

Texts in English

Volume 24, numéro 97, hiver 1979–1980

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/58859ac>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

La Société La Vie des Arts

ISSN

0042-5435 (imprimé)

1923-3183 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce document

(1979). Texts in English. *Vie des arts*, 24(97), 91–94.

By Walter KLEPAC

A DEVELOPING CONCEPT

By Andrée PARADIS

The malaise caused by the definition of the new museological concept set forth in *Le Musée du Québec en devenir* urges us to ponder. Doubtless, it reflects the agitations aroused by attempts at rationalization in the traditional domain of the discourse on art whose development we have followed for some years. Sciences related to language, which are at the base of the revolution in the language of criticism, have led to the passage from literary to scientific discourse on art. Sociology, psychology and philosophy have also contributed to enlarging the field of definitions. Artistic experiment has become a simple function like all other human and social ones. It was necessary at all costs to demystify. Fortunately, we seem to be coming back to more precise awareness. The artistic function is not really like the others. We shall never clarify completely what makes it possible. The museum of to-morrow cannot forget this fundamental truth. It is in the service of an unceasing process of clarification.

It is comforting to think that the principal objections to the concept of the future Quebec Museum were raised by the Arts and the Archaeology sectors, which has assured excellent discussions on the subject of museology in general. But what must be hailed as an event is the spontaneous defense of the art museum. It is clear that the art museum, as an absolutely indispensable institution, must be maintained and developed in order to allow it to remain a cultural tool of prime importance.

Let us consider the definition that aroused so violent an opposition. "A museum is an institution which conserves and conveys values put in concrete form in objects produced by a society and which permits the comprehension of our way of being in the world." Is this in fact a difficulty in semantics, or else a difficulty of interpretation of the theory of the informational architecture of the work taken in the sense of communicational ideology upheld by Abraham Moles? "Art is a programmed sensualization of the environment; as many possible sensualizations, as many possible programmes, as many works of art, and therefore as many artists as makers of environment." The coded transmission of the objet d'art or the artistic experiment is involved here and, when it is a matter of applying a theory of communication to the aesthetic universe, it is necessary to be particularly concerned with the creative act and the more or less obvious message it contains. What the museum seeks to emphasize, beginning with the object, is everything related to the creative act. From whence arises the importance of conservation; it is necessary to begin with the witness (the work), with the object to be conserved; from whence arises the importance of the curator, specialist in the illumination of the work, whose education is linked to the object and to collections. From whence arises, too, the importance of collections, to allow the better siting of works, the establishing of relationships, in order to assure permanent interrogation around the artistic process.

Our experience in the field of museology is still young. This fact assures its dynamism on the one hand and its desire for structuralization on the other. It is necessary, nevertheless, to consider consolidating existing experiments, enriching collections, supporting the efforts of curators, avoiding the risks of failure and fulfilling the immense hunger for comprehension that exists in the new public of museums.

(Translation by Mildred Grand)

The major problem facing many contemporary painters to-day has been to create a genuinely personal idiom for themselves out of the conventions and paradigms of formalist colour field painting of the sixties that could, at the same time, respond to the profound shift in sensibility which seemed to coincide with the advent of minimalism. As the imperatives of the Greenberg aesthetic began to lose their former authority, ambitious decorative abstraction became increasingly problematic as an approach to painting: such works must now stand on their own, without the support of dogma to compel and reinforce credibility. Perhaps the most effective strategy to be adopted by decorative abstract painters in the seventies has been that of intensifying the material aspect, that is, acknowledging through appearance alone those conditions and properties which the painting had in common with other physical objects in the world; but doing so in a way which did not sacrifice the free interplay of a fundamentally pictorial imagination with radical formal invention and a delight in sensuous experience which Matisse and his American descendants had won for abstract painting over the years.

There are, as well, two further and even more difficult demands which formalist/decorative abstract painters must somehow address themselves to. It is often held that a work of art should be able to actively engage the mind of the viewer in addition to stimulating his senses and challenging his sensibility and tastes. In the best contemporary art, the viewer's experience of the work should fully involve his critical judgment the way a situation in daily life would: his encounter with the work should in the end impart an unanticipated sense of discovery. On the other hand, there is also a growing feeling, partly due to a reaction against the anonymity that characterized the most advanced art of the previous decade, that a work has to conspicuously reflect the interests, character, and ways of thinking and feeling peculiar to the artist who made it, even to the point of idiosyncrasy and strangeness. Therefore, if a painter happens to draw upon traditional forms or premises he is expected to assimilate and transform them into something that is singularly his own, something that looks personal.

