



Art Libraries Society of North America, 34th Annual Conference Fairmont Banff Springs, Banff, Alberta, May 5-9, 2006

Session 7: Art Books, Books in Art: The Canadian Chronicle
Sunday, May 7, 2006, 9:00 am - 10:30 am

Moderator: Cheryl Siegel, Vancouver Art Gallery

Speakers:

Jo Nordley Beglo, Bibliographer, National Gallery of Canada
Randall Speller, Librarian, Art Gallery of Ontario
Carole Gerson, Professor, English Dept., Simon Fraser University

Recorder: Carole Goldsmith, Simon Fraser University

Summary:

The moderator, Cheryl Siegel, introduced the speakers and described the *History of the Book in Canada* project. The *History of the Book in Canada* is a federally funded project bringing together scholars and historians from various disciplines, with the aim of producing an interdisciplinary history of book publishing and book arts in Canada from the beginnings to 1980. Eventually 6 volumes will be published – 3 in English and 3 in French. An online bibliography is also being compiled. The three speakers have contributed to this landmark undertaking which considers the place of the book and book arts in Canadian society.

Jo Nordley Beglo "The Encouragement of Interest in Art: 125 Years of National Gallery Publications"

Jo Beglo discussed the evolution of the National Gallery of Canada's publishing program and its contribution to our national heritage. In 2005, the NGC Library and Archives presented an exhibition that displayed 125 years of the Gallery's publications. In her research for this exhibition, Ms. Beglo explored the role that NGC publications played in establishing and disseminating a canon of quintessentially Canadian visual images.

From modest beginnings in 1882, the National Gallery has developed an internationally respected publishing program. Annual lists of the Gallery's founding collection were originally published in the House of Commons *Sessional Papers*. The first separately published catalogue of the National Gallery was prepared for the official opening in 1882. Entries in the catalogue were very brief and typical of early catalogues, consisting of a simple listing of works added to the permanent collection. In 1913, The National Gallery of Canada was incorporated by an Act of Parliament and Eric Brown was confirmed as Director. The Gallery's mandate was legislated as "the encouragement and cultivation of correct artistic taste and Canadian public interest in the fine arts." Despite major challenges, Brown created a broad exhibition program, encompassing contemporary and historical Canadian and foreign art. His vision would ultimately define the publishing program.

To encourage an interest in art across Canada, Brown developed an unprecedented exhibition program that fostered the development of museums and art schools across the

country. In 1916, the Parliament Buildings were destroyed by fire and the Gallery space was occupied by legislators. With the National Gallery closed, treasures from the Gallery were shipped from coast to coast. In 1921, Brown reported that "...there is hardly a town or city of any size in the Dominion which has not had the opportunity of seeing artistic work of good quality." The Gallery reopened in 1921, with the exhibition, *Pictures and Sketches by Tom Thomson*, accompanied by a simple catalogue.

In 1924, The Gallery organized a major exhibition of Canadian art for the British Empire Exhibition in London. The exhibition was a great success, and introduced the work of Tom Thomson and his contemporaries to a European audience. Canada was the only Dominion to produce its own catalogue, as well as a second publication, *A Portfolio of Pictures from the Canadian section*, with full page illustrations. J.E.H. MacDonald designed the covers of both publications, with scenes evoking the Canadian landscape. In 1927, more Canadian works from the second British Empire Exhibition were exhibited in Paris. The exhibition catalogue cover was again designed by J.E.H. MacDonald. A popular poster, designed by Thoreau MacDonald, was described by Eric Brown as "typically Canadian in conception," and featured a pair of stylized deer in flight across a frozen landscape.

From the 1920s, the National Gallery publishing program has continued without interruption, producing critical and historical studies, bibliographies and exhibition catalogues. In 1975 the Gallery published *Canadian Painting in the Thirties* by Charles Hill, which remains a seminal work on Canadian art history. In 1988, the Gallery published a major catalogue, *Degas*, in collaboration with the Metropolitan Museum, New York and the Réunion des musées nationaux Paris; and *Master Drawings from the National Gallery of Canada*, in collaboration with the National Gallery of Art in Washington. The National Gallery now stands in the mainstream of international art publishing, producing comprehensive scholarly catalogues, often in partnership with other museums and university presses.

