

**La peinture canadienne d'hier dans les collections du musée  
des beaux-arts de Montréal**  
**Pre-Contemporary Canadian Painting in the Collections of the  
Montreal Museum of Fine Arts**

Paul Dumas

Volume 20, Number 82, Spring 1976

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/55030ac>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

La Société La Vie des Arts

ISSN

0042-5435 (print)

1923-3183 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Dumas, P. (1976). La peinture canadienne d'hier dans les collections du musée des beaux-arts de Montréal / Pre-Contemporary Canadian Painting in the Collections of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. *Vie des arts*, 20(82), 31–90.

La peinture canadienne d'hier  
dans les collections  
du musée  
des beaux-arts  
de Montréal

*Paul Dumas*



Institué en 1860, sous le nom de *Montreal Art Association*, le Musée des Beaux-Arts de Montréal a été constitué en musée semi-public en 1948. C'est donc à la fois une fort ancienne institution et un très jeune musée. Cette dualité de nature nous autorise à y admirer, comme il se doit, les toiles de qualité que contient la collection de peintures canadiennes antérieures à 1940 et à accepter ses lacunes avec indulgence.

Une des principales missions d'un musée, c'est de présenter au public un ensemble, le plus représentatif possible, de l'art créé dans un lieu donné, ainsi que des échantillons, les meilleurs que l'on soit en mesure d'acquérir, de l'art universel. Situé dans la plus grande ville du Canada, le Musée des Beaux-Arts de Montréal se devait de grouper des œuvres suffisantes en nombre et en qualité pour permettre au visiteur d'ici ou d'ailleurs d'obtenir une notion exacte de l'art et de la peinture au Canada. Il s'en faut de très peu qu'il ait encore atteint parfaitement cet objectif. Sa collection d'art traditionnel ancien du Canada français est, par exemple, moins considérable que celle du Musée du Québec, tandis que la peinture canadienne y est, somme toute, moins abondamment illustrée qu'à la Galerie Nationale du Canada, à Ottawa.

Une collection publique se construit au hasard des dons et des achats. Elle obéit de ce fait aux fluctuations du goût et aux disponibilités du marché. Elle présuppose surtout un plan d'acquisition bien déterminé qui vise à réunir des exemples typiques des divers aspects du talent des artistes les plus importants de chaque période et à combler les vides qui peuvent exister dans cet ensemble. On poursuit fort bien une telle politique au Musée de Montréal depuis vingt ans, et cela nous a déjà valu une ample et fructueuse moisson. Il n'en a pas toujours été ainsi, malheureusement, et, à venir jusqu'à une époque toute récente, le Musée s'en rapportait presque exclusivement à la générosité de ses mécènes pour accroître son fonds<sup>1</sup>. Ceci explique l'allure capricieuse à laquelle s'est constituée la collection de peinture canadienne d'hier au Musée. Un inventaire sommaire du catalogue de cette dernière nous conduit à certaines constatations.

Tout d'abord — comme dans tous les musées du monde — on note la présence au fichier d'un certain nombre de tableaux médiocres, fort prisés dans leur temps mais que la postérité n'a pas retenus, œuvres démodées et désuètes, maintenant reléguées aux oubliettes d'où on en exhume rarement quelque une à l'occasion d'une exposition sur l'évolution de la mode. Laissons ces gloires déchues à leur repos obscur et soyons assurés d'ailleurs que maints artistes contemporains, et non des moindres, iront peut-être les y rejoindre un jour.

En second lieu, le choix d'œuvres de chaque peintre est variable et inégal en nombre et en qualité, la plupart n'étant représentés que par un ou deux ouvrages. La collection comporte des vides, en particulier du côté des peintres canadien-français. Il ne faut pas oublier que jusqu'à tout récemment le Musée était le fief quasi exclusif de la *gentry* anglo-saxonne de Montréal et que ses membres en étaient à peu près les seuls donateurs. On comprend qu'ils aient accordé leur préférence à leurs compatriotes et que, peut-être desservis par cet isolationnisme culturel qui a trop sou-

vent affligé certains Anglo-Canadiens, ils aient été portés à négliger les peintres canadien-français. Fort heureusement, la politique d'acquisition du Musée a bien changé depuis vingt ans et a sensiblement corrigé cet état de choses. Il persiste encore, cependant, des insuffisances. Parmi les peintres du passé, d'aucuns brillent encore par leur absence, comme Zacharie Vincent — il est vrai qu'il a assez peu produit —, Napoléon Bourassa, Charles Huot, Ludger Larose, Henri Beau, Joseph Saint-Charles et, plus près de nous, Randolph Hewton et Alexandre Bercovitch. Le Musée ne possède qu'une huile d'Henri Julien, de Georges Delfosse et de Marc-Aurèle Fortin, et il nous semble que les groupes de Suzor-Coté — peintre des Bois-Francs qui a fait carrière à Montréal — et de Clarence Gagnon — peintre de Montréal qui a fait carrière à Paris — pourraient être plus étoffés. Autant, en tous cas, que ceux de William Brymner et de Maurice Cullen dont le Musée possède quantité importante de fort bons ouvrages. Enfin, le Musée ne contient que deux Homer Watson et trois Horatio Walker, tous bien caractéristiques toutefois de la manière de ces peintres. Toutes ces lacunes, espérons-le, seront sans doute corrigées avec le temps.

