

THE MAKING OF A MUSEUM



JUDITH NASBY

The Making of a Museum

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Footprints Series

Jane Errington, Editor

The life stories of individual women and men who were participants in interesting events help nuance larger historical narratives, at times reinforcing those narratives, at other times contradicting them. The Footprints series introduces extraordinary Canadians, past and present, who have led fascinating and important lives at home and throughout the world.

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The Making of a Museum



Judith Nasby

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Foreword

During an era of noteworthy museum development in Canada, the Macdonald Stewart Art Centre has been recognized as an exceptional university art museum. Widely acknowledged as a model of professional and creative leadership, the Centre demonstrated its excellence through the selection of art and artists, as well as the quality of research and breadth of insights shared through publications. Among other achievements, the museum has been, and continues to be, a primary leader in bringing firsthand knowledge and a sensitive understanding of Inuit art and artists to a worldwide audience. Much of this success can be attributed to Judith Nasby's scholarship and leadership.

In dedicating her career to this institution, Judith ensured it had a consistent focus on well-researched exhibitions and collection development, exceptional community relations and a remarkable generation of funding, as recognized by the many staff whose professional development she nurtured over the years. An important record of this institution's achievements, her memoir reveals her significant contribution to the Canadian museum community and to Canada's stature in the international museum world.

MARGARET DRYDEN

Former chief of exhibitions at the National Gallery of Canada, and former head of visual arts, craft, and architecture funding at the Canada Council for the Arts

Preface

After a modest beginning at the Ontario Agricultural College, the Macdonald Stewart Art Centre soon achieved international recognition for its exhibitions and collections. Many people contributed through their imagination and energy to create a public art gallery for Guelph. This memoir tells the story of the personalities and events that shaped the museum over the past 100 years. The university collection began in 1916 with the purchase of Tom Thomson's last large canvas. In the 1960s a gallery space was created in a campus corridor thanks to the use of clip-on lights.

Curiously, cigarettes have played a significant role. In 1972 the gallery moved to improved facilities in the university library to show Rothmans of Pall Mall Canada's exhibition of Rodin bronzes. In 1904 the Macdonald Tobacco Company of Montreal funded a model school that was renovated in 1979 to become the Macdonald Stewart Art Centre, and du Maurier Arts sponsored commissions that led to the creation of a sculpture park.

The Macdonald Stewart Art Centre was established through a partnership between the University of Guelph, the City of Guelph, Wellington County, and the Upper Grand District School Board to create a community-based art museum to serve the campus and the general public. The sponsoring bodies created a very successful partnership that fulfilled the objectives and provided the financial stability allowing the staff to concentrate their creative energies on curating exhibitions, engaging the public in educational programs and developing the collections.

Since 1980 the Art Centre has established a number of unique collection specializations that have led to international touring exhibitions and scholarly publications. Each specialization has its own story to tell. This memoir shares the anecdotes and initiatives of those who helped create a public art gallery for the Guelph community. The stories reveal how an arts institution can be created by dedicated personalities through serendipity and perseverance.

My objective is to contribute to Canadian museology literature by writing about the development of a mid-sized Canadian city's art museum that is quite different from the art institutions in major cities across the country. This book adds new information to the record of cultural development in the city and the university. In 2014, the Macdonald Stewart Art Centre was renamed the Art Gallery of Guelph to affirm its location and mandate.

Many people have contributed to the success of the Art Centre – the trustees, volunteers, donors and artists who support the museum's vision and place in the cultural life of the community. I thank John and Nancy Bligh for sponsoring this book, giving me the opportunity to reflect on my forty-five years as director and curator. John and Nancy are both retired English professors who arrived on campus in 1970 and witnessed the growth of the gallery. I appreciate the assistance of former acting director and curator of contemporary art Dawn Owen. I also thank Gwenyth Chao, who helped me with formatting the manuscript. I thank Art Gallery of Guelph director Shauna McCabe, who joined the gallery in 2016, and chair of the board of trustees Daniel Atlin for supporting my endeavour to tell the story leading up to the Art Gallery of Guelph as it is today.

Acknowledgments

I thank those who encouraged me and saw value in my endeavour to write a memoir/history of the gallery. In particular, I would like to thank Daniel Atlin, Irene Avaalaaqiaq, Sandra Barz, Wynn Bensen, Nina Berry, Keith Betteridge, Rekha Bhatnagar, Feng Bin, John and Nancy Bligh, Marie Bouchard, Helen Brimmell, Gwenyth Chao, Margaret Dryden, Patricia Flood, Renann Isaacs, Shauna McCabe, Maureen McIntyre, Dawn Owen, Martin Pearce, Gord Peteran, Ron and Fran Shuebrook, Naomi Smith, Christina Smylitopoulos, Janey Southey, Elizabeth Stone, Alastair and Catherine Summerlee, Shawn Van Sluys, Cosmina Ionescu and Franco Vaccarino, Luo Zhongli, the late William G. Bensen, the late Lois Betteridge, and the late Ken Hammill.

