



fig.1 J. Russell Harper at the opening of his 1973 exhibition *People's Art: Naïve Art in Canada* at the National Gallery of Canada. (Photo: Duncan Cameron, Capital Press, courtesy of the National Gallery of Canada)

TO BETTER KNOW OURSELVES

J. Russell Harper's *Painting in Canada: A History*

You know my feeling about Canadian art is that it's not the greatest art in the world. It's part of us, part of our ethos, part of the Canadian way of life and why in hell shouldn't we know something about ourselves?¹

J. Russell Harper, 1972

The publication of writing on Canadian art has increased significantly throughout the latter twentieth century, particularly with the formalization of the study of Canadian art in universities and the creation of such scholarly forums as *The Journal of Canadian Art History*. Only recently, however, has art historical scholarship focused on the historiographical and institutional formation of the precepts that shape our understanding of Canadian art.² The interest in institutions as a central component in the formation of the discipline is worth attention. Writing from a related discipline, Jody Berland has argued that the history of Canadian culture is in large part the history of institutions: the NFB, the CBC/Radio Canada, the CNR, and the governmental policies that regulate them.³ Canadian art fits within the same purview, shaped by institutions – museal, academic and critical – which not only have provided the means of disseminating Canadian art, but have built the framework through which works are viewed and understood. While this institutional history is important, it is only one aspect of the analysis of Canadian art history: the texts lining the shelves of university libraries and perused every year by students also require assessment and evaluation.

This article begins that examination by analysing what has been described as one of the seminal texts of Canadian art history. *Painting in Canada: A History*, written by J. Russell Harper (fig.1), was published in 1966 by the University of Toronto Press (figs.2 and 3) with a simultaneous translation by les Presses de l'Université Laval. Its publishers, its main patron the Canada Council, and countless reviewers heralded *Painting in Canada* as the first comprehensive and definitive history of the nation's artistic production. It was the Council's sole contribution to celebrations of Canada's Centennial and *Painting in Canada* must be understood within the political, cultural and intellectual climate that underscored this symbolically charged event. The book was also the first major publication of J. Russell Harper, who had left his position as Curator of Canadian Art at the National Gallery of Canada to devote himself full-time to the project. Although his particular interest and scholarly strength was Canadian art of the nineteenth century – evident

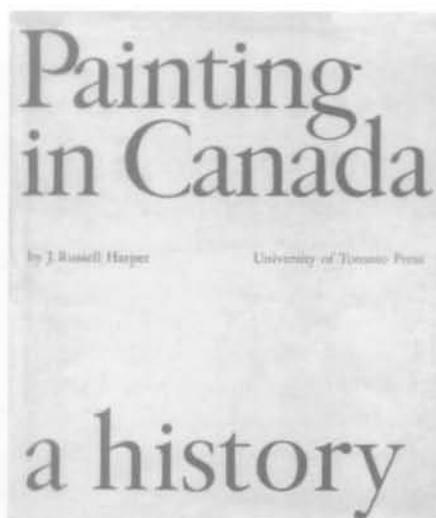


fig.2
Cover of J. Russell
Harper's *Painting
in Canada: A History*,
University of
Toronto Press,
1966. (Photo: the
author)



fig.3
*Painting in Canada:
A History*, page 135.
(Photo: the author)

in his publications on Krieghoff, Paul Kane, and folk art of the period⁴ – it is this survey text that established him as “the father of Canadian art history,”⁵ and that mapped out the narrative and analytical framework that would set the standard for the study of Canadian artistic production for decades to come.

Harper resisted efforts to establish such paternity; however it is impossible to deny his impact on the establishment of Canadian art as a worthy object of scholarly study. In tandem with *Painting in Canada* (re-issued in paperback in 1976), Harper helped shape the academic study of Canadian art history through his appointments at Sir George Williams (later Concordia) and Carleton universities, and in the creation of a graduate program in Canadian art history at Sir George in 1972. Written during what might be described as the “Centennial decade,”⁶ *Painting in Canada* subscribed to many of the ideological and intellectual sentiments of the period: a conscientious attention to Canada’s regional and linguistic diversity, a commitment to the development of narratives of national becoming to benefit contemporary generations, and a strong belief in the ability of culture to ensure the maintenance of an independent nation-state. The full extent of Harper’s contribution remains to be studied. This article however, limits itself to mapping the social and intellectual contexts of his best-known book in order to gauge its effects as the first comprehensive survey of Canadian painting on the subsequent development of this field of study.

Writing for the Centennial

To fully appreciate the contribution of *Painting in Canada*, it is necessary to situate the text fully within the context of the Canadian Centennial. The 100th anniversary of Confederation was an excuse for celebration by communities from all corners of the nation, and the federal government encouraged local events as a means of appearing to bring the regions of the country into a national conversation. Provinces were encouraged to enact their own Centennial legislation (all complied) and matching grant programs were implemented to ensure that municipalities across Canada would receive funding for festivals, beautification projects and monuments. For some, this deferral to provincial and municipal governments was evidence of a decentralized approach – the federal government providing the money but leaving the decisions to individual communities. However the broad reach of official celebrations can be seen as the containment of regional and local responses within a homogeneous, nation-building project.

Although the nation as a unified entity was the focus of the celebrations, politicians were quick to realize that such nationalism could only be achieved through attention to all components of the nation: linguistic, regional and to a limited degree, ethnic.⁷ In particular, the ideology of the Centennial mandated a more considered attention to improving relations between francophones and anglophones in Canada. The Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism,

struck in 1963 and submitting the final volume of its report in 1970, is the clearest example of the federal government's interest in giving official recognition to the role played by both cultures in Canada's history. All government agencies, including the arm's-length Canada Council, were attentive to the issue.⁸

Russell Harper's book was not the University of Toronto Press' first attempt to produce a broad survey history of Canadian art. Late in 1960 Marsh Jeanneret, Director at the Press, outlined a similar project to the Canada Council, describing his proposal as a "definitive history of Canadian art" under the general editorship of Alan Jarvis, with Paul Arthur as the production editor.⁹ Jarvis had been relieved of his duties as Director of the National Gallery in 1959 and in his newfound positions as Director of the Society for Art Publications and Editor of *Canadian Art*, he was the ideal leader for the kind of monumental project envisioned by the UTP. After a series of aborted starts, the project under Jarvis' leadership was abandoned although the concept continued to be strongly endorsed by both the Press and the Canada Council. Several replacement authors were suggested and in 1964 it was agreed that Harper would be the most suitable. While information on the content of Jarvis' projected text is scarce,¹⁰ correspondence between the Press and the Canada Council is instructive for continuities and changes in the overall conception of the project from its original inception under Jarvis' editorship to its fulfillment by Harper.

From the beginning, the book was conceived both as a centenary project and as a scholarly publication. Internal UTP memoranda discussing the format and content of the book compare it to certain of the Skira art volumes, approximately 28 x 25 cm in size, with a large number of high-quality reproductions.¹¹ The publication was not to be a coffee-table or picture book however. It is clear through correspondence within UTP, with the Canada Council and with other publishers interested in Canadian art, that the projected *History of Canadian Art* – the title given to the project until 1963 – would be a "critical historical survey." It was to be informed by serious scholarship and not tainted by "journalistic writing." The scope of the initial project was large: the comprehensive, at one point two-volume history, would cover not only Canadian painting, but sculpture, architecture, drawing, and Aboriginal art. While Jarvis would oversee the whole in his capacity as General Editor, the writing of specific chapters would be given over to various authors: R.H. Hubbard on painting, Kathleen Fenwick on drawing, Allan Gowans on architecture and Jarvis himself on sculpture. An advisory committee would be formed to provide input and to consult with Jarvis on matters of content.

