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Kathy E. Zimon, *Alberta Society of Artists, the First Seventy Years*. Calgary, University of Calgary Press, 2000, 203 pp., 72 colour plates, $49.95 Cdn

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2 John Michael Montias, *Vermeer and his Milieu: A Web of Social History* (Princeton, 1989).
3 E.H. Gombrich, "Preface," in Gowing, *Vermeer*, v.
4 Gowing himself was a painter.
5 This aspect of Gowing's analysis is taken up by Harry Berger Jr in "Conspicuous Exclusion in Vermeer: An Essay in Renaissance Pastoral," and "Some Vanity of His Art: Conspicuous Exclusion and Pastoral in Vermeer," *Second World and Green World. Studies in Renaissance Fiction-Making* (Berkeley, 1988), 441–61, 462–509.
6 Berger, "Conspicuous Exclusion," 454.
7 A debt that Alpers acknowledges. See *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century* (Chicago, 1983), xx, 224.
8 On the larger critical problem of locating Vermeer's paintings in history, see Christiane Hertel, *Vermeer: Reception and Interpretation* (Cambridge, 1996). Hertel describes Gowing's approach in terms of a "paradigm of the metahistorical aesthetic object," 2. See also Karin Leonard, "Vermeer's Pregnant Women. On Human Generation and Pictorial Representation," *Art History* 25, no. 3 (2002), 294–96.
9 A recent book that takes Gowing's conjectures about Vermeer's use of the camera obscura as its starting point is Philip Steadman, *Vermeer's Camera: Uncovering the Truth Behind the Masterpieces* (Oxford, 2001). For a critical analysis of Vermeer's use of perspective, see Christopher Heuer, "Perspective as process in Vermeer," *Res* 38 (Autumn 2000), 82–99.
10 See Emma Barker's analysis of the historiography of Vermeer's personality, and critique of Gowing's approach in Emma Barker et al., eds, *The Changing Status of the Artist* (New Haven and London, 1999), especially 189–97. Similar critiques are offered by Ivan Gaskell, *Vermeer's Wager. Speculations on Art History, Theory and Art Museums* (London, 2000), 27–29; and by Berger, "Some Vanity," 487–88.
11 Gowing, *Vermeer*, 43. Recent revisions of Gowing's gender analysis of these paintings include Leonard, "Vermeer's Pregnant Women"; and H. Perry Chapman, "Women in Vermeer's Home. Mimesis and Ideation," *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 51 (2000), 237–72.

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One of the main tasks of a broadly defined field of art history is to develop a rich understanding of all aspects of cultural production. While historically-specific aesthetic ideals and more pedestrian power struggles within the art world end by enshrining and maintaining a rather select canon of "Important Artists," there remains a multitude of art producers whose work exists beyond the purview of the dominant histories. In many cases, artists located outside the geographical and/or cultural centres do not make an appearance in mainstream accounts. While their relative impact might be narrow as a result, it is essential that their contribution be part of the historical record, in order that our understanding of artistic production move beyond the modernist model of the individual artist "touched" by genius, and that the central role played by teaching, exhibiting, and membership in artists' societies and other institutions be recognized as instrumental to the production of the artist.

Kathy E. Zimon's *Alberta Society of Artists: The First Seventy Years* is a rich account of the history of a provincial artists' association from its formation in 1931 to the present day. Lavishly illustrated with black and white photographs and over seventy pages of colour plates, the book's visual narrative plays as important a role as the text in telling the story of Alberta's oldest artists' society. Chronologically organized chapters address the historical context for the formation of the Alberta Society of Artists (ASA) and the major events and debates over the past seven decades that effectively shaped the Society. Zimon begins by describing the creation of the ASA in 1931 as a response to local artists' and art enthusiasts' ambitions for a province-wide professional artists' society. Spearheaded by A.C. Leighton, a newly emigrated artist teaching at the Provincial Institute of Technology and Art (The Tech), the Society was first preoccupied with establishing itself as a professional organization through the creation of charters and the election of members whose credentials would reflect favourably on it. Exhibitions were a central means of visibly establishing an aura of professionalism and Leighton was an exacting critic in his role as president.

