

VISIONS OF LIGHT AND AIR:
Canadian Impressionism,
1885-1920

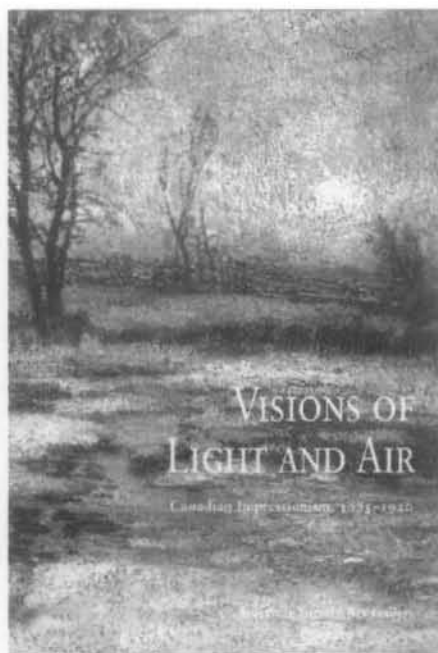
Carol LOWREY, Curator, with essays
by Laurier LACROIX and
Robert STACEY

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Over the last three decades Canadian artists who have been associated to varying degrees with the French Impressionists - those "despisers of art" castigated by Edmond Dyonnet in a wildly inaccurate 1913 speech¹ - have come under increased scrutiny. Retrospective exhibitions have been devoted to the work of, among others, Henri Beau, William Blair Bruce, William Henry Clapp, Maurice Cullen, Ernest Lawson, Helen Galloway McNicoll, Marc-Aurèle de Foy Suzor-Coté and Ernest Percyval Tudor-Hart.² In addition, and despite the difficulties inherent in dealing with the breadth, inconsistencies and contradictions of "Canadian Impressionism" as a phenomenon, the subject has been tackled in an M.A. thesis, an essay by Dennis Reid, a coffee-table book by Paul Duval, and two exhibitions (1965 and 1973).³

The latter three sources have no pretensions to being more than uncritical introductions to the visual pleasure-ground of Canadian Impressionism. This is not the case with *Visions of Light*



and Air, the extensive and valuable catalogue published in conjunction with an unfortunately flawed exhibition of the same name. Finally, nearly a century after winning its initial acceptance, the Impressionist movement in Canada has become the subject of an erudite publication, though not of a comparably satisfying museum display.

Visions of Light and Air was organized by the Americas Society of New York as part of the Society's ongoing mission "to foster a broader understanding and appreciation of the rich cultural heritage of our neighbors in Latin America, the Caribbean, and Canada" (p.8). It comprises sixty-five paintings by twenty-six artists, divided into three sections: "Canadians

Abroad," "Impressionist Canada" (landscapes and a few cityscapes), and "Figures and Portraits." The artists include not only those Canadians usually associated with Impressionism (Beau, Cullen, McNicoll and Suzor-Coté, for example), but also such lesser-known and/or less likely-sounding figures as Vital-Achille-Raoul Barré (1874-1932) and David Milne.⁴ The exhibition is scheduled for showings at the Americas Society Art Gallery, The Dixon Gallery and Gardens (Memphis), and The Frick Art Museum (Pittsburgh). It first opened at the Musée du Québec (June 1995), and will conclude its five-city tour at the Art Gallery of Hamilton, in December 1996.

Visions of Light and Air, the exhibition, is premised upon a definition of "Impressionism" that is so catholic as to lose anything resembling clearly discernible boundaries. It is, of course, true that even in reference to the European context the label "Impressionist" has often been applied with disconcerting carelessness. Not all "Impressionists" were as concerned with painting light as they were with painting objects defined by light. Some avoided spontaneous-seeming compositions, or reliance upon high-valued, unmixed, spectral colours. Still others clung to well-defined modeling and chiaroscuro, or were reticent about employing broken brushwork. As a result, "Impressionist" has tended to be

used in a sweeping way to designate the work of artists whose affiliations with the style were often demonstrably tenuous. Degas, for example, resisted being categorized as such. More recently some of the less thoughtful publicity and/or reporting on exhibitions of work from the Emil G. Bührle and the Barnes collections has made Impressionists of such improbable candidates as Van Gogh, Cézanne, and even Modigliani.

