

as a significant increase in the value given to critique. “Our next project then is to produce the rigorous and robust scholarship that will give Black Canadian art the life it gives us,” he writes (238). The chapter does not fully discredit those before it, but it does ask for more, from institutions, curators (including the editors of this book), critics, and audiences alike. It is a very welcome addition to the volume and, paired with Forni’s earlier honesty, does well to flesh out potential models for responding to Black Canadian art with the intellectual work it deserves. Attentive to issues that are becoming increasingly common in contemporary exhibitions, the section speaks to the need to pause and resituate ourselves, lest we endlessly repeat our mistakes and reinforce the very margins we are trying to abandon.

As such, *Making History* constitutes not only a critical document but an essential guide for future museological work. Through a chorus of compelling voices, the volume contextualizes the complicated relationship between Black Canadian art and institutions, with essays that work to renew the terms upon which Black representation has been dictated. The most exciting part of the book is the sincere openness about the active, long-term work required for more intellectually engaged, laterally related, and actively counter-hegemonic curatorship, as well as ongoing care for art and for each other. As McKittrick acknowledges, it is necessary to begin “thinking about Black art as aesthetic possibility” and “consider how creative representations of Black life

offer a politic, and demand a reading practice, that is not beholden to prevailing negative descriptions of Blackness” (180). An energizing first step in this reading practice, *Making History* serves as a new beginning, and provides an important resource for arts workers looking for new models, as well as anyone looking to learn about Black Canada, its art, and the pathways it makes to the future.

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1. See [www.blackcanadiandiasporacentre.com](http://www.blackcanadiandiasporacentre.com).
2. *New-Found-Lands*, curated by Pamela Edmonds and Bushra Junaid, Eastern Edge Gallery, St. John’s, NL (September 9 – October 18, 2016); *Position As Desired: Exploring African Canadian Identity / Photographs from the Wedge Collection*, curated by Kenneth Montague, Art Gallery of Windsor, ON (February 11 – May 7, 2017); and *Practice As Ritual/Ritual As Practice*, curated by Andrea Fatona, A Space Gallery, Toronto, ON (November 24 – February 23, 2022).
3. Sara Callahan, *Art + Archive: Understanding the Archival Turn in Contemporary Art* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2022), 1–2.
4. Winfried Siemerling, “From Site to Sound and Film: Critical Black Canadian Memory Culture and Sylvia D. Hamilton’s *The Little Black School House*,” *Studies in Canadian Literature* 44, no. 1 (2019): 30.
5. Justin A. Coles, “Black Desire: Black-centric Youthtopias as Critical Race Educational Praxis,” *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 36, no. 6 (2023): 983–84.

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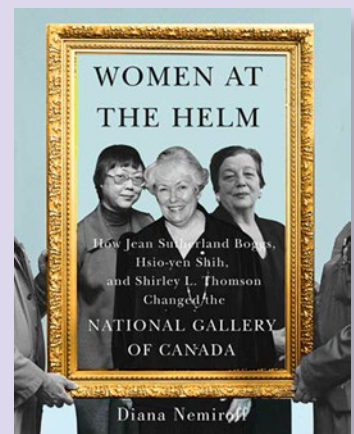
Diana Nemirow  
***Women at the Helm: How Jean Sutherland Boggs, Hsio-yen Shih, and Shirley L. Thomson Changed the National Gallery of Canada***  
 Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2021

552 pp., 85 illus.  
 \$44.95 (paper) ISBN 9780228008736

Anne Dymond

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After initiating significant shifts towards more diverse representation, the Director of the National Gallery of Canada (NGC) resigned before the end of her term, significant questions arose about the length of time taken to appoint a new director lead to questions about the Board, there were public enquiries into the problematic governing legislation of the national museums, and national polemics erupted over the display of controversial art: the 1970s and 80s were volatile at the NGC.



That these issues could as easily describe the last few years at the NGC indicates just how topical *Women at the Helm* is. Diana Nemirow, a curator at the Gallery for more than twenty years before becoming Director of the Carleton University Art Gallery, has gifted us with essential reading for anyone interested in how large museums actually work. Her focus on the Gallery’s three female directors from 1966 through 1997 explores why the NGC was such a notable exception to the general exclusion of women from the top rungs of power in the art museum

world and what might be learned from their tenure.

Divided into four sections, one for each Director, plus one covering the period between Hsio-yen Shih's resignation and Shirley Thomson's arrival, this comprehensive overview reveals the complexity of any Director's role. Each faced challenges dealing with a complicated and changeable relationship with the government's oversight structure, each fought for the autonomy of the Gallery, each faced significant challenges around funding, and each had to create an appropriate administrative structure to mobilize the skills and minimize the weaknesses of their staff. Striking a balance between biographical accounts, such as Andrew Horrall's book on former Director Alan Jarvis, and the often quite focused examinations of moments or exhibitions so often found in museum studies, Nemiroff provides the first comprehensive account of the NCC Director's role.

