

A COMMUNITY-ENGAGED ART PROJECT SUPPORTING ARTISTS WITH DEMENTIA AND THEIR CARE-PARTNERS





Dean Wiley, *Beaver Logs*. Mixed media sculpture with found wood, 2022-23

COVER - Ron Walton, Abstract Dominos (close up), matboard on wood 2022

Belong Where You Find Yourself

PARTICIPATING ARTISTS:

Elaine Berard & Herb Elder
Bonnie & Leon Jones
Merle & Dean Wiley
Amanda Babey & Verna Off
Pat & Ron Walton
Twila Napoleoni & Jeanette Haberstock

This project was overseen by lead artists
Alana Moore & Amber Phelps Bondaroff
with further support from
Jeff Morton, Director/Curator at Godfrey Dean Art Gallery
Yorkton, SK, Canada.

The project included a gallery exhibition at GDAG April 5 - May 23, 2023

Belong Where You Find Yourself is one of eight interventions supported by the Dementia Supports in Rural Saskatchewan (DSRS) initiative. DSRS is a five-year (2019-2024) Collective Impact initiative undertaken by the Saskatchewan Population Health and Evaluation Research Unit (SPHERU), University of Regina, and funded in part by the Government of Canada's New Horizons for Seniors Program. The DSRS initiative seeks to improve public awareness of the stigma and social isolation experienced by people living with dementia and their care partners in rural communities.

Belong Where You Find Yourself

TEXT BY Amber Phelps Bondaroff WITH CONTRIBUTIONS FROM Alana Moore

Belong Where You Find Yourself, is an exhibition that brings together the work of Elaine Berard & Herb Elder; Bonnie & Leon Jones; Merle & Dean Wiley; Amanda Babey & Verna Off; Pat & Ron Walton; and Twila Napoleoni & Jeanette Haberstock. The work on display was supported and encouraged by lead artists Alana Moore and Amber Phelps Bondaroff. Much of the work in the exhibition was created over the past year, while some was started many years ago and revisited under the umbrella of this project and of our shared time together.

We embarked on this journey in March of 2022. Some of the artists participating knew each other prior, while others met for the first time through their participation in this project. They all share a number of things in common. They call southeastern Saskatchewan home and are all navigating the challenges of dementia, either for themselves or a loved one.

Dementia is an umbrella term for the loss of memory, language, problem-solving, and other thinking abilities. Alzheimer's is the most common among many forms of dementia, and symptoms may present themselves in a

variety of ways. While Alzheimer's is at the forefront of biomedical research, there is no cure, and much is still unknown about its causes and prevention. Currently, over 18,000 people in Saskatchewan are impacted by dementia, although in reality there may be many more, as the disease often goes undiagnosed.

From March 2022 - 2023, Amber and Alana visited Yorkton and surrounding communities on a monthly basis. Sometimes we met as a group at the gallery, other times individually, sitting in kitchens, living rooms, and workshops to share stories, family photos, and cups of tea. Sometimes we drew, sang songs, sewed, and shared skills. Usually we laughed, sometimes we cried and most importantly, we got to know each other through shared acts of creative exploration.

While the artists in this exhibition share a common diagnosis, they are defined by so much more than a disease. As the title suggests, as lead artists we strived to meet people exactly where they were at the time of each meeting. We developed individual projects collaboratively rather than prescribing one activity or



medium to everyone in the group. This process centered conversation, listening, and getting to know one another, while attempting to remain in the present moment. We explored existing interests, hobbies, and talents, while gently encouraging deeper explorations of what was already present. Our plans inevitably shifted with the passing of each month and of each moment. The present moment is a slippery thing, fleeting, and ever-changing.

The work in this exhibition is the culmination of a year spent building relationships and resiliency. Over time spent meeting and making together, we have learned so much about and from one another. Through creative acts and explorations, we fostered, forged, and fortified relationships, bound by common experience.

What is in the exhibition are the visual representations of these processes of care and community building; the artworks are accessories to the relationships fostered through their making. We hope that the network of support we have forged continues to thrive, well beyond the physical and temporal framework of this project.

"Sometimes artists
just need a quiet space
and some materials to
create...[as lead artists
our role included]
gently encouraging
each artist to find
their joy..."