The same delicate problems of classification exist *vis-à-vis* the Canadian Impressionists. How does one reconcile the increasingly pure opticality of Monet with Morrice's moody, turn-of-the-century Whistlerian aestheticism, or with Clarence Gagnon's narrative scenes? To ask a more basic question: under what conditions, and to what degree, can an art movement grounded in the socio-economic and aesthetic context of late nineteenth-century France be transposed to a very different country half a world away?

Considerations based on specificity of geographic context are complicated by a second factor that contributes to the often problematic classification of Canadian artists as "Impressionists": the temporal parameters of the movement itself. By the time Canadian artists began travelling to France in large numbers in the 1880's, Impressionism did not hold anything resembling uncontested sway amongst

the avant-garde there, let alone in the art world in general. Thus, for James Wilson Morrice, A.Y. Jackson and William Henry Clapp, Impressionism was one stop on the way to other, more up-to-date styles. For other artists, including William Blair Bruce and Henri Beau, Impressionism (or, especially in Bruce's case, fragments of Impressionist technique) remained in their repertoires for prolonged periods, but not necessarily as their preferred style. Instead, it served as one of a variety of possible approaches, the choice among them being dictated by such contingent factors as subject matter and physical scale.

The readiness of artists such as Morrice and Bruce to muddy the Impressionist waters was also the result of a third factor, beyond both national context and Impressionism's coexistence with newer approaches to picture-making. Much of International Impressionism's tendency to mix, match, heighten or ignore "essential" Impressionist criteria regarding subjects, composition, colour, brushwork and light is a consequence of the substantial influence of artists who were not French, and/or who might not have been Impressionists at all. For example (and this must have been a factor in the Americas Society's decision to sponsor this exhibition), many Canadian artists owed much to the Impressionist practices of their American teachers and

peers. James Wilson Morrice was particularly close to Robert Henri until the latter's departure from Europe for the United States in 1900, and he also went on painting excursions with Maurice Prendergast (Canadian only by birth), William Glackens, Howard Redfield and Robert Henry Logan. William Blair Bruce worked in the company of Theodore Robinson. Laura Muntz had a firm friendship with Wilhelmina Hawley, with whom she ran a summer school in northern France. In 1891 and 1892 Ernest Lawson was an ardent student of John Twachtman of The Ten. And, as Robert Stacey proposes in his essay in *Visions of Light and Air*, Lawson may initially have been steered in the direction of The Ten by Henry M. Rosenberg, an American engaged in 1898 as Principal of the Victoria School of Art and Design in Halifax. Their American contacts helped mold the Impressionism of these Canadian artists, just as Helen McNicoll's training in England imbued her painting with much the same brand of Edwardian Impressionism that permeates the art of Walter Richard Sickert, Algernon Talmage and Dorothea Sharp.

This exposure to an assortment of regional and national variations on Impressionism was combined with a smorgasbord of contemporary movements and the self-evident fact that the scenery of the Canadian Shield

bears almost no similarity to that of northern France. The result was the sort of hybridity that drove the more staunchly classification-minded members of the Parisian art world to distraction, and that becomes a significant source of consternation for the visitor to *Visions of Light and Air*. The exhibition reveals Canadian Impressionism as a complex collection of strands: less a coherently unified movement than a multifaceted phenomenon that opened out in a wealth of unexpected, frequently unlikely, directions. The viewer must certainly concede that Impressionism has long been defined in sufficiently fuzzy terms to encompass a range of artists not given to "pure" explorations of the style. However, there is surely something questionable about using the term as an umbrella to shelter all the works exhibited in *Visions of Light and Air*.

For example, such paintings as Lawren Harris's *Winter Sunrise* (1918) and Suzor-Coté's *Dégel d'avril* (1920) would both have been just as much at home in *Lost Paradise: Symbolist Europe*, on show at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts while *Visions of Light and Air* was occupying two galleries at the Musée du Québec.⁶ Suzor-Coté's involvement with Impressionism is represented in the exhibition not by his most unequivocally Impressionist paintings (dating from c.1906 and all done in France), but by five more technically

and stylistically hybrid canvases from 1913-20. An especially serious problem in the exhibition is the too-frequent conflation of Impressionism with Post-Impressionism. For example, John Sloan Gordon's *Niagara Falls* (1907) is certainly a striking image, but one that is arresting as much for its exploitation of Post-Impressionist Pointillism as for the distinctly un-Impressionist sublimity of its subject. Post-Impressionism is, of course, closely related to Impressionism, as is made clear by its other appellation: Neo-Impressionism. In its techniques as well as in certain of its key concerns, however, it very often contradicts the movement from which it partly derives its name.

