Governing Likenesses:
The Production History of the Official Portraits of Canadian Prime Ministers, 1889-2002

by

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Figure 1

Abstract

This thesis examines the production history of the official portraits of former Canadian Prime Ministers. These paintings were commissioned between 1889 and 2002, and are today exhibited as the Prime Ministers Portrait Gallery, at the Centre Block on Parliament Hill, Ottawa. The following study traces the individuals responsible for initiating and facilitating the various commissions over the years, uncovers the underpinning rationales guiding the production of official portraits, and examines the way in which the finished portraits have been arranged and displayed. This thesis also analyzes the effect of a broader set of issues on the production of the official portraits, including the development of Canadian nationalism, changing attitudes toward art in Canada, and the increasing influence of a growing federal government bureaucracy. I argue that the official portraits have served different purposes at different times. The commissions are now the responsibility of a particular bureaucratic division within the House of Commons, which works in consultation with living former Prime Ministers. Despite the significant influence of the Prime Minister in today's commission process, I maintain that the Prime Ministers Portrait Gallery acts less as a memorial to particular individuals, and more as a signifier of the federal government, as a national institution.

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Introduction

I have hoped that the day might come when I might have a ‘picture’ of myself, which those who have not known me as I am, or known me at all, might be able to see something of what it was that had helped me to win the confidence of my fellow countrymen over so long a stretch of time, and to retain it in times like the present. It is that which you have given in the portrait you have painted.¹

-William Lyon Mackenzie King

This study investigates the production history of seventeen official portraits of Canadian Prime Ministers, executed between 1889 and 2002. This thesis represents a relevant and unique contribution to the debate already current on the significance of portraiture at a national level, in advance of the upcoming opening of the Portrait Gallery of Canada in 2006. Today, these paintings compose the Prime Ministers Portrait Gallery (PMPG) and are displayed on Parliament Hill in Ottawa, in three distinct but interconnected spaces of the Centre Block (**fig. 2**). The portraits of the earliest Prime Ministers are staggered throughout the entrance foyer and main hall, leading into the House of Commons chamber, with more recent additions appearing along the south-western corridor leading to the central rotunda, directly below the Peace Tower. The official portraits are exhibited as a single and cohesive collection. However, the apparent consistency of their arrangement in the Centre Block belies the fact that the PMPG has only recently been so organized and for most of its history was assembled in anything but a systematic fashion.²

In undertaking an exploration of the production history of the PMPG portraits, this thesis traces the various processes underpinning each commission, the conditions that

¹ Letter from King to Frank Salisbury, 21 October 1945, W.L.M. King fonds, MG 26 J8, vol. 35, file 4, Library and Archives of Canada (hereafter LAC).

² See the Appendix for a summation of the most relevant dates and names associated with the commissioning, production and acquisition of each official portrait.

determined their acquisition, and the locations where the final portraits have hung. The story behind each of the official portraits warrants study because significant variance exists in who has initiated the portraits, and how they have been produced, unveiled and exhibited. Often the result of private *ad hoc* initiatives, many of the earliest portraits have served as testaments of loyalty from the supporters of former Prime Ministers, as well as iconic trophies of political victory by one party over another. Today the paintings, gathered together as a single collection, with new commissions facilitated by specific government departments, instead of informal private schemes, suggest broader ideological subtexts. They provide, although not unproblematically, a visualization of leadership genealogy and a tacit legitimization of the Canadian political system. Official portraits are most accurately understood in their present arrangement, in the words of Charlotte Townsend-Gault, as “symbolic expressions” that foreground not “the nature of the individual sitter, but of the institution which endorsed it.”³

As a topic of international academic discussion, the subject of portraiture has received an increasing amount of attention recently. Sources range from critical interrogations of the meaning of portraiture structured according to various thematic issues, as with Richard Brilliant’s Portraiture (1991),⁴ to historical investigations into the uses of portraiture within specific eras and cultures, witnessed, for example, in Marcia Pointon’s Hanging the Head (1993).⁵ Over the past decade, a collection of eclectic historical and theoretical essays, edited by Joanna Woodall, has been published,⁶ and

³ Charlotte Townsend-Gault, “Symbolic Facades: Official Portraits in British Institutions since 1920,” Art History 11 (December 1988): 512.

⁴ Richard Brilliant, Portraiture (London: Reaktion, 1991).

⁵ Marcia Pointon, Hanging the Head: Portraiture and Social Formation in Eighteenth Century England (New Haven: Yale University, 1993).

⁶ Joanne Woodall, ed., Portraiture: Facing the Subject (Manchester: Manchester University, 1997).

curators, artists and conference organizers have demonstrated interest in challenging the traditional representational limits of portraiture, the conventions of gender portrayal and the expanding debate on the relationship between the body and the self.⁷

In Canada, of late, portraiture has proven itself to be a thematically malleable genre. Group exhibitions such as Hand Holding the Brush: Self-portraits by Canadian Artists (1983) at the London Regional Art Gallery used portraiture to address a wide gamut of issues pertaining to the construction of subjectivity to the (re)telling of historical narratives. The 2003 Symposium Portraiture Between Narrative and Abstraction at the University of Ottawa included papers delivered by artists, curators and art historians, and examined issues pertaining to portraits and national portrait collections, Aboriginal culture and problematic boundaries in mimetic representation. Portraiture has also proven to be an ideal forum for critical engagements between the work of contemporary artists and earlier historical precedents, as witnessed most recently with Identities: Canadian Portraits (2004), at the McMichael Gallery.

Official portraiture has been studied by Canadian art historians in relation to the portrait patronage of nineteenth-century Canada and the careers of particular portraitists. The professional activities of nineteenth-century portraitists like William von Moll Berczy, Antoine Plamandon, Théophile Hamel, Cornelius Krieghoff and George Berthon

⁷ See, for example, Kathleen Alder and Marcia Pointon, eds., The Body Imaged: The Human Form and Visual Culture since the Renaissance (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1993), a multi-authored collection of critical essays centered on issues arising from how the human body has been visually represented in the West. Melissa E. Feldman, Face-Off: The Portrait in Recent Art (Philadelphia: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1994), includes an essay by Benjamin Buchloh exploring the surprising rebirth of portraiture in light of the previously assumed demise of the humanist bourgeois subject. Marsha Meskimmon, The Art of Reflection: Women Artists' Self-portraiture in the Twentieth Century (New York: Columbia University, 1996) and Liz Rideal, Mirror Mirror: Self-Portraits by Women Artists (London: National Portrait Gallery, 2001) contain catalogue essays that critically investigate the use of self-portraiture by women artists to challenge male voyeurism and the traditional mimetic paradigm of Western portraiture.

are well documented in several historical essays and exhibition catalogues.⁸ Overview texts on Canadian art likewise routinely mention the portrait work of such painters. However there has been less material focusing on specific official portrait collections in Canada – governmental, corporate or academic – and to lesser-known professional portraitists. Most canonical surveys, including William Colgate's Canadian Art: Its Origins and Development (1943), Graham McInness' Canadian Art (1950), Russell Harper's Painting in Canada: A History (1977) and Dennis Reid's A Concise History of Canadian Painting (1988), remark on only a few of the earliest artists, who produced official portraits of the Prime Ministers, notably Henry Sandham, J.W.L. Forster, John W. Russell, Kenneth Forbes and Ernest Fosbery. Moreover, their attention is for the most part limited to the artists' design work, landscape painting and non-official portrait practices.⁹

When it is mentioned, accounts of official portraiture tend to be dismissive for two reasons. Nineteenth-century official portraits are regarded as derivative of older British prototypes, and thus are not seen to constitute an authentic Canadian expression.¹⁰ Produced to meet certain pre-established formal criteria and financial interests, official portraiture is also given superficial treatment for failing to conform to modernist assumptions about innovation as the important aspect of art. As Harper notes,

⁸ See for example, R.H. Hubbard, Two Painters of Quebec (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1970); Russell Harper, Krieghoff (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1979); Angela Carr, "George Theodore Berthon: Portraiture, Patronage, and Criticism in Nineteenth Century Toronto," Journal of Canadian Art History 11, 1&2 (1988): 23-53; Mary Allodi, *et al*, Berczy (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1991). For a recent and detailed examination of the role of portraiture in pre-Confederation Quebec, see Mario Béland, ed., Painting in Quebec, 1820-50: New Views, New Perspectives (Quebec City: Musée de Québec, 1992).

⁹ William Colgate, Canadian Art: Its Origins and Development (Toronto: Ryerson, 1943); Graham McInness, Canadian Art (Toronto: Macmillan, 1950); Russell Harper, Painting in Canada: A History, second ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1977); Dennis Reid, A Concise History of Canadian Painting, second ed. (Toronto: Oxford University, 1988).

¹⁰ Colgate, 230.

Those artists who could successfully supply the demand charged – and still charge – large sums; they could do so because their canvases were pleasing and they could give their subjects a dignified and stately air beyond the capabilities of the camera...their reputation was built on the ability to set down a likeness and achieve a finished effect.¹¹

Whereas modern art is often characterized by a disavowal of the commercial aspects of art practice, official portraiture it is neither produced nor presented as ‘art’, but is framed instead as a sub-genre, subservient to the interests and expectation of the patron.¹² The value of the finished product rests on the portraitist’s ability to carefully cleave to certain representational conventions and communicate a set of well entrenched ideas which honour the “documentary aspect” of the portrait, rather than the creativity of the artist. This point is driven home by the fact that plaques on the PMPG portraits provide information about the subject, and the duration of his/her term within the institution, but none supply even the name of the portraitist responsible for painting the image.

Contemporary literature dealing with specific collections of official portraits has tended to be eclectic. Beginning in the 1980s, a number of publications addressing official portraiture from several different perspectives appeared. Fern Bayer’s The Ontario Collection (1984) provides valuable information on the role of one provincial government in commissioning official portraits of its Lieutenant Governors, Premiers and Speakers.¹³ A number of publications also explore the concept of official portraiture from less conventional angles. A pair of essays by John Garratt and Bruce Robertson in The Four Indian Kings (1985) implicitly address the conventionality and cultural relativity of eighteenth-century British royal portraiture by recounting how England’s Queen Anne commissioned Jan Verelst to produce full-length portraits of four Iroquois

¹¹ Harper, 298.

¹² Pierre Bourdieu, The Field of Cultural Production (New York: Columbia University, 1993), 74-76.

¹³ Fern Bayer, The Ontario Collection (Markham, Ont.: Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1984).

sachems, who visited England in 1710 to negotiate political and military alliances.¹⁴ In the contemporary context, photographer Andrew Danson's exhibition of Unofficial Portraits (1987) paradoxically pinpoints the conventions underpinning official portraiture, by recruiting many politicians from all levels of Canadian government, to pose and take 'informal' snapshots of themselves.¹⁵

Most recently, the historical use of portraiture to serve nationalist and documentary mandates has emerged as a popular topic. Most of these texts explore questions pertaining specifically to the wide ranging portrait collection held by the National Archives of Canada (now the Library and Archives of Canada, LAC). Lily Koltun's essay for the Harry Palmer catalogue of 125 Portraits (1992), which contains photographs of Companions to the Order of Canada, examines the Archives' role in collecting images of Canadians since 1872.¹⁶ Lydia Foy's introductory essay in Facing History (1993) offers an expanded analysis of the range of portraits in different media from the Archives, framing them as visual documents of the "personalities great and humble who have contributed to Canada's social, political, cultural and economic history."¹⁷ This same portrait collection is presently being reformulated as the Portrait Gallery of Canada, which is scheduled to open in 2006. Finally, in 1994, the Archivist published an issue dedicated to the historical relationship between the public and private personae of Canadian Prime Ministers and photographic portraiture.¹⁸

¹⁴ John G. Garratt and Bruce Robertson, The Four Indian Kings, (Ottawa: Public Archives of Canada, 1985).

¹⁵ Andrew Danson, Unofficial Portraits: Canadian Politicians Photographed by Themselves (Toronto: Doubleday Canada and Art Gallery of York University, 1987).

¹⁶ Lily Koltun, "Focus on Canadians: The National Portrait Collection," in Harry Palmer, 125 Portraits (Ottawa: Canada Communication Group, 1992).

¹⁷ Lydia Foy, introduction to Facing History: Portraits from the National Archives of Canada (Ottawa: National Archives of Canada, 1993), xiv.

¹⁸ Archivist 20, 3 (1994).

In the absence of any publication dealing with the history of today's PMPG, the aforementioned sources provide valuable information with which to frame this official portrait collection historically, and consider its contemporary role at the Centre Block. Presently, the bulk of existing information on the PMPG official portraits is found in archival documents held at the LAC. These include the records of the Department of Public Works and Government Services, which contain one of the earliest inventories, from June 1913, of the works of art stored and displayed at Parliament Hill, including the Prime Ministers portraits. The fonds of the former Prime Ministers and of the government officials responsible for initiating the portrait commissions often imparted detailed information on the commission process, in the form of written correspondence between various departments of government. The diary of Prime Minister Mackenzie King, available online from the Archives website, is a valuable resource for information on both the Laurier and King portraits. The LAC also houses the fonds of Laurier portraitist John W. Russell, containing a series of personal letters between the two men. The only other artist with substantial archival material was J.W.L. Forster, a devout Methodist, whose fonds are held at the United Church-Victoria University Archives in Toronto. Finally, the archives of the National Gallery of Canada (NGC) houses files on almost all of the official portraitists, replete with relevant newspaper clippings, catalogues and essays. The NGC also has on file a document written by Russell in the early 1940s in which he describes the various occasions Laurier sat for him, prior to the latter's death in 1919.

For this thesis every effort has been made to locate original citations. I am, however, indebted to Curatorial Services, a division within the House of Commons,

established in 1989, for having already drawn together and organized the bulk of the above mentioned archival sources, as well as newspaper articles covering unveiling ceremonies and details on the individual portraitists, and citations providing information on the location of various commemorative speeches and parliamentary debates on the official portraits in Hansard. Curatorial Services has also filed its own original documents, which were crucial to my research. This includes printed transcripts of recent interviews conducted with every artist who painted an official portrait since Audrey McNaughton and a paper trail documenting the various initiatives leading up to its own establishment as a division within the House of Commons in 1989. Curatorial Services continues to document the various stages of each official commission it facilitates.

From the outset, it was clear that a thorough investigation of the productive history of the PMPG portraits would necessitate analysis from a number of different angles that encompass a range of historical events and ideological issues. There was not merely the immediate problem of uncovering the origins of the paintings themselves, but of understanding how they are positioned within a broader set of problems from the advent of photography and significance of the interior arrangement and design of the Centre Block interior, to the changing face of Canadian nationalism and the inconsistent role of the federal government in the official commissions. While providing a linear chronology of the acquisition process is crucial, it is no less important to thematically cordon off some of the discussion.

One of the first major themes, explored in Chapter One, is that of portraiture's status as a form of pictorial representation. Specifically, I take aim at the overriding value placed on passively perceivable likeness in standard assessments of portraiture.

Philosopher Nelson Goodman's Languages of Art (1968) provides a set of analytical tools for understanding the production of a likeness as a conceptualization, not fundamentally perceptual, achieved through a prior understanding of a naturalized codex of representation.¹⁹ Norman Bryson expands on Goodman's analysis to provide a sustained critique of the ahistorical and apolitical character of perceptual likeness in painting, which he dates back to Greek antiquity.²⁰ The interrogations by Goodman and Bryson of the traditional understanding of pictorial representation pave the way for a consideration of the official portraits, not as merely pictures of particular individuals, but as images that are theory-laden and communicative of broader sets of social ideas and values.

Charlotte Townsend-Gault's essay "Symbolic Facades: Official Portraits in British Institutions Since 1920" (1988) takes off from the findings of Goodman and Bryson's to provide the main theoretical bulwark around which the entire thesis revolves.²¹ Her central notion is that official portrait collections functions as a facade of "social control," not fundamentally as pictures of particular individuals. As facades the role of the official portrait is institutional and ideological, not individual and psychological, suggestive of the institution as a legitimate "sanctum of power."²²

Ideology in this context is not conceived as in classical Marxism, as a set of false beliefs, but more in line with explanations offered by Culture Studies, as attitudes and ideas that emerge in conjunction with broader forms of cultural practice. The diverse

¹⁹ Nelson Goodman, Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols (Indianapolis and New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1968).

²⁰ Norman Bryson, Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze (New Haven: Yale University, 1983).

²¹ Charlotte Townsend-Gault, "Symbolic Facades: Official Portraits in British Institutions since 1920," Art History 11 (December 1988): 514.

²² Ibid.

production history of the PMPG indicates that while the portraits may have functioned as different ideological expressions at different times and may be informed by certain conventions of representation, they are not “directed by ideology.”²³ This thesis seeks to avoid the idea that ideology is something inserted into the official portraits by the government institution. They are not “a merely passive product” that reflects a static set of values or ideas, but rather, in the worlds of Terry Eagleton,

a certain *production* of ideology, for which the analogy of a dramatic production is in some ways appropriate. A dramatic production does not ‘express’, ‘reflect’ or ‘reproduce’ the dramatic text on which it is based; it ‘produces’ the text, transforming it into a unique and irreducible entity.²⁴

The PMPG portraits, I maintain, communicate different sets of ideas at different times. Most recently they operate as symbolic expressions of the government institution. However, I assert that they function in this way because of the bases upon which they were commissioned, financed, discussed and displayed, not because the portraits, in isolation, reflect a certain set of imposed static ideas.

Chapter One also investigates broader historical issues that can be seen to have impacted the initial desire to produce official portraits of Canadian Prime Ministers. The first portraits of today’s PMPG were produced in the last decade of the nineteenth century, at a time when access to photography was broadening, and new photo-mechanical techniques were being developed, making it easier for images, including portraits, to be reproduced for a mass audience. As Walter Benjamin argues, it was an era when traditional oil painting was seen as both threatened by the efficiency of modern

²³ Raymond Williams, *The Sociology of Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1995), 28-29.

²⁴ Terry Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology* (London: New Left, 1976), 64.

technology and increasingly valued as an authentic expression of artistic genius.²⁵ J.W.L. Forster's Under the Studio Light (1928) and Sight and Insight (1941), a memoir and anecdotal treatise respectively, expose a desire to show professional portrait painting as a relevant practice in the photographic era.²⁶ Ann Thomas' master's thesis, "The Role of Photography in Canadian Painting, 1860-1900" (1976) identifies how painters and photographers often muscled for cultural status by evolving symbiotically, each adapting the appearance and sometimes the techniques of the other.²⁷ Teresa McIntosh's essay on the innovations surrounding the advent of photo-mechanical reproduction in Canada offers particular insight into the importance of an official painted portrait collection of Canadian Prime Ministers.²⁸ The official portrait, as Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson would say, promised a semiotic stability in a former Prime Minister's image, one not as public as images disseminated within mass media, ostensibly safer from unsanctioned manipulation.²⁹

The particular way in which debate over painting and photography was articulated in relation to portraiture, reflected the ongoing influence of earlier treatises on physiognomy and phrenology, which had become especially popular among the educated classes of Victorian England. Portraiture offered a means of fixing the physical features of the human face, which in turn were thought to reveal both universal character qualities about the individual and a sort of wordless biography. Knowing the great influence the

²⁵ Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in Illuminations, ed. H. Arendt, trans. H. Zohn (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970).

²⁶ J.W.L. Forster, Under the Studio Light (Toronto: Macmillan, 1928); J.W.L. Forster, Sight and Insight (Toronto: Oxford University, 1941).

²⁷ Ann Thomas, "The Role of Photography in Canadian Painting, 1860-1900: Relationships Between the Photographic Image and a Style of Realism in Painting" (master's thesis, Concordia University, 1976).

²⁸ Teresa McIntosh, "Canadian Pioneers in Photomechanical Reproduction," History of Photography 20 (Summer 1996): 146-49

²⁹ Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson, "Semiotics and Art History," Art Bulletin 73, 2 (1991): 174-208.

studies of J.C. Lavater and others had throughout the nineteenth century, both in Great Britain and later in Canada, the physical characteristics of the sitters as represented in the official portraits tend either to emphasize or downplay certain features indicating how the portraits are intended to be read.³⁰

A fourth perspective from which I analyze the PMPG collection in Chapter Two is one that addresses the relationship between the portraits and the evolution of nationalism in Canada. Canadian historians Carl Berger and J.M. Bumsted provide useful frameworks for understanding the first official portraits in relation to broader social and cultural forces.³¹ Berger's The Sense of Power (1970), in particular, offers a means by which to explore the production of the earliest official portraits in relation to growing imperialist sentiments in post-Confederation Canada up to the First World War. Benedict Anderson's concept of "imagined community" is marshalled too as a theoretical tool for understanding the continued prevalence of British cultural prototypes in English Canada.³² In the twentieth century, as British influence began to wane in Canada, the expression of a unique Canadian nationalism by the federal government became crucial. Interestingly, most of the official portraits continued to follow earlier representational conventions, but less as a reference to British culture, and more simply to maintain visual consistency between the portraits.

³⁰ Johann Caspar Lavater, Essays on Physiognomy: For the Promotion of the Knowledge and Love of Mankind, trans. T. Holcroft, second ed. (London: Whittingham, 1804). For information on physiognomy's influence in late nineteenth-century Canada see Robert Lanning, The National Album: Collective Biography and the Formation of the Canadian Middle Class (Ottawa: Carleton University, 1996).

³¹ Carl Berger, The Sense of Power: Studies in the Ideas of Canadian Imperialism, 1867-1914 (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1970); J.M. Bumsted, "The Cultural Landscape of Early Canada," in Strangers within the Realm: Cultural Margins of the First British Empire, ed. B. Bailyn and P.D. Morgan (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina, 1991).

³² Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism, revised ed. (London and New York: Verso, 1991).

The final theme, addressed in Chapter Three, deals with the architectural and spatial significance of the Centre Block interior, within which the official portraits are displayed. From the construction of Canada's first Parliament Buildings just prior to Confederation to the rebuilding of the Centre Block after the 1916 fire, the signification of Canada's British political and cultural heritage remains a key issue. J.M. Frew's essay on how Gothic architecture came to be seen as England's "national style" during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, as it was eventually championed by Pugin and Ruskin, details this link.³³ Texts by Kenneth Desson, Kelly Crossman, Harlold Kalman and Carolyn Young provide an array of reasons – ideological, cultural and practical – as to why the decision was made to employ Gothic revivalism in the construction of the first Canadian Parliament Buildings.³⁴

Today, in the wake of ever-increasing tourism to the Parliament Buildings, government policies reflect a desire to conserve and maintain the present appearance of the architecture and artefacts. The Department of Public Works and Government Services and the House of Commons have both recently completed reports outlining the recent conservation policies for Parliament Hill.³⁵ David Lowenthal's concept of heritage, understood as the drive to "refashion the past in present garb" in a way that is "congenial" to present purposes, stands as a useful theoretical tool for unpacking the

³³ J.M. Frew, "Gothic is English: John Carter and the Revival of the Gothic as England's National Style," *Art Bulletin* 64 (June, 1982): 315-19.

³⁴ Kenneth Desson, "The Canadian Parliamentary Stone Carvers: A Study in the Bureaucratization of Art" (master's thesis, Carleton University, 1980); Kelly Crossman, *Architecture in Transition: From Art to Practice, 1885-1906* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University, 1987); Harold Kalman, *A History of Canadian Architecture*, (Oxford: Oxford University, 1994); Carolyn A. Young, *The Glory of Ottawa: Canada's First Parliament Buildings* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University, 1995).

³⁵ Canada, Public Works and Government Services, *Conservation Guidelines for the Interior of the Centre Block* (February 1998), a report prepared by the Heritage Conservation Program for the Parliamentary Precinct Directorate; Canada, House of Commons, *Building the Future: House of Commons Requirements for the Parliamentary Precinct*, (Ottawa, 1999).

continued symbolic significance invested in maintaining a visual homogeneity on Parliament Hill.³⁶ Hung within this space, the contemporary significance of the PMPG portraits exists in tandem with the heritage policies now applied to the Centre Block interior itself.

³⁶ David Lowenthal, Possessed by the Past: The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History (New York: The Free Press, 1996).

1. Unveiling the Frame: Historical Conventions and Conditions in the Production of the Official Portraits of Canadian Prime Ministers

Official portrait painting has always been regarded as a sub-genre, in Charlotte Townsend-Gault's words, "impervious to change."¹ The official portraits of Canadian Prime Ministers, which date from 1889 on and now hang in perfunctory succession at Parliament Hill, in Ottawa, continue to be produced and demonstrate a "remarkable staying power in a century notable for its artistic discontinuities."² Under critical analysis, the aesthetic and typological consistency of official portraiture is seen to be a result of images that are "symbolic expressions not of the nature of the individual sitter, but of the institution which endorsed it."³ Except in professional and critical discourse, however, mention of any symbolic institutional function of official portraiture is often conspicuously absent.

This chapter identifies and critically analyzes how the ideas of Charlotte Townsend-Gault are located in relation to two criteria which recur throughout popular and scholarly discussions of official portraiture, namely the quest for physical likeness and the intimation of the subject's essence. These criteria, shared in common with other types of portraiture, deserve attention not only because they are so pervasive, but more importantly, because they are understood as universal standards for judging all painted portraiture, and function so as to evade and prevent discussion of issues relevant to portraits in an institutional context. By investigating the assumptions that inform the production of official portraiture historically, this chapter argues that likeness and essence

¹ Charlotte Townsend-Gault, "Symbolic Facades: Official Portraits in British Institutions since 1920," Art History 11 (December 1988): 511.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., 512.

are conceived as ahistorical criteria blind to the possibility of any institutional or ideological purpose inscribed within official portraiture. This chapter represents a preliminary study of the historical roots informing the present understanding of portraiture, including modern state nationalism and physiognomy. A more detailed investigation of the official portraits of Canadian Prime Ministers and their particular symbolic and institutional role is pursued in Chapters Two and Three.

