



The man is seated in a simple wooden chair, wearing a vertically striped long-sleeved shirt and light-colored trousers. He has a full beard and is wearing glasses. His hands are resting on his lap. The background is dominated by a large, expressive painting. The upper portion of the painting shows two stylized faces in profile, facing each other. A bright white circle is positioned between them. Below this, a large, white, rectangular structure with a vertical line down the center is visible, resembling a window or a doorway. The lower part of the painting is dark and textured, with some lighter, brushstreaked areas. The floor around the man is covered with various art supplies, including numerous paint cans of different sizes, some with labels like 'select' and '12/20', brushes, and other tools. A large, crumpled piece of paper or fabric with the word 'Hour' repeated in a grid pattern is visible on the right side of the floor.

Preface

The Art of Peter Aspell accompanies two concurrent exhibitions on view in 2016, *Peter Aspell: Saints and Sinners, Mystics and Madness* at the West Vancouver Museum, and *Peter Aspell: The Mad Alchemist* at Richmond Art Gallery.

These exhibitions originated from a mutual passion for the artist's work and the belief—shared by many others—that public galleries and museums have overlooked his work.

Aspell exhibited regularly in commercial galleries in Vancouver, Toronto, Montreal, New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Paris, and has many devoted collectors. Although he had a solo exhibition at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 1958, participated in many group exhibitions there from 1942 through the early 1960s, and was included in the exhibition *7 West Coast Painters* held at the University of British Columbia Fine Arts Gallery in 1959, more than 50 years have passed since his work has been examined in depth in a public gallery or museum exhibition.

Our exhibitions and accompanying catalogue are meant to address this omission, since we believe that Peter Aspell was an artist of immense talent who explored in pictorial form the joys and despairs of the human condition. We realized early on that there was no way, even with two exhibitions, to fully represent the many series that Aspell produced throughout his long, prolific career. Our exhibitions therefore consist of a representative selection of artworks from the late 1980s to the time of the artist's death in 2004. Aspell's paintings and works on paper of figures and mythic landscapes, either richly layered with luscious colours, or rendered in a more restrictive palette consisting mostly of black, white, and grey, stood apart from the art of his contemporaries but nevertheless (and because of this) made an important contribution to the art of this region.

We are indebted to our funders, lenders, collaborators, and our respective staffs for their generous support of this project, which we hope will inspire further interest in the work of Peter Aspell.

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Director, Richmond Art Gallery

Darrin Morrison
Director/Curator, West Vancouver Museum