

Aganetha Dyck

BRAIN IS NOT ENOUGH



Gallery 1.1.1., School of Art, University of Manitoba, January 10-28, 1988

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School of Art, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada

**THE
“ART CIGARETTE”
RESOLUTION**

Early in 1987, Aganetha Dyck sent letters to various office buildings and institutions, including the Winnipeg Art Gallery, to be posted publicly. These letters proposed the following:

I am an artist who is having an exhibition at Gallery 1.1.1., January 10-29, 1987. My exhibition deals with habits and addictions. If you are considering stopping your cigarette habit, I have a proposal for you. If you like you may give me your last cigarette. I in turn will turn it into a work of art, exhibit it at Gallery 1.1.1. and return it to you after the exhibition. There is no charge for the first 25 persons who participate.

She then spent the summer and fall at her studio at West Hawk Lake, turning cigarettes into art. Her studio was littered with hundreds of cigarettes in metamorphosis,—on table tops, shelves, in niches and corners. The finished works are now being exhibited at Gallery 1.1.1., under the title *Brain is Not Enough*.

For Dyck, the act of transforming cigarettes into art is not so strange. In her past work, for example, she gave us fried and canned buttons; sculptural hats, suspended from the ceiling out of reach of any heads; woolen clothing machine-washed and shrunken to uselessness; and shoulder pads clustered into cabbage patches. Recent works, called *Cradles*, were made of trays suspended by cheesecloth, containing found objects embedded into plaster and resin. In the works called the *Refrigerator Series*, open refrigerators displayed disgusting inedibles.

To some extent, any artist's work is autobiographical. The materials Dyck chooses—like buttons, refrigerators, sweaters, shoulder pads—and processes—like frying, machine washing, sewing, wrapping, and embedding—come from domestic surroundings. She works intuitively, which permits complete freedom to explore and to accept resolutions to technical problems. The result is freshness.

The wife, mother, woman, artist, usually produces constructive objects and services. However, for Dyck, the artist, the products are a paradox and they are subversives. They show objects that previously had a

function become useless by the creative act. (Is this a tension arising from the Mennonite emphasis on practicality?) Normally we think of the creative act as formative. In her art to date one feels a drive that every work is a deliberate destruction of an object's entity in order to complete its new existence. The object is so extensively attacked that only a reminiscence of its past is left. The new object created is an artifact and survives as art. The gestalt which allows for audience identification and participation mollifies the feeling that the transformation is sinister.

When a mother and wife turns into a career artist, there can be conflicts and struggles. Dyck's early works show this. The current exhibits at Gallery 1.1.1. reveal in addition a new significance. The subject matter is still subversion, but in the sense that subversion is used not to destroy past functions but to offer assistance to others in overcoming a bad habit. To better understand this evolution, it is important to refer back to her refrigerator series. When these were exhibited (one in the Winnipeg Art Gallery and five in the Main-Access Gallery), Dyck was presented with a notice to move out of her downtown studio space. Where to put them after the show? She ordered the movers to take them to the city dump to be buried for future anthropologists to find and make of them whatever they wished. This dumping was in fact a courageous act which reinforced her new self, the self-confident woman and artist.

When Dyck placed the sign up asking for the "last cigarette" from smokers, she said that she did not wish to make any judgements. However, by asking for the "last cigarette", is she suggesting implicitly or even explicitly that it was a good idea to quit? In the same abrupt way she dumped her refrigerators, is she asking the smoker to throw away a heavy habit? Certainly, by offering to turn the last cigarette into art, she is reaching out a helping hand. This gesture on her part which is socially relevant is a significant departure from her previously introverted works which are self-referential.

Smoking is alternately described as medicinal and poisonous; pleasureable and sickening; sweet-smelling and nauseous; calming and stimulating; addictive and

comforting; romantic and dirty; social and anti-social; and so on and on. That can also describe the art cigarettes.

The art cigarette sculptures, while purporting to be made from the "last cigarette" in the package given up by the smoker, were, in fact, in most cases rolled by the artist or "tailor made". They were made singly, or in sets. Some were coupled. Many were encased in resin, wax, glue, varnish and/or thread wrappings. They were sewn, tied, chained, wired and tied often to other found objects such as rhinestones, costume jewelry parts, glass beads, tinsels, safety pins, metal fasteners, plastic flowers and even metal clamps and screws. Some retain the integrity of a cigarette, while many are transformed into colourful gaudy jewel-like objects or into sensuous and tactile objects. All of these could still be held between the fingers like a cigarette.

Dyck's sensibility for light and dark themes in the past is present in these works. They are simultaneously beautiful and disturbing.

Many are metaphoric: cue tips (reference to smoky poolrooms), chains and plastic syringe parts (to bondage). They may be used merely for adornment, to complete an ensemble, or as conversational pieces, at social gatherings, or to evoke some psychological behaviour. Numerous interpretations are possible. She leaves the viewer to create their own response from memory and expectation. Or just hold them and fidget with them to calm anxieties.

