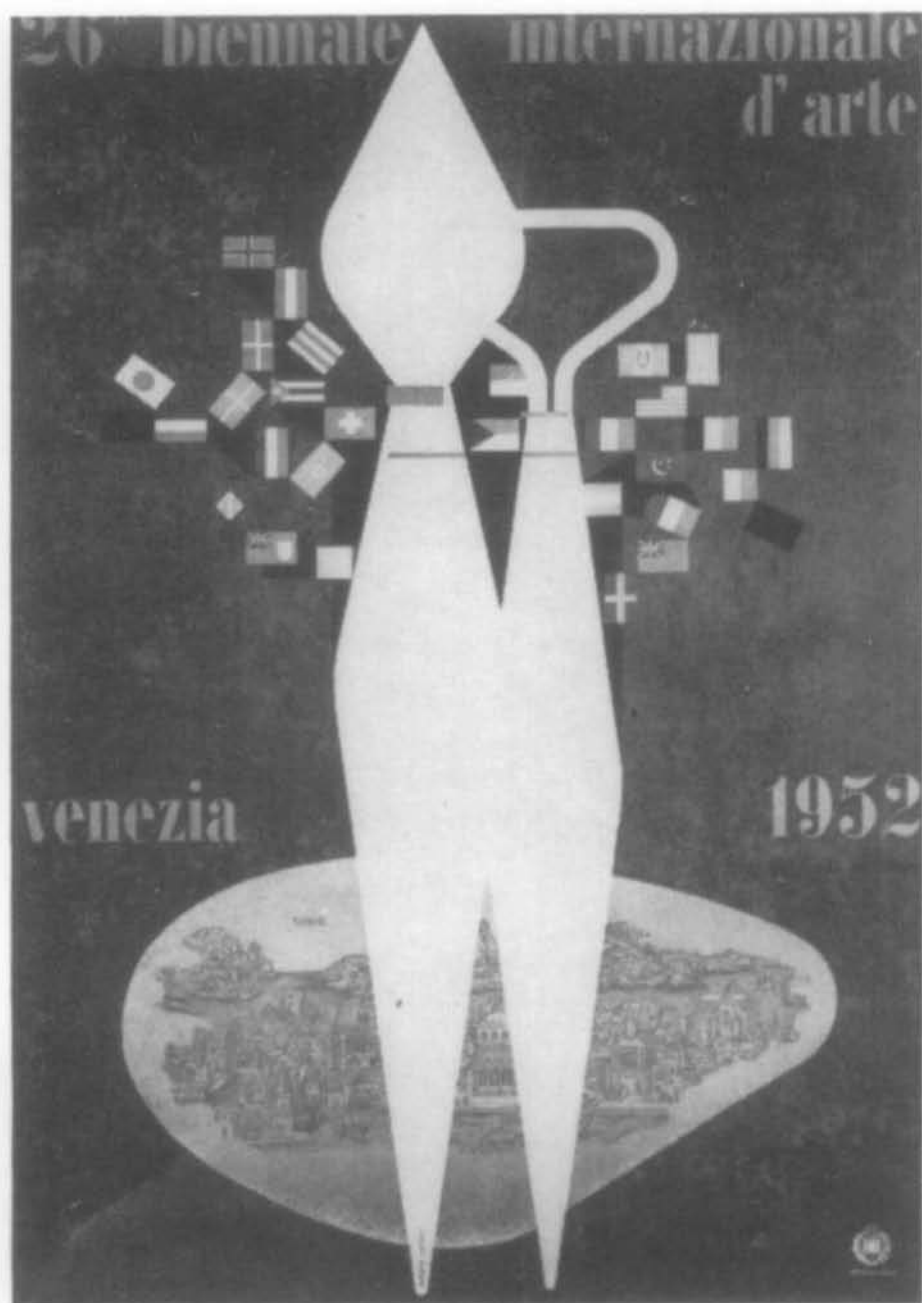




Poster for the 1952 Venice Biennale. (Photo: the author)

CONSTRUCTING AN IDENTITY

The 1952 XXVI Biennale di Venezia and "The Projection of Canada Abroad"

'The Projection of Canada Abroad', is of course a metaphor drawn from the cinema and suggests a practice now universal. Nations project themselves on the international screen in various ways. These extend from the daily work of press officers, to what might be called 'cultural export' an exhibition of pictures abroad.

Massey Commission *Report* ¹

In 1952, Canada was officially represented for the first time at the Venice Biennale. Her debut appearance at "the most famous art exhibition in the world" positioned Canada on the world stage and marked the first significant "projection abroad" of her aesthetic identity in the post-war era. Canada's participation at the XXVI Biennale is a striking reflection of the country's growing confidence in the international arena immediately following the conclusion of World War II. The most important symbol of this new sense of nationhood within a global context was the establishment of Canada's political position as a middle power. As a consequence of this recognition, the *Massey Report* introduced a mandate for an energetic cultural foreign policy and by extension, encouraged the proactive involvement of the National Gallery of Canada in the world's art community. The Gallery's presentation of paintings by Emily Carr, David Milne, Goodridge Roberts and Alfred Pellán at the 1952 Biennale from 14 June to 19 October exemplifies the museum's determination to establish an international presence. This raises issues surrounding the presumption of an official national art and the institutional authentication of culture. The National Gallery's *modus operandi* and its implications in the context of the international audience of the XXVI Biennale di Venezia is the subject of this discussion.²

The Venice Biennale has had a long and venerable history since its inauguration on April 30, 1895 in the Giardini di Castello, the public gardens located at the eastern end of the city.³ As clearly described in Lawrence Alloway's survey of the Biennale, the exhibitions during the years leading up to World War I were essentially salons celebrating and sanctioning official European art.⁴ The presence of James Wilson Morrice in the 1903 and 1905 Biennales documents the first appearance of a Canadian artist. Morrice, however, exhibited his work as an individual invited artist rather than as a representative of a particular nation. A photograph of Room V in the Central Pavilion, which housed the Italian and seven international presentations in eleven galleries, describes both the "salon-style"

installation and reproduces Morrice's two works, *On the Cliff, Normandy*, c.1902 at the extreme left and *Regatta at San Malo*, c.1905, the second painting to its right.⁵ Canada would not reappear for forty-seven years.⁶ (fig.1)

Following the hiatus of the Biennale from 1914 until 1920, the rise of the Fascist regime soon led to changes in the structure of the exhibition and its support of individualism. As a temporary event with didactic, promotional and even commercial purposes, the Biennale had, and still has, political implications. The increasing nationalism and domination of Italian art at the Biennale tended to downplay the international role envisioned by its originators. The presentations themselves during this period validated the widespread conservative modernism of the *rappel de l'ordre*. Although the Biennale carried on during most of the Second World War, the number of participating countries dropped from an average of about fifteen to only ten presenters in 1942. The exhibition was canceled in 1944 and 1946.⁷



fig. 1 Sala Internazionale, Venice Biennale, 1905.
James Wilson Morrice works are at center left.
(Photo: Archivio Storico delle Arti Contemporanee
della Biennale di Venezia [ASAC Biennale])

The return of the Biennale in 1948 marked an enormous change in its purpose and intent because of the renewed dedication to international representation.⁸ The ambitions of the first post-war exhibition are particularly important for this discussion as the ideology of the new mandate for the XXIV Biennale would continue through the 1950s. Sixteen countries were present in 1948, and it has been regarded as among the most significant of all the Venice Biennales because of the far-reaching vision and organizational capabilities of its new Secretary-General, the art historian Rodolfo Pallucchini. Pallucchini's primary agenda was to rid the Biennale art programmes of their Fascist and Nazi overtones and to promote "a new spirit of freedom ... [with] invitations extended to all nations possessing an artistic tradition [and] the Italian Pavilion has opened its door to every tendency" — an impossibility under the previous right-wing regime.⁹ One of the strategies to ensure this rededication to internationalism was the organizing of retrospective exhibitions of historical avant-gardism. Because the Biennale was (and had always been) the most famous symbol of Italian contemporary art, the organizers and Pallucchini in particular, felt a further responsibility "to inform the people of a newly liberated nation about international artistic culture whose existence was unknown to them."¹⁰ The Biennale organized several presentations including an Impressionist and Post-Impressionist show, the Metaphysical Painters and the Peggy Guggenheim collection in 1948; exhibitions of the Fauves, the *Four Masters of Cubism* and works by the first Futurists were shown in 1950.¹¹ Such readdressing of the recent past represented Pallucchini's desire for the Biennale and its audience to undergo a "catching-up" (*aggiornamento*).¹² As part of these *hommages* to European artists who had been largely ignored at Venice for more than two decades, other countries mounted "mini-retrospectives" of their own representatives of modern movements. The Italians, however, would continue their established tradition of organizing the largest manifestations of their cultural identity, incorporating the work of several generations of artists in solo and group exhibitions.

The Biennales of 1948 and 1950 reestablished its status in the international art circuit as the number of participating countries rose from sixteen to twenty-two in the course of the two years and there were now nineteen pavilions.¹³ In the recovery from the trauma and destruction of the War, the Venice Biennale offered many of the old attractions of a universal exposition. The unique character of the event derived from the opportunity to view visual art from different nations by visiting pavilions which often represented new directions in architecture as well as the building's symbolic projection of nationhood. The pageantry of the ceremonies and prize-giving, its location in a pleasure garden adjoining the Lagoon, as well as the enticements of what has been called "the most beautiful city in the world," added to the festive atmosphere. More important, the Venice Biennale provided a neutral ground for the promotion of a social and cultural ideality.

Concomitant with the notion of a free exchange between nations was, however, an increased emphasis on national identity and "the competitive element of the earlier years had come into the open."¹⁴ Despite the growing tensions created by the Cold War, by 1950 the Venice Biennale had gained enormous significance for both its participants and its audience as the cultural symbol of the political, social and economic reconstruction of Europe.¹⁵ The prestigious new identity of the Biennale and its potential as a site for the promotion of official national cultures was becoming of obvious interest to Canada and its own "projection abroad."

The groundwork for Canada's participation in the 1952 Venice Biennale was being prepared at home. In the political arena, Canada's impressive presence on the international stage during World War II and her subsequent record as an aggressive advocate of post-war collective security pacts brought her new recognition as a middle power.¹⁶ Through the policies of Prime Minister Louis St-Laurent and his Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Lester B. Pearson, Canada gained the reputation of an "honest broker" in re-establishing and maintaining peace — thereby continuing what she had accomplished during the war years.¹⁷ The St-Laurent-Pearson multilateral foreign policies have been characterized as pragmatic idealism because of their agenda to satisfy Canada's interests in the international sphere.¹⁸ Immediately following the War, Canada played an instrumental role in the creation of the United Nations and Pearson would serve as President of the General Assembly in 1952. St-Laurent had been an original advocate of the 1949 North Atlantic Treaty Organization and was responsible for the inclusion of the "Canada Article" on non-military cooperation in its Charter (despite Washington's opposition). This period, the "golden age" of Canadian foreign diplomacy, also saw the country's involvement in the economic restructuring of Europe; the establishment of institutions to facilitate multilateral trade; and the beginnings of systematic economic assistance to under-developed areas of the world through such instruments as the 1950 Colombo Plan.¹⁹ As a post-war modern state, Canada also had to perform a juggling act with her closest allies as she increasingly distanced herself from a colonial identity with Britain and struggled to maintain independence from American international domination although her economy became inexorably indebted to the United States.²⁰

Canada's relations with Italy following the Allied victory were "cordial" and she was one of the signatories to the 10 November 1947 UN Peace Treaty with Italy, as well as a supporter of her membership in its General Assembly. (Italy was only admitted in 1954).²¹ Although Canada had reservations about Italian participation in NATO, she did not oppose her becoming one of the twelve founding members. At the cessation of the war, the Italian government had a strong Communist Party coalition but by 1948 the Christian Democrats led by Alcide di Gaspari had won the election and increasingly took a more right than center position which was encouraged by the Allies and the Americans in particular.²²

Certainly the period from 1945 to 1953 was difficult in terms of Italian economic recovery. But it has been said that while Italy lost the war, she did win the peace. A Canadian trade commission office was established in Rome in 1946; two years later the Canada-Italian pre-war trade agreement was revised and Canada extended "most favoured nation treatment" to Italy. Italy had a political representative in Ottawa since January 1946 and the first Italian Minister to Canada presented his papers in early October the following year. In the fall of 1947, a Canadian Legation was established in Rome and the first Canadian Minister to Rome, Jean Désy, presented his papers to the Italian government. Shortly after, Italy requested the Canadian diplomatic mission be raised to the status of an embassy but at first Pearson refused, regarding it as political maneuvering on Italy's part. The Canadian office did become an embassy in 1948. Italian immigration to Canada almost tripled from the late 1940s to 1952 as Canada eased its entrance requirements and also subsidized new arrivals.²³ There was, however, a serious bone-of-contention between the two countries concerning the negotiations over the financial definition of a "nominal settlement" of Canadian claims against Italy for military relief during the war. The saga had many twists and turns. For example in 1951, the Italians attempted to link the settlement of war assets to Canada's assistance in rewriting the UN Peace Treaty on Italy's behalf, a tactic which again did not impress Pearson although he was sympathetic to the revision.

Whatever the nature of their political (and economic) relations, Canada had nothing that could be considered a cultural policy towards Italy. In general, Canada's international cultural relations with foreign countries were *ad hoc* occurrences and the foreign missions and the Department of Foreign Affairs functioned primarily as diplomatic conduits on cultural matters.²⁴ However, a symbolic step was taken in March 1948 as recorded in two items of a "Draft Note from Ambassador in Italy [Jean Désy] to Minister of Foreign Affairs of Italy [Count Carlo Sforzi]" that was sent to Lester Pearson for his approval as Secretary of State for External Affairs:²⁵

1. The Italian government, in token of gratitude for the help given by Canada to Italian civilians during the war, has decided to present [i.e. provide the funds for] the Canadian government with a property [the Palazzo Grandi and its furnishings] to be used as the seat of the Canadian Embassy in Rome.²⁵

3. At the same time the Italian government undertakes to conclude as soon as possible with the Canadian government a cultural agreement providing for the establishment of a foundation designed to facilitate intellectual exchanges between Canada and Italy ... The President of the foundation will be the Canadian Ambassador in Rome.

Once the funding for the purchase of the property and the endowment of the foundation was accepted, the "Canadian government ... considers as closed all questions concerning the relief supplied by Canada to Italian civilians during the war." However, this would not solve the problem of the relief funds debt, which would continue well into the decade; and the foundation would not be established until 1956.²⁶

Thus, prior to Canada's first participation at the Biennale in 1952, her cultural presence in Italy was rather limited. The Information Division of the Department of External Affairs had expressed an interest in art exhibitions in 1949, although it was decided that education was a more pressing matter.²⁷ A year later External Affairs attempted to involve the National Gallery, or more accurately its Design Centre, in exhibitions of "Decorative and Industrial Modern Art and Modern Architecture in Milan," but this took several years to come about.²⁸ The two agencies did cooperate in 1950 in writing an article entitled "Canadian Art Abroad," published in the government's magazine *External Affairs*.²⁹ However, the Department noted in an internal memorandum that the relations with the National Gallery were "not good."³⁰ Meanwhile, the National Gallery lent Renaissance works from its permanent collection to a few Italian exhibitions and it was involved in the 1949 presentation of engravings and gouaches by Roloff Beny and gouaches by Robert LaPalme in Rome. It also assisted in "Il Mostra Internazionale di Bianco e Nero" held in Lugano shortly before the opening of the 1952 Venice Biennale, which included work by Albert Dumouchel, Lilian Freiman, Jack Nichols and Alfred Pellán.³¹ This weak record of Canadian cultural activities in Europe, however, would receive attention with the establishment of the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences.

The import of the 1949-1951 Massey Commission has received lengthy examination in the discourse on Canadian cultural nationalism.³² For our purposes, however, the Commission and its ensuing *Report*, particularly those items referring to policies aimed at creating a Canadian international identity, deserve attention in order to establish the context for the country's representation at the XXVI Biennale. The *Report's* recommendations for the "projection of Canada abroad" can be seen as a strategy to attempt to "catch-up" culturally, and create an identity comparable to its status in the international political arena. The National Gallery's brief to the Commission submitted by its Director, H.O. McCurry certainly expressed his desire to pursue an even more active role in establishing the country's art agenda at home and abroad. Although the Massey *Report* was not published until June 1951, it is safe to assume that the National Gallery was well aware of the positions the Commission was advocating many months before the documents were made public. McCurry was a member of the Commission's Museum Committee, but even more to the point, Vincent Massey

also sat as the Chairman of the Gallery's Board of Trustees until early 1952, when he became Governor-General of Canada.

