

enduring women
veils of secrecy

Director's Statement

Public art galleries have a responsibility to present exhibitions that delight and inspire the viewer, and exhibitions that challenge the viewer to disrupt their comfort, to question and re-evaluate their assumptions. Some exhibitions can be appreciated on a purely visual level, where others force a sense of self awareness or community consciousness. *Enduring Women: Veils of Secrecy* is an example of the latter. Violence against anyone, whether it be a woman, man or child, is a troubling thought. What is worse is the reality of the statistics.

As with any exhibition that concerns itself with confronting its audience and questioning their culpability in injustice and suffering, *Enduring Women* is not just about the artwork produced, or even the artists themselves, but rather what the viewer realizes through the work -- a view point that both Pedros and Curtis-Norcross have embraced in this exhibition. The veiled images seem to deny their own importance, and assert themselves only enough for their message to be understood.

What makes this exhibition unique is the dynamic that is created when a male artist involves himself in an issue that has been predominantly dealt with by women. It is the dialogue between Curtis-Norcross and Pedros that sets this exhibition apart from its predecessors. The cliché injustice of male as perpetrator, female as victim is set aside. That violence against women is rampant in our community is shown from this collective perspective where the strength in women that allows them to endure with dignity is more relevant than showing them bleeding and broken.

I am particularly honoured to offer this exhibition to the community. When you believe strongly in an issue it ceases to be about you and becomes about what we can do together to make a change. It is my hope, along with the artists, that through awareness the violence will end.

I owe special thanks to the Women's Committee of the *St. Thomas-Elgin Public Art Centre* whose funding helped make this publication possible. I would also like to thank Madeline Lennon for her insights and expertise so clearly evident in her essay for this catalogue.

- Debra Seabrook
St. Thomas-Elgin Public Art Centre



Enduring Women 10
Gerald Pedros

The women are present in the room—strong figures striding, or caught moving in a fragmentary view. Their words and agitated markings activate the walls their voices echo from the corners. On the floor, a shadow floats like a thousand tiny clouds held fast, for the moment, by as many sharp straight piercing pins.

Enduring Women is many things: a dialogue, an activist performance, a text interrupted and elaborated, an art exhibition. Gerald Pedros and Sylvia Curtis-Norcross challenged one another to examine and respond to the issue of violence against women—not in general theoretical or historical terms, but rather in the way it actually touches us all if we allow ourselves to see and to hear. They noticed in local newspapers published across Southwestern Ontario reports appearing daily of women battered, killed, threatened, abused, harassed, stalked and living in fear. It might be possible to read these news items neutrally, like anything else reported every day. However, tracking the numbers (the reports, the statistics) makes it overwhelming, especially since these are local accounts about women who may shop in the same stores and live in the same neighborhoods as we do. From this close perspective, the reality is horrifying. Representing this reality artistically, making the hidden visible to effectively draw attention to the issue, is perhaps the greatest challenge for an artist.

In the history of art there are powerful representations that can move a viewer to connect with terrible human situations—Goya's *Disasters of War* and Picasso's *Guernica* are two examples from earlier centuries that speak to the awful violence of war and human suffering. More recently, women artists have taken up the problematic question of how women have been represented in art in the past. They have experimented in many media with depictions of women and women's issues from specifically feminine points of view. The result is an array of work that layers multiple viewpoints and enriches our understanding of women's experience. The expansive collaboration of Pedros and Curtis-Norcross in *Enduring Women* takes these ideas to another level, bringing together the female and male perspectives while engaging with the voices of many women. For here is part of the wonder of the work: women willing to tell their own stories responded to the artists' call in those same local newspapers; theirs are among the words we read that appear and disappear, floating on and around the figures. Again, women supporting this project responded to Gerald Pedros's search for figures to paint—they are friends and relations (not paid models). The intensity of all the participants brings a sense of urgency to the whole installation of paintings/collages, floor piece and sound.



