

**The Robert McLaughlin Gallery,
Oshawa — Permanent Collection**

Joan Murray, staff editor:

Jennifer C. Watson, research &
compilation

The Robert McLaughlin Gallery,
Oshawa, 1978

129 pp., 199 black and white ill.,
2 colour ill., \$20.00

**The University of Guelph Art
Collection: A Catalogue of
Paintings, Drawings, Prints
and Sculpture**

Judith B. Nasby, Curator of Art

Univ. of Guelph, 1980

410 pp., 479 black and white ill.,
31 colour ill., \$15.00

**Checklist of the Paintings,
Prints and Drawings in the
Collection of the Robert Hull
Fleming Museum**

Nina G. Parris, compilation

The Robert Hull Fleming

Museum, Univ. of Vermont,

Burlington, 1977

166 pp., 4 ill., \$7.50

The compilation and design of a permanent collection catalogue in many ways resembles the assembling and mounting of a large and complex exhibition of works of diverse schools, periods and media, in one place at one time. The analogy holds in that the catalogue must do justice to the individual works and to the overall theme of a gallery's acquisition practices, through an articulate, logical, consistent and sensitive arrangement of the whole material. The catalogue therefore is more than simply a record of contents and will invariably condition the user's attitude toward the institution and the collection that it houses. It is therefore essential that it be carefully researched and skilfully designed for maximum didactic efficiency and convenience of use.

The catalogues of the Robert McLaughlin Gallery (R.McL.G.) and the University of Guelph Art Collection (U.G.A.C.) are the main subjects for this review. The Robert Hull Fleming Museum (R.H.F.M.) checklist is included here since it offers an alternate and distinctive solution to the common problem, as viewed by a museum of

comparative scale and scope of operations. One can safely assume that the decision to publish in each case was one made on the basis of a collection that quite recently, both qualitatively and quantitatively appeared to demand this summation in print. Given the prohibitive costs involved in printing illustrated material it cannot have been a decision either undertaken lightly or without considerable planning.

In the first place there would be the need to pull together a research team under an editor responsible for establishing division of labour (updating artists' files, publication and exhibition histories of individual works, establishing precise measurements for all works and noting the exact medium of each work.) The U.G.A.C. catalogue lists sixteen research assistants and the R.H.F.M. lists fifty-six research assistants. The two universities in question would undoubtedly enjoy an advantage in this respect given the numbers of willing and able students available for a project such as this. Critical paths must be established to keep the work from dragging on over such an extended period of time that when finally concluded it is necessary to update research previously completed. One can glean from the respective "Introductions" that the R.McL. G. devoted six years of its energies to this task and the R.H.F.M., five years. Available existing models of catalogues must be examined and camera work undertaken on an ongoing basis to assure the best photographic record possible.

A special problem unique unto this type of catalogue production is that the finished product cannot simply be constructed around what exists at the point of publication. It must also anticipate to some degree what is to come. Given the time expended in research and the sizeable outlay funds, catalogues such as these will generally have to serve to document the particular collection for a considerable portion of the foreseeable future, perhaps as much as ten to fifteen years; this despite the fact that public collections are living organisms that will continuously expand at a steady rate. Joan Murray points out in the "Acknowledgements" for the R.McL.G. catalogue that between the cut-off date for com-

pletion of research and compilation (end of 1977) and the publication date (in 1978), sixty-three additional works entered the collection. Aside from emphasizing the necessity to keep to a critical path of production dates, this situation emphasizes the importance of considering future publications in planning for the present.

The finished catalogue will have to have been designed in the context of at least the following considerations: a) will it be seriously outdated and of little further value within ten to fifteen years, or b) given the careful research, entry notations etc. will it continue to be of use even when a companion volume eventually appears? c) will the original catalogue permit sensible supplementary sections to be added beside it so that *in toto* the publications parallel and catch up to the collection itself at regular intervals? There is, of course, no entirely satisfactory answer to these questions; nonetheless these and other possibilities must all be considered from the point of the inception of the project. A further ramification directly related to this problem is that Directors and/or Curators involved in such a project often emerge with new insights into their collections and in this respect catalogues such as these have a real impact upon the direction and growth of public collections.

Another factor to be considered in the planning stage has to be the need to satisfy the differing but not necessarily mutually exclusive demands of: a) maintaining professional standards in art historical publications; b) honestly portraying the true nature of the collection, and *all* collections formed as they are over the years by numerous personalities involved in acquisitions ebb and flow in terms of judicious and injudicious decisions (university art collections are often at the tender mercies of zealous alumni only too willing to foist upon them souvenirs of trips to "exotic lands.") On a more serious note the relatively more rapid turn-over of curatorial staff in smaller institutions often results in an eclectic collection. Smaller institutions often have their beginnings in unusual and borderline groupings of work around which the institution in fact originally coalesced; c) there is also the need to impress upon the governing body of the institu-

tion the value of the collection and the need to sustain and build upon it; d) the publication, finally, will have to have a sufficiently wide appeal in appearance and content to be saleable in order to provide some revenues to offset its costs.