Like Harper's text, the initial *History of Canadian Art* was to be published simultaneously in English and French. As A.W. Trueman, Director of the Canada Council, asserted in a letter of 2 December, 1960:

When the matter was first discussed by the Council, great emphasis was laid on the necessity of bringing to bear on the whole project an adequate measure of judgement and experience from the French-Canadian side. In view of the great

contributions made to our national art by the French Canadians, this proviso appeals to all as logical and necessary. I mention the matter here at this length merely because in preliminary conversation the names of Mr. Jarvis and Mr. Arthur and Dr. Hubbard were the only ones specifically mentioned, although from the start the vital importance of the French contribution was emphasized and assumed on all points in the conversation.¹²

Trueman goes on to underline that establishing full collaboration between anglophone and francophone traditions needed be an integral part of the planning process and that he expected both Jarvis and the Press to comply. It is clear from the correspondence that such strong language was in response to what was perceived to be Jarvis' reservations about francophones playing a more significant role, and the matter was regularly raised as a concern.¹³ Throughout, it was the Canada Council that insisted on securing a francophone presence, if not at the level of contributors then at least at the level of a larger supervisory board. This is confirmed by the comment Marsh Jeanneret made in a 1961 memo to Frances Halpenny, Managing Editor at the Press: "It remains clear that the Canada Council expects a national history of Canadian art, incidentally, i.e. national in concept from the standpoint of contributors as well as content."¹⁴ As with the subsequent Harper project, a "Francophone presence" was established by way of a consultative committee, described early on as a means of ensuring the "adequate measure of judgement and experience" desired by the Council.¹⁵

Jarvis' tenure as General Editor of the *History of Canadian Art* came to an end with his resignation from the project on 5 March 1963. Concern over missed deadlines had already been expressed by UTP and Jarvis' ability to see the project to completion in a timely fashion was under increasing scrutiny by both the Press and the Canada Council. Names of possible replacement authors were put forward, including R.H. Hubbard and Russell Harper, but it was felt that Hubbard's contribution to scholarship on Canadian art had been exhausted. Harper, meanwhile, was viewed as a solid researcher but it was thought that he was lacking the writing skills that such a project required. Many of the books published at the time presented either biographical sketches of artists or narratives depending largely on reproductions of significant artworks. Both the Jarvis and Harper texts were conceived from the outset as primarily textual, with illustrations to add visual interest and complement the writing. The U of T Press in particular was adamant that any publication on Canadian art be scholarly in nature, rejecting as being too commercial the 1962 proposal by Les Editions HMH Ltée of Montreal to collaborate on a volume of masterpieces of Canadian painting.¹⁶ The seriousness of the endeavour is not surprising, given the important function that histories in general and cultural histories in particular played in the nation-building process. That Harper's text achieves this goal clearly reflects the strong editorial presence of both UTP and the Canada Council.

However it must be underscored that writing a narrative that was detailed in its coverage of artistic production of both anglophone and francophone artists, and that was attentive to developments outside of the traditional geographical foci of art historians up to that point, was one of Harper's own goals and had formed the basis for the writing of an earlier essay, "Three Centuries of Canadian Painting," published in *Canadian Art* in 1962.¹⁷ In a 1963 memorandum to the Canada Council describing the format and content of *Painting in Canada*, Harper addressed this very point:

Much difficulty has resulted from the realization that Canada is five artistic countries: the Atlantic Provinces, Quebec, Ontario, the Prairies and British Columbia. Painters of Quebec and Ontario have made the outstanding contributions, yet lesser men in, for example, Winnipeg and Edmonton, may be of greater importance to the Prairies than certain giants in older regions. It would be unjust to the Prairies to omit these lesser men completely. Certain compromises must therefore be made so that this history will relate to developments in all parts of Canada.¹⁸

Despite these difficulties, Harper pays scrupulous attention to regional as well as linguistic coverage. Painters from Atlantic Canada are particularly well-represented due in part to the long history of settlement in the area, but also to Harper's own knowledge. His attention to the western provinces is less complete, focusing largely on the work of Kane and the painting expeditions to the Rockies by members of the Group of Seven. In both cases, the West is considered as subject matter rather than as the source of any "authentically Canadian" artistic style. There are two exceptions to this general observation: in his analysis of Emily Carr, Harper views her as an artist who is intimately rooted in the landscape and people she paints, and in his discussion of post-war painting, work from Saskatchewan and British Columbia figures prominently in what is largely a cross-country listing of art and artists. Where Harper differs from his predecessors is in his treatment of artistic production as intrinsically connected to the context or location of its production. Because his narrative does not assume an overarching landscape tradition that culminated in the Group of Seven, it is possible for Harper to examine the work of artists working across different genres and in different geographical locations in a manner that allows specificity. As he noted in a progress report to UTP in July 1965:

The book must combine a choice of material based on aesthetic criteria in regard to significant paintings, men and periods, and a fitting of the major achievements into the Canadian historical background – in no other way can an understanding and evaluation of painting be arrived at in a country which has developed from a struggling colony to nationhood where our painting now has international overtones.¹⁹

Harper's approach to the project thus demonstrates the influence of the intellectual climate of the period, that included debates around the dominance of Ontario and Quebec in existing narratives of the development of Canadian nationhood with historians in particular calling for a more concerted study of the impact of regional identities on the formation of national feeling. As I discuss below, Harper's approach to the writing of the history of art in Canada shared many of the concerns of Canadian historians regarding the impact of the climatic and political environment on the actions of figures of the past.

Harper's correspondence reveals that ultimately he found the Centennial requirements of his text somewhat constraining. During negotiations with the UTP for a revised edition of *Painting in Canada* in 1976, he wrote that if there were not going to be a revised French version, the number of illustrations of art from Quebec could be reduced. He further noted: "You realize that the original edition was a Centennial production and consequently given an almost over-heavy French bias;" and he wonders whether there was still a requirement to extend his enquiry to all provinces in all periods:

I stretched the point when hunting material representing every part of Canada. Aesthetically, some paintings from newer or smaller provinces were thin. I can replace some with more significant works which have surfaced more recently. But I wonder about dropping others. For example, if you hope for any Newfoundland institutional sale, one should not completely omit Newfoundland. There is a similar problem in other areas.²⁰

This comment also owes much to Harper's frustration with the process of transforming a lavishly illustrated text into a more affordable paperback edition. Furthermore, it relates to his own interest in giving Ontario's cultural history its intellectual due during a period of intense Quebec nationalism.²¹ However, such comments should not be seen to invalidate his scholarly goals at the beginning of the project. Much like any other survey publication, national or otherwise, the requirements of representativeness and inclusiveness override personal inclination. An analysis of the content of *Painting in Canada* and Harper's methodological approach should illuminate some of the decisions that were taken.

