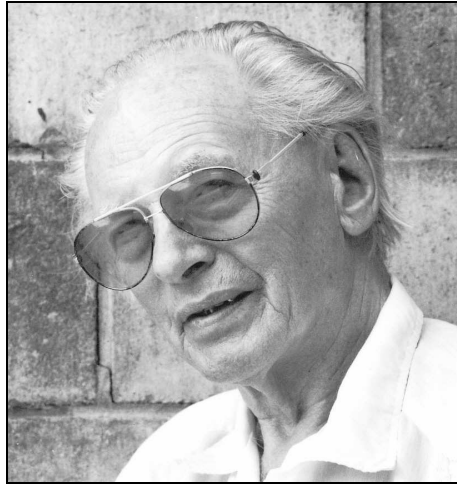


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## **AL PURDY – A PERMANENT TRIBUTE**

*Statue of Canada's Favourite Poet Unveiled in Queen's Park*

One of Canada's most beloved poets was honoured today with the unveiling of a statue in his likeness at an historic ceremony at Queen's Park. This is only the second full-length statue of a poet in Toronto (the other being of Robbie Burns), and one of very few in Canada. The event was presided over by Toronto's Poet Laureate Pier Giorgio Di Cicco with Purdy's widow, Eurithe Purdy, unveiling the monument to her late husband.

Mayor David Miller spoke to the crowd about the man who was often described as Canada's national poet. "Al Purdy is one of Canada's greatest poets," said Toronto Mayor David Miller. "This statue, donated to the people of Toronto by the friends of the Poet Laureate and placed in a prominent location in Queen's Park, is a fitting tribute to a person who enriched the lives of so many Canadians."

In 2001, Scott Griffin, founder of the Griffin Poetry Prize and a member of the Friends of the Poet Laureate, suggested the statue to Dennis Lee, Toronto's first Poet Laureate. Together with Lee, Margaret Atwood, Michael Ondaatje and professor Sam Solecki, Griffin commissioned husband and wife sculptors Edwin and Veronica Dam de Nogales to create the memorial artwork after a review of a number of contemporary sculptors.

Lee said of the poet, who died in 2000: "Al Purdy is one of the titans; if we have a national poet in English Canada, he's it. The Purdy statue is a tremendous way to celebrate his place in our lives."

*Voice of the Land*, the name given to the Purdy statue by the Dam de Nogales, is situated prominently in Queen's Park north.

Griffin – who underwrote the project – along with Lee, Atwood, Ondaatje, and Solecki, partnered with the City of Toronto's Culture Division to honour Al Purdy with the sculpture. Atwood

summarized the importance of the project: “It’s wonderful that the Friends of the Poet Laureate has arranged for this arresting public statue of Al Purdy, one of Canada’s foremost poets. Cities such as Edinburgh, Scotland, are known for their honouring of their own cultural tradition, and it’s encouraging to see Toronto, as well as the province of Ontario beginning to do the same.”

Solecki, Purdy’s editor and close friend, added: “When a great Scottish poet died, one of his friends insisted that ‘Because of his death, this country should observe two minutes of pandemonium.’ Since pandemonium is un-Canadian and not protected by the Charter of Rights, we’re commemorating Al Purdy’s remarkable life with a statue in Queen’s Park.”

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### **About Al Purdy:**

**Alfred Wellington (Al) Purdy** is widely considered the most popular and important Canadian poet of the twentieth century. He was born in Wooler, Ontario on December 30, 1918 and raised in Trenton, Ontario. During the Depression he “rode the rails” to Vancouver and worked in various occupations before joining the Royal Canadian Air Force in World War II. He was appointed to the Order of Canada in 1983 and the Order of Ontario in 1987. He lived all over Canada and later in life travelled extensively beyond its borders with his wife Eurithe. Al Purdy died on April 21, 2000 in North Saanich, BC. His ashes are buried in Ameliasburg, Ontario at the end of Purdy Lane.

Al Purdy is a two-time winner of the Governor General’s Literary Award for *Cariboo Horses* (1965) and *Collected Poems* (1986). He is the recipient of the Voice of the Land Award, specially created by the League of Canadian Poets specifically to honour Purdy’s unique contribution to Canada. Poet Susan Musgrave championed his collection *Rooms for Rent in the Outer Planets: Selected Poems, 1962–1996* for the 2006 installment of Canada Reads. In addition to his 33 books of poetry, he published a novel, two volumes of memoirs – most recently *Reaching for the Beaufort Sea* – and four books of correspondence, including *Margaret Laurence – Al Purdy: A Friendship in Letters*. His final collection of poetry, *Beyond Remembering: The Collected Poems of Al Purdy*, was released posthumously in the fall of 2000. Purdy also wrote radio and television plays for the CBC, served as writer-in-residence at a number of Canadian universities, and edited several anthologies of poetry.

