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THE IDEAL AND THE PRAGMATIC:
THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF CANADA'S BIENNIAL EXHIBITIONS
OF CANADIAN ART, 1953-1968

By Nathalie Limbos-Bomberg, B.A.

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
Canadian Art History

Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario
December 1, 2000
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of Graduate Studies and Research acceptance of the thesis

**The Ideal and the Pragmatic:
The National Gallery of Canada's Biennial Exhibitions of
Canadian Art, 1953-1968**

Submitted by Nathalie Limbos-Bomberg (Carleton)
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts.

Michael Bell, Thesis Supervisor

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Carleton University

Ottawa, Ontario

December 2000

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the National Gallery of Canada's Biennial Exhibitions of Canadian Art, held between 1953 and 1968, as a response to various pressures that contributed to a mid-century call to develop Canada's national arts and culture. At the centre of the pressures that led to the initiation of the Biennial series are the recommendations of the Massey/Lévesque Commission (1949-1951) in which the National Gallery was charged with fostering Canadian visual art and the Canadian visual artist. The artist, Lawren Harris, advocated the central role of the artist in the realization of the Biennial. The timing of the Biennial series – the first exhibition opened and toured just one year after the release the Final Report – was of acute relevance, an attempt by the National Gallery to rise and meet the challenges placed before it by the Commission. The numerous shifts in the format of the exhibition, in its centre of responsibility, premise, and desired outcomes chronicle the changing direction of the institution and reflect the growing demands of the nation as the National Gallery attempted to meet its own, and the country's, perception of its national and international roles and professional responsibilities at the expense of a central artist's role, as envisioned by Lawren Harris.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In researching this thesis, I would like to gratefully acknowledge the time and efforts of Cyndie Campbell, the Head of Archives at the National Gallery of Canada. Her work to prepare the Biennial files for research was both time-consuming and detailed, and the material was always delivered with diligence and professionalism. Even after my on-site research was completed Cyndie continued to meet my many requests for information, long-distance. Thank-you, Cyndie. I am grateful to my friend and editor, Maureen Flynn-Burhoe for her painstaking work in revising this thesis. Maureen, I took your advice on most things, but left some of the fun parts in. I would also like to thank other friends for their help: Amy Jenkins and my sister, Marjolaine Limbos, for their thoughtful readings of certain sections – I promise I will never make you read this again. Thank you to Josée Drouin-Brisebois, Curatorial Assistant in Contemporary Art, National Gallery of Canada, for her help and also Genny Landreville, my personal satellite researcher. Throughout the research and writing of this thesis – a time span of a little over two years – I would like to acknowledge the support of my advisor, Michael Bell, Director of the Carleton University Art Gallery. Through his wide breadth of knowledge, experience and continued guidance, he has challenged me in many ways, and always with patient encouragement. Michael, I would do it over again. Lastly, I would like to thank my husband Dean Clarke for all the years of his hard work – you have given me the freedom I needed to pursue this research.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	1
Endnotes.....	10
CHAPTER ONE	
FROM TRUSTED ADVISORS TO TRUSTEES.....	11
Endnotes.....	32
CHAPTER TWO	
CONCEPTION, INCEPTION AND RECEPTION.....	37
Endnotes.....	66
CHAPTER THREE	
MINOR SUCCESSES AND MAJOR SUCCESSORS.....	69
Endnotes.....	93
CHAPTER FOUR	
NEW DIRECTORS AND DIFFERENT DIRECTIONS.....	98
Endnotes.....	128
CHAPTER FIVE	
THE BIENNIAL EXITS.....	132
Endnotes.....	156
CONCLUSION.....	160
Endnotes.....	169
APPENDIX I	
REGIONAL REPRESENTATION.....	171
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	179

INTRODUCTION

THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF CANADA

The National Gallery of Canada – is it a *national* gallery? Past Director Jean Sutherland Boggs, in her 1971 history of the collection, makes two “claims to distinction” that mark Canada’s National Gallery as different from other national art museums. Firstly, that since its inauguration in 1880, the National Gallery has always considered its responsibilities to be national rather than parochial. And secondly, that the institution has, in both quiet and turbulent times, enjoyed a “particularly close” relationship with Canadian artists.¹ It is the Gallery’s assertion that it operates as an accessible institution, but throughout its history, has the National Gallery of Canada always retained its wide inclusive reach and succeeded in remaining in touch with the nation’s artists?

This thesis examines the National Gallery of Canada’s Biennial Exhibitions of Canadian Art, held between 1953 and 1968,² against this long-standing assertion and argues that the series is a response to various pressures that contributed to a mid-century call for action to develop Canada’s national arts and culture. At the centre of the pressures that led to the initiation of the Biennial series are the recommendations of the influential Massey/Lévesque Commission (1949-1951)³ in which the National Gallery was charged with fostering Canadian visual arts and the Canadian visual artist. The timing of the Biennial series – the

first exhibition opened and toured just one year after the release the Final Report – was of acute relevance, an attempt by the National Gallery to rise and meet the challenges placed before it by the Commission. The numerous shifts in the format of the exhibition, in its centre of responsibility, premise, and desired outcomes chronicle the changing direction of the institution and reflect the growing demands of the nation as the National Gallery attempted to meet its own, and the country's, perception of its national and international roles and professional responsibilities.

The forces that came to bear upon the National Gallery of Canada leading up to and during the time of the Canadian Biennial Exhibitions are complex and find their genesis in the politics and personalities at play during the preceding half-century. In order to contextualize the Biennial Exhibition and the nature of its origins, a broad historical approach is useful. The political and cultural climate of the day is examined for its relevance in terms of federal cultural policy in general, and the National Gallery of Canada in particular. While paramount to this thesis is the progress of the Biennial, which is narrated chronologically and most-often from the Gallery's point of view, external influences are considered for their impact upon internal policies and directives. Such external influences as nationalism and internationalism, internal desires such as the professionalization of the curator role, and the aspirations of the institution to be on par with other national museums and galleries are also considered for their role in shaping the National Gallery and its programmes, in particular, the Biennial.

Within this historical framework, each of the eight exhibitions is evaluated according to the following criteria: procedural method; organizer(s); degree of representation from across Canada in terms of artists (and works) and membership of both the preliminary and final juries; works purchased; works toured; and critical reception at home and while on tour. A critical evaluation of works of art falls beyond the scope of this thesis – the Biennial is regarded as a response to cultural and political pressures only and is not examined for artistic merit.

The primary sources consulted in the process of writing this thesis are located in two archives. The first is the National Gallery of Canada Archives (NGC Archives)⁴ which houses the primary documentation for the Gallery's policies and activities pertaining to the time in question. The second is the National Archives of Canada (NAC) which provides additional documentation of the involvement of key individuals through the personal papers of the artist Lawren Harris, and National Gallery of Canada Directors H.O. McCurry and Charles Fraser Comfort.⁵

In the NGC Archives, the Minutes of the Meetings of the Trustees are seminal sources, establishing a clear chronology and revealing general threads of policy that are fleshed out by each Biennial exhibition file. These records, against the background of other institutional programmes and activities, help both to situate the priority of the Biennial series within the National Gallery's initiatives

and to determine the exhibition's place in an overall post-Massey/Lévesque Commission strategic response.

The content of the files of each Biennial exhibition varies.⁶ The majority fall into two major categories: internal memoranda and correspondence between Board and Gallery staff addressing matters of process and policy and resulting progress and final reports; and external correspondence from three different sources: artists, members of selection committees and other galleries. In the latter, records reveal requests for information or criticisms/reactions and in more elaborately kept files, each artist's request for information, registration form and shipping information are included. In files relating to selection committees, internal and personal correspondence, reports and findings are recorded. Some exhibition files contain the following: exhibition and installation photographs, detailed information on personalities and/or press clippings (in addition to the formal files on these subjects). Negotiations for the touring segment of the exhibition comprise the last component of external correspondence.

Published documents such as exhibition catalogues and annual reports officially record each event. The former serve to provide the final lists of included artists, brief biographies and the titles of works. Sometimes the works purchased by the National Gallery are indicated. The latter contain executive summaries, major accomplishments, acquisitions, turnover of Gallery staff and members of the Board of Trustees (mostly in later Annual Reports), as well as detailed financial summaries of each fiscal year.

In terms of secondary resource material, several studies proved useful.

Providing historical background, Robert Bothwell, Ian Drummond and John English's *Canada Since 1945: Power, Politics and Provincialism* (1989)⁷ offers a wide view of the political climate in Canada at the mid-century mark. The most comprehensive source for the history of the National Gallery is Jean Sutherland Boggs' *The National Gallery of Canada* (1971).⁸ A chronicle of individuals, both salaried staff and others (such as advisors and consultants), who worked to shape the Gallery's collection from its conception, it contains otherwise elusive information on major acquisitions and shifts in curatorial direction. Regardless of its inherent bias, it collects together the story of the National Gallery from birth through the early 1970s, by which time it had achieved something of an international reputation.

Regarding the relationship of federal institutions to government, two sources were referenced for their broad approach. Lawrence Grant's "Canada's Federal Museum Policy" (1991)⁹ provides a chronology of the historical direction of federal museum policy and places the Massey/Lévesque Commission within the ebb and flow of approaches to the museum in Canada. It discusses the government's centralizing and decentralizing initiatives, assesses the intentions, and discusses the success or shortcomings of their implementations. More specific, and in relation to the changing relationship of the National Gallery to government in terms of the authority to acquire works of art, is Martha King's "A Precarious Balancing Act: The National Gallery of Canada at Arm's Length From

the Government of Canada” (1996).¹⁰ Dealing specifically with the case of the National Gallery, it examines the implications of federal support and characterizes the many and complex factors that together form both official and unofficial policy.

On the subject of the Massey/Lévesque Commission, the primary document is the Commission's Report. Paul Litt's *The Muses, the Masses and the Massey Commission* (1992),¹¹ the culmination of his doctoral dissertation and several smaller studies, examines closely the motivations and history behind the Commission – specifically situating it within the nation's political scene and international context. As the definitive study on the subject, Litt's work is a valuable resource for both fact and the complex interplay of the personalities involved. Claude Bissell's *The Massey Report and Canadian Culture* (1982)¹² also deals with the Commission. Bissell, Vincent Massey's biographer, following the man from his recruitment through to his 'legendary' contributions to the Commission, animates the personal complexities and presents a synopsis of the events surrounding the Commission and its recommendations.

Several shorter studies discuss the factors influencing the direction of the National Gallery at the time of the Biennial series. Providing invaluable insight into the subject of state funding of the arts is Robin Endres' "Art and Accumulation: the Canadian State and the Business of Art" (1977).¹³ From a static Marxist point of view, Endres argues for and identifies the motives of government financing of the arts and explores its far-reaching implications. Most

relevant are the sections that address the location of power when the state financially supports arts and culture. John Porter's *The Vertical Mosaic* (1965)¹⁴ is referenced by Endres for its in-depth study of elite theory and for its explorations of class and power relationships – factors that repeatedly appear in the administration of the National Gallery, its policies and practices, and its relationship with the nation's artists.

This thesis is a narrative, with Chapter One setting the stage for the story contained in the subsequent Chapters. It begins by recounting the significant changes to both the formal and informal acquisitions policies of the National Gallery, beginning with the inauguration of the Gallery and leading up to the period in question. This account of the major stages of the Gallery's evolution informs the greater picture of how Canadian works were acquired for the national collection and describes the significant forces that molded its content. The Chapter, as well, touches upon the complex personal dynamics that shaped the Canadian cultural scene in the 1950s. As a prelude, it creates the appropriate background for the argument that the Biennial series was initiated as the principal method for acquiring contemporary Canadian art in response to the recommendations of the Massey/Lévesque Commission and to foster the visual arts in Canada.

The beginning of the narrative of the Biennial series begins in Chapter Two with Lawren Harris' plan to resurrect the pre-World War II Annual Exhibition. The Chapter identifies the possible sources for the idea and places

Harris as its key shaper. The planning and execution stages of the exhibition are enumerated, followed by its public reception. The Chapter concludes by measuring the premise against the outcomes, leading to the changes proposed for the next exhibition in 1955.

Chapter Three picks up the story and follows the 1955 Exhibition from start to finish. It details the results of the Biennial and then recounts the major shift in its organization, suggesting a change in motivation for organizing the show. The Chapter argues that here one sees the beginning stages of the erosion of the influence of the recommendations of the Massey/Lévesque Commission (and Harris' ideas) in a movement towards a more expedient achievement of the Gallery's acquisition goals and an international reputation.

Chapter Four follows the change in Directorship and direction, from McCurry, a Director with a nationalist bias, to Alan Jarvis whose international perspective recommended him the position. The revival of Harris' original plan, and then some (the open juried exhibition) demonstrates the extremes of method with which the Gallery and its Trustees experiment in an effort to create a successful, relevant exhibition for all Canadians.

Chapter Five follows the shift in practice from the completely open show of 1961 to the method of a single selector, a method that will be followed until the Biennial's final year in 1968. The reasoning behind the move to allow professionals to handle the exhibition is detailed, alongside an account of the parallel transition within the institution of the centre of responsibility for

programming from the Board of Trustees to Gallery staff. The Chapter closes with the termination of the Biennial series, and argues that its end is a result of changing mandates and changing needs, shaped by Canada's ambitions as an international presence and the ambitions of a professional staff.

Endnotes

¹ Jean Sutherland Boggs, *The National Gallery of Canada*, (Toronto: 1971), viii.

² The precise dates: the First Annual Exhibition of Canadian Art 11 March – 7 April 1953; the Biennial Exhibitions of Canadian Art: First: 18 May – 20 June 1955, Second: 3 April – 14 May 1957, Third: 5-28 June 1959, Fourth: 20 May – 4 September 1961, Fifth: 20 September – 27 October 1963, Sixth: 4 June – 22 August 1965, Seventh: 5 July – 1 September 1968.

³ Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences 1949-51 (hereafter Massey/Lévesque Commission), *Report*, (Ottawa: 1951).

⁴ The following files are referenced from the Archives of the National Gallery of Canada: *Board of Trustees: Minutes of Meetings & Minutes of the Visiting Committee for the National Gallery of Canada*, File 9.2-B; *Annual Exhibition of Canadian Painting 1953*, File 5.5-A; *First Biennial Exhibition of Canadian Painting 1955*, File 5.5-B; *Second Biennial Exhibition of Canadian Art 1957*, File 5.5-B; *Third Biennial Exhibition of Canadian Art 1959*, File 12-4-64; NGC Archives, *Fourth Biennial Exhibition of Canadian Art 1961*, File 12-4-91; *Fifth Biennial Exhibition of Canadian Painting 1963*, File 12-4-151; *Sixth Biennial Exhibition of Canadian Painting 1965*, File 12-4-227; *Seventh Biennial Exhibition of Canadian Painting 1968*, File 12-4-272; *Clipping Files (1953-1968)*.

⁵ The following fonds are referenced from the National Archives of Canada: *Lawren S. Harris Papers*, MG 30 D 208; *H.O. McCurry and Dorothy McCurry Papers*, MG 30, D186; *Charles Fraser Comfort Papers* RG 32 C 2.

⁶ All records had previously been opened to scholars with the exception of the Biennial Exhibition files. These files required pre-reading by NGC staff to review the content for inflammatory personal statements not directly informing the issue at hand, or personal information on persons still living or whose papers remained closed to the public (Access to Information legislation). The extent of each file varied greatly from 6.5cm of textual records with four exhibition file folders to 90cm of textual records and 46 exhibition file folders; in these cases only sections dealing with policy and procedure were requested, and such documents as registration forms and shipping information were not examined.

⁷ Robert Bothwell, Ian Drummond, and John English, *Canada Since 1945: Power, Politics, and Provincialism*, (Toronto: 1981).

⁸ Jean Sutherland Boggs, *The National Gallery of Canada*, (Toronto: 1971).

⁹ Laurence Grant, "Canada's Federal Museum Policy: Delectation, Democratization, Deliberation, and Denouement," (Ottawa: 1991).

¹⁰ Martha King, "The National Gallery of Canada at Arm's Length from the Government of Canada: A Precarious Balancing Act," M.A. Thesis, (Carleton University: 1996).

¹¹ Paul Litt, *The Muses, the Masses and the Massey Commission*, (Toronto: 1992).

¹² Claude Bissell, *The Massey Report and Canadian Culture*, (Ottawa: 1982); *The Imperial Canadian: Vincent Massey in Office*, (Toronto: 1986);

¹³ Robin Endres, "Art and Accumulation: The Canadian State and the Business of Art," *The Canadian State: Political Economy and Political Power*, (Toronto: 1977).

¹⁴ John Porter, *The Vertical Mosaic: An Analysis of Social Class and Power in Canada*, (Toronto: 1965).

CHAPTER ONE

FROM TRUSTED ADVISORS TO TRUSTEES

The National Gallery of Canada did not always have a Board of Trustees¹ but was, for decades, managed as a department of one or another government ministry. The first of these was the Department of Public Works. Under the watchful eye of the Chief Architect, the few and infrequent acquisitions made at this time were guided by the convenient, the political, and official deposit. The Royal Canadian Academy (RCA) contributed much to the direction of the National Gallery in the early years, having been, with the encouragement of Lord Lorne, Governor General, the midwife at its foundation. The Gallery's permanent collection consisted of the Academicians' diploma pieces deposited at the time of their election to the society, complemented by infrequent donations and purchases.

Yet the Academy sought a greater role. In an effort to formalize and extend its advisory powers, the Academy proposed an acquisitions Advisory Council made up, in part, of its members.² While the proposal for a Council was readily endorsed, the suggestion of constituting it with Academy members was circumvented in favour of high-profile appointments, thus freeing the Gallery from the RCA's demands for more control.³ The Academy, however, remained closely involved with the Gallery. It continued to advocate for a curator, full-time

director, and an organizational structure to conserve the collection.⁴ Perceived by the public servants as a threatening and powerful pressure group armed with a self-serving agenda, the Academy's presence was eventually phased out of the Gallery's quotidian business in an attempt to protect it and its development from a self-interested elite. Nevertheless, political and personal motivations from all directions continually threatened to bias the growth of the collection, and the period under the tenure of the new Advisory Council was no different. It was simply a new elite.

In 1907 an Order-in-Council established an Advisory Council of three men whose express purpose was to provide "advice and assistance" to the Minister of Public Works "in connection with all purchases of and expenditures for objects of art which the Government might make."⁵ Described as a council of laymen, the trio was to be composed of "gentlemen who have shown their interest in an appreciation and understanding of art as evidenced by their public connection with art associations and their private patronage of art."⁶ In accordance with this Act, three men, professionally linked to Canadian art institutions outside of Ottawa, were appointed to the Council: Montreal businessman and collector Sir George Drummond; Mr. Byron E. (later Sir Edmund) Walker, a Toronto businessman; and Senator Arthur Boyle from Montreal.⁷ Not one artist was considered.

A fair amount of art was purchased under the 1907 Act. With an annual grant of \$10,000, the Advisory Council negotiated, between themselves and with

the Minister, acquisitions that bore the reflection of their private personalities and personal tastes.⁸ Sir Edmund Walker – a powerful driving force in the early years of the Gallery and until his death unequivocally the leader of the Advisory Council⁹ – pushed hard for nationalistic purchases in accordance with his deep interest in Canadian art.¹⁰ He more than advised the Minister; he went alone on buying trips and spent the Gallery's money as if it were his own.¹¹ In essence, while funds were in the hands of the Ministry, Walker and the Council controlled the Gallery's acquisitions.

The National Gallery was incorporated in 1913 and a Board of Trustees replaced the Advisory Council. The mandate of the new Board was expanded considerably to include the development, maintenance, care and management of the institution; the acquisition, custody and preservation of the collection; and the more auspicious task of encouraging and cultivating "correct artistic taste and Canadian public interest in the fine arts, the promotion of the interests generally of art in Canada."¹² With a newly defined direction, an increased operating budget of \$100,000, and with Edmund Walker as Chairman, the Trustees embraced their new roles and duly spent almost nine-tenths of the allotted funds on acquisitions in the 1914-1915 fiscal year. During the war years, when the acquisition budget and consequently the number of acquisitions diminished, the motivation to sustain the Gallery's new status remained. The Trustees continued to spend their modest budget where the money would "endure."¹³

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 acquisitions. No longer simply advisors to the Minister, the three-member Board was entrusted with discretionary purchasing power within budgetary restraints. While there was no specific mention of Canadian art in the Act, the desire for Canadian acquisitions would eventually evolve as a natural direction as a result of the progressive ideas of Gallery Director Eric Brown.¹⁴ Following the precedent of the Tate Gallery (which rose to prominence in part due to its promotion of young English artists), Brown and Walker together began the construction of the collection from within the country and from its most contemporary artists. Amidst great criticism, and for the next decade, the pair fostered Canadian talent by acquiring the works of future members of the controversial Group of Seven. Without any foreknowledge of the success those artists would attain in the future, the Gallery bought what they were selling: a vision of Canada. A.Y. Jackson¹⁵ recounts the transaction:

Walker ... came around to see Harris and asked to know what all the fuss was about. Harris told him of our intention to paint our own country and to put life into Canadian art. Sir Edmund said that was just what the National Gallery wanted to see happen; if it did, the Gallery would back us up. The Gallery was as good as its word.¹⁶

The Gallery's patronage of the Group of Seven served dual purposes: building the collection and supporting contemporary Canadian artists. But the controversial nature of the Group's work, considered by some to be too modern, launched the

institution into a period of open and heated debate about its practice of acquiring Canadian art, pitting the Royal Canadian Academy against the Gallery.

The Academy's issue with the National Gallery's support of the Group of Seven culminated in the 1924 Wembley Exhibition: though both camps were represented, the Group stole the show.¹⁷ International eyes opened wide at the Gallery's submissions, while at home critical ones narrowed. Although the Academy's ever increasing desire to extend its influence over Gallery matters had been somewhat thwarted by the removal of all reference to the Academy from the legislation,¹⁸ the Academy continued to be passionately vocal about Gallery affairs. Accusing the Gallery of favouritism in its choice of Canadian works for acquisition and exhibition abroad, the Academy fingered the Group, asserting that:

[T]he Gallery had over a period of years displayed such marked preference for the work of a claimed-to-be-new Canadian school of painting that selection by it could not very well result in other than a showing unrepresentative of the best in all phases of Canadian art.¹⁹

The cultivators of 'correct artistic taste' were publicly challenged by the *other* Canadian artists, namely the Academy's traditionalists. It was perhaps the first public attack in the Gallery's history, but definitely not the last. The RCA did not mince words, but rather said what they and much of the public were thinking: "the Gallery, as a museum directed by laymen, was not fairly representative of the artists of Canada."²⁰

Calls did go out for Brown's resignation,²¹ but what resounded in the halls of Parliament was the positive attention that Canadian art had earned abroad. Pleased with the political results – it was said that the new face of Canadian art had received more favourable comment abroad in the last six years than the last forty of the Academy's – the government showed its support and acknowledged the role the Gallery played in shaping Canada's international image. Slowly but surely the Gallery's acquisition budget rose. Even Prime Minister Mackenzie King argued in the House of Commons for increased funds, and he was not an ardent Gallery supporter.²² Parliament took notice of the Gallery as a possible rallying point for the promotion of nationalism, and sought to cement the nation's cultural reputation internationally through the activities of the National Gallery. On the heels of the success of the Wembley Exhibition, and through increased funding,²³ the Trustees renewed their commitment to foster the home-grown talent that shared their national vision.

Yet subject to the powers and pleasures of political pressures, the Gallery did face periods of frustration and decreased support.²⁴ The government's understated policy of shaping national identity through art was tempered by lay artistic taste – the voter's taste. Among the members of Parliament who agreed with the notion of promoting Canada through the visual arts but disagreed on the vehicle, some latched on to the argument of the RCA and suggested that the Gallery's collection include other artists, namely those "portraying life and scenery in the Dominion."²⁵ The idea of regional representation too was raised in

the House of Commons, most certainly as a political consideration rather than having basis in any evaluation of the existing collection. Indeed, the Gallery could not escape the necessity of satisfying its purse-holders. Times of generous grants were interrupted by years of slashed funds.²⁶

Until 1926, selections for purchase for the National Gallery's Canadian collection were made from the annual exhibitions of the chartered art societies, and were typically made by a committee composed of one or two members of the Board of Trustees and the Director of the National Gallery. This system worked reasonably well, but the selections were usually confined to exhibitions held in Toronto and Montreal. In order to facilitate the Trustees' purchases of the "best work" in all of Canada, the Gallery initiated its own 'one-stop buying show'. It was decided to have all exhibitions conducted by the chartered art societies reviewed by committees in each centre;²⁷ their selections were then invited to an end-of-the-year Gallery show from which the Trustees together would make choices for purchase taking into consideration those works already in the collection. The exhibition was initiated as an annual event, toured Canada and continued until wartime decreases in the Gallery's budget forced its closure.

The initiation of the series satisfied the Gallery's goal of heightening its national presence. Rather than quietly buying from the societies, starting the selection process in the regional exhibitions worked towards a climactic effect: the cachet of inclusion in a National Gallery exhibition and a possible purchase for the national collection. But more than public image was at issue here.

Internationally too, the Gallery was benefiting from the programme. Brown's preface to the exhibition catalogue made clear the other intention of the Gallery: "It is a truism that nothing expresses the customs, manners and ideals of a country more clearly than does its art ... [s]o art becomes an index of nationality."²⁸ And so the National Gallery of Canada, by Brown's logic, could too become an "index of nationality" if the government saw the visual arts as a priority.

When Louis Saint Laurent succeeded William Lyon Mackenzie King as Prime Minister in November of 1948,²⁹ neither personnel nor policies underwent major changes and the Liberal government continued much the same under its new leader. One attitude did change, however. Under King cultural affairs did not progress easily despite the efforts of Minister of National Defence, Brooke Claxton, who had been dubbed the cultural community's "unofficial representative inside the government."³⁰ Propelled by the 1941 Kingston Artists' Conference, artists, through their newly formed Federation of Canadian Artists,³¹ had been asking for government action in the arts since the early years of the war, and it was Claxton who repeatedly (and unsuccessfully) made such resolutions appear on the party's agenda.³² When all other efforts failed Claxton approached the Prime Minister himself and proposed Vincent Massey to spearhead a Royal Commission³³ on the arts.³⁴ King, however, was continually resistant to such an initiative, but with St. Laurent as leader, the idea finally came of age.³⁵

St. Laurent, indeed, saw to the issue. Claxton enlisted the support of friend and political ally Jack Pickersgill, special assistant to the Prime Minister,

who in turn approached Lester B. Pearson, Secretary of State of External Affairs. Claxton and Pearson, both internationalists, saw the issue similarly – Pearson was “sympathetic” to the suggestion of a Commission, hoping that it would “put the improvement of Canada’s image abroad on the public agenda.”³⁶ Certainly an experienced public servant in External Affairs, Pearson, the politician, recognized the crucial role the country’s cultural life played in its international reputation. Canada, matured by the war experience and now prominent in the international scene, would greatly benefit from a stronger and expanded cultural presence both at home and abroad.³⁷ Pearson met with Massey in Europe in 1948³⁸ to discuss the possibility of his involvement, and when he returned to Canada, Pearson gave his blessing for both the candidate and the cause. Claxton then approached St. Laurent with his proposal for a review of the state of the arts, shrewdly leaving out any references to government aid and astutely focusing rather on its potential for political gain.³⁹ The Prime Minister agreed with Claxton, and extended the offer of chair to Massey. Massey accepted.

There is nothing unusual in either the events or choices that led to the government’s approval for the Commission. Feeding off the natural evolution of Canadian culture and post-war nationalism, the Commission was sold, in part, as a political mechanism to lobby the largely untapped support of the Canadian populace. From broadcasting and film to art and education, hundreds of voluntary organizations with thousands of members would be drawn in and appeased by the

investigation. The Commission's strategy was simple: "to organize their friends, confound their enemies, and seduce the uncommitted majority of the general public."⁴⁰ And there was little risk of the unexpected. With the Commission's investigators simply an extension of government office (yet simultaneously at arm's length), the review was guaranteed to be a politically controlled inquiry. From the top down the decision-makers released their power slowly and laterally to fellow colleagues associated with the Liberal cause. The political elite entrusted the cultural elite to in effect keep all decisions 'in the family'.

The Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences (now known as the Massey/Lévesque Commission to acknowledge the roles of its co-chairmen) began in 1949 with the appointment of four members. Although Massey's accord on each nomination was requisite, it was St. Laurent's Cabinet that had final say.⁴¹ Reverend Georges-Henri Lévesque (Father Lévesque), a prominent if not controversial French-Canadian who stood in opposition to Quebec's premier, Maurice Duplessis, and supported the Liberal government was a unanimous recommendation from all sides. Norman Mackenzie, a native Nova-Scotian with strong Maritime credentials who also represented the West Coast as President of the University of British Columbia, was probably chosen as much for his close ties with Liberal insiders as for his interest in increased funding for Canadian universities. Hilda Neatby was the acting head of the Department of History at the University of Saskatchewan and

was viewed as a clever appointment for her scholarly speciality, gender and bilingualism.⁴² Arthur Surveyer, a francophone from Montreal and associate professor of law at the University of Toronto, served as a multipurpose Commissioner with ties to both academia and the public sector. There could have been criticism that none of the Commissioners were artists, but the Commission was after all a political body, assembled by government specifically for the causes and loyalties each member was known to serve. The issue for them was national culture, not the struggling artist.

The threat of a vague, lengthy and inconsequential study into the state of the arts in Canada was perhaps Massey's greatest fear and contributed to his initial reluctance in accepting the post. To keep the task relevant and his fellow Commissioners' enthusiasm intact, he dove into the investigation and swore it would be completed within two years. It was. On June 1st, 1951, the Final Report was submitted to the Prime Minister: almost five hundred briefs informed the four hundred-page document with subjects ranging from broadcasting to film, the press and literature, to universities and education. It was the explicit task of the Commission to "examine and make recommendations" upon the methods and policies through which Canada might improve its cultural resources. The Order-in-Council launching the investigation read in part:

That it is desirable that the Canadian people should know as much as possible about their country, its history and traditions; about their national life and common achievements;
That it is in the national interest to give encouragement to institutions which express national feeling, promote common

22

understanding and add to the variety and richness of Canadian life, rural as well as urban.⁴³

And so not only were concrete recommendations being sought, but also directions through which national development in the arts, culture and education could be achieved. Asked to put into recommendations actions to develop such esoteric ideas as ‘national feeling’, ‘common understanding’ and the ‘spirit of nationalism’, the Commission was assembled to further (partially) cloaked agendas informing post-war Canadian-American relations.⁴⁴ While the Commission did observe the situation of museums and galleries across Canada, their intent was to make recommendations on national institutions – others would receive assistance through the improvement of the national institutions.⁴⁵ Most relevant to this study are the sections of the Report that addressed the particular situation of the National Gallery of Canada.

The brief submitted to the Commission by the National Gallery argued strongly for increased resources and funds, citing years of neglect and stressing the urgency of their request. Echoing almost idea-for-idea the Gallery’s submission, the Final Report called for an extension of present services, ranging from travelling exhibitions to publications and reproductions, education, acquisition, staff and housing. Yet more than material change was demanded on the part of the Gallery – status too was on their agenda. They presented themselves to the Commission:

The value of such institutions as the National Gallery to a country, and specifically to a rapidly growing country as Canada, is apt to

be forgotten or underestimated, since much of that value cannot be put in terms of dollars and cents. By providing material for the study of man in his cultural and artistic activities, it supplements studies of the political and economic aspects of human affairs. By bringing a country into closer cultural relations with others ... it raises national prestige.⁴⁶

The goal of this introduction was to lead the Commissioners towards the Trustees' argument for a certain degree of operating autonomy from and within government. In actual practice, which the Gallery disapproved, the Board of Trustees' recommendations were passed through the Deputy Minister who was described as someone who received his appointment for purposes not related to those of an art gallery. The Trustees made a case for direct access to the Treasury Board (the present degree of separation severely impaired the Gallery's ability to serve the nation effectively) and concluded the brief with an outline of its immediate requirements. The Commission legitimized the Trustees' claims and subsequently recommended an elevation of the status of the institution:

That in the future the National Gallery have a status similar to that now accorded to the Public Archives, and that the Director of the Gallery ... have direct access to the Minister of the department through which the Gallery reports to Parliament.⁴⁷

Under these changes, legislated in the 1951 Act,⁴⁸ the Gallery was now placed under the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration. Yet the Trustees continued to fight hard for its autonomy and took to heart, and to government, the recommendations of the Commission.⁴⁹

The Gallery's new status was deeply significant. Now an 'agent' of her Majesty, the Board was authorized to enter into contracts, make by-laws, and was

awarded a purchasing account for the receipt of any monies appropriated for acquisitions. In terms of accountability, the Trustees were asked to submit an annual report to the Minister of Public Works containing financial statements and "other information."⁵⁰ In return for granting the Gallery's requests, the government expected the Gallery to fulfil its promised destiny at the core of the cultural life of the country.

What was not explicitly outlined in the Report was a pressure for ideological cultural change and development. Many of the intentions of the Commission – that it address the image of Canada abroad and establish a working system of federal institutions – had predetermined outcomes. In certain cases the Commission acted to confirm what the elite already knew the country needed (such as the establishment of the Canada Council). While many of its recommendations were considered to be 'nothing new', they served the double role of giving official notice and making a plea for action and results. While the press congratulated the authors of the document for its definite positive direction it also criticized the Report for being somewhat dated and naïve. One critic lauded the underlying goals of the Commission but rejected its methods, stating that, "Canadian culture would not be established by [an] act of parliament or even order-in-council."⁵¹ Even the Commissioners would have shared some of these apprehensions expressed by journalists of the day, that the Commission was:

too wise to believe that the state can provide more than the general climate of growth, for culture, in a democracy, anyway, must come

25

upward from the people. It cannot be pressed down by the state. Even if it could be, it would be too dangerous.⁵²

The Commission had legitimated the National Gallery's requests and it was now expected to fulfil its promise to become, in Brown's words, "an index of nationality."

And so the members of the Board of Trustees of the National Gallery of Canada were, at the mid-century mark, stewards in trust of not only the national collection but also a substantial part of the country's national artistic pulse. As leaders of artistic taste, their role, in bridging the gap between policy and practice, government and citizen, had reached a critical moment. With the direction received from the Massey/Lévesque Commission – described were the end results and the desired outcomes and effects – it was now their responsibility to formulate a strategy to bring together the many stray ideas and desires and to give concrete embodiment to the Commission's recommendations.

First official mention of the effects of the Commission appeared in the 1951/1952 National Gallery Annual Report:

We are witnessing today a great upsurge of public concern for cultural values. This is all the more striking when it occurs in a country as young as Canada. In the press, in Parliament and elsewhere fresh evidence is to be found almost daily for the growing interest of the public in the arts. During the past year the movement reached a climax with the appearance of the Report of the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences.

The Annual Report went on to enumerate recent implementations:

For its own part the Gallery has carried out its responsibilities to the people to the best of its present limited means. Unusually important additions have been made to the permanent collection, which has always been considered the basis for any sound programme of extension, the number of loan exhibitions has increased, and new fields of educational work have been opened up.⁵³

Another change was also taking place. While the 1913 National Gallery Act stipulated that the Board of Trustees was to comprise between three and five members, under the revised Act of 1951, that number was to increase to nine.