Most problematic of all, however, are the two David Milne oils in the exhibition. *Columbus Monument* (c.1912) is clearly indebted to the Gauguin- and Nabis-inspired paintings of Maurice Prendergast. *Interior with Paintings* (1914) owes much not only to Prendergast but to the Fauvism of Matisse and Derain. They seem very odd choices for this exhibition, the more so because earlier in the century Milne had produced a number of paintings more in keeping with certain tenets of Impressionism. Even then his interest in Monet (he had seen some of the *Haystack* paintings at Durand-Ruel's gallery in New York) had not been focused on light as a form-dissolving phenomenon. The earlier paintings are

instead noteworthy for their integrity of structure and rigour of compositional organization. In this regard both *Columbus Monument* and *Interior with Paintings* grew organically out of Milne's earlier work but, in comparison with those already only semi-Impressionist works, their links with Impressionism are slight. This is particularly true of *Interior with Paintings*. To select the latter as illustrative of Milne's Impressionism seems eccentric at best.

Thus, even allowing for the variety of visual experience that can legitimately be subsumed under the heading "Impressionism," it is difficult not to find one's credulity stretched to - and occasionally beyond - the breaking point by some of the paintings exhibited in *Visions of Light and Air*. Under these conditions it is unclear why artists like Laura Muntz Lyall and Frank Johnston were not also included in the exhibition, and are in fact represented by only one black-and-white illustration apiece in the catalogue. Muntz Lyall was capable of utilizing Impressionist techniques with skill, while her scenes of children with or without mothers show the influence of Mary Cassatt. Johnston, as Robert Stacey points out in his catalogue essay, was the only participant in the four well-known boxcar trips to Algoma who employed a modified Impressionist vocabulary throughout those

three years (1918-21). Neither Muntz Lyall nor Johnston was a "pure" Impressionist by any means. However, the fact that this exhibition subscribes to what at times appears to be an almost capricious definition of Impressionist painting means that the list of artists who might have been included but were not is potentially very long. It is fortunate, therefore, that at least two of the three substantial catalogue essays go a long way toward compensating for these problems.

The three essays are preceded by a foreword by William H. Gerdtz, who has worked extensively on Impressionism in the United States. One of the questions raised by Gerdtz concerns the characteristics that defined Impressionist painting in Canada. It is unsurprising, in light of the factors that created divergence between "mainstream" French Impressionism and the style as it was practised in Canada, that he comes up short when he asks what the defining characteristics of Canadian Impressionism were. Casting about for an answer, he settles on the artists' involvement with "their native land ... rugged and wild ... [and] often with the wilderness itself" (p.13). This is an oft-repeated refrain in Canadian art history: that the Group of Seven aesthetic is the apparently inevitable touchstone and end-point of Canadian art during the period c.1890-1920.⁷ Yet this proposal is fraught with problems with regard to

the work of W.H. Clapp, L.L. FitzGerald and several other artists, including three of the four women whose paintings are exhibited in *Visions of Light and Air*: Frances M. Jones Bannerman, Henrietta Mabel May and Helen Galloway McNicoll. That the crispness of northern winter air is an ideal subject for an Impressionist technique is proved to great effect by Maurice Cullen (*Logging in Winter, Beaupré*, 1896) and Clarence Gagnon (*Le pont de glace à Québec*, 1921). Yet there are at least as many paintings of urban views or of tamed countryside in this exhibition as there are representations of anything more rugged. Further, the more stereotypically "Canadian" scenes do not consistently evince the most thoroughgoing or sophisticated Impressionist approach.

Carol Lowrey's essay follows Gerdt's foreword. This is a general introduction to Impressionist painting in Canada, structured - for the most part - as a series of brief biographical/critical sections. Lowrey touches on a number of topics, including the importance to many of Canada's Impressionists of study in Paris at the École des Beaux-Arts and/or the Académies Colarossi or Julian, the latter particularly popular with anglophone artists. One can trace a series of generational pilgrimages of Canadian artists to Paris and other parts of France, beginning in the 1870's with Robert Harris, James Kerr-

Lawson and William Brymner. The work of Brymner, for one, was closer to the *plein-air* naturalism that he admired in Bastien-Lepage than it was to the work of Monet or Sisley, and he cannot accurately be called an Impressionist. It nonetheless seems somewhat inconsistent, given the exhibition's tendency to err on the side of over-inclusiveness, that neither he nor Harris nor Kerr-Lawson has work exhibited in *Visions of Light and Air*.

