

New Brunswick Artists in the Context of Small Communities: Interviews with Suzanne Dallaire and Thaddeus Holownia

Lauren Beck and Christina Ionescu

In a province currently plagued by a budget deficit and considerable debt, investment in the arts may seem wasteful or overindulgent. Is this investment a legitimate outflow from the government budget and an expense justifiable to the taxpayers? Does the order of the three branches listed in the ministry under the responsibility of which the visual arts fall—tourism, heritage, and culture—reflect its actual priorities and determine which initiatives are primarily funded by its budget allocations? When one examines the organizational chart of the current ministry (Figure 1), which lists the division of Tourism and Parks first and the branch of Tourism and Culture second, and classifies the heritage sub-branch under the branch Parks, Recreation, and Heritage attached to the former, it becomes quickly apparent that its largest and chief division is listed at the top and that a corporate terminology is employed to designate its components and activities. Where do contemporary artists and the visual arts fit into this administrative framework? Under the Arts and Cultural Industries branch, which is attached to the Tourism and Culture branch? Interestingly, it is easier to find an appropriate place for the artists who have passed away, as their artworks could be claimed by the Heritage Education unit or belong to the New Brunswick Museum, which is an agency under the responsibility of the same ministry and figures prominently on the chart. By comparison, the Ministry of Tourism, Culture, and Sport of the province of Ontario transparently assigns a prominent place to Arts and Artists under its Culture branch, while the Department of Tourism, Culture, and Recreation in Newfoundland and Labrador includes an Arts Division and an Arts and Culture Centres Division under its Culture and Recreation branch.

Does the corporate chart and the explicit mandates governing the operation of each unit in the Ministry of Tourism, Heritage, and Culture in the government of New Brunswick suggest that arts and artists in this province are judged according to, and consequently must find ways of fitting into, a business model that takes into account factors such as financing and profitability, capacity building and asset management, and measurable impact on the provincial economy, in particular the tourism industry overseen by the same ministry? And, more importantly, given the focus of this special issue of the *Journal of New Brunswick Studies*, what is the impact of this tacit prioritization and way of thinking as well as the fluctuating provincial and federal funding designated to the arts and culture on artists and small communities in this province?

DIVISION, OFFICE, OR BRANCH	SUBDIVISIONS
Minister (Minister’s Office)	
Deputy Minister (Deputy Head’s Office)	
Communications (Division)	
Finance and Administration (Branch)	
Human Resources (Branch)	
Tourism and Parks (Division)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Parks, Recreation, and Heritage (Branch) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parks and Attractions (Branch) [list of provincial parks] • Heritage (Branch) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Archeological Services (Unit) - Heritage Education (Unit) - Historic Places (Unit) - Museum Services (Unit) - Toponymy (Unit) • Sport and Recreation (Branch) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Programs (Unit) • Active Communities (Branch) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strategic Initiatives (Unit) [list by location] 2. Planning and Process Improvement (Branch) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance Excellence Process (Branch) • Policy and Planning (Branch)
Tourism and Culture (Branch)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Marketing and Visitor Information (Division) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advertising and Visitor Engagement (Section) • Web Technology and Industry Communication (Section) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tourism Communication Centre (Unit) • Content and Special Projects (Section) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Content Development (Section) 2. Sales, Media, and Visitor Experience (Division) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Media Relations and Product Development (Section) • Visitor Experience (Branch) • Trade Sales and Partnerships (Section) 3. Arts and Cultural Industries (Branch) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Art Bank Services (Unit)
Culture and Corporate Services (Division)	
Kings Landing (Agency)	
New Brunswick Museum (Agency)	[list of sections]

Figure 1. Organizational chart of the Department of Tourism, Heritage, and Culture, New Brunswick, as it appears on its official website

(<http://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/contacts/dept_renderer.143.html#structure>; accessed 10 April 2015). This information is in process of being revised.

The impact of the arts on an individual resident is assessed by researchers in terms of health, cognitive/psychological, and interpersonal effects, while at the community level, it is based on economic, cultural, and social implications. The importance attributed by New Brunswickers to the arts was the subject of an important study conducted in 2008. The Canada Council for the Arts partnered with the New Brunswick Arts Board, the New Brunswick Department of Wellness, Sport, and Culture, the Department of Canadian Heritage, and the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency in an innovative pilot project entitled “Building Public Engagement in the Arts.” The results from this study that focused solely on the province provide us with invaluable information about and sharp insight into a subject fraught with subtleties and complexities because of its direct dependency on public opinion. A survey conducted as part of this study delivered, for instance, the following revealing statistics: 80 percent of New Brunswickers specified that the arts were somewhat or very important for their quality of life (compared to 20 percent who noted they were not very or not at all important); 89 percent remarked that the arts were somewhat or very important for their community; and 85 percent stated that government funding for the arts in their community was somewhat or very important (Canada Council for the Arts n. pag.). This survey reveals not only that New Brunswickers recognize the arts as being important to them as individuals and, at a collective level, to their communities, but also that an overwhelming majority of them support governmental investment in the arts at the community level, likely because residents of the province experience first-hand its effects at the local level. In the face of what thus appears to be unquestionable and quantifiable support for the arts from the citizens of New Brunswick, why are we still lagging behind other provinces in the assistance offered to our artists, in providing art education in our schools, as well as in developing and investing in programs that support the arts in our communities? A bright ray of hope is on the horizon. Although it reads like a remarkably well-researched review of literature on the subject of the impact of arts and culture on the citizens of New Brunswick, a review peppered with inspirational quotes that are the trademark of a moving political speech, the document entitled “Creative Futures: A Renewed Cultural Policy for New Brunswick (2014–2019)” summarizes an initiative of the previous Progressive Conservative government and aims for concrete and realistic objectives that could translate into an increase in funding devoted to this area. One of its key actions, for example, is to “establish a one-percent public art policy for provincial and provincially-invested construction and development projects” (13). The plan strives furthermore to “encourage municipalities to establish a one-percent public art policy for municipal construction and development projects” (ibid.). It is only to be hoped that the strategy to establish an implementation plan and accountability framework for this cultural policy is not discarded by the current Liberal government in favour of more pressing concerns, as is often the case when a new party takes power in New Brunswick.

In an attempt to better understand the challenges faced by and specific issues preoccupying New Brunswick artists whose personal and professional lives are closely tied to small communities, we conducted interviews with Suzanne Dallaire and Thaddeus Holownia. Their backgrounds, careers, and current work and living situations exemplify notable oppositions (e.g., insider born here vs. outsider to the community; Francophone vs. Anglophone; female vs. male; painter vs. photographer; mid-career vs. established artist; graphic designer and professional artist vs. academic, printer, publisher, and professional artist). Their creative focus, however, is principally on New Brunswick, and their daily existence occurs in small communities of various types (rural neighbourhoods, the Moncton community of artists, the small undergraduate university, an intimate circle of aficionados of books as beautiful objects, etc.). As artists, they share a fascination with the distinctive landscape surrounding them and derive their creativity from a deep connection to a place and its objects. As New Brunswickers, they have developed an appreciation for a resilient way of life that has a unique rhythm and is rooted in a rich

heritage. They hold as well strong opinions about the situation of the professional artist and the level of support provided for the arts in New Brunswick.

Although Thaddeus Holownia's workshop is located along a dirt road in southeastern New Brunswick not far from the Nova Scotia border, the artist divides his time between this ideal, rural location and the small community of Sackville, where he teaches in the Department of Fine Arts at Mount Allison University. The landscape surrounding his workshop and academic environment becomes a natural subject for his photography, which showcases the seemingly familiar reality in an unfamiliar way. The photographer is interested in how landscape is transformed by or encounters human presence. His artwork thus engages with local communities in direct ways: not only does he shed new light on places and objects that are part of the quotidian existence of their inhabitants, but he also makes them accessible to a spectatorship beyond the confines of Sackville and its immediate vicinity. Through his images of the local landscape, the photographer opens a window into a corner of the world that wilfully remains somewhat remote, documenting a place that economic expansion and environmental change are bound to transform to the core in the twenty-first century. As an artist-scholar with an international portfolio that includes exhibitions and projects spanning continents, he embodies a harmonious symbiosis of the local and the global: he embraces one but does not reject the other, shrewdly claiming what he desires from each context. As an established photographer and tenured university professor, he can access various sources of funding for his projects and is able to travel beyond the Maritimes to places such as Toronto and Paris, to name only two of the urban landscapes on which he has intensively focused at various times in his long career. In spite of this privilege, he is astutely aware of the challenges facing the arts in New Brunswick and offers insightful reflections on a complex subject that he is able to view from different perspectives.

Based in Grande-Digue, a small community located in the predominantly Acadian region of Kent County on the northeast shoreline of Shediac Bay, Suzanne Dallaire is a professional artist whose paintings capture the Atlantic landscape and predominantly blue skies in vibrant colours and on rich surfaces. Her subjects are diverse: views of open fields and textured forests devoid of human presence; snapshots of coastlines with colourful lighthouses, beaches, fishing boats, and villages; and maritime vignettes that showcase places and objects. Her paintings convey a profound connection to landscape, particularly its water element—the omnipresent component of the Atlantic coastline and the interior of New Brunswick. For her, the arts constitute the heart and soul of a place; they are important because they bring beauty into the world and engender an aesthetic experience in the viewers that is transformative, restorative, and empowering. As most artists, she lacks words and ideas to further articulate the precise importance of the arts because *il va de soi*—it goes without saying—that they *are* important. In contrast to Thaddeus Holownia, she is labelled, according to her own account, a “commercial” artist. She does not directly benefit from any art grant or incentive programs administered by either the provincial or federal governments, or from institutional support such as the one normally offered by universities. She is a painter who relies solely on her art to make a living. And she is part of a select few to do so in New Brunswick.

