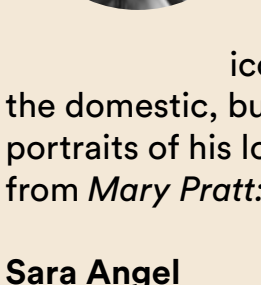


THE MAGIC OF MARY PRATT

Live today, ACI's latest book, *Mary Pratt: Life & Work* by Ray Cronin, reveals the story of how the iconic Newfoundland artist re-contextualized and elevated the ordinary and unseen in everyday life into an exalted realm.



Two years ago, when Mary Pratt died, Canada mourned the incomparable realist painter. Immediately, ACI commissioned author Ray Cronin to explain why she was so beloved. While some called Mary Pratt a “visual poet of the kitchen” because her subjects included egg cartons, aluminum foil, and jars of jelly, Cronin’s new book makes it clear that this characterization was far too simplistic. Pratt became a feminist icon by not only presenting a subverted and sublime portrait of the domestic, but also by boldly taking on her adulterous husband, painting portraits of his lover. For your reading pleasure, here are excerpts and images from *Mary Pratt: Life & Work*.

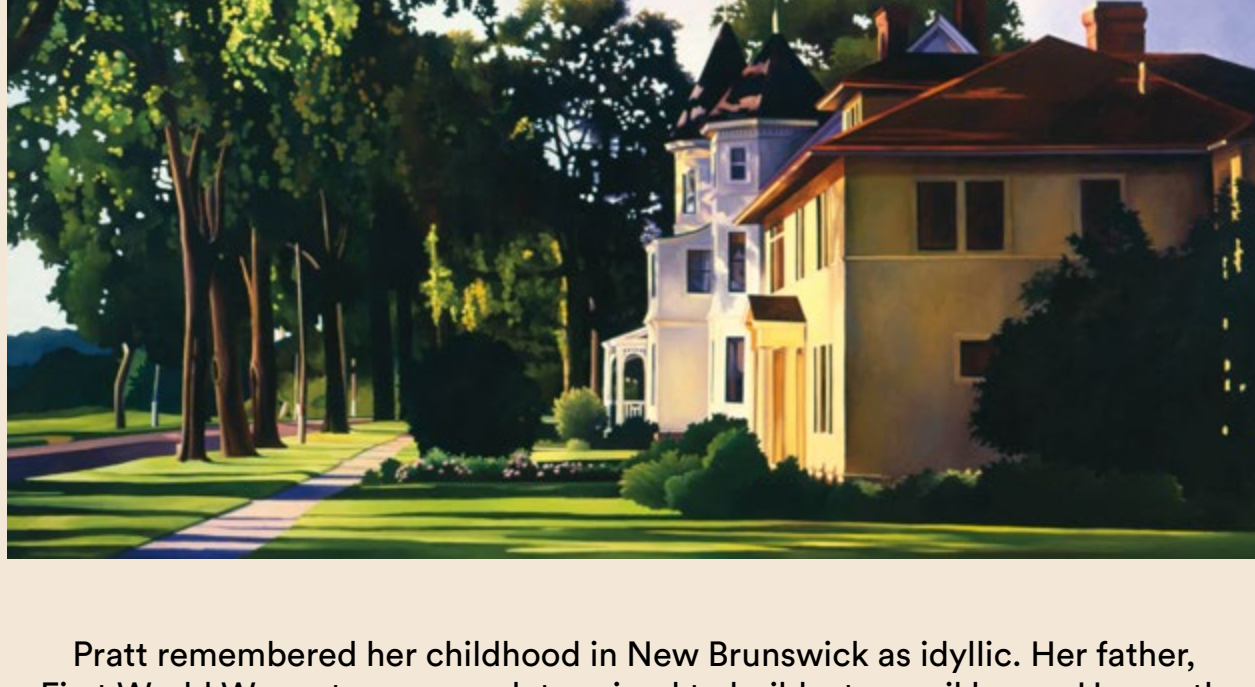
Sara Angel

Founder and Executive Director, Art Canada Institute

Private Collection

A FREDERICTON HAVEN

Waterloo Row—Fredericton, 1972



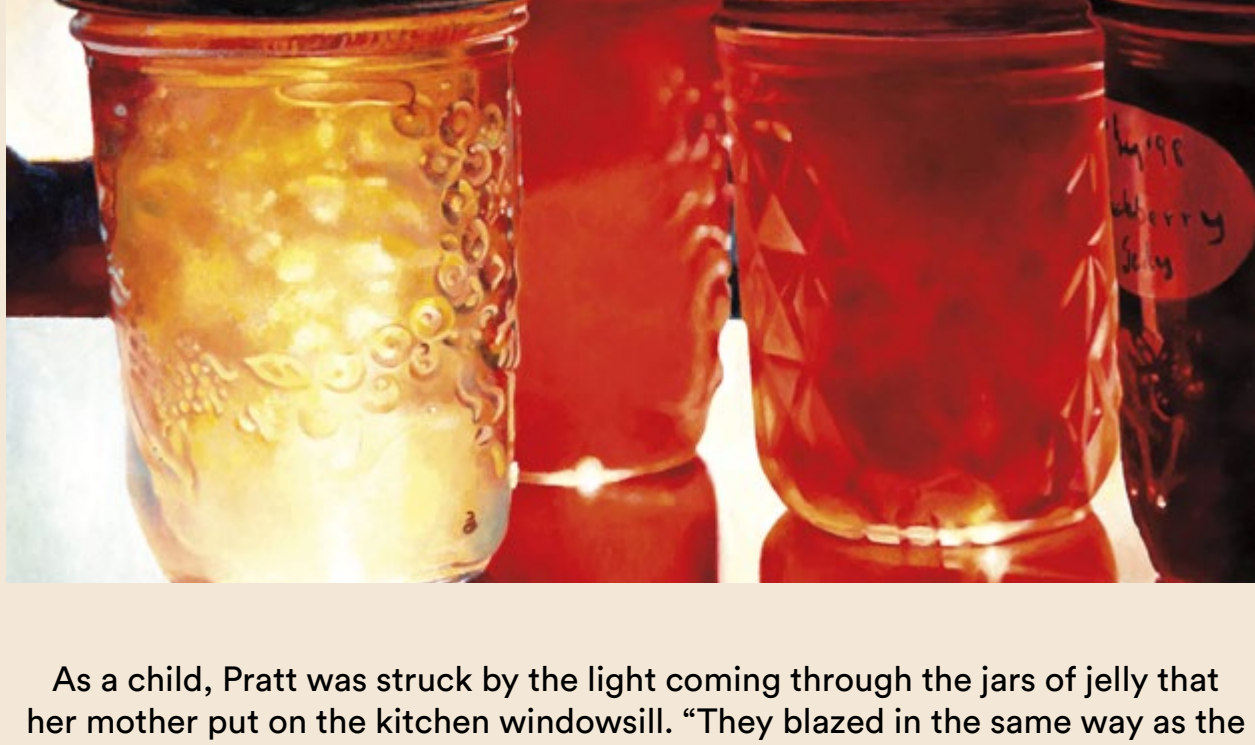
Pratt remembered her childhood in New Brunswick as idyllic. Her father, a First World War veteran, was determined to build a tranquil home. Her mother also wanted their house on Fredericton’s prestigious Waterloo Row—which Pratt would later memorialize in this work—to be a haven, ordered inside and out.

[Learn More](#)

