JENNIFER DICKSON, CM, RA

Canadian [b. 1936, Piet Retief (eMkhondo), South Africa]
[d. 2025, Ottawa, ON, Canada]

Born in South Africa in 1936, Jennifer Dickson graduated as a painter in 1959 from the University of London (Goldsmiths College School of Art). Between 1960 and 1965 she was an associate of S.W. Hayter's Atelier 17 in Paris. The 1963 Biennale de Paris awarded her the Prix des Jeunes Artistes pour Gravure. In 1974 she was awarded a Special Purchase Award from the World Print Competition (San Francisco Museum of Art). The 5th Norwegian International Print Biennale awarded her the Biennale Prize in 1980.

Jennifer Dickson emigrated to Canada in 1969, becoming a Canadian citizen in 1974. In 1976 she was elected a Royal Academician (R.A.) by the Royal Academy of Arts in London, England. As one of forty academicians, she was the first Canadian in the 200 year history of this prestigious institution to be so honored.

The Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography (CMCP) is an affiliate of the National Gallery of Canada. Jennifer Dickson's exhibition "The Last Silence" was curated and circulated in Canada and Europe by the CMCP. In 1993 "The Last Silence" opened in the Palazzo Te in Mantua, Italy, and broke attendance records.

She traveled extensively in Europe and North America documenting the history and symbolism of gardens. Her interests extended from the man-made to the natural landscape.

Born in Piet Retief, South Africa, in 1936, Jennifer Dickson trained as a painter and printmaker at Goldsmiths' College School of Art (University of London, England) from 1954 to 1959. Her graduate studies in etching were under Stanley William Hayter at the Atelier 17, Paris, with which she was connected between 1961 and 1965.

Jennifer Dickson played an integral role in the regeneration of printmaking in England in the 1960s. Her work was distributed widely by Editions Alecto of London, and exhibited in England, France, Belgium and the United States. (She was a contemporary of David Hockney and Allen Jones, both of whom were represented by Editions Alecto.) She founded and directed the graduate printmaking program at Brighton College of Art (now Brighton University) and was instrumental in integrating photography in to the printmaking program in the early 1960s. She attained the title of Senior Lecturer, and in 1963 was awarded the Prix des Jeunes Artistes pour Gravure at the Biennale de Paris.

In 1968 Jennifer Dickson left England for Jamaica with her husband, Ronald Sweetman, and their two-year-old son, William David Sweetman. She spent a year as Visiting Fellow in Fine and Applied Arts at the University of the West Indies. The late Dennis Scott, a distinguished poet and playwright, became a close friend and formative influence. The riots in Kingston and on the U.W.I campus provided the impetus for a move to Montreal in Canada in February 1969. In Montreal Dickson was warmly received by the Francophone printmaking community, many of whom she had known at Atelier 17 in Paris. On the introduction of Robert Savoie, she commenced printmaking, and subsequently teaching, at the Saidye Bronfman Centre. The friendship and patronage of the Montreal Jewish community encouraged her to play an active role as artist, educator and mentor, and sensitized her to the history and current concerns of the Jewish people in a broader context.

In the 1970s and 1980s Jennifer Dickson consolidated her position as an artist and photographer.

Through the support of Dr. Lorraine Monk, Head of the Still Photography Division of the National Film Board of Canada, Dickson's major photographic projects were purchased and circulated across Canada and in Europe. ("The Secret Garden" 1975 and "The Earthly Paradise" 1980.)

When the Liberal government decided in 1984 to dismantle the N.F.B. Still Photography Division, Dickson's role as an arts activist commenced. After six months of vehement protests from coast to coast, the government was forced to reverse their decision, and with the support of Marcel Masse and the newly elected Conservative government, the Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography came in to being. It was the CMCP who curated and circulated, in Italy and across Canada, Dickson's most recent project "The Last Silence: Pavane for a Dying World". In this exhibition Dickson addresses the desecration of our western European cultural heritage by vandalism, greed and war.

While living in Canada, Dickson maintains close professional contacts with Europe. In 1976 she was elected a Royal Academician (R.A.), the only Canadian to have been honored in the past two hundred years by the Royal Academy of Arts in England.