According to an analysis conducted by Hill Strategies Research, based on a 2011 data request from the National Household Survey, the concentration of artists in New Brunswick represented only 0.43 percent of the total population of the province three years ago: this percentage translates to 1,700 artists who spent more time on their art than in any other occupation. Remarkably, this is the lowest percentage of the workforce per province appearing on the chart that accompanies the study (which, it should be noted, excludes Prince Edward Island and the individual territories because there are fewer

than five hundred artists in those areas). British Columbia tops the chart with artists constituting 1.08 percent of its labour force; the median for Canada is 0.78 percent. At the time of the survey, the average income for an artist was \$25,700 in New Brunswick—once again, the lowest among the provinces and territories surveyed. The study does not paint a rosy picture of the economic situation of Canadian artists, who earn on average 32 percent less than other workers composing the labour force in Canada. In New Brunswick, the situation is even more dire: artists earn 36 percent less than the average individual income at the national level. It would be useful to know how the average income of a New Brunswick family that includes an artist or is made up of two artists compares to the provincial and national poverty lines, but these levels are assessed based on the total income of a household and statistics are not available according to occupation. More detailed information on this topic is bound to be available in the near future, given that a task force on the status of the professional artist in New Brunswick was established under the previous government and met for the first time on 29 July 2014. Its clear mandate is to provide specific recommendations on measures or legislation that will improve the socioeconomic status of professional artists in the province.

The benefits that we derive individually and societally from the arts have been the subject of numerous studies that concentrate or touch upon a wide range of interests, including economic impact, cultural policies, standards for physical and psychological well-being, as well as educational objectives and goals (e.g., Bamford; Belfiore and Bennett; Etim-Ubah; Grodach; Towse). The arts play a unique role in the development, sustainment, and mobilization of both large and small communities. For example, it has been shown that the arts stimulate the economy, reinforce social cohesion, improve an individual's health, inspire social engagement, and promote the image of a community. Nonetheless, when looking at a painting or photograph hanging on a wall in an art gallery that catches their attention, viewers likely do not think of these diverse benefits. To them, artworks may appear seductive, intriguing, illuminating, challenging, upsetting, or dehumanizing. Artworks are beautiful objects, metaphors for ideas or emotions, pieces of the puzzle in journeys of self-discovery, valuable remnants from a rich past and cultural tradition, or catalysts for creativity and innovation. Viewers connect with works of art on emotional, intellectual, and, at times, spiritual levels. Nonetheless, how does one quantify and analyze pleasure or other forms of aesthetic experience? How does one establish a clear causal link between investment in the arts and the values that it purportedly inspires in individuals (such as tolerance, intercultural awareness, and support for freedom of expression)? It is encouraging to learn from the data analyzed as part of the aforementioned project, "Building Public Engagement in the Arts," that the majority of New Brunswickers state that the arts matter to them and to their communities. It is therefore time to shift the focus from investigating the significance and impact of arts and culture on individuals, communities, and economic sectors through costly surveys and extensive studies primarily conceived with socioeconomic impact in mind, to seeking ways of increasing support for individual artists and investment in creative projects that revitalize towns, cities, and rural localities. Even though there are some encouraging signs that we are moving in the direction of taking action, most notably through the re-examination of the status of the New Brunswick professional artist, we still subscribe to the practice of commissioning extensive studies that do not seem to lead to much concrete action.

Insufficient attention has been paid to date to the impact of the arts on small communities and even less consideration is given to the artists who live therein. From an airplane flying above New Brunswick at night, the province appears as a cluster of rural communities from which emerge its three largest urban centres—Fredericton, Moncton, and Saint John. The often-significant distance between these centres and the satellite communities that have formed around them, or between these artistic hubs and the more isolated northern part of the province, as well as the harsh and extended winter climate that

marks the region, can have negative effects on individuals, which range from seasonal feelings of isolation or entrapment to disengagement from the community and mental illness. It is interesting to observe that Suzanne Dallaire does not consider herself at all isolated, although she spends long periods of time during the winter painting in her workshop: instead, she sees herself as part of a community that surpasses local and provincial borders. Beyond the potential effects of geographic remoteness and long winters, one of the most significant challenges faced by New Brunswick artists today is how to find new markets for their artworks. New technologies and social media undoubtedly play a significant part in connecting artists to the public, effacing barriers, and situating the individual within a global community. To establish links with the public and a potential clientele when she was launching her career as a painter, Dallaire adopted two parallel strategies: first, she created affordable products (small-scale reproductions of her paintings) that she sold at local farmers' markets in spite of a stigma that surrounds such a milieu, which is perceived to be in binary opposition to the dignified settings of high art; and, second, she had the foresight to jump early on the information bandwagon by creating her own website, which immediately placed her creations at the fingertips of a global market. Holownia also seized upon the potential of placing his work on national and international stages by securing domains for his photography and printing press. Two of the galleries that represent Dallaire's work are not located in New Brunswick: one is situated in Alberta and the other in Prince Edward Island; Holownia's photography is exhibited by several galleries not located in New Brunswick. Interestingly, Dallaire does not lament being able to sell her paintings but the length of the creative process that produces each one of them. She is, however, unusual in so far as she is able to survive off her earnings as an artist. Without financial support from family members or grant programs, artists living in rural communities, where opportunities to supplement their income through part-time employment are likely more limited than in urban centres, face severe and at times insurmountable challenges. As Dallaire remarks in her interview reflecting on an observation made by Herménégilde Chiasson, embracing creative multidisciplinary is in fact a solution to a harsh economic reality faced by artists attempting to make a living through their art practice.

The 2013–14 Annual Report of the New Brunswick Arts Board indicates that 447 applications for funding were received during the period in question, of which the highest number—191—came from the Moncton region (Figure 2). From these 191 applications, 81 were deemed successful by a jury of professional artists, which constitutes a success rate of 42.4 percent. The second most important region, Fredericton and its environs, submitted 120 applications, of which 39 were chosen, which amounts to a success rate of 32.5 percent. Included in this classification are three other regions: Edmundston, Saint John, and the Acadian Peninsula. Of the 447 applications received, 159 received funding in the total amount of \$650,000. The applications received in 2013–14 constitute the second highest number in the previous ten years, ranked below the 472 submitted in 2009–10, whereas the budget allocated to these grants is the second lowest after \$648,080 in 2008–09; the highest yearly amount was \$923,675 in 2009–10. This reduction in funding is worrisome and signs of improvement are not on the horizon.

The extraordinary achievement of the artistic community of Moncton and its surrounding area in the 2013–14 provincial competition is testament to its innovative vision and creative fervour. What distinguishes this region is its substantial Francophone component. Forming an important contingent of the larger New Brunswick community of performers and creators of art, Francophone artists grapple with the significance of a rich and complex heritage, but they have to look in the direction of the future. For some practitioners, the arts have become a means by which Acadian culture and traditions are publically showcased and transmitted to a new generation. In the Moncton region in particular, the arts

contribute to the preservation of the collective memory, often inspire a dialogue about a checkered past, and foster a sense of pride within the Acadian community.

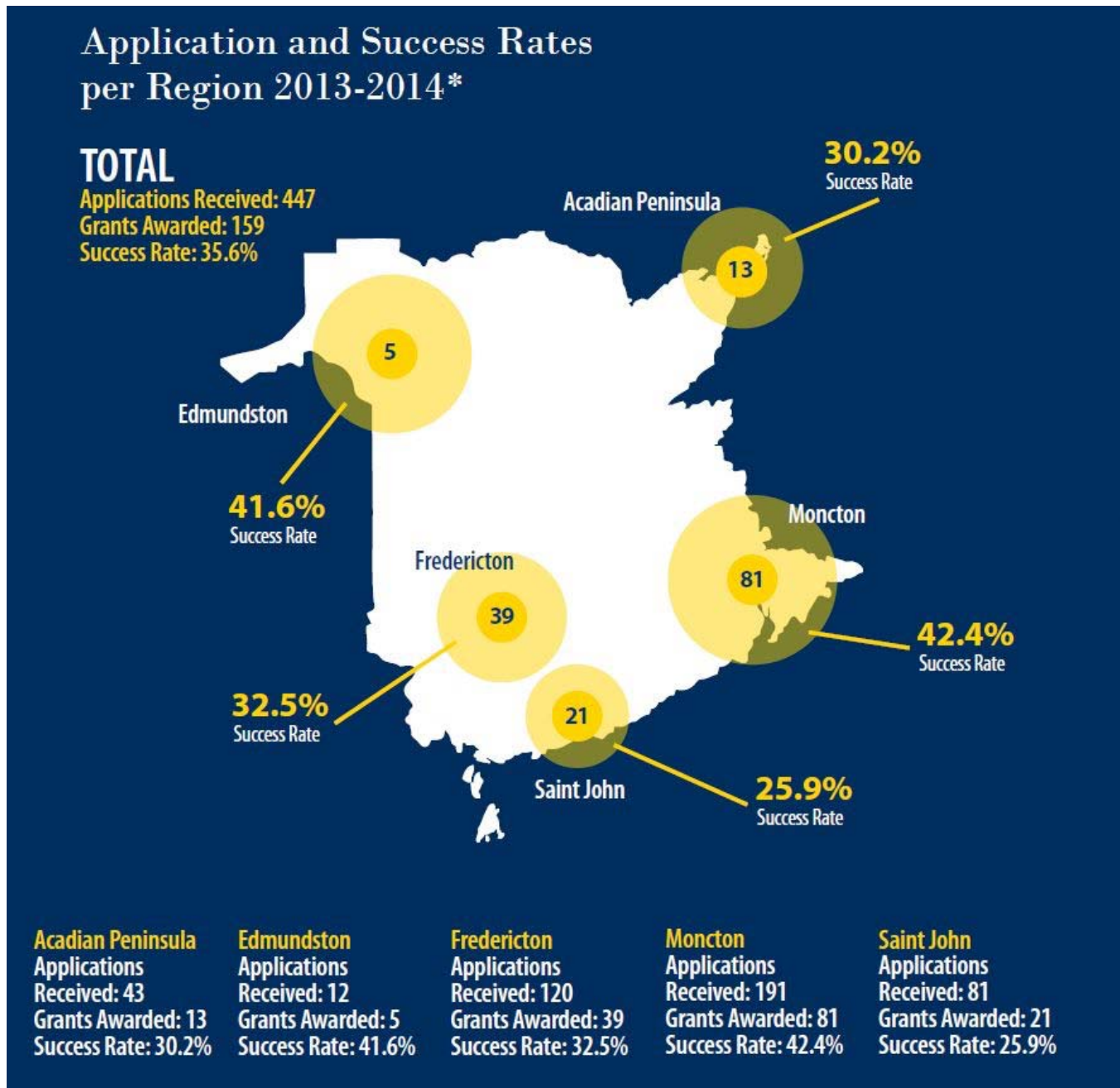


Figure 2. Application for art grants and success rates per region, 2013–14, as compiled by the New Brunswick Arts Board, <http://artsnb.ca/site/en/files/2014/10/15-08_artsnb_ar_ENG_ePDF_SPREADS_s.pdf> (accessed 30 March 2015), p. 25.