Over the next few years and from across the country several new additions were made to the Board guaranteeing a fuller representation of Canada in view of the Gallery's need to remain closely linked with Canadian artists and other organized groups. Yet there was another pool from which these 'gentlemen with an interest and appreciation for art' could be drawn. Until this time, not one artist had held a position of power and influence within the inner sanctum of the Gallery's administration. The Gallery, in its entire history, from the days of the Advisory Council to the present Board of Trustees, with powers extending to government and beyond, had successfully avoided sharing the making of any of its major decisions or policies with artists.

Perhaps the Gallery was seduced by the myth of the starving artist forever bad with money. Or perhaps it was the uneasy feeling among members of boards, councils and juries, that artists in positions of power would give preferential treatment to their own interests and friends. But by all means, and perpetually, the National Gallery, like hundreds of other arts organizations around the country,

subscribed to the practice of shutting artists out of the policies, operations and management of the institution. Even the Massey/Lévesque Commissioners tactfully steered their way through the issue in their recommendations for the formation of the Canada Council, defending themselves in the name of democracy:

We have given great care, in our deliberations, to the many submissions made to us concerning the appropriate composition of such a Council, notably from Canadian artists and writers who have urged that a Council be established which would be representative of their professional organizations. With this view we are unable to agree. We judge that the members of a policy-making body to be concerned with the many complex aspects of Canadian life should be free to consider all problems before them without the restraints which normally would bind them too closely to the organization or to the group which they would represent.⁵⁴

Indeed the Commission was wary of conflict of interest, and changing the status quo.⁵⁵

Once artists had been historically and acceptably eliminated as possible trustees and advisors, the resulting pool from which these positions were inevitably drawn was a high-ranking and upper-class elite. There is no doubt that those who sit on boards are the cream of society: colourfully described as women in “jewelled pantsuits” raising money hosting springtime luncheons and powerful men in “corporate suits,” this elite has been, at the most extreme, categorized under Marxist theory as the “Anglo-Saxon-Anglican, Scottish-Presbyterian upper-middle-class.”⁵⁶ This elite chooses and is chosen for positions of power on the basis of the power they already wield and the class they represent in society.

Either as heads of major corporations and institutions, or as inheritors of ‘old money’, they bring to the role the required pedigree and at times a yearning to ‘do good’.

Another consideration, if one ignores the possibility that elites choose boards for the chance to benefit financially their own interests, is that members of elites often interchange and rearrange their positions with one another. That is to say, that there is nothing uncommon or unusual for boards to have members in common. It is beneficial for both parties – an organization might ‘seek out’ the expertise of one individual from a certain field in order to gain his knowledge and influence for his own organization. This can only happen when the field in question is specialized, such as in the art, music, and finances. While lending ones’ knowledge can increase prestige and social relationships, it also makes ‘good business sense’ to mingle among one’s peers.

One other trend that appears quite frequently within the cultural elite and is evidenced most concretely with the National Gallery is nepotism of both friends and family.⁵⁷ There is not necessarily anything sinister about this practice. It is most often simply a case of asking who you know, and ‘who you know’ means the people who run in your social circle. While the powers that be ensured that board members and advisors spanned the nation geographically by selecting members based on the province of residence or language represented, their choices for positions of power neglected to consider the varied interest groups who had a stake in the affairs of the institution, for example, artists. Instead, the

Board was composed of elites from other disciplines.⁵⁸ The Gallery strengthened its bonds with other corporate bodies and maintained its status among fellow institutions while at the same time nurturing close ties with its potential funding source – the government.

Harry Orr McCurry was now heading the leading artistic institution in the country.⁵⁹ As Eric Brown's Assistant Director and also Secretary of the Board of Trustees, McCurry had seen the institution through the previous twenty years, and his appointment as Director was cheered from all sides. Known for his financial acumen, he had piloted the Gallery through the austere war years when Gallery funding was just over forty thousand dollars per year with no acquisitions budget; he was a man of programs then and, instead, stressed outreach and education. When, in the early 1950s, funds were once again available, McCurry facilitated the acclaimed Liechtenstein purchases,⁶⁰ among other purchases of European works. As a veteran of federal bureaucracy who worked his way to the top, McCurry was well aware of its competitive nature and the daily demands for the delicate balancing of many interests.

Among the members of the 1950s Board of Trustees, one familiar name appears although there should be no surprise considering the tight circle that comprised the close-knit cultural community at that time. Vincent Massey, Canadian minister to the United States (1926-1930), High Commissioner to London (1935-1946), the only Canadian to be appointed to the boards of both the National Gallery and Tate Gallery in Britain and chair of the most influential

Canadian arts commissions, also sat on the board of two of Canada's major cultural institutions: the Royal Ontario Museum and the National Gallery of Canada. Between 1950 and 1952, Massey served as Chairman of the National Gallery, resigning the February after the release of the document that bears his name to avoid the appearance of conflict of interest in the implementation of its recommendations. Massey's presence on the Board, as well as his other experiences, explains quite satisfactorily his qualifications and the government's choice to have him head the Royal Commission.

While McCurry managed the Gallery, Massey led the Trustees through the beginnings of a difficult transitional phase. Before his resignation he welcomed to the Board his long-time friend Lawren S. Harris. The Massey and Harris families were long-time partners in business, and as mature men of culture their paths had crossed frequently.⁶¹ Massey was at ease in the cultural elite. He was not only a member of the 'old rich' who had held many highly influential positions, but he was also highly educated and had received several honorary degrees.⁶² Harris was very much an anomaly. First and foremost an artist, Harris was by definition out of the traditional power structure. Yet due in part to his membership with the nation's artistic elite through his association with the Group of Seven, as well as his inherited wealth and undeniable high-ranking social class, he moved beyond that role. Never a struggling artist dependent on the favor of any artistic institution – he was financially independent, even supplying funds

from his fortune for the Group's Studio Building – his passion for the arts had a deeper motivation which was more idealistic, more spiritual.

Undeniably the family name liberated rather than hindered Harris' career. Freed from the daily pressures of working to support his art, Harris was enabled by his social class and rank to devote himself fully to the ideas of art. Perhaps not the artistic leader of the Group of Seven, he was most certainly an intellectual and spiritual leader. Charles Hill characterized Harris as a "theoretician and intellectual" who shared his ideas and stimulated others:

His nationalism was fuelled by his readings of the Irish nationalist George Russell (AE) before the First World War, and his idealism and broad conception of his mission were strengthened by his study of theosophy. Harris also believed that the artist had a social role: to speak of human injustice and clarify the highest ideals of the nation ... His published articles were inspirational, providing not prescriptions but enlarged frameworks for growth.⁶³

As an artist associated with the most powerful agent of change in Canada's artistic heritage, Harris left behind him a legacy of invention and innovation. Active in the Federation of Canadian Artists and contributing often to public discourse, Harris' ideas appeared frequently in various Canadian publications on the subject of art, literature and spirituality.⁶⁴

This country cannot be pulled together by politics, by economics, or by any one religion, but it can be greatly aided towards a unity of spirit by and through creative life and activity in the arts.⁶⁵

To Harris art was not a frill but a necessity to life and he was eager to devote his energy to promoting visual artists and their art – in particular, to the revival of the National Gallery's Annual Exhibition, but with a difference.

Endnotes

¹ Distinct from directors of a board, National Gallery Trustees are neither elected nor promoted to the position, but are appointed by government and effectively entrusted with the management, within broad policies, of the assets of the organization. Gallery Trustees are subject to the policies of the central agencies (Treasury Board, Public Works, The Auditor-General, etc.) and report to Parliament through the minister responsible. The National Gallery has, over the course of its history, been in various departments, such as Public Works, Agriculture, Citizenship and Immigration etc. Trustees oversee not only financial accountability but also establish institutional policies and ensure roles and responsibilities are fulfilled in the public interest.

² George Reid (1860-1947), President of the Academy since 1906 and most active in that role in the early formation of the Gallery, led the charge for an advisory council of laymen coupled with a co-operating committee of artists appointed by the Academy. Jean Sutherland Boggs, *The National Gallery of Canada*, (Toronto: 1971), 6.

³ Lord Grey, Governor General, tactfully rejected Reid's proposal, arguing that the Academy's involvement might possibly be perceived as "too much control." The Academy understood and did not seek representation on the Advisory Council. Boggs, *National Gallery*, 6.

⁴ Throughout the Gallery's formative years, Reid, on the part of the Academy, lobbied for the need for "authority" in the administration of the Gallery, at one point taking his concerns directly to the Governor General. Boggs, *National Gallery*, 3-6.

⁵ As reprinted in Canada, *An Act to Incorporate the National Gallery of Canada*, June 6, 1913. The original Act of 1907 reads in part as follows: "the expenditure of the various sums of money is entrusted to the Minister of Public Works and it is important that such money should be spent to the best advantage in securing for the country objects of rare value from the artistic standpoint and in promoting growth and true taste and general interest in public art among the people of Canada." Boggs, *National Gallery*, 8.

⁶ Boggs, *National Gallery*, 6.

⁷ Drummond (Art Association of Montreal, now the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts); Walker (Toronto Art Museum, now the Art Gallery of Ontario and the Royal Ontario Museum). Boggs, *National Gallery*, 6-7.

⁸ Minister of Public Works Sydney Fisher took an active interest in the collection. Martha King recounts several instances of political interference not alleviated through cautionary words: the chair of the Council reminded the Minister that it was their "obligation" to remain focussed, and to "support Canada's leading and emerging artists" and to not purchase art "based on personal preferences." Martha King, "The National Gallery of Canada at Arm's Length from the Government of Canada: A Precarious Balancing Act," M.A. Thesis, (Carleton University: 1996), 10.

⁹ Upon the death of Drummond in 1910, Walker became chairman and Dr. Francis J. Shepherd of Montreal joined the Council. Walker died in March of 1924. Boggs, *National Gallery*, 6-7.

¹⁰ Boggs recounts Walker's unique contribution in terms of the other artists he brought into the collection of the National Gallery, namely such Quebec artists linked with France as Maurice Cullen, Clarence Gagnon, and James Wilson Morrice. Boggs, *National Gallery*, 8-9.

¹¹ On one occasion Boyer, who was described as "interested in practically nothing" blocked a purchase of a Horatio Walker, citing exorbitant prices in comparison to the European market. Walker 'urged' the Minister strongly to not allow this Canadian to go unrepresented in the Gallery's collection: he himself had paid a similar price for the artist's work and was willing "to take it out of the hands of the government" if public criticism should arise. Boggs, *National Gallery*, 7.

¹² Canada, *Act to incorporate the National Gallery of Canada*, 1913.

¹³ \$88,500 was spent on acquisitions the year of incorporation. When two years later three-quarters of the funds were slashed, the Trustees continued to purchase where they could. Boggs, *National Gallery*, 13.

- ¹⁴ Eric Brown became the National Gallery's first full-time curator in 1910, and served as Director from 1912 until his death in 1939. Boggs, *National Gallery*, 8.
- ¹⁵ A.Y. Jackson (1882-1974), original member of the Group of Seven.
- ¹⁶ Boggs, *National Gallery*, 13.
- ¹⁷ 270 works by 108 artists comprised the show juried by Academicians. Only twenty Group of Seven works were represented. Charles Hill, *The Group of Seven: Art for a Nation*, (Toronto: 1995), 143.
- ¹⁸ Eclipsing the Academy's advocacy of new legislation to govern the affairs of the NGC, Walker used his influence derived from the positions he held in other Canadian institutions (CEO and President of the Canadian Bank of Commerce (1886 and 1915 until his retirement in 1915); Chairman of the Board of Governors of the University of Toronto (1910); Chairman of the provisional committee and later President of the Board of Directors of the now-known Art Gallery of Ontario (1900 and 1918); and Chairman of the Board of the Royal Ontario Museum (1912)) to push through the Gallery's 1913 Act. He vehemently opposed even recognizing the contribution of the RCA in the formation of the National Gallery, warning of the dangers of the precedent set by their involvement – namely that of artist-control. The Academy records the revised story, omitting the heated competition and stating simply that the Academy's historical role was, as always, "to aid in the advancement of the National Gallery." Hill, *Group of Seven*, 11; and Boggs, *National Gallery*, 11-12.
- ¹⁹ Boggs, *National Gallery*, 14.
- ²⁰ Boggs, *National Gallery*, 14.
- ²¹ Brown was nicknamed "the art dictator of Canada." Hill, *Group of Seven*, 234.
- ²² Dominion of Canada, *Official Report of the Debates of the House of Commons*, June 13 and June 24, 1924.
- ²³ The budget rose to \$75,000 for 1925-1926, and then to \$135,000 for 1928-1929. King, "Precarious Balance," 20-22.
- ²⁴ The mid-thirties were characterized by low allocations and languishing support by the government. In 1931, 118 artists from the RCA, Ontario Society of Artists, Graphic Arts Society, British Columbia Art Society, Palette & Chisel Club, Vancouver Sketch Club and the Islands Arts & Crafts Society of Victoria, attacked the Gallery again in a petition to the new Prime Minister, Richard Bedford Bennett, claiming "flagrant partisanship" on the part of the Gallery for organizing exhibitions that did "not represent the best in Canadian art." Two years later the government's displeasure with the Gallery led to a meagre budget appropriation of \$25,000. Hill, *Group of Seven*, 280.
- ²⁵ Dominion of Canada, *Debates of the House of Commons*, June 15, 1925.
- ²⁶ The average acquisition grant between 1913 and 1924 was \$35,000. Boggs, *National Gallery*, 14.
- ²⁷ These committees were composed usually of the president of the society whose work was under review, the Director of the National Gallery and a member of the Board of Trustees who might find it possible to be present. National Gallery of Canada Archives (hereafter NGC Archives), *Annual Exhibition of Canadian Painting 1953*, File 5.5-A, Memorandum RE Proposal for the Re-establishment of the Annual Exhibition of Canadian Art at the National Gallery, undated.
- ²⁸ National Gallery of Canada, *Special Exhibition of Canadian Art, 1926*. (Ottawa: 1926), Preface.
- ²⁹ Mackenzie King's term was from 23 October 1935 to 15 November 1948 when St Laurent succeeded until 21 June 1957.
- ³⁰ Paul Litt, *The Muses, the Masses and the Massey Commission*, (Toronto: 1992), 14.
- ³¹ The Federation drew out the effect of the Kingston Artist's Conference, publishing numerous articles in *Canadian Art* and proposing positive action in the arts, and the visual arts community caught on: "A National Program for the Arts in Canada," by Elizabeth Wyn Wood (February/March 1944); "Reconstruction Through the Arts," by Lawren Harris (June/July 1944); "A Community Art Centre in Action," by Richard Crouch (October/November 1944); "Regional Support Promised for Community Centres," (October/November 1944); and "Community Art Centres," (December/January 1944-1945). The role of the Conference in bringing about the Massey/Lévesque Commission and other initiatives will be considered in depth in the next chapter.

³² Claxton sat on the committee appointed by the National Liberal Federation to refine resolutions to be put before the convention in 1948. Although his was at the bottom of the list, its rhetorical content – terms such as “Canadian spirit” – asked for more attention. Yet before the resolution could go before the convention, all references to government aid for the arts were removed. Litt, *The Massey Commission*, 12-13.

³³ From the National Library of Canada database: A royal commission results from a memorandum of a minister of a department, or the Prime Minister, to the Governor-General-in-Council (Cabinet) stating the need for a public inquiry on a specified subject. When approved, this memorandum forms the basis for an Order-in-Council which sets out the terms of reference for the proposed inquiry. It also names the commissioner(s) and usually the statutory authority under which the commission is to operate. In the case of a royal commission, the statutory authority cited in the Order-in-Council is Part I of the Inquiries Act which regulates ‘Public Inquiries’. After the Order-in-Council is passed, a commission appointing the commissioner(s) is issued by letters patent under the Great Seal of Canada. The commission is the formal authority for the commissioner(s) to conduct the inquiry. Commissions granted under the Great Seal of Canada are considered ‘royal’ because they originate with the Crown. In practice, commissions are issued by the Governor General, acting in the name of the Crown, and on the recommendation of the Governor-General-in-Council.

³⁴ It is commonly accepted that Massey was the obvious choice for the position: a personal friend of Claxton’s, he had it all: he was “knowledgeable about cultural affairs, a Liberal, and he was available.” Litt, *The Massey Commission*, 29-30.

³⁵ Massey scholar Claude Bissell argues that King disliked Massey and the special demands of small interest groups: “King’s reply (never put into a written form) can be easily imagined. He had no intention of giving Massey an important responsibility and he had no interest in strengthening activities that he thought of as irritating accretions imposed on government by special interests.” Claude Bissell, *The Imperial Canadian: Vincent Massey in Office*, (Toronto: 1986), 195-196.

³⁶ Litt, *The Massey Commission*, 14-15.

³⁷ While the government had many agendas in supporting a commission to inquire into the arts, (see Litt’s discussion in Chapter 1: The Origins of the Commission, pages 24 through 28), most relevant to this study is their desire to attract the political support of a large section of the population, primarily the educated and the cultural elite.

³⁸ Massey did have other irons in the fire. He had been offered the position of master of Balliol College that fall and was in England in November of 1948 considering that post. Litt, *The Massey Commission*, 15.

³⁹ One example was Claxton’s direct reference to a large segment of the population “who read books,” who would benefit from a review of the arts. Reach them, he argued, win their affections, and the Liberals will have increased their public support by perhaps half a million voters. Litt, *The Massey Commission*, 16.

⁴⁰ Litt, *The Massey Commission*, 40.

⁴¹ Litt, *The Massey Commission*, 32.

⁴² While Neatby’s appointment came as a bit of a surprise due to her youth and gender (as a woman of forty-four she was thought an appropriate reflection of the continuing stereotype of the female-dominated field of the arts), her bilingualism also played a role: the Commission was now more than even in terms of French and English representatives. In contrast, Neatby thought it was her association with Western women’s groups that won her the spot. See Litt, *The Massey Commission*, 33-35.

⁴³ Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences 1949-51 (hereafter Massey/Lévesque Commission), *Report*, (Ottawa: 1951), The Order-in-Council.

⁴⁴ “Nationalists have ... hailed the Massey Commission as one of many examples of Canada’s distinctiveness from the United States ... a conservative temperament that makes Canada a distinctive community in North America and justifies an independent Canadian nationality.” Litt, *The Massey Commission*, 5.

⁴⁵ Laurence Grant studies the historical direction of federal museum policy and notes the various stances the federal government has taken with regards to cultural policy. The 1932 Miers-Markham Report, although not an official policy document and therefore disregarded at the time, essentially recommended

decentralization. Twenty years later the Massey/Lévesque Commission saw the federal museums as the "prime instrument" for bringing assistance to the non-federals – centralization. Laurence Grant, "Canada's Federal Museum Policy: Delectation, Democratization, Deliberation, and Denouement," (Ottawa: 1991).

⁴⁶ National Gallery of Canada, *Submission to the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences*, 1949, 2-3.

⁴⁷ Massey/Lévesque Commission, *Report*, 317.

⁴⁸ Canada, *An Act respecting the National Gallery of Canada*, (Ottawa: 1951).

⁴⁹ Not completely satisfied by the move to Citizenship and Immigration, the status of the Gallery continued to be a hot topic at Board meetings. The Trustees feared that the "peculiar nature of the work of the National Gallery and the fact that it operates under a Board of Trustees would make it impossible to fit into a departmental structure, and regulations which are appropriate to other divisions of departments could not be successfully applied to [them]." As well they worried that the position of the Director had not been properly recognized. National Gallery of Canada Archives, (hereafter NGC Archives), *Board of Trustees: Minutes of Meetings*, File 9.2-B, 531-33 and 544-545.

⁵⁰ Canada, *An Act respecting the National Gallery*.

⁵¹ Robert Ayre, "The Press Debates the Massey Report," *Canadian Art*, Vol. IX, No. 1 (Autumn 1951), 30.

⁵² Ayre, "The Press Debates," 30.

⁵³ National Gallery of Canada, *Annual Report of the Board of Trustees for the Fiscal Year 1951-2*, (Ottawa: 1952), 7.

⁵⁴ Massey/Lévesque Commission, *Report*, 377.

⁵⁵ This of course did not happen and an Artists Advisory Committee became part of the Canada Council when it was eventually established in 1957 (although Endres reinforces that the Committee has no real influence or power). In other areas, however, the Commission followed this idea straight through. Rather than giving aid directly to artists, they gave it to national organizations, boards of 'voluntary arts organizations' and to the restoration and creation of cultural hardware (buildings), etc. Pleas for decentralized support went unheeded, suggestions that were perceived by the Commission as "not always ... clear" in their argument. Robin Endres, "Art and Accumulation: The Canadian State and the Business of Art," *The Canadian State: Political Economy and Political Power*, (Toronto: 1977); and Grant, "Canada's Federal Museum Policy: Delectation, Democratization, Deliberation, and Denouement," 6.

⁵⁶ The National Gallery's 1950s and 1960s Board of Trustees fits this description. Endres, "Art and Accumulation," 431.

⁵⁷ In his chapter entitled "Relations between Elites," John Porter gives a 'musical' display of this practice demonstrating that friends put up friends and family vouches for family and no one gets in between. John Porter, *The Vertical Mosaic: An Analysis of Social Class and Power in Canada*, (Toronto: 1965), 524-525.

⁵⁸ Boggs makes no secret of this practice and even goes so far as to congratulate the institution for its cunning. She recounts the story of how Walker used his corporate reputation to push through, instead of the Academy's, the Gallery's draft for the 1913 legislation. Again, when recounting the contribution made by H.S. Southam to the Board of Trustees of the Gallery, she boasts of his clout: "Southam would have satisfied the 1907 Privy Council's requirements [for a trustee] ... for ... as a member of a family that owned one of Canada's largest newspaper groups, and as a publisher of the influential *Ottawa Citizen*, his requests for assistance for the National Gallery could not easily be ignored." Boggs further recounts that when the Gallery lacked funds for acquisitions, the Southam name and bank account came to the rescue. Boggs, *The National Gallery*, 11-12, 27-28.

⁵⁹ McCurry took over as Director upon the sudden death of Brown in April of 1939. Boggs, *National Gallery*, 39.

⁶⁰ See Martha King's thesis for a recounting of these purchases.

⁶¹ Litt recounts an Ottawa story that Lawren Harris was rejected as a commissioner due to the fear that the Commission would become confused with the families' farming equipment company Massey-Harris, and "thereby confusing national culture with agriculture." Litt, *The Massey Commission*, 32.

⁶² Massey received his BA from the University of Toronto in 1910, another from Balliol College, Oxford, in 1913, and an MA from Balliol in 1918. Among the universities that granted him honorary doctorates are: Bishop's, Aberdeen, Birmingham, California, Columbia, Dalhousie, Liverpool, McGill and McMaster.

⁶³ Hill, *The Group of Seven*, 17.

⁶⁴ *Canadian Art*, *Canadian Forum*, *Canadian Bookman* and *Canadian Theosophist*, as well as many daily newspaper publications are among some of the titles that published essays by Harris between 1911 and 1987. Hill, *The Group of Seven*, 349.

⁶⁵ Harris quoted as President of the Federation of Canadian Artists. Bissell, *The Imperial Canadian*, 199.

CHAPTER TWO

CONCEPTION, INCEPTION AND RECEPTION

Appointed to the Board of the National Gallery of Canada in the spring of 1950, Lawren Harris was present at the sixty-ninth meeting of the Trustees on October 4th, 1950. At that meeting, and in the presence of fellow Trustees H. S. Southam,¹ Jean Chauvin,² Vincent Massey (Chairman of the Board), and the Director, H. O. McCurry, Dr. Robert Newton³ raised a question regarding the Gallery's practice of purchasing contemporary Canadian art. A native of Alberta, Newton observed what he saw as a shortcoming in the collection: specifically he "had a feeling that the Western Provinces were not always sufficiently represented."⁴ The curatorial staff usually recommended acquisitions to the Board of Trustees from works seen in recent exhibitions or studio visits. The Board would then, at regular triannual meetings, vote to purchase. Dr. Newton's concern for the selection of contemporary Canadian works brought before the Board – particularly an unrepresentative selection – indicated an acute awareness of the need to provide a fair, representative and egalitarian mechanism to choose works of art for the national collection.

The Trustees, sharing both Newton's perception of the Canadian collection and the need to address the issue of a better balance of works coming before the Board, resolved to revive a pre-war National Gallery exhibition. It was

decided that the Annual Exhibition of Canadian Art series, held between 1926 and 1933, be restored to ensure “that the selection of pictures to come before the Board would be more representative of the whole country.”⁵ Expressly intended to satisfy “the desire of the Trustees to keep in closer touch with the developments of Canadian Art than was possible in any other way,”⁶ the Annual Exhibition had been a selection of painting, sculpture, and graphics chosen from the annual showings of the national and provincial chartered art societies. An informal committee of three acted as jury: the Director, a member of the Board of Trustees, and a senior member of the society concerned. Each year works were acquired for the national collection, and many became “acknowledged classics of Canadian painting.”⁷ The series satisfied the need for National Gallery authorities to see new work from across the country and, as well, provided an opportunity to purchase from that year’s most acclaimed Canadian artists. A success, the Annual Exhibition came to an end in 1933 due to reduced Depression era budgets.

With the decision to revive the Annual Exhibition, the Board as well unanimously agreed that Lawren Harris should take the lead in its organization and “associate himself with the Director in drawing up a plan for the re-establishment ... as soon as possible.”⁸ Harris completed a proposal that, for the most part, followed the premise of the pre-war Annual Exhibition, yet with the suggestion for a slightly modified selection process – one that would identify the new series with its time and directly respond to the pressures and ideas of the mid-century. Conceived once again as a national buying show, the renewed

Annual Exhibition was intended to enable the National Gallery to consciously expand its collection of Canadian art while, at the same time, respond to current artistic developments and political realities.

First evidence of the newly structured Annual Exhibition – an incomplete and partially illegible record containing the major ideas of Harris' proposal – exists in the handwriting of H.O. McCurry.⁹ Casually entitled "Lawren Harris' informal suggestion for Canadian [Exhibition]," this skeleton of a germinating idea would inform the structure of a series of eight exhibitions that would bring into public discussion the themes of art and nationalism, the artist and community, and the role of the National Gallery. Harris expanded upon his first thoughts in an informal letter to the Director:

What I had in mind for an annual National Gallery Exhibition was a selection of the best work done in Canada each year – say 60 paintings – Maritime Art [Association] select the best there – a committee in Quebec select 10 or 12 there – a committee in Toronto select 15 there – a committee in the prairie provinces select 10 – another committee here select 12 or 15.

Having established the scope and scale of the exhibition, Harris addressed its larger purpose:

[The works] should be assembled by and shown at the National Gallery first, then the entire exhibition travel the country to galleries which can accommodate it, and the National Gallery pay each artist a rental fee for each picture for the time it is on tour.... Such an exhibition would set a standard all across Canada, attract large audiences and be an inspiration to artists generally. [The money] would be well spent by the National Gallery....¹⁰

The crux of Harris' proposal – in fact what set his plan apart from the previous series – was the method of selection. The idea of abandoning a centralized jury of three men and women of considerable power and prestige in favour of five separate regional committees, selected specifically for their knowledge of the area's artistic activity, answered the issue of representation from both sides of the question. Indeed, Harris believed strongly that regional committees were more qualified to evaluate artists from their own areas, and regional artists were better served by a voice from within their own communities. In theory, at least, the exhibition would represent the art of the day: committees would select from their own to together present the 'best work done in Canada each year'.

But not every member of the Board agreed. Newton challenged the sixty-work limit suggested by Harris and supported by the Board as he felt it was too low to enable the different parts of the country to be fairly represented. Feeling that there should be more opportunity for artists to bring work to the attention of the Board, he argued for an exhibition on a more generous scale in terms of both size and participation. He presciently wondered aloud if "it would be practical and justifiable to say that any artist in the country might send in pictures for consideration of the National Gallery."¹¹ The idea of bypassing the chartered art societies in favour of an open exhibition was quickly discouraged by McCurry, who, from his post as Director of the national art institution, stated matter-of-factly the desirability of collaborating with the societies. Harris had determined the maximum number based on the capacity of Canada's regional galleries to

accommodate the touring exhibition: only five or six galleries in Canada – including the National Gallery – could hang an exhibition of sixty works or so at one time. He now further justified the limit by observing that “there are not more than 60 artists of high standard in the country.”¹² For all these reasons, Harris’ exhibition proposal remained intact. But as if foreshadowing the future, Newton’s suggestion of an open show would be heard again in the search for an exhibition format that could meet the differing needs of the many groups concerned.

Harris saw his plan as a simple solution to current and ongoing concerns. There was (and still is) a long-standing criticism among Canada’s visual artists that the collection of the National Gallery fell short of representing the “breadth and diversity” of the nation’s own artists.¹³ While the Gallery’s role has always been clearly defined to foster Canadian artists, it continually received criticism for ‘curatorial’ purchases or exhibitions – selections that reflected more the interests of the small group of directors, ‘curators’, informed trustees and advisors. These concerns, among others circulating within the Canadian cultural sector for years, were articulated by and gained a certain prominence and immediacy through the recommendations of the Massey/Lévesque Commission, and the Trustees sought to respond hastily and with thoughtfulness. While there was agreement on what should be accomplished by the national institution, there was widespread disagreement on how to realize these goals. The return of a Canada-wide juried exhibition was seen as one way of alleviating the tension between the Gallery and

the country's visual artists, yet at the same time, allowed the Trustees to address its immediate political realities.

While the procedures for the Exhibition would both improve the Canadian collection's regional representation and support the country's artists, a third and increasingly important need was also satisfied: that of strengthening the role of the Gallery in Canada's cultural landscape. The money "well spent" by the Gallery would further contribute to the formation of a national artistic "standard," not only through the Ottawa exhibition, but through the Canada-wide tour as well. The enlightened policy of the country's pre-eminent art institution would foster large audiences, inspire regional artists, and draw a thread of unity through the provinces. Through the renewed Annual Exhibition Harris envisioned a means to elevate the status of the National Gallery beyond its token position of figurehead, to one of real national and artistic significance.

The central premise of Harris' proposal can be traced to his years as an activist in the Federation of Canadian Artists (FCA). The FCA was formed to address the issues discussed during André Biéler's groundbreaking 1941 Kingston Conference of Artists, namely the "marginal status" of the artist in Canadian society.¹⁴ Its principle objective was "to unite all Canadian artists, related art workers and interested laymen for mutual support in promoting common aid: the chief of these is to make the arts a creative factor in the national life of Canada and the artists an integral part of society."¹⁵ Although Harris was unable to attend the conference, he sent in his place a written motion backing the formation of a

“confederation” of existing societies. He introduced his formal proposal stating that “the growth of a more highly socialized democracy” would be best achieved “by forming a nation-wide and inclusive organization and by working through that organization to serve the cultural needs of the Canadian people.”¹⁶ These were not empty phrases – Harris believed intensely in the power of the arts.

Harris succeeded Biéler becoming the second president of the FCA in 1944 and, the same year as his election, presented a brief on behalf of the FCA to the Special Committee on Reconstruction and Re-establishment (the Turgeon Committee), entitled ‘A National Plan for the Arts.’ One of fifteen submissions to the House of Commons Committee, the proposal outlined plans to decentralize the National Gallery by establishing a series of government-subsidized community centres for the purpose of supporting the arts and integrating them into Canadian society. Harris discusses a possible re-allocation of funds and a realignment of priorities in an informal pamphlet to the Prime Minister:

If a new large and glorified National gallery is erected to exhibit the entire National collection with the necessary offices, storage and shipping facilities ... [it] would take upwards of a million dollars and its yearly grant to maintain it – centralization.

If however a new National gallery were built with offices, storage and shipping facilities adequate for the decentralization of the National collection and the money thus saved is spent on branches of the National gallery built as part of the community centres of the arts all across Canada would that not serve the Canadian people best[?]

If the above propositions were put to the vote of the Canadian people which do you think they would vote for?¹⁷

The FCA's proposition for an extension of the Gallery beyond its centralized location was both literal and figurative: the community centres plan was based on the idea of redistributing funds and cultural resources throughout Canada rather than concentrating them solely in Ottawa. Beyond the fiscal rearrangement, the FCA proposed an infrastructure in which sub-galleries, headed by the National Gallery, would be located in the widely separated regions of Canada. The FCA's community centres proposal reflected a desire both to make the Gallery's collection a presence in the everyday lives of all Canadians and to place more control of the arts in the hands of the communities, most notably, as Harris would promote, the community of artists. The resulting effect would be the full support and integration of the artist within local communities, as well as nationally. Although Harris' community centres plan was never implemented, the main ideas returned as the basis of the brief by the FCA to the Massey/Lévesque Commission. And while the Commission validated the plan and recommended co-operation between institutions, it failed to get direct results and the call for a re-organization of cultural resources went unheeded.¹⁸

Indeed, as an outspoken activist and consummate idea-man, Harris was constantly talking, writing, and campaigning for the improvement of the arts in Canada. Taking on roles over-and-above those of artist and critic, Harris participated in the Canadian cultural discourse at many levels, and presented his ideas from several points of view. Not one to stand still, Harris examined the issues facing the arts and negotiated concrete solutions and explored possibilities

for seemingly insoluble problems. His accessible writing style reached both laymen and professionals, often convincing the former and challenging the latter. Yet unlike the pragmatic professionals, Harris rarely considered the financial ramifications of his ideas: short-term financial costs seemed unimportant in comparison to the benefits of well-placed funds.

In addition to voicing strong opinions on the responsibility of the National Gallery to all Canadians, Harris too spoke his mind on the imbalance of power and responsibility at the centre of the Canadian art establishment. In his personal notes for a *Canadian Art* article debating public art gallery policy, Harris entitled a section "Art Gallery Directors":

But we should maintain a number of safeguards against the dictatorship of any director or curator.... No director or curator in Canada should be permitted to act as judge and jury of paintings, should ever select...or even hang exhibitions. No one man knows enough and no one man should be placed in so onerous a position. In Canada he would have more or less life and death power over our artists.... Our artists are almost wholly dependent on our public galleries and because of our modest means and a small-scattered population this is likely to remain true for years to come.

Juries, Harris concluded,

... [S]hould include artists [*sic*] representatives from reputable art societies, should maintain absolute control of the selection, an arrogant director and hanging of all exhibitions or the deputizing of others they choose to do so.

The same applies to the purchase of works for the permanent collection and everything else.¹⁹

Backing a balanced policy directed at best meeting the needs of all Canadians, in both life and work Harris consistently lobbied for grass roots solutions. Arguing

for the necessity of the Canadian public to access the National collection or in struggling to equalize class and power relationships. Harris occupied a unique position within Canada's cultural elite at the mid-century mark. Perhaps not an odd stance for an artist, it was an interesting one considering Harris' high political contacts, wide circle of friends and colleagues, undeniable personal influence, and vast personal wealth.

