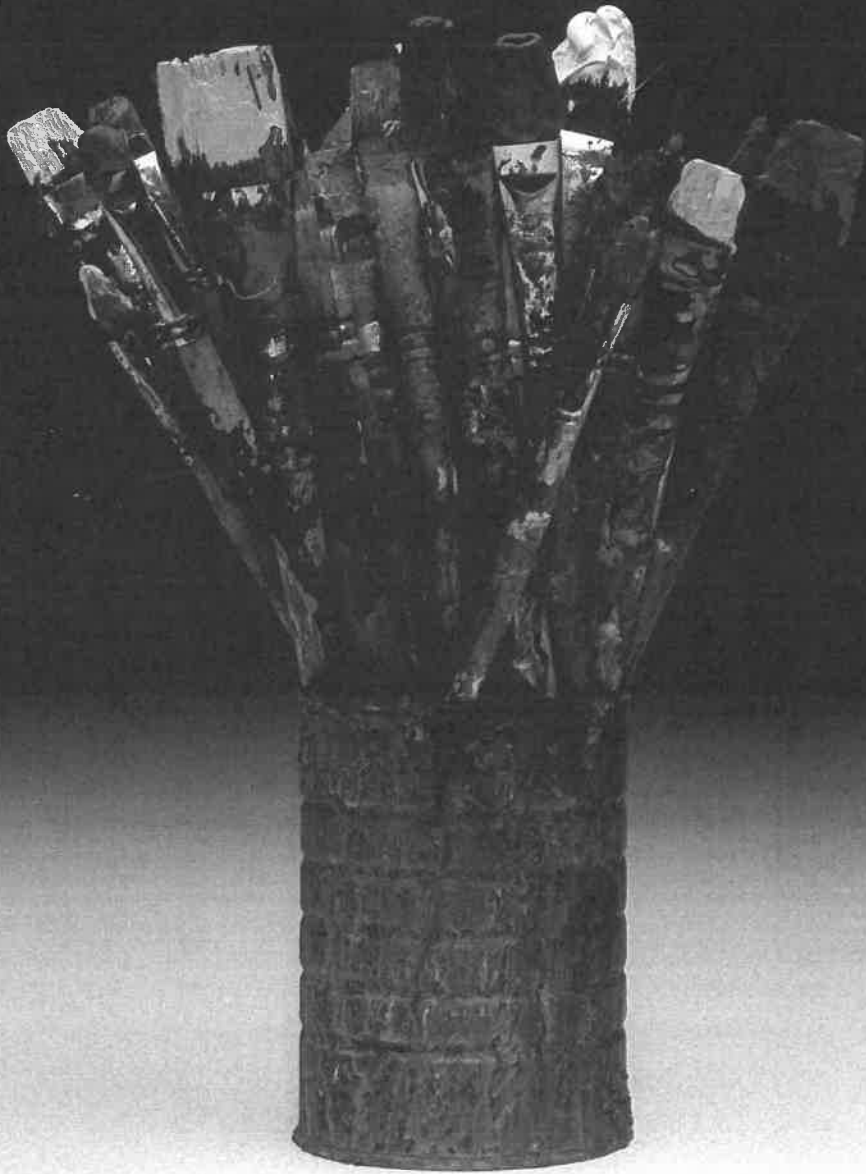


Toronto Painting '84



DAVID BURNETT

Toronto Painting '84

Catalogue of the Exhibition

- 1 David Bolduc
Makalu
Acrylic on canvas
275.0 x 305.2 cm
Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal
- 2 David Bolduc
Ticoma 1983
Acrylic and collage on canvas
175.3 x 170.2 cm
Collection of Art Gallery of Ontario,
Purchase with assistance from Goldie
and Harold Konopny, 1983
- 3 David Bolduc
Dutch House 1983
Acrylic on canvas
157.5 x 157.5 cm
Mr. & Mrs. Richard A. Bain
- 4 John Brown
Something that happened in Sudbury
The disasters of War (after Goya) 1983-84
 1. *Look the rope is breaking*
 2. *Nothing. We shall see*
 3. *Against the common good*
 4. *The consequences*Grease pencil, tempera, oil paint on
plywood
Each panel 243.8 x 152.4 cm
Collection of Art Gallery of Ontario,
Purchase, 1984
- 5 John Brown
*Portrait of Two People Working Towards
a Decision* 1984
Oil, tempera, tar and pencil on masonite
and plywood
Two panels each 182.9 x 121.9 cm; one
panel, 30.5 x 45.7 cm
Courtesy of Carmen Lamanna Gallery
- 6 Brian Burnett
Park Edge 1983
Acrylic on canvas
175.3 x 167.6 cm
Courtesy of The Isaacs Gallery, Toronto
- 7 Brian Burnett
1:05 a.m. 1983
Acrylic on linen
182.9 x 203.2 cm
Courtesy of The Isaacs Gallery, Toronto
- 8 Brian Burnett
Future City Here Now 1984
Acrylic on linen
228.6 x 304.8 cm
Collection of the Corporation of the City
of Toronto
- 9 Graham Coughtry
Gris 1982
Oil on canvas
182.9 x 152.4 cm
Collection of Dr. James Cutler
- 10 Graham Coughtry
Odalisque 1983
Oil on canvas
213.4 x 213.4 cm
Courtesy of The Isaacs Gallery, Toronto
- 11 Graham Coughtry
Garanza Quemada February–March 1984
Oil on canvas
198.1 x 182.9 cm
On loan from the Canada Council Art
Bank/Prêt de la Banque d'oeuvres d'art
du Conseil des Arts du Canada
- 12 Marc De Guerre
Capital, Fascinate 1984
Oil and tempera on plywood with black
and white and colour photographs
Two panels, each 274.3 x 121.9 cm
Courtesy of Carmen Lamanna Gallery
- 13 Marc De Guerre
Free, Not Free 1984
Oil and tempera on plywood with colour
photographs
274.3 x 121.9 cm
Courtesy of Carmen Lamanna Gallery
- 14 Marc De Guerre
You Are Old 1984
Oil and tempera on plywood with black
and white photographs
3 panels, 274.3 x 396.2 cm overall
Courtesy of Carmen Lamanna Gallery
- 15 Lynn Donoghue
Four Tradesmen 1983-84
4 panels: oil on canvas; 4 houses with
mixed media
Each panel 182.9 x 96.7 cm
Joe Curtin, Carpenter: pine and oak, 59.7
x 35.6 x 34.3 cm

- Gary Balabanian, Electrician: panel box, 1-30 amp disconnect, 12 volt bulbs, buzzer conduit, miscellaneous cables, 76.2 x 55.9 x 88.9 cm
 Bill Bromley, Plumber: ¾ in. and ¼ in. copper pipe, brass cleanout, propane torch, 63.5 x 45.7 x 45.7 cm
 Martin Russell, Tiler/Plasterer: ¾ in. plywood, tiles, grout, pigment, 59.7 x 48.3 x 31.7 cm
 The houses were designed and built by the tradesmen with specifications from the artist only as to size and materials.
 Courtesy of Gallery Moos, Toronto
- 16 Joseph Drapell
French Revolution 1984
 Acrylic on canvas
 241.3 x 241.3 cm
 Gallery One, Toronto
- 17 Joseph Drapell
Loving Time 1983
 Acrylic on canvas
 347.9 x 185.4 cm
 Gallery One, Toronto
- 18 Ric Evans
Copper Chevron 1982
 Oil on routered wood
 244.0 x 244.0 cm
 Courtesy of Grünwald Gallery, Toronto
- 19 Ric Evans
Kimona 1982
 Oil on routered wood
 244.0 x 244.0 cm
 Courtesy of Grünwald Gallery, Toronto
- 20 Ric Evans
Double Blue 1983
 Oil on routered wood
 213.0 x 213.0 cm
 Courtesy of Grünwald Gallery, Toronto
- 21 Andy Fabo
The Medusa Strain 1984
 Acrylic on canvas tarpaulin
 Four panels, each, 152.4 x 182.8 cm
 Courtesy of the Artist
- 22 Andy Fabo
The Craft of the Contaminated 1984
 Oil on wood
 228.6 x 213.4 cm
 Courtesy of the Artist
- 23 Oliver Girling
Lemmy in Bondage 1983
 Acrylic on tarpaulin
 182.9 x 243.8 cm
 Courtesy of Grünwald Gallery, Toronto
- 24 Oliver Girling
Goodbye, Hans Hartung 1984
 Acrylic on canvas
 228.6 x 175.6 cm
 Courtesy of Grünwald Gallery, Toronto
- 25 Oliver Girling
Me, the groove, and my friends 1984
 Acrylic on tarpaulin
 274.3 x 274.3 cm
 Courtesy of Grünwald Gallery, Toronto
- 26 Sybil Goldstein
Rubens Study / March/April 1984
 Acrylic and oil on canvas
 91.4 x 121.9 cm
 Courtesy of the Artist
- 27 Sybil Goldstein
Highland Dancers in Nathan Phillips Square April 1984
 Acrylic and oil on canvas
 121.9 x 152.4 cm
 Courtesy of the Artist
- Sybil Goldstein
Watching May 1984
 Acrylic and oil on canvas
 106.7 x 182.8 cm
 Courtesy of the Artist
- 28 Sybil Goldstein
Satyr Family Overlooking the Don Valley July 1984
 Acrylic and oil on canvas
 152.4 x 123.2 cm
 Courtesy of the Artist
- 29 Paul Hutner
Terra 1983
 Acrylic and graphite on canvas
 213.4 x 335.3 cm
 Courtesy of The Sable-Castelli Gallery, Toronto
- 30 Paul Hutner
Hemisphere 1983
 Acrylic and graphite on canvas
 200.7 x 224.8 cm
 Courtesy of The Sable-Castelli Gallery, Toronto
- 31 Paul Hutner
Patria 1983
 Acrylic and graphite on canvas
 200.7 x 344.2 cm
 Courtesy of The Sable-Castelli Gallery, Toronto
- 32 Rae Johnson
Incident at the "Lisbon Plate" 1984
 Acrylic on canvas
 213.4 x 335.3 cm
 Courtesy of Carmen Lamanna Gallery
- 33 Rae Johnson
Night Games at the "Paradise" 1984
 Oil on canvas
 213.4 x 335.3 cm
 Courtesy Carmen Lamanna Gallery
- 34 Douglas Kirton
Living with Psychiatry 1984
 Oil on canvas
 167.6 x 228.6 cm
 Collection of Vancouver Art Gallery
- 35 Douglas Kirton
An observation 1984
 Oil on canvas
 167.5 x 228.5 cm
 Collection of J. Ron Longstaffe, Vancouver
- 36 Douglas Kirton
Drydock 1984
 Oil on canvas
 182.9 x 365.7 cm
 Courtesy of The Sable-Castelli Gallery, Toronto
- 37 Harold Klunder
Antwerp Blue Altarpiece 1980-82
 Oil on linen
 Three panels, 213.4 x 365.7 cm overall
 Courtesy of The Sable-Castelli Gallery, Toronto

