

A Dictionary of Canadian Artists

Compiled by Colin S. MacDonald

MEREDITH, John (John Meredith Smith)

Born in Fergus, Ontario, the son of Mr. & Mrs. William Smith, his father moved to Fergus from Stratford during the depression years and made his living by raising vegetables and selling them directly to individuals at their homes.¹ The family then moved to Brampton where John attended the district high school and did realistic drawing and painting.² He entered the Ontario College of Arts, as his brother William Ronald had done several years earlier. There he became interested in abstract and non-objective art through Jock Macdonald and began his first serious explorations in this direction which progressed during his three years at the College (1950).³ After his studies in Toronto he found a job with the Brampton *conservator* in which his cartoons appeared.⁴ It was around this time that he decided to use his Christian names for his full professional name to avoid confusion with many other Smiths. His brother had changed his name for the same reason. While still living in Brampton he held his first one-man show in Toronto at the Gallery of Contemporary Art in 1958, then in 1961, held a solo show at the Isaacs Gallery when *The Toronto Star*⁵ noted, "Meredith's vertical stripes bend, weave, merge, then pull apart again in patterns that are repeated over and over. In their midst, human figures appear, as if only for a moment. The result is exotic, purely, oddly convincing. The paintings are hard to evaluate or even understand individually. Collectively, seen as a show, they give the impression of a rich, various, sometimes brutal and always absorbing mind at work. Meredith, who is 29 years old, has exhibited occasionally over the last few years, and he had a one-man show at the Gallery of Contemporary Art in 1958; but his work has never looked so strong as it does this week." In 1963 Meredith moved to Toronto and held a second exhibition at the Isaacs Gallery in which Elizabeth Kilbourn⁶ in her review concluded with the remarks, "... you may also see with literally new eyes." It was perhaps a deft remark which essentially applies to his work today. A third show at