

ARTHUR LISMER: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF HIS PEDAGOGY IN RELATION  
TO HIS USE OF THE PROJECT METHOD IN CHILD-CENTERED ART EDUCATION

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## ABSTRACT

### ARTHUR LISMER: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF HIS PEDAGOGY IN RELATION TO HIS USE OF THE PROJECT METHOD IN CHILD-CENTERED ART EDUCATION

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This study examines Arthur Lismer's (1885-1969) pedagogy as it related to his children's Saturday morning art classes at the Art Gallery of Toronto and later at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. Emigrating from England as a young man he had joined with other painters to form the Group of Seven before becoming an art educator. Untrained for this work, he was mainly influenced by Franz Cizek (1865-1946) of Austria, and John Dewey (1859-1952) of the United States. The focus of this study is on the way in which Lismer combined the permissive theories of Cizek with the socially oriented Project Method inspired by Dewey. A basic contradiction is evident between Cizek's philosophy which was concerned with the intuitive development of the individual through art-making, and Dewey's philosophy which aimed at the social integration of the individual through a process of group cooperation and rational learning. In addition there were other factors which affected the way in which Lismer used the Project Method, including social influences which derived from his background in England, particularly from the work of William Morris the artist and socialist. These social concerns and other elements in Lismer's pedagogy are found by this study to have been contradictory to his theory of child-centered art education.

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CHAPTER 1.

Arthur Lismer: His Career as an Art Educator.

## Arthur Lismer: His Career as an Art Educator

In 1911, Arthur Lismer (1885-1969), a commercial artist and aspiring painter arrived in Toronto from his native Britain. With the optimism of youth and his skills as an artist, he hoped to find work which would enable him to continue painting. He was fortunate enough to be hired almost immediately by David Smith and Company, a firm of engravers in Toronto. Two years later, to augment his income, he began teaching art at the Ontario Summer School for Teachers. Entering the field of art education almost by accident, Lismer found an area in which he could express the many facets of his complex personality.

In 1916 Lismer became the principal of the Victoria School of Art and Design in Halifax, Nova Scotia, a position which required his excellent organizational abilities. Lismer began to form his educational philosophy at this time, and said that Halifax was, "an incubator for me. I learned there the business of teaching." (McLeish, 1955, p. 65) He began to observe and lecture in the local school system, and taught classes in art on Saturday mornings. The School of Art and Design was quite fossilized when Lismer became principal, and he spent the following three years fighting an uphill battle with the Board of Governors in an effort to improve and modernize the programmes being offered. In the year 1919 Lismer returned to Toronto to become Vice Principal of the Ontario College of Art, and found that attitudes at the college were as traditional and difficult to change as they had been in Halifax. The chief opponent to Lismer's new ideas was George Reid, the principal. The friction between the two men grew, as Lismer became increasingly impatient with Reid's failure to uphold the rules and regulations of the college. By 1927 Lismer was tired of the administrative difficulties which conti-

nued to curb his plans for the Ontario College of Art, and accepted the position of educational supervisor at the Art Gallery of Toronto. His new position was to give him the freedom to explore his many ideas on art education.

A period of expansion was beginning at the gallery, and Lismer was able to implement a varied programme of gallery education for both parents and children. Lismer began his new work with characteristic energy and the missionary zeal of one who had been frustrated for a long time. He organized lectures, gallery talks, and circulating exhibitions: making special provisions for teachers from the school system, which included a pictorial lending library, and specialized lectures on teaching art. (Yanover, 1980, p. 9) In addition Lismer gave tours of the Art Gallery bringing new interest to the work with his imaginative presentations. Lismer and his staff worked to dispel the atmosphere of elitism, and succeeded in bringing the Art Gallery into a central position in the life of the city.

In 1930 Lismer's most controversial action at the Art Gallery was the introduction of Saturday morning art classes for children. These classes represented a radical change in Art Gallery policy which, up to that time had seen its primary function as being a display area for works of art. Every Saturday Lismer admitted hundreds of children between the ages of eight and thirteen, who, working in very large groups, were taught by a handful of dedicated instructors.

At that time discipline was considered to be essential in the education and training of children, and in a social situation children were expected to be seen and not heard. Even though the noise level during Lismer's Saturday classes rose to the point when the instructors had to shout to be heard, (Medhurst, Note 1) at no time were the children

unmanageable. However it must have been a formidable task to maintain the interest of so many children. The teachers Lismer chose were young and inexperienced art students, several of whom he had taught at the Ontario College of Art. In this way Lismer was able to retain control over the teaching methods used in his classes. He proved to be a good judge of character, many of those trained at the gallery remained with him throughout his teaching career, and spent their lives promoting his ideas.

At first the children were given the task of copying the gallery exhibits. Watching these results, however, Lismer decided on a fundamental change, a decision which was undoubtedly influenced by the advent of the first Cizek exhibition which Lismer brought to the Art Gallery in 1927. The enthusiasm which this show generated was enormous. Yanover says that,

Approximately twelve hundred children saw the show, and a special evening lecture given by a Dr. Koler who accompanied the exhibition drew an enormous crowd of almost a thousand people. The Mail and Empire responded favourably to the show: "Those who see the Cizek Exhibition cannot fail to be touched with the appeal of children at work or play or caught in reverie, it would be a calamity to miss it."

Lismer readily acknowledged the influence of both this exhibition and the philosophy of Franz Cizek on his subsequent growth as an art educator. "Cizek," he said, "was the pioneer of our day in the recognition of the child as artist." The teachings of Cizek became a stimulus to Lismer's developing ideas about education.

(Yanover, 1980, p. 10)



The work of Cizek's children was of an unusually high graphic quality, and was impressive because it was believed that they were completely untutored. This exhibition was inspirational for Lismer and his staff, and no doubt served to promote the Saturday children's art classes.

Lismer said of the Cizek exhibition that it, "started us off with a magnificent demonstration of what children could do under guidance." (Yanover, 1980, p. 10) He appeared to reserve judgment on the amount of freedom which Cizek gave his students.

Recognizing the children's need for action, Lismer introduced the method known as the "Project", or "Enterprise System". Project work appeared first in the primary schools of England, and was inspired by the philosophies of Dewey and Froebel. (Blishen, 1969, p. 577) Dewey's theory of reflective thinking indicated that the child's immediate environment was able to supply all the material necessary for education. He believed that all learning took place as the result of experience, and that thinking about experiences and their consequences was the basis of genuine education. (Deighton, 1971, p. 81) He proposed that all subject areas in school would have more relevance for children if they were studied under one topic. But he stressed that the topic must approximate a genuine "real-life activity" so that it would seem to the child to be worthy of study. (Stormzand, 1924, p. 148) The children who worked according to this method cooperated with each other, researching, sharing and building towards a common end. The opportunity to learn about the chosen topic from many different aspects was coupled with possibilities to interact socially with others. (Alberty, 1927, p. 105) This system of working suited Lismer admirably, in that he was concerned with the social adjustment of the child, as well as the integration of

art with other learning material.

At the end of every school year Lismer and his staff organized presentations for parents and the public. These presentations were called pageants, and Lismer's students worked for months in preparation for these events. Topics were chosen by the instructors and were coordinated to fit into the general theme of the pageant. The instructor presented the topic to the students with films, visual material, a visit to the local museum, or other places of relevance. (Medhurst, Note 2). The students were expected to carry out their own investigations, and subsequent work was developed from their understanding of the topic, which was generally of an historical, geographical, or social nature. The pageant was an occasion for music, dancing and acting, and Lismer, who had always been interested in the theatre enjoyed his role as producer. He acted as, "Impressario, overall director...he ran a sort of structured chaos." (Yanover, 1980, p. 20) Lismer, talking of the child's participation in the projects and pageants said:

His drawing or painting becomes actuality, he designs and makes costumes, weapons, stage settings, puts on a play, and actually lives inside his own creation, a sort of three dimensional planning in which he can move, dance, talk and enjoy himself immensely.

(Lismer, Note 3, p. 2)

The pageants, the result of months of work, were "quite glorious." (Yanover, 1980, p.20) The spectacular effects were no doubt due in large measure to the lavish decorations on the sets, costumes and props. Year after year, the pageants were unquestionably a social success, a triumph for Lismer, and tremendous publicity for the Art Gallery.

No doubt the pageants had originally been implemented to serve as

a focal point for the year's activities. It has been suggested, however, that the pageants became more and more a showcase for Lismer's talents as an art educator. (Landsley, Note 4) Executed on a grand scale, this meant that there was frequently hard labour and little pleasure for many of the students involved. Decision making in these classes was in the hands of the teachers and not with the students as Lismer frequently suggested.

Lismer's early success at the Art Gallery paved the way for the opening of an Art Center in 1933. He felt that he needed to research his methods with smaller groups throughout the week, rather than with the large Saturday classes for a few hours. He had applied to the Carnegie Corporation, which funded experimental projects in progressive education, and was subsequently awarded a grant for \$10,000. An old house was bought and renovated, and became a community center devoted to art, which catered to all sections of society.

Lismer, being occupied with the other numerous programmes at the Art Gallery, left much of the work at the Art Center to a group of teachers who had been trained in the Saturday classes. Information gathered at the Art Center was to prove invaluable to the new programmes which were subsequently set up in Montreal, Halifax, and Winnipeg and later to many others across Canada.

The community spirit fostered at the Art Center was the direct result of Lismer's belief that the individual should have freedom of expression within the framework of community needs. In his private notes he wrote that, "Personality and the individual count as a unit of our culture." (Lismer, Note 5) The needs of the community were indeed great. Lismer had long been appalled at the quality of art instruction within the Ontario School system. He may have seen the

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formal tasks and exercises of the drawing lesson which passed for art education, as being like his own schooling in Victorian England which had failed to inspire him as a boy. (McLeish, 1955, p. 4). In Toronto he found the teaching to be controlled, standardized and regimented, and in his words, "following the dead pattern of other ages."

(Lismer, Note 6). He hoped that the work he was doing at the Art Center would in due course improve the quality of teaching in the local school system, and eventually spread to the rest of Canada.

During the nineteen thirties Lismer undertook a series of lecture tours across Canada, promoting his methods of art education. This tour was responsible for the formation of many children's art classes and art centers. In 1934 he travelled to South Africa, lecturing and touring with an exhibition of children's work from the Art Gallery of Toronto. His assistant Norah McCullough was subsequently sent to open an Art Center in Pretoria. Lismer's reputation was growing and in 1937 he was invited to lecture in Australia, New Zealand, and Fiji. (Yanover, 1980, p. 21) The Art Gallery of Toronto had become the center of art education in Canada, and Lismer a recognized authority.

Lismer returned from his travels to find that a situation he had feared was developing, and funding was to become a serious problem. Between 1936 and 1937 the Carnegie grant was reduced to \$8,000, and the following year to \$6,000 and subsequently ceased altogether. (Yanover, 1980, p. 21) Between 1936 and 1938 additional funds had been found by the Toronto Art Association and the provincial government, however by 1938 a provincial grant was to provide the needed revenue. Lismer, who had always feared the intervention of the educational bureaucrats, resigned. Hunter (1943), commenting on this episode in

Lismer's life said;

Like most aggressive men who want to see the results of their work, Lismer abhors red tape and to a great extent he dislikes convention... When his projects have passed the initial stage, and it becomes necessary to replace Carnegie money with local support, too often it means that strings are attached, and strings are red tape to Lismer. To fight the battle and then quietly take up the position of figure-head is impossible with Lismer, for he is essentially a pioneer. This is not to say that he would necessarily have left Toronto anyway, but with the termination of the Carnegie support, the project had to be placed on an academic basis in order to get funds, and Lismer, not without a pang, left it for new fields to conquer. (p. 6)

The Saturday morning art classes and the Art Center were continued by the same teaching staff, and were to last for another nine years.

Lismer must have been deeply shocked when in 1947 the Art Center, the Saturday morning classes, and indeed most of the programmes which he had initiated were terminated. The rationale given by the Art Gallery was that these services were no longer needed because their methods had been absorbed by the school system and social and community centers. Lismer had indeed held in-service lectures for teachers, in order to stimulate their interest in art education, but these were not of the intensity or frequency to have been classed as teacher-training sessions, and were also attended on a voluntary basis. Dorothy Medhurst affirms that Lismer's ideas were not carried over into the school system. (Yanover, 1980, p. 32) It was a grave disappointment to those involved in the educational programmes, and a great loss to art education, when the

Art Gallery resumed its original mandate, and restricted its activities to the preservation and display of works of art.

