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See table of contents

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petroglyphs  

BY FRED BRUEMMER

In an isolated area of eastern Ontario, far from the highway and cut off from the well-worn tourist paths by forest and swamp, are Canada's most important examples of primitive art. They are the Peterborough petroglyphs — veritable treasures of pre-Columbian Indian art.

The petroglyphs were discovered in 1954 by a prospector on an exploration tour of the Blue Mountains region, 35 miles north east of Peterborough. On the course of his travels, the prospector, Everett Davis, walked past a line ridge several times without noticing anything. But one night, stopping to rest near the ridge, his eye caught some strange figures on a rock.

Quite by accident that night, Davis discovered the biggest grouping of petroglyphs in the country. Other petroglyphs had been found in Canada before but never in this number.

The Peterborough petroglyphs include 92 figures engraved in the calcium stone to a depth of a quarter of an inch. They are distributed in two groups and cover a surface of 135 feet by 102 feet.

The first group has a large bird, probably a heron, measuring 31 inches from head to foot, as the centre piece. The bird is flanked by two triangles, representing trees, or perhaps spearheads. The centre piece of the second group is an almost life-size feminine figure. It is believed she is a symbol of fertility. Around her are intertwined designs supposedly representing serpents.

There are various theories about the age and origin of these figures. According to the archaeologist Paul W. Sweetman, who has made the most detailed study of them, the petroglyphs may be the work of Indians of the Laurentian culture. Some objects of this culture, dating back some 3,500 years, have been found in a little river a few miles from the site.

But it is more likely that the figures are the work of the Ojibway Indians and that they do not date back more than five centuries. They bear a striking resemblance to the paintings of the Ojibways done on the rocks and cliffs of the area. The fact that the petroglyphs, done on relatively soft rock, have been hardly affected by the erosion of time, are further indication that they may be relatively recent. During the past 10 years, many studies have been made — but the Peterborough petroglyphs still remain a mystery insofar as date and origin are concerned.

sixth biennial  

BY JEAN RENE OSTIGUY

Organized in 1955 with the object of assessing the development of contemporary Canadian painting, every two years, the sixth biennial of Canadian Painting this year celebrates its 10th birthday.

The selection of the works this year was entrusted to William Townsend, professor at the Slade School of Fine Arts of the University of London. Professor Townsend already knew Canada and could count on the help of a consultative committee but these factors were not enough to make the exhibition a success.

What ensured the real success of the exhibition was the professor's keen sense of artistic discernment and his talent for organization. It must be pointed out, however, that generally speaking the exhibition is concentrating on subjects of the first group. In the second group, the work of Barbeau, Gauthier and Tousignant are commendable.

Combining 'pop art' with the 'hard edge', it is obvious that giants strides are being made in the country in cold abstractionism.

What mattered to Mr. Townsend was to make the exhibition a success. To this end, he has invited in the field of American art. The surprise, of course, is that such an eminent institution as this, which was slow to accept abstract expressionism and which did virtually nothing to help the development of pop art, should give its wholehearted endorsement to a marginal collection such as that included in The Responsive Eye. The controversy stems in large part from the museum's rather arbitrary selection of the works of Vasarely and Albers, each of whom is represented in the exhibition by a dozen works, and those of Glarner, Bolotovsky and Diller, the exponents of neo-plastics. The latter three, who have exercised a great influence on the development of the 'hard edge' in the United States, are completely lost. The role of these American painters is as important, if not more important, than that of the European masters because of the exciting explorations they have made in the problems of pure color and their interesting experiments with rhythm.

It must be pointed out, however, that generally speaking the exhibition was not designed with any historic quality in mind. This fact would explain the absence from the show of such pioneers as Mondrian, Herbin, Lobel and Baertling.

With New York becoming the principal centre of art of the world, it is likely the American artists will soon lose their hegemony and will find it impossible to dominate the scene. The school of New York will grow as the school of Paris did and the foreigners will become more and more numerous. It is an established fact that in recent years artists of other lands have found in New York a climate which is highly favorable to their development. These artists have come from Germany, France, Italy, Scandinavia and England. There have also been a number of artists from Canada.