A neatly-wrapped and exhaustive definition of portraiture is impossible. Today especially, the portrait is a ubiquitous cultural object, an “interface” between a traditionally reified artistic genre, represented by the official portrait and at the same time part of the banal cacophony of popular imagery, captured in the candid snapshot of daily social life.⁴ Despite the portrait’s broad dispersal within contemporary popular culture, official painted portraiture is usually understood within a relatively narrow and static conceptual framework. From ceremonial speeches delivered at the unveilings, to the personal memoirs of former Prime Ministers, to coverage by the popular media, the assessment of the official portraits of Canadian Prime Ministers have been based on the idea that a portrait is, first and foremost, the unique depiction of a particular existing (or once existing) human being. Upon this premise official portraiture has been defined according to a pair of criteria. First, official portraits are expected to provide a perceptual ‘likeness’ or resemblance of the subject. Secondly, the portrait is conceived to transcend its physical referent and capture the intangible essence or personal identity of the living subject.⁵

⁴ Richard Brilliant, *Portraiture*. (London: Reaktion, 1991), 11.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 8.

Historically, in the popular reception of the Prime Ministers official portraits, concern over the issue of visual resemblance or likeness has been significant. Speaking in February 1890, on behalf of those Conservative party members and sympathizers, who had commissioned and financed the painting of Sir John A. Macdonald (**fig. 3**), Senator Alexander Ogilvie described Macdonald's portrait as one "which preserves to posterity a likeness as nearly perfect as possible of Canada's greatest statesman."⁶ A notoriously anti-Conservative newspaper of the time dismissed Macdonald's legacy, but nonetheless adopted a similar criterion of judgement, based on the visual resemblance between subject and image, describing the portrait as "a fine oil painting...rather older than the original, perhaps, but still a very credible piece of work."⁷

Six years later, the Winnipeg Free Press praised Victor Long's portrayal of Sir Charles Tupper (**fig. 10**) as "a too faithful picture of him," after first mentioning that the image actually referenced a particular photograph of Tupper, not the living sitter.⁸ The Globe extolled J.W.L. Forster's posthumous painting of Alexander Mackenzie (**fig. 4**), which was not formally purchased by Parliament until 1900, as "a very effective likeness," adding that the "friends of Mr. Mackenzie speak of this portrait in terms of unqualified admiration."⁹

The general concern for 'likeness' continues well into the twentieth century. When the Cleeve Horne painting of John Diefenbaker (**fig. 17**) was unveiled in 1968, politicians and the press immediately noted a contrast between the brown eyes depicted in the portrait, and Diefenbaker's piercing blue eyes. The implication was that such a

⁶ "The Premier, presentation of an oil painting yesterday afternoon," Ottawa Daily Citizen, 28 February 1890.

⁷ "In the Gallery, a great day for the Grand Old Party," Globe (Toronto), 28 February 1890.

⁸ "A presentation to Sir Charles Tupper at the Leland," Winnipeg Free Press, 11 May 1896.

⁹ "Two important portraits," Globe (Toronto), 23 March 1897.

detour raised questions about the ways in which a portrait truly represents its subject.¹⁰

The portrait of Lester Pearson (**fig. 19**) was, in turn, lauded for the artist's refusal to idealize the former Prime Minister, depicting him slouched in what one report described as "his most typical pose."¹¹ Most recently, Brian Mulroney's portrait (**fig. 22**) was praised for accurately, but respectfully, rendering the subject's most famous and recognized physical traits, "a contented smile above his famous chin."¹²

The philosopher Nelson Goodman argues that the notion of an image representing its subject on the basis of perceptual resemblance is fallacious. He suggests the concept of likeness, defined as "A represents B to the extent that A resembles B," is a "naïve" view of representation.¹³ The equation of representation with resemblance is problematic for two reasons. First, while resemblance is a self-sufficient or "reflexive" concept, representation is not. An image can be said to resemble itself "to the maximum degree," but the operation of representation implies the existence of something outside the image, which the latter is conventionally thought to stand for. Secondly, resemblance is "symmetrical," but representation generally is not. Two things can resemble each other, but it is only possible for one to be considered a representation. In Goodman's example, notable because it refers to portrait painting, he observes "while a painting may represent the Duke of Wellington, the Duke doesn't represent the painting." Resemblance is, in other words, "no sufficient condition for representation."¹⁴

¹⁰ "Diefenbaker hung on Hill," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), 9 October 1968.

¹¹ "Portrait of Pearson called 'The Sloucher'," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), 25 October 1968.

¹² Paul Samyn, "Mulroney hanged on Hill, Chretien may be next," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 20 November 2002.

¹³ Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols* (Indianapolis and New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1968), 3.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 4-5.

The upshot is that a portrait does not represent someone simply because it looks like them: “The plain fact is that a picture, to represent an object, must be a symbol for it, stand for it, refer to it.” Goodman’s view of representation is that the depiction of a certain object or person makes sense according to a set of socially circulating and habituated symbolic practices, the rules of which are always being redrawn. The image stands for its subject not because it perceptually resembles it, but because it is customarily understood to denote it.¹⁵ The idea of pictorial realism, commonly taken to mean that an image looks like its subject, is according to Goodman, largely shaped by the prior assumption of a representational codex:

Realism is relative, determined by the system of representation standard for a given culture or person at a given time...This relativity is obscured by our tendency to omit specifying a frame of reference when it is our own. ‘Realism’ thus often comes to be used as the name for a particular style or system of representation.¹⁶

Evaluating the success of a portrait in registering the likeness of a particular individual is not fundamentally a perceptual activity, but a conceptual theory-laden one. It presupposes an active ability to read an image in relation to a pre-established set of commonplace representational codes and the idea “that a picture looks like nature often means only that it looks the way nature is usually painted.”¹⁷

According to Norman Bryson, notions of pictorial resemblance and likeness are symptomatic of more than just faulty logic. They signal the historical persistence of the “natural attitude,” which he provocatively defines as “the generally held, vague, common-sense conception of the image as the resurrection of Life.” Bryson views the “natural attitude” as problematic because it assumes physical objects have a “material and

¹⁵ Ibid., 5.

¹⁶ Ibid., 37.

¹⁷ Ibid., 39.

natural” set of characteristics, which “determines or constitutes them.” Thus representation is assumed to be an exclusively technical issue of visual duplication, to be judged along an imagined spectrum of perceptual accuracy, with no connection to the discursive history of society.¹⁸ The “natural attitude” is, for Bryson, an ancient conceptual paradigm that dates back to Greek antiquity and remains central in the formation of Western art history since the Renaissance.¹⁹

It is the particular effect of the “natural attitude” on art historical discourse with which Bryson is largely concerned. To claim that the painting’s task is to picture “Life” is to imply that the only issue with which artists have been concerned is “the fidelity of...registration of the world” and the abstract goal of procuring an exact replication, or what Bryson calls the “Essential Copy.”²⁰ The end result has been an art history that regards the artist and the painted product as disconnected from the social, political and cultural world, “purged” of all traces of the historically specific “productive process.”²¹ The continued naturalization of the relationship between original and simulacrum in the assessment of official portraits is a crucial means through which the ideological

¹⁸ Norman Bryson, *Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze* (New Haven: Yale University, 1983), 6. Roland Barthes regards the naturalization of cultural beliefs and attitudes as a form of mythologizing. Myth, for Barthes, is a type of “depoliticized speech,” produced by and ingrained in a culture but considered transcendent of that cultural context, see Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. A. Lavers (London: Jonathan Cape, 1972), 143-46. Bryson understands the “natural attitude” as mythology in this sense, because it discursively situates artistic representation as motivated toward an optical truth that exists outside of the historical, social and political forces of culture.

¹⁹ According to Bryson, the “natural attitude” is set out paradigmatically in the anecdote told by Elder Pliny in *Natural History* of the painting competition between Zeuxis and Parrhasius. The goal of the competition was to determine who could demonstrate the greatest technical ability in replicating the “essential” features of the visible world through paint. Parrhasius was awarded the victory, according to Pliny, because while the verisimilitude of Zeuxis painting was able to deceive birds, Parrhasius painted a piece of curtain across that tricked the artist Zeuxis, see Bryson, 3-7 and Pliny, *Natural History*, trans. H. Rackman (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Loeb Classical Library, 1952), 9:309-311.

²⁰ Bryson, 3.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

framework of the government institution remains concealed, removing the portrait image from critical consideration.

Understanding the portrait image as a visual record of individual appearance is not the only criterion commonly articulated in existing assessments of official portraits of Canadian Prime Ministers, nor is it the only one that has the effect of severing the portrait from its institutional context. The painted portrait image is also valued in relation to its representation of an intangible and essential character, unique to the sitter. In this sense, the official portrait is conceived as a symbolic image, depicting the sitter at a quintessential moment, illuminating essential character, or representing a metaphorical synthesis of the Prime Minister's political life. This perception does not necessarily interfere with or contradict the iconicity implicit within the "natural attitude" and the assumed replication of the subject's physical appearance. The revelation of a sitter's essence is achieved through the deployment of specific visual cues in and around the portrait that connote a correlation between the subject's appearance and character.

Again, unveiling speeches, press articles and the memoirs of politicians bear witness to a belief that portraiture is expected to convey a subject's intangible essence, as much as the replication of visible appearance. One article in the 1938 Ottawa Journal described a painting of R.B. Bennett (not his official portrait) (**fig. 15**) in relation to what the writer considered the "acid test" of "great portraiture," namely the degree to which it expressed "the essential essence of the subject."²² Likewise, in his diary, William Lyon Mackenzie King (**fig. 14**) articulated the crucial role he believed the artist should play in quantifying the sitter's unique character: "I should like to get a painting of myself which could be left to the country, one which would really portray the side of my nature which I

²² "Oil painting of Mr. Bennett," Ottawa Journal, 8 July 1938.

thought Frank [Salisbury] knew perhaps better than any other artist.”²³ Then House of Commons Speaker, Gaspard Fauteux, in a letter to King, further remarked: “Your portrait...has been seen by Members who like it very much and think it admirably expresses your strength of character and of intellect.”²⁴

Throughout the second half of the twentieth century, a common assumption among politicians and the media remained that painted portraits should capture the personal character of the subject, even when the idea of the subject was not static. Pierre Trudeau (**fig. 20**), for example, claimed that he had reservations about being represented in paint, because this implicitly meant the reduction of his subjectivity to one image. Initially, he preferred “the photographer’s flash because it captured a moment of action.” However, he eventually conceded, according to one journalist, after Myfanwy Pavelic explained her painterly method and technique,

showing him how oil paintings are built up, layer after layer. Hiding, mixing, obscuring, synthesizing, revealing...all the complexities of the person that a generation of journalists and academics had tried to unpeel.²⁵

Brian Mulroney described his official portrait in similar terms. The former Progressive Conservative Prime Minister praised Igor Babailov’s painting for the way it seemed to relay “some of the determination and resolve that I acquired and governed with.”²⁶

The artists responsible for official portraits have also repeatedly voiced the belief that the purpose of representation is to reveal noble truths about the subject, which in turn validate the subject’s social-political position. J.W.L. Forster wrote that while painting

²³ Diary entry 14 October 1945, W.L.M. King diary, Library and Archives of Canada (hereafter LAC) website @ <http://king.archives.ca>. Salisbury painted King’s official portrait in 1945.

²⁴ Letter to King from Gaspard Fauteux, 18 December 1946, W.L.M. King fonds, MG 26 J1, vol. 403, reel C-9169, 364083, LAC.

²⁵ Hugh Winsor, “Even Trudeau likes this hanging,” *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), 2 May 1992.

²⁶ Jenny Jackson, “It shows my determination,” *Ottawa Citizen*, 1 December 2002.

the posthumous Mackenzie portrait, he was concerned to convey the “uncompromising conscience” and “courage” he had once perceived in the living subject.²⁷ Most official portrait artists have placed greater emphasis on the portrait as a character study, rather than simply a mirror of physical appearance. In a letter to Arthur Meighen (**fig. 13**) portraitist Ernest Fosbery wrote, “I generally have little trouble in getting a likeness, but a portrait should go beyond a mere likeness.”²⁸

Official portrait artists in the latter half of the twentieth century have continued to acknowledge the official portrait as a representation of the sitter’s personality. In a 1993 interview, Louis St. Laurent’s (**fig. 16**) portraitist Audrey W. McNaughton stated that while “naturally a good physical likeness is essential,” in order to produce a good painting it must also be “a good work of art” and “show the personality, the character of the sitter as much as possible.”²⁹ A connection is thus made between the official portrait as a register of character, the transcendence of mere visual replication, and its status as a work of art. For Myfanwy Pavelic, the challenge in the Trudeau portrait was to produce an image as enigmatic as the subject.³⁰ Pavelic’s Montreal dealer claimed that he recommended Pavelic for Trudeau’s portrait “precisely because she has a knack for capturing the spirit of a person...I wanted someone who could paint Trudeau’s aura.”³¹ Here, the official portrait is understood as a symbol of the sitter’s political life and accomplishments. But, in some cases, it is conceived as pointing beyond this, peering more deeply into the subject and hinting at a surplus of character, a dormant potential not

²⁷ J.W.L. Forster, *Under the Studio Light* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1928), 76.

²⁸ Letter to Meighen from Ernest Fosbery, 21 September 1948, Arthur Meighen fonds, MG 26 I, vol. 224, reel C-3596, 146930, LAC.

²⁹ Audrey W. McNaughton, “Telephone Interview Concerning St. Laurent’s Portrait,” interview by Audrey Dubé, 22 October 1993, acsn. no. D-451, Curatorial Services, House of Commons, Canada.

³⁰ Winsor, “Even Trudeau likes this hanging.”

³¹ “Trudeau pleased with work on his official portrait,” *Montreal Gazette*, 27 April 1991.

fully encompassed by the sitter's professional life, or apparent to public perception. John Turner's official portrait (**fig. 21**), for example, was described in one press release as conveying a latent personal energy, as if his body was a container "full of the promise that was never realized."³²

The notion that an official painted portrait is limited to capturing and conveying an essence of the sitter has its roots in the Renaissance. It is tied up with a cultural shift treating a sitter's public and professional persona as a sign of individuality.³³ The problem with this paradigm is that, like the concept of perceptual likeness, it reduces the meaning of an official portrait to one of registration, except in this case it is not the mimetic reproduction of physical features that is valued, but a visual transcription of the subject's metaphysical essence. This understanding avoids assessing the portrait's meaning relative to its productive history, the institutional context in which it was displayed or any specific ideological function it was intended to fulfill. As with the criterion of the "natural attitude," evaluation of an official portrait in terms of its revelation of the subject's true essence is ahistorical, and act to conceal a portrait's symbolic articulation of certain broader the socio-political ideas. Among the contextual issues relevant to the meaning implicit in the official portraits of Canada's government leaders is an understanding of the link between official portraiture and the development of modern state nationalism during the nineteenth century.

While nations differ in how notions of collective identity are manifest, the nineteenth century has generally come to be known as a time when "nationalism roused

³² Lawrence Martin, "PM shows Turner a touch of class," *Ottawa Citizen*, 10 May 2001.

³³ Joanne Woodall, introduction to *Portraiture: Facing the Subject*, ed. J. Woodall (Manchester: Manchester University, 1997), 1-2.

mass allegiance to icons of collective identity.”³⁴ Portraits of leaders, as well as being tangible transcriptions of physical likeness and visual records of the subject’s essential character and moral fibre, memorialize an exemplary individual as a potent symbol of national distinctiveness.³⁵ Canada achieved Dominion status in 1867, yet its Anglophone majority remained, for the most part, proud of the cultural and historical connection to the British Empire well into the twentieth century. By the time the first official portraits of Canadian Prime Ministers were commissioned, painted portraiture of the political elite was an established practice in British imperial culture. Numerous honorific prototypes existed of regents, military leaders and colonial governors and judicial legislators. These images reflected a complex set of values related to commercial wealth, militaristic power, history, national identity and human subjectivity premised upon the ideals of Victorian England and disseminated to its colonies.

During the eighteenth century in Great Britain, as Marcia Pointon has described, the link between portraiture and modern cultural nationalism was tangibly demonstrated by the Reverend James Granger’s A Biographical History of England. First published in 1769, it consisted of a bound volume of engraved heads and faces of significant figures in English history. The portraits in Biographical History were originally organized in a way that reflected normative socio-political power relations of the day – from monarchs and ecclesiastics, to soldiers and artists; women and social misfits. These became available at the precise historical moment when new class dynamics were beginning to emerge in

³⁴ David Lowenthal, Possessed by the Past: The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History (New York: Free Press., 1996), 63.

³⁵ Chapter Two explores in more detail the dimensions of nationalism in Canada at the end of the nineteenth century and its relationship to the federal government.

England.³⁶ According to Pointon, Biographical History was not an objective documentary archive, but one that enfolded the contemporary ideological approach to English history, understood as a compilation of the biographies of great personalities. Through a calculated visual arrangement, portraiture could be made to picture, in her words, “the body politic,” promoting “order, continuity and wholeness in a fragmented society, marking boundaries that were threatened and reinforcing a class hierarchy.”³⁷

The practice of memorializing distinguished individuals through portraiture emerged first in Antiquity. Rooms in the private dwellings came to serve the public function of demonstrating the worth of the family. The later understanding of a gallery of worthies emerged during the Renaissance, “with particular emphasis on the heroic.”³⁸ In the mid-nineteenth century, the first national portrait gallery was created in London.³⁹ Emphasis was not placed in the first instance on communicating individual moral and heroic virtue through portraiture, but rather upon the illustration of national history. Established by the British Parliament, it was a bureaucratically supported counterpart of Granger’s Biographical History operating, according to Pointon, in a “public ideological and pedagogic” form, emerging in England “around the mid-nineteenth century, a period characterized in Britain by increasing parliamentary power, constitutional debate and colonial expansion.”⁴⁰ While a national portrait gallery and a collection of official

³⁶ Marcia Pointon, Hanging the Head: Portraiture and Social Formation in Eighteenth-Century England (New Haven: Yale University, 1993), 56.

³⁷ Ibid., 83, 58.

³⁸ Ibid., 62.

³⁹ England was the first to establish its National Portrait Gallery in 1856. It set a precedent for analogous institutions in Scotland (1882) and Ireland (1884), Ibid., 228-29. The United States did not formally found its National Portrait Gallery until 1968, an event H. Smailes has described as a “twentieth-century afterthought,” see A Portrait Gallery for Scotland (Edinburgh: National Gallery of Scotland, 1985), 10.

⁴⁰ Pointon, 228-29. This is not to say that portrait galleries did not have significance outside the Anglo West.

portraits of Canadian Prime Ministers have a number of obvious differences,⁴¹ they both reflect a similar impetus to foreground painted images of certain individuals as nationally significant, regardless of the status of the artist.⁴²

The establishment of London's National Portrait Gallery also paralleled another crucial development in the cultural role of portraiture. In the nineteenth century there was an expansion of the social types considered "eligible for portrayal."⁴³ In the Canadas painted portraiture became more common among the increasingly prosperous mercantile and professional classes, and was no longer the exclusive cultural preserve of ecclesiastics, military officials and vice-regals. The manner in which honour and authority were portrayed through paint was also changing. In the words of Joanna Woodall, "issues of realism and truth were central," with the older iconographies being referenced to confirm the importance of the sitter's professional role:

In portraits of men, overt role playing was abandoned in favour of attempts to reconcile a convincing characterization of the sitter's socio-political position with depiction of the essential inner quality which was considered to justify his privileged place.⁴⁴

Consequently, visual cues were developed and employed in nineteenth-century dedicatory portraiture that suggested an ambiguous synthesis between the sitter's unique individuality and his institutional rank, and between personality and physical appearance. In the context of this cultural lineage, official portraits of Canadian Prime Ministers

⁴¹ Clearly a collection based on the portrait heads of government is more limited than a national portrait collection, where criteria as to whose image should be included is one of ongoing debate. Traditionally, for example, new works, with the exception of those depicting sovereigns, are permitted into a national portrait gallery only after a significant period of time has passed since the death of the subject depicted in the portrait. The method by which portraits were gathered by the PMPG collection has been by commission, sometimes through Parliament, but certainly on the basis of initiatives by government personnel, whereas a national portrait collection is characteristically filled through private donations, *Ibid.*, 262 fn. 47.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 228.

⁴³ Woodall, 5.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

should not be read as passive reflections of the sitters' unique and authoritative essences, but rather as consciously produced signs of uniqueness and authority that articulate a set of established cultural values. Ernst van Alphen, writing in the same anthology as Woodall, relays a further message:

The most innocent reading of portraits would be that the sitters were portrayed because they had authority in the first place, in whatever field of society. But since our insight into the past distribution of authority is mediated among other things through portraits of historical figures on which we bestow authority because they have been worthy of portrayal, this intuitive acceptance of the 'real' authority of the sitter is actually the reverse of that other activity, namely placing authority in them through the function of the portrait...It is because we see a portrait of somebody that we presume that the portrayed person was important and the portrayed becomes the embodiment of authority in whatever way. Thus, authority is not so much the object of portrayal, but its effect.⁴⁵

The representational conventions and iconography shared by nineteenth-century British honorific portraiture and the official portraits of Canadian Prime Ministers are part of a common lineage. The tropes recycled throughout the Canadian Parliamentary collection can be located in English discourses, circulating over a century prior to the first official portrait commissions in Canada. In the mid-eighteenth century, for example, the English painter Joshua Reynolds, in his Discourses on Art, drew a distinction between the painter-as-artist and the painter-as-portraitist. The difference concerned the relationship between artistic expression and likeness, and was grounded in a common Platonic dualism between intellectual reality and physical appearance. Under this tradition, the former was valued and the latter construed negatively as mere 'copyism'.

According to Reynolds' conception, the physical world remained the source of depiction for both the painter-as-artist and the painter-as-portraitist, and likeness in both

⁴⁵ Ernst van Alphen, "The Portrait's Dispersal: Concepts of Representation and Subjectivity in Contemporary Portraiture," Portraiture: Facing the Subject, 240.

instances was a crucial issue. However, the painter-as-artist held a higher cultural status, because his portrayal was conceived as moving in some sense beyond slavish attention to personal aspects of the referent. English academic standards of artistic representation demanded not merely technical ability, but acute intellectual power, which, borrowing from Reynolds' vocabulary, contextualized the subject not as a particular being, where emphasis is placed upon particular "accidents," but as a conceptual or "general" ideal. The task of the true artist, as Reynolds saw it, was to provide an ideal and beautiful representation, not merely a likeness:

If a portrait-painter is desirous to raise and improve his subject, he has no other means than by approaching it to a general idea. He leaves out all the minute breaks and peculiarities in the face, and changes the dress from a temporary fashion to one more permanent...if an exact resemblance of the individual be considered as the sole object to be aimed at, the portrait-painter will be apt to lose more than he gains by acquiring dignity taken from general nature.⁴⁶

Although Reynolds himself was predominantly a portraitist, he nonetheless maligned the genre as "a defective model" because of its tendency to focus on the particular details of a sitter's physical appearance. By contrast Reynolds celebrated the heroic depiction of legendary and historical events, which he saw as unencumbered by technical details, elevating the artist's role to one of grand universal ideals. The portrait only had a chance as a work of art if the artist could provide the subject with "the general air, [more] than in observing the exact similitude of every feature."⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Joshua Reynolds, *Discourses on Art*, ed. R.R. Wark (San Marino, Ca.: Huntington Library, 1959), 72.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 59. Reynolds' neo-classical preference for 'generality' over particular 'likeness' was an influential aesthetic paradigm in eighteenth-century England, but was by no means the only view. The works of a contemporary and rival, Thomas Gainsborough, would become a major influence for British artists in the nineteenth century. According to Edgar Wind, Gainsborough's portraits and letters stress a skepticism toward the philosophical Idealism, historic meta-narrative and not the confidence in reason and human nature implicit in Reynolds' views on painting. Gainsborough conceived the goal of portraiture as rather for the artist to recognize and accept the genre's own "natural limits" by "cling[ing] to the material world" for reference and rejecting "inspiration" from the intellectual pretensions of history, literature and

For Reynolds both the production and evaluation of a painting's merit, in other words its mark as an authentic work of art, rested on the artist's grasp of intellectual ideals and values indebted to Platonic philosophy. An overriding concern for the details of a sitter's likeness was discounted by Reynolds primarily because achieving a likeness was regarded as requiring no special intellectual ability. It rested instead on passive perceptual experience, through repeated exposure to the individual subject whose likeness required evaluation. Reynolds believed that the judgment of perceptual appearance should be left not to the artists concerned with conveying certain general and universal truths, but to those who simply happened to belong to the sitter's "immediate circle."⁴⁸

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, two phenomena complicated the relationship Reynolds articulated between the documentation of physical likeness, the intimation of character, and individual artistic expression. A popular interest in physiognomy, especially in England, combined with the introduction of photography to form a conceptual framework against which a new Victorian attitude to painted portraiture emerged and, in the case of official portraiture, continued well into the twentieth century.

Physiognomy is a pseudo-science, historically traceable to the treatise Physiognomics, attributed to Aristotle, which came to light in the Middle Ages and formed the basis of such later publications such as Charles Le Brun's mid-seventeenth-

philosophy, see Edgar Wind, Hume and the Heroic Portrait: Studies in Eighteenth-Century Imagery, ed. J. Anderson (Oxford: Oxford University, 1986), 16-19.

⁴⁸ John Gage, "Photographic Likeness," in Portraiture: Facing the Subject, 119.

century painter's manual.⁴⁹ In the late eighteenth century, the precepts and lexicon of physiognomic study were systematically expanded by the Swiss clergyman Johann Caspar Lavater. Lavater published his initial volumes of Essays on Physiognomy in German in 1775, and these were translated into French and English by 1799. In England, the popularity of physiognomy initiated subsequent developments of other strands of study based on similar methodologies and assumptions. For example, phrenology, the belief that "the character and personality of individuals could be determined by the...terrain...of their skulls," was popularized by George Combe's 1839 publication Constitution of Man.⁵⁰

Lavater's earlier study of physiognomy assumed that judgements formed about people were routinely based on their superficial appearance. He went on to argue that people should learn how to perform such analyses properly, that is, scientifically.⁵¹ Lavater himself defined physiognomy as "the science or knowledge of the correspondence between the external and internal man, the visible superficies and the invisible contents," and his particular interest was the face.⁵² Adapting from Platonic philosophy, Lavater "viewed the face as a presentation of moral and spiritual truth, expressing distance from or closeness to" a "divine ideal."⁵³

As with phrenology in the following century, Lavater understood a particular aspect of the face – "the natural and essential boney skull and its carefully measured

⁴⁹ Judith Wechsler, A Human Comedy: Physiognomy and Caricature in Nineteenth Century Paris (London: Thames and Hudson, 1982), 15-16.

