

inspiration for Les Plasticiens was mainly Piet Mondrian and their aim was to purify art by emphasising the formal elements.

Two artists, Guido Molinari and Claude Tousignant, though never members of Les Plasticiens, had very similar aims and, with others, formed a second plasticien group about the time the first one was breaking up. The important difference between the first group and the second was the change in orientation: away from the European tradition and towards New York. The most important post-war development in international art had been the evolution of the so-called New York School and the consequent shifting of the art world's focus from Paris to America. This new generation of Quebec painters had been quick to recognise the shift. The Quebec art scene remains a vigorous and experimental one, which seems only fitting since twentieth-century Canadian painting was born there in 1948.

Toronto was slower off the mark. As in Montreal, the embattled non-figurative artists took the most important step. A group of them had been quietly assembling themselves although they scarcely knew each other or each others' work. But in 1953 William Ronald talked his department store employers into building a home-decoration promotion around abstract art. The seven participating artists began discussing the possibility of gaining impact by other joint exhibitions and in due course, along with four other artists, formed Painters Eleven. Their first exhibition in 1954, consisted of thirty-three works by Jack Bush, Jock Macdonald, Harold Town, William Ronald, Kazuo Nakamura, Tom Hodgson, Oscar Cahen, Alexandra Luke, Roy Mead, Walter Yarwood and Hortense Gordon. The show drew the largest crowds in the gallery's history.

American show

During the next five years Painters Eleven exhibited regularly together, as well as separately. In 1956 they exhibited as a group at the annual American Abstract Painters Exhibition in New York, to so favourable a press that their own compatriots were at last impressed. And in 1958 the Quebec artist, Jacques de Tonnancour, arranged for the group to have a show at l'Ecole des Beaux Arts in Montreal. Up to that time there had been no active co-operation between the revolutionary artists in the two cities. The next year, Painters Eleven formally disbanded. Their work of forcing public recognition and acceptance of abstract art was, they felt, done. It had been, in so short a time, a formidable accomplishment.

A contribution to change on a wider scale was the appointment, in 1955, of a new director for the National Gallery of Canada, who had great sympathy for living Canadian artists and who, in his first year as director, not only purchased the work of twenty-six Canadians for the

Gallery but undertook a cross-country tour during which he made 158 speeches promoting contemporary art and the National Gallery.

Almost as though it were springing up in his wake, the artistic flowering that had begun in Montreal in the forties and sprouted in Toronto in the early fifties, now appeared in the west. In the late fifties the focus shifted from two older art centres to one of the most unlikely locations in Canada: Regina, Saskatchewan. In the fifties The University of Saskatchewan's art school conducted an arts series with guest lecturers, those guests being leading American painters, critics and even composers. The two who seem to have had the greatest impact were the late Barnett Newman, an important colour-field painter from New York, and art critic Clement Greenberg, also from New York and undoubtedly the most influential exponent of colour-field painting, or, as it was later called, Post-Painterly Abstraction. Newman's personality and convictions seem to have fired the school's participants with new and more serious ambitions. In 1961, an exhibition called Five Painters from Regina was organised and proved so important that the National Gallery reorganised it and circulated it across the country. Greenberg came to Regina in the summer of 1962, profoundly influenced most of his artist colleagues in colour-field painting.

Coastal awakening

At almost the same time as the Regina phenomenon, Vancouver also earned the attention of the Canadian art world. It was Jack Shadbolt whose powerful personality and effective leadership as a teacher and painter provided the main impetus to the coastal art awakening. Roy Kiyooka arrived in 1959 with his ambitions, New York-oriented work, and through it and the stimulus of his guru presence, broke down the barriers that had tended to separate the British Columbia artists from the main stream. From that time to the present, Vancouver has been given equal status with Montreal and Toronto/London as a major centre of creative activity, consistently producing work of international interest.

This scene has been aided by the vigorous and imaginative management of the Vancouver Art Gallery and by the programme of the Fine Arts Gallery of the University of British Columbia.

These days, in the view of many, one of the greatest contributions to West Coast development in the visual arts is being made through Intermedia — a loosely organised group of some sixty artists who got together in 1967 to form a vehicle for co-operative ventures in related arts; for example, the combination of the visual arts with poetry, dance and music. Intermedia has not simply limited its endeavours to technologically-oriented art. Not only has it contributed to the widening of intellectual

and aesthetic horizons for both participants and audiences, it has stood for a rarity in the arts, creative co-operation.

If Regina as a centre for innovative artists seemed unlikely in the early sixties, London, Ontario seemed unthinkable. But, in the mid-sixties, this is what happened. With the return of Jack Chambers and Greg Curnoe to their home town, a quiet artistic revolution began, which soon became noisy enough and exciting enough to dominate the consciousness of the whole Canadian art world.

Curnoe and Chambers were joined after 1965 by a lively group of young artists, including John Boyle, Murray Favro, Bev Kelly, Ron Martin, David and Royden Rabinowitch, Walter Redinger, Edward Zelenak and Tony Urquhart. This creative group grew to include poets, photographers and film-makers, so that an unselfconscious cross-pollination stimulated the imaginations of all and multi-media collaborative efforts evolved.

Psychologically at least, centennial year and Expo 67 were the climax of the post-war artistic awakening in Canada. The drama had gained momentum all through the sixties.

First there was the Great Art Boom. Its centre was Toronto, since Toronto was where the money was, and it was detected and labelled by the media at the start of the sixties mainly as the result of Harold Town's extraordinary near-sellout show in 1961. Actually, it had been building for two or three years, as the industry's dollar volume quintupled and the market share of non-figurative art, on a pictures-sold basis, jumped from about ten per cent to somewhere near eighty-five per cent.

It certainly looked like a boom. Suddenly, too — as if someone were trying to make up overnight for years of neglect — no fewer than three exhibitions of contemporary Canadian art were mounted at the Commonwealth Institute in London, England. What's more, in the very same year the Department of Transport initiated its ambitious programme of art for the airports of Canada. This project was encouraged to follow the European example of providing a percentage for works of art in all new government buildings.

Travelling jury

It was during the sixties, too, that the Canada Council at last paid off for artists. In 1966, a travelling jury system was instigated. The first jurors travelled across the country, coast to coast, talking to artists and looking at their work. Before this time contact with Canadian artists had been by mail alone.

The Canada Council made some further policy departures by directing money for the first time to art museums and by arranging short-term grants for artists for special projects. Few artists in Canada until the mid-sixties had had an opportunity to meet each other, let alone to gather nationally, but, beginning in 1966, a series