



The Drawers - Headbones Gallery

Contemporary Drawing, Sculpture and Works on Paper

Gertrude Kearns

Abstract Works

1989-1992

September 8 - October 4, 2007

Commentaries by Peter Goddard & Julie Oakes

Artist Catalog, 'Selection of Abstracts 1989-1992 - Gertrude Kearns'
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This catalog was created for the exhibition titled "Abstract (B&W) & Abstract (Colour)"
at Headbones Gallery, The Drawers, Toronto, Canada, September 8 - November 1, 2007

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Rich Fog Micro Publishing, printed in Toronto, 2007
Layout and Design, Richard Fogarty

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ISBN 978-0-9782458-6-3

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Micro Publishing
Toronto Canada

Gertrude Kearns - Abstract Works 1989-1992

We're talking about men's eyes. Cop's eyes. Killer's eyes. Of putting a face on bravery or violence. Gertrude Kearns has just returned from visiting an army camp and remembers looking into those sort of eyes there. "It's the state of mind of the warrior," she reflects. "There's a flatness to it. The challenge to me is not to lose myself in it and congruently not to forget it."

"Abstract Works 1989-1992" was completed during the first Gulf War brought to us by Bush I, setting the stage for the great Middle East meltdown conjured up by Bush II in more recent years. The group of work - or rather, groups - will no doubt come to be seen in terms of the artist's subsequent travels across the psychotic states of 20th century genocide both far ("UNdone:Dallaire/Rwanda") and near ("United States of Being: the John Bentley Mays Portraits."). The past is inevitably re-invented to suit the present.

Thus the recurring image of the hacksaw in "Saw Series" and "Conflict Group" is to be imbued with an ethos of aggression and/or regression. Discipline, self-discipline and control were very much on the artist's mind here as she was beginning to marshal her forces for the more overtly, militaristic "minds of might" work to follow more than a decade later. However I do also find in the fluid, softening lines, as well as even the somewhat anthropomorphic rendering of the handles - leading one to think of later Philip Guston - Kearns was also conjuring up more benign, familiar associations that go with granddad's basement workbench rather than those more in line with Texas Chainsaw Massacre II.

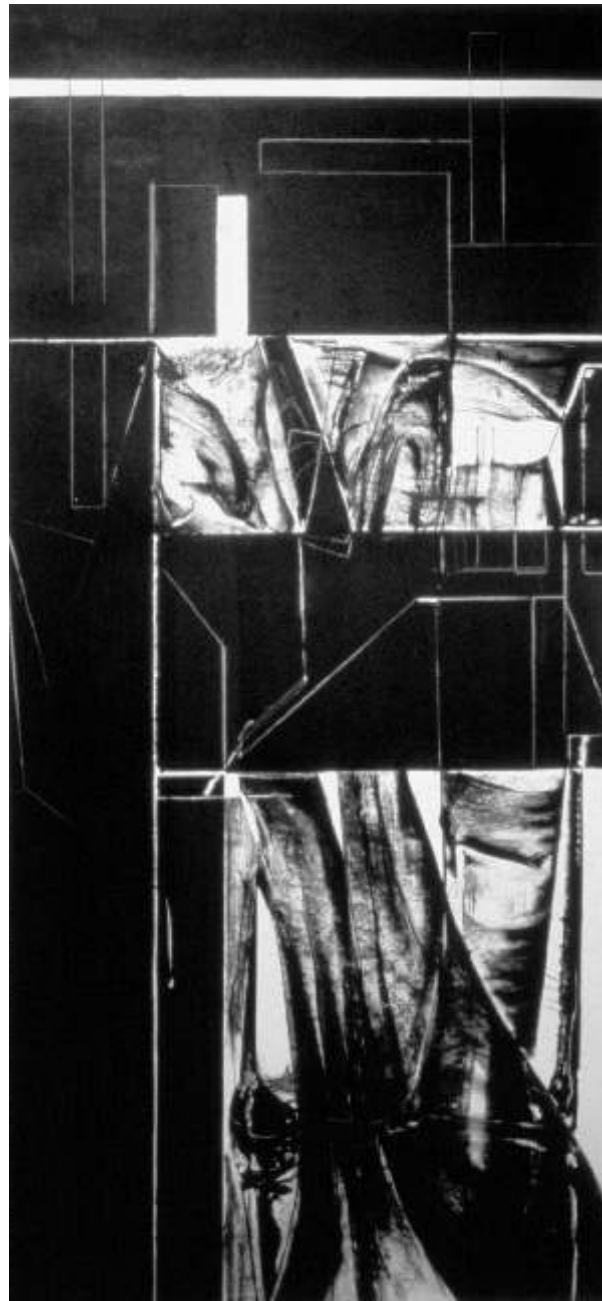
An aside - or maybe not. Kearns's musical background pays us a visit in the cacophony of *Repercussions* (1992) and the more contrapuntal *Here There* (1989) - a pianist she's played a lot of Bach in her time and in the '50s album cover cool of *The Apartments* (1992), a work that would not be out of place along side something from Ulf Puder and the New Leipzig School.

