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THE INFLUENCE OF FILM ON THE
GROWTH OF CULTURE

An address by the Honourable Lucien Cardin, P.C., M.P., Associate Minister of National Defence, at the closing luncheon of the Art Film Festival and Seminar sponsored by the Canadian National Commission for UNESCO, Ottawa, May 25, 1963.

...Even though one fully appreciates the merits and the high significance of the present event which is taking place under the auspices of the Canadian National Commission for UNESCO, it is a fact that NATO's important session has nearly monopolized the press headlines this week. This could have been a source of annoyance to you, and I can well imagine the concern that may have been felt by the organizers of the Festival and Seminar, who were also trying to attract public attention. Such misgivings, however, were not justified, for your meetings had been carefully prepared and the high standard of lectures and exchange of views have fully come up to your expectations and purposes. You had, moreover, a major asset with regard to public information, since your seminar is the first of its kind in Canada. It is, indeed, the first time that the Canadian National Commission has had the honour to present an art film festival and seminar.

Need I say how pleased the Government has been to act as host to the Conference? Since I was called on to replace Mr. Pickersgill, who is responsible for the main cultural institutions of the federal state, it is not in my capacity as Associate Minister of Defence that I address you. On the other hand, I can hardly speak to you in the name of my distinguished colleague, as I should find it awkward to venture into a field of which Mr. Pickersgill has a superior knowledge, and I should be vexed with myself for betraying his thought. I should like, therefore, to act as spokesman for the Government I represent, and my remarks (I hope you will forgive me for this) will necessarily be very general in nature. Furthermore, I am happy for the unexpected duplication of personality afforded to me by this talk, as it enables me to dwell on the diversity and complexity of the tasks of a modern state. In this wide range of activities, I should like to stress the importance we attach to the development of culture. In order to be truly constructive, statesmanship cannot ignore any area of human activity, and it is normal that, beyond their special sphere, Cabinet members should keep, like the gentleman of the classical period, a keen and constant interest in all that concerns man.

A Universal Language

I do not have to convince you of the high status held by the arts as privileged vehicles of the noblest aspirations of humanity. And among the arts, your choice encouraged the more traditional as well as the more recent media. Is there a language more universal than fine arts and a striking force more persuasive and reassuring than films and television? An unequalled instrument of diffusion, films very adequately convey the most varied messages; and I imagine that is also the case for the diffusion of artistic knowledge. May I offer a modest personal testimony? Thanks to the seventh art, I have had the pleasure - often through the remarkable productions of the National Film Board - of becoming acquainted with some fascinating and sometimes original aspects of painting, sculpture and architecture. I am thinking particularly of that stirring film on Ozias Leduc, the painter of Saint-Hilaire. It is not I, therefore, who would criticize the film as an information medium in the field of fine arts, even if I were to temper this opinion with a few considerations to which I shall return in the course of this talk.

I am now bringing to an end this egocentric digression, as I am well aware of the limited relevance here of my personal impressions as a film fan. They reflect at most the point of view of an amateur and derive no particular significance from the fact that they emanate from a Cabinet member. However, it will be of great interest to you, I am sure, to know the value attached by the Canadian Government to an event like this Seminar and Festival of Art Films. That comparisons could have been established by means of some 50 films from different countries, illustrating the art of the most varied periods, is a particularly impressive and rewarding achievement in the still relatively new field of films on art. You may rest assured that Canada is proud to welcome here a Pleiad of distinguished speakers and guests from all provinces of the country, as well as from abroad, who have been willing to share their extensive knowledge and experience of cinematography. On the occasion of this meeting, exchanges took place between some 30 countries, thanks to the eager participation of diplomatic missions. I should not be surprised if this Festival and Seminar of May 1963 were to constitute a landmark in the history of co-operation between fine arts and films.

