

**Lora Senechal Carney, *Canadian Painters in a Modern World 1925–1955: Writings and Reconsiderations*, Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017, 352 pp. colour illus. \$ 120 (cloth), \$ 44.95 (paper) ISBN 9780773551152**

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1928 production of “The Magnanimous Cuckold” featured revolutionary sets and costumes by Liubov Popova, which were, in Vujošević’s words, meant “to help define theatre as a collective, anonymous endeavour, rather than an ensemble of individual actors with individual psychologies” (55). In other words, Popova’s contributions, like Gastev’s experiments, emphasized the collective rather than individualism.

Similar efforts to make the home lives of workers more efficient and rational were developed by Stanislav Strumilin, whose studies of family life coincided with attempts by architects to make homes into sites of labour. This is the subject of the book’s next chapter. Here, the author expands on the work of art historian Christina Kiaer—although she only mentions Kiaer in her notes, and probably should have engaged more openly with the latter’s work. Objects are clearly central to this world, particularly since the small size of Soviet living spaces meant that household items, such as beds, often had to serve more than one purpose. Vujošević connects the small size of living spaces with 1920s reimaginings of marriage and family life in, for instance, the promotion of communal dining.

Public spaces—notably bathhouses—are the subject of Chapter Four. These were spaces that promoted hygiene and served to define the connection between the state and individual bodies. In Vujošević’s words, “The banya was intended to provide new forms of socialization: collective rituals of self-care linked to inherent qualities of industrial production, such as efficiency and precision” (100). Users were also meant to be impressed by new machines that applied assembly-line techniques to the doing of laundry at the same sites. However, because so few of the planned buildings were ever constructed, the bathhouses remained a kind of socialist-realist fantasy.

Nonetheless, Vujošević is able to argue that the well-publicized plans for the buildings, even if they did not come to fruition, were successful in shifting ideas about proletarian agency. Everyday workers were now depicted as slightly less consumed by their labour; instead, they were meant to spend more time enjoying the fruits of their work.

This new notion of the good life, which often clashed with the conditions of day-to-day reality, is the focus of Vujošević’s fifth chapter. Here, she explores the *obschestvennitsa* (“socially active wives”) movement that emerged in the mid-1930s. I found parts of this chapter problematic, because the author was not thorough enough in her background research. For instance, she relied on Rebecca Balmas Neary’s doctoral dissertation, but did not consider Elena Shulman’s book on the movement.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, had Vujošević read Lynne Attwood’s book on Soviet women’s magazines, she would have realized that the messages she sees as given exclusively to this group were, in fact, pervasive and presented to all Soviet women.<sup>2</sup> With that said, Vujošević’s work does show that ideas about beauty and design did come to be emphasized in new ways in this decade. Periodical literature across the spectrum suddenly emphasized decorating one’s living spaces, with significant attention being given to colour, lighting, and objects, such as plants and flowers. Ironically, as Vujošević points out, these articles actually revealed the material scarcities of the era, because women were being advised to make many items themselves—work that would have been unnecessary had such items been abundant in the Soviet marketplace.

*Modernism and the Making of the Soviet New Man* ends with a strong chapter on the Moscow metro, which was a key project of the Second Five-Year Plan, which lasted from 1933 to 1938. The metro not only transformed the physical landscape of the city, but the lives of its builders. The metro was

the ultimate symbol of modernity: the marble used in its stations came from across the country and signified material abundance; its shining surfaces reflected the cultural campaign to spread cleanliness into all Soviet homes; and its use of electricity demonstrated how technology was making life more aesthetically pleasing. As such, the metro was “an extension of the avant-garde project dedicated to bringing art to life”<sup>3</sup> (144), and thus serves as the perfect example of Evgeny Dobrenko and Boris Groys’ interpretations of Stalinism.

All in all, Tijana Vujošević’s book is well worth reading. Her case studies demonstrate time and again how images and representations from the art world clearly pervaded all social and economic relations in the early Soviet period. ¶

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1. Elena Shulman, *Stalinism on the Frontier of Empire: Women and State Formation in the Soviet Far East* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

2. Lynne Attwood, *Creating the New Soviet Woman: Women’s Magazines as Engineers of Female Identity, 1922–53* (New York and London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999).

3. See Evgeny Dobrenko, *Political Economy of Socialist Realism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007); and Boris Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992).

