



# MARION NICOLL

Life & Work

By Catharine Mastin

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# BIOGRAPHY

**Marion Nicoll (1909–1985) is regarded as one of Alberta’s earliest abstract painters. A trailblazer for women in the arts, she was a pivotal influence on the generations that followed her. In the isolated and male-dominated creative community of Calgary in the mid-twentieth century, she was one of the few female art instructors working in a post-secondary institution, and in the 1970s became the first woman from the Prairies to be recognized by the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts. Undaunted by the limitations placed on her by society, she has earned a lasting legacy in the Canadian cultural landscape.**



## EARLY YEARS AND EDUCATION

The stories of Marion Nicoll and the city of Calgary, Alberta, are inextricably intertwined, with each coming to define the other's essential qualities. Born April 11, 1909, Marion Florence Sinclair Mackay was a first-generation settler Canadian, the daughter of immigrants Robert Mackay, of Scottish descent, and Florence Gingras, of Irish and French heritage. Her middle-class Presbyterian family embraced a traditional breadwinner-homemaker model, with her father working as the first superintendent of Calgary's electric light and power services and associate director of Calgary's annual Exhibition and Stampede. Her mother gave birth to four children, three of whom died, leaving Marion as the only surviving child.<sup>1</sup>

Florence kept a protective and watchful eye over her daughter's well-being and encouraged her to remain close to home. As a child, Marion showed an early interest in art, remembering that from age five, she "drew on everything, books, everything else."<sup>2</sup> Always determined, she convinced her parents to let her set up a basement art studio at the age of thirteen. In adulthood, she turned down her mother's proposal to study domestic science and household economics with the response, "Absolutely not."<sup>3</sup>

At Calgary's Central High School, one of Marion's earliest teachers was Reginald Llewellyn Harvey (1888-1973), a British landscape painter.<sup>4</sup> He encouraged her to pursue art and her family was very supportive, though her father worried she would never "make a living at art in any form."<sup>5</sup> Despite this concern, he was willing to fund her studies, and she enrolled at Toronto's Ontario College of Art (now OCAD University) in 1926, where she studied under portraitist John Alfsen (1902-1971) and Group of Seven landscape artists Arthur Lismer (1885-1969), Frank Johnston (1888-1949), and J.E.H. MacDonald (1873-1932). Her student colleagues included Toronto's Frances-Anne Johnston (1910-1987) and, from Alberta, Gwen Kortright Hutton (1909-1978), Annora Brown (1899-1987), and Euphemia McNaught (1901-2002).



LEFT: Postcard of Calgary, Alberta, 1929. RIGHT: *Calgary Exhibition, 1921*, Calgary Stampede poster.







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LEFT: Marion Nicoll as a seventeen-year-old during her first year of education at the Ontario College of Art, Toronto, 1926, photographer unknown, Glenbow Archives, Calgary. RIGHT: Arthur Lismer, *Dead Tree, Georgian Bay*, c.1926, oil on wood panel, 32.8 x 40.8 cm, McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario.

After Marion took a trip home to visit family in 1928, her mother prohibited her return to Toronto on account of her being anemic. She transferred to Calgary's Provincial Institute of Technology and Art (PITA), where she studied under British painter Alfred Crocker Leighton (1900-1965), whose summer landscape classes led to the establishment of what is now the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity. Unconvinced of her technical skills, Leighton placed Marion in the program's first year to strengthen her understanding of colour, but within months she was back in the third year. She was appointed a student instructor in 1933 and an instructor in 1935.<sup>6</sup>

A formative highlight during Marion's studies was encountering the paintings of West Coast artist Emily Carr (1871-1945). An exhibition of her work was brought to PITA, but the administration refused to show it on the grounds that it was "too modern."<sup>7</sup> Leighton took his students into the locked storeroom where the art was being kept, and they took the canvases out one at a time. Marion remembered being "struck dumb," and later said that Carr influenced her more than the Group of Seven.<sup>8</sup> Carr's scenes of British Columbia's Indigenous communities and coastal landscapes embodied a new modernist vocabulary of bold gestural brushwork and strong colour, and she became one of Marion's favourite artists.<sup>9</sup>





LEFT: Emily Carr, *Big Raven*, 1931, oil on canvas, 87 x 114 cm, Vancouver Art Gallery. RIGHT: Harold Mortimer-Lamb, *Emily Carr in Her Studio*, 1939, negative, Vancouver Art Gallery.

The censoring of Carr's show reflected some of the philistine and gendered attitudes toward art and women that persisted in Calgary, systemic barriers that Marion also navigated. She was exposed to few female artists and Carr was an example of independence, resilience, and innovation. Calgary's infrastructure for the visual arts was only just beginning: there was no civic art gallery, and the cultural community was dominated by men.

## STARTING OUT AND MARRIED LIFE

Following completion of her studies at Calgary's Provincial Institute of Technology and Art (PITA), Marion participated in the *plein air* summer classes led by A. C. Leighton at Seebe, Canmore, and Kananaskis, Alberta (1932, 1933, and 1934). During these years, she was creating naturalistic compositions, such as *Flowers, Vase, Books, and Porcelain*, 1932, and *Summer Rain*, 1934.



LEFT: Marion Nicoll, *Flowers, Vase, Books, and Porcelain*, 1932, watercolour on paper, 32.5 x 39.6 cm, Alberta Foundation for the Arts, Edmonton. RIGHT: Marion Nicoll, *Summer Rain*, 1934, watercolour on paper, 22.5 x 31 cm, Alberta Foundation for the Arts, Edmonton.

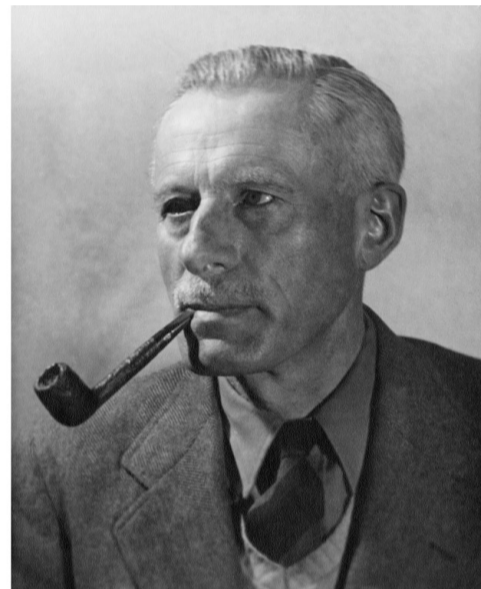
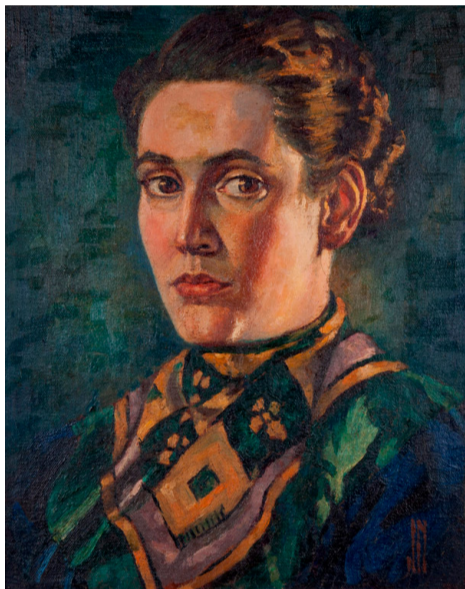
At the Calgary Sketch Club in 1931, Marion met fellow painter James (Jim) McLaren Nicoll (1892-1986), a First World War veteran with interests in art and poetry who had achieved the rank of Sergeant and was recipient of a Medal of



Bravery. He earned a living surveying land after graduating from Civil Engineering at the University of Alberta in 1924, and his drafting skills informed his naturalistic aesthetic. After a long engagement, they married in September 1940 in Medicine Hat, Alberta.

Jim Nicoll was seventeen years Marion's senior. By 1933, their relationship was serious—and long-distance, since his work for oil companies took him across Canada while she remained in Calgary. His *Portrait of Marion*, 1935, expresses his affection for her as artist's muse. She is presented at age twenty-six, and her piercing brown eyes are keenly aware of him. The work depicts her cheekbones deeply shadowed, her brows thick, and her lips carefully contoured.

This flattering image contradicts how Marion felt about herself then, struggling as she was to be comfortable in her atypically tall female body. From Turner Valley, Alberta, where she was sketching at the time, she wrote, "I've slipped back lamentably. A woman is a poor weak thing—even a six foot one... I've just eaten a stupendous meal with the greatest of ease. You'll probably fall out of love with me when you see my so-called figure."<sup>10</sup> It would be years yet before she shed the deference and feminine norms that shaped her identity as a young person during the early years of her companionship with Nicoll, and it was her artistic journey that propelled her forward.



LEFT: Jim Nicoll, *Portrait of Marion*, 1935, oil on canvas, 41.5 x 33.8 cm, Alberta Foundation for the Arts, Edmonton. RIGHT: Portrait of Jim Nicoll, c.1939-42, photographer unknown, Libraries and Cultural Resources Digital Collections, University of Calgary.

Marion's instructors, Leighton and Reginald Llewellyn Harvey, established the Alberta Society of Artists in 1931, which aimed to foster and promote the development of fine arts through member communications, exhibitions, and clubs. Marion was elected an associate in 1936 and "remained only an associate until the category was eliminated in 1954"; meanwhile, her male counterparts were given full membership status from the start.<sup>11</sup> It was in response to such discrimination that she joined the Women Sketch Hunters of Alberta in 1935, a collective of about ten women—other members included Annora Brown and Ella May Walker (1892-1960)—who exhibited together in defiance of male control over exhibitions.<sup>12</sup>

A boost of confidence came in 1936, when *Mountain Water*, c.1936, was accepted in the *Exhibition of Contemporary Canadian Painting* at the National Gallery of Canada, which circulated to South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, and Hawaii.<sup>13</sup> Afterwards, when it was presented in Toronto at the Canadian National Exhibition in 1939, a reviewer described it as "successfully giving the



feeling of a turbulent mountain stream tumbling among the rocks."<sup>14</sup> With its harmonious earth-tone palette, loose brushwork, and close-up composition, the painting exemplifies the artist's evolving style.



Marion Mackay, *Mountain Water*, c.1936, watercolour on paper, 34.8 x 39.6 cm, Glenbow Museum, Calgary.

Since her appointment as instructor at PITA in 1935, Marion had been teaching design and crafts, subjects in which she had limited formal education. Pragmatically, to remain competitive in a male-centered workplace, she decided to study at the Central School of Arts and Crafts, in London, England (now Central Saint Martins), where her skills in decorative arts and art history were strengthened. Faculty there included painter and textile designer Bernard Adeney (1878-1966), German print scholar Sir Sydney Carlyle Cockerell (1867-1962), potter and textile artist Dora Billington (1890-1968), and Bloomsbury Group painter and designer Duncan Grant (1885-1978). Time at London's National Gallery, the British Museum, and the Tate Gallery, and travels to museums in Norway, Sweden, and Denmark gave her further appreciation of world cultures. Her sketchbooks from her time in Europe include drawings of places she visited as well as of ancient pottery.

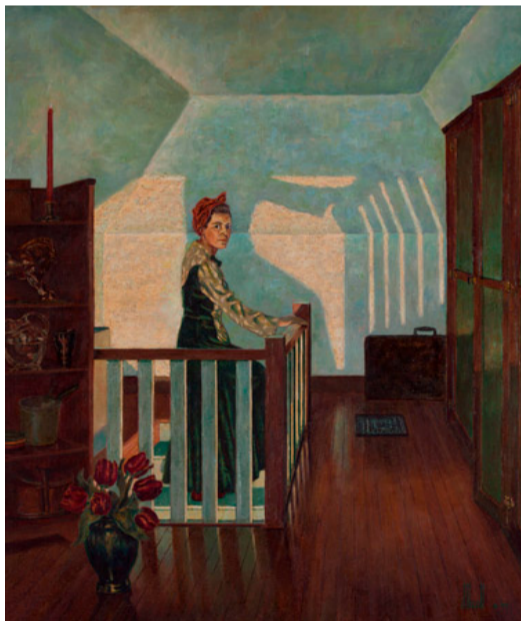




LEFT: Page from Marion Nicoll's sketchbook, Sketchbook #9, c.1937-38, mixed media on paper, 23 x 30 cm, Glenbow Archives, Calgary. RIGHT: Page from Marion Nicoll's sketchbook, Sketchbook #10, c.1937-38, mixed media on paper, 23 x 30 cm, Glenbow Archives, Calgary.

In December 1937, Marion's mother passed away but, with her father's encouragement, she stayed in London to complete her coursework. On June 18, 1938, she returned to Canada and she resumed teaching at PITA in the fall. With her new skills, the technical programs grew to include fabric decoration, batik, leather, block printing, and silkscreen printing. She remained in her position until she married and, amid the Second World War (1939-1945), the next six years proved challenging.

Getting married and becoming Marion Nicoll suspended her regular teaching income and public life, for which she offered this brief explanation: "The writer married in 1940 and left the school."<sup>15</sup> Implemented widely throughout the Western world, the Marriage Bar was a practice that discriminated against women's employment after marriage and it may have been the reason for her departure from teaching. As well, Jim Nicoll's transfers with the Royal Canadian Air Force led to sixteen relocations in the first three years of their life together.<sup>16</sup>



LEFT: Jim Nicoll, *Interior (Marion on Stairway)*, 1942, oil on canvas, 88.8 x 77 cm, Alberta Foundation for the Arts, Edmonton. RIGHT: Jim and Marion Nicoll in Calgary, c.1943-44, photographer unknown, Glenbow Archives, Calgary.



Jim Nicoll's *Interior (Marion on Stairway)*, 1942, shows his wife perched atop a stairwell, casting an ominous, double-life-size shadow on the far wall. The grim expression she wears suggests a discontent with domestic life. However, the couple continued to share a vision for Calgary's artistic evolution as Jim became more involved with the Alberta Society of Artists, serving as editor of its *Highlights* magazine in 1942 and as president in 1943. It was not until 1945, after the couple settled in Bowness, West Calgary, that Nicoll found another teaching opportunity, at the Central Alberta Sanatorium. Throughout the next decade, she became a respected educator and an expert in batik. It was also at this time that she became Alberta's only artist working in automatism.

### EXPERIMENTATION AND TEACHING

In 1946, Marion Nicoll was hired as the only female teacher at the Banff School of Fine Arts summer program. Faculty included Jock Macdonald (1897–1960), who had also just been appointed Head of the Art Department at the Provincial Institute of Technology and Art (PITA); it was probably under his leadership that Nicoll rejoined the organization in 1947 as Instructor in the School of Crafts. This position was pivotal to her work in the 1950s, as she became known for her classes in design, printmaking, textile arts, leatherwork, and jewelry making. She was nationally admired for her batiks, and her pins, pendants, earrings, and rings were featured in touring exhibitions.

Nicoll and Macdonald only worked together for a short time. Twenty years after Maxwell Bates (1906–1980) and William Stevenson (1905–1966) had been banned from Calgary Art Association exhibitions for showing paintings that were “too modern,” Macdonald left “to escape Calgary’s isolation, the lack of understanding about art in general, and the environment of the school itself.”<sup>17</sup> Despite his decision to relocate to Toronto in 1947, the brief period that he and Nicoll were colleagues proved crucial: he introduced her to automatism as practiced by the European Surrealists, a method he had been exploring in watercolours such as *Fish Playground*, 1946.



LEFT: Untitled (Banff Summer Session), From left, top row: A.Y. Jackson and Jock Macdonald; centre row: George Pepper, James Dichmont, André Biéler, Murray MacDonald, and Marion Nicoll; bottom row: Walter Phillips and H.G. Glyde, 1946, photographer unknown, Glenbow Archives, Calgary. RIGHT: Jock Macdonald, *Fish Playground*, 1946, watercolour on paper, 32 x 39 cm, Alberta Foundation for the Arts, Edmonton.

Working automatically involved allowing the hand and pencil, brush, and colour to move without premeditation. Nicoll was so excited that she filled four-foot high stacks of sketchbooks for the next six years—two compositions known as *Untitled (Automatic Drawing)*, both 1948, exemplify her efforts. In her automatics, her process involved two steps: turn inward to her imagination, and then materialize her imagery in painting or drawing. She found the experience of accessing her inner world of symbols and forgotten memories so rejuvenating that, she explained, “Doing one is like having a two-hour nap.”<sup>18</sup> Inspired by the theories of modern psychologist Carl Jung, in her reflections on automatism Nicoll noted, “It was an inside source that you gathered from outside and it was at your subconscious level and the automatic drawing brought it out. That all the impressions that you have of things, through your



eyes, through your senses all gather there and it is...nothing that you've seen or touched or smelt [sic] is lost, it's all sorted in the subconscious...I did things that really shocked me...Violent and peculiar and men or women or creatures with both male and female organs, birds with long forked tongues....I did childhood memories that I'd forgotten all about."<sup>19</sup>



LEFT: Marion Nicoll, *Untitled (Automatic Drawing)*, 1948, brush, pen, ink, and watercolour on paper, 18.9 x 15.3 cm, Glenbow Museum, Calgary. RIGHT: Marion Nicoll, *Untitled (Automatic Drawing)*, 1948, watercolour and ink on paper, 30.1 x 22.6 cm, Glenbow Museum, Calgary.

After Macdonald left Alberta, Nicoll worked alone in automatism, far removed from Montreal's Automatiste movement, which she followed through art periodicals. She continued reading Jungian psychology, including British author Percival William Martin's *Experiment in Depth: A Study in the Work of Jung, Eliot and Toynbee* (1955). Martin entreated the individual citizen to lead a balanced life by engaging in a process of withdrawal (turning inward to spirit and faith) and return (back to the material, physical world). Balance, he argued, included relationships between the inner and outer self, the individual and society, eternity and time, and the physical and social sciences.<sup>20</sup> He called for a fellowship of humanity in the wake of the atomic bomb deployment against Japan in 1945.

Nicoll embraced *Experiment in Depth* as a tool for "self analysis" and by the time this work entered her library, she was already well practiced at the three steps Martin recommended: in her landscapes she was practiced in communion with nature, and in her automatics she was practiced in tracking and recording her dreams and then painting and drawing from the unconscious.<sup>21</sup> By the mid-1950s, Nicoll had solidified the process of visualizing ideas from her inner imagination in art but, because she considered her automatics private and not



for exhibition, her “return” to the outer world as a public abstractionist would not take place until 1959.<sup>22</sup>

Instead of submitting her abstract work to society-painting exhibitions, Nicoll took a different approach by infusing automatism into her batiks, prints, and landscapes and making those public instead. For instance, mythical sea creatures float in space and are surrounded by sinuous lines in her batik *Fishes*, 1955, exhibited at Coste House, Calgary, in 1957.<sup>23</sup> Nicoll’s batik scarves were also worn by her collectors.<sup>24</sup> The print *Bird Pattern*, 1950, derived from one of her automatics, was the cover image of *Highlights* magazine for an entire year.<sup>25</sup>



LEFT: Marion Nicoll, *Fishes*, 1955, silk rayon velvet batik, 157 x 94 cm, Alberta Foundation for the Arts, Edmonton. RIGHT: Marion Nicoll, *Zoomorphic Figure*, 1957, rayon satin batik, 123.5 x 51.5 cm, Alberta Foundation for the Arts, Edmonton.

Nicoll’s few landscapes of the 1950s are not simple records of nature but rather amplifications of mood and imagination. In *Badlands, Eladesor*, 1953, a flock of birds swoops in from a dark sky over a desolate, dry landscape, as though a prelude to Alfred Hitchcock’s film *The Birds* (1963). The sombre *Graveyard and Hoodoos*, 1955, contrasts the brevity of life against the power of nature’s weatherworn ancient hoodoos. *August Heat*, 1957, conveys a scorching day where even the trees, contoured with vibrating yellow, appear to shake with heat stress.



LEFT: Marion Nicoll, *Badlands, Eladesor*, 1953, watercolour on off-white paper, 35.6 x 44.2 cm, Glenbow Museum, Calgary. RIGHT: Marion Nicoll, *August Heat*, 1957, oil on board, 31.2 x 38.1 cm, Private Collection, Mississauga.



## NEW YORK AND EUROPE

Between 1957 and 1959, Marion Nicoll made a momentous transition in her painting, spurred by her attendance at the 1957 Emma Lake Artists' Workshops, north of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. American artist Will Barnet (1911–2012), who had been working as official printer for the Art Students League of New York since 1934, was engaged to lead that year's session, and Nicoll had expected to study printmaking with him—she was experimenting with the medium at the time—but when the necessary supplies were not delivered, Barnet elected to switch the focus to painting and he brought in an Indigenous model to pose for the group. For Nicoll, his approach to teaching was motivating, and she later remembered, "I took off on the first day."<sup>26</sup>

*Little Indian Girl*, 1957–58, shows Nicoll's simplification of shapes and patterns, use of bold colours, and experimentation with black outline.<sup>27</sup> The figure, now the point of departure, added a third step to her abstractions as compared to the automatics: first, observe the external world; second, distill and simplify the sights seen through inner imagination; and third, paint these forms.

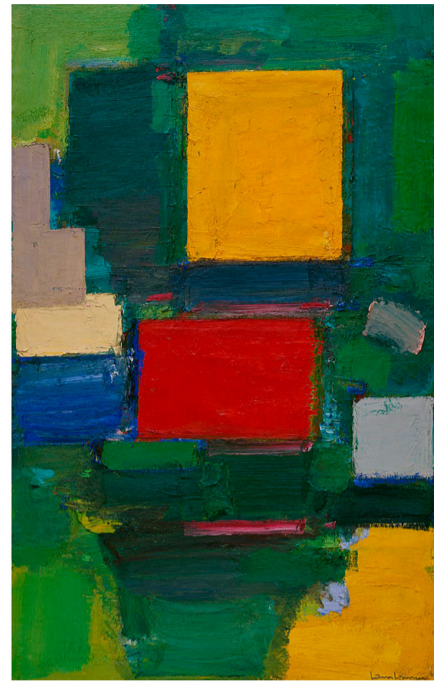


Marion Nicoll, *Little Indian Girl* (triptych), 1957–58, watercolour on paper, 45.2 x 80.1 cm, Alberta Foundation for the Arts, Edmonton.

At Emma Lake her painting was forever changed, and she announced to her husband, "We are going to New York and that's that."<sup>28</sup> In summer 1958, Nicoll arranged a self-financed leave from teaching from the Provincial Institute of Technology and Art (PITA) and she and Jim Nicoll (now retired) left for the Art Students League, where she continued to work with Barnet. Two years her junior, Barnet was ultimately a colleague and a lifelong friend more than he was a teacher to her.

Through Barnet, Nicoll met key figures in the New York art world, such as Robert Beverly Hale, curator of American painting and sculpture at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the legendary critic Clement Greenberg (1909–1994). The Nicolls visited museums and commercial galleries including the Metropolitan Museum, the Frick Collection, and Bertha Schaefer Gallery of Contemporary Art, and she respected paintings by Mark Rothko (1903–1970), Jackson Pollock (1912–1956), and Hans Hofmann (1880–1966).

Two of Nicoll's responses to the New York cityscape, *East River*, 1958, and *The Beautiful City*, 1959, illustrate the move she made from naturalism to hard-edge painting while living in Manhattan. *East River* remains governed by illusionistic perspective, whereas *The Beautiful City* is a flat field of contrasting light and dark with crisply separated areas of colour and shape, the subject not recognizable, even with a title. The transition had been intense. To her artist friend Janet Mitchell (1912-1998) she wrote, "You know my hunger to paint has been insatiable—it's been a strange time, thinking, feeling, sleeping, eating, painting...I think I've whipped my tendency to be decorative—at least to the extent of recognizing it when it happens. Isn't it odd that the training I've had has become an obstacle to be jumped before I could paint?"<sup>29</sup> She would later describe her new works as "classical abstractions."<sup>30</sup>



LEFT: Mark Rothko, *No. 3/No. 13*, 1949, oil on canvas, 216.5 x 164.8 cm, Museum of Modern Art, New York. RIGHT: Hans Hofmann, *The Gate*, 1959-60, oil on canvas, 190.5 x 123.2 cm, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.



LEFT: Marion Nicoll, *East River*, 1958, watercolour on paper, 30 x 38 cm, Private Collection, Calgary. RIGHT: Marion Nicoll, *The Beautiful City*, 1959, oil on canvas, 92 x 71.5 cm, Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, University of British Columbia, Vancouver.

The quality of Nicoll's painting led to three teaching offers, including one at Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art. When painter Will Barnet (1911-2012) encouraged her to stay in New York, she wrote to Mitchell, "It's wonderful to have people consider you a serious painter. Calgary has beaten me down pretty badly."<sup>31</sup> Unfortunately, Jim did not share her enthusiasm for the city, which she summarized thus: "I love New York. My



husband doesn't."<sup>32</sup> Nicoll turned down the job offers but forged ahead with abstraction while Jim's work remained entrenched in naturalism. Although they remained married for life, at this point their paths as artists separated for good.

Peer recognition from home soon followed when Nicoll received confirmation of her first Canada Council grant. This boost to the summer ahead deferred an immediate return to Alberta. Nicoll said, "If I had to return to Calgary straight from here instead of having the glow of Italy in front of me I'd cut my throat and bleed messily from here to Times Square."<sup>33</sup> It was time to recuperate from an intense year and become acquainted with southwestern Europe and their favorite Italian and Spanish artists: Giotto (1266/67-1337), Cimabue (1240-1302), El Greco (c.1541-1614), and Francisco Goya (1746-1828).<sup>34</sup>



Marion Nicoll, *Ulysses Beach, Naxos IV*, 1959, oil on board, 30.5 x 38.1 cm, Private Collection.

In May 1959, the Nicolls arrived at the island of Sicily, where Marion's response to the Mediterranean climate and ancient architectural ruins of Giardini Naxos and Taormina spawned a new body of work. She remembered "the deep, dark purple lava rock from [volcanic Mount] Etna....The only people near you from the beach were the lemon orchard workers....It's a gorgeous place. You could just feel yourself letting go."<sup>35</sup> Their landlord's house became the point of departure for one of Nicoll's most important paintings, *Sicilia V: The House of Padrone*, 1959, a work that was one of Nicoll's earliest successes in rethinking the relationship of colour and shape.<sup>36</sup> She explained, "Colour for me is a shape and a shape is a colour—one demands the other."<sup>37</sup>



Marion Nicoll, *Sicilia V: The House of Padrone*, 1959, oil on canvas, 90 x 105.5 cm, Nickle Galleries, University of Calgary.

Nicoll had always been aware of her environment, but now it propelled her abstract production. The Nicolls' travels in Italy included Rome, where she began *Rome I: The Shape of the Night*, 1960, a daring combination of iridescent blues and pinks balanced against black and green. They spent time in Spain and Portugal before their return to Canada in late August 1959. Nicoll shipped her unfinished European works back to Calgary and summarized her year away as "a vital one in my development as a painter."<sup>38</sup>

## HOME COMING

After several months in Europe, Nicoll returned to Calgary with new confidence in 1959. She resumed teaching at the Alberta College of Art, and in December she opened a solo exhibition featuring twenty artworks from her time in New York and Sicily. The event officially launched her reputation as an abstract painter. The show included *Thursday's Model*, *Spring*, and *The Beautiful City*, all 1959.<sup>39</sup> Abstraction was slowly becoming more accepted in Alberta throughout the 1950s and a month before Nicoll's exhibition, her teaching colleagues Stanford Blodgett (1909-2006) and James Stanford Perrott (1917-2001) held an expressionist art show.<sup>40</sup>

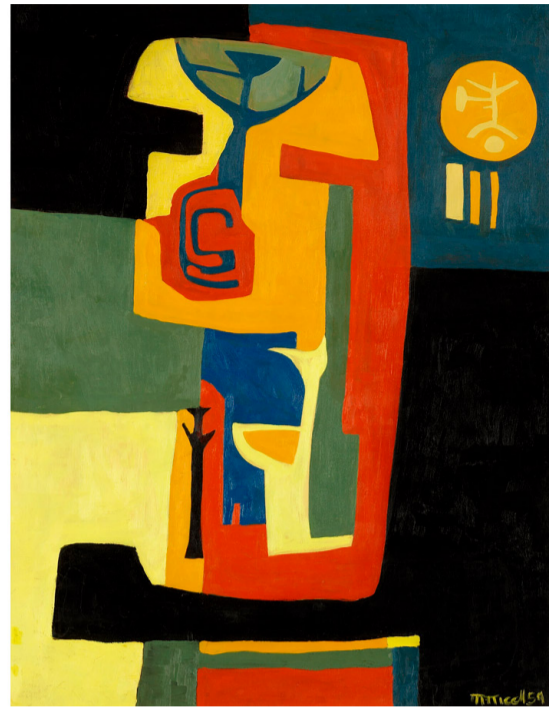




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The response to Nicoll's exhibition was generally positive, noting her work's austerity, clarity, economy of means, and "pure aesthetic reality."<sup>41</sup> Among her female circle, painters who embraced fantasy and abstraction included Janet Mitchell, Helen Stadelbauer (1910-2006), and Ella May Walker. Unlike her peers, however, Nicoll never returned to naturalism. She described her distinct approach by saying, "I evolved my own way into a sharp edged painter, no gradations, no muddiness, no muddy colour...I don't fuzz off the edges."<sup>42</sup>



LEFT: Marion Nicoll, *Thursday's Model*, March 12, 1959, oil on canvas, 92 x 51.1 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. RIGHT: Marion Nicoll, *Spring*, 1959, oil on canvas, 91.8 x 71.7 cm, Glenbow Museum, Calgary.

After the heady days of life in New York, Nicoll remained conflicted about returning to conservative Calgary. Nonetheless, her home city inspired paintings such as *The City on Sunday*, 1960, *City Lights*, 1962, *Bowness Road*, 2 AM, 1963, and the *Calgary Series* (I-III), 1964-66.

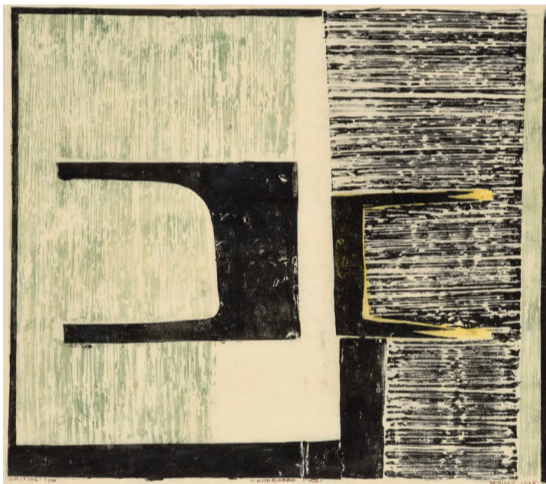


Marion Nicoll, *The City on Sunday*, 1960, oil on canvas, 80.5 x 113.5 cm, City of Calgary Public Art Collection.

Nicoll's almost boundless production from this period led to significant critical attention. In summer 1962, Clement Greenberg visited her during his art tour of the Canadian Prairies, and a year later he identified "Nicoll as among the best painters in oil and watercolour to hail from Calgary" in an article for *Canadian Art* magazine.<sup>43</sup> She was included in the National Gallery of Canada's *5th Biennial Exhibition of Canadian Painting 1963*, wherein she was one of only eight female artists of the total seventy-eight.<sup>44</sup> This show opened in London, England, and toured Canada from Quebec to the West Coast afterwards. Exhibition curator J. Russell Harper positioned Nicoll as among the important experimental artists working in the Prairies.<sup>45</sup> A second solo exhibition in Calgary followed.<sup>46</sup>

Nicoll's importance was further solidified when her solo show organized by the Western Canadian Art Circuit toured to six venues between 1965 and 1966. She participated in the *Sixth Biennial Exhibition of Canadian Painting 1965*, curated by former Western Canadian artist and then Slade School of Art professor William Townsend (1909-1973), and that exhibition gave credence to Nicoll's place in the canon of important contemporary Canadian painting.

In 1960, she had renewed her interest in printmaking, and several of her prints were extensions from her painting practice, such as *Waiting*, 1965. These prints garnered further interest from local, territorial, and national graphic arts exhibitions, including the annual Calgary Graphics exhibits (1963 through 1967), the *Centennial Exhibition of Western Printmakers*, which toured to thirteen venues (1967-1968), and the Canadian Society of Graphic Art (1968).



LEFT: Marion Nicoll, *Waiting*, 1965, cardboard print on paper, 45 x 50 cm, City of Calgary Public Art Collection. RIGHT: Gerhard Doerrié, cover of the catalogue for the *Sixth Biennial Exhibition of Canadian Painting*, 1965.

