

ches dans nos archives pour regrouper les fragments épars d'un passé récent et tenter de combler avec une prudence variable les lacunes inévitables. Et c'est là que nous touchons du doigt les limites intrinsèques de cette méthode. Que Théophile Hamel ait été un ministre influent ou bien un constructeur de bateaux, la méthode eût été exactement la même. Seul le prestige attaché à la peinture vient commander ce grand remue-ménage dans les archives. S'il avait été cordonnier on l'aurait vite oublié. Il résulte de ce genre d'enquête que nous sommes désormais en possession de tous les documents souhaitables sur la personne de Hamel. La question cruciale est de savoir si notre connaissance et notre compréhension de la peinture de Hamel s'en trouve accrue d'autant. Nous croyons devoir dire que si notre connaissance antérieure de Hamel était sommaire, l'abondance des documents mis à jour ne vient pas substantiellement modifier la justesse globale des jugements antérieurs. Elle vient la préciser.

Tout à fait à l'aise dans les réalités quantitatives, mesurables, chronologiques et chiffrées, M. Raymond Vézina se révèle un admirable remueur d'archives et il procède à une mise en place dont il faut convenir de l'utilité pour notre futur historien d'art national. Il reste néanmoins regrettable qu'un si bel esprit de géométrie ait si peu pensé l'articulation de son ouvrage. Ainsi dans le corps du texte, un numéro de renvoi aux illustrations serait d'autant plus nécessaire qu'elles semblent distribuées erratiquement au gré des pages; et faute de ce renvoi, il faut sans cesse recourir à l'index, puis aux pages indiquées. Quant au catalogue des oeuvres, on se demande pourquoi il constitue un cahier à part; ses soixante-quatre pages n'auraient pas gonflé démesurément l'autre tome, celui de l'étude, alors qu'il augmente artificiellement le prix de l'ouvrage entier. Autre raison militant pour la réunion de l'ensemble sous une seule couverture, les tableaux reproduits dans le tome I ne sont pas repris dans le catalogue de l'oeuvre; en conséquence, pour trouver les reproductions, il faut faire la navette d'un tome à l'autre. Abondamment utilisés dans le

seconde tome, les sigles n'ont leur table qu'en tête du premier. Dernière réserve, la fragmentation du texte en courts paragraphes chapeautés d'un petit titre confère à l'ouvrage une apparence de manuel destiné aux écoles secondaires. L'éditeur, pour sa part, aurait pu sans trop de mal confier la réalisation de son livre à un maquettiste compétent, mettre les citations en italiques et choisir un caractère un peu moins gras pour désigner les oeuvres.

En dépit des réserves exprimées, le *Théophile Hamel* de Raymond Vézina reste une contribution importante à la connaissance d'un artiste du siècle dernier. Que les études des aspects socio-économiques de la pratique de la peinture se développent et s'élargissent au point d'englober un certain nombre d'artistes importants de l'époque, voilà qui serait éminemment souhaitable. M. Vézina vient d'ouvrir la voie.

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JOHN VANDERPANT PHOTOGRAPHS
Charles C. Hill
The National Gallery of Canada,
Ottawa, 1976
96 pp., 6 figs., 50 ill. \$5.95

In 1912 when John Vanderpant immigrated to Canada from the Netherlands, photography was going through a period of redefinition with respect to its eligibility as an art form. In New York Alfred Steiglitz had already succeeded in gaining strong credibility for the medium as a mode of visual expression valid on theoretical, philosophical and aesthetic levels. This seemingly impossible feat had been accomplished not by Steiglitz' heavy handed propagandising for the medium but by his unequivocal positioning of it within the mainstream of early twentieth-

century American art.

Although there was no-one quite like Steiglitz in Canada and nothing remotely resembling the New York photographic scene, an awareness of changing attitudes toward the photographic image certainly did exist. The Toronto Camera Club was sufficiently well aware of the thrust of this new direction to have included several works by Steiglitz in the 1897 Annual Exhibition. A successful showing for Steiglitz, indeed he carried off six awards. He received Bronzes for enlargements and marine; Silvers for architecture, interiors and genre; Gold for "best general."¹

The 1902-03 exhibition by the same Camera Club included a loan collection of Photo Secessionist works by Edward Steichen, Frank Eugene, Gertrude Kasebier, Steiglitz, Alvin Langdon Coburn, Clarence White and Eva Schutze.² In 1914, ten prints by Edward Weston were exhibited.³

Painters such as George Agnew Reid (1860 - 1947) and Charles Manly (1855 - 1924) were invited to act as jurors for the Toronto Camera Club exhibitions. In 1901 Manly accepted the offer to advise the members of the club on matters of composition and general pictorial design. He advocated the abandonment of rich detail and precise edges in favour of breadth of form and simplicity of composition. A consciousness of photography as art did exist in Canada at the time of Vanderpant's arrival but it was limited to a small geographic area that lay a great distance from where he first struck roots. Vanderpant brought to Canada a newly established career in journalistic photography and an almost missionary-like fervour for the propagation of the arts, photography in particular.

