



DANCE ME
TO THE END
OF LOVE♥

DANCE ME
TO THE END

The Woodstock Art Gallery is situated on traditional territories of the Indigenous Peoples covered by the Upper Canada Treaties. We would like to acknowledge the history of the traditional territory on which the Woodstock Art Gallery stands. We would also like to respect the longstanding relationships of the local Indigenous groups of this land and place in Southwestern Ontario.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Woodstock Art Gallery would like to thank Linda Jansma for the astute insight and curatorial rigour she brought to researching and curating pieces from the Gallery's permanent collection. Thank you to V Tape in Toronto for the assistance in securing the screening rights to *The Battle* (2015). The Gallery would also like to acknowledge the many generous donors who over the years have shaped and built one of the City of Woodstock's most important community resources for enjoyment and enlightenment.

Exhibition run February 15, 2020 to
 January 23, 2021

Guest Curator Linda Jansma

Designer Kristina Nordstrom

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Dance Me to the End of Love

Within the curatorial process, themes can emerge before the work, or the work can lead the charge.

When the Woodstock Art Gallery's Director/Curator, Mary Reid, asked me to curate an exhibition from the Woodstock Art Gallery's (WAG's) permanent collection, I was delighted. I'd worked with one collection throughout the majority of my career, and now I was given an opportunity to examine work with no preconceived notions. I would be looking at artists whose work I had long admired along with artists whose work was new to me. Florence Carlyle was, of course, an instant draw. The strength of her work and vision was an anchor and I knew I both wanted and needed to include her work in the exhibition.

I came to the collection with vague ideas, and then the collection itself led me to the concrete. While looking at the beautiful lines of Malaya Akulukjuk's drawing *Untitled* (Dancing), of three Inuit figures, Leonard Cohen's *Dance Me to the End of Love* started to play in my head. And from there I began to scroll through the database and pick a couple of other obvious works, like Jennie White's *Love* and George Hawken's *Two Dancers Observed*.

By then I really needed to go back to Cohen. I did a search for the lyrics of *Dance Me to the End of Love*, as well as any specific meaning to the song. I knew that it had become something of an anthem, an iconic hymn to the mysteries of love. There was, however, more to it than that: while the song follows the path of the traditional Greek

hasapiko folk dance (Cohen's years on the Greek island of Hydra made a lasting impression) the impetus was Cohen's knowledge that during the Holocaust, string quartets were pressed into playing beside the crematoriums as victims were led to their death. However, as Cohen goes on to explain:

So, that music, "Dance me to your beauty with a burning violin," meaning the beauty there of being the consummation of life, the end of this existence and of the passionate element in that consummation. But, it is the same language that we use for surrender to the beloved, so that the song — it's not important that anybody knows the genesis of it, because if the language comes from that passionate resource, it will be able to embrace all passionate activity.ⁱ



1

Dance me to the end of love

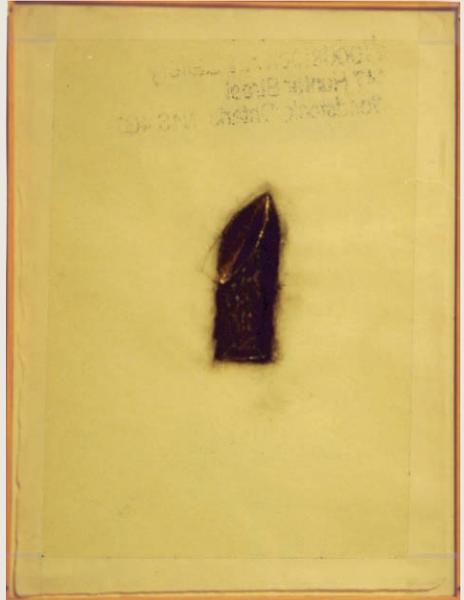
The exhibition begins, then, with images of dance: the beauty that comes through sound and movement, and found in Akulukjuk's uninhibited dancers — a simple line drawing evoking simultaneously movement and joy. A second drawing by Akulukjuk, *Untitled* (Polar Bear Dancer), and *Untitled* (Drum Dancer) by Germain Arnaktauyok, reveal the historic importance of music and dance within Inuit cultures. Paula Conlon states that the drum dance was multi-purpose: "... the drum dance had a multi-functional dimension, providing entertainment during the long winter nights, drawing the people together, and easing tension arising from daily living in a close community." ⁱⁱ

By contrast, George Hawken's entwined figures in *Two Dancers Observed* are co-dependent, making it difficult to recognize where one dancer begins and the other ends within the intricate lines of the etching.

