

LIONEL LEMOINE FITZGERALD
(1890-1956): THE DEVELOPMENT
OF AN ARTIST

Catalogue accompanying an exhibition organized and circulated by the Winnipeg Art Gallery 1978 - 1979. Patricia E. Bovey and Ann Davis Winnipeg Art Gallery, Winnipeg. 1978. 128 pp., 108 ill. paperback: \$8.95, hardcover: \$19.95 An edition in French published simultaneously.

This 1978 - 1979 travelling exhibition and its accompanying catalogue is the first of its kind since the 1958 FitzGerald retrospective organized by the Winnipeg Art Gallery and the National Gallery of Canada two years after the artist's death. Ann Davis and Patricia Bovey are to be commended for the research in the catalogue, especially for their investigations into FitzGerald's various stylistic sources. Charles Hill's work on the artist for his 1975 *Canadian Painting in the Thirties* exhibition and catalogue was a major step forward in creating interest and enthusiasm for FitzGerald's work. This most recent exhibition has given Canadians a further opportunity to view the art of this Winnipeg painter, the last member to join the expanded Group of Seven.

The exhibition catalogue has its weaknesses and problems, most stemming from the authors' apparently arbitrary decision to divide the text into three thematic essays: Patricia Bovey's "The Man" and "Some European Influences on his Work" and Ann Davis' text "A North American Artist." These topics seem to have been invented for the writers' own convenience rather than being dictated by the nature of FitzGerald's *oeuvre*. A better approach would have been to discuss the artist's life and work in a single, extended essay, touching upon influences as they occurred chronologically. As a result of the three distinct sections, the catalogue is rather disjointed. Passages of FitzGerald's writing are quoted twice and nine works are re-

produced twice. The integrity of the layout suffers also as blank pages and floating reproductions not keyed to any text are used to separate the essays.

Bovey's writing style is a little halting and often pedantic in tone. She tends to romanticize FitzGerald in her essay "The Man" which, granted, is a pitfall difficult to avoid when dealing with such a reclusive artist who lived simply, was wholly dedicated to his art and teaching and is revered by so many former students. In her enquiries into his European influences, Bovey manages to deal with all the artists and groups FitzGerald ever discussed in his writings. But because these are many, she considers each source in only a cursory way. Her points about Millet, Seurat and Impressionism are convincing, but her understanding of Cezanne and the Russian Constructivists is meagre. In most instances, her ideas about what FitzGerald derived from the work of the various artists mentioned are not fully developed.

Davis' essay on the American influences on FitzGerald gives the topic a broad-brush treatment as well, which is perhaps the best that can be hoped for in a catalogue that discusses these ideas for the first time. Davis seems to have difficulty expressing her thoughts clearly and makes some rather ambiguous statements. For example, she writes: "FitzGerald achieved some of his greatest works through this relentless pursuit of clear, linear forms." She does not state what is great in FitzGerald's greatest works, or even identify these works. Furthermore what precisely is meant by "clear, linear forms"? Her division (within her essay) of the artist's *oeuvre* into four periods is sound, however, and forms a useful tool for study.

The authors' main failing is that they confine themselves to dealing with FitzGerald's work on a formal level only. All affinities to other artists' work are demonstrated on a superficial visual level only, never with regard to content. Other than formal, stylistic ones, no search is made for any qualities in other artists'

work to which FitzGerald himself may have responded. Davis and Bovey both quote liberally from FitzGerald's letters and diary. Although it is desirable to have the artist's thoughts available in published form, the passages are not always well integrated with the authors' text. At times Davis and Bovey skip over FitzGerald's expressions of deep and profoundly spiritual ideas without comment so that the quotations seem out of context in their own writing. Sometimes the writers come close to delving a little more deeply, but then stop. For example, Davis writes: "FitzGerald found universality in his own backyard," whereas she could have said that he created universality *from* his own backyard and have thus launched into a discussion of his content.

Several errors plague the catalogue and detract from its scholarly tone and aspirations. Bovey writes that FitzGerald was impressed by Seurat's *Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte* while in New York. The painting has been in the Chicago Art Institute since 1926 and the artist commented on it in his diary when he was visiting Chicago. Ten illustrations are given the wrong catalogue number in their captions, and numbers 80 and 81 on p. 64 are confused. In the acknowledgements, Grace Thompson of the FitzGerald Study Centre is called "Gail" and Irene Heywood Hemsworth, FitzGerald's friend and former pupil is referred to as "Irene Helmsworth Hayworth." The footnotes referring to each other's catalogue essays are left with "00" as page references and a work dated 1950 is given the date 1959 in the caption (number 77, p. 98). On p. 60 Ann Davis refers to the artist as "Fitz" with no quotation marks.

The state of research on FitzGerald has advanced since the publication of this catalogue. Kevin Forrest completed his Master's thesis at Carleton University, entitled *The Prints of Lionel LeMoine FitzGerald* in 1979. He proves that FitzGerald did not etch but only engraved, thus changing much previous catalogue in-

formation. As well, Forrest brings up FitzGerald's interest in the art and writing of William Blake which explains the source for FitzGerald's 1942-43 figure drawings; Bovey and Davis do not mention Blake but rather speculate that these stem from FitzGerald's contact with Kenneth Hayes Miller twenty years earlier.

Some viewers unable to get past the restraint in FitzGerald's work, find it hard to enjoy. This catalogue with its excellent reproductions, biographical detail and complete bibliography should help to break down such a barrier and aid in revealing the beauty and richness in FitzGerald's work. In the sense that it does open doors for further exploration and appreciation of FitzGerald's *oeuvre*, the catalogue is a laudable contribution to the literature of Canadian art history.

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PAUL-ÉMILE BORDUAS
(1905-1960) BIOGRAPHIE
CRITIQUE ET ANALYSE
DE L'OEUVRE.

François-Marc Gagnon,
Éditions Fides, Montréal, 1978
650 pages, 141 ill. n. et b., XXVIII ill.
coul. \$25.00

*Miscellanées*¹

Pour le dire succinctement et un peu d'une manière paradoxale, je qualifierais ce livre d'incomplet, en ajoutant aussitôt que c'est ce qui fait son intérêt. C'est donc dire d'emblée que j'ai aimé ce livre mais qu'il m'a laissé insatisfait.

F.-M. Gagnon s'intéresse depuis assez longtemps au «cas Borduas» et cette