

John Meredith: fifteen years

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If ever we have produced a painter more averse to self-exposure than John Meredith, he has been too modest to catch my eye. Underpublicized but not wholly unnoticed, the inauguration of a travelling exhibition of a highly selective choice of his works painted or drawn over the last 15 years was significant among the events at the October opening of the rebuilt Art Gallery of Ontario.* Not that Meredith has ever been anything but eye-catching, from his first tentative yet distinctive

*The exhibition is also travelling to: Sarnia Public Library and Art Gallery, December 6, 1974-January 1; Rodman Hall, St Catharines, January 10-February 2; The Vancouver Art Gallery, February 8-March 1; London Public Library and Art Gallery, March 7-30; The Winnipeg Art Gallery, April 18-May 25; Windsor Art Gallery, June 10-29.

Photos: courtesy The Isaacs Gallery unless otherwise noted.

public appearance in 1958. That was at the long-gone Gallery of Contemporary Art of the Kernerman brothers on Gerrard, in the heady days when there and a little later at Avrom Isaacs' new talent was busting out in almost every succeeding show.

Meredith was then already five years out of the Ontario College of Art, where he had been a quiet but good student, particularly helped by Jock Macdonald, and had meanwhile been working in considerable isolation in Brampton. We were at that time allowed some information about him, for example that he was the much younger brother (seven years younger) of our then comet William Ronald, that their parents were remarkably sympathetic to painters in the family, but that, being called Smith, all parties were averse to the young men becoming known as a set of latterday Smith Bros. One of the

most conspicuous features of those early canvases was a surprisingly aggressive signature designed, if irritatingly, to make his professional name register. It did, rather because the painting was so interesting, so unlike his brother's and so truly individual.

These canvases were for some years dark and brooding. If he was looking outside himself for guidance, it was to neither Toronto nor New York. One felt that perhaps one eye was curious for a while about the techniques, not the imagery, of two Montrealers of exactly his own age, Guido Molinari and Jean McEwen. As he is not a traveller except in his own mind and seems to absorb stimuli without being at all conscious of their specific sources, this may not signify. The early stripes remain significant for their insistent painterliness, for their determination to assume organic rather than mathematical



Untitled Drawing XV, 1965, ink on paper, 13 1/2" x 16 1/2"

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