It is to these changes in the artistic climate that the recent paintings of David Bolduc seem to be directed. In the process of evolving his own response to these changes Bolduc has produced some of the most original and significant formalist paintings since the late Jack Bush.

Throughout his work since the fall of 1977 Bolduc has implicated the viewer's awareness of acrylic paint as a specific physical substance at almost every level of his pictorial constructions. Indeed, Bolduc has translated figure and ground into two completely distinct and opposite material modes — both of which look entirely natural and unmannered and yet conform to the modernist dictum that the surface of a painting appear to be flat.

For example, the lines which make up the simple figure and border look at all times as if they have been squeezed directly from the tube onto the surface of the painting. Each holds the surface with a totally unambiguous matter-of-factness. Each line is, one might say, *individuated indexically* so that it calls attention to itself first of all as a sinuous string of colored synthetic matter prior to any particular sign — compositional — or complex colour-function which it might also have in the painting. One feels the over-all pictorial or decorative identity of these new paintings is grounded in the materiality of the paint. Yet the pictorial and material aspect can only be perceived separately, one at a time. In fact, Bolduc intensifies our sense of this duality by making it virtually impossible for use to lose sight of the one while focusing on the other for very long. He converts our vague awareness of their simultaneous coexistence, i.e., that which we sense but never actually see, into a palpable tension and a nagging paradox. This feeling prevents us from becoming absorbed exclusively in the optical phenomena or the pictorial fictions generated by the painting and keeps us in the concrete world of ordinary experience. It fosters a kind of critical self-consciousness which allows us to preserve a sense of detachment. We are able to attend to the major shifts or dialectical oppositions of the perceptions which occur while looking at the work and to understand them as being what, in fact, the work itself is about. We can see both the work and what it does.

What is involved, however, is not a vulgar one-to-one correspondence between a particular visual effect or a certain emotional twinge and a specific mark on the canvas. Over an extended period of time the viewer gains a keen appreciation of the variety and multilevelled, interrelated complexity that actually exist *within* the lucid, if sparse, image which the painting presents to him at first glance. Even more remarkable are the quite conservative colour co-ordinates and structural devices which Bolduc uses to build up his paintings. Bolduc's by now ingrained method of construction consists of joining or relating two individual, contrasting elements together and then applying them as a single unit to the work in progress. One of the terms of this unit will establish an equally contrasting but different relation to another element in the work; its partner term, however, will bear no relation to the third element at all. Thus by employing the most rudimentary means imaginable Bolduc is able to create fresh and totally unpredictable effects on both an over-all and a local scale. They enable Bolduc to constantly set up new situations for himself while they satisfy, at the same time, his apparent personal need to keep the painting under conscious, rational control as he works along.

The blatant orange and white stripe which caps the central figure in *Nine Below Zero*, for example, seems at first to have come out of nowhere. It is absolutely essential to the picture, however, for it is its garishness and stridency which lend a real authority to the unique and eccentric personality of the figure. It also adds that slightly acidic but ultimately refined pungency which gives the best of Bolduc's works their distinctive and wholly personal sense of colour. Despite its strength the stripe stays in place and serves the picture largely because it is the complement of the streaks of blue found throughout the predominantly purple field.

In the most recent paintings — those exhibited in Montreal, Quebec City and Washington, D.C., during February and March of this year — the decorative impulse so essential to Bolduc's art acquires a greater range of stylistic and formal possibilities than it has ever had throughout the artist's career. On the whole, however, the one feature these pictorial modes have in common is their basically graphic character. Quite a number of individual paintings possess an unassuming and unpolished look which seems to remind one of the ease and spontaneity one usually associates with drawings rather than with paintings.