The Commissioners noted that the "Director of the National Gallery did good service to the cause of painting in Canada by pointing out [in his brief] that exhibitions held in Canada do not produce such satisfactory results as exhibitions of Canadian art held abroad." These presentations were optimistically validated by the expressed belief that they "not only brought to the artist an increased prestige, but also gave him an opportunity to sell abroad certain of his works; art exhibitions which are held in Canada do not produce the same happy results."³³ With very little supporting evidence, the Commission also noted its pleasure "to learn of the appreciation of Canadian painting." It then stated the idealized view that young Canadian artists, particularly abstract painters "are able to hold their own" in an international context.³⁴

Despite such laudatory comments, the Commission's acknowledgment of the true situation was the motivation for the statements in the chapter of the *Report* entitled "The Projection of Canada Abroad." It included such nationalist comments as: "The promotion abroad of a notion of Canada is not a luxury but an obligation, and a more generous policy in this field would have important results, both concrete and intangible;" and that "Exchanges with other nations in the field of the arts and letters will help us to make our reasonable contribution to civilized life." These directives could also have provided the National Gallery with a moral basis for involvement in international exhibitions like the Biennale.³⁵ Indeed, during the second year of the Commission hearings, the National Gallery organized the Canadian Section of works by twenty-one artists in the "I Bienal do Museu de Arte Moderna de Sao Paulo," held in Brazil from October to December 1951.³⁶ The interest in exhibiting in Sao Paulo could have had political and economic as well as cultural implications because of the desire on the part of Ottawa, and particularly Québec, to strengthen ties with Latin America.

The political aspect of the work of the Royal Commission was readily acknowledged: "In supplement to our original Terms of Reference, we received a letter from the Prime Minister [St. Laurent] requesting us to take under review the whole question of the manner in which knowledge of Canada abroad might be extended."³⁷ In his analysis of the Massey Commission, Paul Litt has suggested that the concern for cultural projection abroad was ultimately tied to the defense of the liberal democratic ethos of Western nations. For example, the *Report* stated that "our military defences must be made secure; but our cultural defences equally demand national attention; the two cannot be separated."³⁸ While cultural foreign policy did take second place to political activities, the government was aware that fostering a cultivated Canadian identity abroad was a sound investment. At the very least, involvement in events that profiled the ambitions of Canadian culture at home and the "civilizing function ... of the Canadian painter"

would suggest that the country did possess some degree of refinement and accomplishment.³⁹ Any Canadian projection of its material culture at that time would implicitly reflect its heritage from England and France, thereby giving it credibility in the international arena. Certainly Massey's own definition of culture was framed in terms of traditional European "high" art, which also insinuated its superiority over American mass culture. Furthermore, because the *Massey Report* emphasized the "Canadianess" of the country's painting and its value as "one of the elements of our national unity" through its "expression of the Canadian spirit," art exhibitions abroad would be a most suitable vehicle for the projection of a cultural nationalism.

The *Report* did not specifically recommend that the National Gallery become the instrument for the transmission (and transportation) of Canadian art abroad. Rather, its authors suggested that the Gallery become involved with "travelling exhibitions organized or sent out by the National Gallery [which would] be developed and extended as far as is consistent with the safety of the collections."⁴⁰ The Gallery acknowledged the Commission's concern to broaden its horizons. The Minutes of the 15 February 1951 meeting of its Board of Trustees recorded: "for the sound growth of the National Gallery – the Director make an annual, or at least biennial visit to Europe." The National Gallery might also have developed further self-confidence because its budget for 1950-51 was three times what it had been annually for the past ten years. It was at this time that the Director began to expand the European holdings in the Gallery's permanent collection.⁴¹ As well, Harry McCurry would be awarded an honorary doctorate in the Spring of 1951 by Mount Allison University for "his services to Canadian art."

The *Massey Report* did recommend that the Department of External Affairs become the principal agency of Canada's cultural presence through our diplomatic missions because: "For good or ill, information and cultural matters are now becoming more and more an essential part of foreign policy."⁴² The fact that the Department had functioned inadequately in this regard was also duly noted.⁴³ Despite the Commission's expectations, External Affairs would only play a minimal part in the first presentation of Canadian painting at the Venice Biennale. A related initiative evolving out of the Massey Commission should also be cited as part of Canada's "projection abroad." In 1952 the Royal Society of Canada Fellowship, correctly titled the Canadian Government Overseas Award was inaugurated. The award of \$4,000 was "intended to give Canadian men and women of proven ability an opportunity to spend a year abroad and to devote their time to whatever program they feel will be of most benefit to them professionally." Two of the Canadian participants at the Biennale would receive fellowships: Alfred Pellan in 1952 and Goodridge Roberts the following year.⁴⁴

The earliest documented indication of the National Gallery of Canada's interest in participating in the 1952 Venice Biennale is found in a letter dated 12

July 1950 from H.O. McCurry introducing Donald Buchanan to the "Secretary General, Biennial International Art Exhibition:" "Mr. Buchanan of the National Gallery staff ... expects to arrive in Venice toward the end of August and I have asked him to consult you regarding the possibility of having a contribution from Canada in your next exhibition, which I understand takes place in 1952."⁴⁵ A meeting with Rodolfo Pallucchini occurred on 20 August and on the same date, Buchanan wrote to McCurry that "the visit to Venice has been most satisfactory. The XXV Biennale di Venezia, as they call it, has in its wealth of modern art ... been above even my highest expectations. They want and hope for Canadian participation in 1952."⁴⁶ At that time, Buchanan was, among other things, the Secretary of the National Design Committee and in charge of the Industrial Design Section of the National Gallery.⁴⁷ As well, his lengthy experience with the National Film Board, his 1936 monograph on James Wilson Morrice, his co-editorship of *Canadian Art* magazine and the 1950 publication of his *The Growth of Canadian Painting* suggests the life of a cultural mandarin, and its familiarity with the procedures of the establishment.

In September, Buchanan submitted his "Report on Exhibition for Europe in 1952 (Venice and possibly Paris)" reiterating his successful "interview with the director-general [*sic*] The guiding principle is to have national representation focused on three or four leading contemporary painters." The report then outlined the protocol to be followed:

Canada as a government need only accept the invitation which will be given in the early autumn of 1951 to participate in 1952, and then the administration in Venice will arrange all necessary details on the spot for us. They will set aside a room, or rooms in the main Pavilion such as were given to Brazil, Sweden, South Africa and Ireland this year. There is no cost to Canada except the shipping costs to and from the port of Trieste or Genoa. Shipping costs within Italy are paid for by the Biennale. If we wish to send a Commissioner to supervise the hanging, we can; if not, we can do as Brazil did this year and let the Biennale officers do all the work ... If four artists were included, about ten or twelve works by each would be the right number, provided the works were of average size.

As much of this information was proscribed in the official regulations sent to the National Gallery, the procedures for the Biennale were closely followed with the major exception of the number of works that were eventually sent to Venice.⁴⁸

Buchanan also described his subsequent meeting with the assistant to the Director of the Musée de l'Arte Moderne on the "possibility of a similar exhibition" in Paris and recounted his subsequent discussion with Père Marie-Alain Couturier, who:

confirmed my opinion that the Biennale principle of a three-man or four-man show was doubtless satisfactory for France also. He said as long as Roberts,

Borduas, Pellan were three of those chosen for a four-man show, he would back it to the full and give us his personal assistance. He had no suggestions himself as to who should be the fourth. Perhaps, he said, we knew of some one outside of Montreal of equal stature to the above three.⁴⁹

Couturier also proposed an exchange show with "as many works as possible of Matisse, Braque and Picasso" and others; while such a project reflected the priorities of the Massey Commission, it was not to be. Whether or not Couturier's suggestions for the Biennale representatives were considered at the time of the selection of the artists can only be a matter of supposition; however, the final choice of two of the four artists did reflect his preferences.⁵⁰

Almost a year later, at the June 1, 1951 meeting of the Board of Trustees of the National Gallery, McCurry reported that an invitation to contribute to the Venice Biennale had not yet been received but it was "understood that one would be forthcoming." There was little record of any discussion on the Biennale although Lawren Harris commented that "if Canadian pictures were sent, they would have to be quite modern," but did not define his terms of reference.⁵¹ While the Biennale was mandated to show "contemporary art," neither Venice nor Ottawa would attempt to define the meaning of the phrase. In order to speed up the process, McCurry wrote to Pallucchini inquiring as to: "the numbers and exact dimensions of the galleries which will be placed at our disposal. As this will be the first occasion in which Canada has the privilege of participating in La Biennale di Venezia, we are anxious to present Canadian art as adequately as possible."⁵² Four months later at the October 2nd. meeting of the Board, the Director reported that although Canada had yet to be officially invited, it would "not be expected to send a representative exhibition but should send a generous number of works from four to six artists, perhaps ten or twelve pictures each."⁵³

At the end of October, Donald Buchanan sent a letter to Pallucchini questioning "whether an invitation had been sent or not."⁵⁴ In mid-November Pallucchini replied that "an invitation to the Canadian Government has been sent through the diplomatic channels" in Rome and Ottawa and requested that McCurry "should get in touch with the competent authorities of the Canadian government" for further discussion of the details.⁵⁵ A notation by McCurry on Pallucchini's letter, which arrived in Ottawa on 22 November, reads: "Telephoned Ex. Affairs 'info.' They know nothing about this but will make inquiries immediately." René Garneau of the Information Division of External Affairs then asked the Canadian Ambassador in Rome, Jean Désy to "ascertain whether an invitation ever came to you. If we were not invited, suggest you contact Professor Rodolfo Pallucchini."⁵⁶ On the 24th of November, the Ambassador telegraphed the Secretary of State for External Affairs that he had received the invitation "from Italian External Affairs last week only and transmitted by airmail [to Ottawa] on November 21 but no word ever came from Pallucchini." (Why Désy would have

expected to be contacted by Pallucchini is unclear as that would not have been the diplomatic process.) This official request for Canadian participation, dated 5 November, from the Ministero degli Affari Esteri to the Canadian Ambassador on behalf of the Presidenza della Biennale, was accompanied by a letter of 9 October from Giovanni Ponti, President of the Biennale addressed to Jean Désy. In it, Ponti extended his own formal invitation and noted that "a hall will be placed at the disposal of Canadian artists by this organization." Ponti also requested that the Canadian government reply by the end of the current year and that he be advised of "the name of the person who will be appointed as Director of the Canadian section so that I may immediately get in touch with him in order to work out the necessary details." Garneau then informed McCurry by telephone on 24 November that the invitation was, indeed, in hand.

Finally on 29 November, External's Information Officer, Archibald Day, sent McCurry a copy of Ponti's letter and for the first time formally advised the National Gallery that the "Canadian Government has been invited officially to participate in the XXVI International Art Exhibition in Venice ... As soon as we receive word from you on this matter we shall ask the Canadian Ambassador in Italy to inform the President of the Venice Biennale Art Exhibition of our reply."⁵⁷ In response McCurry testily advised Day that "this matter was discussed with the Board of Trustees some time ago and I am authorized to accept the invitation" and "the Director of the National Gallery will serve as Director of the Canadian Section."⁵⁸ McCurry telegraphed Pallucchini on 3 December: "Hope to send retrospective exhibition of 4 Canadian painters and believe that this would fit into any 2 of the adjoining galleries 48-52 of the Pavilion Centrale. Please confirm availability and dimensions."⁵⁹ At the same time, Archibald Day asked the Embassy in Rome "to inform the President of the Venice Biennale art exhibition [Ponti] that the Canadian Government accepts with pleasure the invitation to participate in the forthcoming international art exhibition [and] Mr. H.O. McCurry will act as Director of the Canadian Section."⁶⁰ For good measure, the Italian Ambassador in Ottawa reiterated the invitation to the Department of External Affairs on 8 December. However, it took one month for Ottawa to reply that it: "had consulted with the proper authorities of the Canadian Government and has, on behalf of the Government of Canada, the honour and the pleasure to accept the kind invitation of the Government of Italy." Formalizing Canada's participation seems to have been a problem of communication among the Italians, the Canadian Embassy and the Information Division of the Department of External Affairs in Ottawa. It is unlikely that the particular concerns of the National Gallery were of major importance to the federal bureaucracy. It was known that External Affairs and the Gallery were not on the best of terms and were obvious competitors in the international promotion of Canadian culture. The problems arising from this lack of efficient exchange had been noted by the

Massey Commission in the "projection of Canada abroad." More importantly for our purposes, it also demonstrates a sleight-of-hand performed by the National Gallery in asserting its role as the official organ for the promotion of Canadian culture. In publicizing Canadian participation in Venice, the Gallery would strongly emphasize its having received the honour of an invitation to present Canada at the Biennale without making mention of its own solicitation of that invitation.⁶¹

Meanwhile in Venice, the particular problems of the National Gallery were of little consequence in the planning of the XXVI Biennale.⁶² The primary concern for the Biennale organizers was the nature and content of their own Italian exhibitions. The second preoccupation was the degree of foreign participation, particularly the number of rooms allotted to non-Italians without their own pavilions in the Palazzo Centrale. At the June 1951 meeting of the Administrative Council, Canada did not appear on the list of foreign countries — "Paesi che hanno chiesta ospitalità per il 1952" which would require space in the main pavilion. Nevertheless, while "everyone is welcome at the Biennale," the use of the Palazzo Centrale was seen as a type of holding-space until countries made a firm and lasting commitment to the event by constructing their own pavilion.⁶³ At its meeting in November, Pallucchini informed the Council that he had learned through "via diplomatica" that Canada would participate. This meant that there were now five foreign countries in the Palazzo, creating even more space problems for the administration.⁶⁴ (fig.2)

At the first meeting of the Executive Committee in December (and at other sessions of the various organizational committees), there was lengthy discussion concerning complaints of "excessive largesse in the Biennale's hospitality to foreigners." Criticisms were levied at Pallucchini for providing *i stranieri* with "too much space" and "giving them the best rooms with the best light" in the Palazzo Centrale, to the supposed disadvantage of Italian artists. Pallucchini, as he would at every administrative meeting, insisted on the fact that the Venice Biennale was foremost an international exhibition as well as a showcase of Italian art and it had an obligation "to be as generous as possible to those countries who wish to participate but do not have their own pavilion." (The Canadian Pavilion would be constructed in 1958.) He also assured the Executive that the Palazzo Centrale would be less crowded than in previous years, that the overall interior light was improved because of new large windows and the pavilion would be more inviting because of the new courtyard designed by the illustrious architect, Carlo Scarpa.⁶⁵ Pallucchini's arguments did not convince everyone, especially the representatives of the Italian art community. A preliminary decision was taken to provide four hundred square metres of space for three hundred and fifty works by the "stranieri" while nine hundred and twelve square metres of the pavilion would display eight hundred and fifty Italian objects.

On 12 January 1952, Buchanan wrote to Pallucchini stating that External



fig. 2 Palazzo Centrale, Venice Biennale; site of Canadian exhibition in 1952. (Photo: the author)

Affairs had asked the Gallery "to take charge of Canada's participation" and requested a reply to McCurry's previous inquiries concerning "what accommodations you can provide as the National Gallery wants to begin organizing the exhibition at once." Pallucchini immediately informed McCurry that "it is an excellent idea to send only four painters, since each one will be sufficiently represented to have an idea of his work as a whole." In early February, McCurry received the long-awaited information from Pallucchini concerning the space reserved for Canada: "I have been able to go ahead with my plan allocation to guest nations ... I have allotted a fine hall to Canada; it is very light, and offers 27 meters of wall space."⁶⁶ There is ample information concerning the choosing of the Canadian works that would occupy Room Thirty-Seven in the Palazzo Centrale; but there is little documentation on the decision process behind the selection of artists who would represent Canada in Venice.

