THE ROYAL ACADEMY OF ARTS
AT MONTREAL

Stylists and Conventionalists Draw Contradictory Opinions

IN COMMON with every art exhibition of the past few years, the forty-ninth annual Royal Canadian Academy opened in Montreal, November 24, to both hearty praise and strenuous blame. As usual, the critic camp divided between the accepted and the new—the latter at one time synonymous with the Ontario Group of Seven and now embodied in a band of younger Canadians whose bold, free methods and freshness of vision have not compromised with criticism.

Altogether there are three hundred and fifty-three entries in oils, watercolors, pastel, sculpture, etchings, and architecture. Most of them represent work well done, satisfy the eye and give pleasure to the aesthetic senses. Not the least interesting phase is a controversy that rages over the arrangement of the exhibits, the separation of modernists from conventionalists. There were critics who found it sufficiently unique for comment, conventionalist supporters interpreting it as a reprimand of the bolder group. What is so strange about the arrangement? The hanging committee merely followed the ordinary laws of the fitness of things when they grouped the works according to tendency. The separation was without motive. Taken all in all, the exhibition is excellent, replete with interest and pronounced by several knowing ones as the finest since the war.

As to the works of art themselves, we paused before the superb portrait of Archibald Browne, R.C.A., by Wayman Adams of New York; admired the natural pose and exquisite lights on the canvas by E. Wyly Grier, R.C.A. of his brother, A. Monro Grier, Esq., K.C.; the simple line and color treatment of Prudence Heward’s Anna and Edwin Holgate’s Portrait. Lilias Torrance Newton, A.R.C.A., one of the modern spirits of the Province of Quebec, exhibited a strong portrait of Mrs. Savage. Regina Seiden was represented in the group by The Argentine Girl, a canvas commenced during her last sojourn in Paris, a lovely thing expressive of thoughtful repose.

Maurice Cullen, R.C.A., Newfoundlander by birth, Montrealer by adoption, suggests the first hint of winter’s dissolution in March Evening in the Laurentians, which reveals what the artists term as ‘painting quality.’ His paint is not simply swiped on with a brush, but is built up until it attains a loose, open, vibrant texture.

F. S. Coburn, A.R.C.A., Clarence Gagnon, R.C.A., and D. H. Robinson, R.C.A., select joyous, homely bits of winter in rural districts where snows lie deep. In direct contrast is a bit of the dismal, by A. Y. Jackson, R.C.A. Quite aside from art criticism, there is no reason in the world why Mr. Jackson should not select seven tumble-down desolate hovels for his inspirations, islanded in a sea of mire, sheltered by a treeless hill, but were I a son of the ancient province I would hope that the world would not consider it typical of a Quebec Village. In comparative obscurity in another gallery is a small canvas by the same artist, Winter, Quebec, a little gem and so simply arrived at.

Two canvases of the north country, the work of G. A. Kulmala, are most impressive. This artist is classified among the modernists, yet he is not entirely of them, else he is ahead or marching one pace to the right. For while Kulmala toys deftly with broad lines and simplicity, beneath it all is the
great reverence for technical authority.

To me, one of the surprises and delights of the Academy is Ontario Hill Town by Lawren Harris. Towns are a new source of inspiration for Mr. Harris, at least, if we may judge from those of his canvases sent to recent Canadian exhibitions. There are many to whom the picture will not appeal, but everyone must admit that it is clever, that the early morning winter sun is uncannily realistic, that the sweeping lines are positively brilliant.

There are two fine works from the brush of Mary Evelyn Wrinch, the wife of G. A. Reid. In the portrait of Sir William Mulock, Chancellor of the University of Toronto, by Curtis Williamson, R.C.A., one feels that here is a conscientious and painstaking study of character. Unfortunately, Mr. Williamson seldom exhibits and consequently his work is not so well known.

Arthur Lismor, of Group of Seven fame, sends Pines, Georgian Bay and Happy Isles, which was exhibited at Wembley.

Arthur Browning, Esq., lends to the exhibition a beautiful bronze, the work of Katherine E. Wallis, Paris, France. Miss Wallis is Canadian born, coming from Peterborough, Ontario, and educated in Toronto. At first she sought expression in oils but evidently was never quite satisfied. Some years ago when talking to a celebrated European artist, it was suggested that she try sculpture. She did, and at once felt her power. Her loveliest works depict various phases of child life and there are a number in the possession of Canadian connoisseurs. During the past summer she traveled with her artist sister through Algiers seeking types among the native children.

M. A. Suzor-Côte, Henri Hebert and Laliberté are strongly represented in the sculpture group. Suzor-Cote has, among others, a characteristic bronze of a Bonhomme in the act of lighting his long stemmed pipe. One of Henri Hebert’s contributions is a stern, serious Chilliwack Indian.

An exhibition of Canadian Art would not be complete without the work of Homer Watson, whom Newton Mc-

Tavish styles the first serious Canadian painter. He has been called the Canadian Constable, but his work is too broad in its massing and too simple in its dignity. His canvases are remarkably vigorous and keen and always he is a poet as well as a dramatist. It was no less an artist than Oscar Wilde who first urged Homer Watson to exhibit in London, England.

E. Hodgson Smart sends portraits of Sir Arthur Currie and Sir Robert Borden from London, England. In the portrait of the former General Officer Commanding of the Canadian troops, there is room for criticism.

Many other artists are represented by distinctive and attractive works. The mere mention of their names is significant: Paul Alfred, Harold Beament, Charles Comfort, Harry and Henrietta Britton, Archibald Browne, Carson and Challener, the Des Clayes sisters, Ernest Fosbery; Frank Hennessey, Charles W. Jefferys, Andre Lapine, G. A. Reid, Emanuel Hahn, and his wife Elizabeth Wood, Florence Wyle, Ramsay Traquair, S. H. Maw, Quido Casini, Carlo Balboni, and F. A. Verner.