HOW TO DISPOSE OF CULTURAL PROPERTY

By Andrée PARADIS

Here is some good news. For about a year, we have seen the collections of our museums and archives being enriched due to a new patron, a law that encourages important gifts and purchases and that forms a most unusual programme: the repatriation of Canadian objects of art and artifacts which, until recently and for lack of sufficient control, have left the country. These are, unfortunately, very well known facts! the dispersion of important collections, that of the Van Horne Collection among others; the sale of cultural and historical objects to foreign collectors; the embargo of numerous objects of art. A situation also shared by more than a hundred and thirty other countries which have decided to put a brake on the outflow of their national heritage.

Our own awakening goes back to the Quebec Cultural Property Act (1972); the federal government followed closely when, in high places, the necessity became clear of taking strong measures of control to protect the artistic, ethnographic and historical property of the country. Only a protecting law foreseeing restraints, to be sure, but also encouragement in the form of tax reductions, would increase interest in conservation and research. Ian Christie Clark, presently chairman of the Canadian Cultural Property Export Review Board, was one of the first to see, very wisely, the advantages of such a law and to work energetically toward its coming into force on September 6, 1977. Named chairman of the Canadian Cultural Property Export Review Board, created under the terms of the Act, he assumed direction of it until July, 1978.

The first report concerning the Cultural Property Export and Import Act, which came out recently at Ottawa, sets forth accomplishments achieved since September 1977. A positive record that informs on the functioning of a system still little known outside the groups involved, these being the personnel of the museums and archives, the representatives of professional associations of dealers, the collectors of cultural property and the experts. Upon close examination, we note that the established system fulfils the requirements of the act's double object: to control the movement of cultural properties within the country and to encourage their acquisition by museums or archives, if they are recognized as exceptional; on the other hand, to prevent, besides, their going out of the country by persons and donated to institutions.

The functions assigned to the Board by Article 17 consist, in the first place, of examining requests for permits within the four months following receipt, except under special circumstances. The main point of the procedure lies in the manner in which embarrassing discrepancy of the system.

In order for an institution to benefit from the designation, it is necessary for it to have the resources needed to preserve cultural properties; and to engage in classifying, conserving and maintaining those which might unexpectedly, its seems that the National Museums Board, concerned with assuring harmonious relations between Canadian museums while respecting their autonomy, should be enabled to study solutions of sharing and mutual aid which take different regional interests into account. It goes without saying that the Association of Canadian Museums and the different regional associations will have their share of responsibility in the evolution of the system.

Another significant aspect of the Act rests in the possibility of giving notice of appeal on the refusal of a permit. To do this, the author of a request must write to the Board within the thirty days that follow the mailing date of the notice of refusal. He is then invited to personally defend his point of view in front of the Board sitting as a review council.

One might also wonder what happens to a work or a precious object which has been lent to an institution by a non-resident and which must be returned to its country of origin. In this case, the immediate delivery of the permit is automatically authorized, since it is advisable to foster international cooperation as well as relations between museums for the demands of research or exhibitions. It is obvious that this law in no way seeks to establish a right of ownership on an object of cultural property.

The second function of the Board concerns the certification of the qualities of a cultural property for tax purposes. The incentives foreseen by the Act to counterbalance controls come in great part from amendments to the Act on income tax, thanks to which the person who donates or sells a cultural property to a public or administrative establishment — which has been designated by the Minister — receives a project proposal for the Act. The property may, in conformity with Articles 26 and 27 of this Act, benefit from certain tax advantages, if the Board certifies by granting of a certificate that the property answers the criteria of exceptional significance and importance as defined by the Act.

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of Quebec objects of art will become more and more numerous and that we are going to enter a golden age in the enrichment of the collection of our institutions. Already, within the framework of this programme, Le Perza, 1957, a bronze by Henry Moore, has been donated to the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts and the Portrait of Marguerite Vanasse, c. 1809, by William Berczy, has been bought by the Quebec Museum.

