Anthony van Dyck's study of Italian art and Rubens' painting continued throughout his first Antwerp period. It was after van Dyck was enrolled as a master in the Guild of St. Luke in 1618 that he seems to have officially assisted Rubens. The two worked together not as master and pupil but as colleagues whose mutual admiration was intense. Van Dyck used many of Rubens' sketches as inspiration for his own compositions. Rubens employed van Dyck to help in the execution of a series of tapestry cartoons for the History of Decius Mus and in the production of several large canvases for the decoration of the Jesuit Church in Antwerp. When Rubens died several of the paintings in his collection by van Dyck were those that the younger artist had produced during the period in which the two worked together.

It was probably Rubens who advised van Dyck to go to England in the fall of 1620. While the venture proved to be quite unsatisfactory for the young artist, he did, during the few months in which he was in England, receive some important commissions and he established contacts with the most important collectors in the country. Van Dyck returned to Antwerp in February 1621 and remained there for eight months and then moved to Italy. It was again probably Rubens who advised van Dyck to go to Italy, for Rubens had enjoyed a most successful period of study and work there in the first decade of the century.

While the work of the young van Dyck and that of Rubens are in many ways similar, there are distinct differences which are the result of the young artist's preferences in painting. Van Dyck was no mere imitator of Rubens. He was always more concerned with the surface of his canvases than the elder master. He could not fully accept Rubens' emphasis on the dramatic spatial recession of compositions. Van Dyck was indeed 'a painters' painter'. This is quite consistent with his enthusiasm for the art of Titian and other masters of the Venetian Renaissance.

Van Dyck's youthful works, because they are so extraordinarily mature, visually exciting creations, deserve attention, for their power to delight the eye has not diminished over the centuries. They are as vital and rejuvenating to-day as ever.

The exhibition The Young van Dyck will be shown at the National Gallery of Canada from September 19 to November 9, 1980. It is one of a series of special exhibitions which celebrate the centennial of the National Gallery of Canada.

2. Suffer Little Children to Come unto Me. Ottawa, National Gallery of Canada.
works is strictly controlled by the authorities of the country. These two reasons explain in part why the place of oriental art is so limited at the National Gallery and elsewhere in Canada. A third reason arises from the fact that most Canadian universities have only lately begun to develop their oriental studies program; contrary, they have developed their collections since the end of the Second World War; they are often of high quality. It must be said that these have immense funds available.

In Canada, except for the Royal Ontario Museum, whose collection is famous, no other museum possesses a department of such value. Much, therefore, remains to be done in this domain, not only at the National Gallery, but at the universities too.

A.M.- Which are the important works of your collection?

H.-Y.S.- In the Hindu domain, or more precisely the South Asian, the Tanenbaum donation comprises, among thirty-five other pieces, four of great style which belong to the empire of the Kouchans of the 2nd century A.D.; these are rare sculptures. The famous classical period of the 8th to the 10th century and formed an aesthetic known by the name of gupsa, is represented by some ten works that allow us to follow the evolution of the sculpture of central India, particularly that of the regions of Madura and Rajasthan. The other pieces of the collection originate, on the whole, in the medieval period, that is, from the 7th to the 10th century.

If Hellenism fostered the art of sculpture, the creation of gods and the representation of spirits, on the other hand, from the 12th century, with the arrival of Islam, iconoclastic religion par excellence, we face the decadence of the national Hindu art and the dismemberment of the empire into little kingdoms. The pala-sena style illustrates this phenomenon well. You know what followed: the English conquest that took place at the end of the 17th century.

In the Chinese domain, consisting, as I told you, of some twenty paintings, it seems interesting to me to recall that the first one was bought in 1914 in New York for 4000 dollars, a tidy little sum at the time. It was sold as being from the 14th century; actually, this Mongol warrior belongs to the 16th century. This painting, which does not really express Chinese taste, was made for the court.

