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Article abstract

Le plus grand défi présenté par la création du nouveau Musée du portrait du Canada, un programme de Bibliothèque et Archives Canada annoncé par le gouvernement fédéral en 2001, consiste probablement à démentir l'idée préconçue selon laquelle ce genre d'institution ne servira qu'à promouvoir sans discernement un nationalisme étroit, ainsi qu'une vision traditionnelle, voire même superficielle, de l'art. Situé directement en face de la colline parlementaire à Ottawa, dans un édifice patrimonial classé (l'ancienne ambassade des États-Unis) auquel s'ajoutera une aile moderne, le Musée du portrait du Canada pourrait facilement se conformer à cette idée reçue. Pourtant, le portrait, qui constitue l'art figuratif le plus accessible qui soit, doit aussi être « démasqué » afin de révéler sa nature interne complexe. Le présent article abordera une étude de cas en photographie et ses incidences sur d'autres médiums, pour exposer les enjeux entourant l'art du portrait au Canada. Ceci permettra de jeter un peu de lumière sur les ambiguïtés de la pratique du portrait et de sa réception, de même que sur les possibilités inattendues qu'offre la création de cette nouvelle institution pour l'art et le public canadiens.

A New Portrait Gallery for Canada: Stacking or Unpacking a National Narrative?

Lilly Koltun, Portrait Gallery of Canada

Résumé

Le plus grand défi présenté par la création du nouveau Musée du portrait du Canada, un programme de Bibliothèque et Archives Canada annoncé par le gouvernement fédéral en 2001, consiste probablement à démentir l'idée préconçue selon laquelle ce genre d'institution ne servira qu'à promouvoir sans discernement un nationalisme étroit, ainsi qu'une vision traditionnelle, voire même superficielle, de l'art. Situé directement en face de la colline parlementaire à Ottawa, dans un édifice patrimonial classé (l'ancienne ambassade des États-Unis) auquel s'ajoutera une aile moderne, le Musée du portrait du Canada pourrait facilement se conformer à cette idée reçue. Pourtant, le portrait, qui constitue l'art figuratif le plus accessible qui soit, doit aussi être « démasqué » afin de révéler sa nature interne complexe. Le présent article abordera une étude de cas en photographie et ses incidences sur d'autres médiums, pour exposer les enjeux entourant l'art du portrait au Canada. Ceci permettra de jeter un peu de lumière sur les ambiguïtés de la pratique du portrait et de sa réception, de même que sur les possibilités inattendues qu'offre la création de cette nouvelle institution pour l'art et le public canadiens.

Perhaps the greatest challenge in creating the new Portrait Gallery of Canada, a programme of Library and Archives Canada announced by the federal government in 2001, might be overturning the assumption that such an institution would be a locus for unexamined, earnest nationalism and traditional, perhaps even superficial art. Located directly opposite Parliament Hill in Ottawa in a classified heritage structure (formerly the American embassy), which is to be expanded with a modern wing, the Portrait Gallery of Canada could easily bow to the prerogatives of such widely held assumptions. Yet portraiture, the most accessible representational art, also needs to be unmasked to reveal its own complex inner character. This essay will use a case study in photography, followed by the implications for other media, to open up the problematics of Canadian portraiture, shining some light on the ambiguities in the practice and reception of portraiture, and also on the unexpected opportunities that the establishment of the new institution offers for Canadian art and Canadian audiences.

Photography provides the case study as its indexical relationship to reality represents ostensibly the most documentary and believable portraiture practice. Questioning its construction is counterintuitive and hence apt to be revealing. This essay will compare portraits dated about the same time of two figures, Louis-Honoré Fréchette and Rudyard Kipling, to pursue this analysis (fig. 1, 2). Fréchette was born in 1839, near Lévis, Québec, and before his death at Montreal in 1908, he had fashioned careers as a poet and playwright, journalist, and politician. This composite of eight photographs of him, with a photograph of his sculpted bust, supposedly marks every five years of his life (as noted under each head) from young manhood at twenty until, toward the end of his life, he is embodied in the toga-clad portrait bust.[1] The intervals of five years are an unlikely actual occurrence, passing largely unremarked due to the uniformity of the ovals. The studios responsible for five of
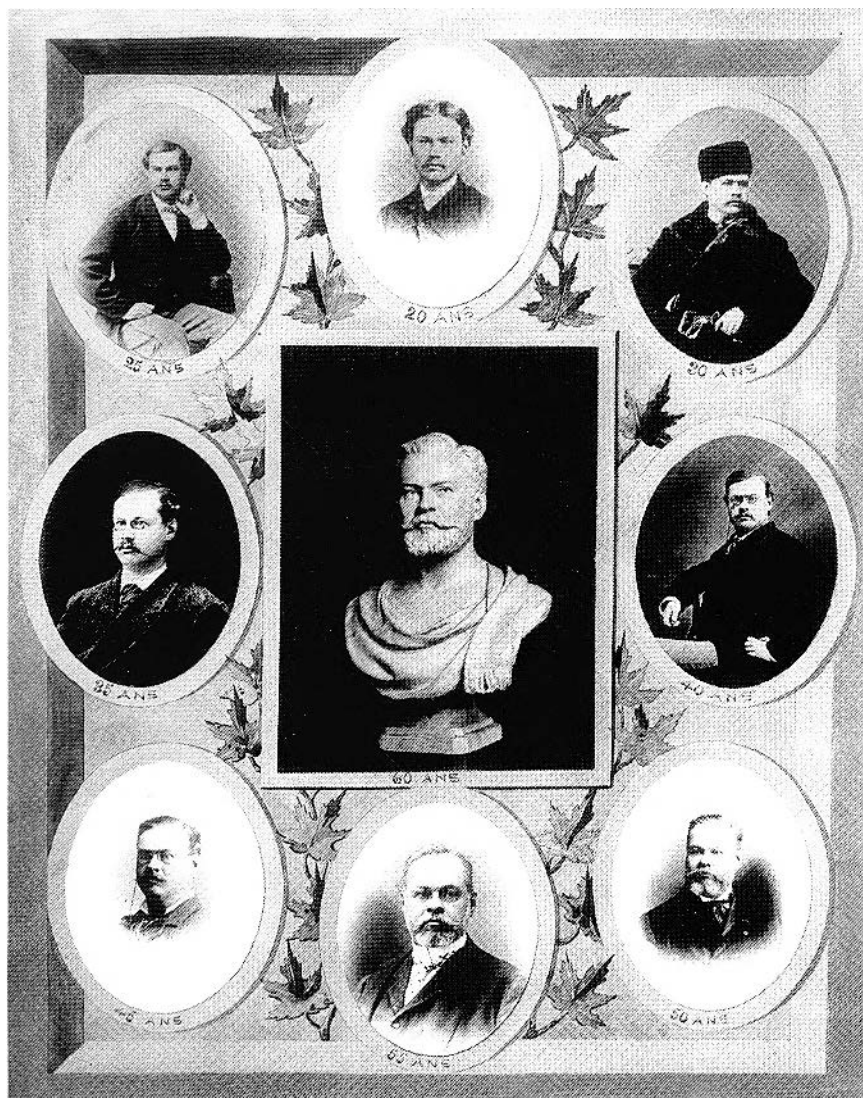
the images are identifiable[2] and it is clear, based on internal evidence such as inscriptions or the active dates of certain studios under specific names, that the ages provided for each medallion of Fréchette are approximations, varying possibly by three to six years from his actual age. Hence, the dates written on the composite image serve a purpose different from exact documentation. Speculatively, the increments moving evenly imply there was an unimpeded, ever-increasing importance and status in the personality, coming to a peak close to or after his death when a sculpted bust (and such a comprehensive composite portrait) was merited. What is there to understand further in this straightforward catalogue of a French-Canadian poet's successful life, apart from how to make eight different portraits taken over forty years look remarkably similar through consistent treatment and the congealing effect of retouching?[3] Is this composite merely typical of Victorian photographs where, as Linkman says, "photographer and sitter conspired together to present an image of the ideal," meaning sitters who were "successful, sober, upright – the very model of respectability"?[4]

