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**The Crystal and the Thought**  
**Fritz Brandtner : Art and Education**

Honor Robertson

A Thesis  
in  
The Department  
of  
Art Education

Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for  
The Degree of Master of Arts at  
Concordia University  
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

May 1993

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## **Abstract**

### **The Crystal and the Thought Fritz Brandtner: Art and Education**

**Honor Robertson**

This study examines the philosophy and pedagogy of the German-born artist and teacher Fritz Brandtner (1896-1969), as seen through his personal Journal, written in English. The Journal contains a wealth of ideas and information and covers social and political issues of Brandtner's era, which are still pertinent today.

Interpreting Brandtner's writings necessitated an understanding of the life and culture in twentieth century Germany. An historical overview of the social and political upheavals and the place of art education in traditional German education is given stressing the importance of the German Expressionists and the Bauhaus.

The Journal is a record of Brandtner's reflections on many subjects. By repeated assertions he reveals his concerns. Some statements he credits to others, but most of his ideas derive from personal observation and the digestion of works by unnamed authors, which he weaves into a personal credo.

Individuals who knew or had been taught by Brandtner were interviewed to shed light on his temperament as a man and a teacher. His teaching is compared with those of his contemporaries. While sharing the positive attributes of the Dewey influenced pedagogues, he reflects the Bauhaus and such earlier innovators as Pestalozzi and

Froebel. He saw the teaching of art as an enrichment to life which would build character.

The proceedings of the 28th World Congress of INSEA have just been held in Montreal, bringing into sharp relief the message which Brandtner so eloquently, if sometimes awkwardly, leaves for us in his Journal.

## Acknowledgements

Many people contributed to the realization of this study. In particular I wish to express my gratitude to the following individuals:

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Thanks are also due to Kathy Adams who helped me get the work into final form and to Miss Edgar's and Miss Cramps School for permission to include archival photographs of Fritz Brandtner and reproductions of his students' work.

Finally, I wish to include a note of appreciation to my family for their support and encouragement.

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## PREFACE

This thesis came about through a personal search to understand my lifelong interest in and, I hope, appreciation of the arts. I felt that my curiosity for all things artistic was somehow linked to my first art teacher: German-born Canadian painter Fritz Brandtner. Because I knew him as a child, I knew him as my teacher, not as an artist. Although I was young, and my exposure to him brief, he left an indelible impression on me. Over the years I have wondered whether it was his pedagogical approach, or the temperament of the man, which most marked me. Upon reflection, it became clear that they were one and the same. Brandtner's thoughts and ideas about art were entirely integrated with his social concerns.

Through my continued interest in the history of art, I came to know a good deal about Brandtner the artist. However, no one seemed particularly interested in Brandtner the teacher; although this is how he supported himself financially throughout his life. Further, I was to find that there seemed to be a certain disassociation between his role as a painter and his role as a teacher, with the latter being under appreciated. Perhaps it was because he taught only children. Perhaps it was because he was German, with foreign ideas.

Because of my own feelings for the man, I felt that there was an enormous debt owed to someone who had done so much for children.

Early in my quest, I came across a reference to an unpublished personal journal kept by Brandtner. I felt that if I could find it, I might have direct access to Brandtner

through his writings. The Journal was generously loaned to me by a Montreal gallery owner. It proved to be written entirely in English and contained a vast range of interests and disclosures which often addressed issues of contemporary concern. This said it was decidedly not the document to use to analyze or describe the pedagogical approach or educational theories of this impressive man. Most of Brandtner's writing was couched in non-specific language and in those general terms so often found, I discovered, in the writers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. To try to get a more personal idea of what lay behind some of Brandtner's statements I, as he, undertook a broad reading program touching on German social history, philosophy, art theory, and education, all the while looking for threads which could tie some of the evidently seminal Germanic ideas reflected in the Journal to art education as practised in North America.

Brandtner appears to have been a product of his time and place. By this I mean that his outlook, linking social goals with artistic ones, closely mirrors the philosophy of his contemporaries who worked or trained at the Bauhaus. Financially unable to attend this celebrated school, Brandtner was nonetheless knowledgeable about what the school taught and shared the collective sentiment that the arts (from housing to table settings) could create a unifying and harmonious effect on the way we live.

To discover more about Brandtner's personal interactions and relationships, I interviewed many of his ex-pupils as well as others who while not students, knew him in the role of teacher. In a few instances, these individuals knew him also as a painter and were able to support the thesis that he considered the roles of artist and teacher to constitute two separate endeavours. This led me to the realization that, while he had

chosen painting as a profession, Brandtner's teaching did not reflect an expectation of producing fellow artists. He states as early as 1938 that his goal was not "to train children to be artists, but to build their character and enrich their lives" (Kids and Paint, Montreal Standard, Sept. 1938). Brandtner saw all human experiences as activities which could be integrated into art and he used the plastic arts as a vehicle to promote both self awareness and development (self-actualization). He used painting and drawing as others might use sports.

Brandtner's approach to teaching was unlike his Canadian contemporaries. His educational theories seemed to reflect early innovators such as Pestalozzi and Froebel more than any particular art specialist. This discovery pushed my research towards greater emphasis in the area of German educational and social philosophy and its dissemination. It also made it necessary to devote time to understanding the importance of "Expressionism" in both social and artistic terms.

Creativity and imitation were issues raised by Brandtner, but as we will see in my references to the Journal he used the terms mostly to differentiate good from bad art. Furthermore, I feel that he would not have equated what he did in activating a child's sense of self discovery with creativity. For Brandtner the word creativity implied innovation and he did not judge his student's work. Brandtner was striving to bring about well-being or *épanouissement*; his method being that the stronger (formed) individual undertakes to encourage and enable the weaker (less formed) one to maximize his/her abilities. Brandtner's quest was to open children's minds to artistic expression and have the experience remain with them. His thoughts are echoed in the words of

French playwright Jean Anouilh that "the object of art is to give life a shape" (The Rehearsal).



**FRITZ BRANDTNER**

**(1896-1969)**

*Art is the crystal through which our muddy thoughts are made clear  
- we start every day anew.*

Fritz Brandtner (Journal)

## **Introduction**

One of the great pleasures of my rural childhood, besides riding horses, was drawing. At a tender age I was taken to the city to meet a big burly bear of a man with a heavy German accent and forceful ideas. I was told that this foreigner, dressed in a three piece suit, was an artist and being a timid sheltered child I thought that I was meeting the height of urban exotica. My relationship with Fritz Brandtner, my first art teacher, lasted for about six years, grade 2 through to grade 8, and while there were some uncomfortable moments during this time, due mostly to my frustration at my inabilities, he challenged me. My memories of him impress me to this day, for he enabled me to draw horses, animals I loved and rode every day, without showing me a picture of one or putting a mark on my paper. For me this was magic. How did Mr. Brandtner do it? (He was always called Mr. Brandtner or Mr. B.)

To try and find the answer I embarked on my present inquiry. When I learned about his personal Journal, I thought that maybe, with a mere reading of this work, I would find the secret that he held, which was the ability to conjure up a mental image in one's head and then coax it through the hand and onto a blank piece of paper. After many readings of Brandtner's Journal, I have found no answer to the question, "how?" My readings of the Journal have been fleshed out with scholarly works and interviews

and at last I have a good portrait of the man, the artist and the educator. Testimonies to Brandtner's abilities as an exceptional teacher abound. But what was it about him? How did he do it? Was it due to the fact that his whole life was an engagement with the arts and his teaching only a by-product? Did he teach by being a role model? Was he simply the product of a rich cultural tradition, a heritage shared by his contemporary fellow Germans?

Each reading of Brandtner's Journal has given me a new or deeper insight into the man - his energy and his purpose. At first I thought that I would feel intimidated by reading something private which had not been edited, but Brandtner's work has little of the personal story or description which one finds in Paul Klee's diaries or Anne Truitt's artist's Journal. Brandtner's work is closer in style to the ideas of his hero and contemporary George Grosz, who is quoted as saying that it is more important to give "the facts of my knowledge from my experiences, than to recount the stupid, external accidentals of my life" (Irwin Lewis, 1971, p.7). With the same emphasis, Brandtner gives us a straight forward jotting down of ideas and considerations (original and borrowed) intended for no one but himself. There is little sentiment and virtually no description in his writing, and the Journal presents itself as an unsequenced and unedited wish list of statements and musings. The abruptness and lack of literary style made reading and comprehension at first difficult, but with exposure over time, the whole work achieved a certain directness of communication. The non-specific language became familiar through the reading of writers from the early part of the century, especially the translated German authors.

Originally, I thought that I would begin by writing about Brandtner's career as an art educator, but that was like putting the cart before the horse; for understanding the strength and pervasiveness of the German culture was of utmost importance, not only to explain Brandtner, but also to see how it set him apart and freed him from the two educational traditions already existing in Montreal, the French and the English. Therefore, the enquiry starts with Brandtner's German heritage and the political climate in Germany prior to his arrival in Canada, in 1928.

Shortly before I completed my writing, another hand written document, came into my hands. It proved invaluable. Like the Journal, it is undated, but the 24 sequential underlined and emphasized pages seem to be from the early 1950s. It consists of a talk delivered to the Ottawa Artist's Association entitled, "Modern Art as I See It". The writing connects many of the fragmented ideas found in the Journal, fleshing them out and putting them in context. Of all of Brandtner's writings consulted, this one seems most to position him within his cultural heritage, in this case echoing the nineteenth century German philosopher and patron of the arts, Conrad Fiedler, whose work Herbert Read turned to for his 1953 Norton Lectures at Harvard. Fiedler died in 1895, the year before Brandtner's birth. Lack of translations made him not well known outside the German speaking world. However, in 1949 Henry Schaefer-Simmern, a follower of Gustaf Britsch, published a translation of Fiedler's 1876 work "On Judging Works of Visual Art". Brandtner could have had direct knowledge of Fiedler's work or he could have come across him through his reading of Herbert Read. According to Schaefer-Simmern, Fiedler "was a well-educated man of his time and one with his



yes: morality involves the three relationships

man to God.

man to himself

and man to his fellow man,

expressions such as:

my life is my own affair (I made my profit, so what)

I am in politics:

anything goes: (dishonesty, slander, and graft in politics today)

betray a gross misunderstanding of

the moral order  
we have become indifferent, to the hard fast line which divides justice from injustice, right from wrong. the people have a good laugh if appeals to their morose minds. there seems not to exist a high degree of honor in politics.

if it is necessary for us to spend millions of dollars to benefitate industry and the farmer and business general why is it not equally important to improve and develop the quality of the worker by helping him to take part in the culture of the nation (no matter how little there is) of it.

or improve the quality of the greatest natural resource of all.

the human mind

by giving support to art, craft and education music theater etc.

# Modern art as I see it.

As chairman L & G, first of all I like to congratulate the Ottawa artist's assoc. for arranging over a period of time these get together, with the idea to allow artists to express their points of view on art. It is perhaps the most encouraging sign of a healthy future for contemporary Canadian art.

But I have been told that panels, lectures and even discussion groups are usually depressing to the spirits of everyone concerned and yet I believe right now, it might be the only way to bridge the gap that exist between the creative artist and the public and the other intellectual disciplines.  
We are all

EXCERPT FROM NOTES FOR OTTAWA TALK

spiritual roots in that great humanistic epoch (the first half of the nineteenth century) Fiedler's pedagogical aim was the harmonious cultivation of human mental powers. It was therefore natural that he should speculate upon the place of art activities in general education and see its pedagogical significance more clearly than anyone else" (Schaefer-Simmern, 1978, p.xvii). Fiedler's name does not appear in the Journal and so we can only speculate as to whether or what Brandtner thought of him. However, through his writings and those of Brandtner's I surmise a reflection of their shared cultural values.

A good deal has been written about Brandtner from an art historical point of view by historians and curators such as Harper and Reid, Dultz and Smith as well as critics Duval and Ayre. Brandtner called himself an artist and I consider it appropriate that that is how he should be remembered. However, I knew him as a teacher and it wasn't until much later that I saw his own work and was able to appraise him as an artist. In judging his production from an adult perspective, I am curious to discover that his reputation as an artist was not greater. And while the literature is favourable to him and his oeuvre, he seems to have had little impact on other producing artists of his day. One gets little sense of how he fitted in with his contemporaries; at best his relationships seem to have been somewhat strained. Was he too avant-garde for Canada? Was he too foreign and outspoken for those in his adopted country? Was he too bombastic or authoritative? Was his work judged to be too garish or expressionistic? My interviewees chose not to answer these questions directly. However, one of his contemporaries not wishing to be named, suggested that Brandtner's greatest fault was his having too great a facility with paint and a critic countered that this made him "follow too many paths" (Fetherling,

1987, p.138). Whatever his relationship with his contemporaries, Brandtner seemed to have found fulfilment in his commitment to open the minds of all kinds of children to art. I believe that his great contribution came from his dedication to pass on his passion and enthusiasm for the arts to young people. His engagement and his ability to link the joys of making art to ordinary things made him special. His Journal abounds with references to the new, the experimental and the young. Brandtner was not one for looking back; experience had taught him, I suspect, to make the most of life while one has it; and that the hope of the future lay in the new generation. However, this was for him only true if there was a good enough education, one which included practice in the arts. Fortune did not favour Brandtner, but he remained steadfast in his ideals, which could be summed up by the first Bauhaus proclamation, "Together let us conceive and create the new building of the future, which will embrace architecture, sculpture and painting in one unity, and which will one day rise to heaven from the hands of a million workers, the crystal symbol of a new faith" (Kinzer, June 21, 1992).

## Chapter 1

### **Brandtner's Background in nineteenth and twentieth century Germany The impact of German Expressionism**

*This chapter begins with the biographical details of Fritz Brandtner life. It portrays him and his authoritarian family as being average lower middle class Germans who lived in cramped urban quarters in the old and busy port city of Danzig. The German working class of pre-war Germany lived in unstable political and social times. Europe after 1850 was in turmoil, a time which culminated in the declaration of war in 1914 insuring that nothing would remain as it had been. Upon leaving school, Brandtner volunteered for the army. His war experiences and imprisonment marked him deeply. Returning home he found that the Prussian dominance, which had given Danzig its political and educational system, no longer prevailed. The enormous reaction by intellectuals and artists to the changes in the social and political fabric at the turn of the century became stronger and more visible after the war. Was it these social concerns that spilled over into Brandtner's Journal? German-speaking teachers have been enormously important in the history of modern Western education. In the realm of art, they have contributed a strong body of theory to the literature and been influential in the practice and preaching of their ideas. In particular, the Bauhaus school, which Brandtner visited, through its artists, teachers and crafts people has spread its artistic and social philosophy world wide. The chapter closes with a section on Expressionism: its origins as both a social idea and a style of painting.*

Friedrich Wilhelm Brandtner was born July 28th, 1896, in Danzig, which was the capital of German West Prussia, but would become, with the treaty of Versailles in 1919, the Free City of Danzig. His grandparents emigrated from southern Austria to the tenth century Hanseatic port, a city whose inhabitants while culturally German heard Polish, English or French freely spoken. This gave the city a cosmopolitan quality and encouraged the citizens to enjoy a rich cultural life. Brandtner's family, which included an older sister as well as his mother and his shop foreman father, shared a small dark apartment in the city. The cramped quarters meant that Brandtner, who from childhood was nicknamed Fritz, spent much of his time outdoors, and from a young age he began

roaming the streets with a sketch pad. Brandtner's father was a strict disciplinarian and his mother a meticulous housekeeper, who allowed no mess or untidiness. Fritz was neither permitted to draw (it was dirty), nor stay indoors (it was unhealthy). Brandtner grew up in a Germany where the proverb "he who doesn't listen has to pay for it" still applied. The prevailing values were conformity, obedience and respect for authority. Brandtner's early interest in art and his mother's requirement that he stay outdoors encouraged him to discover his architecturally rich city. In contrast to his solitary urban wanderings were his many sojourns, with his father, to explore the Baltic coast. It was during these trips that he discovered freedom and the beauty of nature.

In 1914, after completing primary and secondary schools Brandtner finished technical high school with the ambition of becoming an architect. On his 18th birthday, Austria declared war on Serbia. And on August 1st, the German army and navy were mobilized. Brandtner enlisted in the Infantry. After completing a short training course which included cavalry drill, which gave him a lifelong love and respect for horses, Brandtner went to fight, first on the Russian front at Bzura, to the west of Warsaw and later to the Somme on the Western front, where the German casualties reached nearly three-quarters of a million men. In September 1916 he was captured and taken prisoner by the French, a short distance from where his hero Franz Marc had been killed a few months earlier. Brandtner escaped twice, but was recaptured both times. After Germany's defeat in 1918, he was retained in France to serve two years of forced labour.

On his release, he returned to Danzig; he was happy to be back in his beautiful historic, but economically ravaged city and happy to rejoin his fiancée a woman he had

met before going to war. He returned to live with his family, whose living accommodations were unchanged and more inadequate for a grown man. He received the Iron Cross, 2nd class in 1921.

Times were difficult and, lacking the means, Brandtner, who would have liked to study at the Bauhaus, was unable to undertake local architectural studies. Instead he attended some lectures at the University and collected and read everything he could on the subject of art. He embarked upon a self-teaching program which would last the rest of his life. During the 1920s until his departure for Canada in 1928, Brandtner earned his living making commercial signs and doing free-lance work for advertising and display, the same thing he would find himself doing in Montreal for the department stores, Eaton's and Morgan's. Meanwhile he assisted Prof. F.A. Pfuhle, a painter of fashionable portraits and stained glass in his studio, and he taught life classes in the Department of Architecture. (Harper, 1971, p. 11, Duffy/Smith, 1982, p. 89)

Harper suggests that it may have been childhood nostalgia for Karl May's vision of America with its open spaces and free life style, that gave Brandtner the idea to emigrate. Bruno Bettelheim, Brandtner's contemporary, mentions in his essay "Essential Books of One's Life" the impression May's books had on him in his youth. It should be noted that May never visited North America and the veracity of his accounts were questionable.

The fifty years between 1860 and 1920 saw enormous changes in Europe. The population as a whole nearly doubled, especially in cities such as Berlin and Frankfurt, This urban growth coupled with the spread of industrialization created many features that

we take for granted today, such as centralized bureaucracies, trade unions, the beginnings of large-scale corporate structures, universal military service and immigration. Socialism, especially in Germany, became an important political option. In 1871 the proclamation of the German Empire took place at Versailles. "Bismark had crushed the Prussian liberals by making the monarchy and the army the most popular institutions in the country" (Kagan, Ozment and Turner, p. 773, 1987). In 1871, he imposed a tariff to protect German industry and later brought in anti-socialist laws hoping to break the Social Democratic Party; when the laws did not have their desired effect, he added social welfare (health, accident, old age pensions etc.) legislation.