At the time of disposing of a valuable property, it is strongly advisable, given the complexity of tax laws, to ask the advice of a professional accountant on the possibility of deducting from taxable income 100 per cent of the fair market value of the gift. Finally, it is important to examine thoroughly all the measures of protection and conservation of cultural property in order to better know the mechanisms that allow the display, in their place of origin, of these witnesses of the past that are the object of an act and a constant concern on the part of those who believe in the strength of their influence.

1. A Guide to the Cultural Property Export and Import Act is obtainable from the Secretary of State in Ottawa or from one of its regional offices.

(Translation by Mildred Grand)

A SUBWAY WITHOUT GRAFFITI

By René VIAU

Since September 1978 a new Montreal subway line has been serving the southwestern part of the city and has now reached its western limit, at La Salle. With the completion of this spur, the supervisors of the network, the Metropolitan Transport Commission, sees its international reputation confirmed once again. Previously, in 1977, on the occasion of the opening of the stations at the east end of this line (from Préfontaine to Honoré-Beaugrand) the American Institute of Architects termed the ensemble of the network and the stations an architectural production of the highest quality.

From the initial opening of the subway in 1966, Montrealers were impressed by the architectural excellence and the fine diversity to be observed in it. At the Peel station — created by architects Papineau, Gérin-Lajoie, Leblanc — the passenger was in the presence of an extremely interesting architectural concept. A concept that had required a great deal of planning, that of the integration of art into architecture, was expressed here in form and space. This is art which is not at all static, which has not been added but is well integrated. A subway station is a dynamic space that is lived, is discovered. The architects invited the collaboration of Jean-Paul Mousseau and ceramist Claude Vermette, who conceived circles of colour, unifying signs that accentuate the station's architectural unity.

Coming out of the Blockhouse

Not only at the Peel station but elsewhere also they showed through the use of colour, reliefs, murals, etc., that a subway station could be more than a concrete tunnel. After some groping, some more or less fortunate experiments (the historical stained glass windows of the Berri-Montigny and Place des Arts stations), they came around to making use of colour, movement and daylight as well as of glass, concrete and steel. At the Champ-de-Mars station, light was tamed. Marcelle Ferron's coloured glass captures the light and transforms it into coloured reflections that are transmitted to the levels of the platforms. The spaces daily crossed by thousands of persons come alive and emerge out of the greyness.

With the constructions of 1976 and still further with the last stations of the south-west line, architecture asserted itself more and more. Among the 1976 stations, beside the Radisson one, a wonderful architectural success where formal vocabulary is sufficient unto itself, the planners of the subway called upon several famous artists: Montpetit, Daudelin, Bonet and, naturally, Mousseau.

Architecture is also an art. Some stations, by reason of their dramatic character, by the evocative force of the volumes present, have no need of the visual support of other elements of composition. This is so in the Angrignon and Radisson stations. At Radisson, architects Papineau, Gérin-Lajoie, Leblanc have once more produced a striking space. They wished to materialize their almost-organic conception of the subway. For them, the subway can be defined as an enormous collector tube allowing traffic at the interior of the city. This tube requires enlargements, stations... To retain the fluidity of the network, these enlarged areas must be considered as additions to the tube, fed by branch-lines that allow access or exit. The notion of movement, of intuitive and comprehensive travel, is predominant.

It was in this way that the Radisson space took shape around an immense staircase combining the passageways. The station is a huge concrete sculpture, this material being the casing. Ceramic by Claude Vermette covers the floor. Stainless steel forms a hand-rail, a guide as does the lighting.

The Passage of Light

If this idea of the expansion of the tube, of station-sculpture, appears in some stations of the new line, like La Salle, others, Angrignon for example, express the completed concept in a different way. So Angrignon is truly the end of the line, the end of the tunnel, the train enters, after a trip of forty-seven and a half minutes, comes back to the surface a little more than twenty-two kilometres from its starting point. The train enters a park, greenery and light. The exterior environment, a production by Jean-Louis Beaulieu, is astonishingly evident. This is the place where one changes means of transportation, assisted by a series of passageways covered in semi-cylindrical, transparent acrylic. These covered passages form the link between buses, cars, street and subway. This is an airy, exuberant station, where fantasy is omnipresent, as witnessed by the use of colour and the shape of the air vents.

