

AN HISTORICAL ANALYSIS,
DOCUMENTARY SUMMARY,
AND TEACHING PROPOSAL FOR
"REFERENTIAL ABSTRACTION"
IN CANADIAN PAINTING, 1940 - 1960.

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ABSTRACT

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The evolution of painting in Canada was profoundly influenced by the Referential Abstractionists, the Automatists of Montréal and Painters Eleven of Toronto, in the period 1940 - 1960.

The author provides a basis for evaluation of this development, traces its historical evolution, and describes a modularized teaching approach incorporating perceptual, analytical and historical elements, as well as relevant reference data.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This thesis is presented as an historical analysis, documentary summary, and teaching proposal for "Referential Abstraction"¹ in Canadian painting from 1940-1960. It attempts to provide the viewer, in his dialogue with the art object, with an understanding and critical appreciation for the works of the artists involved which, desirably, will lead in turn to a relevant aesthetic experience.

The most significant influence on contemporary Canadian art occurred with the emergence of two distinctive but related groups of artists working separately in Montréal and Toronto from 1940-1960.²

¹This generalized term denotes a style of non-figurative abstraction based on Surrealism and related to the Automatists, Painters Eleven and the New York Abstract Expressionists. In this thesis, the term "Referential Abstraction" means that the artists concerned have maintained references to nature, or to emotion, or to self in their work. This referential basis distinguishes such works from non-referential abstraction in which no reference occurs except to painting itself (e.g. the Plasticiens, a group active in Montréal in the nineteen fifties). Henceforth, this term will appear as Referential Abstraction.

²Names and biographies of these artists are provided in Appendix D.

In "Background for Teaching", the focus is on the history and stylistic evolution of the artists of the Automatist group in Montréal (1942-1955) and those forming the Painters Eleven¹ group in Toronto (1953-1960). This section begins with a definition of Referential Abstraction and continues with its historical development, traced by means of a chronological survey of the exhibitions of each of the two groups, together with references taken from critical reaction to these showings. This is followed by an analysis of the style particular to each group and the relationship of each to the other, as well as to contemporary movements outside Canada.

In the chapter, "Teaching Examples", there is presented a formalistic approach to the subject of Referential Abstraction. The outlined course of study is made up of three units dealing separately with the perceptual, analytical and historical approaches to Referential Abstraction. Each unit is itself sub-divided into three lesson plans of approximately forty minutes duration which are modularized to provide, in sequence, reading assignments, teaching examples, and evaluation techniques.

A set of appendices and non-print material completes this outline and provides reference information assembled for the first time in a single format.

¹The group is referred to in various publications as "Painters Eleven", "Painters XI" and "Painters 11". This thesis will use the normally accepted title of Painters Eleven except when copied in a quotation.

CHAPTER II

BACKGROUND FOR TEACHING

A Definition of Referential
Abstraction in Canadian Painting

Referential Abstraction in Canadian painting was seen first in the nineteen forties in the painting of the Automatists in Montréal and later in the nineteen fifties in the work of Painters Eleven in Toronto.

The original inspiration for both groups is found in the Surrealist concept of automatism¹ with its emphasis on spontaneous images. Nevertheless, the Automatists did not work directly with Surrealist artists but, instead, took their direction from their interpretation of the writings and illustrations of Surrealist writers and painters found in Surrealist publications published in the mid-nineteen thirties.

Painters Eleven found their stimulus in an even less direct way, initially in the writings of Herbert Read and other critics who interpreted the Surrealist movement in Paris, and subsequently in the paintings of the New York Abstract Expressionists who had shaped and moulded

¹See Appendix A.

Surrealist automatism to suit their own understanding and needs. During the period 1940 to 1947, the New York School was further influenced by the presence of ex-patriate Surrealist artists escaping the Occupation of Europe by Nazi Germany.

In this way, it becomes apparent that Referential Abstraction in Canada derived from two, distinct, evolutionary processes, each related to Surrealism but different in the pattern of its transferral and adaptation. The Automatists used primary sources in the form of printed information to create an idiom which served in concept to parallel that of the New York School in its pre-1947 period. Painters Eleven found their inspiration in secondary interpretations of Surrealism, notably in critical writing and in the post-1947 work of the New York artists.

The style of the Automatists was influenced by the literary and plastic aspects of Surrealism and was primarily a revolution in content rather than in the form of the painting. Thus, the Automatists followed such artists of the Surrealist movement as Joan Miró and André Masson who used automatism to stimulate the unconscious mind and encourage a free flow of images to dictate the content; in this way, the subject matter was separated from preconceived ideas but did not necessarily exclude reminiscences. Form, on the other hand, was left to chance and accident and, as a result, was not the essential preoccupation of the artist; the spatial structure used by the Automatists was a

traditional figure-on-ground relationship with well delimited objects and the image was a sign or symbol.

Miró developed his painting method in two distinct stages. In the first stage of "pure psychic automatism", the hand moved freely to follow the dictates of the unconscious. In the second stage, he manipulated the images consciously and set up a colour pattern. The application of colour was either opaque and without texture or thin and transparent using clear, bright hues.

Masson used a pen to build up images in a web of lines. He worked quickly without stopping the movement of the hand and left the images unfinished and unresolved, fragments of a dream world. There was difficulty in transferring this method to oil as the medium slowed the rapidity and spontaneity possible with the pen. Masson solved this problem in his "peinture sur sable". Here he dusted sand over glue to create a textured ground and then applied oil paint with a specially constructed tube, like a pastry-tube. In many of his paintings, the flat patterns of sand and colour dominated over line. He did not pursue this technique, however, and by the end of the nineteen twenties he reverted to a linear Cubist scaffold¹ and curvilinear lines.

¹To clarify spatial structure in Picasso and Braque's work of 1911-21, a linear scaffolding was made to indicate distances and to hold the composition together while an associated structure of planes and cubes, over which realistic details were inscribed, gave volume and served to integrate spatially foreground with background. Douglas Cooper, The Cubist Epoch, (London: Phaidon Press, 1970), pp. 52-53.

In neither case were the works completely abstract.

The Automatist artist, Paul-Emile Borduas, tended to mix these two methods, particularly in his abstractions painted in 1942. The movement of his hand dictated by the unconscious resulted in a continuous network of lines and arabesques. The shapes created by this technique were then filled in with colour and the images were situated within a Cubist scaffold or grid. This resulted in forms in which the paint frequently overlapped, at times creating a third colour. As well, these colours could appear both opaque and transparent. In his work during 1943, he too had difficulty in transferring this spontaneous method to oil and had to evolve a new technique to solve this problem.

The unconscious mind was the source of content in Automatism. In order to exercise and better stimulate the unconscious mind, the Automatists also played the Surrealist game of "le cadavre exquis",¹ that improbable linking in an "incongruous combination" of picture or text. This game

¹Exquisite Corpse. Among Surrealist techniques exploiting the mystique of accident was a kind of collective collage of words or images called the "cadavre exquis" (exquisite corpse). Based on an old parlor game, it was played by several people, each of whom would write a phrase on a sheet of paper, fold the paper to conceal part of it, and pass it on to the next player for his contribution...The game was adapted to the possibilities of drawing and even collage by assigning a section of a body to each player, though the Surrealist principle of metaphoric displacement led to images that only vaguely resembled the human form. Rubin, W.S., Dada, Surrealism, and Their Heritage, (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1968), p. 83.

involved a metamorphosis of one image into another as well as "an association of ideas" technique which was used to arrive at a suitably improbable title.¹

In contrast, the style of Painters Eleven was related to the post-1947 developments of the Abstract Expressionists in which there had been a significant change relative to their initial period in both content and form. The content was now completely abstract; it derived, not from unprovoked images but, instead, from emotional response to some phenomenon or event. Form assumed primary importance, becoming the intuitive "gesture" of the artist or the "action" necessary to record on a surface a particular feeling; the spatial structure was two- rather than three-dimensional and the surface rough and highly textured. Form symbolized emotion for Painters Eleven as content expressed self for the Automatists.

The Painters Eleven artists were aware of the plastic results of automatism in the paintings of the Montréal Automatists through exhibitions and articles in "Canadian Art", but the force of American Abstract Expressionism in popular magazines and art journals, as well as its developing respectability, caught their attention. They did not go back to Surrealist roots but began from Abstract Expressionist solutions.

¹Schneede, U.M., Surrealism, (New York: H.N. Abrams Inc., 1973), p. 22.

There are two phases in the development of American Surrealist-oriented abstraction. The link with Surrealism in the canvases of the New York Abstract Expressionists prior to 1947 showed the use of automatism and, in this, an identification with the world of dreams where organic shapes and somber colours reflected man's inner self. However, they differed with the Surrealists as to subject matter which was frequently concerned with myths and totemic images, with personal forms and symbols replacing literary allusions. The process of painting was involved with automatism and the resultant images were uncalculated and a product of chance. Since Cubism had been the prevailing style during the nineteen thirties, the compositional structure frequently employed was a Cubist grid or scaffold and over this the shapes were superimposed rather than juxtaposed. Surface texture was apparent but not dominant and in many paintings the surface was matt rather than shiny. The format was usually of easel size.

In the late nineteen forties, there was a change both in form and content, particularly related to Jackson Pollock's work, creating the contemporary concept of Abstract Expressionism. "Gesture" seemed to encompass the other factors of the dream world, automatism and surface texture. The subject matter as well as the titles became abstract and the earlier concern with mythic overtones disappeared. The process of painting, automatism in particular, was reduced to intuitive gesture with a resultant built-up surface texture, while the

Cubist structure gave way to an integrated, two-dimensional space with the use of the drip. Shapes remained abstract and organic but the colours brightened and became increasingly full of energy. The format increased in size reaching, in some instances, six by twelve feet.

Painters Eleven came together ten years after the Automatists when automatism had evolved into a different concept of "action" painting, the post-1947 Abstract Expressionist style. J.W.G. Macdonald's use of automatism dated from the early nineteen thirties and stemmed directly from what he knew, through reading, of Parisian sources, while the younger artists were more interested in the concepts of intuitive "gesture" and "action" painting seen in Abstract Expressionist examples. At the same time, they were also subject to the influences of two non-Surrealist artists, Wassily Kandinsky and Hans Hofmann. The content, like that of the New York artists, was abstract but the titles were figurative and related to nature.

Automatism remained the initial stimulus but "action" painting dictated the form. In the early period of Painters Eleven development, there were certain apparent characteristics; three-dimensional space, organic shapes, collage materials and found objects added to the surface, line as calligraphy or embellishment, rich dark colours, a heavy, creamy paint texture and a small to medium size of format. There were changes which occurred after 1955 in terms of space, shape, colour and size. The shapes were fewer and

farther apart with less emphasis on collage except in the work of Tom Hodgson and Harold Town. Although many of the artists continued to use organic shapes, it may be noted that William Ronald moved to squares and grids while Kazuo Nakamura favoured hard-edged geometric shapes. Colour increased in brightness while, through the use of additives, the paint became thinner and the texture less pronounced. The size increased every year, eventually reaching six by ten feet and thereby creating an environment.

In a comparison of the two forms of Referential Abstraction based on Surrealism in Canadian painting, using as an example the stylistic evolution of Surrealist-inspired New York Abstract Expressionism, it appears that the Automatists relate to pre-1947 Abstract Expressionism while Painters Eleven is linked to the later, post-1947 developments. This becomes more apparent from an analysis of the respective design elements of the two groups: composition, structure, pictorial space, line, form or image, texture and size.

The Automatists shared a similar linguistic and cultural background with the Paris Surrealists, hence their understanding and exploration of Surrealist theory and concepts was more direct. The Automatists initially investigated only one facet of Surrealist painting, automatism and accident, and this was subject to local interpretation. However, in 1948, the social revolutionary concept which was another component of surrealism was reflected in the Refus global of Bordeas.

Parallel to the early period of Abstract Expressionism, Borduas used automatism as the process to unlock the unconscious mind. The images and forms he favoured were abstract, as were the numbered titles. If figurative titles were thought necessary, they were added at a later date and the allusions were literary, following Surrealist models.

In Borduas' 1942 gouache paintings, the spatial structure was a Cubist scaffold. He, like the New York artists, had been experimenting earlier with Cubism but this gradually gave way to a deep three-dimensional space with the figures floating in atmospheric space against a background of infinite depth, a Surrealist dream-space. The background colours were dark, black and grey, and foreground figures brightly coloured with white highlights. The background had a minimal texture but, as he changed tools from brush to palette knife, the figures became increasingly textured. In the resultant images, the paint was thick and glossy.

Borduas experimented with various compositional structures in his search to explore in depth both shape and colour independent of subject matter. In 1941, his work followed a Cézanne-type of space with wide black contour lines encircling the centralized composition. However, this proved unsatisfactory as it tended to create a single flat surface at the centre. The 1942 gouache experiments, although painted automatically, retained a Cubist spatial structure with proto-figurative images and overlapping

transparencies. It was not until 1943 that Borduas began to evolve his Automatist style characterized by figures suspended in atmospheric space in front of an infinitely receding background, more akin to a Surrealist dream-space. The movement in these compositions was unpredictable since the images were not grounded.

The early work shown by Painters Eleven also presented a figure-on-ground concept but the influences from Abstract Expressionism caused the linear images and organic shapes against coloured backgrounds to become more integrated and the space two-dimensional. There were various structural solutions used by the different artists of the group. Some preferred a horizontal line, others a grid-like structure or simply a format echoing the frame of the painting. The most frequent compositional movement or directions were from left to right or upward from the bottom. However, there were compositions which exploded from the centre of the canvas or used the reverse, an 'implosion'.

Landscape space for the Automatists consisted of a distinction between a floating figure and an infinitely receding background, a three-dimensional atmospheric space. The compositions tended to build outward from the centre, with strong, dynamic forms creating pictorial energy. The work was spontaneous and the result, a product of chance.

The space that the majority of Painters Eleven artists evolved moved from three-dimensional to two-dimensional, influenced by the Abstract Expressionist concept of

integrated figure and ground. Pollock, in his paintings done after 1947, developed dripping all over the surface of the canvas, a technique which destroyed patterns and moved into every area of the surface. This set up such an ambiguity of foreground and background space that the two became locked together in a skein of lines and eliminated any hierarchy between the elements. It assured that there would be no focalization, no objects and no background.

The Automatists' use of line was influenced by Masson and Miró. For them, line was the first step in automatism and was used to define the image or content. The hand moved spontaneously with a pencil across the ground weaving a skein of lines or creating shapes that were later manipulated into images. Borduas began his drawing in this manner, later creating shapes by filling in between the lines with colour.

Line, when used by some of the artists of Painters Eleyen, became linear drawing superimposed over a base of amorphous shapes. This resulted in a gestural, nervous calligraphy where the eye had difficulty focusing, a technique reflecting an interest in the work of Pollock.

The drip that Pollock used was not unlike Masson's pencil lines but the paint, a faster and more supple medium, created lines which were free, autonomous in themselves, and did not reflect an image. The result was a completely abstract work.

The form evolved by the Automatists was given a definition by Borduas in a paper written in 1947-48 and

published in 1948, En regard du surréalisme actuel. Here, form is /

Un signe, même un point, s'il exprime un volume, non une seule surface qui déterminerait une silhouette. L'ensemble des surfaces d'un objet donné. La conscience détermine le caractère de la forme: naturaliste, impressionniste, futuriste, fauviste, cubiste, surréaliste, surrationalnelle. Impossibilité pour la forme de conserver sa puissance émotive dans l'utilisation consciente. Elle devient, alors académique. Synonyme : insensible.

This definition indicated that for Borduas, form was a sign, three-dimensional and formed in the unconscious mind.

New York Abstract Expressionism displayed no sign, as the artists were not interested in the visual world. Their main concerns were to penetrate the world within themselves and paint their feelings about it rather than about the reality of the outside world. This led them eventually to eliminate signs and symbols entirely. Pollock said that he chose to veil the imagery, for it was the viewer's awareness and enjoyment of subtle colours, harmonious shapes and sensuous surfaces, and not his search for symbols and ulterior meanings which was the meaning of Abstract Expressionist works.

¹Form: A sign, even a dot, if it expresses a volume, [three-dimensional space], not a single surface which would define a silhouette. The entire set of surfaces of a given object. Consciousness determines the character of form: Naturalist, Impressionist, Futurist, Fauvist, Cubist, Surrealist, Surrationalist. It is impossible for form to conserve its emotional force in conscious use. It then becomes academic. Synonym: insensitive. P.-E. Borduas, "Commentaires sur des mots courants", Borduas et les automatistes, Montréal 1942-1955, (Montréal: Musée d'Art contemporain de Montréal, 1972) p.110.

Painters Eleven followed this lead, for if there is symbolic meaning, it is veiled and the imagery is a product of the colour, energy and "action" of the artist. The imagery was based on the recall of past experiences, most frequently involving nature. In this, they were the direct inheritors of the landscape tradition of the Group of Seven; however, their inspiration ranged from urban to cosmic.

The Automatist artists achieved a texture through the use of the quick, sharp brush or palette-knife strokes which produced thick, creamy paint and a glossy surface. In the later nineteen forties, several of the artists began to experiment with the drip, dribbling paint over this built-up surface.

The characteristic texture in Painters Eleven early works tends to be the result of paint spread thickly with a palette knife or dribbled directly from tube on a canvas or masonite board. However, the introduction of Duco, a plastic-type paint, and Lucite 44, an oil additive, and the consequent thinning of the oil, gave new directions after 1955. Lucite 44 produced a quick-drying medium with a matt finish so that the heavy impasto was replaced by fluidity and the tight surface became delicate and airy. This was particularly true in the work of the more "lyrical" members of the group. Some of the Painters Eleven artists also recalled Analytic Cubism, creating collage by gluing small forms, objects, torn paper and fabrics to the surface both before and after painting.

The final comparison that may be made between these two groups is in the matter of size. The Automatists began with and retained the easel size throughout the life of the group. Painters Eleven followed the lead of the Abstract Expressionist artists and began to create larger formats, more than doubling the easel size after 1958. Pollock's technique of dripping and the consequent environment created by larger works encouraged this.

This analysis of the influences on Referential Abstraction in Canadian painting reveals the similarities and differences between the two separate components of the Canadian movement as well as their distinct relationships with outside influences. While both of the Canadian forms stem from Surrealism, differences in local interpretation and the extraneous influences which motivated these two groups of artists caused them to evolve their own definition and style. Nevertheless, both shared the concepts of chance and automatic writing translated into painting as technique and the unconscious and dream world as content.

Historical Development

The Automatists, Montréal.

The historical development of Automatism is best understood through the discussion of the Automatist exhibitions and their effects on the viewing public.

Borduas' training and early career was that of a figurative artist; however, his work underwent a major change at the end of 1941 from figurative to Referential Abstraction.

Alfred Pellan had held an exhibition in Québec City and Montréal of works done in the years 1934-1940 following his return from Paris in 1940, that showed paintings which were both Cubist- and Surrealist-inspired. The impact of these works, together with the Surrealist literature which Borduas had recently read, led to his first experimentations with Surrealist abstraction. In May, 1942, he held a one-man show, Peintures surréalistes, at the Théâtre de l'Ermitage in Montréal.

The paintings, the result of automatic painting, or what Borduas called "automatisme surrational": a technique which moves the hand without conscious direction and whose motivation particularly depends on memory, ranged from proto-representational to complete abstraction. The work was

well-received by both the public and critics and the reviews noted the sudden change that Borduas had made in content from figurative to non-representational. It appeared that the opinions were more concerned with the validity of abstraction as an art form than with the quality of the painting.

At his studio, Borduas gathered some of his students from the Ecole du Meuble as well as other young artists into a group to experiment with Surrealist techniques. In the spring of 1942, Maurice Gagnon organized l'Exposition des Sagittaires at the Dominion Gallery. He used as a model the Contemporary Art Society, a body devoted to the promotion of modern art, especially art influenced by the School of Paris. All the exhibitors were under thirty years of age and included a large proportion of the group around Borduas.

In October of the same year, Borduas had his own one-man show of Surrealist oils at the Dominion Gallery. Using the same technique as that of 1942, he found it difficult to translate from gouache into oil. It was impossible to retain a feeling of spontaneity with the heavier medium so he decided to solve the problem by pre-painting the background black or dark grey, using horizontal brush strokes and, after drying, work the foreground in the automatic and chance manner of the earlier gouache.

The result was successful. It reintroduced landscape space and chiaroscuro into his painting together with the automatism that was already present. Further, it was seminal for his future painting. The public, however, was not

enthusiastic as the paintings were dark, and often less clear in content than the gouache. Borduas sold very little of this work.

Still continuing his experiments with automatism, Borduas embarked in the years from 1943 to 1948 on the greatest teaching period of his career. His pupils became the nucleus of the Automatist group, ideas were actualized and, as he says in Projections libérantes, in 1949:

C'est à ce stade de développement (1943 à 1948) que l'expérience de l'Ecole du Meuble prend son entière signification.¹

Many of those who entered the Ecole du Meuble in the year 1942-43 became the "Groupe automatiste". Borduas continues and says:

Déjà, pour quelques-uns d'entre nous, il était inconcevable d'entrevoir le travail de création, sans la constante découverte. Tout retour en arrière nous était interdit de même que toute fixation. Pellan rejetait en bloc le surréalisme; pour nous il avait été la grande découverte.²

In this statement, Borduas was too dogmatic for, as we know, Pellan favoured and employed Surrealist techniques in his painting.

¹ It is at this stage of development (1943 to 1948) that the Ecole du Meuble experience assumes its whole significance. P.-E. Borduas, "Projections libérantes", Etudes françaises, vol. VIII, (August 1972), Special Number, p. 273.

² Already, for some of us, it was unthinkable to imagine creative work without constant discovery. Looking back was forbidden just as much as standing still. Pellan rejected Surrealism as a whole; for us it was the great discovery. Ibid., p. 273.

In 1946, two major events influenced Borduas' life and that of the young students around him.)

In April, at 1257 Amherst Street, Montréal, a group formed of Borduas, Marcel Barbeau, Pierre Gauvreau, Fernand Leduc, Jean-Paul Mousseau, Roger Fautoux and Jean-Paul Riopelle, held an exhibition of their works. It was an illustration of the Surrealist principal. Borduas writes:

...Leduc...avait beaucoup lu Breton et c'est lui qui voulait la constitution d'un groupe de peintres autonomes situé à la fine pointe de l'évolution et orienté dans un sens unanime.¹

The exhibition represented the first public appearance of a group of Referential Canadian painters. From the few reviews, one can see that some influential critics were enthusiastic. There was mention of the exhibition in several papers and specific reviews in Le Canada and Le Jour. Eloi de Grandmont of Le Canada, said:

Encourager l'art "inventif" à toujours été le fait des critiques les mieux inspirés. Et une manifestation aussi audacieuse que cette exposition des jeunes peintres "surréalistes" a ceci d'heureux qu'elle est la preuve d'une vitalité créatrice étonnante.²

¹...Leduc...had read Breton extensively and he is the one who wanted to form a distinct group of painters who would be at the very tip of the evolution and all oriented in the same direction. Ibid., p. 272

²The best inspired critics have always been known to encourage "inventive" art. And such a daring demonstration, as this exhibition is, by young "Surrealist" painters happily shows a surprising creative vitality. Eloi de Grandmont, "Surréalisme", Le Canada, 24 avril 1946.

There also appeared a favourable short review in Le Jour which said:

Maintenant que leurs expériences se sont concrétisées dans des réalisations tangibles, ils représentent le seul espoir canadien à un art qui puisse défoncer les limites régionales. Le grand intérêt qu'ils soulèvent présentement, positif ou négatif, démontre que leurs créations ne sont pas indifférentes ni médiocres.¹

Borduas, however, was disappointed; writing in Commentaires sur les mots courants, on the reaction of those viewing similar automatist works, he said:

En face des tableaux de cette exposition vous serez sans idée...vous aurez la pénible impression d'un malaise grave, d'une amputation douloureuse et inutile, d'une frustration.²

In September, 1946, Borduas, without warning, was relieved of all but his sight drawing class at the Ecole du Meuble. This was a severe blow as the need for constant interchange with his students was great; now, with the loss of two courses, he saw them much less.