I would also like to thank those Macdonald Stewart Art Centre trustees who have had a special interest in this endeavour: Marilyn Murray, Cheryl Ruddock, Nancy Sullivan, John Valeriote, and Marva Wisdom.

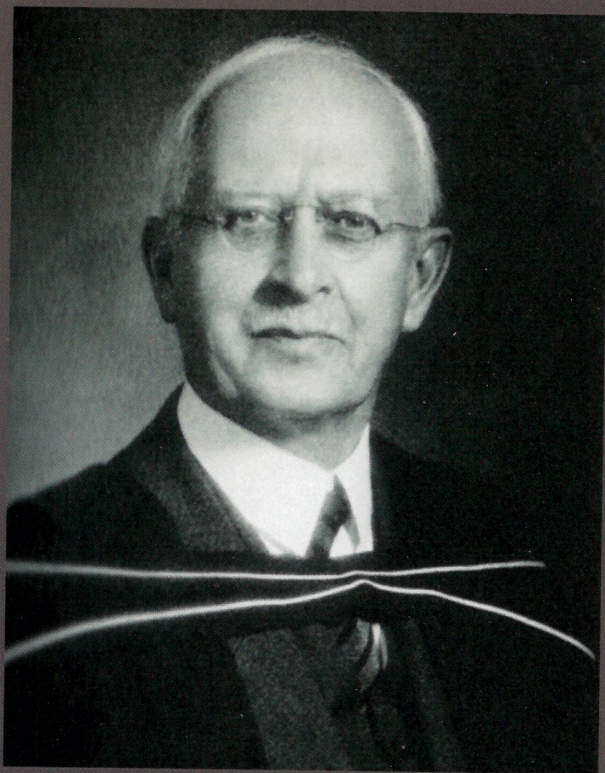
Finally, I would like to thank the outstanding staff at McGill-Queen's University Press, especially my editor, Philip Cercone, editorial assistant Joanne Pisano, copy editor Correy Baldwin, and Footprints series editor Jane Errington.

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The
Making
of a
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1.1
Professor O.J. Stevenson

The Beginning (1916–1967)

The Ontario Agricultural College's (OAC) most illustrious graduate John Kenneth Galbraith (OAC 1931) said that the OAC was the most "backward college" he had ever attended.¹ Surely Galbraith could trace his own interest in the arts to the efforts of an English professor whose dedication brought concerts and works of art to the campus in the 1920s and 1930s.² O.J. Stevenson (plate 1.1), professor of English from 1916 to 1939, was committed to expanding the cultural horizons of students by purchasing significant works of art to initiate a college collection. From this modest beginning to a century later, Guelph now has a prestigious internationally recognized art gallery serving the city and university with a joint collection of nine thousand artworks, as well as a sculpture park.

Stevenson wrote in the 1916 OAC annual report: "It is important, I think, that the young farmer go out from the Ontario Agricultural College not only with an appreciation of the best literature, but also with a taste for fine pictures and good music."³

Stevenson would have been familiar with the breakthrough exhibitions of Tom Thomson and the Group of Seven at the Art Gallery of Toronto (now the Art Gallery of Ontario) and at the National Gallery in Ottawa, as well as Hart House at University of Toronto, which was then forming an art collection. His desire to emulate this initiative was achieved in an unusually creative way. He organized the campus custodians and students to collect used newspapers. A paper-baling machine was purchased, and proceeds from the sale of used paper, plus admissions from his Canadian authors lecture series, were deposited into a picture fund that he administered on behalf of the college.

THE DRIVE

In 1925 Stevenson visited the Studio Building in Toronto to arrange for the purchase of Tom Thomson's *The Drive* (plate 1.2) from the artist's estate for around \$500.⁴ An impressive unveiling ceremony was held at War Memorial Hall on the OAC



1.2

Tom Thomson, *The Drive*, 1916–17, oil on canvas

1.3 *Opposite*

Marc-Aurèle de Foy Suzor-Coté, *The Old Willow*, 1924, oil on canvas

campus with Group of Seven member Arthur Lismer as guest lecturer. This was a remarkable achievement for Stevenson to acquire the last large canvas by Thomson, painted circa 1916, after completing *The West Wind*, in the collection of the Art Gallery of Ontario, and *The Jack Pine*, at the National Gallery of Canada. *The Drive* was Stevenson's first purchase and it remains the keystone artwork in the Art Gallery of Guelph's collections. Some writers like Joan Murray have speculated that the painting is unfinished and shows another hand. An examination by conservator Ursus Dix revealed only a small amount of retouching evident at the edges. Thomson's brother George, also an artist, likely filled in these areas to make the canvas fit its frame. The painting represents a style change for Thomson: he depicted the

background in an Art Nouveau flat-patterning style, while the tumbling logs in the foreground are painted with his iconic broad and expressive brush strokes. One can only speculate the direction Thomson would have taken if he had not been cut short by his tragic death in 1917.

