



No. 43

ART SCHOOLS IN CANADA

Based on an Article by Kathleen H. Moss in  
the Summer 1947 issue of "Canadian Art",  
Revised, April 1949.

The American painter, Robert Henri, once said, "Art has relations to science, religions and philosophies. The artist must be a student. The value of a school should be in the meeting of students. The art school should be the life-centre of a city. Ideas should radiate from it"\*. This is a high goal, but it is safe to say that many of our art schools in Canada to-day are reaching towards it.

Canada is fortunate in having such schools in nearly every province. They have developed rapidly during the past few years. In New Brunswick, the universities and technical schools take the place of a regular school, and in Saskatchewan much the same situation is found, especially since the provincial university there expanded its art classes into a full department. Nearly all Canadian universities now offer one or two courses; several have major courses in the fine arts and in art history; with few exceptions the various summer art schools are under their supervision, and they also have the responsibility of training architects. Excellent technical and vocational schools are found right across the country. Their art departments frequently offer courses in painting which are almost as complete as the regular art schools and usually much more thorough for the training of the commercial artist.

The first art school in Canada was probably the Ecole des Arts et Métiers founded by Mgr. de Laval in 1676 at Cap-Tourmente in Quebec. Applied arts--weaving, carpentry, furniture making, silver-smithing and sculpture "pour l'utilité domestique et pour l'ornement des autels"--were taught there. The school, staffed by master craftsmen from France, flourished in Bishop Laval's time, but after his death in 1708 it declined, and in 1715 the remaining pupils departed severally for Quebec.

Canadian artists after this early period either were self-taught or went abroad to study. Others born in Europe received their training before coming to Canada. After Confederation a new era of prosperity, of growing cities, and of an urge towards national culture, produced art societies and with them schools which would develop artists at home. Both the Ontario Society of Artists and the Royal Canadian Academy were dedicated by their founders to education and public appreciation of art. In 1876, the Ontario Society of Artists succeeded in opening classes in Toronto. This school, known at that time as the Toronto Art School, filled an important gap in provincial education, and recognition of this gave rise to a clash between the provincial government and the O.S.A. The need for a well-equipped subsidized

\* Robert Henri: The Art Spirit, p. 102.