In February, 1947, at 75 Sherbrooke Street West, Montréal, a second exhibition of the group took place. This time, exhibiting with Borduas, were Pierre Gauvreau,

¹Now that their experiences have materialized in tangible realisations, they constitute the only Canadian hope for an art capable of breaking through regional barriers. Whether positive or negative, at the moment they certainly arouse a great interest which proves that their creations are neither indifferent nor mediocre. "Vernissage", Le Jour, 20 avril 1946, p. 4, col. 6.

²Opposite the paintings of this exhibition, you will be without ideas...you will have the distressing impression of a grave illness, of a painful and useless amputation, of a frustration. Borduas et les automatistes, p. 114.

Jean-Paul Mousseau, Marcel Barbeau and Roger Fauteux. The works were of high quality and the few reviews favourable; but the public did not yet seem interested in the abstractions of the group.

There were two interesting commentaries: one by Charles Doyon of Le Clairon (Saint-Hyacinthe) who wrote:

Les exposants...s'avouent tenant du surréalisme. Ici l'ésotérisme est un moyen de pénétrer plus fortement la vie intérieure que par des voies secrètes, que par la canalisation du hasard, que par intuition on trouve des arrangements heureux et donne substance à des phantasmes. Pourquoi pas? Ici le champ d'action est infini! Tout cela est bien, mais gare à l'enlèvement.¹

and one in Le Quartier Latin, in which the author, Tancrède Marcil, gave the group its name, entitling his article, "Les Automatistes. L'Ecole Borduas".²

The first time the group exhibited outside Canada, if we except a brief showing in New York at the Boas Studio where Françoise Sullivan was studying, was in June, 1947, in Paris, shortly before the opening of the large post-war Surrealist exhibition under the direction of André Breton.

¹The exhibitors...claim to be followers of surrealism. Here the esotericism is a means of penetrating the inner life more strongly than by secret ways, that by channeling chance, by intuition one finds fortunate arrangements and gives substance to fantasies. Why not? Here the field of action is infinite. All of which is fine, but beware of quicksand. Charles Doyon, "Art ésotérique", Le Clairon (Saint-Hyacinthe), 7 mars 1947.

²Tancredè Marcil, "Les Automatistes. L'Ecole Borduas", Le Quartier Latin, 28 février 1947.

Six of the Montréal Automatist artists presented an exhibition of paintings, drawings and watercolours at a small, new gallery, Galerie du Luxembourg. The six were Barbeau, Borduas, Fauteux, Leduc, Mousseau and Riopelle.

Leduc and Riopelle had arranged this exhibition and, subsequently, finding a congenial atmosphere in Paris, moved there permanently in 1947, returning only for specific exhibitions in Montréal. Riopelle, feeling his future lay in Paris, signed in 1947 the Surrealist Manifesto, Rupture inaugurale, déclaration adoptée le 21 juin 1947 par le Groupe en France pour définir son attitude préjudicielle à l'égard de toute politique partisane, with forty-seven other artists from Paris, but Leduc abstained.

Riopelle, in an interview with Eloi de Grandmont, of Le Canada, was asked to outline the relationship between the two movements, Automatism and Surrealism. He said:

Notre mouvement, s'il a une parenté avec le surréalisme, c'est du côté de la pensée. Dans le domaine de la peinture, la position surréaliste ne nous paraît pas assez précise. Toutefois, il convient d'attendre la grande exposition des surréalistes pour porter un jugement définitif. Ce dont nous sommes certains, c'est que notre peinture n'a rien de commun avec l'imagerie surréaliste qui est très répandue en ce moment.¹

¹If our movement has a common ground with Surrealism it is on the intellectual level. In the domain of painting, the Surrealist position does not seem precise enough to us. In any event, it is advisable to await the important Surrealist Exhibition in order to make a definitive judgment. Of this much we are certain, our painting has nothing in common with the Surrealist imagery which is very widespread at this moment. Eloi de Grandmont, "Exposition à Paris de six peintres canadiens", Le Canada, 16 juillet 1947.

Borduas, as mentor of the Automatist group, dictated a certain style of painting, that of figure on an infinite, receding background. Marcelle Ferron, a newly-graduated artist from the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Québec City, was extremely faithful to Borduas' concepts using vertical forms floating across a horizontal background. In Paris, Fernand Leduc also continued in 1947 and 1948 to work with objects floating in an infinite space.

However, there were dissenters. Marcel Barbeau was experimenting with an all-over composition without distinction of objects on a background. One of the few surviving works of this period, Le tumulte à la mâchoire crispée, 1946, was so criticized by Borduas that Barbeau destroyed many others that he had painted in this way.

Jean-Paul Mousseau, although in agreement with Borduas' teaching, began to introduce the idea of spatial integration between foreground and background. His change of style is evident in Bataille moyenâgeuse, 1948, where an all-over composition of crowded forms in extremely shallow space only changes into an infinite figure-on-ground relationship at the very top of the painting.

In Paris in 1947, Jean-Paul Riopelle, without any hesitation, already looked towards an all-over composition in a style which locked together the foreground and background into a two-dimensional composition.

In 1947, the "social revolutionary" aspect of Québec Surrealism began to surface in Borduas' writings.

The Automatists had been working towards a third Automatist Exhibition to be held in 1948. The idea of an important statement to accompany the exhibition was proposed by Fernand Leduc and the Refus global ("Global Refusal") text emerged. It was actually three texts: the main one from which it took its name, a glossary of terminology, and two short texts by Borduas, Commentaires sur des mots courants, and En regard du surréalisme actuel. The text was included in a larger pamphlet with contributions by other non-painting members of the group involving the Surrealist concept in dance, poetry and drama.¹

The pamphlet was published by Editions Mithra Myth, alias Maurice Perron, and four hundred copies were distributed by the Librairie Tranquille. Its appearance marked the cultural awakening of these young intellectuals who felt completely trapped in their existing situation within French-Canadian society. Borduas, in these writings, urged exploration, courage and risk for he believed sincerely that Surrealism was the only answer to the liberation of painting

¹The pamphlet included the following: the manifesto itself, Refus global, Commentaires sur des mots courants and En regard du surréalisme actuel by P.-E. Borduas; Au coeur des quenouilles, Bien-être, L'ombre sur le cerceau by Claude Gauvreau; L'oeuvre picturale est une expérience by Bruno Cormier; La danse et l'espoir by Françoise Sullivan; Qu'on le veuille ou non by Fernand Leduc; six reproductions of works by Barbeau, Borduas, Gauvreau, Leduc, Mousseau and Riopelle; four photographs of the Amherst and Sherbrooke street exhibitions; and photographs of the theatrical representation of Gauvreau's plays. The cover was a water-colour by Riopelle, with words by Claude Gauvreau.

("the plastic revolution") and consequently the liberation of the society in which he lived.

The publication sparked an immediate response in the newspapers. There were angry and indignant articles against the pamphlet calling it anarchist, anti-catholic and against human nature. Rolland Boulanger wrote:

Comment peuvent-ils espérer exprimer tout ce qui est dans l'homme par ce qui dans l'homme est le plus inférieur, l'instinct connaturel à la bête? ... Je vois chez le théoricien qui qu'il soit de l'automatisme un vice morbide de raisonnement et une méprise fondamentale à l'endroit de la réalité ontologique de l'humain.¹

The other newspapers also picked up the themes and were moved to criticize not only the philosophy but were also quick to point out that Borduas was a teacher of young minds and his influence was obviously corrupting. Le Petit Journal wrote:

...Nos automatistes annoncent la décadence chrétienne et prophétisent l'avènement du régime de l'instinct.²

¹How can they hope to express all that is in man by using only what in man is most inferior, natural instinct common to man and beast? I can detect in theoreticians of Automatism, whoever they may be, corrupted reasoning and a basic misunderstanding of the metaphysical reality of human nature. Rolland Boulanger, "Dynamitage automatiste chez Tranquille", Montréal Matin, 9 août 1948.

²Our Automatists are heralding a Christian decadence and prophesying the advent of the rule of instinct. Le Petit Journal, 15 août 1948.

Le Devoir attacked the mixing of politics with education saying:

...Nous ne discutons pas le motif invoqué (à savoir le caractère subversif du Refus global). Nous dénonçons l'intervention directe du pouvoir politique dans le domaine de l'éducation.¹

To put this quotation into context it must be remembered that education was the domain of the Church in Québec until 1960. However, the Ecole du Meuble as well as the Ecole des Beaux Arts were the only two educational institutions under the jurisdiction of the Provincial Government.

There were no reports in the English papers and the only concrete reference was that by Donald Buchanan of Canadian Art when, in a special publication on the Automatists, he made reference to Borduas:

Let us hope that such freedom of thought will not be crushed too arbitrarily. Already one learns that, because of this daring expression of such sentiments, Borduas, since publishing this essay, has been dismissed from his teaching post in Montreal.²

Curiously, there was very little reaction by the Automatists to the strong criticism voiced in the newspapers. Claude Gauvreau protested Borduas' dismissal in Le Devoir but there was no public defence of the Refus global except

¹We do not argue about the theme (that is, the subversive nature of the Refus global). We denounce the direct intervention of political power in the field of education. "Bloc-notes: Intervention politique", Le Devoir, 23 Septembre 1948, p. 1.

²Donald Buchanan, "Refus global", Canadian Art, Winter 1948.

by some of his pupils in Le Clairon (Saint-Hyacinthe). Borduas was shattered by the realization after his dismissal that the government, journalists and public in general equated his "bad" politics with "bad" teaching. He was forced to retire to his home in Saint-Hilaire, his only source of income coming from painting.

The third Automatist exhibition never took place and the group began to fall apart. Riopelle and Leduc were in Paris and, when the original participants began to exhibit again, it was as individuals. Borduas won first prize at the Sixty-Sixth Salon of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts in May 1949. This award was interpreted by the Automatists as a vindication of what Borduas stood for.

In Saint-Hilaire, Borduas continued to write and published in July, 1949, Projections libérantes, a record of his life in teaching. He tried to separate his teaching from his other activities and described in detail the method that he had used at the Ecole du Meuble. He pointed out that, of the twenty-four young artists in the Contemporary Art Society, nineteen were his former students. Projections libérantes was not a controversial document and there was little comment in the press. Borduas was to be ignored and, if possible, forgotten.

The 1950 Spring Exhibition of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts refused work by Marcelle Ferron and Jean-Paul Mousseau, but accepted work by Borduas. The Automatists protested on opening night, carrying insulting placards

directed towards the jury. They strongly objected to the two-jury system and the fact that "modern" painting was judged by a jury of "the right", Goodridge Roberts, Stanley Cosgrove and Jacques de Tonnancour, who refused works from "the left". Subsequently they organized at 2035 Mansfield Street, Montréal, l'Exposition des Rebelles (named to commemorate the actions of Louis-Joseph Papineau and the rebellion in Lower Canada in 1837). Borduas was asked to exhibit with them although he was still exhibiting in the Spring Show.

Robert Ayre of the Montreal Star wrote quite tartly about the exhibition saying:

...I admire their enterprise...but I have a suspicion that too much of this clean-up campaign is nothing better than exhibitionism ...art is more than just a spewing out... self-expression is nothing unless there is something to express.¹

Inspired by their persistence, Borduas accepted the invitation of his fellow Automatists and, as well, wrote (between the first and ninth of April) Communication intime à mes chers amis² in which he noted that political action is only of short duration; that it is the work of art, though slower, which has a more profound effect on the consciousness. Written in an effort to restore the integrity of the group he had founded, Communication intime...came too late;

¹Robert Ayre, "Art Notes", Montreal Star, 25 March 1950, p. 14.

²La Presse, 12 juillet 1969, reprint.

the younger Automatists in particular had fastened on political action as the most effective means for change. The collective force of art that Borduas had nurtured was dissipating before his very eyes.

Members of the Automatists decided to mount another exhibition the following year. Les étapes du vivant, 1951, was a didactic exhibition showing the evolution from figurative to non-figurative painting and, while the majority of those exhibiting were Automatists, other abstractionists were also invited. Borduas came to the opening from Saint-Hilaire, but was greatly upset by the two submissions from Riopelle. Riopelle had changed his style after going to France, leaving the sweeping tachist-type brush strokes and now working directly from the tube. In this way, he eliminated the Automatist figure-on-ground concept.

In the following year, 1952, the director of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Robert Tyler Davis, made an unusual invitation. He offered Gallery XI to Borduas for whatever he wished to exhibit. Borduas decided against a two-man exhibition with Marcel Barbeau and, instead, invited the Automatists and some new young painters. Borduas selected the canvases and the Museum called it The Borduas Group. It was a unified and harmonious Automatist exhibition. Borduas presented eleven paintings, dating from 1943 to 1950, and the exhibition received favourable comment in the major papers. La Presse said of this exhibition:

Chacun peut aimer cette peinture spontanée, intuitive, sans idées préconçues, pour diverses raisons: sa liberté d'expression, son organisation linéaire ou l'émotion qui s'en dégage et produit comme les symphonies de Beethoven, toutes les émotions.¹

Although Borduas had left Montréal for New York in April, 1953, he participated in a large catch-all exhibition in Montréal, La Place des artistes, in May. The works included Automatist as well as figurative, primitive and new unknowns, among them Guido Molinari.

The Automatists participated once again, in 1954, in a large exhibition organized by Claude Gauvreau at Galerie Antoine, Montréal. La matière chante, 1954, was an exhibition to gather together the Automatist artists of the first and second generation, with Borduas the sole juror. His departure for New York had left a large gap in the artistic life of the remaining Automatists and this exhibition of abstractionists was to be a type of morale booster. Claude Gauvreau wrote the invitation to potential participants and we see from his text that Automatism was a continuing tradition:

L'exposition a pour but de mettre sur pied
une manifestation collective homogène de travaux
plastiques d'un caractère résolument COSMIQUE.

¹Everyone can enjoy this spontaneous, intuitive painting without preconceived ideas, for various reasons: its freedom of expression, its linear organization or the emotion which derives from it and brings forth, like Beethoven's symphonies, all the emotions. "Exposition de P.-E. Borduas et des peintres de l'Automatisme", La Presse, 4 février 1952.

Seront reconnus cosmiques et éligibles, tous les objets conçus et exécutés directement et simultanément sous le signe de l'ACCIDENT (...)

La sélection des travaux (qui sera naturellement sans appel) et l'accrochage seront assurés par Borduas venu expressément de New York pour cela.¹

The review of the show by Rodolphe de Repentigny was very enthusiastic and he wrote:

Borduas a été ravi par la fraîcheur que montrent ces jeunes, et il a également distingué dans leurs travaux une libération plus avancée, un détachement plus grand, par rapport aux problèmes que leurs aînés avaient à résoudre.²

Claude Gauvreau considered the exhibition a triumph and wrote:

La matière chante, ce fut la fin mais l'apothéose de la vie collective automatiste. Cet ultime effort automatiste sauva - c'est tout de même quelque chose - l'autonomie de l'art non-figuratif.³

¹The aim of the exhibition is to present a collective, homogenous manifestation of plastic works having a resolutely COSMIC character. Will be recognized as cosmic and eligible, all objects conceived and executed directly and simultaneously under the sign of ACCIDENT (...). The selection of the works (which will be naturally without appeal) and the hanging will be carried out by Borduas who has come expressly from New York for that purpose. Claude Gauvreau, "L'épopée automatiste vue par cyclope", La Barre du jour, p. 93.

²Borduas was delighted with the freshness shown by these young artists and he noted as well in their works a more advanced liberation, a greater detachment, as compared to the problems that their elders had to resolve. Rodolphe de Repentigny, "Borduas ravi par une jeune génération de peintres montréalais", La Presse, 21 avril 1954.

³The Material Sings, this was the end but [also] the apotheosis of the collective automatist life. This ultimate automatist effort saved - it is really quite something - the autonomy of non-figurative art. Op. cit. p. 95.

The final exhibition dominated by the Automatist style was held in 1955 at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. Espace 55, presented sixty-six works by eleven artists and included three original Automatists, Leduc, Gauvreau and Mousseau. Gilles Corbeil invited Borduas to come from New York. In a radio interview, Borduas praised two young artists: Robert Dupras for his gestural, tachist works and Noël Lajoie for his watercolours. But he called Leduc and the other artists "dépassés et archaïques" (outdated and archaic).

A debate arose between Borduas and Leduc, carried on in part in the newspapers. Leduc wrote a long letter printed in L'Autorité du peuple. He made two particular points, writing:

...Beaucoup d'entre nous persistent à croire en des voies multiples, et le New-Look américain nous apparaît au moins aussi régionaliste que notre archaïsme.¹

and further in the same article:

...Les théories tachistes de Borduas ne font que prolonger les illusions passées de perspective et de profondeur dans l'illimité de l'espace, et c'est leur seule marge de vie.²

¹Many of us persist in believing that there are many ways, and the American New-Look seems to us to be at least as regionalist as our archaism. Letter published in L'Autorité du peuple, 5 mars 1955.

²Borduas' blob theories merely extend past illusions of perspective and depth in the infinity of space, and that represents their only margin of life. Ibid.

Borduas replied with the text: Objectivation ultime et délirante, 1955, which was written in February and accompanied an exhibition Borduas was having in London, Ontario. This controversy broke the relationship between Leduc and Borduas and what was left of the Automatists in Montréal.

The year 1953 had marked the end of automatic abstraction in Québec as it had developed under Borduas' guidance. Marcelle Ferron continued the Automatist tradition, but Riopelle and Barbeau changed their style and joined the Non-Referential Abstractionists, the "Plasticiens". The Plasticien Manifesto was published in March, 1955, and reaffirmed the plastic elements of painting: tone, texture, line and the relationship between these elements. The Plasticiens rejected the unconscious mind and literature as the stimulus for abstraction as well as the gestural, spontaneous automatism of Borduas. Instead, they became mathematical, formal and hard-edged, affirming the integrity of pure painting over self-expression.

Historical Development

Painters Eleven, Toronto

Unlike the social revolutionary concerns that motivated the Automatists, the original purpose of Painters Eleven was simply to exhibit abstract art. They had an interest in abstraction as a painting style and felt it would help to break down the parochial attitudes of Canadian artists that had kept them out of the mainstream of contemporary art; by banding together, they felt they would have a greater impact.

Individually, they found their work either rejected or badly hung at the juried exhibitions of various artists' societies. There were no private galleries specializing in this genre; therefore, the need for exhibition space motivated them to form a group.

In 1953, William Ronald, desperate at this situation, called together six other artists (Jack Bush, Oscar Cahén, Tom Hodgson, Alexandra Luke, Ray Mead and Kazuo Nakamura) to appear with him in an abstract exhibition at Simpson's Store in Toronto. The only previous exhibition of abstract art had appeared the year before when Alexandra Luke organized the first Canadian Abstract Exhibition at the Oshawa, Ontario, Y.W.C.A. and nine of the future Painters Eleven members were represented.

The Simpson's exhibition, called Abstracts at Home, was held in October, 1953, and grew out of an idea by the critic, George Robertson, in the 1952 Spring issue of Canadian Art: if artists lacked hanging space, perhaps a new and novel way should be found to display art, in shops or department stores.

The Furniture Department featured a display of modern furniture with complementary abstract paintings. The advertisement in The Globe and Mail read:

A painting can perfect a room, confer on the furnishings a greater effectiveness, provide a focal point for the Home...the work of leading Canadian artists has been used to complement contemporary room settings...

Following the Simpson's show, the artists met in Oshawa to discuss the formation of a group for exhibition purposes and four more artists were added. Ronald brought Jock Macdonald, Cahen introduced Harold Town and Walter Yarwood, and Ray Mead brought Hortense Gordon. Bush, in a letter of 2 June 1964, suggests that Yarwood gave the group its name, but Town wrote in a letter to Jennifer Watson,

Archivist of the Robert McLaughlin Gallery:

...Bush...declared that Yarwood created the Painters Eleven title for the group. NOT so, I did; and also all the forewords, including the incorrect spelling in the statement of the first folder.²

¹Pearl McCarthy, "To Disagree Harmoniously - Object of 'Painters Eleven'", The Globe and Mail (Toronto), 13 February 1954, p. 28.

²Harold Town, Personal letter. 9 September 1975. Archives, The Robert McLaughlin Gallery.

In the same letter, Bush noted that the prime inspiration for Painters Eleven was firstly Montréal and the work of Borduas, Lyman and de Tonnancour with their Paris orientation and then the stronger pull towards New York and the influence of Franz Kline, Willem de Kooning and Pollock. It must be added that Hofmann's influence was also extremely important. Bush went on to say:

...The group had spirit...Jock was senior by virtue of his love of new talent and students. His work gained tremendously...Ronald had a brashness unusual in Canadian temperament... Cahén had a wonderful sense of European colour and daring, tolerance and understanding... Yarwood was steady...Nakamura had little to say...at the periodic get-togethers we all steamed up about painting...talked and argued, did something about it.¹

Bush was the only artist connected to a dealer, Roberts Gallery, so it was he who arranged the group's first exhibition in February, entitled Painters 11. In the prospectus for the exhibition, the group made this statement.

This exhibition is not a compact to agree but rather the expression of a long repressed desire on the part of eleven painters to disagree harmoniously in terms visually indigenous.²

The exhibition caused a sensation in Toronto and began a controversy which lasted until they disbanded in 1960.

¹Jack Bush, Personal letter. 2 June 1964, Archives, Concordia University Library.

²Exhibition Brochure, Painters 11, (Toronto: Roberts Gallery).

In 1954, the reviews were fairly sympathetic from the Toronto papers. The Toronto Star wrote:

The show has one common denominator: it gives conservatism a polite but firm kick in the pants, and blazes independent trails. There's colour splashed on most of the subjects, some clearly understandable at first blush, others vaguely discernible after inspection, others "out of this world".¹

and the Varsity said:

...Perhaps the greatest value of this exhibition is simply that of seeing the younger (How avant-garde can you get?) artists in a group of their own.²

No sales were made, but the group was not discouraged and arranged for an exhibition the following year.

Ronald began commuting to New York in the winter of 1952-53 and in August, 1954, won a one thousand dollar scholarship to study with Hans Hofmann in New York. Although he gained philosophically from Hofmann, he was more attracted to the raw, rough and aggressive paintings of de Kooning and Kline. It was Kline's great black and white blow-up "paint-int experiences" that had a strong effect, not only on Ronald, but on Borduas as well in his New York years. There was nothing in them to look pretty: they embodied total risk.

Ronald found breaking into the New York art world difficult and wrote to Luke on 29 September 1954:

¹ Hugh Thomson, "'Painters Eleven' Show Modern Art", The Toronto Star, 13 February 1954.

² T. M. Daly, "Painters Eleven", The Varsity (University of Toronto), 17 February 1954.

...I may be wrong but I feel that I need a show in a good gallery...also should be introduced to a gallery by someone else in the Art World. Then I could enter the art scene as a 'young Canadian' rather than just a young painter...I'm damned positive that yourself, Town, Mead, Jock or almost any of us are as good as Riopelle, Benny or Borduas.¹

In the early spring of 1954, Macdonald became very disturbed by the cool attitude of his colleagues at the Ontario College of Art and the general lack of recognition for abstract work. He was fortunate in receiving a Canadian Government Fellowship and, in August, he and his wife went to France on a sabbatical. Here, he was able to work without teaching or interruption and he was fortunate to meet the artist Jean Dubuffet who gave him encouragement. Macdonald wrote:

...My work in [water-colour] really moved them. They thought I was 'expressing myself' in the medium...Du Buffet [sic] said...if only you could speak in oil as you speak in water-colour... then...you could have a profound contribution and a personal one...There are four oil canvasses started similar to your water-colours but you have not managed to come through for you paint in too solid medium.²

In the following year, Macdonald began to experiment with acrylics, Duco and Proxylin, but it was Town who introduced him to an additive, Lucite 44. This allowed the oil to be free-flowing, quick-drying and able to be painted over

¹Ronald to Luke, Personal Letter. 29 September 1954, Archives, The Robert McLaughlin Gallery.

