

Doris Shadbolt, *The Art of Emily Carr*. Toronto and Vancouver, Clarke Irwin/Douglas and McIntyre, 1979. 223 pp., 198 illus., \$45.00

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after Tippet's biography. Tippet had collaborated with Shadbolt in the preparation of the second edition of the catalogue, *Emily Carr, a Centennial Exhibition* (Vancouver, 1975). Shadbolt, for her part, excludes Tippet's book from her bibliography. Edythe Hembroff-Schleicher, author of last year's book on Carr, finds fault with Shadbolt and Tippet, both of whom, in turn, ignore her existence. How odd.

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The book received a Governor-General's Award for Non-Fiction (English) for 1979.

DORIS SHADBOLT *The Art of Emily Carr*. Toronto and Vancouver, Clarke Irwin/Douglas and McIntyre, 1979. 223 pp., 198 illus., \$45.00.

A popular myth holds that Emily Carr (1871-1945), one of Canada's outstanding artists, was not 'discovered' until 1927. Ironically, Carr herself established the myth. In her autobiography, she recounts what follows her invitation to participate in a 1927 exhibition in Ottawa as if it were the beginning of her life. Her story has her travelling to Ottawa in 1927, at the age of fifty-six, to see her exhibition and to meet her contemporaries in Toronto – the Group of Seven – of whom she had not previously heard. To Emily, this was the first sign of recognition that her country had bestowed upon her. The Victoria-born artist had been trained in the avant-garde traditions of France in her late thirties and had already developed a style that, while completely of her own intuition, paralleled the art of the Group of Seven.

This account, along with other myths surrounding Emily Carr, has been taken for fact by countless authors since her death in 1945. An artist ahead of her time, Emily Carr was known to exaggerate the events that she held very close in her memory. Not until recently have these myths been challenged.

Doris Shadbolt discards much of the mythology in her study of Emily

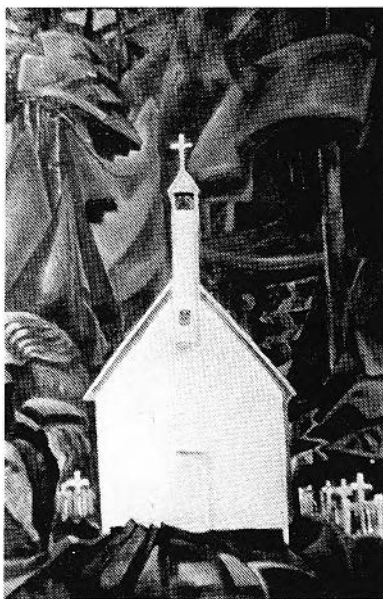


FIGURE 3. Emily Carr, *Indian Church*, ca. 1929. Shadbolt, pl. 69.

Carr's artistic career, bringing to life the real person behind the paintings. Shadbolt begins with an account of Emily Carr's childhood and family life. She then discusses the early achievements of the artist's creative expression during the years marked by Carr's journeys abroad to study, first in San Francisco (1890-93), then in England (1899-1904), and finally in France (1910-11). Although Shadbolt mentions Carr's early Indian paintings in relation to the artist's later developments of the same images, she does not refer to some of the major landscape paintings of west coast motifs, done during the years 1913-27, at which time Emily Carr's 'art had ceased to be the primary drive of her life' (p. 42). Stylistically, these works parallel the art of Tom Thomson and members of the Group of Seven. The subsequent period of Carr's life is treated as a series of intersecting themes. The problems of studying this period are laid out, but at times the text becomes very difficult to follow. The last two chapters deal with Carr's final achievements. The text is accompanied by precise footnotes, and it is especially interesting to view the illustrations alongside of the quotations which the author has judiciously selected from Carr's writings.

Shadbolt details Emily Carr's student years to show that not only

did they introduce the artist to the elements of style and expression, but that they also placed her deep in the realms of the Post-Impressionists and the Fauves. During her year in France, Carr had proven her merits as an artist in a cosmopolitan environment, exhibiting beside the early-twentieth-century masters at the Salon d'Automne. On her return to Victoria in 1912, Carr's artistic ability was more than the people of Victoria could comprehend.

The years 1912 and 1913 are distinguished in Carr's career by many watercolours of Indian totems. Already in her forties, Carr visited the remote Indian villages of British Columbia where she sketched under all kinds of difficult circumstances. Because of the conditions under which many of these paintings were realized, a precise stylistic analysis would serve no purpose. Their importance stems from Carr's ethnological intent to record the fast decaying culture of these peoples. During the same period she did many finished studio paintings which clearly indicate her continued use of the Post-Impressionist style. These paintings mark an important contribution to Canadian art.

Shadbolt's approach to the biography of Emily Carr is different from traditional ones. To gain an overview of Carr's entire artistic career is no easy task, for she left no real chronology of her development. Although at the beginning of her book Shadbolt appears to be treating her subject chronologically, the sense of strict sequence fades rapidly, following the turning point of 1927 which witnesses the opening of the artist's heart and mind in her quest for her inner-self and her supreme God. Two themes appear and intermingle – the old theme of the Indians now finds its complement in Carr's lifelong love of the British Columbia forests. An artist of the immediate moment and its relevant experience, Emily Carr was, at this time, particularly lax with regard to dates and places. As a result, the identity of the motifs in her paintings often becomes obscure and requires extensive study.

Emily Carr's 'Indian Church' (Fig. 3) is a fine example of the transitional nature of this period.