In the 1990s, Ken Thomson, an influential British/Canadian businessman, art collector, and philanthropist, called University of Guelph president Brian Segal and asked to see *The Drive*. When Thomson saw it hanging in the gallery, he mentioned that he owned the sketch and he asked if the university would sell him the painting. When Segal asked my opinion, I launched into a speech about how the collection is built around *The Drive*, purchased by student-raised funds, and how it meant a great deal to the community. Segal told Thomson that the painting was not for sale. Later, I wrote Ken Thomson to ask if he would donate the sketch to Guelph. I hoped to reunite the sketch with the large studio painting, to enrich the representation and future scholarship of *The Drive* in the Art Centre's collection. He politely declined and said his ambition was to own every Thomson painting. The sketch for *The Drive* now permanently hangs in the Thomson galleries at the Art Gallery of Ontario.

Stevenson's second purchase for the OAC collection was also spectacular. In the 1920s, Marc-Aurèle de Foy Suzor-Coté was one of Canada's most successful artists.



In 1928 Stevenson negotiated the purchase of Suzor-Coté's largest canvas, *The Old Willow* (plate 1.3). Although by the 1890s Impressionism was out of date in Europe, it was still immensely popular in Canada at that time. It was so popular, in fact, that Suzor-Coté enjoyed a prosperous retirement in Daytona Beach on the sale of his paintings.

Stevenson made his third purchase – Suzor-Coté's bronze sculpture *L'Essoucheur* (The land cleaner), circa 1917 to 1922 (cast 1925) – by encouraging graduating OAC classes to sponsor an artwork. This sculpture, gift of the class of 1930, shows a farmer removing a stump to clear a field, a symbolic reference for the students whose ancestors had settled and established farmland in Upper Canada (now Ontario) in the early nineteenth century.

In late 1927, an intercollege art club was formed to consider the possibility of purchasing at least one Canadian painting each year to be hung in either War Memorial Hall or the college dining room.⁵ In 1930, President G.I. Christie established a College Fund for building a collection of Canadiana, which was to include books, art, and music. He entrusted the selection of these items to Stevenson.⁶

Although art courses were not part of the regular curriculum, agricultural professors like Daniel H. Jones, an artist himself, attempted to make the students more aware of the arts through extracurricular activities and articles he wrote on art appreciation for the *OAC Review*.⁷ Jones painted scenes of the campus and illustrated his *Handbook on Plant Diseases* with his own beautifully executed watercolours, in the style of eighteenth-century botanical artist Georgius Dionysius Ehret, including the use of a handsome monogram for his signature.

During the 1920s and 1930s, between fifteen and twenty paintings were regularly borrowed from the National Gallery of Canada for rotating display in the dining hall (Creelman Hall) on the Guelph campus.⁸ Works purchased for the new collection were prominently displayed in various campus locations including Massey Library (plate 1.4) and Community House, a suite of rooms in Johnston Hall that served as the president's residence. The current President's House, now an independent stone building near to Creelman Hall, began as the residence for the professor of agriculture.

Artists were also invited to the campus during this early period of development to give lectures and demonstrations. Painter C.W. Jefferys came to the campus in 1920 and sculptor Jacobine Jones visited in 1933.⁹ Jones was a resident artist, working in a studio in the Horticulture Building, where she made clay models of animals from the college herd. Two bronze sculptures, one of a Clydesdale mare and the other of a Jersey bull, were added to the collection in 1935 and 1939 respectively, and also served as trophies for the annual College Royal livestock competition and show.



1.4
Massey Library
reading room

Other artists like painter George Agnew Reid and painter/printmaker Mary Wrinch visited the campus and later presented gifts of their own work for the growing collection. Stevenson continued to encourage graduating classes to support acquisitions and he negotiated the purchase of Reid's 1931 *Champlain Dreams of the Way to Cathay*, perhaps a subject he chose to inspire the students toward more worldly ambitions. After Stevenson's retirement in 1939, Professors G.E. Reaman and E.C. McLean, later heads of the English department, continued Stevenson's initiatives and sponsored touring exhibitions for showing at Massey Library.

In the early 1950s the Massey Library began collecting under the careful direction of chief librarian Florence Partridge. In her thirty-nine years of service, she actively encouraged artists through library art purchases, long-term loans from artists to the campus, and a regular program of changing exhibitions from local and national sources. As there was no dedicated budget for art, Partridge managed to have a little left over in the furnishings budget at the end of the year, which enabled her to acquire such works as Carl Henry von Ahrens's *The Forest Path*.¹⁰ The artworks were hung in the library's reading room. On her retirement, Partridge left a major endowment for art purchases as her legacy for the campus. Her concept was that the curator would make an annual art acquisition in consultation with students from each of the colleges in turn. We followed this format for many years and then decided it would be more effective to allow the fund to grow in order to amass enough interest to make major art purchases every few years. A number of the sculpture park commissions were funded in this way, providing a source of matching funds from federal and provincial grants.