Particularly striking is Bolduc's introduction and increased use of collage: small panels of canvas board, paper scraps or torn sections of corrugated cardboard are embellished with a few primitive designs and then pasted rather unceremoniously in the centre of a canvas. The adoption of this technique seems to have had a considerable liberating effect on Bolduc's notion of how far one can depart from the established painting norms of the day. For one thing, it seems to have prompted Bolduc, perhaps because of the historical association between collage and synthetic cubism, to make extended and bold uses of graphic patterns (diamond grids, polka-dots, etc.) in the ground area of his paintings. As a result, both the figure and the ground contend aggressively for control of the picture plane. In such pictures the figure/ground convention seem to explode before one's eyes. But out of all this visual chaos Bolduc manages to resurrect pictorial constructions for which the viewer has had no preparation or stock response. It is as if these pictures have violated basic rules of picture-making and so demand of the viewer that he struggle with them on his own in order to reorientate himself to them.

To my mind, the most significant offshoot of this development is that it has led to Bolduc's invention of the elongated "checkerboard" motif. No other figure-type in Bolduc's ample repertory provides so clear and condensed an example of his methods of construction: in fact the checkerboard motif is a veritable paradigm of inversion, polar opposition and the quantification of form. It immediately prepares the viewer's mind to think in dialectical terms. At the same time the inherent iconographic and psychological authority of the motif endows the paintings with boldness and resonance. An exemplary work such as *Common Sense* is a picture of intelligence articulating itself exclusively through a purely sensuous medium. The continued exploration of this motif along the lines on which he has been working for the past year and a half seems to be one of the most promising avenues David Bolduc has ever opened up for himself as a painter and an artist.

LIONEL LEMOINE FITZGERALD: MASTER OF THE BRUSH STROKE

By Anne McDOUGALL

L. L. FitzGerald, the painter from Winnipeg, was asked to join the Group of Seven in 1932 to take the place of the late J. E. H. MacDonald. He was a quiet, contemplative man and painter, perhaps the most "non-group" of them all. What distinguishes his work is a painstaking, original way of handling brush, pen, pencil, crayon, as well as oil-brush and sometimes palette knife, to get an ever-moving texture, whether on canvas, board or manila paper. His "brush-strokes" bring to mind the sparkling effects of Seurat, but also the dancing film-work of the well-known Canadian animator, Norman McLaren. With quite different purposes in mind, the two men are alike in creating tiny lines, dots, crosses to bring movement to the surface of their medium. McLaren's, of course, jump to music. FitzGerald's work is more quiet and still. But the rhythm is there and the eye follows a balanced composition into an intricate texture which causes excitement. How does he do it?

For FitzGerald, the challenge was to capture the light and space of the prairie. Unlike Jean-Paul Lemieux, who evokes a feeling of distance and loneliness through a unique handling of space, FitzGerald concentrates on a close study of everyday scenes, often from an upstairs window looking into a neighbour's backyard. He experimented with many techniques and, as principal of the Winnipeg School of Art, urged his students to use technique as a tool, not an end in itself!

His early painting was decorative and Impressionistic. Working as a commercial designer by day, he studied at night with Hungarian, A. S. Keszthelyi, and exhibited in the Royal Canadian Academy show of 1913. In 1921 Frank Johnston of the Group of Seven encouraged him to send pictures to Toronto, and there Lawren Harris invited him to join.

From 1921-22, FitzGerald studied in New York City at a time when the smooth sculptural modelling of American Scene painting was being developed. Back in Winnipeg his style changed. FitzGerald did not see Seurat's painting *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte* until 1930 at the Chicago Art Institute², but his work had already shown Pointillist influence. The American Precisionist Charles Sheeler also influenced FitzGerald, as seen in the "blown" technique of *The Flats, Snowflake*, 1928 and *Ross Farm*, 1930-1. For FitzGerald the way he used his brush was part of the picture. The three oils, *Williamson's Garage*, *Doc Snider's House* and *Farm Yard* combine a fine Pointillist stroke with some of Sheeler's realism. Ferdinand Eckhardt, former director of the Winnipeg Art Gallery, finds the surface of *Williamson's Garage* breathes, like the earth under the snow³. FitzGerald himself said: "It is necessary to get inside the object and push it out rather than merely build it up from the outer aspect⁴".