Recognition in North America and Britain through exhibitions and publications was a significant boost to Nicoll's self-confidence and evolution as an artist and person, but the change had not happened overnight. In 1953, she presented herself thus to a reviewer: "The winter garb of this Calgary-born artist consists of a chain girdled red-gold smock with a Persian pattern, a green tartan shirt, and ski slacks. Her head is covered with a French beret and her feet shod in high buckskin moccasins embroidered by the Indians of the Sarcee reserve."<sup>47</sup> By 1963, student Pat Kemball (later known as ManWoman [1938-2012]) remembered her thus: "She had a soup bowl haircut, wore large moomoos (a loose dress from Hawaii), and smoked cigars, she scared the hell out of the first-year students."<sup>48</sup> The affectionate side of Nicoll, whose union to Jim Nicoll was childless, included her love of animals: at one time the Bowness household included four cats and a dog.



Nicoll was a dear friend to many artists, including Jock Macdonald, Janet Mitchell, and Will Barnet, but was happiest alone in her studio making art, away from the limelight. Her husband's watercolour *Solitaire*, painted when she was a young woman, had taken note of Nicoll's ability to entertain herself with a solo card game, with no need for another player. He often participated on boards and juries, leaving Nicoll with precious time and privacy to create.<sup>49</sup> Reluctant to accept interviews, she asserted, "If I had my own way I wouldn't even talk. Words fall so short of what a person is trying to paint. If you could describe your feelings with words, you would write instead of paint."<sup>50</sup>



LEFT: Jim and Marion Nicoll, date unknown, photographer unknown, silver gelatin on paper, Alberta Foundation for the Arts, Edmonton.  
RIGHT: Jim Nicoll, *Solitaire*, date unknown, watercolour on paper, 37.2 cm x 29.2 cm, Glenbow Museum, Calgary.

As these observations illustrate, in her senior years Nicoll grew to care less and less about how others perceived her in appearance and she performed her gender with some degree of wit. By the end of the 1960s, it was clear that she was an artistic force, assured and comfortable in her own skin, unconcerned with the gender norms that had once governed her female self. Had Nicoll been able to benefit from the writings of theorist Judith Butler, she may well have agreed with her evolving concept of gender identity: "The body is not understood as a static and accomplished fact, but as an aging process, a mode of becoming that...exceeds the norm, reworks the norm, and makes us see how realities to which we thought we were confined are not written in stone."<sup>51</sup>

#### RETIREMENT AND LEGACY

Nicoll had longed to focus full-time on her art since returning from New York in 1959. To realize that goal, she resigned from teaching at the Alberta College of Art on January 31, 1966, at age fifty-seven. The decision enabled her to establish a new schedule of priorities and she continued to be honoured with



recognition. That winter, her sister-in-law gifted her a holiday in La Paz, Mexico, as reprieve from the cold Alberta winter that so troubled her rheumatoid arthritis.

It was in Mexico that Nicoll learned the news of her second endorsement from the Canada Council for the Arts, this time a Senior Artist Fellowship. She wrote to her liaison officer, "I was lying like a fat toad, on a deck chair in the garden patio of Guaycura Hotel under a leafless primavera tree, with its clouds of pink blossoms, and buzzing with the big black bumblebees. I read it twice and said: 'Jesus, a Margarita please.'"<sup>52</sup>

She returned to Calgary in mid-March. For that year, she refrained from the heavy exhibition schedule she had been sustaining to prioritize making new work. In late October, she took a six-week trip to Ottawa, Montreal, and Toronto to meet dealers and curators to begin planning new exhibitions. Between 1966 and 1968, she finished the Calgary Series, developed the Guaycura (I-II) and Runes (I-II) Series, and created single paintings, such as *Prairie Farm*, 1968.



LEFT: Marion Nicoll, *La Paz—Empty Mission*, #1/9 Artist's Proof, 1967, colour relief print on paper, 40.6 x 45.7 cm, Private Collection, Calgary. RIGHT: Postcard of beach resort in La Paz, Mexico, c.1960.



LEFT: Marion Nicoll, *Prairie Farm*, 1968, acrylic on canvas, 92.3 x 157.6 cm, McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario. RIGHT: Marion Nicoll, *Northern Nesting Grounds*, 1964, clay print, 35.6 x 44.9 cm, Glenbow Museum, Calgary.

Nicoll's late works show her moving to even stricter and minimal geometries. Inclusion in J. Russell Harper's 1966 monumental *Painting in Canada: A History* was further affirmation of her place in the emerging canon of Canadian art history.<sup>53</sup> Mexico provided source material for her prints and paintings in the Guaycura and La Paz series, and *January '68*, 1968, was included in the last of the National Gallery of Canada's biennial exhibitions of Canadian painting. She further enjoyed commercial successes with gallerists Henry Bonli in Toronto in 1967 and Vincent Price Gallery in Chicago in 1968. Six prints, including *Northern Nesting Grounds*, 1964, were shown in the survey exhibitions *Directions in Western Canadian Printmaking* (Winnipeg Art Gallery, 1968) and *Canadian Printmakers Showcase* (Carleton University, 1969).

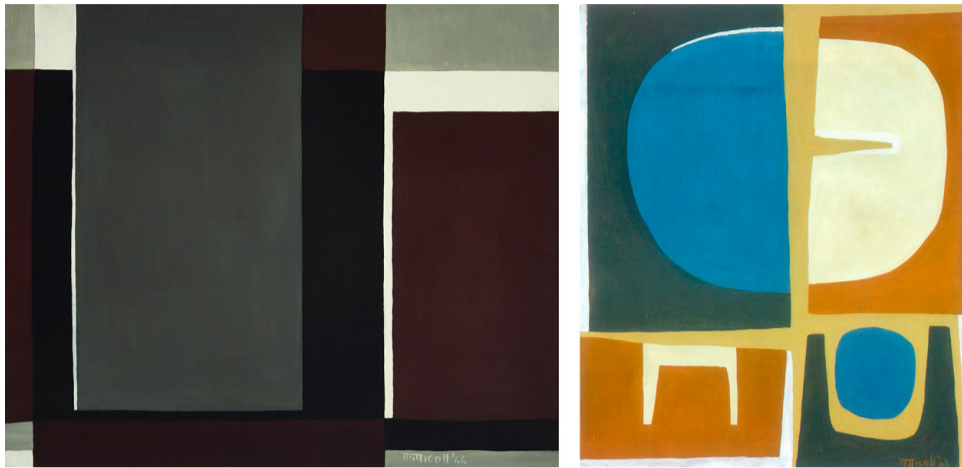


Nicoll's decision to build a career as an abstract artist through her hard-edge oil and acrylic paintings—as opposed to through her automatic watercolours, which she largely regarded as private—was significant. Her preoccupation with time through strategic titling was to underscore the vital role nature plays in leading a balanced life of faith and humanity in a troubled world. *Calgary III, 4 AM, 1966, The City on Sunday, 1960, Spring, 1959,* and *End of Summer, 1963,* take

note of precise hours, days of the week, seasons, and ephemeral phenomena. The triptych *Journey to the Mountains: Approach, The Mountains, Return, 1968–69,* expressed time sequentially through travel. Nicoll took stock of a full year in the four-panel *One Year, 1971.*

Despite working against the ticking clock of advancing arthritis, Nicoll's last decade revealed a life of inner calm and order, distilled from an outer world in which she had always found beauty, despite having lived through two world wars and in a nuclear age of virtually unchecked scientific advancement, almost to humanity's peril. Her last major work, *One Year,* was her final reminder of the life cycle as she closed down her painter's practice that same year, no longer able to stand before her easel. She was just sixty-three and had only recently found the voice she had so long searched for.

Nicoll's creative legacy was her final project. In 1972, she organized a commercial retrospective exhibition of thirty-six prints surveying her abstract print practice from 1960 to 1972.<sup>54</sup> She and her husband made plans that the Alberta Art Foundation would be their beneficiary. Her first retrospective exhibition organized by a public art gallery in 1975, which featured major works such as *Rome I: The Shape of the Night, 1960, Ancient Wall, 1962,* and *Bowness Road, 2 AM, 1963,* was curated by two of her former students, John Hall (b.1943) and Ron Moppett (b.1945), a testimony to her impact on younger artists.<sup>55</sup>



LEFT: Marion Nicoll, *Calgary III, 4 AM, 1966*, oil on canvas, 114.3 x 137.2 cm, Nickle Galleries, University of Calgary. RIGHT: Marion Nicoll, *End of Summer, 1963*, oil on linen, 137 x 114.3 cm, Private Collection, Calgary.



Marion Nicoll, *Rome I: The Shape of the Night*, 1960, oil on canvas, 71.3 x 97.1 cm, Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador Collection, The Rooms, St. John's.

In 1977, Nicoll became the first female artist in the Prairies to become a member of the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts, an event that coincided with the release of the first monographic study on her life and art by J. Brooks Joyner. Her exhibition history included three artist-couple shows in which her practice far outshone Jim Nicoll's.<sup>56</sup> Her last award arrived in 1984: the Alberta Achievement Award, Excellence Category for Outstanding Contribution to Art. On March 6, 1985, Nicoll passed away at Bethany Care Centre at age seventy-five from a heart attack. She was survived by Jim, who passed the following winter.

Nicoll is remembered for her forward view of modernism in Western Canada, and as one of the most important female artists and educators of her generation. Hers was a life that offered her inner resolve as self and artist, a life finally lived in balance after a long, feminist journey of roads uneven at every turn. Her exceptional knowledge and understanding of colour theory yielded a powerful body of abstractions, which continue to delight, inform, and challenge the eye. Alberta University of the Arts professor emeritus and craft historian Jennifer Salahub has rightly observed that "We are witnessing remarkable advances in situating Nicoll's practice within a broader Canadian social and cultural context," but Nicoll also deserves her place in histories of abstraction,





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design, and arts education beyond Canada's borders.<sup>57</sup> Despite working in isolation, Calgary gave Nicoll her place in the canon of Canadian art and an enduring legacy. Her work in all media continues to be coveted today by collectors private and public.



Marion Nicoll, date unknown, photographer unknown, silver gelatin on paper, 40 x 58.2 cm, Alberta Foundation for the Arts, Edmonton.





# KEY WORKS

Marion Nicoll navigated life as a woman artist to establish her own distinct voice in a male-dominated art world. She began in the later 1920s and 1930s, painting naturalistic scenes while teaching design and craft. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s she became recognized for her batiks and experimented privately with automatism. In 1959 she made the transition to hard-edge abstraction and by the early 1960s emerged as one of Canada's most important painters.



## PORTRAIT OF FLORENCE MACKAY 1937



Marion Mackay, *Portrait of Florence Mackay*, 1937  
Watercolour and pencil on paper, 36.5 x 33.8 cm  
Alberta Foundation for the Arts, Edmonton

Marion Nicoll created very few portraits, and most of them are early works depicting family and friends.<sup>1</sup> This picture of the artist's mother, Florence Mackay, shows Nicoll's refined skills in creating a sympathetic likeness. She handles the light and shadow across the cheekbones, nose, and brow tenderly

to convey a realistic and emotive impression of Florence deep in thought. A harmonious sepia palette of earthy reds and browns ensures that the subject, not colour, remains the focal point. Painted when Nicoll was twenty-eight years old, this watercolour demonstrates the technical proficiency she believed was core to an artist's capacity for self-expression.

Nicoll's skills developed primarily from study at the Ontario College of Art, Toronto (1927–1929). There, she studied with Arthur Lismer (1885–1969) and John Alfsen (1902–1971), who had both trained in the rigorous program of life and plaster cast drawing at the Académie Royale des Beaux-Arts, Antwerp, Belgium. "I accepted the academic training without question,"<sup>2</sup> Nicoll remembered, noting her natural affinity for the style. "It was pie and there was nothing to it."<sup>3</sup>

In fall 1937, the year this portrait was painted, Nicoll took a leave of absence from her teaching position at the Provincial Institute of Technology and Art to further develop her skills in decorative arts and art history. She spent eight months at the Central School of Arts and Crafts, London, England, and, while she was there alone without friends or family, her mother died. Her father encouraged her to finish her studies before returning to Calgary in June 1938. It is not certain when exactly in 1937 this work was painted—before she left for England, or while still there. Possibly, then, it may be a memorial portrait but, regardless, it is the only known portrait she did of her mother.

Florence Mackay, protective of her only surviving child, would have been among the few influential women in Nicoll's life.<sup>4</sup> In her youth, Florence had done some teaching before settling on marriage and domesticity and her experience with public activities was limited.<sup>5</sup> Nicoll married in 1940 but never had children and instead prioritized a career as an artist and educator. Though she chose a different path than her mother's, it is telling that Nicoll chose to record Florence in this reflective way and suggests a loving and respectful bond between them.



John Alfsen, *Female Nude Seated, Backview*, date unknown, Conté on paper, 54.6 x 40.6 cm, Seneca College, Toronto.





## CHINOOK 1945



Marion Nicoll, *Chinook*, 1945  
Tempera on board, 37 x 58 cm  
Nickle Galleries, University of Calgary

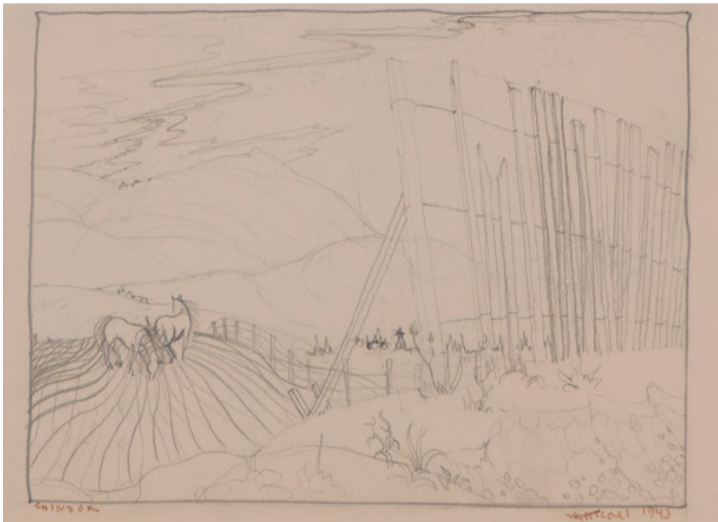
This painting is reflective of Marion Nicoll's naturalistic style, which informed the early years of her career, and depicts a subject she knew well from growing up in Alberta—the warm, dry wind known as a chinook. A prominent arc of purples and greys in the top quarter of her composition depicts the atmospheric effect, which results from warm air currents originating in the Pacific Ocean temporarily settling in the Rocky Mountain Foothills. Nicoll conveys the temperature of the chinook on a late summer day after harvest through the yellow light that dominates the scene. Illuminated rows of plants draw the viewer from the foreground to the middle-ground, where a burst of light on the haystack sets the horses into relief. The bright sky pulls the viewer to the background. *Chinook* is one of Nicoll's few known works in tempera, and her choice of this medium instead of watercolour is significant since the thicker opaque paint enriched the scene's colours and lighting. This early landscape holds an important place in Nicoll's artistic evolution, and it has been included in two retrospective exhibitions.<sup>1</sup>



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Nicoll often sketched out-of-doors in the Alberta Foothills. Her preliminary drawings for *Chinook* reveal how carefully she arranged her composition.<sup>2</sup> The simpler of the plans shows a circular configuration between two horses grazing peacefully in the lower left with their manes flowing in the wind. A vertical thrust of the fence dominates the right side. The second sketch, bearing a closer relationship to the finished painting, has more considered attention to the chinook arc and increased attention to the vertical patterns formed by the fence ties and posts. The final painting brings together the ideas of both sketches but with one additional horse, which creates a stronger middle-ground focal point.



LEFT: Marion Nicoll, *Chinook*, 1943, pencil on paper, 37 x 50 cm, Nickle Galleries, University of Calgary. RIGHT: Marion Nicoll, *Untitled*, 1950, pencil on paper, 37 x 50 cm, Nickle Galleries, University of Calgary.

Throughout her practice, she remained keenly aware of changing atmospheric effects throughout the seasons, months, and days of the year, and these themes informed her subsequent abstract paintings, including the Chinook Series (I-IV), 1963-66. The work is also one of the earliest examples with her distinctive signature, "M. Nicoll," which she used for the rest of her practice. This gender-neutral identity offered anonymity on submission forms for exhibitions at a time when most were adjudicated by male artists.



## UNTITLED (AUTOMATIC DRAWING) 1948



Marion Nicoll, *Untitled (Automatic Drawing)*, 1948  
Watercolour on paper, 30 x 22.5 cm  
Art Gallery of Alberta, Edmonton



This watercolour, created on November 21, 1948, at 11:00 a.m., shows the vigorous energy Marion Nicoll brought to the automatic process. Her hand has moved the paintbrush quickly with fluid washes of colour to create proximate and intersecting lines and amoebic-like, biomorphic forms. The image has no beginning or ending, and no intended meaning or symbolism. Her choice of watercolour was most suitable since her dilution of paint to thin washes allows the composition to be informed by chance, a practice fundamental to automatism. That Nicoll signed and dated the square-shaped image occupying the top two-thirds of the paper and surrounded it with a firm black border suggests she was pleased with the result. Her annotation of time in such a precise manner is indicative of the consistency with which she was creating automatics—as this body of works is described—at this time in her life, noting even the time of day in which she was painting.

After two decades of feeling dissatisfied with the direction of her work as a landscape painter, Nicoll began to transition away from naturalism, but her commitment to the environment around her remained lifelong. In the summer of 1946, she was introduced to automatism by her colleague Jock Macdonald (1897-1960) when both artists were teaching the summer session at the Banff School of Fine Arts, Alberta. He had created several automatic watercolours, including *Orange Bird* and *Fish Playground*, both 1946.



Jock Macdonald, *Orange Bird*, 1946, watercolour on paper, laid down, 18.5 x 26.4 cm, The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa.

To work automatically was to work intuitively from one's inner thoughts by allowing the paint brush or pencil to move freely without reference to the external world. Nicoll explained, "You take a pencil, you are in a quiet place, you put the pencil on the paper and you sit there until your hand moves of its own accord. You do that everyday.... You keep doing it. It will happen without any effort on your part."<sup>1</sup> Nicoll embraced the theories of modern psychologist Carl Jung, who said that everything one experiences is retained by the subconscious mind and can be remembered through deep reflection. She recalled, "You forget nothing of what you've learned or experienced."<sup>2</sup> Practicing automatism ritualized Nicoll's access to her inner world of fantasy and imagination by opening a pathway to the subconscious.<sup>3</sup>





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For Nicoll, the automatics she created in watercolour, ink, and pencil in her sketchbooks were mostly private exercises. Following her earliest experiments in the late 1940s, she continued to make them for the rest of her career, doing dozens of drawings and noting to her artist-friend Janet Mitchell (1912-1998) that the process “takes the place of deep meditation for me.”<sup>4</sup> She later stated, “I’m absolutely sure there was that teaching of the automatic drawing that started me off as an abstract painter.”<sup>5</sup>

## BATIK C.1950



Marion Nicoll, *Batik*, c.1950  
Aniline dye on silk, 100 x 92.5 cm  
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa

Marion Nicoll was first introduced to the batik process of painting on silk with wax resist when she was a student at the Ontario College of Art, Toronto.<sup>1</sup> This untitled work exemplifies how she practiced automatism in her batiks by incorporating fanciful subjects and free-form organic and linear patterning. A



dancing, clown-like character with decorative shoes, puffy pants, and a bird-like head crowned with a tube hat dominates the fabric area. The representational element is set against a background of repeating string-like vertical lines forming a spreading horizontal pattern. The figure's pants are filled with ovoid and circular designs inviting interpretations ranging from seashells to bubbles and stars.

After being introduced to fabric-based work in Toronto, Nicoll continued to develop her skills under further study with ceramic and textile artists Dora Billington (1890-1968) and Duncan Grant (1885-1978) at the Central School of Arts and Crafts, London, England, in 1937-38. When she returned to an economic depression in Calgary in June 1938, her batiks became a source of income—she sold scarves through a local merchant. She also taught the ancient pre-Christian Javanese batik method in her textile classes at the Provincial Institute of Technology and Art until her retirement in 1966. She explained that her batiks functioned as everything from “tapestries to wall hangings, scarves, curtains, portraits and runners.”<sup>2</sup> She exhibited them as complete works of art, considering them no less significant than her work as a painter.



LEFT: Duncan Grant, *West Wind*, 1932, furnishing fabric of screen-printed rayon and cotton, 375.9 x 121.9 cm, Victoria and Albert Museum, London. RIGHT: Jock Macdonald, *Batik*, 1951, aniline dye on cotton, 95.5 x 96.5 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

Nicoll was widely admired across Canada for her work as a batik artist, thanks in part to support from the Government of Alberta, which published her how-to manual *Batik* (1953). Her creations also earned the respect of colleague and friend Jock Macdonald (1897-1960), who asked her to teach him how to make them in summer 1951. Macdonald had introduced her to automatism a few years earlier, and decorative arts and crafts scholar Jennifer Salahub justly observes that the event represented “a reciprocal teaching moment.”<sup>3</sup>

Macdonald's regard for Nicoll's batik work extended to the fact that this piece once found a home in his and his wife Barbara Macdonald's personal collection. This history and provenance challenge the narrative that Nicoll's artistic evolution was reductively comprised of a lineage of male influences. Far from it—Nicoll went on to share her knowledge with dozens of artists and students to resurrect a medium that had been cast as secondary in the contemporary art of her time, dominated as it was by painting and sculpture.



**THURSDAY'S MODEL 1959**



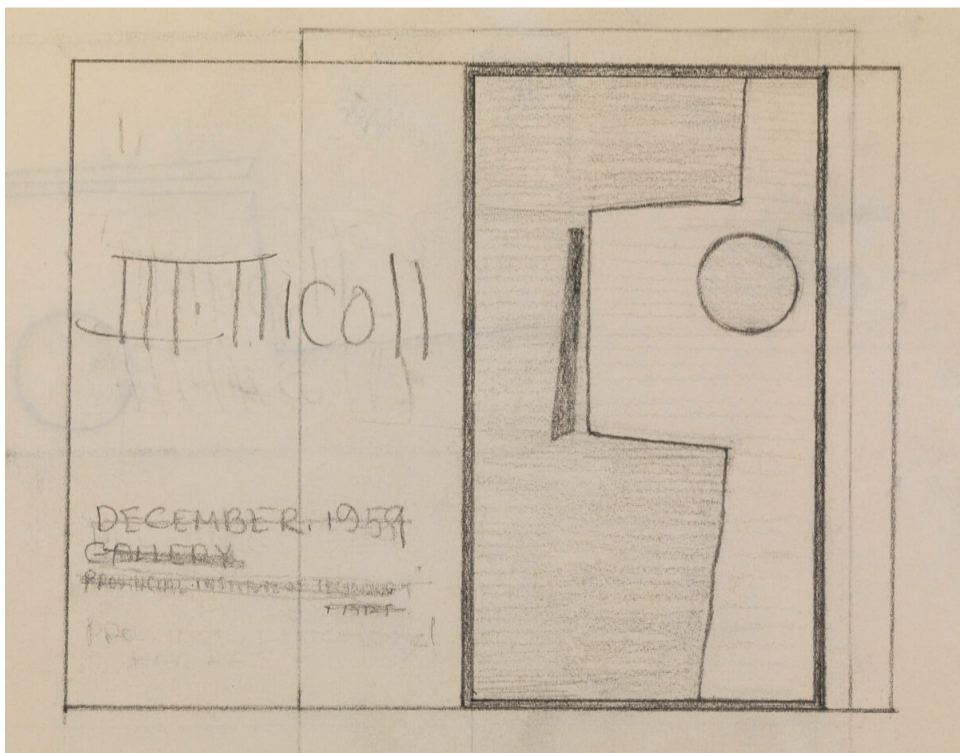
Marion Nicoll, *Thursday's Model*, March 12, 1959  
Oil on canvas, 92 x 51.1 cm  
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa



*Thursday's Model* is formed of just four colours: two large areas of red and white shapes, and two smaller areas of colour, a yellow circle and black thin rectangle. In this painting, Marion Nicoll distilled the observable world to a minimum. Between September 1958 and April 1959, while studying at the Art Students League of New York, Nicoll developed her practice from automatism to hard-edge abstraction. In *Thursday's Model*, made during one of her last classes of the academic year on March 12, 1959, she successfully realized a flat picture plane with no spatial depth by presenting a visual field dominated by colour and shape.

Her brushwork in *Thursday's Model* is highly controlled to create distinct shapes, clean edges, and single areas of colour—significant departures from her previous landscapes in the oil medium, which yielded textured results and intermingled forms. Here the goal was to make the brushstrokes nearly invisible to the eye, and so she pressed the brush flat against the painting surface. The antithesis of her approach in early figure paintings and portraits, this process took the subject only as a point of departure in her search for a modern vocabulary she later came to name “classical abstractions.”<sup>1</sup> It was an important transition to a new method, one she developed alongside vital experiences while living in New York. During her time in the city, she had the opportunity to continue her studies with Will Barnet (1911–2012), and to see colour-field painting by Mark Rothko (1903–1970) and Hans Hofmann (1880–1966) in person.

*Thursday's Model* holds an important place in Nicoll's practice for it was among the twenty paintings that formed her first solo exhibition, *M. Nicoll '59*, which opened on December 7, 1959, at the Provincial Institute of Technology and Art, Calgary, after she had spent a year abroad in New York and Europe. A preliminary drawing in the Glenbow collection confirms that Nicoll designed her own brochure to accompany the exhibition and that *Thursday's Model* served as the cover image to represent her new work. It earned positive reviews from local critics, who noted her austerity of means and clarity of form.



Marion Nicoll, Untitled sketch for brochure, *M. Nicoll '59*, c.1959, graphite on paper, 16 x 24 cm, Glenbow Archives, Calgary.

The honour of presenting a solo exhibition in one's home city was already a significant achievement, but the show was of sufficient interest that it precipitated the unusual circumstances of presentation at two more local venues in 1960—the Bowness Town Hall in the Nicolls' neighbourhood, and the Calgary Allied Arts Centre downtown.<sup>2</sup> The exhibit was Calgary's inaugural experience with the international genre of hard-edge painting, which



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established much of Nicoll's reputation afterwards. No longer were her abstracts private studio exercises, as had been the automatics; henceforth her hard-edge compositions represented her voice as an artist.

Within Nicoll's marriage, however, support for her new direction was only partial. Acting as spokesperson for his wife's exhibition at the Bowness venue, fellow artist Jim Nicoll (1892-1986) remarked: "The general public, conditioned to naturalistic painting...are understandably bewildered, or even irritated by the current prevailing schools of abstract painting. It is necessary to make an unprejudiced effort to meet the modern artist half way and attempt to understand his ideas and artistic vision."<sup>3</sup> Despite her husband's antipathy for abstraction, Nicoll embarked on her most productive decade of painting. As she had done with Jock Macdonald (1897-1960), she looked to supportive artist colleagues, including Barnett. With renewed momentum, Nicoll did not turn back. Next, Nicoll shifted her attention to her immediate environment—the Alberta Foothills and Prairies.



## ALBERTA IV: WINTER MORNING 1961



Marion Nicoll, *Alberta IV: Winter Morning*, 1961  
Oil on canvas, 99 x 116.8 cm  
Private Collection, Calgary

Painted following her return to Calgary from New York and Europe, *Alberta IV: Winter Morning* was one of Marion Nicoll's earliest responses to the Alberta landscape in her new abstract vocabulary. Despite the observable world being her point of departure, her new works were not the naturalistic landscapes she had once painted. Her title informs us of her moment of inspiration: a cold winter day with early morning sunlight offering fleeting warmth. This complex and daring interplay of primary and secondary colours (red, blue, and yellow versus green, orange, and purple) balances warm and cool effects while also achieving overall flatness throughout.

Nicoll's choices were carefully thought out. She was exceedingly practiced and well read in colour theory, including the potential symbolic and emotional effects of colour. Her knowledge had been shaped by modern theories, from the psychological workings of colour espoused by Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944) to the analyses of value, hue, and chroma endorsed by Albert H. Munsell (1858-1918). Nicoll explained, "yellow is the most easily seen colour, Red is next, blue is hazy... yellow commands attention, red signals... Red and yellow focus within the eye... blue focusses outside the eye which makes it appear fuzzy in outline."<sup>1</sup>



Wassily Kandinsky, *Colour Study—Squares with Concentric Circles*, 1913, watercolour, gouache, and chalk on paper, 23.9 x 31.5 cm, Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus und Kunstbau, Munich.

Remembering too her learnings from instructor Alfred Crocker Leighton (1900-1965), she recalled: "We had to get every degree of light/dark, warm/cold that was there, not matching the colour but matching the warmth or coldness and the light or dark... I know the tone of every colour I look at and I use that in abstract painting."<sup>2</sup> Nicoll perhaps also remembered Leighton's call for a distinct vocabulary for painting Alberta, having advised her that "this country won't be painted by me...trained as an Englishman...it's going to be painted by someone who is born here."<sup>3</sup>

*Alberta IV: Winter Morning* is one of the largest and most striking works in the Alberta Series. Begun in 1960, this series was the largest project she developed, comprised as it was of fourteen canvases.<sup>4</sup> To understand the place of *Alberta IV: Winter Morning* in the entire grouping remains a challenge since not one painting is held in a public collection, some are not possible to locate, and photographic images of them are not consistently available. Additionally, over the years, titles have also been confused and this painting is no exception. It has been identified with at least three different titles since it was first brought to public attention, errors that were doubtfully the artist's.<sup>5</sup>

This canvas passed into private hands after Nicoll's 1975 retrospective and was afterwards made available for loan in her subsequent key exhibitions, most recently her 2013 retrospective.<sup>6</sup> Nicoll's painting journal, in which she documents the contents of the Alberta Series, offers much insight into the cohesion she gave to the project. Her subtitles indicate the topography, vegetation, climate, times of day, and changing seasons that inspired the series.<sup>7</sup> It was Nicoll's homecoming after a vital experience in New York and Europe.



## ANCIENT WALL 1962



Marion Nicoll, *Ancient Wall*, 1962  
Oil on canvas, 107.6 x 153.2 cm  
Art Gallery of Alberta, Edmonton

*Ancient Wall* contains a warm, harmonious palette, symbolic designs, and stacked block-like shapes that form a dynamic visual field. Its point of departure was likely “the 300 BC walls of Naxos,” archaeological remains of ancient Greek civilization that Marion Nicoll toured while visiting Sicily in 1959.<sup>1</sup> In April of that year she received confirmation of her first Canada Council grant to support her teaching and art practice. She spent the spring and summer in Italy, Spain, and Portugal, and painted and drew almost every day. Nicoll finished *Ancient Wall* three years after her return to Calgary because she had sent her canvases home from Europe rolled, and some needed reworking.<sup>2</sup> It marked the last of her European-inspired paintings, which also included *Sicilia #1*, 1959, *Sicilia V: The House of Padrone*, 1959, and *Rome I: The Shape of the Night*, 1960.

In summer 1962, American critic Clement Greenberg (1909–1944) visited Nicoll during his tour of the Canadian Prairies. A year later he included *Ancient Wall* in his article for *Canadian Art* magazine, where he identified “Nicoll as among the best painters in oil and watercolour to hail from Calgary.”<sup>3</sup> Greenberg and Nicoll

had met in New York in 1959 through Will Barnet (1911–2012) and Greenberg had given her his private phone number, but she never called him, concluding that “we are different people.”<sup>4</sup> She took offense to his male-privileged commentary that her work showed “the helpful influence of Will Barnet.”<sup>5</sup> Rather, she asserted that she was ready for the change made in New York and that influence and admiration of another artist’s work remain separate matters.<sup>6</sup> Greenberg had ignored the visual force and context of production for *Ancient Wall* in Nicoll’s evolving practice. Nonetheless, his attention remained essential if Nicoll aspired to wider public recognition while circulating amid the male-genius imaginary of hard-edge painting, in which she was among the few women artists.<sup>7</sup>

*Ancient Wall* was first exhibited in summer 1963 in the *All Alberta Exhibition of Painting*, and that year the Edmonton Art Gallery (now Art Gallery of Alberta) became one of the first public art galleries to acquire one of Nicoll’s paintings.<sup>8</sup> It has continued to garner more attention in survey exhibitions of Alberta and Western Canada and was included in her 1975 and 2013 retrospective exhibitions.<sup>9</sup>



Marion Nicoll, *Sicilia #1*, 1959, oil on canvas, 71.2 x 91.4 cm, Alberta Foundation for the Arts, Edmonton.





## CALGARY II: THE UGLY CITY 1964



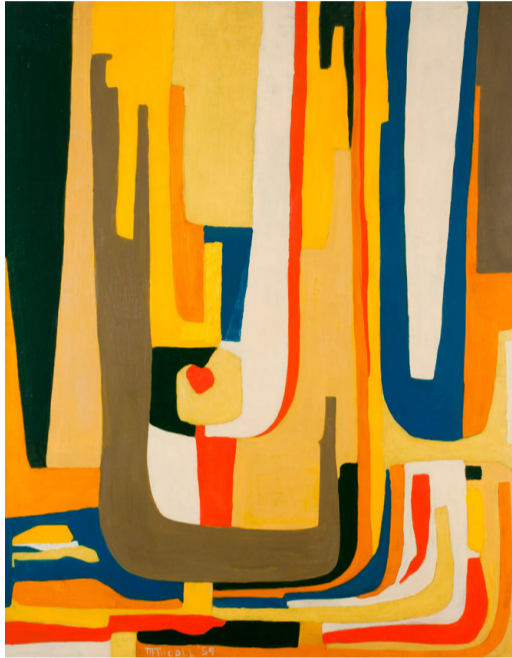
Marion Nicoll, *Calgary II: The Ugly City*, 1964  
Oil and Lucite on canvas, 116.8 x 139.7 cm  
Private Collection

In 1964, Marion Nicoll began a new project inspired by her city of birth—the Calgary Series (I-III), 1964–66.<sup>1</sup> *Calgary II: The Ugly City* layers blues and greens in block-like shapes and includes the letters “CIA” in yellow bands in the centre of the composition. Of the three paintings in the Calgary Series, this one best reflects the internal conflict Nicoll experienced about her homecoming, emotions that had been brewing since 1959.