Much of Dickson's research has concentrated on the application of photography to process of etching (gravure). The chemicals used have proved to be highly toxic, and after suffering severe respiratory damage, Dickson became involved in the health and safety aspects of all media in the arts. In conjunction with Canadian Artists Representation (CARFAC) she initiated seminars to alert students and artists to the grave dangers of exposure to certain chemicals and art materials. Also, through CARFAC, she participated in various seminars, surveys and reports, whose topics ranged from the exclusion of the work of native Canadians from the collection of the National Gallery of Canada (in the 1970s) to teaching young artists survival skills in the marketplace. She worked with CARFAC on a campaign to reverse the short sighted decision of Roch Carrier and Donna Scott to eliminate twenty five years of Canadian cultural history by closing the Canada Council Art Bank.

Despite substantial amounts of time spent as an arts activist and mentor to younger artists, Dickson's primary focus is on her own work as an artist. She attempts in her work to reconnect the onlooker to the sacred aspects of the earth. In a world which seems intent on disemboweling itself, Dickson believes in the power of beauty and in the transforming (shamanic) role of art.

Jennifer Dickson trained as a painter and printmaker at Goldsmiths' College School of Art, London from 1954 to 1959, and her graduate studies in etching were under Stanley William Hayter at the Atelier 17, Paris from 1960 to 1965. She went on to found and direct the graduate printmaking programme at Brighton College of Art (now Brighton University) and was instrumental in integrating photography into the programme in the early 1960s. Dickson moved to Canada in 1969 where she taught at the Saidye Bronfman Centre in Montréal.

Dr Jennifer Dickson RA, Silver Streams (The Lily Terrace, Bodnant), Dickson's first solo exhibition was held at New Vision Centre, London in 1962. This was rapidly followed by a string of solo exhibitions held annually in countries throughout the world, including the UK, Belgium, South Africa, Jamaica, USA and Canada. A 25 year 'Retrospective' of her work was held at Galerie Dresdnere, Toronto in 1985. Dickson's work has also been included extensively in many international group exhibitions since 1956.

Dickson was made a member of the Royal Society of Painters, Etchers and Engravers, London in 1965, and was elected Royal Academician in 1976 (ARA 1970). In 1988 she was made a Doctor of Laws at the University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada. On July 1, 1995 Jennifer Dickson was named to the Order of Canada (C.M.). Her citation mentioned: "She is a painter, photographer, master

printmaker and garden historian whose works are treasured by collectors around the world". In 2002 she received the Victor Tolgesy Arts Award from the Council for the Arts in Ottawa for her contribution to the arts in Ottawa.

PHOTOGRAPHY AS A BASIS FOR JENNIFER DICKSON'S WORK

Trained as a painter and printmaker in the English academic tradition, Jennifer Dickson first picked up a camera to capture her images in 1975. The lack of a formal background in photography has proved a strength, in that being unaware of "the rules" she has broken them with impunity.

At five years old, in a Catholic convent, she was introduced to the 18th century approach to watercolour. She takes great delight in this medium, both for itself, and to introduce colour to the photo-etchings on which her European reputation is based.

As a young painter she had the luxury of painting her watercolours and oils on the spot. Few artists now enjoy such privilege. Therefore the camera enables the hunter-voyeur to bring back to the studio images which can evolve in a more contemplative way.

For Jennifer Dickson the photograph is a point of entry and not an end in itself. In her mixed media paintings the photo blow-up establishes the compositional structure. The gestural handling of light, shade, mood and weather evolves from the freedom of the act of painting in acrylics. A process of burial and retrieval, and a strong sense of ritual leads to the final resolution of the image. Jennifer Dickson's etchings are not literal documents. She attempts to capture the spirit of the place, using colour and light to evoke the transient nature of beauty.

LANDSCAPE AS METAPHOR

Jennifer Dickson considers her work a form of visual poetry. As a child growing up in Southern Africa, some of her earliest memories were of the immense arch of the star-studded sky. She experienced the bleached desolation of the Kalahari Desert, the iridescent blue of the Indian Ocean stained Venetian red at the mouths of rivers swollen by up-country rain.