This new extension of the Lionel-Groulx and Angrignon stations is visited daily by more than sixty thousand persons. The route was established with a view to best serving the population masses of this sector. Besides the Angrignon Park and La Salle stations, the others are those of Monk and Jolicoeur streets in former Ville-Émard (now the Saint-Paul ward) the one in Verdun, situated facing the Verdun city hall, those on de l'Église and Charlevoix streets and the Lionel-Groulx station. The last is a transfer station on two levels through which the extension of the Henri-Bourassa/Bonaventure line will pass. The eight new stations are noteworthy in the care taken in their maintenance.

This is a subway without graffiti, a subway where one feels good, where the light of day penetrates right to the bottom of the underground corridors when the demands of construction permit. Five of the new stations have inherited works of art: sculptures, stained glass, murals, colouring, ... works of art in front of which one does not stop, as one does in a museum. These works of art come one after another, animate the surfaces, share above all in the ambiance of the ensemble.

From Lionel-Groulx Station to La Salle Station

Determinative through the size and freedom of the existing volumes, the Lionel-Groulx station will be the hub of the future network. To consider for this considerable project into the platform level is applied here too by the planners of the station, among whom was architect Yves Roy of the Transport Commission.

From this big building that houses two central platforms placed one upon the other, three shelters and a garage rise to the surface. In a district in full transformation, where dwellings will be encouraged, the exterior architecture does not try to integrate with the present environment, but rather to clearly express its own functions and particularly not to limit future developments which are still to be defined. The precast concrete of the shelters has been sand-blasted. Colours and skylights alternate.

In the interior, on the mezzanine level, one has an understanding of the whole volume of the station. The gaze can even take in the four tracks at one time. In this transfer area, passageways are particularly well defined and walking distance is lessened. In organizing the flow, they tried to reduce possible conflicts to the minimum by opting for genuine symmetry. In the station wide granite stairways adjoin floor covering in a pleasing colour in which orange stained steel, a material also used in the making of the railings. On these brilliantly-finished murals there is a play of reflections and distortions.

The immediate area around which the Charlevoix station is built will also be revived. In the restrained space formed by the station there is, on the mezzanine, a directly lighted composition. Also profiting from natural light, two multicoloured glass-roofs, works by Mario Merola and glass-maker Pierre Osterath, will be placed at the centre of the stairways leading to the control room. A facing of
textured, glazed brick warms the station’s walls. Red and orange predominate, unifying the passage, harmonizing with the tiling in glazed stoneware and, for the platforms, in pink granite.

An Homogeneous Ensemble

The Montreal firm, Gigon-Larouche, responsible for the La Salle station, wanted to produce an original conception that would express a great wish to make the spaces of the station interdependent upon each other. An oblique shelter, housing the user who is waiting for the bus, borders on a well of light equipped with skylights. These well-placed exterior volumes introduce the interior.

To unify the different levels, coloured masses are joined to the treatment of concrete volumes and create a link. From the entrance, the eye is caught and led to this spectacular sculpted passage treatment of concrete volumes and create a link. From the entrance, the eye is caught and led to this spectacular sculpted passage — an ultra-dynamic focalizing element by Peter Gnass. This immense fold seems not at all crushed by the complexity and the abundance of the concrete volumes. Much to the contrary, the sculpture of stainless steel and aluminium glitters. The wall is occupied by a colouring almost kinetic due to the reflection of light, colours, and the movement of passersby who have become spectators and actors at the same time.

At the level of the platforms, the oblique volumes and the rhythmical ceilings are crossed by coloured masses going from one wall to the other, a creation of painter Michèle Tremblay-Gillon. Much more than a simple pursuit of animation, these masses punctuate the space and melt into the volume at the sculptured wall to create an homogeneous whole where the element of surprise occurs.