Writing the History of Art in Canada

The conventional organization of the survey text is chronological. As Robert Nelson²² has suggested, they are the "map of art history" ordering objects into temporal and spatial categories that ensure both their intelligibility as works of art and their place within a linear historical trajectory. The twenty-eight chapters of *Painting in Canada: A History* follow a standard chronology that takes the reader from the first French settlers up to the 1960s. Much like his earlier "Three Centuries of Canadian Painting," the book follows traditional divisions of Canadian history by grouping the chapters into four eras: the French colonial period, the English

colonial period, Confederation to the First World War, and the rise of the Dominion to the present. Within these temporal parameters, Harper tells the story of Canada's artistic production through a combination of anecdotes about artists' lives, discussion of their painting styles and subject matter, and frequent reference to the social and historical forces that shaped their contribution. Relatively short chapters enable him to focus on particular regions or on specific themes that emerge at particular moments in time, such as the rise in popularity of portraiture or the interest in depictions of "the West." In many ways, this is a chronicle of artists arriving from Europe – occasionally from the United States – and making art in less than amenable conditions. Harper does not make grandiose claims for the artists but seeks to record their presence and to note their accomplishments, even if these primarily consist of the visual recording of the landscape of the new colony.

Perhaps the most notable difference between Harper's text and earlier publications is its conceptualization of the temporal parameters of what constituted Canadian art. This is particularly evident in his attention to francophone artists who claim a considerable portion of the narrative. Writers from Newton McTavish (1925) to Donald Buchanan (1950) had largely ignored the work of artists from French-Canada prior to the mid-nineteenth century except to praise their skills in wood carving.²³ Artists who had escaped this general characterization, such as François Malépart de Beaucourt and others whose stylistic innovation and ability moved beyond the copying of French masters, were acknowledged as contributors to the development of a native art tradition in Canada. Most anglophone texts followed William Colgate (1943) by beginning their narratives in 1820 with the arrival in Canada of Paul Kane and Cornelius Krieghoff.²⁴ This particular periodization of the birth of "Canadian" art, however, was contested by Gérard Morisset in his introduction to *La peinture traditionnelle au Canada français*:

Il n'y a pas longtemps, des critiques d'art faisaient remonter la peinture canadienne à Cornélius Krieghoff. Dans leur esprit, il apparaissait nettement que les Canadiens d'avant Krieghoff, pauvres, frustes et bornés, n'eussent pu faire autre chose de mieux que de cultiver médiocrement leurs terres, avoir beaucoup d'enfants et s'amuser d'une façon grossière. Et on laissait entendre que les Canadiens de l'époque 1860 n'avaient pas compris l'art de Krieghoff – ce qui était le comble de l'infamie! – en encore que leurs petits-enfants ne s'étaient, enfin, éveillés à la peinture qu'à la contemplation des œuvres du "Groupe des Sept".²⁵

Beyond addressing the insulting characterization of French Canadians as unskilled painters and unsophisticated consumers of art, Morisset questions the disappearance of the early artists of French Canada from the literature. He notes that Robert Harris had already provided what Morisset described as a brief and incomplete, yet solidly researched study in 1898.²⁶

The dominant focus on English-speaking artists by anglophone art historians prior to Harper should not come as a surprise. Many of the texts written from the

1930s to the 1960s sought to establish an artistic chronology that would lay the groundwork for the establishment of the Group of Seven as Canada's "national school." As a result, greater emphasis was placed on the development of a landscape tradition in painting, a decision which tended to favour the work of anglophone artists. One explanation might be found in the dominance of religious subject matter in much French colonial art, and the corresponding inability of many English-speaking writers to see the work as anything other than poorly executed copies of French originals. British colonial artists, on the other hand, arrived with the more "aesthetically disinterested" desire to document the people and the landscape and therefore it was easier to incorporate them into an artistic chronology that privileged distinctive style as well as subject matter. Harper was meticulous when it came to researching material related to all facets of art production in the Canadas, and his bibliography contains references to both anglophone and francophone authors including Olivier Maurault, Guy Viau, and of course Gérard Morisset; his careful documentation of artists working in Quebec owes much to these authors. From a certain standpoint, there are definite parallels between these histories of art in French Canada and Harper's narrative. In both, the search for a distinctive national artistic vocabulary is a central preoccupation, and the compilation of such material in the form of a survey is the primary means of underscoring the coherence of Canadian art.

In a *national* history of art such as *Painting in Canada*, chronological ordering assumes particular centrality in the organizing of the text: not to establish a formal genealogy of artistic expression but to map the development of artistic production onto the formation of an autonomous nation-state. As Harper noted in his preface, *Painting in Canada* attempts to provide an overview of Canada's art as "an integral part of the life of an expanding nation." (p.vii) His lectures, notes and correspondence emphasize his concern to unearth as much information about as many artists as he could find. For Harper, such research not only provided a more in-depth knowledge of Canada's cultural past, but served the loftier purpose of enabling a country to better understand its origins and development as a nation. Thus, beginning with the arrival of the French colonists, Harper traces the growing independence and authority of artists in Canada, linking developments in artistic style and subject matter with the seemingly inevitable movement towards nationhood. This process is not as coherent a linear progression as might be assumed. Certain chapters discuss work that has only a marginal relationship to the larger developmental narrative. For example, Harper describes the work of British Army topographers as a "gratuitous bonus...foster[ing] some local interest in water-colour painting" but otherwise "not part of a developing Canadian tradition." (p.49) Such moments are the exception, however, as Harper attends closely to artists' contributions to an emerging Canadian art history through the identification of a specifically Canadian sensibility in style, subject matter and even the origins of the artists (fig.4). The concluding paragraph



fig.4 J. Russell Harper inspecting the Canadian Collection at the National Gallery of Canada, c.1963 (Photo: Cliff Buckman, Photo Features, Ottawa, courtesy of the National Gallery of Canada)

of Chapter 7, "The Golden Age in Quebec: The Beginning," summarizes his consideration of artists' embodiment of such putatively national sensibilities:

This whole phase we have been discussing should be of the greatest interest to all lovers of Canadian painting, for in it our artists had gone beyond mere imitation of European prototypes to create paintings with a "Canadian" character. It is art without close parallels. The untutored ex-voto painters of the eighteenth century's opening years were now superseded by a virile, more sophisticated and more accomplished group. Their new painting is unique not just because Quebec was prosperous with an economic climate favourable to artistic development; it is so chiefly because the evolution took place when Quebec painters, cut off by the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars, were vigorously pursuing an almost solitary path as they worked out their own ideas. Yet during those years, trickling rumours of the rococo and neo-classical age gave a special piquancy to their paintings, so that they were also contemporary, lively, and attuned to the times. Near-isolation had had its compensations. (p.78)

Two principal themes figure largely in this paragraph and provide a broad framework for understanding the work of artists in Canada from the past to the present. First, the growing separation of artists from the mother countries is indicated both geographically in the move to the colony and stylistically as imitation is replaced by originality. Secondly, this newfound independence leads to the production of altogether new artistic vocabularies that are manifest in the exploration of new subjects and through the development of an appropriate formal language. Harper argues that "Canadian-ness" was to be found to some degree in the artists' focus on portraiture and landscape rather than the religious images characteristic of the French colonial period. These subjects afforded the artist a measure of freedom to concentrate almost entirely on the painterly or formal aspects of the work. Writing of François Malépart de Beaucourt's *Portrait of a Negro Slave* (1786), for example, Harper notes that: "This is the earliest Canadian painting conceived purely in terms of picture-making and painterly qualities," (p.56) and, following a description of its formal components, he concludes that: "In this painting, the artist consciously seeks after an aesthetic rather than any didactic or literary response." (p.56-7)

The growing independence of Canadian artists from European masters is traced throughout *Painting in Canada*. Successive waves of artists who manage to detach themselves from the degraded pall of imitation lead to the establishment of a uniquely Canadian artistic vocabulary, almost wholly achieved with the Group of Seven and, as Harper remarks later in the book, it is a vocabulary that is notably absent from the work of more recent artists.²⁷ The virility and sophistication that he notes in the work of artists such as de Beaucourt, François Baillargé and Louis-Chrétien de Heer at the turn of the nineteenth century are meant to rhetorically invoke conventional descriptors of the work of the Group of Seven. Harper suggests

that in their search for artistic independence, Quebec artists prefigured the members of Canada's "National School." Both artistic periods coincide with important moments in Canada's national history: the first years of British rule in Canada and the post-First World War years of economic and cultural independence, and this only further underscores their relevance for the development of Canadian art history.