Private Collection

THE SHAPE OF WATER

Jelly Shelf, 1999



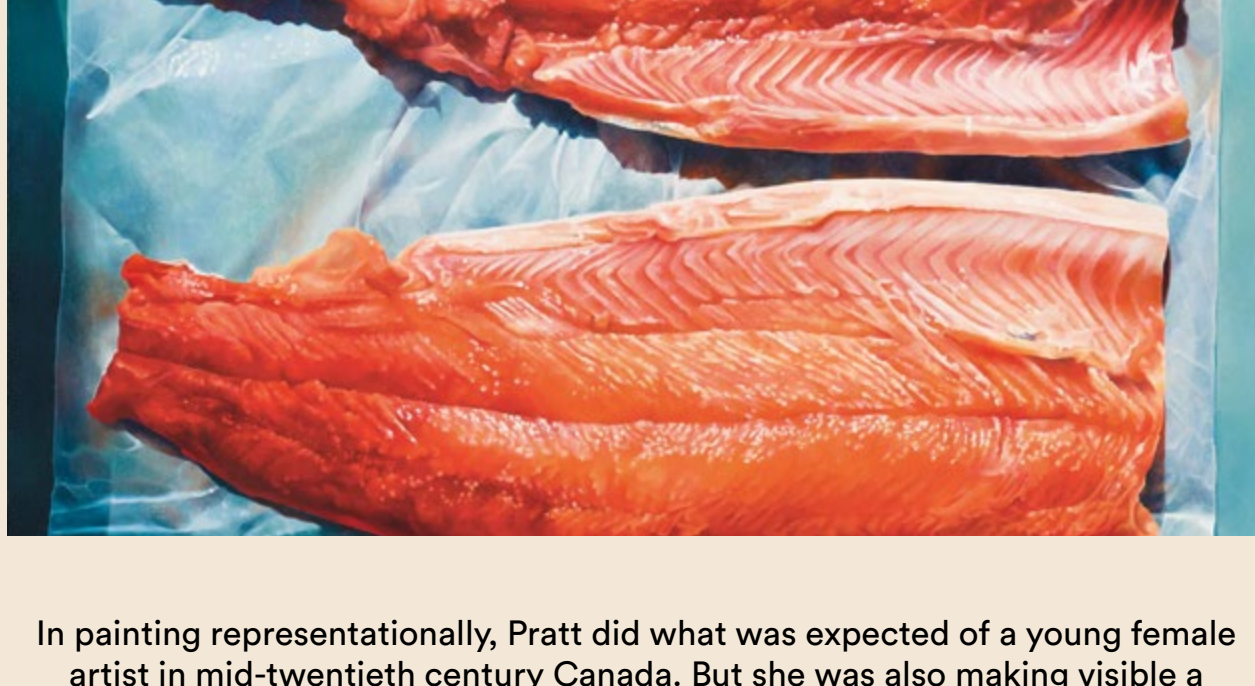
As a child, Pratt was struck by the light coming through the jars of jelly that her mother put on the kitchen windowsill. “They blazed in the same way as the church glass,” Pratt later recalled. Recreating this experience, she filled jars with water tinted with food colouring “to keep the magic of that brilliant coloured light.” Pratt captures this moment once again in her painting *Jelly Shelf, 1999*.

[Learn More](#)

McMichael Canadian Art Collection

THE MAGIC OF REALISM

Split Grilse, 1979



In painting representationally, Pratt did what was expected of a young female artist in mid-twentieth century Canada. But she was also making visible a marginalized reality. Today, her focus on domesticity, surrounded by the trappings of a middle-class upbringing, is read more as realist social commentary than representation.

[Learn More](#)

