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**Robert Hugh Ayre (1900 - 1980), Art - A Place in the Community.
Reviews at The Gazette, Montreal (1935 - 1937) and at The Standard, Montreal
(1938 - 1942).**

Lois Valliant

**A Thesis
in
The Department
of
Art History**

**Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts at
Concordia University
Montréal, Québec, Canada**

March 1991

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ABSTRACT

Robert Hugh Ayre (1900 - 1980), *Art - A Place in the Community*.
Reviews at The Gazette, Montreal (1935 - 1937) and at The Standard, Montreal
(1938 - 1942).

Lois Valliant

This paper is a study of the development of Robert Hugh Ayre's art criticism at The Gazette, Montreal (1935-1937) and at The Standard, Montreal (1938-1942) throughout his mandate at these newspapers. A particular concern of these writings was the place of art in the community. The role of art in society was defined on many occasions by Robert Ayre as meaning that art and artists should play an integral role in society. In Ayre's estimation, it was imperative that society perceive its artists as essential stewards of social and cultural significance. His contention was that society should work toward creating a community integrated into the spirit and the pattern of its culture, with the visual arts a central force.

Ayre's journalistic art reviews at The Standard and The Gazette, throughout the 1930's and 1940's are the basis of this thesis. These documents will therefore be analyzed to determine the evolution of Ayre's critical philosophy. As well, under consideration will be the manner in which he disseminated this philosophy to his readers.

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I should like to extend my thanks to the many individuals who helped me to bring this thesis to fruition. In particular, I am grateful to Nicholas and John Ayre, and the late Mrs. Thelma Ayre, for their verbal and written information and access to various family documents. I appreciate, as well, the invaluable contribution of Louis Muhlstöck in sharing his memories of Robert Ayre and for his enthusiastic support. Also deserving of thanks are the staffs of the Queen's University Archives and the Bibliothèque nationale du Québec. Appreciation is extended to Associate Professor Laurier Lacroix of l'Université du Québec à Montréal who brought to my attention Robert Ayre's criticism.

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This thesis is dedicated
to the memory of
Winnifred Dixon Bruce (1898 - 1975).

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INTRODUCTION

In April 1924, an article entitled "Art Development on the Prairies" was published in the Free Press, Winnipeg. This piece by Robert Hugh Ayre, who was then a general feature writer for the newspaper, pointed out the potential of the Canadian Prairies to foster a distinctive school of art. More particularly, the writer urged Winnipeggers to play a more active role in the development of art in their city. It was Ayre's first piece of journalistic art reporting. He was twenty-four years old.

This article inaugurated an art-writing career which would record over five decades of art in Canada, and distinguish Robert Ayre as an acclaimed Canadian art critic, particularly in the Montreal art milieu. It also contained the nucleus of his philosophic position which demanded the integration of art in the community and by the community. Similarly, the purpose of his numerous articles at The Gazette (1935-1937) and The Standard (1938-1942) in Montreal was to convince his readers of the need for establishing a positive environment for the growth of the visual arts in Canada, and particularly in his adopted city.

Ayre's notion of art in the community, which is the focus of this thesis, was defined on many occasions by him to imply that art and artists must play an integral role in society. He believed it was imperative that society perceive artists as essential stewards of social and cultural significance. His primary contention was that society should work toward creating a community integrated

in the spirit and in the pattern of its culture, with the visual arts at the centre.¹ It is now generally conceded that during the 1930's, in the face of widespread economic and social dislocation, many artists felt the need to re-evaluate their relation to society. They felt isolated in their studios, cut off from a public that either ignored or misunderstood them, or purchased their works merely as luxury goods.² Ayre felt that it was his duty as a critic to be receptive to the needs of the artist and as he stated "get the public to be receptive too."³

By 1930, when Ayre was transferred with the Canadian National Railway's Publicity department from Winnipeg to its headquarters in Montreal,⁴ he brought with him considerable experience in newspaper work. He was also becoming known as a frequent publisher of articles in the Canadian Forum and the Queen's Quarterly. However, between 1928 and 1930, most of his critical analysis concerned the theatre arts and the field of literature. Consequently, Ayre, like many art critics of his generation, developed his writing skills in a broad-based literary field prior to utilizing them in the field of critical journalistic writing on the visual arts. This provided him with a solid reputation as being an

¹Lois Valliant, "Robert Ayre, 1900-1980 - A Critic for the 30's and 40's," International Association of Art Critics - Universities Art Association of Canada, Montreal, Nov. 7-10, 1984. Ayre's interest in the democratization of art in society was the subject of this address at the conference.

²Charles Hill, Canadian Painting in the Thirties, (Ottawa: The National Gallery of Canada, 1975): 15.

³Robert Ayre, "Art in a Cold Climate," text of speech to the Manitoba Educational Association, Winnipeg, 28 March 1967, ts., Robert Ayre papers, Queen's University Archives, Kingston, Ontario. Ayre discusses the art milieu in the 1930's and 1940's and the role he played as an art critic.

⁴Robert Ayre, Winnipeg, to Heit [publisher], loc. unknown, 7 Sept. 1942, private collection. In 1942, Heit was responsible for the promotion of Ayre's play, "Mr. Sycamore."

author of some authority, and no doubt assured his credibility when he entered the field of art writing.

Although Ayre wrote for the Canadian Forum, Queen's Quarterly, The Canadian Geographic, New Frontier, Saturday Night, and other publications⁵ during the 1930's and 1940's, it is through his art commentaries in The Gazette and in The Standard that he established himself as an art critic. His column for The Gazette and The Standard, extending over the period 1935 to 1942, was the genesis and foundation of his art writing career.⁶ An analysis of these columns reveals some of Ayre's most significant, penetrating and interpretive thoughts on art and art criticism. Catholic in his attitude to art throughout Canada, yet most loyal to the Montreal art milieu, he presented a myriad of topics to his readers. Amongst the many subjects he discussed were new books on art, both locally mounted and travelling exhibitions at public institutions and commercial galleries, and newly arrived artists in Montreal. As well, he reviewed and noted new movements in art in Europe and North America; art associations and groups formed in Montreal; and key events in the art world taking place elsewhere in Canada, in the U.S.A., Continental Europe and Great Britain.

Ayre's metier was the trenchant paragraph or short essay, a format he

⁵A bibliography of his writing for publications noted here and other publications outside of the visual arts is attached to the thesis as appendix A.

⁶Ayre's column for The Gazette (1935-1937) appeared once a week in the Saturday edition of the paper. On that basis he produced at least 100 articles while writing for this publication. As well as general book reviews, he wrote approximately 50 articles on the visual arts. At The Standard (1938-1942) which was published only on Saturday, Ayre contributed some 200 articles.

utilized most effectively in his numerous columns for The Gazette and The Standard. These columns had a spontaneous and animated quality engendered by the work of art, painting, drawing, print or sculpture which he might have just seen in a museum or gallery visit. Ayre's coverage of activities and events in the local milieu animate for the reader today the creative spirit of the visual arts of the 1930's and 1940's.

This study proceeds in Chapter 1 with a survey of the evolution of Ayre's writing career from a chronological point of view, with particular emphasis on the period covered by this thesis, which serves as an introduction to the critic. It is also intended to show how Ayre developed his writing skills in a broad-based journalistic and literary field prior to utilizing them in the area of critical writing in the visual arts. A discussion of the reviews at The Gazette and The Standard in Chapter 2 serves to determine what effect Ayre's reviews had on defining the physical characteristics of the section of the paper dealing with art; and the increased space given over to art coverage in both newspapers through his diligence is considered. In Chapter 3 an analysis of the reviews serves as a means to determine the evolution of his critical philosophy and as a method of assessing how he disseminated this philosophy to his readers.

Central as well to Chapter 3 of this paper is the attention he paid to artist groups organized in Montreal and elsewhere in Canada during his mandate at The Gazette and The Standard. Under consideration will be Ayre's important response to the Works Progress (later Projects) Administration's Federal Art

Project (WPA/FAP)⁷ support for artists working as agents in society to establish their place within a renewed community; as well as his own definition of the needs of the Canadian artists, based on those of their American counterparts. Also, under consideration in this section of the study are the measures Ayre utilized to redress the problems faced by Canadian artists, and the measures he utilized to educate his readers to the needs of the artists and their place in the community.

Ayre often asserted that art did not exist in a vacuum. By the same token, neither did his populist beliefs. While some of his ideas were in the vanguard, nevertheless his concerns were generational. As such, in order to understand the context in which he wrote, a brief look at the opinions and ideas of a few of his English Canadian contemporaries who held similar concerns for the place of art in society is presented here.⁸

Walter Abell, writing editorials for Maritime Art, explored the social and

⁷The Works Progress (later Projects) Administration's Federal Art Project (WPA/FAP) August 1935 - April 1943. The largest and most famous of American President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal experiments was set up to give comprehensive encouragement to art and artists. It evolved from a series of programs designed to provide temporary relief for those members of the fine arts community who were experiencing economic hardship during the Depression. The project has been widely cited as an important example of the benefits that can accrue from governmental participation in the fine arts.

⁸See Esther Trépanier, Peintres Juifs et Modernité Jewish Painters and Modernity - Montreal 1930-1945, (Montreal: Centre Saidye-Brontfman, 1987): 72-97, and "L'émergence d'un discours de la modernité dans la critique d'art (Montréal 1918-1938)," in L'Avènement de la Modernité Culturelle au Québec, Yvan Lamonde and Esther Trépanier, Montreal: Institut québécois de recherche sur la culture, 1986: 69-112, for a discussion of English and French art critical attitudes in Montreal during the 1930's and 1940's.

political conditions that the artist faced.⁹ He felt that the lacunae which existed in modern cultural conditions resided "in the sphere of industrial and economic organization and involved two major aspects of the social history of recent times: the shock to cultural traditions caused by the first impact of the industrial revolution, and the social maladjustments resulting from the extreme concentration of wealth."¹⁰ This "social maladjustment" had resulted in the cultural disenfranchisement of huge sections of the population, including the artist.¹¹ Graham McInnes, Toronto art critic, in describing the societal context in which Canadian art is fostered, noted the extreme conservatism of the Canadian public to new ideas, and particularly with regard to the visual arts. It was McInnes' contention that "As a society, we have been on the whole sceptical of anything which did not conform, as a people we tend to live with our stomachs constantly sucked in."¹²

When Ayre is compared with John Lyman, Montreal artist and art critic, it is mentioned that both critics wrote on similar topics in art and with similar dedication. However, Lyman addressed a more selected and limited audience through his writing in The Montrealer Magazine, which was not intended to attract the public at large, while Ayre, writing for the newspaper, attracted

⁹Professor of Art and Aesthetics at Acadia College, Wolfville, Nova Scotia, and editor of Maritime Art (later, Canadian Art) from 1940-1944.

¹⁰See Julia Scalzo, "Walter Abell - From Maritime Art to Canadian Art," Vanguard 16, 1 (February/March 1987): 21; and Walter Abell, "Art and Democracy," Maritime Art 2 (Oct./Nov. 1941).

¹¹It has been pointed out that in his estimation of the social responsibilities of art, Abell could not divorce art from "literal social utility." Scalzo 21.

¹²Graham McInnes, "Canadian Painting," Queen's Quarterly 12, 1 (Spring 1945): 6.

broader cultural sympathies.¹³ Lyman, as well, has come to be regarded as the spokesman for 'modernism' in Canadian art although his Montrealer columns address a broad range of issues as did those of Ayre. His founding of the Contemporary Arts Society in 1939 is seen as a reaction against the Group of Seven and, by extension, the status quo. However, the Contemporary Arts Society, through Lyman's influence, also addressed issues which concerned the support of the artist in society, such as the projects of the American-based WPA/FAP. These are the concerns which identify Lyman's involvement with more populist issues of the 1930's and 1940's and that are linked to Ayre's philosophy. A comparison between the concerns of Lyman and Ayre as exemplified by their journalistic writings would describe a number of similarities between the two. However, such a discussion is beyond the scope of this thesis. Ayre's Québécois counterparts writing for the Montreal French press did not become involved in this populist discourse until later in the 1940's. By the late 1940's, however, Montreal's dynamic art milieu was best expressed in Borduas' explosive Automatiste vocabulary with its underpinning of nationalist and aesthetic ideology.

What must be noted here is that Ayre (notwithstanding his concern for defining the relationship of art to society) did not feel that art should act solely as a literal 'tool' to effect social changes in society. Ayre was never committed solely to an art based on social values. He was never dedicated to art with an emphasis solely on subject matter; it was not necessary for art to present an

¹³See Louise Dompierre, John Lyman 1886-1967, (Kingston: Agnes Etherington Art Centre, 1986); and Janet Braide, "Sources and Documents/Sources Et Documents John Lyman - A Bibliography of His Writings," Journal of Canadian Art History 4, 2 (1977/1978): 130-40.

ideological justification for its role. Essentially, for Ayre, art did not have to depict or deify the actions of factory workers, war heroes or political leaders to justify its existence. Ayre's fear was that too much emphasis on subject matter, which he saw as an inherent aspect of social realist art, could create an art based on propaganda. This is not to say that Ayre did not appreciate such works. However, at no time during his mandate at The Gazette and The Standard did he promote art theories which supported social realist themes at the expense and exclusion of formal elements. Whenever he did discuss these issues, he always noted the formal values inherent in such works, thereby judiciously emphasizing both pictorial and thematic aspects.

Ayre's contention was that while art could be used to sell the principles of "Democracy, as it is used to sell chewing gum,"¹⁴ that was only part of its meaning in society. The solution was to appreciate the "wholeness"¹⁵ of art, both thematically and formally. Ayre's belief was that art and the artist, even the most individualistic, were "part of society, so can never get outside human experience."¹⁶

¹⁴Robert Ayre, "Art Lovers Hear Some Plain Words From Mr. Kent," The Standard [Montreal] 4 July 1942: 10.

¹⁵Robert Ayre, "Representation and Form. The Importance of Subject Matter Urged in a Study of Aesthetic Values," The Gazette [Montreal] 13 March 1937: 13.

¹⁶Ayre, The Standard 4 July 1942.

CHAPTER 1

BIOGRAPHY AND EVOLUTION OF WRITING CAREER

An examination of the development of Robert Hugh Ayre's career, from a biographical point of view, reveals a complex individual who participated concurrently in many streams of Canadian creativity in the arts. His fiction and playwrighting met with success during the 1930's and 1940's.¹ However, it was his recording of the tumultuous growth of the visual arts in Canada during the early decades of the 20th century that authenticates his dedication to this particular area of Canada's cultural evolution.

Robert Hugh Ayre, son of John Ayre and Sadie Millar and the eldest of six children, was born on April 3rd, 1900 in the town of Napinka, located in rural Manitoba. Ayre's father had been born into a farming family in Ballymena, Co. Antrim, Ireland and he was involved in farm labour in the Lowlands as a teenager, although he later worked in the Clydebank shipyards, and engineering on trans-Atlantic boats. From 1893-1894, he worked in Cramp's Shipyards, Philadelphia.² Ayre's mother was from a Dutch family that had emigrated to the United States, settling in Philadelphia, where Ayre's mother grew up. It was in Philadelphia that Ayre's parents met and married. In 1898,

¹In 1938 Ayre's short story "Mr. Sycamore" appeared in "The Best Short Stories of 1938 and the Yearbook of the American Short Story," ed. Edward J. O'Brien, New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1937. "Mr. Sycamore" was subsequently dramatized for the New York Broadway stage in November 1942.

²John Ayre (Robert Ayre's Nephew), Guelph, to the author, Montreal, 13 March 1984.

his parents moved to Napinka, Manitoba where John Ayre worked as a locomotive fireman for the CPR. It appears that the family moved shortly after to Winnipeg, as Ayre spent his childhood in that city.³

According to Robert Ayre's nephew, his uncle's inclination toward the visual arts developed early in his life and seemed to evolve quite naturally. He feels that this might have been related to his domestic environment, for all Ayre's younger siblings shared these interests.⁴ According to Robert Ayre himself, he started "drawing as soon as writing, often illustrating his own stories."⁵ In his personal notebooks, years later, one encounters articulately executed caricatures of various friends.⁶ This early interest in the visual arts remained a concern and, as a young man in Winnipeg during the 1920's, Ayre recalled that he would frequent "the city's art gallery and school, seeing pictures, making friends among artists and reading books about art."⁷ The artist Charles Comfort, about whom he would write in later years, was a boyhood friend attending the same public school in Winnipeg.⁸ While Ayre completed high school, he did not attend university.

³Ayre to Heit, 7 Sept. 1942.

⁴John Ayre to the author, 13 March 1984.

⁵Ayre to Heit, 7 Sept. 1942.

⁶Scrapbook and diary of Robert Ayre, private collection.

⁷Ayre to Heit, 7 Sept. 1942.

⁸Mrs. Thelma Ayre (wife of Robert Ayre), personal interview, 5 March 1984, Montreal. As well, in a questionnaire filled out for "Who's Who In American Art" by Ayre in 1946, he does not complete the section pertaining to "Schools, Colleges and Universities," private collection.

Notwithstanding his early interest in the visual arts, Ayre's ambition was to be a writer, with poetry as his main focus. In 1900, at the age of nineteen, as Ayre recounted "full of dreams of travel"⁹ and with the intention of writing a book about his travels, he visited Hawaii. According to Ayre, he felt his romantic inclination and wanderlust was stimulated by reading Robert Louis Stevenson's Treasure Island and Travels with a Donkey as well as seeing plays that dealt with foreign venues, such as The Bird of Paradise at the Walker Theatre in Winnipeg. In Hawaii he was a "semi-beachcomber" camping in an abandoned shack on the Kona coast with a shipmate. As well, he lived among the natives of Kalapana. While in Hawaii he worked as a labourer to help pay his passage back to Canada. As Ayre recounted, he did attempt to write a book recording his year of travel. However, he felt that at the age of twenty he was "too green" to do his travels justice. While it would be impossible to ascertain the precise effect this type of experience afforded Ayre, it may be contended that it may have had an effect on broadening his view of society.

By 1920, after his return from Hawaii, Ayre commenced his newspaper career as a "cub reporter" at the Winnipeg Telegram.¹⁰ By 1924 he was at the Free Press writing on an assortment of daily news topics.¹¹ Although not on a regular basis, articles pertaining to the visual arts, and bearing Ayre's initials, RHA, began appearing in the Free Press. In these early articles one perceives

⁹Ayre to Heit, 7 Sept. 1942.

¹⁰Text of convocation speech, J. Russell Harper, Professor in the Faculty of Fine Arts, Concordia University, 21 Nov. 1976, Concordia University Archives, Montreal.

¹¹It is possible as well that he may have written a regular column using the pseudonym "The Stroller." Topics in this column were light hearted discussions on the vagaries of living in Winnipeg and life in general. Ayre kept these columns and inscribed his initials next to the pseudonym, Ayre scrapbook.

the root of many of the ideas that Ayre would later develop in Canadian Art magazine and in his newspaper reviews in the '30's and '40's at The Gazette and The Standard in Montreal. Questions such as Canadian art and the Groups of 7's relationship to its development, modern aspects of Canadian art, and the development of a distinctive national style were some of the topics of ongoing interest. A major concern to Ayre, however, was the effort or lack of effort on the part of the layperson to develop an open attitude to exploring new forms and ideas in art. Another salient concern was the role of institutions as patrons of the arts. Of paramount importance however, starting here and continuing through the ensuing years, was his aggressively populist view of art and its ability to be appreciated and accepted by a wide cross-section of society.