Harris' proposal for a renewed Annual Exhibition, worded in much the same language André Biéler used in addressing the artists gathered at Queen's University more than a decade before, was brought up formally at the next meeting of the Board of Trustees. In Harris' absence, McCurry read his proposal alongside his own memorandum, and the Board was convinced of the "far-reaching" implications of the plan for artists. It was "agreed that the exhibition should be developed along the lines suggested."²⁰ It was. Tentative plans for the renewed Annual Exhibition were laid out in a January 1951 memorandum to Charles Comfort²¹, the Gallery's Chief Curator of Canadian Art:

In order to meet the very pronounced desire that all sections of the country should be adequately represented, the country might be divided into areas: (1) Maritime Provinces, (2) Quebec, (3) Ontario, (4) Prairie Provinces, (5) British Columbia; and the number of sections from each area could be based to some extent on the population of each with some special consideration for art centres like Toronto and Montreal.... The exhibition would be opened in Ottawa at the National Gallery and toured to centres possessing grade 'A' galleries....²²

This outline contained all the major elements of the proposal accepted by the Board two months earlier, yet with one critical amendment: it was McCurry himself who proposed that the representation of areas be based on population.²³

Although Harris was absent from the February 15th meeting of the Board of Trustees where the suggestion to select works according to population distribution was first introduced, McCurry had informed Harris of his intention the day before:

I like the idea of having an exhibition of not more than 60 pictures, but how these are to be chosen will present some difficulty. I made out a suggestion based on population with a little bias toward the chief art centres....²⁴

This began a very long and serious discourse between Harris and McCurry in their respective roles of trustee and artist, gallery director and bureaucrat, to define the nature of the exhibition. While the official procedures centred on the idea of presenting a fair allotment of works guaranteed by a population-artwork ratio, Harris challenged the notion of an exhibition based on quotas and argued strongly for presenting rather the best show possible, regardless of calculable regional distribution. As unofficial mediator, McCurry found himself pulled by both factors: while his proposal claimed to protect provincial quotas, he also offered flexibility to respond to the principal art centres of the day. Balancing regionalism and merit, the political and the artistic, he backed a representation of areas “more or less” based on population, “but not too rigidly.”²⁵ The proposal

contained enough loopholes to satisfy even the most zealous idealist, but not Harris.

Harris conceded that a selection based on population distribution might forestall criticism, yet he maintained that it would not necessarily assure the best exhibition possible. He felt that representations from certain parts of the country would “not measure up to the best,” and added somewhat patronizingly that perhaps the exhibition would “stimulate them to do better.”²⁶ Harris’ hometown of Vancouver was the example he used to illustrate his point of a city meriting “a slight bias” in numbers due to its ability to inspire less capable regions: “This isn’t prejudice on my part. It is remarkable the amount of really outstanding painting being done here.”²⁷ In fact it was this city’s high allotments that first prompted McCurry to design the exhibition numbers according to population:

As to the allotment of pictures for each area, I think your suggestions are reasonable with the exception of British Columbia. If Ontario and Quebec are to have 16 paintings each (populations 4,512,000 and 3,976,000 respectively) then British Columbia with a quota of 15 pictures and a population of 1,138,000 will be hard to defend.²⁸

Harris supported his position of striving for the best show possible by suggesting not only an increase in numbers, as in the case of British Columbia’s “bias,” but also a decrease in certain regions. Harris explained to McCurry: “... what I know of the painting being done in the Maritimes and the prairie provinces would lead me to select as many from B.C. as from the Maritimes and prairies together – if it is a question of merit. How is it to be decided?”²⁹

That was the question. Harris' vision for the exhibition differed ideologically from the political realities guiding McCurry, who, as Director of the National Gallery had to acknowledge all regions of Canada. Harris considered it to be not only natural but quite necessary to promote, through increased representation, those regions producing the best art. He challenged McCurry's agenda, yet never doubted his own:

Do we select paintings according to the population of the different regions or according to the merit of the work.... Are there certain considerations, because the National Gallery is a Dominion institution, that dictate a ratio according to population?³⁰

Like a dog with a bone, Harris would not relent. He could not conceive of submitting to forces other than those that he believed would provide an exhibition worthy of national status. He continued to reiterate his unyielding convictions in discussions and letters, and even proposed to contact each Trustee separately for their opinion. Robert Newton entered the discussion, and stood with McCurry:

I think the allocation to the different provinces should be roughly in proportion to population, to avoid wranglings and heartburnings. No doubt Mr. Harris tried to suggest allocations on the basis of the volume of artistic production, but residents of provinces which have low allocations might not agree with him!³¹

McCurry responded with undisguised irony:

I am trying to persuade Lawren Harris that we should keep an eye on population in determining the representation of each region, but he argues for what he calls artistic merit. I suspect that this quality tends to increase if you are domiciled in the Coast Province!³²

In the end there would seem to be no common ground. Although McCurry agreed with Harris on some level, he did not intend to be browbeaten:

I agree that the pictures should be selected on merit entirely, but judging from past experiences, the exhibition will attract a considerable amount of public attention and the press will be sure to analyse the representations of each region. All I think it is necessary to do is keep an eye on the comparative populations so that we do not do too much violence to what the public expects.³³

Bound by their desire to have a defensible case and conscious of their responsibilities and vulnerabilities, the Board of Trustees' opted for McCurry's method. In only twelve months the simple idea for an exhibition had gestated into a major ideological discussion going straight to the heart of issues that the exhibition itself was attempting to address: namely, the democratic notion of nation-wide access to the national institution. The argument of merit versus quota – the idealism of Harris versus the pragmatism of McCurry – would recur and become a hallmark of the exhibition, inevitably plaguing its every manifestation.

With the broad objectives of the exhibition in place, the lengthy process of working out the details of its execution began. Negotiations amongst the members of the Board of Trustees wavered back and forth on certain points. While the pre-war exhibition had been in the media of painting, sculpture, and graphic arts simultaneously, Harris pushed for a separation of media and proposed to hold the show in three sections, feeling that works on paper and sculptures would detract from oils. While exhibitions of the remaining two media were initially planned, they never came to fruition, abandoned for financial reasons. The Trustees, following conventions in place since the Renaissance, considered painting the

more important medium to support. On the issue of juries, Harris capped the number of members in each area at three, yet this too would change as the steady stream of proposed jurors increased. An early Harris proposal, that financial compensation be awarded to artists as 'rental fees' for their works, was passed by the Trustees only to be reversed by the Treasury Board of the Government of Canada after the first year to remove any expectation of on-going government financial support for individual Canadian artists.³⁴ Inclusion in a Canada-wide juried exhibition was honour enough! And money was in short supply in an institution suffering from inadequate staff, equipment, and accommodation: soon the rising cost of the Annual Exhibition itself would come under fire.

The timing of the inaugural exhibition offered yet another subject for ongoing discussions between Harris and his fellow Trustees. Harris suggested that the series run in accordance with the exhibition year, namely from the early fall to the late spring of the next, and be synchronized with the yearly meetings of the Board to facilitate the purchase of pictures for the national collection. He pushed quite vehemently for an October 1952 date, assuring the Board that the show could be organized in such a short period of time, if they got to work on it "right away." In a personal correspondence to Board Chairman Vincent Massey, Harris revealed one motive for the haste: "In view of the country wide response to 'the Massey report' I am convinced that we should start the yearly National Gallery Exhibition next year."³⁵ The Board agreed, but the deadline would prove to be unrealistic and the exhibition was postponed until the following year.

Nevertheless, there is a definite sense of urgency in the discussions. Not only was the content of the exhibition a serious issue, so was the immediate implementation of the plan.

The chief difficulty, in fact what caused the most paperwork to be passed back and forth between Harris, McCurry, and the Board, was the co-ordination of the selection committees. Deciding on 'quotas' by population was one thing, but choosing regional selection committees was another. While Harris saw this as simply another stage in the planning of the exhibition, the Trustees soon realized that it was far more. It was here that complex personal politics played their most active role. Partiality was a rampant phenomenon, coupled with favouritism and even nepotism. The likes and dislikes of certain personalities were as seriously considered as more relevant professional qualifications.³⁶

It was primarily Harris and McCurry who, with input and direction from the Board, made the majority of proposals for committee members.³⁷ The two based their recommendations chiefly on the status and level of activity of the individual in his or her region, with the tendency being to select members from local university or college faculties, the boards of provincial or regional galleries, and nationally recognized regional artists. Newton, the voice of egalitarianism in the process thus far, quickly identified what he saw as a flaw in the selection process. He noted that often it was practicing artists who served in these teaching and administrative capacities, and the result of drawing from these groups was a series of committees with artist majorities selecting from their own work. He

challenged not only the number of artists serving, but felt that any artist on a selection committee should be disqualified from competition.³⁸ The Board disagreed with Newton on both points, and felt strongly that the elimination from competition of any artist serving on a committee would be too great a loss for the exhibition. The format for selection was not amended – the committees remained artist-dominated and serving artists were deemed eligible to compete.

To supplement the selection committees, honorary advisory boards were set up in certain regions to facilitate the recommendation of artists of the area. This was notably the case with the Alberta committee for the Prairie Provinces where four names were unofficially added to the formal committee of three. The result was a tight circle of friends and colleagues – six out of the seven advisors were members of the Edmonton Visual Arts Board. Although only two were voting members, this imbalance of expectation eroded confidence in the impartiality of the selection process.

These arrangements to establish selection committees might have raised serious controversy had the public known that nine official committee members – at least one artist from each committee with the sole exception of Alberta – had works exhibited in the show.³⁹ Throughout the organization of the exhibition, the Trustees had concealed the names of the committee members in favour of anonymous juries. Newton had convinced his colleagues to adopt the suggestion of H.G. Glyde, Chairman of the Edmonton Visual Arts Board. Glyde had argued that a selection committee should remain a “secret panel to avoid petty

jealousies.”⁴⁰ This was no surprise considering his own vulnerability to criticism. Newton marked all his correspondences confidential from that point on, although he was certain the information would leak out. In the Annual Exhibition catalogue, the names were once again purposely omitted. It was an exclusion that did not go unnoticed by either the public or the artists.

Increasingly it became apparent that the Board had not thoroughly enough considered the weight of inherent bias in the decisions of the jurors. In each region, the jury was voting openly not only on the work of a colleague, but in his or her presence. In British Columbia for example, Harris had proposed the members of the Board of the Vancouver Art Gallery, all of whom were artists. To offset any criticisms, Harris suggested himself as a non-voting chair. Professionalism aside, it would be impossible to ask a committee comprised of colleagues, not to mention peers and friends, to make such hard choices. Harris' wife was one of the artists chosen for the exhibition, and although she herself was not on the committee, the appearance of impropriety is undeniable.

Intensifying the appearance of impropriety was a certain predisposed mindset characteristic of this small pool from which committees were drawn. Even from the beginning, when the Trustees chose to select artists from the recognized art societies, there was an air of exclusivity. By using such criteria as the basis for selection, the Board knew full well the names that would most likely appear on the final jury. In the same manner, it was as if the selection process of the committees assured the inclusion of works by certain artists. Harris had

reasoned that the Board of the Vancouver Art Gallery was not only “the logical selection committee but the best available” seeing that “all paintings of any merit whatsoever painted anywhere in BC” were held by the Gallery.⁴¹ In accepting this group as a selection committee, the Trustees were proscribing the selection of artwork. This pattern followed for most of the committees – men and women were selected for the type of decisions they were likely to make, with very few surprises. This “representative” survey of art in Canada was bound from the onset to be a confirmation of the practice of established contemporary artists, simply shuffled according to region, and given a new title.

The Trustees were responsible not only to the community of artists, but also to the country as a whole: each region had to be represented in the number of works shown, and in the demographics of the committee members. It is no wonder McCurry made the initial suggestion to allocate the distribution of representation as a ratio to population, regardless of the compromise to the quality of the show Harris foresaw. At all times accountable to the powers above and to the Board, McCurry felt the pressure applied by all sides, particularly from the provinces.

Indeed the choice of members of the selection committees was one of the weakest points in the Gallery’s presentation of the exhibition. While McCurry took great pains to ‘manage’ his end of the preparations, it was impossible to prevent discontent on all fronts. The unique status of Canada’s newest province, Newfoundland, created one such contentious issue. The Director’s comments

represented the general consensus in Ottawa: “[W]hat are we to do about Newfoundland? I know there are very few important painters there, but I am certain they will expect to be represented. Would it be necessary for someone to go there?”⁴² In the end, Newfoundland was included with the Maritimes under the rule of fair representation, if not for any perceived artistic achievement. It was visited, yet under quite different conditions from the other regions.

It was Harris’ son, Lawren P. Harris, President of the School of Fine and Applied Arts at Mount Allison University in Sackville, New Brunswick, who was selected to head the Maritime committee. Sensitive to the region, he accepted the position of chair, yet cautioned against inviting Halifax artist and Mount Allison faculty member Alex Colville to serve as well: “I believe that other Maritime painters would protest that too much ‘authority’ was centred in one place.”⁴³ McCurry agreed, and rounded out the committee with various other East Coast authorities, coupling Harris Jr. with new National Gallery Trustee Ross Flemington and Donald Mackay, Principal of the Nova Scotia College of Art. MacKay accepted McCurry’s request to serve, yet with a disclaimer:

In acceptance I feel I should mention that the Maritime provinces are not a political entity and the provincial jealousy in art circles is apt to have a certain regional bias. In view of this you will understand, when I mention that Nova Scotia artists are very apt to consider that the jury is somewhat over weight in favour of New Brunswick.⁴⁴

Harris Jr. agreed with his father that merit should guide the selections. In his acceptance letter to McCurry he states:

There would appear to be only five Maritime painters whose work can claim any degree of recognition outside of this immediate region.... Another consideration [is] to dispense with a Committee ... as so few are apparently involved, and write a circular letter to each participant you feel should be invited.⁴⁵

The idea of proceeding differently in the Maritimes was rejected by McCurry, who politely responded to Harris Jr. that although it would be a “delicate operation ... we must try to make everybody as happy as possible about it.”⁴⁶ A good intention, yet impossible to realize.

While the Maritime committee made most decisions as a group, Newfoundland was the exception: Harris Jr. went alone to that province and chose three artists. In his own words he admitted ignorance, stating that he knew “absolutely nothing whatsoever” about Newfoundland painters.⁴⁷ The residents of the province found Harris Jr.’s visit “perplexing,” to say the least:

Perhaps the strangest is the fact that while other parts of Canada have the privilege of submitting work to a committee of judges, Newfoundland’s entries have been chosen by one man, and as far as the general public knows, from work that is far from representative.⁴⁸

Cutting corners to save time and money, the Gallery placed itself directly in the line of criticism – regional representation by knowledgeable jurors seems not to have included all of the East Coast, or at least Newfoundland. While McCurry made every effort to manage his delicate position and preserve the credibility of the Gallery in determining the fairest procedure for selection, he failed in the final round.

Everyone involved in the planning of the Annual Exhibition could be held accountable for its flaws: Harris, voice of the rights of Canadian artists, at least a selected few; McCurry, mediator and first-line of bureaucratic defence; and the Trustees, accountable for the policies of Canada's pre-eminent art museum. From elite positions, and with the goal of developing Canada's visual arts, these men advanced what they saw as a viable solution. The Board, fully realizing the seriousness of the role entrusted to each regional committee, was attempting in their selections of jurors to meet the expectations of many diverse groups while at the same time assuring the achievement of their own goal: the formation of an inclusive national collection. Every aspect of the selection process was subject to public and professional scrutiny. At the most basic level artists saw the exhibition as the opportunity to have their works seen not only by the National Gallery but by the entire country as well. The Gallery was hosting the 'show of the year', promising to select and present the best art in Canada for 1953, and artists wanted their place in the spotlight. It is an understatement that the Trustees had undertaken a project of high and far-reaching expectations. During those months of idealistic conceptualization and planning, it did not occur to the Board, McCurry, or to Harris, that a truly national exhibition was nothing more than a dream – it would in fact prove to be an elusive political and artistic utopian goal.

The Annual Exhibition of Canadian Painting opened at the National Gallery of Canada on March 10th, 1953, for a twenty-seven day run. While preliminary plans had capped the exhibition at sixty, the final show featured

seventy-seven artists, with one work each dating from the last two years. It seems that a measure of artistic merit won out in the end, and each region consistently surpassed its allotment.⁴⁹ McCurry had been right, however, to be wary of Harris' bias towards British Columbia. The province secured sixteen places in the final exhibition, as many as Quebec or the three Prairie Provinces combined, at one quarter the population. Major artistic centres drew the most works: Vancouver dominated the representation with an allotment of almost twenty-percent, followed by Toronto and Montreal at eighteen-percent each. Artists from twenty cities were honoured in an exhibition that was advertised to the Canadian public as representative of the entire country.

The final phase of Harris' plan was the Canada-wide circulation of the Annual Exhibition. More than any other element of the project, the travelling segment was the most direct fulfilment of the recommendations of the Massey/Lévesque Commission:

That the present services of travelling exhibitions organized or sent out by the National Gallery be developed and extended as far as it is consistent with the safety of the collection.⁵⁰

Conceived during the Second World War when the lack of accommodation literally forced the National Gallery on the road, touring exhibition programs played an important role in facilitating access to the national collection. The Massey/Lévesque Commission recommendations affirmed the importance of the practice. Just as demographics played a crucial role in setting the 'quotas' and

hometowns were considered in selecting members for the regional committees, so too now were dates and venues weighed against possible criticisms.

McCurry, in his role of keeper of the political peace, found it his responsibility to monitor the distribution of the exhibition in Canada. He approved a tentative itinerary in May of 1953, one month after the exhibition closed in Ottawa. The western provinces, which had been judged from the onset as not being adequately represented in the National Gallery collection, secured first-pick as the ten venues were meticulously laid out and booked. While at the time McCurry recalled "what the Trustees desire[d] to accomplish," and flagged the fact that certain centres were receiving the exhibition for longer periods of time than others, he approved the schedule based on a one-time exception, and as long as the practice did not constitute a precedent: "[T]his is a definite breach of the regulations, but perhaps ... we might agree to it."⁵¹ The tentative schedule, with only minor amendments, became the final outline.

At all times extremely conscious of the parameters and goals set out by the Trustees at the onset of the exhibition, McCurry carefully negotiated the dates and massaged the travelling schedule to fit those ends. Each centre was sure to compare itself to the others, and McCurry worked hard to even out the tour's distribution. Negative criticism on any level, against any part of the show, would thwart one premise of the exhibition: to bring the National Gallery to Canadians.

Oddly enough, the exhibition did not immediately begin to travel once its showing ended in Ottawa. Four months passed before it opened at the Winnipeg

Art Gallery, its only venue in Manitoba. From there, it travelled directly to Regina College, Saskatchewan, and then to two separate locations in Edmonton, Alberta. After a brief return to Saskatchewan, and then back to Alberta, the exhibition found itself, after two months of rest, in British Columbia for its finale. From September 1953, until the following August, the show logged just over two hundred exhibition days, with its provincial stops as follows: Ontario 27; Manitoba 21, Saskatchewan 34; Alberta 58; and British Columbia 68. Neither the province of Quebec nor the Maritimes received the show.

Alan Jarvis,⁵² McCurry's successor as Director of the National Gallery, would later claim that bad planning alone caused the imbalance of the 1953 travelling exhibition schedule. In a conciliatory letter sent out to galleries proposed for the tour of the 1955 exhibition, Jarvis explained that from its inception, the exhibition was intended to visit both coasts:

When the Annual Exhibition of 1953 ... went on tour, no limitation was placed on the length of individual showings; and it was returned from a tour of Western galleries too late in the season to go to the East.⁵³

This statement was a blatant cover-up of the shortcomings of the tour of the previous exhibition. From the beginning the Gallery had treated the Maritime Provinces as an exception. McCurry had authorized the dates of the travelling schedule well in advance, and made no plans for venues to the east; if arrangements were to be made at a later time, they were never alluded to and never materialized, even if opportunities did. For six of its twelve-month run the

exhibition remained in storage. McCurry permitted the four-month delay before leaving Ottawa, and later approved alterations to the schedule that forced a two-month storage period prior to the final venue in British Columbia.

It seems that the Gallery traded off Quebec and the Maritimes for the opportunity to show at the Vancouver Art Gallery, for it was this last-minute change that caused the exhibition's delay in returning to Ottawa. The VAG, unable to take the show for the month of February 1953 as was initially planned, was given instead a one-month time slot at the end of the summer. This reshuffling enabled the inclusion of this important art centre, yet prevented the scheduled spring Western closing date. The organizers weighed the benefits and drawbacks of each option, and it was decided that the Vancouver Gallery, from where the largest percentage of works in the exhibition originated, was a venue that could not be missed. By ignoring the eastern provinces and downplaying their right to receive the exhibition, the National Gallery alienated the region's artists. The sting of this error in judgement was enough to spur the Trustees on to attempt more balanced exhibition schedules in future showings of the Annual Exhibition.⁵⁴

In the press the exhibition received positive responses and only minor criticisms. There was no reference to the lack of eastern exposure, and needless to say the majority of articles came from the west, their voices brimming with nationalistic pride. Cities whose artists claimed high representations were the first

to congratulate the National Gallery. The city of Winnipeg, ranked fourth with almost eight percent of the country's representation, reported:

The current exhibition ... testifies to the excellent relations, which have been built up between the National Gallery and the gallery here.... The National Gallery took a rather bold course in collecting this exhibition ... [and] as a whole the exhibition eminently justifies the method of selection.⁵⁵

Only one article alludes to the central premise of the exhibition noting the tenacious attempt by the National Gallery to fulfil a highly visible need. Dr. Hilda Neatby, one of the four Commissioners who served with Vincent Massey on the Royal Commission, commented on the Annual Exhibition:

Dr. Neatby spoke briefly of the place of the National [G]allery in the cultural life of Canada ... she had seen some of the difficulties and problems that the National Gallery encounters in its work.... Dr. Neatby discussed the problems of the practicing artist in Canada. First he must earn a living which means that people must buy his pictures, but the main problem is to enlist sympathetic and understanding consideration of what he is trying to do.⁵⁶

Indeed the primary impetus for the Annual Exhibition was the overt support of the Canadian artist. Yet the Gallery was seeking not only to offer opportunity, but to claim reward as well. The Trustees saw in Harris' proposal a major public relations strategy designed to enlist the support of the artist and the public in elevating the standing of the institution within Canada. Overall, the Board seemed satisfied with the results, purchasing eight works from the exhibition. Alongside the names of the artists, the titles and dates of their works, also published in the catalogue was each artist's native region – it was an impressive display of diversity. Yet fortunately the Gallery did not highlight the

purchases made from the exhibition for if any artist was paying close attention they would have surely noticed that only three provinces were represented: British Columbia with four, Ontario with three, and New Brunswick with one. While to the Canadian public this might have seemed a one-sided purchasing policy, to the Trustees it was all part of the balance of the collection Robert Newton had spoke of three years earlier. The western provinces, at least British Columbia, had truly had their revenge, although arguably at the expense of the other provinces.

McCurry, embarrassed by his critics and frustrated by the failures implicit in an impossible task, defended himself: "I hope we will be able to do something different next year.... I think we should return to our old practice, which worked very well. Lawren's notions were never practical and the cost is going to be terrific."⁵⁷ In spite of this statement, and motivated by the initial reasons for the resurrection of the Annual Exhibition, the Trustees, in spite of McCurry's opinion, kept the procedures intact in the following year. The National Gallery's 1953 Annual Report reported on the re-establishment of the Annual Exhibition series, specifically highlighting the new procedures:

This year ... the Trustees decided to test a new method.... The relative merits of the two systems have yet to be gauged, and the best method for securing the best works produced in the country may still remain to be worked out.⁵⁸

This statement would be a common one throughout the fifteen year-run of the series. The impossibility of 'perfecting' suitable procedures would contribute to the exhibition's eventual demise, but first as an annual event and then every two

years, the Biennial Exhibition of Canadian Art took its place as the most important exhibition of contemporary Canadian art.

Endnotes

- ¹ Harry Stevenson Southam is best known as the heir to the family-owned publishing company Southam Company Ltd., and as publisher of "The Citizen," Ottawa. He served as a Trustee for almost twenty years before he replaced Vincent Massey as Chairman for a term of one year in 1952. A significant patron of the arts, possessing one of the finest private collections of painting in Canada, he often donated works to the Gallery's collection. *The Canadian Who's Who: A Biographical Dictionary of Notable Men and Women*, vol. vi, 1952-1954, (Toronto: Trans-Canada Press), 993.
- ² Jean Chauvin, a publisher and writer, was educated, lived, and worked in Montreal where he served as a Honorary Councillor of the Museum of Fine Arts. Chauvin served as a Trustee of the National Gallery until his death in late October 1958. *Who's Who*, 1955-1957, 190.
- ³ When Dr. Robert Newton was appointed to the Board of Trustees of the National Gallery of Canada in 1950, he had just resigned his post as the President of the University of Alberta. Previous to that he had held several high-ranking positions within major institutions: Dean of Agriculture, University of Alberta (1940-1941); Acting Director (1928-1932) and Director (1932-1940), Division of Biology and Agriculture, National Research Council of Canada; Professor of Plant Biochemistry and Head of the Department of Field Crops, University of Alberta (1924-1932). *Who's Who*, 1952-1954, 799.
- ⁴ National Gallery of Canada Archives. (hereafter NGC Archives), *Board of Trustees: Minutes of Meetings*, File 9.2-B, 504-505.
- ⁵ NGC Archives, *Board of Trustees*, 504-505.
- ⁶ National Gallery of Canada, *Annual Exhibition of Canadian Art 1933*, (Ottawa: 1933), 3.
- ⁷ The catalogue of the 1953 exhibition cites several such past purchases: Emily Carr's *Blunden Harbour*, Arthur Lismer's *September Gale*, Prudence Heward's *Rollande*, J.E.H. MacDonald's *Autumn in Algoma*, etc. NGC, *Annual Exhibition 1953*, Foreword.
- ⁸ NGC Archives, *Board of Trustees*, 504-505.
- ⁹ I place McCurry's hand written letter first in the sequence of the Annual Exhibition records for several reasons: (1) its physical placement in the National Gallery's meticulous archival records; (2) the informal nature of the document (hand written, in pencil, and on scrap paper); and (3) the fact that the Harris letter to follow alludes in tone to a prior discussion. I conclude the McCurry document to be perhaps the result of an early meeting or telephone conversation with Harris before more formal procedures were laid out. NGC Archives, *Annual Exhibition of Canadian Painting 1953*, File 5.5-A, Internal Memorandum from H.O. McCurry to Brett, administrative assistant, undated.
- ¹⁰ NGC Archives, *Annual Exhibition 1953*, L. Harris to unknown, November 1950.
- ¹¹ NGC Archives, *Board of Trustees*, 517-518.
- ¹² NGC Archives, *Annual Exhibition 1953*, L. Harris to unknown, undated.
- ¹³ Joyce Zemans discusses the role of the National Gallery in the context of national cultural institutions and while she credits the Gallery with an outstanding collection, she at the same time recognizes the on-going struggle to properly represent Canadian artists. Joyce Zemans, "The Essential Role of National Cultural Institutions," *Beyond Quebec: Taking Stock of Canada*, (Montreal: 1995).
- ¹⁴ Paul Litt, *The Muses, the Masses and the Massey Commission*, (Toronto: 1992), 22.
- ¹⁵ Frances K. Smith, *André Biéler: An Artist's Life and Times*, (Toronto: 1980), 93.
- ¹⁶ Agnes Etherington Art Centre. A reprint of the *Proceedings of the 1941 Kingston Artists' Conference*, (Kingston: 1941), 9.
- ¹⁷ National Archives of Canada (hereafter NAC), *Lawren S. Harris Papers*, MG 30 D 208, Volume 5-1, Draft Document for "The New Master Plan for Ottawa", undated.
- ¹⁸ In the 1970s the idea of a "network" of museums resurfaced, this time proposed by the federal government through the National Museums Policy (1972) of the National Museum's Corporation (1967 until 1990). And so after surviving almost half a decade, through the FCA, the Commission, the National

Gallery and the then lastly through the National Museums, Harris' idea for a synchronized system of resources and relationships between galleries and museums was at last temporarily realized.

- ¹⁹ NAC, *Lawren S. Harris Papers*, Volume 4, Draft Document, undated. For the full article see Lawren Harris and E.R. Hunter, "A Debate on Public Art Gallery Policy," *Canadian Art*, Vol. VII, No 4 (Summer 1950), 147-151.
- ²⁰ NGC Archives, *Board of Trustees*, 517-518.
- ²¹ Charles Fraser Comfort was Director of the National Gallery between 1960 and 1965.
- ²² NGC Archives, *Annual Exhibition 1953*, unknown to C. Comfort, 30 January 1951.
- ²³ NGC Archives, *Board of Trustees*, 517-518.
- ²⁴ NGC Archives, *Annual Exhibition 1953*, H.O. McCurry to L. Harris, 14 February 1951.
- ²⁵ NGC Archives, *Board of Trustees*, 517-518.
- ²⁶ NGC Archives, *Annual Exhibition 1953*, L. Harris to H.O. McCurry, 5 March 1951.
- ²⁷ NGC Archives, *Annual Exhibition 1953*, L. Harris to H.O. McCurry, 5 March 1951.
- ²⁸ NGC Archives, *Annual Exhibition 1953*, H.O. McCurry to L. Harris, 4 December 1951.
- ²⁹ NGC Archives, *Annual Exhibition 1953*, L. Harris to H.O. McCurry, 10 December 1951.
- ³⁰ NGC Archives, *Annual Exhibition 1953*, L. Harris to H.O. McCurry, 10 December 1951.
- ³¹ NGC Archives, *Annual Exhibition 1953*, R. Newton to H.O. McCurry, 11 December 1951.
- ³² NGC Archives, *Annual Exhibition 1953*, H.O. McCurry to R. Newton, 13 December 1951.
- ³³ NGC Archives, *Annual Exhibition 1953*, H.O. McCurry to L. Harris, 13 December 1951.
- ³⁴ NGC Archives, *First Biennial Exhibition of Canadian Painting 1955*, File 5.5-B, H.O. McCurry to L. Harris, 14 January 1954.
- ³⁵ NGC Archives, *Annual Exhibition 1953*, L. Harris to V. Massey, 25 November 1951.
- ³⁶ Ontario juror A.Y. Jackson: "I don't care a hell of a lot about your committee. Douglas Duncan nurses along about five or six artists and has no real interest in others. Key has arbitrary & narrow views and thinks he is an authority. He persuaded the gallery recently to buy a large Goody Roberts, and JJ Vaughn to buy another. Goody can't paint huge pictures. They are only small ones blown up. The committee voted to include a Comfort, a very poor one, and one of mine which I did not want to have included. NGC Archives, *Annual Exhibition 1953*, A.Y. Jackson to H.O. McCurry, 18 January 1953.
- ³⁷ See Appendix I for Regional Committee Members.
- ³⁸ NGC Archives, *Annual Exhibition 1953*, R. Newton to H.O. McCurry, 11 December 1951.
- ³⁹ Committee artists with works in the show: Ontario: A.Y. Jackson, Charles Comfort; Quebec: Arthur Lismer; British Columbia: John Delisle Parker; Saskatchewan: Kenneth Lochhead; Manitoba: Alvan C. Eastman, LeMoine L. Fitzgerald; Maritimes: Lawren P. Harris, D.C. Mackay. NGC Archives, *Annual Exhibition 1953*, Internal Document, undated.
- ⁴⁰ NGC Archives, *Annual Exhibition 1953*, R. Newton to H.O. McCurry, 28 December 1951.
- ⁴¹ NGC Archives, *Annual Exhibition 1953*, L. Harris to H.O. McCurry, 10 December 1951.
- ⁴² NGC Archives, *Annual Exhibition 1953*, H.O. McCurry to Lawren P. Harris, 15 September 1952.
- ⁴³ Alex Colville had served on the faculty of Mount Allison since 1946. He resigned in 1963 to paint full-time.
- ⁴⁴ NGC Archives, *Annual Exhibition 1953*, D. Mackay to H.O. McCurry, 5 December 1952.
- ⁴⁵ NGC Archives, *Annual Exhibition 1953*, Lawren P. Harris to H.O. McCurry, 16 September 1952.
- ⁴⁶ NGC Archives, *Annual Exhibition 1953*, H.O. McCurry to Lawren P. Harris, 15 September 1952.
- ⁴⁷ NGC Archives, *Annual Exhibition 1953*, Lawren P. Harris to H.O. McCurry, September 16, 1952.
- ⁴⁸ NGC Archives, *Annual Exhibition 1953*, E.L. Ball to H.O. McCurry, 29 January 1953.
- ⁴⁹ The regional allotment numbers varied often throughout the planning of the exhibition, and there was no final decision recorded, but the last estimates documented, for a total of 64 works: Maritime Provinces 8; Quebec 16; Ontario 16; Prairie Provinces 12; British Columbia 12. The final distribution, for a total of 77 works: Maritime Provinces 11; Quebec 16; Ontario 18; Prairie Provinces 16; British Columbia 16. NGC Archives, *Annual Exhibition 1953*, L. Harris to H.O. McCurry, 17 May 1952.

⁵⁰ Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences 1949-1951, *Report* (hereafter Massey/Lévesque Commission), (Ottawa: 1951), 315.

⁵¹ NGC Archives, *Annual Exhibition 1953*, H.O. McCurry to S. Key, Ontario committee member, 7 May 1953.

⁵² Jarvis was Director of the National Gallery from May 1955 to 1959.

⁵³ NGC Archives, *First Biennial 1955*, Form Letter by A. Jarvis, 17 May 1955.

⁵⁴ Institutional memory lapsed in 1989. Described in the foreword of the catalogue as "a thoughtfully selected exhibition which recognizes the achievement of some of the country's best artists," the Canadian Biennial of Contemporary Art fell short of including artists from the East. Literally too, the catalogue's cover image displayed a truncated map that ran off the side after New Brunswick and ended there. Diana Nemiroff, *Canadian Biennial of Contemporary Art*, (Ottawa: 1989), 6.

⁵⁵ NCG Archives, *Clipping File: Annual Exhibition of Canadian Painting 1953*, "Canadian Painting in 1953," by Randolph Patton in the *Winnipeg Tribune*, 9 September 1953.

⁵⁶ NCG Archives, *Clipping File 1953*, R. Patton, "At the Art Centre," in the *Saskatoon Star Phoenix*, 16 December 1953.

⁵⁷ NGC Archives, *Annual Exhibition 1953*, H.O. McCurry to A.Y. Jackson, 23 January 1953.

⁵⁸ NGC, *Annual Report of the Board of Trustees for the Fiscal Year 1952-3*, (Ottawa: 1953), 12.

CHAPTER THREE

MINOR SUCCESSES AND MAJOR SUCCESSORS

The First Biennial Exhibition of Canadian Painting of 1955 was held much in the same format and spirit as the Annual Exhibition. Although there were no extensive changes made to the general procedures for the show, the Board instituted several small amendments.¹ Just as the 1953 Exhibition was opening to the Canadian public, the Trustees moved to present the exhibition every two years instead of annually. Simply, more time was needed to organize such a complex exhibition. The nominations of the selection committees and their co-ordination, the subsequent influx of works, the planning of the travelling schedule and the sheer amount of necessary paperwork that went along with each stage meant that just as one exhibition was ending, the next was beginning. The Trustees felt that strain and became concerned by the amount of time staff was spending on the show, or to be more specific, not on other projects. Every two years was as good as every one, they argued, and better for all involved.²

Other changes saw prizes awarded for the "best works submitted,"³ and it was stipulated that competition entries had to be completed since the last year's show. With regard to the purpose of the exhibition, the Trustees' publicly maintained that the Biennial enabled the Board to keep abreast of new "developments in Canadian art."⁴ Behind-the-scenes however, the Trustees were

concerned with widening the scope of the exhibition. They moved to consider all artists, not just members of chartered art societies, and all works of art, whether in public exhibitions or private collections. These minor amendments were intended to maximize the range of artists and the availability of submissions, and render, in the end, the best exhibition possible.

