



Betty Goodwin in her Montreal studio on Boulevard Saint-Laurent, March 1987
Photo: © Richard-Max Tremblay

BETTY GOODWIN (1923 – 2008)

BORN IN MONTREAL in 1923, Betty Goodwin was the only child of Romanian and Jewish immigrants, Clare Edith and Abraham Roodish. Spanning nearly 50 years, her oeuvre is monumental, sentient and authentic, and thanks to her strong sense of humanism, it expresses the fragility and complexity of the human experience. Goodwin worked in a variety of media—painting, drawing, collage, printmaking and sculpture—and often in series, such as *Swimmers*, *Tarpaulin* and *La mémoire du corps* (Memory of the Body). Often associated with expressing themes of loss, absence and memory, her poignant works deal sensitively with challenging subjects. Art historian Matthew Teitelbaum wrote that “her work is a process made clear; expressing feeling is a way of preserving and healing the self.”¹

Although she started earning recognition only around the late 1960s, and mostly for her prints and drawings, Goodwin had been working as an artist since the close of the Second World War. Like many other artists of her generation, she saw painting as a political and social act. Thus, for the first few years of the 1950s, she depicted the continued struggle of the working class and wartime immigrants through scenes of Montreal Jewish neighbourhoods and portraits of workers, in a Social Realist style. She briefly moved on to representations of domestic interiors in a Proto-Cubist style that was in vogue at the time. By 1964, she evolved into what Teitelbaum considers her final painting stage: figures floating freely within the pictorial space, over abstracted backgrounds. From then on, the figure became a consistent thread in her oeuvre, reappearing in numerous series, such as *Swimmers* (1982–88), *Carbon* (1986), *La mémoire du corps* (1990–95) and *Nerves* (1993–95). Imbued with intense emotion, these works express loss, inner struggle, experiences of memory and the passage of time, and states of being, including that of life to death.

In 1968, with the help of John Ivor Smith, Goodwin attended Yves Gaucher’s etching class at Sir George Williams University (now Concordia University). This class proved immensely significant for her career, as printmaking allowed her to reconnect to her artistic beginnings and brought her international recognition. From 1969 to 1974, she worked on a series of etchings using various articles of clothing: gloves, caps, shirts, shoes and, perhaps most famously, vests. Spanning four years, the *Vest* series was directly inspired by her father, who trained as a tailor in Romania and worked as a factory owner, and her artistic mentor Joseph

Beuys, who often wore vests. In her own words, “With the *Vest* series, I made a very explosive and meaningful connection.”²

In 1995, Goodwin’s work was included in the exhibition *Identity and Alterity: Figures of the Body, 1895/1995*, at the Venice Biennale, and in 1996, the National Gallery of Canada held a major solo show entitled *Betty Goodwin: Signs of Life*. She was the recipient of many awards and recognitions throughout her exceptional career, including the Victor Martyn Lynch-Staunton Award of the Canada Council for the Arts in 1983, the Banff Centre National Award for Visual Arts in 1984, the Prix Paul-Émile Borduas in 1986, a Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship in 1988, the Gershon Iskowitz Prize in 1995, the Harold Town Prize in 1998, and the Governor General’s Award and the Order of Canada in 2003. She passed away in Montreal in 2008.

Heffel is honoured to represent the Estate of Betty Goodwin across the country and to continue our collaboration this fall. We are proud to offer in this sale *Half Passage* (lot 24) and *Gloves* (lot 25), two major works from Goodwin’s oeuvre.

1. Jessica Bradley and Matthew Teitelbaum, eds., *The Art of Betty Goodwin* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, in assoc. with Douglas & McIntyre, 1998), exhibition catalogue, 8.

2. Ibid., 38.

TEXT BY ROGER BELLEMARE (TRANSLATED)

FEW CANADIAN ARTISTS have been able to capture the hearts of such a broad and diverse audience: Emily Carr and Joyce Wieland were such artists, along with Betty Goodwin.

The artist explored themes that were neither easy nor cheerful. Her art sprang from her integrity, and her works were statements that went straight to the point without bowing to conventional aesthetic rules—the artist was seeking truth more than beauty.

PEU D’ARTISTES CANADIENNES ont su toucher au coeur un public aussi vaste et varié: Emily Carr, Joyce Wieland furent de celles-ci et Betty Goodwin, notre contemporaine.

Ses thèmes qu’a exploré l’artiste n’étaient ni faciles ni joyeux. Son art ralliait par son intégrité et une densité de propos qui allaient droit au but sans concessions aux règles convenues de la beauté, l’artiste cherchant davantage la vérité que la séduction.