⁵⁰ For an account of the impact of physiognomy and phrenology among the intellectual elite in late nineteenth-century Canada, see Robert Lanning, The National Album: Collective Biography and the Formation of the Canadian Middle Class (Ottawa: Carleton University, 1996), 71-77.

⁵¹ Johann Caspar Lavater, Essays on Physiognomy: For the Promotion of the Knowledge and Love of Mankind, trans. T. Holcroft, second ed. (London: Whittingham, 1804), 2:28.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 19.

⁵³ Joan K. Stemmler, "The Physiognomical Portraits of Johann Caspar Lavater," Art Bulletin 75 (March 1993): 153.

proportions,” not its mutable fleshy expressions (the study of which was termed pathognomy) – as “true indicators of the character of man.” The skeletal structure of the face was supposedly a reliable source for revealing the “divine essence,” considered an unchanging physical substratum.⁵⁴ Fundamental to the conjecture that “divine essence and the physical were connected” was both Christian doctrine and Platonic philosophy, exemplified in classical proportion. In short, for Lavater, “the physical body [was] an image of the spiritual essence of God and the necessary form of the essence of the divine in the material world.”⁵⁵ Of particular interest is the vital role Lavater assigned to the portrait artist in representing an individual’s “indispensable” uniqueness.⁵⁶ Drawing inverse conclusions to those of Reynolds, while nonetheless assuming a similar Platonic framework, the true artist for Lavater not only demonstrated technical proficiency, but was charged with providing “a better knowledge” of the character traits and moral propensities of the individual by capturing and distilling the “fugitive” particulars that revealed the essence of a person.⁵⁷

Lavater’s assertions were immediately criticized as “dangerous superstitions,” and eventually lost much of their philosophic and scientific credence in continental Europe. However, his popularity grew in Britain. Among a literate elite,

the Victorian public consciously or unconsciously acquired the cultural habit of perceiving and reading their contemporaries as physiognomical types, incorporating the subsequent systemization of Lavater’s thought into an accepted code of interpretation.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Lavater, 1:20.

⁵⁵ Stemmler, 153.

⁵⁶ Lavater, 2:7.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁵⁸ Mary Cowling, The Artist as Anthropologist: The Representation of Type and Character in Victorian Art (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1989), 7.

Lavater's theories remained influential in Britain and helped to give form to the growing nationalist sentiment that precipitated the establishment of London's National Portrait Gallery. Lavater believed not only that each person reflected an essential moral character through the face, but that each also exhibited an ethnic and national moral sensibility, which bound the person to a particular country, as distinguished from others.⁵⁹

The mid-nineteenth century philosopher and essayist Thomas Carlyle, who was instrumental in providing intellectual justification for the National Portrait Gallery, was influenced by Lavater. Fifteen years prior to the Gallery's establishment, he delivered a series of lectures, later published as a book, concerning the socio-historical role of the "hero."⁶⁰ His overarching goal was to show that the veneration of the heroic ideal throughout various cultures and histories was "at bottom the main or only kind of worship."⁶¹ Carlyle, like Lavater, had a particular idea of the proper 'heroic' role of the portrait painter in a hero-worshipping society. Through portraiture, the artist produced a visual biography, the historical accuracy of which was judged by cross-referencing the mentality suggested in the portrait with the written products of the individual.⁶² The face, in Victorian England, was not only a private indicator of a "divine ideal," but a locus of shared national culture and values.

The popularity of physiognomy in nineteenth-century England also dovetailed with the development of photographic technology. Once photography had contributed to a notion that portrait likeness was something that could be immediately and objectively

⁵⁹ Lavater, 3:85.

⁶⁰ Paul Barlow, "Facing the Past and Present: The National Portrait Gallery and the Search for 'Authentic' Portraiture," in *Portraiture: Facing the Subject*, 221.

⁶¹ Michael K. Goldberg, introduction to *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History*, by Thomas Carlyle (Berkeley: University of California, 1993), xxvii.

⁶² *Ibid.*, xxxvi.

represented through mechanical means, it not only reinforced Reynolds' original devaluation of likeness as of little concern for the painter-as-artist, but also suggested that the skills of the painter-as-portraitist were technically redundant. At the opposite extreme, against Reynolds' insistence on capturing the "general air" of a subject, photography, coupled with the emergence of Romanticism and the earlier eighteenth-century fascination with personal biography reiterated by Carlyle, inspired a wider interest in the representation of individuality. One conventional and pervasive attitude in the nineteenth century assigned to both the painted and photographic portrait the task of visually portraying the intimate and individual character traits of the sitter. In Canada the perception of portraiture as a form of biography was popularly manifest in the numerous biographical dictionaries published of exemplary Canadians, many of which were illustrated.⁶³

As in painted portraiture, successfully producing a photographic likeness came to connote something other than replicating physical appearance. It also implied the quantification of the essential character of a subject, lying in some sense beneath the surface appearance of the pictured face.⁶⁴ By the end of the nineteenth century, the relationship between referential and artistic expression was framed by debates about how photography affected the painted portrait and the position of the artist-painter.

Ann Thomas has noted that in nineteenth-century Canada "the photograph came to represent authenticity of experience and accuracy of information," a direct

⁶³ See, for example, The Canadian Biographical Dictionary and Portrait Gallery of Eminent and Self-Made Men (Toronto: American Biographical, 1880); Frederick W. Johnston, Portraits of Prominent Canadians (Toronto: C.J. Musson, 1896); Representative Men of Manitoba: History in Portraiture (Winnipeg: Tribune, 1902); John A. Cooper, Men of Canada (Montreal and Toronto: Canadian Historical, 1902). For a critical historical and sociological reading of the biographical dictionary in Canada see Lanning.

⁶⁴ Robert A. Sobieszek, introduction to Ghost in the Shell: Photography and the Human Soul, 1850-2000 (Cambridge, Mass. and London: MIT/Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1999), 20.

transcription of reality both for the painter and the general public. This understanding surfaced despite there being clear evidence that the photographic image was malleable. For example the composite photography of the Notman Studios from the 1860s on was influenced by the Pictorialist movement current in Europe.⁶⁵ The supposed objectivity of the photographic print only intensified the concept of likeness as something that included a subject's intangible inner personality traits. Some simply argued that it was precisely by mechanically securing a record of physical appearance that the photographic portrait simultaneously conveyed a person's likeness and essential character. One commentator, writing in 1892, argued that the camera was,

the great painter of character, and we may rest assured that our physical eccentricities will not be left, as were our ancestors', to the charitable hand of the painter. Instead, the camera will hand down to future generations the relentless truth concerning us, and they will know beyond dispute all of our personal deficiencies...⁶⁶

New technical and chemical developments were also emerging at this time, allowing portrait painters the full advantage of the perceived superiority of photography, subsuming the photograph's reproduction of likeness into their practice. Specifically, by the 1860s some painters used a technique in which the subject's photographed image was projected and fixed onto light-sensitive canvas or onto large sheets of photographic paper that were then secured over the canvas. These projections were used as schematic outlines to be over-painted with colour. The photographic referent obliterated, the

⁶⁵ Ann Thomas, "The Role of Photography in Canadian Painting, 1860-1900: Relationships Between the Photographic Image and a Style of Realism in Painting" (master's thesis, Concordia University, 1976), 15-16.

⁶⁶ Elisabeth Flint Wade, "Hints in Photography," Buffalo Illustrated Express, 26 November 1892.

painted portrait would stand, both optically and conceptually, in close proximity to the supposed true likeness the photograph had represented.⁶⁷

Of course, the crucial point is not that all painted portraiture was suddenly replaced by photographic techniques, although it generally put miniaturists and silhouettists out of business, but that painters began using photographic technologies for their own ends. In late nineteenth-century Canada, grand manner portrait painting remained, despite the perceived objective superiority of photography, a respected practice among upper-middle and upper-class conservative Anglophone and Francophone clientele.⁶⁸ Among this clientele, there was a counter-current that characterized photographers as recorders of “nondescript mugs,” unable to capture the subject’s true interiority.⁶⁹ This task fell to the portrait painter who, as a ‘creative’ artist unconstrained by mechanical artifice could provide an “authentic portrait,” which ostensibly encapsulated, in the words of portraitist J.W.L. Forster, the “dignity, majesty and charm” of the subject’s “life history.”⁷⁰ Thus, portrait painters attempted to recuperate their status in the post-photography era by fusing the eighteenth-century academic distinction between the ideal “general air” of the subject attainable through artistic creativity, and literal likeness.⁷¹

The perceived objectivity afforded by photography’s mechanical process was not the only aspect that had a direct impact on how painted portraiture came to be understood. By the late 1880s, with the introduction of snapshot cameras by Kodak,

⁶⁷ Thomas, 39-44.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 56.

⁶⁹ Sobieszek, 20.

⁷⁰ On the concept of “authentic portraiture” see Barlow, 219. For further information on Forster’s conception of portraiture, see J.W.L. Forster, *Sight and Insight* (Toronto: Oxford University, 1941), 14.

⁷¹ Pointon, 79.

photography became increasingly accessible to the general public.⁷² Industrial innovation was moving photography away from the “awkward and temperamental equipment, complex and volatile chemistry...and in particular, inadequate, uncontrollable lighting” that had limited its use in the past to trained professionals.⁷³ Furthermore, scientific progress in the area of photomechanical reproduction appeared in the late 1860s, through new printing processes developed by Canadians William Leggo and George Desbarats. Leggo and Desbarats discovered a cheap and efficient half-tone technique, which effectively removed the task of printing from “the wood engraver’s hand” and facilitated the reproduction of photographs in popular weekly periodicals like the Canadian Illustrated News.⁷⁴ Both developments transformed portraiture into a popular genre, both in the private sphere and in the very public world of the popular press.

The last quarter of the nineteenth century in Canada was, in the words of one political orator of the time, “the age of the press.”⁷⁵ With these new technological developments, portraits became ubiquitous to a degree previously unimagined. Images were reproducible *en masse*, could be inserted into a plurality of contexts and were

⁷² Although the camera did permit, in the minds of many, a more immediate transcription and reproduction of an individual’s appearance compared to portrait painting, early photographic techniques did require a lengthy exposure period. Moreover, before Kodak introduced a compact personal camera, photography was largely the practice of professional technicians. Thus, “the politician could potentially control – and control quite closely – the photographic image which portrayed him to the public by making himself accessible to the photographer at the times and under the conditions of his own choosing,” see Andrew Roger, “Portrait Gallery: Sir John A. Macdonald,” Archivist 20, 3 (1994): 9. This, however, does not negate that people anticipated the technology would eventually allow for the mass-dissemination of photographic portraits.

⁷³ Lydia Foy, introduction to Facing History: Portraits from the National Archives of Canada (Ottawa: National Archives of Canada, 1993), xxiv.

⁷⁴ For an account of the photo-reproductive innovations of Leggo and Desbarates, see Teresa McIntosh, “Canadian Pioneers in Photomechanical Reproduction,” History of Photography 20 (Summer 1996): 146-49; Thomas, 32-35.

⁷⁵ Thomas D’Arcy McGee, “The mental outfit of the new Dominion,” Montreal Gazette, 5 November 1867.

consumed by diverse audiences.⁷⁶ Suddenly reduced to mechanical reproduction, the portrait became an object “constituted by different viewers in different ways at different times and places.”⁷⁷ Whatever the original intention behind any given portrait, it becomes increasingly haunted by new forms of (re)interpretation through exposure to a mass audience. It is susceptible to what Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson call “the vicissitudes of reception.”⁷⁸ From these “vicissitudes” the portraits of national leaders are not immune. Their images remain a favourite target to be endlessly, seamlessly and cheaply (re)configured into newspapers, periodicals, advertisements; in multitudes of new and diverse contexts for wide public consumption.

By contrast the English art historian Paul Barlow has identified a key function of national portrait galleries as sites of “officially sanctioned celebrity and significance.”⁷⁹ This is equally applicable to the collection of official portraits of Canadian Prime Ministers. Being literally safeguarded within the precinct of the political establishment, the official portrait contrasts with mass-produced and disseminated journalistic portraits. They are hermetically sealed against any potentially discrediting context. Hence, the governmental institution within which they are exhibited is fundamental to the conception of the official portrait. By examining the production history of the official portraits, Chapters Two and Three explore the symbolic roles the PMPG portraits have historically played, in relation to that precinct.

⁷⁶ The classic text on the effects of modern forms of mechanical reproductions is Walter Benjamin’s essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.” The photomechanical reproduction of images represents, for Benjamin, the ability for images to suddenly document the rapid activities of everyday life and “keep pace with speech.” Moreover, “freed” from the hand, “the process of pictorial reproduction,” photographs functioned to discredit the idea of an original image, thus destabilizing the whole notion that certain portraits are more ‘authentic’ than others, see Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” in *Illuminations*, ed. H. Arendt, trans. H. Zohn (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970).

⁷⁷ Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson, “Semiotics and Art History,” *Art Bulletin* 73, 2 (1991): 179.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Barlow, 224.

As is clear from the unveiling speeches, political memoirs, artists' statements and press reviews there were popular attitudes and beliefs related to the Prime Ministers official portraits. Grounded historically in what Norman Bryson terms the "natural attitude," the painted portrait was usually read according to a pair of entwined criteria. The image gained special cultural significance by replicating and resurrecting a sitter's "pre-existent and plenary" outward appearance.⁸⁰ But, the depicted face was expected to intimate, as a sort of visual biography or "wordless speech," an aura of personal identity unique to that particular subject.⁸¹ Despite the prevalence of these notions, developing attitudes toward portraiture during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries significantly altered the meanings, goals and contexts of the portrait. It was no longer merely a private or elite institutional practice, but a vehicle for the expression of private virtues, national values and future aspirations.

⁸⁰ Bryson, 10.

⁸¹ Stemmler, 153.

2. Affirmations of Empire, Trophies of Party Loyalty: The Production History of the First Official Portraits of Prime Ministers, 1889-1967

The first official portraits of Canadian Prime Ministers were commissioned and exhibited between Confederation and the First World War, a time when successive Canadian governments enacted political and economic policies concerned with nation-building. If as Charlotte Townsend-Gault has argued in relation to the official portraiture produced in Britain since the 1920s, official portraits function as a “symbolic expression” of the institution that commissioned them, one would expect the vested interest of the young Dominion’s government in communicating and legitimating its policies and governing authority to affect the character of the patronage, the selection of artists and the acquisition procedure for the official portraits. A scholar might also expect to find a process bureaucratically supervised, organized and standardized. Surprisingly, the government institutions at first played a minimal role in the orchestration of commissions and the exhibition of the images.

This chapter sets out to explore the marked contrast between the first concerted projects of political and economic nation-building and the initially informal and inconsistent approach to commissions and acquisition procedures for those official portraits painted between 1889 and the 1960s. Also evident throughout this phase is the displacement of conventionalized eighteenth- and nineteenth-century aesthetic principles, the burgeoning of a new nationalist spirit in Canada after the First World War, and the advent of a tentative stylistic shift, which took off in the 1920s, as part of the demise of particular historical and ideological conditions that inflected the production of official portraiture in the final decade of the nineteenth century.

While the development of official portraiture in Canada shares a trajectory with that of London's National Portrait Gallery (NPG), portraits of monarchs, military heroes and the social elite had been produced long prior to the NPG opening in 1856. The novelty was in those eligible for honorific portrayal in the NPG collection, and the organization of these images for public access within a state-funded institution of "sanctioned celebrity and significance."¹ The NPG brought together portraits of writers, artists, regents and the like, eliding actual historical and cultural differences among the various British exemplars and identifying national culture with what Anthony Smith describes as "the purely legal and bureaucratic ties of the state," visually suggesting the nation-state's existence "from time immemorable."² The faces were "memories, symbols, myths and values from much earlier epochs in the life of a population, community or area," preserved and perpetuated within the modern nation-state.³

London's National Portrait Gallery assumed a fundamental role for the government in constructing, articulating, and disseminating ideas of national culture and supporting, in Benedict Anderson's terms, the process of "imagining community." Anderson conceives nationalism not so much as ideology, which according to traditional Marxist/Gramscian framework would imply an orchestrated deception or form of false consciousness perpetuated by the ruling elite at the expense of the underclass, but more as an anthropological category or "analytic expression," which denotes certain recurring phenomena and discourses within a culture. The nation-state is for Anderson a changing entity, a concept that comes into view with "the spontaneous distillation of a complex

¹ Paul Barlow, "Facing the Past and Present: The National Portrait Gallery and the Search for 'Authentic' Portraiture," in *Portraiture: Facing the Subject*, ed. Joanna Woodall (Manchester: Manchester University, 1997), 224.

² Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity* (Reno: University of Nevada, 1991), 15-20.

³ Barlow, 220-21.

‘crossing’ of discrete historical forces,” and emerges as a result of a number of conceptual pre-conditions at the end of the eighteenth century in Europe.⁴ Modern nationalist sentiments and doctrines, according to Anderson, are founded on a widely shared belief system that “imagines” nation-states bound by a “deep, horizontal comradeship” that subsumes existing cultural differences and social inequalities.⁵

Canadian historian J.M. Bumsted has argued that the “relatively isolated emergent cultures,” of early Canada, “each with its own historic base and its own response to the North American experience” made it impossible for British colonialists “to find a unified general strategy with which to relate their official culture of trade, law, religion, and government to the dissimilar vernacular cultures of the settlers.”⁶ Bumsted’s conclusions implicitly deny the applicability of Anderson’s thesis to the Canadian colonial context on empirical grounds. Vast cultural and geographic differences within early Canada, as in other formative states, prevented any sort of “imagined community” from taking root in the settlement period.

In the years immediately prior to and following Confederation, successive colonial and federal governments sought to unify conceptually and practically the various cultural solitudes of the former colonies into a single nation state. Canadian society remained very diverse and government policy often needed to compromise between various pockets of difference for pragmatic reasons. Nonetheless, during the last two decades of the nineteenth century especially, members of the Anglophone political and

⁴ Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism, revised ed. (London and New York: Verso, 1991), 4-5.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁶ J.M. Bumsted, “The Cultural Landscape of Early Canada,” in Strangers within the Realm: Cultural Margins of the First British Empire, ed. B. Bailyn and P.D. Morgan (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina, 1991), 363-65.

intellectual elite sought to “imagine” a unified and civilized Canadian culture and political system through the “affirmation of English culture.”⁷ As late as 1891, for example, Conservative Sir John A. Macdonald achieved an election victory under the slogan “a British subject I was born – a British subject I will die!”⁸ This belief, of course, was not merely held by the politicians. Even after 1867,

many Canadians felt no real conflict between an allegiance to the “new nationality” supposedly created at Confederation and their membership, as British subjects, in the Empire.⁹

In his landmark study of Canadian nationalism in the late nineteenth century, historian Carl Berger has argued that links to British imperial culture provided a significant “sense of power” for many Anglophone Canadians. According to Berger, in Canada in the late nineteenth century, imperialism meant “closer union of the British Empire through economic and military co-operation,” which nonetheless “rested upon an intense awareness of Canadian nationality combined with an equally decided desire to unify and transform the British Empire so that this nationality could attain a position of equality within it.”¹⁰

To assert that imperialist sympathies flourished in Canada at the end of the nineteenth century is also to recognize the distinct cultural, political and economic issues that confronted Canada or the concepts of national identity that provided “a different

⁷ Robert Lanning, The National Album: Collective Biography and the Formation of the Canadian Middle Class (Ottawa: Carleton University, 1996), 48-50.

⁸ Anna Blaszczyńska, “As Canadian as Possible: ‘Canada First’ and the Shifting Rhetoric of Canadian National Identity” (master’s thesis, Carleton University, 2000), 6.

⁹ K.D. McRae, “State Formation and Nation Building in Canada,” unpublished essay (Ottawa: Carleton University, June 1970), 7.

¹⁰ Carl Berger, The Sense of Power: Studies in the Ideas of Canadian Imperialism, 1867-1914 (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1970), 3, 49. Berger also claims that “one of the most arresting features of Canadian imperialist thought was how seldom praise was lavished upon England. True, imperialists extolled the British constitution and political system and gloried in the cultural and historical achievements of the English people,” but from Confederation to the First World War, Canadian imperialists held “a curious mixture of affection and anxiety, resentment and solicitude” toward Great Britain (260).

landscape and genealogy” from that of Britain, other European countries, or even the United States.¹¹ The fact that Canadian national sentiment was to a large degree defined by the Dominion’s imagined configuration within the British Empire underlines first the dominance of Anglophone culture, already institutionally entrenched in Canada’s legislative and judicial systems and thus in the trajectory of national identity myths. Secondly it points to a fear among Canadians, which emerged in the years following Confederation, that the United States in the post-bellum era was potentially an “aggressive” and “out of control” empire.¹² National suspicion and paranoia peaked with the exodus of the British military from Canadian garrisons, coupled with the perceived threat to national sovereignty from the standing armies of the Union, during the American Civil War (1861-65), the Fenian Raids (1866 and 1870), and the doctrines of continentalism proliferating in the United States.¹³ Moreover, deep-seated religious and cultural schisms within the new Canada had come to a head as a result of the Red River (1869-70) and Northwest (1885) Rebellions and the state-sanctioned hanging of Métis leader, Louis Riel, in 1885.¹⁴ Canada’s British heritage, at that period, was linked to

¹¹ Eva Mackey, The House of Difference: Cultural Politics and National Identity in Canada (London: Routledge, 1999), 9.

¹² Sylvia Bashevkin, True Patriot Love: The Politics of Canadian Nationalism (Oxford: Oxford University, 1991), 7.

¹³ Mackey, 12.

¹⁴ These armed insurrections in the West were the direct result of land acquisition strategies sanctioned by the federal government to geographically unify Canada from sea to sea. Previously, no colonial government or settlement had been established in either the north or north-west by Britain, because the Hudson’s Bay Company was chartered by the British government to administer the area. The HBC eventually sold its share of north-western territory to the Canadian government in 1869. Political and armed resistance ensued when, without consulting the resident Métis and other Aboriginal communities, government land-surveyors were sent west to collect data for European immigration. The suppression of the rebellions and the execution of Riel fueled well-established hostilities between English-Protestants, French Catholics and Native groups for generations.

Anglophone Canada's sense of national sovereignty, which in turn positioned itself under the protective umbrella of Britain's imperial shadow.¹⁵

It was precisely the fear among English Canadians that Canada might remain culturally fractured, politically divided and vulnerable to foreign invasion that fuelled nation-building and expansionist policies of the federal government. While a variety of nationalist doctrines and movements, such as the Ontario-based Canada First flourished independently of the federal government, the general consensus among English Canadians was that national ideas were best achieved by a strong and benevolent central government.¹⁶ As the nineteenth-century Canadian nationalist initiative took flight through the policies and institutions of the federal government, the first official portraits of Canadian Prime Ministers provided visible reminders of the various customs, procedures and hierarchies within Canada's political system, as well as its political and cultural link to a British imperial heritage. In post-Confederation Canada, government and nationalism fed one another.¹⁷

The first official portraits of Canadian Prime Ministers were intended to play a particular role against the backdrop of these nationalist and imperialist doctrines, where

¹⁵ J.M. Bumsted has argued that the key factor explaining why "the British were unable to create a cultural hegemony," was "the absence of a common and unifying traumatic experience, such as war of national liberation experienced by the American colonies." The perceived threat of American expansion, the transfer of domestic power to a Canadian government and palpable cultural divisions within Canada during the second-half of the nineteenth century, however, did provoke traumatic reactions by many in the Canadas. The symbols and values of British imperial culture adopted by institutions such as the federal government can be seen to perpetuate a form of nationally self-induced British cultural hegemony, see Bumsted, 391.

¹⁶ Canada First was a force in Canada roughly between 1868 and 1875. While the group was generally pro-Confederation, its members were hostile to what they regarded as the negative effect of party politics on nationalist sentiment. Post-Confederation government was a "Baal," weakening Canada as a nation because it demanded loyalties established on the basis of partisan politics rather than the principles of national cohesion, see William A. Foster, "Party versus principle," Daily Telegraph and Evening Journal (Ottawa), 24 August 1867. The objective of the Firsters "was to provide a bond for unifying the country by putting national needs above politics," see Elisie Holinsky, "Young Canada': The Gist of Canada First" (master's thesis, Carleton University, 1987), 13.

¹⁷ Bashevkin, 9.

government policies and national culture were so intertwined. An important distinction must be made, however, between what the official portraits of Canadian Prime Ministers symbolically expressed and the manner in which they were commissioned.

Unlike the American President, who represents the head of state, the Canadian Prime Minister has always been understood as “merely the head of the Government,” whose role is primarily in the definition of national policy.¹⁸ While both are elected, the Prime Minister’s power as a national figurehead is much more limited. While the PMPG portraits depict individuals who have occupied the apex of elected political power, the Prime Minister is not conceived “as a symbol of the nation but as the most important symbol of the Federal Government.”¹⁹

While the federal government played a central role in broadly defining national identity, especially for Anglophone Canadians after Confederation, it might be expected that the production histories of the first official portraits of the Prime Ministers would be standardized in such a way as to reflect this fact. Paradoxically, the first commissions indicate that the portraits were intended for something other than national mythology. Of the seven Prime Ministers who held power between Confederation and the turn of the century, four official portraits were completed during the final decade of the nineteenth century. In each case the commissions were private affairs, involving no formal bureaucratic orchestration. The artists who painted the images – Henry Sandham (Macdonald), J.W.L. Forster (Mackenzie and Thompson) and Victor Long (Tupper) –

¹⁸ Thomas A. Hockin, “The Prime Minister and Political Leadership: An Introduction to Some Restraints and Imperatives,” in The Apex of Power: The Prime Minister and Political Leadership in Canada, second ed., T.A. Hockin ed. (Scarborough, Ont.: Prentice-Hall, 1977), 21.