- 38 Harold Klunder
Self-Portrait in Two Parts (with Catherine)
1980-83
Oil on canvas
Four panels, each 152.4 x 91.4 cm
Courtesy of The Sable-Castelli Gallery,
Toronto
- 39 Jamie Lyons
Untitled 1984
Acrylic, acrylic medium on Crezon
243.8 x 731.5 cm
Courtesy of the Artist
- 40 Catharine MacTavish
Arms Race
Acrylic, mixed media on canvas
304.8 x 487.7 cm
Courtesy of the Artist
- 41 Catharine MacTavish
Both Sides 1981-83
Acrylic on canvas
243.8 x 396.2 cm
Collection of Art Gallery of Ontario,
Purchase 1984
- 42 Ron Martin
A reflective surface July 14–August 3, 1983
Acrylic on canvas
243.8 x 365.7 cm
Courtesy of Carmen Lamanna Gallery
- 43 Ron Martin
A scale of low intensity colours February
19–March 6, 1984
Acrylic on canvas
243.8 x 365.7 cm
Courtesy of Carmen Lamanna Gallery
- 44 Ron Martin
*Sun and Moon Four Series of Relative
Shades* April 2–May 21, 1984
Acrylic on canvas
243.8 x 365.7 cm
Courtesy of Carmen Lamanna Gallery
- 45 Sandra Meigs
The Scab Picker 1984
Acrylic on belgian linen and acrylic on
cotton canvas
289.6 x 716.3 cm and 292.1 x 200.7 cm
Courtesy of The Ydessa Gallery
- 46 Bruce Parsons
Jumper 1983
Paint on canvas
173.0 x 264.0 cm
Courtesy of Grünwald Gallery, Toronto
- 47 Bruce Parsons
United Technologies 1983-84
Painted installation: ten panels with
mixed media (paint, brass, formica, and
wood)
304.8 x 609.6 cm
Courtesy of Grünwald Gallery, Toronto
- 48 Andy Patton
The Struggle for Privacy 1983
Oil on canvas
152.4 x 213.4 cm
Courtesy of S. L. Simpson Gallery, Toronto
- 49 Andy Patton
The Statues 1984
Oil on canvas
152.4 x 243.8 cm
Courtesy of S. L. Simpson Gallery, Toronto
- 50 Andy Patton
A Picture of the Surf Rolls In 1984
Oil on canvas
152.4 x 304.8 cm
Collection National Gallery of Canada
- 51 Jaan Poldaa
*(2, 1, 3)/5 Colours: Red Blue Grey Blue
Red* 1982
Alkyd on plywood
182.9 x 203.2 cm
Courtesy of the Artist
- 52 Jaan Poldaa
Frieze #2 1983
Alkyd on plywood
42.0 x 480.0 cm
Private Collection, Toronto
- 53 Gordon Rayner
Beaver Patrol (Recycled) 1983
Constructed painting, mixed media
53.4 x 108.6 x 9.5 cm
Courtesy of The Isaacs Gallery, Toronto
- 54 Gordon Rayner
Tin Can Alley 1984
Constructed painting, mixed media
36.8 x 96.5 x 15.3 cm
Courtesy of The Isaacs Gallery, Toronto
- 55 Gordon Rayner
Oriental Evocation 1984
Constructed painting, mixed media
95.3 x 77.5 x 19.1 cm
Courtesy of The Isaacs Gallery, Toronto
- 56 John Scott
Leviathan II 1984
Gouache & acrylic paint on paper, mixer
amp., stereo speakers, tape deck &
cassette loop tapes
792.5 x 1,082.0 cm
Courtesy of Carmen Lamanna Gallery
- 57 Howard Simkins
Studio visit 1983
Oil paint on canvas
160.0 x 208.3 cm
On loan from the Canada Council Art
Bank/Prêt de la Banque d'oeuvres d'art
du Conseil des Arts du Canada
- 58 Howard Simkins
Death of Magic 1984
Oil paint on canvas
208.3 x 568.9 cm
Courtesy of The Sable-Castelli Gallery,
Toronto
- 59 Vincent Tangredi
The Devil's Pig 1983
Fresco, canvas, mounted on honeycomb
aluminium panel
213.4 x 182.9 cm
Courtesy of Carmen Lamanna Gallery
- 60 Vincent Tangredi
Gathering Acorns for Pigs 1983
Fresco, canvas, mounted on honeycomb
aluminium panel, polychrome wood-
carved skull
Three panels, each 213.4 x 182.9 cm
Courtesy of Carmen Lamanna Gallery
- 61 Joanne Tod
The time of our lives 1984
Oil on canvas
198.1 x 198.1 cm
Courtesy of Carmen Lamanna Gallery
- 62 Joanne Tod
Having Fun? 1984
Oil on canvas
198.1 x 198.1 cm
Courtesy of Carmen Lamanna Gallery

- 63 Renée Van Halm
Upon Awakening She Becomes Aware
1983
Painted wood
243.8 x 322.6 x 200.7 cm
Collection of Art Gallery of Ontario,
Purchase, 1983
- 64 Renée Van Halm
In Pausing She is Implicated in a Well-structured Relationship
Acrylic, wood, fabric, and plaster
256.5 x 277.0 x 196.0 cm
Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Purchase,
Horsley and Annie Townsend Fund
- 65 Joyce Wieland
The Artist on Fire 1983
Oil on canvas
106.7 x 129.5 cm
The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa
- 66 Joyce Wieland
Paint Phantom 1983-84
Oil on canvas
121.9 x 170.2 cm
Courtesy of The Isaacs Gallery, Toronto
- 67 Shirley Wiitasalo
The Dream Goes On 1981
Oil on canvas
152.4 x 182.9 cm
Courtesy of Carmen Lamanna Gallery
- 68 Shirley Wiitasalo
Expansive Expensive 1981
Oil on canvas
152.4 x 182.9 cm
Petro-Canada Art Collection
- 69 Shirley Wiitasalo
Papago Park 1984
Oil on canvas
121.9 x 182.9 cm
Courtesy of Carmen Lamanna Gallery
- 70 Robert Youds
Teasing and Healing 1983
Encaustic on wood
121.9 x 365.7 cm
Courtesy Grünwald Gallery, Toronto
- 71 Robert Youds
Innocence and Urgency 1983
Encaustic on wood
121.9 x 365.7 cm
Courtesy of Grünwald Gallery, Toronto
- 72 Robert Youds
Out all night 1983
Encaustic on wood
121.9 x 289.6 cm
Courtesy of Grünwald Gallery, Toronto
- 73 John Yudelman
The Public Baths 1983-84
Acrylic on canvas
274.3 x 274.3 cm
Olga Korper Gallery
- 74 John Yudelman
Ministerial Responsibility 1983
Acrylic on canvas
182.9 x 121.9 cm
Mr. and Mrs. Peter Baxter

Sponsor's Foreword

The City of Toronto's Sesquicentennial is a fitting occasion for the Art Gallery of Ontario to present a major exhibition of contemporary Toronto paintings.

The exhibition captures the vitality and diversity of the city, of which Wood Gundy has been a part since our founding in 1905. The paintings reflect a cultural heritage as seen through the eyes of established artists, as well as those beginning their careers.

We hope Canadians everywhere will share and delight in the spectrum of issues covered by the exhibition. It mirrors exceptionally well the excitement and sophistication of the quality of life in the city itself in the 1980s.

We are pleased to join the Art Gallery of Ontario in bringing you this innovative and historically unique exhibition.

C. E. Medland
Chairman, Wood Gundy

Twelve years ago *Toronto Painting 1953-1965*, organized by Dennis Reid for the National Gallery of Canada, was shown at the Art Gallery of Ontario. Since that time the importance of the visual arts to life in Toronto has developed dramatically – a greater number of professional artists work in this city, the variety and number of private galleries and artist-run spaces showing contemporary art have expanded, and the art audience has become larger and more involved.

Art in Toronto today is characterized by both a wide diversity and a high standard of work. This combination is the mark of a major cultural centre. The foundation of this diversity was laid in the late 1960s and through the 1970s with an ongoing emphasis on painting, and a surge of activity in video, performance art, and mixed-media works. In the 1980s we are witnessing continuity in all these areas as well as the emergence of a new generation of artists that includes a dynamic range of young painters.

This exhibition, organized by Dr. David Burnett, Curator of Contemporary Canadian Art at the Art Gallery of Ontario, comprises the work of thirty-two artists now working in Toronto. Covering a wide variety of styles and approaches – both figurative and abstract – the exhibition represents generations of artists from those in the middle of their mature careers to those whose work is shaping future directions.

The exhibition has been made possible by the cooperation of many people in the community – dealers in private galleries and directors of artist-run spaces. Our thanks to all these people for their interest and involvement, and our gratitude to Wood Gundy for their association and enthusiastic support for *Toronto Painting 1984*.

