

Images of Industrial Life and Organizing

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DOCUMENTS

Images of Industrial Life and Organizing

Rosemary Donegan

THE FOLLOWING IMAGES WERE SELECTED from the exhibition *Images/Images Industrielles*, curated by Rosemary Donegan. The exhibition was produced by the Art Gallery of Hamilton and sponsored by the National Museums of Canada, it toured nationally in 1987-88 to the Art Gallery of Hamilton, Vancouver Art Gallery, the Glenbow Museum, Calgary, the Edmonton Art Gallery, the Winnipeg Art Gallery and Mount Saint Vincent Art Gallery, Halifax.

The exhibition and catalogue examined the industrial vision of Canada as captured in the imagery and form of painting, sculpture, graphics, photographs and the promotional arts, in the first half of the twentieth century. It focused on the expanding industrial interest of business, government and labour and the belief in/and critique of Canada's industrial development.

The works selected for *Labour/Le Travail* depict some of the social issues and labour events artists addressed in the period. Although images of unions were not a major theme in Canadian art of the period, there is a continuing, if somewhat fragmentary, record of artists' concern with the realities of working class life and the struggle to gain economic and social recognition.

For further information please see the catalogue available from the Art Gallery of Hamilton, 123 King St. West, Hamilton, L8P 4S8. Also see: Rosemary Donegan, "Symbols and Ideas: A Survey of Union Iconography and Collections," *Archivaria*, Summer 1989 and Rosemary Donegan, "Mural Roots: Charles Comfort and the Toronto Stock Exchange," *Canadian Art*, Summer 1987, vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 64-69.

The War at Home

Florence Wyle (1881-1968)

Munitions Workers, 1918

bronze, 66.3 cm (height)

Canadian War Museum

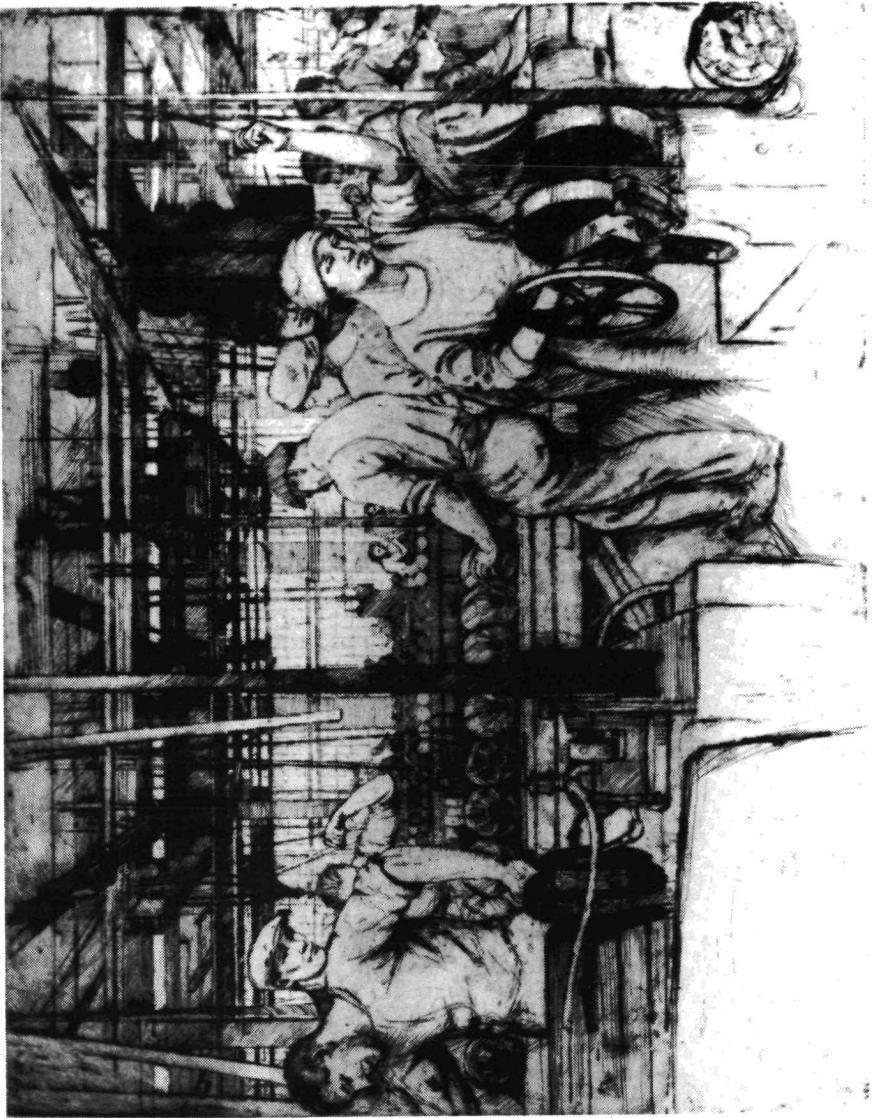
Note: One of a series of sculptures produced by Wyle and Francis Loring in 1918 depicting women war workers. Eric Brown, the director of the National Gallery of Canada, had commissioned them to capture, "the various types of the girl war workers in their working clothes, munitions makers, aeroplane girls, land workers, fruit pickers I believe that you can give them the spirit that has prompted the workers to take the places of the men in the time of need."