¹⁹ Ibid.

were all Canadian-born Anglophones, who built careers through commissioned paintings and illustrations.

Henry Sandham, not academically trained, but still a charter member of the Royal Canadian Academy, began Sir John A. Macdonald's official portrait (**fig. 3**) in 1889. The commission was initiated by Alexander W. Ogilvie, who was a wealthy Anglophone businessman from Montreal and a Tory Senator. The cost was supported by a group of Conservative Party sympathizers. Its partisan character was again underlined when it was officially unveiled for an audience of parliamentarians in the Conservative Caucus Room in the House of Commons in February 1890.²⁰ Sandham appears to have been granted the commission because two years earlier Sandham had painted portraits of Ogilvie and his wife. They had probably been introduced to each other through Sandham's first employer, William Notman, who had worked briefly in the Ogilvie milling business before establishing his photography studio empire.²¹ In 1889 believing that existing portraits of Macdonald had been unsuccessful in "properly representing" the man, Ogilvie placed the Boston-based Sandham in direct contact with the Prime Minister.²² Preferring to work from a live subject so that the sitter's presence could "enter into the spirit of the work," Sandham traveled to Ottawa for a sitting with Macdonald in June 1889, probably at the Topley photographic studio on Sparks Street.²³ It was the last painted portrait for which Macdonald sat.

²⁰ "The Premier: A very interesting question," *Ottawa Citizen*, 28 February 1890.

²¹ Stanley G. Triggs, "William Notman," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, ed. F.G. Halpenny (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1990), 12:787.

²² Letter from Henry Sandham to Macdonald, 11 May 1889, John A. Macdonald fonds, MG 26 A, vol. 473, reel C-1796, 235398, Library and Archives of Canada (hereafter LAC).

²³ *Ibid.*, 235399.

After the Macdonald portrait it was another decade before an official portrait of a Prime Minister was acquired and exhibited in Parliament. In 1897 on his own initiative, J.W.L. Forster completed posthumous portraits of two Prime Ministers, Liberal Alexander Mackenzie (**fig. 4**) and Conservative Sir John S.D. Thompson (**fig. 7**), using black and white photographs as referents. Always the savvy businessmen, Forster allowed the portraits to be displayed on Parliament Hill, as an enticement for their purchase either by political parties or by the government through public funds.

Initially Forster had attempted to sell the Thompson portrait separately, to a potential customer of the same political stripe as the former Prime Minister. When this failed, he approached the Liberal-appointed House of Commons Speaker Thomas Bain and offered to sell the portraits as a pair to the Canadian government.²⁴ He finally won the support of the Speaker, who was responsible for submitting a successful motion for their purchase by Parliament, once the artist had dropped \$200 from his initial asking price. The portraits of Mackenzie and Thompson, Forster wrote to Bain, “mean more to the country and to me than the price I may be given for them.”²⁵ Already on display in the Centre Block for nearly three years before they were purchased, neither portrait was officially unveiled.

²⁴ As late as April 1899, Forster attempted to entice the Conservative Party with the Thompson portrait, and approached the Conservative M.P. in the riding of Toronto West, Edward F. Clarke. He turned to Bain only after the original plan fell through, see letters between Clarke and Forster, April 1899, J.W.L. Forster fonds, acsn. no. 86.105c, United Church-Victoria University Archives (Toronto). Forster’s decision to approach Bain makes sense, although it also reveals the lack of any government body responsible for the acquisition of official portraits of former Prime Ministers. Forster would have already known that the commissioning of former Speakers portraits was customarily the responsibility current Speakers. As the Speakers of the House of Commons and Senate are considered overseers of the practical and aesthetic features of their respective parliamentary domains it would seem reasonable that, in the absence of any definitive body responsible for the official portraits of Prime Ministers, the Speaker of the House of Commons would naturally fill the void.

²⁵ Letter from Forster to Thomas Bain, 13 July 1900, *Ibid.*

What would eventually serve as Sir Charles Tupper's official portrait (**fig. 10**) was also painted in the last decade of the nineteenth century, by the Winnipeg-based Victor Long. It was commissioned and financed, like Macdonald's portrait, through private subscriptions from Tupper's "Manitoba admirers," and was presented to him at an unveiling ceremony in the Leland hotel, in Winnipeg, in May 1896.²⁶ Tupper was Prime Minister at the time of the unveiling, although he lost power in the early summer election of that year. The portrait, based on an 1896 photograph, became the property of Austin E. Blount, a former private secretary of Tupper between 1896 and 1901, who eventually donated it to the then Public Archives of Canada. The portrait was acquired for Parliament in 1941 when, at the instance of Arthur Beauchesne,²⁷ then Clerk of the House of Commons, it was exchanged for a painted portrait by Théophile Hamel of the French explorer Jacques Cartier, after an 1839 representation by François Riss.²⁸

The physical arrangement of the first official portraits in the Centre Block, and the type of spaces in which they were exhibited testifies to the irregular and informal nature of these first commissions. A pre-designated space in which the portraits were to be exhibited did not exist; their display was as informal as their acquisition. Of the three that actually hung in Centre Block at this time, only two were hung in the same vicinity – Macdonald and Mackenzie in the House of Commons Reading Room, while the Thompson was in the Parliamentary Library.²⁹ Later, a detailed inventory of paintings in the Centre Block, misleadingly entitled The Portrait Gallery of Parliament, drawn up in

²⁶ "A presentation to Sir Charles Tupper at the Leland," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 11 May 1896.

²⁷ Letter from Arthur Beauchesne to Blount, 26 September 1941, Austin Blount fonds, MG 27 II E6, vol. 1, file Tupper Family, LAC.

²⁸ "The Riss Picture and Copies by Hamel," Art Portrait File 211-3, Documentary Art and Photography Division, LAC. A copy of this document is held also in ascn. no. D-445.3, Curatorial Services, House of Commons, Canada.

²⁹ Asc. no. D-173 and D-209, Curatorial Services, House of Commons, Canada.

June 1913, recorded the haphazard and discontinuous display of all the portraits then on exhibit. It reveals two relevant pieces of information concerning the Prime Ministers official portraits. First, an introductory preamble confirms the *ad hoc* nature of commissions for portraits of Prime Ministers. The author expresses surprise to discover that while money was regularly set aside for portraits of the Speakers of the House of Commons and Senate, no such fund existed for portraits of the elected leaders of the federal government.³⁰ Secondly, of the official portraits of former Prime Ministers that did exist, the inventory indicates that, at this time, no single 'gallery' space was designated for them. At this time, all existing portraits of historical figures, events, and Legislative officials were dispersed throughout various Parliamentary corridors, lobbies, and offices. The official portraits of Macdonald, Mackenzie, and Thompson by then were hung together, but co-mingled without distinction among the portraits of Governors-General and Speakers, in the Parliamentary restaurant.³¹

Contrary perhaps to expectations, the private and *ad hoc* character of the commissions for the official portraits completed and financed in the final decade of the nineteenth century, and their exhibition at Parliament, reveals that little thought was given by the government bureaucracy to the idea that the portraits might represent a visual document of continuity in political leadership or the beginning of a consolidated collection. Yet the popular press routinely made note of the induction of new official portraits into the Parliamentary collection, covered the unveiling ceremonies, and even published verbatim the speeches delivered at these events. Judging by the irregular way in which these first paintings were commissioned and exhibited, it is more likely that the

³⁰ "The Portrait Gallery of Parliament," June 1913, Department of Public Works fonds, RG 11, vol. 2731, file 2164-48, LAC.

³¹ Ibid.

official portraits produced during the final decade of the nineteenth century were intended for a very limited audience, one already convinced of the legitimacy of the structure of Canada's political institutions. Significantly, the first official portraits were hung in the Parliamentary restaurant, a place for socializing among those bureaucrats and politicians working within the political system. Furthermore, the independent involvement of the Liberal and Conservative Parties in gracing the walls of Parliament with images of their former leaders suggests such portraits were only quasi-official, functioning more like competitive trophies, demonstrating one party's victory over another, not a collective testament to political leadership in Canada.

The story behind the official portrait of Canada's first French-Canadian Prime Minister, Sir Wilfrid Laurier (**fig. 11**), typifies the status of the official portrait as a token of party success, and underlines the way in which the formal nature of the commission process served to accentuate the function of the portrait. Laurier first became familiar with the Hamilton-born painter John Russell in the summer of 1912, when the latter was approached by a Liberal supporter to paint the Prime Minister's portrait for the newly formed Ontario Club.³² After an unveiling at the Club in 1915, Laurier personally commissioned another portrait from Russell, asking that it replace an oil pastel drawing of Laurier by Marc-Aurèle Suzor-Côté, from the collection of the National Gallery of Canada (NGC), but exhibited in the House of Commons Speakers' chamber.³³

Russell's second work replaced the Suzor-Côté in the Speakers' chamber by the fall of 1915. A few months later, on 3 February 1916, a major fire razed the Centre

³² Sir Wilfrid Laurier," unpublished autobiographical document by John Russell, c. 1939-45, acsn. no. 313, curatorial file, National Gallery of Canada Archives (hereafter NGCA). This document is also available in acsn. no. D-439, Curatorial Services, House of Commons, Canada.

³³ Letter from Sir Wilfrid Laurier to Russell, 26 May 1915, John Russell fonds, MG 30 D60, LAC.

Block, except for the Parliamentary Library. The following day, the government moved to a floor of the Victoria Memorial Museum, displacing the National Gallery, which had occupied the building since 1912. A new Centre Block opened four years later.³⁴ A number of significant works of art – some the earliest examples of post-Confederation Canadian history painting³⁵ – were destroyed by the fire, but Russell's 1915 portrait of Laurier was rescued, along with the official portraits of Macdonald, Mackenzie and Thompson. Unable to locate Suzor-Côté's drawing (it was later revealed that Laurier's private secretary, J. Lucien Giguère, had seized and retained the portrait), Laurier offered the National Gallery Russell's 1915 portrait as compensation. At Laurier's death in 1919, no receipts or letters existed to establish with any certainty whether or not Laurier ever paid Russell for this portrait, as he had promised.³⁶

In 1917 Russell painted a third portrait of Laurier on speculation, as Forster had with the Mackenzie and Thompson portraits, and likewise provided it for display in the Centre Block, hoping it might eventually be bought by the former Prime Minister, the Liberal Party, or Parliament. In October 1922 after government activity had returned to the newly built Centre Block, a Cabinet Advisory Art Committee included the 1917 portrait of Laurier in its inventory of art works for potential purchase.³⁷ A year later the

³⁴ The first Centre Block was built between 1859 and 1866, see Canada, House of Commons, Debates, 12th Parliament, 6th Session, 122:578-81 for the government's immediate public reaction to the blaze. See Debates, 13th Parliament, 4th Session, 141:1-8 for the official opening of the first session in the new building in late February 1920.

³⁵ These included Robert Harris' *Fathers of Confederation* (1884), J.W.L. Forster's *Welcome by the Parliament of Canada to the Imperial and Colonial Delegates and Departure of the Royal Canadian Regiment from South Africa* (c. 1895-99), and Frederic Bell-Smith's *Arrival of the H.M.S. Blenheim in Halifax* (1896).

³⁶ "Sir Wilfrid Laurier – Portraits – Chronology," acsn. no. D-439, Curatorial Services, House of Commons, Canada.

³⁷ "Minutes of a Meeting of the Cabinet Advisory Art Committee," W.L.M. King fonds, MG 26 J2, vol. 35, file 1602-1, LAC.

second portrait of 1915 was transferred from Parliament to Laurier House,³⁸ at the behest of then Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King.³⁹ This time, Newton MacTavish, editor of the Canadian Magazine and Liberal-appointed National Gallery Trustee, began an initiative, with the support of King, to purchase both the 1915 and 1917 Russell portraits, the latter to remain in Parliament as Laurier's official portrait.

Between December 1923 and January 1924 a request was made to Sir Edmund Walker, president of the Bank of Commerce and Laurier-appointed chairman of the NGC Board of Trustees (the function of which was to discourage interference by politicians and the Royal Canadian Academy in the purchase of art by the Gallery) to remunerate Russell for both portraits to the tune of \$5000.⁴⁰ It was hinted in the correspondence that, by agreeing to this purchase, the Gallery would ensure its promised \$100,000 government grant. The sudden death of Walker in March 1924 made the King/MacTavish scheme easier to realize. Sir Edmund's shift in support from the Laurier Liberals to Sir Robert Borden's Conservatives in 1910, over the former's championing of economic reciprocity with the United States, had resulted in strained relations between Walker and King, who formed his new Liberal government for the first time in 1921.⁴¹ Funds were finally

³⁸ Laurier House was, between 1897 and 1948, the residence of first Sir Wilfrid Laurier and after his death, William Lyon Mackenzie King. It is now considered a public heritage site.

³⁹ Diary entry 8 March 1923, W.L.M. King diary, LAC website @ <http://king.archives.ca>.

⁴⁰ After its purchase, both Russell and Mackenzie King seem to have believed that the \$5000 only represented payment for the 1917 portrait. King casually reported in his diary, in March 1924, that Russell had stated of the 1915 portrait at Laurier House that "the painting of Sir Wilfrid downstairs was to be mine as long as I lived or wanted it, it was then to revert to him" – that it was not, in other words, considered to be government property, see diary entry 20 March 1924, W.L.M. King diary.

⁴¹ Douglas Ord, The National Gallery of Canada: Ideas, Art, Architecture (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University, 2003), 68. The Laurier portrait was just one of a number of purchases King pressured the Gallery make. Upon his election, "King soon advised the Gallery's Board of Trustees that they should purchase a painting from his friend Carl Ahrens, which they declined to do. Within a month, three Liberal supporters were appointed to the Board; the purchase of Ahren's painting for the large sum of \$1500 followed in April 1922," see Nathalie Limbos-Bomberg, "The Ideal and the Pragmatic: The National Gallery of Canada's Biennial Exhibitions of Canadian Art, 1953-68" (master's thesis, Carleton University, 2000), 18.

secured to purchase the Laurier portrait from the NGC budget, without either the consent of then gallery Director Eric Brown or a Parliamentary vote.⁴²

The purchase, which formally installed Russell's 1917 painting as Laurier's official portrait, was contentious for two reasons. First, it still remained unclear whether or not Russell had actually been paid by Laurier for the 1915 portrait. If he had, then \$5000 was an exorbitant price for a single portrait at the time.⁴³ Secondly, the 1917 portrait according to some National Gallery staff was of questionable artistic merit and by 1930 its surface had started to deteriorate as a result of poor craftsmanship.⁴⁴

The events and circumstances leading up to the obtuse purchase of the Laurier portrait reveal the continued absence of any standardized process through which the official portraits of Prime Ministers were commissioned. In retrospect had the artistic community and general public been more aware of the King/MacTavish ramrod, the government might have been forced to establish more formal criteria, transparent systems of accountability, and standardized procedures by which official portraits were commissioned, produced and acquired in the future.

The purchase of the Laurier portrait was not the last time institutional controversy and intrigue surrounded official portraiture. From the mid-1910s through the 1930s, key debates concerning the institutional relationship between the National Gallery of Canada and the Royal Canadian Academy directly involved artists responsible for the official portraits of Laurier, Sir Robert Borden, Arthur Meighen and R.B. Bennett. In the context

⁴² "Minutes of the Board of Trustees of the National Gallery," 22 May 1924, NGC Archives; and Russell, John Wentworth, *Oils Purchased / Canadian*, National Gallery of Canada fonds, file 1.12R, NGC Archives.

⁴³ \$5000 for the 1917 Laurier portrait was the highest price the NGC had paid for a painting since Horatio Walker's *Oxen Drinking* had been purchased for \$10,000 in 1910, see Charles Hill, *The Group of Seven: Art for a Nation* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1995), 139.

⁴⁴ Diary entry 20 March 1924, W.L.M. King diary.

of an emerging sympathy among Canadian artists toward modern aesthetic values, the First World War, and a new nationalist rhetoric in particular, the work of official portraitists was increasingly conceived as outdated and often antithetical to a more 'authentic' expression of Canadian art.

In the years following Confederation, four major artistic associations had emerged in Canada, all based in Montreal, Toronto, or Ottawa.⁴⁵ The memberships of these societies were interconnected and overlapping. Each was, in its own way, founded with the aim of linking artists from disparate parts of the country, consolidating regional and national talents for artistic training, acting as forums for artistic debate, disseminating information on the arts, pooling financial resources into single institutions, organizing exhibitions, and fostering "a distinctly Canadian art."⁴⁶ Of these, the Royal Canadian Academy (RCA), patterned after the British Royal Academy of Arts, was Canada's first national art association. It is indicative of the conservative character of the RCA that seven of the fifteen artists who produced official portraits of Canadian Prime Ministers were members of the Academy. An eighth, the British painter Frank Salisbury, belonged to the Royal Academy in Britain.⁴⁷

The National Gallery of Canada was established in tandem with the RCA. Its collection initially developed as a government-controlled holding bank for the Academicians' Diploma pieces. From the outset, the acquisition policy of the Gallery

⁴⁵ These included: the Art Association of Montreal, founded in 1860; the Society of Canadian Artists, active from 1867 to 1873 in Montreal; the Ontario Society of Artists, founded in 1872 in Toronto; the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts, formed in Ottawa in 1880, and officially incorporated by a Parliamentary act in 1882.

⁴⁶ Joan Murray, "The Society in Retrospect," *Ontario Society of Artists: 100 Years, 1872-1972* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1972); and Rebecca Sisler, *Passionate Spirits: History of the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts, 1880-1980* (Toronto and Vancouver: Clark, Irwin and Company, 1980).

⁴⁷ RCA members who have contributed portraits to the PMPG collection include Henry Sandham, J.W.L. Forster, Kenneth Forbes, Ernest Fosbery, Cleeve Horne, Hugh Mackenzie, and Myfanwy Pavelic. Frank Salisbury was a member of the Royal Academy.

reflected the taste and discernment of the governing body of the Academy. In 1907 under George Reid, the RCA petitioned the Laurier government to establish more systematic RCA control over the NGC's acquisition and purchasing policy.⁴⁸ Conscious that this would entail vesting substantial control in a "state institution" to a privately elected "professional body of limited membership," the government offered a compromise. It appointed three laymen to the Gallery's Advisory Arts Council⁴⁹ to mediate between the RCA and the government body to which the NGC was ultimately answerable, namely the federal Department of Public Works.⁵⁰

In 1913 Council Chairman Sir Edmund Walker and the NGC's newly appointed curator Eric Brown successfully lobbied Parliament to introduce and pass a National Gallery Act.⁵¹ The Act dissolved the Council and replaced it by a Board of Trustees, although "in practice, this board remained [constituted] for a time [by] the members of the Advisory Arts Council." Eventually the Board membership increased from three to five.⁵² Under the Act, the Board became answerable to the Governor-General and was given more autonomous discretion in the acquisition of work for the Gallery, widening still further the administrative gulf between itself and the RCA.⁵³

⁴⁸ "Royal Canadian Academy of Arts Memorial Regarding the Present Conditions and Needs of Canadian Art," 7 January 1907, Department of Public Works fonds, RG 11, vol. 1653, 299-300, LAC.

⁴⁹ The original members of the Advisory Arts Council included two businessmen – Sir George Drummond of Montreal and Byron Walker (later Sir Edmund Walker) – and one politician, Senator Arthur Boyle.

⁵⁰ "To administer the Gallery, an Advisory Arts Council was created by an Order in Council, that is by the Privy Council, and approved by the Governor General...The Advisory Council members would provide 'advice and assistance' upon request from the Minister [of Public Works] in the selection of works of art for the National Gallery...They were given an annual grant of \$10,000, see Martha J. King, "The National Gallery of Canada at Arms Length from the Government of Canada: A Precarious Balancing Act" (master's thesis, Carleton University, 1996), 9.

⁵¹ "National Gallery of Canada Act," Statutes of Canada, 1913, c. 33.

⁵² Ord, 69.

⁵³ "One key distinction between the 1907 Act and that of the revised incorporation of 1913 lay in the power accorded to the Board of Trustees in terms of acquisition. No longer simply advisors to the Minister, the three-member Board was entrusted with discretionary purchasing power within budgetary restraints," see Limbos-Bomberg, 14. See also "Certified Copy of a Report of the Committee of the Privy Council,

From their mutually interconnected inception, the RCA and NGC were conceived as national institutions, devoted to the development of art in Canada. Their respective contributions to Canada's budding national arts scene was at first a united enterprise because both the Academy and the Gallery grew from a "grass roots movement" that, until the end of the nineteenth century, was largely "unaware of the major [avant-garde] art upheavals in Europe."⁵⁴ For the first three decades of their existence, both sought to confront and ameliorate their own financial and infrastructural limitations, instead of ruminating on the various artistic antagonisms that were beginning to develop with increasing intensity across the Atlantic. However, as the artistic landscape of Canada matured and as more institutional separations were introduced between the Academy and the Gallery, marked ideological differences concerning aesthetic styles and nationalist ideals began to emerge between them.

Between the 1910s and 1920s, new aesthetic initiatives challenged the complacent support of European Academic standards upheld within the reigning art societies in Canada. In reaction some English-Canadian artists fell under the influence of the dark and moody "subjective" landscape paintings of the Hague school, which had emerged in Holland in the 1870s and were very popular with wealthy Montreal collectors in the early twentieth century. In 1907 a number of English-Canadian artists, including Edmund Morris, Curtis Williamson, and Horatio Walker broke with the Ontario Society of Artists (OSA) and banded together to form the Canadian Art Club. The secessionist Club aimed to create a national movement, and eventually broadened its membership to include Montreal artists, such as William Brymner and Maurice Cullen, who had been influenced

Approved by His Excellency the Governor General on the 30th December 1922," W.L.M. King fonds, MG 26 J2, vol. 36, file 1602, LAC.

⁵⁴ Sisler, 14.

by French Impressionism. Although the Club disintegrated during the First World War, after the death of Morris, it set the stage for a more concerted experimental and nationalist spirit to emerge with the Group of Seven.⁵⁵

By the 1920s the RCA was considered by emerging artists with modernist sympathies to be the epitome of “narrow-minded” art societies in its support of formulaic Euro-Academic aesthetic criteria. This was largely the result of Academic policy being defined, throughout the 1920s and 1930s, by “ultra conservatives” who controlled the helm.⁵⁶ The parochial vision of the Academy became entrenched in opposition to an equally partisan direction of another type, supported by the director and trustees of the NGC. Under Eric Brown, who was promoted to gallery director in 1912, the NGC supported, exhibited and acquired works of “emerging schools,” including the Group of Seven, which provoked a much stronger public response than traditional academic art.⁵⁷

The ideological tension between the two institutions came to a head in 1924, during the organization of an exhibition of Canadian art for the first British Empire Exhibition at Wembley, England. Informed in 1922 that the NGC, not the RCA, was to handle the selection of Canadian art, the Academy petitioned the Government, requesting that it retain control of the selection and organization of the exhibition.⁵⁸ This proved to

⁵⁵ Dennis Reid, *A Concise History of Canadian Painting*, second ed. (Oxford: Oxford University, 1988), 123-28.

⁵⁶ Sisler, 102-04.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 83, 92. The framing of the work of the Group of Seven as ‘modernist’ is in line with the way the Group’s detractors saw them, and is not to imply that their work should be understood as ‘new’ or ‘avant-garde’ in the context of the rest of the western artworld in 1920. Joan Murray has argued that the aesthetic concerns common throughout the work of the Group during the 1920s link them to Post-Impressionism, a term coined by the British art historian Roger Fry in 1906 to refer to the work of French artists Cézanne, van Gogh and Gauguin from the mid-1880s. Murray notes that even the artistic models of Post-Impressionism were approached by the Group of Seven with “considerable caution,” see Joan Murray, *The Birth of the Modern: Post-Impressionism in Canadian Art, c. 1900-20*, (Oshawa, Ont.: Robert McLaughlin Gallery, 2001), 12-17.

⁵⁸ Letter from RCA to Eric Brown and Prime Minister King, 7 December 1923, letter from Sir Edmund Walker to King, 21 December 1923, W.L.M. King fonds, MG 26 J2, vol. 35, file 1602-1, LAC.

no avail. Eric Brown, who was given the task of organizing the exhibition largely from his prior experience in facilitating a string of successful exhibitions across Canada and the United States, did acknowledge the RCA in making his decisions, however. The selection jury for the Wembley exhibition included artists associated with the Academy – only one (Arthur Lismer) being a member of the Group of Seven. Collectively, the jury assembled a broad selection of works for exhibition. However, “convinced that if the Academy did organize the show it would be a tepid affair, dominated by senior academicians to the exclusion of the modern artists of Montreal and Toronto,” Brown worked to maintain as much control as possible. The ire and paranoia of the Academic conservatives surfaced repeatedly, because Brown under the premise that art was “an index of nationality,”⁵⁹ wanted the Group of Seven represented as what he believed to be an authentic national movement, more so than others.⁶⁰

Bitterness towards Brown’s policies did not abate when the British press heaped praise upon the Canadian works exhibited at Wembley, where the so-called modernist camp of Canadian art dominated. The more traditional submissions, on the other hand, were critically neglected. The fact that the show was installed by the NGC directorate so as to separate traditional and modern work tacitly made the Gallery’s ideological loyalties and aesthetic proclivities all the more glaring.⁶¹ While antagonism towards the Gallery’s perceived partisan interests had diffused slightly by 1927, when the major art societies, including the RCA, were allowed to work in co-operation with Eric Brown in the selection of Gallery purchases, Brown’s nationalist bias for modern expression remained

⁵⁹ Eric Brown, preface to Special Exhibition of Canadian Art, 1926 (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1926), n.p.

⁶⁰ Hill, 142.

