



Carl Beam: Four Directions



Av-1 [Avrom Isaacs], not dated
Mixed media on canvas; 91.4 x 61.0 cm
Collection of the AGW

Cover: *Sitting Bull*, 2000
Serigraph on paper; 76.2 x 56.0 cm
Collection of the AGW

Director's Foreword

The AGW is pleased to present *Carl Beam: Four Directions*, featuring the works of Carl Beam (1943-2005), an artist known for his paintings, prints, murals and installations, and who self-identified as an artist first and an Ojibwe and Euro-American citizen second. Through all three subject positions, he encourages reflections on the complexity of self-expression, society and citizenship. In this exhibition, Beam's work addresses concerns of Canada's Indigenous peoples through portraits of socially and culturally-engaged citizens who have contributed to social betterment through activism, art and leadership, such as Louis Riel and Martin Luther King Jr. The exhibition is comprised of two gifts from the private collection of Florence and Milton Winberg of Toronto. The collectors enjoyed a long friendship with the artist spanning several decades and their gifts enabled the AGW to exhibit Beam as both a painter and printmaker.

This exhibition is a timely one to support the 2015 release of the Government of Canada's *Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*. This document calls for action across all sectors of Canadian society to remedy past actions with respect to relationships between mainstream Canadian history and Indigenous history with the goal of advancing social justice. As stated in their call to action:

The Commission believes that reconciliation cannot be left up to governments, the courts, and churches alone. There must also be dialogue and action in communities across the country. Reconciliation must happen across all sectors of Canadian society.

Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015, p. 306)

In support of this attempt to address past inequities through renewed commitments to government policy, the AGW continues its work, albeit as an independent Canadian charity, to better reflect the history and diversity of Indigenous artists in and beyond this region. For significant change to take place, the voices of Canada's Indigenous people are to be heard and felt in public galleries and institutions.

During the development of this exhibition, we invited Ann Beam, an artist in her own right and marriage partner to Carl Beam, to offer memories of life with her husband and their artist-couple story. Her statement forms an important part of this e-publication. AGW staff members, Jaclyn Meloche (Interim Curator of Contemporary Art) and Jessica Cook (Education and Public Programs Coordinator) ably guided this project to fruition in a beautiful collaboration that resulted in visualizing the traditional Indigenous four directions in Carl Beam's work. By responding to the colours dominant in Beam's work, Curator



Pure Energy, 2000
Serigraph on paper; 76.2 x 56.0 cm
Collection of the AGW

and Educator brought the four directions to the exhibition layout, by grouping the works in accordance with the colours red, black, white and yellow. Their statement, drawing on Cook's knowledge of the traditional four directions, bore witness to an important lens through which to see Beam's art. I commend their efforts to collaborate and those of Ann Beam for encouraging thoughtful insights on new ways to see Beam's work.

My thanks are extended to Canada Steamship Lines, Montreal for joining the exhibition as sponsor and for their commitment to supporting our ongoing work with developing exhibitions featuring Indigenous art practices in Canada. The AGW is indebted to the Canada Council for the Arts and the Ontario Arts Council for their support in bringing this project to fruition. The City of Windsor continues to support the AGW through our 49-year *gratis* lease agreement wherein *Carl Beam: Four Directions* is presented. Support from these organizations has ensured that we are able to deliver a strong program of contemporary art exhibitions and corresponding publications for our audiences to enjoy.

Each and every staff member of the AGW has in some way contributed to the successful outcome of this exhibition and I recognize all of them from exhibition production, design and education to finance, development and public relations. We are pleased to add this e-publication to our ongoing series available through the Gallery's website. Finally, I would like to recognize the artist for asking viewers to reflect on the intersections and world views of Euro-Canadian and Indigenous cultures and the importance of subject recognition within his artwork.