When she returned to Alberta after a year in New York and Europe, her teaching position in design and crafts at Calgary’s Provincial Institute of Technology and Art (PITA) remained unchanged at a school still run by men who excluded her from giving classes in painting. This reality continued until her retirement in

1966, despite her many successes in Western Canada and showing in the National Gallery of Canada's *5th Biennial Exhibition of Canadian Painting 1963*.<sup>2</sup> The experience must have felt like a bitter pill after having turned down teaching opportunities in New York because of her husband's disdain for the city and desire to return to family roots.

Just before painting this work, Nicoll stated that she yearned to live in New York, "where I'm twice as alive. New York is a friendlier place than Calgary...to me it's the most beautiful city in the world."<sup>3</sup> The warm red-yellow palette she used in *The Beautiful City*, created in Manhattan in 1959, met its opposite in *Calgary II: The Ugly City*, with its cool blue-green palette, the other side of the primary colour spectrum. Usually, Nicoll found impetus in a single location or experience to develop her abstractions but *Calgary II: The Ugly City* was possible because of its precedent, *The Beautiful City*.



LEFT: Marion Nicoll, *The Beautiful City*, 1959, oil on canvas, 92 x 71.5 cm, Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, University of British Columbia, Vancouver. RIGHT: Postcard of New York City, 1959.

Nicoll was reticent to offer much by way of spoken words about the meaning of her paintings, noting that, "If my work doesn't make its own statement, then nothing I can say would make any difference. If it does make its own statement, a written explanation is superfluous."<sup>4</sup> Just the same, the integration of the highly charged letters "CIA" is an uncanny connection to the acronym for the Central Intelligence Agency. This American institution was created in 1947 to address foreign intelligence matters and mounting tensions between the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. P.W. Martin's writing on the Cold War, advocating for faith and peace in a troubled nuclear age, had entered Nicoll's library by 1959.<sup>5</sup> She had read Martin's call to personal action: "At a time when it seemed as if the individual citizen were becoming little more than a statistical unit in the modern mass state, it is upon the individual citizen that everything now depends."<sup>6</sup>

At the very least, *Calgary II: The Ugly City* marked an important realization that Nicoll could achieve more in her abstractions than her previous paintings, which froze in time only one place. Through careful titling and use of symbol, autobiography, and contrast, her abstractions were becoming more layered and multi-locational. The oppositions of beauty and ugliness are contrasted in the two paintings, but *Calgary II* may also signal Nicoll's intention to establish a comparison of nations. Alongside the Alberta Series, 1960-62, the Calgary Series was among Nicoll's major bodies of work to respond to her home. In those groupings, *Calgary II* has held a critically significant place since the 1970s, having been included in her 1975 retrospective exhibition and serving as frontispiece for the first monograph on her life and art in 1978.<sup>7</sup>





FEBRUARY 1967 1967

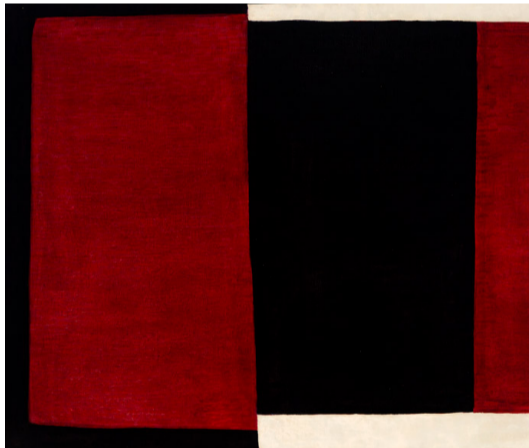


Marion Nicoll, *February 1967*, 1967  
Aniline dye on fabric, 193 x 134.6 cm  
Leighton Art Centre, Alberta

Marion Nicoll's early batiks were an extension of her work in automatism, but the approach in *February 1967* aligned with her hard-edge paintings, such as *Thursday's Model*, 1959, and *Self Portrait*, 1959. Vertical shapes of white, blue, and brown frame a yellow split-disc contoured with black outlines, which also surround the outer rim of the composition. The result is a mirage-like effect animated by fringe-like forms. It is probably Nicoll's last batik—she remembered being “coaxed” into making it after retiring from teaching the medium in 1966.<sup>1</sup> Who undertook the coaxing remains unknown, but it may well have been Nicoll's former batik student Barbara Leighton (1909–1986). Marion and Jim Nicoll (1892–1986) and Barbara and Alfred Crocker Leighton (1900–1965) were lifelong friends. *February 1967* was acquired by Barbara sometime after 1970 and became part of the Leighton Art Centre collection, near Millarville, Alberta.<sup>2</sup>

Despite having prioritized her painting and printmaking after 1959, Nicoll had always considered her batiks a serious art form, parallel in importance to her work in other media. Rarely, though, were there opportunities to exhibit them alongside her paintings because of the persisting historic segregation of craft from fine art. It was in 1969 in the late-career artist-couple exhibition organized by the Glenbow Foundation, Calgary, that Nicoll first exhibited a batik with her paintings.<sup>3</sup> *February 1967* was one of seven works representing Nicoll from her New York period to her most recent, and it was shown as a wall hanging, just like her canvases.

Realized on an impressive scale of 1.93 metres, the physical presence of *February 1967* is palpable in two photographs documenting the exhibition—one where Nicoll is standing before it, and another where it is shown adjacent to the painting *Guaycura I: Red Rock, Black Rock*, 1966. *February 1967* was the largest work in the show and clearly held its own amid her hard-edge paintings.



LEFT: Marion Nicoll, *Guaycura I: Red Rock, Black Rock*, 1966, oil on canvas, 106 x 137 cm, Private Collection. RIGHT: Marion Nicoll standing before *February 1967*, 1967, in 1969, photographer unknown, Glenbow Museum, Calgary.

The Marion and Jim Nicoll exhibition included a modest selection of both artists' works: seven by Marion and twelve by Jim.<sup>4</sup> In contrast to her abstractions, his were mostly landscapes of Alberta, two paintings from their trip to Sicily in 1959, and *Interior (Marion on Stairway)*, 1942. Curator Lorne E. Render, known for his research on art in Western Canada, was perhaps thinking about expanding this canon when organizing this exhibition.<sup>5</sup> However, he initiated a strategy that would be repeated in Calgary twice more in exhibitions featuring the Nicolls in 1971 and 1983.<sup>6</sup> Inevitably, the heterosexual artist-couple exhibition begs comparison to stage one artist as more consequential than the other; traditionally, the husband received the spotlight. In this case, however, Marion's powerful scaled-up abstractions flipped the gender order to leave Jim in her shadow, despite the number of works by him being greater than hers, and despite him casting her as muse in his portrait.





# MARION NICOLL

Life & Work by Catharine Mastin

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For Marion, the exhibition once again exposed her gender, this time with the added weight of her marital status. In 1975, an individual retrospective deservedly set her apart from an artist-couple context, but it was not until her 2013 retrospective that her batiks would once again be exhibited alongside her paintings.<sup>7</sup>



JANUARY '68 1968



Marion Nicoll, *January '68*, 1968  
Oil on canvas, 137.2 x 114.3 cm  
Alberta Foundation for the Arts, Edmonton

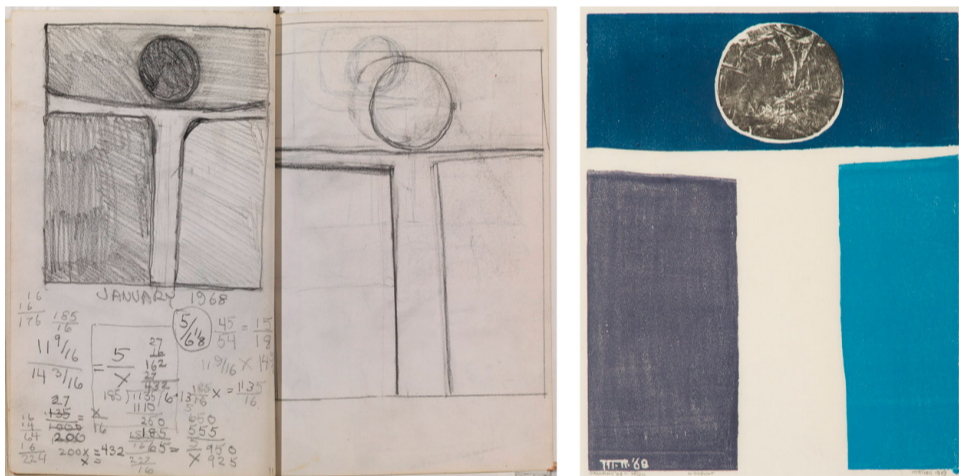


In *January '68*, a cool palette of two blues, purple, and black is contrasted with a large white central area. The figure-ground and light-dark relationships are suggestive of an outstretched torso set in a barren landscape, with the black circular form at once a head or a moon at night. The composition is perhaps a symbolic metaphor for Marion Nicoll's aching body in Alberta's cold January, which exacerbated her difficulties from her advancing arthritis.

In 1968, Nicoll made three new abstractions that were her aesthetic responses to each month of the winter; *January '68* was the first of them.<sup>1</sup> Despite her physical discomfort, she created one of her most important late-career paintings, a work that garnered national and international interest. To her friend Janet Mitchell (1912-1998) she explained the impact of the weather on her health at the time: "We have had ten days of chill, so naturally I ached. Now it is 0 degrees [-18 Celsius] and the wind is blowing, the snow almost parallel to the ground. The birch [trees] are thrashing around....I'm wearing grey sweat trousers (for men when they are exercising) with socks, high necked long-sleeved green sweater and a muumuu over the whole mess."<sup>2</sup> By March, Nicoll was in hospital and was not released until mid-May.

In the spring, between hospital and studio, Nicoll finished *January '68*. Two studies and calculations for enlargement show her planning process, which she explained "sometimes would take a year."<sup>3</sup> It was completed just in time for inclusion in William Seitz's seven-week studio tour of Canada. A known curator in postwar abstraction, he was then director of the Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, Waltham, Massachusetts, and he had been appointed guest curator for the National Gallery of Canada's *Seventh Biennial Exhibition of Canadian Painting*.<sup>4</sup> He chose Nicoll as one of only seven women of the seventy-one artists shown, recognizing the "philosophical and poetic nourishment" offered by her work.<sup>5</sup> *January '68* was also the choice of artist-educator William Townsend (1909-1973) for a special edition of *Canadian Art Today* in *Studio International*, which introduced Canadian contemporary art to an English public.<sup>6</sup>

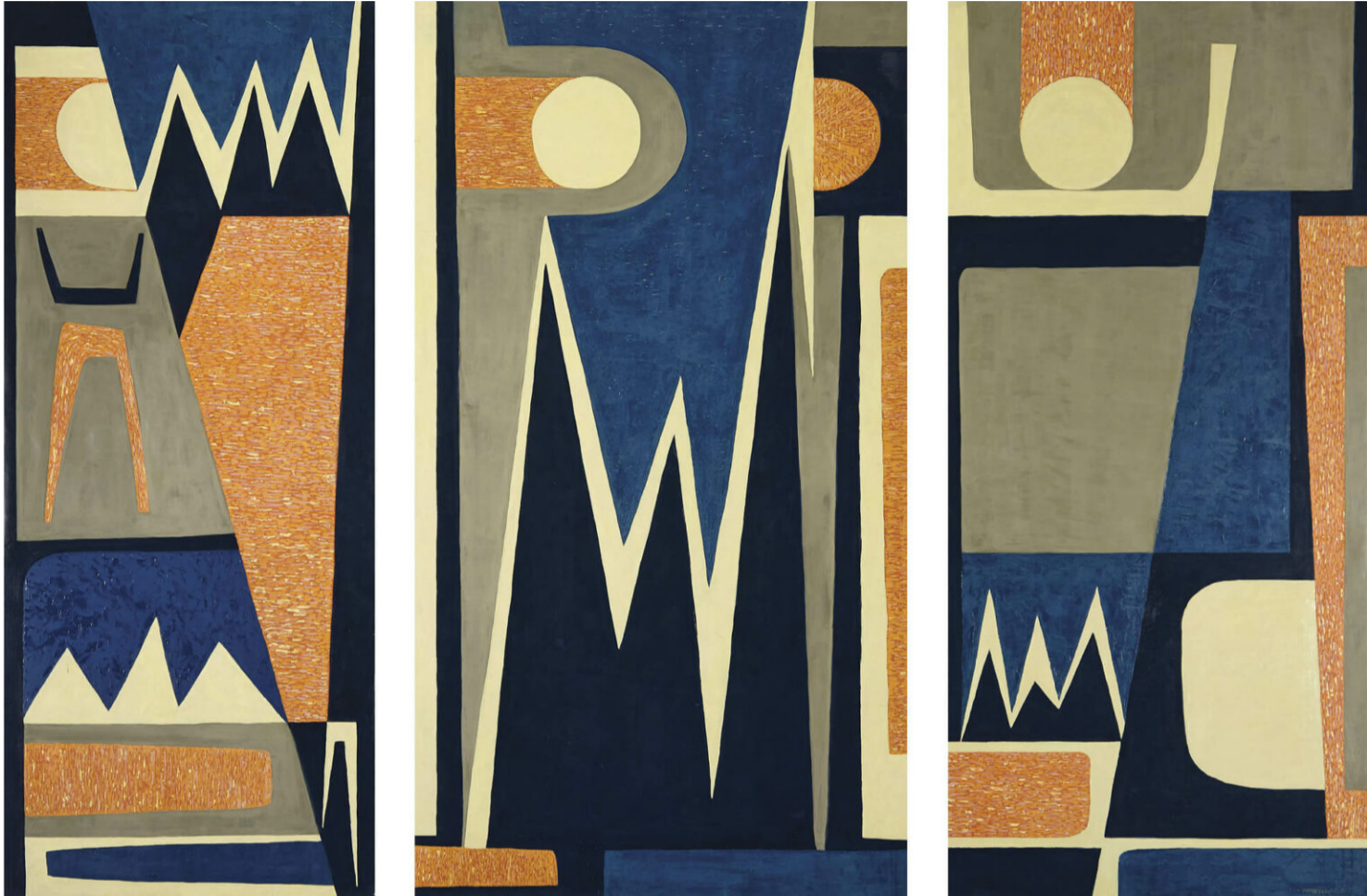
Nicoll developed *January '68* into two more projects: her 1969 holiday greeting card to be shared with friends and family; and one of her largest print editions in the woodcut process. In 1973, *January '68* found its final home in a provincial public art collection when it was purchased by the Alberta Foundation for the Arts.



LEFT: Marion Nicoll, *Studies for January '68*, Sketchbook #3, c.1968, graphite on paper, 21.5 x 14 cm, Glenbow Archives, Calgary. RIGHT: Marion Nicoll, *January '68*, 1968, woodcut on paper, 42 x 31 cm, City of Calgary Public Art Collection.



## JOURNEY TO THE MOUNTAINS: APPROACH, THE MOUNTAINS, RETURN 1968–69



Marion Nicoll, *Journey to the Mountains: Approach, The Mountains, Return*, 1968–69  
Oil on canvas, triptych: *Approach*, 274.3 x 114.3 cm; *The Mountains*, 274.3 x 152.4 cm;  
and *Return*, 274.3 x 129.5 cm; total: 274.3 x 396.2 cm  
Nickle Galleries, University of Calgary

*Journey to the Mountains: Approach, The Mountains, Return* was a culminating achievement in Marion Nicoll's artistic practice. It was the first time she used a triptych format at this scale and this strategy enabled her to create her largest painting to date. It contrasts a palette of primary and secondary colours—cool blue and warm orange—interspersed with black, grey, and white. Her use of dynamic jagged geometries placed at various heights throughout teases the viewer's eye to dance across the three panels.

In 1975, Nicoll's artist friend Will Barnet (1911–2012) considered it the most successful example of her capacity to “translate physical reality into painting language...[to] search for truths that are the very essence of being alive...to translate her environment in terms of power and beauty.”<sup>1</sup> Almost forty years later, Elizabeth Herbert summarized the painting as “an allegory of Nicoll's growth into artistic maturity...a modernist's vision of the self within the panorama of home.”<sup>2</sup>

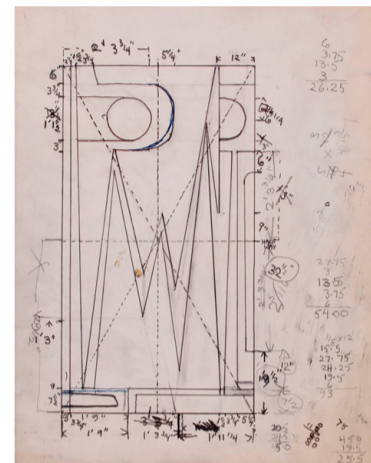
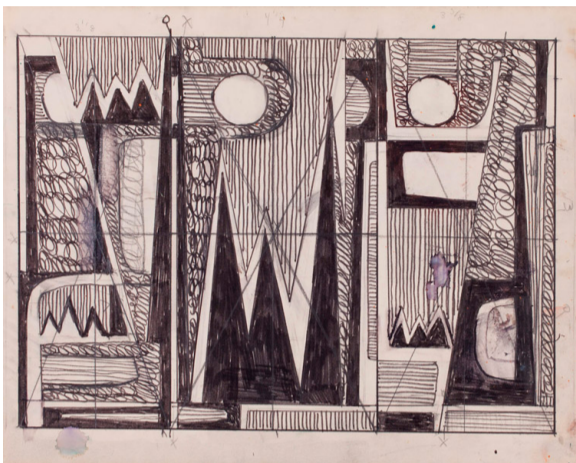


The monumental triptych had been planned for a client in Edmonton and was the only painting commission Nicoll was ever offered.<sup>3</sup> However, a relationship turned sour and the patron returned it a month after it had been installed in her home, leaving Nicoll both hurt and short of a major sale after three months of full-time work. She finally gifted it to the University of Calgary less than a decade before she passed away.

Her preliminary drawings for *Journey to the Mountains* show her care in balancing the flow of movement and light across the three panels by changing their order left to right and adjusting the shapes and forms within them. The project marked two significant shifts in Nicoll's abstractions—the sheer scale of the work, and her conception of time. She had been working in series for a decade but, until *Journey to the Mountains*, each painting remained a freestanding object responding to one moment in time and, once sold to various owners, the series could not be experienced again as a totality. She had not considered the triptych format before.

The scale increase made possible by using three panels to form *Journey to the Mountains* changed her approach to be akin to a colour-field-scale abstraction, wherein the viewer's field of vision is physically enveloped when standing before the work. The result was significantly more impactful as a simultaneous experience detailing three temporal moments—approaching, arriving, and returning. *Journey to the Mountains* was a radical departure from the landscapes she had once painted in which a single frame fixed one moment in time.

Throughout her life Nicoll had honed her skills in experiencing the outer world and turning to her inner self to find peace. *Journey to the Mountains* was an autobiographical summation of her artistic life to and from the mountains after a long feminist journey. It marked the end of her working in a serial format and commenced her exploration of multiple panels to create ever more imposing visual effects. Although it was hurtful at the time, it is fortuitous that *Journey to the Mountains* found its final home in a public, rather than private, art collection, for it was the most autobiographical work of her lifetime.



LEFT: Marion Nicoll, Preliminary sketches from sketchbook, date unknown, felt pen on paper, 24 x 30.5 cm, Alberta Foundation for the Arts, Edmonton. RIGHT: Marion Nicoll, Preliminary sketches of *Journey to the Mountains*, date unknown, mixed media on paper, 30.5 x 24 cm, Alberta Foundation for the Arts, Edmonton.



A watercolor painting of a mountain range. The mountains are rendered in various shades of brown, red, and yellow, with dark blue and black lines suggesting shadows and textures. The sky is a deep blue with several birds in flight, their wings spread. The overall style is expressive and somewhat abstract.

# SIGNIFICANCE & CRITICAL ISSUES

**Marion Nicoll is recognized as an influential educator and artist and for helping to usher Calgary's art scene into modernity. Despite an uneven playing field for women, she became a painter of great national reputation, yet was only ever given the opportunity to teach design and crafts. She nevertheless found ways to integrate painting into her lessons and her mentorship of students was felt for at least three generations. Working virtually in isolation from others exploring experimental art forms, she remained committed to abstraction to earn recognition in Canada, Britain, and the United States.**





### BALANCING “FINE ART” AND “CRAFT”

When Marion Nicoll began her career, she inherited an art world in which there were rigid divisions between the so-called “fine arts” and the so-called “crafts.” Although today many contemporary artists are widely respected for their work with materials such as fabrics and clay, Nicoll faced a medium-driven art system—shaped by gender politics—where painting, sculpture, printmaking, and architecture were given privilege over all other media, including textiles, ceramics, beadwork, jewelry, and needlework.

Such hierarchies were clearly marked in Canada by official art institutions, most notably the first national art society—the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts (RCA). In their constitution of 1879, the arts were listed as including “Painting, Sculpture, Architecture, Engraving and the Industrial Arts,” whereas work in other media was considered secondary, much of it designated to the expansive field of craft.<sup>1</sup> The document explained, “No needlework, Artificial flowers, cut paper, shellwork, models in coloured wax, or any such performances shall be admitted into the exhibition of the Canadian Academy.”<sup>2</sup> Underscoring these medium-based divisions was the fact that it was normally women who specialized in the excluded art forms, and they did not have the same access to the fine arts or professional paid employment that men did. Their work was automatically relegated to secondary status and they were expected to remain outside men’s arenas and not challenge the status quo.

Nicoll’s education marked the beginning of her journey through these systemic challenges for female artists. At the Ontario College of Art, where she began studying under a cadre of male instructors in 1926, her courses included drawing, painting, and batik. By choice, her later program at the Provincial Institute of Technology and Art (PITA) focused on painting, the process in which she eventually established her legacy. But after graduation, Nicoll knew all too well that to be employed, as a woman, she needed a stronger education in crafts, and in 1937–38 she embarked on further study of textiles, weaving, bookbinding, mosaic, and pottery at the Central School of Arts and Crafts in London, England. On her return to Calgary, she resumed working as an instructor at PITA, teaching fabric decoration and leather work, and after the



National Gallery, Ottawa, February 1900, photograph by Topley Studio, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa. This Royal Canadian Academy of Arts exhibition at the National Gallery in Ottawa was organized hierarchically and featured only works of “fine art,” not those considered “craft.”

Second World War, she became the head of the craft program. It was under her leadership that the college curriculum grew to national recognition. Henceforth she embarked on becoming a serious educator and practitioner, juggling both her painting and her work in fabrics, metals, and printmaking.



LEFT: Marion Nicoll, *Procession of Birds* (detail), 1956, aniline dye on silk, 73 x 222 cm, Glenbow Museum, Calgary. RIGHT: Marion Nicoll, *Batik*, c.1950, aniline dye on silk, 100 x 92.5 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

Nicoll went on to be an important spokesperson for the craft movement in Alberta and a leading figure in reviving the ancient batik art form of painting on wax. Not only did Nicoll take the craft profession seriously but she also challenged its gendered contours—she encouraged her male students to explore textiles. Her involvement as juror for the 1963 annual *Albertacraft* exhibition was a testament to her leadership in changing perceptions of craft to insist that it too was a legitimate art form. On the occasion of the 1965 *Albertacraft* exhibition, she boasted that, “The writer has seen many crafts shows on this continent and abroad and is able to say that this [is] one of the very best...there is none of the look of the local bazaar about it.”<sup>3</sup>





LEFT: Marion Nicoll, *February 1967*, 1967, aniline dye on fabric, 193 x 134.6 cm, Leighton Art Centre, Alberta. RIGHT: Marion Nicoll, *Spring '67*, 1967, oil on linen, City of Calgary Public Art Collection.

For Nicoll, the craft field was not only a means to earn a living but also an arena she sought to expand and champion, and in which she aspired to establish new standards of excellence. From her earliest education to her last batik of 1967, she showed a sustained commitment to these goals. Her achievements in watercolour, oil, and drawing informed her textiles in a fluid creative process, and she considered all her work merit worthy. Her most important writings celebrated crafts—as she declared in one article, “The museums of the world are full of a wealth of this work.”<sup>4</sup> In this regard, she was looked to by the government of Alberta, among others, as an expert in the field.



# MARION NICOLL

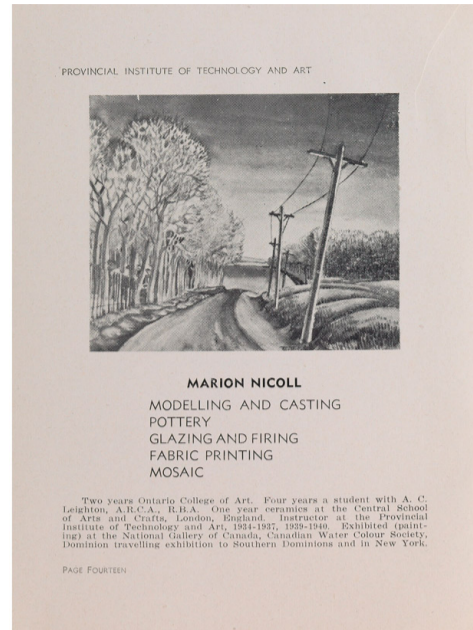
Life & Work by Catharine Mastin

## TEACHING LEGACY

From 1933 to 1965, Marion Nicoll was an instructor at the Provincial Institute of Technology and Art (PITA). She taught steadily, with the exceptions of 1937 and 1959, when she furthered her education in London and New York, and for six years after her marriage in 1940. For much of this time she was the only female artist on staff.<sup>5</sup> In reference to her last years of teaching, when the college had 165 instructors, she said, "Don't let them kid you that women are equal when it comes to jobs... When I left there, it took the time of a man and a half to do what I was doing."<sup>6</sup>



LEFT: Cover of the Provincial Institute of Technology & Art Art Department calendar, 1947-48, Glenbow Archives, Calgary. RIGHT: Art Department instructor profile for Marion Nicoll at the Provincial Institute of Technology & Art, 1947-48, Glenbow Archives, Calgary.



Nicoll's role at PITA was to lead the School of Crafts, not the School of Painting, which was always given to men. Even so, she sustained a lifelong commitment to painting to become one of the most nationally recognized artists on staff. The 1947-48 syllabus identified James Dichmont (1875-1962) and James Stanford Perrott (1917-2001) as instructors in Drawing and Painting. Nicoll was named instructor for Ceramics, yet her instructor profile illustrated one of her landscape paintings in watercolour.<sup>7</sup>

It surely irked Nicoll that Perrott was given that role when he had been one of her former students; like her, he was experimenting with landscape in the late 1940s. After she passed away in 1985, Perrott credited Nicoll as "the rock upon which everybody stood when they were starting out to make art."<sup>8</sup> As PITA grew after 1948, a lineage of male instructors in the School of Painting followed, including Henry G. Glyde (1906-1998), Walter Phillips (1884-1963), Illingworth Kerr (1905-1989), and Ron Spickett (1926-2018). Despite the inequalities towards women, Nicoll persisted, developing an impressive teaching legacy and list of accomplished graduates while challenging gender norms and balancing her own success.

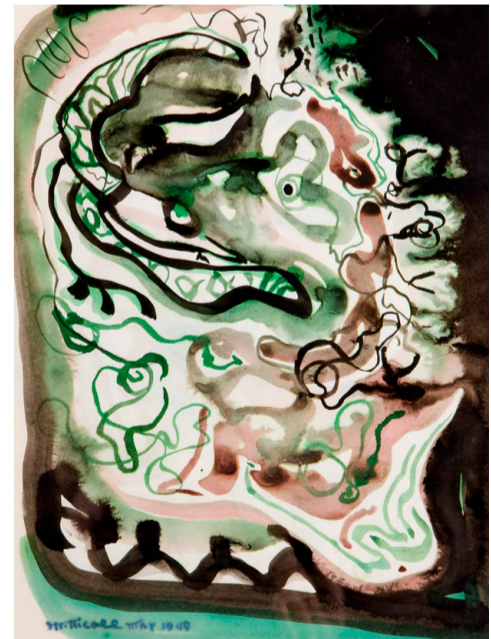




LEFT: James Stanford Perrott, *Canmore Train Stop*, 1946, watercolour on paper, 36.6 x 54.2 cm, Alberta Foundation for the Arts, Edmonton. RIGHT: Marion Nicoll, *Utopia*, 1947, oil on board, 40.6 x 48.3 cm, University of Regina President's Art Collection.

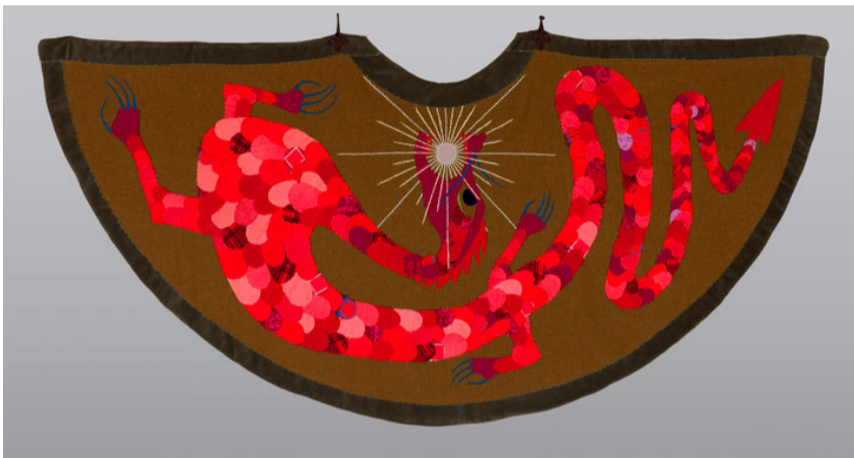
Nicoll was committed to establishing a strong foundation for her students in a wide variety of materials and media and a thorough understanding of the formal elements of art. Her Design and Handcrafts course included working with batik, printing in silk-screen, block relief and stencil, tie-dye, jewelry, and leather, and emphasized skill development, with attention to rhythm, balance, opposition, harmony, line, tone, and texture.<sup>9</sup> Her lectures on colour stressed the study of both its history and psychological effects.<sup>10</sup> She insisted that her students be well versed in the theories of Albert H. Munsell (1858-1918), who advocated an understanding of the roles of hue (colour), value (lightness or darkness of colour), and chroma (the strength or weakness of colour).<sup>11</sup>

Teaching was primarily a vehicle to support Nicoll's artistic practice and for her to earn a living. Nonetheless, she took her pedagogical responsibilities seriously and remained steadfast in her belief that "Nobody can teach you to be an artist. Absolutely nobody. All this business of teaching techniques is bass-ackwards [sic], because a technique is a 'result' not a start."<sup>12</sup> When once asked what makes a great teacher, she replied, "It is the ability to inspire their students."<sup>13</sup> Nicoll felt that the most important support she could give was to foster self-expression. She had learned from working in automatism that a way to find that voice was to turn to the inner self, and she encouraged her pupils to do the same.



LEFT: Marion Nicoll, *Untitled (Automatic Drawing)*, 1948, watercolour on paper, 30.1 x 22.6 cm, Glenbow Museum, Calgary. RIGHT: Marion Nicoll, *Untitled (Automatic Drawing)*, May 1948, ink watercolour on paper, 30 x 22 cm, Alberta Foundation for the Arts, Edmonton.

As a teacher, Nicoll is remembered as a compelling force who “suffered no loafers or prima donnas in her classes.”<sup>14</sup> As students George Mihalcheon (1924–2011) and George Wood (b.1932) reminisced, “She scared the hell out of everybody.”<sup>15</sup> ManWoman (1938–2012), who took her batik courses, considered her his favourite teacher. “She gave me a strong sense of design.... She helped me discover my own originality and belief in myself...I remained very close to Marion and had a special relationship with her.”<sup>16</sup> Ceramics student Luke Lindoe (1913–2000) attributed the foundation of the Ceramics program and its growth to Nicoll.



LEFT: ManWoman (Pat Kemball), *Dragon Swallowing the Sun*, 1964, appliqued, embroidered cotton corduroy, wool, felt, velvet, fully opened: 101 x 199.3 cm, Collection of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, Edmonton. RIGHT: Luke Lindoe, *Figure*, 1962, clay, 48 x 64.5 x 37.5 cm, Alberta Foundation for the Arts, Edmonton.