In 1978 ARLIS/NA recognized the National Gallery of Canada for "continuing commitment to excellence in its diversified publishing program." National Gallery of Canada publications have received numerous honours, including the George Wittenborn Memorial Book Award. The Gallery's commitment to the encouragement of interest in Canadian and foreign art continues across the span of 125 years into the 21st century.

Randall Speller "Canadian Artists and Books: 1920-1970"

Randall Speller outlined the contribution of Canadian artists to the history of book publishing in the 20th century, with many exemplary examples of book design and illustrations.

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, publishers turned to illustrators and designers to meet the challenges of a rapidly changing marketplace. Some Canadian artists, like Palmer Cox and Henry Sandham, moved to the United States or England, where there were more opportunities in commercial art and trade publishing. Palmer Cox invented the "Brownies" in 1883, for *St. Nicholas Magazine* in the United States. Cox successfully marketed his creation, endorsing products from clocks to Nabisco cookies. In 1900, Eastman Kodak named the Brownie Kodak camera after the popular elf-like creatures. Henry Sandham also worked as a successful illustrator for American magazines, such as *the Century Magazine*.

By 1900 Toronto had emerged as the centre of English language publishing and printing in Canada. As the Canadian publishing industry began to develop, many Canadian artists, such as C.W. Jefferys and Tom Thomson, returned to work in Toronto and other major cities. Jefferys became one of Canada's most important book and text-book illustrators.

Illustration and commercial design was the most important source of income for artists well into the 1960s. Many well known artists worked for commercial advertising companies. A *Canadaink* 1927 magazine cover by A.Y. Jackson helped the Canada Printing Ink Company show off its products, while a 1926 Ford Motor Company brochure illustrated by Frank Carmichael showed the increasing sophistication of Canadian commercial advertising.

The 1920s saw a new era of national pride, resulting in new ideas about Canada as a place worth celebrating. Publishers turned to artists to create a new look, using 'Canadian' images and scenery. Many illustrators were influenced by the Arts and Crafts movement, with its aesthetic of flat, decorative and patterned forms. J.E.H. MacDonald, one of the founding members of the Group of Seven, was the most influential commercial illustrator of the 1920s. MacDonald's work focused on the illustrated elements of the book. The title page and endpapers were often hand-lettered and illuminated with botanical motifs. Other members of the Groups of Seven were equally famous as illustrators. Lawren Harris and Frederick Varley's works defined and influenced most Canadian design and illustration until the 1950s.

The 1930s were dominated by Thoreau MacDonald. He modernized the arts and crafts elements from the 1920s into a very distinctive and recognizable style. He also introduced the notion of package design to the book trade. Many of his works, such as *Maria Chapdelaine* (1938), are highly collectible. Although modern artists such as Bertram Brooker introduced experimental ideas in design, most bookwork remained conservative. The advent of WWII introduced an ambitious program of original Canadian publishing. "The Thorn-Apple Tree" (1944) with richly printed woodcuts by Franklin Carmichael, provided a nostalgic, reassuring look at early pioneer life. The post war period saw the impact of cheaper photography and the dominance of well-designed, attractive American books.

In order to compete in the international market, Canadian publishers turned to typography and book design. The arrival of several European book designers in the early 1950s transformed Canadian publishing. Designers worked closely with producers to create less expensive and more attractive books. In 1965, Frank Newfeld won bronze and silver medals at the Internationale Buchkunst-Ausstellung in Leipzig for his design and illustrations for *The Chequered Shade* (1963) and *Within the Zodiac* (1964). Geoffrey Matthew's *Economic Atlas of Ontario* won the "most beautiful book in the world" award at Leipzig in 1969.

The 1960s was an era of experimental writing and publishing. The Centennial celebrations of 1967 coincided with the arrival of small publishing houses, such as The House of Anansi, The New Press and Oberon Press. By the 1970s design and illustration had all but disappeared in major publishing firms, although design advocates remained active. In 1981, the Alcuin Society began its Annual Awards in Book Design, the only national competition in Canada that celebrates the art of book design. Small presses, such as Coach House Press, Talon Books, Collections du Nénuphar and Porcupine's Quill have made illustration and design an important part of book production.