The increasing independence of Canadian artists from their European counterparts that indicates a changing relationship between the colony and the parent countries, allows Harper to produce a history of names that form the basis for a Canadian art history. Interest in artistic genealogy can be seen in his fairly consistent identification of Canadian "firsts": from the description of the "first Canadian canvases" (p.13) painted for Monsignor Laval in the seventeenth century, to the first Canadian-born artist (François Malépart de Beaucourt) to the Group of Seven as the first artists "to make artists and public listen and observe." (p.303) All these "firsts" establish a history of Canadian artistic production that increasingly severs its ties to European traditions. Just as Canada developed from "colony to nationhood," so did its artistic production.

As noted above, Harper was not alone in the development of this artistic nation-building genealogy. Other art historians, including Gérard Morisset, employed a similar organizational framework. Laurier Lacroix argues that Harper's text owes much to Morisset's evolutionary narrative of French Canadian art from its origins in medieval France to its eventual decadence.²⁸ The differences between the approach of each author, however, mitigates against an argument that might privilege this line of influence. Morisset's account of French-Canadian painting depends upon a highly-developed stylistic analysis that pays limited attention to socio-historical factors that may have had an impact upon the development of such a genealogy. In *La peinture traditionnelle au Canada français*, Morisset's detailed examination of painterly form provides a level of art historical analysis that was unmatched in Canada at the time. Works that had largely been dismissed as the product of copyists are given a depth of treatment that enabled an appreciation for pre-Confederation painting which consciously suggested parallels with European art. Morisset's discussion of the lives of the artists fleshes out his analysis of the paintings and situates his work squarely within a conventional history of styles.

In contrast, Harper shows greater interest in the artist as an historical figure whose relevance to the history of art simultaneously frames his position as an actor in the nation's history. In every chapter of *Painting in Canada*, an account of changes in artistic style and subject matter is set against salient political and social developments in the emerging nation. As a result, the text is rich in its analysis of the conditions of production as well as the circulation of artworks, and particularly in accounts of art schools, artists' groups, exhibition spaces and patronage. Earlier texts also addressed some aspects of the importance of art institutions in the history of Canadian art, but attention largely focused on the

formation of artists societies such as the Ontario Society of Artists or the Royal Canadian Academy and their bringing together of artists. *Painting in Canada* also addresses questions of patronage during the French colonial period, the exhibition of art in agricultural fairs and other issues relevant to a broad understanding of the experience of artists working in different historical periods. In Harper's text, the artist and the artwork exist at the conjunction of an analysis of stylistic development, artistic value and society.

Emphasis on the historical character of art situates Harper at some distance from Morisset's connoisseurial approach and more in concert with the work of Canadian historians of the post-war period. Historical writing in Canada from the inter-war period onward may be broadly characterized by an environmentalist approach which sought to explain the specificity of Canada's political, economic and social development by the impact of its environmental context. Whether in the more economically-oriented focus of the proponents of the Laurentian thesis (e.g. Harold Innis and Donald Creighton²⁹) or the broader-based approach of scholars such as William Morton and A.R.M. Lower,³⁰ historians argued that the geographical and climatic character of the nation produced specific economic relations within Canada and between this country and other nations, producing conditions that shaped Canadian political institutions. Even though the environmentalist approach owes much to the frontier thesis of nineteenth-century American historian Frederick Jackson Turner, its focus on geography and climate necessitates the formulation of an argument in which the specificity of the Canadian context is central, and differentiates Canada from the more dominant nations of Britain and the United States.

The environmentalist model is of course familiar to historians of Canadian art because it is the dominant trope for discussing the work of the Group of Seven. Writing in 1927, historian W. Stewart Wallace noted: "The work of this group has attracted international attention, mainly because of its strong native character. It tends at times to the crude and bizarre; but at its best it is instinct with the feeling of Canada's 'great open spaces,' from which...it draws its inspiration."³¹ Indeed, the same political and intellectual context that produced the Group of Seven as Canada's "national school" was instrumental in cementing the dominance of the environmentalist approach in the writing of Canadian history and its almost exclusive focus on issues relevant to Central Canada.

By the 1950s, some writers were critical of the nationalist focus of this approach, particularly for its assumption of the homogeneous impact of geography and the general disregard of the potentially different experiences of the regions. J.M.S. Careless first raised this critique in 1954,³² arguing that the sweeping nationalist orientation of Canadian history in the first half of the twentieth century effectively blinded scholars to other, more local or regional events that aligned Canada with developments in the United States and Britain. Careless argued that significant socio-economic concepts such as the emergence and consolidation of metropolises and their ability to shape the political and economic institutions of the

surrounding regions, enabled a more complex understanding of the development of the nation. In this view, the emergence of metropolises in Canada, their domination of the economies of the surrounding regions, and the relationships between metropolises across Canada, provide the basis for understanding the character of the country. In 1969, Careless would expand his revision of the nationalist cast of Canadian history in his theorization of the "limited identities"³³ approach which questioned the inevitable imbrication of national identity and national unity, suggesting instead that Canadian identity could be found in different forms through the smaller affective units of region, class, and ethnicity.

While the exploration of the concept of limited identities post-dates *Painting in Canada*, the book's concept of the region as a central aspect in this country's history is worth considering in light of Harper's much-lauded attention to regional diversity. Ramsay Cook's initial call for limited identities³⁴ extended to class and ethnicity, but Careless's decision to focus on region in his 1969 essay is a telling indication of the symbolic attachments that regionalism provided in Canada during this period. Attention to the region preserved the environmentalist focus of Canadian historical writing in large part because the limits of Canada's regions were virtually identical to existing provincial borders, and consequently reinforced the political makeup of the Canadian nation-state. Regions could be viewed as the nation writ small, microcosms of national identity differentiated one from the other by a few clearly identified, usually environmentally derived characteristics.³⁵ It is important to note here that Quebec is largely seen as one region among many, a tactic which effectively de-legitimizes any claim to nationhood voiced by French Canadians. In the context of the Quiet Revolution, this strategy is employed by anglophone historians as well as by the federal government as a means of appearing to take Quebec's calls for *cultural* distinctiveness seriously, while ignoring the political implications such distinctiveness might hold.³⁶

The environmentalist approach continued to dominate Canadian historiography well into the 1960s as the fervour surrounding the Centennial celebrations increased. As many writers have noted, 1967 provided the ideological as well as the financial support for projects that could be characterized as nation-building. For example the re-issue in paperback of standard works of Canadian history and the publication of source materials such as the Carleton Library series published by McClelland and Stewart, revived the nationalist aims of the one-volume histories of Canada that had emerged in the 1940s and 50s.³⁷ The narrative structure as well as the ideological orientation of these publications reinforced the teleological and environmentalist structure of the development of Canada from colony to nationhood that would characterize writing produced for the Centennial. *Painting in Canada* evinces a similar strategy partly because of Harper's belief in the largely reflective relationship between artist and society, but also because of the institutional and contextual requirements made of the text.