In harmony with the penetration of light, they wished to lessen in this way the impression of being in a tunnel. From the platforms one sees the suspended mezzanine and the sculpture. In 1976, even before being built, La Salle station was awarded one of the ten prizes for excellence from Canadian Architects.

The Other Stations

The Église station was conceived by the Lemay-Leclerc firm. The architects had to limit creative possibilities to the use of expressional materials on account of a particularly demanding technical situation. Let us describe the fan-shaped shelter that unfolds upon itself and from which the light meant for the interior creeps in. This is a successful construction that is perfectly integrated with the buildings of this shopping street. Claude Théberge incorporated concrete reliefs there, and Claude Vermette added ceramics whose designs bear the warm colours of autumn.

At Verdun a naturally-lit volume was set up, taking into account the depth of the station. Antoine Lamarche here created motifs in the concrete which are supported by graphic bands. Nonetheless, these assume the initial simplicity of the space.

From Monk station emanates a certain theatrical aspect accentuated by the treatment of the concrete dividers and the location of the mezzanine suspended above the platforms and by the fluidity of the passages. This is an impressive volume where humour is present in the poses and the gestures of the female figures which represent the centenary of the birth of Alfred Laliberté. The politicians and the members of the committee interfered a great deal in the creation and the production of this work. At first they demanded that the sculptors’ plans should be presented in water-colour instead of as traditional models. They then hurried Laliberté by obliging him to submit his project to a French artist for approval. This anecdote reveals a scornful attitude toward Canadian art and artists, who were considered a by-product of the monotonous and the routine. Finally, they hastened to modify the figure of Ontario, under the pretext that it appeared more arrogant than that of Québec.

The erection of the monument to the Patriots is a typical example of the patriotic manifestations so popular at the turn of the 20th century. The initial project, as illustrated by the model at the National Gallery, was reduced in part concerning the nudity of the three figures in the bronze monument. The politicians and the members of the committee interfered a great deal in the creation and the production of this work. At first they demanded that the sculptors’ plans should be presented in water-colour instead of as traditional models. They then hurried Laliberté by obliging him to submit his project to a French artist for approval. This anecdote reveals a scornful attitude toward Canadian art and artists, who were considered a by-product of the monotonous and the routine. Finally, they hastened to modify the figure of Ontario, under the pretext that it appeared more arrogant than that of Québec.

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These offer many aspects, some of which are less known, of the artist’s evolution between 1905 and 1934. Laliberté produced more than nine hundred twenty-five sculptures and five hundred canvases. The critic of the occasion of many events’, among which the National Gallery has promoted, the ten sculptures in its collection. Returning in 1907 with more than four hundred sculptures, almost half his production, Laliberté had no difficulty in obtaining a position as professor at the Arts and Manufactures Council. Also, he lost no time in securing varied commissions for public monuments. From then his name was seen among those of prominent artists, with those of Philippe and Henri Hébert, George W. Hill, Coeur-de-Lion McCarthy or, later, Emile Brunet. The peak of his career in monumental sculpture occurred between 1910 and 1925.

The most successful work through its aesthetic balance was the simple fountain at the Maisonneuve market. The most popular was the statue of Dolfard at LaFontaine Park. With the very fine Louis Hébert at Québec, these are his three best productions. His imagination and his advantage were compromised by the unfavorable conditions created by juries that influenced the content of the works. He would always have a bitter memory of the funerary monument to Sir Wilfrid Laurier in the Notre-Dame cemetery at Ottawa and of the monument to the Patriots at Pied-du-Courant at Montreal.

The National Gallery owns half of a plaster model for Laurier’s funerary monument. A studio photograph proves to us the existence of another model in larger dimensions. In each of these two versions the poses and the gestures of the female figures which represent the nine Canadian provinces differ in several details from the actual bronze monument. The politicians and the members of the committee interfered a great deal in the creation and the production of this work. At first they demanded that the sculptors’ plans should be presented in water-colour instead of as traditional models. Then, they humiliated Laliberté by obliging him to submit his project to a French artist for approval. This anecdote reveals a scornful attitude toward Canadian art and artists, who were considered a by-product of the monotonous and the routine. Finally, they hastened to modify the figure of Ontario, under the pretext that it appeared more arrogant than that of Québec.