One can reasonably assume that the ultimate choice to send Carr, Milne, Roberts and Pellán was made by McCurry, Buchanan and Robert Hubbard, who had been appointed Curator of Canadian Art in 1947. The Gallery files contain one hand-written, undated and unsigned list of artists names which cites Borduas, Pellán, and Roberts, each with an arrow beside their name "and two more -

Binning? Cosgrove? Riopelle?" Another notation, again undated and unsigned, written on the back of the copy of Ponti's 1951 letter to Désy, has "Pellan" and "Roberts" each with a check mark; Borduas' name is crossed out; Binning's name has both a check-mark and a cross-out. New names listed were "Emily Carr" with both a check-mark and a "?" and "Milne" with a check-mark. The selection had obviously been finalized by February 19th. when McCurry asked Lawren Harris to select paintings by Emily Carr and added that "Other names suggested include Pellan, Roberts and Milne." The reasons for the elimination of Borduas, Riopelle and B.C. Binning in 1952 can only be a matter of speculation. Certainly Hubbard in particular and the National Gallery in general, were most supportive of the two Québec abstract painters; and had strongly defended the publication of Borduas' *Réfus global*. Interestingly, the three painters would be the Canadian representatives at the next Biennale.⁶⁷

It is possible that the National Gallery might have felt that it had to make a choice between Pellan and Borduas because of the animosity between the two painters in the 1940s, although that would hardly be of importance to the Biennale visitors (and the Gallery had previously presented them together in other exhibitions). There are, however, more plausible, if still speculative, reasons. For instance, once the decision was taken to send four artists, the notion of sending three painters — Roberts, Pellan, Borduas — from Québec to its first Venice Biennale might have caused some dismay among the rest of the Canadian art community.⁶⁸ More important, perhaps, might have been a concern for the visual cohesion of the presentation. Although Pellan worked in the language of abstraction, his images evolved through figurative motifs which would relate his work to the representational content of Carr, Milne and Roberts. Pellan could also be considered a more "establishment painter" than Borduas because of the early support he had received from the Musée de la Province (Musée du Québec), even though he had not had a solo exhibition since 1943. Furthermore, Pellan had spoken to the Massey Commission and because of his activities in Paris prior to 1940, he was alluded to in the *Report* as one of those young Canadian abstract painters "able to hold their own" in international showings. There is, as well, the possibility that the Gallery was aware of Pellan's desire to return to Europe and his participation in Venice might be advantageous to his career. (Pellan would have an exhibition at the Musée nationale d'art moderne in Paris in early 1955.)

Lastly, the decision to send Borduas (and possibly Riopelle and Binning) in 1954 may have also been made at this time. While it was not an overriding policy for all presentations, the publicity materials from Venice stated that the historical exhibitions at the 1952 Biennale would "deal first and foremost with Expressionism." Pallucchini had already made it known that in 1954 there would be the first official theme: Surrealism.⁶⁹ If the National Gallery had been aware of this at the time, the presentation of Borduas, Riopelle and Binning two years

later might have seemed an appropriate link to the spirit of the XXVII Biennale. Whatever the reasoning, the final four artists reflected a more conservative taste which, perhaps, is not an unexpected strategy by the Gallery at its debut appearance in Venice. The selection process for Canada's first showing in twenty years at the prestigious 1952 Pittsburgh International was quite different. Gordon Washburn, the Director of Fine Arts at the Carnegie Institute traveled across Canada and chose six painters; Roberts was the only one who was also included in the Venice Biennale.⁷⁰

There is no documentation to suggest that the Gallery solicited any external advice on the selection of the participants. It did not consult with various artists groups as Japan had done for its first presentation at the Palazzo Centrale.⁷¹ Nor did it involve other art institutions in selecting and curating the presentation as happened at the United States Pavilion.⁷² Similarly, the British presentation was organized by the British Council, a relatively independent organization with committee members from various institutions.⁷³ The National Gallery, in fact, went to great lengths to maintain an air of secrecy about the selection of painters and paintings. (This was certainly not the case, for example, of the United States.) One can only presume that the Gallery was hoping to ward off any potential complaints and criticisms. For example, it is certain that there would have been much consternation in Québec if it were known that Borduas had been considered and then rejected. In answer to one request for information in late April 1952, two months before the Biennale opened, McCurry stated that "we would prefer not to announce the names of the artists nor give out a list of the paintings being sent because they may not all be hung. Announcement will be made from Venice when the exhibition is open."⁷⁴ In early May, External Affairs sent a strong response to queries from the Canadian Consul General in New York: "The Director of the National Gallery has not been able yet to know what space would be available to the Canadian exhibit in Venice and is therefore not, repeat not, in a position to supply information ... A similar reply was given recently by the National Gallery to a request from Canadian newspapers."⁷⁵ At this point however, McCurry had already sent the paintings to Venice and he was well aware that the space allotted Canada three months earlier should accommodate the work. Obviously, the National Gallery did not want to chance anything they felt might detract from the opening festivities at the Biennale and its own promotion of Canada's official cultural identity.

The National Gallery's choice of artists was generally representative of senior Canadian painters. All had received support from Ottawa through their inclusion in numerous exhibitions sponsored by the Gallery and by the purchase of works for its permanent collection.⁷⁶ The four could be called establishment painters at this point in their career, but each had been considered "independents" at an earlier time. Carr was associated with but distinct from the Group of Seven.

Her presence provided a historical reference to the presentation; that she was a woman artist was unusual, but not exceptional in the context of international Biennale participants. Milne, despite his patronage by the Masseys, had chosen to live and work outside the mainstream. Roberts' Montréal modernist identity separated him from most Canadian figurative painters and Pellan's relationship to the second-generation School of Paris painters (as well as his independence from the Automatistes) distinguished him within the nascent Canadian abstract art community. With the exception of Carr, this recognition by the National Gallery would further secure their careers in Canada, although it would have little immediate impact on providing any of them with international reputations.⁷⁷

It would appear that by the end of January 1952, the National Gallery had made its decision on the selection of artists and was involved in choosing possible works. The Gallery, however, would not be overly forthcoming about informing the artists of either their participation or the choice of their works. This is apparent from the McCurry — Goodridge Roberts correspondence in the National Gallery Archives in both the Biennale and the artist's files. Roberts had sent a number of paintings to Ottawa immediately following his January exhibition at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, as well as pictures from the West End Gallery and private owners, in addition to photographs of works which could not be shipped to the National Gallery at that time.⁷⁸ In an undated letter received at the Gallery on 5 February, Roberts wrote to McCurry that he "had been thinking over your remarks to me concerning the chance that some of my work might be required for an overseas exhibition" and provided him with a list of "where the best of my work is to be found." Interestingly, none of the nine works that Roberts recommended was included in the final selection. In letters dated the 3rd. and 10th. of February concerning the return of the privately-owned paintings, Roberts stated that he had to inform the impatient owners that he still did not know the purpose of McCurry's request and that he only "understood that there was a chance of some of them being away on exhibition though where or for how long, I was unable to say."⁷⁹ In mid-February, Hubbard and Buchanan came to Montréal to visit Roberts' studio and to see private collections. (They also looked at Pellan works.) It is hard to reconstruct what transpired when they met with Roberts but subsequent correspondence between him and the National Gallery continues to refer to the project as "an exhibition abroad."⁸⁰

As part of its selection process, the National Gallery asked certain private collectors to send paintings to Ottawa and these potential lenders, however, were clearly informed that the works were being considered for the Venice Biennale. For example, McCurry contacted Roberts' Montréal dealer, Max Stern of the Dominion Gallery stating that: "I hope to be able to give you full particulars of the exhibition after the matter has received final approval from our Trustees."⁸¹ In the case of two of Roberts' Montréal collectors, Joseph Barcelo and Maurice



fig. 3 Goodridge Roberts, *The Sandpit*, 1942, oil on canvas, 55 x 70 cm, Lavalin Collection of the Musée d'art contemporaine de Montréal.
(Photo: MACM)

Corbeil, letters sent to them by McCurry on March 4th. implied that the decision to include their works in the Biennale was a *fait accompli*, although that was not necessarily the situation. On the same date, Hubbard contacted Roberts to ask for "dates for the large still life sent by Millman [West End Gallery] and *Sand Pit* in Barcelo's collection" as they were "now cataloguing the Biennale pictures."⁸² (fig.3) This seems to be the first time the exhibition is named in their correspondence. On 15 March, Roberts wrote to Robert Hubbard saying "I am looking forward to hearing exactly what is to be done with the pictures of mine that are being rounded up by the Montreal Museum and sent to the National Gallery. As yet I don't know whether or not it has already been decided that they are to be sent to the exhibition in Europe." Roberts also enquired if any of the works were being considered for purchase by the National Gallery.

In mid-April, McCurry officially informed Barcelo and Corbeil that three Roberts works from their collections had been chosen for Venice.⁸³ On 23 April, Roberts again asked Hubbard for information: "The other day Jo Barcelo showed me a letter from the National Gallery letting him know that his 'Sandpit' is to go to Italy. So far I haven't had any word from Harry [McCurry] and am, of course, anxious to get first-hand information about what of my work is to be included."

Within two days, Hubbard did contact Roberts both by telephone and in a letter informing him of what paintings were, in fact, already on their way to Venice.⁸⁴ However, on 8 May, Roberts wrote to McCurry asking "If you can do so I would like to have you tell me what Canadian artists are being represented in the Venice exhibition. I was, of course, very pleased to learn that I am one of them." The next day Hubbard astonishingly replied: "The publicity for the Biennale is being handled at the Venice end. There has been no announcement with regard to the Canadian section and the catalogue is, of course, not ready. For your own private information, however, the artists represented are yourself, Pellam, Milne and Carr."

To relate the discussion above to the selection of the entire Canadian presentation, it appears that by early March, the Gallery had gathered a substantial number of paintings and photographs of works from various private collectors, institutions and the artists themselves. As has been mentioned, the letters sent by the National Gallery to private owners were sometimes unclear as to whether the work would actually go to Europe. The Gallery's own position in the procedure is, however, quite emphatically stated in the introductory sentence of the letters to the lenders: "The National Gallery has had a request to organize a carefully selected group of Canadian pictures for an international exhibition of first importance to be held in Europe during the summer from June to October (the famous Biennale of Venice)."

There is documentation that a relatively secure first selection of works was made at a meeting on March 16 attended by McCurry, Buchanan, Hubbard and the Toronto collector and dealer, Douglas Duncan.⁸⁵ At this gathering, there were fourteen paintings by Roberts, including three from the artist, seven from private owners, two from the Dominion Gallery and two from the National Gallery. However, the Gallery file also includes a list of the first and second choice of twenty-five works by Roberts with the heading "Venice Biennale." Unfortunately, there is no indication of the date the list was compiled or who did the evaluation or even whether the works were categorized after seeing paintings or only photographs.⁸⁶ The "First Choice" includes fourteen pictures while the "Second Choice" has eleven. The paintings vetted by the committee in mid-March consisted of twelve "first" choices and two "second" choices. The five paintings which eventually went to Venice were all from the "first choice" category.

Thirteen of Carr's works, including three from the Gallery, were also discussed at the March 16th. meeting. Four paintings had been sent by Lawren Harris, who with Ira Dilworth, was responsible for the Emily Carr Trust housed in the Vancouver Art Gallery. Earlier, on 19 February, McCurry had telegraphed Harris: "Have received invitation from Venice Biennale limited to four Canadian artists. Could you select eight best moderately sized canvases from Emily Carr Trust and ship express within a week ... quick action essential." The next day Harris wired McCurry stating that "we should allow only 4 Carr's from Collection



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EMILY CARR 'PORTO DI BLUNDEN, (Canada)

Fototeca ASAC Biennale

(282) Foto Ferruzzi - Venezia

fig. 4 Postcard,
Emily Carr,
Blunden Harbour,
1931-32, oil on canvas,
130 x 94 cm,
National Gallery of
Canada. (Photo:
ASAC Biennale)

Harris wired McCurry stating that "we should allow only 4 Carr's from Collection to go to Europe." He also suggested that they take four works from the Charles S. Band collection: "They are tops. Also suggest Blunden Harbour and one Vincent [Massey] owns." On 22 Feb., he told McCurry that he had made the selection of paintings from the Trust. In his reply, McCurry wrote that *Blunden Harbour* "is a little too large for the space allotted to us, but perhaps if we send it, we could reduce the total number."⁸⁷ McCurry informed Harris of the final selection on 24 April stating that they could only take two large Carrs "and one of those had to be 'Blunden Harbour'." (fig.4) In order to balance the selection in terms of size, they:

needed two small works ... we found one in our own collection ... and one from a local private collector [J.E. Coyne, Head of the Bank of Canada] So



fig. 5 Emily Carr,
Indian Church
(Friendly Cove),
1929, oil on canvas,
109 x 69 cm, Art
Gallery of Ontario,
Bequest of Charles S.
Band. (Photo: AGO)

fig. 6 Postcard,
David Milne,
Waterlilies and the
Sunday Paper,
1929, oil on canvas,
52 x 62 cm, Hart
House, University of
Toronto. (Photo:
ASAC Biennale)



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DAVID MILNE "NONFEE, (1928) (Comité)

Foto: ASAC, Biennale

(277) Foto Ferruzzi - Venezia



fig. 7 Postcard,
Alfred Pellán,
*Surprise
académique*, c. 1943,
oil and silica on can-
vas, 162 x 130 cm,
Private coll.,
Montréal. (Photo:
ASAC Biennale)

and to provide something strong in opposition to off-set the Pellans, we found we had to put in Band's 'Indian Church' as the other large painting. (fig.5)

Of the nineteen Milne pictures considered at the March 16th. meeting, the majority were selected by Douglas Duncan from his own collection and the Picture Loan Society; others came from Hart House (fig.6), the Art Gallery of Toronto and private collectors including Vincent Massey and Donald Buchanan, as well as two from the National Gallery.⁸⁸ A month later McCurry would inform Duncan that only one of his works was included in the final selection.⁸⁹ The selection of Pellán's paintings was made from thirteen works: one-third belonged to the artist while others came from private collections in Québec, particularly that of Maurice Corbeil (fig.7), from the Musée de la Province (Musée du Québec), and one from the National Gallery.⁹⁰

On March 18, two days after the committee met, McCurry informed some of the owners that their works had been chosen.⁹¹ Several collectors who had only sent photographs for the earlier stage of the selection process, were now asked to forward the actual paintings for "final consideration." The unnamed "Committee," presumably consisting of McCurry, Hubbard and Buchanan met at the end of March.⁹² On the 29th of March, McCurry notified Pallucchini that

"our plans for Canadian participation ... are in their final stages. Four artists are to be represented and the paintings have been selected with a view to arrangement of them in the room allotted to us." To ensure that the paintings would fit comfortably in "the space allotted to Canada," the presentation underwent a trial-run around 1 April when the works were laid out in the Victoria Building home of the National Gallery in a room equivalent in size to Room XXXVII in Venice. Twenty-two paintings were finally selected: four by Carr, eight by Milne, and five each from Roberts and Pellan. (See Appendix I). Eight were lent by institutions; and six of these were owned by the National Gallery. Three pictures came from the artists and the remainder from private collectors, many of whom had close connections with the Gallery.⁹³

The National Gallery Board of Trustees' only formal response to the selection is found in the *Minutes* of its annual fall meeting, which coincided with the final days of the 1952 Venice Biennale. Lawren Harris, who was perhaps slightly chagrined that only one of his suggestions for works by Emily Carr had been accepted,

enquired as to how the pictures had been chosen for this exhibition. The Director explained that, as there was insufficient time to call a meeting of the Board and as space at the Biennale devoted to Canada was extremely limited, with the help of the senior staff and with consultations with the Chairman [H.S. Southam], paintings had been selected after hanging them experimentally in a similar room at the National Gallery. Mr. Harris proposed that a definite plan to select Canadian pictures for exhibitions abroad under the auspices of the National Gallery should be devised. The matter was left for further thought and suggestion.