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Lora Senechal Carney’s *Canadian Painters in a Modern World 1925–1955: Writings and Reconsiderations* is an extensively

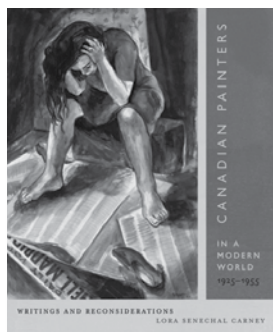
researched work and a valuable addition to Canadian art history. The book consists of a selection of primary source texts, reprinted artworks, and photographs, which Carney has framed with contextual narrative essays. The author has pored over thousands of letters, newspaper and magazine articles, reviews, private journals, and artists' statements to carefully select primary sources that illuminate the artistic developments and discourses in Canada from 1925 to 1955. These writings are organized into eight chapters that address the artworks, as well as the public and private lives of specific artists, including Lawren Harris, David Milne, and Emily Carr, while also revisiting the socio-cultural context of the Spanish Civil War, the Second World War, and the early Cold War and their impact on artists in Canada. In the texts that introduce each chapter, Carney reflects upon how artists' writings, art criticism, and personal correspondence constitute "a gathering of evidence of [artists'] perspectives on the issues that mattered to them" (xxvii), whether they be aesthetic, social, or political.

The book is organized chronologically. It begins with Lawren Harris, focusing on the artist's changing attitude toward Europe and its influence in the world. The first reprinted primary source is a little-known review, published in 1926 by Harris in

Europe in moral opposition, praising the former's non-violent policies as a counterpoint to Europe's own colonial ones. What becomes clear from the selection of writings by Harris and others included in this chapter is that, for Harris, Canada and North America's quest for a sense of nationhood is quite separate from Europe's and is rooted in the spiritual. The following year, Harris shifted his position, defending recent artistic developments in Europe. As he argued in a review of the 1927 *Société Anonyme* exhibition presented at the Art Gallery of Toronto, the abstract paintings on view were "emotional, living works, and were therefore capable of inspiring lofty experiences; one almost saw spiritual ideas, crystal clear, powerful and poised" (29). The reprinted sources indicate that Harris, like Emily Carr and others, was searching for and trying to articulate what it meant to be a modern artist in Canada in the 1920s and 1930s; they also demonstrate how he used the language of Theosophy and spirituality as a means of establishing his approach to modern aesthetics. The following chapter, "Discovering David Milne," reveals the important support Milne received from Canadian philanthropists Vincent and Alice Massey, as well other Toronto-based artists, while he persevered with his practice despite his isolation from the urban centre, working away in Six Mile Lake, Ontario. Chapter Three focuses almost exclusively on Emily Carr's journals in an effort to "understand the course of her spiritual life," and "her quest to find God" in both art and life (63). In the reprinted excerpts, Carr comes across as a less self-assured artist than Harris, but one who, like her Ontario peer, was driven by a deep need to express herself through art and to articulate her spiritual search in this regard.

The last five chapters of the book are broader in scope. The author's examination of the Spanish Civil War in Chapter Four offers a collection of writings that address "how individual

artists and critics saw their roles in the growing crisis [of the Spanish Civil War]" (97). There was no consensus as to whether artists had a moral duty to respond to world events, and the well-known debate between Elizabeth Wynn Wood and Paraskeva Clark is here given more context with writings from both English and French Canada, including an excerpt from Walter Abell's *Representation and Form: A Study of Aesthetic Values in Representational Art* (1936), the first book on aesthetic theory published in Canada. In the chapter "Defending Art vivant in Montreal," Carney brings to life the story of how modern art slowly advanced toward the boiling point in wartime Montreal. While she claims this story is well-trod territory, the narrative is less familiar to those unable to read the French-language art history and primary sources of this period. While Montreal—and Quebec—were more open and generally more accepting of international and European artistic styles than English Canada—as the reprinted texts demonstrate—this chapter is a reminder of the constraints felt by Montreal artists in the face of the Catholic Church. The Automatistes (discussed in Chapter Seven) would, of course, throw off these shackles, and Carney's narrative and choice of source documents in her chapter on this well-known group reasserts their importance and avant-garde status in the history of Canadian art, while also revealing the international connections developed by many members, such as Paul-Émile Borduas, Jean-Paul Riopelle, and Françoise Sullivan. Chapters Six and Eight focus on the Second World War and the Cold War. They examine the responsibility many artists felt with regards to democracy and politics, and chart their responses to wartime. Carney includes here texts by writers such as Robert Ayre and Walter Abell, as well as Pegi Nicol MacLeod's account of her involvement with the Women's Services, during which she painted women in the armed services in the 1940s. Chapter Eight examines



