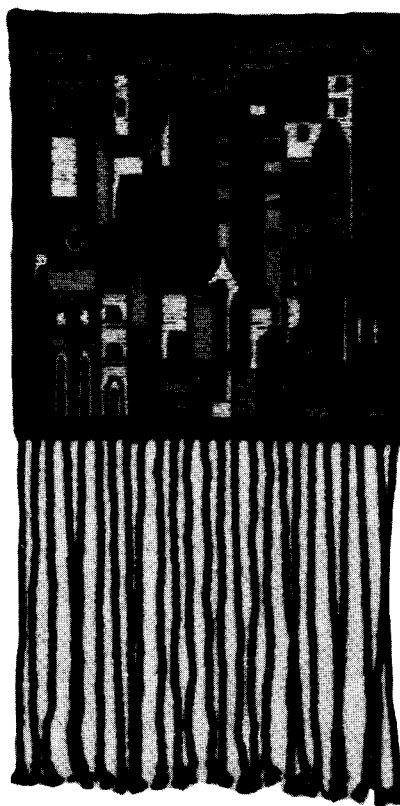


Immigrant Women's

Art Show



Pat Parnell

Une exposition d'art de femmes immigrées fut l'un des événements intéressants qui se déroulèrent lors du deuxième Institut d'été relatif aux femmes et à l'éducation (Women and Education Summer Institute) à Saskatoon en 1982. Onze artistes femmes ont fait preuve de leurs talents dans des domaines aussi divers que la peinture, la photo et la sculpture. Nombreuses parmi ces femmes étaient celles qui avaient d'impressionnants curriculum académiques comme artistiques.

An Immigrant Women's Art Show was one of the highlights of the second Women and Education Summer Institute (WESI) held at the University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, in July and August, 1982. WESI is a program of the Department of Educational Foundations, College of Education, aimed at exploring the forces that shape women's lives.

The art show was a striking demonstration of the talent that newcomers bring to Canada. Eleven artists, originally from Southeast Asia, India, Africa, South America, and Europe, exhibited oil paintings, photographs, batiks, water colours, weavings, sculptures, wax carvings, prints, and drawings. For some of the artists, this was a first public showing; for others, it was one more step in an established career. Several of the artists vividly depicted remembered homelands; others preferred to work within the framework of mainstream North American art.

The creativity and talent of these immigrant women was obvious. What surprised some viewers were the impressive academic and artistic credentials of the artists — perhaps an indication that immigrant women are still seen as appendages to their husbands. Wei Lan Wong studied art in her native South Vietnam and now pursues painting as a hobby. Rajinder Dhand has studied at two Indian universities and has master's degrees in geography, Hindi literature, and painting and drawing. Manjari Sharma studied sculpting both in India and the United States; she has expanded her artistic efforts to include batik and oil painting. Helen Weber, born in the Ukraine,

has lived in Germany and the United States. She has studied sculpting, drawing, and printmaking in Canada and now plans to develop her writing skills. Eva Mierzejewski, who is interested in commercial art, attended art school in her native Poland. Eva Sylwestrowicz, also Polish, has a master of arts degree with majors in tapestry and industrial designing. Uli Meng, originally from Austria, studied art in Canada and is especially interested in foundry work. Louise Pretorius apprenticed to an interior designer in South Africa and enjoys painting in oils. Livia Carvalho studied art education at the University of Paraiba in Brazil and is now pursuing her interest in photography.

The art show was a complement to a week-long WESI workshop for immigrant women that dealt with the special problems women face in adjusting to a new culture. The social worker who led the workshop is herself an immigrant from Chile. The beginning sessions were a reflection of problems immigrants have in the larger society: most participants were reluctant to speak because they thought their English was inadequate; cultural differences were apparent — for example, in the concern or unconcern shown for stated starting and ending times of the workshop sessions. By the end of the week, however, the participants were sorry to disband. They are now hoping to form a support group which will meet on a regular basis.

The art show itself was such a success that a Saskatoon art gallery featured an expanded version of the show in November, 1982. As a result of the press coverage of the show, a Polish immigrant in Manitoba wrote a touching letter to the Polish weaver in Saskatoon. The letter, written in English, expressed some of the loneliness and displacement felt by new Canadians, but it also included the wish that they would grow to love Canada. Those of us born in Canada hope so too.

1. Eva Sylwestrowicz, weaving
2. Rajinder Dhand, batik
3. Wei Lan Wong, watercolour

Photographs: Norm Quan, A.U. Services, University of Saskatchewan

