Document generated on 10/11/2024 11:51 p.m.

RACAR : Revue d'art canadienne
Canadian Art Review

Elizabeth Collard, *The Potters' View of Canada: Canadian Scenes on Nineteenth-Century Earthenware*. Kingston and Montreal, McGill-Queens University Press, 1983. x + 194 pp., 171 illus., $34.95 (cloth)

Jennifer Salahub

Volume 11, Number 1-2, 1984

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1074348ar
DOI: https://doi.org/10.7202/1074348ar

See table of contents

Publisher(s)

UAAC-AAUC (University Art Association of Canada | Association d'art des universités du Canada)

ISSN

0315-9906 (print)
1918-4778 (digital)

Explore this journal

Cite this review

Salahub, J. (1984). Review of [Elizabeth Collard, *The Potters' View of Canada: Canadian Scenes on Nineteenth-Century Earthenware*. Kingston and Montreal, McGill-Queens University Press, 1983. x + 194 pp., 171 illus., $34.95 (cloth)]. *RACAR : Revue d'art canadienne / Canadian Art Review*, *11*(1-2), 156–157. https://doi.org/10.7202/1074348ar

Tous droits réservés © UAAC-AAUC (University Art Association of Canada | Association d'art des universités du Canada), 1984

This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

https://www.erudit.org/en/

building monograph. R.H. Hubbard's *Rideau Hall: An Illustrated History of Government House* (Montreal, 1977) stands at the head of the list, and also sets an example of a building history that is at least as social as it is architectural. *Vice Regal Mansions of British Columbia* will remain an important tribute both to that province's Government House and to architect Peter Cotton.

HAROLD KALMAN
Ottawa

ELIZABETH COLLARD *The Potters' View of Canada: Canadian Scenes on Nineteenth-Century Earthenware.* Kingston and Montreal, McGill-Queens University Press, 1983. x + 194 pp., 171 illus., $34.95 (cloth).

Clearly, it is Elizabeth Collard who emerges as the dynamic force behind much of the research into the history of ceramics in Canada. A steady contributor to periodicals and texts, she is perhaps best known for her seminal work, *Nineteenth-Century Pottery and Porcelain in Canada,* published in 1967 (revised edition: Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1984). The consistent quality of these publications has assured her of a strong following of scholars and collectors, both here and abroad. Her stated preference for the writing of articles has meant a lengthy wait for this, her second, major book. *The Potters' View of Canada: Canadian Scenes on Nineteenth-Century Earthenware* deals with transferware displaying Canadian scenes and motifs.

While enthusiasts and major museums in the United States have been collecting historical china for over a century, those interested in the visual history of Canada have been comparatively slow to recognize the potential wealth of material to be found on ceramics. The historic events and topographic views displayed on these wares are an indication of how Canada was perceived and prove to be both educational and entertaining.

Interestingly, the potters discussed were not Canadian, nor were the wares, meant for the small Canadian market. Rather, these were products of various potteries in Scotland and England and the portrayed views reflect the nineteenth-century interests in documentation and Canada. While this corpus might lead to purely academic discussions as to what constitutes Canadian decorative art, Elizabeth Collard states that her intention is the location and documentation of the sources from which the various Canadian scenes are derived. For collectors, the need is obvious: with many pieces unmarked, attribution becomes difficult. One would assume that certain motifs such as beavers perched on maple branches or readily recognizable vistas should be free from misconceptions regarding origins. Yet, the author reveals some problems, such as 'Table Rock', a *Canadian* view of Niagara Falls, classified as an *American* view by nineteenth-century ceramic historians until this error was rectified, by Collard, in 1967.

The difficulty in locating business records of this period, the number of short-lived minor potteries, and the use of ambiguous titles have presented major obstacles to historians. Yet when combined with the search for the often elusive published sources, one can only credit the author's perseverance. She has traced the motifs to various journals, encyclopedias, and in one case, to a series of Montreal published Christmas cards depicting winter activities which later appeared on a popular series of earthenware entitled 'Canadian Sports.' The production dates of the cards combined with the style of the hollow-ware suggest that the probable date of manufacture would be situated in the 1880s.