The ultimate determinant as to the nature of the publication in its appearance and probably also the quality of its contents has to be that of the available funding. Funds have to be solicited from a number of sources. In this regard both the R.McL.G. and U.G.A.C. find themselves blessed in their location in the province of Wintario. In addition to grants from this source, a reading of the respective "Acknowledgements" of these two catalogues indicates the additional sources that had to be tapped. The R.H.F.M. also recounts its funding by the Museum Program of the National Endowment for the Arts (U.S.A.) and additional trust funds. This and all of the foregoing factors play a part in determining the eventual appearance of the publication which, in turn, will likely reflect the many compromises made along the way from inception to completion.

The R.McL.G. catalogue commences with a "Foreword" by Joan Murray dealing with the funding of the Gallery's collection based upon "thirty-seven paintings willed to the City of Oshawa by Alexandra Luke, to be held 'til such time as a non-commercial art or picture gallery is established in Oshawa, wherein they can be properly displayed." The "Foreword" then details the growth of the collection and continues on to discuss the role of Alexandra Luke. There then follows a page by Jennifer Watson devoted to explanatory notes on the organization and content of the catalogue entries and use of abbreviations.

The entries are made alphabetically according to artists' surnames "regardless of school or country." This arrangement of course scatters the relatively few non-Canadian entries throughout the catalogue, rather than orphaning them in a small section at the conclusion. It also is obviously designed to permit an easy search for a particular artist. In fact this intention is frustrated to some degree by an unfortunate text design and idiosyncratic placement of certain groups of works.

The use of a four-column text per page format together with a continuous entry format means that a particular artist's entry can begin at any point within a column depending upon the conclusion of the immediately preceding entry; as a result information frequently continues to the top of a few column and is broken by page turnings. A dictionary scheme is employed by prefacing the top left-hand side of a new page with the surname of the artist whose entry has been continued from the previous page. However English language dictionaries preface a new page *not* by repeating a previous page entry's name, but rather by noting the *succeeding* entry on the new page.

Further confusion arises in the R. McL. G. catalogue when in the course of the alphabetical sequence one encounters, immediately following "Eccles, R.K." (p. 16) for example, the entry "Editions I A set of thirty award-winning prints from a juried competition sponsored by the Ontario Arts Council in 1974." Immediately following this explanatory note appears the alphabetical listing of the thirty artists concerned, over pages 17 to 20, in an identical type-face, scale and entry system used throughout the catalogue. If one opens the catalogue by chance in the midst of this particular entry one can be easily confused by this second alphabetical listing apparently out of synch with the remainder of the catalogue. The next entry to follow, on p. 21 is "Eyre, Ivan" following on immediately without sufficient pause, leaving one with the initial impression that this is a misplaced entry from the "Editions I" grouping.

The same situation is repeated following "Gordon, John S." (p. 32) where one finds the "John Gordon Portfolio" running from p. 32 through to p. 35, immediately followed on p. 36 by "Gould, John"; "Jones, Phyllis" (p. 46) is followed by "Japanese Prints" (pp. 47-53). The first two columns on p. 53 conclude the "Japanese Prints", the remaining two columns move on to "Jopling, F.W."; "Olympic Prints" follow "Novak, Nicholas" on p. 93 through to "Panabaker, Frank" on p. 94. One gets the hang of this if one reads the catalogue strictly in sequence from start to finish, but catalogues of this type are reference tools, not gener-

ally handled in that manner by the reader.

Groupings of special collections always create something of a problem for publications, as is clearly evident in this catalogue. Perhaps, given the density of information and text per page it would have been wiser to collect these groupings within a separate, clearly identifiable, section. It might have then been possible to find a home for "Oscar Cahen's illustrations excluded" (p. xiii) (Illustrations of and for precisely what?) in the catalogue.

The individual entries themselves are praiseworthy and Jennifer Watson is to be congratulated for her efforts in this respect. They provide all the necessary information one could hope to usefully find in a catalogue such as this: artist's name, dates, title of work, year, a very complete description of the physical nature of the work, size (metric only), artist's notations on the work, provenance, accession code, and exhibition history of the work. In addition and on occasion information is included, where appropriate, as to watermarks and pentimenti. Where the notation "Literature" is appended to an entry, a somewhat heavy concentration is made upon "in house" publications such as *What's Happening at the Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa*. The annotation of random works in the form of explanatory remarks concerning a particular choice of subject matter or medium by an artist is invariably interesting and refreshing as it serves to punctuate and enliven the unfolding roll-call of artists, works and specifications.

