

BETSY WARLAND

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Short Biography

Betsy Warland (1946-...)

Creative nonfiction writer, poet, essayist, teacher, manuscript consultant, and editor Betsy Warland was born in the United States in 1946. Betsy immigrated to Canada in 1973, becoming a citizen in 1980. Warland has published eleven books of creative nonfiction and poetry.

Dedicated to emerging writers, Betsy is the former director of The Writer's Studio, part of Simon Fraser University's Writing and Communications Program (2000 -2011). She currently directs and is a mentor in her own five-month manuscript development program, Vancouver Manuscript Intensive. Betsy is on faculty in both programs.

An active member of The Writers' Union of Canada, Betsy served on the National Council (2010-2012) and is the co-founder, along with Myrna Kostash, of the Creative Nonfiction Collective. Her archives are in the National Library of Canada.

Perhaps most known for her language-focused writing and ways of working with silence, Betsy finds as much meaning in scoring blank space on the page as she does in inscribing written language. The unsayable, the secreted, the unknowable: these are her obsessions – how we encounter them in lover relationships, family, a homophobic society, a mono-truth society and the inner work of spiritual practice.

Currently, Betsy is working on a creative non-fiction manuscript "Oscar of Between." Excerpts from her manuscript, alongside Guest Writers' and Artists' work and comments from readers can be found at Oscar on her website.

Critics write

“Betsy Warland demonstrates her exceptional ability to undermine linguistic hegemonies without being demanding or showy.”

– *Matrix*

“Betsy Warland has gained a reputation for saying what few writers risk fixing in print. . .Not a word is wasted. However, as the reader discovers, sometimes what is excised speaks most clearly.”

– *Rain Taxi*

“Her honesty is astounding. Where one page reads like an open wound, the next blooms with insight.”

– *Room of One’s Own*

New and selected books

Breathing the Page: Reading the Act of Writing

Betsy’s 24 essays on writing, *Breathing the Page: Reading the Act of Writing* (Cormorant Books, 2010), was a twelve-year writing project. Her evoking the non-everydayness of the seemingly everyday materials with which writers work and her conceptualizing the forces encountered beneath the language of craft embody decades of her quest as a writer, teacher of creative writing, and manuscript consultant.

“*Breathing the Page* offers practical advice and, at times, breathless insight. Yes, writing well is worth the effort, Warland is telling us. Now get to work.”

—*National Post*

Only This Blue: A Long Poem with an Essay

In *Only This Blue: A Long Poem with an Essay* (The Mercury Press, 2005), Betsy traces moments of awe and dread on her journey through a life-threatening experience. Light, colour, sound, all are evoked in poetic lines pared to the bone, reflecting daily perceptions turned on their head. In her essay “Nose to Nose,” she deepens her investigation of the relationship between scored space and scored line. A textual meditation, her essay invites readers to consider the shape and movement of poetry and prose, their origins and their possible place in the written world.

“It’s as if a tide is running through the book. A cityscape, seen by the narrator, becomes imbued with meaning. Her sudden uncanny relation to her body is compared to losing one’s childhood home: ‘the address was right but/the house torn down/,creek filled in,/hill gone.’ “

–*Winnipeg Free Press*

Bloodroot: Tracing the Untelling of Motherloss

Bloodroot: Tracing the Untelling of Mother Loss (out of print but available at betsywarland.com, 2000) is a compelling prose narrative of how Betsy learns how to navigate her mother’s growing incapacities and impending death. The book also charts their disparate relationships to narrative and truth through language.

“Warland achieves something unexpected – an inspiring story of mother-daughter reconnection.”

– *Room of One’s Own*

What Holds Us Here

What Holds Us Here (Buschek Books, 1999) is a collection of nine suites of poems on various forms of longing, ranging from Van

Gogh's paintings, to love found and lost, to a muse on the nature of narrative. Several suites of poems have been set to music by LLoyd Burritt and Elizabeth Raum (see Video/Audio).

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