An Extension of the Museum

The mission which is yours is laden with consequences in the field of civilization. In his wonderful Dialogue with the visible, René Huyghe does not fear to state that "the visual, its prestige and vast powers must be put to work in order to preserve the inner balance of human life." This view agrees with the teachings of depth psychology and with the objectives of modern states, which aim at the material and moral welfare of their citizens and seek all ways to tighten the bonds of brotherhood between men. Knowledge of the arts throws indeed some very interesting light on the evolution of peoples and civilizations, and in this perspective I see art films as a marvellous extension of the museum and an instrument whose potential must be used to a maximum.

The democratization of culture corresponds to a basic need, and one can observe, on a universal scale, a growing interest in arts. If, in a modern state, art must be the property of all citizens, it behooves the specialists, in the first place, to devise the most appropriate ways of reaching that goal. By sharing your experience on the various levels of film production, film acquisition and distribution, you are able to establish rational plans for the development of artistic resources. You are the advisers of the state, which relies on your valuable co-operation for a better development of culture and, in the particular field with which we are at present concerned, for a wider spreading of art knowledge through audio-visual methods.

Getting through to the Public

I shall not conceal the fact, however, that, in my humble opinion, this objective is of a colossal nature and unattainable on a short-term basis in spite of the considerable effort which is now being put forth. While it is conceivable, for instance, to increase significantly the number of "museophiles", a class of people among whom are recruited the most enthusiastic art-film lovers, and to widen the circulation of films in cultural or educational institutions, the day seems far off when one will truly be able to reach the man in the street, or in the country, that anonymous crowd which must be won over patiently. That is why I think that art films, which are just emerging from their "heroic period," should use not an elementary language but one that is characterized by the utmost simplicity. I know you are perfectly aware of the vast challenge to be taken up and are searching for the means best suited to convey your message. As an example, may I mention here an experiment made along that line? Very recently, the NFB undertook this painstaking approach to the public with a film on the painter Paul-Emile Borduas. In the hope of introducing the spectator into the confusing world of abstraction, the film proceeded from the known to the unknown and strictly followed a chronological sequence. The public will, in the last resort, decide if the experiment was successful and if the film transcended the "silverscreen." During its première in Montreal, I can assure you that it was warmly received by the public, perhaps precisely on account of that direct and simple approach.

But it is not my business to enter a debate outside the scope of my knowledge, which you can successfully solve. I wish only to point out the accessibility of art films to the general public, and I remain convinced that popularization and quality do not exclude one another. On the contrary.

Co-operative Planning

Now, I should like to assure you that your objectives are borne in mind by the Government. I shall dwell here on what some people call "perspective," which is nothing else but a rational anticipation and a wise utilization of years to come. It is undeniable that efficient action can only be ensured by a continuing co-operation of all intermediate bodies, the specialists and the state. And one cannot insist too much on the responsibility of the state, which is, in the last resort, the co-ordinator and the determining factor of social and cultural progress in modern society. In this spirit, the most practical instrument available to the state exists under the name of planning or, if one prefers a less radical term, orientation. To develop rational plans which

necessarily cover a rather long period, the co-operation of specialists such as yourselves is indispensable. In the present stage of human evolution, the role of chance is getting smaller every day. This can be observed daily, not only in laboratories but also in administration. And one of the surest ways to make the best possible use of resources, be it in the field of economy or culture, is to develop programmes of wide scope. It might be thought, at first, that the arts, owing to the individualism and freedom which are the hallmarks of their highest manifestations, cannot be placed under the rule of "plans". That is true of creation. Art councils do not engender genius, although they often promote its expression. In the end, a plan keeps all its value in the development of artistic capital if it is true, as can be proven by the body under whose auspices you are gathered, that the moral and intellectual development of humanity must be organized to a large extent.