[Eric Brown to Loring and Wyle, 10 and 18 September 1918, in National Gallery Archives, 5.42]



Dorothy Stevens (1888-1966)
Munitions Heavy Shells c. 1918
etching, 27.5 x 35.0 cm (image)
Canadian War Museum

Note: One striking feature of the portrayal of the ‘home front’ during the First World War was the presence of women as industrial workers. Plus, the number of women artists who were active in depicting the war effort.



The Mines of Cape Breton

Lawren S. Harris (1885-1970)
Miner's Houses, Glace Bay c. 1921
oil on canvas 107.3 x 126.9 cm
Art Gallery of Ontario

Note: The painting is based on Harris's trip to Cape Breton in 1921. His depiction of life in Cape Breton, where the miners were enduring wage cuts, cutbacks in coal and steel production, and prolonged strikes against the Dominion Coal and Steel Company, is one of the strongest and most evocative paintings of industrial life in the 1920s.



Glace Bay c. 1921 (published *Canadian Forum*, July 1925)
block print 14.0 x 17.0 cm
original print: L.H.S. Holdings, Toronto

Note: The block print was published in the July 1925 *Canadian Forum*, accompanying a story condemning the use of private police forces and the federal militia in strikebreaking.



The 1930s and the Critique of the Industrial Age

Alfred Laliberté (1878-1953)

