

Painting Spirit: Recent Work by Barbara Berry and Terri Robin Vernon

Saint Mary's University Art Gallery, Halifax
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review by Mary Yoshinari

This exhibition at the Saint Mary's University Art Gallery featured the recent work of two painters, Barbara Berry and Terri Robin Vernon. Although the collaborative nature of the exhibition was reflective of its spiritual focus, it nevertheless underscored the divergent approaches of these two artists in terms of imagery and the painting medium.

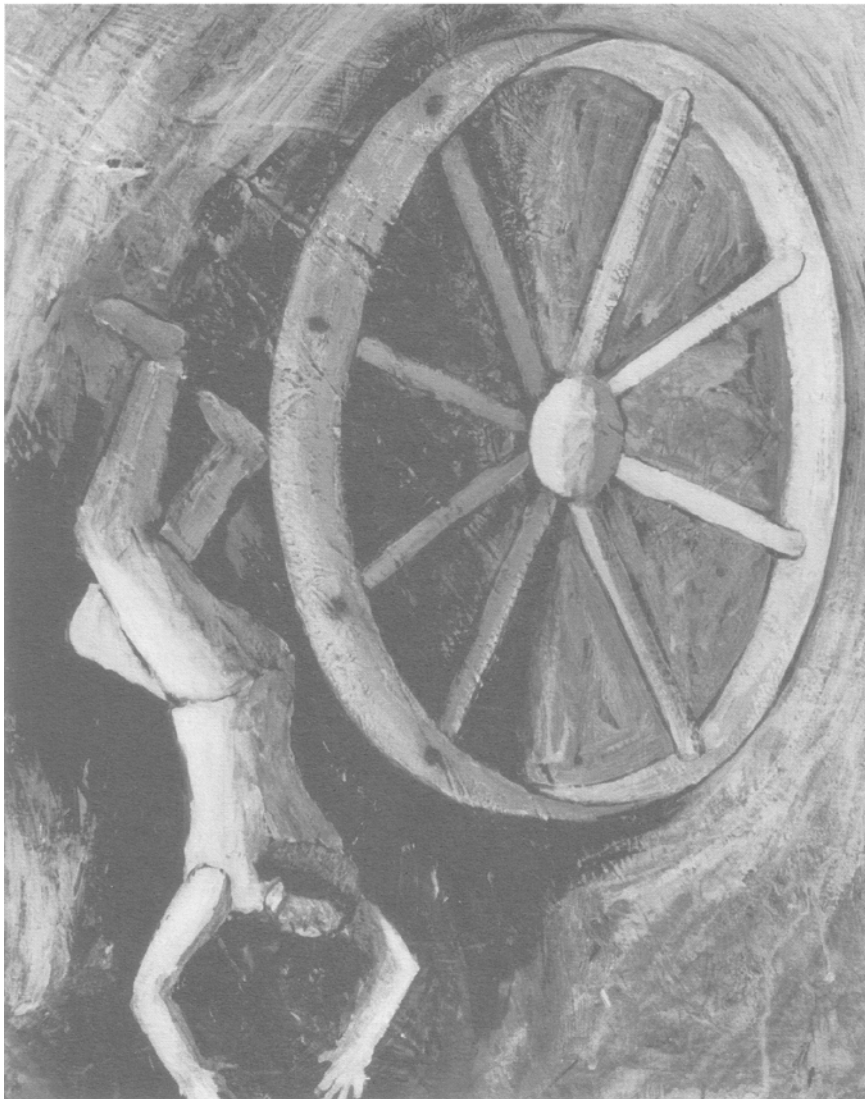
On one hand, Berry's large, colourful works reflect an expressive and tactile use of materials. Her paintings also become sculptural with the inclusion of three-dimensional plywood elements which are not confined to the traditional boundaries of the canvas. Conversely, Vernon's paintings are completely uniform in terms of dimensions, and her handling of the paint is somewhat subdued in contrast to Berry's use of impasto.

Titles such as "Meek and Outrageous" are reflective of Berry's layering of animal imagery, which juxtaposes aggression with

passivity. However the dualism of these 'animal abstractions' may also be seen as embodying nature's cycles of growth and decay. In paintings such as "Leopard and Moth," Berry's amalgam of human and animal forms appears as a decorative and dynamic kaleidoscope which evokes mythological creatures such as the centaur and minotaur.

Nature's duality can also be found in the imagery of "Wolf and Kids," which suggests both protection and the interaction between predator and prey; within the framework of the painting, wooden spikes echo these concerns. In other paintings such as "Gentle and Fearless," a ghost-like white animal appears to be both protected and consumed by the visceral aggression of an elephant-tiger form which also functions as a kind of mask with human faces discernible within its orbs.

Berry's overall use of vibrant colors also finds a contrast in the gentle pastels of "Yellow Dog and the Raven-Haired Dakini". While the decorative vertebral and skeletal framework emphasize protection in a structural sense, a reference to shamanism may also be suggested. Elsewhere, the image of a white dog appears statue-like,



Terri Robin Vernon, "Wheel of Fortune", 1995. Acrylic on board, 35.6 x 28 cm.

