

Judy Williams /

THE SEARCH FOR THE TRUE CEDAR

The Search for the True Cedar is a cycle in watercolour that was exhibited as part of the Vancouver Art Gallery's Alternate Space program in Spring, 1975. I was moved by the series, especially by its mystical complexity. It struck me as being a latter-day (and local) evolution of the Legend of the True Cross.

IMAGES

The Search for the True Cedar: Discovery of the True Cedar, 36" x 24½", w/c, 1975.

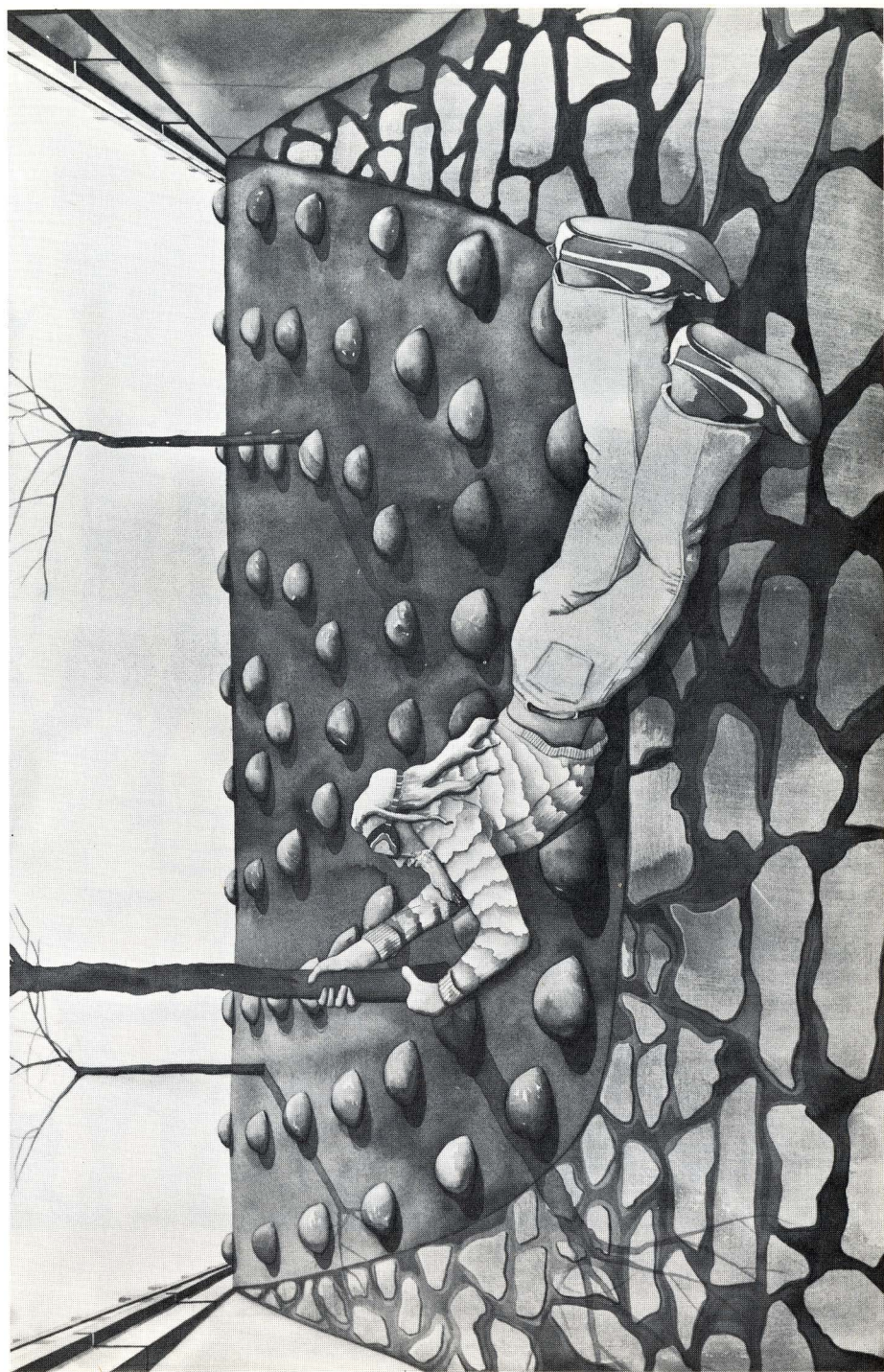
The Search for the True Cedar: Need, 11½" x 39", w/c, 1975.

