

## Miller Brittain — A Memory

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[See table of contents](#)

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(The following is an excerpt from the catalogue accompanying the Miller Brittain Exhibition, currently touring Canada)

# MILLER BRITTAIN—A MEMORY by Luke Rombout



When I first met Miller in the summer of 1954 he was, in retrospect, at the height of his career. He was having shows in New York, gaining a reputation in Canada, painting well, and as the cliché goes "living a full life". His wife Connie was then still living and I have seldom seen two people who so beautifully complemented each other. They were both quite disorganized individuals, living in rather small quarters on Chipman Hill in Saint John. The interior of their apartment was 17th century Jan Steen—a rich conglomeration of objects, food, furniture, books and clothing all strewn in volume and everywhere. There was or existed a most comfortable atmosphere and it was a good place to be. The kitchen had to be climbed into, so to speak, and Connie who was a fabulous cook, would prepare her meals in this chaos ... dinner was usually served at midnight. It was in those days a happy place with friends going in and out all day and well into the night. Their daughter Jennifer, precocious and then three years old, would be the first to invite people in "... and have a Bloody Mary with us."

Miller's studio was a few blocks away and his quarters there were, not sur-

prisingly, a duplication of his rambling household. Paintings, drawings, sketches, and art materials were strewn all over the place. A colourful mosaic on the floor consisted of hundreds of empty beer containers. Miller would come and go to his studio as he saw fit—his sense of time was his own. Once in the studio he spent long and hard working hours. Connie responded to his work like few people I know. She understood his vision completely, with intuition and compassion. In addition she looked after Miller's exhibition enquiries, his one-man shows and saw to it that the works were titled and suitably framed. Miller relied upon her comments only—he fully trusted and valued her taste and judgment—they were partners in his work.

Miller, who stood only about five feet four, was slightly built with a handsome engraved face. He commanded attention almost everywhere he went, either on account of his clothes, which were colourful, his gestures, which were energetic, or his speech which was slow and drawling, almost Southern. He was intelligent, well read, and possessed great retention. He quoted well and from wide sources in almost every conversation while he usually talked about people, events or places in the minutest details; he loved conversation. Walter de la Mare was one of his favourite poets and some of Miller's drawings are based upon the poems. He knew the Bible like a clergyman although he was during most of his life a somewhat unorthodox religious person. Not until two years before his death did he

*Ci-contre: Two standing figures, 1963. Pastel et gouache.*

*Ci-dessous, à gauche: The sculptor, 1955. Huile.*

*Ci-dessous, à droite: And God made the two great lights, 1950. Pastel et gouache.*