The artist herself believes that much of her work in the early '90s pre-figured her subsequent militaristically inflected work. In her way - typically, with an admirable aversion to current fashion - Kearns builds on one aspect of critic Clement Greenberg's conflation of masculinity, abstraction, surface and flatness. Yet it's not for the gender biased, quasi-nationalistic reasons in Greenberg's mind but as her way of intellectually embracing and aesthetically embodying the heroic ideal inherent in the warrior mentality that she would visit later. Like true grit, absolute flatness is impossible to obtain due to the play of colours in a work, however minimal, and the feelings they inevitably generate. Yet Kearns's allusion to absolute flatness - the surface on the surface sense you find with *Yellow Black #1* and *Yellow Black #2* (both 1991) - is her way to approach idealism's unyielding potential in times fractured by ever fluctuating emotional stress.

And indeed a closer inspection of "Abstract Works 1989-1992" allows a better understanding of the emotional and intellectual depths we must fathom with Kearns's later images of men at war - at war with themselves, as often as not. With them Kearns is directly looking at the warrior's way of putting a face on the ideal self - of embodying the idea of virtù in the sense the word was used in the Renaissance.



Repercussions - 77 x 44 inches - oil/charcoal on paper - 1992



Systems - 79 x 38 inches - oil/charcoal on paper - 1991



Installation photo, east wall, 675 King Street West, Toronto
Kearns Willemse Exhibition, Independent and Non-Aligned, October 18-November 15, 1991
Photo by Elaine Kilburn, 1991, Toronto



Capability, Conflict Group - 77 x 50 inches - oil/charcoal on paper - 1991



Constricted, Conflict Group - 77 x 50 inches - oil/charcoal on paper - 1991



Mind Set, Conflict Group - 77 x 50 inches - oil/charcoal on paper - 1991



Red Black - 80 x 44 inches - acrylic, crayon, charcoal on paper - 1992



Constructions - 57 x 44 inches - acrylic, crayon, charcoal on paper - 1992



The Apartments - 38 x 44 inches - oil, pastel, charcoal on paper - 1992



Yellow Black #1 - 38 x 44 inches - oil, graphite on paper - 1991



Yellow Black #2 - 54 x 38 inches - oil, graphite on paper - 1991



Containments - 72 x 96 inches - acrylic on canvas - 1992



Horse and Rider - 68 x 72 inches - acrylic on canvas - 1992



Blue Yellow Black #3 - 72 x 48 inches - acrylic on canvas - 1992



Blue Yellow Black #2 - 72 x 48 inches - acrylic on canvas - 1992

Gertrude Kearns - Versatility In An Abstract Language

A division can be made between the drawings and the paintings in order to clarify the difference between the two while still revealing the common bond strength.