²Macdonald to Max Bates, Personal letter. 20 March 1955, Archives, The McCord Museum, McGill University.

in an hour without fatness or gloss; it had the quality of a stain. It was this which finally gave him the ability to work with the speed and freedom of water-colour and ink, his experimental medium.

The second Painters 11 exhibition was held in February, 1955, and caused a few more comments. Three paintings were sold; two by Gordon and one by Bush.¹ Their statement for this exhibition differed slightly from the first exhibition; with reference to the Automatist Manifesto, the Refus global, this statement read:

There is no manifest for the times. There is no jury but time. By now there is little harmony in the noticeable disagreement. But there is a profound regard for the consequences of our complete freedom.¹

This did not bring favourable reaction from Saturday Night magazine which commented as follows:

...The first three sentences of the statement on the folder can be understood. There is no new statement of belief in the paintings, and time will assess their worth more accurately than any contemporary critic. But we looked in vain for a revelation of a "profound regard for the consequences of our complete freedom". A regard for consequences implies the discipline that denies complete freedom: moreover, it is doubtful if artistic freedom means anything if it is unrestrained by the intellectual discipline imposed by the necessity for communication. It is not enough that a painter or a musician or a writer be able to see or feel things differently from this fellows; he has a responsibility to share his vision, emotion and thought with others. If there is no such communication, art is meaningless, and ceases to be art...In all the works at

¹Exhibition Brochure, Painters 11, (Toronto: Roberts Gallery, 1955).

the Painters Eleven Exhibition, there was obviously artistic freedom, but to us there were few that had the power to communicate...¹

There was a large Painters Eleven exhibition organized in December, 1955, which extended until May, 1956, on the Western Ontario Gallery Circuit. This allowed thirty-three paintings to be seen outside Toronto, in London, Oshawa, Windsor, Hamilton, as well as at Hart House, University of Toronto.

It was at this time that Macdonald complained in a letter to Max Bates that the critics were completely ignoring the group in Toronto and certainly they would have been better without the critical reviews from these smaller cities. As the London Free Press said:

"So little for the Mind" [referring to the critical attack on the content in education, by Hilda Neatby, published in 1953] forced itself on us as a title for the Painters XI show...The lack of appeal of this show to the mind is sure to do harm to the cause of non-objective art in Canada and to Painters XI.²

The year 1956 proved to be one of expansion and recognition of Painters Eleven, if not in Toronto, at least elsewhere. The annual Roberts Gallery show was one of small format pictures. There had been few sales the year before and it was hoped that the small format and lower prices

¹"Communication in Art", Saturday Night, LXX No. 22, 5 March 1955, p. 3.

²L.C., "Display of Non-Objective Art seen Offering Little to the Mind", The London Free Press, 10 January 1956.

would induce a few buyers; this time, two definite sales were recorded and Alexandra Luke subsequently purchased a large part of what remained.

But the biggest break came through Ronald in New York. In 1955, Mr. Lawrence Campbell of American Art News, Martha Jackson of the Martha Jackson Gallery in New York, and Dr. Hale of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York had been to Toronto to see the Painters Eleven group exhibition. It was partly through their interest and partly through Ronald's direct efforts that an invitation was issued to Painters Eleven by the American Abstract Artists' Association to appear with them in New York. Toronto virtually ignored the news; however, the group was not only given a room to themselves at the exhibition but the reviews, on the whole, were very good. The New York Times, Time Magazine, The Village Voice and Art News were all positive. The review in The Village Voice said:

...Borrowing our native Expressionism as a liberating factor, they prefer to employ it to describe personal experience rather than regional phenomena. Comparing the work...few of the local contingent are unwilling to admit the decisive superiority of the Canadian showing. There seems a greater relaxation in dealing with broad surfaces, a general refinement in depicting movement that requires no violence to communicate emotion and a facility to apply rich, ardent coloring without transitional fuss: Cubism is smiled on as a flagging Grandad.¹

¹"American Abstract Artist With 'Painters 11' of Canada", The Village Voice (New York), 1 No. 3, 16 May 1956.

It must be noted that the group, although well-received in the United States, was completely disregarded or even villified by the press at home. The Toronto Telegram said:

...In Canada many have saved their ripest verbal tomatoes for Painters XI. During the Ottawa showing, The Citizen hooted: "Too many of these paintings will evoke the well-known reaction: 'My five-year-old boy can do better'".¹

A radio review by Vincent Tovell, a Canadian Broadcasting Corporation commentator in New York was perhaps the most negative, if at least thoughtful and knowledgeable. He wrote:

Now ugliness and abstraction are, of course, not necessarily synonymous...The deeper question is the 'why' -of all this. I know that "freedom" is the keynote of 'abstract expressionism'... Freedom from what?...In the case of Painters Eleven, freedom from the sort of landscape impressionism that has dominated Canadian taste...But freedom for what? To express a wider view we are told - an inner vision, freedom to use paint and canvas and all the tools more spontaneously...To create new idioms, a new painters' language.

Turning violently, even belligerently, from the traditional Canadian representationalism, Painters Eleven then are moving into another mainstream of contemporary art...it goes without saying that Painters Eleven are turning their backs on any subject or idiom that are obviously Canadian.

As I looked at them I kept wondering: what are they trying to do? Is this crude, declamatory and sometimes frenzied work self-expression? Is this the loneliness, the agony, the emotional dislocation of a new generation in Canada? Is this good art?

¹Paul Duval, "Canadian Galleries Snub U.S. Artists", The Telegram (Toronto), 21 April 1956.

...It's true that today's ugliness may be tomorrow's beauty. But then again, it may not.¹

Despite the coldness and lack of attention at home the group was very pleased with their reception in New York. It could certainly be compared with the Automatist Exhibition at the Galerie du Luxembourg in 1947 and their success outside Québec.

In 1957, Ronald severed his connection with Painters Eleven after a falling out with Town. There had always been friction as their basic philosophies conflicted, and when money entered the picture, there was a complete split. In essence, the dispute seems small. Town wanted Ronald to pay for the shipping of his paintings from New York to exhibitions of Painters Eleven in Toronto and elsewhere. Town felt, now that Ronald was beginning to make money, he could well afford the cost.

Ronald was convinced that, by going to New York, he had moved to the centre of the action in contemporary art. He signed with Kootz Gallery, made friends with the artists, writers and musicians of the New York avant-garde such as writers Alan Ginsberg, John O'Hara and Edward Albee; musicians Hazel Scott and Chet Baker; artists Kanowitz and Rauschenberg; and, most important for Painters Eleven, had met the most influential critic of the moment, Clement

¹Vincent Tovell, CBC Radio, May 1956, Review of the AAA Exhibition, New York, Archives, The Robert McLaughlin Gallery.

Greenberg.¹ Town, on the other hand, felt it quite unnecessary to live in the New York milieu; and in his opinion an artist could do just as well remaining in Toronto, developing without a New York mentor.

Greenberg was interested in the group and, working through Ronald, suggested he come to Toronto for a visit and give individual critiques. Greenberg came in the early summer of 1957. Town and Yarwood refused to participate, but Macdonald wrote that Greenberg:

...told me my new work was a tremendous step forward - to be able to completely free myself from the canvas limitations...He thought that Ray Mead and myself were ready for any top-notch gallery in New York or anywhere. He thought Hodgson exceedingly good, though at present the most confused...

[he said]...'In general, the New Yorkers are much slicker and more aware of what's been done and still looks plausibly possible, but they're too cut and dried, too impersonal in the final analysis and I really feel you people might have a better chance of getting something important out of yourselves simply because you're so much more open and ready to take experience as it comes. The sophisticated good taste of the New Yorkers, which works to shut off real originality, is a serious handicap in the final analysis'.²

The visit gave great impetus to the work, particularly of Luke, Bush and Macdonald. Luke wrote in her notes of Greenberg's criticism:

¹William Ronald. Toronto. Interview, 17 February 1977.

²Macdonald to Max Bates, Personal letter. 3 July 1957, Archives, McCord Museum, McGill University.

...Too busy, too much detail, too hard to conform with the idiom of the day. Become absolutely free - let pure colour stand without decorating it with another shade. Don't be afraid of space - put your large canvas on the floor, use anything but artists' brushes, use a large wall-painting brush.¹

Macdonald wrote in reference to Bush's critiques:

...To Bush he (Greenberg) gave an awful scolding though at the same time he thought him more advanced than Hodgson, Yarwood, Nakamura or Town. He told Bush to stop using idioms of design such as broad black lines from Soulages or Kline: and speak in his own way.²

Bush never forgot his dialogue with Greenberg:

...Greenberg: "You people up here are scaring the hell out of me, you're so good, but what you're doing, Bush, is just takin' all the hot licks from the New York painters, which is so easy to do".

...Bush: "You know from the beginning my worry had been to try to paint like the boys, to fit in with the crowd, and fortunately for me, I could never quite do it...the difference was Bush, and I just couldn't get rid of it."³

The group was tremendously encouraged by these events and in October, 1957, Painters Eleven moved to the new Park Gallery and gave their most prestigious show in Toronto. There was an excellent catalogue with a foreword by Paul Duval and the newspapers were well-disposed:

...These abstractionists are worth seeing, being a

¹Alexandra Luke's notebook. Archives, The Robert McLaughlin Gallery.

²Op. Cit.

³Barrie Hale, "Still Knocking Them out of the Park", The Canadian (Gazette), 27 December 1975, p. 9.

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great deal more artistically mature than one might think from the complaints of not being appreciated.¹

Vincent Tovell gave a long review which proved to be one of the most thoughtful, although, as usual, prejudicial; ending his article:

...It will be interesting to watch the course of Painters XI...they have...wrenched themselves free of that traditional (representational art) and launched themselves into space, free floating...they can't go on, it seems to me, for long in the monotonous ways of their current style.²

Painters Eleven began to run down as a group after the Park Gallery exhibition. Ronald had left for New York, Mead moved to Montréal, and the other artists seemed well set in their individual ways. The group had indeed made an impact and soon a strongly influenced new generation would begin to exhibit their works.

There was no individual Painters Eleven exhibition in Toronto in 1958 but there was a large exhibition at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Montreal in May of that year. This was an impressive show and included four paintings each, from ten of the original Painters Eleven artists. When it was over, the National Gallery selected three works from each artist and sent a special exhibition of Painters Eleven across Canada, visiting Winnipeg, Vancouver, Calgary,

¹Pearl McCarthy, "New Setting for Contemporary Art", The Globe and Mail (Toronto), 2 November 1957.

²Vincent Tovell, "Eleven Painters Start a War", Canadian Commentator, 1 No. 11, November 1957.

Edmonton, Kingston and Sackville.

The honour was returned in October when Painters Eleven invited ten Québec artists to exhibit with them at the Park Gallery. There was one painting each from Léon Bellefleur, Bordeas, Albert Dumouchel, Patterson Ewen, Riopelle and de Tonnancour (two paintings each from these last two painters). There was again an excellent brochure and, from these last two major exhibits, the reviews in both French and English were good. From the Montreal Star came real praise:

...The Eleven are sensational painters, for the most part working on a bigger scale than the Quebec non-objectives and with much greater violence.¹

This type of abstraction was now being exhibited across Canada, except for the Maritimes, and the influence of abstraction was strong. It was so strong in fact, that opposition arose from other artists, especially in Toronto. Canadian Art published a story in early 1959 which explained the Toronto controversy. The article said:

Rallying around the indignant and militant Kenneth Forbes, the Ontario Institute of Painters includes such well-known senior painters as Archibald Barnes, Manly MacDonald, Frank Panabaker, Marion Long and Evan MacDonald. They feel that not only are the times out of joint, but that well-defined conspiracies exist to discount and ignore the traditionalists in art societies and in important exhibitions. They are convinced that by stupidity or cunning, the dealers,

¹Robert Ayre, "The Sound and Fury of Painters Eleven". The Montreal Star, 10 May 1958.

critics and art gallery directors are combining with the modernists to bring about a state of artistic anarchy.¹

The conflict of the two groups, Painters Eleven and the Ontario Institute of Painters, resulted in an exhibition called Points of View, in which three types of work were shown: the abstract expressionist, the realist, and those in-between. The public was then asked to make their own decisions. It really was a very healthy sign that "art" could spark and withstand this type of controversy. The Ontario Society of Painters published a statement which said:

We believe the painter's concern should be the warm breathing world of flesh and blood and growing things. To cease to represent the visible world and attempt to paint the incomprehensible is to abandon his proper sphere. To learn from tradition is to benefit from the experience of the human race of all ages. To reject tradition entirely is to return to the vague gropings of the primitive man. To express his ideas and feelings for beauty, the artist must select from nature and by means of conception, composition and style, form the objects of his picture into a unified and harmonious whole. The traditional artist, each with his own individual discernment of beauty is not too concerned with passing fashions. We are therefore confident that traditional art with its infinite variety will be vindicated by artistically intelligent people.²

¹Clare Bice, "Conflicts in Canadian Art", Canadian Art, vol. XVI, #1, February 1959, p. 31.

²William Heine, "Points of View Make a Lively Show", Weekend Magazine, VIII, No. 45, 8 November 1958.

There was also a statement made by Painters Eleven:

Painters XI exists as a mechanism for the exhibition of work created in the spirit and character of this, the present, by artists who, though they may not agree, are kindred in creative intention. We have issued no manifesto, we have at no time insisted that ours was the only way. What we have done is paint and exhibit here and abroad receiving in the time since our formation more individual honours and collective acclaim than any other group in Canada. In so doing, we have secured recognition for the vital, creative painting done in the province. In this sense our work will soon be accomplished, and no doubt we will return to the singular ways that are best for painters anywhere, anytime.¹

A second American exhibition involved not only Painters Eleven but other Canadian artists as well. The Museum for Contemporary Art in Dallas, Texas, in 1958, mounted a show of paintings from thirty-three Canadian artists. The show was somehow inserted into "British Week", a promotion of Neiman Marcus Men's Store. All the events were British except number 15, A Canadian Portfolio. A catalogue, written by various artists, Lawren Harris, Macdonald and others, was prepared and five Painters Eleven artists were exhibited. Luke, Macdonald, Nakamura, Town and Ronald were shown, their works lent by the artists or private galleries. Macdonald noted in the preface that Painters Eleven's inclusion in the exhibition clearly showed the confidence that the National Gallery of Canada had in the group:

¹
Ibid.

...in the 1958-59 season, the National Gallery of Canada is sponsoring an eight-month Painters XI travelling exhibition across Canada. We feel that the National Gallery, through its support, has established the fact that Painters XI may now be considered a group of artists who are contributing to the historical development of art in Canada. We trust that this is so, as we all inwardly desire to contribute something of worth to the cultural assets of our country.¹

The Québec representation included a painting by Borduas and one by Riopelle, both oils.

There were no exhibitions of Painters Eleven in 1959. The National Gallery travelling exhibition mentioned by Macdonald continued from September, 1958, to March, 1959.

The exhibition had a definite influence on Western artists who worked so much in isolation. Art McKay, a future member of the Regina Five group, was ecstatic. He wrote:

...Like a breath of warm air from a more humane climate, the freshness and vigor of these paintings clears the atmosphere and purges the senses with exuberant energy...It introduces to Saskatchewan in full force, the work of the only real Canadian avant-garde movement.²

In April, 1960, the last large Painters Eleven exhibition was held in Montréal at the Stable Gallery of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. This Gallery, renovated from an adjacent stable by a group of energetic young art buffs, brought the show to Montréal. There were thirty-four

¹Catalogue, Canadian Portfolio, 4 September - 2 November 1958.

²A.F. McKay, "Painters Eleven work on display at gallery", Regina Leader Post, 29 November 1958, p. 12.

paintings by nine of the artists, dating from 1958-60, and all were for sale. Cahén and Ronald were missing. The reviews in the French press were hardly complimentary. Le Devoir damned but La Presse damned violently. This was a turn-about from 1958 when the critics were enthusiastic. Was the change of location from the Ecole des Beaux Arts to the Montreal Museum, or the new Molinari-Plasticien popularity, or the ghost of Refus global, or just bad painting the reason for this? Robert Ayre had positively glowed in 1958, but Dorothy Pfeiffer in 1960 wrote:

In the Oxford Dictionary, a painter is defined as "one who paints pictures". Possibly it is time for the dictionary to be revised. None of the Painters Eleven can possibly be classified under that definition...Some of the work...appears forced, imitative and even pretentious. Occasionally, it is also strangely dull to those who follow contemporary art-books and publications from other countries.¹

Discussing the exhibition, La Presse said:

Ce qu'on imagine de pire est là. Supposez que vous écrasez un tube de couleur pour en faire gicler la pâte, ou que vous peignez avec un guidon de bicyclette ou avec la queue d'un cheval qui se promène sur le canvas, ou encore que vous crachez votre dentifrice en pleine toile, et vous aurez une peinture du Groupe des Onze...Flic! Flac! De la peinture à coups de balai ou de vadrouille!²

¹Dorothy Pfeiffer, "Painters Eleven", The Gazette (Montreal), 16 April 1960.

²The worst that one can imagine is there. Suppose that you squash a tube of colour to squirt out the paste or that you comb [it out] with a handlebar or horse's tail which wanders over the canvas, or yet again that you spit your dentifrice full at the canvas, and you will have a painting by Painters Eleven...Flic! Flac! Painting by means of a broom or mop. "Le Groupe des Onze", La Presse (Montréal) 16 avril 1960.

Françoise de Repentigny wrote in Le Devoir:

La galerie est infestée d'une espèce curieuse de peinture sorte d'assommoir pictural, faite pour boucher les trous avec désinvolture grotesque...

Leur art est surpeuplé, leur verve bâtarde. Cet emportement dans le fatras des couleurs contribue à émousser l'artiste. Il s'en suit un gaspillage pénible à voir, triste farce, de pâte, de papiers collés, de morceaux de toile rapiécés, glanés ici et là: une tour de Babel moderne.¹

Fair reviews were given to Macdonald, Town and Nakamura but the rest fell into limbo. Repentigny ended by saying that the exhibition was a nightmare. A partial explanation may be found in a letter Macdonald wrote to Max Bates:

...Have felt for the last eighteen months that Painters XI were at the end. No longer the old unity. Most for themselves. Producing 7' X 7' or 8' X 7' canvasses to grasp the attention of the centre of the walls or even to out-do each other. And these canvasses fail to convey the qualities formerly evident in smaller works. I think Town believes he has grown beyond the association he once desired with other artists. Yarwood paints decidedly better than most of the group.²

It is difficult for artists to remain part of a group for any length of time. Egocentric and individualistic by nature, once their purpose is accomplished, they move in new

¹The Gallery is infested by a peculiar kind of painting, a sort of pictorial brickbat, specially made to block up holes with grotesque éase... Their art is over-crowded, their sense of humour bastard. The artists are carried away by a hodge-podge of colours which have an exhilarating effect on them. So much waste is a sorry sight, a sad farce, of paste, paper, glue, bits and pieces of canvas, darned together: a modern Tower of Babel. Françoise de Repentigny, "Peinture sans issue", Le Devoir (Montréal), 23 avril 1960.

²Macdonald to Bates, Personal letter. 12 November 1958, Archives, Concordia University.

directions. This became a fact for both the Automatist and Painters Eleven groups. Bush as secretary-treasurer wrote in his diary:

...to wind it up, in the spring of 1959, I suspected that things had come to an impasse. I called a meeting held at Tom Hodgson's studio. Present were Jock Macdonald, Harold Town, Walter Yarwood, Alexandra Luke, Tom Hodgson and myself. The question was: Do we disband or continue? Some wanted to continue as a group, some wanted to disband. The vote was finally - disband.¹

One final exhibition followed in Kitchener in December, 1960. The review, with the usual lack of understanding or awareness, wrote a fitting end to Painters Eleven.

Painters Eleven are in for a surprise...who are described as "next to the Group of Seven... the only other small group to become a force in the Canadian Art World", would have found doubt expressed regarding not only the validity of their means of expression (i.e. are their paintings art?) but also the category "national"... As to the exhibition itself, one wonders if the paintings are not too personal or too limited in experience to warrant more than passing attention.²

Despite the adversely critical opinions built up during the five years of their existence, Painters Eleven could not be denied their place in history. They broke the academic stranglehold on English-Canadian painting just as the Automatists did in French Canada. In this way, both groups contributed substantially to the vigorous upsurge in contemporary painting in Canada.

¹Jack Bush, Diary, 19 October 1960. Archives, The Robert McLaughlin Gallery.

²"Painters Eleven Lack Cohesion", Guelph Guardian, 6 December 1960.

Analysis of Style

The Automatists, Montréal

The development of Automatism revolved around the key figure of Paul-Emile Borduas. In the late nineteen thirties and early nineteen forties, he had seen in various art books and periodicals, examples of work by Cézanne, Picasso, Braque and various Surrealist artists. Searching for a suitable form of expression for his ideas, he tried out the style of each of these painters, rejecting all but the latter group.

La femme à la mandoline, 1941, (ill. 1), although strongly related to a portrait of the same name done by Picasso in 1910, it combines Picasso's technique of Analytic Cubism, seen in the treatment of the mandolin, hair and breasts, and the volumetric considerations of Cézanne indicated in the use of colour. The figure is simplified rather than fragmented, built up of volume; the nose, breasts and hands share the same intensity of light. The subject is pressed to the picture plane and surrounded by a thick, dark line which cuts it out from the background. The diamonds on either side are inspired by Picasso and echo the background leaf motif found in Pellán's work Jeune fille aux anémones, 1934, which Borduas had recently seen in Pellán's retro-



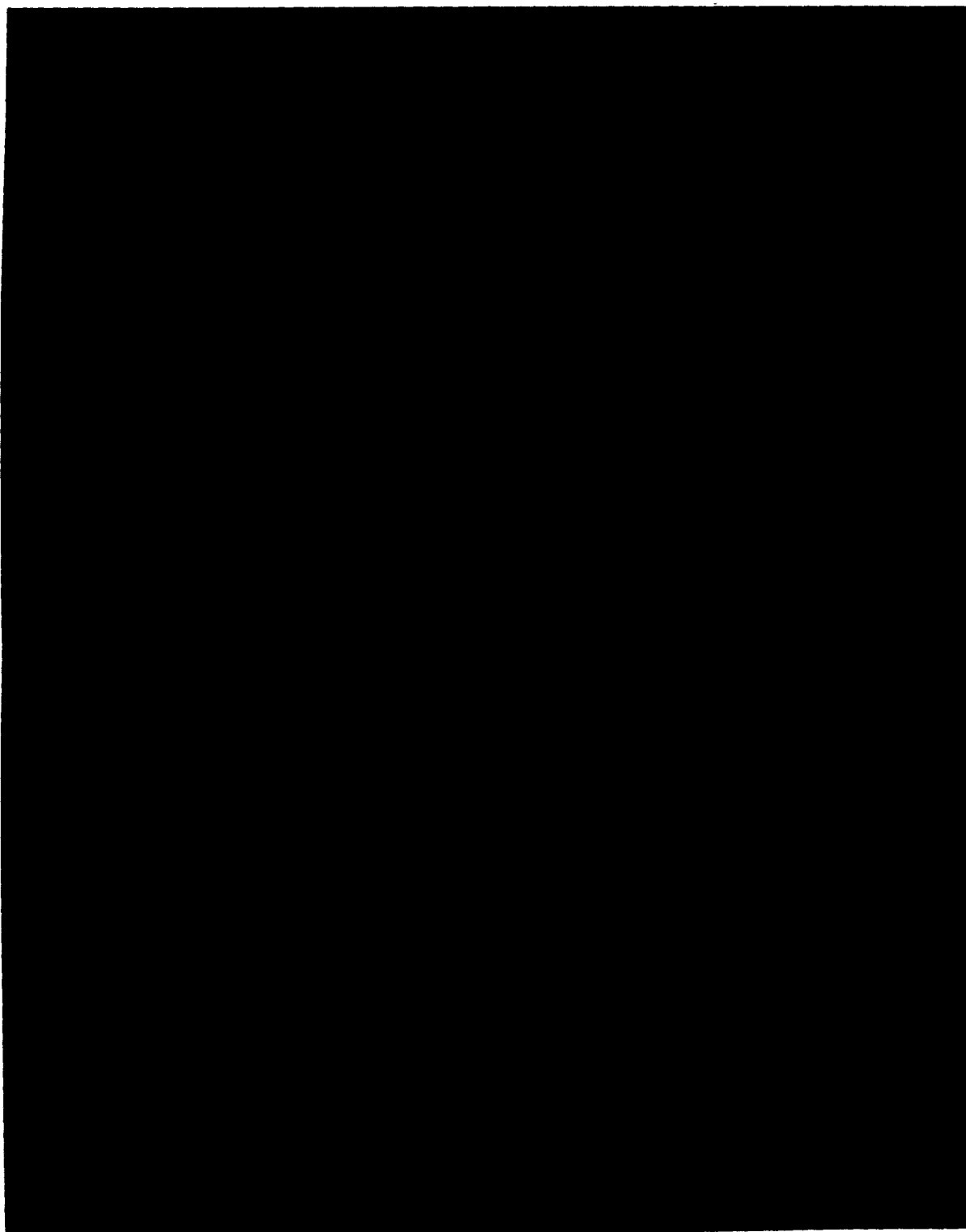
1. La femme à la mandoline, 1941, P.-E. Borduas.
Oil on canvas. 81 x 63.5 cm.

spective exhibition at Montreal in October, 1940.