The trans-Atlantic migration started by Brymner and others in the 1870's subsequently included William Blair Bruce and Maurice Cullen in the 1880's, Raoul Barré, Henri Beau, Ernest Lawson, Morrice and Suzor-Coté in the 1890's, and Emily Carr, William Henry Clapp, Clarence Gagnon, A.Y. Jackson and Henrietta Mabel May in the twentieth century prior to the outbreak of the First World War. Other artists, Helen McNicoll prominent among them, absorbed their Impressionist lessons not from Paris but from England. These artists reinforced the growing interest, among Montréal collectors and art critics, in Impressionism. As early as 1892 William Scott's gallery was showing works by French Impressionist masters, and four years later Suzor-Coté scored a critical (though not a financial) coup when he exhibited his works in a rented storefront.

Anglophone Toronto was less in touch with contemporary develop-

ments in Paris. Impressionism received its first public exposure there only in 1908, at the inaugural exhibition of the Canadian Art Club. On this and subsequent occasions the exhibitors were Cullen and Morrice. During the seven years after 1908 the Club also showed work by Torontonians Ernest Lawson, as well as by Clapp, Suzor-Coté and Clarence Gagnon.⁸ As Lowrey indicates, Toronto's relatively late interest in Impressionism was coupled with the fact that the style enjoyed only a brief period of sustained attention there. Important figures in the introduction of Impressionism to Toronto - most notably George Agnew Reid - defended it, but to a large degree both their roots and their practice reflected aesthetic conventions of a pre-Impressionist world. In addition, as Dennis Reid observed in his 1990 essay "Impressionism in Canada," the richest Toronto collectors were outstripped by their Montréal counterparts in terms of both wealth and adventurousness. There was no Toronto equivalent of Montréal's William Scott Gallery. And whereas the Art Association of Montréal was showing paintings by the core group of Parisian Impressionists as early as 1896, the Art Museum of Toronto did not even open until 1918.⁹

Lowrey underscores her comments about Toronto's lack of enthusiasm for Impressionism by quoting Dennis Reid on such artists as Farquhar

and Elizabeth McGillivray Knowles, Mary Heister Reid and Clara Hagerty (none of whom is included in the exhibition itself). These artists viewed their "artistic modernity in a more broadly based Aestheticism" rather than in terms of Impressionism *per se* (p.28).¹⁰ This is undeniably true, although Farquhar McGillivray Knowles would not necessarily have seemed jarringly out of place in this exhibition. In any case, Lowrey does not use Toronto's comparative (*vis-à-vis* Montréal) lack of enthusiasm for Impressionism as an excuse to gloss over Toronto artists' interest in several aspects of the style. Indeed, only nine of the twenty-six artists in the exhibition were Quebecers, whereas fifteen were Ontario residents and two (FitzGerald and Carr) were born and worked in the West.

Of the three substantial essays in *Visions of Light and Air*, Lowrey's is the only one that appears in both the English and the French versions of the catalogue. This is unfortunate. As an introduction to the artists and issues involved in Canadians' encounter with Impressionism, it covers much the same ground as Dennis Reid's 1990 essay, which was also published simultaneously in English and French. Unilingual francophone readers are thus denied ready access to the scholarship of Laurier Lacroix and Robert Stacey, both of whose essays are more specialized and groundbreaking than

Lowrey's. The omission of Lacroix's essay from the French catalogue is particularly ironic because his original text was written in French and then translated for inclusion in the English publication. It considers at length a fundamental aspect of the history of Canadian Impressionism addressed in a comparatively cursory manner by Lowrey: the means by which the style became known and was popularized between its initial appearance in Canada in the early 1890's and its widespread acceptance two decades later.

Lacroix's essay opens by identifying the very real difficulties involved in increasing public awareness of Impressionism. The reproduction of images in the press could be a complex affair. Black-and-white photography and printing, especially with the relative lack of sophistication hampering these processes in the late nineteenth century, could scarcely be expected to convey a faithful idea of the appearance of "true" Impressionist paintings, which relied for much of their effect on uniformly high-value colours. In worst-case situations, scenes of boaters or picnickers could be reproduced as indecipherable blurs with no outlines and insufficient amounts of detail to overcome the visual static. Hand-copying might have been an attractive option, had not Impressionism by its very nature emphasized the importance of spontaneity. In addition, in the 1890's

Impressionism in Canada lacked a large and eager audience. It was thus in the early stages of achieving the very acceptance that would have justified the labour of copying in the first place.