Five years as an art student in a tough, grey and impoverished part of dockland London intensified her yearning for beauty. Italy, first glimpsed in 1958, offered visible traces of different strata of time. This was the first of ten journeys to a civilization which has had a profound influence on her aesthetic evolution. In Italy she witnessed beauty triumphant over the desecration wrought by the barbarity of man.

The impact of the Canadian landscape was slow in manifesting itself in Jennifer Dickson's work. Imagination is quickened by memory; it is familiarity which triggers image. As the Rideau River with its lakes and streams became part of the cycle of her day and seasons, the axis of water, sky and cloud supplanted the classical European landscape in Dickson's work.

In Jennifer Dickson's mixed-media paintings, watercolours and hand-tinted etchings, light is the essential animating factor. It glitters `a la Giverny on the quarry pool of the Butchart Gardens. The crepuscular fingers of dusk flicker across the Rideau River. There are hints of spring showers along the crest of the Mendip Hills. In a vision of both Old and New Worlds, these landscapes invite entry, and contemplation.

Jennifer Dickson worked in the following media:
Photo-etching and serigraphy, usually hand-coloured watercolour on paper.
Photo-based acrylic and oil painting.

Black and white, and cibachrome photography.
Video and multi-screen slide presentations.
Watercolours.

ARTIST STATEMENT

I want to reinforce a belief in beauty; in this way, every work I make is a statement.

– Jennifer Dickson, 2000

EDUCATION

1954 – 1959	Goldsmiths College of Art, London, England
1960 – 1965	Atelier 17, Paris, France

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2026	Summer Exhibition, Royal Academy, London, UK
2020 – 2021	Jennifer Dickson's The Credo Project, Ottawa Art Gallery, Ottawa, ON
2011	Wallack Galleries, Ottawa, ON
2001	Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, BC
2000	Wallace Galleries, Ottawa, ON
	Golin-Harris International, New York NY
1999	The Royal Society of Painter-Printmakers, Bankside Gallery, London, UK
1998	Wallack Galleries, Ottawa, ON
	Tatar-Alexander Photography, Toronto, ON
	AT Kearney, London, UK
1997	Wallace Galleries, Ottawa, ON
	The City Gallery, London, UK
	Art Gallery of Sudbury, Ontario, ON
	The Frederick Horsman Varley Art Gallery of Markham, Markham, ON
	Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, Birmingham, UK
1996	Wallace Galleries, Ottawa, ON
	The Gallery, Victoria Woolen Mill, Almonte, ON
	The City Gallery, London, UK
1995	Wallack Galleries, Ottawa, ON
	Royal Academy of Arts (Print Room), London, UK
	The Kamloops Art Gallery, Kamloops, BC
	Estevan National Exhibition Centre, Estevan, SK
	Moose Jaw Art Museum and National Exhibition Centre, Moose Jaw, SK
	Swift Current National Exhibition Centre, Swift Current, SK
1994	Joseph D Carrier Gallery of Columbus Centre of North York, North York, ON
1993	Wallace Galleries, Ottawa, ON
	The Ottawa Art Gallery, Arts Court, Ottawa, ON
	Centro Internzionale D'Arte E Cultura, Palazzo, Te, Mantua, Italy
	Il Centro Culturale Canadese, Piazza Cardelli, Rome, Italy
	The Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography, Ottawa, ON
	Wallack Galleries, Ottawa, ON
1992	Wallack Galleries, Ottawa, ON

	Galerie Dresdnere, Toronto, ON
	Alex Fraser Galleries, Vancouver, BC
1991	Wallack Galleries, Ottawa, ON
	Galerie Dresdnere, Toronto, ON
	Paul Kuhn Fine Arts, Calgary, AB
	The Nickle Arts Museum, University of Calgary, Calgary, AB
1990	WKP Kennedy Gallery, North Bay Arts Centre, North Bay, ON
	Temiskaming Art Gallery, Haileybury, ON
	Burlington Cultural Centre, Burlington, ON
	Wallack Galleries, Ottawa, ON