⁶¹ Ibid., 143-44.

a constant bone of contention for conservative Academy members into the 1930s and beyond.⁶²

By the late 1920s the three Canadian painters who had produced or would produce official portraits of Prime Ministers – including Russell, Kenneth Forbes (Sir Robert Borden and R.B. Bennett), and Ernest Fosbery (Arthur Meighen) – had each actively attacked the close association between modern art and the NGC in letters to the press, and were organizing petitions in opposition to the Gallery's perceived stance against traditional aesthetics.⁶³ Their complaints ranged from the claim that modern art was a fad orchestrated by gallery dealers, who cynically favoured obtuse forms, to laments that modern art criticism segregated issues of academic craftsmanship from artistic criteria. Concerns also included incredulity toward the idea that modern artistic movements could in any way be conceived as indicative of an original national culture.⁶⁴

The most interesting and articulate criticism to emerge from the pens of these official portraitists came from Ernest Fosbery. In 1927 he published a review in Saturday Night about F.B. Housser's laudatory history of the Group of Seven, A Canadian Art Movement. Unlike Russell and Forbes, who produced rather desperate diatribes, relying on vague generalities and conspiracy theories, Fosbery's criticism centred upon the

⁶² Sisler, 154.

⁶³ Hill, 277-80.

⁶⁴ After public outcry against the alleged "pornographic" quality of his odalisque, *Modern Fantasy*, displayed at the Canadian National Exhibition in late summer of 1927, John Russell waged a press war against the provincial mores of Canadian society, on the one hand, and the "subterfuges" of modern art on the other, see "'Art getting nowhere' charges John Russell," Toronto Star, 3 November 1927, and "Praises Mr. Russell's art," Hamilton Spectator, 28 March 1931. A.Y. Jackson responded to Russell's bitterness by suggesting that the problem was his inability to depict subjects that resonated with Canadians, see "Have to substitute pines for models," Toronto Star, 8 November 1927. From this time well into the 1950s, Kenneth Forbes railed against what he regarded as a "modernistic" "art hoax." He proposed that modern art was something of an international conspiracy orchestrated by French art dealers, see "Don't fall for the modern art hoax," Maclean's 71 (5 July 1958), 8, 50-52. Forbes' views were summed up in a 1931 speech he delivered to the Society for Sanity in Art in Chicago, upon which he later expanded and published as Great Art to the Grotesque (Toronto: Pitt, c.1973).

specific popular “myths” that had emerged to explain and justify the growing acclaim of the Group.⁶⁵

Fosbery claimed that Housser’s account relied upon three problematic assumptions: “the fable that the members of the group were amateurs ‘uncontaminated’ by European influence,” “the fable that they ‘discovered’ that Canadian landscape was paintable,” and “the claim that these men are the first and only Canadian painters, in fact that a national school of painting has arrived.”⁶⁶ Most pertinent in this context is the latter of these. Among Housser, a number of the Group members, and Eric Brown, it was believed that the Group of Seven constituted the first true national school of painting in Canada – the first to visually and artistically embody an authentic Canadian nationalism. In a later essay on landscape painting in Canada, Fosbery wrote:

In the recent turmoil of ‘isms’ and ‘ists’ when to be of a ‘movement’ seemed to many the most important thing...there was danger of losing sight of the fact that originality is an endowment not a device...⁶⁷

Fosbery’s point was that nationalist spirit and artistic originality should not be devices that could be artificially instituted by a particular group policy or expressed through a uniform modernist rhetoric.

Unfortunately Fosbery’s rebuttal is also problematic in its own way. His criticism conveniently assumed its own set of ‘myths’ that have been thoroughly discredited by recent feminist and post-colonial theory. First, he sets his critique of artistic movements in relief against the idea that artistic originality is solely the product of individual genius – an assumption historically embedded within the canon of Western art history, since the Renaissance and which forms the ideological backbone of the modern avant-garde.

⁶⁵ Ernest Fosbery, “As to Certain Myths,” Saturday Night (12 February 1927).

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ernest Fosbery, “Landscape Painting in Canada,” Canadian Geographical Journal 1 (August 1930): 280.

Griselda Pollock argues that the notion of genius “functions to sustain a patriarchal legend” and is legitimated under a canon in which the selective and hierarchical privileging of artists and art works that has tended to favour “white masculine creativity.” The notion of genius does not refer to an empirical fact, according to Pollock, but operates tacitly to condition how individual works of art are conceived, discussed and interrelated with one another. Its effect is to tautologically confirm the canon’s authoritative status as the source of traditional standards from which all works of art are to be judged.⁶⁸

Secondly, Fosbery’s counter-definition of national painting expressed a racial essentialism. “National schools of painting” emerge, Fosbery wrote, “due to racial qualities that unconsciously affect the painter in his outlook on life.”⁶⁹ The assertion of a connection between artistic uniqueness and racial identity was, of course, not unique to Fosbery. Earlier regional nationalist movements, such as Canada First, had already claimed that the best cultural expression in Canada was the result of,

the idea that Canada was populated by a type of people particularly strong of will and body, a Northern people, homogeneous, and therefore more single-minded about their potential.⁷⁰

The problem with this paradigm is the assumed cultural homogeneity and racial ‘purity’ of the Canadian nation-state. Against this view, Homi K. Bhabha has pointed out the culture of a nation can never be fixed or distilled into a single authentic essence because culture is, at every level, in the constant process of being constructed through “the

⁶⁸ Griselda Pollock, *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art’s Histories* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 9-19.

⁶⁹ Fosbery, “As to Certain Myths.”

⁷⁰ Lanning, 51.

overlap and displacement of domains of difference.”⁷¹ Fosbery’s racial determinism is not only open to academic critique; it locates him within a societal context that has also formed the backdrop to recent criticism of Canadian arch-modernist and Group of Seven member Lawren Harris.⁷²

In other words, the work of self-proclaimed traditionalists like Fosbery and Forbes, their involvement in painting portraits of and for the Canadian political establishment, and their reactionary invectives in the press must not be understood as heroically defending a ‘true’ or ‘authentic’ version of aesthetic value or Canadian art history. Neither should they be casually dismissed as belonging to an increasingly marginalized and isolated artistic minority. Their consistent reactions against modernism in Canada must be framed in relation to a broader set of social tensions and creative contexts.

Fosbery and Forbes were not alone in their criticism of the Group of Seven or more broadly of modernism and its implications. Conservative critic Hector Charlesworth, for example, saw the Group’s tentative modernism as threatening not only established artistic values but, after the Russian Revolution and growing popularity of socialism worldwide especially during the economic depression of the 1930s, as jeopardizing the institutionalized economic and political structure of the nation – and more generally its “imagined community” of shared and binding values. Among social conservatives, the aesthetically innovative and sometimes politically radical spirit of artistic modernism represented a cultural and political threat to democracy, capitalism,

⁷¹ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 2.

⁷² Ann Davis, *The Logic of Ecstasy: Canadian Mystical Painting, 1920-40* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1992), 66-67.

and the Canadian parliamentary system of government.⁷³ In this context official portraiture can be understood not merely as a sub-genre of establishment values, but, after the First World War, as a forum through which conservative artists could resist a culture in transition.

The First World War (1914-18), in which over 60,000 Canadians died, had dampened the ideal of an imperial tie between Canada and Great Britain⁷⁴ and encouraged “North American isolationism.”⁷⁵ It had not completely, however, vanquished the desire to maintain a sense of cultural connection with Great Britain. In May 1937 when the Coronation of King George VI took place at Westminster Abbey in London England, the event was documented and memorialized in a sizeable painting by Royal Academician Frank Salisbury, who had been commissioned by four Commonwealth states, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and Canada, to prepare the work as a gift to the King.⁷⁶ Throughout the summer and fall of 1946, Salisbury’s Coronation painting toured Commonwealth nations.⁷⁷ Not unexpectedly, portraits of each of the Commonwealth leaders also appeared among the faces in the crowd of the finished piece. In June Salisbury made personal contact with Canada’s Prime Minister Mackenzie King to arrange sittings for King’s portrait to be included in the Coronation

⁷³ Paul H. Walton, “Beauty My Mistress: Hector Charlesworth as Art Critic,” *Journal of Canadian Art History* 15,1 (1992): 96.

⁷⁴ Key examples of Canada’s growing independence from Great Britain include the Canadian Parliament’s authority to ratify the Treaty of Versailles in 1919; the attempt to boost Canada’s status within the Commonwealth with the Balfour Report, presented at the 1926 Imperial War Conference; the negotiation with the United States in 1923 of the Halibut Treaty, the first foreign treaty signed by Canada without the British government’s supervision; and the British Parliament’s 1931 Statute of Westminster, which recognized Canada’s political right to define its own foreign policies, see Arthur Lower, *Colony to Nation*, revised fourth ed. (Don Mills, ON: Longmans Canada, 1964), 478-91.

⁷⁵ Berger, 264.

⁷⁶ The painting measured 17’x10’6”.

⁷⁷ “Coronation painting arrives in Ottawa,” *Montreal Gazette*, 3 June 1946; and “Coronation to stay at Gallery,” *Ottawa Journal*, 18 November 1946. Salisbury’s portrait of Mackenzie King, before it was exhibited at the National Gallery, has been shown at the Royal Academy in London, see letter from King to Frank Salisbury, 19 May 1946, W.L.M. King fonds, MG 26 J8, vol. 36, file 5, LAC.

painting.⁷⁸ The men developed a personal friendship so that, after the Second World War (1939-45) and on the suggestion of Salisbury's wife, Maude, Salisbury was commissioned by Mackenzie King to paint the latter's official portrait (**fig. 14**) in October 1945.⁷⁹

King intended from the outset to personally finance the portrait and then donate it to the NGC or the Canadian Parliament. In his mind the goal of the portrait would be his personal epitaph, to commemorate his dedication and aptitude as Canada's longest serving national leader. Through correspondence with Salisbury and in his diary King specified that the portrait should suggest a balanced personality and appear professional but without being conspicuously officious. Mimicking the staged casualness of the Mackenzie portrait,⁸⁰ King was represented directly acknowledging the viewer, holding his glasses "as if they had been taken off to speak after reading."⁸¹ Salisbury finished King's portrait in October 1945, and the Prime Minister eventually paid just over \$2000 for it.⁸² It was initially exhibited at the National Gallery of Canada with Salisbury's Coronation painting in 1946.⁸³

In the winter of 1946-47 House of Commons Speaker Gaspard Fauteux notified King that, under his initiation, an official portrait of Sir Robert Borden had been commissioned. He also requested that Salisbury's portrait of King be purchased by

⁷⁸ Letter from Frank Salisbury to King, 8 June 1937, W.L.M. King fonds, MG 26 J8, vol. 35, file 4, LAC.

⁷⁹ Diary entry, 14 October, 1945, W.L.M. King diary.

⁸⁰ There is an interesting story behind Forster's portrait of Alexander Mackenzie, which makes the apparent calm and relaxed depiction of him highly ironic. At the time of the 1885 photo shoot at the Topley Studio in Ottawa, which resulted in the image that served as the reference for Forster's painting, Mackenzie's nervous system was actually deteriorating. In a letter to his daughter, Mackenzie writes that during the photo session he had "great trouble controlling" his "nervous system," and required a back brace to control his movement through the long exposure time required, see letter from Mackenzie to Mary Thompson, 2 May 1885, Alexander Mackenzie fonds, MG 26 B, vol. 15, file 2, LAC.

⁸¹ Diary entry, 14 October 1945, W.L.M. King diary.

⁸² "Confidential Financial Memo," 8 September 1952, W.L.M. King fonds, MG 26 J8, vol. 36, file 4, LAC.

⁸³ "Coronation painting to stay at Gallery."

Parliament, so that it could be exhibited along side that of Borden in the main lobby of the Centre Block, directly under the Peace Tower. The existing official portraits of past Prime Ministers by this time had been transferred to the western foyer of the House of Commons. King agreed to Fauteux's request, but insisted on donating rather than selling his portrait to Parliament.⁸⁴

Plans for Borden's official portrait had begun the winter before the outbreak of the Second World War. Prime Minister during the First World War, Borden had died in 1937. Although it is unclear who initiated the project, by March 1939 the Clerk of the House of Commons had begun searching for existing portraits of Borden.⁸⁵ Augustus John had painted one in 1919, but it was owned by the NGC. A second painting, by E. Hodgson Smart, had been offered to Parliament, but it was rejected because it depicted Borden in an academic gown, making him appear "more like a university professor" than a Prime Minister.⁸⁶ This latter decision reveals the conventions implicit in official portraiture, despite the continued informality of the commission program up to this point. The portrait was expected to symbolically express the government service of the sitter to the exclusion of all others roles. The outbreak of war drew attention away from the official portrait of Borden, but consideration resumed immediately after the war in 1946, when Kenneth Forbes was finally retained to undertake the commission. Completed in 1947, its referents were photographs and a sculpted bust of Borden (**fig. 12**).⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Letter from Gaspard Fauteux to King, 18 December 1946, W.L.M. King fonds, MG 26, J1, vol. 403, reel C-9169, 364083, LAC, and letter from King to Gaspard Fauteux, 10 January 1947, Ibid., 364085.

⁸⁵ The position of Clerk of the House of Commons is non-partisan. His/her role is to advise the Speaker and Members on the rules of the Commons.

⁸⁶ Letter from unnamed House of Commons Clerk to Lady Borden, 14 March 1939, Parliament of Canada fonds, RG 14, acsn. no. 1980-81/134, box 18, file 900, LAC. Also available in acsn. no. D-637.1, Curatorial Services, House of Commons, Canada.

⁸⁷ Letter from unknown to Mr. J.J. Hisgrove, 11 February 1946, Ibid. Also available in acsn. no. D-637.2, Curatorial Services, House of Commons, Canada.

The simultaneous completion of the King and Borden official portraits did not go unnoticed. King was the first to suggest a joint ceremony, themed as the unveiling of Canada's wartime Prime Ministers, to coincide with the first visit of an American President, Harry Truman, at the end of the Second World War.⁸⁸ This dual unveiling, so soon after the end of the Second World War, powerfully highlighted the potential for the Prime Ministers' official portraits to serve as public markers of key events in Canada's political history. As such, the Borden/King unveiling drew attention to the official portraits as public monuments, collectively offering not simply painted images of individual Prime Ministers irrevocably divided along party lines, but a linear and coherent visual genealogy of the nation's parliamentary leaders. Most importantly, the portraits were no longer conceived independently of each other. Using the term introduced fifty years earlier by the Austrian art historian Alois Riegl, the scripted joint unveiling of the portraits functioned to render them as "intentional monuments." They were made to collectively "recall a specific moment or complex of moments from the past" – namely political leadership during the First and Second World Wars – and most significantly to suggest the natural continuation of that leadership in the present and into the future; to make, in other words, "a claim to an eternal present and an unceasing state of being."⁸⁹

Over the next fifteen years the acquisition of three more official portraits took place. They were all commissioned and unveiled individually however, and without the broader thematic links established by the Borden/King ceremony. The next round of

⁸⁸ Diary entry 19 May 1947, W.L.M. King diary. See also Canada, House of Commons, Debates, "Appendix B," 20th Parliament, 3rd Session, vol. 6, 11 June 1947, 4066-67.

⁸⁹ Alois Riegl, "The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Character and Its Origin" [1903], trans. K.W. Forster and D. Ghirardo, Oppositions 25 (1982): 24, 38.

official portraits was, once again, produced largely in response to rivalries between the major parties. Two were of Prime Ministers who had held power before Mackenzie King's third term (1935-48). Arthur Meighen's brief administrations during the 1920s, first as part of a Union government and later with the Conservative party, were grounds for his portrait (**fig. 13**), by Ernest Fosbery, commissioned by the House of Commons Clerk, one year after the portraits of the wartime Prime Ministers were added to the parliamentary collection. Meighen sat to Fosbery in June of 1948. The artist was then asked to produce two replicas of the portrait, one for Meighen's son and another for the Trader's Finance Corporation, a subsidiary of Canadian General Securities Limited, where Meighen served as president in 1932, having left politics in 1926.⁹⁰ An unveiling ceremony was planned, but Meighen fell ill, and the event was never rescheduled. The portrait hung in the Conservative caucus room until 1952, when it joined the rest of the paintings in the House of Commons entrance corridor.⁹¹

Louis St. Laurent's official portrait (**fig. 16**) followed the trajectory of those for Macdonald and Tupper, being financially backed by political allies and Liberal party faithful. Spearheaded by C.D. Howe, a veteran Liberal cabinet member, who flourished in many diverse portfolios, and J.W. Pickersgill, a close assistant of St. Laurent, the commission was granted rather suddenly, in response to St. Laurent's deteriorating health.⁹² Painter Audrey W. McNaughton began the task early in the summer 1958, becoming the first female artist to produce an official portrait of a former Prime Minister. McNaughton was not a member of any provincial or national artistic society and although

⁹⁰ Letter from Meighen to Ernest Fosbery, 31 May 1948, letter from unknown to Ernest Fosbery, 29 July 1948, Arthur Meighen fonds, MG 26 I, vol. 224, reel C-3596, 146924, 146927, LAC.

⁹¹ "Premiers' portraits," *Toronto Star*, 1 March 1952.

⁹² Letter to potential subscribers for St. Laurent portrait, 7 November 1958, C.D. Howe fonds, MG 27 III B20, vol. 107, file 1, LAC.

she had been a student of Russell, this appears to have had little impact upon her being selected for the commission.⁹³ Her work had been noticed by politicians in the spring of 1958 when she exhibited paintings and drawings at Parliament Hill documenting her trip with the Grenfell Medical Mission along the coast of Labrador the year before.⁹⁴ St. Laurent sat for the portrait in August 1958, and the finished work was unveiled in the Centre Block in March 1959, then hung among the others in the House of Commons entrance chamber.⁹⁵

Two days after the unveiling, in what would appear a case of keeping the scales of partisanship balanced, then Conservative Prime Minister John Diefenbaker and House of Commons Speaker Roland Michener turned their attention to a portrait of the 1930s Conservative Prime Minister R.B. Bennett, who had died a decade earlier.⁹⁶ As in the case of Borden, already existing portraits of Bennett were initially sought. A potential piece, owned by Lord Beaverbrook and the University of New Brunswick on display at the university's Bonar Law-Bennett Library was identified early in 1962, and shipped as a donation from that institution to Ottawa. However, upon its arrival, the painting, by Lawren P. Harris Jr., was judged too small by comparison with other official portraits and returned.⁹⁷ Diefenbaker secured public funds through the Department of Public Works and Government Services and Kenneth Forbes was, once again, recruited to paint an official portrait based on archival photographs (**fig. 15**). A second larger painting of Bennett, executed in 1938 by Forbes, did exist at the Bonar Law-Bennett Library. Like

⁹³ "Canadian artist opens exhibit at art gallery in Port Hope," Peterborough Examiner, 20 August 1973.

⁹⁴ Audrey W. McNaughton, "Telephone Interview Concerning St. Laurent's Portrait," interview by Audrey Dubé, 22 October 1993, acsn. no. D-451, Curatorial Services, House of Commons, Canada.

⁹⁵ Ralph Hyman, "St. Laurent portrait unveiled in Parliament," Globe and Mail (Toronto), 5 March 1959.

⁹⁶ Letter from Roland Michener to Diefenbaker, 6 March 1959, John Diefenbaker fonds, MG 26 M, series VI, reel M-7920, 233515, LAC.

⁹⁷ Canada, House of Commons, Debates, 24th Parliament, 5th Session, vol. 3, 28 February 1962, 1339.

the Macdonald and Thompson portraits, it depicted the Prime Minister in his Windsor uniform, which would have further heightened the connection between the Conservative party and Canada's colonial-imperial heritage. However, it appears never to have been offered as a substitute for the Harris painting.⁹⁸ Bennett's official portrait was completed then forgotten in a store room for a year, and not unveiled at Parliament Hill until November of 1963, after the Diefenbaker Conservatives had lost the 1963 spring election.⁹⁹

By the time of the Bennett unveiling, official portraits had ceased to be disjointedly displayed throughout different parts of the Centre Block. The earliest Prime Ministers – Macdonald, Mackenzie, Thompson, Tupper and Laurier – occupied the House of Commons foyer and entrance hall, with later additions assuming chronological positions along the Commons's southern corridor.¹⁰⁰ Although it is unclear when, or by whom, decisions on these arrangements were made, the placement served to underline the Prime Ministers institutional connection rather than the partisan differences between the individuals or the chronology of the paintings themselves. As such, the portraits had begun to express an ostensibly unified vision of the political system of the Canadian

⁹⁸ Vedette, "Round and About," Atlantic Advocate (March 1962): 68.

⁹⁹ Alan Dawson "Year in storage, Bennett portrait for Commons is unveiled at last," Globe and Mail (Toronto), 14 November 1963.

¹⁰⁰ Immediately following their unveiling, the paintings of Borden and King were exhibited apart from the rest of the official portraits in the Centre Block's Hall of Honour. Eventually however they were installed among the others at the entrance of the House of Commons, but not before objections from at least one private citizen. In a letter to Prime Minister St. Laurent in 1949 L.L. Smith wrote: "I thank you for acknowledging my recent letter about the present location of the portraits of Sir Robert Borden and Mr. Mackenzie King by sending me a copy of House of Commons Debates in which Speaker Gaspard Fauteux is reported to have said, 'We have felt in no more appropriate way could we honor our present Prime Minister today than by giving his portrait its place in these halls of parliament *among* those of other Prime Ministers whose lives are a part of the history of our country.' That is in accord with the essence of my previous letter to you to the effect that the portraits in question should not be hung in the front entrance hall by themselves but should be hung among those of other prominent statesmen on the suitably plain walls of the halls set aside for that purpose." Letter from L.L. Smith to St. Laurent, 15 January 1949 and 24 January 1949, St. Laurent fonds, MG 26 L, vol. 68, file P-65-1, LAC.

nation-state, and by extension an understanding of Canadian history in terms of that political system, through the honorific representation of those who had risen to the apex of power.

Nevertheless, at a number of levels, the collection was far from perfect in articulating this ideological concept. Commissions remained largely private *ad hoc* ventures rather than being bureaucratically instituted and standardized, and this made the portraits function more as emblems of partisan alliances and trophies of political rivalry than as the symbolic expressions of the political system as a whole. Secondly, the absence of the nineteenth-century Prime Ministers Sir John Abbott and Sir Mackenzie Bowell meant that the generic and serial integrity of the portrait collection as a visual document of contiguous leadership was yet to be achieved. Finally, the nationalist claims part and parcel with the tentative modernism proposed by the Group of Seven and the concept of what constituted 'authentic' Canadian art in the decades following the 1920s served to marginalize the traditionalist aesthetics of the official portrait artists and the cultural relevance of the official portraits themselves.

In conclusion, towards the end of the 1960s the federal government, as an institution began playing a more determined role in orchestrating and financing the production of the official portraits of the Prime Ministers. Centennial celebrations, government concerns with heritage and conservation, increased tourism on Parliament Hill and the presence of new broadcast technologies radically altered perceptions of the space within which the official portraits could be hung and by extension the approaches to official portraits themselves. The symbolic function of the Prime Ministers portraits as

ideological affirmations of the legitimacy of the political system increasingly became front and centre, as systems of patronage and organization were regularized.

3. Individual Faces, Institutional Memorials: The Role of Government Departments in Commissioning Official Portraits of Prime Ministers, 1967-2002

Since 1967 a total of seven official portraits of Canadian Prime Ministers have been unveiled and placed on permanent display in the entrance foyer, hall and southern corridor in the House of Commons (**fig. 2**). They are now counted, along with their predecessors, as composing the Prime Ministers Portrait Gallery (PMPG). The exact date at which the collection of official portraits became known as the PMPG is not known. The title appears in government documents after the establishment of the House of Commons Office of the Curator, in 1989. What is unique about the portraits completed since the Centennial is how they were produced, and the impact this has had upon how the portraits appear and collectively function. While earlier commissions were often initiated privately, sometimes posthumously, by a former Prime Minister's admirers or the party faithful, those painted over the past three decades have been assigned largely while the Prime Minister was alive, and orchestrated through formal and increasingly standardized processes, under the bureaucratic surveillance of various departments of government including the Secretary of State, the Department of Public Works and Government Services and the House of Commons Office of the Curator/Curatorial Services.

The increasingly regulated character of the post-1967 commissions affects the overall function and meaning of all the official portraits in two key ways. First, it causes the official portraits to be conceived as an interrelated collection representing Canada's national leadership within what Homi K. Bhabha terms "an evolutionary narrative of

historical continuity.”¹ Secondly, while the images function individually as individual testaments to particular Prime Ministers or political parties, as part of the PMPG collection they operate more clearly as legitimizing symbolic expressions of the government itself. The transformation and systematization of the commissions is consistent with the expansion of federal bureaucracy after the Second World War and, more specifically, with changes in how the physical sites of government are perceived. Parliament Hill has become an important heritage and tourist site, and the introduction of televised broadcasts along with the upcoming launch of a government website for the official portraits is gradually making the paintings more accessible and therefore more significant for the public at large. Although official painted portraiture in nineteenth-century Britain was an institutionalized sub-genre and reflected values of an imperial establishment and this context was appropriated and modified by the Canadian reality, the Canadian Prime Ministers portraits now stand at the outset of the twenty-first century as symbolic expressions of the federal government and the Canadian political system.

While a “polite fiction of a British Commonwealth of nations survived” in Canada throughout the period immediately following the Second World War, a number of significant political steps, mentioned in the previous chapter, had already been taken by the Canadian government to sever links with British influence. By this time Britain was economically debilitated by two world wars, and it was the United States that gained global economic and military predominance.² During and after the Second World War, Canada entered into a number of pragmatic military and economic partnerships with the

¹ Homi K. Bhabha, “Introduction: Narrating the Nation,” *Nation and Narration*, Homi K. Bhabha, ed. (London: Routledge, 1990), 3.

² D.N. Sprague, *Post-Confederation Canada: The Structure of Canadian History since Confederation* (Scarborough, Ont.: Prentice-Hall, 1990), 233.