In the oil painting, *Farm Yard*, FitzGerald evolved the brush stroke that is his most characteristic feature. Charles Hill describes it: "Applied thinly layer over layer, the dry paint has almost the quality of a *bas-relief*, intensifying the internal structure of each of the forms . . . while most of the canvas is painted in bleached tones of similar values a subtle richness is added by the green on the boards at the left and faint purples in the shadows on the barn"⁵. The rhythm built into the deceptively uncluttered painting, through the building up of each form stroke by stroke, gives a life and vitality not found in less thoughtful, sweeping strokes.

In the later '30's, FitzGerald came under another influence, that of the abstract painter, Bertram Brooker, who once told Lawren

The recent works of David Bolduc were exhibited at the Sir George Williams Art Gallery, Concordia University in Montreal, Sept. 13-Oct. 2, 1979.

By Janet BRAIDE

Harris that if he ever painted he would paint music⁶. FitzGerald's painting, *The Pool*, which hangs with *Farm Yard*, *Prairie Fantasy* and *From an Upstairs Window* in Ottawa's National Gallery, evokes a wide, fresh scene far more open and grand than its actual 35 x 45 cm warrants. The cascading brush work has a sense of music. The pencil lines of the reeds reveal the canvas background in a hairline on either side of the bending forms. A fine brush has been used. The short strokes are flecked on the sides to create tiny delicate lines. The sky falls into the pool in limpid reflection. The shapes of the reeds, combined with the ethereal brush work, are musical and lyrical.

In *The Jar*, FitzGerald applies his meticulous drawing technique to oils, using the tip of his brush to build up glistening highlights that round out the jar from within.

During the '40's FitzGerald's teaching responsibilities left little time for painting. Rather than struggle with the frustration of oils, he spent the years experimenting with water-colour. Dennis Reid sees his work "as an intense personal need to refine his experiments to essence"⁷. The results were not seen for another 20 years. The New FitzGerald Exhibition, Winnipeg, 1963, showed a series of nude drawings and self-portraits, both rare occurrences in Canadian painting. The nudes emerge, tentatively, through a cloud of cross-hatching that allows the figure to show rather than urges it. The water-colour permits a softness, too, to the sensitive self-portraits, sometimes bolstered with pencil. The picture is built dot by dot in very soft colours resulting in a surrealistic, dreamlike look.

FitzGerald painted a favourite subject, the apple, in all media. In 1941 he used oil for the *Still-life* composition of apple and geranium. He achieves an extraordinary mosaic using the tip of his brush and also a palette knife. The rain of tiny rectangular shapes completely covers the board, creating a dense, velvety texture. The white spots, left unpainted, resemble Seurat in a homespun Canadian way, like folk weaving or Scottish homespun versus French tapestry. FitzGerald's apples have been compared with Cézanne's. Eckhardt sees Vermeer, Chardin and Degas in the "intensive" quality⁸.

Coloured chalks were another medium used in this period. They give delicate yet authoritative modelling to *Two Apples on Window Sill*, 1943. In *Four Apples on Tablecloth*, 1947, the cross-hatches give way to flying dashes. This is the style that resembles McLaren's abstract films, *Dots* and *Loops*. Like drifting, blowing sand, come to rest in soft apple shapes, the little dashes seem inevitable, like breath. The movement is like McLaren's drawing-on-film technique — one tiny line chasing the next. In *Winter Apple*, 1951, oil is combined with white space to form a deliberate design. *Two Apples*, 1951, shows a broadened Pointillist treatment in muted colours.

FitzGerald switched his brushes with versatility; e.g. *Geranium by the Window*, 1946, shows depth and solidity in water-colour. *The Little Plant*, 1947, in oil, shows concave strokes which no longer reflect the form of the brush but cover the surface like scales. Another experiment was with black chalk, as in *Chris' Barn*, 1949, with short strokes applied to soft drawing paper to produce decisive accents.

By 1949 FitzGerald retired from teaching and returned to oil to paint *From an Upstairs Window*, 1951, generally regarded as one of his best works. The picture reflects a working-out of ideas tried in pen, chalk and water-colour. The spatial treatment is more complex than in the works of the '30's.

