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The Chronicles of The National Gallery of Canada  
at  
The Venice Biennale

Carol Harrison Reesor

A Thesis

in

The Department of Art History

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
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## ABSTRACT

### THE CHRONICLES OF THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF CANADA AT THE VENICE BIENNALE

This thesis presents a chronological examination of the presence of the National Gallery of Canada at the Venice Biennale. The period of time begins with 1952 and Canada's first official entry as a participating nation in this prestigious exhibition. Nineteen eighty-six marked the last Biennale at which the National Gallery would act as the arbiter of Canadian art in Venice.

The focus of this work is the process for selecting the art presented at the Venice Biennale, by the various Commissioners. The writers of the texts for the *Biennale di Venezia Catalogo* in its various incarnations, and of the subsequent National Gallery publications, are acknowledged and their writings analyzed for insight into the decisions taken.

The first chapter, *The Foundation: 1952, 1954, 1956*, introduces the initial steps taken by the small group of Canadian bureaucrats to present their selections of Canadian art in a global context.

*Presenting in the Pavilion: 1958--1966*, the second chapter, introduces the new Canadian pavilion. Subsequent response to this controversial building and the impact its structure had in determining the actual selection of art is treated throughout the rest of the thesis.

*The Boggs Era* examines the years from 1968 to 1976, when Dr. Jean Sutherland Boggs was Director of the National Gallery. Implementations of a more professional style marked these middle years of exhibiting Canadian art at the Biennale.

*The Devolution* looks at the period from 1978 until 1986 and the final exhibition under the supervision of the Gallery's Diana Nemiroff.

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THE CHRONICLES OF THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF CANADA  
AT THE VENICE BIENNALE

**Introduction**

The source of material for this thesis was the National Gallery of Canada Fonds. Files from the Secretary of State, External Affairs, and the Department of Communications, as well as press coverage, magazine articles, periodicals, personal correspondence, and directors' and commissioners' reports have now all been gathered together into a single repository covering the participation of the National Gallery of Canada in the Venice Biennale.

To supplement the written archival data, a series of personal interviews was arranged. Commissioners Brydon Smith and Diana Nemiroff, who remain at the Gallery, and Jessica Bradley were available for face-to-face interviews and follow-up conversations. Pierre Théberge and Bruce Ferguson, in Montreal and Santa Fe, respectively, responded to the same list of questions by telephone.

Because my concern rests with the process and the structure of the Canadian presence at this international showcase of art, rather than with an analysis of individual work, I did not interview the artists involved. Furthermore, for reasons cited in the Privacy Act, full financial disclosure is not available.



## Chapter I

### The Foundation: 1952, 1954, 1956

In August 1950, Donald Buchanan went on a mission to Venice. He carried a letter of introduction to Italian art authorities from H. O. McCurry, then Director of the National Gallery of Canada: "This will serve to introduce you to Mr. Donald Buchanan of the National Gallery staff who expects to arrive in Venice towards the end of August. Mr. Buchanan is on holiday and while he is in Italy I have asked him to consult you regarding the possibility of having a contribution from Canada in your next exhibition, which I understand takes place in 1952."<sup>1</sup> Buchanan was clearly sounding out the possibilities of sending Canadian artists to showcase their art at the international biannual art exhibition known as the Venice Biennale. In a short note to McCurry, written on 20 August 1950, Buchanan described the trip as most satisfactory, and in referring to a meeting with the Biennale authorities, he noted, "They want and hope for Canadian participation in 1952."<sup>2</sup>

Although this would be Canada's first exhibition as a nation at the Biennale, Canadian art had been shown previously. In 1903, and again in 1905, James Wilson Morrice had presented his paintings under the International category in Venice. There was, however, no mention of his being a Canadian in the exhibition catalogues.<sup>3</sup>

As Buchanan had promised at the end of his 1950 note to McCurry, on his return to Ottawa he filed a "Report on Exhibition for Europe in 1952 (Venice and possibly Paris)." Acknowledging the success of his meeting which brought about the invitation to the National Gallery, with the Director General of the Biennale, and the welcome that Canada might receive as a participant, this 1950 "Report" would become the basis for the participation of the National Gallery of Canada in the prestigious Venice Biennale. Since 1895, countries had been invited to send several of their important contemporary artists to present their art over the summer period, normally from June to October. "The guiding principle in the Biennale is to have national representation focussed as far as possible each time on three or four leading contemporary painters," reported Buchanan.<sup>4</sup>