On 5 April, the Gallery sent the material requested for the Biennale's general catalogue which consisted of an introductory text, unsigned but written by Robert Hubbard, along with entries on the works.⁹⁴ In its 12 April press release, the Biennale made the official announcement that "Canada will appear this year for the first time."⁹⁵ The paintings were shipped from Ottawa to New York on 16 April in order to arrive in Venice by the end of May.⁹⁶ Along with them, the National Gallery also sent its *Le Pont de Narni* by Jean-Baptiste Camille Corot for inclusion in the twenty-seven work Corot retrospective curated by Germain Bazin for the Biennale and also presented in the Palazzo Centrale.⁹⁷

Twenty-six nations were present at the XXVI Venice Biennale; eight other foreign countries showed with Canada in the thirty-five connecting rooms of the Palazzo Centrale — Italia.⁹⁸ The arrangement of the twenty-two Canadian works in Sala XXXVII, located on the east side of the building, was presumably based on the plan devised in April at the National Gallery. (Appendix II). There are no known installation shots, although a photograph of Cuba's presentation in the adjoining room provides a glimpse through the doorway of Roberts' *The Sandpit*



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fig. 8 Cuban exhibition, Palazzo Centrale, 1952. Roberts' *Sand Pit* (fig.3) and Milne's *Painting Place III* and *Black Root II* (*Autumn Woods*) can be seen through the doorway. (Photo: ASAC Biennale)

adjoining room provides a glimpse through the doorway of Roberts' *The Sandpit* to the left of Milne's *Painting Place* and *Autumn Woods* (*Black Root II*) (fig.8). This image suggests that certain changes were made in the final arrangement of the individual works because in the National Gallery plan, Roberts' *Portrait (Marian)* (fig.9) was adjacent to the two Milnes. We can safely assume that Emily Carr's works were installed on the wall with the entrance way to the Cuban exhibition; these were followed by the Roberts paintings; then the Milne works along the wall with the doorway onto the two galleries used by Brazil; and finally, the wall for the Pellans.⁹⁹ Two of the Pellan paintings and one each by Milne and Carr were available for sale but none was purchased.¹⁰⁰

In retrospect, the presentation of the twenty-two paintings could be seen as having more importance as a "projection of Canada abroad" than as a tribute to the four Canadian painters. The Biennale was a display of nationhood. Each pavilion or room within the Palazzo Central was identified by the name of the presenting country. Despite Rodolfo Pallucchini's ideology of liberal democracy and his support for the modernist proposition of collective aesthetic values, the Venice Biennale represented the glorification of national identities. (Even today, visitors to the Biennale can be overheard asking others if they had seen "France," or visited "Germany" and where is "Greece?") As an exhibition site, the Biennale was a type of hybrid for it was neither a permanent museum presentation nor a temporary international survey show. Because each country decided for itself what would



fig. 9 Goodridge
Roberts, Marian
(Portrait), 1937,
oil on canvas,
84 x 66 cm, Musée
du Québec. (Photo:
Musée du Québec)

more important than its place within a global art community.

The selection of works to represent and promote Canada could be viewed as a type of historical-modern overview as the production dates of the paintings ranged from 1928 to 1949. This, combined with the fact that it was the first Canadian participation, imbued the presentation with pedagogical overtones as its principal function was to introduce the country to a largely European audience. The rather conservative nature of the exhibition (although this does not imply any criticism of the individual works themselves) reflects the National Gallery's definition of a circumscribed national artistic identity for foreign consumption. There was no attempt to present work that stood outside the evolutionary mainstream of Canadian art — a mainstream that had, in fact, been largely determined by the National Gallery.¹⁰¹ If the Canadian presence at the Biennale was envisioned as an enactment of the Massey Commission's mandate for a "projection of Canada abroad," then the National Gallery certainly did foster a singular harmonious image of Canada. It can also be seen as creating a self-defined foreign cul-

tural policy that was not unlike the identity proffered by the agendas of the Department of External Affairs. The unassuming but competent image projected by the Canadian exhibition could also be interpreted as the visual equivalent to the country's political, economic and social status as a "middle power." Whatever its place within the context of Canadian internationalist ambitions, the presentation was the visualization of an homogeneous "imaged community" for foreign approval that avoided the complexities of difference and divergence which identified the Canadian art milieu at home.

The short text in the Biennale general catalogue and Hubbard's essay in the Biennale's official magazine were intended to provide a framework for the display but had self-imposed limits, as we shall see, and contextual discussion was highly simplified at best. By showing only four artists (as the Biennale preferred), Canada could not tell as wide a narrative as Japan, another first-time participant which also presented twenty-two works but by eleven artists. That each Canadian painter was given their own wall of equal size and accessibility presents a democratic and non-hierarchical portrait of modern Canadian art. However well-intentioned the selection and arrangement of the works, the multifaceted discourse of Canadian art in the early 1950s, when it was undergoing its most interesting "crisis," would be hidden from view. The Biennale visitors would naturally assume that this *was* the discourse of contemporary painting in Canada.

The twenty-two paintings suggested a shared visual culture through their representational content. However, a close reading of the individual motifs reveals a pluralistic interpretation of figurative imagery. The traditionally dominant Canadian landscape image is the least common theme. References to the body are the most prolific — ranging from Carr's anthropomorphic totems, Pellan's segmented and intertwined shapes to Roberts distanced figures. The deceptively casual still-lives of Roberts and Milne as well as Milne's innocent architectural motifs, also reinforce the modernist notion that painting is about art and the ambiguity of reality and artifice. This belief in the potential of pictorial language was by necessity devoid of any nationalist implications. Ironically, the National Gallery's projection of a singular Canadian cultural identity as the sign of nationhood was in clear contradiction to the aesthetic privileging of individualism by the practitioners of Canadian modernity. This inherent conflict between nationalism and modernism was the most important factor in the "coming of age" of Canada in the decades following World War I and was characteristic of the current debates on the Canadian cultural condition.

Another strategy for the "projection of Canada abroad" was a one-week display of Canadian art books and periodicals. This event was part of a book-fair which was initiated in 1948 and was open to visitors for the duration of the Biennale. Its mandate was to highlight publications on modern art produced by countries participating in the Biennale. The presentation was sponsored by the

Galleria d'Arte del Cavallino of Venice and occupied the Padiglione del Libro (Book Pavilion). The National Gallery, in co-operation with the Department of External Affairs, was responsible for Canada's selections. Before shipping the printed material, McCurry had self-deprecatingly informed the Cavallino that: "Suitable Canadian publications are not very plentiful ... and I hope you will find them of sufficient interest to be put on display. Some of the publications have direct reference to the artists represented in the Canadian section of the Biennale."¹⁰² According to the list forwarded to the Biennale, the publications were: Emily Carr's *Klee Wyck* and *Growing Pains. The autobiography of Emily Carr*; Buchanan's *James Wilson Morrice, Canadian Painters*, and *The Growth of Canadian Painting*; John Lyman's *Morrice*; Maurice Gagnon's *Pellan*; Robert Elie's *Borduas*; Jacques de Tonnancour's *G. Roberts*; M.-A. Couturier's *Marcel Parizeau*; the National Gallery's *Eskimo Art and Canadian Painting. An Exhibition arranged for the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.*; from the Art Gallery of Toronto and the National Gallery *Arthur Lismer and Emily Carr: her paintings and sketches*. Ottawa also sent *The Report of the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Science* (and the French-language edition) as well as the *Royal Commission Studies. A selection of essays ...*. Periodicals included *Arts et pensée* (mars-avril 1952) and four recent issues of *Canadian Art*. The books and magazines presented a broader picture of Canadian art than might be conveyed by the paintings in the Palazzo Centrale. Although there were other exhibition catalogues and historical surveys which would have also been appropriate, most conspicuous by their absence were Paul Dumas' *Lyman*; Maurice Gagnon's *Peinture moderne*, and *Sur un état actuel de la peinture canadienne*. Also omitted, but not surprisingly, was a copy of Borduas' *Réfus global* which might have been just too hot for the Department of External Affairs to handle.

McCurry's other responsibility to the Biennale, in addition to attending the June 14 opening ceremonies with Pierre Dupuy, the recently appointed Canadian Ambassador to Italy, was as a member of the International Committee for Prizes. The committee was composed of national commissioners who were in Venice on 11 June for the deliberations.¹⁰³ Although the Biennale Archives contain the jury voting records, there is no indication of McCurry's preferences. First prize for a foreign painter was awarded to Raoul Dufy; Alexander Calder won for foreign sculpture; first prize to an Italian sculptor went to Mario Marini and the first prize for Italian painting was shared by Bruno Cassinari and Bruno Saetti.¹⁰⁴ What did remain as a lasting record of the Canadian participation at the Biennale were texts by the National Gallery and the critical appreciation of Canada's first "projection abroad" at the Venice Biennale.

The first half of Hubbard's unsigned two-page introduction for the "Canada" section of the Biennale general catalogue begins with an unabashed tribute to the National Gallery, "an advocate of the interchange of art exhibitions

between countries to promote international understanding.”¹⁰⁵ The justification for the Gallery’s self-testimonial is that: “A young nation is sensitive to what is said of her abroad and thus the development of painting in Canada has been affected by the reactions to successive exhibitions abroad.” This misleading and unfortunate statement is then followed by a selective history of Canadian participation at international art exhibitions (or more correctly, many of the National Gallery presentations abroad). Several lines of the short text are inappropriately given over to the accomplishment of the Group of Seven in the context of the mid-1920s Wembley exhibitions, where they received an “enthusiastic reception in comparison to the “public indifference and hostility at home.” Canadian showings at Paris in 1927, the Tate in 1938 and at Washington in 1950 were also seen as a success because they gave “our artists a new confidence.” The text, so far, has thus invented a tradition for Canada in the international arena which is not only exaggerated, but more importantly, has the rather provincial tone of positioning Canadian art (and artists) in a passive rather than active role. In contrast with another first-time participating nation, Cuba devoted the first half of its Biennale catalogue essay to describing the achievement of her artists. While this may also be seen as a form of (the expected) self-congratulations on such an occasion, at least the emphasis was placed on their fourteen artists rather than the organizers of the presentation.

Hubbard’s next and shorter paragraph finally, if summarily, deals with the artists: Carr “provides the link ... with the ‘national’ landscape movement, for she began her most characteristic work only after contact with the Group of Seven in 1927.”¹⁰⁶ Milne, who apparently did not need such rescuing, was “the lone representative of the gentler mode at a time when the austere held the imagination of our painters.” (fig.10) In contrast, Roberts and Pellán were allotted two sentences each (rather than just one) and were “vital forces in Canadian art today.” Roberts reflected “the contemporary search for monumentality and formal harmony” and his works “convey a poetic truth about what is still in many respects a solemn land.” If Hubbard was referring to Roberts’ landscape painting, this may have been somewhat confusing to the viewer as only two of his works in Venice were landscapes. Pellán, on the other hand, “brought the *éclat*, the joy, the violence and clash of the *École de Paris* into Canada and made them factors in present developments through the sheer force of a vigorous personality.” The description, which does not explain “present developments,” is much like the rest of the text on the artists in its avoidance of contextual references. With the exception of Carr, the first part of the essay also had little relevance to the discussion of the artists. The final lines of the piece express the National Gallery’s gratitude to the institutional lenders, then to Douglas Duncan and Lawren Harris, and lastly, “the artists themselves who have collaborated in assembling this exhibition;” a sequence that betrays the Gallery’s priorities. Although Hubbard’s enthusiasm



fig. 10 David Milne, *Snow in Bethlehem II (First Snow)*, 1941, watercolour, 39 x 56 cm, Gallery of Ontario. (Photo: AGO)

and support for Canadian art is undeniable, it is difficult to understand the ambiguity of the text, its irrelevance to the pictures presented and its defensive attitude. If his intentions are still unclear today, it is impossible to comprehend what it would signify to the readers of the Italian catalogue in 1952.¹⁰⁷

Hubbard wrote a much lengthier article for the official magazine, *La Biennale di Venezia. Rivista bimestrale dell' Ente della Biennale*, where it was accompanied by reproductions of Roberts, Milne and Pellan works.¹⁰⁸ (Carr's *Blunden Harbour* was reproduced in the general catalogue.) This text also begins by citing the National Gallery but now in a more appropriate manner. He states that the artists were chosen as "representative of the several important trends of the contemporary period," but without further elaboration. The next paragraph is brief, and a similarly elliptical discussion of Canadian painting in the 1920s (but not much later), which reinforces the invented homogeneity of the country's art and "the growth of a Canadian tradition." Nevertheless, "our art did not become recognizably Canadian until the period of the First World War, a time which saw a general wash of national feeling sweep across the country. Canadian artists then loudly declared their independence of foreign styles." After defining the visualization of our supposedly uniform, "highly distinctive landscape," Hubbard then

introduces what will be the *leit-motif* of the rest of the article by stating that while "the resulting style has its own character," it was "inevitably bore affinities to various European movements." Ironically, the Group of Seven was originally introduced as exemplary of a "national" movement, independent of "foreign styles;" but by the end of the paragraph, their "contribution" is one of international modernity.

From there, Hubbard proceeds with biographical entries on each artist, amplifying some of the material in the Biennale catalogue. Carr is still "inspired by the vigorous landscapes" of the Group but she is credited with developing "an intensely personal style." In light of Hubbard's projection of the international associations in the work of the others, it is ironic that he does not mention her European training and interest in American art. Milne "is a completely different sort" from the Group and the other "national" painters." He too is credited with an "extremely personal style," and mention is made of his participation in the Armory show and that he "worked ... in the woods ... of the United States." There is, however, no hint of the length and importance of his American career. The discussion on Roberts begins with an irrelevant reference to "a family which produced a well-known Canadian nature poet."¹⁰⁹ His work, "in spite of" the fact that he studied in North America and lived in Canada, has the necessary qualities for an international presentation as it "shows some natural and inevitable sympathies with certain aspects of Picasso and other European painters." Hubbard ends his discussion with the inexplicably condescending statement that Roberts "shows a rare insight into those solitudes of the soul which some sensitive persons may still feel in spite of the rapidly growing public interest in the arts." Pellan is once again discussed in the most energetic vocabulary, with references to Paris where he became "associated with Picasso, Léger, Miro and Max Ernst" and was introduced to the poetry of Paul Eluard. But he too is cast as a victim: "As a muralist he is, however, still frustrated in a country which has not as yet developed any great need for this branch of art."

The piece culminates with the inference that Canadian art has a greater diversity than is suggested by the current presentation, by referring to future presentations of "others of our leading painters: Morrice; the Group of Seven and their followers; the present-day automatistes, abstractionists, genre painters and the 'introspective' painters of human sympathy." In the same tone of self-deprecating passivity used in the Biennale catalogue, the piece concludes with the statement that "Canada is glad to submit her art to international inspection and welcomes the stimulating effects of criticism." It is clearly the intention of the texts sent from the National Gallery to cast a particularly modest image of Canadian art and its grateful pride in being included in such an illustrious international exhibition. Nevertheless, the authoritative voice of the National Gallery in the general catalogue suggests that its construction of Canadian culture outweighs the

individual contributions of the artists. Hubbard's text in *La Biennale* magazine is more sympathetic, but its twists and turns which attempt to position Canada in an international context are of little service to the artists, let alone the aesthetic ambitions of the country.