His work of the '50's shows a measured tread into abstraction. Robert Ayre calls it "the natural development of his pondering of form in still life and in his drawings of trees and perhaps partly because of his association with Lawren Harris during visits to the Pacific Coast"⁹. The non-objective world takes over, for instance, in *Study, Apples*, 1955. In a work like *Still Life with Hat*, 1955, FitzGerald fills the pen and ink study with what Eckhardt calls "iron filings or countless stars in the Milky Way"¹⁰. *Flooded Landscape*, 1956, creates a mysterious world with weightless cross-hatching. *Pool and Road*, 1955, is abstracted but recognizable, in fine ink lines. *Abstract*, c. 1955, is abstract, as are *Autumn Sonata*, 1954, and *Abstract in Blue and Gold*, 1955.

The last two show a smooth brush stroke. Gone are the surface rhythms. Harper notes that early non-objective painters, such as FitzGerald, failed to exploit the tactile values of surface textures¹¹. Perhaps the versatile FitzGerald chose to emphasize texture in other media and to use oils differently. The prairie painter, on the whole, was a loner. What he achieved with his thoughtful brush work makes him almost unique in Canadian painting.

At the end of the nineteenth century, mural decoration in private homes in Toronto and Montreal was part of Beaux Arts-influenced interior architectural style. Charles Porteous, a Montreal businessman, planned a fine summer family home at Ste. Petronille de Beau-lieu and the house, situated at the southern end of the Island of Orleans, was designed under the influence of this style.

At the turn of the century, Porteous commissioned William Brymner, the head of the Art School at the Art Association of Montreal, to paint oil on canvas murals for the dining room. The work, successfully executed, now stands as a particularly beautiful example of Canadian Edwardian mural painting.

The Porteous family were among the landowners when the parish of Ste. Petronille, Quebec, was formed in 1871. The family had a substantial history in the annals of the Montreal business community and two Porteous men, Thomas and William, connected with the Bank of Montreal, are recorded as petitioners for the incorporation of the Bank in 1821¹. A third member, John, the great-nephew of William, was the father of Charles, who in the 1890's would become the friend and patron of William Brymner. Charles, born in Montreal in 1848, spent his early years of employment with the Bank of Montreal in Lindsay, Ontario, then in Kingston, and later became a financial advisor².

In the summer of 1893, the Porteous children summered at the Island of Orleans with Emily, Charles' unmarried sister, in her home, Rosemont. This house, now across the road from the Charles Porteous home, was on family land, not confronted by a paved highway or separation from the river as it would be today. In 1894, Alex C. Hutchison, the Montreal architect, wrote to Porteous about plans for a "proposed house". He mailed Porteous a copy of *Building News* for 1892 which Hutchison had found in the library of the Mechanics Institute. In this issue, a bound volume, there were photographs of "dwelling houses", pictures of which had been reproduced in the *News* previous to 1889. Hutchison recommended that Porteous choose a plan from the volume³. Was this a plan for the house at the Island? It is possible, since on February 4, 1895, Porteous received the following message from George Wood of Hutchison's office in Montreal: "... sending by express, plans and specifications for your proposed house. Mr. Hutchison is in Italy... we are calling for tenders"⁴.

One set of plans, whether from Hutchison or not, was completed during the summer of 1895 and Frances, Charles' wife, sent him a telegram saying that the plans for Homewood had arrived and she asked if she should "send them on". Tenders for the house began to arrive. H. Stavely, architect at 92 Peter Street in Quebec City, tendered for painting and glazing at "the Island house". W. Scott & Sons of Montreal wrote to give Porteous a price for canvas "on the wall where the panels occur". In May of 1896, Albert Peters, contractors and builders in Quebec City, wrote: "The men will go down shortly with wainscoting and put in place in Dining Room... It will give the Dining Room a very handsome appearance"⁵.

While tenders were submitted and work set in progress, Porteous considered the decoration to go above the wainscoting in the dining room.

The first commission did not work out. In 1897 Rex Stovel, a Toronto artist, sent the following letters to Porteous from New York: "I take the liberty of asking you to allow me to go to your country house, camp in the stable, on the verandah, anywhere, so that I may be near the house and commence decoration for you. I have for the past few months been studying all the fine decorations to be found in New York, Boston and Washington and am feeling very strongly that I am ready to do something of which I shall be proud. Your dining room (judging from the description which I had from a mutual friend who visited your wife last summer) presents an excellent opportunity. I think an arrangement of apple trees in bloom, with the head and shoulders of one or two figures enjoying the blossoms and a glimpse of the river and hills, will make a charming composition, suggestive of spring and all its promise"⁶.