In Paris, that summer of 1950, after visiting Venice, Buchanan had a meeting with Mme. Humbert, Assistant to the Director, M. Cassot, of the Musée de l'Art Moderne. It was hoped that the Musée would present the

Canadian exhibition after its showing at the Venice Biennale. During their meeting, Mme. Humbert made reference to Father Alain-Marie Couturier, a Dominican priest--artist.<sup>5</sup> That same summer Buchanan met the priest. Father Couturier would prove to have a direct impact on the 1952 and 1954 selection of artists that Canada would send to Venice. Couturier, then based in Paris, was consulted by Buchanan because of the importance given him by Mme. Humbert. There is no evidence to suggest Buchanan had met the priest before, although Couturier had earlier been a promoter of Borduas and his followers in Montreal. Buchanan was told that "Father Couturier would make a suitable intermediary for us in negotiating such management." In fact, Buchanan wrote to McCurry, Father Couturier's "name worked like a charm in opening doors for Canada in French art circles." Couturier told Buchanan that as long as Roberts and Borduas [with whom he had studied at Chaillons] and Pellan were three of those chosen for a four-man show, in both Paris and Venice, he would back it to the full and give his personal assistance.<sup>6</sup> The National Gallery would pay serious attention to Couturier's advice in planning its first Biennale participation.

There were several factors that entered into the final choice of artists selected for Canada's official introduction to the Venice Biennale. An ad hoc group of people met on one recorded occasion only, 16 March 1952, to select the artists to represent Canada under the auspices of the National Gallery of Canada. The group consisted of Director Harry McCurry; Douglas Duncan of the Picture Loan Society in Toronto; Donald W. Buchanan, author and art historian; and Robert H. Hubbard, Associate Director of the National Gallery, all of whom were key players in the Canadian art establishment. They selected twenty-two works by four contemporary painters: Emily Carr, David Milne, Goodridge Roberts and Alfred Pellan, the latter two reflecting perhaps the opinion of Couturier. That a female artist was included in this selection must be noted. Minutes from the March meeting of the "selection committee" indicate that the final choice and number of paintings would be made in consideration of space provided by the Biennale authorities. The room allotted to Canada was Gallery XXXVII in the Central Pavilion at the Giardini, where nations without their own pavilions presented their exhibitions. For the next two Biennales, this space would be reserved for Canada.

Important additional input for the choice of artists had also apparently come from Lawren Harris. In reference to the selection problem, McCurry lamented to Harris, in a letter of 24 April 1952, "The space was even more limited than we had thought and ... it would be possible to take only two large Emily Carrs. One of those, as you suggested, had to be 'Blunden Harbour' ... So you see, both trees and totem poles were covered."<sup>7</sup> National identity would become an important criterion in the selection process. Given this evidence, it is possible to speculate that McCurry may have discussed the Biennale project, in terms of both the artists and the works, with other "senior" Canadian artists.

McCurry became Commissioner of the exhibition, a position held by a senior administrator of the National Gallery for several years to come. Essentially, the Commissioner was fulfilling a role similar to that of the curator of any art exhibition---to select, to gather, to present and to explain. A general catalogue was available for visitors at the Biennale. Each participating country submitted information on its presenting artists. In the Canadian contribution, the 1952 text was provided by the National Gallery's Curator of Canadian Art and Associate Director, Robert Hubbard, who wrote the justification or explanation for the selection of artists and works. The translation of Canada's text into Italian would be done in Venice.

This four-page text, including biographical information and descriptions of the twenty-two paintings, would be the first of seventeen enunciating what can be interpreted only as the "official position" of the National Gallery of Canada. By 1962 such prefaces had evolved and expanded into a separate catalogue, usually produced in Canada and made available to visitors at the Canadian exhibition. The ideas and issues that have become the basis for many of the issues in Canadian art would be imbricated within the catalogue text. Eurocentrism, national identity, the polarity of English and French, gender and geography---all may be identified within Hubbard's first text, and these issues would recur throughout the history of Canadian participation in the Venice Biennale. As well as acknowledging the benefits that artistic interchange could reap for nations' understanding of one another, Hubbard's first telling phrase, "A young nation is sensitive to what is said of her abroad," presages the role that the press, both national and international, would have on the Biennale over the next forty years.<sup>8</sup>

In exploring the selection, Hubbard stated that Emily Carr, who had died in 1945, was the referent to the national landscape movement, "for she began her most characteristic work only after contact with the Group of Seven in 1927." David Milne, classed as a senior painter, was "the lone representative of the gentler mode at a time when the austere held the imaginations of our painters." Goodridge Roberts and Alfred Pellan were considered vital forces in Canadian painting: "Roberts is perhaps the most important representative of the contemporary search for monumentality and formal harmony. His works possess a calm and an equilibrium never before achieved here."

