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HISTORICAL SKETCH

OF THE

Women's Art Association of Canada

Prepared by Miss F. Deeks and read by Mrs. W. D. Gregory,
on the occasion of the 25th Anniversary of the
Association, in the New Galleries,
594 Jarvis Street

TORONTO, May 15th, 1912.

In September, 1887, a group of young women was organized in Toronto into a self-governing, mutually helpful society on the same plan of work and study as that of the Art Students' League in New York. A large, well-lighted studio was opened in the Yonge Street Arcade in connection with the Associated Artists, but separate from them, and in that studio, those young women used to meet and work together—drawing, painting, modelling, and also sketching from still life, and the living model, which was a new step in art education in Toronto.

These young artists carried off the Government prizes and medals at the Toronto Exhibition in 1888, and they were very ambitious to pursue the work that was being done by serious students in Paris and New York. As there was no opportunity for seeing good pictures, or hearing lectures on art, they undertook the initiative in Toronto—and later in other parts of Canada—of gathering together good pictures, and holding loan exhibits. They also held exhibitions of their own work, and arranged musicales, and lectures on art, illustrated with photographs, gravures and etchings.

Friends were invited to spend an hour at the studio on each Wednesday afternoon for art conversation, which was followed by a lecture—the first Wednesday of the month, however, being reserved for talking upon composition, and for criticism of the students' efforts in that direction. Notable among the lectures of this period were two given by Miss Stetson, of Boston, on Greek Art, and which were illustrated with 500 photographs.

Those art talks and lectures were the precursors of the delightful Art Study Club, and the organized lecture courses of after years.

In 1889 (23 years ago) the first Art Loan Exhibition was held in Toronto. Along with the Club's work in painting, drawing, and industrial design, more than fifty loaned canvases were exhibited for the purpose of giving the students an opportunity of studying some of the pictures in Toronto, and of giving the public a chance of seeing them.

Prominent among the loans was a fine portrait of Liszt, by Baron Jukofsky, lent by Messrs. Mason and Risch. It displayed so much of the skill and mastery of resource characteristic of a great portrait that to see it was a lesson in art treatment and art method.

The Club had reason to congratulate itself upon the success of the Exhibition, and upon the excellence of its own artistic work displayed.

So, already, there had been inaugurated Exhibitions, Lectures, Courses in Art, At Homes, Musicales and Sketching Clubs, and the next advance was a proposal by the Director to effect an organization that should not only be a bond and centre of interest in Toronto for Canadian women artists, but which should, through various branches throughout the country, form a wide-reaching circle permeated with the same idea (*courage and purpose in art*) as the Head Association.

Consequently in 1890 the Club was incorporated into "The Women's Art Club," for the purpose, according to its preamble, "of creating a general interest in art, and the encouragement of women's work, and for mutual help and co-operation among its members, and the holding of Art Exhibitions and Art Conversations."

Three Exhibitions were to be held annually. At the Spring and Autumn Exhibitions—which were to be public—only original work done by women, *members* or *non-members*, was to be admitted subject to the approval of the Club hanging committee.

The officers elected were: President, Mrs. Dignam; Vice-President, Miss E. Armstrong; Sec., Miss M. F. Pattullo; Treas., Miss C. D. Osler.

The patronesses were: Mrs. Armstrong, Mrs. Irving Cameron, Mrs. John Cameron, Mrs. Edgar, Mrs. Farrer, Mrs. Falconbridge, Mrs. H. H. Humphrey, Mrs. McPhedran, Mrs. MacVicar, Mrs. Featherston Osler, Mrs. B. B. Osler, Mrs. John Payne, Mrs. Robt. Sullivan, Mrs. Street.

The motto chosen was that of the old Plantin Printers of Antwerp: "LABORE ET CONSTANTIA,"—"By Labor and Constancy."

The active membership consisted of about a score of women, resident and non-resident, the annual fees being for resident member \$10.00, for non-resident \$5.00, and for honorary or associate members \$1.00, of whom there were a large number, including several artists in the United States.

The Club was conducted on the same lines as before. The members worked from life, studied the history of art, and the development of the different schools, and were always ready and willing to give a helping hand to any advanced artist or serious student.