The Mechanical Era c. 1935

oil on plaster, 99.1 x 66.0 x 50.8 cm

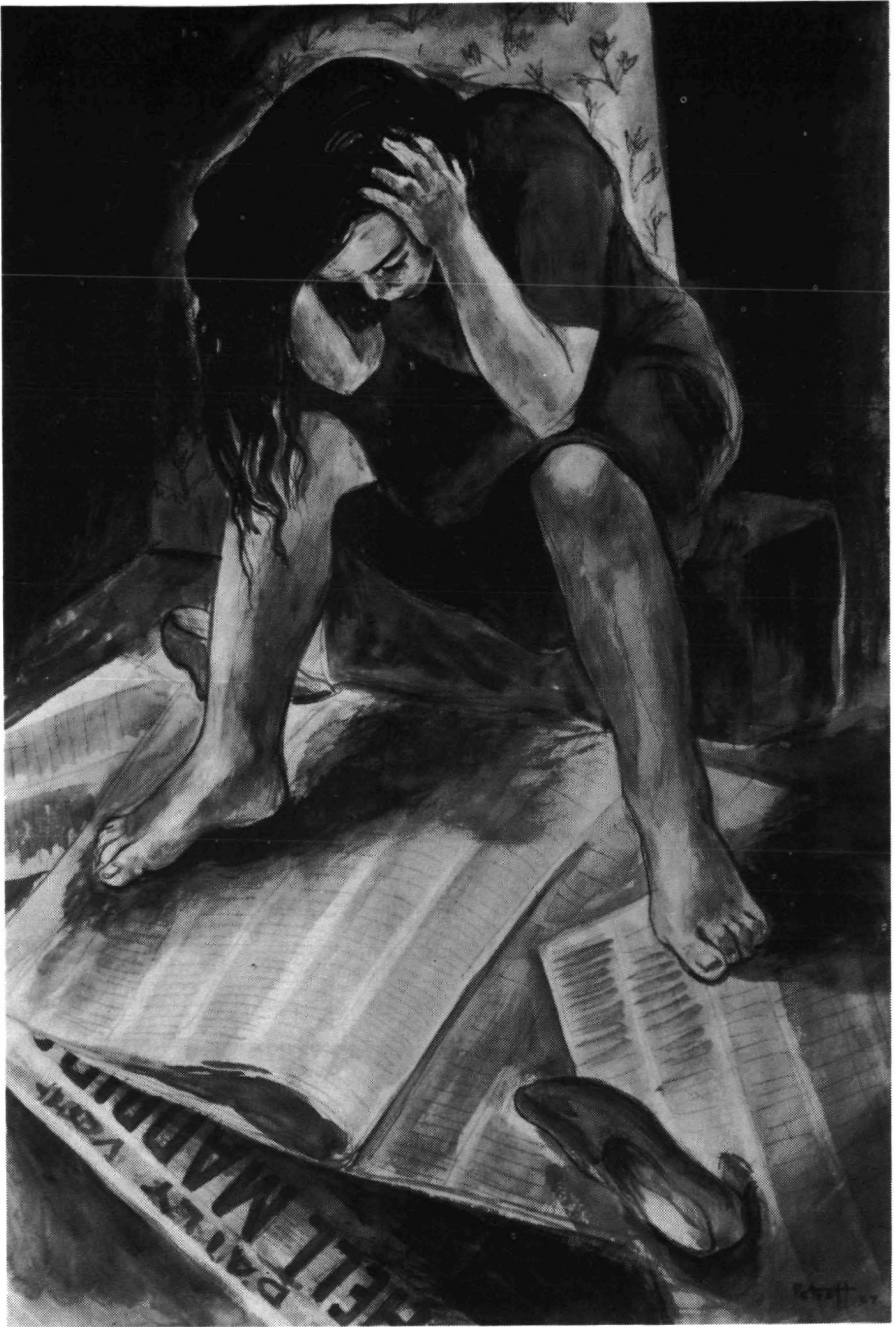
National Gallery of Canada

Note: Quebec artist, Alfred Laliberté, saw industrialization as an agent of the anglo-ruling class, destroying the traditional rural catholic life of Quebec. The mechanical age has become a robot, the machine out of control, "It is an image of modern times where the idea of everything which is mechanical has taken over our hearts and minds," [Odette Legendre, ed., *Alfred Laliberté, Mes Souvenirs* (Montreal: Les Editions Boréal Express, 1978), p. 196, translation]



Nathan Petroff (born 1916)
Modern Times, 1937
watercolour on paper, 55.9 x 35.6 cm
National Gallery of Canada

Note: Petroff, while a student at Toronto's Central Technical School, was an active member in the Toronto branch of the Artist's Union which was attempting to organize commercial artists in the city. The union was active in bargaining for the 44 hour work week, job security, an end to bargaining-out and rental fees for work in gallery exhibitions.



