Michael's World
A GENERATION OF STUDIO ARTISTS IN OLD TOWN VICTORIA

Through the 1970s to the 1990s, more than one hundred artists and craftpeople took up studio spaces in the semi-abandoned and derelict buildings of Old Town. The lively cultural community created by these artists sparked the rejuvenation of this historical district. Responding to the artist-led renaissance of social and economic activity, Michael Williams and a few other entrepreneurs began redevelopment of the neglected heritage properties in the downtown core. "We were the disfavored," said Laid Campbell, one of the earliest occupants of studio spaces in Chinatown. Many artists tenanted Michael’s properties. Some leased space for working and teaching studios or for storefront "occasional galleries." Others were just friends who coach-surfed where they could. This was Michael’s world: the world in which he developed a multitude of friends and acquaintances, his taste for art, and ultimately his own personal art collection. Swans Hotel, which he opened in 1987, became Michael’s art gallery, and the public spaces and hotel rooms continue to display selected works from his collection as well as pieces by other artists.

At the cutting edge of the revitalization of Old Town Victoria during this period was a thriving colony of artists. Attracted by cheap rent and new institutions such as the Open Space Gallery, the Victoria College of Art and the University of Victoria, many of these artists rented space from Michael. In 1984, he transformed the bar and café at Swans, established studios, galleries and informal clubs in Chinatown and its vicinity. Over a period of twenty-five years he developed friendships among them: he was renowned as a patron, mentor and confidant to many. The pub at Swans quickly developed a reputation for debates prompted by his latest acquisitions that adorned its walls. Rum and hazelnut port was paid in. Michael developed his own critical eye and connoisseur’s taste. And from this he developed his collection of over one thousand works of Pacific Northwest Art.
The Changing Face of Old Town

Post-war growth and prosperity, the automobile and expectations of second-generation immigrant families prompted a population shift from Victoria’s core to the suburbs. With the exodus went the city’s retail and service industries. By the late 1960s large parts of the downtown were nearly derelict. On lower Johnson, Yates, Fort and Wharf Streets only a few marginal shops and vacancies houses remained. Chinatown, once a focus of activity, was semi-abandoned with the passing of the generation of Chinese bachelors who came to work at “Gold Mountain.”

Impetus for revitalization finally came with Mayer Biggarstaff-Wilson and his council’s plan for a renewal of downtown Victoria. This initiative was kick-started with plans to create Centennial and Bastion Squares in 1962, the restoration of City Hall, and a subsidized “paint-up” program for old buildings. Designer Allan Edwards, who ran a school of fine and commercial art and whose own international career included design contracts for the Hilton hotel chain, had instigated a campaign to save Bastion Square from demolition.

By 1967, under the direction of city planner Rod Clark, Bastion Square was restored and a pedestrian sanctuary was established through the square from View Street to Wharf Street. Developer Sam Baswif and his brother, architect Nick Baswif, contributed by restoring the old Law Courts building. Sam Baswif became a city councillor in 1971 and initiated the city’s first heritage policies. In the mid-1970s, the Baswif brothers redeveloped the run-down nineteen-century buildings housing warehouses and junk shops in the half-block encompassing lower Johnson and Pandora and Store Street to create award-winning Market Square. Based on the concept of an open-air market, the shops, galleries and restaurants surrounded a preserved central courtyard that became a popular venue for community events.

Michael Williams was another of the small group of entrepreneurial developers in this period who saw opportunities in the restoration of historic buildings in Old Town. He astutely anticipated that redevelopment would encourage businesses and residents to repopulate this once depressed district. Williams himself pioneered the introduction of new residential space in the heart of downtown. By the early 1970s the slow process of restoring Old Town was underway. But ahead of the developers, a vibrant community of artists had moved into upper floors and vacant shopfronts. Attracted by climate, the myths of the casual “west-coast lifestyle,” and emerging institutions such as the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, the Faculty of Fine Arts at the newly formed University of Victoria, and the Victoria College of Art, these artists were the vanguard in the revival of the area.

Beginning on lower Johnson Street, Williams renovated over a dozen heritage buildings. His restoration of the Victoria Paper and Box Company building and adjacent Grand Central Hotel (both built in 1890) at 547 to 561 Johnson won him international recognition for heritage preservation and urban development. The centerpiece of his holdings was Swans Hotel at the corner of Pandora Avenue and Store Street. The building was originally a Scott and Polen warehouse and feed store built in 1893; by the 1950s it was owned and operated byuckerfield’s Company, and by the early ’80s it lay abandoned. Williams worked with architect Bill Patterson and local craftsmen and artisans to completely renovate and refurbish the complex. Williams called the new boutique hotel Swans because “it was truly an ugly duckling before we started.” It immediately became a magnetic force in the transformation of the area. Williams’ collection of original art displayed throughout the buildings was and remains a key attraction. Visitors can take self-guided art tours of the circulating display, and guests can choose their accommodation based on the art in the rooms.
Wharf and Store Streets

The first downtown gallery to show west-coast contemporary art in Victoria was Bente Rehn's Pandora's Box, which opened on Pandora Avenue in 1966 and then moved to Hartweg Court in the 1200 block on Wharf Street. In 1971 Nita Forrest acquired this site for The Print Gallery, which she moved from its original location in Oak Bay. Both galleries were hubs of art activity in the city. Forrest was a member of the Limners, and fellow Limners Bob De Castro and Elza Mayhew had sculpture studios at harbour level. Pandora's Box and The Print Gallery showed the work of early Limners such as Ricky Ciccimarra, Myfanwy Pawlic, Jan and Helga Grove, and Herbert Stübben, and represented other prominent artists including Richard Reid, Ron Olley, Joe Pliszka, Jack Shadbolt, Psina Granier, Charles Felix and Don Harvey. The Print Gallery closed in 1972, leaving a temporary void in downtown exhibition venues.