The dissemination and popularization of Impressionism was therefore incumbent largely upon the activities of collectors and critics. Lacroix, restricting himself mainly to Montréal, follows Janet Brooke in tracing the growing interest of collectors.¹¹ After 1889, tycoons such as George Drummond and William Cornelius Van Horne collected paintings by Manet, Cassatt, Degas, Renoir, Pissarro and Sisley, albeit at a modest rate. More importantly, they loaned them to exhibitions at the Art Association of Montreal twice before the turn of the century: in 1895 and 1897. As noted by Lowrey, Montrealers could also see French Impressionist paintings at William Scott's gallery, and Lacroix adds to this information the fact that, in 1906, they flocked to the Art Association to see twenty-nine paintings loaned by the Impressionists' most important dealer, Paul Durand-Ruel. Finally, a 1909 A.A.M. exhibition of some three hundred pieces of modern French art is characterized as one of the most important "turning points as to the quality and number of works in the Impressionist style produced in Canada by Canadian artists" (p.44). The exposure of what was described as Post-

Impressionist art at the A.A.M.'s 1913 *Spring Exhibition* further legitimized Impressionism as a style, in large part because it pushed even further the limits of what was considered aesthetically acceptable in modern times. In fact, as Dennis Reid has noted elsewhere, the catalogue text for the Durand-Ruel collection had made exactly the same point seven years earlier.¹²

Lacroix's essay also builds upon Lowrey's brief observation that critical attitudes toward Impressionism as a style for Canadian art were often polarized over the issue of cultural nationalism. Whereas William Sherwood, for example, criticized it as an imported style, Hector Charlesworth could praise Suzor-Coté's work for being "so genuinely Canadian ... as to delight all who aspire toward a national art" (1913; p.26). In particular, Impressionism's emphasis on the importance of light struck a chord among Canadian artists and critics who, like Donald Buchanan in 1941, differentiated between the "diffused and pinkish light that is nearly always present in our snow-bound skies," and "the greyer atmospheres of northern or central Europe or in the clearer horizons of the Mediterranean" (p.24). And, as Lacroix demonstrates, the predilection of artists such as Cullen, Morrice, Suzor-Coté and Gagnon for winter landscapes strongly suggestive of a Canadian climate was a key factor in the acceptance of

Impressionist-inspired painting in the increasingly national-identity-minded years after c.1895.

Lacroix's analysis of published criticism of Impressionism in Canada is buttressed with substantial endnotes, containing quotations and analysis of the assumptions and arguments that underlay criticism during the two decades beginning in the early 1890's. Particularly interesting here is the inquiry into what, exactly, critics and other writers meant when they referred to "Impressionism." Lacroix demonstrates that, in general, they tended to avoid the difficulty subtended by "naming the pictorial experience proposed by Impressionism" (p.53, note 35). In this way critics like the wittily pseudonymous "Lynn C. Doyle," writing in *Toronto Saturday Night* in 1895, could concentrate on technical/formal devices at the expense of anything like a penetrating analysis of composition, spontaneity or subject. The result could easily be the near equation of Impressionism with "*plein-air* painting, an extension of the Barbizon School and rural landscape, ... a useful short-cut in Canada, where the latter genre was dominant from the 1890s" (p.46). Lacroix thus declines to take up William Gerdts' challenge to identify the characteristics of a specifically Canadian variant of International Impressionism. Instead, he concentrates on the related but more fruitful goal of

teasing out the tangle of factors that mediated the critical and public acceptance of Impressionism in Québec.

