

RE

ING

INGS

ECTION

GALLERY

T

ke

of Sir William

e, Governor of

probably executed

marriage in 1820.

and predominantly

ia and the East-

ned in England

North America.

this work as a

proportionately

at neck-less ap-

indicate that the

locally. Through-

a mark of social

portrait painted.

the artistry of the

houette done of

ntings of rural

y popular in his

ced to turn to

re subsistence as

th century Can-

ncern was the

landscapes were

ic jolly French

e heroic North

hom were frequ-

al. Both "Indian

que with which he was so conversant, to his newly-found Canadian subject matter. In the middle of the 19th century it would have been impossible for Krieghoff to have developed a "national" mode of painting, as it was to appear some seventy years later, with which to portray the rugged Canadian landscape. Without Impressionism and its experimentation with light, the Group of Seven could never have been possible.

James Kerr-Lawson was a post-Confederation painter who studied widely in continental Europe, in particular at the Academie Julian, before returning to Ontario, where his parents had emigrated with him as a child. A close associate of Homer Watson, his work shares many of the qualities of their colleagues the "Brown Decades". Kerr-Lawson, like many Canadian artists of the eighties and nineties was greatly influenced by the American schools of painting, in particular by the well-established Philadelphia painter, Thomas Eakins. "Study of a Girl" (1888) echoes the delicate and sensitivity of some of Eakins' best work, but in its refinement transcends the North American schools and reflects the influence of some of the 19th century pre-Impressionist painting in France.

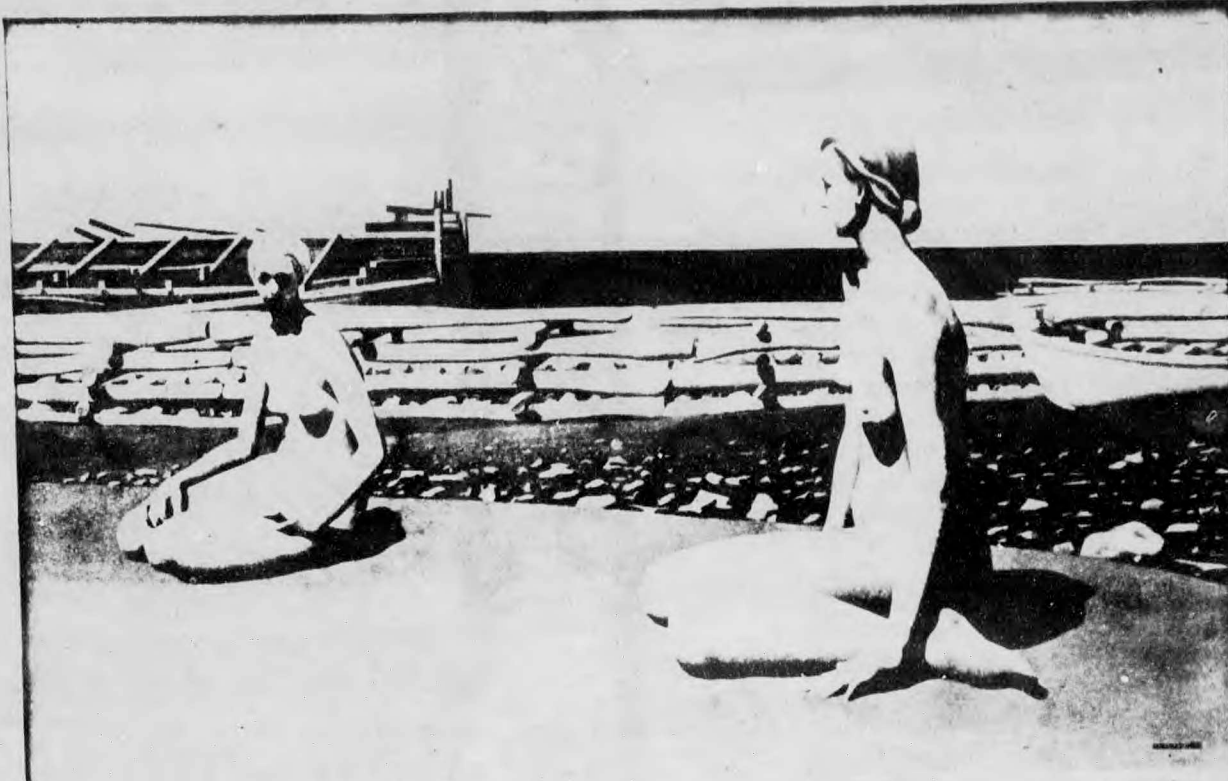
James Wilson Morrice and Ernest Lawson were the first Canadian artists to exhibit an awareness of Impressionism, albeit some thirty years after its birth in France; Morrice by returning to Western Europe and Lawson to the United States. Morrice, through his close involvement with such Post-Impressionists as J.M.W. Turner, Marquet and Matisse, became a proponent of their new aesthetic, simply "art for art's sake." Their concern was with the painterly aspects of painting, flat areas of colour with an emphasis on the decorative element. The soft planarity of Morrice's

"Woman in a Wicker Chair" (1895), comes very close to the misty flatness of Marquet's nudes, although the subtlety of the palette is more closely allied to Whistler than the Impressionists. This portrayal of Morrice's model, Jeanne Baume does not constitute a portrait but rather a decorative, non-didactic presentation.

