

A Brief History

In the very early days after WW2, ceramic art, as distinct from manufactured ceramic ware, had begun to creatively flourish particularly in the UK and US but also in Canada. In this nascent period in Alberta, there was little information or access to materials. As the impetus for development increased, a group of artists and educators agreed to form the Alberta Potters Association (APA) in 1970 in order to access information and extend interactions with other potters both nationally and internationally. By 1973, this young association had established Contact Magazine. Canadian in scope, it focused on introducing clay artists of all levels to wider ranges of current experience, concepts and techniques. Through the APA and Contact Magazine, Alberta potters now had access to symposia, shows and visits by International artists. For example, the APA organised Ceramics International, held in Calgary in 1973, in cooperation with The International Academy of Ceramics (Switzerland).

This time period saw a surge in the development of Ceramic Departments in post-secondary institutions such as the (then) Alberta College of Art, the Universities and the Banff Centre as well as the establishment of province-wide pottery guilds. The Alberta Art Foundation (1972) was formed by the Government for the purpose of collecting and exhibiting works. Alberta Culture Visual Arts supported the APA and its endeavors with grants. Many of APA's members contributed significantly to contemporary activities in the province.

By the late 90's however, government funding and venues became less secure and the APA's role became less clear. The Internet, easy access to travel, workshop availability, the development of Residencies, flux spaces and community based studios all contributed to the difficulties in maintaining a province-wide organisation. The APA was struggling to stay afloat. Contact Magazine came to its end in 1999. These difficult years culminated with the proposal to disband the APA in the winter of 2006.

But the APA would not pass quietly. By March, Jim Marshall, a founding member, started to rally the troops. A newly formed committee from Medicine Hat made a bid to keep the APA alive. Jim Marshall, Les Manning and Sharon Altonen were voted in as the new executive with a new vision for the restructuring. This included regional rotations of executives and AGM duties (every two years),

greater use of digital technologies for web pages, portfolios, a re-focus on the grassroots layers and on community development. Following this plan, the APA was housed in Medicine Hat (2006-2007), Red Deer (2008-2009), Lethbridge (2010-2011) and Calgary (2012 – present). The host regions organised some phenomenal AGM's, workshops and presentations by numerous Artists and most importantly, it offered an opportunity for members to meet.

However, the APA has always been a volunteer organisation and with continually changing Boards, the overall continuity has suffered. So, it was decided that the Board remain in Calgary. A comprehensive survey was conducted to identify how the organisation could best serve the members with subsequent development of a reorganizational plan as reflected in the Mission statement. Provincially, the Off-Centre Show (Webster's Gallery) and Symposium held at (the then Alberta College of Art & Design) was held in Calgary in 2013. Projects include website development, a greater social media presence, workshops, retreats, AGM events, a historical documentation project and this show, 2020, a Celebration of 50 Years. As well, local to the Calgary area are the Millarville Market, a Christmas Sale and Coffee & Ceramics events.

We remain a vibrant group who are dedicated to serving the ceramic arts! At no other time has ceramics (nationally and internationally) enjoyed such wide cultural popularity through museum/gallery exhibitions, the Handmade Movement and community programs. The APA is clearly an invaluable facilitator for arts within communities.

Connie Cooper

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2020

OUR MISSION

Our mission is to stimulate our members through informative workshops, lectures, exhibition opportunities and community building, while helping to connect our members to the larger arts community through events and our affiliate art organizations.

Please visit our website: www.albertapottersassociation.org

