

A Tribute to EVE LAMBART



By Karen Mazurkewich

Eve Lambart was the First Lady of Canadian animation, yet she toiled in obscurity at the National Film Board for more than 20 years as Norman McLaren's faithful collaborator. Lambart was hired in 1942 to do delicate lettering on films. After a few years at the Board, she had some films to her name, *The Impossible Map* (1947) and a joint credit with George Dunning on *Family Tree* (1949); however, for the most part, she worked long hours conducting careful collaborations on *Begone Dull Care*, *Around is Around*, *Rythmetric*, the Oscar-nominated *A Chairy Tale*, *Lines—Vertical*, *Lines—Horizontal* and *Mosaic*.

For years, Lambart watched as young men she trained were promoted; for years she had to humbly apply to them for salary raises. Lambart craved yet resisted attempts to direct. She even balked when executive producer Wolf Koenig finally approached her about taking the lead on her own film. "I had been so accustomed to helping Norman that I found it difficult [to work independently]," she said. With *Fine Feathers* (1968), Lambart finally stepped out from behind her mentor's shadow. It was a revelation. For 20 years, she had acceded to McLaren's more subdued appetite for colour. Given free rein on her own film, Lambart announced herself in a blaze of blues and reds. She also exchanged the protractor and ruler for scissors and paper. "I was fascinated with cutouts," she says. "Mathematics, computing films like *Lines—Horizontal* were a dead end."

From abstract design, Lambart embraced fables and fantasy about greed and vanity. Subsequent films such as *The Hoader*, *The Lion and the Mouse*, *The Story of Christmas*, *Mr. Frog Went a-Courting* and *The Town Mouse and the Country Mouse* are morality tales steeped in tradition. It took Lambart years to assert her personal vision, but she had laid a steady foundation for other women artists in Canada. A succession of female animators took their cue from her films, crafting more allegorical tales and bringing a touch of whimsy to the NFB's Studio A. Despite her own difficulties getting ahead, Lambart was fiercely opposed to employment equity. She took no one under her wing and adopted a hard-line approach: "I hate training people. I feel like yelling at them, 'experiment and find out by yourself, don't expect to be told anything.'"

Evelyn Lambart died in April of this year as she lived, proudly independent, living by herself in the Eastern Townships of Quebec, surrounded by the colours of her garden and her patchwork quilts. ●