- Alana Moore



THE LILAC TREE MERLE AND DEAN WILEY

When we started working together Merle was astutely concerned about what others would think. At the early stages of dementia, it wasn't totally obvious who knew about Dean's condition and who did not. A natural caretaker, Merle was cautious in what she shared, wanting to protect Dean from potential ridicule or stigmatized attitudes from their community.

Merle shared with us the story of a lilac tree they had planted, from a cutting, in their back yard, many years ago. The tree had grown to be well-established and lush. She looked forward to the springtime blooms and to the shade it provided in the heat of the summer. One day Merle returned home to find the tree gone. Dean had taken it upon himself to cut it down, assuming that Merle would be pleased with the change. The branches of the once towering lilac now sat cut and stacked, in tidy piles

in the front yard. The loss of the tree hit a nerve. Dean's aggressive pruning was one piece of a larger series of confused behaviors. As Merle mourned the loss of the tree she also mourned for other things that were changing with the progression of Dean's dementia.

The wood from the lilac tree contained vibrant rings of violet, interspersed with memories of a long marriage. Never one to sit idly by, Merle asked Dean to cut the wood into smaller pieces with his chop-saw. She got to work, turning thin slices into coasters with inspirational messages, business card holders for Dean's former shop, and pieces to hold photos of the former tree in full bloom. She then arranged the pieces into an altar of sorts, commemorating the lilac and the memories that surrounded it.

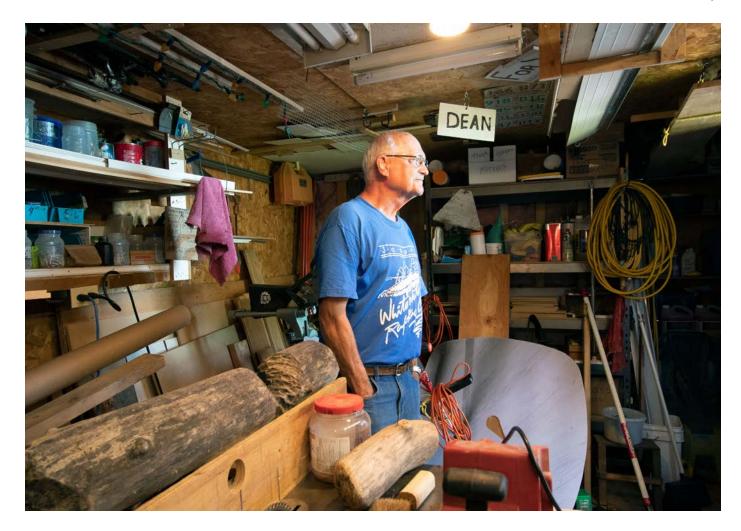


This story feels particularly apt in demonstrating the power of creative exploration for those navigating the symptoms of dementia. The open eyes of a creative mind turned a small tragedy into a work of art. The saga of the lilac tree shows the beauty of creative resilience that rises to the surface when caring for a loved one who is navigating the different stages of dementia.

Over the course of this project, Merle has transformed from a hesitant participant into an outspoken advocate for people living with dementia and their families. As the project progressed, there has been a noticeable softening of Merle's concern for what others will think, as she evolves into a community leader and advocate for those living with dementia.

"...it's important for both the person with alzheimers and their caregiver. It is reassuring that we are not alone on this journey."

- Merle Wiley











MERLE AND DEAN WILEY

TOP LEFT - Merle Wiley, *Cards*. Paper, mixed media and photography, 2022 -23

BOTTOM LEFT - Dean Wiley, *Train*. Mixed media scultural installation.
Ongoing since 1990's

TOP RIGHT - Merle and Dean Wiley, The Lilac Tree. Lilac wood and mixed media. 2023

воттом RIGHT - Dean Wiley, Beaver Logs found wood, plywood and hardware.
Ongoing since 2020

PAGE 4 - Dean Wiley in his workshop, Saltcoats, SK. 2022

PAGE 5 - Meeting for tea and cookies at Merle & Dean Wiley's, Saltcoats, SK. 2022

ABSTRACT DOMINOS RON AND PAT WALTON

Ron is a natural performer. At our first group meeting, he introduced himself by walking across the room theatrically, lighting up the entire space with his antics. Pat prefers to be out of the spotlight. She has made sets, props, and costumes for various community theatre productions that the pair have been involved in over the years. Her quiet yet strong demeanor has lent itself best to working behind the scenes. Ron was diagnosed with Alzheimer's in 2015. He stopped acting in community theatre when he started forgetting his lines.

