

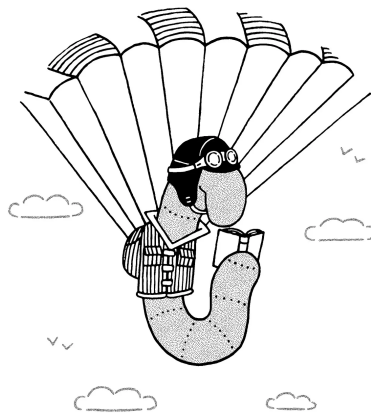
# Bookworm, no. 45

Lou Braibant reviews “Toller Cranston: Ice, Paint, Passion.” Sarah O’Connor reviews Sarah Henstra’s “The Lost Tarot.” A cover artist Q&A. Original poetry by Maureen Hynes. Inside the June issue.



LITERARY REVIEW OF CANADA

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## Skater Boy

**Toller Cranston: Ice, Paint, Passion**

*Phillippa Cranston Baran*

Sutherland House Books

290 pages, hardcover

Canada lost a legend on January 23, 2015, when the figure skater and artist Toller Cranston died of a sudden heart attack at the age of sixty-five. His sister, Phillippa Cranston Baran, later collected “adapted content” and asked his friends, employees, acquaintances, and fans to share stories about the champion athlete. She then bundled these accounts into the wonderful *Toller Cranston: Ice, Paint, Passion*. Heartfelt and intimate, this book “is not a chronicle or a biography,” but a “celebration of a man who embodied, in every single thing he did, the values of courage, creativity, and

expression.”

The German word *toller* means “greater, brighter,” and Cranston made his life just that. In his twenties, he transformed men’s ice skating by “employing movements that previously had been done only by women,” and he went on to win bronze at the 1976 Olympics in Innsbruck, Austria. He retired from the sport that same year. In 1992, after a stint as a Broadway star in *The Ice Show*, he moved to San Miguel de Allende, Mexico, to become a prolific artist with an exuberant style. He bought a seventeenth-century house, which he crammed with more than 18,000 ceramic pieces, chandeliers, and paintings. He was known to be generous to his staff, and he helped whomever he could. (Back when figure skaters in the Soviet Union found it difficult to buy the necessary attire, Cranston “would stuff his suitcase full of women’s tights” before he competed there and lied to customs about their purpose.)

Perhaps most impressive was his ability to live an uninhibited life. He showcased his sexuality despite severe stigma, dressed in “dramatic capes and hats,” and refused to engage with technology. Cranston Baran includes photographs of his triumphs on the ice, his paintings, and his everyday life in Mexico. These pictures, paired with the contributors’ touching entries and quotes from Cranston himself, create a beautiful book fit for a coffee table. In 1977, a *New York Times* review of his Broadway play ended with “Go see him.” Likewise, this review can only finish with: go read it.

—Lou Braibant



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