In many of the drawings, although derived from within concrete reality (the saw), the work expresses a characteristic which is not specific to the object. Rather, it pertains to the formal aspect of art that is abstraction and by emphasising the shape, especially of the handle, new associations are made. The obvious and intended association to the bull, as the double grip of the saw handle forms the horns, is inescapable. Yet, this is not a depiction of a bull, but a sympathetic resonance with the qualities of the beast. There are myriad art historical usages of the animal, from the ancient Greeks where Zeus assumes the form of a bull to entice (and eventually rape) Europa to Picasso's repeated use of bulls and bull fights as symbols of virility, rights of passage, violence and war. The bull has been a loaded visual trope.

The dominant size of the paper works with the stark use of black, white and sometimes red supports the aggressive associations as does the fact that the referential object is a saw, a jagged blade, a cutting tool. That the point of menace has been transferred from the blade to the handle furthers the sense of rich layering. 'Handsome' is an unavoidable adjective when describing Gertrude Kearns' work and 'handsome', being the term most used to denote masculine beauty, strength and vitality; is seductive. These are beautiful, elegant pieces, dignified in bearing and well appointed. They show muscle both in the well defined shapes and the sheer physical scope.

When the saw is no longer evident or other readily available references such as the architectonic leaves the conversation, as in the yellow, blue and black paintings, certain qualities (elegance, virility, confidence and resolve) remain in tact. Without the specific directive, the dynamic between the shapes is less didactic, even veering on playful. There is a sense of abandon and freedom in this brave and ambitious work, as if Kearns has decided to show us her versatility in an abstract language, her accomplishments a declaration of her sure footedness. The magnificence of the work, secure on all levels, intellectual to technical, commands respect.

Julie Oakes



Gertrude Kearns with Capability, 1991
Photo by Cylla von Tiedemann, 1991, Toronto

Gertrude Kearns

1950-Born in Canada

2007 CANADIAN WAR MUSEUM Ottawa: May 2005- permanent installation of works Canadian War Museum, Ottawa, War Art Collection and on loan: curator Dr Laura Brandon

AWARDS

1996: National Aviation Museum Honourable mention, national competition Artflight
1995: National Aviation Museum First prize, national competition Struggle for Peace
1992: Ontario Society of Artists Most Outstanding Work, Anthony Miles Award, jurors Doris McCarthy + Kathryn Minard 1991 Gulf Crisis painting
1983: Toronto Art Director's Club Merit award with Vosburgh Design Studio, Toronto

EXHIBITIONS/INSTALLATIONS one-person

2005: Nov 17-Dec 11: *United States of Being the John Bentley Mays Portraits*, Lehmann Leskiw Fine Art,
2004: Jan 15-Feb 14: *blue yellow black* abstract works, 1993-97, Lehmann Leskiw Fine Art, Toronto
2003: Dec-Jan 7: *Dean of Queen* installation Pages window, Queen West, Toronto
2002: Oct 30-Nov 16: *UNdone: Dallaire/Rwanda*, Propeller Gallery, Toronto
2001: Apr 4-21: *Stills*, Propeller Gallery, Toronto
2001: March: *Rocky 1.6*, Peter Pan, Queen West, Toronto [SPIN Gallery]
2000: Oct 1-27: *Rocky 1.5*, Academy of Spherical Arts, Toronto, curated: Gail Sherkin
1999: Nov: *Squeegee or Not Squeegee*, installation Pages window, Queen West, Toronto
1999: Sept 16-30: *Rocky 1*, 71 Sullivan St. Studio, Toronto
1999: Sept 25-Oct 3: ARTSWEEK Featured Event, Open Studio, Toronto
1999: 'squeegee works in process' 73 Sullivan St, Toronto
1998: Dec: *DANCERS*, Peter Pan, Queen West, Toronto
1998: Feb-Mar 8: *PORTRAITS*, Rivoli, Queen West, Toronto curated: Nancy Tong
1997: July 1- Sept 30: *Conflict Works*, Ruby and Edwardh Barristers, Toronto, curated: Jean Teillet
1996-1993: annual October shows 1 Atlantic Avenue, Toronto
1994 Nov 4-Dec 4: *Portraits of Toronto People*, 1 Atlantic Avenue, Toronto
1993-1990: annual studio shows, 73 Sullivan St, Toronto
1991 Oct 18-Nov 8: Kearns Willemse Show: Independent and non-aligned, 675 King West, Toronto [with Theo Willemse] 1990 Saw Series and 1991 Conflict Group
1989: June Studio Show, 191 Niagara St., Toronto
1984 Nov 23-83-Jan16-84: *Portraits*, The Elmwood Club, Toronto, [with sculptor Angela Houpt]
1983 Jan 5-29: Watercolours, Rio de Janeiro portraits+landscapes
Koffler Centre for the Visual Arts, Loggia Gallery, North York