After his resignation in 1938 Lismer went to Hawaii on a lecture tour, and after a disappointing wait for a position to materialize at the National Gallery in Ottawa, accepted a position at Teacher's College, Columbia University. He was scheduled to teach four courses: two in child art, and two in teacher training, a total of six hours a week, which left him with time to observe at different schools. He admired much of what he saw, and was most impressed with the work of Victor D'Amico, the Educational Director of the Museum of Modern Art in New York. He was, however, out of sympathy with the academic approach to art education and found American thinking to be too cramped by systems and methods. Gilda Hinter-Reiter says that, "He became somewhat distressed with the 'uniformity' of the educational institutions. He felt the old hostility arise at the evidence of... hundreds of teachers submerging their own individualism as craftsmen to conform to the authoritative gospels'." (Hinter-Reiter, 1967, p. 25)

The year Lismer was at Columbia was also the last year of John Dewey's long and illustrious career as professor emeritus at that University. Dewey's influence on Lismer had been profound. The two men had met at the New Education Fellowship Conference in Cape Town in 1934, and it is almost certain that they met again while Lismer was at Teacher's College in New York. (Bridges, 1981, p. 2)

In 1939 when the long awaited appointment at the National Gallery in Ottawa finally materialized Lismer returned to Canada. He was to be the advisor on Canadian art and art education to the National Gallery, a position devised by his old friend Eric Brown, the Director of the

Gallery. This was an exciting prospect for Lismer who had long wanted to encourage Canadian cultural awareness, and who had a lifelong commitment to art education. But although Lismer made two successful lecture tours across Canada that year, his plans were shattered by the sudden death of Eric Brown. In addition the outbreak of the second world war meant the curtailment of all the National Gallery activities. (McLeish, 1955, pp. 176-177) In 1940 Lismer was offered the position of Educational Supervisor to the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, which he accepted. At fifty-five he was still a dynamic figure, and the passive role of civil servant had been, in some ways, a frustrating one for him.

Lismer arrived in Montreal to find that, unlike the situation at the Art Gallery of Toronto when he had first arrived, much work, in the field of art education, had already been accomplished by Anne Savage and Franz Brantner. Building on this foundation Lismer set about establishing the Department of Education at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.

Writing about this period of development for the educational facilities at the Museum, Lismer recalls in his unpublished autobiography that,

In December of 1940 I came to Montreal and started all over again, organizing an Art Gallery and Museum into educational activity with children and adults. By this time the pattern was evident. I knew what would happen and it did. Teachers, children, French and English speaking came. There were activities of lecturing, instructing, school visits, children's classes, and the Art School of the Montreal Art Association to revive.

Montreal is an exciting place, with its racial impacts and factions, and high emotional activity in the arts. We have now

(1945) about three hundred children in the classes, from three years to fourteen, and over five hundred adult students in the Art School. I am on the staff of McGill University, lecturing in aesthetics and Art History. I conduct a course for 'non-professional men and women', and now after five years of activity of this kind, we are to open a new Children's Art Center in Montreal. (Bridges, 1977, p. 49)

Once again Lismer chose young art students to act as his teaching staff, this time from the Art School of the Montreal Art Association. In addition he hired one or two child welfare and social workers. These people, and others who wished to teach art, were not considered qualified until they had completed two years of Art school training, and had attended philosophical and technical lectures in art education given by Lismer at the Museum and at McGill University.

In Montreal Lismer used the same teaching methods as he had used in Toronto. Projects were once more the focus of the children's Saturday classes. At the Christmas season there were exhibitions and presentations, and again at the end of the school year there was a Spring pageant. The Art Center was located on Ontario Street, just north of the Museum, in a large comfortable house. Although Lismer was well past the age of retirement he was as busy as ever, lecturing, broadcasting and appearing on television. In his efforts to raise interest in art education Lismer was still travelling long distances, encouraging the setting up of art activities. (McLeish, 1955, p. 180) The Montreal Art Center became the focal point, providing the research and ideas, and serving as a model for the new centers in the surrounding area.

In 1967 Lismer was still active at the Museum, (One Man Show, 1967.



p. 16) but after twenty-seven years his memory was failing and at the age of eighty-two he was asked to retire. Lost without the work which had absorbed him for so many years, Lismer would walk to the Museum several times a week, his presence was tolerated by the understanding staff, but without the stimulation of his demanding job he felt useless. He died in 1969 at the age of eighty-four, and was buried beside other members of the Group of Seven in the grounds of the McMichael Gallery at Kleinburg in Ontario, Canada.

Lismer's contribution to art education had not gone unnoticed. In 1941 Dalhousie University had awarded him an honorary doctorate, and in 1946 he was elected to the full membership of the Royal Academy. In 1963 nearing the end of his career McGill University awarded him a second doctoral degree. (MacDonald, 1975, p. 865)

## Notes Chapter 1

- Note 1. Medhurst, D. Taped interview. Toronto, Ontario. July 7, 1981.
- Note 2. *ibid*
- Note 3. Lismer, A. Child art and education. 1951. Item 19, Art and Education Box. (Unpublished manuscript, Library Archives, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal)
- Note 4. Landsley, A. Taped interview. Montreal, Québec. September 15, 1981.
- Note 5. Lismer, A. Fundamental values in art. n.d. Item 25, Art and Education Box. (Unpublished manuscript, Library Archives, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal)
- Note 6. Lismer, A. The teaching of art. Australia, 1937. Item 11, Art Education Box. (Unpublished manuscript, Library Archives, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal)

CHAPTER 2.

Influences from Lister's Background Evident in his Pedagogy.

Part 1            Social Influences

Part 2            Aesthetic Influences

Influences from Lismer's Background Evident  
in his Pedagogy

Part 1: Social Influences

Arthur Lismer's formal schooling ended at thirteen when he became apprenticed to a firm of illustrators attached to a Liberal Party newspaper, the "Sheffield Independent". Trained as a commercial artist, he had no background in art education, and based his teaching methods on trends in art education as well as on the general educational philosophy of the period. This study suggests that one of the strongest influences on his ideas, however, came from his background in late nineteenth century Victorian England.

Lismer was born during a period of public interest in social reform, when literature, art and politics all focussed on the need for social change. For Lismer growing up at that time, it would have been difficult to ignore the rising tension between rich and poor, and it was not surprising that, in his teaching, he made cooperation between individuals a priority. To further his aim Lismer found that Dewey's Project Method (See Chapter 1, p. 4) which presented many opportunities for joint action, was an ideal way of working. By encouraging interaction between students Lismer believed that he was "helping the individual to improve his social attitudes." (Lismer, Note 1) In addition Lismer also encouraged his students to become more socially aware, and to assume some responsibility for the society in which they lived. His own social commitment as an artist, and his belief in art as an effective tool for changing society, was part of the reason why he was attracted to the other members of the Group of Seven. This is evident in a quotation from the first Group of Seven Catalogue which stated that:

A country depends upon three things: its Words, its Deeds and its Art. Recognizing that Art is an essential quality in human existence they will welcome and support any form of Art expression that sincerely interprets the spirit of a nation's growth. (Catalogue, Note 2)

Indeed these words could have been written by Lismer himself, as Shirley Yanover pointed out, "With such an outlook as this, specifically the idea of art as social force, Lismer's increasing commitment to education seemed inevitable." (Yanover, 1980, p. 9)

#### General Context

Lismer was born in 1885 into a poor family, and spent his youth in Sheffield, a steel and silver manufacturing town located in the English industrial midlands. Sheffield, like other towns in the midlands, had suffered from the ill effects of the Industrial Revolution. The mechanization of industry, which had started in the mid-eighteenth century, had caused a series of drastic changes, and craftsmen, replaced by machines, had been forced to move to the industrial centers in order to find work. As a result the overcrowding and poor working conditions bred misery and poverty for the working class. This was largely ignored by the prosperous middle class, many of whom had made large fortunes from industry, and were therefore unwilling to recognize the need for social change. The Victorian ability to ignore unpleasant facts, and the general passion for respectability, resulted in a callous disregard for the plight of the poor. (Lister, 1966, p. 10) This attitude was reflected in the art being shown in the Academy at that time, which ranged from the small narrative painting frequently showing a sentimental view of the poor, to the large historical work which indicated a desire to escape to a more admirable past.

The end of the nineteenth century, however, saw the growth of certain social pressures which could not be ignored, and which forced a complacent society to recognize the need for reform. At that time there was a recession in both agriculture and business, and the population of cities swelled with large numbers of poor. An influx of foreign immigrants from troubled eastern Europe also added to the distress. (Seaman, 1973, p. 304) Writers, including Dickens and Ruskin, who had been pressing for reform for over forty years began to affect public opinion. During that time there was an increase in the number of labour unions, and several members of the Labour Party were elected to Parliament; these events coincided with the formation of the Socialist movement of which William Morris, the designer and political activist, was a prominent member. As the social conscience of the age developed, books and plays exposing particularly grave problems appeared. Among these, "Mrs. Warren's Profession" by George Bernard Shaw showed the existence of widespread prostitution among the poor. (Seaman, 1973, p. 326) Towards the end of the century the church protested more frequently against the state of society, and increasing numbers of the middle class began to join charitable organizations. Due to public pressure the government of the day was forced to make serious efforts to improve the deteriorating social conditions.

The social upheaval which was taking place during Lismer's youth had a marked effect on his moral, political, and social philosophy. This can be seen in his writings on art education which are punctuated with comments of a sociopolitical nature which can in general be attributed to the influence of William Morris. In addition to these influences, however, it is important to remember that his family were members of the Unitarian church and that Lismer taught in the Unitarian Sunday School for several

years. Members of this church advocate absolute freedom of opinion, emphasizing responsibility towards others, and a concern for reason, freedom and tolerance. Lismer's later friendship with Frank Scott, the Canadian political writer, also indicated that he had some sympathy for left-wing politics. (Pinsky, Note 3) Lismer read widely on social issues, and Dorothy Medhurst, one of his assistants at the Toronto Art Gallery, remembers that Lewis Mumford, the humanist political philosopher, was one of the authors he recommended most highly. (Medhurst, Note 4)

A review of Lismer's background may help to explain the emphasis which he placed on social issues in his Saturday classes, where art-making was used, in part, to make his students aware of the society in which they lived. For example, transportation, factories, and machinery were often topics of projects. His students took various trips to train stations and other places of local interest, visiting factories where biscuits were being made, or newspapers printed. At times, for example during World War II, there was "Much glamorization of industry," and work. (Medhurst, Note 5) Lismer's use of topics which were part of his students' personal experience could also have been influenced by Dewey's theory of experience and reflective thinking. (See Chapter 3, p. 43) Lismer echoed these notions at a teachers' conference in 1946 when he suggested that the teacher turn to "the world he lives in, and to his environment and his own time and place for social re-direction." (Lisner, Note 6) In a radio broadcast he also stressed that adolescents should be made aware of the culture in which they live, and their place in that culture. (Lisner, Note 7) Lismer, like Dewey, believed in the power of education to change society, and for Lismer this meant that

students must be conscious of their obligations, not only towards their own society, but in a larger sense, towards the global community.

(Lismer, Note 8) His belief in the power of education to change society, and in the power of the individual to effect change can be seen in the following quotation,

The task of education...is a stupendous one - to make man a socially minded, creatively alive and peaceful citizen of a larger community ....To develop his capacity to understand his responsibility as a unit in a vast social order of which he is a minute but important item..(Lismer, Note 9)

Lismer worked to achieve these ideals in his Saturday classes. By using the socially oriented Project Method he fostered a spirit of cooperation and social awareness. His choice of this method was, perhaps, not only influenced by Dewey's writings, but could also be attributed to the influence of William Morris, a major figure in the fields of Design and Politics during the latter part of the nineteenth century.

#### William Morris and his influence on Lismer's pedagogy

William Morris (1834-1896), the son of wealthy parents, became interested in Socialism while he was still a student at Oxford University. As a young man he became a founding member of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, a group of radical young artists who were committed to overthrowing the popular art of the times. Morris, like other members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, was fascinated by the Medieval period and, it has been suggested, was converted to Socialism by the legend of Morte D'Arthur, and by his impressions of Rouen Cathedral. (Gaunt, 1942, p. 193) Morris saw the Cathedral as a magnificent example of group achievement, and interpreted the harmonious relationship of the craftsmen - builders as an exercise in Socialism, rather than as an example of Christian cooperation.



The round table at Camelot also became a symbol for him, standing for communal living and accomplishment. These examples of common endeavour had Communist implications, and indeed Morris became a member of the Communist party during the latter part of his life. (Thompson, 1977, p. 111) After a brief period Morris left the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and opened his own craft manufacturing business. His workshops were models of good working conditions, and demonstrated his ideals of mutual respect between workers, and the responsibility of each worker to the group. (Briggs, 1962, p. 152)

It seemed reasonable to Morris that if men were to work together in harmony, that they would also benefit from living together under one roof. His dreams of a contemporary Camelot are shown in the following quotation,

I console myself with visions of the noble communal hall of the future, unsparring of materials, generous in worthy ornament, such an abode of man as no private enterprise could come anywhere near for beauty and fitness, because only collective thought and collective life could cherish the aspirations which would give birth to its beauty. (Briggs, 1962, p. 176)

His ideals of a perfect society in which everyone lived together in harmony, in combination with his dislike of the machine and its products were among the factors which inclined Morris towards Socialism. His contribution as a designer-craftsman, writer and publisher, were to make him an influential figure in many fields, including those of commerce, politics, and education. His influence was at its height when Lister was a boy at the end of the nineteenth century, and it is possible that admiration for Morris's life as an artist and socialist prompted Lister to combine social concerns with art education.