When Leighton's ill-health reduced his role as ASA president to little more than that of figurehead, H.G. Glyde was appointed to the position in 1942. In a symbiosis that seemed to characterize the first half of the Society's history, Glyde was also the principle instructor and later head of the Art Department at The Tech. During these early years, the ASA provided a forum for congenial gatherings of professional and amateur artists in Calgary, monthly critiques of members' works, as well as art classes led by both Leighton and Glyde, including a life drawing class led by Glyde in the late 1930s which was deemed somewhat controversial in conservative Calgary for its employment of nude models. These regular activities were facilitated by the move of the ASA offices into Coste House in Calgary along with the Art Department of The Tech: a cohabitation that would further tie the two institutions during the 1940s and 1950s. A large mansion that had reverted to the city for non-payment of taxes, Coste House was the ideal location for the broad range of art activities in Calgary, from the classes conducted by the Art Department, to the critiques and social

gatherings of the ASA. Glyde's tenure as president continued until 1947, despite his move to Edmonton to establish the Division of Fine Art at the University of Alberta in 1946.

During this early period, activities in Calgary and Edmonton were conducted relatively independently. Both groups were subject to the charter and by-laws of the Society, but there seems to have been very little official contact between the two bodies. Glyde's departure for Edmonton in 1946 necessitated the establishment and maintenance of greater links between the two cities, but aside from participation in Society exhibitions, the branches functioned largely as independent associations, the presidency remaining in Calgary with a few exceptions. From 1950 onward, the primary functions of the ASA were regular exhibitions of members' works in both Calgary and Edmonton, and the provision of a forum for members' discussions of artistic production. Zimon's analysis of the work produced during this period is couched around the prints featured in the Association's newsletter *Highlights*. While this small publication had been a part of the ASA's activities virtually since the beginning, its full contribution was only realized in 1948 when members reinstated the newsletter as a regular publication. During the 1950s, *Highlights* was a lively forum for the expression of members' views, particularly around modernism, with adherents and detractors giving voice to their opinions in written form and through the production of original prints, which became a central component of the publication and gave a materiality to the aesthetic debates.

Zimon devotes much of *The Alberta Society of Artists* to chronicling the major events and changes to the Society over the past seventy years, each chapter covering roughly two decades. In the final three chapters, however, she employs a thematic approach and provides a bit more colour to the chronology outlined in the first half of the book. "Token No Longer: Women and the ASA" follows the participation of female members in the Society from the early years, when women were only reluctantly admitted to associate membership, to the last few decades when women have been most active in the association, frequently serving as president. The final two chapters provide an overview of the work produced by Society members in terms of subject matter and medium. While the prints and essays contained in the Society's newsletter *Highlights* demonstrate that many members worked in styles that could be described as modernist, the preponderance of the landscape in ASA exhibitions suggests the largely conservative nature of the organization and the influence of its founders and first presidents Leighton and Glyde. The final chapter provides an overview of the many media that artists associated with the ASA have explored, which include painting, sculpture, printmaking, and drawing. In part this can be seen as an attempt to counter the perception that the ASA is largely a "painters," society, although the colour plates seem to suggest that painting in general, and landscape painting in particular, was favoured by the majority of ASA members.

There is a wealth of detail in this book that will be welcome to historians of Canadian art and Canadian cultural institutions. Particularly evident in the appendices, Zimon has compiled an exhaustive inventory of the people who made the Alberta Society of Artists such a vibrant institution. This inventory includes membership in the ASA over this seventy year period, lists of presidents and chairmen, editors of the ASA newsletter *Highlights*, changes made to the charter and by-laws of the association, and a useful summary of ASA exhibitions from the inception of the Society to the present. In the text itself, however, the detail tends to overwhelm the narrative, and a critical discussion of issues is often overshadowed by descriptions of the participants involved. Similarly, the discussion of members' artwork is thin, a result perhaps of attempting to include as many individuals and styles as possible. This may be the inevitable outcome of aiming this book primarily towards current ASA members. In her introduction, Zimon notes that she was asked by the association to bring earlier histories of the ASA up to date, a task that seemed particularly important now as older members were still around to be consulted on their interpretations of events culled from minutes of meetings, correspondence, exhibition lists, etc. In her desire to "present events from a neutral perspective" and thus fulfill the wishes of her primary audience, Zimon has missed the chance to probe the history and to reflect on the relationships between this institution and other artists' associations in Canada as well as the relationship between members of the Society and art production elsewhere in Alberta. The absence of abstract steel sculptors among the membership, for example, seems striking in a province that for some time was dominated by the medium.

Nevertheless, Zimon's book undertakes one of the most important tasks in the writing of a nation's art history: the exploration of all facets of cultural production in Canada, however they might seem to exist outside the narratives of contemporary Canadian art's development. Many readers will recognize few names from those cited in the text, but Kathy Zimon's history of the Alberta Society of Artists is a reminder of the centrality of looking at the "ex-centric" in order to question the assumptions on which dominant histories of art are constructed.

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