Nature morte, Ananas et poires, 1941, (ill. 2), is also an experiment based on Cézanne's technique of situating objects in space, found in still life paintings. Rather than placing the fruit directly on a white cloth or dish, Borduas surrounded it with a heavy black line causing him two specific problems: the fruit seemed to float over a black "hole" in the canvas and, further, the composition had a tendency to slide down the picture plane. Borduas found that neither the Cézanne- or Cubist-inspired techniques of situating objects in space was the answer to his problems. Both caused difficulties in execution and both required a conscious dictate of will in order to organize the elements. Preconceptions were not eliminated and the conscious mind was always in control.

Borduas was searching, not for an abstract mode of painting, but for a way to move from the outer to the inner expression. In this inner world, the world of the unconscious mind, are objects, figures and forms ungoverned by the constraints of reality. He found in Surrealism, the group led by André Breton, the ideas and method he wished to pursue.¹

¹In the Surrealist Manifesto, 1924, these ideas of automatism and dream images were joined within a framework of social revolution. Borduas had commented on this aspect of Surrealism in 1942 in his paper, Manières de goûter une oeuvre d'art, but it was not until later in his career that he published his idea of social revolution in manifesto form, Refus global, 1948.



2. Nature morte, Ananas et poires, 1947, P.-E. Borduas. Oil on canvas. 48.3 x 61 cm.

Originally a literary movement, but later encompassing painting, Surrealism represents primarily a revolution in subject matter. It took its inspiration not from the exterior or natural world but from the interior and irrational nature of man himself. Surrealist painting was loosely based on two of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic techniques: association of ideas and analysis of dreams.

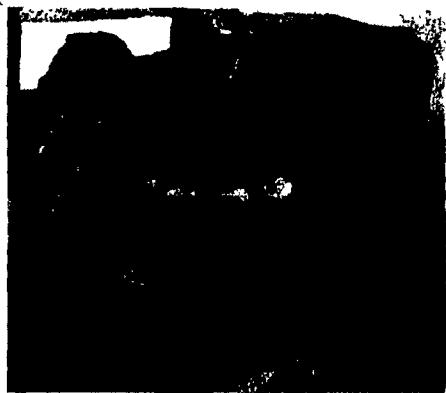
Automatism in painting was the counterpart of verbal, free association of ideas and automatic writing in literature. It was the unconscious directing the hand and led to automatic painting.

Cimetière marin, 1942, (ill. 3), shows the influence of Miró and Masson on Borduas' "Surrealist" paintings. The "writing" of unconscious thoughts in painting involved the hand with line. Later these "lines" were joined in a random manner and this explained the presence of organic or biomorphic shapes. Borduas felt that the pictorial space was Surrealist, but it was, in fact, shallow and Cubist-inspired, reflecting his earlier experiments with spatial solutions.

Salvator Dali and René Magritte used dreams for their inspiration. Dreams recall remembered images and it is the unusual juxtaposition of objects which distinguishes this type of painting, the form relating objects in a renaissance or three-dimensional space. This aspect is also evident in some of Borduas' works of 1942-43 such as La Cavale infernale, 1943, (ill. 4).



3. Cimetière marin, 1942, P.-E. Borduas.
Gouache on paper. 46.4 x 61.6 cm.



4. La Cavalle infernale, 1943, P.-E. Borduas
Oil on canvas. 40.6 x 45.7 cm.

Borduas' knowledge of Surrealism came from a variety of sources. His discussions with Maurice Gagnon dating from the mid-nineteen thirties were very significant. Gagnon was the librarian and taught history of art at the Ecole du Meuble in Montréal. His book, Peinture Moderne, published in 1943, made reference to the main ideas found in Surrealism, those of automatic writing and dreams, and named André Masson and Salvador Dalí among the leading Surrealist artists.

In the late nineteen thirties, Borduas encountered authentic French sources in the Surrealist publication Minotaure, found in the library of the Ecole du Meuble. In edition number 8 of 15 June 1936, Borduas encountered in a chapter of "L'Amour fou", entitled 'Château étoilé' by André Breton, a description of automatic writing which he found a useful tool for his own experiments. Breton relates a method which Leonardo da Vinci used with his students:

...La leçon de Léonard engageant ses élèves à copier leurs tableaux sur ce qu'ils verraient se peindre (de remarquablement coordonné et de propre à chacun d'eux) en considérant longuement un vieux mur, est loin d'être comprise. Tout le problème du passage de la subjectivité à l'objectivité y est implicitement résolu et la portée de cette résolution dépasse de beaucoup en intérêt humain celle d'une technique, quand cette technique serait celle de l'inspiration même.¹

¹Leonardo's lesson is far from being understood. He would ask his pupils to gaze at an old wall for a long period of time and to copy in their paintings what they would see appear there (this would be remarkably well coordinated and particular to each one of them). The whole problem of the passage from subjectivity to objectivity is therein implicitly resolved and the thrust of this resolution greatly exceeds in human interest that of a new technique, even if the technique were that of the inspiration itself. Minotaure, "L'Amour Fou", 'Château étoilé', No.8, 15 June 1936, p. 125.

He makes further allusions, in the titles of several of his 1942 paintings, to the work of the Surrealist poets, Isidore Ducasse, dit le Comte de Lautréamont, and Arthur Rimbaud¹ and, according to Maurice Gagnon, he was reading these poets at the moment he was painting in 1942.

There are also American sources for Borduas' knowledge of Surrealism but they are not as precise. In 1943, while on a visit to New York, he saw several exhibitions of Surrealist paintings and purchased books and catalogues on the subject. He was also aware of the American Surrealist publication, VVV.

Borduas also had in Canada a resource in the person of Alfred Pellán, newly-arrived back in Canada in 1940 with paintings demonstrating the whole gamut of School of Paris styles: Fauvist, Cubist and Surrealist.

The outcome of his readings, discussions and exposure to Surrealist paintings were soon evident. The paintings in gouache which Borduas showed at the exhibition Peintures surréalistes, April, 1942, were painted without pre-conceived ideas, without subject matter and without a title until the work was completed. In these paintings, following the technique of automatic writing, Borduas used charcoal on the paper to build up a network of lines and then filled in the

¹The following two titles were related to these poets: Abstraction 5 or Combat de Maldoror et de l'aigle and Abstraction 13 or Taureau et Toréador après le combat, noted in Gagnon, F.-M., Borduas, (Montréal: Fides, 1978), p. 131.

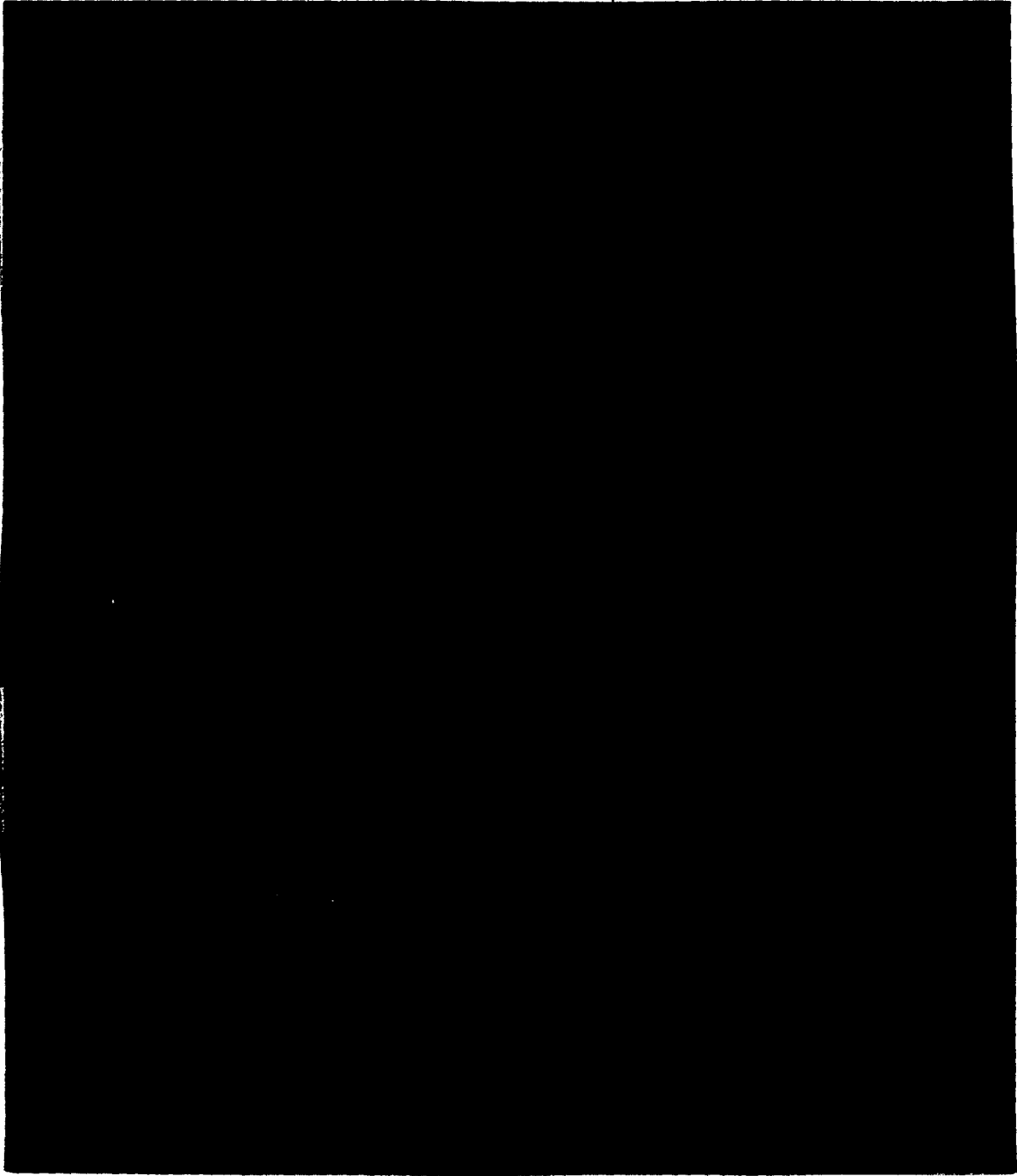
spaces with colour. He described the paper as his "paranoiac screen". This term, first used by Salvador Dali in 1934, referred to the surface which, when stared at over a period of time, produced a variety of phantasmagoria. Dali had profited by Leonardo's lesson of the wall.

The results did not seem entirely spontaneous. There was a similarity in the arabesques formed by the lines, and the colour had a certain determinism, with red versus green as the predominant combination. The work seemed pre-determined and the spontaneity structured. The works, when finished, were merely titled Abstraction 1, Abstraction 2, and so on, but later, when exhibited they acquired names for the benefit of the viewer; thus, Cimetière marin for Abstraction 11, 1942, or Chantecler for Abstraction 6, 1942.

Borduas' earlier figurative formats had consistently used vertical rectangles for portraits and horizontal for landscape and still life. An analysis of the titles of the forty-five gouaches also indicates that he continued to follow this format. Those that are vertical acquire a portrait character such as Chantecler while those on the horizontal, like Cimetière marin, have a title indicating landscape or still life. The titles themselves depend on the Surrealist technique of association of ideas, used to stimulate the unconscious in the search for imagery. The titles used by Borduas have references that are intellectually tenuous while remaining visually meaningful such as Phare l'évêque, 1942.

Viol aux confins de la matière, 1943, (ill. 5), is representative of the change which occurred in 1943. Borduas began to transfer his spontaneous gouache experiments to oil. The thickness and slow-drying quality of the medium presented problems and he was forced to change his methods. He now painted the background black or grey / black using wide, horizontal brushstrokes. After this had dried, he painted the foreground with quick strokes in a vertical manner. He continued this vertical/horizontal format throughout the Automatist period and influenced the other members to do the same. For this reason, there is an unusual homogeneity in the work of the Automatists.

Borduas's work is the definition of Automatist style. It was he who initiated the techniques and directed their application. Style for Borduas was the explicit expression of inner emotions too complex and elusive to be spontaneously revealed except by a strict application of and conformity to the idiom and techniques he created and used; in his view deviation was heresy. Such rigorous constraints gave homogeneity of style to the work of the Automatists but also invited reaction from the artists themselves. After the emergence of the Plasticiens in 1955, the Automatist style had few imitators; even Borduas himself had by then become infected with a different style (New York Abstract Expressionism).



5. Viol aux confins de la matière, 1943, P.-E. Borduas. Oil on canvas. 40 x 46 cm.

Analysis of Style

Painters Eleven, Toronto

The Automatists as a group revolved around and took direction from one central figure, Paul-Emile Borduas, and developed their style according to definite concepts.

Contrary to this, Painters Eleven were a like-minded but disparate group of artists who originally joined together for exhibition purposes.

The structure of the Painters Eleven group precluded that Jock Macdonald's position would be similar to Borduas' in the Automatists, that of master to pupil. Macdonald was influential as a teacher of Harold Town, Alexandra Luke and William Ronald; however, his importance was tied more strongly to the evolution of his style. Macdonald began as a Group of Seven landscape artist but evolved, in a thirty-year career, through the use of automatic painting, to Referential Abstraction.

During Macdonald's Vancouver years, he and Lawren Harris were involved in discussions and experiments with abstract art. They were well aware of Surrealism with its central idea of automatism and in 1949, Harris wrote in an article for Canadian Art:

...These new ways of painting are called abstract, non-objective, non-representational or non-figurative (these are all misnomers). These are not the same as Surrealism. Surrealism is automatic painting, where the whole process comes from and is controlled by the unconscious. (I here refer to the Surrealism of André Breton)...Whereas the process of abstract painting is a creative interplay between the conscious and unconscious with the conscious mind making all the final decisions and in control throughout. This leads to quite different results, in that it draws upon the full powers of the practitioner and therefore contains a much fuller range of communication and significance.¹

Macdonald's automatic paintings of the 1930's, the Modalities, were a combination of geometric abstraction with Art Deco elements and reflected his academic education in design. The 1946 automatics continued to retain figurative tendencies. Their structure echoed that of Cézanne, Picasso and other School of Paris artists but the work was light, spontaneous and free in character.

Macdonald shared with Borduas the problem of transferring ink and water colour, which are rapid, flexible mediums, into oil, with the consequent loss of spontaneity. The oils of 1948 reflect his search for a solution.

Bird and Environment, 1948, (ill. 6) is a completely automatic work and does not seem dissimilar to Borduas' Fortified Island, 1941, (ill. 7). The centralized subject is surrounded by Cézanne-inspired dark lines but the bird has been flattened in a Cubist manner and the definition

¹Lawren Harris, "An essay on Abstract Painting", Canadian Art, vol. VI, no.3, Spring, 1949, p. 104.



6. Bird and Environment, 1948, J.W.G. Macdonald.
Oil on canvas. 63.5 x 88.9 cm.



7. Fortified Island, 1941, P.-E. Borduas.
Oil on canvas. 68.6 x 87 cm.

between foreground and background is ill-defined.

Ocean Legend, 1947, (ill. 8), also an oil has a strong relationship to a Cubist-inspired painting, Woman, 1925, by André Masson (ill. 9). The Analytic Cubist fragmentation has been transformed into the biomorphism of Surrealism and the total work retains a figure-on-ground relationship.

The basic dichotomy in Macdonald's work was the conflict between the intellectual and plastic approach to painting and the difficulty inherent in their reconciliation. Macdonald spent two brief sessions with Hans Hofmann at his school in Provincetown in 1948 and 1949, and subsequently met him in New York. More important than painting were their discussions based on the ideas found in Wassily Kandinsky's book Concerning the Spiritual in Art, 1912. Their talks ranged over many topics of common interest; the recording of inner feelings on canvas, imagery based on nature, the psychology and physiological effect of colour in producing three-dimensional space and form and the effect of the medium on the artist - how he transforms this into the reality of the painting.¹

Deeply affected by these sessions with Hofmann, Macdonald, like Borduas, had to search his inner self for the strength to change his whole concept of painting. For neither did the transition come easily, and only in the

¹Roger Lee, The Theories of Hans Hofmann and their Influence on his West-Coast Canadian Students, p. 27.



8. Ocean Legend, 1947, J.W.G. Macdonald.
Oil on canvas. 86.4 x 61 cm.



9. Woman, 1925, André Masson. Oil on canvas.
73 x 72.4 cm.

company of like-minded artists did they completely accomplish their purpose. Macdonald wrote in 1952:

...Our concepts about nature, space and time have brought into being a new form of consciousness. The abstract artist is expressing his inner vision of this new form of awareness. The new concepts of space cannot be expressed through the former illusion of visual perspective. In abstract art the "space" is created through the energies and transitions realized by the directions of lines and space, the movement of inter-related forms, and the spatial qualities of colour. An artist must seek to discover new forms of beauty.¹

Pictorially, the Hofmann style was influential on Painters Eleven development. Three other members together with Macdonald had studied with him in New York: Ronald, Luke and Gordon. Hofmann was never deeply interested in Dada or Surrealism, although he was aware of automatism. Rather, his mentor was Kandinsky in form and colour, and his abstractions were based on nature. Macdonald saw Hofmann's ideas translated into the works of the Abstract Expressionists in New York, as many of these artists had attended his school in New York during the nineteen thirties and nineteen forties. However, Pollock's introduction of the gesture, a natural result of automatism, revealed a method which would allow Macdonald to synthesize his ideas.

The style displayed by Painters Eleven artists falls roughly into the two categories; gestural and lyrical painting. The dynamic "gestural" or "action" painting that was

¹Brochure, Canadian Abstract Exhibition, 1952, Painting No. 26.

introduced by Pollock in New York results in a work that is anti-formal, imageless, energetic and free in brush work. The visible characteristics are splatters, scratching, and gouging, together with a thick and painterly surface.

The works of Ronald, Town, Hodgson, Bush and Yarwood reflect this style. However, their works do retain images but also display a furious energy of brush and palette knife strokes coupled with rich, luscious colour reminiscent of Matisse.

J'accuse, 1956, by Ronald, (ill. 10), is a representative painting in this style. The taut, centralized image is held by a vertical/horizontal grid. This containment creates a visible and emotional tension emphasized by the rough diamond shape and the upward, diagonal surge of the image. The sharp colour contrasts of red, black and white and the heavy impasto texture contribute to the painting's rough, dynamic appearance. Two-dimensionality is achieved by the integration of foreground objects with background space. The red image moves up and over the lower two-thirds of the canvas whereas, in the upper portion, the background seems to move over the diamond shape into the foreground.

In the early years, Hodgson, Town and Mead were experimenting with Synthetic Cubism and gestural painting. Found objects, paper and fabrics of all kinds were integrated with rich colours creating a three-dimensional surface. A change occurred with these artists by 1957. They moved from



10. J'accuse, 1957, William Ronald. Oil on cotton.
152.4 x 177.8 cm.

the heavy impasto to a thinner, looser paint and the number of objects was reduced and simplified.

In contrast to the emotionally-charged work of Ronald and Town, the paintings of Macdonald, Luke and Nakamura present a more tranquil and lyrical appearance. The composition may be either centralized or all-over, frequently continuing beyond the confines of the frame. There is an elegance of shape and a smoother texture achieved by the elimination of the thick, creamy impasto favoured by the other members.

Journey Through Space by Alexandra Luke, 1956,

(ill. 11), the cosmic forms move diagonally across the picture plane as though pulled by some anti-gravitational force towards a space outside the frame of the painting. The colours are variegated blues with white and black, recalling man's conception of the universe. Thinned, rather dry, brush strokes working up from the lower right give the swirling images a feeling of weightlessness. The painting retains three-dimensionality, the infinity of space. A number of the artists, especially Macdonald, were regular readers of Scientific American, an American periodical, and were fascinated with the ideas and discoveries of 'outer space'.

Bush was asked in 1964, about the sources of the Painters Eleven style. He wrote:



11. Journey Through Space, 1956, Alexandra Luke.
Oil on linen canvas. 210.7 x 148.5 cm.

...Prime inspiration was Montréal. Borduas, Lyman and de Tonnancour had discovered France-Paris. Then on to Kline, de Kooning, Pollock. Through Ronald all invited to show at American Abstract Artists in New York, '56. First physical contact with kindred spirits. Gave a real challenge ...we were instinctively wise to pay attention to New York. Paris was not really the thing that drew us.¹

From the above, it can be seen that the evolution of Painters Eleven style combines concepts from both Surrealist and non-objective sources and allows for a rich and diverse product. This Referential style has continued to influence young artists until the present.

This analysis of style would be incomplete without reference to the emotional dimension. The subjective impact on the viewer of Referential Abstraction is clearly different from one's response to figurative works. Identification of and with recognizable objects establishes a foothold for the viewer in the artist's experience and a partial sharing of perception and mood as conveyed by the technique and in the aesthetic statement inherent in the work. Referential Abstraction offers no such easy bridging with the subjective; the emotional expression of the artist incorporated into a given painting may, or may not, be reflected in the reactions of the viewer, depending on the temperament and sensitivity of each. On the other hand, the significance of a specific non-figurative work relates in part to the intensity of the

emotional response induced, regardless of whether or not such response has anything in common with the actual feelings of the artist while painting it.

The Automatists display an inhibited intensity which is readily perceived by the viewer. This may explain why the group eventually found it necessary to move on to other idiomatic forms of expression such as geometric or "Plasticien" style with which they felt more comfortable.

Painters Eleven, on the other hand, were so robust and exuberant that the emotional release was effectively complete at the moment of execution and, therefore, while the style was imitated and continued by other artists, the painters themselves either moved on to a different manifestation of painting or lost momentum.

Epilogue

From the vantage of time present, it is interesting to note that the introduction of Referential Abstraction to Canada in the nineteen forties and nineteen fifties evoked either little (at best) or severely critical (at worst) comment from even the most sensitive observers at the time.

Firmly rooted in a vigorous European movement (Surrealism) and appearing in Canada through two distinct cultural apertures, Referential Abstraction should have aroused greater curiosity and expectation when it appeared. Instead, it was either neglected or villified.

