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## Book Review: Magic off Main: The Art of Esther Warkov

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*Magic off Main: The Art of Esther Warkov.* By Beverly J. Rasporich. Calgary, Alberta: University of Calgary Press, 2003. 99 pp. Photographs, color illustrations, selected references. \$29.95 paper.

Beverly J. Rasporich discusses the work of one of western Canada's most intriguing artists, placing it in a contemporary art context. Warkov's art is beautifully documented, offering the reader excellent illustrations of the detail, color, and fine technical workmanship of the original pieces. Dividing the book into three main sections—"An Artist's Life," in which Warkov's early influences are considered in terms of her family, art education, and life experiences; the "Early and Middle Years"; and the artist's "Mature Work"—Rasporich discusses the intricate and detailed narratives in Warkov's creations and relates them to both surrealism and the postmodern.

Rasporich writes with great clarity to show how Warkov has used biographical events, cultural events and artifacts, and personal beliefs as the foundation for her work. She writes about Warkov's Jewish heritage, her love for her birthplace, Winnipeg, with its "Edwardian cultural past" (and where she still lives and works in the family house on Matheson Avenue), and about her "deep nostalgia for what might have been" coupled with her strong belief in the "cultural possibilities" of her city. Rasporich discusses Warkov's walks around Winnipeg recording with her camera the details of the urban landscape, her use of camera formats in her drawings and paintings, and how she incorporates her knowledge of the prairie landscape and her understanding of the history of Manitoba in her art. Rasporich engages the reader in the works themselves and in her analyses.

In placing Warkov's work in a regional context, Rasporich writes that Warkov is "particular to her Canadian environment. The context of her work is western Canada. In this respect she is an original and innovative prairie regionalist who articulates personal experience as a Jewish woman growing up in

the North End of Winnipeg and her memory of that experience, through the construction of the subjects of her art." *Magic off Main* is a rich narrative of Warkov's life and work, calling attention to the fact that meaningful art does not need to be made in the "cultural center."

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