We also own a group of paintings from the 18th century known by the name of eccentrics of Yangzhou; these are important. As much by style as by treatment of subject, they foretell, with a certain number of other works, the modernization of Chinese painting which for a long time failed to recognize occidental art. The most famous among the other paintings in our collection is attributed to Qiu Ying, an artist of the 16th century, which I greatly doubt. It seems, rather, to have been painted in the 18th century. Indeed, this fine neo-classical canvas, representing an emperor of the Han dynasty, is clearly different from the Ming style, in general stronger.

A.M.- This year the National Gallery is celebrating its hundredth anniversary. What aspirations have you on this occasion?

H.-Y.S.- First, I wish that the Gallery would retain its high level of quality and that its reputation should be maintained or even increased. As much by style as by treatment of subject, they belong to Mr. Suma, Japanese ambassador to Canada. The diversity of works and styles allows us to remedy the most serious shortages. Just think! Our budget has not changed in six years! But you know, as I do, the magnitude of the present crisis. This having been said, in spite of these painful restrictions I remain optimistic.

The Suma Collection

A.M.- Could you show us this collection that holds a unique place in the evolution of modern Chinese painting?

H.-Y.S.- The exhibition comprises more than eighty scrolls by contemporary Chinese artists; they belong to Mr. Suma, Japanese ambassador to Canada. The diversity of works and styles allows us to divide the collection into four parts: A) Modernism in the great tradition, with painters such as Xu Gu, Wu Changshi, Huang Binhung, Pu Ru, Zhang Daqian; B) Other, of the lessons of occidental painting and especially of those of European techniques. Chinese palettes use only primary colors that contribute to opening the heart's space. Is this painting not essentially feminine? Is its delicate quality not unique? Another scroll, A Landscape (1925) by Gao Jianfu, surprised me by the originality of its style. The lofty mountains in it are clearly different from the other peaks drawn by many Chinese painters.

A.M.- Among the scrolls belonging to the third period, a picture of incomparable freshness attracted me; this was Orchid Pavilion (1929) by Chen Shuren; in such a space, light, beauty and gaiety blend wonderfully; this art seeks to enter into our feelings, thanks to the green colour that contributes to opening the heart's space. Is this painting not essentially feminine? Is its delicate quality not unique? Another scroll, A Landscape (1925) by Gao Jianfu, surprised me by the originality of its style. The lofty mountains in it are clearly different from the other peaks drawn by many Chinese painters.

H.-Y.S.- Indeed, Orchid Pavilion is worth a pause. What has often struck me, like you, in this picture is the foreign quality of the colours and the European influence, evident in the extension of the painting, the surprise on the subject of a Landscape by Gao Jianfu does not astonish me, for this painter took advantage, perhaps better than any other, of the lessons of occidental painting and especially those of Japanese technique. You will find in it, besides, certain decorative aspects so dear to the Nipponese style and, particularly, the village above the left, a genuine miniature, so perfect in design.

A.M.- With your permission, let us close this visit to the Suma Exhibition by choosing a work by Qi Baishi, the modern painter. Obviously, many pictures deserve to be mentioned, but let us keep only the most beautiful one, in my opinion A Landscape, dated 1922. Do not these bare, snowy peaks emerging at the centre of whirlwinds and waterfalls encourage the fantastic inspiration that presides at such a choice? We have many other reasons for exaltation.

H.-Y.S.- Qi Baishi is a professional, one of the best, because he perceives artistic elements in all things: these perceptions ceaselessly distill freshness. Here we have an artist turned toward Buddha; the many voids symbolize such a desire. I understand your choice, because the spirit of Zen dwells in a painting of this kind; its rise to the human being from the conventions of religion. This means returning to roots, to save the human being from the conventions of religion. This means returning to roots, to save the human being from the conventions of religion. This means returning to roots, to save the human being from the conventions of religion.