Enduring Women 21
Gerald Pedros

*...how bad life can get...
I hit you but remember I love you*

Layering is the telling motif in this installation. Mylar sheets reveal and conceal: painted bodies, whole and fragmented; texts carefully printed but hidden; scrawled phrases partially, wildly scratched out. The mylar's surface is skin-like, inviting us to touch, to smooth and press the top layer against the next, against the wall, so that we can read more clearly what is beneath the surface. It is hard to resist the sensuous quality of this material. Through our touch we become complicit, we make contact with these bodies and the tough emotions their words express. Struggling to read the reports and news clips scattered on the surfaces of Pedros' painting/collage works, we encounter small images from art history and popular culture that contrast with the brilliant, expansive and active lines of the figures that fill the works. These 'side-bars' are like the marginal drawings of medieval manuscripts that whimsically comment on the larger main text, so it is not surprising to find among them images taken from a work that inspired Pedros, the *Bayeux Tapestry*, a long linen hanging embroidered by women in eleventh-century Normandy, depicting in several layers the story of the struggle for the English crown complete with diplomatic trickery and brutal combat. Mixed in with these *Bayeux* figures are other collaged drawings such as suggestive miniatures from ancient Greek pornography and from 20th century men's fitness manuals...and the age-less, pervasive *heart*. Altogether these small images suggest the larger world of enduring attitudes towards women and violence that encompasses us today, balancing visually with the texts that speak of violence. Yet, looking through and around these subtexts we find the strong bodies of women who seem self-contained, whether whole, walking towards us and exchanging our gaze (as in the larger work), or seen fragmented as though in action. Some are clearly visible while others are in shadow, hidden and only revealed as layers gently shift.

In his studies of these women, Gerald Pedros limited his use of colour, but the splashes are very bright foils for the dark expressive lines of the figures. They are appealing representations—the largest are life-size, nude, directly and vigorously drawn, reflecting the artist's respectful position before the realities of women's lives. Significantly, from among his own experiences Pedros highlights his relationship with his mother as influencing his decision to tackle this difficult topic and to represent the nude. This mother he describes as best friend—a woman not abused, but capable of “sheer endurance in every situation”—a mother recently lost. To her memory he dedicates this work as more representative of her character than a portrait could ever be.



Detail of *Enduring Women 2*
Sylvia Curtis-Norcross

Once I had a black eye... You spend your whole life looking...

Central to the project embodied in *Enduring Women* is the on-going dialogue between the two artists. Sylvia Curtis-Norcross and Gerald Pedros developed their ideas in discussions about their responses to the shocking information they found about women and violence, as well as in exchanges about their studio work, as they experimented with their different approaches to artistic practice. It is interesting that Curtis-Norcross, a woman who has experienced and understands the many layers of women's lives, first worked on the concept of a shadow falling across the floor from one of Pedros' life-size nudes, whose shape it reflects. The material for this work references everyone living in this area: it is constructed with the torn pages of the local telephone directory, a straight-pin holding each piece to the floor. The effect is beautiful and unnerving, much like a collection of preserved butterflies. The process of tearing and pinning each paper fragment is consuming, like a ritual of mourning for a vulnerable body—a powerful statement from the artist.

Curtis-Norcross' mylar pieces take texts as their focus, texts that are covered over, scratched out and manipulated with dense gestural script or wild scribbling. No bodies are represented here; rather we have the *marks* of a body. The artist's powerful writing gestures on mylar are rubbed out or scratched over



Enduring Women 14
Gerald Pedros

repeatedly, or her words circle round themselves to a centre void. Perhaps the most potent cry is expressed through the red stitching across the top of one mylar sheet. At one point the stitching catches and slips; the mylar is crinkled and torn (as though crunched in frustration), and writing across the surface appears to have been rubbed out. Along the bottom are lines of fierce painted horizontal gestures covering over writing. The colours are dark earthy tones that almost obliterate a flesh-coloured area. All this is laid over an under sheet of paper covered entirely with carefully controlled printing in pencil of what appears to be a report of violence against women. The power of this image is unmitigated.