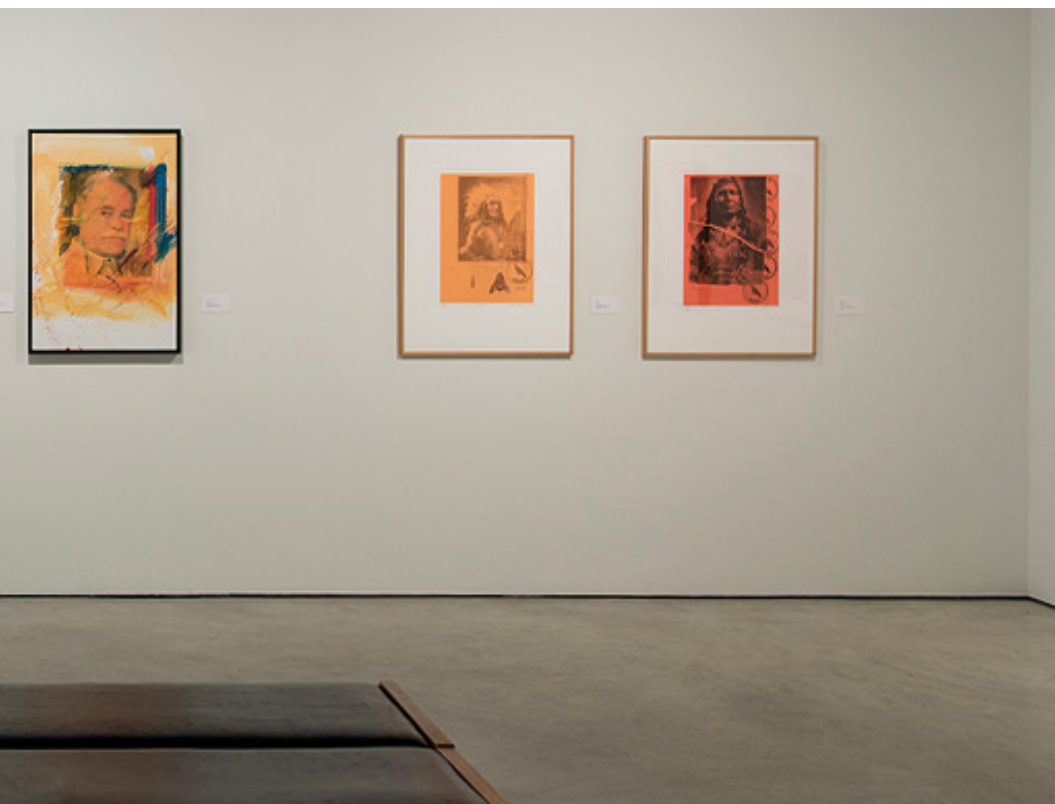
Catharine Mastin, PhD
AGW Director

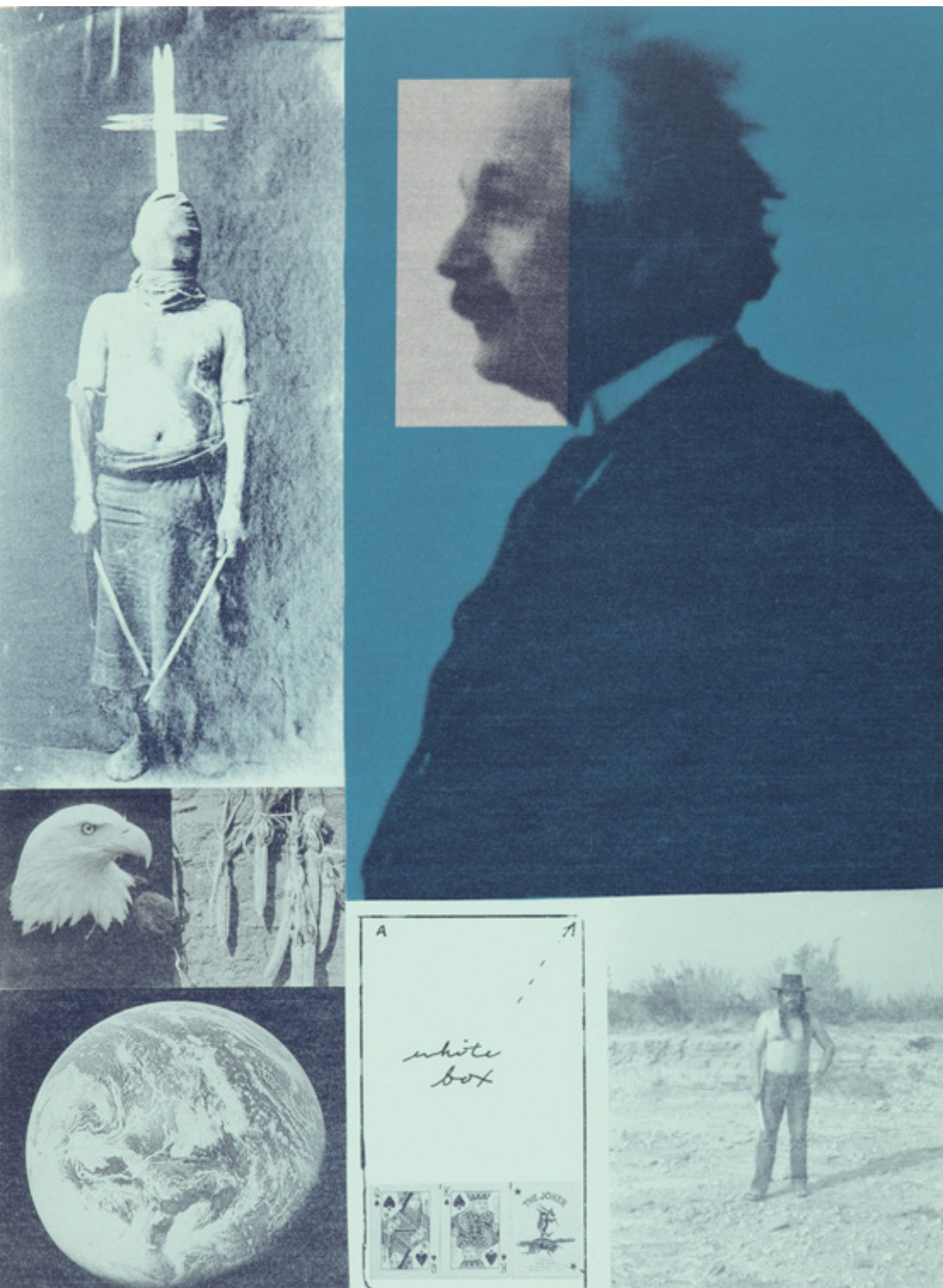
EN FAMILY GALLERY











Albert in the Blue Zone, 1998
 Serigraph on paper; 56.0 x 76.2 cm
 Collection of the AGWA

Carl Beam's Amazing Art Life

by Ann Beam

Carl and I had an "Amazing Art Life," where we helped each other in un-imaginable ways! We met in 1979. I was already a working artist when I met Carl, teaching at Toronto's Three Schools of Art. I was also working as an illustrator at the University of Toronto's School of Medicine.

One day, I saw a painting for sale on the wall in the place where I was working. It was an incredible 6 ft x 8 ft painted portrait of Sitting Bull on canvas. "Who made that work?" I asked my employer.

"Oh, that's Carl Beam's work," she said. "He will be here tomorrow."

"I need the day off tomorrow," I told her. So the following day, I got all dressed up with a portfolio of my artwork under my arm and went to meet Carl Beam. Three months later, we were married in New Mexico!

When I first met Carl, I noticed he had big notebook of photographs and images he collected to use in his art. He also had photographs of his finished artworks. I really liked that.

He was an inspired artist. He was of Ojibwe ancestry but never felt limited or confined to the Woodland style of painting. He was having an art conversation and making connections, across cultures and across time. He felt no limitations on his imagination or on his art. He certainly felt his Native origins and did not have to prove that to anyone. He was a survivor of Residential Schools although he never spoke about it publicly - but he expressed it in his art, beginning in the mid '80s, before anyone else was talking about it.

When I first met him, he occasionally used a photo image transfer technique in his art (similar to the one Robert Rauschenberg used). I shared with him a new technique I had discovered, whereby I made a photo image of mine and printed it in reverse onto a t-shirt transfer. I would then iron the image onto cotton paper.

