



*Painting is just a craft. It's what you do with it that makes it art.*  
Bob Boyer, 1994

## **The Legacy of Bob Boyer A Teacher's Guide**



Bob Boyer during the powwow held in conjunction with the MacKenzie Art Gallery opening of the exhibition, *The Powwow: An Art History*, 2000.  
Photo: MacKenzie Art Gallery

## **Bob Boyer**

Boyer graduated from the Regina Campus of the University of Saskatchewan with a Bachelor of Education (Art) in 1971. He then worked for several years throughout the province in various capacities as an educator, including his position as Community Program Officer for the MacKenzie Art Gallery from 1973 to 1975. In 1978, Boyer joined the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College (now the First Nations University of Canada) in Regina where he worked until his untimely death in 2004. He actively participated in the development of the Indian Fine Arts Program at the College, where he became Head of the Department of Indian Fine Arts (1980-1998; 2001-2004) and was appointed a full Professor of Indian Art History in 2004. Within both this academic environment and various community arts initiatives throughout the country, Boyer's influence on countless artists and students is far-reaching.

In his myriad roles, Boyer continually championed the need for the heightened recognition of Aboriginal art and artists in Canada. He was a Board member of the national advocacy organization, the Society of Canadian Artists of Native Ancestry, since its founding in 1983. He served as co-chair with Alfred Young Man in 1990-1992. SCANA is recognized as an important organization that effectively lobbied for the inclusion of contemporary Aboriginal art at institutions throughout Canada during the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Boyer began painting highly representative portraits and landscapes in the early 1970s with a gradual transition to large-scale oil paintings. His use of abstract symbolism and vibrant colours began happening by the late 1970s. Consistent throughout his extensive career is the important role of the traditions and values of Northern Plains Aboriginal people. While Boyer worked in a variety of media, he is perhaps best known for his acclaimed series of blanket paintings that he began in 1983 following a trip to Japan and China. Using flannel blankets as the painting surface, Boyer combined elements of historical Northern Plains design with personal symbology and contemporary references. For the most part, these “blanket statements” are politically-charged depictions of the devastating impact of colonial imperatives upon Aboriginal philosophies, land, religions and cultures.

In the last decade of his life, Boyer’s art celebrated Indigenous experience, cosmology and spirituality throughout the world. Boyer’s exhibition history parallels the recent history of Aboriginal art in Canada, his work being included in most of the major group exhibitions throughout the country over the past twenty-five years.

Lee-Ann Martin, Curator



*A Seven Arrow Storm, 1984*

*How does the son of a barber get to be an icon of Native Canadian painting?*

### **The Path: Early Influences**

*In this section we explore Bob's formal education at school and his informal education gained through personal and professional experiences. We look at the path he traveled, the choices he made and some of the guidance he received along the way.*

Bob Boyer was born in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan on July 20, 1948. He grew up in St. Louis and later attended high school in Prince Albert. It is interesting to note that Boyers are listed among the first settlers of the tiny village of St. Louis, which is located approximately halfway between Prince Albert and Batoche. Ancestors on both sides of Bob's family fought and died at Batoche during the Metis<sup>2</sup> resistance of the North-West Rebellion. The City of Prince Albert is known as Saskatchewan's gateway to the North and, per capita, is home to the highest concentration of Aboriginal people in Canada.<sup>3</sup>

So if one wishes to believe that one is placed upon their path at birth, Bob was born halfway between Batoche, an historic site that commemorates the turbulent history of the Metis people, and Prince Albert, a vital community rife with the challenges of healing and building bridges for the future. It was perhaps the perfect place for Bob's journey to begin.

In high school Bob started dating Ann McGuinness (they would eventually marry and have two sons), and when Bob graduated in 1967 he signed on as a surveyor in Northern Saskatchewan:

*Then a strange thing happened. I planned to stay on as a surveyor and didn't intend to go to university. A friend, Guy Palmer, was after me to go to university to take art. One weekend I was home in Prince Albert and received a form in the mail from the university. My application had been accepted. Included was a lot of classes I was supposed to be taking. He had registered me, so I thought I might as well go.<sup>4</sup>*