The desultory lectures of former days had been very interesting and entertaining, but now they were considered not sufficiently educative, so an organized course of lectures was introduced, and delivered, from time to time by such eminent men and women as Mr. Bernard MacEvoy, Mr. Byron E. Walker, Prof. Mavor, Prof. Fraser, Prof. Hutton, Prof. Wrong, Dr. Hemsted, Dr. Ryerson, W. A. Langton, Mrs. Dignam, Rev. Charles Shortt, Rev. Father Teefy, Rev. Father Ryan, Chancellor Wallace of McMaster University, Rev. Prof. Clark of Trinity, Oliver Howland, Canon Cody, J. A. Paterson, Mrs. J. W. F. Harrison, Rev. Louis Jordan, Mr. L. R. O'Brien, Chancellor Rand of McMaster, and many others, and they proved to be a great influence in assigning art to its legitimate place in national culture and education.

The Club was doing good work, and it soon became a valuable stimulus and centre, in drawing to a focus much artistic ability that would otherwise have become scattered, or have been lost in desultory or misdirected effort. The Spring Exhibition of 1891 contained work from women in Toronto, Goderich, Brantford, London, Kingston, California, Birmingham, Ala., and New York, and among the exhibitors were Mrs. Mary H. Reid, Miss Stennett, Mrs. J. E. Elliott, Miss C. D. Osler, Miss Bertram, Miss Hendershott, Miss Lily Fisher, Miss

E. W. Armstrong, Mrs. Florence Campbell, Miss Daisy Clark, Miss Sullivan, Miss Vickers, Mrs. Gregory, Mrs. John Payne, Miss Fanny Sutherland, of London, Eng., Miss Ware, Miss Mitchell, Mrs. Carter, Mrs. Dignam, Miss Amy Street, who had just returned from Leipzig, Miss L. O. Adams, Miss McConnell, Miss Phelps, Miss Hamilton, Miss A. M. Plewes, Miss Seager, Mrs. Lovell, Miss Lennox and Mrs. Coffin, and Mrs. Scott, of New York.

At this Exhibition the Club had the distinction of issuing the first illustrated art catalogue published in Toronto. It contained the first pen and ink illustrations done by the members, and which represented some of the work on view. As the allegorical cover indicated, by Labor and Constancy, a new realm had been reached in the flight of the Club, which advance was as startling as it was unexpected.

The Women's Art Club had established a reputation at home for energy and ability, and it had gained so much recognition abroad that for the spring exhibition of 1892 excellent work was sent in from different cities in the United States, and over 200 exhibitors were represented from Toronto, Montreal, Portage la Prairie, Winnipeg, and other Canadian centres. The public was invited to view the exhibit without charge, and the year closed with the substantial financial balance on hand of \$1.49.

The Club was now incorporated into The Women's Art Association of Canada.

Nearly all the women painters of Canada, many of whom are the best known artists of to-day, were enrolled as active members, and the increasing list of patronesses and associate members contained many well-known names. The Society continued to live up to its motto "By Labor and Constancy," and while the work showed the influence of academic and foreign training, it presented Canadian subjects and was characterized by earnestness of purpose, and steady advance with regard to subject, composition, treatment, quality and variety.

No instruction was given—that could be obtained in art schools and private studios, at home or abroad—and the adherence to this principle was the cause at this time of a slight dissatisfaction. A few members, failing to appreciate the Society's broad aim and outlook toward the future, wished to turn its fine rooms into a studio with an instructor, but as the patriotic spirit of the Association had been fostered too strongly to yield, the movement was rejected, and the disaffected withdrew to open their own studio under a newly-arrived teacher, where they pursued their work for about one year.

The object of the Association was to provide—not instructions, but an incentive and help towards self-development; to draw out, independent of the instructor, personal resources, which are necessary to individual and distinctive effort, and which alone can produce growth.

In 1891 the Association moved into beautiful new quarters in the Canada Life Building. In 1893 it affiliated with the newly-formed National Council of Women, and at the request of Her Excellency, Lady Aberdeen, the President read a paper in Ottawa on "Women in Art in Canada," at the annual meeting of the Council; and at each of the nineteen annual meetings since papers have been read and art congresses have been arranged, thus giving the Association a wider propaganda.