Of Purdy’s work, his friend and poet, George Woodcock says: “It is poetry, written and read, that was Purdy’s essential mode.” Woodcock goes on to say, “important factors in Purdy’s poetic liberation from his early dependence on moribund romantic models were the humour and the anger he began to introduce, a characteristic style and form with relaxed, loping lines and a gruff, garrulous and engaging poetic persona.”

Purdy was one of a group of important Canadian poets, people like Woodcock, Milton Acorn, Alden Nowlan and Patrick Lane among others, whose roots were embedded in Canada’s working-class culture. His poems, Woodcock says, “reveal the generalist erudition that is acquired by a self-taught man with a passion for reading, and he sought especially to bring into poetry a sense of Canada’s past, of the rapid pattern of change that has made much of Canada acquire the quality of age in so brief a history.”

Purdy was celebrated for a style of poetry that more closely resembled the rhythms and patterns of oral speech, the colloquial and experiential in his mind eclipsing flights of fancy and artifice. American poet Charles Bukowski touched on Purdy's trueness of purpose when he said, "If you want to read some decent strong human stuff without fakery I'd say Al Purdy the Canadian. . . one of the few very good poets since 1900." Purdy managed to reflect his own extensive travels and to evoke a sense of history, of our past, of a Canadian complex, in poems like 'The Runner', 'The Country North of Belleville', 'My Grandfather's Country', 'The Battlefield of Batoche' and the long verse cycle for radio that he wrote about the Loyalist heritage entitled 'In Search of Owen Roblin'.

Writing from Ameliasburg in 1986, in his own earthy and self-deprecating style, Purdy said: "All of us who write are indebted to everyone else who writes for our enthusiasms and craft (or sullen art). I have enjoyed being alive and writing a great deal, being ashamed and prideful, making mistakes and stumbling on answers before I know the questions existed. In a world so abundant with both good and bad things, in which my own unique lighted space of human consciousness burns and flickers, at this moment when the past and future converge to pinpoint now, am at an age when the body says, "Slow down, you silly bugger," there are still important things in my life, and still poems I want to write. Which is a very long sentence: it makes me thirsty for a beer or two. And it occurs to me that if I were aboard a rowboat floating in the middle of all the beer I've drunk in a lifetime, I'd never be able to see the shore. At which point the high gods of serious things throw up their hands in horror."

### **About *Voice of the Land***

*Voice of the Land*. the name given to the Purdy statue by the Dam de Nogales, is situated prominently in Queen's Park north. The site was selected by the Friends of the Poet Laureate as the most appropriate place in which to honour Al Purdy, due to his tremendous achievements in literature and his significance as a cultural figure. After advice from the Art Committee for Public Places, professional art consultant Karen Mills was retained by the Friends of the Poet Laureate to further develop the design to respect Parks, Forestry and Recreation's plans for the park and the City's artwork donation criteria. The placement of the sculpture and the design of the base have been developed in order to respect the protection zones for the adjacent trees, to appropriately position the sculpture in relation to the other landmarks and paths within the area, and to be in keeping with the character and importance of both the park and the poet. Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff have reviewed the revised site proposal and have approved the sculpture's location in Queen's Park north.

The sculptors commissioned to create this memorial artwork were selected after review of a number of contemporary sculptors by a group consisting of the Friends of the Poet Laureate, Dennis Lee (then Poet Laureate), Scott Griffin, Margaret Atwood, Michael Ondaatje and Professor Sam Solecki. The selected sculptors, Veronica de Nogales Leprevost and Edwin Timothy Dam, have a history of exhibitions in Canada, the United States and Spain and in 2004 completed the Johnny Lombardi memorial at College and Grace Streets in Toronto. Landscape architect firm Quinn Design Associates worked with the artists and the donor on siting the artwork.

## **About the Sculptors Edwin and Veronica Dam de Nogales:**

**Veronica de Nogales Leprevost**, born in Barcelona, Spain in 1970, and **Edwin Timothy Dam**, born in 1970 in Hamilton, Ontario, did not meet until an exhibition in 1997 with the Generalitat de Barcelona. Discovering that they shared an intense curiosity for nature, for life and for sculpting the relation of man within it, they married, and soon after began to exhibit their works together. Naturally, over a short while, it became increasingly difficult to distinguish the work of one from the other. Wishing never to promote a separation of what they considered a singular union, they began to sculpt together, co-signing each work they created **Dam de Nogales**. Now, residing in Canada, they continue to work intensely together between both countries of birth.