In 1982 Franz Willis and Michael Calten opened North Park Gallery above stained glass artist and sculptor Rob Wines' Water Glass Studio on North Park Street. In 1984 they moved the gallery to the second floor of a building they purchased at 1649 Store Street, part of the Bockerfield's complex adjacent to where Swans Host would open in 1987. The Out of Hand Craft shop leased space at street level. Franz Willis became the sole owner of North Park in 1989 and changed the name to the Franz Willis Gallery. With its annual Beaux Arts Ball and impressive stable of local, national and international artists the Franz Willis Gallery rapidly became a cultural anchor to Chinatown.

The concept of Swans as an "art hotel" grew out of the proximity the businesses shared. From the many artists Willis featured, Michael Williams developed reference points for his own collection, building substantial holdings of works by Charles Malininsky, Brad Pusatti, Marlene Davis, Ken Fleet and Don Harvey. It is apparent from the choices he made, under the mentorage of Willis, that he developed a taste for challenging art. Anecdotes about Williams convey how much he relished displaying controversial works by artists like Malininsky, Fleet and Pusatti in prominent locations in Swans and enjoyed the heated conversations that these works would engender. One startling painting in the collection is Yellow (1994), an unsettling homoerotic portrayal of a menacing youth by Attila Richard Lukacs. Michael was so interested in this notorious new Canadian star that he travelled to Berlin to visit his studio, and then purchased Yellow directly from him.

Nita Forrest, Seated Man #4, 1976

Nita Forrest played a significant role in drawing attention to the work of Victoria's artists. She opened The Print Gallery in Oak Bay in 1968, which was one of the first galleries to feature local professional artists. Both collectors and artists looked forward to the "scintilating" opening nights, which are still remembered as highlights in the arts calendar of the period.

ELZA MAYHEW
The Gift, 1965

Elza Mayhew trained under Jan Zach during the 1950s when he lived in Victoria and then again with him at the University of Oregon where she earned a MFA in 1963. As an award-winning sculptor, she realized prestigious public commissions and represented Canada internationally at events such as the Venice Biennale in 1964.

Mayhew's work is an affirmation of human existence, its beauty, architecture, universal beliefs and symbology. The gift, one of her small bronzes, evokes an ancient altar or temple, and is possibly rooted in memories of small roadside Shinto shrines in Japan in the 1950s. The theme of the temple is prevalent in her body of work, and People Temple, the title of one of her pieces, confirms that for her the temple was both a human figure and a building. Her work is deeply informed by her classical studies at the University of British Columbia, where she wrote a thesis on Roman tombs.

One of her large totemic pieces, Coast Spirit from 1967, graces the UVic campus near the entrance to the McPherson Library. Directly across the main campus square, her monumental Horner Theodos stands near the Mortarini Building. It was bought from the artist in 1988 as part of the president's twenty-fifth anniversary collection, and was her last completed work. Mayhew was awarded an Honoray doctorate from UVic in 1989.
Johnson Street

O n the upper floor at the southwest corner of Johnson and Government in the early 1960s, the French-trained graphic designer Jean André operated what was to become one of Victoria's largest design studios. Around him clustered graphic artists such as the English-trained illustrator and rock guitarist Martin Springett. Springett's work can still be seen on the give-away bookmarks at Muir's Books on Government Street. During the 1960s André was assembling the team of artists, sculptors and designers that would become the powerhouse exhibition production crew for the innovative walk-through environmental displays at the BC Provincial Museum. The team included Lloyd Cook, Ann Friesen, Tom Putnam, Ronnie Knowlton, Stuart Stark and others. Their work was documented in an M.A. thesis by UVic art history student and artist Karen Wonders, who lived in the Lee Association building on Fisgard, across from the old police station. The design firm continues as André & Associates, headed by André's daughter Bianca MESSAGE and with Ronnie Knowlton as Senior Design Associate. Its office has moved down Johnson Street to Market Square.

James Lindsay leased property from Michael Williams at 645 Johnson Street and ran King Solomon's Studio Café there for six years from 1983 to 1989. Numerous exhibitions of local and up-island artists were held in this colliGALery. Adopted First Nations artist Cheryl Samuel maintained a weaving studio in the Victoria Box and Paper Company building, across from Market Square. She was one of the artists commissioned by Williams to work on the convocation suite of furnishings for UVic.

For an "Artists' Studio Tour" organized by Lois Imarte in 1983, Margaret Shostak, Andrew Lucie, Wilhelm Koilmanis, Heather Murray, Anna Muller, Susan None and Mary Ann Campbell assembled work for an exhibition at 546 Johnson. Also for that tour, around the corner on Government Street, painters Avis Rasmussen and Yves Vial opened their studio at number 4, 1322A Government. Later Vial moved his studio and gallery to 645 Herald Street, a building now occupied by the Gallery on Herald.

Behind Johnson Street, in Market Square, Deborah de Boer operated the Rogue Gallery, which brought the work of many emerging downtown artists to view. The Rogue Gallery later moved to the top floor of the Eaton Centre. De Boer was much appreciated by local artists for her work as a freelance and often unpaid curator. In 2005 she opened Deluge Contemporary Art Gallery in a nineteenth-century fire hall at 436 Yates. The new venue houses both the Deluge Gallery and the Antinmatter Underground Film Festival. It is just a few doors up the street from the Legacy Art Gallery and Café.