(Translation by Mildred Grand)
...ON THE WAY

By François-Marc GAGNON

Of all the aspects of the National Gallery's collection, one of the most difficult, it is not that of completing it (one never comes to an end in collecting), at least of making it representative of reality, is the foreign contemporary art sector. How can one give, even if only an idea, of the complexity of contemporary art without a typical fauve or cubist painting, without a Russian constructivist work, without some surrealist works, etc.? Even the sector of contemporary American art cannot claim representativeness without a certain number of names and pictures.

Thus it is with great joy that we learn that the National Gallery has just acquired a painting by Barnett Newman titled The Way I. If the Gallery has now succeeded, for the last ten years, in following the American art trends, it faces quite another problem when catching up with older periods involved. Pictures are then much more rare, more expensive and more sought-after all over the world by rival institutions. The Gallery already owned a unique Jackson Pollock - the famous Number 29 - that Pollock painted on glass on the occasion of the short film (ten minutes) that Hans Namuth and Paul Falkenberg produced about this artist and his work at the end of 1950 and the beginning of 1951. But Barnett Newman was not represented there by a painting. This lack was a serious one because it deprived us of a prototypical work which has had, in Canada, as elsewhere, an altogether preponderant influence. We are indebted to the contacts of Brydon Smith, who is curating contemporary art in the United States, for a meeting that led to his perspicacity in having made possible the acquisition of this painting. May he find here the expression of our gratitude for his work.

Signed and dated below on the left: Barnett Newman 1951. The Way I is a picture of modest dimensions (101.6 by 76.2 cm; approximately 40 inches by 30) and austere colours: dark red at the centre, black on the top, a greenish black on the left. The black seems to have been painted at two times: a brilliant black background first, then a flat dark greenish black, but uneven and showing in places the lower layer. The red of the central area is restrained and does not really separate this central area from a background. We have, rather, the impression of three juxtaposed vertical areas. As the painting does not resort to hard edge technique, we feel the hesitation of the hand in the meeting of the two lateral areas with the central one.

This painting now occupies a wall on the second storey of the Gallery. It is placed close to Jackson Pollock's Number 29 (1950) and Clyfford Still's 1949 G (1949), oddly in colours that bring to mind those of Barnett Newman. This arrangement is not by chance. It well indicates the place which, in curator Brydon Smith's mind, Newman's painting occupies in the Gallery's contemporary art collection. As a matter of fact, with the acquisition of the Newman one might say that the National Gallery has just filled one of the most important gaps in its collection regarding the representation of great trends in contemporary American painting. The Pollock marked one of its poles; the Newman reveals the other, and at the same time the Clyfford Still and the Arshile Gorky (Charred Beloved II, 1935) take on all their meaning.

The modesty of the dimensions of Newman's painting should not lead us to think it of little importance. According to Newman himself, The Way I is the first example of a picture in which he had given up zip, the divisions of the pictorial area by narrow vertical bands, to replace them with equal elements, a decision that was going to have great importance for the rest of his work. Indeed, The Way I is divided in such a way that half of the pictorial surface is at the centre and the other half, cut into quarters, is carried to each side. According to Newman, the division of the painting into two areas corresponding to 1/2 and 1/3 of the total surface of the painting in the second. Promethus Bound (1952; oil on canvas; 11' by 50'). Private collection, N.Y.) goes still further, since the picture consists of only one pictorial area stopping just before touching the bottom of the picture. In a certain fashion The Way I shows the course that subsequent paintings will take.

But it shows this in another manner, revealed by Thomas B. Hess' subtle exegesis. According to him, one would find in some of Newman's paintings allusions to the Jewish mystique. Thus, in spite of its Latin title, Cathedra would allude to the theme of the Throne that, in the Bible, designates the place (ha makom) of the divine revelation. In this painting, the place is represented by the perfect square that appears somewhat misplaced on the right between two vertical zips. Very conscious of divine transcendence, the Jewish mystique does not aspire to the union Deo (communion with God) like that of the Christians. It aspires to being able only to stand at the door (The Gate is also the title of a 1954 painting by Newman), while veiling its face in front of the Presence. The experience is not without danger, for it is said that one cannot see God without dying. This does not make it less fascinating. Further, it is necessary to find the path that leads to the door from which one can contemplate the place (ha makom). The furnace red of the central area in The Way I could not better signify this ambivalence of the road that leads to God. The seeker of God can entirely burn away there.

