

Myfanwy Pavelic

Mirrored Selves
Within and Without

Curated by
Patricia Bovey



University of Victoria Legacy Art Galleries

(facing)
"1205", Algonquin Hotel, N.Y.
1946

(front cover)
Raincoat (Self-Portrait)
1987

(back cover)
Hands and Frames (Self-Portrait)
1967
(detail)



Foreword

Mirrored Selves: Within and Without was initiated because of the University of Victoria community's widespread appreciation for the portraiture of Myfanwy Pavelic (1916-2007). One of my first tasks when I arrived in this job was to review the locations of art across campus to ensure artworks were not facing undue security and environmental risks. Sadly a large number of the pieces that had to be removed from permanent display were by Pavelic. Staff members were devastated that we were taking away Pavelic portraits that they had loved and lived with for so many years. I promised then that we would develop a future exhibition that would bring out the breadth of Pavelic's work and allowed campus and the broader community the opportunity to see her work in the context of her entire career. To honour this, the exhibition spans both our downtown and campus galleries.

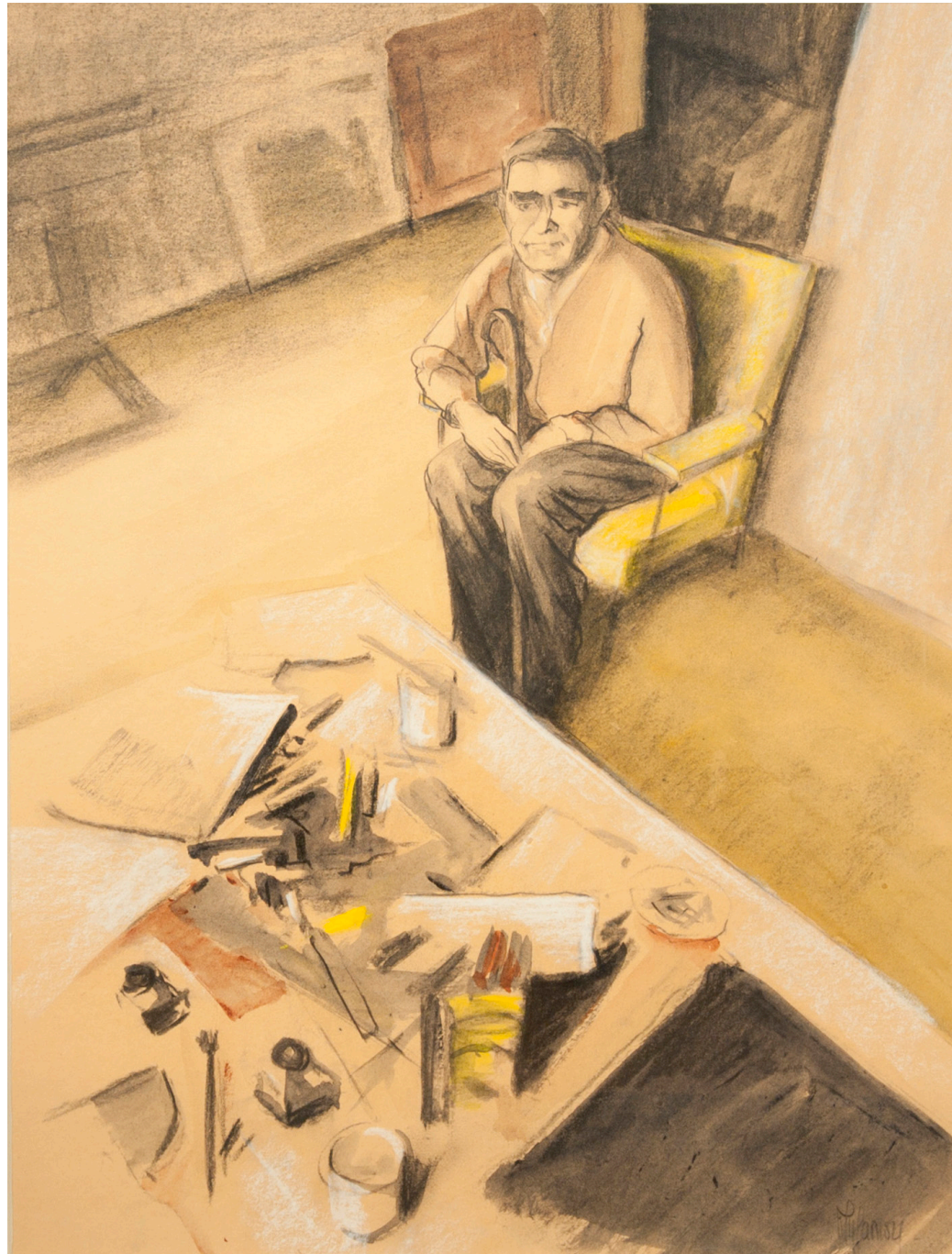
It seemed most appropriate to invite Patricia Bovey to curate the exhibition. She had known Pavelic personally and had curated the artist's work when she had held the position as Director at the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria in the 1980s and 90s. In her many visits to Pavelic's Saanich Peninsula studio, she had seen much of the artwork that now finds its home at UVic.

Bovey has brought her years of consideration of Pavelic's practice to bear on this project. Her choice of works from the more than 300 paintings and drawings in the UVic collection as well as her analysis of Pavelic's development over seven decades as an artist allows us to understand this artist's ability to go beyond the surface - to plumb the depths of character and human emotion. Furthermore, we see the success of the work lies in the significance of the relationship between the artist and her many sitters who ranged from close friends in Victoria to significant national and international figures. Perhaps the biggest impact of this exhibition on me is how it tracks Myfanwy's relationship with herself as she returns again and again from youth to old age to her own face and hands. Not holding back and honest in her representation of self in all its facets from beauty to maturity, uncertainty to confidence, Pavelic gives us a visual representation of an artist's life well-considered.

Mary Jo Hughes
Director
University of Victoria Legacy Art Galleries



Self-Portrait
1976



Max Bates in
Yellow Chair
1980

Within and Without: in the Centre Yet Isolated

I shudder when I hear people say that I am a portrait painter. I say, I do people. I am a painter.¹

So said Victoria artist Myfanwy Pavelic² at the high point of her long and esteemed career.

Portraiture is the art of the artist studying people and portraying what it is to be human, in paintings, drawings, sculpture, print and film. Portraits offer immediate connections between the viewer and the person depicted. They are documents of a specific time, place, person and mood – glimpses of an individual that become permanent once committed to paper or canvas. Myfanwy Pavelic’s paintings, drawings and collages present a moment of fleeting gestures and expressions in time. Accomplished in portraying a person’s physical self, and understanding their unique inner nature and individual essence, she consistently revealed the tensions between her subject’s *within* and *without*.

With her ability to combine the depiction of physical reality with that of psychological insights in each work, Pavelic achieved author Shearer West’s definition of portraiture:

Portraiture is about both body and soul. It represents the ‘front’ of a person—their gesture, expression, and manner—in such a way as to convey their distinct identity as

well as to link him or her to a particular social milieu.³

Pavelic’s art is insightful and compelling. Most of her sitters were within her circle of family and colleagues. She knew them well – their ideas, philosophies, likes and dislikes – and thus her intuitive sense was keen. Others, like AIDS activist Dr. Peter (Jepson-Young) and Katharine Hepburn, initially outside her sphere, soon came within it after the experience of being painted by her. Though Pavelic was a person with many acquaintances, her friend and colleague Robin Skelton noted “She feels that she herself has had very few friends, very few close ties, and that she has always been something of an outsider.”⁴ The actuality of being close within her own circle, yet outside many usual social and community situations, increased her personal sense of alienation, or aloneness, which inevitably altered her life and enhanced the dichotomy between her personal and artistic circumstances.

Burdens weighed heavily on her throughout her life. From a family of means she had many opportunities. Yet, as a child, she suffered from weak joints precluding her participation in many normal childhood activities, including school team sports, thus cutting her out of ordinary youthful events. As a teenager she underwent several knee surgeries in Boston.