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Chinatown: Herald Street

Herald Street defined the northern border of Chinatown. It also bordered the industrial district on Victoria's old harbour, and a curious mix of warehouses, tenements and marine-related manufacturers lined Store and Wharf Streets. Several historic buildings on and around Herald Street attracted artists. On the second floor of 545 Herald, French-trained artist and UVic grad Yves Vial operated his studio and gallery. At 666 Herald, in the Hook Sting Tong building, silversmith Kamil Azmow, book binder Courtland Benson, and photographer Alan Home briefly occupied studios. Around the corner, between Herald and Flushing at 1720 Government, was the studio of art teacher and mixed-media artist Robert Sunderland, another UVic graduate. From 1981 to 1982 Robert Kidd operated his Studio Gallery in the same block at 1725 Government Street.

The large doorways and high ceilings of 529/33 Herald, the old Hart's livery stables built in 1893, provided space for Tony Hunt's Arts of the Raven carving studio from the early 1980s until 1999. The carving studio had originated as a small workshop in the Arts of the Raven Gallery, which opened in the newly renovated Law Courts building in Boston Square in 1969 under the management of Hunt's business partner, John Livingston. The gallery's mandate was to provide a venue for high-quality Northwest Coast Native art. The workshop served as a carving and jewelry-making studio and training facility and quickly outgrew its space. It moved to warehouses in the Songhees before settling in the Herald Street location. The gallery and studio were profoundly influential in the revitalization of west-coast Aboriginal art. The many young artists and apprentices, several of them Hunt family members, who passed through the studio comprise a veritable who's-who of the First Nations art world today: Calvin Hunt, George Hunt Jr., Nancy Dawson, Art Thompson, Dan Yeomans, Tom Patterson, Diane Pasco and Jim Gilbert.

Some of the artists from this group became involved in Michael Williams' major commission for the University of Victoria, the Ceremonial Furniture Suite for convocations. Williams' connection with the artists evolved through his friendship with John Livingston, a relationship that began with a commission to convert an original Livingston carved door that Williams had acquired into a free-hanging panel that was then hung by the bar at Swans. This was one of the first contemporary First Nations pieces Williams collected and, as his interest in Native art grew, Livingston became his art consultant and his liaison with other leading Aboriginal artists. Williams would drop by the Arts of the Raven workshop, often after dining at the Herald Street Caffe, and the workshop artists would join Williams and local artists at Swans. They were grateful to Williams for featuring their art in the hotel lobby and in the pub, where it gained them recognition and often led to further sales and commissions.

TONY HUNT (Sr.)
Eagle, Killer Whale, Salmon, Esf, n.d.

Renowned as an artist, Tony Hunt is also Kwakwaka'wakw hereditary chief of Fort Rupert and Kiks.ana Hlun, he is the guardian of Mungo Martin (1880–1962) and the son of Henry Hunt (1923–1985), artists who were pivotal in keeping cultural traditions and arts alive. Tony trained under both these master carvers at Thunderbird Park, in the vicinity of the Royal BC Museum. He designed the Hunt Family Big House for the museum, but his grand masterpiece is the ceremonial Big House at Fort Rupert. He has designed and carved over one hundred totems, many of which stand in countries around the globe. Tony Hunt has in turn influenced a generation of artists who apprenticed with him in his Arts of the Raven workshop.

JOHN LIVINGSTON
Northern Eagle design paddle, 1998

Adapted Kwakwala artist John Livingston has been a central figure in the development and promotion of Aboriginal art in Victoria. Through his association with Tony Hunt and his friendship with Michael Williams, he brought the work of up-and-coming artists to public attention. Williams developed a passion for First Nations art, and Livingston was a mentor and guide. He introduced Williams to artists in their studios in Victoria and, on the mainland and helped secure some of the superb works in his collection.

Williams owned several works by Livingston. This paddle, originally displayed in the dining room of his new Ten Mile Point home, shows the artist's finely honed design and carving skills, developed through his apprenticeship with the Hunt family. Livingston's impressive body of work includes prints, masks, barked and boxed totem poles and monumental sculptures.

John Livingston, Northern Eagle design paddle, 1998
HENRY HUNT
Kumugwe Mask, ca. 1961

This mask representing Kumugwe, lord of the underworld world, was
part of a donation of seventeen carvings and five prints by Henry
Hunt given to the Museum by Dr. Peter Smart, a UBC alumnus. Kumugwe Mask is
an important transitional piece in this artist's oeuvre, dating from
a period in which he began to incorporate the oca into his work, a
theme he pursued for the rest of his career.

Henry Hunt's sphere of influence on younger Aboriginal artists is
inestimable. The University of Victoria recognized his contribu-
tions by granting him an honorary doctorate of fine arts in 1983.

The Ceremonial Furniture Suite
for the University of Victoria, 1993

This magnificent suite of connoisseur furnishings was
Michael Williams' gift of appreciation to the University
of Victoria after receiving an honorary doctorate in 1990
for his work in urban renewal and cultural conservation in downtown Victoria. Williams
commissioned John Livingston to coordinate the project, and
together they conceived a plan to commission Aboriginal artists from the major tribal groups on
the coast to contribute to the design and creation of the six
pieces that ultimately comprised this unique suite. Including
Livingston, twelve major First Nations artists participated in
a cooperative venture, each choosing to work on a section of
the whole ensemble, which was to be unified by colour and
form. Materials adopted Kwakwahth
artist John Livingston carved the
keelson and the chief's copper-
shaped form of the back of the
chair, the armrests, and the
legs. Tlingit artist John Smith
wove the Ravenstail cushion for the seat and armrest, and adopted Klukwan
artist Cheryl Samuels wove the
Chilkat basketry panel to fit into
the copper-shaped form. Musqueam artist Susan Point carved the kneeling figure at
nose of the chair. Ditidilt artist
Art Thompson carved the back
face of the chair; Nitina' artist
Norman Neil carved the eagle for the top; Haida artist Don Yeomans
carved the gigam and front front foot.

