

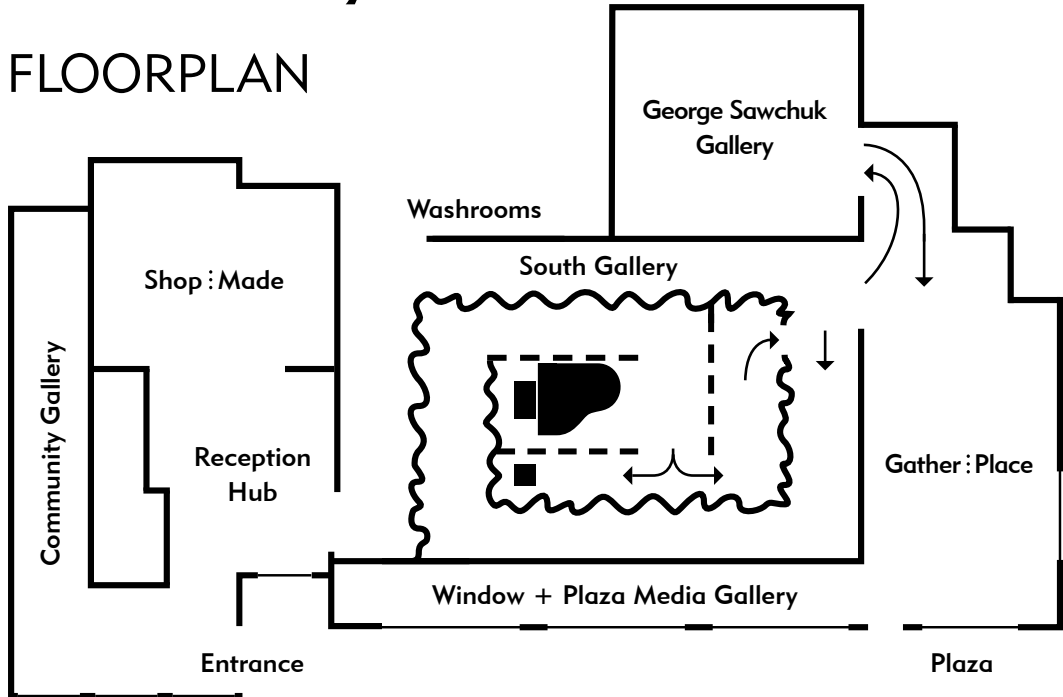
# Pas-à-pas; not intent on arriving

APRIL 4 – MAY 30, 2026

COMOX VALLEY ART GALLERY

# Comox Valley Art Gallery

## FLOORPLAN



## PRODUCTION TEAM

Executive Director GLEN SANFORD  
Director of Curatorial Programming  
DENISE LAWSON  
Operations Manager CASSIDY  
GEHMLICH  
Technical Facilitator DAVID LAWSON

Digital Creation + Outreach Officer  
TAYLOR ROBINSON  
Curatorial Intern RHEA WHITEHEAD  
Gallery Assistants JOJO OLIVER JAEGER,  
KAT RADFORD, and KAT CATCHPOLE

# Curatorial Reflections

## FROM CURATOR DENISE LAWSON

This is what SD Holman said to me:  
“We all grieve ...and it never ends...”

*Grief.* Grief that stops us in our tracks, brings us to our knees, disorients and guts us. It is the burden that presses down with a force that wants to pull us under. Under the surface of living.

This exhibition is not the work of a walking artist who set out with the conscious resolve of drawing attention to a particular subject, social justice activation, or political assertion. It was not born of an intention to point to or disrupt. Rather, it is a body of work that evolved out of love, death, and enduring grief.



Self portrait by SD Holman

This is how it happened. Pioneering social worker and Three Bridges Clinic founder Catherine White Holman, the wife of acclaimed artist, photographer and curator, SD Holman, was killed in a float plane crash. What ensued for SD was an “undone-ness” — an inability to “make sense of it.” What could be done in the midst of this unraveling, besides choosing to not go on? There was a lone thing to do... in the chill of an early spring west coast morning SD stepped over the threshold of their Vancouver home and started walking east.

“I didn’t know whether I was going to die; I didn’t care. I was going to find, you know, life out there. I just needed to walk out my door and keep walking.”<sup>1</sup>

And so the person who happened to be an artist walked... pas à pas — one step then another... over and over and over... across ancient ancestral territories, through mountains, prairie, woodlands, and the vast sky between the west coast ocean and the shield country lake-lands at the centre of this continent. SD carried a small camera and a journal, using these to process their journey of memory and mourning. From time to time, strangers,

a little dog, SD's mom, and a few friends showed up to walk alongside. The most unlikely of individuals offered shelter in bad weather, hot tea, food, and their own stories of loss and grieving. Mountains, valleys, rolling hills, sweeping grasslands, straight roads and winding pathways, heat, icy drizzle, wind, warm sun, thunder storms and blizzards ...repeat, repeat, repeat... until the day arrived that SD was done walking. In the company of enduring grief, there was still living to be done.

Once home and round the table of friendship, SD shared the journal, images and stories of the walk. Their words and images reverberated with love and loss and grief and healing. Here was beauty and harshness, silence and music, loneliness and relationship. Here was a body of work that resonated with every heart. Here was a body of work to be shared with the world. Friends helped Holman bring the work to its first iteration at SUM gallery in April of 2023 — "artist and curator Paul Wong, who encouraged Holman to create the installation; SUM Gallery curator Mark Takeshi McGregor; writer Persimmon Blackbridge, who has worked with words from Holman's travel journal; and pianist Rachel Kiyō Iwaasa, who brought Bach's *Goldberg Variations* to Holman — its looping structures... acting as an organizing principle for *Pas-à-pas*." <sup>2</sup>

For the exhibition at CVAG, the work has come to its full fruition. The installed works that include the addition of videos

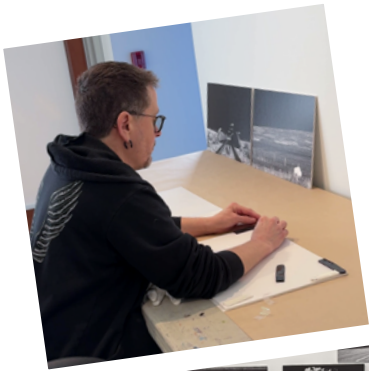
and more images on paper and silk are arranged to lead visitors through liminal spaces within the gallery — a labyrinth of ethereal clouds of cotton gauze, panels with the pure essence of words articulated and words erased; to a grand piano with live and recorded presentations of the *Goldberg Variations* (JS Bach) that allude to the mystery of loneliness residing within presence and absence; a winding pathway of exquisite and arresting photographs, with their monochromatic tones and whispers of colour, lead onward between the ground beneath and the great dome of sky above that mirror the spaciousness of being; a video, *Heart of a Dog* that embraces the visceral experience of what it is to journey in the tender company of the more-than-human, sharing aliveness in the wide world while being alone to wrestle with the terms of life and death.

