

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF THE CARIBOO LIBRARY  
BOX 3010, KAMLOOPS, B.C.  
V2C 5N3

005946

Kamloops Art Gallery

c.1

6934310

1 of 5

KAMLOOPS  
ART  
GALLERY

UNFINISHED

Memories



Spencer J. Harrison

UNFINISHED

Memories


*ORGANIZED BY THE KAMLOOPS  
ART GALLERY FOR*

THE ART GALLERY OF THE  
SOUTH OKANAGAN

THE VERNON PUBLIC ART  
GALLERY

THE KELOWNA ART GALLERY

PRINCE GEORGE ART GALLERY



*This exhibition is dedicated to Bernard  
Sauvé, and to the music of Sarah  
McLaughlin.*

**Spencer J. Harrison**  
**Unfinished Memories**

Publisher:

© **Kamloops Art Gallery**  
207 Seymour Street  
Kamloops, British Columbia  
V2C 2E7

All rights reserved — no  
portion of this catalogue may  
be reproduced or used without  
the written permission of  
the publisher.

ISBN. 1-895497-04-3

Cover Design: Tak Yamaguchi  
Design: Anna-Marie Larsen  
Proofreader: Trish Keegan  
Photography: Spencer J. Harrison  
Printed in Canada by Noran Printing Ltd.

The Gallery's exhibitions and programmes  
are assisted by the Government of British  
Columbia through the Ministry of Tourism  
and the Ministry Responsible for Culture,  
the City of Kamloops, the Canada Council,  
corporate sponsorships, and the energetic  
donation of time by Gallery volunteers.

## FOREWORD

It is through the spirit of co-operation and determination of many that this  
exhibition has been circulated:

Thank you to Jann L.M. Bailey and Anna-Marie Larsen of the Kamloops  
Art Gallery for their research, essay, and production of the exhibition  
catalogue. To Susan Brandoli of the Vernon Art Gallery, Gerald Jessop of  
the Kelowna Art Gallery, Anna Pickett of the Prince George Art Gallery,  
and Emile Mongran of the National Museum of Canada, my appreciation  
for their unending patience. A thank you is also extended to Norma Miller  
of Noran Printing Ltd. for special assistance with this publication.

To Spencer J. Harrison, thank you for sharing with us this voyage and your  
profound honesty.

*Brenda Fredrick, Director*  
*Art Gallery of the South Okanagan*





***AND IN THE SILENCE I HEARD YOUR HEART BREAK***  
1990, acrylic on canvas, 50 x 60"

## UNFINISHED MEMORIES

*Art is a road back, and like all roads back, it is a road forward, for it leads not to a past, accomplished somewhere back there, but to the past within us. It offers a road back to experiencing, to a quickening of the senses, to a fuller realization of our humanity, and to a wholeness which is our real heritage.<sup>1</sup>*

Our heritage, our expression of self, is one of collective consciousness. It is riddled with change and the production of art makes visible these continuous changes in our thinking and feeling. These tangible outpourings are often an expression of very personal values coupled with an interpretation of our own feelings — feelings that require parameters but demand knowledge beyond the known.

Since the Renaissance, art has moved away from religious representation to embody the intellectual and philosophical theories of the day. Artists have become self-conscious and individual.<sup>2</sup> Spencer J. Harrison has said that his work is about passion taken to the point where passion is almost painful.<sup>3</sup> (Like religious fervor, emotional pain embodies the potential for transcendence.) This emotional quest takes the artist to an uneasy intuitive threshold: nothing can ever be perfect.

For Harrison, the image of a boat has become a token of an ideal. The boats he paints portray the spiritual nature of his being and their relationship to his sexuality. The literal utilitarian potential of a boat dictates its use as a vessel for movement on water. That it is a



vessel, a vacuous receptacle, ensures it sedulous authority to transport and to be filled. In the majority of Harrison's paintings the boat is empty, soliciting from the viewer the urge to claim that uninhabited space. Thus, we are engaged in Harrison's seductive quest for the vessel's enigmatic codes.

Harrison has said that "the boats appear empty and adrift, often within an undesirable landscape. Metaphorically, however, these boats are not empty, but act as ambiguous vessels containing spiritual attributes."<sup>4</sup> Though the boats are situated in melancholic and desolate landscapes, their cargos, while not exclusively figurative, are always emotive. For Harrison the boat is a metaphoric transport of yearning desire taken to the threshold of intimacy and honesty. Harrison uses the boat both as a decorative symbol, satisfying his idea of what is perfect, and as a vessel filled with emotional facts or codes. It functions as a mnemonic key, or touchstone of self.