Ayre's April 16th, 1924, column in the Free Press is a pronounced example of his populist view of the visual arts. "Art Development on the Prairies" appears to have been Ayre's first journalistic writing on the topic of the visual arts and reveals he felt that Winnipeg had "an energetic little community of the devotees of painting, etching and the like, but the support given them is meagre, and if it was not for their own zeal, they would have little encouragement to carry on."¹² He then introduces the former Winnipeg artist Emile Walters to his readers. This artist was working and living in New York, and had achieved, according to Ayre, Canadian, American and European

¹²Ayre scrapbook. In his scrapbook, Ayre inserted clippings of the articles he wrote for the Free Press [Winnipeg] during the 1920's. As is the case for the article cited here, the newspaper citation and the date of publication is noted in Ayre's handwriting next to each clipping.

acclaim.¹³ He points out to the reader that Walters was convinced that the prairies could foster a distinctive school of art, since nature was the only influence. In the east the effect of the various "French cults" affected artmaking, while on the prairies "isolated from the art centres, the artists had to develop along their own lines." As well, Walters felt that more emphasis should be placed on art in the schools and colleges. At present the system did not go far enough. Arts and crafts were neglected, and these the artist regarded as essential. As Ayre summarized the artist's opinions, it becomes evident that he endorsed the artist's point of view and he advises his readers that such ideas were essential to the development of a Winnipeg art community.

Despite Ayre's interest in the visual arts, his articles on the theatre in Winnipeg were more prolific. Between 1925 and 1927 Ayre reviewed in the Free Press the activities of such theatre groups in Winnipeg as the Community Players, the Little Theatre, and the University of Manitoba Dramatic Society. Of particular interest to Ayre were newly-formed groups such as the Russian Rehearsal Club which studied "the work of the Moscow Art theatre and its revolutionizing influence on the modern stage."¹⁴ Members of this group, such as the artist Lionel LeMoine FitzGerald, and its director, the art collector Edith Sinclair, were links for Ayre to the world of the visual arts, as well as being close

¹³Ayre notes that the artists work "Roosevelt Haunts" was in the collection of the National Gallery in Washington, another was in the National Museum of Iceland, and many more were to be found in public and private collections throughout the United States and Canada.

¹⁴R.H.A., "Will Study Work of Moscow Art Theatre," Free Press [Winnipeg] 1926, Ayre scrapbook. The first meeting of this group was held at the home of LeMoine FitzGerald.

friends.¹⁵ Notwithstanding the fact that he was employed on a full time basis as a journalist at the Free Press, Ayre was also developing his own skills as a playwright and his one act play Treasures in Heaven¹⁶ was the fourth production of the 1925-1926 season of the Winnipeg Community Players. The play was described by the reviewer as highly successful.

By 1927, Ayre had given up his job at the Free Press and started working for the Canadian National Railways in its Publicity Department in Winnipeg.¹⁷ Ayre says of this period that life opened up for him. The Railway gave him travel; it gave him Canada. "It gave me the Rockies in Jasper National Park; it gave me Alaska and the Yukon; Northern Manitoba and the East."¹⁸ Ayre did not abandon his interest in writing, and, in March 1928, he published the first of many articles on the theatre in the Canadian Forum.¹⁹ As a contributor to the periodical, Ayre's credentials were briefly noted: his considerable experience in

¹⁵In the 1920's, what would become a lifelong friendship began to develop between Ayre and LeMoine FitzGerald. This is clearly revealed through the extensive correspondence between artist and critic throughout the ensuing years until FitzGerald's death in 1956. Ayre and FitzGerald had met through the Winnipeg Little Theatre and both attended exhibitions at the Winnipeg Art Gallery. Elizabeth Wylie, "The Development of Spirituality in the Work of Lionel LeMoine FitzGerald 1890-1956." Thesis for the degree of Master of Fine Arts, Concordia University, Montreal, 1981; and Ayre papers, Queen's University Archives.

¹⁶The programme for the fourth production of the season, 19 and 20 Feb. 1926, read as follows: "'Treasures in Heaven' by Robert Ayre produced and Designed by Edith Sinclair, Costumes by Dorothy Wilson," Ayre scrapbook.

¹⁷As well, by 1925 Ayre married Thelma Everett in Winnipeg. They had one son, Nicholas.

¹⁸Ayre to Heit, 7 Sept. 1942.

¹⁹Robert Ayre, "Ibsen and Canada," Canadian Forum 7, 90 (March 1928): 569-571.

newspaper work at the Free Press and his accomplishments as a playwright were cited.

In 1930, after two years with the CNR in Winnipeg, Ayre was transferred to its Headquarters in Montreal (1930-1932). There is little documentation for this first two-year period in Montreal, although it is evident that Ayre continued to contribute articles to the Canadian Forum. In 1932, still working for the CNR, Ayre was once again transferred, this time to Toronto, after he had travelled to England and Paris, financed by his successful publication of a series of children's stories. These stories were based on West Coast Indian legends and were subsequently prepared for radio and broadcast by the CBC in Canada and by the British Broadcasting Corporation.²⁰

Ayre then spent two years in Toronto (1932-1934) as editor of the railroad's Canadian National Magazine. While in Toronto, Ayre was introduced by Lawren Harris to "all the art crowd,"²¹ and by the end of two years had come to know the art community intimately.²² In Toronto he had renewed his friendship with Charles Comfort. As well he established friendships with A. Y. Jackson, and other members of the Group of 7, as well as with Will Ogilvie and Paraskeva and Philip Clark.²³ It seems likely that during that period he also made the acquaintance of Harold McCurry, as well as members of the Hart

²⁰Ayre to Heit, 7 Sept. 1942.

²¹Mrs. Thelma Ayre, personal interview, 5 March 1984, Montreal.

²²Robert Ayre, Montreal, to Lawren Harris, jr., loc. unknown, 11 Sept. 1970, Ayre papers, Queen's University Archives. This letter reveals that Ayre had met Harris sometime in 1930 in Jasper B.C.

²³Mrs. Thelma Ayre, personal interview, 5 March 1984, Montreal.

House String Quartet.²⁴ Ayre was also well acquainted with the Arts & Letters Club²⁵ and made it a habit to visit artists in their studios.²⁶ Notwithstanding his numerous postings, Ayre continued to contribute articles to the Canadian Forum. As well, in the summer of 1930, he contributed his first article to the Queen's Quarterly²⁷ and became a regular contributor of articles dealing with theatre, a few short stories and some poetry.²⁸ In 1933, however, an article entitled "Canadian Group of Painters"²⁹ was his first piece in the Canadian Forum on the visual arts. In 1934, he contributed an article on the Royal Canadian Academy.³⁰ This renewed interest in matters in the visual arts appears to coincide with his exposure to the art milieu in Toronto.

²⁴Louis Muhlstock, personal interview, 2 Feb. 1984, Montreal. Ayre and Muhlstock maintained a close and lifelong friendship.

²⁵Mrs. Thelma Ayre, personal interview, 5 March 1984, Montreal.

²⁶Louis Muhlstock, personal interview, 21 Feb. 1984, Montreal.

²⁷Robert Ayre, "The Raven and the Sun," Queen's Quarterly 37 (Summer 1930): 495-513.

²⁸Some titles of the articles he wrote are: "National Theatre with Roots," Canadian Forum (June 1930): 344,346; "The Theatre Guild of Montreal," Canadian Forum (August 1930): 425,426; Queen's Quarterly 37 (Summer 1930) (short story): 495-513; "Pollyanna farmer," Canadian Forum 11 (November 1930): 56-59 (short story); "Victoria Square, Montreal," Canadian Forum 12 (January 1932): 131 (poem); "Frederick Philip Grove," Canadian Forum 12 (April 1932): 255-257; "When the Railway came to Canada," Queen's Quarterly (May 1932): 274-290; "Jacob Ben Ami and the Essentials," Canadian Forum 12 (Aug. 1932): 436; "Pauline Johnson," Canadian Forum 14 (Oct. 1933): 17; "Mr. Cooney makes it Right with God," Canadian Forum 14 (April 1934): 267 (short story).

²⁹Robert Ayre, "Canadian Group of Painters," Canadian Forum 14, 159 (Dec. 1933): 98-100.

³⁰Robert Ayre, "Royal Canadian Academy," Canadian Forum 14, 160 (Jan. 1934): 141.

By the spring of 1934 he had left the CNR. His new employment entailed travel between Windsor and Detroit as he was working for an advertising agency promoting the sale of Ford motor cars.³¹ But this job did not suit his temperament and he resigned shortly afterward moving with his wife and "no prospects" back to Toronto.³² By the end of 1934, however, after "free-lancing a while" in Toronto, Ayre moved back to Montreal.

Ayre joined The Gazette staff as a full time member either late in 1934, or very early in 1935. It would appear that he was not hired in the capacity as a section editor and art critic. However, according to Ayre, by 1935 he "made a place for myself as art critic and editor of the book page."³³ Initially, as editor of the literary section of the newspaper, Ayre reviewed a wide range of books from new novels to children's literature. He first touched upon art concerns through his reviews of art books. Under Ayre's editorship, the format of the 'Book Page' was expanded to cover art exhibition reviews. The exhibition review was introduced and controlled by Ayre on an exclusive basis until the last few months of his mandate at The Gazette in 1937. By the end of summer 1937, Ayre's contributions to The Gazette became sporadic as he prepared to move to his new job in the publicity department of the CNR in Montreal in the fall of that year. Ayre's new job focussed on publicity for the newly formed Trans-Canada Air Lines,³⁴ which was owned by CNR, and as he describes it, he went to his

³¹Ayre to Heit, 7 Sept. 1942; and Mrs. Thelma Ayre, personal interviews, 7 Feb. and 5 March 1984, Montreal.

³²Ayre to Heit, 7 Sept. 1942.

³³Ayre to Heit, 7 Sept. 1942.

³⁴See Robert Ayre, "Trans-Canada Air Lines," Canadian Geographical Journal 33, 1 (July 1946): 2-18.

new job "carrying on my art reviews by invitation of The Standard."³⁵ At The Standard he wrote "Art News and Reviews" on a regular basis from 1938 to 1942. The newspaper was published only on Saturdays, and Ayre undertook this job on a part-time basis.

From 1936 to 1937, at The Gazette, and from 1938 through to 1942, at The Standard, Ayre's primary topic of interest in his columns on the visual arts was their evolution and place in the Canadian community. During these seven consecutive years of newspaper writing at these venues, he continued to make a name for himself as a Canadian art critic of note, and particularly within Montreal's art milieu.³⁶ While his permanent regular job was still Associate Editor of the Canadian National Magazine at the CNR, many lunch hours were spent visiting art galleries and museums for his exhibition reviews. Ayre was developing into one of Montreal's highly regarded art critics. Louis Muhlstock recalls that Ayre was considered by the artists in the city as being "very fair and broadminded . . . [and] artists were very interested in the influence he had"³⁷ in Canadian art circles. According to Montreal artist Marian Scott, "Robert Ayre was the professional critic in Montreal, as an English art critic . . . best I can think of . . . sometimes a little sentimental . . . supportive and open minded."³⁸ Teacher and art critic Walter Abell also commends Ayre's writing:

³⁵Ayre to Heit, 7 Sept. 1942.

³⁶This thesis covers his seven consecutive years of writing for these newspapers. Ayre continued to contribute articles on a sporadic basis subsequent to 1942.

³⁷Louis Muhlstock, personal interview, 2 Feb. 1984, Montreal.

³⁸Marian Scott personal interview with Laura Brandon, 28 Oct. 1985, Montreal. Laura Brandon is an Art History Graduate student at Queen's University completing her thesis on the self portraits of Pegi Nicol MacLeod.

Here and there across Canada . . . one discerns the growth of true criticism. Robert Ayre's column in the *Montreal Standard* has an honest ring to it. One feels that the writer has a serious concern for his subject, that he conscientiously studies his material, and that he is offering his sincere conclusions.³⁹

Besides being wholeheartedly involved in the local art scene throughout the 1935-1942 period in Montreal Ayre also participated in important national art events that occurred during these years. Of great importance was the Kingston Conference, held in the city of Kingston on June 26th, 27th and 28th, and at the National Gallery in Ottawa on June 29th, 1941. This event is now regarded as one of the pivotal developments in the evolution of Canadian art. The Conference defined for Canada the place of art in a democratic society. The perceived need for such a conference originated with Canadian artist André Biéler, who shared with Ayre many populist ideas on the place of art and artist in society.⁴⁰

An important legacy of the Kingston Conference was the formation of the Federation of Canadian Artists made up of 'laymen' as well as artists. André Biéler became its first national president and Lawren Harris its second. Ayre participated actively in this organization, in an officially elected capacity, as its

³⁹Walter Abell, "On Criticism," *Maritime Art* 2, 4 (May 1942): 111-112.

⁴⁰André Biéler and Elizabeth Harrison, eds., *The Kingston Conference: Proceedings* (Kingston: Queen's University Press, 1941). Biéler was artist in residence at Queen's University. The Conference brought together artists, critics, administrators and scholars for four days of workshops, seminars and social interaction. The Conference was held under the joint auspices of the Carnegie Corporation, the National Gallery and Queen's University.

first Public Relations representative in Montreal.⁴¹ He was elected to this post in May 1942 at the Federation's first national meeting in Toronto a year after the conference had taken place. Later, in the fall of 1942, when Ayre was transferred back to the West, he was appointed the Chairman for the Federation, Manitoba Region, and served in that capacity from 1942 to 1943. As well, Ayre had acted in an unofficial capacity through his many reviews in The Standard that defined for his readers the ambitions and accomplishments of the Federation.⁴²

The proposed role of the Federation was described by Lawren Harris at Kingston in 1941. His position, which Ayre supported, was:

All of the art societies in Canada and the staffs of all the art colleges could unite in one federation and work together toward their own creative and social enlightenment and also seek the cooperation of those organizations, institutions and individuals in (Canada) which are interested in its cultural development.⁴³

Ayre and Lawren Harris had been friends since 1930 and both had aspirations to define the place of art in the community. From the Federation's inauguration in 1941 through to 1946, Ayre's involvement with the organization and with Harris is evident in the extensive correspondence between the artist

⁴¹Robert Ayre, "F.C.A.'s Second Conference Charts Broad Programme," The Standard [Montreal] 9 May 1942: 27.

⁴²See: "Montreal Division of Federation of Artists Will Hold Symposium," The Standard [Montreal] 21 March 1942: 25; "Art Gallery Attracts 77,000 Visitors to 'Big Names' Exhibit," The Standard [Montreal] 28 March 1942: 25; "Oriental Art Exhibit Displays Unique Treasures," The Standard [Montreal] 25 April 1942: 27; The Standard 9 May 1942; "Art Notes: The '41 Kingston Conference Shows Gratifying Results," Montreal Star 2 June 1951: 10.

⁴³Ayre, Montreal Star 2 June 1951.

and critic. Questions pertaining to the Federation's organization, its usefulness, and how it could be influential in defining the place of art in Canadian society were ongoing topics of discussion in their numerous letters.⁴⁴

The Kingston Conference established the foundation of the Federation that acted in the very manner proposed by Lawren Harris. As well, some ten years later, in assessing the results of the Kingston Conference, Ayre was of the opinion that the "Canadian Art Council" (later known as the Canada Council) was organized as a result of the famous Artists' Brief to Parliament, and subsequently the Massey Commission, both of which could be directly traced to the Kingston Conference.⁴⁵

During the 1930's and 1940's in Montreal, other aspects of his work not concerned with the visual arts, but rather with the theatre, brought him to the attention of the public. In 1942 Ayre was once again cast in the playwright's role. His short story, "Mr. Sycamore" was adapted for the stage by Ayre and received much acclaim and recognition. Ayre had begun the story in 1933 and it was published in the Paris paper Candide and performed in American colleges as a one act play. A radio version with music was broadcast twice by the Columbia Workshop and in England by the B.B.C. Max Whyllie published the script and music in his "Radio Writing" and Ayre states that at that time

⁴⁴Ayre papers, Queen's University Archives.

⁴⁵Ayre, Montreal Star 2 June 1951; as well, "Report of the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences," Canadian Art 8, 4 (Summer 1951).

"publishers who had turned him down wrote asking to see more of his writing." The story also appeared in the Book Digest.⁴⁶

He was approached later by a New York producer to turn the story into a stage play. Working with American playwright Ketti Frings as a faithful collaborator, the story was dramatized for the Broadway stage and, in November 1942, it was presented at the Guild Theatre on Broadway with Lillian Gish and Stuart Erwin playing the leads.⁴⁷ The play was reviewed by several Canadian and American newspapers.⁴⁸ In 1942, Ayre received a Canada Drama Award.⁴⁹

Ayre kept copies of the reviews in his personal scrapbook, along with telegrams from well-wishers. That he was still close to friends in the visual arts made in his Winnipeg and Toronto days is attested by telegrams he received from Paraskeva and Philip Clark, and the Comforts. A copy of the entertainment section advertising the play, possibly from The New Yorker, was autographed by a number of Ayre's well-wishers, many of whom were part of the visual arts milieu in Toronto.⁵⁰ By September 1942, two months prior to the Broadway

⁴⁶Ayre to Heit, 7 Sept. 1942.

⁴⁷Ayre to Heit, 7 Sept. 1942.

⁴⁸Reviews appeared in New York Herald Tribune, New York World Telegram, New York Times, Evening Star (Washington), Times Herald (Washington) and Washington Daily News. In Canada reviews were featured in Windsor Daily Star, Montreal Star, Free Press (Winnipeg), Globe and Mail, Montreal Herald, and Kitchener Daily Record.

⁴⁹Text of convocation speech, J. Russell Harper, 21 Nov. 1976.

⁵⁰Ayre scrapbook.

debut of the play, Ayre was uprooted again having transferred to Winnipeg with the CNR's Trans-Canada Air Lines. On the eve of the move Ayre wrote, in a biographical letter for the promotion of the play "Mr.Sycamore," that while there was not much art in Winnipeg, he felt "weighted" with his experience in the East. He felt that with this move back to Winnipeg, he had "something to bring" to the West.⁵¹

This celebration of Ayre's ability as a writer and playwright was obviously outside the frame of art criticism. However it may be contended that this type of literary success reinforced his validity and viability as a critical writer concerned with the visual arts.

Ayre's validity and viability as a major contributor to the growth of Canadian art, however, is more particularly demonstrated in his co-editorship with Donald Buchanan of the art periodical Canadian Art from 1944 to 1959. The fact that he was appointed to this position indicates that by 1944 Ayre was regarded as a reliable successor to Walter Abell, the periodical's former editor, and as a major contributor to the growth of art in Canada.

It is significant at this point to examine how Ayre came to be appointed to the position of co-editor with Buchanan. What this reveals is where Ayre saw himself, by 1944, in relationship to the development of art in Canada. It denotes the contribution the critic felt he had already made in this regard, and as well, it suggests what further contributions Ayre considered he would be able to make as editor of Canada's only national art periodical.

⁵¹Ayre to Heit, 7 Sept. 1942.

