

# From Water into Sky

*If there is magic on this planet, it is contained in water.*

Loren Eiseley  
American anthropologist  
1907-1977

Transparent, tasteless, odorless and nearly colourless, water is the main constituent of Earth's streams, lakes and oceans and the fluids of most living organisms. Listed as one of the four classical elements by the ancient Greek philosopher Empedocles, water covers 71% of the Earth's surface and makes up between 55% to 78% of the human body. Described as 'the solvent of life', water is vital for all known forms of life.

Water is also the solvent for one of the oldest art processes known to humankind: watercolour painting. Watercolour painting is an artistic method where the paints are made of pigments suspended in a water-based solution and bound by a colloid agent, such as gum arabic. Watercolours have been used for manuscript paintings at least since ancient Egyptian times. Watercolours have also been the dominant medium used in Chinese, Korean and Japanese painting for centuries.

The continuous use of watercolours as an art medium in western art began in the Renaissance and by the 18th century had become an important artistic tool, especially in England. The growing importance of this media was closely tied to the acceptance of the landscape as an appropriate subject for painting. By the end of the 19th century 'the LANDSCAPE' had become the main artistic genre in British art and watercolours, due to their fluidity, transparency, luminosity and versatility became a primary means of expressing this subject. In the later part of the 19th century the influence of watercolour painting spread from England into North America and watercolours proved to be an excellent medium in capturing the awe-inspiring physicality of this expansive territory.

The travelling exhibition **From Water into Sky**, featuring art works from the collection of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, explores the use of watercolour painting in expressing the landscape of Alberta and elements of the natural world. Investigating various approaches to watercolour painting and modes of artistic representation from high realism to abstraction, the artworks in this exhibition give voice to the countless marvels and moods of the natural world and the 'magic' that can be found both within and through water.

*The exhibition **From Water into Sky** was curated by Shane Golby and organized by the Art Gallery of Alberta for the Alberta Foundation for the Arts Travelling Exhibition Program. The Travelling Exhibition Program is financially supported by the Alberta Foundation for the Arts.*

FRONT COVER IMAGE:  
Simon Camping  
Castle Mountain, 1980  
Watercolour on paper  
Collection of the Alberta Foundation  
for the Arts



## The Alberta Foundation for the Arts Travelling Exhibition Program

The Art Gallery of Alberta is pleased to present this travelling exhibition to venues throughout Alberta. Currently the Art Gallery of Alberta serves over 60 venues in approximately 35 communities. Exhibitions on tour from the Art Gallery of Alberta easily adapt to space requirements of smaller venues: schools, libraries, museums, health care centres and other community facilities. The exhibitions are organized in such a manner as to make unpacking, packing, hanging and shipping as easy as possible. Along with the exhibition, each venue receives an Educational Interpretive Guide. These materials enable teachers to use the exhibition within the school curriculum.

The Alberta Foundation for the Arts Collection is the primary source of works featured in the travelling exhibitions. Other sources for exhibitions may include community partners, archives, private collections and loans from artists. Each year we welcome new venues to enrich their community art through the Alberta Foundation for the Arts Travelling Exhibition Program.

### Our Thanks

The artists

The Alberta Foundation for the Arts

and to the many individuals, organizations and communities who contribute to the success of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts Travelling Exhibition Program each year.

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The Alberta Foundation for the Arts  
Travelling Exhibition Program

# From Water into Sky

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Jean Richards  
March 99, 1999  
Watercolour on paper  
Collection of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts

**Jean Richards** was born in Edmonton and educated at a private school, Llanarthney School for Girls. From there she embarked on many years of university courses in both art and writing. She graduated with honours from the Lorne Greene Radio Academy and went from there to work as a radio time buyer in Toronto. She returned to Edmonton and became the only woman radio and television executive at the James Lovick Advertising Agency, where she stayed for seven years. She later resigned and free-lanced for a series of magazines, wrote and edited *Downtown Edmonton*, and was a morning commentator at CKUA, radio series on CBC Trans Canada, and the morning show at CBC.

From 1960 on Richards became a full-time artist and writer. She wrote only on art subjects and painted full time. She was a permanent free-lance art critic for the Edmonton Journal (1960-1981) and was a correspondent for *Arts West* (1961-1980). During this time she also had a one woman show every one or two years displaying her work locally and had her work exhibited in many group shows both nationally and internationally.