The serialization of the artist's fractured desire is evident in paintings such as *The Ceremony Painting*, *Can I Only Love You From Afar*, and *I Just Wanted to Hold You Forever*. In *Can I Only Love You From Afar*, the artist has painted the bow of the boat in the lower picture plane and the viewer, by positioning, becomes its passenger. The vessel rests on the edge of a waterfall, about to go over. By its shape, the waterfall suggests Horseshoe Falls at Niagara Falls. This site is classified as one of the seven natural wonders of the world but also connotes idealized love, the rosy glow of honeymoons, and the consummation of desire. Harrison has transformed this clichéd locale into a landscape made tense by its dark tones and the kinetic stress of cascading water, thus creating a sophisticated emotional panorama.

The volatile position of the boat in *Can I Only Love You From Afar* metamorphoses to a calmer vista in *The Ceremony Painting*. The

troubled sky gives way to one of vibrant blue. The tight, almost claustrophobic composition of *Can I Only Love You From Afar* becomes an expansive seascape in *The Ceremony Painting*. Breaking the horizon line is a boat that does not fall through the air but floats on it. Harrison says this piece speaks of a lack of ritual in romance today, paraphrasing his own wistful desire for the ceremony of courtship. That the boat hovers in the air, neither rising to the heavens nor situating itself on its intended surface speaks of a need to choose, and of locating oneself between the poles of the physical world and the psychic/emotional one. Harrison demands softness rather than aggression. Romance is a distraction from the boredom of everyday life; desire is paradoxically appealing and uncomfortable.

*I Just Wanted to Hold You Forever* offers a sense of closure. Security of decision and emotional rootedness are manifested in the rowboats mooring line. The sky, oblique and moody, attests to the discomfort and oppression of decision as the counterpoint of desire. Committing to a choice could mean you have to give up the illusion that you have it at all.

Perhaps it is the picture *Every Cherished Moment Remembered* that best echoes Harrison's personal narrative of loneliness and haunting sensual emotion. The canvas is striking by its difference. It is a moody, vertical arrangement of hue and tone modelled into abstract form. Breaking the centre top of the picture is the prow of a boat. It is easily read as an upsidedown boat until the viewer realizes it is a reflection of the prow on the water. Reflection, like memory, is dynamic and changing. By taking as his subject the reflected surface, the artist metaphorically evinces awareness not only of the subjective appeal of romance but of its unsatisfactory and ephemeral nature.

Through a strata of emotional allusion — the “moody” sky, the “melancholic” boats — human presence is consistently inferred. When the body is included, rendered as truncated fragments on the blueprints *Front View Goodbye* and *Boat Builders and Boat Section*, the bodies are meshed with architectural components such as stairs and columns. This composite presentation puns the “supporting” role of the individual: ultimately, the psyche, not the body, sustains romance. The sparsely delineated craft retains the focal role of this drama.

Consistent within this body of work is Harrison’s need to delineate structure and assess emotional facts or codes. This analysis is emphatic in the pictures *Unfinished Memories* and *You See I Became Tired Of People Asking How You Are*. Unusual because they are paintings of the figure (though not, one senses, intended as portraiture), the idealized nature of the representation parallels the earnest struggle with emotion consistent throughout this exhibition. The rower is isolated yet engulfs the picture plane. The placement and rendering of these figures mimic the exaggerated proportions of classical gods. As Harrison has focused on the structure of the boat, so too has he focused on that of the rower.

Harrison’s boats float in isolation, sometimes moored or carried by the force of the water to precipices. They are unpopulated and thus inanimate, representing disempowerment and incapacity. The figures in *You See I Became Tired of People Asking How You Are* and *Unfinished Memories* are rowing. The message offered is that the self is complete in and of itself. The tools required to propel the boat (the relationship) are part of the rower; empowerment of the individual will likewise propel the relationship.

The paintings, like the figures, are heroic and ask us to celebrate the individual and subjective self. The verbal clues offered in Harrison’s

