THE EVENING BREEZE

by F. S. Challener, R.C.A.
The Academy Exhibition

By F. H. BRIGDEN, O.S.A.

The Forty-eighth Annual Exhibition of the Royal Canadian Academy, which was on view in the Art Gallery of Toronto from November 18th till the end of December, while containing much excellent work was far from being the representative show which might reasonably be expected from Canada's premier Art body.

The Jury of Selection, who had set a high standard and who rejected half of the 422 pictures submitted, might have possibly eliminated some which would have added interest to the exhibition, but undoubtedly the chief weakness lay in the fact that a number of our leading painters failed to make their usual contribution. One noticed in particular the absence of works from such men as Horatio Walker, Clarence A. Gagnon, Maurice Cullen, Lauren Harris, J. E. H. MacDonald, Frank Carmichael, F. H. Varley, R. S. Hewton, F. McG. Knowles, Franklin Brownell and Curtis Williamson, while Arthur Lismer was represented by black and white drawings, which were brilliantly executed but did not make up for the absence of more important work by this artist.

Architecture and Sculpture seemed inadequately represented when consideration is given to the number of noted men and women in these branches of the fine arts who have been honoured by election to the Academy. Now that Toronto has its enlarged Gallery, one room could well have been devoted to Architecture. While not disparaging the few pieces of sculpture displayed in the hall, we might look to the Academy to make a more important showing in this department, using the spacious Sculpture Court for a display which would be indicative of the high place Canadian sculptors are taking in the world of art.

Having dealt with the absentees and limitations of the exhibition, it is a pleasure to make some comment on the works which safely passed the jury, and which were so admirably arranged. One thing was at once apparent, that the standard set by the jury did not prevent the acceptance of work by many young, and in some cases unknown, painters; nor did
that our women painters have individuality and vitality, as well as a feeling for beauty of form and colour. Others whose pictures give emphasis to design rather than to a full presentation of nature are Albert H. Robinson, Mabel H. May, Kathleen M. Morris and Franz Johnston, the last named showing one of his landscape decorations, entitled the “Moon Ring”, a harmony in blues, original in conception and with romantic suggestion. Of the newcomers two were noticeable, Charles F. Comfort and G. A. Kulmala. Regarding Comfort’s contribution we take the liberty of quoting the estimate of the discerning critic who writes the Art Column for the Mail & Empire.—

“A remarkably clever painting that will repay considerable attention is ‘Quebec Landscape’, by Charles F. Comfort. It is an original picture, done boldly and evidently with a great deal of thought. The foreground is put on so boldly that it almost suggests sculpture, and the distances are delicately impressionistic. It is quite the most experimental canvas in the exhibition, and amazingly effective. It immediately places Comfort among the painters with individuality who are not to be overlooked.”

Kulmala, who is a graduate of the Ontario College of Art and a pupil of J. W. Beatty, gave in “The Mill” a splendidly conceived and well carried out composition, breathing a real Canadian spirit. The work of these two young men, each distinctly individual, demonstrates that it is not necessary to be imitative in order to achieve something ar-
resting and truly Canadian in feeling and motive. While we hold in high regard the group of talented artists who have brought honour to Canada abroad, it would be regrettable to have a Canadian school develop which encourages our students to work along the lines of any one method or style.

The Group of Seven, apart from their recent recruit, A. J. Casson, was represented in this exhibition by one canvas, “Barns” by A. Y. Jackson. It was, however, one of the strongest pictures on the walls, depicting unkempt farm buildings in the setting of a dreary winter landscape. Even the average visitor paused before it, receiving a shock which, no doubt, added zest to his tour through the Galleries. One wonders whether the pure art interest of line, rhythm and composition predominated with the artist, or whether he was more intent on telling the story of a farmer’s struggle with an unproductive soil.

A. J. Casson, the newly elected member of the Group of Seven, who was also this year honoured by admission to the ranks of the Associates of the R.C.A. was represented in the exhibition by an oil, “Sunrise”, which had dignity of composition and unusual effect of morning light; also by a water colour “Birches”, of great beauty in colour and design. Casson has a personal and intimate viewpoint and his adoption by the group is additional evidence that that body is not so much confined to one mode of expression as the public have been led to believe.

The portraits in this year’s Academy were an important factor in its general interest.

The retiring president, C. Horne Russell, showed a life-like presentation of Hayter Reed, Esq., which, as is the case with all Mr. Russell’s work, made a strong popular appeal. His large canvas “The Duck Pond”, was one of the favourites with gallery visitors. Occupying the central position on the north wall Mr. E. Wylly Grier’s “Portrait of a Lawyer”, commanded attention. The interesting light which diffused the canvas, together with the placing of the figure and the refined character of the painting combined to give an added aesthetic appeal to a picture which is also a successful portrait. Mr. Grier’s other exhibits were admirable examples of his work, mastery in handling and with fresh notes in the colour schemes. Allan Barr’s two portraits have strength and simplicity with a decidedly modern
flavour. This young man has been in Canada long enough to become more definitely associated with the Canadian art movement and should have membership in one of our art bodies. Kenneth Forbes, a more recent addition to the group of portrait painters showed, in "Mrs. Clifford Sifton", one of his well painted and highly finished canvases.