Show me slowly what I only know the limits of

Leonard Cohen's study of life's meaning through spiritualism was a consistent theme in his work. Cohen's maternal grandfather was a rabbi and his paternal family had built synagogues in Montreal, where Cohen himself would celebrate his bar mitzvah. While throughout his life he considered himself Jewish, he contemplated the human condition through, at one point, Scientology, as well as a decades-long study of Zen Buddhism that culminated in his

becoming a monk in 1996. It is this existentialism that marks the work of Ed Zelenak, whose artist statement explains that his work, “explores the condition of the inner self, the dichotomies of life, and the interplay of intuition and logic.”ⁱⁱⁱ Of the WAG’s extensive collection of Zelenak’s work, three have been chosen to represent the part of Cohen’s song that requests that we examine limitations. Does the songwriter ask us to examine the limitations of love? Of humanity’s capacity for evil? Zelenak’s iconography and symbols represent a longing for meaning and a challenge for the viewer to contemplate their own place in the universe.



2



Dance me to your beauty with a burning violin

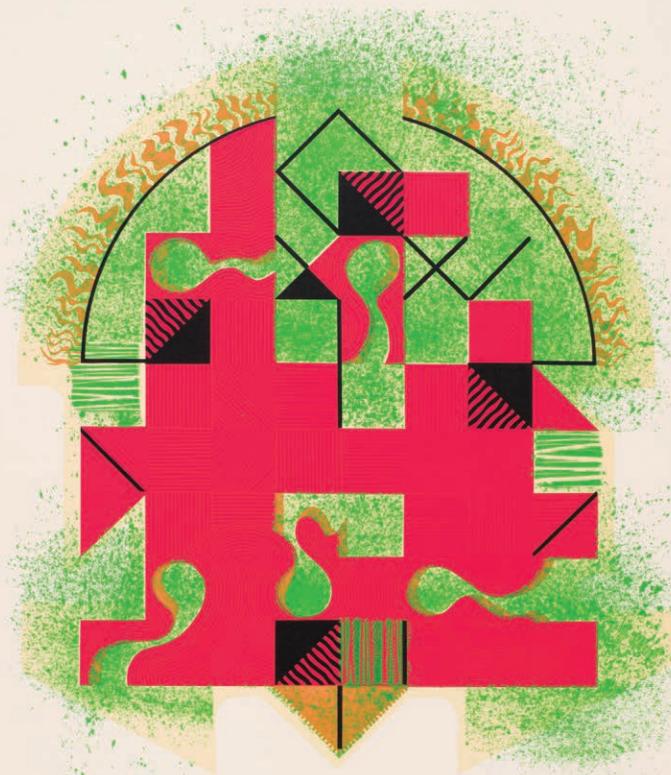
Cohen's song, while imbued with images of love, is, of course, about great loss. While *Dance Me to the End of Love* refers to the horrors of World War II, in which people's faith, political views, sexual orientation, or ethnicity could mean the difference between life and death, Joseph Hubbard, in his sculpture *Latin American WMD: Missile #6*, references contemporary conflict that also leads to genocide. The hands trapped within the missile's fuselage are unidentified "collateral damage." The line in Cohen's song, "Dance me through the panic till I'm gathered safely in," points to the indescribable moments before one human raises their hand against another.

In 1908, Florence Carlyle would write to her art dealer, William Macbeth: “Owing to the tense demand in my mind and the terrible anxiety, grief in my heart, no work has been possible. The winter that held out such possibilities for me has passed and has been the most painful one of my life.”^{iv} In this missive, Carlyle is noting the passing of her dear friend, the artist Edith Moses, with whom she shared a studio in New York City. Carlyle painted Moses in the 1905 work *The Jewess*. Rabbi Jordan Helfman translates the painting’s inscription as “HaYehodun,” the “woman Jew,”^v but clearly, the subject holds far more importance to Carlyle than the title and inscription signify, the loss of whom rendered her, for a time, incapable of painting.

Loss is also expressed in *Light Upon Light (in memory of Emina Hadzic Hassan)*, May 20, 1997 by London, Ontario-based artist Jamelie Hassan who, through this patterned watercolour, memorializes her niece.

A central image in this section is Tony Scherman’s dramatic painting *Widow III* from 1989 and a recent addition to the WAG collection. Her face obscured, the nude figure rises from a black ocean, arms raised and body twisted in anguish. This nude does not adhere to the art-historical trope of a consideration of the male gaze — indeed, there is a need to turn away from the subject’s despair and agony. The artist notes that this figure is in horrible pain, an unremembered pain that is sublimated into the painting itself.^{vi}





SHARADHANI 80 "E" 1973

SHARADHANI 80

Dance me to the wedding now and dance me on and on

Having been a poet and author, Leonard Cohen turned to music in the 1960s as a way to bring his art to a larger audience.