Nous venons de signaler les coins d'ombre, il nous reste à souligner maintenant les points forts de la collection de peinture canadienne d'hier.

Mises à part les quelques faiblesses ci-relevées, l'on peut affirmer que, tout compte fait, le visiteur du Musée peut y acquérir une connaissance satisfaisante touchant l'évolution de la peinture au Canada, pourvu, bien entendu, que les toiles soient accrochées aux cimaises, comme ce ne fut hélas! pas toujours le cas dans le passé. Une promenade au Musée McCord, avec lequel le M.B.A.M. a conclu une entente amicale, permettra à l'amateur de compléter dans une large mesure l'information déjà recueillie au Musée. Ce dernier possède peu d'exemplaires de nos tout premiers peintres, qui se cantonnèrent surtout dans le tableau d'église. Un don récent de M. Maurice Corbeil a fait entrer au Musée deux effigies historiques peintes par François Malepart de Beaucourt, et on y avait acquis, il y a cinq ans, une rare nature morte de William von Moll Berczy, Paul Kane, l'iconographe par excellence des Indiens du Canada, triomphe surtout au R.O.M.A. de Toronto et au Musée National, à Ottawa; le M.B.A.M. possède de lui deux tableaux qui sont de tout premier ordre. Cornelius Krieghoff, peintre habile et artificiel qui demeure depuis des décades le préféré des encanteurs et des financiers anglo-canadiens, figure en bonne place avec onze toiles où s'étaient sa dextérité et son pittoresque de pacotille, tandis que son contemporain William Raphael se défend fort bien et moins bruyamment avec deux ouvrages caractéristiques. Jean-Baptiste Roy-Audy est bien représenté par trois portraits solennels et guindés et les trois peintres de Québec, Joseph Légaré, Antoine Plamondon et Théophile Hamel le sont également, le premier par une composition curieuse, le second par des portraits et des tableaux religieux, fragments d'un chemin de croix, et le troisième par deux solides portraits. Les petits paysagistes canadiens du 19<sup>e</sup> siècle sont nombreux aux cimaises, avec leurs vues panoramiques dénuées de prétentions autres que descriptives.

Mais c'est avec la peinture canadienne du

2



3





4 20e siècle que le M.B.A.M. conquiert une grande richesse documentaire. Nous avons noté au passage l'excellence des ensembles de William Brymner et de Maurice Cullen, tout en déplorant le nombre insuffisant des Suzor-Coté et des Clarence Gagnon. A peu près tous les peintres valables de l'époque précontemporaine sont représentés dignement ici, et presque toujours par des tableaux de qualité. Trois Ozias Leduc, d'acquisition plus ou moins récente, dont son fameux *L'Heure mauve*, illustrent à merveille, bien qu'incomplètement, le talent particulier de ce grand solitaire, tandis que John Lyman tient un rang honorable avec sept huiles lumineuses. Un savoureux Adrien Hébert, acheté depuis peu, *Le Magasin de tabac Hyman*, vient de s'ajouter à sa claire perspective de la place Jacques-Cartier. La réunion de toiles et de croquis des peintres du Groupe des Sept et de leurs épigones, Albert Robinson, David Milne, Lionel LeMoine FitzGerald et Emily Carr est parfaitement représentatif — bien qu'en nombre succinct — de cette école de peinture torontoise dont tous ne raffolent pas, il est vrai, mais qui a néanmoins joué un rôle important dans l'histoire de l'art canadien.

La grande vedette de la collection de peinture canadienne d'hier au Musée des Beaux-Arts de Montréal, sinon la grande vedette du Musée tout court, c'est incontestablement la collection de tableaux, pochades et aquarelles de James Wilson Morrice, lequel a été et demeure encore à ce jour le meilleur peintre du Canada. Grâce en soient rendues à la famille de l'artiste qui a généreusement doté le Musée d'un ensemble incomparable où l'on peut admirer toutes les facettes du talent du peintre. Le M.B.A.M. ne possède pas moins de soixante-dix ouvrages de Morrice, de toutes les dimensions. De ce nombre, neuf ont été offerts par