But a description has survived of an event that suggests there are at least three alternative exhortations embedded in such a composite, which this mimetic aspect of the portrait both assists and obscures. On 13 January 1894, the University of Toronto unveiled what was intended to be the first of a series of portraits of the university's benefactors "and important personages in the country's history." The newspaper article describing the event preserves a direct witness to contemporary attitudes toward portraiture in Canada:

HONOR THE NOBLE DEAD
It is intended that the spirits of wisdom and intelligence looking down from these walls upon the young faces ... below ... may insensibly mould those faces and minds with their own image ... [W]e would fain hope that [Bishop

Figure 1. Quéry Frères, *Louis-Honoré Fréchette*, 1899 or later. Carbon print, 21.9 × 17.4 cm. Ottawa, Library and Archives Canada, PA-195721.

a sentiment of honouring during an act of remembrance by the viewer. The focus this put on the viewer rather than on the creator or sitter, and how this focus might have determined the form of the work, has not often been acknowledged.[6] The memorializing image would need to resolve the dilemma between the realism essential to inspiring belief in the truth of the image with the expression of universal conventions and qualities essential to evoking this active sentiment of reverential remembrance, an agreement to "honor the noble dead," even among viewers unfamiliar with the sitter, as would be the majority of viewers of memorial portraits.

Fréchette's composite did this by paralleling commemorative sculpture, not only in its central image, but in every image, thereby evoking the same responses with each. The manipulations that make them all seem the same also make them resemble sculpture, well beyond any stillness imposed by the slow technology of early cameras and headrests. A prime sculptural cue that could trigger appropriate traditional responses was the isolated bust format and the derivation of the ovals from the roundels of medals.[7] Other cues were the similarity to Johann Joachim Winckelmann's famous description of classical sculpture as full of "noble simplicity and calm grandeur" of expression, and the youthful, unlined face and monochrome colouring. Also implicit was the link of photography with death, as in commemorative sculpture; for as often stated, photography was intended to "capture the shadow 'ere the substance fade" for the benefit of those left behind: "how unspeakable will be the satisfaction which you will derive from them, as you travel down time's distant course."[8] It was not a record of a moment in time of and for the sitter.

Apart from the sculptural cues, the similarity of Fréchette's undecaying portraits to each other over time could deliver the message that the same values and virtues animated him throughout his career, sustaining him physically as well as morally, and this proved him worthy of admiration even from strangers. There was no temporal uniqueness about each head, despite the dating, and this resulted in the same message being delivered by both young and old manifestations of Fréchette. The young Fréchette prefigured the achievements of the old, while the old

Strachan] looks down [upon the students] today ... saying ... "now all that is left of my mortal body, its outward form and likeness, looks down upon the students ... and my name is become an heirloom and a common bond between them."[5]

The three exhortations are therefore: the urge to commemorate those whom death has ennobled and who defy that death through portraiture; the urge to social cohesion through the "common bond" of the hero; and the urge to self-improvement through the "insensible" moulding of faces and minds by portraits.
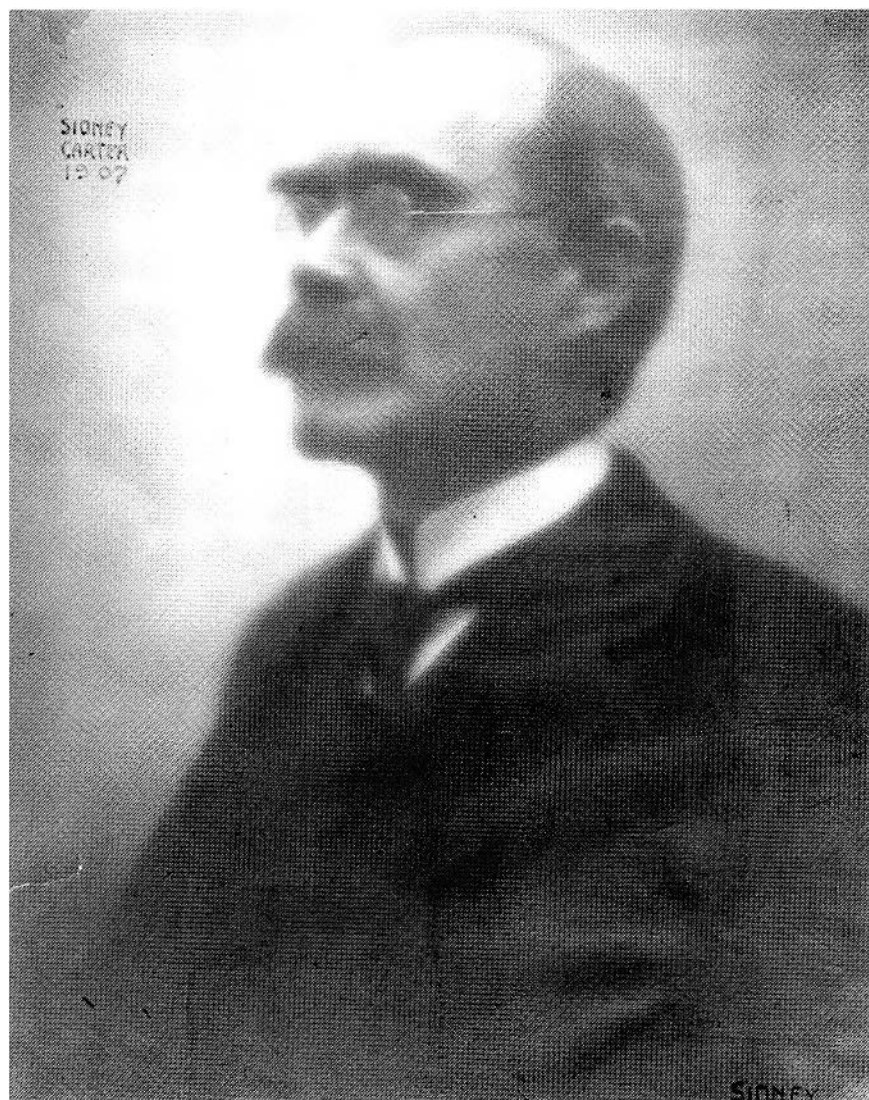
Regarding the first of these exhortations, it is important to distinguish commemoration from the simple documentation of the person, even in a flattering, ideal form. The prime goal of the commemorative artwork at the time (as now) was to inspire

Figure 2. Sidney Carter, *Rudyard Kipling*, 1907. Silver gelatin print, 24.8 × 18.7 cm. Ottawa, Library and Archives Canada, PA-135434.