When Lismer began to work at the Art Gallery of Toronto, he was faced with the task of teaching art to large numbers of children on Saturday mornings. At first he encouraged them to copy the exhibits in the gallery, but this was not in line with contemporary thought in art education, which became apparent to Lismer when the Cizek exhibition arrived in Toronto in 1927. However, he did not choose to work according to Cizek's much publicized method of "letting the children teach themselves," (Art education considered as growth and self fulfillment, 1924, p. 1) but used the Project Method, which had been developed by Dewey. This method gave him the opportunity to promote other areas of learning which concerned him, which included the social integration of the child. In a lecture which he gave in 1951, Lismer said that he used this method of instruction because he wished,

To extend the range of a child's creativity beyond his personal expression in a single drawing or painting, that is only part of his potential range. He has to learn to work with an idea in relation to others - that is, he contributes self-exploration, self-adaption, and self-expression to a mutual plan or project...

In other words his personal effort is enlarged into a group enterprise.....He is taught to work with the group. (Lismer, Note 10)

Lismer's use of Dewey's Project Method satisfied his social priorities and meant that children were given a common theme on which to work, and that their art-making was frequently a joint effort with others in the group. A review of some of his major concerns for art education are a reminder of how closely he followed Morris's ideal of the spirit of the Medieval artist-craftsman. In his notes he wrote that the aims of his method of working were, "Learning to work together. Cooperation towards

a common end. Group consciousness - and interest in common progress. The ability to work together." (Lisner, Note 11) Unlike Morris, Lisner was not so much concerned with changing society, as with, "Helping the individual to improve his daily living." (Lisner, Note 12) His purpose had social implications, however, since the "improvement" he hoped for was the adjustment of the individual to the prevailing "social attitudes and conditions." (Lisner, Note 13) In addition Lisner believed that art education, as a discipline, was morally beneficial to society and that as an activity it presented solutions for the problem child. In a manuscript written to accompany a film on his art classes at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Lisner stated that,

Art also develops a social sense of working together, of understanding that creative things are important and imperishable. That destructive acts are unwise and anti-social, leading to aimless thinking and doing, to thoughtless leisure hours and delinquency. (Lisner, Note 14)

Lisner also believed that his version of the Project Method, which helped children to adjust to the group, and society, ultimately led to a "sympathetic understanding of people in all lands and life." (Lisner, Note 15). Statements of this nature show that Lisner, like Morris, was a social idealist and cherished Utopian hopes for society. Both Morris and Lisner were, however, primarily artists who used their work to advance their social ideals, Morris, through the Arts and Crafts Movement, and Lisner through his use of a socially oriented approach to art education.

In addition to Lisner's belief in the importance of the group, he was convinced that the individual and in particular the artist was accountable to society. This idea was also a major element in Morris's philosophy

and was one of the reasons why he became active in the Socialist Movement.

The artist's responsibility to society

Morris was disillusioned with the age in which he lived, specifically with the products and poor working conditions generated by the machine. He felt that as an artist he had a responsibility to change the ugliness which the Industrial Revolution had brought.

As a young man he had been apprenticed briefly to an architect, and, as a result, had become interested in saving historic buildings from poor restoration attempts. Because of this activity he became socially involved for the first time, and subsequently spent much of his time and energy in trying to improve social conditions in industrial England. He found his true vocation, however, when his house was being built, and said of that episode that,

We found, I and my friend the architect...that all the minor arts were in a state of complete degradation especially in England, and accordingly in 1861 with the conceited courage of a young man I set myself to reforming all that: and started a sort of firm for producing decorative articles. (Briggs, 1962, p. 30)

This modest description of the 'Firm', to which Morris devoted so much of his life, belies the widespread changes which occurred as a direct result of this enterprise. Morris set up his craft-manufacturing business on the premise that a return to good craftsmanship would eventually lead to an improvement in the quality of machine-made goods. His attempts to improve public taste lead to "The long slow process of uncluttering middle-class drawing rooms," (Seaman, 1973, p. 317) and eventually to a better quality of machine-made goods. The struggle to achieve these

objectives was long and difficult and Morris became convinced that some sort of revolutionary action was needed to further his ideals. As Seaman points out, "This aesthetic revolt against machine-made artifacts lead to a proper attack on capitalism...it also forced Morris into the Socialist camp." (Seaman, 1973, p. 317) Morris was born to wealthy parents, and made his own money by manufacturing goods for sale. It is ironic, therefore that he reacted so bitterly against Capitalism. His main concern was the welfare of the workers who he found were condemned to labour under wretched conditions in joyless and repetitive jobs. He believed that as an artist it was his duty to lead the way to a better life for his fellow man. In an article which he wrote for the magazine Justice, he stressed his belief in the artist as the saviour of society by stating,

Civilization has reduced the workman to such a skinny and pitiful existence, that he scarcely knows how to frame a desire for any life much better than that which he now endures perforce. It is the province of art to set the true ideal of a full and reasonable life before him. (Briggs, 1962, p. 37)

Morris spent his career fighting against the industrial society of Victorian England. His work as a designer and his promotion of craftsmanship influenced succeeding generations and resulted in the cult of the craftsman which is still present in the society of today. Lisner was conscious of the debt which was owed to Morris, and commenting on his frustrated desire to change society said,

William Morris....and a few others well known for their heroic idealism and practical policies...tried to fight the machine. They saw the debacle, and it came. The machine won out...and the

National spirit of design and simplicity had succumbed to the horrors of the machine. (Lismer, Note 16)

Lismer, like Morris, believed that art had the power to change society, an idea which has lost its force, so that today we can no longer regard art as a powerful political tool. Lismer was influenced in his youth by this notion and maintained his belief in the power of art to effect change. He seemed to conclude, however, that education through art offered a more direct way to alter society by changing individual attitudes.

As a young man, Lismer had been attracted to the other members of the Group of Seven because they were social idealists, and believed that they could use their painting to promote their ideals. These ideals included the wish to give Canada a national art form, by showing, "The spirit of a nation's growth" (Hankin, 1979, p. 86) in their painting. During the period in which he was working with the Group of Seven, and was still employed by the Grip Engraving Company, Lismer's financial resources were meager, and it was partly due to financial necessity that he accepted his first teaching position. (Breslin, 1960, p. 28). As he became interested in teaching and the possibilities of education, he must have realized that this was a different, and perhaps more effective way of promoting his social ideas, and he eventually became more dedicated to teaching than to painting. (Johnstone, 1951, p. 33)

When Lismer began to teach in 1913, one of his main concerns was to improve the general level of taste. Accordingly while he was the principal of the Victoria School of Art and Design in Halifax (1916-1919) he set out to cultivate the "aesthetic sensibilities" (McDhurst, Note 17) of the community. In a speech entitled "Art and the Community"

Lismer said,

We should begin by explaining the idea of art and the advantages materially and spiritually, that lie in the possession of simple well chosen wallpapers, furniture, ornaments, tableware, - for art like charity begins at home.... We realize that a harmonious environment means comfort, enjoyment and added efficiency in life, and yet it is well known that so many homes of our people are museums for the accumulation of useless and ugly things.

(Lismer, Note 18)

Lismer's belief in the importance of well chosen furnishings, and of the home environment for the well being of the community, shows Morris's influence on Lismer's generation.

When Lismer became the Educational Supervisor at the Art Gallery of Toronto in 1927 he found that the gallery was being used almost exclusively for exhibiting art. In his new position he felt that it was his responsibility to ensure the participation of as many members of the community as possible, and he consequently developed programmes which were to bring large numbers of adults and children into contact with the Museum. Lismer was concerned that the art in the Museum should be not only accessible, but would also become familiar to the general public. He said, "Art education should seek to democratize art, to make art more commonly understood, and not keep it a mystery locked in a rich man's castle or in the forsaken rooms of a museum." (Lismer, Note 19)

He "believed very strongly in the link between ethics and esthetics, 'a more beautiful world is a better world'." (Medhurst, Note 20) During his Australian tour he told an audience that,

Looked at in the right way, it is the duty of every individual to

become conscious of the social implications of art. Not as pictures and sculpture, but art as wholesome living with some attempts to preserve dignity and beauty, (Lisner, Note 21)

He had strong feelings about his own duties towards society, and did not hesitate to remind others of "the social responsibility of the individual" especially towards the "sights and sounds of ugliness" in the environment. (Lisner, Note 22) He suggested that with effort, and "if we gave sufficient thought to it and cared a little for the decay of individual responsibility to ugliness in our environment, we should begin to feel the artist in us stir." (Lisner, Note 23) His use of the words "duty" and "responsibility" are a reminder of the conservative society of his youth which took its moral tone from Queen Victoria herself, and from the powerful teachings of the church.

Lisner, as an artist, was aware that Canadian culture was lacking in some areas, and like Morris, he blamed industrialization for this situation, and said, "In the technical world we are efficient. But in our emotional and artistic life we are tardy...We have lost touch with a lot of things through the machine." (Johnstone, 1951, p. 48)

Lisner's inclusion of social issues in his teaching, such as his use of group activities, and his promotion of individual responsibility to society remained a major part of his teaching philosophy until he retired. There is some evidence that his students were affected by these ideas; today there are many who are active not only in music, sculpture and painting, but in fields which have more obvious social implications such as, educational programming, museum administration, and film making.



## Part 2: Aesthetic Influences

This study has observed that Lismer used the Project Method not only as a vehicle for teaching art to children, but as a way of promoting ideas which were important to his philosophy. There were, in addition to his interest in social conditions, other influences from his English background which affected his use of the Project Method. The society of Lismer's youth was highly respectful of education and regarded it as a privilege; learning, to Lismer, who left school at an early age, was something to be treasured and promoted. He saw in the Project Method, therefore, an excellent opportunity to inform his students on a variety of topics which would expand their range of knowledge. Lismer's interest in history and cultural anthropology probably developed from his background but could also have been influenced by the writings of John Dewey. (Dewey, 1916, pp. 207-218)

Lismer appeared to have been particularly interested in the Medieval period, and used related material in his Saturday classes. Dorothy Medhurst, one of Lismer's assistants in Toronto, admitted to being puzzled at the amount of Medievalism present in Lismer's pedagogy. She assumed that it came from other English teachers of Lismer's generation such as Sybil Marshall or Dorothy Heathcote. (Medhurst, Note 24)

However, the historical, and the Medieval influence in particular, was a product of Victorian England and was still present during Lismer's youth.

### Interest in the Medieval period

During the nineteenth century there were several historical revivals in architecture, and a general tendency to look to the past for innova-

tions. The French Revolution in 1789 had caused the breakup of tradition throughout Europe, and the natural development of architecture ceased for a considerable time. When Europe was again at peace the renewed freedom to travel stimulated an interest in styles of the past. In England the result was an eclectic movement in architecture which became known as "The Battle of the Styles," out of which the Greek and Gothic revivals developed. A general nostalgia to look back to more tranquil times was also apparent in literature, and several authors including Sir Walter Scott, Goethe, and Victor Hugo wrote romantic Medieval novels. (Bannister Fletcher, 1945, pp. 834-835) There is no doubt that the uneasy social conditions of the nineteenth century were responsible for the interest in the Medieval period, which appeared to the newly-industrialized Victorians to be a time of peace and tranquility.

During this period academic art was promoted by the Royal Academy. In 1848, however, this situation was challenged by a group of young painters known as the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. They admired more primitive forms of painting, such as the work of the German Nazarene Group, and Italian painting before the Renaissance and it has been suggested that they were also the first European artists to show an interest in the art of more primitive cultures. (Adams, 1978, p. 39) Their work showed a simplicity of lighting and grouping and the brilliance of their colour was innovative at the time and shocked many of those who were used to more somber paintings. Much of the stimulus for Pre-Raphaelitism derived from John Ruskin, the great art critic and social commentator. Ruskin, who was devoted to the Medieval period encouraged the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood to look to the fourteenth century for inspiration, and their adoption of the ideals and values of this period

subsequently became dominant in their work. They used the great Medieval themes of courtly and unrequited love, and the legends of Beowulf and Arthur, and in so doing, illustrated this period for the Victorians. Their work, which was ridiculed at first, subsequently became so popular that it dominated English painting up to the end of the nineteenth century.

William Morris was a member of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood during their early militant period, but left the group when they ceased to be radical. His major interest was in changing society, and he devoted his energies to the Arts and Crafts Movement and to his growing interest in Socialism. He continued, however, to live and work in the spirit of Pre-Raphaelite Medievalism. For Morris, this meant that his written and graphic work was based on romantic notions of chivalry, simplicity, and ideal beauty which had obsessed the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. His living conditions also reflected this interest, his house had been built in the Gothic Revivalist style and was decorated throughout with murals and tapestries of Medieval themes, and music from that period was played from the minstrel's gallery. His wife, Jane Morris, who had inspired many Pre-Raphaelite paintings dressed in long flowing garments, a style adopted by other women in the Arts and Crafts Movement. She learned to spin and weave and many details of the life they led reflected their notion of an idealized fourteenth century. (Gaunt, 1942, p. 138) Morris discovered virtues similar to those of the Medieval period in the early Greek and Viking cultures, and elements of these also appeared in his work. His craft workshops produced a variety of furnishings including tapestries and stained glass windows, and in most of this work the influence of Pre-Raphaelite Medievalism predominated.

