

Montrealers, drew them all as well to the Group's style of landscape and ultimately into membership in the CGP.

Activities in Montreal thus seemed in the shadow of Toronto until later in the 1930s, when the organizing of one remarkable man began to focus those unique characteristics Montreal painters brought to Canadian art. John Lyman (1886-1967), the son of a prominent anglophone family, received his art training in Paris before the First World War, where he made the acquaintance of another, older Montrealer, James Wilson Morrice, and studied briefly with an associate of Morrice's, Henri Matisse. When he finally returned to settle in Montreal, late in 1931 (the expatriate's life appealed to him as it had to Morrice), Lyman was, then, firmly committed to an aesthetic of "pure" painting, free, he believed, of any content beyond its own formal excellence.

The adulation accorded the Group of Seven in Canada amazed him. Its emphasis on the adventurous exploration of the Canadian landscape — which was almost alone responsible for attracting public approbation — seemed to him to have nothing to do with the art of painting, and he knew that the national aspirations of the Group, whose members were acclaimed as the only truly Canadian artists, precluded the acceptance of painters who were as accomplished. "The real adventure takes place in the sensibility and imagination of the individual," he wrote early in 1932. "The real trail must be blazed towards a perception of the universal relations that are present in every parcel of creation, not towards the Arctic circle."

### *Contemporary Art Society*

Lyman advanced his views at every opportunity as an art critic, in teaching, and ultimately, in December 1938, at the first exhibition of the Eastern Group, when he was joined by Goodridge Roberts (1904-1974) and a few other painters from Montreal who shared his belief in formal painting values and his taste for the *École de Paris*. By then convinced that the CGP was incapable of adapting to a rapidly changing world, he called a meeting out of which was born the Contemporary Art Society (CAS), devoted to the promotion on a broad base of a living modern art. Comprising lay members and professional artists — as had been the Canadian Art Club that had attempted a generation earlier to connect with contemporary international trends — CAS held its first exhibition in Montreal in December 1939. Important as a support for individual painters of talent, such as Goodridge Roberts, and for its program of public education through exhibitions of post-Fauve painting, the CAS soon became the single most active forum for the expression of the aspirations of a community of young francophone artists who were developing in the *École des Beaux-Arts de Montréal* and the *École du Meuble*.