This exegesis seems to us to illuminate the picture from the interior as much as it seems to us necessary that it be pursued to explain the coherence of the whole in Newman's themes. Why is The Way I followed by Achilles, who, after all, is only a Greek hero? Newman has said that, in this picture, the red central area is Achilles' shield, the extraordinary work of art forged by Hephaestus which Homer described in detail. Like the Jewish mystique, Achilles goes forward on the path of danger, since he is preparing for battle. Is this not true also of Ulysses, whom his long and complicated journey led to places more and more dangerous as much for the soul as for the body?

But the theme of Achilles reveals another dimension to us. The Greek hero is covering himself with a finely sculpted shield, therefore with a work of art. And so, when Newman goes to the sources of the Jewish mystique as to those of Greek mythology, it is less for themselves that he does this. Rather, he seeks there metaphors of the elective creation and of the destiny of the modern artist. Like his old imitators, Newman was trying to penetrate into the depths of the human psyche, but could reach them only by signs and forms and, therefore, as through a veil.


(Translation by Mildred Grand)

WROUGHT IRON COOKING AND FIREPLACE UTENSILS

By Richard J. WATTEMAKER

In the Winter 1971-72 issue of Vie des Arts1 appeared an article on the acquisition by the Macdonald Stewart Foundation of a collection of approximately two thousand wrought iron utensils assembled by and formerly belonging to M. Hotermans in Paris. A portion of this extraordinary resource was first exhibited in 1971 at the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, organized a travelling exhibition of sixty-three pieces selected from the reserve collection, tapping only a small number of the remaining treasures of the Macdonald Stewart Collection.

A considerable number of objects in this collection served as points of reference and study by a brilliant and dedicated French scholar-teacher, Raymond Lecoq (1913-1971). Professor Lecoq, beginning in 1950, devoted two decades to research on all the various types of household objects made of iron and had completed, just next to this book, its second edition. His work, Société des Arts, l’âtre; La cuisine; L’éclairage, was published in 1973.

Now the second volume of Lecoq’s systematic contribution to the understanding of the material culture of France, Les Objets de la vie domestique — Utensiles en fer de la cuisine et du foyer, des origines au XIXe siècle, has been published. As with Lecoq’s previous volume and also his earlier books on feronerie, posthumous articles and works on other subjects, this handsome edition is illustrated with drawings by the author as well as with photographs taken by him which comprised an extensive personal archive extending over thirty years. In this book, Raymond Lecoq discusses some thirty objects, more than seventy-five examples which are now in Montreal, discussing many of these objects in the text. Thus his book has a special attraction for Canadians above and beyond the growing worldwide interest in understanding the everyday practical activities in the life of the common man in earlier times. It is to this very end that such recent studies as Arthur Tremblay, forgeron de village and Le Forgeron et la ferblanterie, have been directed and published in Québec. The Musée National des Arts et Traditions Populaires in Paris has provided an important centre for similar approaches to the study of French culture. Suzanne Tardieu, maître de recherche au Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) and herself the author of important studies of this type, has written of the author in her preface to Les Objets de la vie domestique: “Je garde le souvenir de l’esprit ouvert, curieux, de ce travailleur isolé qui, patiemment, réunissait tout ce qui — et même au delà — était l’objet de ses préoccupations. Il accumulait les faits, entassait les références. Rien ne lui paraissait étranger à son domaine... Il exploitait toutes les sources de son enthousiasme, dont nous les travaux qui pouvaient avoir été écrits sur les objets de métal.”

