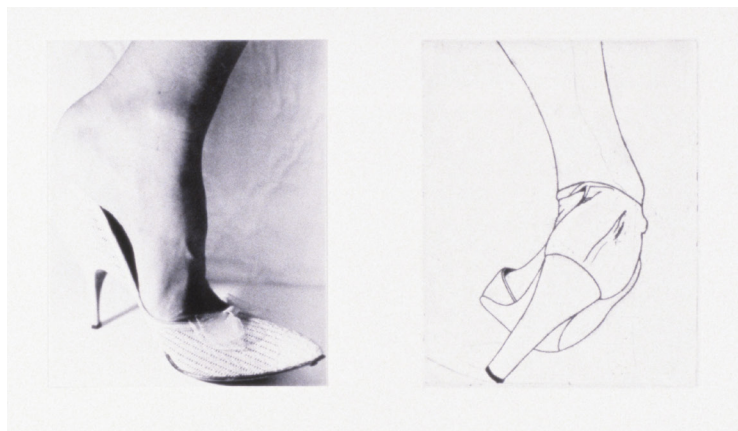


Early Years: Printmaking, Feminism & Social Activism



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Marsha Kennedy began her art training at the University of Regina, completing a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in 1977. Although the initial intent of her undergraduate studies was to major in

box frame, to emphasize how carbon is the common element for body, earth and stars.^{iv} This work was the start of Kennedy's continual exploration of the interconnectedness of all life forms, as well as a long-held engagement with the land of her birth, expressing concern for its environmental future and acknowledging the impact of its settler and colonialist history on Indigenous people, the land and its species.

painting, she switched her focus to printmaking, studying under Jack Cowin where she felt she had more freedom and support to explore representational imagery and personal narrative.ⁱ Painting at Regina's Fine Arts department back in the 1970s was focused on either abstraction or Pop Art under the direction of Ted Godwin and Art McKay. These modernist agendas made working in painting too restrictive for Kennedy, whose inclination towards figuration and provocative, postmodern narratives was timely and consistent with other women of that generation who were becoming influenced by feminist theory and wanted to break away from painting's patriarchal history.

Shortly after graduate school, Kennedy began to lose interest in printmaking, which required access to expensive studio materials and equipment. She wanted to work more simply and be free to explore stimulating ideas and questions without technical restrictions, and therefore turned to drawing and painting.^v Her work during the mid 1980s became recognized both for its feminist and environmental content.^{vi}

During her undergraduate studies, Kennedy began working with images of dolls within domestic settings in a surrealist manner. The doll imagery, which acted as a signifier for herself, childhood innocence and women in general, and her eventual shift to images of high heels, provided a means to explore notions of femininity, sexuality, imposed gender roles and societal expectations and repression of women.

During this period, images of birds first began to appear in Kennedy's work, a subject of interest that she has repeatedly returned to throughout her career. The first bird images were created in honour of her father, referring to his passing and to incoming life, and were presented in a neo-expressionist style, which was prominent in the 1980s. Kennedy came to associate birds with her father, gifting him some canaries when she moved away for school and introducing him to the practice of rehabilitating birds, a practice that Kennedy began as a young child, instilling in her a lifelong regard for wildlife conservation.^{vii}

Kennedy pursued graduate studies in printmaking at York University where she completed a MFA in 1981. Studying under Eugenio Tellez, her advisor at York, who moved her interests towards sociopolitical issues, she continued to investigate feminist theory, engaging in the body politics of corporeal feminism and experimenting with depictions of her own body in mixed media works, multi-panel prints and light box installations to challenge the male gaze, question notions of femininity and assert her own subjectivity. She also began to explore her own personal affinity with nature in her graduate work. One pivotal work from her MFA is the piece, *Qu'Appelle in Time* (1981), featured here in this exhibition, which consists of a series of four lithographs. This work depicts Kennedy, herself, "calling and listening as she floats among the celestial bodies of a star map" and within an earth map.ⁱⁱ Based on a memory of star gazing when she taught at the Summer School of the Arts at Fort San in the Qu'Appelle Valley, the work also references the Indigenous legend of calling spirits at the shores of the valley's lakes.ⁱⁱⁱ Pieces of coal are incorporated into the work, being inset into the shadow

Following graduate school in Toronto, Kennedy became more politically active, becoming a founding member of Art in Canada Against Apartheid from 1983-1985, supporting high profile marches and organizing fundraisers, and a member of Pollution Probe, a campaign to clean up Lake Ontario. This environmental activism directly influenced the series of work, *Water Saving and Life Safety* (1988), which offer moody, visually poetic images of figures in water. Kennedy also became actively involved with the Toronto Humane Society's wildlife rehabilitation program, fostering various animals, like raccoons, squirrels and birds.

While establishing her practice in Toronto and an exhibition history of solo and group exhibitions throughout Ontario, Kennedy taught as a sessional instructor at Fanshawe College of Applied Arts and Science in London, ON, briefly at the University of Regina, as well as at the University of York and University of Guelph throughout the 1980s.^{viii}

Top:
Drift
lithograph
31.1 x 40.0 cm
1976

Middle:
Collection Series
intaglio, photograph
40.6 x 56.5 cm
1979

Below:
To My Father
mixed media, museum board
106.7 x 152.4 cm
1984

Right:
Portrait of a Situation
film, fluorescent lightbox
each unit 63.5 x 53.3 cm
1981



ⁱMarsha Kennedy, Personal interview, May 27, 2020.
ⁱⁱRyan Arnott, *Phantom Limbs* (Regina: Rosemont Art Gallery, 1994), exhibition catalogue.
ⁱⁱⁱKahtapwao, Cree for "What is calling" inspired the valley's French name and that of the lakes, now known as, Katepwa and Echo. Sourced from Wikipedia, *Katepwa*, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Katepwa>, accessed July 21, 2020.
^{iv}Ryan Arnott, *Phantom Limbs* (Regina: Rosemont Art Gallery, 1994), exhibition catalogue.
^vMarsha Kennedy, Personal interview, May 26, 2020.
^{vi}Kennedy's feminist and environmental work was included in group and two-person exhibitions, including *Women Work/Women Culture* in 1984, curated by Carol Conde and Karl Beveridge in London, ON, and *Fem/Fest 1985* in Toronto. A solo exhibition of photo-collage drawings at Mercer Union in Toronto in 1984 featured a centralized figure of a working woman in varying environments, exploring notions of self and womanhood, social standards and values, achievement and success.
^{vii}Marsha Kennedy, Personal interview, May 19, 2020.
^{viii}Kennedy also participated in a group exhibition at Neutral Ground Artist-Run Centre in Regina, SK in 1983, titled *Replacing*, during the period of time that she taught as a sessional at the University of Regina from 1982-1983.