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Doreen E. Walker

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See table of contents

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PETER MELLEN *Landmarks of Canadian Art*. Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 1978. 260 pp., 141 illus., $50.00.

For sheer visual pleasure *Landmarks of Canadian Art* would be hard to duplicate. Selections for this stunning publication (intended to represent the 'treasures of our heritage') were made by a distinguished editorial board composed of Jean Sutherland Boggs, J. Russell Harper, James Houston, Joan Murray, Luke Rombout, Jean Trudel, and author-chairman Peter Mellen.

'Our aim was simple,' states Mellen in his introduction, 'to find the best works by the most important artists in Canadian art.' Some 116 works were so elected, with an additional 13 being tentatively designated (in a closing chapter) as possible 'landmarks of the future.'

The 'landmark' illustrations which follow a lengthy survey essay are presented in six sections (corresponding to the chapters in the introductory text), with outstanding examples from Inuit and Indian cultures featured in Section One. Amongst the twenty-one selections of 'The Native Peoples' are *Dorset Shaman's Mask, Sechelt Image*, and *Tsimshian Chilkat Blanket*. From more recent times a number are identified by artist, as are *Mother and Child* by Oshaweetuk-A, *Bear on Ice* by Manno, and *Sun Owl* by Kenojuak.

The ensuing sections (covering a time span from 1500-1978) include Canadian works based on western art traditions: the 'great classics' along with several 'lesser-knowns.' Basically there are few surprises, and one finds such obvious choices as *Marguerite Bourgeoys, Sœur Saint-Alphonse, Sunrise on the Saguenay, Jack Pine, Forest, British Columbia, Pavane, Venus Simultaneous*, and *Sunday Morning No. 2*. Perhaps less familiar (and more questionable) are Hamel's *Madame Renaud and her Daughters*, and John O'Brien's *British Naval Squadron off Nova Scotia*. Although one might question the merits of certain individual selections, the compilation is assuredly a superior one. It is upon turning to the text that one's enthusiasm wanes.

Handsome (and welcome) as this publication is, a charge of irresponsibility is laid in connection with several aspects of the writing. One acknowledges the author's 'awesome challenge' of 'compressing three thousand years into a few pages'; and recognizes that the intention was to tell the story 'simply and directly, with as little jargon as possible.' But there are errors and inconsistencies which are surely surprising for an author of Peter Mellen's stature. Mellen's *The Group of Seven* (1970, also published by McClelland and Stewart) was justly praised: it is a work which merged successfully a documented text (based on extensive research) with an attractive presentation. Not quite so with *Landmarks*.

What are the problems? The intention here is to cite examples (conceding that some indeed are minor) to indicate the seeming lack of care in preparation of the text.

First there are inaccuracies in citing dates and naming titles. The first exhibition of the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts was held in 1880, not 1882 (p. 35); the portrait *Marguerite Bourgeoys* was X-rayed in 1963 not 1965 (p. 93, see *Saint-Sulpice du Canada*, December 1964); and John Chambers's film is entitled *Hart of London*, not *Heart of London* (p. 50). Other errors are perhaps less obvious and thus more serious.

The writing on New France seems particularly flawed. Introducing the section '1500-1760' is an item credited to Marie de l'Incarnation. The relevant passage (unidentified in *Landmarks*) is found in *Lettres de la révérende Mère de l'Incarnation*, edited by l'abbé Richaudeau (Paris, 1876), letter of 24 August 1641. Mellen's translation (found also in Mother Denis Mahoney, O.S.U., *Mary of the Incarnation*, New York, 1964) is a form of paraphrase which reveals a disregard for accuracy in the use of source material.

The statement by Jean de Brébeuf is incorrectly dated as well as incorrectly quoted (p. 89). The excerpt cited (also unidentified) stems from 'Brébeuf's Relation of the Hurons' published in *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents*, edited by Reuben Gold Thwaites (x, Cleveland, 1897). However, the second portion of Mellen's selection does not correspond to 'Brébeuf's Relation'; and the date in *Landmarks* should read 1636, not ca. 1648.

It is stated erroneously that 'Bishop Laval invited them [the Récollets] to re-establish the order in New France' (p. 26). W.J. Eccles in *Canada Under Louis XIV, 1663-1701* (Toronto, 1964) writes that it was 'the King's and Colbert's orders' that initiated the return of the Récollets to New France; and that 'their chief function was to serve as a foil against the Jesuits and Bishop Laval.' In the art historical literature, François-Marc Gagnon (*Premier peintres de la nouvelle France*, I, Québec, 1976) deals with the semewhat complicated background related to the re-establishment of the order. Clearly Laval was not the instigator.