John K. Esler (1933–2001) found her to be “the most impressive of all the staff. She was a strong force...at a time when women could hardly get jobs in that area. Her strength of character and determination for excellence made her a very powerful person in Calgary and Alberta.”<sup>17</sup> Perrott remarked, “It was her subjective example and her interest in people that made the difference. She started me out when I was floundering and put the joy of art into my head and into my heart. In the world of art, which can be so mechanical and material, her values were aristocratic and civilized.”<sup>18</sup>

### CONFRONTING DISCRIMINATION

Having faced professional sexism in her own career, Nicoll was supportive of others who were facing systemic barriers, including on the basis of race. She championed Dene artist Alex Janvier (b.1935) when he was experiencing racism from the Department of Indian Affairs, who tried to force him to take commercial rather than fine art and threatened to withdraw his financial support. Nicoll joined him to fight the department to a standstill until he was allowed to study painting.<sup>19</sup> Janvier’s *Subconscious Series*, 1960, was among the results of her teachings in automatism and he has subsequently been recognized for his lyrical abstractions and images of residential school history.

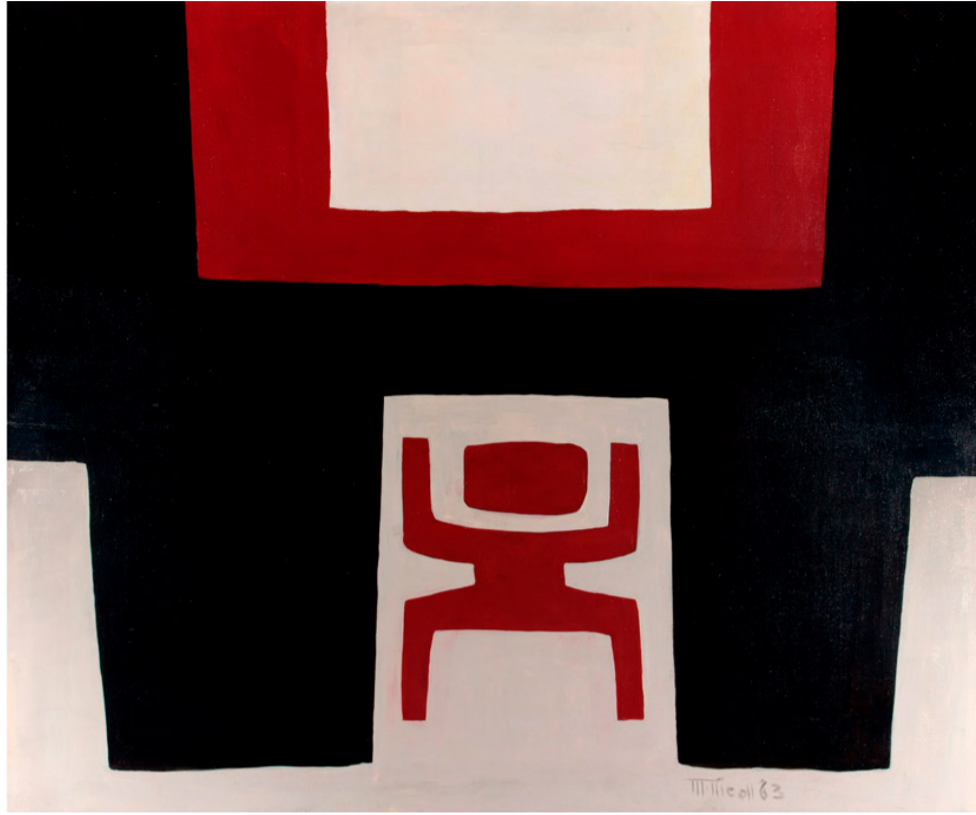




LEFT: Alex Janvier, *Subconscious #3*, 1960, graphite on paper, 21.3 x 27.9 cm, Canadian Museum of History, Gatineau. RIGHT: Katie Ohe, *Puddle I*, 1976, bronze, 27.9 x 88.9 x 88.9 cm, Glenbow Museum, Calgary.

Nicoll was well known for challenging gender norms. Painter Carroll Taylor-Lindoe (formerly Moppett) (b.1948) recalled, “No one really knows what she had to do to maintain her position. There are an awful lot of women my age and older who are glad she was there. Many of us thought Calgary wasn’t quite the right place for her, but we are indebted to her for staying here.”<sup>20</sup> Nicoll also encouraged her male students to create fabric art—a field traditionally associated with women—and Derek Whyte later led a crafts program for the New Brunswick government. Sculptor Katie Ohe (b.1937)—whose biomorphic sculptures, such as *Puddle I*, 1976, are in effect kinetic automatics—has said definitively that “Marion Nicoll is at the root of everything art is today in Calgary.”<sup>21</sup>

Nicoll found alternate means to teach painting and abstract art forms regardless of her official circumstances as lead in the School of Ceramics. Her Finger Painting course taught the Chinese method from the Tang dynasty, which she explained “instilled rhythm and freehand expression” and the results, she conceded, “are of course abstractions.”<sup>22</sup> So too her courses on string cylinder printing and metal and wire construction realized abstractions. In 1963, Jenni Morton’s article “Painter Teaches Craft Classes” offered a public platform where Nicoll made it known that she “would have preferred to teach painting rather than crafts.”<sup>23</sup> Another opportunity soon followed to discuss her “success elsewhere, but not in Calgary” and, when she stated that “all I ask of life is to paint,” she hinted that her patience with teaching was finite.<sup>24</sup> She was working on large series of paintings, as can be seen in *Ritual I*, 1962, and *Ritual II*, 1963.



LEFT: Marion Nicoll, *Ritual I*, 1962, oil on canvas, 125.1 x 71.8 cm, Private Collection. RIGHT: Marion Nicoll, *Ritual II*, 1963, oil on canvas, 128 x 152.8 cm, Alberta Foundation for the Arts, Edmonton.

On December 30, 1965, Nicoll tendered her resignation. She said, "Teaching didn't bother me at all. What bothered me was the garbage around it. The bells, the reports, the chain of authority, discipline."<sup>25</sup> To the college vice-principal, she announced that it was either retirement or she would remain on sick leave.<sup>26</sup> Only then did she learn how much her colleagues valued her. Principal Illingworth Kerr replied, "I believe that an art school has not a constant quality but has at any time no more than the sum total of its instructors and their ability to share experience, so we cannot admit that 'any one is expendable.' Your individual quality as an instructor cannot be replaced."<sup>27</sup>

By January 1966, with her teaching career completed, she was finally able to make art her full-time priority. The Marion Nicoll Gallery at what has now become the Alberta University of the Arts was later named in her honour to recognize her outstanding teaching career, and it is known for presenting exhibitions of student work.





# MARION NICOLL

Life & Work by Catharine Mastin



Marion Nicoll Gallery, Alberta University of the Arts, Calgary, featuring an exhibition of works by Bobby Ng.

## STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY

The modern evolution of Calgary's art community was enriched through Nicoll's art, memberships, public service, and the opening of her Bowness home to visitors. In addition to her memberships with the Calgary Sketch Club and Alberta Society of Artists, she joined informal collectives, including the feminist Women Sketch Hunters of Alberta and the Calgary Group, which was committed to modern expression.<sup>28</sup> She was also a notable voice of support for work in craft and design, participating in the establishment of arts infrastructure, public demonstrations, exhibition adjudication, volunteer committee work, writing, and exhibiting.

With Calgary Alderman Mary Dover in 1958, Nicoll assisted in forming the Log Cabin on St. George's Island, Bow River, one of the first local outlets for the sale of quality handmade crafts.<sup>29</sup> Her public interviews documented the processes of batik fabrication, ceramics, and silk-screen printing and she spoke proudly about the successful batik work of her students.<sup>30</sup> Her publication *Batik* (1953) was one of four brochures issued by the Alberta government's Cultural Activities Branch.<sup>31</sup> In her essay "Crafts in the Community," she stressed

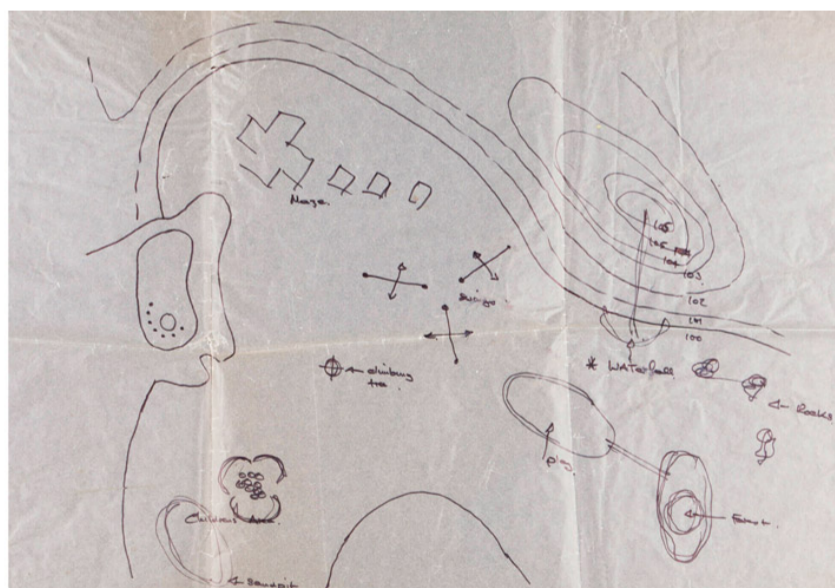
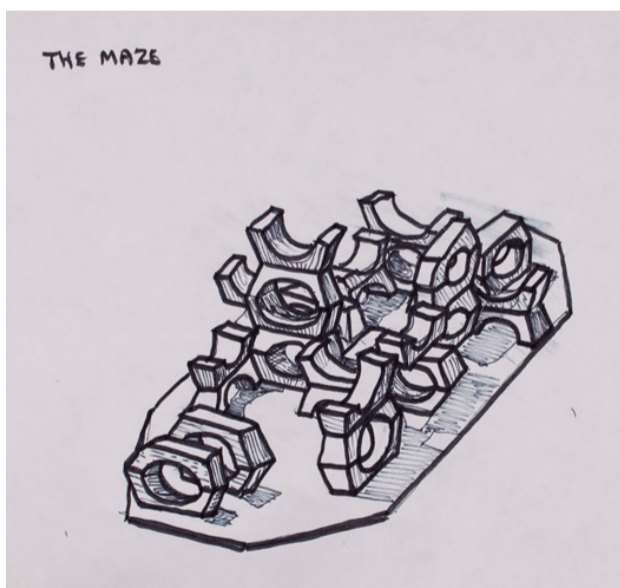


LEFT: Marion Nicoll, *Fishes*, 1955, silk rayon velvet batik, 157 x 94 cm, Alberta Foundation for the Arts, Edmonton. RIGHT: Marion Nicoll in her studio, c.1963, photographer unknown, Glenbow Archives, Calgary.

design excellence and a desire to nurture the artist's "feeling of kinship with the craftsman of the past and others working all over the world." Among her goals was the desire that "the crafts produced in this province will bear the unmistakable stamp of this country and its people."<sup>32</sup>

As a volunteer, Nicoll offered service to organizations in Calgary, Edmonton, and Montreal. In Calgary, she acted as organizer, chair, and juror for the annual exhibition series *Albertacraft*. The 1963 exhibition included entries from across Canada and her juror's statement noted that "the use of materials ... is showing more imagination... and the quality of work rising steadily."<sup>33</sup> Nicoll also served as judge for the Alberta Government's scholarship awards, member of the Alberta Visual Arts Board, and advisor for the Canadian Handicrafts Guild.<sup>34</sup>

Nicoll envisioned that the artist also had a vital role in public planning, including urban environments. For *Environment '69*, an interdisciplinary group exhibition of artists and architects succeeding the former *Albertacraft*, she developed a concept vision for a children's playground that included a maze, moveable wall unit, people wall, climbing and sliding unit, combined swing and climbing bar, and natural rock area. Her aims were threefold: make a fun place for children that stimulates their natural desire for play, adventure, innovation, and fantasy; create a focal point that enhances the neighbourhood at any time of the day or year; and finally, integrate the environment into the natural landscape so that it emphasizes the unique character of the country.<sup>35</sup> Some elements of this proposal were later realized for the Bowness Montgomery Day Care Association, Calgary, but those elements have not survived today.<sup>36</sup> Her plans show how she transformed her experiences in abstraction from two to three dimensions: she took a geometric approach for *The Maze*, a space for children to climb and crawl, and an interplay of organic forms for the *Natural Rock Area*.



LEFT: Marion Nicoll, *The Maze*, c.1969, felt pen on paper, 20.2 x 25.3 cm, Alberta Foundation for the Arts, Edmonton. RIGHT: Marion Nicoll, *Untitled (Playground Project)* [study for the Natural Rock Area], c.1969, felt pen on paper, 35 x 74.5 cm, Alberta Foundation for the Arts, Edmonton.

For several decades, the Nicolls opened their Bowness home to welcome visitors and encourage conversations about art. This generosity of community spirit led to many fond memories. Lifelong friend Janet Mitchell (1912-1998) remembered how often the artist couple entertained and held summer garden parties, saying, "Long after her students left the college they would find their



way out to the Nicolls' for advice, a letter of recommendation, or simply for absorbing conversation... Even their friends were extraordinary. Their friends were, and still are, from every kind and condition and position. If one has a guest from out of town, one invariably took them to the Nicolls'; and it generally was a visit long remembered."<sup>37</sup>

### ABSTRACTIONIST IN ISOLATION

From her earliest landscapes to her final abstractions, Nicoll's painting practice was ongoing and, by the later 1950s, it became her driving force, the medium through which she most wanted recognition. "No man in his right mind would become a painter by choice to-day. A painter is one because he must be,"<sup>38</sup> she observed. "I wouldn't be anything else."<sup>39</sup>

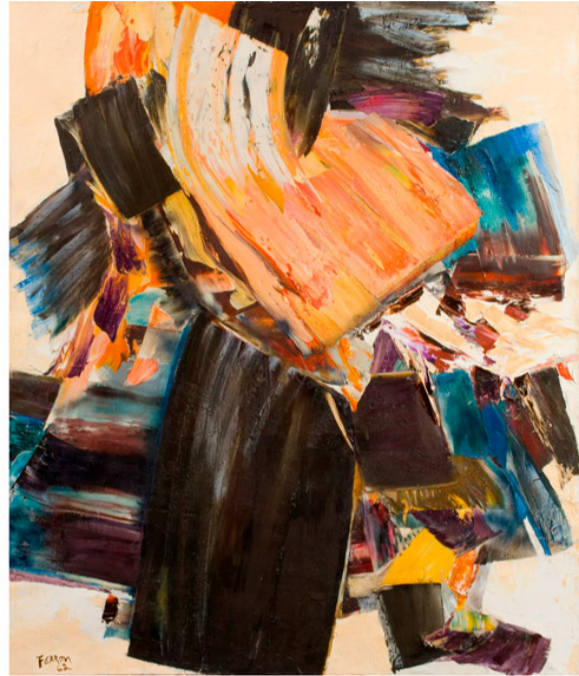
Considering the geography in which Nicoll worked, it was an astonishing accomplishment that she sustained her practice in automatism. After Jock Macdonald's (1897- 1960) departure for Toronto in 1947 she remained alone in Alberta in her pursuit of this method, experimenting in works like those known as *Untitled (Automatic Drawing)*, 1948. She was far removed from the European Surrealists who produced automatic drawings, such as Francis Picabia (1879-1953), Jean Arp (1886-1966), Salvador Dalí (1904-1989), André Masson (1896-1987), Max Ernst (1891-1976), and Grace Pailthorpe (1883-1971). These artists used methods such as frottage (rubbing), doodling, collage, and collaboration, and their efforts measurably expanded the possibilities of drawing. As Leslie Jones, associate curator of prints and drawings at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, has observed, the Surrealists fostered a process of "freedom, the ability to try new things at a moment's notice, allow oneself to slip up, make mistakes, take a different path."<sup>40</sup> Nicoll likewise appreciated that "you can't make a mistake in automatic drawing."<sup>41</sup>

Nicoll looked to established artists including Russians Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944) and Marc Chagall (1887-1985), whom she considered among the first automatic abstractionists.<sup>42</sup> She read articles about her peers in *Canadian Art* magazine, which featured Automatiste and Surrealist artists from Montreal including Paul-Émile Borduas (1905-1960), Jean Paul Riopelle (1923-2002), Marcelle Ferron (1924-2001), and Jean-Philippe Dallaire (1916-1965).<sup>43</sup> She was familiar with the Automatiste manifesto *Refus global* (1948) and probably took note of the group's inclusion of women—Madeleine Arbour (b.1923), Muriel Guilbault (1922-1952), Thérèse Renaud (later Thérèse Leduc) (1927-2005),



LEFT: Marion Nicoll, *Untitled (Automatic Drawing)*, 1948, watercolour, gouache, pen and ink on paper, 35.6 x 30.1 cm, Glenbow Museum, Calgary. RIGHT: Marion Nicoll, *Untitled (Automatic Drawing)*, 1948, watercolour on paper, 30.1 x 22.6 cm, Glenbow Museum, Calgary.

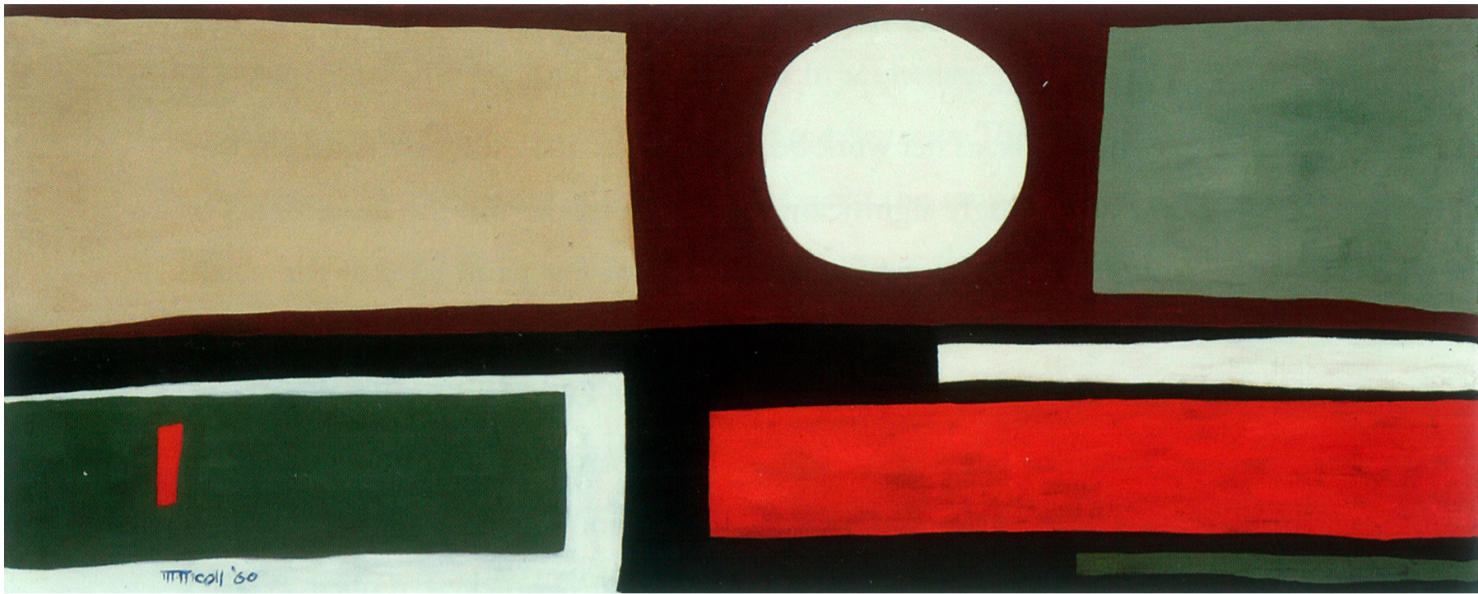
Françoise Riopelle (1927–2022), Françoise Sullivan (b.1923), and Ferron among them. Nicoll also read *Vie des Arts* to compare her work with the Montreal art scene.<sup>44</sup> She kept on hand British psychologist P.W. Martin's *Experiment in Depth* (1955), which she considered a valuable tool for self-analysis, for he encouraged the recording of one's dreams from the subconscious.<sup>45</sup>



LEFT: Paul-Émile Borduas, *Leeward of the Island (1.47)*, 1947, oil on canvas, 114.7 x 147.7 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. RIGHT: Marcelle Ferron, *Kanaka*, 1962, oil on canvas, 201.5 x 171 cm, Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, Québec City.

Through her automatics, Nicoll had sharpened her two-step process of accessing the subconscious to create images. When she turned to hard-edge painting in 1959, creating works such as *Thursday's Model*, 1959, and *Alberta VI, Prairie*, 1960, she added a third step—observe the external world; turn inwards to distill, sort, and order what she had seen; and finally, capture these images in paint. Martin's *Experiment in Depth* was surely welcome reinforcement of Nicoll's capacity to engage in the process of moving back and forth between inner and outer worlds through the process of what he named withdraw and return—what she lived as an abstract artist. Nicoll explained what it was to be in steps two and three of her process as follows: "When I'm painting, I bring my whole critical faculty to bear.... You're constantly accepting, rejecting as you paint... afterwards then you bring your real critical faculty and decide... whether it is right or wrong.... You use the whole person you can't just be all intuition any more than you can be all mental."<sup>46</sup>

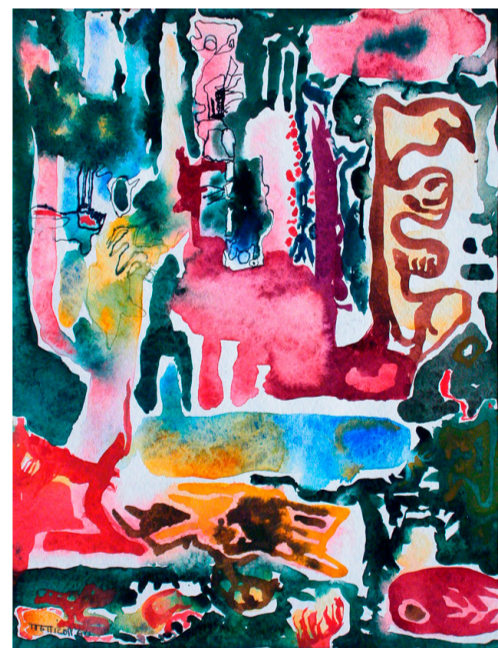
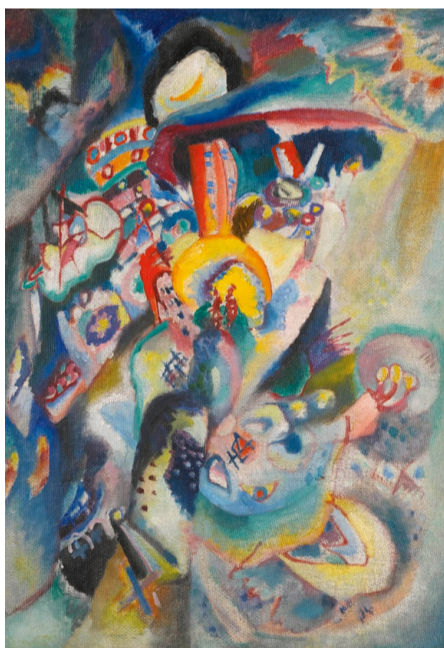




Marion Nicoll, *Alberta VI, Prairie*, 1960, oil on canvas, 60.9 x 152.4 cm, Private Collection, Calgary.

Automatism, through which Nicoll had learned the process of her inner reality, her ability to withdraw from the outer world and return afterwards as exhibiting artist, remained with her. She never released her paintings from the actual world to be only about pure form and colour because her environment continued to matter to her. Abstraction was her vocabulary because it synchronized with her lived time—modernity.

As Ann Davis, former director of the Nickle Arts Museum at the University of Calgary, has argued, Nicoll's abstractions were also deeply spiritual compositions expressed through silence and alchemy. As she explains, alchemy is a philosophy based on the transformation of matter and abstraction is a way to articulate the spiritual. It is to convert the physical to the metaphysical, and to allow the inner world to be visible. Building on Kandinsky's idea of total realism (transmutation of the worldly object) and total abstraction (silence about the world), the artist reduces the artistic to a minimum and "art no longer represents but presents."<sup>47</sup>



LEFT: Wassily Kandinsky, *Moskau II (Moscow II)*, 1916, oil on canvas, 52.8 cm x 39 cm, Private Collection. RIGHT: Marion Nicoll, *Untitled (Automatic Drawing)*, 1960, watercolour on paper, 35 x 22.7 cm, Art Gallery of Alberta, Edmonton.

When Nicoll made the decision to shift to hard-edge abstraction, she continued to work in isolation, and that problem was exacerbated in Calgary after she moved back from her year spent living in New York. Gender continued to be a social obstacle to inclusion within the hard-edge painting movement. She was geographically far from Les Plasticiens, Quebec's hard-edge painting movement, in which there were no female artists. She participated in the National Gallery of Canada Biennial Exhibitions of Canadian Painting in 1963, 1965, and 1968, and, while finally on the national stage, she was in all three



instances the only female artist from Alberta.<sup>48</sup> Overall representation of women in these exhibitions only ranged between 10 and 12 per cent of the total exhibitors.

Joyce Wieland (1930-1998), who was then an emerging Canadian feminist artist, was also included in the 1965 biennial. Wieland and Nicoll had coincidentally both made the transition to abstraction in 1959, but they are not known to have met one another. By 1968, when William Chapin Seitz (1914-1974) declared hard-edge abstraction “an essential style, if not *the* style of our age,” Nicoll may no longer have been alone in the genre, but she remained one of its few female practitioners in Alberta.<sup>49</sup> She exhibited with Chicago’s Vincent Price Gallery in 1968 but otherwise never re-entered the American hard-edge scene after New York.



LEFT: Joyce Wieland, *Time Machine Series*, 1961, oil on canvas, 203.2 x 269.9 cm, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto. RIGHT: Marion Nicoll, *March*, 1967, oil on canvas, City of Calgary Public Art Collection.

Nicoll envisioned her hard-edge painting practice to be her most important artistic legacy and that it was cut short at age sixty-three from arthritis was regrettable. After 1971, she drew and made prints when she could cope with her physical discomfort. Among her last known works of art was the print *Self Portrait*, 1979, made to accompany the first monograph on her life and art, *Marion Nicoll: R.C.A.* Like many of her prints, the image was an extension of her painting practice—this one following the oil painting *Self Portrait*, which she created in New York in 1959. It was no coincidence that she chose to bookend her practice with these two images to close two decades of her feminist journey. When she painted the 1959 *Self Portrait* in the hard-edge genre, she consciously marked the self as her centre. That year also marked the year she became a public abstractionist in her first solo exhibition. For the balance of her life, it was her hard-edge painting that brought her recognition and the way she wanted to be remembered.





# MARION NICOLL

Life & Work by Catharine Mastin



LEFT: Marion Nicoll, *Self Portrait*, 1959, oil on canvas, 76.2 x 60.9 cm. RIGHT: Marion Nicoll, *Self Portrait*, 1979, clay print, 25.5 x 20 cm, 197 of 200.



An abstract painting featuring large, bold, geometric shapes in red, black, green, and brown. The red shape is at the top, black is in the middle, and green and brown are on the sides and bottom. The text 'STYLE & TECHNIQUE' is centered in white on the black background.

# STYLE & TECHNIQUE

Marion Nicoll was exceptionally committed to technical development and mastery of the materials she worked with throughout her career. She instilled in her students the principle that “technique is a result, not a start.”<sup>1</sup> She considered all her work equally important and finessed her skills using six key processes: painting in watercolour; automatic drawing and painting; painting in oil and acrylic; batik; jewelry; and printmaking. Throughout her practice, the key styles in which she worked included naturalism, automatism, and hard-edge abstraction.





## PAINTING NATURE IN WATERCOLOUR

In the 1930s, Nicoll sketched outdoors and camped backcountry in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains, as a photograph of her on horseback on the Bow Forest Reserve illustrates. She had been taught by some of Canada's most important landscapists, including Group of Seven artists Frank Johnston (1888-1949) and Arthur Lismer (1885-1969) at the Ontario College of Art (1926-1929).



LEFT: Marion Mackay on horseback, Bow Forest Reserve, date unknown, photographer unknown, Glenbow Archives, Calgary. RIGHT: A.C. Leighton with students at Seebe Summer School, c.1933, photographer unknown, silver gelatin print. Courtesy of Leighton Art Centre, Alberta.

It was under study with Alfred Crocker Leighton (1901-1965) at the Provincial Institute of Technology and Art in Calgary (1929-1931) that Nicoll solidified her landscape painting skills in watercolour. Her training consolidated her use of tone when applying colour to her drawings, which can be seen in one of her depictions of the Rocky Mountains.



LEFT: A.C. Leighton, *View of Edmonton from the North Saskatchewan*, 1930, pencil and watercolour on paper, 38.7 x 49.5 cm, Glenbow Archives, Calgary. RIGHT: Marion Mackay, *Untitled-Rockies*, August 1940, watercolour and pencil on paper, 28.2 x 35 cm, Nickle Galleries, University of Calgary.

*Untitled-Rockies*, 1940, includes an under-drawing overlaid with washes of watercolour over which she applied a drier brushwork. Thickened colours were used for elements of the foreground, middle ground, and background river, trees, mountains, and sky. This work can be compared with Leighton's *View of Edmonton from the North Saskatchewan*, 1930, which demonstrates his careful attention to detail and use of delicate washes to form the open prairie skies. The palette of earth-tone greens, blues, and browns seen in both artists' paintings shows how Nicoll observed Leighton's key lessons in colour harmony. Nicoll's watercolour *Brewster's*, sketched on her 1935 trip to the Brewster's Guest Ranch in Seebe, Alberta, demonstrates another adaptation of colour harmony. Below this landscape scene, she noted in exquisite detail the blues and greens to be toned with black and white throughout.





LEFT: Marion Nicoll, *Brewster's*, 1935, watercolour on paper, 25.3 x 17.7 cm, Alberta Foundation for the Arts, Edmonton. RIGHT: Marion Nicoll, *Crowsnest Pass*, 1948, watercolour on paper, 33.5 x 39 cm, Alberta Foundation for the Arts, Edmonton.

### AUTOMATIC DRAWING AND PAINTING

Nicoll made automatic drawings and watercolours from 1946 to the late 1970s, creating dozens of images. When she first began exploring automatism in her thirties, it was a significant departure from her naturalistic work. Her introduction to this Surrealist mode of production came via colleague Jock Macdonald (1897-1960), whom she met at the Banff Summer School in 1946 where both artists were teaching.

Macdonald had come from Vancouver, where he had met Grace Pailthorpe (1883-1971) and attended a lecture she gave on Surrealism in conjunction with her 1944 exhibition at the Vancouver Art Gallery.<sup>2</sup> Pailthorpe was a physician and surgeon during the First World War, became a Freudian analyst in 1922, and had exhibited in the 1936 *International Surrealist Exhibition* in London, England.<sup>3</sup> She provided a bridge to European Surrealism for Macdonald, and, in turn, for Nicoll.



Grace Pailthorpe, *April 20, 1940 (The Blazing Infant)*, 1940, oil paint on hardboard, 43.1 x 57.7 cm, Tate Gallery, London.

The process of working automatically involved being alone, concentrating, and allowing the hand to move freely without planning—Nicoll once compared it to meditation.<sup>4</sup>



Macdonald noted his delight at her ongoing commitment: "Ha! Ha!" he exclaimed, "One cannot account for what comes forth and in truth it doesn't matter. However, now that you find things definitely suggestive of nature forms, you can be sure that the door is now open—Excellent."<sup>5</sup> Nicoll believed that the practice was integral to her development as an abstract painter.

Nicoll made her automatics in pen, pencil, and watercolour and her works range from simple line drawings to complex compositions with fanciful creatures and abstractions. Automatism challenged Nicoll's tight control over brush and pen and released her from depicting the external world, inviting forth her inner world of imagination. Two examples from the Glenbow collection (both known as *Untitled (Automatic Drawing)*) from 1948 and 1949 illustrate the fertility of mind she found within. The square-shaped watercolour painted on November 14, 1949, features intersecting lines and forms, and a phallic shape at the centre of the image is suggestive of sexual climax; the ink drawing below the watercolour evokes a conjoined bird- or butterfly-like creature.



LEFT: Marion Nicoll, *Untitled (Automatic Drawing)*, November 14, 1949, watercolour and ink on paper, 30.1 x 22.6 cm, Glenbow Museum, Calgary. RIGHT: Marion Nicoll, *Untitled (Automatic Drawing)*, November 11, 1948, watercolour, pen, and coloured ink on paper, 26.7 x 19.2 cm, Glenbow Museum, Calgary.

The work made on November 11, 1948, blends together her ink under-drawing with watercolour washes—a fluid medium that Nicoll found to welcome elements of chance, in keeping with the automatic process. Figure and ground relationships intermingle, the natural colour of the paper plays its own role in the overall composition, space is no longer governed by perspective, illogical subjects co-exist, light comes from the surface itself, and narrative is irrational.



