

The Pristine Land

Mary Allodi, *Canadian Watercolours and Drawings in the Royal Ontario Museum*, Toronto, Royal Ontario Museum, 1974.
290 and 260 pages in 2 volumes; 430 ills., \$30.00

Robert H. Hubbard

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quarts était la forme standard : cette forme combine à la fois la frontalité et le profil sans que l'œil ou la main ne soient reliés explicitement à un objet spécifique. Cette prédominance du trois quarts donnait à la figure de profil ou frontale, alors exceptionnelle, une valeur unique ou une valeur d'opposition (p. 38).

Reprenons ici l'exemple de l'illustration du récit de Moïse : « *The historical Moses in this version [la première] is not only himself a sign but he makes a sign which is addressed to the Christian viewer with its awareness of the cross [...]. In the two Bodleian miniatures (Fig. 2) the contrast of the frontal and profile, though less strongly marked than before, is a means of distinguishing a past symbolic event and a present symbolized one, the first a historic unique action and the second a recurrent liturgical performance* » (p. 40-41). Dans les périodes postérieures, les images d'action (les thèmes d'action) exigeront cependant pour les figures royales ou divines une représentation totalement frontale.

La distinction entre *frontal* et *profil* (p. 37-46) peut être même sémantisée par des axes de valeurs (le bien / le mal ; le sacré / le profane ; céleste / terrestre ; le mort / le vivant ; l'actif / le passif). Schapiro conclut en esquissant une *interdépendance sémiotique* (valeurs sémantiques) entre le symbolisme du figurant et de son complément narratif et le symbolisme des couleurs qui est lié à une sémantique *floue* : l'interdépendance varie d'époque à époque, d'une culture à une autre, d'un espace épistémologique à un autre.

L'étude de Schapiro contribue à une vaste recherche de la sémiotique picturale et, par opposition à certains travaux d'origine française (Marin, Schefer), elle propose une démarche heuristique *flexible* qui permet d'intégrer plusieurs méta-systèmes sémiotiques — comme la psychanalyse, les mathématiques, la biologie, l'anthropologie, la psychologie de la perception —, qui nous *oblige* à analyser des textes picturaux à partir d'un système *ouvert* et *hybride* dont le but final consiste, peut-être, à reconstruire les traces irréductibles d'une *Pratique*.

Cependant, l'analyse d'un système complexe (celui de la peinture) ne peut exister qu'en mettant le « sujet en procès » à travers la *chora* sémiotique (l'*Ordonnanzprinzip* des pulsions fondamentales, le jeu aléatoire du fantasme), ses rythmes, ses gestes, ses primitifs sémiotiques¹².

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Mary ALLODI, *Canadian Watercolours and Drawings in the Royal Ontario Museum*, Toronto, Royal Ontario Museum, 1974. 290 and 260 pages in 2 volumes ; 430 ills., \$30.00.

It is axiomatic that landscape, as the chief subject-matter of Canadian art for nearly two centuries, rooted in English landscape painting of the eighteenth century. It is reasonably assumed that this influence came to us through the British army and navy officers trained in the days before photography to record their surroundings in drawings and water-colours. Many such were stationed in Canada from 1759 to the withdrawal of the British garrisons in 1870-1, and they were reinforced in the nineteenth century by a number of civilian illustrators visiting Canada.

Until recently, however, there was little published evidence of the activity of these artists. A few scholars knew the early drawings of Canadian scenes in the private collections of Robert Reford, William H. Coverdale and Sigmund Samuel. More accessible but relatively little known were those acquired by Sir Arthur Doughty and his successors for the Public Archives of Canada, as well as the collections of the several provincial archives and of the Séminaire de Québec, the McCord Museum of McGill University, the National Gallery of Canada and the Glenbow-Alberta Institute.

Publications were thin on the ground aside from such early books as George Heriot's *Travels through the Canadas* (1807) and William Henry Bartlett's *Canadian Scenery* (1842), illustrated with engravings after their original drawings. The odd volume of history published early in this century contained reproductions of water-colours by Cockburn and others. The John Ross Robertson collection (Toronto Public Library), the Coverdale collection (then in the Canada Steamship Line's Manoir Richelieu Hotel at Murray Bay) and the Sigmund Samuel collection in Toronto were catalogued in rather a haphazard and certainly a non-art historical way.

At mid-century the catalogues of several exhibitions including *The Development of Painting in Canada / Le développement de la peinture au Canada* (Toronto, Montreal, Ottawa and Quebec, 1945), *200 Years of Art in Halifax* (Halifax, 1949) and *L'art au Canada français / The arts in French Canada* (Quebec, 1952) pioneered in situating the work of the topographical artists in the context of Canadian painting as a whole. In 1958 the late F. St. George Spendlove published *The Face of Early Canada*, a book which was mainly concerned with engravings and lithographs but which reproduced several fine drawings in colour. Several books on the general history of Canadian art also made mention of the topographical artists.¹

12. Christian BAUER, « Éléments d'une méta-théorie des sémiotiques a-signifiantes », Québec, Université Laval, thèse inédite, 1975, chapitres A.III. et B.I. Voir également Julia KRISTEVA, « L'espace Giotto », *Peinture*, 1972, 2/3, p. 35-51.