Attribution for *France Bringing Faith to the Indians of New France* is acknowledged as uncertain (p. 89), but then one reads: 'it has been hanging in the Ursuline Chapel since *well before* the early nineteenth century, when it was described as a work by Frère Luc' (reviewer's italics). Described by whom? From a description of Joseph Sansom (*Travels in Lower Canada*, London, 1820) it is known that the painting was with the Ursulines in July 1817 (although no artist is named). Prior to Sansom, however, there is no documentation that relates with certainty to this work. A lengthy list (undated) compiled by l'abbé Louis-Joseph Desjardins ('Copie des envois de tableaux, de Paris en 1817 et 1820 par mes frères et placés par moi au Canada') includes importations placed with the Ursulines along with 'Autres tableaux anciens dans le chœur.' It is here that one finds the puzzling reference (and unconvincing with regards to *France Bringing Faith*): 'Découverte du Canada du Frère Luc.' (See H. Magnan, 'Liste des tableaux envoyés de Paris au Canada de 1817 à 1820,' *Bulletin des recherches historiques*, XXXII, 1926).

France Bringing Faith is assuredly

a commentary on (if not a commemoration of) missionary activities in New France; but to state that 'the work was intended *for use* by the missionaries' (reviewer's italics) is surely unfounded (see Gagnon, *La conversion par l'image, Montréal*, 1975, Annexe I).

Corresponding weaknesses are found in other areas of the text. For Robert Harris there are seemingly conflicting statements. The introduction states: 'When Robert Harris arrived in Canada in 1879 after two years in Paris, he soon became the leading portrait painter of his generation' (p. 33). Then for a work of 1886 one finds: 'With this painting [*A Meeting of the School Trustees*] the artist began to receive portrait commissions' (p. 139). (See Moncrieff Williamson, *Robert Harris (1849-1919): An Unconventional Biography*, Toronto, 1970, for information on Harris's early career as portraitist.)

It is misleading to read in *Landmarks*: 'After *discontinuing* his visits to Canada, Morrice kept in touch primarily through exhibitions at the Canadian Art Club' (p. 36), when it was stated as well that 'the Club held exhibitions every year *until 1915*' (reviewer's italics). According to Morrice's biographer, Donald W. Buchanan (*James Wilson Morrice*, Toronto, 1936), the artist visited Canada as late as 1914.

To write that Emily Carr 'travelled alone ... [to] France to study art' (p. 40) is in error. Documented in 'Sister and I, from Victoria to London. Memoirs of Ods [sic] and Ends' (Provincial Archives of British Columbia) is the following: 'July 11 [1910] left for France accompanied by Alice.' See Edythe Hembroff-Schleicher, *Emily Carr: The Untold Story* (Saanichton, B.C., 1978); and also Carr, *Growing Pains* (Toronto, 1946) for references to 'sister' in Emily's account of her visit to France.

Elsewhere one reads: 'With the founding of the Contemporary Art Society [1939], Canadian artists were exposed to these new developments in twentieth-century art' (p. 42). What are *these* new developments? Mellen has been discussing Lyman's return from Paris in 1931 and his familiarity with contemporary European trends. Immediately preceding the above quotation, however, the author writes of 'the "modernist" philosophy of the Paris school, best summarized by Maurice Denis's famous statement ... [1890]'; and refers to the 'concept of "pure" painting, with an emphasis on the formal qualities of line, colour, and form – rather than subject matter.'

To concepts such as *these*, Canadian artists had been exposed prior to 1939. As early as 1913 Harold Mortimer Lamb had written (undoubtedly in defence of such pioneer Canadian 'modernists' as Lyman and Morrice) 'Some Notes on Understanding and the Appreciation of Art,' *Montreal Herald*, 26 November:

> In music the message is conveyed by means of sound: in sculpture, by form and mass seen in space: and in painting by line, form, mass, color and tone.