G. Horne Russell's, "The Barefoot Boy", owes more to the Impressionists than the Post-Impressionists. The young boy is treated in a fully volumetric manner in the midst of a naturalistic landscape. Russell's use of light and shadow demonstrates an understanding of the basic tenants of Impressionism. The sketch for this work was probably done outdoors.

In 1910, Emily Carr left her native British Columbia for a trip to France where she first came exposed to the Fauves (so named because of their almost primitive "beast-like" use of bold colour and distorted shapes). Upon her return to British Columbia, Emily Carr portrayed the West Coast Indians, whom she knew and loved, in the manner of the Impressionists.

"Indian Village: Alert Bay" depicts four Indian women, no one of which is intended as an individual characterization, in the landscape. By placing them in the middle of their village surrounded by their art forms and tools for survival, Emily Carr is offering the viewer a more penetrating insight into their character than could be afforded by a more traditional portrait. The large areas of intense flat colour mirror the rich and dignified heritage of these quiet, weathered people.



John Alfsen's, "Head of a Young Man" (1954), and Pegi Nicol MacLeod's, "Jane" (1941), are basic portraits, each treated in a distinctive manner. Alfsen's vision has always been uniquely personal although his work exhibits a great respect for some of the painterly qualities of the 17th century masters. The lush application of earthy-hued pigment in the pensive, almost tragic face of "Head of a Young Man" evokes the portraiture of Velasquez.

Pegi Nicol MacLeod's, "Jane" (the artist's daughter), is rendered in an Expressionistic manner. The diagonal positioning of the young child on the canvas, the cumbersome treatment of the small hands cradling a cup and the tousled hair, all contribute to an image of the awkwardness of the dining ceremony for the little girl. The endearing treatment of the sitter creates a highly empathetic portrait.

In 1924, Andre Breton founded Surrealism, "a literary and art movement, influenced by Freudianism and dedicated to the expression of imagination as revealed in dreams, free of conscious control."<sup>2</sup> Two works which indicate the influence of Surrealism on Canadian art are Alex Colville's, "Nudes on the Shore" (1950), and Miller Brittain's, "Male and Female" (1956-57).

The cool, marbled female forms resting passively on the shore in Colville's painting are obviously not individual characterizations but instead are highly idealized symbols of womanhood. Their proximity to the water with its corresponding connotation as a life-giving force and its obvious relation to woman establishes a paradox. These women do not conform to our image of woman as the eternal mother, as the source of life. Instead they appear as aloof as a Praxitelean marble. It is this contradiction of values in the painting which gives it its surreal quality.

Brittain's visionary painting, "Male and Female", appears almost as a visual transcription of the poetry of the English Romanticist, William Blake. The fusion of the two figures is symbolic of the Blakeian ideal of the incompleteness of man and woman, only becoming complete in union.

The classical influence has moved in and out of Canadian painting. Certainly the sparse austerity of Colville's, "Nudes on the Shore", is just as classical in its feeling and purgation of superfluous detail as it is surreal. Another classically-inspired work is Stanley Cosgrove's, "Saint Anne" (1952). The classical simplicity of this work is in complete harmony with the character of this woman of the spirit. The

12. ALEXANDER COLVILLE  
Nudes on the Shore  
Nus sur le rivage

extreme reductiveness of this painting, which almost borders on the crude, reflects the influence of Cosgrove's Mexican teacher, Orozco.

Both John Fox in his painting, "A Glace in the Mirror", and Ghitta Caiserman-Roth in, "Woman with Mirror" (1955), have utilized the latter technique. However, the solidly-realized, sculptural young woman in Caiserman-Roth's painting contrasts markedly with the delicate and fugitive little creature in Fox's presentation, whose physical self seems hardly more substantial than her mirror image. Stylistically Caiserman-Roth's debt is to the German Expressionists; Fox's is to the Post-Impressionists.

The exhibition concludes with Donald Jarvis's attempt to combine two polarized idioms in "Portrait of Somebody". This work has retained the figurative element, although considerably abstracted, but the technique used is one borrowed from the contemporary hard-edge/colour field school which applies pure colour in sharply defined areas with the aid of masking tape and the spray gun. The rationale behind this hard-edge/colour field movement is to reduce painting to its most basic vocabulary, that of shape and colour by ridding it of any figurative subject matter which will enable the viewer to latch onto the literal elements and proceed to "read" the painting with a literary instead of a visual vocabulary. Once form and colour are understood they should be sufficiently evocative to create a non-literary response within the viewer. Jarvis has presented himself with an exceedingly complex problem in this painting.

This exhibition is in no way to be regarded as an exhaustive presentation of the evolution of figure painting in Canada, for there are many notable omissions. It is rather an attempt to demonstrate how the artist at different times in history perceives the same subject, the figure, in a varying manner and with an alternating attitude. The artist is, however, restricted in one sense, in that his perception of the figure or any other subject for that matter is necessarily based on and often altered by, the body of visual knowledge which preceded him.

