

York campus art tour uncovers treasures

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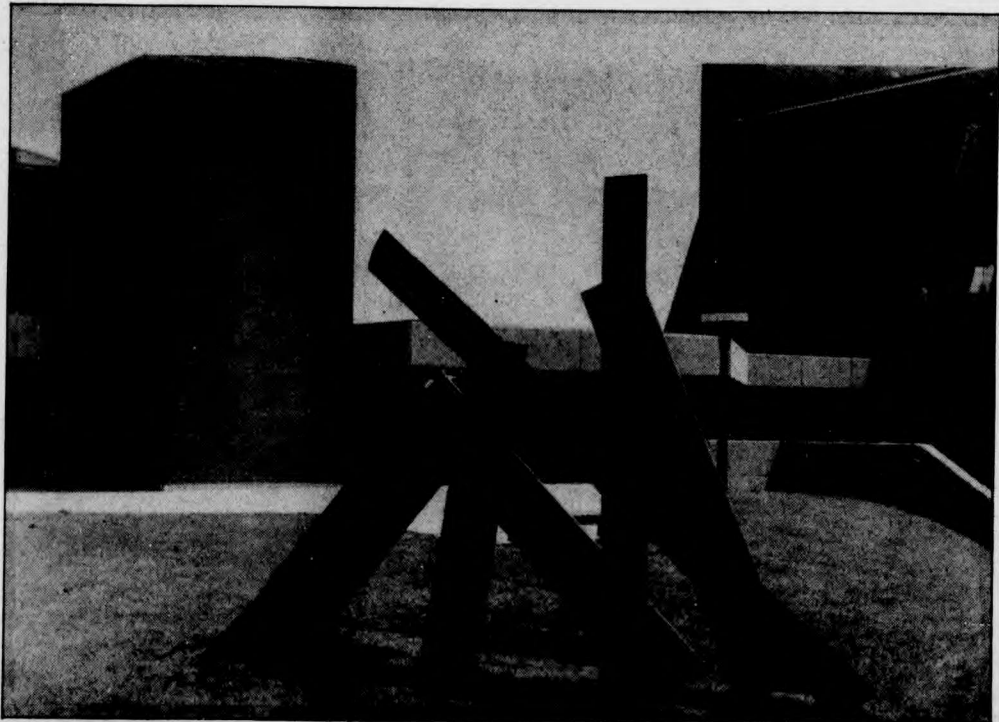
What with the recent installation of the Barclay-Holway sculpture on campus and the questions it may be provoking, it might be interesting to note that the Art Gallery of York University (A.G.Y.U.) conducts a guided tour of the University's collection each week. Meeting every Thursday in front of the flag-pole at 12 noon, the tour runs between 30 to 45 minutes and is directed by A.G.Y.U. gallery apprentice Sandra Slosel.

When York was designed, the planners wanted to incorporate art into the whole fabric of the design. The problem was that for the first time in Art History, it seems, architects and sculptors were not collaborating with each other. Despite this, a number of works on campus were commissioned before the government cut off funding in 1972. Of the one half percent of the budget designated towards these commissions, less than one half of this allotment was spent before 1972. With Glendon Campus included, a total of \$150,000 was spent on commissioned objects of art.



Given the flat terrain and the sprawling shopping mall quality of the buildings, many of the sculptors at the time were interested in giving their structures a sense of movement. Influenced by the ideas of the Constructivist School which originated out of Russia in the early part of this century, the sculptors felt that movement in space and not volume was important in art.

American sculptor Alexander Calder's "Model of Man", for example, which is mounted on the traffic circle in front of the Ross Building displays a certain lyric sweep in its gesture. A gift of the International Nickel Company, the piece was originally a scale model (maquette) for a finished piece which was 7 times the size and displayed at Expo '67 in Montreal. Built out of carbon steel and painted jet black, Calder subtly manages to keep his forms tight together.