The Ceremonial Furniture Suite for the University of Victoria, 1993
Chinatown: Fan Tan Alley

The core and social hub of the Old Town artistic community was Fan Tan Alley, a narrow passage between Fisgard and Pandora Streets redolent with the history of early Chinese immigration. Over the years some forty artists rented, squatted or couch-surfed in the alley’s bed-sits, studios and storefronts. Former Idiof Dick Joe, latterly a landscape architect, calls the spaces and eventually allowed the incumbents to rent new tenants. Jack Wilkinson, designer of the fountain in Centennial Square, may have been the first to open a studio in Fan Tan Alley. Glasgow-born and much travelled Lord Campbell was an early tenant, along with sculptor Bert Vandenburg who occupied 4th Fan Tan. In 1927, at number 106, Glen Howarth opened a teaching studio in a converted second-floor Chinese gambling hall called the New World, where he stayed for seventeen years.

In the 1970s urban artist, curator and critic Robert Amos, designer J.C. Scott, and artist Catriona Macleod, who had both studied together at Queen’s University, arrived in Victoria via Vancouver. Macleod arrived first. Through landroid Dick Joe she found rental space for another Vancouver friend, jazz-drumsup Andy Graffit, at 5555 Fisgard, at the corner of Fan Tan Alley. When Scott came to town he moved in with Graffit. In their large warm-light space in what had been a Chinatown gambling club, these friends founded the Brand New Era Social Club in 1978. A sort of speak-easy, gallery and crash pad, the BNESC took its name from its Vancouver predecessor, the New Era Social Club, whose members were part of the alternative art and music scene. The name New Era Social Club was taken from an old description above the door of its Powell Street premises where Graffit and several other club members had lived. The BNESC also modelled its activities on other Vancouver counter-culture organizations such as the Western Front, founded by Victoria-born Eric Mercey, and where Amos had worked for a short time in performance art and video. BNESC was plugged into the circuit that brought underground rock bands through Vancouver to Victoria. The club was well known for its music and art parties, Friday-night showings of National Film Board films, "erotic art" exhibitions (held near April Fuels Day), and Halloweens street events generating a reputation as a host of "post-punk expressionism."

Graffit and some friends also started the Mount Baker Tea and Calligraphy Society in 1978, which tipped broadly into the correspondence art movement of the period. During their sporadic meetings the members would drink tea and practice calligraphy with répétitively abstract forms of paper and ink. Teddy Post (Manoosh), a Vancouver performance artist and correspondence artist, currently known for his international World Tea Party events, would sometimes drop by for these sessions. He also contributed work to the erotic art shows. After Graffit left in 1979, J.C. Scott kept their rental space for his design studio and continued to host the activities of the BNESC. Through the 1980s Phyllis Senact taught art classes in a room at the back of Scott’s studio.

Furniture craftsmen Danish-trained Else Norgaard and David Potter at 13 Fan Tan anchored the mid-alley storefronts with their workshops, later supplanted by Vintage Woodworks founded by pioneer heritage building restorers Bill Murphy and Jim Silvers. In space above Vintage Woodworks furniture designer Allan Collier opened his own gallery of contemporary design. Collier helped assemble the William’s commissioned UVic Ceremonial Furniture Suite produced by a consortium of Aboriginal artists. These Fan Tan Alley woodworkers also did custom work commissioned by J.C. Scott for some of his design projects. Organ builder Hugo Spilker occupied a storefront in the alley, later moving around the corner onto Fisgard. Godfrey Stephen, sculptor and portraitist of Michael Williams, had a studio close by. In the 1990s Noah Becker and Trevor Gashie occupied a studio in Fan Tan in the space previously occupied by the woodworkers. Inspired by the BNESC’s erotic art shows, they held Big Society Art parties, with curators showing that even included work by such luminaries as Myfanwy Pavelie, Noah Becker and Marlene Davis met Pavelie while students at the Victoria College of Art when she recruited them as her own studio models.

K.C. Tebbutt, who studied with Jack Wise, was also a noted Fan Tan habitué and introduced Nerial Morriseau to the group during the six months or so that he lived in Victoria. Tebbutt opened the short-lived Gallerie Untitled on Government Street near Fisgard, where he held an exhibition of Morriseau’s work. K.C.’s trademarked brother, Brock Tebbutt, a.k.a. Joe Average, was also involved with the Fan Tan Alley group. Lia Scully, a Victoria College of Art trained filmmaker, and Gordon Hughes shared a studio at 170 Fan Tan Alley.