The middle classes, which had never been totally homogeneous became less so. Tensions between the different levels were made worse by economic insecurity and competition with the large industrial companies to maintain their place in the market; this put great stress on the petit bourgeoisie, who had to work very hard to sustain themselves.

Friedrich Nietzsche articulated in philosophical terms human discomfort with existence (with the individuals's role in society) as he examined morality and the idea of "limiting human activity to strictly rational behaviour" — which he felt would impoverish human life and experience. Nietzsche sought a return to the spirit of the ancient Greek heros; he valued the positive effects of instinct and ecstasy in human behaviour. He echoed what philosophers were saying about other subjects. "There was a growing tendency to see all conceptual categories as useful creations rather than exact descriptions" (Kagan, Ozment and Turner, 1987, p. 855). Unlike Nietzsche, the



American Pragmatists, William James and John Dewey, wrote in the spirit of social hope. Pragmatists tell us that "what matters is our loyalty to other human beings clinging together against the dark, not our hope of getting things right" (Rorty, 1982, p. 165). James suggested that the truth of an idea depended on how well it worked; knowledge was "less an instrument for knowledge than for acting". For Dewey, whom Brandtner admired and quoted in his Journal, "the will to truth is not the urge to dominate but the urge to create, to 'attain working harmony among diverse desires'" (Rorty, 1982, p. 207). In their appeal to the feelings and emotions and the questioning of rationalism, the philosophers were voicing a realization that everything was flux where "little or nothing but change was permanent. Human beings had to forge from their own inner will and determination the truth and values that were to exist in the world" (Kagan, Ozment and Turner, 1987, p. 855). The birth of psychoanalysis came about as scientists joined artists and philosophers in trying to understand and reconcile the complex motives and tensions that lay behind human actions and behaviour. Brandtner by virtue of being born German during these fluid times fell heir to a culture critically examining changes in its social structures and values.

After 1871, the already advanced Prussian educational system was extended throughout Germany and Bismark undertook to see that education would fall under state rather than religious direction. Under the Prussian educational system different types of schools existed. The Gymnasium emphasized the humanities and the liberal arts, while the Volksschule emphasized industrial and community interests. Art was not considered a subject in itself but was lumped in with music, gymnastics and needlework.

Industrialists who were at the time, and still are, an important voice in the regional councils, have always had "an ambivalent attitude toward the teaching of subjects to do with art. Some see its value as vocational only. Others have a vested interest in an unsophisticated clientele". Furthermore, trends toward arms building and science tend to reduce interest in art education on the part of educators and legislators. This theme taken from Brunhilda Kraus' doctoral (1968) dissertation, is repeated in Brandtner's Journal. Kraus tells us that the early twentieth century brought a new art education movement, Germany was in danger of losing its industrial edge in foreign markets because of poor product design. Everyone cooperated to reform the subject area of all the arts, but with no "definite central leadership". In the Gymnasium drawing of natural objects from daily life was begun and the study of schematic ornamental forms that had been previously required was abandoned. It was not copying that the teachers called for, but for "the students to extract the essential form from these objects" in 2D and 3D. Subject matter moved from dead objects to "flowers" "nature" and "outdoors".

Europeans, from the time of Pestalozzi and Rousseau, have championed the value of art expression. No one has done more for art education than Froebel, a student of Pestalozzi, who believed that art contributed to life. Furthermore, Froebel wanted education to involve perceptual sensitivity. He felt that children were inventive and expressive and he espoused Pestalozzi's idea that children should learn by doing. However, the founder of the Kindergarten did not believe in having children draw in school time; art he felt should be done at home. (Michaels and Morris, 1984, p. 104)

The Czech, Franz Cizek was among the early art educators. In 1897, at the urging of some of his fellow students at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna, and after overcoming problems with the authorities, Cizek began his first private juvenile classes. The Children's Art classes were to last until the Nazi occupation forces arrived in Vienna 41 years later. The harsh discipline and rigidity of the existing educational system made Cizek's classes a happy respite for his students. He was reputed to not have shown children how to draw, but through stimulation to have encouraged them to become involved in their art. Much has been written about Cizek and his teaching style, some of it contradictory, but what is certain is that it was in sharp contrast to what had come before. Peter Smith writes that Cizek's ideas were known and valued by individuals such as Dewey and Munro, who felt that U.S. schools could use "more freedom for the child to look at the world and to experiment in congenial ways of expressing himself in some artistic medium" (Smith, 1985, p. 219). Although Cizek's work was disparaged by his student- Viktor Lowenfeld, Smith maintains that their "rhetoric was more than coincidentally similar." Lowenfeld brought his form of art education to the United States when he had to flee the Nazi regime. Unlike Cizek, he believed in recognizable stages in the development of children's art and wrote books to illustrate his theory. The ex-patriot Viennese, Sir Ernst Gombrich, did not share Cizek's isolationist view of child art education. In contrast to Cizek he went "quite far in demonstrating that art is derived from art, or whatever imagery a child sees about him, not untutored observation or pure inner-generated expressiveness" (Smith, 1985, p. 220).

Another German who had an impact on art education was Gustaf Britsch, an architect who practised in the Munich area. His research, based on the study of child art as well as historical works of art, allowed him to develop his own theory in which "visual perceptions of the visible world are transformed into gestalt formations and expressed as works of art" (Abrahamson, 1989, p. 1). After opening private institutes in Florence and Munich, Britsch established an institute for the science of art and art education at Lake Starnberg. Before his untimely death in 1923, Britsch lectured throughout Germany; upon his death his pupil Egon Kornmann carried on his work. Henry Schaefer-Simmern, born in Germany the same year as Brandtner, met Kornmann at the World Congress on Art Education in Prague in 1928. He was struck by the similarities to his own developing theories. In 1937, he brought Britsch's ideas to the U.S. (Abrahamson, 1989, p. 2) In large measure, Britsch was interested in the need to consider the "innermost structure of the work" and felt there existed a "logical progression' which was not conceptual or abstract in nature, but rather, perceptual and artistic, being more in the domain or realm of intuition" (Abrahamson, 1989, p. 11). Britsch, Kornmann and Schaefer-Simmern all discouraged drawing and painting from a live model, from still life or objects in nature because of the restriction of the one viewpoint. Britsch was concerned with a unified conception, "with the artistic, gestalt forming ability in people and their art". Abrahamson writes that "Britsch offered a key to being more human, to existence in the fullest sense through art" (Abrahamson, 1989, p. 20). This is a concept that finds its echo in Brandtner's Journal writings.

The Bauhaus, an Art and Architectural School founded in 1919 at Weimar, moved to Dessau in 1925 and while its influence can still be found, strongly, even in North America, it closed when the Nazis came to power in 1933. The School's ideas and philosophy have spread far and wide by those who studied or taught there - through their art production as well as through their teaching and writings on their principles of art and education. Walter Gropius, one of the founders, said in 1936 that "the object of the Bauhaus was not to propagate any 'style', system, dogma, formula, or vogue, but simply to exert a revitalizing influence on design. We did not base our teaching on any pre-conceived idea of form, but sought the vital spark of life behind life's everchanging forms" (Hirschfeld-Mack, 1963, p. 1). Gropius, left Germany in 1934 to teach at Harvard. The early days of the Bauhaus had a very mixed crowd, "but all were united in one aim, the seeking of a new way of life, a new architecture and new surroundings and a definite negation of all those forces which had caused the First World War" (Hirschfeld-Mack, 1963, p. 5). Traditions were questioned. The list of those who formed part of the Bauhaus is legendary, but the names which recur most often are Klee and Kandinsky. From the beginning the Bauhaus had an "international as well as something of a Utopian character" (Hirschfeld, 1963, Introduction). The creative activities included music, dance and theatre as well as industrial design. The divisions which separated artist and craftsman were eliminated. The School became important for linking the art and the crafts and breaking down the barriers separating the "fine" from the "applied" arts, but unlike William Morris the emphasis was on creative experimentation with the materials. (Hirschfeld-Mack, 1963, p. 7-8)

An example of the Bauhaus influence can be seen in the work of Ludwig Hirschfeld-Mack, who left Germany in protest against National Socialism and emigrated to Australia where he headed the Geelong Grammar School Art Department (in Victoria). He is considered to have "made an outstanding personal contribution to art education" by applying the principles of the Bauhaus to school education. In later life Hirschfeld-Mack wrote a survey of the Bauhaus in which Gropius is quoted as concluding that "it was, then, the teaching method of the Bauhaus which was revolutionary. So far I have not found any new system which has replaced its ideas effectively" (Hirschfeld-Mack, 1963, Introduction).

The Bauhaus would probably not have come about if it had not been for the social and economic problem of post war Germany. Expressionism was the prevailing art style in Germany at the beginning of the century, but when the movement came to be known in North America, it had lost its German association and was thought of as a label for an art form which expressed "emotion" and "feeling". In fact it was a "vaguely defined art 'movement' whose participants began their activity independently, in five or six German-speaking cities, regions, or even countries, only to be tagged by art critics with a foreign label which, in a country drifting towards war, came gradually to be coloured by nationalistic hyperbole" (Gordon, 1987, Introduction, xv). Because Expressionism does not have a defining "essence" it is easier to talk about it in relation to something else.

One has only to glance at the works of Fritz Brandtner to see the influence of German Expressionism in his painting, an echo of his influence can even be found in

some of his students' works (see illustrations). Brandtner was particularly interested in "The Brucke" and "Blaue Reiter" movements, the latter being the creation of his two heroes, Franz Marc and Wassily Kandinsky. The same two artists collaborated on an Almanac, containing new artistic insights, which appeared in 1912. It was to be the first of many volumes but circumstances prevented a second. The influence of "Der Blaue Reiter" was enormous and later was to prove to be connected to the Bauhaus 'idea' in which both had in common "the thought of a synthesis of culture encompassing all fields" (Lankheit, *The Blaue Reiter Almanac*, 1974, p. 47). After a second printing, the Almanac was soon out of print. It was not published in English until years later. Brandtner was unquestionably impressed by the ideas expressed in the Almanac which has since gained in recognition as being "the most important programmatic work of twentieth-century art" (Lankheit, *The Blaue Reiter Almanac*, 1965, preface).

To understand how "Expressionist art embodies the vanguard aesthetic of modern art and social and cultural history of its time" it is necessary to examine Expressionism as an "idea". "Ambivalence, reactivity and rebellion: these are properties of German modern art and culture which constitute the Expressionist 'idea.' Do they also reflect aspects of the German national character?" (Gordon, 1987, Introduction, xvii) 'The answer is not clear, but what is known is that the Expressionist's intellectual milieu was aware of the developments, largely by fellow compatriots, in science, social science and pseudo science and that while the artists were inspired by Gauguin, Van Gogh and Munch they remained unique developing an art form that was intellectually and socially based. Donald Gordon's 1987 book on "Expressionism" is dedicated to questioning the

extent to which Expressionist art contributed to twentieth-century art as a whole - from the 1900s "cult of Nietzsche" to "Abstract Expressionism" of the 1940s and "Neo-Expressionism" of the 1980s.

Nietzsche's influence extended to many Expressionists. It was he who gave the younger generation a dislike of the material society and faith in the individual's ability to transform society; this was translated into a politically liberating "thirst for action" (Gordon, 1987, p. 18). Some Expressionists became anarchists. But the notion of decline and renewal had a long afterlife in Germany, partly because of the rigidity of prewar society and partly because of Germany's failure to win the war. "Wartime stress was an important factor in most Expressionist art after 1914". Artists were torn between being patriots or pacifists. (Gordon, 1987, p. 153) The unsettling idea of creation through destruction created a climate in which artists were fearful that change might not come about. German cultural history went from despair to hope and back again in the years 1900-20. (Gordon, 1987, p. 24-25)

The Expressionist artist tended to see himself as hero or victim and sometimes both together. This added a further ambiguity to the self-portrait which could be viewed as Everyman (a view of the modern condition in general) or as specifically German (a view of the Germanic state of mind in particular). *Einfühlung*, (empathy) means "feeling into" another and came from German psychology. "Empathy describes both kinds of ambivalence in the Expressionist self-portrait: the artist's in creating it, and the observer in viewing it. It means self-identification by the artist with the fiction of his art; it also



means self-identification by the observer with the view of the artist communicated by the fiction" (Gordon, 1987, p. 140).

In its earliest sense, Expressionism meant anti-Impressionism — assigning the French Post-Impressionists, Cezanne and Matisse the label of the first Expressionists. The Hungarian born art history student, Antonin Matejcek, invented the term in Paris, in 1910. His seminal essay published in Prague contained his thesis that there was "a new antithesis to Impressionism in modern French art, which he explicitly labelled 'Expressionism'" (Gordon, 1987, p. 175).

Brandtner's Journal supports certain Expressionist ideas as noted above. Personally, he had progressed from being a patriot in Germany to being a promoter of anti-nationalism in Canada. In artistic terms he had grappled with the notion that one has to destroy in order to build anew. He valued the German concept of empathy, believing that great art could not exist without it. Moreover, his personal struggles had imbued him with the conviction that through art the individual could achieve a state of balance "to be free of all rules ... to feel what one thinks and also to think what one feels". Like the Expressionists, Brandtner was very aware of progress whether it be artistic, scientific or social. The latter was of special concern to Brandtner because of his conviction that an individual could effect change in society. In his Journal he writes "we have first to produce conditions favourable to art before we can expect it to flourish. Art is something to live and fight for and the artist is as important to the nation as the engineer or scientist".

## *Summary*

*The passage of time coupled with Brandtner's difference from myself in culture, language and gender, (compounded by the fact that one can no longer find the German city that Brandtner grew up in as it is now the Polish town of Gdansk) made it impossible for me to get the flavour of Brandtner's youth. Hence, I decided to accept the details that had already been collected about Brandtner's early life. What interested me was that while Danzig was a unique city it was culturally German. Therefore, there is little to indicate that Brandtner's upbringing would have been greatly different from other German school boy's from the same social class. The Prussian school system was dominant in the Germanic countries and it provided a rigorous curriculum which focused on academic excellence. It incorporated the advanced ideas of educators such as Pestalozzi and Frobel, but kept the social aspects of education a low priority. Brandtner attended and graduated from such a school; his educational values, however, seemed to reflect a different emphasis. His post-secondary education took place in the trenches and work camps of France. Brandtner's wartime hardships caused him to question man's relationship to Nature and to his fellow man and taught him the importance of self reliance.*

*Brandtner, through his part-time teaching and his self-study program, was knowledgeable about the contemporary art movements in Europe and while he was especially interested in Expressionism and the movements which led to it, he was well aware of and was in fact part of the particular German culture out of which it emerged. Unable to become an architect or study at the Bauhaus he looked for new possibilities for his prodigious artistic output and he saw global implications for the arts as they were being taught and produced at the Bauhaus.*

## Chapter 2

### **The Post-World War I Art Scene in Canada: Foreign and Domestic Influences on Contemporary Artists and Teachers**

*This chapter begins with Brandtner's arrival in Winnipeg on the eve of the Depression. Economic times were terrible for everyone, but Brandtner managed to support himself by finding work where he could. The art scene in Canada was fifty years behind Europe and Brandtner found that his art work was regarded as avant-garde and his ideas were misunderstood. His only ally was the artist Lemoyne Fitzgerald who convinced him to move to Montreal where he would find a more enlightened art community. In Montreal, Brandtner met and worked with the leading artists of the city. He was a founding member of the Contemporary Art Society of 1939. In 1940 war was declared. Brandtner had become a proud Canadian, but he had not lost his German accent or his love of German Expressionist art. The War brought ex-patriots and refugees to Montreal and by the end of the decade the focus of the city's art scene had shifted from the anglophone to the francophone artists.*

*The Kingston Conference took place in 1941. It was the brainchild of Queen's University Dean of Arts, Andre Bieler who realized that Canadian artists, because of the great distances in the country, were working in isolation. He felt that they would benefit if they could come together as a body and discuss their mutual concerns. At this time in the Maritimes, working with a Carnegie Foundation Grant, was the influential American educator Walter Abell. From his post at Acadia University he was able to disseminate his personal ideas through his creation and publication of "Maritime Art" which later would become "Canadian Art".*

*The Massey Commission, mentioned in Brandtner's Journal, came from the interest in the welfare of the arts begun at the Kingston Conference. The Commission's consensus, from hundreds of submissions, was that artistic expression was a low priority in the country. The Commission may have raised consciousness, but it offered nothing new.*

*The chapter ends with an overview of the important work of well known art educators, C.D. Gaitskell, Anne Savage and Arthur Lismer.*

Brandtner arrived in Winnipeg in 1928, the year before the Great Depression. The economic upheavals resulting from the collapse of the financial institutions would affect the lives of all Canadians. Unemployment and poverty were everywhere and one

'got by' with basic necessities. No one was buying art and the health of the creative arts suffered severely. Established artists were lucky to find jobs teaching; others were lucky to find any kind of work. It was a time of acceptance, and the only significant contribution to Canadian art was the Toronto based Group of Seven. (Reid, 1973, p. 204) Thus, the influence of the Group on the new generation of artists was great and those who wanted another approach and who could find the means travelled abroad to New York, London or Paris. "The rift between European experimental painting and Canadian trends [begun before the Depression] widened" (Harper, 1977, p. 305). Those artists unable to travel re-examined their surroundings with greater interest and worked out new ways to represent what they found. Harper calls this the beginning of regionalism and cites among many artists who fall into this category Carl Schafer, Louis Muhlstock, Jack Humphreys, Adrien Hebert and J.P. Lemieux. With the disbanding of the Group of Seven these artists as well as many others formed the Canadian Group of Painters. The Abstract Movement was late coming to Canada and did not reach significant proportions until World War II. Harper credits only five painters; Bertram Brooker, Lemoine Fitzgerald, Lawren Harris, Jock Macdonald and Fritz Brandtner with experimentation in abstraction, even though not all of their work "fall strictly within Kandinsky's classic definition of 1937".