Although not treated at length in Shadbolt's book, this painting, owned by the Art Gallery of Ontario, gives us an insight into the divine nature of the artist's God. It portrays a tiny Indian church almost consumed by the great Western forests; in this painting, God (the Church) and Nature (the Forest) are one. Until her introduction to theosophy in 1927, Carr had only perceived God as persisting in a church. This painting thus marks Carr's transition, as she recognizes the God in everything animate and inanimate.

Some people believe that in order to understand an artist's inner life, it is necessary to resort to a form of psychoanalysis. (The application of psychoanalysis to art history was developed, as is well known, from Sigmund Freud's study of Leonardo da Vinci.) Doris Shadbolt has attempted to apply this method of understanding the inner-self to the art of Emily Carr (p. 140). The importance of the theme of life, growth, and rebirth, for example, is treated in this way, but the results are somehow unsatisfactory. Relating Carr's forest landscape paintings to sexual images and, in particular, to phallic symbols strikes one as being simplistic. Not mentioned is the artist's interest in natural themes, which relates to her firm belief in a rejuvenating infinite life force, created by God. Since psychoanalysis required immediate knowledge of the individual's subconscious, Doris Shadbolt's inference of sexual imagery in Carr's work can only be speculative.

In the final analysis, Doris Shadbolt's *The Art of Emily Carr* is significant because it constitutes a more comprehensive study of the art of this great artist than previous publications. It also appears at the end of a decade in which several similar studies about Canadian artists have been written by Canadian art historians and published by Canadian publishers. Unfortunately, the quality of the reproductions in Shadbolt's book is poor; they show little resemblance to the true pigmentation of the original paintings. Of vital importance to the Canadian art scene, this book falls short, in this regard, to previously published examples.

The continuing fascination with the art of Emily Carr and the

eccentric person behind the art should encourage art historians to continue their research on this Canadian artist. The appearance, in the past two years, of three major books dealing with Emily Carr (Edythe Hembroff-Schleicher, *Emily Carr: The Untold Story*, Saanichton, B.C., 1978; Maria Tippet, *Emily Carr: A Biography*, Toronto, 1979, reviewed above; and this book by Doris Shadbolt) has revealed much new information about the artist and her work. These studies serve to open the door to further advanced research on Emily Carr's life and art.

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PAUL-ÉMILE BORDUAS *Écrits/Writings 1942-1958*. Translated by Dennis Young and François-Marc Gagnon, introduced and edited by François-Marc Gagnon. Halifax, The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design/New York University Press, 1979. 160 pp., \$15.00, \$10.00 (paper).

Twenty years after writing to his friend Claude Gauvreau that the correct treatment for his failing spirits and health 'would be affection in my luminously beautiful country,' Paul-Émile Borduas is being fêted in Canada. The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts held a Borduas retrospective in 1962; Guy Robert's book *Borduas, ou le dilemme culturel québécois* (1977) was shortly followed by François-Marc Gagnon's *Biographie et analyse de l'œuvre* (1978); *Artscanada* devoted its issue of December 1978/January 1979 to Borduas.

The latest tribute to Borduas is the bilingual edition of his writings by Dennis Young and Gagnon, many of which are available for the first time in English (Fig. 4). This extension to the anglophone audience would have pleased Borduas. In the last letter of this collection, entitled 'One small corner-stone is the turf of my old prejudices,' he realizes that his old assumption about being *Canadien* — 'as we say when we unreasonably identify this epithet with our "French superiority"' — was a betrayal of a much more valid unity which was Canadian.

Paul-Émile Borduas *Écrits/Writings 1942-1958*

Introduced and edited by François-Marc Gagnon
English translation by Dennis Young

Présenté et introduit par François-Marc Gagnon
Traduction anglaise de Dennis Young

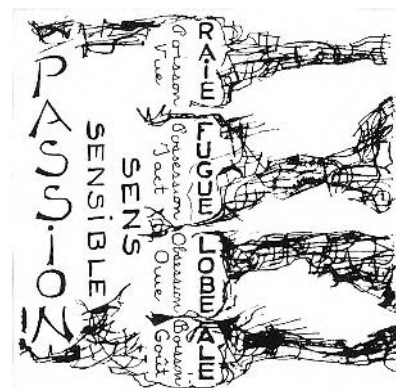


FIGURE 4. Borduas, cover.

This kind of reversal is typical of Borduas and frustrating to those who want to ascertain Borduas's position on art, on politics, on the effectiveness of art as political device, on nationalism, on internationalism, and so on. It is what leads Robert to devote a central section of his book to what he calls *Dilemmes* — the apparent contradictions and conflicts in Borduas's thought. Fortunately, in this collection we are given no directives for understanding Borduas, only Borduas's writings and a short introduction to each of the three sections: Montreal and Saint-Hilaire, New York, and Paris. These introductions contain brief biographical information and what has become the mandatory apology for Borduas's 'awkward, untutored' use of language. My own command of French is too crude to detect any crudities on Borduas's part, but the English version (and this is undoubtedly due in part to the careful, sensitive translation by Young and Gagnon) contains simple, lucid, and at times amazingly beautiful prose. The introduction also, in an attempt to locate Borduas in the tradition of famous manifesto writers, compares him to Marinetti — to whom he is nothing like. There is in Borduas no rejection of the past, no shrill macho stance, no rigidity of ideology that could ever become Fascist. There is instead that