Money, though unquestionably an enabler for Pavelic as she faced difficult situations, also proved to be a barrier. Money allowed her to live in New York as a young artist and later to send her only child, Tessa, who lived with disabilities, to a special school in New York. Nonetheless, given her means, she often wondered if her friends were real, or whether they wanted something from her.⁵

Living in New York for many months each year during Tessa's school terms and at home only in the summer, rendered Pavelic both inside and outside her community as an adult, just as she

had experienced during her upbringing. Under normal circumstances parents interact with other parents, but given their peripatetic lives the Pavelics were cut off from these more typical relationships.

Away, yet home; burdened, yet financially free: these were strong contributing factors to Pavelic being *within* herself and *within* her circle, while simultaneously *without* or outside her community, and *without*, as she intoned, many friends. A private person, this artist's challenges were unknown to most. Many were envious of her, although in conversation, Pavelic often spoke of her envy of other artists not faced with her constrictions. While she often talked of loneliness, she certainly enjoyed working and being alone. She also loved being part of the Limners, a group of Victoria artists. Her Ardmore home on Victoria's Saanich Peninsula was a mecca for many social events for artists from Victoria and across Canada.

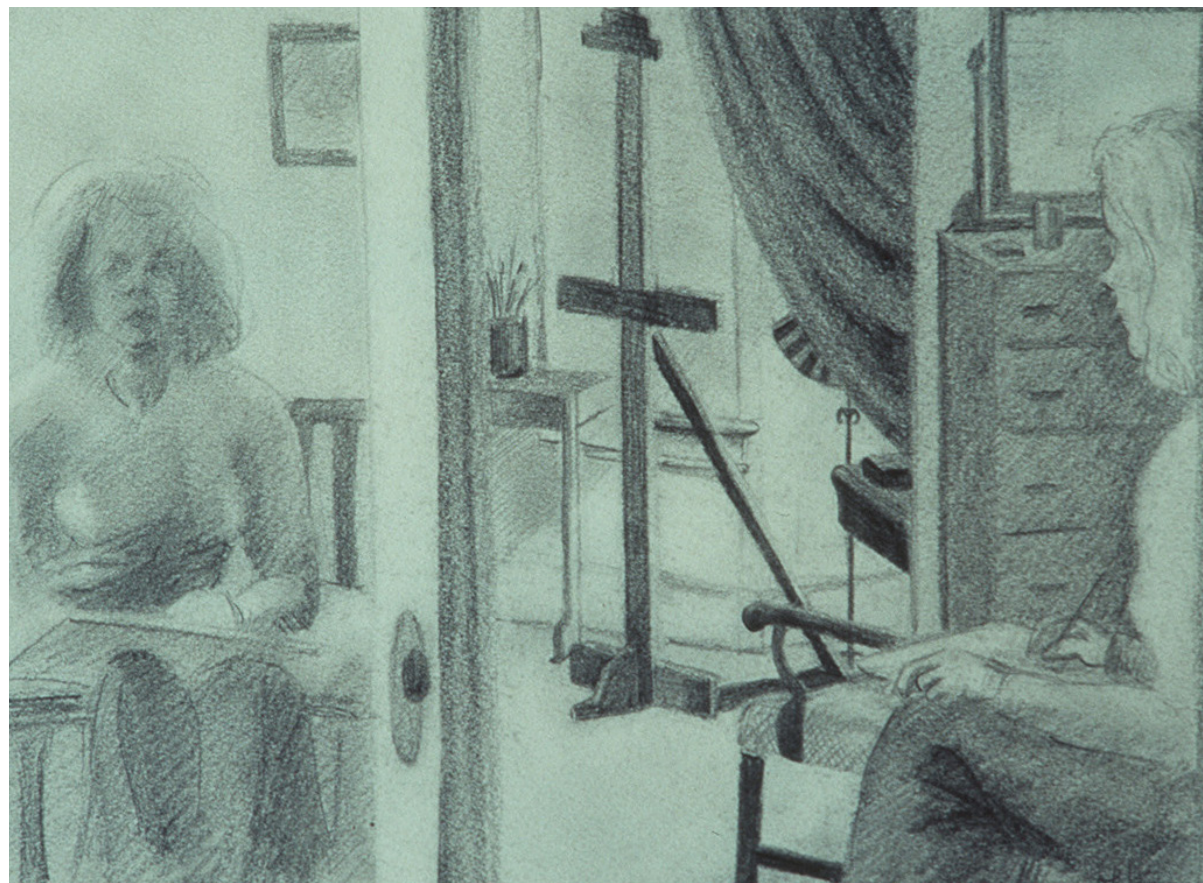
Pavelic's determination and insights are evident throughout her work. Respected in Victoria and known by some internationally, she remained largely unknown across Canada. Did her family responsibilities deny her the time or flexibility to make connections for her work to be exhibited throughout Canada?

Perceptive, sensitive, acute, and strong, Pavelic's steely determination and continued explorations resulted in a large body of work. Her art, while seemingly easy is complex, sensitive and full of meaning and depth.



(above)
Max's Birthday Party
1975

(facing)
Tessa – Thirteen
1963



Two Mirrors
1964

The Artist & Her Work

Born in Victoria on April 27th, 1916, Myfanwy Pavelic was the only child of Victoria businessman Will Spencer and his wife Lillian, and granddaughter of David Spencer, founder of British Columbia's major department store, Spencer Stores. She grew up in one of the province's richest families and was exposed to

the upper echelons of society from a very young age. Her family's involvement in music was a constant in her youth. Music, which could have been a career, became her lifelong passion.

Myfanwy's accounts of her childhood accentuate her atypical youth.

I had very little contact with people of my own age for a long time. When I was younger, my friends were all ages, from six years to ninety! But later, when I became a teenager, I found it very difficult to 'fit in.' I had read more, seen more and done more than the average young person, but I was a 'babe' in other ways—I had never gone downtown and sat at a soda fountain or watched a movie. I always thought that people of my own age considered me a sort of 'blue stocking,' someone who wears glasses and reads a lot!⁶

Her physical constraints and her parents' travels meant Myfanwy's school attendance was regularly interrupted, resulting in an unconventional schooling. Various periods with a governess were interspersed with some years at Victoria's Norfolk House School. In 1923 and 1927, she travelled to Europe with her parents and spent a few months in boarding school. While in Europe her parents took her to many art museums, which made an indelible mark on her. Her visual memory was keen. Vermeer's paintings also had an enduring impact, particularly his use of mirrors in his compositions.⁷ Mirrors were to be a recurring element in Pavelic's self-exploratory work, starting as early as 1964 in her drawing *Two Mirrors* and later in paintings such as *First Mirror*, 1989, and *Studio Mirror*, 1992. Introspective, her depictions of her studio interiors provided another means of self-exploration over the many years of her career, as seen in her 1946 painting "1205" of her Algonquin Hotel room, and *Studio*



Studio Mirror
1992

Inside Outside, a 1994 portrait of her studio in Ardmore.

From the time she was eight, Pavelic was a frequent visitor to Victoria artist Emily Carr's studio. The two formed a close friendship and later a correspondence. Recognizing Myfanwy's nascent talent, Carr inspired the young artist. Though never her teacher, Carr gave the young Myfanwy a number of pointers, admonishing



Self in Studio
1940

her “to work, work, work”.⁸ In 1931, when Myfanwy was fifteen, Carr invited her to have an exhibition at Victoria’s only art gallery, the People’s Gallery. Myfanwy assisted Carr with the selection of works though unfortunately could not see the exhibition. She was in Boston undergoing two knee surgeries.

In between those surgeries, Myfanwy attended Miss Edgar and Miss Cramp’s School in

Montreal, where her interests in music and art were enthusiastically encouraged. She loved her time there.⁹ She had, of course, already had the Victoria exhibition and as an accomplished young pianist she wanted to be a professional musician. Sadly, her musical dream ended early. She later reflected: “I was working toward a concert with the Washington State String Quartet when my wrists gave out.”¹⁰ With a resolute focus she then turned to her art. The disappointment over her truncated career as a pianist remained with her throughout her life.