When John Lyman returned to Montreal in 1931, after many years abroad, an awakening began to take place in Montreal. Lyman contended that art should have no sentimental or literary content, for "it is the relationship of one form to another and of one colour to another in a formal or 'classical' spirit which has true aesthetic value and

gives pleasure to the eye". He wished to spread his gospel and in cooperation with Andre Bieler he set up the 'Atelier' where artists could work in their own way. By 1937 artists were rallying around Lyman; among the many were Fritz Brandtner and Marian Scott. In 1939 artists, and laymen sympathetic to Lyman's ideas, formed The Contemporary Art Society. (Harper, 1977, p. 331) The first project organized by the group was an exhibition entitled "Art in Our Day". It brought together the work of Kandinsky, Marc, Modigliani, Derain, Vlaminck and others. Only three months later war broke out. (Harper, 1977, p. 332)

The second World War brought many refugees to Montreal. Alfred Pellan returned, after many years in France, to teach at the Beaux Arts. He brought with him his paintings and his philosophy of modernism. Marie-Alain Couturier, a Dominican priest and authority on world art movements was another who fled German occupied Paris. He taught and lectured and helped the Contemporary Art Society organize exhibitions of the "Independents". Fernand Leger, who was living in New York: occasionally came to lecture in Montreal. (Harper, 1977, p. 338) Meanwhile, at the Ecole du Meuble, Paul Emile Borduas, one of the few French Canadian artists to be a member of the Contemporary Art Society, held a staff position. His own philosophy of art was not yet formed, but would come about in cooperation with such students as Riopelle, Barbeau, Leduc, Mousseau; together they were to become what was later labelled the Automatistes. This group formed a nucleus and with a few other artists published, in 1948, the "Refus global" a hand-assembled mimeographed book. The Refus' statement was to become the philosophy of young French Canadian artists. All

the co-signers were denounced by the establishment and Borduas, who had written the title essay, was dismissed from his job. He left the city in 1953. (Harper, 1977, p. 339) Harper credits the influence of the wartime refuges as well as Pellan's example and accomplishments for "initiating a break with traditional social and intellectual customs" out of which grew the so-called Montreal school. There would be no going back and the Francophone painters replaced the Anglophone painters in Montreal as the dynamic force. By 1948, The Contemporary Art Society which had begun with so few French members now had an equal number. (Reid, 1973, p. 211)

The 1930s and 40s also saw developments in the Canadian arts community as artists, critics and teachers came together to try to create policies and programs which would be government supported and funded for the diffusion of the arts throughout the country. Their efforts culminated in the 1941 Conference in Kingston. One of the most influential men at the time was the American Walter Abell. Abell was a published critic, art teacher and ethics professor; strongly influenced by the formalist theories of Clive Bell and Roger Fry. However, in the 1920s, he had been associated with John Dewey at the Albert C. Barnes Foundation and his writings reflected as well the social philosophy of both Dewey and Barnes; this promoted the idea that art was tightly linked to life, to everyday things and it carried the values and aspirations of the contemporary society. (Helene Sicotte, n.d., p. 92, the translation is mine) In 1928, Abell received a Carnegie Corporation grant to become the titular chair of the Art department at Acadia University (in Wolfville, Nova Scotia). To Abell his mission was clear, "the cultural opportunity, of this generation in Canada, is to join the world effort toward cultural

democracy and to see that such forward movements as have recently happened in the United States are made to happen here" (Sicotte, n.d., p. 95).

Abell's first forum for the transmission of his ideas in Canada was the Maritime Art Association, which he co-founded in 1935. It was a co-operative enterprise of art groups and women's clubs and associations which came together in the Maritime provinces to promote and support the arts. (Sicotte, n.d., p. 88) In 1940, Abell became involved in the publication of Canada's first visual arts periodical, *Maritime Art*. Abell was instrumental in the creation of *Canadian Art* which replaced *Maritime Art* in 1943. Abell's message, which was diffused in the mentioned magazines, was that art could be both useful and "spirituelle" in making humanity happier. An idea not dissimilar to that held by American artists and teachers such as Robert Henri and John Sloan and critics such as Charles Caffin and Edwin Bjorkman, who saw art as an instrument of social reform. Artists, according to Abell had a functional role which was to create beauty "to enrich the spiritual and emotional content of life, making individuals and communities happier to be alive" (Sicotte, n.d., p. 94).

Walter Abell had done advanced studies in Europe and written about the "tradition moderne" begun by Cezanne and Matisse. He embraced Bell's theory of "significant form" while searching for universal qualities which would transcend particular ones in modern art movements; Abell accepted art movements such as Cubism because it was an reflection "of its time" (Sicotte, n.d., p. 91). Sicotte writes that Abell made many references to classical Greece in his articles. It was the democratization of the arts in ancient Greece which attracted him. "Greek art ... could be seen in the market squares.

Art was a part of the normal, daily life of the people. The public saw the artist at his work, and the artist was stimulated by the public." In this quote Abell echoes a notion to be found in Brandtner's Journal concerning the interaction of the artist with the public: Brandtner attributes this not to classical Greece, but to a primitive society's relationship to the arts.

The 1941 Conference of Canadian artists marked a turning point in the way Canada perceived and affirmed the social role of the artist. (Sicotte, n.d., p. 100) The Conference was the direct result of the trip taken by Swiss born artist and teacher, Andre Bieler, the previous summer to the west of Canada. Bieler, who was at the time head of the fine arts department at Queen's University, "had been impressed by how little the artists scattered across Canada knew each other". His reason for the Conference was to bring the artists together so they could appreciate one another. More than one hundred and fifty delegates attended and besides getting acquainted they were able to discuss the "function of art in a democracy and the part it should play specifically in the life of Canada" (Bieler, 1951, p. 55). Photographs of the conference record the 'who's who' of the Canadian art scene. In one photo Brandtner can be seen seated at the back of the room; A.Y. Jackson is in the front row. (Bieler, 1951, p. 55) The conference produced the Federation of Canadian Artists and the Canadian Arts Council as well as the "Brief Concerning the Cultural Aspects of Canadian Reconstruction" which would be presented to the House of Commons Special Committee in June 1944. (Bieler, 1951 p. 55) Ten years later Bieler turned to the writings of Abell to sum up what exactly the Kingston Conference had accomplished. In the November issue of *Maritime Art*, Abell wrote that



"it [the Conference] dealt with real problems: the technical problems of the artist and the cultural problems of the society in which he lives". Furthermore, "the Conference started a movement for the welfare of art in Canada ... culminating after years of effort in the Royal Commission on National Development on the Arts, Letters and Sciences".

The Royal Commission convened, in 1949, under Vincent Massey and produced the Massey Report in 1950. The Commission, which lasted two years and gathered 462 formal submissions had "nothing new to offer" (Ayre, 1951, p. 57). It was important, however, because it was the first time Canadians took stock of their cultural life. In the words of Robert Ayre, who succeeded Abell as joint editor of *Canadian Art*, "the Report has measured us and found us wanting, it has shown us the way to redeem ourselves. It is up to us whether or not we accept even the minimum. It is up to us to decide what kind of people we shall be". Even though Ayre compares the Massey Report to Lord Durham's famous document for nation building, he refutes the notion that the Report was anti-American, saying that although cultural exchanges are excellent "it cannot be denied, however, that a vast and disproportionate amount of material coming from a single alien source may stifle rather than stimulate our own creative effort; and passively accepted without any standard of comparison, this may weaken critical faculties". The Report "signalled that henceforth the federal government would fulfil a major function in the arts, as patron and also as warden" (Fetherling, 1987, p. 185).

Finally the Report points out that if "the state is to assume an increasing measure of responsibility in cultural affairs, we shall find ourselves in step with the most modern nations". "The Massey Commission, however, rejected the idea of a 'Ministry of Fine

Arts and Cultural Affairs'" (Ayre, 1951, p. 58). And there was an outcry about the cost of subsidizing culture across Canada. Douglas Low, a Canadian Press staff writer, urged the 'little man' to open his heart, soul and pocketbook and improve himself when he wrote, "Canadian artists would do better if there were more scholarships, fellowships, grants and institutions. The government should help finance them. Little man, that means taxes. It means you" (Ayre, 1951, p. 58).

In 1948, Barker Fairley, a Toronto artist and poet gave a radio talk on the C.B.C. entitled "What is wrong with Canadian Art". His summation was that art was stagnating; that people had lost interest in it and that furthermore, painters and sculptors were being outdistanced by the poets and novelists. He blamed the critics, who suffered from "the atmosphere of timidity that pervades every aspect of our intellectual lives" and not wishing to offend their artist friends critics rarely said anything "illuminating".

According to Frances Smith, what seemed to have impressed Brandtner most at the Kingston Conference was "what had been accomplished in the U.S. during the depression under the Federal Programme for works of art in public buildings". He wrote to Bieler that he hoped to find the same thing going on here, and with humour included a 'credo' which began "I believe in Rowan and his Chief Bruce, the mighty friends of the American Artist ... [and continued] I believe in all who fought for immediate improvements of conditions for the artist, in the Conference, in the unforgiveness of the sins of omission to form an Artists Federation on the spot, in the resurrection of a Healthy Body of artists from a broken down one, and long life for our friends with care everlasting" (Duffy/Smith, 1982, p. 54). Brandtner was initially active in the Federation

of Canadian artists and addressed groups "urging artists 'to abandon the attitude of mind that develops indifference ... this is the time to stand politically so that we will be able to avail ourselves of the new social and spiritual resources so that our art will help to shape and serve the new humanity'". He also spoke out for the need of community centres across Canada. Further opportunities for action seem to have been limited for him. (Duffy/Smith, 1982, p. 54)

The brief submitted by the Federation of Canadian artists to the Massey Commission, drew attention to the strong sense of freedom and integrity felt by the artists; to their generosity and contribution to the cultural life of the country, but as artists they felt that they could serve their country better if there was more recognition of the worth and dignity of the artist and "more opportunities for the artist to live by his art". Alfred Pellán elaborated on this when he told the Commission that artists were required to do work they did not wish to do because "we are quite unable to live from our art alone" (Fetherling, 1987, p. 187).

The Report, in the section titled the Problems of the Canadian Painter, wrote, "The Canadian painter faces very serious problems. Painting in Canada is not yet fully accepted as a necessary part of the general culture of the county, to the detriment both of the painter and of other Canadians. The result is that in spite of the great enthusiasm of the painters and of important groups of amateurs, they are somewhat isolated from the rest of the population" (Fetherling, 1987, p. 185). (I say, tell us something new!)

Art education in Canada reflected the reality of the times. Artistic expression enjoyed a low priority and those who taught the visual arts, or disseminated them were

not necessarily closely linked either geographically or philosophically, not having received the same formation.

Education is not a federal responsibility and each province developed its own policies. This study does not intend to give an overview of the different emphasis and approach in art education which could be found across Canada, but rather will introduce a few individuals in the field, who might have had an impact on Brandtner, either by being practising artists/teachers like him or by being child educators. One of the latter was the internationally recognized authority Franz Cizek known for his "child centred approach". His teaching methods spread quickly to North America where the ground at the time was fertile. They were soon incorporated into the style of many educators. Cizek shared a common language and culture with Brandtner, but I could find no mention of him or his teaching in the latter's Journal. My interviewees all spoke of Cizek and assumed that Brandtner must have been influenced by him. Besides no allusion to Cizek, the Journal makes no mention of Canadian art teachers such as C.D. Gaitskell, Arthur Lismer or Anne Savage, the latter two known to have had personal contact with Brandtner.

C.D. Gaitskell, best known today for being one of the founders of The Canadian Society for Education Through Art, was the Director of Art for the Ontario School Board and was very influential through his texts on school art. Like Brandtner, he was an ardent admirer of Read and Dewey, but unlike him he was an academic, not a practising artist. By the late 1940s Gaitskell's reputation as an educator was growing. "Gaitskell was an aggressive and ambitious man who was determined to see the results of his work

and used any available means to further his ideas on education through art" (Zaremba-Czereyska, 1989, p. 14). He was also involved with the International Society for Education Through Art and was able to promote himself and his ideas on more than the domestic front. He worked tirelessly "to unite art education and bring recognition and respect to the discipline". He taught teachers that art in the elementary level could be taught like any other subject, however, at the secondary level the teacher must have "some of the capabilities expected of an artist" (Zaremba-Czereyska, 1989, p. 75). Zaremba-Czereyska notes as well that he saw the role of the teacher as counsellor (p. 81) and was known to work on new projects in front of children. (p. 49) And while Gaitskell emphasized the individuality of the child his philosophy was firmly rooted in Dewey's "Progressive Theory" which "hoped to encourage active involvement in a learning situation" (p. 118). The idea of integrating art with other subjects was also important to him. Finally, Gaitskell was politically astute and an able administrator. He worked with a devoted group of assistants and adherents, who assured the spread of his gospel. It was a case of working hard and being in the right place at the right time. (Zaremba-Czereyska, 1989, p. 150-152)

A different approach to the teaching of art came from art specialists who considered themselves as artists first and teachers second: Lismer, Pellan, Borduas, Lefort, Brandtner, Savage, Seath and Scott to name a few working in Montreal in the 1940s. Anne Savage like Gaitskell had a career within the public school system. She began teaching at Baron Byng High School in 1922 and started her Saturday morning classes in 1937. She was a trained painter having worked with the leading painters of

the time (Cullen and Brymner) and a "self taught teacher". Savage matured during the dominant years of the Group of Seven and held an attachment to nature similar to theirs in which she saw landscape as "essentially romantic" (Sherman, 1990, p. 4). She was friendly with the Toronto based Group especially with her life long correspondent A.Y.Jackson. In the 1920s, Savage met Lismer, a founding member of the Group, who was becoming a gallery educator of some repute. He introduced her to child art and the teaching of Cizek. "In 1927 he brought Cizek's exhibition of children's art to Toronto, and was one of the first teachers in North America to implement the new approach to art education". Lismer's program at the Art Gallery of Ontario was funded by the Carnegie Foundation. "The theme of art as experience was basic to Lismer's approach" (Sherman, 1990, p. 6). Savage adopted Lismer's goals in her Saturday art classes for children aged 10 to 15, at the Art Association of Montreal. Savage worked both as an artist as well as a teacher (with the Protestant School Board) and was motivated to search out a wide variety of writings by British and American educators; authors such as Victor D'Amico, Marion Richardson, Belle Boas and Herbert Read. Boas, a New York teacher used "works of art to illustrate design principles and picture study to learn art history"; Savage did likewise in her classes. (Sherman, 1990, p. 8) Another acknowledged influence on her teaching was Marion Richardson's "enthusiasm for visual description"; storytelling had always been used by Savage to motivate her students. Alfred Pinsky, instrumental in creating the Fine Arts Department of Sir George Williams, was a student of Savage at Baron Byng. He held her in high regard both as a person and teacher.

In a 1982 interview Ghitta Caiserman-Roth tells us that Arthur Lismer, the Yorkshire born member of the Group of Seven, thought of himself as an important painter, even in the days when his work was not selling and he was supporting himself by his teaching. In the same interview Caiserman-Roth says that she found Savage more modest in her view of herself and while Savage was definitely a painter, Caiserman-Roth feels she was a teacher first "she was tremendously involved with her students and didn't forget them". Lismer according to Caiserman-Roth taught with a "showmanship" style. He was a "pied piper" and "consummate actor, who made the museum his stage." He did not hesitate to give a theme to children and then illustrate it with a "how-to-do-it bit" done on the spot. (Mulcaster, Caiserman-Roth, 1982 interview transcript, p. 20) Lismer, Caiserman-Roth felt, was more at ease with children than adults. "He was wonderful with little children. He loved them. And I think he was easily threatened by adults, and he became very irascible, very touchy at the Canadian Group of Painters" (Grigor, 1982, p. 20).

Despite these personal quirks Lismer's contribution and tireless work were of great significance in promoting art. He had difficulty, however, with administration and worked with his self-selected devoted staff, "to dispel elitism". His work at the A.G.O. brought the gallery "into a central position in the life of the city" (Grigor, 1982, p. 2). When the Carnegie money ceased Lismer left the A.G.O. and spent a year at Teacher's College in New York (it was Dewey's last year there) and then spent a short stint at the National Gallery in Ottawa. And in 1937, while his reputation was high, he was invited to lecture in Australian, New Zealand and Fiji. (Grigor, 1982, p. 7)

In 1940, Lismer arrived in Montreal to find both Savage and Brandtner with established Saturday classes for children. Lismer returned to his role of museum educator, this time with the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, and as he had done at the A.G.O., he chose assistants from the city's art students, adding one or two child welfare and social workers. In 1945, Lismer was responsible for 300 children aged 3-14 and about 500 adults. His teaching methods were similar to those he had used in Toronto. Unlike Brandtner he embraced Cizek's child centered approach with Dewey's socially oriented Project Method. Grigor sees "a lack of consistency between his theory and his practice." In his classes "he fostered a spirit of cooperation and social awareness" (Grigor, 1982, p. 18).

#### Summary

*Events in Brandtner's life were poorly timed. He could not have known that he would arrive in Canada during the depression. He was used to hardship and so he coped in an unfamiliar language in an unfamiliar land. Hardest for him to bear must have been the lack of artistic awareness and appreciation he encountered. In Winnipeg his only soulmate was Lemoyne Fitzgerald and he advised him to move to Montreal. Montreal proved more cosmopolitan, but Brandtner's artworks were still found to be revolutionary and avant-garde. He became involved with the local art movements and lectured to interested groups in the city. He attended meetings such as the Kingston Conference on the arts, which raised his hopes that cooperation between artists would work for the betterment of the arts and increase cultural awareness in the country. He knew of the programs happening south of the border, and even applied for a Guggenheim Grant. Brandtner's expectations were again buoyed by the Massey Commission. He hoped the Report's findings would increase the status of arts programming, and that the government would become financially involved in the implementation of new policies. He went as far as listing, in his Journal, ideas he had for community arts centres.*

*I have included a cursory look into the teaching styles of C.D. Gaitskell, Anne Savage, and Arthur Lismer, three prominent Canadian art educators to see if there were any basic influences that they shared with Brandtner. Because he chose to work alone it appears doubtful that he would have been influenced by them. Furthermore, I could find no reference in the literature or among my interviewees to suggest that Brandtner had any interest in the teaching styles of other art teachers.*



## Chapter 3

### Brandtner as Art Educator

*This chapter gives an overview of Brandtner's teaching career which began after his arrival in Montreal, in 1934. Over the years, he taught diverse groups of children, but was best known for the Children's Art Centre, which came about with the help of his friend Norman Bethune. Like Pestalozzi, Brandtner felt that learning should be active and fun and to this end he had children observe their surroundings and then work from their own understanding of what they had seen. To experience Brandtner's teaching approach, a student of his recalls classes at the Children's Art Centre. His reputation was such that he was asked by non-profit and social organizations to set up classes for disadvantaged children. However, because the organizations operated with little funding his classes were under constant threat of closure. Sometimes Brandtner worked gratis. Financial support was a problem throughout his career and he worked with missionary zeal to sustain his programs. He never received government funds for his efforts. It wasn't until 1944, when he was hired as drawing master at Miss Edgar's and Miss Cramp's School for girls that Brandtner himself began to receive regular remuneration. His association with the school lasted for twenty-two years. During this period, he lectured at the McGill School of Social Work and gave courses at the University of New Brunswick. He supported his wife and himself with what he earned, but never neglected his work as a productive artist. It was as an artist that he finally won recognition when he was awarded a Canada Council Grant the year before he died.*

Fritz Brandtner's career as an art educator lasted most of his productive life and comprised many different aspects of teaching. He began by giving life drawing instruction to university students in his native Danzig. Arriving in Montreal from Winnipeg in the Spring of 1934, on the advice of his friend Lemoyne Fitzgerald (who felt that Montreal was a city where experimental art would be more readily received) Brandtner worked alone and created his own art programs for the underprivileged and handicapped; he lectured on art to various interested groups and finally became, for twenty-two years, the art master at a structured private girls' school. At no time,

however, would he have described himself as anything other than a practising artist; indeed had he been able to financially sustain himself he might never have become involved in teaching. However, everyone I spoke to was unanimous in declaring him a born teacher.