**Veronica de Nogales Leprevost**'s intense interest in art and in nature began at an early age manifesting itself in drawings and paintings of nature and of wildlife, which took her as far as the snowy wooded areas of Sweden. In 1988, at the University of Fine Arts of Barcelona, she began to undergo an anatomical shift to the study of human body movement rendered not only through two-dimensional mediums of painting, etching and drawing but also through the third and fourth dimensions of sculpture and of dance. Recognizing the strength of her talent, the Provincial Gallery of Catalunya, Spain offered her a solo sculpture exhibition, first in Spain, and soon after honoured her works in Paris. Subsequently her works were taken on by galleries in Spain and Brussels.

**Edwin Timothy Dam**, of Dutch and Friesian descent and native of Hamilton, Ontario, began his anatomical studies at McMaster University. Two years later he transferred to Calvin College of Grand Rapids, Michigan, where he underwent a polar shift in his studies to philosophy and literature. After graduation, he passed a short stint in creative writing for the Canadian magazine industry, before moving to Japan and then to Vancouver, BC where he joined a clay studio. While it was in Vancouver that he began to foster a passion for sculpture, it was perhaps his move to Barcelona two years later that was monumental for it was there that while attending one of her sculpture exhibitions, he met Veronica. With her encouragement, he entered and won second in the Pere Jou Sculpture Competition in Sitges, Spain and began his career as a sculptor.

Together, in the winter of 2000, they erected their first permanent outdoor work *El Espiritu del Bosque (The Spirit of the Woods)*, rendered in bronze and iron in Urus, a mountainous pueblo in the north of Spain. In September of 2001, they erected *Words towards Poesia*, a monumental work of bronze and steel, on the grounds of Bristol College, Fall River, Massachusetts. In October, 2001 and January, 2002 they installed *The Wandering Brute* and *Meditations Over a Chair* in the St. Louis University's Lay Sculpture Park, Missouri. *The Sculptor's Palette* was placed in Yorkville, Toronto, in July, 2002. Also in 2002, *The Poet*, commissioned by Martin County, Florida was permanently installed in front of the new Hoke Public Library of Jensen Beach. In June, 2004 the Johnny Lombardi Piazza was unveiled in Little Italy, Toronto. Here the artists not only created the larger than life size bronze sculptures, but also re-designed the entire piazza, utilizing oceanic wave forms for granite benches to divide and connect the spaces. Also in 2004 they unveiled 14 individual bronze sculptures in The Bishop A. Tonnos Spiritual Park of Hamilton, Ontario, and in that same year, the artists re-interpreted the life of the innovative *George F. Morris* in figurative and architectural forms for Southern Ontario's new Chatham-Kent Public Hospital, utilizing bronze, granite and Cor-ten steel. 2005 included intense study into Bio-molecular forms, and resulted in the creation of *The Spirit of Discovery* for the Donnelly centre of Cellular and Bio-molecular research that has since become the icon for the entire Discovery District of Toronto, and appears on all their documentation. In 2006 they created their *On the Shoulders of Giants* monument, the first contemporary public sculpture to honour so many medical researchers in a single work of art, responding both to the history and future of the

centre, as well as the contemporary architecture. In June, 2007 the City of North Vancouver unveiled a contemporary equestrian sculpture dedicated to the lives of the work horses that once trod a path in the pioneering of the city. The work was entitled *The Long Ascent* in which the artists not only responded to an existing 125 year old water trough with the creation of a life size horse of steel and bronze, but also utilized the length of the sidewalks to embed stainless steel hoof prints marking the original path where the work horses once trod. At the end of July, 2007, Chatham-Kent saw the unique green space urban design project and the unveiling of *Echoes of the Iron Horse*, created to revitalize the core of Highgate, Ontario. In March, 2008 *Pincellades del Temps* was erected in Sitges, Spain. Their current work, a monument to the late Al Purdy entitled *Voice of the Land* was unveiled in Queen's Park north today.

**About the the Friends of the Poet Laureate:**

The Friends of the Poet Laureate is a volunteer committee whose members share Toronto's first Poet Laureate Dennis Lee's enthusiasm for the literary arts.

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