

Beaverbrook's baby grows up

By IAN CAMPBELL

In all the Maritimes there is no other gallery like the Lord Beaverbrook Art Gallery, and there are few like it in the world. It is the only international show room in the Maritimes and it is unusual in the world because it was the work of a single patron; his buildings and his paintings. This extensive patronage was common in the nineteenth century but rare in our own when the Gallery was completed in 1959. It was a gift to the province he loved.

One wonders, would such gifts be refused? How often would you like to return a gift from a rich uncle or aunt because it does not suit your wardrobe? That is the question one must ask about the Lord Beaverbrook Art Gallery. Does it suit the public? At its opening it had 300 paintings which totally represented the tastes of Lord Beaverbrook. Indeed, it was his monument, as he controlled its direction and its future, purchasing and accepting only paintings he wanted. Today, the gallery has 1600 paintings and more responsible goals. It is more a part of the community than every before, and more a part of the world of art.

Originally though, the Gallery was, in every way, Beaverbrook's baby, after he decided to give the province a gallery over an archives, an alternate plan. The building, designed by architect Neil M. Stewart, was done so with the consultation of Lord Beaverbrook "who was ever the arbiter and final judge." What pictures hung in the finished Gallery was Beaverbrook's decision. Of assistance in choosing paintings, Beaverbrook exclaimed, "The pictures in the Gallery are my choice. I would rather tear down the Gallery and burn the pictures than put up with (the advisor) again!" Up until Beaverbrook's death in 1964, the Gallery was his place. Even complaints about high electric bills were handled by Beaverbrook from his estate in England, just as you or I might grapple with N.B. Power.

Paul Hachey, the Assistant Curator, and Stuart Smith who was the Director of the Gallery between 1964 and 1969, agree that Beaverbrook was no connoisseur of art. As an art history professor, Smith notes that Lord Beaverbrook did have "a sense of history." The early Canadian paintings of the collection; in particular, the group of 26 Kreighoffs by

Canada's pioneer painter, demonstrate this concern.

Although Beaverbrook was a highly subjective collector, by his death the Gallery was nonetheless strong in Canadian and English paintings. Unfortunately, works by painters disliked by Beaverbrook, like A.Y. Jackson, were not purchased while they were still cheap. Such policies ceased and today the compilation is much stronger and more complete. Paul Hachey notes, "It is one of the top fifteen collections of Canadian art in the country."

Some paintings collected by Beaverbrook if not pleasing to the eye, do have interesting histories. Two in particular stand out for this reason: Salvador Dali's "Santiago el Grande" and Graham Vivian Sutherland's "Study of Sir Winston Churchill."

"Santiago el Grande" is mammoth at 10 by 13 1/2 feet. A large white horse mounted by St. James carrying a crucifix is the centre piece against a background of bright blues. This horse leaping heavenward is famous. It was rejected by the southern French church it was painted for because the small cloaked figure in the lower right corner turns away from the miracle. Of the figure, who is his own wife Gala, Dali said, "She symbolizes the Pilgrim of my life." The painting was purchased by Sir James Dunn and donated to the Gallery. That church in southern France would, no doubt, love another chance to purchase it.

Graham Sutherland's "Study of Sir Winston Churchill" of 1954 tells a tragic tale. A portrait of the former great Prime Minister was commissioned by the Members of the English Houses of Parliament to be presented to him on his eightieth birthday. By this time he had already suffered a stroke and sadly was no longer the warrior who inspired Britain during the Second World War. The harsh truth of Sutherland's portrayal of the old man was devastating. "Members of both Houses of Parliament who were assembled that day in Westminster Hall to see the presentation were shocked, and Winston himself was disgusted." The painting was destroyed by the Churchill family, but the sketches remain in the Lord Beaverbrook Art Gallery. They are a moving record of Churchill's character, and represent, as Stuart Smith noted, "his powerful and domineering

spirit."

Paintings like these build the reputation of the Gallery. Other paintings do so by going out on loan. Joshua Reynolds's "Mrs. Thrale and Her Daughter (Queeny)" is at the prestigious Tate Gallery in England bring publicity to its home in Fredericton. Other famous works shown at the Beaverbrook Gallery include those of: Sandro Botticelli, Thomas Gainsborough, Eugene Delacroix, Thomas Mallord Turner, and Eugene Boudin; and in the Canadian vein the works of Tom Thomson, Emily Carr, Franklin Carmichael, and Alex Colville.

