included this early influence of collage along with photographs of photographs. (By rephotographing I make the images my own). I also wanted to do a book about Canada; so I collaged over a Government publication of arctic flora. The pages of the book became the landscape to which I wed the images. The central part consists of images (Tom Thomson rephotographed) from my film "The Far Shore" when it was called "True Patriot Love." The main theme of the book is really ecology. It is also autobiographical in that it shows what I was thinking in 1971.

Joyce Wieland, in *Women's Bookworks: A Survey Exhibition of Contemporary Artists' Books by Canadian Women, including Unique Book-Objects and Printed Editions* (Montreal: Centrale Galerie Powerhouse, 1979).

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