GROUP EXHIBITIONS /JURIED and Auction

2007 Nov 11 Canadian Forces Artist Program-DHH NDHQ, Ottawa
2007 October Kingston Portrait Prize, Finalist
2007 Sept 8-Oct 4 *Abstract (B&W) essays by Peter Goddard and Julie Oakes & Featured in Gykan Room*
2007 May 28 AUCTION *Important Canadian Art*, Sotheby's in association with Ritchie's Toronto
2007 April 12 AUCTION *12 on 12* Centre for Contemporary Canadian Art Database- CCCA, the Gladstone Hotel, Queen West, Toronto

GROUP EXHIBITIONS (cont'd)

2006: Aug 23-29: *Propeller Turns 10*, alumnae-Propeller Gallery, Toronto
2006: Apr 22-May 24: *Results of the Headhunt*, The Drawers-Headbones Gallery, Toronto
2006: Apr 1-Apr 30: *Abstract*, gallery artists, Lehmann Leskiw Fine Art, Toronto
2006: Feb 25-Mar 28: *Body Language*, Lehmann Leskiw Fine Art, Toronto
2005: Oct 7-29: *The Kingston Prize for Contemporary Portraiture*, juried, Kitty Scott, Richard Rhodes, Gananoque Firehall Theatre portrait of Major-General Lewis MacKenzie
2005: Oct 10-Dec 30: *Boots on the Ground*, Canadian Embassy Gallery, Washington DC GK at opening on Nov 11-05 representing History and Heritage DND -- 5 radio interviews CBC across Canada from Washington Nov 11-05
2004: Sept: Lehmann Leskiw Fine Art, Toronto, *Artsweek, Gallery Artists*
2004: Feb 28-Mar 4: *Monkey See Monkey Do*, SPIN Gallery, 1100 Queen West,
2004-2000: Jan 7-18/04: Propeller Gallery *SPARK members show*, annual members shows
2004-2000: Propeller Gallery, Toronto, *Annual Valentines Shows*
2003: Apr 10-27: *A Proximate*, Zypr Gallery, Toronto curated: Emelie Chhangur
2000: Oct 18-Nov 4: *Lamentable Expedients*, Propeller Gallery, Toronto, curated: Donald Brackett
2000: Oct 17-29: *Dreams and Nightmares*, Gallery 1313, Toronto, Curated: Noxious Art Gallery
2000: June 14-July: *1 Persona*, Propeller Gallery, Toronto, curated: Napoleon Brousseau
1999: Dec: *Mighty Canadian Art*, Red Head Gallery, Toronto
1999: Sept: *Gesampt Kuntswerk*, curated: Robin Donovan, Poor Alex Theatre Workshop, Toronto
1999: July: Squeegie exterior installation Brunswick House, *COOL ART Annex Show*, Toronto
1999 Jan: *annual juried show [x 2]* Art Gallery of Mississauga, Mississauga
1998 June 3-6: *Spirits of Power*, Lubicon Legal Defence Fund, A SPACE Gallery, Toronto
1996 May: *Artflight* National Aviation Museum, Ottawa Honourable mention
1995 May: *Artflight* National Aviation Museum, Ottawa First prize, juried: Pierre Landry, National Gallery and Dr. L. Brandon, Canadian War Museum
1996: Portraits in Lonsdale Gallery, Toronto, *not hung*
1993: Mitchell McNaught Gallery, Hamilton, gallery artist
1992: Madison Gallery, Toronto, gallery artist
1992: *Homeworks*, Dance Umbrella of Ontario, studio of Ian McKay, 2 works from 1991 Gulf Conflict group as set for dancers

