

Date: Sept 1, 2005

To: Virtual Museums of Canada

From: Dr. Karen Anne Finlay, History in Art Dept., University of Victoria.

Re: "A Woman's Place:" *How Women's Art-Making Shaped Early Victoria*":
Virtual Museums of Canada grant application

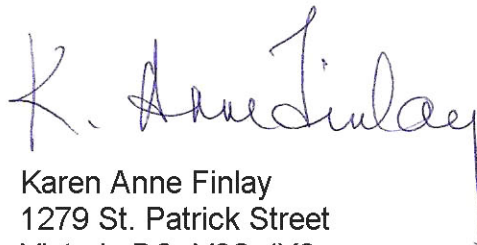
Begun four years ago as a collaboration between the University of Victoria History in Art Department and the BC government's Heritage Branch and later the Royal BC Museum, this research project has been funded by a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada CURA (Community-University Research Alliance) grant. The primary outcome of the CURA phase of funding was a physical exhibition at the Maltwood Art Museum and Gallery, University of Victoria, entitled, '*A Woman's Place: Art and the Role of Women in the Cultural Formation of Victoria, B.C., 1850s-1920s*' (1 September 2004 to 11 January 2005.) The exhibition was accompanied by a 148-page catalogue of the same title and brought to fruition the research of over twenty-five university students and a diversity of community participants. As a virtual exhibition, the project will continue the vibrant community-university partnering by bringing the University together with a host of local individuals and organizations, as well as expanding to include provincial (the Women's History Network of BC) and national (the Textile Museum of Canada in Toronto) organizations and collections.

While the physical exhibition documented an extremely rich social and cultural history, it was not able to do full justice to the research or the artifacts and documents available, due to the limitations of physical, financial, and human resources. Without the same physical constraints, a web exhibition enables an increase in the visual record and the incorporation of other media (such as video and audio), as well as an enormous expansion of the audience.

Furthermore, while the geographic frame of the topic is local – that is, Victoria – the project has a regional and national significance. Victoria occupies a unique position in the history of western Canada. Rapid colonization dating from the mid-nineteenth century situates the city as the oldest non-native art center west of Ontario. The disproportionately large role played by women in the cultural formation of the greater Victoria area is highlighted by the under-representation of non-native women in western Canada generally until the turn of the twentieth century. In 1871, unlike most of B.C. where the ratio of non-native men to non-native women was a dramatic 13:1, in Victoria, it was 4:1 (*'A Woman's Place'*, 10-11), making it home to the highest concentration of women in western Canada at that time. An understanding of the early and active cultivation of the arts by women here provides significant, hitherto downplayed context for the accomplishments of Emily Carr. Early colonization of the Victoria area also had enormous ramifications for First Nations/non-native interaction. Victoria became, for example, the major northwest coast centre for trade in First

Nations women's basketry. Finally, not only is a study of the role of women's art practice in Canada's cultural formation during the colonial and early post-colonial period unique in the web domain, but many of the women documented, I would argue, should be "elevated" to the national canon of Canadian artists: in particular, Sarah Crease, Eleanor Fellows, Hannah Maynard, Sister Mary Osithe, and Sophie Pemberton. Other women, such as Doris Holmes, Martha Douglas Harris, Alice Ravenhill and Louisa Mills deserve to be recognized more widely for their roles in the fields of art education, interior design, the establishment of cottage craft industries, and the promotion of First Nations art. A web exhibition showcasing this research and making it widely accessible to all educational levels is an ideal way to contribute to the rewriting of Canadian art history to greater reflect the role of women.

From the outset, the project has been dedicated to significant student involvement, in an effort to provide students with opportunities for primary research on local heritage collections as well as hands-on museum experience. The virtual exhibition phase of the project continues this emphasis on student involvement. A recent graduate from the Cultural Resource Management program at the University of Victoria, Adrienne Munro will fill the position of Project and Research Coordinator, and Kate Daley, currently enrolled in the Cultural Resource Management program, will fill the role of Project and Research Assistant. Ms. Munro has been intimately involved with the project since its earliest phases; she functioned as an assistant curator for the physical exhibition and was one of the three primary authors of the exhibition catalogue. She is a talented researcher and writer, a creative and lively interpreter of historical material, a superior editor, and an able administrator. Recently returned from a curatorial internship at The Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew, London, Ms. Daley has been involved as a research and curatorial assistant on the project as well as being a contributor to the exhibition catalogue. She is a bright, energetic, resourceful, creative and committed individual who is keen to expand and deepen her museological experience. I am entirely confident in Ms. Munro's and Ms. Daley's abilities to help bring this project to a successful and innovative conclusion.



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