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Sculptures by Alfred Laliberté in the National Gallery of Canada

By Robert DEROMO

The centenary of the birth of Alfred Laliberté (1878-1953) was the occasion of many events, among which the National Gallery paid homage to him by exhibiting the ten sculptures in its collection.
3. The year 1926 marked a turning point in the artist's career. After producing several monuments, he came to a philosophic and literary interval. He began two manuscripts, Pensees et reflexions and Les Artistes de mon temps, in which he revalued his concepts and accomplished a return to his past. Two years later, he undertook his most ambitious project: the two hundred fifteen bronzes of the Légendes, coutumes et mètiers d'autrefois series for the Quebec Museum, completed in 1933. What is most striking in this collection is the illusion of Canadian-French art as re-interpreted by Laliberté, a skilful and inexhaustible narrator. It is no longer the sculptor who produces his work, but the emotional, visceral man who gives us a faithful portrait of his society, its traditions, its phantasms and its psychology. This exercise in creation has led to the exorcising of a good many of the collective fears conveyed by legends and certain customs. At the same time, this series embodies a desire for the conservation which aims to preserve for future generations the crafts and customs of a bygone age. In this regard, the sculptor worked more as an ethnographer or a folklorist.

4. From the aesthetic point of view, Laliberté successfully brought about the synthesis between French style and Canadian content so much attempted by the artists of that period. In this case it is not a matter of an art of creation, but one of French-Canadian interpretation. Le Repas du veau admirably illustrates this vein.

L'Ère de la mécanique, a work that emits a strange power, was presented at the Spring Show of 1934 at Montreal. It denounces the invasion of the machine that pitilessly pounds a man and a woman. The latter utters a pathetic cry of despair and fright, while the man, who already bends his spine, seems to beg for mercy. In a rather discerning manner, however, the art critics of the time between the two world wars in this country acclaimed the industrial and technological superiority of Germany and the United States. The steel of the mechanical parts of the robot, its head in the form of an electric bulb, the eagle poised on an open book all refer to these two great powers. In another connection, this sculpture embodies the artist's bitterness toward the evolution of art and his pessimism regarding the future of civilization. L'Ère de la mécanique was used as the newsprint in an anti-campaign against the construction of parking lots instead of public parks in Montreal.

5. The last two works in the National Gallery's collection, although they are only rough models, are no less attractive. Neither, however, can be dated accurately. L'Allégorie de la mort, in very fine movement, shows us the old man with his sickle who cuts off the lives of the tiny figures around him. Its style is akin to that of a terra-cotta (Les Oiseaux de mer, Family, Spectacle). The surface presents an effect of mellowness, fluidity and velvetiness. In its phantasms and its psychology. This exercise in creation has led to the exorcising of a good many of the collective fears conveyed by legends and certain customs. At the same time, this series embodies a desire for the conservation which aims to preserve for future generations the crafts and customs of a bygone age. In this regard, the sculptor worked more as an ethnographer or a folklorist. From the aesthetic point of view, Laliberté successfully brought about the synthesis between French style and Canadian content so much attempted by the artists of that period. In this case it is not a matter of an art of creation, but one of French-Canadian interpretation. Le Repas du veau admirably illustrates this vein.

