

Retrospective marks artist's one-hundredth birthday

The Edmonton Art Gallery is presenting a major retrospective of the works of F.H. Varley, one of Canada's renowned Group of Seven artists.

The exhibition, *F.H. Varley, A Centennial Exhibition*, comprises about 175 paintings and sketches by the artist. The retrospective was organized by Christopher Varley, grandson of the painter and head curator of Canadian art at the Edmonton Art Gallery, to celebrate the



F.H. Varley in his Unionville, Ontario studio in 1963.

one-hundredth anniversary of the artists' birthday.

War artist

F.H. Varley was born in Sheffield, England in 1881. He arrived in Canada in 1912 and began an illustrious career. In 1918 Varley returned to Europe to paint as a war artist for the Canadian War Records Office and in May 1920 displayed with the first art exhibition of the Group of Seven. Over the years he travelled from the east to west coasts of Canada painting, teaching and exhibiting his work. In 1964, he was awarded the Canada Council medal and in 1969 he died at the age of 88.

The exhibition, which is the first Varley retrospective to be mounted in Canada provides the opportunity to study this artist's work closely.

What distinguishes Varley's work is the vitality with which he kept the English romantic tradition alive. His portraits and landscapes of the 1920s and mid-1940s are considered by some to be among the best art produced in Canada.

Dozens of drawings, watercolours and small oil sketches make up the bulk of the exhibition — evidence of Varley's frequently high achievements with these intimate media. His pencil was a tool of



Vera, one of Varley's most popular portraits was done in 1930 and sports the artist's thumb print on the lower right hand corner.

discovery with which to speculate and ponder. He was a rigorous and probing draughtsman, who sought out the "mood" of his subjects.

Portraiture celebrated

Included in the comprehensive showing are many of Varley's famous portraits which were painted during the years he was associated with the Group of Seven: *Self-Portrait* (1919), the portrait of Vincent Massey (1920), *Vera* (1930), as well as the portrait of Margaret Fairley (1921), a study of the painter Barker Fairley's wife.

Varley was equally well known for his expressive landscapes painted during the years that he lived in British Columbia. *View from My Studio Window* (1928-1929) was painted looking out towards the harbour in Vancouver. In many of the works from this period the mountains of Lynn Valley appear, such as *Blue Ridge, Upper Lynn Valley* (1931) and *Lynn Peak and Cedar* (1934).

The exhibition also offers a private view of the artist and is accompanied by photographs, farewells from students and friends, and a selection of the artist's letters.

After closing in Edmonton on December 6, the retrospective will travel to the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, Victoria; the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa; the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal; and the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.



Stormy Weather, Georgian Bay, oil on canvas, 1920.