With the first exhibition well underway, anticipated complaints about past practices began to surface. Ross Flemington,⁵ a new addition to the Board since May of 1952, assumed Robert Newton's critical voice in discussions. As early as February 1953 he questioned the selection process, and now, months after the Annual's closing, with feedback filtering in from all sides, he voiced his concerns again. Maintaining that regional committees were not objective and impartial, he recommended that juries be "made up of experts outside the district concerned."⁶ No doubt the criticism of tight-knit groups selecting works so close to home was on the minds of the members of the Board, for they agreed – yet only in principle. The Trustees saw no way around having the preliminary selections made by local juries.

And so in the end, and in spite of Flemington's concerns and other subsequent reminders of the flaws in the organization of the previous show, the 1953 selection procedures remained intact and were given a second chance. Announcements for the First Biennial Exhibition, set for the winter of 1955, were sent out to committee heads and members, with a confidential disclaimer:

As stated in the catalogue of the [1953] exhibition, the perfect method of choosing the best paintings produced in the country over a stated time may still remain to be worked out, but it has been decided to give the present system a fair trial over several years.⁷

A separate notice, again addressed to regional committee members, represented the official position of the National Gallery in relation to the Biennial Exhibition:

The method of selection for the Biennial will remain the same as for the Annual Exhibition of 1953. The preliminary choices will be made by regional committees acting in an advisory capacity for the National Gallery. The number of paintings sent from the various regions is to be determined by the distribution of population, but some special consideration must also be given to the several leading artistic centres in the country.... The overriding consideration of each regional committee in making its choices should be that of high quality in the works chosen, for only thus can the exhibition be of value to the country.⁸

Once again spearheading the organization of the exhibition, Harris and McCurry negotiated the major difficulty encountered in the selection for the previous show: the co-ordination of the selection committees. It was déjà vu when the issue of artists' involvement on regional juries was again raised, for the criticism came from within, from former committee member Dr. Gordon Snelgrove, Head of the University of Saskatchewan's Art Department:

I have given a great deal of thought to the question of acting on a Selection Committee which has members who are practising artists and at the same time submitting paintings for the selection of that committee.... I have strictly adhered to the rule of not acting on such a committee ... with the exception of the last Saskatchewan Committee ... and I was not satisfied at having broken the rule ... for it is a question of principle.⁹

Refusing to serve on the grounds of participating in a "questionable precedent,"¹⁰ Snelgrove respectfully requested a review of the procedure. Norah McCullough,

from her position as National Gallery liaison for the West (and Executive Secretary, Saskatchewan Arts Board), spoke for McCurry and the Board: with no apologies she defended the practice, citing other galleries that accepted the procedure.¹¹ Snelgrove was free to vote “for or against,” she reminded him, but his conscience was not eased, and in the end, his withdrawal was “accepted regretfully.”¹²

Anticipating criticism on these grounds, the Trustees were pre-emptive in their organization of regional committees for the 1955 Biennial. First, provincial chairs were rejected. Instead a member of the Board of Trustees would act *ex officio* on each committee. This move placed final responsibility with the Gallery, withdrew Board ‘advisors’ from the line of fire, and provided a sense of cohesion and unity to the decision-making process: the inner circle of Trustees would assure that the goals and ambitions of the Gallery were furthered in each region.¹³ Second, the Board attempted to diversify the qualifications of the membership by evening out the numbers of artists and informed laymen. In British Columbia for example, Harris maintained his position as head of the committee but was joined by three new selectors, of whom only two were practicing artists: B.C. Binning (School of Architecture at the University of British Columbia) and Charles H. Scott (Director of the Vancouver School of Art). Fred Ames (Principal of the Vancouver School of Art), from the previous committee, and Doris Shadbolt (art educator and wife of Vancouver painter Jack Shadbolt) provided a counterweight to the artist-majority (but not quite enough to achieve balance). These changes

were honest attempts at building an impenetrable defence against inevitable criticisms.

Another procedural review saw the streamlining of the selection process: the Trustees moved to maintain division of the country into five regions, but altered the number of administrative committees needed in the Prairie Provinces. While a dozen official members and a handful of unofficial advisors had previously served, now the Gallery sought to limit this number in an attempt to increase the efficiency – and lower the cost – of the selection process. It was remarked during the planning of the Annual Exhibition that “small groups usually worked more efficiently,”¹⁴ and now this adage was used to justify an increasingly smaller number of selection committees. The Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba committees were amalgamated into a single ‘Prairie Committee.’ with a total of six representatives, two from each province.¹⁵ Mrs. H.A. Dyde,¹⁶ National Gallery Trustee acting as *ex officio* and chair of the Prairie committee, congratulated the Board on this move: “We like the idea of wiping out provincial barriers for the prairies.”¹⁷ And the Board liked the idea of fewer committees butting heads, but the haggling between regional juries was just beginning. Speaking in confidence, Dyde revealed a second reason amalgamation: “I hate to be disloyal to my new province, but in a sectional exhibition Alberta should not have as many successful entries as [Saskatchewan] and Manitoba.”¹⁸ It was a shrewd decision in light of the final distribution numbers. Effectively, by

amalgamating the provinces, the exact numbers of certain provincial representations were buried, relieving the inflexibility of rigid provincial quotas.

The 1955 Exhibition process generated an extensive discussion dealing with the intricate harmonization of artists and their works. In widening the scope of the exhibition, and allowing both privately owned and previously exhibited works into the show, the Board unwittingly created an administrative headache. Once regional selections were completed, the long and complex arrangements for securing the works for exhibition began. The co-ordination of acquiring works on loan from a multitude of lenders was onerous and complicated: it included locating the selected works of art (replacing them with suitable works if unavailable), then packing, shipping, and organizing delivery. In any one case, up to a half-dozen letters were exchanged before the arrangements were finalized.¹⁹ This tedious administration exhausted the patience of the Director, who gradually ceded control of these administrative details to staff in order to concentrate on other Gallery matters.

Slowly but surely McCurry handed over the reins of the exhibition to Robert H. Hubbard, the National Gallery's Curator of Canadian Art and soon-to-be Chief Curator.²⁰ While the Director, in concert with the Board, determined the overall vision of the exhibition series, by February 1954 Hubbard had assumed responsibility for the majority of correspondence and was supervising most administrative tasks. The move freed McCurry from the show's long and elaborate orchestration, and the transfer of responsibility enabled the project to

receive more concentrated attention. Hubbard himself sat in on the Ontario and Quebec juries to counteract the Board's concern about artist-majorities, wide geographic distances and the resulting fragmented committees.

The five regional committees sent just over eighty works to the National Gallery for the Biennial Exhibition of 1955. This number being too high, and with the express intention of facilitating the exhibition's national tour, Gallery staff "reluctantly"²¹ weeded out the selection to sixty-two works to facilitate the exhibition's national tour.²² Despite efforts to "improve" selection criteria, processes and committees, the final distribution of exhibited works by region varied only slightly from that of the 1953 exhibition. The Board was satisfied that the requirements for regional representation had been met, and from a national perspective the show was a success.²³ McCurry must have been pleased, despite the few bumps.

Slightly fewer cities were represented – the major ones dominated – and several claimed all the quotas for their province. While Montreal adequately represented the province of Quebec, ranking first with almost twenty-three percent (fourteen works) of the country's representation, Regina boasted only one work – less than two-percent – for the entire province of Saskatchewan.²⁴ But overall the Prairies dropped only slightly in representation, Regina's low numbers conveniently being camouflaged by the Trustees' decision to treat Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta as one region.²⁵ Ontario commanded almost thirty-percent of the exhibited works, a number that drew distribution away from all

other regions, with the exception of Quebec. The province of British Columbia was reined in, showing only a dozen works: a decrease of four works from the previous exhibition.²⁶

Yet there were factors that went contrary to Harris' vision for the exhibition, and the Trustees inadvertently found themselves in a predicament of their own making. The Board had mandated itself to purchase the best works, those of "high quality ... for only thus can the exhibition be of value to the country." But many of the works were already sold when they entered the exhibition and were thus not available for purchase. The Trustees had to purchase from what was left. Doubting that they had secured the best works, either for exhibition or acquisition, the Gallery met its critics head-on in the 1955 Biennial catalogue:

Our warmest thanks go to all members of the committees who have given so freely of their time and energies on our behalf. At the same time it is only just to say that the rather cumbersome and lengthy procedure of selection has perhaps caused some important works to be unavailable. We therefore hope to devise a more direct method for future biennials.²⁷

Harris had warned the Trustees to take certain measures to assure that artists would reserve their 'best' for the National Gallery exhibition: fees for rental of pictures, knowledgeable and well-networked juries with a necessary operating budget, and specifically, that nothing other than merit guide the selections. By implementing a few notions in force, and short cutting others, the Board effectively subverted the goal of Harris' proposal. The exhibition should have

gathered Canada's most outstanding works unequivocally positioning the Gallery's collection as the representative national collection. Neither goal was reached. The Trustees were not meeting the high standards of their self-imposed mandate, yet they could not afford to lower them. Both measures of quality and rational distribution were required.

By the end of its Ottawa run in the spring of 1955, the Biennial Exhibition had acquired a certain prestige and was referred to by artists and jurors as the "big 'buying' show," the "National" and the "big Canadian show."²⁸ Adjudicated exhibitions elicit feelings of relief among the chosen few, and deception among the others, acutely aware of their exclusion from the most influential exhibition in the country. Those overlooked or rejected actively inquired into the Gallery's procedures, practices and the explanations for their exclusion. They located the flaws, voiced their criticisms – as per their particular point of view – and attacked the procedures vehemently. The Trustees were soon inundated with inquiries, letters, and public reactions to the year's showing of "the best art in Canada." The public, professional colleagues, and most of all the artists, wanted answers.

Artists' reactions varied from the seemingly polite to the outwardly demanding. Henri Masson,²⁹ a successful Ottawa artist included in both exhibitions, simply asked the names of committee members.³⁰ Goodridge Roberts³¹ claimed to have had no "inkling" of the exhibition until it was too late, and went straight to the heart of the matter: "I feel badly that I'm not represented."³² Hubbard responded promptly to Roberts, explaining that the

reason for his exclusion was his absence from the country at the time of selection. He commiserated with the artist, ending his letter emotionally: "I also feel badly about your not being represented."³³

Another artist, Jori Smith,³⁴ voiced her dissatisfaction with the Gallery's cross-section of the state of Canadian art and directed her outrage unequivocally at Quebec committee member F. Cleveland Morgan. Attempting to strengthen her argument for inclusion, she coupled her exclusion with that of another well-known artist:

I have heard from official sources that you were one of the four members of the Quebec selection committee to choose painters to be invited to send to the Biennial Exhibition.

I am surprised indeed that I was ignored but well-nigh floored when I heard that such a painter as John Lyman had not been invited. A committee which does not include both John Lyman and Jori Smith in a National show is an incompetent one, don't you think?³⁵

Writing to Flemington, Hubbard attempted to counter Smith's criticism by trivializing her contribution as an artist: "I regret to learn that you have been approached by Jori Smith.... She has been agitating in our direction as well ... [and] has also written to us demanding in no uncertain terms that she be included in every important National Gallery Exhibition!"³⁶ John Lyman³⁷ followed with his own letter, and revealed his suspicions:

... it was my very first intimation that the show had been chosen and how it had been chosen. To the best of my knowledge, there was never any public announcement of either fact. Apparently it was kept a secret except for the favoured few.³⁸

The artist continued, arguing the 'tax-payer' point of view: the Gallery was under "obligation to act in an open and democratic, not an underhanded way."

Noting the absence of the committee members' names in the catalogue, he accused the Gallery of engaging in "bad business," and demanded to know who was "responsible":

Surely you cannot be pleased with the results. In this province ... the selection was apparently made by only a part of the jury with frivolous nonchalance and particularity. It would be easy to name half a dozen painters of better quality than a number who were included. The chief qualification for acceptance seems to have been a second hand resemblance to some manner that is fashionable at the moment. Is it that, or authentic personal integrity in the artist, that the National Gallery is trying to foster?³⁹

Lyman was correct: the Quebec committee of four only existed on paper: Arthur Lismer⁴⁰ and Jacques de Tonnancour,⁴¹ both established artists, alone selected the works in that province.⁴² Lyman's letter received serious attention from Hubbard, who qualified both the decisions of the Trustees and the selection committee, and took the matter under advisement.⁴³ Hubbard's oversight was more than embarrassing, bordering on the incompetent. He had deliberately placed himself on the Ontario and Quebec committees to ensure an impartial and healthy representation from these important provinces. Such slip-ups damaged the reputation of the Gallery, for artists like Goodridge Roberts and John Lyman were undeniably key players in the Canadian art world.

If the selection process failed to yield the 'best', the exhibition's tour achieved greater success: all regions were given access to the show, if not always

consistently. In a seemingly odd move, the Board toured the exhibition the least amount of time – only fifteen days – in the province that ranked first in regional distribution: Quebec. Conversely the exhibition toured the lowest-ranking province, Saskatchewan, on two separate occasions, for the highest total of forty-five days.⁴⁴ Dyde's prophecy of low numbers for Alberta was unfulfilled, for the province secured relatively average numbers, and held the touring exhibition in the province for a month and a half. There seems to be no clear logic behind the disparities in the length of time the exhibition toured in different regions. Although most certainly venue availability was a major factor, it is plausible that longer exhibitions were intended as compensation for lack of representation. Provinces unsuccessful in securing high regional representations could be consoled by receiving the tour for longer segments. Surely an attempt by the Trustees to equalize the results and soothe any hard feelings, the move may be understood in light of a comment made in conjunction with the 1953 exhibition by Lawren Harris. He believed that any region, "whose representation [did] not measure up to the best", would benefit from seeing the final show and be stimulated to "do better."⁴⁵

The fatal error of the 1953 touring exhibition – that of failing to plan for and subsequently ignoring the East – was corrected in 1955. The Gallery planned a coast-to-coast tour from the start, with arrangements being made as the exhibition opened in Ottawa:

The only way to shorten the tour to the West and gain the two months or more required to send it on tour to the East as well, without prolonging the tour unduly, would be to limit the period for showing in the West.⁴⁶

Time was a serious concern for the Board. The travelling segment was to take no more than a year, a timeline strictly observed in light of the Treasury Board's refusal to grant funds for 'rental' fees to compensate artists whose works were in the exhibition. Out of consideration for the artists, no more an imposition was desired than necessary: the Board considered the loss of a work for twelve months as a financial hardship and this was contrary to the exhibition's goals of supporting the Canadian artist.⁴⁷ One suggestion, of splitting the exhibition in two in order to increase the visibility of the tour while allowing smaller venues to be considered, was dismissed in the same breath as it was made.⁴⁸ The exhibition remained intact, and reached a dozen venues.⁴⁹

In terms of public reception, reviewers picked up on certain major themes: the absence of several important artists, that again all provinces were represented with the exception of Prince Edward Island, and that certain Maritime entries seemed to be "courtesy" inclusions.⁵⁰ Others noted the inconsistencies of the exhibition, reviving discussion of the tension derived from the conflicting criteria of quality versus democratic representation. One particularly articulate argument spoke to the "unevenness" of the show, created by the desire of the Trustees to have each province included:

Canadian painting is a great deal better than the Biennial suggests. Undoubtedly the method of judging – using first a regional committee, then a final selection in Ottawa – contributed to the disappointing results. The Biennial can become the most important exhibition of contemporary Canadian painting but it will only do so if paintings are chosen on merit rather than geography.⁵¹

Overall, the regional distribution of the selection was praised, while the method of obtaining a high-quality show was debated. The Trustees were faced with an ominous decision: “go back to the old way,”⁵² or create an entirely new method of selection that satisfied all concerned. Certainly, the latest round of complaints caused the Trustees to re-evaluate their procedures, and take steps to create a better system in the future.

The Board that had unanimously voted in favour of a renewed Canadian juried exhibition, and had guided the preparations of the first two showings, had been completely revamped when it came time to establish the procedures for the Second Biennial Exhibition in 1957. One of the many recommendations of the Massey/Lévesque Commission, that of increasing the number of members of the Board of Trustees to nine,⁵³ came into effect member-by-member starting in May of 1952. Upon the resignation of Board Chairman Vincent Massey, H.S. Southam was elected in his place, only to step down the following April due to illness and be replaced, at first temporarily and then permanently, by Charles P. Fell⁵⁴ in March of 1953.⁵⁵ Robert Newton was the sole departure from the Board at this time, while five additions represented Canada from coast-to-coast: Mrs. H.A. Dyde (Edmonton); Ross Flemington (Sackville, N.B.); F. Cleveland Morgan⁵⁶

and Jean M. Raymond⁵⁷ (Montreal); and John A. MacAulay⁵⁸ (Winnipeg).⁵⁹

The Directorship too would change hands, with Alan Jarvis succeeding McCurry in May of 1955. Only Harris and Chauvin remained to see the “new era” of leadership at the National Gallery.

Yet even before the membership of the Board of Trustees expanded, certain administrative and bureaucratic changes had taken place that reflected the direction the Board wished the Gallery to take in following the recommendations of the Massey/Lévesque Commission. Adequate quarters for the collection of the Gallery had been a long-running issue, and when the latest plans once again failed to materialize in an approval to build a new building, the Trustees referring to the influential Report, urged “its necessity for the cultural development of Canada.”⁶⁰ More than a passing influence, the recommendations of the Commission materialized one by one: a plan for extension services, the continuation of the successful and extensive travelling exhibition program, and increased facilities in terms of storage and staff were among the many programs and services being addressed at this time.⁶¹ In fact, just as the Prime Minister’s Office was “anxious to put into effect as much of the Royal Commission’s Report as possible,”⁶² so too were the members of the Board diligent in lobbying for the immediate change in the Gallery’s status. They interpreted the Commission’s recommendations as an overall increase in the autonomy of the Board: the status of the Director was elevated to that of a Deputy Minister, reporting directly to the Minister.

And so, as perhaps the most publicly realized recommendation of the Commission, the Biennial Exhibition took its first substantial turn since its inception. There are many possible reasons for the sudden change in practice. Taking over the leadership of the Gallery from McCurry, Jarvis was not particularly pleased with the inefficiency of the previous method. Harris had been totally committed to its initial procedures; McCurry reluctantly agreed, but Jarvis was not convinced. The cost of the Annual and the First Biennial Exhibition had been indeed as "terrific" as McCurry had suspected, and the regional committees taxed Gallery resources heavily in both dollars and effort. Harris and McCurry's relationship was key to the early arrangement of the series, but now, four years after the initial proposal, the delicate balance of personality and politics had changed. This is not to say that the exhibition was deemed less valuable to the image of the Gallery within Canada. It is more likely that the Gallery's many other projects took a certain pressure off the Biennial series to carry the full weight of its nationalistic mandate. As other Gallery projects became more visible, the Biennial would become one of many cornerstones on which the Gallery would build its prestige.

Harris had expected Jarvis to carry on as usual. Harris continued his hands-on approach, assuming that the third exhibition would proceed like the others. He did concede the possibility of a certain 'shake-up'; "I think at the beginning of a new regime a new jury should be appointed,"⁶³ but he could not have anticipated the degree of change Jarvis would implement. Harris proposed

an expansion of the exhibition program to include an exhibition of water-colours in the off-years of the Biennial, happily pointing out to Jarvis that "This would mean ... a major National Gallery [Exhibition] of Canadian painting every year."⁶⁴ A yearly headache rather than a biennial one was probably the last thing Jarvis wanted, but he remained diplomatic with Harris:

You will remember that we expressed dissatisfaction at the Trustees' meeting regarding the basis of selection for the Biennial and I think the whole thing should be gone into.... I have not really had time to think at all thoroughly about the possibility of a Biennial of water colour painting. This is something we will go into very thoroughly at staff meetings and I will be writing to you again about it.⁶⁵

Three days later, Jarvis wrote to Harris announcing the Gallery's decision to hold one biennial, "of works in all media, including sculpture," and asked the artist's opinion.⁶⁶

Harris was seeing his national plan fall apart, and quickly composed one of his trademark long, detailed and hand-written letters, complete with numbered points and sub-headings, but with the major point: "I am not sure it is a good idea in terms of service to the whole country. It is of course a good idea as a big 'buying' show."⁶⁷ Touching on all the major flaws of the series thus far, Harris traced how present procedures strayed from his suggestions. He claimed that adhering to regional quotas had compromised the achievement of a "first class" exhibition. The result was not the best work in the country, but only the best work "in relation to each province or region." Works accepted in the Prairies were not as good as ones rejected in Quebec due solely to population-based

distribution. Harris however acknowledged the problem that McCurry's strategy of regional allotments had tried to resolve: "[A]ll parts of the country should be represented in a National biennial."⁶⁸ Harris feared that a single large biennial would exclude smaller art centres from the touring segment because of insufficient exhibition space. To dissuade Jarvis from creating an exclusive show, Harris cited the original goals and motivations that had inspired the exhibition in the first place – goals that were now being ignored. Yet, despite these pleas to consider the Trustees' first principles, idealism gave way to an unavoidable administrative and professional reality.

In 1956, an internal Gallery memorandum revealed the professional staff's stand in relation to the Biennial series:

As it is essential that the National gallery staff, as soon as possible, make a fairly complete survey on the spot of artistic production in Canada by personal visits to artists' studios, it would therefore be feasible to combine this investigation with the selection of works to be sent to Ottawa for possible showing in the 1957 Biennial of Canadian Painting.⁶⁹

Harris had been right in suspecting that the new combined media exhibition was designed as a "big 'buying' show" – a certain shift away from selection heavily influenced by the artists' community in favour of control by Gallery professionals. But Harris was out-of-the-loop, so to speak, and was simply informed of the procedures from this point on – his ideals proving to require too much effort for too little reward, according to the new Director. Harris' proposal – which had been instituted almost faithfully in the first two presentations – fell to

the wayside, as did his input. The new procedures were far removed from Harris' vision of the exhibition. He withdrew his voice from the preparations and ceded responsibility for its organization to Donald Buchanan, the Gallery's Associate Director.⁷⁰

Indeed, a great shift had just occurred. By taking the responsibility for the exhibition's premise, organization and implementation out of the hands of Harris, the Trustee, and placing it entirely with Gallery staff, Jarvis had altered the focus and goals of the show. No longer a means to facilitate the collection's balance of provincial and regional representations, or a politically-charged event conceived to rally Canadians and the country's artists around the Gallery, nor even an exhibition geared towards fostering Canadian talent, the show became primarily a curatorial collection-building tool. While this too had been the goal of the Trustees in the first two exhibitions, they had at least endeavoured to temper the need for acquisitions against other parties' benefits.

Jarvis announced the new procedures late in the summer of 1955. He eliminated the regional juries, and placed three National Gallery staff members in charge:

In view of the amount of territory to be covered, the investigation could not be feasibly done by one person, hence it is recommended that Canada be divided into three regions, namely (1) head of the Great Lakes to Pacific Coast; (2) Ontario and Ottawa Valley; (3) Montreal east to St. John's Newfoundland. Dr. Hubbard and Messrs. Buchanan and Ostiguy would each take over one of the regions and make visits and recommendations.... It might be practical to nominate advisory committees in certain regions; their

work, however, would be limited to recommending the names of artists whose studios should be visited.⁷¹

Renamed the Biennial Exhibition of Canadian Painting, the series had rotated one hundred and eighty degrees from the one originally conceived by Lawren Harris: democratic selection by regional juries would be replaced by a team of National Gallery curators. Acquisitions had to be made – they were key to the growth of the collection and reputation of the institution – yet support of the Canadian artist on their terms was optional. Simply put, the times had changed and so had the key figures. Jarvis opted to stay the title but change the means.

The changes to the selection process of the Biennial Exhibition were a direct result of the Gallery staff's active evaluation of the previous years' practices. In the fall of 1955, five months after the closing of the Second Biennial, the Board of Trustees, including invited Gallery staff Alan Jarvis, Director, Donald Buchanan, Associate Director, and Robert H. Hubbard, Chief Curator, reviewed the Exhibition's achievements thus far, and read from an official memorandum:

Observation has shown that [the selection process] worked extremely well in at least one province, moderately well in a few others and was unsuccessful in three important regions. In British Columbia and in the prairie region it worked very well because in these places organizations are active and there is a strong tradition of co-operation among people in these places. The difficulties came in Ontario, Quebec and the Maritime Provinces.

The report went on to address the shortcomings of the selection process:

The arts organizations, though long established, have for some years been diminishing in importance.... In addition, it was difficult ... to secure committee members who would take the trouble involved in selecting paintings, as they were very busy people and their time was precious. When they did assume the responsibility they tended to leave the selection until the last moment and then do it hastily. The result was complaints of neglect....⁷²

Appointed as Director in May of 1955, it was only Jarvis' second Board meeting, yet he had been informed enough of the trials of the two previous exhibitions and the struggles to satisfy all interest groups all the while trying to maintain the Gallery's own agenda. Aware of the unfolding of the First Biennial of Canadian Painting, and the resulting criticisms, he was determined to rein in the exhibition to correct as many problems as possible.

When Harris wrote Jarvis at the end of May 1955 with the suggestion of holding a watercolour exhibition every other year as the Biennial, Jarvis – that same day – signed a letter announcing his intention to drastically change the procedures in time for the third attempt at an all-encompassing Canadian exhibition. The two letters perhaps crossed in the mail – that of Harris optimistically suggesting they try the procedures again, and Jarvis swearing that next time the procedures would fall under the direct supervision of Gallery staff. The men were at opposite ends of the ideological spectrum: Harris pushing to submerge criticism and follow yet again the artist-oriented status quo and Jarvis deciding that one of his first acts as Director would be to change the selection process.

Avery Shaw, Curator of the New Brunswick Museum, questioned the selection process and in his letter of response, Jarvis assured his colleague that the shortcomings of the previous show would not be repeated:

The first Canadian Biennial was collected by a group of regional committees, but since this did not work out in a wholly satisfactory way, the procedure for the next one is being changed. Next time we are going to send a member of the Gallery staff into each region to visit all the artist's studios to make a preliminary selection.... The final selection will be made in Ottawa by a jury consisting of the Director of the Gallery, some distinguished critic from abroad ... and some other Canadian.⁷³

It would be months before Jarvis broke the news to Harris. Disguising their significance, Jarvis announced small administrative changes always under the guise of group decisions made by Gallery staff and was always careful to canvass Harris' opinion on each issue. Little did Harris or the Trustees know that the decision had long been made.

It might seem a little curious then, that when the official memorandum of the new Biennial procedures was proposed to the Trustees, that it was Harris who first motioned in favour. In the six months since his plea to Jarvis to remain faithful to the principles informing the organization of the first Annual and subsequent Biennials, Harris seems to have been persuaded of certain realities. He accepted the fact that the exhibition procedures were out of his hands, and that in Jarvis' desire to make it both a fiscal and an artistic success compromise was needed. While he still clung to the stipulation that Gallery staff would be aided by unofficial advisors in each region, and was careful to mention this fact in his

motion, he committed himself to a 'join them' attitude.⁷⁴ In any case, it would be Harris' last motion on this subject, and indeed this iteration would be his final contribution to the Biennial procedures until 1962.

The Gallery supported its arguments for the effectiveness of the new procedures with its own research:

The most successful exhibitions of this nature in other countries, from all reports and from the evidence of the quality of the exhibitions themselves, have reflected the choice of one person of good taste. The last Carnegie International, selected personally by Mr. Gordon Washburn, was an outstanding example and widely hailed for its quality and interest. Certainly there are dangers involved in this method, and the proposed new method for the National Gallery tries to retain the advantage of personal selection while safeguarding the exhibitions from the limitations of personal taste, favouritism, etc.⁷⁵

As incongruous as it seems, Harris seems to have quietly listened to and condoned Jarvis' presentation as he introduced the new process that would place all the power in the hands of a small group of individual curators. The very notion was contrary to Harris' opinion and what the FCA had advanced under his presidency just a decade previous. Nevertheless, he must have continued to believe in the potential of the exhibition, in what it could do, even in its new guise, for the country's artists.

In taking the exhibition under its authority, Gallery staff strove to 'clean-up' its practice. Gone were the complications of co-ordinating large committees, the orchestration of community, regional, and national galleries. There was now a direct line of communication between Gallery curator and artist. And indeed this

direct line was the same that facilitated acquisitions: through the Biennial Exhibition the idea of a buying show was given national importance and legitimate backing. Over the next ten years the National Gallery's Biennial Exhibition was transformed time and time again in a bid to create the ultimate exhibition series, one that could boast both financial feasibility and artistic relevance, while serving the whole of Canada.

Endnotes

- ¹ These were discussed at the seventy-eighth meeting of the Board of Trustees, held on 11, 12 March 1953, in the office of the Director. National Gallery of Canada Archives, (hereafter NGC Archives), *Board of Trustees: Minutes of Meetings*, File 9.2-B, 591.
- ² "The change to a biennial it is hoped will give the necessary time for collecting, cataloguing and showing the most important oil paintings produced within the country during the period." NGC Archives, *First Biennial Exhibition of Canadian Painting 1955*, File 5.5-B.
- ³ The Board suggested \$500 for first place, \$300 for second, and \$200 for third. It was the last time monetary prizes would be offered. Just as rental fees for artists works were prohibited by the Treasury Board in the first exhibition, in 1957 the Board replaced prizes with 'awards of merit'. NGC Archives, *Board of Trustees*, 591 and 793.
- ⁴ NGC Archives, *First Biennial 1955*, Draft Document, undated.
- ⁵ Reverend William Thomas Ross Flemington was a career academic, receiving thirteen honorary degrees and at the time of his appointment to the Board of Trustees of the National Gallery, and to the selection committee of the Annual Exhibition, was President of Mount Allison University (1945- 1962). NGC Archives, *Clipping File*, "Flemington Dies After Long Illness," by Wally Sears in *Moncton Times*, 12 July 1971.
- ⁶ Flemington's third and final recommendation, to select jurors from outside the region was made at the October 1953 meeting of the Board of Trustees. NGC Archives, *Board of Trustees*, 597. First mention of his concerns appear in a correspondence from McCurry: "It may not ... be practical to do this as the National Gallery would be involved in extremely high travelling expenses. The reason for choosing artists in the locality is because they do know what is going on in that area much better probably than anyone coming in from outside." NGC Archives, *Annual Exhibition of Canadian Painting 1953*, File 5.5-A, H.O. McCurry to R. Flemington, 13 February 1953. The issue was raised again at the March 1953 meeting of the Board of Trustees where the response was that "preliminary selections would have to be made up by local juries, but the final selections might be made by an outside jury." This of course never happened. NGC Archives, *Board of Trustees*, 591.
- ⁷ NGC Archives, *First Biennial 1955*, Draft Document, undated.
- ⁸ NGC Archives, *First Biennial 1955*, Draft Document, undated.
- ⁹ NGC Archives, *First Biennial 1955*, G. Snelgrove to N. McCullough, and copied to H.O. McCurry, 28 May 1954.
- ¹⁰ NGC Archives, *First Biennial 1955*, G. Snelgrove to N. McCullough, and copied to H. O. McCurry, 28 May 1954.
- ¹¹ Norah McCullough spoke for McCurry's and the Board's position in this matter: "Artists - chosen for their ability as artists, are serving throughout the country on the Gallery's committees and naturally, they will also be submitting works, the practice which has been operating for all major Canadian exhibitions since I can remember. You will recall too, that for the All-American Show of 1953 at the Metropolitan Museum, one of the specific clauses was that artist-jurors, by virtue of being invited to serve as artist-jurors, had two submissions entered automatically in this exhibition." NGC Archives, *First Biennial 1955*. N. McCullough to G. Snelgrove and copied to H.O. McCurry, 9 June 1954.
- ¹² NGC Archives, *First Biennial 1955*, N. McCullough to G. Snelgrove and copied to H.O. McCurry, 9 June 1954.
- ¹³ Serving as *ex officio*: Lawren Harris for British Columbia, Mrs. H.A. Dyde and J.A. MacAulay for the Prairies, C.P. Fell for Ontario, Jean Chauvin for Quebec, and Ross Flemington for the Maritimes. NGC Archives, *First Biennial 1955*.
- ¹⁴ NGC Archives, *Annual Exhibition 1953*, R. Newton to H.O. McCurry, 28 December 1951.

- ¹⁵ H.O. McCurry responded to L.L. Fitzgerald: "I also note that you recommend three members for Manitoba as before, but I believe that the particular Trustees who have made this exhibition their particular concern wish to have only one committee embracing the three prairie provinces. I do not, however, think there would be any objection to the Manitoba member co-opting two helpers." NGC Archives, *First Biennial 1955*, H. O McCurry to L.L. Fitzgerald, undated.
- ¹⁶ Dorothy Dyde, originally from Ottawa, was married to Mr. Henry Alexander Dyde, OBE, a barrister based in Edmonton, Alberta. *The Canadian Who's Who: A Biographical Dictionary of Notable Men and Women*, vol. vi, 1952-1954 (Toronto: Trans-Canada Press), 312. She joined the Board of the National Gallery in May of 1952 and served until December 1967 when it was replaced with the Visiting Committee of the National Museum Board.
- ¹⁷ NGC Archives, *First Biennial 1955*, Mrs. H.A. Dyde to R.H. Hubbard, 13 February 1954.
- ¹⁸ NGC Archives, *First Biennial 1955*, Mrs. H.A. Dyde to H.O. McCurry, 25 January 1954.
- ¹⁹ One artist's work in particular caused a lot of correspondence. William Winter's *Pink Fence* was out of the artist's possession and held by a local high school; the artist proposed to send another in its place, but Hubbard preferred to keep the Ontario jury's decision intact. Hubbard wrote to the high school, which answered back that perhaps they could lend out the work, depending on the length of time. Hubbard forwarded the dates, only to be refused by the institution. At that time, Hubbard returned to correspond with the artist, who had written a few times as to the standing of the issue, and proposed a replacement work. That too fell apart, and in the end the artist was not represented. NGC Archives, *First Biennial 1955*.
- ²⁰ Hubbard served as the National Gallery's first Curator of Canadian Art between 1947 and 1955 when he was made Chief Curator, a position he held until 1959. Prior to 1947, curatorial roles were principally borne by the Director.
- ²¹ "In several cases the committees sent considerably more than were requested ...[and] we have been forced to eliminate some works.... I trust that the committees and the artists involved will appreciate the exigencies involved and our reasons for this action. It is planned in future years, ideally using a method of selection which provides a 'ceiling' to the number of works, in order both to avoid such 'rejections' and to represent a variety of different artists each year." NGC Archives, *First Biennial 1955*, H.O. McCurry to A. Lismer, 28 April 1955.
- ²² "In view of the ever-increasing demand experienced by the National Gallery for travelling exhibitions, it is expected that the Biennial Exhibition of 1955 will travel from coast to coast in Canada. In order, therefore, to keep the exhibition down to a suitable size for travelling and showing in the majority of art centres, the number of paintings included will be limited to about 65." NGC Archives, *First Biennial 1955*, Press Release, undated.
- ²³ The final regional distribution numbers, with estimates in parentheses: British Columbia 12 (12); Prairie Provinces 11 (12); Ontario 18 (16); Quebec 14 (16); Maritimes 8 (9). NGC Archives, *First Biennial 1955*.
- ²⁴ Sixteen cities were represented in 1955, down three from nineteen in 1953. Calgary, Alberta; Regina, Saskatchewan; Winnipeg, Manitoba; Montreal, Quebec; Halifax, Nova Scotia; and St. John's, Newfoundland were the only cities in those provinces to be represented. NGC, *First Biennial Exhibition of Canadian Painting 1955*.
- ²⁵ In 1953 the Prairies held twenty-percent of the country's representation; in 1955 they held eighteen-percent. NGC Archives, *Annual Exhibition 1953* and *First Biennial 1955*.
- ²⁶ NGC Archives, *First Biennial 1955*.
- ²⁷ National Gallery of Canada, *First Biennial Exhibition of Canadian Painting 1953*, (Ottawa: 1953). Foreword.
- ²⁸ NGC Archives, *First Biennial 1955*, A. Jarvis to L. Harris, 10 June 1955; J. Smith to F. Cleveland Morgan, President of The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts and member of the Quebec selection committee, undated; G. Roberts to R.H. Hubbard, undated.
- ²⁹ Henri Leopold Masson (1907-1996).

