

New Book By Karen McLaughlin Hot Off The Presses

by Lesa Light

When you first pick up this new book, you notice a strange picture on the front. It looks like cells of the body or a bushy tree or even a cross section of coral. But like any good art, it is all of those things and more. However, for want of a better title for her picture, artist Karen McLaughlin called the picture Heart, but she called her book *Choral*.

Choral is about five generations of Nova Scotian women from the same family and it moves freely between the ponderings of the women and the testimony of some of their neighbours. It pays no attention whatsoever to a regular time line. McLaughlin admits that the structure is complicated but "That's how I made it, it's important to me." The effect "straddles poetry and prose."

McLaughlin toured the Maritimes recently, stopping at UPEI's Faculty Lounge on October 26 for a reading and to display some of her artwork.

"The picture on the front is actually a leaf from my neighbour's basement," McLaughlin explains. She made the picture using her own technique of etching through layers of oil pastel

colours. All three colours are then apparent in varying degrees. The effect is detailed and evocative of the novel's tree-like structure which moves off in many directions at once.

of prose. Like a coral reef, it has sharp edges filled with holes, beautiful colours, and new generations building on the old.

Because the novel is not structured in the usual way of nice, regularly-plotted

chapter at a time. It's meant to be read all at once." Savoured all at once is a better term.

Written as the result of a Calgary art show, *Choral* started life as a 64-foot long, triple text, video-like art exhibit. Offered the chance to do a video, but without the money to produce one, McLaughlin "decided to write a story that kept moving." She got the idea to sew a video and wrap it around the room.

"My friends said it was not enough, there was a bigger story here" and thus *Choral* was born.

The movement and interplay of women ends up being a "choral" of voices that harmonize together. When McLaughlin presented it at the reading, Vaughn Jelliffe, Kate Lee, and Rilla Marshall participated with her to create the blend of voices reading the likes of: "But what do you do when you stroke the side of your face in the full-peeled day and remember: this is the skin of my mother. This is the skin of my mother and her sisters and my grandmother and my great-grandmother. This is noisy skin."

You can get *Choral* at the Woman's Network at 3 Queen St. or local bookstores. Then sit back and savour. It will do your heart good.



Karen McLaughlin, Photo by John McLaughlin

In the text there are sections of poetry-like material topped with two bands of lines from other poems and the whole thing is interspersed with sections

novels with a beginning, middle and satisfactory conclusion, it may seem threatening at first glance. Actually it isn't, it moves rather smoothly.

"It's not a novel to be read a

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