The provincial government should be commended for continuing to support initiatives such as the New Brunswick Art Bank Acquisitions Program in spite of the monetary shortfall and economic challenges the province is facing. A provincial counterpart to the Canada Council Art Bank, the New Brunswick Art Bank is a permanent collection of the visual arts that was founded in 1968 to celebrate

the contribution made by contemporary artists to the province. Through the acquisitions program of the art bank, contemporary visual art produced by artists from the province is acquired for display in provincial government offices and for loan to interested organizations. In the forty-seven years since its inception, the art bank has acquired more than eight hundred works of art from more than two hundred fifty artists from the province. The 2011 survey data compiled by Hill Strategies Research revealed that New Brunswick then had about 1,700 artists, and if we consider that number to be currently the same, only about 15 percent are represented in the collection—though it is a fact that between 1968 and 2015 the overall population of artists was significantly higher. Therefore, this small percentage undoubtedly needs to be increased in future years if we attach importance to the preservation of our artistic heritage.

The New Brunswick Art Bank actually predates its federal counterpart and is likely the first collection of its nature to be established in a Canadian province. By comparison, since its establishment forty-three years ago, the Canada Council Art Bank has acquired more than seventeen thousand paintings, prints, photographs, and sculptures that represent more than three thousand Canadian artists. Comparing the two collections is no simple matter, however, as the exercise needs to take into consideration a number of factors on which data are not easily gathered or accessible (e.g., the number of registered artists in each province, the yearly production per artist, the number of applications received by each program, etc.).

One can comparatively examine, nonetheless, the representation of Thaddeus Holownia's work in these two collections. The searchable online database of the Canada Council Art Bank lists twenty-four photographs taken by the photographer, which were produced by him between 1975 and 1994; most of them are linked by their title to the exact places in the Atlantic provinces that they capture. The searchable online database of the New Brunswick Art Bank lists only four photographs by the same photographer, listed by title and purchase date: *Mount Whatley, N.B.* (1984), *Dorchester, N.B.* (1984), *Tonge's Island, N.B.* (1984), and *Rocklyn Bridge, Upper Dorchester, N.B.* (1993). At a glance, this photographer's work thus appears underrepresented in the provincial collection of visual art, when compared with the representation of his pictures in a national context. Suzanne Dallaire is part of the large number of artists whose work is not included at all in these two considerable art banks, despite her local popularity.

It is notable that the program does not favour established artists: those in the initial or intermediary stages of their professional careers are also encouraged to apply. The process of selection is juried and based on merit: every two years, a jury selects artwork to be purchased based on the acquisitions budget made available for the period in question. The program objectives are clearly outlined on the website of the Department of Tourism, Heritage, and Culture: to promote excellence through the acquisition of works of art; to develop a collection of contemporary works of art by living New Brunswick artists; to provide support and encouragement for New Brunswick visual artists living and working in this province; to make the collection accessible to the public and to public employees through its display in government buildings; and to make the collection accessible for educational purposes (Acquisitions Program n. pag.).

It is encouraging to learn that items from the collection can be loaned to interested and qualified institutions; recently, a travelling acquisitions exhibition rendered the collection accessible to a number of small communities across the Maritimes. For twelve months beginning in September 2014, the exhibit was mounted throughout New Brunswick (Florenceville-Bristol, Dieppe, Edmundston, Miramichi, Caraquet, Saint John, and Campellton), as well as in Nova Scotia (Pointe-de-l'Église).

Coupled with complementary educational materials designed to assist educators, this travelling exhibit can have a great impact on targeted demographics, such as youth, seniors, families, aboriginal communities, persons living with disabilities, and mental health support groups.

When the provincial and federal art banks are compared at the level of the works contained in each collection and the number of artists represented, it becomes apparent that the holdings of the New Brunswick Art Bank should be increased. This is particularly important in light of the artistic wealth of New Brunswick and the voiced support by its citizens for the arts. It is hoped, therefore, that the provincial government will recognize the importance of this initiative and increase its funding. Another idea worth investigating is transforming it into a yearly competition.

Aside from individual practitioners and researchers, who advocates for the importance of arts and culture in New Brunswick? Established in 1990, the Association acadienne des artistes professionnel.le.s du Nouveau-Brunswick is an Acadian arts service organization for professional artists that aims at protecting and representing their rights as well as at promoting their contributions to society. One of its most recent contributions, *A Global Strategy for the Integration of Arts and Culture into Acadian Society in New Brunswick*, is an ambitious portrait of a vibrant artistic community and a vision for how the public can become involved in its sustainment and development. Founded in 2009, ArtsLink NB is an organization that seeks to advance and promote the value of the arts primarily in Anglophone New Brunswick. It recently undertook an important research project to examine the current arts and culture sector of the province, which was based on an extensive survey of artists and cultural organizations as well as statistical analyses of data not easily accessible but entirely reliable. Its key findings are disconcerting, as evidenced by the following:

Across a variety of metrics, the profile of the New Brunswick arts and cultural workforce at present is not as strong as elsewhere in the country. From an employment as well as an economic output perspective, New Brunswick's arts and cultural sector is stagnating while it has been expanding in the rest of Canada. The province's artists and cultural workers are highly educated; however, their careers are characterized by part-time employment and lower than average wages. The workforce is also aging faster than the rest of the country as many younger artists move out to develop their careers elsewhere. (ArtsLink NB 6)

Both organizations strongly advocate for investment in the cultural engine of the province, sensing perhaps that it is an attractive argument to the federal, provincial, and municipal sources of funding. They also emphasize that the arts are instrumental in the development of children and youth. For example, they improve a student's self-confidence, build communication skills, increase intercultural awareness, as well as reinforce resourcefulness and problem-solving skills. Furthermore, these organizations argue that the arts have a great influence on the creative and innovative minds upon which the public and private sectors of New Brunswick will need to rely in order to compete successfully in the twenty-first century world and workplace. Educators and schools depend on pedagogical visits to public museums and on well-stocked libraries. A lack of systematic investment through the last decades in arts and culture infrastructure within the province is starting to take a toll on the public institutions charged with collecting and preserving artifacts and other objects of cultural and historical significance. The role of the museum as an institution of public value should be taken into consideration in the debate opposing fiscal responsibility and investment in the arts and culture, as the preservation of a layered and multifaceted heritage is at stake in New Brunswick.

In the case of the New Brunswick Museum currently occupying a site of historical significance on Douglas Avenue in Saint John, the pressing need to repair a structural failure in the roof, install fire suppression mechanisms, address artifact preservation standards such as climate control, provide adequate lab and conservation space, and increase public accessibility has left the fate of the institution up in the air. Built in the 1930s, the structure that houses the nucleus of Canada's oldest continuing museum is owned and maintained by the province. In fact the New Brunswick Museum is an agency of the Department of Tourism, Heritage, and Culture (Figure 1). No doubt in an effort to address the issue constructively, however, the public statements released by the museum as well as interviews with members of its staff do not attribute any blame for the impending closure of the building, deemed unsafe by 2017, to the failure of the province to maintain and upgrade the structure occupied by this important institution. As documented by CBC news, recent public discussion concerning the future of the Collections and Research Centre of the New Brunswick Museum is focusing on a proposal to build a \$40-million addition to the current building ("New Brunswick Museum"). A fund-raising firm has already been hired and a public consultation process has begun to examine the options available. One wonders if, when the design and planning of the addition are considered, cost effectiveness and functionality will trump architectural vision and green building principles. At the same time, the museum is facing another challenge: the lease of its Exhibition Centre, located within Market Square since 1996, is expiring. On the third floor at this location is located the world's only permanent gallery of historical and contemporary New Brunswick fine art, which is complemented by exhibitions of historic Canadian and international artworks. The owner of the attached building, Fortis, has placed the shopping complex that forms part of the uptown pedway network up for sale. If such an important art institution is in this perilous and precarious state, taxpayers should be seriously concerned about the health and stability of the other museums, libraries, and heritage sites located throughout New Brunswick.

The interviews with Suzanne Dallaire and Thaddeus Holownia that accompany this special issue should be considered important points of access to the contemporary artistic communities of New Brunswick to which the artists belong. Both interviewees discuss candidly the benefits of working within the intimate settings provisioned by small communities and rural environments, but they do not shy away from expressing their preoccupations and struggles. Their straightforward answers to our questions remind us that support from public and private institutions is instrumental in sustaining the artistic communities of this region. Of primary concern to artists from this province is finding ways of transcending regional and national boundaries, of bridging the gap between the local and the global. Anchored in the landscape that surrounds them, their artwork is as much about the present as it is about the past and the future.