Partridge's 1954 inventory showed forty-nine artworks in the collection. In 1958, OAC president J.D. MacLachlan invited A.Y. Jackson, a member of the Group of

1.5

Evan Macdonald, *George Sydney Smith, the Air Gunner*, 1942, oil on canvas

1.6 *Opposite*

A.J. Casson, *Ontario Village, Spring*, 1948, oil on board



Seven, to be a resident artist at the college. Jackson stayed with the MacLachlan family at the President's House. While on campus he sketched college buildings and completed one of his largest paintings: a mural, measuring about one metre high by two and a half metres wide, that depicted the college green, showing Johnston Hall, the Chemistry Building, Massey Hall, and the Massey Library.

A notable painting that hung in the library reading room was a portrait of *George Sydney Smith, the Air Gunner* (plate 1.5) painted by artist Evan Macdonald. Macdonald was born in Guelph and trained in the Royal Academy in London. In 1945, members of the 1944 to 1945 short course at RCAF Guelph's Wireless School commissioned him to paint a portrait of one of their classmates to symbolize their stay on campus. The sitter, George Smith from Toronto, was in training at the Wireless School at the time. Smith, aged 17 or 18 when this portrait was painted, was killed in action during the Second World War.¹¹ Later, the painting was featured in Flora Macdonald Spencer's book on the life and art of her father, Evan Macdonald, as well as in the accompanying retrospective exhibition at Art Centre.

One senses that there must have been a certain amount of competition between the OAC, the Macdonald Institute, and the Ontario Veterinary College (OVC) to acquire works of art. The Macdonald Institute began collecting art in 1953 with the purchase of Lawren Harris's *Pines, Kempenfelt Bay*. They also acquired smaller canvases by Group of Seven members J.E.H. MacDonald, Arthur Lismer, and A.J. Casson (plate 1.6), as well as by their contemporary Yvonne McKague Housser. These paintings were hung in the dean's office in the Macdonald Institute and in a model dining room that was a feature of the interior design programs. Professor Edith Bray formed another interesting campus collection of chairs by leading Canadian furniture designers such as Russell Spanner and Thomas Lamb from the 1940s to the 1960s. Unfortunately, this important collection (possibly the only one in existence at the time) was gradually lost through theft and gifting, as it was deemed no longer necessary for the curriculum. Similarly, a historical costume collection was later considered outside the curriculum and was given to the Guelph Civic Museum, as well as to other heritage institutions.¹²



The Macdonald Institute, established in 1903, has a long history in art. One of the strongest supporters was Adelaide Hoodless, who fought for the establishment of a school of domestic sciences for women in Guelph. In her address to the Ontario Agricultural and Experimental Union in 1896 she made the following point:

Why should not true art be taught in connection with our everyday work and surroundings and in the simple adornment of a home in the country as well as in the more pretentious home of the wealthy citizen? By inculcating a love for harmonious colouring and impressing upon a child the fact that beauty does not consist in the money value of an article, much could be done towards making country homes more attractive, and that social bridge erected between city and country life more easily crossed.¹³

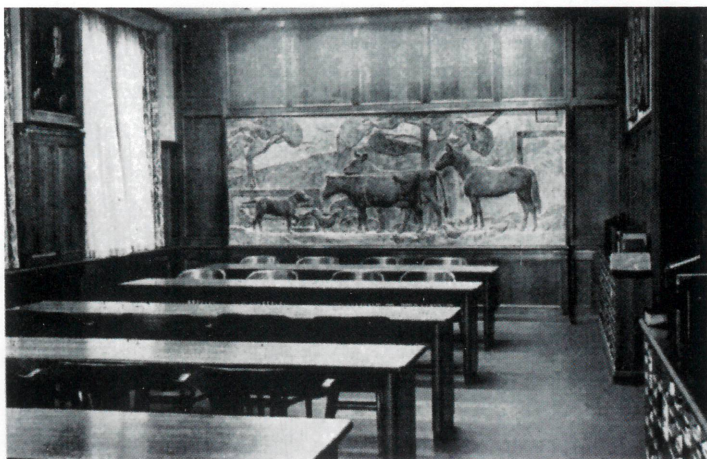
She called for courses that would give young women an understanding of aesthetics and its place in a home environment, as well as providing them with a thorough scientific education.

