Introduction

Christiane Pflug (1936-1972) is an important German-born Canadian artist who has become known for her detailed drawings and magical realist painting style. Her artistic beginnings began in 1953 when she went to study fashion design in Paris, France. During this time, she met her future husband Michael Pflug who encouraged her to pursue painting. Christiane relocated to Tunis, Africa in 1956 and immigrated to Canada in 1959. These transitions significantly influenced the subject matter of her work which centered on themes of her surrounding environment and her domestic interiors. Many of the works she produced in her short life now reside at several public Canadian art collections. The purpose of this research project was to conduct a technical examination of her art, with a focus on those on paper, housed at the Agnes Etherington Art Center (AEAC). Non-invasive methods were used to identify her material preferences and trace her artistic developments as she moved from Europe to Africa, and then to Canada. At the same time, this research explored the function of Christiane's graphic drawings, specifically in relation to her oil paintings. Ultimately, this project hopes to generate interest in this under-recognized artist and contribute to the limited body of knowledge surrounding her work.

Methods

- 24 works were selected for examination from the AEAC collections
  - 21 works of art on paper, including bodycolour (gouache), watercolour, tempera and oil paintings; 1 sketchbook; 3 oil paintings on canvas
- Preliminary Research was conducted at the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO) E. P. Taylor Research Library and Archives. Works from the National Gallery Canada (NGC) were also examined at the Prints and Drawings Study Room
- Visible examinations under the microscope
- Technical photography of all works on paper:
  - Visible and raking light photography
  - Transmitted light photography
  - Ultraviolet-induced visible fluorescence (UVF) photography
  - Infrared (IR) photography
- Infrared reflectography (IRR) of paintings on canvas with Queen’s University’s Optical Spectroscopic and Infrared Remote Imaging System (OSIRIS)

Summary of Christiane’s Artistic Evolution

Paris, France (1953-1956)
- Produced a series of fashion studies while attending École Baziot.
- Met Michael Pflug who encouraged her to paint on plein air.
- Experimented with bodycolour, watercolour, tempera and oil paint on paper.

Tunis, Africa (1956-1959)
- Became more interested in painting still lifes with tempera on canvas.
- Began drawing more frequently for both its spontaneity and ease of use, especially after the birth of her daughters.

Toronto, Canada (1959-1972)
- Painting in oil on canvas and drawing with graphite on paper became her preferred mediums; produced a series of works depicting the Toronto landscape and views of interiors from her Toronto homes at Young Street (1960-1962), Woodlawn Avenue (1962–1967) and Birch Avenue (1967–1972).
- Briefly experimented with printmaking.

Discussions and Preliminary Conclusions

- Examination of Christiane’s paintings on paper showed she experimented with a variety of media on both laid and wove paper. Watermark identification revealed that in Paris she used laid papers made by the German paper manufacturer, Zerkall Bütten. All graphite drawings were executed on wove paper and both hard and soft pencils were likely used. Some of her wove papers were made by Latutie et Cie., a paper manufacturer in France. This wove paper was identified in her sketchbook ‘Two Island Lake’ and other finished drawings, now housed at the NGC. This revealed Christiane continued to use European-made materials while in Canada.
- Christiane’s drawings served many functions; some appear to be sketches whose subjects appear in later paintings (Figure 4). Other drawings are perspective exercises or stand alone as finished works. Regardless of their function, most works appear to be taken out of a sketchbook.
- Traces of graphite underdrawings were visible in some early paintings on paper. In these works, graphite was also identified on top of the paint layers. In Christiane’s paintings on canvas, changes in the position of subjects and shifts in the contours of objects were detected; however, it is difficult to determine if these were deviations from underdrawings or changes made while painting. X-Radiography should be done for more information.

Observations

Visual Examinations
- Media related stability issues: paper supports of oil paintings have staining from the binder; the large tempera on paper, made in Tunis, is cracking and flaking, revealing underlying painting layers (Figure 4).

Transmitted Light Photography
- Many laid paper supports have a ZERKALL BÜTTEN watermark. All laid paper supports have similar chain and laid line measurements (Figure 1).
- The wove paper identified in her sketchbook and Two Island Lake have the same DESSIN SUPERIEUR GELATINE LATUNE BLACONS watermark.

Ultraviolet-Induced Visible Fluorescence Photography
- The sketchbook and Two Island Lake fluorescence blue light significantly more than any other paper, likely due to optical brightening agents that were added in the paper manufacture (Figure 3).

Infrared Photography
- IR photography did not detect graphite underdrawings in paintings with thick paint layers or areas with dark colors such as blue and green.
- IR photography may have detected the faint outline of a rose in Still Life with Rose and Bottles (Figure 4), suggesting this figure was later painted over.

Infrared Reflectography of Paintings on Canvas
- In all paintings, slight changes in the position of objects and/or subjects were detected in the reflectograms. These changes were likely made during the painting stages. Bird Cage with Hydro Mast (Figure 5) is the only painting where strong evidence of underdrawings were seen.

Notes:
- The paper was trained at the Master of Art Conservation photo studio by Norman Paul and Rowena Howland on November 10, 2008 with the OMPS infrared camera of Queen’s University Medical Faculty’s Technical Art History. This camera, acquired through the generous support of Dr. Michael Pflug, is calibrated with an infrared sensor and an infrared 1000 nm ± 0.5% (1.0-3.0 mm) camera, and is operated in the 1020-1200 nm range.