determined how the young would be portrayed – not caught in his own earlier moment in time, but consistent with his later reputation. This effect recalls Richard Brilliant's remark about Benjamin Franklin, portrayed by the artist Benjamin West as an old sage conducting his experiments with lightning, when Franklin actually published these experiments in his forties: "West was not deterred from inserting this anachronistic image into his portrait because that Franklin was already 'the Franklin' for all purposes of commemoration and portrayal, a virtual icon of the great man."[9]

The second evocation was also dependent on the viewer; Bishop Strachan's portrait was to be "an heirloom and a common bond" among his countrymen. Fréchette's image shares this urge to patriotism and community cohesion. By the end of his life, he had become the unofficial poet laureate of French-

Canadian feeling. He denounced Canadian Confederation by way of a violent verse, "La voix d'un exilé," written about 1866–69 from Chicago. His best-known poem was "La légende d'un peuple" of 1887, which celebrated the history of Québec and the French-speaking people from the explorations of Jacques Cartier in the sixteenth century to the recent Métis rebellion led by Louis Riel. Here is found the potential for ostensibly straightforward "national narrative" to embed argument rather than document in a portrait. The content (that is, the sitter presented as hero through multiple visual sculptural tropes) aligns with the longstanding associations of a genre (that is, portraiture understood as visual exemplar for emulation) to produce an image virtually compelling a receptive French-speaking viewer to respond with a swelling increase in national patriotic pride, leading to greater cultural cohesion. Yet, even as Fréchette gained national hero status for French speakers, he pursued his career in the federal House of Commons and wrote in English as well as in French, being honoured in English-speaking Canada as well, and serving as president of the Royal Society of Canada in 1900–01. Hence, paradoxically, this image also expresses Fréchette's capitulation – a marginal or rebellious content has been rendered mainstream via the rigidly conventional visual coding of the medium and the format (which even includes a wreath of maple leaves). Such a commemorative image would be acceptable to an English-speaking power structure while invoking memories, and memories only, of French-speaking rebellion via poetry.

The third way in which this image revolves around the viewer, after its invocations of an honourable remembrance defeating death and of cultural cohesion, is in its exhortation to personal virtue. This was similar to the way the University of Toronto hoped its portraits might "insensibly mould those faces and minds," and to the way portraits were expected to function to improve a viewer's basic nature, even before the establishment of portrait galleries. The power to effect this change relied on the spectator's religious perception of goodness or the divine presence in God's creation, such as in the fine soul of a sitter. Portraits, indeed art of any sort, were expected to provide that intimation of the divine through the perception of universals

(such as wisdom and intelligence) or of the immortal soul of the sitter, the aspect that defeated death. In 1865, the Anglican Bishop Francis Fulford, a cleric who was notably president of the Art Association of Montreal, said, "if the painter ... is himself impressed with the divine origin and divine end of all visible things, then will he paint religious pictures and impress men religiously and thus make good men better, and possibly make bad men less bad. This is the true moral use of Art, to quicken and deepen, and enlarge our sense of God."[10] William Sawyer, who was both a portrait painter and a portrait photographer in Canada, proposed in lectures in 1861 and 1865 that "the Artist's ... exalting influence upon the mind ... mov[es] it onward 'through nature, up to Nature's God.'"[11] By following the artist in such perception, the beholder was enabled to rise above mere materiality, his own as much as that of the sitter, who took on universal values (such as intelligence, or wisdom) above being a specific individual. Little wonder the sitter had to be presented as ideally flawless. Immersed in religious feeling, the beholder was transformed into a more spiritual and better person. In fact, he could also prove his own pre-existing spirituality through such aesthetic perspicacity. Beautiful or affective portraits, like all art, would evidence less the virtue of the subjects in them than that of the appreciative beholders.

In sum, we find this Fréchette image, far from being a simple history of a man's life through graduated, aging portraits, is actually a complex reflection of the attempt to resolve some profound anxieties: for the sitter, the repeated need to defeat death; for the creator, the attempt to reconcile realism with the divinely and patriotically mandated ideal; for the viewers, the resolution of fears about cultural worth and self-worth. Yet how difficult it is to pin down who is, or are, the sitters, creators and viewers in the Fréchette work! For all its apparent obviousness, who is the sitter? After all, Fréchette did not in fact sit for this last, large, cobbled-together composite, and he was many men when he sat for all the small portraits it contains. Similarly, the identification of a creator is elusive, since several others took the portraits that the firm of Quéry Frères ultimately composed into this work. Finally, who are the viewers – French-speaking or English-speaking? Marginal or mainstream in the power structure of Canada? When looking at this work, do they see art, or history, or God, or themselves? Impossible to say, for the meaning of this work changes for each of these players; final meaning is always deferred. There is no fixed national narrative.

In this, the composite photograph reflects the richly multivalent meanings of pictures, depending on the viewer's perspective – on nationalism, on portraiture. This is made more evident yet if we look at another portrait, created at almost exactly the same moment. If Fréchette was a rebel poet-hero in a conventional frame, Sidney Carter's portrait of Rudyard Kipling shows us a conventional poet-hero in a rebel's frame, but this time one

with whom English-speaking Canadians could identify (fig. 2). Kipling visited Montreal late in September and October 1907; tellingly, although Sidney Carter had opened his photo studio there in partnership with Harold Mortimer-Lamb only in January of that year, this was already the place to which Kipling would turn for an artistic photographic portrait. Sidney Carter, who left a career as a bank clerk, practised and proselytized Pictorialist photography, an international movement beginning about the early 1890s and claiming for itself the exclusive right to the title of artistic photography. Pictorialists, denying anything in Victorian realist photography but the primitiveness of an early technology, expressed instead the moral value of the medium or the style as it made accessible an elemental, even mystical, force animating the photographer as creator. To understand both these overt claims and the unacknowledged subtexts in the Kipling portrait, it is essential first to understand the source and range of Pictorialism's ideology and adherents, themselves somewhat obscured today by a largely dismissive art scholarship.

Histories of Pictorialism tend to define its origin not as driven by a narrative ideology but as almost purely visual and stylistic, a reaction against the kind of photography represented by the Fréchette, which had been widely practised since the 1860s and 1870s. That now seemed exhausted, clichéd, driven by commercial considerations, and without the opportunity for artistic individualism. The new style has been understood as a development of amateurs who, in deliberate repudiation, practised it as "art for art's sake" rather than for money. To prove the upstart proposition that photography was as capable of producing art (that is, of looking like art) as any other medium, Pictorialists mimicked the subjects, styles, and artists beloved in late Victorian painting, printmaking, and drawing – the Barbizon school, japonisme, Symbolism, Millais, Rossetti, or Whistler. Hence, adherents manipulated negatives and prints in flexible media like gum bichromate or bromoil to create special effects, notably soft focus rather than the needle-sharp clarity of professional photography, and they exploited the recent technology of ever more rapid photography to catch ephemeral moments of absorption, thought, or atmosphere.