Today, with the advent of computer production and a highly competitive marketplace, we are witnessing a return to design principles. Although illustration no longer plays a central role in mainstream Canadian publishing, the study of design and illustration can bring the work of many lesser known artists to light.

Carole Gerson " Books and Reading in Canadian Art"

Carole Gerson discussed the portrayal of books and reading in relation to social issues such as class, gender and nationalism. For *History of the Book in Canada* vol. 3, Prof. Gerson and Yvan Lamonde co-authored "Books and Reading in Canadian Art," which examined social attitudes towards books and reading as represented in Canadian images.

Conventional portraits of early North American settlers used the book as a symbol of piety or culture, while shelves of books indicated learning and authority. Most 18th and early 19th C. portraits show women holding a single book, whereas men tend to be depicted in their libraries. Single books could serve as signs of faith, as with four portraits of nuns from Quebec, by Antoine Plamondon. Shelves of books or libraries were associated with the professions, civil service and Protestant clergy.

In the early 19th C., books and reading material might be prominently placed in a domestic scene to indicate gentility, as in Wm. Berczy's 1809 portrait of the Woolsey family. In the early 1800s, images of absorbed readers were rare. . A closed book represented a certain social status. Readers may be depicted with partially opened or open books, gazing toward the book or towards the artist. By the second half of the 19th C., scenes of reading and readers became more varied, reflecting romantic interests and sentimental attitudes to children. One of Canada's most familiar images of young readers is George Reid's *Forbidden Fruit* (1889), depicting a country boy hiding in the hayloft with his book.

Between 1840 and 1918, the active woman reader was more frequently seen in paintings than the male reader. The Victorian era was a period when the secular woman reader began to pervade Anglo-American mass culture, the significance of which is up for discussion. Did she represent an assertion of individuality and educational advancement, or was she a threatening figure whose actions could disrupt family life and society? Did the "self-absorbed" and often "sexualized" woman reader simply maintain the "perspective of the male gaze" or did she imply a radical change?

In the 20th century, landscape painting prevailed as the main focus of Canadian art, while artists retained earlier patterns of representing books and reading in portraits and still life arrangements. Although the earlier practice of using books to signal social or intellectual status didn't completely disappear, images of books in 20th C. art and photography strengthened the link between reading and gender. In formal portraits of men, books identify the subject as an author, such as Edwin Holgate's portrait of Stephen Leacock (1943) and Yousuf Karsh's photographs of Marshall McLuhan. Women are more commonly depicted as readers - as consumers rather than as creators of texts. The image of the solitary reader implies intimacy between painter and subject, and also between subject and viewer. Images of men reading are relatively rare and usually created by friends or relatives. Unidentified men are usually shown reading a newspaper or magazine.

Most scenes of reading occur in domestic sites; scenes of outdoor reading involving women usually relate to social occasions such as a picnic. In formal portraiture, two standard poses prevail: the subject may gaze outward at the viewer while holding a closed book, or may appear as an interrupted reader glancing up from an open book, bringing the full face into view. However, most depictions of women readers present the woman as utterly absorbed. The solitary woman reader embodies the pleasure of reading as a fulfilling experience. The erotic potential of the image is expressed in Edwin Holgate's *Mother and Daughter* (1926), in which the woman and child are so absorbed in their book that the mother's nakedness goes unnoticed. Pairs of readers are usually female, or male and female.

The symbolic weight of the book as cultural artifact and repository of knowledge contributes to its continuing presence in still life paintings. Artists such as Ozias Leduc, David Milne, Goodridge Roberts, Alfred Pellan and Maxwell Bates used books in their works to invoke the life of the mind, sometimes identifying the book's author or title to add further meaning.

In the 1960s and 1970s, books began to appear in sculptures and installations. Joyce Wieland transformed books into art and art into books with her 1971 exhibit, "True Patriot Love / Veritable Amour Patriotique," in which she appropriated an existing government technical pamphlet, adding her own works to the text. Michael Snow's "Cover to Cover" (1975) is an upaginated volume whose text consists of photographs arranged to subvert conventional notions of the book. In the 1980s, feminist and First Nations artists added long written passages to visual images, as a major political strategy. Artists such as Charles Rea used discarded books in three dimensional sculptural works, taking a further step in the artistic trend to simultaneously hallow and challenge the sanctity of the material book.