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Interview avec Suzanne Dallaire

* Christina Ionescu a mené cette interview avec l'artiste à l'automne 2014 et, par la suite, y a apporté de légères modifications de forme sans conséquence sémantique.

Avez-vous le sentiment d'exercer votre métier d'artiste dans une petite communauté au Nouveau-Brunswick ou de faire partie d'une communauté d'artistes qui est plus large et qui dépasse les frontières provinciales?

J'ai le sentiment d'exercer mon métier d'artiste dans une petite communauté, mais en même temps, j'ai l'impression de faire partie d'une communauté qui est nettement plus large. J'exerce mon métier dans la province du Nouveau-Brunswick, mais deux des trois galeries qui me représentent ne s'y trouvent pas. En ce qui concerne le lien avec d'autres artistes, c'est surtout à l'échelle locale, mais ça dépend des circonstances. Je suis persuadée que « ma communauté » dépasse de loin les frontières provinciales... Je n'ai pas du tout l'impression d'exercer mon métier à l'intérieur d'une frontière fixe et insurmontable. De plus, grâce aux médias sociaux et à la technologie, c'est facile de dépasser les bornes d'un territoire aujourd'hui.

Est-ce que vous savez qui visite votre site Web?

Quand j'ai créé mon site Web (www.suzannedallaire.com), j'ai aussi ouvert un compte avec Google Analytics. Je pouvais donc voir, par exemple, le nombre de visiteurs qui se rendaient là, combien de temps ils étaient restés, quelle(s) page(s) ils consultaient, de quelle ville ils se connectaient, s'ils revenaient sur mon site ou si c'était leur première visite—ce genre de détails. Je ne fais plus cela maintenant, mais auparavant je lisais ces analyses régulièrement, car je trouvais ces renseignements fascinants. Cependant, il est plus intéressant d'attendre des mois, de ne pas regarder quotidiennement, parce que les statistiques sont plus amples et éclairantes. On peut voir que, par exemple, 80 % des visiteurs sont du Canada, dont un pourcentage élevé de la province du Nouveau-Brunswick.

En d'autres mots, vous ne vous sentez pas vraiment isolée en tant qu'artiste même si vous exercez votre métier à partir de Grande-Digue, de Shediac ou de Moncton, villes qui ne sont ni très grandes à l'échelle nationale ni situées dans des régions très peuplées?

Je pourrais être à Toronto, à Grande-Digue ou à Montréal : mon degré d'isolement n'est pas influencé par une ville en particulier. Je ne me sens pas du tout *isolée* à Grande-Digue. Si j'étais à la maison sans véhicule, je me considérerais sans doute comme isolée... Par ailleurs, j'ai vécu longtemps à Moncton et cela m'a plu dans le temps, mais je préfère les régions proches de l'eau. Cela remonte peut-être à mon enfance puisque j'ai grandi à Cocagne, sur le bord de l'eau. Pour ceux qui ne le savent pas, c'est une localité située à l'embouchure de la rivière Cocagne dans le havre de Cocagne, qui donne sur le détroit de Northumberland. Je pense que c'est surtout le fait d'être proche de la mer qui me parle. La ville de Moncton n'est pas loin de l'océan, mais il est certain que je ne pourrais jamais habiter dans les terres profondes, car j'étoufferais, littéralement.

Avez-vous des liens avec d'autres artistes (des provinces maritimes ou d'ailleurs)? Vous engagez-vous dans des projets collectifs?

Je ne m'engage que très rarement dans des projets collectifs. Je ne dirais pas que je ne suis pas capable de le faire ou que je ne le ferai jamais, car cela dépend du projet, mais franchement je suis profondément introvertie et je préfère travailler seule. Si je m'engageais dans des collaborations avec d'autres artistes, je ne me sentirais pourtant pas mal à l'aise, malgré mon caractère introverti. Si la bonne occasion se présente, je n'hésiterai pas à la saisir.

Pourriez-vous me décrire votre lieu de travail?

C'est dans la pièce d'entrée de ma maison. Finie en bois, cette pièce a, dans un sens, plusieurs fonctions : atelier, pièce d'entreposage et bureau. Il ne s'agit pas d'une grande pièce, mais j'ai tout ce dont j'ai besoin à l'intérieur et j'y suis à l'aise. Parce qu'il y a plusieurs fenêtres, j'ai ce qui est le plus important pour moi : la lumière naturelle. La pièce n'est pas luxueuse, donc je ne me stresse pas si je la salis. Quand je sais que je ferai du *mess*, j'étale quand même de grands draps pour la protéger parce que je ne veux pas mettre de la peinture partout. J'achète souvent un stock de canevas à l'avance et je les garde là, ce qui fait que si un jour je décide de peindre un grand tableau, j'en prends un qui est convenable, et je suis bien installée dans mon atelier. Idéalement, j'aimerais avoir un atelier qui aurait un plafond très haut, mais je suis heureuse dans mon lieu de travail actuel. Cependant, pendant l'année, les journées courtes sont dures peu importe où l'on est au Canada : travailler avec des lampes n'équivaut pas au travail à la lumière du jour...

Le sujet de vos belles toiles, ce sont les provinces atlantiques du Canada, surtout les paysages... Qu'est-ce qui vous fascine dans ces paysages?

Je pourrais peindre n'importe quel sujet, mais intrinsèquement, c'est le paysage qui m'attire— celui du Nouveau-Brunswick, de l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard ou de la Nouvelle-Écosse... Dans ces provinces, on est entouré d'eau partout et c'est profondément la mer qui me parle. Il est difficile d'expliquer cet attrait, c'est quelque chose d'intérieur. Depuis ma jeunesse, j'ai toujours été à l'aise au bord de la mer, près des cours d'eau, sur des quais et sur des bateaux de pêche. Je peins également des tableaux d'automne et d'autres sujets, donc l'eau n'est pas le thème privilégié ou l'arrière-fond constant de mes œuvres. Mais j'estime qu'environ 90 % de mes toiles sont liées à l'eau. En fait, la couleur bleue domine dans mes toiles. Le ciel est toujours ensoleillé, il y a rarement des nuages, c'est le ciel du beau temps. À cet élément-là s'ajoute évidemment la mer, qui est également bleue. Pour le reste, j'utilise d'autres couleurs. Ce qui est certain, c'est que ma palette est garnie de couleurs riches et éclatantes.

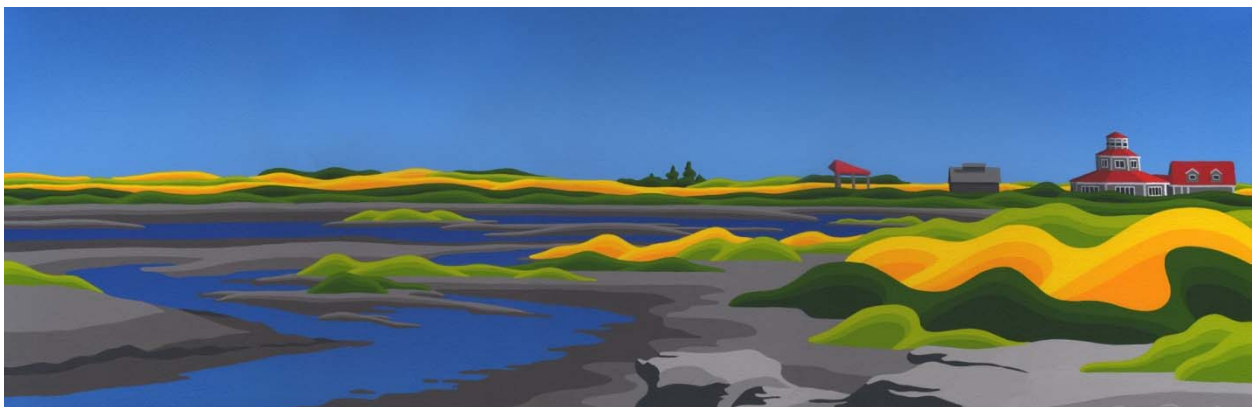


Figure 3. Suzanne Dallaire, *Maison au toit rouge à la Plage Parlee*, 12 × 36", acrylique, 2014. Image reproduite avec la permission de l'artiste.

Qu'est-ce qui explique le caractère si vibrant de vos toiles?

Quand j'ai commencé à peindre, je faisais de l'aquarelle, un médium qui n'offre pas de couleurs aussi vibrantes. Par conséquent, mon style était plus réaliste et j'incorporais plus de détails dans mes œuvres. J'ai ensuite travaillé pendant six ans au pastel sec, qui était déjà plus vibrant... Mais depuis 2009, je me consacre uniquement à l'acrylique, qui me permet l'usage des couleurs incandescentes. Au début, je trouvais le changement de gamme de couleurs laborieux et intimidant, mais je m'y suis adaptée. C'est aussi mon style graphique qui influence le choix des couleurs. Étant donné que je suis graphiste de formation, j'ai tendance à simplifier ce qui s'étale devant moi. Quand j'aperçois un paysage, mon œil de graphiste distingue d'abord le contraste des lumières, puis les formes. Dès le début du processus, je suis consciente du fait que j'enlèverai des détails : par exemple, je ne peins jamais toutes les feuilles d'un arbre. Lorsqu'on se spécialise dans la conception graphique et qu'on est en train de créer un logo, on sait au préalable qu'il faut saisir l'essentiel de quelque chose et que les détails sont la plupart du temps superflus. Lorsque je peins, je ne schématise pas autant, mais c'est le même processus. Afin d'éviter de créer des tableaux manqués, ce qui m'arrivait surtout au début, il faut garder une harmonie de contrastes, de couleurs et de formes pour que tout se balance globalement. Par ailleurs, l'un de mes champs d'intérêt est l'art inuit, qui repose sur une conception graphique du contenu et sur des couleurs vibrantes sur le plan de la forme.

