

Lawren Harris and the International Exhibition of Modern Art Rectifications to the Toronto Catalogue (1927), and Some Critical Comments

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[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

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Résumé de l'article

En 1927, du 1^{er} au 24 avril, l'Exposition internationale d'art moderne, provenant de la collection de la Société Anonyme de New York, fut présentée par l'Art Gallery of Ontario à Toronto. Le Comité des expositions qui avait d'abord résolu de ne pas participer à cet événement jugé « trop révolutionnaire » dut cependant revenir sur sa décision par suite des pressions de Lawren Harris, éminent artiste de Toronto. Dans une lettre datée du 26 décembre et reproduite ici en entier pour la première fois, Harris s'engageait à faire venir à ses frais l'exposition, si le comité maintenait son attitude. Mais la lettre atteignit son but et le Canada connut sa première exposition d'art abstrait, événement comparable en importance à ce qu'avait été l'Armory Show aux États-Unis. Le catalogue imprimé alors, considéré jusqu'à présent comme un document fidèle de l'exposition tenue à Toronto, se révèle à plus d'un titre trompeur et erroné. En effet, la découverte récente d'une copie de ce catalogue annotée par E.R. Greig, conservateur de l'Art Gallery of Toronto en 1927, permet de constater pas moins de 25 corrections apportées à la liste des oeuvres, Greig ayant indiqué les oeuvres qui, bien qu'annoncées, ne furent, pas accrochées ou installées. Cette liste de la publication de 1927 est redonnée ici avec les annotations de Greig. L'exposition qui fit sensation à Toronto attira plus de 10 000 personnes, nombre peu ordinaire pour cette époque. Dans les journaux locaux, on trouve presque quatre fois plus de comptes rendus de cette exposition, par rapport aux autres expositions spéciales présentées par l'Art Gallery. Les commentaires critiques des journalistes ou d'artistes s'exprimant dans les journaux et les périodiques contenaient des prises de positions énergiques en faveur ou contre l'exposition. Quatre de ces articles sont présentés en annexe.

Lawren Harris and the International Exhibition of Modern Art:

Rectifications to the Toronto Catalogue (1927), and Some Critical Comments

L. R. PFAFF

Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto

From April 1-24 1927, the Art Gallery of Toronto featured the International Exhibition of Modern Art from the collection of the Société Anonyme, New York. The wonder is that it was shown at all. Although at its meeting of 19 July 1926 the Exhibition Committee had decided against importing this show because it was deemed 'too revolutionary as yet for Toronto,'¹ by 13 December 1926 it was agreed that 'further enquiries be made from Messrs Fox and Hekking as to the advisability of securing the International (Modern) Show for the Gallery in April [1927].'² Upon receiving enthusiastic replies from W.H. Fox of the Brooklyn Museum and William M. Hekking of the Albright Art Gallery, the Committee lost no time in inviting Katherine Dreier to bring the works to Toronto at the end of March; she accepted by its meeting on 30 December 1926.³

In the event, none of this would have happened without the timely intervention of the prominent Toronto artist, Lawren Harris, who finally persuaded the Exhibition Committee to reconsider bringing the exhibition to Toronto. To Katherine Dreier, President of the Société Anonyme, he wrote:

I talked with the chairman of the exhibition committee of the gallery to-day. He fears that just following a campaign for new members and trouble last spring because of our own show they might lose a number of members – dear me – then he talked expense – I told him I would pay half – but they are a very timid crew, his committee, so they may side step the opportunity. To-morrow I talk with another one and will press the importance of securing the exhibition with him and others.

If they refuse I will secure some place where we can hold the exhibition, advertize it in every way possible. I can get the papers here interested even if by way of ridicule. I am determined if you are agreeable and I can afford the cost to get the exhibition here for April or a part of it.⁴

Harris' efforts and the effect of this, the first exhibition of abstract art in Canada, are discussed in two recent publications.⁵ In both, reference is made to Harris' letter to the Exhibition Committee in which he set out the importance of the show. This letter is undated but was written in early December 1926.⁶ Its significance cannot be overestimated: it demonstrates Harris' conviction of the importance of Modern Art, his belief in the promotion of art in Canada rather than Canadian art, and his determination that this exhibition would be seen in Toronto even if it meant bringing it at his own expense. The letter achieved its purpose. An exhibition which Charles Comfort, the Canadian painter, likened in national importance to the Armory Show⁷ was held in Toronto. As a document, however, the letter has suffered the

1 E.R. Greig to H.O. McCurry, July 20, 1926, File of Exhibition, *International Exhibition of Modern Art*, Archives of Art Gallery of Ontario. The author gratefully acknowledges the assistance of Professor W. McAllister Johnson, Margaret Machell, archivist of the Art Gallery of Ontario, and the staff of the Library, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo.

2 Minutes of the December 13, 1926, Exhibition Committee Meeting (Art Gallery of Toronto, Archives of Art Gallery of Ontario).

3 Minutes of the December 30, 1926, Exhibition Committee Meeting (Art Gallery of Toronto, Archives of the Art Gallery of Ontario).

4 Lawren Harris to Katherine Dreier, undated but late November or early December 1926 (Katherine Dreier-Société Anonyme Collection, Yale University).

5 Ruth L. Bohan, *The Société Anonyme's Brooklyn Exhibition; Katherine Dreier and Modernism in America* (Ann Arbor, UMI Research Press, 1982); see especially 'The Brooklyn Exhibition,' 51-66, and 'Critical Response to the Exhibition,' 97-114. Also: Edmonton Art Gallery, *The Modern Image: Cubism and the Realist Tradition* (Edmonton Art Gallery, 11 December 1981 – 24 January 1982), in which 'Katherine Dreier, the Société Anonyme and the Canadian Reaction,' 9-11.

6 Probably coincident with his letter to Dreier, *supra*, n. 4.

7 See Milton W. Brown, *The Story of the Armory Show* (New York, Hirshhorn Foundation, 1963).

indignity of being frequently cited but quoted only in dribs and drabs; it is little known – and less understood – simply because it has been ‘published’ only in various parts.⁸ As a key letter in the literature of English Canadian art history it is here given *in extenso* for the first time from the original in the exhibition file of the Archives of the Art Gallery of Ontario (Appendix A).

Of the 307 works mentioned by Harris as being shown at the Brooklyn Museum from 18 November 1926 to 9 January 1927, only a portion travelled to subsequent showings at the Anderson Galleries, New York (25 January – 8 February 1927), the Albright Art Gallery, Buffalo (25 February – 20 March 1927), and thence to the Art Gallery of Toronto. One of the problems inherent in the circulating exhibition system is that of changes in works exhibited from one showing to the next. Many of these are effected at the last minute and too late for the printed catalogue. According to the Buffalo catalogue, 176 works were exhibited in that city; the Toronto catalogue, with the omission of Lawren Harris’ *Miners Houses* (Number 8), lists the same works. Heretofore it has been considered as authoritative as any published list.

It appears, however, that its listing is at best misleading and in some cases quite erroneous. A number of items could not be – or were not – actually shown, undoubtedly because the Curator, E.R. Greig, was expecting ninety works until he learned, as late as 13 March 1927, that almost 180 were being sent on from Buffalo.⁹ From lists in the exhibition file we know as well that certain works were not sent from Buffalo, that substitutions were made, and that other works received were not hung at all. It has been virtually impossible to

tell from these lists with their cryptic notations (‘Not in catalogue’ or ‘Parcel of unframed pictures’) what works were actually installed. With the recent discovery of a copy of the Toronto catalogue annotated by Greig, sense may, at last, be made of these lists. One finds no fewer than twenty-five disparities between the list of works indicated in the catalogue as being on view and those actually installed: four of the works listed were not sent on from Buffalo, one work by an artist was substituted for another, fifteen works were *not* hung (seven presumably because they were unframed), and four works not listed *were* hung.¹⁰

For this reason the ‘Catalogue’ listing has been extracted from the printed catalogue and is reprinted here with annotations indicating which works were actually hung (Appendix B). At this distance in time, such ‘footnotes to history’ are in the end not as minor as they might at first seem; they demonstrate unequivocally that we must question the very documents upon which we rely. Because of the absence of photographs of the Toronto installation – the supreme irony for what, in the event, was a seminal influence upon the Canadian art scene – this text takes on an additional importance.

The publication which accompanied the Toronto version of the Société Anonyme show is typical of the ‘monthly exhibition catalogue’ format used by the Art Gallery of Toronto from 1926 until 1938 inclusively, whereby exhibitions held concurrently had a common catalogue.¹¹ Thus the catalogue for the International Exhibition of Modern Art, The Canadian Society of Graphic Art and Historical Paintings and Drawings by C.W. Jefferys respectively are published together, between one cover, and with continuous pagination. The catalogue for the International Exhibition of Modern Art has a brief foreword by the Council of the Art Gallery of Toronto which stresses the universality of the movement and the representativeness of the collection presented as a duty to those interested in all phases of artistic life. An introduction by Katherine Dreier (approximately one printed page in length) concentrates on the educational purpose of the Société Anonyme and stresses the number of countries represented. She concludes: ‘If any young talent has been safeguarded through this Exhibition from misdirected efforts and has been helped to remain true to himself and not to feel the need to compromise with the public, that does not yet understand, we will feel that we have served our purpose.’¹² Probably for reasons

8 Mentioned in Peter Larisey, ‘Nationalist aspects of Lawren S. Harris’s Aesthetics,’ *Bulletin of National Gallery of Canada*, xxiii (1974), 9; *Lawren S. Harris: Urban Scenes and Wilderness Landscapes 1906-1930* (Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, 14 January – 26 February 1978), 214; Douglas Worts, ‘Lawren S. Harris: transition to abstraction 1934-1945’ (Master of Museum Studies final paper, University of Toronto, 1982), 16; Bohan, 64; Edmonton Art Gallery, 42.

9 William M. Hekking to Edward R. Greig, March 10, 1927, File of Exhibition, *International Exhibition of Modern Art*, Archives of Art Gallery of Ontario.

10 This copy of the *Catalogue of the Exhibition of the International Exhibition of Modern Art Assembled by the Société Anonyme, The Canadian Society of Graphic Art and Historical Paintings and Drawings by C.W. Jefferys, R.C.A., O.S.A.* (Art Gallery of Toronto, Toronto, 1-24 April 1927) is in the Reference Library, Art Gallery of Ontario.

