ISLA BURNS, RCA

Canadian [b. 1952, Calcutta, West Bengal, India]
[d. 2024, Camrose, AB, Canada]

Isla Burns was born in Calcutta in 1952. She travelled frequently between five cities: Bombay, Monghyr, Saharanpur, Calcutta, and Gauhati. This time and these places left an indelible visual memory which later became a deep source of inspiration in her sculptures.

In 1963, she attended a convent school in Edinburgh, Scotland. Edinburgh, with its international festival of culture was another important exposure to painting and sculpture as well as theatre and music. During her last two years at the convent she became a day student and enrolled in night classes at the Edinburgh College of Art. She studied drawing and sculpture.

In 1970, her mother took a job at The Cross Cancer Institute in Edmonton as a radiation oncologist specializing in breast cancer. She arrived in Edmonton in January 1970 and immediately enrolled in the Alberta College of Art (now the Alberta University of the Arts (AUArts)) in Calgary where she studied under Katie Ohe and Ole Holmstead. She concentrated mainly on figurative sculpture and later abstract sculpture. In her third year she took an apprenticeship welding course at SAIT. After working with numerous materials (clay, plaster, wood, plastic and resin) she discovered steel. This was a major turning point, sparking a lasting love for this material.

In 1975, she went to the University of Alberta to take an MVA in sculpture, working in steel but also continuing with her interest in portraiture and the figure.

In 1978, the year she graduated, she received the Beta Sigma Phi Award in Art and Design.

Isla was offered a job after graduating at EBCO industries in Richmond, BC. EBCO had recently been contracted by Boeing in Seattle to fabricate freight carriers. The job included riveting and welding aluminum. She was the first female EBCO had ever hired as a welder. The respect of her foreman lead to her teaching riveting to other employees. She established a studio in Vancouver and started making sculptures.

A year later she moved to Saskatoon where she also worked as a welder repairing centrifuges for the oil patch. She established another studio and was soon showing at Art Placement and had a large sculpture purchased by the Mendel Gallery.

In 1983, she returned to Edmonton and started teaching at the University of Alberta. She taught there for 30 years.

In 1991, she was awarded a commission from City Hall in Edmonton to make a three-ton stainless steel sculpture.

In 2002, she received an Award for Excellence from the Alberta college of Art and Design (AUArts). Additionally, in 2002 she was accepted into The Royal Canadian Academy. In 2013, she was inducted into the Cultural Hall of Fame.

ARTIST STATEMENT

Whether looking at art or making art I expect to be emotionally lifted, to be taken out of the ordinary and transported into the unexpected and extraordinary. The feeling is visceral while at the same time it is also spiritual. The combination of these two sensations is the constant that keeps me making sculpture.

Too often our eyes take for granted what we are seeing we are not as tuned into the feedback from our visual senses as we are with music or smell or touch. For me, an image requires being aware of a visual presence and in that impassive silence of looking I want to be taken into and beyond the realm of form. There is a universal aesthetic that contains these sensations and qualities and it can be found in great art of all cultures.

It is this enduring transcending quality that makes the art of ancient cultures as relevant today as it was at the time it was created. I aspire to the constants in art, these are the things that move me, for they are truly expressive of all the aspects in the beauty of the human condition. – Isla Burns, 2017

"Let the beauty we love be what we do." – Jamaluddin Rumi
Quote taken from, "A Meeting by the River", Ry Cooder & V.M. Bhat

EDUCATION

1969	Graduated from St. Margaret's Convent, Edinburgh, Scotland
1968 - 1969	External student, Edinburgh College of Art, Edinburgh, Scotland
1970 - 1974	Diploma in Sculpture, Alberta College of Art, Calgary, AB
1975 - 1978	Master of Visual Arts, Sculpture, University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

2017	Tempered Steel, Peter Robertson Gallery, Edmonton, AB
2014	90 x 90, Celebrating Art in Alberta, AGA 90th Anniversary, Alberta
2014	Regions of Distinction, Edmonton Members of the RCA, Enterprise Square Gallery, AGA, Edmonton, AB
2012	Samskara, Peter Robertson Gallery, Edmonton, AB
2010	A Renaissance Group Show, Enterprise Square Gallery, Edmonton, AB
2010	Wrought Iron, Peter Robertson Gallery, Edmonton, AB
2009	Forms of Worship, Algoma Gallery, Sault Saint Marie, ON
2007	Fireworks, A collaborative exhibition with Karen Cantine, Peter Robertson Gallery, Edmonton, AB
2005	Metal Works, A collaborative exhibition with Karen Cantine, The Vanderleelie Gallery, Edmonton, AB
2004	Form-Space-Concept-Metaphor: Contemporary Alberta Sculpture, Special Art Exhibition Celebrating the centennial of Alberta, Triangle Gallery, Calgary, AB
2003	Migrations in the Third Dimension in Canada and the Cyclades, The Cultural Foundation of Tinos, Tinos, Greece
2002	5 Degrees of Separation, Art Gallery of Calgary, Calgary, AB
2001	75th Anniversary Exhibition, ACAD, Calgary, AB
2001	Recent Sculpture, Gallery One, Toronto, ON
2001	Beyond Craft, The art Gallery of South West Manitoba, Brandon, MB
2001 - 2003	Solo Exhibitions, The Vanderleelie Gallery, Edmonton, AB
2000	Solo Exhibitions, Paul Kuhn Fine Arts, Calgary, AB
1996	Modes of Abstraction, Misrepresentation, Edmonton Art Gallery, Edmonton, AB
1995	Hardingham Workshops 1986 -1995, Christ Church Mansion Lawns, Ipswich, UK
1995	The other Alberta Sculpture, Carlton University Art Gallery, Ottawa, ON
1992	Solo exhibition, Edmonton Art Gallery, Edmonton, AB
1991	Spectrum 91 – Women in Sculpture, Triangle Gallery, Curated by Katie Ohe, Calgary, AB
1990	Objects & Structures, 3 Dimensional Still Lives, Edmonton Art Gallery, Edmonton, AB
1989	Exotic Steel, FAB Gallery, University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB

1988 Recent Sculptures, Paul Kuhn Fine Arts, Calgary, AB
1987 Solo Exhibition, Edmonton Art Gallery, Edmonton, AB
1987 Triangle, Barcelona, Spain
1986 Hardingham Sculpture Workshop, Sainsbury Centre for the Visual Arts, The University of East Anglia, Norwich, England
1986 - 1990 Sculpture by Invitation, Edmonton Art Gallery, Edmonton, AB
1984 Triangle Artist's Workshop, Pine Plains, New York, USA
1983 Canadian Contemporary Art - The Current Generation, Edmonton Art Gallery, Edmonton, AB
1982 Seven Sculptors, Studio Exhibition, Edmonton, AB
1980 Eight Sculptors (Traveling Exhibition) Art Placement, Saskatoon, SK

SELECTED AWARDS AND HONOURS

1978 Beta Sigma Phi Award in Art & Design, University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB
2002 Award for Excellence, Alberta College of Art & Design, Calgary, AB
2002 Accepted into The Royal Canadian Academy of Arts
2013 Accepted into City of Edmonton's Arts & Culture Hall of Fame

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

SESSIONAL INSTRUCTOR

2013 Augustana College, Camrose, AB
2006 - 2010 Figurative Sculpture, University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB
2006 - 2009 Augustana College, Sculpture, Camrose, AB
2001 Abstract Steel & Wood Sculpture, University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB
1996 - 2005 Visual Fundamentals, An introduction to Sculpture & 3 Dimensional Design, University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB
1993 - 1994 Figurative and Abstract Sculpture, University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB
1989 - 1990 Figurative Sculpture, University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB
1983 - 1985 Visual Fundamentals & BFA Drawing, University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB

WORKSHOPS

1995 Visiting Artist, International Ceramic Workshop, Red Deer College, AB
1987 Triangle Artist's Workshop, Barcelona, Spain
1986 Hardingham Sculpture Workshop, Norwich, England
1985 Collaboration in Clay, The Works, Edmonton, AB
1984 Triangle Artist's Workshop, Pine Plains, New York, USA

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

2017 “The Artist's Studio”, Black Dog publishing, Book, Joseph Hartman
2017 “Living and vegetative work. Isla Burns explores organic qualities of metal sculpture”, Vue Weekly, Stephan Boissonneault
2012 “Studio Inside”, Edmonton Journal, Janice Ryan
2012 “Abstract Metal Sculpture Shines in Isla Burns Exhibit”, GIG CITY, Stuart Adams
2010 “Wrought Iron”, Edmonton Journal, Janice Ryan

2010 “Arts Section”, Phabrik Magazine, Sandra Sing Fernandes
2007 “Alberta Art and Artist's” Book, Patricia Ainslie & Mary-Beth Laviolette
2006 “An Alberta Chronicle” Book, Mary-Beth Laviolette
2006 “Art Spots”, CBC Documentary, Janice Ryan
2004 “Torch Songs - Katie Ohe & Isla Burns”, Legacy Magazine, Winter, Patricia Myers
2004 “Migrations”, Galleries West, Fall/Winter, Dr Caterina Pizanias
2004 “Dissident Acts. Spirit & Matter”, Artichoke, Spring, Dr Caterina Pizanias
1995 “Alberta Sculptors come in from the Cultural Cold”, Arts Books and Ideas, Ottawa Citizen, March 12th, Alan King
1994 “Steel Magnolias”, Globe & Mail, 7th of May, John Bently Mays
1993 “The Place of Sculpture”, Border Crossings, Vol.12, Number 3, Lelde Muchlenbachs
1989 “Of Earth and Steel: Taming the Prairie in Canada”, Vol.12, Practicing the Arts in Canada, Dr Caterina Pizanias
1987 “Isla Burns & lyle Lis At the EAG”, Art Post, Lelde Muchlenbachs
1987 “Isla Burns & Lyle Lis At the EAG”, Update Magazine, Russel Bingham

SELECTED PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

City of Calgary, Calgary, AB
City of Edmonton, Edmonton, AB
The Alberta Foundation of the Arts, Edmonton, AB
Grant MacEwan University, Edmonton, AB
University of Calgary, Calgary, AB
University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB
The Mendel Art Gallery, Saskatoon, SK
The Art Gallery of Alberta, Edmonton, AB
Canada Council Art Bank, Ottawa, ON
The Canadiana Fund, Ottawa, ON
The Glenbow Museum, Calgary, AB
Augustana University, Camrose, AB
City of Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain
Visual Art Collection, Foreign Affairs & International Trade, Ottawa, ON

SELECTED PUBLIC COMMISSIONS

The City of Edmonton, City Hall, Edmonton, AB
The University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB
Abu Dhabi, UAE

SELECTED PRIVATE COLLECTIONS

Edmonton, AB
Calgary, AB
Saskatoon, SK
Toronto, ON
Victoria, BC
Sault Saint Marie, ON
Dubai, UAE
Barcelona, Spain

London, UK
Norwich, UK