Ce sont des toiles dépeuplées, pourrait-on dire, car les gens n'y figurent pas. Comment expliquez-vous l'absence de présence humaine? Qu'est-ce qui vous incite à privilégier la nature?

On y trouve des gens, mais il est vrai que ce n'est pas souvent le cas. La réalité, c'est que ma force est le paysage, qui est en effet le personnage principal de mes toiles et, en quelque sorte, celui des provinces maritimes aussi. Du point de vue technique, je suis tout à fait capable de peindre des êtres humains, mais je suis moins à l'aise dans ce domaine. Quand j'incorpore la présence humaine, je le fais de façon subtile : une personne qui marche dans un petit village de pêche, en demi-poste et en haut à l'arrière-fond, ou un pêcheur sur un bateau éloigné. J'ai également peint mes enfants sur la plage, donc je suis capable de le faire. Mettre en scène des êtres humains n'est pourtant pas ma spécialité technique ni non plus ma passion en tant qu'artiste. En revanche, ma meilleure amie, l'artiste professionnelle Amber Lounder, ne s'intéresse généralement qu'aux êtres humains et cherche à capter leurs émotions profondes. Si elle fait des paysages, et elle en a fait d'extraordinaires, c'est comme si son âme était vidée par le processus de création.

Quels sont les endroits où vous peignez et quel est votre processus de création?

Ce n'est que rarement que je peins directement sur place. Quand je conduis aux alentours ou que je pars en vacances, je prends beaucoup de photos. Il y a des milliers de photos sur mes ordinateurs qui mangent de la mémoire. Je voyage régulièrement dans les provinces maritimes du Canada. Peu importe la destination, j'ai mon œil d'artiste avec moi et j'apporte toujours mon appareil photo parce qu'on ne sait jamais ce qu'on va découvrir... En 2009, par exemple, je suis allée aux Îles de la Madeleine et j'y ai pris mille photos en trois jours. Mais il ne s'agit pas de photos soi-disant professionnelles : je ne m'installe pas pour avoir l'angle parfait ou dans le but de saisir la lumière idéale. Dans certaines photos, on voit même l'essuie-glace de ma voiture. Ce qui m'attire d'abord dans un paysage, ce sont la composition et les formes; il n'est pas essentiel pour moi de capter tout de suite un contraste de lumière dans la photo qui m'inspire. La photo se transforme en tableau dans mon atelier. Je ne peins pratiquement jamais sur le vif à cause des facteurs techniques (par exemple, la peinture sèche vite et on est moins bien équipé

dehors) et surtout parce que mon processus est très long. Je suis plus à l'aise dans le luxe de mon atelier, mais j'admire les artistes canadiens qui peignent à l'extérieur, surtout en hiver!



Figure 4. Suzanne Dallaire, *Quatre bateaux de pêche*, 20 × 20", acrylique, 2015. Image reproduite avec la permission de l'artiste.

Y a-t-il une évolution dans vos toiles axées sur le paysage atlantique?

Parfois, j'ai l'impression qu'il n'y a pas vraiment d'évolution. Mais quand je regarde plus attentivement des toiles que j'ai peintes il y a quinze ans ou même plus récemment, je me rends compte que, bien que les sujets que j'affectionne n'aient pas beaucoup changé, on peut certainement voir une évolution de style et de technique qui s'est produite graduellement et qui demeure discrète. Lorsque je regarde un tableau dont à un moment donné dans le passé j'ai été très fière, je trouve des fautes ou je sais qu'aujourd'hui je peindrais le même thème de façon différente. Plus souvent qu'avant, je traite, ces jours-ci, des sujets en grand plan. Par exemple, j'avais peint un tableau intitulé *Village de pêche*, dans

lequel il y avait deux bateaux dorés que j'aimais d'une affection particulière. Un jour, en regardant de nouveau sur l'écran la photo qui m'avait inspirée, j'ai décidé de faire un grand tableau consacré uniquement à ce détail-là et j'ai donc zoomé pour examiner le contraste de lumière qui était exceptionnel. J'ai ensuite consacré un tableau de 26 × 60" à ces deux chaloupes qui n'étaient précédemment qu'un détail dans une grande scène. Par ailleurs, ces mêmes chaloupes-là figurent dans un autre tableau en tout petit, dont les dimensions sont de 12 × 24". En tant qu'artiste, je trouve fascinant ce changement de perspective.



Figure 5. Suzanne Dallaire, *Bateaux et cabanes colorées*, 18 × 36", acrylique, 2014. Image reproduite avec la permission de l'artiste.

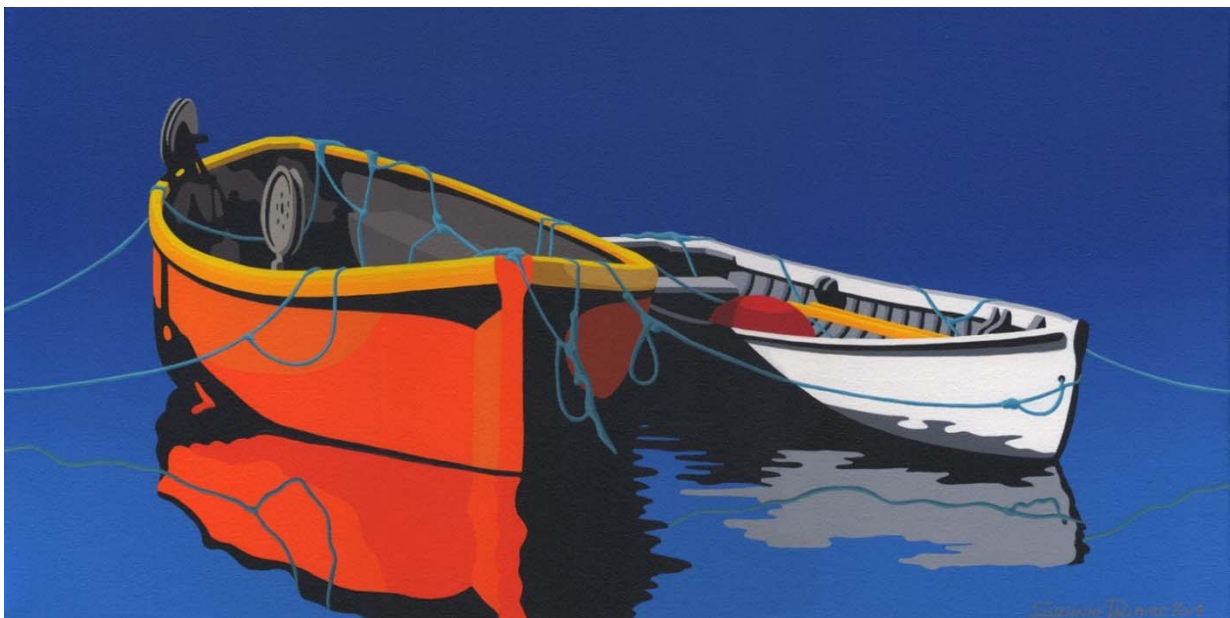


Figure 6. Suzanne Dallaire, *Entremêlées/Tangled*, 12 × 24", acrylique, 2014. Image reproduite avec la permission de l'artiste.

L'hiver est omniprésent dans la littérature et la peinture canadiennes. Dans sa thèse de doctorat, Margaret Atwood considère cette saison comme l'un des principaux défis du peuple canadien en ce qui a trait à sa survie. Quel rôle l'hiver, préoccupation obsédante chez les habitants des provinces maritimes, joue-t-il dans votre œuvre?

L'hiver ne figure pas beaucoup dans mes toiles, mais ce n'est pas parce que cette saison-là ne me plaît pas du tout ou que je n'aime pas faire des tableaux qui la mettent en scène. Cependant, il faut que j'aie de bonnes photos des scènes d'hiver qui me permettraient de rester dans mon style et d'utiliser ma propre technique picturale. Je ne me sers que de mes propres photos comme base de mes tableaux : je n'emprunte pas celles des autres qui se trouvent, par exemple, sur Google Images. Or, l'hiver, je suis en quasi-hibernation et sors un peu moins de chez moi. Je suis très occupée, car je peins à plein temps (il y a des semaines où je consacre probablement cinquante heures à mon travail) et mon processus de création est très long. Je produis en moyenne entre quarante et cinquante tableaux par année, ce qui correspond à environ un par semaine. Pendant douze ans, mon rendement annuel n'était que de trente-cinq toiles approximativement et, en 2014, ce sera sans doute autour de quarante-cinq. Et tous mes tableaux finissent par se vendre. Peindre, c'est mon seul gagne-pain et, pour dire la vérité, les tableaux d'hiver sont plus difficiles à vendre. Néanmoins, je les adore et, quand j'ai envie d'en peindre, je le fais quand même puisque je ne produis pas seulement en fonction de ventes. Mais si je dépendais uniquement de ma production d'hiver, il y aurait peut-être quelques mois de l'année où je ne mangerais rien... Il faut ajouter qu'un de mes tableaux préférés, dont le titre est *Branches rouges*, a été créé pendant l'été, mais il met en scène des tiges nues d'arbustes au bord de la mer surgissant dans la neige et s'élançant dans un ciel bleu sans nuages. Quand j'habitais à Pointe-du-Chêne, je promenais mon chien pendant toute l'année sur la plage Parlee. J'avais donc beaucoup de photos de ce lieu-là à tous les moments de l'année et j'ai décidé un jour d'en choisir quelques-unes pour faire une série de tableaux. La photo sur laquelle *Branches rouges* est basé datait d'environ onze ans quand je l'ai examinée avec un regard nouveau. Avec du *cropping*, je savais exactement ce que je voulais en faire...



