



## **Collection Access, Research, Education, and Scholarship Program**

The Missoula Art Museum collects, preserves, exhibits, and researches art that is relevant to the culture of the American West with an emphasis on contemporary Montana artists. Interns help staff to achieve this mission by supporting collection management, programming, and scholarship activities for nearly 2,000 artworks. Intern research projects based create active connections with the MAM Collections.

In late 2016, MAM acquired five watercolors, collages, and drawings by Missoula artist Patricia Forsberg. Collection Intern Cassidy Schoenfelder wished to explore the origins of the watercolors. Through discussions with the artist in Winter 2016-17, she discovered Forsberg's creative range, and authored the following essay on Forsberg's inspiring integration of literary, music, and visual art practices.

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# I CALL US INTERDISCIPLINARIANS

By Cassidy Schoenfelder, MAM Collection Intern, Fall 2016 – Spring 2017  
University of Montana, BA and Art History Minor, 2017

Patricia Forsberg practices various art forms, including music, visual arts, and written works, all of which embody her interdisciplinary lifestyle. Each demands a different creative process, which is the prominent reason for her disciplined approach. Understanding her experience with these media can help viewers to appreciate Forsberg's identification of her art practice as truly interdisciplinary.

Although she remains an active artist, her last exhibition with two-dimensional work was at Montana Art and Framing in 2012 titled, *Plum Blossoms & Wabi Sabi*. She presented 70 works with thinly-lined female figures surrounded with decorative Japanese paper. Each figure is shown nude, faceless, and reacting to its environment created by the collaged paper. The heavily Asian-influenced exhibition also presented Japanese poetry—haiku and tanka—that related to each individual painting and drawing. The Missoula Art Museum holds one of these incredible Asian works from 2007 titled, *It Looks Like Blossoms* (fig. 1). Accompanying the piece is the following text:

*It Looks like Blossoms*

*Winter seclusion -  
unexpectedly  
from between the trees  
snow falls so that  
it looks like blossoms*

*-Ki no Tsurayuki*

Patricia Forsberg considers her literary involvement an important and essential component of her art. Forsberg reads writers and poets like C.D. Wright, Anne Carson, Rebecca Solnit, and Maggie Nelson. For her, an author can compose a language into a collective idea with just as much intent and beauty as a painter. Forsberg takes ample time exploring a variety of publications and enjoys investigating the origins of words throughout her reading. Even after graduating from the University of Montana in 1981 with a MFA in painting, she continues to audit classes in literature. Courses include *Virginia Woolf's Daughters: British and Irish Novelists from Woolf Onward*; *Shakespeare*; *Three Contemporary Poets: Louise Gluck, Anne Carson, and Alice Oswald*; *James Baldwin*; *Ecocritical Theory and Practice*; and *Gender and Sexuality in 20th and 21st Century Literatures*.

While balancing academic and personal reading interests, Forsberg also practices and performs throughout the year with the Missoula Symphony Orchestra. Since her musical interest started as a young child with the violin, music has become a skill and art form she can never give up. Playing an instrument requires dynamic attention between the body and the mind—a focus that after much practice has a high reward. Forsberg's reward comes from mastering a new piece of music. The reward may be for personal growth as a musician or for a collective piece to be performed with the community performers. The artwork—the music—is a creative process from start to finish and to her there is beauty in every step. The performances with the Missoula Symphony Orchestra are like a collaborated exhibition where all of the artists create, breathe, and move together, mirroring passion and care for the sounds they make and the notes that they play (fig. 2).

Though she is a lifelong learner, Forsberg's formal education began in the medical field, where she worked as an RN in intensive care in Washington, D.C. She then enrolled in the Corcoran School of Arts and studied figure drawing, photography, watercolor, and design. Faculty members included artists like Mary Beth Edelson, pioneer of the feminist art movement, and Robert Stackhouse, a sculptor and contemporary artist. They encouraged students to explore the arts beyond the classroom. Stackhouse was one of the first to push Forsberg to think more conceptually, which has been functional in all of her artistic expressions—art, music, and literature.

Her education at the University of Montana during and after her MFA introduced her to influential faculty members like well-known artist Walter Hook and art historians Julie Codell, Valerie Hedquist, and Rafael Chacón. She studied art, language, and culture solo for 18 months in Italy. Later she joined Hedquist and Chacón for a comprehensive study-abroad art program in Rome. With these experiences she was influenced by the philosophy, literature, and symbolism found within Italian culture. The annunciations and sacred conversations in Renaissance art resonated with her, even influencing her design approach for three pieces found in the Missoula Art Museum's permanent collection. These pieces were framed as diptych and triptych altarpieces, such as the 1993 diptych, *Sweet Lavender and Thyme* (figs. 3 and 4).

Forsberg remains an active artist in Missoula, practicing and performing with her violin, reading, writing, taking classes at the University of Montana, and working in her studio. Her interdisciplinary approach to creating works is inspiring to other artists. Rather than pinpointing one's practice to a specific medium or moment in time, she encourages one to

view her entire creative lifestyle as a work of art. While the visual artworks by Forsberg in the MAM Collection exhibit her interests in language through the integration of poetry and in art historical concepts through color, composition, and display, it is really Forsberg's lifestyle that captivates audiences through multiple outlets of images, literature, and music. Patricia Forsberg is a perfect example of an artist who creates work that cannot always be kept inside of a vault.