The veteran portrait painter, J. W. L. Forster, must have enjoyed painting the Indian Maiden. As a pleasant change from the more prosaic subjects which offer for the portrait painter, it added a lively note to the East Room. Manly MacDonald, more generally known as a landscape painter, with considerable charm of colour, showed a well painted head of Madame Gaskins. The success of this effort would justify his going further into this field of Art endeavour. Here also were two quite well painted heads by Mrs. Helen Davidson, a new name for Toronto. Other artists who gave figure subjects, which were something more than portraits, were Charles Simpson of Montreal, whose picture entitled "Kathleen", is particularly fine in colour interest, and Marion Long of Toronto, who showed a successful canvas entitled "Girl with Fruit".

Figure subjects, which are rare at our exhibitions, partly because our Artists cannot afford to pay for the models, were more in evidence at this year's Academy than usual, adding strength and balance to the show.

Suzor-Côté had two nude figures which were capable in drawing and execution, as might be expected from this outstanding Canadian artist. He was also represented by four pieces of Sculpture, additions to the series depicting French-Canadian life which have been greatly admired at recent exhibitions. While in his figure painting and sculpture, Suzor-Côté is enriching our native art, some of us look back to the thrill we received from his winter landscapes from Old Quebec and hope he will find time to do some more of these. Mrs. Laura Muntz Lyall had two beautiful canvases of Child Life and Motherhood. A modern "Madonna", is one of the finest pictures we have seen from the brush of this artist who has developed along lines which give her a unique position amongst Canadian artists.

F. S. Challener's large mural decoration reproduced on page 17 occupied a prominent position on the East Wall of the Centre Gallery and was a satisfying demonstration that we do not need to go outside our own country to find painters qualified to do the finest work for the decoration of our public buildings. In this connection we are reminded of a remark by Mr. Tack, the American artist, who was awarded the commission to decorate the Manitoba Parliament buildings. The writer was looking over the finished work with the artist himself who said "You have a man in Canada who could have done this just as well," referring to Fred Challener, whose mural decorations on the walls of the dining room of the Royal Alexander Hotel, Winnipeg, were much admired by Tack.

Among the figure painters should be mentioned Charles de Belle, whose delicate pastels have poetic fancy and elusive charm. McLaren's "Dumbell" is a capable performance with a touch of humour characteristic of this young man who numbers paint-
Canada could afford to use the unusual combination of artistic ability with historical knowledge possessed by this Canadian painter and commission him to decorate some of our public buildings with themes drawn from the dramatic and colourful incidents of our past. George A. Reid has for many years advocated that Canadian painters should have the opportunity of doing work such as this and has done much unselfish work in his efforts to arouse public interest in the subject. At this Academy, he had the preliminary sketch for a mural painting which has been completed on the walls of theEarls Court Public Library, and for which he was last year awarded the Academy prize for the best design for a public hall decoration. Mr. Reid had also three North Country landscapes in the exhibition—a new departure for him, and one in which he has not failed to win distinction. His “Lake in the Hills” was a beautiful symphony in blue and green.

The “Beech Tree” was a typical canvas by Fred. S. Haines, fine in colour and decorative in design. J. W. Beatty who is making an important contribution to the cause of Canadian art in his summer landscape class, connected with the Ontario College of Art, sustained his reputation for vigorous broad painting in three typical canvases, of which the Madawaska Valley made, perhaps, the strongest appeal. H. S. Palmer showed an unusually virile painting of Gatineau Hills, demonstrating that this painter of poetic pastorals is not averse to experimenting in fresh fields of art expression. The veteran, Homer Watson, was well represented. His colour is subdued but the statement of form is as

André Lapine presented another of his horse subjects—“The Gravel Pit”. In this he succeeded in giving the effect of out-door light admirably and we reckon it as one of the best he has so far produced. He had also several out-door studies made in his old home district while on a recent visit to Russia. Another Landscape Artist who has given the added attractions of figures is T. W. Mitchell, one of those elected as an Associate of the Academy this year. He displayed two large canvases pulsating in light and colour, the effect being produced by a modification of the impressionist technique which is original with this artist. Both his subjects were Northern Ontario scenes on the Upper Ottawa. In “Hudson Bay Point” he made effective use of the figure of a lumberman returning from work with his axe and saw.