Born into privilege, the societal expectations for Myfanwy were high. In 1937, at twenty-one, she was presented at Court at Buckingham Palace, not an event she relished. She was keen to get on with her career. A year later, in 1938, she was pleased to have her first exhibition at the Vancouver Art Gallery, which comprised of thirteen works including *Red Shawl*, *Maestro Paddy* (Cecil Heaton) and *Mrs. Sutherland Brown*. The *Vancouver Sun* photo caption noted:

*Miss Myfanwy Spencer, talented young Victoria artist ... before one of her own canvases at the opening of her exhibition of portraits at the Vancouver Art Gallery. The small show, which is the first Miss Spencer has ever held, [in Vancouver] is attracting favourable comment.*¹¹

However, Myfanwy was expected to marry and not have a career as an artist. In 1939 she acquiesced and married flying officer R.D. Campbell; however, the marriage soon ended in divorce. Again, she turned to her art. She

spent 1942 crossing Canada doing portraits of military officers in department stores in major cities. The proceeds, about \$10,000, went to the Red Cross.¹² When the *Toronto Daily Star* drew public attention to this project and to her abilities as a portraitist, her career was finally launched. In 1943 and in 1945 she won the Malkin Silver Medal for portraiture and in 1944 had two works accepted in the Vancouver Art Gallery’s *Thirteenth Annual B.C. Artists’ Exhibition*.

Myfanwy decided to further her art practice in New York in 1943 and lived at the Algonquin Hotel where she set up her studio. Immersing herself in painting she created a substantive body of work including “*Otto*” – *Chef of Algonquin Hotel*, 1945, which won her one of her Malkin medals. This painting shows Otto leaning forward, head and shoulders, wearing his white chef’s hat and jacket. He fills the entire canvas, his hat and shoulders cut off by the canvas edge. Set against a dark background she effectively highlighted the sitter’s friendly and accessible personality. Of her time in New York Myfanwy said:

*...for about six months, I had criticisms from an Italian painter [Vittorio Borriello]. He was never there when I was working—he simply came in to criticize my work. But at the end of six months I found that he wanted me to be doing what he was thinking. And I just decided that we had to say good-bye because I couldn’t see it that way. Oh, it helped. In certain things I was doing I learned a great deal from him.*¹³



“Otto” – Chef of Algonquin Hotel
1945

Truly important for her artistically and personally, this time in New York defined the primary interests seen in her later work: her self-portraits, depictions of hands, mirrors and doorways and her basic treatment of space. In New York Myfanwy also made lasting friendships with international musicians and artists, including Viktor Tischler, Jan Cherniavsky, Andres Segovia and Vladimir Horowitz, many later to become frequent visitors to her Victoria studio. In New York she also met her second husband, Niki Pavelic, an immigrant from a leading Zagreb

family. Niki featured frequently in her portraits. As she often commented, he “supports and inspires much of my work – he always encourages me enormously.”¹⁴

Though an artist with prescient human insights, Pavelic was for the most part self-taught:

*I never went to an art school. But I worked—believe me I worked. I worked with skeletons and I worked with just everything... I drove myself, working from models and as I said, bones. That was how I got my anatomy. And I experimented as much as I could.*¹⁵

For Pavelic, knowledge of anatomy and the skeleton was essential for all portrait painters. She decreed the importance of “knowing what is underneath”.¹⁶

Pavelic’s philosophy of portrait painting echoed that of French painter Henri Matisse who had stated that the “essential expression of a work depends almost entirely on the projection of the feeling of the artist in relation to his model rather than organic accuracy.”¹⁷

Internationally acclaimed British painter Lucian Freud’s comments, “I could never put anything into a picture that wasn’t actually there in front of me”¹⁸, also parallels her approach.

Pavelic’s deep respect and engagement with her subjects is evident. Intense observation was essential in determining what she wanted to portray about the sitter. Her choices of

composition, background, materials, size, lighting and demeanour were critical to her process and to its outcome. Whether a quick sitting and sketch or a more prolonged execution, Pavelic sought to balance the external, the likeness, with the internal, the inscape. Through her powers of observation, her skeletal knowledge and her ability to depict the fleeting moment of the mood or look of an individual, she captured the inner essence of the person, their souls, fears and loves. She had the eye, instinct and ability, as Colin Graham, former Art Gallery of Greater Victoria Director, said in 1985: “She is able to get under the skin of her subjects... she has an outstanding gift for character. She is natural.”¹⁹

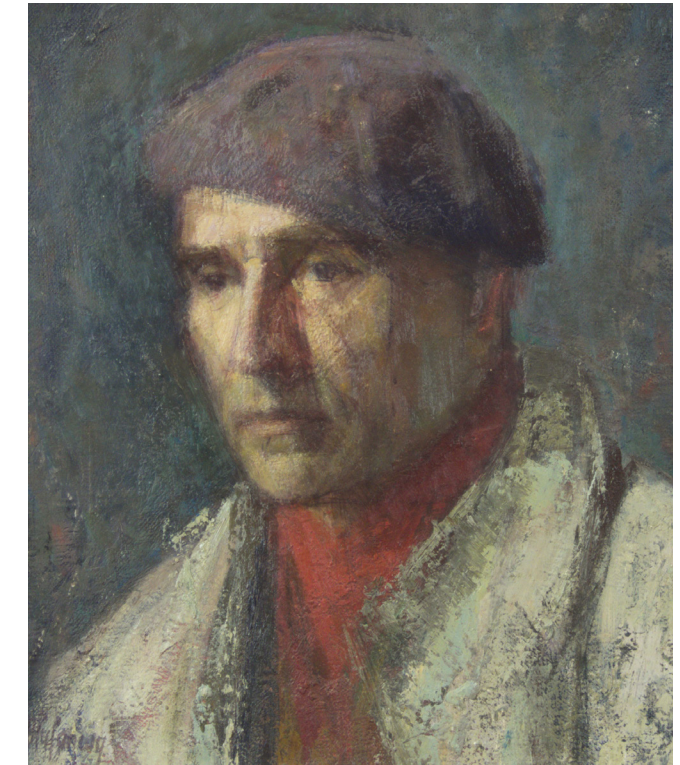
Working in New York again from 1956 to 1969 during Tessa’s school years, Pavelic was inspired by the New York cityscape to explore abstraction alongside her portraiture. But, she claimed “Abstraction was too empty for me; it didn’t say anything to me.”²⁰ She later incorporated her resulting knowledge of geometric form into her work, particularly in backgrounds, like *Meditation*, 1974, *Self Portrait*, 1976, and *Blue Sky*, 1991. Blocks of colour echo the sensibilities of the sitter.

Spencerwood, the family’s haven in Saanich Peninsula’s Ardmere, became home after Tessa’s graduation in 1969. Having been both *within* and *without* Victoria’s artistic community for a number of years, Pavelic’s artistic engagement reached new levels once she was in Victoria full-time. She built a large,

magnificent studio with good light and high ceilings overlooking Patricia Bay. Its walls were filled with her work and her concert grand piano was prominent at one end. At the other end of the room, near the corridor connecting her studio to the house, were her easel, her painting coat hanging on its peg and a table filled with pots of paint brushes.

For the most part a private person, Pavelic worked alone. However, many congregated at Spencerwood after the family was settled full-time. As she said: “...my life seemed to be just one big mass of people. I would never ask some people in for tea to fill up time. I just never would do it. Whenever I seemed to have a quiet hole, I would paint”.²¹ Artists and musicians visited frequently, especially her Victoria colleagues and Yehudi Menuhin, internationally acclaimed violinist and conductor and her close friend of many years. Impromptu studio concerts became the norm. A founding member of Victoria’s Limner Society of Artists in 1972, and its president following the 1980 death of Maxwell Bates, she often hosted Limner²² meetings and Royal Canadian Academy events.