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2026	International Women's Day, Wallace Galleries, Calgary, AB
2026	Bold & Beautiful, Wallace Galleries, Calgary, AB
2026	Mother's Day, Wallace Galleries, Calgary, AB
2021	International Women's Day, Wallace Galleries, Calgary, AB
2014	Winter II, Wallace Galleries, Calgary, AB

SELECTED AWARDS AND HONOURS

AWARDS

2002	Victor Tolgesy Award by the Council of the Arts, for cultural leadership, Ottawa, ON
1980	A Biennale Prize at the 5th Norwegian International Print Biennale
1978	The Walter Moos Award at the First Canadian Biennale of Prints and Drawings
1973	A Special Edition Purchase Award, World Print Competition, San Francisco Museum of Art
1973	The George A Reid Award, Canadian Painter-Etchers and Engravers
1963	Prix des Jeunes Artistes pour Gravure, Paris Biennale

HONOURS

1995	Order of Canada (CM), Canada
1988	Honorary Doctorate (LLD), University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB
1970	The Royal Academy of Arts (RA), London, England, UK

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

GUEST LECTURER

Guest lecturer at nine US Universities.
Invited to speak across Canada at Canadian art schools and universities.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

2023	Dickson, Jennifer. *Poems for a Phantom Lover*. Porcupine's Quill, 2023.
1991	Dickson, Jennifer. *Gardener's Journal*. Porcupine's Quill, 1991.
1989	du Cornet, Rikki. The Fountains of Neptune. Front cover illustrated by Jennifer Dickson. McClelland & Stewart, 1989.
1988	Dickson, Jennifer. *The Hospital for Wounded Angels*. Porcupine's Quill, 1988.

1987 Billings, Robert. *The Revels*. Front cover illustrated by Jennifer Dickson. Porcupine's Quill. 1987

1984 Urquart, Jane. *The Little Flowers of Madame de Montespan*. Illustrated by Jennifer Dickson. Porcupine's Quill, 1984.

ADDITIONAL EDUCATION, RESIDENCE, AND EXPERIENCE

1968 Visiting Fellow in Fine and Applied Arts at the University of the West Indies, Kingston, Jamaica

SELECTED PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

Art Gallery of Hamilton, Hamilton, ON, Canada
Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography, Ottawa, ON, Canada
Carleton University, Ottawa, ON, Canada
The London Museum, London, ON, Canada
Musée d'art Contemporain, Montreal, QC, Canada
Musée du Quebec, QC, Canada
Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal, QC, Canada
National Film Board of Canada, Montreal, QC, Canada
National Gallery, Ottawa, ON, Canada
The Still Photography Division, National Film Board of Canada, Ottawa, ON, Canada
University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB, Canada
University of British Columbia, Toronto, ON, Canada
University of New Brunswick, Fredericton, NB, Canada
Birmingham City Art Gallery, Birmingham, UK
British Museum, London, UK
City Art Gallery, London, UK
Ferens Art Gallery, Hull, UK
Portsmouth City Art Gallery, Portsmouth, UK
Royal Academy of Arts, London, UK
South London Art Gallery, London, UK
Towner Art Gallery, Eastbourne, UK
University of Kent at Canterbury, Canterbury, UK
Victoria and Albert Museum, London, UK
Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, France
Palazzo Te, Mantua, Italy
University of West Indies, Jamaica
National Gallery of Art, Wellington, New Zealand
Museum of Contemporary Art, Fredrikstad, Norway
National Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa
Ball State University, Indiana, USA
Chicago Art Institute, Chicago, USA
The Cincinnati Museum of Art, Ohio, USA
The Art Bank, Canada Council, Ottawa, ON, Canada
The Art Gallery of Brant, Brantford, ON, Canada
Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, USA
Evelhjhem Art Centre, University of Wisconsin, Wisconsin, USA
Metropolitan Museum, New York, NY, USA
Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, USA
Smithsonian Institute, Washington DC, USA

Hermitage Museum, Lenningrad, Soviet Union
Museum of Contemporary Art, Skopje, Republic of Macedonia