In the 1950s, Dean Margaret McCready supported this vision by offering weaving courses as part of the curriculum. Woodworking, pottery, and silversmithing were extracurricular subjects taught by practising artists like Lois Etherington Betteridge,

1.7
Florence Wyle (right) and
Frances Loring assemble
the bas-relief at the Ontario
Veterinary College

1.8 *Opposite*
MacNabb Memorial Library
showing the bas-relief by
Florence Wyle





who ensured that the silversmithing studio was outfitted with the very best equipment.¹⁴ Art history and interior design were gradually introduced. Gordon Couling, who began teaching art and design courses at the Macdonald Institute in 1949, was an indefatigable supporter by using the collection as a teaching resource. Beginning in 1952, Couling organized small exhibitions for monthly showings in the hallways of the Macdonald Institute and in the Massey Library reading room, featuring etchings by Nicholas Hornyansky, watercolours by Walter Phillips, sculptures by Yosef Drenters, European graphics from Avrom Isaacs's Greenwich Gallery, Pablo Picasso's *Vollard Suite*, and a Clarence Gagnon retrospective.

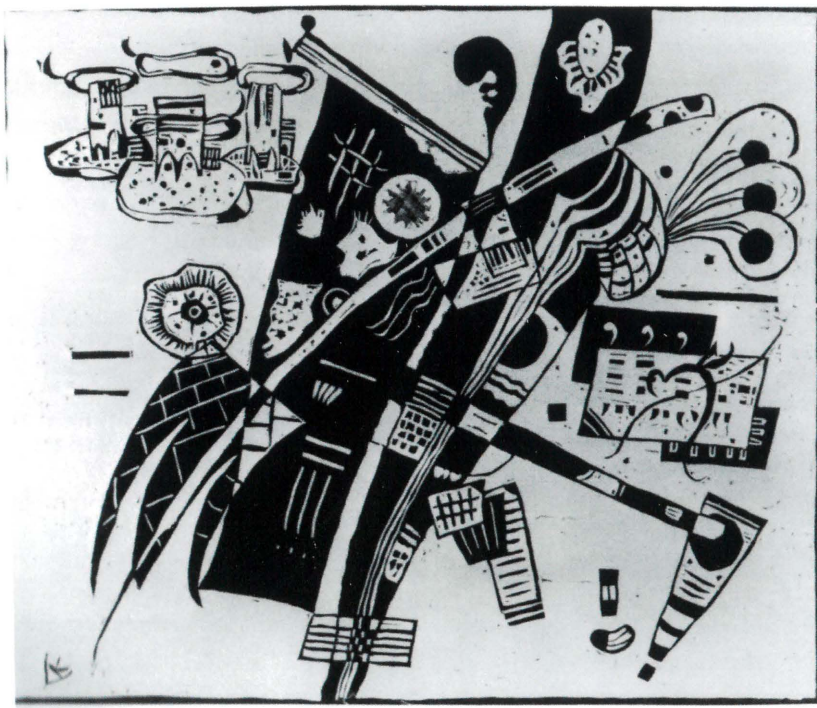
In 1954 the OVC commissioned leading sculptor Florence Wyle to create a large plaster relief depicting farm animals as a focal point for the OVC McNabb Memorial Library (plates 1.7 and 1.8).¹⁵ In the 1970s, Dean Dennis Howell continued this initiative to display Canadian art by funding paintings by Alex Colville, William Kurelek, Jack Humphrey, and K.M. Graham for exhibition in their library.

BACHINSKI/CHU PRINT STUDY COLLECTION

In 1964, the University of Guelph was established by combining the three founding colleges with the new colleges of arts and science. The formation of a fine art department the following year under the chairmanship of Couling was another stimulus. Fine art students played a major role in developing a specialized collection of historical and contemporary prints by Canadian and international artists. Students contributed half the proceeds from the annual sale of student prints to an art purchase fund, and each year different students served on the print selection

committee. The Bachinski/Chu Print Study Collection was named in recognition of Professors Walter Bachinski and Gene Chu, who taught printmaking and established the collection as a valuable teaching resource. Today, the print collection is housed in the university's School of Fine Art and Music and curated by Professor Christina Smylitopoulos.

The Bachinski/Chu Print Study Collection features historical prints in a range of media, spanning the sixteenth century to the contemporary period, including notable works by international artists Ernst Barlach, Max Beckmann, Marc Chagall, Jim Dine, Albrecht Dürer, Francisco Goya, Wassily Kandinsky (plate 1.9), Robert Motherwell, Pablo Picasso, Giovanni Battista Piranesi, Rembrandt van Rijn, and Georges Rouault. The collection continues to be a research focus for art history, for museum studies, and for those students working in the printmaking studio. Graduate students learn the principles of museum management by researching, cataloguing, and processing acquisitions in print media.



1.9

Wassily Kandinsky (Russian), *Composition*, 1935, woodcut (restrike)

University of Guelph Art Gallery (1968–1980)

GALLERY IN THE MACKINNON BUILDING

There was a rapid expansion of the University of Guelph's College of Arts beginning in 1964 with a focus on creating community programming. This was a useful strategy to position the university as a more comprehensive institution, as it was burdened by being known as the "Cow College" or, worse, "Moo U." Dr A.M. (Murdo) MacKinnon hired concertmaster Edith Kidd to organize free Thursday noon-hour music concerts and other performances that were aimed at attracting the community.