Role of UNESCO

The activity of an organization such as UNESCO in the spread of culture is submitted to a strict working plan, which is gradually expanding, thanks to the active co-operation of its members, who multiply initiatives of the type of your Festival and Seminar of Art Films. As a member of UNESCO, Canada encourages the diffusion of the art masterpieces of the world by distributing its publications. Prominence is also accorded by your organization to the development of educational aids such as films, which contribute to a better knowledge of the plastic arts and help to intensify the exchange of ideas and information. By endeavouring to interest as large a public as possible in the various fields of arts and humanities, you are aiming at a dual objective: to enable all men to take part in the cultural life of the community and to help everyone to appreciate the artistic inheritance of man, thereby ensuring the development of mutual respect and understanding between nations.

Originality of Canada

There is no task more directly related to your objectives or more necessary to the development of international co-operation with regard to culture than the collecting and dissemination of information. In technical fields like that of art films, specialists must accumulate facts and documents before they can plan and carry out their projects. A gathering like yours, by the inventory it takes, by the exchanges it promotes and by the mine of information it uncovers, eminently favours the cultural action of the state. It is, of course, by encouraging initial action at the national level that UNESCO may attain its objective. A look at Canada reveals that the originality of this country resides mainly in the coexistence of two cultures that hold a rank of prestige in Western civilization. The development of these two cultures, which stimulate each other and have been referred to lately by the neologism "biculturalism", requires the equality of and complete respect for the two great sources of humanism which constitute our inheritance. The contribution of other ethnic groups should not be neglected.

A mosaic with two predominating colours but tinted with shades and hues borrowed from many different cultures, Canada promotes the development of arts as one of the most valuable factors of unity in diversity. The Quebecker who discovers British Columbia through the works of Emily Carr, the

Vancouverite who becomes acquainted with Quebec through the eloquent paintings of Jean-Paul Lemieux, are better able, assuredly, to hold a dialogue and to appreciate the values of their respective traditions that form - let us not forget it - a common inheritance.

Art as Cement

If one considers the present effulgence of Quebec, one must recognize that much of the credit is to be given to Quebec artists. For the past 20 years, Canada has seen a great development in the field of arts, but it is not untrue to say that a good part of our prestige has been brought by the artists of Quebec. I further believe that art constitutes the most precious cement that can unite nations and, in our case, strengthen the ties of the two major ethnic groups. The Torontonians, the residents of Winnipeg, the citizens of Moncton or of Montreal can discover the common points which draw them closer together; they can define their identity as Canadians more easily by being in contact with works of art than through any other way. The success of a Riopelle and the achievements of a Harold Towne constitute, on the national as well as the international level, self-assertions of which Canada can be justly proud.

The art film which helps our nationals to acquire a better knowledge of their own artistic wealth can also bring to Canadians a fraternal message from other countries. During the next season, thanks to a travelling exhibition of the National Gallery, Picasso will be, to the hundreds of thousands who will visit museums, something more than a name to be used as a handy designation for modern art. To a still greater extent than these exhibitions, films can reach huge audiences. Until now, films on art have been only a sub-section in the general category of cultural films. In the future, it will perhaps be appropriate to make a sharper distinction and to intensify the specific distribution of these films. I am inclined to believe that more could be done for the diffusion of films on art. Nothing should hamper such diffusion, provided that the general public is not frightened away by demonstrations which are too technical or too austere and provided the best way is found to reach the average spectator.

This Seminar and Festival is a proof of an ever-growing interest in art. While it is true that the responsibilities of the state imply the realization of many other objectives of vital interest, I am ready to acknowledge that an answer must be given immediately to the needs which were frankly and clearly stated by the specialists gathered at this 1963 meeting.

I agree, therefore, in principle to the wishes you expressed and I shall put before my colleagues in the Government the resolutions adopted at the conclusion of this conference with regard to the creation of an information centre which would possess a unique and detailed catalogue of new productions, Canadian or foreign, in the field of art films. This initiative would result in a better integration of art films within the Canadian distribution network. You agree that, in fact (and one should praise here the wonderful work of the Canadian Film Institute), this centre does already exist, but you wish to assure its development. I fully endorse your suggestions, so true is it that the diffusion of arts holds a unique, inalienable and predestined place in the upkeep and development of civilization.

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