And certainly at *The International Exhibition of Modern Art*, held in Toronto in 1927 (an exhibition referred to earlier by Mellen), a number of Canadian artists were *exposed* to 'new developments in twentieth-century art.' Dennis Reid writes of the show (*A Concise History of Canadian Painting*, Toronto, 1973): 'It must have been an amazing exhibition, including works by Mondrian, Duchamp, Kandinsky, Stella, and virtually every modernist of distinction.' So even if 'it failed,' as Reid goes on to state, 'to interest any painters other than Brooker,' there was *exposure*. Indeed according to the editor of *Canadian Forum* (May 1927) the event occasioned 'something of a flutter in Art Circles.'

In discussing Paul-Émile Borduas and 'younger artists' in Montréal, Mellen notes that they held 'their first Surrealist exhibition in New York in 1946,' and adds that 'the same show opened in Montreal' (p. 44). But it could not have been 'the same show' for in Montréal the works of Barbeau and Fauteux were seen along with those of the New York exhibitors: Borduas, Fauvreau, Mousseau, Riopelle, and Leduc. See *Borduas et les automatistes 1942-1955* (exhibition catalogue), Montréal, Musée d'art contemporain, 1971.

Further concerning Borduas, it is an over-simplification to state that in Paris his work became 'serene and stark, painted in black and white' (pp. 44-5). This is clearly denied in an examination of plates in Gagnon's monograph, *Paul-Émile Borduas 1905-1960* (Montréal, 1978).

We are told in *Landmarks* that in 1959 Regina artists were exposed to the 'innovative *work*' of Barnett Newman (p. 48). From Greenberg's account ('Clement Greenberg's View of Painting and Sculpture in Prairie Canada Today,' *Canadian Art*, March 1963) it is known that 'Newman's *ideas* had a galvanizing effect on the artists who attended his "seminar" ' and that 'Newman came to Emma Lake *without bringing* any of his paintings along, and he did *no* painting while he was there' (reviewer's italics).

Throughout the text there are many questionable generalizations. What can statements such as the following mean without expansion and examples? 'By the time the Rococo style reached Canada, it had been transformed into a more serious and sober idiom, which was just what the newly formed society wanted' (p. 28). 'He [Jack Shadbolt] has worked through various approaches to Abstract Expressionism and Realism ...' (p. 48).

But errors and ambiguities notwithstanding, the *Landmarks* text is clearly praiseworthy for its abundant use of source material. Juxtaposed with many of the 'landmarks' are relevant quotations which lend interest, and on occasion meaning, to the visual presentations.

One reads from William Berczy's letter (p. 108) of *The Woolsey Family* painting; and from a contemporaneous review of Antoine Plamondon's 'portraits of three nuns' (p. 112). William Blair Bruce relates engrossing details of his 'Salon picture' (p. 144) now known as *The Phantom Hunter*; while A.Y. Jackson reflects on *Terre Sauvage*, proclaiming it, in authoritative terms, as 'the first large canvas of the new movement' (p. 168).

Artists' statements for more current works are equally well chosen. Jock Macdonald (*Fleeting Breath*) asserts that he has 'Never ... entirely deserted objective painting' (p. 211); and Ronald Bloore (*Painting, 1961*) acknowledges the conceptual nature of his work (p. 226). Michael Snow (*Venus Simultaneous*) comments on his 'huge theme-and-variations composition,' *The Walking Woman* series (p. 221); while

Gershon Iskowitz (*Uplands H*) declares the *Uplands* paintings are 'a new evolution for me of flying shapes ... the whole landscape' (p. 240).

Statements of Tiktak (*Mother and Child*), p. 75; Norval Morrisseau (*Warrior with Thunderbirds*), p. 80; and Bill Reid (*Box: Haida Myth of Bear Mother*), p. 83, to add just three, complement as well the expressive 'landmark' imagery.

Yet source citations are incomplete. A description of Borduas is labelled merely 'Maurice Gagnon, 1945' (p. 204). How simple to have included origin as *Peinture canadienne* (a key writing of the 1940s), and courteous to have acknowledged Harper, *Painting in Canada* (Toronto, 1966) for translation. Indeed courteous also to have acknowledged the lengthy Levasseur translation (p. 101) as from 'Pierre-Noel Levasseur: A Letter,' *Journal of Canadian Art History*, I, 1 (Spring 1974).

The Carr selection (p. 186) accompanying *Forest, British Columbia*, ca. 1932, has neither source *nor* date. The excerpt is from *Hundreds and Thousands: The Journals of Emily Carr* (Toronto and Vancouver, 1966), and the lack of identification seems needless. (It is interesting to note that the entry is from September 1935 – a date later than the 'landmark' – when Carr's paintings were indeed revealing: 'Air moves between each leaf. Sunlight plays and dances').