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I have spoken of three main stages in Tremblay’s work. The first is marked by a certain surrealism: Fetish (some English titles reveal Jean-Jacques Tremblay’s American birth and his early childhood spent at Thunder Bay in Ontario; his family moved to Montreal when he was seven years old) opens the year 1918 with a picture reminiscent of a double archway which lengthens on the diagonal; in the frame of the second one, the head of a man. In the foreground, on the right, an opening shows a mannequin like those of feminine lingerie counters, without a head, naturally, and without legs, clad in a brassière for an ample bosom and a little pantie; the whole is treated in dark tones, only the columns of the first archway being lighted, and the three openings of the second one, where stands out — quite reduced in proportion, as a matter of fact — the torso-man­nequin in the, explicit, of course, title of the picture. Les Chemises de femme shows in the foreground a tangle of bodies, arms and legs (the only close face is more than half hidden under a parasol); farther away, other nude bodies, almost indistinct in the strong sunlight reflected by the sand and, at the very back, at the edge of the dunes, a tiny red beacon that rises at the skyline. In Voyage d’automne, a mysterious figure — or rather only the folds of his white garment, like a long robe made of draped material — is seated, occupying the whole centre of the picture and standing out on the orange-brown background; the head is represented by a spherical white form. On the right of the canvas, there is the end of a central heating radiator, completely unexpected.

The second period is chiefly marked by the invasion of white figures that build networks taking on almost as much importance as the figures. This is the time of advanced technology and the voyage into the void: the canvas is divided into different zones with clearly defined contours, each zone is autonomous, limited by the following one. But the whole gives a spatial quality to the canvas, very quickly denied, as if one picture were hiding another which, in its turn, were connected with other objects on the plastic level. Thanks to the trompe-l’ceil effect of the boxes, the picture is completely unexpected.

Among the most recent pictures (a series titled Couples), Spectacle and Interlude well illustrate the progressive movement toward an abstraction in which, however, there still exists the disjointed form of a body. In Spectacle, on a fleecy background of encroaching clouds, a diagonal crosses the canvas: a reciling girl, her body covered with a pleated white fabric (her dress?), her hands joined on her chest, her face invisible; the lengthening of the diagonal allows us to make out the nude torso of a man, arms stretched above his head beyond the field of the picture. The same theme and a similar treatment are to be found in Interlude: in the foreground, a girl in a yellow dress, bare arms and legs bent; an area of gray clouds. The second period is chiefly marked by the invasion of white figures that build networks taking on almost as much importance as the figures. This is the time of advanced technology and the voyage into the void: the canvas is divided into different zones with clearly defined contours, each zone is autonomous, limited by the following one. But the whole gives a spatial quality to the canvas, very quickly denied, as if one picture were hiding another which, in its turn, were connected with other objects on the plastic level. Thanks to the trompe-l’ceil effect of the boxes, the picture is completely unexpected.

Escale, two Touaregs of the 21st century in full green or blue garments with orange yellow scarves fluttering in the desert wind are wearing white helmets (from diving-suits or space-suits); they are scanning the horizon in profile, back to back. Promenade presents a discreet but clear image of sexual desire, contrary to what one usually finds in Tremblay and in spite of the tame appearance of the scene which takes place in a park, in the middle of a meadow: that is what makes it even more erotic. The painting, entitled by the artist, is a representation of the emotion that gives the title of the picture. The composition of the picture interrupts the reading of the canvas’ surface, just as the camera’s view-finder limits and takes out of context the image chosen by the artist. A series of paintings from the middle and the end of the sixties, in a black frame like a mat or a passe-partout frame bears witness to this.

From 1962 on, the flock dominates and the crudeness of the pictures becomes visible, particularly in the green previously mentioned by Normand Thériault. Then windows appear. Redundance of the square in the enclosing, included square or of the coloured rectangle reproducing in reduced proportions the first rectangle of the picture. Although Gagnon’s art is in no way related to geometric abstraction, the constancy of the title of the picture interrupts the reading of the canvas’ surface, just as the camera’s view-finder limits and takes out of context the image chosen by the artist. A series of paintings from the middle and the end of the sixties, in a black frame like a mat or a passe-partout frame bears witness to this.

In the very accurate catalogue of the exhibition, Philip Fry comments at length upon the importance of the window in Gagnon’s canvas. He says: “We can see a hole, a window, or rather a door, opening of any kind, all that makes a hole (window, door, opening of any kind, . . .) is displayed. Often the right-angled shapes are placed parallel with the contours of the canvas itself. They can also be floating, almost defined. The colours, widely spread out, sometimes span from one surface to the other, creating an ambiguity in the reading; a continuity of level on the one hand and a depth of field on the other, through contrasts of shades and colours.