In 1968, Couling hired me to be curator of art. My first assignment was to immediately plan an exhibition program, since the previous part-time curator had abruptly left with nothing in place. The exhibition space, in the long first floor corridor of the MacKinnon Building (home of the College of Arts), consisted of brick walls on one side, punctuated with doorways to classrooms, and windows on the other side looking over a treed inner courtyard. There were six large showcases in the adjoining corridor. I solved the lighting problem by removing the pot light bulbs and plugging in clip-on spotlights to illuminate the brick walls. No one seemed to notice or care that the fire code was possibly contravened.

The exhibitions changed monthly. I showed National Film Board exhibitions of photography by Lutz Dille and Michael Semak, and co-curated *Magic Realism in Canada* with the University of Waterloo Art Gallery. We had openings on Sunday afternoons with wine and hors d'oeuvres served in the corridor. I almost missed my first opening because I decided to take the bus. I waited for an hour and then finally called a taxi. Coming from Hamilton, it never occurred to me that Guelph would not have Sunday bus service. The openings were popular, attracting people from the town who were eager to discuss the art and seemed delighted that the city's cultural scene was expanding.

I employed students to assist in hanging exhibitions. My first employee was Margaret Dryden. In 1969 she and fellow student John Wood curated an exhibition titled *Canadian Printmakers*, working with assistance from Walter Bachinski and

Professor Warren Tresidder to select prints from the Print Study Collection and obtain temporary loans. On the basis of this experience, Dryden was shortly after hired to be director of the Nova Scotia Museum of Fine Arts' Centennial Art Gallery at the Citadel in Halifax. One of her first experiences was to receive an obscenity charge from the Halifax Police for her exhibition of Fred Ross's paintings of ballet dancers!¹ Dryden later became chief of exhibitions at the National Gallery of Canada and head of visual arts, craft and architecture funding at the Canada Council for the Arts.

I created a mailing list of people both on and off campus who had expressed interest in the gallery, as my objective was to create an exhibition program to serve the entire community, not just the university. This objective was fully supported by Professor Couling and Dean MacKinnon. I boldly called the space the "University of Guelph Art Gallery," which allowed us to apply for grants through the Ontario Arts Council and Canada Council for the Arts. It was unlikely that anyone would actually come from Ottawa or Toronto to see how poorly equipped the facilities were. In 1969 I was invited to become a member of the Ontario Association of Art Galleries, an organization of public gallery directors. Our purpose was to lobby the government for funding and any other issues of concern to public galleries. There were so few of us, all the members formed the board.

TEACHING ASSIGNMENT

In addition to my being curator of art, Professor Couling hired me to teach two courses in my first year (1968–69). I taught a design course for thirty young women who were enrolled in home economics at the Macdonald Institute. The course took place in a studio on the second floor of Zavitz Hall, overlooking what is now the university's Central Plaza. I purposely parked our red Austin-Healey 3000 convertible directly outside the door to give myself the aura of extra authority, since some of the students were only a few years younger than me. One design project was to glue various found objects on pieces of brown Masonite. I hated teaching this course but loved my second assignment, which was to lead a weekly seminar for the art history introductory course taught by Tresidder. MacKinnon then asked me if I would like to continue as a faculty member or be a professional staff member. After attending dysfunctional faculty meetings, I decided on the professional side because my real interest was in being a curator.

A highlight of the University of Guelph Art Gallery's 1969 to 1970 program was the Art Gallery of Ontario's touring exhibition of bronze sculptures by Sorel Etrog (plate 2.1). The small bronzes were displayed on plinths in the brick corridor. Eight

large bronzes were prominently displayed outside along the campus' central walkway, now called Winegard Walk. Included was Etrog's large bronze *Complexes of a Young Lady*. A CBC television reporter interviewed me as we walked among Etrog's bronzes. The interview was broadcast the following day on the national evening news, giving the university a boost of recognition.

Over the years, some of the most interesting displays were presented in the showcases, which featured a broad range of objects including eighteenth-century English air twist drinking glasses, domestic tools from Borneo, English Delft pottery, rare books, British theatre posters and playbills, Chinese jades, nineteenth-century Canadian pottery and glass, nineteenth-century hand tools, African ritual sculpture, historical musical instruments, and textiles from India. Microbiology professor Charles Cork lent some of these small collections. He often spoke vaguely about the possibilities of donations. For some unknown reason, he would call me every time he went on a trip to give me his departure and arrival dates, but no donation was ever made. All of these small exhibitions, borrowed from local collectors like Cork, had an audience of hundreds per day, giving these audiences a glimpse into cultures they might not have otherwise seen without going to a major city museum.