Organizing in the 1930s

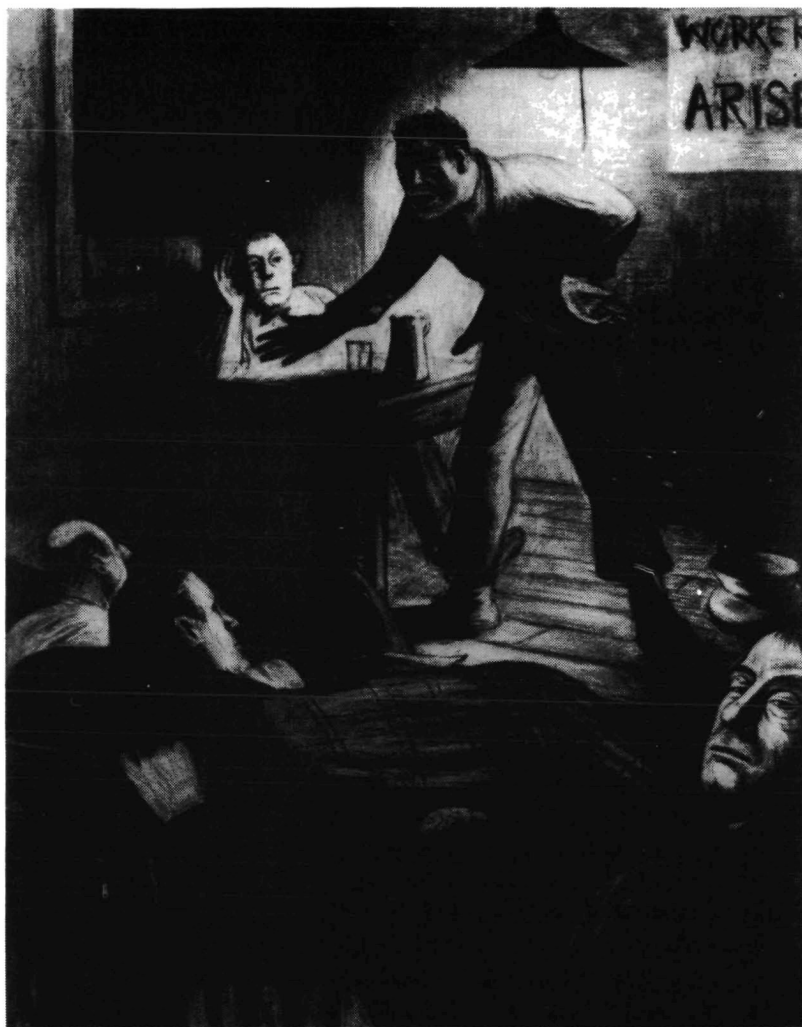
Miller Brittain (1912-1968)