Lisner, who was born at the end of the Nineteenth century, shared

an interest in history with others of the period, and like his contemporaries showed a particular interest in Medieval times. Dorothy Medhurst remembers that castles, lords and knights were recurring themes on Saturday mornings. (Medhurst, Note 25) Every Christmas there was a big presentation, and in Lismer's view "there was only one kind of Christmas and that was the Medieval Christmas, you had to have that sort of flavour to it." (Landsley, Note 26) This was followed in the Spring by the big year-end pageant, which, again, showed Lismer's affinity with the Medieval period. As McLeish noted in a quotation from a newspaper of that time,

'Melodious as the music was, something of its feeling would have been lost, had it not been for the handsome pageantry which bound the whole thing together....Angels, kings, lords and ladies of the court, and simple peasant folk were children from the Gallery's Saturday morning classes. (McLeish, 1955, p. 146)

In the Middle Ages, pageants were spectacular parades which took place in the open air, winding through the streets of towns and cities. Houses were decorated with banners and tapestries, and people could view the scene from windows, balconies and rooftops. Lismer tried to capture the air of festivity in his year-end pageants, and chose to use the largest spaces at his disposal, at both the Art Gallery of Toronto and the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. In Toronto presentations took place in the central sculpture courtyard, and the audience, which was composed of parents, public and press sat around the square. In Montreal there was no similar space, so pageants took place at the base of the big marble staircase. One of his students remembers standing on the stairs in costume while the audience sat at the foot of the stairs, or leaned

over the balcony above. (Hyland, Note 27) The positioning of the audience and the use of twelve foot high banners as decoration simulated the setting of a Medieval pageant in atmosphere and scale. (Landsley, Note 28)

The events in Lismer's pageants were varied, and included songs, dances and plays. There were also puppet shows and tableaux (Yanover, 1980, p. 20) and one report of a pageant at the planning stage indicated that there were plans for jugglers and dancing bears. (Report, Note 29) As in the Medieval pageant, the costumes in Lismer's presentations were the focal point of the event. There was much use of colour and pattern both in the background and in the costuming, and a notable tendency to decorate every surface. This element was also conspicuous in the work of Cizek's students, and the exhibitions of their work which caused so much admiration in Toronto in 1927 and 1929 (Yanover, 1980, p. 11) may have influenced Lismer to expect this type of art from his students. William Morris was, however, the major influence during Lismer's formative years and presumably it was from this source, and from the Medieval influence that Lismer acquired his taste for the richly decorated surface.

#### Interest in the decorated surface

William Morris was not formally trained as an artist, but learned to master all the crafts which his company produced. This enabled him to design appropriately for each craft, and the richness and refinement of his work in diverse materials testified to his outstanding abilities. The crafts produced by his firm included tapestry weaving, fabric printing, and stained glass work. In 1890, near the end of his career, Morris founded the Kelmscott Press and introduced new typefaces which were influenced by Medieval manuscript writing, and which revolutionized

typography. The Kelmscott Press became well known for the richness of its book designs which Callen describes in the following quotation;

Old-style gothic typefaces were adopted, with the title page, and often all double page spreads treated decoratively as a single unit. The pages were densely covered with type and ornament, initial letters and matching decorative borders.

(Callen, 1980, p. 181)

Morris was responsible for the revival of the book as an art form, and believed that the only work of art which surpassed the Medieval book was the Medieval building. (Briggs, 1962, p. 4)

Morris was influenced by the Pre-Raphaelites, not only through his enduring interest in Medievalism, but also in the thickly overlaid nature of his design work which, like Pre-Raphaelite painting, completely covered the surface. The Pre-Raphaelite use of infinite detail was in part their response to Ruskin's suggestion that they paint "Truth to Nature." In the 1860's a French critic remarked that, "These men put on canvas, one by one, the unmodified sensations of their eyes," and added that they moralized like poets, but that, "between the workman and the poet the artist has no place." (Taine, Note 30)

The Pre-Raphaelites arranged their pictorial space according to their subject matter, the details, however, were distributed in an unselective way over the entire pictorial surface. The Daguerreotype, which was a photographic process popular at the time, had a similar appearance. However, the major influence on their work was undoubtedly the art of the fourteenth century in which all-over detail predominated.

Morris's work retained the same feature of crowded space common to the Pre-Raphaelites, but his choice of form and content was more refined

and selective. His choice of English country flowers as his main motif showed his preference for the unsophisticated earthiness which he associated with the Middle Ages. (Gaunt, 1942, p. 139) His work was unusual at the time for its quality of sinuous linear growth which pre-dated the Art Nouveau movement, popular at the fin-de-siècle. The writhing nature of the plant forms he used could have been influenced by his admiration for Norse and Celtic art, elements of which lingered on during Medieval times. It is interesting to note that the short-lived influence of the Art Nouveau period did not detract from Morris's subsequent importance to British design.

Lisner's early work showed the same closely packed sense of space and a tendency to cover the entire surface of a painting which was present in the work of William Morris and Pre-Raphaelites. These features were also shared by other members of the Group of Seven and may have been reinforced in Lisner's work by his association with them. Lisner's "Rock, Pine and Sunlight" (1920) and "September Gale" (1921) and even his later paintings, such as "Nova Scotia Fishing Village" (1930) all indicate a preoccupation with complex pattern. This element was also present in the work of his students, especially in the projects done on Saturday morning for the pageants.

The pageants which took place at the end of the school year became the showcase for the work of Lisner's students. Photographs show "the lavish display and meticulous detail with which the children had composed costumes, shrines, etc." (McLeish, 1955, p. 146) The tendency to embellish every surface has been noted in the work of the Pre-Raphaelites and William Morris, and in Lisner's early paintings. In some way this tendency was transferred to the work of Lisner's students. This can be

seen, for example, in the "Maori Meeting Place" (Yanover, 1980, p. 29) which was part of the 1936 pageant, and in which the background and costumes were so heavily decorated that it is difficult to distinguish one from the other.

Heavy patterning was also evident in the work of Cizek's students and it has been suggested in this study (Chapter 2, p. 31) that this may have been a secondary influence on Lismer himself. It is quite possible, however, that Cizek, like Lismer was also influenced by William Morris and his work in the decorative arts. Certainly Cizek was aware of the nature of Morris's work, as his conversation with Wilson shows;

It was your William Morris and Ruskin....who first tried to make art penetrate every corner of life - brought it right into peoples' homes, to their wallpapers, and the tiles of their hearths, and the very clothes they put on. My contribution is that I start with the children and make them begin to decorate the world they live in. (Wilson, 1921, p. 6)

He also expressed a wish that the children's ideas would "grow like flowers in a wood - naive, untrained and gaily coloured." (Wilson, 1921, p. 6) It is possible that Cizek may have had a taste for peasant art and consciously promoted decorative work in his classes. This could not be said of Lismer, although a similar element was apparent in his students' work. Former colleagues remember that he was not particularly aware of the bias towards decorative art in his children's classes.

(Landsley, Note 31. Medhurst, Note 32) It is likely that the preference of the period, which favoured the decorative arts, influenced the type of work which both Cizek and Lismer motivated by approbation.



In a similar way the Nineteenth Century was also responsible for shaping Lismer's social awareness, and he found in North America that Dewey had developed a system of education which promoted social consciousness in children, which satisfied Lismer's own social criteria. His affinity with Medievalism was the result of a particular phenomena of Nineteenth Century England, where, for many, the Medieval period assumed aspects of a Utopian dream. It was natural, therefore, that Lismer would refer to this period frequently in his teaching and subconsciously promote work which had, for example, the characteristic all-over patterning of Medieval books and tapestries.

This study has found that Lismer, who educated himself through his readings, was also influenced by ideas which he absorbed from his background in England, and which shaped the choices he made in his teaching methodology. His choice of the Project Method provided a practical framework within which he could advance other concepts in conjunction with art instruction. He was, however, also concerned with the promotion of child-centered art theories which had developed from his admiration for the work of Franz Cizek and Marian Richardson and which were, as this study will observe, incompatible with Dewey's Project Method.

## Notes Chapter 2

- Note 1. Lismer, A. Art education n.d. notes. Item 35, Art and Education Box. (Unpublished manuscript, Library Archives, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal)
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- Note 20. Medhurst, D. Taped interview. July 7, 1981.
- Note 21. Lismer, A. Art and the community. n.d. Item 18, Art and Education Box. (Unpublished manuscript, Library Archives, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal)

- Note 22. Lismer, A. The art of appreciation. Canadian Comment, April, 1935. Item 10. Nature of Art Box. (Library Archives, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal)
- Note 23. Ibid.
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- Note 26. Landsley, P. Taped interview. September 15, 1981.
- Note 27. Hyland, J. Telephone interview. January 28, 1982.
- Note 28. Landsley, P. Taped interview. September 15, 1981.
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CHAPTER 3.

Educational Influences on Lismar's Pedagogy.

### Educational Influences on Lismer's Pedagogy

Arthur Lismer had little knowledge of educational philosophy or practice when he began to teach art as a young man in 1913. He had left school at the age of thirteen, and had been trained in the commercial arts, learning the craft of painting in his spare time. During his stay in Halifax, Nova Scotia, as the principal of the Victoria School of Art and Design, Lismer began to formulate his philosophy of art education, observing and trying out his ideas on a small group of children who met on Saturday mornings for art lessons. Lismer read widely, and became interested in the progressive education movement pioneered by John Dewey in education, and by Franz Cizek and Marian Richardson in art education. The new freedom for the child, evident in child-centered education, was in sharp contrast to Lismer's own schooling in Victorian England, and although Lismer accepted many of these new ideas he retained and used notions which originated in his youth and which were not in accord with child-centered art education as formulated by Cizek. Lismer was sympathetic towards the ideals of progressive education, and understood the needs of children, identifying as an artist with their desire for more freedom. His interpretation of child-centered art education, however, was modified by his use of the Project method, and, as this study will attempt to show the two are not synonymous.

#### Historical Background

The history of the child-centered movement in education shows a long slow development of the ideal of freedom for children to participate in their own education.

In the ancient world, education of the young was limited to the children of the upper classes, and was authoritarian and aimed at making

the individual subservient to the state. This process was first challenged by Socrates (469-399 B.C.); whose advice to students, "know thyself", was a notion very close to the modern concept of self-realization, (Strebel and Morehart, 1929, p. 7) and the idea that "each (person) must have his own unique ideal." (Nunn, 1947, p. 13) History reveals, as Dewey has observed, that educational philosophy has always swung between the two extremes of imposition and free expression, the choice being determined by social needs and pressures. (Dewey, 1916, p. 122)

After the conquest of ancient Greece, Greek learning was carried to Rome by captive scholars, and when Rome eventually fell, the learned were forced to scatter, and many took refuge in monasteries. These institutions became centers of learning which gradually developed into the great Medieval Universities. Knowledge at these institutions was stored and cherished, and was passed on to students for the preservation of learning rather than for the benefit of the individual. During the Renaissance many new movements and reforms developed, these were in part due to the influence of Dante, who chose to write in Italian rather than in Latin as had previously been the custom. Of the new ideas, the Humanist movement was undoubtedly of the greatest interest to the intellectuals. The Humanists placed the individual at the center of human concerns, and this notion, which evolved into the "naturalistic ideal" during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries became the popular philosophical theory of education. The connection between humanism and education was originally made by Elizabethan Sir Francis Bacon (1561-1626) who suggested that the natural evolution of the child should determine the subject matter and teaching method. This idea was not adopted by educationalists,

however, mainly because of the work of John Locke, (1632-1704) who, in the mid-seventeenth century proposed that the mind could be forced to accept knowledge, an idea which became known as the doctrine of "Formal Discipline" and remained in force in the school system until well into the twentieth century. The interpretation of this philosophy resulted in repressive and authoritarian action on the part of the teacher, and placed the development of the individual student as the lowest priority. The ideals of Francis Bacon were not developed further until Rousseau (1712 - 1778) presented a plan for the education of the child in his novel "Emile" (1762). Rousseau separated the child Emile from society, and placed him in natural surroundings in the sole company of his tutor; in this setting learning came from the child's interests and observations. These ideas had such a powerful effect on French society, that Napoleon credited Rousseau with being the moving force behind the French Revolution.

The "Naturalistic Ideal" remained a speculative proposition, however, until Pestalozzi (1746 - 1827) developed and used what he termed the "Natural Laws of Education." These laws referred to the natural human methodology of absorbing information, and have since become known as the psychological method of instruction. These ideas were amplified by his pupil Froebel (1782 - 1852) who was able to take the "Naturalistic Ideal" further because of his scientific training and orientation. Froebel, who wished to study children as close to their natural state as possible, was mainly interested in the young child. He set standards for pre-school education which are still in use today, including the use of pleasant surroundings, and the type of equipment which stimulated the child into learning by doing. (Stroebel and Morehart, 1929, p. 18) He placed children



and their needs at the center of the curriculum, and in this respect was perhaps the major influence on the philosophies of Franz Cizek and John Dewey. Dewey, the major figure in the American progressive education movement, believed that learning should develop from the interests and surroundings of the child. In addition, however, he stressed the social implications of education, including the obligations of the educational system to make the child into an integrated member of society. It has been argued that these aims were at odds with the ideals of child-centered education, (Entwistle, 1970, p. 35) and indeed Dewey's philosophy of education did not include the cultivation of the inner personality of the child, a trend which he saw as a divisive factor in society. (Dewey, 1916, p. 122) In the light of Dewey's educational priorities which placed social concerns above the inner development of the individual, Lismer's choice of the Project Method, which was essentially concerned with group activities would seem to be an inappropriate vehicle for teaching child-centered art education, which aimed at the development of the inner child. Nevertheless Lismer chose to use Dewey's Project Method in his children's Saturday art classes at the Art Gallery of Toronto, and at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. It must be assumed therefore, that Lismer's social concerns corresponded with Dewey's ideas for education, and that his use of the Project Method confirmed that social integration was a priority above the development of the individual child. Dewey's philosophy of education suited the political and social tenor of the times, and his Project Method remained in use until the 1960's. Remnants of his powerful ideas are still evident and have become part of the accepted tradition in educational practice.