Pavelic’s Victoria output was prolific and she had a number of exhibitions in the twenty-five years following her permanent return to the city. She was an active member of the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts for many years, a founding member of the Canadian Portrait Academy in 1997 and the recipient of many well deserved honours. In 1984 she



Niki – Head Beret
1952

received both the Order of Canada and an Honorary Doctorate from the University of Victoria. In 1998 she was awarded the F. H. Varley Medallion for Best Portrait Painting for her portrait of *Pierre Elliott Trudeau*. In 2001 she was inducted into the Order of British Columbia.



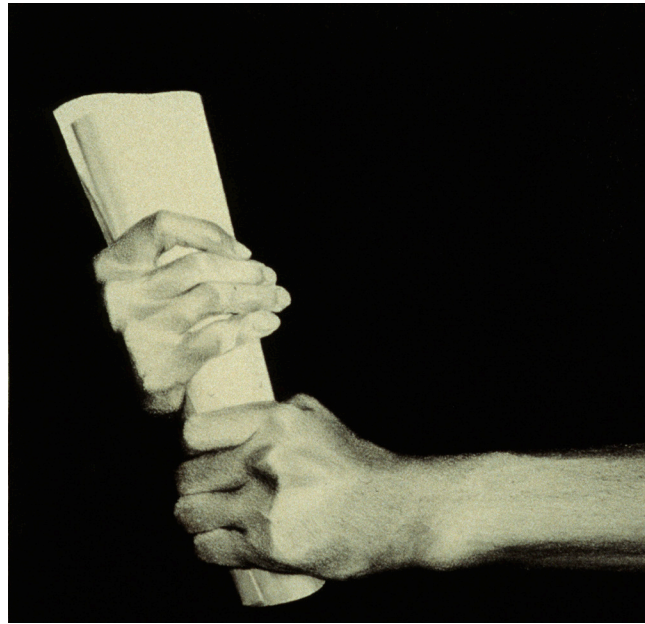
Perceptions & Lines of Feeling

Contradictory sensibilities defined many aspects of Pavelic's life, feelings and art. Reality, superimposed on her acute inner perceptions, rendered much of her work autobiographical. Poignant juxtapositions of the inner and outer, the *within* and *without*, exuded dignity, beauty, honesty and depths of joy, sadness or despair.

Pavelic did many self-portraits, formal commissions and portraits of people close to her: family, friends and colleagues. Her continuous self-exploration led to her distinctive visual voice. Her sensibility of line, colour and form were delicate and penetrating, especially her depictions of hands. In some compositions she flattened form. In others, line alone created her definitions of space. While always keenly interested in, and aware of, contemporary art, she eschewed most trends. Her work and interests were constant, focused on the human: form, personalities and emotions. Landscape painting only interested her seriously in the last decade of her life. As she said: "People and things have edges, but where does a landscape stop?"²³

Karl Spreitz (*Relationship Series*)
1985

Her personal portraits, those of friends and members of Victoria's Limner Society, are "people I am interested in doing. People whom I know, friends of mine, and I enjoy doing them when I see something that is interesting to me to catch."²⁴ The portraits of her colleagues in her *Relationship Series* reveal their psychological inscapes: their *within* and *without*. In her *Portrait of Richard Ciccimarra*, 1971, for instance, she employed his artistic use of diagonals cutting across the composition to render his figures alone. Her use of this compositional structure in her sensitive drawing of him effectively enhanced his aloneness from the wider world. He ultimately committed suicide. Limner, photographer and filmmaker Karl Spreitz also affected Pavelic's work and often assisted her by photographing her subjects, suggesting possible compositions as seen through his camera frame. Pavelic clearly captured his penetrating vision in her portraits of him, particularly *Karl Spreitz (Relationship Series)*, 1985. At the front of the picture frame, he looks directly at the viewer. Geometrical shapes in strong colours of red and blue form his sweater.



Decision
1969

During protracted periods of isolation, Pavelic's focus often shifted from portraying others to doing self-portraits. "I do self-portraits when I run out of other people. I have done a few when I felt all tied up inside or am lonely maybe – I wanted to paint the loneliness away."²⁵ Her ability to convey her own moods is palpable. The quality of line and strength of her pencil and charcoal are powerful and sensitive, suggestive yet firm. Pavelic did many self-portraits in which she presented herself both as the object and as subjective emotion, as evident in *Despair*, 1965, *Anguish*, 1968, *Release*, 1968, and *Decision*, 1969. In *Anguish*, her face hidden, allows her hands to convey all she is experiencing. They fall poignantly and listlessly

over the box on which she leans with a sense of utter dejection, highlighting the anguish of her personal situation.

When she delves into herself she fabricates self, as in her *Exercise with Head Series* of 1984. In one she wrapped her head with a scarf, in another she set herself against a background of blue and grey blocks. In *Glasses* her glasses are the core subject, held in a manner reflecting her own reality, recalling her wearing of glasses since childhood. She often took her glasses off when she worked, altering her vision. These self-portraits reveal her psychological insights—her self-reflected moods, attitudes and expressions. She did her first self-portrait when she was eight, several in her teens and many throughout her career. Collectively they are expressive figurations of self. As she said, "it doesn't matter what I do to myself".



Anguish
1968

The Artist's Reflection on Means & Methods

*I cannot separate drawing and painting from living. Each new paper or canvas holds for me the same possibility for discovery and growth – as each new day. Possibility, yes, but only after countless hours – eager – hesitant, sometimes seemingly hopeless hours, there will come that rare moment of realizing a deeper understanding. And, from that small step forward – one starts again.*²⁶



Pavelec's versatility is evident in many media—pencil, charcoal, collage, oil, acrylic and pastels—but drawing was her preferred technique. "I love drawing. I wish that I could paint as well as I sometimes can draw."²⁷ However, for each work she selected the medium she felt would best express the mood and inscape of the person before her. She reflected, "I was born, thank God, with some talent of sorts—but talent isn't what does it—it's the working at it!"²⁸

Having first painted in oil, Pavelec shifted to acrylic in 1966. Acrylic dried much more quickly. She also found it easier to manipulate as "oil paint was too heavy to drag across the canvas and I could draw with acrylic."²⁹ She deliberately pulled and pushed her colour across the surface of the canvas. Her forms and subjects evolved. Whether painting or drawing, her eye was always on the sitter's nuances of movements, comportment and expression.

Colin Graham wrote of her drawing: "From the outset drawing came so easily to her that she seems to have achieved authority with barely a struggle. The pencil has been her most expressive instrument."³⁰

Masterful in her use of simple and expressive lines, Pavelec said when drawing:

Exercise with Head
(Self-Portrait)
1984

*I take my glasses off. ... Charcoal, I love charcoal – it is responsive for me. I stick it at the end of a long stick. I get as far away from the paper just so the end of it touches the paper. I only hear and feel the point of the charcoal. I do not see what I have done. I look at the subject, the blur and there are intensities. There are deeper bits. I go on scratching ... something pulls out from the paper. I can pull it out more if I don't see it.*³¹

In the 1970s she experimented with collage, linking particular papers with her sitters' personalities and professions. Of the medium she said: "When I became tired of oil painting at one stage, I used collage and this proved to be influential in the design and composition of my later works."³² The collaged portraits of architect John di Castri, conductor Laszlo Gati and violinist Yehudi Menuhin were an important turning point in her art. As with her other collages, she selected appropriately symbolic papers: architectural blue prints for di Castri, music scores for Gati and soft tissues for Menuhin. Coupled with her compositional approach of counterbalancing forms, she exhibited a canny ability of tying the immediately perceptible with deeper psychological meaning. As in her drawings and paintings the sitters look directly to the viewer, Gati's eyes being formed of collaged quarter notes. She told Karl Spreitz:

Collages give me a break from my usual way of looking. I got really intrigued to see how much of a person I could bring out with using



Pat Martin Bates and Jocelyn
(Relationship Series)
1984

*a totally different substance. It was a searching time. I learned a lot. I liked best the sort of pairing of the paper... and ripping the paper. It was such a different kind of reaction from a painting.*³³

Hands were as important as faces for Myfanwy Pavelec when capturing an individual. "I notice a person's hands more than I notice their face ...it is what I feel about a person!"³⁴ Hands dominate in her portraits. In her drawing *Pat Martin Bates and Jocelyn Hands*, 1984, one feels the strong relationship between mother and daughter through her depiction of hands.