By the summer of 1944, Ayre, still in the employ of the CNR, was once again transferred from Winnipeg to Montreal in the capacity of Assistant Manager, Press Bureau. News of this transfer was noted by Ayre in a letter to Lawren Harris dated June 29th, 1944.⁵² As well the text of Ayre's letter focussed on the possibility of Ayre himself editing Canadian Art. Ayre sought this position because he was aware that Abell was about to leave Canada. Subsequent correspondence between Ayre, Lawren Harris, Walter Abell, Harold McCurry of the National Gallery, and Elizabeth Wyn Wood on the subject of Ayre's proposed editorship of the periodical evinces the active role Ayre played in seizing the reins of editorship, and getting the first issue of the newly-titled periodical in print.⁵³

Prior to writing Harris on June 29th, 1944, Ayre had informed the Montreal artist, Fred Taylor, another member of the Federation of Canadian Artists and a mutual friend of Ayre and Harris, that he, Ayre, would be interested in assuming the editorship of the periodical. Taylor then informed Lawren Harris of Ayre's suggestion, and on May 7th, 1944, Harris wrote Ayre fully approving the idea. However, he indicated that the National Gallery would hold on tight to the magazine, and intended to appoint an editor selected by the National Gallery.⁵⁴

⁵²Robert Ayre, Montreal, to Lawren Harris, Vancouver, 29 June 1944, Ayre papers, Queen's University Archives.

⁵³Correspondence between parties, Ayre papers, Queen's University Archives.

⁵⁴Lawren Harris, Vancouver, to Robert Ayre, Montreal, 7 May 1944, Ayre papers, Queen's University Archives. It must be noted that while Lawren Harris fully supported Ayre's appointment to the position of editor, and may have facilitated it through his influence with officials of the National Gallery, Ayre himself was very strongly interested in pursuing this appointment. As well, the conditions under which he would consider this job were determined by the critic and not Harris.

In his June 29th, 1944 letter to Harris, Ayre openly expresses his opposition to proposed control of Canadian Art by the National Gallery: "I don't see how it could take such an action, as Canadian Art is not exclusively a National Gallery proposition even if Ottawa does pay 9/10th of the cost."⁵⁵ Part of the text of Ayre's letter to Harris, quoted here, describes why Ayre felt he was suitable for the job as editor for Canadian Art. It also indicates where he saw himself in relationship to the Canadian art community.

I should be very much interested in editing Canadian Art and I know I could do it in my spare time. And I feel I could do a good job. I know the Canadian Art field pretty well and have a good deal of newspaper magazine experience. For some years I edited the Canadian National Magazine and I have edited Little Theatre publications. I know what it's all about. . . .

I should have the satisfaction of making some contribution to Canadian development, and if the cost of production were diminished, Canadian Art might be able to stand on its own feet and not feel too heavily the shackles of the National Gallery. . . . Let me know what you think of these proposals.⁵⁶

It appears that subsequent to this letter Harris forwarded Ayre's proposal to the National Gallery.

In a letter from Ayre to Harold McCurry, on July 26th, 1944, the issue of editorship was still not clarified. Ayre refers to having taken upon his shoulders "the responsibility of getting out the October issue of Canadian Art,"⁵⁷ although

⁵⁵Robert Ayre, Montreal, to Lawren Harris, Vancouver, 29 June 1944, Ayre papers, Queen's University Archives.

⁵⁶Ayre to Harris, 29 June 1944.

⁵⁷Robert Ayre, Montreal, to Harold McCurry, Ottawa, 26 July 1944, Ayre papers, Queen's University Archives.

he still felt that his position was ambiguous. While he declared that he fully intended to get the October issue to press, he wished to have his status clarified as to "title, duties and remuneration. . . . Has Buchanan been appointed, with myself as his assistant, or has the committee in mind a joint editorship?"⁵⁸ However, by August 1st, 1944, Ayre received news from Lawren Harris that, at the July 1944 meeting of the "board" responsible for Canadian Art, it had been officially decided on a "dual" editorship with Ayre as "editor in chief" and Buchanan, because he lived in Ottawa, to be responsible for layout and printing.⁵⁹ Ayre, working along with Buchanan, ensured that the October-November issue of Canadian Art was indeed published.

In January 1945, Ayre and Buchanan received from Walter Abell a congratulatory letter addressed to them both. Abell's text read:

After receiving the December-January number of Canadian Art, I can't resist sending a line to the editors to say that I think it's a fine performance. It's alive with a sense of the current activities of Canadian culture, and that always seemed to me the first essential to a vital magazine.⁶⁰

⁵⁸Ayre to McCurry, 26 July 1944. Ayre was not convinced that the magazine required two editors. In a letter written to Walter Abell, also on the 26th of July, 1944, Ayre explained his ambiguous status. However, he reiterated that he felt the main concern at the moment was to publish the next issue of the periodical. He intended to write an article on Abell, and with this in mind, his concern was to obtain from Abell some biographical data, with particular reference to Abell's stay in Canada and to the genesis of Maritime Art and Canadian Art.

⁵⁹Lawren Harris, Vancouver, to Robert Ayre, Montreal, 1 Aug. 1944, Ayre papers, Queen's University Archives. In 1944, Canadian Art was published under the auspices of a Board representing the National Gallery of Canada, The Art Association of Montreal, The Vancouver Art Gallery, The Maritime Art Association, and The Federation of Canadian Artists.

⁶⁰Walter Abell, East Lansing, Michigan, to Robert Ayre and Donald Buchanan, Montreal, 16 Jan. 1945, Ayre papers, Queen's University Archives.

Canadian Art, co-edited with Buchanan, would remain one of Ayre's major achievements. Among the many topics which concerned Ayre and Buchanan were those dealing with issues concerning the democratization of art and the need to create community art centres and to establish a government arts policy.⁶¹

Living again in 1944 in Montreal, Ayre became a full participant in the city's art milieu. Montreal would remain his permanent domicile until his death in 1980. Once again he was busy writing reviews for The Standard, though not on a regular basis. As well, his articles for Canadian Art appeared on a quarterly basis, and he contributed art pieces to such magazines as Saturday Night. He was also actively delivering lectures dealing with the "Nature of Art," "Art for Art's Sake" and "Art in Canada" presented on CBC Radio Talks in Canada and on short wave in Europe.⁶² Through his association with the Federation of Canadian Artists, Quebec Region, and under its sponsorship, he was instrumental in setting up a series of lectures entitled "Art in Society," presented through the McGill University Extension department in the fall of 1946.⁶³ In keeping with the pattern of his multi-faceted career that was manifest from the '20's through the '30's, Ayre had added another dimension to his career in the '40's. His position as co-editor and writer for Canadian Art would run concurrently with his role as a CNR employee, journalist, writer, lecturer and art critic.

⁶¹Trépanier, Jewish Painters 58.

⁶²Robert Ayre, Who's Who in American Art, Questionnaire, 1946, private collection.

⁶³Ayre papers, Queen's University Archives.

In 1950, Ayre became the art critic for the Montreal Star, a position he held for twenty years. As he noted in a May 27th, 1950 letter to the artist LeMoine FitzGerald, he had been "invited to write a weekly column" for the paper.⁶⁴ He published his many art reviews and critiques under the caption "Art Notes." He continued, however, to "make his living" as a member of the Public Relations Department of the CNR.⁶⁵ While a consideration of his art coverage at this newspaper falls outside the scope of this thesis, and is worthy of a study in its own right, nevertheless, it may be stated that his extensive career at this newspaper was as vigorous as it had been at The Gazette and The Standard. Through this column, as well as other art channels, he continued to play an active role in the Montreal art milieu until his retirement from journalistic art criticism in 1970.

In 1962, Ayre travelled widely throughout Europe on a Canada Council grant and, in 1967, he visited the Canadian Arctic and later Moscow and Leningrad. On November 21st, 1976, he received from Concordia University, in Montreal, the degree of Doctor of Laws, honoris causa.⁶⁶ J. Russell Harper, Professor in the Faculty of Fine Arts, delivered the address. It serves as a concise and eloquent assessment of Robert Ayre's career as a significant critic of Canadian art.

This man declares that his hobby is looking at pictures. I suspect that he has seen more Canadian paintings than any other single

⁶⁴Robert Ayre, Montreal, to LeMoine FitzGerald, Winnipeg, 27 May 1950, Ayre papers, Queen's University Archives.

⁶⁵Robert Ayre, "Art Criticism," text of address to the Art Association of Montreal, 6 Dec. 1955, ts., Ayre papers, Queen's University Archives.

⁶⁶This was the only honorary degree conferred on Ayre.

individual. In looking, and in writing about what he sees, he has demonstrated enlightenment in the finest humanitarian tradition. He has written about the art critic's role. . . . The critic's function is to estimate qualities and character, and to assist in the interpretation of values. Ayre believes that the good critic speaks both to the public and on its behalf. The critic, with his heightened sensibility, specialist's knowledge and experience, should seek to discriminate between what is worthwhile and what is trivial, what is real and what is sham. Far from dragging the artist down to the common level of appreciation, the critic should endeavour to raise the common level towards the artist. Robert Ayre has always aspired to be a "good critic."

We honour Robert Ayre for other reasons. He has supported the idea that Canadian paintings should be hung in our schools. He hopes thereby that our people will not be Philistines in their attitudes towards good art. He has championed the purchase of Canadian paintings for the good of Canadian art, but warns against mediocrity whether at home or abroad. . . . His many hundred critical reviews have chided charlatans and helpfully assisted others through isolating their imperfections. His words are respected for their great sincerity, honesty and integrity. His has been an ennobling endeavour. It has enriched the lives of hundreds of thousands of Canadians. It has done incalculable good in this nation.⁶⁷

Robert Ayre died in Montreal on December 23rd, 1980.

⁶⁷Text of convocation speech, J. Russell Harper, 21 Nov. 1976.

CHAPTER 2

PHYSICAL CHANGES

(i) **The Gazette (1935 - 1937)**

In order to assess more closely the evolution of Ayre's journalistic art writing at The Gazette and The Standard newspapers, both publications will be examined separately. The intention here is to identify the individual characteristics of each newspaper just prior to Ayre's involvement as the art critic, and to ascertain the impact the writer had in the development, evolution and structure of art coverage at these venues.

By the end of 1934, as has already been noted, after leaving an advertising agency in Detroit and a brief period of freelancing in Toronto, Ayre returned to Montreal and joined The Gazette.¹ Since it was customary for general news reports to remain unsigned, neither Ayre's name nor initials appear with any columns from the end of 1934 to the end of 1935. However, for the first time, in the January 4th, 1936 issue of the paper in the section designated "Books of the Day," the initials "R.H.A" appear under a book review captioned "Modern Painters."² Ayre's text was a review of a special issue of Studio, and a study written by T.W. Earp dealing with late 19th and early 20th-

¹Ayre to Heit, 7 Sept. 1942.

²R.H.A., "Modern Painters," The Gazette [Montreal] 4 Jan. 1936: 3.

century painters, namely Cezanne, Van Gogh, Seurat, Picasso, Braque, Matisse, Derain, Modigliani, Rousseau, Rouault, Utrillo, Renoir, Soutine, Chagall and Roy. This column signals the start of book reviews dealing with the visual arts.

While other writers also contributed articles to this section on a variety of topics, Ayre was the only one to review art books. As well he continued to submit pieces on books of poetry. Later, art events and exhibitions were added to this section and became Ayre's exclusive concern. In observing the growth of this section of the paper, as it metamorphosed from the 'Book' page to the 'Art' page, one becomes aware that Ayre created and defined for himself the role of art critic at The Gazette.

Why it was necessary for him to have "made" a place for himself as "art critic and editor" becomes apparent if one considers that art coverage was not given any priority at The Gazette. Reviews of art exhibitions did not appear in The Gazette with any regularity, and, when they did, the reviews remained anonymous,³ and might be found on any page in the paper where the editor could find space to print them. In contrast, music, literature, drama, cinema and fashion columns were printed in a fixed, assigned position in the daily and

³For example: Anonymous, "Canadian Scenes Are On Display - Harold W. McCrea, O.S.A. Shows Paintings in Eaton's Fine Art Galleries - Variety in Subjects - Toronto Artist Finds Much Congenial material for his Brush in Quebec Province," The Gazette [Montreal] 7 Jan. 1933: 15; Anonymous, "French Paintings On View At Scott's - Fine Examples by Members of Impressionist and Modern Schools Shown - Interesting Art Period - Collections from London Includes Six Works by Renoir Showing Development Between 1872 and 1910," The Gazette [Montreal] 3 Dec. 1934: 2; Anonymous, "Color Prints Make Attractive Show - Outstanding Workers in Medium Represented in Exhibition at Johnson's - Collection is Varied - Walter J. Phillips, R.C.A. Has Canadian Scenes - Animals and Birds by Bresslern-Roth," The Gazette [Montreal] 15 Dec. 1934: 20.

weekend newspapers. In keeping with this 'tradition,' in the December 3rd, 1934⁴ edition of the paper, for example, a review of an exhibition at W. Scott and Sons, then one of the few commercial art galleries in Montreal, was published cheek to jowl with stories entitled "Alberta Liberals Adopt Platform," "Former President of Notaries Dies" and "Quebec Woodsman Killed."

The art columns, however, were extensively captioned, indicating what would be discussed. The text of the review was usually a listing of the works exhibited, with a short biography of the artist in question. Very little critical analysis was rendered and these reviews could more aptly be qualified as "picture reporting."⁵ Many of the reviews were a curious mixture of pragmatic description and historical anecdote. One such example, an excerpt from a lengthy review of the works of Harold W. McCrea, O.S.A., at the Eaton's Fine Art Galleries, serves to illustrate the 'style' in question:

. . . in general the effect of the exhibition is cheerful. . . . "Fort Rouille" with its sturdy stockade, figures, canoes and distant ship, makes an effective composition and also shows what time and energy will do, since on its site grew York and the Toronto of today.⁶

The literary section was, however, more structured and the January 4th,

⁴Anonymous, The Gazette 3 Dec. 1934.

⁵Art Historian Arlene R. Olson explores this term extensively in her analysis of late 19th and early 20th century New York journalistic art criticism. The critics discussed are: Royal Cortissoz (1869-1948) New York Tribune, James Gibbons Huneker (1857-1921) New York Sun, Elizabeth Luther Cary (1867-1936) New York Times. Arlene R. Olson, Art Critics and the Avant-Garde, New York, 1900-1913. (Studies in fine arts: Criticism; no. 3) UMI Research Press: New York 1980.

⁶Anonymous, The Gazette 7 Jan. 1933.

1936 issue serves as an example of its format. The page was divided into three equal sections: "Books of the Day" was concerned with book reviews; "The Raconteur," dealing with diverse literary matters; and the remainder of the page, uncaptioned, discussed sundry news items. This layout for the book page was established prior to Ayre's arrival.

Whilst the format and space devoted to the review of books changed throughout Ayre's years at The Gazette, what remained consistent was that the 'book review' section was taken seriously and considered a necessary component of the paper's Saturday edition. What is central to the question of art coverage at this paper is that Ayre manipulated the literary section by inserting reviews of art books and art concerns. In particular he started to review the art exhibitions taking place in Montreal. On December 5th, 1936, the caption for the book page changes. "The Raconteur" disappears and this section is simply headed "Books of the Day." Aside from a few advertisements, the entire page is devoted to book reviews, and Ayre continues to discuss art books and catalogues.⁷

Eventually, this section of the paper expanded to give more space to art reviews and reports by Ayre. By February 27th, 1937, the main caption changes again and "Books of the Day" becomes "News and Reviews of Books and Pictures."⁸ On April 24th, 1937, with the art reviews often centralized on the

⁷Robert Ayre, "Pertaining to Marin And Art Under W.P.A.," The Gazette [Montreal] 5 Dec. 1936: 10.

⁸Ayre's review on that date was: "Strange New Worlds Are Opened To Art By Dada and Surrealism," The Gazette [Montreal] 27 Feb. 1937: 18.

page, Ayre introduced reproductions⁹ of the works he reviewed. This was the first time reproductions were placed on the page, further enhancing the review and signifying the importance of the art column. Reproductions of works then appeared on a regular basis; usually a maximum of three was presented. While one illustration often pertained to Ayre's review of an exhibition, another might advertise a new acquisition by a local or out-of-town museum, sometimes mentioning where the painting was purchased. Reproductions would also occasionally accompany a brief biography of an artist. This remained the format until Ayre's departure in the fall of 1937.

By October of 1937, Ayre was no longer writing on a regular basis for The Gazette. His articles appear after this date on a sporadic basis. He left to take up a job in advertising at CNR for its newly formed Trans-Canada Air Lines. Subsequent to his departure, art and literary concerns were separated and two new sections created. The December 18th, 1937 edition of the section serves as a good example of this new format. "Fine Arts, Crafts and Decorations" was the heading for the page concerned with art matters and "Books and Authors of the Day" became the caption for the book section of the paper, which was then relocated to another part of the paper. What is interesting to note is that in the section devoted to art, such as the December 18th, 1937 example, only half the page was concerned with art matters. The rest of the page concerned sundry news items bearing captions such as "Habitant to Plead Privy Council Case" and "N.Y. Jews' Boycott of Reich Answered." While Ayre's presence had an impact on the growth of journalistic art criticism at The Gazette, by the time he

⁹Robert Ayre, "Toronto Stock Exchange Murals Greatly Stimulate Canadian Art," The Gazette [Montreal] 24 April 1937: 20. Ayre's text was a discussion of the Charles Comfort murals.

left, with the shadow of war and social unrest a grim reality of the time, art was once again at least partially expendable. However, Ayre undeniably left the legacy of a specific art section at The Gazette.

(II) THE STANDARD (1938 - 1942)

While art criticism and art concerns diminished at The Gazette after Ayre left in 1937, he had nevertheless contributed to the establishment of a permanent column concerned with the visual arts. When the CNR offered him a job in 1937, he resigned from his job as art critic and editor at The Gazette, and assumed a full-time posting at CN, based in Montreal.¹⁰

In leaving the Gazette, he did not abandon the art world, undertaking a full time position at CN in 1937 while carrying on his art reviews on a part-time basis at the weekly, The Standard, in Montreal. This occurred, as he informed us by "invitation of The Standard"¹¹ and commenced in July 1938.¹² As we have seen, this established the pattern that characterized the rest of his working life: maintaining a permanent full-time job at CN, and yet managing to remain actively involved with the art scene in Canada, and Montreal in particular.

¹⁰Mrs. Thelma Ayre, personal interview, 7 Feb. 1984, Montreal; and Ayre to Heit, 7 Sept. 1942.

¹¹Ayre to Heit, 7 Sept. 1942.

¹²Robert Ayre, "Exhibition of Early Quebec Furniture Placed on Display at Henry Morgan's," The Standard [Montreal] 30 July 1938: 21.

The transition from one venue to another was not disruptive, and Ayre continued to expand the art reporting methods he had established at The Gazette. The Gazette had been his introduction to the Montreal art scene; at The Standard he solidified his image as a viable representative of Montreal's art critical milieu. In reassessing this period of his career, Ayre noted that he felt it was these columns in The Standard for four years (1938-1942) that gave him a "following throughout Canada."¹³ This "following" was made possible because The Standard was available on a national basis. As well as the local (Montreal) edition, Maritime and Dominion editions were also published. These two editions carried the same art review a week after it appeared in the Montreal edition.¹⁴

The Standard was published only on Saturdays and by its very nature was calculated to appeal to the leisure and populist activities of its readers, as the index to its contents attests. Comprised usually of eighty pages, though at times expanding to as many as one hundred and eight, the paper was divided into sections dealing with such items as "Man of the Week," "Social Activities," "Photonews" (comprising some twenty pages), a complete novel (comprising twelve pages), two comic sections, "Sports News," and, in the 1940's, "Week of the War." In 1939, a magazine supplement formed part of the paper with sections entitled "Milady's Realm," "Sunday in the Home," "Boys and Girls," "Crossword Puzzle" and "Bridge," to name just a few areas of interest.