The year 1894 reports active branches of the Association in London, Winnipeg and Montreal. Wherever there was sufficient interest to warrant it a branch was formed to carry on, locally, the aims and

objects of the Head Association, which now revised its constitution in order to provide by-laws for the branches, which henceforth continued to spring up, until they were established at London, Winnipeg, Montreal, Hamilton, Brockville, St. Thomas, St. John, N.B.; Kingston, Portage la Prairie, Ottawa (Winnipeg re-organized), Peterboro'; Charlottetown, P.E.I.; Moncton and Fredericton, N.B.; Fernie, B.C.; Owen Sound and Edmonton, Alberta. Representatives were also appointed in Vancouver, Victoria, London, Eng., Edinburgh and the Hague and Holland.

Several branches at various times have been discontinued for lack of local sustaining effort. Two branches, namely, Winnipeg and Montreal, had received special attention and help from the Head Association on account of their being important centres. The former is now known as the Western Art Association, and the latter as the Canadian Handicraft Guild.

At the sixth annual exhibition in March, 1894, there were 41 exhibitors and 105 exhibits, not only from many parts of the Dominion, but also from New York, Rochester, Cleveland, Michigan, California, and much admiration was expressed for the phenomenal progress of the Society.

At this time also the Out-Door Sketch Club was formed with a studio at Weston as a rendezvous, and many delightful hours were spent in profitable employment, continuing the work of the Saturday Night Sketch, which had met for years at the homes of the members.

The Association was now truly national in scope, as was shown by the artist membership of 29 resident in Toronto and 30 non-resident throughout Canada, and through its branches and affiliations.

The year 1897 was a memorable one. The Association arranged an exhibit of members' work at the Loan Exhibition given by the Y.M.-C.A. It affiliated with the Women's Institute of London, and turned its attention to assisting in the introduction of systematic art instructions and loan exhibitions into the public schools, and to a more comprehensive and orderly exhibition of women's work at the Industrial Fairs. The Association prepared a series of competitions for which prizes were offered for designs that would be available for all purposes of the manufactures, and also united with others for bringing about the introduction of technical and manual training and domestic science into educational institutions.

The Association also asked for and received the co-operation of the artists of Toronto in holding "Open Studio Day," for which a committee of the Association made the arrangements on the first Saturday of each winter month. It was a means of bringing the artist and art patron into direct relation with each other. "Open Studio Day" became a much appreciated public movement, and an important factor in the development of public interest in art.

But the most practical achievement of the year, and one that marks an epoch in ceramic art in Canada, was the completion of the painting of the Historical Dinner Set that had been undertaken two years before, for the purpose of encouraging ceramic artists to a higher standard of excellence in their work.

The white china of the set—16 dozen pieces—had been imported from Doulton's, England, (through the Gowans-Kent firm) and as a special favor to the Association the Doulton's stamp had been left on it. Material was then searched for by a committee in the shape of photographs, and drawings, and direct sketches of old forts, battle-

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Sketches
Sketches
Sketches

Open Studio Day

Ceramics

fields, old gates, and other historical scenes, also reproductions of game, fish, shells, ferns and flowers of Canada. A competition was then arranged among the ceramic artists throughout Canada, to whom the work was apportioned according to their individual proficiency in the painting of various subjects. It was a stupendous work, and when completed the dinner set was exhibited in Toronto, Montreal, Quebec and other Canadian cities.

In consequence of a conference with the President of the Association and Lady Edgar, a few members of the Senate and House of Commons at Ottawa met them in the apartments of the Speaker, Sir James Edgar, to consider the disposal of the dinner set, when it was arranged that the set should be purchased, at the artists' prices, by means of a private subscription on the part of the members of the Senate and House of Commons, who should present it to Her Excellency the Countess of Aberdeen, upon her departure from Canada.

The presentation and farewell address, and the response of Lady Aberdeen, were most touching. The Historical Dinner Set now reposes in cases especially made for it, and was placed in the great hall of Haddo House in Aberdeenshire, Scotland, where it is shown to all visitors.

The Ceramic Magazine, of New York, obtained photographs of various pieces, and illustrations appeared in prominent Canadian papers; some of the original photographs have been framed, and are hanging on the walls of this gallery. Two years had been spent at the work, but when it was finished ceramic art had been raised to a standard unsurpassed on this continent, and this standard has since been maintained, as shown at the W.A.A.C. annual ceramic exhibitions.

By this time an important part of the work was being done by the associate members of the Society, who acted on committees in connection with exhibitions, lectures, social functions, and the work that was being undertaken in the various fields of new endeavor.