In the drawings of Menuhin's hands, such as *Yehudi Menuhin – Hands Holding Violin*, 1982, one feels and hears the specific note. She reflected that "What pleased me so much when Menuhin saw the portraits is that he said he could feel the note he was playing by looking at the way I painted his hand."³⁵ Pavelic's many quick sketches of hands and faces reveal her sitter's characteristic sensibilities, whether Menuhin playing the violin with his eyes closed, her own hands as artist and would-be pianist, or Trudeau's *Talking Hands*.

Writer Cara Patik echoed this importance, saying:

The subject matter of hands would be a recurring theme in her art: ... she was always disappointed when someone wanted a portrait done of themselves that did not include their hands ... 'I know people by their hands.', Pavelic said.³⁶

Before commencing a work, Pavelic attentively studied her sitter, assessing their movements, expressions and interests.

I find I do most of my looking when they are not sitting – when they are off guard – I can feel it happen and I can feel that thought. If my feeling can come through, my hand feels it. I am aware if my hands have done what is in the feeling.³⁷

She did not do preliminary sketches for her canvases "because then all I have been feeling has gone into the drawing, and I need a new 'something' – call it inspiration if you like—in order to work on the painting."³⁸ This deliberate, intuitive approach is testament to her engagement with her sitter and her need for a fresh interest in each work:

I don't like to do a complete drawing before I do a portrait; I draw all around it. If I had to do a proper drawing – say I had something in my mind, got the person to sit that way; everything I feel goes into the drawing and I no longer have any interest or 'aliveness' about the painting.³⁹



(above)
Laszlo Gati
1975

(facing)
Yehudi #16
1982

Pavelic was also definite that she did not ‘put’ people in her canvasses:

*I often use an old canvas and I particularly enjoy painting over something I’ve already done, allowing bits to come jumping through accidentally. ... The composition happens as the work progresses. Often the messy background makes it easy to disperse shapes as needed. I’d rather it took over me than I took over it.*⁴⁰

Thus, sitters emerged early from her messy canvasses. However, the surfaces of her finished works are smooth, revealing relatively few brushstrokes and none of the messiness of the early stages of a work. She was as aware of her forms and space as she was of colour and the emerging personalities. Building her compositions intentionally, she said:

*I was very conscious of space and the organization of a composition before I even organized it; if it didn’t work I would ‘fix it’ ... the people and their relationships made the compositions. Without people it is only the organization and manipulation of space.*⁴¹

Ted Lindberg noted that, beginning a work,

... she “messes up” a canvas by randomly wiping brushes and using up dabs and dabs of pigment on the surface of her support – no attempt is made at drawing or composing. After the canvas or board is sufficiently covered... the mere suggestion of volumes, colour components, light and shadows inhabiting a “space” which has begun to

*shape itself... the underpainting is the acrylic, out of which she has “pulled” the image, adjusting the colour... although traces of the underpainting appear everywhere.*⁴²

Pavelic’s sense of randomness, accident and underpainting were consciously developed as she was acutely aware of the effect of each brush stroke. Her means of contrasting expression, messy and planned, mirrored her portrayals of the depths of her subjects.



Katharine Hepburn
1980

Impacts Within & Without Canada

*I do not feel a distance in relating to people. For all of what they are is contained or generated within their physical boundaries - and it is the wanting to reach - to uncover the inside that draws me to paint them - and is, I think, the reason I always return to figures.*⁴³

Pavelic was widely known in the world of portraiture, but not as well known in other art circles. Portrait commissions gave Pavelic an even greater stature nationally and internationally. Her 1991 official portrait of Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau, for instance, hangs on Parliament Hill alongside the official portraits of Speakers and Prime Ministers. Pavelic is unquestionably a peer among all the major Canadian artists whose works line the halls in Canada’s Parliament buildings. While relatively few are women, Pavelic joins Lilius Torrence Newton, Joyce Devlin, Joanne Tod and Mary Valentine. On the international stage Pavelic’s portrait of Sir Yehudi Menuhin, commissioned when he was knighted, marks her as the only Canadian artist represented in the UK’s National Portrait Gallery.

Many Canadian and international celebrities have been immortalized in Pavelic’s paintings, including Hollywood actress Katharine Hepburn, Canada’s Chief Justice Beverly McLaughlin

and pioneering AIDS doctor, Dr. Peter. Each portrait shows sensitivity to her subject and deftness with line, colour and composition. Her first painting of Katharine Hepburn was done from television’s *Dick Cavett Show*. She sent the image of the painting to Hepburn to introduce herself. Hepburn’s response? “I just hope I look the way you painted me.”⁴⁴ A close friendship ensued with visits back and forth and frequent conversations. Pavelic also painted internationally acclaimed Canadian pianist, Glenn Gould, in absentia. Always inventive, Pavelic asked Colin Graham, who was about Gould’s height, to pose for the feet. She wanted to be sure the foreshortening was correct.⁴⁵

Despite having to meet the criteria of the terms of the commission, Pavelic’s official portraits of Pierre Elliott Trudeau and Yehudi Menuhin reveal the artist’s keen perception of the individuals and their stature. As was evident from many conversations with this author, the personal rapport between Yehudi Menuhin and Myfanwy Pavelic was especially strong, musically and artistically, each holding the other’s artistry in high regard.

Undertaking the official portrait of Pierre Elliott Trudeau was perhaps the most challenging honour for Pavelic. Writer Ted Lindberg commented:

After a lifetime of reading faces, bones, anatomy, coloration and human presence, she knew exactly what she was looking for... She had to establish the distinctive difference between the photographic image

*and the artist-interpreted likeness. With such a mercurial subject, it was the challenge of a lifetime. ... it was the physical and psychological presence of the man which had to be established and committed to memory in scant time.*⁴⁶

Trudeau's handlers had wanted her to paint him in his Montreal home. Pavelic, however, was adamant. She did not want "to work with him in an environment where the stress of his everyday celebrity was close at hand." She insisted on the privacy of her Ardmore Drive studio, stating that "I don't want to see what other people see. I want to see what I see—and what he sees."⁴⁷

Accepting her reasoning, Trudeau stayed at the Pavelic's Spencerwood guest house for a few days. He read, canoed in the bay and engaged with the family. While he was there, Pavelic observed Trudeau's movements, mannerisms, interests and intelligence. She did pencil sketches after the Prime Minister retired for the evening. She did the paintings after he had departed. "I saw the man that few people knew. ... I thoroughly enjoyed everything that happened about that portrait. It was happy and comfortable on both sides. He enjoyed it and I know I enjoyed it. It doesn't often happen that you get that kind of feeling."⁴⁸