11 From Karen McKenzie and Larry Pfaff, ‘The Art Gallery of Ontario: sixty years of exhibitions, 1906-1966,’ *RACAR*, VII, 1-2 (1980), 62-91, the reader will see how different the International Exhibition of Modern Art was from the usual preoccupations of the Art Gallery of Toronto.

12 *Catalogue of the Exhibition of the International Exhibition...*, 4.

of space this introduction is simply a reduced version of that which she provided for the printed typescript serving as the catalogue for the Buffalo showing; in it she distinguishes works by Mondrian, Gabo, Léger, De Chirico, Malevich and Baumeister as representative of six different groups within the movement. Each of these works is illustrated and followed by a paragraph of commentary.¹³ In the Toronto catalogue these groups are only listed and the three works actually illustrated (*Gaiety* by Kandinsky, *The Forest* by Ernst, and *Mademoiselle Pogany* by Brancusi) seem to have been randomly selected.

The exhibition opened at the Art Gallery of Toronto on Friday evening, 1 April 1927, and on the following Monday, Dreier, who had been responsible for the installation, gave a lecture in which she attempted to explain 'modernism' and pleaded for progress in its interpretation. Three hundred forty-six persons attended this lecture.¹⁴ When the exhibition closed on 24 April, 10,509 had viewed it – approximately 6300 more than had attended the fifth exhibition of the Group of Seven, the celebrated Canadian landscape painters, held at the same institution from 7-30 May of the previous year.¹⁵

Something of the impact of the exhibition can be gathered from the fact that no fewer than thirteen reviews and articles appeared in the four Toronto daily newspapers, eleven during the three-week period of its installation. This is roughly four times as many as might be found for any other special exhibition at the Art Gallery of Toronto at this time. The earliest, a half-page spread in *The Evening Telegram* of March 5, anticipated the show by a month. Based on a visit to the Albright Art Gallery it is almost entirely cribbed – albeit enthusiastically – from Katherine Dreier's introduction to the Buffalo catalogue and illustrated by the same seven reproductions found in this catalogue.¹⁶ As the show was being both hung and dismantled, reviews appeared in *The Toronto Daily Star*. In the interim, articles appeared every three or four days; certainly the show, for whatever motive, was judged newsworthy by the city's journalists.

It is difficult, of course, to tell how wide an impact the press coverage had. Of the four Toronto newspapers *The Globe* was the most prestigious, with an audience extending throughout the province and possibly Canada. *The Mail and Empire*, followed by *The Toronto Daily Star* and *The Evening Telegram*, had large city circulations. Readers of each of these newspapers would have been well aware of

the exhibition and possibly, even if they had not visited it, of some of the images in it, since twelve (all different from the three illustrated in the exhibition catalogue) were reproduced with these articles. Those who read the bulk of the pieces in *The Star* and, to a lesser extent, in *The Telegram* would have seen outright condemnation or scornful ridicule of the exhibition. Far from attempting to explain the aesthetics of modernism, the papers stress the sensational and were probably guilty of artificially sustaining public interest.

Critical responses in *The Globe* and *The Mail and Empire* (both reprinted here in Appendix C) were remarkably reasonable, sympathetic, and articulate for the day. The better is undoubtedly that of Fred Jacob in *The Mail and Empire* who cautioned those aroused to anger, derision, humour or flippancy to remember that, far from being a small, local group determined to be different, the artists represented were from no less than twenty-two countries and were 'endeavoring to create a new art form, entirely different in approach, in conception and in purpose from the orthodox painting to which we are accustomed.'¹⁷ In an enlightened didactic review, he sought to provide viewers with a method of approach which would satisfy rather than frustrate. His discussion of thirteen individual works is exceedingly important. Not only does he show that they exemplify different approaches to 'modernism,' but he also singles out features which give the works meaning for the viewer or at very least provide him with a familiar point of contact for these strange new images. The review in general is characterized by a tone of calm and reason; it is low-keyed but persuasive. Fred Jacob concludes: 'If these pictures awaken emotional or aesthetic responses in some men or women, or appear, for them, to have a profound significance, then they do justify themselves in a certain direction ... Other gallery frequenters can

13 *International Exhibition of Modern Art Assembled by the Société Anonyme* (Buffalo Academy of Fine Arts, The Albright Art Gallery, 25 February – 20 March 1927).

14 Attendance Records, Art Gallery of Toronto (Archives of Art Gallery of Ontario). A copy of Dreier's 'Lecture on Modern Art, Toronto, April 4th, 1927' (n.p., n.d.) is in the Reference Library, Art Gallery of Ontario.

15 Attendance Records, Art Gallery of Toronto (Archives of Art Gallery of Ontario). See also 'A brief outline of the exhibitions held in the Gallery from May to November, 1927,' *The Art Gallery of Toronto Bulletin*, 1 (November 1927), 3-4.

16 'Puzzle pictures by great modernists to be seen at Art Gallery of Toronto,' *The Evening Telegram*, Toronto, 5 March 1927, 18. See also 'Modern art and the new primitives are explained by Katherine Dreier,' *The Evening Telegram*, Toronto, 2 April 1927, 40.

17 Fred Jacob, 'Amazing paintings by ultra-modernists,' *The Mail and Empire*, Toronto, 2 April 1927, 5.

only grope with curiosity and interest, and attempt to discover what these modernists are endeavoring to do.¹⁸

The sympathies of Lawrence Mason, the reviewer for *The Globe*, had undoubtedly resulted from his visit in August 1926 to an exhibition by the group Der Sturm on Potsdamerstrasse in Berlin. There he had seen, and described for his readers, canvasses similar to those in the Toronto show.¹⁹ Mason maintained that the collection assembled in Toronto comprised all that was needed by the well-informed for a thorough understanding of post-impressionist movements in art. In an attempt to move his readers from a 'bald literalism' to other sensibilities, he defined and introduced abstract art as the avoidance of the familiar, concrete or realistic forms of natural landscape and human life while the object itself is reduced to its component elements. Mason concludes his discussion of individual works in the exhibition: 'Compare Brancusi's magnificent egg-like head of Mlle. Pogany in polished brass with the sickeningly sugar and sentimental sawdust-doll 'Psyche,'²⁰ in the old Grange, and be honest enough to confess that the former has far more life, power, originality, beauty and creative artistic genius.'²¹ Mason's review is more theoretical, aggressive – even repetitious – than that in *The Mail and Empire*; one would have preferred to have had more comments about individual works. However both reviewers sought to instruct in a sane and persuasive manner possibly unequalled in Toronto newspapers even today.

18 *Idem*.

19 Lawrence Mason, 'On German soil,' *The Globe*, 4 September 1926, 23.

20 *The Psyche*, probably Cesare Lapini's marble sculpture *Girl with Butterfly* now in the study collection of the Art Gallery of Ontario and in 1927 installed in The Grange, the Georgian mansion bequeathed to the city of Toronto by Goldwin Smith to be the first home of the Art Gallery of Toronto.

21 I.[awrence] M[ason], 'Modern Art displayed in International Exhibit at Toronto Art Gallery,' *The Globe*, 6 April 1927, 13.

22 Louis Blake Duff, 'The new art,' *The Globe*, Voice of the People section, 12 April 1927, 4.

23 A.J. Clark, 'The art primitive,' *The Globe*, Voice of the People section, 15 April 1927, 4.

24 F.H. Brigden, 'The Modern Art show,' *The Globe*, Voice of the People section, 11 April 1927, 6.

25 Bryne Hope Saunders, 'An attempt to understand this "amazing" modern "art",' *The Evening Telegram*, Toronto, 16 April 1927, 38.

26 'Are they pictures or are they propaganda,' *The Evening Telegram*, Toronto, 16 April 1927, 38.

27 Owen Staples, "'Coarse conceits in a realm of nonsense" International Exhibition of Modern Art,' *The Evening Telegram*, Toronto, 22 April 1927, 30.

Mason's review elicited three responses in the 'Voice of the People' section of *The Globe*. To Louis Blake Duff, a journalist and author from Welland, Ontario, the new art 'torn away from the trammels that have bound pictorial representation since the dawn' was merely 'mumbo jumbo.'²² A.J. Clark believed that the artists represented in the International Exhibition, like the Australian aborigines, satisfied themselves as opposed to others; the result is so specialized that the untrained mind cannot appreciate it without baffling and bewildering verbal accompaniments.²³ A landscape painter and member of the Ontario Society of Artists, F.H. Brigden, took exception to the implication that the 'obscure experiments' of the modernists were superior to the more realistic works of the Graphic Arts Club and the Jefferys' exhibition in adjoining galleries. In Brigden's view, Jefferys' work exhibited powers of draftsmanship and character expression which were entirely lacking in the International Exhibition. For him, the great task before Canadian artists was the interpretation of the landscape and history of their country; from this they must not be diverted by the modernists.²⁴

Less impressive than the reviews in *The Globe* and *The Mail and Empire* is Bryne Hope Saunders' 'Attempt to understand this amazing modern art' in *The Evening Telegram*. The tone is set by her first reaction ('Fireworks. Zig-zags of color. Crashing lines. A pandemonium ...') and her review consists of her own, largely emotional, reactions and the overheard comments of other viewers. She concludes sadly that she must leave Modern Art to the higher intellects in Toronto.²⁵ Another review in *The Telegram*, 'Are they pictures or are they propaganda,' betrays the reviewer's complete puzzlement with the show; although well-meaning, it contains so many vague and poorly thought out generalizations as to be almost unintelligible.²⁶ Owen Staples, a prominent Toronto painter and illustrator on the staff of *The Telegram*, glowingly described at the head of his article as 'of the understandable school of painters who paint with reverent care and toilworn skill the beauty of petal, of person, of landscape, lake or city scene so that those who know the flowers, the people, or the places may recognize them and their message in the pictures,' also attacked the exhibition, albeit more gently; he compares the works unfavourably to his ideals: Millet's *The Sower*, *The Gleaners* and *Angelus*. While Staples praises some of the canvases for their purity of colour, the tension between the traditional and the new is too great for him to appreciate the exhibition. His remarks, like those of Saunders, are sincere but sentimental.²⁷

The four most derisive reviews were to be found in *The Toronto Daily Star*.²⁸ Each of these is unsigned but it is possible that they are from the pen of Augustus Bridle, art editor of *The Star* in the 1920s. Their tone ranges from pejorative to hostile, although the first, in spite of obvious disagreement with the views of Katherine Dreier, admits her sincerity and dubs her 'the complete evangel in art.'²⁹ From the second of these openly deprecating reviews we learn that three canvases by Max Weber, *Contemplation*, *Retirement* and another unnamed, were censored and withdrawn on the second day of the hanging, presumably because they were nudes. *The Star*'s reviewer ironically noted, 'the exclusion of these nudes may not be an instance of prudery. The authorities may have desired to preserve the artistic unity of the exhibition which was compromised by the presence of these canvases which did seem to bear some resemblance to something seen before on land or sea.'³⁰ As an antidote to the preceding and from the pages of the same newspaper, we have Dr. Salem Bland's column under the byline 'The Observer.' In it, a clergyman noted for his liberal views and champion of the Group of Seven also defends the seriousness of this movement ('It would be difficult to believe in the rationality of the world or of its Creator if so many serious and self-forgetful artists in so many lands, working separately, could all be victims of a delusion') and praises the explanatory lecture of Katherine Dreier.³¹ So much for 'local' reaction.

