

# Profile of an Emerging Printmaker

*Lee Croy*

**L**EE CROY is a printmaker and painter living in Gibsons, British Columbia. She works in a home-based studio with a 300lb Takach etching press and an easel. Lee is an active member of the Sunshine Coast Arts Council and a recent member of the Malaspina Printmakers Society in Vancouver.

Growing up in Perth, Western Australia, Lee discovered a serious passion for making art while simultaneously forging a career path in pediatric nursing. Over the years, the two paths co-existed harmoniously until they eventually merged into one motivation. She is now inspired to create and exhibit visual art that is a deep healing response to life. In addition, Lee teaches art workshops for children, encouraging them to listen intuitively to their own creative voice and maintain this internal wisdom as they cross the threshold into adolescence.

## THE JOURNEY FROM THERE TO HERE

Europe beckoned soon after graduation from nursing school. The sudden exposure to so much art and culture in Europe was overwhelming for Lee; she worked in Paris the entire summer so she could visit the Louvre every week. Switzerland became home base for five years. Exposure to alternative methods of healing laid the foundation for a more holistic approach to nursing. Short trips to Western European cities provided constant opportunities to visit art museums and galleries and she attended weekly life-drawing classes.

One day a backpacking Canadian passed through her Swiss village and a year later she moved back to British Columbia with him. They settled down in Whistler at a time when the town was just beginning to invent itself as a world class ski resort. In true pioneer spirit Lee adapted to numerous jobs including signwriting and menu design and also exhibited and sold landscape watercolours. A few years later they got married and moved to Vancouver. Returning to pediatric nursing, Lee started using "hands on healing" to complement nursing care. She also continued moonlighting as a graphic designer and illustrator, updating skills in fine arts and graphic design.

In 1989 the couple moved to Gibsons with their four-year-old daughter. They had a second child and over the next seven years, Lee worked part-time at the community hospital, continued illustrating and began teaching art in the schools and community.



### THE MAKING OF A COMMITTED ARTIST

“The turning point in my life that merged healing and visual art into one aspiration came when I took a printmaking course through the Capilano College campus in Sechelt in 1996 from printmaking instructor Doug Biden. I was immediately hooked on the process.”

“Biden hauled his own printing press up from his Gibson’s studio and left it in the new Sechelt First Nations Band building where he taught the evening classes. We acid-etched our plates in a makeshift lab outside in the rain and snow and came back again on Saturdays for the four hour printing session, usually staying the whole day. Sometimes our work was accompanied by the rhythmic drumming and singing we could hear coming from a nearby room down the hall where the First Nations Community had their gatherings.”

“In the last few weeks of the eight month course, Biden encouraged me ‘to create something more meaningful’. Stepping up to the challenge I designed, etched and printed three multi-coloured 12”x18” zinc plates out of a proposed seven plate series in the space of three classes. The print images, later collectively referred to as the “Focusing with Katherine” series, were based on a written account of shamanic healing sessions a close friend had gifted me a week before she lost her physical battle with cancer. Biden must’ve appreciated the work because he offered



me the use of his home studio after completion of the course to print up the rest of the series. Doug eventually became an unofficial mentor, our sons became the best of buddies and our families forged a strong lasting friendship.”

“In April 2005 I was invited by the talented local dancer and choreographer, Domonique Hutchinson, to exhibit the framed “Focusing with Katherine” etchings in the foyer of the Gibsons Heritage Theatre in a collaborative project entitled “Je Vois La Vie en Rose”. The dance production (which also included a short film I was involved in) was about women survivors of cancer. It was a very satisfying and successful experience working in collaboration with other artists in my community. Also, a generous donation from the proceeds went to support alternative holistic organizations and conventional cancer research.”

“After finishing the first year of printmaking, I quit nursing, commuted into North Vancouver and completed the two year Studio Art diploma in printmaking, drawing, painting and sculpture at Capilano College.”

“When Biden put his Takach etching press up for sale in 2002, I took out a loan and bought it, intuitively trusting that it was the right thing to do.”

### THE PRESENT

“Now I’m exploring a few different avenues with the press by printing collographs, linocuts, woodcuts and monoprints. I like making art books. So far, I’ve made several prototypes including ‘*Apple Book*’ and ‘*Book of Roots*’. ‘*Apple Book*’ started out as a sculptured wooden apple and ‘*Book of Roots*’ is made of wood, leather, engraved copper and vellum.

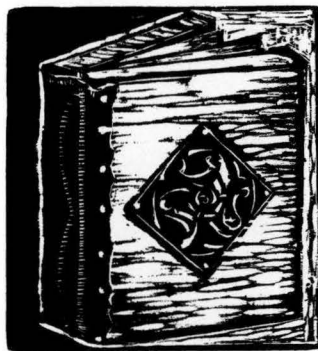
‘*Flight Book*’ is the first small edition art book to come off the press. There are 6 pages of printed images that fold out accordion style. Each cover is uniquely handmade.

