

AUDIO 1

Leonard Cohen

The Spice Box of Earth

around 1960

ink on cardboard

Leonard Cohen archives, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto

Audio description of the work

This work is a drawing on a piece of sand brown cardboard slightly smaller than letter paper size. The cardboard is the everyday corrugated sort that would make up a cardboard box and the drawing is presumed to be made by a black ball point pen.

Written in three lines and in all capital letters, The text "SPICE BOX" "OF" and "EARTH" takes up the centre of the cardboard. On the right hand side is a two dimensional drawing of a traditional Jewish Besamim container, also known as a spice box or spice tower. The spice box is drawn as a triangle on top of a square. Its base is three long thin tripod-like legs protruding from the bottom. At the very top of the spice box is a little pointed flag bearing three Hebrew letters, right to left, Kaf He Nun-Sofit. The triangle top of the spice box has its scaly texture indicated by row upon row of backwards letter C's . The body of the box is filled with fine looping doodles that resemble the curved metal of a filigree pattern. Along the bottom there are three rows of the scale pattern which continues on the tripod legs which travel straight down and then curve out quite close to their base.

The cardboard has a few grease stains in the centre and a few dabs of dirt near the bottom. On the top left corner written in pencil is the word box and the roman numeral for 3 which is three straight vertical lines.

The book "Spice Box of Earth" is on display in a case nearby. Also displayed on the same wall as this work is a typical Cohen doodle and a poem on the back of a napkin. A floor to ceiling reproduction of a black and white photograph of a young Cohen sitting at his writing desk in his creative space in Hydra, Greece is affixed to this wall at the far left.

End of Audio Description.

Exhibition label text:

Published in 1961, *Spice-Box of Earth* was the most popular and commercially successful of Cohen's early books, and established his reputation as a leading poet in Canada. Its title draws from the ceremonial object— usually made of silver and decorated with elaborate filigree—used in the Havdalah (“separation” in Hebrew) ritual that marks the end of the Jewish Sabbath on Saturday evening. Cohen's poem “Out of the Land of Heaven” celebrates the joy and sacredness of the Sabbath and the role of the spice box in it. This distinctive sketch made by Cohen, drawn in ink on a scrap of cardboard, includes his family name—Kohen— written in Hebrew in the flag attached to the finial.

End of Exhibition label text.

AUDIO 2

Leonard Cohen

Portrait of Georgianna (Anne) Sherman and Leonard Cohen

around 1958
gelatin silver print

Audio description of the work

Displayed against a black backdrop, this palm sized black and white photo is in a keepsake tin frame with a shiny metallic relief border. This photobooth photo depicts a young Leonard Cohen with his then love interest Anne. The couple in their 20's take up the bottom two thirds of the photograph. Cohen is on the right and looks directly at the camera, his mouth open in the process of a smile. On the left is Anne in profile. She is in front of Cohen and her forehead touches his temple. She is a white woman with straight brown shoulder length hair held back by a kerchief worn as a hairband. She has high cheekbones and wears lipstick and a light shirt. She smiles as she looks. He is a white man and his dark hair is worn short. He has a five o'clock shadow and wears a collared knit shirt which is undone.

In this area depicting Cohen's early life this plexiglass topped display table shows a collection of writing and other artifacts. Also in this case is a sample of Cohen's social network and community including a photo of Cohen with his lifetime friend, Morton Rosegarten. The documents include personal letters to his mother from summer camp, a school report card, and a letter from his camp counselor.

End of Audio Description.

Exhibition label text:

Cohen's first serious love affair was with Georgianna Sherman, whom he referred to as Anne or Annie. They met at Columbia University in New York City, where Cohen was pursuing graduate studies in literature and Sherman was a program coordinator. The innocence of their young love is captured in this gem-like, framed photo-booth portrait. Their relationship ended due to Cohen's strong resistance to settling down, but he continued to write to Sherman and send poems such as the following, which was published in *Selected Poems: 1956–1968*:

For Anne

(Audio of Leonard Cohen)

*With Annie gone,
Whose eyes to compare
With the morning sun?*

*Not that I did compare,
But I do compare
Now that she's gone.*

End of Exhibition label text.

AUDIO 3

Leonard Cohen

Desk in Room 1219

1968

notebook page with Polaroid Type 20 instant prints

Audio description of the work

Set against a deep blue wall a square plexiglass case displays two wall mounted items from the collection of Cohen's personal journals displayed in this area of the exhibition labeled "Tennessee 1968". On the left, at standing-height eye level, is a page from a tall and narrow lined notebook with five palm sized black and white polaroid photos stuck in it. Next to this on the right is a typed sheet of paper with a block of text on the top half.