Because of Donald Buchanan's involvement with the Canadian presentation at the Biennale, his article "The Biennale of Venice Welcomes Canada" in *Canadian Art* can also be considered as a "National Gallery" text.¹¹⁰ However, as it was aimed at a Canadian audience, the emphasis is on the recent history of the Biennale. The Canadian painters are mentioned *en passant* and their names are only cited in the second to last paragraph of the article, although a work by each is generously reproduced. As has come to be expected, more attention is given to the organizers but with the assurance that the selection of artists "was no easy task for the National Gallery," and that: "Great care was taken to obtain choice examples, both from public and private collections. Included are several, owned privately, which have never been shown in public before." The fact that his own Milne was included and that a significant proportion of works came from the National Gallery was not mentioned.¹¹¹

The Canadian Ambassador to Italy, Pierre Dupuy wrote a confidential report on the Biennale intended for an exclusive audience in Ottawa.¹¹² More than half the items in his text were dedicated to a general condemnation of international modern art, although he conceded that a few of the historical shows "contribute in restoring the visitor's mental balance." This statement was preceded by a diatribe against the Russian Pavilion itself (since the Soviets did not present any art in 1952), and against all Communist artists and the "scores of paintings [which] are definitely anti-capitalist, and a few anti-American." In addition, both Alexander Calder, the winner of the international prize for sculpture and the Graham Sutherland retrospective were severely chastized by Dupuy. Nevertheless, he reported that "the Canadian paintings do present an honest though limited, cross-section of our national artistic development [and] Emily Carr dominated the team *Port of Blunden* is the best piece for its sobriety and decorative value."¹¹³ Dupuy totally ignored David Milne; and Roberts' "portrait of a nude woman [was] much too soapy, but I must admit not worse than most of the human figures one can see hanging on the walls or standing as sculptures on the floor."¹¹⁴ Not surprisingly, Dupuy had the most to say on Pellan's "abstract exhibits," (fig. 11) although even he did not get off lightly:

They pay credit to the 'non-figurative' group in Canada. Compared with paintings of similar tendency from other countries, Pellan's pieces appear quite superior in colour, design and cheerfulness. The pity is that he has become the prisoner of his own formula. What was justifiable and acceptable as research and boldness some twenty years ago is now losing part of its interest through repetition. This is no longer vanguard, but rear-guard action. In



fig. 11 Alfred Pellán, *Les îles de la nuit*, 1944, oil and ink on board, 116 x 89 cm, Université de Montréal. (Photo: the author)

my opinion, Pellán should be given a chance of coming to Europe soon in order to discover by himself that the pendulum is switching back to nature. Dupuy concluded his report to the government by suggesting that "a few sculptures should have been included ... and would have given a more complete knowledge of Canadian art," although he gives no hints on what should have been chosen.

Eric Newton's article "Canada's Place in the 1952 Biennale as Viewed by an English Critic" in *Canadian Art* took a more distanced view.¹¹⁵ Newton had given a National Gallery-sponsored lecture tour across Canada in 1937 and would do so again in 1953.¹¹⁶ He had also written the "Forward" to Buchanan's 1950 publication, *The Growth of Canadian Painting*. In his short essay in *Canadian Art*, Newton easily positioned Roberts and Pellán in the international context: "it would not surprise me had I come across Roberts in the French Pavilion or Pellán in any of the rooms given to Latin America." However, while Pellán had "inher-



fig. 12 Goodridge Roberts, *Landscape near Lake Orford*, 1945, watercolour, 54 x 75 cm, National Gallery of Canada. (Photo: NGC)

ited the language elaborated by modern abstract artists all over Europe and America his formal design lacks the power and the confidence that one finds in ... [Emilio] Vedova, or ... [Hans] Hartung." Roberts was "a superlative painter, an exponent of what the French ... call *la belle peinture*," which is "a gift that is rare in Canada." (fig.12) However, it "ceases to be remarkable in the Venetian Biennale" because of the widespread influence of the *École de Paris* throughout Europe. Milne, whose work he had first seen in the mid-1930s, had "no counterpart" although "his is a small but exquisite talent," which nevertheless, gave "an aristocratic touch to a room that otherwise lacks aristocracy."

Newton was most effusive about Carr, perhaps because of their long association and his acknowledged familiarity with her work compared to that of Roberts and Pellán.¹¹⁷ He had begun his remarks on the Canadian presentation by suggesting that "nations tend to be submerged under the personalities of certain distinguished artists who may or may not be characteristic of the countries to which they belong," making it "unreasonable to try to discover national characteristics." However, he cited Emily Carr as an example of one of the "great artists" who lived in a place that "provided exactly the right environment for bringing out all that was best in the artist." His most noted comment seems to have been his belief that she "might have well have filled the whole Canadian room with a one-man [*sic*] show." Agreeing with Newton's article, A.Y. Jackson later wrote to

McCurry stating that "if our whole exhibition had been devoted to Emily Carr it would have been more effective." McCurry concurred but correctly acknowledged that "there would have been a howl in Canada." He then cut the discussion short by raising the question of Canada having its own pavillion.¹¹⁸ It is not surprising that even at this late date, McCurry and Jackson would continue to privilege Carr as the paradigm of modern Canadian painting. Such nostalgia for the past is evident in Canada's essay in the Biennale catalogue and the *Rivista*, as well as positioning Carr in the context of the Group of Seven. Again, McCurry's understanding of the significance of Venice was not as a site for encouraging the new narratives of Canadian art, but for the presentation of a type of official state culture. The enthusiasm for Emily Carr in Canada seems, however, to be limited to the circle around the National Gallery.¹¹⁹ The few reviews in Canada of its participation at the 25th. Biennale did not go much beyond reporting the names of the artists and acknowledging that Venice bestowed a certain prestige to Canadian art and especially to the National Gallery. This lack of attention may simply be the result of general disinterest in an event that was happening far away and would welcome few Canadian visitors. The foreign press showed no greater enthusiasm.

Those few European periodicals and newspapers which cited Canada in their coverage of the Biennale usually only mentioned that it was the country's first appearance in Venice.¹²⁰ Attilio Podestà, in the periodical *Emporium*, noted that the contribution by Canada "includes two older painters, more specifically representative of a Canadian art — Emily Carr, who died in 1945 and David Milne; the two who are more noticeably representative of 'contemporary research' are Goodridge Roberts and Alfred Pellan, inspired by Klee."¹²¹ Piero Scarpa, in Rome's *Il Messaggero del Lunedì*, wrote that Canada and other "small" countries were "of little interest because the documentation was so fragmentary."¹²² The critic Lionello Venturi in his well-known article in *Commentari* stated that "the 1952 Biennale is better than the preceding ones in the presentation of Italian art and worse in terms of foreign art." Canada was not mentioned at all, presumably because the "invited foreign presentations in the Italian Pavilion would only be worth considering if they reached a reasonable artistic level."¹²³ Robert Vrinat, in *La Vie Intellectuelle*, in an essay on the human spirit in contemporary figuration, abstract interpretation and non-figuration, dismissed Canada in a single sentence: "Le Canada est un pays à paysage."¹²⁴ The Québec writer, Claude Picher, who argued strongly against Montréal non-representational art and the "universality" of modernism, quoted an unidentified French critic on the Biennale to help plead his own case: "The painters of Canada seem to wish to abolish all national character from their works and are content, for the most part to tag behind French contemporary art."¹²⁵

One relatively lengthy mention of Canada did take a more positive approach. Marcello Venturoli, who would win the 1952 Biennale prize for the

best critical essays in an Italian periodical, wrote:

The section from Canada presents four painters in all. The best is without doubt Alfred Pellán who shows five 'abstract' pieces, very sure and recognizable. Through the subtlety of the undercolour, which always functions tonally, [through] the tendency to create from pure symbols, allusion, and almost episodic description, [and by] the superimposition on the ground of scarcely accented 'strip-like figures,' the art of Pellán, especially in *Iles de la nuit*, puts us in mind of our own [Giulio] Turcato. David Milne demonstrates finesse and poetry in *First Snow* (oh, that church as if seen from the air, those snow flakes designed ... with a compass!). Emily Carr in her four works, does not yet reveal maturity even though the artist's impassioned search is moving. (See *Indian Church*). Goodridge Roberts is preferable in *The Sandpit* — painted very freely — and in *Landscape near Lake Orford*, the most solid among his works.¹²⁶

The "effects of criticism," were probably not as positively "stimulating" as the National Gallery might have wished. Nevertheless, by the time the Biennale closed the Giardini gates in October, plans were already afoot for Canada "to submit her art to international inspection" at Venice in 1954.

The 1952 Biennale di Venezia clearly defined the ambitions of its renewed mandate: "Continuing the programme of the last two exhibitions, the XXVI Biennale will bring together the most valued and significant expressions of contemporary art, both Italian and foreign." Twenty-six nations were represented and fourteen special historical and retrospective exhibitions were also organized. Canada's presentation, however, caused little stir in Venice or at home. In retrospect, the importance of Canada's participation in the Biennale lies in the place it assumed in the chronology of Canadian art history: the first significant appearance on the world stage of contemporary art. In this light, the National Gallery's presentation may be seen as an example of *aggiornamento*, a catching-up to establish Canadian modern art in the international arena. The exhibition is also important for the part it played in the narrative of the making of a modern nation. Canada's presence in Venice was a reflection of the growing confidence of the country as it assumed a role in international political affairs. The exhibition was also a visual manifestation of the aims of the Massey Commission; it indeed functioned as an exemplary instrument for "the projection of Canada abroad." Whether the National Gallery's presentation described the "most valuable and significant expressions" of the country's art community is open to debate; that it fully participated in the construction of an exportable national cultural identity is not.

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Notes

- 1 *Report of the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences 1949-1951* (Ottawa: Edmond Cloutier, 1951), Chapter XVII, Item no. 2, p.253; hereafter referred to as the *Report*.
- 2 The National Gallery would continue to be responsible for the Biennale up to and including the 1986 presentation. After that, Canada's representation would be organized by different curators and institutions.
- 3 For detailed histories of the Venice Biennale and discussion of the administrators, committees, individual artists, group exhibitions, prize winners etc. see in particular: Paolo RIZZI and Enzo DI MARTINO, *Storia della Biennale 1895-1982* (Milan: Electa, 1952) and Dario VENTIMIGLIA *et al.*, *La Biennale di Venezia. Le Esposizioni Internazionali d'Arte 1895-1995* (Venice/Milan: La Biennale di Venezia, 1996). Philip RYLANDS and Enzo DI MARTINO, *Flying the Flag for Art. The United States and the Venice Biennale 1895-1991* (Richmond, Va.: Wyldbore and Wolferstan, 1993) also includes appendices of events, prizes and statistical compilations of all nations. During the early years, the Biennale was known as L'Esposizione Internazionali d'Arte della Città di Venezia; in 1930 the name was changed to Esposizione Biennale d'Arte. In this paper it will be referred to as La Biennale di Venezia which was the official name of the administration structure.
- 4 The most insightful English-language appreciation of the Biennale is still Lawrence ALLOWAY, *The Venice Biennale 1895-1968. From Salon to Goldfish Bowl* (Greenwich, Conn.: The New York Graphic Society, 1968).
- 5 In 1903 Morrice submitted two works to the jury for presentation at the Biennale in the Sala Internazionale, Altre nazionale. They were listed in the Biennale's general catalogue as no. 36 *La Spaggia di S. Malo* and no. 37 *L'autunno a Parigi*. Morrice was invited to return in 1905 and bypassed the jury. The works are identified in the general catalogue as *Sulla spiaggia and Regate a S. Malo*. In both catalogues he is identified as "Morrice William [*sic*] James, Montreal (Canada)" and cited as living in Paris. The documents relating to Morrice's participation are found in Vol. 55 (1903) and 56 (1905), Archivio Storico delle Arti Contemporanee della Biennale di Venezia (ASAC), Ca Corner della Regina, Venice. In 1958 a special tribute exhibition of Morrice's work was presented in the newly-constructed Canadian Pavilion.
- 6 In 1897 James Kerr-Lawson exhibited no. 24 *Fisherman's Daughter* and no. 25 *In Granada* (my translation). In the brief biographical information he provided for the general catalogue on p.83, he identifies himself as a Scot and does not mention his early years in Canada; as well, his works were exhibited in Sala R — Scozia (Scotland). His participation at Venice is not mentioned in Robert LAMB's *James Kerr-Lawson. A Canadian Abroad* (Windsor, Ont.: Art Gallery of Windsor, 1983).
- 7 The Film Festival was presented in 1946; it had begun in 1932 as the Mostra Internazionali d'Arte Cinematografica. It should be noted that in the 1930s the exhibition policy of the Biennale expanded to include the decorative arts and in particular (but not surprisingly), glass.
- 8 The stalwarts of the Biennale throughout its history and despite the wars, included Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Great Britain, Holland, Hungary, Spain, Switzerland, the United States of America and to a lesser extent, the USSR. For a detailed record of the participation of all nations (despite some errors in the overall tallies), see RYLANDS and DI MARTINO, Appendix XI, 361-65.
- 9 Rodolfo PALLUCCHINI, "The world's art at Venice," *Art News* 7, no. 5 (September 1948): 20-24, 53. Pallucchini made similar statements on the 1948 Biennale in various international art publications as well as in material issued from his office in Venice. Pallucchini remained as Secretary-General of the Biennale until 1956; among the many accomplishments of his tenure was the regular programme of distributing bulletins and press releases to bring international attention to the Biennale.

10 Marcia E. VETROcq's, "The Agenda for Abstract Painting in Post-War Italy," *Art History* 12, no. 4 (December 1989): 450. This article (pp.448-71) is an excellent discussion of the critical and aesthetic debates in Italy and the positioning of Italian art in an international context. Vetrocq emphasizes that the renewal of art symbolized "the larger crisis of Italian recovery and participation in the world after 1945," 451.

11 Peggy Guggenheim moved her collection from New York to Venice in 1947; it was shown in the empty Greek Pavilion in 1948 and then travelled to Florence and Milan before being permanently installed in her newly-acquired Palazzo Venier dei Leoni in 1949 and opened to the public.

12 Palluchini's concern for "catching up" was not unlike the more circumscribed aesthetic debate in Québec in the late 1940s on the issue of *rattrapage*.

13 In 1948, 1108 artists participated, showing 3065 works of art with 216,471 visitors; in 1950 while the number of works rose slightly, the numbers of artists and visitors decreased by a little more than 10%; for statistics on all the Biennales see: RYLANDS and DI MARTINO, Appendix VI, 339-41.

14 ALLOWAY, *The Venice Biennale*, 141.

15 The USSR did not participate in the Biennale from 1936 until 1954, while the United States was only absent five times from 1895 until the present.

16 The term middle power denotes not only a country's political and economic status, but also its mediatory role in seeking compromises and formulas for agreement in international conflicts. Other middle power countries included Australia, Denmark, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, and Sweden. The United Kingdom, France, the United States and the Soviet Union were the principal world players until the latter two emerged as the "superpowers" of the Cold War.

17 St-Laurent was elected Prime Minister in 1948. He had been the Secretary of Foreign Affairs in the previous Mackenzie King administration with Pearson as his Under-Secretary. Pearson was elected Prime Minister of Canada in 1963.

18 For a discussion of the concept of pragmatic idealism in terms of Canadian internationalism, see: Costad MELAKOPIDES, *Pragmatic Idealism. Canadian Foreign Policy, 1945-1995* (Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995).

19 Sources on Canada's political foreign policies and activities during the early years of the post-war era are almost limitless. R.A. MACKAY, *Canadian Foreign Policy 1945-1954. Selected Speeches and Documents* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1972), provides an excellent "Introduction" and documentary materials. It must also be remembered that Québec did not necessarily agree with all aspects of Ottawa's external policies.

20 Canada's most decisive political confrontation with Britain came with the Suez Crisis in 1956 when she abstained from voting in a UN resolution demanding a cease-fire and Anglo-French withdrawal. Pearson's creation of a peacekeeping force to supervise the cessation of hostilities led to his receipt of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1957. Although Canada's foreign policies and her attempts at mediation between the West and Russia were essential to her international identity, domestic relations with the United States were her primary preoccupation.

21 The USSR continued to block Italy's original request for membership in 1947. One ongoing problem was the disposal of its former colonies; more important was the question of Trieste which was finally returned to Italy in 1954. Nevertheless, Italy was a member of many UN agencies, associations and councils before obtaining a seat in the General Assembly.

22 Di Gaspari visited Ottawa from 15 to 22 Sept. 1951 for a meeting of the North Atlantic Council.

23 For example, in 1949, 800 Italians emigrated to Canada, in 1952, 21,000; new arrivals were lent \$165 each. For a discussion on various aspects (except cultural) of Canada's relationship with

Italy at the time, see the summary report "Relations between Canada and Italy," Department of External Affairs, 1952, National Archives of Canada (NAC), RG25, Vol. 6526, file 9676-40, pt. 2.1. Information on immigration is found in pt 3.2. I wish to thank Ted Kelly of the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Relations for his invaluable help in identifying relevant documents held at the NAC. In 1952, for example, Canada provided major relief aid to victims of the devastating Po Valley flood.

24 A coherent cultural policy by the Canadian government was eventually formulated in 1963. The Cultural Affairs Division of the Department of External Affairs was created in 1965. The Québec government, however, had begun to establish external cultural ties with the election of Jean Lesage in 1960. For a discussion of exhibitions of Canadian and particularly Québec art presented outside of Canada in the 1960s, see France COUTURE, "L'exposition de la modernité artistique, lieu de construction de l'identité nationale," *RACAR* XXI, no. 1-2 (1994): 32-42.