- ³⁰ The names were omitted from both the 1953 Annual catalogue and the 1955 Biennial catalogue, yet even if they were included, the list may have misrepresented the people responsible for the choices. In many cases only a few members of the committee were active on the selection jury, while in some 'advisors' were doing most of the work in bringing artists to the attention of the jury. This issue will be dealt with more fully in the text.
- ³¹ William Goodridge Roberts (1904-1974).
- ³² NGC Archives, *First Biennial 1955*, G. Roberts to R.H. Hubbard, undated.
- ³³ NGC Archives, *First Biennial 1955*, R.H. Hubbard to G. Roberts, undated. Roberts was included in the preliminary list of artists to be considered for the province of Quebec. NGC Archives, *First Biennial 1955*, Memorandum of a Meeting of the Quebec Committee for the National Gallery Biennial Exhibition, 29 November 1954.
- ³⁴ Jori Smith (1907-).
- ³⁵ NGC Archives, *First Biennial 1955*, J. Smith to F.C. Morgan, President of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, and selector for Quebec, undated, enclosed in letter to R.H. Hubbard from F. C. Morgan, 22 June 1955.
- ³⁶ NGC Archives, *First Biennial 1955*, J. Smith to F.C. Morgan, President of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, and selector for Quebec, undated, enclosed in letter to R.H. Hubbard from F. C. Morgan, 22 June 1955.
- ³⁷ John Goodwin Lyman (1886-1967).
- ³⁸ NGC Archives, *First Biennial 1955*, J. Lyman to R.H. Hubbard, 30 June 1955.
- ³⁹ NGC Archives, *First Biennial 1955*, J. Lyman to R.H. Hubbard, 30 June 1955.
- ⁴⁰ Arthur Lismer (1885-1969).
- ⁴¹ Jacques Godefroy de Tonnancour (1917-).
- ⁴² The Quebec committee: F. Cleveland Morgan, Arthur Lismer, Jacques de Tonnancour and R.H. Hubbard (Jean Chauvin and Jean Raymond absent) met 29 November 1954, at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts to discuss the selection process. Lismer read a list of names that he and de Tonnancour had prepared; neither Jori Smith's or John Lyman's names were included. "Dr. Lismer and M. De Tonnancour were then commissioned by the committee to choose the actual paintings and to send them to the National Gallery by the middle of January 1955." NGC Archives, *First Biennial 1955*, Memorandum of a Meeting of the Quebec Committee for the National Gallery Biennial Exhibition.
- ⁴³ "I have received your letter of June 30 concerning the First Biennial Exhibition. This, as you will have received from the catalogue, is a continuation of an old series of annual exhibitions, the last of which was held in 1953. Our Board of Trustees devised a plan of regional committees as explained in the foreword. A preliminary announcement of the present exhibition was made in the press in March 1954. Perhaps it may be of some comfort to you that in the catalogues of 1953 and 1955 we have stated that we hope to devise a different method for future exhibitions of this kind. Needless to say, I am very glad to have your views on the subject and shall communicate them to my colleagues." NGC Archives, *First Biennial 1955*, R.H. Hubbard to J. Lyman, 4 July 1955.
- ⁴⁴ The Musée du Québec exhibited the First Biennial between 12 March and 1 April 1955. The Norman Mackenzie Art Gallery, Regina College had the show between 6 and 26 September 1955; The Saskatoon Art Centre and the University of Saskatchewan exhibited 26 November until 19 December 1955. NGC Archives, *First Biennial 1955*.
- ⁴⁵ NGC Archives, *Annual Exhibition 1953*, L. Harris to H.O. McCurry, 5 March 1951. Harris would make a similar comment when lobbying for the procedures for the 1957 Biennial: "It is of great importance that each province and region exhibits the biennial and can view its contribution along with that of the others and benefit from the lessons to be learned." NGC Archives, *Annual Exhibition 1955*, L. Harris to A. Jarvis, 21 June 1955.
- ⁴⁶ NGC Archives, *First Biennial 1955*, Internal Memorandum, 6 May 1955.
- ⁴⁷ This was a favourite issue of Harris': "When the rental proposal was submitted to Treasury a few years ago it objected – said the honour of having his work exhibited should satisfy an artist. The real point is that

when an artist sends his picture to the National Gallery and then it goes on tour it costs him money and in the case of his best work he won't send it to the National [G]allery and allow it to go on tour because if he does so his chances of selling it diminish or disappear." NGC Archives, *First Biennial 1955*, L. Harris to A. Jarvis, 21 June 1955.

⁴⁸ "An alternative plan would be to split the exhibition in two, thus making it easier to handle by all galleries, especially the smaller ones. Question: How the heck do you split an exhibition without causing hard feelings and, more important, without ruining the exhibition as a real survey of Canadian painting." NGC Archives, *First Biennial 1955*, Internal Memorandum, 6 May 1955.

⁴⁹ National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, Ont., 18 May – 20 June 1955; Norman Mackenzie Art Gallery, Regina College, Regina, Sask., 6-26 September 1955; Edmonton Museum of Arts, Edmonton, Alta., 1 October – 5 November 1955; Saskatoon Art Centre and University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, Sask., 26 November – 19 December 1955; Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver, B.C., 27 December 1955 – 16 January 1956; Calgary Allied Arts Centre, Calgary, Alta., 13-23 February 1956; Musée du Québec, PQ, 12 March – 1 April, 1956; Sackville Art Association, Sackville, N.B., 9-20 April 1956; Halifax Memorial Library, Halifax, N.S., 25 April – 15 May 1956; Saint John Art Club, Saint John, N.B., 20 May – 10 June 1956; London Public Library and Art Museum, London, Ont., 22 June – 15 July 1956; Mount Allison University, Sackville, N.B., 3-12 August 1956. NGC Archives, *First Biennial 1955*.

⁵⁰ NGC Archives, *Clipping File: First Biennial Exhibition of Canadian Painting 1955*, "Trials and Achievements of a National Gallery Director," by Robert Ayre in *The Montreal Star*, 28 May 1955.

⁵¹ NGC Archives, *Clipping File 1955, The Winnipeg Gallery*, November 1955.

⁵² NGC Archives, *Annual Exhibition 1953*, A.Y. Jackson to H.O. McCurry, 28 January 1953.

⁵³ Recommendation (k) stipulates: "That the Board of Trustees of the National gallery be increased to nine members." Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences 1949-51 (hereafter Massey/Lévesque Commission), *Report*, (Ottawa: 1951), 318.

⁵⁴ Fell had played a key role in the founding of the Toronto Art Gallery (now the Art Gallery of Toronto). He sat as a Member of that Council (1947-1965), as its Chairman (1950-1953) and then as its Vice-President (1954-1967). An investment dealer by profession, he held several influential positions within the financial world (President, Empire Life Assurance Co.) and academia: he sat on the Board of Governors for McMaster University for over thirty years, with positions ranging from Chairman, Chancellor and Senator. On the Board of the National Gallery he was Chairman for all but his first year (1952-1959). *Who's Who*, 1952-1954, 341.

⁵⁵ Vincent Massey resigned as Chairman of the Board on 26 February 1952. H.S. Southam was appointed on 11 March 1952, resigned shortly after and was replaced by Charles Fell in March of 1953. NGC Archives, *Board of Trustees*, 544, 593.

⁵⁶ Morgan, a company director, was as well linked to the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts as Board Member (1916-1947), President (1947-1956) and then Honorary President (1956-1962). He sat on the Board of the National Gallery until 1959. *Who's Who*, 1952-1954, 769.

⁵⁷ Raymond was an engineer and industrialist who served in several high-ranking corporate positions. He was appointed Chairman of the Gallery Board in January 1964 and served as such until the Board of Trustees was replaced in the late 1960s. *Who's Who*, 1952-1954, 880.

⁵⁸ A lawyer and director of several major Canadian companies and corporations, MacAulay served until the end of 1967. NGC Archives, *Clipping File*, "City lawyer dies at 86," *Winnipeg Tribune*, 7 November 1978.

⁵⁹ Dyde, Fell, Flemington, Morgan and Raymond were welcomed at the seventy-sixth meeting of the Board on 22 May 1952, while MacAulay joined six months later to complete the nine. NGC Archives, *Board of Trustees*, 550, 563.

⁶⁰ NGC Archives, *Board of Trustees*, 552-53.

⁶¹ "... [T]he Board, realizing that the present facilities of the National Gallery are entirely inadequate, is also unanimously of the opinion that ... provision[s] should be made ... for the carrying on of an extension service of the Gallery, to function under the management of qualified personnel supervised by the National

Gallery Director in order to meet the growing and insistent demands of all parts of Canada for participation in the cultural benefits and services of the National Gallery, pursuant to the recommendations contained in the Report of the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences." NGC Archives, *Board of Trustees*, 572-73.

⁶² NGC Archives, *Board of Trustees*, 531-33.

⁶³ NGC Archives, *First Biennial 1955*, L. Harris to A. Jarvis, 30 May 1955.

⁶⁴ NGC Archives, *First Biennial 1955*, L. Harris to A. Jarvis, 30 May 1955.

⁶⁵ NGC Archives, *First Biennial 1955*, A. Jarvis to L. Harris, 7 June 1955.

⁶⁶ NGC Archives, *First Biennial 1955*, A. Jarvis to L. Harris, 10 June 1955.

⁶⁷ NGC Archives, *First Biennial 1955*, L. Harris to A. Jarvis, 21 June 1955.

⁶⁸ NGC Archives, *First Biennial 1955*, L. Harris to A. Jarvis, 21 June 1955.

⁶⁹ NGC Archives, *Second Biennial Exhibition of Canadian Art 1957*, File 5.5-B, "Report on Organising 1957 Biennial of Canadian Painting," undated.

⁷⁰ Buchanan was Associate Director of the National Gallery from 1955 to 1959, when he became Acting Director for one year. He does however return with a different hat a few years later, as member of the Board of Trustees (October 1964-1965).

⁷¹ NGC Archives, *Second Biennial 1957*, Internal Memorandum, undated.

⁷² NGC Archives, *Board of Trustees*, 730-31.

⁷³ NGC Archives, *First Biennial 1955*, A. Jarvis to A. Shaw, 30 May 1956.

⁷⁴ It was Jarvis who presented his "Report on Organising the 1957 Biennial of Canadian Painting" to the Board of Trustees 23 May 1956. The motion was moved by Lawren Harris and seconded by Jean Chauvin, yet with the stipulation: "Where possible and when available individuals will be appointed as regional advisors. This is the desire of the Trustees but they do recognize that in all cases such appointments may not be feasible. Carried." NGC Archives, *Board of Trustees*, 737.

⁷⁵ NGC Archives, *Board of Trustees*, 730-31.

CHAPTER FOUR

NEW DIRECTORS AND DIFFERENT DIRECTIONS

The Second Biennial Exhibition of Canadian Art, renamed and redesigned to include all-media, opened in Ottawa on April 3rd, 1957. With no complex committees to orchestrate and certainly fewer personality issues to deal with, the Gallery was more than satisfied with the planning phase of the exhibition. The fact that 'Gallery officials' made almost all the decisions seemed to alleviate much of the stress of previous years, and the exhibition opened without a hitch.

Donald Buchanan described the Gallery's revised selection process in his introductory essay to the Biennial catalogue:

The initial choice of works to go before the final jury was made by three members of the National Gallery who, a few months ago, visited almost two hundred studios from coast to coast, in order to make a thorough survey of the present growth in Canadian art.

He went on to describe what was publicly known about the jury:

... [T]he Board of Trustees of the National Gallery was to appoint a jury the experience of whose members would be both Canadian and international in scope. They selected three men....¹

What the general public had not known, and would never officially know, were the names of the "members of the National Gallery" who had made the initial selections: then Public Relations Officer, Jean-René Ostiguy² travelled to Quebec and the Maritimes; Robert H. Hubbard, the Gallery's Chief Curator, covered Ontario; and Associate Director Donald Buchanan surveyed Manitoba westward.³

Nor would the Canadian public, or the artists, ever have any real comprehension of the behind-the-scenes changes in responsibility for and focus of the show.

In setting up the official procedures for the exhibition, Jarvis had recommended not only changing the show's selection process but also shifting its central premise as well: without the desire to engage the visual arts community in the process, it became now a strictly in-house Gallery affair. Supporting Canadian artists, seeing new work from across the country and purchasing it representationally for the national collection informed the initial exhibition: support Canadian artists and foster Canadian art. But that was all but abandoned now. Replacing these old motivations was a single desire: to strengthen the ability of the Gallery to purchase from select, important artists recognized by international authorities. Jarvis had convinced the Board of Trustees that the permanent collection could only be strengthened by acquiring works by a select group of renowned artists chosen by the Gallery's staff. While acquisitions had always played a crucial role in the success of the Gallery, five years after the recommendations of the Massey/Lévesque Commission the Gallery and the Trustees were motivated more by international recognition than a strong national reputation.

Jarvis handpicked prospective Biennial jurors to present to the Board of Trustees for approval. He made his first invitation to participate in the fall of 1956 to Andrew Ritchie, Director of Painting and Sculpture at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. In describing the scope of the exhibition, Jarvis was

conscious of the prestigious personality he was attempting to attract: “[W]e hope not only to get the cream of Canadian painting of the last two years, but also that it might be a major buying exhibition for the Gallery.... The staff are unanimous about who we would like ... yourself.”⁴ In accepting the position, Ritchie revealed the appeal of the prospect for him – based on professional reasons – of adjudicating such an exhibition:

Of course I should be glad to serve on your jury ... We know far too little about Canadian painting down here and this would certainly give me an opportunity to see a good deal of the work of the past two years.⁵

In completing the triad (the Director himself would sit on the jury) Jarvis sought to round out the group by seeking someone to represent French Canada, a large segment of the Canadian cultural landscape. From early on it was planned to balance the jury, as much as it is possible to balance a panel of three, with nominations from various cultural sectors, and he now approached Jean Simard, art critic, author and instructor in design from the École des Beaux-arts in Montreal.⁶

The dramatic shift in the constitution of the Second Biennial selection committee from community-based regional juries to a single elitist jury of leaders of major art institutions was diametrically opposed to Lawren Harris’ original vision for the exhibition. Jarvis’ confirmation of high-ranking professionals and specialists, including himself, was synonymous with nominating himself as sole juror. Harris, we saw, had cautioned: “No director or curator in Canada should be

permitted to act as judge and jury of paintings ... [n]o one man knows enough and no one man should be placed in so onerous a position. In Canada he would have more or less life and death power over our artists....”⁷ The absence of external regional committees in favour of an elitist jury, coupled with the use of Gallery staff as initial selectors, reversed the principles of the exhibition and made the show an exclusive Gallery matter from start to finish.

Ideologically as well the new method of assembling the selection committee was radical. No longer were the Trustees interested in promoting Canadian artists from within, but now Gallery staff, with Board approval, was concerned with grooming its image in the eyes of its sister institutions – nationally and internationally. The exhibition was approached with an eye on image rather than substance, efficiency over complexity. The streamlined, Gallery-controlled method, it was hoped, would yield the better result.

To further enhance the Gallery’s international image, Jarvis sought to consider an otherwise overlooked group of artists: those Canadians either studying or working abroad, yet who still retained natural ties to the country.⁸ Acting on Jarvis’ behalf, Buchanan contacted potential liaison officers for the Gallery in Europe to propose artists who were active, notable and worthy of inclusion in the show. In France Buchanan contacted Jacques Dubourg:

It is important that we do not neglect the work of Canadians living in Paris ... the best method would be to have the 2 or 3 Canadian

artists living in Paris, whose careers we are interested in following, bring recent examples of their work to your gallery to look at. Then anything you thought came up to fairly high standards could be selected by you to ship at our expense in Canada....⁹

Dubourg accepted, as did Philip James, Director of Art with the Arts Council of Great Britain in London.¹⁰ The web of 'Gallery officials', both within Canada and abroad, was spun.

Jarvis clearly outlined the procedures for the 1957 show and these were now communicated to both those on permanent and temporary payroll. Buchanan likened the selection process to that of the Brussels Exhibition, namely, that "the works of art should be selected from living artists who have made their impact in Canada during the post-war period."¹¹ While no official regional advisors were appointed, each member of the "investigating team" was expected to choose his own advisor whom he could call upon to "help him decide."¹² To avoid past errors works had to be available for purchase – the Gallery was adamant on this point – and it was stipulated that nothing was to be chosen from an artist whose work did not come up to "standards required for purchase by the National Gallery."¹³ Only one qualification was made as to the calibre of the selections:

It [is] assumed that when an artist's work [shows] no progress or change over that contributed over past years to national exhibitions or to Biennial Exhibitions, then no selections of his work [will] be made for sending to Ottawa.¹⁴

This was an important stipulation for it was indeed the bottom line: the Gallery saw the Exhibition as its primary source for acquisitions and intended to purchase

the majority of the works.¹⁵ But they wanted only advanced work by recognized, accomplished, and progressive artists.

According to the plan, only artists selected by invitation were eligible to have their works considered for inclusion in the exhibition. Over four hundred water colours, drawings, prints, oils and related media from just under two-hundred artists were selected in the preliminary surveys of the Gallery 'officials' and these works were sent to the National Gallery for the final adjudication process. By the middle of March 1957, seventy-seven works – forty-five oils and thirty-two works on paper from sixty artists – were chosen by Ritchie, Simard and Jarvis, and with that selection, the exhibition smoothly passed from concept to reality.¹⁶

Buchanan's introductory Biennial catalogue essay described the elimination process in terms that did not flatter those who had not been selected:

Abstraction ... is much ... the practice of the day. Unfortunately only a few of its adherents (the best of them are honoured in this exhibition) seem to be able to combine imagination with any sustained realization of purpose. Many other artists active in this field, while serious in intent, only produce the non-flowering grasses and stalks of art, those that briefly shoot up in the warm sun of fashion and as briefly die to form the compost heap from which the more powerful growths are fertilized.¹⁷

While Simard approved of and repeated the analogy: "May I tell you how much I enjoyed your introduction ... I have quoted many passages ... in articles of my own," Buchanan's inflammatory remarks raised more than a few eyebrows.

Sarcasm was one retort:

We have all of us here read your introduction with delight, and especially the part where you compare the work of painters not included in the exhibition to manure. I am sure that the pressure of your work has allowed you to overlook the honouring of the bill that I sent you three months ago....¹⁸

An excluded Paraskeva Clark¹⁹ graciously and humorously played with the metaphor in her letter to Hubbard: it "is a compliment as I don't belong to these modern fruitless ... that make that compost heap – oh well – perhaps I'll rise yet ... out of ashes of burned reality – wish me luck."²⁰

A more critical group of Quebec artists whose work was non-figurative, the Association des Artistes Non-Figuratifs, penned a collective response, attacking the content of the show:

The badly designed soap box which serves as a cover for the catalogue ... warns us of the insulting comments contained in the introduction.... In fact, the introduction is simply an apology on behalf of the jury for not finding any vital direction in Canadian art.... It would be upsetting for the rejected non-figurative painters to be so described, if it were not such a ridiculous piece of writing, and typical of the pedantic reactionary.²¹

The letter was signed by artists who are now presented in the Gallery's collection as the most important artists in Montreal in the 1950s: Louis Belzile,²² Paterson Ewen,²³ Jean McEwen²⁴ Fernand Leduc,²⁵ Rita Letendre²⁶ and Fernand Toupin.²⁷ These artists and their supporters questioned not only Simard's politics, but accused him of incompetence and disloyalty. The group agreed with Ostiguy's initial selection, but maintained that Simard had failed in his responsibility to support French-Canadian artists by eliminating them in the final selection. They

felt their progressive Montreal style, not just the work of individual artists, had been rejected:

Montreal is so pitifully represented since [it] was represented by a vast majority of abstract works in the initial choice of Mr. Ostiguy, Quebec representative of the National Gallery.²⁸

This group of Montreal artists sensed that the Gallery tended to favour such well-known artists as Jean Paul Riopelle²⁹ and Paul-Emile Borduas.³⁰ They questioned the government's recent surge of interest in cultural affairs and accused the Biennial series of being a false call to artists – an unfulfilled promise of an all-Canadian exhibition of recent work.³¹ The group felt little more than victims of a hoax.

There may well have been bias. Both Ostiguy and Simard were from Montreal: both had taught at the École des Beaux-Arts. Ostiguy's publications reflected Quebec's historical painters rather than modern ones,³² yet it was he who initially selected the non-figurative works by Quebec artists in the Gallery's first round pick. But it was the second jury with Simard, in conjunction with Ritchie and Jarvis, who rejected the style in its entirety. Although Simard's personal opinion remained veiled behind the collective decision of the jury, he had been selected for his expertise on Quebec culture to offset this type of criticism. He had failed. It is unclear whether it was Ostiguy's choice that did not adequately represent painting in Quebec, or that of the final jury. In both panels however, personal taste did dominate the criteria for choice and work representative of the province was not necessarily selected for the exhibition. In

any case, Ostiguy was not reprimanded or deemed ill qualified for his part of the selection process. On the contrary the Gallery must have trusted his abilities – he was chosen to be the organizer for the 1959 Biennial Exhibition.

The issue of the Montreal artists remained an internal story. The press and the public were oblivious to these points of contention, more concerned with the content of the exhibition – Ottawa and the rest of the country seemed to sleep through the affair. But the selection of artists was not the only area of the exhibition's organization that could have received criticism: regional representation and the travelling exhibition were also highly suspect.

With both British Columbia and Ontario placing sixteen works each, and the former province at one third of the population, it seems that the final jury completely rejected any reliance on quotas and chose to follow, in the spirit of Lawren Harris, criteria based somewhat on artistic merit. Indeed Ontario had slipped from first place and fared a slightly lower-than-average number in comparison with other years, yet still held its own, tying for second place. One could have said that Simard had been more than fair to Quebec: with thirty-nine percent of the show's works originating from French-Canadian artists, it was the first time the province of Quebec could boast the highest representation. With a population comparable to Ontario, it had double that province's representation.³³

The Gallery's nurturing of a core group of key artists was maintained in the touring segment when the exhibition never travelled east of Quebec City. Although there were works by Maritime artists in the Biennial,³⁴ there seems to

have been a case made that touring to the East Coast was not required. The exhibition travelled for five months, staying at least two weeks in each region and as much as two months in others, but once again the Gallery proved that the Maritimes could be invisible to the Ottawa-based organizers.

One could argue that the Gallery and the Trustees had removed themselves from the responsibility of supporting the Canadian artist – at least in the language Lawren Harris had used in selling the premise of the 1953 exhibition. Indeed, they no longer looked to population to determine regional quotas, and had long stopped looking at the gaps in the national collection and seeking out a way to fill them. More concerned now with buying works, the art was judged solely on merit and the maker's reputation. These may be sound criteria for acquisition (for many perhaps, the only criteria), but it was nevertheless very different from how the Gallery had initially described the exhibition to Canadians and Canadian artists. Still using the Biennial title, the Gallery knew full well that, title aside, this Biennial bore little relationship to its predecessors. Shifting it then, to more of a purchasing bazaar, the Gallery's priorities were enhanced, all the while diminishing any secondary, positive effects for the country and its artists. And so on one point alone the Gallery and its Trustees managed unequivocally to support Canadian artists: the Board purchased just under one-half of the exhibition, and paid a modest rental fee to the others.

In the short history of the Biennial, no more than a few handfuls of works had ever been purchased from any one exhibition (eight in 1953 and seventeen in

1955), and here in 1957 thirty-four works made it into the national collection – the numbers would never again be as high. Indeed these figures confirmed that the exhibition was principally designed and executed to bring forth works worthy of purchase. These intentions were revealed several times throughout the planning of the show, but at no time more explicitly than when Buchanan described the rules for choice to Jacques Dubourg: “Nothing [is to be] chosen from an artist whose work you do not think comes up to standards required for purchase by the National Gallery.”³⁵ Dubourg, who would return the names and works of such internationally acknowledged artists as Edmund Alleyne³⁶ and Jean Paul Riopelle, was certainly not, in his choices, selecting artists that needed encouragement and stimulation from the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa. Rather he helped the Gallery to assert its reputation internationally.

Yet the Gallery staff was not solely relying on the Biennial Exhibition for all the Canadian acquisitions it recommended to the Board of Trustees. Just as the earlier 1953 exhibition was coming to a close, Robert Hubbard, Curator of Canadian Art, questioned the moratorium on the acquisition of contemporary Canadian works between exhibitions. The Trustees had purchased only ten percent of the 1953 Biennial and perhaps disappointed with the choice of works available, now left the matter in the hands of Hubbard. He presented a scheme to the Board and was duly accorded a discretionary amount for immediate purchases, for those occasions where works “first shown” would be lost if not bought. While the Trustees stipulated that they could not wholly “delegate their

right to pass on acquisitions,” Hubbard was given “initiating responsibility ... appointed ... to discover these works.”³⁷ It seems that the Trustees were not fully confident that they were choosing from the best – procedural changes echoed this lack of confidence in the quality of the works compiled for the Biennials. As an extension of Hubbard’s new powers, the procedures for the 1957 Biennial read oddly like the curator’s proposal: essentially, that National Gallery officers would seek out works in exhibitions and studios, sending their selections to Ottawa for consideration by the Trustees.

Many agendas were at play here. When Lawren Harris had proposed the series in late 1950, McCurry as Director had seen a way to answer many of the issues pushed to the forefront by the Massey/Lévesque Commission. Canada’s distinctiveness from the United States, the fostering of Canadian culture, and the elevation of the institution in terms of extension and resources were but a few concerns that were addressed by Harris’ plan. But under the direction of Jarvis there was a very different priority. Post-war internationalism was more relevant now and the Gallery had a lot to prove under its new autonomous stature if it was to keep up with its sister institutions in the States and abroad. The Biennial’s shifting practices reflected this change, and was just one of many programmes modified to meet changing needs.

Not much changed in the organization of the 1959 Biennial. The ease of bringing the 1957 show to realization appealed to the Gallery and what wasn’t broken did not need to be fixed. While there were routine discussions

surrounding the methods and procedures – and certain personalities shuffled positions – the process remained the same. Hubbard described the procedures succinctly:

Initial selection for works to go before a jury will be made by staff members of the National Gallery, who will visit each region of Canada for this purpose. Works so selected and sent to Ottawa will then be presented to a jury.... Any artist who has work or works chosen by the jury for the exhibition will receive a selection award of \$25 ... the Trustees ... expect to purchase a large number of the works picked by the jury. For this reason works submitted will have to be for sale. The exhibition, after showing in Ottawa, will be circulated for approximately one year to each of the principal art galleries and art centres of Canada.³⁸

The members of the staff who made the initial selections changed their assignments from the previous year: Buchanan, who had surveyed the west in 1957, would now replace the Director on the final jury of three in Ottawa. Ostiguy, now Head of Education at the Gallery and one of its first high-ranking bilingual employees, filled the vacant position of organizer of the show. It would prove to be a shrewd choice. Jarvis did not completely phase himself out of the exhibition, but maintained a leadership role: it was he who wrote to the ‘distinguished authorities’ and asked for their time and expertise on the final Ottawa jury panel.

On this matter, leaders of major institutions were again asked. The jury consisted of Buchanan, the Gallery’s Associate Director, Colin Graham, Curator of the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, and the last position, reserved for an international expert, was filled by Gordon Washburn, Director of the Department

of Fine Arts at the Carnegie Institute in Pittsburgh. It was Washburn's experience as a juror that had first inspired the Gallery to take the path they were now following – that of relying on the judgement of a small circle of experts. He had served successfully as the sole juror for the last Carnegie International, the prestigious annual exhibition of American contemporary art, and the Gallery had used the success of the Carnegie as its cue for setting up its jury of three. Although the National Gallery Trustees admitted certain “dangers involved with this method”, they concluded that it would be possible to “retain the advantage of personal selection while safeguarding the exhibitions from the limitations of personal taste, favouritism, etc.”³⁹ One can only assume that they hoped to diffuse all these pitfalls by spreading the responsibility for the decisions among three, rather than the one, and by changing experts every year.⁴⁰ Washburn's appointment to the Biennial jury was a deliberate strategy on the part of the Gallery, establishing an association with the successful American show, and attracting a little of its artistic pedigree.

The calibre of Biennial artists continued to be a decisive factor in the 1959 show: artists participated by invitation only, and like the previous Biennial, Canadian artists abroad were included in the invitation. The Trustees accepted the staff's recommendation, to:

[D]raw up a list of artists who would merit invitation to participate. By this is meant artists who have shown progress in their work and have submitted works of high standard to national and regional exhibitions in the past years. In this first method of elimination we can work with the advice of

112

the art gallery directors and museum directors. Their advice to us would be strictly confidential.⁴¹

Quite consciously the Gallery sought to use the exhibition not as a developmental opportunity for new artists, but rather an occasion for it to associate with artists of high calibre who were already well-known in the art world.

In a bid to gain efficiency through simplification, the Gallery opted throughout the process of selection of both 1957 and 1959 to propose curators and directors from various galleries as advisors. Artists from the regions, or peers of artists, were no longer consulted but were replaced by professional men and women whose decisions, as Lawren Harris had foreseen, could make or break careers. Long ignored was his advice to avoid such pitfalls and rely upon artists' participation no matter what the cost – either in dollars, man-hours, or appearance. Directly in opposition to the principles guiding the initial project, Gallery staff and the Trustees (by their assent) had effectively re-shaped the procedures of the exhibition.

Ostiguy managed the exhibition with a firm hand. Corresponding with extreme ease in both official languages, he seemed perfectly suited for the task of steering the Gallery through the many currents of complex public relations (that was in fact his first position at the Gallery). And when two recurring problems resurfaced, Ostiguy met them head on. In an evaluation of the procedures used in the first two exhibitions, the Gallery summarized the experience of the Maritime committee:

[T]he Maritime Provinces, which have so few painters, service on these committees proved embarrassing to the artists who, if they were not to contribute works themselves, would have left the exhibition without interesting works.... The Maritime committee for the last Biennial was not able to visit Newfoundland....⁴²

Again in 1957 no Newfoundland artists were invited to submit works to the Biennial, but this year, for the Third Biennial Exhibition of 1959, Ostiguy sought to rectify the situation. He wrote to the Deputy Minister of Education in Saint John's, Newfoundland, and asked his advice:

[W]e do not know of any new talent which may have developed. Would you be kind enough to let us know ... artists who you think would merit an invitation to the exhibition?⁴³

Although the Deputy Minister promptly responded offering two names, neither artist managed to secure a place in the final round.⁴⁴

The province of Quebec demanded a slightly different solution. The criticisms of a small group of Montreal painters revealed a noticeable flaw in the previous show, and this year they were given special consideration. In laying out the procedures for the 1959 exhibition, Hubbard had made a personal recommendation on the matter:

I would recommend that we write to some members of the Association des Artistes Non-Figuratifs de Montreal and ask if they could send their works to the École des Beaux-arts in Montreal. I make this suggestion because artists are so numerous in Montreal that it would be a good idea to have the help of ... the École ...⁴⁵

Suggesting the co-operation of the École des Beaux-Arts made good networking sense, but it was not without some irony. The Montreal Non-Figuratifs were not likely to forget that it was Jean Simard, a professor at the École who had

participated in the group's categorical elimination from the final jury selection in Ottawa in 1957. Ostiguy was attempting to mend that bridge, and so the idea of dredging up the memory was discarded and the École was not used. While Ostiguy may not have directly followed the word of Hubbard's recommendation, he certainly adhered to its spirit. The importance of this group of Montreal artists could not be denied, and the Gallery sought to guarantee that their exclusion would not be repeated.

In 1957, in order to deal more efficiently with the demands of such an extensive geographic area as Canada, the Gallery had, on the recommendation of the Board of Trustees, established a "section devoted to exhibition extension services."⁴⁶ Two official liaison officers were appointed alongside the director of the department to advise on the Gallery's behalf on matters not exclusive to the Biennial. Norah McCullough was appointed as the western representative, while francophone artist and Musée de la Province employee Claude Picher represented his home province Quebec and the Maritimes.⁴⁷ Ostiguy and Picher represented two bilingual francophones placed in positions of increasing importance; it was by no means accidental. Conscious of the growing importance of French language and culture, not to mention the Gallery's recognition of where a large section of their Biennial selections were consistently coming from,⁴⁸ improved lines of communication were merited. Montreal in Quebec was an artistic centre that could not and would not be overlooked. Acknowledging its presence, even if

it meant a slight neglect of the other provinces, seemed a worthwhile compromise to an institution that sought to organize an exhibition of the 'best of Canadian art'.

Ostiguy did not simply stay in Ottawa to receive names, but actively selected works for the Biennial show. It seems that the Gallery trusted no one other than itself in the consistently high-yielding region of British Columbia. He intended to travel west where he would meet personally with artists that the Gallery had earlier described as 'most influential': "An additional paragraph would be added to the letters going out to several artists of high reputation mentioning to them our forthcoming visit to their studio."⁴⁹ It was these artists that the Gallery felt merited a personal studio visit, not just an invitation in the mail. While Ostiguy was meeting with Vancouver and Victoria artists, Picher was in Quebec on a similar mission. Ostiguy had previously sent off a confidential letter to John Steegman, the Director of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, for suggestions of French-Canadian artists meriting an invitation to the Biennial. Ostiguy suggested the names of almost fifty artists; seventy submitted works for final jurying in Ottawa and thirty-two were selected for the exhibition.⁵⁰

All in all Montreal was well represented: of the ninety-eight artists represented in the exhibition, thirty-six names were from the province of Quebec. On top of that staggeringly high percentage of French-Canadian artists, thirty-percent of the total number of artists once studied at the École des Beaux-Arts in Montreal. Twenty-one of these were relatively 'new' artists – they had never

before appeared in a Biennial exhibition. And for the first time, the catalogue of an exhibition appeared in both languages. The break with formal policy was a deliberate attempt on the part of the Gallery to strengthen ties with the Quebec visual arts community. The choice of Picher as the initial selector guaranteed as much.

Picher's studio visits were productive, for at least some members of Montreal's visual arts community were pleased with the Gallery's selections from Quebec. A group of students wrote directly to Jarvis:

We are writing you today to congratulate you for Mr. Picher's work. We are a group of painters in Montreal. Most of us were or are still studying at l'École des Beaux-Arts. We are serious about our work and would like to be seriously thought of – Mr. Picher, who was in town for the Biennial in search of new talents and ideas, came to see us (most of us were exposing at the Salon des Refusées) ... 5 out of the paintings chosen were accepted... We are not only grateful because a few of us were accepted but the fact that we had been invited to such an exhibition was quite an honour and an encouragement in our work.