Frooted art was a Fan Tan commodity from the beginning. Mexican exile Luis Huarte, trained as a lawyer and artist in Mexico, arrived in Victoria in 1974. He moved into a large top-floor space in Fan Tan across the alley from the wood-

working shops. He attended the Victoria College of Art and quickly gained local attention for his post-activist public art. Huarte founded a loose arts coalition, Alley Art, and for five years ran the Artists in City Hall program. Nerial Morriseau lived with the late Huarte during his short stay in Victoria, and in gratitude he gave them a large painting from the shaman-themed work that he had just begun at this time. Andy Smitz took over the metal Art screen print studio from Joe Hoadley. Smitz was credited with taking the social protest art-image circuit to the height of high art. Noah Becker and another Mexican Luis Merino were noted for haunting semi-abstract portrait images of their colleagues and other denizens of the neighbourhood. The Merinos—Luis, Sandra and David, all artists—occupied the studio at 11 Fan Tan Alley, a studio also used by Lianne Olsen. Olsen had a pottery studio at the back of this space where she offered classes.
When Luis Buñuel moved to Los Angeles in 1988, J.C. Scott moved his design studio down the alley into Buñuel's former loft. Interior designer Louise Nawa partnered in this design studio with Scott. Her sister, artist Kathleen Nawa, and sculptor Jay Untern and they occupied a studio in the Duck's Building on Broad Street. Kathleen and Louise completed advanced degrees in UVic's art history department. Another sister, Maureen Nawa, who was for a time the partner of Kamil Azizov, graduated from UVic with a Ph.D. in English. The Nawa sisters were immersed in the downtown scene, participating in artists' events, including some exotic art shows.

Today Andy Graffit feels that Dick Joe deserves long-overdue recognition as a driving force in the resurrection of Chinatown. With foresight Joe recognized that renting long-deserted spaces to artists would begin to transform the area. And so he envisioned, the artists did bring Fan Tan Alley and the surrounding neighborhood back to life. Before they moved in, and for several years thereafter, buildings at street level in Fan Tan were vacant and boarded-up. The woodworkers were the first to open street-level shops, soon to be followed by galleries, studios, and other businesses. The always lively artist-sponsored events drew large crowds into the area. By the time Chinatown was restored in the 1980s, locals and tourists alike had rediscovered this part of Old Town.

Luis Buñuel
Fan Tan Alley Halloween Party poster, 1982

Fan Tan Alley was the social reference point for the Old Town artistic community. Luis Buñuel, who arrived from Mexico in 1914 was a staple in this community, organizing parties, exhibitions and public tours of artists' studios. He was a founding member of Alley Art, a street-art coalition. The thousands of peace banners he produced for the annual peace parade in Victoria were avidly collected and displayed for years throughout the city. He coordinated the Artists in City Hall program, which he developed in collaboration with the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria. He even ran for mayor in 1985. In 1988 he moved to Los Angeles, where he is involved in urban and Latino arts organizations.

Nawa’s poster advertised a Halloween party as “All Day Art Benefit” to be held on October 20, 1982. Tickets were $3. Halloween parties were held for two consecutive years. Security guards paced at both entrances to Fan Tan Alley. The committee admission to these jam-packed street parties.

NoaM Becekr
Portrait of Glenn Howarth, 1992

The articles of Fan Tan Alley were often their own subjects. Becker's portrait of neighbour Glenn Howarth captures him in his studio, with suggestions of Howarth's own works on the wall behind. Becker was a student of Howarth's at the Victoria College of Art and studied privately with him in his Fan Tan Alley studio.

GlenN HowArth
Pub Scene, 1975

Glenn Howarth was another key figure in Old Town artist's community. His Pub Scene, painted in his familiar tondo format, vividly captures the experience of a group of friends excusing a crowded pub table. The oversized glasses of beer, the bowls of nuts, the focus, and the air thick with smoke induce a boisterous, claustrophobic atmosphere. The painting portrays Jack Wai, a father figure and spiritual guide for many local artists, and some of his colleagues in the pub of the Churchill Hotel, one of the local

GlenN HowArth, Pub Scene, 1975

watering holes popular with downtown artists and UVic students. After graduating from UVic in 1970 and while developing his own artistic practice, Howarth became a highly regarded instructor at the university and the Victoria College of Art. He also opened his own teaching studio in Fan Tan Alley, the Victoria Drawing Academy, which he has recently moved to a building at the end of a street in Brentwood Bay. Williams admired Howarth's work and encouraged young artists such as Noah Becker to study with him. The Williams collection holds thirty-one pieces by Howarth.
PHYLIS SEROTA
The Painters’ Day, 1981

This painting depicts several artists on a rocky ledge by the ocean. It is a whimsical documentation of a “painters’ day” that was organized by gallery owner Paul Kyle in 1981. Kyle invited some of the best-known local artists to spend a day at “The Point.” Michael Williams’ home on McNally Road in Ten Mile Point. Phylis Serota said that at the time she felt “totally intimidated” by the other artists like Jack Shadbolt and Toni Onley, but Kyle had invited her to come. Onley arrived at the house in his own float plane from Vancouver, carrying a Benton for Kyle. The artists depicted in the painting are, at the top from left to right: Flemming Jorgensen, with a tea; Jack Shadbolt painting driftwood; Colin Grahame and Jack Wise seated together; and both wearing white shirts; Donald Harvey, standing by the tree, Anne Nyan, sitting under the tree.

At the bottom, from left to right are: Anne Pagouill, wearing a hat; Bill Porteous; James Girard, with a beard; and Yvon Villier beside Phylis, who is shown painting. In the background are members of a media crew from the CBC that Kyle had invited to document the event.

Serota said, “I couldn’t work too well there; I just did some sketches of people, but realized the next day that I was the only figurative artist there, so I took those sketches and started on Painters’ Day.” Kyle then used her image for the invitation to the exhibition he held to display the works all the painters had done that day. The event at the Point was the beginning of what became Victoria’s Moss Street Point Art, an annual event that celebrates local artists.

In 1981 Serota was a recent UVIC grad (1979), but she soon gained recognition as one of Victoria’s best-known and most popular artists.