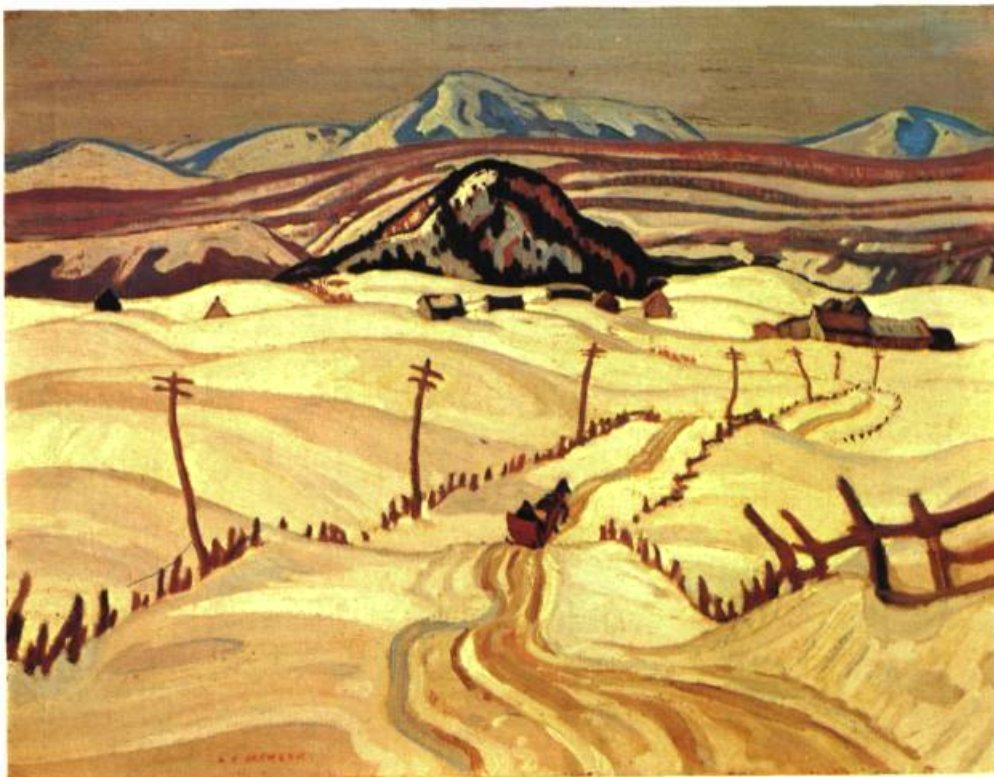
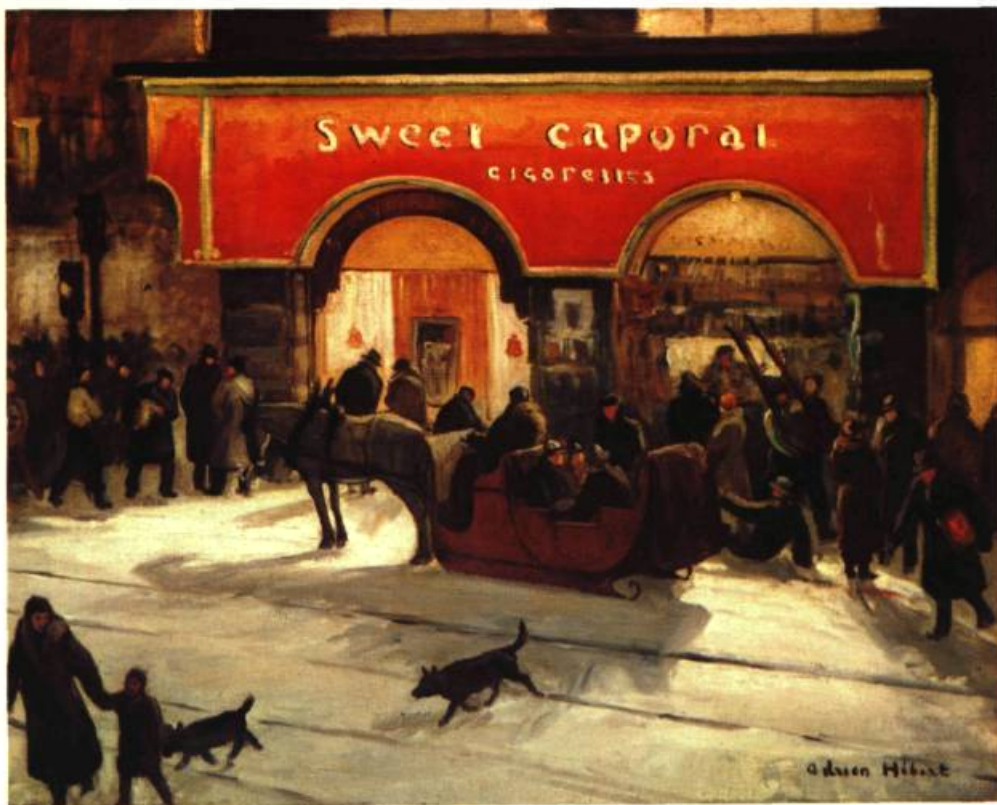
1. James Wilson MORRICE (1865-1924)  
*La vieille maison Holton à Montréal*, v. 1909.  
(C'est sur son emplacement que le musée actuel a été érigé.)  
Huile sur toile; 61 cm x 73,6.  
Acquis en 1915. Legs John W. Tempest.