The letter went on to thank the Gallery:

We wanted you to know how much we appreciated Mr. Picher's work and the fact he was so interested in the younger generation is a mark of broad-mindedness of the National Gallery.⁵¹

These compliments were not lost on Jarvis, nor was the unintentional irony: Gallery staff had stipulated its interest in established artists only, for in their minds the recognizable names would guarantee a strong exhibition. Although the congratulations were appreciated, there was also some dissension. Artists who had exhibited in Montreal's Salon du Printemps did not appreciate their rejection

in favour of artists whose work showed in the Refusée section. The Montreal press picked this up, publicly accusing Picher of bias. Picher did not tolerate the insinuation and was quick to defend himself: the works he had selected from the Printemps show were unavailable to travel to Ottawa and were therefore ineligible. These same artists did have works selected by other 'liaisons' and were thus included.⁵² With no official French-speaking representative on the Ottawa jury (Buchanan, Associate Director; Colin Graham, Art Gallery of Greater Victoria; and Gordon Washburn from the Carnegie Institute in Pittsburg made the final selections) the Gallery was open to inevitable criticism. While Ostiguy and Picher did work hard to satisfy the Quebec situation, their presence alone was not enough for all French-Canadian artists, especially those not chosen this round.

By the time the Third Biennial opened to the Ottawa public in May of 1959, Jarvis had stepped down as Director, the weight of the scandal surrounding the Liechtenstein purchases too heavy to bear.⁵³ It was his successor, the artist Charles Comfort,⁵⁴ who spoke at the opening ceremonies of the exhibition in the Maritimes at the Beaverbrook Gallery in Fredericton, New Brunswick. Comfort praised the show for its successes and summarized its thorough scope: over 700 works of art were assembled at the National Gallery for adjudication – “from Newfoundland to Vancouver Island” – and fifty-nine oils and thirty-nine water colours, gouaches, drawings and prints were selected.⁵⁵ The press and the public seemed to share the Gallery's satisfaction with the show. The process had been smooth and seemingly effortless, and no complaints were being voiced. The

Quebec problem had been resolved to the satisfaction of most artists, and a great debate had sprung as to the direction of contemporary Canadian art. Why then were the procedures once again radically altered in yet another bid to find the elusive answers to the questions? How does one organize a summarily meaningful, artistically relevant National exhibition of Canadian art in support of the country's artists in a fair and democratic spirit? How does the National Gallery establish a national presence throughout the country that is feasible, sustainable, and effective?

The summer of 1960 opened with a call from the Director for procedural proposals for the Fourth Biennial Exhibition of Canadian Art. Comfort had obtained authorization for a review of the procedures from the Board at his first meeting of the Trustees after a lengthy discussion of the previous years' experience.⁵⁶ He now charged each member of his immediate staff with the task of putting forth recommendations for the 1961 Biennial. Donald Buchanan, Associate Director, for a few more months as least; Jean-René Ostiguy, now Curator of Canadian Art; Richard Simmins, replacing Ostiguy as Director of Extension Services; Claude Picher and Norah McCullough, liaisons to the east and west all contributed ideas. The procedures to run the next show were a compilation of select features of five proposals, plus the Director's own particular point of view.

Buchanan, the first to speak, objected to senior Gallery staff's time-consuming visits to artists' studios in the regions. He concluded that the same

funds could be used to “subsidize ... [a] regional method of collection and appraisal”:

In each region a gallery would be asked to sponsor a regional exhibition.... When the regional exhibition was being held the National Gallery would send one of its senior staff to view the exhibition and he and the chairman of the regional jury ... would then pick from the exhibition the best 25 examples to be sent for showing in Ottawa. In other regions the desired quota of paintings would be picked in the same way from the subsidized regional exhibition. The paintings so picked would then be submitted in Ottawa to a national jury of the same composition as previous years....⁵⁷

Comfortable with trusting the selection of the most influential exhibition in the country to three men of high cultural status, Buchanan proposed to re-direct funds and save the Gallery staff some time and effort. In a simple and effortless proposal that offered no real specifics, Buchanan expressly designed a plan to yield the same result as the years before.

Ostiguy, more thorough in his evaluation, returned to the premises of the original conception and identified the exhibition’s major difficulties. He felt that the exhibition was not meeting its purposes, namely, to “summarize the best productions of Canadian Art of the past two years” and to provide works for purchase. A third goal was added: the exhibition at its most basic level should be “the exaltation of the very best and its presentation to the world’s attention.” Ostiguy criticized the Biennial for its “undemocratic attitude,” low standards of quality, for being of “no importance” to any artist whose works were already held

in the collection.⁵⁸ The Biennial, in Ostiguy's opinion, had failed on all three counts.

In openly acknowledging the tendency artists have to "work" towards any biennial or "impressive exhibition," Ostiguy proposed a regional or provincial adjudicated exhibition as a prelude to the national adjudication. He compiled statistics from the recent Gallery Biennial series, as well as other major shows, and supported his point of having certain provinces grouped together under one general region – specifically those whose artistic production fell below a 'standard' set by other more productive regions. He anticipated criticism of this last point, and cut it off at the pass. Ostiguy stated that they had a "special right to put the National Gallery stamp by means of a final and additional quota or by other means ... [that they had] the right moreso if [they paid] all expenses of such an organization such as that needed."⁵⁹ Arguing his ideas logically, Ostiguy categorically defended his proposal point by point.

He then introduced a rarely discussed topic at the Gallery, the roles and duties of the Gallery, and specifically how the Biennial currently fitted into those obligations:

As to encourage the younger artists, it is no more the duty of the Gallery to do that. Local encouragement is given more and more by local governments, cities, museums and galleries, commercial galleries and Canada Council. We give recognition to artists who have produced works of rare quality. We help them in other ways also and this is sufficient.⁶⁰

Ostiguy felt that the obligations of the Gallery resided in a network of institutions. He foretold of a "climate of confidence" between the different levels of government, and counselled against continuing to treat the provinces paternalistically:

[I]f for instance a province sent bad works ... that province risks criticism in Ottawa and would be ashamed to show lower standards in a national exhibition of such importance.⁶¹

Unlike Buchanan, Ostiguy was unafraid to risk a presentation of works that would not "measure up to the best." He looked past the temporary unpleasant mechanics of the show in order to strive for a larger, more enduring purpose. He was convinced that eventually the exhibition would come into its own, and fulfil the expectations of its original premise.

Richard Simmins opened his proposal to the Director with the understatement of the decade: "There is no single system to choose the Biennial which will be satisfactory to Canada as a whole."⁶² All Gallery staff was in agreement on this one point! Simmins then proceeded to propose a radical system that would be backed in a combined proposal advanced by himself, Claude Picher and Norah McCullough. Simply put, they opted to open the exhibition to all of Canada – they proposed to hold a completely open exhibition.⁶³

Picher's individual proposal reproached the three-man jury system for the three most commonly cited weaknesses: excess expenditures, public criticism, and dictatorial methods. He argued that the plan proposed by the Associate Director would bring no "qualitative change," just a result "identical" to those of

previous years.⁶⁴ As a solution, Picher proposed to level the playing field by eliminating quotas, both minimum and maximum, and allowing all artists to compete against one another for top spots. Only the most meritorious works would be included, ensuring the integrity and high standards of the entries.

The main ideas of Picher's proposal resurfaced in the joint Simmins/Picher/McCullough document with explicit mechanics in place. The open show was to be advertised nationally in all the important daily newspapers in Canada, with entry forms available in every major exhibiting centre in Canada. A limit of two works per artist was imposed in order to keep the number of entries to a manageable number: Picher estimated that no more than 800 entries would be received through this method, basing this number on recent shows in both Quebec and Winnipeg.⁶⁵ On the most controversial and difficult point to settle – that of the jury – Simmins, Picher, and McCullough “strongly recommended”⁶⁶ a jury of five for final selections, yet stipulated that no member of the National Gallery staff be allowed to sit on the panel. The touring segment was an important element, and it now dictated the maximum number of works: ninety was the imposed cap, determined by the major exhibition centres that would be able to handle a show of that size. Reflecting the spirit of ‘openness’, the jury would appear in public as a panel to discuss the exhibition. In both television and radio interviews, the panel, and by extension the Gallery, would assess the results and the exhibition's success in fulfilling its purpose, namely to foster all Canadian artists while advancing the National Gallery as a possible rallying point for a

nationalist agenda. The Division of Extension Services was cognizant of the concerns and needs of the visual arts community both regionally and nationally. This proposal, readily accepted by both Comfort and the Board of Trustees, became the new backbone of the Biennial series.

In the fall of 1960, the Gallery proudly announced its new Biennial procedures: "Biennial Exhibition Now Open to All" caught the attention of the general public, the press, and galleries both nationally and internationally. Alex Colville, asked to join the jury, responded enthusiastically with his input:

[I]t is simply that the Biennial be very well advertised so that anyone who might want to submit work will be sure to know about it. I think that one danger of the Biennials may be a tendency to stick to a well-worn path, to invite the better known and more generally praised artists – thus leaving the Gallery open to the accusation of favouring a certain clique.... Anyone working in art knows that in fact there are not many unknown, unacclaimed artists of promise, but there are probably some, and one of the most important functions of the Biennial is to seek these people out and give serious consideration to their work.⁶⁷

He supported the Gallery's efforts wholeheartedly. The exhibition, he concluded,

would have a good influence on public opinion as related to the National Gallery and to art in general, because it would demonstrate the genuine wish of the National Gallery to serve the whole country without prejudice, and to appraise the work of the most humble painter. I am sure, for instance that newspaper editors seeing such an announcement ... would be inclined more favourably toward the National Gallery.⁶⁸

The names of the other four jurors were publicly announced in Gallery press releases, and nationally in *Canadian Art*. Clare Bice, artist and Curator of the Public Library and Art Museum in London, Ontario; Dr. Ferdinand Eckhardt,

Director of the Winnipeg Art Gallery; artist Jean-Paul Lemieux, from the École des Beaux-Arts in Montreal; and as Chairman, Philip James, Secretary of the Museum Association of England. The Gallery, having learned from accumulated years of experience in jury selection, had carefully diversified its cast. With the procedures in place, and the personalities set, all that was left for the Gallery to do was sit back and receive the “no more than 800 entries” projected by Simmins, Picher and McCullough’s accepted proposal.

The Gallery spent a large segment of its Biennial budget on advertising the exhibition. Taking to heart Colville’s advice to adequately publicize the show, and the financial estimate the artist initially gave, more than five thousand dollars was spent. Daily and weekly newspapers, provincial and national, including *The Globe and Mail*, *Le Devoir*, and several magazines with cross-Canada circulation such as *Maclean’s* and *Saturday Night*, carried the announcement and artists’ guidelines for the first open national Biennial exhibition. Realizing the ads not only notified artists of the Biennial, but also functioned as “good institutional ads for the Gallery in general,”⁶⁹ the Gallery seized the opportunity of a lifetime. The public and the press’ reception was unprecedented, and there was an awakened interest creeping across the country. Radio broadcasts reached even the most remote artists, those who had previously been excluded:

Here’s good news for Canada’s artists! The national show will be wide open to all Canadian residents for the first time since the annual and biennial exhibitions began over 30 years ago.⁷⁰

Gallery staff was aware that the more established artists might feel disgruntled by being lumped with unknowns and amateur artists in this open exhibition format. J. Russell Harper, the Gallery's newest addition as Curator of Canadian Art, formulated a 'personal invitation' form letter (in both French and English) to be sent to artists who merited more personal attention. The letter was carefully worded, and the entry forms inconspicuously enclosed:

You may have seen the announcement of the IVth Biennial of Canadian Art.... We are eager to show Canadian Art of the highest calibre being produced currently in this country. We hope that it will conform to the best professional standards, and have real artistic merit. This letter is a personal request ... to submit two major works for this important jury exhibition. Only by obtaining work of the highest quality can we assemble a show which will make a real impact in the art world. I hope that the exhibition will reveal the real force that is in Canadian painting in 1960.⁷¹

Gallery staff wanted to avoid alienating the established "cream" of Canadian painters – they wanted to guarantee that these artists would not abstain from submitting works to an exhibition that was advertised as an open call to artists. An omission of the 'greats' in order to include the 'unknowns' would not serve the Gallery's purpose any better than the reverse scenario. Their concerns were well-founded.

Over 1900 paintings, drawings and prints arrived at the National Gallery for consideration by the five-man jury, and the panel considered "every one of them."⁷² In previous shows, no more than three-hundred works had ever arrived at the Gallery's door! Inevitably by the nature of the large pool of artists and

works, there was a certain lack of cohesion in the final presentation and admittedly, important omissions. The jury apologized:

In principle however we believe that while good reasons can be and for this Biennial have been advanced in favour of the "free for all" this does not necessarily make for the maintenance of the highest standards, and may account for a number of regrettable absences.⁷³

The jury was careful to make mention of other Gallery exhibitions:

There is a great deal to be said for exhibitions held annually and not under the aegis of the National gallery, open to all comers. There is equally as much in favour of exhibitions held at regular intervals in the National Gallery confined to the work of as few as four or six artists....⁷⁴

This phrase, carefully introduced within the text of the exhibition catalogue, summed up the Gallery's, and the public's thoughts: the staggering number of entries did not guarantee results. Robert Newton finally had an answer to his question of almost a decade outstanding, if it would be "practical and justifiable" for any artist to send in works for consideration. Indeed, the open method did not solve all problems.

The 1961 Biennial Exhibition was indeed a bold and ambitious move on the part of the Gallery to attempt to satisfy the largest stakeholder group – the artists. Comfort, the Director, was after all an artist. Catering to all and sundry meant risking the exclusion of major recognized names. Also, in giving the National Gallery of Canada 'stamp' of approval to previously unknown amateurs, the jury invariably paired these with the more time-honoured works of Canada's

celebrated artists. The press, which had praised the theory of openness, now mocked the results. The exhibition met with mixed reviews:

Are these 90 paintings and graphics REALLY the 'best' among 1,800 entries chosen by the international jury to represent the 'cream' of Canadian art from coast to coast?⁷⁵

It was impossible to please everyone. Gallery staff had predicted that some established artists would refuse to enter, even with personal invitations. Their fears were realized and the absence of these pivotal artists was a glaring omission. Yet to be tallied were the costs in terms of money and time, but in any case, once again, it was time to rethink the plan.

Endnotes

¹ National Gallery of Canada, *Second Biennial Exhibition of Canadian Art 1957*. (Ottawa: 1957), Introduction.

² Ostiguy had held that position since 1955 and would until he became Head of Education Services in 1958. He continued his climb up the Gallery's ladder, becoming the Director of Extension Services in 1963 and then the Curator of Canadian Art in 1965. An accomplished author (having written more than two dozen articles on Quebec artists and Canadian art in general, not to mention a brief look at the 1955 Biennial published in *Canadian Art* (vol. 12, no.4), he had taught previously at the École des Beaux-Arts in Montreal, and would continue on to teach at the University of Ottawa and then Laval. The first fluently bilingual staff member, his abilities were invaluable to the Gallery as it became necessary in Canada to function in both French and English. NGC Archives, *Biographical File: Jean-René Ostiguy*, Résumé.

³ Buchanan refers to an October 29th meeting when he summarizes the decisions affecting the Second Biennial: "It was also agreed that Mr. Ostiguy would do his research in Quebec, the Maritime provinces and Newfoundland; Dr. Hubbard in Ontario; and Mr. Buchanan in the Prairie provinces and British Columbia." National Gallery of Canada Archives (hereafter NGC Archives), *Second Biennial Exhibition of Canadian Art 1957*, File 5.5-B. Memorandum from D. Buchanan to A. Jarvis, R. H. Hubbard, K. Fenwick, and J.R. Ostiguy, undated.

⁴ NGC Archives, *Second Biennial 1957*, A. Jarvis to A. Ritchie, 26 October 1956.

⁵ NGC Archives, *Second Biennial 1957*, A. Ritchie to A. Jarvis, 30 October 1956.

⁶ First mention of this intention appeared in Alan Jarvis' letter to Andrew Ritchie: "This time it is our intention to have a three-man jury composed of myself, another Canadian (probably French-Canadian) and someone outside Canada. The way this next one works out will, we hope, set a pattern for the future...." NGC Archives, *Second Biennial 1957*, A. Jarvis to A. Ritchie, 26 October 1956. Prior plans did not include the stipulation of one juror representing French-Canada.

⁷ National Archives of Canada (hereafter NAC), *Lawren S. Harris Papers*, Volume 4, Draft Document, undated.

⁸ Jarvis himself was an internationalist. Although born in Ontario and having attended the University of Toronto (1938), he completed his studies at Oxford and in New York City and worked principally abroad. During the war he was stationed in England, went on to work for the Board of Trade of the United Kingdom government (1945), then England's newly formed Industrial Design Council (1946) and eventually became head of Oxford House (1951). McCurry on the other hand developed from within the public service of Canada, making a career of the National Gallery. NGC, *Annual Report of the Board of Trustees for the Fiscal Year 1954-5* (Ottawa: 1955), 6-11.

⁹ NGC Archives, *Second Biennial 1957*, D. Buchanan to J. Dubourg, 1 November 1956.

¹⁰ Philip James accepting Jarvis' offer: "I shall be very glad to help you with the selection of work by Canadians living in London for your third biennale.... I see that you suggest that there are only two or three Canadians living in London in whose work you are interested; so it is really not a difficult matter." NGC Archives, *Second Biennial 1957*, P. James to A. Jarvis, 9 November 1956.

¹¹ NGC Archives, *Second Biennial 1957*, Memorandum from D. Buchanan to A. Jarvis, R. Hubbard, K. Fenwick, J.R. Ostiguy, undated.

¹² NGC Archives, *Second Biennial 1957*, Memorandum from D. Buchanan to A. Jarvis, R. Hubbard, K. Fenwick, J.R. Ostiguy, undated.

¹³ NGC Archives, *Second Biennial 1957*, Memorandum from D. Buchanan to A. Jarvis, R. Hubbard, K. Fenwick, J.R. Ostiguy, undated. There were always cases where a work that had been selected for the Ottawa jury was subsequently returned for failing to be available to Trustees for purchase.

¹⁴ NGC Archives, *Second Biennial 1957*, Memorandum from D. Buchanan to A. Jarvis, R. Hubbard, K. Fenwick, J.R. Ostiguy, undated.

- ¹⁵ This was a point that Charles Fell, Chairman of the Board of Trustees needed clarified: "During the past week I have been perusing the first draft of the minutes of the last meeting.... Are we on the right track in having indicated our intention to purchase the whole Exhibition? If this fact becomes known, what prices are the artists going to place on the paintings which they submit? There are other questions of this nature that lead me to the conclusion that there should be some qualifying sentence which would give us an out, if difficulties arise." It was Lawren Harris that revisited the motion, and rescinded his approval. Donald Buchanan addressed the Director: "...no action to reverse this resolution need to be taken until the autumn meeting of the Board ... provided that in the interval the Gallery, in any publicity concerning the Biennial, refrains from any mention of the method of purchase of paintings from the Biennial." NGC Archives, *Second Biennial 1957*, C. Fell to A. Jarvis, 6 July 1956 and D. Buchanan to A. Jarvis, 11 July 1956. This discussion proves that the Gallery regarded the Biennial Exhibition series as the principal method of acquiring Canadian works for the National collection.
- ¹⁶ NGC, *Second Biennial 1957*, Introduction.
- ¹⁷ NGC, *Second Biennial 1957*, Introduction.
- ¹⁸ NGC Archives, *Second Biennial 1957*, M. Forster to D. Buchanan, 16 May 1957.
- ¹⁹ Paraskeva Clark (1898-1986).
- ²⁰ Clark sent one dollar to Hubbard asking for a copy of the catalogue to be mailed to her; he returned her dollar with the catalogue, a peace offering perhaps for her exclusion from the show. NGC Archives, *Second Biennial 1957*, P. Clark to R. Hubbard, 24 April 1957.
- ²¹ NGC Archives, *Second Biennial 1957*, Louis Belzile, Paterson Ewen, André Jasmin, Fernand Leduc, Rita Letendre, Jean McEwen, Jean-Paul Mousseau and Fernand Toupin to A. Jarvis, Montreal, 24 May 1957.
- ²² Louis Belzile (1929-).
- ²³ William Paterson Ewen (1925-).
- ²⁴ Jean Albert McEwen (1923-1999).
- ²⁵ Fernand Leduc (1916-).
- ²⁶ Rita Letendre (1929-).
- ²⁷ Fernand Toupin (1930-).
- ²⁸ NGC Archives, *Second Biennial 1957*, L. Belzille, P. Ewen, A. Jasmin, F. Leduc, R. Letendre, J. McEwen, J.P. Mousseau and F. Toupin to A. Jarvis, Montreal, 24 May 1957.
- ²⁹ Jean-Paul Riopelle (1923-).
- ³⁰ Paul-Émile Borduas (1905-1960). Borduas and Riopelle were each represented by one work and were among those purchased by the National Gallery from that year's exhibition. NGC, *Second Biennial 1957*.
- ³¹ Part One of the letter was translated into English yet Part Two remained in the original French: "Il paraîtra difficile d'expliquer, il nous semble, comment Belzille, Ewen, Ferron, Gauvreau, Jasmin, Leduc, Letendre, McEwen, Mousseau et Toupin, qui tous se cotoient en des disciplines d'art non-figuratifs et dont l'activité et qualités professionnelles ne sont pas à démontrer, comment tous, après avoir été invités, furent rejetés en bloc.... La présence de Borduas, de Riopelle, autant de celle de Binning, loin de changer nos convictions, ne peut que souligner l'opportunisme du jury. Ici, nous accusons Monsieur Jean Simard, dont le rôle était de représenter l'élément canadien-français dans ce jury, d'incompétence dans ces fonctions et de trahison envers un art qu'il peut ne pas goûter, mais qu'il avait le devoir de ne pas ignorer." NGC Archives, *Second Biennial 1957*, L. Belzille, P. Ewen, A. Jasmin, F. Leduc, R. Letendre, J. McEwen, J.P. Mousseau and F. Toupin to A. Jarvis, Montreal, 24 May 1957.
- ³² Articles in *Vie des Arts*, *Canadian Collector* and several National Gallery of Canada publications explored the work of such historical artists as Marc-Aurèle Fortin, Ozias Leduc, Adrien Hébert, James Wilson Morrice and Charles Huot among others, but also some general works on contemporary painting in Canada and Quebec. Ostiguy was chosen for the task, and kept it, due to his extensive knowledge of Canadian painting and his ability, language-wise, to connect with the discourse in Quebec. NGC Archives, *Biographical File: Jean-René Ostiguy*, Résumé.
- ³³ See Appendix I.

- ³⁴ David Alexander Colville (1920-), Jack Weldon Humphrey (1901-1967), Ruth Salter Wainwright (1902-1984).
- ³⁵ NGC Archives, *Second Biennial 1957*, D. Buchanan to J. Dubourg, 19 November 1956.
- ³⁶ George Edmund Alleyn (1931-).
- ³⁷ NGC Archives, *Board of Trustees: Minutes of Meetings*, File 9.2-B, 656-658.
- ³⁸ NGC Archives, *Third Biennial Exhibition of Canadian Art 1959*, File 12-4-64, Volume 1. Internal Memorandum entitled "Third Biennial Exhibition of Canadian Art (1959)." undated.
- ³⁹ NGC Archives, *Board of Trustees*, 730-731.
- ⁴⁰ Problem solved: "A Qualified senior member of the National Gallery curatorial staff ... will travel from coast to coast once every two years ... [a] different person would be chosen each second year for a cycle of at least six years, in order to avoid the perpetuation of the taste of any one person." NGC Archives, *Board of Trustees*, 730-731.
- ⁴¹ NGC Archives, *Third Biennial 1959*, "Procedures for the Biennial," J.R. Ostiguy, 25 November 1958.
- ⁴² NGC Archives, *Board of Trustees*, 730-731.
- ⁴³ NGC Archives, *Third Biennial 1959*, J.R. Ostiguy to G.A. Frecker, 4 February 1959.
- ⁴⁴ Ostiguy had approached Frecker with the name of R. Shepherd who had recently returned from Europe. Frecker happily acknowledged the artist and added another: Mr. Harold Goodridge. NGC Archives, *Third Biennial 1959*, G.A. Frecker to J.R. Ostiguy, 13 February 1959.
- ⁴⁵ NGC Archives, *Third Biennial 1959*, Internal Memorandum from R.H. Hubbard to Gallery Staff, 25 November 1958.
- ⁴⁶ NGC, *Annual Report of the Board of Trustees for the Fiscal Year 1957-8* (Ottawa: 1958), 36.
- ⁴⁷ Claude Picher was born in Quebec and studied there at the École des Beaux-Arts, as well as in France and the United States. At the time of his position as liaison for the east for the National Gallery, he was in charge of extension activities at the Musée de la Province in Quebec. NGC Archives, *Second Biennial 1957*.
- ⁴⁸ Percentage of entries selected from Quebec: 1953: 20.8; 1955: 22.6; 1957: 39.
- ⁴⁹ NGC Archives, *Third Biennial 1959*, "Procedures for the Biennial," J.R. Ostiguy, 25 November 1958.
- ⁵⁰ NGC Archives, *Third Biennial 1959*, Press Releases prepared by J.R. Ostiguy, undated and 7 May 1959.
- ⁵¹ NGC Archives, *Third Biennial 1959*, unknown to A. Jarvis, 26 May 1959.
- ⁵² Picher finished his rebuttal letter stating the he could not accept having such misinformation published when he was officially representing the National Gallery of Canada as liaison for the east. He also mentioned in a later letter that he would let a second issue drop, that of the accusation that the National Gallery had a 'closed door' policy with regards to artists invited to participate in the Biennial Exhibitions. NGC Archives, *Third Biennial 1959*, C. Picher to R. Chicoine of "Le Devoir," 2 May 1959 and 11 June 1959.
- ⁵³ NGC Archives, *Board of Trustees*, 981. See Martha King's narrative for the events that led to his, Charles P. Fell, and F. Cleveland Morgan's resignation: "The National Gallery of Canada at Arm's Length from the Government of Canada: A Precarious Balancing Act." M.A. Thesis, Carleton University, 1996.
- ⁵⁴ Charles Fraser Comfort was Director of the National Gallery between 1960-65. A recognized artist, he came to the Gallery from the University of Toronto as Associate Professor, Art and Archaeology.
- ⁵⁵ NGC Archives, *Clipping File: Third Biennial Exhibition of Canadian Art 1959*, untitled in the St. John's Evening Times, 4 May 1960.
- ⁵⁶ NGC Archives, *Board of Trustees*, 993.
- ⁵⁷ NGC Archives, *Fourth Biennial Exhibition of Canadian Art 1961*, File 12-4-91, Memorandum from D. Buchanan to C. Comfort, R. H. Hubbard, R. Simmins, J.R. Ostiguy, 3 June 1960.
- ⁵⁸ NGC Archives, *Fourth Biennial 1961*, Internal Document by J.R. Ostiguy to C. Comfort, 13 June 1960.
- ⁵⁹ NGC Archives, *Fourth Biennial 1961*, Internal Document by J.R. Ostiguy to C. Comfort, 13 June 1960.
- ⁶⁰ NGC Archives, *Fourth Biennial 1961*, Internal Document by J.R. Ostiguy to C. Comfort, 13 June 1960.
- ⁶¹ NGC Archives, *Fourth Biennial 1961*, Internal Document by J.R. Ostiguy to C. Comfort, 13 June 1960.
- ⁶² NGC Archives, *Fourth Biennial 1961*, Memorandum from R. Simmins to C. Comfort, 8 June 1960.

⁶³ Richard Simmins was the first to venture the idea of an open show: "I would recommend that we open up the exhibition to permit works to be sent in from all parts of Canada...." Two days later the trio of Extension Services wrote an elaborate proposal considering all the mechanics. NGC Archives, *Fourth Biennial 1961*, R. Simmins to C. Comfort, 8 June 1960 and R. Simmins, C. Picher and N. McCullough to C. Comfort, 10 June 1960.

⁶⁴ NGC Archives, *Fourth Biennial 1961*, C. Picher to C. Comfort, D. Buchanan, R.H. Hubbard, R. Simmins, and J.R. Ostiguy, 10 June 1960.

⁶⁵ NGC Archives, *Fourth Biennial 1961*, C. Picher to C. Comfort, D. Buchanan, R.H. Hubbard, R. Simmins, and J.R. Ostiguy, 10 June 1960.

⁶⁶ NGC Archives, *Fourth Biennial 1961*, C. Picher to C. Comfort, D. Buchanan, R.H. Hubbard, R. Simmins, and J.R. Ostiguy, 10 June 1960.

⁶⁷ NGC Archives, *Fourth Biennial 1961*, A. Colville to C. Comfort, 3 August 1960.

⁶⁸ NGC Archives, *Fourth Biennial 1961*, A. Colville to C. Comfort, 3 August 1960.

⁶⁹ NGC Archives, *Fourth Biennial 1961*, Memorandum entitled "As for Biennial", 14 November 1960.

⁷⁰ Ottawa, Hamilton, Toronto, Montreal, Winnipeg, Regina, Lethbridge, Calgary, Edmonton, Grande Prairie, Trail, Vancouver, and Victoria radio stations picked up the news. NGC Archives, *Fourth Biennial 1961*, Text of Broadcast entitled: "An Item of Interest to You," 12 November 1960.

⁷¹ NGC Archives, *Fourth Biennial 1961*, Form letter by J.R. Harper, 1 December 1960.

⁷² National Gallery of Canada, *Fourth Biennial Exhibition of Canadian Art 1961*, (Ottawa 1961). Report of the Jury.

⁷³ NGC, *Fourth Biennial 1961*, Report of the Jury.

⁷⁴ NGC, *Fourth Biennial 1961*, Report of the Jury.

⁷⁵ NGC Archives, *Clipping File: Fourth Biennial 1961*, "Canadian Biennial: We Propose Salon of the Rejected," *Ottawa Citizen*, 8 July 1961.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE BIENNIAL EXITS

J. Russell Harper,¹ Curator of Canadian Art at the National Gallery of Canada and organizer of the 1963 Biennial Exhibition, began his turn at the helm by critically evaluating the 1961 show. He calculated the expenses and came up with a staggering figure: the cost, even without acquisitions, had soared to almost twenty-five thousand dollars.² Harper confronted the Director, Charles Comfort, with the harsh financial reality:

The Fifth Canadian Biennial should take place next spring and plans must be formulated immediately.... There is no possibility of the present staff being able to handle the number of entries arriving in the building for an open show.... We CAN NOT afford all of this for one exhibition with the tremendous work load that is being carried on all sides ... we CAN NOT find money to hire outside help ... and we must cut down on expenditures.³

Gallery spending was already under close scrutiny as a result of Jarvis' audacious attempts to acquire European masterpieces from the Liechtenstein collection and this perceived abuse of the Gallery's semi-autonomous crown agency status led to severe slashes in its appropriation from Parliament. Never before had finances weighed so heavily in the plans for the Biennial series. Money was an issue these days, and would remain one for the time being.

With input from staff, Harper formulated a new approach to the Biennial. First he cleared his proposal with Comfort:

Plans for this exhibition must be formulated immediately ... I have had considerable discussion relating to it with Mr. Dale, Miss Fenwick and Mr. Simmins. We have also discussed the budgetary difficulties with Mr. Veit and the question of work load with Mr. Hume. We have been able to evolve the following formula which seems to be on the possible way to economically conduct the exhibition for the coming year.⁴

Offering up the extreme scenario, Harper held nothing back:

The alternative would seem to be to cancel the exhibition entirely since any method involving considerable staff time and money is impossible at present. I realize that there may be some public criticism but there has always been some in the past and there will always be some in the future no matter what method is chosen, and we must simply be prepared to accept it; after all some criticism is always good for everybody.⁵

These were not exaggerations. The financial realities of a completely open show were jarring, and indeed outside criticism was bound to arise no matter what the procedure. Comfort reserved his comments and agreed to take Harper's proposal to the Board of Trustees for approval.

In October of 1962, Comfort and Harper, as well as other invited Gallery staff including Robert Hubbard, Chief Curator, Richard Simmins, Director of Extension Services, and Jean-René Ostiguy, Head of Education Services, joined the meeting of the Board of Trustees in which Harper's proposal for the 1963 Biennial was revealed:

The Fifth Biennial of Canadian art ... would not be an open competition ... Mr. Harper would visit various studios across Canada to make a preliminary selection of paintings. Honorary Advisory Committees would be set up across the country with a view to suggesting artists whose works should be seen ... a selection of from 200 to 250 works would be made and brought to the Gallery for final selection by a jury comprised of two members of the Board of Trustees and three members of the professional staff.⁶

To minimize costs, Harper recommended taking full responsibility for organizing the exhibition and suggested a solo, cross-country tour to visit artists. The idea of bringing the Curator of Canadian Art to the works would avoid the greatest expense of the last show, namely shipping charges, and money would again be saved by internally staffing the final jury. In consideration of the probable increase of submissions from the previous year if the show were to remain an open one, a one-man travelling selection committee and the final Gallery jury seemed to Harper, in a bid to keep the exhibition running, the only possible solution:

This method must be regarded as a temporary expedient for the coming Biennial and not as a precedent for future exhibitions.... I might add that there are two reasons why I have allowed the suggestion to go forward that I should make the selection: first, I would have an opportunity as Curator ... to meet the artists right across the country, something which I feel is desirable and should be done anyway; and secondly, I feel that I have a knowledge of the needs of the collection for purchase better than would an outsider. Of course in such a trip one will inevitably hear of other older paintings for sale, etc which may prove very useful to us.⁷

After discussion and several financial negotiations, the Board was convinced of the necessity of the move and approved Harper's recommendations.

In a circle that was becoming more and more complete, the Trustees reverted to their earlier patterns of relying on the judgement of just a few men. And even more incriminatingly this time, they now relied on only one individual for the initial selection – a paid National Gallery employee, the Curator of Canadian Art, no less. In doing such, the Gallery was simply following procedures in place for any gallery planning an exhibition. Namely to go out,

choose works, and bring them back. While it had the stamp of the Biennial on its back, and all the symbolic value that came attached to the now-famous exhibition, the show was once again set up to fail to achieve so many of its initial goals, especially those promoted by Lawren Harris. Harper's choice of artists would be based on curatorial judgement and would surely not have the same resonance as the selection made by and in the regions, choosing from their own and according to quotas determined by population. The tremendous national spirit rallied by the previous years' show would quickly dissipate once word was out that the Gallery had reclaimed control in such a total manner – emerging Canadian artists excluded in this process were the very ones the Biennial had initially set out to support. Governed by unilateral decisions, the Biennial lost its distinctive quality.

Yet the Trustees felt compelled to be financially prudent and adopt these extreme measures. The imposition by the federal government of its 'austerity programme' offered the Gallery two choices: cancel the national exhibition or make whatever concessions necessary to continue a now famous and certainly anticipated show. Lacking financial means to do otherwise, the Trustees felt compelled to sacrifice the open process. Feeling pressure from the visual arts community to stage the next show, the Board and the Director accepted Harper's proposal with reluctance.