### John Dewey

John Dewey (1859 - 1952), the American philosopher and psychologist, was undoubtedly the most influential and venerated figure in the Progressive Education Movement. He was concerned with both practical and theoretical ideas, and through his experimental school at the University of Chicago, he developed new systems for the development of learning.

Dewey found that the educational system of the times separated children's interests and activities at home from their life at school. He argued that unless the two areas of a child's life were brought together that education would remain a matter of remembering facts which were unrelated to the reality of the child's life. He believed that the world of everyday life was sufficiently rich to provide the necessary background for the education of children and fit them for a place in society. His system of education was based on these ideas, and on the notion that true learning was born of experience, he proposed therefore that education should be "a continual reorganization, reconstruction, and transformation of experience." (Dewey, 1916, p. 50) Dewey's major concern, however, was the socialization of the student and to achieve this Dewey suggested that schools should be made to resemble society as closely as possible. Certainly the Project Method, which was developed from Dewey's theories of education, followed this pattern, and encouraged group activities and group effort towards a common goal.

Dewey believed that social and political reform could be achieved through education, and as a supporter of the Democratic system he advocated governmental use of the educational system to further the goals of democracy. In his Pedagogic Creed he stated,

I believe that education is the fundamental method of social progress

and reform... Through education society can formulate its own purposes, can organize its own means and resources, and thus shape itself with definiteness and economy in the direction in which it wishes to move. (Archambault, 1964, p. 437-438).

Our objection to the use of the educational system in this way derives from present day experiences of totalitarian systems which have notoriously used education as a political tool. As Entwistle points out, "Opposition to totalitarian regimes derives largely from the assumption that these ride rough-shod over the legitimate aspirations of individuals." (Entwistle, 1970, p. 26) Dewey's concern was, however, to tie the heterogeneous population of the United States together at a time when there was a heavy immigrant population. To do this he felt that, "The emphasis must be put upon whatever binds people together in cooperative human pursuits." (Dewey, 1916, p. 98) In order to achieve this objective, Dewey was against any educational method which dealt with individual development as its exclusive goal, and said,

The idea of perfecting an inner personality is a sure sign of social divisions. What is called 'inner' is simply that which does not connect with others - which is not capable of free and full communication. What is termed spiritual culture, has usually been futile, with something rotten about it, just because it has been conceived as a thing which man might have internally - and therefore exclusively. (Dewey, 1916, p. 122)

Entwistle objects to this element in Dewey's philosophy which he finds deliberately undervalues, "the individuals need for a strong inner life of his own," (Entwistle, 1970, p. 35) and points out that,

These are the kinds of considerations which prompt some educationists

to contend for the primacy of an 'inner life' against Dewey's stress on the need to refer all experience to what is 'outer'.... Hollins quotes Santayana's view that, 'In Dewey....there is a pervasive, quasi-Hegelian tendency to dissolve the individual into his social functions; and he comments that this quotation, 'attacks Dewey's preoccupation with the social side of experience; he undervalues the individual's need for a strong inner life of his own.'

(Entwistle, 1970, p. 35)

In the light of Dewey's objections to placing the individual above the group, it must therefore be understood that the Project Method was child-centered only in so far as the subject and treatment had to be relevant to the children concerned. This method was not, as will be seen later in this study, concerned with the individual development of each child. The social aspects of the Project Method appealed to similar values in Lismer's philosophy, and the influence of his youth in a society which was conscious of social issues prepared him for the acceptance of Dewey's ideas. He found that the Project Method fulfilled his criteria for the social integration and involvement of large numbers of children, and this appeared to be his priority for the Saturday classes. He did not follow all of Dewey's intentions however, and frequently used exotic subject matter as motivation, rather than topics which were closer to the child's experience. He used aspects of the Project Method which suited the situation at the Art Gallery and later at the Montreal Museum, however the Project Method itself was not consistent with the theories of child-centered art education which Lismer also adopted.

The Influence of the Child-centered  
Art Movement on Lismer's Pedagogy

Child-centered art education was originally defined by Franz Cizek (1865 - 1946) as a way, "to teach children art by the simple method of not teaching at all in the accepted sense, but of letting the children teach themselves." (Wilson, 1921, p. 1) Cizek, who is considered to be one of the fathers of modern methods of art education developed his ideas at a time when, as Marian Richardson said, there was a "growing respect for the individuality of the child." (1948, p. 59) These ideas were part of a larger movement encouraged by the findings of psychology, which suggested that the child was a different being from an adult rather than, as had previously been thought, an undeveloped and therefore inferior adult. In addition, the interest in children as artists brought a new recognition of the visual relationship between children's art and the art of primitive peoples.

Children before the nineteenth century were treated as small adults and were expected to share in all the pleasures and sorrows of their parents' lives. However, early in the nineteenth century the separation between children and adults increased, and with more educational opportunities for children, the separation of the sexes also became a common practice. A growing awareness of the needs of children was apparent even before the advent of psychology (see Chapter 3, p. 40); Rousseau in the mid-eighteenth century showed an interest in the child as an individual. "The child is not a small grown-up, he has needs of his own, and a mentality adapted to these needs." (Viola, 1944, p. 7) A recognition of the needs of children did not, however, include the child's natural inclination to draw, and the sort of drawing instruction which first

CHAPTER 4.

The Influence of the Child-centered Art Movement  
on Lisner's Pedagogy

appeared in the school system was designed to be useful.

Drawing appeared in the school system in England circa 1840, and was called "Linear Drawing". It was taught in conjunction with carpentry, housebuilding, and land surveying. (Sutton, 1969, p. 45) Herbert Spencer in his book Education: Intellectual, Moral and Physical written in 1861, perhaps made the first reference to the child as an artist when he said,

What is it that the child first tries to represent? Things that are large, things that are attractive in colour, things round which its most pleasurable associations most cluster... The question is not whether the child is producing good drawings. The question is whether it is developing its faculties.

(Spencer, Note 1)

Spencer also made some notable observations about drawing in education, and said,

During early childhood no formal drawing lessons are possible.

Shall we therefore repress, or neglect to aid these efforts at self culture? Or shall we encourage and guide them as normal exercises of the perceptions and the powers of manipulations...

From what has been said, it may readily be inferred that we

condemn the practice of drawing from copies. (Spencer, Note 2)

These were isolated observations, however, and even though Spencer took a surprisingly liberal view of educational practice, it is interesting to note that he still referred to the child as 'it'. Ruskin, who was interested in promoting the "natural development of the child", opposed the use of drawing as an aid to vocational subjects, and attempted to have art, in the school system, changed from a practical to a cultural pursuit. (Field, 1970, p. 50) His efforts, at that time, were not

successful, and the use of copy books, introduced in the 1840's, continued as standard practice into the twentieth century. In 1868 examinations were added to the art programme, and examples from the Department Directory of 1870 show that children were expected to copy complex outline drawings of designs, vases, and still life objects. (Sutton, 1967, pp. 107-112) There were more enlightened programmes available to schools which were situated near, and worked with, local art schools. One of these programmes designed by the principal of the Birmingham School of Art in 1888, showed a desire to give children at least a measure of freedom. His suggestions for Standard 3 concluded with the statement that, "Design - the main object of all drawing... is of educational value in stimulating and exercising the individuality, the idiosyncracies of each child." (Sutton, 1967, p. 133) This emphasis on design in the late nineteenth century reflected the needs of industry, which demanded a constant supply of competent designers.

During the 1880's, a groundswell of opinion against the narrow application of art in the school curriculum made small but important gains. Ruskin, who had been advocating for many years that school children should be exposed to the best in music, art, and literature was joined by his most outspoken supporter, Ebenezer Cooke. Cooke, a former pupil of Pestalozzi, knew James Sulley the psychologist, and made attempts to reconcile his theories of art education with psychology. In 1895 Cooke developed an 'Alternative Syllabus' to be used at the discretion of individual schools, which for the first time used psychological insights in connection with art education. He emphasized that, "the study of the child has influenced very much the alternative syllabus." (Sutton, 1967, p. 139) His findings resulted in the inclusion of colour for the first



time in a school syllabus and, although copying was still in vogue for art instruction, the figures in the Alternative Syllabus had a new freedom and liveliness not seen before. (Sutton, 1967, pp. 137-152) Cooke was also influenced by Froebel's methods and was probably the first person to teach art according to Froebel's principals. Froebel maintained that children's spontaneous expression in art was of primary importance to their development, he defined the role of the teacher as being passive and non-directive. (Sutton, 1967, p. 158) At the International Health Exhibition in 1884 Cooke described Froebel's philosophy as it applied to art education,

Imagination some teachers consider their enemy. Froebel makes it the very center of his system....He finds the child a creative being, with active imagination....Froebel's aim is education by natural development working in alliance with nature, by methods learned by observing the child. (Sutton, 1967, pp. 151-158)

It is clear that the child-centered movement in art education owed much to Froebel, and his methods inspired not only Cooke, but Franz Cizek. Cizek began his teaching career in Vienna at the end of the nineteenth century and was the first person believed to have employed child-centered philosophy to art education in its entirety. His work and philosophy were recorded by admiring students, and as a result have been subject first to uncritical acclaim, and later to disbelief in his reported methods. There is no doubt that in contrast to the schools of the time Cizek's classes for children gave them considerable freedom. However the much repeated statement of his teaching principles; "to let the children grow, develop and mature," suggested that art materials were supplied and that the children worked on their own, as their individual

ideas demanded, which was far from the truth.

The exhibition of work by Cizek's students which went to Toronto in 1927 was a great influence on Lismer, but he seemed to have suspected from the conformity of the work that there had been some "guidance" from Cizek. (Yanover, 1980, p. 10) Lismer was attracted to the 'Naturalist Ideal' and advocated art teaching principles which resembled those of Cizek. In practice, however, he seemed to prefer the Project Method which promoted the socializing aspects of art-making. These two very different approaches became part of Lismer's pedagogy, however, it was for the ideals promoted by Cizek, that Lismer became known.

#### Frank Cizek

Frank Cizek began studying art in Vienna in 1885, and later became a member of the 'Secessionists', a group of artists which included Gustave Klimt, and which was dedicated to pioneering modern art in Austria. Cizek became interested in children's art while watching children painting on a fence opposite his boarding house. Other members of the Secessionists encouraged his interest and in 1897 he was given a permit to teach, and later in 1903 accomodation, but no funds from the State. His work with children received much publicity in Britain and the United States, however, and it was from these sources that he gained enough financial support to continue until 1938, when he became too blind to work.

Accounts of Cizek's methods were written in the English language by Wilhelm Viola, and Francesca Wilson. Both writers, who admired his apparently effortless procedure, have given an unbalanced view of his teaching practice, suggesting that he was a passive figure in the art room, a notion which Cizek himself seems to have encouraged. In answer

to Wilson's question as to how he achieved his results Cizek replied, "I don't do....I take the lid off and other art masters clap the lid on." (Wilson, 1921; p. 3) Wilson also gave the impression that there was something miraculous about Cizek himself,

Whatever the type of class, whether Cizek's part in it is that of a mere onlooker, as he loves to call himself, or more active in the criticism lesson, he is the one person that matters in the room, and the magician for whom all these little gnomes are working, though they know it not, the wizard who has released their powers and enabled them to express the things in them which might otherwise have slumbered forever. (Wilson, 1921, p. 15)

Carline described Cizek during his classes as giving the impression of watching the proceedings in a dream, "with his cold remote eyes and far-off unsmiling expression." (Carline, 1968, p. 162) The spiritual qualities associated with Cizek's teaching can also be found in accounts of lectures and talks which he gave. To the teachers of Doblin in Austria he said,

Teach art by the simple method of not teaching at all in the accepted sense, but by letting the children teach themselves... I beseech you, more than anything else, to free the schools you are teaching in from yourselves, ie. from the schoolmaster... The teacher ought to learn to hover like an 'invisible spirit' over the pupil, always ready to encourage, but never to press or force. (Art education considered as growth and self-fulfillment, 1924, p..1)

It was generally understood at the time that Cizek's method involved little or no teaching in the accepted sense. In the preface to Dulac's

book, Christmas Pictures by Children, written in 1922, Wilson wrote that Cizek refused "with scorn to tell them what they ought to do, or how they should do it, he was lavish with his praise, and did not point out faults. Great stress was laid on excellence of colour, conception and design." Accounts which stressed the passive role of the art instructor, as presented by Cizek, were widely circulated, with unfortunate results for art education. In some cases drawing from copy books gave way to a complete lack of any kind of instruction at all.