In Hubbard's reference to Pellan, the discussion of the polarity of French and English is introduced: "Pellan is at the opposite pole. He has brought the éclat, the joy, the violence and clash of the École de Paris into Canada and made them factors in present developments through the sheer force of a vigorous personality." Short biographies of the four artists, the titles of the twenty-two paintings and the following quotation concluded the "catalogue" of the National Gallery of Canada's initial foray into the Venice Biennale exhibition: "This group of paintings has been chosen to give an idea of the variety to be found in our painting today and is, we hope, to be only the first of a series of such representations."

Reaction to this first presentation was written by Donald Buchanan, Co-Editor of *Canadian Art*, whose article "The Biennale of Venice Welcomes Canada" was the first to treat the Gallery's Venice presentation. He discussed the place Canada had now taken with most of the other nations of the free world. He stated that emphasis on the figurative arts remained the prime focus, and noted the Biennale proposed to expand and include sculpture, etchings and engravings. As well, parallel festivals, another off-shoot of the exhibition in Venice, would include cinematography, theatre and contemporary music. Buchanan also made brief reference to the awards won by the National Film Board of Canada.<sup>9</sup>

A British viewpoint on our participation in the exhibition was provided by Eric Newton's "Canada's Place in the 1952 Biennale as Viewed by an English Critic." Newton had been the guest speaker of the educational programme under the auspices of the National Gallery in 1953. As well, he had a contract to write for the magazine *Canadian Art* and toured the country from September until December 1952 collecting his information. Newton

refers to the strange and independent genius of Carr, notes that Pellan has "inherited the language elaborated by modern abstract artists all over Europe and America" and, while he acknowledges Miro's contribution, feels "Pellan's pattern is heavier and more closely knit and his colour is more insistent and personal." Roberts "is a superlative painter, an exponent of what the French, with their feeling for professionalism, call *la belle peinture*." <sup>10</sup>

Describing Carr, "whose art could only have come from Canada," Newton suggested she "might well have filled the whole Canadian room with a one-man show" with her absorption of the vast primeval foliage of the wild West Coast.<sup>11</sup> The same sentiments were expressed in a document from McCurry to A. Y. Jackson on 17 November 1952. McCurry candidly writes, "I agree that Emily Carr would have made a stronger impression if the whole exhibition had been given over to her, but I imagine there would have been a howl in Canada."<sup>12</sup>

In a revealing letter from a National Gallery Trustee, Mrs. H. A. Dyde of Edmonton, to McCurry argues, "My criticisms of our last show in Venice were supported by people I talked to in Italy, Paris and England. All excellent painters but did not mix too well hung together. I think a one-man show of Emily Carr or Milne or Pellan should have been terrific but hanging together they were all wrong. Europeans do not like to see pictures this way. I gather Roberts cut no ice at all."<sup>13</sup> Dyde's argument could be interpreted as an example of a type of Eurocentrism, the preoccupation shared by many Canadians that major consideration be given to Europe's reaction to whatever our colonial nation may present.

The National Gallery of Canada showed its selected art at the Central Pavilion for the next two Biennales. Its restricted space would impel, in part, the action to acquire our own pavilion. Buchanan's summary in his article in *Canadian Art* refers to the lack of space, and points the way to 1954, in expressing hope that someday Canada would have her own pavilion. At the same time, he was adamant about the need to construct a permanent National Gallery in Ottawa.

"Artium Portus," or "haven of the arts," was the theme given to the XXVII Biennale in 1954. The theme concept was erratic throughout the history of the exhibition and seemed to have little effect on the actual selection of work for the Canadian entry. Thirty-two countries presented their

art in 1954. Canada's selection comprised works by Paul-Emile Borduas, Jean-Paul Riopelle and Bertram Charles Binning. Now Chief Curator of the National Gallery, R. H. Hubbard succeeded McCurry as Commissioner, on the Trustees' recommendation, and again wrote the text for the catalogue. Perhaps with the covert goal of acquiring a national pavilion, Hubbard deplored that "in the space allotted to Canada, only thirteen paintings could be hung." The three painters, he wrote, were chosen to conform with the established policy of the Biennale of illustrating the most significant trends in contemporary art.<sup>14</sup>