Stovel had studied with George Reid, the Toronto muralist in Reid's studio at Onteoro on the Catskill Mountains of New York State, during the summer of 1894. Among visiting artists that year was Harriet Ford, a friend of the Porteous, and it is likely that she spoke about Charles Porteous' ideas for murals to the Onteoro painters⁷. Certainly Stovel did not finish the work. Indications are that he did not progress very far with the murals and the whereabouts of anything he may have painted is presently unknown.

1, 3, 4, 8 and 10. Ferdinand Eckhardt, Catalogue, A Memorial Exhibition, Ottawa, National Gallery, 1958.

2. and 5. Charles C. Hill, "Canadian Painting in the Thirties", National Gallery, 1975.

6. and 11. J. Russell Harper, "Painting in Canada: A History", Toronto University Press (2nd ed.), 1977, p. 323.

7. Dennis Reid, "A Concise History of Canadian Painting", Toronto, Oxford University Press, 1973, p. 165.

9. Robert Ayre, "The Arts in Canada", Toronto, MacMillan, 1958, p. 17.

Documentation indicates that Brymner made sketches for the murals in 1899. At the turn of the century Brymner was at the height of his ability and as a result of teaching and the sale of his work, he probably made as much money as any Canadian artist of the period.

Brymner and Porteous were good friends. They belonged to the same associations and clubs. They had artist friends in common, among them Horatio Walker, Homer Watson and William Cruikshank. James Ross and Porteous had purchased works by Brymner, as had many Ross and Porteous business associates.

Brymner, a craftsman, thoroughly trained in French academic tradition, was a man of great integrity and there would have been no doubt that if he accepted a commission he would complete it. In addition, his artistic style lent itself to the kind of decoration Porteous had in mind. Brymner's subject matter was simple and direct, occasionally narrative and sentimental, only rarely allegorical; his composition formal; his palette reflecting something of earlier nineteenth-century classicism. He was drawn to the delicate greyed tonalities of Corot but when confronted with the atmosphere of the Canadian countryside, he painted with colours in a higher key.

In his very young years Brymner's family had holidayed at Baie St. Paul and this is where he chose to work when, in 1885, he returned for the last time from his student days in France. Here, in the lower St. Lawrence, Brymner painted some of his most beautiful works, both *genre* and figures in a landscape. Both subject matters reflected his ability to create subtle tonal relationships and to adjust his limited palette to the grey days he loved and the moments of sunshine which he never ignored? During this period he painted with great skill the relationships of light and dark, sunshine and shadow, in subjects such as the form of a handsome woman or the classical, framing, compositional devices of which he was so fond.

As the years passed, his summer holidays from the School of the Art Association were spent in many places. He travelled frequently to Europe; in 1892 and 1893 he painted in the Rocky Mountains; but as the century came to a close he spent much of his time in Quebec City, at Beaupré and Baie St. Paul. He experimented with water-colour on fine canvas and painted water-colour views of Quebec, harvest scenes and landscapes by the river.

Brymner's work was reviewed sympathetically in the Montreal press when there was a Spring Exhibition at the Art Association of Montreal or when the Royal Canadian Academy had their annual show. As a result of all these circumstances it is not difficult to understand that Porteous offered Brymner the Homewood mural commission.

Brymner's first studies for the murals were pencil sketches from nature. A letter to Morris indicates he finished the paintings in his studio in Montreal. Some pencil sketches which relate to the murals are in the Art Gallery of Hamilton; some have colour notations. It is possible that Brymner, using these sketches and others as studies, composed his subjects directly on his canvases. No intermediary water-colours or oil sketches are currently in evidence. Grids for enlarging from smaller works are not apparent on the canvases, although, of course, they may be there. Brymner used grids to work up large canvases which were painted from subjects sketched and photographed during his trips to the Rocky Mountains in the early 1890's.

The mural qualities which Brymner admired sprang from a single source, his love of the work of Pierre Puvis de Chavannes, and some of this influence is reflected in the paintings at the Island of Orleans. They are formal in composition; Brymner's palette is limited to soft tones of green, blue and brown, highlighted with pink. There is harmonic unity over all the mural scheme. Of necessity the works are broadly painted, but their scale is appropriate to the room.