Gone were the descriptive titles noting where she had been and what she had seen, as she had done in her landscapes: most of her automatics remain untitled, including inscriptions noting only the time of day and/or date of creation. Nicoll continued automatic creation to her last years, despite dexterity challenges posed from her advanced arthritis, because, as she recalled, through automatism, "It was as though I could breathe."<sup>6</sup> Her 1978 black-and-white ink drawing fills almost the entire page, with lines and washes bleeding from one area to the next.



LEFT: Marion Nicoll, *Untitled (Automatic Drawing)*, 1978, ink on paper, 35.5 x 28 cm, Alberta Foundation for the Arts, Edmonton.  
RIGHT: Marion Nicoll, *Untitled (Automatic Drawing)*, date unknown, ink on paper, 23 x 30 cm, Alberta Foundation for the Arts, Edmonton.

### OIL PAINTING AND A STUDIO

Nicoll created very few works in oil before 1959. As a landscapist, she had been trained to paint in watercolour and to make oil sketches on small boards. A photograph of her sketching in Sunshine, Alberta, illustrates the *plein air* process she used—seated with sketch box, panels, paint, and brushes in hand, observing the scene before her. It was, however, in her hard-edge abstracts on stretched canvases, painted from 1959 onwards, that Nicoll developed her finest command over the oil medium.

Using pure oil paint proved challenging because of its long drying time and thick viscosity, but she stayed with the medium for well over a decade once she shifted to hard-edge abstraction. Sometimes she added a paint thinner called Lucite, which enabled a faster drying process, reduced the texture, and enabled her to realize crisply delineated forms. Her shift from a textured landscape to an unmodulated abstract surface is evident in the comparison of a 1946 mountain sketch *Untitled Mountain Landscape*, with *Foothills: I*, 1965.





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LEFT: Marion Nicoll, *Untitled Mountain Landscape*, 1946, oil on hardboard, 31.0 x 37.9 cm, Glenbow Museum, Calgary. RIGHT: Marion Nicoll, *Foothills: I*, 1965, oil on canvas, 125.5 x 165.5 cm, Glenbow Museum, Calgary.

A technical challenge Nicoll realized in the early 1960s was that her working space was insufficient to accommodate increases to the scale of her abstractions – paintings such as *Bowness Road, 2 AM*, 1963, were nearly two metres in length. With the support of her husband’s engineering skills, she designed a studio addition for their Bowness home, filled with natural light and space enough to step back from the paintings in order to assess their impact before public exhibition. It was finished by the end of 1963, and in 1965 the finishing touch of an easel from the studio of Post-Impressionist artist Henri Rousseau (1844-1910) (acquired from Alfred Crocker Leighton) made it Nicoll’s haven. She observed, “It takes a five-foot canvas. When I’m painting longer, I just paint on it sideways. The only thing I’d take with me if I got up and left this place is that easel. The rest of it can stay.”<sup>7</sup>



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Marion Nicoll, *Bowness Road, 2 AM*, 1963, oil on canvas, 138.2 x 186.3 cm, Glenbow Museum, Calgary.

After his visit to see Nicoll's new space, American artist Will Barnett (1911–2012) noted, "We shall never forget your beautiful new studio and the curve of the earth as you look out of the studio window and the Chinook clouds. Your work as it were all over the room—was superb."<sup>8</sup> Most of Nicoll's abstracts were done in oil except for her very last paintings, such as *One Year*, 1971. In that instance, she shifted to plastic-based acrylics because she liked the medium's suitability to hard-edge compositions and "because you can overpaint and it dries fast."<sup>9</sup>





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Marion Nicoll, *One Year*, 1971, acrylic on canvas, four panels: 153 x 92 cm; 153 x 82 cm; 153 x 56 cm; 153 x 101 cm; total dimensions: 153 x 331 cm, City of Calgary Public Art Collection.

Another important technique in Nicoll's abstractions after New York was her change to working in a serial format. Between 1960 and 1968, she developed nine bodies of hard-edge painting in series—*Presence* (I-IX), *Alberta* (I-XIV), *Chinook* (I-IV), *Ritual* (I-II), *Omen* (I-II), *Calgary* (I-IV), *Foothills* (I-II), *Guaycura* (I-II), and *Runes* (I-II). By making series, she was able to thematically expand an idea over several paintings. Her titles gave structural and sequential coherence to each work by including the series title followed by a roman numeral and a subtitle. They were inextricably tied to the meaning of her abstractions, serving as constant reminders of the passing of time through cycles natural and mechanical (*Calgary III, 4 AM*, 1966, and *One Year*, 1971) and as reflections on the brevity of life and humanity's place in the natural order.

### SCULPTURE TO WEAR

All of Nicoll's rare jewelry pieces in metal and gemstones remain in private collections, making technical and stylistic study of them a challenge. Most were created after she travelled to Vancouver in 1956, where she studied with silversmith J. Christjansen.<sup>10</sup> She considered her metal work "wearable art," having declared it such at the event *Sculpture to Wear: Bronze, Silver and Gold*, and sometimes exhibited her jewelry alongside her paintings.<sup>11</sup>

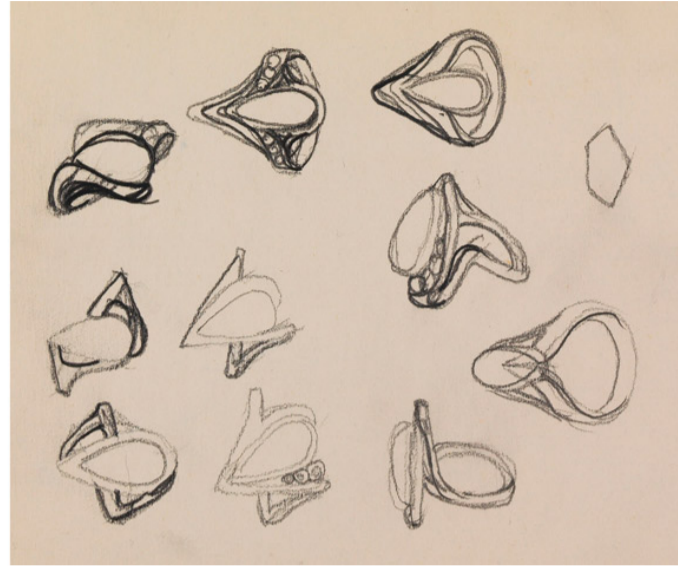
The sterling silver pin *Plateau* (location unknown) was included in the *First National Fine Crafts Exhibition* organized by the National Gallery of Canada, which toured to three Canadian art galleries and the Canadian Pavilion in the Universal and International Exhibition, Brussels.<sup>12</sup> In *Albertacraft '62*, Nicoll showed twelve works, including rings, pin-pendants, and earrings, alongside her abstract painting *Alberta XII: First Snow*, c.1962.<sup>13</sup> The pin-pendant *Snow Fence*, c.1956-62, was included in that exhibition.

Nicoll's sketches for her metal work, such as a page of designs for finger rings in the Glenbow collection, illustrate that she thoroughly considered the relationships between stones and metals, her approach modern and simplified, like her abstract paintings. Her amethyst and silver bracelet, received by its current owner as a high school graduation gift from her mother, shows Nicoll's careful planning of repeating forms and detailed attention to the joins between forms and clasp.<sup>14</sup> A silver bracelet and matching earrings are believed to have been purchased as an anniversary gift.<sup>15</sup> Stylistically, Nicoll's metal works are consistent with her abstractions: on the one hand, they embrace the freedom of line characteristic of her automatics and, on the other hand, they continue the repeating shapes of her hard-edged abstractions.



Marion Nicoll, *Snow Fence*, c.1956-62, silver on bronze, pink tourmaline pin-pendant, size unknown, Private Collection, Calgary.





LEFT: Marion Nicoll, silver and amethyst bracelet; silver bracelet and matching earrings; sterling silver and amethyst cabochons, date unknown, Private Collection, Calgary. RIGHT: Marion Nicoll, sketches for finger rings, Sketchbook #2, date unknown, pencil on paper, sketchbook, 13 x 18 cm, Glenbow Archives, Calgary.

Working with metals required great precision and Nicoll is known to have used a custom-designed tool that supported her hand to assist her fabrication.<sup>16</sup> Consistent with her paintings, the natural world informed her subjects and modern approach: her jewelry included such titles as *Winter Sun*, *The City*, *Pedestrian*, *Winter Seed*, *Grass and Reflected Sun*, and *Pine Needles* (all works c.1956-62).<sup>17</sup> That she was also sufficiently imaginative to create the unorthodox thumb-ring and design thematically matched sets of pins and earrings is testimony to the technical, stylistic, and conceptual innovation she achieved with metals and gemstones.

### BATIK

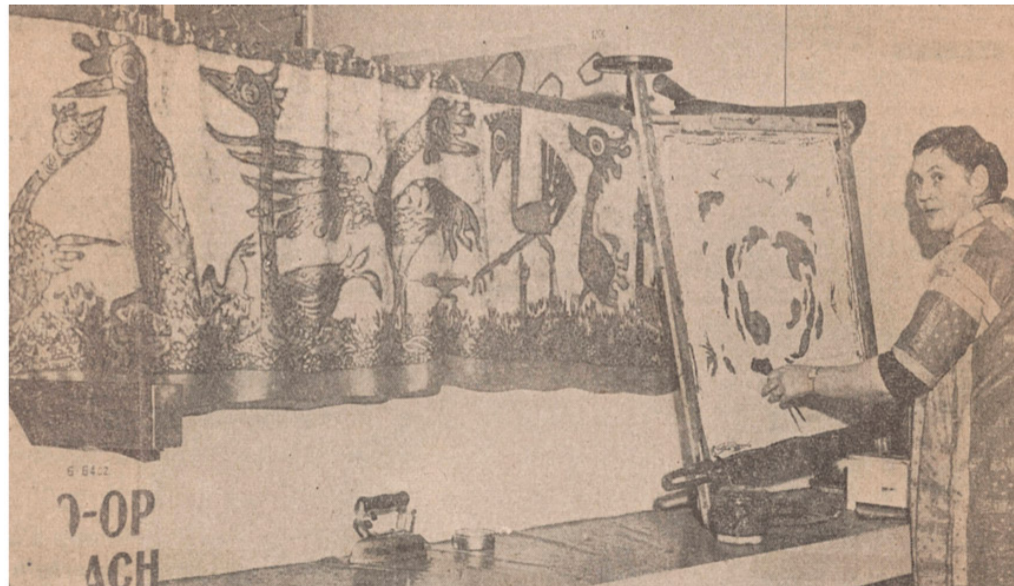
By the 1950s, Nicoll was considered an expert on the ancient Javanese practice of creating designs in wax resist on fabrics, known as batik.<sup>18</sup> She had first learned the process as a student at the Ontario College of Art and undertook further training at the Central School of Arts and Crafts, London, England, in 1937-38. The technique later became part of her teaching at the Provincial Institute of Technology and Art, and she sold many works privately for income. By the time the Government of Alberta commissioned her to write on the subject in 1953, she had about twenty years of experience with the medium. She also participated in public interviews and demonstrations, notably with *Procession of Birds*, 1956, for which she is known to have won "a top prize in a Quebec exhibition."<sup>19</sup>



Marion Nicoll, *Procession of Birds*, 1956, aniline dye on silk, 73 x 222 cm, Glenbow Museum, Calgary.

Nicoll's how-to manual *Batik* explained the detail required to produce work in this medium.<sup>20</sup> The artist begins with a preliminary drawing and sourcing of materials—fabric, a stretcher, paraffin, beeswax, aniline dyes, pins, iron, and cleaning materials including such mordants as acids, distilled water, calcium carbonate, and lead-free gasoline. The design is drawn onto the fabric with soft pencil and wax is applied to those areas to retain the natural fabric colour.

Each colour appearing in the final image requires a separate dyeing process. Thus, Nicoll recommended a key learning from her automatics—incorporate the colour of the substrate in your design to save one step in dyeing. Cleaning processes included application of a hot iron and gasoline bath to remove wax residues. Finally, the batik was dipped in mordant, washed, rinsed, and pressed with an iron to smooth out the fabric.



LEFT: Marion Nicoll, Illustration from Sketchbook #12, date unknown, coloured pencil and graphite on paper, 30 x 23 cm, Glenbow Museum, Calgary. RIGHT: Marion Nicoll undertaking a batik demonstration with *Procession of Birds* (1956), illustration from *Calgary Albertan*, November 30, 1957, photographer unknown, National Gallery of Canada Library and Archives, Ottawa.

Stylistically, Nicoll's batiks of the 1950s were an extension of her automatic paintings, featuring fanciful imagery drawn from her inner world and a flowing, linear quality throughout. Nicoll's Sketchbook #12 shows how she moved easily between drawing and batik to apply the process of automatic expression. The



front and back pages show planning she did for compositions similar to those in *Procession of Birds*. As well, the front includes her colour palette—white, copper, wine, yellow-green, gold, and blue.

Nicoll's batiks were highly coveted in the private market and earned her representation with New York gallerist Bertha Schaefer.<sup>21</sup> She was also highly regarded for her teaching of fabric arts, so much so that Calgary artist John K. Esler (1933–2001) organized an exhibition of student work in Nicoll's honour, *Calgary Fabric Wall Hangings*.<sup>22</sup>

### PRINTMAKING

Nicoll made prints throughout her career, including in linocut and silkscreen processes, but it was in the 1950s that she began working innovatively in non-traditional media such as clay and collography (cardboard build-up). *Christmas Tree*, 1952, was her first work using a clay support, a matrix she preferred for its malleability. In it, she incorporated fanciful imagery developed from her automatics.



LEFT: Marion Nicoll, *Butterflies*, 1953, clay mould, 28 x 34.3 cm, Glenbow Museum, Calgary. RIGHT: Marion Nicoll, *Butterflies*, 1953, clay print on paper, 28 x 34.3 cm, Glenbow Museum, Calgary.

The original block and finished print for *Butterflies*, 1953, show Nicoll's continued work with automatism and her innovation in the clay medium. Consistent with the traditional block-relief print process, forms left in relief appear in the print as colours and forms incised into the clay remain uncoloured. However, the inscriptions she noted at the bottom of the print reveal this to be anything but a traditional print: "incised with knife, fork, spoon, round washer and hair clip." Using these carving tools, Nicoll challenged the printmaker's trade while overturning conventional associations of those objects with household gender roles. Eating utensils from the kitchen, bolts and washers from the tool room, and hair clips from the vanity found new utility in her hands.

Relative to the dominant use of lithography, silkscreen, and metal-plate etching processes in contemporary printmaking, Nicoll rewrote the rules as a feminist and artist in her clay prints. One of her first abstract prints, *Expanding White*, 1960, is another example of innovation. Printing on the unusual surface of a J Cloth brand household cleaning towel, Nicoll explored the two-colour woven pattern intrinsic to the J Cloth to create a mottled look with textural variations. Her title draws attention to the role played by white throughout the composition: the white areas create a maze-like geometric pattern and serve as an outside border, qualities consistent with her hard-edge painting practice.





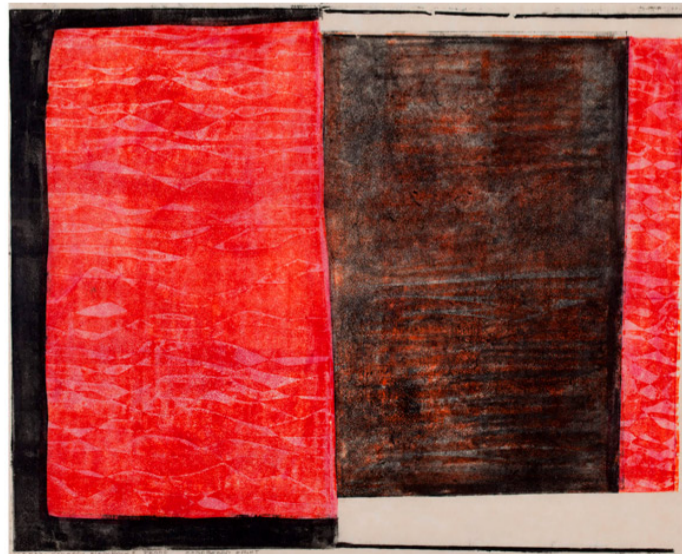
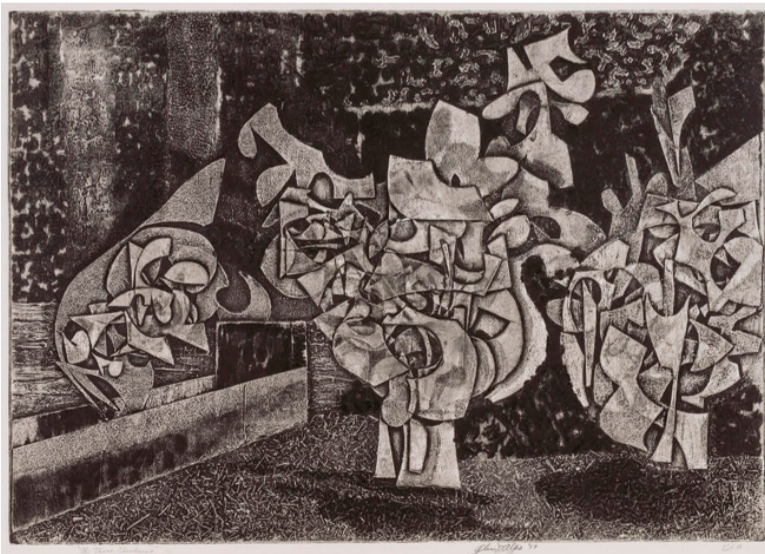
# MARION NICOLL

Life & Work by Catharine Mastin



Marion Nicoll, *Expanding White*, 1960, clay print on J Cloth, 19.1 x 25.4 cm, Alberta Foundation for the Arts, Edmonton.

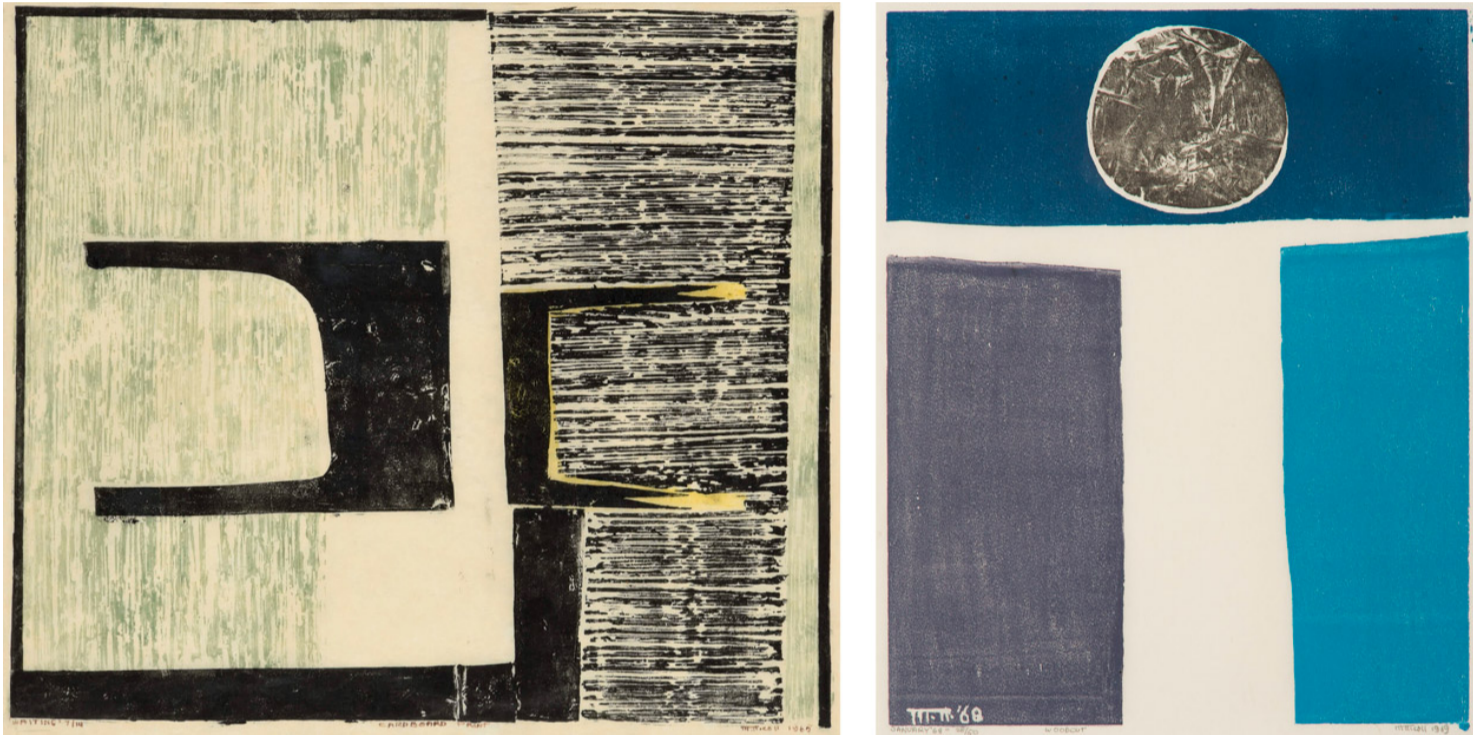
As a printmaker, Nicoll is known for her work with collography, which she began exploring in 1965. She may have learned about the possibilities of this substrate while living in New York in 1958-59, since Glen Alps (1914-1996), who is attributed with discovering the process, had recently shown his collographs at the Brooklyn Museum.<sup>23</sup> *La Paz, Red Rock Black Rock*, 1967, illustrates how the collograph could yield larger areas of colour and create a play of negative and positive geometries.



LEFT: Glen Alps, *The Three Chickens*, 1958-59, collagraph on paper, 71.1 x 94.6 cm, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington.  
RIGHT: Marion Nicoll, *La Paz, Red Rock Black Rock*, 1967, cardboard print on paper, 40.6 x 50.2 cm, Alberta Foundation for the Arts, Edmonton.



Some of Nicoll's prints were extensions of her practice: *Waiting*, 1965, and *January '68*, 1968, both followed completion of her abstract paintings of the same titles. For *January '68*, Nicoll embraced a more traditional method in her choice of woodcut with the result that she was able to develop one of her largest print editions—numbering fifty—for this image. Edition sizes for works on her more experimental and fragile matrixes such as collography tended to be smaller: *Waiting* and *La Paz, Red Rock Black Rock* were realized in editions of fourteen and fifteen prints respectively.



LEFT: Marion Nicoll, *Waiting*, 1965, cardboard print on paper, 45 x 50 cm, City of Calgary Public Art Collection. RIGHT: Marion Nicoll, *January '68*, 1968, woodcut on paper, edition 28/50, 42 x 31 cm, City of Calgary Public Art Collection.

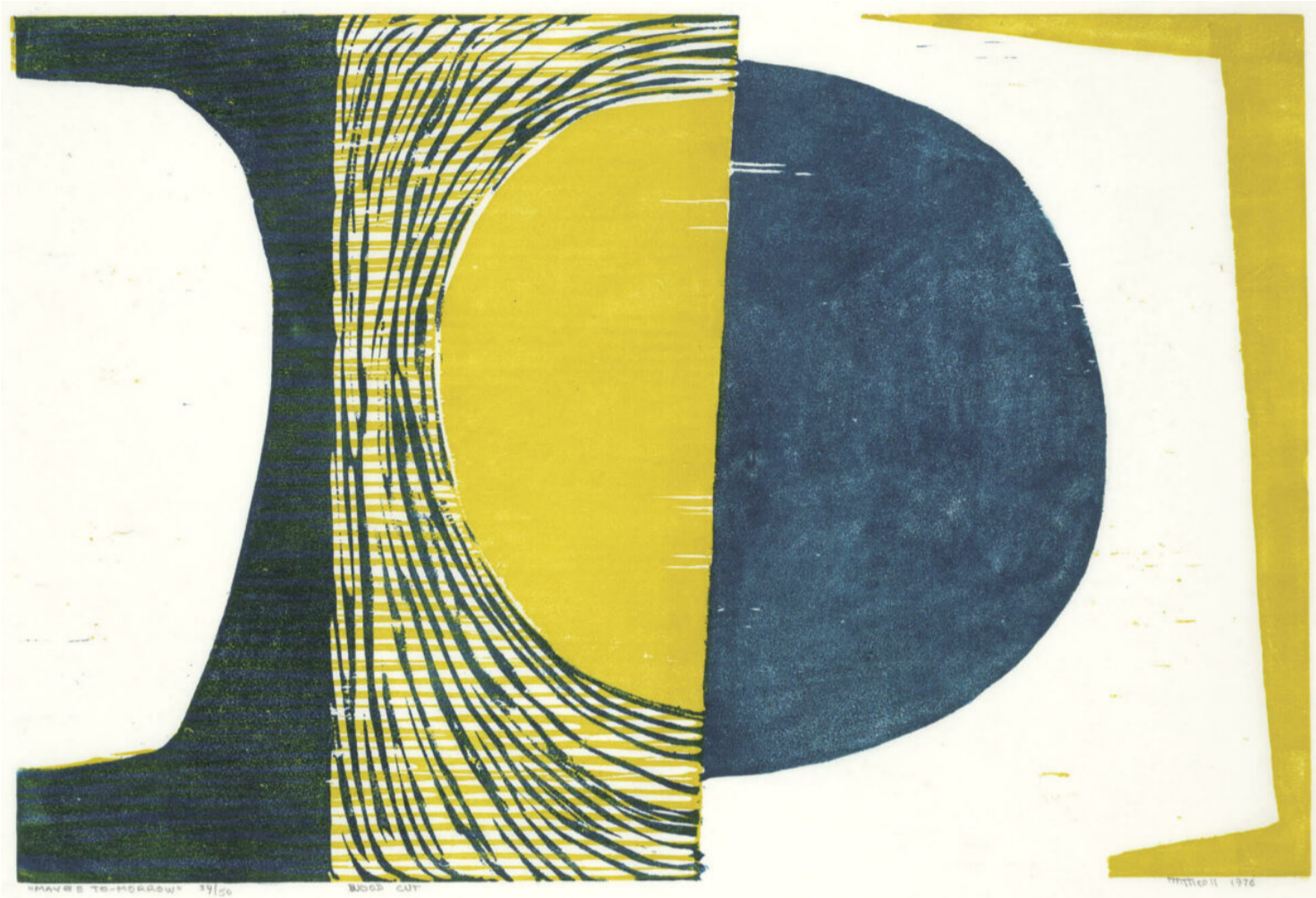
Given the many media with which Nicoll worked and excelled, she truly was a polymath. In printmaking, she is recognized for attaining “remarkable results with little or no equipment” and for using “unconventional materials such as plasticine, matboard, and string for the matrix.”<sup>24</sup> In batik fabrication, artists, government officials, and teaching institutions such as the Provincial Institute of Technology and Art looked to her for expertise. In jewelry, her works were so highly coveted that not one of them yet resides in a public art collection. In painting, she sharpened her technical skills each time she changed strategies, from landscape painting to automatism to hard-edge abstraction.

Nicoll wrote little about art, but when she did, she focused on technical skill development, such as her how-to manuals *Monoprints* (1951) and *Batik* (1953).<sup>25</sup> She remained steadfast in her commitment to technical excellence and the handmade in an age of mass production and mechanization. For her, though, technique was never more important than the artist's true goal of self-expression.



# MARION NICOLL

Life & Work by Catharine Mastin



Marion Nicoll, *Maybe To-morrow*, 1976, colour woodblock print on paper, edition 34/50, 30.5 x 45.7 cm, Private Collection, Calgary.





Marion Nicoll began exhibiting her early paintings in exhibitions organized by artist-member associations such as the Canadian Society of Painters in Water Colour and the Alberta Society of Artists. During the 1930s, Alberta's art community was so deeply exclusionary that some of her first exhibitions were with other female artists outside of these societies, such as the exhibition collective Women Sketch Hunters of Alberta. Nicoll considered her decorative arts a parallel practice to her work as a painter, and she exhibited batiks and metal work throughout Alberta and Canada, and in Belgium. During her lifetime, Nicoll was honoured with several important exhibitions, including her first solo show of paintings held in Calgary in 1959 featuring her work from a



year spent in New York, Italy, Spain, and Portugal. She was honoured with a retrospective exhibition curated by artists John Hall and Ron Moppett, organized by the Edmonton Art Gallery, Alberta, in 1975. Scholarly attention to her practice has been largely posthumous. Her first critically significant exhibition was organized by the Glenbow Museum, Calgary, Alberta, in 1986, and in 2013 a second retrospective exhibition and publication were organized by the Nickle Galleries and the University of Calgary Press.



LEFT: Marion Nicoll standing before *February 1967, 1967*, in 1969, photographer unknown, Glenbow Museum, Calgary. RIGHT: Marion Nicoll sketching at Sunshine, Banff Summer Session, 1946, photographer unknown, Glenbow Archives, Calgary.

## SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

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- 1936** November 30, 1936, *Women Sketch Hunters of Alberta*, Civic Block, Edmonton, Alberta (three works). Nicoll's first known group-artist exhibition.
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- 1937** April 1937, *Tenth Annual Exhibition, Canadian Society of Painters in Water Colour*, Art Gallery of Toronto, Grange Park. Nicoll's first group-artist national exhibition.
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- 1957–58** June 1957, *First National Fine Crafts Exhibition*, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. Travelled to the Canadian Pavilion in the Universal and International Exhibition, Brussels, Belgium, 1958. Nicoll's first time exhibiting internationally one of her metal works, the jewelled pin *Plateau*.
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- 1959–60** December 7–19, 1959, *M. Nicoll '59*. East Block, Provincial Institute of Technology and Art–Art Gallery. Subsequent Calgary venues included Bowness Town Hall, February 13–20, 1960 and the Gallery of the Allied Arts Centre, Calgary, March 13–April 2, 1960. Nicoll's first solo exhibition (twenty abstract paintings).
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- 1962** Dates unknown in 1962, *Albertacraft '62* (fourteen works, thirteen jewelry).
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- 1963** December 6-19, 1963, *M. Nicoll*, Allied Arts Centre, 830-9th Avenue S.W., Calgary. Nicoll's second solo exhibition in Calgary (thirty-three works).
- 
- 1963-64** September 20-October 27, 1963, *5th Biennial Exhibition of Canadian Painting 1963*, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, opened in London, England. Curated by J. Russell Harper. Travelled to: Public Library and Art Museum, London (Ontario), November 8-December 1, 1963; Norman Mackenzie Art Gallery, Regina, December 13, 1963-January 5, 1964; Winnipeg Art Gallery, January 17-February 9, 1964; Vancouver Art Gallery, February 21-March 15, 1964; Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Kingston, March 27-April 19, 1964; Musée de la Province du Québec, April 23-May 10, 1964; and Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, May 19-June 7, 1964. Nicoll was included for the first time in this national survey with the painting *Winter Sun* (location unknown).
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- 1965-66** June 4-August 2, 1965, *Sixth Biennial Exhibition of Canadian Painting 1965*. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. Curated by William Townsend. Travelled to: Beaverbrook Art Gallery, Fredericton, New Brunswick, September 8-October 3, 1965; Musée d'art contemporain, Montréal, Quebec, October 21-November 14, 1965; London Art Gallery, Ontario, November 26-December 19, 1965; Norman McKenzie Art Gallery, January 7-February 6, 1966; Edmonton Art Gallery, February 23-March 20, 1966; Vancouver Art Gallery, British Columbia, April 1-May 1, 1966; Winnipeg Art Gallery Association, Manitoba, May 13-June 5, 1966. Nicoll was included for the second time in this national survey with the painting *Waiting*, 1964 (location unknown).
- October 18-23, 1965, *Paintings by Marion Nicoll*, Western Canadian Art Circuit, Trail Art Club. Curated by Harry Kiyooka. Toured to: University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, November 22-December 5, 1965; Alberta College of Art, Calgary, Alberta, March 28-April 15, 1966; Kelowna Art Exhibit Society, Okanagan Regional Library, Kelowna, B.C.; Regina Public Library, Regina, Saskatoon, June 7-28, 1966. Nicoll's first exhibition to tour Western Canada (twelve works).
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- 1967** April 15-May 4, 1967, *Marion Nicoll*, Bonli Gallery, Toronto (twelve works). First commercial solo exhibition in Central Canada including one of her batiks.
- 
- 1968** July 5-September 1, 1968, *Seventh Biennial Exhibition of Canadian Painting*, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. Curated by William Chapin Seitz. This was the last biennial exhibition for which there was no subsequent tour and Nicoll exhibited *January '68*, 1968 (see Key Works).
- 
- 1971** March 9-20, 1971, *Jim and Marion Nicoll Paintings*, University of Calgary Art Gallery, Theatre Gallery (nine works).
- 
- 1972-73** November 19, 1972-January 12, 1973. *Retrospective Exhibition of Graphics by Marion Nicoll, A.S.A.*, Strathcona Place, Edmonton, Alberta. This first exhibition of prints included works from 1960-1972 (thirty-six prints).
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**1975** May 30–June 29, 1975, *Marion Nicoll: A Retrospective, 1959–1971*, Edmonton Art Gallery, Edmonton, Alberta; also shown at Glenbow-Alberta Institute, Calgary, Alberta, July 22–August 17, 1975. This was Nicoll's first retrospective of abstract paintings and prints. Curated by the artist collective "Duck Ventures" (aka Ron Moppett and John Hall, both of Calgary). Catalogue published (fifty-three works).