Although Brandtner taught some adult classes, his greatest contribution was his teaching of children. Such underlined quotes from his Journal as "*can't we ever realize that it is not for the old to judge the young. That it is the young who must judge the old*", indicate a perspective which not many educators espouse unless they feel secure in the company of young people. Like Pestalozzi, Brandtner felt that learning should be active and fun. Teaching based on demonstrations, he admits, can be "useful and profitable but for the student just to stay and watch is not food enough. Watching is one of the best ways of learning but only if you observe the pattern and then go out and try and do it yourself". Brandtner was at home with young people, who, lacking the hardened attitudes and prejudices of their elders, could be inspired to experiment and take risks. Brandtner was always aware of the experimental work of the young leaders in the art world; numerous examples of Jackson Pollack's work were displayed in Brandtner's studio. There was something of a childlike optimism in Brandtner who saw each day as a new opportunity to create something wonderful: "We live for those fantastic and unreal moments of beauty, which our thoughts may build upon the passing panorama of experience".

Brandtner proudly became a Canadian in 1937, nine years after his arrival in Winnipeg and three years after his establishment in Montreal. He had a working knowl-

edge of French from his years as a French prisoner of war; his fluent English bore a strong German accent and, while he knew artists from both linguistic groups, he taught in English only.

Norman Bethune, Canada's controversial hero and medical pioneer, was a good friend of Brandtner's. They met through their mutual interest in painting when Bethune bought Brandtner's painting "Sunflower" from the Art Association's 1934 Spring Exhibition. (Duffy/Smith, 1982, p. 32) Brandtner made a painting to celebrate Bethune's first operation at l'hôpital du Sacre Coeur. It shows Bethune surrounded by nuns and medical personnel, cradling a child's body. (Stewart, 1990, p. 28) Bethune, while a practising surgeon, regarded himself as an artist with a special passion for self-expression. (Stewart, 1990, p. 33) Both men shared more than their description of themselves as artists. They shared personality traits and political opinions as well. Both were forthright and had difficulty disguising what they found contemptible; both espoused a philosophy which called for the destruction of the old, to "Create a *tabula rasa*. Construct anew" (Stewart, 1990, p. 34). A philosophy which might be easier to apply in dealing with children than adults. While childless, the two men loved children and Bethune persuaded Brandtner, with little difficulty, I'm sure, to direct free art classes for under-privileged children on Saturday mornings, with Bethune and others contributing the paint and materials.

The Children's Art Centre became a reality in 1936 and lasted until 1950, in Bethune's Beaver Hall Square apartment, which later for a while became Brandtner's home. It was attended by 20 children of various ages. To have first hand knowledge



Dr. Norman Bethune at Sacre Coeur Hospital  
(F. Brandtner, 1935)



Children's Art Centre (Montreal, 1936)

of the school I interviewed the (now late) Shirley Stoker, who was a student at the centre and the artist Marian Scott, who modestly described herself as an assistant to Brandtner.

Shirley, who died in 1990, devoted her life to the promotion of art and education. At the age of 8 she remembered being one of the school's first and youngest students as well as one of only two girls. Unlike the other students Shirley came from a privileged milieu: a house in Westmount and a private girls' school. She told me that, while at no time did she feel intimidated, this was her first exposure to boys in the class and to children who came "from all walks of life". Shirley, unlike Marian Scott could recollect neither stories nor music being used at the beginning of sessions, but rather remembered a free discussion of what Brandtner might have seen or done that particular week; they would be simple things such as "stopping the caleche driver and feeding his horse". No themes were given and everyone found their own spot on the floor and went to work. Shirley recalls being drawn to the older boys and especially a student called Paul, who did huge mural-like work, sometimes "15 feet long and he'd do what he knew - the railway tracks, the smoke stacks, the factories, the whole thing". Everyone, she said, was in awe of this boy's work. The fact that the class was diverse, she said, worked to everyone's advantage. The different backgrounds meant that subjects were approached from different points of view, "none of us was doing the same painting or the same subject". Shirley mentioned that while she remembered Brandtner taking a brush to add a touch here or there to a student's work, he was, she said, more apt to rely on his sense of humour to cajole a child to do something or "he'd make you laugh". Moreover, she recalls he never talked down to children or "made you feel like a fool or that you

couldn't do it". To my question of what she thought was Brandtner's greatest attribute as a teacher, she replied: "he tried to get you going", and to make you aware of your surroundings to see "the whole world [as] your house". Brandtner, Shirley believed, probably spent more time with the older students, talking about their works to the class, but never comparing one with another - discussing what they had achieved and how she found this very stimulating. At no time, did she feel neglected or lost during these classes. Furthermore, according to her, Brandtner was the only teacher (and she knew many: Lismer, Seath, Pellan, Borduas and Goodrich Roberts), who she felt "was teaching because he *had* to teach". She went so far as to say that "the fascinating thing was that he really, genuinely believed that the only way to further good painting was to teach it".

The Centre's work was recognized and the artworks were exhibited in the Sun Life Building where 50,000 visitors saw the paintings at the national "Produced in Canada" exhibition. (Harper, 1971, p. 17) In 1937 they went to an international children's exhibition in Paris and won three out of the six prizes awarded. Robert Ayre, the Montreal Star's art critic wrote favourable reviews about Brandtner's work with children. He quotes him as saying that children should be given a choice of materials to work with; that their "ideas should not be ridiculed"; that any criticism be given kindly and finally that "care should be taken not to praise skill at the expense of creative ideas" (Duffy/Smith, 1982, footnote p. 35).

Brandtner's success was such that over the next two years he was asked to teach at the Griffintown Community Centre, the Iverley Settlement, the Negro Community

Centre, Neighbourhood House and the Family "Y" at Verdun. His only financial support came from a few interested friends. He quickly realized that he would have to campaign actively for funds to keep his projects going. He was tireless in his appeals for money and support; approaching such diverse organizations as the Junior League of Montreal, government agencies as well as the Carnegie and Guggenheim foundations. No funds were forthcoming because his projects did not form part of a museum program. He was not deterred; he cutback on the number of children in the classes and the amount of materials and continued to teach in spite of a lack of financial aid.

In 1939, Brandtner began classes with the children in the chronic orthopaedic ward of the Children's Memorial Hospital. Dr. E. de Belle, the Superintendent of the hospital, declared the art work to be a most beneficial therapy for the largely bedridden youngsters. Brandtner's aim in these classes was for the children to regain confidence in their ability to do things and to express experience in their own way. (Duffy/Smith, 1981, p. 37) Brandtner's prescience in establishing this project was remarkable: nearly 50 years later in 1988, the city of New York implemented a program for hospitalized children with the same goal of increasing the young patients' self confidence. The program has met with enormous success and, in an almost uncanny reprieve of the earlier project, the artist who directs the classes given to the confined youngsters uses the same method of "encouragement not instruction" as Brandtner used in his classes a half century before. (Novarro, April 8th, 1990)

In his constant quest for financial support, Brandtner applied to the Guggenheim foundation for a research grant. His interest remained children's art centres. He felt that



by studying the activities of centres in the United States he would be able to make recommendations which could be implemented in Canada with government support. His proposal was recommended by the Montreal artist and teacher Anne Savage and endorsed by H.O. McCurry, director of the National Gallery of Canada, who described Brandtner as possessing "an exceptional degree of enthusiasm and sound judgment". With no grant forthcoming, the plan was dropped.

The only government money Brandtner received, and it was not for teaching, was in 1968, when as an experimenter in the medium of encaustic, he was given the Visual Arts Award by the newly created Canada Council. However, it was a story of too little, too late; for while seven thousand dollars gave Brandtner his first freedom from money worries, he died the next year. (Duffy/Smith, p. 38, 1981)

In 1944, Brandtner was hired to be the art master at Miss Edgar's and Miss Cramp's School, his association with the school lasted until he suffered a heart attack at the school, in 1966. The girls' school was founded in 1909, with housing provided by Sir William Van Horne, an artist and patron of the arts. Miss Cramp, an educator from England, and one of the founders of the school, was a believer in the education-through-art movement and together with Miss Edgar, built a curriculum for their new school to reflect a broad background of knowledge with the emphasis on the arts. Drawing was a compulsory subject from the first grade, as was the study of the history of art and architecture in the later grades.

In an interview with Maisie MacSporrán the headmistress, who hired Brandtner, I was assured that the relationship between Brandtner and the school was a very "happy"



Drawing Class (1950s)  
Junior School E.C.S.

one. The diminutive Miss MacSporran, herself an ECS "old girl", was an informed and knowledgeable educator, well aware of the arts' programs which existed in Montreal in the 1930s and 40s. She was a friend and admirer of Anne Savage and her teaching at Baron Byng. She first met Brandtner in the early 1940s when he was speaking at St. George's school, which was at the time a progressive co-educational elementary school. She was immediately won over by his ideas and the energy with which he expressed them, but was unable to offer him a position as the school already had an art teacher. However in 1944 the need arose, and Brandtner accepted a part-time job at the school with alacrity. Over the next twenty two years, what began as a part-time position became a career. At first he taught only the compulsory drawing classes, but soon a "special" after-school art class was added. This extra class was voluntary and comprised girls of all ages and abilities, with the extra fees paid by parents; better and more varied art materials were provided. Sometimes a group project was undertaken, such as the 1950 Egyptian mural in the School library, where even the youngest and smallest members of the class, myself included, contributed in some way. Later, Brandtner was asked to instruct the older student in the history of art and architecture, which were required subjects for graduation. Brandtner's teaching of these academic subjects was not, according to my interviews, at the same level as his studio teaching, his classes were said to be somewhat uninspired. But even those who did not enjoy their drawing lessons (according to my observation - the retiring or timid ones), recognized Brandtner as someone who tried to give them an appreciation and understanding of art — especially "abstract art". On the other hand those, who enjoyed his teaching (according to my



The Riders (No. 28) F. Brandtner



E.C.S. Library Mural (1950)

recollections - the more social or curious) liked him more than other teachers (Seath, Lismer, etc.) because of his "emotional involvement" (McClure, 1988, interview).

Everyone who met Brandtner was aware of his physical presence, and my interviewees described him as a big energetic man with expansive gestures and a strong accent. As a teacher he moved about a good deal, coaxing his students not to be hesitant, but to produce work that looked like "positive statements done with conviction", as one ex-student put it. An overview of the students' art reproduced in the existing School magazines from Brandtner's time reflect the master's interest in cubism and abstract art; some years display an almost total uniformity of expression.

No matter how much time he devoted to his teaching commitments, Brandtner, who had enormous stamina, pursued his own work, executing commissions, exhibiting constantly, participating in artists' groups such as The Contemporary Art Society and The Federation of Canadian Artists. In 1936, he had a one man exhibition of 120 paintings sponsored by the Canadian League against War and Fascism. (Harper, 1971, p. 15) He also addressed and lectured to interested groups; one he especially enjoyed was the McGill School for Social Work, where he was a lecturer in 1951 and a special lecturer "in group work skills" from 1952-55. Sketchy and incomplete notes and objectives exist in his Journal and appear to be from such a series of talks. The School provided Brandtner the perfect forum from which he could discuss and elaborate on how to enrich the lives of others through the practice of art. Although the social-work students were not artists, Brandtner respected their knowledge of what he called "content" in art, and chose to speak to them from the perspective of a practising artist, more concerned with

the formal elements and creative possibilities than with subject matter per se. He spoke about the importance of "the arts and crafts" and how they could be used in therapy. He was able to draw on his considerable and varied personal experience with children from diverse ages and backgrounds.

During the summers 1949-53 Brandtner was director of The Observatory Art Centre at the University of New Brunswick. This must have been a rewarding experience for him as some of his students continued to write to him, over the years. Judging from the correspondence (and quoted by Harper) many Frederictonians must have come under Brandtner's influence. A letter written to Alan Gordon in December 1960 indicates that his classes at U.N.B. embraced more than the formal teaching of art. For Brandtner recalls "the fun we had and the satisfaction we got discussing our problems to discover the art of living and to understand the place of art in society" (Duffy/Smith, 1982, p. 42). It would seem that in the summer school classroom he was able again to unite his two great concerns "art" and "living".

Russell Harper wrote a comprehensive catalogue for a 1971-72 Brandtner exhibition organized by Sir George Williams University. The goal of the series of annual one man shows was "to give scholars and the public an opportunity of re-evaluating the personal contributions of selected Canadian painters to the national scene" (Cooke, Catalogue of Brandtner Retrospective, 1971, foreword). Brandtner, according to Harper, "retained a youthful mind; he was a wise man in whom was embodied a young man's spirit for artistic experimentation and philosophic contemplation" (Harper, 1971, p. 7).

Did Brandtner's ideas change over the 40 years in Canada? A discussion of Brandtner the teacher would not be complete without some mention of his role as an artist. Throughout history artists have been influenced by earlier artists. In his Journal, Brandtner acknowledges the debt which artists owe to preceding ones and how it explains the pendulum swings and the cross fertilizations which occur throughout the history of art. Brandtner was artistically formed by the leading movements of his day and by the fact that he grew up in an architecturally rich Hanseatic city. Having finished technical high school and being unable to afford a university education, he undertook to educate himself. He made himself aware of all that was happening in the art world while assisting the conventional local artist Prof. Pfuhe in his studio. His limited means curtailed his travels and Berlin's "bright lights and harsh shadows" intimidated him. (Duffy/Smith, 1982, p. 16) In 1925, books on the Bauhaus began to appear, describing the institution's philosophy, its aim, "to train young people to understand and test the immediate needs of a post-war society", and its emphasis on the "active collaboration of master and student" (Duffy/Smith, 1982, p. 17). These socially based ideas appealed to Brandtner and were incorporated into his teaching style. He sums up his own art production as "a creation that expresses myself and the time I live in - of course with all my troubles, happiness, sadness, beliefs etc. It is a language I hope that is still alive and while it acknowledges its debts to the arts of the past, it has no part in them".

### *Summary*

*Montreal provided Brandtner with a larger and more open community than the one he had encountered in Winnipeg. By the late thirties the local art scene was improving and Brandtner was able to participate in all aspects of the city's artistic life. He quickly earned*

*the respect of individuals from different walks of life and his artistic opinions were appreciated by his contemporaries. Brandtner encountered people, like Norman Bethune, with whom he could share his views. The two men had much in common both politically and artistically and spent time together before Bethune left for Spain. It was their mutual liking for experiment and risk, coupled with determination, that enabled these two childless men to create the Children's Art Centre in 1936. Works by the Centre's students would later win international prizes.*

*Brandtner's personal teaching style is recounted by the late Shirley Stoker, a student at the Centre. Her account leaves little doubt that Brandtner's personal approach came from his own experience based on Pestalozzi's and later Dewey's philosophy that "all learning should originate in the learner's experience (Downs, 1975, p. 126)." Brandtner used his energy to motivate children to paint. Having the students work on the floor put children of all ages at the same level. Furthermore, Brandtner assumed a non-judgmental attitude towards his students' work and spoke to them as equals in the fashion of the Bauhaus School as an "active collaboration of master and student". Brandtner's art and teaching incorporated and reflected a social message which he deemed appropriate for the times. It is a shame that there was so little financial reward for Brandtner who spent so much time and energy seeking support for children's art programs. Undaunted, Brandtner soldiered on; maintaining his conviction that teaching was the only means to "further good painting."*



## Chapter 4

### Brandtner's Journal

*This chapter is a analysis of Fritz Brandtner's Journal. The diary written in English is in the possession of a Montreal gallery owner and friend of Brandtner. I worked from a photocopy because over time the original has become brittle and delicate. While the copy lacked the visual appeal of the original it maintained the exact text. As in many personal works written over a period of years there is much repetition of ideas and themes. To give structure to my analysis I chose to take Brandtner's reiterations as emphasis and organized my discussion of his work under six specific themes. The selection was made from a wide range of possibilities. I based my choice on issues I could personally remember him addressing. They are in order; 1) Brandtner's concern for "content" in art; 2) his dislike of anything "imitative" or copied; 3) his ideology of a "creative artist"; 4) his insistence on defining the terms "abstract" and "modern art"; 5) his ideas about self-discovery through art; and finally, 6) his conviction that pictures should be made from "feeling, not knowing".*

*Using these topics I linked Brandtner's thoughts to the individuals he noted in his Journal. I expanded upon some of his writings and attempted to put statements of his into context under the appropriate heading. When it was possible I tried to illustrate Brandtner's writings with first hand reportage derived from interviews with individuals who had known him in his capacity as a teacher. The analysis of the six topics was framed by Brandtner's omnipresent social and political concerns; as a crusader committed to the betterment of society. Culture, which he took to be a nation's most important asset, he found threatened and in decline in Canada, and he championed for better education, which he felt to be the only remedy for improving the situation. Furthermore, he believed in a positive role for the "creative" artist (and he considered himself one) as spokesperson to challenge society's complacent attitudes.*

Brandtner's Journal consists of about 270 randomly numbered pages most of which seem to come from school notebooks. The pages, some of which are added, are held together by a decorated cloth cover designed and painted by Brandtner. With time the pages have become brittle and a bit discoloured. Because of this I was unable to work with the original document. Unfortunately, the photocopy is an uninspiring reproduction of the original, lacking the coloured illustrations and coloured markings.

Ruskin says that all works of quality must bear a price in proportion to the skill, time, expense and risk attending their invention and manufacture.

beautiful forms and compositions are not made by ~~chance~~ <sup>chance</sup> nor can they ever in any material be made at small expense.

art is as far as I am concerned  
not to repeat like parrots

not to imitate  
not to copy

but to create  
to imagine  
to design

to work out <sup>your</sup> ~~his~~ own problems and ideas.

art is not created by the soft.

nothing is achieved without effort.

echo of the  
emotion after  
experience has  
past.

JOURNAL EXCERPT

There are very few dates which appear in the Journal, and those that do are from the early 1950's, but there does seem to have been one or more revisions or reworkings as evidenced by Brandtner's notes and underlined thoughts and ideas in different inks and colours. Not working with the original makes the flow difficult to judge, which parts to read together and which parts not to - as indicated by a change in colour or ink. I have surmised, therefore, that the whole document was written in the early part of the decade. News clippings referring to a Kandinsky's retrospective, to the issues of censorship and pornography, and references to The Massey Report (1951) and the Cold War again seem to locate the Journal in the early 1950s.

I was unable to determine why it was that Brandtner wrote in English. It could have been in deference to his adoptive country, but more likely it was because he was a practical man and English was the language in which he taught and communicated.