*Pas à Pas; not intent on arriving* is an exhibition that takes us on a pilgrimage through the hard facts that every life is interrupted, that what we love is lost, and into the realization that if we learn to carry on, grief and love are always with us — one step in front of the other...

<sup>1</sup> Smith, Janet. "SD Holman steps through grief in SUM Gallery photo-based exhibition *Pas-à-pas; not intent on arriving*", *STIR Arts & Culture*, Vancouver. WEB. 30-03-2026.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.





**SD Holman and Rachel Kiyoo Iwaasa at CVAG preparing for *Pas-à-pas*; not intent on arriving**





From the series *Blue Sky's Ahead* by SD Holman

# The Void

WRITTEN  
BY PAUL WONG

I did not know Catherine. I met SD in 2012 when they curated my work *2Hot2Handle* for the Queer Arts Festival, and in 2013 I invited SD to Burning Man. In the unforgiving Nevada desert, amidst the burning temples and shrines, I caught glimpses of their grieving the loss of their significant other. Over the years, I would be told: *this is Catherine's birthday, this is Catherine's death day, I am going to the bench, we always did this...*

In 2014, I included SD's artwork in the monumental storage lockers exhibition *Thru The Trapdoor*. We presented a series of small light boxes, photographed arrangements of Catherine's clothing and belongings. A fitting work that responded to what is often put away into storage lockers, objects too precious to throw out, lacking the need to be in present but we need to still cling and hold onto. Adjacent to this was a series of lockers deconstructed to accommodate a grand piano that featured performances by Rachel Kiyo Iwaasa — performing derangements using the elements of the piano in an experimental way, generating noise, sounds and bars of music.



I had heard about this walk, never quite understanding what it took to just walk, one foot in front of the other, the monotony, the relentless repetition, the will to keep going until it was time to stop. It was mysterious. There was both my curiosity and my understanding that it was time and important for SD to finally deal with this trauma and to look at the materials and thoughts surrounding this extraordinary act of love and anger. This is why I encouraged SD to do this project.

What we are seeing is the detritus that they are willing to share: fragments from the road, highly redacted journals, scraps of images accompanied by Rachel Kiyo Iwaasa rendering of Bach's 1741 *Goldberg Variations*, a harpsichord composition consisting of thirty variations, a composition without a beginning, middle and end. Rachel has been alongside SD's journey in the void of grief, the aftermath of shock, the endless loop of loss.

*Pas-à-pas; not intent on arriving* provides a public interdisciplinary art space to be and consider and share grief — yours or mine or theirs. The private is public is private. This second iteration of *Pas-à-pas* is a significant moment for SD and Rachel to do this first collaboration and to let it out... Tread lightly or go deep, its up to you.

I am writing this in Ubud, Bali, the day after Nyepi, the Balinese Hindu

New Year, the Day of Silence in which the entire island shuts down, no people or cars are allowed out or on the road, the airport is closed, and in many places the use of electrical light is limited. It is a day of meditation and reflection. The night before is a vibrant celebration of parading of Ogoh-ogoh — hand crafted effigies of monstrous human and animal-like creatures — and then burning them at cemeteries, intended as an act of keeping the demons away for the New Year. The day after Nyepi is for relighting the fires. The act of making and releasing *Pas-à-pas; not intent on arriving* — I hope that this also is an act of placating the demons and coming into the light and renewal.

## ABOUT PAUL WONG

Paul Wong is a pioneering figure, known for his innovative work in visual and media art. With a career spanning over five decades, Wong has continuously pushed the boundaries of storytelling, working outside mainstream conventions making art for site-specific spaces and screens of all sizes. He is an award winning artist and curator and founder of several artist-run groups, and organizing events, festivals, conferences and public interventions since the 1970s. Wong has produced projects throughout North America, Europe and Asia.



# Pas-à-pas; not intent on arriving

## ARTIST STATEMENT BY SD HOLMAN

We all will grieve. This may be my journey, but it is not about me. I am not the first to observe that grief is both solitary and universal; that we find ourselves utterly alone with feelings shared by all at some point for as long as beings have lived and died. That *crazy with grief* is not a metaphor, but the literal truth. That the path is not linear but cyclical; we are urged to move on, but if we get to the other side, we find ourselves on the other side of an ouroboros, forever devouring ourselves and being reborn. That grief is love; with us always and everywhere, no matter how far we travel. And if we do not recoil from its enduring, faithful constancy, in it, we may glimpse the eternal.

I had no intention of making art when I stepped out my door and took a little walk across Canada after my beloved wife Catherine died. I don't like walking. I needed to walk out my door and keep walking. She died in a plane crash. I couldn't make sense of it. I walked for 3 months / 2500 km. I took a little G11, because taking a camera is what I do. I made 8,000 images — 99 videos — 30,000 words. These are some of them.

I learned that the grieving often go on walking pilgrimages. Walk. Breathe. Think. Don't think. Circle. Repeat. Step. By step. Try to change the outcome as you move over unfamiliar terrain. Different and the same. No epic Canadian landscapes here, instead tiny human steps cycling endlessly in an intimate vista.



There is no arc to this story. I did not come out of it healed.

I looked at the ground, *a lot*;

the same every day, every day different as I tried every day to commute the ending;

I took a semicolon; a pause, rather than a full stop.