However more than photographic style was a stake. In line with the powerfully moralizing element of much earlier Victorian work, art in general was still popularly seen as the means to a glimpse of the eternal and the divine. In 1898, *Saturday Night* described an art exhibition as "representative of the groping of the human soul after the ideal (nay, after divinity)."[12] Rarely given weight in considerations of Pictorialism is that it reflected the emphasis shifting in art from an external search or "groping" of the beholder, guided by the artist (as in the views of Bishop Fulford or William Sawyer), to an internal personal search by the artist, guided by but ultimately escaping the

highly attuned and cultivated senses into a perception of, or unity with, the "music of the spheres." If God was implied in the artist's search, it was a God outside the confines of conventionality.

This shift in both art and Pictorialism was as much an expression of the desire for escape from late-century anxieties as a need to refresh an old style. Economic depression and the evils of capitalism are reflected in an article by William Wilfred Campbell, published in the Toronto *Globe* of 1892:

> [I]t is heart-rending to ... see the immense amount of wealth squandered on personal aggrandisement and selfish luxuries and then to note the corresponding amount of destitution, degradation and misery ... Religionists may cry out about the hopelessness of mere humanity as a religion, but it would be better did they put a little more hope into the anguish of the world by putting more of the humanities into their religion.[13]

The reference to "humanity as a religion" recognized that humanism, atheism, and other tendencies were shaking the dogmas of the day, because the accepted religions did not seem to answer the miseries that the author ascribed to "absorption of capital," or monopolization. Atheism was also being engendered, as earlier in the century, by scientific enquiries that every day seemed to open new evolutionary, microscopic and macrocosmic worlds, encouraging as well new mystical and spiritualist movements in reaction. The Transcendentalism of Walt Whitman, Theosophy, and Christian Science had followers in Canada, particularly within creative circles. Wrapping this immaterialism up with photography, in 1903, the Belgian Symbolist Maurice Maeterlinck, who was widely admired in Canada as elsewhere, wrote that "thought has found a fissure through which to penetrate the mystery of this anonymous force [photography] ... and compel it to say such things as have not yet been said in all the realm of chiaroscuro, of grace, of beauty and of truth."[14]

Maeterlinck's essay resonated with Pictorial photographers in its belief that photography could express the creative impulse "to say such things as have not yet been said ... in all the realm ... of truth." It validated escape from a degraded and confusing world by asserting the higher value of the individual's "thought" in pursuit of the ineffable, previously the divine. It was reprinted in the catalogue for Canada's landmark first Pictorialist exhibition, which Sidney Carter (and possibly his partner, Harold Mortimer-Lamb) organized in November 1907 in Montreal. However, it was promptly "gummed together" with the facing page of the catalogue by what Carter called the "chicken-livered secretary of the Art Association" where the exhibition was to take place. The secretary did not want repercussions upon the

Association should the exhibition flop as an art statement. However, it was a success, with five hundred people at the opening and reviews that were, as Carter said, "voluminous, entirely favourable and on the whole intelligent." This brings out another unacknowledged side of Pictorialism. Through searching to express the immaterial, its practitioners were also searching for a new certainty – acceptance by the artistically inclined social elite. Carter wrote that he was particularly anxious about his show "as some of the prominent people here are beginning to take an interest and I should like to overwhelmingly convince them."[15]

So how is the Kipling portrait positioned in this nexus of artistic, social, and spiritual (and, if we recall that Carter had just opened a portrait studio, even commercial) ambitions? A few weeks after Carter took his portrait of Rudyard Kipling in the fall of 1907, he exhibited it (among some thirty other works of his own) in the Montreal show of two hundred and fifty or more Pictorialist images intended to make a revolutionary art statement. Pure artistry was Carter's claim; but was it the entire message of the portrait? Was he not using Kipling to lend public credibility to his own more culturally politicized argument about the artistry of Pictorialism? By portraying and exhibiting elite subjects (and there were others, such as Lady Drummond, wife of business magnate George Drummond and friend of Lady Aberdeen, wife of the Governor-General), was he not co-opting their status to validate his own agenda? Further, by creating an elite event and infrastructure – the art show – which by definition would only be open to or appreciated by those whose souls had the receptive sensitivity of the aesthete, he flattered his sitters through their inclusion. An irony of Pictorialism was its adherents' conspicuous attempt to make converts, while not admitting to any popularizing instincts. Hence the photographs in the 1907 show were not merely on display, but stimulated debate. Paralleling the "moulding" of character expected from earlier Victorian portraiture, they were intended to alter the viewer, engendering in him or her a new or changed conviction about Pictorialism as art, as well as a heightened empathy with the issues of the yearning soul and a truth greater than minute realism so amply addressed by Pictorialist images. That Carter's show was a success proves the level of comfort with his propositions among the members of a receptive audience.

Yet there was additional emotionally evocative content in the Kipling. For despite his being cast within an exclusive context, there was no more popular poet in the British empire than Rudyard Kipling. Like Fréchette, he was the unofficial poet laureate of a people, those of the British Empire, and had taken on a political aura as well as a poetical one. During the recent Boer War (1899–1902), in which Canada had participated in aid of Britain, Kipling's collected works had been sold cheaply in installments by the Toronto *Globe*, that indefatigably