United States, including the Ogdensburg Agreement (1940), the Hyde Park Declaration (1941) and the construction of the Alaska Highway (1942).³ Their alliance further developed in the wake of the Cold War with the Visiting Forces Act (1947), which effectively gave the United States military access to the Canadian north while making them exempt from Canadian law. This was followed by participation in the NATO (1949) and NORAD (1958) defence organizations. Many in Canada worried that these partnerships signalled a threat to Canadian autonomy and the onset of continentalism, dominated diplomatically by American interests.⁴ As was the case in the late nineteenth century, Canadian Prime Ministers were, once again, faced with the double-edged task of ensuring national security while affirming sovereignty.

This period of uneasy partnership with the United States was forged during an era of economic growth, paralleled by an expansion of the Canadian federal government bureaucracy. Beginning in the decade following World War II, a “steady increase in household wealth” went hand-in-hand with the development of “a common public culture based on popular consumption.”⁵ At the level of government, federal initiatives reflected a new emphasis on national policy, not seen since the era of Macdonald. From the establishment of Canadian cultural institutions and funding programs proposed in the Massey Report of 1951, to the development of new infrastructures like the St. Lawrence

³ At the beginning of the Second World War, before the United States was drawn into the conflict, Canadian Prime Minister King and American President Roosevelt signed the Ogdensburg Agreement, setting up a Joint Board on Defense to address mutual problems related to the military protection of North America. The Hyde Park Declaration a year later integrated Canadian and American munitions production to assist Britain’s war effort. In 1942, with the United States at war, Prime Minister King allowed the American military to construct a road through Canadian territory, from northern British Columbia to Alaska.

⁴ For resistance to American economic influence and cultural hegemony in Canada after the Second World War, see Philip Massolin, Canadian Intellectuals, the Tory Tradition, and the Challenge of Modernity, 1939-1970 (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2001), chapter 5.

⁵ Gerald Friesen, Citizens and Nation: An Essay on History, Communication, and Canada (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2000), 191.

Seaway (1959) and the Trans-Canada Highway (1962), Expo '67 centenary celebrations, to the formal recognition of two official languages in 1969, federal governments – Liberal and Progressive Conservative – marshalled considerable energy in the post-war era to establish and maintain Canada's position as a united cultural, political and geographic entity. The decades following the Second World War were also a time of bureaucratic expansion for government. The federal civil service grew and political and fiscal authority shifted away from the provincial "partners of Confederation," to become increasingly centred in the national government. According to historian D.N. Sprague, federal departments became "the new strongholds of Confederation."⁶

In the words of Christopher Dandeker, "the age of bureaucracy is also the era of the information society."⁷ The burgeoning of federal government bureaucracy after the Second World War coincided with the proliferation of new media and communication technologies. At the time Marshall McLuhan began theorizing the social and cultural effects of new media of communication on society and what impact they would have on traditional conceptions of the nation state. McLuhan wrote that while modern nationalism was an "unforeseen consequence" of print technology, he hinted that the established definition of the nation state was beginning to dissolve amidst the new media of communication:

Political unification of populations by means of vernacular and language groupings was unthinkable before printing turned each vernacular into an extensive mass medium. The tribe, an extended form of a family of blood relatives, is exploded by print, and is replaced by an association of men homogeneously trained to be individuals. Nationalism itself came as an intense new visual image of group destiny and status, and depended on a speed of information movement unknown before printing. Today

⁶ Sprague, 245-51.

⁷ Christopher Dandeker, Surveillance, Power and Modernity: Bureaucracy and Discipline from 1700 to the Present Day (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 1990), 2.

nationalism as an image still depends on the press but has all the electric media against it.⁸

In this context of an expanding federal government, growing speculations about Canadian sovereignty fuelled by the rise of American cultural, economic and political dominance and the challenges new communication technologies represented for the traditional nation state, the manner in which official portraits of Canadian Prime Ministers were commissioned began to change. From unregulated expressions of private appreciation or party loyalty, they became bureaucratically regulated and managed events. The approach to commissions since 1967 has not been completely homogenous, however, responsibility often shifting from one department to another. Nevertheless, the standardization of official portrait commissions can be broadly understood to alter the meaning and function of those portraits through the increase in bureaucratic control over what Dandeker has called the “subjective factors of human mood and temperament.”⁹ With the commission, acquisition and exhibition processes structured by an institutionally sanctioned process, the official portraits can be understood more clearly as symbolic expressions of the institution of government.

In the larger context of preparation for Canada’s Centennial celebrations in 1967, there emerged greater governmental awareness of the symbolic significance of the Prime Ministers official portraits and the lack of any formal policy structuring their initiation. The production histories of the John Diefenbaker and Lester Pearson portraits reveal two significant detours from the way in which past commissions were undertaken. Together they mark the end of *ad hoc* commissions and patronage, being coordinated under the direction of a particular department of the federal government, the Canadian Secretary of

⁸ Marshall McLuhan, Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), 177.

⁹ Dandeker, 8.

State for Canada's Centennial Celebration, headed by Judy LaMarsh.¹⁰ As such, they were both publicly funded through Parliament.¹¹ Secondly, with the exception of the King portrait, the Diefenbaker and Pearson portraits represent the first time the Prime Minister was directly involved in the selection of the artist responsible for the painting. These two new aspects of official commissions remove the portraits from the partisanship of any particular political allegiance, while at the same time locating the portrait as a symbol of an institution, the federal government, as a cohesive and singular whole.

The first attempt at procuring a portrait of Diefenbaker was made in 1966 by then Prime Minister and long-time political adversary, Lester Pearson. In a letter on behalf of the Secretary of State, Pearson invited Diefenbaker – still the leader of both the Progressive Conservative party and the Official Opposition – to select an artist. Diefenbaker was provided by the Secretary of State with a list of artists who were either familiar to the department or had already received government commissions, including Lilius Torrence-Newton, Charles Comfort, Lawren P. Harris Jr. and Cleeve Horne.¹² The decision to undertake an official portrait was considered a “worthy” project, in light of the upcoming Centennial celebrations. At the same time, the government also sanctioned

¹⁰ Canada, Secretary of State, Centennial Commission, The Centennial and Canadians: A Report of Centennial Activities, 1966-67, (Ottawa, 1967). The Secretary of State is a member of cabinet and in charge of the Department of the Secretary of State. In 1966 the duties of the Secretary of State were spelled out in the Department of State Act, which included issues pertaining to citizenship, ceremonial events, federal libraries and archives, and the promotion of the arts, bilingualism and multiculturalism.

¹¹ Canada, House of Commons, Debates, 27th Parliament, 2nd Session, vol. 7, 11 March 1968, 7459.

¹² Other than having demonstrated on previous occasions their ability to successfully undertake government commissions, documents do not reveal why only these particular artists made the list. After World War II Torrence-Newton, a member of the Montreal Beaver Hall Group from the early 1920s, had made a substantial name for herself as a professional portraitist. For example, she painted Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip for Rideau Hall in 1957. By the late 1960s Comfort was an established and publicly decorated artist whose work included portraits. The most recent work he had undertaken for the federal government at the time was two murals for the National Library and Archives, depicting historical European and contemporary Canadian literary figures. Harris Jr.'s work was already familiar to Diefenbaker, who had considered his portrait of R.B. Bennett, owned by Lord Beaverbrook and the UNB, an official portrait candidate. Cleeve Horne was known to Diefenbaker through his portrait of Governor-General Roland Michener, painted in 1962.

the production of public sculptures of former Prime Ministers Meighen, King, Bennett and St. Laurent.¹³ Diefenbaker eventually approached Horne, likely because he was already familiar and impressed by the painting the artist had recently produced of Governor-General Roland Michener. Sittings were arranged, and the final portrait (**fig. 17**) was completed during the first-half of 1968.¹⁴

Pearson retired from leadership of the Liberal party and from political life altogether in the spring of 1968. At this time the Secretary of State likewise requested that he select an artist to paint his official portrait (**fig. 19**). Pearson chose Hugh Mackenzie, an artist who had not been officially recommended by the Secretary of State, but with whom the former Prime Minister was familiar because the artist's sister was Pearson's daughter-in-law. Mackenzie arranged sittings with his subject, but also consulted Polaroid photographs and film stills of Pearson as referents.¹⁵

Documents of the Secretary of State suggest that initially a joint unveiling of the Diefenbaker and Pearson portraits in 1968 was to take place in the Centre Block, much like the joint dedication of the Borden and King portraits two decades earlier. However, the portraits proved to differ substantially in size, the Diefenbaker nearly twice the size of the Pearson.¹⁶ Given that the two men by this time shared not only political differences but deep-seated personal antipathy towards each other following the flag debate of 1964, when the Red Ensign was replaced by the maple leaf, it was judged necessary to schedule separate unveilings.

¹³ Letter from Lester Pearson to John Diefenbaker, 24 May 1966, acsn. no. D-176, 4-6, Curatorial Services, House of Commons, Canada.

¹⁴ Cleeve Horne, "Telephone Interview Concerning Michener, Diefenbaker and Sauvé Portraits," interview by Audrey Dubé, 27 September 1993, acsn. no. D-176.1, Ibid.

¹⁵ Hugh S. Mackenzie, "Telephone Interview Concerning Pearson's Portrait," interview by Audrey Dubé, 21 October 1993, acsn. no. D-433.3, Ibid.

¹⁶ "Memorandum: Publicity Concerning Diefenbaker Portrait," 21 August 1968, acsn. no. D-176, 16-17, Ibid.

Horne's portrait of Diefenbaker both conforms to and departs from a number of well-established conventions to endow the subject with authority. Diefenbaker stands facing the viewer wearing a black suit in a typical pose, one well documented by photography – his left-hand on his hip (**fig. 18**). The overriding colours of the portrait, white, black and scarlet, starkly confirm its official character. The format is vertical, with dimensions approximately 145x107cm, similar to the earlier portraits of fellow Conservatives Thompson, Tupper, and Borden. At the same time, Diefenbaker is cloaked in an academic gown from an honorary degree he received in India from the University of Delhi while on a diplomatic tour of Asia in 1958. Scholarly vestments had previously disqualified one painting of Borden from being accepted as official, but because Diefenbaker received the honorary degree while in office it serves a relevant symbol of his public service. The gown's inclusion at this point also reflects the degree to which the subject was afforded control by the Secretary of State over how the final image would look. Horne's painting is also unique among previous portraits in that it reflects certain twentieth-century modernist style. The flat planes of colour that compose both the figure and ground faintly echo the approach of Cézanne's later work. Conventionalized and contained, this formal feature serves to underline authoritative monumentality.

Mackenzie's egg tempera portrait of Pearson, no less than Diefenbaker's, shares aspects consistent with and at the same time at odds with the rest of the collection. The Pearson portrait is muted in colour and, measuring only 97x77cm, is dwarfed by most other portraits in the collection.¹⁷ Although similar to the Diefenbaker image insofar as it

¹⁷ Mackenzie was trained in the techniques of Magic Realism while he studied with Alex Coville at Mount Allison University, New Brunswick. Originally a term invented by Alfred Barr Jr. in 1942, and applied to post-World War II European Verist Surrealism and German Expressionism, it became associated with the approach, by Coville and others, to representing time as frozen within the image: "to take a transient

presents Pearson in what his own daughter recognized as his characteristic pose, it is by contrast a very private, personal and intimate image, which negates the traditional goal of official portraiture, to signify public authority.¹⁸ Pearson is shown slouched in a chair in the lower half of the picture, gazing off to one side in a pose that as one researcher with the National Gallery Association, Mary Cooper, described as “obviously domestic.” While Horne’s painting of Diefenbaker both confirms and transcends conventions of official portraiture evident throughout the collection, Cooper expressed the view that “*something* is wrong” with the work by Mackenzie. Rather than asserting the subject’s professional achievements, the portrait of Pearson seemed in her view to raise “questions about portraiture in general and its role in public buildings.”¹⁹

When both official portraits had been completed, that of Diefenbaker was unveiled first. The ceremony took place in early October 1968 and was prefaced by a series of laudatory speeches by the House of Commons Speaker, Conservative opposition leader Robert Stanfield, Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, and Diefenbaker himself.²⁰ This was only the fourth time a Prime Minister had been present for the unveiling of his own official portrait at Parliament. A little over two weeks later, accompanied by an analogous set of speeches, Pearson’s portrait was ceremoniously introduced in the House of Commons.²¹ As the portraits of Borden and King had been, those of Diefenbaker and Pearson were temporarily displayed facing each other in the Centre Block’s Hall of

moment in a series of actions and immobilize it in such a way that the spectator is caught up in an immediate awareness of time having stopped,” see Magic Realism in Canadian Painting (London, Ont.: London Public Library and Art Museum, 1966); Nancy-Lou Patterson, Magic Realism in Canada (Guelph and Waterloo, Ont.: University of Guelph/University of Waterloo, 1969).

¹⁸ Mackenzie, “Telephone Interview Concerning Pearson’s Portrait.”

¹⁹ Mary Cooper, “Two Portraits Compared,” source unknown, acsn. no. D-176.7, Curatorial Services, House of Commons, Canada.

²⁰ Canada, House of Commons, Debates, 28th Parliament, 1st Session, vol. 1, 9 October 1968, 1013-15.

²¹ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, 25 October 1968, 2071-74.

Honour, before being re-hung for permanent display in the southern corridor of the House of Commons wing with the other official portraits.²²

Sixteen years after the unveiling the Diefenbaker and Pearson portraits, then Secretary of State Serge Joyal approached Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau to make arrangements for the latter's official portrait commission.²³ It was only the third time – the others being for Macdonald and King – that official portrait arrangements were initiated while the Prime Minister was still in office. By 1984 Trudeau had led the country consistently, with the exception of an eight-month period between early June 1979 and early March 1980, when the Progressive Conservative Joe Clark was Prime Minister, since he was first elected in the spring of 1968. He resigned from power and political life later that year. Trudeau delayed the portrait until 1990. By that time, a House of Commons curatorial office had been established, with funding arranged through the Department of Public Works and Government Services.²⁴ Trudeau eventually selected the British Columbia artist Myfanwy Pavelic, whose work he had seen in a gallery that represented her in Montreal and sittings were scheduled at her studio near Victoria.²⁵

Over the course of Trudeau's studio visit, Pavelic completed thirteen paintings from the initial photographs and sketches she made. Trudeau selected the official portrait

²² Sally Barnes, "Dief, Trudeau trade jokes at unveiling of Chief's portrait," *Toronto Star*, 9 October 1968.

²³ Letter from Serge Joyal to Pierre Trudeau, 24 April 1984, acsn. no. D-583.4, 1, Curatorial Services, House of Commons, Canada.

²⁴ Letter from Jean T. Fournier to Thomas Axworthy, 20 August 1991, acsn. no. D-583.4, Curatorial Services, House of Commons, Canada.

²⁵ "Pavelic portrait of former PM goes up May 1," *Vancouver Sun*, 29 February 1992, and Ann Duncan, "Pictures of an ex-Prime Minister," *Montreal Gazette*, 28 February 1992. See also letter from Franklin R. Silverstone to Harris Boyd, 10 January 1991, acsn. no. D-583.4, 8, Curatorial Services, House of Commons, Canada.

(fig. 20) from this oeuvre.²⁶ Trudeau's image can be situated somewhere between the rigid stance of Diefenbaker and the slouch of Pearson. He is represented in an obscure shallow space, before a cool background that could be a fragment of a high Modernist abstraction or three-dimensional space. Caped with an overcoat and the signature rose in his lapel, Trudeau is casually perched, affirming the sitter's dandified stereotype. Pavelic's portrait of Trudeau enfolds both the former Prime Minister's public persona of urbane and dashing aloofness and offers a glimpse of his private magnetism, which developed and flourished in the popular media during the Trudeaumania of the late-1960s. The official portrait was finally unveiled in a ceremony attended by Parliamentarians early May 1992, at Centre Block.²⁷

The direct involvement of the Secretary of State in commissioning the official portraits of Diefenbaker and Pearson in the years bracketing the Canadian Centennial, and again in the mid-1980s with the Trudeau portrait, marks a decisive shift away from the largely *ad hoc* partisanship of the earlier official portrait commissions. The move toward standardizing the commission process was consistent with other aspects of government regulation after the Second World War and the growing government interest, emerging during the Centennial celebrations, in symbolic expressions of Canadian cultural and political history. Paradoxically perhaps, the portraits of Diefenbaker, Pearson and Trudeau are, even today, the most innovative of the entire collection. While the Secretary of State in each case initiated and facilitated production of the portraits, to the point of offering Diefenbaker a list of potential artists, the bureaucratization the portrait commissions did not result in a standardized outcome. Pearson's personal

²⁶ For further information on and visual reproductions of the larger suite of works produced from Trudeau's visit to Pavelic, see Ted Linberg, *A Portrait by Myfanwy* (Victoria: Morriss, 1991).

²⁷ Hugh Winsor, "Even Trudeau likes this hanging," *Globe and Mail*, 2 May 1992.

selection of Mackenzie, for example, guaranteed the acceptance of the resulting work, despite the fact that it may have failed to conform to a number of the sub-genre's established representational conventions. Nevertheless, the involvement of a bureaucratic administration in initiating, organizing, and supervising the details of the Diefenbaker, Pearson and Trudeau commissions is a new departure, which regularized and depoliticized the procedures for future portrait commissions.

With the three portraits produced after 1967 a modification in the relationship occurred in what Raymond Williams described as “the variable relations” or “formations” of portrait artists as “cultural producers,” to a focus on the government institution. The shift can be understood as an alteration in the concept of patronage. Patronage generally “implies an act of variable social choice” in which a social body, in this case the government institution, offers monetary support to artists not because the artist is *a priori* understood “as part of the social organization,” but on the basis of an occasioned choice; there is a decision “to act as a patron to them.”²⁸ Before the Diefenbaker work, portraitists were commissioned “as an individual professional worker” from private sources often linked to partisan interests as well as the government institution, and only sometimes supported by public funds from Parliament. By contrast the commissions after 1967 are undertaken directly by government, and the official portraits are systematically woven into the symbolic expressions of that institution.

Beginning with the Diefenbaker portrait, the government institution as a public bureaucratic entity is more extensively, but subtly, involved in decisions surrounding the portrait. At one level, the involvement of former Prime Ministers in the selection financed by the Secretary of State signals a desire to empower the subject, creating the

²⁸ Raymond Williams, The Sociology of Culture (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1995), 35, 38-39.

perception that, because the Prime Minister is involved in the commission process, the portrait provides a legitimate and personal representation of the subject. At another level, however, this shift in responsibility to a government department ensures a regulated, serialized production and display of official portraiture into the future. Under state management, the official portrait becomes an automatic entitlement of the Prime Minister's political station, even if the results are more individual, and often less formal. As such, the production process leading up to the final portrait serves to highlight the institutional connection between the various Prime Ministers rather than their historical distances and ideological differences.

The bureaucratic regularization of the commission and acquisition process for the official portraits of the Prime Ministers, which began in the late-1960s, demonstrates a growing interest in exerting control over the acquisition of its institutional symbols. This trend extended beyond the official portrait collection into the physical site in which the paintings are displayed, and represents a response to the changing character of public access to the Centre Block interior. An investigation of how the historical meanings and symbolic significance of the Centre Block architecture and designs are being maintained and conserved will serve to position the official portrait commission process within a larger context.

Since the Centennial celebrations of 1967, Parliament Hill has routinely served as the setting for "major celebrations," "seasonal activities" and "public demonstrations and protests," events that have been documented and broadcast across the country through mass media. In 1977 "broadcasting cameras, a desk consol and a control room" were installed in the House of Commons Chamber to allow for televised coverage of debates.

With the number of visitors to Parliament Hill “doubling every 10 to 15 years” since the 1960s, the Centre Block had already reached capacity.²⁹

On the one hand, the growing presence of television media and increased tourism to the Parliament Buildings has provided the opportunity for today’s public to observe the day-to-day affairs of the country’s political system more than ever before. On the other, this increased sense of public accessibility to political activities in the Parliament Buildings has also functioned to underscore the exclusivity its space. What has become increasingly apparent is the degree to which the Centre Block has become both the most quintessential of public spaces and the most regulated. As the seat of democratic government, it was perhaps the most direct symbolic expression of public interest, but access thereto is under constant scrutiny. In the words of former parliamentary Clerk Joseph Maingot,

in the case of streets, parks, schools, hospitals, libraries, and museums, there is an implied invitation to the public at large to use the property...This is not true, however, of most federal government offices, and is certainly not true of the Parliament Buildings. The two Houses of Parliament have exclusive possession of the portions used by them respectively, and have at least the same right to exclude strangers as the law affords to private persons in possession of property. Visitors who disregard the restrictions imposed on them are therefore considered trespassers.³⁰

Of course, the enforcement of controlled access to the Parliament Buildings has nothing to do with the sanctity of the structures themselves, but with the security of the activities taking place within the buildings. However, this is not to deny that the very design of the

²⁹ Canada, House of Commons, Building the Future: House of Commons Requirements for the Parliamentary Precinct, (Ottawa, 1999), 11, 53-54.

³⁰ Joseph Maingot, Parliamentary Privilege in Canada, second ed. (Ottawa, Montreal and Kingston: House of Commons/McGill-Queen’s University, 1997), 176-77.

structures and spaces of Parliament has and continues to play a major role in conditioning how the activities of governance are understood by society at large.

The construction of the first Parliament Buildings began in 1859 on Barrack Hill, one decade before Confederation. In 1857, the same year Queen Victoria selected Ottawa as the capital of the United Provinces of Canada, control of the area which encompasses today's East, West and Centre Blocks was transferred from the British Crown to the government of Canada West. With Confederation ownership of the buildings and territory were transferred to the Dominion of Canada.³¹ The architectural style of the original Centre Block was an example of High Victorian Gothic, and its replacement when all but the Parliamentary Library was razed by fire in 1916 is neo-Gothic.³² While there are a number of key differences between the two Centre Block structures in aesthetic design, ornamental symbolism, layout, size and materials, both buildings were intended to assert Canada's cultural and political link to Great Britain, on the one hand, and its distinction from the United States on the other.³³ The same decade in which the first Centre Block was constructed saw the completion of national government edifices in London and Washington. By choosing a High Victorian Gothic mode of architectural expression, Canada implicitly aligned itself with the traditions embodied in the Houses of Parliament at Westminster (1837-67) and at the same time

³¹ Ibid., 169.

³² The original Centre Block was designed by Thomas Fuller and Chilion Jones, and completed in 1866, see Carolyn A. Young, *The Glory of Ottawa: Canada's First Parliament Buildings* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University, 1995).

³³ For a comparison between the architectural design of the old and new Centre Blocks, as well as detailed tally of the present Centre Block's building materials, sculptural themes, lighting sources, and air circulation system see Canada, Public Works and Government Services, *Conservation Guidelines for the Interior of the Centre Block* (February 1998), a report prepared by the Heritage Conservation Program for the Parliamentary Precinct Directorate.

established an ideological contrast to the domed and classicist American Capitol building, of 1792-1864, which firmly rejected such resonances.³⁴

Throughout the nineteenth century, the heritage of Gothic architecture came to be seen in Great Britain and other countries of northern Europe as a national index. A century earlier intellectuals had complained of the irrationalism, religious superstition, barbarity and “unrestrained licentiousness” of Gothic architecture, ideas contrary to the noble and orderly principles and values associated with Classical form and symmetry.³⁵ In Britain Gothic was part of an ancient continuity and provided a logical counter-expression to the Classicism popular in France and the United States, against which Britain had pursued major military conflicts at the end of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Just as the collection of the National Portrait Gallery played a part in mythologizing the faces, personalities and exploits of diverse heroes of the past and present nation-state, themes from Britain’s Gothic heritage provided the cultural prototypes both in nineteenth-century Britain and for its colonial outposts abroad. Medieval culture in Britain became divested of its sometimes negative associations and instead signified a robust unity of chivalry, piety and heroic nationalism.³⁶

As early as the 1840s A.W.N. Pugin had argued that Gothic forms should be embraced by architects throughout Great Britain because they were associated with moral virtues which could, as his later contemporary Thomas Carlyle believed of the

³⁴ Young, 109.

³⁵ Even Horace Walpole, one of the earliest defenders of a Gothic romanticism in England, would not grant it aesthetic status over the “rational beauties of regular architecture” (i.e. Classical), see Horace Walpole, *Anecdotes of Painting*, (New York: Arno, 1969), 1:120.

³⁶ Draughtsman and author John Carter, in the late eighteenth-century architectural periodical *The Builder’s Magazine*, was one of the first to connect Gothic architecture to the British political system – in direct contrast to French and American Republicanism – “linking his defense of its threatened glories to a respect for the Monarchy, Church, and Constitution, the very institutions most threatened by Revolutionary doctrine,” see J.M. Frew, “Gothic is English: John Carter and the Revival of the Gothic as England’s National Style,” *Art Bulletin* 64 (June, 1982): 317.

biographical study of great historical personages, mitigate the dehumanizing social ills of industrialism. The same idea was taken up by critic John Ruskin, who foresaw a single national architecture in his 1849 publication The Seven Lamps of Architecture:

The architecture of a nation is great only when it is as universal and as established as its language; and when provincial differences of style are nothing more than so many dialects.³⁷

The key to establishing a national architecture was, for Ruskin, a willed consistency and uniformity of buildings:

All the truth which there is in our English nature, all the power of our English will, and the life of our English intellect will...be useless...unless we are contented to submit architecture and all art, like other things, to English law.³⁸

In the essay “The Nature of Gothic,” included in his 1851-53 volume The Stones of Venice, Ruskin argues that Venetian Gothic serves as the ideal template for a national architecture.³⁹ Ruskin championed such forms as universally adaptable to structures of different types, from private dwellings to government buildings, thereby severing its traditional association with Continental Catholicism and making it more palatable for the wider British public, who were Church of England Protestants.⁴⁰

Canada’s High Victorian Gothic Centre Block, which opened a year before Confederation, but was not fully completed until 1876, was well received by the soon to be confederated Dominion for reasons which grow out of Ruskin’s understanding of Gothic as an English national architecture. First, the style served to underline Canada’s distinction from the United States and, in the minds of the Anglo-descended majority, to

³⁷ John Ruskin, “The Seven Lamps of Architecture,” The Complete Works of John Ruskin, (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, n.d.), 1:187.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 190.