To produce such fascinating results has required extensive and painstaking research. The author's meticulous use of primary sources, including diaries, journals, invoices and newspapers, has resulted in a prodigious quantity of information, fully documented in the notes. Never pedantic, the text traces the evolution of the image from its source to the finished transfer. This is aided by excellent plates: *The Potters' View of Canada* contains over 170 black and white photographs with representative wares from the ceramic collection of the Museum of Man in Ottawa. The earthenware, plus illustrations of potters' marks, border patterns, and the published prints and photographs from which the views are adapted fill over half of the book and imbue the reader with some of the author's enthusiasm.

Well-indexed and including an excellent, albeit short glossary, the book leads even a novice through the field of ceramics. It is disturbing to discover that there is no bibliography, although much information can be gleaned from the voluminous notes, found following the text, glossary and plates; the reader who puts up with the annoyance of flipping to plates and finally to these notes will be well compensated by the exhaustive and revealing references.

Of the twelve chapters following the introduction the first deals with the technique of transfer-printing. The others are concerned with the various sources for the individual views or motifs. Given the autonomous nature of each chapter, what could be read as an anthology becomes accessible, localized information for the thematic collector. Moreover, since these separate themes are set in a historical context by the author, the reader is presented with an overview of nineteenth-century production. The progression from the early, composite, often utopic view to the later literal interpretation, using photographic images, calls attention to the attitudes of the period. A parallel development in the evolution of the earthenware, with changes in body, shape and colour, is also elucidated.

Overall, the nineteenth-century is revealed as a multifaceted age, one of industrialization and imperialism. The romantic yet earnest desire for information provided a vast market for travel literature, printed vistas and souvenirs from distant, therefore exotic outposts of civilization. Canada and Canadiana fascinated the Europeans. Everything pertaining to Canadian life was noteworthy, and innumerable Canadian panoramas found their way, via the printmaker, to the parlour and drawingroom walls of Europe. For example, William H. Bartlett's illustrations for *Canadian Scenery* were so popular that four separate potteries produced wares depicting Bartlett's scenes; to date, twenty-four of these panoramas have been identified.

The eclectic and eccentric nature of the Victorian age is most pronounced in a dinner service entitled 'Arctic Scenery.' Typical of much contemporary earthenware, the potter is unknown. The multi-scene pattern consists of a central motif

complemented with variations of igloos, ice floes and dog sleds. Surrounding this, is a border of tropical flora and fauna. This dinner service, with its adherence to the picturesque and its quest for the exotic, is not unique in its odd juxtapositions, but instead is a product of the age.

This very incongruity helps to date the service as does the fact that the lion of the border is taken from an 1834 edition of *The Naturalist's Library*. The central motif scenes on the pottery are shown to be from an earlier source and are loosely based on prints made from the illustrated journals of Sir Edward Parry's search for the North-west Passage. Again, Elizabeth Collard extends a word of caution to collectors of Canadiana: scenes containing snow and sledges are often found to be drived from views of Siberia or Greenland and care must be taken until future studies provide us with accurate documentation.

Although not considered by the author to be a definitive work, with new discoveries regularly coming to light, it is the only book to deal with this subject and to be remarkably complete. The perspicuity the author brings to this field ensures that *The Potters' View of Canada* will have as wide an appeal as the wares it discusses.

JENNIFER SALAHUB
Montreal

SARA STEVENSON and DUNCAN THOMSON *John Michael Wright: the King's Painter*. Edinburgh, National Galleries of Scotland, 1982. 96 pp., 58 illus., 10 colour plates, £3.50.

