

Puppets enliven history of Quebec painting

La Couleur chante un pays!, a dramatic puppet show relating part of the history of Quebec art was presented recently at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts by the Théâtre de l'Avant-Pays.

The play, enacted by both actors and puppets, reconstructs some outstanding events in Quebec's history of painting, from the time when Hamel and Plamondon were the fashionable portrait painters to the ideological battles between the academicism of the Fine Arts School and the *Peinture vivante* movement headed by Pellan and Borduas.

Five actors handle 18 puppets based on paintings from the museum's collection, and they themselves appear in masks to portray painters such as Ozias Leduc, Marc-Aurèle Fortin and John Lyman.

A look behind the scenes

La couleur chante un pays! also looks behind the scenes of a museum: the conservator courts the woman curator and the night watchman has to humour Morrice's *Young Woman in Black Coat* about her complexion, while an Indian, from a Légaré painting, has wandered astray. In the meantime, two of Krieghoff's peasants drink and make merry.

The approach of the play is to have the puppets present Quebec art in a realistic manner: it is history told in a



Ti-Toine, one of Krieghoff's peasants in *Les Chutes de Montmorency*.

new way with the characters living, moving, dancing and singing through two centuries of painting.

The original text of *La couleur chante un pays!* has been published by the Editions Québec-Amérique, as part of their Jeunes Publics collection. The publication is fully illustrated with colour and black-and-white reproductions of works in the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts' collection.

Canada-Switzerland literary prize

Writer Gilbert La Rocque of Montreal has won the Canada-Switzerland Literary Prize for his novel *Les Masques*, published in 1980.

The prize will be awarded in Switzerland in the spring. The annual prize, financed jointly by the Canada Council and the Fondation Pro Helvetia of Switzerland, provides \$2,500 in alternate years to a Swiss or Canadian writer for a work published in French in the preceding eight years.

La Rocque has published five novels since 1970. During his career, he has written numerous articles in periodicals and been active as a literary critic and translator. He is currently director of publishing at Editions Québec/Amérique.

Les Masques is the third volume in a trilogy which includes *Après la boue* and *Serge d'entre les morts*. Its narrator, who is himself a writer, is obsessed by memories and fantasies. As he explores his interior world, the masks of illusion fall away and the truth is revealed.

Each year the juries for the Canada-Switzerland Literary Prize choose a category of literature — the novel, poetry, drama or serious non-fiction — in which to award the prize. This year the Canadian jury proposed seven novels to the Swiss jury.

Cultural grants

The federal government is providing \$565,700 in project grants to Canadian cultural organizations under its special program of cultural initiatives.

The program, set up to assist arts and culture organizations and activities across Canada, is operated by the Department of Communications. Initially outlined by the government in December 1980, the program has a budget of \$39.6 million to be distributed over three fiscal years.

Under one part of the program, which supports special cultural projects of national character or significance, grants totalling \$524,700 are being made available for 15 projects across Canada. In addition, a project grant of \$41,000 is being given to the Toronto Theatre Festival for its Stage Directions conference. This particular grant falls under another section of the program designed to strengthen the management of Canadian professional non-profit performing arts organizations.



Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Yves Bellemare photos

Puppets and actors with Théâtre de l'Avant-Pays.