The R. C. A.

The 48th exhibition of the Royal Canadian Academy, held last month at the Art Gallery of Toronto, was not the most exciting exhibition in the Academy’s history. Although it was supposed to represent all that is outstanding in art in Canada it seemed to be a much milder affair than the Ontario Society of Artists usually put on. One expects more from a royal society than a display of saleable pictures. One might expect to see signs of intelligent interest in the development of art generally and a desire to relate the adventurous work abroad to our own aesthetic problems.

One finds from many artists the same stuff year after year, repeating not only themselves, but using types of composition that are almost public property, and common to all exhibitions.

Whether the jury frowned on anything unconventional or no, there is little that would attract attention outside of Canada.

Design and color have been the outstanding qualities in landscape painting in Canada. Draughtsmanship is still sadly neglected and most of our work would be improved by more attention given to form and less to color and surface qualities, although there is a healthy disregard in much Canadian painting of the suavities of technique that seem to be the goal of many American painters.

If the critic of the London Times found Canadian landscape painting racy of the soil the comment on our figure painting would be quite to the contrary.

In Swedish, Russian or Spanish painting one feels no division between figure and landscape, the same bold characterization and freedom in design run through the two; they are not two different things. With us, landscape is often a rough out of doors pursuit, but the figure work is suggestive of all the old studio conventions of many years ago.

When one looks around in the Academy for original work it sifts down to a few canvases, mostly by the younger artists. Chas. Comfort’s “Quebec Landscape” is bold in design and vigorously painted.

Sarah Robertson’s “Le Repos” is a simple, direct piece of work, serene and colorful. “Miners’ Shacks, Cobalt,” by Yvonne McKague, with its bold arrangement of light and contrasting planes, is one of the notable canvases. One notices also Holgate’s solidly painted “Quebec Village,” a sparkling winter landscape by Mabel May, the naively beautiful “Fishing Nets,” by Marjorie Gass, “Gatineau Hill,” by Herbert Palmer, colorful but somewhat vague in structure.

The water colorists continue to assert their freedom. There are several examples fresh in color, painted easily with a big brush, Benedicte Monk, Pegi Nichol, A. J. Casson and Chas. Comfort showing interesting work. Notable also are the vigorous pen drawings of Quebec by Arthur Lismer, and a color print of real distinction by Walter Phillips, a bronze head of “Alphonse Jongers,” by Henri Hebert and a “Mourning Woman” in tin by Elizabeth Wood.

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