Figure 7. Suzanne Dallaire, *Branches rouges*, 12 × 36", acrylique, 2012. Image reproduite avec la permission de l'artiste.

Dans un article du numéro inaugural de la *Revue d'études sur le Nouveau-Brunswick*, Herménégilde Chiasson affirmait que la multidisciplinarité est une caractéristique du milieu culturel acadien (29). Est-ce que votre art est en quelque sorte multidisciplinaire?

Mon art n'est en fait pas du tout multidisciplinaire—je n'écris pas, je ne fais pas de sculpture, je ne suis pas comédienne, je ne filme pas... Mais, j'ai fait des études en conception graphique et ensuite j'ai fondé

ma propre compagnie, La Maison Graphique. Pendant quelques années, j'ai fait du design graphique (qui est à mon avis une forme d'art) en même temps que de la peinture. En 2002, j'ai décidé de mettre toute mon énergie dans la peinture... Cependant, en Acadie, au Nouveau-Brunswick et même dans un contexte géographique plus large, les provinces maritimes, il y a beaucoup d'artistes qui dépendent uniquement de ce qu'ils gagnent grâce à leur métier et qui ont en effet une production artistique multidisciplinaire qui s'adapte à la consommation restreinte des biens culturels dans un petit milieu comme le nôtre. La population de tout le Nouveau-Brunswick équivaut, en fait, à environ un quart de celle de la région métropolitaine de Toronto. Chez nous, la multidisciplinarité est donc avant tout liée à la lutte pour la survie à cause des facteurs économiques. La population de la région n'est pas assez grande pour soutenir convenablement tous les artistes; ceux qui sont capables de s'engager dans plusieurs domaines ont plus de chance de pouvoir se consacrer à leur vocation artistique à long terme. La vie d'artiste n'est pas du tout facile au Nouveau-Brunswick : on peut prendre une vague et puis on a du travail pendant plusieurs années, mais il y a des moments où l'on se retrouve quatre, cinq ou six mois sans travail. Lorsqu'on travaille à son compte, sans avoir le droit au chômage, on est vite dépourvu de ressources. Je pense donc que la multidisciplinarité en effet résout ce problème-là pour l'artiste, celui de ne pas pouvoir travailler à plein temps pendant une longue période et à son propre compte dans une discipline en particulier.

Parce que vous ne faites que de la peinture, avez-vous dû trouver d'autres moyens pour subsister?

L'artiste actuel doit absolument avoir un côté entreprenant... Avant, j'allais régulièrement au marché des fermiers [c'est un marché public], pour montrer mes travaux. Si j'avais été trop fière, je n'aurais pas réussi à survivre dans ma carrière d'artiste. Il y avait des gens qui considéraient avec condescendance que cela dévaluait mon travail ou que gérer une vente était une entreprise trop commerciale pour une artiste, mais leur opinion ne m'a pas empêchée d'y aller quand même. Pour les marchés, je faisais des reproductions sur toile, de petites dimensions et dans des séries limitées. Il s'agissait d'un sous-produit qui rendait mon art plus accessible au grand public parce que ce n'est pas tout le monde qui peut se payer un tableau de, par exemple, 500, 1 000 ou 2 000 dollars... J'apportais en plus quelques tableaux originaux, mais je me concentrais surtout sur la vente des reproductions. Fréquemment entre 2002 et 2006, et puis de temps en temps entre 2010 et 2014, j'ai ainsi préféré exposer et vendre mes productions dans les marchés, ce qui n'était sans doute qu'une parenthèse, pour pouvoir vivre de mon art, plutôt que de trouver un emploi qui m'aurait permis d'avoir un salaire normal ou de base, mais qui aurait exigé en échange le temps précieux dont j'avais besoin pour mon art. Ce n'est pas parce que je ne suis pas capable : j'ai fait des études en psychologie à l'Université de Moncton de 1994 à 1998 avant d'entreprendre une formation en conception graphique entre 1998 et 2000 au CCNB de Dieppe. Mais pour arriver à l'étape actuelle de ma carrière, il fallait passer par là. De 2006 à 2009, j'ai aussi géré un café-galerie à Dieppe : Mosaïque. Il y avait une section consacrée à l'art, puis une autre à l'expérience gastronomique : le succès tenait à cette combinaison insolite. À cette époque-là, je travaillais en pastel sec et mon processus de création était moins long, mais ma production artistique a beaucoup baissé lorsque je gérais une entreprise à plein temps. C'est vrai que j'avais également deux enfants qui étaient jeunes à ce moment-là... Quand j'ai fermé le café et que je suis retournée à la peinture, c'était en quelque sorte comme si je débutais à zéro. Tout artiste bâtit petit à petit une réputation et une clientèle; pour les maintenir, il faut demeurer actif et visible. Et moi, j'avais été trop longuement absente de la scène. Aujourd'hui, j'ai une production artistique de quarante à cinquante tableaux par année qui me permet de vivre de mon art—c'est une réalité! Normalement, je vends la moitié directement aux clients et l'autre moitié dans les galeries. En 2013, deux nouvelles galeries ont commencé à vendre mes tableaux (Gainsborough Galleries à Calgary et Pilar Shephard Fine Art Gallery à Charlottetown), ce qui

est non seulement lucratif, mais aussi encourageant. Que mes tableaux soient vendus directement aux acheteurs dans les marchés, de temps en temps, ou qu'ils soient exposés dans les galeries, quelle différence y a-t-il s'ils finissent par se vendre? En outre, lorsqu'on est dans un milieu comme le marché, on a l'avantage d'avoir un contact direct avec le client. Pour moi, le client est très important parce que c'est lui qui achète un de mes tableaux et choisit de l'introduire dans son milieu intime. La réaction d'une personne qui est séduite par une image que j'ai créée dans mon atelier est toujours satisfaisante pour moi.

Comment les nouvelles technologies, la médiatisation ou la commercialisation influencent-ils la vie actuelle et la production artistique des artistes du Nouveau-Brunswick?

Il faudrait d'abord séparer les nouvelles technologies et la médiatisation de la commercialisation. Pour la plupart des artistes et pour moi en particulier, les nouvelles technologies constituent un avantage : on peut joindre en très peu de temps énormément de monde. En voici un exemple concret : quand j'avais ma galerie, l'usage de Facebook n'était pas aussi répandu qu'aujourd'hui. Si on organisait le vernissage d'une exposition, il était nécessaire de préparer 200 invitations individuelles sur papier, ensuite de les imprimer et de les mettre dans des enveloppes, et enfin, de les expédier par la poste. Ce processus, qui coûtait cher et prenait du temps, ne donnait pas le résultat d'une annonce mise aujourd'hui sur Facebook, qui est diffusée immédiatement et peut rejoindre un nombre incroyable de gens en l'intervalle de quelques heures, car elle est souvent partagée avec des amis et connaissances par un destinataire quelconque. Ne parlons même pas de Twitter, de Pinterest et des autres médias sociaux... Pour les événements culturels, ce genre de campagne publicitaire est extraordinaire, car elle donne un accès direct aux artistes et amène des visiteurs dans les galeries. Quant au phénomène de commercialisation, je dois préciser que je hais *a priori* le terme de « commercial » : à mon esprit, c'est *gross*, répugnant, du genre Walmart ou Costco. Mais je suis biaisée de ce côté-là parce que je trouve qu'au Nouveau-Brunswick, et peut-être dans d'autres endroits aussi, il y a une séparation marquée entre les artistes : ceux dont les œuvres ornent les murs de galeries publiques et ceux qui vendent des tableaux dans des galeries privées. Je suis ainsi étiquetée comme « artiste commerciale », mais je n'arrive pas à comprendre pourquoi exactement et l'étiquette me frustre d'autant plus. Je me demande si c'est parce que j'ai du succès en vendant mes tableaux dans des galeries privées qu'automatiquement je suis une artiste commerciale. Qu'est-ce que cette étiquette veut vraiment dire et pourquoi lui attribue-t-on autant de connotations négatives? Ma production annuelle étant de quarante à cinquante tableaux, je ne vois pas ma création comme étant à l'échelle commerciale. En tout cas, je préfère être étiquetée comme artiste commerciale et vivre de mon art plutôt que de ne pas l'être et puis de me voir obligée de faire quelque chose d'autre pour survivre.

Le visage du Nouveau-Brunswick est en train de changer... Croyez-vous que l'arrivée croissante de nouveaux immigrants au Nouveau-Brunswick aura des répercussions bénéfiques ou nuisibles sur les arts visuels et la culture?

Jusqu'ici, au sud-est de la province, on n'observe pas vraiment ce phénomène qui a tant marqué des provinces comme l'Ontario et la Colombie-Britannique, mais il est certain qu'un jour le visage du Nouveau-Brunswick changera peut-être de façon fondamentale. Ce changement aura certainement une influence sur la société, l'économie, la culture et les arts visuels. Il y a des gens qui voient ce changement comme une menace et c'est triste. À mon avis, la conséquence la plus importante sera un élargissement du milieu artistique et culturel. On ne peut pas arracher ou effacer une culture et une histoire qui sont omniprésentes et d'une importance non négligeable. La diversité apportera une nouvelle

manière de voir dans notre milieu, et pour les arts, ce sera un enrichissement. En vérité, je ne vois pas beaucoup de menaces ou de risques alarmants... La peur de perdre quelque chose d'important est pourtant naturelle.

Toujours selon Herménégilde Chiasson, les arts et la culture sont les « porte-paroles essentiels d'un lieu et surtout d'une culture » (30). Comment la production artistique et culturelle du Nouveau-Brunswick reflète-t-elle une certaine réalité propre à cette province?