The two most important cultural periodicals in Canada in the 1920s were *Saturday Night*, a weekly, and the monthly *Canadian Forum*. Although both were based in Toronto, they had a wide circulation and each of them in its serious coverage of the exhibition would have given it national publicity. In an editorial ('Modern Art') in the May 1927 issue of *The Canadian Forum*, an unidentified writer stated that the exhibition will have proven to a handful of people that the visual arts, fundamentally different from literature, are 'an affair of space-relations, expressed through colour, line, solid form' and that the validity of art is not determined by any majority vote.³² In the same issue appeared articles, intended by the editors to give both sides of the cause for a wide circle of readers who were not able to see the collection, written by Lawren Harris and Franz Johnston, two founding members of the Group of Seven. In a sophisticated and eloquent essay Harris discussed the sources of abstraction and dealt with specific reactions and misconceptions about the exhibition. His article,

although illustrated with Mondrian's *Clarification I*, could have been improved only by descriptions of specific works.³³ Franz Johnston, whose association with the Group of Seven had ended in 1922, does deal with individual works, but in such a vituperative manner that his countering of Harris' apology³⁴ descends to the sheer invective typical of the bulk of reviews in *The Toronto Daily Star*. Both of these articles are reprinted in Appendix C.

Stewart Dick, 'official lecturer at the National Gallery, London,' writing in *Saturday Night*, begins his review by cautiously admitting that the Art Gallery of Toronto had followed an open-minded policy in bringing the exhibition; that through Katherine Dreier's introductory lecture and Lawren Harris' sympathetic explanatory tours, the Gallery had done all in its power to give it fair treatment. In the interests of the public he intended to present the other point of view, 'a frankly unsympathetic one of an artist and a student of art as it has hitherto existed for several thousand years.' For Dick, one common ground pervades the exhibition: the avoidance of correctness of visual representation. He is obviously a literalist as his objections to *Vocalization* (Number 147) demonstrate. Of it he scornfully remarks, '[It] apparently represents a dissection of the human throat and chest revealing an interior filled with tubes like a pipe organ.' The article goes on to assert that simplification of form has resulted in distortion, coarseness and absurdity; colours violently exaggerated have produced sensationalism.³⁵

28 These are: 'Art Gallery now contains greatest freaks of art,' *The Toronto Daily Star*, 31 March 1927, 34; 'Paintings of nudes consigned to cellar,' *ibid.*, 4 April 1927, 22; 'Scrambled art paintings to grace Toronto homes,' *ibid.*, 18 April 1927, 3 (according to this article, 'seven purchasers acquire[d] canvases shown at International Exhibition,' but each of the three works identified as sold, Jonsson's *Bunte Welt*, Carlsund's *Wall decoration for an observatory* and Gaulois' *Construction in Blue*, ended up in public collections: Yale University Art Gallery, Arkiv for Dekorativ Konst, Lund, and Yale University Art Gallery, respectively. Nor is there any indication that seven fewer works returned to New York than arrived in Toronto. I cannot account for this discrepancy); 'Exit scrambled zoo exhibition,' *ibid.*, 25 April 1927 (referred to in Bohan, 249, but unlocated by writer).

29 'Art Gallery now contains greatest freaks of art,' *loc. cit.*

30 'Paintings of nudes consigned to cellar,' *loc. cit.*

31 'The Observer [Salem Bland]: A test of open-mindedness,' *The Toronto Daily Star*, 8 April 1927, 6.

32 'Modern art,' *The Canadian Forum*, vii (May 1927), 228.

33 Lawren Harris, 'Modern art and aesthetic reactions: an appreciation,' *The Canadian Forum*, vii (May 1927), 239-241.

34 Franz Johnston, 'Modern art and aesthetic reactions: an objection,' *The Canadian Forum*, vii (May 1927), 241-242.

35 Stewart Dick, 'Modern art of many lands at Toronto Art Gallery,' *Saturday Night*, 16 April 1927, 5.

On balance, the reaction to the exhibition on the part of art critics, the general public and artists was one of strongly-held, even polarized, views, not unlike popular attitudes to contemporary art even today. Not all artists, however, were as hostile as Johnston or Staples. Although the painters Bertram Brooker and Charles Comfort did not review the exhibition, both were stimulated by it. Comfort was a docent for the show and in an autobiographical sketch states: 'it had a great fascination for everyone who witnessed it, though on the whole I think the Canadian public was baffled by the exhibition ... Such of my friends as Bertram Brooker, Edna Tacon, Gordon Webber and Law-

36 Margaret Gray, Margaret Rand and Lois Steen, *Charles Comfort* (Toronto, Gage, 1976), 18.

37 See Dennis Reid, *Bertram Brooker 1888-1955* (Ottawa, National Gallery of Canada, 1973), 12-14.

ren Harris were, of course, aware and interested in the directions in which the exhibition pointed. Personally, I believe that the beginning of abstract painting in Canada, certainly in Toronto, can be dated from that period.³⁶ Brooker, whose first exhibition of abstract paintings had been held in January 1927 at the Arts and Letters Club, Toronto, was undoubtedly encouraged by the Société Anonyme show.³⁷

So far, no one has discussed what effect the Société Anonyme exhibition really had, whether on the work of Harris, Brooker, Comfort or any other Canadian artist. It is hoped that accurate knowledge of the actual works exhibited will be of assistance to those interested in searching for the specific stylistic influences which this galaxy of 'modernists' may have had upon Canadian painting.

APPENDIX A

Letter from Lawren Harris to the Exhibition Committee, Art Gallery of Toronto, December 1926

25 Severn St.
Toronto.

The exhibition committee of the Art Gallery of Toronto
Dear Sirs,

I have just returned from New York. While there I visited the International exhibition of Modern art at the Brooklyn Museum. From what I saw, heard and read in New York reviews, I believe it to be the most representative, most stimulating and the best exhibition of advanced modern art so far shown on this continent. There is nothing in it of an offensive nature, that is, decadent in a moral sense. All the works impressed one as exemplifying sincere adventure, research and expression and whilst there are numerous attempts at unusual expression and others showing unusual uses of various media the whole exhibition leaves a clear and to me very convincing impression. The element of fake, of vociferously striving for attention, of trading on gullibility is quite absent.

This exhibition closes in Brooklyn on Jan. the 2nd. Thereafter it goes to various municipal galleries in the States ending at the Albright Gallery, Buffalo in the month of March. Miss Dreier the president of the society responsible for the exhibition tells me it could come to the Art Gallery here for April direct from Buffalo which should cut down expenses.

The exhibition comprises 307 works of paintings, drawings and sculpture and would, I think, fill four of the galleries here, perhaps five. Few of the pictures are large, in fact most of them are quite small. Twenty-three countries are represented and

the works chosen are the most representative of experimental endeavor the last fifteen years in these countries.

Miss Dreier has written three books on modern art and is an artist herself. She has been lecturing at the Brooklyn Museum and will lecture at each city where the exhibition is held, in the galleries with the pictures on the walls. I can vouch for her intelligence and charm.

Mr. Robson has the catalogue of the exhibition. The few reproductions give no idea of the exhibition. Mr. Fox, the director of the Brooklyn Museum has written the foreword explaining the attitude of the Brooklyn Museum toward the exhibition. Might I ask that it be read.

The Société Anonyme is issuing an illustrated catalogue with biographies etc. to sell at \$10.00. This catalogue is designed for the permanent possession of libraries and will go to more than 200 of these on this continent and in Europe.

My name appears in the catalogue Mr. Robson has. I may say that neither of my pictures will be here with exhibition.

I have written Miss Dreier informing her that should the gallery here find it necessary to refuse the exhibition and providing the expense is not too great, that I will endeavor to have the exhibition come here and hold it somewhere else. Needless to say I don't want to do that.

Yours etc.
Lawren Harris

'Catalogue' section of printed Toronto Catalogue of Exhibition, with annotations

Reprinted below is the 'Catalogue' section from the printed Toronto catalogue of the exhibition. Each work is listed as it is found in the catalogue and then followed, in square brackets, with the additional information derived from Greig's annotated copy. Those works ticked by Greig are indicated as 'hung' or 'installed'; those which remain unticked are designated 'not hung' or 'not installed' and followed by his reason, if given. The present location of each work, if known, is also given in square brackets; this is based on the information found in the appendix 'Checklist of the Exhibition' of Bohan's *The Société Anonyme's Brooklyn Exhibition; Katherine Dreier and Modernism in America*. Since the majority of works are at present in the collection of the Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, references are made to the number of the entry in Robert L. Herbert, Eleanor S. Apter and Elise K. Kenney's *The Société Anonyme and the Dreier Bequest at Yale University; A Catalogue Raisonné* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1984) for illustrations of these works (here abbreviated as Herbert). For the remainder, illustrations are provided where possible.