Comfort revealed his lukewarm support to the Chairman of the Board:

I should like ... to acquaint you with some of the reservations which I have in considering Mr. Harper's proposals. Basically, I

believe that the principal of an open show is the ideal in which we should work. If I were directing an independent gallery, privately endowed, I should adopt Mr. Harper's plan without question; history has shown a one-man selection of an exhibition to be an admirable solution of the problem. However, I am directing a national gallery, with a wide moral responsibility, financed by public funds, I feel that the choice by one single individual, no matter how informed or reputable, may well be open to understandable criticism.⁸

It was not the first time the Director had expressed his unease with the Gallery's current situation. He had accepted the Directorship on certain conditions:

The Chairman welcomed the new Director and assured him of the support and cooperation of the Board.... In replying Dr. Comfort said that he regarded his acceptance of the position as a moral obligation and that he has accepted with certain reservations. He had wished to be assured of adequate funds for the purchase of works of art.... In regard to his salary, he would be undertaking what he felt to be a moral responsibility at considerable personal sacrifice.⁹

As a successful artist himself, Comfort must have felt the moral weight of all artists upon his conscience. While he was a member of the cultural and social elite, evidenced by his appointment to the Gallery's Directorship, he was inclined to agree with the likes of Lawren Harris on points concerning fair representation and artists' rights. But as Director he could not speak from that point of view alone:

Because of the special circumstances surrounding this particular Biennial, I would in this instance agree to the collection by Mr. Harper.... Also, it is my considered opinion that the final selection should be made by a committee ... a suitable compromise might be arrived at if the final selection were made by a five-man committee....¹⁰

Having expressed his reservations about the exclusive approach adopted by the Gallery, Comfort relaxed in the knowledge that he had at least suggested

reserving the final judgement to a jury as in the previous year's procedures, and that this compromise had been accepted. In the name of economy the Board overrode pleas for a more open process of selection and the "bird-dogging" approach of Harper was approved.¹¹

The Trustees defended the one-man system of selection with their need to cut costs, but Board discussions often revealed other, secondary motives. Trustee J. Grant Glassco¹² backed Harper and his method:

The Government's austerity programme imposes on us ... a direct obligation to compromise.... The 4th Biennial was the first one which was really an 'open' exhibition, and while possessing the virtues of the democratic approach and catholicity, it was by no means an unqualified process ... we should have to find some way of overcoming the prejudice against an open competition shared by many of the better Canadian painters.

In spite of the large sum of money spent, the Biennial had not attracted the best contemporary Canadian artists and the Board felt that even if they could spend the money again, it would not improve their chances. It was argued that a Gallery-based 'curator', who would be careful around the feelings of the 'better' artists, would have more success in reaching the highly sought after and recognized artists. In wanting it all, the Trustees conceded to sacrifice the wider participation and collaboration needed for an open process.

Comfort was convinced that the Trustees were traversing very dangerous waters. Expectations built upon the experience of six exhibitions included procedural fair play aimed at serving all artists, not just an elite group. The Gallery's trial and error experiences should have led them to suspect that this 'one-time' practice would not be welcomed by the majority of artists, even in

spite of the larger dismal fiscal picture. While certain colleagues privy to the Gallery's delicate position offered words of encouragement in the controversial practice rather than see the exhibition cancelled,¹³ others questioned the purpose of the show at all. National Gallery Trustee Frank Panabaker¹⁴ addressed his opinions directly to the Director:

I think the Biennial should be dropped. I wonder why it was thought up in the first place. There are plenty of shows now ... [no] painter can keep up with them all.... The last Biennial was a sheer waste of good public money.... If this is an example of the way tax-payer money is thrown around, it is no wonder the economy needs sharp retrenching. Even if the Biennial was a proper survey of [Canadian] painting, which it has never been yet, there is no need for it at all, in view of so many other properly conducted annual shows.¹⁵

Caustically commenting on certain noted artists' boycott of the previous exhibition, Panabaker added sarcastically: "[W]hy would painters happen to have their best one or two paintings on hand when Russell happened to call?"¹⁶

Panabaker was not alone in suggesting that the Gallery redirect its efforts to more 'goodwill gestures' towards the public galleries.¹⁷ Effectively foreshadowing the reappearance of the artist and his voice, Mrs. H.A. Dyde wrote to Comfort, recalling Lawren Harris' first notions of provincial and regional committees, and proposed their revival.¹⁸ The nature of the Biennial was eroding, compromised year by year as the Gallery 'adjusted' its procedures to meet current issues, changing agendas, and demands of austerity. The turnover of Directors and members of the Board of Trustees contributed to the general confusion over the Biennial's goals and definition and the resulting directional impasse was being negotiated by fiscal pressures alone. This was wholly unsatisfactory to the

initiator of the exhibition, a man who dealt with ideals and did not barter them away.

And so, after a long period of silence and for the first time in years, Lawren Harris spoke on the mess his idea had become:

I believe that a one man selection of two-hundred works, by visits to the major studios, and from a selected centre for examination of lesser known painters, would leave a trail of frustration and discontent across the country which would be most unfortunate. I also feel that such an effect would be inevitable, regardless of the earnestness and goodwill of the individual making the selection from such a vast number placed in front of him.¹⁹

Harris was less forceful than before when reviving his original ideas, wary of political and bureaucratic obstacles he was facing, yet he went on to present his initial plan dating back to the early fifties – some Gallery players would never have heard his original ideas directly from him. Stating that it was a “simple solution to [his] mind,” he pointed out that “a sense of co-operation in this time of difficulty would appeal to public feeling; whereas the one man selection could be too autocratic to be acceptable.”²⁰ The brevity of Harris’ argument and the moment he chose to speak to the issue were evidence of his astute understanding of an entrenched political climate moved only by practical financial concerns. Harris knew his Board and his Gallery. The Trustees set Harris’ reminder aside. did not change their course, and gave Russell Harper the freedom to move on his one-man proposal.

Official procedures were laid out systematically in a late summer memorandum.²¹ The process maintained some aspects of an open exhibition by inviting all artists to submit works (by appointment) for Harper’s consideration

upon his visit to regional centres. The exhibition would deal with painting only, with plans for a related media exhibition the next year (yet this mixed media show, like those planned throughout the series, never materialized). Shipping costs would be paid on works chosen by the Gallery; once again the whole exhibition had to be eligible for purchase; and Canadian artists abroad were included by invitation (submissions via photographs). The fact that the open format was being discarded this year in favour of the invitational method was carefully mentioned – the Gallery wanted to make sure this was clearly understood. The regional visit dates were pre-organized and for the first time in the exhibition's history all provinces, including the forever neglected Maritimes, and especially Prince Edward Island (which had yet to be represented by a work), were given consideration.

While none of these concessions to equity completely balanced out the fact that the Gallery was once again acting alone, inviting recognized artists and extending preferential treatment to acclaimed names, the attempt to physically reach each coast was at least notable. The estimated seventeen thousand dollar budget (approximately one third less than the previous year's final costs) confirmed the cost-effectiveness of the procedural changes. Yet due to the fact that the sum still exceeded the limit for discretionary spending, Treasury Board approval was required and this took months of haggling.²²

In an attempt to make this a workable solution, a comprehensive network of Honourary Advisory Committee members was established comprising of gallery directors, dealers, educators, artists, and collectors. Confidentiality was an

issue here and the names of the Advisors were kept internal. The only publicized names were Harper's and the final Ottawa jury of six individuals, made up of an equal number of members of the Board of Trustees and Gallery staff (this was another bid to cut out the costs of 'paying for judgements'²³). Three Trustees: Thomas Mayer (Chairman), J. Grant Glassco and Jean Raymond, and three National Gallery staff members: Robert Hubbard, Chief Curator, Kathleen Fenwick, Curator of Prints and Drawings, and Harper chose the final eighty-six works, of which ten were approved for purchase by the Board of Trustees.

Clear priorities were established to inform how the Gallery selected the final works and then toured the show. The distribution of works reflected previous Biennials: Quebec and Ontario again dominated the show with an average of thirty percent each; British Columbia lagged behind with sixteen percent; and the Prairie Provinces, with the exception of Manitoba which had no works accepted (this too was not extraordinary), hovered around the ten percent mark.²⁴ A trickle of works from the east made it into the final selection, but not enough, again, to be remembered when it came time for the trans-Canada tour.²⁵ In fact one could argue that Canada itself was placed second when it came time for the show to tour. In a seemingly odd move with no motivation other than the political, the Fifth Biennial Exhibition of Canadian Painting showed first in Britain before Canada's own citizens got a chance to see the show.²⁶

Presented first at the Commonwealth Institute in London, England, the Fifth Biennial demonstrated effectively how Canadian cultural achievements

could represent the nation abroad and cement Canada's position as a senior member of the Commonwealth.²⁷ Nationally, good relations with well-recognized artists were nurtured through special invitations, and now, internationally, good relations came in the form of opening-night honours. To mark the occasion, an extensive bilingual catalogue was published with a comprehensive essay written by none other than J. Russell Harper. The theme of internationalism was raised in terms of the many stylistic approaches included in the show. The influence of New York, for example, was discussed in conjunction with the Emma Lake Workshops of Regina College. The Japanese motifs creeping into the work of several British Columbia artists were also noted. Regional trends were mentioned, justifying the choices of the jury: with a few exceptions the Maritimes were "clinging" to figurative painting while Quebec moved forward under the inspiration of the 'greats'. The debates opposing figurative and non-figurative styles continued in Harper's investigation of origins and directions. As in previous exhibition catalogues, the summary resembled a disclaimer:

The foregoing must point up the confused pattern of Canadian painting out of which this exhibition had to be chosen.... From the heterogeneous group thus assembled it has been the jury's responsibility to make a final sifting, choosing those works they feel give a condensed and coherent survey of the best of Canadian painting over the past two years.²⁸

The Gallery's assessment of the London showing was positive, even glowing:

One of the most successful exhibitions we have held abroad has been the 5th Canadian Biennial.... Dr. Radakrishna, President of India, opened the exhibition in the presence of Her Majesty the Queen and H.R.H. Prince Philip. More than 250 specially invited

guests were present, including many distinguished Canadians living in England and the Continent. I have not received ... the total number of visitors to this exhibition but I understand that it was a very considerable number. The British press was most favourable....²⁹

The Gallery wanted to move ahead, to be on par with other like national institutions and most importantly, to be a player on the international scene.

Critically Harper did a fair job of compiling the exhibition and assessing it in the catalogue. Tempers did flare in public about the Gallery's autocratic approach, but it was apparently nothing the Gallery would not be prepared to handle again for the next exhibition was based on Harper's blueprint for the Fifth. Once again one man picked the show.

The responsibility for organizing the Sixth Biennial was passed on to an outside expert in 1965, the British artist William Townsend, Reader in Fine Arts in the University of London at the Slade School of Fine Art. Pending Trustee approval, Hubbard offered the position to Townsend in May of 1964, the same month the Fifth Biennial closed its touring segment. Hubbard encouraged Townsend to accept the offer in light of his "plan of regional exhibitions" and cited the Gallery's principal reason for the outsourcing: "We are so madly busy here that we have little time to devote to the Biennial Exhibition in the absence of a Curator of Canadian Art."³⁰ Townsend was quick to reply and was pleased to discuss his idea:

I should be interested to prepare a memorandum for you on my ideas for Provincial Biennials as a basis for selection for the National Biennial. You would realize that this would be very much a project in my own head and not the result of serious

inquiry or of any research into the regional situations except in so far as I know them by chance contacts across the country.³¹

Interest in revisiting the idea of regional juries did not assure the choice of William Townsend as the sole juror for the Sixth Biennial. Comfort and Hubbard wanted to solidify their plans before taking the proposal to the Trustees for approval. If they wanted to advance the strategy of using a lone juror (echoing the role played by Harper for the Fifth Biennial), they would have to strengthen their argument for making such a choice, especially in light of the criticisms that were bound to arise. Comfort and Hubbard considered and discussed not only the professional qualifications of the man they would recommend, but also second tier benefits that might entice the Trustees to accept their recommendations. The pair knew that the Sixth Biennial had to proceed, that they were unable to spare the time themselves, and that the usual field of landmines ahead called for caution.

Several names were put forward and tested against their criteria. Firstly, the individual had to be an international. Secondly, he had to be free to make the Canada-wide tour of galleries and artists studios at the specified time – the publication and translation needs of the catalogue had predetermined the deadlines. The Gallery's choice had to as well satisfy a growing concern in Canada for bilingualism in not only the printed word but also in terms of appearances: a French-speaking juror was important. The Director had openly stated that "a Frenchman might be more acceptable than an English selector" and so Jean-René Ostiguy, now the Director of Extension Services, recommended the

name of an individual in France.³² In the end Gallery staff ran around trying to match up their wish list with who was available, who was willing, and who they could manage to contact on such short notice. William Townsend fulfilled all these requirements, except that of complete bilingualism (Townsend spoke with “reasonable fluency ...[enough]... for ordinary occasions”³³), and his was the name brought to the Board of Trustees.

The Board had been prepared for the fact that last year’s ‘exceptional’ approach was going to be repeated:

In the time now available it appears neither practical nor desirable to organize an elaborate system of regional juries for the 6th Biennial. We therefore propose to follow the one-man method employed for the 5th Biennial.³⁴

The request for approval was a bit deceptive though for when the name of the juror was officially released to the Trustees for their consent, the negotiations with Townsend had already progressed into final stages.³⁵ More and more the Trustees were left to simply rubber-stamp the moves of professional Gallery staff and trust their recommendations – it was a very different time now than when Harris and the Trustees took the first initiatives in the early 1950s.

One year prior, in October of 1963, Lawren Harris, after months of missed meetings and reduced input, stepped off the Board of Trustees of the National Gallery just as the Fifth Biennial was opening in England. Personally suffering the loss of his wife as well as experiencing his own health problems, Harris let his interest in Gallery matters decline, perhaps in recognition of the professionalization of the Gallery’s staff. Without stating as much, the Board

had withdrawn from active input into the day-to-day functioning of the Gallery, reserving for itself the function of overview. Relations were more formal, in-camera discussions more frequent with casual exchanges discouraged. Gallery business was becoming more business-like in Ottawa, and the need to draw upon specific skills of any one Trustee declined in light of the increasing knowledge and skill level of paid staff. The museum professional had arrived.³⁶ and had been on the scene for quite some time, and the Board of Trustees was now reserved for acquisition approvals, programme and policy accords and government and international relations.

Comfort did not let Lawren Harris' resignation go unnoticed and short of eulogizing him in his Director's Report, he certainly sang his accomplishments. Citing Harris' "deep sense of public responsibility," his "valuable contribution as an artist," and most importantly, the part he played in seeing the Gallery through a period of great change, he summed up his tenure:

He was appointed in January 1950 and served through one of the most expansive phases in the development of this institution, in which he played a considerable part.... He will be greatly missed.³⁷

Trustees had come and gone in the past, yet the void left by Harris' resignation seemed to be felt by all.

William Townsend began his trek through the studios and galleries of Canada in September of 1964 and completed his survey in two parts, returning again in November after a two-week break for a previous professional commitment abroad. He was aided by the twenty-eight members the Advisory

Committee appointed by the Gallery, many of whom had served with Harper in the previous Biennial. The Committee must have adequately guided Townsend through the initial selections for he (Townsend was not only the initial selector but the sole final juror, too) pulled from the provinces a representation comparable to those of his predecessors. Becoming almost formulaic (Ontario and Quebec at thirty percent, British Columbia between ten and fifteen, the rest here and there), the distribution by provinces remained steady regardless of who was making the choices! Perhaps certain numbers just felt right, or perhaps these were truly the best works and the distribution just happened to always fall in the same way, but in any case it was always similar. In the touring segment, too, one could anticipate the venues and duration of the presentation.³⁸

The press was favourable to Townsend, and to the Gallery. While they hated the means, they had no quibble with the results. They liked that there was not a whiff of compromise – one man had only to agree with himself while a panel of jurors was bound to trade one work for another with the resulting show being a mishmash. Not every school was represented, but ‘so what’ they argued: maybe they were left out for good reason. The press played the Biennial as a look at Canadian art through the eyes of the country’s contemporaries – how the world saw them rather than how they saw themselves. The show was a “prize,” the “deftest summing up of new trends and faces,” and the “the biggest and best so far,”³⁹ and the Gallery was lauded for their decision to leave the choice up to one man:

No doubt there will be many, especially among the rejected and their friends, who will quarrel with Mr. Townsend's findings, and indeed with the idea of leaving an important exhibition like the Biennial to the judgement of one man, and a stranger to boot. I don't agree with him in all his choices, but on the whole I think he has made a remarkably comprehensive and pertinent survey, and I have no objection to his being asked to make it.

The journalist went on to discuss what was in essence a curated show:

There is nothing revolutionary about the one-man jury, and the operation works all the better if he is an authority from the outside, who ought to have a wider frame of reference than the folks at home, and who, free of the pressures of local politics, can look at the woods because he is not too concerned with the trees.⁴⁰

Indeed Townsend was an outsider, but not from too far. He had established the Leverhulme Scholarship whereby the top Canadian art students were selected for study abroad at the Slade School in London, was a visiting professor at the University of Alberta and had taught for numerous years at the Banff School of Fine Arts.⁴¹ Townsend was an internationally recognized artist and had a personal connection with the National Gallery – one of his works hung in its collection. All around, the Gallery seemed to have made a good choice.

With the Biennial planned for every other year, the opportunity for the Gallery to capitalize on its success was enormous in 1967, the Centennial Year. Jean Sutherland Boggs was now the Director of the Gallery (Comfort had stepped down in late summer 1965, with Dr. W.S.A. Dale⁴² acting as Interim until the appointment of Jean Sutherland Boggs in May of 1966), and she worked quickly to mark the occasion. Before his resignation Comfort had been contacted by the Department of External Affairs proposing to show the Biennial exhibition in Europe. He had replied in the positive but regretfully reported that the show was

already booked into Canadian venues. He, however, offered up the next exhibition, slated for 1969, as a good fit for such an international programme: "I would encourage museums to have authorities approach the Gallery even now with a view to obtaining showings of that exhibition."⁴³ The Gallery was eager to see the Biennial abroad and worked hard to make it happen.

In 1967 the National Gallery established a new department of International Exhibitions aimed at actively promoting such shows as the Biennial to a wider, more internationally desired audience.⁴⁴ The Gallery's resources were not only being spent to enrich the lives of its citizens but also to represent Canada internationally. Critically the Biennial was doing well – the press was on the Gallery's side and had backed their practice of one man of choosing works for the exhibition. Parliament too had noticed the international impact of the show and was promoting its success abroad as a Canadian programme. The Gallery responded:

[Y]our missions abroad should be told that the National Gallery will guarantee the quality of the [Eighth Biennial of Canadian Painting] when circulated. If, for some reason, we are unhappy with the quality of the Biennial as it is displayed at the Gallery ... we are prepared to substitute works from our own collection or from other private and public collections. The museums concerned can therefore be assured that the National Gallery intends to ensure that the exhibition sent to them will be of the highest quality.⁴⁵

While government was pleased, popular success with Canadians was not as evident. The newness of the show had long since faded and its periodic realization, now lacking the excitement that the wider regional participation had created, failed to generate enthusiasm in the visual arts community. Indeed the

Gallery seemed less concerned with the public and the artists, paying closer attention to headlines and its reputation with sister institutions. The Gallery had certainly, and the Trustees had necessarily, shifted their focus away from the country's artists to the nation's reputation.

As it happened, rushing to pull the Biennial together in a year when so much was happening was too much for the Gallery and they happily put the show off to 1968. Other similar exhibitions had claimed the works of many of the artists the Gallery was hoping to attract.⁴⁶ On the heels of Townsend's "remarkable job" as a sole juror,⁴⁷ Dale as Acting Director strongly encouraged the Board of Trustees to adopt the plan once again. Boggs picked up the ball shortly after her appointment and advanced the same suggestion. Labelling it a triennial and marketing it as such, the procedures for the show followed that of the previous two exhibitions: one juror of international reputation was to be chosen and his selection would become the exhibition. The practice of contracting-out, all the while claiming the impartiality of an outside viewpoint, enabled the Gallery to have it all: success at a low price and a low level of effort and commitment.

Negotiations were more straightforward this time and an invitation went out from Boggs to William Seitz, Director of the Rose Art Museum at Brandeis University in Waltham, Massachusetts.⁴⁸ Seitz had decided to make the exhibition "adventurous" and had resolved, even before his Canada-wide tour, to show fewer artists and represent them by a larger number of works each – his strategy was to "define more fully the work of Canada's painters."⁴⁹ This was an

interesting goal, to say the least, one that the Gallery fully supported if not generated. When Seitz was contacted in late June of 1967, he was given free rein by the Director, and a suggestion:

This exhibition ... is supposed to contain what the juror believed to be the best in Canadian painting and sculpture.... The decision about how many works are to be included and how many works by a single artist is essentially his. I would be inclined to suggest myself that it is more interesting when there are more examples of a single artist's work.⁵⁰

Achieving a complete survey of art in Canada during the past two years had always been the inevitable objective of the show. It was an elusive one. The Gallery stumbled from method to method, year to year, trying to find the best way.

Seitz accepted Boggs' suggestion to concentrate the exhibition around a core of artists and presented one hundred and thirty-three works by seventy artists.⁵¹ Many works were borrowed from private and public collections and either as a consequence of the unavailability of the works, or the fact that some artists were represented by as many as five works each (or a combination of the two), a record-low number of works were acquired.⁵²

The Gallery could afford to allow acquisitions to fall to second priority – other exhibitions, perceived to be better shows, gave ample opportunity for the Gallery to acquire. In planning the Seventh Biennial, Joanna Marsden, Coordinator of International Exhibitions, boasted of the Gallery's other programmes:

[T]he Department of External Affairs is now actively interested in exhibition exchanges. The first big exhibition to be sent to Europe ... as part of this cultural exchange programme, and most certainly the most important exhibition of contemporary Canadian art to

be especially put together for circulation outside of Canada, had been organised by the curatorial department.... They have spent a great deal of time travelling across Canada to select the works in the exhibition from galleries and museums, private collectors and the artists themselves. It is called "Canada – art aujourd'hui"....⁵³

One might have thought that "the most important exhibition of contemporary Canadian art" would have been the Biennial series, yet mention of that show came later. There was something oddly familiar, though, in its description:

External Affairs is interested in circulating the 8th Biennial ... which will be selected by Bill Seitz ... on somewhat similar basis as "Canada – art aujourd'hui": that is, a limited number of artists each represented by a reasonable number of works, and would therefore be suitable for circulation abroad.⁵⁴

Why continue an exhibition that had been effectively replaced by one that was proclaimed as better? Even External Affairs was more interested in the better-packaged show designed by the Gallery's curatorial staff to impress international audiences. The duplication was obvious. Two exhibitions from the same institution could not logically compete against one another in the same market – there were only so many artists and works to go around!

Indeed the Gallery was getting better results with its own shows. By creating several solid, curatorially rigorous exhibitions of Canadian art, the Gallery was essentially freed from having to stage a show that was required to be a survey of the best works and artists of the last two years. And acquisitions were not restricted by concerns for regional representation, and the Gallery did not have to be preoccupied with fostering unknown and emerging Canadian talent. Whether intentional or not, the Trustees had set the Gallery up to gracefully bow out of the Biennial and work within more flexible parameters.

The Gallery, as an international institution, was set to select its artists, their works, and organize exhibitions worthy of both national and international audiences.

The Trustees had been preparing the public and the artists for the possibility that the series might one day draw to a close. Biennial catalogues had included poorly disguised apologies for the cumbersome processes and awkward results. The open show of 1961 may have been successful for artists and the public, but it was not deemed a success for the Gallery. The reverse approach, that of allowing one man to choose the show (1963, 1965) had both benefits and drawbacks. But in 1968, it seemed that only the negative aspects were visible and these were highly publicized.

The press had a long history of exhibitions to draw upon by the time the Seventh Biennial opened in July of 1968. Long before it was public knowledge that the Gallery had failed to book the show into cross-Canada venues, the press had caught on to the fact that the Biennial was on its last legs. It was suspected that the Gallery intended to end the show right there and then, and simply stated the obvious. Indeed the Gallery had decided to redirect their efforts on contemporary Canadian art and focus on more critical successes such as the *Canada – art aujourd'hui* show. Journalists headlined their critiques with such titles as “We’ve Outgrown Biennials,” and “Days of the Biennial Numbered?” Seitz, speaking unofficially for the Gallery, claimed that the difficult goal of the Biennial – that of comprehensively presenting contemporary painting in Canada – would perhaps be the reason for its eventual demise:

Art in Canada is already too multiform and copious to present painting, drawing, graphics and sculpture (even without considering the varieties of 'intermedia' in a single exhibition.⁵⁵

This did not go unnoticed by the journalists either who spotted the difficulty faced by the lone juror:

That's the trouble with the Biennial show. It makes no statement. No matter how perceptive the juror, a survey exhibition is too vast in scope to say anything more than the fact that there are good, mediocre and awful painters at work across the nation.⁵⁶

Claiming that by its very nature the show inherently lacked focus and direction, the Biennial had more than outgrown its purpose. It was an exhibition without a home, without a place, and without a gallery wishing to take it on.

A significant change in the organization of the administration of the National Gallery coincided with the realization by the Trustees. William Seitz and the press that visual art practice had developed so much in recent years that it could no longer be surveyed in a single coherent show. The legislation to establish a corporation for the administration of the National Museums of Canada was enacted March 20th, 1967 (effective April 1, 1967), and the Gallery's independent Board of Trustees was replaced by a 'Visiting' committee comprised of select Trustees of the new umbrella corporation and friendly advisors.⁵⁷ In March of 1970, the year the Eighth Biennial of Canadian Art would have taken place, a short discussion saw closure to an issue that had plagued the Gallery for more than twenty years:

There was a discussion of the usefulness of regular national biennials or triennials, juried by an outside juror. The Curator of Canadian Art. M. Théberge, the Curator of Prints, Mrs. P. Delworth, and the Chief Curator, Dr. Hubbard questioned their

validity. [One Trustee] summed up the feeling that the National Gallery has always had a particularly close relationship with Canadian artists and cannot neglect its responsibility to see that they are given adequate exposure, particularly if the economic situation in Canada becomes more grave.

The Committee went on to conclude:

Although this was acknowledged, the consensus was that regular biennials or triennials at the Gallery could be dropped but in the hopes ... of devising new solutions for changing situations.⁵⁸

And that was that.

Endnotes

- ¹ J. Russell Harper had been Curator of Canadian Art at the National Gallery of Canada since 1959.
- ² The almost two thousand entries cost between ten and twelve thousand dollars to ship one way, with artists paying the cost of sending their work to the National Gallery. The jury cost twenty-five hundred dollars, advertising five thousand, and all other funds went towards the cost of printing the catalogue and other incidental charges. National Gallery of Canada Archives (hereafter NGC Archives), *Fifth Biennial Exhibition of Canadian Painting 1963*, File 12-4-151, Internal Memorandum by J. R. Harper, n.d.
- ³ NGC Archives, *Fifth Biennial 1963*, Internal Memorandum by J. R. Harper, n.d.
- ⁴ NGC Archives, *Fifth Biennial 1963*, J. R. Harper to C. Comfort, 13 July 1962.
- ⁵ NGC Archives, *Fifth Biennial 1963*, J. R. Harper to C. Comfort, 13 July 1962.
- ⁶ NGC Archives, *Board of Trustees: Minutes of Meetings*, File 9.2-B, 1170.
- ⁷ NGC Archives, *Fifth Biennial 1963*, J. R. Harper to C. Comfort, 13 July 1962.
- ⁸ NGC Archives, *Fifth Biennial 1963*, C. Comfort to J. Raymond, 31 July 1962.
- ⁹ NGC Archives, *Board of Trustees*, 986.
- ¹⁰ NGC Archives, *Fifth Biennial 1963*, C. Comfort to J. Raymond, 31 July 1962.
- ¹¹ NGC Archives, *Fifth Biennial 1963*, G. Glassco to C. Comfort, 6 August 1962.
- ¹² Glassco came from a financial background. An accountant by training, he was a partner in Clarkson, Gordon & Company, sat on the Executive Committee of the Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants, and was Chairman of the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto. He was appointed to the Board of Trustees of the National Gallery in November of 1959 and served as such until its dismantling in 1967. *The Canadian Who's Who: A Biographical Dictionary of Notable Men and Women*, vol. vi, 1952-1954, (Toronto: Trans-Canada Press), 460.
- ¹³ One example was Mrs. Hugh Mackay, a past juror in Harris' time: "...due to the austerity program we must be very careful of expenditures. Mr. Harper seems to have dealt very successfully with that ... I really feel it is wonderful to think that the National Gallery is in the hands of such good leaders as you, Dr. Hubbard and Mr. Harper...." NGC Archives, *Fifth Biennial 1963*, Mrs. H. Mackay to C. Comfort, 8 August 1962.
- ¹⁴ Frank Shirley Panabaker studied art at the Ontario College of Art, the Grand Central School of Art and the Art Student's League in New York. He served the same term as Glassco, from November 1959 until 1967. *Who's Who*, vol. vi, 1952-1954, 821.
- ¹⁵ NGC Archives, *Fifth Biennial 1963*, F. Panabaker to C. Comfort, 8 August 1962.
- ¹⁶ NGC Archives, *Fifth Biennial 1963*, F. Panabaker to C. Comfort, 8 August 1962.
- ¹⁷ NGC Archives, *Fifth Biennial 1963*, F. Panabaker to C. Comfort, 8 August 1962.
- ¹⁷ "If this Biennial is going to be held anyhow, I would suggest the National gallery create goodwill by working through the public galleries of Canadian cities. Each director would invite one or two entries from all the good painters of all schools in his area. Then Russell would call on these galleries and would collaborate with the local director at least, and possibly, in addition, a local jury of painters...." NGC Archives, *Fifth Biennial 1963*, F. Panabaker to C. Comfort, 8 August 1962.
- ¹⁸ The circle was completing itself: "Dr. Harris has suggested a scheme several times whereby provincial and regional committees would be set up to choose paintings to be submitted to a jury at the National Gallery. Such a plan has merit but it would take a great deal of organization and it would not be practical for the Biennial of 1963. However I think his plan might be considered seriously by the staff. This plan would provide a buffer between artists and the National Gallery. Committees on the spot could watch constantly for the best local painters." NGC Archives, *Fifth Biennial 1963*, Mrs. H.A. Dyde to C. Comfort, 12 August 1962.
- ¹⁹ NGC Archives, *Fifth Biennial 1963*, L. Harris to C. Comfort, 13 August 1962.
- ²⁰ NGC Archives, *Fifth Biennial 1963*, L. Harris to C. Comfort, 13 August 1962.
- ²¹ NGC Archives, *Fifth Biennial 1963*, Internal Memorandum, 15 August 1962.

²² By October 9th, 1962 the Treasury Board had still not approved the expenditure and the Gallery was poised to cancel the exhibition for the year rather than face a "black mark" for not securing the best artists. The next day the approval miraculously came through and the show went on. NGC Archives, *Fifth Biennial 1963*, J.R. Harper to R. Hubbard, 9 October 1962. The Gallery seems to have overestimated its costs for the Sixth Biennial was reported in the 1964-65 budget as having cost the Gallery a mere \$6,313.00. NGC Archives, *Board of Trustees*, 1358.

²³ Some had argued that here the Gallery should not be stingy, that maybe they should pay for the appearance of fairness: Trustee J. Grant Glassco upheld Harper as the initial selector but wanted non-Gallery staff to do the final choosing: "My inclination would be to spend a little money on this phase because the appearance of integrity and independence in the final selection is of great importance." NGC Archives, *Fifth Biennial 1963*, G. Glassco to C. Comfort, 6 August 1962.

²⁴ Quebec ranked the highest with 26 works (30.2%), Ontario second with 23 works (26.7%), British Columbia third with 14 works (16.3%) and Saskatchewan fourth with 10 works (11.6%). NGC Archives, *Fifth Biennial 1963*.

²⁵ New Brunswick came in 6th place with four works, and Nova Scotia and Newfoundland tied with one work each. NGC Archives, *Fifth Biennial 1963*.

²⁶ With the Maritimes excluded from the touring segment, the Fifth Biennial travelled in Canada as follows: National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, Ontario 20 September – 20 October; Public Library and Art Museum, London, Ontario 8 November – 1 December; Norman Mackenzie Art Gallery, Regina, Saskatchewan 13 December – 5 January; Winnipeg Art Gallery, Winnipeg, Manitoba 17 January – 9 February; Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver, British Columbia 21 February – 15 March; Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario 27 March – 19 April; Musée du Quebec, Quebec, Quebec 23 April – 10 May; Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, Victoria, British Columbia 18 May – 7 June. Alberta was left out in the cold in 1963, an exclusion than was normally reserved for Manitoba, and of course the Maritimes. NGC Archives, *Fifth Biennial 1963*.

²⁷ The exhibition opened in London of June 12th until the end of August 1963. NGC Archives, *Fifth Biennial 1963*.

²⁸ National Gallery of Canada, *Fifth Biennial Exhibition of Canadian Painting 1963*, (Ottawa: 1963). "The Contemporary Canadian Scene," 6.

²⁹ NGC Archives, *Board of Trustees*, 1261.

³⁰ Harper had resigned as Curator of Canadian Art in October of 1963. NGC Archives, *Sixth Biennial Exhibition of Canadian Painting 1965*, File 12-4-227, R. Hubbard to W. Townsend, 19 May 1964.

³¹ NGC Archives, *Sixth Biennial 1965*, W. Townsend to R. Hubbard, 25 May 1964.

³² Ostiguy had contacted Georges Boudaille. For some reason he was kindly declined in favour of "another course of action." Philip James (he had previously served as one of a jury of five in the 1961 Biennial) seems to have been Comfort's top choice. When he proved unavailable, Comfort agreed to go with Townsend. NGC Archives, *Sixth Biennial 1965*, C. Comfort to R. Hubbard, 10 July 1964 and C. Comfort to G. Boudaille, 31 July 1964.

³³ NGC Archives, *Sixth Biennial 1965*, W. Townsend to C. Comfort, 7 August 1964.

³⁴ NGC Archives, *Sixth Biennial 1965*, Memorandum entitled "Plan of Selection of the 6th Biennial of Canadian Painting," inserted in correspondence from C. Comfort to J. Raymond, 10 July 1964.

³⁵ Trustee approval to proceed with a one-man jury came through on July 29th. Comfort had been discussing the position with Townsend since May. Comfort acknowledged Townsend's acceptance on August 6th. It was a tight timeline. NGC Archives, *Sixth Biennial 1965*.

³⁶ The Board was complicit in the professionalization of staff as can be seen in its recommendations to the Secretary of State: "The status of the Director ... the Assistant Director, the chief administrative officer, the responsible officers of the curatorial division and of the art restoration and art extension services, and other such members of the staff requiring special training and experience, should be clarified in accordance with other comparable pieces of legislation.... This is required because these posts can only be filled by persons possessing appropriate training and experience in the art museum field. The supply of such qualified persons is most restricted in Canada and they are difficult to find or recruit." NGC Archives, *Board of Trustees*, 1267.

³⁷ NGC Archives, *Board of Trustees*, 1259.

³⁸ The touring numbers partially 'righted' themselves in 1965, and Alberta was in, Manitoba and the most of the Maritimes out: National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, Ontario 4 June – 22 August; The Beaverbrook Art Gallery, Fredericton, New Brunswick, 8 September – 3 October; Musée d'art contemporain de Montreal, Montreal, Quebec 21 October – 14 November; The London Art Gallery, London, Ontario 26 November – 19 December; Norman Mackenzie Art Gallery, Regina, Saskatchewan 7 January – 6 February; Edmonton Art Gallery, Edmonton, Alberta 23 February – 20 March; Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver, British Columbia 1 April – 1 May; Winnipeg Art Association, Winnipeg, Manitoba 13 May – 5 June. NGC Archives, *Sixth Biennial 1965*.

³⁹ NGC Archives, *Clipping File: Sixth Biennial Exhibition of Canadian Painting 1965*, Time, 18 June 1965 and "Biennial Show Poses Question," n.d.

⁴⁰ NGC Archives, *Clipping File: Sixth Biennial 1965*, "Sixth Biennial Opens in Ottawa," by Robert Ayre in *The Montreal Star*, 12 June 1965. Ayre was a regular journalist covering the Biennial and had seen it progress from its beginnings in the early 50s. He had also written on the Massey/Lévesque Commission: "Report of the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences," *Canadian Art*, Vol. III, No. 4 (1951) 145-149.

