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Emily Norry,  
*Queeries into History: The Love of Loring and Wyle*  
**September 8<sup>th</sup>- October 14<sup>th</sup>, 2017**

Emily Norry's artistic practice focuses on queer histories and how queer narratives and perspectives have often been ignored or hidden. Norry starts a body of work by collecting a body of research around a particular subject. Using photographs and historical records of her subject, she visually reconstructs their life and major moments to highlight the experience of queer women and how important they were to the fabric of their communities.

Frances Loring and Florence Wyle were unique artists in the Toronto scene. The two sculptors had initially met in 1905, forming a close bond. Their relationship wasn't public (and therefore not explicitly documented) for fear of public scrutiny, but for many queer artists, including Emily Norry, feel there isn't much ambiguity. Moving from Chicago to Greenwich village in New York, and later to Toronto, The two artists spent more than 50 years living and working together.

Loring and Wyle flourished in the more conservative Toronto art market, earning a wide array of praise from their contemporaries. The War Museum of Canada's online catalogue states that Group of Seven painter A.Y Jackson had offered to "knock down all the statues in Toronto" in order that they replace them

with their own art.<sup>1</sup> While examining their artistic careers, Norry had also a great interest on how history is written, which details are accounted for when writing a biography, and what it means in regard to the documenting of queer histories.

They started their art careers in New York, where their more traditional sculptures visually separated them from the modernist impulses of the time,<sup>2</sup> they came to Toronto in 1912,<sup>3</sup> where they opened a studio on Adelaide. They later moved their studio to the corner of Lombard and Church.<sup>4</sup>As post-war artists, many of their sculptures dealt with the strength and resolution of women in the war effort at home. During World War I and II, women filled the vacant spaces in the labour force left by absent soldiers. These jobs were largely in factories, and, after the still-recent industrial revolution, consisted of often dangerous and laborious work. Loring and Wyle's catalogue of works includes *The Furnace Girl* (1918-1919), a bronze sculpture showing a young woman dusting soot off the ground. Her stance is weary, but strong. It is the look of someone who does the same miserable job day in and day out with a sense of determination. At a time when women at home were producing many of the materials used on the domestic and war fronts, *The Furnace Girl* holds an important place as a feminist work finally valuing the contribution that women made to Canadian society.

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<sup>1</sup> "Search the Collections |Canadian War Art Museum (Sculpture, The Furnace Girl)", *Canadian War Art Museum*, accessed on 08/25/2017, <http://www.warmuseum.ca/collections/artifact/1016817/>

<sup>2</sup> Elspeth Cameron, *an excerpt from And Beauty Answers: The Life of Frances Loring and Florence Wyle* (excerpt) (Cormorant Books, 2007), [http://www.cormorantbooks.com/read\\_9781897151136/](http://www.cormorantbooks.com/read_9781897151136/)

<sup>3</sup> Gary Fitzgibbon, *Description & Finding Aid: Frances Loring and Florence Wyle* (Toronto: AGO, 2016), [https://www.ago.net/assets/files/pdf/special\\_collections/SC029.pdf](https://www.ago.net/assets/files/pdf/special_collections/SC029.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Elspeth Cameron, "A Woman's Work: And Beauty Answers: The Life of Frances Loring and Florence Wyle" (excerpt) *National Post: Book Reviews* (Toronto: National Post), [https://www1.toronto.ca/city\\_of\\_toronto/city\\_clerks/book\\_awards/files/pdf/cameron-excerpt-np.pdf](https://www1.toronto.ca/city_of_toronto/city_clerks/book_awards/files/pdf/cameron-excerpt-np.pdf).

Norry's biographical monoprints are mainly made from reproducing historical photos of women artists onto plexiglass using watercolour paint, spraying the resulting image with water, pressing it onto fabric, and peeling it off. This style of printmaking is unique as it generates only a single print, rather than multiple. When printed onto fabric, the images transfer as blurry. They change through the transfer process. If the plate moves, or an extra bead of water is displaced, or the fabric is slightly wrinkled, that becomes weaved into the work, permanently shaping the only copy of the final product.

One of the largest works entitled *In the Studio* (2017) from Norry's series *Queeries Into History: The Love Of Loring and Wyle*, shows Loring and Wyle in the studio together working on sculpted busts. Their studio is filled with other sculptures. A cat rests on a chair. Towards the edges of the print, tables and flowers decorate the room. It is apparent that this is not just a studio, but a home. This is the space that Loring and Wyle would spend much of their life in, living and working together. The print is bordered by a fabric print of roses in white and grey, decorating the pleasant scene. There is a natural warmth to Norry's work; with soft colours and comforting imagery. She displays here the happier side of queer history.

Many of Norry's prints are decorated with pressed flowers. The flowers are scattered around the space, and are used both as a material and a recurring theme in the work. They expand on a similar point that the monoprint makes; the original flowers were bright, vibrant, and three-dimensional, but the act of preservation causes them to change and flatten. The flowers we see today, like the monoprint in transfer, are different from the original, and allow us to view them in a new light.

In addition to the prints, an antique chair and table, both in pristine condition, sit with the works in the exhibition space. The chair is especially reminiscent of the prints. It is bright green, and decorated with delicate flower embroidery. Similar to the subjects of *In the Studio*, Norry has turned the art-workspace into a home, allowing the historical documentation to enter our own intimate spaces. It reframes the women and their politicized existence not just as artists but as lovers, the home now functioning as an equally political space. The gallery gains a sense of domesticity, and instead of the clinical (and often biased) methods of more a traditionally conservative and heteropatriarchal history, Norry's *The Love of Loring and Wyle* investigates far beneath the surface of events and looks at the complex emotional bond between these two figures.

While Norry's work might originate from a biographic perspective, it quickly acquires an element of poetry. It isn't simply an investigation of the romance between Loring and Wyle, it goes further than that, asking us questions about how we engage with queer histories and perhaps how we can better understand the queer experience through them. As a history that has been routinely ignored or mistreated by traditional academia, Norry's work allows a more thoughtful discussion of what it means to be queer in a historical setting. It challenges us to read between the lines of recorded documents and find something beyond that presents historicized individuals as people, far more complex and burdened than we might give credit for.

- Sam Roberts

## Works Cited

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