¹³Ayre to Heit, 7 Sept. 1942.

¹⁴This explains why it is possible for the same article to have more than one date of publication.

The page entitled "World of Art, Literature and Music," where Ayre's column appeared, alternated between the main body of the paper and its magazine section. However, The Standard, more populist than The Gazette, considered the visual arts as pertinent to its wider readership. While Ayre had had to "make a place" for his art reviews and criticism at The Gazette, at The Standard he was able to supplement and expand upon an established, if somewhat limited, coverage of the visual arts. Because of this, he was able to commence directly with reviews of art exhibitions taking place in Montreal and elsewhere in Canada, the United States, Continental Europe and Great Britain. In contrast, his route at The Gazette had been oblique, having to introduce art concerns through the art book review.

If one examines The Standard in 1937, a year prior to the commencement of Robert Ayre's column, there is no doubt that art coverage had its fixed place at the newspaper. However, while the large captioned title of the section equally emphasized each art form, i.e., art, literature and music, most of the print was given over to the coverage of literary concerns, which took up as much as eighty percent of this section. The column captioned, in less bold typeface, "Canadian Art and Artists," was delegated approximately fifteen percent, while the section captioned "The Little Theatre" occupied about five percent of this page. Interestingly, and despite the fact that "Music" appeared in the large captioned title of the page, in many issues music reportage was given short shrift. By the fall of 1938, however, the space for books was lessened in order to accommodate a music column written under the pseudonym "Pointable."

The July 2nd, 1938 edition of The Standard, just four weeks prior to Ayre's first review, illustrates the customary format of the page. In particular, the column entitled "Canadian Art and Artists," written by the paper's art reviewer Richard H. Haviland, took the format of a 'series' presenting Canadian art and artists.¹⁵ Appearing on a regular weekly basis, Haviland's column described the artist's career by a brief biography and cited key aspects of his or her professional life. As well he catalogued 'important' works and their locations in museums and private collections but did not review current exhibitions where these artists were showing. The subject showcased was usually an established living Canadian artist, and, more often than not, a member of the R.C.A. A portrait-photograph of the artist accompanied the article but little art critical analysis was attempted.

The following excerpt from Haviland's August 6th, 1938¹⁶ review of the work of Horatio Walker, R.C.A., N.A., serves as a typical example of his "Canadian Art and Artists" column:

Horatio Walker, R.C.A., N.A., at 80 years of age, is one Canadian artist who perhaps more than any other has achieved outstanding recognition and success during his lifetime. . . . He is represented in most of the important art galleries and museums of the United States and Canada. . . . In the price market his works have definitely competed with old masters, fifteen, twenty, and as much as twenty-five thousand dollars having been paid for the glowing

¹⁵Richard H. Haviland, "Canadian Art and Artists - Clarence Gagnon, Foremost Painter of French-Canada," The Standard [Montreal] 2 July 1938: 21.

¹⁶Richard H. Haviland, "Canadian Art and Artists - Horatio Walker, R.C.A., N.A., Achieved Outstanding Recognition," The Standard [Montreal] 6 Aug. 1938: 21. Ayre's contribution on the page that day was "Summer Show At Eaton's Draws Over 200 Pictures." This illustrates the contrast with regard to subject matter between the two art reviewers, with Haviland far more historical in his approach and Ayre dealing with the current art scene in Montreal.

color, the able draughtsmanship, and above all, his power to choose subjects of significance and appeal. . . . In 1918 he was made a member of the Royal Canadian Academy. Among his more important pictures are "Oxen Drinking," "Turning the Harrow," "Wood Cutters," "Barnyard at Moonlight," "Ploughing - the First Gleam" and "Calves in Spring."¹⁷

When Ayre's first column appeared on July 30th, 1938, space allotted to literary concerns was diminished and his and Haviland's columns were given approximately the same amount of space, as two separate but equal entities.¹⁸ However, throughout 1938 and 1939, Ayre's column, now bearing the caption "Art News and Reviews," was usually accompanied by one or two reproductions and a few times as many as three appeared, while Haviland's column continued with the single artist's photograph-portrait. Eventually the size of these reproductions was reduced, further highlighting the illustrations of Ayre's reviews, and thus emphasizing his "Art News and Reviews" over Haviland's column.

As well, the reproductions accompanying Ayre's column usually appeared at the top of the page, drawing the reader immediately to his article. These illustrations of works from the exhibitions covered in his reviews were representative of a variety of contemporary art forms. Often highly patterned with intricate compositional features, the art work reproduced clearly and dramatically in the paper, and Ayre would sometimes include excerpts from his text in the caption. This acted as a direct link between article and reproduction, thereby reinforcing both textual and visual aspects of his review.

¹⁷Haviland, The Standard 6 Aug. 1938.

¹⁸Ayre, The Standard 30 July 1938.

In the November 26th, 1938 issue¹⁹ of The Standard, the page title-block "World of Art, Literature and Music" was changed to "Art News and Reviews; Little Theatre; World of Music." "Art News and Reviews" continued to be the sub-caption above Ayre's column so that the page title appeared to spotlight his review. As well, he would now include reproductions of the latest acquisitions at the Art Association. These usually appeared under the boldly captioned "An Important Purchase by the Montreal Art Association." This served to further enhance the importance of art matters on this page. By April 15th, 1939, the title of the section was changed once again; the page title-block now read "Music, Art, Little Theatre" and was half the pica size of the previous caption. The title for the art section no longer headed the page but appeared at the top left corner. It retained its visual impact, nevertheless, because it was the only major caption on the page. Ayre's column still retained its own smaller but bold-face caption "Art News and Reviews."

By the end of April 1939, however, the captioned heading of the page was eliminated entirely, and each column bore individual titles in small but bold letters.²⁰ As well, book reviews were once again incorporated into this section under the caption "Bookman's Notebook" written by other authors. By the summer of 1939, Haviland's column had been eliminated and in its place was a

¹⁹ Robert Ayre, "Eastern Group' Show Modest, Authoritative; Werner Portraits Liked," The Standard [Montreal] 26 Nov. 1938: 26.

²⁰See April 22nd, 1939 issue for format - review on that date: Robert Ayre, "Stage and Costume Designs Stimulate Interest In Theatre," The Standard [Montreal] 22 April 1939: 14.

short-lived series entitled "Canadian Authors Series"²¹ in a very similar format to Haviland's artists series. By July 1939, the sub-captions on the page read "The New Books and Their Authors," "Art News and Reviews," "The Little Theatre," and "From a Bookman's Notebook," with news of the music world contributed from time to time by "Pointable."

In addition to reproductions of the works illustrating Ayre's reviews of museum and gallery exhibitions, in October 1939 another art reproduction was added to the page: the Art Association's "Treasure of the Week."²² Ayre had announced his interest in this in the October 21st issue of the paper:

Each week at the Art Association Galleries on Sherbrooke Street West there will be shown "The Treasure of the Week" and exhibits will include paintings by Holbein, Gainsborough, Bronzino and Goya, sculpture and other objects of art. Most of them are from private collections not usually accessible to the public.²³

While the photograph accompanying the review usually referred to a local exhibition, Ayre would also include photographs of submissions made by Montreal and Canadian artists in international exhibitions, as well as those held in other Canadian cities. On March 25th, 1939, "Montreal Painter Exhibits in

²¹Example: Roderick Kennedy and Jean Ritchie Anderson, "Canadian Authors Series - Frederick Philip Grove - Searcher for America," The Standard [Montreal] 24 June 1939: M-7.

²²The works would be displayed for approximately a week. The work displayed could be drawn either from the collection of the Art Association, or from a private source. Reproduction of "Portrait of Voltaire" by Penne (Antoine), 1868-1757, appeared on 28 Oct. 1939.

²³Brief insertion in Ayre's column of that day. Review by Ayre entitled "Exhibition of Kathleen Morris Works To Be Followed By Lilius T. Newton," The Standard [Montreal] 21 Oct. 1939: M-7.

Toronto" is the caption for a reproduction of Sam Borenstein's Downtown St. Dominique Street, which formed part of his solo exhibition in the Fine Art Galleries of the T. Eaton Company in Toronto. On April 8th, 1939, "Exhibited at New York" captions a reproduction of the pottery of Prince Edward Island artist Mary Allison Doull. As well, in the September 2nd, 1939 review, Ayre keeps his readers abreast of the works of art which represented Canada at the Worlds Fair, "Canadian Paintings at World's Fair Continue To Be Centre of Interest." Ayre also published reproductions of works of art that won awards at annual competitions in Montreal, such as the Jessie Dow award from the Art Association's Spring Shows.²⁴ Emphasis was also cast on exhibitions held by such groups as the Contemporary Arts Society²⁵ and the Eastern Group,²⁶ and Ayre's use of reproductions documented and validated Montreal's art competitions, awards, annual exhibitions and exhibitions of newly formed groups.

Visual arts concerns were further expanded on the page through a number of means. Sundry items concerning art were picked up on the wire service from other Canadian cities, having such captions as "Artist Back from

²⁴Robert Ayre, "Spring Show Record Attendance Encouraging To Canadian Artists; More Exhibitions Are Pending," The Standard [Montreal] 1 April 1939: 22. Winners that year of the Jessie Dow prize for oil painting were C. Anthony Law for "Cold Winter Day, P.Q.," and for water colours, Goodridge Roberts for "Gatineau Hills."

²⁵ Inaugural exhibition of the Contemporary Arts Society - Robert Ayre, "Art Of Our Day Attracting Attention By Its Vigor in Design," The Standard [Montreal] 20 May 1939: 22. As well, all other exhibitions and events sponsored by the Contemporary Arts Society were covered by Ayre.

²⁶ Some examples: Robert Ayre, The Standard 26 Nov. 1938; and "Eastern Group Presents Array of New Works At Art Association," The Standard [Montreal] 27 Jan. 1940: M-7.

Arctic Tells of Incredible Color and of Painting Below Zero," which appeared in the July 29th issue. As well, the artist Philip Surrey's contribution of a number of art book reviews,²⁷ in tandem with Ayre's "Art News and Reviews," served to expand coverage of art concerns. One example was Surrey's column in the October 26th, 1940 issue²⁸ entitled "New York's Art Students League Reviews 65 Years of Varied Experiences," in which he reviewed the book 65 years of Art - The Story of the Art Students' League of New York by Marchal Landgren. In the same issue Ayre's report was entitled "Art Association Evening Classes Provide Outlet for City Students" in which he highlighted Goodridge Roberts association with Will Ogilvie in the School of the Art Association of Montreal. Whether the juxtaposition of Surrey's book review on the New York art school with the article on the Montreal art school was intentional or not is unknown. However, with these two reviews appearing together there is a subtle suggestion that the Art Association had the potential to play a role in Montreal parallel to that of the Art Student's League in New York.

On rare occasions Ayre would discuss an art book in addition to his exhibition reviews. A good example was his column on Virginia Woolf's Roger Fry: A Biography which appeared on January 18th, 1941.²⁹ In that same issue

²⁷Starting while Ayre was at The Standard, and continuing after he left in 1942 to return to Winnipeg, Surrey contributed art book reviews and was also the photo editor at the paper. It is possible that Ayre may have been instrumental in helping Surrey as the Ayre and Surrey families had been good friends in Winnipeg. Mrs. Thelma Ayre, personal interview, 5 March 1984, Montreal.

²⁸Philip Surrey, "New York's Art Students League Reviews 65 Years of Varied Experiences," The Standard [Montreal] 26 Oct. 1940: 25.

²⁹Robert Ayre, "Roger Fry's Influence on Art Weighed by Mrs. Virginia Woolf In Distinguished Biography," The Standard [Montreal] 18 Jan. 1941: 25.

Philip Surrey reviewed Maurice Gagnon's Peinture Moderne.³⁰ Ayre's review dealt with an internationally acknowledged pioneer of Modernism and Surrey's explored the question of 'modernism' in a Canadian context. If not intentional (which it probably was), the juxtaposition of these two articles expanded the question of modernism for the attentive reader.

Towards the end of the summer of 1941, the page began to place less emphasis on the visual arts, with articles dealing with the War starting to take precedence. Reports bearing such titles as "French Women Risk Death to Serve with de Gaulle,"³¹ "Scotland Popular with Canucks on Leave,"³² and book reviews dealing with Hitler's Nazi philosophy became more prolific. Even art items, other than Ayre's "Art News and Reviews," had some allusion to war concerns, such as the wire service report that appeared on July 12th, 1941 entitled "Rembrandt's 'Night Watch' Saved from Nazis." Ayre continued to produce "Art News and Reviews" throughout this period - indeed, it was from July 1941 to January 1942 that he covered the pre-Kingston Conference news, the Conference itself and assessed its aftermath.³³ As well there were brief

³⁰Philip Surrey, "Modern Painting and Canada's Relation to It Discussed in Lively Book," The Standard [Montreal] 18 Jan. 1941: 25.

³¹Rose Patterson, "French Women Risk Death to Serve With de Gaulle," The Standard [Montreal] 6 Sept. 1941: 9.

³²Wallace Reyburn (Standard Staff Correspondent), "Scotland Popular With Canucks On Leave," The Standard [Montreal] 2 Aug. 1941, Dominion ed.: 5.

³³Robert Ayre's reviews which dealt with the Kingston Conference were: "Conference of Artists Called for June 26-29 at Queen's University," The Standard [Montreal] 12 April 1941: 27; "Outspoken Painter Coming to Kingston For Art Conference," The Standard [Montreal] 31 May, 1941: 23; "Canadian Artists Urge War Records As Works of Art," The Standard [Montreal] 5 July 1941: 9; "Benton 'No Humbug,' Notes Observer At Conference," The Standard [Montreal] 12 July, 1941: 9; "Art Association Gets Paintings By Walker, Cullen," The Standard [Montreal] 29 Nov.

items dealing with music concerns, but, nevertheless, this page once again was dominated by literary items. Book reviews were more in evidence as well as short news reports dealing with war concerns.

On April 11th, 1942, the column caption "Art News and Reviews" was shortened to read simply "Art News," although there was no change in the length of each review. Ayre continued to write his reviews until July 4th, 1942.³⁴ At that time he was preparing to return to Winnipeg, having been again transferred with CN. He lived there until 1944 when he was once more transferred back to Montreal. However, through to the end of 1942, Philip Surrey contributed three art book reviews under the "Art News" column (July 11, Aug. 15, and Sept. 5, 1942)³⁵ and articles were written by Dorothy Sangster (Aug. 8, 1942)³⁶ and John Lyman (Oct. 24, 1942).³⁷ Short reports concerned with art were picked up by wire service from New York and Toronto. With no regular critic, art coverage now appeared on a sporadic basis.

In the November 14th, 1942 issue of The Standard, Ayre contributed a book review, sent from Winnipeg, of a book of cartoons by the satirical

1941: 14; "Kingston Conference Most Important Art Event of Last Year," The Standard [Montreal] 3 Jan. 1942: 23.

³⁴Ayre, The Standard 4 July 1942.

³⁵Philip Surrey, "Cheney Traces Trend in Modern Art," The Standard [Montreal] 11 July, 1942: 10; "Art Catalogues Worth Attention," The Standard [Montreal] 5 Sept. 1942: 23.

³⁶Dorothy Sangster, "Gagnon Painted Many Habitant Scenes in France," The Standard [Montreal] 8 Aug. 1942: 10.

³⁷John Lyman, "Canadian Art Show in U.S. is Best Yet Sent Abroad," The Standard [Montreal] 24 Oct. 1942: 10.

cartoonist Charles Addams, entitled Drawn and Quartered.³⁸ It appeared under the column captioned "Book Reviews." "Art News" was not a feature of the page that day. However, a brief item headed "Former Art Critic Has Play Opening"³⁹ did appear on the page on the same day. This further confirmed that Ayre was no longer the art critic for The Standard.

Approximately a year and a half after Ayre's departure, The Standard's December 18th, 1943 issue reveals very little interest in art concerns. The page where Ayre's "Art News and Reviews" had formerly appeared displays column captions which read "Book of the Week," "This Week's Crossword Puzzle" and "Bridge," as well as a number of book reviews and advertisements for current films showing at various Montreal cinemas. An unsigned news item captioned "Goodridge Roberts Paintings are Shown"⁴⁰ is the only allusion to the visual arts that appears on the page.

"Art News and Reviews," and subsequently "Art News" with Ayre as its author, had appeared continuously throughout his four years as the art critic for The Standard. During 1940 and 1941, despite sharing the page with news and reviews of literature, music and the theatre, art concerns had become central to the page. Art reporting had become a growing concern in The Standard and paralleled Ayre's enthusiasm for its growth in Montreal. Although war news

³⁸Robert Ayre, "Book Reviews - There's Good News Here For the Addams Addicts," The Standard [Montreal] 14 Nov. 1942: 8.

³⁹Anonymous, "Former Art Critic Has Play Opening," The Standard [Montreal] 14 Nov. 1942: 8.

⁴⁰Anonymous, "Goodridge Roberts Paintings Are Shown," The Standard [Montreal] 18 Dec. 1943: 14.

throughout 1942 diminished the emphasis on art concerns at The Standard, nevertheless "Art News and Reviews" offered regular, albeit less, information on the visual arts. While the focus on war news may have been partly to blame for the diminished art reportage, it would seem that with Ayre's move to Winnipeg The Standard and its public lost a reliable and formidable guide to and critic of the visual arts. After his departure, it does not appear that The Standard was willing or perhaps able to maintain journalistic art criticism at its former level of competence.

CHAPTER 3

SOCIAL FUNCTION OF ART - SOCIAL IMPLICATION OF THE ARTIST

Throughout the 1936-1942 period of writing for The Gazette and The Standard, Ayre intentionally brought to his reader's attention the organization and development of new artist groups. While artist groups of every nature were of interest to Ayre, and judiciously reviewed in his columns, the focus of this section of the thesis will be Ayre's 'manifesto' which emphasized the relationship between art, artist and society, particularly as it was exemplified by artist groups in Canada and elsewhere. What remains pivotal is his manifest concern for defining the place of art in Canadian society as one of the most salient elements in his writing.

Ayre recognized the obstacles that obstructed a compatible relationship between art, artist and society. He makes this identification, initially, by distinguishing the problems faced by artists who functioned through 'group action' as, for example, those involved in America's WPA projects. Once these obstacles are identified, Ayre attempted to redress these problems for his readers, and the art institutions of society, by presenting the means to create a favourable climate for art in the community. How he accomplished this through topics he developed in his columns, as well as his recognition of the importance of group formation in Canada, will also be discussed in this section.

Ayre attempted through his columns to generate information which would help the public understand those issues which dominated the art world and more precisely the Canadian context, and to help facilitate the accommodation and appreciation of art and the artist as viable and dynamic aspects of Canadian society. Of the many events which occurred during the '30's and early '40's, the most relevant to Ayre's understanding and proselytizing of the relationship between art and society was the manifestation of group action at the Conference of Canadian Artists, held at Queen's University, Kingston and at the National Gallery in Ottawa from June 26-29, 1941. It may be said that the issues addressed at the Kingston Conference represent the summation of Ayre's aspirations in defining the place of the artist and art in Canada.