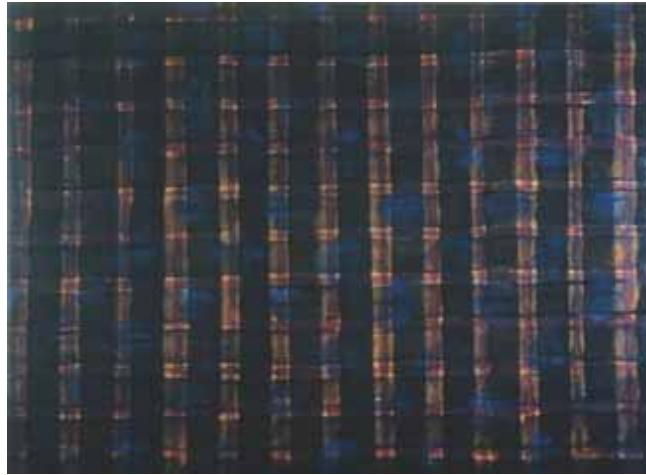
*On the Way to Melfort, 1970—71*

Bob attended the University of Saskatchewan, Regina Campus from 1968 to 1971. At school he encountered teachers who were members of a group of modernist painters known as the Regina Five. There was also an influx of new ideas and new artists on the scene influenced by California Funk. These were important influences in the history of art in Regina and one might assume both had some impact on Bob's development as a painter. However, Bob is quoted as saying:

*Maybe they affected my art, they must have. The influence was probably more personal. They were just very good to me, that's all.<sup>5</sup>*

Ted Godwin (a member of the Regina Five) was one of Bob's first art professors and he would also become a close, life-long friend.

## Suggested Activity



Ted Godwin, *Tartan for Me Running*, 1968

### A Tartan Painting

*Students will make an abstract painting. They will explore overlapping colours, colour symbolism and learn that one can “read” an abstract composition.*

**Context:** Although Godwin’s Tartan paintings may appear as pure abstraction, tartans can have symbolic meaning. Consider the colour symbolism of the **Saskatchewan Tartan**:

*Saskatchewan’s official tartan... has seven colours with gold representing prairie wheat; brown for summerfallow; green for the forests; red for the prairie lily; yellow for rapeseed flower and sun flower; white for snow; and black for oil and coal.<sup>6</sup>*

### To Make a Tartan Painting

You will need:

- heavy-weight paper
- tempera or acrylic paint. Choose colours that are personally significant, or that relate to a theme
- corrugated cardboard cut into small rectangles, 3 – 6 cm wide

Using cardboard in place of brushes allows you to drag the paint evenly across the surface of your paper. To create a tartan painting start by dipping a piece of cardboard into one colour and paint lengthwise across the paper in fairly even rows. Choose another colour and another width of cardboard and paint stripes in another direction. Lines can be horizontal, vertical and diagonal. Let the lines start to overlap and watch as the colours mix and change as layers of semi-transparent paint allow for many interesting variations.

**Discuss:** Look at examples of paintings by Ted Godwin and Bob Boyer. Are there similarities? Differences?

**Optional:** Try using the same materials to make a painting in the style of Bob Boyer.

After university Bob had various jobs that took him into many remote Northern communities, frequently by float plane. He encountered many people who were still living relatively traditional lifestyles, and although Bob was traveling as a teacher, an administrator and a personnel officer, he also entered communities with an interest in learning about them. His artwork was beginning to reflect the culture of the Northern Plains and his growing understanding of traditions such as shamanic spirit drawings.

Bob's interest and developing knowledge in traditional First Nations art inspired him to approach the MacKenzie Art Gallery with an exhibition proposal:

*Boyer's interest in design became the premise for the groundbreaking exhibition 100 Years of Saskatchewan Indian Art: 1830–1930 ..., which he curated for the Norman Mackenzie Art Gallery in 1975. His design analysis of the stylistic differences between Cree, Assiniboine, Sioux, Blackfoot and Saulteaux objects – as works of art – departed significantly from the anthropological material culture studies of the time. Boyer's premise extended equally to all objects contained in the two-part circulating exhibition.<sup>7</sup>*

The exhibition was important for its acknowledgment of the relevance of “Indian art” within the arts community.

In 1978 Bob was hired by the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College (Regina Campus) as a program consultant to write the curriculum for its Department of Indian Art. Bob soon became an Assistant Professor and then Head of the Department. This provided a tremendous opportunity for Bob to draw together his many experiences, to develop an art program that would encompass elements of his formal education and traditional learning, and to start a dialogue about the spaces in-between:

*I wanted to develop a program that brought all the cultural elements of Indian art together: spirituality, design, as well as ancient history. I also wanted to bring it up to date with the attitudes of mainstream art.<sup>8</sup>*

## Looking Back: Traditional Values

*In this section we further explore the influence of Northern Plains traditional culture on Bob's development.*