2. William von MOLL BERCZY (1748-1813)  
*Nature morte aux fleurs*, v. 1805.  
Huile sur panneau; 28 cm x 22,8.  
Legs Horsley et Annie Townsend.

3. Ozias LEDUC (1864-1955)  
*Fin du jour*, 1913.  
Huile sur toile; 50 cm 8 x 34,3.  
Legs Horsley et Annie Townsend.

4. William BRYMNER (1855-1925)  
*Nu allongé*, v. 1915.  
Huile sur toile; Non signé; 45 cm 7 x 87.  
Don de Mme William Brymner.

5. William RAPHAEL (1833-1914)  
*Paysans attaqués par des loups*, 1870.  
Huile sur toile; 60 cm 3 x 106.  
Don de Milles Scott.



6. Adrien HÉBERT (1890-1967)  
*Le Débit de tabac Hyman*, 1937.  
Huile sur toile; 81 cm 3 x 121,9.  
Legs Horsley et Annie Townsend.

7. Alexander Y. JACKSON (1882-1974)  
*Jour gris dans les Laurentides*, 1931.  
Huile sur toile; 63 cm 5 x 81,5.  
Fonds A. Sidney Dawes et Dr F. J. Shepherd.

8. Clarence-A. GAGNON (1881-1942)  
*Bœufs au labour, à Beaupré*, 1903.  
Huile sur toile; 51 cm 1 x 71,4.  
Don du Dr J. Douglas Morgan.

différents donateurs anglais, neuf ont été achetés par le Musée grâce à des fonds constitués par d'autres mécènes et le reste a été légué par la famille Morrice, dont une dizaine d'esquisses et d'aquarelles en 1974, pendant la fermeture du Musée. Si l'on excepte les nus, l'on peut goûter dans cette collection très variée tous les aspects de ce poète attachant et singulier qui s'est égalé aux plus brillants petits maîtres de l'Impressionnisme: paysages de France ou des Antilles, vues de Venise ou d'Afrique du Nord, scènes de la rue ou du cirque, visages mélancoliques abîmés dans la rêverie, perspectives enneigées du Québec, tout Morrice est là avec son laconisme du trait et de la couleur, avec ses accents discrets comme des murmures et, pourtant, si prenants. Je connais plusieurs amateurs, et nous sommes de ceux-là, qui sont souvent retournés au Musée uniquement pour y revoir une fois de plus les Morrice. On nous informe que le Musée rénové aura sa salle Morrice et que l'on y exposera à tour de rôle les différents tableaux de lui qu'on y possède. Pour célébrer la réouverture du Musée en mai 1976, nulle fête ne saurait être plus brillante, selon nous, que d'y voir rassemblés une fois, dans un même lieu, tous les Morrice de la collection du Musée.

Le regretté Donald Jarvis, qui avait le sens du spectacle, avait persuadé le gouvernement canadien d'acquiescer quelques toiles de maîtres provenant de la collection des princes du Liechtenstein (deux Filippo Lippi, un Memling et un Rubens), afin d'enrichir la Galerie Nationale du Canada de tableaux prestigieux susceptibles d'y attirer les foules et, dans le même ordre de pensée, il avait même rêvé y faire entrer aussi le rarissime *Portrait de Ginevra Benci*, par Léonard de Vinci, maintenant à la Galerie Nationale de Washington. Nous avons souvent interrogé les collections du Musée des Beaux-Arts de Montréal afin d'y déceler des pôles d'attraction populaire. Il y a d'excellentes choses dans notre Musée, mais peu de vedettes éclatantes. A défaut de jocondes ou de vénus de Milo, pourquoi ne mettrait-on pas davantage en valeur cet ensemble prestigieux d'œuvres de James Wilson Morrice qui s'avère le joyau de la collection de peinture canadienne d'hier du Musée des Beaux-Arts de Montréal?

1. Pour combler les lacunes des collections du M.B.A.M. ou de tous les musées du Canada et accélérer leur enrichissement, il serait hautement souhaitable qu'on votât enfin, à Ottawa, une loi de dégrèvement fiscal plus souple et plus généreuse, comparable à celle qui est en vigueur aux États-Unis, et qui inciterait davantage les collectionneurs à céder leurs trésors aux galeries publiques.

2. Nos vifs remerciements à M. Germain Lefebvre, Conservateur adjoint de la Collection de peinture canadienne au Musée, dont l'assistance, en cette période de fermeture, nous a été infiniment précieuse.

English Translation, p. 89

9. Albert Henry ROBINSON (1881-1956)  
*La Baie-Saint-Paul*, v. 1923.  
Huile sur toile; 68 cm 8 x 84,1.  
Don de Mme W. L. Davis.