In contrast to Calder, British sculptor Anthony Caro's "Criss-cross Flats" (1974) in front of the Fine Arts Building and Burton Auditorium appears to be a haphazard and raw arrangement of heavy steel slabs. Donated in 1976, York originally invited the artist to come and construct a number of pieces which turned out to be the "Flats" series—"Dufferin St. Flats", "Yonge St. Flats", etc. Although the

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finishing touches were done on campus, much of the construction was improvised at York Steel Yards where, to Mr. Caro's amazement, his two assistants manipulated the 4,000 lbs. of steel "as if it was butter." Left untreated and allowed to rust naturally, the piece makes you aware of its process and media.

In Mark di Suvero's massive, 6 ton "Sticky Wicket" by the Administrative Studies Building, "the piece that everybody loves to hate" you are immediately aware of the heavy steel beams being used in an unorthodox, playful way. "The forms jut out, invade our space and make an impression. You weren't supposed to sit and admire it, you were supposed to feel its impact!" explained Sandra. Indeed, the work has the presence of a dinosaur. di Suvero was one of the invited artists at the 10th International Sculpture Conference held at York in 1978. With several tons of material and with no plan, no concept and no preparatory drawings completely improvised the finished piece. At times cutting the sheet metal as if it were mere paper, he created curves and curly-cue shapes very uncharacteristic to the material. Overall, the work has a lot of thrust and tension running through it, giving it an exciting new angle each time you look at it.

Perhaps George Rickey's "Four Squares in a Square" sculpture up on the podium between the Ross Building and the Scott Library best exemplifies the Constructivist's notion of movement because it is the most kinetic. His four 5 foot square panels of stainless steel, mounted on 15 foot beam move quietly and effortlessly to each shift in the prevailing wind currents. Like the Calder piece, it is an exact duplicate of a much larger work belonging to the Museum of Modern Art in Berlin. Elegant and flowing, it picks up and enlivens the architecture surrounding it.

In the 1960's, York University was pioneering in having permanent art installed in its buildings and it was looking for something up-to-date, off-beat, modern and technological. For \$18,000, that's exactly what it got when they commissioned Michael Hayden's "Escalator Piece." It was the first major, permanent electronic work installed in a public place in



FROM ESCALATORS TO PIE PLATES: Art tour leader Sandra Slosel, pictured here in front of Gervais' 'Confederation,' explains finer points of York's bulging art collection.

Canada. Consisting of 960 10 watt bulbs, the sculpture blinks on and off sequentially in pulsations of 1/10 of a second to 14 seconds whenever the silver bands along its side are pushed. Originally audio was incorporated into the work's design but because the mechanism was not fully developed, it was removed. The bright, arcade quality of the piece may seem out of context to some with the austere, studious nature of a library where hardwork and eye strain usually go together. The work does manage to provide a little fun and human involvement for the short 13 second duration

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one is riding the library's escalator. Tour guide Sandra Slosel describes her reaction of the work as one of "entering or leaving the Twilight Zone."

Like Michael Hayden, Canadian artists represented on campus tended to move away from the traditional materials used in sculpture. Materials like bronze and heavy metal. Hugh Leroy's "Rainbow Piece" in the water

course south of the main floor escalators at Scott Library incorporates the use of fibre-glass. His graduated series of coloured pipe curves which rest in the 6 inch pool may remind some of Lifesaver's Five Flavor candy. Its vibrant simplicity helps to combat the strict architectural lines which surround it. Similarly Lise Gervais's "Confederation" piece in Central Square's outdoor cafe makes use of the same medium but the work suggests some organic science-fiction plant growth or perhaps even pie plates balancing one on top of another.

Upon reaching the new Barclay-Holway sculpture during the tour, Sandra decided to test the perception of the 16 or more in the group by asking them what they thought the work might be. Despite hints, dropped by Sandra that it was a "familiar object" and although the group examined the piece from every angle, general befuddlement was their only response. This might be a little disheartening for Alan Barclay and Linda Holway to learn but perhaps an alternative site with a more advantageous view of the piece would aid in the appreciation of the work's overall concept a little better.

Those who take the walking tour with Sandra will discover that for the most part York's art collection not only contrasts its architectural surroundings but richly augments and humanizes it as well. Take advantage, while the offer still lasts.