As I find to be the case with most personal works, Brandtner repeats himself. My first readings of the Journal, gave me a certain feeling as to what the most important themes might be. At that time I isolated them as 1. his concern for "content" in art, 2. his dislike of anything "imitative" or "copied", 3. his ideology of a "creative artist", 4. his insistence on defining the terms "abstract" and "Modern Art", 5. his ideas about "self-discovery" through art, and 6. his conviction that pictures should be made "with feeling [,] not knowing." I will remain with these themes, even though greater familiarity with the Journal has suggested others; foremost, however, I feel the necessity to deal with Brandtner's social and political views. In this manner I attempt to contextualize the originally stated themes.

Further readings of the Journal made me more aware of time and sequencing problems. But I kept to the given order of the Journal and assumed that all underlining in colour was done at a later date. With each reading I began to see Brandtner as a much more globally concerned person. His thoughts and ideas about art were very integrated with his social concerns. Developmental change in our social, political, cultural and artistic outlook through education was what Brandtner was after -- which would enable us, while directing our eyes towards the future, to accept the contemporary ideals of peace, equality and justice for all. Brandtner wanted us to develop as people.

In his last pages, Brandtner summarizes concerns which recurred many times: "The great revolution in the world which is to equalize opportunity, bring peace and freedom must be a spiritual revolution. A new will must come, this will is a very personal thing in each one. We have to find through public conscience and social justice a way to check the tendency to extremes of wealth and also of poverty". This sounds more like a social reformer than a visual arts teacher. Indeed, I feel that Brandtner's ideas about art and life were inextricably interwoven. He states that "we must educate people to be able to think and judge for themselves" and that "democracy lives or dies on the capacity of citizens to think for themselves and offer critical examination of the policies of government ... to meet ... the challenge of changing times". In "the 20th century all thought and feeling is relative to man, he does not reflect the world but invents it". Cubism and Abstract art (which Brandtner would refer to as Modern art) are to allude to Kant, the putting together of various conceptions to, "comprehend their variety in one perception". These inventions constituted for Brandtner the concrete

realization of how he viewed the world, where the artist had to "understand the spiritual, philosophical, psychological and social hopes of his time (Journal)".

Brandtner, who proudly became a Canadian citizen in 1937, does not always describe his adoptive country in very flattering terms. When, as a Canadian, he asks the questions "What kind of an artistic world do we live in?" "What kind do we want?" and "what kind should we have?" He answers that, "the intellectual level of our nation is regrettably low ... we have been able to prosper without philosophy or art and material prosperity has been our overwhelming concern". He warns that "we will receive nothing but pity from the rest of the world, if we remain content with the accomplishments of yesterday. We cannot achieve progress except by steady forward plowing, [and] only when we become participants (artists and public alike) in the activities of our time". Canadians, Brandtner tells us, are satisfied with mediocrity; "They are willing to build intellectual developments (in art, music, theatre) with a medicine dropper. Culture cannot develop that way. One must have courage and take a chance". "In Canada we have abandoned the arts and put our trust in political, military, economic and scientific remedies". If we believe as he does that "cultural development is one of the strong cornerstones of freedom", then we must "not only be satisfied with the past, but focus our eyes upon the future things to come". Brandtner's thinking was very much along the lines of the German Expressionists who had been concerned about ways to combat the materialism which they saw as destroying the spiritual values of modern life. "Artists in opposing naturalism aspired not only to a radical new style of art but also to the creation of a better world, free of the conventions and dehumanizing conditions imposed

upon the creative spirit of mankind by a culture which they regarded as soul stifling and morally bankrupt" (Greenwood, 1975, p. 3).

The French proverb cited by Brandtner that "Culture is what remains when everything else is forgotten" is a cue to Brandtner's railing against the Canadian public, its government and politicians. The Canada of today, he says, will be remembered by its "cultural discipline and achievements" and so "let us prove by example and statement that creative art, craft, sculpture, music, drama etc. is vital and a necessary part of our cultural process". He suggests that a new and cohesive cultural policy be set in place.

He says that we must ask ourselves certain questions:

1. are we taking steps to preserve the popular traditions of our country in art and craftsmanship? Sculpture etc.
2. have we taken steps to make known our cultural heritage and preserve it in galleries, museums for the future?
3. have we encouraged the creative artist whether in painting, sculpture, music, literature drama etc. in any way?
4. have we taken steps to provide the best architecture and decorations for our public buildings?
5. have we taken steps to fight the triumph of mediocrity and the opposition to new ideas in any field?
6. have we taken fully sufficient steps to provide higher education for all classes of our population?

Assessing the situation raised by his questions, Brandtner writes, "Let us have the honesty to admit the futility of our present cultural progress and let us have the courage to embark on a program of extensive activities, that will help us to enjoy this world, this land of ours and live a richer more satisfying life; creative art is one step". The

positiveness of Brandtner's personality as well as his enormous energy enabled him to make suggestions as to what the problems might be and how they could be improved.

Brandtner embraces self-reliance when he cautions that "our best defense is education, there is hope for man only in man, we must believe in the good of man". But to begin with, "We need a fresh insight into the world of today [with] freedom to think and to question, to share one's doubts and hopes with others and yes to make mistakes ... of great necessity [are] inspired teachers ... who can transmit personal enthusiasm for creative work to future students". "To fit the individual into society as we the artist see society as it should be, is definitely a duty of educational authority in a democracy and art can play a great part in this process".

On a more concrete level, he suggests that examples of contemporary art "new form, new ideas" could be placed in all hospitals, schools and art galleries because of their educational value. And while creative art must compete with television, movies and organized sports, "public taste [is] formed by publicity and everyday articles [and] can be educated or corrupted". This education is the role of "art directors" and Brandtner feels that they do not "perform their educational responsibility" because they "judge the public taste lower than it is". The "influx of cheap as well as low cost designs and patterns is a serious matter to the artist in Canada - Why not employ Canadian creative artists?" But unfortunately, "Our Western idea of culture is more apt to be associated with success" and success is associated with "big is better" and "bigness in all its forms, government, labour and business" has an "evilness" about it. (Brandtner seems to be echoing Ezra Pound's "with usura the line grows thick") What Canadians need are

"profit-sharing and cooperative methods" as well as to "discover that thinking can be fun". Until then, however, "the arts in this country must expect to fair poorly". He continues by saying that what we need is to:

develop a program which will help to recognize the just claims of our artists, educators and University administrators. Canada should organize a culture train. (prescience of Brandtner can be seen in the Confederation train of 1967) No one can deny that culture cannot [sic] be improved (in spite of the Massey report). Unless all our citizens in every part of the country and not only in the big cities are fully aware of its existence including the contemporary isms, or does culture belong only to the few? Why not for the masses?

Ultimately, Brandtner insists "Society is responsible for the quality of art that grows out of it", and confesses that "I have never seen a community in Canada where the art activities was (sic) better than its people wanted it to be". Finally, in Brandtner's opinion:

posterity will judge us on our achievements in the spiritual sphere, the cultural side will not be able to make much headway unless Canadians are willing to judge in terms of quality not just in terms of success measured in cash. The decline of the intellectual is most significant in [the] U.S. and Canada.

This last sentiment seems to have had its advocates in the U.S as well. Jacques Barzun, the educator and critic wrote in 1944 that "We must put a premium upon intellect, and a premium is always money".

In discussing the themes mentioned at the beginning of the chapter it is important to point out that Brandtner divided art producers into two categories, the professional and the amateur. This was in no way intended to create different levels in art, but was to explain why for the professional painter "it is the result that counts. While the process or "the doing" which demanded great self discipline was a means of checking one's vision against the "higher goal the total vision". On the other hand, "The amateur's



greatest satisfaction is in the doing rather than the result". "Art and painting for pleasure ... has nothing to do with art". and speaking as a professional, he says that to produce art "requires years of training, discipline, vision and a keen mind, not only a few technical tricks". I remember hearing Alex Colville, at a McGill lecture in the early 1980's expressing a similar view. Brandtner, moreover, considers the amateur and the professional to represent two poles and between them "lies mediocrity and imitation", both of which he disliked.

## **1. Brandtner's concern for "content" in art**

Why was Brandtner concerned that there should be "content" in art? And what did he mean by it? For the answer we must consider what he thought art was. "Art is" is the theme he returns to most often and because art was his life he intertwines it with every other subject. For Brandtner,

Art is a living manifestation that life is not all despair, hate, depression, frustration and a scramble for material possessions, but that there is left a whole new world of adventure, new experiences, new lands, new relationships and an opportunity to touch the hearts of people everywhere. The sharing of ideas is the purpose back of all social life if we accept this then the artist should be in the centre of things.

and in the text Brandtner has underlined Kandinsky's book "Concerning the Spiritual in Art". From this book I was able to find a quote to which Brandtner would have subscribed. In italics, Kandinsky had written, that "the artist must have something to say, for mastery over form is not his goal but rather the adapting of form to its inner

meaning". This quote is footnoted and refers back to Bocklin an early nineteenth century German artist.

On another occasion, Brandtner describes art as "a guide to our choices, art develops our understanding, both of man made beauty and also of nature's beauty and helps to make life richer". And again more personally "Art is as far as I am concerned not to repeat like parrots, imitate, copy but to create — imagine — design — to work out your own problems and ideas". Put more poetically art is an "echo of the emotion after experience has past". Furthermore, he writes that "the work of art is a projection of the mind of the artist and the painting is, therefore, an image of a mental process". These last statements seem to bear out Lowenfeld's thoughts on art when he wrote that

a work of art is not the representation of the thing; it is, rather, the representation of the experience which we have with the thing .... Any form of art expression is, therefore, a dynamic, ever changing process which is of the greatest educational significance, for through it the individual mind remains flexible and adjustable. (Lowenfeld, 1950, p. 13)

Although Brandtner never mentions Lowenfeld or his ideology, their similar ideas may have something to do with their contemporary dates and common Germanic heritage.

Brandtner, a product of German social upheaval and World War I goes to an extreme when he quotes Nietzsche; "he who wishes to be creative must first destroy and smash accepted values and history has proven him right". However, in the context of the total Journal, this extreme statement (probably only refers to his concept of Modern art) comes across as an anomaly to Brandtner's pro-democracy anti-fascist stance. I feel that it was probably written at a time of frustration, when he wished that Canadian art

appreciation was not so rooted in the academic style of painting and that the Canadian public would accept work which had already been accepted fifty years earlier in Europe.

Cezanne is credited with saying that "painting is nature as seen through a temperament" (Gilot, 1990, introduction, xii). This reference to the importance of the artist's emotional state when creating an art work could have come from Brandtner. Indeed, he may have read it somewhere. Brandtner was a great admirer of Cezanne and mentions him several times; he even credits him with sometimes using the subject as the pretext of a work rather than the theme. Early in his Journal Brandtner stated and underlined that "Art comes from character and from personality more than from theory and imitation of nature". "The attitude of the artist" toward his work is of prime importance, he writes, because art is about the power of "translating feeling from the artist to another person". "Art is not a matter of rules and techniques or the search for an absolute ideal of beauty rather it is the expression of ideals and emotions about the life of the times". "Technique is not your message see that it becomes the means and not the end of your art". However, what was essential to the structure of a work for Brandtner was the place of drawing; it was the "grammar". Drawing was, in his words, "the fundamental element in all great picture making".

Being an artist made it easy, Brandtner says, to explain form in art and his appreciation of primitive and unsophisticated art work; like the work of Kandinsky, Klee and others of his time, his understanding came from the qualities of these works. To quote Kandinsky, these primitives "sought to express ... only internal truths, renouncing in consequences all consideration of external form". Moreover, Brandtner was not alone

when he expressed what for him constituted an art work, "unity within variety is the essence of art and where it is lacking no art can exist". This opinion is shared by Roger Fry, who also felt that a work of art should not be judged "by its reaction on life" but rather considered "as an expression of emotions regarded as ends in themselves" (Fry, 1974, p. 29). However, Brandtner continues, "most people ... look for some meaning that can be attached to the values of actual life". But generally, he found that the public had a better knowledge of content (in the form of historical knowledge) than form and so when lecturing (Duffy/Smith, 1982, p. 43) he chose to address more often the latter. Not to build on what they knew but to build where they knew naught.

As the American artist Mark Tobey observed "the content of painting is tied up with time, place and history. It is always related to man's beliefs and disbeliefs, to his affirmations and negations. How we believe and disbelieve is mirrored in the art of our times" (Kuh, 1960, p. 7). The 20th century brought a reappraisal of the concept of time "a new fourth dimension" in "human thought and creation" in Brandtner's words which had a bearing on the content in art. The element of time existed for him on many levels, both for the artist and the viewer. Contemporary time dictates that "Our paintings are different from those of the past because we live in a different world ... they are the mirror of our age". The history of art, according to Brandtner is like the swing of a pendulum with "each generation reacting strongly against the tendencies of its immediate predecessor". Producing art takes real time because "art means selecting and arranging" and "long periods of gestation". Moreover, what an artist really meant by his painting, he himself would find different meanings in it at different days and hours and in different

stages of his own development". Exposure to an artwork over time is important as well because "the work of art does not yield its charms to superficial observation"; in fact "forms which at first dismay and puzzle us are revealed to our understanding simply by greater contact with them".

While Brandtner devotes a great deal of his Journal to other indispensable elements such as the discipline, structure and design that underlie a work of art, he also lectures us on the "triumph of mediocrity" or "the paint slinging frenzies" of some contemporary artists, who use "jittery form, nervous lines, [and] washed out feelings". "These paintings are like people all mixed-up" he says. The reason may be that people are anxious living in the "fear of an atomic age". But because for him "a picture has to be judged by itself and not as a reference to something else", it follows that when the artist "is no longer master of the paint he uses [and has] no predetermined scheme or intellectual organization - a nightmare of extremes and boredom [occurs]". Moreover, it seems to Brandtner "that artists who rebel against their time or go to extreme[s] are equally wrong, they can't escape and have simply to move with the times".

An idea which Brandtner shares with other artists, and endorsed by Montreal artist/craftsman Walter Schlupe, a fellow traveller in the Pestalozzian tradition, is his conviction that art is a psychological adventure similar in both effort and excitement to a physical one:

Every advance in the (sic) culture has been made by the adventurous and with the death of adventure comes the decay of culture, therefore every kind of adventure in art and any other activity should be applauded - if the results are valueless the future generations will judge them and deal with them. But for us we should encourage even futile adventure, because amongst the futile may and certainly will spring up the real.

if the child can leave the art class with  
some ability to make up his own mind. 87  
I think we have achieved more than <sup>the</sup> examining  
subject and into it.

art is Youth's land of  
enchantment  
creating it, he discovers a  
wonderland of beautiful forms  
patterns, colors.

exploring it, he finds himself  
and by this self-discovery,  
fulfills the aim of art  
education.

art is a challenge, rather than an  
escape.

+ the artist of today became  
a competitor of nature. <sup>he does not</sup>  
before the role of the artist <sup>care if people</sup>  
was to copy nature. today he <sup>call him</sup>  
creates his own order, attains his own <sup>or his art is more</sup>  
equilibrium, invents his own forms <sup>cultures, nations</sup>  
subscribes his own discoveries with color, <sup>from</sup>  
finds the inner reality of objects.  
the enormous conquest of space his goal.  
came into being. the pulse and  
tempo of today, our time. form  
in the sense in which I am using it does not  
exist in nature. nature does not produce it.

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This attitude of non-judgmental encouragement seems to me to be at the heart of every great teacher. In summation, he tells us that "no amount of intelligence will empower us to judge of the rightness or wrongness of a work of art. The value of art cannot be measured by the extent of its audience, but only by the quality of feeling, emotion which it produces in its most responsive onlooker".

A short example early in the Journal illustrates how, ultimately, Brandtner sees content and form as one.

Instead of values we must speak of structure the subject matter will be a woman but the content of the painting really is the painter's love for the woman, the content is love. ... Content and form are one, no longer does he try to reproduce exactly what he saw but arbitrarily and forcibly what he felt." Finally, "you must paint only what is important to you, [you] must not respond to outside demands. They (the people) do not know what they want, or what you have to give.

## **2. Brandtner's dislike of anything "imitative" or "copying"**

"As in every form of human development, we pass from idea to observation, from observation to question from question to explanation" writes Brandtner about the process of creating an art work, but insists that "observation is the first essential [and that] it is harder to see than it is to express".

For Brandtner "nature is the great storehouse of design, nature produces the material" and he personally expresses a concern as to what mankind does with it.

In nature you will find everything: form, rhythm, structure, colour, special relationships etc.; in this way we acquire a well tested stock of ideas to furnish our mind. Such furnishing being education proper as distinguished from the pseudo education you will get in art school.

And even if "the public today will accept anything" and "most people believe they are competent judges of art, simply because they think art is no more than [the] imitation of nature". Brandtner cautions that "the business of the painter is not to copy nature, but it is to find in nature things out of which to make design ... for our business is not to represent nature but to produce a good picture which will be a translation of nature". Moreover, he writes that people have a tendency to compare paintings with the real objects they represent. And while we may never tire of "the fascination of a sunset, reflection of waves" etc, these optical transformations are important to us because the experience of them can "mobilize wider responses, thoughts and feelings in emotional and intellectual realms, and so the experience becomes complete by a careful interchange of the lines, shapes, colours the rhythm of time is translated into space". However, imitation which is "the testimony of the eye ... taxes no one's imagination" while only pleasing "by reminders of known things". Making the point still more forcibly, Brandtner declares that while nature is indispensable to the artist "she is his servant not his master". The nineteenth century was for him a period "of too much nature, as a result art was reduced to a formula of technical skill". Kandinsky also felt that the art principles of the past should not be revived for "such imitation is mere aping" (Kandinsky, 1911, introduction, p. 1). Art, for Brandtner, was like religion; it "draws its inner nourishment from the spiritual world and cannot be explained by the mechanical process of imitation or [the] copying of texture, colours etc". Furthermore, "the more faithful a copy is the falser it is. Everyone knows that the faculty of imitation implies lack of creative force". Finally, Brandtner urges us to "gradually crush out the imitative and



allow the creative power to take hold", for "the artist addresses his art to the inner eye instead of trying to please the outer eye by familiarity or clever imitation". As Kandinsky puts it, "the inner voice of the soul tells him what form he needs, whether inside or outside nature". Or to return to Brandtner "one cannot be dogmatic about art. Art exists so that we may say the unsayable. Art comes it is not made it cannot be made on purpose". To back this, Brandtner quotes Shakespeare's "King Lear" as to calling up the "spirits from the vasty deep ... but will they come?"