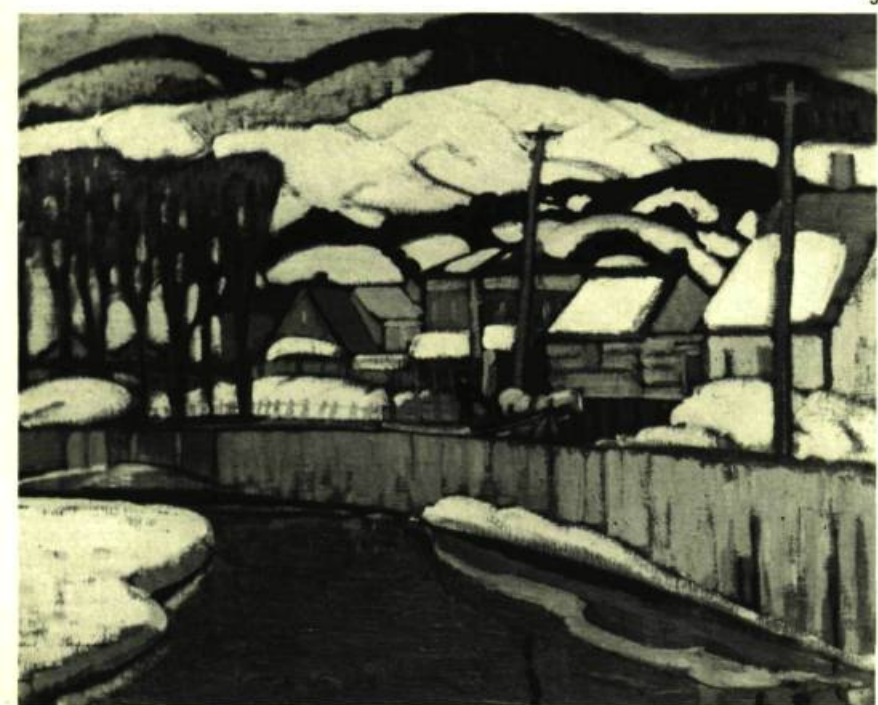
10. Paul KANE (1810-1871)  
*Caw-Wacham*.  
Huile sur toile; Non signé; 76 cm 2 x 61,2.  
Legs Gilman Cheney.



8

9

10



communities: Rimouski, from Jan. 16 to Feb. 17, 1974; Sherbrooke, from March 10 to 31, 1974; Fredericton, from July 4 to Sept. 15, 1974; Quebec, from Nov. 21, 1974, to Jan. 12, 1975; and Winnipeg, from March 13 to June 29, 1975. This was how the extension service of the Museum officially began. The task of putting into practice the new policy of the Secretary of State was entrusted to the National Museums. It became necessary to establish a system of regular grants to enable cultural extension via museums to become a permanent system. Those who wished to participate in the program were assured of annual support. Obviously, certain conditions had to be met and the effectiveness shown of projects proposed to National Museums.

The Deputy-director of the Museum was charged with organizing a team, with conceiving exhibitions, with creating a system of presentation and interpretation, and with organizing circuits. With the assistance of the entire Museum staff, the project became a reality. First, the staff familiarized itself with conditions in various cultural centres in Quebec and then in the rest of Canada. Mr. Jacques Dumouchel, assistant curator for extension, hired in 1974, began inspection tours while co-operating in the organization of exhibitions. A son of Albert Dumouchel, whose example and teaching gave birth to contemporary print-making in Quebec, Mr. Dumouchel enthusiastically undertook organization of the exhibition *The Fifty-five Stations of the Tokaido* by the great Japanese artist Hiroshige. Japanese wood-prints played an important rôle in the modernization of methods of contemporary art around the end of the nineteenth century. It was a long-term rôle since the spatial concepts of the Japanese masters even now continue to influence the evolution of graphic creation. The Museum thought it appropriate to give the public an opportunity to see and admire this extraordinary series of prints which formerly only had been talked about. The series had just been given to the Museum by Mrs. Mary Fraikin in memory of her father, Maurice Van Ysendyck.

In mounting this second travelling exhibition after *Cultures of the Sun and the Snow*, the practical bases for the extension service had been set. It was decided to present only original works. Reproductions would be used solely for didactic support.