CATALOGUES/BROCHURES

Sotheby's in association with Ritchie's Toronto, M ay 28 2007 *Important Canadian Art* item 145, pg 114
The Drawers-Headbones Gallery *Contemporary Drawings and Works on Paper*
A Selection of Heads Results of the Headhunt, April 22-May 23, 2006
Propeller Centre for the Visual Arts *UNdone: Dallaire /Rwanda* Gertrude Kearns, Text by Anna Hudson:
Sept 11, 2002 & Oct 30-Nov 16 2002
Propeller Centre for the Visual Arts *Lamentable Expedients: Imagining the Fourth Dimension* curated:
Donald Brackett, Oct 18-Nov 4, 2000

BIBLIOGRAPHY critical+popular

2007 Apr 27 The National Post, Arts and Life 'Bloodbaths take on a reverent glow in artwork' review Paul Gessell of Art and War by Laura Brandon

BIBLIOGRAPHY (cont'd)

- 2007 spring 'Art and War' by Dr Laura Brandon, publisher I.B. Tauris and Co.Ltd, London UK and NYC USA
chapter 7 War Art Internationally 1990-2005
- 2007 spring Canadian premier issue of MORE magazine [Transcontinental Publications, USA] '40 Leaders over 40', by Kim Pittaway
- 2007 Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Technologies vol. 13, No. 1, 9-17 (2007)
copyright 2007 Sage Publications U of Bedfordshire UK 'War Art + the Internet' a Canadian Case Study [G Kearns + Somalia works in CWM] Laura Brandon, Canadian War Museum
- 2007 Jan 13: Toronto Star, Saturday Arts+Entertainment: 'We've seen Saddam's defiant face before', by Peter Goddard [quote from phone interview]
- 2006 Nov 10: CBC TV News Morning, Gertrude Kearns in her Toronto studio with Heather Hiscox, War Art from Afghanistan
- 2006 fall issue: Canadian Art, 'The Vanguard in War Art' by Dick Averbs [mention]
- 2006 Oct 28: Toronto Sun, Gertrude Kearns' paintings capture Canadians in combat', by Mike Strobel
- 2006 Sept 19: CBC Radio, Sounds Like Canada, 'Artist in Afghanistan', Shelagh Rogers with Gertrude Kearns
- 2006 Aug 28: Globe and Mail review section front page 'Scenes from the Front', Val Ross "Gertrude Kearns's works can create their own conflicts, but she's earned respect from soldiers and curators alike"
- 2006 May 7: Toronto Sun: 'No feeling in war's portrayal' Peter Worthington
- 2006 May: Royal Cdn Military Institute RCMI Members' News 'War artist in Afghanistan'
- 2006 April 9: The Citizen's Weekly The Ottawa Citizen: Elizabeth Payne, 'KANDAHAR, Studies in Real Life' Feature article War Paint....
- 2005 Dec 28: Toronto Star: 'Art went big in '05' "The 10 most notable shows....", Peter Goddard [United States of Being- JB Mays Portraits]
- 2005 Dec 8: Toronto Star: 'Portraits of the mightily depressed', Peter Goddard review of United States of Being
- 2005 Nov 26: Globe and Mail: 'Being John Bentley Mays', Gary Michael Dault review of United States of Being
- 2005 Nov 11: CBC Radio: 5 interviews across Canada with GK from Washington DC representing the Canadian Forces Artist Program, Boots on the Ground, Canadian Embassy Gallery
- 2005 Sat July 30: Financial Post: 'Royal Canadian Military Institute wants you!', Gigi Suhanic
- 2005 May 17: Toronto Sun 'Disservice done to Canadian veterans' Peter Worthington
- 2005 May 15: Toronto Sun 'In defence of the War Museum', letter by Joe Geurts, director of the Canadian War Museum
- 2005 May 9: Toronto Sun 'War rages over 'art' ' Peter Worthington
- 2005 May 7: Ottawa Citizen 'Divergent portraits of war: Canadian heroes relive their battles' Elizabeth Payne
- 2005 May 7: National Post 'Difficult Image'
- 2005 May 6: Toronto Sun 'Voices lost in CWM debate' Peter Worthington
- 2005 May 5,6,7: Ottawa Citizen comments re Canadian War Museum GK Portraits
- 2005 May 4: Globe and Mail Cover story Canadian War Museum Alan Cumyn, "...three strikingly unsettling paintings by Toronto artist Gertrude Kearns..."
- 2005 May 3: National Post 'Vet to Boycott Museum over Somali-torture Art' by Tony Lofaro
- 2005 May 3: CBC TV Canada Now 6pm and TheNational10 pm, interviewed in studio re Canadian War Museum and controversy over Somalia paintings.
- 2005 May 1: Ottawa Citizen: 'War, unvarnished' Elizabeth Payne
- 2005 May: Ars Medica: a Journal of Medicine, Health and the Humanities, 'Gertrude Kearns: Conflict, Conscience, and the Artist-Healer' essay/review by Anna Hudson in conjunction with G Kearns