### **3. Brandtner's definition of a "creative artist"**

It is necessary at this point to restate the fact that, even though Brandtner was unable to support himself financially from his own art production, at no time did he consider himself other than an artist. (Scott, 1990, interview) And when he defines a "creative artist", we must be cognizant that he undoubtedly includes himself in this definition. "The creator," he claims, "is an adventurer ... who follows paths that have not been traced, who doesn't obey ... he likes the danger of the risks ... he takes chances". We must remind ourselves that Brandtner neither regarded "the making of art" nor "material prosperity" as the secret to life; for him life's value was in the living of it. For him life and art were inseparable, therefore, "success in the full meaning of the word" could only be attained after "one has something to say". Earlier Brandtner contended that technical ability was not in itself enough to make art; and while technique could be taught, only the creative artist was capable of "creative invention", an important attribute of the uniqueness that is inherent in a work of art. A work of this kind

necessitates that "artists make their own rules so that what they say will correspond to what they feel". Brandtner does not attempt to reproduce in his work the visible or "secure the onlooker's sympathy - instead he [the artist] creates out of his own mind a unified symbol of the intensely complex world". For him there is no mystery in picture making because "one line determines another, one form creates another form, one colour determines another colour and values".

Nature is credited by Brandtner as being the storehouse of ideas; but the reason one studies nature, he says, is to become "united" with it or "become acquainted with himself through nature". The role of the artist of the past was to copy nature, but today's creative artists, and a view he shared, look "down upon the boring platitudes of the art of the academy. They have examined realism and found it an inferior type of expression" (Scott, 1990, interview). "The affair of the painter is", according to Brandtner, "to exercise and develop his creative imagination". The "seeking and daring artist is worth more than the well trained craftsman who blindly copies". Brandtner returns again to the theme that:

the artist has to understand the spiritual, philosophical, psychological and social hopes of his time and has to forget the academic follower of tradition ... Academic painting in contrast is reassuring painting because it offers, no new avenues of thought, no unorthodox technique, no social thinking, no new relationship. The academy has taken Europe as a model, Europe of the 19th century the Europe of decay and has helped spreading [sic] the mediocre more efficient[ly] than the Europe she has copied.

One of the important tasks of the "professional creative artist", says Brandtner, is to "awaken aesthetic sensibility among the public and the layman" whenever "the public lags behind art (new ideas in art)". For according to him "It is as much a mistake

to accept a thing without understanding it as to reject it without understanding it". Bethune concurs with his friend and goes farther when he declares that "the function of the artist is to disturb. His duty is to arouse the sleepers, to shake the complacent pillars of the world ... In a world terrified of change he [the artist] preaches revolution - the principle of life" (Lord, 1974, p. 190). But while for Brandtner "every artist is an exponent of a philosophy of wonder according to his ability [he] does not wish to be misunderstood, for if he is not understood his whole artist[ic] life is a failure". In addition Brandtner feels that there should be a spirit of cooperation among fellow artists, "we must realize that artists are not in competition with each other" and the Contemporary Art Society, of which he was an early member, endorsed this view in its manifesto which called for "each artist to seek personal satisfaction in his own painting and make no attempt to move others directly" (Harper, 1977, p. 332).

In addition Brandtner says it is "better to go forward and risk making a mistake than to stay dully where one is sure of being right". His inventiveness and force of character are present when he repeatedly declares that repetitious work was for him both "boring" and "escapism"; he was consumed by new ideas and energetic belief in the future; "the future has more in store for us than we have known in the past", and "history shows man's techniques and knowledge always developing at an ever increasing rate".

The final task of the contemporary artist, according to Brandtner is to "liberate the inexhaustible energy reservoir of the visual associations, to accomplish this they [the artists] need a clear grasp of the social field, intellectual honesty and creative power

capable of integrating experiences into a plastic form. This goal will be reached only when art once more lives in unity with human life". This sounds like a definition of the wholistic, Gestalt theory in which "genuine learning and thinking involve getting to the heart of a problem, understanding the structure of the situation, and achieving insight into the essential features required to make sense of what ever is at issue" and only then putting it into plastic form.

Brandtner is fond of making analogies between the different art forms, usually using them to illustrate the commonality of abstract qualities. In the following quote he uses poetry, "the contemporary artist is claiming one thing, the right which the poet has already, to take an object into his mind, to concentrate over (sic) it and to reshape it according to his emotions and creative ability and by doing so make it a work of art".

In summation, as stated earlier, what concerned Brandtner most was a dedication to life itself. Before any artistic expression takes place, he states "there should be the development of a personal philosophy through experience, reading, seeing and much thinking", as well as lots of hard work. Art production while important was but a by-product of life experience or to quote Brandtner directly "art is a result. It is the trace of those who have had creative vision, vitality and originality and the courage to live their lives". "Free yourself from your own preconceived ideas about yourself ... buck for freedom", he challenges us "let us have faith in our own individuality" otherwise "society", as he has told us before will only get the "art it deserves".

#### 4. Brandtner's definition of the terms "abstract" and "Modern art"

Aristotle, Brandtner feels was wrong when he said that "art is imitation"; and wonders that it has taken until the end of the nineteenth century for us to break with the realist convention. Great painters of the past had to work within certain limitations and often their art was concerned with the transmission of ideas and the telling of stories. With the political and social upheavals of the early twentieth century our methods of thinking and feeling changed as did our methods of expression. The tendency of the late nineteenth century philosophers to see "all conceptual categories as useful creations rather than exact descriptions" and their urging of their contemporaries to see the human situation as an ever-changing flux, where nothing but change was permanent, freed individuals to "forge truth and values from their own inner will and determination" (Kagan, Ozment and Turner, 1987, p. 855). The new social values and theories gave birth to psychoanalysis. Meanwhile, the artistic movements of Cubism and German Expressionism came about as artists' reevaluated visual representation in a time of social change in order to give personal and sometimes experimental expression to their new found values and feelings.

It was Brandtner's opinion that "the person who fights Modern art the hardest is also the person who fights the twentieth century the hardest and those that find it easiest to get along in the twentieth century find the most in Modern art - never a dull movement". This statement is consistent with others wherein Brandtner expresses dislike of dullness in any form, an accusation he once levelled at his compatriots, "we probably in Canada have more boredom per square inch than in any place on earth". He, however,

declares that he has no difficulty in accepting the new and different because of his confidence in the future. By 1950, he could not fathom why "America [the] prime inventor of the new civilization" had not accepted art which had been accepted in Europe for forty years. He believed it to be that North Americans only appreciated manual skill and that there was a "distrust of the works of the intellect". But as he says, "Modern art is not the end in art nor are we turning back to what has been done before, evolution in art, as in other matters will continue and the end of art will come with the end of the human race". Therefore, "art in every age must undergo reformation ... [we] cannot be content with timid lamentations". What we today call Modern art (Cubism, Surrealism, Futurism, etc.) Brandtner is sure, "will develop into the art of making people think". It is art that "forces people to examine what they are seeing and most important what it is they are thinking". And you "can't create well unless you think well".

"The desire to create new visions is nothing new; it can be traced through the whole history of art", but it is the Cubist movement that Brandtner credits with changing our, or at least his, attitude toward art because "cubism began as an analysis of the nature of the aesthetic". "Kubismus", as he refers to it, is where a fusion takes place and where the elements "reappear in all their original purity". "Each painting", he warns, "should stand by itself not only as to subject matter but also technically", for "the inner world is only furnished with aspects of the outer world no matter in what juxtaposition". "Words are clumsy instruments ... incapable of expressing the great truths and values or mysteries which surround our lives. That is why the abstract artist again and again directs our thinking to a frame of reference which lies inside us". Brandtner

directs the viewer, however, to "pioneer" and not allow either conservatism or academic rules and thinking to "build a wall around our minds".

Pictures from an earlier time or style record "a single moment of a given place or time and the mood of the painter at that time. Abstract pictures on the other hand may be literally an abstract of many thousand such moments and the tension in the painter, his aim in fact is now to find himself ... to express what is within him ... Intuition takes the place of observation". In the beginning, abstract art, Brandtner says, was easier to read for it was a take-off of a landscape, an interior, people etc. over time; however, the identifying elements became fewer and fewer until today they

are entirely absorbed in the general touches of colour ... they are sometimes impossible to identify and the connotations entirely private ... mental pictures or pictures of the mind not of a thing seen but of a thing felt ... the painter takes a great risk for his signs may not make themselves clear to us and his language, therefore, may not be understood.

Brandtner identifies three trends which for him are important in the development of abstract or non-objective art. The Futurists, whose work was concerned with movement, brought new meaning to the concept of motion which had not been important in the past and which heightened the contemporary artist's concern with the "spacial point to (sic) view - movement and space". The Surrealists, who came about through their "investigation of dreams, the mysterious underworld [and] the subconscious", added fantasy to the repertoire and finally, the Abstract Expressionists, who Brandtner felt created an "egocentric art" drawing on their subconscious and states of inner being and whose production seemed "concerned more with the art of painting than with painting as a means to an end".

From this may follow Brandtner's idea that you "don't need to understand Modern art. You feel it". Moreover, it would seem that he also uses the term "Modern art" to embrace art which we would call contemporary. There is a certain point at which it is difficult to differentiate the two meanings; he is such an enthusiastic promoter of new ideas. For him Modern art, in the European sense, had been accepted long ago. By now it must be evident to the reader that Brandtner was not one for standing still or peacefully accepting the status quo. He saw himself as living in an "age of action," an age in which "art (if true) has to follow, has to express this action ... We have to admit that many accepted beliefs ... must be scrapped. Much of art still lies buried under meaningless traditions". He is, however, sympathetic to the public's difficulty in making sense of and accepting the proliferating new art movements. Firstly, he suggests that abstract art is an inherently "anti-literary kind of art" and while, according to him, most artists can read, few writers can see, and critics tell us too little about art and too much about themselves. Secondly, it is possible, he says, that we object to Modern art because we have witnessed "masses of work without talent" as Art Galleries are filled with "legions of inferior imitators". Lastly, it is much easier to declare Modern art as "ugly and brutal" and not apply ourselves to trying to extract "the mysterious beauty that is contained in most of it".

For those who say "my 4 year old child can draw better than that" Brandtner has total contempt, for, as he says, not only does it imply a great misconception about the aims of contemporary art, but it reflects badly on child art by looking down on it as only "unskilled scribbles". He warns us that "we won't have any culture until we have



developed a taste and understanding for contemporary art, music and architecture". Pictures, he insists, "should make us think, it matters very little whether we agree with the picture right away, or not, or never". Brandtner again admonishes us to

view our surroundings with a fresh eye which seeks art values amidst the confusion of social, political or economic problems. ... It has been said that Modern art is work of an experimental nature, this is misleading. All creative/great art is of an experimental nature. The only art work of no value is that which is not experimental.

Furthermore, "our method of seeing has changed. We are today peculiarly sensitive to internal structure of things", and if "we see cubistically [sic] why not paint it?" asks Brandtner. Those people who only appreciate art that was done in the past and can find nothing of interest in the work of their contemporaries, are, for Brandtner, themselves living more in the past than the present. He suspects them as having "sentimental romantic ideas about the imaginative life of the times, the lives they might have lived", and as looking at art from a perspective of "dates and times" rather than looking for "aesthetic values". And while Brandtner acknowledges that others may have had difficulty with the term "abstractism" for him it meant "the essence of the rhythm and tempo of any given activity the recording of the underlying patterns of experience", and therefore, for him "All art is primarily abstract".

## **5. Brandtner's ideas about "self-discovery" through art**

Most likely, Brandtner would have declared his whole life a voyage of adventure and self-discovery and assumed that others would view their lives similarly. Having committed himself totally to the promotion and production of art, he observed that,

you can study art at the finest schools can work under the supervision of the greatest artists, yet the crucial moment arrives when you face the world alone ... dependent upon your ideas and vision ... you may feel uncertain, but you must not worry ... do not be in too great a hurry to produce masterpieces, allow expression to develop gradually, allow the spark within you first to glow, then take fire and then feed that fire constantly.

Late in the Journal, he says that "self discovery through art, discovery of one's own inner power, is a slow process developing through continued experience and exercise".

Experience as both teacher and artist convinced Brandtner that material practice and teaching practice were very different endeavours; he wrote,

being an artist and being a teacher are two conflicting things - my work manifests the unexpected ... the unique feeling. — In teaching it is just the opposite I must account for every line, shape and colour and I am forced to give an explanation of the inexplicable and account for the variety of styles the student presents.

He acknowledges the dilemma of the teacher; for while he was a strong believer in learning from one's own mistakes, he considers as his quote from Einstein indicates that "it is the supreme art of the teacher to awaken joy in creative expression and knowledge". Or more directly, it is "the art of the teacher to wake new forces, Expressionismus — to wake feeling, Kubismus — to wake the mind, Kinetismus — to arouse the eyes". Brandtner is blunt in discussing teaching styles, he finds lecturing to be "a spoonfeeding system of teaching and the quiz and recitation system not much better". His vision of education is determined by his holistic view of life. "We learn by living, therefore, education must be based on action and every action leading to better action. The stronger we live anything the stronger we learn it and understand it". And while he encourages full participation on the part of the student, he feels that the educator has an

active role as well in the learning process, even if only a philosophical one for "the greatest reformers or teachers have been moved not by a vision of man as he is, but of man as he might be". However, whatever the teaching, Brandtner felt justified in holding to Pestalozzi's view in which "learning is not worth a penny when courage and joy are lost along the way." Brandtner, having been educated in the free city of Danzig, had experienced first hand Pestalozzi's revolutionary attitude towards teaching - the Prussian education system being based upon many of Pestalozzi's ideas. Furthermore, his knowledge of the teachings of Froebel and Cizek convinced him that

there is no boy or girl who cannot benefit to some degree from the experience that the study and practice in art offers, and the more peculiar the individual is the more strange perhaps will be his expressions (or the more deeper [sic] will he move us.)

For Brandtner the aim of education was "to open the mind and not fill it as we would a pot or any other hollow vessel". And accepting that he felt "the focus of thought" had shifted from "the external, visible aspects of reality to the internal and invisible", how was he to teach or convey "such intangibles as energy, motion in space or the impulses of the subconscious?"

On a few occasions, I remember Brandtner being directive; drawing bold lines over a classmate's hesitant strokes. I defer, however, to Marian Scott, who first met Brandtner as an artist, and later assisted him at the Children's Art Centre. When interviewed, she voiced the same observation, and I concur with her reasoning that "it wasn't to make a painting good, it was to show the child how it [a picture] could be brought into unity". Also, we both felt that he wished to teach students not to be afraid or timid in their expression; his intervention was never to correct a line or a mark.

"Pictorial accuracy" was not important to him; it was "all over structure" or "unity" which he sought. For "if the child can leave the art class with some ability to make up his own mind. I think we have achieved more than by examining technical skills". Brandtner also was concerned that the eye and the mind be trained to see beyond the surface of visible things, something he reproached the academic painters with not doing. His constant stressing of "bigness", bothered Scott, who worried that there might be children who wished to do delicate work. But for Brandtner there was no room for delicacy. He was a large physical man who exuded enthusiasm and vitality as evidenced by his teaching practices. According to Scott he was "one of the really good teachers I have come across ... he gave so much of himself ... enthusiasm ... getting them started and yet not dominating them too much and when he saw they were working on their own, not interfering ... except when they got stuck". "Art", declared Brandtner, "is Youth's land of enchantment creating it he discovers a wonderland of beautiful forms, patterns, colours. Exploring it, he finds himself and by the self-discovery fulfils the aim of art education". His description of his own teaching method is that "The most any art teacher can do is to guide people in the right direction and stimulate them to think about and want to do art". Scott, who admitted to feeling guilty about calling herself an art teacher, felt that most of her generation did not consider that there was one way of teaching art. She agreed with Brandtner that essentially art could not be taught, only that certain things could be looked at or suggested.

Brandtner seems to have shared the philosophy of Herbert Read, that "education is organic to life", with the study of art having its proper place, which, according to

Read puts it "where it should always have been - right at the heart of things". Similarly, Brandtner feels that "a school's duty is to sensitize the student to advanced thought and contemporary artistic expression", and that "the wise art teacher ... will evaluate arts and crafts in terms of their contribution to the complete education of the individual". Moreover for Brandtner the concept of empathy is important, his explanation of it is the European idea, "the feeling of increased vitality" or "*einfihlung*" (one of the few German words which appears in his Journal). "Art must be raised to the highest intensity if it is to dominate life and give us a sense of order" because, he cautions, "today the chaotic sounds and lights in our daily experience are intenser (sic) than those in art". And because vision is an important means for us to "apprehend reality", Brandtner recommends "the reorganization of our visual habits so that we perceive not isolated 'things in space' but structure, order, and the relatedness of events in space-time, is perhaps the most profound kind of revolution possible, a revolution that is long overdue not only in art, but in all our experience".

Returning again to Brandtner's preoccupation with art reflecting all aspects of life and not being merely the imitation of nature, he gives us an insight into his own artistic production, "my own art is a creation that expresses myself and the time I live in - with all my troubles, happiness, sadness, beliefs etc". For "we live for those fantastic and unreal moments of beauty, which our thoughts may build upon the passing panorama of experience". If we follow his personal example that all artistic expression helps us to develop an understanding of ourselves and our surroundings, then art is a vital concern for everyone; whether "individuals are interested in art or not, they can profit from

learning how design influences their lives and discover how it can make their visual experiences more interesting and meaningful".

Brandtner's concern for his fellow humans recurs frequently in his writing. Life for him was never easy, but his war experiences had made him fearful of another war. His Journal covers the years of the cold war; numerous times he alludes to the growing importance of science and technology on our lives. Throughout, one feels the political and economic concerns of the 1950s, the build up of military strength and the threat of atomic weapons. Brandtner constantly castigates the government's military spending saying that the same money would be better spent on education and cultural programs. Brandtner is fervently anti-war and cries out against "the destructive forces" in society. He pleads for tolerance and respect for the individual. "Devotion to love, mercy and respect for human personality is the only vision that can save man from total destruction". Brandtner, a fierce individualist, declares that "there is hope for man, only in man", and "I believe I have left long ago behind that cruel, fearful possession known as patriotism or tight nationalism, no blind intense devotion for an institution that has stiffened in chains of its own making". Lastly, he confirms that it is only through hard work and a striving for "excellence" that we can achieve "truth", "when isms and beliefs are challenged". For it is "what one does what counts and not what one has the intention of doing". Or as Brandtner cites Malraux "Man is what he achieves". An ancient philosopher, Brandtner notes, wrote that the mind is the master of all fortune; the cause of either misery or happiness which depended on how we think, "for by our thinking we do precondition our lives". On a personal level Brandtner confides "my love of mankind

is individual, international ... always I find race expressed in the individual - and I believe it is better to try and fail than not to have tried at all, but I do not believe that I have failed". In summation, it is Brandtner's opinion, that it is not the number of letters after one's name that indicates education, but "the habits, ability and character of the individual".