The children in Cizek's classes "drew and painted only from imagination, and this constituted another drastic change from earlier methods." (Carline, 1968, p. 162) Cizek was not, in fact, teaching drawing, he was doing something entirely different. Wilson pointed out that "the age he loved most was from one to seven," because, like Froebel, he wanted to study the young "unspoilt" child. She quotes a lecture given by Cizek in 1921,

This is the age of purest art. A child draws a great deal in this period, not because, as grown ups make out, he wants to communicate something, but because he wants to formulate his own ideas - express what is in him. (Wilson, 1921, p. 4)

Cizek's role as "that of a mere onlooker" (Wilson, 1921, p. 15) in the studio was the only possible attitude he could assume in the light of his stated beliefs, which were that, "the unspoilt child is tremendously creative (Viola, 1944, p. 27)....A young child produces what he knows, not what he sees (Viola, 1944, p. 29)....First they (children) are creative and only much later comes the grammar of drawing and painting." (Viola, 1944, p. 31)

The time was ripe for this philosophy, which, for the first time

encouraged children to give form to their inner ideas. The advent of child psychology, and the various art movements such as the Fauves, Futurists and the Expressionists were also concerned with revealing inner thoughts and feelings. In practice, however, although the adult artist was expressing an interior world, for the children who attended Cizek's classes more motivation must have seemed necessary. Cizek, contrary to his public statements, did not rely on the spontaneous expression of his students, but presented quite specific pictorial motivation before they began to work.

Cizek: We shall draw a line down the center. This is a wall. At one side of the wall Santa Claus will stand and on the other, who will stand there? The "Krampus," at the side of the paper near the window we have the "Krampus". (Later) You must all begin with the mitre near the top of the paper - as Trude did. Not in the middle! Otherwise it would be a wee Santa Claus. (Viola, 1944, p. 113)

As the lesson progressed he made comments about the children's work, "You have given Santa Claus a black beard like the Emperor of Abyssinia, but Santa Claus has a white beard....One child has made a beard with two lines, but that is not enough. It should be outlined to show the full size." (Viola, 1944, p. 114) Again towards the end of the lesson Cizek urged the children to decorate their work, and gave some very specific directions;

"If Santa Claus goes to the children he puts on his best clothes. He has a long golden coat fastened with a clasp. There are golden decorations on this clasp....the coat is lined with red and the shirt underneath is snow white. You see only a little bit of his

shoes under his coat. On his shoes he has gold buckles. We shall paint them with real gold. Now do the decorations on his coat. (to the child who shows him his drawing) You must cover all your paper nicely. (to another child) You must make your decorations thicker." (Viola, 1944, p. 114)

Cizek also exerted considerable control over the colours used by his students, giving them one colour at a time, and even mixing colours beforehand.

Cizek: Those who have finished their drawing may begin painting. You get the red colour now. What are you going to paint red?

Children: The lining of the coat.

Cizek: Paint red what should be red....Now you get the paint for skin and hands. What are you going to do now?

Children: Face and hands. (Viola, 1944, p. 114)

Viola's description of Cizek with his "gentle voice....his kind face, bending over little heads; and indeed all that charm of his whole attitude towards 'his' children," again gives the impression of a saintly character. It is possible that, on the whole, this was an accurate description. There were times, however, when Cizek could be quite critical and even unkind. He said, "Here is a child who, instead of a Christmas tree has made a broom. (Laughs) It must be a poor child who makes a Christmas tree out of a broom." (Viola, 1944, p. 118)

F. is in a stage where he leaves the abstract for the concrete... He begins already upon anatomy. - which is beyond him of course. He wants to say with his inadequate means what only grown-ups can say. (Viola, 1944, p. 132)

Carline commenting on this aspect of Cizek's teaching recalls the case

of a particularly brilliant pupil of rich parentage. The professor was subsequently asked about his pupil's progress and he replied most uncharitably: "He produces nothing now at all - he is so rich."  
(Carline, 1968, p. 159)

When Viola (1944) was answering questions about Cizek, he was asked if Cizek still painted, and replied that Cizek had not touched a brush in thirty years, believing that there were enough artists, and that it was more important for children to create. (Viola, 1944, p. 70) He seemed to have submerged his own desire to paint and to have worked through the children he was teaching. His control over the children's work can be seen in the following quotation,

When I say, for instance, make the hair, a child should not be satisfied with making decorations. When I say now do the eyes, you should not make blots, but eyes with lids, pupils, and all the parts of the eyes. I try to guide you slowly so that your work grows slowly, but also clearly and well, not muddled. That would give me no pleasure. (Viola, 1944, p. 115)

He seemed to have had a change of heart the following week, however, and asked his students, "What can you do with it? I must ask you what you want. Not you ask me what I want. I want nothing. You must want something." (Viola, 1944, p. 115) It is clear, however, that he did want a very specific type of work from his students, and had pre-conceived notions of child art which resulted in a uniformity in the work of his students. Brent Wilson remarks on the amount of control which Cizek maintained in his classes:

Once his Juvenile Art Class had begun, the child art Cizek observed was done under his influence in circumstances he controlled so

completely albeit unknowingly. (Wilson, 1974, p. 2)

Reports which stressed Cizek's passive approach lead to a misunderstanding of his methods, and those who followed this model were left floundering with unstructured lessons and poor quality art work. Absolute freedom in any teaching situation is a denial of terms, and it has become clear that art is not different in that respect from other disciplines. Possibly Cizek instinctively realized this, and not trusting to the native ability of his students, gave them verbal motivation and assistance. In the light of these findings it is apparent that Cizek's students were not, in fact, expressing their inner thoughts and feelings, but were largely illustrating the verbal descriptions which Cizek gave them.

There were contradictions in Cizek's work, and in the work of Marian Richardson, and this was also true of Lisner's philosophy and teaching practice. Lisner was attracted to Cizek's idea that the child "has worked entirely out of feeling, unself-consciously, spontaneously, pressed on by some urge from within him." (Art education considered as growth and self-fulfillment, 1924, p. 1) Lisner also suggested that the teacher was not necessary to the child's art-making when he said, "The child is the true artist in that he can use and enjoy aesthetic experience. He has native gifts of perception and sufficient skill to give his ideas and experience form." (Lisner, Note 3) Both men worked against the notion of child-centered art education, however, by using teaching methods which conflicted with their students' personal expression. Cizek worked to achieve a specific type of decorative art, and Lisner appeared to be more interested in art which developed from social interaction.

There were others who were influenced by the findings of psychology



and a growing interest in new art movements, including a recognition of the value of primitive art forms. Among those who abandoned the old methods of teaching drawing was Marian Richardson, of England. Lismer met her in England in 1934 on his return trip from South Africa. Lismer's daughter said that her father, "knew about her before then, but had not met her." She thought that they might have met again later or had some correspondence. (Lismer-Bridges, Note 4) Medhurst, however, remembers that Lismer actually observed Richardson teaching on one of his many return visits to Britain. (Medhurst, Note 5) There was an exhibition of children's drawings from Britain at the time when Lismer was in South Africa, which were technically excellent, but Lismer remarked that children could not base an emotional life on such work. He added that this was subject to change, "as is evident in the contributions of L.C.C. (London County Council) schools under Miss Richardson's direction, who (sic) is making a marvelous change in the direction of liberating the graphic and lyrical character of the English child." (Lismer, Note 6) There was no doubt that she had an influence on Lismer, philosophically he agreed with her teaching practice which at the time was revolutionary because, "she refused to give direct instruction and allowed the aesthetic sensibilities and the imagination of the pupils to guide them." (Carline, 1968, p. 170) Lismer expressed a similar philosophy in a lecture he gave in Australia in 1937, "We learn from the child to respect his own desire for self-expression and enable him to release these dynamic and vivid images that are the evidence of his five senses..." (Lismer, Note 7) Marian Richardson was a unique individual with an unusual talent, her model of art education, however, which was widely copied, was only used successfully by those rare instructors who had a similar gift of description.

Marian Richardson

Marian Richardson (1892 - 1946) was, by her own admission, an uncommitted artist and found her true vocation when she began to teach art at Dudley Girl's High School at the age of nineteen. Almost by accident she began a lesson one day by describing a street scene which she had painted herself. She says of this experience;

One day I decided to try giving the children a word picture I asked them to shut their eyes while they listened to a description of a little local street, lit by the moon, as I had myself seen and painted it a short while before. I was surprised and delighted with the results. No doubt the fact that I had seen the subject as a picture gave colour and point to my words and reduced them to what was artistically significant. From this moment the work had a new quality.... In a vague dark way I began to see that this thing we had stumbled upon, as it were almost by chance, was art not drawing; something as distinct and precious as love itself and as natural. I could free it, but I could not teach it; and my whole purpose was now directed to this end, as I set out to learn with and from the children. (Richardson, 1948, pp. 12-13)

The revelation of this experience changed her approach and she began to teach "by not teaching at all" as Cizek described his own method. She was encouraged in this by Roger Fry, the art critic, who helped spread her ideas by giving her exhibition space at the Omega workshop, which he organized. He was highly critical of art teaching methods of the time and said, "There can be no doubt...that the average child has extraordinary inventiveness in design, and the average adult none whatever, and that in between these two states there occurs the process known as art

teaching." (Carline, 1968, p. 170) Richardson's method appealed to Fry because, as she said, "How different it all was from the orthodox technique which these children had learned before in imitation of adult conventional art. They were now developing an art of their own, vital enough to discover its own means of expression." (Richardson, 1948, p. 17)

In time the child-centered approach to art education began to assume the features of a cult, and both Cizek and Richardson were treated with almost religious awe. In the introduction to Richardson's book, Art and the Child, Kenneth Clarke talks about her method of describing scenes as a form of hypnosis, "I use the word hypnotised half seriously, for the extraordinary vividness with which her pupils realized her descriptions did seem to involve some kind of telepathic suggestion." (Richardson, 1948, p. 8) Richardson herself was convinced that something unusual was taking place when she said, "As I talked something passed between us, and whatever possessed for me the genuine picture quality had a sort of incandescence which I could communicate." (Richardson, 1948, pp. 8-9) Clarke concludes the preface with the following words,

She had a gift of universal love. This sublime gift, for which so many poets and artists have striven in vain, is only to be achieved through a humility seldom allied with creative gifts... It is not for us to say who is, or is not a saint; but as I read the passages that follow, I know that I am in the company of one who has had an unusually direct and pure revelation of the divine spirit; and I believe that I recognize the same tone of voice which I hear in the dialogues of St. Catherine of Sienna.

(Richardson, 1948, p. 10)

The suggestion of special powers and saintliness attributed to the major figures of child-centered art education made it difficult, if not impossible, to follow this method with any degree of certainty. Richardson's descriptive method was widely copied in Britain and the old Commonwealth, but in other hands it was abused and finally discredited.

The child-centered art movement was based on the assumption that children created spontaneously without adult intervention. Both Cizek and Richardson, however, used descriptions to motivate their students, and their success depended to a large extent on their personalities, and on their ability to choose evocative words. Richardson, for example, was able to describe Velasquez' "Serving Maid" so vividly that a student, who had never seen the painting, was able to reproduce a remarkable likeness. (Richardson, 1948, plate 15) The ability to transpose the nuances of pictorial imagery into words requires a rare talent, and Lismer must have been aware of the frailty of this way of working. His decision to use the Project Method, a more structured and socially oriented system, suggests that, as McLeish said, "He was far more interested in the wider aspects of child art for the general techniques of education." (McLeish, 1955, p. 144) Lismer wanted however to be identified with the child-centered approach to art education, and went out of his way to express this philosophy on numerous occasions. It would in any case have been unpopular at that time, to publicly disagree with the notion that children should have freedom of expression. The Project Method, however, was perhaps more suited to Lismer's situation on Saturday mornings, where large numbers of children had to be kept occupied. He may have felt more confident with a method which promised some physical activity, stimulating social exchanges, and the pageant as an exciting

climax to the year's work.

Child-centered art education became widely known through the publicity received by Cizek, and to a lesser extent by Richardson. The general public became interested in the notion that everyone had creative potential, and that the 'unspoilt' child is naturally gifted. It is regrettable that this method generated high expectations which were impossible to fulfill, and that art education which has subsequently developed in a more practical direction, is still challenged to justify its position.

There is no doubt, however, that art education owes a debt of gratitude to Cizek and Richardson for changing the orientation of art education from a mechanical to a personal activity. They were to die in 1946, a few months apart, at a time when art education had begun to turn away from the ideas they had promoted.

Notes Chapter 4

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- Note 2. *ibid.*
- Note 3. Lismer, A. Teaching children. Note, ink, 1 page. Item 29, xix.  
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- Note 4. Lismer-Bridges, M. Letter, August 25th, 1981.
- Note 5. Medhurst, D. Taped interview, July 7, 1981.
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CHAPTER 5.