## Self portraits by SD Holman ▼ ▲



Collaborating with pianist Rachel Kiyo Iwaasa, Bach's *Goldberg Variations* became the organizing principle for this work. The musical variation form, and these variations, in particular, are a solace in grief with their orbital gravitation around a theme. Milan Kundera captures this peregrination of loss in *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*:

"Variations are like a voyage. But that voyage does not lead through the infinitude of the exterior world....The voyage of variations leads into the other infinitude, into the infinite diversity of the interior world hidden in all things.... Variation form is the form in which the concentration is brought to its maximum; ...to speak only of essentials, to go straight to the core of the matter... as if down a shaft leading into the interior of the earth. The voyage into that other infinitude is no less adventurous than the voyage of the epic. It is how the physicist penetrates into the marvelous depths of the atom...

"We know we cannot embrace the universe with its suns and stars. Much more unbearable is to be condemned to lack that other infinitude, that infinitude near at hand, within reach.... We all lose in whatever we do, because if it is perfection we are after, we must go to the heart of the matter, and we can never quite reach it. That the external infinity escapes us we accept with equanimity; the guilt over letting the second infinity escape follows us to the grave... there is nothing more unbearable than lacking the being we loved, those... measures and the interior world of their infinitude of possibilities."



This is a love song

In Memoriam Catherine White Holman

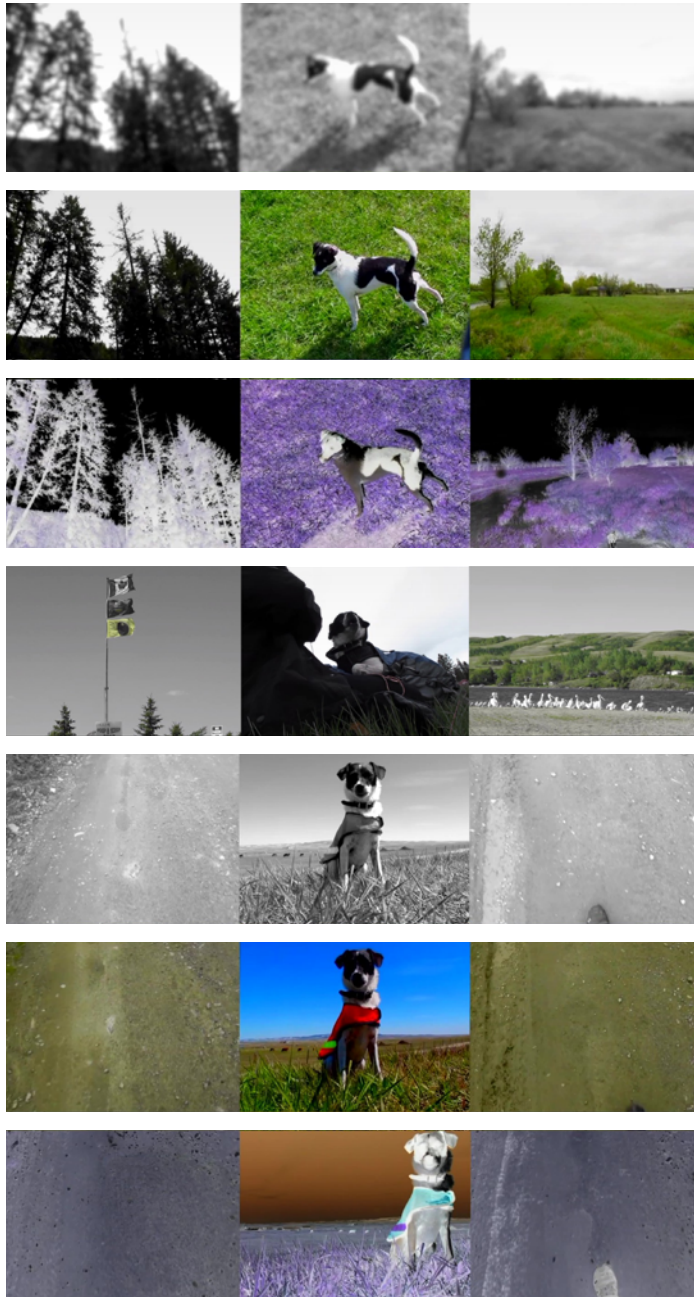
(1954 – 2009)



# WHY HEART OF A DOG

Tilda, aka Matilda Berry Moo Braveheart Swinton, Wonder Dog of Little Dog Nation (ca. 2005 – 2022), accompanied me on this journey, as dogs have accompanied many on journeys of grief. The dog-faced Anubis, one of the oldest gods of Egypt, was the protector of the dead, ensuring they received their due rights in burial, standing by them in the life after death, and acting as a guide to assist their resurrection. The name Anubis is the Greek form of the Egyptian Anpu, which means to decay. Known as Lord of the Sacred Land, The Dog who Swallows Millions, and Master of Secrets since they knew what waited beyond death, the powerful canine god Anubis was also the patron of lost souls and the helpless.

**Stills of Tilda from *Heart of a Dog* by SD Holman** ▶



*Pas-à-pas; not intent on arriving*





*Pietà — Tilda's last day* by SD Holman



# NOTES FROM THE PIANIST, RACHEL KIYO IWAASA

Legend has it Bach composed the *Goldberg Variations* for a count who, experiencing excruciating pain, commissioned a piece to help him make it through the night. Brahms, who played them obsessively after his mother's death, is only one of the many people who have turned to this piece when mourning. Approaching this work in tandem with SD Holman's artistic journey through grief, I learned things I cannot imagine having found on my own.

As pianists learning Bach, we are taught to strive toward maximum independence between individual lines. But this music calls us to attune to the voices as interdependent.

In life, we are taught to seek harmony and avoid discord. In music, and in Bach in particular, dissonance is where all the emotion — the juice — resides. Musical dissonance lets us practice dwelling in the incongruity between how we think things should be, and how they actually are. There are many categories of musical dissonance; Bach's favorite kind were suspensions, those heartrending clashes when some notes stubbornly refuse to let go, though the rest of the music has moved on to the next chord. There are so many of these in the *Goldberg Variations*,

I stopped hearing them as dissonances in need of resolution. Instead, I listen for the consonances to blossom into the next suite of bittersweet suspensions.

In the *Goldbergs*, Bach crafts dissonance not only in pitch but also in time. We hear melodies imitated in different voices, like the past echoing into the present. The music is radically polyrhythmic, with incompatible or ambiguous rhythms concurrently unfurling, like different timelines coexisting in the same space. There were many passages I found impossible to learn until I reconceived the musical motives at cross-purposes with the written time signature, much as in grief, our present becomes overlaid with might-have-beens.



