

Towards a Harmonious Union

JOSÉ HERNANDEZ reflects on his friendship with Robert R. Reid
with hope for the future.

ROBERT REID HAD JUST turned 90 when I met him. He was sharp-witted, curious, and a straight talker. I liked him immediately. I have to say, I think he enjoyed me too. In the subsequent years I had the privilege to know him, our conversations touched on many areas; Robert was interested in adventuring still, though his body had other ideas.

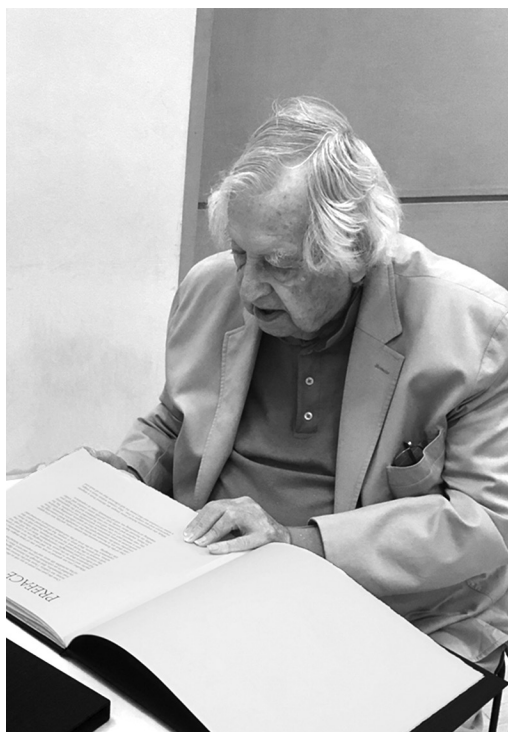
I was introduced to Robert in 2017, soon after I emigrated to Canada, by Paul Crawford, director and curator of the Penticton Art Gallery. Paul had hosted the exhibition *Love, Toni xox*, which comprised a series of deeply personal handwritten and illustrated letters Toni Onley wrote to his estranged third wife Yukiko Onley shortly after their breakup in 2009. In support

of this exhibition, Robert was commissioned to design and publish a limited-edition book faithfully reproducing the original letters while maintaining the original feel of the works. Paul had deep respect for the depth of feeling and skill with which Robert revealed Onley's heart-wrenching communications to his beloved, estranged wife and thought Robert would be the perfect person to collaborate with me on a book of my art, and my wife Anastasia's poetry, based on my near-death experience. This work would eventually become *Ethereal*, published in 2019.¹

Whether it was the milestone 90th birthday he had celebrated when I met him, or whether he had a lifelong interest in the survival of consciousness, I'll never know. But Robert had an insatiable



Robert R. Reid examines a copy of his first book, *The Fraser Mines Vindicated* (1949).



Robert R. Reid leafs through *Ethereal* (2019), his collaboration with José and Anastasia Hernandez.

curiosity about my near-death experience and my subsequent work to explore the theme through my art and mindfulness practice.

I travelled to Vancouver to meet in person with Robert about a dozen times, and we would often get together on Zoom to collaborate on the work of producing *Ethereal*. Regularly side-tracked, we spent hours thrashing out Robert’s explorations of research on consciousness, sharing with me what he had read and keen to hear my personal opinion or whether I had first-hand insights to illuminate

the abstract concepts into which he was delving.

Prior to meeting me, Robert had approached his curiosity on the subject from a purely scientific perspective, and he was fascinated by my personal experience and the second-hand stories I had been privy to during the many years I facilitated a chapter of the International Association for Near-Death Studies (IANDS). We had some interesting conversations.

Robert, in his younger years, had lived a colourful, rich life, and had survived profound personal tragedy. His quest for understanding in his later years was a genuine attempt to fathom the meaning of his experiences and embrace peace, grace, and acceptance. He was preparing to move into another world and his favourite piece of my art was *Union*; he looked at it as the coming



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Union, José Hernandez

together of two worlds in harmonious encirclement.

Two memories stand out for me when I think back on this larger-than-life man I was fortunate enough to call a friend. The first was watching Robert sign the signature page of the limited edition *Ethereal*; he signed his name in copperplate script, so deliberately and beautifully with his fountain pen, I was humbled to scrawl my name beside his. The second was my fortunate opportunity to watch Robert with the finished copy of *Ethereal* at the Alcuin Society Wayzgoose 2019 in Vancouver.

He was proud of his work, as he should be. It was a beautiful collaboration and I’m truly grateful to have had the opportunity to cross paths with Robert in this world.

Go in peace, my friend. We’ll see each other again.

1. See Paul Crawford, “Ethereal,” *Amphora* 184 (Spring 2020), 14–18.

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~ José Hernandez is an artist working in mixed media expressed in a digital format. He is co-founder of Immersive Arts LLP, a collaborative of art and design professionals working with health care organisations to foster a calming, healing, and centring environment.