nationalistic organ. *Saturday Night* described his tour in Canada as a "triumph" and reported that "at every stopping place he was besieged." The paper even allowed itself a certain wryness: "It has seemed that in him are embodied not only the patriotism, but every open and secret prejudice of the [Anglo-Saxon] race."[16] The paper also reported on speculation that he might be in Canada secretly to help resolve the problem aroused by the anti-Asian riots in Vancouver that had taken place on 7 September 1907, and indeed, he did address that question when he arrived in Vancouver in October, saying that "the way to keep the Yellow man out is to get the White man in ... Pump in the immigrants from the Old Country."[17] Social upheavals, particularly around the waves of immigrants at this time, were, like poverty and exploitive capitalism, disturbing circumstances of Canadian life that Pictorialists would wish to escape, never reflecting such issues directly in their work.
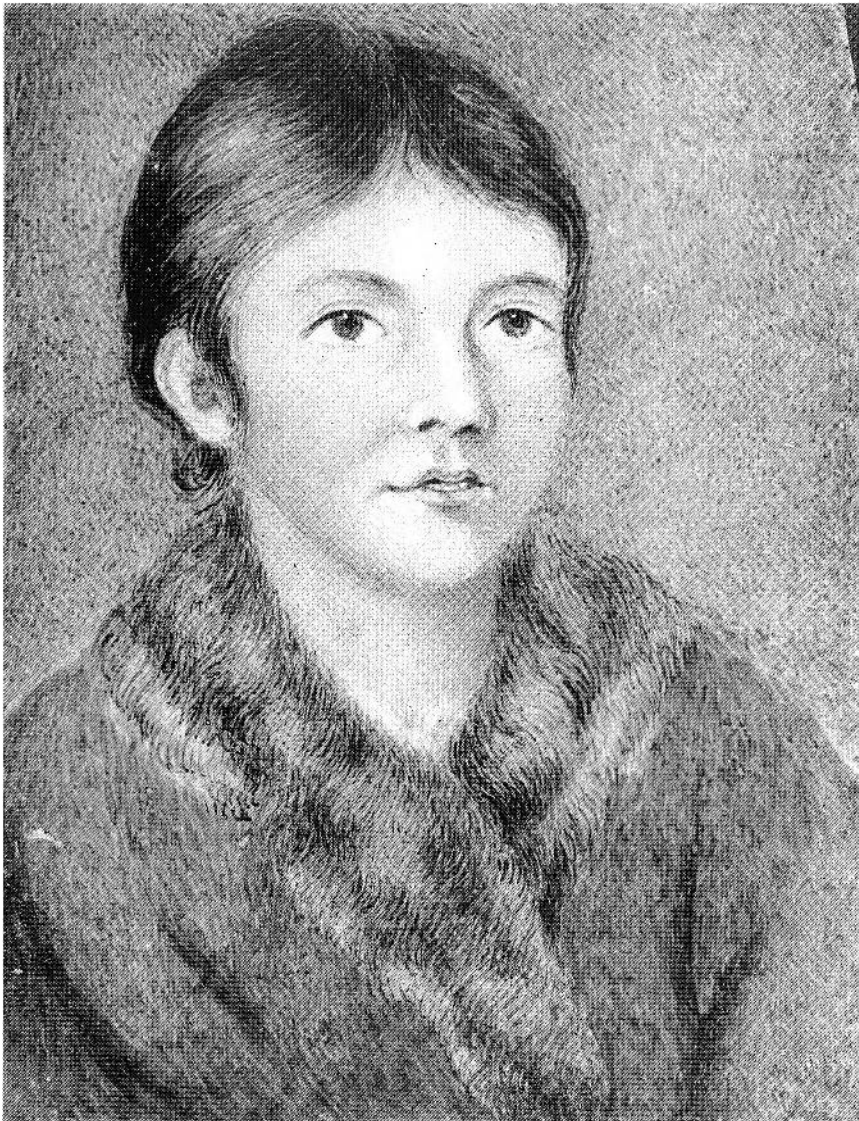
However, Kipling's reputation and the involvement of national feeling would have been inescapable for Carter during the sitting or subsequently for his audience when viewing the portrait. The portrait would be expected to live up to this content beyond any art or likeness, or spiritual "groping," or even personal character, and to express the universal surge of patriotism that Kipling's name alone triggered. The challenge for Carter was to create an image as engaged with this social and political message, understandable by all, as with the style and ideology of Pictorialism, still very new and strange. His solution was to submerge all detail in the moody style and thereby underscore Pictorialism as intrinsically concerned with the inexpressible and immaterial, leaving ample room to accommodate the viewer's own overlay of the heroic. He allied its visual language with the concept Kipling, not the referent Kipling, and then placed his own name and the date, in a manner reminiscent of Renaissance practice, directly opposite Kipling's forehead. This brought instantly onto the picture plane the issue of Kipling as abstract two-dimensional incorporeality, along with the photographer's interpretation of him as artwork and social icon, rather than as deceptively real inhabitant behind an invisible window onto another world. Interestingly, *Saturday Night* also said about Kipling, "No portrait of him looks like him. From his portraits one would expect to find him stocky if short [he was just over five feet tall], but he is not. He is a little, quick bundle of energies."[18] Nor would Carter's portrait evoke such a description. Kipling is almost sunk in facial shadows and anonymity, while a radically simplified forehead (shades of phrenology!) and a decided nose carry the photographer's interpretation of intellectual power and vigour, and hence of uprightness of character and of patriotism. In the Kipling, a rigidly imperial, politically informed message is delivered in a marginal aesthetic medium searching to become elite, partly through validation by portraying such elite subjects as abstracted and immaterial, and

partly by creating an elite infrastructure of art exhibitions, which by definition would be exclusive to those with sensitive spirits.

The hero-worshipping context of Carter's Kipling portrait points up that there are more similarities with the Fréchette than might at first appear from the differences of style. The Fréchette, too, had messages and an effect to achieve, as well as its own two-dimensional textual labelling on the surface. Nor is Kipling's similarity in pose to a sculptural portrait bust, like Fréchette's, without significance. "Broad effects" of soft focus in Pictorialist printing had results similar to the massive retouching in the Fréchette composite: the elimination of distracting detail, the conformity to an ideal, and the emphasis upon the direction suggested for the viewer's imagination. To achieve this, the Fréchette used hieratic patterning, global encompassing of Fréchette's whole life, and elimination of atmosphere. These two photographs, produced at about the same time, confirm the overlapping diversity typical in eras of transition, as well as the debt to constructed contexts which activates the buried, message-carrying role of all images, even the most apparently documentary.

What, then, are the submerged multiple meanings revealed by this case study? What can these two portraits – of Fréchette and of Kipling – offer us regarding the intersection of portraiture and national narrative, so singularly at play in a national portrait gallery such as the new Portrait Gallery of Canada? The first insight is that the selection and depiction of an individual accomplishes something other than the mere documentation of features, and other even than the personal individual moral instruction, by way of the setting up of an exemplar, which was so often claimed. These meanings of documentation and exemplar, which are focused on the specific sitter and the specific viewer, are dependent on broader networks of social assumptions, with deeper roots beyond individual sitters and viewers, to become believable or to work their own effects. These broader networks become visible as individual images are aggregated, brought together in sequences or collections or galleries where they can be compared to each other and placed into the context of other relevant archival material; the groups to which they belong can thus also be perceived. The Fréchette and the Kipling, for example, both place a high premium on imitation and conformity – the Fréchette on imitation of the ancients to position the sitter's reputation among the eternals, the Kipling on imitation of validated art modes to transform a new medium into one with tradition and history by way of association. Both use the established past to define and justify values of the debatable present, an action which continues into history museums, not to mention history books of today. Yet both also cut the social cake a bit differently. Both offer a level of resistance to homogeneous cultural interpretations: Fréchette by represent-

Figure 3. Lady Henrietta Martha Hamilton, *Desmasduit*, or *Mary March*, 1819. Watercolour on ivory, 7.5 × 6.5 cm. Ottawa, Library and Archives Canada, C-087698.

survive death, to be eternal, become thereby externally validated, not subjectively associated with one individual but objectively manifested through the lives and characters of many individuals and many generations. Such values, whether in matters of taste, race, religion, gendered ideology, or nationalism, can then form the unquestioned justification, the metanarrative, for the group's membership and exclusivity, for its discrimination or canonicity. Hence if the Portrait Gallery of Canada were to question the canon, it would need to question more than who is in the canon, which is easy to adjust, but why we have a canon at all, underwritten by unquestioned social values that are believed to be enduringly valid. What happens if, as with this case study, we read Canada's portraits consistently "against the grain"? Are we not rewarded by more depth, more excitement in their meanings? We have already seen that, for instance, Fréchette and Kipling can become not just exemplars of achievement, but also of marginalization and implicit, even explicit, resistance. If we extend this, we may discover that Canada's story is full of such implicit drama.