Guided by the old proverb "Charity begins at home", the extension service, before taking to the roads of Quebec and of Canada, first looked after the metropolitan region where thousands of persons have only limited access to original works of art. This is how *The Fifty-five Stations of the Tokaido* was launched at Concordia University Dec. 5, 1974. Critics George Bogardi and Henry Lehmann described the exhibition as the most extraordinary show held in Montreal that year. If one dwells on this exhibition, it is because it made it possible to determine standards of presentation and execution. Other than those already described, it was decided that each exhibition would be accompanied by unilingual French and English poster-folders available to the public without charge. These illustrated documents include an essay containing interesting data on the works exhibited — data in keeping with the Canadian cultural and artistic context. The following is a list of centres which *The Fifty-five Stations of the Tokaido* has visited or will visit: Montreal, Dec. 5, 1974, to Jan. 7, 1975; Shawinigan, Jan. 23 to Feb. 23, 1975; Trois-Rivières, Feb. 26 to March 22, 1975; Rimouski, April 9 to May 4, 1975; Winnipeg, May 15 to June 22, 1975; Regina, July 15 to Aug. 15, 1975; Frede-

ricton, Oct. 1 to 31, 1975; Thunder Bay, Nov. 20 1975, to Jan. 4 1976; Vaudreuil, Jan. 26 to Feb. 23, 1976; Timmins, March 6-31, 1976; Saint-Lambert, April 15 to May 3, 1976.

This exhibition was followed by *Eros*, a series of paintings by André Thérout, on the theme of the female body; *Vibes in Colour*, the achievement of Rita Letendre from 1962 to to-day, with one painting representing each year; and, finally, *Ritual Sculpture from Black Africa*, another exhibition designed to enable Canadians to judge, on the basis of originals, a form of art which shook the Western tradition to its foundations. These exhibitions completed the first year of activity of the extension services.

In 1975, Mr. Jacques Toupin, who had been artistic director of La Maison des Arts de La Sauvegarde, succeeded Mr. Dumouchel, who left the Museum to undertake personal projects. Mr. Toupin brings to the Museum and to its extension services considerable experience in the field of traditional and contemporary Quebec art. He is preparing the 1976 program with enthusiasm. The anticipated exhibitions are *Quebec, TV and Co.*, paintings by the self-taught artist Ernest Gendron, which even now is assured of a cross-Canada circuit; and *Smiles*, forty works by seven Montreal artists who use black and white in their drawings and prints to illustrate contemporary life with a certain degree of irony. Mr. Germain Lefebvre, associate curator of Canadian art, conceived and prepared the exhibition. Mr. Toupin also is working on an exhibition dealing with design of the past and present. It will allow the viewer to compare the practical solutions arrived at years ago in the fabrication of utilitarian objects with what present-day designers propose. Suzor-Coté is on the program, along with the oeuvre of Albéric Bourgeois, the great caricaturist of *La Presse* in the 1920s and 1930s. Two consecutive exhibitions will be devoted to him: the first on the theme of national affairs, the second on international politics. Under study are projects of avant-garde art, monumental outdoor sculpture, and women artists.

The staff in charge of extension services at the Museum works in close co-operation with centres which present the exhibitions. Curators and the assistant conservator, Raynald Hardy, assist by going on-site when handling or installation problems occur. Such visits are valuable didactically since the information they supply benefits the heads of the centres. Thus, a slow, but constant, development of sound museological procedures results in the whole of Quebec and of Canada. It has even occurred that what seemed logical at first was later reversed. We were astonished when a number of centres, whose galleries were notorious for their inadequacies, decided to improve them in order to be able to present exhibitions we had offered them, subject to the meeting of certain conditions. Until then, there had been the conviction that one simply had to set up galleries and that exhibitions would follow on their own. Now the wish to receive travelling exhibitions has become the principal motivation for improving physical plants.

It would be wrong not to comment on the enormous amount of work carried out by Museum preparators and carpenters. Under the direction of Mr. Albert Couturier, they look after framing, the construction of bases, display cases, and crates for packing. Mr. Donald Youngson handles transport and insurance. Accounting is administered by Mr. John Wynn. Translation, particularly important in Canada, is the responsibility of Mme Camille Létourneau. Mme Françoise Saint-Michel and Bill

Bantey handle public relations. Mme Jacqueline Primeau and Miss Muriel Berger look after administrative and secretarial matters.

To sum up, it is fortunate indeed that the National Museums have detached the basic support grant from general contributions they make to associate museums. They thus ensure continuity of extension services, now considered essential. If we are still far removed from the *museum without walls* — a Utopian notion if ever there was one — *the museum outside the walls*, on the other hand, is already here.

---

## PRE-CONTEMPORARY CANADIAN PAINTING IN THE COLLECTIONS OF THE MONTREAL MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS

---

By Paul DUMAS

Founded in 1860 under the name of *Montreal Art Association*, the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts was established as a semi-public museum in 1948. It is therefore at one and the same time a very old institution and a very young museum. This duality of nature leads us to admire in it, as we should, the fine canvases contained in the collections of Canadian paintings dating from before 1940, and to accept its gaps with indulgence.

One of the chief missions of a museum is to offer to the public the most representative ensemble possible of the art created in a given place, as well as the best examples within its power to acquire, of universal art. Located in the biggest city in Canada, the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts should have felt obliged to devote itself to grouping works sufficient in number and quality to allow local visitors and those from elsewhere to form an exact idea of art and painting in Canada. Little is lacking for it to attain complete perfection on this point. The Museum's collection of the old traditional art of French Canada is, for example, less extensive than that at the Quebec Museum, while Canadian painting is, on the whole, less fully illustrated here than in the National Gallery of Canada at Ottawa.