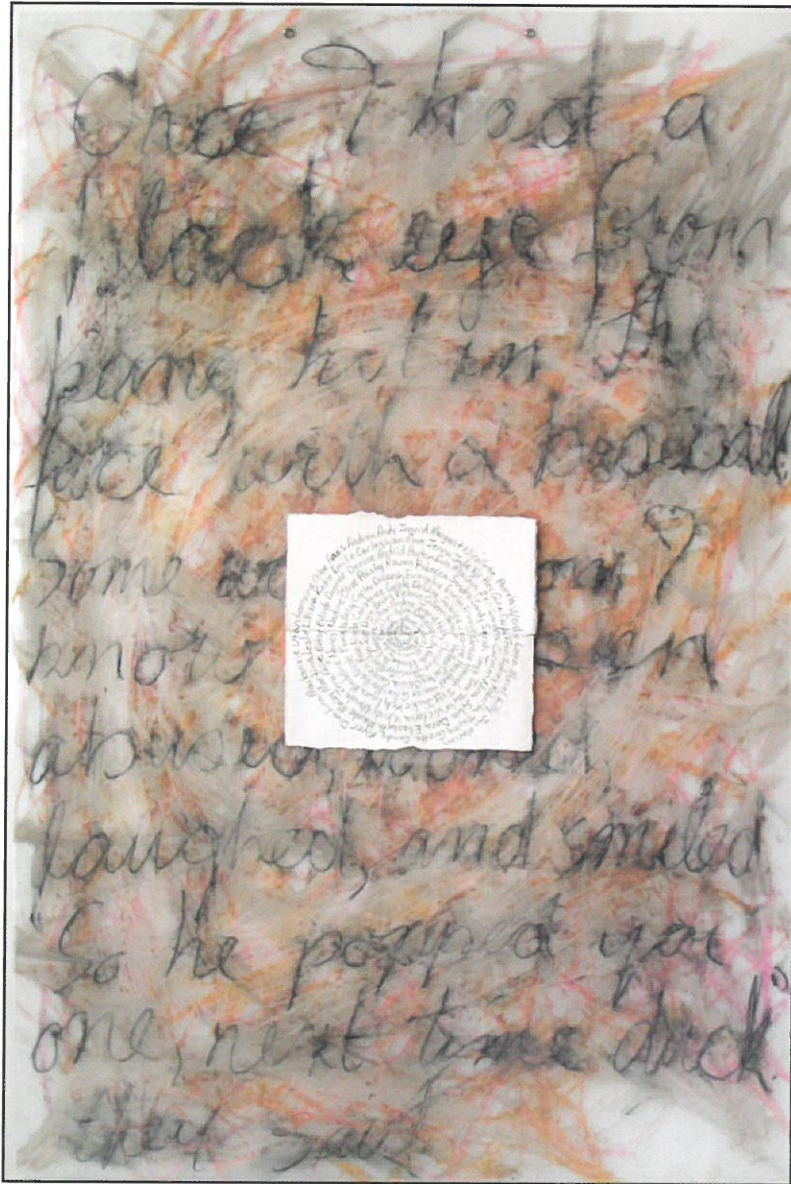
There is a sound component complementing the works in *Enduring Women*: three motion-activated tapes. The tapes are voices of women talking as they work, and of an individual recounting years of abuse at the hands of her father. Digitally manipulated to produce layers of sound, they are not unlike the visual layers we see around us in the exhibition. The eerie quality of disembodied laughter, and exchanges that cannot be understood, touches us as we attend to the images and texts.

The strength of *Enduring Women* is the promise embodied in all the participants in this installation who step forward to recognize the existence of shadows in the lives of too many women in our world. The artists present themselves as active witnesses and protestors against the silence. They call on us to join them.