## Illustrations



Fig. 1: Patricia Forsberg, *It Looks Like Blossoms*, gouache, ink, collaged paper, 2007, 5 5/8" x 4 1/2". MAM Collection, gift, Katherine Markette, M.D., 2016.10.08.

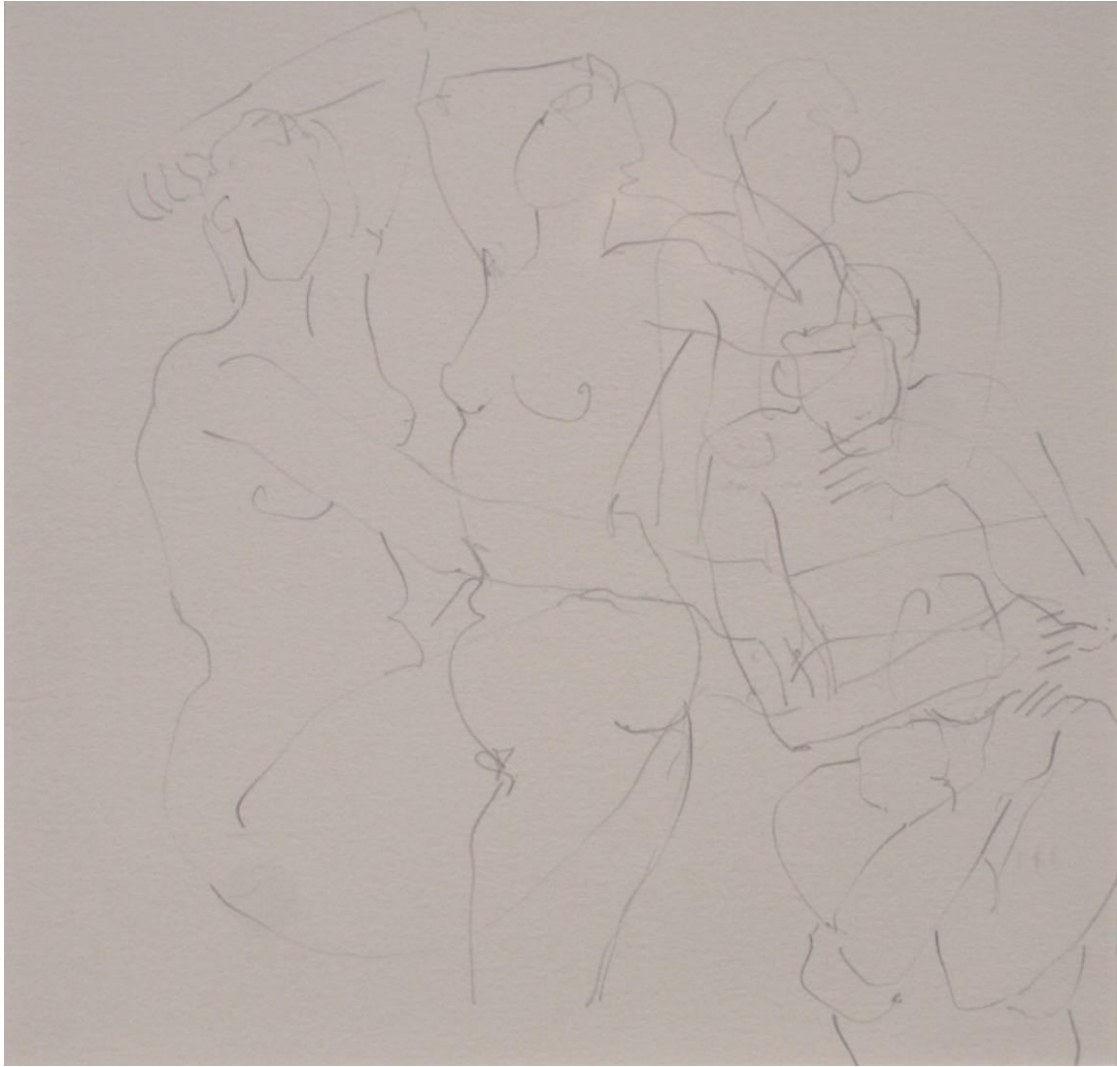


Fig. 2: Patricia Forsberg, *Simple Gifts (When Francis's Angel Returns)*, graphite on toned paper, 1995, 6 7/8" x 7 3/8". MAM Collection, gift, Therese Schroeder-Sheker, 2002.17.01



Fig 3. Patricia Forsberg, *Sweet Lavender and Thyme*, watercolor on paper, 1993, each painting 4" x 3½", overall 11¾ x 19¼". MAM Collection, gift, Margaret Kingsland and John Fletcher, 2016.





Fig. 4: Detail of left panel of *Sweet Lavender and Thyme*