Workers Arise, 1936

carbon pencil on paper, 57.5 x 45.0 cm

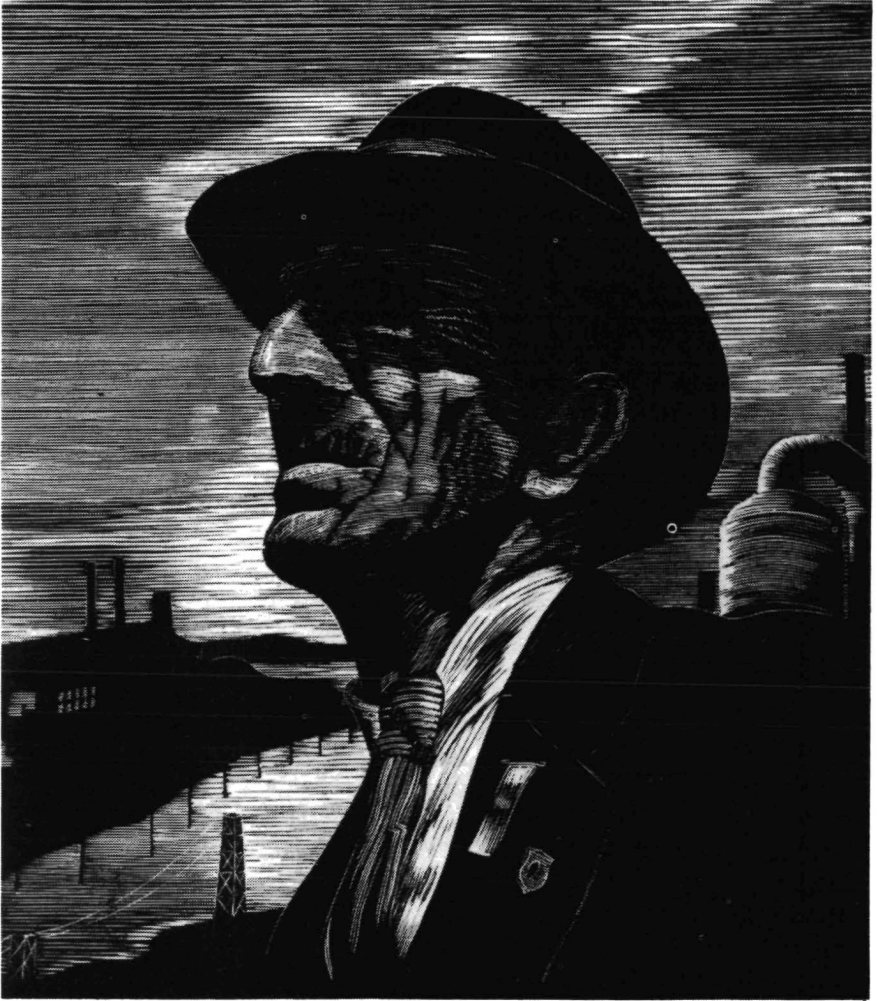
Private Collection

Note: Brittain was an active member of the Oxford Movement in Saint John, N.B. in the 1930s. His work of the period captures the poignancy and poverty of the community in a series of drawings and paintings of longshoremen, fishermen, rummage sales and charwomen. His best known painting is *Longshoremen* (1940) in the National Gallery of Canada.



Leonard Hutchinson (1896-1980)
Lock-Out, c. 1937
woodcut, 25.2 x 22.1 cm (image)
Private Collection

Note: Hutchinson, who was active in the Hamilton branch of the Artist's Union, produced a number of woodcuts of the early union organizing drives at the Hamilton DOFASCO steel plant in the late 1930s.



The Second World War

Alma Duncan (born 1917)

Rivetting Ships Boilers, 1943

black conté on paper, 51.1 x 66.1 cm

Canadian War Museum

Note: In the 1940s, the Federation of Canadian Artists (FCA), which was a national artists organization formed at the Kingston Conference in 1941, petitioned the government to establish an Official War Artists Program as it had during the First World War, to record the military and civilian role of the war effort. Although, the government never officially implemented the policy, a number of artists were to independently record the 'industrial front.'

In Montreal, Alma Duncan, Fred Taylor, Fritz Brandtner and Louis Muhlstock, sketched at the CIL, Canadian Vickers and United Shipyards plants in 1943. In Toronto, Caven Atkins, Carl Schaeffer and Charles Goldhammer, sketched at various plants, including the Toronto Shipbuilding Co., in 1942. [See: Caven Atkins, *Untitled (Forging)*, 1942]