*An element of Boyer's work that has not changed is its incorporation of Plains Indian motifs. Boyer's close association with the Plains Indian community is linked to his passion for the powwow which is central to his life and art. To Indian people powwows are a celebration of their culture, a confirmation of their identity. The colour, pattern, and the movement of the powwow, stimulated by the rhythm and song of the drum group have an undeniable presence in his paintings. Boyer participates actively in the powwow circuit on the northern plains during the summer months when he is not as involved with his teaching duties at the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College. A visit to Boyer's home may find him and his wife, Ann, making various components of powwow clothing - bustles, head dresses and spreaders, breastplates, aprons, moccasins, chokers, bells, anklets, or beadwork including belts, armbands, headbands, cuffs, capes and the like - which he has designed either for himself or on commission for others. The powwow outfits are under close scrutiny by the Plains Indian community for cultural correctness and appropriateness of their design elements. In his paintings, however, Boyer uses Plains Indian design elements or geometric motifs, ranging from pyramids to crosses and triangles, both for their formal design possibilities and to convey the substance of personal meditations.*

### **Suggested Activity: Make a Painted Paper Envelope**

*Students will explore traditional designs and begin to understand cultural significance of symbols and images. They will begin to develop their own symbolic images.*

In the early 1980s, Bob created paintings that related to the symbolism and structure of the painted parfleche. Historically parfleches were box-like containers made from thick rawhide and painted with geometric designs. The word parfleche actually comes from the French noun *fleche*—arrow, and the verb *parer*—to ward off.



*Dakota parfleche*, date unknown, rawhide, paint, 19.5 x 34.0 x 21.0 cm, Collection of the Royal Saskatchewan Museum (E418.14/4547).  
Photo: Don Hall

You will need:

- A large sheet of paper
- Painting and/or drawing materials of choice
- Ribbon, sinew, or string

Before you start:

Research traditional parfleche designs.  
Review design elements in the work of Bob Boyer.  
Consider bilateral symmetry.

Folding procedure:

- Fold paper in half lengthwise. Unfold, and fold each side in to the middle. Turn and fold in half lengthwise. Unfold again, and fold both sides in to the middle (overlap the inside edges to allow for holes for the ties)

#### Decoration Options:

- Use geometric designs and bilateral symmetry.
- Reflect Bob's incorporation of traditional design with contemporary materials and concerns.
- Choose a theme such as The Natural Environment, Taking a Stand, The Spirit of the Landscape
- Reflect the theme of a multi-layered self-portrait
- Study traditional Indigenous designs and create painted envelopes to represent various cultures.

### **Beadwork Design**

*Traditional beadwork design also provided stimuli for the art of Bob Boyer.*

When glass beads were introduced to First Nations people by European settlers, these beads became very important to many groups. They were described in several First Nations languages using terminology that had typically been reserved to describe gifts from the spirit world, and were so valuable that a horse might be traded for just a handful of them.<sup>9</sup>

During the Reservation Era, which lasted from the late-nineteenth- until the early-twentieth-century, the mobility of First Nations people was limited. One effect this had was the creation of more leisure time that many used for activities including, but not limited to, weaving, basketry, beadwork and quillwork.<sup>10</sup> The blossoming of these so-called “women’s arts,” the products of which came to represent the nation’s ethnicity, may have occurred in response to a popular Euro-Canadian-held belief at the time that the First Nations way of life was a dying one.<sup>11</sup>

Stylistic and technical approaches to beadwork differ from region to region as well as from nation to nation and the attribution of such works to a particular nation is not always straightforward—in the past and present, summers witness the gathering of Plains peoples for festive occasions at which artists show each other their most recent works, in effect sharing design ideas with each other that individuals could then adapt and incorporate into their own respective design vocabulary.<sup>12</sup>

The latter half of the twentieth century witnessed a reconsideration of the gender roles in First Nations art production; beadwork, which was traditionally considered to be a woman’s art, is currently practiced by men as well as women.<sup>13</sup>



*Design for Marie, 1986*

*In 1986, [Bob] created two beautifully-lyrical floral beadwork designs: one for his mother, Design for Leona ... and another for his sister, Design for Marie.<sup>14</sup>*

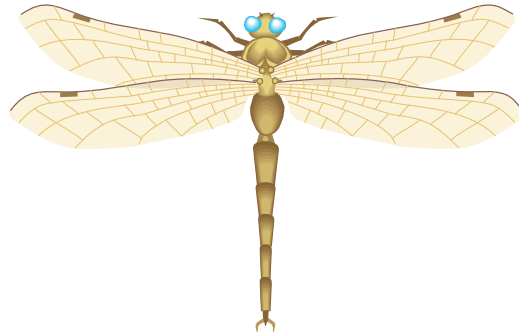
How is the design similar to other art works by Bob Boyer? How is it different?