One production that had a lasting impact on them both was, *My Fair Lady*. One visit, we pulled up a recording of "Wouldn't it be Lovely," from the musical. Ron rose to his feet to belt out "Wouldn't it be looooovely..." in a striking baritone. This moment shaped the course of our work together.

Finding pre-existing creative threads was a consistent element in this project. We tried not to introduce new or unfamiliar ways of working and instead encouraged new ways of engaging with the familiar. Pat came into the project, as many did, assuming that everyone would learn how to paint. While painting was familiar and resonant for some, others had different creative threads to pursue.

We later met in Pat's lush flower garden in the height of summer. Ron seemed unfazed by the July heat, donning a wool jacket and wig from his collection of costumes. With cameras rolling, we tried to recreate the moment of spontaneous song from a few months prior. Ron whistled and hummed along to the recording, stopping frequently to check-in. "Was that any good?" "Did we get it?" Then, for a moment, he fell into song, "Lovely, Lov-e-lyyyyy." While we didn't recreate the moment, we captured another — one that showed Ron in his element, reminding us of the capacity that music has to connect us to the present moment and to each other.

At a later meeting, Pat left the room with Alana to record a monologue she had written. It was a text imagining Ron's perspective of forgetting. Pat had initially hoped that Ron would read it, but as his dementia progressed, this became less feasible, so she decided to read it herself.

"One night I couldn't sleep so I got up and started typing....and I just came up with that monologue, out of nowhere."

- Pat Walton

Ron and I sat with my then four-month-old daughter, arranging small pieces of coloured mat-board on a solid background. Over the course of half an hour or so, we developed a game. One person made a 'move' by placing pieces on the background. Then the other person made a move by either adding, subtracting, or moving the pieces around. There were no rules, just a loose structure; a conversation without words, guided by internal impulse and aesthetic sensibility. The game is reminiscent of one I would play with my father as a child, using items on the table while we were waiting for food to arrive at a restaurant. We used to call it *Abstract Dominos* and it would keep my child-self occupied for many hungry minutes.

Sitting with Ron, the game captivated all three of us for some time and the results were quite striking—abstract arrangements reminiscent of the work of painter Piet Mondrian. Pat took the pieces home and played the game again with Ron when they were both feeling up for it. She later glued some of the arrangements down, while others were left un-fastened as ephemeral collages.

opposite page - Ron & Pat Walton, on the set of, *Wouldn't it be Lovely,* Melville, SK. 2022











RON AND PAT WALTON

TOP LEFT - Pat Walton, Flower Collages. Mixed media and photography,

2023

BOTTOM LEFT - BOTTOM LEFT - Ron & Pat Walton,

Wouldn't it be Lovely (Gallery view) Mixed media & video installation. Video filmed and edited by Alana Moore

2022-23

Ron Walton, Abstract Dominos. TOP RIGHT -

Mixed media on wood. 2022

BOTTOM RIGHT - BOTTOM RIGHT - Pat Walton, Sun

Flower Crepe paper and recycled

materials, 2023

THE HARVEST LEON AND BONNIE JONES

At 6'7" Leon's presence is immediately noticed when he enters a room. This is not only due to his tall stature, he has a warmth and magnetism that commands attention. Leon moved to Canada from Trinidad in the early 1970s. He lived in Edmonton and Yellowknife before settling in Yorkton in 1993, where he met his wife Bonnie. One of only a few people of colour in the small prairie town, Leon is full of stories about his past. Stories about growing up in Trinidad, about his family, and about leading the band at his church. Leon's storytelling is captivating. He tells us he wants to write these stories down. He is particularly passionate about the strong women in his life, especially his and Bonnie's mothers. We ask if there are any

ways that we can support his writing. Can we give him homework? Check-ins? "When it comes, it comes. There is no forcing it," Leon responds.

We leave Leon with a notebook and some pens. When we visit next, the notebook remains empty and there is no further talk of writing. We decide to shift gears and instead ask Leon about his music.