William J. Withrow
Director

Lenders to the Exhibition

Musée d'art contemporain, Montreal
Mr. & Mrs. Richard Bain, Toronto
The Isaacs Gallery, Toronto
The Corporation of the City of Toronto
Dr. James Cutler, Toronto
Carmen Lamanna Gallery, Toronto
Gallery Moos, Toronto
Gallery One, Toronto
Grünwald Gallery, Toronto
Andy Fabo, Toronto
Sybil Goldstein, Toronto
The Sable-Castelli Gallery, Toronto
Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver
J. Ron Longstaffe, Vancouver
Jamie Lyons, Toronto
Catharine MacTavish, Toronto
The Ydessa Gallery, Toronto
S. L. Simpson Gallery, Toronto
David Bellman Gallery, Toronto
Canada Council Art Bank, Ottawa
The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa
Petro-Canada, Calgary
Olga Korper Gallery, Toronto
Mr. & Mrs. Peter Baxter, Toronto
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa

Acknowledgements

Any large-scale exhibition is dependent on the work and support of many people; when it includes the work of thirty-two artists that dependency is substantial. My first thanks must, of course, go to the artists – for their work and commitment that command our attention and respect, and for their interest and patience in responding to all the demands that inclusion in the exhibition has put on them. The owners and staff of private galleries and artist-run spaces have been of inestimable help in attending to enquiries and requests – my thanks to all these people and, in particular, to Fela Grünwald, Ydessa Hendeles, Avrom Isaacs, Alkis Klonaridis, Goldie Konopy, Olga Korper, Carmen Lamanna, Walter Moos, Jared Sabie, and Sandy Simpson. My thanks also to those private collectors and public galleries who have agreed to lend works to the exhibition.

At the Art Gallery of Ontario there are many special thanks that I want to make – above all to Karen Finlay, Assistant Curator, Exhibitions, who worked closely with me, and attended to collecting photographs, bibliographical and bibliographical information, and compiling the catalogue entries for each artist. My thanks also to Anthony Jones, Deputy Chief Curator, Administration; Douglas Todgham, Manager of Development; Elizabeth Addison, Manager of Marketing; Barry Simpson, Registrar; Glenda Willrod, Head of Extension Services; Maia Sutinik, Coordinator of Photographic Services; Peter Gale, Deputy Head of Education; Charles Kettle, Manager of Technical Services; Norman Terry, Head of Promotions; Gail Hutchison, Head of Communications; Ivan Holmes, Designer Supervisor; Larry Ostrom, Head Photographer; John Ruseckas, Chief Preparator; Judy Malone, Editor; Catherine Van Baren, Production Editor; and Brigitte Quinney, Curatorial Secretary. My special thanks go to my secretary, Mara Meikle, and, as ever, to my wife Marilyn.



There is already evidence of an impatience with painting, looking past its edges and rejecting it as institutionalized and complicit with market interests and speculation. To critics on the left much current painting can appear as a crude but orchestrated device to regain a vanguard position and, by its loaded quotations from the past, to reassert an art of authority. To those on the right it stands either as evidence of a final disappearance of quality and the death of originality, or the prologue to a revival of values which had seemed lost in art's dismemberment over the past twenty years. However one sees painting now – as the phoenix, the albatross, or the carrion crow – the choice of emblems is open.

In recent years figurative painting has been the centre of polemical, ideological, or merely enthusiastic attention. But the arguments, both for and against, have tended to polarize around painting as an enterprise, leaving abstraction or figuration as second-order issues. Clearly this is symptomatic of a more fundamental crisis than a simple attachment to or rejection of a means for making artifacts. It is crisis at the deeper roots of strategies concerned with the understanding of modernism, expressed in ever more strident terms, whether in support of the new as a continuing radical pressure for a broad reordering of social structures, or against novelty as the feeder of a system perpetrating "modernist chic."

The situation appears as a cacophony of overlaid echoes or a labyrinth of multiple choices. But it has less to do with painting or not painting than with competing claims to represent the relationship between artistic change and social relevance. It is a situation that has arisen from the very freedom and autonomy of modernism – freedom from the traditions of a practice, from the systems and expectations of religious and aristocratic and bourgeois patronage; freedom from traditions viewed as absolutes, and freedom for the validity of individual expression, the autonomy of change. Ironically, but necessarily, it creates its own conflicts in determinations of the new, in its total claims to negate the past and declare the future. And with this has come a special crisis in the avant-garde, the leading edge of modernism, where identity of opposition is dissipated both by the liberal climate of absorption, and preoccupation with art as an autonomous practice.

The historical model of the avant-garde, from the later nineteenth century to the 1920s, refers to a period of major reordering in western societies, and a dissolution of assumed values in every aspect of society. But, as Daniel Bell has observed, the twentieth century has witnessed "a widening

disjunction" between the three realms of society, which he defines as the techno-economic, the polity, and the cultural.

There are different rhythms of social change, and . . . there are no simple, determinate relations among the three realms . . . in culture there is always a *ricorso*, a return to the concerns and questions that are the existential agonies of human beings. Though the answers may change, the forms they take may derive from changes in society. In different times, the answers may vary, or they may be recast in new aesthetic forms. But there is no unambiguous 'principle' of change.¹

1. Daniel Bell, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 1978), pp. 12-13.

To those who focus their view on the visual arts, the relative autonomy of art's development and the confusion of rapid changes tend to make each shift of attention appear as a major structural upheaval. Those shifts demand justification in terms wider than art itself, but cannot escape the conflicting rate and significance of change between aspects of culture and the broader social and political conditions. What may seem a major directional change in art – say from painting to the dematerialized object and then back to painting – may not, from a larger view, be more than shifts of perspective around the complex of international, national and local issues, around changing historical strategies or interpretations, or the rejection by one generation of the concerns of a preceding one. The language of opposition tends, however, to be apocalyptic. There has been a steady stream of declarations of the end of art, from the assumed 'aimlessness' of Abstract Expressionism, to the 'artlessness' of Minimalism in the 1960s, to the rejection of the art object in the 1970s, when the distinction between art and life became unclear and the idea or concept exceeded the need for permanence.

But we cannot speak of art as lost or recovered, only of a complex of perspectives shifting in time and place, reflective of societies that are increasingly fragmenting into special interest groups. We have to position this complex between the relationship of 'progress' in society and the desire for societal change in regard to particular issues – the status of women, minority interests, economic disparity – within the diversity that is the consequence of art's autonomy.

The obvious reason to avoid painting now would be to stay free of accusations of following fashion and to accept those opinions that have 'advanced' to declare current painting passé. But to do so would be to ignore some

essential issues. We must accept that painting, in many and varied approaches, exists and exists here in Toronto. This is not to cling to painting, or to assert it as the mainstream position; we are not now in a situation where one technique can make exclusive claims. Rather, we must examine painting as an aspect of what is happening, and what has happened within the context of this place.

All of these issues, both with regard to art in itself and the relationships to changing social conditions and expressions, have two aspects. One is a view abstracted from the experiences of many places; the other is concerned with specific conditions of a particular place. Travel, the rapidity of communication, the mass and availability of books and magazines, international exhibitions and symposia, and the international reach and effects of the art market tend to equalize information. The new, from wherever it comes, quickly loses its surprise. It is absorbed into the practice of artists, it becomes the subject of arguments about the good and the bad, the right and the wrong, the advanced and the reactionary. With increasing swiftness, each innovation becomes divided into itself, fragmented and specialized. Terms and sub-terms are invented, clung to, declared obsolete – “New Image,” “New Figuration,” “Raw Art,” “Bad Art,” “Narrative Painting,” “Neo-Expressionism.” Criticism devours and recedes from works of art altogether, assuming an autonomy and independence of its own.

To read the general literature on modern art is to gain the impression that art in Canada has no history². In relation to the development of western art, Canadian art is not discussed in terms of having a history. Emphasis is given, rather, to individual Canadian artists who have been taken into the international context: Jean-Paul Riopelle in relation to post-war Parisian painting; Alex Colville in relation to international Realist painting; Jack Bush as part of American Formalist painting; Michael Snow as an experimental filmmaker; General Idea in experimental art and performance. These artists, and a considerable number of others, have gained distinct profiles as individuals in the story of recent art, but their work is seldom discussed in relation to a context with a history. This is not surprising in view of the reticence to deal with the history of Canadian art as an entity. It is too often treated as a dislocated series of events evaluated in terms of attachments and dependencies on art made elsewhere. The examination, investigation, interpretation and argument as to what has been and is being produced in Canada is always weakened by that reticence.

It has been easy, indeed traditional, to assess art here with that made elsewhere, and to assume that the connections always move in one direction. There is of course historical legitimacy, since the sources of art in this country are derived substantially from the explicit introduction of French and English work. More than just a coincidence of aesthetic interests, the initial references of art were integrated with the establishment of institutions, for instance, the close association of art in French Canada with the Church and in English Canada with the British military topographers, both reflecting particular attitudes toward colonization. Further, the traditions of portraiture were related symbolically to the divisions of a social hierarchy and the responsibilities of moral leadership.

Even when art (art as an institution) was accepted marginally as a necessary value, it remained for a long time essentially *thought of* as originating elsewhere. For instance, in the 1850s the Government of Canada West supported Dr. Egerton Ryerson, its Chief Superintendent of Education, on

2. H. H. Arnason's, *History of Modern Art* (New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc., 1977), for instance, mentions only four Canadian artists: Borduas, Bush, Lochhead, and Riopelle. A European curator recently told me that, in looking through my book *Contemporary Canadian Art* (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1983), he was astonished to learn that Bush, Colville, and a number of other prominent artists were Canadian.

trips to Europe to buy copies of European master works to form the basis of a collection "to encourage the Fine Arts in Upper Canada."³ And just under a century later, Charles Comfort in his essay on painting for the Massey Royal Commission Studies, in which he sought to describe "a Canadian spirit in painting" said:

It would be a great value to Canadian painters and sculptors if a closer relationship were maintained with the United Kingdom and with France. Such a policy would be in line with those sympathies and loyalties which are part of our cultural heritage.⁴

The issue, in the immediate post-war period, was presented as one of defining a Canadian place by a balance between cultural connections with the old colonial powers and the increasing absorption of American values. It was an issue stated with very different force and direction in Hugh MacLennan's seminal book *Barometer Rising*.⁵ Published in 1941 at the height of the Second World War, the book is centred around issues arising from Canada's involvement in the First World War. MacLennan contrasts the colonial attitudes of Colonel Wain, who has benefited materially in Canada but seeks the status and position that he believes only Britain can give, to those of his daughter Penny and her lover Neil MacRae. She breaks the moral and social norms by becoming a professional in "a man's world"; and MacRae, educated in the United States, rejects Wain's dependencies and values in favour of a commitment to Canada.