We both used this technique a tremendous amount by the year 2000. Those techniques were only 2 of about 6 different photo image transfer techniques we later developed.



Jim Thorpe, 2000
Mixed media on canvas; 91.4 x 61.0 cm
Collection of the AGW

Carl was a great painter right from the start of his career. In the late '70s, he painted portraits of Sitting Bull and M'Chigeeng Elders and anything and everything that engaged his attention. He would juxtapose images, ideas and written content, all on one-dimensional ground. He disregarded the illusionary, three-dimensional deep space of Renaissance depictions, in favour of the flat tableau, where a dialogue of multiple images could take place.

Right from the start, he created a visual conversation of juxtaposed images and archetypes that spoke to him and engaged his spirit. He did this in many multi-media art forms*:

- Acrylic on canvas
- Watercolour
- Acrylic on canvas with photo transfer
- Acrylic on paper with photo transfer
- Ceramics, painted or with combinations of decals and hand paintings
- Cement with photo transfer and found objects
- Silkscreen on paper
- Silkscreen on plexiglas
- Three dimensional plexiglas pieces with found objects
- Etchings with juxtaposed photo images

*many of these mediums included hand written texts

His approach to etching was also unique, as he preferred to work on steel rather than zinc. His unique painting style, whether with acrylic, oil, or watercolour, would include the techniques of spattering, dripping and scribing. He would also include written personal dialogue. There was so much happening to engage the viewer!

His unique technique on plexiglas was created in the early '80s. He produced many works – large and small. There was a series of small pieces, titled *The Koan Series*, purchased by Rosamund Vanderburg. He created several large scale pieces as well, some of them three-dimensional with found objects.