1. Graham MCINNES, *A Short History of Canadian Art* (Toronto, 1939); Gérard MORISSET, *Coup d'œil sur les arts en Nouvelle-France* (Québec, 1941); Gérard MORISSET, *La*



J. P. Cockburn, *The Château St-Louis Looking West Towards the Citadel*. Toronto, Royal Ontario Museum

The rich harvest of publications in the sixties and seventies includes important works on the landscape draughtsmen. J. Russell Harper in several exhibitions² prepared the way for his monumental book *Painting in Canada / La peinture au Canada* (1966) which dealt with early painting more fully than ever before. Several individual artists have been the subjects of monographs,³ and the sales catalogues of the Canadian branches of Christie's and Sotheby's have listed a number of important drawings. A number of centennial exhibitions have

made known the work of early artists in British North America.⁴

The cataloguing of the important collections was broached by Michael Bell in his exhibition *Images of Canada / Visages du Canada* and his book *Painters in a New World*, both of which presented a fine selection from the holdings of the Public Archives of Canada. In 1974 there appeared Lorne E. Render's *The Mountains and the Sky*, comprising a colourful sampling of the Glenbow-Alberta Institute's collection, and Mary Allodi's *Canadian Watercolours and Drawings in the Royal Ontario Museum*.⁵

On several counts Mary Allodi's two handsome volumes are the best yet. The quality of the drawings reproduced, the wealth of material made available for stylistic analysis, the competence of the attribution of unsigned drawings, the primary sources provided for the social historian, the vicarious excitement afforded the

peinture traditionnelle au Canada français (Ottawa 1960); and my own *Anthology of Canadian Art* (Toronto, 1960) and *The Development of Canadian Art / L'évolution de l'art canadien* (Ottawa, 1963).

2. *Everyman's Canada / Une imagerie canadienne* (Ottawa, 1962); *A Century of Colonial Painting / Un siècle de peinture: l'époque coloniale* (Charlottetown, 1964); *Trésors de Québec / Treasures from Quebec* (Ottawa, 1965). See also J. Russell HARPER, *Early Painters and Engravers in Canada* (Toronto, 1970).

3. Alvin M. JOSEPHY, *The Artist was a Young Man, the Life Story of Peter Rindisbacher* (Fort Worth, 1970); J. Russell HARPER, *Paul Kane's Frontier* (Toronto, 1971); Alexander M. ROSS, *William Henry Bartlett* (Toronto, 1973); and my own *Thomas Davies* (exhibition catalogue, Ottawa, 1972) and *Thomas Davies in Early Canada* (Ottawa, 1972).

4. *100 Years of British Columbia Art* (Vancouver, 1958); *The Painter and the New World / Le peintre et le Nouveau Monde* (Montreal, 1967); *Three Hundred Years of Canadian Art / Trois cent ans de l'art canadien* (Ottawa, 1967); *A Pageant of Canada / Pages d'histoire du Canada* (Ottawa, 1967).

5. Published by the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, at \$30 for the two volumes.

general reader by the discovery of a pristine land — all these make the book an extremely valuable contribution to Canadian studies.

The Royal Ontario Museum's collection of Canadian water-colours and drawings is large (2,220 items in all). It is richly varied, ranging chronologically from earliest to fairly recent times and geographically from coast to coast. It sparkles with major constellations, including groups of works by Edwin Whitefield (415 items), Paul Kane (344), James Cockburn (194), A. P. Coleman (165), James Duncan (61), Coke Smyth (52), George Heriot (46) and William Armstrong (46). But there are single stars and small clusters as well, including drawings by Thomas Davies, James Peachey, C. R. Forrest, Peter Rindisbacher, William Berczy, William Eagar, John Woolford, Sir Richard Levinge and many others. Besides landscapes there are a few portraits: Sir John Franklin, Sir Isaac Brock, the Berczy family, Lord Lisgar and Lord Dufferin and many Indian heads by Paul Kane. It would be invidious to draw attention to gaps in the collection except to state a personal wish to see the romantic style of Alexander Cavalieri Mercer represented. The colour plates in the book are well chosen to stress the aesthetic highlights of the collection.

Providing a text to accompany such a large catalogue presents a problem. Here both the foreword by the Museum's curator of Canadiana Donald Blake Webster and the introduction by Mary Allodi are rather too brief to give us all the information we should like to have.

Nowhere (for example) is it stated exactly which items constituted the original Samuel collection or just when individual items entered the Museum. The artist biographies and notes on individual pictures are models of their kind, dealing with such interesting matters as the false Bartlett signatures on the Coke Smyth drawings and William Armstrong's habit of making later replicas of his early drawings. But there was evidently no space for other matters such as the basis for the attribution of certain unsigned drawings, the approximate dating of undated works or the occasional fuller description of subject-matter; these would have made the book even more useful to the student. Sacrificed too are references to the drawings in literature and a record of previous owners and exhibitions; these would have made it into a *catalogue raisonné*. The reproduction of every item in the collection (as it is the proportion is about one to every five) even in postage-stamp size would no doubt have increased the price considerably.

This book points up the need for more of the same. I hope it will inspire other collectors public and private to issue catalogues of this order. I also look forward to future exhibitions, drawn from both Canadian and untapped French sources, which will make known a still greater body of work and allow us to establish a canon of the works of the topographical artists. Mary Allodi has blazed the trail.

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