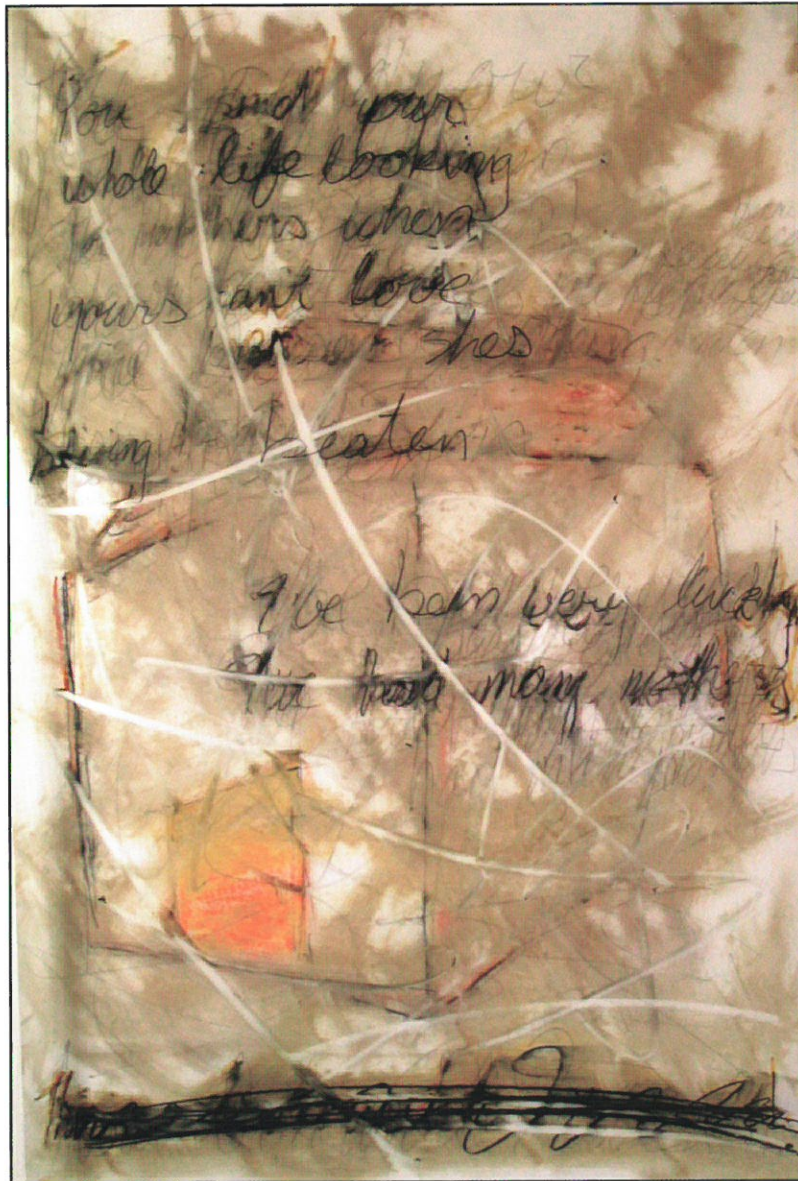
- Madeline Lennon



Enduring Women 1
Sylvia Curtis-Norcross



Enduring Women 3
Sylvia Curtis-Norcross



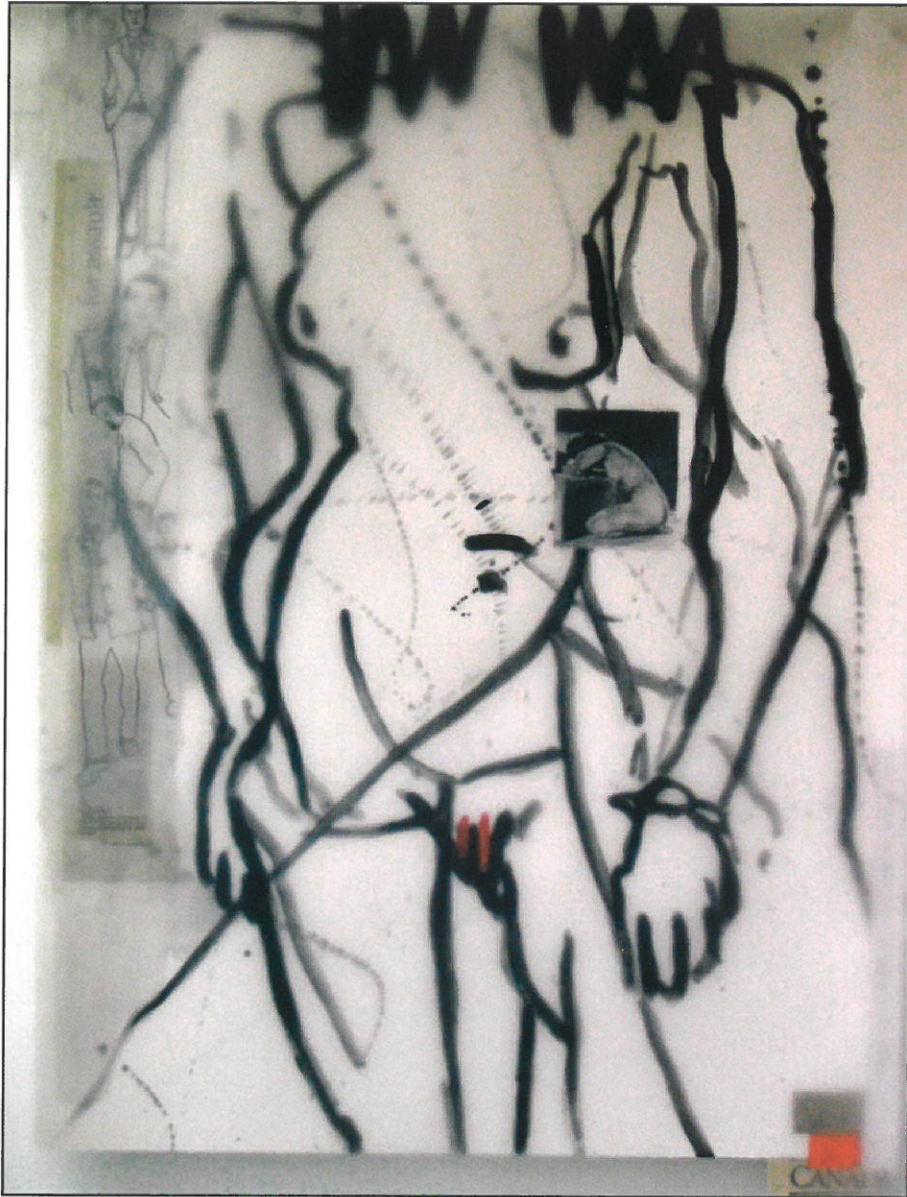
Enduring Women 5
Sylvia Curtis-Norcross



Enduring Women 6
Sylvia Curtis-Norcross



Enduring Women 8
Gerald Pedros



Enduring Women 9
Gerald Pedros



Enduring Women 11
Gerald Pedros



Enduring Women 12
Gerald Pedros



Enduring Women 13
Gerald Pedros



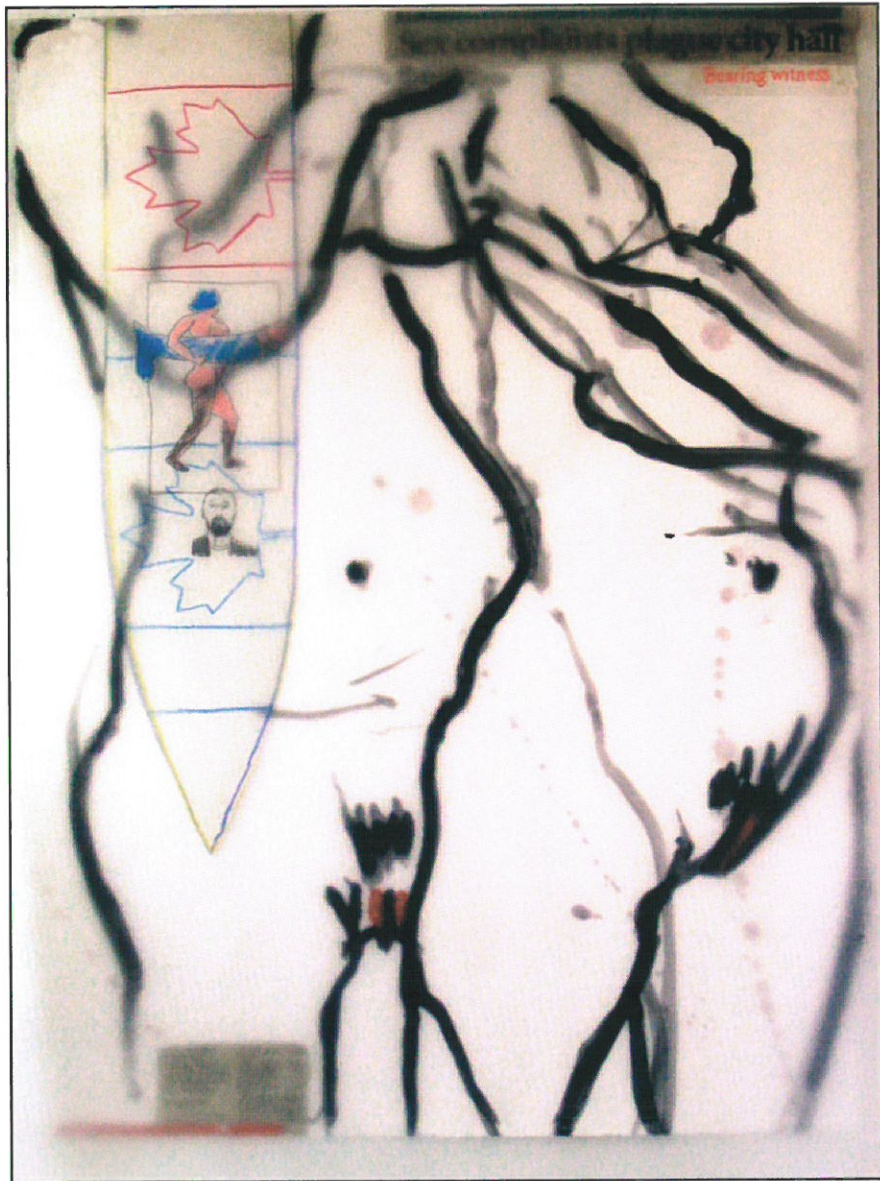
Enduring Women 15
Gerald Pedros



Enduring Women 17
Gerald Pedros



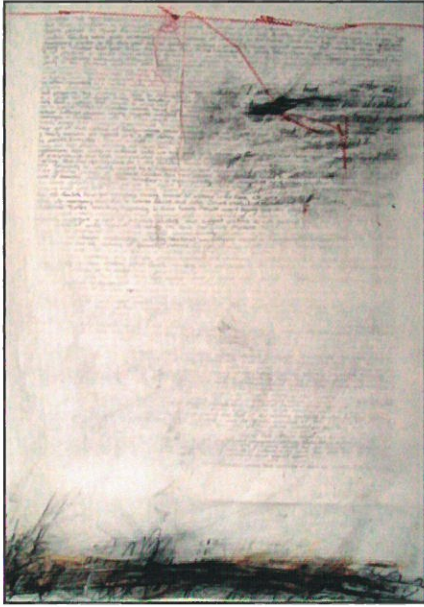
Enduring Women 18
Gerald Pedros



Enduring Women 19
Gerald Pedros



Enduring Women 20
Gerald Pedros



Enduring Women 4
Sylvia Curtis-Norcross

Sylvia Curtis-Norcross

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EXHIBITIONS

- | | |
|-------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2005 | Exhibition at the St Thomas-Elgin Public Art Centre |