A public collection is assembled at the will of gifts and purchases. And so it obeys fluctuations of taste and availabilities of the market. It presupposes especially a well-defined plan of acquisition that aims at collecting typical examples of the different aspects of the talent of the most important artists of each period and filling the voids that may exist in this ensemble. Such a policy has been followed very well at the Montreal Museum for twenty years, and this has already brought us an abundant and fruitful harvest. Unfortunately, this has not always been true, and, until a very recent period, the Museum depended almost exclusively on the generosity of its patrons to increase its funds<sup>1</sup>. This explains the capricious pace at which the collection of yesterday's Canadian painting was acquired at the Museum. A brief inventory of its catalogue leads us to certain findings.

Firstly — as in all museums in the world — we note in the catalogue the presence of a certain number of mediocre pictures, much prized in their time but not retained by posterity, old-fashioned and obsolete works, now relegated to oblivion whence one might be exhumed rarely on the occasion of an exhibition on the evolution of its particular style. Let us leave these fallen glories to their obscure

rest and let us also be assured that many contemporary artists, and not minor ones, will perhaps join them some day.

Secondly, the choice of the work of each painter is variable and uneven in number and quality, most being represented by only one or two works. The collection admits of voids, particularly in the class of French-Canadian painters. It must not be forgotten that until very recently the Museum was the almost exclusive domain of the Anglo-Saxon *gentry* of Montreal and that its members were almost the only donors. It is understandable that they gave their preference to their compatriots and that, perhaps badly served by that cultural isolationism which has too often afflicted some Anglo-Canadians, they were led to neglect the French-Canadian painters. Very fortunately, the Museum's acquisition policy has changed much in the last twenty years and has appreciably corrected this state of things. However, there still exist some deficiencies. Among the painters of the past, some are still conspicuous by their absence, such as Zacharie Vincent — although it is true that he produced very little —, Napoléon Bourassa, Charles Huot, Ludger Larose, Henri Beau, Joseph Saint-Charles and, closer to us, Randolph Hewton and Alexandre Bercovitch. The Museum owns only one oil by Henri Julien, Georges Delfosse and Marc-Aurèle Fortin, and it seems to us that the groups by Suzor-Coté — painter of Bois-Francs who made a career in Montreal and by Clarence Gagnon — Montreal painter who made his in Paris — could be more ample. As much, in any case, as those by William Brymner and Maurice Cullen, of whom the Museum owns a considerable number of very good works. Finally, the Museum contains only two Homer Watsons and three Horatio Walkers, all very characteristic, nevertheless of the style of these artists. It is to be hoped that all of these absences will be corrected with time.

We have just described the shadowed corners, and it now remains for us to emphasize the strong points of the collection of yesterday's Canadian painting at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.

Putting aside the few weak spots mentioned above, we can state that, all in all, a visitor to the Museum can acquire there a satisfying knowledge of the evolution of painting in Canada, provided, naturally, that the canvases are hung, as was not, unfortunately, the case in the past. A visit to the McCord Museum, with which the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts has made a friendly agreement, will give the lover of art the opportunity of completing in large measure the information previously acquired at the Museum. The latter has few specimens of the work of our very first painters, who confined themselves mostly to church pictures. A recent donation by Mr. Maurice Corbeil has brought to the Museum two historical figures painted by François Malepart de Beaucourt, and five years ago a rare still-life by William von Moll Berczy was acquired. Paul Kane, the iconographer par excellence of the Indians of Canada, is best represented at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, and at the National Museum in Ottawa; the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts owns two of his pictures which are first-rate. Cornelius Krieghoff, a clever artificial painter who has for decades been the favourite of auctioneers and Anglo-Canadian financiers, appears well represented with eleven canvases in which are displayed his dexterity and his picturesque shodiness, while his contemporary, William Raphael, holds his own very well and less noisily with two characteristic works. Jean-Baptiste Roy-Audy is well represented by three solemn and

pompous portraits, and the three Quebec painters, Joseph Légaré, Antoine Plamondon and Théophile Hamel are represented as well, the first by a strange composition, the second by portraits and religious pictures, odd parts of a stations of the Cross, and the third by two strong portraits. The lesser Canadian landscape painters of the 19th century are numerous on the walls, with their panoramic views divested of pretensions other than descriptive.

