



DEBATES OF THE SENATE

1st SESSION • 42nd PARLIAMENT • VOLUME 150 • NUMBER 111

THE LATE ROBIN HOPPER, C.M.

Statement by:

The Honourable Patricia Bovey

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Hon. Patricia Bovey: Colleagues, last week Canada lost a pioneer ceramic artist whose work was celebrated nationally and internationally. Robin Hopper, member of the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts and the Order of Canada, was, in 1977, the first recipient of the Saidye Bronfman Award for Excellence in Fine Crafts, now a Governor General's visual arts award.

British-born, Robin emigrated to Canada in 1968 as head of the ceramics department at Toronto's Central Technical School. In 1970, he established Georgian College's ceramics and glass department. Then, in 1977, he moved to Metchosin outside Victoria. Thirty years ago, he founded the Metchosin International Summer School of the Arts.

As artist, he created unique, one-of-a-kind pieces and functional wares, transforming ceramic expression with new glazes, forms and decoration. His work was stellar, gracing public, corporate and private collections, including the Canadian Museum of History, Winnipeg Art Gallery and Art Gallery of Greater Victoria. I had the pleasure of curating a travelling exhibition of his art in the 1970s and since have frequently published his work.

Two years ago, Hopper was celebrated in the University of Manitoba School of Art's major exhibition, MUD, Hands, fire.

It was a treat to watch this great teacher, so knowledgeable about global ceramic history, discuss past and contemporary

ceramics with students. He shared his vast knowledge through his international workshops, technical videos and books on myriad ceramic aspects, including how to survive as an artist.

Hopper's advice? Understand art fundamentals, think big and experiment. He did, firing chicken bones on his plates achieving fascinating effects, layering different clays forming his unique agatewares and undertaking multiple colour glaze tests. Hopper never ceased experimenting.

A celebrated gardener and environmental conservationist, his own garden represents many differing ecosystems. Its plants, and the birds they attracted, became his artistic subjects. With his wife, artist Judi Dyelle, hospitality abounded in their garden, studio and gallery. Over many years my children frequently came there with me. This weekend they recalled, "So many memories of going out there, mom, and poking around and Robin being funny and acerbic and interesting. End of an era."

Robin said:

Exceptional cooks alter recipes to suit their needs and tastes. Exceptional ceramists do likewise in pursuit of a special elusive quality. For ceramist, mastery means learning to live with the often unreliable responses of materials and fire, where the invisible has such a profound effect.

Robin was that exceptional master, visionary and big dreamer. I extend my condolences to his family, friends and colleagues. Goodbye, dear friend, and thank you for your exceptional contributions and boundless creativity, which have benefited all immeasurably.
