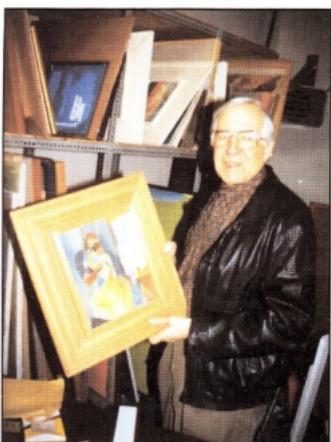


A Family of Artists Reveals Its Prairie Roots

One prominent artist in a family of five is an honour. But when the wife is also a prominent artist and the children are equally promising, that is something totally outstanding. All were born in Saskatchewan where the landscape and the spirit of the Canadian prairies had an affect. William (Bill) Perehudoff (1919-), the head of the family, comes from a Doukhobor background and has been painting for over fifty years. His passion for form and colours have led him to experiment in his farm studio on the North Saskatchewan River. His perseverance and tenacity appear to stem deeply from his Russian roots.



Artist William Perehudoff in his studio at Langham, Saskatchewan, January 1992.

As a boy, Bill was taught to be devoted to the land. Also he was taught that co-operation was necessary for survival of the family and the community. Bill left school at the age of fifteen in order to help his parents on the farm, but continued to educate himself at the home of a local nurse who had a collection of newspapers and books. Given that he did not speak English until the age of ten, this was no mean achievement. With his determination, Bill managed to reach Grade 12 with the help of a particular teacher who encouraged him on to see something better and a career as an artist seemed to be a ticket to a new life.

Eventually Bill decided to go abroad to learn of contemporary European and American painters, and it was on his first trip to Europe in 1951 that he met the young Dorothy Knowles (1927-), who was studying at an art school in London. He persuaded her to join him in Europe and they married in Paris later that year. On their honeymoon in Italy they travelled by bus, went to see many churches and galleries and soaked up as much knowledge as they could. They were inspired.

They returned to Saskatoon and Bill heard of an opening for a commercial artist at Modern Press. Here he stayed for 25 years providing sustenance for the family. As head artist, Bill created 15 artistic pen-and-ink sketches for Koozma J. Tarasoff's *Pictorial History of the Doukhobors* (1969). He also laid out hundreds of historical photographs for this book, which now long out of print, has become a collector's item. His 'Burning of Firearms' sketch has remained as one of the remarkable images of the Spirit Wrestlers movement that he respected and admired.

On the 3rd February 1999, Bill Perehudoff was one of 54 outstanding Canadians named to the Order of Canada at Rideau Hall, Ottawa. Governor General Romeo LeBlanc pinned the order's insignia on the his lapel and read the citation as follows:

'He has become one of the country's leading abstract painters whose works are found in the permanent collections of Canadian galleries from coast to coast. While his early paintings immortalized historical and scenic views of rural Saskatchewan, his art has evolved continuously over his 50-year career. An important member of the Saskatoon artistic community, he has also been a strong supporter and patron of emerging young artists in western Canada.'

Bill Perehudoff was born in the Langham district to a Doukhobor family that remained to farm the Saskatchewan prairies with thousands of other Independent Doukhobors after the split of 1908. His father, William, and his mother Stella (1892-1996) came across the Atlantic and established homes in Bogdanovka, a community west of Langham. The village bore the same name as the one they left near the border of Georgia and Turkey.

As a boy, Bill was taught to

We can only speculate about the perceptions, thoughts and feelings that unconsciously shape Perehudoff's compositions. Perceptions? Perhaps the flat horizontals of prairie farms divided by fences, punctuated by distant buildings, broken by the meandering river; the frost patterns on winter windows, the ever-changing formations of summer clouds; given Perehudoff's vibrancy of colour, the endless variety of prairie sunsets. Thoughts? Perhaps the intellectual milieu of the Saskatoon art community, the teachings of Charlott, Ozefant, Greenberg; summers at Emma Lake where artists and intellectuals gathered; the moral and ethical imperatives of Doukhobor upbringing. Feelings? Perhaps the security of family, community and friends; again, the Doukhobor ethos of caring and being responsible. I imagine that these are some of the things that make up the hidden content of Bill Perehudoff's non-referential art.' Bob Steele, 1997.

Between harvesting and seeding crops on his farm, Bill studied art in Colorado Springs and New York. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, he participated in the Emma Lake artists' workshops in northern Saskatchewan when he came into contact with such invited notable American abstract painters as William Noland and Jules Olitski, as well as art critic Clement Greenberg.

All the while, both Bill Perehudoff and Dorothy Knowles painted mostly the prairie landscapes. Gradually Bill began to shift from nature to culture, moving further away from the representational art to that of the abstract. Today Bill's images are formal equivalents of orchestrated colourshapes on canvas. Bob Steele, a friend of the family and retired associated professor of art education at UBC, states: 'Perhaps more than any other Canadian painter, Bill Perehudoff is the creator of pure visual music'¹.