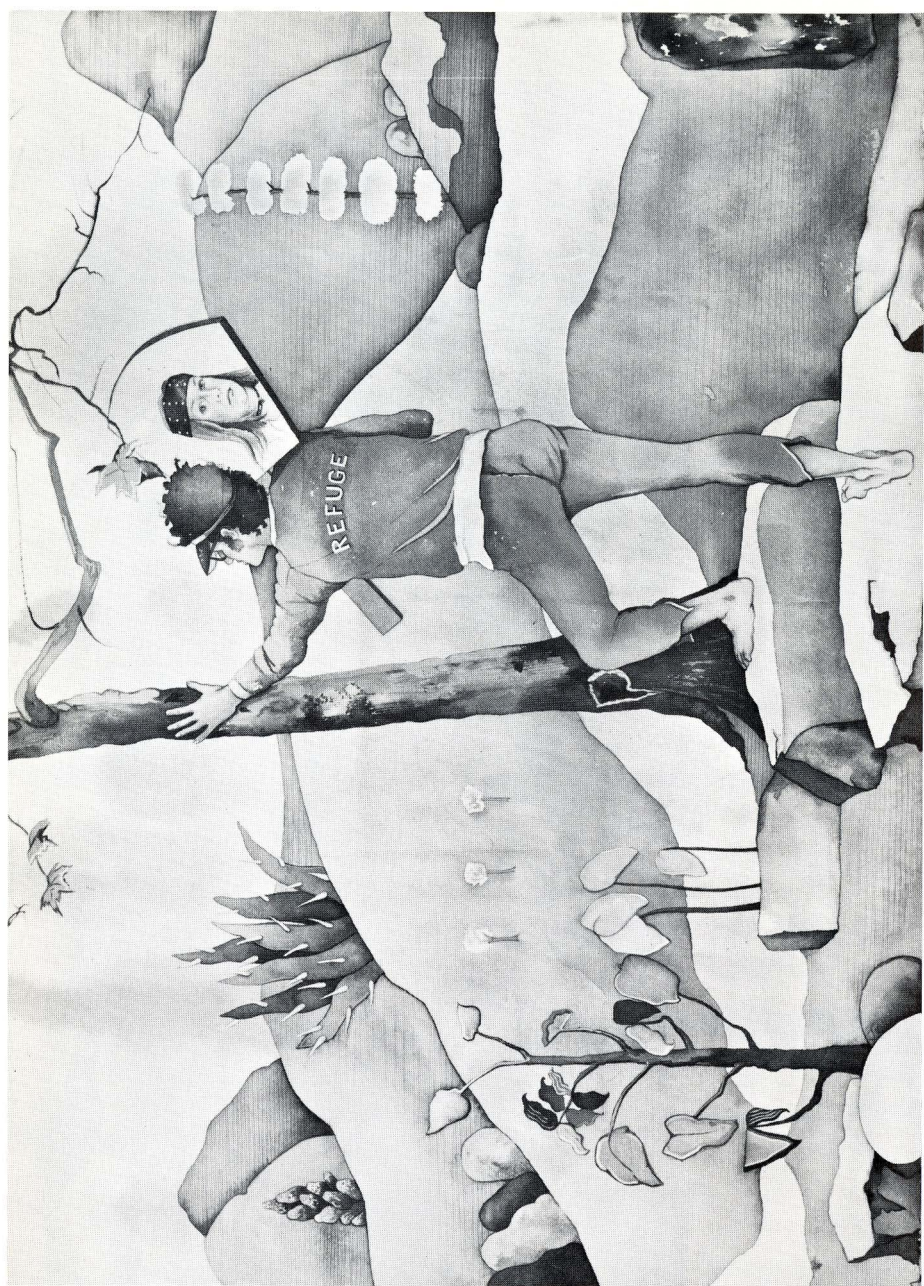
The Search for the True Cedar: Leaving Refuge, 21½" x 30", w/c, 1975.

The Search for the True Cedar: Artistic Technique, 35" x 25½", w/c, 1975.

Photography: Tod Greenaway









The paintings that I call *The Search for the True Cedar* came as a *revelation* to me. Although that is the hardest thing to say about them, I can't think of any other word to use. They simply fell into place and I looked at the world in a different way when those paintings happened to me. I look at *people*, whereas before I had been looking at shapes and forms, and things.

(How did they originate?) . . . One specific fact. I purchased four years ago (with a number of other people) 186 acres of land on Desolation Sound (near Refuge Cove, B.C.) not far from the endless beaches I enjoyed as a child on Texada Island. . . . The land was bought without a great deal of thought, but with a lot of love and dreams. I have always been attracted by "folly" — by the word, "*folly*" — by the folly of idealism and adventurism . . . by those things generally dismissed as uneconomic, impractical, dangerous, spendthrift or foolish. . . . Well, Refuge Cove is like that and I definitely wanted to be there. But it wasn't just the place that I liked, but the whole idea of a land co-op and its attendant *madnesses*.

As I worked to build . . . houses (on this land), I was overwhelmed by the forest and the sea; I was horrified by the havoc we were wreaking. Overcome with anguish whenever we cut trees down (and by the hard physical labour of working in the country, moving it around), I was (nevertheless) sustained by the interaction of the people around me and their confrontation with the land. We were building where no one had ever built before and that felt good; for good or ill we were falling trees and pouring cement as if we planned to stay. (Although) it's one of the great, noble experiments, the question *was* and still *is*: "Are we at work to *murder trees*?"

The paintings simply *happened*. I just saw what there was to do. I chucked out my ideas about how I *ought* to make art and painted what I was participating in — the inter-relationships between the people at Refuge Cove and the land (itself) interested me more than the building . . . I wanted to paint the *folly* of an illusive, highly

necessary but *unnecessary* search for what we see is true. And, why not a search done in the most Romantic, Canadian-frontier way? *A figure with axe . . . in landscape.*

I like the *folly* of making art or chopping wood. The paintings (in the cycle) are, of course, just beautifully coloured, inert pieces of paper. The Cedar That Was Searched for (as split) is a metaphor for (quest for) the *nameless something* that explains existence. There is *nowhere to go and nothing to find* — that was something I thought I knew, but now after doing these paintings *I know it*. . . . The process of doing *The Search for the True Cedar* paintings caused (and causes) changes in me and in the people I paint. The people are *real* and they cannot help but be affected by what I paint. The works sometimes reflect events and ideas past, but occasionally they *foretell*. That is because I am not just a mirror, but I am creating out of disparate pieces of my being *a new thing* and I can actually move beyond my own knowledge by . . . *splitting the shake with the grain*, by moving with the time.

I have begun some new works called: *Sea Door: Reward*. As the tide moves in and around me, the sea “door” presents me with the junk of the world. What comes to me here — the dead bodies, the sea-changed glass, the kelp and the pain of human interaction — that is what I am painting. And the “reward” is simply for *hanging around*.

(From a taped message sent to *The Capilano Review*.)

— Judy Williams
December, 1975