In her past works, Dyck destroyed the functional object partly because the artist is in conflict with the practical demands of society. In this case, for once, the artist and society agrees. She is destroying objects without function.

Grace E. Thomson
Winnipeg

BIOGRAPHY

Aganetha Dyck

Citizenship: Canadian

Born: September 12, 1937.

Address: 121 Dunrobin Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba, R2K 0T3.

Phone—Studio: (204) 667-3056.

Education

1974-76 Prince Albert Community College, Prince Albert, Saskatchewan.

1980-82 University of Winnipeg, Art History

Selected One Person Exhibitions

- 1978 "Aganetha Dyck", Art Centre, Prince Albert, Saskatchewan.
- 1979 "Changes", The Norman Mackenzie Art Gallery, Regina, Sask. A "Prairie Artist Series" exhibition which travelled in Saskatchewan under the Community Programme of the Norman Mackenzie Art Gallery, Regina, Saskatchewan.
- 1979 "Sizes 8-46", Arthur Street Gallery, Winnipeg.
- 1983 "23 Suitcases", A.K.A. Gallery, Saskatoon.
- 1984 "Aganetha Dyck: Recent Work", The Winnipeg Art Gallery.
- 1984 "This Summer's Canned Buttons", Upstairs Gallery, Winnipeg.
- 1985 "Aganetha Dyck", Susan Whitney Gallery, Regina, Saskatchewan.
- 1986 "Cradles", Plug In Gallery, Winnipeg.
- 1987 "Suitcases", Oseredok Gallery, Winnipeg.

Selected Group Exhibitions

- 1975 "To a Fine Art: Saskatchewan Fabric", Rosemont Art Gallery, Regina. Toured Saskatchewan in 1975-76 under the Community Programme of the Norman Mackenzie Art Gallery.
- 1975 Gallery on the Roof, Regina, Saskatchewan.
- 1977 "Manitoba Decorative Arts", Ukrainian Cultural and Educational Centre, Winnipeg.
- 1978 "Fibres", Fibre Art Associates Juried Show, Fleet Gallery, Winnipeg.
- 1978 "Twelve Manitoba Artists", Leonard Marcoe Gallery, Winnipeg.
- 1982 "Under Construction", Winnipeg Art Gallery, Winnipeg
- 1983 "Contact One", Walter Phillips Gallery, Banff, Alberta.
- 1986 Expo 86, Canada Pavillion, FOOTNOTES.
- 1986 "Another Prairies", Harbourfront Gallery, Toronto.
- 1986 Convergence '86, John Black Aird Gallery, Toronto.
- 1987 "A Multiplicity of Voices", University of Manitoba and Plug In Galleries, Winnipeg.
- 1987 "1987", Winnipeg Art Gallery.
- 1987 Main Access Gallery, Winnipeg.

Related Work

- 1983, 86 "Alive in the Gallery", Public Slide Lecture, Kamloops Public Art Gallery, Kamloops, British Columbia.
- 1983 Slide Lecture, University of Saskatchewan, Joan Borsa's class.
- 1985 Mentor for the M.A.W.A. program, Winnipeg, Manitoba.
- 1986 Public slide lecture, Plug In Gallery, Winnipeg.
- 1986 Max Dean Et Al Group, Finalist, Tribute to Human Rights Commission, Ottawa.
- 1987 Slide lecture, University of Manitoba.
- 1987 Slide lecture, Concordia University, Montreal.
- 1987 Acquisition Committee, Winnipeg Art Gallery.
- 1970-85 Travelled extensively in the United States of America and Canada.
- 1984 Travelled to Paris, France. Toured Holland and Germany.



R. Talbot, Distribution Group, University of Manitoba

Detail; Brain is not enough



R. Tubol, Distribution Group, University of Manitoba

Detail; Brain is not enough



Detail; Brain is not enough



William Eakin

Detail; Brain is not enough

Awards and Grants

- 1977 Canada Council Explorations Grant.
1979 Manitoba Arts Council, Visual Arts Grant.
1981 Manitoba Arts Council, Visual Arts Grant.
1983 Manitoba Arts Council, Senior Arts Grant.
1985 Canada Council Arts Grant "B".
1985 Leon A Brown Award, Winnipeg Art Gallery.
1986 Manitoba Arts Council, Senior Arts Grant.

Collections

Canada Council Art Bank
Saskatchewan Arts Board
Winnipeg Art Gallery
Private Collections in Canada, United States of America,
England, and Germany.
Artspace, Winnipeg.