This was particularly marked during the great Portrait Loan Exhibition of 1899, for the success of which credit is justly due to some two hundred members for their valuable and untiring efforts upon committees, which were engaged from January 1st until May, in arranging and classifying the exhibit, attending to social functions, musical programmes, editing, printing, publishing, catalogues, etc.

The exhibition was undertaken to illustrate through one subject—portraiture—art production, in all its different mediums and methods. Each section was creditably illustrated, in some instances with unique examples, and always with worthy ones.

Collections of the original wax and the Tassie medallions were shown, which included 23 portrait medallions by Miss Andras, largely of George IV, Queen Charlotte, and the Royal Family. These, with the Ross Robertson collection, the Masonic portraits, which with miniatures, lithographs, engravings, etchings, and photography (the latter illustrated from the beginning by silhouette and daguerreotype), photographs, mezzotints, wood-medallions, educational, temperance, Masonic, historical, and commemorative medals, not to mention others, will serve to indicate the scope of the exhibition which filled the large hall and several rooms in the Temple Building, kindly given to the Association for the purpose.

This exhibition presented the greatest variety of methods and mediums in the art of portraiture ever gathered together and it was brought to a successful issue, giving the Society a fund of over a thou-

sand dollars, which has since served as a business fund for financing foreign exhibitions, home industries and other projects.

Influenced by the movement for reviving and developing handicrafts in other countries with which the Association was kept in touch through its President, and its affiliations, the great importance of those industries as a national development, and product, became realized. and in 1899 it was decided to make a still greater effort than heretofore towards their development.

Therefore watching for the smallest beginning in any craft, or home industry, the Association endeavored to encourage it and to build it up by bringing it in some way into public notice. The co-operation of Canadian women with the new settlers also became a consideration, and as a help to the Doukhobor and Russian women in the pursuance of their artistic needle work, the Association took over the work which the National Council had organized for philanthropic reasons—that of sending out to them well-selected material and designs for working.

Also, with a view to interesting the public, and to showing the relative standing of Canada in this branch of industry, as compared with other countries, a notable exhibition was arranged in 1900 of the handicrafts and art industries at which women work, such as laces, embroideries, metal work, basketry, bookbinding, wood-carving, pottery, leather work, weaving, rug making, etc., illustrating different periods in their development in different countries.

This exhibition was the first of its kind held in Toronto, and it aroused an interest which resulted in the organization, by the Association and its branches, of the competitions for the promotion of practical designs. Several applications were received from manufacturers for various designs, notices of the work appeared in several art magazines, and the American Art Annual published lists and information of exhibitions and art workers.

Following this a press and tools were purchased by a subscription of several of the associate members, and the first craft club—the *Bookbinding Club*—was successfully launched, fifty members having since learned this craft. The various other clubs were formed from time to time, including lace making, pottery, wood-carving, enamel jewelry, metal work, gold and silver jewelry, tooled leather, stencilling, etc.

To sustain the interest thus awakened, and to concentrate it into definite purpose through an intelligent and well-informed public has since been the continual care of the Association, in its work towards the ultimate end of arousing the State to a realization of its responsibility for furthering the arts and crafts industries of this country after the example of the Governments of older worlds.

In connection with the hand-book issued by the Government for the Paris Exposition of 1900, important data was gathered for the statistics regarding Canadian women in art, music and the drama, by the President of the Association, who read a paper that same year on "Purity in Art and Its Influence on the Well-being of the Nation," before the Art Section of the International Congress, in London, England. At this time the Arts and Crafts Association of London, England, promised assistance to the Association through interchange of exhibits, and the Women's Institute thereupon sent out to the Association its first foreign exhibits of craft work and painting.

Special efforts were made to exploit the homespuns of Quebec and the Maritime Provinces, and under the auspices of the Canadian Government large exhibits were sent to International Expositions at

St. Louis, Edinburgh, London and Melbourne, Australia; for the latter arrangements were made by the Hon. President, the Countess Grey, who had taken up the interest in the W.A.A.C. of her predecessor, Lady Minto. Similar exhibits were also shown in several European centres. In connection with the Quinquennial Congress, a permanent depot was arranged by the Association's representative, Mrs. Hamstead, with the Society of Artists, Bond Street, London, Eng., at the close of a very large and successful exhibit held there in the rooms of the affiliated Society, the Women's Institute. The Home Industries now became a very important work of the Association.

