

FIRST ECUADOR ENVOY

On August 23, His Excellency Alberto Coloma Silva presented his Letter of Credence as first Ambassador of Ecuador to Canada. The ceremony took place at the Supreme Court, Ottawa. The Chief of Protocol, Department of External Affairs, Mr. Henry F. Davis, presented the Ambassador to the Administrator, the Honourable Patrick Kerwin, Chief Justice of Canada. Mr. Marcel Cadieux, Deputy Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, and Colonel A.G. Cherrier, Assistant Secretary to the Governor General, were in attendance on the Administrator on this occasion.

Mr. Coloma has served in Paris, London, Madrid, Rome, Geneva and Genoa. In 1960 he was appointed Secretary-General for the XI Inter-American Conference of the Organization of American States.

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CANADIAN ARTS CONFERENCE

A forum for the discussion of many of the problems agitating Canadian cultural circles was provided in Toronto recently at the first Canadian Conference of the Arts. The three-day palaver was organized by a committee under the direction of Alan Jarvis and included speeches, informal gatherings, panel discussions on the various arts and exhibitions of painting, sculpture, graphics and books. More than 6,000 artists, patrons, journalists and "interested persons" gathered at the O'Keefe Centre to listen to such guests as Sir Julian Huxley, Japanese sculptor Isamu Noguchi, Broadway producer Robert Whitehead, West Indian novelist George Lamming, British architect Jane Drew, Russel Lynes, editor of Harper's Magazine and others.

Because of the important role the Canada Council has come to play in the national cultural life, some time was devoted to a consideration of its policies. In the keynote address, Dr. Claude Bissell, the Council's Chairman, touched on some of the problems facing the Council. Speaking of the difficulty of making objective judgments in the arts, he said: "In our society, where the pressures are so numerous, subtle and pervasive, and where commercialism has blurred the difference between folk art and popular taste, it is increasingly urgent to turn for assistance to those who have devoted their lives to the study and comparison of art through the ages, and who try to distinguish between the permanent and the ephemeral. It is inevitable that the judgment of the expert will meet with strong and even bitter opposition, for there has always been a gap between the popular taste of the day and the preferences that survive. The difficult and esoteric art of today becomes the popular art of tomorrow.... The pictures of Van Gogh, ridiculed in their time, become, as we have recently seen, the treasured possessions of mankind.... The Canada Council, then, is concerned with seeking out the best in art, and in our search we ask the advice of those who are honoured among their peers. We are not trying to summon into existence something which hitherto has shown few signs of life."

CATALYTIC ACTION

The Council had been, therefore, the speaker went on, more of a catalyst than an element in the artistic chemical reaction. It was "designed to provide some of the conditions by which good art, and occasionally great art, can flourish in this country." Dr. Bissell added, however, that the time had perhaps come for the Council to adopt a more active policy in identifying young artists worthy of support. It had been said that the Canada Council, particularly in the field of the visual arts, had handed itself over to the *avant-garde* group. On the contrary, Dr. Bissell said, his chief concern was that the Council hadn't been *avant-garde* enough, that it hadn't assisted the artist working outside the formal schools. It was a mistake to think of Canadian art as backward and primitive; from its earliest beginnings it had been receptive to cosmopolitan influences, perhaps over-eager to be in the height of fashion, with the result that it had often been characterized by a sort of respectable Bohemianism. The Council should, therefore, be on the lookout for artists whose work was not tailored to the current demands of either popular or refined taste.

SOCIETY AND BEAUTY

It was not the Council's function, however, but the role of society at large, that received the most searching analysis at the conference. The need for protest groups and individual action at the local and national level was enunciated by several speakers. They stressed the need to marshal public opinion to insure that the various agencies responsible for Canada's public buildings, town development etc. should consider the aesthetic as well as the commercial aspects of their programmes. This theme received its most forthright statement in the panel on the "Arts in Society" and later in the address of Sir Julian Huxley. "People have a right," Sir Julian said, "to grow up and live in an emotionally and aesthetically satisfying environment instead of a depressing and stultifying one." He urged the formation of national pressure groups similar to the "anti-ugly" societies in Britain to promote such things as better design, urban renewal and the use of the arts to make our surroundings more beautiful. René Lévesque, Minister of Natural Resources in Quebec, agreed and referred to some of the ways his government was helping to strengthen the place of the arts in French Canada. A Department of Cultural Affairs, the first in Canada, had been formed in his province and the government had recently passed an Order-in-Council stipulating that 1.5 per cent of the cost of provincial buildings must be devoted to works of sculpture or other decorative arts. Possibly the most forceful expression of the importance of the arts in society, however, was made by Professor Northrop Frye on the opening afternoon of the conference: "The arts can teach a way of seeing and hearing that nothing else can give. They can teach a way of living in society where the imagination can take its proper central place."