

Bruno Bobak -Expressionist

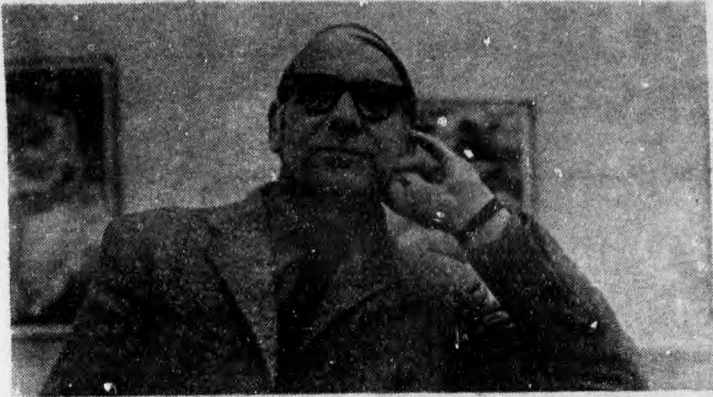


photo by Rudi

by Elizabeth Smith

Bruno Bobak and Molly Lamb Bobak are considered to be the University of New Brunswick's Resident Artists. This is not their true position although that is why they originally came to Fredericton in 1960. Bruno Bobak considers his real responsibility at the university is director of the Art Centre in Memorial Hall. This is the first of a two part article on the Bobaks.

The Owen's Art Gallery of Mount Allison University in Sackville, NB have organized an exhibition of figurative paintings entitled, "Bruno Bobak's Humanism". This exhibition is presently in the west gallery of The Beaverbrook Art Gallery in Fredericton.

international artist

Bruno Bobak has had many other one man exhibitions, not just in Canada, but in several European countries. Of course it all began when he was a child. As he says,

"Kids are always painting. Most of them grow out of it. I didn't."

Mr. Bobak was born in Poland but his parents immigrated to Canada when he was about two years old. The only immigrants accepted in Canada at the time were farmers, so the Bobaks first moved to Saskatchewan, but soon decided the rural life was not for them and moved to Toronto where they remained.

In Toronto they lived in a mixed central European neighbourhood, where Mr. Bobak found the people to be "very gentle, quite creative."

He attended school in Toronto but got out as soon as he could. As he explains,

"I didn't care much for arithmetic or english grammar of that kind of rubbish. I think only people who enjoy mathematics should have to take it.

like copying pictures and doing plaster casts of their hands. Of this experience, Mr. Bobak says,

"Looking back, I feel that kind of education is not a bad one. One was taught technique, how to do things. If one had talent, he certainly could express himself. In art schools today, one is taught how to express oneself, but not any technique. It's like playschool now."

Kids should be given adding machines in primary school - after all, that's what they do when they get out.

I was a school drop-out at about sixteen."

Mr. Bobak had been attending the Art Gallery of Toronto's children's art classes and was given a scholarship from there to study at the Ontario College of Art and stayed only a month. His reason for disliking it so,

"It seemed to be full of girls who were just using it as a finishing school. It seemed to be a school for the elite. Now it's improved and it's one of the best art schools in Canada."

The school that appealed to Mr. Bobak was Central Tech in Toronto. The regime was very academic, but it seemed to have the best teachers and to offer what Bruno Bobak felt he had to learn.

Central Tech was run on the strict class system. There were about thirty people in the class, and missing one class resulted in expulsion. The students did all the conventional exercises,

Within a week of graduation from the four year courses at Central Tech, Mr. Bobak was called up by the Canadian army. After basic training he was sent to England.

"All of the time I was in the army I was painting. This interested the War Artist's Advisory Committee and, just before D-Day in England, I was dragged out of my military unit and told I could be a war artist instead."

Mr. Bobak explained that the position of war artist originated before the camera was invented. Every military unit had an artist to record each battle. Today these events are recorded on film, but the tradition of war artists continues. The war artist no longer has to document events, but can paint anything they are inspired to paint.

Bruno Bobak met Molly Lamb at this time. The future Mrs. Bobak was a war artist with the Canadian Women's Army Corps. Artists were assigned studios in London for six months of each year, and the Bobaks shared a studio.

Jealousy "Paintings are a world in themselves, and words are a world in themselves, the two are so different that you can't express paintings in words. This is the picture of a love triangle," says Bobak.

photo by Rudi



The Bobaks moved to Ottawa after the war. Mr. Bobak arranged exhibition designs for the department of trade and commerce. This work left him little time for painting, so eventually he moved to Vancouver to teach art at the Vancouver School of Art.

Since the army, Mr. Bobak had been exhibiting and selling his paintings a great deal. He intensely disliked teaching and decided to give it up and to support his family on his pictures alone.

He says, "This was a dramatic move - but it worked out for the best. One has to take a plunge in life, for better or for worse. It's a mistake to go through life regretting something."

In 1960 Mr. Bobak was invited to come to the University of New Brunswick for a year he was asked to remain as director of the art centre.

To some, Fredericton may seem a remote place for an artist to live, especially after being accustomed to the artistic environment of Vancouver. Mr. Bobak, however, has a low opinion of Vancouver and a deep affection for Fredericton.

"There are a lot of artists in Vancouver, but unfortunately they think they are the centre of the art world. What is really unfortunate is that they believe it."

"I love this city, I love the climate. I love the gentle pace of life here. We've made some

good friends in Fredericton, and friends are what make a place tolerable to live in.

"There isn't any artistic environment in Fredericton - that's what I like about it. An artist does not really need that kind of a climate. One can still get the exposure without living in it."

Mr. Bobak could not be called a Maritime artist. His pictures are not influenced by where he lives. He paints in England and Greece the same themes and style as he paints in Fredericton.

intense emotions and moods

Bruno Bobak is an expressionist. His theme are intense emotions and moods ranging from depression to the charming and sensuous. He admits that he has, "an obsession with things like loneliness, love, and compassion," although he also says these are not autobiographical. Many of his figures do look like self-portraits, though.

He loves to draw, and ideas for large works develop from many small drawings and water-colours. The major works take months to complete, building up slowly layer after layer of paint.

Some of the original sketches are taken from life, but most come from his imagination.

Colour is very important to Bruno Bobak. The pictures are vivid with bright pigments. Colours have meaning to him. For example, he says that the colour "red" shows passion - love, anger.

Bruno Bobak also works in the woodcut medium, again often with figures.

It is difficult to talk about the subject of the paintings with Mr. Bobak. As he says, "If I could say it in words, I wouldn't be painting. The meaning derived from them is different with each viewer."

Bruno Bobak's work has evolved from a concentration on landscapes, to the mostly figurative work he does now. At the Beaverbrook Art Gallery in Fredericton there is a comprehensive collection of Bobak's paintings, that he terms, "typical of my work". The collection hangs until February 28.