Private Collection

BED RINGER

The Bed, 1968



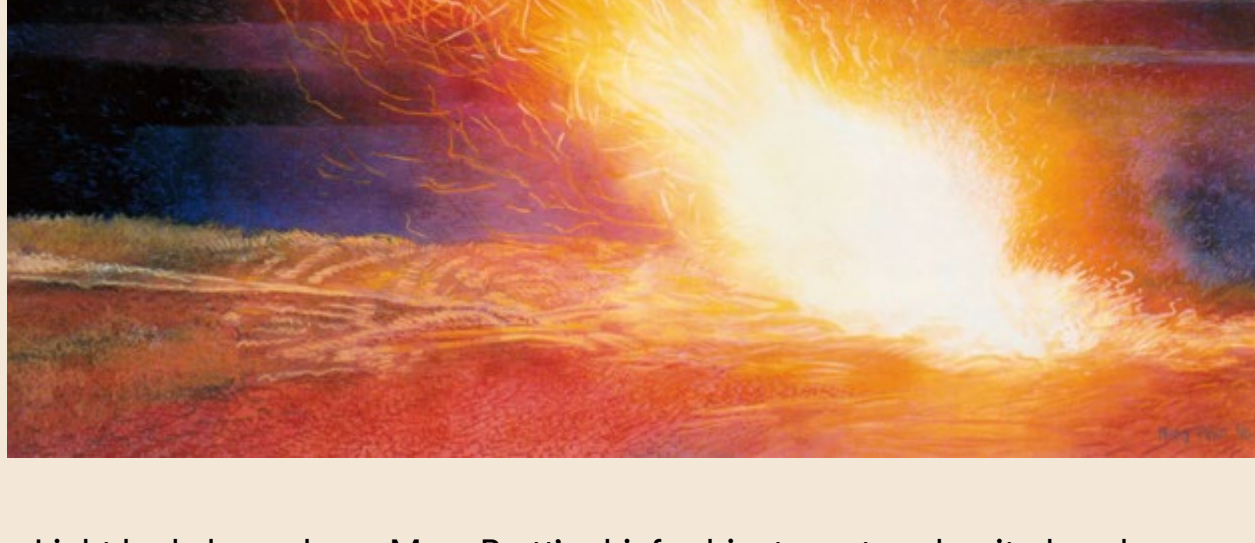
Pratt painted pictures that foregrounded flesh, sex, and death, like this work, *The Bed, 1968*. Despite perceiving her reputation as being “sweet and lovely and full of maternal concern,” Pratt explained, “unless something gave me a sort of erotic charge, I wasn’t interested.”

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Sun Life Assurance Company

THE INCENDIARY APPARITION

Burning the Rhododendron, 1990



Light had always been Mary Pratt’s chief subject, captured as it played across the surfaces of things, transforming the mundane into the extraordinary. This painting, however, is about light itself as a beautiful destroyer. Based on a photograph of a dead rhododendron on fire in her back garden, this work references the biblical story of God appearing to Moses in a burning bush, and speaks directly to how light is both a force of destruction and revelatory.

[Learn More](#)

Beaverbrook Art Gallery

BRUSH WITH RETALIATION

This Is Donna, 1987



Donna Meaney, pictured here, came to live with the Pratt family to help with the housework and children. She ended up modelling for Mary’s husband, Christopher, with whom she had an affair. Cronin reveals how Pratt boldly subverted the situation, making her husband’s mistress the subject of her art.

[Learn More](#)



I was lucky to know Mary Pratt, and remain surprised and proud that she trusted me to write about her on so many occasions. Mary was the first artist I encountered who had a legion of dedicated fans—“my people” she would say—who loved her art and through it loved her. Count me among them. I wanted to write about Mary Pratt for ACI in order to share with as wide an audience as possible what an extraordinary artist and person she was.

Ray Cronin

Author of *Mary Pratt: Life & Work*

We hope that in this time of isolation Pratt inspires you to find meaning and delight in your own everyday surroundings. If you enjoyed this newsletter, please share it.

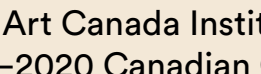
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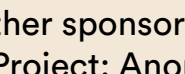
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Image Credits: [1] Mary Pratt, *Eggs in an Egg Crate*, 1975, oil on Masonite, 50.8 x 61 cm, Memorial University of Newfoundland Collection, The Rooms Provincial Art Gallery, St. John’s. [2] Mary Pratt, *Waterloo Row—Fredericton*, 1972, oil on board, 75.8 x 117.2 cm, private collection. [3] Mary Pratt, *Jelly Shelf*, 1999, oil on canvas, 55.9 x 71.1 cm, private collection. [4] Mary Pratt, *Split Grilse*, 1979, oil on Masonite, 56.1 x 64 cm, McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario. [5] Mary Pratt, *The Bed*, 1968, oil on canvas, 91.4 x 91.4 cm, private collection. [6] Mary Pratt, *Burning the Rhododendron*, 1990 watercolour and pastel on paper, 127.6 x 239.4 cm, Sun Life Assurance Company, Toronto. [7] Mary Pratt, *This Is Donna*, 1987, oil on canvas, 185.4 x 106.7 cm, Beaverbrook Art Gallery, Fredericton.