The immense impact of Jean Sutherland Boggs's role as Director is the focus of the first four chapters. While some of this material is familiar from Douglas Ord's history of the Gallery, under Nemiroff's guidance the focus is more squarely on the role of the Director. Nemiroff lays out Boggs's successes towards creating "a thoroughly first-rate institution," by focusing on top-quality research, exhibitions, and publications, but also by planting the seeds for future growth, such as plans for a new building, a better library, and a significant publishing department. It reveals how important international respect and connections

are to so many of the Gallery's functions: facilitating acquisitions, loans, and the now-common major touring exhibitions. Among Boggs's many long-impacting achievements, she lured Brydon Smith from the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO) and concomitantly changed the acquisition policy so he could begin collecting contemporary American art. This shift away from a parochial interest in Canadian art is well contextualized, and the impact of the turn towards the contemporary is recognized as truly formative. Smith's 1967 acquisition of Andy Warhol's *Brillo Soap Pad Boxes* (1964) is one component of Boggs's necessary efforts to improve the Gallery's international reputation. Previous director Charles Comfort had refused to certify them as art only two years prior; following on Comfort's 1962 exhibition of numerous fakes from the collection of American magnate Walter P. Chrysler, the NCC's international reputation had to be repaired. Soon, photography would be added as a collecting area, and Boggs's deft re-focusing of staff member James Borcoman's position again had long-term impact. That Boggs allowed both curators a small discretionary budget is the kind of telling detail Nemiroff uses as evidence of Boggs's empowerment of her curators. Nemiroff signals as major coups the increase in the acquisitions budget that Boggs secured from the government (which sadly remained unchanged for almost twenty-five years), and the purchases of works by some significant European artists, although the text might have further contextualized the continued focus

on Euro-American art. Boggs is also credited with significant staff growth. When Boggs arrived in 1966, curatorial decisions were made by the Director and two others; when Boggs left, ten years later, there were seven curatorial departments and 17 curators—a marked uptick in professionalization that changed the Gallery's capacity. Nemiroff's assessment of the 1968 National Museums Act, which led to the formation of National Museums Commission (NMC), is central to the story of the National Gallery and to the Director's decreasing access to real power. This centralizing body was intended to reduce administrative duplication in the four national museums. However, as Boggs predicted, in fact, it reduced their autonomy, their ability to lobby effectively for their institutions, and often became a bureaucratic juggernaut. This oversight body intertwined with the lack of progress on a new building to replace the Lorne Building in ways that deeply impacted both Boggs and Shih. In Nemiroff's account, it seems clear that sometimes leaving is the most powerful thing a director can do. The essential insight, however, is just how much Boggs's ambitions for the Gallery shaped what it has become.

Both because the material was less known to me and because it has such clear connections to issues now animating museums, I found the two chapters on Dr. Shih's tenure revelatory. As with other sections, Nemiroff begins with a short biography: hired away from the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) and the University of Toronto, Shih was a surprise appointment. Although the

surprise may be attributed in part to her area of expertise—she was an expert on Chinese art, which was not a collecting area for the Gallery—Nemiroff reveals how Shih’s identity as a Chinese-Canadian woman was regarded as appropriate for the Trudeau government’s new interest in diversity (if not yet in decolonization). Shih’s commitment to diversifying the collection so that it could begin to represent diasporic Canadians had some major successes. The acquisition of an impressive collection of primarily Indian art, owned by the estate of Parsi-American art dealer and collector Nasli Heeramanek required significant expertise; because its cost far exceeded the budget, Shih convinced Max Tanenbaum, a Toronto-based philanthropist, to acquire and donate almost 300 works. Shih also curated or brought to the Gallery at least six significant exhibitions of non-Western art in her roughly four years there. Nemiroff laments that this broadening of the Gallery’s focus was “a seed that fell on barren soil” (300). But Nemiroff is careful not to directly link this shift in focus to the controversies around Shih’s leadership, described in more lurid detail in Ord’s text. While Nemiroff acknowledges personality as a component of the mass exodus of most of the Canadian curatorial department, she is careful not to tread into areas where she does not have evidence, which leaves intangibles such as sexism and racism, unconscious or not, to the interpretation of the reader.

The third section covers the period from Shih’s departure in 1981 to Thomson’s hire in 1987. The extent

to which the relation with the NMC had become unworkable should be clear through the resignation of two successive Directors, but sometimes Nemiroff’s anecdotes are more telling. As an example, in 1984, the government decided the Still Photography Division of National Film Board collection would become a sub-museum of the NGC and planned the announcement in Toronto. Nemiroff reveals that Gallery Director Jo Martin had to request permission to leave Ottawa to attend, because his travel outside the city had to be approved by the NMC. In this case, permission was refused, and the NGC Director could not even pretend to be a central player in this decision which had major consequences for the Gallery. The role of the Director in these crucial years in the struggle to get a new building are framed by Nemiroff’s interpretation of Martin as Boggs’s faithful lieutenant. Boggs returns as the key figure, hired as head of the newly formed Canadian Museums Construction Corporation to lead the charge on the new building.