We shall find this ambiguity of reading right through Gagnon’s work, as between two orders of demands. The canvases framed in black including one or more strongly or lightly textured surfaces set up a double frame — a window within the window that is the canvas. In some of the pictures of 1965 to 1970, we pass from a window to a window, from one window to a window. . . .” From 1967 on, the picture’s frame is no longer defined, however, by the tricks or spatters that reaffirm the fact that this is a plane surface. It is as though the viewer is called to order in his spatial reading and involved, caught up in the process lived by the painter. More or less accentuated, this redundancy is always present, as if one picture were hiding another which, in its turn, were concealing a third, and so on, but there is also a changing of background, now without texture, now very much textured, as in the canvases titled Espace/Ecran blanc where the surface is of brushed aluminum.

In most of the works produced between 1970 and 1978 and especially in those of the last years, the black framing has disappeared but still remains, as hidden or underlying, the frame in the canvas. Instead of windows, a series of canvases presents horizontal bands painted in identical fashion, with broad brush-strokes, in grayed colours swept with a decisive vigour. The picture is not centred, each zone is autonomous, limited by the following one. But
We inevitably think of seascapes, mountains, a fleecy sky, water was comprised solely of water-colours, several of the Sea and Sky The effect was that of light seen through a haze. The Vancouver show with the depth of what is framed and what frames.

3. Normand Thériault, From September 1968-69), Quoted by Philip Fry in Catalogue From September to October 1978, p. 24. Consider the environmental, the shapes of things and their order, especially the tradition of landscape painting. Combining these two exhibitions would have revealed as the central concerns of Smith's work the influence of the landscape, the primacy of colour and the singular importance of the act of painting.

Gordon Smith is a painter; a statement about the artist at once as simple as it is complex and revealing. Living on the West Coast of Canada for the past thirty years, Smith has devoted himself, to the act of painting, to the myriad concerns attached to the manipulation of pigment. During this same period, he has also maintained a career as a teacher and is to-day a professor at the faculty of education at the University of British Columbia. As both artist and teacher, Smith has been a central figure in the development of the visual arts in Vancouver.

In 1955, Smith's Structure with Red Sun was awarded first prize at the First Biennial of Canadian Painting, and brought him national attention. Reviewing the exhibition, J.-R. Ostiguy observed: "Gordon Smith belongs to the best tradition of non-representational painters. His Structure with Red Sun evinces plastic qualities, shining with golden tones, reinforced with black ones. Curves and counter curves, horizontals and verticals, piled up in broad flat tints create an effect of both thickness and transparency. We notice that he tries to do with virtuosity or waste out recipes. In his painting, Gordon Smith reveals to us, with freshness and spontaneity, the feeling of the proud play of branches of the lofty British Columbia fir tree." In these observations, Ostiguy touched on the salient characteristics of the painting: the fluid handling of the medium, the successive layerings of colour to arrive at a final resolution, and the presence of the landscape. These three characteristics remain key elements in Smith's career as a painter.

Born in England in 1919, Smith was the second son of William and Daisy Smith. A grocer by trade, Smith's father was an artist by avocation. He soon involved his sons with his passion both for the English countryside and its depiction, as exemplified in the works of J. M. W. Turner, John Constable and Samuel Palmer, which were often the objects of Sunday visits to the Tate and National Galleries. He introduced to his boys his ability to mix pigments on a palette to create water-colour painting. While Gordon evinced an ability and interest in art, which he pursued at school, he also introduced the boys to water-colour painting. While Gordon had not mapped out for himself the career of an artist, the events leading to this were set in motion in Winnipeg in 1937.