Nevertheless, as subsequent events have amply demonstrated, both the Automatists and Painters Eleven anticipated, by a decade and more, the radical shift in social attitudes that appeared in the nineteen sixties, particularly in Europe and North America. This shift saw a greater emphasis on self, a removal of traditional constraints, the drug culture, equal rights movements, la Révolution tranquille in Québec, and major confrontation between youth and the so-called establishment.

Referential Abstraction is therefore important not only as a major development in the history of art in Canada, but also as the unrecognized harbinger of the dynamic social events that have taken place in our midst in the twenty years that have followed the disbanding of Painters Eleven.

CHAPTER. III

TEACHING EXAMPLES

Introduction

The teaching proposal contained in this chapter presents a series of lesson plans within a semester's framework. These plans are aimed at the Secondary and Junior College level and presuppose a basic knowledge of twentieth century European painting styles.

The goal for the semester is to explore three ways of involving the students with Referential Abstraction, particularly emphasizing two Canadian groups: the Automatists of Montréal and Painters Eleven of Toronto.

The three approaches considered in this proposal may be used in sequence or at the discretion of the teacher. They involve three units of three lessons each under the titles:

1. Visual perception: A cognitive process which observes how the artist in the twentieth century has changed the role of, and organized, the elements of design in Referential Abstraction.
2. Critical analysis: A process which analyzes Canadian Referential Abstraction in terms of design elements, artistic intent and aesthetic validity.

3. Historical perspective: The location and evolution of Referential Abstraction through a study of two groups of Canadian artists, the Automatists of Montréal and Painters Eleven of Toronto.

The information found in Chapter II, "Background for Teaching", relates directly to the historical chronology and analysis of Referential Abstraction in Canadian painting. These sections form the background for the lesson plans and should be used as reading assignments for Unit II and Unit III. Additional research information is also provided within the lesson plans themselves and in the Appendices.

Evaluation techniques to test the effectiveness of the learning process are provided at the end of each unit. The testing is carried out by means of a "Visual Treasure Hunt", a written test and an essay.

UNIT I VISUAL PERCEPTIONIntroduction

The concern of Unit I is to encourage students to "see" what they are looking at.

This unit refers to selected postcard reproductions, taken from a package of twenty-four supplied in Non-Print Material, and provides teaching information and questions.

The teacher should read the information himself and then, without comment, present the reproductions and questions to the students. Discussion should be encouraged.

An evaluation procedure is described at the end of the unit consisting of a game which makes use of all of the reproductions.

UNIT I VISUAL PERCEPTION

LESSON 1. A STUDY OF LINE AND SHAPE

Objective:

To understand the changing role of line and shape in specific examples from Referential Abstraction.

To observe line and shape and differentiate their visual relationships.

Content:

Line and shape may be represented in different ways. With the use of reproductions the student will:

- 1) recognize lines existing independently of shape, as elements in their own right;
- 2) recognize lines creating silhouettes and contour lines defining shapes;
- 3) recognize organic shapes created by line;
- 4) recognize organic shapes created without line;
- 5) recognize the relationships of the lines and shapes in a composition.

1) Emphasis on line as an element

a) Caligraphic Line

Reproduction: Transit, 1943, Mark Tobey.

Teaching information:

Mark Tobey presents lines as independent objects in this work. They are symbolic, playful and animated but never lose their two-dimensional quality even when they cross each other.

Other artists who used line in this way are: Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee, Harold Town.

Questions for class-room discussion:

How does Tobey present line in Transit?

Describe the quality of the line in Transit.

What kind of feelings do you have while looking at this painting?

b) Continuous gesture

Reproduction: Number 1, 1948, Jackson Pollock.

Teaching information:

Pollock moved from figurative symbols to Referential Abstraction in 1947. In this he was influenced by the Surrealist artists to use accident, chance and automatic writing as techniques to unlock the unconscious mind, the source of imagery. The subject of Pollock's paintings from this time became the skein of continuous line without beginning or end, created by the drip of paint acting as a pencil. The weaving of the line in and out led to an ambiguity of picture space between foreground and background creating a two-dimensional composition. The continuous line further prevented the eye from resting, building up tension between the work and the viewer.

This kind of painting is called "action" painting because the action of the artist involved in the technique is evident. It is also called "gesture" painting as the path of the line indicates the gesture of the artist as he works. Another artist who worked in this way was William Ronald.

Questions for class-room discussion:

What is the subject of this painting?

Where do you think the idea for the subject of the painting came from?

How would you describe what the artist does when he paints?

If line is defined as a path of action, describe the path the eye follows in this painting.

What is the quality of the line?

What kind of space is found in this painting?

How do you feel when looking at this painting?

2) Emphasis on silhouette and contour lines

Reproduction: Of Birds and Grass No. 2, 1954,
Jack Shadbolt.

Teaching information:

Jack Shadbolt began to produce paintings in which many of the representational elements were simplified. By doing this, some of the shapes became silhouettes but the majority of the shapes remained three-dimensional contoured shapes defined by line.

Other artists who used line in this way were Paul Klee and Wassily Kandisky.

Questions for class-room discussion:

How do you define a silhouette?

How do you define a contour line?

How are the majority of shapes defined in this composition?

How else is line used in this painting?

3) Emphasis on organic shape with line

Reproduction: Agony, 1947, Arshile Gorky

Teaching information:

The organic shapes used by Gorky are a product of automatism, the images dictated by the unconscious mind. The contours of the shapes are created by thin, attenuated lines, frequently superimposed over colour; which do not always

contain or outline them. The shapes are joined by tautly stretched lines producing strong tensions. The shapes float across the ground and are seldom totally defined by either the contour line or the colour.

Another artist who created shape in this way was Alexandra Luke.

Questions for class-room discussion:

How would you describe the shapes in Agony?

How does the artist create the shapes in Agony?

Describe the feeling you have looking at these shapes.

What is the source of these shapes?

4) Emphasis on organic shape without line

Reproduction: Composition (Abstraction), 1955,
Willem de Kooning

Teaching information:

The organic shapes used by de Kooning are a product of automatism which in the post-1947 period had become embodied in the "gesture" of the artist. This gesture produced shapes created by slashes of thick paint that reflected the "action" of the artist while painting.

Other artists who created shape in this manner are Hans Hofmann, Franz Kline, Paul-Emile Borduas.

Questions for class-room discussion:

What words would you use to describe these shapes?

Describe how the artist might have made these shapes.

To what realm do you think these shapes relate? Give your reasons.

5) Differentiation of line and shape

Reproduction: La machine à Bonheur, 1958,
René Marcil

Teaching information:

This painting reflects different types of lines and shapes. The lines contour shapes or form silhouettes, are objects themselves or create recognizable symbols. The shapes are both geometric and organic. These lines and shapes build up recognizable patterns and rhythms through repetition.

Questions for class-room discussion:

Are you able to recognize specific shapes in this composition?

Are the shapes always defined by line?

What purpose did the artist have in mind when he used both organic and geometric shapes?

How is the rhythm set up in this painting?

What mood does this work evoke? How is it done?

Describe the pictorial space in which these lines and shapes are situated.

UNIT I VISUAL PERCEPTION.

LESSON 2 A STUDY OF COLOUR AND TEXTURES

Objective:

To observe the changes which have taken place in the role and function of colour in Referential Abstraction.

To consider the use of texture in Referential Abstraction.

Content:

Colour and texture will be explored. With the use of reproductions the student will:

- 1) observe how the use of colour has changed from the description of an object to an objective description of a natural phenomenon: emotion or spiritual state;
- 2) examine how colours, acting in concert set up vibrations and movements on a ground and cause varying emotions from tranquility to excitement;
- 3) consider the importance of texture.

1) Emphasis on the role of colour in Referential Abstraction

Reproduction: Floodtide, 1959, J.W.G. Macdonald.

Teaching information:

- This painting is an objective reference to the energy of nature known to man through science. This is reflected in the monumental red and blue forms which surge upward and beyond the frame of the painting. Images, created by colours, are the vehicle through which Macdonald is able to translate his thoughts and emotions.

Questions for class-room discussion:

What is this painting about? How do we know?

How important is the title of a painting?

What design element seems most important in this painting (line, shape, colour, texture)?

What is the role of colour in this painting?

If we think of each colour as a different actor in a play, how has the artist been able to keep the characters in balance?

What mood does the painting have? How is this mood created?

2) Emphasis on the creation of movement and emotion by the manipulation of colour

Reproduction: Yellow Space, 1961, Alexandra Luke.

Teaching information:

This water colour from 1961 has a fluidity, softness of tone and clarity of colour which emerges in Luke's work after 1957. She uses black as a compressing mechanism on all four sides preventing the loose yellow and yellow orange images from floating completely off the picture plane.

There is a contrast between the warm yellow-orange and the cool grey creating a forward-backward motion, a balance.

The colours in this painting blend and move in such an accidental manner that the transparency and fluidity of colour gives an airy and free feeling.

Other artists who used colour in this manner are Mark Rothko, Adolph Gottlieb, J.W.G. Macdonald.

Questions for class-room discussion:

If you look at this painting carefully, do you find that certain colours move? How do they move? Can you explain this?

Describe how these shapes are prevented from moving off the 'picture' plane.

How do you feel when you see colours such as black, white, grey and yellow?

When these same colours are juxtaposed in this painting, do they generate the same feelings or do your feelings change?

How much does colour affect the total feeling of this painting?

3) Consider the importance of texture

Reproduction: Landing, 1958, J.-P. Riopelle.

Teaching information:

Texture involves two distinct aspects in painting. The first is the manner in which the artist manipulates his paint in order to give a visual texture to the objects as the viewer perceives them.

Quite separate, is the actual surface texture of the painting. Referential Abstraction is based on Surrealism which has translated automatism into gesture. In the texture of the paint, the viewer is able to identify with the force and dynamism of the artist's emotion at the moment of inspiration.

Riopelle loads his brush and with one gesture lays a slash of paint on the canvas. Repeated, this gesture builds up a rich and dynamic surface to both sight and touch.

Questions for class-room discussion:

Do you think there would be difference between the look and the feel of the surface texture of this painting?

How has Riopelle created the texture? What tool did he use? Try to explain his technique.

Can you explain why so many of the Referential paintings have such a dynamic and tactile surface?

UNIT I VISUAL PERCEPTION

LESSON 3 EVALUATION

Objective:

To assess the progress made by the students in response to Referential Abstraction through a written test.

Content:

The students will participate in a game, A Visual Treasure Hunt, which has three learning objectives:

- 1) An emphasis on terminology and meaning.
- 2) A transfer of knowledge from the known to the unknown.
- 3) A stimulus for class discussion.

Game: A Visual Treasure Hunt

Instructions:

The object of the game is to recognize the elements of design used by different artists. There are eight questions whose answers are found in the twenty-four postcard reproductions provided for Unit I. The answers should be in writing. A teacher's answer sheet is provided.

Game Questions:

1. A painter can apply his paint in different ways, either very thin creating a wash (a watery look) or a thick, textured surface called impasto (whipped cream texture).

Find two paintings where a wash is used.

Find two paintings where the artist has used impasto.

2. Non-objective as opposed to Referential paintings may include geometric shapes.
Can you find paintings with the following shapes: circles, triangles, squares, parallels, cones, etc.; list as many as you can.
3. Referential paintings may include organic (natural) shapes. List at least four paintings with organic shapes.
4. Find paintings where the lines:
 - a) describe a contour;
 - b) describe a silhouette;
 - c) are hatched or cross-hatched;
 - d) themselves are objects.
5. The texture can often tell you which tool has been used to apply the paint. In the following, find the painting where the tool was:
 - a) a small brush;
 - b) a large brush;
 - c) a palette knife;
 - d) dripping from the can;
 - e) scratched with an implement;
 - f) a dry brush;
 - g) water-colour on wet paper;
 - h) a spatula loaded with colour.
6. Some paintings have intense, bright colours while others have quiet colours. Select three paintings with intense colours and three with quiet colours.
7. The red in Kline's painting, Dahlia, 1959, is very intense. How is this achieved?
8. What is the dominant colour in Sans titre no 1 by Marcelle Ferron? Why is it difficult to find?

Teacher's Answer Sheet:

1. Wash: Blue and Green, 1953, Kazuo Nakamura
Yellow Space, 1961, Alexandra Luke

Impasto: Fond blanc, 1957, P.-E. Borduas
Sans titre no 1, 1961, Marcelle Ferron
Rosy Fingered Dawn, 1963, W. de Kooning
Landing, 1958, J.-P. Riopelle

2. Circles: Frozen Sounds Number 1, 1951, Adolph
Gottlieb
- Squares: Red Square & Black Square, 1915,
Kasimir Malevich
- Triangles: Bavarian Don Giovanni, 1919,
Paul Klee
3. Organic shapes: Painting, 1948, W. de Kooning
Festive Pink, 1959, H. Hofmann
Ascend, N/D, Oscar Cahén
Floodtide, N/D, J.W.G. Macdonald
4. Contour: Agony, 1947, Arshile Gorky
- Silhouette: Frozen Sounds Number 1
- Hatched & cross-hatched: Blue and Green
- As objects: Pillars and Crosses, N/D, Paul Klee
5. Small brush: Agony
- Large brush: Rosy Fingered Dawn
- Knife: Landing
- Dripping: Number 1, 1948, Jackson Pollock
- Scratching: Blue and Green
- Dry brush: Blue and Green
- Water-colour: Yellow Space
- Loaded spatula: Sans titre no 1
6. Bright colours: Composition, 1955, W. de Kooning
Festive Pink
Yellow Space
- Quiet colours: Fond blanc
Ascend
Of Birds and Grass No. 2, 1954,
Jack Shadbolt
7. The juxtaposition of several reds together.
8. Blue/Black

The colours are loaded on a spatula and
pulled across the surface, mixing them.

UNIT II . CRITICAL ANALYSISIntroduction

The concern of Unit II is to undertake a formal analysis of two Referential Abstractions that are representative of the Automatist and Painters Eleven style.

The analysis will follow a sequence which begins with a description of the design elements as well as the tools and materials used in the painting. This is followed by a formal analysis of the structure, composition and design elements involved. Next, a consideration of the artist's intent is explored and criteria for judgement on the quality of the aesthetic result are developed.

Reproductions of two paintings are given together with teaching information and questions for classroom discussion and a reading assignment.

Evaluation is based on a written analysis of two unseen slides from Unit III found in Non-Print Material: one Automatist and one Painters Eleven, chosen at the teacher's discretion.

Testing should be conducted at the end of this unit and the answers found to be consistent with the methodology for analysis and evaluation taught in this unit before proceeding to Unit III.

E

UNIT II CRITICAL ANALYSIS

LESSON 1 DESCRIPTION AND FORMAL ANALYSIS

Objective:

To develop an ability to describe and analyse Referential Abstraction paintings in a methodical and comprehensive manner and, in particular

- 1) to describe or take an inventory of what is present in the painting without making a value judgement;
- 2) to give a technical description of the way in which the work is executed;
- 3) to analyze the paintings in terms of line, colour, shape, texture and location in space.

Content:

Referential Abstraction presents no obvious subject matter; consequently, the principal lines, colours and shapes themselves become the subject. Description involves an inventory of the kinds of lines, shapes and colours present in the painting. The methods, materials and tools used by the artist to achieve texture and surface quality are also described.

Formal analysis considers how the design elements are organized in the compositional space. The specific relationships of line, shape and colour are discussed together with the use of texture and the resultant surface quality.

Reproductions: Sous le vent de l'île, 1947,
P.-E. Borduas
& Gypsy, 1956, William Ronald

1) Inventory of the design elements

Teaching Information:

- ★ The absence of recognizable objects may facilitate objectivity in preparing an inventory of the principal components contained in each painting. Care is necessary to avoid qualitative description, however, and descriptive words should be free of personal interpretation.

Questions for class-room discussion:

What are the design elements used in each painting?

Prepare an inventory, comparing one painting to the other, under the headings of line, shape, colour, texture and composition.

2) Technical description

Teaching Information:

The tools and materials of the artist directly influence the form and finish of the work. In addition to traditional equipment such as brush and palette knife, modern artists use rollers, sponges, sprays, brush handles, and other instruments to apply and work the medium which includes new painting materials derived from industrial technology and ordinary use (e.g., collage). Since the identification of tools and materials is not always apparent, such information must sometimes be obtained from outside sources.

In the class-room examples Borduas and Ronald use oil on canvas with brushes and a palette knife. Ronald also uses a sharp instrument like a brush handle to gouge out paint to create graffiti marks.

Questions for class-room discussion:

What tools and materials were used by each artist?

What are the painting methods used?

Make a comparison of these methods.

3) Analysis of the paintings

Teaching information:

Formal analysis is concerned with two main aspects of painting:

How the lines, shapes, areas of colour and texture found in the inventory are constituted;

The relationships of line, shape, colour and texture, found in the painting.

Questions for class-room discussion:

Describe the compositional structure of each work.

What type of space is used by each artist?

How is balance achieved in each composition?

Is line present? Describe how it is used.

How are shapes created in Sous le vent de l'île? in Gypsy? Is there a basis for comparison?

Describe the role of colour in each painting.

How many different things does the texture tell about the painting (tools, materials, methods, emotion. etc.)?

Reading Assignment:

"Supplementary Research Information", provided at the end of Unit II.

Chapter II, "Background for Teaching: Analysis of Style".

UNIT II CRITICAL ANALYSIS

LESSON 2 INTERPRETATION OF THE ARTIST'S INTENT

Objective:

An attempt to interpret the intent and understand the meaning in Sous le vent de l'île and Gypsy.

Content:

The viewer's approach to the intent and meaning of the painting is through a sequence of three steps. The viewer is involved:

- 1) at the autobiographical level: the personal interpretation of the painting based on all previous socio-cultural experience;
- 2) at the universal level where the work is related to the total collective experience of man;
- 3) through statements made by the artists and critics directly related to the work.

Refer to the Reading Assignment for Unit II, Lesson 1.

1) Personal interpretation:

Teaching information:

Each viewer's perception is the sum of his experiences and this he carries into every new situation. The meaning of the art object for him is more than simply the unity of the work in terms of balance, rhythm and tensions created by the placement of the formal elements. It is also the impact on his senses and the relevance of new ideas in relation to his own experience of life and living.

Knowledge of the artist's intent is only necessary in the sense that it may heighten the viewers' perception. Frequently, the importance is found in areas and ideas that the artist had not considered when he began his painting.

Questions for class-room discussion:

Why do you think Ronald called his painting Gypsy?

Describe what you think Borduas was thinking about when he painted Sous le vent de l'île.

How would you compare the sound of the two paintings if they were music?

If you found yourself inside Sous le vent de l'île, how would the space feel?

Is the feeling of space the same in Gypsy?

2) Universal interpretation:

Teaching information:

The universal themes common to all men involve such concepts as joy, conflict, struggle, myth, drama, etc.

The artist may not have any of these broad, thematic concepts in his mind when he begins to work on his canvas but such may emerge as the painting progresses, or be sensed and interpreted in this way by the viewer.

Question for class-room discussion:

Compose a story based on themes that you see represented in either of the two paintings. Allow your emotions and imagination to be stimulated by what you see.

3) Critics' interpretation:

Teaching information:

The critic has become the interpreter of the intent and meaning of contemporary painting.

It is he who relates the work to the history of art and its place in present events.

His own knowledge, based on research which includes the writings and interviews of the artists themselves, form the basis for his critical appraisal.

This type of criticism, both favorable and otherwise, may be found in the reading assignments in Chapter II.

Questions for class-room discussion:

What comment does Borduas make about his intent in this painting? What do the critics say?

How does Ronald talk about the intent of his painting? Do the critics interpret his work in the same way?

How important are the writings of the critics in contemporary art?

Find the names of three major critics and discuss their criticism of either the Automatists or Painters Eleven, or both.

UNIT II CRITICAL ANALYSIS

LESSON 3 JUDGEMENT

Objectives:

To illustrate two criteria of judgement available to the viewer of Referential Abstraction.

Content:

Because of the absence of figurative elements, Referential Abstraction requires different criteria as a basis for judgement and evaluation.

Two that can be used are: the art work as a solution to a problem and the artist's technical performance.

Advance Reading Assignment:

"Background for Teaching, A Definition of Referential Abstraction" and "Analysis of Style: The Automatists and Painters Eleven", Chapter II.

"Supplementary Research Information", provided at the end of this unit.

Reproductions: Sous le vent de l'île, 1947, P.-E. Borduas
Gypsy, 1956, William Ronald

1) The Art Work as a Solution to a Problem

Teaching information:

Referential Abstraction, being non-figurative, may be regarded as the solution to a particular problem rather than a way of recording an object.

To adequately understand the problem and be a critic of the solution, the viewer must have an extensive background in the history of art: movements, theories and changes in taste. He should also have a knowledge of political and social history to understand the context in which the work is found.

Questions for class-room discussion:

With reference to the Reading Assignment, discuss the following questions relating to Sous le vent de l'île and Gypsy:

What is significant about Referential Abstraction in Canadian art in the period 1940-1960?

What were the artists' intentions when they painted these particular paintings?

How did the artists view themselves and their works?

What complaints did the critics make about Referential Abstraction in general?

How did the critics view these two specific paintings?

How did the public view this style of painting?

Do you feel that by today's standards the criticisms of the past are still valid?

2) Technical Success of the Painting

Teaching information:

In the twentieth century, new materials, mediums and tools have been used in painting. The criteria for judgement of a painting must therefore include a study of how the artists worked, the materials they used, and an assessment of the degree of technical success achieved.

Questions for class-room discussion:

With reference to the Reading Assignment, discuss the following questions relating to Sous le vent de l'île and Gypsy:

How has Borduas managed to transfer the flexible medium of gouache to oil?

How do you think Ronald solved the problem of painting with oil spontaneously?

Do you think the tools used by each artist were effective in satisfying their technical needs? Why?

How has each artist intensified the colours he has used?

How aware are we of the technical aspects of the painting? Does this technical awareness add or detract from the meaning of the painting?

EVALUATION

The teacher displays two unseen slides from Unit III found in the Non-Print Material included: one Automatist and one Painters Eleven chosen at the teacher's discretion. Students are required to prepare a written analysis of each based on the methods and information provided in Unit II.

Supplementary Research Information/(Unit II)1) Sous le vent de l'île, 1947, P.-E. Borduas

1 May 1942 Conversation between P.-E. Borduas and Maurice Gagnon, related by M. Gagnon, Archives, Borduas, Musée d'art contemporain, (Montréal) T.267

"Je n'ai aucune idée préconçue. Placé devant la feuille blanche avec un esprit libre de toutes idées littéraires, j'obéis à la première impulsion. Si j'ai l'idée d'appliquer mon fusain au centre de la feuille ou sur l'un des côtés, je l'applique sans discuter et ainsi de suite. Un premier trait se dessine ainsi, divisant la feuille. Cette division de la feuille déclenche tout un processus de pensées qui sont exécutées toujours automatiquement. J'ai prononcé le mot "pensées" i.e. pensées de peintures, pensées de mouvement, de rythme, de volume, de lumière et non pas des idées littéraires, philosophiques, sociales ou autres, car encore, celles-ci ne sont pas utilisables dans le tableau que si elles sont transposées plastiquement. Le dessin étant terminé dans son ensemble la même démarche est suivie pour la couleur! Comme pour le dessin - si la première idée est d'employer un vert, un rouge - le peintre surréaliste ne le discute pas. Et cette première couleur détermine toutes les autres. C'est particulièrement au stade de la couleur que les problèmes de lumière, de volume entrent en jeu. Donc autant d'actes mentaux, de travail mental - travail régi par la formation personnelle très poussée du peintre - travail mental sans cesse aux prises avec la sensibilité du peintre, sensibilité qui, ici comme ailleurs dans l'oeuvre d'art, engendre le chant, sa qualité poétique.