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- 2004 Feb 28: Globe and Mail: Gary Michael Dault review of Monkey See Monkey Do, SPIN Gallery with reference to Gorillaman by GK
- 2004 Jan 31: Globe and Mail: review by Gary Michael Dault, *blue yellow black*, at Lehman Leskiw Fine Art, Toronto
- 2004 winter: Aboveground Lowdown: Nicole Collins artist interview with GK; *blue yellow black* at Lehmann Leskiw Fine Art, Toronto
- 2003 Nov 8: National Post: Books, review of Shake Hands with the Devil by Lewis MacKenzie Dallaire's journey into darkness editorial use of Dallaire #5
- 2003 Nov 23: Toronto Star: Books, review of Shake Hands with the Devil by Kim Hughes Devil's snare editorial use of Urgent, 2001
- 2003 May 26: The Gazette [Montreal]: Arts + Life 'Stress of Keeping the Peace editorial use of Injured: PTSD, Battleground/depression' by Cheryl Cornacchia
- 2003 spring: Canadian Art: review by Gary Michael Dault, 'Gertrude Kearns' UNdone: Dallaire/Rwanda Propeller Centre for the Visual Arts Vol 20 #1 pg 106
- 2003 spring: Canadian Medical Association Journal: Left Atrium review by Vivian Tors 'Camouflage and Exposure', Vol 168, #9 pp1164-1165
- 2002 Dec 31: Toronto Star: Arts and Entertainment, review by Peter Goddard, 'From Surreal to too-real: Best of 2002'
- 2002 Nov 28: Freewriters.ca: 'Profiles in Courage', interview by Martine Clementes, a Conversation with Gertrude Kearns
- 2002 html Cactus Club, Amigo Motel: review by John Bentley Mays of UNdone
- 2002 fall: dart International: review by Steve Rockwell 'UNdone, Gertrude Kearns at Propeller' Vol 5#3pg36
- 2002 Nov 11 CBC RADIO Sounds Like Canada: Remembrance Day Interview, Shelagh Rogers with GK at Propeller, UNdone
- 2002 Nov 9: Globe and Mail: review by Gary Michael Dault, 'The Art of War' UNdone: Dallaire, Rwanda
- 2002 Nov 7: CBC TV Canada Now: General Lewis MacKenzie with GK at UNdone
- 2002 Nov 4: CBC RADIO French CIBC 860: Dr. Anna Hudson [AGO] interview by Annie-Claire Fournier discussing work of GK at Propeller show, UNdone
- 2002 Nov 2: Toronto Star Arts and Entertainment: review by Peter Goddard of UNdone at Propeller 'Painting the Inner Hell of War'
- 2002 Oct 31: CIUT RADIO U of T Visual Voice: 12-1 PM Ashleigh Elson interview with GK re UNdone and related work
- 2002 Oct 30: The National Post, Arts and Life: review by Chris Wattie of UNdone at Propeller 'Portraits of Struggle'
- 2002 Oct 24: The Toronto Star, Arts and Entertainment: galleries listing of UNdone with photo spread and related text
- 2002 Sept 11: Propeller invitation/brochure: review by Anna Hudson
- 2001 fall: LOLA 10 - the Man Issue: review by Mary McKenzie of STILLS at Propeller Centre for the Visual Arts, Toronto
- 2001 Apr 5: NOW Critics Picks: STILLS Gertrude Kearns at Propeller
- 2001 Apr 11: CBC TV Canada Now: Interview at Propeller with GK re STILLS
- 2001 Apr: Toronto Life Magazine: review by Betty Ann Jordan Gertrude Kearns, Stills at Propeller
- 2001 Mar 29: EYE Listings: photo spread of STILLS at Propeller