the *Canadian Forum*, which considers Romain Roland's book on Mahatma Gandhi. Harris sets Ghandi and

how artists including Alex Colville and Miller Brittain grappled with an entrenched sense of fear as the Cold War era dawned; excerpts by Jack Shadbolt, Alexandra Luke, and Jock Macdonald, the manifesto of the Plasticiens, and a piece by Guido Molinari provide a sense of the changing attitudes to art and culture into the 1950s.

The book includes numerous high-resolution reproductions of artworks and photographs that will be new to most readers. Carney does little, however, to analyze and connect these images to her claims about the artists and their social context, leaving the task of critical analysis to students and scholars of historical Canadian art. Carney's book would have been strengthened had she laid out her selection criteria in more detail—not just in terms of the primary source texts she reproduces—but in her choice of artists for stand-alone chapters. Why do Harris, Milne, and Carr warrant their own chapters, while other modern artists—including Pegi Nicol MacLeod, John Lyman, Paul-Émile Borduas, and Paraskeva Clark—do not? Carney's choices reinforce the notion that Harris, Milne, and Carr—three artists who have arguably received some of the most attention in Canadian art history—are the most important of their day. However, these choices surely demand more scrutiny.

*Canadian Painters in a Modern World 1925–1955: Writings and Reconsiderations* will be of particular use to those teaching Canadian art history at the post-secondary level. Since the publication of George Fetherling's *Documents in Canadian Art* in 1987, there have been few easily accessible volumes with primary source material for scholars of Canadian art history. That Carney has put these writings into context and offered a narrative framing device for each chapter is of great benefit for those trying to engage new and current generations of students learning about historical

Canadian art. The book is written in accessible prose and a general public with a vested interest in historical Canadian art will find within its pages anecdotes and new perspectives on well-known figures like Harris and Carr, while Carney's assessment of the social aspects of the period under examination offers new insights into hitherto overlooked material and gives a strong sense of changing viewpoints, atmosphere, and artistic developments in Canada. ¶

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Lee Rodney  
***Looking Beyond Borderlines: North America's Frontier Imagination***

London and New York: Routledge, 2017  
214 pp. 34 b/w illus.  
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\$49.46 (e-book) ISBN 9781315731698

Will Straw

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Those who organize academic conferences in the social sciences and humanities will sometimes admit that the most effective way to attract large numbers of presenters is to announce that your theme is “the border.” Borders are the lines that demarcate national states, of course, but scholars will use the term to name lines of demarcation of all kinds—those that run between literary genres, sexual identities, areas of the psyche, and academic disciplines themselves. One challenge of the interdisciplinary field called “border studies” is to slow down a proliferation of metaphors that turns every category, thing, or relationship into one involving borders or their transgression.

One of the many strengths of *Looking Beyond Borderlines* is that it steers close to a meaning of “border” in its

limited, geographical and political sense. This dense, well-researched book is about the boundaries between national territories, with a particular focus on the United States and its northern and southern frontiers. Lee Rodney resists the rhetorical flights that lead scholars to find borders everywhere, but she nevertheless succeeds in rendering her political borders richly multidimensional. As this book shows, international borders do more than just divide. They also gather around themselves practices and structures of various kinds: civil-society activism, technological infrastructures, architectural experiments, and artistic interventions large and small.



International borders, Rodney argues, have always been caught up in successive regimes of visibility, which have shaped the ways in which borders are established, policed, and represented. As she shows, official photography supplemented the first cartographic border surveys in North America, which were conducted in the late nineteenth century. If these photographs helped transform visual landscape into political territory, they did so in implicit collaboration with landscape painting that, in W.J.T. Mitchell's words, did the “dreamwork of nationalism,” adding myths to measurements. A century later, we confront a wide range of media representations of borders, often centred (in fictional texts, in particular) on the figure of the immigrant and border-crosser. We are all familiar with those scenes of