## 1. Symmetry in Nature

*Students will understand bilateral symmetry in nature*

*The natural environment is the traditional teacher of the natural order of things.*

Symmetry in biology is the balanced distribution of duplicate body parts or shapes. In bilateral symmetry one half is an approximate mirror image of the other (sometimes called reflection symmetry). For example, the elaborate patterns on the wings of a butterfly are one example of bilateral symmetry.



List examples of symmetry in nature

Find images and create a Symmetry in Nature display

Make copies of the images and let students divide them symmetrically

Draw your favourite

## 2. Folded Paper Symmetrical Painting.

*Students will understand symmetry and balance in art.*

You will need:

- Drawing paper
- tempera or acrylic paints
- brushes

Prepare by looking at examples of traditional beadwork design and symmetrical paintings by Bob Boyer.

Fold the paper in half and open again.

You will paint a design on one side, fold the paper and rub the two sides together.

Method 1:

- Work from a plan. Make a light pencil sketch on one side of the paper. To transfer the paint from the one side to the other you will have to paint a little bit at a time. Each time you paint a bit, fold and press.

Method 2:

- Start painting without a plan. Make a line or two on one side, fold and press. When you see the results, plan your next lines. Continue.

Other options: Find a beadwork design that you really like and use it as a model for your *Folded Paper Symmetrical Painting*.

### **3. Beadwork Design Activity**

*Students will create a beadwork design.*

You will need:

- paper
- pencils
- coloured pencils

Following the previous two activities, make your own beadwork design.

### **A Design for Someone**

*Students will consider the value of quiet reflection or meditation in the creative process.*

*Students will respectfully and thoughtfully create a gift.*

Everyone must have a partner – known or secret. To make a design for your partner you will need to find out pertinent information – favourite colours, activities, symbols, dreams.

Once you have gathered information it is time for quiet reflection.

Go for a walk, sit in nature, meditate, listen to music.

Make symbolic drawings for the information on your list. Close your eyes and try to arrange the images you have collected from your partner. Open your eyes and start to create.

Option: Incorporate bilateral symmetry.

Once you feel that you are ready, create the design for your partner. Present the design as a gift.

### **Blanket Statements: Finding One's Voice**

*Students will explore the development of Bob's concern for the issues of Indigenous peoples. Students will make interpretations of paintings of this period and reflect upon issues for Indigenous cultures. Students will make art about personal and cultural issues.*

*In October 1983, Boyer painted his first blanket, *A Smallpox Issue...*, which was actually a flannel sheet, not a blanket, heralding a new direction that was at once political and narrative, abstract and provocatively traditional.<sup>15</sup>*

The following have all been cited as reasons why Bob began painting on blankets:

- He had traveled to China and was impressed by the abstract designs of the rugs in portable Mongolian dwellings known as yurts.
- He found stretching canvas to be a tedious process.
- He was referring to the painted aprons affixed to the interior of a tipi, and to the painted tipi as well.
- He saw tipi liners as the perfect portable artwork.
- He was thinking about a blanket's ability to receive, enclose, and protect.
- It references the tradition of giving blankets as gifts within Aboriginal cultures.
- We are born and wrapped in a blanket: baby blankets.
- He had an old blanket in his studio, and in a moment of frustration he picked it up, drove nails into it and started to paint.<sup>16</sup>

Compare and contrast *A Smallpox Issue* with *A Government Blanket Policy*



*A Smallpox Issue*, 1983

Look at the two paintings. What are the similarities? What are the differences? Based on your observations only, describe what you think might be important to the artist, then read the context for each painting. Keep in mind that there are no right and wrong answers. Even with the information provided, students should know that all interpretations are valid and artists most often appreciate new insights into their work.



*A Government Blanket Policy*, 1983

### **Context: A Smallpox Issue**

*A Smallpox Issue addresses the deliberate and horrific impregnation of the smallpox virus into government-issued blankets distributed to Aboriginal populations during the nineteenth century. The brightly-coloured dots in the central panel read as fever sores from the disease that decimated scores of Aboriginal people. Three tipis at the top balance the strip of bloodied and red land at the bottom of the blanket. This work is a stunning verbal and political allegory that relates directly to the blanket itself as subject. "In fact, the whole gesture of the artist selling blankets back to the whites in the form of art is a highly ironic and political act."<sup>7</sup>*

### **Context: A Government Blanket Policy**

*The three tipis appear again in the bottom centre of A Government Blanket Policy and become a recurring symbol of Aboriginal cultural history, self determination, spirituality and sovereignty. The combined British and American flags are reversed and superimposed over the upside-down tipis to represent the conflation in "blanket policies" of the two countries that dominated Aboriginal rights and decimated Aboriginal peoples in North America. The inverted tipis here become a metaphor for a world forever turned upside-down for the continent's Indigenous populations. The Union Jack signifies the British role in developing treaties within their Canadian territories. The "X" at centre-left suggests a black mark on both countries for the wrong enacted, while also alluding to the signing of treaties by First Nations peoples who did not write or understand English. It is interesting to note that the American flag was also a popular design motif among the Lakota and Dakota during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>18</sup>*

How does reading the information impact your interpretation of the paintings?