Rachel Kiyō Iwaasa  
photographed by SD Holman ▲▶





I usually work with living composers. Playing Bach, we collaborate with the dead. We spend endless hours trying to figure out what our absent partner might have wanted, gleaning hints from the traces they left, trying to do them justice. It is one of the few ways our culture gives active permission to dialogue with the deceased — but like grieving, it is a process we are expected to keep behind closed doors. The raw, the fractured, the fixated — these we cloister in solitude, emerging only when we can hold it together. The recording that plays when I am not here was made in a single take, part of a practice in coming to terms with my human failings and the irretrievability of the past. In its flaws and fumbles, witness me learning to live with regret.

The piano located in CVAG's South Gallery and played by Rachel Kiyō Iwaasa during *Pas à Pas; not intent on arriving* is courtesy of Gladys Schmidt.



# LIST OF WORKS

## SOUTH GALLERY:

### S-1 **Aria — Recovery**

Original Print Silk  
Banner: photo printed  
on archival silk,  
102" x 51"

### S-2 **Labyrinth**

Fabric Gauze Veil:  
cotton gauze. 30  
veils, each 60"x103"

### ***Pas-à-pas: not intent on arriving | Variations 1 – 15 — Grounded***

Limited Edition Print Series:  
15 photo-based images,  
1/3 InkJet giclée archival  
cotton fibre, each 24"x30"

### G-1 **Variatio 1**

### G-2 **Variatio 2**

### G-3 **Variatio 3 Canone all'Unisuono**

### G-4 **Variatio 4**

### G-5 **Variatio 5**

### G-6 **Variatio 6 Canone alla Seconda**

### G-7 **Variatio 7**

### G-8 **Variatio 8**

### G-9 **Variatio 9 Canone alla Terza**

### G-10 **Variatio 10 Fughetta**

### G-11 **Variatio 11**

### G-12 **Variatio 12 Canone alla Quarta**

### G-13 **Variatio 13**

### G-14 **Variatio 14**

### G-15 **Variatio 15 Canone alla Quinta; Andante (Minore)**

### ***Pas-à-pas: not intent on arriving | Variations 16 – 30 — Spirit***

Limited Edition Print Series:  
15 photo-based images,  
1/3 InkJet giclée archival  
cotton fibre, each 24"x30"

### G-16 **Variatio 16 Ouverture**

### G-17 **Variatio 17**

### G-18 **Variatio 18 Canone alla Sesta**

### G-19 **Variatio 19**

### G-20 **Variatio 20**

### G-21 **Variatio 21 Canone alla Settima (Minore)**

### G-22 **Variatio 22 Alla breve**

### G-23 **Variatio 23**

### G-24 **Variatio 24 Canone all'Ottava**

### G-25 **Variatio 25 (Minore)**

### G-26 **Variatio 26**

### G-27 **Variatio 27 Canone alla None**

### G-28 **Variatio 28**

### G-29 **Variatio 29**

### G-30 **Variatio 30 Quodlibet**

### S-3 ***Pas-à-pas; not intent on arriving | Variations 128 — Proof of Life***

Interactive Installation:  
InkJet photos  
on paper scattered  
on the floor, 3"x4"

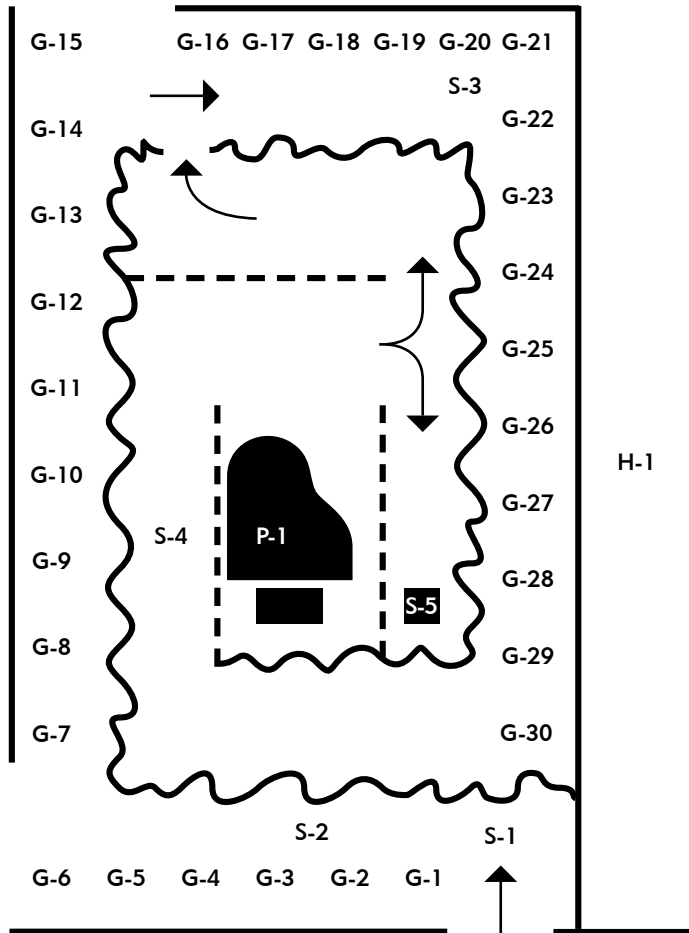
### S-4 **Quodlibet**

Paper Erasure Poetry  
Banners: words by SD  
Holman; erasure  
by Persimmon  
Blackbridge, 18 panels  
on photo paper inkjet  
each 3'x8'

### S-5 **Erasure**

Installation: journal  
– SD Holman  
with erasure poetry  
by Persimmon  
Blackbridge, journal  
dimensions 8.5"x11";  
antique church chair





P-1 **Goldberg Variations**  
 Grand Piano  
 and Sound  
 Installation: J.S. Bach;  
 aria mit verschiedenen  
 Veränderungen,  
 BWV 988 *Goldberg  
 Variations*; 3 live  
 performances