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**1978** February 28, 1978, *Marion Nicoll, R.C.A.*, Masters Gallery, Calgary. The first of two exhibitions celebrating Nicoll's election to the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts.

December 6, 1978, *Marion Nicoll, R.C.A.*, Masters Gallery, Calgary. The exhibition is followed by the release of J. Brooks Joyner's *Marion Nicoll, R.C.A.* published by Masters Gallery including Nicoll's last print, *Self-Portrait, 1979*, in an edition of 215.

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**1986** April 5–June 9, 1986, *Marion Nicoll: Art and Influences*, Glenbow Museum, Calgary, Alberta. Curated by Christopher Jackson. Travelled to: Edmonton Art Gallery, Edmonton, Alberta, August 23–October 26, 1986. This was Nicoll's second major public art gallery exhibition and the first survey of her art practice, but it did not include any of her design work (eighty-five works). Catalogue published.

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**2013** January 25–April 27, 2013, *Marion Nicoll: A Retrospective*, Nickle Galleries, University of Calgary. Curated by Ann Davis and Elizabeth Herbert with Jennifer Salahub. This was the second major retrospective exhibition of Nicoll's work and the first scholarly exhibition and catalogue to assess Nicoll's multidisciplinary career including her works in fabric and metal arts. Related book published.

### WRITINGS BY THE ARTIST

Nicoll, Marion. *Batik*. Edmonton: Cultural Activities Branch, Department of Economic Affairs, Government of the Province of Alberta (1953): 15 pages.

Nicoll, Marion. "Crafts in the Community: An Outline of What can be Achieved in Crafts with Good Design Instruction." *Leisure: Cultural Activities Magazine* II, no. 3 (September 1960): 15–18.

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### CRITICAL, SCHOLARLY AND MONOGRAPHIC WRITINGS ON THE ARTIST

Davis, Ann. "Silence and Alchemy: The Development of Marion Nicoll." In *Marion Nicoll: Silence and Alchemy*, 1–35. Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2013.



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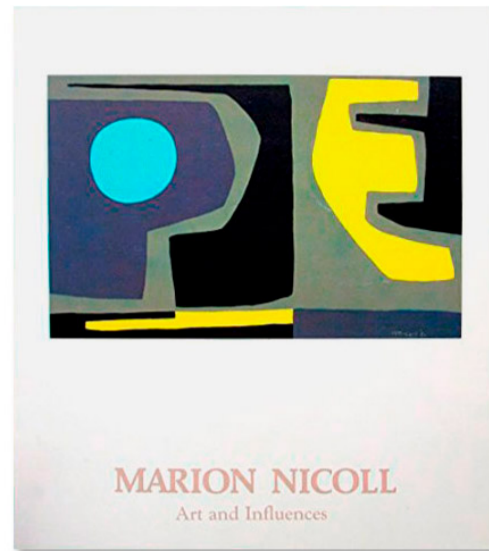
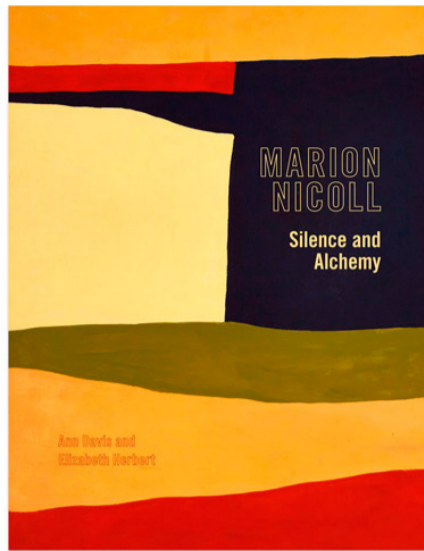
Jackson, Christopher. *Marion Nicoll: Art and Influences*. Calgary: Glenbow Museum and Art Gallery, 1986. Exhibition catalogue.

Joyner, J. Brooks. Foreword by Janet Mitchell and Preface by Peter Ohler. *Marion Nicoll*. Calgary: Masters Gallery, 1979. Collector's Edition, 215 volumes, each volume accompanied by an original clay print specially executed, signed, and numbered by Marion Nicoll.

Mastin, Catharine M. *Beyond "The Artist's Wife": Women in Artist-Couple Marriage and the Exhibition Experience in Postwar Canada*. PhD dissertation, University of Alberta, 2012.

Pashak, Natasha. *Almost Outnumbered: The role of Alberta in the life and work of Marion Nicoll*. Master of Arts (Art History) thesis, Concordia University, 2010.

Salahub, Jennifer. "Mine Had a Ripple in It." In *Marion Nicoll: Silence and Alchemy*, 69-108. Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2013.



LEFT: Cover of *Marion Nicoll: Silence and Alchemy* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2013). RIGHT: Cover of *Marion Nicoll: Art and Influences* (Calgary: Glenbow Museum and Art Gallery, 1986).

#### FURTHER READINGS ON THE ARTIST

Ainslie, Patricia, and Mary-Beth Laviolette. *Alberta Art and Artists*. Calgary: Fifth House, 2007.

Cochran, Bente Roed. *Printmaking in Alberta, 1945-1985*. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1989.

Greenfield, Valerie. *Founders of the Alberta College of Art*. Calgary: Alberta College of Art Gallery, 1986.

Harper, J. Russell. *Painting in Canada: A History*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press and Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1966.

Joslin, Mark. *The Alberta Society of Artists: Sixty Years*. Edmonton: Edmonton Art Gallery, 1991.

Laviolette, Mary-Beth. *Alberta Mistresses of the Modern, 1935-1975*. Edmonton: Art Gallery of Alberta, 2012.

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Nasgaard, Roald. *Abstract Painting in Canada*. Toronto and Vancouver, Halifax and Yarmouth: Douglas & McIntyre and Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, 2007.

O'Brian, John, ed., *The Flat Side of the Landscape: The Emma Lake Artists' Workshops*. Saskatoon: Mendel Art Gallery, 1989.

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Townsend, William, ed., *Canadian Art Today*. London: Studio International, 1970.

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Varley, Christopher. *Winnipeg West: Painting and Sculpture in Western Canada, 1945-1970*. Edmonton: Edmonton Art Gallery, 1983.

Wilkin, Karen. *Painting in Alberta: An Historical Survey*. Edmonton: The Edmonton Art Gallery, 1980.

Zemans, Joyce. "The Automatics." In *Jock Macdonald: The Inner Landscape/A Retrospective Exhibition*, 109-51. Toronto: The Art Gallery of Ontario, 1981.

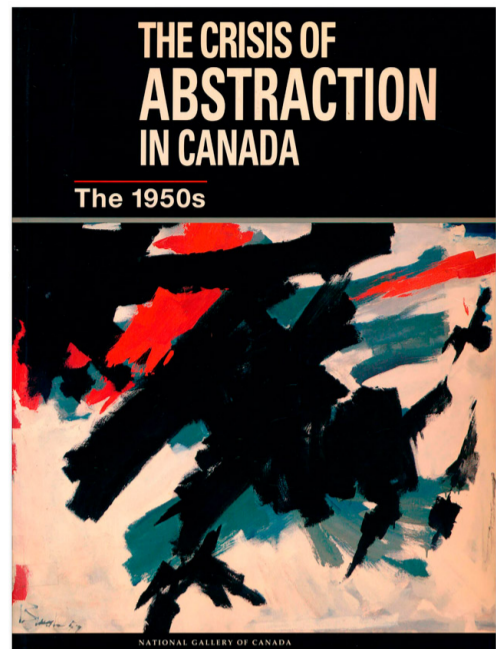
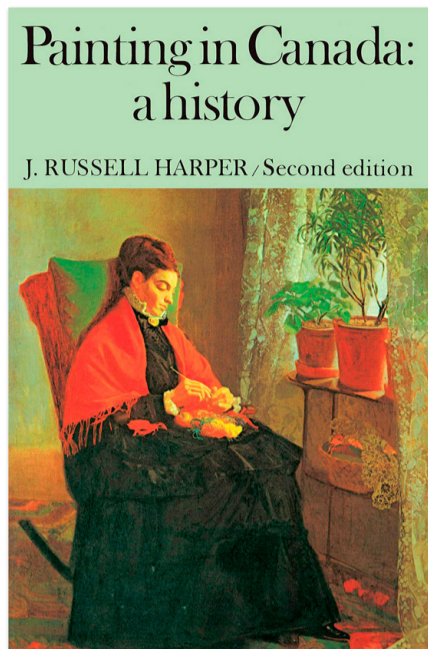
Zimon, Kathy E. *Alberta Society of Artists: The First Seventy Years*. Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2000.

## KEY INTERVIEWS WITH THE ARTIST

"Interview with Jim and Marion Nicoll," June 9, 1972, Arts and Crafts Division, Alberta Foundation for the Arts, Edmonton.

"An Interview with Jim and Marion Nicoll," Helen K. Wright (audio) and Ingrid Mercer (video), January 29, 1973, X20-14 and X20-15, Glenbow, Calgary, M6522, file 21.

"Marion Nicoll in Conversation with Duck Ventures," in *Marion Nicoll: A Retrospective, 1959-1971*. Edmonton: Edmonton Art Gallery, 1975.



LEFT: Cover of *Painting in Canada: A History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press and Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1966). RIGHT: Cover of *The Crisis of Abstraction in Canada: The 1950s* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1992).





# MARION NICOLL

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"Joan Murray talking to Marion Nicoll," May 24, 1979, Robert McLaughlin Gallery Archives (typescript), Library and Archives of Canada (audio recording).

"Marion Nicoll in Interview with Laura Chrumka," 1982 Junior League Women's Oral History Project, RCT-403, Glenbow, Calgary.



Cover of *Marion Nicoll, R.C.A.* (Calgary: Masters Gallery, 1978). Nicoll's last print, *Self Portrait*, 1979, was included in a limited edition of 215 released in 1979.

## ARCHIVES

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Taylor Family Digital Library, University of Calgary, Alberta.

Marion and Jim Nicoll Fonds, Glenbow, Calgary, Alberta.

Janet Mitchell Fonds, Glenbow, Calgary, Alberta.



### NOTES

#### BIOGRAPHY

1. Her older sister died in infancy, her brother at fifteen months, and her younger sister, Isobel, at seventeen years old.
2. Marion Nicoll, "Interview with Joan Murray," May 24, 1979, 3, The Robert McLaughlin Gallery Archives, Oshawa (hereafter Murray Interview).
3. Murray Interview.
4. Nicoll studied at St. John's Convent, Red Deer, Alberta, in 1925-26, but her instructors are not known.
5. Marion Nicoll, "Interview with Marion and Jim Nicoll," June 19, 1972, 8, Alberta Foundation for the Arts Archives, Edmonton (hereafter AFA Interview).
6. Nicoll's teaching appointments are detailed in Jennifer Salahub, "Mine Had a Ripple in It," *Marion Nicoll: Silence and Alchemy* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2013), 73.
7. AFA Interview, 14.
8. Marion Nicoll Interview with Laura Chrumka, Junior League Oral History Project, 1982, RCT 403, Glenbow Museum, Calgary. Helen K. Wright, "Interview with Marion Nicoll," January 29, 1973, 1, video-tape X20-14, Marion and Jim Nicoll Fonds, Glenbow Museum, Calgary, Alberta, file 21 (hereafter Wright Interview, X20-14).
9. Marion Nicoll, "The Four Greatest Artists," *Highlights: Quarterly Magazine of the Alberta Society of Artists* (March 1952), n.p. El Greco, Sandro Botticelli, Emily Carr, and Maurice Graves were her four favourite artists.
10. Marion Mackay to Jim Nicoll, June 10, 1935, 3, Marion and Jim Nicoll Fonds, Glenbow Museum, Calgary (hereafter Nicoll Fonds), file 23.
11. Kathy E. Zimon, *Alberta Society of Artists: The First Seventy Years* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2000), 81.
12. The first known exhibition of the Women Sketch Hunters was in February 1935, as confirmed by the article "Sketch Club Show Arouses Commendation," February 6, 1935 (courtesy Jennifer Salahub, Calgary). Others followed in 1936, such as F.H. Norbury, "Sketch Hunters are Commended on Exhibition," November 30, 1936, publisher unknown, City of Edmonton Archives, Edmonton Art Gallery File, No. 2, 1936-1949.
13. *Exhibition of Contemporary Canadian Painting*, arranged by the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa for the Carnegie Corporation of New York for circulation in the Southern Dominions of the British Empire, September 15, 1936-April 16, 1939, cat. 60.





14. "Calgary Paintings to Hang at C.N.E.," *Calgary Herald*, August 9, 1939, 24.
15. Marion Nicoll, "Crafts in Alberta," November, 1965, 4, Nicoll Fonds, file 62.
16. Bresky Dushan, "Teacher Favors Experimental Art; Husband Doesn't Share Opinions," *Calgary Herald*, January 26, 1953.
17. Valerie Greenfield, *Founders of the Alberta College of Art* (Calgary: Alberta College of Art Gallery, 1986), 9. Joyce Zemans, *Jock Macdonald: The Inner Landscape* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1981), 132.
18. "Marion Nicoll: Painter," *Environment '70* (Edmonton: Arts & Crafts Division, Cultural Development Branch, and Edmonton Art Gallery, 1970), Nicoll Fonds, file 130.
19. Murray Interview, 4.
20. P.W. Martin, *Experiment in Depth: A Study in the Work of Jung, Eliot and Toynbee* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1955, paperback 1976), 260, 263.
21. Martin, *Experiment*, 261.
22. Nicoll only exhibited one automatic in the *First Calgary Art Show*, Coste House, September 23, c.1949, *Automatic No. 1.*, Nicoll Fonds, files 130-34.
23. Untitled News Clipping, *Calgary Albertan*, November 30, 1957, Artist's File, National Gallery of Canada Library.
24. Mrs. Catherine Freize of Calgary is shown modelling a batik scarf in the article by Mary Biner, "Ancient Wax Painting Form Being Taught at Art College," *Calgary Herald*, January 8, 1965.
25. Jan Roseneder, *The ASA Index: 1948-1980* (Calgary: University of Calgary Libraries, Bibliography Series No. 1. 1982), 58.
26. Adeline Flaherty, "Life and Painting Synonymous for Calgary Artist-Teacher," *Calgary Herald*, January 27, 1965.
27. It is important that Marion Nicoll took note of the model's Indigeneity, albeit without identifying the subject by name, a practice typical in modelling class regardless of race. Nonetheless, inferences of racial difference are further suggested in her title; the model's actual age and physique, though, may never be known. In Bowness, Nicoll spent much of her life living adjacent to the Tsuu'tina Nation. This may have sensitized her to the Indigenous presence in Saskatchewan.
28. Murray Interview, 6.
29. Marion Nicoll to Janet Mitchell, March 1, 1959, 1, Janet Mitchell Fonds, Glenbow Museum, Calgary.



30. Mary Biner, "Artist Plans Constant Work to 'Earn' \$5,500.00 Scholarship," *Calgary Herald*, n.d., c.1966.
31. Marion Nicoll, "Interim Report to Canada Council," June 6, 1959, Nicoll Fonds, file 93, 3.
32. AFA Interview, 18.
33. As cited in Christopher Jackson, *Marion Nicoll: Art and Influences* (Calgary: Glenbow Museum, 1986), 22.
34. Marion Nicoll, "Interview with Helen K. Wright," January 29, 1973, video-tape X20-15, 8-9, Nicoll Fonds, file 21, (hereafter Wright Interview, X20-15). See also "The Four Greatest Artists," *Highlights: Quarterly Magazine of the Alberta Society of Artists* (March 1952), n.p., where she identifies El Greco, Sandro Botticelli, Emily Carr, and Maurice Graves as her four favourite artists.
35. AFA Interview, 2.
36. AFA Interview, 7.
37. Wright Interview, X20-15, 3.
38. Marion Nicoll, "Interim Report to Canada Council," June 6, 1959, Nicoll Fonds, file 93.
39. The three Calgary venues were: East Block, Provincial Institute of Technology of Art, December 7-19, 1959; Bowness Town Hall, February 13-20, 1960; and Gallery of the Allied Arts Centre, March 13-April 2, 1960.
40. "Tech Art Instructors Exhibit Paintings at Joint Showing," *Calgary Herald*, November 17, 1959.
41. "Artist Shows Oil Paintings," *Calgary Albertan*, December 8, 1959 and "Exhibition of Paintings," *Calgary North Hill News*, December 3, 1959.
42. Murray Interview, 11, 13.
43. Clement Greenberg, "Clement Greenberg's View of Art on the Prairies: Painting and Sculpture in Prairie Canada Today," *Canadian Art* XX, no. 2 (March-April 1963): 96.
44. Iain Baxter, Frank Palmer, Ron Spickett, and George Wood were the other artists from Alberta.
45. J. Russell Harper, "The Contemporary Canadian Scene," *5th Biennial of Canadian Painting 1963* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1963), 5, 26.
46. *M. Nicoll*, Allied Arts Centre, Calgary, December 6-19, 1963. This exhibition featured her new Ritual and Alberta Series paintings.





47. Dushan, "Teacher Favors Experimental Art."
48. "Marion Nicoll Questionnaire," Exhibition File, *Marion Nicoll: Art and Influences*, Glenbow Museum, Calgary.
49. Jim was board chair for the Bowness Library (1959-1964) and juror for the Calgary Exhibition and Stampede.
50. Adeline Flaherty, "Life and Painting Synonymous for Calgary Artist-Teacher," *Calgary Herald*, January 27, 1965.
51. Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 29.
52. Marion Nicoll, "Report to Canada Council," February 22, 1967, Nicoll Fonds, file 94.
53. J. Russell Harper, *Painting in Canada: A History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1966), *The Slough*, illustrated, 394. This work is held in the Alberta University of the Arts, Illingworth Kerr Gallery collection.
54. *Retrospective Exhibition of Graphics by Marion Nicoll, A.S.A.* was held in Edmonton at Strathcona Place Society, 1972.
55. *Marion Nicoll: A Retrospective, 1959-1971* (Edmonton: Edmonton Art Gallery, 1975).
56. The exhibits were: Glenbow Foundation, 1969; the University of Calgary, 1971; and Muttart Art Gallery, 1982.
57. Salahub, "Mine Had a Ripple in It," 102.

### KEY WORKS: PORTRAIT OF FLORENCE MACKAY

1. Known portraits include: *Evelyn*, 1940; *Peggy*, 1946; and *Janet Mitchell*, undated.
2. Marion Nicoll, as quoted in J. Brooks Joyner, *Marion Nicoll, R.C.A.* (Calgary: Masters Gallery, 1979), 51.
3. As quoted in Christopher Jackson, *Marion Nicoll: Art and Influences* (Calgary: Glenbow, 1986), 8.
4. Natasha Pashak details the family's losses in "Almost Outnumbered: The Role of Alberta in the Life and Work of Marion Nicoll" (Master of Arts Thesis, Concordia University, 2010), 21.
5. Florence Mackay teaching before marriage is mentioned in Marion Nicoll, "Interview with Laura Chrumka," Junior League Oral History Project, 1982, RCT 403, Glenbow Museum, Calgary.



### KEY WORKS: CHINOOK

1. See these publications: Christopher Jackson, *Marion Nicoll: Art and Influences* (Calgary: Glenbow, 1986), cat. 1, illustrated page 40; and Ann Davis and Elizabeth Herbert, *Marion Nicoll: Silence and Alchemy* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2013), illustrated page 13.
2. Though these sketches are dated, the dates for both works may be in question since Nicoll used a different medium than graphite to sign them.

### KEY WORKS: UNTITLED (AUTOMATIC DRAWING)

1. Marion Nicoll in Interview with Joan Murray, May 24, 1979, 2, The Robert McLaughlin Gallery Archives, Oshawa (hereafter Murray Interview).
2. Murray Interview, 4.
3. Marion Nicoll as quoted in Ann Payne, "Jim and Marion Nicoll," *Art West VI* (1977): 14.
4. Marion Nicoll to Janet Mitchell, January 25, 1968, 2, Janet Mitchell Fonds, Glenbow Museum, Calgary, M852-5, Correspondence, 1959-1973.
5. Murray Interview, 2.

### KEY WORKS: BATIK

1. Her teacher was probably Franz Johnston, for Roger Burford Mason mentions his batik teaching in *A Grand Eye for Glory: A Life of Franz Johnston* (Toronto and Oxford: Dundurn Press, 1998), 60. Nicoll remembers that "I was taught by a man at the Ontario College when I was at the college, in 27, 28, 29.," in Helen K. Wright, "Interview with Marion Nicoll," January 29, 1973, 10, video-tape X20-14, Marion and Jim Nicoll Fonds, Glenbow Museum, Calgary, file 21 (hereafter Wright Interview, X20-14).
2. Unauthored and untitled article, *Calgary Albertan*, November 30, 1957, Marion Nicoll Artist's File, National Gallery of Canada.
3. Jennifer Salahub, "Mine Had a Ripple in It," in *Marion Nicoll: Silence and Alchemy* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2013), 102.

### KEY WORKS: THURSDAY'S MODEL

1. Mary Biner, "Artist Plans Constant Work to 'Earn' \$5,500.00 Scholarship," *Calgary Herald*, n.d., c.1966.
2. The exhibition dates were as follows: East Block, Provincial Institute of Technology, December 7-19, 1959; Council Chamber, Bowness Town Hall, February 13-20, 1960; and Allied Arts Centre, March 13-April 2, 1960.
3. James McLaren Nicoll, "Bowness Goes Modern," Marion and Jim Nicoll Fonds, Glenbow Museum, Calgary, file 115.





## KEY WORKS: ALBERTA IV: WINTER MORNING

1. Marion Nicoll, "Power Paint Course, V. See-Ability of Colour," Marion and Jim Nicoll Fonds, Glenbow Museum, Calgary (hereafter Nicoll Fonds), file 59.
2. Helen K. Wright, "Interview with Marion Nicoll," January 29, 1973, 10, videotape X20-14, Nicoll Fonds, file 21, 2 (hereafter Wright Interview).
3. Wright Interview, 2.
4. The fourteen paintings in the Alberta Series are as follows: *Alberta I: A Tree*; *Alberta II: Moon in the Morning*; *Alberta III: Against the Light*; *Alberta IV: Winter Morning*; *Alberta V: Mountain Rise*; *Alberta VI: Prairie*; *Alberta VII: Winter Sunrise*; *Alberta VIII: Sun and Trees*; *Alberta IX: Prairie Town*; *Alberta X: September*; *Alberta XI: The Season's Change*; *Alberta XII: First Snow*; *Alberta XIII: Foothills*; and *Alberta XIV: Winter Fields*.
5. These include *ALTA VII (Winter Morning)* in the exhibition *Marion Nicoll: A Retrospective, 1959-1971*; *Winter Morning* in J. Brooks Joyner, *Marion Nicoll, R.C.A.* (Calgary: Masters Gallery, 1979), illustrated, 18; and *Alberta IV: Winter Morning* in Christopher Jackson, *Marion Nicoll: Art and Influences* (Calgary: Glenbow, 1986), illustrated, 34.
6. Ann Davis and Elizabeth Herbert, *Marion Nicoll: A Retrospective*, Nickle Galleries, University of Calgary, January 25-April 27, 2013, listed, no catalogue number.
7. Marion Nicoll, Untitled [Painting Journal], 1958-1980s, Nicoll Fonds, M6642, file 62.

## KEY WORKS: ANCIENT WALL

1. Marion Nicoll, "New York-Europe Journal," Entry for May 20, 1959, Marion and Jim Nicoll Fonds, Glenbow Museum, Calgary (hereafter Nicoll Fonds), file 93.
2. *Marion Nicoll: A Retrospective, 1959-1971* (Edmonton: Edmonton Art Gallery, 1975), curated by Duck Ventures (aka John Hall and Ron Moppett). Other European works finished in Calgary included *Rome I*, *Rome II*, *Madrid I*, and *Madrid II*.
3. Clement Greenberg, "Clement Greenberg's View of Art on the Prairies: Painting and Sculpture in Prairie Canada Today," *Canadian Art* XX, no. 2 (March-April 1963): illustrated, 96.
4. Marion Nicoll in Interview with Joan Murray, May 24, 1979, 18, The Robert McLaughlin Gallery Archives, Oshawa.
5. Greenberg, "Clement Greenberg's View of Art on the Prairies," 96.
6. Helen K. Wright, "Interview with Marion Nicoll," January 29, 1973, 5, videotape X20-14, Nicoll Fonds, file 21.



7. Women artists associated with the American hard-edge painting movement included June Harwood and Canadian-born Agnes Martin.

8. Nicoll's exhibition was shown in both Edmonton and Calgary: May 6-30, 1963, Edmonton Art Gallery; and June 3-29, 1963, Calgary Allied Arts Centre, Calgary.

9. Karen Wilken, *Painting in Alberta, An Historical Survey* (Edmonton: Edmonton Art Gallery, July 11-August 30, 1980), cat. 95; Christopher Varley, *Winnipeg West: Painting and Sculpture in Western Canada, 1945-1970* (Edmonton: Edmonton Art Gallery, 1983), illustrated, 22; John Hall and Ron Moppett, *Marion Nicoll: A Retrospective, 1959-1971* (Edmonton: Edmonton Art Gallery, 1975); Christopher Jackson, *Marion Nicoll: Art and Influences* (Calgary: Glenbow, 1986), cat. 17.

### KEY WORKS: CALGARY II: THE UGLY CITY

1. *Calgary I*: April 1964 (Private Collection, Mississauga); *Calgary II: The Ugly City*, 1964 (Private Collection); and *Calgary III, 4AM*, 1966 (Nickle Galleries). *The House Where I Was Born*, 1962, wasn't part of the Calgary Series.

2. J. Russell Harper, *5th Biennial Exhibition of Canadian Painting 1963* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1963), cat. 52, *Winter Sun*.

3. Jenni Morton, "Painter Teaches Craft Classes," *Calgary Herald*, February 6, 1963.

4. Marion Nicoll to W.T. Ng, Cultural Development Branch, Arts and Crafts Division, Edmonton, July 20, 1973, Marion and Jim Nicoll Fonds, Glenbow Museum, Calgary (hereafter Nicoll Fonds), file 131.

5. P.W. Martin, *Experiment in Depth: A Study of the Work of Jung, Eliot and Toynebee* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1955, paperback, 1976), 15.

6. Martin, *Experiment in Depth*, 256.

7. John Hall and Ron Moppett, *Marion Nicoll: A Retrospective, 1959-1971* (Edmonton: Edmonton Art Gallery, 1975), illustrated. J. Brooks Joyner, *Marion Nicoll, R.C.A.* (Calgary: Masters Gallery, 1979), illustrated, 6.

### KEY WORKS: FEBRUARY 1967

1. Helen K. Wright, "Interview with Marion Nicoll," January 29, 1973, 10, video-tape X20-14, Marion and Jim Nicoll Fonds, Glenbow Museum, Calgary (hereafter Nicoll Fonds), file 21.

2. The Leighton Art Centre collection was not accessioned until 1996 but *February 1967* was part of Barbara Leighton's collection, Stephanie Doll to the author, November 16, 2020.

3. Lorne Render and Marion Nicoll, "Release," November 28, 1969 for the Lounge Exhibition, November 4-23, 1969, Nicoll Fonds, file 123.





# MARION NICOLL

Life & Work by Catharine Mastin

4. Lorne Render and Marion Nicoll, "Release," November 28, 1969 for the Lounge Exhibition, November 4-23, 1969, Nicoll Fonds, file 123.

5. Lorne E. Render, *The Mountains and the Sky* (Calgary: Glenbow, 1974). Render's birth date is unknown.

6. *Jim & Marion Nicoll Paintings*, University of Calgary Art Gallery, March 9-20, 1971; *Tribute to Jim and Marion Nicoll*, Muttart Gallery, Calgary, January 19-February 14, 1982.

7. *Marion Nicoll: A Retrospective, 1959-1971* (Edmonton: Edmonton Art Gallery, 1975). *Marion Nicoll: A Retrospective*, Calgary, Nickle Galleries, University of Calgary, 2013, unnumbered checklist.

## KEY WORKS: JANUARY '68

1. *February*, 1968, was purchased by Kresge's Detroit and its location is presently not known. *March*, 1968, is held in the City of Calgary Art Collection.

2. Marion Nicoll to Janet Mitchell, January 25, 1968, 1, Janet Mitchell Fonds, M-852-4, Glenbow Museum, Calgary.

3. Marion Nicoll in Interview with Joan Murray, May 24, 1979, 14, The Robert McLaughlin Gallery Archives, Oshawa.

4. William C. Seitz curated *The Responsive Eye*, 1965, for the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

5. William C. Seitz, "Introduction," *Seventh Biennial of Canadian Painting* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1968), 9.

6. William Townsend, ed., *Canadian Art Today*, *Studio International* 46 no. 2 (1970): illustrated, 90.

## KEY WORKS: JOURNEY TO THE MOUNTAINS: APPROACH, THE MOUNTAINS, RETURN

1. "Introduction," *Marion Nicoll: A Retrospective, 1959-1971* (Edmonton: Edmonton Art Gallery, 1975).

2. Elizabeth Herbert, "Marion Nicoll and the Sublime," in Ann Davis and Elizabeth Herbert eds., *Marion Nicoll: Silence and Alchemy* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2013), 64-65.

3. Other non-painting commissions included a concrete washroom wall for the Government of Alberta campground on the Trans-Canada Highway between Tilley and Brooks Alberta in 1967 and a playground for the Bowness-Montgomery Day Care Centre, Calgary, in 1970.

## SIGNIFICANCE & CRITICAL ISSUES

1. *Constitution and Laws of the Canadian Academy of Arts* (Ottawa: A. Bureau Printer, 1879), 3.

2. *Constitution and Laws of the Canadian Academy of Arts*, 35.



3. "Crafts in Alberta," November 1965, unpublished typescript, 10, Marion and Jim Nicoll Fonds, Glenbow Museum, Calgary (hereafter Nicoll Fonds), file 62.
4. Marion Nicoll, "Crafts in the Community: An Outline of What can be Achieved in Crafts with Good Design Instruction," *Leisure: Cultural Activities Magazine* 2, no. 3 (September 1960): 15.
5. Syllabus, *Art Department: Provincial Institute of Technology & Art, 1947-48*, Nicoll Fonds, file 59, notes that Edna McManus taught Commercial Art and Advertising and Margaret P. Hess taught Art Appreciation and Art History.
6. Marion Nicoll, "Interview with Marion and Jim Nicoll," June 19, 1972, 7, Alberta Foundation for the Arts Archives, Edmonton (hereafter AFA Interview).
7. Art Department, 14.
8. Stanford Perrott, as quoted by Nancy Tousley, "Pioneering Local Artist Dies After Long Illness," *Calgary Herald*, March 7, 1985.
9. Marion Nicoll, "Design and Handcrafts," Nicoll Fonds, file 59, 1.
10. Marion Nicoll, "Power Paint Course," Lecture No. 7, Calgary Paint, Oil and Varnish Club, Provincial Institute of Technology, March 7, 1950; and "Lecture to Paint, Oil and Varnish Salesmen's Association," January 24, 1950, Nicoll Fonds, file 59.
11. Nicoll, "Design and Handcrafts," 2-4.
12. AFA Interview, 6.
13. "Joan Murray Talking to Marion Nicoll," May 24, 1979, 9, Typescript sent to author from Joan Murray Fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa.
14. Christopher Jackson, *Marion Nicoll: Art & Influences* (Calgary: Glenbow, 1986), 36.
15. Valerie Greenfield, *Founders of the Alberta College of Art* (Calgary: Alberta College of Art Gallery, 1986), 22.
16. "Marion Nicoll Questionnaire for Pat Kemball," Exhibition File, 1986 for the exhibition, *Marion Nicoll: Art and Influences*, 1986, Glenbow Administration Archives, Glenbow Museum, Calgary.
17. John K. Esler, as quoted in Tousley, "Pioneering Local Artist."
18. Stanford Perrott, as quoted in Tousley, "Pioneering Local Artist."
19. Jackson, *Marion Nicoll*, 36.