1974 Towards a People's Art Barry Lord
pp. 156-159

...Sous le vent de l'île is also a continuation of the Québécois tradition. It is a passionate statement in brilliant colour and flickering light. With an over-all brownish tone established in the background between passages of aquamarine to either side, and with the bright greens, reds, browns, black and white flashing

across the foreground, it is a formal equivalent to the votive painting of an overturned canoe...

...The taches that made up the foreground of Sous le vent de l'île have now taken over the whole surface of the canvas, the painting has become nothing but a 'field' for the direct application of paint primarily by the palette knife. What is left of the Québécois tradition - the contrast of light, the rich colour and texture, the sensuous forms - is nothing but the particular nuance that Borduas gives to what New York could recognize as 'abstract expressionism'.

1968 National Gallery of Canada
Bulletin No. 12, Borduas:
Sous le vent de l'île, par
Bernard Teyssède, pp. 22-31.

En ce début de 1947, quand il peint Sous le vent de l'île, quand il médite aux notions de forme, de volume, d'espace pictural en des termes qui deviendront les Commentaires sur des mots courants, Borduas engage l'automatisme dans une voie que certains ont qualifiée de "non-figuration baroque", mais qui en réalité s'apparente bien mieux aux ordonnances classiques. Un parcours sinueux part de l'émerveillement ressenti en mars 1944 devant Mondrian: "J'ai reconnu spontanément la plus fine lumière que j'avais encore jamais vue en peinture. Et lumière était dans le temps, pour moi, synonyme d'espace". Il aboutit aux tableaux austères de Paris, en blanc et noir, douze ans plus tard; et dans cet intervalle, Sous le vent de l'île pose le premier jalon.

2) Gypsy, 1956, William Ronald7 May 1956 Time Magazine Quote Wm. Ronald

There are some painters who just paint, while some painters are alive. We're Alive. If you didn't have someone to spill paint over the canvas, everyone in Canada would be painting those lukewarm landscapes.

May, 1956 Review on CBC Radio, American Abstract Artists' Exhibition, Riverside Museum, New York City.
Reviewer: Vincent Tovell.

...The deeper question is the "why" of all this. I know that "freedom" is a keynote of "abstract expressionism", indeed of the whole abstract movement. Freedom from what?...in the case of Painters Eleven, freedom from the sort of landscape impressionism that has dominated Canadian taste for a generation... But freedom for what? To express a wider view we are told -- an inner vision, freedom to use paint and canvas and all the tools more spontaneously...not just to squirt, splash and sweep the colours in all directions, as it might appear, but to create new idioms, a new painter's language.

...to me...it was not a pleasant experience to be among these twenty-two pictures. Most of them seemed to me ugly and baffling to the mind.

31 October 1959 Toronto Star Robert Fulford

...Now there is more attention to structure in his paintings and the result is a far greater solidity. They are now like great walls of paint, full of tension and excitement. They are as personal as ever, but now tend to reach out more to the viewer. The most striking and memorable work is "The Visitor" [Gypsy came a year later but was of the same series], a huge head which explodes off the canvas in a dozen different directions...has a background of thick rough stripes which pull the composition together and give them a kind of strength which Ronald has never before attempted.

2 April 1960

Toronto Star

Robert Fulford

...a few years ago Ronald was an action painter but today his work demonstrates a successful search for sound construction and solid images that sets him quite apart from the standard action painters. In this exhibition the paintings are dominated by the vision of a circular central image in the process of exploding. In Gypsy, Ronald sets a vivid central image in red and blue against a great, taut, wall of stripes that bind the picture tightly and set off perfectly the hacked, rough, vibrantly spontaneous style.

23 March 1963

Toronto Globe and Mail

Talking with William Ronald by Michael Hanlon

What group are you?

...My work changes so much from year to year. Then you have to decide what is abstract art or expressionism or modernism or abstract expressionism. They're all labels invented by critics. You could say my work is abstract but it doesn't have recognizable images...

What artists influenced you most?

The thinking of J.W.G. Macdonald has played a great part in my work...But I guess I've come under the influence of New York people, Pollock, Kline, Rothko...

I'm an idea painter...I looked at old art. I got into 10th and 12th century manuscripts with illuminated borders. That's where the colours come from.

...that central image, that often furious concentration of energy at the heart of the canvas which spills over to carry energies of colour to the edges of the painting...the influence of Hans Hofmann.

UNIT III HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVEIntroduction

The concern of Unit III is to present a chronological development of Referential Abstraction in Canadian painting with reference to the two main groups: the Automatists, 1942 - 1955, and Painters Eleven, 1953 - 1960.

The development of the Automatists will be viewed through eight slides; four will show the evolution of Paul-Emile Borduas' work and four will illustrate the different approaches of three other artists of the group.

The development of Painters Eleven will be illustrated through a selection of seven reproductions. Six artists have been chosen: William Ronald, Harold Town, Tom Hodgson, Alexandra Luke, J.W.G. Macdonald and Jack Bush, to represent the evolution of this group.

The reading assignment for this unit is contained in Chapter II, "Historical Development". The slides are found in Non-Print Material and the teaching information in each lesson is followed by questions to stimulate class-room discussion. This unit should be presented in a lecture format with an evaluation based on readings and class-room discussion.

UNIT III HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

LESSON 1 THE AUTOMATIST GROUP, 1942 - 1955

Objective:

To study the historical development of the Automatists in Montréal through an appreciation of the key paintings by members of the group in the period, 1942-1955.

Content:

A lecture will be given using slides of paintings by Borduas, Mousseau, Ferron, Riopelle.

Teaching information is followed by questions.

Evaluation will take place at the end of the unit.

1) Surrealist Paintings in Gouache, 1942.

Slide: Abstraction no 11 or Cimetière marin, 1942,
P.-E. Borduas

Teaching information:

Automatism based on Surrealism was concerned with a new approach to subject matter rather than an exploration of pictorial space.

Surrational Automatism was defined by Borduas as non-preconceived writing in paint, one form calling up another until a skein of lines covered the support. Colour was later filled in and defined shapes emerged. The result was a spontaneous work, the images inspired by the unconscious or irrational mind.

In April, 1942, the first Québec exhibition of Surrealist-inspired paintings was shown in Montréal. The Surrealist Paintings

exhibition was comprised of forty-five gouache paintings by Borduas and both the public and press reacted positively to the work.

Cimetière marin illustrates the concepts that are present in all the paintings in this exhibition. It was in this series that Borduas began to clarify his approach to abstraction. The original title was an abstract, a number. The format is horizontal and related to his earlier figurative landscape and still life paintings. There is an emphasis on perspective and surface design. The matt colours are clear and bright with a combination of blue-black and red-green favoured. White gives areas of light, and black the shadows.

The exhibition was successful, Borduas sold nearly all the works and this led the next year to an exhibition of oils at the Dominion Gallery in Montréal.

Questions for class-room discussion:

What was Borduas' intent in the series of gouache paintings of 1942?

Why does this painting have two titles?

What made this exhibition so historically important?

How did Borduas achieve a certain spontaneity in this work?

What concepts are illustrated in this painting?

Describe the results of this exhibition.

2) Surrealist Paintings in oil, 1943.

Slide: Viol aux confins de la matière, 1943,
P.-E. Borduas

Teaching information:

This painting is an example of pure automatism and part of the exhibition at Dominion Gallery which took place in the autumn of

1943. Borduas had encountered difficulty in trying to transpose his work from gouache to oil and still retain spontaneity within the composition. His solution to the problem was a two-step approach. He painted the backgrounds brown-black or green-black with a wide brush using horizontal brushstrokes. Later, he worked with the foreground images using a medium brush loaded with colour. In this solution were the first combined formats, as he retained horizontality related to the landscape and still life paintings in the background and the verticality of portraiture in the foreground images.

True to the literary concepts of Surrealism, the titles related to the 'association of ideas' of intellectual games.

The change of technique created a deeper perspective with foreground figures floating against an infinite background, a spatial characteristic of all Automatist canvases executed in Montréal.

The critics were enthusiastic about this exhibition but the public found the paintings dark and Borduas sold little.

Borduas turned more towards his teaching in the next few years and together with his students of the previous five or six years formed a group of young, enthusiastic artists committed to automatism as a technique of creating abstract paintings.

Questions for class-room discussion:

What comparison can you make between this painting and Cimetière marin?

How has Borduas reconciled his earlier formats of landscape, still life and portraiture in this painting?

What was the result in visual terms of his new format?

Describe the various results of this exhibitions.

3) "Automatism", 1947.

Slide: Automatism 1.47 or Sous le vent de l'île, 1947, P.-E. Borduas

Teaching information:

In 1946 and 1947, the first two Automatist exhibitions were held. Automatism 1.47 was in the second, Sherbrooke Street show, and it led to the naming of the group by a young critic, Tancrède Marcil.

This painting is characteristic of the style Borduas practiced during these years. Surreational Automatism now presents a dream like landscape where fragmented figures float over an infinite space. The images are organic in shape and the technique is free and gestural. The colours are clear and white is used to evoke light qualities. Subsequent to this second exhibition, Fernand Leduc and J.-P. Riopelle organized an Automatic exhibition in a small gallery in Paris, the Galerie du Luxembourg. It gave the group the opportunity to be seen outside Montréal and enhanced their reputation and recognition at home.

Questions for class-room discussion:

What is the significance of this painting?

What changes had taken place in Borduas' style from 1943 to 1947?

What were the reasons for having an Automatist exhibition in Paris?

4) A New Phase, Provincetown, 1947.

Slide: Les signes s'envolent, 1953, P.-E. Borduas

Teaching information:

A third Automatist exhibition was scheduled in Montréal for the autumn of 1948. It was proposed that a manifesto similar to that of the Surrealists accompany this exhibition. The result was Refus global, not an introduction to the exhibition but a document that stood alone.

Considered inflammatory and anarchist, the Refus Global asked in strong terms for freedom for individual and collective creativity. Borduas and the document were denounced by the government and the Church, and Borduas lost his teaching position at the Ecole du Meuble. Unable to find another position, a virtual exile in his own province, Borduas went to New York in the spring of 1953.

New York was empty of artists so Borduas moved to Provincetown for the summer. Here, the combination of sand, sea and sun liberated him from the difficulties of the previous five years and he painted forty canvases in a celebration of freedom.

In these works, he lightened his palette, using large amounts of white. He still followed the original format of horizontal background and vertical foreground figures, but there is less concern with atmospheric space. The vertical images now press closely to the background.

In these 1953 works, Borduas began a new phase of painting, breaking away from the self-imposed restrictions of the Automatist period.

Questions for class-room discussion:

Describe the events which led to Borduas' departure from Québec.

How does Les signes s'envolent illustrate the change in Borduas' style with the move to Provincetown?

5) Chance and Accident in Automatism, 1946.

Slide: Dernière campagne de Napoléon, 1946, Fernand Leduc

Teaching information:

Fernand Leduc was the theoriticien of the group and had the deepest knowledge of Surrealist writings, particularly those of André Breton.

It was Leduc who suggested to Borduas that a group based on the Surrealist model be formed. Furthermore, it was he who negotiated in Paris between Borduas and Breton on the question of the group entering Breton's projected International Surrealist exhibition which the Automatists did not join. Leduc had also been the one to suggest that the third Automatist exhibition be accompanied by a manifesto similar to the "Surrealist Manifesto". This idea resulted in Borduas writing the Refus global. In his painting, Leduc was attracted to the chance and accidental aspect of Automatism. This was also the focus of the work of Marcel Barbeau and of Marcelle Ferron.

This painting presents a tight and integrated composition. The foreground figures are merely splatters, not images and the middle and background move to a small, dark centre space rather than the indication of a vast expanse. The painting seems to be moving towards an integrated space. The painting gesture is free, almost frenzied, with a final grand splash across the centre surface.

In this painting, Leduc seems to be moving ahead of Borduas' definition of Automatism.

Questions for class-room discussion:

Describe the role of Leduc in the group of Borduas.

What aspect of Automatism did he favour and how did this affect his painting?

6) Dream Images in Automatism, 1948.

Slide: Bataille moyenâgeuse, 1948, J.-P. Mousseau.

Teaching information:

Jean-Paul Mousseau spent time in Borduas' studio while still at high school; from the age of seventeen he, together with Pierre Gauvreau, experimented with and explored Automatism and dream images.

Poil-de-carotte, (ill. 12), a book illustration, is very reminiscent of the work of André Masson in its almost figurative, doodle-like lines and forms. It is close to Borduas' description of Automatism with the pen moving on the paper, the 'paranoiac screen', making circles, arabesques and hatchings, building up the images into a free, dream-like landscape.

The figures are so densely packed in Bataille moyenâgeuse that the figure/ground relationship has almost been obliterated. Only at the top of the painting are the forms diminished in size and presented against an infinite background. This work begins to move away from Borduas' concept of Automatist space to an integrated space.

Mousseau, in common with many of the young artists around Borduas, never had to free himself from the figurative background taught by schools of art. He participated in all the Automatist exhibitions and signed the Refus global.

Questions for class-room discussion:

Describe the direct influences on Mousseau.

In what aspect of Automatism was he interested?

How did his painting relate to the ideas of Borduas?

What advantage did Mousseau have being an adolescent when he met Borduas?

7) Towards an Integration of Space, 1950.

Slide: Composition, 1950, J.-P. Riopelle

Teaching information:

Jean-Paul Riopelle was not a pupil of Borduas but did spend a great deal of time in his studio. His main concerns were with the spatial structure and the tone and texture of the paint. He began to integrate the figures and background at an early date, becoming independent of Borduas. His work

was not Automatist in the terms that Borduas was using.

Riopelle left for Paris in 1946. There he met André Breton and joined the group of Surrealist painters around him. He participated in the International Surrealist exhibition and signed the manifesto, Ruptures inaugurales. He joined the group around Breton but signed the Refus global in 1948 and remained on good terms with Borduas.

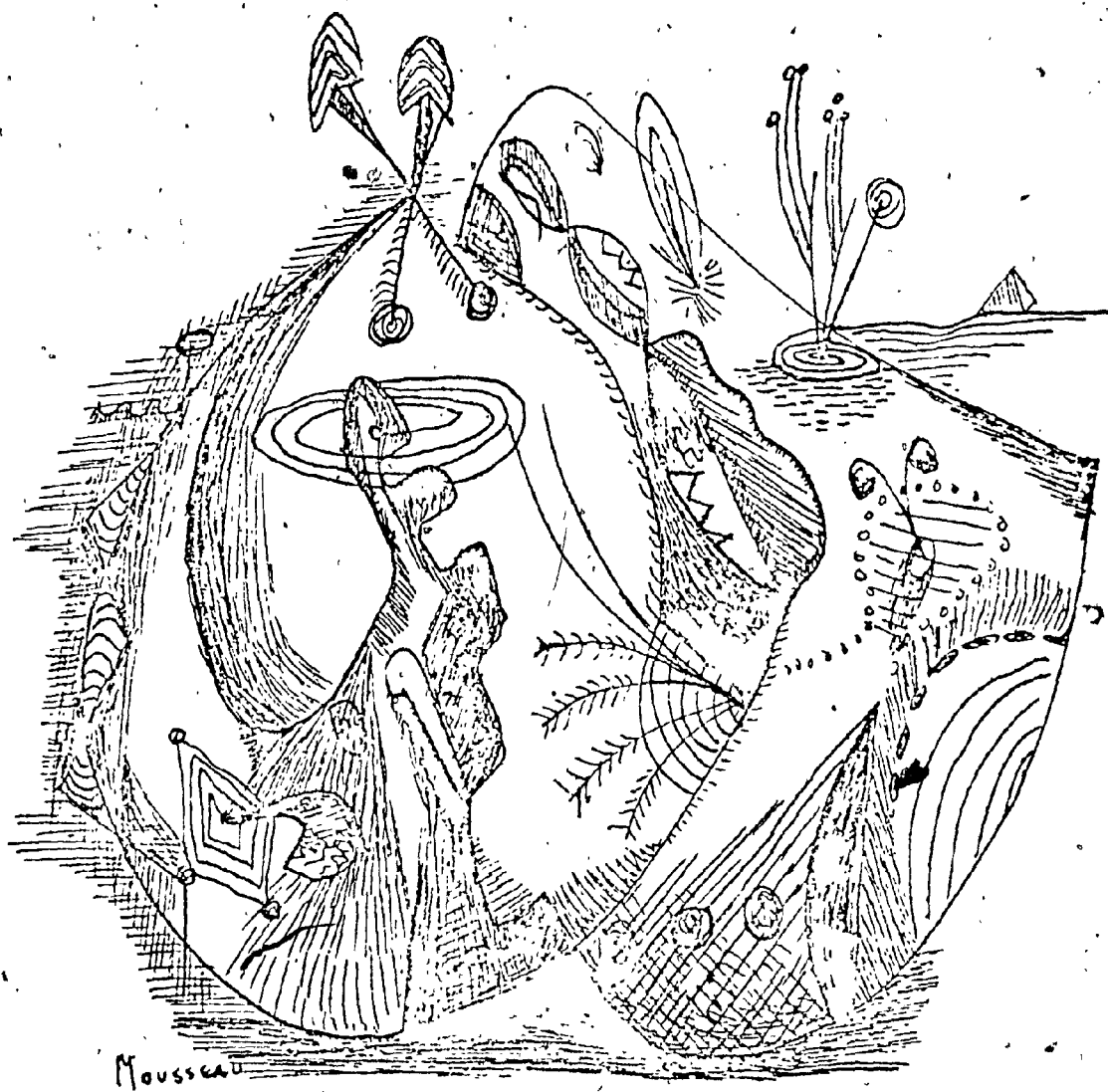
Riopelle has since been described as a "tachist" painter working with sharp strokes of paint.

Questions for class-room discussion:

Describe how Riopelle was related to the Automatist group.

How was his painting related to Borduas' concept of Automatist space?

What role could Riopelle have played after he moved to Paris?



12. Poil-de-carotte, n.d., Jean-Paul Mousseau.
Book illustration.

UNIT III HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVELESSON 2 HISTORY OF PAINTERS ELEVENObjective:

To study the historical development of Painters Eleven in Toronto through an appreciation of key paintings by members of the group in the period 1953 - 1960.

Content:

A lecture will be given using slides of paintings by Ronald, Town, Hodgson, Luke, Macdonald and Bush.

Teaching information is followed by questions. Evaluation will take place at the end of the unit.

1) Early Referential Abstraction of Painters Eleven

Slide: Slow Movement, 1953, William Ronald

Teaching information:

1953 marked the beginning of Referential Abstraction in Ontario and, although based on Surrealism, the gestural style and concept of foreground-background integration towards two-dimensionality linked it to New York Abstract Expressionism.

Slow Movement echoes the earlier totemic references of Jackson Pollock, the "pictographs" of Adolph Gottlieb and the thin, attenuated lines of Arshile Gorky.

The group to which William Ronald belonged was formed more by accident than concerted effort. There was a need for artists

painting in an abstract style to band together for exhibition purposes. A group met in Toronto at the exhibition, Abstracts in the Home, and subsequently formed their exhibition group, Painters Eleven.

The group itself was roughly divided between the older artists like J.W.G. Macdonald, Jack Bush, Alexandra Luke, Oscar Cahén and Hortense Gordon and the younger members, Ronald, Harold Town, Tom Hodgson, Walter Yarwood, Ray Mead and Kazuo Nakamura.

Questions for class-room discussion:

Why was Painters Eleven formed?

Where did most of the members meet?

Where was the immediate source for Slow Movement?

What are the names of the eleven artists?

2) Collage Influence in Referential Abstraction

Slide: Music Behind, 1956, Harold Town.

Teaching information:

The two most dynamic of the eleven painters were Town and Ronald. Young, excited and tremendously stimulated, they each reached an extremely high level in their work during these years.

In his student days, Town was influenced by Degas, Bonnard and Matisse and later, in 1948, he looked to the Futurists and Cubists for sources of painting styles. In drawing, he learned a great deal from studying Picasso and Saul Steinberg.

Town did not leave Toronto but used local sources for information: the Art Gallery of Ontario, the Royal Ontario Museum, art journals and popular magazines.

Music Behind was inspired by Synthetic Cubism and is a collage incorporating found objects: paper, sheet music, Japanese fan, the insides of a piano, and other objects

placed in a random and chance manner. The dripping over these objects relates to the work of Jackson Pollock, whose painting was well-known to Town through magazines and journals.

Questions for class-room discussion:

Describe the stylistic influences on Town at the beginning of his career.

To what movement is collage related and how did it evolve?

Describe the "found objects" in this collage.

What other stylistic influences are found in this painting?

3) Direct New York Influences

Slide: Central Black, 1955-56, William Ronald

Teaching information:

Ronald first went to New York in 1954 on a scholarship and moved there permanently in the winter of 1955-56.

The style he evolved in the three years between 1953 and 1956 was raw and aggressive, related to de Kooning and Kline of the New York School.

In New York, he met artists and critics and, through his contacts as well as the publicity that Painters Eleven had received at home, the group was invited to participate in the 20th Exposition of American Abstract Artists and Painters Eleven at the Riverside Museum in New York.

There had been three Painters Eleven exhibitions, two at Roberts Gallery in Toronto and one on the Southern Ontario Gallery Circuit. This New York exhibition was the first outside Canada and, aside from the exposure in New York, they felt it would give them credibility at home.

This exhibition was also important for the meeting between those members who attended

the opening night and the critic, Clement Greenberg, who later came to Toronto to view the work of members of Painters Eleven.

Central Black is described by Ronald as an "implosion". The image contained by a grid and a wide band of red at the top forces the explosion back towards the centre. The feeling of contained power is characteristic of Ronald's work at this time and creates a very dynamic canvas. In 1957, Ronald left Painters Eleven after a dispute with Town but continued on friendly terms with the other members.

Questions for class-room discussion:

Why was it important for Painters Eleven to participate in the American Abstract Artists' exhibition?

What changes had taken place in Ronald's work in the three year since Slow Movement?

What artists were influential on his development at this time?

4) Calligraphy in Referential Abstraction

Slide: March Pond, 1958, Tom Hodgson

Teaching information:

The subject matter for much of Tom Hodgson's work came from the area in which he lived. For a number of Painters Eleven years, he had a house at Toronto Island and, as a champion canoeist, spent many hours on the water.

In his style, he was influenced by Town and Cahén. After 1953, Cahén divided many of his canvases into sections with different coloured areas. Over these he would draw with a brush. Town, in Music Behind, used collage materials, adding fabrics, papers and other materials to the surface of the canvas. Hodgson pursued both of these techniques in March Pond, dividing his canvas into sections, adding various fabrics and then, almost in a frenzy, drawing a combination of calligraphy and graffiti.

Clement Greenberg came to Toronto in June, 1957, and when he saw Hodgson's work considered him good but somewhat confused as a painter.

Questions for class-room discussion:

Describe how the artists of the group influenced each other.

How does the title of the painting relate to the surface of the canvas?

How much influence do you think an outside critic has on a painter's work?

5) Lyrical Referential Abstraction

Slide: Journey, 1957, Alexandra Luke

Teaching information:

Alexandra Luke (married name, Margaret McLaughlin) has a unique place in the development of Referential Abstraction. She had been painting abstractions in the 1940's attending classes at Provincetown with Hans Hofmann and had organized the First Canadian Abstract Exhibition in Oshawa in 1952.

It was at her cottage that the first meeting of Painters Eleven was held and it is at the McLaughlin Gallery in Oshawa that the works and archives of Painters Eleven are housed.

Luke flew to New York for the opening of the American Abstract Artists' exhibition and met Clement Greenberg. The effect of Greenberg's visit to Luke's studio caused her to simplify her compositions and evolve her own style, as distinct from a re-hash of Hofmann's. Through the medium of water-colour she achieved a clarity of hue and softness of tone and work that was elegant and subtle.

Questions for class-room discussion:

Describe the relationship of Luke to Painters Eleven.

