

Any show which includes the work of seven painters cannot hope to encompass an art scene as diverse and healthily heterodox as that of Canada. As the Montreal critic Georges Bogardi noted in a review of *Contemporary Canadian Painters*, "No one would pretend of course that it constitutes anything like a survey of Canadian painting. What it does instead is indicate the diversity and daring still exercised by our artists in a medium that has, throughout the century and time and time again, been pronounced moribund. In fact, if this exhibition has a theme, it would be the tenacity with which our major painters continue to wrest new and personal solutions from painterly idioms one would have thought exhausted years ago."

That is probably as good a description as any of the criteria for the selection of this exhibition. Beyond any obvious formal similarities, we looked for artists whose works show a vital, consistent, continuous and personal approach to the practice of painting. The sole limitations were that the work be from the collection of the Art Bank and of a size appropriate for travel. In placing the paintings in this show in context, it could perhaps be helpful to point out, for example, that the serial colour experiments of Guido Molinari are part of a body of work which, since the early 1960s, has achieved a remarkable cumulative authority. Or that the visceral paintings of Ron Martin, in which the artist manipulates a given amount of paint on his canvas, are again part of a sustained, programmatic investigation into the nature of painting. In such cases, however, we would hope that the nature of their work is self-evident, and that similarly the highly personal vocabularies of John Meredith and Claude Breeze, the joyful lyricism of Gershon Iskowitz, the reticent elegance of Charles Gagnon or the exuberant roughness of Paterson Ewen, quite simply speak for themselves.

Of the resource from which these works come, there is perhaps more to say. The Art Bank was founded in 1972 as an innovative complement to the Council's programme of grants to individual artists. It is in effect a large-scale purchasing scheme designed to help both artists and those galleries which have made a significant contribution to Canadian art over the years. The work is selected by constantly changing juries of artists, curators, critics and collectors who travel across the country throughout the year. Their purchases are then rented to federal government buildings, generating a substantial revenue which goes toward the operating costs of the programme.

To date, the Bank has accumulated over 7,000 works by more than 700 artists, a figure large enough to inspire charges of indiscriminate largesse and small enough to bring forth accusations of elitism! Rather more to the point, the purchasing programme permits the Council to reach a greater number of artists each year than it can by grants, and in a rather more direct manner. The Bank's collection is a catholic one, embracing all manner of isms and virtually every medium save video and holography. In the long term, it is an invaluable educational tool, dedicated to the view that familiarity with contemporary art breeds a sense of ease and delight. As befits the largest collection of contemporary Canadian art, the Art Bank also fulfils a role as a major lending source, a ready reference for researchers with neither the time nor resources to cross the country, and, not least, as the organizer of the kind of cooperative enterprise of which *Contemporary Canadian Painters* is an example.

# INTRODUCTION

BY/PAR GEOFFREY JAMES