In 1976 Leon released an album of spirituals called *The Harvest*. Bonnie brings a copy on CD for us to listen to. On the album cover Leon is sitting in a rolling prairie field surrounded by wheat. He is wearing an immaculately





fitted suit and is lit by the warm glow of the late afternoon sun. As we listen to *The Harvest*, Leon begins to sing along. His strong voice is interspersed with side notes about what the band is doing. "The drums come in here," "Now, wait for it - the backup singers - Bonnie - this is you now."

We listen through the entire album. Leon pauses from time to time with his head in his hands. Tears begin to flow from his eyes, and ours. The emotion of these songs is palpable. We didn't come expecting to film Leon singing, but Alana has her camera ready to capture this special moment.

Months later, we show the video to Leon. This time he has a new guitar, a gift from Bonnie, in hand. As he watches the video he plays along, strumming the guitar, singing, and laughing. He pauses between singing to tell us, "I think I can get serious with these songs now, I know them, I remember them, I remember what they are about."

We get to know Bonnie better by visiting her at the couple's home. Her family and matrilineal history are very important to her. Her grandmother immigrated to Canada from Austria in the early 1900s. Her Mother, who was born in Theodore, Saskatchewan, passed away the year before. Bonnie shows us photos of her mother, pieces of her clothing, her hand-woven

Ukrainian sash, a recipe book, and a well-worn bible.

Bonnie also shows us a drawing her mother did from memory of the family farm. Her sister later did a painting of the farm based on her mother's depiction of it. Bonnie later creates her own version, a collage using photographs of her mother visiting the site of the former farm. In the exhibition, we see all three versions of the same scene, as envisioned by three different artists.

"I really enjoyed watching him do... something that I never thought I would see Leon do."

- Bonnie Jones









LEON AND BONNIE JONES

TOP LEFT - Leon Jones, *The Harvest*. Framed vinyl record, 1976/2023

BOTTOM LEFT - Bonnie & Leon Jones, Harvest (Gallery view).

Mixed media & video installation.

Video filmed and edited by Alana
Moore, 2022-23

TOP RIGHT - Bonnie Jones, Shadow Box & Memories of Mum, (installation)
Mixed media,
2022-23

воттом RIGHT - Bonnie Jones, Shadow Box (close up) Mixed media, family hierlooms and photographs, 2023

PAGE 12 - Bonnie sharing family photos at Merle & Dean's home. Saltcoats, SK. 2022

PAGE 13 - Leon playing his new guitar. Yorkton District Carehome, 2022

PATCHWORK AND PENCILS VERNA OFF AND AMANDA BABEY

Verna is 92 when we first meet her. A proud greatgrandmother, she is soft-spoken and somewhat guarded before she gets to know us. She tells us that she likes to draw and prefers to do so alone. We deliver drawing materials and a foldable table to her room at the Yorkton District Care Home.

When we visit and ask Verna if she's done any drawing she usually shrugs and answers, 'Not too much.' However, there are always at least a few new drawings tucked away in her portfolio. Landscapes, farms, buildings, and animals, rendered on the backs of envelopes, calendars, and scraps of paper. At Verna's request, we bring her photos of horses and buildings from around Yorkton to draw from. Her drawings are quaint and sincere. A standout from early 2023 depicts a path leading through



"[the project]
really deepened
our relationship...
it allowed me to see
the through lines of
our lives that are so
similar."

- Amanda Babey

the woods, the words 'The long way home' are written in tidy cursive at the top of the page. Verna isn't afraid of colour. She boldly layers pencil crayon and ink with impressive confidence. I tell her how her drawings remind me of the late Frank Cicansky, father of the well-known Saskatchewan ceramicist, Vic.

Amanda is Verna's granddaughter. She joined the project a few months in after serendipitously realizing that we knew one another from Regina. In working with Amanda, we learn much more about Verna. Verna used to be an avid quilter and has made elaborate quilts for all of her grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Amanda plans to finish making a quilt that her grandmother started many years ago. She initially hoped that Verna could share her skills and show her how to finish the quilt. But the project didn't pan out exactly as Amanda thought. Verna wasn't able to show her granddaughter how to finish the quilt, so Amanda taught herself, looking up videos on Youtube, and asking friends for tips. She sifts through her grandmother's sewing box, finding pattern pieces and detailed handwritten notes as to their uses. The sewing box shows a side of Verna that we hadn't seen previously. It shows a meticulous craftsperson and a careful record-keeper. The project does bring granddaughter and grandmother closer together, just not in the way that Amanda had expected.