Fraser Wilson

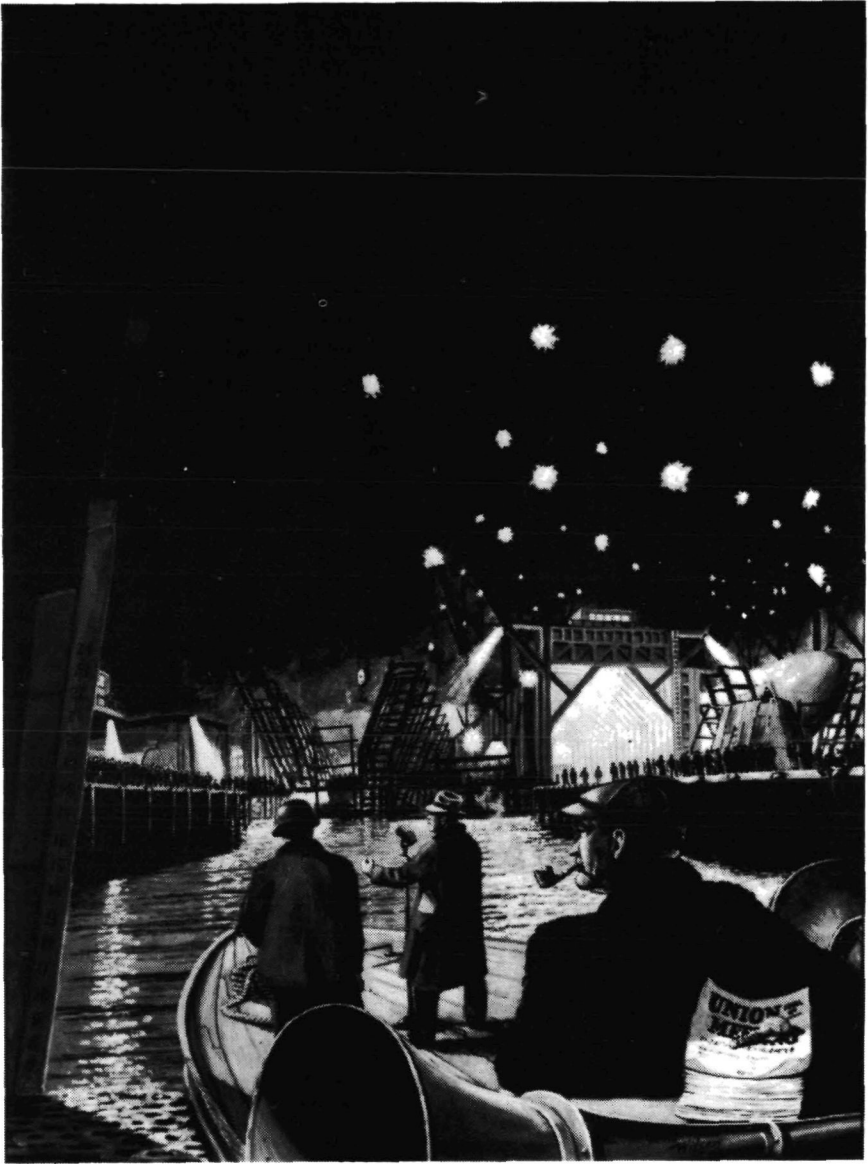
Organization, 1944

oil on canvas board, 72.5 x 54.0 cm

Private Collection

Note: Wilson, a local commercial artist, depicts a real-life scene of a dramatic night-shift union meeting in the drydocks of the Burrard Shipyards in Vancouver.

The painting was first exhibited at the 1944 *British Columbia at Work* organized by the Vancouver Labor Arts Guild, at the Vancouver Art Gallery. The Labor Arts Guild which sought 'to bring Art, Labor and the community into closer understanding and unity,' had been organized by John Goss and Julia Christenson, in association with unions like the Boilermakers and the International Woodworkers of America. They ran a wide range of art classes, dance, musical and theatrical events and children's activities. The organization was to flounder after the war, partially due to an organized McCarthyite smear campaign against Goss and Christenson and the lack of support from the artistic community, once the cohesive focus of the war effort had come to an end.