³⁹ John Ruskin, “Stones of Venice,” The Complete Works of John Ruskin, (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, n.d.), 2:151.

⁴⁰ Kristine Ottesen Garrigan, Ruskin on Architecture (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1973), 23.

visually project a sense of national unity, “our common ideal, our common artistic sense, our common ancestry and our common Christianity.”⁴¹ Secondly, the Parliament Buildings became potent symbols in Canada, because they reflected a popular belief that “Gothic is evidently a style especially suited to, and maturing in, a cold climate.”⁴² The glorification of nature was doubly prevalent in Canada at this time, when the rugged northern wilderness was seen as a positive symbol of economic stability and national identity. Sir William van Horne, president of Canada’s first transcontinental railway company, praised the new Parliament in precisely these terms: “Gothic interiors and arches owe so much to the elm, the glorious irregularities of Gothic tower and spire and pinnacle reflect an inspiration received from the grandeur and majesty of the pine.”⁴³ Finally, the first Centre Block’s Gothicism fulfilled practical as well as symbolic considerations. Gothic building techniques were widely understood, and did not require industrial technology or knowledge of modern materials; the types of stone required for the building were readily available in Canada at the time.⁴⁴

After the 1916 conflagration destroyed most of the original Centre Block, “it went without saying” that the replacement would be Gothic, “because of the style of the surviving East and West Blocks, and [because of the] continued associations with Canada’s British heritage and the Gothic of the Parliament Buildings at Westminster.”⁴⁵ Head architect John Pearson incorporated the anti-industrial British nationalist aesthetic of the Arts and Crafts movement, when designing the new interior, while his partner, J.

⁴¹ Wilfred Campbell, *Canada* (London: Black, 1907), 104-05.

⁴² This was a note added in Walpole’s discussion of architecture at the end of Henry VIII’s reign by Ralph N. Wornum, editor of *Anecdotes of Painting*, 1876 ed., 1: 117.

⁴³ J.D. Edgar, *The Story of Canada and its Capital* (Toronto: George N. Morang, 1898), 59.

⁴⁴ Kenneth Desson, “The Canadian Parliamentary Stone Carvers: A Study in the Bureaucratization of Art” (master’s thesis, Carleton University, 1980).

⁴⁵ Harold Kalman, *A History of Canadian Architecture*, (Oxford: Oxford University, 1994), 2:712.

Omer Marchand, further developed the systematic and adaptable cross-axial floor plan reminiscent of the Parisian École de Beaux-Arts, but found also in the British Houses of Parliament in Westminster and the original Centre Block. All three main entrances were aligned with the major traffic areas in the building – the Senate to the east, the House of Commons to the west and the central reception hall beneath the Peace Tower.⁴⁶ A sixth floor was added to the new scheme to accommodate the need for more office space. Moreover, the Pearson/Marchand design differed from the earlier Centre Block in that iron, steel and reinforced concrete, which had become commonplace construction materials in Canada by 1910, were used.⁴⁷

According to Harold Kalman, the architecture of the new Centre Block broadly reflected the spirit of “historicism” that defined architectural tendencies in Canada at the time. Historicism refers to the nineteenth-century revival of “past architectural styles,” in which both the “historical forms” and the “symbolic associations” of the architecture are maintained. Kalman asserts that, in Canada, the continued presence of architectural historicism into the twentieth century can be explained as a “desperate need to cling to the past” in the face of “rapid social and industrial change,” which was occurring throughout the country at that moment.⁴⁸ Kalman goes on to argue that the continuation of a form of architectural historicism remains implanted in recent federal government

⁴⁶ *Conservation Guidelines for the Interior of the Centre Block*, sec. 3, 14-24.

⁴⁷ Kelly Crossman, *Architecture in Transition: From Art to Practice, 1885-1906* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University, 1987), 4.

⁴⁸ Kalman, 705. It is ironic that the new Centre Block, which drew such obvious connections to British culture and heritage, was completed in 1927, one year after a Canadian delegation had attempted to raise the country's status at the Imperial Conference and a mere four years before the Statute of Westminster effectively granted the Canada sovereignty over its foreign policy. The steps taken by the Canadian government toward increased political independence, in other words, were not mirrored by an analogous desire to alter the traditional colonial associations of its political symbols.

initiatives surrounding the maintenance and conservation of the Parliament Buildings.⁴⁹

The government's approach to the architecture of the parliamentary precinct reveals an equally "desperate need" to preserve, in the face of restoration, renovation, building expansion and spatial rearrangement, the structural and ideological qualities of the precinct as a whole.

The use and conservation of architectural forms in order to signpost an evocative historical past signals a distinction made by David Lowenthal. In Lowenthal's terms, the continuation of Gothic revivalism reflects a mandate of heritage, not history. Whereas historical study might generally be conceived as the exploration and explanation of pasts, ideally tempered by a conscious awareness of these pasts growing "even more opaque over time," heritage, by contrast, views the past in the context of "present purposes," and thus artificially constructs pasts, in strict denial or unconcern for this temporal opacity.⁵⁰ Although the methodologies of history and heritage "refashion the past in present garb," the former demands a critical self-consciousness in order to make pasts "comprehensible," while the latter aims entirely to construct an image of the past that is "congenial" to contemporary contexts.⁵¹

In 1998 a report was commissioned within the Department of Public Works and Government Services to study the challenges involved in the maintenance and conservation of the Centre Block interior, including the areas where the official portraits are displayed. The specific goal of the report was to,

assess all the interior treatment decisions in the various rooms as originally built and as changed over time against the identified areas of

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ David Lowenthal, Possessed by the Past: The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History (New York: The Free Press, 1996), xi, 3.

⁵¹ Ibid., 148.

value for each room. From this evaluation, the guidelines will ensure that the heritage values of the individual rooms and the interior of the building as a whole are protected, maintained, or enhanced.⁵²

The report concluded with a proposal for a series of guidelines related to everything from the coherent design of new parliamentary furniture to the future installation of air circulation systems. Its purpose was to standardize the procedures by which future maintenance and repair projects would be considered before the conservation or replacement of any feature to evaluate the Centre Block's security systems, and outline the long-term risks resulting from an influx of television reporters, cameramen, security personnel and tourists. While a detailed critical analysis of the official findings is a task outside the ambit of this thesis, it is enough to note that the recommendations of the report broadly revealed a general unease that the "heritage character" of Centre Block – and specifically its interior – might slowly dissolve under the pressure of such updates without policy guidelines to preserve it. Here, the dissolution of architectural heritage needs to be considered alongside a potential rupture in the symbolism that represented the continuity of democratic traditions in the Canadian political system.

The 1998 report briefly, but revealingly, included a proposal for guidelines to be put in place surrounding the display of official portraiture in the Centre Block. The official portraits of Canada's former Prime Ministers, for the most part, hang chronologically in three connected areas of the Centre Block. Beginning in the entrance foyer of the House of Commons and progressing up one flight to the open entrance hall and into the main southern corridor, they occupy a site that has two functions. The area acts as a contextual vehicle, affirming and enhancing the institutional messages projected by the official portrait collection as a whole, notably the idea that political leadership in

⁵² Conservation Guidelines for the Interior of the Centre Block, sec. 4, 6.

Canada can be legitimized and visualized through its representation along a chronological continuum.

However, an exhibition strategy was necessary because, according to the authors of the report, the varying proportions apparent among many of the portraits was aesthetically inconsistent with the more cohesive and predictable design of the interior architecture – with the linear corridors and consistent use of Gothic motifs.⁵³ The scale of one “horizontal” painting – probably the Mackenzie portrait (**fig. 4**) – is identified as “too large” for the bay in which it is displayed. The lack of a coherent planning for the exhibition of the official portraits raised the question of whether they were “appropriate” for the walls of Centre Block. The report recommended that “policies should be developed in conjunction with a curator to confirm the precedents for the practice of hanging portrait paintings in the space and for the selection of suitable other installations.”⁵⁴ The upshot is that while both the collection of official portraits of former Prime Ministers and the interior architecture of the Centre Block are interconnected and are intended to carry similar ideological functions, namely to construct and convey a

⁵³ Together, the House of Commons foyer and entrance hall reach upward three floors, with a ceiling backlit by a skylight and patterned with concrete tracery and coloured glass. The floors are made of polished marble, doors are oak with iron tracery, and the walls and arches are composed of Tyndall limestone, with columns of granite. Along with the skylight, the space is illuminated by a large stained-glass window, set within the southern wall of the entrance hall and electric light fixtures of Gothic design, introduced in the 1960s, and formed out of wrought iron. Relief carving, completed between 1918 and 1983 appears throughout the entrance hall: from the ceiling frieze representing the coat of arms, flora, natural resources and industries identified with each Canadian province, to the carved continuous narrative on the balcony depicting 25,000 years of settlement history, to depictions over the Gothic archways of animals related to both Aboriginal and Christian icons, symbols and myths. The walls on which the most recent official portraits are hung in the southern corridor of the House of Commons are divided by an arcade of engaged columns, which acts as a framing device for a range of fixtures, including painted portraits, sculpture and furniture. For a detailed description of the materials, design and various sculpted relief projects throughout the House of Commons foyer, entrance hall and southern corridor see, Conservation Guidelines for the Interior of the Centre Block, sec. 6, 25-31; also, Audrey Dubé, *Stone Carving in the Parliament Buildings* (January 1998), an unpublished research report for the Public Information Office, House of Commons, acsn. no. D-96, Curatorial Services, House of Commons, Canada.

⁵⁴ Conservation Guidelines for the Interior of the Centre Block, sec. 6, 31-33.

sense of authentic Canadian heritage, their ability to do so is unequal. While the interior space is cohesively designed, the portrait collection cannot help but appear *ad hoc*.

Despite the fact that the collection of official portraits of former Prime Ministers is formally known as the Prime Ministers Portrait Gallery, the relationship between the portraits and the place within which they are displayed is ambiguous. The conventional modern understanding of the gallery interior is characterized by American art historian Brian O'Doherty in this way:

The ideal gallery subtracts from the artwork all cues that interfere with the fact that it is 'art'. The work is isolated from everything that would detract from its own evaluation of itself. This gives the space a presence possessed by other spaces where conventions are preserved through the repetition of a closed system of values. Some of the sanctity of the church, the formality of the courtroom, the mystique of the experimental laboratory joins with chic design to produce a unique chamber of esthetics.⁵⁵

This description contrasts with the PMPG space. True, the Centre Block space is something of a "closed system." The "sanctity" of the House of Commons entrance hall and southern corridor is underlined by the Gothic motifs, which allude to the continued association with British cultural precedents. But this space fundamentally serves the practical function of housing the nation's political activities. In other words, the "gallery space" of the PMPG *does* "interfere" with the artistic character of the official portraits because it does not aim to suggest ideologically uninvested standards of aesthetic purity. The southern corridor is traversed by politicians on the way to and from meetings; the House of Commons entrance foyer serves as the place where the television media gather to conduct commentary and scrums of the latest political issue unfolding. Flags and benches compete with the Borden and King portraits, the Thompson and Tupper portraits

⁵⁵ Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*, expanded ed. (Berkeley: University of California, 1986), 14.

hang beside windows and are badly backlit, the Laurier portrait is juxtaposed over a west-coast Aboriginal stone carving, a fire hose vies for attention in the same bay as the Mackenzie portrait, and fire alarms, fire extinguishers, office doorways, engaged columns, and directional signage proliferate among the official portraits in the southern corridor. These features operate to remove any sense of privileged aesthetic status from the official portraits. Also the ontological status of the portraits as works of 'art' is highly contestable because none of the identification plaques provide the name of the artist responsible for the image. As art historian Angela Carr has stated, "this sort of illustration is not about the artist or his technique," but about the painted subject's relation to the government institution.⁵⁶

In isolation the suggestion made in the 1998 government report regarding the presence of portraiture within the Centre Block seems to imply that no government-sanctioned bureaucratic involvement in the official portrait collection exists beyond that of the Secretary of State. In fact five years after Serge Joyal approached Pierre Trudeau to select an official portraitist, and three years prior to the portrait's actual unveiling, initiatives were taken to establish a government branch responsible for all artefacts and works of art within the House of Commons. Thereafter, there was increasing government involvement in the official portrait collection of former Prime Ministers. The establishment of an Office of the Curator, now entitled Curatorial Services, represents a crucial event in determining the commissioning and exhibition practices of the paintings today.

Between 1974 and 1980 no fewer than six attempts were made in Parliament, through Private Members Bills initiated by Liberal MP Ian Watson, to define a broad-

⁵⁶ Jenny Jackson, "'It shows my determination'," *Ottawa Citizen*, 1 December 2002.

ranging set of responsibilities for a Parliament Hill Curator. An official to be appointed jointly by the Speakers of the Senate and House of Commons, Watson proposed the responsibilities of a Parliamentary Curator might include the compilation and maintenance of “an inventory of all items on Parliament Hill, including buildings and their contents, that in his opinion have historic value,” and providing advice and architectural guidelines on any changes to the buildings of Parliament Hill or their contents. According to Watson, the establishment of a Parliamentary Curator was necessary to protect objects of historical and artistic worth relating to “the appearance and setting of Parliament Hill” from being accidentally destroyed out of ignorance of their actual value.⁵⁷ Despite Watson’s efforts, these initial proposals met with very little success.⁵⁸

Beginning in 1980 a number of interested private citizens continued to lobby for the cause by approaching the Parliamentary Speakers – Jeanne Sauvé (House of Commons) and Jean Marchand (Senate) – as well as Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau. George Wilkes, a retired civil servant with an interest in Canadian heritage properties, led a new initiative, the goal of which was no longer the establishment of a Parliamentary Curator by an Act of Parliament, but temporary government funding “for a modest, long-term project that would see the preparation of a comprehensive inventory in both written

⁵⁷ Canada, House of Commons, “Bill C-464: An Act to Provide for the Establishment of the Office of Parliament Hill Curator,” first reading, 2 May 1980, 32nd Parliament, 1st Session.

⁵⁸ One major reason for the Bill’s repeated failure was simply the character of the legislature process. All House of Commons bills are subject to three readings, debate and consideration by committee before they can be transferred to the Senate for Royal Assent. More significantly, only five hours each week are set aside for the introduction of a usually huge quantity of Private Members Bills. A bill must be passed within the limited period of a parliamentary session otherwise it is immediately annulled and must be re-initiated in the following session. The various attempts to pass a bill to establish a Parliament Hill Curator are recorded in Canada, House of Commons, *Debates*: 1. Bill C-356: 31st Parliament, 1st Session, vol. 1, 15 October 1974, 378; 2. Bill C-262: 31st Parliament, 2nd Session, vol. 1, 22 October 1976, 374; 3. Bill C-212: 31st Parliament, 3rd Session, vol. 1, 3 October 1977, 428; 4. Bill C-418: 31st Parliament, 4th Session, vol. 1, 30 October 1978, 583; 5. Bill C-287: 31st Parliament, 1st Session, vol. 1, 24 October 1979, 562; 6. Bill C-464: 32nd Parliament, 1st Session, vol. 1, 2 May 1980, 668.

and pictorial form of all the art works lodged in or forming part of Canada's Parliament Buildings." Wilkes claimed the curatorial assessment of the federal government's Parliamentary assets to be a project that might facilitate the public dissemination of information – for education and tourism – to raise national public interest and pride in Canadian heritage.⁵⁹

By October 1980 Wilkes' proposal had approval from the parliamentary Speakers, and he was given the responsibility of chairing the five-member committee to conduct a "preliminary overview of the administration and development of the resources of the art works of Canada's Houses of Parliament."⁶⁰ In March 1981 the committee submitted two substantially similar reports entitled The Art Works of Canada's Houses of Parliament, to both Speakers Sauvé and Marchand, and to The Federal Cultural Policy Review Committee.⁶¹ Two specific points were made in the reports which are crucial to the context of this chapter. On the one hand, there was a desire to conserve the original designs and materials in the Parliament Buildings and the works of art and artefacts lodged therein. According to the committee, parliamentary "artworks" – from paintings

⁵⁹ George Wilkes' initial letters to the Speakers and Prime Minister were written in June 1980, acsn. no. D-338.3, Curatorial Services, House of Commons, Canada.

⁶⁰ Stage 2 Committee, "The Art Works of Canada's Houses of Parliament: A Report to the Speaker of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Commons" (March 1981), Ibid. The committee members included: George Wilkes, Mary Cooper (National Gallery Association), Eleanor Milne (Parliamentary Stone Carver), Wendy Sailman (Public Works Canada, National Capital Region), Carol Sutherland (Library of Parliament).

⁶¹ The Federal Cultural Policy Review Committee, which produced what is colloquially known as the Applebaum-Hébert Report, was set-up by the Liberal government in August 1980. It represented the first review of Canadian cultural institutions and government cultural policy since the 1951 Massey Commission, see Canada, Information Services, Department of Communication, Report of the Federal Cultural Policy Review Committee, Louis Applebaum (chairman) and Jacques Hébert (co-chairman) (Ottawa, 1982). Wilkes' committee later submitted a response to the Applebaum-Hébert Report, which identified the second and fourth chapters as being "particularly relevant to the issues raised in our brief," see George Wilkes, et al, "The Art Works of Canada's Houses of Parliament Response to the Report of the Federal Cultural Policy Review Committee, Presented to The House of Commons Standing Committee on Communications and Culture" (February 1983), acsn. no. D-338.3, Curatorial Services, House of Commons, Canada.

and sculpture to stone, metal and glass ornament – “are as much a part of our parliamentary heritage as are the laws enacted by the House of Commons and the Senate.”⁶² More specifically the reports observed “in their splendid setting, the art works gather together a host of feelings and aspirations. They display our past. Through the architecture and the interior embellishments of the buildings, we gain a heightened sense of our history, strengthen our self-awareness and broaden our understanding of our role in the world.”⁶³

At the same time, the committee’s reports identify the centralization of responsibility within a government body, the activities of which are permanently funded and whose members can contribute cultural, technical and administrative expertise, as the most effective way to guarantee the conservation of the heritage value of the various artistic objects and architectural features of the Parliament Buildings. “A position or entity must be created which would be the place where all the varied lines of interest and responsibility would converge,” and would be responsible for overseeing the systematic compilation, ordering, public dissemination and analysis of information related to the artwork of Parliament Hill, of the past and into the future.⁶⁴

Because of a change in the governing political party – from Liberal to Progressive Conservative beginning in September 1984 – and subsequent federal budgetary constraints, decisive government action was not taken to establish a Parliamentary Curator until early in 1989. Throughout this period Wilkes remained vigilant in directing attention to the issue, writing to the new Speakers of the two Houses – John Bosley

⁶² Letter from George Wilkes to Jeanne Sauvé, 16 June 1980, Ibid.

⁶³ See, George Wilkes and Mary Cooper, “The Art Works of Canada’s Houses of Parliament: A Brief to the Federal Cultural Policy Review Committee” (March 1981), Ibid.

⁶⁴ Stage 2 Committee.

(House of Commons) and Guy Charbonneau (Senate) – in 1985.⁶⁵ Finally, a decision was made by Speaker Bosley, independently of any parliamentary proposal, to establish an Office of the Curator for the House of Commons in the fall of 1988. The first Curator, Stephen Delroy, began work at the beginning of February 1989.⁶⁶ While the administrative scope was less comprehensive than originally conceived by Watson, pertaining only to the management, conservation, research, display and interpretation of art, artefact, and architectural collections, within the House of Commons and not for Parliament as a whole, the responsibilities of the Office included the official portrait collection of former Prime Ministers.

When the curatorial office for the House of Commons was established, the living former Prime Ministers who were not represented in the PMPG collection included Progressive Conservative Joe Clark, Liberal John Turner – who had each held power briefly in the 1980s – and Progressive Conservative Brian Mulroney, Prime Minister between 1984 and 1993. Chronology dictated that Clark's portrait should be the first of these to be produced. However, it had been established as protocol by the Office of the Curator that the proposed sitter should be given a final say as to when a portrait can be commissioned. In 1996 Clark requested that the portraits of succeeding Prime Ministers

⁶⁵ Letters from George Wilkes to John Bosley and Guy Charbonneau, 22 July 1985, file D-338.7, Curatorial Services, House of Commons, Canada.

⁶⁶ Unfortunately, very little tangible information appears to exist leading up to the establishment of the Office of the Curator. My conclusion that the decision to establish the office was made in the fall of 1988 is based on information provided by the present Chief Curator, David Monaghan. In a private e-mail to me on 26 November 2003 he wrote: "I have spoken with the staff at both the Speaker's Office and the Sergeant-at-Arms Office regarding the circumstances and decisions surrounding the establishment of the Curator's Office. Unfortunately, neither has been able to locate any information on this topic, nor were they able to identify any information in BOIE [The Board of Internal Economy, responsible for the financial and administrative matters respecting the House of Commons] records...I can confirm that Mr. Stephen Delroy, the first Curator, began work at the House at the beginning of February 1989. Interviews for the position were held in December 1988; thus, one might safely assume that a decision was made to create the position by the Fall of 1988," see e-mail letter from David Monaghan to author, "RE: Carleton Student," 26 November 2003.

be commissioned first, since he remained active in federal politics.⁶⁷ Over the next five years the Office of the Curator commissioned official portraits for Turner and Mulroney.

The arrangements to have the two portraits painted illustrate the increasingly bureaucratic nature of official portrait commissions, following the establishment of a House of Commons curatorial post. Both were produced through a standardized process. Turner was approached first in 1998, followed by Mulroney in 2001. In both cases, the Office of the Curator, whose title changed to Curatorial Services around 2000, needed to guarantee the necessary funding – approximately \$30,000 at the time – from the Minister of Public Works and Government Services. Curatorial Services then contacted each former Prime Minister to request their co-operation and arrange the process by which an artist would be selected for the task. As neither Turner nor Mulroney had any inclination about who should paint their portraits,⁶⁸ Curatorial Services initiated a “closed competition,” supplying each subject with ten to twelve portfolios from Canadian portraitists.⁶⁹ The various contenders, whose portfolios were culled from an initial list of “official portrait artists” drawn up from recommendations made by “other curators, galleries and Rideau Hall,” were then contacted, and asked whether or not they would like to compete for official commissions.⁷⁰

Working from the portfolios provided and in separate consultation with Curatorial Services, Turner and Mulroney each made a selection on the basis of the information provided. Turner opted for Brenda Bury and Mulroney, on the advice of his wife Mila,

⁶⁷ Paul Wells, “Portrait of a man unwilling to be consigned to history: Joe Clark refuses to sit still,” *National Post*, 30 June 1999.

⁶⁸ Documents indicate that Mulroney was, in fact, already familiar with Igor Babailov before he chose him for the official commission. Mulroney’s wife, Mila, had privately commissioned a sketch of him for his sixtieth birth in 1999.

⁶⁹ “Commissioning of Official Portraits of Prime Ministers” (December 2000), acsn. no. D-832.2, Curatorial Services, House of Commons, Canada.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

for Igor Babailov.⁷¹ Following this, both artists were notified by Curatorial Services, and the terms and cost of the commission were set. Curatorial Services then established contact between the two former Prime Ministers and the respective artists so they could schedule studio sittings. When each of the portraits was completed the artists arranged for the paintings to be framed. Finally, dates were set for unveiling ceremonies through joint consultation with the sitting Prime Minister, Curatorial Services and the Speaker of the House of Commons.⁷²

The Turner portrait (**fig. 21**), which was unveiled in early May 2001,⁷³ bears some affinity with those portraits produced since Diefenbaker. Its loose brushwork, bold palette of primary colour, generalized construction of likeness and positioning of the subject in an ambiguous and uncluttered space continues the tentative modernist detour away from the older conventions found among the portraits produced before 1968. Like the Pearson portrait, albeit to a lesser degree, the image also seems intended to function more as personal testament of Turner, the individual, than of his formal and institutional status as Prime Minister. Importantly, however, Bury's portrait also conforms to characteristics that allow it to appear cohesive with the rest of the PMPG portraits. Like five of the six paintings of his Liberal predecessors, Turner is pictured seated, not

⁷¹ Both Bury and Babailov work as professional portraitists. Both immigrated to Canada, but have worked on commission throughout North America and Europe. Bury was born in England, but has lived in Canada since 1979. At the time of the Turner commission, Bury had already produced official portraits of Jeanne Sauvé as House of Commons Speaker and Guy Charbonneau as Senate Speaker. Babailov was born in Russia, immigrating to Canada in 1990. Babailov's prior commissions included portraits of New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani and Russian President Vladimir Putin. Curatorial Services has files and portfolios on both artists.

⁷² "Commissioning of Official Portraits of Prime Ministers."

⁷³ Both the Turner and Mulroney unveilings received coverage in local and national newspapers the day after. See, for example, Lawrence Martin, "PM shows Turner a touch of class," *Ottawa Citizen*, 10 May 2001, Jenny Jackson, "Mulroney's still in the picture," *Ottawa Citizen*, 20 November 2002, and Jenny Jackson, "It shows my determination."

standing. Moreover, the posture and gaze echo those of more successful Liberal Prime Ministers, Laurier and King. Thus the work suggests his lineage with them.

The Mulroney portrait (**fig. 22**), which was unveiled at the Centre Block late in November 2002, marks a return to more traditional portrait conventions. By contrast with the Turner portrait, Mulroney is depicted in a dark suit in what is ostensibly a parliamentary office with a heavy wooden desk and a library of books. The image thus establishes a strong link to the official portraits of other former Conservative Prime Ministers Borden and Bennett. At the same time, a number of qualities suggest that this portrait too is something of a personal testament to Mulroney, the private individual, as to Mulroney the former Prime Minister. The hands, for example, do not hold or gesture toward any legislative document. Mulroney is surrounded by objects that attest to his personal achievements and commitments. A family photograph portrays him as a devout husband and father, and a lapel badge his Companion of the Order of Canada membership. Most uniquely, on the wall behind Mulroney is a representation of the landscape painting *Mist Fantasy* by J.E.H. MacDonald. This painting was never displayed in Mulroney's parliamentary office, nor has he ever owned it. Rather, as a potent signifier of Canadian nationalism, it offers a public riposte to his political adversaries, who characterized his participation in the free trade deal with the United States in the mid-1980s as a sell-out of Canadian interests.