His greatest deception and sorrow seems to have been society's reluctance to accept what the artist has to offer, by not valuing him and by disregarding the importance of the arts in general. It is with regret and resignation that he writes "It was a dream, a dream that he the artist could contribute to society that society would hold out its hand, welcoming the artist to join it and take his appointed place, but it is not enough to have a dream, we simply have not the society which supports this sort of dream our society has no culture and is simply not up to it".

## **6. Picture should be made "with feeling not knowing"**

It is to Hans Hofmann 'the great artist', that Brandtner attributes the idea of a picture being made "with feeling not with knowing". This does not mean that Brandtner did not believe in knowledge, only that he believed more genuine learning took place through one's own experiences and mistakes. The German Expressionist tradition to which both were heir strongly emphasized emotional aspects in artistic production. "Expressionism" in Brandtner's words stresses "subjective emotional reactions to the visual world rather than make[ing] a pictorial transcript of the world of appearances". This idea is closely linked to his definition of "intuition" which he declared to be "the

power of discovering truth without reasoning". Brandtner clarifies this by saying "it has been my lifelong preoccupation to get to the essence the exact quality of an object and its relationship to probe beneath the surface of things. This does not mean that intellect has conquered intuition in (sic) the contrary intellect and intuition function together". Further confirmation of the way in which feeling, for Brandtner, was an experiential quality and not necessarily dependant on knowing is emphasized when he declares that "it is impossible for the student to learn how to paint by watching demonstrations or by listening to lectures ... the only way to understand the problem is to work hard freely and directly in paint". "Art can be learned it cannot be taught and that difference between teaching and learning is really important, because no one can teach painting it has to be learned".

While continually concerned with design and overall unity in an art work, Brandtner does not feel that there existed right or wrong elements. In fact, he cautions the student not to "alter a line once it has been put down" because once the mental conception, however imperfectly, is put down, no amount of correction will return it to its original conception: "it would be like recapturing something (by luck) which has escaped in the dark and it is doubtful if we can recapture any more than what we have done in the first place". He cites an example of an untrained adult who is asked to draw something, a landscape or a person whom he knows well and loves; "why", he asks, "will his result be so different from his mental image?" He answers that it is because "he has never exercised his inner power for expression to a point where his own concept (notion) becomes coordinated with what he believes is true and beautiful". Furthermore,



"if ever we begin to set knowledge up in the place of emotional reaction if we make knowledge the master instead of the servant, then knowledge becomes a curse". "Painting centres much less on seeing the 'real world' than remaking of it another world". For according to Brandtner, the primary aim of painting is not to reproduce nature "but to convey a mood, a feeling which flows back and forth from the artist to the onlooker". And "no amount of intelligence will empower us to judge the rightness or the wrongness of a work of art. The value of art cannot be measured by the extent of its audience, but only by the quality of feeling, emotion which it produces in its most responsive onlooker".

Brandtner's style of teaching was one in which there was much enthusiasm and little intervention on his part, not unlike Pestalozzi, who used experience gathered during outings or field trips to stimulate self-activity. He saw his role as an agent of support and encouragement trying to motivate and guide a student to express his own thoughts and observations about the environment or "Nature" as he might call it. Brandtner, unlike Lisner, did not have his students visit museums to see works of art. But like fellow Germans Britsch, Lowenfeld and Schaefer-Simmern, he wanted his students' work to come naturally, uninfluenced by the production of others. He saw no point in having large numbers of children visiting the galleries "'to see the real thing' unless they can [could] appreciate its meaning in their own terms. The material presence of the work itself means nothing if the child does not understand of what the presence is composed". He was also somewhat ambivalent about the kind of art found in the museums. Too much of it, he claimed, was there, not because of its quality, but because anything old

was revered by the local population. On the other hand stories abound about his visits, accompanied by students, to bread factories or bridges, or to the stables on the Mountain. These first hand experiences were intended only for inspiration, to open the eyes of the young to the world around them. At no time during these visits was anything but visual imagery encouraged. The collected visual information would be stored along with daily personal observations to draw upon and use in the next class. (Stoker, 1989, Scott, 1989, interviews) In discussing the importance of observation, Brandtner uses the term "observational discrimination" which he explains as an observational order in which elements are selected and discarded and where the retained elements are rearranged into a subjective order of prominence. His real interest, however, lies in the question of "how the individual selects and how he rearranges what he retains in relation to other individuals. In fact we have here a distortion of the facts according to the abstract thoughts of the individual". Clearly, the ordering and processing of artistic thought and output, which is more determined by feeling than knowing, intrigued him and the recognition that each work was original and individual enabled him to be constantly engaged in the role of facilitator, knowing that each individual achievement was unique. However, he also acknowledges that making art is more than the realization of our individual perceptions; "we are given talents small talents or great talents - it is for each of us to develop it in the highest degree. But talent alone is not enough, beside talent there must be mind, intelligent controlling critical, careful mind and there must be character to drive the talent". "We have to learn to see visions and we have to learn to

convey ideas ... understood by the onlooker directly through his eyes. The painter must care, he must be moved by what he is trying to do".

Turning to the writings of Hans Hofmann, we can see that he too concluded that "‘objectification’ was not the final aim of art". What was it that made both Hofmann and Brandtner claim that the greatest resource of mankind was the human mind? And for them to advocate an education that would make us see images, not objects. Was it personal experience that had taught them that knowing was not enough? Brandtner points out that; "the object which is back of every true work of art, is the attainment of a state of being, a state of high functioning, a more than ordinary moment of existence". Seeing in images, as both teachers advocated, would incorporate the author’s ‘whole psychic makeup’, and be reflected in his art work. Both artists attest to their works being examples of this process; describing their pictures as works seen ‘through a temperament,’ but never dependent on a ‘daily mood’. It is of note that each described his nature as optimistic. Brandtner on several occasions entreats us to be "cheerful", have "hope" and "confidence" in ourselves. This positive attitude to life, I found to be of interest knowing that both artists had known difficult times.

I must mention, however, that while Hofmann had had to leave Europe, he did not suffer the same hardships, as Brandtner, in his new country. Hofmann, who was sixteen years older than Brandtner, had attended the best art schools in Germany and France. He was a renowned teacher with his own school in Munich and when he decided to flee Nazi Europe; he had no trouble being sponsored as an immigrant to the U.S. Upon his arrival in 1930, he was appointed to a teaching position in California,

two years later he went to the Arts Students League in New York and finally founded his own schools. However, time and place is everything and Hofmann encountered a thriving interest in modern ideas on the part of young American painters and critics. Clement Greenberg wrote in 1945 that Hofmann was probably the most important art teacher of his time, while Leo Steinberg is quoted as saying that "Hofmann's paternalistic side, though benevolent could be ... overwhelming." At his death in 1966, Hofmann's reputation as an artist was as great as his reputation as a teacher. But anyone who has been exposed to his teaching, directly or indirectly, acknowledges an enormous debt to him for having brought the ideas of European modern art to the aspiring artists of America.

In contrast, Brandtner's art work and ideas were judged too avant garde by Canadians, first in Winnipeg and then in Montreal. The non-sponsored Brandtner, had suffered the trauma of emigrating to a foreign land, alone, unable to speak the language and expected to work as a labourer in a government sponsored program. (Duffy/Smith, 1982, p. 4) And while the two men shared a similar philosophy about art and its educational value and even physically resembled each other, both being robust individuals with expansive natures and heavy German accents; their personal life experiences could not have been more different. Still, it seems to me that that which Hofmann succeeded in doing for American art education, Brandtner strove to do on a smaller and more limited scale for Canadians. Harper says that the abstract movement did not catch on in Canada until the Second World War, and that it was the work of only five men, one of whom was Brandtner. Harper writes that he believes Brandtner did not fully realize "the

uproar which he would create" in his shows in Winnipeg, where he was criticized for his "ultra modernism". With his move to Montreal in 1934, he remained unchanged and undaunted and continued to discuss and promote modern art. The similarity of Hofmann's and Brandtner's philosophy seems to be rooted in their "stressing the self-sufficiency of art", that while they both felt that art could not be taught, "its means and conditions could" (Sandler, 1973, p. 53). As Germans, both possessed a strong cultural background formed by a rigorous and demanding educational system. Their awareness that art was not only in the eye, but also the result of intellectual considerations contributed to their being challenging teachers, who used their vitality and empathy to encouraged their students to value the "spiritual, intuitive and imaginative feelings", in their work. (Sandler, 1973, p. 54) Their knowledge of art and life allowed them to admit to the confusion of attitudes that made art opinion, while agreeing "that no one can give a correct explanation of what art really is" (Goldwater, 1972, p. 217).

The British contemporary art educator Peter Abbs, in a recent article, endorses Hofmann and Brandtner's theories contending that "the grammar of the arts, ... cannot be introduced through a series of prescribed schematic exercises divorced from the animating energies of feeling, sense perception and imagination. They must be introduced as a necessary part of *expressive activity seeking formal articulation*" (Abbs, 1985, p. 13).

The writings in the Journal which deal most specifically with the formal theories of painting, I found to be very much in the manner of Paul Klee's 1923 lecture, published posthumously in 1945 and translated into English in 1948, with a foreword by

Herbert Read. Brandtner could have read it in either language, but the English translation by Paul Findlay is, in some instances, almost identical to Brandtner's writing. I did not find an exact quote; therefore, I assume that Brandtner had read the text, digested it and then wrote it down upon reflection. The sense, however, is very much Klee with ideas incorporated from Kandinsky and Read. Examples such as "don't talk, painter, paint" and "most of you are much more familiar with content than form", etc., used by Brandtner in his lectures, perhaps to the McGill social work students, are taken directly from the lectures that form the basis of Klee's book. (Herbert, 1964, p. 75) The many music analogies are also reminiscent of Klee, an accomplished musician. Brandtner's use of the word mediocrity may also have come from Klee, who used it to explain the importance of art being able to take us out of our everyday ordinary lives. The chaotic and confusing times of the world were also of concern to Klee and his diaries are a testament to his "strong attachment to all the events of daily life, as part of the whole of and with nature" (Klee, 1964, p. ix).

Felix Klee describes his father's dairies as being about "a struggle with human and artistic problems as they confront every developing and serious artist". But most of all it is the similarity of outlook that most touched me. Klee says "And anyway, I do not wish to represent the man as he is, but only as he might be".

In Brandtner's writings this appears as "The greatest reformers or teachers have been moved not by a vision of man as he is, but of man as he might be". Is this his acknowledgement that Klee was his role model because he was of the first order of teachers? At least twice in the Journal, Brandtner quotes Klee from his 1920 "Creative

Credo" in which Klee says that "art does not reproduce the visible, rather it makes visible", however, this is only part of the quote, which comes from his preserved lecture notes. Klee elaborates by adding that "formerly we used to represent things visible on earth ... today we reveal the reality behind visible things" (Vitz and Glimcher, 1984, p. 64).

The overall feeling of the writing and the theories that Brandtner espouses are consistent with his time and culture. Unable to afford to study at the Bauhaus, he must have read everything he could about the school, its goals and most of all the master teacher/artists who taught there. He was most strongly influenced by Klee and Kandinsky and their perceptual principles largely based on Gestalt ideas about line, shape and form. His use of words such as "variety" and "unity" should be seen in the context of his time and their importance in Gestalt psychology. The movement was one which emphasized an integrated holistic nature of perception. It was, also, an analytical-reductionist movement in which simple form removed the recognizable object. (Vitz and Glimcher, 1984, p. 181)

### *Summary*

*Brandtner's Journal was the basis for this thesis and I approached it as an artifact of cultural history. I did not want to set out expectations that I had to prove; rather I wanted the Journal to reveal the author through his own words. I believed that through Brandtner's writings I would come to have a distinct picture of the man and his ideas. Unfortunately, Brandtner's spontaneity and humour are not apparent in his impersonal writing style which lacks nuance and warmth, however, with familiarity the general language he used communicated his thoughts very directly. Later, I found this kind of writing to be not untypical of the period and echoed by Brandtner's contemporaries such as Gombrich and Read.*

*The Journal generated a vast amount of material and I found it necessary in this chapter to limit my discussion to six themes. Therefore, some of my perceptions and discoveries made about Brandtner, at this time, appear in other parts of the thesis. I organized my analysis around the discussion of precise themes which allowed for more depth and cohesion to my views, for it enabled me to join together statements from different parts of the Journal; reinforce by other thoughts and ideas of Brandtner and others. To further my understanding of Brandtner, especially in the context of teacher, I compared and contrasted him to individuals I felt he had read or had knowledge of, as well as specific individuals quoted by him in his writings. The Journal revealed a personal agenda and the difficulties encountered by Brandtner in trying to persuade others of its merit. The Journal brought back the overwhelming sense of uncertainty of the cold war era, which I had known as a child, and I marvelled at Brandtner's fortitude and optimism in continuing to propose new and progressive ideas. His Journal provides an historic link between the social and cultural concerns of the 50s, as he saw them, and many of the unresolved problems we encounter in these domains to this day. After several readings of the Journal the realization came to me that the importance of the document lay in the access it gave us to the creative thoughts in another mind.*



## Thesis Conclusion

There is no doubt that Fritz Brandtner, with his robust physique, his German accent and his enthusiasm for everything that could be touched by art, would have had an impact on all he met. His contribution to art education in Montreal in the 1930s and 1940s was extraordinary, especially his creation of programs for disadvantaged children, who otherwise would never have been exposed to the arts. A socially conscious man he fought tirelessly to keep these programs alive. And when they faltered he took no remuneration and did everything in his power to have them continue. His motives and teaching style were unlike those of the other well known teachers in the city. From the idealist German philosophers, Brandtner acquired the arguments which equated art with high moral purpose, but life experience had moulded him into a practical twentieth century man. He collected books and read constantly. He read philosophy as well as influential authors in both the arts and sciences and he knew about all aspects and movements in the arts. The search for knowledge, so rooted in German culture, he continued through his independent studies, which enabled him to pick and choose ideas and strategies he could incorporate into a personal style.

Shortly after his arrival in Montreal, he became a Canadian citizen and joined many organizations, both artistic and political. As a man of action he used his formidable energy to try and raise the profile of the arts in Canada and "creative" artists in particular. However, he remained an outsider and finding himself only marginally accepted - his vigorous efforts being considered too radical and his ideas too optimistic,

over time he withdrew and became a lone wolf. His Journal seems to date from this latter period as a private forum, where he could continue to express the concerns which never left him.

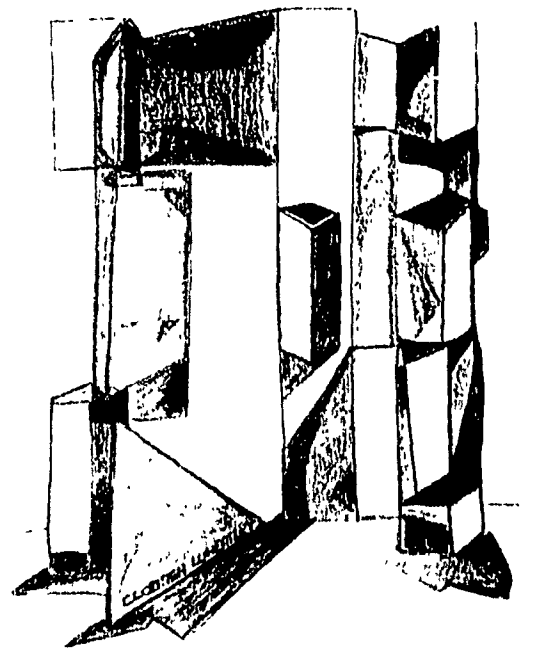
Throughout the Journal Brandtner expresses the need to assess our priorities (as he sees them) and to take steps to improve our culture (Canadian) for the betterment of society. We must believe in human inherent good, he says, for mankind is ultimately responsible for itself. He continues by saying that education is paramount to this end, and that art has a role in the process of fitting the individual into society. With this in mind he developed his own non-transferable teaching style. Marian Scott maintained that he never delegated teaching responsibilities nor discussed a teaching approach with her at the Children's Art Centre. She was there simply to assist him.

All those I interviewed concurred with my recollections of how he interacted with young people. Brandtner didn't teach in the conventional sense, but rather motivated his students with encouragement, by coaxing and cajoling and by not being judgmental. His delivery was physically animated with much gesturing and entreaties to be bold. The only thing he would not tolerate was copying in any form. For him any non-original work was worthless, whether it was an idea borrowed from a book or a friend it fell into the same category and for him it was more questionable than a mortal sin. He would address its corruptive effects on everything from the smallest thing to a entire life's philosophy. The effect forced students to work on their own, at their own pace and gave them little reason for comparing their works. This had the benefit of eliminating

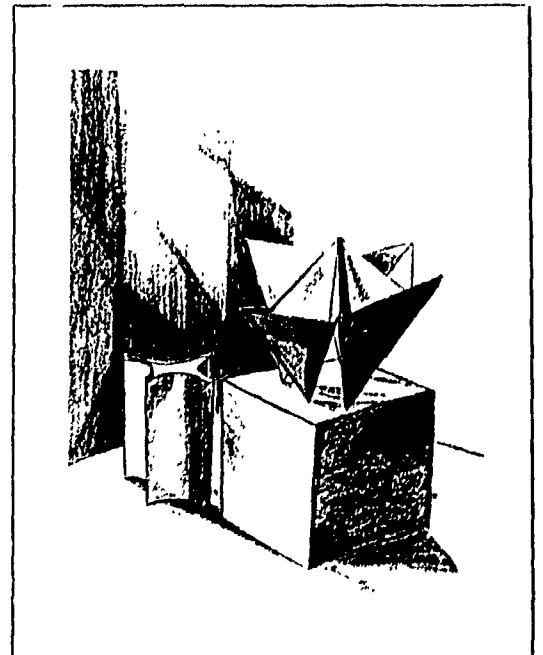
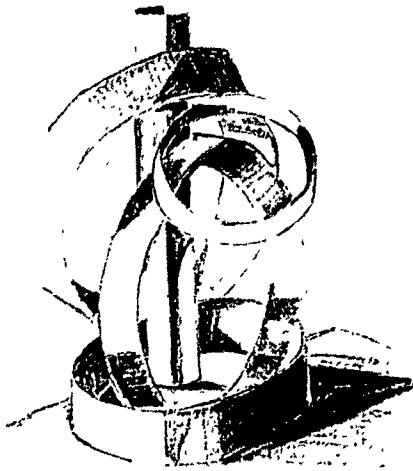
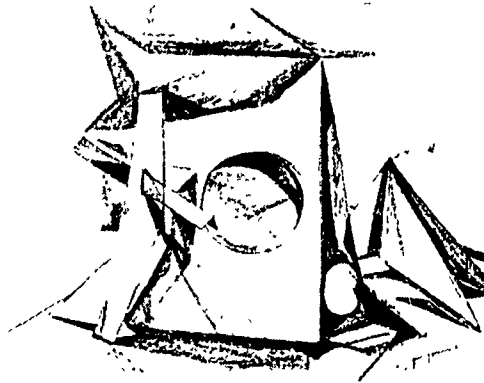
competition, while increasing interaction with the instructor. Journal entries indicate the importance Brandtner felt cooperation had over competition, in all endeavours.