CHINATOWN: FISGARD STREET

The exodus of the young second-generation Chinese Canadians from the city core in the 1950s and 60s was part of the general movement to the suburbs. Left behind were a number of seniors, mostly older single men. At street level were grocery shops and restaurants remained, as did many of the civic social amenities, the tong societies, the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association School, and the social clubs. Chinatown was identified for heritage preservation in the city’s Old Town Report (1978), and heritage designation followed in 1979, UVIC geography professor David Lai, chairman of the Chinatown Rehabilitation Committee, spearheaded the resurrection that took place in the early 1980s. The Gate of Harmonious Interest, built in 1981, was one of Lai’s initiatives and remains a permanent testament to his visionary leadership and a symbol of the revitalization of the area. Fisgard Street was, and remains, the social and economic spine of Chinatown, now one of the city’s major tourist attractions. Victoria's Chinatown, the oldest Chinatown in Canada, was designated a National Historic Site in 1995.

Before and after the restoration of Chinatown, artists occupied studios and showed in galleries in several buildings along Fisgard. The original Fan Tan Alley, opened as a small textile gallery at 541 Fisgard, near the entrance to Fan Tan Alley, sold its organs shop moved out of Fan Tan and remained as Fisgard until recently. In the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association building at 545/546 Fisgard UVIC visual art professors Roland Breiter and Linda Gossman occupied studios, Russian jewelry designer Kamil Atkarow had a stone at street level. At different times Laid Campbell occupied various studios on the street in the 500 and 600 blocks, as did glass artist Kerry Joe Kelly. Kelly executed the spectacular entrance windows for Swans Hotel. Scene painter Jean-Paul Costain and Jerome Zachary occupied studios at number 592/5, Chair Davies, a close friend of J.C. Scott's and part of the UVIC group, lived at 5316 Fisgard for about a year in the late 1970s before moving to Montreal. She is now an internationally renowned media artist, academic, and new media art critic.

Robert Ames returned from Japan in 1961 with his wife, Sarah, also an accomplished artist, and they sublet rooms at 5318 Fisgard. Robert’s colourfield record of Chinatown street life and buildings during this period is well known. His prints, drawings and paintings have become almost synonymous with Victoria’s own image of Chinatown.
ROBERT AMOS
Rigaud Street, 1982

Robert Amos has been a fixture in Victoria's art scene since he arrived in 1975 to take a position as assistant to the director at the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria. While working at the gallery he studied painting with Jack Wise at the Victoria College of Art. Wise, a follower of Eastern religions, encouraged Amos's own interest in Asian Art and culture. Amos, in order to raise funds to travel to Japan, initiated the first exotic art exhibition at the Brand New Era Social Club. The show proved to be so popular it became an annual event that continued for at least another decade. Since his return to Victoria in 1981, Amos has become an established commentator on the arts, known in particular as an art writer and critic for the Times-Colonist since 1986. His colourful streetscraper documentaries, maintained over the years as a continuing personal artistic passion, have provided an aesthetic frame for the popular visualization of Old Town.

ROLAND BRENER
Warship, n.d.

Like Ronald Harvey and Pat Martin Bates, Roland Brener had a distinguished career teaching at UVic, retiring in 1997. He maintained a studio on Rigaud Street, across from the entrance to Fan Tan Alley. Brener gained international renown for his large kinetic sculptures that employ robots and computers. Warship, a small mixed-media sculpture, is playful like many of his large-scale pieces, illustrating his interest in pop culture and the use of found materials; it incorporates a model warship and an actual-handled, hanging plastic soap holder with a large seashell on the end, which are nailed together in a churning, plastic foam sea. Brener was a passionate sailor, and it is fitting that the university collection holds a work with a seafaring theme. He is one of Canada's most illustrious artists. He represented Canada internationally at major exhibitions such as the Venice Biennale (1968), and his work is in major collections across the country.

LAIRD CAMPBELL
Zimbabwe, ca. 1980

Laird Campbell was trained in Glasgow in display and set design. After coming to Canada in 1963, he worked as a designer for Expo 67 in Montreal. He moved to Victoria in 1970 and lived in a studio space in Chinatown for twenty years. His first show, "Chinatown Conclusions," was held at Open Space in 1973. In 1977 he exhibited a three-dimensional sculpture in "Geminia," a group show at the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria. Since the late 1960s he has worked primarily in multi-media, and his art continues to be informed by his background in design and applied arts. Campbell currently lives in Port Alberni.

Broad Street: Duck's Building

The Duck started life as the Knights of Pythias meeting rooms, an investment in 1890 by Simon Duck, carriage maker and later provincial minister of finance. This is one of the downtown heritage properties bought by Michael Williams in the 1960s. The high-ceilinged, second-floor meeting hall subdivided into a warren of rooms continues to provide attractive studio spaces. James Lindsey rented a large space in the Duck's building in 1965-66 to make two eighteen-foot triptych paintings and other work for his 1966 Open Space exhibition "Defending Stalagrad."