CATALOGUE

ERIKA KLIEN (Cizek Method) AUSTRIA

- 1 Abstraction
[Greig: hung
Collection: Yale University
Art Gallery
Illustrated in Herbert, 412]
- 2 Decorative Drawing
[Greig: not hung ('not here')]
- 3 Decorative Drawing
[Greig: hung
Collection: Yale University
Art Gallery
Illustrated in Herbert, 410]
- 4 Decorative Drawing
[Greig: hung
Collection: Yale University
Art Gallery
Illustrated in Herbert, 409]

SERVRANCKX BELGIUM

- 5 No. II, 1923
[Greig: hung
Collection: not known]

PAPAZOFF BULGARIA

- 6 The Idol
[Greig: hung
Collection: not known]
- 7 Water Colour
[Greig: hung
Collection: Yale University
Art Gallery
Illustrated in Herbert, 533]

EMIL FILLA CZECHOSLOVAKIA

- 9 Still Life with Eggs
[Greig: hung
Collection: not known]

GUTTFREUND "

- 10 Business (Sculpture)
[Greig: installed
Collection: not known]
- 11 Industry (Sculpture)
[Greig: installed
Collection: National Gallery,
Prague]

CLAUSEN DENMARK

- 12 Abstraction II
[Greig: hung
Collection: not known]

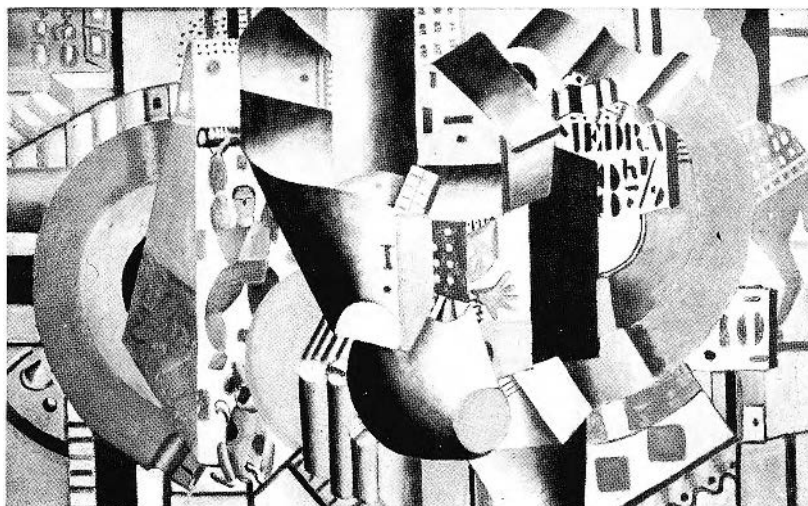


FIGURE 1. Fernand Léger, *Abstraction, Circus*, 1918. Oil on canvas, 57.8 × 94.6 cm. Paris, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou (Photo: Museum).

STORM-PETERSEN DENMARK

- 13 Ruhende Indianerin
[Greig: hung
Collection: not known]

- 14 Sonne und Mond
[Greig: hung
Collection: not known]

LETT HAINES ENGLAND

- 15 Mountain and Bridge
[Greig: hung
Collection: not known]

ARP FRANCE

- 16 Wood Sculpture II
[Greig: installed
Collection: not known]

- 18 Still Life
[Greig: hung
Collection: Phillips Collection,
Washington]

MARCELLE CAHN FRANCE

- 19 Composition
[Greig: hung
Collection: Private Collection,
Belgium]

DUCHAMP-VILLON "

- 20 Bronze Figure
[Greig: installed
Collection: Yale University
Art Gallery
Illustrated in Herbert, 247]

BRAQUE "

- 17 Charcoal Drawing
[Greig: hung
Collection: not known]

SUZANNE DUCHAMP "

- 21 Flowers
[Greig: hung
Collection: not known]

ALBERT GLEIZES

- 22 Abstract Painting II
[Greig: hung
Collection: not known]

FERNAND LÉGER

- 23 Abstraction 'Circus'
[Greig: hung
Collection: Musée National
d'Art Moderne, Paris
Illustration: Figure 1]
- 24 Abstraction 1920
[Greig: hung
Collection: not known]
- 25 Abstraction 1925
[Greig: hung
Collection: Yale University
Art Gallery
Illustrated in Herbert, 431]

METZINGER

- 26 The Port
[Greig: hung
Collection: not known]

ARMAND NAU

- 27 Le Concierge
[Greig: not hung]

SUZANNE PHOCAS

- 28 Travestis
[Greig: hung
Collection: not known]

PICABIA

- 29 Peinture du Midi (Framed
by Legrain)
[Greig: hung
Collection: Yale University
Art Gallery
Illustrated in Herbert, 552]
- 30 Peinture Voiles
[Greig: hung
Collection: not known]

VALMIER

- 31 Abstract Forms
[Greig: hung
Collection: not known]

JACQUES VILLON

- 32 Jockeys
[Greig: hung
Collection: Yale University
Art Gallery
Illustrated in Herbert, 738]
- 33 Jacques
[Greig: not hung ('not here')]
- 34 Etching
[Greig: not hung ('in parcel')]

KAKABADZE

GEORGIA

- 35 Object in 2 Dimensions I
[Greig: hung
Collection: not known]
- 36 Object in 2 Dimensions II
[Greig: hung
Collection: not known]
- 37 Object in 3 Dimensions I
[Greig: installed
Collection: Yale University
Art Gallery
Illustrated in Herbert, 370]

FRANCE



FIGURE 2. Max Ernst, *The Forest*, 1925. Oil on canvas, 115.6 × 73.7 cm. Brussels, Galerie Isy Brachot (Photo: Toronto, Art Gallery of Ontario).

- 38 Water Colour, Sail Motif
[Greig: hung
Collection: Yale University
Art Gallery
Illustrated in Herbert, 361]
- 39 Water Colour, Sail Motif
[Greig: hung
Collection: Yale University
Art Gallery
Illustrated in Herbert, 365]
- 40 Illusion of the Eye
[Greig: hung
Collection: not known]

WILLY BAUMEISTER

GERMANY

- 41 Wall Decoration, Black-Red
[Greig: hung
Collection: not known]
- 42 Water Colour
[Greig: hung
Collection: Museum of Modern
Art, N. Y.]
- 43 Water Colour
[Greig: hung
Collection: not known]

CARL BUCHHEISTER	GERMANY	MÜNTER-KANDINSKY	GERMANY	76 Clarification II [Greig: hung Collection: not known]
44 3-form Variation 25/1 [Greig: hung Collection: not known]		59 Tjillebotten [Greig: hung Collection: not known]		
HEINRICH CAMPENDONK	"	NIETZSCHE	"	VANTONGERLOO
45 Pierrot [Greig: hung Collection: not known]		60 Construction 1030 [Greig: hung Collection: not known]		77 Perspective Drawing for Dining Room I [Greig: hung Collection: not known]
46 The Red Cat [Greig: hung Collection: Yale University Art Gallery Illustrated in Herbert, 125]		KURT SCHWITTERS	"	78 Perspective Drawing in Colour for Dining Room II [Greig: hung Collection: not known]
MAX ERNST	"	61 Radiation [Greig: hung Collection: Phillips Collection, Washington]		HUSZAR
47 The Forest [Greig: hung Collection: Galerie Isy Brachot, Brussels Illustration: Figure 2]		62 Merz 1003, Pfaucrad [Greig: hung Collection: Yale University Art Gallery Illustrated in Herbert, 628]		79 Composition of Human Figures [Greig: hung Collection: Museum Sztuki w Lodzi, Lodz, Poland]
48 The Sea [Greig: hung Collection: not known]		63 Merz [Greig: hung Collection: not known]		80 Composition of Flowers [Greig: hung Collection: Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris Illustration: Figure 3]
HEINRICH HOERLE	"	64 Merz [Greig: hung Collection: not known]		BELÁ KÁDÁR
49 Abstraction in Yellow and Black [Greig: hung Collection: not known]		65 Merz [Greig: hung Collection: not known]		81 Music [Greig: not hung ('not here')]
50 Abstraction in Black, Yellow and Red [Greig: hung Collection: not known]		66 Merz [Greig: hung Collection: not known]		82 Separation [Greig: hung Collection: Yale University Art Gallery Illustrated in Herbert, 345]
KESTING	"	SEIFERT	"	83 Silence [Greig: hung Collection: Yale University Art Gallery Illustrated in Herbert, 346]
51 Abstraction I [Greig: hung Collection: Yale University Art Gallery Illustrated in Herbert, 381]		67 The Mason [Greig: hung Collection: not known]		84 Tierbild [Greig: not hung ('in parcel')]
[51a Abstraction II Greig: hung ('in corridor') Collection: not known]		68 The Mechanic [Greig: hung Collection: not known]		85 Coloured Drawing [Greig: hung Collection: Yale University Art Gallery Illustrated in Herbert, 351]
KUETHE	"	KÄTE STEINITZ	"	MOHOLY-NAGY
52 Landscape [Greig: hung Collection: not known]		69 Water Colour [Greig: hung Collection: Yale University Art Gallery Illustrated in Herbert, 647]		86 K IV, 1922 [Greig: hung Collection: not known]
53 Carnival [Greig: not hung ('in parcel')]		STUCKENBERG	"	87 Z VI, 1925 [Greig: hung Collection: not known]
FRANZ MARC	"	70 Abstraction [Greig: hung Collection: not known]		88 C XVI, 1923 [Greig: hung Collection: not known]
54 Deer [Greig: hung Collection: Phillips Collection, Washington]		71 Water Colour [Greig: hung Collection: not known]		89 Woodcuts [Greig: hung Collection: not known]
55 The Dream [Greig: hung Collection: not known]		72 Water Colour [Greig: hung Collection: not known]		90 Water Colour [Greig: not hung ('in parcel')]
JOHANNES MOLZAHN	"	VORDEMBERGE	"	PERI
56 Aerodynamic [Greig: hung Collection: not known]		73 No. 15 [Greig: hung Collection: not known]		91 Bett, Tür, Fenster [Greig: hung Collection: not known]
57 Family Group II [Greig: hung Collection: Yale University Art Gallery Illustrated in Herbert, 500]		CAESAR DOMELA-NIEWENHUIS	HOLLAND	92 Vor dem Tisch [Greig: hung Collection: Museum of Modern Art, N. Y.]
58 Physico-mechanical Parallels [Greig: hung Collection: not known]		74 Composition Labile [Greig: not hung]		
		MONDRIAN	"	
		75 Clarification I [Greig: hung Collection: Museum of Modern Art, N. Y.]		

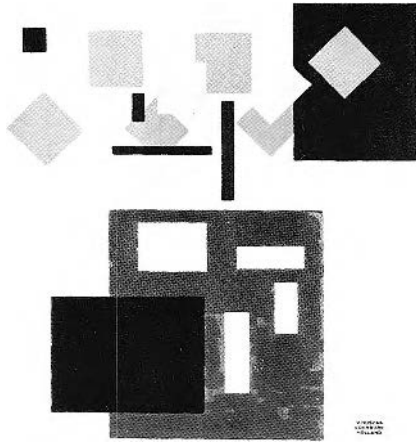


FIGURE 3. Vilmos Huszar, *Composition of Flowers*, 1923. Oil on canvas, 61.6 × 56.5 cm. Paris, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou (Photo: Museum).