In the hope of consolidating a movement towards a Woman's Building, the Association now offered to other organizations the use of its fine new galleries and studio in the Confederation Life Building.

It also entered heartily into the work of the Art Leagues, that were organized for the purpose of improving the environment of children in their school life, on the advisory board of which the President, Vice-President, and Miss Muntz were appointed members.

In 1902 the exhibitions of imported foreign pictures were instituted for the purpose of showing the great schools of water colorists, in which Canadian artists at that time were particularly concerned. The exhibitions consisted principally of Dutch, French, German and Scotch masterpieces, illustrating the greatest development of the present-day water color painting. The imported exhibit of 1903 was augmented by the addition of the pastels and cartoons of Willy Sluiter (a large number of which were acquired by Sir Wm. Van Horne), and it was afterwards placed on view by the Winnipeg and Montreal branches.

Foreign exhibitions have since been held annually, and have contained further a valuable collection of Dutch etchers; Walter Crane's entire collection of illustrations and designs, and many typical examples of the leading French, Scotch, English and German painters. The Government acquired a number of the Walter Crane illustrations for the Gallery in Ottawa.

As the growth of the Society has been such as to require rooms suited to its needs negotiations were entered upon to effect the reconstruction of the present building, which was ready for occupancy in September, 1907.

These new galleries were equipped with all the necessities of an uptown club. A tea room was supplied for the use of members and their friends, and the occasional musical entertainments of times past gave place to an organized series of weekly *Twilight Musicales*, held throughout the season, and for which excellent programs were provided, with the view of attracting many to take a deeper interest in the work of the artist, as shown in the galleries, and of the musicians, whose ranks are yearly enlarged by the addition of new-comers.

A reading room was opened and a telephone installed—the gift of one of the associate members for a year—and lectures, exhibitions, the Art Study Club, and various other interests, afforded pleasant diversion, and profitable employment.

A new seal, designed by Mr. Howard, was adopted by the executive, and the spring exhibition opened with a collection of Italian classic needlework, and laces sent over from Italy by "Le Industrie Femmine Nationale" at Rome, which was the first exhibit sent out of Italy by that Society, and consisted of reproductions of famous pieces preserved in museums, churches and palaces.

An event of importance that marked this period, when newly awakened interest was directed toward the revival of Celtic literature, was the production in Massey Hall of two plays, "Deirdre," by Yeats, and "The Money Spinner," by Pinero, under the direction of Mr. Douglas Paterson.

While the Association is doing pioneer work in art education in Canada, and while it offers social and educational opportunities for self-development of a very high order both to the individual and to the community, it has always manifested a spirit in sympathy with the advanced thought and movement of the age, which is in some degree indicated by its affiliation with the National Council of Women of Canada (and thus indirectly with the International Council), the Women's Institute of London, England; The Toronto Society of the Archaeological Institute of America, The Toronto Guild of Civic Art, the National Society of Craftsmen, New York, and by its friendly relations with the International Art Club, London; The Women's Art Club of New York; L'Industrie Feminile Italianae, Rome, Italy.

The direct influence of the Association, by its efforts for the cultivation of taste and the elimination of the superfluous, is upon the *Canadian home*, and its consequent influence upon the nation is easily perceivable.

Its great purpose is not commercial, but through the awakening of public intelligence upon the subject of art, its aim is to stir artistic impulse, educate artistic ability, promote artistic growth and produce artistic accomplishment, a condition which is surely being attained by the united and persevering efforts of its members, "By Labor and Constancy."

A brief and incomplete summary of the undertakings of the Association is as follows:

126 Exhibitions held.

30 Exhibitions sent in sequence to the Branch Associations.

850 Regular Meetings with a large number of special and adjourned meetings.

144 Musicales arranged, the programmes supplied by voluntary generosity of the artists taking part.

133 Lectures given before the W.A.A.C. by eminent men and women.

19 Congresses in connection with the National Council of Women taken part in.

17 Branches established, from Edmonton in the West to Charlotte-town in the East.

6 Affiliations with other societies.

The Association has a charter granted by special Act of Dominion Parliament, is thoroughly organized and equipped for the continuance of its patriotic work for Canada and Canadians in the field of art in its broadest sense, and pays tribute to the press for its generous support at all times, to its friends—gentlemen and ladies—who have never failed to respond to any call upon their time, means or influence, and to the loyal help of its members in their untiring, continuous and strenuous work.

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