I’ve constructed a couple of box sculptures to house the books too. The base of ‘*Knowledge Tree*’ for instance is a damaged apple tree. It took me three days to dig up the long thick roots but I was excited because they reminded me of muscular legs that wanted to run.

When carving the surface of the printing matrix, I like to leave a lot of the markmaking lines the tools leave behind, incorporating them as

part of the design, as evidence of the artistic process.”

“Jack Shadbolt and Wassily Kandinsky have greatly influenced my work. I think it’s because these are two visual artists that loved form, colour and movement.”



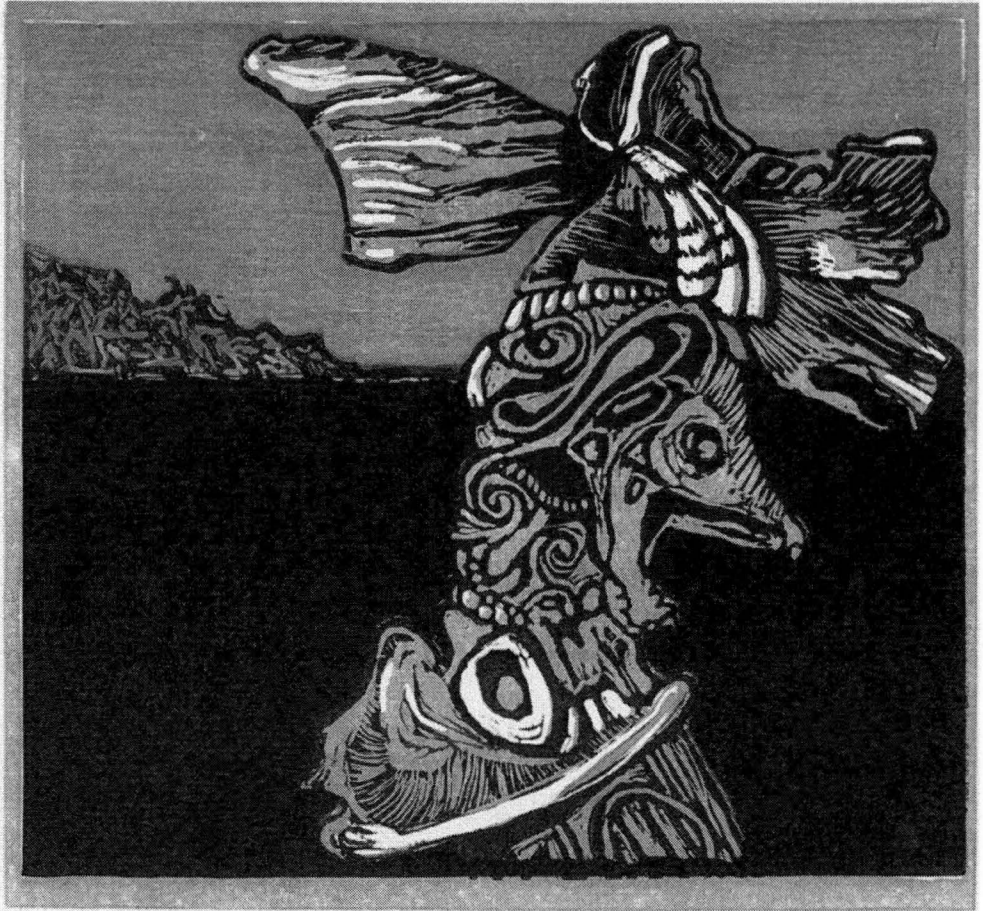
“I spend a lot of time developing raw material for my art from on-site sketching, personal experiences and research. I’m a voracious reader of non-fiction books. Once the raw material is gathered together, I begin painting or printing these ideas in the studio and the creative intuitive process just takes over. “Second Growth” and “Chalice” are the beginning forms of a new series of large oil paintings and prints using this method.”

A drawing Lee did in this series visually documenting the creative process of “Second Growth” was chosen by a jury of peers for a drawing exhibition at the Surrey Art Gallery in Vancouver. Entitled *Out of Line*, the show ran from November 2004 to February 2005.

This summer Lee exhibited in three art shows. The first was an invitational show at the Sunshine Coast Art Centre entitled *Power of Place, Point of Departure*, where the theme addressed the adaptations made by artist residents to meet the challenges of living in a community situated on a water-bound peninsula. The second show was held at the Festival of the Written Arts in Sechelt where the Alcuin Society hosts a booth every year. The third exhibition was at the Gibsons Landing Fibre Arts juried show in Gibsons where book arts are a welcome addition to the mixed media section.

In addition to the new series of prints and paintings on the Second Growth and Chalice theme, Lee is currently working in the studio on some new art books.

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Second Growth © 2005 Lee Croy