

# MODERNIST ART FOR A MODERNIST BUILDING

WORKS BY ST. VITAL ARTIST BRUCE HEAD



## About Bruce Head

Bruce Head's artwork adorns the walls of the St. Vital Library. A celebrated artist, Head was born in St. Boniface in 1931 and lived most of his life in St. Vital. His early interest in art was encouraged and he graduated from the University of Manitoba School of Art in 1953. He was part of a group of artists whose work revolutionized visual art on the Prairies. Head's art is represented in the National Gallery of Canada, and he was elected to the Royal Canadian Academy in the early 1970s, becoming the youngest Manitoban to achieve this honour at the time. In addition to his career as an artist, Head worked as a graphic designer for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation for more than 30 years.

## Modernism and Prairie Landscapes

The art Bruce Head created was part of a style called Modernism, which features abstract shapes, colours, and lines. Modernist artists broke free from realistic painting, experimenting with form and materials to address social and political issues and to reflect on the natural world. Head's artwork was deeply influenced by his surroundings. While many of his paintings and sculptures are abstract, he stated that his work is always connected to the land, specifically the Prairie landscape. For example, the green painting *Swim Meet* evokes both a flat horizon line and the movement of water, achieved by shaping the canvas with hidden objects. *Poplars* is less abstract, depicting a grove of poplars as one might experience them in the countryside. Even with this more realistic painting, it is clear that Head was inspired by the landscape rather than aiming to reproduce it exactly.

## Techniques and Innovation

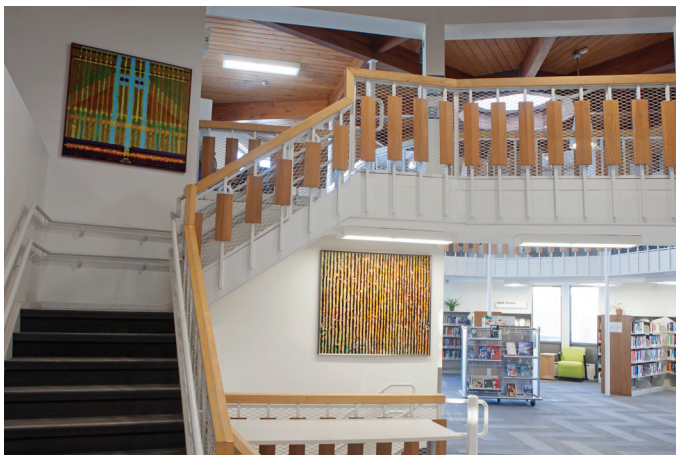
Head was always looking for ways to create what he called a "total environment." He used a variety of materials in his paintings, including metallic paint, stencils, cutouts, and objects to create texture. Sometimes, he bent and stitched his canvases to add a third dimension to his work. This interest in form extended to his sculptures, such as *Untitled (Mobile)*, created from bent aluminum and covered with acrylic paint. The collection of his art displayed at the library includes works from 1960 to 2007, showcasing both his constant desire to innovate and his deep connection to his chosen subjects. Curators and scholars have described Head's art as energetic, vibrant, complex, and lyrical—a kind of visual poetry.

## Legacy

Bruce Head died on December 30, 2009, leaving behind a legacy of artwork represented in hundreds of private and public Canadian collections. Many of his major pieces are displayed in public spaces in Manitoba, including corporate offices, country clubs, government lobbies, and the St. Vital Library. His most significant public installation is *The Wall* (1978), a massive cast concrete artwork built into the Portage and Main underground concourse in downtown Winnipeg.

## The Modernist St. Vital Library

It is fitting that Bruce Head's art is now displayed in the St. Vital Library, as the library itself was designed in the Modernist style. The building was created by architect George A. Stewart, who was born in Boissevain and graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Architecture from the University of Manitoba in 1948. In 2014, the library became the first Modernist-style building to be added to the City of Winnipeg's List of Historical Resources.



## Displayed Works

The St. Vital Library features an impressive collection of Bruce Head's artwork, spanning nearly five decades. The displayed works include:



**1**  
*Looking Glass*  
Oil on hardboard  
1965



**2**  
*Untitled*  
Ink on hardboard  
Early 1960s



**3**  
*Untitled*  
Ink on hardboard  
1965



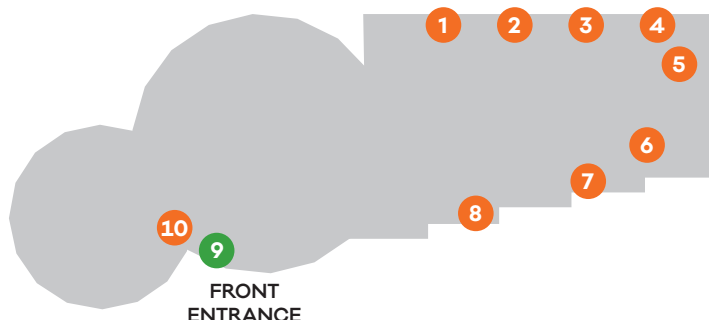
**4**  
*Untitled*  
Oil on hardboard  
1960



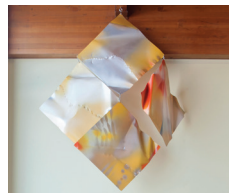
**5**  
*Kitchen Cupboards*  
Shaped canvas  
1976

MEZZANINE LEVEL

MAIN FLOOR



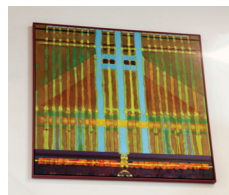
**6**  
*Swim Meet*  
Shaped canvas  
1976



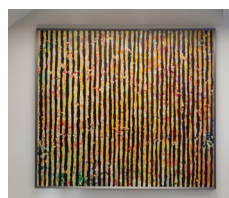
**7**  
*Untitled (Mobile)*  
Acrylic on aluminum  
1995



**8**  
*Poplars*  
Acrylic on hardboard  
2007



**9**  
*Powerhouse*  
Acrylic on stitched  
canvas  
1985



**10**  
*Yucatan*  
Acrylic on hardboard  
2003

All works City of Winnipeg Public Art Collection | Writing and research by Tricia Wasney | Photos by KMA