But it is with Canadian painting of the 20th century that the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts achieves a great documentary richness. We have noted in passing the excellence of the representation of William Brymner and Maurice Cullen, while deploring the insufficiency of Suzor-Coté's and Clarence Gagnon's works. Almost all the important painters of the pre-contemporary period are worthily represented here, and almost always by fine pictures. Three Ozias Leduc, more or less recently acquired, one of which is his famous *L'Heure mauve*, illustrate wonderfully although incompletely the special talent of this recluse, while John Lyman holds an honourable place with seven luminous oils. A delightful Adrien Hébert, bought recently, *Hyman's Tobacco Shop*, has just been added to his limpid perspective, *Place Jacques-Cartier*. The ensemble of canvases and sketches by the painters of the Group of Seven and their epigones, Albert Robinson, David Milne, Lionel LeMoine FitzGerald and Emily Carr is perfectly representative — although scanty in number — of this school of Toronto painting with which not everyone is infatuated, it is true, but which has nevertheless played an important rôle in the history of Canadian art.

The very best part of yesterday's Canadian painting collection at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, if not the best of the whole museum, is undeniably that of the pictures, sketches and water-colours by James Wilson Morrice, who was and still remains to this day Canada's greatest painter. Thanks are due for this to the artist's family, who generously bestowed on the Museum an unrivalled ensemble in which one can admire all the facets of the painter's talent. The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts possesses no fewer than seventy of Morrice's works, of all sizes. Of these, nine were given by different English donors, nine were bought by the Museum thanks to funds provided by other patrons, and the rest were bequeathed by the Morrice Family, among them about ten sketches and water-colours in 1974, during the closing of the Museum. If we exclude the nudes, we can enjoy in this much-varied collection all the aspects of this engaging and unusual poet who was the equal of the most brilliant minor masters of Impressionism: landscapes of France and the Antilles, views of Venice or North Africa, street or circus scenes, melancholy faces sunk in reverie, snowy vistas of Quebec, all of Morrice is here with his economy of line and colour, with his accents discreet as murmurs and yet so enticing. I know several art lovers, and we are among them, who have often returned to the Museum solely to see the Morrice works once more. We are told that the renovated Museum will have its Morrice room, and that they will exhibit in turn the different pictures they have of his. To mark the reopening of the Museum in May 1976, no celebration could be more brilliant, in our opinion, than to see gathered together for once, in the same place, all the Morrice works in the Museum's collection.

The late Donald Jarvis, who had a feeling for a spectacle, had persuaded the Canadian government to acquire some canvases by masters from the collection of the princes of Liechtenstein (two Filippo Lippi, a Memling and a

Rubens), in order to enrich the National Gallery of Canada by prestigious pictures able to attract crowds and, in the same line of thought, he had even dreamed of bringing in also the extraordinary *Portrait of Ginevra Benci* by Leonardo da Vinci now at the National Gallery in Washington. We have often examined the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts collections in order to discover in them poles of popular attraction. There are excellent things in our museum, but few dazzling ones. Lacking Mona Lisas or Venus de Milos, why should we not further show to advantage this prestigious collection of James Wilson Morrice's works that is the brightest jewel of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts collection of Canadian painting of yesterday?

1. To fill the gaps in the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts collections, and in all of Canada's museums, and to hasten their enrichment, it is much to be desired that there should finally be passed in Ottawa a more flexible and more generous tax abatement law, comparable to the one in force in the United States, and which would further prompt collectors to transfer their treasures to public galleries.
2. Our warm thanks to Mr. Germain Lefebvre, Curator of the Canadian Painting Collection at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, whose assistance, during this period when the museum was closed, has been immeasurably valuable to us.

(Translation by Mildred Grand)

## QUEBEC CONTEMPORARY ART IN THE MUSEUM

By Germain LEFEBVRE

In October, 1940, the Art Association of Montreal — since become The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts — staged a major exhibition of the work of Alfred Pellán who had just returned to Canada after a fourteen-year stay in Paris. It had the effect of a bomb on Montreal critics and art-lovers and the Museum, in presenting it, officially recognized the artistic renewal which had begun in Quebec a year before through the foundation of the Contemporary Art Society, under the leadership of John Lyman.

The desire to maintain a close link with contemporary creative activity was not a new phenomenon at the Museum where the *Spring Exhibition* each year shows the most recent achievement of painters, sculptors and print-makers. Even before the Pellanian shock, the *Spring Exhibition* catalogues of the late 1930s included the names of a number of artists who soon were to participate in the emancipation of an art centred on the search for new aesthetic values, such as Goodridge Roberts, Fritz Brandner, Marian Scott, Jean-Paul Lemieux, and Paul-Émile Borduas.

A year after the appearance of *Refus global*, whose author drew the censure and anathema of the authorities and the Establishment, the jury of the sixty-sixth *Spring Exhibition*, presented from April 20 to May 15, 1949, dared accept the works of Marcel Barbeau, Pierre Gauvreau, Jean-Paul Mousseau, Jean-Paul Riopelle, all co-signatories of the manifesto, and topped its audacity by awarding the prize for painting to Paul-Émile Borduas. It is interesting to note that the exhibition also included entries from Léon Bellefleur, Anne Kahane, Jean McEwen, Alfred Pellán, Jacques de Tonnancour, Albert Dumouchel, Louis Archambault, and Robert Roussil.

Beyond these group exhibitions, the Museum