We can relate this to developments in the visual arts in the 1940s and 1950s in Montreal and Toronto. Not only were radical changes in attitudes toward tradition expressed, but those changes and their points of reference took strikingly different directions in the two cities, directions that symbolized and actualized the existence of a history that was not simply a reflection of histories from elsewhere, but one manifestly Canadian. This is not to pretend that Les Automatistes in Montreal did not respond and refer to the French Surrealist movement, nor that the Painters Eleven in Toronto were not affected by New York Abstract Expressionism. But the history of these directions did not just derive from those references, nor from the Parisian acceptance of Jean-Paul Riopelle, or the New York acceptance of William Ronald and, later, Jack Bush. That history exists in the fact that all the artists involved, and all their work, constitute part of the complex of what is the history of art *here*, a complex that is distinct and implicit in all that has happened subsequently.

3. I am grateful to Fern Bayer, Curator, Government of Ontario Art Collection for permission to quote from *The Catalogue of the Ontario Collection*, to be published by Fitzhenry & Whiteside Ltd., Toronto in November 1984.
4. Charles F. Comfort, "Painting: The Interpretation of a Canadian Spirit in Painting," *Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences Studies* (Ottawa: Edmond Cloutier, Printer to the King, 1951), pp. 411-12.
5. Hugh MacLennan, *Barometer Rising* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1969).

2

One can speculate on two opposed forms of reaction to an exhibition such as *Toronto Painting '84*. To some people this exhibition, with its breadth of inclusions and the scale and quantity of work, may appear interesting as a sampling of current activity, as a way to gather together a range of work that it is otherwise only possible to experience in a scattered way over an extended period of time. To others it may appear arbitrary both in its limitation to one medium, painting, and in its juxtaposition of artistic activities that philosophically, aesthetically, and critically appear to have little or nothing in common. In the first case the individual works may stand simply as representative of various modes of activity. In the second the issue centres on the vehicle of the exhibition itself, no matter how strongly one may feel about particular individual works. And in both cases there can always be disagreements over individual inclusions and exclusions.

The central question, however, is one of opening perspectives on the complexity of contemporary artistic activity in Toronto, one that relates both to current pluralism and to historical references. An important perspective, for instance, arises from changes in the exhibition of work in Toronto; now an artist's work can be viewed at public institutions, artist-run galleries, or private galleries. Well into the 1950s the principal means for public showings of current art in this city were the official societies, in particular, the Ontario Society of Artists. The selections for these exhibitions were open, but in practice operated within narrow standards of acceptability. The result was to perpetuate a journeyman notion of competence and to resist serious questioning of those standards. The system protected continuity and exercised control by the fact that other opportunities for exhibition were severely limited. The impetus for changing that context came through the activism of a small number of artists working independently – for instance Albert Franck's initiative with the Unaffiliated Artists' exhibitions in 1950 and 1951, Alexandra Luke's *Canadian Abstract Exhibition* in 1952 and, most importantly, the formation of Painters Eleven in 1953.⁶

The abstract paintings shown in these exhibitions were, of course, by no means the first shown in Toronto; the Société Anonyme exhibited at the Art Gallery of Toronto in 1927 and there were exhibitions of the work of Bertram Brooker, Fritz Brandtner, Lawren Harris, and Jock Macdonald.⁷ The essential context for their work, however, was the development of European abstraction in the early years of the twentieth century, an abstraction deeply affected by the spiritualist movements that had currency in intellectual cir-

6. The Unaffiliated Artists' exhibitions were held at The Fine Art Galleries, Eaton's College Street, managed by R. F. Valkenberg. For documentation on the Painters Eleven, see Joan Murray, *Painters Eleven in Retrospect* (Oshawa: The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, 1979).

7. The full history of abstraction in Canada during the 1920s to the 1940s has still to be properly documented and described.

cles of the time. What distinguished Painters Eleven was a shift to American contacts and the notion that American art was the most forceful and advanced being done anywhere. And while the climate of opinion toward the visual arts was substantially resistant, the Painters Eleven were an avant-garde, responsive to the larger changes occurring in Canadian society in the years after the war, particularly a growing economic and political relationship with the United States and a redirection of cultural ties away from Europe. The most powerful and progressive aspect of this redirection was the influence of popular culture with the growing influx of American music, films, radio programs and, above all, television, received in Canada from the United States even before the CBC began telecasting in 1952.

The institutions of art, such as the artists' societies, the museums and government-appointed bodies such as the Massey Royal Commission (which published its report in 1951), assumed essentially unnegotiable distinctions between high and popular culture. The Painters Eleven's opposition stood at the leading edge of a new perspective in which a wide range of cultural assumptions were being brought into question.

This perspective was recognized, at one level, by the attention, and the support it brought, that contemporary Canadian artists began to receive from media, particularly newspapers and mass circulation magazines. This relationship between new Canadian art and the (rare) public attention reflected a phenomenon that had developed in New York in the 1940s. New American art was then featured in magazines like *Life* and *Harpers Bazaar*, and department stores became involved in the art market, for example, the exhibition of contemporary American art at Macy's in 1942, and the photo-spread *Life* did in 1944 with the title "Department Stores Popularize Art."⁸

It has become overly simplistic to emphasize the influence of New York Abstract Expressionism on the Painters Eleven and to describe their work by way of Franz Kline, Robert Motherwell, Willem de Kooning, Jackson Pollock, and so on. The reality is, however, more complex and any perspective on the Toronto artists' work must engage three other major factors. First, it must acknowledge the range and strength of the individuals' work, led by Harold Town, William Ronald, Jock Macdonald, and Oscar Cahén. Second, it must take into account the particular history and the conditions of art as they existed in Toronto in the 1950s. And third, it must recognize how the particular attack of their work was related to the context of a society that socially, economically, politically, and culturally was experiencing rapid

8. On this aspect and others relating to the New York art scene in the 1940s, see the excellent study by Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art, Abstract Expressionism, Freedom and the Cold War* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1983). The display of contemporary art sponsored by department stores was not, of course, unprecedented; see, for instance, *No-Jury Exhibition by Toronto Artists* (Toronto: The Simpson Galleries, April 9–April 23, 1927).

and unprecedented change. Their work cannot be reduced to an appendage of American art history, but must be asserted as a vital aspect of Canadian art history, and the meaning associated in the broader cultural terms of the country. They created a context, the fact and implications of which cannot be ignored.

The radical character of the Painters Eleven work in the Toronto context provoked strong reaction, both for and against. Opposition to the new – and this applies not simply to Painters Eleven but to every generation, or every decade – so often combines two aspects: an anger or sense of helplessness at what appears a prevailing confusion, and a belief in or desire for the existence of a presently hidden key. Charles Comfort, for instance, in assessing the situation in 1951 wrote:

So much is said and yet so little is known about contemporary trends in painting. The movement is one of diversity, restlessness and the arbitrary interpretation of variables. Trends are less inclined to take account of regions, and we find continental, or even hemispherical boundaries, becoming blurred or impotent in the face of the rapid spread of new thought.⁹

Fourteen years later, in 1965, a reviewer for *The Varsity* looking at an exhibition of contemporary Toronto work at the Jerrold Morris International Gallery wrote:

Are Toronto artists motivated by cupidity or sincerely trying to find solid ground in the quagmire of Pop, Op, and the strange art movements of the 60s. Is this a hoax or an honest attempt to find a meaningful style in the chaos of modern art?¹⁰

The confusion of twenty years ago now seems innocent, in view of the real confusion that we face in the 1980s. The very notion of seeking a “meaningful style in the chaos of modern art” immediately opens up the issue. There is no stylistic Holy Grail for the honest knight to gain. The diversity, clamour, and ambition of the new are the conditions of the present, as are the polarizations and ambiguities of its reception. These conditions are amplified when it comes to considering Canadian art (and Toronto in particular) because of the contradiction between the connections and influences – apparent and real – of international movements and a vague idealism that seeks to root the existing trends into a demonstrably local aspect.

For this reason it is difficult to find real value in the generalizations needed to describe an entity such as a “Toronto Sensibility” or a “Toronto Look.” To depend on such definitions is to admit either a paucity of creativity here or the existence of an overwhelming institutionalized system of cultural direction. Neither of these situations, I believe, exist. I cannot accept, therefore, either the notion of a “Toronto Sensibility” as described by Anita Aarons’ 1978 exhibition at The Art Gallery at Harbourfront,¹¹ or Donald Kuspit’s 1981 label of “Exotic Modernism” to characterize contemporary Toronto art.¹² Both are rationalizations of examples, abstractions to illustrate a city’s palpable mood. They are true only in relation to the level of their generalization; like describing Toronto as a safe city, despite the acts of violence committed in it, or a tolerant city despite incidents of intolerance.

Ironically, present complexity in art appears more extreme here because our traditions are limited in comparison to many other countries, and because those traditions have so often been expressed less as an indepen-

9. Comfort, “Painting,” p. 413.

10. Iain Ewing, “Are They Fools or Frauds,” *The Varsity* (8 October 1965), p. 11.

11. Toronto, The Art Gallery at Harbourfront. *A Toronto Sensibility*. 17 February–19 March 1978.

12. Donald Kuspit, “Exotic Modernism Toronto,” *Vanguard* vol. 9, no. 9 (November 1980), pp. 18-25.

dent entity than as a series of dependencies on the inventions of others. It is complex also in that the substantial emergence of advanced art in this city has coincided with unprecedented instability in international art. There has been an extraordinary compression of change, so much so that the range of development in Toronto art is commensurate with the careers of those artists, now in their late fifties or early sixties, who made the decisive break with essentially nineteenth-century formulae. And all this has occurred within a time that has witnessed the growth of the United States to extraordinary power and its wielding, whether by size or wealth or policy, of enormous cultural influence.

