



fig.1 Jack Sures, **Stoneware bowl**, 1967, 22 cm high x outside diameter of 45 cm,
Coll. of Confederation Centre Art Gallery, Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island.
(Photo: courtesy of the Confederation Centre Art Gallery)

MONCRIEFF WILLIAMSON, MARITIME REGIONALISM, AND THE DREAM OF A NATIONAL CRAFT MUSEUM

Tucked away in the vaults of Charlottetown's Confederation Centre Art Gallery are sixty-nine objects that symbolize the failed dream of a national craft museum. Collected between 1965 and 1967 by Moncrieff Williamson, then director of the gallery, these pieces represent what he considered to be the best of contemporary Canadian craft. The objects were among the over one hundred and seventy works displayed in the *Canadian Fine Crafts* exhibition that Williamson curated for the Canadian pavilion at Expo '67 in Montreal. The fine craft works in the exhibition were a careful blend of utilitarian function, playful representation, and artistic conceptualization. For example Jack Sures' stoneware bowl of 1967 is minimally glazed, with a practical rim and footed bottom (fig.1) and one can easily imagine the feel of the grainy clay body as the bowl is placed on a dinner table. In contrast to the earnestness of such functional ware, Williamson also chose lighthearted pieces depicting recognizable figures and motifs. Elain Genser's *The General*, 1967 (fig.2), a fabric hanging adorned with medals, epaulettes, and gold tassels, can be read as a play on authoritarian military images as the well-decorated general is reduced to a cartoon character. Williamson was also cognizant that craft extended well beyond the utilitarian or playful, and he was careful to feature a number of individuals who worked in a conceptual manner. One of the most famous textile artists of the day was Charlotte Lindgren, whose hanging *Winter Tree*, 1967 stood out from many of the other objects on display at *Canadian Fine Crafts* (fig.3). Created from wood and lead wire, the piece is composed of a complex single woven form that emerges from a tight circular base and becomes a series of loose threads suggesting the branches of a tree.

Williamson selected objects from the *Canadian Fine Crafts* exhibition for the Confederation Centre Art Gallery's collection as part of his earlier and ambitious plan for a national craft museum. During a speech to the Prince Edward Island Craftsmen's Council in 1965 Williamson had excited the audience and his ideas were carefully reported in a Charlottetown newspaper:

Mr. Williamson outlined his plans to have the first Canadian museum devoted to the crafts in the Confederation Centre; and eventually to take over the present legislative building.... In addition, he foresees the establishment of craft study collections, didactic displays and a craft library, and the encouragement of active summer workshops, with qualified craft instructors coming here, and suggests that the basement of the legislative building might well be used for this.¹

Williamson's involvement with Canadian crafts began when he participated in the formation of the Canadian Council for Environmental Arts in Winnipeg in February 1965.² His friend Norah McCullough, the Western liaison officer for the National Gallery of Canada, spearheaded the organization, which soon became the Canadian Craftsmen's Association.³ Following this meeting Williamson returned to Charlottetown with a new interest in the crafts. His work curating Canadian crafts for the Centennial year led him to further recognize the popularity and increasing sophistication of the crafts, while also noting the serious lack of institutional spaces that exhibited professional work. Williamson believed that Charlottetown was the ideal location for a national craft museum and that he was the perfect candidate to undertake such an ambitious project.⁴ Meanwhile, the sixty-nine fine craft works would be part of the first holdings in one of Canada's most prestigious visual arts collections. However, the project never progressed any further. Now forty years after Williamson boldly announced his plans for a large-scale craft institution, his vision is being resurrected, albeit as a historical curiosity. Recently the Confederation Centre Art Gallery inaugurated an exhibition entitled *From Our Land: The Expo '67 Canadian Craft Collection* (3 October 2004 – 30 January 2005), presenting Williamson's entire collection to the public for the first time since Expo '67.⁵ The works were then shown in the Canadian Museum of Civilization's *Cool 60s Design* (25 February – 27 November, 2005).

In his September 1996 obituary for Williamson, the multi-disciplinary Torontonians Mavor Moore wrote that "Crieff" was "an art gallery revolutionary," and that his desire to think nationally and his inclusive attitude toward the crafts could be read as fairly radical.⁶ Born in 1915 to an aristocratic family in Scotland, Williamson received his formal training at the Edinburgh College of Art.⁷ During the Second World War he undertook "secret Foreign Office assignments" in Europe, before immersing himself in the postwar London art world.⁸ In the late 1940s Williamson began "an American sojourn," when he married a "rich Pennsylvanian beauty." Sadly, this adventure ended with her "descent into fatal madness."⁹ Williamson then returned to London where he worked as an art critic and curator, and as the director of the Art Exhibitions Bureau, Exhibitions Aid Service in London from 1953 to 1957.¹⁰ He returned to North America in 1957 where he became the Extension Services' curator at the Art Gallery of Victoria, and then director of the Art Department at the Glenbow Foundation in Calgary three years later. In 1964 Williamson was given the prestigious position as the first director of Charlottetown's Confederation Centre Art Gallery.

