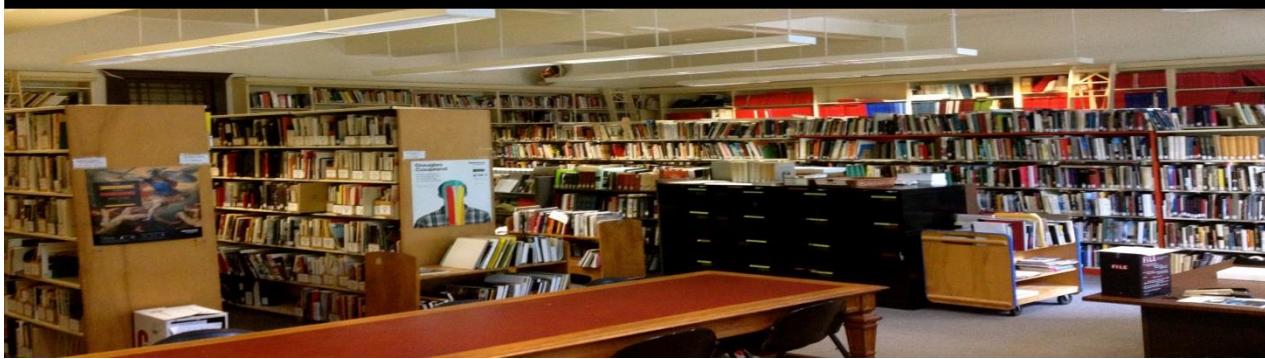


Young Canada Works Grant – Summer 2015

Archives Assistant: Jenna Dufour (MLIS Candidate, University of British Columbia)



As a current Master's student in Library and Information Studies (MLIS) program at the University of British Columbia, I was fortunate to have landed summer employment as an Archives Assistant at the Vancouver Art Gallery Library & Archives through the Young Canada Works (YCW) funding program.

Based on what I learned from a 2006 needs assessment for the management of current records and archives at the gallery, the knowledge gained from an introductory course to archival studies for librarians I completed in June, and discussion with the current librarian, Cheryl Siegel, my summer project has primarily involved working with the directors sous-fonds from 1931 (the year the gallery came to fruition) until the early 1970s. Most of these records have been worked on, bit by bit, by previous assistants and interns over the years. My particular project goal has been to create consistency with the arrangement and description of these records for each director with the result of easier access and retrieval. In addition to box file lists with added notation and creating a new numbering scheme for these records, I have created 6 separate finding aids for 6 directors in partial compliance with the Rules for Archival Description (RAD). The gallery's librarian is also the archivist – and so the standards used for describing the director's sous-fonds have been tailored to the library's own specific needs while meeting both budget and staff constraints.



Biking to the Vancouver Art Gallery!

Some highlights working as an Archives Assistant at the Vancouver Art Gallery:

Coffee Breaks with library staff and interns/volunteers: This has always been a lovely social outlet of the day, since working with records can feel mentally straining at times, and of course, quiet. It's the perfect time to get to know the library staff and volunteers a bit better while enjoying some morning coffee and casual conversation. It's also the chance to talk about libraries and librarianship in general. The insightful opinions and shared experiences of the volunteers—most of whom are retired librarians—has been incredibly helpful when thinking about strategic planning and the various trajectories I might be pursuing when I graduate next spring.

(From left to right) Library Staff & Volunteers:
Kristina, Cheryl, Jenna, Jason, Carol and Joanna





My Work Space for the summer

Records. Reading. Learning. Professional Development:

A core highlight of this job is that I've been able to couple my passion for working in an art organization while gaining exposure to the world of archives work. As an aspiring art librarian, this role compliments my future goals. Often, working in smaller special libraries requires a variety of skills and abilities since teams are often significantly smaller, and this summer position has given me exposure to the 'archival language' of institutional records. Being an archives assistant felt quite daunting at first, but my completion of an archives introduction course in

May/June taught me some key archival terminology and archival basics, which has been particularly helpful in understanding how to work with textual records and graphic material in the archives, as well as the ability to write archival descriptions to enhance access of these records for internal/public users. In addition, creating six finding aids helped me improve a variety of skills: professional writing, editing, the ability to follow directions (RAD-compliance), having excellent detail to attention and accuracy, and to work independently as a self-motivated individual.