SCHEIBER	HUNGARY	PALLADINI	ITALY	107	Escale [Greig: not hung ('not here – fish & lemons instead')] Citrons et Poisson [Collection: not known]
93 Cabaret [Greig: not hung]		100 Starting on a Journey [Greig: hung Collection: not known]		ALADJALOV	RUSSIA
94 Jazz Band [Greig: hung Collection: Yale University Art Gallery Illustrated in Herbert, 614]		PANNAGGI		108	Harlequin and Woman [Greig: hung Collection: Yale University Art Gallery Illustrated in Herbert, 1]
FINNUR JONSSON	ICELAND	101 Dynamic P.M. [Greig: hung Collection: not known]		ARCHIPENKO	"
95 Bunte Welt [Greig: hung Collection: Yale University Art Gallery, lost Illustrated in Herbert, 344]		SEVERINI		109	Metal Relief [Greig: installed Collection: Yale University Art Gallery Illustrated in Herbert, 11]
96 Frau am Spieltisch [Greig: hung Collection: Yale University Art Gallery Illustrated in Herbert, 343]		102 Abstraction, 1918 [Greig: hung Collection: not known]		110	The Bather [Greig: not hung]
DE CHIRICO	ITALY	KUNIYOSHI	JAPAN	FEIGA BLUMBERG	"
97 Intérieur Métaphysique I [Greig: hung Collection: Yale University Art Gallery Illustrated in Herbert, 163]		103 Strong Woman and Child [Greig: hung Collection: not known]		111	Night Ramblers [Greig: hung Collection: not known]
98 Intérieur Métaphysique, 1925 [Greig: hung Collection: not known]		RANGHILD KEYSER	NORWAY	DAVID BURLIUCK	"
DOTTORI	"	104 Composition I [Greig: hung Collection: Yale University Art Gallery Illustrated in Herbert, 382]		112	The Eye of God [Greig: hung Collection: Yale University Art Gallery Illustrated in Herbert, 104]
99 Mystic Landscape [Greig: hung Collection: not known]		MME. HALICKA	POLAND	113	Harlem River Bridge [Greig: hung Collection: Yale University Art Gallery Illustrated in Herbert, 105]
		105 Sur la Plage [Greig: hung Collection: Yale University Art Gallery Illustrated in Herbert, 322]		114	The Star Spider [Greig: hung Collection: not known]
		LOUIS MARCOUSSIS	"	115	Russian Legend [Greig: not hung]
		106 Constellation [Greig: hung Collection: not known]		GABO	"
				116	Construction for an Observatory I [Greig: installed Collection: Gabo family, London]
				117	Model for Public Fountain (Model privately owned) [Greig: installed Collection: Gabo family, London]
				KANDINSKY	"
				118	Whimsical Line [Greig: hung Collection: not known]
				119	Gaicy [Greig: hung Collection: not known Illustration: Figure 4]
				120	Rote Tiefe [Greig: hung Collection: not known]
				LISSITZKY	"
				121	Proun [Greig: hung Collection: not known]

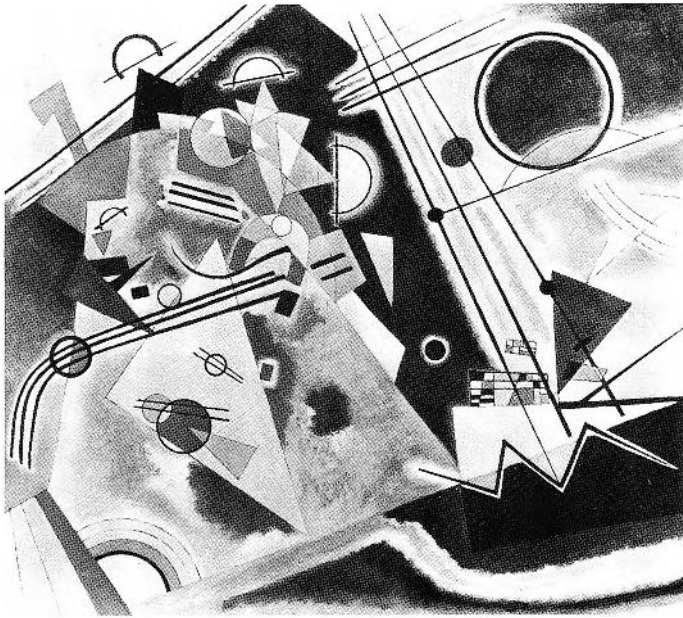


FIGURE 4. Wassily Kandinsky, *Gaiety*, 1924. Oil on canvas, 65.4 × 72.4 cm. Collection unknown (Photo: Toronto, Art Gallery of Ontario).

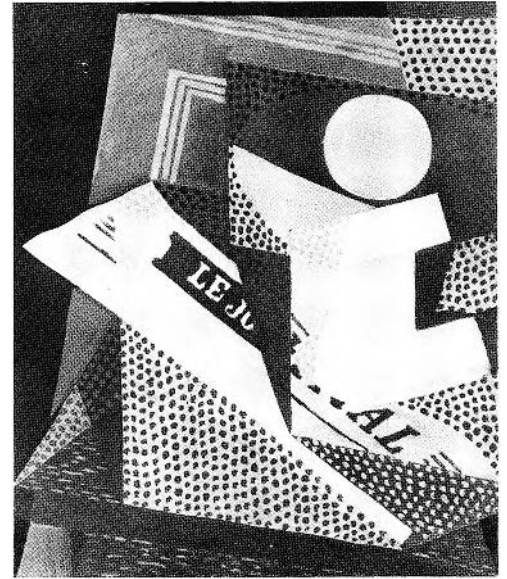


FIGURE 5. Juan Gris, *Newspaper and Fruit dish* (formerly *Abstraction in Yellow and Blue I*), 1916. Oil on canvas, 46 × 37.8 cm. New York, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, Gift, Estate of Katherine S. Dreier, 1953 (Photo: Toronto, Art Gallery of Ontario).

- | | | |
|--|--|--|
| 122 Proun 99
[Greig: hung
Collection: Yale University
Art Gallery
Illustrated in Herbert, 437] | 129 Abstract Still Life
[Greig: hung
Collection: not known] | 136 Composition II
[Greig: hung
Collection: not known] |
| 123 W.B. Proun 98
[Greig: hung
Collection: not known] | MIRÓ | SPAIN |
| PEVSNER | RUSSIA | JEAN CROTTI |
| 124 Head
[Greig: installed
Collection: not known] | 130 Study in Yellow
[Greig: hung
Collection: Yale University
Art Gallery
Illustrated in Herbert, 470] | SWITZERLAND |
| 125 Torso
[Greig: installed
Collection: Museum of Modern
Art, N. Y.] | 131 Study in Blue, 1926
[Greig: hung
Collection: formerly Museum of
Modern Art, N. Y.] | 137 The Bridge
[Greig: hung
Collection: not known] |
| VASILLIEFF | PICASSO | 138 Song of the Night
[Greig: not hung ('not here')] |
| 126 Child with Rooster
[Greig: hung
Collection: Philadelphia Museum
of Art] | 132 Music, Abstract Painting
[Greig: hung
Collection: Indianapolis Museum
of Art] | JOHANNES ITTEN |
| 127 Laying the Cards
[Greig: hung
Collection: Yale University
Art Gallery
Illustrated in Herbert, 707] | PEDRO DE SAGA | " |
| JUAN GRIS | SPAIN | 139 Accord in Blue-Green
[Greig: hung
Collection: not known] |
| 128 Abstraction in Yellow and Blue I
[Greig: hung
Collection: Solomon R.
Guggenheim Museum, N.Y.
Illustration: Figure 5] | 133 Abstraction
[Greig: hung
Collection: not known] | 140 Horizontal-Vertical
[Greig: hung
Collection: not known] |
| | OTTO CARLSUND | PAUL KLEE |
| | 134 Wall Decoration for
an Observatory
[Greig: hung
Collection: Arkiv for Dekorativ
Konst, Lund, Sweden] | " |
| | OSTERBLUM | 141 No. 2 – 1923 (Water Colour)
[Greig: hung
Collection: not known] |
| | 135 Composition I
[Greig: hung
Collection: not known] | 142 No. 131 – 1924 (Water Colour)
[Greig: hung
Collection: Museum of Modern
Art, N. Y.] |
| | | 143 No. 158 – 1924 (Water Colour)
[Greig: not hung] |
| | | 144 No. 8 – 1925 (Water Colour)
[Greig: hung
Collection: W. Allenbach, Bern] |
| | | 145 Urnen (Water Colour)
[Greig: hung
Collection: Museum of Modern
Art, N. Y.] |

