



Self-portrait (oil on hardboard)

Eric Byrd Retrospective

Peachland Little Schoolhouse, BC, Canada - Saturday, June 26, 2004

An Abstract of the Artist

Eric Byrd was an expatriate from Durban, South Africa, who lived in Montreal from 1950 until his death in South Africa in 1983.

Born in Durban, South Africa, on February 18, 1905, Eric was taken to England in 1906, raised in Cardiff, Wales, and educated at the Hornsey and Slade Schools of Art. He returned to South Africa in 1938 to teach at the Natal Technical Art School, Natal University, and the Witwatersrand Technical Art School in Johannesburg.

From 1943-50, Eric was based in Durban where he engaged in freelance painting and was very active in Durban art life developing a wide reputation on the South African art scene.

In 1950, Eric followed his brother, Dr. Kenneth Byrd of McGill University, to Montreal where he taught evening classes at Sir George Williams. One of his early students at these classes became the renowned Canadian modern abstract artist, Yves Gaucher. In the 50's, he taught at summer schools at Trois Pistoles and the Banff School of Fine Arts. In 1953, he designed the costumes for *Children of Men*, an abstract ballet of the Royal Winnipeg Ballet Company.

Eric never made use of an agent to promote his work preferring instead to quietly sell his works by word of mouth and at showings held at private parties to which he was invited. He would hold private group lessons in his artist's attic on Closse Street and was highly popular among the Women's Art Society of Montreal who took to his humorously loquacious and personable nature.

While his early Canadian works included both oil and watercolour portraits, figure studies, and landscapes of the Laurentians and Rockies, his later paintings were increasingly restricted to watercolour, particularly flower studies. Another period involved experimentation in semi-abstracts during the 60's and 70's.

In 1952, Eric exhibited his South African and Canadian paintings (at one of his rare exhibitions) alongside the works of John Little in the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. In later years to avoid our winters for health reasons, he annually returned to South Africa to spend the South African summers with friends painting portraits, landscapes, and garden or floral scenes.

On May 5, 1983, he died while staying with friends in Grahamstown, Cape Province. Some of Eric's most brilliant flower studies were painted in the months before he died. Look for those paintings dated '83.

For further information, please phone Christopher Byrd at 250-767-3001. Email: cbyrd@shaw.ca