Les Objets de la vie domestique comprises thirty chapters divided into five main sections of differing length: Généralités; Production du feu; L’Âtre; La cuisine; L’éclairage. Tracing the history of fireplaces and kichens from prehistoric times, the author marshals the essential — often sparse — relevant documentation available and combines modern archeological discoveries with his own firsthand investigations of pieces in the Musée des Antiquités Nationales, au château de Saint-Germain-en-Laye. Representative chapters include typological and morphological studies as well as inquiries into the etymological derivations of the names and terms for objects often known by different designations in various regions of France. Thus, the first chapter is devoted to the “l’étage” — the hearth — for which we were foraged. Lecoq reveals to us both aspects of life into dignified and beautiful works of art. Life was based on direct personal experience and individual trial and error, and this equilibrium between necessity and inventiveness, this empirical objective, left the inspired craftsman free to experiment within a broad range of human values. Unpretentiously created in response to specific needs, these utensils were frequently ingeniately designed to express the social place and needs of the users, for which they were forged. Lecoq reveals these to us both aspects — the practical and creative spirit of the blacksmith — as he graphically presents in words, drawings and photographs the evolutionary process by which this experimentation often refined the necessities of life into dignified and beautiful works of art.

At the end of a brief preface, the author notes: “Chacune de ces créations témoigne de la patience qui se transmettaient de père en fils, et de la passion que se transmettaient de père en fils les gens de condition modestes et de vie tranquille, vit la charge de l’utilisateur aussi y a laissé son empreinte. La patine des manches et les gants de cuisse sont leur empreinte. La patine des manches et les gants de cuisse sont leur empreinte. Elle leur est devenue la marque de fabrique de leur travail, celle qui les a distingués de leurs pairs et qui leur a permis de se distinguer.”

Raymond Lecoq was a natural teacher. We may discern from the above passage the good humour and humanity which infused his
passionate quest to learn and transmit the secrets of these utensils. Being unsentimental, he was ever-conscious that the objects exemplify facets of creativity as surely as do any other products and that we may gain the same satisfaction from the study of these objects alone as from any mere anthropological facts but truly a special appreciation of the psychology and culture of our ancestors. The gentle intensity, conviction of purpose and insight with which Raymond Lecoq pursued his investigations resulted in a solid achievement which has enriched the fund of knowledge for students and scholars alike in many fields.


BIL FESTERSTON’S RECENT PAINTINGS: THE MACRO-MYTHOLOGY

By Arthur PERRY

The millworkers in Squamish, B.C., are a tough, fun-loving lot. Much of their entertainment is both physical and violent; it can entail the purposeful demolition of their cars, or the brawling, teeth-loosening contact of non-professional hockey. Their world is one built on the macho-myth, on brute strength, and on all-male bull-aggression.

Squamish is a small town that is kept going by its pulp mill. The forty-five mile drive from Vancouver envelops the viewer in one of Canada’s most spectacular stretches of expansive coastal cliffs and dotted gulf islands. Driving the long sloping descent into Squamish, towards the dimly-lit columns of mill smoke is an unparalleled vista of sea and rugged West Coast landscape.

The town itself reflects the mill and its workers: small wood-frame houses, a pool hall and the central drinking spot, The Chieftain. The cars in Squamish belong to the pre-energy crisis period — Cadillacs, Buicks, Meteors — the heavy American beasts of muchacho steel. They’re old too, usually from the mid and late sixties. Yet all are kept spotless with continual body work and engine know-how.

Another notable point of Squamish is its large number of heavily chromed motorcycles; Harleys and Triumphs are everywhere. The overall feel to Squamish’s physicality is one of brute strength and powerful street wear. It’s no place for introversion or weakness.