It is worth noting that this art form is reaching out for new materials and is concerning itself with problems of experimental psychology. But a fear still exists, as William C. Seitz points out in his conclusion to the exhibition catalogue. What future, he asks, is there for a visual art that has left physical perception in a state of trauma?
Reaching down to the base where the angle of the triangle was formed. The way in which the color seemed to move on the form. The artist made a framework.

A work of sculpture should always be determined by the exterior structure, its meaning and its suggestion of space. The triangle is an exciting form. As for the plastic school, it is the best established in Montreal. "If there is indeed a particular school of thought in Montreal, it is that of the plastic artists."

"It is extremely difficult to judge 1,700 works in three days and, under such conditions, it is natural enough to expect that some errors may occur," says Gaucher. "It appears that the figurative painting was, in the general opinion of everyone, very mediocre and the informal painting generally weak. It was in hard-edge painting, according to general agreement, that there was the highest degree of competence."

"Sculpture should always be linked with architecture," he says. "A work of sculpture should always be determined by the exterior framework."

What captured my attention in his most recent exhibition was the way in which the color seemed to move on the form. The artist made use of one color — a bright red. The effect was one of different shadings related to each other as to the angle of the triangle was formed. Here the viewer suddenly became conscious of the forms of the work, its structure, its meaning and its suggestion of space.

In his last show, Soucy presented sculptures which made use of the transparent glass form. The sculptor designs empty tractions so that other triangles can penetrate into them. Certain of his sculptures provide a feeling of animation by means of a rotating type of movement. A work made up of three triangles, for example, may offer three separate rotating movements, thus creating an interesting play of form effects.

There is no doubt that the triangle is an exciting form. As for the sculptor's choice of colors, he has started off with the colors he considers most passionate.

Raymonde Godin's feelings for art are basic. "The world the painter creates," she says, "is his strength and the only thing he really owns. Painting is his reason for being and into it he puts the sum total of his human experience. It is a contest, too, because if his work does not survive outside of him and on its own merits, no one will bother to count the effort that went into it."

Maritime art

BY JEAN PAUL MORISSET

The directors and curators of the principal museums and university art galleries in the Maritimes have joined hands to form the Atlantic Provinces Art Circuit, a non-official association which has already begun to consider art problems common to the four provinces concerned. This is an efficient, serious effort which should do much to co-ordinate and enrich the important exhibitions originating or imported to the areas. This is the kind of happy effort which is much too seldom seen.

Gabriel Filion

BY PIERRE VADEBONCOEUR

The current painting of Gabriel Filion seeks to conform on the finished surface to the totality of space, as though the space concerned was an infinite and luminous plan in which it was almost impossible to know and there is a poetic feeling of space — poetic, yet defineable and favorable to the creation of optical illusions.
The Paul Facchetti Gallery in Paris, which launched Riopelle on his career in 1946, has been exhibiting the works of a young Montreal painter named Germain Perron in a number of shows since last autumn. The Paris critics have received him most favorably, so much so in fact that an exhibition of his works will be held at Canada House in the City Universitaire. It is expected, too, that two of his works may be acquired for Quebec's Museum of Modern Art.

A one-man show of the works of Alechinsky was held at the Galerie Lecobre on East 77th Street in New York. This was the artist's third show at this gallery. The works shown were pictures that were sometimes tender, sometimes poetic and even pathetic. Alechinsky, part of the Cobra Group, having known the writer Christian Dotremont and the painters, Jorn, Appel and Cornille, has never allowed himself to be restricted by techniques. His work is much influenced by nature: roots, seaweed and marine flowers.

The National Gallery in Ottawa held its first exhibition of Victorian works from March 26 to April 25. The show offered a wide range of works from Landseer to Whistler. The paintings and drawings came from a large number of collections from England and the United States, including the queen's collection.

