

*"Life is short and the art long." - Socrates*

## Drawing with Gerry Squires

by Kathryn Welbourn

It's hard to think that we have come to the end of the radiant works of Gerald Squires. He was the first to paint the difficult tangle of our interior landscape — rock, twisted trees, moss, lichens, the vast tangle of the barrens, sudden caribou — or horses galloping across the skyline — thick clouds moving just as fast. His humane and startling portraits were the same — real, searching and full of glory.

Spending time with a work by Squires rubs off on you. You see his dramatic, waiting boreal forest, his moving barrens, his muscular rocks and cliffs, his beautiful light all around you. It's the gift of his paintings to allow you to see what has always been here, to feel your own humanity in the place that you live.

I met Gerry by taking one of his drawing classes. At the end of the weekend session, he encouraged me to keep drawing. He said it would improve everything else I was trying to do. He suggested the Group of 77.

I took his advice, and for the next three years, just about every Thursday, I went to the drawing sessions at the St. John's Arts and Culture Centre. For less than 10 dollars anyone can show up and draw a nude model for two hours. It's still amazing to me that almost every week Gerry would be there, working away with the 10 to 15 other regular members who came to the practice.

Gerry was a long-time member of the decades-old group. Often, after struggling and cursing over my own effort, covered in charcoal, I would take a break and watch Gerry draw. I've been told Gerry also cursed and sweated over a difficult pose or a part of a drawing that wasn't coming right, but I never saw that. He looked relaxed and concentrated at the same time. His drawings emerged under his confident hand — beautiful and original.

Seeing a man of his prodigious talent working week upon week over his own drawing is beyond inspiring. It makes the act of drawing, at whatever level you may be, seem a vital part of being alive. Gerry was willing to discuss just about anything — how to paint in nature when the world is so enormous, the infuriating gap between what you want to create and what you actually manage to do, what the heck the meaning is of one of his surrealist paintings hanging in The Rooms, or the advantages of Blundstone boots that can "take you from the woods to church and back home for your dinner."

It's hard not to have stars in your eyes when thinking or writing about Gerry — he was gentle and funny, encouraging and complete, a brilliant, generous man. Gerry was at the first drawing session after the summer break, on September 10. I had been told by a friend that he was ill and there was nothing more to be done, that he had been spending as much time as he could in his studio painting. He looked pretty good that day. We were glad to see him there. Someone put the coffee on and after some conversation, the model struck a pose and we all got down to work. It was the last time we would draw with Gerry. His presence there is deeply missed.



*Sometimes a model wouldn't show up so we would model for each other. These are drawings members of the group made of Gerry when he took his turn.*