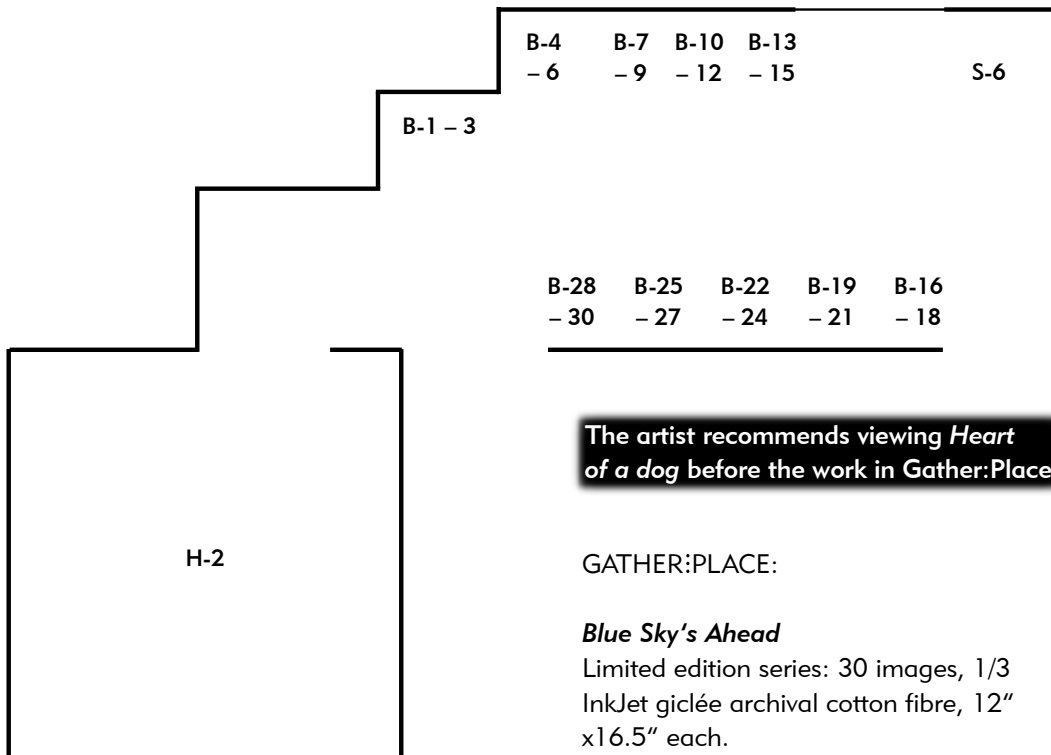
and continuous loop  
 recording by pianist  
 Rachel Kiyo Iwaasa;  
 sound recording:  
 Paddy Ryan

WINDOW + PLAZA  
 MEDIA GALLERY  
 (VIEWED FROM OUTSIDE):

H-1 **Aria — *Heart of a dog***

Follow the arrows to navigate  
 the **Labyrinth**.





The artist recommends viewing *Heart of a dog* before the work in Gather:Place.

GATHER:PLACE:

***Blue Sky's Ahead***

Limited edition series: 30 images, 1/3  
InkJet giclée archival cotton fibre, 12"  
x16.5" each.

GEORGE SAWCHUK GALLERY:

H-2 ***Aria da capo — Heart of a dog***  
Projection Installation: 9 channel,  
3 screen projection, 56 minutes;  
video editor: Winston Xin;  
soundtrack: J.S. Bach: Aria mit  
verschiedenen Veränderungen BWV  
988 *Goldberg Variations*, Rachel  
Kiyo Iwaasa, pianist;  
sound recording: Paddy Ryan,  
continuous looping.

- B-1 **Variatio 1**
- B-2 **Variatio 2**
- B-3 **Variatio 3 Canone all'Unisuono**
- B-4 **Variatio 4**
- B-5 **Variatio 5**
- B-6 **Variatio 6 Canone alla Seconda**
- B-7 **Variatio 7**
- B-8 **Variatio 8**
- B-9 **Variatio 9 Canone alla Terza**
- B-10 **Variatio 10 Fughetta**
- B-11 **Variatio 11**
- B-12 **Variatio 12 Canone alla Quarta**



B-13 Variatio 13  
B-14 Variatio 14  
B-15 Variatio 15 Canone  
alla Quinta; Andante  
(Minore)  
  
B-16 Variatio 16 Ouverture  
B-17 Variatio 17  
B-18 Variatio 18 Canone  
alla Sesta  
  
B-19 Variatio 19

B-20 Variatio 20  
B-21 Variatio 21 Canone  
alla Settima (Minore)  
  
B-22 Variatio 22 Alla breve  
B-23 Variatio 23  
B-24 Variatio 24 Canone  
all'Ottava  
  
B-25 Variatio 25 (Minore)  
B-26 Variatio 26

B-27 Variatio 27 Canone  
alla None  
  
B-28 Variatio 28  
B-29 Variatio 29  
B-30 Variatio 30 Quodlibet  
  
S-6 Aria da capo —  
*Recovery*  
Banner: original silk  
printed photo, silk,  
archival, 113" x 51"

[REDACTED] just beyond [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] Hope [REDACTED] 130km [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] day 5 [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] I am [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] the walking dead. [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

Words by SD  
Holman  
and erasure  
poetry  
by Persimmon  
Blackbridge,  
from *Erasure*



# Biographies

## SD HOLMAN

"My pronoun is art."

This isn't metaphor — it is an invocation. Holman's identity refuses linguistic containment: not he, not she, not they — but art itself, capacious enough to hold transformation, loss, play, erotic charge, and world-making.

For over four decades, SD Holman has moved between and witnessed cultural terrains across Canada, the U.S., and Germany. Born in Hollywood, Holman has been foundational in queer and environmental arts communities. In 2025, King Charles III awarded them the Coronation Medal for significant contributions in arts, culture, and human rights advocacy. Described by curator and scholar Jonathan D. Katz as "visionary," Holman occupies the edge of visibility, embracing the conceptually rich terrain of the Interbeing, and continues to advocate for artistic dissent in an age defined by ecological collapse and social precarity. Their work is a call to presence in a world precariously losing its capacity to attend.