The journal page will be described followed by a reading of the typed text.

The page is a scrapbook style collection of images. The top two are white bordered polaroids which fill half the width of the page in landscape orientation. From the top down they feature a writing desk with, at centre, the notebook this page is from which is topped by a book, some small pads of paper and a handgun. Also on the desk from left to right is a black rotary dial phone, a roll of double sided tape in a clear dispenser. A water glass with a handful of pens, a bottle of glue, and reading materials including a copy of "The Ladder of Lust" which is a thin book with a painting of a man looking at an undressed woman on the cover. Below this among other less discernible objects are a pack of Camel cigarettes and a wrapped piece of Double Bubble chewing gum. The next polaroid is a snapshot of handguns in a shiny display case. Next is a portrait orientation photo of 34 year old Leonard Cohen with his body position indicating it was taken as a selfie. He gazes at the camera with a look of concentration presumably from the effort of taking the picture. Leonard is a clean shaven white man with straight short dark hair. He wears a light dark coloured coat over a black suit with a white shirt and black tie. On the lower part of the page beside these are: a picture of four white handled guns in a display case which also displays some knives and a photo of the view of traffic out of the back seat of a car. This photo has a five pointed gold star stuck to the top left corner.

Beside the first two photos are notes. Handwritten in black script with the exception of some capital letters which are in printing is the following text:

Desk in room 1219

Noel hotel

Photo secured by
Scotch double stick tape
Sticky on both sides

And

Row of revolvers as described
December 18, 1968.

End of Audio Description.

Cohen on Guns

1968
typed page

Audio description of the work

Moving to the typed paper displayed alongside the journal page: The paper has yellowed slightly by time and the darkness of the letters of the text is slightly irregular as were the products of manual typewriters of the day. The handwritten number 88 is in the top right corner.

The typed text reads:

Nashville
December 20, 1968

My heart leaped up when I beheld the glass counter
With its magic row of revolvers in the Woodbine
Army Surplus Store. My eyes devoured the precious
machinery. I had to keep myself from laughing
out in joy. To be so close!

Magic moves from poem to gun.

I came close to loving the automobile but I never
quite succeeded. Watches and clocks have their
fascination but I am so uninvolved in the jewels
and the wheels. It is like watching fish in a
bowl, one cannot interfere, only behold. The
artifacts in museums interested me by the mere
accident of their survival. I never loved a shard
or a painting. I've walked through factories,
rebuking myself for my indifference, straining to
be a modern man who at least respects his utensils,
stifling a yawn. But these guns, I loved them

as my eye fell upon them, as one loves beautiful women. I bought the tear gas pen, dreaming.

End of typed text.

End of Audio Description.

Exhibition label text:

Cohen collected a variety of pistols and rifles during his life, and guns appear often in his music, art, and writing. The first gun that attracted him was his father's WW1 service pistol. In Nashville, one of his favourite places to visit was the Woodbine Army Surplus Store, where two of the photographs on this page were made. Elsewhere in this notebook, Cohen recorded his response to seeing the guns on display. Later he typed out the original hand-written diary entry, which underscores the extent of his fascination with the subject.

Cohen once remarked quote "I don't hunt, I like target practice. I kind of fell into [editors note: gun ownership] because I was interested in becoming a cowboy at one time.... When I lived in Nashville, I had a lot of admiration for these guys I saw around. They were very attractive. I liked the way they spoke...a lot of them carried a gun or had rifles in the back of their trucks. That's when I started getting interested in firearms." end quote.

End of Exhibition label text.

AUDIO 4

Leonard Cohen

Still Life

1976–1980

ink and crayon on paper

Audio description of the work

Drawn on a leaf of slightly larger than letter sized white paper is a dynamic arrangement of everyday objects drawn in blueish-metallic hues.