For example, tracking our conventional national narrative quickly through even a few portraits is to find ourselves tracking lives framed at critical moments by conflicts, even though Canada's history has been characterized as a "peaceful" one.[19] There is Desmasduit, or Mary March (fig. 3), who saw her husband and child killed and was herself brought to the governor of Newfoundland, whose instruction to return her to her tribe was pre-empted by her illness and death. Her portrait, painted in 1819 by the governor's wife, Lady Henrietta Martha Hamilton, is the only known portrait from life of a Beothuk and so carries the tragic weight of the extinction of an entire race, since the last Beothuk died some ten years later. Eugenia "Jim" Watts (fig. 4) was a Montreal journalist who served with Dr Norman Bethune's mobile blood transfusion service in the Spanish Civil War of 1936–39, in which 1,300 Canadians volunteered. After her return to Canada, her activism was undimmed and she was under surveillance as a Communist and social suspect. *The Jury*, portrayed by Duncan Macpherson in 1971 (fig. 5), almost caricatures the faces of those serving at the trial of Paul Rose, charged with the murder of Pierre Laporte, a Quebec government minister during the

ing, albeit ambivalently, the place of a conquered people; Kipling by distinguishing a new class among Pictorialist workers – a mix of middle-class clerks and upper-class sitters – where membership was not based on either rank or money exclusively, but rather on aesthetic perception and spiritual empathy. Both this project of Pictorialist up-classing, and Fréchette's positioning on the inside but without assimilation, can be accorded status as part of a fluid Canadian national identity, making these portraits as important for defining viewers as for defining sitters.

The whiff of variance and diversity, though, does not overcome the reliance of both these portraits on one foundational narrative which they in turn re-present – the continuity of their group and its values through the denial of death by way of memory and continuing influence: arguably a foundational principle of portraiture since pre-history. Values that seem to

Figure 4. Fred. B. Taylor, *Eugenia "Jim" Watts*, 1940. Oil on canvas, 61 × 50.8 cm. Ottawa, Library and Archives Canada, C-039248.

But there is a tougher canon to crack even than a fixed history or a national narrative. Let us turn to Kipling to identify it:

> When the flush of a new-born sun fell first on Eden's green and gold,
> Our father Adam sat under the Tree and scratched with a stick in the mould;
> And the first rude sketch that the world had seen was joy to his mighty heart,
> Till the Devil whispered behind the leaves, 'It's pretty, but is it Art?'[20]

In considering portrait art, we, like the Devil, may disturb our assumptions about what it is, for there is no coherent "story" of Canadian portraiture yet written. Like all new historical narratives, this will be a creative endeavour for the Portrait Gallery of Canada, not a documentary one. It will imagine a new world within which the known boundaries will be dissolved rather than re-drawn; boundaries serve most effectively to exclude whereas the Portrait Gallery of Canada has a mandate of inclusiveness. This has already set Canada's portrait gallery apart from other portrait galleries in the world, for it is not only about great or famous individuals, but about all Canadians, and not only Canadians but all those who helped fashion and who continue to fashion the country. That distinctively inclusive mandate will help to de-couple the portrait from any received definition of portraiture, and even from being based solely on the five centuries of portraiture already available to the gallery in the holdings of Library and Archives Canada. For example, is the assumption that there was no portraiture in aboriginal societies before white contact defensible? What of the expression of tribal identity in an ancestor mask, such as one of the Haida or Tsimshian, with specific tribal markings and the life-like intent of the movable eyes and mouth? Why is this form of ritualized or mythologized portraiture not seen to correspond to the definition of portraiture, even as Macpherson's cartoonish faces are, despite the latter artist's revelation of their melding together into an extraordinarily homogeneous, anonymous, male, middle-aged, white culture summoned for the ritual of judgment?[21] Is it because the western and white world has the power to make the

crisis of the Front de la libération du Québec, or FLQ, of 1970. Since then, we can point to the players in the Oka crisis of 1990 and Canada's involvements in Kuwait, Kosovo, Afghanistan, Angola. This is not to mention the violent strikes in Winnipeg in 1919, the Regina riot of the "On to Ottawa" trekkers in 1935, the two world wars, the Korean War, and the Canadians who joined United States forces to fight in Vietnam. This series of examples is intended to make the point that national canons, such as our "peaceful" history, or the traditional historical role of women, can be read "against the grain" to challenge a prescribed set of fixed meanings to include or reveal a greater diversity of stories and players than we thought we had and even to subvert them, with highly creative effect.
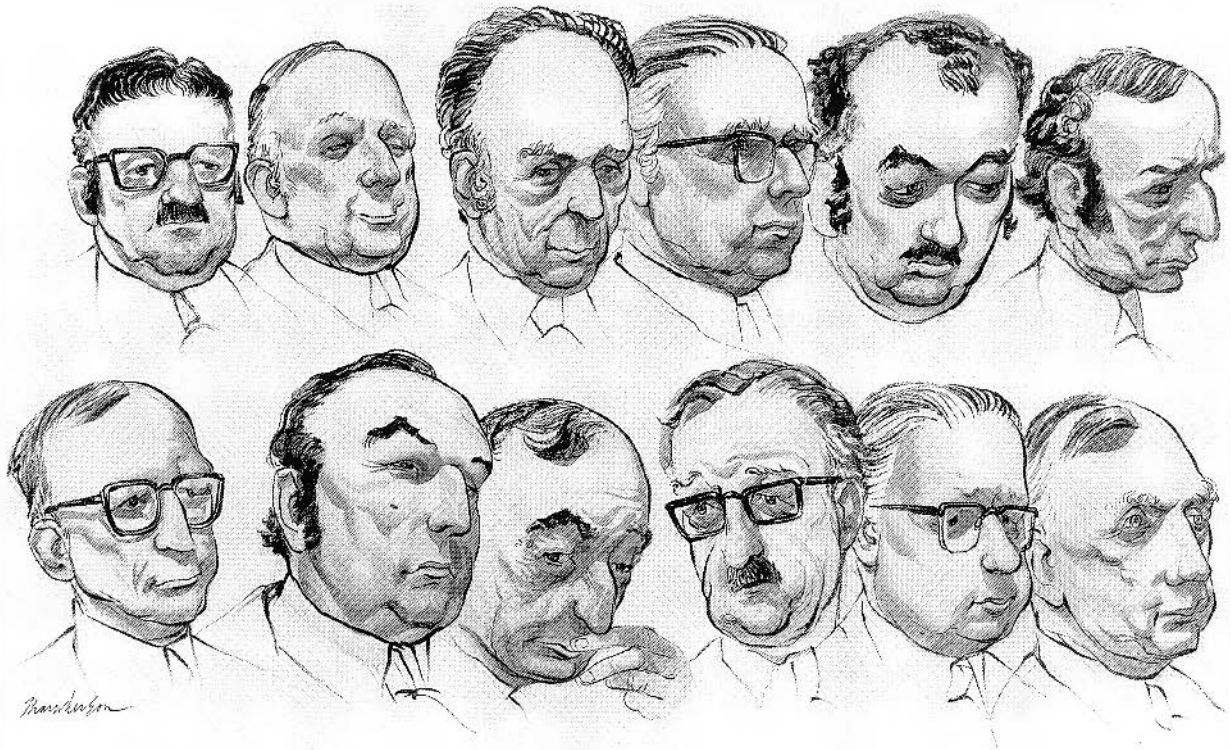
Figure 5. Duncan Macpherson, *The Jury*, 1971. Black ink with crayon and watercolour over pencil on illustration board, 76.1 × 40.1 cm. Ottawa, Library and Archives Canada, C-139531 (Reprinted with permission — Torstar Syndication Services).

definitions, so our constructions of portrayal are unconsciously classified as truths, while those of others are myths and imaginings? Perhaps we think our adherence to our referent must be more "objective" because we so often label the face with a name, while the face of aboriginal peoples bears a communal label. As long as we consider that the totems and masks are not portraits, then the peoples they depict are safely separated, ensconced as unthreatening objects of distanced ethnographic or anthropological study, not part of us or part of art. Here is another narrative due for some fresh thinking.