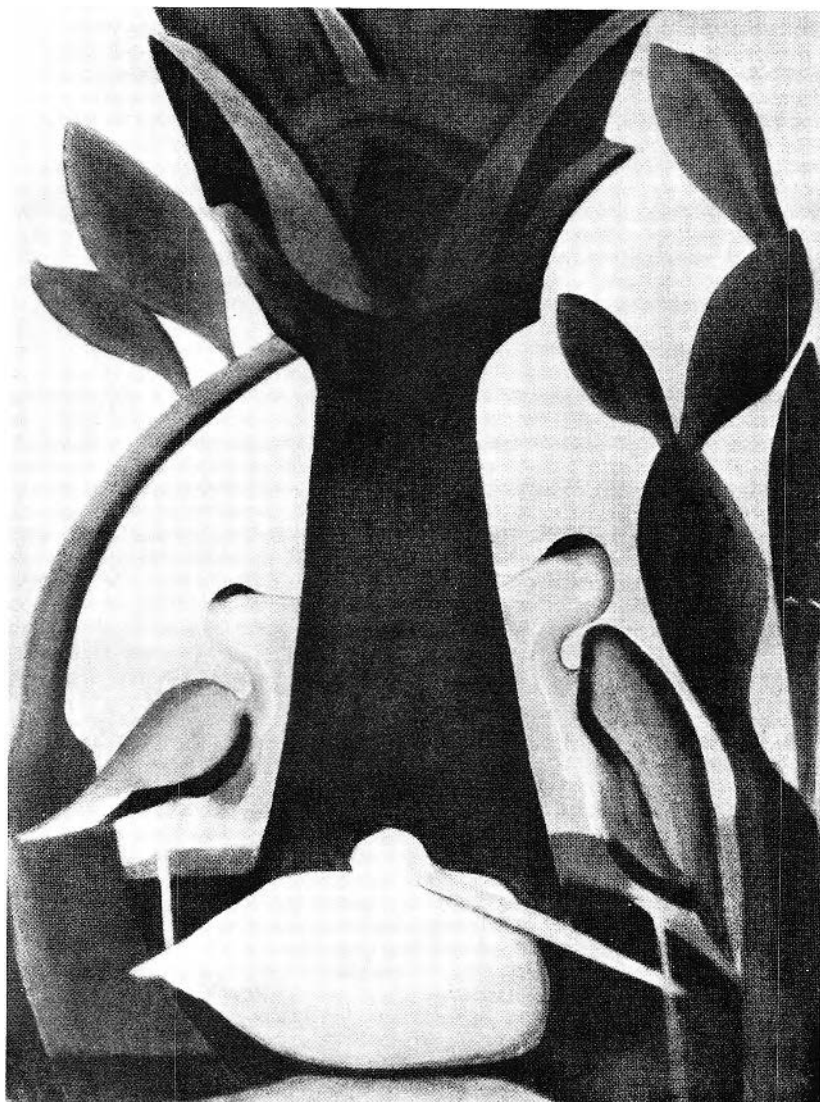


FIGURE 6. Joseph Stella, *The Palm* (formerly *Herons*), 1926. Pastel on paper, 111.8 × 83.2 cm. Washington, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution (Photo: Toronto, Art Gallery of Ontario).

JOHN COVERT UNITED STATES

- 146 Ex Act
[Greig: hung
Collection: Museum of Modern
Art, N.Y.]
- 147 Vocalization
[Greig: hung
Collection: Yale University
Art Gallery
Illustrated in Herbert, 166]

STUART DAVIS **

148 Still Life
[Greig: hung
Collection: Mrs. Stuart Davis,
New York]

KATHERINE S. DREIER **

149 At a Stravinsky Programme
[Greig: hung
Collection: not known]

150 Unknown Forces
[Greig: hung
Collection: Brooklyn Museum]

EILSHEMIUS **

151 Rhythm
[Greig: hung
Collection: not known]

152 The Dream
[Greig: hung
Collection: not known]

[152a
[152b
[152c Greig: 'also a, b, c [unidentified]
in corridor']

PAUL GAULOIS **

153 Construction in Blue
[Greig: hung
Collection: Yale University Art
Gallery
Illustrated in Herbert, 290]

KARL KNATIIS **

154 Barnyard
[Greig: hung
Collection: not known]

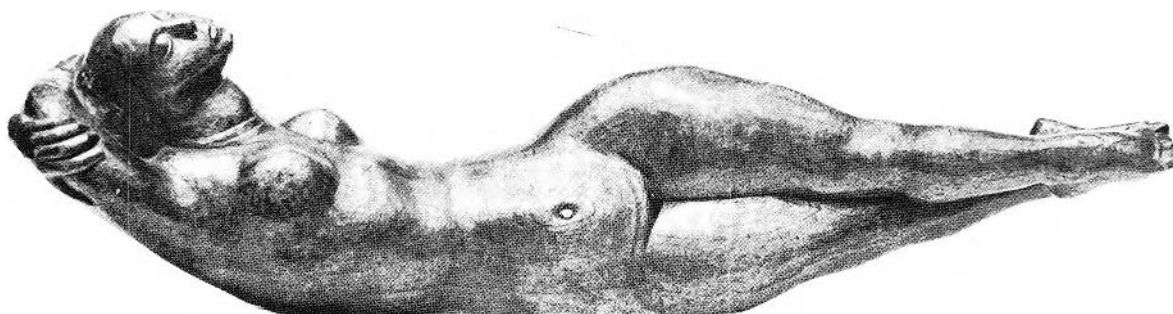


FIGURE 7. William Zorach, *Floating Figure*, 1922. Borneo mahogany, 22.3 × 84.5 × 16.8 cm. Buffalo, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Room of Contemporary Art Fund, 1946 (Photo: Toronto, Art Gallery of Ontario).

very funny things about the pictures. However, it would be well for them to remind themselves before they grow flippant that these paintings are not the product of a small, self-conscious group, determined to be different. The Société Anonyme has gathered together the work of the modernists from twenty-two countries, and is showing the canvases of dozens of artists who have nothing in common except a determination to sever their connection with traditional painting. The collection provides evidence that the movement is not a local or purely freakish one, but that there is a universal tendency, especially in the super-civilized centres, to break away from the arts that are built, in an evolutionary manner, upon tradition. Probably these artists, on the whole, are not trying to do something that will defeat or discredit the Rembrandts and the Raphaels. Rather, they are endeavoring to create a new art form, entirely different in approach, in conception and in purpose from the orthodox painting to which we are accustomed. For that reason the show offers Torontonians a unique opportunity. It is worthy of respectful examination by any person who wants to know what Modern Art means, even though it is probable that the vast majority of honest seekers will leave the gallery with the admission that they can neither understand nor feel it

Much Abstract Art.

The study of these pictures will not be made any easier by the fact that there are almost as many theories of approach as there are artists. You cannot put your finger on specific things that all of them attempt to do. Of course, a large number of them endeavor to express abstract moods, and then the value of the picture lies in its ability to awaken an appropriate response in the emotions of a person looking at it. But even this effort to create highly sensitized reactions is made in different ways. For example, there is the work of Mondrian, the acknowledged leader of a group that stands for clarification. This painter has sent from Holland a picture that is supposed to be a masterpiece. To the uninitiated, it is only a white square, with one grey corner, on which have been drawn an incompleting square of four broad lines. Undoubtedly, such pictures will be Greek emotionally to persons who do not understand the painter's theories of placement and simplicity. Then they will turn to 'Jockeys,' by Jacques Villon, the French artist, brother of the man who painted the famous 'Nude Descending the Staircase,' which caused a sensation in the early days of post-expressionism – all those modernistic words now appear obsolete. There is no simplification in 'Jockeys.' It is a massed effort in red, without realism, to suggest motion, the accumulated action of a horse race, but quite without exact figures.

After examining the Hollander and the Frenchman, who are as far as the poles asunder, you may turn to the Austrian, Erika Klien, and in 'Abstraction,' you will find lovely color and a suggestion of realism. It would appear to be a man's conglomerate impression after watching passing vehicles on a crowded street. Its meaning is much less elusive, and it has design that anybody can enjoy. There are some pictures, notably those of Lissitzky, that give the suggestion of being geometrical drawings, although upon close examination one learns that they are not mathematically accurate. While not attractive to the eye, the meaning of these would appear to be metaphysical. Then again, among the more difficult, are the works of Kandinsky, the Russian, considered one of the great names, and Pinnur Jonsson, of Iceland, in which abstract impressions are gathered into a flat design. It is quite apparent that all these men have different conceptions of what they are trying to do, and to each one of them a different interpretation must be applied.

A Touch of Realism.

Scattered among the abstractions, there are a number of canvases possessing a touch of realism that will give an ordinary gallery frequenter a place of contact. One or two of them, like 'Mystic Landscape,' by the Italian Dottori, are quite understandable in their relationship to scenery, but most of them would appear to be symbolic, although most modernists hate that word, perhaps because it suggests the early years of the present century when all the literary ladies talked of symbols. If 'Depression,' by Wallace Putnam, an American, is not allegorical, it is nothing at all. The idea is quite obvious, and the figure of the man drawn with strength. Katherine Dreier, another American, has contributed a bit of satire, 'At a Stravinsky Program,' fairly neatly painted, in which the blank face, the surprised face and the silly face would seem to depict the popular attitude in the presence of a new art. Then there is a particularly clever cartoon, entitled 'Jazz Band,' by Scheiber, a Hungarian, in which the leering, obscene faces, the big mouths and the grotesque instruments suggest eloquently the coarse, objectionable qualities of jazz music. Such pictures are readily understandable.

The majority of the symbolic canvases are not so easy to read. For example, Johannes Molzahn, a German, may have intended to suggest in his 'Family Group,' the spiritual gap between the modern hard-faced society woman and her children. He has placed them among strangely-colored tubes that have an odd way of putting them on different planes. However, there are some persons who will not feel that he has discovered a new way of expressing the full tragedy of such a situation.

It is not possible to mention in detail the various strange experiments in picture-making. One of them is manufactured of feathers, and several have been constructed of paper, pasted together. Into others, different foreign objects have been fastened, so as to secure bizarre effects. An occasional canvas is merely a humoresque, like Bela Kador's 'Separation,' in which a man is riding away from his ladylove on a most extraordinary animal, and then again you will find the futurist idea of a portrait.

The purpose of this review has not been to make the exhibition seem lucid, but it is a show that calls for reporting rather than criticism. What sense would there be in carping about a thing that has definitely arrived? Why attempt to measure it for persons who do not, as yet, know its standards or its pattern? If these pictures awaken emotional or aesthetic response in some men and women, or appear for them, to have a profound significance, then they do justify themselves in certain directions. The fact that several of them are marked 'Sold' indicates that they find minds which are in tune with them. Other gallery frequenters can only grope with curiosity and interest, and attempt to discover what these modernists are endeavoring to do. The present exhibition gives them an unprecedented opportunity, for it includes the modern art of England and Japan, Sweden and Bulgaria, Denmark and Georgia, Belgium and Bulgaria, Spain and Norway, and even the more recently created Czecho-Slovakia. Nothing like it has ever before been shown in Toronto.

Three other exhibitions were opened yesterday at the Art Gallery, namely, the annual show of the Graphic Art Club, the annual show of the Toronto Camera Club, and a number of paintings and drawings by C.W. Jefferys, illustrating the history of Canada and the United States. More will be said about these local shows at a later date. – Fred Jacob.