Je partage complètement l'avis d'Herménégilde Chiasson. Néanmoins, le sens et l'importance d'une œuvre d'art ne se limitent pas à un lieu et à une culture. De nos jours, la mondialisation fait en sorte que l'art communique des messages qui dépassent aisément des frontières géographiques et culturelles. On n'a pas besoin d'appartenir à la même communauté que l'artiste pour être touché par un de ses tableaux ou même pour le comprendre. Mais il est certain que, si on lit l'histoire de l'art, on trouve constamment des liens concrets entre les œuvres produites à une même époque qui définissent un courant ou un mouvement artistique, aussi bien que des connexions directes entre ces œuvres-là et le contexte artistique, culturel et sociohistorique dans lequel elles sont nées. Au moment de la création, l'artiste et ses contemporains ne sont sans doute pas toujours conscients de ces liens qui sont en train de se créer et de se solidifier, mais plus tard, ils finissent par se cristalliser. En tant qu'artistes contemporains, nous ne nous rendons pas compte du fait que nos œuvres reflètent une réalité particulière—historique, géographique, culturelle... Ce qui me paraît pourtant certain, c'est que cette réalité dépasse les frontières provinciales.

On remarque parfois que les artistes acadiens contemporains s'orientent trop vers un passé qui est lourd. Quelle importance les artistes acadiens d'aujourd'hui devraient-ils accorder au passé dans leur production artistique? En d'autres termes, comment s'orientent-ils vers l'avenir sans oublier le passé?

Je suis à 100 % d'accord avec cette observation. Je pense qu'il n'y a rien de mal à faire référence au passé dans un projet, que ce soit en littérature, au théâtre ou dans les arts visuels : c'est notre histoire, celle des Acadiens, qui est à la fois tragique et captivante. Mais si on ne s'attarde qu'à cela, la référence devient plate, banale, parce qu'on n'avance pas. C'est *safe*, mais dangereux. Étant donné que notre monde est toujours en expansion, si on est coincé dans le passé, on arrête une évolution qui devrait se produire de façon naturelle et qui pourrait être enrichissante. Quant à moi, je suis d'abord *artiste*, mais il n'empêche que je suis extrêmement fière d'être acadienne. Je ne veux pourtant pas me définir uniquement comme artiste acadienne : en d'autres mots, je préfère que le passé des Acadiens, que je réclame d'ailleurs à haute voix comme le mien, ne détermine pas qui je suis en tant qu'artiste. Pour utiliser une analogie simple, si j'étais médecin, je ne me considérerais pas comme médecin acadienne tout simplement parce que mes racines n'auraient aucune influence sur la façon dont je traiterais une maladie. À mon avis, il ne faut certainement pas que ces racines soient une *béquille* à des buts commerciaux parce que le public peut ainsi nous connaître ou reconnaître. Même à l'extérieur de la province, les Acadiens sont connus pour leur passé mouvementé. Mais nous devrions tenir à ce que les gens nous connaissent également au présent : qui nous sommes et ce que l'on peut offrir actuellement. Nous sommes des artistes extraordinaires qui ne devraient pas être connus uniquement pour un lien fort avec un passé à part. Nous pouvons être très fiers d'être acadiens mais il n'est pas nécessaire que le passé soit le *focus* de nos créations et de nos rêves. Je suis très heureuse quand ce passé apparaît de façon naturelle dans mes propres toiles, quand c'est parfaitement *blendé* et qu'il n'y a pas d'objectif préalable : par exemple, un drapeau acadien qui bat de façon anodine dans mes paysages.

Pourrait-on parler d'un manque de centre artistique et culturel au Nouveau-Brunswick, dans le sens que nous n'avons pas de Halifax, de Montréal, de Toronto ou de Vancouver dans la province? Dans la ville de Moncton, quels organismes jouent un rôle dans la diffusion des beaux-arts?

Au Nouveau-Brunswick, il n'y a pas une ville en particulier qui s'impose comme grand centre artistique et qui joue le rôle principal dans la diffusion des arts et de la culture. Dans les grandes villes de la province, ce sont les galeries (publiques, universitaires ou privées) qui assument ce rôle-là, mais à une échelle plus petite. À cause de l'absence d'un centre stable et énergique qui ancrerait la communauté artistique de la province, il y a un phénomène frappant qui se manifeste en de nombreux endroits : les cliques, qui fonctionnent à partir de l'inclusion ou de l'exclusion des artistes sur la base de valeurs ou de principes collectifs. À Fredericton, on a la chance de trouver plusieurs galeries commerciales (Gallery 78, Ingrid Mueller et Gallery Opaque, pour en nommer quelques-unes), aussi bien qu'une galerie publique importante qui accueille les expositions des artistes contemporains (Beaverbrook Art Gallery). En revanche, à Moncton, l'absence d'une vraie galerie commerciale touche de façon conséquente tous les artistes, surtout étant donné que le sud-est de la province a une concentration importante d'artistes professionnels. Ce manque est dû à des facteurs économiques. Au centre-ville, où se trouvent des hôtels et des restaurants fréquentés par les touristes, la plupart des galeries qui ouvrent font faillite ou finissent par fermer. Lorsqu'on a un loyer mensuel de 5 000 dollars et que la vente des tableaux rapporte 10 000 dollars dont 60 % sont rendus aux artistes, comment peut-on se débrouiller? J'en ai fait l'expérience à Mosaïque. On avait un trafic et un achalandage incroyables puisque c'était un café-galerie et les ventes étaient bonnes des deux côtés, mais il n'était pas facile de regarder quotidiennement le revenu.

Est-ce que le Conseil des arts du Nouveau-Brunswick appuie suffisamment les artistes dans la province? Est-ce que le gouvernement canadien devrait investir davantage pour soutenir les arts et la culture dans cette province qui demeure en quelque sorte défavorisée? Quels types d'initiatives devrait-on soutenir?

Je ne dispose pas de statistiques, mais je suis convaincue que ce n'est pas assez. Il n'y aura sans doute jamais suffisamment d'argent investi dans les arts et dans la culture, mais on pourrait leur accorder plus de soutien financier. On ne peut douter que les subventions appuient et stimulent la production artistique et culturelle. Je suis peut-être biaisée parce que je n'ai jamais bénéficié de subventions et, en tant qu'artiste soi-disant commerciale qui vit de son art, je ne me qualifierai pas. Les critères de qualification sont trop étroits et contraignants. Dans les moments où ma situation était moins stable, un peu d'aide financière m'aurait aidée à préparer une exposition. Je ne peux pas arrêter de vendre des tableaux pendant six mois afin de préparer des pièces pour une exposition parce que je n'ai pas les moyens de survivre autrement. Mais il est difficile de justifier les dépenses dans ce domaine auprès du grand public, qui ne comprend pas toujours à quoi cela sert exactement de faire un tableau ou une installation, ou même ce que les arts lui apportent en général. Or, ils apportent de l'esthétique et de la vie; ils sont l'âme d'une communauté. Sans les arts, la vie serait plate et ennuyeuse. Ce que l'on soutient fréquemment à l'échelle provinciale et fédérale, ce sont les événements culturels. On accorde parfois des millions de dollars à ce genre d'événements; on annonce cet appui en grande fanfare et le grand public le considère comme génial. Cependant, on ne se rend pas compte qu'après les coûts de l'administration, la rémunération des employés qu'on embauche temporairement, et le paiement des locaux et des matériaux, il y a littéralement des grains de sable qui sont accordés directement aux artistes.

Interview with Thaddeus Holownia

* This interview was conducted in the winter of 2015 and edited for length by Lauren Beck.

What are the benefits of and challenges to locating your studio within a small New Brunswick community?

The benefits are that I have a fantastic landscape to look at; I have more square footage space to work in than most of my artist friends who have decided to stay in the city. It is a matter of deciding what your lifestyle is going to be, what you are willing to give up. I have a great working environment at the Department of Fine Arts at Mount Allison University. Small is not for everyone; the challenges can be a limited number of entertainment and cultural choices, but even that has changed in the last decade.



Figure 8. Thaddeus Holownia, *High Marsh Road*, Sackville, New Brunswick, silver gelatin contact print from 7 × 17" negative, 1994. Used with permission of the photographer.

Can you describe where you work, the space and the environment?

At Mount Allison University, I work in arguably the finest fine arts teaching facility in Canada. It is the envy of all who come and see it. It came about through careful planning and diligence on the part of Mount Allison administrators, physical plant functionaries, a great team of architects, and a fantastic, smart, and dynamic group of fine arts and drama teachers and technicians. It took time, and there was lots of give and take, but the end product will serve both students and instructors at Mount Allison in a most positive way for many generations to come. Teamwork pays off. In relation to my personal artistic workspace, when I first moved to Sackville, I rented a space a few kilometres away in Amherst, Nova Scotia, to have a darkroom and a studio space beyond Mount Allison University. When I built my house in Jolicure, New Brunswick, I also built a letterpress shop. For a number of years I rented space at a local foundry for storage and shipping for Anchorage Press (<http://www.anchoragepress.ca/>). Eventually, I decided that it would be smart to put everything under one roof, so I built a 3,000-square foot, three-floor studio space in Jolicure, which is one kilometre down a country road from where my home is located. It now serves as my letterpress shop, my silver/analogue darkroom, my digital darkroom, my office, and a repository for more than thirty-five years' worth of my creative activity. It is

situated on a two-acre plot of land where the Canadian poet John Thompson (1938–1976) had his house, which burned in 1974. The studio is surrounded by upland Tantramar marsh, so it possesses this extraordinary 360-degree viewpoint that extends for many kilometres in every direction. Apart from a few local transplanted academics and the long-time resident farmers, it is pretty much deer, fox, coyotes, eagles, other creatures of the marsh, birds, and a big sky.

You often invite people to visit your studio, even unannounced. How does the situation of your studio mesh with its accessibility to the community?