(A) Ayre's Manifesto

In 1936, Ayre used an essay written by Holger Cahill,¹ National Director of the Federal Art Project of the WPA, to introduce to The Gazette readers the ambitions and success of the American art projects. While it is generally accorded that, in 1937, André Biéler was one of the first members of the Canadian art milieu to point out the support given to American artists through the WPA projects, it must be noted that Ayre introduced this topic to his readers a year earlier.² Cahill's essay appeared in the catalogue for the exhibition

¹Holger Cahill was formerly a curator at the Newark Museum. There he assisted in the selection of contemporary art. He was responsible for the organization of exhibitions entitled "American Primitives" (1930) and "American Folk Sculpture" (1935). Paul Ira Kornfeld, The Educational Program of the Federal Art Project, diss., Illinois State U, 1981. Ann Arbor: UMI, 1985. 3267.

²Ayre, The Gazette 5 Dec. 1936.

"New Horizon's in American Art" presented at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1936. In addition to the many examples of work produced by the creative divisions of the WPA, the catalogue also contained a selection of children's work from classrooms of the FAP Teaching Division.³

The catalogue introduction by Cahill defined the purposes of the project and its contributions to American culture. Ayre saw this essay as a "study of art in relation to society and a statement of policy."⁴ What should be remembered in trying to appreciate Ayre's admiration of the WPA is that the administration and organization of these programs were undertaken by people such as Cahill who were closely familiar with the needs of the American artist. It is not surprising therefore that Ayre would look to such systems set up by these people as 'mentor-structures' which could be relevant to the Canadian artist.

Ayre specifically pointed out to his readers what he felt was the contribution of WPA's work projects a year after its founding: "art in the United States, in the past year or so, has spread amazingly, has come closer and closer to the people and has attained a new significance."⁵ It is this result which Ayre regarded as most relevant to the growth of art in the community. The most important aspect, however, of Ayre's treatment of the Cahill essay is that it seems to serve as a means of conveying his own personal 'manifesto.' Ayre interprets Cahill's position by writing that:

³Kornfeld, diss., 1981.

⁴Ayre, The Gazette 5 Dec. 1936.

⁵Ayre, The Gazette 5 Dec. 1936.

Art was a normal social growth, deeply rooted in the life of mankind and extremely sensitive to the environment created by human society;

that to maintain art as a vital, functioning part of any cultural scheme required a sound general movement on the part of society;

that art was suffering from the cleavage which existed between society and the artist;

that there was under-consumption of art in society;

that only increased consumption could restore art's social relevance in society.

The issues addressed here may be regarded in fact as Ayre's ideology wherein he defined his view of the artists' and art's place in society, and identified the problems encountered by this segment of the community. While it is certain that these beliefs did not form part of any written document, nevertheless they serve to define and underline the issues that Ayre continuously brought to the attention of his readers through his newspaper reviews. They serve to emphasize his ongoing interest in the social function of art and the social integration of the artist in society. These beliefs also defined that aspect of his critical intent which was to scrutinize not only the production of the artist, but also the institutionalized systems of support which society provided for that production.

Ayre constantly identified the problems that artists faced in society. In order to ensure that he could communicate successfully with his audience, he felt he must directly address his readers who he collectively called "laymen." As part of this, he wished to amplify their knowledge of art by introducing them to the terminology that specifically described newly emerging art forms. Ayre felt

that this knowledge would diminish the prejudice he knew to exist against the "moderns,"⁶ thus maintaining art as a vital functioning part of the Canadian cultural scene. Secondly, he brought to his readers' attention the need for children to be exposed to art at an early age. He believed that this would ensure a future generation willing to create an environment sensitive to the needs of art and artist and to fuse the "cleavage" which existed between society and artist. Thirdly, Ayre also looked to cultural institutions for support for the artist. His primary focus was the Art Association of Montreal, and it was his contention that the Association should adopt an aggressive collection policy directed at new Canadian art. He felt this was imperative in order to maintain the integrity and relevance of art in Canadian, and particularly Montreal, society.

(i) The "Layman"

'Layman' was a term often used by Ayre and other writers of his generation to refer to his readers. Ayre espoused a philosophical position which maintained that a knowledge of art by the general public was essential to the quality of life and would ensure the normal "social growth" of art in the community. Therefore, from the outset Ayre waged an active campaign to encourage the 'layman' to become actively involved in the visual arts, and to understand new theories in order to come to a fuller awareness of the meaning of art in society. Ayre felt that one of the functions of the art critic was to "criticize

⁶Ayre used this term to describe both European and Canadian art, from the early 20th century through to the 30's and 40's. See Trépanier "L'émergence d'un discours de la modernité dans la critique d'art (Montréal 1918-1938)" 69-112.

the public, and so educate it, and so improve taste and understanding and raise the standards."⁷

Further, by ensuring that the 'laymen' address and redress their lack of education in the arts, the rift between society and artist would be diminished. Ayre utilized his column as a pedagogical tool to help his readership cultivate an environment which would support art as a fully-rooted and vibrant growth in its midst. He often suggested that they read art catalogues from out of town museums as an alternative method of 'seeing' an exhibition, if the actual event could not be attended.

An example of this didactic approach is evident in the text of a December 5th, 1936 review in The Gazette, where Ayre discusses the catalogue for the retrospective exhibition of the American painter, John Marin, at the Museum of Modern Art:

Montrealers are not always able to run down to New York to see the stimulating exhibitions of the Museum of modern Art. The Museum's publications - available through books stores or as part of the out-of-town member's subscriptions - are therefore a boon. Indeed they are indispensable to everyone who is anxious to keep up with art and its development; and art is livelier news today than it has been for generations.⁸

In true pedagogic fashion, Ayre insists that the John Marin catalogue was "a volume that should go into every library."⁹

⁷ Robert Ayre, "A Note on Criticism," Canadian Art 7, 4 (Summer 1950): 130.

⁸Ayre, The Gazette 5 Dec. 1936.

⁹Ayre, The Gazette 5 Dec. 1936.

Not only were practical tools suggested to further the "art consciousness"¹⁰ of the reader, as well Ayre would, from time to time, present brief discourses on the evolution of western art history, various theoretical approaches and arguments surrounding the production of art, and the definition of art terminology. He would then add his own commentary and interpretation which would either complement, contradict or elaborate the theories being presented. As well, before a discussion of the works under scrutiny in his review, he would often point out to his readers the public's own shortcomings and lack of receptivity to new ideas.

For example, Ayre's June 13th, 1936 column in The Gazette was a discourse on the meaning of the term 'abstraction.' Before introducing Alfred Barr's catalogue, "Cubism and Modern Art," which Ayre described as a guide to the evolution of art from Impressionism through to Abstraction, he pointed out the limitations of the general public:

You have only to go into a gallery where 'modern' works are hung, even the most mildly modern and listen to the comments to realize how hard it is to get people to understand that art is a fruit of man and likely to assume independent forms. "But that doesn't look like Mount So-and-so" they protest. "There should be a bump here and a cleft there . . . whoever saw a tree like that . . . did you ever see a blue horse, unless you were drunk?"¹¹

As well, Ayre comments not only on the scepticism of gallery visitors but also on the anger that modern art could unleash: "They are dismayed and

¹⁰A term Ayre used on many occasions to describe the level of knowledge of art he wished his readers to attain.

¹¹Robert Ayre, "Fruit of man," The Gazette [Montreal] 13 June 1936: 15.

angry. Sometimes they laugh, but usually they are angry; they feel somehow that they have been criticized, that their senses have been affronted."¹²

To Ayre, the crux of the problem was that the uninformed viewer expected that art "must be imitation." He contended that the viewers, having learned to look at objects from an impressionist point of view, had to extend themselves further and learn to appreciate non-representational forms and abstraction. For many, this was a quantum leap. In this review of Barr's book, Ayre noted:

Yet abstract art is nothing new. Through Mr. Barr doesn't happen to mention it, it has been going on for thousands of years, and has been accepted in ceramics and textiles. Look how the ancient Peruvians conventionalized fishes and animals in their designs, and even man. . . .

He emphasized that in order for the viewer to truly understand abstraction, the search for the recognizable image had to be abandoned. The viewer had to be aware that all artists were still working ". . . well within the tradition of art, reacting to what has gone before, as original artists always have done." Ayre then pointed out to his readers the evolution of art from post-impressionism to abstraction by noting that ". . . abstraction sprang from the two main traditions - Cezanne and Seurat and cubism on the one hand and Gauguin, Matisse and Kandinsky, on the other, running into Surrealism."¹³

¹²Ayre, The Gazette 13 June 1936.

¹³Ayre, The Gazette 13 June 1936.

Having introduced the meaning of abstraction in one particular context, it was quite typical for Ayre to continue the discussion in later columns. Thus in his March 13th, 1937 Gazette column, Ayre reviews Walter Abell's book Representation and Form,¹⁴ in terms of examining the question of abstraction. However, his argument now considers the merits of subject matter versus abstraction, and an analysis of the meaning of 'form.' Ayre summarizes Abell's argument which maintained the validity of content, and that without content, form can neither achieve completion nor give the spectator full satisfaction. He acknowledges that Abell's book:

. . . serves a very useful purpose. It reminds us that there is some importance in subject matter a fact denied by many modern critics and by painters - chiefly the abstractionists who go to extremes in their reaction away from associations to pure form.

He nevertheless points out that Abell's argument could be invalidated as it had not presented the point of view of the abstractionists. Ayre states:

I feel like putting in a word for the abstractionists. It was not, of course, Mr. Abell's function in this book to plead for them - he does just the opposite - but he might have defined their position a little more clearly.

While Ayre acknowledged that a ". . . feeling of community is certainly behind the growth of social art," he felt that perhaps the abstractionists were repudiating a society which had become enmeshed in art values which were no longer valid to society; art values which were no longer integrated in the spirit and in the pattern of its culture. Ayre therefore defined the 'abstractionists' as:

¹⁴Ayre, The Gazette 13 March 1937.

fastidious people who rebelled against not only the cheapness and formlessness of the older "literary" art and against the formlessness of Impressionism, obsessed with accidental appearance but against a formless society. Fed up, they become severe, they withdraw into austerity. It will certainly not be they who will throw themselves into the new romanticism.

He defined the "new romanticism" with its stress on subject matter as being capable of enriching art and life, but he warned:

There is a danger that it will go too far in its emphasis on subject matter at the expense of form. It has already done so, as some horrible examples of propaganda painting show only too clearly.¹⁵

Ayre felt that there were deficiencies in both approaches to art. With abstraction the problem was with the spectator for whom "it was difficult . . . to allow even the purest abstraction . . . to be pure. We cannot help reading all sorts of things into them." As well with too much emphasis on subject-matter what could result would be "the hollowness that results when plastic qualities have been neglected." What Ayre is afraid of here is the fostering of subject matter at the expense of form. Ayre's concluding lesson to his readers is that the solution was to be "balanced" between any extreme stance on these issues. Essentially he felt that at this point Abell's position was also "the middle one." Ayre also warned against art as propaganda. What is salient is that he takes into account the link between society and art, even when the focus of his discussion is a analysis of the formal terminology of art.

¹⁵Ayre, The Gazette 13 March 1937.

In a 1941 column in The Standard, Ayre reviews Sheldon Cheney's book on modern painting, The Story of Modern Art, and therein continues his "instruction" on abstraction/modernism. He contends that while the author had done an excellent job in tracing the development of western art from the end of the 18th century to the 20th century, his handling of modernism was limited. Ayre counsels his readers that Cheney's version of the history of art is incomplete because:

It would have been a more profound study had he investigated modern art in its relation to society. True as it is that art, and especially in the past century, has followed its own stream of development, it does not live in a vacuum. Even its divergence from the main affairs of the world has its sociological significance.¹⁶

The "sociological significance" that Ayre considers important was the turning away of the 'moderns' from 'literary art' which was achieved through an emphasis on subject matter, and the turning towards an art which emphasizes form. Ayre points out that the artists' actions were symbolic of a rejection of an art that depended on figurative traditions, and a society that still felt this to be the ideal. He further contends that artists had turned toward the "inner life:"

Refusing any longer to imitate nature, to be sentimental, or to moralize, the modern artist is compelled to create form, to give his picture a life of its own, to express his experience of the inner life and the cosmic order.

It is evident that Ayre's intention is to create a public receptive to the new forms as a means to maintain art as a "normal social growth, deeply rooted in

¹⁶Robert Ayre, "Sheldon Cheney's Book On Modern Painting Accents Biography," The Standard [Montreal] 20 Dec. 1941: 13.

the life of mankind." It was essential that they, the consumers of art, namely the 'laymen,' create an environment sensitive to these newly emerging forms of art by understanding the criteria which guided the new art forms. As Ayre advises his readers, "with all the opportunities there are nowadays to see exhibitions of modern painting and with books like Mr. Cheney's accessible, there is . . . no longer any excuse."¹⁷

The text of a 1943 speech which Ayre gave to the Saskatoon Art Association a few months after he completed his mandate at The Standard, reiterates the pedagogical message he presented to the "layman:"

The best way to find art is to experience it. Look at a picture, or a statue. . . . A friend of mine, a layman says, "What is art?" Most of us experience art without knowing anything at all about empathy or eclecticism or significant form; the majority of people never bother their heads about aesthetics. But we should be on guard against ignorance. The attitude, "I don't know anything about art, but I know what I like" is nothing to be proud of. So I say let's not deliberately incapacitate ourselves: let's use our brains as well as our eyes and ears, let's think and inquire.¹⁸

(II) Art and Children

The relevance of art to children was a significant and regular topic in Ayre's columns throughout his mandates at The Gazette and The Standard because children represented the art audience of the future. Ayre proposed his own theories on the importance of art for children and was interested in the

¹⁷Ayre, The Standard 20 Dec. 1941.

¹⁸Robert Ayre, script of speech to the Saskatoon Art Association 1943, ts., Ayre papers, Queen's University Archives.

theories of others.¹⁹ In addition, he involved himself with the participation of youngsters in art making, and with the opportunities for them to develop an appreciation of art through diverse and innovative forms of exposure. While Ayre reviewed and discussed the various teaching methods at private institutions, such as the Art Association Saturday morning classes,²⁰ and at Montreal private schools, such as the Study,²¹ he was more concerned that the access to art and participation in art classes be made available to those in the public school system and in less privileged Montreal communities.²²

Ayre covered shows of children's art with the same enthusiasm that he displayed for the adult exhibitions. The works of the children were reproduced and analyzed and he mentioned the young artists by name, pointing out prize winners and particularly talented children. For example, in a May 1939 review, Ayre singles out:

Riva Feinberg who won first prize for modelling with a snowballer and a peasant bowed down with a burden, and Bob Bevington,

¹⁹Robert Ayre, "Art, for Children, a Joy of Life Rather Than Stereotyped Drudgery," The Standard [Montreal] 22 Oct. 1938: 6; and "Pictures in the Schools," Canadian Art 2, 1 (Oct./Nov. 1944): 29. Ayre referred to the teachings of Franz Cizek on a number of occasions.

²⁰Robert Ayre, "Assessing Worth of Junior Artists," The Standard [Montreal] 1 June 1940: 9; "Paintings By Young Students Based on History of Own Land, 'A New Approach to Geography'," The Standard [Montreal] 7 June 1941: 11; "Five Courses Set by Association for Summer School," The Standard [Montreal] 2 May 1942: 25.

²¹Ayre, The Standard 22 Oct. 1938.

²²Robert Ayre, "Art Appreciation And the Schools," The Standard [Montreal] 25 May 1940: 9.

who came second with a spiny prehistoric beast, both show a good feeling for the clay.²³

Ayre felt that the place of a future generation of Canadian artists would be ensured by a cognizant and appreciative audience. It was up to society to ensure that art was not of marginal importance to the next generation.²⁴

It was Ayre's expressed hope that members of the younger generation would not be allowed to become "philistines." The term "philistine" was generational and was used by Ayre to identify the "layman" who was unwilling to accept art as a viable and necessary part of existence. He contended that it was quite possible for the wealthy and educated to be "philistines," and he was most unsympathetic towards ". . . the professional and business classes, men and women who have had had advantages and opportunities and who ought to know better." Ayre pointed out that many of the teachers of the young were themselves "philistines" and stated that it was essential for this group to be shown proper methods of art education. Ayre's often-repeated ambition, expressed through his column and through articles, was to ensure a new "art-conscious" generation.²⁵

He was acutely aware that people who were concerned about the place of art in society, whether the art of children or of adults, would have to justify that

²³Robert Ayre, "Sharp Contrasts and Fine Artistry in Current Exhibition," The Standard [Montreal] 27 May 1939: 14.

²⁴Robert Ayre, "They Have To Be Shown," text of speech c. 1944, ts., Ayre papers, Queen's University Archives.

²⁵Ayre, text of speech c. 1944.

position. Art and the teaching of art would have to display its own social responsibility by earning its place in the community, and acting for and on behalf of the community. Quite realistically, Ayre felt that many of the older generation would "never be converted" to an appreciation of art. The solution to this problem according to Ayre was "prevention rather than cure." His belief in early art training for children was based on the theories of art educator Franz Cizek, who contributed to the then popular "cult of the child in art."²⁶

Ayre was particularly impressed with Montreal artist Fritz Brandtner's contribution to the development of children's art at The Children's Memorial Hospital, The Griffintown Club, The Negro Community Centre, the Children's Art Centre and in Brandtner's own studio. On June 7th, 1941, Ayre reviews children's art on display at Henry Morgan's auditorium and discusses the work Brandtner was doing with the chronic orthopaedic patients of The Children's Memorial Hospital:

It is not possible to overestimate the value of Mr. Brandtner's work among the hospital children. Some of them have been in bed, imprisoned in casts, for years. . . . To these little incurables the hours spent in playing with paints are a joy. . . . Painting for the other is a help toward recovery and rehabilitation.²⁷

It is evident from his review that Ayre attempted to validate the role of artist and art in all levels of society. Art is here presented as a vehicle of healing, and the artist as healer. In this way Ayre presented to his reader a valid reaffirmation of the social relevance of art in a diverse community. When

²⁶Ayre, Canadian Art 2, 1 (Oct./Nov. 1944).

²⁷Ayre, The Standard 7 June 1941.

he reviews the works of the children in The Griffintown Club and The Negro Community Centre, art and artist are validated as "enriching" the lives of the financially deprived.

He also validated the role art plays in the lives of children severely deprived because of the abuses of the War. This is demonstrated in his October 25th, 1941 review of the drawings of British children at the Art Association, circulated by the National Gallery.²⁸ Ayre was concerned with the devastation the war had caused to children, for "we know well enough what the war has done to the children of Britain; how it has dislocated their lives . . . made them orphans, destroyed their lives." As he pointed out, the exhibition represented to the British a "faith that the sense of beauty and the enjoyment of life will be allowed to expand in a world forever free from tyranny." To Ayre, it further substantiated the role of art in society.²⁹

Ayre actively tried to involve the public schools in playing a larger part in exposing children to art. He noted in his reviews the work of Louis Muhlstock, who had "introduced travelling exhibitions to the schools"³⁰ in order to provide opportunities for children who did not visit museums to be able to see art. It appears that Ayre was involved in judging the winners of a writing competition open to the public high school students in Montreal under the auspices of The

²⁸Robert Ayre, "Good Exhibition Of Drawings by British Children," The Standard [Montreal] 25 Oct. 1941: 10.

