

**Winifred Petchey Marsh, *People of the Willow: The Padlimiut Tribe of the Caribou Eskimo*. Toronto, Oxford University Press, 1976. 63 pp., illus., \$9.95**

Peter Larisey

Volume 5, Number 1, 1978

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1077327ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1077327ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

UAAC-AAUC (University Art Association of Canada | Association d'art des universités du Canada)

ISSN

0315-9906 (print)

1918-4778 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Larisey, P. (1978). Review of [Winifred Petchey Marsh, *People of the Willow: The Padlimiut Tribe of the Caribou Eskimo*. Toronto, Oxford University Press, 1976. 63 pp., illus., \$9.95]. *RACAR : Revue d'art canadienne / Canadian Art Review*, 5(1), 69–70. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1077327ar>

The early works discussed by Gagnon include several commissions for church decoration both in Canada in collaboration with Ozias Leduc, and in France in contact with Maurice Denis. We even see some easel paintings of religious subjects, such as *La Fuite en Égypte* of 1930. Not generally known, these early works help us to situate Borduas properly in his cultural context and to throw into even greater relief the impressive development of his art. Gagnon's full monograph on Borduas is due in 1978 and will certainly deal with the necessary biographical dimensions of the artist's life; until then the present book offers the best survey of Borduas's work.

Of the painters treated in these three studies, William G.R. Hind (1833-89) is the least familiar to students of Canadian art. Almost nothing is known about the artist himself, and, as Russell Harper points out, 'a study of his life and accomplishments must be based on the many surviving small paintings and sketches, and on about a dozen meagre, contemporary published references.' Harper brings together all of the available chronological and biographical data, as well as observations on the social and cultural pressures affecting Hind's life and art. These he relates to keen formal and stylistic analyses of the works. He also seeks out attitudes

of the artist that are both hidden and revealed in the works themselves. Harper's patience and care have produced a fascinating study (Fig. 1).

Hind came to Canada from England in 1851. He settled in Toronto, where his brother, scientist Henry Youle Hind, had lived since 1848. Hind became a 'Drawing Master' and painted well, but was exhibited poorly. In 1861, after a return trip to England, he took his first journey into the Canadian wilderness, on a government-sponsored trip up the unexplored Moisie River, north of Sept-îles, into Labrador. The trip took six weeks, and more than one hundred works (in pencil, watercolour, and oil) survive, some of them reproduced as chromolithographs and woodcuts in the published report of the excursion.

Hind's second trip, begun in 1862, was with about 150 'Overlanders,' would-be prospectors trekking across the continent to the Cariboo gold fields. Hind's pictorial record begins at Fort Garry and extends — in sketchbooks and larger watercolours — through the Rockies to Victoria. Hind lived in Victoria for the next few years, painting and sketching in the nearby gold-mining areas; in 1870 he was a resident of the Red River Colony at Fort Garry. While there, he prepared a series of illustrations of Indian life for the *Illustrated London News*, only two of which were published.

Later in 1870, Hind travelled to the Atlantic Provinces, where he spent the rest of his life. He apparently abandoned painting as a career, and worked for the Intercolonial Railway, probably as a draughtsman. One small sketchbook (of 1876) and a few drawings of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick villages and towns survive.

Harper's contribution to our knowledge of Hind will be definitive until new documentation comes to light. In this, his second publication on the artist, Harper weaves the results of his research and his seasoned observations on the paintings and on the artist's elusive personality into a very readable and satisfying account.

PETER LARISEY  
Carleton University  
Ottawa

WINIFRED PETCHEY MARSH *People of the Willow: The Padlimiut Tribe of the Caribou Eskimo*. Toronto, Oxford University Press, 1976. 63 pp., illus., \$9.95.

To date, only a few people have seen or heard about Winifred Petchey Marsh's excellent work. Marsh came from England to the Canadian Arctic in 1933 as the bride of the Anglican missionary, the Reverend Donald Ben Marsh. Although she considered her main work to be helping in the care of the mission, she also began to paint Arctic flora and beadwork designs. One day, a Danish archaeologist who was visiting asked her why she was not painting the local people. The watercolours illustrated in the present volume are a result of this inspiration (Fig. 1).

The book contains three sections. The first, an introduction by the artist, describes some aspects of life in the Arctic and the conditions under which the paintings were done. She includes a map of the western shore of Hudson Bay showing the area of the Arctic around Eskimo Point where she and her family lived. This introduction is decorated in the wide margins with ten colour reproductions of Marsh's paintings of various tiny regional plants. The main part of the book, 'Scenes of Padlimiut Life,' containing thirty-three colour reproductions of Marsh's watercolours, follows. The third section, 'Beaded Appliqué Clothes and Ornaments of the Padlimiut and Avilingmiut Peoples,' has ten colour reproductions of her paintings of decorated Eskimo clothing and charts illustrating a large variety of annotated beadwork patterns and designs. One can see from her charts, although one cannot read them since the reproductions are too small and the publisher has not supplied captions, that she labelled these designs carefully.