AMANDA BABEY AND VERNA OFF

- TOP LEFT Amanda Babey, Quilt & Sewing chest. Cotton, batting and thread, 2022-23
- воттом LEFT Verna Off, working in her room at the Yorkton District Carehome, 2022
 - TOP RIGHT Amanda Babey & Verna Off, visiting at Godfrey Dean Art Gallery, Yorkton, SK, 2023
- воттом віднт Verna Off, Lighthouse. Ink on paper, 2023
 - PAGE 16 Verna Off, The Long Way Home. Ink on paper, 2023.
 - PAGE 17 Close up of Verna Off drawing, Yorkton, SK. 2022

MOUNTAINS OF MEMORIES JEANETTE HAVERSTOCK AND TWILA NAPOLEONI

Jeanette's room at the Yorkton district care home is filled with books, photographs of family, drawings from grandchildren, and paintings she has done in her younger years. When we visit, her granddaughters are often there, along with their mother, drawing, reading, or sitting with their grandmother. The room comes alive with the energy of three generations of women, sharing space and creating together.

Twila shares stories with us about her mother. Jeanette seems to have done it all. Raising a family, working as a school teacher, speaking multiple languages, drawing, painting, and writing. One of Jeanette's more ambitious undertakings was writing a book. Originally published in 1976, *Maria's Memories* details the life and memories of Jeanette's paternal grandmother. Maria moved to South Eastern Saskatchewan from a small town in the Austrian

province of Bukowina in 1895. Jeanette interviewed her grandmother over 50 years ago, gathering stories about her youth. She assembled these conversations into *Maria's Memories*, including a series of hand-drawn illustrations. Twila recently re-published *Maria's Memories*, something she wanted to do for a long time. Re-visiting this book also inspired other threads of creative exploration for the entire family.

Maria had always wanted to visit the Carpathian mountains in Europe but never had the opportunity to do so. On a trip to the Rockie Mountains Twila's daughter, Isabella, poses as Maria, re-creating a scene from her great-great grandmother's imagination, looking westward across rolling fields, towards the rocky mountains. Photographs from this trip are included in the exhibition.



On their summer holiday in 2022, the family spent a week together on a houseboat. Jeannette joined with her wheelchair and lots of support from her children and grandchildren. While on the houseboat, the family shared memories and stories about Jeanette, which were captured on video by their family friend, Victor Aguayo. The video captures moments in time when three generations of the family are together. In many ways, the video makes reference to Maria's Memories, with multiple generations remembering and sharing moments together.

"[the lead artists] let it grow organically... Whatever came out they helped lead and form our ideas."

- Twila Napoleoni











JEANETTE HAVERSTOCK AND TWILA NAPOLEONI

TOP LEFT - Twila Napoleoni, Family Photo Wall.
Photographs, frames, 2023

воттом LEFT - Twila Napoleoni, *Isabella as Maria.* Photography, 2022

TOP RIGHT - Twila and her daughters visiting Jeanette at the Yorkton District Carehome, 2022

воттом RIGHT - Jeanette Haberstock, Maria's Memories (First edition) and Embroidered cushion, 1975

> PAGE 20 - Jeanette Haverstock & Twila Napoleoni, *Memories*. Mixed media and video installation. Video by Victor Aguayo, 2022-23

PAGE 21 - Twila & Jeanette greeting Amber and Lumi at the gallery, Yorkton, SK, 2023

RENDERING TO REMEMBER **ELAINE BERRARD** AND **HERB ELDER**

Elaine and Herb are both skilled craftspeople. When we first meet, they bring a collection of artworks to show us. Watercolour paintings of flowers and animals by Elaine; detailed ink drawings of landscapes and ships by Herb. They enjoy the social aspect of our project, always looking for others to draw and paint with. A few months later we gather around their kitchen table to draw together. Elaine uses watercolours, while Herb prefers coloured pens and pencils to draw landscapes from memory—a gravel pit framed by trees. It is a scene he seems to know quite well. Flipping back through the pages of his sketchbook we can see that he has drawn this scene many times over, repeated from memory, again and again.

On the same visit, we learn that Elaine is a skilled seamstress. She shows us a collection of her flawlessly constructed quilts while sharing stories about sewing blue jeans and winter coats. Her sewing studio is immaculately organized, with rows and rows of thread in every possible colour, a work of art in its own right.

