

Dr. Jim Gray was the epitome of an aspiring artist and art educator during his entire 46 year history in the Vancouver art and Art Education scene.



Jim Gray, 1986

James Underwood Gray was born in Winnipeg in 1927, but moved with his family to Vancouver in his early years. While attending Kitsilano High School he entered Canada's Merchant Navy as a cadet officer during WWII and upon returning from active duty, enrolled in the Vancouver School of Art in 1946. Strongly influenced by the great artist teacher Jack Shadbolt, in 1950 he received his Graduation Diploma with honours in Drawing and Painting. Following a year of teacher training at the Provincial Normal School, where he met his wife Pat Lindblom; in 1951 he began teaching at a number of Vancouver schools, including four years as an art specialist at Gladstone Secondary. Realizing his strong leadership abilities, in 1959 Jim was appointed District Art Supervisor by the Vancouver School Board. During that time he reinforced his education knowledge with two university degrees and nurtured a healthy culture of art education with his teacher colleagues, supporting them and a local chapter of the BC Art Teachers' Association. Comprehending the dire need for Canadian educational research, with the support of the VSB and Canada Council, Jim conducted a nation-wide inquiry in 1967 exploring the unique "Characteristics of Art Education Across Canada" to help broaden understanding with administrators on the important role art teaching played in our schools.

In 1968, he joined the Faculty of Education at UBC, teaching painting, methods classes, art education trends, graduate studies and of course, supervising student teachers ~ like yours truly. Like other members of the art department, he also maintained his studio practice, having a number of exhibitions in local art galleries. Soon after joining the faculty, Jim began working on his doctorate and in 1973, obtained a PhD from the University of Washington in Seattle, becoming the first art educator in the department to receive a doctoral degree. Thanks in part to his developing many important professional connections at NAEA Conventions over the years, he brought a vital academic impetus to the art department and of course, to graduate studies. This was important as it would pave the way for an extensive graduate program in art education at UBC to fully evolve with doctoral staff and students in the late 1980's. Dr. Rita Irwin, who became Associate Dean of UBC Teacher Education from 2005 ~ 2015 was one of the first doctoral students in art education to have Jim Gray as her advisor. She recalls: "Jim was the epitome of a mentor too. He was well known for his compassionate guidance sprinkled with classroom stories and his occasional narratives at sea. In each case one could tell he loved his profession and was eager to mentor the next generation of artists and art educators as we sought to improve education together. His enthusiasm, patience and wisdom made him the kind of mentor we all aspired to become".

He also initiated the inspirational Quarterly Quorum program for grad students in 1982, bringing them face to face with a number of the continent's leading art education theorists and researchers. In 1990, he and colleague Dr. Ron MacGregor conducted "PROACTA: DBAE", a continent wide research project on the wide ranging effects of Discipline Based Art Education; concluding among many things, that despite all the quality curriculum material being distributed on what to teach: "The Teacher is the Curriculum".

After spending his entire adult life advancing Art Education in BC and across this great land, Jim retired from the University of British Columbia in 1992 and soon moved with his wife Pat to their getaway cabin near Powell River, BC. Shortly thereafter they began regular Cruise ship journeys that he often illustrated in his sketchbook as the ship culture, like a lively classroom, always fascinated him and he could reminisce his Navy days at sea too. Sadly, his wife died in 2009 and after moving to Campbell River in 2015 to be closer to his family, Jim Gray passed away at age 89 on March 18, 2017.

Thanks For All Your Great Pioneering Work Jim !!

- Bill MacDonald, former UBC student '69 -'74, M.Ed '82