

"I don't mean that they're difficult people," she says, "but civil servants are not a body of people who would normally go out and choose art for offices. You know, maybe only 2 per cent of our clientele are already regular gallery-goers, and so their response when they walk in here is anywhere from pure amazement and joy to — you know, they don't know where to look, maybe the ceiling. It's intimidating."

Nonetheless, by August of this year, 4,172 of the 6,752 works in the Art Bank collection were out on rental to about 70 government departments and agencies — about 63 per cent of them, in other words. "What amazes me, thinking back over two years," says Bradley, "is what part of the collection is out on rental, and it's the *really good* work. There's something about really good work that speaks for itself, and that's exciting and encouraging. I like that a lot."

Most of the rentals so far have been achieved by a kind of catch-as-catch-can, osmotic, word-of-mouth process, which is fine as far as it goes. But the Art Bank has not yet reached the point where rentals cover the cost of running the collection. It was presumed, though never in fact insisted upon, that the Art Bank would be self-sufficient by the end of its initial five-year period. It won't be.

"It would take a long time for the program to be self-sufficient even in terms of administrative costs, and a helluva lot longer than that to be totally self-sufficient," says Chris Youngs, who, at 32, became director of the Art Bank in July, 1976, after serving for a year as chairman of its advisory selection committee. He doesn't talk much like an Ottawa mandarin, and he doesn't look much like one, in his comfortably worn jean jacket and pants and open-necked check shirt. He doesn't have the history of one, either. Born in Lafayette, Indiana, he attended several universities in the U.S. and Canada, collecting sufficient credits for a degree but never bothering to acquire one, leaving these institutions "because they became disillusioned with me or, usually, I became disillusioned with them." He started the Nightingale Gallery and was active with A Space, both commercial Toronto art galleries concerned with the undiscovered or avant-garde, before moving on to run the Owens Art Gallery at Mount Allison University in Sackville, New Brunswick.

Sometimes, though, he *does* talk like an Ottawa man: "Let's say we've purchased roughly 4 million dollars' worth of art in five years," he says. "Twelve per cent of that is \$480,000. Well, that's nowhere near self-sufficiency, even if we rented everything. I'll tell you what I've projected: if we have a built-in inflation factor of 10 per cent, five years from now we should have stabilized to the point where rentals will cover administrative costs, and we'll have enough income to purchase a million dollars' of art a year."

The question that naturally arises here is *why* should the Art Bank, or any other branch of government, go on buying contemporary art at the rate of a million dollars a year, or *any* rate? If the art market is that weak and needs that much stimulation, why not say the hell with it? The answer goes back to the formation of the Canada Council itself, nearly 20 years ago, to "foster and promote the study and enjoyment of, and the production of works in, the arts, humanities and social sciences." All of the Council's programs, including the Art Bank, are directed to that end, so the answer to the question is, basically, if that end is not desirable, *none* of the Council's programs can be. And

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despite yearly sniping from the media and unfriendly MPs who pounce upon any strange request for funds the Council has granted, or has even received. In fiscal 1974-75, the Council spent almost \$22 million to foster and promote the production and enjoyment of the arts in this country, about \$4.6 million of it on the visual arts, including the Art Bank. That is, for people who like comparisons, less than a quarter of what one of our new Aurora search-and-surveillance planes is going to cost.

The Art Bank maintains quality control of its collection in a couple of ways. First, the work to be purchased is selected by a system of juries, whose

constantly changing composition guards against built-in biases and accommodates expertise from all across the country. Selection is limited to the work of full-time professional Canadian artists, people who earn their living, or try to, from their art. (No Sunday painters, please.) So far, the Art Bank has found about 650 artists thus seriously committed whose work meets its standards, or about one in 10 who submit work for purchase. Second, the fact that the Art Bank is not expected to act like a revenue-producing mechanism avoids the very real danger of limiting its purchases to the kind of work it might consider easy to rent to its clients. (For example, the Bank continues to buy contemporary sculpture, even though this has predictably proved to be the most difficult work to find clients for. In the warehouse right now is a piece by Arthur Handy, for example, and a couple more by Nobuo Kubota and Royden Rabinowich — all excellent stuff and all, so far, clientless. It is simply the nature of the medium. As Youngs puts it: "There is a psychological block to it in a lot of people's minds; it takes up more

space than painting, which is only on the wall, so to speak. Sculpture takes in territory, it's *aggressive* in that way.")

These days, the Art Bank is taking steps to raise its profile, through increased activity of its liaison officers and its projects officer — lectures, slide shows and travelling exhibitions intended to encourage further rentals in the branch offices of government departments across the country, to get the collection *out there*, beyond the warehouse and the offices in Ottawa, "to bring art to a broader public."

The Bank is organizing an exhibition, that they will rent to External Affairs, which will be seen in Toronto and Montreal before touring the world for three years. Another exhibition will tour the Maritimes, and this one is a rent-as-you-go show; it will be seen in four cities Down East, then return to Halifax, where it will be dispersed among the Bank's clientele. The Bank has also broadened its rental mandate to include public buildings on the provincial and municipal level, non-profit organizations such as hospitals, and even 10 or 12 selected corporations, "but our purpose there," says Youngs, "is to encourage private collecting.

not just encourage rentals."

This year Youngs will lose Ann Chudleigh, who has been the Bank's administrative officer for about a year and a half. He plans to take over as much of the administration of the collection as he can (in addition to his duties as overseer of the purchases) and to distribute the rest of it among the other staff members. Instead of hiring another administrator, he plans to hire a new education officer — as a kind of travelling salesman? "A lot of the use of this collection has come about through word-of-mouth, which was fine up to a point, but what we need now is a real drive for information distribution. We need ways of making those works of art more than just physical presences to be rented out; we need to deliver some hints, some keys as to what are the real spiritual rewards of having it around.

"So the educational value of this collection is one of the things I'm very deeply concerned with. At the same time, results of it are very, very subtle. The whole program is like that. You will only be able to see the results of it with any reasonable degree of accuracy in about 10 years, and I think that's how far ahead we have to look."