The paintings are decorative and while in contemporary art analysis this word has become a pejorative, it is not so in this case. They fulfill their purpose, which is to be decorative in the context of the dining room of a family summer home.

Whatever the influence and intentions, Brymner painted with a fresh point of view an ancient subject for artists, the four seasons. He has chosen harvest as his theme, the part of each season which is most relevant to the function of the dining-room to which the fruits of the harvest are brought.

The sequence commences on the west wall across from the original entrance door to the room. Spring, the harvest of the river, is depicted by fishing boats and the seine net. Summer is the early harvest of the fields which is characteristic of eastern Canadian agriculture. While some men bring in grain, others, with their oxen, prepare fields for a second sowing. Gathering apples, representing the harvest of autumn, is painted on the east wall; and on the south wall around a big bow-window are scenes of early winter and harvest in the sugar bush.

The room is about twenty-four feet long by nineteen feet wide, and a little more than nine feet high. The panels on the east and west walls are painted in three sections, the canvases on each side of the door measuring approximately three and a half feet in height by six feet in width; the joining panel over the door jamb is seventeen inches high. The panels on each side of the window on the south or river wall are about six feet high by seven feet wide and the joining panel over the window, seventeen inches high and eleven feet long. Over the chimney piece is the work attributed to Harriet Ford and on the mantle the motto "I Bide My Time". The panels on each side of the chimney piece measure four feet ten inches in height by three feet two inches in width.

Most, but not all, of the canvases are signed on the lower left, WM BRYMNER. Some are dated 1900. It is almost eighty years since they were painted. They are dirty, and the paint is cracking; there is paint loss; in some spots the canvas is bare. The "Ford" canvas, doubtless as a result of its location over the fireplace, is buckling.

There is much to study in this lovely house. In 1902, plans were made with Darling and Pearson, Toronto architects, to enlarge Homewood and a section was attached or rebuilt at the west end. The name of the house was changed to *Les Croisardières* and more commissions were given by Porteous for murals. Maurice Cullen is reputed to have painted scenes which now hang in the hall between the two parts of the house, stories of early Canadian history. There is correspondence in the Porteous papers which indicates Homer Watson painted canvases for what was to become the billiard room, now a sitting room. One large, dark mural by Brymner hanging in this room is dated 1903. It depicts apple trees in blossom and different in colour, composition and brush work from his earlier harvest scenes.

To-day the house is a private residence belonging to *Fraternité Sacerdotale*. Not open to the public, it is a haven for elderly brothers, who can enjoy their retirement years in this beautiful turn-of-the-century summer family home⁸.

1. F. W. Terrill: *A Chronology of Montreal and of Canada from A.D. 1752 to A.D. 1893*, Montreal, 1893, p. 83.

2. Porteous Papers, MG 29; A 32; biography; Public Archives of Canada.

3. Ibid: A. C. Hutchison, Montreal, to Charles Porteous, Montreal (21 March, 1894).

4. Ibid: George Wood, Montreal, to Charles Porteous, Montreal (4 February, 1895).

5. Ibid: Albert Peters, Quebec City to Charles Porteous, Montreal (18 May, 1896).

6. Ibid: Rex Stovel, New York, to Charles Porteous (n/p; n/d).

7. Muriel Miller Miner: G. A. Reid, *Canadian Artist*, Toronto, 1946, p. 66.

8. For a full study of William Brymner as an artist, refer to Janet Braide: *William Brymner 1855-1925, The Artist in Retrospect* exhibition catalogue, Kingston, 1979.

(The Brymner retrospective was held at the Agnes Etherington Art Centre, May 13 to June 30, and then travelled to the Museum of Fine Arts of Montreal, August 30 to September 30, and the Musée du Québec, October 11 to November 11).

Service **Typographique** Limitée
1061, rue St-Alexandre
Montréal H2Z 1P5
Téléphone 866-6545

RODOLPHE HOLMES

ÉVALUATEUR AGRÉÉ

HOLMES, BYERS ET ASSOCIÉS

ÉVALUATEURS CONSEILS

EXPERTISE EN BIENS

IMMOBILIERS

EXCLUSIVEMENT

32, PLACE DES HAUTS-BOIS, NORD
STE-JULIE, P.Q. J0L 2S0
TÉLÉPHONE (514) 649-5967