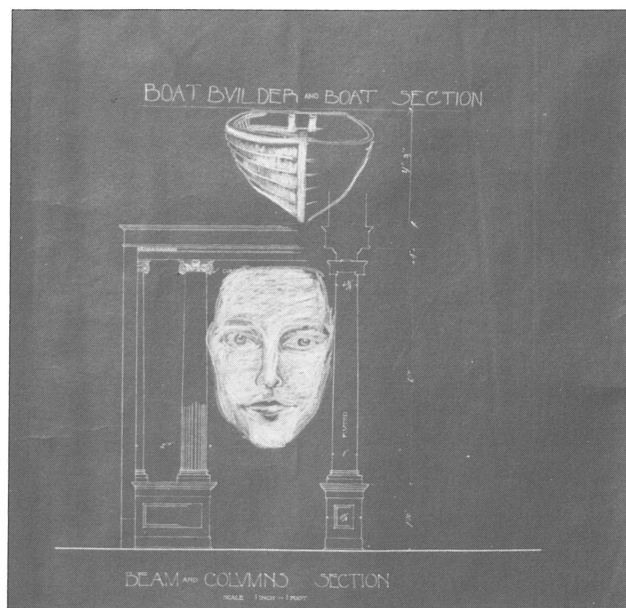
prose-like titles allow entry to the metaphor of the vessel as a container for thoughts and emotions. In Harrison’s paintings lingering thoughts are combined with ambient forces to echo the struggle for a relationship in his life. The frequency of the boat as a symbol refers from one work to another and empowers the work to reach beyond personal specifics to a universal, psychological content. We can learn from Harrison’s visual outpouring to appreciate softness over aggression, sensuality and gentleness over rage. As we make unconscious choices we inherently accept our natural inclination to make order out of chaos.

Jann L.M. Bailey  
Director/Curator  
Kamloops Art Gallery

Anna-Marie Larsen  
Exhibition/Education Coordinator  
Kamloops Art Gallery

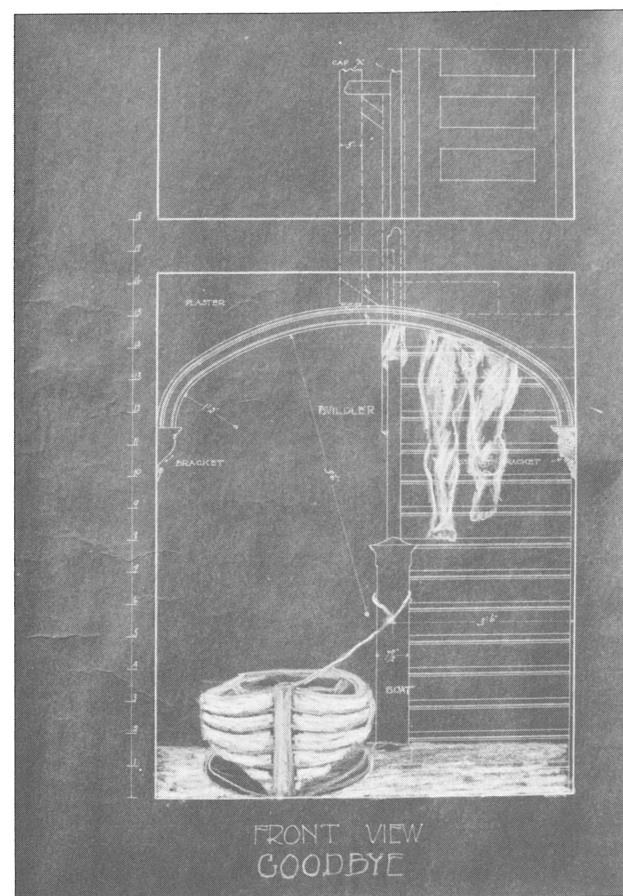
Notes:

1. Louise Dudley, Austin Faricy, and James G. Rice, *The Humanities*. Toronto: McGraw-Hill, 1978, p. 476.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 57; 65; 70.
3. Spencer J. Harrison, from a conversation with A. Larsen, January 7, 1992. Unless otherwise indicated, all further quotes are taken from this interview.
4. Spencer J. Harrison, from a conversation with J.L.M. Bailey, January, 1989.



**BOAT BUILDER AND BOAT SECTION**

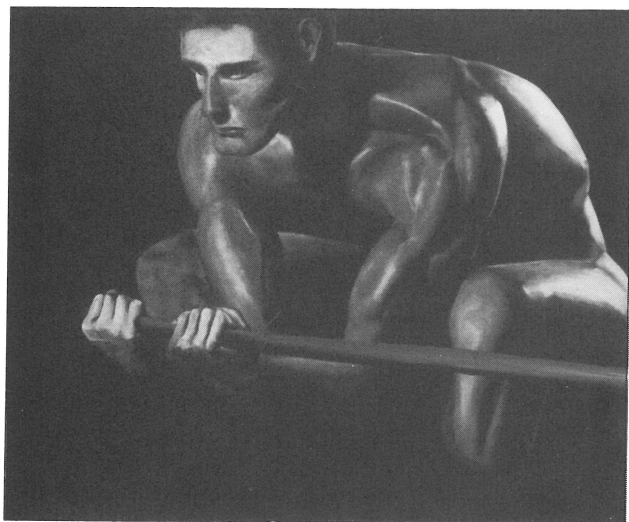
1990, china marker on antique blueprint,  $17\frac{1}{2} \times 18\frac{5}{8}$ "