Limiting the type-face styles to two, on two differing scales and employing bold type for entry headings, italics for titles, artists' signatures and print enumerations helps to clarify the sequence of information, but from a visual point of view it makes for a very busy page. Photographic reproductions are numbered consecutively throughout, at the lower left hand corner of the image; the number is then repeated immediately before the title of the work in the text column.

The U.G.A.C. catalogue is a handsome production and an ambitious one for a university art gallery. Following a "Foreword," "Acknowledgements" and discussion of Dr. O.J. Stevenson's

contributions in initiating a "college art collection," p. xiii provides the reader with explanatory notes on the catalogue, and its systems. As is the case with the R.McL.G. catalogue, entries are made alphabetically according to artists' surnames regardless of country and school of origin or period of activity.

Each entry commences a new page so that one is readily able to establish whether a particular artist is represented in the U.G.A.C. The disadvantages of the system appear in disconcerting encounters such as "Goya y Lucientes" sandwiched between "James Gordaneer" and "K.M. Graham" or "Rembrandt van Rijn" flanked by "George A. Reid" and "Jack Reppen"! The overall attitude of the U.G.A.C. is to allow for a more lavish format than is the case in the R.McL.G. example; as a consequence certain benefits do accrue to the reader. The entries are arranged in what is essentially a three-column format, the first column invariably providing biographical information on the artist: full name, nationality, date and place of birth and (when appropriate) death. The biographical column also contains a brief summary of the artist's education, important exhibitions and short notes on the characteristic style and subject matter of the artist.

The column devoted to specifications of the works themselves gives in standardized form the title, date, medium, size (metric only), signature/date and the accession number, provenance, exhibitions and, under "References" where and when the work has been published. This entry information is never broken over two pages and each succeeding and complete listing of a particular artist's work commences anew on a second or third page where required. Each succeeding entry on an artist commences a new page and is emphasized by means of a double ruled line above the new entry's name. In no case is there more than one artist listed per page. The arrangement of all information on a page usually allows for generous quantities of type-free space.

Two point sizes are essentially used for the type, the larger for biographical information and the smaller for the specifications. Within this format the

use of italics and two different "weights" of type further serves to clearly distinguish between the variety of information being offered. Photographic reproductions are identified by means of the U.G.A.C. accession number at the lower right corner of the image which, itself, is always placed in close proximity to the particular listing for the work. All in all these factors make for a highly legible, clearly organized, reassuringly consistent, easily-learned system.

At the conclusion of the alphabetical sequence there is a section somewhat lamely identified as "Other artists" (pp. 394-401) devoted to "Unidentified" Chinese, Canadian and Inuit artists. A listing of "Portraits of Record" (pp. 403-05) is oddly separated from "Index of Portraits" (p. 410) when there is some apparent connection between the two pieces of information. An "Index of Artists" (pp. 406-09) lists artists in the collection by nationality within "American," "British and European" and "Canadian" groupings, with a final small group of "other artists."

The R.H.F.M. *Checklist* as its name infers represents an alternative to the illustrated catalogues already discussed. A *Foreword* provides a brief description of the origins of the collection and on p. 10 "An Explanation of Format" notes the checklist methodology. The system employed here sees a division made between "North American artists" (alphabetical listing according to artists' surnames) and "European and Latin American artists" (alphabetically according to nations within each of which, alphabetical listing of artists' surnames.) Each of the two divisions is prefaced by a "Bibliography" but the "North American" contains no standard references for the section on "Canada" (pp. 117-18). The reason for this *lacuna* can only be that at the time of going to press the R.H.F.M. possessed only nine works by six Canadian artists.

The *Checklist* employs a format based upon a two-column structure with individual entries broken, where necessary, over successive pages. Artists' names are given in a bold type-face, titles of works in largest point scale and upper case lettering. Following the artist's names there appears a concise

biography and bibliographical references to the artist. Specifications of the works are curt and to the point: medium, size (metric only), signature/date location, museum accession number, occasional exhibition references, and provenance, all arranged in a block without headings.

The comparatively modest approach of a checklist format at times appears to have encouraged a somewhat slipshod layout. The top of the first column on p. 124 is inexplicably blank leaving one with the impression that some information may be missing; p. 125, the last two entries of the second column are printed out of line with the preceding information. There is also, at times, a certain vagueness in maintaining the pre-determined "box" for textual information (p. 128), probably in an attempt to avoid breaking individual entries over two pages.

The *Checklist* has no photographic reproductions, and as a result the great advantage to the R.H.F.M. has to have been a comparatively low production cost. As Nina Parris mentions in her "Introduction" the hope was that this would be the first in a series of publications necessary to cover the eclectic collection held by the R.H.F.M. In fact a companion volume published in 1980 (*Recent Gifts and Acquisitions 1976-1980*) has appeared in the interim. This new volume (not seen by the author) does not however cover all the remaining areas of the collection left out of the original 1977 publication; for the moment no further companion volumes are planned. However the initial decision to produce a modest checklist has permitted a complementary volume to appear within a three year period.