Holman's art unfolds in the spaces between: between photograph and ritual,



Self portrait  
by SD Holman

performance and installation, visibility and elision, grief and emergence. They adopt the role of participant observer — a position that Judith Butler theorizes in social participation within the matrix of intelligibility, where gender, identity, and culture are continually produced through relational visibility. Holman enters this matrix to disturb it, to uncover the unseen, to dignify those cultural subjects forced into erasure.

SD Holman's work champions the Symbiocene, a term as a counterpoint to the Anthropocene, which is the current geological epoch characterized by human impact on the planet. Coined by Australian environmental philosopher Glenn Albrecht in 2011, the Symbiocene envisions a future where humanity re-integrates with natural systems, fostering mutualistic relationships rather than exploitation.





From  
the series  
**Grounded**  
by SD  
Holman



Holman is a graduate of ECUAD, recipient of the King Charles III Coronation Medal, a laureate of the YWCA Women of Distinction Award, and Founding Artistic Director Emeritus of the transdisciplinary QAF+SUM gallery.

Holman's work is collected privately and exhibits internationally, including Wellesley College, Amherst College, CLGA ArQuives (Toronto), the Advocate Gallery (Los Angeles), the Soady-Campbell Gallery (New York), the San Francisco Public Library, On Main Gallery, The Helen Pitt International Gallery, Charles H. Scott, Exposure, Gallery Gachet, SUM gallery, the Roundhouse, Vancouver East Cultural Centre, Artropolis and Fotobase Galleries (Vancouver).

Holman's portrait project *BUTCH: Not like the other girls* toured North America

and is going into its third print edition, published by Caitlin Press. Seven written and produced art books can be found at [queerartsfestival.com/catalogues](http://queerartsfestival.com/catalogues). Art published in printed books: *Culture and Education*, Wadham, Pudsey & Boyd, (Pearson Education Australia: 2007; 2nd ed. 2009); *Femme/Butch: New Considerations of the Way We Want to Go*, Gibson & Meem (Routledge: 2002); *Fusion* (Link publications: 2002); *The Mammoth Book of Erotic Photography*, Jakubowski & Jaye Lewis (Robinson Publishing: 2001). Studio Q, Holman's notorious DTES Art Salon in Vancouver's Chinatown, was featured in *Secrets of the City* (1st edition).

Holman's earliest work emerged in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside and Chinatown — sites of cultural survival, grit, and radical community. Straight out of Emily Carr University, they joined the Vancouver Association for Non-commercial Culture (the NON), positioning themselves early in the artist-led salon and activist milieu.

By 2008, Holman directed *Pride in Art* and spearheaded the founding of Queer Arts Festival (QAF) — ranked among the world's top queer arts festivals — and founded SUM Gallery, Canada's sole 2SLGBTQ+ mandated art space. Their DTES salon, Studio Q, became notorious for mixing art, politics, erotics, performance, and care — in a salon environment where art wasn't shown, it was enacted.



# RACHEL KIYO IWAASA

“Keyboard virtuoso and avant-garde muse” (Georgia Straight), Rachel Kiyō Iwaasa is “among Canada’s foremost contemporary music pianists” (Paolo Pietropaolo, CBC Radio). Rachel’s reputation for fearless performative risk has inspired many of Canada’s most notable composers to write for her, including Hildegard Westerkamp, Rodney Sharman, Jocelyn Morlock, Cris Derksen, Nicole Lizée, Farshid Samandari, Emily Doolittle, Jeffrey Ryan, Leslie Uyeda, and Jordan Nobles.

Rachel’s recordings, available from Redshift Records and earsay music, are frequently broadcast on CBC. Rachel’s album *Known & Unknown: Solo Piano Works* by Rodney Sharman was praised as “exceptional, gripping and timeless.” (Tom Haugen, Take Effect), and listed in the Top 10 Modern Composition Albums of 2024 by The Wire Magazine (UK).

Rachel’s art practice explodes expectations of what is possible at the piano, flowering most powerfully in liminal collisions between artistic genres. Her interdisciplinary adventures include work with visual artists SD Holman, Camille Georgeson-Usher, and Tanya Willard, film director Nettie Wild, playwright David Bloom, choreographers Jennifer Mascall,



SD Holman (L) and Rachel  
Kiyō Iwaasa (R)

Idan Cohen and Tara Cheyenne Friedenberg, and multi-media provocateur Paul Wong.

With SD Holman, Rachel co-founded the Queer Arts Festival in Vancouver, acknowledged as one of the top festivals of its kind in the world. Rachel teaches at the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra School of Music and lives in the sovereign unceded territories of the shíshálh and Squamish Nations.

Rachel’s roots in the Comox Valley go back to 1908, when her grandfather Tadao Iwaasa arrived in Cumberland from Hiroshima, Japan. She is currently working on a transdisciplinary project about madness, suicide and the wartime uprooting of Japanese-Canadians, through the lens of the Iwaasa family history, in collaboration with SD Holman, composer Keiko Devaux and dramaturg/director David Bloom. Portions of this work, *Chiyo: a Thousand Generations*, can be viewed at the Cumberland Museum through 2027.





Self portraits by SD Holman



# Community Art Activations

## INTER-CULTURAL ART PROJECT AND GLOBAL ART PROJECT

Grief, dying, and death. No one can avoid these aspects of life, but collectively we have tried. Anti aging strategies abound to keep us fit, vital, wrinkle free, and clear minded. We use hushed voices and euphemisms when the inevitable happens... "she is putting up a good fight", "they passed", "he needs to just get over the loss and get on with life".

In collaboration with the Comox Valley Hospice Society, the gallery invites the community to participate in two accumulating public art projects that ask us to think about our own *death* and accept the reality of *grief* as an enduring and good aspect of living and loving.

These art activations are a way of stripping stigma and removing the shrouds of silence and denial that have cloaked the reality of suffering loss and life ending.

The public art activations — *Memory Stones* and *Before I Die* — are available to the community to engage with on a drop-in basis during gallery hours.

Instructions and materials can be found in the CVAG Community Gallery. The gallery team in the CVAG Reception Hub and Shop:Made are available to answer questions and go over the ways the public are invited to interact with these accumulating public art projects.