²⁹On the subject of British art during the Second World War, see Brian Frederick Foss, "British Artists and the Second World War, with Particular Reference to the War Artists' Advisory Committee of the Ministry of Information," diss., University College, London, England, 1991.

³⁰Ayre, The Standard 25 May 1940; and Canadian Art 2, 1 (Oct./Nov. 1944).

Standard. The topic was "Why I Think There Should be More Art Exhibitions in This School," and he devoted his May 25th, 1940 review to publishing excerpts from various students' essays. He printed the winning paper in its entirety. Part of it read:

The understanding of art is a vital and necessary factor in the lives of the youth of today. This being the case, I am of the opinion that the school is the ideal place wherein to implant the seed of appreciation that will generate and produce in later years a profound comprehension of all works of art. . . .³¹

In the last month of his mandate at The Standard, in his June 13th, 1942 review, Ayre turns his attention once again to the subject of art in the schools.³² He points out that Montreal art teachers have had a direct effect on the lives of children in Saskatoon in that "Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, is a long way from Montreal, but Montreal has had a good deal to do with rousing that prairie community to a lively interest in art."

He goes on to inform the readers that:

Wynona Mulcaster a former student of Ernest Lidner, in Saskatoon began teaching art. . . . A few months later, Fritz Brandtner of Montreal was invited to send to Saskatchewan an exhibition of paintings by children he had inspired. . . . According to Miss Mulcaster it ' . . . has done a great deal of good, and has helped to establish an attitude that it would have taken me years to introduce alone.'

³¹Ayre, The Standard 25 May 1940. The winning essay was written by Patricia Metidier, a student from Verdun High School.

³²Robert Ayre, "Special Exhibition Displays Unique Montreal Relics," The Standard [Montreal] 13 June 1942: 10.

Ayre further noted that the school board in Saskatoon was enthusiastic. He also informed his readers that the art classes were conducted in a large loft which Wynona Mulcaster and her students had whitewashed and decorated with their paintings. Further, the students sketched outdoors, made large murals and worked in fresco. At the end of the review Ayre noted "Canada has a new mental climate in the making."

It is evident that Ayre had an almost evangelical zeal for the encouragement of art in children, and children in the art world. He perceived in this involvement elements of far-reaching consequence for the evolution of art in the community. It may also be asserted that he believed wholeheartedly that inroads were being made in preparing a favourable climate for art in Canada.

(iii) The Art Association

With respect to the "under-consumption" of art in society, Ayre singled out the museum as the principal agent of support that could rectify the situation. He had definite ideas as to the ideal functioning of this type of institution, and these become abundantly clear through his reviews. Ayre points out that traditionally many people regarded the Art Association of Montreal as if it "belonged to the public instead of, as it does, to an association of individuals."³³ What is evident, however, in assessing the text of many of his columns is that Ayre himself appeared to regard the Association in the same light. This is not surprising since the closest public gallery was situated in Quebec City and the citizens of

³³Robert Ayre, "Art Association of Montreal," Canadian Art 5, 3 (Summer 1948): 112.

Montreal tended to regard the Art Association as the 'civic' art gallery in their midst. Ayre, however, was certainly aware that this institution was a private concern and that what public funding it received consisted of modest grants from the Province of Quebec and the City of Montreal.³⁴ This official funding was supplemented by membership fees, and as well by membership donations, and assistance from the business sector in Montreal.

It is generally recognized that the Art Association of Montreal was an extremely conservative private institution which only modestly began to buy contemporary art in 1939.³⁵ Ayre some 30 years later, in reassessing the growth of the Art Association, pointed out that it was only in 1952 that a professional director had been appointed to the Association which, as he noted, "for a hundred years" had been run "like a gentlemen's club."³⁶ This notwithstanding, his columns reveal that he expected the performance of the Art Association to rank with those of other larger and better endowed public institutions of art elsewhere in North America, and he regularly compared the Art Association of Montreal to the Museum of Modern Art in New York. He demanded from the Art Association museological approaches and exhibitions of the same calibre as those produced by what he saw as an ideal model.

Further, a prominent topic in his columns at The Gazette and The Standard was the comparison between the Art Gallery of Toronto and the Art Association with respect to innovative exhibitions, artist support and, in

³⁴Ayre, Canadian Art 5, 3 (Summer 1948).

³⁵Hill 14.

³⁶Ayre, text of speech 28 March 1967.

particular, collecting policies. Thus in a review Ayre recommends to his readers, and by extension to the Art Association, the innovative idea of the Art Gallery of Toronto in presenting demonstrations by artists in oils, watercolours, pottery, wood and other media.³⁷ On the other hand, on occasion, he does not hesitate to reprimand both organizations. Particularly dismayed with the quality of the work chosen by the Art Association for the 58th Spring Exhibition, he refers to some of the artists as "honest plodders." He also considers the works presented in the 69th exhibition of the Ontario Society of Artists at the Art Gallery of Toronto, as "shameless exhibitionism."³⁸ He then compared both organizations and noted: "Honest poverty there is in the Montreal Spring Show, but the dishonest poverty in the O.S.A. seems to me much more serious."

On May 20th, 1939, his review of the exhibition "Art of Our Day," which was the first show sponsored by the Contemporary Arts Society, reveals the state of collecting in Montreal. Ayre is delighted to find Cezannes, Derains and Utrillos in private Montreal collections. He nevertheless notes that "Montreal has been known as the last pasture for contented Dutch cows and it must come as a surprise to many that it could let down the fences for strange Blue Horsemen."³⁹ Elsewhere, he states: "There is money in Montreal and the people who have it buy pictures . . . but the fact remains, most of them are years behind the times and the picture dealer who has the temerity to think that

³⁷Robert Ayre, "R.C.A. Exhibition to Open Here on Thursday," The Standard [Montreal] 1 Nov. 1941: 10.

³⁸Robert Ayre, "Painters Who Have Nothing to Say and Say it Elaborately," The Standard [Montreal] 29 March 1941: 25.

³⁹Ayre, The Standard 20 May 1939.

Montreal is a modern metropolis has a hard row to hoe."⁴⁰ Ayre was well aware, then, of the lack of commitment to contemporary art, both foreign and local, on the part of collectors in Montreal, and in particular the acquisition committee at the Art Association. What becomes evident from his reviews at The Gazette and The Standard is that Ayre encouraged the Art Association to take an aggressive collecting stance with regard to both contemporary European, and Canadian art. He felt this would guard against stagnation and thereby ensure the potency of the museum's collection, and, as well, extend the reach of art and artist in the city.

Ayre expected an art museum, and particularly the Art Association of Montreal, to play an active part in the life of the community. He felt that while it should reflect the cultural legacy of the community in which it existed, it should also be a creative force, willing to reflect the evolution of contemporary art in that milieu. With respect to Montreal, in particular, he noted that the city could build, through the focussed efforts of the Art Association of Montreal, "a collection of important paintings" which he felt would be a notable "tourist attraction for the city."⁴¹ His approach to building collections was based on a belief that art should reflect the community's most vital art production, and thereby support both artist and society:

We no longer build for eternity. As never before, art is expendable, there should be room in the museums for the expendable. Granted a museum must be a storehouse of the

⁴⁰Robert Ayre, "Show at Scott Galleries of Contemporary English Painters Last By This Firm," The Standard [Montreal] 25 March 1939: 22.

⁴¹Robert Ayre, "Fine Paintings from Amsterdam Now at Art Association Here," The Standard [Montreal] 3 Dec. 1938: 26.

treasures of the past, but if it's alive it will be like a movie theatre, too, with continuously changing feature programs thereby encouraging new expressions of artistic life, and by extension, nurturing the expressive and physical life of the artist. . . .⁴²

On February 11th, 1939, Ayre announced that a new wing would be added to the Art Association and assessed what positive results could be actuated. His concerns once again centered on the direction of the collecting policies of the Art Association and the practical and economic results which could result in the community:

Of course this is only a beginning for there are more important elements in an art gallery than the fabric of the building, than elegant social occasions. . . . If stone walls do not a prison make, neither do they make an art gallery. What goes into these new rooms is the most important thing. With more space . . . the members of acquisition committees and those responsible for arranging loan exhibitions have greater opportunities and responsibilities. If this seems like solemn preaching, they must bear with me. I'd like to see the community enriched. I'd like to see tourists come to Montreal to look at other things than our picturesque Frenchness.⁴³

The lack of a clearly focussed direction in collecting art at the Art Association was an ongoing bone of contention between Ayre and this institution. He was well aware that there was no specific plan with regard to acquisitions and that in fact the collection was growing in a haphazard

⁴²Robert Ayre, "Dissenters" undated text, ts., Ayre papers, Queen's University Archives.

⁴³Robert Ayre, "New Wing For Art Association; New Contemporary Arts Society; and New Picture Exhibitions," The Standard [Montreal] 11 Feb. 1939: 10. Ayre's profession at the CN was that of publicist. He would, on occasion, intentionally suggest advertising strategies, and sometimes utilize advertising 'jargon' to 'sell' the idea of art to his readers or listeners. See Ayre, text of speech. c. 1944.

fashion.⁴⁴ Consequently, Ayre did not hesitate to point out in his reviews, for the Association's benefit, both European and Canadian art for sale at commercial galleries, such as Watson's and Scott's, and particularly those which he considered would make important acquisitions for the collection.⁴⁵

The text of his columns could be very bold and direct in suggesting such purchases, as was the case in 1938 when the Art Association exhibited contemporary French paintings which had been brought to the city by the Johnson Art Galleries, and first exhibited there. Ayre had gone to Johnson's expecting to find the works in question, only to find that some had been sent over to the Art Association for display, although they had not been purchased:

I had to go over to the Association to see the Matisse "Odalisque" and the Derain "Paysage." They looked very comfortable there. I don't know whether the canny acquisition committee will agree with me and far be it [for] a modest reviewer to try to influence such a august body. . . . What a feather it would be in Montreal's cap if Matisse and the Derain stayed here. . . .⁴⁶

With the Association's collection policy an ongoing concern, Ayre also reported new acquisitions in his columns. The acquisition citation appeared not only in the text of his review, but from time to time, when a photograph of the work was available, in the caption accompanying the reproduction. The caption often indicated where the work had been acquired; if a work had been donated

⁴⁴Ayre, Canadian Art 5, 3 (Summer 1948).

⁴⁵Robert Ayre, "French Pictures on View Not Hitherto Displayed on American Continent," The Standard [Montreal] 8 Oct. 1938: 7; "Exhibition at Scott's of French Moderns Attracts Much Interest," The Standard [Montreal] 15 Oct. 1938: 6.

⁴⁶Ayre, The Standard 3 Dec. 1938.

to the Art Association, the patron's name, and country and city of origin would also be noted. In encouraging the purchase of contemporary art by the Art Association, Ayre may have actually stimulated the purchase of art, particularly from local Montreal commercial galleries such as Scott's and Johnson Brothers.

As well Ayre facilitated a focus on the commercial gallery as the readers became aware of the type of art available for purchase at the commercial dealers in Montreal. He was always very concerned about the support of commercial galleries and, on the occasion of the closing of Scott's, he devoted his column to a stern reprimand of the Montreal public for its lack of support for the gallery.⁴⁷ He felt Scott's had acted like a public art museum gallery by presenting the Montreal community with the most up-to-date art from Europe, and by its support of local artists.

Ayre used various occasions to send a message to the Art Association of Montreal acquisition committee. On December 31st, 1938, he described an exhibition of LeMoine FitzGerald's drawings,⁴⁸ and the next week he precipitously wrote:

The FitzGerald drawings are still in the Art Association print room. If you haven't seen them, go tomorrow. If you have, go again. Perhaps the Association will buy two or three of them for its permanent collection.⁴⁹

⁴⁷Ayre, The Standard 25 March 1939.

⁴⁸Robert Ayre, "LeMoine FitzGerald's Drawings Delicate Sensitive and Admirable," The Standard [Montreal] 31 Dec. 1938: 8.

⁴⁹Robert Ayre, "Lord Tweedsmuir to Open New Wing of Art Association's Building; Several Exhibitions Planned," The Standard [Montreal] 7 Jan. 1939: 8.

On January 28th, 1939, Ayre reviewed an exhibition of J.W. Morrice's works at Scott's Galleries,⁵⁰ and a week later he mentioned that the Art Association had obtained five new acquisitions, among them being a Morrice and a LeMoine FitzGerald. This indicates that Ayre was aware of the influence his columns had on the art community and he may have subtly suggested that some Art Association acquisitions were encouraged by his exhibition reviews:

This week the Art Association announces five new acquisitions which should be of great interest to all art lovers in Montreal. As a gift comes "Village, West Indies" by James Wilson Morrice, whose show at Scott's was reviewed on this page last Saturday. It will be a valuable addition to a proud collection. The painting was exhibited in the French Gallery, London in 1925, at the Galleries Simsonson, Paris, the following year and in the exhibition of Canadian Art in Paris in 1927, all after Morrice's death in Tunis. . . . Purchases are "Place Jacques Cartier" by Adrien Hebert, painted in 1936 and exhibited in Mr. Hebert's one man show in the Watson Galleries; "Possa del Mare" by Eric Goldberg, begun at this village near Barcelona about three years ago and finished in Montreal, reproduced in the Spanish publication "Art" and exhibited here and in New York; a water color "Old Tree" by Louis Muhlstock, which was recently seen in an exhibition at the Faculty Club; and a prairie landscape, one of the pencil drawings by Lionel LeMoine FitzGerald of Winnipeg, shown last month in the Association's print room.⁵¹

Ayre also kept his readers apprised of the acquisitions of the Art Gallery of Toronto. In this way he would subtly fan the flames of rivalry between Montreal and Toronto and further encourage the support of the artists in the Montreal community by the Art Association. On May 23rd, 1942, the caption for Ayre's column announced that the Art Gallery of Toronto had acquired the

⁵⁰Robert Ayre, "J.W. Morrice Pictures at Scott's: 'One of Greatest of Our Painters,'" The Standard [Montreal] 28 Jan. 1939: 21.

⁵¹Robert Ayre, "Art Association Of Montreal Announces Five Acquisitions; Lively Exhibition In Print Room," The Standard [Montreal] 4 Feb. 1939: 10.

works of two "Montreal" artists: "'Dharana,' an oil painting by Frederick H. Varley and 'Spy Rock, Laurentians,' a water color, by Fritz Brandtner."⁵² While Ayre acknowledged that Varley was perhaps "more closely associated with Toronto than Montreal," he nevertheless described Varley as a Montrealer based on the fact that for the past several years the artist "has been living and working" in this city.⁵³ Ayre pointed out that Brandtner⁵⁴ had been living here for the past eight years and identified the ways in which he had become important to the local art community:

Brandtner came to Montreal from Winnipeg about eight years ago and has made himself an integral part of the community not only as a painter and designer who has left his mark on some of our public buildings but as an inspirer of children in his own Art Centre in the St. George's School, and in the Children's Memorial hospital and in various community settlements.⁵⁵

Despite this, ironically, it is the Art Gallery of Toronto that is collecting his works.

On June 20th, 1942, Ayre's caption for his column announces that the Art Association has recently acquired four works produced by Montreal artists. His fervor is evident when he notes:

⁵²Robert Ayre, "Toronto Gallery Purchases Two Outstanding Works," The Standard [Montreal] 23 May 1942: 27.

⁵³Ayre, The Standard 23 May 1942. Essentially, Ayre was aware that Varley was not specifically identified with a particular city having lived and worked in Toronto, and Vancouver as well as Ottawa and Montreal.

⁵⁴Ayre had been responsible for introducing Fritz Brandtner into the Montreal art community. See letter: LeMoine FitzGerald, Winnipeg, to Robert Ayre, Montreal, 8 March 1934, Ayre papers, Queen's University Archives. As well, Ayre did the first critique of Brandtner's work in Montreal: "Expressionist in Montreal," New Frontier 1, 2 (May 1936): 29-30.

⁵⁵Ayre, The Standard 23 May 1942.

Good news for the younger painters of Montreal, and for the public, too, comes from the Art Association this week. The President . . . announces the purchase of four paintings by three artists of this city, Marian Scott, Goodridge Roberts and Philip Surrey.⁵⁶

And, for the benefit of the Art Association:

We can't leave it to Toronto to recognize our painters. Within recent months, Toronto has acquired the works of seven Montrealers and no doubt this was a stimulation. Let's hope it is only the beginning for there are others who deserve to be included in our permanent collection.

Ayre's encouragement for purchases by younger, innovative artists is evident. As well he takes care to point out that he had commented upon the Surrey works a few weeks earlier, insinuating that the acquisition committee might have observed and been influenced by his remarks. It may be suggested that this device would further validate his critical assessments to his readers. Most significantly, Ayre observes that "the action of the Canadian Acquisitions Committee of the Art Association should be warmly commended by the community at large."

It may be stated that Ayre's intention was to address and be heard by the acquisition committee directly. If he was not always able to influence the works chosen from an individual artist, Ayre made it abundantly clear that what was necessary was an aggressive policy directed towards collecting new Canadian, and particularly Montreal, art. In 1948, six years after Ayre had stopped writing

⁵⁶Robert Ayre, "Art Gallery Buys Four Paintings By Montrealers," The Standard [Montreal] 20 June 1942: 29.

for The Standard on a regular basis, the text of an article for Canadian Art reveals that he was still concerned about the lack of focus on the Canadian collection at the Art Association.⁵⁷ He pointed out that some attempts had been made to rectify the lack of Canadian art by:

. . . obtaining works by Lawren Harris, Varley, Lismer, Jackson, Emily Carr, LeMoine FitzGerald, Lyman, Holgate, Goldberg, Hennessey, Pilot, Roberts, Muhlstock, Hebert, Robinson, Biéler, Borduas, Eveleigh, Surrey, Maurice Raymond, Cosgrove, Webber, Campbell Tinning, Prudence Heward, Anne Savage, Marian Scott, Ethel Seath, Sarah Robertson, Lilius Newton. . . .

He nonetheless felt that, "the Canadian collection, is however, still incomplete, and better examples of some of the painters are needed."

In 1967, twenty-five years after he last wrote regularly for The Standard, Ayre noted in a speech⁵⁸ he delivered to the Manitoba Educational Association that many of his aspirations with respect to institutional support for the arts in Canada, and in particular the visual arts, had indeed materialized. The most crucial aspect of this growth was that "the arts [were] . . . alive all the way across 4,000 miles." Ayre had observed in 1936 "that art was suffering from the cleavage which existed between society and the artist; that there was under-consumption of art in society; that only increased consumption could restore art's social relevance in society." What is evident in Ayre's 1967 text is that the development in institutional support for the arts throughout the country had, in his view, helped to reduce the "under-consumption" of the arts.

⁵⁷Ayre, Canadian Art 5, 3 (Summer 1948).

⁵⁸Ayre, text of Speech 28 March 1967

(B) Group Action: Canadian Groups

In 1936 Ayre looked to the United States Works Progress (later Projects) Administration's Federal Art Project (WPA/FAP, 1935 - 1943)⁵⁹ as a symbol of the effectiveness of artist groups working for the establishment of art as a viable entity in society. These projects, set up by the American federal government in response to an appeal instituted by the artists themselves,⁶⁰ were clearly the most ambitious cultural and social experiments organized to provide temporary employment for needy American artists during the Depression. The salient feature of these projects, as it pertained to Ayre's vision of art's place in society, was that the WPA initiated art projects as part of a community effort. In bringing to the attention of his readers what was essentially group action on the part of the American Government working for and in unison with American artists, Ayre touched upon a tangible example of the power of group effort in defining a place for the artist in the community. Influenced, therefore, by the WPA philosophy, Ayre identified the obstacles artists and art faced in Canadian society and looked for solutions which could address and redress this state of affairs. As mentioned earlier, in what may be regarded as Ayre's 'manifesto,' he identified the caesura between art and society as central to all art issues.