Because it is located about eighteen kilometres from the town of Sackville, along an unpaved road, the accessibility is difficult for some people who may not like to get their cars dirty. People do drop by, but not as many or as often as you would think. I believe there may also be an intimidation factor that keeps people from just dropping by. Once a year, I participate in “Art on the Marsh,” a weekend when local artists have an open house in their studios. This allows all people access for a couple of days to come and see what the varied creative community is up to. In terms of my productivity, someone stopping in for a coffee or a Scotch is just as much the work of an artist as setting some lead type on the letterpress or rocking a print tray in the darkroom.

Some of your photography seems fascinated with the landscape of this region. What intrigues you about the physical geography of the area?

Someone once said to me that there is more history per square foot on the Tantramar marshes than anywhere else in Canada. Regardless of whether this is true or not, I have found this place to be rich in subject matter for my cameras. The so-called taming of the landscape, the traces of human activity in the landscape is what interests me in the work I have done since I first came to Mount Allison University as a visiting artist in 1976. That first trip to Sackville from Toronto, when I came by train travelling through the Memramcook Valley and along the upland marsh and the tidal flats, I was really taken by the landscape. Later, I was given a two-year appointment and charged with starting up the photography program. I did not envision myself staying here. From a creative perspective, the reason I came to Sackville was to work on a book with Douglas Lochhead (1922–2011), then director of the Centre for Canadian Studies at Mount Allison University, and it ended up taking ten years to put together. It was published by McGill-Queen’s University Press in 1989. *Dykelands* contains twenty-six photographs and poems written by Douglas in direct response to those landscape images. After you have been here for ten years, the place begins to fit you.



Figure 9. Thaddeus Holownia, *Rockland Bridge, Upper Dorchester*, New Brunswick, silver gelatin contact print from 7 × 17" negative, 1981. Used with permission of the photographer.

Humans do not seem to be featured prominently in your work. Are there other ways in which humans become incorporated into your photography?

I am always interested in the landscape, the architecture, and the human-constructed landscape. The dykes were built and the tides were held back—and I have a strong attraction to that notion of containing nature. That thread relating to humans working the landscape, and both the significance and insignificance of that act, is a large part of the work that I do. Whether photographing the architecture in Paris or in Toronto, or working in Newfoundland, human intervention in the landscape and architecture is always present in my work.



Figure 10. Thaddeus Holownia, *Field and Tree*, Sussex, New Brunswick, chromogenic contact print from 7 × 17" negative, 1998. Used with permission of the photographer.



Figure 11. Thaddeus Holownia, *Ferryland*, Newfoundland, chromogenic contact print from 7 × 17" negative, 1989. Used with permission of the photographer.

How does the use of colour or of black and white impact your photography of towns like Sackville, and is there a contrast in how you might approach photographing urban cities as opposed to small towns?

The use of colour or black and white is specific to the language I'm trying to use in relation to the subject matter. The majority of the work I do is in black and white. But I am always ready to photograph in black and white or in colour. Projects kind of find their own space as I work on them. I am an artist who needs to work on something over a longer period of time—a year, two years, five years, or ten years. I do not approach any project differently. I look at the world the same here as I do in Paris. If I see something in a building here that interests me, I think I could tie a thread from that observation to a building that I photographed in Eastport, Maine, or Toronto. Emotionally and intellectually, I am standing in the same place responding to something that is inherently interesting to me. I do not think that I change who I am by where I go.



Figure 12. Thaddeus Holownia, *Queen & Bathurst Street*, Toronto, Ontario, chromogenic contact print from 7 × 17" negative, 1987. Used with permission of the photographer.

Beyond photography, you also are interested in the craft of the book and operate Anchorage Press. What interests you about printing and the creation of books?

When I was living in Toronto, I spent some time at the Coach House Press and I had friends involved there interested in art bookmaking and publishing. Stan Bevington, Ric Simon, Victor Coleman, David Hlynsky, Pam Grundy, Judy Jarvis, and others were large influences on how I looked at the idea of the book and at photography. Later, upon moving to Sackville, I started collecting letterpress equipment because it seemed like an easy way to put words on the page and to do it elegantly while still having tactile control over everything. This was long before the advent of desktop publishing. At that particular moment in time, letterpress technology was being hauled to the dump and digital publishing was to become the way of the future. I was fortunate to gather up some printing presses, some type, and some typesetting equipment. Whereas the physical, mechanical process of making a photograph is insignificant—anybody can learn to take a light reading and to put film in a camera—the cerebral process of doing photography is where it all happens. Framing and setting up the camera is a mere mechanical process. Making books and handling type, and being physical in the making of the book, are tactile processes that are different than the photographic process. I like being able to choose fine paper and think about how type sits upon the page. It feeds a different creative space for me. Whether I am producing the book myself, physically printing it, getting it bound, and choosing the materials, or if I am hiring somebody to do that, I am still in control over it. My first book was published by McGill-Queen's University Press, as I already mentioned, but all subsequent books have been produced either by the Gaspereau Press or by my own imprint, the Anchorage Press. I work with writers whom I respect and who are my friends or who become my friends through projects. I start with a blank slate, identify a topic or theme such as the salmon river landscape, then I find someone who has an interest in that topic, and I work on that project with them until we nail it down. For instance, *Silver Ghost: An Homage to the Atlantic Salmon Rivers of Eastern Canada* (2008), my collaboration with Harry Thurston, was arrived at in this way.

How do new technologies such as digital photography affect your creative process and, in your view, how does the spectator encounter your photographs today?

Millions of photographs are made every day, and unfortunately the photograph as a physical object is pretty much lost on most people. There will be a gap in the history of photography at some point when hard drives crash and because technology keeps changing in a way that keeps us from accessing what we have done. These will be interesting issues for archivists and historians to deal with. As I continue to work with large sheets of film, the impact on my archive and work is nil. I do enjoy the ability to enlarge my images using digital means. In terms of teaching, we embrace all technologies. Whether we are dealing with wet plate collodion or digital photography, the students find ways to use it creatively. It comes back to everything being a tool. Whether it is a thick brush or a thin brush, it is how you paint and what you have to say that matters. Whether you work with a digital camera, a large format view camera or a thirty-five-millimetre camera, it is just a tool. Artists embrace the tools that have been discarded as well. We give first-year students thirty-five-millimetre cameras and they are enthralled with them because they have never seen one. It is interesting. People view my photographs as somewhat physically different because they are very detailed and contain no pixels.



Figure 13. Thaddeus Holownia, *Lime Pile*, High Marsh Road, Sackville, New Brunswick, silver gelatin contact print from 7 × 17" negative, 2011. Used with permission of the photographer.

What might artists in larger communities such as Toronto or even Moncton be missing out on that you benefit from in Sackville? And, vice versa—is there something that you might be missing out on by not working in a larger, urban context?

When I left Toronto, there were some people who said that they would never speak to me again because they could not imagine me moving back to New Brunswick. I went to high school in New Brunswick, so I sort of knew the place anyway. I think we need to be comfortable in our skins. If you live in Sackville and you are not happy, it is a big tragedy and you should not be here. Life is very short. I am happy to be in Sackville because it nurtures my creativity and the lifestyle that I want to embrace. I do get a fix by going to larger centres (New York, Paris, Berlin, Toronto) usually for work, maybe for a maximum of three weeks, which is enough for me. I will go somewhere, use it for what it has got, then I will come back to my studio and be quite happy to be back here in my environment.



Figure 14. Thaddeus Holownia, *Parc de Monceau*, Paris (8^e Arrondissement), France, silver gelatin contact print from 4 × 10" negative, 2010. Used with permission of the photographer.

What sort of ties do you have to other artists, in the Maritimes or elsewhere, and how do collaborations with them on projects develop?

I collaborate a lot with writers and not as much with visual artists. I subscribe to the idea that the book is a very democratic object. The idea of collaboration appeals to me and I only work with writers who are going to contribute new material when making a book with me. My books are creative objects that come from a singular idea and become nurtured into a unified voice.

How do artists in New Brunswick reach out to audiences on a national and international scale?

The Internet, social media, collectives, residencies, and artist-run centres are the main vehicles for younger artists to reach out. The physicality of getting your work out of here and shown in legitimate galleries elsewhere presents a challenge. You have to be inventive and pursue your audience relentlessly.

In New Brunswick we seem to lack an artistic and cultural centre in the way that Montreal and Vancouver might serve as centres for Quebec and British Columbia. How does this province sustain a community of artists?

I think that, because of the large geographical space and the small population of the province, the artistic communities in New Brunswick are smaller and more condensed. In Sackville, we have as rich an artistic community as anywhere in the world. Artistic communities are present in all the larger centres (Moncton, Fredericton, and Edmundston), and smaller places such as St. Andrews.

How does the linguistic variety found throughout the province affect this community of artists? Would you say that there is a Francophone community and an Anglophone one, or does art in this province transcend language and discrete spectatorships?

I think the artistic community is more intermingled. Artists find their own space and they follow one another; it is a small community regardless. I do not think language separates artists, rather that they have their own, common language. We find ways of communicating beyond language.

Many small New Brunswick communities possess vibrant art scenes populated by both emerging and established artists. In your view, what draws them to these places as opposed to larger urban centres such as Toronto or Halifax?

Cost of living; cheap studio space; community. The university is an important part of this creative scene, and there are many people who come out of Mount Allison University who then become part of the bigger creative scene in Sackville, or who already have formed an association with the artist-run centre, Struts Gallery. Today, there is a parallel universe going on in Sackville, in Halifax, in Moncton, with lots of the same sort of things going on. What's nice about Sackville is the scale of it. You can go to an opening or to a musical or theatre event, and see many of the same people. I think that there is a cross-pollination of support here that might not happen in larger centres. I like it a lot and appreciate that people are not in their cubicles, which I think is one of the major strengths of this community.