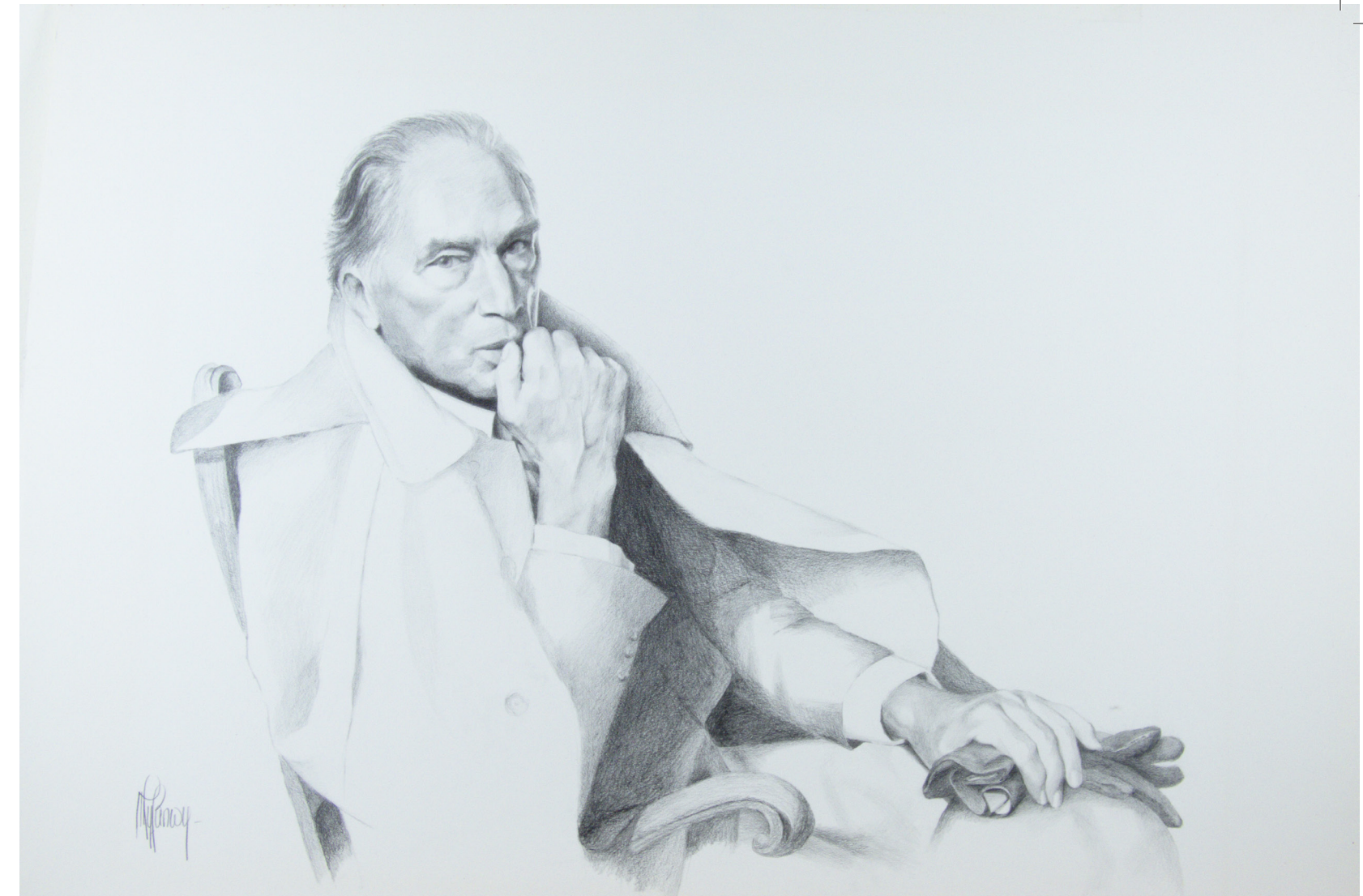
This commission was an important milestone for her. On completing it she reflected: "His many faceted expressions conceal an almost impenetrable inner reserve enticing me to attempt to capture something of that inner

man."⁴⁹ Interestingly Pavelic's own equally multiple "faceted expressions" conceal her "almost impenetrable inner reserve." Gentle yet determined, definite and uncompromising, Pavelic's psychological insights into others were as keen as those into herself.

At the unveiling of the portrait, Trudeau recalled:

*I didn't like the idea of the invitation to 'pose for a portrait'... There is something stiff about a portrait – an assumed position of modesty or grandeur. But when I saw how she would do my portrait I knew I had chosen the right artist because I could see this portrait was alive not posed. She said that she tries 'to draw from a blur of colours.' Layer over layer it emerged. The artist spent time trying to find my soul ... In the portrait I am reminded of me in time ... I am very grateful to the artist for her work of me.*⁵⁰

In all of these works, it is clear that the artist ably perceived and articulated the *within* and the *without* in a single work.



Hand on Chin
1991



Two Mirrors
1964

Dichotomies Mirrored & Revealed

Pavelic's major breakthrough came with the 1986 solo exhibition *Altered Ego* at Vancouver's Floating Gallery. This exhibition showcased the strength of the dual aspects of her explorations into the dichotomies of her inner and outer selves. She experimented with new technical ideas and creative problem-solving. She used mirrors innovatively to delve into multi-dimensions of self. This series, in which she faced her own emotions head on, is a particularly engaging and truthful personal exploration. The works reveal:

*...the complex process that is enacted when an artist through the medium of the mirror becomes transformed and objectified. In each instance the sense of self, the ego, becomes altered through the contradictory actions of close scrutiny and emotional distancing. ... Whether the image is a manifestation of the artist's grappling with a technical or formal problem, a means of exorcising pain, healing mind and spirit or at the interface where the artist's work and the artist's psyche meet; each is an uncompromising view of self. This is a view that encompasses a multiplicity of personalities and articulates an inner as well as outer reality.*⁵¹

Pushing boundaries in her art, Pavelic honestly portrayed her vulnerability in juxtaposition to her

strength. Some works were ephemeral in quality. Some proffered backgrounds and colours enhancing the overall mood or feeling, and in others backgrounds were stripped. By removing her glasses in this series, "she is left with only the vague, dim forms of her face. This enabled Pavelic to concentrate in a detached manner, on both the structure of the figure before her and on technical problem solving."⁵²

Pavelic never feared aging. As she reflected in conversations with this author, she felt her face as a young woman was pretty and uninteresting. It was only as she grew older that her face became more interesting, to look at, to draw and to paint."⁵³

Pavelic's mirrored selves extended to her depictions of her studio—her unpeopled portraits. These portray the *within* and *without* of her working space. Mirrors, intersecting frames, doorways and corridors probe the presence and intimacy of her personal creative space. By juxtaposing the reality of space with her thinking processes, these paintings become portraits of her as an artist. She included a self-portrait in *Studio Mirror*, 1992. In others, intersecting angles and spaces comprise the entire subject. The complexities of angles and interlocking foregrounds and backgrounds evoke her multiple dichotomies of self and place. In the 1994 work, *Studio Inside Outside*, she took this a step further, superimposing the studio exterior onto the interior, thus combining physical reality with her creative psychological inscape. In her eight decades of creating, Pavelic

developed her core subjects – self, space, portraits and mirrors. These remained constant. Throughout her life she was fully engrossed with the inner and outer dimensions of being human. These confluences, coupled with the dichotomies of her multiple or layered feelings and expressions of *within* and *without*, gave her work strength and emotional vulnerability. All her work is in some way autobiographical, as Robin Skelton wrote:

*Her sensitivity towards the slightest gestures and nuances of the human body has clearly been enhanced by her own experiences of bodily limitations. Her awareness of those subtleties of attitude which are so incisively and lucidly presented ... must owe something to her own experience of struggling towards human relationships. ... it is the outsiders whom she paints with most understanding and precision. ... The bodily gestures are organized ... with more than ordinary clarity and intensity; the body is used equally with the face as an index to character and emotion ... she has chosen in her mature work ... to make each painting a study of character and emotion.*⁵⁴

Menuhin echoed this depth:

Surely the highest reaches of our lives are when a meeting of hearts, a joining of thought, of perception and intuition creates a personal language, as spiritual as it is ardent. Myfanwy herself is the finest distillation of living experience translated through her

*creative genius into a universal language which can leave no one untouched.*⁵⁵

Despite this appreciation close to home, in 1981 Pavelic opined in disappointment, “I don’t think people in the east know that there are artists out here.”⁵⁶ One hopes that situation has changed. Jack Hardman’s 1978 words were prophetic, defining her as an artist with “integrity and the courage to create in her own unique voice. ... The ability to stand aside from the mainstream of that which is ‘in’ makes this artist a revolutionary, and revolution produces change.”⁵⁷

Sixty-two years after Pavelic’s first exhibition, Colin Graham wrote: “I have watched her art develop in spite of many difficulties, into a body of work which now ranks among Canada’s most impressive contributions to the art of figure painting.”⁵⁸ However, when Pavelic passed away in May 2007 her work was not as widely known across Canada as its substance deserved.

With pencil, charcoal and brush Myfanwy Pavelic encompassed mind, spirit and mood, reality and psyche. Her intuitive blending of the within and without in all the ‘mirrored selves’ imbues her work with an enduring legacy, a permanent memory of time and place.