Critical Analysis

### Critical Analysis

This study has examined Arthur Lismer's background and the influences which helped to shape his pedagogy as it related to his Saturday classes. In reviewing these factors the problem of inconsistency between Lismer's theory and his practice became apparent. The following analysis will discuss the relationship between his theory and practice and will attempt to determine whether he accomplished the goals of child-centered art education which he promoted.

Lismer was influenced by two of the major figures in child-centered education; by Cizek, who promoted child-centered art education, and by Dewey, who developed the Project Method, a child-centered cooperative system of learning. Cizek's liberal theory defined art-making as an intuitive sub-conscious process, and was fundamentally different from Dewey's Project Method which promoted group activities and work which came from the children's research and which was therefore based in rational thought. The passive role of the teacher which Cizek proposed is in contrast to the teacher in Dewey's method, who shared decision-making with the students. Dewey was critical of Cizek's promotion of absolute freedom of choice and action in the art room, which he felt, to be ultimately unproductive. Lismer's teachers worked in a way which was quite contrary to the philosophies of both Cizek and Dewey and which was in fact closer to the model of the traditional teacher. The contradictions between Lismer's theory and practice could, perhaps be traced to his eclectic reading habits, and to his inability to critically analyze his own pedagogy. An examination of his work also suggests that Lismer's background in England and his own traditional education would have made it difficult, if not impossible, for him to have followed



Cizek's theory, and at the same time relinquish all authority in his art classes. In addition Lismer was not self-effacing by nature, and this study found that there was a similar phenomenon in Cizek's pedagogy. Cizek was the original model of the artist-teacher, and it is possible that Lismer was attracted to his theory because as an artist he also identified with that role.

It is important, in an analysis of Lismer's pedagogy, to examine the type of schooling which he received and which this study suggests had an effect on his own attitude towards education. His schooling in England which lasted for the brief period of eight years, was of the traditional type and his art education at Sheffield Central High School patently "uninspiring". (McLeish, 1955, p. 4) His aversion to this type of education remained with him throughout his life. He referred to it as being like "stuffing a stocking, cramming everything down, then saying - there's my education, now I can leave." (Lismer, Note 1) He said of art education within that system;

It is in this period (between the ages of six and twelve) that nearly all the formal tasks for class procedure are devised - theories of perspective, theories of colour, principles of design, accuracy and skills, neatness and meticulous routine - all designed to give the child the formal shackles of conventional school life. They sit at impossible desks in badly lighted rooms. They are taught to behave in the manner giving the least trouble to the teacher. They have to observe other mentors actions. They are restricted, cajoled, enticed, and bullied into acceptance and reception of adult patterns of life, given over to them in potted forty minute sections. They are the sad victims of others' expe-

riences. After this they are examined and tested in factual knowledge and documentary evidence. As educational qualities, memory, and absorption are placed high above imagination and response. (Lisner, Note 2)

His condemnation of that type of schooling explains, to some extent, his adoption of some of the more liberal theories connected with child-centered education. There was, perhaps, also a desire on Lisner's part, to be identified with the more avant-garde aspects of the new movement, as exemplified by the statements of Franz Cizek. Lisner adopted many of Cizek's theories, but did not apply them to his teaching practice.

Cizek had turned his back on traditional methods of art instruction and had proposed that children should be given a new freedom to express their ideas through the medium of art. His statement that his class was a place where children could, "Grow, develop and mature," (Viola, 1944, p. 12) was considered radical at the time, and presented those who were involved in art education with a new and attractive alternative. His approach seemed full of promise and appeared to give hope for a new era in art education.

Viola described Cizek's way of working in the following terms; "If it is permissible to speak of a 'Cizek method' it can only be described as follows; to let the child depict whatever he likes, to let him use whatever technique he shows most aptitude for, and never to correct his work." (Viola, 1944, p. 16) This meant that there was a dramatic reduction in the role of the teacher in the art room. Cizek saw himself a "a mere onlooker" (Wilson, 1921, p. 14) and an "invisible spirit." (Art education considered as growth and self-fulfillment, 1924, p. 1) He said, "The teacher must renounce everything here. He must be

nothing - the child everything." (Viola, 1944, p. 45) This statement indicates that he believed that there was little teaching to be done because, as he said, "The child is born with creative power." (Viola, 1944, p. 44) The teacher's role in Cizek's model of art education was that of an attendant who waited for children to develop as they worked through a process of "growth and self-fulfillment." (Viola, 1944, p. 44)

This radical approach to art education was, as Entwistle has pointed out closely linked with the findings of psychoanalytical theory. (1970, p. 57) Cizek believed that true art could only be created from the subconscious, "What originates from the conscious is thought out - everything great has originated from the subconscious. Art more and more dries up because it is supplanted by the intellect." (Viola, 1944, p. 33) He believed that in art, there should be no enlightenment; "Art is like love and religion. If there is enlightenment love and religion are gone." (Viola, 1944, p. 46) Cizek denied that he looked at child art from a psychological point of view. (Viola, 1944, p. 32) However, his orientation towards art which came from the subconscious and which was, in his opinion, inhibited by conscious intellection, placed him within that category. (Entwistle, 1970, p. 56)

Cizek became well known through exhibitions of his children's work which travelled to England and North America. Lismer embraced much of Cizek's philosophy, and this was notable in his discussions with his staff, and in his lectures and writings. He told his teachers that they must have, "A willingness to sacrifice personal knowledge and static formulae in favor of the child's needs", (Lismer, Note 3) and that they "Must approach with no preconceived theory, but must discover it with the child." (Lismer, Note 4) These were statements which placed the child

in a passive position, as in Cizek's approach in which the teacher was "nothing, the child everything." (Viola, 1944, p. 45) However, the way in which Lismer used the Project Method meant that his instructors presented both verbal and visual motivation, a position which could be called directive rather than passive. A comparison can also be made between Cizek's statement that he had, "liberated the child," (Viola, 1944, p. 43) and a similar statement by Lismer, in which he said that, "Freedom is essential to life's full expression." (Lismer, Note 5) Lismer, however, had reservations about the quality and the amount of freedom which should be given to children in the art room. In a paper presented at a conference in 1946, he described different types of instructors, and criticized the teacher who had a permissive attitude towards art education;

The teacher who believes in freedom - she tries to develop originality and personal expression in her class and lets her children do exactly as they please. The lack of direction, lack of cohesive thought and action turns freedom into license. This teacher has not been a participator. (Lismer, Note 6)

On another occasion he said of children that, "They don't want freedom, they do need guidance of course." (Lismer, Note 7) He was perhaps among those educators,

Who would question this presumption in favour of freedom, by no means convinced that we should always opt for freedom and arguing the need for constraints, especially in education...We are offered a concept of controlled freedom, apparently a contradiction in terms. (Entwistle, 1970, pp. 49-50)

Lismer's rejection of Cizek's methods may have been influenced by

Dewey's criticism of the permissive model of education. Dewey said that, There is a present tendency in so-called advanced schools of educational thought (by no means confined to art classes like those of Cizek) to say, in effect, let us surround pupils with certain materials, tools, appliances, etc. and then let pupils respond to these things according to their own desires. Above all let us not suggest to them what they shall do, for that is an unwarranted trespass upon their sacred intellectual individuality since the essence of such individuality is to set up ends and aims.

(Archambault, 1964, p. 153)

This study has examined the traditional model of education in which the teacher was dominant and the child passive, and the permissive model, represented by Cizek, in which the teacher was passive and the child dominant. Dewey proposed a more moderate approach in which the child and the teacher worked together in a system of cooperative learning. This approach was seen, at the time, as an innovation in educational practice and has become the most generally accepted approach to teaching children. Dewey was primarily interested in the context and implications of education within a democratic society, and wanted schools to become microcosms of that society. He proposed that children should be the agents of their own learning, participating in decisions about the directions and content of their schooling and sharing in the choice of their own study material. The teacher in this situation became a guide and adviser and with the student formed part of a cooperative system of learning.

Dewey's orientation was towards, "The scientific mode of enquiry and the scientific systemization of human experience... and this way of thinking and approaching the world became a major feature of his philo-

sophy." (Deighton, 1969, p. 82) He was therefore out of sympathy with an approach such as Cizek's which excluded the intellect and relied on the subconscious to aid a child's development. Lismer's admiration for both Dewey and Cizek placed him in a position between two different modes of thinking, the intuitive and the intellectual. The theories he supported were concerned with art which came from the child's spontaneous expression and therefore originated in the subconscious, non-intellectual faculty. In contrast the method he chose encouraged art making which was supported by the children's research and therefore was designed to improve intellectual capacity. Contemporary research (Fincher, 1976, pp. 138-156) suggests that there are two different ways in which the brain processes information. Sydney Wolff writing about these findings said:

Recent research in cognitive psychology and brain physiology indicates the existence of two different kinds of intelligence or sets of information processing rules; one sequential or analytical, the other wholistic or relational. This duality has been variously labelled rational and intuitive, objective, subjective, convergent and divergent, and explicit and tacit. All these are ways of saying that the brain is bicameral, the left hemisphere specializing in language, and the right hemisphere in intuitive-perception. (Judson, 1980, p. 35)

This research suggests that teaching methods which do not combine these two processes will not ultimately be successful. The traditional model in which Lismer was raised, dealt almost exclusively with the forming of "logical chains of information" (Judson, 1980, p. 35) and has now been abandoned. Cizek's permissive model which relied almost exclusively on

the intuition is similarly no longer in general use. Dewey's approach was, perhaps, a more balanced model which offered the student a personal choice of subject matter to be studied. This insured a relationship between the student and the learning material which encouraged some use of intuitive perceptual powers. Lismer did not, however, adopt all of Dewey's recommendations and omitted, perhaps the most vital area of Dewey's concern, that of allowing students to play a part in the selection of their subject matter. The following quotation shows the importance which Dewey placed on the personal involvement of the student in the area of study.

Although the logical organization of subject matter is the proper goal of learning, the logic of the subject cannot be truly meaningful to the learner without his psychological and personal involvement in exploration. (Dewey, 1916, p. 160)

Dewey stressed that in the choice of subject to be studied a discussion between student and teacher was essential to student involvement. The teacher was therefore not a passive figure, but should, "Share in a discussion regarding what is to be done and be as free to make suggestions as anyone else." (Archambault, 1964, p. 154) In Lismer's Saturday classes it appears that topics for the pageant projects were pre-arranged by the instructors and were not determined by the students. This must have been considered necessary because of the long-range planning required to put on the Christmas tableaux and the Spring pageant. A quotation from the staff meeting held on January 1939 shows the importance placed on the integration of the subject matter, and a selection of the topics which were chosen, some of which were clearly outside the experience of the students involved:

Erma Lennox Suttcliffe: In the twelves we are planning, as usual, a large and a small group. The usual subject matter as planned in relation to the whole term will continue to be worked through....

Dance forms prominent, younger children doing plant and animal rhythms, although this might not work with a sport theme. Older groups might do a history of sport....Men playing ancient games, German fencing school, Bretton game of shuttles....South Sea shooting, a Medieval May day. (Staff Meeting, Note 8)

From this it can be seen that the teachers chose their topics to fit the theme of the presentations. Dorothy Medhurst was questioned on the problems of sustaining student interest in a pre-arranged topic, she said, "If it doesn't catch fire, then you have to dump it, and many things were dumped. If you are peddling Greek chariots and it's a dud, you don't persist with it, you drop it and start again with something else."

(Medhurst, Note 9) Again the new topic would have to be picked to fit into the pageant theme. When asked what happened to a child who did not want to work on the group topic, William Withrow, once a child in one of Lismer's classes, remembers that, "If a supportive or ancillary role could not be devised for the occasional loner, that child was subtly given an administrative responsibility." (Withrow, Note 10) It is clear that children who wanted to work on their own ideas while preparing for the pageant were not encouraged to do so. In this situation the wishes of the children as a group were respected, but individual differences were not accommodated. It was believed at the time, however, that the method which was being used was child-centered, perhaps because of statements made by Lismer to that effect. Medhurst, when asked how she thought children could be expressing their own ideas if the subject matter came



from someone else; replied;

Well if the subject matter caught fire, I think you can say it comes from the child because it is in fact becoming part of his experience, a part of something he cares about. It wouldn't be child-motivated in the sense that it doesn't always have to depend on some experience in the child's past. I think to me, it includes bringing in new possibilities to children which if they become real to the kids they can use along with all the others.

Interviewer: So they are not dealing with their own experience?