As Canada's "National Memorial to the Fathers of Confederation," the Centre was funded by all the provinces and the federal government. Today its website proclaims that "The Confederation Centre is the result of a dream shared by all Canadians – to create a place where our country's history and multicultural



fig.2 Elaine Genser, **The General**, 1967, fabric, found objects, glue, stitchery, 233 x 97 cm, Coll. of Confederation Centre Art Gallery, Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island. (Photo: courtesy of the Confederation Centre Art Gallery)

character is celebrated, and where the talents of its people are nurtured and showcased.” This inclusive attitude toward the arts was first formulated by Williamson, who saw the crafts as a part of a national mandate. In an effort to elevate the status of the crafts, craft organizers invited him to participate on juries and Williamson began implementing ways to promote professional craft practice in Canada.

It is important to understand the position occupied by the crafts in Canada’s artistic hierarchy during the 1960s. Within the art milieu, crafts were generally considered to be the work of dilettantes; otherwise they were looked at principally as objects of ethnographic curiosity. After mid-century, the crafts began breaking free of the shackles of tradition. For example, in Regina the California Funk movement influenced the development of a specifically Canadian form of avant-garde ceramic sculpture. Canadian textile artists were executing sculptural weavings and large wall-hangings to be installed in innovative architectural spaces. As well, metal artists were making statements out of previously dismissed utilitarian forms like flatware. The acceptance of such craft objects into exhibitions at Expo ’67 where they would be shown adjacent to presentations of painting and sculpture was a significant step forward; and if Williamson had succeeded in providing the fine crafts with its own museum, the Canadian craft movement would have advanced even further.

It remains somewhat of a mystery why his plan for a national craft museum failed to materialize; however, an examination of both the historical and contemporary situation may help disclose the reasons why his project was doomed to failure. In seeking to be all-encompassing in his selection of objects for Expo ’67’s *Canadian Fine Crafts*, Williamson’s choices reflect the divisive tensions between traditional and contemporary craft practice in late 1960s’ Canada. Cutting-edge, conceptual craft objects were slowly gaining acceptance within the visual arts community, while work deemed traditional continued to occupy a marginal role. As a result, craftspeople who considered themselves more aligned with artistic concerns became increasingly outspoken about the perceived damage of being associated with more traditional makers. Williamson’s desire to create a national craft museum also raised issues of Canadian regionalism and in turn, mirrored the reductive views that had also forced Maritime crafts to be read as anti-modern.

Certainly Williamson prided himself on understanding the regional and national nature of Canadian art. In his 1976 catalogue for the exhibition *Through Canadian Eyes: Trends and Influences in Canadian Art 1815 – 1965*, he would write of the “gradual emergence of a visible artistic Canadian identity,” that grew out of regional isolation and “the overwhelming reality of distance.”¹¹ The “reality of distance” was a common theme in Williamson’s writing. In his books on Robert Harris, who was known as “Canada’s Confederation Painter” following the 1884 completion of his official portrait of the “founding Fathers,” Williamson stressed how Harris worked to leave Prince Edward Island in order to advance his artistic

training: "Travel to and from the Island requires a frame of mind, an attitude of tolerant apathy apparently mastered only by the native-born Islanders."¹² In his catalogue for *Canadian Fine Crafts* Williamson had already introduced the theme of regionalism and distance, writing that: "Until recently, for many Canadians a sense of isolation through distance has been one of the disadvantages of our vast country."¹³ To Williamson, the technological advances of the 1960s meant that these distances could be overcome and the tensions of regionalism that had previously slowed down or prevented national arts initiatives could be eroded.

In the case of craft in the Maritimes, this would require major changes in entrenched attitudes. Mary Black, who had been appointed Director of Handcrafts for the province of Nova Scotia in 1943, saw regionalism as a strength, rather than a weakness for the arts. In 1952 she wrote an article "Improving Design in Handcrafts" for *Canadian Art* magazine, advocating that Nova Scotia should rely on regionalism to develop its craft identity: "It may be difficult for persons in contact with modern art in our nation's capital or larger cities to understand our approach here in Nova Scotia."¹⁴ Black argued that: "In answer to those who deplore regionalism we reply: 'Why should our people in the grain provinces use designs based on fish and our fishermen develop their designs from the oil derricks of the foothills of Alberta, or why would our Indians of the plains weave Scottish tartans?'"¹⁵ Despite Black's assertion of the provincial nature of Nova Scotians, she featured images of professional, European-trained craftspeople in her article. For example, the ceramist Konrad Sadowski, known for his functional and decorative painted objects, was represented by a jug and a painted vase with the caption: "The pottery below is by a Polish craftsman now living in Nova Scotia."¹⁶ It would have run counter to Black's romanticized myth of the anonymous Maritime craftspeople to identify his professional credentials. What was missing from Black's discussion was an acknowledgment that the crafts, like the other arts, were moving away from traditional representation toward conceptual studies; and this often translated into an exploration of materials that would expand the boundaries of utility and tradition. Konrad Sadowski, in fact, had begun reducing the necks of his vases until they were symbolic rather than useful.