Why were these paintings significant in the development of Bob's career?

## More Blanket Statements

### *Trains-N-Boats-N-Plains: The Nina, the Santa Maria and a Pinto*



*Trains-N-Boats-N-Plains: The Nina, the Santa Maria and a Pinto, 1991*

#### An interpretive strategy

Start by making a simple list of the words that come to mind as you look at this artwork. This can include colours, shapes, identifiable objects, words—anything at all.

Next consider how the artwork was created. Where did the artist begin? Do you think he worked on all the panels at the same time? Did he paint one at a time? What are some of the decisions he would have made in the process?

What appears to be important to this artist?

If this painting was used as the cover artwork for a book, what do you imagine would be the content of the book?

#### Contextual Information

In 1992 several exhibitions were organized in response to the celebration of 500 years since the “discovery” of North America by Christopher Columbus. Bob was invited to participate in INDIGENA: Perspectives of Indigenous Peoples on Five Hundred Years. This exhibition, organized by the Canadian Museum of Civilization, invited contemporary Aboriginal artists to challenge the "celebration" and respond to issues such as colonization.

## Reading the Artwork

**The title** - makes reference to the three ships of Christopher Columbus' famous voyage to North America, and to the song, *Trains and Boats and Planes*, by Burt Bacharach. Boyer often employed wordplay in his titles that can serve as keys to understanding multiple references in his paintings. Changing "Planes" to "Plains" is a reference to the geographical region in North America, and altering the Pinta to "a Pinto" is an inside joke that plays upon the stereotype of a "rez car."

**Turtle Island** – refers to North America before Christopher Columbus, and in fact many Aboriginal people still refer to North America as Turtle Island.

**Verdrangung** – a German word Boyer heard on the radio while working on this painting. Its interpretation suggests that one can suppress and repress a memory as if it didn't happen. Boyer heard it within the context of the Holocaust, in discussing how a younger generation is able to "carry on" by personally and culturally suppressing this horrific historical event.

**The Three Crosses** – can have multiple interpretations. Most viewers see them as Christian iconography and read them as indicating religious suppression of Aboriginal culture. In the context of Christopher Columbus, they can also be envisioned as the ships' masts as they might have appeared from the shore. Boyer also provided another interpretation: upon discovering new land an explorer would drive his sword into the earth; Aboriginal people reference the earth as Mother.

**Pipe bowls** – reference Aboriginal peace pipes.

**Triangles** – Often triangular shapes can be read as tipis. Boyer's travel and research extended his iconography to be inclusive of other indigenous cultures leading to his use of the stepped pyramid as another common triangular shape.

**Black Marks** – When Boyer added the word Verdrangung to the painting he misspelled it. He used the black paint to correct the spelling and took out the first "N", but then re-balanced the imagery by adding other black marks, and in doing so, also blotted out some of the peace pipes.

**Red Paint Drips** – Boyer's earlier blanket paintings also employed dripping red paint and had significant political references. They allude to the bloodshed of Aboriginal people.

**Perspective** – Boyer often employed aerial perspective. Mountains and tipis are presented horizontally or from an aerial view directly above the land. This created a kind of "Cosmic landscape."<sup>19</sup>

**Parcels** – On the floor are objects wrapped in maps. They appear as gifts, but the wire and chain that ties them presents a contradiction – when is a gift not a gift? In conjunction with the other references to Columbus and colonization, they become contentious "parcels of land."

**Skull and Cross Bones** – pirates, poison, graveyards, ancestors are all possible interpretations.

**Blankets** –Boyer’s paintings on blankets, and their provocative titles, often contrasted the traditional and cultural symbolism of a blanket (security, warmth, generosity) with difficult issues related to the colonization of North America.

What is your interpretation of this artwork? Does it create a good opportunity for reflection? In your opinion, can art make a difference?

### **Make a Statement**

*Students will make an artwork related to an important issue.*

This project can be done individually, or in small groups.

Choose an issue and collect an assortment of materials and images to represent your ideas. Lay out your ideas into a visual design. Play with the way you use images and words. Combine, arrange, alter, distort, blend, isolate and re-organize your images.

Incorporate drawing, painting and writing.

*Now you are ready to begin.* Take this visual research and start to plan your artwork. Write about the intent, the process and the results. Add comments such as, “What I would really like to do with this concept is...”

