"Lumber Wharf, Halifax, N.S." by Stanley Royle, R.B.A., A.R.C.A., a new acquisition of the Art Association of Montreal. It may be seen in the Spring Show.

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Evolution In Canadian Art Principal Message Of Exhibition 56th In Art Association’s History

By ROBERT AYRE

I NEVER did like crowds. I might as well admit it at the outset. So to me the 56th annual Spring Exhibition of the Art Association was somewhat exhausting. When 345 pictures are all talking at once, babbling banalities, shouting vulgarities, showing off, holding forth tediously, repeating, like so many Charlie McCarthy’s, what the men who pull the strings have said again and again, you long for a sanctuary. I did, anyway. I wished the Association had made provision in its new wing for a small quiet room with nothing whatever on the wall.

It was a more comfortable party last year. But even 128 guests can be too many. I like a small company, say about 20. Nevertheless, I grant you these big soirees have to be. The fault’s in me for not being gregarious.

Now what I have said must not be taken as a sweeping denunciation of the 56th Spring Exhibition. In the midst of the hubbub I was able to pick out what were to me true voices. The pictures were not all vulgar and boring and silly. There was a guarded tree from the Pacific Coast that nauseated me, there was the madonna and the monkeys, there were sentimentalities and trivialities, but taste and bad painting, much that was well-meaning but ineffectual, but there was also some good painting. On the whole, I should say the show was much better than in former years. For one thing, it was open to some of the unacademic who have not been welcomed or who, at any rate, have not felt themselves welcome, in the past. *

I shall make no attempt to go all round the walls with you, nor even to discuss the paintings that might generally be accepted as important; I shall simply indicate a few personal preferences.

For me, most of the interest centered in the small square gallery. There was Lawrence Harris’s calm Lake Superior, with its pure light. In it you have the Canada that is going out of fashion, but that is still here and still profoundly stirring, the remote Canada without people. A step further and you have Charles Comfort’s "Pioneer Survival," the same impressive forbidding Canada, with the people added. They have come into it, they have managed to dig up the tremendous roots, they have cleared a space and tacked on their shocks. They know the land and the rocks are hard, the roots they have forced out are more in the country’s scale than they can ever be. More amenable to human action is the land in A. Y. Jackson’s paintings, but it remains a tough land, strong in tone, vigorous in rhythm. In Anne Savage’s “Autumn” it has been brought under cultivation, but the fight is still in it. A shift and you go right into the warm colored life of the folk in Andre Bieler’s broad peasant-like French-Canadian “Before the Auction.” The country rocks in his “Wet Earth,” but it is becoming individualized. Refinements are stealing in. And here is the city. Look at Louis Muhlstock’s “View from a Window” and at Philip Perry’s “The Boardwalk.” One brings out, with a sort of gentle nostalgia, all the warmth of crowded human habitations; the other is of the City, too, and at the same time it suggests to me an awareness of something beyond the immediate circumstance; not the underlying grim Canada, but something in the mind. *

The refinements are coming in. We are quite away from the old Canada in the airy green landscapes of Parakewa Clark, in the reticence of David Milne, in the sophistication of H. E. Evelyn’s portraits, in John Lyman’s nude and Eric Goldberg’s southern French village, in Marion Scott’s stylized flowers; in Marie Davis’s delicate little girl, in Prudence Heward’s appealing Negro child “Clytie,” in Avery Shaw’s semi-abstraction of a Halifax landscape.

In this one small room you pretty well run the gamut of Canada in painting. In other galleries you’ll find Lillas Torrance Newton’s handsome and lively portraits (I liked particularly her A. Y. Jackson and Man’s), Robinson’s large and vigorous Quebec pieces; Allan Harrison’s landscapes all of a glow and with features smoothed out; Fritz Brandtner’s characteristic blue horses; Avery Shaw’s collage, “Man with Accordian,” a neat novelty for a Spring Show: the intimate—and shall I say frowzy?—Montreal of Jack Beder; Miller Brittain’s bit of hot polka, “Promenade”—the Proletarian begins to make itself felt in Canadian painting; Sarah Robertson’s fat farm seen between sunflowers; the decorations of Ethel Seath and Rody Kenny Courlne; Stanley Cosgrove’s sensitive portrait and landscape; Cavi Atkins’ clean arrangement of rooftops; Campbell Tinning’s individual water colors. These are some I remember.

There are drawings and etchings not to be overlooked; there is sculpture, and there is the usual architecture section. The show continues through April 2.
“Morning, Lake Superior” by Lawren Harris. Now on view in the 56th Spring Exhibition of the Art Association, it has been acquired for the permanent collection.