What I loved most about this job is working in such a beautiful library (filled with light and air) and being able to learn about the gallery's history through original documentation. Working in the archives is incredibly different than library work because each record arranged is a kind of its own, and together, these items (textual and otherwise) coalesce as the life of an institution or organization. Without them, how is the history of an organization properly traced? It has been quite interesting to learn (in more intimate detail) how the gallery grew, functioned, and changed from one director to another over time as a result of the tireless efforts of early curators and employees of the gallery as well as local support from organizations and residents.



Photos found in the Purchase & Acceptance files

Getting insider's scoop on current exhibitions: a tour by the artist himself, Geoffrey Farmer's How Do I Put This Ghost in My Mouth?

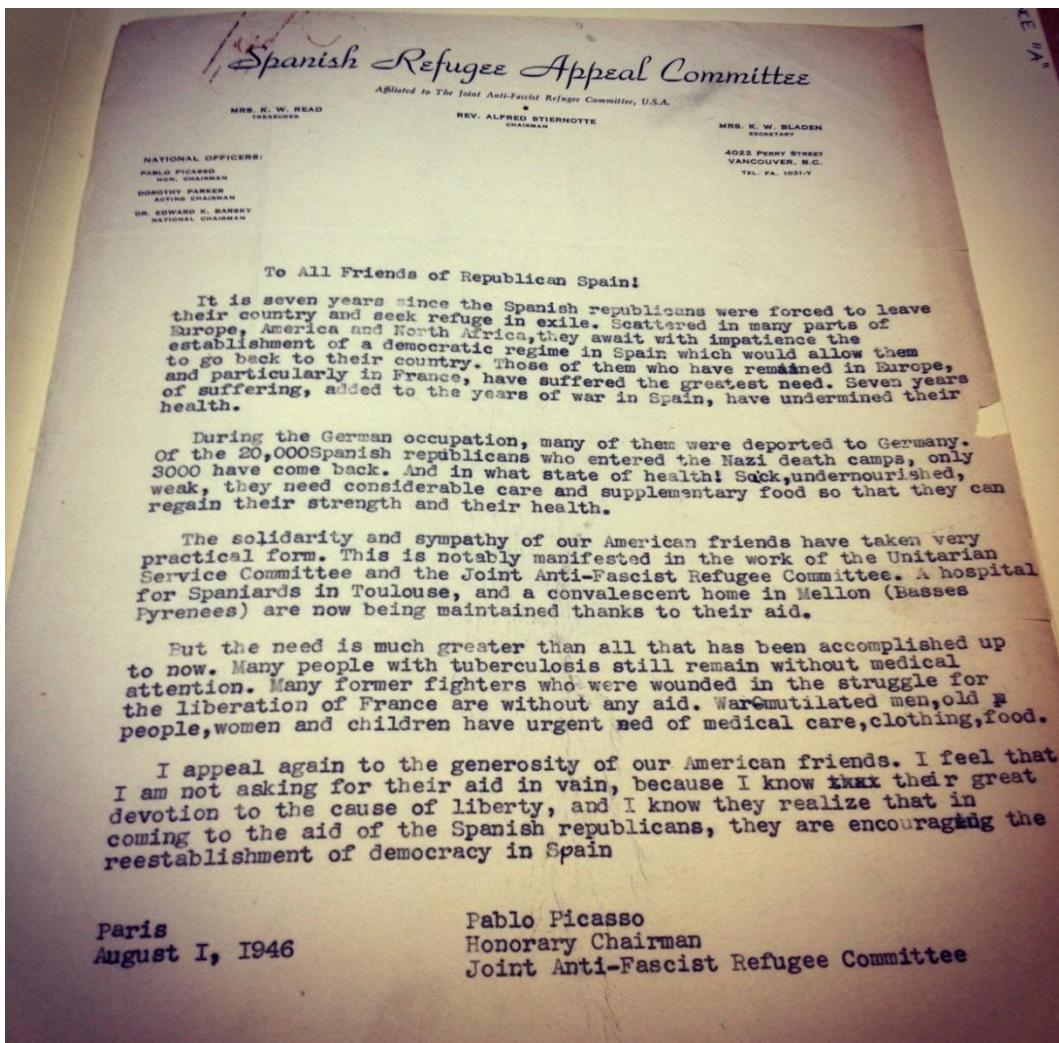
Another perk—outside of the workspace—has been opportunities to learn about current exhibitions, such as attending the personal artist led tour by Geoffrey Farmer himself on his current mid-survey career, "How Do I Fit This Ghost In My Mouth?" This was a chance to hear from Farmer about his work and how his art often coincides with his own views of the world, his personal life experiences and the artists, writers and cultural movements that have greatly influenced his own work. Hearing Farmer talk about various pieces of the exhibition with such honesty and with ease made the whole space feel more meaningful and personal.