Selected Bibliography

- 1975 Regina Leader Post, review, Gallery on the Roof,
December.
1979 CKY-TV News, January, "Sizes 8-46", Winnipeg.
1979 CKND TV Guest Artist on "For Art's Sake" with
Kevin Evans.
1979 CBC Radio review by Dale Amundson on "Round
About", January.
1979 CBC TV coverage of installation at Norman Mackenzie
Art Gallery, October 24, with Lorna Jackson.
1979 Winnipeg Free Press, review of "Sizes 8-46" by
Leonard Marcoe.
1982 Arts West, Vol. 7, No. 6, June, "Winnipeg Sculptors",
by Andrea Lang.
1982 Vanguard, Summer, review "Under Construction", by
Kip Park, Pages 51 and 52.
1982 Winnipeg Free Press, review "Under Construction",
by John Graham.
1984 Winnipeg Free Press, review "Aganetha Dyck:
Recent Work", by Randal McIlroy.
1984 CBC Radio interview. Stereo morning.
1984 Arts Manitoba, Winter 1984. "Women's Work:
The Radical Domestications of Aganetha Dyck", by
Sheila Butler. Pages 15 to 19. Cover.

- 1985 Regina Leader Post. "Surreal Exhibit explores range
of buttons in jars", by Meta Perry. June 20, 1985.
1985 Western People Magazine, "Responding to the
environment: Winnipeg artist Aganetha Dyck uses
the ordinary to create art", by Sigrid Dahle.
Pages 14 and 15. August 22.
1985 Vanguard, September, Susan Whitney Gallery,
review by Joan Borsa. Page 30.
1986 CBC TV "State of the Arts" coverage of "Cradles"
exhibition. Robert Enright. February 6.
1986 Winnipeg Free Press, article by Adrian Chamberlain,
regarding the "Cradles" exhibition.
1986 "Another Prairies", Harbourfront Gallery, Toronto,
Catalogue.
1986 "Another Prairies", Globe and Mail, John Bentley
Mays.
1987 "A Multiplicity of Voices", Catalogue, Sigrid Dahle,
University of Manitoba.
1987 Woman's Art Journal, Vol. 8, No. 1, Spring/Summer
1987, United States of America publication.
Pages 35 to 38.
1987 Contemporary Art in Manitoba, Catalogue,
The Winnipeg Art Gallery.
1987 Border Crossings, Summer Review, Al Ruston.
Pages 25 and 26.

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CREDITS

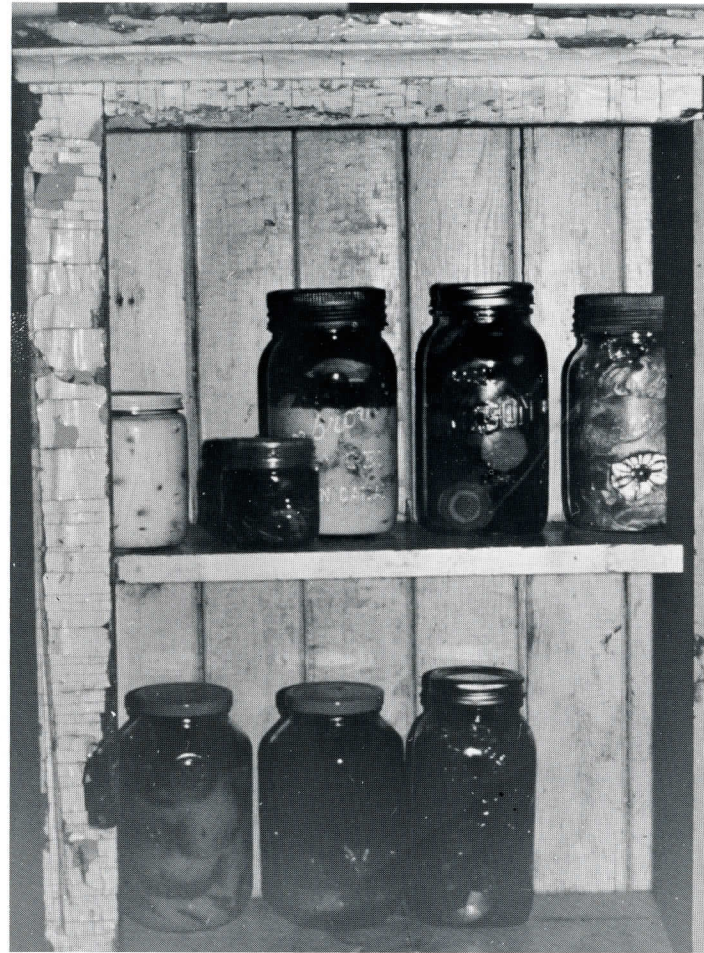
Exhibition Curator: Grace E. Thomson
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Refrigerator, 1986



William Eakin

In My Father's Garage (the button jars in the cupboard) 1984



William Eakin

Cabbages, 1981



James Lam

Cradles, 1986



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