No longer produced through *ad hoc*, sometimes posthumous arrangements or private financing on the part of the Prime Minister or his political allies, the establishment of an administrative office to facilitate, among other things, the commissioning of official portraits of former Canadian Prime Ministers has operated to

ensure, at least in principle, that all future commissions will be routed consistently through an identical bureaucratic process. The role of Curatorial Services as an institutional expression of the federal government, effectively works to communicate a cohesive representation of Canadian political leadership, highlighted by recent efforts to fill two earlier gaps in the collection. The official portraits of Sir John J.C. Abbott and Sir Mackenzie Bowell, two relatively obscure nineteenth-century Conservative Prime Ministers had never been commissioned. One of the tasks of Curatorial Services was therefore to regularize the process of official commissions and ensure that the collection would be chronologically complete, despite its *ad hoc* lineage.

Historically, the absence of Abbott and Bowell from the PMPG collection was excused on the basis that both had led the country for very short terms (under three years collectively) and had been unconventionally appointed from the Senate, not elected, when the sitting Prime Ministers (Macdonald for Abbott; Thompson for Bowell) had died in office.⁷⁴ Only recently, with increased public and media attention paid to the PMPG in the wake of the Turner and Mulroney unveilings did the impetus develop to fill the chronological gaps in the collection.⁷⁵ By July of 2001 funding for the portraits had been secured by Curatorial Services through the Department of Public Works and Government Services.⁷⁶ Subsequently, a committee, comprised of past and present representatives of Curatorial Services, Public Works and Government Services, and the National Gallery of

⁷⁴ Letter from Audrey Dubé to Fred Welling, 11 April 2001, acsn. no. D-829.1, Curatorial Services, House of Commons, Canada.

⁷⁵ Preceding the Abbott and Bowell commissions, the official portrait of former Prime Minister John Turner had been unveiled and publicized in May 2001. Future public attention on the PMPG was guaranteed as arrangements for portraits of Brian Mulroney and Kim Campbell were already being mobilized.

⁷⁶ The maximum amount designated for both was \$40,000, including the cost of the works' shipping, framing and materials, see Letter from David Stephenson to Audrey Dubé, 17 July 2001 acsn. no. D-829.1, Curatorial Services, House of Commons, Canada.

Canada, was constituted to initiate a closed competition and decide on artists for the task.⁷⁷

At the first formal meeting, the selection committee established a list of guidelines outlining the artists' role, and devising general criteria the portraitists would need to follow. Two criteria, which testify at once to the ideological nature of official portraiture, and to the desire to conceal this function, included making sure the results would "harmonize" with portraits produced during the era in which the Prime Ministers each held power and that the portraits would demonstrate "respect" toward their subjects, the station of the Prime Minister, and by extension the history of the Canadian political system.⁷⁸ This latter requirement proved challenging because the artists were left to reference a limited set of pre-selected black and white photographs. Moreover, the apparent age of both men in their portraits needed to correspond to their age when they held power. This narrowed the photographic referents even further and, especially in the case of Abbott, required that the artist be able to conceal very obvious signs of physical deterioration, the depiction of which would not have demonstrated proper "respect." In

⁷⁷ The committee membership was decided by Curatorial Services, and included Eleanor R. Milne (former Federal Government Sculptress); Kitty Scott, (current Curator of Contemporary Art, National Gallery of Canada); Audrey Dubé, (Acting Chief Curator, Curatorial Services); David Stephenson (Project Leader, Public Works and Government Services Canada), see minutes from the first meeting of the "Selection Committee for the Commissioning of Official Portraits of Former Prime Ministers Sir J.J.C. Abbott and Sir Mackenzie Bowell," 21 August 2001, Ibid.

⁷⁸ "The following will be the mandatory requirements for the selection of artists: a) it will be two new works of art; b) it will be two commissioned painted portraits; c) the artist(s) will be Canadian or working in Canada; d) it will be experienced portrait artist(s), committed to excellence in portraiture; e) the artist(s) will have to represent and **respect** the dignity of the [Prime Minister's] Office; f) the artist(s) will be working with secondary materials, e.g. historical photos, documents, etc.; g) the dimensions, spacing and location requirements for the paintings will have to be examined [*sic*] by the Curatorial Services, see Ibid. These criteria were expanded on at a later meeting: "the new portraits, even though contemporary works, have to **harmonize** with the early portraits of the Prime Ministers' Portrait Gallery and respect to a certain extent the style of the period," see minutes from the third meeting of the "Selection Committee for the Commissioning of Official Portraits of Former Prime Ministers Sir J.J.C. Abbott and Sir Mackenzie Bowell," 22 October 2001, Ibid.

the end, Muli Tang was selected to produce the Abbott and Joanne Tod the Bowell portrait.⁷⁹

The medium, approximate dimensions and format of the Abbott and Bowell portraits were predetermined by Conservation Services. Tang and Tod were supplied with written information, and black and white portrait photographs of their subjects. They were also provided with colour thumbnail reproductions of the portraits already hanging in the Centre Block, so that at every stage of production their portraits could maintain a visual coherence with the other official portraits of the PMPG.⁸⁰ Curatorial Services was in constant dialogue with the two artists, and over the course of the commissions, undertook a combined studio visit and interview with each of them. In early June 2002, at Centre Block on Parliament Hill, with an audience comprised of politicians, the artists, their guests, and the descendants of the two former Prime Ministers, both official portraits of Abbott and Bowell (**fig. 5** and **fig. 8**) were unveiled together.

Muli Tang's portrait of Abbott projects a sense of health, confidence and power. Photographs taken of Abbott in 1892, contemporary to his brief term as Prime Minister, exhibit signs of exhaustion brought on by old age and poor health (**fig. 6**). In this case, it was obligatory that Tang's portrait cleave to the criteria of "respect," rather than conform

⁷⁹ Tod is a well-known contemporary Canadian artist, based in Toronto. She made a name for herself in the 1980s and 90s. Her work has been extensively documented and critiqued in newspaper articles, exhibition catalogues and art periodicals. It is generally framed in relation to concerns related to feminist discourse and post-modernism. Tang, a Chinese-born Canadian, works in a conservative academic style and primarily as a professional portraitist. He lives in Montreal. Curatorial Services has compiled files and portfolios on both artists.

⁸⁰ In subsequent letters to Tang and Tod it was stipulated that the paintings were to be done in oil or acrylic and be three-quarter length portraits, see letters from Audrey Dubé to Muli Tang and Joanne Tod respectively, 13 September 2001, acsn. no. D-829.1, Curatorial Services, House of Commons, Canada. Finally, the maximum dimension of the paintings was set at 48"H x 38"W. See letters from Audrey Dubé to Muli Tang and Joanne Tod, 29 October 2001, Ibid.

to every feature of the photograph. Thus, Abbott is idealized with a physically strengthened vertical stance and his facial expression exudes self-confidence rather than exhaustion. He has a more substantial head of hair, including a pair of well-trimmed side-burns, and his hands show no signs of either the arthritis that plagued him or of photographic distortion. The former Prime Minister's collar and suit have also undergone meticulous re-tailoring, and his bow tie and eyebrows have each been symmetrically re-rendered.⁸¹ Along with these modifications, Abbot is set against a spatially and contextually obscure backdrop. The 1892 Abbott, who appears as a time-bound individual in Ottawa's Topley Studio, is transplanted, in Tang's official portrait, into a neutral non-specific space, at once 'respectable' and timeless, an exemplar of established and official national authority.

In her portrait of Bowell, Tod attempted a somewhat different modification to the photographic referent (**fig. 9**). Instead of carefully concealing the time-bound features of the photographic image, Tod's portrait, at one stage in its production, contained an ironic reference to the contingent and constructed nature of history and identity, a theme recurrent in much of her other work. By importing an anachronistic element into the scene, notably a scarf of the Manitoba tartan, the portrait was on one level intended to symbolize a pivotal event in the career of the "characteristically indecisive" Bowell. Towards the end of his leadership term, he had been pressured over the issue of remedial legislation to restore public funding to Roman Catholic schools in that province.⁸² However, as a mid-twentieth-century invention, the Manitoba tartan, in itself, was historically misplaced. Tod eventually removed this element, at the request of Curatorial

⁸¹ Muli Tang, personal interview with author at Montreal, 14 March 2003.

⁸² John T. Saywell, introduction to *The Canadian Journal of Lady Aberdeen, 1893-98*, ed. John T. Saywell, (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1960), xli-lxii.

Services, because it was both incorrect historically and also potentially disrespectful. Bowell was both an English immigrant and an Orangeman, and would not have wanted any reminders of the crisis of this career. Nonetheless, while physically erased from sight, the scarf remains part of the conceptual image of Bowell, recoverable through X-ray technology.

The Abbott and Bowell portraits did not, of course, represent typical commissions. The high degree of bureaucratic control and surveillance exerted over Tang and Tod by Curatorial Services should be understood as rare. While the office usually exercises control over which artists a Prime Minister can select to paint an official portrait, normally the Prime Minister – not the curatorial staff – has the final say (within certain provisos of dimension and scale) on the artist to be responsible, and to a large degree over the format of the commission and the timing of its unveiling. This can be explained by the fact that the official portrait has come, in recent years, to forefront the personal style of the artist and to commingle the representation of the sitter's private personality with that of the professional station. Charlotte Townsend-Gault theorizes this,

is in part a reaction against the attention to (and formal rejection of) those signs of office which were a more conspicuous characteristic of the official portraiture of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Among the reasons for this shift is the hazily expressed wish on the part of commissioning bodies to bring themselves 'up to date'.⁸³

By contrast to earlier *ad hoc* arrangements leading, for example, to the Mackenzie, Thompson, Borden and Bennett portraits, bureaucratic facilitation has allowed living Prime Ministers more individual power over how the portrait will look.

⁸³ Charlotte Townsend-Gault, "Symbolic Facades: Official Portraits in British Institutions since 1920," *Art History* 11 (December 1988): 517.

Townsend-Gault is quick to observe that an increase in emphasis on the sitter as an individual is not necessarily a sign that the official portrait is any less a symbolic expression of the endorsing institution. Rather, it implies “an attitude which betrays some awareness of the part these portraits play in constituting the image of an institution.”⁸⁴ Curatorial Services is a bureaucratic entity directed towards the systematic and efficient coordination of tasks and workers. Thus commissions are necessarily subject to standardized institutional evaluation. The portfolios on which the former Prime Ministers base their decisions are compiled by Curatorial Services in collaboration with other curators and galleries, with the decisive task of selecting “a full gamut of styles,” of which “only the best and most experienced are retained.”⁸⁵ Significantly, there exists no formal criterion indicating what exactly constitutes ‘the best,’ or what sorts of ‘experiences’ are to be privileged. Thus, despite the principle which allows the individual Prime Minister a large degree of control over the production of his official portrait, the bureaucratic apparatus of Curatorial Services orchestrates the commission process. The final image not only reflects the individual decisions of the artist but, more fundamentally, the bureaucratic structuring of the commission process, both before and after the portrait has been painted. In the future, Curatorial Services will continue to play a determining role in the representational function of official portraits by assuming responsibility for the collection of artist portfolios, supervising the completion of the portrait, ensuring its fit within certain dimensional requirements, and arranging the display of the finished painting among the others in the Centre Block.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ “Commissioning of Official Portraits of Prime Ministers.”

A memo written in 2000 by Curatorial Services, during the process of the Mulroney commission, summarized the government-sanctioned purpose of official portraiture,

Official portraits are commissioned in order to honour past Prime Ministers and to provide an artistic document of parliamentary history that can be viewed by the parliamentary community and visitors to the Centre Block.⁸⁶

As a government document, this statement is predictable in that it treats the meaning of the official portrait as unaffected by the manner in which it was produced. Implicit in this text is the idea that the official portraits of Prime Ministers have always functioned and been perceived in the same way. While certain conventions of representation appear consistently throughout many of the portraits, even while the commissions themselves were largely *ad hoc*, the above statement fails to mention or consider is how the formal involvement of government departments in the commission process has altered the symbolic status of the portraits. The bureaucratic regulation of the official portraits of former Canadian Prime Ministers has passed through a number of discreet stages over the past three decades. From an initial impetus emerging out from Centennial celebrations in the late 1960s, to calls for the establishment of a Parliament Hill Curator throughout the 1970s, and finally with the institution of an Office of the Curator at the House of Commons in 1989 following the efforts of George Wilkes and others, bureaucratic involvement in official commissions has been far from consistent. Nevertheless, it has had the effect of guiding the function of the PMPG collection toward a single set of ends – ends markedly different from those tacitly assumed when official portraits of the Prime Ministers first began being commissioned at the end of the nineteenth century. Under the

⁸⁶ Ibid.

bureaucratic management of Curatorial Services, the official portraits have above all come to serve as collective and positive symbolic expression of the federal government institution through the linear, consolidated and regularized display of political leadership.

Conclusion

The efforts of those who in the past produced portraits, drawings and caricatures of me will be obliterated by the realistic skills that Mr. [Cleeve] Horne has brought to bear in producing the portrait that is before us.¹

-John G. Diefenbaker

Over the course of this study, the official portraits of former Canadian Prime Ministers have been analyzed from several different angles. They have been assessed in relation to a pair of conventionally and consistently assumed criteria related to the role of pictorial representation. Considerable attention has also been devoted to tracing the people, events and ideas informing each individual commission. Finally, this thesis has studied the relationship between the official portraits and space they occupy in the Centre Block, with specific consideration of the impact of the government's architectural conservation policy on the official portraits. What unites these angles of analysis is the notion that the Prime Ministers Portrait Gallery (PMPG) harbours a rich and complex production history. Far from being a collection of mute and static images, immediately accessible through what they visually present, the dynamic conditions determining how a portrait was commissioned, who paid for it, when it was unveiled and how it is now displayed directly bears on how the portrait is to be understood.

One overarching issue, carrying over into all three chapters, remains how to correlate the production history of the official portraits to the question of their ideological function. To what degree can the PMPG portraits be conceived not merely as depictions of individuals but indicators of a broader set of socio-political ideas and cultural values? Charlotte Townsend-Gault's essay "Symbolic Facades" has figured prominently throughout this thesis. However, where her analysis of British official portraiture since

¹ Canada, House of Commons, *Debates*, 28th Parliament, 1st Session, vol. 1, 9 October 1968, 1015.

1920s arrives at a stark categorical conclusion – that official portraits are ideological facades, “symbolic expressions not of the nature of the individual sitter, but of the institution which endorsed it” – several important qualifications must be added in relation to this thesis.²

Townsend-Gault’s essay helps to conceptualize the current government policies and exhibition conditions concerning PMPG portraits. The role of Curatorial Services in facilitating future commissions and the current formal identification of the official portraits as composing a single collection certainly serve to foreground their institutional context and lend credence to her argument that “the overriding contextual feature” of official portraiture is,

the ability of the institution to exercise control over these objectifications of its ideology, because it can control the commissioning mechanisms and the artist commissioned.³

However, my research has shown that the official portraits have not always been understood as ideological symbols of the government institution, because they have not always been produced under the auspices of a standardized institutional mandate. To be sure, all the portraitists have needed to obey certain well-understood conventions in order for their painting to be accepted. The point is rather that the portraits produced before 1968 were not the result of a single, bureaucratically enforced, policy. They were produced for the most part in a piecemeal fashion, without formal protocol or consistency, one at a time.

Analysis of the production history of the official portraits has demonstrated that the bulk of the portraits have served a variety of different ends, at various times.

² Charlotte Townsend-Gault, 512.

³ Ibid, 515.

Whereas the Macdonald portrait was presented to Parliament in the presence of Macdonald, as a gift from a group of loyal subscribers, the Thompson and Mackenzie portraits were calculatingly sold to Parliament through the savvy initiatives of the portraitist, Forster. The official portraits of interim Prime Ministers like Abbott, Bowell and Tupper were acquired at least decades after the sitters' terms in office, and appeared less as a means of dignifying the subjects and more to answer the present purpose of filling in the existing gaps of the collection. Even individual portraits have, at different times, functioned towards a variety of ends. Mackenzie King commissioned, purchased and donated his own portrait to Parliament, without any input or co-ordination from government officials; it was from start to finish a private initiative. Yet, the portrait's presentation to Parliament, along with a posthumous depiction of Borden, was one of the most public and formal unveiling ceremonies to date, themed as a celebration of the 'wartime' Prime Ministers with American President Harry Truman as the guest of honour.

In other words, the diverse and *ad hoc* production history of the earliest portraits composing the current PMPG makes it difficult to pin-point the precise ideological character of the collection. While the role of the Secretary of State, and later Curatorial Services, seems to confirm Townsend-Gault's argument that the portraits commissioned since Diefenbaker's function as "symbolic expressions" of the government institution. However, it remains unclear whether the earlier irregularly commissioned, yet still highly conventionalized, portraits, which were produced for various interests and often in the absence of any formal institutional supervision, absorb or militate against this ideological role. It is, of course, undeniable that presently the official portraits are framed as a

coherent collection of “symbolic expressions.” The consolidation of the portraits within one of the most accessed areas of the Centre Block interior downplays the improvised origins of the collection and permits tour guides to draw public attention to their apparent unity. The CBC used the House of Commons entrance hall as the stage for the recently televised federal election broadcast, at various times including transmissions of several of the official portraits. In this context, the portraits functioned more than ever as legitimizing signs of the political system, a homogenous set of symbols for the federal government institution.

However, implicit throughout this thesis is the contention that the formal and representational elements of the portrait image reflect the impact of certain historical conditions on its production. By unveiling the origin of each of the official portraits what becomes clear is less a monolithic institutional presence of the federal government and more the relatively diverse commission circumstances that have conditioned the production of the majority of the official portraits. In short, because today’s endorsing institution is responsible for the production of only the most recent portraits, it is impossible to ignore the influence of the *ad hoc* commissioning of earlier works even in the standardized context of the most recent official commissions. Most of the gaps in the collection may have been filled, the arrangement of the portraits may strive to confirm the political authority and sanctity of the endorsing institution, but under critical scrutiny the various circumstances under which the earliest portraits were commissioned, and the continued reliance on certain recognizable historical conventions, cannot be erased from the images.

Over the course of this thesis, issues have been raised which, due to necessary spatial and thematic restraints, would benefit from further exploration in the future. Most significantly this thesis contributes to, and would benefit from, detailed historical investigation of how the Prime Ministers have been, and continue to be represented in various contexts. The wide dissemination of images made possible through the development of mechanical technologies of reproduction, mentioned briefly in Chapter One, and the emergence of popular culture in the nineteenth century has meant that official portraiture does not gain significance in isolation, but by existing against a backdrop of competing forms of representation. The first official portrait for example, of Macdonald, was painted in 1889, around the same time political cartoons were emerging as a regular feature of Canadian newspapers and periodicals.⁴ Portraits of Canada's Prime Ministers have appeared in diverse and sometimes contradictory contexts, from newspaper photographs to trading cards; their public personas have been satirized in caricatures as well as commemorated on the nation's currency. As such, national conception of the Prime Ministers is always fragmented, while at the same time being reduced to an abstraction and distilled over time as an increasing stockpile of photographs, film clips and election memorabilia.

For its part, this examination of the official portraits of Canadian Prime Ministers has nonetheless exposed a central rationale to the production of official painted portraits in the modern era. On one hand, the official portraits of Canadian Prime Ministers hang in relative isolation at the Centre Block, public access to them being greatly, although not completely, curtailed as a result of broader issues of security. On the other hand, the very

⁴ Peter Desbarats and Terry Mosher, The Hecklers: A History of Canadian Political Cartooning and a Cartoonists' History of Canada (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1979), 11.

notion of an official portrait implicitly indicates that they were produced and carry significance as public entities. Official portraiture today provides at once opposition to, and a strong reminder of, the satirical caricature or the unflattering newspaper photograph of the former heads of government. The perfunctory and sanctioned images of political leaders necessarily result from and engage with an already socially circulating visual dialogue between competing portrayals of the same subjects. Produced always at the end of a public career, the official portrait is rhetorically pivoted as the last and definitive image of a former Prime Minister. The “realistic skills” of the portraitist, as Diefenbaker’s opening remarks attest, serve as signs of the portrait’s legitimacy and the subject’s honour. Intuitively aware that the portrait has an impact on how the subject is perceived and will be understood in the future, Diefenbaker’s statement confirms a fearful awareness that, as Ernst Gombrich writes of caricature, portraiture potentially offers “a visual interpretation of a physiognomy which we can never forget and which the victim will always seem to carry around with him like a man bewitched.”⁵

⁵ E.H. Gombrich, Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation, second ed. (New York: Bollingen Foundation, 1965), 344.

Appendix: An Overview of the Productive History of the PMPG

Subject	Initiation	Artist	Portrait Date	Acquisition	Unveiling	Dimensions (cm)
Sir John A. Macdonald (1815-1891) 1 July 1867 – 5 November 1873 17 October 1879 – 6 June 1891	Senator A.W. Oglivie, 1889	Henry Sandham (1841-1910)	1889	Commissioned and financed by Macdonald supporters and donated to Parliament, 1890	27 February 1890	118.75x152.4
Hon. Alexander Mackenzie (1822-1892) 7 November 1873 – 9 October 1878	The artist, 1897	J.W.L. Forster (1850-1938)	1897	Arranged by Speaker Thomas Bain in 1899; publicly funded in 1900	none	121.5x154
Sir John J.C. Abbott (1821-1893) 1 June 1891 – 24 November 1892	Curatorial Services and PWGSC, 2001	Muli Tang (1947-)	2002	Commissioned by Curatorial Services; publicly funded	3 June 2002	117x91.4
Sir John S.D. Thompson (1845-1894) 5 December 1892 – 12 December 1894	The artist, 1897	J.W.L. Forster (1850-1938)	1897	Arranged by Speaker T. Bain in 1899; publicly funded in 1900	none	143x106.8
Sir Mackenzie Bowell (1823-1917) 21 December 1894 – 27 April 1896	Curatorial Services and PWGSC, 2001	Joanne Tod (1953-)	2002	Commissioned by Curatorial Services; publicly funded	3 June 2002	131.8x91.4
Sir Charles Tupper (1821-1915) 1 May 1896 – 8 July 1896	Political supporters from Manitoba, 1896	Victor A. Long (1866-1938)	1896	Arranged by Clerk A. Beaudesne in exchange with the National Archives, 1941	none	168.3x100.2
Sir Wilfrid Laurier (1841-1919) 11 July 1896 – 6 October 1911	The artist and subject, 1915	John W. Russell (1879-1959)	1917	Initiated by Prime Minister King and N. MacTavish in 1923; purchased with public funds through the National Gallery, 1924	none	236.8x155

Sir Robert Borden (1854-1937) 10 October 1911-10 July 1920	Speaker G. Fauteux, 1946	Kenneth K. Forbes (1892-1980)	1947	Arranged by Speaker G. Fauteux in 1946; publicly funded	10 June 1947	140.2x92.4
Rt. Hon. Arthur Meighen (1874-1950) 10 July 1920 - 29 December 1921 29 June 1926 - 25 September 1926	House of Commons Clerk, A. Beauchesne	Ernest Fosbery (1874-1960)	1948	Arranged by Clerk A. Beauchesne, 1948; publicly funded	none	127.6x101.6
Rt. Hon. William L. Mackenzie King (1874-1947) 29 December 1921 - 28 June 1926 25 September 1926 - 7 August 1930 23 October 1935 - 15 November 1948	Maude Salisbury, the artist's wife, 1945	Frank O. Salisbury (1874-1963)	1945	Financed and donated to Parliament by King, 1947	10 June 1947	127.6x102.3
Rt. Hon. Richard B. Bennett (1870-1947) 7 August 1930 - 23 October 1935	Speaker R. Michener and Prime Minister Diefenbaker	Kenneth K. Forbes (1892-1980)	1962	Arranged by PWGSC; publicly funded, 1962	14 November 1963	127x102.2
Rt. Hon. Louis S. St. Laurent (1882-1973) 15 November 1948 - 21 June 1957	J.W. Pickersgill and C.D. Howe, 1958	Aurdrey W. McNaughton (1917-)	1958	Commissioned and financed by St. Laurent supporters and presented to Parliament	4 March 1959	114x89.1
Rt. Hon. John G. Diefenbaker (1895-1979) 21 June 1957 - 22 April 1963	Secretary of State for Canada's Centennial Celebration, Judy LaMarsh, 1966	Cleeve Horne (1912-1998)	1968	Arranged by the Secretary of State; publicly funded, 1968	8 October 1968	145x107.2
Rt. Hon. Lester B. Pearson (1897-1972) 22 April 1963 - 20 April 1968	Secretary of State for Canada's Centennial Celebration, Judy LaMarsh, 1966	Hugh Mackenzie (1928-)	1968	Arranged by the Secretary of State; publicly funded, 1968	24 October 1968	96.7x76.7

Rt. Hon. Pierre E. Trudeau (1919-2000) 20 April 1968 - 2 June 1979 3 March 1980 - 30 June 1984	Secretary of State, Serge Joyal, 1984	Myfanwy Pavelic (1916-)	1991	Arranged by Curatorial Services; publicly funded, 1991	1 May 1992	122x91.5
Rt. Hon. John N. Turner (1929-) 30 June 1984 - 17 September 1984	Curatorial Services and PWGSC, 1998	Brenda Bury (1932-)	2000	Arranged by Curatorial Services; publicly funded, 1998- 2000	8 May 2001	146x101.6
Rt. Hon. Brian Mulroney (1939-) 17 September 1984-13 June 1993	Curatorial Services and PWGSC, 2001	Igor Babailov (1965-)	2002	Arranged by Curatorial Services; publicly funded, 2002	19 November 2002	212.2x91.3

Figures

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Figure 22

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