Finally, of course...Coming across records from well-known artists, and records that are quite humorous in nature:

Below are only a few of the records that caught my eye while working on this project over the past 11 weeks. Archives are truly of paramount importance not only as evidence of an institution's past, but also culturally—both inside and outside of gallery walls—for Vancouver's community to preserve tangible documentation that can teach us about the past, support research and new ideas, and can help us build upon our existing artistic achievements.

Some Documentation from the VAG Archives

Correspondence from Pablo Picasso (Directors Sous-Fonds | Box: D4 Folder: 28)



Above: A letter by Pablo Picasso from Paris in August 1946 concerning the Spanish Refugee Committee

Transcription: "To All Friends of Republican Spain: It is seven years since the Spanish republicans were forced to leave their country and seek refuge in exile. Scattered in many parts of Europe, American and North Africa, they await with impatience the establishment of a democratic regime in Spain which would allow them to go back to their country. Those of them who have remained in Europe, and particularly France, have suffered the greatest need. Seven years of suffering, added to the years of war in Spain, have undermined their health. During the German occupation, many of them were deported to Germany. Of the 20,000 Spanish Republicans who entered the Nazi death camps, only 3,000 have come back. And in what state of health! Sick, undernourished, weak, they need considerable care and supplementary food so that they can regain their strength and their health. The solidarity and sympathy of our American friends have taken very practical form. This is notably manifested in the work of the Unitarian Service Committee and the Joint Anti-Fascist Refugee Committee. A hospital for Spaniards in Toulouse, and a convalescent home in Mellon (Basses Pyrenees) are now being maintained thanks to their aid. But the need is much greater than all that has been accomplished up to now. Many people with tuberculosis still remain without medical attention. Many former fighters who were wounded in the struggle for the liberation of France are without any aid. War-mutilated men, old people, women and children have urgent need of medical care, clothing, food. I appeal again to the generosity of our American friends. I feel that I am not asking for their aid in vain, because I know their great devotion to the cause of liberty, and I know they realize that in coming to the aid of the Spanish republicans, they are encouraging the reestablishment of democracy in Spain. Pablo Picasso, Honorary Chairman, Joint Anti-Fascist Refugee Committee. Paris August 1, 1946"

Summer Shows close down? when I'd like end of May be alright? Then I'd like you know by end of April if I was able to carry it through or would have to put it off till Autumn to exhibit. My greater difficulty is the mounting. If I can get anyone to help me through that, it is (not difficult) not nearly so difficult as mounting water colors that run or wash off. everyone is so busy on their own business these days.