Robert Stacey employs a comparably productive approach to deal with another consequential subject given only cursory treatment in Carol Lowrey's introductory essay. In "The Sensations Produced by (Their Own) Landscape: Some Alternative Paths to - and Away from - Canadian Impressionism," he turns his back on the Province of Québec. He instead considers landscape artists working elsewhere in Canada who had acquired their knowledge of Impressionist theory and practice from other, less strictly canonical sources than Paris schools and galleries. This approach has the benefit of bringing into the Impressionist orbit three artists working west of the Ontario-Manitoba border: C.W. Jefferys, L.L. FitzGerald and Emily Carr - something not done in Dennis Reid's important 1990 essay. It is tempting to agree with Stacey that this may have had something to do with Reid's francocentric claim that "[e]very serious young artist in Canada aspired to study in Paris, and by the early 1890s they all did"¹³ (p.56). In fact, of the seventeen artists from outside Québec whose work is included in the *Visions of Light and Air* exhibition, fully half did not train in Paris, whereas all nine of the Québec artists did. Helen McNicoll, Lawren Harris and Arthur

Lismer, for example, all studied in European countries other than France. Jefferys and FitzGerald studied only in North America.

Stacey discusses artists, such as these, who did not spend time in Paris and northern France, the geographic centre of the Impressionist movement. His contention is that their interest in techniques associated with Impressionism or other avant-garde movements was part and parcel of their concern for the faithful rendering of the local landscape and for the evocation of its effects on its inhabitants. For example:

[O]ne finds it hard to believe that ... [Tom Thomson] was unfamiliar with Divisionism and the French Fauves, yet it is entirely possible that he came up with these effects independently and, as it were, *sui generis*. Or, as he himself might have expressed it, the land, the light and the seasons *made* him paint as he did. (p.67)

Essentially the same claim is made for Arthur Lismer, Jefferys and FitzGerald: that the visually and emotionally accurate representation of Canadian landscape and climate virtually demanded the utilization of modified Impressionist and other avant-garde techniques. This is a potentially dangerous argument, implying as it does a cause-and-effect relationship between landscape and climate on the one hand, and aesthetic approach on

the other. Impressionism, defined here with sufficient looseness to cover Thomson's *The Pointers* (*Pageant of the North*) of 1915, is not seen as a set of formal and technical devices imposed mechanically upon a landscape. Rather, it responds to very real needs in the portrayal of the (Canadian) environment. This is as much the case with the crisp winter air encountered by the Group of Seven in northern Ontario as with the hazy summer heat of FitzGerald's Manitoba.

However, Stacey is well aware that style in art does not spontaneously spring, Venus-like, from pre-Cambrian rocks, Georgian Bay waves or Prairie wheat fields. Artists - including those working in locales that, from the cafés of Montmartre, might have seemed to border on the ends of the earth - were exposed to art that was related to Parisian Impressionism, even if sometimes several degrees removed from it. Without travelling to Paris they could become aware of the Impressionist potential by observing how well it responded to local, but not necessarily French, conditions. Scandinavian landscape painting, seen by Lawren Harris and J.E.H. MacDonald at the 1913 Exhibition of Contemporary Scandinavian Art at the Albright Art Gallery, remains the best-known of the alternative avenues for Canadian artists. It had the advantage over French-Impressionist landscape painting that the ter-

rain and climate with which it dealt bore obvious similarities to the parts of Ontario of which artists like Harris and MacDonald were so fond.

But Scandinavian painting was hardly unique as a doorway to Impressionism. For example, Lowrey had observed that L.L. FitzGerald, who never studied in Europe, was indebted to reproductions in art magazines, and especially to his acquaintance with the Glasgow School's Donald MacQuarrie and George Telfer Bear, both of whom settled in Winnipeg during the 1910's. Stacey adds to this, suggesting that FitzGerald "picked up his second-hand Impressionist technique from his omnivorous readings" and from Hungarian emigré A.S. Keszthelyi, who had taught at the Carnegie Institute in Pittsburgh and the Art Students League in New York before going to Winnipeg (p.70). He also comments on, for example, the popularity of the *plein-air* instruction available at schools such as New York's Art Students League, and links this with the 1890's depression that compelled such Toronto artists as C.W. Jefferys to seek their livings in large American cities. He also recognizes that railway ties between Atlantic Canada, Boston and New York City not only encouraged Canadian travel southward, but expedited the northern peregrinations of Americans such as Henry M. Rosenberg. In this manner Stacey, like

Lacroix, builds a case for linking three distinct phenomena: the quest for regional or national character, the use of Impressionist techniques, and the mediating factors through which Canadians became familiar with Impressionism.