| 2004 | Open Air II, Public Sculpture Exhibition, London ON
Open Air II, UWO Engineering Dept. Collaboration, London ON |
| 2002 | 401 connections, Gallery 401, Toronto collaborative text/sound piece
con/quest, group show, Access Artist Run Centre, Vancouver BC |
| 2000 | Unvarnished Truths & Boldface Lies, group show at the Sifton Gallery,
London ON |
| 1999 | Grid Lock, Forest City Gallery, London ON |
| 1998 | Conversations, group show at the Sifton Gallery, London ON |
| 1997 | Make Your Own Money Event, CARO Group Exhibition, Toronto ON |
| 1996 | Gibson Gallery Juried Miniature Show, group, London ON |
| 1995 | Gibson Gallery Juried Miniature Show, London ON |
| 1990 | Hillary Gallery Membership Show, UWO London ON |

GALLERY EXPERIENCE

- 1999** Galleries @ the Galleria, education programming
1990/99 co-curated yearly exhibitions at the London Public Library Galleries
1990 LRAHM, Co-curator and animator of "Over Land, Sea and Air"
LRAHM, Registrar for "London Sculpture in Sight"
1989 The Hillary Gallery, (University of Western Ontario's student run gallery),
Director

PUBLICATIONS

- 2005** Catalogue essay for London's sesquicentennial exhibition, You Are Here
Lifestyle, profile of Dorothy Knowles, et. al.
2004 Catalogue essay for the Macintosh Gallery U.W.O. re Aidan Urquhart
Lifestyle, profile of Rory O'Kelly
2003 Lifestyle, profiles of Lynette Richards, Mark Reutter, Jeff Willmore
2002 Lifestyle, profile of Brian Malt
2001 Lola, review of Har Prakash & Michael Czupryna at The Forest City
Gallery, London
1999 Lola, review of Aidan Urquhart at Gallery 96, Stratford ON
The London Free Press, Volunteering a Lifestyle supported by the board
of Education and my mother-in-law
1997/8 staff writer for Scene, over 60 articles, 2 radio interviews
1997 Arts Atlantic, review of Anne Meredith Barry Recent Work

INITIATIVES

- 1999** Art On, (Committee Member), contact Madeline Lennon, Chair Visual
Arts UWO 661.2111 X 6181
1998-2000 Lunch time lecture series at Parkwood hospital, about regional artists
1999 Lecture at The London School of Art
2000 Coordinator of Public Projects, Veteran's Arts Program,
Parkwood Hospital
1999 Founding member of Art On, UWO Visual Arts Alumni Chapter
1999 Galleries @ the Galleria Volunteer, organizer/host of the "lunch with
London's artists" series
1999 Faculty of Arts fund raising advisory committee, UWO

Gerald David Pedros

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STUDIOS

Pouch Cove Foundation Art Residency Program in Newfoundland (2005)

Banff Centre Leighton Artists Colony, Banff, Alberta (1993)

La Sociedad Mexicana de Artes Plasticas 9S.O.M.A.R.T.) Mexico City, Mexico (1987)

Le Centre Genevois de Gravure Contemporaine, Geneva, Switzerland (1978)

Toronto, Ontario

Montreal, Quebec

AWARDS

Ontario Arts Council (1997,1995,1992,1989, 2001)

Canada Council (1979)

Greenshield Foundation Graduate Assistantship (1976.1977)

