

Walter Bachinski on Frederick Hagan

Walter Bachinski 0:00

My name is Walter Bachinski. I'm a practicing artist. I've been exhibiting, probably since the early 70s. I work in variety of media - for the last twenty-five or so years, making books.

Walter Bachinski 0:11

I started OCA around 1960. I was aware of Fred Hagan in my first year, but we didn't really study printmaking. First year was sort of an all-around year, you did a little bit of this, a little bit of that. But I certainly picked up on that Fred was a very important teacher at the college. In my second year, and taking printmaking, I made an effort to really try and get to know him. And, you know, being young and all that kind of thing, and sort of ambitious, maybe trying to impress him at the same time.

Fred had this habit of coming in early to the studio, so he would be in the workshop, in the print shop around eight o'clock. I made a point of being in the printshop pretty early on in my second year. I started asking him all sorts of questions. I was bugging him a lot, you know, slowly getting to know him. And he was wonderful in the sense that he never got tired of answering my questions about this artist or that artist. I mean, I was just exploring everything at that point, and he was extremely helpful. Yeah, he knew a lot about a lot of things that I was trying to figure out.

Walter Bachinski 1:18

We did become friends towards the end. He was instrumental in deciding where I was going to go to graduate school because at that point, in the 60s, the mid 60s, there was no place to go in Canada. Nova Scotia was just thinking about starting a graduate program, but Fred had a Canada Council grant to visit printshops in the United States. He went to several universities to check out their art departments, and the one that he found that he connected to the most was the one in Iowa. And so, when I decided what I was going to do after leaving OCA, I ended up applying to Iowa.

Walter Bachinski 1:50

Oh, the other thing I should mention, the program - it was called museum studies. We met once a week at the Royal Ontario Museum and we did a lot of drawing there. Fred had developed a number of exercises that I found really, really difficult to solve, but really, really helped in terms of my understanding of composition. I'm not sure how long after I left that program continued, but I found that extremely, extremely helpful. The idea of studying from the masters was something that Fred really instilled in me, and I continue to do that even now. I keep looking at artists that I admire and still try to learn from them. A direct influence in terms of the actual figuration of Fred's work didn't last much longer than I was a student at OCA, but the idea of working out, studying, all that kind of thing stuck with me right until right now. His work ethic - I don't know how he ever produced the amount of work that he produced, because he was a full-time teacher at the Art College and there was an hour spent on either end of his teaching day

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driving. And so, he was working at night and on the weekends and he brought up, what, five children. The work ethic stuck with me - you can't wait around for things to happen.

Walter Bachinski 2:37

Fred made a point, if he needed a table in the shop, he would make the table. He wouldn't go out and, you know, ask the principal, "can I have the money for a table." He would actually get the lumber and make the table. So, when I started teaching, that's the approach that I took. If I needed a table, or a bench, or some piece of equipment that I knew I could make, I would make it. That sort of carried over. I took Guelph because I was starting from scratch and I could build something. I remember just having a room with nothing in it, and then thinking back to Fred's situation where he would have often the need for this or the need for that, so I did a lot of the building of things early on when I started teaching.

Walter Bachinski 3:54

The students affected me in a way that, I think, was very important. I learned a lot from my students. I really had this interest in books, in making books. I would get these characters from OCA in the printshop during the summer, but they didn't want to make one-of-a-kind prints, what they wanted to do was make books. So, I said okay, go ahead in my printshop making books. And that really got me going quite a bit in terms of maybe I should start making books myself. They were really helpful in pushing me in my own work towards the making of books. The other way they affected me was their attitude about what art should be. They would question me about some of the things that I was doing. And because I really responded to these students.... I can't say their innocence... but there was something about the nature of their being that that affected me in my approach to making art... It's hard to describe and it's hard to pick out the works that reflect this.