

The Emblems of James Reaney: Magnetically Drawn

Thomas Gerry

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Reaney's emblems are examined as a multi-leveled artform, as Thomas Gerry presents a guided journey through the artist's imagination.

In this illustrated book, *The Emblems of James Reaney: Magnetically Drawn*, Thomas Gerry, professor of Canadian studies at Laurentian University, presents a thorough and appreciative voyage among the graphic images of the multi-talented James Reaney, whom he regards as both mentor and friend.

Reaney, poet, playwright, essayist, and in this context, painter/artist, is examined through his remarkable use of emblems. Within the large body of his artistic work, Reaney's lettered and inked emblems bespeak his deep connection to classical archetypes and analogues. The text reads like a guided tour through a museum of Reaney's imagination.

Each of the artist's ten published emblems (an image with a motto, usually allegorical) is lovingly presented in its own chapter (The Castle, The Tree, Windlady, etc.) and analyzed on its intrinsic merit as well as for its place in the totality of Reaney's work. Each emblem is accompanied with an exhaustively researched treatise on its origins, implications, and impact.

Quotations from Reaney's literary output are strewn throughout the book, including this statement of the power of song—like emblems, another symbolic device—from one of the artist's plays: "The meaning's felt often before it's seen; My heart knows what my rusted mind does not."

While intensely focused on the work of Reaney, this exploration can be appreciated even by those new to his productions. Thoroughly researched and annotated, the book provides even the uninitiated with all the information and context required to arrive at an admiration of the full reach of Reaney's creative endeavors. The reverence the author feels for his subject matter is apparent. Further, the book serves as a rich source document for anyone wanting to learn about emblems as an art form, and their historical context.

Gerry aptly provides the reader with a backdrop of Canadian art history, and Reaney's place therein. The book is printed on heavy paper, worthy of mention as it allows the reader to get a true sense of the definition, intricacy, and brilliant color (where applicable) of Reaney's favored emblems. The cover is an image of an original Reaney watercolor, providing yet another sample of this man's almost unlimited artistic range.

The Emblems of James Reaney will be well received by Reaney followers, but is also suitable for students of the art and arcana of emblems, as well as for those interested in Canadian art history.

BARBARA BAMBERGER SCOTT (August 22, 2013)

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