Many months later, we meet at the Godfrey Dean Gallery on a cold afternoon in March. Elaine brings a selection of her and Herb's paintings and drawings, as well as a couple of guilts for the exhibition. Herb's drawings were mostly done many years ago—some are the same ones we saw on our first visit. I ask if Herb has been drawing recently and Elaine shakes her head. "Not anymore. Not unless someone really encourages him to do it, and it's been hard to find the time." Herb has recently been moved into long-term care, nearly an hour's drive away from their home in Yorkton. With the responsibilities of day-to-day life, plus this lengthy commute, it is difficult to carve time for art making, despite its importance in both of their lives. Many people in long-term care don't have the dedicated support to do the things that bring them joy. Family and support staff alike are generally overwhelmed, attending to their basic, everyday needs.

At one point in our meeting, Elaine leaves to grab some more artwork from the car, and while she is gone Alana suggests doing some drawing. Herb picks up a coloured pencil and immediately starts drawing. A pine tree, a house, a barn, some grain growing between them. When Elaine returns, she is pleasantly surprised. It has been months since Herb has drawn anything. "I could sit here

and draw for another four or five hours," he responds. He tells us how the door to the barn slides open to the side, so he had to extend a beam to make extra space for the door. There is a practicality to the decisions he makes on the page. The results are precise, calculated, and engaging.

We stay late at the gallery, enjoying the shared space of drawing together. People with progressed dementia often need a quiet and focused environment in which to work on a task such as drawing. They may move more slowly and become overwhelmed with external stimuli such as a group art class. While in this moment Herb didn't need much encouragement to draw, he did need someone to instigate the idea, to set out materials, and to hold a quiet space.

"If you decide to do a craft together, you're usually close enough that you can converse with each other, and inspire each other to go a little further..."

- Elaine Berrard

OPPOSITE PAGE - Elaine Berrard and Herb Elder drawing outside at Merle and Dean Wiley's home, Saltcoats, SK. 2022













ELAINE BERRARD AND HERB ELDER

TOP FAR LEFT - Herb Elder, drawing at his home in Yorkton, SK, 2022

TOP LEFT - Elaine Berrard, showing one of her watercolours, 2022

BOTTOM LEFT - Herb Elder, *Gravel Pit, Memories*. Ink on paper, 2022

TOP RIGHT - Elaine Berrard in her sewing studio, Yorkton, SK. 2022

воттом віднт - Elaine Berrard, Flower Quilt. Appliqué and quilted cotton, 2004-2023

BELONGING

When a person living with dementia creates something, whether through a drawing or a song, we see a part of who they are. This visibility shows us who a person is, beyond a diagnosis, and is so very important in overcoming negative stigmatization for those living with dementia, and elders in general.

Our experiences with this project showed us how art can be a powerful vehicle for understanding the complexity and diversity of people's experiences. This project demonstrates how creativity is not necessarily dependent on memory and how creative skills stay with an individual well beyond short-term memory and even language. Working with this group for over a year, gave us the time and resources to hold space in which to playfully explore, and to share stories, skills, and memories. The lengthy timeline allowed for moments such as the ones described above to happen, while we patiently built relationships and trust. These are just a few of the moments we experienced over the course of the project. We hope to continue learning and building upon what has been achieved so far, ever striving to belong, where we find ourselves, right now.



"Community engaged art often places more emphasis and importance on the relationships amongst participants than on any end result or product... but we also had a strong framework of artistic creation...[which] looked different for each participating artist.."

- Amber Phelps Bondaroff

















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COLLABORATING ORGANIZATIONS:

Alzheimer Society of Saskatchewan
SaskAbilities
Parkland Valley Sport, Culture and Recreation District
City of Yorkton
Godfrey Dean Art Gallery
Uof S RaDAR
Uof S Cognitive Kitchen
Uof S Île-à-la-Crosse

EXHIBITION PHOTOGRAPHS - Kelly Litzenberger
RECEPTION PHOTOGRAPHS - Jeff Morton
PARTICIPANT PHOTOGRAPHS - Alana Moore & Amber Phelps Bondaroff

TOP IMAGE - Dean Wiley, Cabin & Trees. Wood and mixed media, 2023