He had attempted to remove these obstacles through the voice of his columns at The Gazette and The Standard by three primary means: by augmenting the "layman's" knowledge of new art forms in contemporary society;

⁵⁹Marlene Park and Gerald E. Markowitz, Democratic Vistas: Public Offices and Public Art in the New Deal. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984.

⁶⁰Kornfeld, diss., 1981.

by recognizing the importance of children's exposure to art; and by stressing the need for financial and moral support from the Art Association of Montreal through an aggressive collecting policy aimed at contemporary Canadian art, and, in particular, Montreal art.

Since Ayre's aspirations for establishing a place for art in the community had been originally inspired by artist group action as exemplified by the WPA, it is not surprising that he judiciously followed the development of groups and associations which emerged in Canada during the 1930's and 1940's. It must be remembered that he brought to the attention of his readers those groups whose philosophy was in keeping with his own populist views: groups who shared his ambition to establish a place in the community and to find ways of financial support for the artist. As well, he was concerned with those associations that focussed on the formal issues of art, and the response of Canadian art to international trends.

Ayre provided detailed coverage in his reviews of such associations as the Eastern Group (founded in 1938), Contemporary Arts Society (1939), 'Prog' (1936) and the Seven Arts Club (1940), bringing to the attention of his readers the attitudes as exemplified by their exhibitions. Also he would suggest to his readers the type of art societies he wished to see develop in Montreal. An example of this was his suggestion (December 1938) that a Picture-Loan society be started, patterned on those already in existence in Toronto, the United States and England.

(I) The Eastern Group

In his November 5th, 1938 column for The Standard, Ayre introduced the Eastern Group of Painters to his readers and noted briefly that this group would hold its first exhibition on November 26th, 1938, at W. Scott and Sons galleries. He pointed out, as well, that each member of the Eastern Group of Painters, John Lyman, Aleksandre Bercovitch, Eric Goldberg, Goodridge Roberts, Jori Smith and Jack Humphrey, would show four paintings.⁶¹ In his November 19th column, a week prior to the upcoming November 26th debut of the Eastern Group, Ayre noted: "One of the major art events in Montreal this season should be the first show of the Eastern Group of Painters." He gave a brief history of the group and its members and further detailed the association's organizational principles.⁶² Of interest was the fact that the Eastern Group was particularly concerned with the 'multi-lingual' formal vocabulary of art and its response to international trends. The main characteristic of the 'eastern' artists was their openness to European influence. Ayre further informed his readers:

[Its membership] . . . can be enlarged by . . . unanimous vote. . . . An informal fellowship, it has no officers and is held together not by any programme but by common standards, by similarity of views on fundamentals. . . . A glance over the list of names will make it clear to anyone who knows their work that the painters differ widely from each other in both outlook and method. They are not bound together as a school espousing any manner or ism; they are not abstractionists, or naturalists or preachers of social doctrines; they are not "regional" painters in the sense that they paint, for instance, "the Quebec scene" as opposed to Georgian Bay; they do not even try to be Canadian painters; what brings

⁶¹Robert Ayre, "Rich Exhibition of Samplers Invites Estimates of Character of Young Misses Who Did Them," The Standard [Montreal] 5 Nov. 1938: 7.

⁶²Robert Ayre, "Fritz Brandtner's Panel Gay and Novel," The Standard [Montreal] 19 Nov. 1938: 26.

them together is a common devotion to painting for its own sake. They are kindred spirits in their conception of art and they think it's a better idea to come together for an annual exhibition of their best than to hold individual shows which are often padded for the sake of covering walls.

Ayre identified their belief in 'art for art's sake' and emphasized that the focus of the Eastern Group was the formal concerns, the freedom to reject academic art, and the freedom to reject Group of 7 principles. Ayre felt that their concern for individuality, innovation, and the right to challenge the status quo was the privilege of the artist and he communicated this view to his readers on many occasions. It is this right to challenge the status quo which Ayre most admired, and which this group held in common with groups of a more populist nature.

His November 26th, 1938 column is a summary of what his readers could expect from the exhibition, and was accompanied by two reproductions: Jack Humphrey's Three Nondescripts, and John Lyman's La Montagne d'Argent.⁶³ Ayre primarily addresses the formal qualities of the works, describing John Lyman's The Serial as a study of two figures, well thought out in composition and color and painted with scrupulousness. Aleksandre Bercovitch's contributions, however, are noted as being "rather disappointing," particularly the "almost sentimental portrait of a small girl 'Little Grandmother.'" Eric Goldberg "maintains his individuality," presenting works painted in "his misty dreamy style and pale color," while Jack Humphrey's contribution is

⁶³Ayre, The Standard 26 Nov. 1938. It was possible for Ayre to review an exhibition which would open the same day that his column appeared by visiting the exhibition prior to its official opening. It is apparent in many of his columns that he did this quite frequently. In this way his column would provide timely coverage of the exhibition in question.

"outstanding." Humphrey's Three Nondescripts is described as "though thinly painted . . . almost as solidly built as sculpture." Jori Smith is "represented by three pensive children and a still life, broadly and freely painted, full of vitality in handling and in color." Goodridge Roberts is described as "a quiet reflective painter," and his Gatineau landscapes, as expressing not "boisterous rhythms and colors but . . . subtleties of mood and tone."

It may be observed that Ayre focussed on the variety of approaches expressed by the painters in this group but his descriptions reinforced the individuality of each artist. As well he specifically pointed out to his readers that the work of these artists was "anything but academic." Their intent was to maintain their own individuality and this is what he wanted his readers to remember: "The six have proceeded according to their own vision; three of them owe more to European experience than to the Canadian scene. I don't for a moment go back to the Seven; I rejoice in their celebration of dramatic Canada."⁶⁴

(II) Picture-Loan Society

More germane to his quest to bond the "cleavage between art and society" were groups whose main concern echoed Ayre's populist viewpoint. Such groups as the Picture-Loan Society of Toronto could help establish the importance of art in the community. By 1936, Toronto artists had already established a Picture-Loan Society.⁶⁵ Organized by Douglas Duncan, Rick

⁶⁴Ayre, The Standard 26 Nov. 1938.

⁶⁵Hill 17.

Kettle, Erma Lennox, Norah McCullough, Gordon MacNamara, Pegi Nicol and Gordon Webber, with the objective of improving the sale of the works of younger artists, this organization was patterned on the Picture Hire Limited in England. It was designed so that artists would receive revenue, based on two per cent of the purchase value, from the rental of their works. Space was found and exhibitions arranged.

The new gallery opened on 14 November 1936 with a group show of pictures by younger artists. During the first year three hundred works were rented, fourteen exhibitions held, and special exhibitions sent to towns outside Toronto. For quite a few artists the opening of the Picture Loan marked the first upswing in their careers in seven years.⁶⁶

In his December 24th, 1938 column in The Standard,⁶⁷ Ayre encouraged the establishment of a similar picture-loan Society in Montreal as it would be instrumental in disseminating a knowledge of art while helping the artist financially. He felt that in order to create a community supportive of the arts it was necessary to ensure that people became "art-conscious," believing that art should be as available as possible without expending great sums of money. In his text Ayre gave details as to how a picture-loan society would be organized using the Toronto organization as a model. He pointed out the "one-man shows held continuously in the Charles street galleries in Toronto" and noted that several Montrealers had been invited to participate over the years. He noted that at least one-quarter of the artists represented in the collection were from Montreal, with one-half from Toronto, and the remainder from the rest of Canada

⁶⁶Hill 17.

⁶⁷Robert Ayre, "Picture-Loan Society Means of Acquiring Paintings You Admire," The Standard [Montreal] 24 Dec. 1938: 7.

and the United States. Ayre observed that, in the light of this tradition, it would be possible for a Montreal picture-loan Society to "arrange exchange exhibitions with Toronto."

A work of art was not sacrosanct to Ayre, so it is not surprising that he goes on to state that:

Pictures should not always be considered as sacred lifetime investments. That attitude and it's a common one puts too great a strain on some of them. . . . We are not all little Mellons collecting for posterity. Why should we be intimidated by a picture. Why not let them come in and out making their contribution to our changing lifes like books and music, alive rather than static?⁶⁸

This reasserts Ayre's attitude that society needed constant exposure to the visual arts to facilitate an appreciation and understanding. It also reflects his belief that if people were not willing to reach out to the arts, then society had to create institutions which would reach out to the people, as he himself did through his art reviews.

Ayre's suggestion of a Montreal picture-loan society was a key example of his ongoing search for practical means to establish a place for the artist in society. As Ayre had noted in his 1936 review of Cahill's essay, he wished to rejoin the cleavage that existed between artist and society and to actively search for ways to increase consumption of art in society and so restore its social relevance. It would appear, however, from Ayre's reviews, that a picture-loan society was never set up in Montreal patterned precisely on the Toronto version. Nevertheless, Ayre noted that by 1940, the Contemporary Arts Society

⁶⁸Ayre, The Standard 24 Dec. 1938.

had established a "picture loan system" as he described it, which was available to the public.⁶⁹

(III) Contemporary Arts Society

In his February 11th, 1939 column, Ayre announced the formation of the Contemporary Arts Society (CAS), noting that its first "organization" meeting was to be held on February 22nd, 1939.⁷⁰ Ayre made a prophetic pronouncement when he observed that this group might "have a far-reaching effect on Canadian art."⁷¹ The CAS became one of the leading forces in promoting the acceptance of modernism in the Canadian, and particularly the Montreal, art milieu.

John Lyman, the first "chairman" of the CAS, had initiated the idea for such an organization when he had observed in his article published in the fall of 1938 the lack of financial and moral support given to contemporary Canadian artists.⁷² Ayre, in introducing the association to his readers, noted details of the objectives and ambitions of the group. According to Ayre, Lyman had informed him that the purpose of the Society was to defend the professional interests of

⁶⁹Robert Ayre, "Seven Arts Club Alive to Relation of Arts to Society," The Standard [Montreal] 10 Feb. 1940: M-7. The picture-loan system operated out of 754 Sherbrooke St. W., apt. 4. This facility was open to the public on Tuesdays and Saturdays from 3-6 p.m.

⁷⁰This first organizational meeting was held at Strathcona Hall, Montreal, at 8:30 p.m.

⁷¹Ayre, The Standard 11 Feb. 1939.

⁷²John Lyman, "Art," The Montrealer, 1 Oct. 1938.

modern artists and the cause of modern art in general. Ayre included as well the official criteria to be met to become a member of the organization: "It will be open to painters, sculptors and workers in the graphic arts who have professional standards and whose point of view, sincerely held, is non-academic."⁷³

He further informed his readers that "about 15 attended a preliminary meeting and a much larger group is expected Wednesday night. Chapters of the society will spring up in other cities and a section for lay members is planned." Ayre's obvious excitement at the formation of the CAS is evident in his detailed coverage of its aspirations in supporting the artist in society which were in accordance with Ayre's own ambitions for the Canadian artist and art in Canada. This enthusiasm continued throughout the lifespan of the group; he reviewed each and every CAS exhibition.

In his February 10th, 1940 column Ayre recapitulated the ambitions and developments of the CAS one year after its inception. It is evident from this text that he has carefully documented its evolution in the local art milieu. Significantly, he notes its expansion from a dominant emphasis on painting to its involvement in the art milieu on a wider basis in its support of lectures and other activities aimed to spread the "art message." Ayre observes:

It is just a year since the Contemporary Arts Society was organized. Intended first for artists who felt that they should stand together to further the art of today, it expanded to gather in lay members; producers and consumers in the one organization; after all, neither can get along without the other. Exhibitions were held, or works painted by artist members and works by European

⁷³Ayre, The Standard 11 Feb. 1939.

contemporaries loaned from the collections of the laymen. Lectures and discussions have taken place and a picture loan system has been put into operation.⁷⁴

Although cognizant of the CAS's endeavour to introduce modernism to Montreal, Ayre was evidently interested in the populist concerns that this group also demonstrated. Three months after the above text appeared in The Standard, the CAS would play an assertive role in promoting the integration of art in society by sponsoring a meeting to describe the WPA and its government sponsored art projects. The WPA was the group that Ayre had first regarded as a symbol of artists working together for change in society and on which he had formulated the tenets of his 'manifesto' in 1936. That the WPA activities could find a counterpart in Canada was a prime interest of both Ayre and Lyman.

(iv) "Prog"

In a February 25th, 1939 review for The Standard, Ayre introduced to his readers the Toronto group 'Prog' which had been organized in 1936. Its membership consisted of artists, teachers and social workers who had come together to:

study and promote new and worthwhile trends in education in relation to social development; to foster a more widespread interest in all the creative arts; to provide a stimulus for mural painting and other art projects . . . to make a contribution to the life of the community.⁷⁵

⁷⁴Ayre, The Standard 10 Feb. 1940. A year after its inception, Ayre recapitulates the objectives of the CAS.

⁷⁵Robert Ayre, "Paintings by R.W. Pilot Brilliant in Color; Spring Show on March 6," The Standard [Montreal] 25 Feb. 1939: 20.

Study groups from this association met once a month and discussed current topics as well as carrying on research work. Artist members designed posters, murals and floats to further social and political causes such as re-housing and peace.

It is not surprising that such a group would interest Ayre and that he would conscientiously bring it to the attention of his readers. Essentially, a group such as 'Prog' was a composite of Ayre's belief in the place of art in the community, for it represented the interaction of society and artists. It might be contended that a group such as 'Prog' was symptomatic of the '30's, in its intention to create a community with representatives from a cross-section of society. A group such as this exemplifies the zeitgeist of the time and in a broad sense foreshadowed the emergence of a conference such as that held in Kingston in 1941. However, while he had exuberantly introduced 'Prog,' it was not mentioned again in his column, presumably because it was short-lived.⁷⁶ Nevertheless it serves as a paradigm of the type of group which exemplified art and community actively and positively interacting for a common good.

(v) Seven Arts Club

In his February 10th, 1940 column⁷⁷ for The Standard, Ayre announces the inaugural meeting of the of the Seven Arts Club in Montreal. This group, which lasted only a year, was not only concerned with the visual arts, but as

⁷⁶The exact date of Prog's demise is not known, nor has it been ascertained what the initials represented.

⁷⁷Ayre, The Standard 10 Feb. 1940.

well wanted to ensure the "stimulation of architecture, sculpture, music, the theatre, the film and literature." As art was publicly perceived to exist in a vacuum, the Seven Arts Club struggled to forge a link between the creators and performers and the general public. The club was not to be limited to a few initiates, but was to have the widest possible appeal so that the general public would be aware of art in its midst. The aims, as fashioned by provisional members Hazen Sise and Peter Dawson, and reported in Ayre's text, were to:

- (1) promote understanding of the arts, always stressing their interdependence and their roots in human experience;
- (2) endeavour to bridge the existing gap between the artist and the public;
- (3) enquire into methods of widening appreciation [and] of marketing and promoting more effective art education.

What is most conspicuous when the principles of the Seven Arts Club are examined, is that they mirror, almost word for word, the tenets of Ayre's own 1936 'manifesto' inspired by the WPA. In his 'manifesto,' the critic had defined for himself and his readers the place of the artist in the community as well as the problems faced by these artists, and these were the principles which defined Ayre's ongoing discourse in the press. The endeavour to "bridge the gap between artist and public" as The Seven Arts Club proposed, and as Ayre had defined it in his 'manifesto,' to mend the ". . . cleavage which existed between society and the artist . . ." were precisely the same. This leads one to speculate whether or not Ayre was influential in defining the tenets of the Club. The principles of the Seven Arts Club may be seen as a further manifestation of Ayre's ambition to define a place for art in the community - aims which he had announced to his readers four years earlier.

It is not surprising that he further informed his readers that the group had used the "W.P.A. in the United States and the mural painters of Mexico as illustrations" on which to model itself. Ayre further points out to his readers that groups such as the CAS welcomed the formation of other artist groups:

Some may have felt that it [Seven Arts Club] was invading a field already held by the Contemporary Arts Society, but John Lyman, creator of the C.A.S. feels no trespass. He told the meeting the other night that he welcomed the new group, that there was room in Montreal for the two of them.⁷⁸

The importance he continually placed on art's role in the community is apparent when Ayre details in his column the proclamation of the Seven Arts Club, as follows:

From the broadest point of view, such organized movements to reforge the former links between artists, performers, craftsmen, manufacturers and consumers are today historically the more necessary because the tremendous advances in technology, in modes of living and in social customs have shattered traditional relationships. It will be the task of our generation to study the social function of the arts and bring about a new harmony among them based on the realities of life as it is lived TODAY.⁷⁹

It is evident that by 1940 Ayre felt that the Montreal community was becoming more receptive to the cause of the place of the arts in general. He indicated the many different associations which by 1940 were being organized to encourage the arts, in all their diverse forms, and shared his optimism with his readers when he stated:

⁷⁸Ayre, The Standard 10 Feb. 1940.

⁷⁹Ayre, The Standard 10 Feb. 1940.

With the Montreal Repertory Theatre, the symphony, societies, the Contemporary Arts Society, now the Seven Arts, and with the Film Society struggling to be reborn, Montreal is becoming a livelier place to live in.⁸⁰

(vi) Towards The Kingston Conference

In his April 27th,⁸¹ and May 4th, 1940⁸² columns, Ayre once again brought to the attention of his readers the WPA projects in progress in the United States. Ayre had attended a meeting on April 23rd, 1940, sponsored by the CAS and held, at short notice, at Strathcona Hall of McGill University where John Lyman, President of the CAS, was then teaching. The object of the meeting was to introduce Edward Rowan, assistant to Edward Bruce, Director of the United States Government's section of Fine Arts, to the members of the CAS. The organization which Rowan represented was responsible for the decoration of all Federal public buildings in the United States, under the Government's Section of Fine Arts.⁸³ In five years this organization had "spent

⁸⁰Ayre, The Standard 10 Feb. 1940.

⁸¹Robert Ayre, "Canadians Would Like Art 'Project,'" The Standard [Montreal] 27 April 1940: 9.

⁸²Robert Ayre, "Art Project Here A War Casualty," The Standard [Montreal] 4 May 1940: 9.

⁸³ Edward Rowan discussed the function of the Treasury Department's Section of Painting and Sculpture, later called the Section of Fine Arts. The art projects were ambitious cultural and social experiments and were inspired by the same political motives which underwrote other Roosevelt New Deal experiments. The New Deal set up a number of more ambitious projects, which had different administrators, goals and constituencies but which functioned together to give comprehensive support and encouragement to art and artists.