The second international biennial of tapestry will be held at the Musée Cantonal des Beaux-Arts at Lausanne in Switzerland from June 18 to Sept. 26 with Canada figuring among 25 participating countries. Various kinds of tapestries, among them examples of the embroidered variety, and a variety of weaves will be shown.

In May, the Dale Collection was officially accepted by the National Gallery of Art in Washington. It will occupy six new galleries specially constructed for it. It is the most important donation of French impressionist and post-impressionist art made to the gallery to date. The collection of Chester Dale, president of the Washington institution from 1935 until his death in 1965, includes works by such artists as Boudin, Mary Cassatt, Corot, Courbet, Daumier, Degas, Gauguin, Van Gogh, Manet, Modigliani, Monet, Morisot, Picasso, Renoir and Toulouse-Lautrec.

A special tribute was paid to the poets and painters of Quebec at Nogent-le-Rotrou, France, from April 13 to May 2. Among the French-Canadians exhibiting were Edmund Alleyn, Réal Archer, Paul Beaulieu, Marcelle Ferron, Jean McEwen, Marcelle Maltais, Germain Perron, Paul Emile Borduas and two Franco-Canadian painters, René Harbour and James Pichette. The event was sponsored by the Centre International d’Etudes Esthétiques (Cercle Paul-Valéry) under the patronage of the Department of National Education with the cooperation of Paris-Montreal-Presse (Maurice Laval, director and Jean Cathelin, editor-in-chief.)

An exhibition of Canadian ceramics was held at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts from April 27 to May 14 with 60 ceramists showing 103 pieces. These exhibitions are arranged by the Canadian Guild of Ceramists in conjunction with the ceramic clubs of Montreal and British Columbia, the handicraft section of the province of Nova Scotia and the Arts Council of Saskatchewan. The object of the exhibition is to give ceramists of this country an opportunity to show and sell their works and also to raise the standards of Canadian ceramics to the international level.

The Byron Gallery in New York recently exhibited the spheric work of a Swiss painter named Paul Talman, an artist who likes free movement and who has a spirit of inventiveness. His works are plexiglas squares in which there are rolling balls placed symmetrically. The glass is of different colors and the balls of two colors. Paul Talman lives in Bak in Switzerland and his works are in great demand in Europe. His exhibitions have been held in various cities, among them Amsterdam, Stockholm, Zagreb, Berne, Milan and Cologne.

Painting, the theatre, literature and music all have their classics—but in the world of music, there is a special field devoted to recordings and this, too, has its own classics. Into what might be termed a Record Museum should go a number of special efforts which have survived the test of time. Probably the most important historical series in existence now is the one distributed in America on the Angel label and called 'Great Recordings of the Century.' A record library is not worth the name if it does not also possess two other recordings on the Angel label. These are the Tristan and Isolde of Ludwig Suthaus and Kirsten Flagstad, conducted by Furtwaengler, and the works for piano by Mozart, played by Walter Gieseking. RCA Victor also maintains a proud catalogue with Toscanini, Rubinstein and Heifetz among its many historical pieces. A music library should also include some of the greats of the music hall variety, among them such people as Mistinguett, Yvette Guilbert, Maurice Chevalier, Trenet, Piaf and Sophie Tucker.

In the world of film-making, Canada has its share of cameramen who may rightfully be classed as artists and among them one name stands out brightly. It is that of Georges Dufaux, director of photography at the National Film Board. He has done countless short subjects and medium-length films and his highly-sensitive camera work has made it possible for a number of films to reach the screen which could not have done so on their content alone. In 10 years of cinema work, Dufaux has opened up a whole new world of sight and feeling.

La Galerie d'Art de Vancouver travaille actuellement à l'élaboration d'un catalogue raisonné sur l'œuvre du peintre canadien de la Côte Ouest, Emily Carr (1871-1945).

Toute personne possédant des œuvres de l'artiste (huiles, croquis, aquarelles, dessins) ou des lettres est priée d'entrer en contact avec Madame Doris Shadbolt, conservateur.

The Vancouver Art Gallery
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