Again, the choice of artists was not left solely to the Gallery executive. Correspondence on 7 February 1954, between McCurry and Mrs. H. A. Dyde, the dissenting Board of Trustees member, suggests the content of some of the discussions around the 1954 selection of artists. McCurry defensively wrote that he was "sorry to find that you are still intransigent about Canada's appearance in the Biennale. It seems a pity to have Canada out of step with the rest of the civilized world. Notwithstanding the chatter you quote, I feel that our first appearance at the Biennale was quite good and as satisfactory as could be achieved in the space and time at our disposal."<sup>15</sup> Dyde's reply contained opinions about her lack of enthusiasm for building in Venice: "I am planning to go over this summer to see the exhibition in action. Having seen the place as a deserted Luna Park I know that I am prejudiced. Six months of activity every two years seems a poor investment to me. Venice I adore with a passion but it is definitely phoney." She concurred that with Riopelle and Borduas, "You could find no better to exhibit."<sup>16</sup>

The choice of B. C. Binning for the 1954 exhibition came about despite the artist's own hesitation. A series of fifteen letters, beginning on 25 January 1954 and ending on 5 April, document the successful effort of Robert Hubbard to persuade Binning to allow his work to be shown. Without initially disclosing the purpose of his enquiry, Hubbard asked Binning, "What important paintings do you have on hand at present?" An Associate Professor at the School of Architecture of the University of British Columbia, Binning was reluctant. He revealed that "I have made a pact with myself that I would not exhibit anything for the next year or so, until I had finally come to some new conclusions regarding my painting." Hubbard, still unable to disclose details of the Venice show, requested photographs of the new paintings from Binning. The artist, clearly unsettled, replied to Hubbard: "I do

not know what you feel about this new direction of mine. All I can say at the moment is that I have some hope in it, but it must be regarded as a transitional period very definitely."<sup>17</sup> On 18 February 1954, Hubbard told Binning about the possibility of his work being shown in Venice. The artist was quite pleased, but reiterated his hope that his early paintings could be brought together for the exhibition. This would not, however, be the case.

Hubbard, in the 1954 catalogue essay, describes the three Canadians, Borduas, Riopelle and Binning: "Their work fuses abstraction and surrealism and in this way is related to the declared general theme." Hubbard refers to them as leaders among young painters and states that they represent a movement which began in Canada about 1940 by turning attention away from provincialism to internationalism; from the geography of Canada to the great universal movements of the day. Here, according to Hubbard, is an indication not only that the Canadian art world recognizes the presence of international avant-gardism but that Canada is in the mainstream in so far as these particular artists are concerned.

As stated previously, Hubbard raised the element of polarizing the French and the English in terms of their artistic expression:

In Canada today there are two approaches to abstract and surrealist art: the free or 'automatic,' and the intellectual. In the group of paintings presented here these trends may be identified with the two main ethnic groups in Canada, the French and the English. Thus Borduas and Riopelle of Montreal represent the French Canadian feeling for a visual, a sensual mode of expression, and Binning of Vancouver one that is technical and intellectual.<sup>18</sup>

Thus the two solitudes are perpetuated by Hubbard, who described the English-speaking Binning as precise in his drawing, detached, amusing, "avoiding the depth, despairs and confusion of contemporary life." Could the determination on the part of Hubbard to present Binning, despite the artist's own reluctance, be seen as a perpetuation of this polarity in Canadian art? Or was it geography and collegiality, old friends extending support?

Hubbard expounded next on the difference between Borduas and Riopelle, leading figures in the "Montreal School," describing how Borduas

inspired les Automatistes, including Riopelle. Hubbard recalled that during the forties they had written surrealist plays, shocked staid Montreal by making wild appearances at polite vernissages and, most important of all, published the first art manifesto in Canada. Hubbard's text mentioned Canada's connection to Europe with his description of painters beginning anew, throwing off the shackles of imposed conventions and painting by purely intuitive means.

This is a more scholarly treatise by Hubbard than his general text of 1952. It is also more personal, as he describes Borduas as quiet by nature and "profound, with a poetic insight into the character of his country and its solitudes." He also comments in detail on the transition in Borduas' work from the forties, when it was sombre in tone, rich in colour and intense in feeling, to 1954, in New York, when it became brighter and effervescent, with an underlying intensity of feeling. Again a comparison was made between Borduas and Riopelle, also "intense" and "sombre," but recently in Paris Riopelle "has developed a brilliant technique. His patterns, still intricate, seem capable of infinite variety. Together Borduas and Riopelle provide material for a study not only of the effect of new environments but also of the surprising and enduring strength of their 'Canadianism.'"<sup>19</sup> Hubbard's last remark opens up yet another facet of the discourse. Our national identity is revealed through the descriptors of both the artists and their work. *Vigour, strength, variety, intensity*---these evocations are abundantly used, likening us to grounded organisms, the geography of the land. The word *vigour* is used twice in the first Gallery preface.

