

# Arts touch the senses in many ways



**John Sommer**  
IDEAS AND THE ARTS

Painting, in most cultures of the past, had the task to record events or to illustrate legends and religious histories. Practically all painting between the year 800 and 1400 after the birth of Christ, for instance, illustrated the Bible.

Later, in still-life portraits, the landscape became fashionable objects for artmaking in an increasingly secular civilization.

With the discoveries of science, painting became scientific and illusionistic and was given the misleading label "realistic".

Eventually, with the invention of photography, the umbilical cord between painting and surface reality was cut. The artist was now free to discover and explore parallel visual universes, so to say, the one he was actually living in.

Joseph Niepce invented true photography in 1826. The eye, which is a highly complex, but relatively crude organ, could act as a door now, that allowed entry to fields beyond human conception, to fields of the imagination.

It took about another 80 years before totally non-objective or abstract paintings appeared. We credit Vasily Kandinsky for having painted, around the year 1910, the first painting without any reference to so-called reality.

Music, being a non-visual art medium, always possessed this freedom to find expressions for something that is beyond definition by the human eye. Because of this, music became the supreme art form of religious longing and ecstasy, in particular, in the compositions of Johann Sebastian Bach.

Abstract painting came relatively late to Canada, but by the 30s, painters like Bertram Brooker and Jock MacDonald did experimental abstract work that we now praise.

In the 50's the battle was on between the old, established artists and the young abstract rebels like Jack Bush, Harold Town and Oscar Cahen. The latter won and by the end of the 60s there was hardly a realistic painting in sight in Toronto art galleries.

Since then, the scale has tipped the other way again. We are now deluged by paintings that give the viewer, through pendantically rendered detail, a never-ended world of fugacious wish-fulfillment.

It's time for a switch.

An exhibition such as "Hidden Bounty", for instance, staged some weeks ago at the Cultural Centre, with its many clear and unsentimental artworks from the 60s, was positively refreshing in the present prevailing artistic climate.

Recently I went to Acton, to the home of Valerie Nichol, an abstract painter and pianist, and Robert Daigneault, a composer and painter. I wanted to see their

new paintings. When I left them, Robert gave me a tape with one of his compositions played by Valerie. I have played the tape for the last hour. The music made me write what I have written so far.

His music and her painting seem to be different sides of the same coin. Her way of playing his music resembles the way he paints. These two artists collaborate in a way I have never encountered before.

They both studied at the Royal Conservatory of Music in Toronto. In addition they studied at the Ontario College of Art.

Since then, they have been part of the cutting edge of modern music and painting in Canada.

Robert is an established composer now. He has written scores for The Toronto Dance Theatre, The Galliard Ensemble, The Toronto Percussion Ensemble, The Oxford String Quartet and many more.

Valerie performs her husband's work only and creates with him multi-layered musical tapes. They give concerts together and prefer performing, if possible, in a space that is hung with Valerie's paintings.

Most of her paintings are large abstracts consisting of a lava-like matrix on which particles of paint seem to rush forth and collide in a never-ending dance of colored light. The mood of the dance changes from painting to painting.

His paintings are tiny lacquered objects that look as if they are fragments of a much larger work. These fragments are mute and yet endlessly mysterious and

evocative. The river of time seems to have bleached and polished them. And Valerie's playing of Robert's music is like an ingathering of the pebbles and bird bones found on a beach.

In experiencing the arts all our senses are engaged and deftined. The arts come in a hundredfold chorus of voices. Try to listen to all of them.



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### BOX CULVERT CONSTRUCTION 5TH LINE, LOT 29

The Town of Halton Hills invites you to attend a Public Information Centre to review the detailed design drawings for the construction of the above-noted culvert.

The Public Information Centre will be held as follows:

**DATE:** Thursday, May 31, 1990  
**TIME:** 6:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.  
**PLACE:** Committee Room  
Town of Halton Hills Civic Centre  
1 Halton Hills Drive  
Halton Hills (Georgetown)

The Public is encouraged to attend the centre to review the design and provide comments.

Enquiries on the project may be addressed to:

Mr. Ron Goddard, C.E.T.  
Town of Halton Hills  
P. O. Box 1228  
1 Halton Hills Drive  
Halton Hills (Georgetown)  
Ontario  
L7G 5G2  
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