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VIVA FOUNDATION ANNOUNCES 1991 CASH AWARD WINNERS

On May 28, 1991 at 8:30 p.m. the VIVA Selection Committee announced that Vancouver artists Persimmon Blackbridge and Gary Pearson are the recipients of the 1991 VIVA cash awards. The committee feels that the two chosen artists have both made outstanding long-term commitments to their work as visual artists and a continuing contribution to the development of visual art in this region. The Selection Committee wishes to acknowledge that in spite of limited financial support and recognition, Blackbridge and Pearson have willingly proceeded with the development and production of their own work and have made a visible and significant contribution to the cultural life of their community.

The VIVA Selection Committee is made up of artists, critics and curators who are asked by the Foundation to bring together a selection of unsolicited nominees to be discussed with respect to their appropriateness for this Award. In this sense it is not a competition and artists are not asked to make submissions. The mandate of the committee is province-wide and includes a variety of media. In its first three years the award has acknowledged the work of artists from the Lower Mainland whom the Committee felt were deserving of support. While the number of deserving artists is far larger than the resources of the Foundation, the Selection Committee makes every effort to identify through its process a pair of artists whose belief in what they do is reflected in their longstanding commitment to their work and the artistic life of British Columbia.

Persimmon Blackbridge

A well-known figure in Vancouver's art community, Persimmon Blackbridge's two most ambitious projects to date are sculptural installations, that obviously concerned women, but also addressed major social issues. Her content is social and political, yet her handling of forms is powerful and expressive

The earlier of these, *Still Sane*, was shown at Women in Focus Gallery in 1984. This multi-media production was based on the life story of a woman who had been institutionalized, judged mentally unfit because of her lesbian predilections. Her thoughts about the unjust incarceration, the phrases that indicated her progress toward a healthy self-acceptance, were written, literally on the surfaces of dozens of ceramic body casts that depicted a woman past middle years in attitudes of despair and triumph.

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In *Doing Time* — an environment created for the Surrey Art Gallery in 1988 — Blackbridge collaborated with four female ex-inmates, three of whom were women of colour. In this work, where a maze of grey walls transformed the gallery into a prison, twenty-four clothed papercast portraits of the former prisoners were set near inscriptions that chronicled their experiences inside and outside jail.

Blackbridge has contributed her values to a mother who took her to art galleries and picket lines when she was young. Other strong influences are medieval European sculpture, the paintings of Joe Cook, the instruction of Sally Michener, the lesbian community and several generations of relatives locked up in institutions.

Gary Pearson

Gary Pearson paints with oil on linen canvas. His images include grids, conduit-like pipes, spirals, rectangles and figures. This sounds very traditional, but in fact, the paintings use paint in a totally new way, an almost crude surface evolves because there is no falling back upon paint trickery, clever effects or charming colour. Colour in Pearson's paintings often defies verbal description: they are ochre-like?, a sort of grey?, almost a yellow?, a near-white? The images are vaguely familiar, but can never be literally pinned down as "something". Even the figures are an entirely new symbol for the human form.

This work is from an informed artist, aware of art history and contemporary trends, but inventing a new painterly language totally avoiding cliché to produce a challenging art that gives us no well-worn answers.

The VIVA Foundation was created by Doris and Jack Shadbolt in 1988. Previous winners are Carol Itter, Neil Wedman, Carel Moiseiwitsch, Stan Douglas, Terry Ewasiuk and David Ostrem.

A press kit containing photographs and detailed biographical information is available upon request. Call Janice Whitehead, (604)254-1405.