Patricia Bovey



*Blue, Black
and Orange*
1980

Endnotes

1. Myfanwy Pavelic to Eileen Leyroyd as published in *Relationships: Myfanwy Spencer Pavelic* (Victoria, B.C.: Morriss Publishing Ltd, 1985) np.

2. Born Myfanwy Spencer, I refer to the artist as Myfanwy when discussing the years and work prior to her marriage to Niki Pavelic; thereafter as Pavelic.

3. Shearer West, *Portraiture* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2004), 36-37.

4. Robin Skelton, "Myfanwy Pavelic: Perception & Solitude," *The Malahat Review*, No. 2 (July 1972) 59.

5. Myfanwy Pavelic interview with the author, June 8, 1994.

6. Joy Bretz, "Myfanwy Pavelic – Master Artist", *Westcoast Reflections*, Vol. 4. No. 9 (October 1994) 21.

7. Pavelic, interview, June 8, 1994.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

10. Bretz, p. 22.

11. *Vancouver Sun* (September 7, 1938) np, accessed in Vancouver Art Gallery artist file.

12. Myfanwy Pavelic interview with the author, November, 1993.

13. Myfanwy Pavelic interview with Audrey Johnson, *Victoria Times-Colonist*, October 11, 1981, accessed in Art Gallery of Greater Victoria artist file.

14. Myfanwy Pavelic in film "Portrait of Myfanwy Pavelic in her Studio," produced by Karl Spreitz with Colin Browne, 1980.

15. Pavelic, Johnson interview, October 11, 1981.

16. Pavelic, interview, November, 1993.

17. Cynthia Freeland, *Portraits & Persons: A Philosophical Inquiry* (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 2010) 156.

18. Paul Moorhouse, *A Guide to Twentieth Century Portraits* (London, UK: National Portrait Gallery, 2013) 52

19. Grania Litwin, "The Review," March 13, 1985, accessed in Pavelic artist file, University of Victoria Legacy Art Galleries.

20. Myfanwy Pavelic interview with the author, August 11, 1993.

21. Myfanwy Pavelic as quoted by Robert Amos in "BC Artist Captures Trudeau," *Calgary Herald*, May 11, 2007.

22. The Limners were a group of Victoria artists whose early members included Maxwell Bates, Pat Martin Bates, Richard Ciccimarra, Robert de Castro, Walter Dexter, Nita Forrest, Colin Graham, Helga Grove, Jan Grove, Elza Mayhew, Myfanwy Pavelic, Carole Sabiston, Herbert Siebner, Robin Skelton, Sylvia Skelton, Karl Spreitz and Jack Wilkinson. All their work focused on the human condition.

23. Pavelic, interview, August 11, 1993.

24. Pavelic, Spreitz film, 1980.

25. Ibid.

26. Myfanwy Pavelic *Artist Statement* 1984, Artist's File, Art Gallery of Greater Victoria.

27. Pavelic, Johnson interview, October 11, 1981.

28. Bretz, 20.

29. Pavelic, interview, August 11, 1993.

30. Colin Graham in *Myfanwy Spencer Pavelic: A Selection of Works 1950-1978*, (Burnaby, B.C.: Burnaby Art Gallery, 1978) np.

31. Pavelic, Spreitz film, 1980.

32. Pavelic interview with the author, November, 1994.

33. Pavelic, Spreitz film, 1980.

34. Bretz, 22.

35. *Myfanwy Pavelic, Art on Video*, University of Victoria Television Productions, with the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, 1991.

36. Cara Patik, "An Evening with Myfanwy," *Focus Magazine*, Feb. 2004, 1.

37. Pavelic, Spreitz film, 1980.

38. Pavelic, interview, November, 1993.

39. Pavelic, Johnson interview, October 11, 1981.

40. Pavelic, interview, August 11, 1993.

41. Pavelic, interview, June 8, 1994.

42. Ted Lindberg, *A Portrait by Myfanwy* (Victoria, B.C.: Morriss Publishing, 1991) np.

43. Carol DeFina, "Self As Object – Self As Subject," in *Altered Ego: Works By Myfanwy Spencer Pavelic, C.M., R.C.A.*, (Vancouver, B.C.: Women in Focus Art and Media Centre, 1986) np.

44. Katharine Hepburn in Spreitz film, 1980.

45. Pavelic, author interview, August 11, 1993.

46. Lindberg, np.

47. Unsigned Article, *Victoria Times Colonist Weekend Edition*, Friday July 13, 2001, accessed in AGGV artist file.

48. Pavelic, interview, November 1994.

49. Ibid.

50. Comments of the Right Honourable Pierre Elliott Trudeau, video of the *Trudeau Portrait Unveiling on Parliament Hill*, Ottawa, Parliament Hill Communications, May 1992.

51. DeFina, np.

52. Ibid.

53. Pavelic interview, August 11, 1993.

54. Skelton, 59.

55. Yehudi Menuhin, comments at the Maltwood Art Gallery and Museum opening of his portraits, notes made by the author, 1982.

56. Pavelic, Johnson interview, October 11, 1981

57. Jack Hardman in *Myfanwy Spencer Pavelic: A Selection of Works 1950-1978*, (Burnaby, B.C.: Burnaby Art Gallery, 1978) np.

58. Colin Graham, *Remarks* written for the opening of *Inner Explorations*, Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, 1994, accessed in AGGV Pavelic artist file.



Red Shirt (Self)
1963

Exhibition Lists

All works are from the collection of the University of Victoria Legacy Art Galleries unless otherwise indicated.
All University of Victoria works are credited as “Gift of Dr. Myfanwy Spencer Pavelic” unless otherwise indicated.
All works are measured in centimeters, height followed by width.

Part I
Legacy Art
Gallery,
Downtown

Mirror Door, 1932
Pencil on paper
27.1 x 24.0
Collection of Art Gallery of
Greater Victoria; Gift of the
Artist

Daddy, 1938
Oil on canvas
91.4 x 71.1

Mother Red Dress, 1938
Oil on canvas
91.4 x 71.1

Self in Studio, 1940
Oil on canvas
62.0 x 46.5

“Otto” – Chef of Algonquin
Hotel, 1945
Oil on canvas
63.5 x 50.8

Red Book, 1945
Oil on canvas
39.4 x 29.2

“1205”, Algonquin Hotel,
N.Y., 1946
Oil on canvas
59.1 x 49.1 (Framed)

Self-Portrait (Profile), 1952
Oil on canvas
85.1 x 64.8

Niki – Head Beret, 1952
Oil on canvas
35.6 x 30.5

Tessa – Head, 1958
Oil on canvas
36.8 x 31.8

Self-Portrait (Line-Painting),
1962
Oil on canvas
81.3 x 61.0

Tessa – Thirteen, 1963
Oil on canvas
93.0 x 78.0
Gift of Myfanwy Spencer
Pavelic and Nikolai Pavelic

Red Shirt (Self), 1963
Oil on canvas
74.3 x 54.6

Two Mirrors, 1964
Charcoal on paper
44.3 x 54.8
Collection of Art Gallery of
Greater Victoria; Gift of the
Artist

New York Studio, 1969
Acrylic on board
95.5 x 64.5
Collection of Art Gallery of
Greater Victoria; Gift of the
Artist

Laszlo Gati, 1975
Acrylic, paper,
and mixed media
on Masonite panel
100.0 x 126.5
Gift of Laszlo Gati

John DiCastri, n.d.
Mixed media, paper collage
and paint on board
105.0 x 135.0
Gift of Joanne Di Castri

Self-Portrait, 1976
Mixed media, graphite,
and paper collage on
pressed fibre board
112.0 x 95.7
UVic Acquisition Fund

Yehudi Menuhin, 1976
Paint, coloured tissue paper
and Kleenex on paper
60.3 x 52.8