What was the effect of Greenberg's visit on Luke's painting style?

Where are Painters Eleven work and archives kept today? Why is this so?

6) Nature as a Source of Imagery

Slide: Fleeting Breath, 1959, J.W.G. Macdonald

Teaching information:

J.W.G. Macdonald, better-known as "Jock" Macdonald; was perhaps the most influential member of the group. A philosopher as well as the teacher of Ronald, Town, Hodgson and Luke, he had been working with Surrealist ideas of automatism in the early thirties. He exhibited Modalities, a series of proto-abstract works in oil in the late thirties but it was not until 1946 that his work became less structured. The influences that are discernable in these works come from Miró and Klee and the mediums are inks and water-colour.

Throughout the 1950's, Macdonald was experimenting with the spontaneous and chance aspects of Surrealism, finding similar problems to those facing Borduas. The problem was to translate one medium, water-colour, into another, oil, while still retaining spontaneity. The difficulty in finding a solution discouraged Macdonald but on his return from France, after a year of work and study, Town introduced him to Lucite 44, an oil additive. Macdonald had found the solution as the oil now became flexible, quick-drying with a matt finish. His work from this time forward became free and lyrical in character.

He was further encouraged by Greenberg's visit in June, 1957, and his last years were very productive. The style he evolved was lyrical Referential Abstractions based on natural phenomenon.

Questions for class-room discussion:

Describe the importance of the medium on the ability of the artist to translate his ideas onto a surface.

What is the source of Macdonald's inspiration for his painting?

Describe how Macdonald's style had evolved over thirty years.

What had the various influences been?

7) Simplified Composition in Referential Abstraction

Slide: Breakthrough, 1958, Jack Bush

Teaching information:

In 1947, Jack Bush began to experiment with Cubist space, the increasing use of local colour delimited by drawing, Surrealist juxtaposition of unrelated objects and dislocations of scale.

Travelling to New York frequently after 1952, looking at the New York Abstract Expressionist exhibitions, he began to use slashing brush and spatula strokes and the high value contrasts of currently successful American artists like Kline and Gottlieb.

In 1957, severely criticized by Greenberg for his copying of the "hot licks" of Abstract Expressionism, Bush simplified his images, thinned his oil and acrylic paints and moved into a new phase. The canvases were larger, the shapes flattened and the space two-dimensional.

In the late 1950's, he saw the Matisse painting, Bathers by a River, 1916, and from this time forward, the drawing, colour touch and sense of pictorial design were influenced by Matisse.

Bush was the treasurer of Painters Eleven and also the only one who had a dealer. It was with his dealer, Roberts Gallery, that the first Painters Eleven exhibitions were held.

As treasurer, Bush closed the books for the group in 1959, returning to each member twelve dollars; Painters Eleven disbanded because it was no longer needed. Each artist had already begun to go his own way feeling that, through the group, Referential Abstraction had been well established.

Questions for class-room discussion:

Why do artists form groups?

What was the benefit of Painters Eleven to each artist?

Discuss the benefit to Bush.

UNIT III HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

LESSON 3 EVALUATION

Unit III

There are two methods of evaluation for Unit III suggested in this lesson

- 1) Write an essay. Two possible topics are:
 - a) Discuss the historical development of the Automatist group or the Painters Eleven group, or
 - b) Discuss one artist and his influence and relationship to the group.

Information for this essay may be found in "Background for Teaching, Historical Development".

The bibliography gives additional sources for research material.

- 2) Create an exhibition of Referential Abstractions.

Each student will research one painting and together write a catalogue for the exhibition discussing the history of each work and its place in the evolution of Referential Abstraction.

Course Evaluation

A suggested evaluation for the total course outline is a comparison of the two groups based on the following:

- a) stylistic sources;
- b) inspiration;
- c) technique;
- d) analysis of style;
- e) historical development;
- f) significance.

APPENDIX A

Notes on Surrealism : Definition of Terms

Surrealism

André Breton's definition of Surrealism found in the 1924 Surrealist Manifesto was as follows:

Surrealism - Noun masculin. Pure psychic automatism by which one intends to express verbally, in writing or by any other method, the real functioning of the mind. Dictation by thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason and beyond any aesthetic or moral preoccupation.

(Encycl.) - Philos. Surrealism is based on the belief in the superior reality of certain forms of association heretofore neglected in the omnipotence of dreams; in the undirected play of thought.¹

In 1924, there was no conception of Surrealist painting. Breton in Le Surréalisme et la peinture, 1928, wrote that art would be a means of expression and not an end, and further that:

Surrealist identity would hinge on the methodological and iconographic relevance of the picture to be the main ideas of the movement, that is, automatisme and the 'dream image'.²

Later, Surrealism encompassed the following concepts: automatism, accident, biomorphism, found objects and a commitment to social revolution.

¹Manifeste du Surréalisme (Paris: Editions du Sagittaire, 1924), p. 42.

²Le Surréalisme et la peinture (Paris: Gallimard, 1928). p. 60.

Automatism

The critics who interpreted Surrealism gave specific definitions of terminology. The word 'automatism' was used by the Automatists, Painters Eleven and the New York Abstract Expressionists. A comparison may be made of the term as used by Nicolas Calas in Confound the Wise, 1942, a source for early Abstract Expressionism and Borduas' definition of the term, found in Commentaires sur des mots courants, 1948.

Calas wrote:

I distinguish three types of automatism, "Poetic Automatism"... [it] is purely psychological and is built on the dream pattern. Next comes "Objective Automatism" in which it is the invisible forms in a stain that are turned into a picture. Invisible form is the environmental counterpart of the unconscious and the process through which the image comes into existence, scratching or rubbing creates effects of objective hazard that is to the stain what automatism is to the dream: the driving force, that from invisibility and unconsciousness leads through free association to consciousness and discovery. Between these two extreme forms there is a third one, "Physiological Automatism"... the automatic factor in the free movement of the agent, the arm and hand... The shapes... are biomorphic as opposed to the geometric.¹

Borduas had defined from his reading and understanding of Surrealism, three types of automatism:

- 1) "Automatisme mécanique" which corresponds to Calas' "Objective Automatism";

¹Nicolas Calas, Confound the Wise (New York: Arrow Editions, 1942), p. 244.

...produit par des moyens strictement physiques, plissage, grattage, frottements, dépôts, fumage, gravitation, rotation, etc.

...Les objets ainsi obtenus possèdent les qualités plastiques universelles (les mêmes nécessités physiques façonnent la matière).

...Ces objets sont peu révélateurs de la personnalité de leur auteur. En revanche ils constituent d'excellents écrans paranoïaques.¹

2) "Automatisme psychique" which loosely corresponds to Calas, "Poetic Automatism", but enlarges the scope by including literature:

...En littérature: écriture sans critique du mouvement de la pensée...

...En peinture: a surtout utilisé la mémoire... A cause de la mémoire utilisée, l'intérêt se porte davantage sur le sujet traité (idée, similitude, image, association imprévue d'objets, relation mentale) que sur le sujet réel (objet plastique, propre aux relations sensibles de la matière employée).²

¹Mechanical Automatism: produced by strictly physical means, crumpling, scraping, rubbing, dropping, smudging, gravitation, rotation, etc. Objects produced in this manner have universal plastic qualities (the same physical laws control the materials). These objects tell very little about the personality of their author. They make excellent paranoiac screens however. P.-E. Borduas, Borduas et les automatistes, p. 108.

²Psychic Automatism: in literature: free and uncensored movement of thought. In painting: has depended especially on memory...because of the use of memory, interest comes mainly from the subject treated (idea, metaphor, image, unexpected association of objects, mental connections) rather than from real subject (the plastic object, suitable to the sensual relations of the materials used). Ibid., p. 109.

- 3) In the third category, Calas deals with "Physiological Automatism", gesture and the biomorphic shape which results from the automatic movement of the hand and arm. Borduas defines "Automatisme surrational" as non-preconceived writing in paint, without a mention of biomorphic shape. Borduas and Calas are in fairly close accord in their explanations of Surrealist terminology but the Montréal artists in practical terms rejected all but "Automatisme surrational".

APPENDIX B: CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS, 1940 - 1960

The following chronology summarizes some important events in the development of Referential Abstraction in Canadian Painting.

DATE	EVENT	SIGNIFICANCE
1940 9-27 October	<u>Retrospective Exhibition, Alfred Pellan.</u> At the Art Association of Montreal.	Exhibition of 161 works painted in the previous fourteen years, shows Fauvist, Cubist and Surrealist influences. He personified the new "Rattrapage" ("catching-up" with Europe, School of Paris) ideas of Québec artists.
1941 26 April - 3 May	<u>Première exposition des Indépendants, Galerie municipale au foyer du palais Montcalm.</u> Québec City.	Introduction by Fr. Marie-Alain Couturier, friend of Matisse and devoted to "modern art". Borduas exhibited five paintings. Among were three "Nature morte" showing the mode of Cézanne and "Portrait of Mme G." with Cubist influences.
1942 11-14 January	<u>Expositions des maîtres de la peinture moderne,</u> Joliette, Québec.	Borduas exhibited four abstractions. Among them "Harpe brune".
6 February - 2 March	<u>Canadian Group of Painters</u> Art Gallery of Toronto, Toronto.	Borduas exhibited "Harpe brune".
25 April - 2 May	<u>Peintures surréalistes</u> Théâtre de l'Ermitage, Montréal.	Borduas exhibited forty-five gouache abstractions described as "Surrealist". A critical and a financial success.
1943 January	"Amérique française" 'Manières de goûter une oeuvre d'art'.	In volume 2, number 4, of this journal, Borduas published this text.

DATE.	EVENT	SIGNIFICANCE
1943 1-9 May	<u>L'Exposition des Sagittaires</u> Dominion Gallery, Montréal.	Twenty-three young artists including eleven of Borduas' students and four who frequented his studio are exhibited.
2-13 October	<u>Borduas</u> , One man exhibition. Dominion Gallery, Montréal.	Thirty paintings in oil, dated 1940 to 1943. Many in the Surrealist style. A critical but not a financial success.
13-24 November	<u>Contemporary Art Society</u> , Dominion Gallery, Montréal.	At this annual show Borduas exhibited the abstraction, "Ronces rouges".
1945 October	<u>Exhibition of 20 Canadian Artists</u> , at the <u>Contemporary Art Society</u> , Eaton's Fine Gallery, Toronto.	Included with those exhibiting were Borduas, F. Leduc, P. Gauvreau, J.P. Mousseau. Good critical review.
1946 January	<u>Montreal Artist Exhibition</u> , Studio Franziska Boas, New York.	Françoise Sullivan, a non-painting member of group exhibited informally, the works of Borduas, Mousseau, J.P. Riopelle and Leduc. The exhibit passed virtually unnoticed.
1-18 September	<u>"Art Now"</u> by Herbert Read, available in Vancouver.	The arrival of this book stimulated discussion of Surrealism among the artists around Lawren Harris and Macdonald.
1-14 February	<u>Macdonald Exhibition</u> , Vancouver Art Gallery.	Exhibition of automatic water colors. No record of works shown but two paintings of the period show the style. "Russian Fantasy" and "Butterfly".
	<u>7th Exhibition of the Contemporary Art Society</u> , Art Association of Montréal.	Included were, Borduas, Marcel Barbeau, R. Fauteux, Gauvreau, Leduc, Mousseau, Riopelle. Borduas showed a figurative work of 1945, "La Femme au bijou".

DATE	EVENT	SIGNIFICANCE
1946	20-29 April Exposition de peintures, 1257 Amherst Street, Montréal.	Surrealist-inspired works by the group around Borduas, Borduas, Barbeau, Fauteux, Gauvreau, Mousseau and Riopelle.
	16-30 November 8th Exhibition of the Contemporary Art Society, Dominion Gallery, Montréal.	Works by Borduas, Barbeau, Fauteux; Gauvreau, Leduc, Mousseau, Riopelle included. Exhibition to Toronto in January, 1947.
1947.	March International Exhibition of Surrealists, Paris.	Borduas declined the invitation from André Breton, signed personally, to participate in the show, Riopelle participated.
	15 February - 1 March 2e exposition automatiste 75 Sherbrooke Street West, Montréal.	The group included Borduas, Barbeau, Fauteux, Gauvreau, Leduc, Mousseau. Tancrède Marcil gave the group its name based on a painting by Borduas, "Automatisme 1.47", now entitled "Sous le vent de l'île". Riopelle and Leduc in Paris to stay.
	20 May <u>Bien Être</u>	Presentation of Surrealist theatre. Written by Claude Gauvreau and performed by non-painter members of the Automatist group.
	20 June - 13 July <u>Automatisme</u> Galerie du Luxembourg, Paris.	Included were Borduas, Barbeau, Fauteux, Leduc, Mousseau, Riopelle. More than fifty works.
	21 June Paris	Riopelle signed the Surrealist Manifesto, "Rupture inaugurale, déclaration adoptée le 21 juin 1947 par le Groupe en France pour définir son attitude préjudicielle à l'égard de toute politique partisane".

DATE	EVENT	SIGNIFICANCE
1947 August	<u>J.W.G. Macdonald, Water Colors</u> San Francisco Museum of Art	Exhibition of thirty-six automatic water-colours.
Summer	Provincetown, Massachusetts, U.S.A.	Alexandra Luke to Hans Hofmann's summer school. She continued this every summer until 1952. She was also influenced by Macdonald to work with automatic water-colours. Met Macdonald at the Banff School of Fine Art in the summer of 1946.
1948 9 August	<u>Refus global</u>	Publication of the Automatist Manifesto. Four hundred copies.
2 September	Borduas dismissed.	As a result of the publication of the <u>Refus global</u> , Borduas was dismissed from the Ecole du Meuble.
December	<u>Canadian Art</u>	Special "Québec" issue, volume 5, number 3. 'Automatisme' by Maurice Gagnon included.
1949 20 April - 15 May	<u>66th Salon of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Montréal.</u>	Works included by Borduas, Barbeau, Gauvreau, Mousseau and Riopelle. Borduas won first prize.
July	"Projections libérantes".	Borduas' autobiographical work which discussed his artistic and teaching evolution.
Summer	Provincetown, Massachusetts, U.S.A.	Macdonald briefly at Hans Hofmann's summer school.
1950 18-26 March	<u>Exposition des Rebelles, 2035 Mainfield Street, Montréal.</u>	Automatists who participated were, Barbeau, Mousseau, Ferron.
1-9 April	"Communication intime à mes chers amis".	A paper written by Borduas at Saint-Hilaire.

DATE

EVENT

SIGNIFICANCE

1951 May

Les étapes du vivant,
Exhibition.
81 Ontario Street, Montréal.

Exhibition organized by the Automatists.
Included Mousseau, Barbeau, Riopelle,
Gauvreau and Ferron.

1952 26 January -
13 February

The Borduas Group
Gallery XII, Montreal Museum
of Fine Arts, Montréal.

Borduas, Mousseau, Ferron and Gauvreau with
younger artists. Borduas selected the works
and it was a harmonious, Automatist exhibition.

October

Canadian Abstract Exhibition
Y.W.C.A. (Adelaide House),
Oshawa, Ontario.

Sponsored by the South Ontario Galleries. This
exhibition included nine of the future Painters
Eleven artists. Macdonald, Luke, William Ronald,
Jack Bush, Oscar Cahén, Hortense Gordon, Tom
Hodgson, Ray Mead, Harold Town. There was a
catalogue with the artists' opinions about
abstract art.

1953 1 April

Borduas leaves Québec.

Borduas leaves for New York, finds no one there
and goes to Provincetown, Mass., and paints
until September.

May

La Place des Artistes,
82 Sainte-Catherine Street
West, Montréal.

A catch-all exhibition. Included Borduas, Ferron
and Leduc.

19 October

Abstracts at Home
Simpson's Store,
Toronto.

Seven abstract artists exhibit in a furniture
promotion. Painters Eleven form after this show.

1954 20 April -
4 May

La matière chante
Galerie Antoine,
Montréal.

An exhibition to gather the Automatists of the
first and second generation. To boost the morale
of those left after Borduas departure for New
York. Borduas the sole juror.

DATE	EVENT	SIGNIFICANCE
1954	13-27 February Painters 11 Exhibition Roberts Gallery, Toronto Robertson Galleries, Ottawa.	First Painters Eleven Exhibition. Included Macdonald, Luke, Town, Ronald, Gordon, Mead, Cahén, Hodgson, Bush, Kazuo Nakamura, Walter Yarwood. Two thousand attended but no sales.
	Winter William Ronald	Ronald to New York on a Hockey Scholarship of \$1000.00. Saw the work of Jackson Pollock, Franz Kline, Mark Rothko. Attended Hofmann's New York School.
1955	11-20 February <u>Espace 55</u> , Exhibition Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Montréal.	Included the Automatists, Mousseau, Leduc, Gauvreau. Borduas criticized the Automatists 'archaic' style. Precipitated a break between Borduas and Leduc.
	26 February "Objectivation ultime et délirante	This text was written to accompany Borduas' exhibition in London, Ontario. Published in response to criticism by Leduc in <u>L'Autorité du peuple</u> , on March 12.
	Winter William Ronald	Ronald moved permanently to New York.
	11-26 February Painters 11 Exhibition Roberts Gallery, Toronto.	The exhibition by Y.M.C.A. (Adelaide House) opening in Oshawa.
1955	December to May, 1956 Painters Eleven Exhibition, Western Ontario Gallery Circuit.	Exhibition travels to London, Toronto, Oshawa, Windsor, Hamilton.
1956	28 February - 7 March <u>Small pictures by Painters 11</u> , Roberts Gallery, Toronto.	The large pictures were not selling so they tried a smaller format.

DATE	EVENT	SIGNIFICANCE
1956	8 April - 20th Annual Exhibition of American Abstract Artists with Painters 11 of Canada, Riverside Museum, New York.	Success outside Canada. Good reviews in New York publications. Members of Painters Eleven met the critic, Clement Greenberg. No Toronto critiques.
	15 September - Painters Eleven Exhibition, Arts and Letters Club, Toronto.	A small exhibition in the "home" of traditional Canadian Art.
	30 October	Accidentally killed.
	26 November - Oscar Cahén.	
1957	30 October - Painters Eleven 1957 Exhibition Park Gallery, Toronto.	This was the opening exhibition of a new gallery. At this time Ronald resigned from the group over a financial dispute.
	16 November	
	June - Clement Greenberg	Greenberg visited members of Painters Eleven in their studios and appraised their work.
1958	3-22 May - Painters Eleven 1958 Exhibition Ecole des Beaux Arts, Montréal.	A large exhibition which subsequently traveled across Canada, sponsored by the National Gallery of Canada.
	30 May - Painters Eleven Exhibition, The Alan Gallery, Hamilton.	Exhibition of twenty works.
	19 June	
	30 May - Painters Eleven with Ten Distinguished Artists from Québec, Park Gallery, Toronto.	Of the Automatists there was Borduas, Mousseau and Riopelle.
	19 June	

DATE	EVENT	SIGNIFICANCE
1958	17 October - 26 November <u>Points of View Exhibition</u> London Library, The Art Gallery, London, Ontario.	This exhibition was the result of a controversy between traditional and abstract painters. The paintings were chosen and hung to represent the differing points of view. It then travelled on the Western Ontario Circuit, to St. Catharines, Windsor, Hamilton and Oshawa.
	4 September - 2 November <u>A Canadian Portfolio Exhibition</u> Gallery of Contemporary Art, Dallas, Texas.	Five Painters Eleven artists and Borduas and Riopelle. Macdonald wrote about Painters Eleven in the catalogue.
1959	5 September - 1 March National Gallery of Canada Travelling Exhibition Painters Eleven	Mentioned earlier as part of the exhibition at the Ecole des Beaux Arts. Sent to Winnipeg, Vancouver, Calgary, Regina, Edmonton, Kingston, Sackville. The group was disbanded as members began to go in different directions.
1960	22 February Borduas	Borduas died in Paris.
	8-30 April <u>Painters Eleven Exhibition</u> , Stable Gallery, Montreal. Museum of Fine Arts, Montréal.	Large exhibition. Poor reviews.
	3 December Macdonald	Macdonald died in Toronto.
	2 December <u>Painters Eleven Exhibition</u> Kitchener-Waterloo Gallery, Kitchener, Ontario.	Exhibition held.

APPENDIX C: LIST OF EXHIBITIONS, AUTOMATIST AND PAINTERS ELEVEN

YEAR	DATE	EVENT/LOCATION	PARTICIPATING ARTISTS
1946	20-29 April	<u>Exposition de peintures</u> 1257 Amherst Street, Montréal.	Borduas, Barbeau, Fauteux, Gauvreau, Leduc, Mousseau, Riopelle.
1947	15 February - 1 March	<u>2e exposition automatiste</u> 75 Sherbrooke Street West, Montréal.	Borduas, Barbeau, Fauteux, Gauvreau, Leduc, Mousseau.
	20 June - 13 July	<u>Automatisme exhibition</u> Galerie du Luxembourg, Paris.	Borduas, Barbeau, Fauteux, Leduc, Mousseau, Riopelle.
1950	18 March - 26 April	<u>Exposition des Rebelles</u> 2035 Mansfield Street Montréal.	Borduas, Barbeau, Ferron, Mousseau and other artists.
1951	May	<u>Les étapes du vivant</u> 81 Ontario Street, Montréal.	Barbeau, Mousseau, Riopelle, Gauvreau, Ferron and other artists.
1952	26 January - 13 February	<u>The Borduas Group</u> Gallery XII, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Montréal.	Borduas, Barbeau, Ferron, Gauvreau, Mousseau and other artists.
1954	13-27 February	<u>Painters 11 Exhibition</u> Roberts Gallery, Toronto. Moved to Robertson Galleries, Ottawa.	Macdonald, Bush, Town, Cahén, Hodgson, Mead, Nakamura, Luke, Yarwood, Ronald, Gordon.
	Late March - early April		
	20 April - 4 May	<u>La matière chante</u> Galerie Antoine, Montréal.	Barbeau, Gauvreau, Leduc, Mousseau and other artists.

PARTICIPATING ARTISTS

YEAR	DATE	EVENT/LOCATION	PARTICIPATING ARTISTS
1955	11-20 February	Espace 55, exhibition Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Montréal.	Leduc, Gauvreau, Mousseau.
	11-26 February	Painters 11 Exhibition Roberts Gallery, Toronto.	Macdonald, Bush, Town, Cahén, Hodgson, Mead, Nakamura, Luke, Yarwood, Ronald, Gordon.
		Preceded by opening at the Y.M.C.A., Oshawa, Ontario	
1955	December - May 1956	Painters Eleven Exhibition Western Ontario Gallery Circuit. St. Catharines, Ontario. London Public Library,	Macdonald, Bush, Town, Cahén, Hodgson, Mead, Nakamura, Luke, Yarwood, Ronald, Gordon.
1956	January 27 February - 4 March 22 March - 5 April 6 April - 2 May From 16 May	Hart House, University of Toronto, The McLaughlin Library, Willistead Gallery, Windsor, Art Gallery, Hamilton.	
1956	28 February - 7 March	Small pictures by painters 11 Roberts Gallery, Toronto.	Macdonald, Bush, Town, Cahén, Hodgson, Mead, Nakamura, Luke, Yarwood, Ronald, Gordon.
	8 April - 20 May	20th Annual Exhibition of American Abstract Artists with Painters 11 of Canada Riverside Museum, New York.	Macdonald, Bush, Town, Cahén, Hodgson, Mead, Nakamura, Luke, Yarwood, Ronald, Gordon.
	15 September 30 October	Painters Eleven Exhibition Arts and Letters Club, Toronto.	Macdonald, Bush, Town, Cahén, Hodgson, Mead, Nakamura, Luke, Yarwood, Ronald, Gordon.