After Lindsey left, Williams rented the space to sculptor Jay Unwin and his wife, artist historian Dr. Kathleen Niwa. Kathleen fondly remembers how kind Williams was. He would "say not a word" when it was obvious they were living in the "storage space" rented from him in the Duck; he would "gently wave away" outstanding bills at Swans when money was tight and diapers were needed for their baby, Paris. And he shared Kathleen's joy on receiving her Ph.D., pulling her aside at Swans where she and Jay went to celebrate and saying sweety, "Oh! I'm so happy for you! I have one now, you know." The studio was a mainstay of the Duck's block group of artists who were woven into the close-knit downtown arts community in that vibrant era. Unwin's Victoria legacy is in his dramatic street corner sculpture Peace and Harmony at Herald and Quadra, a commission for the new Victoria Police Station. After his tragic death in a car accident in 1996, the large studio was taken over by Sean Natran. Also in the Duck were UVic visual arts photography professor Fred Douglas, painter Uri Daric, Craig Carnwell and George Grove.
SEAN NATTRASS

Unicross #2, soothing, smooth, and oily, suave, plastic as clay, 1995.

Unicross #2, an example of the artist's industrial found-art, consists of materials scavenged in and around the Duck's Building. This assemblage, a stilted Canadian flag, a flagpole made from a massive gravel bed post, a postage stamp fixed on the remnants of a pacing cage, captures the ambiance of Old Town as it emerged from a semi-industrial area in a state of destruction and decay. Williams, who acquired this work, notes that he was one of the players in the gradual "gentrification" process.

JAY UNWIN

Untold, nude female torso, 1986.

Unwin was born in Victoria in 1958. His first career was as a shipwright, but a deep interest in art took him to Italy in 1968, where he apprenticed in stone carving at Pietro Santa, Carrara. His first solo show in Victoria was held at Open Space.

He was an accomplished sculptor in a variety of media including wood, steel, lead, fibreglass and marble.

Recognition of his work led to major commissions for sculptures to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Royal Roads Military College and to create a public sculpture for the Victoria Police Department.

Lower Fort Street

Open Space, the first professional artist-run gallery in downtown Victoria, opened in 1972 at 330 Fort Street. Open Space was the brainchild of Gear Millar, one of the recently arrived Americans who contributed immensely to the cultural life in the city. Miller served as the first director of Open Space, and was later founding publisher of Monday Magazine. Open Space was initially set up as a series of market stalls in the downtown, where artists could show their work. The large loft upstairs was used as a performance space.

Artist-run spaces were gaining currency in Canada as artists moved away from commercial galleries and traditional arts media. Parallel, non-profit galleries formed an association, ANNPAC, in 1977 with the support of the Canada Council. Artist-run galleries across Canada became a circuit for performance and exhibition tours of multi-disciplinary art, Programming at Open Space rapidly developed to include video and other new-media, photography, multi-media installations, as well as avant-garde music with performances by UVic School of Music professor John Celona. Celona’s partner, Jeanne Shoemaker, became director of Open Space in 1998. It was under her leadership that the gallery was able to purchase the building.

Peter Carson, the first architect in Victoria to specialize in heritage building conservation, was very active in the founding board. Carson was consulting architect for Michael Williams' first Old Town restoration project, Maynard Court. Active in Open Space early programs and among the early regular exhibitors were many of the downtown studio artists: James Lindsay, Laird Campbell, Jay Entwistle, Jack Kiddie, Robert Amon, Luis Martinez, Kane Williams, Liz Scally, Joe Average, Brad Pasnelli and Ted Polkinghome. There was often a cross-over of events between Open Space and the Brand New Era Social Club.

The Northwest Coast Institute of the Arts operated out of a loft in the building that housed Open Space. The founder and director of the NCIWA was Bill Bartlett, and Jack Wise, Bill Portous and Flemming Jorgensen were original members of the faculty. In 1974 the school, renamed the Victoria College of Art and with Joseph Kyle as director, moved to its Bank Street location in the former Bank Street Elementary School. Bartlett had become director of Open Space for a number of years the Victoria College of Art operated a gallery on the second-floor at 564 Yates Street, where it held occasional exhibitions of work by students and faculty. Both Open Space and the Victoria College of Art, now incorporated into University Canada West as its art academy, continue to serve important roles in the cultural life of the city as institutions that offer alternative opportunities for the experience of and training in the arts.
BRAD PASUTTI
Tempo Perdita, 1991

Brad Pasutti graduated with a BFA from the University of Victoria in 1983. Michael Williams acquired several of his large pastel works from the Fran Willis Gallery. Tempo Perdita, purchased from a solo exhibition of new work in 1991, was featured on the exhibition poster. Williams was always eager to buy and to ostentatiously display such a choice exhibition piece. He was known to send staff members from Swans to hold the first place in line at gallery openings to ensure that he could purchase the pieces he had selected at previews.

This entrancing image by Pasutti depicts the interior setting of a colonial-era baroque church in Antigua, Guatemala, destroyed like much of this city by devastating earthquakes in 1773. With its majestic space and fractured and distorted forms, the image effectively evokes both the force of the earthquake and vanished past time, as echoed in the title. Pasutti’s passion for Mexico and Central America (first ignited by a trip with Jack Kidder to Oaxaca) and his fascination with the history of art and architecture, particularly from the baroque period, are reflected in this work.

JOE AVERAGE
Mr. and Mrs. J. Average on their honeymoon, 1983

Born into a family of artists in Victoria, Joe Average (Brock Teutsch) was actively involved in the downtown art scene until he moved to Vancouver. At the Brand New Era Social Club he experimented with filmstrip and other media. His early art readily shows his interest in Pop Art, particularly the work of artists such as Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein. Joe Average is well known as an AIDS activist and has won numerous awards for his outstanding contributions to AIDS awareness through his art and community service. November 5, 2002, was declared Joe Average Day by the mayor of Vancouver.

