

have my own strong sense of independence. She was a good role model for me.

AL: The torque also appears in the painting *Earth Goddess*. Your grandmother stands on plowed ground. The torque is also there larger than life and the figure stands inside of it. What does this mean? Why is the torque there? What are you saying about your grandmother?

DK: Beyond the torque’s real meaning, it is also a circle. I see circles as a universal symbol of confinement, and also as a symbol of completion. It is as if by farming and taking care of her children - being incredibly independent - she located her own sense of completeness.

AL: What about the parallels between the cyclic functions of a woman’s body and that of the earth, and the literalness of the circle?

DK: Again, sure. In terms of, say, the menstrual cycle and the cycles of the earth. Spring is when animal young are born and crops are planted. In the painting it’s also springtime. She’s standing barefoot in a plowed field and she’s holding a baby, a participant of those natural cycles.

I also intentionally painted her barefoot. Another thing I remember is that she used to like to mix clay with her feet for plastering the log granaries. I think of her feet as being very strong and that they gave her a strong foundation.

AL: In another figurative painting, called *After Harvest*, you painted yourself standing barefoot, but you’re not standing on the earth. Can you describe that painting?

DK: I’m holding a sack of flour and I’m standing barefoot on a patchwork quilt. Quilt-making was a skill that was passed from generation to generation, from mother to daughter. I guess I thought of the sack of flour as representative of the wheat that we grew to sell. Because of this, for instance, the money for me to go to school was available, which meant I could choose a different lifestyle than farming.

AL: There are some obvious connections between the paintings *Earth Goddess* and *After Harvest*. However, one difference is that in *After Harvest* you chose to place yourself indoors. Why?

DK: I think that it was an unconscious attempt at reconciling having left the farm, and a way to explore some of what I identify as symbols of my personal past.

AL: You painted yourself standing on a quilt which represents the prairie landscape. Behind you are blue walls, not a blue sky. So you’re not standing in a real landscape, although you are conveying the idea of landscape. Likewise, the harvest that you are holding is a refined and processed version of the wheat that you grew on the farm. There’s a paradoxical sense that you are severing yourself from your past at the same time that you are trying to reconcile it.

DK: I guess that’s true. I do feel removed from that. I’m glad that I don’t have to cope with inheriting the land in the way that my father did. Another thing about farming is that its very hard to get away from the farm for long periods of time because of the commitment you have to looking after the animals and the crops. So I think I have more freedom in that sense than perhaps my mother or father or grandmother did. I feel less constrained by my heritage.

AL: How do you feel now about your technical ability with the figure?

DK: I struggle with it. I struggled with the one in the *Earth Goddess* quite a bit. It did start flowing better, the colors started to work and I tried to loosen it up a bit.

AL: How did you approach *Sacred Earth Quilt*?

DK: I looked at aerial photos of the prairies to see how the land is sectioned off and the patterns that result from that. I find that the patterns of the land are very similar to the patterns in quilts, which is why in some sections things like the log cabin pattern have emerged. The colors I used are different than the colors of the landscape, but the marks and lines that I used are similar to what you would see in a landscape like this.

AL: So you have created a metaphor by making the landscape into a quilt - you’re blanketing the earth?

DK: It’s a protective cover.

AL: When you first started working with the torque, you used it as the focus of you composition. Your manipulation of it, trying it out in different contexts, would indicate that you were trying to find the place where it could belong. In the later work, the torque is still evident but you seem to become more confident about its use. In the *Sacred Earth Quilt*, you have included several torques. Here, however, they are mediated by the other elements of the landscape you have painted, rather than being its focus.

DK: I think in some way that I have begun to wish that the ring was more a part of my own culture. I’m using this ring in a more general way. In *Harvest* and *Earth Goddess*, the figures are becoming more important than the ring. I don’t know! I may have worked through it. I’m starting to get other ideas!

List of Works

Dimensions are in centimeters; height precedes width. All works are courtesy of the artist.

1. *Barriere* 1988 charcoal on paper 70.5 x 51
2. *Clockworks* 1988 lithograph 69 x 69
3. *Tools of the Ring* 1989 serigraph 89.5 x 69
4. *Gold Ring* 1990 acrylic on paper 91.5 x 129.5
5. *Ritual Amphitheater* 1990 acrylic on paper 89 x 117
6. *Cold Fire* 1990 lithograph 89.5 x 70
7. *Earth Goddess* 1991 oil on canvas 178.5 x 115
8. *After Harvest (self-portrait)* 1991 oil on canvas 186 x 125
9. *Three Sisters* 1991 oil on canvas 192.5 x 129.5
10. *Sacred Earth Quilt* 1991 oil on canvas 162.5 x 457

*Art and its Practices*  
*An Investigation of Contemporary Art*

Kamloops Art Gallery  
Darlene Kalynka  
Cultural Inclinations  
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Darlene Kalynka  
interviewed by  
Anna-Marie Larsen  
October 1991

