

Out of the Wood

BY ROSEMARY KILBOURN
(PORCUPINE'S QUILL, 2012, \$27.95)

THIS RETROSPECTIVE of the work of Ontario wood engraver Rosemary Kilbourn, complete with a preface by Kilbourn and an introduction by Tom Smart, is an attractive and inspiring work by Porcupine's Quill. The arrangement of the reproductions is visually interesting; it attracts the eye while creating space for Kilbourn's own commentary on each work.

A casual reader will be drawn in by the familiarity of the images. Whether an early work such as the cover illustration for her brother William Kilbourn's study of William Lyon Mackenzie King, *The Firebrand*, or a later work reproduced for a postage stamp honouring novelist Frederick Philip Grove, one can't help but feel acquainted with the style. It is as familiar to Canadian eyes as the work of Thoreau MacDonald, but in many ways deeper and more complex.

Indeed, as Smart pointed out last year in an article for *DA: A Journal of the Printing Arts*, Kilbourn is very much aware of her place in the world, and this combines with a rich spiritual vision to lend her engravings texture and layers of unspoken meaning. It has also led her into other areas of work, including stained-glass commissions. The deep well of influence and its expression in a broad oeuvre have allowed Kilbourn's work to quietly seep into Canada's remembering of itself.

The scale of some of the works occasionally overwhelms this relatively small volume, but details help focus the reader's attention on Kilbourn's stylings in such a way as to give a sense of the whole of each. For example, details of *Pentecost* (1962) illustrate Kilbourn's comment that she wanted to show not just tongues of flame over the heads of the disciples, but flames that both represent and are fanned by the wind of the Holy Spirit. "Little candleflames...never adequately evoke the mighty gale that swept the

disciples' fear into total conviction," she notes in the accompanying text. Subsequent details show how her engraving conveys both flame and wind engulfing each human figure, consistent with the medium of the wood. The images are of the wood, woodsy, yet also sinuous, like the fire and wind that could so easily consume it. The images, in turn, consume the viewer.

Some of the engravings fold out in a double-page spread, while a full-scale reproduction of *The Obedience of Noah* (1966) allows readers to experience one of Kilbourn's monumental works.

But what is one to make of Kilbourn's significance? Her legacy is traced through the work of more recent stars of Canada's wood engraving scene, including Gerard Brender à Brandis, Wesley W. Bates and George A. Walker, and this collection allows readers to see the inspiration for their work. *Christmas Rose* (1994) reminds one of Brender à Brandis, Walker springs from *The First Furrow* (1979) and Kilbourn's dynamic use of light and dark, while Bates's jovial and occasionally racy subjects seem to lurk in the many rural landscapes. These engravers live, one might say, from the imaginative space Kilbourn opened for them to trace their own lines forward, and deeper, into the wood for which Canada is known.

This book will allow readers to savour that legacy—and inspire those wishing to extend it.

~ REVIEWED BY PETER MITHAM

Canadian Folk Art to 1950

BY JOHN A. FLEMING &
MICHAEL J. ROWAN (UNIVERSITY
OF ALBERTA/CANADIAN MUSEUM
OF CIVILIZATION, 2012, \$45)

THIS WEIGHTY, 600-PAGE TOME seems, at first glance, to have nothing to do with the mission of the Alcuin Society. A successor to the authors' previous collaboration, *Folk Furniture of Canada's Doukhobors, Hutterites, Mennonites and Ukrainians* (University of Alberta, 2004), the present volume is an expansive review of folk art divided into 17 chapters touching on