Writing a “Canadian” Art History

Although I have been arguing that *Painting in Canada* was strongly shaped by the Centennial context for which it was written, it is also evident that Harper espoused nationalist views on Canadian art and culture that were consonant with those of the dominant English-Canadian intellectual climate. As he painstakingly demonstrated, art played a central role in the formation of the nation, not simply providing an image of an emerging country. Through the formation of its artists and affiliated cultural institutions, Canada was able to develop an autonomous cultural tradition. It is clear in *Painting in Canada* and throughout his correspondence that Harper believed that Canada's future depended upon the continued development of the cultural field, not only through historical research but in the creation of new work. A particularly revealing glimpse into Harper's approach to the study of the relationship between art and nationhood can be found in his account of the post-war scene in Canadian art. It is here that we can see the historiographical process at its most raw because he attempts to place contemporary artists within an already existing historical schema.

By his own admission, Harper was not comfortable with contemporary art,³⁸ and this is clear from the shift in tone and emphasis in the writing of the final chapter. Earlier portions of *Painting in Canada* considered the close connection between the artist and her or his social milieu, often with brief anecdotes to enliven the story, but Harper employs a primarily formalist vocabulary to talk about the production of artists working after World War II. Also notable is the absence of a sense of the relationship between recent painting and the continuing development of Canada as a nation that dominated the rest of the book. This is not altogether surprising since an analysis of work virtually contemporaneous with the writing would require the kind of speculation incompatible with the academic history intended for *Painting in Canada*. At the same time, it is clear that Harper was keenly aware of and interested in the effects of certain conditions on post-war art, conditions that were arguably characteristic of the Centennial period and mitigated against contemporary artistic production being able to present a strong and relatively coherent front. In this final chapter he appears genuinely puzzled that, having painstakingly traced the development of distinct Canadian painting through three centuries, it seems to have completely disappeared into an anarchy of styles. In the first few pages of the chapter, he discusses what he feels to be the impediments to the formation of a national style in the post-war period, issues which extended to the writing of Canadian art history. Harper sees three specific conditions emerge: the threat of a weakened Canadian identity in the face of international movements, the related increase in mass media, and the lack of cultural institutions in Canada that could play a leadership role in defining and promoting contemporary Canadian art.

Perhaps the most powerful condition impeding the creation of a distinctly Canadian art after 1945 was the increasing influence of international art. The reliance upon foreign approaches worried Harper because it seems to prevent the

kind of personal statement and exploration that is the mark of serious art. Although not overtly stated in the chapter, it appears that this borrowing of “isms” from Europe and New York differs from earlier modes of influence because contemporary artists have not been able to transform the terms to suit their particular national idiom. Throughout *Painting in Canada*, Harper makes comparisons and notes links between artists working in Canada and other countries, but the period of influence is always of limited duration and the Canadian artist’s ability to assimilate the formal elements taken from the masters and to then move beyond them, is considered to be a sign of artistic maturity. The detrimental effect of the influence of Paris and New York on contemporary artists, however, is only compounded by Canada’s “national inferiority complex,” that results in “playing down the domestic achievement at the expense of the foreign.” (p.383)

In his view the threat generated by the influence of internationalism on Canadian artists is intensified by the mass media. Here, however, the threat is largely American and Harper voices many of the fears of cultural imperialism that were to characterise Canadian concerns in the 1960s and 1970s.³⁹ For Harper, the media are a double-edge sword. On the one hand, the “ever-increasing speed of communication” (p.383) should provide ample opportunity for the creation of an indigenous Canadian art movement, so the lack of such a phenomenon is puzzling. On the other hand, the dominant American presence in the mass media prevents Canadian communities from independent thought and subjects them to a constant barrage of American ideas. Unlike Quebec, which Harper viewed as largely safeguarded from such media imperialism by a “protective language wall,” English Canada is laid bare to such influence in the arts as in day-to-day life: “A national identity in the arts depends on a national habit of thought, and Canada has never created this essential basis.” (p.383)

The formation of a sense of identity is further troubled by the dearth of cultural institutions that support contemporary Canadian art through critical writing and university-level research. Harper would pursue this theme for many years following the publication of *Painting in Canada*. In conference presentations, lectures and in letters to university administrators during his tenure at Sir George Williams/Concordia University, he frequently bemoaned the lack of substantive critical writing on contemporary art in Canada, and the role that such institutions should play in fostering not only the nation’s artistic production but a broader sense of nationalism. In a lecture entitled “Research in Universities”⁴⁰ for example, he describes the need for more investigation of all aspects of what he terms “the field of Canadian background,” which seems to incorporate the fine arts as well as history and other areas in the humanities and social sciences. For Harper, the advantage of undertaking this research in the university lies in the opportunities for interdisciplinary conversations that such an institution facilitates, one that is made

more difficult by the specialized focus of the art gallery: "I do not believe that I can formulate a proper analytical presentation of any phase of my subject without setting it against a social, economic, political and other multi-faceted background of this country. This should be possible by association and discussion with one's colleagues in other disciplines."⁴¹ Such research was to be first disseminated to academics, but Harper adds the second argument that academic work should also serve as the basis for writing addressed to a broad spectrum of the Canadian public. He would later make this point more directly in a letter to the CBC by suggesting that *Painting in Canada* be the basis for a television series on Canadian art in the style of Kenneth Clark's 1971 *Civilization*.⁴²

Harper also emphasizes the importance of university programs staffed by Canadians to ensure that the art and artists of the nation are a primary focus of research, and secondly to further the production of home-grown approaches to the study of that art. In a later document exploring advances made in the study of Canadian art history, he remarked:

All phases of Canadian-oriented studies are expanding rapidly. This happens despite agnostics, academics pre-occupied with old established disciplines to the exclusion of contemporary demand, and the influence of those American and European immigrants holding key cultural positions in Canada who are prone to decry the local achievement.⁴³

Here Harper is in line with a number of academics, writers, critics and artists who saw the hiring of Americans in Canadian universities and cultural institutions not simply as taking jobs away from Canadian citizens, but more significantly as preventing the formation of an indigenous approach to the study of the nation's culture and traditions. This position was famously voiced by cultural nationalists in the late 1960s and the 1970s.⁴⁴ While Harper was briefly a member of the Committee for an Independent Canada in 1972, his writings do not share the militancy of many of the period. For example, *artscanada's* publication of "The Canadian Cultural Revolution,"⁴⁵ an issue devoted to the state of contemporary Canadian art, received much criticism because its primary author Dale McConathy was an American critic who was criticized for having little comprehension of the particular conditions for art production in Canada.⁴⁶ In 1976 the editors of *CAROT* (the Canadian Artists Representation newsletter) asked Harper to write an essay in response to this much-reviled issue of *artscanada* but he demurred, noting that he believed he could be more effective through his own writing and research than by authoring what would be a highly polemical piece.⁴⁷ Like many of the more conservative Canadian intellectual figures of the period,⁴⁸ Harper endorsed the need for strong Canadian cultural and academic institutions. He knew that in his particular field of Canadian art history, the means to achieve sustained and in-depth research in the field was through the hiring of Canadians who could be relied upon to carry out such a project.

