

Editorial

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It seems appropriate to give a brief history of the development of RACAR's editorial policy, since this may not always be inferred by the casual reader. Any periodical is a platform for current discussion; in time it becomes a repository or journal of record. RACAR consciously accepts this dual role.

When the present editors began their mandate in 1977, at the time that RACAR became the official publication of the Universities Art Association of Canada, we began by asking ourselves what seemed to be missing from Canadian art periodicals that could be of long-term benefit to readers. Knowing that we could publish only twice yearly, content had to be sufficiently varied to appeal to a wide variety of interests. Launched in 1974 as a not-for-profit journal with an historical rather than a contemporary point of view (as also was the semi-annual *Journal of Canadian Art History*), RACAR was determined to encourage good writing in the arts. We accordingly became a 'clearing house' and thus a focus for the wide variety of quality articles and documentation on the history of art, architecture, and the decorative arts.

RACAR receives for consideration manuscripts on both Canadian and non-Canadian subjects. Most public funding agencies in this country favour studies with Canadian content or context. Yet for all but a few specialized journals to be exclusively Canadian would ignore the work of our scholars who study international material, bring about justified charges of provincialism, and all but eliminate foreign circulation. RACAR recognizes this problem, and operates under guidelines for minimum Canadian content that are agreeable to our publisher, our sponsor, and our principal funding agency, yet will still encourage international contributions and readership.

It rapidly became clear to the editors that the magazine would have to be redesigned (it was, in 1978) to provide an attractive format for historical writing. We also noticed that many Canadian museums and galleries had no scholarly bulletins. Clearly, our pages would have to be opened to curators, librarians, and archivists as well as to art historians in order to attract specific, if limited, contributions to the discipline as a whole. Yet articles and shorter notices would not suffice of themselves, and so it was determined that recurrent features of some more tangible documentary value would have to be created.

As a result, two service features came into being: The first number of each volume contains 'The Year's Exhibitions in Canada' while the second number has an illustrated 'Principal Acquisitions of Canadian Museums and Galleries.' Both rubrics require more explanation than might at first seem necessary.

'The Year's Exhibitions' lists shows originated or co-originated by Canadian institutions and which are accompanied by either a catalogue or a handlist. As such, it is the first serious attempt to publish an accessible listing of the record of an important activity of galleries and museums of all sizes. This should not be confused with a bibliography, to which it makes no pretence as it is always incomplete in some way. However, it is interesting to note that the composition of this listing varies significantly from year to year. This we take as a sign of success in dealing with smaller art institutions which produce exhibitions with catalogues on an occasional basis, institutions which otherwise lack the means and the opportunity to publicize their work.

'Principal Acquisitions' has passed through several design stages and elicits greater variety and choice with each year. The choice of works to publish is left to the institutions themselves, but may be edited to maintain some sense of proportion among contributors.

For a country as geographically dispersed as Canada, some central organ of information on collections development and temporary exhibitions should have existed long ago. We are now told that these features are increasingly looked to as some indication of institutional trends which would not otherwise be perceptible. In due course, this type of effort will be extended into other enquiries, notably a repertory of the catalogues of permanent collections throughout the country.

In like manner, we began in 1977 a series of numbered supplements to RACAR which have a two-fold intent: first, to permit smaller institutions to publish exhibition or collection catalogues under our auspices, and also to publish the acts of important symposia or colloquia. This process is rather simple at base: by designing to our general specifications for an issue as a whole, contributing institutions are assured of rapid and less costly production, an automatic distribution to our entire subscription list, and the possibility of arranging a suitable press run or number of offprints which can be sold over their own counters. Such supplements must come to us with their own funding and conform to our publishing schedule, but the demonstration has been made and needs only to be followed up. Two supplements are planned for next year.

Colour illustration is offered on a selective basis, with an attempt being made to reproduce items from Canadian collections. As with all younger periodicals, it takes time to become better known and appreciated and, above all, to attract contributors from all over the world who can publish in French or English.

RACAR does feel that a greater number of people must become involved in the making of tomorrow's sources (and the transmission of yesterday's documents) so that a firm tradition of writing on the arts in Canada may come about. In this, one might learn from eighteenth- and nineteenth-century tradition of learned societies, which published vast amounts of documents and small studies to which we still turn. When printed sources were relatively rare and the manuscript was the rule, the simple 'communication' of soberly-presented documents was possible to everyone having access to them. For some reason, the craft of art-historical writing has become increasingly rarefied of late, tacitly restricted to professionals as defined by some sort of credentials other than a good general education and interest. The strong focus on exhibitions, monographs, and catalogues over the last decade or so may have led to a number of synthetic studies done without full knowledge of the documentation available. Whatever their real merits, one must realistically admit that what we are doing, even today, is still only a 'first run through' any given Canadian subject, whether in itself or in relation to European and North American tradition.

For this reason, the Editors wish to encourage the formal submission of what are being called 'Notes & Documents,' in order to place into circulation documents of intrinsic importance. We therefore issue a call to readers for contributions of this nature. If response is high, it would justify the occasional volume of 'Memorials of the Early History of Canadian Art' (the title is adopted from the note published on pages 110 to 112 of this number). It will be understood that this effort parallels but does not replace the normal articles and notes or any recurring features.