YEAR	DATE	EVENT/LOCATION	PARTICIPATING ARTISTS
1957	30 October - 16 November	Painters Eleven 1957 Exhibition Park Gallery, Toronto.	Macdonald, Bush, Town, Cahén, Hodgson, Mead, Nakamura, Luke, Yarwood, Gordon.
1958	3-23 May	Painters Eleven 1958 Exhibition Ecole des Beaux Arts, Montréal.	Macdonald, Bush, Town, Cahén, Hodgson, Mead, Nakamura, Luke, Yarwood, Gordon.
	30 May - 19 June	Painters Eleven Exhibition Alan Gallery, Hamilton, Ont.	Macdonald, Bush, Town, Cahén, Hodgson, Mead, Nakamura, Luke, Yarwood, Gordon.
	5 September - 1 March, 1959	Painters Eleven 1958 National Gallery of Canada Travelling Exhibition;	Macdonald, Bush, Town, Cahén, Hodgson, Mead, Nakamura, Luke, Yarwood, Gordon.
	5-12 September	Winnipeg Art Gallery;	
	26 September - 12 October	Fine Arts Gallery, University of British Columbia;	
	7-23 November	Calgary Allied Arts Gallery;	
	28 November - 28 December	Norman MacKenzie Art Gallery, Regina;	
1959	2-18 January	Edmonton Art Gallery;	
	13 February - 1 March	Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Kingston, Ontario;	
	6-22 March	Mt. Allison School of Fine and Applied Art, Sackville, N.B.	
	4 September - 2 November	A Canadian Portfolio Museum for Contemporary Arts, Dallas, Texas.	Luke, Macdonald, Nakamura, Town, Ronald.
	17 October - 26 November	Points of View Exhibition London Public Library and Art Museum, London.	Macdonald, Bush, Town, Cahén, Hodgson, Mead, Nakamura, Luke, Yarwood, Gordon and other artists.

YEAR	DATE	EVENT/LOCATION	PARTICIPATING ARTISTS
1959	31 October - 15 November	Painters Eleven with Ten <u>Distinguished Artists</u> <u>from Québec.</u> Park Gallery, Toronto.	Macdonald, Bush, Town, Cahén, Hodgson, Mead, Nakamura, Luke, Yarwood, Gordon, with Borduas, Mousseau, Riopelle and others.
1960	8-30 April	Painters Eleven Exhibition Stable Gallery, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Montréal.	Macdonald, Bush, Town, Hodgson, Mead, Nakamura, Luke, Yarwood, Gordon.
1961	2 December - 15 January	Painters Eleven Exhibition Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery Kitchener, Ontario.	Macdonald, Bush, Town, Cahén, Hodgson, Mead, Nakamura, Luke, Yarwood, Gordon.

APPENDIX D

Biographies of the Artists

The Automatists

Paul-Emile Borduas

Marcel Barbeau

Marcelle Ferron

Pierre Gauvreau

Fernand Leduc

Jean-Paul Mousseau

Jean-Paul Riopelle

Painters Eleven

Jack Bush

Oscar Cahén

Hortense Gordon

Tom Hodgson

Alexandra Luke

J.W.G. "Jock" Macdonald

Ray Mead

Kazuo Nakamura

William Ronald

Harold Town

Walter Yarwood

A list of group exhibitions in which these artists participated will be found in Appendix C.

The Automatists

Paul-Emile Borduas (1905-1960)

Borduas was born in Saint-Hilaire, Québec, in 1905. He received his early training from Ozias Leduc, a church painter and decorator and worked with him from 1922-27. His formal art education began at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in 1923 and he graduated with a teaching diploma in 1927. He continued his studies at the School of Sacred Art in France under the direction of Maurice Denis, the Symbolist painter.

Borduas' teaching career was varied during the 1930's. He joined the Catholic School Commission in 1927, resigned the following year and re-joined in 1933. He was also employed at the classical college Saint-Sulpice from 1933 until the 1940's. In 1937, he joined the staff of the Ecole du Meuble as a full time teacher and stayed until 1948.

In 1946, the first Automatist Exhibition was held, followed by two more in 1947. In 1948, he published the Automatist Manifesto, Refus global, a document so inflammatory that he was dismissed from his position at the Ecole du Meuble and was forced to live by his painting alone. In 1949, he published Projections libérantes, the justification for his teaching and his life.

During the 1940's, Borduas was the vice-president of the Contemporary Art Society, a body dedicated to the interchange of ideas and annual exhibitions.

Borduas left for the United States in the spring of 1953, stayed for two years, and then left for Paris where he spent the last five years of his life. He died in 1960.

Marcel Barbeau (1925-)

Marcel Barbeau was born in Montreal in 1925 and studied at the Ecole du Meuble from 1942 - 1947. He joined the group around Borduas while a student and after graduation, in 1947, was admitted into the Contemporary Art Society.

Barbeau together with J.-P. Riopelle and J.-P. Mousseau, shared a studio where they made their first experiments with Surrealist techniques.

He participated in all the Automatist exhibitions and signed the Refus global in 1948.

Marcelle Ferron (1924-)

Marcelle Ferron was born in 1924 at Louiseville, Québec. She studied under Jean-Paul Lemieux at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Québec City. She joined the Automatist group on her arrival in Montréal in 1946 and signed the Refus global in 1948. She participated in the Automatist exhibitions from 1950 to 1952 and left for Paris in 1953 where she stayed until 1965.

Pierre Gauvreau (1922-)

Pierre Gauvreau was born in 1922 in Montréal, and studied at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Montréal but spent much of his spare time in Borduas' studio. He began his student days with an interest in Picasso and modern painting. In 1938, he received his first painting prize from the hands of Borduas.

He exhibited with the Automatists on several occasions and signed the Refus global in 1948.

Fernand Leduc (1916-)

Fernand Leduc was born in 1916 in Montreal and studied at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Montréal from 1939 - 1943. He frequented Borduas' studio and with him joined the Contemporary Art Society. He participated in the Automatist exhibitions from 1946 - 1955 and signed the Refus global in 1948. It was he, in fact, who proposed a manifesto similar to the Surrealist Manifesto, Rupture inaugurale of 1947.

Leduc lived in Paris, on and off, from 1947 to 1953 and although invited by André Breton to join the Surrealists, remained independant.

He and Borduas had a dispute and broke their relationship in 1955. He later joined the Plasticien group.

Jean-Paul Mousseau (1927-)

Jean-Paul Mousseau was born in Montréal in 1927 and began his studies in art under Frère Jérôme at the Collège Notre-Dame from 1940-1945. The years 1945-46 were spent at the Ecole du Meuble where his fellow students were Guy Viau, Charles Daudelin, André Jasmin and Pierre Gauvreau. He met Borduas in 1942 when he visited a student exhibition at the Collège at the invitation of Frère Jérôme.

Mousseau frequented Borduas' studio throughout the 1940's, participated in all the Automatist Exhibitions and signed the Refus global in 1948.

In 1947, he was chosen to represent young Canadian painters at Prague in an International Exhibition.

Jean-Paul Riopelle (1923-)

Jean-Paul Riopelle was born in 1923 in Montréal and studied at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Montréal, later in 1943-44 at the Ecole du Meuble. He, like the other members of the group spent much of his time at Borduas' studio in the company of young artists, writers and dancers. He exhibited in a number of the Automatist exhibitions and signed the Refus global in 1948.

Riopelle left for Paris in 1946 and in 1947 participated with Barbeau, Mousseau, Leduc and Gauvreau in the exhibition, Automatisme at the Galerie du Luxembourg. He also participated in 1947 in L'Exposition surréaliste, organized by André Breton.

Riopelle remained in Paris but continued to exhibit in Montréal with the Automatists.

Painters Eleven

Jack Bush (1909-1976)

Jack Bush was born in Toronto, later moving to London and Montréal. He worked as an illustrator and commercial artist in advertising while studying art at night. Later in Toronto he attended the Ontario College of Art. He became a commercial artist and in his spare time sketched and painted.

In the early 1950's, he became interested in abstract art based on Surrealism having seen examples of Borduas' and J.W.G. Macdonald's work in local exhibitions.

In 1952, he visited New York, was attracted to the work of the Abstract Expressionists and developed a parallel style.

At the formation of Painters Eleven, in 1953, Bush became the Secretary-Treasurer and it was he who arranged the first exhibition. He participated in all the exhibitions and officially disbanded the group in 1960. He died in 1976.

Oscar Cahén (1916-1956)

Oscar Cahén was born in Copenhagen, Denmark in 1916. He studied at the Academy of Art in Dresden and taught illustration and design at Rotter's studio in Prague,

Czechoslovakia. He went to England in 1938 and was interned as an enemy alien in 1939 and sent to prison camp in Canada in 1940.

He was released from prison camp in 1941 and became a commercial artist and illustrator.

He joined Painters Eleven in 1953 and was killed in 1956. He participated in the exhibition during his life and his paintings appeared in subsequent exhibitions until 1959.

Hortense Gordon (1887-1961)

Hortense Mattice was born in Hamilton in 1887 and died there in 1961. As a child she briefly studied art under John Gordon whom she married in 1920.

From 1920 until 1935 the Gordons spent every summer in Europe and the United States travelling and studying. She attended classes with Hans Hofmann in 1947.

Hortense Gordon was the oldest member of Painters Eleven and participated in all the exhibitions.

Tom Hodgson (1924-)

Tom Hodgson was born in Toronto in 1924 and studied art at Central Technical School and the Ontario College of Art, graduating in 1946. During the war he served in the R.C.A.F. After graduation he became a professional designer in an advertising firm in Toronto, and remained in the commercial field until 1955 when he turned to teaching.

Hodgson was also an Olympic paddler, representing Canada in 1952 and 1956.

He joined Painters Eleven in 1953 and was represented in all the group shows.

Ray Mead (1921-)

Ray Mead was born in Watford, England. He received his art training at the Slade School of Art in London, G.B. During the war he was a R.A.F. pilot, and in 1946 stationed in Hamilton, Ontario. He returned to Canada after the war and became a member of an advertising firm in Toronto.

He became a member of Painters Eleven in 1953, at the same time introducing Hortense Gordon to the group. His work appeared in all Painters Eleven exhibitions.

Kazuo Nakamura (1926-)

Kazuo Nakamura was born in Vancouver in 1926. He began his formal art training at the Hamilton Technical School and continued at the Central Technical School in Toronto from 1948-1951. He began exhibiting in 1951 and was one of the artists displayed in Simpson's Exhibition, Abstracts in the home, in 1953. It was from this exhibition that the eleven artists gathered to form their group.

Nakamura participated in all the Painters Eleven exhibitions.

• William Ronald (1926-)

William Ronald Smith was born in Stratford, Ontario, in 1926. He received his art education at the Ontario College of Art and Hans Hofmann's New York School.

He joined Simpson's display department on his return from New York and assisted in the exhibition Abstracts at Home. The seven artists participating in this exhibition met for the first time at Ronald's studio and formed the basis for Painters Eleven.

Ronald resigned over a dispute in 1956 and did not exhibit in any further exhibitions.

Alexandra Luke (1901-1967).

Alexandra Luke (Mrs. Ewart McLaughlin), was born in Montréal in 1901 and received her early education there and in Oshawa, Ontario. Largely self-taught, she began exhibiting in the early thirties. Her formal art education began when she attended the Banff Summer School and studied under A.Y. Jackson and J.W.G. Macdonald. Two years later in 1947, she attended Hans Hofmann's Summer School at Provincetown, Massachusetts. She returned for the next three summers.

The first exhibition of abstract art in Ontario was organized by Luke in 1952 and nine of the artists of the future group, Painters Eleven, were among the exhibitors. Luke's studio in Oshawa was the meeting place for the inauguration of Painters Eleven. She participated in all the exhibitions. Luke died in 1967.

J.W.G. Macdonald (1897-1960)

James Williamson Galloway "Jock" Macdonald" was born in Thurso, Scotland, in 1897 and died in Toronto in 1960. He was educated at the Edinburgh College of Art, and then taught at the Lincoln School of Art, England, Vancouver School of Art, Provincial Institute in Calgary and the Ontario College of Art, Toronto. He briefly, during the summers of 1948 and 1949, attended classes with Hans Hofmann in Provincetown.

Macdonald painted his first automatic abstraction in the early thirties and continued to experiment with this technique throughout his career.

He was a founding member of Painters Eleven and the teacher of three other members, Luke, Ronald and Town.

Harold Town (1924-)

Harold Baring Town was born in Toronto in 1924 and received his art education at the Ontario College of Art.

Degas, Cubism and Futurist tendencies characterized his painting during his student and post-student days in the 1940's.

In the period 1950-1952, he exhibited with the "un-affiliated artists", a group organized by the Toronto artist, Albert Franck. Here work by Ronald, Nakamura, Cahén, Yarwood and Town appeared in non-juried shows.

Town was one of the founding members of Painters Eleven and participated in all of the exhibitions.

Walter Yarwood (1917-)

Walter Yarwood was born in Toronto in 1917. He gained his early art education at Western Technical School. After graduation he became a commercial artist.

A "Sunday" painter, he was encouraged to join Painters Eleven, and this participation led him to resign from advertising to paint full time. His interest changed, and in 1960 he gave up painting to become a sculptor.

He participated in all the Painters Eleven exhibitions.

NON-PRINT MATERIAL

A. Set of postcard reproductions:

1. Borduas, Paul-Emile, Fond blanc, 1957,
oil on canvas.
2. Cahén, Oscar, Ascend
3. de Kooning, Willem, Composition (Abstraction),
1955, oil, enamel and charcoal
on canvas.
4. de Kooning, Willem, Rosy Fingered Dawn, 1963.
5. Ferron, Marcelle, Sans titre no 1, 1961,
huile sur toile.
6. Gorky, Arshile, Agony, 1947, oil.
7. Gottlieb, Adolph, The Frozen Sounds, Number 1,
1951, oil.
8. Hofmann, Hans, Festive Pink, 1959,
9. Kandinsky, Vasily, Study for 'Composition No.2',
1910, oil on canvas.
10. Kandinsky, Vasily, Small Worlds III, 1922.
11. Klee, Paul, The Bavarian Don Giovanni,
1919, watercolour and ink.
12. Klee, Paul, Pillars and Crosses,
13. Kline, Franz, Dahlia, 1959, oil.
14. Luke, Alexandra, Journey, 1957, oil and sand
on linen
15. Luke, Alexandra, Yellow Space, 1961.
16. Macdonald, J.W.G., Floodtide,
17. Malevich, Kasimir, Suprematist Composition: Red
Square and Black Square, 1915,
(or 1914?), oil.
18. Marcil, René, La machine à bonheur, 1958,
oil on canvas.

19. Nakamura, Kazuo, Blue and Green, 1953,
20. Pollock, Jackson, Number 1, 1948, oil.
21. Riopelle, Jean-Paul, Landing, 1958, oil on canvas.
22. Rothko, Mark, Number 10, 1950, oil.
23. Shadbolt, Jack, Of Birds and Grass No. 2,
24. Tobey, Mark, Transit.

B. Two reproductions:

1. Borduas, Paul-Emile, Sous le vent de l'île, 1947,
oil on canvas.
2. Ronald, William, Gypsy, 1959, oil on canvas.

C. Set of slides:

1. Borduas, Paul-Emile, Cimetière marin, 1942,
gouache on paper.
2. Borduas, Paul-Emile, Viol aux confins de la matière,
1943, oil on canvas.
3. Borduas, Paul-Emile, Sous le vent de l'île, 1947,
oil on canvas.
4. Borduas, Paul-Emile, Les signes s'envolent, 1953,
oil on canvas.
5. Leduc, Fernand, Dernière campagne de Napoléon,
1946, oil on cardboard.
6. Mousseau, Jean-Paul, Bataille moyenâgeuse, 1948,
gouache on cardboard.
7. Riopelle, Jean-Paul, Composition, 1950
oil on canvas.

8. Ronald, William, Slow Movement, 1953,
Casein and Duco with slight
graphite on masonite.
9. Town, Harold, Music Behind, 1956,
Mixed media and collage on
masonite.
10. Ronald, William, Central Black, 1955-56,
oil on canvas.
11. Hodgson, Tom, March Pond, 1958,
oil and fabric collage on
canvas.
12. Luke, Alexandra, Journey Through Space, 1956,
oil on linen canvas.
13. Macdonald, J.W.G., Fleeting Breath, 1959,
oil on canvas.
14. Bush, Jack, Breakthrough, 1958,
oil on canvas.

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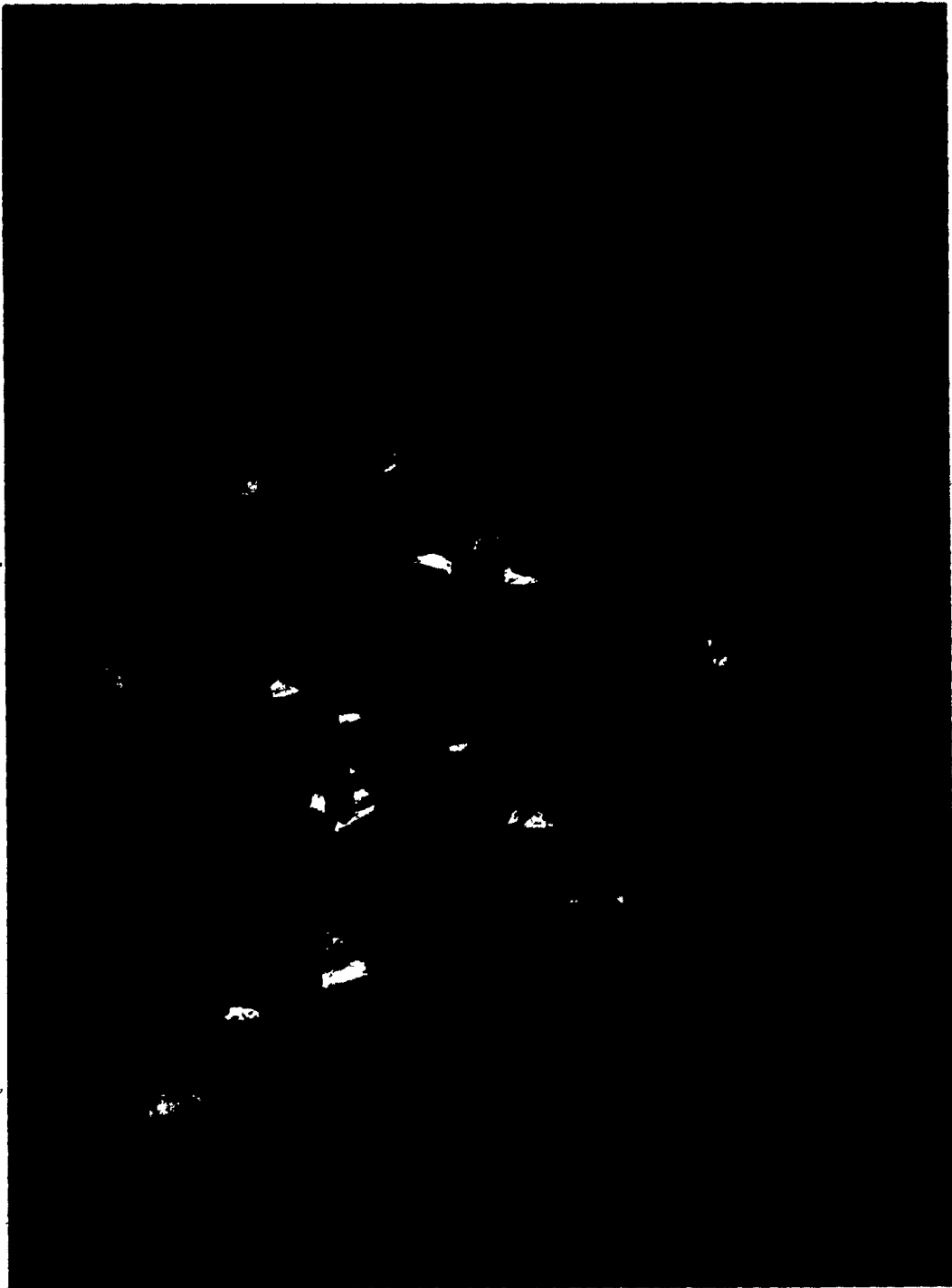
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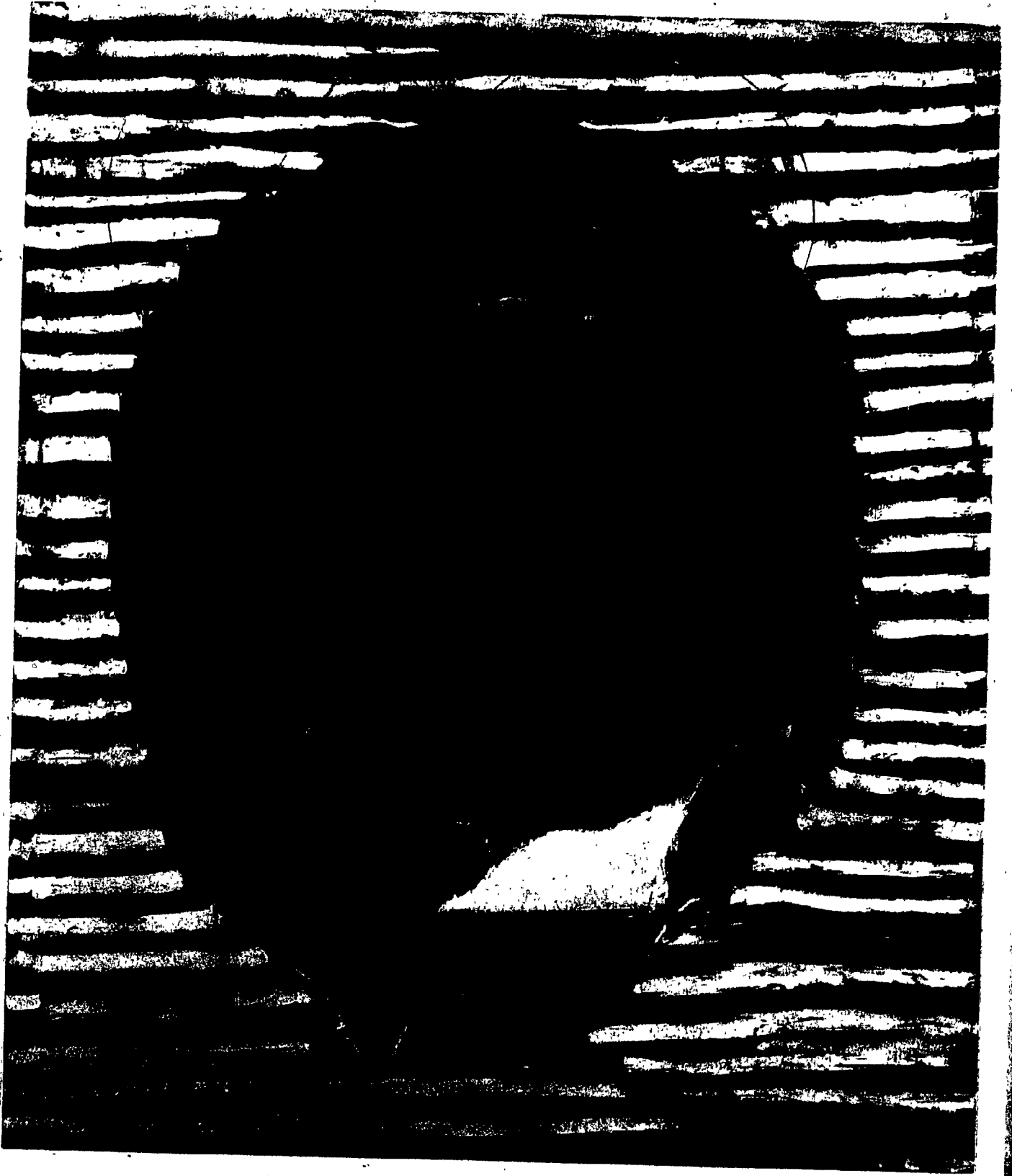
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SMALL ABSTRACT
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