

## *Creating Memory: A Guide to Outdoor Public Sculpture in Toronto* By John Warkentin

David Crombie

---

Volume 102, Number 2, Fall 2010

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1065592ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1065592ar>

[See table of contents](#)

---

Publisher(s)

The Ontario Historical Society

ISSN

0030-2953 (print)

2371-4654 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

---

Cite this review

Crombie, D. (2010). Review of [*Creating Memory: A Guide to Outdoor Public Sculpture in Toronto* By John Warkentin]. *Ontario History*, 102(2), 251–253. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1065592ar>

ratization, bringing culture to smaller communities across Canada? Jennings presents this as an ongoing theme of the book, manifest first in the conflict between Hamilton Southam and his counterpart in government, Gérard Pelletier. Making the NAC into a centre of excellence implied that its greatest impact would be felt in the Ottawa region, which seemed to violate both the regional imperative in Canadian governance and the democratizing impulse. In a fascinating dissection of the rarefied world of Ottawa's elites, Jennings sheds light on the degree to which the NAC became a kind of private playground for the region's high rollers. She observes that a "culture of 'freebeeism'" (p. 160) pervaded the capital. Many powerful people objected to the NAC's relentless calls for public money, but they also took for granted their constitutional right to fine meals and cheap tickets to the best performances if there were clients, foreign dignitaries, or out-of-town relatives to entertain. The NAC's catering arm almost always ran a deficit, so in a very real sense taxpayers across Canada were being asked to pay so that Ottawa's glitterati could enjoy the high life on the public tab.

*Art and Politics*, then, tells an important story, both in and of itself and as representative of the larger themes in the his-

tory of Canadian culture. It does, however, bear the hallmarks of an "official" history of the facility. It is full of names, far too many for the reader to digest; it is almost as if Jennings could not bring herself to leave anyone out, even if their connection to the NAC was a single appearance. Perhaps the same impulse was behind the rather gratuitous inclusion of a colour wedding portrait of *maestro* Pinchas Zukerman and cellist Amanda Forsyth. In general, Jennings tends to be too even-handed and reluctant to offer criticism. At certain times in its history, the NAC has been appallingly badly run (viz. six CEOs in three years) and many of its problems can be traced back to the shortcomings of various senior managers. But even those who nearly succeeded in running the facility into the ground get no more than a gentle slap on the wrist. *Art and Politics* is heavily based on interviews with NAC insiders, past and present, and one senses that Jennings has tried a little too hard to avoid bruising fragile artistic egos. A more critical writer might have been tempted to ask whether the NAC has survived as a vibrant cultural hub not because of the efforts of successive management teams, but in spite of them.

Jonathan F. Vance  
The University of Western Ontario

## *Creating Memory: A Guide to Outdoor Public Sculpture in Toronto*

By John Warkentin

Toronto: Becker Associates, in association with The City Institute at York University, 2010.  
xii + 347 pages. \$32.50 softcover. ISBN 978-0-919387-60-7 <[www.yorku.ca/city](http://www.yorku.ca/city)>

For walkers, strollers, cyclists, city-lovers and history buffs, John Warkentin's *Creating Memory* is an extraordinary gift. It is a treasure trove of information revealed through the profiling

of over 600 public sculptures that grace Toronto's streets, parks and special places. It is also an excellent interpretive account of how these totems of memory and message "fit into the fabric" of the city and contrib-

ute to the telling of Toronto's story. The author invites us to join him and explore these riches for ourselves. "To get the feel of Toronto," he writes, "there is nothing like riding the buses through different parts of the city, observing people, the streets and buildings, getting off the bus, walking short or long distances to search for a sculpture in areas you don't know well, and placing it within its geographical context." (p. xii)