'Modern Art' Displayed In International Exhibit At Toronto Art Gallery / Nearly Two Hundred Examples by Artists of Over Twenty Different Nations on View / Interesting Foreword in Catalogue a Great Aid to the Uninitiated / GLOBE REVIEWER EXPLAINS CULT

At last 'modern art' in the field of drawing, painting and sculpture has come to Toronto in sufficient force to convince any reasonable person that it is a mistake to remain in ignorance of the methods and purposes of this world-wide movement. The following article has been prepared in the hope of helping such reasonable persons to understand sympathetically, even if they then may not care to accept practically, the fundamental assumptions, principles and motives which have produced the manifestations known variously as Post-Impressionism, Expressionism, Futurism, Cubism, Orphism, Synchronism, Vorticism, Constructivism, Da-Daism, and the like.

In the International Exhibition of Modern Art now on view at the Art Gallery of Toronto, the Société Anonyme has assembled nearly two hundred examples of the new tendencies in the plastic and pictorial arts by artists of more than twenty different nations. For people who have not travelled extensively, this exhibition performs the great service of bringing Europe to our very doors.

Of course, those who are really in touch with the subject will know that there are considerably more extreme phases than any shown here, but the collection is a representative one nevertheless, and comprises all that any one needs for a thorough understanding of post-impressionist movements in art. Many of the exhibits now at the Gallery were seen and briefly commented upon by the 'Globe-trotter' last summer in Europe.

Advice for the Uninitiated.

To begin with, every one should read and digest the Foreword and introduction in the Catalogue. Next we may do well to realize that we have, all of us, always accepted 'in principle' the chief fundamental assumption of modern art. For instance, in the annual shows of the Toronto Camera Club we realize that photography moves away from a lifeless mechanical process and tends to become a living art in proportion as it forsakes bald literalism or factual realism and introduces other elements, such as imagination, personality, and design.

We know, also, that if you turn a mirror on nature the result is not necessarily a picture, in the artistic sense, because certain vital elements – such as selection, composition, and intelligent purpose – are lacking. Just so with the Graphic Art Show and the historical paintings and drawings by C.W. Jefferys, on view in the adjoining rooms: some of these exhibits fail to reach the level of real art because mere illustration, a transcript of supposed facts, lacks just this prime requisite of all great art, the expression of the human spirit.

The Logical Inference.

Well, then, when we have once admitted that art begins with the departure from superficial actualities why not admit further that the more we dispense with these lifeless facts or hampering outward appearances and allow free play for the higher human faculties, the purer will be the art-form resulting?

Such at least is the entirely logical position of modern art, briefly stated. A painted portrait may be a truer likeness than a

photograph, as well as a far greater work of art, because the painter forsakes outer fact for inner truth, mechanical reproduction for personal analysis, the literal for the spiritual, the objective for the subjective. A tree, a cow, a farmer in overalls – so much is what a dog, a horse, a Hottentot, a child of two, might see. But we, the heirs of all the ages in the foremost rank of time, knowing the universe of the infinitely little, the electron theory which all but turns matter into spirit; and the universe of the infinitely great, the galactic theory which all but eliminated this world of ours; knowing radioactivity, Einstein relativity, and travel by land, sea, air and under water at formerly undreamed of speeds – shall we rest content with what an animal, a savage, or an infant may see? Surely a more mature, adult art is conceivable, expressing more adequately our scientific knowledge, our complex civilization, our questing human spirit.

Modern art, accordingly, has caused to multiply wearisome copies of external aspects and familiar objects, and has stressed creative originality in penetrating beneath the surface of things and presenting human reactions, feelings, or ideas about those things in subtle and novel forms. That the results may seem strange to some of us is no argument against their value, for the fault may, quite possibly, be in our own limitations. In some cases the artist has simply passed the daylight image of some hackneyed object through the prism of his consciousness and painted the resulting spectrum. If we are surprised to find so many colors in an ordinary ray of light, that merely proves our ignorance.

Most of the pictures in the present exhibition are confessedly 'abstract.' That is, they frankly avoid the familiar 'concrete' or realistic forms and facts of natural landscape and human life, and offer us, instead, an alambicated product which is highly intellectualized. They reduce the object to its compound elements, or raise it to the *n*th power, or study its relation to the cosmic energy, or give us the absolute of which it is a variant. But always they get away from the banal or obvious, and saturate their subject with brains and character.

Strength of the Modern Position.

It is difficult to see how modern art can be successfully attacked, in theory. And in practice, if one maintains that the proof of the pudding is the eating, one is met by the axiom that there is no absolute rule in questions of taste. We may not like 'abstract' art, but others may. In any event, there is so much of it going on all over the world that we cannot intelligently ignore it.

As for the question of beauty, this too is merely a matter of taste. What is beautiful to one is ugly to another. There is a fine modern sonnet beginning 'Euclid alone has seen true Beauty bare,' which suggests very well the beauty of the abstract, and no one will deny that there may be a beauty in machinery, a beauty in pattern and design, in 'significant form,' in idea, construction, relation, power, in old age, deformity, disease, or even death itself.

However, it is important to remember that one of the most fruitful sources of the whole modern movement was the revolt against beauty, against the idea that everything in art had to be sweet and pretty and fragrant and all dressed up in its Sunday best. The older art stood for the 'beautified,' the imitated, and the academically conventional in drawing, coloring, arrangement, perspective, etc. The freer, newer art stands for simplification, organization, and expression.

The new aims are intensity, equilibrium, purity, transparency, 'with no extraneous subjects to disquiet or preoccupy,' no

stereotyped forms or formulas to get between the eye or soul and the thing-in-itself, which arouses our emotion. Through decorative suggestion, then, or through any and every medium of expression the artist seeks to release his creative impulse, his poetic spontaneity, his subconscious reaction, or his piercingly analytical insight. Yet there are so many different schools that even these sweeping generalizations fail to cover the whole field.

A Few Specific Cases.

Coming now to a few specific cases in the present exhibition which will serve as easy introductory steps for the beginner, this reviewer would recommend the evident effectiveness of No. 159, 'Depression,' to start with. The sense of impending doom in this canvas could not have been conveyed by realistic methods. Then take No. 1, 'Abstraction,' think of the Chaldean original (every one recalls the hunters in chariots attacking lions), and revel in this brilliant translation of that original from statics to dynamics. And then take No. 147, 'Vocalization,' and realize that the subject is not someone singing, or music, or harmony, or a vocalist, but just exactly 'Vocalization'—and how else would it look? If we are unwilling to perform this mental operation, we really have no right to blame the artist.

No. 31, 'Abstract Forms,' is a good test. If one studies it and feels one's way into it, one will soon come to admire and enjoy it. And surely most people will admit that 'Abstraction,' No. 70, is highly effective. Or again, compare No. 129, 'Abstract Still Life,' with the chromolithographs of roses which are sold in the 'art' stores, and see if you must not admit in all candor that the former is more intelligent, more interesting and more vital. Or, finally compare Brancusi's magnificent egg-like head of Mlle. Pogany in polished brass with the sickeningly sugar and sentimental sawdust-doll 'Psyche,' in the old Grange, and be honest enough to confess that the former has far more life, power, originality, beauty and creative artistic genius.

Lasting Values of the New Art.

Whether or not one cares for the extreme phases of expressionism shown in this exhibition, one cannot deny the lasting value of this movement's contribution to art. In the first place, its protest or revolt against academic traditionalism may well be sound. We now realize the artificiality of Pope's rhetorical heroic couplets, and Tennyson's glorified magazine-verse, though their contemporaries did not; in the same way, we realize the lifeless formalism of Egyptian and Byzantine art; and it is quite possible that our own traditional art is equally artificial, vainly repetitious, weakly stereotyped, as the modern group claim, even though we ourselves cannot realize it.

In the second place, while this exhibition abundantly illustrates the theory of the movement, it is not the extreme form of this theory, but its indirect influence, which may prove most lastingly valuable. At least, without attempting to predict future developments, we can say that this movement has already widened horizons, emancipated technique, opened up new worlds of color, explored and reclaimed for art vast regions which were wholly ignored by academic painting, and broken down the stone wall which seemed to forbid all future progress at the end of the nineteenth century.

In the third place, while one might not care to own and live with many of these modern or abstract exhibits, it is well to remember that the genuine masterpieces of the giants of this new movement, from Cezanne and Matisse to Augustus John and Epstein, are worth thousands of dollars in the open market, are eagerly sought after, and are steadily rising in value. The reaction from meticulously finished detail and from pretty-pretty saccharinity has certainly gone farther than most laymen realize. — I.M.

(3) *The Canadian Forum*, VII (May 1927), pp. 239-242.

MODERN ART AND AESTHETIC REACTIONS

An Appreciation, by Lawren Harris

Every large municipal art gallery on this continent was offered the more or less extreme exhibition of modern art which hung in the Toronto Art Gallery during April. Three out of the forty odd galleries accepted the exhibition. They were the Brooklyn Museum of Art, the Albright Art Gallery of Buffalo, and the Toronto Art Gallery. These three galleries accepted the exhibition believing that they should endeavour and permit the public itself to judge the pictures.

The pictures were gathered from twenty-two different countries, twenty of them European, and they embodied so many different directions and ideas, and these were in some instances so new to us and gave rise to so much speculation, that any summary is made difficult.

The idiom of the pictures being different from the accepted idioms of the past and present created at first sight the impression of sameness, but the oftener one visited the exhibition, the more diversified it became, until nearly every picture separated itself into its own unique embodiment of idea. Indeed, I doubt if any exhibition we have had ever displayed such a wealth of ideas, or so much real adventuring, or so large a proportion of stimulating and profound works. One rarely questioned the design of the pictures, the rhythm, balance, and organization, or the technique. These were generally of such a high order that the spectator was completely freed to live in and experience their spirit. A few pictures contained ideas that were slight and some seemed purely explorations into new ways of seeing. Indeed, most of the pictures required of the spectator a new way of seeing. Here was the difficulty for most people. They could not adjust themselves to a new way of seeing and without this adjustment the pictures naturally seemed meaningless, bizarre, even ugly. But when one had become familiar with their visual idiom, a new, clear and thrilling communication came from the walls of the gallery: the place was alive with a clean-coloured pristine life.

Here we had almost a new medium of expression, not supplanting any medium but adding another means of expression to the older ones. The idiom is too new, is still too much in the experimental stages to look for but a few devotional works. The range of ideas it is suited to may synchronize with a new idea of devotion peculiar to the coming generations. That to us now its appearance is mechanistic says nothing. Behind and within, and yet an integral part of this appearance, is a life peculiarly moving and containing its own possibilities of devotional expression perhaps as great as any we have had.