20. *She Who Dares: Marion Nicoll*, <https://www.ywcalgary.ca/ywdares/150-women/marion-nicoll/>.
21. Katie Ohe, as quoted in Tousley, "Pioneering Local Artist."
22. Marion Nicoll, "Finger Painting," Nicoll Fonds, file 59, 1.
23. Jenni Morton, "Painter Teaches Craft Classes," *Calgary Herald*, February 6, 1963.
24. Adeleine Flaherty, "Life and Painting Synonymous for Calgary Artist-Teacher," *Calgary Herald*, January 27, 1965.
25. AFA Interview, 5.
26. Marion Nicoll to Dr. D. G Fleming, December 30, 1965, Nicoll Fonds, file 116.
27. Buck [Illingworth] Kerr to Marion Nicoll, February 14, 1966, Nicoll Fonds, file 117.
28. The Calgary Group included Marion Nicoll, Luke Lindoe, Vivian Lindoe, Janet Mitchell, Cliff Robinson, Wesley Irwin, H.B. Hill, Maxwell Bates, W.L. Stevenson, and Dorothy Willis. *Highlights: Quarterly Magazine of the Alberta Society of Artists* 2, no. 1 (February 4, 1948): 4.
29. Marion Nicoll, "Crafts in Alberta," Nicoll Fonds, file 62, 14.
30. The interviews are as follows: "Calgary Boasts Woman Expert in Batik Art," *Amherstburg Echo*, January 9, 1958; Mary Biner, "Ancient Wax Painting Form Being Taught at Art College," *Calgary Herald*, January 8, 1965; Jenni Morton, "Painter Teaches Craft Classes," *Calgary Herald*, February 6, 1963; and "Calgary Woman Masters Ancient Wax Painting Art," *Montreal Gazette*, December 30, 1957.
31. The others were *Approach to Pottery; Textile Printing; Weaving; and Craft Centres in Alberta*.
32. Marion Nicoll, "Crafts in the Community," *Leisure: Cultural Activities Magazine* 2, no. 3 (September 1960): 18.
33. Marion Nicoll, "Albertacraft 1963," Nicoll Fonds, file 62, 2-3.
34. Nancy Townshend, *A History of Art in Alberta* (Calgary: Bayeux Arts, 2005), 210.
35. As annotated on *Playground Project*, felt pen on paper, Alberta Foundation for the Arts, 1981.155.396.B.
36. Linda Curtis, "A Child-like Approach," *The Calgary Albertan*, December 6, 1969.



37. Janet Mitchell, "Foreword," in *Marion Nicoll R.C.A.* (Calgary: Masters Gallery 1979), 11, 13.

38. Marion Nicoll, "Journal," Nicoll Fonds, file 62.

39. As cited in *Environment '70* (Edmonton: Arts & Crafts Division, Cultural Development Branch, and Edmonton Art Gallery, 1970), Nicoll Fonds, file 132.

40. Leslie Jones, "Tracing Dreams: Surrealist Drawing, 1915-1950," in *Drawing Surrealism* (Prestel, Munich, London and New York: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Del Monico Books, 2012), 58.

41. AFA Interview, 4.

42. Nicoll, "Journal."

43. George Duthuit, "A Painter Awakening—Jean-Paul Riopelle," *Canadian Art* 10, no. 1 (Autumn 1952): 24-27; Joe Plaskett, "Paris Honours Pellan," *Canadian Art* 12, no. 3 (Spring 1955): 113-15; Donald Buchanan, "The Art of Jean Dallaire," and Pierre de Ligny Boudreau, "Marcelle Ferron: A Young Painter," *Canadian Art* 12, no. 4 (Summer 1955): 143-49.

44. AFA Interview, 19.

45. P.W. Martin, *Experiment in Depth: A Study of the Work of Jung, Eliot and Toynbee* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1955, paperback 1976), 260-63.

46. Marion Nicoll, "Interview with Helen K. Wright," January 29, 1973, video-tape X20-15, 7, Nicoll Fonds, file 21.

47. Ann Davis, "Silence and Alchemy: The Development of Marion Nicoll," in *Marion Nicoll: Silence and Alchemy* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2013), 6.

48. In 1963, Alberta artists were Iain Baxter, Frank Palmer, Ron Spickett, and George Wood; in 1965, Alberta artists were Roy Kiyooka, Frank Palmer, and Sylvain Voyer; in 1968, the only other Albertan was Roy Kiyooka.

49. William Chapin Seitz, *Seventh Biennial Exhibition of Canadian Painting* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1968), 9.

## STYLE & TECHNIQUE

1. Marion Nicoll, "Crafts in the Community," *Leisure: Cultural Activities Magazine* II, no. 3 (September 1960): 16.





2. Luke Rombout et al., *Vancouver Art and Artists, 1931-1983* (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 1983), 68. The exhibition featured the work of Pailthorpe and Reuben Mednikoff. Ann Davis identifies three lectures between April 14 and July 10, 1944, one of which Macdonald attended, "Silence and Alchemy: The Development of Marion Nicoll," in *Marion Nicoll: Silence and Alchemy* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2013), 7-8.
3. Joyce Zemans, *Jock Macdonald: The Inner Landscape, A Retrospective Exhibition* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1981), 109.
4. Marion Nicoll to Janet Mitchell, January 25, 1968, 2, Janet Mitchell Fonds, Glenbow Museum, Calgary, M852-5, Correspondence, 1959-1973.
5. Jock Macdonald to Marion Nicoll, October 3, 1946, as cited in Zemans, *Jock Macdonald*, 120-22.
6. Marion Nicoll, "Joan Murray Interview with Marion Nicoll," May 24, 1979, 17, The Robert McLaughlin Gallery Archives, Oshawa (hereafter Murray Interview).
7. Marion Nicoll, "Interview with Marion and Jim Nicoll," June 19, 1972, 10, 12, Alberta Foundation for the Arts Archives, Edmonton (hereafter AFA Interview).
8. Will Barnet to Marion and Jim Nicoll, December 30, 1963, 2-3, Marion and Jim Nicoll Fonds, Glenbow Museum, Calgary (hereafter Nicoll Fonds), file 1.
9. AFA Interview, 25.
10. Nancy Townshend, *A History of Art in Alberta, 1905-1970* (Calgary: Bayeux Arts, 2005), 211.
11. The date for this event was after 1960 since it included the hard-edge oil painting *First Snow* (location unknown).
12. *First National Fine Crafts Exhibition* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1957), cat. 73. Canadian tour: Winnipeg Art Gallery; Public Library and Art Museum, London; and Art Gallery of Hamilton, Nicoll Fonds, file 32.
13. Checklist of Works, "Alberta Craft '62," *Snow Fence* was cat. 10, Nicoll Fonds, file 115.
14. Phone interview, Marion Moorhead and Catharine Mastin, June 16, 2020.
15. Phone interview, Marion Moorhead and Catharine Mastin, June 16, 2020.
16. Phone interview, Marion Moorhead and Catharine Mastin, June 16, 2020. The tool is no longer extant.
17. The checklist for *Alberta Craft '62*, Alberta College of Art, confirms Nicoll exhibited fourteen works, including twelve pieces of jewelry. Nicoll Fonds, file 115.



18. See these untitled and unauthored articles: *Montreal Gazette*, December 30, 1957; and *Calgary Albertan*, November 30, 1957, Marion Nicoll Artist's File, National Gallery of Canada.

19. Reference to this is made in the untitled article *Calgary Albertan*, November 30, 1957.

20. Marion Nicoll, *Batik* (Edmonton: Cultural Activities Branch, Department of Economic Affairs, Government of the Province of Alberta, 1953), 15 pages, Nicoll Fonds, file 62.

21. Schaefer sold four of Nicoll's batiks but none of them went to the Sheldon Museum of Art, beneficiary of Schaefer's collection. See "Invoice Receipt" for Young Indian sold to Bertha Schaefer, April 21, 1967, Nicoll Fonds, file 117.

22. This exhibition is undated. *Calgary Fabric Wall Hangings*, Nicoll Fonds, file 133.

23. <https://www.davidsongalleries.com/artists/modern/glen-alps>, site accessed August 28, 2020.

24. Bente Roed Cochran, *Printmaking in Alberta, 1945-1985* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1989), 110-12.

25. Marion Nicoll, "Monoprints," *Highlights: Quarterly Magazine of the Alberta Society of Artists* 4, no. 2 (March 1951). Alberta Society of Artists Fonds, University of Calgary Archives, Alberta.





## GLOSSARY

### **academic tradition**

Associated with the royal academies of art established in France and England in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries respectively, the academic tradition emphasized drawing, painting, and sculpture in a style highly influenced by ancient classical art. Subject matter for painting was hierarchically ranked, with history painting of religious, mythological, allegorical, and historical figures holding the position of greatest importance, followed, in order, by genre painting, portraiture, still lifes, and landscapes.

### **Arp, Jean (German/French, 1886–1966)**

Born Hans Arp, Jean Arp was a Surrealist artist and original member of the Dada group. His work includes textile, wood relief, sculpture, and collage. Arp also wrote essays and poetry, contributing to publications including *De Stijl* and *La Révolution surréaliste*. In the 1930s, following his association with the Paris group Abstraction-Création, Arp's work began to incorporate aspects of Constructivism, which translated into harder edges in his forms. His wife was the Surrealist artist Sophie Taeuber.

### **Art Gallery of Alberta (AGA)**

Founded in 1924 as the Edmonton Museum of Arts by curator Maud Bowman (1877–1944) with the assistance of local art associations, the museum was renamed the Edmonton Art Gallery in 1956. The gallery held its exhibitions at various public venues throughout Edmonton during the first half of the twentieth century, before a permanent facility was established at Churchill Square in 1969. In 2005 the institution was again renamed the Art Gallery of Alberta. A redesigned and expanded building opened in 2010.

### **Art Students League of New York**

A progressive art school established by artists for artists in 1875. By the turn of the twentieth century the Art Students League was attracting many students who would become central figures in contemporary American art. Teachers included William Merritt Chase, Thomas Eakins, and Robert Henri.

### **Automatics**

Refers to work produced through the technique of automatism, an art-making method associated with the modernist Surrealist movement in the early twentieth century. Influenced by Freudian theory, automatism seeks to prioritize the unconscious desires of the mind by suppressing purposeful or logical aesthetic choices and instead allowing the hand to write, draw, or paint the canvas in an uncontrolled, stream-of-thought manner.

### **automatism**

A physiological term first applied to art by the Surrealists to refer to processes such as free association and spontaneous, intuitive writing, drawing, and painting that allow access to the subconscious without the interference of planning or controlled thought.



### **Automatistes**

A Montreal-based artists' group interested in Surrealism and the Surrealist technique of automatism. Centred on the artist, teacher, and theorist Paul-Émile Borduas, the Automatistes exhibited regularly between 1946 and 1954, making Montreal a locus of mid-century avant-garde art. Members included Marcel Barbeau, Marcelle Ferron, Jean-Paul Mousseau, Jean Paul Riopelle, Fernand Leduc, and Françoise Sullivan.

### **Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity**

Established in 1933 as the Banff School of Drama, the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity is a post-secondary institution located in Banff National Park, Alberta. Founded by the University of Alberta, the Centre offers educational programs in the performing, literary, and visual arts. It is particularly well known for its artist residencies and practicum programs, having served as a site of artistic inspiration and creative practice for many Canadian artists since its founding.

### **Barnet, Will (American, 1911–2012)**

A painter and printmaker known for his flattened, geometric, and semi-abstract approach to figurative art. Based in New York since the 1930s, Barnet worked at the Art Students League before later holding teaching positions at the Cooper Union, Yale University, and the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. His unique, experimental style of figuration inspired a generation of burgeoning modernist artists such as Cy Twombly, Mark Rothko, and Marion Nicoll.

### **Bates, Maxwell (Canadian, 1906–1980)**

An architect and artist whose expressionistic paintings are held at major institutions across Canada. As a soldier with the British Territorial Army during the Second World War, Bates was captured in France and spent five years in a POW camp. He recounted the experience in his book *A Wilderness of Days* (1978).

### **Borduas, Paul-Émile (Canadian, 1905–1960)**

The leader of the avant-garde Automatistes and one of Canada's most important modern artists. Borduas was also an influential advocate for reform in Quebec, calling for liberation from religious and narrow nationalist values in the 1948 manifesto *Refus global*. (See *Paul-Émile Borduas: Life & Work* by François-Marc Gagnon.)

### **Calgary Group**

A group of artists important to the history of modern art in Canada. The Calgary Group promoted non-objective art in Western Canada in the late 1940s, at the same time that Paul-Émile Borduas and the Automatistes advocated for its legitimacy in Quebec and elsewhere.

### **Canadian Society of Graphic Art**

Founded in Toronto in 1904 as the Society of Graphic Art and chartered in 1933 as the Canadian Society of Graphic Art, the society was an organization of artists interested in printmaking, illustration, and drawing. From 1924 to 1963 it hosted annual exhibitions, producing *The Canadian Graphic Art Year Book* in 1931. Notable members included Bruno Bobak and Charles Comfort. Once among the largest artists' organizations in Canada, the society disbanded in 1974.





### **Carr, Emily (Canadian, 1871–1945)**

A pre-eminent B.C.-based artist and writer, Carr is renowned today for her bold and vibrant images of both the Northwest Coast landscape and its Native peoples. Educated in California, England, and France, she was influenced by a variety of modern art movements but ultimately developed a unique aesthetic style. She was one of the first West Coast artists to achieve national recognition. (See *Emily Carr: Life & Work* by Lisa Baldissera.)

### **Central School of Arts and Crafts (Central Saint Martins)**

A public institution founded in London in 1896, which offered courses in design and the visual and applied arts initially inspired by the Arts and Crafts movement led by William Morris. In 1989 it merged with Saint Martin's School of Art to form the Central Saint Martins College of Arts and Design, now part of the University of the Arts London.

### **Chagall, Marc (Russian/French, 1887–1985)**

A painter and graphic artist, Chagall's work is characterized by colourful, dreamlike images and a defiance of the rules of pictorial logic. Although he employed elements of Cubism, Fauvism, and Symbolism, Chagall did not formally align with any avant-garde movement.

### **colour-field painting**

A term first used to describe Abstract Expressionist works that use simplified or minimalist forms of flat or nuanced colour, as in paintings by Morris Louis. It was later applied to works by such artists as Kenneth Noland and Barnett Newman in the United States and Jack Bush in Canada, whose geometric or abstract motifs highlight variations in colour. Post-Painterly Abstraction, a description coined by the critic Clement Greenberg, includes colour-field painting.

### **Dalí, Salvador (Spanish, 1904–1989)**

The star of the Surrealists and one of his era's most exuberant personalities, Dalí is best known for his naturalistically rendered dreamscapes. *The Persistence of Memory*, 1931, with its melting clock faces, remains one of the twentieth century's most parodied artworks.

### **Dallaire, Jean-Philippe (Canadian, 1916–1965)**

A painter and illustrator known for his brightly coloured works featuring fantastical characters. Born in Hull, Quebec, Dallaire worked in Ottawa before setting off to study in Paris, where he met and was greatly influenced by the Canadian artist Alfred Pellon. From 1940–44 he was interned by the Gestapo. Dallaire later taught at the École des beaux-arts in Quebec City and worked as an illustrator at the National Film Board in Ottawa.

### **El Greco (Greek, c.1541–1614)**

Painter, sculptor, and architect considered the first master of the Spanish School. Born Doménikos Theotokópoulos in Crete, El Greco settled in Toledo, Spain, in 1576, where he executed major commissions throughout his career, including the prized altarpieces *Espolio*, 1577–79, and *Burial of Count Orgaz*, 1586–88.



## **Emma Lake Artists' Workshops**

An annual two-week summer program established by Canadian artists Arthur McKay (1926–2000) and Kenneth Lochhead (1926–2006) in 1955. The goal of the workshops was to connect Saskatchewan artists to the greater art world by inviting art theorists, critics, and artists to conduct workshops at the remote location of Emma Lake in northern Saskatchewan. Throughout the years, the workshop leaders included influential figures such as Clement Greenberg, Barnett Newman, and Will Barnet.

## ***en plein air***

French for “in the open air,” *en plein air* is used to describe the practice of painting or sketching outdoors to observe nature, and in particular the changing effects of weather, atmosphere, and light.

## **etching**

A printmaking technique that follows the same principles as engraving but uses acid instead of a burin to cut through the plate. A copper plate is coated with a waxy acid resist; the artist draws an image into the wax with a needle. The plate is then immersed in an acid bath, incising the lines and leaving the rest of the plate untouched.

## **Ferron, Marcelle (Canadian, 1924–2001)**

A painter, sculptor, and stained-glass artist and a member of the Montreal-based Automatistes. Ferron studied at the École des beaux-arts in Montreal (now part of the Université du Québec à Montréal) before meeting Paul-Émile Borduas, whose approach to modern art became crucial to her artistic development. In 1953 she moved to France, where she lived for thirteen years.

## **Giotto (Italian, 1266/67–1337)**

An acknowledged master of the early Italian Renaissance who was equally celebrated in his own day: critics including Dante praised the naturalism of his pictures and considered him to have revived painting after a centuries-long slump. Among his most spectacular achievements is the fresco cycle decorating the walls of the Arena Chapel, Padua.

## **Glenbow-Alberta Institute**

An art and art history museum in Calgary, Alberta, the Glenbow-Alberta Institute was formed following Eric Lafferty Harvie's donation of his collection of historical artifacts from western Canada to the province of Alberta in 1966. Now the Glenbow Museum, it is dedicated to the art and culture of western Canada, with important historical, artistic, archival, and library collections. Exhibitions at the museum focus on both art history and contemporary art.





### **Goya, Francisco (Spanish, 1746–1828)**

Francisco José de Goya y Lucientes was an influential painter of the Spanish Enlightenment whose expressive style would guide the Romantic, realist, and Impressionist painters of the nineteenth century, particularly French artists including Édouard Manet. Though he rose to prominence as a court painter for the Spanish monarchy, Goya's drawings and etchings of the horrors of the Napoleonic Wars and Spanish struggles for independence in the early nineteenth century, none of them published during his lifetime, would prove some of his most enduring work.

### **Greenberg, Clement (American, 1909–1994)**

A highly influential art critic and essayist known primarily for his formalist approach and his contentious concept of modernism, which he first outlined in his 1960 publication "Modernist Painting." Greenberg was, notably, an early champion of Abstract Expressionists, including Jackson Pollock and the sculptor David Smith.

### **Group of Seven**

A progressive and nationalistic school of landscape painting in Canada, the Group of Seven was active between 1920 (the year of the group's first exhibition, at the Art Gallery of Toronto, now the Art Gallery of Ontario) and 1933. Founding members were the artists Franklin Carmichael, Lawren Harris, A.Y. Jackson, Frank Johnston, Arthur Lismer, J.E.H. MacDonald, and Frederick Varley.

### **hard-edge painting**

A technical term coined in 1958 by the art critic Jules Langsner, referring to paintings marked by well-defined areas of colour. It is widely associated with geometric abstraction and the work of artists such as Ellsworth Kelly and Kenneth Noland.

### **Hofmann, Hans (German/American, 1880–1966)**

As both an Abstract Expressionist painter and a teacher who influenced a generation of artists, Hans Hofmann was a key figure in the American art world following the Second World War. Trained in Munich, where he grew up, and in Paris, Hofmann began his career as a Cubist painter and showed in Europe in the early part of the twentieth century. His style moved through Expressionism, and by 1939 he was creating the Abstract Expressionist works that would secure his place in art historical narratives. Hofmann's later work is defined by his bold use of colour and gesture, and by a sense of the Cubist structure he developed as a young painter.

### **Janvier, Alex (Dene Suline/Saulteaux, b. 1935)**

Influenced by Expressionism and strongly by his First Nations heritage, Janvier was a founding member of the Professional Native Indian Artists Inc. and is a pioneering figure in Indigenous art in Canada. Often composed with bright, symbolic colours and curvilinear lines, his nonrepresentational paintings address themes of land, spirit, and the struggles and triumphs of Indigenous culture.



### **Johnston, Frances-Anne (Canadian, 1910–1987)**

Educated at the Ontario College of Art in the 1920s, Johnston painted primarily interior scenes including a large number of still lifes and florals. Her husband was the painter, illustrator, and commercial artist Franklin Arbuckle.

### **Johnston, Frank H. (Canadian, 1888–1949)**

A founding member of the Group of Seven. In 1921, he became principal of the Winnipeg School of Art and later taught at the Ontario College of Art (now OCAD University), Toronto. He formally severed his ties with the group in 1924, preferring to paint in a realistic style less controversial at the time than his earlier decorative work.

### **Kandinsky, Wassily (Russian, 1866–1944)**

An artist, teacher, and philosopher who settled in Germany and later in France, Kandinsky was central to the development of abstract art. Much of his work conveys his interest in the relationships between colour, sound, and emotion. *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (1911), his famous treatise on abstraction, draws on mysticism and theories of divinity.

### **Kerr, Illingworth (Canadian, 1905–1989)**

Born in Lumsden, Saskatchewan, Kerr was a painter celebrated for his colourful, emotive landscape paintings of the Saskatchewan and Alberta prairies. He taught at the Vancouver School of Art before becoming director of the art department at Calgary's Provincial Institute of Technology and Art in 1947 (now known as the Alberta University of the Arts). In 1983 Kerr was named to the Order of Canada in recognition of his long and prolific artistic career.

### **Leighton, Alfred Crocker (British, 1900–1965)**

A British-born artist who made many trips to Canada in the 1920s, where he worked for the Canadian Pacific Railway, creating sketches of the scenic landscapes encountered along the CPR routes. He settled in Calgary in 1929, accepting a position as Art Director at the Provincial Institute of Technology and Art (now known as the Alberta University of the Arts). He co-founded the Alberta Society of Artists in 1931 and later assisted in the formation of the Calgary and Medicine Hat Sketch Clubs.

### **linocut**

A printmaking technique in which the image is relief-carved into a linoleum block using various sharp tools, such as chisels, gouges, and knives. The final print is created by applying ink to the block and pressing the inked block onto another surface, by hand or with a printing press.

### **Lismer, Arthur (British/Canadian, 1885–1969)**

A landscape painter and founding member of the Group of Seven, Lismer immigrated to Canada from England in 1911. He was also an influential educator of adults and children, and he created children's art schools at both the Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto (1933) and the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (1946).





### **lithograph**

A type of print invented in 1798 in Germany by Aloys Senefelder. Like other planographic methods of image reproduction, lithography relies on the fact that grease and water do not mix. Placed in a press, the moistened and inked lithographic stone will print only those areas previously designed with greasy lithographic ink.

### **MacDonald, J.E.H. (British/Canadian, 1873–1932)**

A painter, printmaker, calligrapher, teacher, poet, and designer, and a founding member of the Group of Seven. His sensitive treatment of the Canadian landscape was influenced by Walt Whitman's poetry and Henry David Thoreau's views on nature.

### **Macdonald, Jock (British/Canadian, 1897–1960)**

A painter, printmaker, illustrator, teacher, and a pioneer in the development of abstract art in Canada. Macdonald began as a landscape painter but became interested in abstraction in the 1940s, influenced by Hans Hofmann and Jean Dubuffet. Macdonald was one of the founders of Painters Eleven in 1953. (See *Jock Macdonald: Life & Work* by Joyce Zemans.)

### **ManWoman (Canadian, 1938–2012)**

Born in Cranbrook, B.C., as Patrick (Pat) Kemball, ManWoman was a mixed-media artist who took on the dual-gender name after a near-death experience in his youth. ManWoman produced illustrations and prints which made use of colourful, Pop Art aesthetics paired with the controversial symbol of the swastika. He sought to rehabilitate the swastika's association with the Nazi regime, instead celebrating it in his art as a sacred, peaceful, and gentle symbol of spirituality.

### **Marion Nicoll Gallery**

A student-run gallery at the Alberta University of the Arts (AUArts) dedicated to showcasing the creative work of students and emerging artists. The gallery is named after the Albertan abstract painter Marion Nicoll (1909–1985), who in 1933 became the first female instructor to teach at AUArts (then known as the Provincial Institute of Technology and Art).

### **Mitchell, Janet (Canadian, 1912–1998)**

A modernist painter from Medicine Hat, Alberta, best known for her watercolour and oil paintings of Calgary's urban landscapes and alleyways. Her fantastical paintings often made use of bold, blended colours and flowing lines. In 1948 Mitchell's work was shown as part of the "Calgary Group" exhibition at the Vancouver Art Gallery, later considered one of the first exhibitions of modernist art from Alberta. Her career spanned six decades, during which she exhibited extensively in group and solo shows across Canada.



## **modernism**

A movement extending from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century in all the arts, modernism rejected academic traditions in favour of innovative styles developed in response to contemporary industrialized society. Modernist movements in the visual arts have included Gustave Courbet's Realism, and later Impressionism, Post-Impressionism, Fauvism, and Cubism and on to abstraction. By the 1960s, anti-authoritarian postmodernist styles such as Pop art, Conceptual art, and Neo-Expressionism blurred the distinction between high art and mass culture.

## **National Gallery of Canada**

Established in 1880, the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa holds the most extensive collection of Canadian art in the country as well as works by prominent international artists. Spearheaded by the governor general, the Marquis of Lorne, the gallery was created to strengthen a specifically Canadian brand of artistic culture and identity and to build a national collection of art that would match the level of other British Empire institutions. Since 1988 the gallery has been located on Sussex Drive in a building designed by Moshe Safdie.

## **Nicoll, James McLaren (Canadian, 1892–1986)**

A landscape painter best known for his detailed, vibrant scenes of rural and urban Canada. Nicoll was born in Fort Macleod, Alberta, and worked as an engineer for the Canadian Pacific Railway before taking up painting in the 1930s. He was active in the Calgary art community, becoming involved in a number of local institutions and organizations such as the Alberta Society of Artists and the Calgary Allied Arts Council.

## **Ohe, Katie (Canadian, b.1937)**

A sculptor working in metal from Peers, Alberta, who is recognized as one of the first practitioners of abstract sculpture in Alberta. Her work explores the kinetic relationship between viewer and art object, attempting to induce a sense of mobility or touch through abstract forms and moving sculptures. Since 1970 she has taught sculpture at the Alberta College of Art and Design (now known as the Alberta University of the Arts).

## **Ontario College of Art (now OCAD University)**

The name given in 1912 to what had previously been the Ontario School of Art (founded 1876), and what would become the Ontario College of Art and Design in 1996. In 2010 the institution was renamed OCAD University, to reflect its new status. OCAD University is located in Toronto and is the oldest and largest art school in Canada.





### **Pailthorpe, Grace (British, 1883–1971)**

A psychiatrist and psychoanalyst who explored aspects of the unconscious through her paintings, drawings, and poems. The artist Reuben Mednikoff introduced her to Surrealism in 1935; in 1936 they helped found the British Surrealist Group and participated in the First International Surrealist Exhibition, where Pailthorpe cemented her reputation as a leader of the movement in Britain. In the early 1940s she worked in Vancouver, lectured on Surrealism and exhibited there, and returned to Britain in 1946.

### **Phillips, W.J. (British/Canadian, 1884–1963)**

Watercolourist and printmaker known for popularizing Japanese woodcut colour printing in Canada, with subjects including still lifes, portraits, and landscapes. Phillips moved to Winnipeg in 1913 and became a prominent art critic for *The Winnipeg Evening Tribune* from 1926 to 1941. In 1925 he helped re-establish the Manitoba Society of Artists and from 1940 to 1959 taught at the Banff School of Fine Arts (now the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity).

### **Picabia, Francis (French, 1879–1953)**

A painter, poet, and leader of the anti-rationalist and antiwar Dada movement in Europe that arose in protest against the art establishment and the First World War. Picabia's artistic production was so diverse as to remain unclassifiable; beginning as a Post-Impressionist, he experimented with Fauvism, Cubism, Orphism, and Futurism.

### **Plasticiens**

A Montreal-based artists' group active from 1955 to 1959. Although not opposed to their contemporaries the Automatistes, the Plasticiens encouraged a more formalist, less subjective approach to abstract art, such as that of Neo-Plasticist Piet Mondrian. Members included Louis Belzile, Jean-Paul Jérôme, Fernand Toupin, and Jauran (Rodolphe de Repentigny).

### **Pollock, Jackson (American, 1912–1956)**

Leader of the Abstract Expressionist movement, best known for his drip paintings of the 1940s and 1950s. Pollock is also closely associated with action painting, in which the act of painting is gestural and the artist approaches the canvas with little notion of what he or she will create.

### **Post-Impressionism**

A term coined by the British art critic Roger Fry in 1910 to describe painting produced originally in France between about 1880 and 1905 in response to Impressionism's artistic advances and limitations. Central figures include Paul Cézanne, Paul Gauguin, and Vincent van Gogh.



### **Provincial Institute of Technology and Art**

Founded in Calgary in 1916 as one of the first publicly-funded polytechnic institutes in North America, the Provincial Institute of Technology and Art (PITA) offered vocational training programs alongside courses in visual and applied arts. In 1960, PITA was reorganized and renamed the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology while the institute's art department became the Alberta College of Art (now known as the Alberta University of the Arts). Notable faculty included the Canadian painter Marion Nicoll, who taught at the school from the 1930s through the 1960s.

### **Refus global (Total Refusal)**

A manifesto released in 1948 by the Automatistes, a Montreal-based artists' group. Written by Paul-Émile Borduas and signed by fifteen other members, the main text condemned the dominance of Catholic ideology and the social and political status quo in Quebec. *Refus global* influenced the province's period of rapid change that came to be known as the Quiet Revolution. The sixteen signatories of *Refus global* were: Madeleine Arbour, Marcel Barbeau, Paul-Émile Borduas, Bruno Cormier, Marcelle Ferron, Claude Gauvreau, Pierre Gauvreau, Muriel Guilbault, Fernand Leduc, Jean-Paul Mousseau, Maurice Perron, Louise Renaud, Thérèse Renaud, Françoise Riopelle, Jean Paul Riopelle, and Françoise Sullivan.

### **Riopelle, Françoise (Canadian, 1927–2022)**

Françoise Riopelle, née Lespérance, is a Quebec dancer and choreographer, one of the signatories of the Automatiste manifesto, the *Refus global*. She studied choreography while in Paris with her first husband, the painter Jean Paul Riopelle, from 1946 until 1958. After returning home, she founded the École moderne de danse de Montréal with her collaborator Jeanne Renaud, becoming a leading figure in the introduction of modern dance to Quebec alongside Renaud and the multidisciplinary artist Françoise Sullivan.

### **Riopelle, Jean Paul (Canadian, 1923–2002)**

A towering figure in Québécois modern art who, like the other members of the Automatistes, was interested in Surrealism and abstract art. Riopelle moved to Paris in 1947, where he participated in the last major exhibition of the Parisian Surrealists, organized by Marcel Duchamp and André Breton. (See *Jean Paul Riopelle: Life & Work* by François-Marc Gagnon.)

### **Rothko, Mark (American, 1903–1970)**

A leading figure of Abstract Expressionism, Rothko began his career as an illustrator and watercolourist. In the late 1940s he developed the style that would come to define his career, creating intense colour-field oil paintings that express the same anxiety and mystery that informed his earlier figurative work.

### **Rousseau, Henri (French, 1844–1910)**

A self-taught painter known for his dreamlike canvases depicting exotic landscapes and animals, such as *The Sleeping Gypsy*, 1897, and *The Repast of the Lion*, 1907. Rousseau was admired by Pablo Picasso and other artists of the Parisian avant-garde. Despite the technical naivety of his work he is considered a modern master.





### **Royal Canadian Academy of Arts (RCA)**

An organization of professional artists and architects modelled after national academies long present in Europe, such as the Royal Academy of Arts in the U.K. (founded in 1768) and the Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture in Paris (founded in 1648).

### **Stanford Perrott / James Stanford Perrott (1917–2001)**

A Calgary-based artist and educator who studied under Marion Nicoll at the Provincial Institute of Technology and Art where he later taught and became Head of the College. Perrott painted realist watercolours and large-scale abstract compositions over the course of his long career. His work is included in the collections of the Glenbow Museum and the Alberta Foundation for the Arts.

### **Sullivan, Françoise (Canadian, b.1923)**

Born in Montreal, Sullivan—an artist, sculptor, dancer, and choreographer—studied at the city's École des beaux-arts (now part of the Université du Québec à Montréal) in the early 1940s, where she met Paul-Émile Borduas. His vision of automatism would become a great influence on her modern dance performances and choreography. (See *Françoise Sullivan: Life & Work* by Annie Gérin.)

### **Surrealism**

An early twentieth-century literary and artistic movement that began in Paris, Surrealism aimed to express the workings of the unconscious, free of convention and reason, and was characterized by fantastic images and incongruous juxtapositions. The movement spread globally, influencing film, theatre, and music.

### **triptych**

A triptych is an artistic work in three panels or parts. It may refer to a suite of relief carvings or paintings, or to a series of three literary or musical works meant to be considered together as reflections on a single theme.

### **Vancouver Art Gallery**

The Vancouver Art Gallery, located in Vancouver, British Columbia, is the largest art gallery in Western Canada. It was founded in 1931 and is a public, collecting institution focused on historic and contemporary art from British Columbia, with a particular emphasis on work by First Nations artists and, through the gallery's Institute of Asian Art, on art from the Asia Pacific Region.

### **Wieland, Joyce (Canadian, 1930–1998)**

A central figure in contemporary Canadian art, Wieland engaged with painting, filmmaking, and cloth and plastic assemblage to explore with wit and passion ideas related to gender, national identity, and the natural world. In 1971 she became the first living Canadian woman artist to have a solo exhibition at the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa. (See *Joyce Wieland: Life & Work* by Johanne Sloan.)