In its examination of the process of canon-formation in national histories of art, this article has questioned both the narrative tradition of art historical writing and the mapping of a history of cultural production onto a narrative of national identity. Art history survey texts have long functioned to establish a select number of artists and artworks as having value within a broad conception of western civilization. When these histories are given a national focus, the process of selection and combination of a defined number of valued artists and artworks occurs within an existing discourse that describes the emergence and consolidation of the modern nation as a geo-political unit to which individuals have developed an affective relationship.⁴⁹ As a publication with direct links to celebrations of the nation, *Painting in Canada* had to negotiate the imperatives of a federal ideological project that was based on the celebration of national unity, and the complexities of Harper's personal vision of the historical emergence of a "Canadian" artistic tradition. While this narrative situates itself within the larger context of nation-building, Harper's quest for stronger Canadian national feeling was located in the advancement of an increased awareness of the nation's past, rather than in support of an instrumental relationship between artworks and an ideological project of nationalism.

The importance of *Painting in Canada: A History* can be gauged by its numerous reprints, especially of the paperback edition, its creation of opportunities for the teaching of Canadian art at the university level, and its subsequent imitators.⁵⁰ In its geographical and linguistic inclusiveness, *Painting in Canada* opened opportunities for subsequent study and even more significantly, laid the groundwork for the creation of the systematic scholarly study of *Canadian* art history. As such, Russell Harper and his work deserve to be at the center of any analysis of Canadian art historiography.

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Notes

- 1 J. Russell Harper, interview with Janet Braide, *Ottawa Citizen*, 26 Feb. 1972.
- 2 In recent years, Joyce Zemans has published important work on the production and circulation of prints by the National Gallery of Canada and select partners as a central component in the construction of a dominant representation of Canadian art. See Joyce ZEMANS, "Establishing the Canon: Nationhood, Identity and the National Gallery of Canada's First Reproduction Programme of Canadian Art," *The Journal of Canadian Art History/Annales d'histoire de l'art canadien* XVI, no.2 (1995); "Envisioning Nation: Nationhood, Identity and the Sampson-Matthews Silkscreen Project: The Wartime Prints," *JCAH/AHAC* IXX, no.1 (1998); "Sampson-Matthews and the NGC: The Post-War Years," *JCAH/AHAC* XXI, nos. 1& 2 (2000). Sandra Paikowsky's recent essay on the support of a particular (international) vision of Canadian modernism in the National Gallery's first participation in the Venice Biennale similarly documents the processes through which definitions of Canadian art are institutionally produced and circulated. See Sandra PAIKOWSKY, "Constructing an Identity: the 1952 XXVI Biennale di Venezia and 'The Projection of Canada Abroad'," *JCAH/AHAC* XX, nos. 1& 2 (1999). Recent debates over First Nations cultural production, historical and contemporary, has provided the impetus for many examinations of the institutional structures which govern the display and evaluation of Canadian art, evident in the work of, for example, Ruth PHILLIPS, *Trading Identities: The Souvenir in Native North American Art from the Northeast, 1700-1900* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1998). Quebec art historians have also been instrumental in examining the institutional conditions for the formation and understanding of art in Quebec, from the excellent essay by Laurier LACROIX, "Gérard Morisset et l'histoire de l'art au Québec" in *À la découverte du patrimoine avec Gérard Morisset* (Quebec: Ministère des Affaires Culturelles/Musée du Québec, 1981), to the discussion of art journalism in Quebec since the Second World War in Louise MOREAU, "L'art de la modernité. La revue *Vie des Arts* et sa contribution au discours sur les arts visuels au Québec dans les années 1950 et 1960," *JCAH/AHAC* XIX, no.1 (1998).
- 3 "It would not be stretching the truth very far to say that the first texts in Canadian cultural studies were written by royal commissions.... These studies, spread across most of the twentieth century and synthesizing a range of political viewpoints within the country, have done much to define and circumscribe the values and goals of critical thinking about culture in Canada." Jody BERLAND, "Marginal Notes on Cultural Studies in Canada," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 64, no.4 (1995): 515.
- 4 J. Russell HARPER, *Krieghoff* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), *A People's Art: Primitive, Naïve, Provincial and Folk Painting in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), *Paul Kane's Frontier* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971). For a full list of Harper's writing see the bibliography compiled by Brian FOSS and Loren LERNER, in *JCAH/AHAC* VII, no.2 (1985).
- 5 See for example, Virginia NIXON, "Meet J. Russell Harper, father of Canadian art history," *The Gazette* (Montreal), 8 March 1975.
- 6 Dating roughly from 1961 to 1971, it encompasses both the preparation for the Centennial (the Centennial Commission formed by an Act of Parliament on 29 Sept. 1961) and the years following 1967 when "Trudeaumania" extended the feeling of pride and optimism about Canada's future (at least amongst English-Canadians) that characterized the Centennial celebrations. For an introduction, to these issues, see Peter AYKROYD, *The Anniversary Compulsion* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1992).
- 7 In the "Terms of Reference and Structure of the Centennial Commission," the Research Branch is given the following mandate: "A contribution to national unity is one of the principal objectives of the Centennial Commission. Several aspects of the Commission's program are related

to the improvement of relations among Canada's various ethnic groups. To this end, the Research Branch, has as its main object to keep abreast of current developments in Canada and to provide indicators as to the proper and most productive course to follow." Centennial Commission, *Centennial Facts: General Information on the Centennial of Canadian Confederation 1867 - 1967* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer 1966), 7.

8 For example, discussions on the make-up of the Centennial project's advisory board stressed that there be suitable linguistic and well as regional representation. The advisory board consisted of the following: Guy Viau (Montreal), Gérard Morisset (Musée du Québec), Stephen Vickers (University of Toronto) and Ian McNairn (University of British Columbia). In letters to each of them requesting their participation in the project, Marsh Jeanneret (Director UTP) wrote: "It is our hope that the committee described above would be composed of members from representative areas of Canada.... The advice of members of the committee would be a most important contribution to what we hope and expect will be a major event in the celebration of 1867." History of Canadian Art, University of Toronto Archives, University of Toronto Press, UTA, A89-0009/012.

9 Marsh Jeanneret to Dr. A.W. Trueman, Director, Canada Council, 9 Nov. 1960, UTA, A89-0009/012.

10 In a memo from Frances Halpenny to Jeanneret, 12 April 1962, mention is made of an attached report from Jarvis outlining the proposed contents of the book. This document was apparently sent to the Canada Council along with a number of other UTP files that have not been located.

11 University of Toronto Press, File Memo, 11 Oct. 1960, UTA, A89-0009/012. Even at this early stage, discussion was taking place as to the kind of printing technology which would be most appropriate to a book of the quality envisioned by UTP. Paul Arthur's role as production editor was seen as pivotal to its success: "even if the viewers don't get too much into the text, they will sense the history through the symbols of the pictures." UTP, File Memo, 13 Oct. 1960.

12 A.W. Trueman to Marsh Jeanneret, 2 Dec. 1960, UTA, A89-0009/012.

13 In a UTP file memo recording notes of a meeting with Jarvis on 5 Dec. 1960, it was noted that the importance of including French-Canadians on the Editorial Committee "was raised with Mr. Jarvis, who is going to take it under advisement." Such directives were reiterated in a memo from Jeanneret to Halpenny of 2 May 1961, and a letter from Jeanneret to Trueman of 27 Feb. 1962, UTA, A89-0009/01.

14 Jeanneret to Halpenny, 2 May 1961, UTA, A89-0009/012.

15 In these early negotiations between UTP and the Council, possible francophone participants are discussed, including Jean-Paul Morisset – only once briefly named as a possible contributor/collaborator with Jarvis – and a representative from *Vie des Arts*, possibly art director Claude Beaulieu.