We seem, therefore, uncomfortably caught between two factors. On the one hand there is the parallel of art to other creative initiatives, casting art here into the shadow of reputations from elsewhere. If the points of reference have shifted from artists such as Franz Kline and Robert Motherwell and Jackson Pollock to Georg Baselitz, Anselm Kiefer, and Julian Schnabel, the principle remains unchanged. On the other hand, attempts to define a "Toronto Look" or a "Toronto Sensibility" appear either as romantic insularism or implicit acceptance of dependency. We must demand a broader perspective. It must be one that accepts all that is achieved here, with the interrelationships between artists and their work, with the divisions of opinion and approach, with the references to art from elsewhere. It must be a perspective that accounts for the particular character of support and discussion through exhibitions, (including artists and areas neglected); through the directions and character of private galleries; through artist-run spaces; through the collecting interests of private individuals and corporations; through critical writing; through the support of provincial and federal agencies. In other words, it is oversimplifying to look at work produced here in reference to its counterparts in other places and to construct an exclusive character called a "Toronto Look"; to do so overlooks the particular character of all that is produced, the complexity of the shifts from one generation to another, the specific structure of support and interest, or the circumstances of neglect and disregard. All of these factors have an impact and the levels and directions they produce are multiform.

3

We must always be concerned with two indivisible but distinct phenomena. First there are the general conditions of western art, which at this time are bound into the so-called "return to painting," and figurative painting in particular with the critical and artistic oppositions to it. Second there is the question of local issues and their relationship to a specific history. These two phenomena are related not only through purely artistic issues, but also as they reflect changes in the balance between international and local concerns, a factor most recently affected by a weakening from the 1970s of the United States' prestige. If the New York market still maintains a major influence on western art, it does not control, as it did until recently, the hegemony of creative innovation. Attention has turned to a number of European countries, in particular, those where American art has had the greatest impact: Germany especially, Italy, England, and the Netherlands, less so France which, since the war, has maintained a more independent course.

In Canada the reticence in discussing our own history in relation to art history as a whole has tended, in connection with the "return to figuration" and the "return to painting," to emphasize attachment to American "New Image" painting and the new German and Italian painting. This further underlines an uncritical *attitude* of derivativeness from historical, cultural, and political systems that are, in essence, different from our own. The references, for example, of current German art to their Romantic or Expressionist traditions, or to self-examination in relation to their history through the 1930s and 1940s are neither superficial nor, fundamentally, transferable, although they may stand as metaphors for contemporary expression elsewhere.

American art, although similar to Canadian art in its historical dependence on European traditions, has developed quite differently. There has been, for instance, no parallel here to the massive appropriation of European culture from the later nineteenth century; no parallel to the massive acquisition of European art which has led in the United States to the formation of so many great collections. Nor has there been a parallel to the dynamics of American society which could attract the new, whether this meant the emergence of a genuine avant-garde in New York in the early years of the century, or the human resources in the refuge it offered, through the 1930s, to so many European professionals, intellectuals, scientists, and artists. The emergence in the 1940s of an indigenous radical art was inseparable from the changes wrought by America's unprecedented military,

political, and economic position, and from a sense of national purpose which, in the 1940s and 1950s, focussed on decisive moral and political divisions of American free enterprise and democracy against world-communism.

The radicalism of the Painters Eleven was expressed in terms of a recognition of international change to oppose the parochialism of the status quo. The statement announcing their 1957 exhibition read in part:

What might seem novel here in Ontario is an accepted fact everywhere else. Painting is now a universal language; what in us is provincial will provide the colour and accent; the grammar, however, is a part of the world.¹³

And fifteen years prior to this, in 1942, Walter Abell had complained that "existing cultural conditions are inadequate either to support the artist or to give active circulation to art . . . Compared to this the question of a national flavour in art seems almost trivial."¹⁴

The shift of American references was recognized in the Massey Royal Commission report of 1951, but its conservatism favoured a cultural justification of a compromised national character, a balance of European and American forces. Events, however, were developing their own momentum, which came to be strongly supported by the Canada Council. The formation of the Council, a Massey Commission's recommendation, came in 1957, but it was years before the range and depth of its influence was determined and in that time the art scene and interest in the visual arts in Toronto developed substantially. The number of private galleries showing advanced art, both Canadian and international, grew: Barry Kernerman's Gallery of Contemporary Art, the Park Gallery, the Dorothy Cameron Gallery, Avrom Isaacs' Greenwich Gallery in the 1950s; the Jerrold Morris International Gallery, Dunkleman Gallery, Gallery Moos, the David Mirvish Gallery, Carmen Lamanna Gallery in the 1960s.

A group of artists younger than Painters Eleven began to attract attention in the late 1950s, particularly those associated with Isaacs' Gallery – Michael Snow, Joyce Wieland, Graham Coughtry, Dennis Burton, John Meredith, Gordon Rayner, Robert Markle, and others. They were the first generation of very young artists – then in their twenties – to receive substantial attention in Toronto. This was manifested in a sudden expansion of interest in acquiring work by contemporary Canadian artists, led by a few large collectors such as Joseph Hirshhorn, and by attention and support

13. Toronto, The Park Gallery. *The Park Gallery Presents Painters Eleven 1957*. 31 October–16 November 1957.

14. Walter Abell, "Canadian Aspirations in Painting," *Culture* vol. 3 (1942), p. 180.

by the media. There was a sense that something was happening.

The interest, however, was narrowly based on shallow foundations and after some six or seven years the expansion in collecting slowed, media interest waned, and artists still at the beginning of their careers found themselves set to one side. A reviewer for the *Toronto Telegram*, for instance, could write in October 1964 about the twenty-nine-year-old Rayner that he was "a sort of neglected grand old man of contemporary Canadian art – all too frequently unsung and comparatively underpriced."¹⁵ It was a statement symptomatic of a thoughtless impatience and superficiality which have plagued and continues to plague art criticism here; there is a tendency to write artists off just as they are beginning to make their mature and independent work. But more than that, in the context of the time, the statement reflected another aspect of the situation. The interest in work coming out of New York was no longer a novelty. Recognition that the core of new developments were those coming from New York had been a substantial factor in marking the break of art in Toronto with its conservative past. But as this knowledge became more widespread, the focus of attention shifted to what was happening there. The rapid changes occurring in art in New York formed the perspective by which to look at what was being done here. Comparisons either emphasized that Toronto art was lagging behind or attempted to explain that concerns here were different. Thus a reviewer in 1966, tackling the apparent disinterest in Pop Art in Toronto, wrote of there being a revitalized interest in landscape painting:

Landscape is really the only form of painting in this country with a tradition Just now, though, landscape painting seems to be reasserting itself as a significant subject matter once more

He then goes on to identify the importance of landscape in the current work of artists such as Harold Town, Gerald Hume, Gordon Rayner, Gershon Iskowitz and Paul Fournier. He continued:

When New York and English artists abandoned abstract expressionism in the early 1960s and turned to recognizable subject matter they chose Pop Art themes. That hasn't happened in Canada. The subject matter our artists are taking up is landscape.¹⁶

He relates this difference to the greater urbanization in New York and London as compared to the closer contact with the countryside in Toronto.

There may be truth in this, but the perspective it gives is that of a sort of withdrawal from what seemed the most current activity. What has to gain recognition, however, is the fact that art in Toronto at that time was expanding and diversifying. By 1966 Painters Eleven had long been dissolved: Cahén, Macdonald, and Gordon were dead; Ronald had been in the United States for over ten years; Mead had moved to Montreal; and the two most important members still working in Toronto, Town and Bush, had little in common philosophically, and next to nothing aesthetically. The "Isaacs" artists had established places and reputations. Harry Malcolmson, writing in 1965 under the headline, "Why Toronto has few young artists?" felt that the avant-garde in Toronto, by retaining an interest in Abstract Expressionism, "may have focussed attention on [the Isaacs group] longer than might otherwise have been the case."¹⁷ Yet the diversity existed. In 1967 David Bolduc, Claude Breeze, Gerry Santbergen, Barton Schoales, and Gary

15. *The Toronto Telegram*, 24 October 1964.

16. Harry Malcolmson, *The Toronto Telegram*, 26 February 1966, p. 10.

17. Harry Malcolmson, *The Toronto Telegram*, 1965.

Lee-Nova all had their first Toronto shows to which a reviewer in the *Toronto Star* reacted:

I have a sense . . . of a whole new generation of painters moving onto the scene – and moving, not in a body unified by common stylistic aspirations, but as individuals.¹⁸

This diversification went much further: Les Levine had been working in Toronto since 1958; Greg Curnoe, living in London, Ontario, had exhibited in Toronto since 1957 with regular one man shows there from 1963.

The point is that if there was a flattening in the market surge and an ambiguity toward aspects of art in Toronto through comparison with New York, the mid- to later 1960s showed a genuine broadening of the base of new art, coinciding with the major diversifications occurring in advanced art elsewhere – Pop Art, colour field painting, conceptual art, and installations. It was coupled with a more focussed polarization between nationalist and internationalist concerns, and heightened by the symbolism of the 1967 Centennial. The sense of the limited but well-defined community around new art may have dissolved – a loss of identity regretted by some people – but this period in the later 1960s now appears crucial to the notion of an independent, diversified, and complex art scene. It was the moment from which rapid growth in all aspects of the community arose. And with this came the character of variety and an interweaving of local and international issues that cannot be reduced to a single direction or sensibility.