25 *Documents. External Relations*. Volume 16 (1950) ed. Greg Donaghy. (Ottawa: Department of Foreign Affairs and International Relations, 1996), 1600-01. Canadian claims against Italy are stated in Articles 78-79 of the 1947 Peace Treaty.

26 In February 1954 a cultural agreement was signed between Canada and Italy to formally establish a Canadian Foundation in Rome, headed by the Canadian Ambassador but it was not in place until two years later. It was primarily intended to accommodate educational activities. Also in 1956, the Italian government established an Italian Culture Institute in Montréal.

27 A. Anderson in a 16 May 1949 memo to G.C. McInness, of External's Information Division, expressed his desire to "undertake the responsibility for all matters pertaining to art exhibitions." McInness responded the next day, that "art exhibitions should logically come under Cultural Relations" but wants to wait until "educational matters" are in order. NAC, RG 25, Vol. 3959, file 9703-40.

28 External Affairs' version of the events are in the file cited above.

29 The unsigned short text was published in *External Affairs*, Vol. 2., no. 5 (May 1950): 175-79, the bulletin of the Department of External Affairs. H.O. McCurry, H.H. Southam and R.H. Hubbard edited the text before its publication. Undated letter to Graham McInness, Information Director, D.E.A. National Gallery of Canada, Archives, National Gallery of Canada fonds, Outside Activities/Organizations/Dept. of External Affairs, 7.4. E. External send a request for information from McCurry on 18 Jan. 1951. Hubbard responded three weeks later.

30 The Information Division memo was written by J. Seaborn to Anderson, 3 Feb. 1950 but Anderson replied that a letter should not be sent to the Gallery questioning the quantity and quality of their exhibitions abroad.

31 An invaluable listing of exhibitions associated with the NGC can be found in Gary MAINPRIZE, "The National Gallery of Canada: A Hundred Years of Exhibitions. List and Index," *RACAR* XI, nos. 1-2, (1984): 3-78.

32 In addition to the numerous commentaries on the recommendations and implications of the Massey Commission published in the early 1950s and later, see also Paul LITT, *The Muses, the Masses and the Massey Commission* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1959).

33 *Massey Report*, Part I, Section IV, "Scholarship Science and the Arts;" Section XV, "The Artist and the Writer," sub section "Painting. The Problems of the Canadian Painter," item no. 20, 210.

34 *Report*, subsection "Contemporary Tendencies in Canadian Painting," item no. 11, 207. This comment was made in relation to "the success of Pellán's exhibition in Paris before the war and of recent exhibitions of Robert LaPalme in Rome and in Paris."

35 *Report*, Section V, "Cultural Relations Abroad," Chapter XVII, "The Projection of Canada Abroad," item no. 3, 254. Presentations of Canadian art were most frequently seen in the United States and to a lesser extent in London and Paris.

36 The artists represented in the first Sao Paulo biennial were Leon Bellefleur, B.C. Binning, Molly Bobak, P.-É. Borduas, Pierre de Ligny Boudreau, Fritz Brandtner, Paraskeva Clark, Stanley Cosgrove, Albert Dumouchel, L.L. FitzGerald, Lillian Freiman, A.Y. Jackson, Arthur Lismer, Henri Masson, David Milne, Will Ogilvie, J.-P. Riopelle, Goodridge Roberts, Carl Schaefer, Marian Scott and Jacques de Tonnancour. The Sao Paulo biennials did not have the *cachet* of the Venice shows, as they were located in "a less accessible place" and were known more "through its catalogues than on-site visits," ALLOWAY, 15. Exhibitions of Canadian art had been presented in Brazil in the late 1940s with the assistance of the National Gallery. Jean Désy, who would become Canada's representative in Rome had been the Ambassador to Brazil.

37 *Report*, Part II, Chapter XXIV, "Information Abroad," subsection "Cultural Exchanges," item no. 2, 365. The letter was sent on 25 April 1949. This statement is followed by the recommendation that "one Council assume the primary responsibility for such official aid and countenance;" this would eventually evolve as the Canada Council. That it was suggested that the Council be based on British models reflects Massey's anglocentrism, which was not necessarily typical of Canada's foreign policies.

38 *Ibid.* "Introduction," item no. 13, 275.

39 *Report*. See note 12, item no. 24, 211.

40 *Report*, Part II, Chapter XX, "Other Federal Institutions," subsection "The National Gallery," item no. 5a, 315.

41 The budget, including funds for acquisitions for 1950-51 was \$260,770; in the ten preceding years it had a total annual average of \$90,000. For discussion on the Gallery in this period, see Jean Sutherland BOGGS, *The National Gallery of Canada* (Toronto: Oxford Univ. Press, 1971), esp. Chapter 6.

42 *Report*. See note 14, subsection "Cultural Activities of Commonwealth and Foreign Countries," item no. 29, 263. In the Report, the Commission acknowledged that the division between information and cultural exchanges was not clearly drawn. External Affairs did purchase a limited number of silk-screen reproductions of Canadian paintings from the National Gallery for distribution in its missions and other venues abroad. The silk-screen programme is discussed by Joyce ZEMANS in vol. XVI/2 (1995) and vol. XIX/1 (1998) of *The Journal of Canadian Art History/Annales d'histoire de l'art canadien*.

43 By 1950, Canada had forty-five diplomatic and consular offices in thirty-four countries as well as trade commissions in nineteen cities without diplomats or consuls. Government information and cultural services were the responsibility of the Information Division of the Department of External Affairs, which published its monthly *Bulletin* for national and international distribution.

44 Financing of the one-year award came from Government of Canada Blocked Funds for France and the Netherlands and was administered by the Royal Society. Blocked funds in Italy would be used for the construction of the Canadian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 1958. Other "art" grantees in 1952 were Jack Humphrey and Clair Bice (for museum studies); Stanley Cosgrove, Robert LaPalme and Louis Archambault in 1953. The regulations stated that applicants had to be over thirty-years old and "must have already attained distinction in their fields. No formal academic course need be followed but applicants must submit a definite plan of study."

45 The National Gallery Archives, National Gallery Fonds, Box-5.4-B "Canadian Exhibitions/Foreign, Biennale (Venice) 1952," files 1 and 2 are the principal source of primary materials on the Canadian participation in Venice. I wish to thank Cyndie Campbell, the Gallery Archivist, for her devoted assistance in this project. The second source of documents are the files at the Archivio Storico delle Arti Contemporanee della Biennale di Venezia (ASAC), Venice. Material relating to the Canadian participation is found in Serie Paesi. 1940-1968.8. "Canada 1952-1963." Other materials relating to the administration of the 1952 event are found in box numbers 38-44, 159-62, among others. I wish to thank Daniela Ducceschi for her assistance at the Biennale Archives.

In many cases, the same materials are found in both archives and unless otherwise indicated, the documents at the National Gallery may be assumed to be the source of the information cited for the correspondence between Venice and Ottawa. Most of the letters from the National Gallery to the administration of the Biennale were translated into Italian on their receipt in Venice. Letters from the Biennale to the National Gallery were written in English.

Pallucchini's name should have been known to McCurry as the Gallery had been receiving publicity materials from him and the Committee for the XXV since 1949. As well, the Gallery had agreed to distribute leaflets for the poster competition of the 1950 Biennale at the request of Mario di Stefano, the Italian Ambassador in Ottawa.

46 The date of Buchanan's visit was noted on a translated copy of McCurry letter in Venice: "già veniva domenica 20 agosto e parlato con M. Pall. [Maestro Pallucchini]."

47 The office of the Industrial Design Section of the National Gallery was established in 1947 and was formalized by a by-law to the National Gallery Act at the 21 March 1950 meeting of the NGC Board of Trustees when Buchanan was named Chief of Section. While aspects of Buchanan's varied career have been studied, there is as yet no full analysis of his activities.

48 Italian and English versions of the 1952 Biennale regulations can be found in the NGC Archives and were supposed to be sent to the participating artists as well. Information regarding foreign participation (items 13 to 19) reiterates the established protocol for dealing with foreign countries in their own pavilions or within the Italian pavilion. Furthermore the "governments of all nations taking part ... will appoint their own commissioner, who will superintend the preparation of his particular exhibition" and will be responsible for supplying information on each work, biographical information and "a selection of photographs of the works of art that will be exhibited." As well, the participating nation was responsible for "a short preface to the section concerned ... which will be included in the official catalogue." The Commissioners were "guests of the Biennial for the period in which the International Jury is sitting for the awarding of the prizes."

49 Père Couturier was well-known in Québec for his organization of exhibitions of *l'art vivant*; see Monique BRUNET-WEINMANN, "Le Père Couturier à Québec (1940-41), *RACAR* 14 (1987):151-8 and François-Marc GAGNON, *Chronique du mouvement automatiste québécois 1941-1954* (Montréal: Lanctôt Editeur, 1998) as well as in Gagnon's monographs on Borduas.

50 Couturier also arranged an appointment for Buchanan with Henri Matisse (who Buchanan had met years earlier when researching his monograph on Morrice.) As a result, the National Gallery purchased Matisse's *Nu sur un canapé jaune* which according to Matisse was a suitable acquisition for Canada as it was "nothing too shocking." For a discussion of his meeting with Matisse, see Donald BUCHANAN, "Interview in Montparnasse," *Canadian Art* VIII, no. 2 (Christmas-New Year 1950-1951): 61-65. There is no mention in the article of his visit to Venice during the same trip.

51 NGC Board of Trustees, "Minutes of Meetings, March 21, 1950-Oct. 15-16, 1952," file 9.21 B, June 1, 1951 In the regulations of the Venice Biennale, there were never guidelines concerning the time-span appropriate to "contemporary." This was also the case in the early years when Morrice participated, but at that time any work which had been exhibited in Italy during the previous twelve months could not be displayed at the Biennale.

52 McCurry to Pallucchini, 7 June 1951.

53 NGC Board of Trustees, "Minutes...", 2 Oct. 1951.

54 Buchanan to Pallucchini. In the Biennale Archives there are two copies of the letter, one dated 29 Oct. on NGC Industrial Design Information Services letterhead and another dated 30 Oct. on Office of the Director, NGC stationery, which may have been slightly confusing.

55 Pallucchini to Buchanan, 18 Nov. 1951.

56 Garneau to Désy, 23 Nov. 1951. In a "Note to File," written by S.A. Freifield, 22 Nov. states that External had received a telephone call from McCurry regarding Pallucchini's letter and

"Mr. Garneau can find no record of the invitation in Information Division and is checking with European." NAC, RG25, Vol. 4434, file 9703-AJ-40. Other correspondence cited here by External Affairs regarding the invitation is found in this file.

57 Archibald Day, Information Division, Dept. of External Affairs to McCurry, 29 Nov. 1951, enclosing the letter from Ponti. A copy of the letter is found in the NAC and NGC files.

58 McCurry to Day, 3 (?) Dec. 1951.

59 McCurry's rapid response of 3 December was followed by a more formal letter to Pallucchini on 15 December asking for the number of rooms assigned to Canada "so that we can make the selection fit the space available."

60 Day, (as) Acting Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs to the Canadian Embassy, Rome, 5 Dec. 1951.

61 Ponti's 9 Oct. 1951 letter to Désy notes that he had "been told last summer, through a letter from the National Gallery of Canada and a meeting with Mr. Donald Buchanan of the desire of Canadian artists to be represented" at the next Biennale.

62 The administration of the Biennale was an autonomous organization (Ente autonomo). The principle responsibilities fell on Rodolfo Pallucchini as Secretary-General of the Biennale. Its President, the Hon. Prof. Giovanni Ponti played a more official than active role. An abbreviated summary of its committee structure is as follows: the Administrative Council consisted of the President and six councillors, including the Mayor of Venice, representatives of the Italian government, the Province of Venice and the Presidents of the Accademia di Belle Arti of Rome and Venice; the Executive Committee of eleven members, included Pallucchini and artists, art writers, and national union representatives. There was also the XXVI Biennale International Committee of Experts including six Italian art historians and one art authority each from Austria, France, Belgium, Germany, Switzerland, Great Britain, Holland and the United States. Finally there were the commissioners for each national pavilion and each country showing in the Central Pavilion; as well as commissioners for the Decorative Arts Pavilion and for the various special exhibitions (historical and contemporary). The 1952 International Jury for Prizes, presided over by Pallucchini, included seventeen commissioners as well as representatives from the Administrative Council of the Biennale and the International Committee of Experts.

63 ASAC, Box 62, "Minutes of the Meeting of the Administrative Council, Venice," 23-24 June 1951. All translations from Italian of ASAC documents are by the author.

64 *Ibid*, "Minutes" of the 15 November meeting in Rome. The Council stated that countries without their own pavilions requiring space in the Central Pavilion had until 20 December to announce their participation. The other countries at this point were Australia, Japan, Cuba and Uruguay. Some nations, like Canada, would use the Palazzo Centrale for a few years before constructing their own pavilions.

65 ASAC, Box 42 - II. Verbal, "Summary of Minutes of the First Session of the Executive Council," 3 Dec. 1951. Much of the discussion was given over to the planning of an exhibition in the Palazzo Centrale (also referred to as the Italian Pavilion) showing the work of senior Italian artists, another for the younger generation as well as a special "anthology" show of Italian contemporary art. The list of participants would change with each subsequent meeting of the Executive. Another major concern was how to include the work of Italian artists who were traditionally ignored because their work fell outside of mainstream modern movements. The Council decided that only a limited number of invitations be extended to the artists and that there was great need for a rigorous selection committee which "could act fairly."

66 Pallucchini to McCurry, 8 Feb. 1952; he enclosed a small drawing of Sala XXXVII, a square room of 26.80 metres of running space.

67 For a discussion of the 1954 Canadian participation, see GAGNON, *Chronique*, 928-44; also see the NGC Archives. Binning was very surprised that he had been selected.

68 It should be kept in mind that a concern for regional (or gender) representation was not a factor at this time. However, Borduas was certainly better known outside of Québec than Pellan. For a recent study on Pellan, see Michel MARTIN, *et al.*, *Alfred Pellan* (Montréal and Québec: Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal and Musée du Québec, 1993).

69 Pallucchini to James Thrall Soby, Curator of the Dept. of Painting and Sculpture, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 22 Sept. 1951. ASAC, Box 38. There is no evidence of a similar letter being sent to McCurry. After the XXVI Biennale opened, there was public discussion that Surrealism would be theme in 1954.

70 The others were Borduas, Binning, Stanley Cosgrove, R. York Wilson and Marthe Rankin. The exhibition was considered as important to the United States as the Biennale was to Europe. From 16 Oct.-14 Dec., 1952, twenty-three nations participated with 257 artists; one-third of the exhibition was devoted to American painting and the show travelled to San Francisco the following February.

71 A discussion of Japan's first participation in the Biennale in 1952 is found in *The Venice Biennale. Forty Years of Japanese Participation*, by various authors (Tokyo: The Japan Foundation, 1995). The choice of painters and pictures was made by a committee of artists and critics representing various art societies and the exhibition was sponsored by the Yomiuri newspapers. The eleven artists in the Palazzo Centrale included Ryzuzburo Umehara, who was also the reporter for Yomiuri in Italy and France. Japan would construct its own pavilion in 1956, two years before Canada.

72 The history of the American participation is described in RYLANDS and DI MARTINO, *Flying the Flag...* In 1952 the United States held four solo shows in the four rooms of its pavilion — Alexander Calder, Stuart Davis, Edward Hopper and Yasuo Kuniyoshi, a much less exuberant choice than in 1950 with Gorky, Pollock and de Kooning, among others. The American Federation of Arts, selected the artists and arranged for the individual curators at the request of David Finley, Director of the National Gallery of Art in Washington and chairman of the National Commission of Fine Arts. Finley served as Commissioner; James Johnson Sweeney of the Metropolitan was Curator of the Pavilion and the Calder room. Other curators were Andrew Ritchie of MoMA (Davis); Hermon More of the Whitney (Hopper) and John I. H. Baur from the Brooklyn Museum (Kuniyoshi). The Pavilion was owned by Grand Central Galleries in New York but sold to MoMA in 1954.