Katharine Hepburn, 1980
Acrylic on canvas
120.0 x 92.0

Niki – Raincoat, 1982
Oil on canvas
61.0 x 45.7

Yehudi Menuhin –
Green Horizon, 1982
Oil on canvas
81.0 x 96.2

Exercise with Head
(Self-Portrait), 1984
Acrylic on canvas
67.0 x 61.0

Exercise with Head #2
(Blue Scarf), 1984
Acrylic on canvas
50.6 x 45.0

Exercise with Head #3
(Self-Portrait), 1984
Charcoal on board
51.0 x 45.9

Exercise with Head #5
(Self-Portrait), 1984
Acrylic on canvas
50.8 x 45.7

Exercise with Head #6
(Glasses), 1984
Acrylic on canvas
50.5 x 45.1

Myfanwy and Tessa, 1985
Acrylic on canvas
73.0 x 75.5

Glenn Gould, 1986
Acrylic on canvas
101.6 x 118.8

Raincoat (Self-Portrait),
1987
Oil on canvas
102.9 x 72.3

First Mirror, 1989
Acrylic on Masonite
40.6 x 35.5
Collection of Art Gallery
of Greater Victoria; Gift
of the Artist

Blue Sky (Pierre Trudeau),
1991
Acrylic on canvas
121.5 x 91.5
Gift of the Estate of
Michael C. Williams

Self-Painting, 1991
Acrylic on canvas
68.3 x 53.1
Collection of Art Gallery
of Greater Victoria; Gift
of the Artist

Studio Mirror, 1992
Acrylic on Masonite
76.2 x 55.7
Collection of Art Gallery of
Greater Victoria; Harold
and Vera Mortimer-Lamb
Purchase Fund

Studio Inside Outside, 1994
Graphite on paper
and BFK rives
38 x 31.3
Collection of Art Gallery
of Greater Victoria;
Gift of the Artist

Untitled (Self-Portrait), n.d.
Acrylic, pastel and charcoal
on board
61.7 x 51.0

Part II
Legacy
Maltwood,
UVic Campus

Jan and Mischel
Cherniavsky - “Musicians”,
1945
Oil on canvas
64.0 x 51.0

Despair, 1965
Charcoal on paper
54.1 x 39.8
University of Victoria
Acquisition Fund

Hands and Frames
(Self-Portrait), 1967
Charcoal on paper
43.2 x 43.8

Anguish, 1968
Charcoal on paper
66.0 x 76.2

Release, 1968
Graphite on paper
48.3 x 35.2

Decision, 1969
Charcoal on paper
35.6 x 36.5

Ricky Ciccimarra, 1969
Conté and wash on paper
28.9 x 18.4

Portrait of Richard
Ciccimarra, 1971
Charcoal on paper
55.9 x 77.5
Collection of Art Gallery
of Greater Victoria; Harold
and Vera Mortimer-Lamb
Purchase Fund

Portrait of Karl Spreitz, 1972
Charcoal and conté on
paper
57.7 x 56.0

Meditation, 1974
Acrylic on canvas
104.0 x 70.8
Transferred from Burnaby
Art Gallery

Max Painting, 1974
Charcoal on paper
47.0 x 62.0
Gift of the Estate of Robin
and Sylvia Skelton

Max’s Birthday Party, 1975
Graphite and charcoal on
d’Arches paper
36.8 x 54.6

Max Bates (Hand Raised),
1978
Charcoal on paper
31.5 x 28.0
Gift of the Estate of Michael
C. Williams

Perception, 1978
Graphite on board
46.7 x 41.9

Max Bates in Yellow Chair,
1980
Graphite, charcoal, ink
and wash on paper
55.8 x 40.6
Gift of Dr. Geoffrey
and Ms. Freda Mason

Blue, Black and Orange,
1980
Oil pastel and acrylic
on d’Arches paper
47.0 x 38.1

Kate (Katharine Hepburn),
1981
Graphite on paper
41.3 x 39.4

Yehudi Menuhin (Brown
Wash), 1982
Acrylic on canvas
86.4 x 111.8

Yehudi Menuhin, 1982
Watercolour on paper
25.5 x 63.0

Acknowledgements

Myfanwy Pavelic: *Mirrored Selves Within & Without* opens twenty-five years after the 1994 Art Gallery of Greater Victoria retrospective exhibition, *Myfanwy Pavelic: Inner Explorations*, an exhibition I had the privilege to curate. It is rare to be given the opportunity to re-examine an artist’s work a quarter of a century later and it has been inspiring.

I thank the Legacy Gallery, particularly Mary Jo Hughes, Director of Art at the University of Victoria, for her invitation to undertake this special project. My thanks go as well to Emerald Johnstone-Bedell, Assistant Curator and who project managed the early stages for her attention to detail, timelines and insights into Pavelic’s work; to Roger Huffman for his care over the installation and preparation of the works and to all the Legacy Gallery staff for their professionalism and genuine interest. I also thank Sarah Yates for her careful editing – this text is improved by her insights.

I very much appreciate the assistance and support Marcia Semenoff has given to this project. Her work with Myfanwy Pavelic in the artist’s latter years was significant and thanks are due to her for the interviews she did with the

artist and the care she has given Pavelic’s work, diaries, daybooks and notes.

For providing access to their archives and artists’ files, I extend thanks to the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, the Burnaby Art Gallery and to Jane Devine Mejía of the Vancouver Art Gallery. I especially appreciate the loans from the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria’s collection, donations Myfanwy Pavelic made in 1995 to complement her gift to the University of Victoria.

Over the years I spent many hours with Myfanwy in her studio, following the progress of a number of works, poring over drawings, paintings, collages, letters and notes and talking with her about her visual goals, approaches and working processes. Her insights were profound; her art was enduring. Pavelic’s visual explorations of her inner soul and those of her sitters were heartfelt and compelling. This new look at Myfanwy Pavelic’s work confirms anew each of the conclusions I drew twenty-five years ago.

Patricia Bovey
May 2019

Yehudi Menuhin – <i>Hands Holding Violin #14</i> , 1982 Graphite on paper 45.5 x 57.0	Robin Skelton and Alison (<i>Relationship Series</i>), 1985 Acrylic on canvas 55.9 x 50.8
Yehudi Menuhin – <i>Three Heads #11</i> , 1982 Conté on paper 35.6 x 40.6	Elza and Anne – <i>Drawing</i> , 1985 Charcoal and conté on paper 75.6 x 64.8
<i>Hands Holding Violin (Yehudi Menuhin #4)</i> , 1982 Charcoal on paper 61.0 x 76.2	Glenn Gould, 1986 Charcoal on paper 40.0 x 33.0
Yehudi #16, n.d. Graphite on paper 61.0 x 62.0	“1986” (<i>Self-Portrait</i>), 1986 Graphite on paper 60.0 x 48.9
Pat Martin Bates and Jocelyn (<i>Relationship Series</i>), 1984 Acrylic on canvas 34.6 x 34.3	Beverley McLachlin, 1989 Graphite on paper 56.0 x 46.0
Elizabeth and Stephanie’s <i>Hands (Relationship Series)</i> , 1984 Charcoal on paper 38.7 x 51.4	Untitled (<i>Pierre Trudeau</i>), 1991 Graphite on paper 73.8 x 55.0
Jack Kidder and George Forbes (<i>Relationship Series</i>), 1984 Acrylic on canvas 76.2 x 63.5	Hand on Chin, 1991 Graphite on paper 45.5 x 60.5 Gift of the Estate of Michael C. Williams
Karl Spreitz (<i>Relationship Series</i>), 1985 Acrylic on canvas 75.6 x 75.6	



Yehudi Menuhin
– *Green Horizon*
1982

Credits

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Catalogue Design:
Amy Smith
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Editing:
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Proofing:
Bradley Clements

Photography:
UVic: Holly Cecil
AGGV: Stephen Topfer

ISBN 978-1-55058-644-2

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and the Estate of Myfanwy Pavelic, 2019
Printed in Canada

We acknowledge with respect the Lekwungen-speaking
peoples on whose traditional territory the University of
Victoria stands, and the Songhees, Esquimalt and
WSÁNEC peoples whose historical relationships with
the land continue to this day.

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