In this work Cohen has drawn a canister of paint thinner, a candle stick, a salt shaker and a can of root beer and arranged them in an equally spaced zigzag on the page, two in the background and two in the foreground. On the left the paint thinner is a rectangular tin which sits in the middle of the page and is half its height. The company name GRUMBACHER is printed down the side of the pale blue receptacle. The label is white and reads DILUANTS ODEUR PRE-TEST. Under this is a skull and crossbones to indicate it is poison. Just to the left of centre positioned with its base at the bottom of the page is a plain gray candlestick holder with a nub of a white candle. It is three quarters the height of the page. On the right side is a typical restaurant type glass salt shaker placed slightly higher than the candlestick and slightly shorter than half of the page height. It is a quarter full of white salt. Its glass sides appear with slightly diagonal edges as if its twisted to the right. Nestled into the bottom right corner is the top half of a can of root beer. Brown with a red label that has a mini mug of root beer at the top of it, the letters "I-R-E-S" are the end letters of the label's brand. The can has been opened and the lid is entirely visible at an odd angle. On the left side of the can written vertically is the signature Leonard Cohen.

The other works on the same wall are similar line drawings, a kleenex tissue box and a heater as well as a floor to ceiling enlargement of a photobooth photo strip of Cohen in his 40's. This work also marks a shift in the exhibition material from primarily photos and artifacts to paintings and drawings made by Cohen.

End of Audio Description.

Exhibition label text:

Central to Cohen's personal taste and way of life was a deep attachment to everyday household objects, such as a table, chair, or mirror. There is a studied purpose to this still-life arrangement, with a can of paint thinner, a candlestick, a salt shaker, and a soda can forming a quartet of objects to which he has given his full attention.

End of Exhibition label text.

AUDIO 5

Leonard Cohen

My Mother's Last Hand

from Untitled (Watercolour Notebook)

1980–1985

notebook with 13 watercolours

Audio description of the work

This is a description of a watercolour painting in a notebook which is slightly larger than letter paper size. The notebook is displayed under a plexiglass case at standing height eye level and is open to this watercolour of the palm of a left hand, made as a part of a daily practice of drawing.

Taking up a full page of the right side of the notebook, this line drawing is of a left hand, palm up angling from the bottom left to the top right of the page. The thumb is parallel to the other fingers and is held in a resting position between the pointer and middle fingers. It is in profile and has a short nail quite close to its knuckle. The hand, drawn in black ink, has cross hatched shading on the right side of the fingers and on its heel and springlike coils of hair along its thick wrist. It is shaded in with a watery magenta. The space on the page above it, on the left, is purple and below it, is yellow. Written diagonally along its upper flank are the words -Quote "My mother's last hand" end quote.

Looming large beside the work on the right is a giant reproduction of a watercolour painting of a woman reclining, A work Cohen created after the style of a painting featuring what he would have called an Odalisque, an eroticized artistic genre in which a concubine is represented mostly or completely nude in a reclining position.

End of Audio Description.

Exhibition label text:

This watercolour notebook contains 13 drawings made by Cohen over several years and executed in a consistent style. The full selection can be seen on the monitor to the left. Many are annotated with a single line or couplet that responds to the content and mood suggested by the drawing. The notebook is open at the page that shows the hand of his mother, Masha, who died in 1978. He later explained: quote "Drawn in the last few months of her life, it is her hand and my hand drawn as one." end quote

End of Exhibition label text.

AUDIO 6

Green Chair

Leonard Cohen
Green Chair
2007
Inkjet print

Audio description of the work

This framed image in portrait orientation is an enlarged print of a watercolor painting of a green armchair. It is 30 inches by 20 inches or 76 by 50 cm.

Originally painted on a sheet of lined notebook paper in the watercolour notebook just steps away, the page's lines are still visible, especially on the borders of the work. Similar in style to the other watercolours this bright green rounded back chair plays with shape and perspective. The seat and curved upholstered armrests seem to pitch forward by showing both the perspective from in front of and looking down on the seat cushion at the same time. It has a wide seat with sturdy wooden legs which are on casters. Draped over the back of the chair is a rectangular white crocheted doily with an eight sided star shape and scalloped edges. On the seat of the chair is a square cushion on which are sprigs of pink flowers and what resemble two yellow birds and a purplish blue three sided shape on a white background. The chair is on a wooden floor coloured in yellow with wide planks set near to a white wall. In the painting everything is playfully tilted towards the right.

On the bottom left are two stamps. A red circle with an upside down and rightside up heart and a red square. Beside this in handwriting is the print number listed as 90 out of 200. In the bottom center green chair is written and on the bottom right is a signature Leonard Cohen 2011.

This is the only work centered on a wide blue wall. Written in large white print above it is a quote by Leonard Cohen Quote, "If you liberate yourself, anything you lay your hand on can sparkle".
End quote

End of Audio Description.