73 There were two major exhibitions in the British Pavilion: retrospectives of work by Graham Sutherland and Edward Wadsworth and "New Aspects of British Sculpture" including nine artists. Herbert Read was the Commissioner; the selection committee comprised Herbert Read, Philip Hendy, John Rothenstein and Lilian Somerville, Head of the Fine Art Department of the British Council. Sophie BOWNESS' *Britain at the Venice Biennale 1895-1955* (London: British Council, 1995) focuses more on the early years of British participation but does provide summary notes on the 1952 showing. A discussion of the implications of the Biennale can be found in Margaret GARLAKE, *New Art New World. British Art in Postwar Society* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1998).

74 McCurry to K.M. Haig, Winnipeg, 30 April in response to her letter of 15 April. In HAIG's article, "Dr. McCurry's Coyness," in the *Winnipeg Free Press*, 8 May, 1952 she accused him of being "coy" for not announcing the names of the artists and the titles of the paintings while the Americans had not been at all secretive.

75 René Garneau, Information Division, External Affairs, Ottawa, 3 May 1952, NAC, RG 25, Vol. 4434, file 9703-AJ-40.

76 It is beyond the scope of this article to detail the artists' relationship with the Gallery but a rapid calculation of its patronage can be made by consulting the NGC catalogue of its Canadian collection.

77 Doris Shadbolt's publications on Emily Carr remain important monographs although little attention has been paid to her posthumous career. Milne's biography has been covered in detail in the *catalogue raisonné* recently published by David Silcox and the author's 1998 *Goodridge Roberts 1904-1974* is the latest study of his work and life.

78 Roberts and William Armstrong showed in Gallery XII in the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 5-23 January 1952. Roberts wrote to McCurry regarding the sending of work on 25 and 31 January.

79 In Roberts' letter to McCurry on 10 Feb. he notes: "I am also grateful to hear that you will be showing some of the others to officials of the Dept. of External Affairs." As there is no further documentation, it is likely the involvement of External Affairs referred to the possible purchase of work for diplomatic missions.

80 On 12 Feb. McCurry wrote to Roberts, thanking him for "the partial list of pictures which you think might be considered for exhibition abroad." It was at this time that he informed him of the impending visit by Hubbard and Buchanan. McCurry's correspondence with Pellán at that time was equally elliptical. Roberts wrote to Hubbard, 20 February asking that "If any of those borrowed [pictures] are being considered for the show in Europe, I hope that the National Gallery will get in touch with the owners as soon as possible."

81 While the Board of Trustees had already given their "final approval" in October 1951, McCurry would use this sentence in all letters to private collectors.

82 When the Gallery expressed their interest in borrowing *The Sandpit*, Barcelo agreed on 7 March to lend the work but pointed out that it was an oil, not a watercolour. He also expressed a concern for insuring his pictures because of international hostilities and McCurry informed him on 10 March that "should war break out during the period of the exhibition, the pictures will be covered by war insurance."

83 That same day, 15 April, McCurry informed Stern that none of the Roberts paintings he had shipped to Ottawa would be included in the show.

84 McCurry had sent Pellán a list of his selected works on 8 April when he also sent a similar letter to Douglas Duncan stating which Milnes had been chosen.

85 The list of this first selection of works records the four names. Also McCurry wrote to Sydney Key, Curator, Art Gallery of Toronto, 18 Mar. 1952: "On Sunday we had a conference with Douglas Duncan and arrived at a semi-selection of Milnes for the Venice Biennale." Duncan was a great promoter of Milne although he was famous for his disorganized business habits; he was also the founder of Toronto's Picture Loan Society.

86 One reason for possibly suggesting that this list was drawn up prior to 16 March is because when Roberts' *Still Life*, was seen by the selection committee, it was described as in the possession of the National Gallery, while on the list it is noted as being owned by the artist. *Still-Life* was officially purchased by the National Gallery at the 27 March 1952 meeting of the Board of Trustees. Milne's *The Tower*, which was also sent to Venice, was purchased at the same time. There are "First" and "Second" choice lists for only Roberts and Pellán in the NGC files.

87 Harris also recommended they send Carr's *Grey* owned by Charles Band: "It is to my mind the best thing Emily ever painted and would help her representation and the entire Canadian section. It is a very mysterious and wonderful canvas." At the time, *Grey* was in an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, but was sent to Ottawa for "final consideration" and returned to Toronto on 28 April after being rejected. The work selected from Band's collection was *Indian Church*.

88 Buchanan's *Autumn Woods* had been given to him by Vincent Massey in 1935.

89 McCurry to Duncan, 15 Apr. 1952. "The Committee thought, however that we should send a group of eight Milnes, as his paintings are smaller than those of the other artists.... On the

other hand, we thought that a group of 4 oils might strengthen the representations and we added one belonging to Donald Buchanan."

90 The complete list of works collected for the selection can be found in the National Gallery Archives. Owners whose work was not going to Venice were notified in mid-April; "insufficient space" was given as the reason for their elimination from the selection.

91 For example, on 18 March McCurry notified Nicholas Ignatieff, Warden of Hart House that the Gallery would be sending their David Milne *Water Lilies* to Venice. The same day he also informed Sidney Key that the AGT Milne, *First Snow in Bethlehem* would also go to the Biennale.

92 McCurry to Duncan, 18 March, concerning Milnes' *The Lake*: "I should very much appreciate it if you would allow the picture to come to the National Gallery for final consideration within the next week or so."

93 The most obvious of these were Buchanan, Vincent Massey and Douglas Duncan as well as J.E. Coyne and Charles Band. The private collectors of the Roberts and Pellan works came from Québec.

94 Sixty lines of space had been reserved for Canada in the Biennale's general catalogue. Although there is much correspondence between McCurry and Pallucchini concerning the entries on the works, the published entries had missing information and were inconsistent.

95 "Many American Countries Taking Part," Biennale *Bulletin*, no. 22. The only other information given was that McCurry would be the Commissioner for Canada. The press release also announced the first time participation of Cuba and Guatemala.

96 The paintings did not get to Venice as early as originally expected as there was a change of ship used to transport the works from New York to Italy. The paintings arrived in Venice around 22 May.

97 ASAC. Box 42 - II. "Verbal." The decision to mount the Corot exhibition was taken by the International Committee of Experts on 1 Oct. 1951. The Ottawa Corot was requested from the National Gallery on 12 Dec. 1951; NGC Curatorial files, "Corot." In the press coverage of the Venice Biennale, the *Ponte de Narni* received more attention than any of the Canadian artists and was widely reproduced.

98 These were Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Cuba, Japan, Norway, South Africa and Sweden. Only Argentina, Brazil, and Norway had more than one room. The number of artists and works presented varied from country to country. For example, Japan and Bolivia showed twenty-two works in a similar size space to Canada. However, there were eleven artists from Japan and three from Bolivia. The rest of the *sale* were devoted to a group show of Italian senior artists; Italian younger painters; eight Italian solo shows; three historical Italian exhibitions; foreign artists living in Italy; presentations of work by Kokoschka and Soutine; as well as the Corot retrospective. A complete inventory of the artwork in each room in the Palazzo Centrale and the individual pavilions can be found in the Italian-language general catalogue, *XXVI Biennale di Venezia. Catalogo* (Venezia: Alfieri Editore, 1952).

Cuba and Japan were also showing for the first time; Norway had not been at the Biennale since 1914; Israel made its second appearance and in 1952 constructed its own pavillion as did Switzerland. Nine countries had been turned away because of lack of space. The number of foreign countries participating increased slightly over the previous Biennale; in total, 640 artists showed almost four thousand art works; ASAC, Box 41, "Attività della Segreteria Generale per l'organizzazione della XXVI Esposizione Biennale International d'Arte di 1952."

99 It is likely that McCurry oversaw the installation as he arrived in Venice on 8 June; Pallucchini had informed him that the show must be ready by the 10th. As McCurry was the Commissioner for Canada, the Biennale provided his accommodations at the Bauer Hotel on the Grand Canal. During his eight-week stay in Europe, he would also attend the the XVII International

Congress of the History of Art in Amsterdam as well as beginning the process of acquiring works in London for the National Gallery of Canada from the Liechtenstein Collection.

100 The works were Pellan's *Au clair de la lune* at \$1000 and *Femme à la perle*, \$300; Carr's *Survival* at \$800; and Milne's *Sled* for \$175. Sales were a very important source of revenue for the operating of the Biennale as it would receive 15% of any work sold "whether the sale is contracted directly by the artist himself, or the proprietor of the work in question, or by any other person selling on behalf of the artist;" *Biennale Regulations*. In 1954 there would be complications over the sale of a Riopelle work; see GAGNON, *Chroniques*.

101 See Anne WHITELOW, "Exhibiting Canada: Articulations of National Identity at the National Gallery of Canada," unpublished doctoral thesis, Concordia University, Montréal, 1995.

102 Carlo Cardazo of the Cavallino Gallery had contacted McCurry 18 May 1952 concerning the National Gallery's participation. In McCurry's response he noted that the Department of External Affairs would be shipping the books. The Massey Commission had suggested that External be more actively involved in the dissemination of Canadian publications abroad.

103 The other commissioners on the International Jury for Prizes were from Argentina, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Cuba, Denmark, Egypt, France, Germany, Japan, Great Britain, Yugoslavia, Norway, the Low Countries, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland as well as representatives from the Administrative Council of the Biennale and the International Committee of Experts.

104 There were over thirty other prizes awarded with the majority going to Italian artists. The prize money, ranging from 1 million lire for the first prizes down to forty thousand, came largely from Italian private and public sources. The prize winners are listed in several histories of the Biennale.

105 The length of the Italian text is sixty-five sentences, and was determined by the Biennale organizers. The original English essay at the NGC has a notation that it was written by Robert Hubbard.

106 The subtext is that this contact was prompted by an exhibition at the National Gallery.

107 This essay was followed by the listing of the works; the artists were identified only by birth (and death in Carr's case) date and their current place of residence.

108 Hubbard's article appeared as "Quattro Pittori Canadesi" ("Four Canadian Painters") in *La Biennale di Venezia. Rivista bimestrale dell'Ente della Biennale* 9 (July 1952): 36-37. Short summaries in English were printed at the back of the magazine. Hubbard's typescript in the NGC Archives does not identify where the text was published. The black and white reproductions were: Robert's *Landscape near Lake Orford* and *Marian*; Milne's *Tower*, and Pellan's *Surprise académique*. A 900-word text had been requested by Elio Zorzi, the Editor of the "official illustrated magazine," on 13 May 1952.

109 One assumes "the poet" is his uncle Sir Charles G.D. Roberts although his cousin Bliss Carmen, his aunt Elizabeth Roberts MacDonald, his sister Dorothy Leisner and his father Theodore were all well-known poets.

110 Donald BUCHANAN, "The Biennale of Venice Welcomes Canada," *Canadian Art* 9, no. 4 (Summer 1952): 144-47. Buchanan was also Co-Editor of the magazine in addition to his responsibilities at the National Gallery.

111 The works illustrated were Pellan's *Homme-Rugby*, Roberts' *Nude*, Carr's *Survival* and Milne's *Painting Place*. Interestingly, the four works reproduced came from private collections.

112 "Report from Pierre Dupuy, Ambassador, Canadian Embassy, Rome, Italy to the Secretary of State for External Affairs [Lester Pearson], June 17, 1952, Despatch no. 381. Opening of the Venice Biennale." NGC, "Outside Activities/Organizations/Dept. of External Affairs," 7.4.E. Dupuy had recently replaced Désy, who was still attached to the Embassy as a diplomat and attended the opening ceremonies of the Biennale. Letters of invitation were sent to all the Ambassadors of Italy, including Corrado Baldoni in Ottawa (ASAC Box 43).

- 113 Dupuy was highly impressed that it "had the honour of being reproduced in the catalogue."
- 114 He continued: "nothing could be more depressing than these specimens that seem to have been chosen in a hospital waiting-room of a very poor suburb. I would suggest that the artists who indulge in such work be forced to live for some time with their models They would soon be cured or else."
- 115 Newton was the art critic for the British newspaper *The Manchester Guardian*, a contributor to various periodicals and the author of several books. His article was published in Vol. X, no. 1 (Autumn 1952): 18-21 and was illustrated with Pellan's *Surprise académique*, Roberts' *The Sandpit*, Carr's *Logged-Over Hillside*, and *Aggressività Incombente N. 1* by the non-figurative Venetian painter, Emilio Vedova (b.1919).
- 116 See his "report" on the tour, published as "Canadian Art in Perspective," in *Canadian Art* XI, no. 3 (Spring 1954): 93-95.
- 117 Newton had visited Carr in Victoria in 1937, selected eight out of the twelve works sent by the National Gallery to London's Coronation Exhibition in May 1937 and had reviewed her work favourably in British and Canadian publications of the late 1930s.
- 118 Jackson to McCurry, 10 Nov. 1952; McCurry to Jackson, 17 Nov. In the fall of 1952, McCurry began proposing a Canadian pavilion to be financed by blocked funds in Europe (which he was already using for acquisitions); but the project was generally seen as a luxury when the National Gallery premises in Ottawa were so inadequate.
- 119 Mrs. H.A. (Bobby) Dyde, a member of the Gallery's Board of Trustees also agreed with Newton and Jackson and had harsh criticism of Roberts (whose work she owned and bought for the Edmonton Art Gallery). She had not visited the Biennale but naively insisted that the presentation would have been more effective if the work of only one painter was shown instead of a group exhibitions: "Europeans do not like to see pictures this way."
- 120 The Biennale Archives holds ten cartons of 1952 press clippings from Italian newspapers. (I examined only those from Rome, Florence and Milan when it became obvious that in general, Italian cities were primarily concerned with the exhibitions of their own artists.) The major Italian newspapers and periodicals did give some coverage of the exhibitions from other major European countries like France, Germany, Belgium etc. The American presentation was not as well covered. In general, most publications, regardless of origin, focused on the artists of their own countries. The Biennale produced a lengthy general bibliography; see: "Bibliografica della XXVI Biennale" in *La Biennale di Venezia. Rivista bimestrale dell'Ente della Biennale*, "numero 13-14 (aprile-giugno, 1953): 69-71.
- 121 See "La Biennale di Venezia - Le sezioni straniere," *Emporium* (Bergamo), CXVI, 1952, 87-96. Podestà was the Editor. All translations from the Italian in this discussion are by the author.
- 122 7 Aug. 1952; the other nations were Brazil, Cuba, Bolivia, Guatemala, Japan, South Africa, Sweden and Norway.
- 123 Lionello VENTURI, "Mostre d'arte 1952. La Biennale," *Commentari* III, no. iv (ottobre-dicembre 1952): 252-55. Venturi was then best known to anglophone audiences for his 1936 publication, *The History of Art Criticism*. He was the Co-Editor of *Commentari* and organized the first and only exhibition of the Gruppo degli Otto Pittori Italiani (Group of Eight Italian Painters) for the 1952 Biennale. He described the movement as *Astratto-concreto*, a strategy to resolve the conflict between abstraction and representation.
- 124 See VRINAT's "L'art moderne devant l'homme. La XXVIe biennale de Venise," *La Vie intellectuelle* (Paris), octobre 1952, 65 -77; the reference to Canada is on page 74.
- 125 See PICHER's "Notre peinture et nous. Vers un peinture nationale par sa forme, humaine et universelle par son contenu," *Arts et pensée* 14 (novembre-décembre 1953): 47-52 where he is highly

critical of Maurice Gagnon and Père Couturier. Picher, a painter himself, also wrote in *L'Autorité* and elsewhere, was in charge of exhibitions at the Musée du Québec and in 1955 helped found the Société des arts plastiques; he later was an exhibitions officer at the National Gallery of Canada.

126 Marcello VENTUROLI, "Maestri e correnti alla XXVI Biennale di Venezia," *Rassegna* (Pisa), n. 6-8e, 9-10 (guigno-agosto; settembre-ottobre, 1952): 44-45. The announcement of his award was in the Biennale *Bulletin*, no. 66 of 12 Jan. 1953. This special issue of *Rassegna* was a compilation of Venturoli articles. Giulio Turcato (1912-95) was involved with various artists group and was a member of the Gruppo degli Otto Pittori Italiani (see n. 123). I wish to thank Gianni Volpe for his insights on the Italian critical texts.