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2000 spring: Descant Literary Review: A Museum of War, cover art by GK from Canadian War Museum Collection, essay by Dr. Laura Brandon, 'Memorandum on the Curating of War'
1999 Sept: Artsweek Magazine supplement.: featured event
1998 Oct 4: Ottawa Citizen: review by Richard Starnes 'Hidden Treasures', works of GK in Canadian War Museum Collection
1995 July7: Airforce Magazine: review by Vic Johnson Of interest... GK at National Aviation Museum/award
1992 Nov: Toronto Life Magazine:article by Gary Michael Dault [architectural] + photowork by Joy von Tiedemann 'A Break with Tradition'
1991 Dec 23: Rogers TV Interview with G. Kearns and T.Willemse, Kearns Willemse Exhibition
1991 Nov 12: CBC TV: Interview by Justin Smallbridge with Kearns and Willemse, Kearns Willemse Exhibition
1991 Nov 3: CITY TV City Pulse: interview by Teresa Ronchon with Kearns and Willemse at Kearns Willemse Exhibition
1991 Nov 1: Globe and Mail: review by Kate Taylor, Art About, Kearns Willemse
1983 Oct 4: L'Express de Toronto: review by M.A.M. 'L'artiste torontoise Gertrude Kearns cree un groupe de portraits de Franco-Ontariens'

COLLECTIONS Institutional+Corporate

Department of National Defence, Task Force Afghanistan 2006
Canadian War Museum, Ottawa Canada 2007 2006 2005 2002 1999 1996
Royal Canadian Military Institute Toronto 2004
Veterans Affairs Canada 2004
Canadian Warplane Heritage Museum, Hamilton 2002
Academy of Spherical Arts, Toronto 2000
University of Toronto 1998
National Aviation Museum, Ottawa 1997
Toronto Sun Canadian Collection, Toronto 1991
Crown Life/CrownX Canadian Collection, Toronto 1990
Labourer's Local 183, Toronto 1989

Visual resource material on file at:

Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto
Canadian War Museum, Ottawa
Carleton University, School of Journalism
National Gallery, Ottawa
Portrait Gallery of Canada, Ottawa
University of Toronto Art Centre
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