

# mentor's introduction

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When Ophra Benazon began painting, she was on visual form, so much so that she became angry when people 'injected' content into art; many of us who were also involved in art decades ago felt the same way. With a BA in Humanities, she became a high school humanities teacher in Israel. She found emotional fulfillment in her painting, and she thought of her art as separate from her academic work.

Years later, Ophra was painting and exhibiting her work in Toronto. Although she was reading art history and studying art, she decided she needed to combine her studio with teaching. At that point, she began her MA in Art Education.

When Ophra moved to the small city of Sherbrooke, Quebec, she became involved with artists and writers who were also interested in modern art and formal values. A group of artists and writers would meet at a pub near the Université de Sherbrooke, drink and talk. They began promoting one another's work and formed a collective to introduce modern art to the public. Passionately believing in the decentralization of art from the major cities, they felt it was their "mission to go out to the public, and to get modern art into people's eyes and minds" (O. Benazon, personal conversation, 14 July 1998). In her MA thesis describing the evolution of this group, *Regroupement des artistes des Cantons de l'est*, Ophra wrote that they held exhibits and events and created for themselves what Howard Becker calls an art world.

As the art scene and group shifted their emphasis from visual form to minimal, pop, conceptual, and environmental art and performance, Ophra was concerned with the vilification of structural concerns and treating formal values as though they were techniques, or regressive. When Ophra Benazon began teaching painting at nearby Bishop's University, she developed her teaching to include these values which she sees as inherent in art. This approach to teaching is the focus of her current doctoral dissertation research. Hers is an approach that can be useful to others who are also interested in teaching visual form while addressing content in students' art.

## Reference

Benazon, Ophra. (1988). *The Regroupement des artistes des Cantons de l'est: Its History and Contribution to Local Art and to Art Education, 1973-1988*. Unpublished master's thesis, Concordia University, Montreal, Quebec, Canada.