From July to September 1982 the Scottish National Portrait Gallery mounted an exhibition of nearly forty works by the painter John Michael Wright (1617-94). Wright cannot be called a 'discovery.' George Vertue, the 'English Vasari,' knew much about him and his work. Hence, Horace Walpole included him in his history of English painting. C.H. Collins Baker, writing in 1912, devoted a substantial chapter to Wright in his *Lely and the Stuart Portrait Painters*. He subtly analysed Wright's style and claimed that he was 'the most conspicuously independent painter of the Stuart period,' by which he meant that his particular qualities set him apart from the main Van Dyck-Lely-Kneller stream of seventeenth-century English portraiture. Wright has continued to occupy an important place in general histories of English painting, such as those by Professor Waterhouse and Sir Oliver Millar. In 1960 the latter catalogued the seventeen works by Wright in the great *Age of Charles II* exhibition at the Royal Academy.

But the Edinburgh exhibition is the largest showing of Wright's work to date and the catalogue is the most substantial publication on him to appear. It offers much new information, including his recently discovered will, a document which revises his date of death by six years.

The bulk of the catalogue is by Sara Stevenson and Duncan Thomson (the latter is known for his meticulous monograph on the Scottish painter George Jamesome, ca. 1590-1644, to whom Michael Wright was apprenticed). There is a chapter on the artist's life followed by one on the paintings. Then comes a note on Wright's technique, by John Dick. The final and largest section is the catalogue proper: entries for the thirty-six paintings and one engraving by Wright which were in the exhibition, and four entries on suits and pieces of armour, included because of their frequent appearances in Wright's portraiture. The most impressive suit was the so-called 'Lion' armour of the mid-sixteenth century, decorated with gold damascened foliage and embossed lions' masks. Lent by the Tower of London, it appears in Wright's portrait of General Monck, Duke of Albemarle, the hero of the Restoration, but may have belonged to the painter himself.

For Wright was a considerable collector as well as a painter. He spent over a decade in Rome, acquiring and studying books, gems and medals, and associating, as a contemporary tells us, 'with the most celebrated antiquaries of the place'; such was his reputation by 1653-54 that he gained a post as antiquarian to the Archduke Leopold, Governor of the Spanish Netherlands.

Wright was extraordinarily cosmopolitan. He was the only British painter to be a member of the Accademia di San Luca, Rome, in the seventeenth century, the society whose distinguished foreign members included Poussin and Velasquez. Though apparently born in England in 1617, he is known to have been apprenticed to George Jamesome in 1636. According to the contract, the apprenticeship was to last five years. In fact it probably ended sooner, for Jamesome was imprisoned in the second half of 1640, for religious reasons that were to lead to the Civil Wars in Scotland and England and to the Roman exile of the young Wright.

Hitherto, no painted work from Wright's Scottish or Roman periods was known. However, the exhibition presented a small portrait of Robert Bruce, 2nd Earl of Elgin, with a contemporary inscription claiming authorship by Wright at Rome. This modest picture is in its style a suggestion of the mature Wright. One only wishes that the Haddington *Earl of Haddington*, which the cataloguers illustrate and attribute to Wright, had also been in the exhibition.

The only other certain Roman work by Wright is an engraving. A new discovery about this (apparently) unique print is the mark of Sir Peter Lely. It is after Annibale Carracci, since it is inscribed *A.C. Invent.* 'The painting of which it is a copy is not known,' says the catalogue. However, the motif of the Madonna with the Child on her lap is close to Annibale's etching *Madonna and Child with an Angel* of ca. 1606 (see Posner, *Carracci*, n° 173). The hatched background in Wright's print is very reminiscent of those in etchings by Annibale. One wonders then, whether instead of recording an Annibale painting, Wright's engraving may be a copy of either a lost Annibale print or drawing. This idea is strengthened by the consideration that Wright had a large collection of Old Master drawings in Rome. Richard Symonds, an English amateur, made notes about some of them, including one by Annibale. (Incidentally, the 'C... who was Titian's scholar and did Paeses well in imitation of Titian' [p. 15] is presumably Domenico Campagnola.) Symonds described Wright as 'Scotus.' But it is worth noting that Wright signed himself, not once but twice, on his print as '*Anglus*.'

Wright's first signed and dated portrait of 1658 is the *Mrs. Claypole* (Oliver Cromwell's daughter) in the