Aside from William Gerdts' foreword and the essays by Stacey, Lacroix and Lowrey, *Visions of Light and Air* includes a useful bibliography for Canadian art of the time, and for Canadian Impressionism and the twenty-six exhibiting artists in particular. There are also brief biographical summaries of each artist, and colour plates of all sixty-five exhibits. Lacking is any reference to the handful of *bors catalogue* works added to the installation at the Musée du Québec. These included a large summertime view of Cap-Diamant by Maurice Cullen, from the Musée's permanent collection. In the exhibition installation this was paired with the artist's winter view of the same area (1909; Art Gallery of Hamilton), a canvas of identical size, painted from exactly the same spot. The pairing was a striking and important demonstration of the Impressionist predilection for serial views, exemplified by Monet's paintings of haystacks, cypress trees and the facade of Rouen Cathedral. It is therefore unfortunate that the catalogue itself does not even hint at the existence of the second of these two Cap-Diamant paintings. Nor, for that

matter, does it feature reproductions of any other painting series, such as the Algonquin Park season-cycle on which, as Stacey's essay reminds us, Tom Thomson was working at the time of his death.

In general, the catalogue's sixty-five colour reproductions are of high quality, although the colour in the photograph of Emily Carr's *Yan, Queen Charlotte Islands* (1912) is an embarrassment. Also unfortunate is the fact that the scumbled *facture* in all four paintings by William Henry Clapp is somewhat lost in reproduction. For the most part the selection of the thirty-nine black-and-white reproductions neatly supplements the colour plates, adding springboards to exploration for the reader interested in pursuing the complexities of Impressionism as it manifested itself in the work of Canadian artists.

However, useful though the plates and illustrations are for conveying the potential breadth of Impressionism in Canada, it is to be wished that the process of selecting works for the exhibition had been marked by a greater degree of adventurousness. Eighteen public and five private collections contributed pieces to the show, but in a startlingly large number of cases the works are the same examples that are increasingly coming to stand for the loose concept "Impressionism by Canadian artists." In some instances

this is well-nigh unavoidable. For example, although George Agnew Reid was a key figure in the early history of Impressionism in Toronto, and was one of the first Canadian artists to conduct Impressionist-oriented outdoor classes (in Onteora, New York, beginning in 1893), *Idling* (c.1892) is one of his very few works that can be considered to incorporate legitimately Impressionist characteristics in any real sense. William Blair Bruce's *Landscape with Poppies*, painted at Giverny in 1887, is for various reasons so Monet-esque that it would be a pity to omit it from any survey of Impressionist painting by Canadian artists. Cullen's *Logging in Winter, Beaupré* more than deserves its fame as one of the first paintings to use Impressionist techniques to capture the distinctly un-French sensation of cold air and crisp light against sparkling snow, with shadows tinted bluish because the snow reflected the tones of the sky.

However, despite the extremely open definition of "Impressionism" in *Visions of Light and Air*, and the correspondingly large number of paintings available to the organizers, the list of exhibits looks disconcertingly familiar. Fourteen of the sixty-five colour plates are of works that also appeared as illustrations in the essay Dennis Reid contributed to Norma Broude's *World Impressionism* in 1990. This figure represents almost fifty per cent of Reid's

twenty-nine illustrations. (Morrice's *Quai des Grands-Augustins, Paris* might be considered a fifteenth example of duplication between these two sources. The National Gallery of Canada version is represented in Reid's essay, as well as in Paul Duval's *Canadian Impressionism* of 1990, while the almost identical Musée d'Orsay version is included in *Visions of Light and Air*.) Is it really credible that there exists a core group of "essential" Impressionist painting that is as small as comparisons between the illustrations in Reid's essay, Duval's book and the present catalogue suggest?

The failure of the organizers of *Visions of Light and Air* to go further afield in search of exhibits is especially unfortunate because, as noted earlier, the show features works that do not accurately document all the various artists' involvement with Impressionism. Milne's *Interior with Paintings* is perhaps the most obvious example. In this sense the exhibition itself is only slightly more critical in its definition of Impressionism than was Joan Murray's *Impressionism in Canada, 1895-1935*, organized for the Art Gallery of Ontario in 1973 and highlighting the work of thirty artists. Notwithstanding the shortcomings of the exhibition itself, however, Lacroix's and Stacey's catalogue essays present important documentation and hypotheses regarding what has for too long been perhaps the

most imprecisely-defined stylistic tendency in Canadian art. Superseding Dennis Reid's 1990 essay, it takes the latter's place as the most detailed and critically informative publication to date on its subject.