The 8 ft x 12 ft *The North American Iceberg* was an outstanding piece in Carl's body of work, with screen-printed photo image transfers and acrylic paint on plexiglas. Carl wrote a letter to Diana Nemiroff, former curator at the National Gallery of Canada (NGC) in the mid '80s, proposing that the NGC purchase *The North American Iceberg*. Nemiroff said yes, and the Gallery did purchase the work. That was a big step forward for the NGC and for Carl, as well as other artists in Canada, Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal.

In the mid '80s, he also had a wonderful exhibition at the Thunder Bay Art Gallery entitled *Altered Egos*, curated by Elizabeth McLuhan. It had an excellent catalogue and toured four different venues in Ontario. This had a significant effect on the promotion of Carl's work.

Carl, our daughter Anong, and I travelled everywhere together – to Europe, back and forth many times throughout the United States, and coast-to-coast throughout Canada. Travelling constantly exposed us to new things and that energized our art. We moved to the Southwest in the early 1980s and lived north of Santa Fe for 2 years (we would make two trips to Canada every summer to share what we were experiencing with the people of M'Chigeeng where Carl grew up).

The thing that really lit us up in New Mexico was the ceramic art of the ancient Anasazi people, created between 900 and 1200 A.D. This was present in many museums in Santa Fe. The Anasazi used a hand-built technique for ceramic, rather than the wheel technique we had been taught in our art schools. Their hand-built pieces were then stone polished rather than glazed. They were also painted with dark red hematite and black iron. They used open bowls as spheres, with a geometric edge, and an open centre. After 100 years of this, they put their personal images in the center, under the geometric edge. This totally inspired Carl and me! We went non-stop on this technique, which totally dominated our art thinking for a good chunk of time. We began to work in their ancient medium, but with our own contemporary images and interests. In 1982, we were asked to have an exhibition at the Maxwell Museum of Anthropology in Albuquerque, entitled *The Painted Pottery of Ann and Carl Beam*. We later shared this pottery technique with friends on Manitoulin Island.

We returned to Canada in autumn of 1983. Carl felt like his art was important for Canada and that we needed to return there. We settled in Peterborough and lived there for 9 years, constantly making our own artwork and each having many exhibitions. We began thinking about building our own house. We observed the building techniques of other surrounding homes including stone, brick, etc. We were contemplating this quite a bit until one day, on our wedding anniversary, our daughter Anong handed us a wedding gift. It was a model of an adobe house, with a cactus and a picture of her sitting in front of it. She had made it out of cardboard. I held it in my hands and said, "Carl, maybe we should make an adobe house?" We began making test adobe blocks in our garage. In June of 1992, we moved up to M'Chigeeng (which was then called West Bay) and lived in a trailer while we made 3,500 adobe blocks in a flat field on plywood. They are made of 100% Manitoulin clay and sand with a tiny amount of emulsified asphalt. We had them tested in New Mexico. It revealed that the blocks had the strength of 450 lbs. per square inch, (all that

was required was 350 lbs. per sq. inch). We built our house, facing south (facing the sun like everyone in the Southwest does) and we moved in by Christmas!

Two years later, we built an adobe studio. This building only took us 10 days compared to the 6 months it took for our first house. A year later, we created a third building, a guest house made out of rammed earth that went up in one day! We did all this work ourselves, without the banks and without a mortgage. It was a huge relief to not have to come up with rent every month. Later, we opened our own art gallery in the guest house. We had been represented by many art dealers throughout our careers, but it had become time to be our own art dealers. Neon Raven Art Gallery opened in M'Chigeeng on Canada Day, 2002 and expanded in 2007.

We continued to make art in our studio on Manitoulin and we also continued to travel a lot. In 1999, we began working with Gordan Novak, at Novak Graphics in Toronto (and later in Hamilton). We both did screen prints with Gordan, and our work was exhibited in his group exhibition in Shanghai, China and Shenzhen. Carl was also commissioned to make screen prints by collectors, Florence and Milton Winberg in Toronto. Carl created a very large series of screen prints for him.

In 2004, we were asked to have a ceramic exhibition at the Canadian Clay and Glass Gallery in Waterloo, Ontario. This exhibit featured over 50 ceramic works by Carl, Anong and myself, curated by Virginia Eichhorn. This was the first show to feature all of our art together. It was a huge success and the exhibition traveled to four venues in Ontario.

Carl had some health issues related to diabetes at this time. His health problems increased, and in 2005, after receiving the Governor General's Award in Visual and Media Arts in Ottawa, Carl passed into spirit in July.

I am extremely grateful for our "Amazing Art Life" and how we helped each other. Even though he is up in spirit, that Art Life continues to grow, bigger and bigger still!

Carl Beam: Four Directions

October 22, 2016–January 22, 2017

Curated by Jaclyn Meloche in collaboration with
Education and Public Programs Coordinator Jessica Cook.

Curated by Ann Beam.

AGW Art Gallery of Windsor

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