Appendix I - List of Works

The listings below and the numbering system replicates the information found in the section on Canada in the *XXVI Biennale di Venezia. Catalogo*, 197-200. English or French titles and variations are given below each entry. The information originally sent by the National Gallery was incomplete.

Emily Carr

1. *Porto di Blunden* (c.1929). Ottawa, National Gallery of Canada.
- *Blunden Harbour*
2. *Chiesa Indiana* (c.1930). Toronto, coll. C.S. Band, Esq.
- *Indian Church*; now *Indian Church (Friendly Cove)*
3. *Sopravvivenza* (c.1940). Ottawa, coll. J.E. Coyne, Esq.
- *Survival*
4. *Alberi Arbattuti sulla Collina* (1940). cartone. Ottawa, National Gallery of Canada.
- *Logged-Over Hillside*

David Milne

5. *Ninfee* (1928). Toronto, coll. Hart House, Università di Toronto.
- *Water Lilies*, now *Waterlilies and the Sunday Paper*
6. *Luogo di Pittura* (1930). Port Hope, coll. H.E. The Rt. Hon. Vincent Massey, C.H., Governatore del Canada.
- *Painting Place*, now *Painting Place III*
7. *Boschi in Autunno* (c.1933). Ottawa, coll. D.W. Buchanan, Esq.
- *Autumn Woods*, now *Black Root II*
8. *Nuvole d'Inverno* (1937). Toronto, coll. Douglas Duncan, Esq.
- *Winter Clouds*
9. *Prima Neve, Betlemme* (1941). Acquarello. Toronto, Art Gallery of Toronto.
- *First Snow, Bethlehem*, now *Snow in Bethlehem II*
10. *Riti di Autunno* (1943). Acquarello. Ottawa, National Gallery of Canada.
- *Rites of Autumn*
11. *La Torre* (c.1947). Acquarello. Ottawa, National Gallery of Canada.
- *The Tower*, now *Tower (Scaffolding II)*
12. *La Slitta* (1949). Acquarello.
- *Sled*

Goodridge Roberts

13. *Nudo* (1939). Tavola. Montreal, coll. M. Maurice Corbeil.
- *Nude*, now *Seated Nude*
14. *Ritratto* (1939). Montreal, coll. M. Maurice Corbeil.
- *Portrait*, now *Marian*
15. *Cava di Sabbia* (1942). Olio su masonite. Montreal, coll. M.J. Barcelo, C.R.
- *The Sandpit*
16. *Paesaggio nei pressi de Lago Oxford [sic]*, 1945. Acquarello. Ottawa, National Gallery of Canada.
- *Landscape near Lake Orford*
17. *Natura Morta* (1947). Ottawa, National Gallery of Canada.
- *Still Life*

Alfred Pellán

18. *Al Chiaro di Luna*, 1937.
- *Au clair de la lune*
19. *Donna con Perla*, 1938.
- *Femme à la perle*
20. *Uomo - Rugby* (1942). Montréal, coll. Dr. Albert Jutras.
- *Homme(s)-Rugby*
21. *Sorpresa Accademica* (1947). Montréal, coll. M. Maurice Corbeil.
- *Surprise académique*
22. *Le Isola della Notte* (c.1945). Quebec, coll. M. Mark Drouin
- *Les îles dans la nuit*

Appendix II - "Plan for Hanging Venice Biennial, Room, ca. 22 1/2' x 22 1/2'. As of April 1, 1952."

Prepared by the National Gallery for Sala XXXVII; the titles are those used on the plan; the numbers are those in the catalogue, XXVI *Biennale di Venezia* (Appendix I above). However, there is no documentation that the works were displayed in exactly this order.

Wall I - Emily Carr:

2. *Indian Church*; 4. *Logged Hillside*; 3. *Survival*; 1. *Blunden Harbour*

Wall II - Goodridge Roberts:

13. *Nude*; 16. *Landscape*; 17. *Still Life*; 15. *Sand-pit*; 14. *Portrait*

Wall III - David Milne: (paintings were double-hung)

6. *Painting Place* and 7. *Woods*; 5. *Water Lilies* and 8. *Winter Clouds*; 9. *First Snow* and 11. *Tower*; 12. *Sled* and 10. *Rites*

Wall IV - Alfred Pellán:

22. *Iles de la Nuit*; 19. *Femme à la perle*; 21. *Surprise académique*; 20. *Homme-Rugby*; 18. *Au clair de la lune*

Construire une identité

La XXVI^e Biennale de Venise en 1952 et «la projection du Canada à l'étranger»

En 1952, le Canada était pour la première fois représenté à la Biennale de Venise. Ses débuts à «la plus célèbre exposition artistique au monde» ont mis le Canada sur la scène mondiale et formé l'identité esthétique canadienne de l'après-guerre. Le rapport de la commission Massey avait recommandé de «projeter le Canada outre frontière» en mettant en valeur la politique culturelle du pays à l'étranger et en encourageant l'engagement proactif de la Galerie nationale du Canada (aujourd'hui Musée des beaux-arts du Canada) dans la communauté artistique mondiale. La présentation de vingt-deux tableaux par Emily Carr, David Milne, Goodridge Roberts et Alfred Pellán à la Biennale de 1952, du 14 juin au 19 octobre, montre que la Galerie était déterminée à établir sa présence sur la scène internationale. Cela soulève aussi quelques questions concernant un supposé art national officiel et l'authentification institutionnelle de la culture. La manière de procéder de la Galerie nationale et ses implications dans le contexte international de la XXVI^e Biennale de Venise sont le sujet du présent exposé.

La participation du Canada à la XXVI^e Biennale reflète son assurance croissante dans l'arène internationale et sa situation politique en tant que «moyenne puissance». Grâce aux politiques du premier ministre Louis Saint-Laurent et de son secrétaire d'État aux Affaires étrangères, Lester B. Pearson, le Canada s'était acquis une réputation d'honnêteté dans le rétablissement et le maintien de la paix après la Deuxième Guerre mondiale. Il a joué un rôle clé dans la création des Nations unies, en 1945, et Pearson allait être le président de l'Assemblée générale de l'O.N.U. en 1952. Saint-Laurent avait été un des fondateurs de l'Organisation du traité de l'Atlantique Nord, en 1949, et avait participé à l'élaboration de sa charte. Cet «âge d'or» de la diplomatie canadienne a aussi vu l'engagement du pays dans la restructuration économique de l'Europe, dans l'établissement d'institutions pour faciliter le commerce multilatéral et dans la mise sur pied d'un système d'aide systématique aux régions sous-développées du monde. Depuis la victoire alliée, le Canada entretenait avec l'Italie des relations «cordiales»; il avait été l'un des pays signataires du traité de paix entre les Nations unies et l'Italie, en 1947. Les deux pays avaient établi des missions diplomatiques à Ottawa et à Rome et, en 1947, Jean Désy était devenu le premier ambassadeur du Canada en Italie. Il y avait, toutefois, de sérieux désaccords entre les deux pays à propos des négociations autour du règlement des compensations financières que le Canada réclamait à l'Italie pour l'assistance militaire durant la guerre.

Depuis 1895, la Biennale de Venise fournissait un terrain neutre pour la promotion d'idéaux sociaux et culturels, en offrant des occasions de contempler l'art de diverses nations dans des pavillons qui représentaient de nouveaux développements en architecture, ainsi que par l'éclat des cérémonies et de la remise de prix. Après les changements radicaux de caractère et de structure qu'avaient apportés deux guerres mondiales, la Biennale de Venise était devenue le symbole culturel de la reconstruction politique, sociale et économique de l'Europe d'après-guerre.

Le potentiel d'une Biennale revivifiée comme site de la promotion des cultures nationales était d'un intérêt certain pour le Canada, comme moyen de «se rattraper» sur le plan culturel et de s'y créer une identité comparable à celle qu'il s'était donnée sur le plan de la politique internationale. Le rapport Massey soulignait le «canadianisme» de l'art de notre pays et sa valeur comme «élément d'unité nationale» et «grand moyen d'expression de l'esprit canadien» et proposait les expositions artistiques à l'étranger comme véhicule des plus approprié pour la projection d'un nationalisme culturel. Bien que le rapport n'ait pas été publié avant juin 1951, la Galerie nationale connaissait sa position bien avant que le document ne fut rendu public. Le directeur de la Galerie, H.O. McCurry, avait présenté un mémoire à la commission et faisait aussi partie du comité des musées de cette même commission. Vincent Massey a été président du conseil d'administration de la Galerie jusqu'au début de 1952, alors qu'il a été nommé gouverneur général du Canada.

La première démarche de la Galerie en vue de sa participation à la Biennale fut la rencontre de Donald Buchanan avec le secrétaire général de la Biennale, Rodolfo Pallucchini, à Venise en juillet 1950. Il fut alors suggéré que le Canada soit représenté par quatre artistes. Malgré l'entente verbale concernant la participation du Canada à la XXVI^e Biennale, l'invitation officielle n'est parvenue qu'en 1952, principalement à cause d'une confusion causée par les canaux diplomatiques officiels à Rome et à Ottawa. En dépit des difficultés que cela causait à McCurry, il est peu probable que les inquiétudes de la Galerie nationale aient eu beaucoup de poids auprès de la bureaucratie fédérale: le ministère des Affaires extérieures et la Galerie n'étaient pas en très bons termes, car ils se faisaient une concurrence évidente comme promoteurs de la culture canadienne. Mais la Galerie nationale a fait son propre tour de passe-passe en s'affirmant comme organe officiel de promotion de la culture canadienne. En faisant connaître au public la participation du Canada à Venise, la Galerie a appuyé sur le fait qu'elle avait eu l'honneur d'être invitée à présenter le Canada à la Biennale, sans mentionner qu'elle avait sollicité cette invitation.

On peut raisonnablement supposer que la décision finale d'envoyer Carr, Milne, Roberts et Pellan a été prise au début de février 1952 par McCurry, Buchanan et Robert Hubbard (qui avait été nommé conservateur de l'art canadien en 1947). Les dossiers de la Galerie contiennent une liste manuscrite, sans date ni signature, d'artistes, parmi lesquels Borduas, Pellan et Roberts, avec une flèche à côté de leur nom et «deux autres - Binning? Cosgrove? Riopelle?». Sur une autre note, égale-

ment sans date ni signature, on retrouve les noms de «Pellan» et de «Roberts» cochés; le nom de Borduas a été rayé; le nom de Binning a été coché et rayé. La liste comporte de nouveaux noms, ceux d'«Emily Carr», coché et accompagné d'un «?», et de «Milne», coché. Bien qu'il n'y ait aucun document concernant l'élimination de Pellan, de Riopelle et de Binning, ils allaient représenter le Canada à Venise en 1954. Les quatre artistes finalement choisis reflètent un choix sobre et conservateur, ce qui n'est peut-être pas une stratégie inattendue de la part de la Galerie pour sa première apparition à Venise.

La sélection des tableaux pour la Biennale a été faite par la direction de la Galerie, avec, à une occasion, l'aide du collectionneur et marchand d'art torontois, Douglas Duncan. La décision du comité a été prise à partir d'œuvres sollicitées de la part d'artistes, de marchands d'art, de collectionneurs privés et d'institutions publiques, y compris la Galerie elle-même. Rien ne permet de croire que la Galerie ait sollicité des avis extérieurs concernant le choix des participants ou des œuvres, comme cela se faisait dans beaucoup d'autres pays. En fait, la Galerie nationale s'est donné beaucoup de mal pour préserver le secret autour du choix des peintres et des tableaux. À titre d'exemple, Goodridge Roberts n'a pas su lequel de ses tableaux avait été choisi avant la fin d'avril, alors que l'œuvre était déjà en route pour Venise. On ne l'a pas non plus informé du nom des autres artistes canadiens participants avant le début de mai. Il est évident que la Galerie voulait éviter toute critique qui aurait pu détourner l'attention des cérémonies d'ouverture de la Biennale et de sa propre promotion de l'identité culturelle canadienne officielle.

Le Canada occupait la salle XXXVII du Palazzo Centrale, qui était à la fois le pavillon de l'art italien et celui des pays qui ne possédaient pas leur propre édifice. (Le Canada allait construire son pavillon en 1958). Bien qu'il n'y ait pas de photos de l'installation de Venise, un plan dessiné à la Galerie nationale à partir d'un essai d'accrochage des tableaux à Ottawa accorde un mur à chaque artiste. L'ensemble de la présentation reflétait la définition de la Galerie nationale d'une identité artistique nationale à l'intention d'un public étranger. La Galerie a produit un texte non signé pour le catalogue général de la Biennale et un article plus long pour la revue de la Biennale — tous deux écrits par Robert Hubbard et publiés en italien. Les deux textes, en dépit de leurs différences, tendaient à souligner le rôle de la Galerie nationale dans la création d'un art canadien plutôt qu'à analyser le travail des artistes. Bien que les textes aient fait brièvement référence à l'aspect international de l'œuvre des quatre peintres, le thème principal était la création d'une culture visuelle imposée, homogène et commune, alors que, ironiquement, les tableaux montraient que les artisans de la modernité canadienne privilégiaient l'individualisme. Les textes ne faisaient aucune référence au conflit inhérent entre le nationalisme et le modernisme qui dominait le débat culturel canadien. Le Canada avait aussi fourni au «salon du livre» de la Biennale dix-sept volumes sur l'art moderne au Canada ainsi que quelques exemplaires du rapport Massey et des numéros des revues

Canadian Art et *Arts et Pensée*. De plus, en tant que commissaire national, McCurry faisait partie du comité international des prix de la Biennale.

Il n'est pas étonnant que des articles par Donald Buchanan et Eric Newton dans *Canadian Art* aient applaudi la contribution canadienne. Dans les milieux de la Galerie nationale, Emily Carr semblait tenir une place privilégiée et même mériter une exposition personnelle à Venise. Un rapport confidentiel par l'ambassadeur du Canada en Italie, Pierre Dupuy, était très critique à l'égard de l'art international, bien qu'il ait été, lui aussi, très impressionné par Carr et aussi par Pellan. Les quelques articles dans les journaux canadiens tendaient à ne mentionner que le nom des artistes, tout en reconnaissant que Venise donnait un certain prestige à l'art canadien et particulièrement à la Galerie nationale. Cela suggère un manque général d'intérêt pour un événement qui se passait au loin et qui n'accueillerait que peu de visiteurs canadiens. La presse étrangère ne montrait pas beaucoup plus d'enthousiasme. Les quelques journaux et périodiques européens qui nommaient le Canada dans leurs articles sur la Biennale se contentaient généralement de mentionner que c'était sa première apparition à Venise. D'autres se plaignaient qu'il n'y eut pas assez de documentation pour fournir de la matière. L'influent critique et historien, Lionello Venturi, laissa entendre que les œuvres ne valaient pas la peine qu'on en parle. L'article le plus long et le plus positif qui ait paru dans la presse étrangère était signé par Marcello Venturoli, qui allait remporter le prix de la Biennale 1952 pour les meilleurs essais dans un périodique italien. Venturoli plaçait Pellan au premier rang et Carr au dernier.

Rétrospectivement, l'importance de la participation du Canada à la Biennale est dans la place qu'elle occupe dans la chronologie de l'histoire de l'art canadien, comme première apparition significative sur la scène internationale de l'art contemporain. Vue sous cet angle, la présentation de la Galerie nationale peut être considérée comme un exemple d'*aggiornamento* dans une tentative de faire entrer l'art canadien moderne dans l'arène internationale. L'exposition est importante aussi par le rôle qu'elle a joué dans le récit de la création d'une nation moderne. La présence du Canada à Venise était le reflet de l'assurance qu'il avait acquise dans le domaine de la politique internationale. L'exposition était aussi la manifestation visuelle des objectifs de la commission Massey; elle a vraiment été un instrument exemplaire de «la projection du Canada à l'étranger». Que la présentation de la Galerie nationale ait répondu au mandat de la Biennale de présenter les expressions les plus valables et significatives de la communauté artistique, est sujet à débat; qu'elle ait pleinement participé à la construction d'une identité culturelle nationale exportable, cela ne fait aucun doute.

Traduction: Élise Bonnette