GEORGE GROVE
Untitled, 1985

George Grove is the son of Ian and Helen Grove, members of the Limners, and thus grew up immersed in the arts and a milieu of artists. In 1985 he graduated with a BFA from UBC, where he developed a special interest in printmaking. Pat Martin-Bates, his instructor, has donated several of Grove’s prints from her own collection to the University. He is a multi-talented artist who was an important arts advocate in Victoria. He served on the board of directors of Open Space, was president of X-Changes Gallery, and in 1986 co-founded Ground Zero Printmakers and Studios, which continues as a non-profit artist-run society for the support of a wide range of printmaking. He now lives in Vancouver and runs Naked Eye Studio, which designs and creates professional media puppets, anime, comics, props and other creative materials for the movie and television industries.

JIM GORDANER
Untitled, self-portrait, 1991

Williams collected his artist friends, literally. Gordaner’s self-portrait is one of several in the Williams’ collection; others are by Glenn Howarth, James Lindsay, and artists positioning themselves within the group portraits. Gordaner is one of several figures in Victoria’s arts community, and he has influenced numerous local artists through his teaching positions at UBC, Camosun College, and the Victoria College of Art, where he taught for fifteen years from 1972 to 1992. He and his collaborator, photographer Raymond Lavers, led the Chapman Group, an association of young artists that met regularly at Gordaner’s Chapman Street home and studio to discuss issues around art and art theory. His own work was shown in exhibitions at Kyle’s Gallery on Fort Street, the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, the Victoria College of Art gallery, and the Fran Willis Gallery, which represented him from the late 1980s.
Blanshard Street: Morris Printers

Dick Morris, manager of the printing firm founded by his father, acquired Sono Nis Press in 1976 from west-coast poet Michael Yates. With a talented team of typographers and designers, including Jim Bennett and Keji Hosana, the press became a publishing force in western Canadian literature. In the book-hard library above the presses Dick hosted liquid Friday soirées attended by the company of “Limmers.” Morris Printing and Sono Nis Press published many catalogues, books, and monographs by or about the Limners. Limmer Robin Skefton became managing editor of Sono Nis Press from 1976 to 1983 and was a key link in the relationship between the publishers and the artists.

Peripheral to Old Town both geographically and socially, the Limners circle represented the established professional artists of Victoria. Early members of the Limners included the German émigré Herbert Steiner and American expatriate artists and filmmaker Karl Sprung; Robin Skefton, USV poet and literary critic; and his wife Sylvia, a well-known calligrapher; portrait artist Myfanwy Pavlic; sculptors Bob De Casca (a Limmer member rejigged) and Elza Mayhew; and figurative painter and print gallery owner Nita Forrest. Maxwell Bates, who died in 1960, and Richard Cuccaroni, who died in 1973, were also founding members of the Limners. Bates had proposed the formation of the group, which began informally in 1921. It became a registered society in 1972, with stated objectives to promote and exhibit the members’ work and to encourage the visual arts in Victoria. To express their common humanist interests, they adopted the Rune symbol for humanism as their logo. The group soon grew to include the painter Jack Wilkinson; USV visual arts professor and printmaker Pat Martin Bates; ceramicists Jan and Helga Grove from Germany, via Istanbul, where they had met Skefton; Walter Dexter, another ceramicist; Colin Graham, founding director of the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria; textile artist Carole Salaberry; and artist Leroy Jensen, who lived on Salt Spring Island. Dick Morris was one of several honorary members. It was not all seriousness with the Limners: they developed an envied reputation for high-spirited, often themed parties and exhibition openings. Through their far-reaching teaching and mentorship, arts administration and advocacy, and the exceptional standard of their own work, the Limners have made inestimable contributions to the cultural life of Victoria.

They were among the first artists that Michael Williams knew in Victoria. He often hosted them at his home in Ten Mile Point and several of them were regulars at the pub in Swans. Many of their works entered his collection. UVic’s McPherson Gallery covers the years has acquired collections of other material related to the Limners. In 1991 Myfanwy Pavlic donated to the university most of her large private collection, with approximately one hundred works by her colleagues two hundred and eighty-two examples of her own work, including portraits of such famous sitters as Glenn Gould, Yshuld Menahih and Pierre Trudeau. Robin Skefton donated his own significant collection of art, publications, manuscripts and other mementos. These combined donations constitute a significant repository of the work and archives of this important group of artists.

Myfanwy Pavlic, Helga and George Grove, 1985

PAT MARTIN BATES
Country of Hearts, n.d.

Pat Martin Bates was an insperational professor of printmaking at UVic receiving an alumni excellence in teaching award in 1991 and an honorary doctorate in 1994. She has represented Canada internationally and has won countless international awards in juried exhibitions for her unique and complex body of work. Her innovations in printmaking seem limitless: her works are perforated, embossed, embossed, collaged, byweld, two-sided, and back-lit in boxes. As in Country of Hearts, she frequently incorporates text into her work, engaging the viewer directly in dialog.

Bates has been a mainstay in Victoria’s arts community as a teacher, a member of the Limners, an arts advocate, a representative in local and national arts organizations, and an advocate of the Victoria College of Art.

The human figure, particularly the female figure, is the subject of Wilkinson’s paintings and, in the words of fellow-Limmer Robin Shelton, his “paintings of women are all subtly poised between the world of present day reality and that of legend.”

Artists' reception, Legacy Art Gallery. From left to right: Maxine and John Livingston, Megan Parris; Glenn Howarth (top); Robert and Sarah Amos (bottom); Richard Hunt, Pat Martin Bates; Fran Willis, Donald and Elisabeth Harvey (top), Godfrey Stephens, Noah Becker, Andy Graffiti (bottom). PHOTOS: GODFREY STEPHENS

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