Make the artwork, display and discuss. Invite others into a dialogue with you about your concerns.

### **An Apprenticeship Activity**

*Students will create an artwork similar in style to the work of Bob Boyer.*

Look for symbols and images that express notions of personal and cultural identity. Play with the images, altering them to fit within a geometric format (using graph paper may be helpful).

Review Boyer’s use of symmetry and balance.

Sketch the design for your identity portrait painting.

Transfer the design to your painting surface.

Review Boyer’s use of colour and layering of paint.

Select colors that are personally and culturally significant.

Paint colours in layers, allowing one layer to dry before adding the next layer.

Allow areas of colour to show through, and earlier edges to show up as outlines of the shapes.

## **Blanket Painting**

Students will work in groups of three to five people.

Each group is provided a blanket.

Prepare the blankets with a ground. Exterior white latex primer is suggested.

Preparation:

Each student working on a large piece of paper--as large as possible--will start to organize important images and symbols.

*Look at the paintings of Bob Boyer for inspiration. Research other First Nations and Metis artists. Look for artists who make big paintings. Reflect upon similarities and differences in the artists' approaches.*

With your own sketches in hand, start to discuss the ways to bring the various concepts together. Do a large group sketch that incorporates some of each individual's ideas and images. Ensure that each member of the group feels that they are represented in the final sketch.

Paint the blanket considering all of the elements -- colour, shape, texture, line. Is one more prominent than the others? Resolve.

## Looking forward: The Spiritual Landscapes

*This section looks at the importance of nature, concepts of harmony and balance, and the cyclical nature of the universe.*

*In the last decade of his life, Boyer's art celebrates Indigenous experience, cosmology and spirituality throughout the world.*

*For Bob Boyer and other artists of Native North American ancestry, an underlying spirituality pervades the natural world and all human activities and relationships. This world view is an integral force in Boyer's life, and one that lies at the foundation of his art practice.<sup>20</sup>*

The Lakota was a true naturalist –  
a lover of Nature.  
He loved the Earth...  
the attachment growing with age....

[T]he old Lakota was wise....

[H]e knew that lack of respect for  
growing, living things  
soon led to lack of respect  
for humans too.

So he kept his youth close to its  
softening influence.<sup>21</sup>

*Chief Standing Bear (Lakota)*

*What I remember most is how deeply Bob connected to nature – to Mother Earth, and how appreciative he was of all her gifts. Bob once said, "Mother Earth treats us so well. Do you know there are children who do not know where food comes from? There are kids who believe milk comes from a cardboard box. There are people who do not know where things go when they flush. Look after your Mother".*

*When I consider the legacy of Bob Boyer and what that legacy would include, I believe that it would undoubtedly include the recognition of a need to keep our children close to the Earth and to its "softening influence," to educate our children as complete and whole human beings, so they may become the nurturers, the keepers of the seed, and perpetuate a legacy of "connectedness."*

*Therefore, this teacher's resource package has as one of its main objectives the opportunity for students to develop skills, creativity and inspiration, through the extraordinary experience of art, while connecting with Mother Earth and to the extraordinary magic and wonder of her many gifts.<sup>22</sup>*

### **Bob's Summer Art Class**

One summer Bob taught a weekend workshop to a group of teens. He started with a brief talk about finding inspiration in nature. Participants were then instructed to go outside, find a quiet space in the park, sit and do nothing.

Bob had collected willow branches for the workshop. When the students had finished their "meditation" in nature they were invited to take the branches and some other materials, and construct an outdoor sculpture.

Take students into the natural environment.

When it is not feasible, Bring Nature In.

Set up a nature display or make a Nature Mobile.

Participants will understand that nature is a wonderful aesthetic stimulus, and that "closeness with nature" can be achieved within the four walls of the classroom.

You will need:

Branch or stick

Natural collected objects such as: pebbles, pine cones, leaves, wildflowers, twigs, nuts, apples, mushrooms, string, twine or sinew

Procedure:

Tie collected nature objects to branch or stick with twine, string or sinew.

Tie twine or string onto branch to hang.

### **Pastel Painting Activity**

You will need:

- Coloured paper or pastel paper (at least 12" x 28")
- Chalk pastels or oil pastels

Procedure:

- Connect with nature. Go for a walk, sit in a park. Take your time. Wait until some level of change comes over you from being in a natural environment.
- Write a poem, diarize your experience, sketch.

Review concepts of balance, symmetry and symbolism. Look at the chalk or oil pastels.

Consider colour and texture. Create.

## **Thank-You Earth**

You will need:

Markers

Watercolours

Brushes

Paper

Water

Poems and pictures that portray your gratitude for Earth's natural resources.