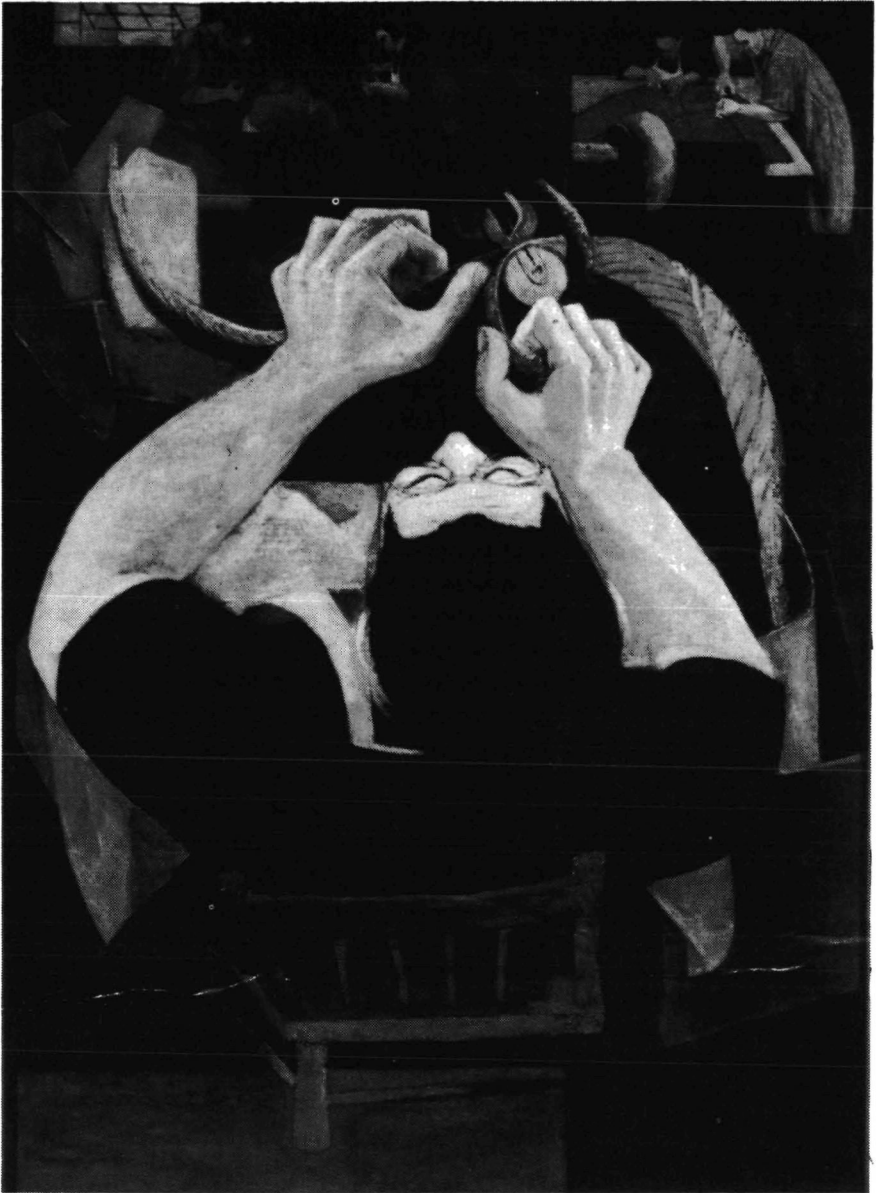


The Crisis of the Post War Period

Henry Orenstein (born 1918)
Self-Portrait as Fur Worker, 1949
oil on canvas, 98.5 x 70.5 cm
Collection of the artist

Note: During the late 1940s, Orenstein worked on Spadina Ave. as a fur-worker in the summer, while attending art school in New York.

In the 1950s Orenstein was commissioned by the Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers of Sudbury to paint a mural for the local union hall, which was the centre of a broad ranging cultural and athletic program. [unfortunately due to the poor reproduction quality in black and white it is not illustrated here]. Orenstein's mural depicts the social and cultural role of Mine Mill Local 598 in the Sudbury area. At that time, Mine Mill was in the midst of a series of raids by the United Steelworkers.



Frederick B. Taylor (1906-1987)
Talking Union, 1950
oil on canvas, 71.2 x 94.0 cm
The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts

Note: Taylor conceptualized the painting, using friends to pose for him individually in his studio, he set the meeting in Joe Beef's Tavern in St. Henri, Montreal. Taylor described the painting as "four Canadian seamen meeting with a CSU organizer, working men consciously acting to protect and improve their working and living conditions." [Frederick Taylor to Luis de Moura Sobral, 14 August 1975, in Montreal Museum of Fine Art Archives]

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, the CSU was in the midst of a major struggle with the Great Lakes shipowners, assisted by the Canadian government and Hal Banks of the Seafarer's International Union (SIU).

Cover Image:

Laurence Hyde (born 1914)
Factory, c. 1932
wood engraving, 10.0 x 9.5 cm
The McMichael Canadian Collection, Kleinberg, Ontario



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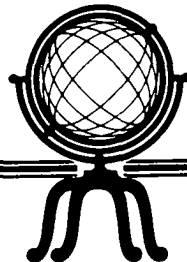
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