The claims of modernist criticism, for all its knowing sophistication, proceed by polarization and contradiction – thus the declarations of the death or rebirth of art, the death or revival of painting, the death of figuration or its return, and every binary combination between them. Over the past six or seven years we have witnessed the death of painting, the revival of painting and, most recently, an impatience with its monopolizing of attention (its fashionability) and opposition to its institutionalized avant-gardism that conceals more urgent issues of social and political concern. Whatever happened to pattern painting? What is meant by the well-voiced expectations that painting will be neglected in the next *Documenta* when, two years ago it was dominated by painting, and especially figurative painting? Closer to home, a review of an exhibition of Brian Burnett's work in 1980 could state surprise at finding a young artist "still painting";¹⁹ two years later his work was described as "forceful painting . . . welcome in these times of abstract revisionism."²⁰ In 1979 Adele Freedman wrote, "Figurative painting is now considered as dead as last summer's leaves" and the following year, "There are those who argue that painting is passé . . ."²¹ A couple of years later matters were being rather differently stated; John Bentley Mays in a 1982 review of Brian Burnett's show declared, "advanced Toronto art in the eighties is, and will continue to be, representational"²² and the following year he wrote that Coughtry is

the child of a generation of Toronto artists who believed in painting for the love of it, a sheer, patriarchal thrust and rejoicing in art and sex alike which is now unfashionable. Seeing the fleshly lights, densities and translucencies in Coughtry's art, we might wish that younger artists could feel and express such things, even if such feelings aren't ideologically correct.²³

In Toronto, although figurative painting was already being made, a vital focus was given by the formation of the ChromaZone group and the open-

18. Harry Malcolmson, *Toronto Daily Star*, 29 April 1967.

19. Marjorie Harris, "Brian Burnett and ducks and bunnies," *Toronto Star*, 24 May 1980.

20. Monica Pastor, "Brian Burnett," *Art-magazine* vol. 13 (May/June/July 1982), p. 62.

21. Adele Freedman, "Lynn Donoghue: simply figured portraits," *Toronto Life* (January 1979), p. 80 and "Freedom won with flying colours," *Globe and Mail*, 2 February 1980.

22. John Bentley Mays, "The wobbles are out and recognition returns," *Globe and Mail*, 25 September 1982.

23. John Bentley Mays, *Globe and Mail*, 26 February 1983.

ing of their Spadina Avenue gallery in September 1981. As Rick Rhodes has described it:

It was the first gallery to take a serious interest in the new figurative art that has come to typify the decade. Before the gallery opened . . . there was no point of focus for this work in the city, no way to see just how it differed from the installation, video and performance art around it.²⁴

The following year four artist-run spaces, YYZ, ChromaZone, A Space, and Gallery 76 cooperated in staging *Monumenta*, a large-scale show focusing on image work in a variety of media.²⁵ As a further mark of the sort of change in attitude projected by exhibitions one can compare Andrew Hudson's *14 Canadians*, organized for the Hirshhorn Museum, Washington in 1977 with *New Directions: Toronto/Montreal*, organized by Fela Grünwald and Diana Nemiroff at Art Toronto 1982.²⁶ The first, which included eight artists from Toronto, related Canadian art to American formalism; *New Directions . . .*, with seven artists each from Montreal and Toronto, investigated a new view of the relationships to internationalism and the contrasting histories of art in the two cities.

The phenomenon of painting, and of figurative painting in particular, as it seemed suddenly to arise in Toronto, was immediately referenced to new art elsewhere, to German and Italian artists as well as Americans such as Willem de Kooning and, above all, the later work of Philip Guston. The codification of this phenomenon came with the 1981 exhibition *A New Spirit in Painting* at the Royal Academy of Art, London.²⁷ It was, for many people, a first encounter with artists like Baselitz, Fetting, Lüpertz, Kiefer, Penck, Chia, Paladino, Kounellis, Merz. Their work was also set into a context of established masters like Picasso, de Kooning, Matta, and Hélion. The whole venture was presented in an evangelical spirit, with generations converging to recapture the true values of art and imagination, and to overcome the neglect of the previous twenty years. From there events moved very quickly. Of the German artists, for instance, Baselitz had his first New York solo show in 1981, Lüpertz, Kiefer, Immendorf and Penck followed with solo shows in 1982. They were heralded as almost spontaneous discoveries, although Baselitz and Immendorf had been showing for twenty years, Lüpertz for fifteen, Kiefer and Penck for twelve.

Three years later, in the spring of 1984, the Museum of Modern Art reopened with a massive international show. The contrasts between the London and New York shows are apposite. Even the titles, from the emotive promise of *A New Spirit in Painting* to the descriptive *An International Survey of Recent Painting and Sculpture*,²⁸ mark a change in expectations. The London show assumed an art historical context for the diversity and novelty in the exhibition, but it was a simplified context in its disregard of so much that had happened in the later 1960s and 1970s. It was a sort of structuralist recovery of the past justified by the present, against the New York show's post-structural, 'flat earth' view of current activity. The first assumed an avant-garde set within a modernist historical context; the second denied a context and with it the avant-garde's edge of resistance. Perhaps most striking in comparison of the two exhibitions were the differences presented in terms of the international character of current art. The London exhibition, beginning from the standpoint of individual genius and with an indifference to particular context, could use painting with its proven history to assert a mythic restoration of universal values. The show ac-

24. Rick Rhodes (Regina. The Norman Mackenzie Art Gallery, *ChromaZone/Chromatique* (exhibition catalogue) (Regina: The Norman Mackenzie Art Gallery, 1983), p. 5.
25. Toronto, YYZ Artists' Outlet *Monumenta* (joint exhibition at A Space, ChromaZone, Gallery 76, and YYZ), 1982.
26. Washington, DC, Hirshhorn Museum. *14 Canadians*. 1977; and Toronto, "Art Toronto 1982" *New Directions: Toronto/Montreal* 8-11 October 1982.
27. London, The Royal Academy of Art. *A New Spirit in Painting*. 15 January-18 March 1981.
28. New York, Museum of Modern Art. *An International Survey of Recent Painting and Sculpture*. May-August 1984.

cepted the internationalism of current art, the immediate transmission of information, the internationalism of dominant aspects of the art market and of curatorial and critical practice. It accepted the notion of global activity subtended from a progressive history comprising the inventions of particular individuals. The New York show also accepted the global character of art but in the sense of a rootless historical referencing that makes complexity and fragmentation its own statement. The experience was of visual shell shock from the assault of images abstracted from specific contexts.

If, in 1981, painting appeared like the return of the prodigal son after years of dissolute directionlessness, in 1984 it had become not the son but the temptations. The problem in both approaches was the assumption of a history of modern art projected as a deterministic universality, but a universality centered on a dominant culture: first the French, and subsequently the American. Further, that projection has been written as an acceptance of direct and necessary links between French and American art. While the circumstances of those leading cultural positions have been quite different when the cultural is set in relation to the political and economic realms, the history of modern art has been written in such a way as to stress the essential autonomy of art, giving its course a sort of infallibility. What we now witness is a shifting to regional even more than national concerns, an examination of particular histories, and a recovery of the variety and complexity that has always existed, but which the myth of universality suppresses.

It is interesting to find the American critic, Donald Kuspit, arguing in 1977 both against the "mythical regionalism" symbolized by Andrew Wyeth and formalist abstraction with its hold on "a predetermined" look of "good art." Kuspit asserted the validity of a "critical realism." He said:

There is no reason why regional artists today, in the name of the myth of a completer [sic] view of reality, cannot end their submission to a tired modernist style and become arrogantly realistic.²⁹

Still there is a sense in which a distinction remains between regional artists, as a genus, and some other group (nationalist? internationalist?). A different aspect of this was put forward by Annelie Pohlen in her assessment of current German art for the catalogue of the Fifth Sydney Biennale in 1984. She wrote,

The change from a post-war internationalism to a currently progressive autonomisation of the regional/national should, at closer examination be seen as a problem of communication rather than one of the nature of artistic production — at least from the German point of view.³⁰

She goes on to discuss the relationship of German art to its history and denies that a simple (universal) distinction can be made between preoccupation with one medium or another. Regional/national concerns are set now not in terms of a distinction between a valuable but circumscribed localism and a mainstream, but by an internationalism validated by those concerns. Projecting this into our own situation one would expect now a very different assessment of Toronto than that made by a visiting American critic in 1973, who wrote:

Toronto is a nice place to live but not necessarily the place I'd move to if I wanted to get into closer touch with contemporary art.³¹

29. Donald Kuspit, "Mythical Regionalism and Critical Realism," *Contemporary Art/Southeast* vol. 11, no. 1 (April/May 1977), n.p.

30. Annelie Pohlen, "The German Situation, or the Other Side of the *Wilden* Coin," *The Fifth Biennale of Sydney. Private Symbol: Social Metaphor* (Sydney: Biennale of Sydney Ltd., 1984), n.p.