Or can allegory be a portrait? Marianna Gartner created a mural on the domed ceiling of the Alberta Treasury Board building in 1996, the giant faces and figures representing the population of Alberta – Native, African, European, Chinese. Painted in grey against a brown and blue background, they are derived from old photos, but not photos chosen from known

Alberta immigrants. Rather, some are from early police records kept in Calgary's Glenbow Museum and others are from flea markets and junk shops in North America and Europe. Hence, they are found images. Their original sources and meanings have been evacuated and new meaning poured into them through their transformation into art.

Does abstraction count as portraiture? Arnaud Maggs' self-portrait called *Fifteen*, of 1989, sets out a series of eight pages of carbon tissue taken from a typed autobiography, each page carrying a small grid of nine dymotaped numbers, each row of numbers totalling fifteen when read in any direction (fig. 6). The fifteen refers to Andy Warhol's dictum that we will all be famous for fifteen minutes, while the carbon tissue plays on the contrast of obscurity (particularly of memory) with celebrity, and the urge to divine character in a portrait beyond facial likeness. Can such a fragment or "archival document" (or found

Figure 6. Arnaud Maggs, *Fifteen* [self-portrait], 1989. Carbon paper and dymotape, detail: 27.9 × 21.6 cm. Ottawa, Library and Archives Canada, C-151074.
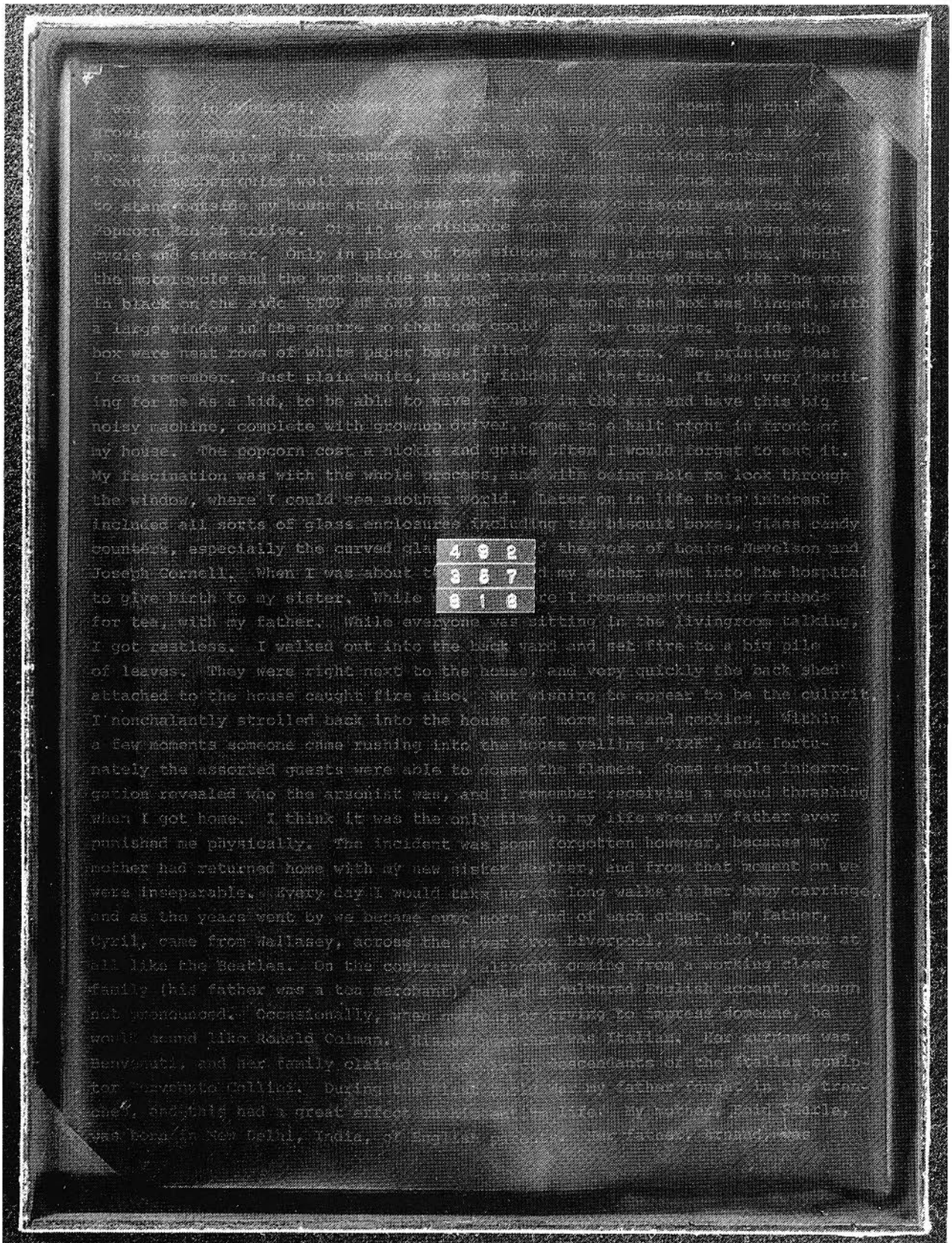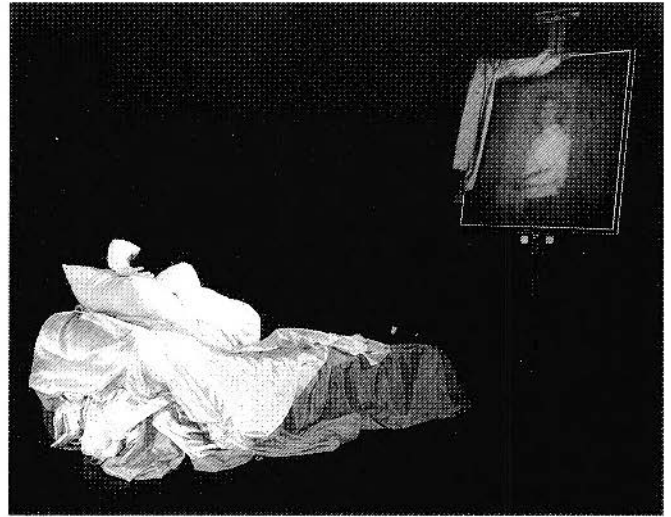
Figure 7. Sorel Cohen, *An Extended and Continuous Metaphor #19*, 1986. Chromogenic prints, diptych, each side: 121.9 × 152.4 cm. Ottawa, Library and Archives Canada, PA-212811 (left) and PA-212812 (right).

detritus, as in the Gartner) be the sole remaining indicator of an existence and serve as metonym for a lifetime and hence for a portrait?

All these examples – caricatures, historical reconstructions, allegories, found objects, and abstractions – foreground the role of the creator who is very often rendered invisible in considerations of more documentary-looking portraiture by our urge to believe what seems recognizable, to look through the image and beyond the creator to enter the past. But it is the inescapable encounter between creator and sitter, upon which Sorel Cohen's self-portrait allegory mordantly comments (fig. 7). Eliding both painting and photography, she criticizes the historical framing by artist and society of the recumbent and passive, often nude, female by wearing a sweatsuit while she reclines in the classic posture and concurrently serves as her own voyeur and creator.