Only three years or less separate the earliest paintings of Canada's Arctic by Winifred Petchey Marsh from those done by Lawren S. Harris and A.Y. Jackson based on sketches made during their Arctic trip of 1930. The differences between her work and theirs are many. Firstly, Harris and Jackson encountered hundreds of Eskimos and others living in the Arctic, but were not interested in painting them.



FIGURE 1. Hind, *Self-Portrait*, 1876. Harper, fig. 45.



FIGURE 1. Marsh, *Patoongnuya Coming into an Igloo*, ca. 1937. Marsh, p. 39.

Obedient to their nationalist programme, they focused on the forms of landscape itself. Marsh, on the contrary, was interested in the North as a human environment, and the Padlimiut Eskimos themselves provided her main subject. She was by no means uninterested in the landscape, but in her integration of the Padlimiut, their architecture, and their environment, she paints the *human* North.

A second difference has more to do with technique and point of view. Harris especially (although it was a common attitude among the Group of Seven) had a distinctly anti-European thrust to his nationalism, and he tried hard to rid his own painting of European and English influences. Marsh's paintings, however, are in the tradition of the refined English watercolour. In her hands, the tradition is seen to be sensitive to light, colour, and atmosphere, carefully but not slavishly observant of detail, reticent yet warm in observing people, striving for clarity in pictorial composition, but in a delicate manner that makes many of Harris's Arctic paintings look contrived and cerebral by comparison. Marsh's ten years of training and teaching at the Hornby School of Art in England had well prepared her to handle the surprises of light and colour and space that awaited her in the Canadian Arctic.

It should be noted that all of the reproductions in the main section of the book are too blue. *Padlimiut Washday: Drying Skins* (p. 35) is particularly harmed. In the original painting, the long, slender poles used for drying skins are painted in warm browns and greys. Stuck in the snow at varying angles and at different depths in space, they cross and diverge or approach being parallel in intriguing ways. They combine in a delicate three-dimensional composition of dancing forms which contrast in colour with the neutral background of sky and snow. Because of the blue soaking in the book's printing, the browns have lost their strength and warmth, the contrast is weakened, and much of the complexity and beauty of the painting is lost.

The publishers unfortunately give us no indication of the size of the watercolours reproduced in the main section of the book. (They range from  $8\frac{5}{8}'' \times 11\frac{3}{8}''$  to an impressive  $20\frac{3}{4}'' \times 29\frac{1}{2}''$ .) They give us no indication of what fraction of the artist's *œuvre* these constitute. (They comprise most of it.) They tell us nothing of the whereabouts of the works. (Most are now in the new museum and art gallery at Yellowknife, NWT.) The tiny, colourful plant studies in the Introduction are beautiful and intricate. They were painted about life size, but the publishers do not tell us this, nor do they identify the plants in any way. With very little effort and expense, Oxford University Press could have made this charming book more useful to art historians and to the general reader.

PETER LARISEY  
Carleton University  
Ottawa

NANCY HELLER AND JULIA WILLIAMS  
*The Regionalists*. New York, Watson-Guption, 1976. 208 pp., 142 illus., \$35.00.

For many years now the American Regionalists have been victims of critical abuse and historical neglect. The foreshortening of historical perspective combined with the powerful demands of a

'mainstream' has cast this realm of American art into the rôle of a background against which the achievements of the 'forties and 'fifties can stand in sharper relief. The historical and critical profile of the Regionalists are, however, becoming more sharply defined.

The motivation is no doubt partly art historical, with its own generative impulses, and partly also a response to a more widespread interest in the period itself. Within the visual arts, the interest is not simply explained as a need to redress an imbalance, for there can be no serious question of discovering a major reputation for any artist associated with the Regionalist movement. The interest is a necessary one, especially when recent American art no longer needs to prove itself by contradiction with tradition.

*The Regionalists* is a large, handsome, and extraordinarily well illustrated presentation. Built around its large-format plates, forty-eight in colour and ninety-four halftones, it brings together a wide-ranging selection of works from public and private collections. Thomas Hart Benton, Charles Burchfield, Grant Wood, Reginald Marsh, and John Stuart Curry are given particularly generous scope by the illustrations.

The relatively brief text begins with a short discussion of how Regionalism may be defined, followed by four thematic groupings of Regionalist work: 'The American Land,' 'Small Town America,' 'Urban America,' and a somewhat uneven *mélange*, 'Myth, History and Social Commentary.' The text, however, is awkward in a number of respects, and the difficulties start with the authors' attempts to differentiate within the broad category of American Scene Painters the two sub-categories of Regionalism and Social Realism. Particular stress is put on a distinction between Regionalism as the positive and Social Realism as the negative side of the American Scene. This turns out to be something of a blunt critical instrument, and the problems of operating with it become immediately apparent as the authors attempt to explain how particular artists may sometimes fall into one category and sometimes into another. The problem of the approach can be exemplified by the consideration of Hopper and