To the detriment of the study of craft history, Mary Black's particular mandate for the crafts in eastern Canada created the assumption that Maritime crafts operated as anti-modern. In his groundbreaking 1994 book, *The Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia*, Ian McKay demonstrated the inaccuracy of the cultural stereotype of Nova Scotia as a simpler society that in turn was reflected in its crafts, and he identified Mary Black as complicit in creating this false identity.¹⁷ She was certainly not alone in her quest to preserve regional craft traditions. This desire was expressed in the first half of the twentieth-century by groups like the Canadian Handicrafts Guild, which was Canada's oldest national craft organization, and individuals such as the anthropologist and folklorist, Marius Barbeau, of the National Museum of Man.

But in the 1940s and 1950s when Mary Black was at her bureaucratic zenith, craftspeople themselves were questioning the dependence upon tradition. In her 1945 article for *Canadian Art*, the artist Elizabeth Wyn Wood had already recycled all the stereotypes regarding Canadian crafts, and comments that: "For instance the Maritime Provinces (New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island) are famous for their tweeds, linens and rugs."¹⁸ However, she also acknowledged the experimentation and changes that were occurring in Canada: "we have, on the other hand, a few, perhaps less than a hundred ceramists to whom pottery is a very high art – experimenting always with glazes and pastes, trying ancient formulae and producing rare new ones, calling to their aid whatever help modern chemistry and techniques can give them."¹⁹ Among the innovative ceramists she featured were Kjeld and Erica Deichmann of Moss Glen, New Brunswick, whose work was completely professional if not always radical in form. However, to the detriment of contemporary artists engaged with craft materials, it seems that the romanticized vision of the uncomplicated Maritime craftsperson put forward by Mary Black had taken hold by the late 1950s and is still in part supported today.

It is significant that Moncrieff Williamson, who wanted to make Charlottetown the home of a national and modern craft museum, was not originally from the Maritimes. He argued that the regionalism at play in the Atlantic provinces could be harnessed to create a strong national identity, and wrote in his 1967 *Canadian Fine Craft* catalogue essay that: "Even the most casual study of the limited bibliography of Canadian arts and crafts reveals that Canada has always been pursuing a national identity, even to the extent of underplaying her own cultural richness."²⁰ He believed that demonstrating the interplay between regions and their crafts might identify a truly Canadian form of craft. This could be accomplished by exhibiting conceptual craft objects created in the international style side-by-side with those developed in so-called isolation. Williamson was by no means the first "come-from-away" to attempt such a dramatic revamping of the art community in the Maritimes.

Walter Abell, Acadia University's first Professor of Art and Aesthetics, was an American who was ultimately responsible for the establishment of Canada's first national art magazine, *Canadian Art*. His academic position, sponsored in 1928 by the Carnegie Corporation, gave him the institutional authority to implement significant changes to the Maritime art community. In 1934 and with further Carnegie assistance, he determined that the Maritimes needed to improve communications within the region in order to further its artistic development.²¹ Abell was instrumental in founding the Maritime Art Association in 1935, which published the first issue of *Maritime Art* magazine in October 1940. He featured the article "Handcrafts in the Restoration of the Port Royal Habitation," by Ronald Peck²² and subsequent issues of the magazine included articles on the crafts ranging from stained glass to woodcarving. Despite Abell's best efforts, his Report