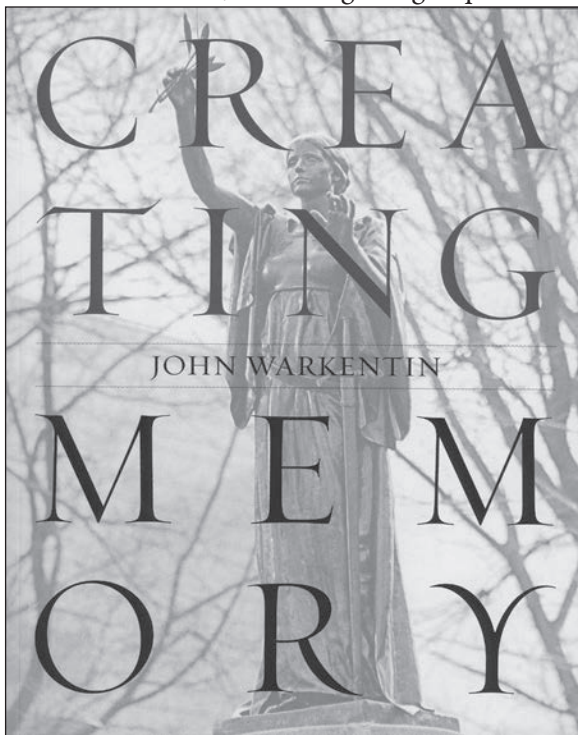
Professor Warkentin also places Toronto's sculptures and public art in a national context by comparing its experience with that of other Canadian cities. He notes Montreal's distinct advantages in being able to cradle its monuments in the lovely *places* and *terrasses* of its historic street-scapes and celebrating the fruit of creative ten-

sion between two major cultures vying for presence and meaning. This he contrasts with the constraints imposed on Toronto by the practical though unrelenting rigidity of the grid pattern of its streets. He lauds Vancouver's extensive range of public art, the imagination that comes from attentiveness to local, aboriginal and environmental interests and the success of urban public policies designed to encourage the development of civic artistic expression. Toronto's public art, however, does not seem to offer

as coherent or epic a story of the city's origins, collective history or heroic figures in as compelling a way as places such as Quebec City. "Rather," he writes, "in Toronto public art relates much more strongly to ordinary people and reflects everyday life. Public sculptures in Toronto are markers that evoke memories of forbearers of immigrant groups, of economic growth and

the evolution of public infrastructure." (p. 303)

Though it is not the main thrust of his book, Professor Warkentin does not neglect the sculptors themselves. In a brief but informative essay, he touches on the contributions of many of the over 320 artists who have contributed to Toronto's sculptural inventory since 1870. He honours the works



of such early artists as Hamilton MacCarthy, Emanuel Hahn and Walter Allward; Elizabeth Wyn Wood, Florence Wyle and Frances Loring in the early to mid-twentieth century; and Sorel Etrog, Gerald Gladstone, Michael Snow, Maryon Kantaroff, William McElcheran and many others up to the present. He also recalls the many incidents of vigorous public debate that greeted their works, reflecting not only differences in opinions and tastes but also the dichotomy often existing between public

and professional perspectives. The sharpness of these public discussions he observes has been muted by familiarity and the passage of time.

In *Creating Memory* Toronto's sculptures are organized into sixteen topic categories, then located geographically in eight districts, clustered around three major and a number of minor axes across the whole of the city. This approach allows the author not only to profile the individual monuments but also to offer some coherence by relating them to important themes in Toronto's history. The topics include the founding of Toronto, natural heritage, economic development, warriors and conflicts, imperial relations, human diversity and community, political and civic tradition, education, religion, artists and athletes—among others.

In his conclusion, Professor Warkentin seizes the opportunity to offer some thoughts on what is missing in Toronto's sculptural inventory. He remarks on the surprising dearth of monuments commemorating great national events and achievements and laments the meager appreciation—almost to the point of absence—of First Nations people and their leadership. “Toronto has forgotten its early aboriginal

roots,” he writes. (p. 308) Missing also is any significant celebration of the exploits of many European and Euro-Canadian explorers such as Samuel de Champlain, Alexander Mackenzie, David Thompson, John Franklin and Vilhjalmur Stefansson. The accomplishment of responsible government and the contribution of reformers like Robert Baldwin and Louis-Hippolyte Lafontaine; the building of transcontinental railways and the saga of the development of health and medical care: these are amongst the list of achievements, persons and events that Warkentin argues still await their due sculptural recognition as significant threads in Toronto's story.

It is a fair comment that Toronto too often suffers from an ignorance of its own past and fails to appreciate that history is always at work whether we are paying attention or not. John Warkentin's book is an excellent addition to other current attempts to rectify this state of affairs. By providing an accessible framework to explore these monuments, *Creating Memory* lays a path for each of us to discover Toronto's unique narrative with new eyes.

David Crombie  
Toronto