16 In a letter to Claude Hurtubise, Director of Les Éditions HMH Ltée, Marsh Jeanneret wrote: "In addition to covering a rather wider field than Canadian painting, our project is perhaps likely to concern itself more with a critical historical survey than yours is likely to, to judge from your description of the latter." 1 Aug. 1962, UTA, A89-0009/012.

17 HARPER, "Three Centuries of Canadian Painting," *Canadian Art* 19 (Nov.-Dec. 1962): 405-52.

18 HARPER, *Memorandum re Projected Centennial History of Canadian Painting*, 8 Nov. 1963, National Archives of Canada, MG 30 D352, vol 43, file 4.

19 Progress Report, 19 July 1965, UTA, A89-0009/012.

20 Harper to Ian Montagnes (General Editor, University of Toronto Press), 14 June 1976, NAC, MG 30 D352, vol. 42, file 27.

- 21 In the last few years of his life, Harper devoted himself to researching pre-Confederation artists in Ontario. In letters to various Ontario cultural institutions and individuals, Harper would write a variant of the following: "I am beginning to assemble material for a history of painting in Ontario before 1867, chiefly because I think we have been very much short-changing ourselves in comparison to what is happening in other provinces in the cultural art field. We have a rich cultural past as well if we can only get it down...." NAC, MG 30 D352, vol. 21, file 26.
- 22 Robert NELSON, "The Map of Art History," *The Art Bulletin* LXXIX, no.1 (March 1997): 28-41.
- 23 See for example, Newton MCTAVISH, *The Fine Arts in Canada* (Toronto: MacMillan, 1925) and Donald W. BUCHANAN, *The Growth of Canadian Painting* (London and Toronto: Collins, 1950).
- 24 William COLGATE, *Canadian Art: Its Origins and Development* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1943).
- 25 Gérard MORISSET, *La Peinture traditionnelle au Canada français* (Ottawa: Le Cercle du Livre de France, 1960), 7.
- 26 Robert HARRIS, "Art in Quebec and the Maritime Provinces" *Canada: An Encyclopedia of the Country*, vol. 4 (Toronto, 1898), 353-59.
- 27 HARPER, *Painting in Canada*, "The styles of this country's best-known contemporary artists were developed initially on foreign soil; they have absorbed popular 'isms' originating in the United States or Europe and then adapted them to suit their own personal tastes. Thus their personal statement is more restricted because they link themselves to a foreign style. But while there is no 'Canadian School,' certain focal points of great artistic activity have developed." (p.383)
- 28 LACROIX, "Gérard Morisset et l'histoire de l'art au Québec," 143-4.
- 29 See for example, Harold INNIS, *The Fur Trade in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1930) and Donald CREIGHTON, *The Commercial Empire of the Saint-Lawrence, 1760-1350* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1937).
- 30 W.L. MORTON, *The Canadian Identity* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961) and Arthur R.M. LOWER, *Colony to Nation* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977).
- 31 W. Stewart WALLACE, *The Growth of Canadian National Feeling* (Toronto: The MacMillan Company of Canada Limited, 1927), 77.
- 32 J.M.S. CARELESS, "Frontierism, Metropolitanism, and Canadian History," *Canadian Historical Review* 35, no.1 (March 1954): 1-21.
- 33 J.M.S. CARELESS, "'Limited Identities' in Canada," *Canadian Historical Review* 50, no.1 (March 1969): 1-10.
- 34 Ramsay COOK, "Canadian Centennial Cerebrations," *International Journal* XXII (Autumn 1967), 659-63.
- 35 For a thorough analysis see William WESTFALL, "On the Concept of Region in Canadian History and Literature," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 15, no.2 (Summer 1980): 3-15.
- 36 One early notable exception is historian W.L. Morton who uses the example of "la survivance" in French Canada to explore ways that Western Canada could potentially achieve a measure of independence or recognition from the Center. See MORTON, "Clio in Canada: The Interpretation of Canadian History" in *Contexts of Canada's Past: Selected Essays by W.L. Morton*, ed. A.B. McKillop (Toronto: MacMillan, 1980), 496-519. This essay was originally published in 1946.
- 37 See William KILBOURN, "The Writing of Canadian History" in *Literary History of Canada*, ed. Carl F. Klinck (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965).

38 For example in a letter to Harold Town (26 Sept. 1976), Harper writes: "I never did want to deal with anything in the way of contemporary art since I don't believe that it really fits into a historical context." NAC, vol.42, Correspondence, 1976. In 1974, Harper wrote to Doris Shadbolt, then Associate Director of the Vancouver Art Gallery, asking if she would be interested in writing a survey of Canadian painting since 1945 in two or three chapters. Shadbolt declined because of prior commitments. NAC, RG 30 D342, vol.44, Correspondence, *Painting in Canada*.

39 Concern over American cultural imperialism was voiced in the 1951 Report of the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences (Massey Report) and even earlier in the 1929 Report of the Royal Commission on Radio Broadcasting (Aird Report).

40 NAC, MG 30 D352, vol. 19. This document is undated but is located in a file titled "Correspondence 1968-1973". In a letter to Frances Halpenny dated 1 Nov. 1971, Harper noted at the bottom "Trying to think about things to put in a brief about university research in the humanities – I don't feel very lucid." NAC, RG 30 D342, vol. 44, Correspondence, *Early Painters and Engravers*.

41 Ibid.

42 See letter to Robert Weaver of the CBC, 29 Nov. 1974, NAC, MG 30 D352, vol. 20: "This lifetime of research has produced a mosaic which I would dearly love to pass on to others because I have always been personally excited about the Canadian evolution and I see no reason why others should not experience it as I see it."

43 "Advance in the Study of Art History: A Progress Report," c.1977/78, NAC, MG 30 D342, vol. 19, Notes.

44 See for example, *The Struggle for Canadian Universities*, ed. Robin Mathews and James Steele (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969), and Susan CREAN, *Who's Afraid of Canadian Culture?* (Don Mills: General Publishing Co., 1976).

45 *artscanada* 200/201 (Autumn 1975).

46 For a cogent critique of this issue of *artscanada*, see Greg CURNOE, "Feet of Clay Planted Firmly in U.S.A.," *Canadian Forum* 56, no. 661 (May 1976): 9-11.

47 Letter to Jane Martin, editor of *CAROT*, 11 March 1976, NAC, MG 30 D342, vol. 20-31.

48 As one example, Jack McClelland, of McClelland and Stewart, resigned from the Committee for an Independent Canada because he felt their publishing policy was too extremely nationalistic. See his letter to Mordecai Richler, 16 April 1973 in *Imagining Canadian Literature: The Selected Letters of Jack McClelland*, ed. Sam Solecki (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 1998), 179-80.

49 For a discussion of affect in relation to national formations, see Homi BHABHA, "Dissemination: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation" in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi Bhabha (New York: Routledge, 1990), 291-322.

50 Two histories of Canadian art appeared within less than a decade of the publication of Harper's book: Dennis REID, *A Concise History of Canadian Painting* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1973) and Barry LORD, *Painting in Canada: Towards a People's Art* (Toronto: NC Press, 1974).