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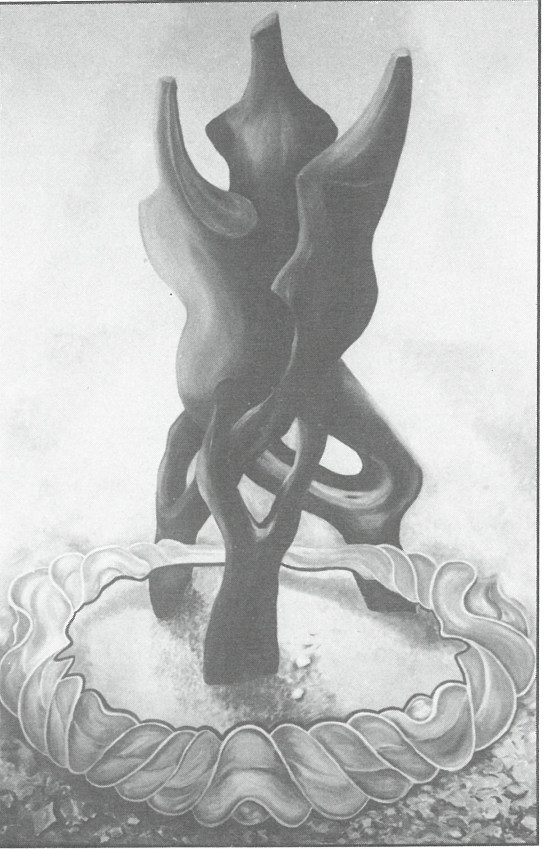
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Cover illustration: *Three Sisters*

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Art and its Practices  
An Investigation of Contemporary Art



Darlene Kalynka  
Cultural Inclinations

November 7 to December 1, 1991





After Harvest (self-portrait)

### Introduction

Within the context of her work, Darlene Kalynka has placed a recurring motif, a torque. This centuries old object has been used as a symbol of protection and to inform and address the subject of personal discovery. Through Kalynka's object de femme, we are witness to the imagination and meaning of life, as it relates through genealogy, her spiritual understanding and appreciation of different cultures, and to the dignity and faith Kalynka places in civilizations.

This exhibition would not have been possible without the help of many people. I would like to sincerely thank Darlene Kalynka for her help in organizing this exhibition, Anna-Marie Larsen for her conscientious curatorial work, Jo-Ann Atkinson, Trish Keegan, Terry Roberts and Shelley Whittaker for their administrative and preparatory work, and Tak Yamaguchi for his creative design. I would also like to extend my sincere appreciation to our energetic and dedicated gallery volunteers.

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Jann L.M. Bailey  
Director/Curator

1 Lynn Beavis: *Exploration*,  
Kamloops Art Gallery, Kamloops,  
British Columbia, 1990

AL: You have been working with the torque for a long time. Could you tell me how you discovered this object?

DK: I think I was visiting some friends at Christmas time. I was looking through some magazines and found an illustration of the torque. I don't really know why it fascinated me. Perhaps because it was glitzy and gold and that kind of thing. I wasn't allowed to have the magazine so I had someone xerox it for me in different sizes and I started working from those images. I've been working with photocopies of that picture for probably three or four years now.

AL: In the essay about your work that was included in the catalogue produced in conjunction with the exhibition, *Exploration*<sup>1</sup> it is stated that your work is related to time, the earth, culture and ritual. When I look at the objects that you select and work with and how you manipulate them, I make associations that are more domestic than, for instance, ritualistic. I see things such as clocks, quilts, the Indian potholder, and fire. To me, these represent the home and the domestic sphere.

DK: I guess I would agree with that. Certainly, the Indian potholder is domestic. I guess I think of time as being a ritual element because it takes time to do something.

Its interesting that you would find these images closer to the domestic realm than the ritualistic. The work that I did before the torque appeared were of actual domestic items like tea bags, cookies, and unusual food objects that I would set-up on place mats and napkins. Part of the appeal of the torque, I think, was that it was an object that I could ritualize for myself, maybe even build a bit of fantasy around it.

AL: Is this redundant? Isn't it an object already steeped in its own meaning and sense of ritual?

DK: I guess I'm changing its meaning by placing it in new contexts. For instance, in the print called *Ritual Amphitheater*, there's an area that could be thought of as water.

AL: I want to explore this for a moment. I see things in your work such as the Greek amphitheater, the Scandinavian torque, the potholder, which comes from aboriginal Canadian culture, that indicate an appeal for objects that are both ancient and definitely a reflection of another culture.

DK: I guess a lot of the appeal is that I'm interested in objects, in collecting them, and appreciating their 3-dimensional aspects. It also probably has something to do with them being found objects.

AL: Your initial attraction to these objects is an intuitive one. How important is it to you to determine the etymology of these objects?

DK: I do rely on my intuitive attraction to an

object and my initial explorations have been based on that. With the torque, for instance, I found out about its attributes and history after I had been working with it for some time.

AL: I think there's a shift evident in the work in the show. The pictures included cover a period of about three-and-a-half years, which means we can actually trace where your thoughts are going. In the last year, this has shifted closer to home, a little closer to Darlene Kalynka's home. It's as if you are researching and locating your personal etymology, perhaps mediating this search through images of your family, specifically those of women in your family. That's a very contemporary search, both in terms that are personal to you and because a lot of your peers are engaged in a similar process. Can you comment?

DK: I have noticed that I'm moving away from working with still life, or with a particular object. I'm putting a figure in now. I guess I have always shied away from using the figure because of the technical ability required to paint it. I have also felt that I needed to make my work more personal than it was. I found that I was looking at family photographs to see if I could find out what my own strengths were. I feel like I have assumed a lifestyle that is very different from, for instance, that of my mother or of my grandmothers.

It is one of my grandmothers that appears in the painting *Earth Goddess*. She came to Canada from the Ukraine when she was very young and started farming when she was eighteen. She had seven kids and her husband died quite young. So at age 30 she was looking after a farm and trying to keep the creditors at bay, as well as trying to keep her kids from being taken away. She was very determined, very strong-willed. She was a farmer in a time when women weren't thought of that way, and she looked after the farm without help from men. I see that independence and I realize that I

Right: *Earth Goddess*

Left: The artist's grandmother