31. Kenneth Baker, "Notes from an Exploratory Expedition," *Art in America* vol. 61 (March/April 1973), p. 93.

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Some of the strongest and best of recent art criticism has come from writers who have spoken out against the enthusiastic embrace of painting and of figurative painting in particular; I am thinking of Craig Owens and Benjamin Buchloh among others. The defense of painting has been less powerfully stated and, particularly by those with a neo-conservative or liberal viewpoint, it has been undermined by attacks on its motives. The sudden enthusiasm for painting, the grasping of novelty, the media hype can all appear as opportunism; the relationships that have been drawn with political and social neo-conservatism are disturbing; the accusations of a cynical manipulation of market forces to resupply the art market with a new brand of commodity, at a time of widespread economic distress, have proved difficult to deflect. And the very enthusiasm for the new has made it easy to forget that paintings continued to be made and collected through the 1970s and that the new figurative painting, in its rawness, is not immediately accessible to a wider audience. The very notion of the new as a means to regain the radicality painting lost in the 1970s can be seen as an attempt to play both ends, to appear both reliant on art history and yet expressionistically new, with a sort of desperate eclecticism. Benjamin Buchloh has written:

The aesthetic attraction of these eclectic painting practices originates in a nostalgia for that moment in the past when the painting modes to which they refer had historical authenticity. But the specter of derivativeness hovers over every contemporary attempt to resurrect figuration, representation, and traditional modes of production. This is not so much because they actually derive from particular precedents, but because their attempt to reestablish forlorn aesthetic positions immediately situates them in historical secondariness. That is the price of instant claim achieved by affirming the status quo under the guise of innovation.³²

For Buchloh this practice is one that renews a hieratic structure, complying with the status quo and yet furnishing the interests of ideological domination with the satisfaction of being both 'progressive' and yet in control of that progressiveness. This approach to painting appears to be a dismissal of both modernism and the precise historical position of the criticism of modernism, so that the critical function of the avant-garde is swamped by a morass of activity and replaced by fashion. And fashion is complicit with the art system – museums, private galleries, collectors, corporations – the

32. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression," *Modernism and Modernity: The Vancouver Conference Papers* (Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1983), p. 112.

interests of which are vested in the control of value questioning, a position possible when the dominant structure can prevent serious challenge to the status quo. Art that is concerned with art (and vested in the art system) negates threat because its self-generating circularity never reaches beyond those who have the time, the education and the social situation to find it of interest. Robin Hardy's article "A Queen Street Editorial" in *Parallelogram* seemed to reach for a similar point. He concluded:

Art that dealt with the issues created by art was an indulgency afforded in the 60s and 70s when everyone was wealthy and had time to spare. Now the world is insisting that the work of artists must somehow be engaged with the world at large if artists are to have a relevance – indeed, if anyone is to have a world at all.³³

33. Robin Hardy, "A Queen Street Editorial," *Parallelogram* vol. 8 (February/March 1983), p. 9.

But beyond the extraordinary generalization that "everyone" was wealthy in the 60s and 70s (surely, the wealthy were wealthy in the 60s and 70s and it was they who supported the art system), the fact is that "the world" does not insist on engagement from the work of artists. To refer back to Buchloh's point, "the world" has no opportunity to insist on anything when the critical edge is dulled by the derivativeness of the new painting that simply reinforces the authoritative and exclusive status quo. Hardy, it seems, turns back his own argument for, previously, he had been rightly contesting local censorship of the arts and the 1982 campaign led by the then mayor of York, Gayle Christie, to withdraw municipal funding from a number of Toronto arts organizations. If the people involved in such campaigns are in any way representative of "the world," their expectations are more likely to be that artists should confine activities to ways that comply with the status quo. Buchloh, in fact, goes much further for he fears the repressive implications in the reintroduction of expressive figuration, and he parallels current events to the conditions favourable to fascism,

at first in haunting visions of incapacitating and infantilizing melancholy and then, at a later stage, in the outright adulation of manifestations of reactionary power.³⁴

Serge Guilbaut has written of the present situation in these terms:

Culture today seems to confront the same predicament that faced Clement Greenberg in 1939, when he wrote "Avant-garde and Kitsch," but

34. Buchloh, "Figures of Authority," p. 83.

with one essential difference. For Greenberg at that time the danger was clearly visible, it came, . . . from the outside, . . . from fascism. A solution was possible, even if it did have to take the form of an enormously costly military effort. Similarly, the threat posed by Kitsch originated outside of high culture; here, too, a defence lay to hand, in the shape of the avant-garde. But today modern culture is being killed from the inside, through the very structure of post-industrial society. Neither an army nor the avant-garde (now blown apart into pluralism) can effectively contain the dangers involved.³⁵

Pluralism has been counted as a loss by the right as a collapse of clarity and a slipping from a hierarchy of authority; on the left it appears as a dissolution of anti-institutional solidarity and a re-opening to authoritarian entrenchment. And to argue for it as a reflection of the diverse vitality of the present can be condemned from both sides as simply an optimistic form of liberal compromise.

Within this clash of polemics and political stances, what tends to be overlooked are the actions of individual artists and the results of their particular choices, which cannot simply be subsumed under the abstractions of painting or non-painting, figuration or non-figuration. Pluralism is a name but not an invention of the 1980s – we can describe pluralism in the art of the 1950s through to the 1970s. But what also existed in those decades was the influence of American art as that of a dominant culture, along with the writing and institutions to maintain that hegemony. And although there seemed to be in Canada from the late 1960s a polarization between the emergence of a nationalism in art (often expressed in anti-American terms) and a valuation of “international standards,” the underlying reality here was of the provincial and regional distinctions. As Robert Fulford pointed out in 1977, it could be said that Canadian nationalism “has always been fragmented.”³⁶ As the number of artists, the audience for art and the places to exhibit have increased, the tendency toward regional distinctions has been emphasized. And this factor, which has long marked art in Canada, has further to be considered in the light of the generally increasing diversity of artistic interests and directions. It has also to be combined, particularly in relation to the larger centres of Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver, with the effects of the “progressive autonomisation of the regional/national,” now so evident everywhere in the western world. While at one level this has had the effect of appearing as an equalization of concerns – for instance, as manifested in the interest in figurative painting – at a deeper level, it opens the demand to see the new in terms of local circumstances and local historical situations.

This demand opens up a need for an assessment and questioning that has been relatively rare in connection with art in Toronto. I do not mean developing approval for an inward-looking sense of self-sufficiency, such as marked the conservative nationalism of the 1930s and 1940s. The work done here, in its quality and awareness, proscribes that. What I do mean is recognizing the particular matrix of issues that refer to *here* – history, the means of exhibition, critical attitudes and outlets, audience, means of funding support, outside interest, diversity of community interests, attitudes toward censorship and so on. In a recent article “Axes of Difference,” the Toronto critic Philip Monk, specifically in reference to art in Toronto, sets up two axes of difference; the first between expression and mediation, or as

35. Serge Guilbaut, “The Relevance of Modernism,” *Modernism and Modernism: The Vancouver Conference Papers* (Toronto: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1983), pp. xiv-xv.

36. Robert Fulford, “Canada’s restive nationalism,” *ARTnews* vol. 76 (April 1977), p. 78.

he subsequently describes it, "between representation and expression in general," and the second between "current work by men and women in Toronto. This seems predominantly to align itself along the former axis – representation for women, expression for men . . ." He then characterizes these differences:

We seem to witness an access to power by women accompanied by a sense of loss of power by men in an inverse proportion, marked by a confidence and a withdrawal respectively. This access and confidence lead women to deal with representational practices, as instituted by modern forms of communication and reproduction; the sense of loss of power and withdrawal by men lead to a retreat to art history and tradition. Thus the referents for subject matter and practice are located in the real for women and the gallery and art world for men.³⁷

37. Philip Monk, "Axes of Difference," *Vanguard*, vol. 13, no. 4 (May 1984), p. 12.

The intent here is not to take up Monk's specific thesis, but to show how, within a chosen range of new art in Toronto, a level of argument exists that is both full and independent. And by this the possibility is opened to *project* what is happening in art here, rather than simply absorbing the ideas of others and adapting them to our situation.

5

It can be justifiably argued that much of the advanced work now being made in Toronto is not concerned with painting but with techniques such as photography, montage, video, sculpture, and mixed media. It can also be argued, as Annelie Pohlen and Philip Monk from different viewpoints have, that the essential issues in current debate cannot be made exclusive to one means. It can also be shown how it is impossible to separate many of painting's present concerns from the conceptual, political, autobiographic and media-reflective concerns of the 1970s that arose in the work of a younger generation working in video, performance, and mixed media. A conflict between dependencies on art from elsewhere and an independent response to the new developed in the late 1960s and created a tension that forced solutions very different from the radicality of the previous twenty years. The work of General Idea, Ian Carr-Harris, Lisa Steele, Colin Campbell, Robin Collyer, Noel Harding, John Massey, and others, emerging through the 1970s, introduced a critical level of activity that substantially redirected the character and range of art in this city.

This situation must form part of the context in which we now approach painting. Whereas for some people, painting, as opposed to other techniques, forms a satisfactory frame of reference to look at new work, at a deeper level it cannot be seen without recognition of the artists' self-consciousness or irony about its use, or awareness of its relativity to all other forms of artistic activity. This is because painting is part of a larger context, both in relation to artistic activity and to criticism, that it is important now to look at its range. Painting does constitute a major element of current activity in Toronto, and focusses on two things in a particular way; first, the relationship with art being made elsewhere, and second, consideration of the relationship between current activity and the modernist tradition as it has developed here over the past forty years. These two factors are heightened because of the dismantling of a single dominant influence and raise, in a new way, the issue of history. It is because of the continuing importance of the work of several generations of artists, and the accumulative interweaving of all that has occurred, that simply adding the newest work to that of the past only confirms a narrow perspective already taken as accepted. The evaluations of history are not made by reference to absolute standards but by the changes of the present. As John Dewey has said, experience has to be made conscious and this is done "by means of that fusion of old meanings and new situations that transfigures both."³⁸

38. John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (1934) (New York: Capricorn Edition, 1958), p. 275.

We are faced with what appears to be a contradiction. On one side, there seems to be a commonality of concerns and a similarity in the way those concerns are manifested in widely scattered places. On the other, the conviction grows that any account of an activity demands precise recognition of each context and the historical circumstances, from or against which it has been formed. It is a contradiction that, at one level, is by no means new. What is new is that the separation between an international mainstream, the opposition of an avant-garde and the continuity of a strictly limited, derivative, provincial or local genre is no longer as clearly sustainable. For art here, this can be described specifically in terms of the rapid growth of activity over the past fifteen years and the diversification of interests accompanied by work of the best professional standards. It is a growth in diversity and quality that demands attention in its own terms as an entity; an entity gaining shape over a period of time and now, more than ever before, in a position to question its premises. It is a time for criticism in the fullest sense.