Medhurst: Possibly not, except that, can one draw a firm line between tangible real-life experience if it becomes sufficiently real? I guess what I'm saying: to the child which is real, the thing that he did last week and was pleased and excited about? Or the thing he really thinks about with great intensity and involvement. (Medhurst, Note 11)

It is difficult to understand how this approach could be called child-centered if Cizek's definition is used, in which, "The teacher must renounce everything." (Viola, 1944, p. 45) Or if the definition comes from Dewey, who believed that the teacher and pupil should, "Share in a discussion regarding what is to be done." (Archambault, 1964, p. 154) In addition the subject matter chosen was frequently outside the experience of the children, and dealt with exotic topics which were mainly geographical and historical and needed visual reinforcement to give the needed information. Lismer had, in fact, a very large collection of pictorial material which Medhurst remembers was used "an enormous amount." (Medhurst, Note 12) The use of this type of material in conjunction with slides and films would, it is suggested, have removed the students even

further from their own, "spontaneous expression," an element which Lismer had advised his teachers to look for in children's art work. (Lismer, Note 13)

The presentation of a teacher inspired topic, reinforced with visual material suggests an additional interest in the educational possibilities in this way of making art. Indeed Lismer said that his aim was to "use art as a means to develop child character and knowledge." (Lismer, Note 14) Yanover described his way of working as follows, "They (the children) would be given a topic, and they would research and learn everything they could about it. Then they would explore and find suitable materials to illustrate what they knew." (Yanover, 1980, p. 20) However, after they had completed their research the children would make full use of their artistic license and ignore what they had learned (McLeish, 1955, p. 148) which would tend to negate rather than reinforce any knowledge gained, except in the broadest sense. The search after knowledge suggests that during the period of preparation for the pageant, at least, Lismer was more interested in intellectual than in intuitive art-making, which was contrary to statements he made about the re-direction of the teacher, "towards a new conspiracy with the child to rediscover himself." (Lismer, Note 15) There is no doubt that there was a sincere belief on the part of Lismer's staff that his way of working encouraged, "ideas and expression," as the quotation from Medhurst suggests. However, Anne Savage, a noted Montreal artist and teacher, who was very familiar with Lismer's methods made the following observations;

They would have some subject like China, or India for their local pageant and the children would make all sorts of cut-out papers and things, then someone else would pick them up and arrange them

into a dress...then someone else would take them. The only trouble was there wasn't so much individual expression. The children were part of a big movement. (Calvin, 1967, p. 35)

There was, as Savage observed little opportunity for an individual with ideas to carry them through to completion. The art-making experience, at least while the pageant was being prepared, was a group endeavour. Indeed Lismer believed that art teachers should, "make a team play of the art lesson." (Lismer, Note 16) Clearly one of his major concerns was the social integration of the student. He believed with Dewey that one of the main functions of education was to help the child to, "understand his responsibility as a unit in a vast social order of which he is a minute but important item." (Lismer, Note 17) The position of individuals within the group, therefore, placed an emphasis on their social function to the possible detriment of their "inner" development. (See Chapter 3, page 44) Art-making under these conditions meant an adjustment between individuals and the dominant personalities or ideas of the group. Lismer said, "Anything that he (the child) does detrimental to his fellow is a disturbance of an organic whole of which he is a functioning and vital unit." (Lismer, Note 18) This quotation shows that in this situation Lismer placed the wishes and well-being of the group above those of the individual, a notion closely allied to Dewey's philosophy, but diametrically opposed to Cizek's. In the preparations for the pageant therefore, Lismer's emphasis on group dynamics contradicted his statements on the importance of developing the individual through art. (Lismer, Note 19) The processes of exchange, sharing, and compromise which are a necessary part of social maturation, are at best a questionable way of making art which by its nature requires the progressive develop-

ment of an idea, or series of ideas within the context of an individual's experience. It appears, however, that Lismer was not aware of a conflict between social and individual interests, and said of the pageants;

Our experiments in this direction result in positively huge presentations given before audiences of parents, teachers and public. The child produces them (costumes, props, and scenery) the teachers guide, but interfere as little as possible with the child's idea." (Lismer, Note 20)

The quality of teacher-interference present on Saturday mornings was described by Withrow who, as a student, had been involved in the Indian pageant;

I wore a headdress - we went to Kensington Market and got feathers and dyed them and then we seemed to make a real deal of the use of cardboard that had corrugations so that you could stick the feathers in the tubular corrugations and make the head band. I think it was subtly suggested that we felt that we were inventing it (sic) and I think that was the real genius in the way he trained his teachers. The children always thought that they had thought all these things up, but I think there were little clues dropped.

(Yanover, 1980, p. 20)

Withrow's statement shows the reluctance on the part of Lismer's staff to appear to be teaching. In another comment Withrow said that the principles of design were taught but never mentioned. (Withrow, Note 21) Lismer's staff seem to have been caught, perhaps unconsciously, between a desire to remain in a passive role, and the need to maintain the high standard of the pageants.

Lismer's theories, which originated with Cizek, supported the

notion that teachers, "do not interfere with ideas and child character in action." (Lismer, Note 22) Indeed his staff did not admit to teaching in the accepted sense of the word. Norah McCullough, Lismer's assistant at the Art Gallery of Toronto, defined her own approach to teaching as follows, "The teacher's place....is to serve as a discreet guide, and to release by suggestion." (McCullough, 1938, pp. 24-25) There was, however, the problem of producing a satisfactory pageant which was of a suitably high standard to fit Lismer's reputation as Canada's leading art educator. The "glorious results" which Withrow remembers did not happen by accident, and, it is possible, were subject to more control than reports would suggest. In addition there appeared to be a pageant style which was present year after year and which was unlikely to have happened spontaneously without some sort of direction on the part of the teachers. The style was extremely decorative and there was a preoccupation with pattern on everything in the presentations, including the enormous banners which dominated the scene and were covered with characteristic designs on a large scale. It is possible that although Lismer's staff may not have wished to "interfere" with the children's ideas and expression, it is likely that under the pressure to produce an outstanding pageant they were placed in the uncomfortable position of having to "guide and suggest" perhaps more than they would have wished. It is interesting to note that in their subsequent teaching careers Lismer's instructors followed child-centered theories to a far greater extent than had been possible under Lismer's direction perhaps because they did not use the Project Method. Those who observed Dorothy Medhurst teaching at the Ontario Institute of Child Studies noticed that she was much more concerned with individual development than with the interaction of the group. (Sherman, Note 23)

This analysis of Lismer's pedagogy, as it referred to his Saturday morning art classes, has found that there were serious differences between his child-centered theories and his use of the Project Method. Although he consistently supported the notion that the ultimate aim of art education "was to release ideas and expression and to lead out from the child," (Lismer, Note 24) he continued to use a method which was based on the importance of group interaction and which, by its nature failed to deal with the individual expressions of each child. This way of working, however, fulfilled Lismer's social aims and his notion that the art activity should be, "social in action, and combine individual expression into social acts." (Lismer, Note 25) This idealistic notion contained ideas which were contrary to his other ideals of art-making as an intuitive and spontaneous activity carried out by an individual. There were several elements in Lismer's version of the Project Method which denied individuals the right to make their own decisions. These included the presentation of pre-arranged subject matter, and the visual material necessary to support that subject, the need to compromise individual ideas in a group situation, and the need to conform to the requirements and standards of the pageant. This study has found that the Saturday morning children's pageant as an undertaking undermined and indeed negated Lismer's child-centered theories in nearly every way and forced standards and the need to compromise and organize on Lismer's staff and students.

## Notes Chapter 5

- Note 1. Lismer, A. Victoria Daily Times. August 4, 1956.
- Note 2. Lismer, A. Education through art. Australia, 1937. Item 11.  
Art and Education Box. (Unpublished manuscript, Library Archives,  
Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal)
- Note 3. Ibid.
- Note 4. Lismer, A. Art education for children. 1948. Item 9. Report  
to Holland. Art and Education Box. (Manuscript complete,  
Library Archives, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal)
- Note 5. Lismer, A. Child art. 1950. Item 38. Art and Education Box.  
(Notes, Library Archives, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal)
- Note 6. Lismer, A. Re-directing child and teacher. n.d. Item 17.  
Art and Education Box. (Notes, Library Archives, Montreal  
Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal)
- Note 7. Lismer, A. Developmental stages in child art. n.d. Item 4.  
Art and Education Box. (Notes, Library Archives, Montreal  
Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal)
- Note 8. Staff meeting. January 20, 1939. Art Gallery of Toronto.  
(Library Archives, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal)
- Note 9. Medhurst, D. Taped interview. July 7, 1981.
- Note 10. Withrow, W. Written questionnaire. September 3, 1981.
- Note 11. Medhurst, D. Taped interview. July 7, 1981.
- Note 12. Ibid.
- Note 13. Lismer, A. Child art. 1950. Item 38. Art and Education Box.  
(Notes, Library Archives, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal)
- Note 14. Lismer, A. Initiation to art. n.d. Item 37. Manuscript to  
accompany film on children's classes at the Montreal Museum of

Fine Arts. Art and Education Box. (Manuscript, Library Archives, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal)

Note 15. Lismer, A. Re-directing child and teacher. n.d. Item 17.

Art and Education Box. (Notes, Library Archives, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal)

Note 16. Lismer, A. Education through art. Australia, 1937. Item 11.

Art and Education Box. (Unpublished manuscript, Library Archives, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal)

Note 17. *ibid.*

Note 18. *ibid.*

Note 19. *ibid.*

Note 20. Lismer, A. Child art and education. 1951. Item 19. Art and

Education Box. (Unpublished manuscript, Library Archives, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal)

Note 21. Withrow, W. Written questionnaire. September 3, 1981.

Note 22. Lismer, A. Initiation to art. n.d. Item 37. Manuscript to accompany film on children's classes at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. Art and Education Box. (Manuscript, Library Archives, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal)

Note 23. Sherman, L. Interview. Montreal, Québec. March 10, 1982.

Note 24. Lismer, A. Education for children. 1948. Item 9. Report to Holland. Art and Education Box. (Manuscript complete, Library Archives, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal)

Note 25. Lismer, A. Education through Art. Australia, 1937. Item 11. Art and Education Box. (Unpublished manuscript, Library Archives, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal)



CHAPTER 6.

Summary and Conclusions.

### Summary and Conclusions

This study has traced Arthur Lismer's career as an art educator from his early beginnings at the Art Gallery of Toronto to his retirement from the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. During his forty years in museum education, one of his main interests were the Saturday classes which were run for the benefit of city children, and for training student art teachers. An examination of Lismer's teaching methods, however, revealed that there was a lack of consistency between his theory and his practice. Theoretically he appeared to agree with Cizek's liberal approach, but in fact he chose to use Dewey's socially oriented Project Method. Accordingly this study undertook to examine the basis for both his theory and practice, and the people and events which were influential in shaping his ideas. These included a critical appraisal of the work of Franz Cizek and Marian Richardson, the major figures in child-centered art education, and an examination of the theories and methods of John Dewey, philosopher, psychologist and educator. It became apparent that the Child-centered movement included a wide variety of approaches. Lismer's interpretation was a variation of Dewey's Project Method which was different in nearly every respect from the theories of Cizek and Richardson. His version of the Project Method was also coloured by other influences which were traced to his youth in nineteenth century England, in particular to William Morris. These influences from Lismer's background in conjunction with the way in which he used the Project Method were not in harmony with the child-centered approach which he supported in theory and which, in the final analysis appears to have been the least important of his concerns.

Lisner had phenomenal energy and a sense of mission from which he

never deviated, and which became more defined as he involved himself in Museum education. It was his ambition to educate Canadians in the arts, but the task was more difficult than he anticipated and his efforts often met with resistance. Lismer was unable to tolerate restrictions to his plans, and his refusal to work within the limitations of bureaucracy possibly robbed the educational system of an opportunity to change its approach to art education. Lismer's successes can therefore be seen more in the achievements of his students, than in any influence which he may have had on the school system.

This analysis suggests that in addition to background and other influences which may have shaped Lismer's pedagogy, his own personality was in part responsible for the problem of inconsistency. He was gregarious by nature, and enjoyed talking to groups of students and teachers, and, it is suggested, would have found it impossible to follow Cizek's notion that "the teacher is nothing, the child everything." There is no doubt that he was opinionated, and that he enjoyed his position of authority as Canada's leading art educator. He was, in addition, contradictory in his statements, and although it was thought that this was his technique for keeping an audience alert, the present study suggests that this tendency was a result of his eclectic reading habits and his lack of critical expertise, which was also apparent in his selection of a theory and practice which were in conflict. His continued use of permissive child-centered theory with a method which was fundamentally directive for over forty years, shows his inability to look at his work in an objective and self-critical way.

A study of this nature is not intended to discredit the subject of scrutiny, but is undertaken in order to identify and analyze problems

which may be of some relevance to contemporary art education. Lismer's promotion of one type of theory while he was engaged in an entirely different type of practice presents a clear example of a problem to which art education has long been vulnerable. Current research indicates a critical awareness of this problem, and of the importance of a sound theoretical approach in combination with a relevant supportive method.

In conclusion I would like to balance some of the criticism which this study has levelled at Lismer's work, and include two quotations which will, perhaps, add to an understanding of his importance to art and art education in Canada. For the thousands of children who attended his Saturday classes, Anne Savage has, perhaps, captured the essential benefits of Lismer's way of working;

Where are you ever going to...see these beautiful things made?...  
Some people....criticize and say,...."The individual child isn't going to be developed." Well of course the individual child is going to be developed. He is going to see something he never ever is going to see again...And he'd remember things he won't ever see again,...and it would stimulate him. (Calvin, 1967, p. 35)

For Lismer's staff, associates and others who were involved in his work it is fitting that this study should close with the words of Norah McCullough who was his assistant for many years;

What I choose to remember about Arthur Lismer is his wry humour, his gift of sympathy for all young people and his enduring friendship for me. He has illuminated the arts for more than two generations of Canadians, and as one of them I will not forget how much I owe him. (Ballantyne, 1964, p. 336)

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