**Discuss:** What natural wonders of Earth make our planet unique? Choose one topic that really interests you, such as water, mountains, or endangered species. Research information on how these natural wonders can be preserved now for the future.

Outline a scene that reflects the beauty of nature.

Paint.

Write a colourful accompanying poem thanking Earth for its natural gifts. Describe the beauty represented in your painting, and convey the urgency for preservation of resources in a convincing way.

Create a scene with a grandparent or other older person who remembers what used to be.

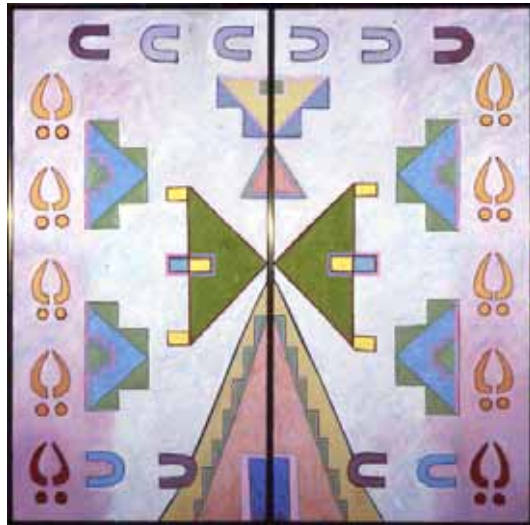
## **Contemporary Fresco Painting**

In an interview with his friend and art dealer James Kurtz, Bob Boyer referred to his use of petroglyphs in the painting *Scene/Seen at St. Victor's*, as looking to history as a way to reflect upon the present. He saw this painting as “a representation of the ongoing existence of the Indian community,” and that “the past is the present, and the present is the past.”

He was also interested in historical painting techniques. Indeed, some of Bob's earliest paintings were painted with egg tempera, a paint composed of egg yolk, water and dry pigment, popular at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. He was also something of a revisionist in that he considered rock painting and petroglyphs to be pre-cursors to fresco painting. He developed his own contemporary fresco technique by mixing paint with drywall plaster, and applying it to a surface covered in burlap.

*Scene/Seen at St. Victor's*

One of the inspirations for *Scene/Seen at St. Victor's* is the petroglyph site at St. Victor Provincial Park in Saskatchewan. Ask students if they know what a petroglyph is, and if they have been to the St. Victor site.



*Scene/Seen at St. Victor's*, 1993

**St. Victor Petroglyph site**



Detail of petroglyphs at St. Victor Provincial Park, Saskatchewan. Photo: Saskatchewan Archives Board, (R-PS 84-2454-146)

## What is Fresco Painting?

Fresco is:

*Wall-painting in a medium like watercolour on plaster.... buon fresco [or true fresco], practiced in Italy from the 13<sup>th</sup> century and perfected in the 16<sup>th</sup>, is one of the most permanent forms of wall decoration known.... an area [of the wall] ... is covered with.... damp plaster... then painted with pigments mixed with plain water or lime-water, allowance being made for the fact that the colours dry much lighter. Because the plaster is still damp a chemical reaction takes place and the colours become integrated with the wall itself...<sup>23</sup>*

## Contemporary Fresco Painting

*Boyer begins ... with fresco, a painting technique, currently little used, in which paint is directly applied onto limestone plaster walls rather than canvas. (Boyer has substituted drywall compound on plywood out of conservation and portability concerns.) Although fresco is familiar to many students of European art history who trace its use from early Roman villas through to the chapel paintings of Giotto to the masterworks of Leonardo and Michelangelo during the Italian Renaissance, it is according to Boyer a technique with a longer linear heritage than this accepted history would have us believe. Boyer not only identifies this technique as one practiced by indigenous peoples the world over but links it directly to the earliest extant visual expressions in human history, cave and rock paintings. He cites many examples of painting on rock from those over 15000 year old caves found at Lascaux in Southern France, to the pictographic images on rock found throughout North America, to the more ritualized and hence formalized images found on the walls of Incan and Mayan stone temples. By equating his own use of fresco here to its use by (much) earlier indigenous peoples, Boyer creates a divergent trans-historical reading of the practice of fresco which allows him to reclaim it from the grasp of dominant and elitist European models. Moreover, Boyer identifies visual symbolism not as a manifestation of the European tradition but as an abstract language of colours and forms long employed by indigenous artists who used it to synthetically describe and encode a variety of knowledges.<sup>24</sup>*

## Contemporary Fresco Painting Activity

### Materials:

- 12' X 18" hardboard
- tempera or acrylic paint (high-quality paint is not essential)
- drywall compound
- plastic knives, paint scrapers
- painting palettes (cardboard squares covered in wax paper works well)

### Procedure:

*You will need three painting sessions.*

#### Session 1. Developing the imagery/design

- Keep the design simple: signs and symbols, shapes and colours.