In a 1980 review of Gordon Rayner's retrospective exhibition, John Bentley Mays wrote of how "our young painters, conceptual artists, sculptors and workers in mixed media are laying foundations for a richly complex Toronto school of the 80s and 90s." He then goes on to give this future potential a context of the recent past:

Yet, I wonder, how often these young, tremendously energetic artists walk by the Isaacs Gallery, just north of Bloor and Yonge, and never realize they are near ground zero of one of the most colourful explosions in the history of Canadian art?³⁹

It is an important juxtaposition. To me the central word here, in two senses, is "near." First because, chronologically, the separation between 1980 and that "colourful explosion" is little more than fifteen years; second because the "Isaacs Group" around 1965 were young artists who are now in the middle of their mature careers – Michael Snow, Joyce Wieland, Gordon Rayner, Graham Coughtry, John Meredith, Dennis Burton, Robert Markle (all still associated with the Isaacs Gallery) and Greg Curnoe, Tony Urquhart, Richard Gorman, for instance, who were showing at the gallery in the late 1950s and 1960s.

The issue, of course, is not one of a simplistic continuity. There are links that can be made, some quite directly, since a number of the younger

39. John Bentley Mays, "Rayner exhibition recalls a crucial era for Toronto," *Globe and Mail*, 19 July 1980, p. E9.

artists have been students of the senior ones, for instance, at the Ontario College of Art and the New School of Art. But the essential point lies in the changes of approaches, concerns, styles, media, in ways responsive to the precise circumstances of the time and the changing conditions of the place. Nevertheless the character of identity cannot be limited to the (progressively briefer) moments of newness that young artists introduce. It lies also in the support of the commitment that is made by individuals, a commitment to an activity that is professionally demanding and yet, for the most part, treated as materially and socially marginal. It is an issue that is sharpened in this country because the history of its art is relatively short and the assertion of its cultural independence still shorter. And ironically, along with the growing awareness of the complexity of international movements and the challenge made by art here in terms of invention and quality, it has become a pattern in Canada to subject artists to relative disregard at the point when they enter the maturity of their work. They are ignored, or their work treated with impatience because they continue to work without adopting every new development, or listening to every false echo. The notion of identity lies in the commitment. And it is a commitment in human resources, set within a particular and changing plural society.

The tendency to give particular attention to the new by distancing it from the mainstream has led to an article of critical faith in downplaying the existence of painting in the later 1960s and through the 1970s. But rather than a disappearance of painting there was in fact a super-evaluation of a particular type of American painting, colour field or formalist abstraction. It and its supporters came under strong attack, particularly from American critics, for what was seen as vested interest and the disengagement of art from the immediacy of events. It was an attack that has been encouraged, with few exceptions, by the progressive etiolation of formalist painting's surfaces and its practitioners' apparent obsession with negative composition by editing edges. The attack also pointed to the need to distinguish more seriously between painting concerns in other places. The most obvious example in this country has been in Montreal where painters have developed approaches from within circumstances and debate that relate most strongly to their own situation and not to their being a northern outpost of New York.

There have been other aspects of painting in the United States in the 1970s that have had little impact here. For instance, there was the 'discovery' of a new genre that enabled Gregory Battcock to publish his anthology *Super Realism* in 1975 based around articles written between 1971 and 1975. He found Linda Nochlin's 1968 catalogue essay for *Realism Now*, in which she described current Realist painting as "a major innovating impulse," as the first attempt "to identify the new movement."⁴⁰ But it was not a new movement in any essential way. It was the creation of the illusion of a movement, pulling together a wide diversity of work from contexts that could be set in opposition to the principal antagonisms that existed between formalist painting and the rejection of painting. It was a perspective that could be made to appear valid in the United States simply because of the large number of working artists.

This is just an example of a certain type of rationalization that is possible, although contrived, in the United States. In Canada the response is different because there are far fewer artists, because regional differences appear more pronounced, and because the expansion of artistic activity has

40. Gregory Battcock, *Super Realism: A Critical Anthology* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1975), p. 115 and p. 111.

been so rapid and so recent. Painting in Toronto did remain a major activity through the 1970s, with the continued work of established artists from the Painters Eleven and the "Isaacs Group," from artists such as Gershon Iskowitz and William Kurelek and Louis de Niverville and from a growing number of younger artists – David Bolduc, Alex Cameron, Joseph Drapell, Howard Simkins, Daniel Solomon, Paul Fournier, John MacGregor, Harold Klunder, David Craven, Ric Evans, Jaan Poldas, Milton Jewell, Jamie Lyons, Joan Frick, Milly Ristvedt, Paul Sloggett, and many others. Their concerns could not be limited to a particular area or style, although the work was predominantly abstract – and we can describe a complex of connections and distinctions between the younger and older artists that cannot simply be dissolved away in terms of relationships that may or may not have existed with aspects of art elsewhere.

Side by side with the continuing activity in painting there were, as I have already mentioned, a whole series of quite different approaches that rejected the concerns of painting, or were critical of their historical assumptions and connotations. There was skepticism about the notion of the artist in his or her studio, about the apparent separation of artistic activity from the immediate social and political issues, and the lack of a rigorous criticism of the way society was projected through the popular media. Aspects of this criticism had already existed in the late 1950s and early 1960s – for instance, in the *Walking Woman Works* of Michael Snow of 1961-67, in the 'happenings' of the time and the neo-Dada events of the Eleves Art Exhibitions.⁴¹ There was also, as Greg Curnoe has recently and clearly underlined, the impact of Les Levine, who was then working in Toronto. Curnoe has written, "The emergence later of the work of Iain Baxter and General Idea seem to be artificially isolated when they are considered outside of the context created by the works and ideas of Levine."⁴²

These points are important not only in terms of showing fully the changing contexts in art here, but also in the setting of perspectives on a historically emerging culture, rather than viewing it as a series of disjointed and rejective events dependent on outside initiatives. The development in video, photo-works, performances, site works and installations appeared to set painting as a practice at the margins of advanced art. But when, in the mid-1970s, this "isolation" of painting seemed most confirmed, some younger artists were beginning to work with two-dimensional figurative images: John Scott, Shirley Witasalo, Nancy Johnson, Sandra Meigs, and others. And this cross-media activity shifted emphasis to a different range of concerns – to women's issues, sexual politics, popular culture, political and social issues, and a recasting of the nature of the personal, impersonal and intrapersonal expressions.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s there was a sense that art here had lost momentum. Robert Fulford wrote in 1974, "This sense that the visual arts have for the moment been pushed aside by Canadian society is conveyed most acutely by our journalism In the early 1960s, the Canadian media discovered Canadian art, and celebrated its virtues."⁴³ He goes on to speak of the continued influence of American art, despite the actions of some artists to assert a nationalist position – Joyce Wieland, Greg Curnoe, John Boyle, and the activities of CAR – but "So far, the best art of this generation has not gripped the imagination of any substantial part of the Canadian people – not even, in most cases, the economic elite." He discusses the crucial factor in art's existence being the influence of government support, "Canadian artists are individuals, working in an atmosphere of complete

41. See Barry Hale, "Introduction," *Toronto Painting: 1953-1965* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1972), p. 18 and David Burnett, *Toronto Painting of the 1960s* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1983), p. 15.

42. Greg Curnoe, "A Bias of Communications: Visions Reviewed," *Vanguard*, vol. 12 no. 10 (December 1983/January 1984), p. 20.

43. Robert Fulford, "Art on the edge of empire," *ARTnews*, vol. 73 (September 1974), p. 22.

freedom, but at the same time they are in a peculiar way producing state art."⁴⁴

In fact it was just at this moment that a major shift was taking place. The excitement generated in the 1960s was a peculiar and spontaneous combination of the new in art within a society undergoing and recognizing immense change. There was a radicality in all areas, a disjuncture from historical assumptions, which could be symbolized by relatively well-defined but numerically small groups of artists. By the mid-1970s, with the increase in the number of artists and increasingly diversified radicality, the directions of the new could no longer be as simply contained. Further, the earlier radical moves in art had occurred in painting and the attack of those artists could be seen as directly focussed on an artistic tradition almost exclusively described in terms of painting. By the mid-1970s this was no longer the case.

It is in relation to this, in recognizing the totality of the situation here, its history, its continually changing perspectives, its complexity in the relationships between art produced here and that produced elsewhere, that one must read Jennifer Oille's comment on the ChromaZone initiative in organizing their 1982 *OKromaZone* exhibition in Berlin as a counter to the 'official' Canadian exhibition of *OKanada*.⁴⁵ She wrote of finding the current figurative trend in Toronto "strange in a city that has abstracted its preference for the pictorial in a preoccupation with form."⁴⁶ ChromaZone's attack was radical and unprecedented and yet not isolated. The context must be broadened and in at least three ways. First, the figurative has, at many levels, had an important part in recent art here – one can list, and by no means exclusively, the examples of Harold Town, Graham Coughtry, Michael Snow, Joyce Wieland, Robert Markle, Dennis Burton, Claude Breeze, Eric Freifeld, Hugh Mackenzie, Charles Pachter, Louis de Niverville, John Gould, and so on. Second, the artists associated with the ChromaZone group cannot arbitrarily be separated from the figurative concerns that existed in a variety of media through the 1970s – in painting, video, performance, and mixed-media works. Third, international relationships that have long existed with abstract painting in Toronto have to be considered in relation to the contexts raised by the new figurative painting here and developments occurring elsewhere. And the very point is that we must recognize these, not in terms of following trends, but as particularities of response, innovations reflecting the broader conditions of the time and the specific conditions of this society.

This exhibition, consciously and deliberately, brings together and juxtaposes – sometimes comfortably, sometimes disharmoniously – a wide range of activity drawn from art being made in Toronto in 1984. It presents an aspect, complex and diverse, of an even larger activity involving a wide range of media. This aspect contains concerns that are related and opposed, similar and contradictory. We have to break into the simplified categories of art, of "formalism" or "new image" or "neo-expressionism." We have to displace the instant historicism that at once absorbs and forgets the activity, work, and commitment of individuals, and reduces the new to an autogenic process of isolated events. By drawing together such a variety of work the exhibition seeks not to authorize a particular direction, or the exclusivity of the artists shown, nor to proclaim a narrow character or sensibility, but to open questions that have to do with the complexity of perspectives demanded by the historical and current situation of this place.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 26.

45. Berlin, Das Institut Unzeit, *OKromaZor die anderen von Kanada*. 6-26 Decern 1982.

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