The relatively smooth operations of the Thomson years (1987–97) make for fewer revelations but suggest paths to success. Nemiroff notes that Thomson inherited a much better situation than either of her predecessors: the long, hard fight for a new building was essentially done; the NMC was on its last legs and Thomson was able to reassert the autonomy of the Gallery; even the budget had improved. Thomson effectively defended the autonomy of the gallery in fending off complaints about Hans Haacke’s critique of Alcan in *Voici Alcan* (1983) at the

new buildings opening exhibitions. Her success here perhaps led her to underestimate the care needed at the outset of the *Voice of Fire* controversy. Public outcry over the Gallery’s purchase of American artist Barnett Newman’s 1967 piece led to threats of political interference, which has been considered more extensively in Bruce Barber, Serge Guilbaut and John O’Brian’s edited volume on the issue.<sup>1</sup> Nemiroff considers Thomson’s role in the controversy judiciously, even generously, describing her response as “less than stellar.” Yet even in a period of the Gallery’s history I thought I knew well, there were some surprises. For example, just how active the Board was in the acquisition of a Rothko in 1993, down to weighing in on the timing of the offer, seems unusual in an oversight Board.

In the 1990s, when Nemiroff herself was such a key player at the Gallery, we might have hoped for more gossip, but Nemiroff is too professional to publish the tell-all scoop of which we might have dreamed. Nevertheless, there are times when her assessment is almost too careful. We do not learn much new, for example, about the slow recognition on the part of the Gallery that it needed to do more to decolonize the collection and represent the diversity of the country’s art. More surprising is how indirectly the text sometimes deals with systemic gender issues. For example, Thomson finds out she is paid less than her second in command, the Deputy Director she hired. Nemiroff admits “There are a few possible explanations for this inequity, amongst which gender discrimination cannot be ruled out,”

but she goes on to explain in detail the government's employment pay grid, in effect minimizing the role of systemic gender bias in her analysis. Similarly, Nemiroff's observation that all four female directors of the gallery have had PhDs leaves the reader to explore on their own the implication of the unstated fact that none of the male directors have earned this credential. Despite such quibbles, the impact of this text on our understanding of the evolution of the National Gallery in these key decades is profound. This is an important book, and the successes and failures that Nemiroff lays bare make for essential reading for anyone interested in Canada's artistic heritage or in institutional leadership. We can only hope that future Directors of the Gallery will consider it required reading.

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1. See Bruce Barber, Serge Guilbaut, and John O'Brian, eds., *Voices of Fire: Art, Rage, Power, and the State* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996).

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Stephanie Springgay  
***Feltness: Research-Creation, Socially Engaged Art, and Affective Pedagogies***

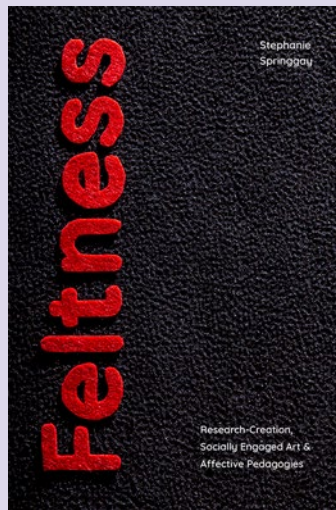
Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2022

224 pp., 63 color illus  
\$25.95 (paper) ISBN 9781478018902.

Laura Ryan

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Through repeated touching, felting locks together individual fibers to create a new material. Stephanie



Springgay uses the process of *felting* as a metaphor for her proposed pedagogy of feltness, which calls for collaborative, intimate, and tactile modes of arts education. Springgay argues that affective, interdependent, and experiential projects can *felt* a class(room) into a restorative space of learning, yielding unanticipated learning outcomes.

Springgay's book *Feltness: Research-Creation, Socially Engaged Art, and Affective Pedagogies*, threads this concept of feltness through a series of case studies of generative arts prompts posed to elementary through to postsecondary students. In one instance, elementary schoolers were asked to paint blocks of colour onto narrow wooden panels roughly two feet tall. They spiked these "colour bars" into the sand of a Toronto riverbank, creating a horizontal row of bright color along the shoreline. The students then photographed these bars with their peers, situating them within the Canadian landscape. In doing so, the students asserted their own relationship

with the land they occupy by visually inhabiting it. The project taught the students about the *terra nullius* myth of much Canadian landscape painting, which has historically often shown the country as uninhabited, while making art that actively disrupted the idea (1–2). Another prompt, offered to secondary and university classes, asked students to listen to one of their peers give a presentation in a language most of the class did not speak (121). In one iteration, students listened to their Indigenous classmate lecture in Cree inside the classroom, prompting an experiential and affective confrontation with settler dominance in education (146). These research-creation prompts and the events or projects they generated are discussed alongside other similar projects to form a series of case studies of research-creation at each educational level.

The book comprises an introduction and seven chapters, with sixty-three color photographs of these described research-creation events included in a middle insert. Each chapter offers new examples of *felt* pedagogies and a trove of impressively current supporting theoretical concepts. With frequent reference to Natalie Loveless and Jorge Lucero, Springgay grounds her own work within the growing scholarly movement affirming art as a worthy and potentially transformative mode of education. The text certainly succeeds in its effort to affirm the value research-creation as a productive educational process—a process that is valuable because of its difficulties: its incompatibility with current education and its need for