The Sir Max Aitken Gallery dedicates itself mainly to British portrait painters between the 17th and 19th centuries. The Hosmer-Pillow-Vaughan Gallery represents the art of continental Europe from the 15th to 19th centuries. Included in this Gallery is a large Gobelin's tapestry from "The Hunts of Maximilian" (c.1692) Two other tapestries hang on the walls, 17th century Flemish tapestries: "Holy Kinship, Virgin and Child" and "Diana at the Hunt." They are intriguing contrasts to oil and canvas. The Beaverbrook Gallery is on its way to reaching its goal

reversed Gallery. Unfortunately the goal of the Gallery to represent the best of international art does not include nurturing local talent.

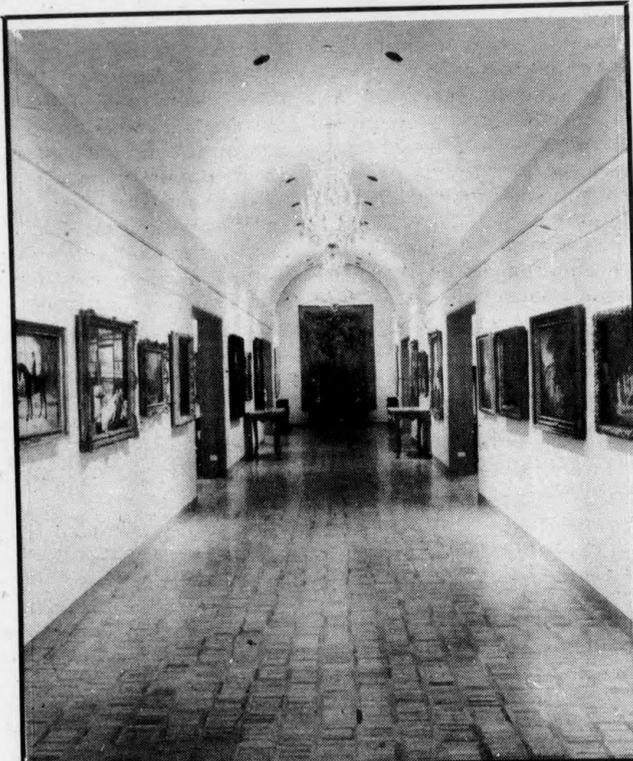
Is this a wise decision for an institution relying on public funding? Could more support be gained from the public if provincial artists were supported? At the close of the Beaverbrook age the city was left with his Gallery relying on Public funds. The Gallery is not funded by the Federal or Provincial Governments. Federal grants are available for the purchase of Canadian paintings and thankfully the Beaverbrook Foundation still assists. But because of this, Stuart Smith points out: "The Gallery is only as good as its patrons."

The staff at the Gallery prefer to gain an audience by showing and teaching the working of the masters. Through lecture, demonstrations, film programs, art classes, and seminars the staff hope to develop an appreciation of the great painters. In many ways the Gallery is like the New York Yankees who collect the best players in baseball to ensure a winning season. The costs are high. The results are not always appreciated. But there are victories.

The Gallery has grown from the paternal protection of Beaverbrook, when it was a personal show place. The Victorian style of Beaverbrook's patronage made the Gallery an oddity in his day. Whether or not it has remained an oddity, as an oasis of fine art in a country and province which do not fund it, is for you to judge. Has its controversial collection and promotion policies aggravated its position in the community—Does it serve the public? The answers to these questions must be your own. They will differ from person to person. Whatever you decide, the experience of finding the answer, be it through attending exhibitions or the Gallery's outreach presentations, the experience will be an enriching one. There are riches to be found.

BEAVERBROOK ART GALLERY

As part of the Visiting Artists' Programme Alex Cameron will give a lecture on his work on Tuesday, February 12 at 12:30 p.m. Mr. Cameron is one of five young Toronto artists whose work has been recently acquired by the Beaverbrook Gallery.



Vaulted corridor Gallery

Paintings from these artists and other masterful creators give the Gallery the best representation of Western art "north of Boston and east of Montreal," says Paul Hachey. The opening of the east and west wings put the Gallery comfortably in this position.

The project took three years and 3.1 million dollars to complete. Seventy percent of the funds were donated by the Beaverbrook Canadian Foundation, and The Marguerite and Murray Vaughan Foundation gave one million dollars each. Today the east wing is divided into three separate galleries: The Sir Max Aitken Gallery, the Hosmer-Pillow-Vaughan Gallery, and a vaulted corridor gallery dividing the other two. All are part of the permanent collection.

which is "to collect the representation of art from the Western World. Two or three of the best paintings from the best artists." So says Paul Hachey. Former Director Stuart Smith believes that working on the English and Canadian collections would be wiser. In this way the Gallery would be more valuable in a teaching way showing the progression of Canadian and English art in greater detail.

As the state of the Beaverbrook Gallery was controversial during Beaverbrook's command of it, so too is it controversial today because of the direction it has chosen for the future. One major complaint is that it does not support local talent. This is a concern of local artists like Martin Elder who can always use exposure through an established and