The mill workers are Featherston’s people. Back-slapping, swearing, and continually drinking beer. Featherston has become as much a part of Squamish as its famed sandy-coloured stone used for West Vancouver fireplaces. As mentioned, the mill workers enjoy themselves by being tough, and one of their eccentric means of venting their mill-fever is to don the role of bikers: they become the Squamish Tribesmen, an organized gang of romantically-minded meanies who invade the American southwest. It’s a violent outlet of aggressive energy with which they build up a peer structure of power and fear.

In his exhibit at the Vancouver Art Gallery (April 20 to June 3, 1979), Bill Featherston presents a number of large canvases dealing with the mill workers’ multi-lives. In works such as Les Enfants au Paradis, 1979, we see the candid view of a Tribesman as he downs a canned beer amidst a gale of motorcycle chrome on a California desert. In this work, any sense of power is arrested. The bikes rest idly against the open landscape. What Featherston does, and does so well, is to humanize the social facades built up around people. In other words, we see the Tribesman in this painting as an ‘enfant’, as a child playing at being tough. This is not a moment of violence, even if the skull logos on the heavy bikes point in that direction. What Featherston’s art is attempting to show in all his views of the Squamish Tribesmen is their associated macho roles and their tough-guy affectations. The Tribesmen are not shown as romantic heroes or malicious villains but rather they are seen as merely temporary toughies in the rôle of bikers.

The same is true for Featherston’s series of Demo Derby paintings. These same mill workers, when not biking their way into American romance,ison, will engage in square-pedal cars. The fascination of these men is their rôle shifting. At one time they will deck themselves out with horrific skull insignia, at another time they will climb into cars painted with images of Cap’ n Crunch or Looney Bird cartoons, and at still another time they will put on hockey uniforms at two o’clock in the morning and attack each other with sticks and flying elbows. Their lives are a series of segmented lives, all of which are masquerades for brutal warfare in the name of entertainment.

Featherston’s paintings of half-crazed mill workers racing around a dirt track with steel I-beams welded to their doors and chains hanging down their trunks are paintings of action, compared to his Tribesmen paintings that are paintings of introspection and thoughtful silences. The Tribesmen’s paintings expose the human side of the macho-myth, of the humanized side of the macho-myth — the role of Marlon Brando’s Wild One, while the Demo Derby paintings point to the aggressive gladiator spirit of Charlton Heston’s Ben Hur: both roles are macho, and both roles allow the protagonists to prove their virile lust for danger and excitement.

Featherston views the powerful playfulness of these men as equivalent to the force and aggression shown in Norman Jewison’s Rollerball. Like the players in Rollerball, when the mill workers get into uniform (hockey, biker or the dirt track variety), they become instantly mean. The game becomes a patsy for the violence. Featherston’s hockey paintings are clutters of uniforms and bodily contact: they are not single heroic acts. Unlike Ken Danby’s famed in the Grease (from which Featherston lifted the title for his own hockey paintings), Featherston is not into romanticizing or creating Canadian icons. His desire is to capture some of the sloppy professional exuberance that goes under the name of hockey in the early morning hours at Squamish.

Being a mill town, Squamish loves its logs. The demo-derby’s track is ringed with logs and sawdust fills the track. It is the logging festival, the noise is the game. But this game is a segment of the mill workers’ best chance to affirm their roles. They will climb into cars painted with images of Cap’n Crunch or Looney Bird cartoons, and at still another time they will put on hockey uniforms at two o’clock in the morning to affirm their masculinity. It is an attempt to join in the workers’ intense ability and persona. It is an attempt to humanize the social facades built up around people. In other words, we see the Tribesman in this painting as an ‘enfant’, as a child playing at being tough. This is not a moment of violence, even if the skull logos on the heavy bikes point in that direction. What Featherston’s art is attempting to show in all his views of the Squamish Tribesmen is their associated macho roles and their tough-guy affectations. The Tribesmen are not shown as romantic heroes or malicious villains but rather they are seen as merely temporary toughies in the rôle of bikers.

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