Most of the pictures were abstract. These could be divided as coming from two sources. One half of them from naturalistic sources wherein the more abstract and lasting qualities of design, movement, rhythm, equilibrium, spatial relationship, light, and order were extricated from the fleeting aspects of a scene or scenes to suggest its informing, persisting life. The other half, and in the main the most convincing pictures, were directly created from an inner seeing and conveyed a sense of order in a purged, pervading vitality that was positively spiritual. Many of these abstractions appeared flat at the first seeing, but with contemplation or sometimes in an unguarded moment, they unfolded in space and became absolute within their frames; that is, by no power of sight or thinking could any plane, colour, or surface be shifted from its exact place in space, and though the boundary lines of the planes were as

sharp and precise as a knife edge the space was soft and palpable. Some of the abstractions yielded the experience of infinite space between flat shapes only a few inches apart. Again, they could be viewed as an indication in aesthetic terms of the trend of scientific thought.

There were other pictures that, by a peculiar relationship of concrete objects and by rendering transparent some of their planes, sought to give the experience of the unreality of appearances. Others portrayed the unreality of dreams. Still other works by distortion and unnaturalistic use of colour achieved bold and immense relations that almost became devices expressive of the outlook and life of a whole people.

The exhibition proved rather a treat to most people. Many were angered, many resorted to ridicule; but some remained to contemplate truly; and, while no one could quite accept all the pictures, nevertheless they had many new and illuminating experiences.

Perhaps if we deal with some reactions and misconceptions which the pictures induced, we may convey a clearer idea of their scope and trend.

The works that were direct creations of abstract arrangements appeared to most people like charts, as if they were arrived at by mathematical calculation or by the use of the engineering draughtsman's instruments. In reality they were achieved by a precision and concentration of feeling so fine that on the emotional gamut they parallel the calculations of higher mathematics. But, they remain emotional, living works, and were therefore capable of inspiring lofty experiences; one almost saw spiritual ideas, crystal clear, powerful, and poised.

Again, if these pictures were compared to other and accepted works they appeared eccentric. But if one accepted their idiom and lived in the pictures – as one must to know and experience any art – one found scarcely an eccentricity in the whole exhibition. Within their idiom they were logical, ordered – some few almost magical in their arrangement.

The idea which many onlookers acquired that painting should confine itself to native moods or to various interpretations and not be metaphysical, mystic, or psychological, or express pure abstract ideas is certainly an arbitrary one. Surely one may express any conceivable idea, trend, thought, or experience so long as the form of its expression and the idea are appropriate the one to the other.

Also the notion that any child can create such pure abstractions, that they are haphazard fantasies, is quite erroneous. Children create a different kind of expression. Only long time, much brooding and hard work, through almost endless study and penetration into the ephemerality of nature will lead to a classification that has the high resonance of spiritual reality. Exacting indeed is the way, demanding an austerity few laymen and none of the looser variety of artists are aware of.

Many people deeply interested in the future of Canadian Art feared that the direction shown in the exhibition might lure some Canadian artists from their path. That seems very unlikely. While the exhibition did stimulate creative thought and emotion and opened new and thrilling vistas, it would be almost impossible now for any real Canadian artist to imitate any European artist. Our way is not that of Europe, and, when we evolve abstractions, the approach, direction, and spirit will be somewhat different. Furthermore, the exhibition has enlarged the vision of many of our people, has awakened them to a greater range of ideas and new possibilities of expression and has thus enlarged the eliciting audience for our artists. This should keep them true to their own path and help clarify their particular direction.

The pictures did not soothe the complacencies, nor were they what is called primitive, nor were they merely clever. They

were alive with vital ideas, with the power and austerity of true discovery and the largeness of outlook necessary to real adventure. There were a few works so purged of all smallness, vagueness, and sentimentality, so pure and elevated, that they acted on some individuals as saints do on the gross-minded; that is they stirred the odorous sediment of resentment into angry eruption and this erupted unpleasantness was, as usual, attributed to the pictures.

Also the pictures were derided because they were difficult and it was said that the test of a new art is how far it conveys a message to the spectator. This is too general a statement to have any meaning. Every new development in the arts has had a handful of adherents merely, and hosts of opponents. This is ever the test. If it has sufficient vitality, inner life to withstand the repugnance and recrimination of the conservatives, it persists, and the temporary fuss and animosity subside. If it has no real life but is the product of cheapness or conceit, it disappears. The truth is that works of art test the spectator much more than the spectator tests them. Great art is never kept alive by the masses of men, but by the perceiving, by those who are sufficiently affected to bother about it. It is in the vanguard of life not in the main body.

It is surely a commonplace that the established order of any pursuit, the priests and profiteers of the accepted, and the unperceiving masses of men, do not like to be disturbed. They even resent it and will resort to vilification or ridicule to waylay any vital new manifestation that seems to threaten their comfort or their peace of mind. Whereas complacency plays no part in the life of creative individuals; the urge of spirit is too active in them. And does not the evolution of man result from the friction of these two forces? The one negative, acquisitive, unseeing, and conserving; the other positive, adventurous, and intuitive; and are not they dependent on each other for life?

An Objection, by Franz Johnston

Having heard a great deal of argument both for and against the exhibit now in the Art Gallery of Toronto, the writer finally decided to see for himself. He went, he saw, and was conquered. Outside the sky was clear and the air fresh and invigorating, which sent the writer in a happy state and with an open mind to see the collection. One of the most interesting things was Erika Klien's *Abstraction* (1). This really looked as if the man had something in mind, and felt better for being rid of it. It suggested the effect one sees when a motion picture projector fails to synchronize, and the result is an almost intelligible blur. Gutfreund's sculpture (10 and 11) looked like heroic German toys, not so good as some possessed at one time by the writer. Arp's wood sculpture is a sheer piece of hokum. Braque's *Still Life* is sickening even to one with a good strong stomach. Cahn's *Composition* (19) should be entitled 'Decomposition'. By this time my bright spirits were somewhat slackened, and I was finding it would be a job to go through with it; but I did. Metzinger's *Port* is like a child's drawing through a sophisticated mind. Picabia's *Peinture du Midi* (26) at least is obvious as to what its intention is; but why? Valmier's *Abstract Forms* (31) is a piece or rather several pieces of unadulterated rot that is as abstract as the odor from decaying garbage. Villon's *Jockeys* (32) suggests an interior view of what a rider's stomach must look and feel like during the most intense motion, while on a fleecing horse with a rough spine. Baumeister's *Wall Decoration* could be no decoration to any wall, at least not on ours. Campendonk's *Red Cat* (46) is that, but why in Heaven's name some people, otherwise intelligent, rave over the alleged metaphysics, clarifications, and abstractions supposed to be in these abortions in

paint is beyond the writer – thank God. *The Forest* by Ernst (47) looks, and I believe is, done in the same way that one takes a rubbing of an old coin or a piece of embossing, only in this case it was a rough sawn board and some small chicken wire. I prefer trees that rustle in the wind and show beautiful sky patterns through their foliage. Both of Marc's pictures (54 and 55) are sad. Sadly enough, one has 'Sold' marked on it. Both the picture and the purchaser. I hope Molzahn's *Physico-Mechanical Parallels* (58) has not mental parallels. Schwitter's *Radiation* (61) suggests that a little radiation might be had from it if it were placed in the furnace. It is dirty in colour, absurd in arrangement, and anyone who sees a single solitary glimmer of art in it is hypnotizing himself, and I hope he does not 'come to' while in front of it. Mondrian's *Clarifications* would be much clearer if the canvases had been left entirely blank. A piece of clean glass would be much more significant and certainly more highly organized.

But why go on? The whole show is not one that should be seen by young art students, at least they should not be told it is great, because mind is ordered, clean, and reasonable in its

original state. I am confident that most of the creatures that perpetrated these monstrosities have 'leprous brains', if any. These people who do these things are more dangerous than many incarcerated in asylums for the insane, many of whom at least are cheerful in their dementia. *The Eye of God* by Burliuck (112) is but an enlarged section of the ocular cavity of the skull with the skin removed from a diseased face. The Eye of God! God help the perpetrator! It is really a waste of valuable space to talk about these things that are like so many things a feeble-minded child would draw, seeing all sorts of mystery and marvels in his work that an alert, clear-thinking, energetic brain might be sympathetic towards but hope the child might die. Before closing I would like to ask that anyone visiting this exhibit should look at Zorach's *Portrait* and therein they will see the answer to the whole exhibit. The very people in Toronto who are raving about the esoteric qualities in these works are those who raise the greatest 'hullabaloo' when a side-show shows physical abortions and freaks of nature. Then why in the name of common-sense and fair-mindedness endorse these mental miscarriages?

RÉSUMÉ

En 1927, du 1^{er} au 24 avril, l'Exposition internationale d'art moderne, provenant de la collection de la Société Anonyme de New York, fut présentée par l'Art Gallery of Ontario à Toronto. Le Comité des expositions qui avait d'abord résolu de ne pas participer à cet événement jugé «trop révolutionnaire» dut cependant revenir sur sa décision par suite des pressions de Lawren Harris, éminent artiste de Toronto. Dans une lettre datée du 26 décembre et reproduite ici en entier pour la première fois, Harris s'engageait à faire venir à ses frais l'exposition, si le comité maintenait son attitude. Mais la lettre atteignit son but et le Canada connut sa première exposition d'art abstrait, événement comparable en importance à ce qu'avait été l'Armory Show aux États-Unis. Le catalogue imprimé alors, considéré jusqu'à présent comme un document fidèle de l'exposition tenue à Toronto, se révèle à plus d'un titre trompeur et erroné. En effet, la découverte récente d'une copie de ce catalogue annotée par E.R. Greig, conservateur de l'Art Gallery of Toronto en 1927, permet de constater pas moins de 25 corrections apportées à la liste des œuvres, Greig ayant indiqué les œuvres qui, bien qu'annoncées, ne furent pas accrochées ou installées. Cette liste de la publication de 1927 est redonnée ici avec les annotations de Greig. L'exposition qui fit sensation à Toronto attira plus de 10 000 personnes, nombre peu ordinaire pour cette époque. Dans les journaux locaux, on trouve presque quatre fois plus de comptes rendus de cette exposition, par rapport aux autres expositions spéciales présentées par l'Art Gallery. Les commentaires critiques des journalistes ou d'artistes s'exprimant dans les journaux et les périodiques contenaient des prises de positions énergiques en faveur ou contre l'exposition. Quatre de ces articles sont présentés en annexe.