**FRONT VIEW GOODBYE**

1990, china marker on antique blueprint,  $17\frac{3}{4} \times 12\frac{7}{8}$ "





***UNFINISHED MEMORIES***  
1990, acrylic on canvas, 50 x 60"

## **BIOGRAPHY**

**BORN** 1962, Peterborough, Ontario

### **EDUCATION**

1985 Art and Architecture Studies, Venice, Italy  
1987 Bachelor of Fine Arts, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario

### **SOLO EXHIBITIONS**

1991 Artspace, Peterborough, Ontario (Residency)  
1990 Peterborough Art Gallery, Peterborough, Ontario  
Williamson House Gallery, Peterborough, Ontario  
1989 Kamloops Art Gallery, Kamloops, British Columbia  
Lindsay Gallery, Lindsay, Ontario  
1988 Broadview Gallery, Peterborough, Ontario  
1987 Winters Gallery, York University, Toronto, Ontario  
Kingston Hall, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario  
1986 Artspace, Peterborough, Ontario

### **GROUP EXHIBITIONS**

1991 Window Space, Artspace, Peterborough, Ontario  
1987/88 Lindsay Juried Show, Lindsay Art Gallery, Lindsay, Ontario  
1987 Kawartha Autumn Studio Tour, Peterborough, Ontario  
1986/87 Toronto Outdoor Art Exhibition, Toronto, Ontario  
1987 Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Kingston, Ontario  
K.A.A.I., Kingston, Ontario  
1986 Saw Gallery, Ottawa, Ontario  
Artspace, Peterborough, Ontario  
New Faces, Artspace, Peterborough, Ontario  
1985 The Next Wave, Artspace, Peterborough, Ontario

### **AWARDS**

1988/89/90/91 Ontario Arts Council, Materials Assistance  
1986/87 Toronto Outdoor Art Exhibition Honourable Mention, Student

## LIST OF WORKS

### ***TODAY A CARD CAME FOR YOU***

*I Was Alone*  
*And Searching For You*  
*We Became Lovers*  
*I Told You, "Love Never Just Ends"*  
*"But Sometimes It Changes"*  
*And The Pain Is Now Too Much*  
*Though My Diary Will Always Be Full Of Memories Of You*

1990, in seven parts, each acrylic on paper, 2 x 2"

### ***VESSEL OF THE HEART***

1991, acrylic on panel, 10 x 14"

### ***IN MY HEART ONLY AS A MEMORY***

1991, acrylic on canvas, 24 x 36"

### ***UNFINISHED MEMORIES***

1990, acrylic on canvas, 50 x 60"

### ***OF JOAN OF ARC***

1989, acrylic on canvas, 36 x 48 $\frac{1}{4}$ "

### ***BOAT BUILDER AND BOAT SECTION***

1990, china marker on antique blueprint, 17 $\frac{1}{2}$  x 18 $\frac{5}{8}$ "

### ***FRONT VIEW GOODBYE***

1990, china marker on antique blueprint, 17 $\frac{3}{4}$  x 12 $\frac{7}{8}$ "

### ***LOVERS MOORING PLAN***

1990, china marker on antique blueprint, 23 $\frac{7}{8}$  x 17 $\frac{5}{8}$ "

### ***EVEN A PIERCING CRY WOULD SEEM LIKE LITTLE MORE TO YOU THAN SILENCE***

1990, mixed media, 22 $\frac{1}{2}$  x 30 $\frac{1}{4}$ "

### ***TOGETHER WE WOULD DREAM, NOW WE ONLY WEEP***

1990, mixed media, 22 $\frac{1}{2}$  x 30 $\frac{1}{4}$ "

### ***CAN I ONLY LOVE YOU FROM AFAR***

1989, acrylic on canvas, 45 $\frac{1}{2}$  x 48"

### ***YOU SEE, I BECAME TIRED OF PEOPLE ASKING HOW YOU ARE***

1990, acrylic on canvas, 60 x 50"

### ***YOU DIDN'T EVEN HEAR ME SAY GOODBYE***

1990, acrylic on canvas, 53 $\frac{3}{8}$  x 47 $\frac{3}{8}$ "

### ***AND IN THE SILENCE I HEARD YOUR HEART BREAK***

1990, acrylic on canvas, 50 x 60"

### ***THE CEREMONY PAINTING***

1991, acrylic on canvas, 24 x 36"

### ***EVERY CHERISHED MOMENT REMEMBERED***

1991, acrylic on canvas, 24 x 36"

### ***I JUST WANT TO HOLD YOU FOREVER***

1991, acrylic on canvas, 48 x 106 $\frac{1}{4}$ "

