

Quebec, even though the principal British garrison in Canada, was a city that retained a strong sense of French culture, unlike Montreal, which for about two decades at mid-century was, for the only time in its history, predominantly English-speaking. It also carried with it the aura of a capital, as it had been the administrative centre of New France, and from 1851 to 1855 and 1859 to 1865 was the capital of the United Canadas. Indigenous traditions were there able to survive the successive waves of immigration, and this gave an artist like Joseph Légaré (1795-1855) the stability that arises only from a degree of security. The continuing demand for church decoration, although copy-work, assured a living.

Légaré, a remarkable man, had early purchased a large collection of seventeenth and eighteenth century pictures brought to Canada by two French priests who acquired them from speculators in France who, in turn, had taken them from religious structures looted during the French Revolution. Légaré's training was in repairing and copying these pictures, his income derived from the sale of copies, and by their display in his private museum in Quebec City. He also collected reproductive engravings. It was as though he had set out single-handedly to regain the heritage of European visual culture that had been threatened by the British conquest, and by that more subtle deterioration of links resulting from distance over time. At the same time Légaré turned his almost 'primitive', provincial late-Baroque style to Canadian subjects, knowing that he was building something unique. How well he built is attested to by the dynasty of painters he founded: his apprentice Antoine Plamondon (1802-95), and, in turn, his apprentice Théophile Hamel (1817-70), and *his* apprentice Napoléon Bourassa (1827-1916), dominating portraiture and church decoration in Quebec for the rest of the century.

By mid-century there were numerous and growing signs of stability in the cultural life of the anglophone parts of the country as well. The growth of institutional structures, it appears, could compensate for the lack of indigenous traditions. Immigrants simply brought their structures and traditions with them, and when the structures were not portable, they were reconstructed in the New World. It didn't always work. There was no guarantee that the kind of exhibiting societies flourishing in provincial centres in England in the early decades of the nineteenth century would prove successful in Canada. But then other ways were found when the demand warranted. The Upper Canada Provincial Exhibition, for instance, awarded art prizes every year from 1846, and with a professional category from 1852, even though it was primarily an agricultural and industrial fair. Similar forms developed in Lower Canada after mid-century, and in 1860 the first attempt was made there to establish a public art gallery.