There are also fascinating fragments interspersed throughout the text for which one would welcome even partial information. (Surely even the most casual reader is interested in the origins of such statements.) For example:

'As Peel himself said, "Flesh is never flesh until you feel you can pinch it with your fingers" ' (p. 143).

'As Cullen once said of Morrice's art, "It looks as if it were painted from the recollection of a dream" ' (p. 126).

'Lawren Harris always found "something fine" about Watson's work, "something big and lasting" ' (p. 154).

Considering the scarcity of major publications devoted to Canadian art history (and this surely *is* a major publication), the weaknesses indicated in the text of *Landmarks* seem most regrettable. If the goal had been the Christmas market of 1979 instead of 1978, inaccuracies might well have been eliminated. *Landmarks of Canadian Art* could then have been recognized for its thoroughly reliable scholarship, as well as for its wealth of source material and stunning visual imagery.

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JOHN R. PORTER ET LÉOPOLD DÉSY
L'Annonciation dans la sculpture au Québec, suivi d'une étude sur Les statuaires et modeleurs Carli et Petrucci. Québec, Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1979. 151 p., 103 illus.

Le temps des inventaires n'est probablement pas fini mais il est assez avancé pour que des études iconographiques commencent à voir le jour. Jean Simard dans son *Iconographie du clergé français au XVII^e siècle* (Québec, 1976), avait ouvert brillamment la voie. John R. Porter et Léopold Désy viennent de le faire pour la sculpture ancienne du Québec dans le présent ouvrage, bientôt suivi (malgré la date) de leur petite étude construite sur le même modèle mais portant sur « le Souper d'Emmaüs dans la sculpture du Québec » publiée dans un récent *Bulletin* (n° 23, 1974) de la Galerie nationale du Canada. On attend beaucoup enfin de la thèse de doctorat de Nicole Cloutier (déposée au Département d'histoire de l'Université de Montréal) sur l'iconographie de sainte Anne dans l'art au Québec.

FIGURE 1. *L'Annonciation*, deuxième moitié du XIX^e siècle, église Our Lady of Annunciation (Ville-Mont-Royal). Porter et Désy, ill. n° 36.

Le présent ouvrage se veut un recensement des *Annonciations* sculptées de la province de Québec, depuis les origines (fin du XVII^e siècle) jusqu'à nos jours (Fig. 1). Les auteurs qui n'ont pas vécu comme les gens de ma génération dans la haine des statues de plâtre, n'excluent même pas les productions de ce genre de leur inventaire. J'admire, sans pouvoir m'y faire tout à fait, la catholicité de leur goût ! C'est peut-être ce qui les justifie d'ajouter une « étude sur les statuaires et modeleurs Carli et Petrucci » à leur ouvrage qui autrement paraîtrait quelque peu adventice ici. Je ne goûte pas beaucoup pour ma part le style bonbon fondant de ces imagiers populaires, mais j'ai toujours craint que, dans leur cas, quelques préjugés raciaux vinssent se mêler à mon rejet de leur esthétique. Rien comme une étude objective pour en préserver. Je sais gré aux auteurs de l'avoir fait.

Comme ils nous l'indiquent dans l'introduction, les auteurs avaient voulu établir sur une base documentaire plus étendue une affirmation de leur étude sur l'ancienne chapelle des Récollets de Trois-Rivières, où le maître-autel était orné d'une *Annonciation* sculptée : « On connaît une dizaine de représentation de ce thème dans toute la sculpture du Québec ». Celle de l'autel de Saint-Maurice est unique en son genre. En effet, l'emplacement précis du thème est exceptionnel, de même que son interprétation iconographique (dans Porter et Désy, « L'ancienne chapelle des Récollets de Trois-Rivières », dans *Bulletin* 18/1971 de la G.N.C., Ottawa, p. 11). Entre-temps, leur information s'est étendue puisqu'ils traitent maintenant d'une trentaine d'*Annonciations*, dont dix-sept en bois sculpté.

Leur a-t-elle permis d'appuyer les affirmations du *Bulletin* ? Pas vraiment. On a pu constater que « l'emplacement » de l'Annonciation, décorant le tabernacle est loin d'être exceptionnel, puisque c'est la position qu'on lui voit occuper à