In 1934, Smith's mother separated from her husband and took with her sons to Winnipeg, where members of her family had already immigrated. It was an extremely difficult period, adjusting to Winnipeg and surviving financially during the Depression. Eventually, Smith was introduced to his brother's art by Brigden's of Winnipeg, which was de facto, an art centre where most of the leading artists of Winnipeg were to be found. From 1937 to 1940, Smith's training was at once both academic and practical.

The limitations of the situation in Winnipeg were made all the more apparent by a trip to San Francisco in the summer of 1939 to visit the Golden Gate International Exposition (a trip made possible by Brigden's advanced policy of financially supporting its artists during slack business periods). For the first time, at the age of twenty, Smith made contact with significant examples of work by major twentieth-century painters such as Matisse, Picasso, and Duchamp, the latter of which introduced to him the</p>
Severely wounded in the leg during the Sicilian campaign in June 1943, Smith spent several months recuperating in Tunisia, where he had to consider his future career. Working with Ogilvie had spurred him in his desire to paint, but the possibility of living from the sale of his paintings was unrealistic. He decided upon the career of a professional artist that would involve him in issues central to his concern for painting as well as permit him time to work on his own. In late December, he sailed from London and rejoined his wife, Marion, in Vancouver on January 10, 1944, when he began the process of readjusting to civilian life.

In January 1945, Smith embarked on an eighteen-month educational programme to obtain the necessary qualifications for art teaching. In the first few months, he attended night school and day school simultaneously, and later completed his art school training at the Vancouver School of Art (now the Emily Carr College of Art). In September 1946, he joined the staff of the Vancouver School of Art as the instructor for graphic arts and commercial design.

After 1946, while teaching, Smith continued his painting. For him, as well as for Vancouver in general, it was a time for assimilating much of the pictorial vocabulary of the West Coast, and, in particular, for Smith, dealing with the essential two-dimensional nature of a canvas: “At that point, I was concerned with my awareness of the space, or the flatness of the canvas. I know that to-day this sounds like a very obvious thing, but at that time it was a major concern of mine.”

Still Life of 1948/9 is representative of Smith’s work at the time and anticipates several of the concerns and influences with which Smith was dealing. The till-top table and the altered perspective of the flower pot allude to his concern for the flatness of the canvas, but also allude more specifically to a general interest in contemporary British painting and its considerable debt to the School of Paris. In Vancouver this strong interest in contemporary British painting manifested itself in three major exhibitions of British work, as well as several other presentations in the West Coast in the 1950s. Such that much of this work dealt with the landscape fostered an interest in an abstract landscape as being the dominant artistic expression. For Smith, it was a restatement and reinforcement of his earlier experiences in England.

When Smith attended the California School of Fine Arts in the summer of 1950, this emphasis on landscape-oriented work collided with the experience of Abstract Expressionism. Here he was introduced to and spent the summer executing non-objective gestural paintings, canvases much larger than the small easel works he had done previously: “It became for me an exciting experience just manipulating paint. It was the best damn thing that happened, it was a real shock treatment. We got into the act of painting. That was our subject matter and that’s what we did.”

Returning to Vancouver, he continued for a while to paint as he had learned in San Francisco but found very little appreciation or encouragement for this work. The Abstract Expressionist mode was considered a flash in the pan. In addition, however, there was his own need for an “image” which led him away from purely gestural work: “I continued to paint freely and gesturally for a while, but found that I was attracted to some sort of image…”

The image which back into Smith’s paintings was that of the landscape, but transformed by the experience of San Francisco. The paintings of the early 1950s took on a geometrical and simplified form; an assembly which will be exhibited in Vancouver this Spring. A radical change from the series of coastal images of the 1970s, this volte-face is, in fact, central to the change and renewal integral to Smith’s work. As Smith noted when talking about the development of his work: “As far as I am concerned, painting is an ongoing process of accommodation — it’s what keeps me going. ... what really stays in my mind is the sense that the primary force is what is on my mind right now, what I’m doing right now and the painting I am going to be doing to-morrow.”

6. Conversation with the artist, August 19, 1976.
7. Conversation with the artist, August 29, 1974.

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