As cited earlier, the Works Progress (later Projects), Administration's Federal Art Project (WPA/FAP, 1935-1943) sought to aid artists by employing those who were already on relief. It focused on large cities, where most of the artists lived, and the work produced went to state and municipal, rather than federal, institutions. The

more than \$1,000,000 on murals" in post offices and other federal buildings throughout the United States.⁸⁴

Under Bruce and Rowan, this Fine Arts Section had organized an exhibition of studies for murals which had been exhibited in the United States and was about to be circulated in Canada by the Canadian National Gallery. Rowan had been to Ottawa to "launch the tour [but] there was some hitch, and rather than cool his heels waiting in the Capital, Mr. Rowan paid a flying visit to Montreal to tell his story to as many as might be gathered together. . . ." In the light of this unexpected opportunity, the CAS seized the moment to introduce Rowan to Montrealers. As Ayre observed:

The Contemporary Arts Society did the best it could on a few hours notice and while the group that assembled in Strathcona Hall was not as large as the visitor deserved it was good considering the circumstances and it certainly made up in keenness what it lacked in numbers. Most of the audience was prepared for Mr. Rowan. They were painters who had been thinking and talking a great deal about art and the community.⁸⁵

The topic of Rowan's discussion was an account of the United States' government involvement with the artist projects produced for this section of the

WPA/FAP employed as many artists and artisans and served as much of the public as it could.

To provide decorations for federal buildings, the Treasury Department, which at that time built and administered those buildings, also directed two art programs. One, the Treasury Relief Art Project (TRAP, 1935-1939), like the WPA/FAP, largely employed artists on relief. The other, the Treasury Department's Section of Painting and Sculpture, had as its Section Leaders, Edward Bruce (1879-1943), and Edward Rowan (1898-1946), and was the longest lived of these agencies. See Marlene Park and Gerald E. Markowitz, Democratic Vistas.

⁸⁴Ayre, The Standard 27 April 1940.

⁸⁵Ayre, The Standard 27 April 1940.

WPA. This was an important subject for Canada as government sponsorship of public works of art was becoming a major interest of many artists concerned about their role in the social issues of the day, especially now that the country was at war.⁸⁶ The artists who attended the meeting were extremely enthusiastic and had queried the speaker as to how to go about requesting projects, similar to those set up by the United States government, from the Canadian government.

Ayre's reaction, however, was decidedly pessimistic, holding out little hope for a similar project in Canada at that time, because of the war. While it has been cited that "in light of the events in the United States, the lack of cooperative activity among [Canadian] artists to better their own situation is a bit surprising,"⁸⁷ it is not so surprising if one considers that at the time when American artist involvement and cooperation with the New Deal art projects was at its strongest, Canadians were already serving in military action. As Ayre pointed out to his readers: "the most dreadful fact we have to face is that we are at war. . . . As a people we are sending men to battle and spending millions on guns and aircraft."⁸⁸ While the U.S. could set aside one per cent of building costs for murals to decorate public buildings, in Canada "we won't even have the buildings."

Ayre pointed out as well, that even if the war was not a hindrance, it was hard for him to envision "new post offices with murals in Ste. Anne de la

⁸⁶Hill 17.

⁸⁷Hill 17.

⁸⁸Ayre, The Standard 4 May 1940.

Pocatiere, Que., and Napinka, Manitoba." As he further reasoned, one post office mural translated into one artist and one work. Ayre's preference was that the Government should provide the people of outlying areas with small art galleries:

If you gave the people of Moose Jaw and the surrounding prairie communities a small gallery of pictures from all parts of Canada, their horizon would be widened and their experience deepened. They would benefit, the artists would benefit, and, as you multiplied the galleries, the whole of Canada would benefit.

While Ayre's response to the single mural was not enthusiastic, his vision and hope for a gallery project on the part of the government again reflects clearly his populist approach. His intention was to expand the horizon as far as possible and this would mean the largest number of artists, exposed to the largest audience, benefitting all of Canada.

Possibly an important point Ayre reports that he had made at this CAS meeting with Rowan was his advice to the artists on finding a means for more exposure. Ayre felt that the problem could be resolved by the artists themselves with a direct appeal to the Canadian Government:

Maybe the minister will have to be stimulated at home. Perhaps the artists, perhaps organizations of artists and laymen like the Contemporary Arts Society will have to carry on a persistent lobby, not only in Parliament but amongst the people as a whole so that the demand will be widespread.⁸⁹

⁸⁹Ayre, The Standard 4 May 1940.

What is evident is Ayre's ongoing belief in the concerted force of artist and layman working as a group to effectively establish a viable, definitive place for art in the community. These columns appeared in April and May of 1940, fully a year before the June 1941 date of the Kingston Conference. It thus may be suggested that the aspirations expressed at that time served to stimulate the members of the Montreal art community who attended the Conference. As one of the most important art events which occurred during the 1940's, the Conference of Canadian Artists was a tangible expression of the vision of the artist's place in society, a vision which Ayre had conveyed to his readers time and again through his column. An examination of Ayre's participation in the events as the voice of The Standard serves as a way to examine his particular attitude to the event.

In Ayre's April 12th, 1941 column⁹⁰ for The Standard, written to announce the Conference of Canadian Artists at Queen's University, there is an emphatic air of optimism with regard to what he believed this Conference would accomplish. His text confirms that he hoped the Conference, through discussions and demonstrations, would work towards dispelling "hesitancy as to the direction and purpose of art in Canada . . . and the relationship of the artist to society" and "bring the artists in this widespread country closer together to restore them to a place worthy of the contributions they have to make to mankind." As Ayre more precisely observed, "Of the greatest value, it seems to me, will be the opportunity the conference will give for the artists of Canada to meet each other to live with each other for a few days."

⁹⁰Ayre, The Standard 12 April 1941.

This extract from the text alludes to one of Ayre's greatest fears: the lack of communication between the artists of the country. It must be remembered that Ayre's career with CN had forced him to travel extensively across Canada. He was a native Winnipegger, and had lived for a number of years in Montreal and Toronto. He had kept up his connections with the Winnipeg art community especially through a close friendship with LeMoine FitzGerald. Artist friends in the Toronto art community included Paraskeva Clark and Charles Comfort, and in Vancouver there was Lawren Harris. His personal and business correspondence includes letters from a large proportion of the artists who came to the fore at the end of the '30's and through the '40's. Ayre's vision of Canada was broad-based but not entirely free from regionalist concerns. Nevertheless, national concerns could override regional ones.

Consequently, Ayre brought it to the attention of his readers on several occasions that one of the greatest dangers to the healthy evolution of art's place in Canada was in "allowing geographical difficulties to divide the country."⁹¹ While he acknowledged that regions existed in Canada, he was of the opinion that "we have local differences but we are small in population and we are one people."⁹² Ayre underscored that this Conference would provide an opportunity for Quebec and Ontario to draw closer together. A sharp contradiction must be noted at this juncture. While Ayre professed to be non-regionalist, he was definitely partial to promoting the artists of Montreal.⁹³ On occasion there was a subtle suggestion in his columns that Montreal's approach to art was more

⁹¹Ayre, The Standard 12 April 1941.

⁹²Ayre, The Standard 12 April 1941.

⁹³Trépanier, Jewish Painters 92.

dynamic. He might also be accused of fostering, albeit subtly, the traditional rivalry between Montreal and Toronto. However, it does not appear that he did this to the detriment of any one artist over another, based upon their province of origin, for his references were always to the city and not to the individual artist.

Notwithstanding this, by singling out the two regions of Ontario and Quebec to make his point, Ayre alludes to the traditional rivalry that existed between the two centres and uses this to send a more forceful message to his readers. Ayre felt that both Ontario and Quebec were guilty of considering their own uniqueness in Canadian art as representative of the 'true' manifestation of the Canadian statement. Ayre's assessment of the Canadian identity can be compared to that of his contemporary in Toronto, the art critic Pearl McCarthy, who felt that "Canadian Art:"

. . . does not refer to the assessment of values . . . does not refer necessarily to subject matter or to the place where the artist happened to be born, but, rather to the fact that he is what he is because he matured in the physical and spiritual environment of Canada and that he realized his personality, in relation to world currents of thought as well as local background.⁹⁴

It is evident that Ayre's hope for the meeting of artists at Kingston was that this would be an opportunity for Canadian artists to ensure that the country did not become categorically regionalized. As he explained, the danger lay in the country being divided into "water-tight compartments."⁹⁵ He felt that it would be an opportunity for artists from the various centres in Canada, as well as those

⁹⁴Pearl McCarthy, "Canada's Art Ferment," Culture 9 (1948): 396. In 1948 Pearl McCarthy was art critic for the Globe and Mail.

⁹⁵Ayre, The Standard 12 April 1941.

outside of the main centres, to exchange ideas, and envisioned a sharing of information between the participants: "Ontario and Quebec will be able to draw closer together, to know at first hand what is going on in the Maritimes, on the Prairies, away out at the Pacific Coast."⁹⁶ Unfortunately, regional representation at the meeting was in fact not as equitable as Ayre had hoped. In the following weeks, both pre-conference and post conference, Ayre kept his readers abreast of the situation. As well, he brought to the attention of his readers the technical workshops, such as colour mixing laboratories, conservation instruction and other practical events which were being planned for the Conference.

Both André Biéler and Ayre felt it was important that Canada should look to the United States for guidance. Biéler felt that "the Federal Art Project and its diffusion of art through the country, kindling even the smallest centre"⁹⁷ was a model that Canada should utilize. Ayre, like Biéler, had always regarded activities in the art milieu in the United States as a viable source of guidance to the visual arts in Canada. As discussed previously in this essay, as early as 1936, Ayre had brought the activities of the WPA, and its representative Holger Cahill, to the attention of The Gazette readers.

André Biéler's opening address at the Conference brings to light one of the key themes which propelled the Conference. It reiterates the message Ayre had persistently brought to his readers for the effective functioning of art associations in Canadian society. Biéler stated:

⁹⁶Ayre, The Standard 12 April 1941.

⁹⁷André Biéler's remark cited by Ayre in The Standard 12 April 1941.

We have [art] societies all through the country, but we have nothing that would bring them together, nothing that would serve as a central point where they could convene or by means of which the members of these various societies could present their case to the government or anyone else. So this is one thing I should like you all to think about during this Conference so that, if possible, we might be able to formalize in some way the idea of setting up a federation of the art societies of Canada.⁹⁸

On July 5th, 1941,⁹⁹ Ayre's column is an animated report of events that had occurred at the Kingston Conference, providing detailed coverage of activities and highlights, both serious and anecdotal. The most important information which emerges from this review, and which reflects the aspirations of Biéler's opening address, was the possibility of starting a Federation of Canadian artists. Ayre noted, "The question of a Federation wasn't really settled. Lawren Harris, now living in Vancouver outlined a practical scheme. But there were two or three points of view."¹⁰⁰

As well, Ayre detailed in his text what he considered to be the "Resolutions" that had come out of the Conference. In order to understand the proceedings from Ayre's point of view, it is important to note how he composes these resolutions:

- The Dominion Government was asked to get busy about war records in the form of works of art. It was pointed out that Canada took a lead in the war of 1914-1918 in setting up such a collection,

⁹⁸As cited by Robert Ayre on the 10th Anniversary of the Kingston Conference in a review for Montreal Star where he recapitulates and highlights the salient events at the Conference. Ayre, Montreal Star 2 June 1951.

⁹⁹Ayre, The Standard 5 July 1941

¹⁰⁰Ayre, The Standard 5 July 1941.

that Britain had lost no time in the present war and that Canada was still lagging;

- Another resolution deplored the tendency seen in some quarters to put things off until after the war. Even in the midst of air raids, England carries on, and exhibitions for instance are more numerous than ever;

- Universities that have no Fine Arts department were urged to set their houses in order. One of the most prominent laggards is McGill, left behind by smaller institutions like Acadia and Saskatchewan;

- The conference was also very much concerned about art in the High School, through the country. Art should be something more than an option. It should be built into the lives of the young people.¹⁰¹

Art for War records, exhibitions, art in Universities, and in high schools were all issues which Ayre had constantly addressed throughout his mandate at The Gazette and The Standard. While these concerns were generational, of his own volition Ayre had identified and brought to the attention of his readers the specific areas where art was most needed in the community.

When Ayre first announced the upcoming Conference on April 12th, 1941, he had stated that the greatest value he put on such an event was that it gave artists from across Canada the opportunity to meet each other. In his report after the Conference it is evident that the results were positive:

To me the Conference was important if for no other reason than it gathered together some 150 artists from all parts of the Dominion, Vancouver and Edmonton, Saskatoon and Winnipeg met Toronto, Montreal, Ottawa, Quebec, Fredericton, Saint John and other cities

¹⁰¹Ayre, The Standard 5 July 1941.

. . . East and West. . . . A new understanding was born, a new friendship, a new solidarity.¹⁰²

Eight months later, in his January 3rd, 1942 column, after recapitulating events which had occurred in the Canadian art world, and which he had brought to the attention of his readers throughout 1941, Ayre wrote that "the most important event was the Conference at Kingston, which brought together artists from all parts of the Dominion and out of a slow gestation is about to give birth to a national association for the furtherance of the arts in Canada."¹⁰³

¹⁰²Ayre, The Standard 5 July 1941.

¹⁰³Ayre, The Standard 3 Jan. 1942.

CONCLUSION

It is evident that in choosing the daily press as a vehicle to disseminate his ideas on art, Ayre selected one of the most effective media to reach the general public. Ayre perceived himself to be a reliable source of information for the 'layman' - one who could be depended upon for clearly articulated guidance on the visual arts in Canada. As he stated in 1942 with regard to his art criticism, "I think I can say I have done something constructive for art in this country."¹ It may be contended that Ayre's assertion is well justified. His reviews at The Gazette and The Standard should be considered the "constructive" legacy which the critic bequeathed to the Canadian 'layman,' and as well to Canadian art history. Consequently, although nearly five decades have elapsed since Ayre wrote for The Gazette and The Standard, his reviews continue to be a primary source of knowledge on the art that emerged in Canada throughout the 1930's and 1940's. The clarity of Ayre's writing ensures that information is neither obscure nor ambiguous. When Ayre introduced reproductions to accompany his reviews, he fashioned a 'catalogue' which serves today as a retrospective of art in Canada, and particularly Montreal, from 1936-1942.

In 1967, Ayre delivered a speech to a Winnipeg audience.² His text was a recapitulation of the development of Canadian art from the 1920's through to

¹Ayre to Heit, 7 Sept. 1942.

²Ayre, text of speech 28 March 1967.

the 1960's. As he stated, "I have been around a long time. Nearly everything that has happened in the arts in this country has happened during my lifetime and when I speak about the development I speak from my own observation." Significantly, Ayre addressed the expanding role of the museum in Canadian society:

New Museums and art galleries . . . are springing up all over the country and old ones can no longer contain themselves. It is significant in the development of Canada that the Quebec Ministry of Cultural Affairs has enlarged the Quebec Museum, opened others in the old city and established the Museum of Contemporary Arts in Montreal.³

As well he noted the emergence of the Canada Council as a significant cultural agency to support the creative spirit in Canada. The most important observation, however, was his delineation of the growing financial autonomy of the artist in Canadian society. Ayre observed that "there never was a time when Canada offered so many opportunities to her artists and gave her people so many opportunities to enjoy their work for the first time in their lives, many of them (artists) without private means, find they can make a living by their talents without resorting to other employment."

It may be suggested that Ayre felt that the "under-consumption" of art in society was now rectified, and that artists, twenty-five years after he wrote for the The Gazette and The Standard, were being integrated into the community. Ayre describes what it had been like in the "earlier days,"⁴ defining the measures he

³Ayre, text of speech 28 March 1967.

⁴Ayre, text of speech 28 March 1967.

had to take to support the visual arts in his capacity as reviewer for The Gazette and The Standard through the 1930's and 1940's. Ayre contends that:

In the earlier days, when the shoots were so tender in our rough climate, it was necessary to nurse them along, lest we had no growth at all. In the days when appreciation and encouragement came first, I did of course try to raise standards, to root out the flabby and the phony, to welcome fresh expressions and by interpretation get the public to be receptive too.

It would appear that by 1967 Ayre no longer felt the need for the solicitude he once felt was necessary to ensure the proper growth of art in the community. This solicitude had been manifest during the 1930's and 1940's, when, in accordance with his 'manifesto,' he had felt it necessary to address the "cleavage which existed between society and the artist," and to redress the "under-consumption of art in society."

Ayre declared that he had been an eyewitness to the growth and integration of art in society. As well he declared that he had encouraged and been receptive to this growth. As an observer and a participant, it is apparent that his contribution had been most significant, and highly effective.

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Appendix A

Robert Hugh Ayre - 1900 - 1980

CREATIVE AND DOCUMENTARY WRITING

"The American Empire." Canadian Forum 7, 76 (Jan. 1927): 105-106.

"Ibsen and Canada." Canadian Forum 7, 90 (March 1928): 569-571.

"Chauve Souris and the Little Theatres." Canadian Forum (Dec. 1929): 105-107.

"National Theatre with Roots." Canadian Forum (June 1930): 344,346.

"The Theatre Guild of Montreal." Canadian Forum (Aug. 1930): 425,426.

"The Raven and the Sun." Queen's Quarterly 37 (Summer 1930): 495-513.

"Hierophant." Canadian Forum 10 (Sept. 1930): 465,466.

"Pollyanna Farmer." Canadian Forum 11 (Nov. 1930): 56-59.

"Victoria Square, Montreal." Canadian Forum 12 (Jan. 1932): 131 (poem).

"Frederick Philip Grove." Canadian Forum 12 (April 1932): 255-257.

"When the Railway Came to Canada." Queen's Quarterly (May 1932): 274-290.

"Jacob Ben Ami and the Essentials." Canadian Forum 12 (Aug. 1932): 436.

"Pauline Johnson." Canadian Forum 14 (Oct. 1933): 17.

"Mr. Cooney Makes it Right with God." Canadian Forum 14 (April 1934): 267.

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"Mr. Sycamore" The Encyclopedia of the American Theatre 1900 - 1975 San Diego: A.S. Barnes & Co. Inc., 1980.

"Mr. Sycamore (11/13/42, Guild, 19)

Whimsical fable about a postman (Stuart Erwin) who decides it would be nice to turn into a tree and does. 'The play stops growing long before the tree does.' (PM).

Mr. Sycamore, adapted from a story by Robert Ayre, was written by screenwriter Ketti Frings (Hold Back the Dawn, Come Back Little Sheba, etc.). Miss Frings later won the Pulitzer Prize for her dramatization of Thomas Wolfe's Look Homeward, Angel (1957). C: Lillian Gish, Russell Collins, Enid Markey, Otto Hulett, John Phillip, Harry Townes, Leona Powers. P: The Theatre Guild. D: Lester Vail. SD: Samuel Leve."

Appendix B

Robert Hugh Ayre - 1900 - 1980

TRAVEL 1924 - 1980 (Canada)

1924 - 1927	Winnipeg	<u>Free Press</u> [Winnipeg].
1927 - 1930	Winnipeg	CNR Publicity Department.
1930 - 1932	Montreal	CNR Headquarters, Publicity Department.
1932 - 1934	Toronto	Editor of CNR <u>Canadian National Magazine</u> .
1934	Windsor/Detroit	Advertising agency promoting sale of Ford Motor cars.
	Toronto	Freelance work.
1934 - 1937	Montreal	Editor of Literary section of <u>The Gazette</u> .
1937 - 1942	Montreal	CNR, Publicity for Trans-Canada Airlines; <u>The Standard</u> .
1942 - 1944	Winnipeg	CNR, Publicity for Trans-Canada Airlines.
1944 - 1980	Montreal	Public Relations, CNR; Co-editor <u>Canadian Art</u> ; Art Notes - <u>Montreal Star</u> ; contributions to various newspapers and periodicals.

Appendix C

Robert Hugh Ayre - 1900 - 1980

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTICES, DEATH ANNOUNCEMENT, REVIEW

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