Betty Dimock
by Amy Karlinsky and Janice Dehod

Betty Dimock (née Grimmer) was born in Saint John, New Brunswick in 1916. While her identical twin Kitty pursued Home Economics at Mount Allison University in New Brunswick, Betty pursued visual arts at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, New York from 1933 to 1935. She became an avid student in watercolour, training with William Starkweather in the American Impressionist Style. She recalls fondly, “Mr. Starkweather allowed us to use a palette of three colours only—Indian yellow, alizarin crimson and prussian blue.”

From 1937 to 1940, Betty trained as a nurse in Chipman Memorial Hospital in St. Stephen, New Brunswick. Upon receiving Registered Nurse qualifications she mobilized with the South African Military Nursing Service on invitation from General Jan Christiaan Smuts, Prime Minister of South Africa. After serving eighteen months at Oribi Military Hospital in Pietermaritzburg, Natal, South Africa, Betty returned to Canada to serve with Canadian Medical Army Corp in Canada, England and North West Europe. All the while, her enthusiasm for visual arts never waned. In Paris, she had the privilege to take a course in French Art and Culture at The Sorbonne, offered to military personnel with a background and interest in art.

Health concerns brought Betty back to Canada in 1946. Within a year she moved to Winnipeg to convalesce and met and married Herbert V. Dimock in 1951. Herbert supported and wholeheartedly encouraged her to pursue all future interests with local and foreign studies. She was active in the Artists’ Societies of the day: The Winnipeg Sketch Club (1953-1962), The Manitoba Society of Artists (1964-1974). She received awards for her watercolours in the late 1960s. Dimock was the President of the MSA from 1971 to 1974. She established her first studio in St. Boniface and later, one in the Confederation Building on Main Street. Dimock exhibited at numerous local galleries including the Fleet Gallery on McDermot and The Thomas Gallery on Albert Street, the Winnipeg Convention Centre and The Manitoba Theatre Centre. Group exhibitions were followed by significant solo shows in 1975, 1981, and 1985.

Dimock’s influence was deeply felt as an art educator. She taught children’s art classes at the Forum Art Institute in 1967 and 1971, and with the Manitoba Arts Council’s Artists in Schools Program. She painted alongside aspiring artists always in her own studio: art teachers, amateurs, and professionals. Dimock’s philosophy, valuing independence and nurturing is articulated in one of her grant applications, “I encourage students to be individuals and uninhibited, to be creative, to acquire a desire to try all media and phases of work... in turn I encourage teachers to accept each student as an individual and to accept their work as such, rather than streamline them into one way of seeing and working.”

Art historian, Marilyn Baker, in 1980, writing about the work at University College, noted, “Dimock has been interested in abstract harmonies and colourful application of mood.” (Free Press, November 25, 1980) Space, colour and form became preoccupations in Dimock’s work and personal philosophy. Notes Dimock, “I allow images to develop. This is where the subconscious experience projects beyond intellect. I refuse to be limited by intellect.” Dimock lists painters Paul Klee as a significant influence; particularly his ideas on play that suggest a work should not be overworked or over planned. Dimock talks about her work in relation to certain polarities: what is felt versus what is known, freedom versus control, and the subconscious versus the intellect.

Many of the prints included in the Essence of The Moment are from editions that were exhibited in Metamorphic Ruminations at the University of Florence, Italy, in early and late Italian Renaissance, completing her BFA at the University of Manitoba in October of 1979. This was followed by a ten-week course in woodblock printmaking with Master Printmaker Toshi Yoshida in Japan. Printmaking sparked a new creative expression, “I pursued silkscreen intaglio, engraving and the Japanese technique of woodblock printmaking. They all have contributed to my choice: lithography.”

Image: Ruminations of a Current Issue, 1986

Cover image: One Way Out, 1984

Image: The Valley between Man and Nature, 1986
Confederation Centre in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island in 1985. At that time, curator Shirley Madill provided an essay emphasizing the works’ optical effect, “the space in these works hover at midpoint between atmospheric spatiality and shallow depth where masses and forms are suspended against one and other.” Director David Webber added, “Dimock’s coloured lithographs require the viewer’s active involvement. This is art that goes below the surface of things, to provoke participation, thought, and discovery.”

The bold material assertions have not dimmed over time. In Dimock’s prints there is a lot of working with gesture, spatial planes and colour relationships. Black against colour is important, balancing hue, value, and a competing colour; all making an area within the plane that is both flat and layered. Shirley Madill characterized the artist as, “independent, with genuine enthusiasm, an intuitive artist who produces her art with mesmerizing care.” In and out of the galleries, showing her work, teaching, and engaging, Betty Dimock demonstrates that independence, enthusiasm and intuition are still cornerstones of her life and art. It is within negotiations of these various boundaries, within the spaces in-between that Dimock finds her strength as an artist.

Exhibition History

1953/62 Winnipeg Sketch Club
1954 Canadian National Exhibition and Calgary Exhibition
1964 Fleet Gallery, Winnipeg, MB
1964/70/72-74 MB Society of Artists Exhibitions, The WAG, Winnipeg, MB
1967/71 Red River Exhibition (Manisphere) Winnipeg, MB
1967/74 St. James Civic Centre Shows, Winnipeg, MB
1970/71/72 North of 60 for 70, Yellowknife, NWT, Centennial Concert Hall, Winnipeg, MB, Brandon University, MB
1972/73 Manitoba Mainstream, The WAG and The National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, ON
1974 Les Galerie D’Art Perrin, Winnipeg, MB
1974 Winnipeg Convention Centre, Winnipeg, MB
1975 Manitoba Theatre Centre, Winnipeg, MB
1975 10 Years: Paintings by Betty Dimock, King George VI Gallery, New Brunswick Museum, St. John, NB
1976 Gallery Restigouche, Campbellton, NB
1977 Manitoba Arts Council, Archives Building, Winnipeg, MB
1977 14th International Jury Exhibition, curated by Clement Greenberg, Winnipeg, MB, Grand Forks, Fargo and Minot
1977/78 Aspects of Manitoba Art, The WAG, curated by Milise McKibbin, Winnipeg, MB
1978 Aboriginal Settlements Texted Museum of Art, U of Minnesota, Duluth, MN
1978/80 Winnipeg Centennial Library, Winnipeg, MB
1980 Prints and Painting, University College, UM, Winnipeg, MB
1981 Betty Dimock, The WAG, curated by Elizabeth Legge, Winnipeg, MB
1985 Manitoba Printmakers Ukrainian Cultural Centre
1986 First International Biennial Print Exhibition, Summerstown Gallery, New York, NY
1986 14 Panel Collection, Way of the Cross for St. Aidan’s Church
1987 The Element of Land, Ukrainian Institute of Modern Art, Chicago, IL
1990 Progressions The Centre cultural francos-manitobain, Winnipeg, MB
1990 Women Artist of the Thomas Gallery, Thomas Gallery, Winnipeg, MB
1998 The Light Within: Manitoba Women in Art, Mn Assoc. of Community Arts Councils, Guadalajara, Mexico
2006 A Lifetime of Thoughts, Ken Segal Gallery, Winnipeg, MB

Essence of The Moment
Betty Dimock
August 1st-30th, 2013
Opening
Thursday, August 1st, 2013, 5-8pm
Artist Talk
August 15th, 2013, 7pm