# ABOUT OUR COMMUNITY COLLABORATOR, COMOX VALLEY HOSPICE SOCIETY

The Comox Valley Hospice Society offers emotional and psychosocial support services to ease the journey of dying, grieving, and caregiving. Compassionate care is brought to the community through a diverse group of trained volunteers and staff who demonstrate a philosophy of care that supports the process of death and dying in hospice, in hospital, facilities, or in people's homes. At the core of CVHS is the belief that living with an illness, dying, caregiving, and grieving is a normal part of life and a commitment to the art of living, honouring each person's dignity at all stages of life.

CVHS offers individual counselling, support groups, community peer groups, a variety of visiting programs, resources, Advance Care Planning and community education at no charge and is primarily funded by individual donations, grants and bequests.

"At Hospice we believe that living with an illness, dying, caregiving and grieving are normal parts of life. We also believe that living life to the fullest is important for each of us. Our hope is that when an illness occurs or people are dying in our community they will experience dignity and peace; their caregivers will receive the help they need; and they, and their families and friends, will be supported in their grief."



Crew from Cascadian Wood Tech, who volunteered to build our community art activations

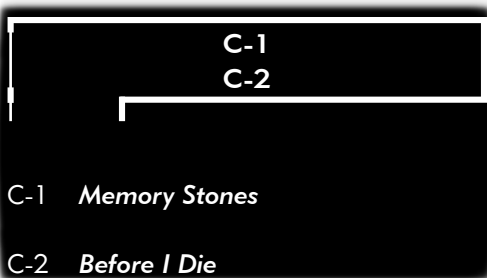


# Memory Stones

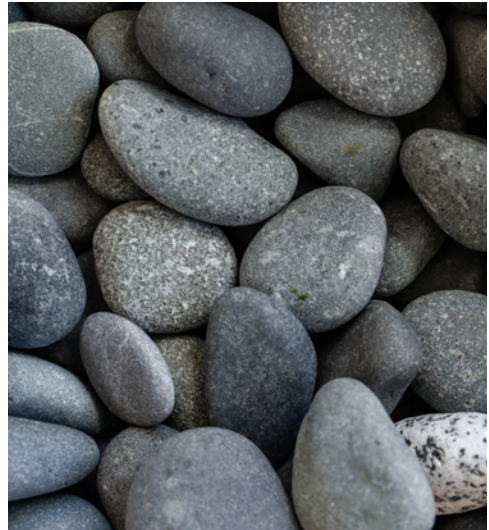
## DESCRIPTION

Grief does not need to be solved or set aside. It asks only to be felt. To hold a stone while moving through this exhibition is to give that feeling a form. Its surface becomes a place to gather memory, feeling, and all that cannot be said aloud.

Across time and cultures, stones have marked loss and remembrance. Stones do not fade or wither. They remain. To place your stone on the shelf is not to let go of grief, but to acknowledge it. It is a quiet gesture that says this mattered. Each stone carries a story that cannot be seen, and set amongst others, it becomes part of the shared experience of loss and care. Grief, like the stone, has weight. But it can be carried, witnessed, and, for a moment, set down.



## Stones for CVAG visitors



## INSTRUCTIONS FOR VISITORS

At the beginning of your visit, you are invited to choose a stone and carry it with you as you move through the exhibition. You may hold it, turn it in your hands, or simply keep it close. As you engage with the works, you might place an intention into the stone, reflect on a loss, or bring to mind someone or something you are grieving. When you have finished, please place your stone on one of the shelves. Over time, these stones will gather into a collective expression of memory, grief, and shared human experience.



# Before I Die

## DESCRIPTION

It's easy to get caught up in the day-to-day and forget what really matters to us. *Before I Die* is a global public art project that invites people to reflect on their lives and share their personal aspirations in public. Originally created by the artist Candy Chang after the death of a loved one, this installation is here thanks to local residents who want to create a space to restore perspective and reflect with their community. More than 5,000 walls have been created around the world. This wall is yours. Enjoy.

## ARTIST STATEMENT BY CANDY CHANG

I never expected *Before I Die* to go beyond my neighborhood. I created the first wall on an abandoned house near my home in New Orleans after the death of someone I loved. Joan was like a mother to me for fifteen years and there were still so many things she wanted to do: learn to play the piano, live in France, see the Pacific Ocean. Her sudden death sent me into a long period of grief and depression. I grew up secular and felt

a shocking lack of instruction or ritual in my life. Everything felt absurd. My inner world felt like it didn't belong outside at all.

I lived a block away from this abandoned house that had been collecting dust and graffiti for years. It looked sadder than me, and it finally crossed my mind that it would break Joan's heart if she knew that her death made me give up. I wondered if I could do something to honor her and reflect on mortality.

I made a homemade stencil that said, "Before I die I want to \_\_\_\_." With help from old and new friends, I painted the side of this crumbling house with chalkboard paint and stenciled it with this prompt, so anyone walking by could pick up a piece of chalk, reflect on death and life, and share their personal aspirations in public. In my mind it was just another experiment, and I didn't know what to expect. Because it was cheap to make, I thought it was no big deal if it didn't work out.

The next day, the wall was entirely filled out and it kept growing.

*Before I die I want to... get my wife back, overcome addiction, forgive my parents*



*for their shortcomings, eat more everything, see a woman become president, be the man she believes I am, build a school, make a livable wage, see the leaves change many times, see him one more time, see what I'm like as an old man, evaporate into the light...*

I saw my neighbors in a new light, and the wall became an honest mess of longing, fear, insecurity, gratitude, humor, pain, and grace.

I remember the responses that resonated with me most were the heartbreaking ones, the devastating ones, the ones you wouldn't typically tell a stranger. They made me feel less alone and gave me courage to face my own struggles. And it taught me the value of anonymity. When we anonymously share without fear of judgment or desire for recognition, what emerges looks profoundly different and more honest than performative digital forums.

This neglected space became a constructive one, and people who ordinarily had little to do with one another began taking care of it. People donated chalk. People helped me wash down the wall when it was completely full. Neighbors introduced themselves in front of the wall while reading through the day's responses. The grandmother who lives

across the street said, "People are around all the time. The block is safer now."

There were a handful of wise-ass comments. The world will always have boys who want to draw dicks in public space, but people erased them — it's chalk! — and they were profoundly eclipsed by thousands of sincere responses that made me feel close to my community in a way I never felt before. Introverts like me



**Before I Die at CVAG**

could share just as much as the extroverts. I also learned that when the wall begins with a few thoughtful responses, it can set the tone and the way others share.