His works — fifty of which are reproduced in this catalogue — provide a glimpse of the photographic aesthetic between the early twentieth century and the period that preceded the Second World War. In his earlier works Vanderpant is much influenced by the soft-focus,

dreamy and intangible images that we associate with Steichen's work of the 1890's. Later, in the early '30's, his work reflects the "straight," sharp-focus imagery of Edward Weston and Imogen Cunningham, both of whom were members of the f64 group. Also evident in his work is the changing attitude toward subject matter — away from the more figurative content of the first decades of the twentieth century towards a more abstract visual sensibility such as we find in the works of American photographers, Sheeler, Weston, Cunningham and in the Europeans Bing, Moholy-Nagy and Lotar. But there is also in Vanderpant's works a periodic emergence of Camera Club or Salon conventions.

This catalogue, which accompanies a travelling exhibition of fifty Vanderpant photographs, is a valuable contribution to the history of Canadian art for several reasons; the most obvious being that it brings a well documented background to our non-existent history of Canadian photography of the twentieth century. Through Hill's thorough gleaning of catalogues, Vanderpant's unpublished manuscripts, his correspondence and the correspondence of artists, photographers and photographic societies, we learn of important associations between the photographer and the artists Emily Carr, Fred Varley and Jock Macdonald. Other interesting details that are brought to light are Vanderpant's partnership with photographer Harold Mortimer-Lamb in 1926 and the existence in 1927 of a British Columbian group known as the "B.C. Pictorialists." Hill's description of Vanderpant's activities provides us with a picture of a man with enormous energy and organizational abilities. He had no sooner moved from Okotoks, Alberta to New Westminster in 1920 than he set about establishing the New Westminster Photographic Salon. By 1922 he is recorded as having been active in the organization of the art activities of the Salon. This same year, 1922, marked the beginning of a six year period during which he made constant submissions of his work to international salons. His success in the salon

circuit, both locally and internationally, was almost immediate and within two years he had been elected a member of the Pittsburgh Salon of Photographic Art and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Great Britain. These years also saw him touring the United States and Canada to give lectures.

The questions that this publication raises are interesting since many of them revolve around the particular qualities of Salon photography. Much of it has been dismissed as kitsch, like much nineteenth-century painting, and perhaps justifiably so. Vanderpant's work, like that of the Ottawa photographers Johnson and Castonguay, is superior to the often flaccid, sentimental and derivative images of the Salons and camera clubs. It is never, it is true, possessed of the same commanding authority and originality of a Weston, Steichen or Steiglitz but it does present a searching after the integration of formal and philosophical values and it does possess a quiet and authentic tone. Although it is an index of influences current in photography of the period it also retains a certain individuality that seems to have stemmed from Vanderpant's strongly centred personal philosophy and ethical principles.

All the works selected for the exhibition are reproduced in the catalogue and comprise early genre-type studies, portraits, still life studies and an interesting series of photographs of industrial architecture, as well as studies of light and pattern treated in a highly abstract manner. Comparative material is included such as Varley's painting *Head of a Girl*, c.1929 (portrait of Vera Weatherbee) which relates to Vanderpant's *Vera*, 1930 a silver bromide and Edward Weston's *Kale Halved*, 1930, (gelatin silver) which relates particularly to Vanderpant's untitled (silver bromide) of c.1932 showing a halved cabbage. There are also informal photographs showing the members of the Group of Seven in the Arts and Letters Club, 1929. Two photographs, one a casual snapshot of Emily Carr and John Vanderpant in Carr's studio, 1935 by

Harry Upperton Knight and a portrait of Vanderpant by John Helders, of the same year, provide an informal glimpse of the photographer.

Peter Varley's affectionate four page recollection of the photographer is highly readable and adds a personal dimension to the publication:

The Vanderpant Galleries has a roofed gate at the sidewalk edge under which a display case showed the passing people the most recent portrait that pleased John's own aesthetic feeling. The memory of my own shy face in that special box still lingers strongly.⁴

Apart from an attempted definition of the three trends that dominated the early decades of the history of twentieth-century photography, which appears in the introductory paragraph and seems to be more of a response to convention rather than conviction, stylistic issues are not ventured into deeply. A discussion of the formal values of Vanderpant's photographs within the context of his Neo-Platonic beliefs and within the context of photographic history in general would have served to underline a major point about Vanderpant as a photographer.

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Notes:

¹ Public Archives of Canada, *Toronto Camera Club Collection*, MG 28 1. *Scrapbook*, V, containing newspaper clippings and catalogues.

² Public Archives of Canada, *Toronto Camera Club Collection*, Catalogue, *Toronto Camera Club Exhibition, 1902-03*, n.p. Steichen works in the exhibition as follows: *Rodin*, *John W. Alexander*, *William Chase*, *Narcissus*; Frank Eugene's contribution: *La Cigale*, *Portrait of Alfred Steiglitz*; Gertrude Kasebier: *The Red Man*, *Blessed Art Thou*, *Portrait of the Smoker*, *The Sisters*.

³ Public Archives of Canada, *Toronto Camera Club Collection*, *Toronto Camera Club 1914 Exhibition Catalogue*, n.p.

⁴ Charles HILL, *John Vanderpant Photographs* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1976), p.9.