Thanking you

Sincerely

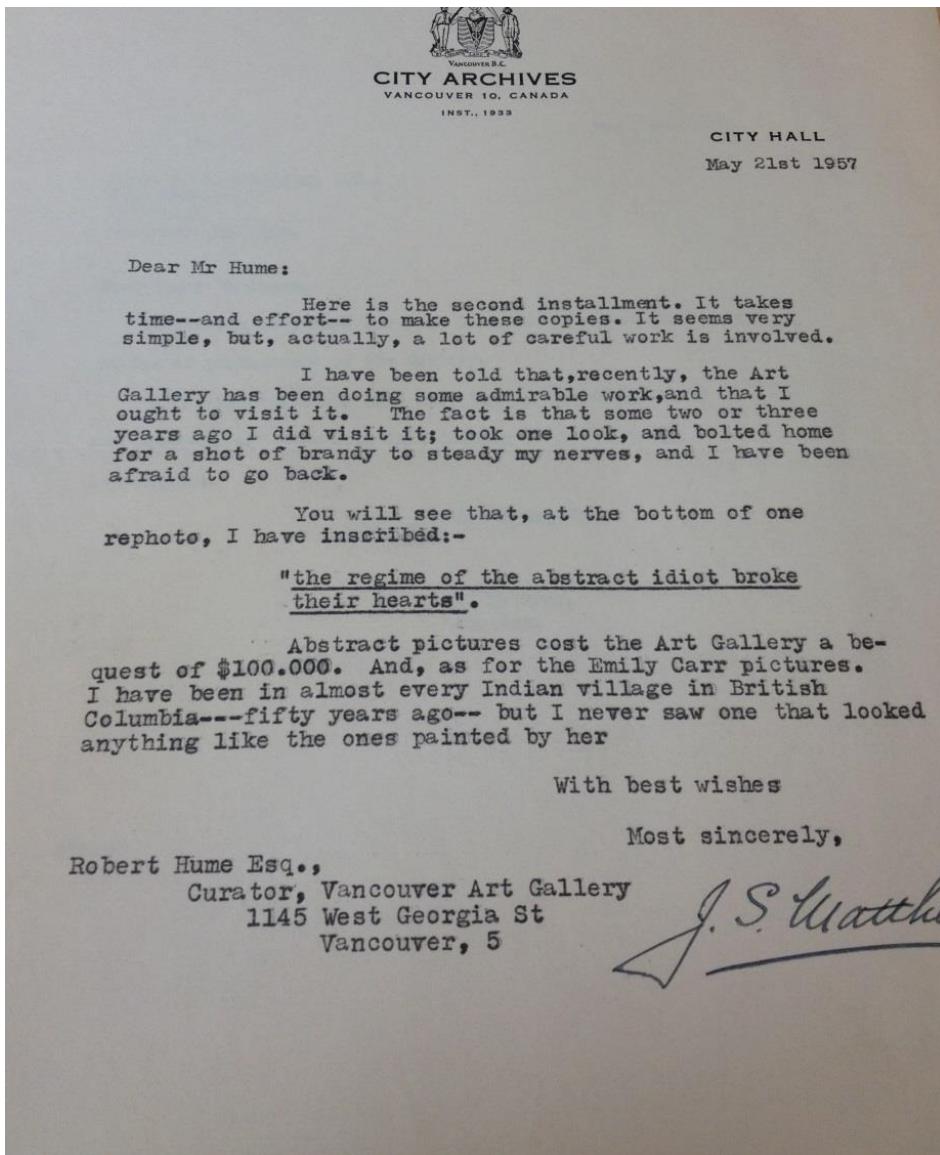
Emily Carr

Above: A letter written by Emily Carr to VAG director Arthur Savell Grigsby regarding possible spring exhibitions and her declining health.

Transcription: Feb. 24th 19— Dear Mr. Grigsby, Thank you for yesterday's letter yes I am home from hospital but so far have been able to do no painting had a bad attack last Monday and so it goes. I keep having set backs and ----- I should like to have one more show in the gallery the work I did last summer. Lawren Harris wanted me than the small downstair gallery for the rest and I showed with reasonable [luck] be able to fill that with what I have on hand it needs – and an odd – of sketches & pictures here and there – could I make reservation now? For the small gallery (watercolor room ----) with the option of giving it up at 2 or 3 weeks notice if I find myself – to it this Spring? What is the latest chance of showing before summer shows close down? Would end of May be alright? Then I'd let you know by end of April if I was able to carry it through or would have to put it off till Autumn to exhibit. My greatest difficulty is the [mounting?] if I can get anyone to help me through that. It is (not difficult not nearly so difficult as mounting water colors that run or wash off. Everyone is so busy on their own business these days. Thank you Sincerely, Emily Carr

Correspondence from City Archivist J.S. Matthews re: Abstract Painting and Emily Carr

(Directors Sous-Fonds | Box: D14 Folder: 6)



Above: Eccentricity of an Archivist – Letter from J.S. Matthews and his reaction to his 1st visit at the Vancouver Art Gallery to Vancouver Art Gallery director Robert Hume.

Transcription: "Dear Mr. Hume: Here is the second installment. It takes time—and effort—to make these copies. It seems very simple, but, actually, a lot of careful work is involved. I have been told that, recently, the Art Gallery has been doing some admirable work, and that I ought to visit it. The fact is that some two or three years ago I did visit it; took one look, and bolted home for a shot of brandy to steady my nerves, and I have been afraid to go back. You will see that, at the bottom of one rephoto, I have inscribed:- "the regime of the abstract idiot broke their heats". Abstract pictures cost the Art Gallery a bequest of \$100,000. And, as for the Emily Carr pictures. I have been in almost every Indian village in British Columbia—fifty years ago—but I never saw one that looked anything like the ones painted by her With best wishes Most sincerely, J.S. Matthews"

August 2015

**By: Jenna Dufour
MLIS Candidate, University of British Columbia**