⁴¹ The Gallery described Townsend's professional qualifications in their press releases. The press too picked up on his abilities and unanimously reported on Townsend's six years as visiting professor at Banff. NGC Archives, *Sixth Biennial 1965*, Press Release, 28 August 1964 and NGC Archives, *Clipping File: Sixth Biennial 1965*.

⁴² A Canadian scholar trained at Harvard and the Courtauld, William S.A. Dale held several positions with the Gallery: Assistant Curator, Assistant Director, Acting Director and Deputy Director. Jean Sutherland Boggs, *The National Gallery of Canada*, (Toronto: 1971), 44-45.

⁴³ NGC Archives, *Seventh Biennial Exhibition of Canadian Painting 1968*, File 12-4-272, C. Comfort to Head of Information Division, Department of External Affairs, 2 April 1965.

⁴⁴ Joanna Woods Mardsen, the Co-ordinator, described her role to the Board of Trustees: "I am involved in some things which [are] of great concern to us all here – the image of Canadian works of art outside of Canada as projected by exhibitions; and the encouragement of exhibitions of Canadian art abroad in such a way as to promote a greater knowledge and a better understanding of the work produced by the artists of this country." NGC Archives, *Board of Trustees*, 1610. The goal of the department was "to plan the International programme and work in liaison with the Department of External Affairs." NGC, *Annual Report of the Board of Trustees for the Fiscal Year 1967-8* (Ottawa: 1968), 23.

⁴⁵ NGC Archives, *Seventh Biennial 1968*, J. Marsden to B. A. Wallis, Arts Section, Cultural Affairs Division, Department of External Affairs, 25 August 1967.

⁴⁶ The Gallery's Annual Report cited several centennial exhibitions: *Sculpture '67* in Toronto, *Expo 67* and *National, Canadian Painting 1850-1950*. NGC, *Annual Report*, 1967/68, 18-23. One must suspect that the Gallery was not only too busy to get the Biennial exhibition in that year but that there were no more works left to show.

⁴⁷ NGC Archives, *Board of Trustees*, 1399.

⁴⁸ Boggs offered the position to Seitz in June of 1967: "From your letter of June 22 expressing enthusiasm about Canada, I rather hope I may have some chance of persuading you to take on a special project for us which is to be a one-man jury...." NGC Archives, *Seventh Biennial 1968*, J. S. Boggs to W. Seitz, 27 June 1967. Seitz was a hired gun, cited by the press as the "one-time curator" of the Museum of Modern Art's "excellent" show *The Responsive Eye*, and having taken his expertise on the road, he was an obvious if not competent choice for the Gallery.

⁴⁹ NGC Archives, *Seventh Biennial 1968*, R. Graburn (Executive Assistant to Boggs) to D. Andrus, Department of Fine Art, University of New Brunswick, 6 September 1967.

⁵⁰ NGC Archives, *Seventh Biennial 1968*, J. S. Boggs to W. Seitz, 27 June 1967.

⁵¹ In Section One fifteen artists were represented by five works each; Section Two had fifty artists represented by one work each; and Section Three, "The Structurists," varied between one and two works by five artists. NGC, *Seventh Biennial of Canadian Painting 1968*, (Ottawa, 1968).

⁵² Nine works were bought, or 6.85% of the exhibition. Other years had seen comparatively substantial acquisitions: 1953: 10.4%; 1955: 27.4%; 1957: 44.2%; 1959: 8.2%; 1961: 17.6%; 1963: 11.6%; 1965: 17.3%.

⁵³ NGC Archives, *Board of Trustees*, 1610.

⁵⁴ NGC Archives, *Board of Trustees*, 1610.

⁵⁵ NGC Archives, *Clipping File: Sixth Biennial 1965*, B. Andrews in *The Telegram*, 6 July 1968.

⁵⁶ NGC Archives, *Clipping File: Sixth Biennial 1965*, "We've Outgrown Biennials," in *Toronto Star*, 6 July 1968.

⁵⁷ The Board of Trustees vehemently opposed the amalgamation – they had envisioned themselves as an autonomous entity, a special institution that required special consideration. The Gallery had likened themselves to other international art institutions and had asked for comparable provisions to the National Film Board and CBC. It was to no avail. The change was reported on the first page of that year's Annual Report: "The fiscal year 1967-68 was the last for the National Gallery of Canada as an independent corporation under the National Gallery Act. On December 1 a bill was given second and third readings in the House of Commons and on December 7 its amendments were approved by the Senate. With its promulgation on April 1, 1968, the National Gallery of Canada will become part of the Corporation of the National Museums of Canada which will have its own Board of Trustees. Henceforth its annual reports will be made as part of the National Museums of Canada." NGC, *Annual Report*, 1967-8, 8.

⁵⁸ NGC Archives, *Minutes of the Visiting Committee for the National Gallery of Canada*, 12 March 1970, 100.

CONCLUSION

There is no mention of the Biennial after 1970. While the title did reappear under new terms in the Canadian Biennial of Contemporary Art (1989), it was albeit in an admittedly revamped format and not in the tradition of the earlier series.¹ The curator recalled the old series for what it had become in its later years:

Those exhibitions were a young nation's affirmation of the maturity and vitality of its artists and its readiness to compete in the international artistic arena. They celebrated the winds of change in Canadian art, its creation of a national style and a national subject – the northern landscape, its forays into modernism, and its contribution to an international language of abstraction.²

This recollection fell short of Lawren Harris' imagined legacy for the show and the series was presented more in terms of the successful birth of an internationally recognized institution than as an initiative by the Gallery to foster Canadian art. The early goals of forging a bond between the institution and the country's artists and of becoming a vehicle to promote a national place for the visual artist were all but replaced. It was a debatable point whether the National Gallery achieved its goal of an elevated status 'beyond token position of figurehead to one of real national and artistic significance' – Harris' vision. Not in debate, however, was the fact that if the exhibition was to be measured against its initial goals, the series had failed.

Many pressures brought about the call for the Massey/Lévesque Commission and for its recommendations for state-sponsored intervention in culture. For the Canadian visual arts community, the 1941 Kingston Artist's Conference launched an urgent call to action in the arts, and this energy crept slowly but steadily across the country. Post-war nationalistic optimism played a significant role, as did fears of mass culture and the cultural absorption of Canada into the United States. Discussions about the government's cultural responsibilities spurred it into action, and lobbyists from the cultural elite saw to their own respective concerns. The Commission "was interested not just in culture in Canada, but in Canadian culture."³ Political interests were joined by a nationalist cultural ideology.

The promotion of Canada's image at home was one principal benefit but there was more. Simply put, the government's financial support for culture made the country look good both nationally and internationally.⁴ It was, as one historian has cited, the dawn of "civilization and arts subsidies for all," an evolutionary leap from earlier barbaric times.⁵ Lester Pearson, a foreign affairs specialist himself, saw the value of cultural promotion early in the 1950s and later promoted it as Prime Minister of his own Liberal government. Convinced that national unity and international credibility could be promoted through the efforts of cultural organizations, his government is said to have set the stage for the idealistic decentralization and democratization movements of the early 1970s.⁶

Indeed, Vincent Massey's goals for the Commission had been grand:

"The report would be an official statement on Canadian 'culture' – what it lacked, what it could and should be:"

Canadian culture, the commissioners reported, existed on the margin of society. It was time to end the isolation and irrelevance of the Canadian writer and the Canadian artist and make them 'an integral' part of the Canadian environment. Only then could 'the spiritual foundations' of our national life be secured.⁷

With a mandate to make recommendations to national institutions, the Commission put polite pressure on those with the power to foster culture to do so. It was a centralized approach that would, in theory, through national bodies, bring aid to Canadian writers and artists. Yet the federal institutions did not shape Canadian cultural life in the ways the Commissioners expected, in spite of the fact that most national institutional recommendations had been implemented.⁸

The Commission entrusted the National Gallery with the task of encouraging the visual arts and their appreciation through the vehicle of its expanded services. With an increased number of members of the Board of Trustees, and the Gallery's elevated status, the Trustees and the Gallery attempted, in the revival of the Biennial, to effect a plan to meet the recommendations of the Commission. The Trustees interpreted their new mandate and created a programme that could, in its ideal manifestation, meet the goal of making the National Gallery of Canada a rallying point for Canadian artists.

Concern for regional representation in the national collection brought about the return of the pre-war Biennial series: the Board wanted a fair and

egalitarian method to choose works for the national collection. The elaborate programme suggested by Lawren Harris was designed to directly support a yet unaided segment of the cultural producers – the emerging Canadian artist – all the while achieving important goals for the Gallery.

Harris, closely linked to power through his class and personal ties, knew intimately the issues at the forefront of the Canadian cultural community and attempted to merge the best interests of all concerned together in one plan. Support for the producing artist was key for Harris, and his plan reflected more his artist-activist personality than his social position. The Trustees could achieve their end of buying the best contemporary Canadian art for the permanent collection and simultaneously be viewed as stepping away from the centre and into the provinces to meet and encourage artists in the regions. The reputation of the National Gallery in the eyes of all Canadians could be enhanced alongside the institution's progressive growth as the national centre for visual art. The Gallery could benefit, the recommendations of the Commission could be met, and Canadian artists could take their rightful place in society, as the 1941 Kingston Conference recommended and the Federation of Canadian Artists advocated.

Yet early compromises in the initial plan spelled the beginning of never-ending negotiations over the means – there were just too many pressure points and bureaucratic limitations. Without Harris' constant advocacy of the artist within the deliberations of the Trustees, these other pressures and limitations gained the upper hand and eventually reshaped the procedures for the series. First to go was financial support in the form of rental fees to artists for their works; it

was not desirable for government to support the artist directly. Secondly, provincial quotas would dictate the selection of works rather than artistic merit. The regional selection committees, a network of artists and peers, were abandoned next. In a move to streamline the process, regional committees were replaced by 'advisors' or extensions of the Gallery's curatorial arm. Eventually the pool of decision-makers became smaller and smaller until eventually only one individual became the initial and final selector.

But there were attempts to reverse the autocratic trends the Gallery was slipping into in the name of efficiency. The 1961 open Biennial appealed to a broad majority and served several nationalistic ends, yet it prevented other goals (like the participation of the nation's best artists) from being achieved. For the Sixth Biennial in 1965 the Gallery Director entrusted the selection to an outside expert, removing the institution from accusations of dictatorial conduct. In 1968 this method was again used, but by then the whole series was in danger of extinction. Indeed the procedures could never be perfected to meet all expectations. They were simply too many and too diverse.

If developing Canadian artists were happy, recognized names were offended. If the exhibition was inclusive, the quality was less than ideal. When quality was high, many works were unavailable for purchase. With merit the guide to selection, the Gallery did not meet its proscribed role of encouraging grass-roots Canadian talent. When provincial quotas were in force, discrepancies in the level of quality were glaring. Throwing money at the series did not

guarantee success, yet neither did simplified cost-cutting measures. Simply put, the series attempted too much to be successful in meeting all expectations.

Acquisitions were always the primary motivation and just as this need guided the inception of the Biennial and followed the exhibition through its many manifestations, they became the only tangible results of the series. When the more difficult goals of fostering and encouraging and surveying contemporary art production eluded the Gallery, the exhibition was steered towards the attainable and desired need to buy. The Biennial became less and less informed by Harris' vision and became more controlled by the primary curatorial imperative – acquisitions.

Soon after its formation in 1957, the Canada Council, filling the gap of a genuine and national presence supporting the Canadian artist, freed the National Gallery from the sphere of national encouragement of the widest constituency of Canadian artists.⁹ The Gallery recognized that the dearth of support for the emerging Canadian artist no longer existed as it did at the time of the Commission's recommendations, and consciously moved the Biennial in a different direction as a result of that knowledge. It was Jean-René Ostiguy who reminded the Gallery that conditions had changed, that "it [was] no more the duty of the Gallery ... to encourage the younger artists," but rather the role of "local governments, cities, museums and galleries, commercial galleries and Canada Council."¹⁰ The Gallery was liberated from the responsibility of reaching into each and every region on an equitable basis.

The professionalization of the Gallery's staff, too, played a large role in redirecting the course of the Biennial. When Harris offered his suggestion for a return of the Biennial Exhibition in October of 1950, the Gallery's senior staff comprised just two members: the Director, H.O. McCurry, and the Curator of Canadian Art, Robert Hubbard. Within five years, the members of Gallery senior staff doubled and now included a Chief Curator, Hubbard and an Associate Director, Donald Buchanan, both of whom now joined the Director at meetings of the Board of Trustees. Several additional departments came into being over the next few years, doubling the numbers yet again (Public Relations, Education, Extension Services, Conservation, Prints and Drawings), until eventually, by 1960, the members of the Gallery's senior administrative staff just about outnumbered the members of the Board of Trustees.¹¹

Delivering reports on their departments at triannual Board meetings, staff roles had slowly evolved into more specialized ones requiring more expertise than any untrained lay person (such as a member of the Board of Trustees) could offer. What was happening at the National Gallery was also occurring in institutions all over the country. Based on the need of a bureaucratic administration to remain powerful, new elites of highly specialized and trained experts formed.¹² The new elite (at the National Gallery, the museum or gallery professional) enabled the Gallery to position itself internationally. The control and application of knowledge by 'men of knowledge' facilitated excellence in a field that itself had always been internationalized; the National Gallery had availed itself of international experts to advise on purchases for its European collections.

The implication for the National Gallery, and for the Biennial Exhibition in particular, was a shift away from the influence of amateurs and regional knowledge to those legitimized by education and professionalization. While in the 1950s, the membership of the Board of Trustees (and earlier with the Advisory Council) had been filtered through class and power structures, in the early 1960s, Gallery salaried staff was selected and given responsibility according to levels of education, experience and expertise.¹³ The Biennial came under the control of a more professionalized workforce: *pace* Lawren Harris.

One last factor greatly influenced the decline and the final demise of the Biennial. By the late 1960s, the surge of nationalism had peaked, had passed through the Gallery. Expo 67 signified both the peak of a nationalist drive and a moment of international recognition. Indeed internationalism was the new guiding principle. Alan Jarvis, fresh from prestigious appointments in England, brought international cachet to the Directorship of the National Gallery in 1955. He succeeded in his short term to increase staff, streamline procedures and produce measurable results (some of them not so politically acceptable!). While in the 1950s the Gallery's position and role in the support of artists in Canada was paramount, now the image of Canada abroad gave substantial direction to the Gallery. Jarvis took the Biennial exhibition into his own hands (and out of the hands of the Board) and shaped it to forward the international reputation of the Gallery. The formation of the department of International Exhibitions (1967) during the directorship of the internationally acclaimed art historian and Degas

scholar Jean Sutherland Boggs cemented the direction of the National Gallery of Canada for the rest of the century.

Endnotes

¹ Director, Dr. Shirley Thompson, described the show as "not simply a revival of the older tradition ... [but] a thoughtfully selected exhibition which recognizes the achievements of some of the country's best artists.... Perhaps the most original aspect ... is that it is intended to be a collaboration among several art galleries across the country." Diana Nemiroff, *Canadian Biennial of Contemporary Art*, (Ottawa, 1989), Foreword.

² Nemiroff, *Canadian Biennial of Contemporary Art*, Foreword.

³ Paul Litt, *The Muses, the Masses and the Massey Commission*, (Toronto: 1992), 4.

⁴ Endres is more than suspicious of state-sponsored culture and argues the Marxist perspective, namely, that in any such discussion, there are only two functions of the capitalist state: accumulation and legitimation. She proposes the former as dominant, citing legitimation as overstressed. According to Endres, accumulation is fostered in several ways. First is direct accumulation in the form of the building of cultural hardware (art centres, theatres, universities). Second is indirect accumulation in the form of tax loopholes, subsidizing art festivals (for the stimulation it provides to the tourist industry), or tax returns. But most relevant to this study is the giving of grants (public money) to arts organizations rather than artists, thus freeing the corporate elite (who run arts organizations) from having to make their own personal donations. On this last point Endres has issue with the Commission, specifically in its desire to see the Canada Council fund professional organizations and be not staffed by artists, but rather by elites (see Chapter 1). Robin Endres, "Art and Accumulation: The Canadian State and the Business of Art," *The Canadian State: Political Economy and Political Power*, (Toronto: 1977).

⁵ Litt, *The Massey Commission*, 5.

⁶ Laurence Grant has studied the issue of federal policy direction at length and cites the ideas of Anita Rush in "The Evolution of Federal Support to Museums and Art Galleries" (1987). The 1972 National Museum Policy was an "aberration ... of the previously prevailing pattern of seeing the federal museums as the prime instrument of federal policy, and major centres as the natural beneficiaries of cultural activities." It called for not only democratization and decentralization, but also pluralism, federal-provincial cooperation and international liaison. Laurence Grant, "Canada's Federal Museum Policy: Delectation, Democratization, Deliberation, and Denouement," (Ottawa: 1991), 9-12.

⁷ Robert Bothwell, Ian Drummond, and John English, *Canada Since 1945: Power, Politics, and Provincialism*, (Toronto: 1981), 152.

⁸ Bothwell, Drummond, English, *Canada*, 153.

⁹ The Canada Council was modelled after the Arts Council of Great Britain, and carried out a threefold purpose: to subsidize the arts in Canada, to promote Canada's cultural image abroad through tours and exchanges, and act as a national commission for UNESCO. Endres, "Art and Accumulation: The Canadian State and the Business of Art," 417.

¹⁰ National Gallery of Canada Archives (hereafter NGC Archives), *Fourth Biennial Exhibition of Canadian Art 1961*, Internal Document by J.R. Ostiguy to C.Comfort, 13 June 1960. See Chapter 4 for Ostiguy's discussion.

¹¹ In June of 1960, the two groups were neck in neck with nine members each. Invited to Board meetings to report on discussions related to their departments, staff members were most probably doing most of the talking. In 1963, the year of Harris' resignation, the coup was complete with a record fifteen staff members contributing to Board discussions. NGC Archives, *Board of Trustees: Minutes of Meetings*, File 9.2-B, 1228.

¹² The Gallery as a whole could be more powerful, and respected, if its panel of experts carried more and better weight than its sister institutions. John Porter, *The Vertical Mosaic: An Analysis of Social Class and Power in Canada*, (Toronto: 1965), 221-222.

¹³ Eric Brown served as both Curator and Director between 1912 and 1939. McCurry held the same dual role until 1947 (when Hubbard joined the Gallery's staff). Neither Brown nor McCurry held graduate or post-graduate degrees in any specialized field. When Jarvis assumed the Directorship in 1955 (with no letters behind his name), he was aided by Robert Hubbard, Ph.D., (Curator of Canadian Art, Chief Curator). When the Gallery's staff expanded considerably in the early 1960s, higher education became a requirement as evidenced by the 1967 Annual Report in which the level of education was pointedly mentioned. The

Director, Jean Sutherland Boggs, held a doctorate. National Gallery of Canada, *Annual Report of the Board of Trustees for the Fiscal Year 1967-68*, (Ottawa: 1968), 102.

Appendix I: Regional Representation

Annual Exhibition of Canadian Painting, 1953
Estimated Population of Canada: 14,845,000

Initial selection of works made by seven regional committees: **British Columbia:** Lawren S. Harris, Chairman; Fred Ames, Principal, Vancouver School of Art; William P. Weston, Artist and Art Instructor, Normal School, Vancouver; Orville Fisher, Artist; John Delisle Parker, Artist and Author. Alberta: Mrs. H.A. Dyde, Chairman; Stanford Perrott, Edmonton Visual Arts Board; Blake Mackenzie, Edmonton Visual Arts Board; & the Advisory Committee of Edmonton Visual Arts Board Members: H.G. Glyde, E. Poole, Mrs. Wilson, Mrs. P.J.A. Fleming. **Saskatchewan:** Norah McCullough, Chairman; Dr. Gordon Snelgrove, University of Saskatchewan; Mrs. Michael Kalmakoff; Mrs. Albert Johnston; Kenneth Lochhead, Artist and Art Instructor, Regina College; Richard Simmins, Curator, Regina College Gallery. **Manitoba:** Alvan Eastman, Chairman; L.L. Fitzgerald, Artist and Principal, Winnipeg School of Art; A.H.S. Gilson, President, University of Manitoba. **Ontario:** A.Y. Jackson, Artist; Douglas Duncan, Sydney Key, Curator, Art Gallery of Toronto; Charles Fraser Comfort, Artist; Gerard Brett, Director, Royal Ontario Museum of Archaeology, Toronto. **Quebec:** Jean Chauvin, Chairman; Arthur Lismer, Artist; Jacques de Tonnancour, Artist and Art Instructor, École des beaux-arts, Montreal; F. Cleveland Morgan; Jean Raymond. **Maritimes:** New Brunswick: Dr. Ross Flemington, Chairman; Lawren P. Harris, Artist, Instructor, Mount Allison University, Sackville. Nova Scotia: D.C. Mackay, Artist, Principal, Nova Scotia College of Art Organized by H.O. McCurry, Director, National Gallery of Canada with the Trustees of the National Gallery of Canada. Final selection by Trustees.

PROVINCE	POPULATION*	WORKS CHOSEN	WORKS CHOSEN		WORKS PURCHASED	WORKS PURCHASED		TRAVELLING SEGMENT (in days)
			TOTAL WORKS	PERCENTAGE		TOTAL WORKS	PERCENTAGE	
BC	1,165,210	16	20.80%		4	5.20%		68
AL	939,501	5	6.5		0	0		58
SK	831,728	5	6.5		0	0		34
MA	776,541	6	7.8		0	0		21
ON	4,597,542	18	23.4		3	3.9		27
PQ	4,055,681	16	20.8		0	0		0
NS	642,584	4	5.2		0	0		0
NB	515,697	6	7.8		1	1.3		0
NFDL	361,416	1	1.3		0	0		0
PEI	98,429	0	0		0	0		0
TOTAL = 77		TOTAL = 8		10.4% of Exhibition		208		

*Statistics Canada. 1951 Census Data.

First Biennial Exhibition of Canadian Painting, 1955
Estimated Population of Canada: 15,698,000

Initial selection of works made by five regional committees: **British Columbia:** Lawren S. Harris, *ex officio*; B.C. Binning, Artist and Instructor, School of Architecture, University of British Columbia; Charles Hepburn Scott, Artist and once Director, Vancouver School of Art; Mrs. J.L. Shadbolt, Fred Ames, Principal, Vancouver School of Art. **Prairie Provinces:** Alberta: Mrs. H.A. Dyde, *ex officio*; H.G. Glyde, Head, Department of Fine Arts, University of Alberta. Saskatchewan: Norah McCullough, Executive Secretary, Saskatchewan Arts Board; Kenneth Lochhead, Artist and Art Instructor, Regina College. Manitoba: J.A. MacAulay, *ex officio*; L.L. Fitzgerald, Artist and Principal, Winnipeg School of Art. Ontario: C.P. Fell, *ex officio*; Charles Fraser Comfort, Artist; A.Y. Jackson, Artist; Martin Baldwin, Director, Art Gallery of Ontario; Will Ogilvie; R.H. Hubbard. **Quebec:** Jean Chauvin, *ex officio*; Arthur Lismer, Artist; Jacques de Tonnancour, Artist and Instructor, École des beaux-arts; F. Cleveland Morgan; R.H. Hubbard. **Maritimes:** New Brunswick: Dr. Ross Flemington, *ex officio*, President, Mount Allison University, Sackville. Nova Scotia: LeRoy Zwicker, Artist, Newfoundland; Jack Humphrey, Artist.

Organized by H.O. McCurry, Director, National Gallery of Canada (and then later by Robert Hubbard, Curator of Canadian Art) with the Trustees of the National Gallery of Canada. Final selection by Trustees.

PROVINCE	POPULATION*	WORKS CHOSEN		WORKS PURCHASED		TRAVELLING SEGMENT (in days)	
		TOTAL WORKS	%	TOTAL WORKS	%	TOTAL WORKS	%
BC	1,398,464	12	19.30%	3	4.80%	25	
AL	1,123,116	5	8.1	2	3.2	45	
SK	880,665	1	1.6	0	0	45	
MA	850,040	5	8.1	1	1.6	0	
ON	5,404,933	18	29	7	11.3	55	
PQ	4,628,378	14	22.6	2	3.2	15	
NS	694,717	1	1.6	1	1.6	25	
NB	554,616	4	6.4	1	1.6	40	
NFDL	415,074	3	4.8	0	0	0	
PEI	99,285	0	0	0	0	0	
TOTAL = 62		TOTAL = 17		27.4% of Exhibition		250	

*Statistics Canada, 1956 Census Data.

Second Biennial Exhibition of Canadian Art, 1957
 Estimated Population of Canada: 16,610,000

Initial selection made through studio tours by National Gallery 'advisors': Jean-René Ostiguy, Public Relations (Maritimes and Quebec); Donald Buchanan, Associate Director with the aid of unofficial advisors (Prairie Provinces and British Columbia); and Ronald Hubbard, Chief Curator (Ontario). National Gallery liaisons made selections of artists abroad: Jacques Dubourg (Paris) and Philip James (London). Organized by Donald Buchanan, Associate Director, National Gallery of Canada. Final selections made by jury of three: Andrew Ritchie (Director of the Department of Painting and Sculpture, Museum of Modern Art, New York), Jean Simard (Art Critic and Instructor, École des beaux-arts, Montreal) and Alan Jarvis (Director, National Gallery of Canada).

PROVINCE	POPULATION*	WORKS CHOSEN		WORKS PURCHASED		WORKS PURCHASED		TRAVELLING SEGMENT (in days)
		TOTAL WORKS		TOTAL WORKS		TOTAL WORKS		
BC	1,398,464	16	20.80%	3	3.90%			33
AL.	1,123,116	5	6.5	2	2.3			37
SK	880,665	3	3.9	1	1.3			13
MA	850,040	3	3.9	1	1.3			20
ON	5,404,933	16	20.7	8	10.4			31+ (unavailable)
PQ	4,628,378	30	39	15	19.5			44
NS	694,717	1	1.3	2	2.3			0
NB	554,616	2	2.3	2	2.3			0
NFDL	415,074	1	1.3	0	0			0
PEI	99,285	0	0	0	0			0
TOTAL: 77				TOTAL: 34		44.2% of exhibition		147 +

*Statistics Canada. 1956 Census Data.

*Statistics Canada. 1956 Census Data.

Third Biennial Exhibition of Canadian Art, 1959
Estimated Population of Canada: 17,483,000

Select artists are invited to participate. Names are compiled by Gallery staff with suggestions/additions by regional galleries and other advisors. Initial selections made by National Gallery 'liaisons' Norah McCullough (west) and Claude Picher (east) with Jean-René Ostiguy, Head of Education Services, National Gallery of Canada, travelling to British Columbia. Organized by Jean-René Ostiguy, Head of Education Services, National Gallery of Canada. Final selections made by jury of three: Gordon Washburn (Director of the Department of Fine Arts, Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh), Colin Graham (Curator, Art Gallery of Greater Victoria) and Donald Buchanan (Associate Director, National Gallery of Canada).

PROVINCE	POPULATION*	WORKS CHOSEN		WORKS PURCHASED		WORKS PURCHASED		TRAVELLING SEGMENT (in days)
			TOTAL WORKS		TOTAL WORKS		TOTAL WORKS	
BC	1,629,082	19	19.40%	3	3.10%			42
AL	1,331,944	7	7.1	0	0			42
SK	925,181	5	5.1	0	0			28
MA	921,686	2	2	0	0			0
ON	6,236,092	19	19.4	0	0			85
PQ	5,259,211	36	36.7	3	3.1			42
NS	737,007	1	1	0	0			0
NB	597,936	3	3.1	2	2			22
NFDL	457,853	0	0	0	0			0
PEI	104,629	0	0	0	0			0
TOTAL: 98		TOTAL: 98		TOTAL: 8		8.2% of exhibition		261

*Statistics Canada. 1961 Census Data.

*Statistics Canada, 1961 Census Data.

Fourth Biennial Exhibition of Canadian Art, 1961
 Estimated Population of Canada: 18,238,247

Open exhibition. Special invitation to select artists. 1900 works were submitted.
 Organized by Richard Simmins, Director of Exhibition Extension Services, National Gallery of Canada.
 Final selections made by a jury of five: Philip James, Secretary, Museums Association of England, formerly Director of Art, Arts Council of Great Britain, London, England; Clare Bice, Curator, Public Library and Art Museum, London, Ontario; Alex Colville, School of Fine and Applied Arts, Mount Allison University, Sackville, New Brunswick; Dr. Ferdinand Eckhardt, Director, The Winnipeg Art Gallery; Jean-Paul Lemieux, École des beaux-arts, Montreal.

PROVINCE	POPULATION*	WORKS CHOSEN	WORKS CHOSEN		WORKS PURCHASED	WORKS PURCHASED		TRAVELLING SEGMENT (in days)
			TOTAL	WORKS		TOTAL	WORKS	
BC	1,629,082	19	20.10%	4	4.40%	72		
AL	1,331,944	4	4.4	1	1.1	21		
SK	925,181	7	7.7	3	3.3	21		
MA	921,686	5	5.5	1	1.1	0		
ON	6,236,092	33	36.3	3	3.3	105		
PQ	5,259,211	26	22	3	3.3	23		
NS	737,007	0	0	0	0	0		
NB	597,936	1	1.1	0	0	0		
NFDL	457,853	1	1.1	1	1.1	0		
PEI	104,629	0	0	0	0	0		
TOTAL: 91		TOTAL: 16		TOTAL: 16		TOTAL: 242		
						17.6% of exhibition		

*Statistics Canada. 1961 Census Data.

Fifth Biennial Exhibition of Canadian Painting, 1963
Estimated Population of Canada: 18,931,000

Initial selection made by J. Russell Harper, Curator of Canadian Art, National Gallery of Canada from studio visits and with the aid of advisors in each region: Fred Amess, Vancouver; Claude Beaulieu, Montreal; André Biéler, Kingston; Edwy Cooke, Fredericton; Maurice Corbell, Montreal; Tony Emery, Victoria; H.G. Glyde, Edmonton; Colin Graham, Victoria; Lawren P. Harris, Sackville; Miss Lucy Jarvis, Yarmouth; A. F. Key, Calgary; T.R. MacDonald, Hamilton; Donald Mackay, Halifax; John Macgillivray, Edmonton; Ian McNaime, Vancouver; F.S. Nendell, Saskatoon; Mrs. P.D. O'Brien, London; John Parkin, Toronto; Christopher Pratt, St. John's; Kenneth Salmarche, Windsor; Dr. Evan H. Turner, Montreal; Sydney H. Watson, Toronto; Richard Williams, Winnipeg; W. J. Withrow, Toronto; S.J. Zacks, Toronto.

Organized by J. Russell Harper under the direction of Charles Comfort, Director, National Gallery of Canada.

Final selection was made by a jury of six: three National Gallery Trustees: Thomas Mayer (Chairman), J. Grant Glasco and Jean Raymond; and three National Gallery staff members: R.H. Hubbard, J. Russell Harper and Kathleen Fenwick.

PROVINCE	POPULATION*	WORKS CHOSEN		WORKS PURCHASED		TRAVELLING	
		TOTAL WORKS	PERCENTAGE	TOTAL WORKS	PERCENTAGE	SEGMENT (in days)**	SEGMENT (in days)**
BC	1,629,082	14	16.30%	1	1.20%	53	53
AL	1,331,944	7	8.1	1	1.2	0	0
SK	925,181	10	11.6	3	3.5	23	23
MA	921,686	0	0	0	0	23	23
ON	6,236,092	23	26.7	1	1.2	77	77
PQ	5,259,211	26	30.2	4	4.7	17	17
NS	737,007	1	1.2	0	0	0	0
NB	597,936	4	4.7	0	0	0	0
NFDL	457,853	1	1.2	0	0	0	0
PEI	104,629	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL: 86		TOTAL: 10		11.6% of exhibition		193	

*Statistics Canada, 1961 Census Data.

**Prior to being shown in Canada, the exhibition opened at the Commonwealth Institute in London for a run of 45 days

Sixth Biennial Exhibition of Canadian Painting, 1965
Estimated Population of Canada: 19,644,000

Honourary Advisory Committee: Ralph Allen, Kingston; Peter Bell, St. John's; Clare Bice, London, Ontario; John Climer, Saskatoon; Tony Emery, Victoria; Lawren P. Harris, Sackville; A.F. Key, Calgary; Edward Lawson, Montreal; North McCullough, Regina; T.R. MacDonald, Hamilton; John MacGillivray, Edmonton; Donald C. Mackay, Halifax; Ian McNairn, Vancouver; F.S. Mendel, Saskatoon; Jean-Paul Morisset, Quebec; John C. Parkin, Toronto; Kenneth Saltmarche, Windsor, Ontario; Doris Shadbolt, Vancouver; Stuart Allen Smith, Fredericton; Richard E. Williams, Winnipeg; W.J. Withrow, Toronto; S.J. Zacks, Toronto.

Organized by William Townsend, Reader in Fine Art in the University of London at the Slade School of Fine Art.
Final selection by William Townsend.

PROVINCE	POPULATION*	WORKS CHOSEN	WORKS CHOSEN		WORKS PURCHASED	WORKS PURCHASED		TRAVELLING SEGMENT (in days)
			TOTAL WORKS			TOTAL WORKS		
BC	1,873,674	17	14.90%		3	2.60%		30
AL	1,463,203	6	5.3		1	0.8		50
SK	955,344	14	12.3		3	2.6		30
MA	963,066	4	3.5		3	2.6		0
ON	6,960,870	31	27.2		4	3.5		61
PQ	5,780,845	36	31.6		5	4.4		24
NS	756,039	3	2.6		1	0.8		0
NB	616,788	2	1.8		0	0		25
NFDL	493,396	1	0.09		0	0		0
PEI	108,535	0	0		0	0		0
TOTAL: 114		TOTAL: 20		TOTAL: 17.3% of exhibition		TOTAL: 220		

*Statistics Canada, 1966 Census Data

*Statistics Canada. 1966 Census Data.

Seventh Biennial Exhibition of Canadian Art, 1968
Estimated Population of Canada: 20,701,000

Initial and final selection by William Seitz, Director of the Rose Art Museum at Brandeis University, Waltham, Massachusetts, U.S.A
Organized by William C. Seitz and assisted by:
Richard Graburn, Executive Assistant to the Director, National Gallery of Canada (travelled with Seitz, planned the itinerary, wrote all correspondence and co-ordinated the catalogue); Pierre Thberge, Assistant Curator, Canadian Art, National Gallery of Canada (replaced Graburn and accompanied Seitz), and Dennis Reid, Assistant Curator, National Gallery of Canada (completed biographies for catalogue).

PROVINCE	POPULATION*	WORKS CHOSEN	WORKS CHOSEN		WORKS PURCHASED	WORKS PURCHASED		TRAVELLING SEGMENT (in days)
			TOTAL WORKS			TOTAL WORKS		
BC	1,873,674	29	21.80%		1	0.75%		60
AL	1,463,203	9	6.7		0	0		0
SK	955,344	21	15.8		1	0.75		0
MA	963,066	3	2.3		1	0.75		0
ON	6,960,870	32	24.1		3	2.3		0
PQ	5,780,845	32	24.1		3	2.3		0
NS	756,039	0	0		0	0		0
NB	616,788	6	4.5		0	0		0
NFDL	493,396	1	0.08		0	0		0
PEI	108,535	0	0		0	0		0
TOTAL: 133					TOTAL: 9	6.85% of exhibition		60

*Statistics Canada. 1966 Census Data.

*Statistics Canada, 1966 Census Data.

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