



1 //

### Horizon

No longing here to go out on the ocean,  
 battle the raging sea, visit distant shores.  
 I stand on land and ponder the horizon,  
 Waiting to see what the sea brings to me.  
 There is always something, if one waits—  
 subtle glint of sun's reflection,  
 white where water meets the sky.  
 Could it be ice? Most often just a ship  
 heading into port, but sometimes  
 a bright line of white along that edge grows to fill  
 the surface from horizon to shore.  
 Pack ice, an undulating field of glacier bits  
 meandering across the ocean, driven by currents and wind  
 like invading marauders, surrounding ships, pushing and  
 scraping against the shore, disappearing with the wind in the  
 blink of an eye. Sometimes icebergs  
 like fairy castles shimmering as they drift lazily down the  
 coast until grounded on rocks or blown back out to sea.  
 Ever hopeful, I stand on shore,  
 eyes on the horizon.

- Tara Bryan (2020)



2 //

This brochure accompanies the exhibition  
*Tara Bryan: Unfolding Horizon*, presented at  
The Rooms from June 25-September 25, 2022.

ISBN: 978-1-928156-30-7

COVER // *Gros Morne* (1992).  
Oil on canvas.  
The Rooms Collection.

1 // *The Great Wall of China* (2017).  
Image courtesy of the estate.

2 // *Looming* (2001).  
Oil on canvas.  
Courtesy of Christina Parker Gallery.

3 // *Down the Rabbit Hole*  
(seven editions published between 1998 and 2016).  
Image courtesy of the estate.

4 // *Clear Day in Lead Bay* (c. 2018).  
Oil on canvas.  
Private Collection.

www.therooms.ca



TARA  
BRYAN

UNFOLDING  
HORIZON



## TARA BRYAN UNFOLDING HORIZON

*I stand on land and ponder the horizon,  
Waiting to see what the sea brings to me.*

These are Tara Bryan’s words from her poem “Horizon.” Those of us who knew Tara are not surprised to have found her pondering Newfoundland’s uncertain sky at the point it seems to touch our equally uncertain sea. By training Tara was a landscape painter, and with relocation to Newfoundland she was lured by seascapes as well.

Born in Texas, Tara spent her youth there and in Oklahoma, her university years in New Mexico and Wisconsin, a year teaching English in China, and more years of work and study in New York. By the time she set foot in Newfoundland, she was adept at making the most of new surroundings.

But could anything have prepared her for her first visit in 1989 to this island at the edge of the North Atlantic? I suspect standing onshore and gazing seaward she was both overwhelmed and entirely excited to discover an unconventional, wildly beautiful propellant for her art practice.

“The air in Newfoundland is tangible,” she would write years later, “softening and dispersing the light . . .” By narrowing her colour choices and focusing on a shoreline’s elemental features, she would capture in her paintings its mysterious beauty and

the innate physical strength of the rock defining it.

In spring those features included the ice and icebergs that would come to be a signature focus of her paintings, bearing all the elements that had drawn her to landscapes—peaks, valleys, plateaus, basins. And swirling against them—the glorious greens and blues of the surrounding seawater. In each iceberg Tara found a world unto itself.

Printmaking, another aspect of her varied creative talent, was also reshaped by her move to Newfoundland. She established a strong working relationship with St. Michael’s Printshop. It went hand-in-hand with her virtuosity as a letterpress printer and bookmaker. Her walking bird press—so wide-ranging in approach, so innovative in design—excelled here, growing to the artistic expression for which she became most widely known, drawing accolades from far beyond Newfoundland.

The many books that came from her studio give us the experience of holding Tara’s art in our hands, invariably thrilling since we never quite know how that experience will unfold. What we do know is the book’s construction will be tied in some extraordinary way to its subject matter,

that Tara had challenged herself and us, its readers, to experience the subject in a manner that brought a fresh, surprising appreciation of the text.

In “Down the Rabbit Hole” we hold an intricately designed tunnel book with hinged layers that, when released from its string ties, drops abruptly 45 centimetres, drawing our eye down, down the hole it creates, and the spiraling text surrounding it. In “To Stretch the Night” we discover Tara surmounting the challenge of repositioning text for eighteen varying monotypes of each of the book’s poems, together with mounting eighteen different bas-relief bronze sculptures on lacquered walnut covers. In “Making Bread (not bombs)” we’re presented with a remarkable evocation of Tara’s lifelong preoccupation with social justice—a double-sided flagbook unfolding in a profound commentary on the domestic/savage dichotomy of our modern age. It was through her bookwork that I knew Tara best, having collaborated on three artist’s books, and my teenage son having worked as her assistant for many years. In “Gros Morne Time Lines”, my text, Anne Meredith Barry’s linocuts, and Tara’s bookmaking skill came together out of a shared esteem for the natural features of Gros Morne

National Park. We met over several months with increased enthusiasm for the shape the book might take. In the end the reader glides both eye and hand past the wrapper’s caribou bone clasps, over a thin slice of peridotite inserted into the fabric cover, to a 5.5 metre-long concertina sweep of image and text, the elements all so carefully orchestrated by Tara. The book would find its way into several prestigious rare book collections, both in Canada and abroad.

Tara Bryan was treasured for her collaborations, her mentoring, her committed engagement with the arts community, and, most of all, for her art—paintings, books, prints and ephemera. Their physical presence, intelligence, and emotional underpinnings deepen our understanding of our world, generating debate about its beauty as well as its precariousness. It is the legacy of an exceptional artist. We are so very thankful she came to visit, then came to call Newfoundland home.

*About the author:*  
Kevin Major is the award-winning author of more than twenty books. He has written for both adults and young people—fiction, non-fiction, poetry, and plays. He resides in St. John’s, NL.

### About Tara Bryan

Tara Bryan (1953-2020) was a painter and book artist who lived and worked in Newfoundland. In 2005, “Down the Rabbit Hole” (2005) won Best in Show at the Fourth North American Juried Book Arts Exhibition and, in 2009, “Good Against the Nightmare” (2008, with Duncan Major) won the Distinguished Book Award, Miniature Book Society Competition. Tara was a finalist for the NLAC Arts Achievement Award in 2011, and was inducted into the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts for Book Design in 2012. In 2018, she received an Alcuin Society Award for Book Design for “Façades for Mark Rothko” (text by Crispin Elsped). She was a lifetime member of VANL/CARFAC, which selected her for its Long Haul Award in 2010. In 2021, Tara was posthumously awarded the Endurance Award by VANL/CARFAC. “Aftermath (Cracking Up)” from her 2010 exhibition *On Ice at The Rooms* was made into a large-scale mural installed on the façade of the Convention Centre in downtown St. John’s, NL.

To learn more about the artist:  
<https://tarabryan.com/>