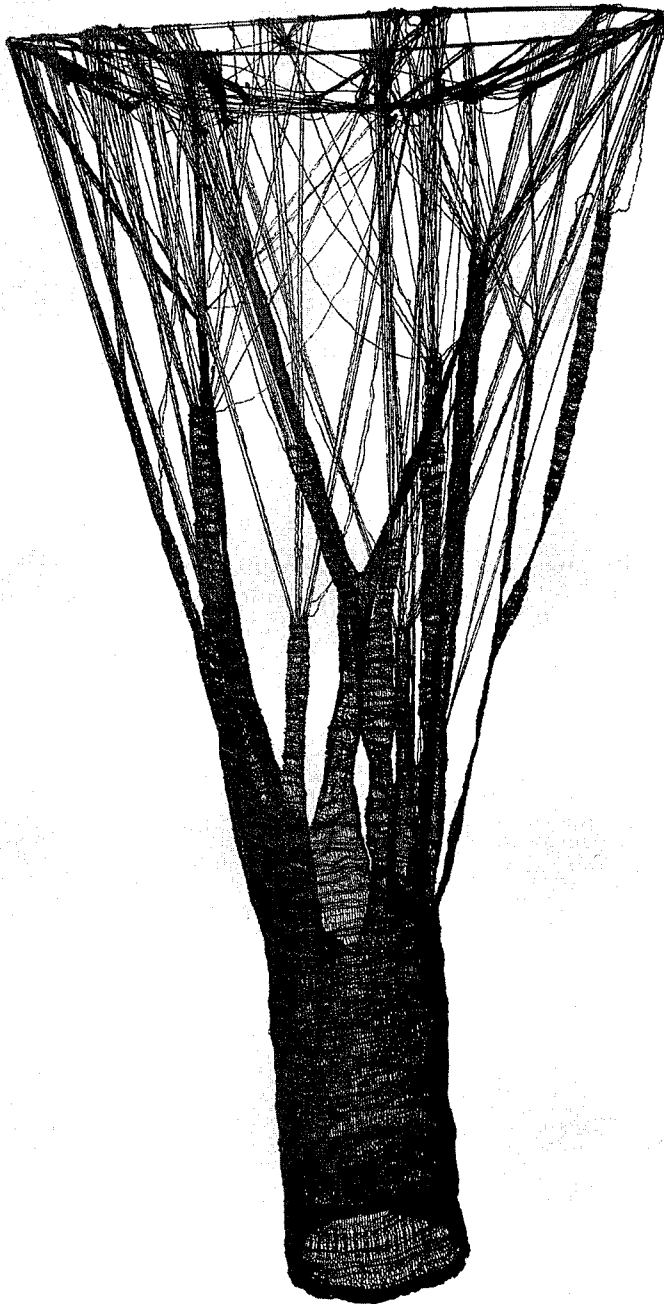


fig.3 Charlotte Lindgren, **Winter Tree**, 1967, wool, lead wire, 148 x outside diameter of 73 cm, Coll. of Confederation Centre Art Gallery, Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island. (Photo: courtesy of the Confederation Centre Art Gallery)



fig.4 Entrance to *Canadian Fine Crafts*, Expo '67, Canadian Pavilion, featuring Heather Maxey, **Floriform**, 1967, cloth collage and appliqué with stitchery, 119 x 72 cm, Coll. of Confederation Centre Art Gallery, Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island. (Photo: courtesy of the National Archives of Canada)

of the Editor for 1942-43 indicates that there were problems in giving *Maritime Art* a wider profile: "The principal tension during the past two years has resulted from our effort to combine a regional and a national magazine in one and the same publication."²³ Abell was unapologetic for the problems caused by his desire to expand it into a national magazine because the change "would bring into the Maritimes the stimulus of the best ideas from all parts of Canada, and could thus be a stimulating force in the development of Maritime thought and talent. Furthermore it would win credit for the Maritimes throughout the country, and such credit could never be secured by remaining entirely within the confines of a regional bulletin." A similar sentiment was echoed by Williamson in his wish for a strong Maritime presence in the national craft museum proposed for Charlottetown. He wrote to Erica Deichmann requesting that she consider gifting some Deichmann pottery to "the first Canadian museum devoted to the fine crafts...in view of your long association with the Maritimes."²⁴

As Abell and Williamson were aware, the artistic activity of the Maritimes was diverse and required national exposure to overcome the stigma of regionalism and static tradition. Abell achieved this largely through his writing, and over two decades later, Williamson would do the same by his involvement with a number of national craft exhibitions. In addition to organizing *Canadian Fine Crafts* at Expo '67, he was a curator for the Quebec branch of the Canadian Guild of Crafts' 1967 exhibition *Canada Crafts* in Montreal. The previous December, he had officially opened the National Gallery of Canada's *Canadian Fine Crafts* exhibition curated by his friend and peer Norah McCullough. Williamson envisioned his crafts exhibit at Expo '67 as an independent show separate from the exhibitions on painting, sculpture, drawing and printmaking in the Canadian pavilion (fig.4). Some critics expressed surprise at the inclusion of crafts at this international venue, but praised the exhibition for showing work of "sufficiently high quality to rank as art."²⁵

Canadian Fine Crafts was not the only major exhibition at the time to feature crafts alongside other fine arts. The Centennial Commission's *Perspective '67* at the Art Gallery of Ontario presented fine crafts, painting, sculpture and graphic arts of Canadians between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five. It was no surprise that Williamson served as a member of the exhibition's national jury. Dorothy Todd Henaut's article "1967 – The Moment of Truth for Canadian Crafts" in *artscanada*, credited the inclusion of crafts within fine art exhibitions as an indication of "the rapid evolution in attitude."²⁶ Featuring an image of Charlotte Lindgren's *Winter Tree* (fig.3), her article reflected the exchange of ideas Henaut and Williamson enjoyed while she was preparing her text and he was jurying for Expo '67. They had met through their involvement with the Canadian Handicrafts Guild, where Henaut was secretary-treasurer from 1964 to 1966. By the time she resigned the position, Williamson and Henaut agreed that the craft establishment urgently needed to accommodate the rise of professional fine crafts. Despite their concerns,

"The weight of the Guild is such," wrote a frustrated Henaut, "that it will continue on the same as ever."²⁷ Although it is never explicitly stated in their correspondence, they used their positions within the craft world as administrators and authors to further the cause of professionalism. Henaut sent Williamson drafts of her various articles for proofreading, and he kept her informed of the artists he was including in exhibitions, as well as his criteria for their selection.