2.1

Sorel Etrog: *Bronzes* exhibition in the MacKinnon Building, 1969

DOCUMENTING THE COLLECTION

My third assignment in my first year as curator of art was to make an inventory of the university's artworks. With clipboard in hand, I searched campus wide, retrieving artworks from closets, attics, and empty offices. Among the first paintings I found was a 1905 full-length portrait of Professor J. Hoyes Panton; it was located in a damp basement under a stairwell, wet to the sitter's knees. I found money to pay a conservator, George Fletcher, to repair the canvas, because this was one of the earliest paintings in the OAC collection. Fletcher recommended we cut the professor "off at the knees" to make a three-quarter-length portrait, a solution that saved the painting.

One of the first initiatives of the OAC was to record benefactors, presidents, and professors who had shaped the development of the college. Large oil paintings were commissioned from fashionable portrait artists like J.W.L. Forster and Edmund Wyly Grier. These portraits, in their elaborate gilded frames, still hang in a dignified setting on the auditorium walls of War Memorial Hall.

Other early portraits associated with the OAC's founding did not fare so well. The majestic portrait of former Ontario minister of agriculture John Dryden, in a massive frame, is torn across the sitter's waistcoat. It is now stored at the Art Gallery of Guelph, awaiting someone interested in funding its restoration. Other early portraits are in permanent storage at the University of Guelph. The exception is a massive full-length portrait, created in 1882, of OVC founder Andrew Smith that was brought from Toronto when the OVC moved to Guelph in 1922.² At one time, the OVC also displayed smaller matching portraits of Smith, his wife, his father, and his mother. To this day, the OVC continues the tradition of commissioning painted portraits of retiring deans.

An unfortunate occurrence in the 1970s was the gradual discolouration of Artin Cavoukian's portrait of Colonel Samuel McLaughlin, an important donor to the university library. The Ektachrome photograph, illuminated by bright lights in the library foyer, gradually turned green due to the effect of the high light levels. Cavoukian replaced the portrait and other similar ones. From then on the university commissioned more stable photographic processes that became available for portraits of record.

I surveyed every building on campus to create an inventory of artworks. When I entered the rotunda of Johnston Hall, I was alarmed to see Tom Thomson's magnificent painting *The Drive* hung on the wall, with OAC students playing touch football in front of it! I used my newly minted authority and asked them to stop. I carried on and recorded anything and everything that remotely looked like art to build up as large a list as possible. A large but dispersed collection of art would



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Yvonne McKague Housser, *Summer Night, Toronto*, 1949, oil on masonite

be a good argument for the establishment of a proper gallery. I learned to catalogue the artworks correctly by reading Dorothy Dudley's book on museum registration (originally published in 1968 by the American Association of Museums and still in print today), which advised having an "A" collection of artworks that you wanted to show to the public and a "B" collection that would be composed of minor works for study purposes only.³ I created a fair-sized "B" collection that built up the numbers.

The fortunate discovery of the Thomson painting hanging in an unfortunate location in the Johnston Hall foyer gave me a good excuse to call on President W.C. Winegard to argue my case. He was receptive to the idea and we began a long journey to find a suitable proper gallery for the collection and temporary exhibitions. Winegard, being a University of Toronto graduate, was very familiar with the importance of the Hart House Collection of Group of Seven paintings and saw the merit of making University of Guelph masterworks accessible to the community.

Later, Winegard became a significant collector of early-twentieth-century Canadian art and he donated a number of paintings to the collection. I worked with various presidents to select artworks for the President's House, giving me a perfect opportunity to present the case for the creation of a permanent art gallery.

GALLERY IN THE MCLAUGHLIN LIBRARY

In 1970, the research of Nathan Stolow, a scientist at the Canadian Conservation Institute, indicated that ultraviolet waves in sunlight and in fluorescent lights, together with intense and continuous light levels, would cause paper to fade and the surfaces of oil paintings to deteriorate. New museum light level standards were established; this was the ammunition I needed. I approached Winegard with my concerns and we looked at possible campus buildings that could be renovated. The first buildings that we considered, Raithby House and Trent Building, proved to be too small. Around the same time, MacKinnon felt I should meet chief librarian Florence Partridge, who he knew had an interest in art. MacKinnon arranged a lunch at the faculty club that was located in Johnston Hall. I had the impression that Partridge was rather prim and conservative. MacKinnon asked if we would like to have a sherry before lunch. I said yes and Partridge said she would have "scotch on the rocks." I knew I had just met a kindred soul. We moved the gallery to the main floor of the university library in 1970, where it remained until the Macdonald Stewart Art Centre was opened in 1980.

Locating the exhibition program first in the MacKinnon Building and then in the McLaughlin Library (later renamed the University of Guelph Library) produced an enormous audience, which was very persuasive when applying for Canada Council for the Arts and Ontario Arts Council programming grants.