Ten months later, the wall in New Orleans ended for happy reasons: a new owner bought the property and the house became a home again. But this wasn't the end of the project: I received hundreds of messages from people around the world who wanted to make walls with their



communities. I enjoyed traveling everywhere from Almaty, Kazakhstan to Querétaro, Mexico to make walls with students, arts organizations, and residents. However, I couldn't keep up with the requests, and I quickly realized I wasn't needed. The beauty of the project is its simplicity.

So, I made a step-by-step guide for anyone to make their own wall. And today, thanks to passionate people around the world, over 5,000 *Before I Die* walls have been created in over 75 countries and over 35 languages.

It's been one of the greatest experiences of my life to see this little experiment grow into a global project, a kind of memento mori for the modern age. It's easy to get caught up in the day-to-day. Contemplating death is the quickest way to crush the trivial, restore perspective, and redefine what's meaningful to you at every age. People have asked if they can remix the project, and I say yes please feel free — ideas come from other ideas, so people have made all kinds of walls, including *When I graduate I want to...*, *I love Heraklion because...*, *Happiness is...*, *I go downtown because...*, *Lebanon would be better if...*

I am continuously inspired by everyone's walls... and this project sparked my life-long interest in the future of ritual in public life. I crave shard spaces to commune over existential questions

without the requirement of shared doctrine. It feels even more pressing as we grapple with epidemic loneliness, deepening polarization, online judgment, and the disembodiment that comes from living behind screens. How can we create emotional infrastructure that speaks to the pains of our age? It not only serves fundamental needs of the human spirit, it cultivates a sense of belonging, which is vital for civic life.



From the series *Spirit* by SD Holman



# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT EVENTS AT CVAG

MINI GRIEF 101: Wednesday, April 15 |  
2 – 3:30pm | Registration Recommended |  
Presented by CV Hospice Society

MUSIC MEDITATIONS: Friday, April 17 |  
2 – 3pm | Led by Threshold Choir

COMMUNITY GRIEF CIRCLE: Wednesday,  
April 29 | 2 – 4pm | By Registration |  
Facilitated by Cadence Moffat McCann  
(Inner Cadence)

## NATIONAL HOSPICE AND PALLIATIVE CARE WEEK: May 3 – 9, 2026

MINI GRIEF 101: Wednesday, May 6 |  
2 – 3:30pm | Registration Recommended |  
Presented by CV Hospice Society

DEATH CAFE: Thursday, May 7 | 2 – 3pm |  
Facilitated by CV Hospice Society

MUSIC MEDITATIONS | Saturday, May 9 |  
2 – 3pm | Led by Threshold Choir

WAVES OF LOSS – AN INTERACTIVE  
JOURNEY THROUGH ENVIRONMENTAL  
GRIEF: Saturday, May 23 | 2 – 3:30pm |  
Registration Required | Facilitated by Tina  
Willard-Stepan (Connected by Water)

DEATH CAFE: Thursday, May 28 | 2 –  
3pm | Facilitated by CV Hospice Society

# OFFSITE ACTIVITIES

*PLACEKEEPING GRIEF* – EXPLORING  
ALTERED LANDSCAPES: Tuesday, April  
21 | 4 – 6pm | By Registration | Facilitated  
by Meaghan Cursons (Connected by Water)

CURATED GRIEF RESOURCES: April 4  
– May 30, 2026 at the Vancouver Island  
Regional Library (Courtenay)

WALKING WELLNESS | Self-Guided  
Walks on Trails within the Comox Valley  
(Guidebooks made by CV Hospice Society)

# EXHIBITIONS

*PAS-À-PAS; NOT INTENT ON ARRIVING* |  
SD Holman with Rachel Kiyō Iwaasa |  
April 4 – May 30, 2026

COMMUNITY GALLERY ART  
ACTIVATIONS | *Before I Die* – Global Art  
Project + *Memory Stones* – Inter-Cultural  
Art Project | April 4 – May 30, 2026

# PERFORMANCES

*GOLDBERG VARIATIONS (J.S. BACH)* |  
Saturday, May 2 | 2pm | Rachel Kiyō  
Iwaasa

*GOLDBERG VARIATIONS (J.S. BACH)* |  
Saturday, May 30 | 2pm | Rachel Kiyō  
Iwaasa



580 DUNCAN AVENUE COURTENAY BC V9N 2M7  
 250.338.6211 WWW.COMOXVALLEYARTGALLERY.COM  
 HOURS: WEDNESDAY – SATURDAY 10AM – 5PM  
 ADMISSION: DONATIONS GRATEFULLY ACCEPTED

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Comox Valley Art Gallery is grateful to operate on the Unceded Traditional Territory of the K’ómoks Nation.

This convergent program is made possible through the support of our FUNDERS: City of Courtenay, Canada Council for the Arts, BC Arts Council, Government of Canada, Province of BC, Comox Valley Regional District, Town of Comox | LOCAL SUPPORT: ABC Printing, Hitec Screen Printing, SD71 Printshop | COMMUNITY COLLABORATORS: Comox Valley Hospice Society, Courtenay Branch of the Vancouver Island Regional Library, Threshold Choir, Inner Cadence, Connected by Water

ERASURE POETRY: Persimmon Blackbridge  
 VIDEO EDITING: Winston Tho Xin  
 SOUND RECORDING: Paddy Ryan  
 SPECIAL THANKS: Gladys Schmidt, Roy Ing, Hieu Nguyen and The Lab, Cascadian Wood Tech and Cyrill Werlen

SD HOLMAN: “Thank you, Rachel, Persimmon, Vikki, and Tilda for keeping me alive. Thank you to the countless others who helped along the way. Thank you Rachel Kiyo Iwaasa, Persimmon Blackbridge and Paul Wong for encouraging me to do this work.”

RACHEL KIYO IWAASA: “Thank you Shaira (SD Holman) for letting me be part of this journey. I have always wanted to play the *Goldberg Variations*, but I was afraid to approach that Everest. Once again, you take me by the hand and lead me to the limits of my longing, as Rilke would say, beauty and terror together always.”



**PROGRAM SPONSORSHIP:**  
**The McGrane-Pearson**  
**Endowment Fund, held**  
**at Vancouver Foundation**