It is clear that he also spoke to Henaut about his desire to create a national craft collection. In September 1965 she had told him that his plan should be promoted across the country: "I have an idea that an article by you on the collection of crafts you are now gathering, the role of the Confederation Art Gallery, or the relation of craft to 'art,' etc., would be of great interest in our [the Canadian Handicrafts Guild's] forthcoming bulletin *The Craftsman/!Artisan*."²⁸ This was not to be as he replied that he was too busy traveling in the United States to write such a piece. In the draft for her article "The Moment of Truth for Canadian Crafts" that she sent Williamson on 3 Nov. 1966 to proofread, Henaut wrote that "Many of the articles in the exhibition will serve as the basis of the first permanent collection of fine crafts to be set up in a Canadian museum when the Confederation Centre Art Gallery and Museum establishes its fine craft collection." By the time the article was published in *artscanada* in January 1967 any mention of the national collection had been removed. Although it remains unclear why Williamson did not use his position to advance his scheme of a national craft collection and eventual museum, his desire to promote fine crafts remained strong. In his essay for *Canadian Fine Crafts* he argued that while both functional and nonfunctional objects were selected for display, what created the most excitement were pieces that used craft materials in an expressive or challenging way as "from time to time a craftsman will create a work which transcends the restrictions of form and function."²⁹

Ironically, the context in which Williamson's collection is presented in the recent exhibition and accompanying catalogue, *From Our Land: The Expo 67 Canadian Craft Collection*, is in direct opposition to his desire to promote fine craft. The first thing that strikes the reader of the catalogue for *From Our Land* are the images of Expo '67, not the fine crafts. Shauna McCabe, former Senior Curator of the Confederation Centre Art Gallery writes: "In its juxtaposition of fine craft with souvenirs, the exhibition raises questions of significance and insignificance, ultimately probing the process of collecting."³⁰ This presentation had little to do with Williamson's position on fine crafts; in fact, Williamson was an active correspondent with Anita Aarons, an outspoken critic of the combination of crafts and souvenirs. Both were members of the Canadian Craftsmen's Association, formed in 1965 to promote fine craft, and this group was appointed by the federal Centennial Commission to oversee the selection of crafts for Expo '67 in the precise hope that such handcrafted objects would not be equated with mass-produced souvenirs. Williamson also wrote to Henaut that he had "a long talk with Anita

Aarons” about questions of standards, and one can only surmise that to see the fine crafts now reduced to a comparison with Expo ’67 souvenirs would have defeated the purpose of their stringent system of jurying at the time.³¹

Furthermore, Lee Plested in his essay “From Our Land: The Expo 67 Canadian Craft Collection,” in *From Our Land* writes that the crafts are not treated as art objects, but rather as material studies reflecting a particular lifestyle. He begins by arguing that “Williamson’s exhibition offers today’s audience a unique view of the Canadian resistance to international modernity and developing globalization,”³² and then goes on to reduce the crafts from artistic to alternative statements, as “analogous to the ‘drop-out’ activism of the hippies and the growing Canadian counter-culture of the late 1960s.” Certainly the crafts enjoyed a high level of popularity amongst those seeking alternative lifestyles, but when Williamson collected these objects he was dealing with professional craftspeople who sought to earn their living from their work while establishing artistic reputations. Any political statements regarding materialism were bound up in the expertise of the artists, which was of the utmost importance to Williamson in his promotion of fine craft.

It is disheartening that *From Our Land* diminishes these art objects to anti-modern statements, echoing both the earlier writing of Mary Black and the desire of the Canadian Handicrafts Guild to maintain links between the crafts and tradition. Plested also raises the issue of regionalism but now it is conflated with utopia: “In this way Williamson’s project typifies the utopian idealism that the craft revival realized through their small-scale, regionalized, utilitarian craft production.”³³ It is also disturbing to see the crafts equated with a nostalgic sense of the romanticized past by dint of their inherent materiality. This is obvious in Plested’s statement that: “The tourist audience of Expo 67 was interested in exoticizing the rural craftsman, while the artisans themselves were invested in replicating the myth in their work: it imbued their mastery of a craft with the effect of un-alienated labour.”³⁴ Fifty years later, we have Mary Black’s simple, rural Nova Scotian craftsperson now expanded on a national scale. Nothing could be further from the truth. For artists like Jack Sures and Charlotte Lindgren the exploration of ceramics and textiles was intended to push the boundaries of their materials rather than making “lifestyle” statements through the crafts. For Sures, a resident of Regina, and Lindgren, whose home was in Halifax, the rural ideal simply did not apply. Their work, like many others in *Canadian Fine Craft*, was not about regional specificity; it was about achieving new levels of professional production for craft in Canada.

