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A Heyday of Colours

Royal Canadian Academy Exhibition, Now Open, Has no Need of Coloured Spectacles

AN Irishman who used to live in Toronto before he died made a wise remark about chickens to somebody who advised that hens should have plenty of green food.

"Why not put green specs on the fowl and feed them shavings," said he.

Which is precisely the reverse of what is necessary when you go to the exhibition of the Royal Canadian Academy is now open to the public at the Art Gallery in the Public Library. This is the first Academy show that has been here for three years; and it is one of the most original the Academy ever had. Most Academy shows are rather gloomy, and to be appreciated by amateur eyes would require some kind of coloured spectacles. This one is almost a riot of colour.

An All-Canadian Show.

Something must have happened long before the war to make such a change in the colour scheme of the R.C.A. Of course this exhibition is not the same kind as the O.S.A. or the Canadian Art Club. It is not confined to one province or city; it has pictures from all over Canada. It is held in any one of a number of Canadian art centres, such as Toronto, Montreal, Ottawa and Hamilton. Every year, as the result of trying often enough to get pictures hung, certain artists are elected members or associates of the R.C.A. And the exhibition this year contains over two hundred canvases sent from points as far distant as Halifax and Winnipeg. The subjects of the pictures range from one side of the country to the other. And to judge by the average of the colours, Canada is no longer a land of fogs and greys and glooms.

Every Conceivable Colour.

Every conceivable colour is in that exhibition. Most of the blues are bluer than ever, the reds more dazzlingly red, the purples more daring, the greens more vivid, the snows colder, the sunsets more brilliant. But the show as a whole has a freshness of subject and treatment that makes it appear almost juvenile in contrast to some of the stately, sombre spectacles of bygone R.C.A. exhibitions.

As usual, Toronto and Montreal furnish most of the canvases. Many of the biggest are from Montreal. The biggest is Maurice Cullen's "Ice Harvest." Cullen is fond of ice. His best picture at the R.C.A. is probably "Winter Evening, Quebec." J. W. Beatty is back again with some north-country and out-west landscapes, some of which he got on his trip to the Rockies last summer. His "Lake Lucerne in the Rockies" is one of the best he ever did. Jefferys, President of the O.S.A., has one little gem, "Autumn's Garland," a masterpiece of perspective where the sky is actually behind the trees and the leaves stick out as though you could shake them. An excellent thing from a new source in Winnipeg is "The Grey Cloak," by Mary Clay Ewart; a portrait of rare handling in the cloak and the plume with enough face to carry both.

More Surprises.

A. Y. Jackson, who used to be a Montrealer but is now in Toronto, comes up to his old standard of surprises in a dazzling north-country splash of crimson maple leaves with a river beyond. He has one or two others that would be very hard to describe. H. S. Palmer has gone clean away from his familiar pastoral note and has flung on a riot of purples and violets in a sky that hangs like a picture of war over a peaceful plowman landscape. Lismer has a daring poplar leaves thing with a guide's shack up in the woods; a very dazzling, dancing composition. Gagen is back with a number of his familiar fine old storm-tossed scenes with rockbound coast and angry waves.

Homer Watson has keyed himself up and let considerable light into his

canvases with good effect. Atkinson is much less sombre than usual and has come almost to the point of getting a real glow into his landscapes. Dorothy Stevens, clever always, has a scantily-clad lady reclining on a bed behind a finely-painted curtain. Gagnon has a number of glittering winter scenes as chaste as snowdrops, all done in French style. George A. Reid has broken away from his pastoral style and injected a lot of optimism into his landscapes. Mary Reid's "Hollyhocks" are real enough to pick. McGillivray Knowles has a fine bit of composition and colour with several figures, "On the Beach at Perce, Quebec." Mrs. Knowles has four, all characterized by her accustomed brilliancy. J. E. H. Macdonald, always grippy and masterful, has three, of which his "March Evening" is a dazzling high-key contrast to his Persian rug effect in "A Laurentian Hillside." Lawren Harris is never conventional, and in his "Winter Morning" he has depicted the north-land bush with a masterly, almost dizzy, hand. Emily Coonan, from Montreal, has a splendid bit of mediaevalism in her "Two Spanish Girls." Wyly Grier's golf portrait of L.A. Hamilton, Esq. is one of the best he has done since his "Master of Northcote." Harry Britton has the most audacious piece of color in the whole show, his "Faraglioni Rocks, in Capri."

Many Poetic Variations.

Archibald Browne is on hand again with his surprising fecundity of poetic variations on the moon, the dream-haunted trees and the eternal silences. "Archie," as he is known to the craft, never slaps colour on raw. He believes in mixing the colours before they go on. Consequently his work is always elusive to a point of subtlety. The same method followed with less punctilious care characterizes the landscapes of Wm. Brymner, President of the Academy. He has a delightful tone-poem in this show which by its delicacy of treatment continually draws the eye away for a quiet contrast to the tropical colourings of some of the other canvases. C. M. Manly is seldom absent from any really good show, whether of the R.C.A. or the O.S.A.; and L. M. Bell-Smith, one of the oldest exhibitors, still keeps up his cheerfully virile treatment of customary themes, now and again varied, as it was this summer, by a trip to the Rockies. Horatio Walker, recently President of the Academy, has but one canvas in this year's collection, by no means up to his usual standard, from the Isle of Orleans. J. R. L. Forster has a chaste and stately portrait much decorated with diamonds and jewellery and not much after the manner of his usual work. A singularly good figure picture by Owen Staples is demurely corralled in a niche by the door, very characteristic of the artist's modesty.

And there are scores of others, all more or less strenuously ambitious to lift the R.C.A. out of its comfortable, placid atmosphere of repose and sometimes conventionality, and to make it more expressive of an eager young country panting to do bigger and more daring things in art. Altogether, it is a case of not needing the green spectacles to look at the shavings, but a collection of pictures that require to be seen more than once in order to make sure they are not in many cases more daring than nature. And above all things this exhibition proves that the R.C.A. has forever outgrown the cramped and melancholy accommodation afforded by Toronto art galleries. When are we to have a real picture gallery in Toronto? Echo answers—"When?"

Social Strangers.—Bank Teller (politely)—"I'm sorry, madam, but I cannot cash your cheque. You must bring in some one to identify you; that is, some one who is known to both of us."

Fair Customer (loftily)—"Indeed! I am sure our social spheres are entirely too distinct for such a thing to be possible."—Life.