Commissioner Hubbard's activities in 1954 were not limited to organizing the exhibition in Italy. As well, in his role of Commissioner of Canadian art at the Biennale, he was eligible for the position of jurist on the international panel of Biennale authorities, which awarded prizes for the best artworks of the 4,000 on view that year. Hubbard also wrote, in an article for *Canadian Art*, "Show Window of the Arts -- XXVII Venice Biennale," of his hopes that Canada would soon have her own pavilion. He similarly indicated that we profited from the British example of several years previously, when Britain adopted the principle of the simple, effective presentation of one or two artists at each Biennale. In his review Hubbard included favourable comments on Canada's presentation, written by London critic Denys Sutton in the *Daily Telegraph*. Sutton spoke in the same breath of Riopelle and the



leading figures of contemporary art, adding that Riopelle was one of the most gifted painters of the day. Hubbard also referred to another British critic, Robert Melville, who wrote in an article in *The Listener* of Riopelle's paintings as being among "the largest and most sumptuous canvases at the Biennale" and spoke of his (Riopelle) having "inherited from the old masters of the modern movement an unquenchable thirst for spontaneity that is giving paint its ultimate lustre." A third British journalist, David Sylvester, "showed a lively interest in the originality of Borduas."<sup>20</sup>

If the development of a policy by the National Gallery can be gleaned from writings by its Curator of Canadian Art, the following statement is significant as it articulates both position and commitment to a long-term plan:

There are lessons to be learned from Venice. One is the tremendous importance attached by most other countries to the arts.... That is the continuing need to present Canadian art abroad as well as we possibly can, something the National Gallery has insisted on for years ... but we must also make an impact by the quality of our work, by its contemporaneity and by the effectiveness of its presentation. At Venice, to be more specific, we ought to have a pavilion of our own. For it is here that our national vigour will make itself felt, to the benefit of our prestige abroad and the stimulation of our creativeness at home.<sup>21</sup>

It must be noted that Hubbard was using *Canadian Art*, a magazine partially funded by the National Gallery, of which his colleague Buchanan was Co-Editor, to further a Gallery-related policy, in this case its own pavilion which the National Gallery would have at the Biennale. Thus his comments on the Biennale in the periodical represent the "official" line of the Gallery. In light of this, it is not surprising that his article on the exhibition in Venice took the positive point of view.

An unsigned article in *Saturday Night*, 5 March 1955, entitled "The National Gallery's Selection -- Controversial Art Chosen to Represent Canada in Europe and U.S.," commented that the National Gallery of Canada had sent work that showed surrealist and fantastic elements:

The most subjective of the three painters chosen by the National Gallery of Canada is Jean-Paul Riopelle. "Tocsin," painted in 1953, is characteristic of his vividly colored, agitated designs. Thirty-two year old Riopelle has won international recognition during the past few years for his frenzied abstract canvases. He now holds a Canadian Government Fellowship, and is painting in Paris where he is ranked high among young painters. His pictures are in major galleries.<sup>22</sup>

Contrasting Riopelle and Borduas to Binning, the anonymous author of the *Saturday Night* article referred to Binning as British Columbia's best-known modernist, whose works are as quiet in pattern as Riopelle's are hectic. This slight reference to Binning is in complete opposition to the vigorous pursuit by the Gallery towards Binning's participation in 1954.

There was a revealing sentence at the end of *Saturday Night's* review. "After being shown at Venice in the international art exhibition, the National Gallery selection was shown in Washington through January." It indicated that the plan, discussed by Buchanan in his 20 August 1950 note to McCurry, to show at the Musée de l'Art Moderne in Paris had failed to materialize. Could the fact that Father Couturier had moved to Canada and perhaps lost some of his influence in opening doors for Canadian artists have been the reason that the Canadian component of the Venetian exhibition did not move to Paris as hoped?<sup>23</sup>

The final word on the 1954 show is by the *Montreal Star's* Robert Ayre (also Co-Editor of *Canadian Art*), "Canada's Representation at Venice Biennale." He quotes from New York critic Robert M. