

Wendy Cain on Frederick Hagan

Wendy Cain 0:00

I first encountered Fred Hagan in 1972. I had just graduated from a combination of art history and art studio at U of T and had a strong-willed mother who told me she wanted me to be an independent young woman. And so, I went to the College of Education. I spent a day and a half there, and then I went kicking and screaming from there thinking that I simply couldn't do that - this year, I would just barter a year of studio. So, I went down to the Ontario College of Art and arranged for an interview the next day - came back with a portfolio and was accepted. It was the year after we had this visionary president, and he basically abandoned all of the curriculum at the Art College. From my point of view, it felt like it was like a graduate school where people were just working independently. But I was floundering because I thought I wanted to be a painter, and I was trying to find my feet. Probably about two months into the semester, I wandered into the printmaking department. Fred Hagan was always a strong-willed man and a person who held strong opinions... he had been on sabbatical the year before and felt that this chaos was not his problem. And so, he basically stepped back from any administrative work in the print studio because he felt that they needed to accept that if they wanted the place to be running properly, then they would have to acknowledge that he was the head of printmaking and the administrator. So basically, he let people be very free, as he did with me.

Wendy Cain 1:30

Because I thought I wanted to do lithography - which was his love - he proceeded to say, "okay, here are the presses." And, you know, "go about whatever you want to do." So, I did work, I don't think I was that successful at it, but then at the beginning of the second semester, he waltzed me into the screen printing room and said, "I think maybe you'd like to work in here." And that changed my life. I never looked back. I felt like I had partly come home when I landed in printmaking, but I'd really come home when I landed in the screen room. I was his student in a time when there was very little structure in the entire college, and I felt it was to my benefit because I was in the community, but I didn't have to conform to a particular curricular structure that I didn't necessarily want to follow. And so, I graduated in 1974, and then I got a teaching assistant position for the next year. I bartered with Fred, and I said, I will give you a day a week as a monitor and do whatever assistant stuff would be required if you let me work in the studio a couple days a week. And so, that was the deal that we had for two years. Then, one of the faculty erupted into a dispute with Fred and took a year off, so Fred hired three of these young whippersnapper printmakers in the fall of 1978 to replace this person's time. He never came back, and most of us never went away. So, I went from being a student, to being a teaching peer, and then eventually to being a friend.

Wendy Cain 2:58

I think the most important lesson that I could take away from him was his ability to give a student creative space. I think it would be part of that observational skill that he had, that he would assess what it was that was going to work for you. I noticed, certainly for me, but for a number of other people, that he would basically just... he would be the facilitator, he would

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provide the environment for you to be able to just be an independent printmaker. He wouldn't necessarily interfere with the content that you were working with, or the practices that you were developing, or dealing with stylistic issues. I mean, he himself was so embedded in a figurative practice that you would think that that would be the kind of thing that he would respond to - and I suspect that that's why Ted Fullerton is such a good advocate for Fred because they spoke same kind of language - but I never felt that I was disadvantaged by the fact that I was not dealing with a figurative practice. I was able to go into the studio and to produce work and to be in that kind of safe conceptual space because of Fred.

Wendy Cain 4:03

Printmaking does require discipline, and it does require a particular kind of mindset. It's a sequential way of thinking. For myself, I found it really useful to have a very vague idea of what I wanted to achieve, and then just begin working in the studio. And being able to do that kind of accumulation, and that building of components of the image that you're working with - there's a quality of trust that's involved in that. And I think that Fred communicated that because he would have trust in a person to be able to work through it and do it.

Wendy Cain 4:37

When I think back on the teaching that I did, I was probably close to being a sponge, in that the best part for me of my teaching career was the interaction in the studio. I think that what I learned from teaching was the importance of engagement. If you're not actively seeking or absorbing engagement, then you're really not present. I think it's that sense of being present, and being able to think on your feet, and respond honestly and with some kind of sensitivity to whatever comes about in a studio session, that is really the crux of being at all successful in education. It's that one word, engagement.