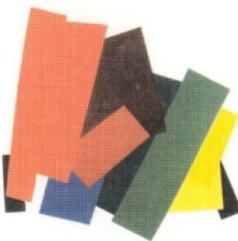
Today, Bill Perehudoff lives with his spouse Dorothy Knowles, probably the most prominent landscape painter in North America, in two residences. One is in Saskatoon. The other one on their farm near Langham overlooking the North Saskatchewan River valley and beside one of the original Doukhobor settlement sites (Bogdanovka). With the winding river, rolling hills, Canada geese, golden fields of grain, the wide expanse of the blue sky, the view from their farm residence and several studio buildings is one of those special sacred images of the Canadian prairies.

The family's passion for painting was passed on to their offspring. Their three daughters², Rebecca, Catherine and Carol, all accomplished artists, have not forgotten their Doukhobor roots. In the mid-1990s, Cathy produced a documentary video called *Write It on the Heart*. It was shown at various art galleries and at an exhibition in 1995 of portraits of five contemporary Doukhobor women of different generations. The spirit of the Perehudoffs is best summered up by Nicole Eaton and Hilary Weston in their book, *At Home in Canada*:

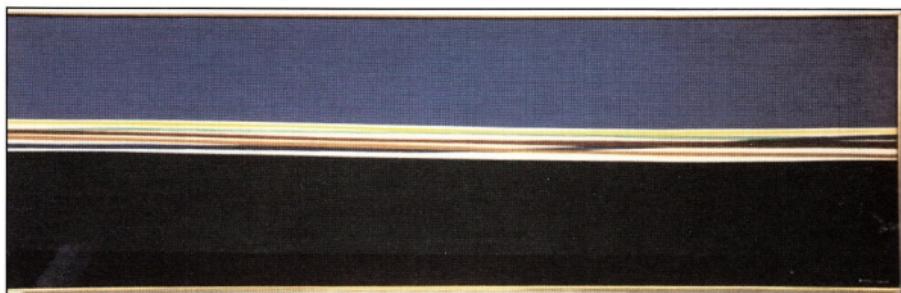


W. PEREHUDOFF

Above, Perehudoff's artistic depiction of the 1895 arms burning for the Centennial quilt design.



Left, another Perehudoff abstract in acrylic, 1966 measuring 53" x 56"



Above, Doukhobor Sash by Bill Perehudoff. Acrylic on canvas, 108 inches by 33 inches. Donated to the Canadian Museum of Civilization in 2000.

'This family has been rooted in the land for generations now. Bill's grandfather loved and worked the land to provide shelter and sustenance for the family, and now the younger generation find themselves returning to it to provide sustenance for the soul and inspiration for their artistic life'.³

If you visit the farm studio, you may see Bill Perehudoff in his favourite pose working on the floor wearing kneepads. Being well over 80 years old, Bill admits to being addicted to painting. Instead of waiting for inspiration, he goes to work. He likens himself to an athlete.

'...I go out and warm up, fuel myself and then wait for the ideas to flow.'

'The Doukhobor spirit is something within you. Maybe that is what abstract art is all about.'⁴

Right, by William Perehudoff's re-creation of the persecution following the June 1895 arms burning in Caucasus.

Below, Early 1900s village scene in Saskatchewan, as depicted in a pen and ink sketch by William Perehudoff.



Above, Perehudoff's 1969 sketch in pen and ink of a young Doukhobor couple.



Drawing in pen and ink of outdoor sobranie by William Perehudoff.

1. Bob Steele, *William Perehudoff*, an essay show catalogue, Douglas Udell Gallery, Vancouver, 1997.

2. When Dorothy Knowles was our painting landscapes, the girls had crayons and paper and worked under foot.

'Rebecca Minton graduated in law, worked in Calgary, went to Chicago for a show where she met her husband-to-be, stayed there and is painting landscapes and landscapes.'

'Catherine Fowler graduated with an education degree, married Graham Fowler, an art professor at the University of Saskatchewan, and she paints landscapes. Once a student at a folk school in Norway, she is returning there in October with an art show.'

'Carol, the youngest, has four degrees, including a master's in business administration, and has been teaching English in South Korea for the last seven years. She just returned to Saskatoon on Friday. She is also an artist.'

'Works of each of the daughters adorn the walls of the Perehudoff's Saskatoon home' (Ned Power, 'Doukhobor Spirit', in *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, February 1999).

3. Nicole Eaton & Hilary Weston, *At Home in Canada* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1995); 35.

4. Ned Powers, 'Doukhobor Spirit', in *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, February 1999.