Williamson’s collection of fine crafts at the Confederation Centre was intended to demonstrate this growing professionalism and his “first Canadian museum devoted to crafts” would offer a number of perspectives on the objects. He envisioned both “period rooms relating to Island and Confederation history,” illustrated through historical crafts, and “craft study collections, didactic displays...a craft library, and the encouragement of active summer workshops, with qualified craft instructors

coming here.”³⁵ Nostalgic views on crafts and Maritime craft production would not be erased; instead they would be contrasted to the realities of contemporary fine craft. Williamson believed that the Maritimes was slowly emerging from a history of hobby craft production. In 1965 he hoped that the newly formed Canadian Craftsmen’s Association would help Maritime craftspeople improve their standards of production, allowing them to create “objects up to the required standard to market them in any part of the world.”³⁶ By 1972 he would argue that advances had been made in this direction. In a newspaper article titled “Vast Change Noted in Island Handicrafts,” Williamson stated that he was “delighted to see the great improvement of serious, as opposed to gimmicky crafts, even at the hobby level.”³⁷ Undoubtedly he believed Maritime craftspeople would benefit enormously if he could provide them with concrete examples of “good” craft objects that adhered to his aesthetic and technical expectations. At the same time, he obviously felt that the Maritimes was no longer willing to be stigmatized by the myth of anti-modernism, and was ready to become the national headquarters for fine craft.

Williamson presumed that establishing a national craft museum in Charlottetown was a perfectly feasible idea, and he certainly possessed the aesthetic and administrative expertise to amass such a collection and run the institution. He had also shown his flair for diplomacy by maintaining his support of the two opposing national craft organizations (Canadian Guild of Crafts and the Canadian Craftsmen’s Association) while curating *Canadian Fine Crafts*. Why, then, did his vision remain unfulfilled? Most likely it was because the responsibility for craft representation shifted to provincial councils after 1967. Securing support for a national museum of crafts in the Maritimes would have proved difficult, if not impossible as these new groups wanted to develop provincial craft collections that were regionally focused. As well, the situation of limited funding for craft organizations both provincially and federally, meant that demands for money for a national initiative like Williamson’s would now be in competition with the provinces’ own mandates. The metalsmith and Nova Scotia College of Art and Design instructor Orland Larson described the funding for crafts in 1978: “In the world of crafts nationalism and regionalism are at work simultaneously.”³⁸ Between 1965 and 1980 ten provincial craft councils were incorporated and subsequently decentralized the support for the field. On the positive side, they developed new publications, conferences, stores, educational services and display spaces, resulting in quality juried regional exhibitions and important craft collections across Canada. As a result, however, Canada’s major museums such as the National Gallery of Canada, the Art Gallery of Ontario, and the Royal Ontario Museum, devolved responsibility for mounting large craft exhibitions. Undoubtedly this shift in funding and exhibition expectations damaged Williamson’s plan and there was little interest in the creation of a new centralized institution for the dissemination of

the fine crafts. Instead of his dream for a national museum of craft, today we are sadly left with a hodge-podge of small regional collections, or with craft being marginally displayed within larger institutions. Regionalism can be blamed for this situation. But this is not the definition of regionalism as it pertains to the anti-modern myth of the Maritimes; rather it is a regionalism shaped by the competition for arts funding. Craftspeople are market-savvy from necessity, and well aware that their professional advancement depends upon the support structures available to them locally, provincially and federally. But fine craft artists also need to decide whether redirecting some of the limited financial resources towards a national craft museum is a worthwhile endeavor. Williamson's blending of utilitarian function, playful representation, and artistic conceptualization has become the norm, but still Canada remains bereft of an institution where the many diverse approaches to craft are highlighted as art. In order to finally achieve a national craft museum, we need to overcome provincial isolationism and regional antagonism while simultaneously overthrowing the dangerously reductive view of craft as anti-modern. Moncrieff Williamson was ready to do this in 1965.

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Notes

1 "Curator outlines plans for crafts," 1965, Robert Harris scrapbook, Confederation Centre.

2 Ibid.

3 For more information on Norah McCullough, see Sandra ALFOLDY, "Norah McCullough: Pioneering Professional Craft in Canada," *The Journal of Canadian Art History* XXVI (2005): 34-55.

4 "Curator outlines plans for crafts," Harris scrapbook.

5 Catalogues have been published for each exhibition. See *Made in Canada: Craft and Design in the Sixties*, ed. Alan ELDER (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005) and Lee PLESTED, *From Our Land: The Expo 67 Canadian Craft Collection* (Charlottetown: Confederation Centre Art Gallery, 2005).