##### First Fresco Application

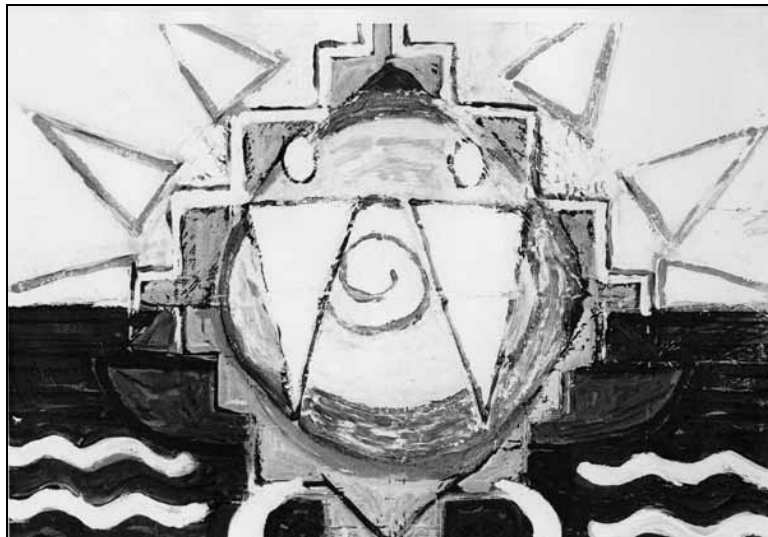
- Mix plaster with paint on your palette.
- Apply mixture to board using plastic knives or paint scrapers.
- Allow to dry.

#### Session 2. Second Fresco Application

- Apply a second layer to areas that you wish to enhance.
- Allow to dry.

#### Session 3. Finishing

- Add last layer where desired to heighten colour, or add detail.



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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Ted Godwin, "Pauses on the Pollen Path," *Bob Boyer: His Life's Work* (Regina: MacKenzie Art Gallery, 2008), 149.

<sup>2</sup> For the purposes of this publication, a choice was made to omit the accent on "Metis" out of respect for Bob Boyer's memory and his own personal preference.

<sup>3</sup> As per information published on the Statistics Canada website, <http://www12.statcan.ca/english/censuso1/Products/Analytic/companion/abor/canada.cfm#5>

<sup>4</sup> *Prince Albert Daily Herald*, 7 August 1973.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Enright, *Border Crossings*, 11 (December 1992): 53.

<sup>6</sup> Canadian Heritage, "Ceremonial and Canadian Symbols Promotion: The Symbols of Canada: Tartans," Canadian Heritage, [http://www.pch.gc.ca/progs/cpsc-ccsp/sc-cs/o6\\_e.cfm](http://www.pch.gc.ca/progs/cpsc-ccsp/sc-cs/o6_e.cfm) (accessed August 14, 2008).

<sup>7</sup> Lee-Ann Martin, "Bob Boyer: His Life's Work," *Bob Boyer: His Life's Work* (Regina: MacKenzie Art Gallery, 2008), 22.

<sup>8</sup> Enright, 54.

<sup>9</sup> Janet C. Berlo and Ruth B. Phillips, *Native North American Art* (Oxford & New York: Oxford UP, 1998), 29–30.

<sup>10</sup> Berlo and Phillips, 126.

<sup>11</sup> Berlo and Phillips, 126.

<sup>12</sup> Berlo and Phillips, 117–18.

<sup>13</sup> Berlo and Phillips, 35.

<sup>14</sup> Martin, 49.

<sup>15</sup> Martin, 34.

<sup>16</sup> Martin, 36; Enright, 54.

<sup>17</sup> Martin, 39; includes a quotation from McLuhan, 14.

<sup>18</sup> Martin, 39.

<sup>19</sup> Oko, n.p.

<sup>20</sup> Oko, n.p.

<sup>21</sup> Luther Standing Bear, *Land of the Spotted Eagle* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 192, 197.

<sup>22</sup> Susan D. Bear, "Letter to the Teacher," *Bob Boyer Legacy Project* (Regina: MacKenzie Art Gallery, 2006),

<sup>23</sup> Peter and Linda Murray, *The Penguin Dictionary of Art and Artists*, sixth edition, Penguin Reference Books (London, England: Penguin, 1989), 148.

<sup>24</sup> Jack Anderson, *Timelessness* (Regina: Rosemont Art Gallery, 1999), n.p.