Winegard appointed an advisory committee on art acquisitions as a resource for the curator of art. MacKinnon chaired the committee, whose role was to advise on the suitability of acquisitions and commissions, and on a plan for locating outdoor sculpture. The objective was to build a collection representing over 300 years of Canadian art, from the earliest topographical artists to contemporary work. Acquisitions through purchases and donations were made to keep abreast of current developments and to fill in gaps.

Beginning in 1969 the University of Guelph alumni, through the Alma Mater Fund, provided acquisition funds that the province matched through the lottery-funded Wintario program. Purchases and gifts resulted in as many as sixty new acquisitions annually. Two trust funds for purchasing art were also established. Agriculture professor Frederick N. Jerome provided funding to purchase works by

young regional artists and Partridge created an endowed fund through which art would be acquired annually in consultation with student representatives from each of the colleges, in rotation.

With a generous acquisitions budget, I attended Sotheby's Canadian art auctions, held in the grand room at the top of the Simpsons building in Toronto, bidding successfully on important works, such as James Pattison Cockburn's eighteenth-century aquatint *The Falls of Montmorency* and William Napier's 1857 view *South Gate, Upper Fort Garry, Assiniboine River*. Other key historical works were acquired by donation, including the *View from Allan's Bridge up the River Speed in Guelph* by an unknown itinerant artist. Another donation was Robert Whale's 1850s painting of *Niagara Falls from the Upper Bank*. This view may be his earliest of Niagara Falls, painted soon after his arrival in Canada in 1852.

An unusual acquisition for the University Collection in 1971 comprised 140 British horse brasses (plate 2.3) collected between 1914 and 1920 by Guelph resident Dr Norman C. Wallace, while he was director-in-charge at a military hospital in Shorncliffe, England. These highly polished nineteenth-century cast brass or silver amulets were adornments to leather harnesses and were worn to represent the sun god, guardian of driven horses, to protect against evil, disease, and misfortune. Other brasses featured crescent moon, star, heart, and cross motifs and patriotic symbols of the rose, thistle, and shamrock. Images honouring trades include brewers, whose delivery wagons were pulled by teams of up to eight horses, embellished with jingling flyers, forehead and ear pieces, and a martingale holding as many as eleven brasses. Other themes are portraits of Queen Victoria, former British prime minister Benjamin Disraeli, famed circus elephant Jumbo, and Fred Archer, a popular jockey of the day. Today, the collection is on display at the ovc's Large Animal Clinic, together with a harness maker's vise to symbolize the significance of the horse in the development of veterinary medical science.⁴ Without a proper gallery to show the collection, artworks were displayed in campus buildings in locations that were accessible to the public rather than being office decorations.

To research contemporary art, I made the rounds of the commercial galleries to get to know the dealers. Jean-Paul Riopelle's *Voie Poupee* was purchased for \$5,000 from the Mira Godard Gallery in Toronto in 1978 and Jack Bush's *Blue Partita* (1976) from the Waddington's Auction House for \$5,000 in 1977. Others were purchased directly from artists like Alex Colville, Ken Danby, Paul Fournier, and Lillian Freiman. Freiman was born in Guelph and later lived in Manhattan. I co-curated an exhibition of her work together with the Agnes Etherington Art Centre in Kingston, Ontario. Freiman felt she had been forgotten and, although she was in ill health, she was thrilled to see me when I visited her small studio/apartment. She took great

2.3

Horse brass agricultural themes include a cockerel and a bugle

2.4 *Opposite*

Michael Snow, *Torso*, 1963,
canvas with polyester resin,
enamel, and alkyd enamel



joy in her birds, which she kept in elaborate cages. We acquired three portraits by Freiman for the collection.

Avrom Isaacs's gallery on Yonge Street just north of Bloor, in Toronto, was a source of numerous acquisitions by artists Greg Curnoe, Joyce Wieland, Graham Coughtry, John MacGregor, and Michael Snow, whose *Torso* (plate 2.4) and *Door* are exemplary of the period. Isaacs later moved his gallery to John Street, around the corner from the Art Gallery of Ontario. One day he invited me for lunch. We went down the street to an upscale "white tablecloth" restaurant, ordered seafood, and shared a nice bottle of chardonnay. Without warning, I slapped Isaacs across his tie. He said, "What did you do that for?" I replied, "There was a cockroach on your tie." We agreed to not say anything and enjoyed our meal.

Later, after Isaacs had recovered from a heart attack, he became an avid road cyclist. Decked out in the latest gear, he would often ride in the Guelph/Elora area and would call in at the gallery. Isaacs also owned the Inuit Gallery on Prince Arthur Avenue in Toronto, where I made many purchases of drawings and sculptures for the collection. Isaacs also made significant art donations for the Guelph collection, including *The Way It Was* by Inuit artist Normee Ekoomiak (from Chisasibi, Quebec), which depicted the story of his own life, drawn on an entire roll of shelf paper that was given to the gallery in its original box. Little did I know, or even suspect, that Isaacs's daughter, Renann, whom I first knew as a young rock musician with