Without music the song is incapable of continuing. Florence Carlyle's *Young Woman Seated at Piano* shows a woman before the instrument on which she is no doubt accomplished. Women in the era in which Carlyle painted were taught the domestic arts and music was often part of the training to become respectable wives and mothers. Carlyle, of course, broke with many of those conventions by not only remaining unmarried, but becoming an accomplished and respected artist.

Rudolph Bickers's serigraph series from the Shostakovich Portfolio is an abstract interpretation of the Russian composer's piece *Piano Quintet in G Minor*. The artist forwarded the series as a gift to the composer, who replied with pleasure that Bickers would be so inspired by his music. The series includes prints of colourful forms — varied like musical notes on a page.

The Threshold is a painting of Florence Carlyle's companion and friend Judith Hastings. In her thesis on Carlyle, Susan Butlin writes about this painting's subject, stating that, "the threshold is not merely a physical limit, but is in fact an inner point of transition in which she reexamines her commitment to the event."^{vii} Carlyle, while known for depicting domestic scenes, often imbued them with a feminist

interpretation that underlined her personal independence.

Moving through this section, E. Whitway's serigraph *The Mystery Unfolds* shows a marrying of two abstracted forms, while Elisapee Ishulutaq's untitled pen-and-pencil drawing is of the dance of two birds in unison. Olexander Wlasenko's pigment drawing *Oh, what a delicious fish soup...* is based on the Russian folktale *The Flying Ship*, which tells a story of hardship and courage which ultimately lead to true love and marriage to a princess – certainly the stuff of fairy tales.

On Leonard Cohen's death in 2016 Peter Knget, in remarking on the artist's oft-times dark poetry and songs, wrote: "... in the very examinations of darkness ... we can often find profound glimmers of hope." ^{viii}

Jennie White's design is embossed and pierced into the composition with the work's title, *Love*, representing a fitting ending to an exhibition inspired by a Cohen song which, itself, mentions the word "love" ten times, and which we count on enduring.

Linda Jansma, Guest Curator

END NOTES

- i <https://cohencentric.com/2016/08/17/leonard-cohen-origins-dance-end-love/> (accessed January 25, 2019)
- ii Paula Conlon, "Iglulik Drum Dance," <http://native-dance.ca/en/scholars/igluulik-inuit-drum-dance/> (accessed August 26, 2019).
- iii Ed Zelenak website: <http://edzelenak.com> (accessed August 26, 2019).
- iv Woodstock Art Gallery archives.
- v I am grateful to both Rabbi Helfman and Sam Mogelonsky for their efforts to translate the inscription on this painting.
- vi A discussion between the artist and Ihor Holubizky. Email to the author, August 29, 2019.
- vii Susan Butlin, *Making a Living: Florence Carlyle and the Negotiation of a Professional Artistic Identity*, Carleton University, 1995, 183.
- viii Peter Knegt, "Leonard Cohen lyrics to help bring you into the light," CBC Arts, November 11, 2016, <https://www.cbc.ca/arts/leonard-cohen-lyrics-to-help-bring-you-into-the-light-1.3847148> (accessed August 26, 2019).

ILLUSTRATED WORKS

Unless otherwise specified, all works: Woodstock Art Gallery Permanent Collection.

Cover Image

Malaya Akulukjuk, Canadian, 1915-1995.
Untitled (Dancing), c.1973. Felt pen on paper.
20.2 x 25 cm. Gift of Eileen Senior and James and Mary Moorhead. Acc. # 2016.012.037

1. Jennie White, Canadian, b. 1959. *Love*, 2000. Pierced paper. 25.5 x 25.5 cm. Gift of Arlene Kennedy, 2017. Acc. # 2017.010.014
2. Ed Zelenak, Canadian, b. 1940. *Double Ark Memory*, 1990. Patinized tin, washi paper, wood. 39 x 29.7 x 3.5 cm. Anonymous Gift. Acc. # 1993.004.002
3. Florence Carlyle, Canadian, 1864-1923. *The Jewess*, 1905. Oil on canvas. 76.5 x 36 cm. Gift of Florence Johnston, 1976. Acc. # 1976.004.001
4. Tony Scherman, Canadian, b. 1950. *Widow III*, 1989. Encaustic on canvas. 177 x 152 cm. Anonymous Gift. Acc. #2019.004.001
5. Rudolf Bickers, Canadian, b. 1943. *Fugue (Shostakovich Portfolio)*, 1971. Serigraph on paper. 75.7 x 63.4 cm. Gift of the Women's Committee, 1972. Acc. # 1972.001.001d
6. H.W. Collective. *The Battle*, 2015. Video. 3:00 minutes. Courtesy of V tape, Toronto, ON.



6