The checklist approach brings one naturally to the issue of photographic reproductions. The R.H.F.M. decision not to reproduce works (the four illustrations are based on "photocopies of the architectural plans by McKim, Mead and White of New York City for the Fleming Museum in 1930") obviously makes the heaviest demands upon the user of the three publications being considered. The *Checklist* is designed for the scholar with sufficient knowledge of the field concerned not to need reproductions. (The R.H.F.M. *Recent Gifts and Acquisitions* has however included eighteen black and white

and one [on the cover] four-colour reproductions). If the original intention of separate volumes on the various areas of the R.H.F.M. collection is honoured then the scholar need only acquire the volume of particular concern — a saving in costs to museum and user alike. Another advantage is that the individual volume can be relatively slim and portable (8" x 8½" x ½" - 20.2 x 21.5 x 1.5 cm) and easily used as a reference guide when touring the museum.

The R.McL.G. offers two, four-colour and 199 black and white reproductions thus covering 26.6% of the 755 works in its collection as of December 1977 in a format correspondingly more substantial in scale and weight (9¾" x 8½" x ½" - 24.7 x 21.5 x 1.5 cm). The reproductions themselves vary in scale from approximately six to sixteen square inches (39 cm² to 103 cm²). This range however is not related in any manner to the different sizes of the works reproduced so that one must check the specifications in order to imagine the actual scale of the original. The reproductions are scattered with a certain random abandon throughout, a consequence no doubt of having settled upon the four-column layout. This further serves to break up the flow of information on any one page. The quality of reproduction appears acceptable although one is at a loss to explain the rakish angle of the printing of F.W. Jopling's *Whirlpool Rapids...* on p. 53, apparently subject to the forces portrayed in this mezzotint.

The U.G.A.C. catalogue contains thirty-one four-colour and 479 black and white reproductions, representing a little over 70% of the 674 works listed. This greater proportion of reproductions in comparison with the R.McL.G. catalogue tells in the overall dimensions of the U.G.A.C. publication: 10½" x 8½" x 1" - 26.6 x 21.5 x 2.5 cm. The individual reproductions are correspondingly more generous in scale ranging in general from five to thirty-six square inches in area (32 cm² to 232 cm²). Once again the relative scale of the reproductions has been considered more in terms of the over-all design of the catalogue rather than the specifics of the individual works. One further point in common between the R.McL.G. and U.G.A.C. catalogues is that neither one can

guarantee the user that what is reproduced is *not* a cropped image. A rule of thumb to be followed here is to always permit an edge of paper, liner, frame or contrasting ground to remain apparent in order to guarantee full inclusion of the image.

Under completely ideal conditions every Director/Curator would like to see the majority of paintings reproduced to appear in a four-colour process. Given the prohibitive costs of colour printing this is generally not feasible. The R.McL.G. contents itself with two colour reproductions, William Ronald's 1956 *J'Accuse* on the cover (a handsome and appropriate choice given the R.McL.G.'s concern with the Painters Eleven) and Alexandra's Luke's 1957 *Symphony* as a frontispiece to the "Foreword." The U.G.A.C. catalogue, in addition to the juxtaposition of an "ancient" and "modern" Canadian work on its cover again reflects its more lavish ambitions in reproducing thirty-one works in colour in a sixteen page grouping at the catalogue centre. Each of these works is reproduced again in black and white beside its particular entry, a debatable duplication when one considers costs, but necessary to maintain uniformity of catalogue design. Obviously scattering the colour reproductions throughout and beside particular entries would have vastly increased printing costs and could not have been seriously considered.

In summation one is presented then with three distinct approaches to the problem of permanent collection catalogue publication. The R.McL.G.'s catalogue some may feel suffers in respect to overall design and lay-out, but is a relatively compact, informative, reasonably well-illustrated reference work that would be of equal value both in the presence of and apart from the collection. The scale of its undertaking would not seem to prohibit a companion or supplemental volume from appearing within the period of ten to fifteen years from the original publication date. The U.G.A.C. catalogue is well designed, fully illustrated and constructed with a high degree of legibility in mind. The comparatively more lavish attitude would seem to suggest that this publication will have to stand for its collection far into the

forseeable future. This might not be as critical an issue for a university collection where acquisitions generally mount at a rather less dramatic pace than at other types of public art galleries. The comparatively austere approach of the R.H.F.M. has established a modest policy in collection publication for that institution. The benefits in low initial costs and in allowing a second volume to appear quite recently are readily apparent. If nothing more it is a well-designed *aide-memoire* and an enticement to visit first-hand, the R.H.F.M. Any comparatively scaled institution embarking upon a similar project would be well-advised to consider the options offered by these three recent publications.

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