POUR NOUS CONNAÎTRE MIEUX

La peinture au Canada : des origines à nos jours

Publié en 1966, le volume de J. Russell Harper, *La peinture au Canada : des origines à nos jours* est apparu au moment où les préparations pour le centenaire de la confédération canadienne suscitaient une grande ferveur. Mis en vente simultanément en français et en anglais par les Presses de l'Université Laval et la University of Toronto Press, le volume de Harper fut promu comme la première histoire complète et définitive de l'art canadien par son traitement des traditions artistiques francophones et anglophones. Étant la seule contribution du Conseil des Arts du Canada pour marquer le centenaire, *La peinture au Canada* ne peut être comprise en dehors du contexte politique, culturel et intellectuel de cet événement d'une immense signification symbolique. Ce fut aussi la première publication importante de Russell Harper, qui a d'ailleurs quitté son poste comme conservateur d'art canadien au Musée des beaux arts pour se consacrer entièrement au projet. En dépit du fait qu'il est plus reconnu pour ses recherches sur l'art canadien du XIX^e siècle, comme en font foi ses publications sur Cornelius Krieghoff, Paul Kane et l'art populaire de la période, on associe le nom de Harper avec *La peinture au Canada*, ouvrage qui l'a consacré comme «doyen de l'histoire de l'art canadien» et qui a établi le cadre narratif et analytique – du moins au Canada anglais – de l'étude de la production artistique au Canada pour les décennies à venir. Cet essai se limite à l'examen des contextes intellectuels et sociaux du texte de Harper, afin d'évaluer l'influence de ce premier aperçu complet de la peinture au Canada sur le développement de ce champ d'étude. En tant que texte relatif au centenaire, *La peinture au Canada* souscrit aux sentiments idéologiques et intellectuels de la période : une attention consciente à la diversité linguistique et régionale du pays, un engagement à développer des récits du devenir national pour les générations futures, et une reconnaissance du rôle important de la culture pour maintenir l'indépendance du Canada face aux États-Unis.

Le caractère bilingue et biculturel du texte se présente comme l'aspect le plus particulier de l'entreprise de Harper, étant donné le soutien du Conseil des Arts du Canada et le contexte de sa publication à l'occasion du centenaire. La correspondance entre le Conseil et la University of Toronto Press affirme, de plus, que les directives concernant l'inclusion à parts égales d'artistes francophones

et anglophones sont venues largement du Conseil des Arts, qui avait insisté, au début du projet, pour que soit formé un comité consultatif composé d'un nombre égal d'anglophones et de francophones. Néanmoins, Harper lui-même avait déjà montré qu'il était intéressé à écrire une chronique de l'histoire de l'art aussi bien du Canada français que du Canada anglais dans son article intitulé «300 Years of Canadian Art» publié en 1963 dans la revue *Canadian Art*. À cet égard, il se distingue de la plupart des historiens de l'art anglophones qui l'ont précédé et qui traditionnellement situent la naissance de l'art canadien au moment de l'arrivée au pays de Paul Kane et de Cornelius Krieghoff. En prenant ses distances avec cette convention, Harper est, d'une part, clairement soumis aux impératifs de l'année du centenaire qui demandaient de prendre en considération les contributions égales des cultures anglophones et francophones au Canada. Par contre, la recherche entreprise par Harper pour *La peinture au Canada* doit énormément aux contributions d'historiens d'art canadiens français tels que Gérard Morisset qui note explicitement, dans l'introduction de son volume *La peinture traditionnelle au Canada français*, que les historiens d'art anglophones étaient jusque-là incapables de reconnaître la contribution des artistes canadiens français en dehors de la sculpture sur bois.

Quoique Harper soit redevable à des historiens d'art francophones tels que Morisset pour accroître ses connaissances sur les artistes canadiens et pour ainsi écrire une histoire plus complète, il ne les a pas suivis dans son approche historiographique. Contrairement à Morisset, en particulier, qui démontra à travers ses écrits une maîtrise singulière de l'analyse formelle, Harper est davantage un historien sociologique, traitant en premier lieu des contextes de production et de réception des œuvres d'art plutôt que de l'évaluation de leurs qualités esthétiques. À cet égard, il se situe dans une tradition plus proprement liée à la thèse environnementale de «l'école laurentienne» associée aux historiens anglophones Harold Innis, William Morton et A.R.M. Lower. Ces historiens, écrivant durant les années trente, quarante et cinquante, soutenaient que le caractère géographique et climatique du pays produisait des relations économiques particulières au sein même de la nation, et entre le Canada et l'extérieur qui ont données forme aux institutions politiques et culturelles canadiennes qu'on connaît encore de nos jours. Ce modèle historiographique est d'ailleurs bien connu des historiens de l'art du Groupe des Sept. En effet, le même contexte politique et intellectuel qui a présenté le Groupe comme «école nationale» d'art a renforcé le pouvoir de l'approche environnementale sur l'élaboration de l'histoire (anglophone) canadien et son intérêt presque exclusif pour les questions propres au Canada central. Malgré la critique du caractère homogène que cette vision du Canada présentait au cours des années cinquante – en particulier les textes de J.M.S. Careless qui, déjà en 1954, demandait une considération des caractéristiques régionales dans l'analyse de l'histoire

canadienne – l’approche environnementale restera dominante à travers l’historiographie canadienne des années soixante, surtout lors des célébrations du centenaire. On peut noter dans cette historiographie l’apparition constante d’écrits qui soulignent le développement du Canada de ses origines coloniales à sa maturité nationale. La présentation de l’art et des artistes dans *La peinture au Canada* démontre une téléologie presque identique, d’une part à cause de la conviction de Harper que l’art est un reflet de la société qui l’a produit, mais d’autre part à cause des exigences institutionnelles et contextuelles concernant ce texte.

C’est ici que les convictions nationalistes de Harper sont les plus évidentes. Comme il le démontre à travers son texte, l’art a joué un rôle important dans la formation nationale, non seulement en présentant l’image d’une nation en voie de formation, mais en démontrant, à travers l’établissement d’artistes et d’institutions culturelles, que le Canada est capable de développer une tradition culturelle autonome. Le dernier chapitre, traitant de la peinture au Canada après 1945, démontre clairement que les convictions nationalistes de Harper s’étendaient au-delà d’une simple énumération de peintres, pour analyser le besoin immédiat d’encourager une vie intellectuelle proprement canadienne. Alors que le chapitre donne une liste des artistes travaillant à travers le Canada – ce qui le distingue de la richesse du contexte narratif du reste du volume – Harper se demande, dans les premiers paragraphes, pourquoi la période d’après-guerre n’a produit aucun style dit «canadien». Il présente trois hypothèses : en premier lieu, la dominance de styles internationaux chez les artistes contemporains empêche la formation de styles innovateurs ici au Canada; en deuxième lieu, l’influence des médias de masse largement américains se fait ressentir de plus en plus sur la société canadienne; finalement, l’absence d’institutions consacrées à l’art canadien contemporain nuit au développement d’une culture proprement «canadienne». Dans ce livre de Harper, on peut voir un soupçon du discours nationaliste canadien qui se fera ressentir dans les années post-centenaire. Pour Harper, ces remarques à propos de la disparition d’un style «canadien» est une indication de la force de ses convictions que ce n’est que par l’étude sérieuse du passé que les Canadiens se reconnaîtront. C’est peut-être dans cet effort de reconnaissance que l’influence de Harper s’est fait le plus ressentir : dans la création de cours traitant de l’histoire de l’art canadien dans les universités Concordia et Carleton, et par le biais de la publication d’un corpus croissant d’écrits critiques sur l’art au Canada.

Traduction : auteur