## **woodcut**

A relief method of printing that involves carving a design into a block of wood, which is then inked and printed, using either a press or simple hand pressure. This technique was invented in China and spread to the West in the thirteenth century.





**The works of Marion Nicoll are held in public and private collections in Canada and internationally. Although the following institutions hold the works listed below, they may not always be on view.**



## ALBERTA FOUNDATION FOR THE ARTS

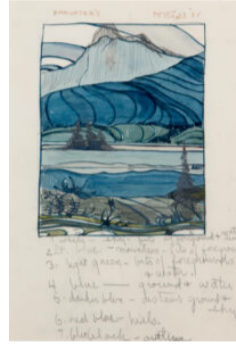
10708 105th Avenue  
Edmonton, Alberta, Canada  
780-427-9968  
affta.ab.ca



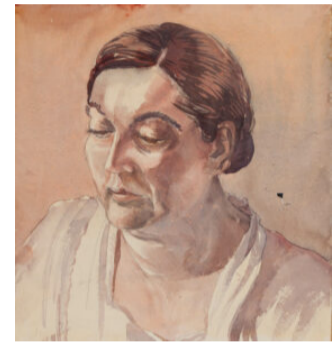
**Marion Nicoll, *Flowers, Vase, Books, and Porcelain*, 1932**  
Watercolour on paper  
32.5 x 39.6 cm



**Marion Nicoll, *Summer Rain*, 1934**  
Watercolour on paper  
22.5 x 31 cm



**Marion Nicoll, *Brewster's*, 1935**  
Watercolour on paper  
25.3 x 17.7 cm



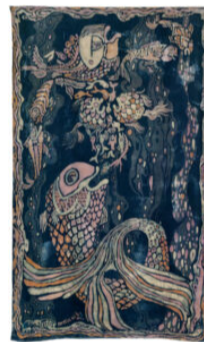
**Marion Nicoll, *Portrait of Florence Mackay*, 1937**  
Watercolour and pencil on paper  
36.5 x 33.8 cm



**Marion Nicoll, *Crowsnest Pass*, 1948**  
Watercolour on paper  
33.5 x 39 cm



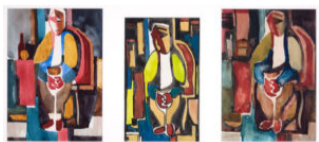
**Marion Nicoll, *Christmas Tree*, 1952**  
Clay print on paper  
17.7 x 15.2 cm



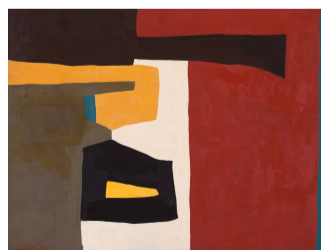
**Marion Nicoll, *Fishes*, 1955**  
Silk rayon velvet batik  
157 x 94 cm



**Marion Nicoll, *Zoomorphic Figure*, 1957**  
Rayon satin batik  
123.5 x 51.5 cm



**Marion Nicoll, *Little Indian Girl*, 1957-58**  
Watercolour on paper  
45.2 x 80.1 cm



**Marion Nicoll, *Sicilia #1*, 1959**  
Oil on canvas  
71.2 x 91.4 cm



**Marion Nicoll, *Expanding White*, 1960**  
Clay print on J Cloth  
19.1 x 25.4 cm



**Marion Nicoll, *Ritual II*, 1963**  
Oil on canvas  
128 x 152.8 cm





# SOURCES & RESOURCES

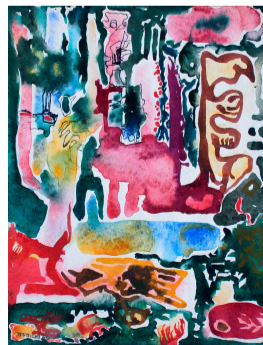
ART GALLERY OF ALBERTA

2 Sir Winston Churchill Square  
Edmonton, Alberta, Canada  
780-422-6223  
youraga.ca



**Marion Nicoll, *Untitled (Automatic Drawing)*, 1948**

Watercolour on paper  
20 x 22.5 cm



**Marion Nicoll, *Untitled (Automatic Drawing)*, 1960**

Watercolour on paper  
25 x 22.7 cm



**Marion Nicoll, *Ancient Wall*, 1962**

Oil on canvas  
107.6 x 153.2 cm



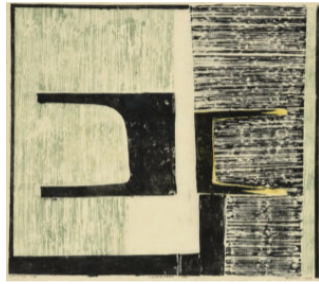


## CITY OF CALGARY PUBLIC ART COLLECTION

Calgary, Alberta, Canada  
403-268-2489  
calgary.ca/publicart



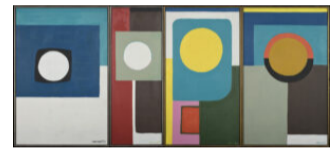
**Marion Nicoll, *The City on Sunday*, 1960**  
Oil on canvas  
80.5 x 113.5 cm



**Marion Nicoll, *Waiting*, 1965**  
Cardboard print on paper  
45 x 50 cm



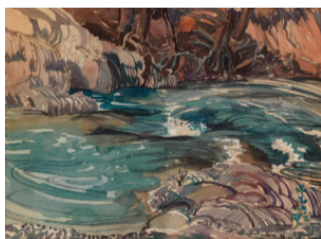
**Marion Nicoll, *January '68*, 1968**  
Woodcut on paper,  
edition 28/50  
42 x 31 cm



**Marion Nicoll, *One Year*, 1971**  
Acrylic on canvas  
Four panels: 153 x 92 cm; 153 x 82 cm; 153 x 56 cm; 153 x 101 cm  
Total dimensions: 153 x 331 cm

## GLENBOW MUSEUM

130 9th Avenue SE  
Calgary, Alberta, Canada  
403-268-4100  
glenbow.org



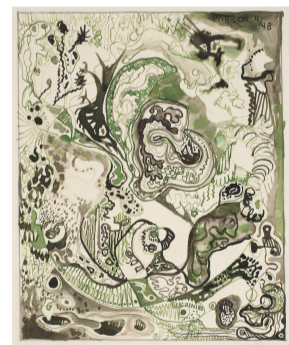
**Marion Mackay, *Mountain Water*, c.1936**  
Watercolour on paper  
34.8 x 39.6 cm



**Marion Nicoll, *Untitled Mountain Landscape*, 1946**  
Oil on hardboard  
31.0 x 37.9 cm



**Marion Nicoll, *Untitled (Automatic Drawing)*, November 11, 1948**  
Watercolour, pen and coloured ink on paper  
26.7 x 19.2 cm



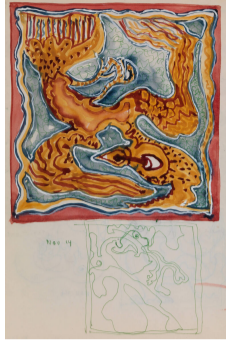
**Marion Nicoll, *Untitled (Automatic Drawing)*, 1948**  
Brush, pen, ink and watercolour on paper  
18.9 x 15.3 cm





# MARION NICOLL

Life & Work by Catharine Mastin



**Marion Nicoll, *Untitled (Automatic Drawing)*, 1948**

Watercolour and ink on paper  
30.1 x 22.6 cm

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**Marion Nicoll, *Untitled (Automatic Drawing)*, 1948**

Watercolour, gouache, pen and ink on paper  
35.6 x 30.1 cm

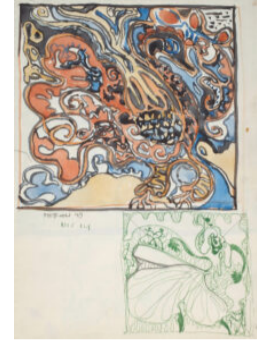
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**Marion Nicoll, *Untitled (Automatic Drawing)*, 1948**

Watercolour on paper  
30.1 x 22.6 cm

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**Marion Nicoll, *Untitled (Automatic Drawing)*, November 14, 1949**

Watercolour and ink on paper  
30.1 x 22.6 cm

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**Marion Nicoll, *Badlands, Eladesor*, 1953**

Watercolour on off-white paper  
35.6 x 44.2 cm

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**Marion Nicoll, *Butterflies*, 1953**

Clay print on paper  
28 x 34.3 cm

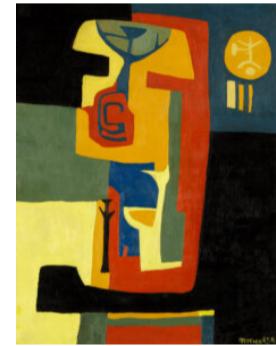
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**Marion Nicoll, *Procession of Birds*, 1956**

Aniline dye on silk  
73 x 222 cm

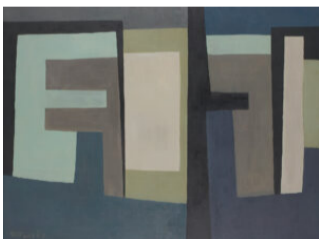
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**Marion Nicoll, *Spring*, 1959**

Oil on canvas  
91.8 x 71.7 cm

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**Marion Nicoll, *Bowness Road, 2 AM*, 1963**

Oil on canvas  
138.2 x 186.3 cm

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**Marion Nicoll, *Northern Nesting Grounds*, 1964**

Clay print  
35.6 x 44.9 cm

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**Marion Nicoll, *Foothills: I*, 1965**

Oil on canvas  
125.5 x 165.5 cm

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## LEIGHTON ART CENTRE

282027 144 Street West  
Foothills, Alberta, Canada  
403-931-3633  
leightoncentre.org



**Marion Nicoll, *February 1967*,  
1967**

Aniline dye on fabric  
193 x 134.6 cm

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## MCMICHAEL CANADIAN ART COLLECTION

10365 Islington Avenue  
Kleinburg, Ontario, Canada  
905-893-1121 or 1-888-213-1121  
mcmichael.com



**Marion Nicoll, *Prairie Farm*, 1968**

Acrylic on canvas  
92.3 x 157.6 cm

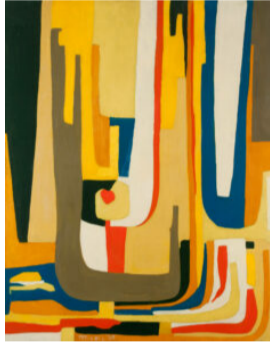
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## MORRIS AND HELEN BELKIN ART GALLERY

University of British Columbia  
1825 Main Mall  
Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada  
604-822-2759  
belkin.ubc.ca



**Marion Nicoll, *The Beautiful City*,  
1959**

Oil on canvas  
92.0 x 71.5 cm

---

## NATIONAL GALLERY OF CANADA

380 Sussex Drive  
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada  
613-990-1985  
gallery.ca



**Marion Nicoll, *Batik*, c.1950**

Aniline dye on silk  
100 x 92.5 cm



**Marion Nicoll, *Thursday's Model*,  
1959**

Oil on canvas  
92 x 51.1 cm

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## NICKLE GALLERIES

University of Calgary  
435 Campus Lane NW  
Calgary, Alberta, Canada  
403-210-6201  
nickle.ucalgary.ca



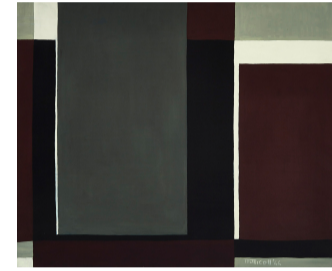
**Marion Mackay, *Untitled-Rockies*, 1940**  
Watercolour and pencil  
on paper  
28.2 x 35 cm



**Marion Nicoll, *Chinook*, 1945**  
Tempera on board  
37 x 58 cm



**Marion Nicoll, *Sicilia V: The House of Padrone*, 1959**  
Oil on canvas  
90 x 105.5 cm



**Marion Nicoll, *Calgary III, 4 AM*, 1966**  
Oil on canvas  
114.3 x 137.2 cm



**Marion Nicoll, *Journey to the Mountains: Approach, The Mountains, Return*, 1968-69**  
Oil on canvas  
Triptych: *Approach*,  
274.3 x 114.3 cm; *The Mountains*,  
274.3 x 152.4; and *Return*,  
274.3 x 129.5 cm,  
total: 274.3 x 396.2 cm





## THE ROOMS

9 Bonaventure Avenue  
St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada  
709-757-8000  
therooms.ca



**Marion Nicoll, *Rome I: The Shape of the Night*, 1960**

Oil on canvas  
71.3 x 97.1 cm

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## UNIVERSITY OF REGINA

3737 Wascana Parkway  
Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada  
[www2.uregina.ca/president/art/](http://www2.uregina.ca/president/art/)



**Marion Nicoll, *Utopia*, 1947**

Oil on board  
40.6 x 48.3 cm

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

### CATHARINE MASTIN

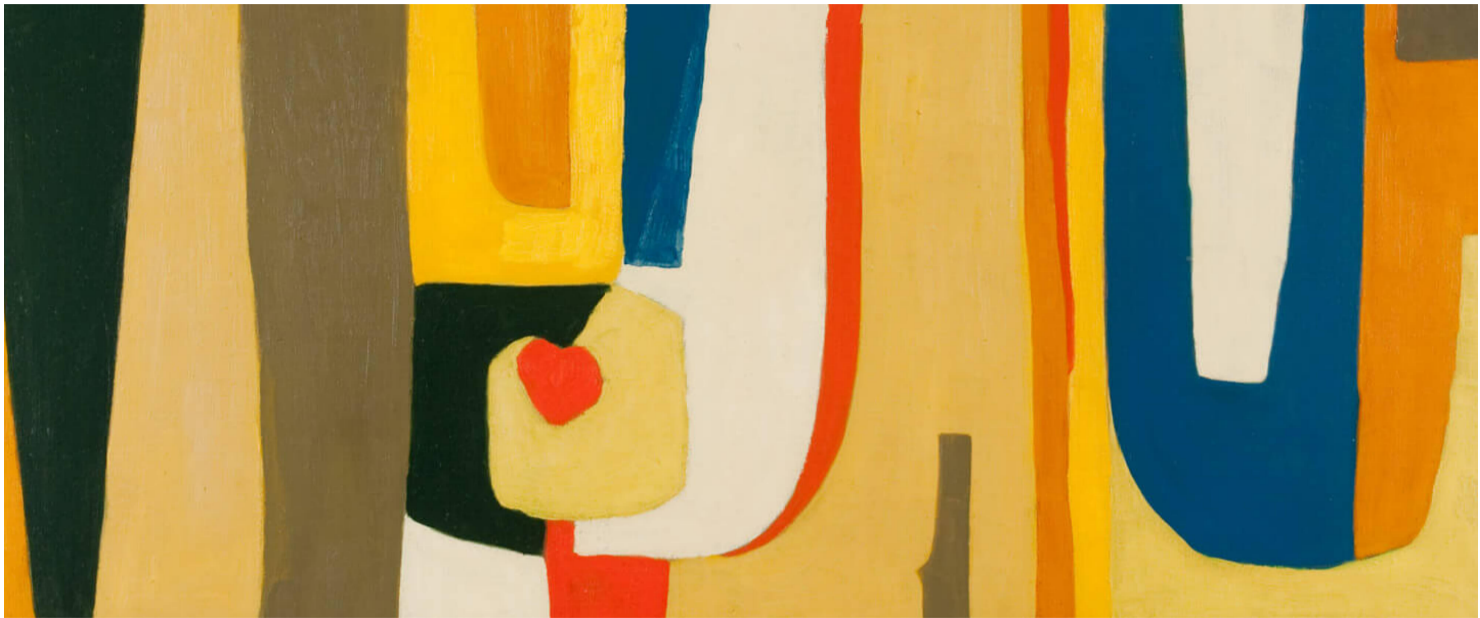
Catharine Mastin is an independent scholar and curator with specialization in modern art and feminism and is an Adjunct Member of the Faculty of Graduate Studies in Art History at York University, Toronto. She received her PhD from the University of Alberta, Edmonton in 2012 on women in artist-couple relationships. Elements of her doctoral research have been published in *Mary Pratt* (2013, 2nd edition 2016) and *Uninvited: Women in the Modern Moment* (2021). Her recent publishing projects include *Frances-Anne Johnston: Shadow Effects* (Ottawa Art Gallery, 2022) and *Territories: Brenda Francis Pelkey* (2017).

Dr. Mastin is also an experienced museologist and from 2010 to 2020 she served as the sixth Executive Director of the Art Gallery of Windsor, during which time she led the gallery through a significant organizational change process, brought the organization to a back-to-back award-winning performance record, and led it through the 75th anniversary in 2018. She served as Senior Art Curator for the Glenbow Museum, Calgary (1995-2006) and began her curatorial practice at the Art Gallery of Windsor where she served as Curator of Canadian Art (1989-1995). Her volunteer work includes service on the Board of Directors for the Ontario Association of Art Galleries including a term as President (2017-2018). Since 2014 she has served as External Advisor at the Gail and Stephen Jarislowsky Institute for Canadian Art. She is also a peer-elected member of The Arts & Letters Club of Toronto.



**“Marion Nicoll was one of six women included in my dissertation on women in artist-couples and I chose to write *Marion Nicoll: Life & Work* because of the artist’s foundational role in advancing the cause of abstract art in Western Canada and Nicoll’s pivotal role as an educator in mentoring women.”**





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4 Devonshire Place, Toronto, ON M5S 2E1

## COPYRIGHT & CREDITS

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

### From the Author

I first became aware of Marion Nicoll's work after moving to Calgary, Alberta in 1995 to become the Senior Art Curator at Glenbow Museum. My enthusiasm for her practice quickly developed into acquisitions of her work, exhibition projects, and then exploration of her artist-couple marriage to Jim Nicoll during my doctoral work at the University of Alberta between 2006 and 2010. When ACI invited a proposal from me for a monograph on an important Canadian artist, Marion Nicoll was uppermost in my mind. In private life, my sustained interest in her work has been shared by my husband, David McNamara, and also our daughter, Jennifer McNamara. It is to them I dedicate this book for they have borne witness to the many hours I have spent thinking about Nicoll, and they have heard out my many ideas and arguments at the dinner table and beyond.

To the staff at ACI, I thank them all, but most notably those with whom I have worked directly. These include Sara Angel and Michael Rattray, with whom early discussions on this book were formed. Since then, Sara Angel and Jocelyn Anderson have shepherded this project to fruition with editorial and design support from Rosie Prata and Monique Johnson. I also give special thanks to the Title Sponsors, William R. and Sidney Pieschel of Calgary, whose financial



support and endorsement has enriched this project, and to Daryl Betenia and Melanie Kjorlien of Glenbow Museum for supporting this book as a cultural partner and copyright holder for the Nicoll estate.

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Marion Nicoll, *Alberta IV: Winter Morning*, 1961. (See below for details.)

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Biography: Marion Nicoll in her studio, c.1963. (See below for details.)



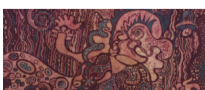
Key Works: Marion Nicoll, *Calgary II: The Ugly City*, 1964. (See below for details.)



Significance & Critical Issues: Marion Nicoll, *Badlands, Eladesor*, 1953. (See below for details.)



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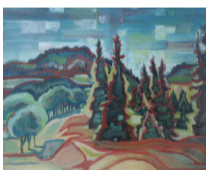
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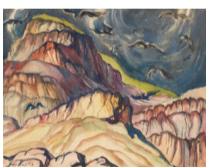
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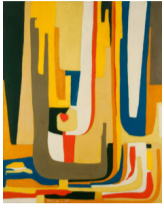


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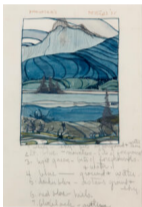
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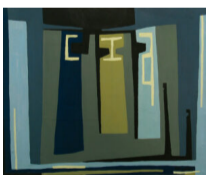
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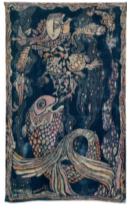


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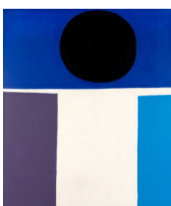
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*La Paz-Empty Mission*, #1/9 Artist's Proof, 1967. Private Collection, Calgary. Courtesy of Levis Fine Art Auctions & Appraisals, Calgary.



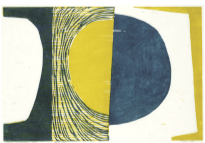
*La Paz, Red Rock Black Rock*, 1967. Collection of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, Edmonton (1973.004.009). © Glenbow Museum, Calgary.



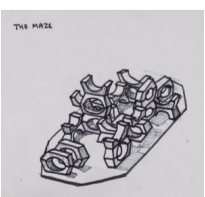
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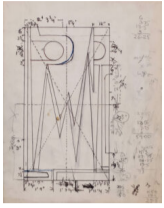
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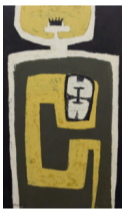
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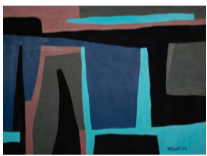
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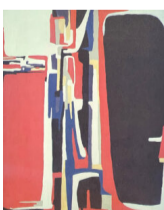
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*Self Portrait*, 1959. Location unknown. Courtesy of McMaster University Archives and Research Collections, Hamilton, from Brooks Joyner, *Marion Nicoll: R.C.A.*, Calgary: Masters Gallery, 1979. © Glenbow Museum, Calgary.



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*Sicilia*, 1959. Collection of Ellen & Daryl Fridhandler, K.C., Calgary, Alberta. Courtesy of TrépanierBaer Gallery, Calgary, Alberta. © Glenbow Museum, Calgary.



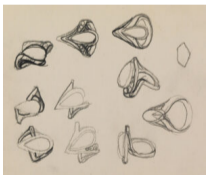
*Sicilia V: The House of Padrone*, 1959. Collection of Nickle Galleries, University of Calgary (NG1968.074.000). © Glenbow Museum, Calgary.



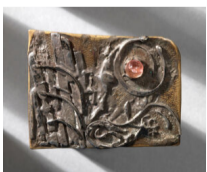
*Sicilia #1*, 1959. Collection of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, Edmonton (1973.011.002). © Glenbow Museum, Calgary.



Silver and amethyst bracelet; silver bracelet and matching earrings; sterling silver and amethyst cabochons, date unknown. Private Collection, Calgary. © Glenbow Museum, Calgary. Photo credit: Tiller Wolf.



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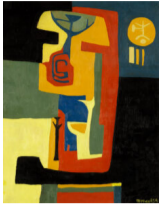
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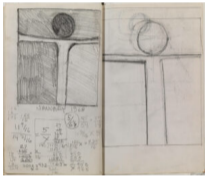
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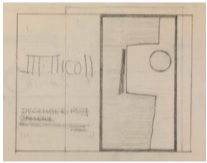
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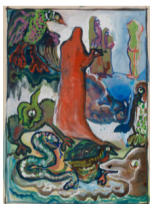
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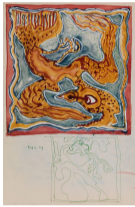


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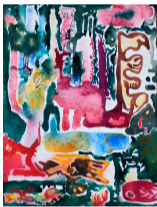
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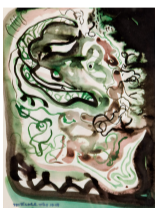
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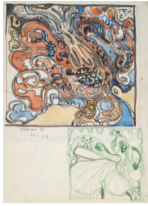
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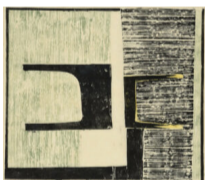
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A.C. Leighton with students at Seebe Summer School, c.1933, photographer unknown. Courtesy of Leighton Art Centre, Alberta (2010.04.345).





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Art Department instructor profile for Marion Nicoll at the Provincial Institute of Technology & Art, 1947-48. Glenbow Archives, Calgary, Marion and Jim Nicoll Fonds, file 59.



*Batik*, 1951, by Jock Macdonald. Collection of the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, gift of Joyce and Fred Zemans, Toronto, 2008 (42514). Photo Credit: NGC.



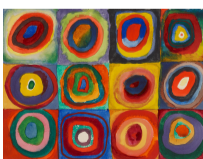
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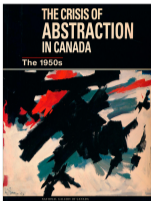


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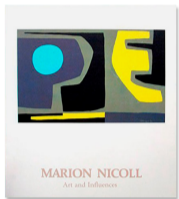
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Cover of the catalogue for the *Sixth Biennial Exhibition of Canadian Painting*, 1965, designed by Gerhard Doerrié (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1965). Courtesy of Queen's University Library, Kingston.



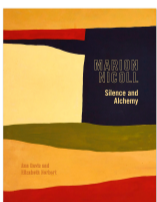
Cover of *The Crisis of Abstraction in Canada: The 1950s*, by Denise Leclerc and Marion H. Barclay (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1992).



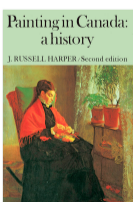
Cover of *Marion Nicoll: Art and Influences*, by Christopher Jackson (Calgary: Glenbow Museum and Art Gallery, 1986).



Cover of *Marion Nicoll: R.C.A.*, by J. Brooks Joyner (Calgary: Masters Gallery, 1979). Photo credit: Hodgins Art Auctions LTD.



Cover of *Marion Nicoll: Silence and Alchemy*, edited by Ann Davies and Elizabeth Herbert (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2013).



Cover of *Painting in Canada: A History*, by John Russell Harper (Toronto: University of Toronto Press and Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1966).



Cover of the Provincial Institute of Technology & Art Art Department calendar, 1947-48. Collection of the Glenbow Archives, Calgary, Marion and Jim Nicoll Fonds, file 59.





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*Dead Tree, Georgian Bay, c.1926*, by Arthur Lismer. McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario, gift of Mr. and Mrs. R.E. Dowsett (1969.21.1).



*Dragon Swallowing the Sun, 1964*, by ManWoman (Pat Kemball). Collection of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, Edmonton (1973.013.060). © Estate of ManWoman.



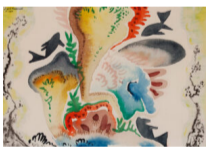
*Emily Carr in Her Studio, 1939*, by Harold Mortimer-Lamb. Collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery, gift of Claudia Beck and Andrew Gruft (VAG 2014.55.1 b).



*Female Nude Seated, Backview*, date unknown, by John Alfsen. Collection of Seneca College, Toronto. Courtesy of Cowley Abbott Fine Art, Toronto. Photo credit: Cowley Abbott.



*Figure, 1962*, by Luke Lindoe. Collection of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, Edmonton (1997.048.002). © Estate of Luke Lindoe.



*Fish Playground, 1946*, by Jock Macdonald. Collection of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts (1973.013.002).

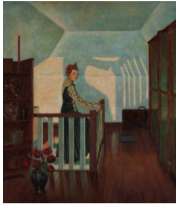


*The Gate, 1959-60*, by Hans Hofmann. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (62.1620). © 2018 Renate, Hans & Maria Hofmann Trust/Artist's Rights Society (ARS), New York.



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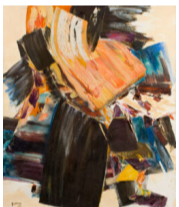
*Interior (Marion on Stairway)*, 1942, by Jim Nicoll. Collection of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, Edmonton (1978.013.001). © Glenbow Museum, Calgary.



Jim and Marion Nicoll, date unknown, photographer unknown. Collection of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, Edmonton (1982.003.008).



Jim and Marion Nicoll in Calgary, c.1943-44, photographer unknown. Collection of the Glenbow Archives, Calgary, Marion and Jim Nicoll Fonds (PA 2435), file 4.



*Kanaka*, 1962, by Marcelle Ferron. Collection of the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, Quebec City, purchase (1971.74). © Œuvres Ferron / SOCAN (2022).



*Leeward of the Island (1.47)*, 1947, by Paul-Émile Borduas. Collection of the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa (6098). © Estate of Paul-Émile Borduas / SOCAN (2022). Photo credit: NGC.



*Lounge Exhibition*, Marion and Jim Nicoll, date unknown, photographer unknown. Collection of the Glenbow Museum, Calgary, Marion Nicoll Artist's File.



Marion Mackay on horseback, Bow Forest Reserve, date unknown, photographer unknown. Collection of the Glenbow Archives, Calgary.





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Marion Nicoll, date unknown, photographer unknown. Collection of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, Edmonton (1982.003.007).



Marion Nicoll as a seventeen-year-old during her first year of education at the Ontario College of Art, Toronto, 1926, photographer unknown. Collection of the Glenbow Archives, Calgary, Marion and Jim Nicoll Fonds (PA 2435), file 4.



Marion Nicoll Gallery, Alberta University of the Arts, Calgary. Courtesy of the Marion Nicoll Gallery, Calgary.



Marion Nicoll in her studio, c.1963, photographer unknown. Collection of the Glenbow Archives, Calgary, Marion and Jim Nicoll Fonds (PA 2435), file 22.



Marion Nicoll sketching at Sunshine, Banff Summer Session, 1946, photographer unknown. Collection of the Glenbow Archives, Calgary (PA 2435), file 9.



Marion Nicoll standing before *February 1967*, 1967, in 1969, photographer unknown. Collection of the Glenbow Museum, Calgary, Marion Nicoll Artist's File.



Marion Nicoll undertaking a batik demonstration with *Procession of Birds* (1956). Image published in *Calgary Albertan*, November 30, 1957, photographer unknown. Courtesy of the National Gallery of Canada Library and Archives, Ottawa, Marion Nicoll Artist's File.



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*Moskau II (Moscow II)*, 1916, by Wassily Kandinsky. Private Collection.



National Gallery, Ottawa, February 1900, photograph by Topley Studio. Collection of Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, purchase, 1936 (PA-028157). Courtesy of Library and Archives Canada / The Brechin Group Inc.



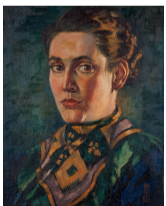
*No. 3/No. 13*, 1949, by Mark Rothko. Collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, bequest of Mrs. Mark Rothko through The Mark Rothko Foundation, Inc (428.1981). © 1998 Kate Rothko Prizel & Christopher Rothko / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.



*Orange Bird*, 1946, by Jock Macdonald. Collection of The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa, gift of M. Sharf, 1983 (1983MJ38).



Portrait of Jim Nicoll, c.1939-42, photographer unknown. Libraries and Cultural Resources Digital Collections, University of Calgary (CU1170663). Courtesy of Libraries and Cultural Resources Digital Collections, University of Calgary.



*Portrait of Marion*, 1935, by Jim Nicoll. Collection of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, Edmonton (1981.046.054).



Portrait of Marion Nicoll, date unknown, photographer unknown. Collection of the Glenbow Archives, Calgary, Marion and Jim Nicoll Fonds (PA-2435).





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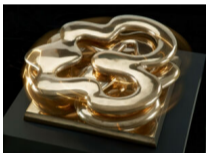
Postcard of beach resort in La Paz, Mexico, c.1960. Courtesy of eBay.



Postcard of Calgary, Alberta, 1929. Courtesy of Internet Archive.



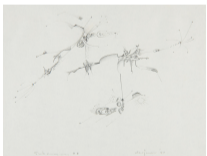
Postcard of New York City, 1959.



*Puddle I*, 1976, by Katie Ohe. Collection of the Glenbow Museum, Calgary, purchased with the support of the Canada Council for the Arts Acquisition Assistance Program and with the Glenbow Collection Endowment Fund, 1999 (998.039.001A-C). © Katie Ohe.



*Solitaire*, date unknown, by Jim Nicoll. Collection of the Glenbow Museum, Calgary (81.64.2R). © Glenbow Museum, Calgary.



*Subconscious #3*, 1960, by Alex Janvier. Collection of the Canadian Museum of History, Gatineau (VI-D-170, IMG2016-0118-002). © Alex Janvier.



*Time Machine Series*, 1961, by Joyce Wieland. Collection of the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, gift from the McLean Foundation, 1966 (65/25). © National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.



*The Three Chickens*, 1958-59, by Glen Alps. Collection of the Smithsonian American Art Museum, gift of Professor Emeritus Glen E. Alps and Ruby M. Alps (1993.39.6). © 1978, Glen E. Alps.



Untitled (Banff Summer Session), 1946, photographer unknown. Collection of the Glenbow Archives, Calgary, Marion and Jim Nicoll Fonds (PA 2435), file 9.



*View of Edmonton from the North Saskatchewan*, 1930, by A.C. Leighton. Collection of the Glenbow Archives, Calgary (63.26.13). © Glenbow Museum, Calgary.



*West Wind*, 1932, by Duncan Grant. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, given by Mrs. Graham Rawson (T.130-1972). © Estate of Duncan Grant.

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Life & Work by Catharine Mastin

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