SELECTED CANADIAN EXHIBITIONS

- | | |
|-------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2005 | St. Thomas-Elgin Public Art Centre, St.Thomas, Ontario |
| 2005 | James Baird Gallery, St. Johns's, Newfoundland |
| 2004 | Outline in Black, Jens Thielsen Gallery, London, Ontario |
| 2001 | Thielsen Galleries Inc., London, Ontario |
| 2000 | Roberts Gallery Limited, Toronto Ontario |
| 1999 | Jean-Claude Bergeron Gallery, Ottawa, Ontario |
| 1997 | Thielsen Galleries Inc., London Ontario |
| 1997 | Blyth Festival Art Gallery, Blyth, Ontario |
| 1997 | Wallace Galleries Ltd., Calgary, Alberta |
| 1996 | Totem de Piedra, Centre D'Art Contemporain, L'Annonciation, Quebec |
| 1996 | Elgin - St.Thomas Art Gallery, St.Thomas, Ontario |
| 1996 | Thielsen Galleries Inc., London,Ontario |
| 1995 | Totem de Piedra, Community Arts Council of Vancouver, British Columbia |
| 1995 | Totem de Piedra, Strathern Centre, Montreal, Quebec, Canada. |
| 1995 | Ottawa School of Art, Ottawa, Ontario |
| 1994 | Totem de Piedra, Center Exposition du Vieux Palais, St-Jérôme, Quebec |
| 1994 | Thielsen Galleries Inc., London, Ontario |
| 1993 | Centre of Contemporary Art, St. Thomas, Ontario |
| 1992 | Temiskaming Art Gallery, Temiskaming, Ontario |

- 1991** Elgin - St.Thomas Art Gallery, St.Thomas, Ontario
- 1991** Totem de Piedra, Group Book and Print Exhibition, organized by l'Atelier de l'Ile
- 1989** Galerie Samuel Lallouz, Montreal, Quebec
- 1985** Centre Saidye Bronfman, Montreal, Quebec

INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITIONS

- 2005** 4th International Conference on Public Art & Muralism, Tlaxcala , Mexico
- 1994** Swords into Plowshare Peace Museum, Detroit, Michigan
- 1991** Galeria Praxis, Mexico D.F.
- 1991** Morelia, Michoacan, Mexico
- 1991** Museo Nacional de la Estampa, Mexico City, Mexico.
- 1991** Kilkenny Arts Festival, Kilkenny, Ireland
- 1991** Guinness Hop Store Gallery, Dublin, Ireland
- 1990** Ernst Brant Galerie, Cologne, Germany
- 1987** Sociedad Mexicana des Arts Plasticas, Mexico City
- 1978** Centre Genevois de Gravure Contemporaine, Geneva
- 1978** Galerei Parallele, Geneva, Switzerland

PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

- Museo Nacional de la Estampa, Mexico City
- Consejo Nacional Para La, Mexico City
- Musee d'Estampes Geneva, Switzerland
- Centre de Gravure, Geneva, Switzerland
- S.O.M.A.R.T., Mexico City
- Guinness Brewery, Dublin, Ireland
- Bibliotheque Gabrielle Roy, Quebec City
- Consulate General of Morocco, Montreal
- Elgin-St. Thomas Art Gallery, St. Thomas
- Teleglobe Canada, London, Ontario
- Woodstock Art Gallery, Woodstock
- London Life of Canada, London, Ontario
- Concordia University, Montreal
- St. Joseph's Hospital, London, Ontario
- St. Thomas - Elgin General Hospital, London, Ontario
- University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario
- Canadian Art Bank
- Air Canada Corporation
- Museum London, London Ontario



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Gerald Pedros

CREDITS

Audio

audio artist: Kevin Curtis-Norcross

voices: Alexandra Hlinyanszky, Deanna Jones,
Cole Lewis, Dana McLaughlin, Natasha Pedros

recording: Joe Lapinski

photos: Jan Row

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**St. Thomas-Elgin Public Art Centre's
Women's Committee.**

Our appreciation and respect goes to all the women
who served as models for this project whether through
their stories, voices or images.



Detail of *Enduring Women 23*
Gerald Pedros