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JANNA WATSON

STATEMENT

Strange Legacy

"Janna, I'd like you to go to the back and paint the essence of a tree. Make it abstract." When I returned to show him what I created, he used to say to me time and time again "It's okay... but it needs to be wilder." I was eight years old and loved hanging out with my grandfather, Arthur Bonnet. He was a seasoned artist who turned away from landscapes in the thirties/forties and moved towards abstraction after studying at Pratt Institute, New York when Expressionism was making its way to Canada. I am continuously inspired by Arthur's fascination to make clashing colours work. Through his lessons, I remember him telling me "I love things harmoniously ugly." These words have stuck with me throughout my practice.

Painting wild and embracing "different" have always been my primary focus. As I work through harmoniously ugly pigments, I feel like I'm communicating with him by painting independent and bold brushstrokes suspended in time and space. When I feel a painting is nearly complete, I like to use oil stick and ink as the final step to help ground the work, and as a personal reminder to paint wilder! These scribbles are my exclamation marks that finish each sentence.

Memories of my grandfather were so present while I worked through this collection. Arthur first taught me how to paint with watercolours and would buy me artist grade supplies (which I realized that I couldn't afford when I was studying at OCAD!). To pay respect to his lessons, I incorporated lighter washes of paint across the panels. And after all of these years, I discovered that I intuitively prefer working on birch wood (rather than canvas) because the paint absorbs similarly to watercolour paper, and it highlights the material that it is painted on. In some cases, the washes are so thin that it emphasizes the woodgrain and flashbacks of painting the trees outback start flooding in.

This new series holds a special place in my heart. This collection is dedicated to the memory of Arthur Bonnet who would be celebrating his hundredth birthday this year.