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Notes

1 Edmond DYONNET, in Arts and Letters Club of Toronto, *The Yearbook of Canadian Art* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1913), 227. Quoted in J. Russell HARPER, *Painting in Canada: A History*, 2nd. ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), 237. By this date Impressionism was an established and respected style in Montréal, yet Dyonnet insisted that "no French-Canadian painter fortunately has dreamed of following in their [the French Impressionists'] folly...."

2 *Inter alia*: Pierre L'ALLIER, *Henri Beau, 1863-1949* (Québec: Musée du Québec, 1987); Joan MURRAY, *William Blair Bruce* (Oshawa: Robert McLaughlin Gallery, 1975); Paul MILLS, *William Henry Clapp, R.C.A., 1879-1954* (Carmel, California: Laky Gallery, 1966); Sylvia ANTONIOU, *Maurice Cullen, 1866-1934* (Kingston: Agnes Etherington Art Centre, 1982); Barbara O'NEAL, *Ernest Lawson, 1873-1939* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1967); Joan MURRAY, intro., *Helen McNicoll, 1879-1915: Oil Paintings from the Estate, Part I and Part II* (Toronto: Morris Gallery, 1974, 1976); Louise BEAUDRY, *Couleur et lumière: les paysages de Cullen et de Suzor-Coté* (Laval: Fondation de la maison des arts de Laval, 1991); K.J. GARLICK, *Percyval Tudor-Hart, 1873-1954* (Oxford: Ashmolean Museum, 1981).

3 Mervyn CROOKER, "The Influence of French Impressionism on Canadian Painting" (M.A. thesis, University of British Columbia, 1965); Paul DUVAL, *Canadian Impressionism* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1990); Dennis REID, "Impressionism in Canada," in Norma Broude, ed., *World Impressionism: The International Movement, 1860-1920* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1990); *Canadian Impressionists, 1895-1967* (London: London Public Library and Art Museum, 1965); Joan MURRAY, *Impressionism in Canada, 1895-1935* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1973).

4 The twenty-six artists in the exhibition are: Frances Jones Bannerman, Vital-Achille-Raoul Barré, Henri Beau, P. Franklin Brownell, William Blair Bruce, Emily Carr, William Henry Clapp, Maurice Cullen, Lionel LeMoine FitzGerald, Clarence Gagnon, John Sloan Gordon, Lawren S. Harris, A.Y. Jackson, C.W. Jefferys, Ernest Lawson, Arthur Lismer, J.E.H. MacDonald, Henrietta Mabel May, Helen Galloway McNicoll, David Milne, James Wilson Morrice, George Agnew Reid, Albert H. Robinson, Marc-Aurèle de Foy Suzor-Coté, Tom Thomson and Ernest Percyval Tudor-Hart.

5 On the social and economic factors that paralleled or contributed specifically to the development of Impressionism in Paris, see: T.J. CLARK, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984); Robert L. HERBERT, *Impressionism: Art, Leisure, and Parisian Society* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988); and Harrison C. and Cynthia A. WHITE, *Canvases and Careers: Institutional Change in the French Painting World* (New York/London/Sydney: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1965).

6 The Symbolist roots of Suzor-Coté's winter-river paintings are enumerated in Jean-René OSTIGUY, *Marc-Aurèle de Foy Suzor-Coté: Paysage d'hiver/Winter Landscape, Masterpieces in the National Gallery of Canada #12* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1978).

7 As exhibition curator Carol Lowrey explains, the emergence of the Group of Seven was also a significant factor in the decision to delimit the period covered by this exhibition:

Although such artists as Robert Pilot and Frederick Hutchinson carried the Canadian Impressionist tradition well into the 1930s and 1940s, *Visions of Light and Air* focuses on the period 1885-1920, when the aesthetic had its greatest impact on Canadian painters. The cut-off date coincides with the official formation of the Group of Seven, whose preoccupation with the development of a "national" school of landscape painting, based on the depiction of the rugged north country, instigated a new, programmatic direction in Canadian art. (p.16)

8 Cullen exhibited again with the Club in 1909 and twice in 1910.

9 REID, 111.

10 *Ibid.* Reid also notes, however, that like G.A. Reid, Knowles was capable of producing the occasional Impressionism-inspired view.

11 Janet M. BROOKE, *Discerning Tastes. Montreal Collectors, 1880-1920* (Montréal: Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 1989).

12 REID, 102.

13 *Ibid.*, 93.