

## Collaborations in a time of COVID : Writers and Artists of Salt Spring Island

### Curatorial Statement

Collaboration is about making connections, exploring possibilities, making associations, all actions that do not accord well with the careful isolating and distancing that have become our new way of life. When this project was instigated last year, we had no way of knowing just how restricted our way of life would become very shortly after those first introductions had been made. In mid-March an idea that had been greeted at the beginning of the year with enthusiasm by a very diverse group of 26 writers and artists suddenly became more complicated. The majority who had responded so positively to my invitation knew of each others work but did not know each other in person. I was surprised and delighted when I checked in with them at the end of April to discover they were all carrying on, getting to know each other and working towards a common goal, an exhibit in October that at that time had begun to seem highly unlikely.

Only two of our collaborators Karen and Murray Reiss had no problem in their isolation. It was an exhibit of their work which sparked this idea. In 2015 the words of Murray Reiss's poetry acted as a springboard to push wife Karen's paintings into wholly new territory. The result, shown at Kizmit in 2015, was a strong body of work and one of the more interesting exhibits of that year on Salt Spring. I have always enjoyed words and images equally. This exhibit made me conscious that with a little instigation there were opportunities waiting to be explored on an island so richly blessed with talented writers and artists. I am very grateful that ArtSpring's Cicela Månsson saw the possibilities and encouraged this project forward.

Any collaboration between two different disciplines forces participants to consider each in relation to the other, opening up the formal boundaries, exposing the creators to risk, forcing them to step outside their comfort zone into new territory. Ideally in this case the viewer becomes a third protagonist. Intertwined with writer and artist's intent reading and viewing have equal importance, and no longer assume their usual roles of explanation but take on the more challenging one of exploration.

Throughout Covid an image by the British artist Bob and Roberta Smith OBE RA has sat on our kitchen windowsill. In Bob and Roberta's typical large font style the image says THERE IS STILL ART THERE IS STILL HOPE. In strange times something to live by. In real life "Bob and Roberta" collaborates successfully with his wife, artist Jessica Voorsanger.

In this exhibit Tai Whelon returned home from virus inflicted Montreal to work long distance with young island poet Taryn Muldoon; second generation island artist Gabrielle Jensen found lives to explore in internationally recognised author Kathy Page's "Dear Evelyn"; and Canadian theatre great Susan Benson considered the drama of Afghanistan through the words of a very busy Dr. Kevin Patterson. Along with the 20 other writers and artists involved in this exhibit they prove Bob and Roberta Smith's slogans true. Art does indeed make people powerful.

Margaret Day  
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