C. W. Jefferys exhibited two of the originals for the series of historical pictures, which are being published by Nelsons for use in the schools throughout Canada. The importance of the work Mr. Jefferys is doing in this and other historical illustrations cannot be overestimated. Not only do they rank high as works of art, strong in drawing, composition and colour, but they are the result of long years of research and study, winning for the artist recognition as an authority on many points connected with our past history from the leading students and writers on Canadian history. Has not the time come when...
showy yellow flowers gave an excellent opportunity to the artist for building up an interesting composition with the rich background effects which he loves to introduce. It is hoped by many that Mr. Holmes' Wild Flower pictures can in some way be secured as a national possession.

Peter Sheppard and Loveroff showed typical examples of their colourful paintings which have been attractive features in our exhibitions for some years past. They are graduates of our own College of Art, and like Kulmala, are developing Canadian themes, each in his own distinctive way.

Archibald Brown was represented by one of his poetic interpretations, this time a winter landscape entitled "The Frozen Lake", an unusual colour effect in reds and purples.

J. L. Graham, one of the Montreal group, whose work is well known in Toronto, had two landscapes with cattle somewhat reminiscent of the Dutch School which was so popular in Canada some years ago.

Robt. W. Pilot, another Montreal artist, has been exploring the beauties of the New Brunswick Coast and showed several subjects of Rock and Sea with excellent out-door qualities. They reminded us of the contention of the late C. M. Manly that the New Brunswick coast with the Island of Grand Manan offered the finest sketching ground to be found on the Atlantic seaboard.

The French-Canadian Habitant driving his picturesque sleigh on the winter highway and at work in the woods was again seen in the well painted canvases by F. S. Coburn. The work of this artist gives pleasure to gallery visitors wherever it is
shown. Some critics have suggested that there is considerable similarity in his subjects, but if this is a fault it is one which Coburn has in common with numbers of distinguished Artists.

A new name amongst the exhibitors was that of Elizabeth S. Nutt of Halifax, whose pictures showed evidence of experience and sound workmanship. “Evening Twilight” was especially noticeable.

The etchings, drawings, block prints and architectural drawings justified a better display than was possible in the Hall in which they were placed.

Those who have been going to the exhibitions of the Graphic Arts Society of Toronto, recently organized into a national body under the name of the Canadian Society of Graphic Arts, will have some recognition of the great advance which native art is taking in this direction.

In the department of Prints we have two men who have won international recognition. W. J. Phillips, A.R.C.A., is acknowledged by critics on this continent and in Europe to be one of the leaders in the intriguing art of colour block printing. Quite recently complete sets of his prints were purchased by both South Kensington and the British Museum, and the leading dealers in London and New York are handling his work. While receiving his early art training in England, Phillips has lived for the past fifteen years in Winnipeg and developed his wood block printing in that city, far removed from the stimulus of an art atmosphere. He is also an expert in the water colour medium and is a member of the recently formed Canadian Society of Painters in Water Colour. Phillips had two prints in the exhibition, the first of a new series of Rocky Mountain subjects.

Fred S. Haines, the well known Canadian painter and president of the Ontario Society of Artists, has also won fame for his native land through his colour aquatints. By using special methods of his own he has produced quite distinctive effects, and his prints, owing to their interest of subject and beauty of colour, make a wide popular appeal. He, too, has secured a large sale for his work outside of Canada. At the Academy he was represented in the Print Section by “The Dead Tree”, a successful and typical example.

Arthur Lismer’s drawings have already
been referred to. For the artists they were amongst the most stimulating work in the exhibition. The subjects were from Quebec and Georgian Bay, where he has found inspiration for some of his most notable canvases.

Suzor Coté further displayed his versatility by some masterly charcoal drawings, and C. W. Jefferys gave added interest to the black and white section with a number of his pen and ink historical illustrations.

Etchings were contributed by Hebert, Raine, R. W. Pilot, Charles Goldharmer, Phillis Armour, Kathleen Daly and Owen Staples, the latter showing one of his successful University of Toronto series.

The writer does not feel competent to enlarge on the Architectural work in the exhibition, but was struck with the clever handling of some of the drawings, and was particularly interested in the water colour treatment of Mr. Lyle’s Gage Memorial Fountain.

Sculpture was represented in this section by a photograph of Emanuel Hahn’s Edward Hanlan Memorial, which was admired by thousands who saw it last fall at the Canadian National Exhibition, where it occupies a splendid location outside the Ontario Government building, facing the lake. Hahn also exhibited a sketch model for a cenotaph.

Other sculptors whose work was seen at the Academy were Henri Herbert who had a striking bronze of Alphonse Jongers, Suzor Coté whose French-Canadian subjects have already been noticed, Merle Foster, Adele Read, F. A. Scrotino of Montreal and Elizabeth Wynn Wood of Orillia.

The attendance at the Art Gallery in Toronto is showing steady growth and much credit is due to the public spirited citizens who have supported the Gallery in its recent enlargement.

A further encouragement was derived from the campaign for new members this winter which added upward of eight hundred new annual subscribers.

With the hearty co-operation of the art bodies of Canada a substantial forward movement in aesthetic development can be looked for during the coming years in Toronto and other Canadian cities.