#### Artist's Statement:

*The Alberta landscape has enriched my life in so many ways, with its constant change of light, form and space. My purpose as an artist has always been to try to capture this in my work; to seek the beauty and try to communicate it to the viewer. In reality, everyone can see the living things in our environment, but few really understand what they are seeing. Whether I paint an abstract of a canola field or paint it in a traditional manner, the idea is the same; a need to find the living essence of things.*

*To help me show what I see I use many different tools besides a brush and watercolour paints. I often use crayons, pastels, inks, acrylics and even ground up rock! I might even paint an entire work with a sponge dipped in colours, whatever helps to give my personal mark, a voice. I like to think of my work as visual poetry.*



Robert Sinclair  
Snowed Glimpse, 1991  
Watercolour on paper  
Collection of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts

**Robert Sinclair** was born in 1939 in Saltcoats, Saskatchewan. He received a B.F.A. from the University of Manitoba in 1961, an M.A. from the University of Iowa in 1965, and an M.F.A. from the University of Iowa in 1967. From 1965 to 1997 he taught in the Department of Art and Design at the University of Alberta in Edmonton. He is a member of the Royal Canadian Academy of the Arts and the Canadian Society of Painters in Watercolour. Sinclair has participated in numerous solo and group exhibitions since 1965 and his work can be found in the collections of the Art Gallery of Alberta, the Art Gallery of Windsor, the Royal Collection of Her Majesty the Queen in Windsor Castle, the Canada Council Art Bank in Ottawa, the Glenbow Museum in Calgary, and numerous corporate and private collections.

#### Artist's Statement

*The more I paint the more it seems that I am at the beginning again.*

*Painting exists and begins in my mind, but I rely on my body to know when a painting is resolved. Each painting while being painted is comprised of continuous moments of 'not knowing-ness'. Insight (intuition) is stimulated by this process. Often during these moments something new arises, a kind of receiving as a gift rather than a getting. It is like a door opening leading to new insights and connections.*

*Watercolour painting offers me the opportunity to express and compress the complexity of our world within my artistic interest in the simplicity of the reductive or minimal statement. It is an attempt to touch the beginnings of forms. To this end, I explore the endless variations of themes found in the fundamentals of art and our perceptions of art and reality.*



Vivian Thierfelder  
We Just Roll, 1976  
Watercolour on paper  
Collection of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts

**Vivian Thierfelder** was born in Edmonton and received a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from the University of Alberta in 1970. Before turning to fine art as a full time pursuit in 1983, Thierfelder worked in the area of foreground preparation for the Natural History diorama program and in exhibit design and construction at the Provincial Museum of Alberta, as well as the graphics department of a major telecommunications firm. Since beginning to paint more than 30 years ago, she has worked in oils, acrylics and now, exclusively, in watercolour. Her subject matter has ranged from various natural materials to elaborate still life and into exotic tropical flowers whose riotous colours first had an impact on her during a year-long stay in Hawaii. Her works often utilize diagonals to lead the eye into the heart of the painting, encouraging the visual exploration of perceived three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional surface. Vivian Thierfelder's work celebrates the lushness of the natural world using colour and detail revealed by strong natural light.

Thierfelder has participated in numerous group and solo exhibitions since the 1980s and is a member of the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts, the Canadian Society of Painters in Water Colour, and is a Signature Member of the Federation of Canadian Artists. She has received numerous awards for her work and is in the collections of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, the Glenbow Museum, the collection of HRH Queen Elizabeth II Collection of Drawings and Watercolours, Royal Library, Windsor Castle, the University of Alberta, and numerous corporate and private collections.

#### Artist's Statement

*In the private and intuitive selection of subject matter, composition and style, I attempt to mirror my experience and personal reverence for the rich and varied world around me. My recent works are a blending of the sensual and the spiritual. They prove to be a microcosm of detailed chaos composed of light, shadow, densities, texture and colour which, through the 'focusing-lens' of a human mind and hand, emerge ordered and defined on a two-dimensional plane....Through the 'magic' ritual of this translation, I incorporate a sense of spirituality that leads me to regard the resulting painted images as personal visual hymns.*