Each of these examples erodes the seemingly sturdy bonds of any received definition of portraiture. Happily there can be many definitions, as there can be many national narratives applicable concurrently to one nation and one portrait. As the case studies of Fréchette and Kipling abundantly show, there is no obligation to fix on one narrative. Whether for history or for art, the existence of the Portrait Gallery of Canada will provide a new collective focus for exploration. Things seen together, like these two portraits, mean something different from things seen individually due to the creative possibilities in unexpected comparison and in the beauty of, as Lautréamont, precursor poet-hero of the Dadaists, wrote, the "chance encounter of a sewing machine and an umbrella on an operating table." We all seem ready for a more surprising, less pompous view of ourselves, as was Jean Chrétien when he participated in the creation of his portrait with Andrew Danson Danushevsky (fig. 8). The photographer set up the camera, and left the room while Chrétien

Figure 8. Andrew Danson Danushevsky, *Jean Chrétien, self-portrait*, 6 November 1985. Silver gelatin print, 32.9 × 32.7 cm. Part of the series *Unofficial Portraits*, published 1988. Ottawa, Library and Archives Canada, PA-185961.

posed and exposed his own negative with a cable release; Danushevsky and Chrétien participated in a collaborative definition of creator hovering somewhere between the unusual pairing of politician and artist. What on earth would Thomas Carlyle have thought of it all: he who championed the founding of London's National Portrait Gallery in line with his belief in transcendent heroes as the true makers of history?

In an age of multiple deferred meanings, the Portrait Gallery of Canada's best option might, excitingly, be to defamiliarize the natural and usual narratives, and to surprise and delight, most especially about the nature of portraits and portrait galleries and the historical work that they do in society. Perhaps we should let that other great Victorian supporter of portrait galleries, John Ruskin, have the last word. He said that we write our history in three books – the book of our deeds, the book of our words, and the book of our art; and of the three, the only truly trustworthy one is the last.

This article is based upon a Shannon Lecture in History delivered at Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada, on 26 September 2003.

Notes

1 The bust was possibly sculpted by an Hébert, of a family representing one of the great names in Québec sculpture history. But which Hébert is uncertain; indeed, the inscription may be a later addition.

2 From originals in Library and Archives Canada's Fréchette collection: J.B. Livernois of Québec City; E.L. Brand of Chicago; Wm J. Topley when he ran the Notman Studio in Ottawa; J.L. Jones of Québec City; and W. Notman and Son of Montreal.

3 For a contemporary illustrated comparison of pre- and post-retouching of albumen portraits, see Hermann Vogel, *The Chemistry of Light and Photography in Their Application to Art, Science, and Industry* (London, 1876), Plate VI: "Effect of Retouching Negatives," Albertype, opp. 237.

4 Audrey Linkman, *The Victorians, Photographic Portraits* (London & New York, 1993), 6–7.

5 From the speech of Professor Hutton, in the article "Honor [sic] the Noble Dead," Toronto *Globe*, 15 January 1894, 5.

6 Even Richard Brilliant, whose work on portraiture remains a touchstone, privileged the artist over the viewer: "the viewer's awareness of the art work as a portrait is distinctly secondary to the artist's intention to portray someone in an art work, because it is the artist who establishes the category 'portrait'." Richard Brilliant, *Portraiture* (Cambridge, Mass., 1991), 7–8.

7 Marcia Pointon explores the link of portrait heads in ovals with numismatic tradition and with the *imago clipeata* – painted or engraved portrait heads in circles or ovals derived from images of ancestors or emperors incised on shields. Marcia Pointon, *Hanging the Head, Portraiture and Social Formation in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven & London, 1993), 65–66. Her volume also references the history of portrait collecting and ordering, and of portrait galleries, from the ancient world through the medieval and Renaissance periods on into the nineteenth century.

8 Quoted in Lilly Koltun, "Pre-Confederation Photography in Toronto," *History of Photography* 2, no. 3 (July 1978), 252.

9 Brilliant, *Portraiture*, 138.

10 Reported in the Montreal *Herald*, 28 February 1865, n.p., from a photocopy held in Notman Photographic Archives, McCord Museum, Montreal.

11 Michael Bell, *W. Sawyer, Portrait Painter* (Kingston, 1978), 84.

12 "Studio and Gallery," *Saturday Night* 11, no. 10, 22 January 1898, 9.

13 C. [William Wilfred Campbell], "At the Mermaid Inn," Toronto *Globe*, 7 February 1892, 9.

14 Maurice Maeterlinck, [untitled], in *A Catalogue of an Exhibition of Pictorial Photographs arranged by the Photo-Club of Canada*, held in the galleries of the Art Association of Montreal (Montreal, 1907), n.p. Reprinted from *Camera Work*, no. 2, April 1903, supplement: there titled "Je crois."

15 Letter from Sidney Carter to Alfred Stieglitz, 22 October 1907, in the Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, U.S.A. All Carter quotations are from letters in the same correspondence between Carter and Stieglitz; citations are courtesy of Georgia O'Keeffe. The story of the censored catalogue was first discovered when these letters were located in the early 1970s by Andrew J. Birrell, head of the photographic collections in the National Archives of Canada (now Library and Archives Canada). It was confirmed when this author located and acquired the Sidney Carter fonds and related collections in 1979 and 1980 for the Archives, including the only known copy of the catalogue. The anecdote was first published in 1984 in Lilly Koltun, ed., *Private Realms of Light, Amateur Photography in Canada 1839–1940* (Ottawa, 1984), 44. The relevant pages of the catalogue were later unglued by the conservation service of Library and Archives Canada.

16 "The Front Page," *Saturday Night* 21, no. 2, 26 October 1907, 1.

17 *The Province*, 17 October 1907, quoted in Robert Jarvis, *The Workingman's Revolt, The Vancouver Asiatic Exclusion Rally of 1907* (Toronto, 1991), 36. In fact, Andrew Lycett says Kipling was in Canada for a combination of personal and political reasons: to collect an honourary doctorate which McGill University had awarded him in 1899, and to "bolster the imperialist cause," by encouraging support for the Imperial Conferences and for the imperial "family" and English settlers through a series of lectures; see Lycett, *Rudyard Kipling* (London, 1999), 374–77.

18 "The Front Page," *Saturday Night*, 26 October 1907, vol. 21, no. 2, 1.

19 It can be argued that every Canadian date marking a war, a conquest, or a contested claim, particularly if it has been resolved by the imposition of brutal power relations upon a marginal force, has been inscribed in Canadian history as isolated or exceptional, rather than as endemic or symptomatic, just as in other colonial histories. Cf. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York, 1979).

20 Rudyard Kipling, "The Conundrum of the Workshops," in *The Definitive Edition of Rudyard Kipling's Verse* (London, 1940), cited in Alberto Manguel, *Reading Pictures: What We Think About When We Look at Art* (Toronto and New York, 2002), 15.

21 Lydia Foy remarks: "Initially representing himself, Rose argued that he would not be tried by a jury of his peers because Quebec law of the time allowed only men of established financial means to serve as jurors." Lydia Foy, *Facing History: Portraits from the National Archives of Canada* (Ottawa, 1993), 123.