6 Mavor MOORE, "Lives Lived: Moncrieff Williamson," *Globe and Mail*, 2 Sept. 1996.

- 7 Williamson, Moncrieff 1915-1996, DOC/CLWT, National Gallery of Canada Artist files.
- 8 MOORE, "Lives Lived."
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 "Biography of Moncrieff Williamson." Prince Edward Island Archives (PEIA). Moncrieff Williamson Archives (MWA), RG 44 S.2, Box 25, Canadian Conference of the Arts file.
- 11 Moncrieff WILLIAMSON, *Through Canadian Eyes: Trends and Influences in Canadian Art 1815 - 1965* (Calgary: Glenbow-Alberta Institute, 1976), 1.
- 12 WILLIAMSON, *Robert Harris 1849 - 1919: An Unconventional Biography* (Toronto and Montreal: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1970), 20.
- 13 WILLIAMSON, *Canadian Fine Crafts* (Ottawa: Queen's Printers, 1967), 5.
- 14 Mary BLACK, "Improving Design in Handcrafts," *Canadian Art* 9, no.4 (Summer 1952): 158-62.
- 15 Ibid., 159.
- 16 Ibid., 162. It must be noted that Konrad Sadowski produced his ceramics with the help of his wife Kristina, who was responsible for the surface decoration. Many articles, including this one, neglected to mention her contribution.
- 17 Ian McKAY, *The Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994), 153.
- 18 Elizabeth WYN WOOD, "Canadian Handicrafts," *Canadian Art* 11, no.5 (Summer 1945): 186-92, 207.
- 19 Ibid., 191.
- 20 WILLIAMSON, *Canadian Fine Crafts*, 7.
- 21 Steven MCNEIL, *Maritime Art: Canada's First Art Magazine, 1940-43*, NGC Library and Archives exhibition #13 (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 2002).
- 22 Ronald PECK, "Handcrafts in the Restoration of the Port Royal Habitation," *Maritime Art* 1, no.1 (October 1940): 1-15.
- 23 Walter ABELL, "Maritime Art: Report of the Editor for the Year 1942-43," National Gallery of Canada Archives, NGC fonds, file 5.11M.
- 24 Williamson to Mrs. Milton Gregg (formerly Erica Deichmann), 7 October 1965, PEIA, MWA, RG 44, S.2, Box 82.
- 25 "Expo a Storehouse of World's Treasure," *The Montreal Star*, 28 April 1967.
- 26 Dorothy Todd HENAUT, "1967 - The Moment of Truth for Canadian Crafts," *artscanada* 24, no.104 (January 1967): 20-22.
- 27 Dorothy Todd Henaut to Moncrieff Williamson, 28 Nov. 1966, PEIA, MWA, RG 44 S.2, Box 25, Canadian Guild of Crafts file.
- 28 Ibid., 13 Sept. 1965.
- 29 WILLIAMSON, *Canadian Fine Crafts*, 3.
- 30 Shauna McCABE, "From Expo to eBay," in PLESTED, *From Our Land*, 7.
- 31 Williamson to Henaut, 26 Oct. 1966, PEIA, MWA, RG 44 S.2, Box 25, Canadian Guild of Crafts file.

- 32 PLESTED, *From Our Land*, 8.
33 Ibid., 14.
34 Ibid., 15.
35 "Curator outlines plans for crafts," Harris scrapbook.
36 Ibid., "Sees Opportunity for P.E.I. Craftsmen."
37 "Vast Change Noted in Island Handicrafts," *Charlottetown Guardian*, 16 May 1972.
38 John CRUICKSHANK, "Craftsman campaigns for quality," *The Whig-Standard* (Kingston), 18 Feb. 1978.

Résumé

MONCRIEFF WILLIAMSON, LE RÉGIONALISME MARITIME ET LE RÊVE D'UN MUSÉE NATIONAL DES MÉTIERS D'ART

Cachés dans les caves du Centre des arts de la Confédération de Charlottetown, se trouvent soixante-neuf objets qui symbolisent le rêve évanoui de créer un musée national des métiers d'art. Ces pièces, collectionnées entre 1965 et 1967 par Moncrieff Williamson, alors directeur de la galerie d'art du Centre, représentent ce qu'il considérait comme les meilleurs exemples de l'artisanat canadien. Ces beaux objets réunissent avec bonheur la fonction utilitaire, la représentation ludique et la conceptualisation artistique. En tant que commissaire de l'exposition *Les métiers d'art au Canada*, au Pavillon du Canada d'Expo '67, Williamson avait réuni plus de 170 objets. Il a gardé ceux qu'il préférerait pour constituer le noyau du musée national des métiers d'art qu'il rêvait de créer. Williamson croyait que Charlottetown était l'endroit idéal pour une telle institution.

Bien qu'il ait réussi à acquérir ces objets, le musée projeté ne vit jamais le jour. Ironiquement, quarante ans après que Williamson eut annoncé son plan audacieux d'une institution à grande échelle consacrée aux métiers d'art, sa vision renaît, quoique plutôt comme curiosité historique. Ses objets étaient inclus dans la récente exposition du Musée canadien des civilisations *Design à gogo*, et le Centre des arts de la Confédération a aussi présenté une exposition intitulée *De notre pays : la collection canadienne d'artisanat d'Expo 67* dans laquelle la collection de Williamson était présentée au public pour la première fois depuis des décennies. La raison pour laquelle son projet de musée national des métiers d'art ne s'est jamais matérialisé demeure un mystère. Toutefois, une étude des écrits historiques et contemporains, qui renforcent le mythe d'un artisanat des Maritimes romantique et régional, aide à comprendre pourquoi sa stratégie était vouée à l'échec.

Il est important de reconnaître la place qu'occupe l'artisanat dans la hiérarchie artistique au Canada dans les années 1960. Longtemps considéré comme le domaine de dilettantes ou objet de curiosité ethnographique, l'artisanat s'affranchissait des entraves de la tradition. Les Maritimes n'étaient pas à l'abri de ce glissement vers l'artisanat vu comme un art. Bien que Mary Black, directrice de l'artisanat pour la Nouvelle-Écosse dans les années 1940, ait pour beaucoup contribué à développer l'artisanat néo-écossais comme souvenirs ou objets d'utilité courante attrayants, il ne serait pas juste de réduire toute l'activité artisanale des Maritimes à ce seul modèle. Ce que la définition de Black ne dit pas, c'est que les métiers d'art, comme les autres arts, s'éloignaient de la représentation pour se diriger vers des modèles plus conceptuels.

Il est significatif que Moncrieff Williamson ait cru pouvoir transformer la perception qu'on avait des Maritimes, de refuge antimoderne de métiers traditionnels en un musée national des métiers d'art, bien qu'il n'ait pas été originaire des Maritimes. Né en Écosse en 1915 dans une famille aristocratique, Williamson a reçu sa formation artistique à l'Edinburgh College of Art. Arrivé en Amérique du Nord en 1957, il a été engagé comme directeur du service de diffusion de la Art Gallery of Victoria. Trois ans plus tard, il devenait directeur du département des beaux-arts de la fondation Glenbow de Calgary. En 1964, Williamson s'est vu offrir le poste prestigieux de premier directeur du nouveau Centre d'art de la Confédération à Charlottetown. Il croyait que le régionalisme des Provinces atlantiques pouvait contribuer à forger une forte identité nationale, et cette idée est nettement évidente dans ses écrits. Ces idées étaient également soutenues par des articles dans la publication *Maritime Art* dans les années 1940. Williamson croyait que montrer l'interaction entre les régions et leur artisanat en les exposant à côté d'objets d'artisanat conceptuel créés dans un style international, contribuerait à identifier une forme authentiquement canadienne de métiers d'art professionnels. Un musée national de métiers d'art aurait été un instrument majeur pour cette analyse.

Nous devons féliciter le conservateur Lee Plested d'avoir présenté de nouveau au public la collection de Moncrieff Williamson, à l'occasion de l'exposition *De notre pays : la collection canadienne d'artisanat d'Expo 67*. Toutefois, son article du catalogue traite les ouvrages d'artisanat non comme objets d'art mais comme

reflet d'un mode de vie particulier. Les métiers d'art étaient certainement très populaires auprès de ceux qui cherchaient un mode de vie alternatif, mais Williamson collectionnait ces objets d'artisans professionnels qui souhaitaient gagner leur vie par leur travail tout en établissant leur réputation artistique. *De notre pays* fait de ces objets des manifestes antimodernes, se faisant l'écho des premiers écrits de Mary Black, ainsi que du désir de la Canadian Handicrafts Guild de maintenir le lien entre l'artisanat et la tradition. Il est décourageant de voir les métiers d'art assimilés à une utopie ou au sentiment nostalgique d'un passé idéalisé, du fait de leur matérialité inhérente.

La collection de Williamson devait former le noyau d'un musée national des métiers d'art qui aurait présenté un certain nombre de perspectives sur l'artisanat. La vision nostalgique de l'artisanat et de la production artisanale des Maritimes n'aurait pas été effacée, mais mise en contraste avec les réalités des métiers d'art contemporains. L'établissement d'un musée national des métiers d'art à Charlottetown était une idée tout à fait réalisable à l'époque. Williamson possédait la compétence artistique et administrative pour être le conservateur d'une telle collection, et sa réputation de promoteur des métiers d'art l'avait conduit jusqu'à Expo '67. Alors, pourquoi sa vision ne s'est-elle pas réalisée ? Il est probable que ce soit parce que le mouvement en faveur d'une représentation nationale de l'artisanat s'est modifié à mesure que les conseils provinciaux d'artisanat prenaient de l'importance. Entre 1965 et 1980, dix conseils provinciaux d'artisanat ont été incorporés. Il aurait été difficile, sinon impossible, d'obtenir des appuis pour la création d'un musée national des métiers d'arts, alors que ces nouvelles associations désiraient constituer des collections provinciales d'artisanat axées sur les régions. De plus, des demandes de subventions pour une initiative nationale comme celle de Williamson auraient été en concurrence avec les mandats particuliers des provinces. Nul doute que ces changements dans les attentes au niveau du financement et des expositions ont fait du tort au projet de Williamson. Au lieu du musée national des métiers d'art dont il rêvait, nous sommes malheureusement en présence d'un méli-mélo de petites collections régionales, ou de pièces d'artisanat exposées de façon marginale à l'intérieur d'institutions plus importantes. L'idée de Williamson d'associer fonction utilitaire, représentation ludique et conceptualisation artistique est devenue la norme, mais le Canada est toujours privé d'une institution où les différentes manières d'aborder l'artisanat seraient mises en vedette en tant qu'art. Si nous voulons finalement avoir un musée national des métiers d'art, il nous faudra surmonter les antagonismes régionaux tout en rejetant la perception dangereusement réductrice de l'artisanat comme étant antimoderne. C'est ce que Moncrieff Williamson était prêt à faire en 1965.

Traduction : Élise Bonnette