Through Efland's book on the History of Art Education, I discovered Natalie Robinson Cole, under the section Artist/Teacher. While Brandtner may have embodied some of the attributes of teachers such as Britsch and Schaefer-Simmern, it was Efland's description of Cole which he most resembled. Unfortunately, he tells us nothing about her formation, so we cannot compare her background with Brandtner's (Recent information from an article by Peter Smith describes her not an art education specialist, but as a classroom teacher overseeing general education). But her students it seems were similar to his, being mostly poor and ethnic. Her 1940 text book appears to have been widely used. Was Brandtner aware of it? For like him, she based her lessons on actual experiences (visits to factories, etc.) and wrote that it was the teacher's job to give encouragement and praise, but not to show the children what to do. Furthermore, Cole endorses the facilitator aspects of the teacher's job "children have genius — yes. But the teachers must dig to get at it". Like Brandtner, she demanded her students work large and boldly, no little "stingy 'fraidy cat' pictures". The downside to this kind of teaching, however, seems to be that a stylistic similarity of imagery occurs. (Efland, 1990, p. 202) This can be found in some of the later editions of the ECS school magazines under Brandtner's tutelage.

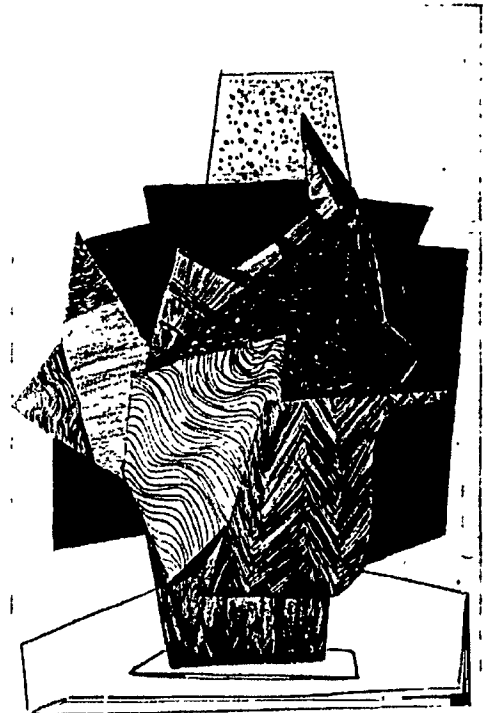
The discussion of Brandtner's teaching would not be complete if I did not add what I found to be of interest in an essay by Ernst Gombrich. In "Research in the Humanities: Ideals and Idols" he describes the difference between an English college



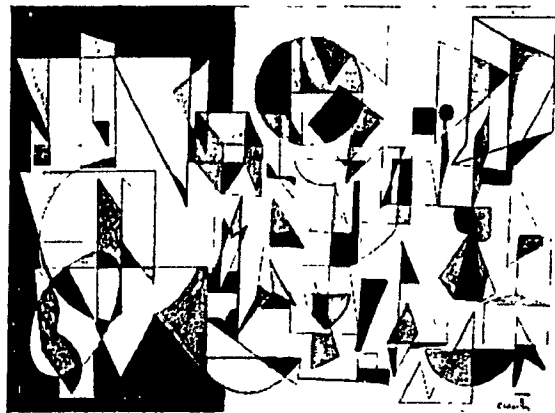
ART



E.C.S. BEAVER LOG 1954-55



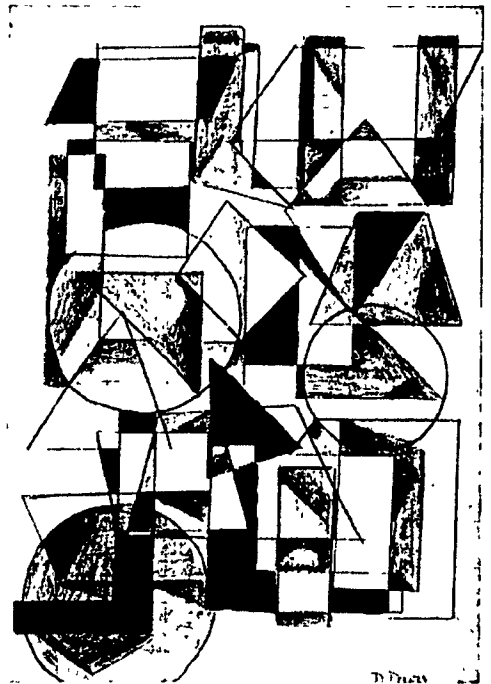
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Verzuman



C. ANGLIN



D. DUCK

E.C.S. BEAVER LOG 1955-56

don and what he calls a "continental professor". This I felt had relevance to Brandtner for I believe he combined the attributes of both, for while like the "continental professor" he was loyal to his subject; like the don he felt responsible for his students. Brandtner, formed by the rigorous German educational system, held the conviction that the arts transcended everything, but he was innovative and practical and presented his subject in a perspective which would benefit his young students. In Brandtner's personality there existed no conflict. On the one hand he was a concerned "creative" artist championing the rights inherent therein, and on the other, a forceful individual opening the eyes of the young to the multiple possibilities of art and the world around them. Because back of everything it must be remembered that unlike fellow art teachers, Brandtner's object was not to train children to be artists, but rather, by his own admission art-making was "to build character and enrich their lives". De-emphasizing the importance of the product made the teaching of technique unimportant and allowed Brandtner to go straight to the issue of freeing the child's image of the world around him. Instructing children enabled him to satisfy a philosophical concern in a practical manner. He could redefine man's place in Nature (environment) by bringing art to those whose perceptions could change. He wanted his students to depart his artroom independent thinking individuals, able to "view our surroundings with a fresh eye which seeks art values amidst the confusion of social, political and economic problems".

In his role as a concerned artist Brandtner took every opportunity to address the public. From his notes it is clear that he was a promoter of all the arts, but admits to being more at home in "visual language". Art, for him was a language, "a form of

thinking" and the mind represents "the mysterious mental land, through which ideas, thoughts and feelings are brought to light for communication and understanding".

Brandtner the teacher and Brandtner the artist were one and the same. We have followed the development of his personal 'credo.' He has been compared and contrasted to other teachers and artist/teachers of his time. Like some he was formed in a rich encompassing culture which never left them. His emigration to Canada showed his ability to change the given in his life, but changing countries and citizenship did not make him any less German or foreign. Indeed, at times it must have been very difficult for him. For in spite of his willingness to adapt and change and his ability to adopt a North American outlook, he remained heir to the culture of his forefathers. The vanguard of intellectual thought at the turn of the century was situated in the German speaking countries. But because of the difficulty of the language only the highly educated or foreign trained were familiar with the vast amounts of written expertise in the fields of the arts and sciences. The avant-garde ideas of The German speaking states, however, did not bring about quick changes to their own societies where "Custom was King". These societies did not welcome departures from the accepted norms of tradition; standards were uniform and innovation generally was frowned upon. (Gombrich, 1979, p. 69) Furthermore, the new European immigrants, who arrived in the U.S., as Brandtner had in Winnipeg, may have believed America to be like the wild west of Karl May. These foreigners with their modern ideas and methods set about to civilize the natives. Brandtner lacking the accepted formation of his discipline would not have fared better had he chosen to remain in his homeland. Thus, with his wartime experiences and

the modest accomplishment of having finished technical school, and taken a few university courses, Brandtner arrived in Canada, a man of the world, in "advance", both socially and intellectually, of his North American counterparts. Or to quote Brandtner,

when I arrived from Europe I had a very good idea of what art should and could do. I knew all the latest works Kandinsky, Mondrian, Chagall, Grosz, Klee etc. ... As for me, before I came to Canada I had been extremely interested in cubism and its possibilities ... then the Bauhaus ideas and courses directed by Gropius, Bayer, Klee, Kandinsky etc. penetrated the art activities in Germany and forced constructivist thinking and new use of materials on students and artists alike interested in art. (Harper, 1971, p. 7)

The influence of the Bauhaus never left Brandtner and although it had been impossible for him to attend the School, he sought to read and digest everything he could about their ideas and methods. He undoubtedly incorporated whatever of it he could into his own courses. The renowned colour theorist, Johannes Itten, could have served as a teaching role model for Brandtner. He described his own teaching approach by saying that it

was expressionistic in character and placed a high premium upon individuality and idiosyncratic production ... My teaching was designed to guide the student acquiring the means of artistic expression by appealing to his individual talents and to develop an atmosphere of creativity in which original work became possible. (quoted in Efland, 1990, p. 216)

Brandtner's teaching and his interest in colour echoed Itten's ideas.

Lastly, it is to the works of the celebrated art historian, Ernst Gombrich that we turn to find certain similarities to the language used by Brandtner in his Journal. Only thirteen years separated the two men, so we can assume that they shared a similar Germanic education. Gombrich emigrated to England in 1936 at the age of twenty seven, and for most of his life was associated with the Warburg Institute of the



University of London. Like most Germans and Austrians of his generation, Gombrich remained rooted in the rich history of Western civilization. He believed in the tradition of General Knowledge which included the recognition and appreciation of the works of art produced by this civilization. Gombrich's theory of artistic expression differed from Brandtner's in that he believed there existed a continuity of development built by artists borrowing from or imitating other artists or artistic movements. Brandtner, on the other hand, while acknowledging a debt to creators from other cultures and times, felt that the realization of an artwork was intuitive and if it did not spring from the artist's unique experience, it was copying. He was, therefore, against showing young people well known artwork believing that such exposure would inhibit the child's own imagination based in his or her own experience.

Gombrich held many visiting professorships in England and the U.S. and his publications were numerous and influential. None was better known or met a larger audience than his "The Story of Art". In the Preface the author states that the book is intended for teenage readers, who have just discovered the world of art for themselves. His wish, he says is "to place works in their historical setting and thus to lead towards an understanding of the master's artistic aims".

From the Introduction through to the final pages about Experimental Art, Gombrich sounds like Brandtner. In his role as historian Gombrich shares the concerns of Brandtner the artist. Gombrich knows through empathy that while the artist is striving "to achieve the right balance", he is unable to tell us why he changes this and leaves that. "He does not follow any fixed rules. He just feels his way". Also, one cannot "lay

down rules" because one can never know in advance the "effect the artist may wish to achieve. ... One never finishes learning about art. There are always new things to discover". "It is an exciting world of its own with its own strange laws and its own adventures". To enjoy works of art "we must have a fresh mind, one which is ready to catch every hint and to respond to every hidden harmony: a mind most of all, not cluttered up with high sounding words and ready made phrases. It is infinitely better not to know anything about art than to have the kind of half-knowledge which makes for snobbishness" (Gombrich, MCMLV, p. 17).

In the last chapter of the book, Gombrich discusses "Modern Art". He describes it as a "type of art which has completely broken with the traditions of the past and tries to do things no artist would have dreamed of before". Experimentation lead to "new movements which usually raised a new 'ism' as a battle cry". Furthermore, he tells us that the revolution in taste was pioneered by a few, the Bauhaus being in the forefront. Modern engineering and architecture with their clean lines and bold innovations were the beginning, which soon spread over into the arts and crafts movement. Taken together they gave us a cohesive artistic vision, one to which we have seen Brandtner subscribe. The increasing problems of "form" lead artists into experimenting with no subject matter whatever. Pure expression came about through the works of Kandinsky, some of whose works consisted only of arrangements of shapes and colours. Gombrich categorizes Modern artists as those who want to innovate. And beyond this he "wants to feel that he has made something which had no existence before. Not just a copy of a real object ...". Artists are not out "to represent any subject in particular, nor, for that matter to

solve any specific 'formal problems'. They believe that the work should be allowed to grow according to its own laws". To understand their frame of mind, Gombrich tells us we must go back to our own childhood, to a time "when we turned a broomstick into a magic wand, and a few stones into an enchanted castle". The preoccupation the modern artist has for the simple and childlike cannot be treated lightly according to Gombrich "for the artists feel that this directness and simplicity is the one thing that cannot be learnt. Every other trick of the trade can be acquired. Every effort becomes easy to imitate after it has been shown that it can be done". (Lest you become as little children ...)

"It is just as thoughtless to be 'for modern art' as it is to be 'against it.' The situation in which it grew is just as much our own doing as that of the artist". The general public has accepted the role of the artist as a fellow who produces art, but expects him to turn out work similar to that which has already been labelled art. The artistically initiated may wish only for "something new". This brings Gombrich back to his original thesis which is that art is created by individuals who are gifted with the ability to balance "shapes and colours till they are right, and, rarer still, who possess that integrity of character which never rests content with half-solutions, but is ready to forgo all easy effects, all superficial success for the toil and agony of sincere work". Brandtner has used the word sincere many times to sum up 'good' art work.

Gombrich echoes Brandtner and fellow Germans in their concern that the public be educated to respond to the arts when he writes:

whether there will always be art depends to no small extent on ourselves, their public. By our indifference or our interest, by our prejudice or our understanding we may decide the issue. It is we who must see to it that the thread of tradition

does not break and that there remain opportunities for the artist to add to the precious string of pearls that is our heirloom from the past.

During the writing period of this work, a constant refrain from Brandtner's Journal came back to me. It was his voice articulating his belief that "art is a result ... [of] living a life". Clarifying this he writes, "art is ... the trace of those who have had creative vision, vitality and originality and the courage to live their lives". Brandtner's desire was for integration between personality (the development of a personal philosophy drawn from experience) and production. His holistic vision called for artists and amateurs to work from intuition - informed by personal knowledge and feelings rather than theory. Children represented the logical place to begin this process (he would have been a great promoter of Head Start Programs). It was his faith in our abilities that encouraged us as young people. He dared us to develop in our own way. And while I was too young to comprehend his overall philosophy, as I grow older, I realize that what he was saying in today's parlance might be "get a life", — participate, become involved, dare to experiment and make mistakes, be yourself, become autonomous. The arts were simply Brandtner's recommended way of finding and focusing oneself. He wanted artistic expressions to be drawn from meaningful experiences and emotions rather than from direct visual observations or imitation. In this he credited Hans Hoffmann as proposing - "a picture should be made with feeling not with knowing" (Journal). From the professional artist, however, Brandtner would have demanded more. He would have insisted that to be recognized as an artist, one had to work, tirelessly and experimentally to produce "creative" work incorporating knowledge of general culture and the currents of the time.

Brandtner knew better than anyone that self-confidence and self-reliance made better companions than fickle critical acclaim. In the classroom, he introduced us to a myriad of possibilities and encouraged us to find our own expression. Ultimately, he was telling us that the only person one should satisfy was oneself. For "only through words, gestures and symbols do we know at second hand what others are thinking and feeling. Experience of life is personal nontransferable, and what is worse often incommunicable" (Journal).

In his ongoing battle against complacency, the ebullient Brandtner forced new ideas upon his unwitting students by presenting issues which needed more and different solutions. He was particularly interested in elements which were judged ugly or useless or discarded as worthless (driftwood, broken tools, scrap metal). He would introduce such objects to us and challenged us to find ways of transforming them. Thus he opened us up to re-evaluation by questioning misconceptions. "We need a fresh insight into the world of today". Cooperation was the educational method he preferred because it had the potential to create an open and non-competitive environment. With it and the "proper social, political and cultural climate" came the "freedom to think and to question, to share one's doubt[s] and hopes with others and yes to make mistakes" (Journal).

In summation, as I desperately tried to reconcile in a few words the man I knew as a child with the man I came to know through his Journal, I fell upon an entry in which Brandtner unselfconsciously reveals himself as I found him to be:

inspired teachers are needed who can transmit personal enthusiasm for creative work to future students. For that reason a creative artist who arises from a society in an unpredictable fashion and leaps beyond the recognized barriers of his time is of a naturally rebellious temperament which often leads him into

difficulties which (sic) lesser person's and makes him therefore, persona non grata in our society. But the emergence of such personalities of creative vision is likely to affect all the other higher strata of intellectual life and certainly will greatly contribute to our artistic endeavour and culture. The present therefore is a challenge which must lead us to re-examine the place we have accorded to our artists in our free enterprise society. We have no right yet to pat ourselves on the back for its achievements.

After all is distilled, what I remember most about Brandtner was that he was distinctive. Besides being the first artist I ever met, he looked and spoke unlike anyone I had known. I was and am drawn to the unusual and different more than to the familiar. Therefore, what impressed me about Fritz Brandtner was his physical presence, his geniality and his enthusiasm. Being the only male teacher in an all-girl school gave him great visibility. Although he exuded masculine self-confidence, he was not intimidating; because he remained the comic hero of his unconventional stories, many of which were thinly disguised morality tales from his years at war. His egalitarian spirit admitted no favouritism or sexism in the classes I attended. Through the teaching of art, Brandtner tried to inspire his students to embrace his philosophy of self-discovery by involving them in developing creative ways of expression. Upon the application of a brush or pencil to paper, we became fellow adventurers accompanying him as he enthusiastically invited us to discover the many ways of seeing and thinking in order to "give someone confidence in his own way".



MR. BRANDTNER, F.I.A.L., C.G.P.

It is much to the regret of past and present pupils of the school that one of our most gifted teachers is leaving us.

Mr. Brandtner, who has taught history of Painting, History of Architecture, Drawing and Special Art at Miss Edgar's and Miss Cramp's since 1944, lived in Danzig until 1928, and during that time was Assistant Professor of Art at the University. He has been an art teacher in different community centres, a lecturer at the McGill School of Social Work; and director of the Observatory Art Centre at the University of New Brunswick.

We have been honoured in having as outstanding a painter as Mr. Brandtner to teach us, for he is not only represented in many private collections, but also in various permanent ones, such as the National Gallery of Canada, which has fourteen of his works

Mr. Brandtner won the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts Jessie Dow Prize for water colour in 1946, was elected first in the Canadian Olympic Contest in 1948, won First Honourable Mention in the Painting and Graphic Art Section of the fourteenth Olympiad in London, England, 1948; and won Second Prize in the 1950 Competition for a design for the Canadian five cent pieces

Many of the important buildings of our time, such as the Place Ville Marie Development, here in Montreal, are adorned with murals and decorations designed and executed by Mr. Brandtner. He has also participated in exhibitions abroad, arranged by the National Gallery of Canada.

In addition to all these things, Mr. Brandtner has attained one other important achievement. he has given, to many hundreds of girls who have passed through Miss Edgar's, the gift of understanding art, what it is, and what it should be: "The contemporary artist is claiming one thing, the right, which the poet has already, to take an object into his mind, to concentrate over it, to reshape it according to his emotion and creative ability, and by doing so, make it into a work of art"

All of us, his grateful pupils, join together in wishing "Mr. B." all the best in his future plans and projects

**FRITZ BRANDTNER**

(1966)

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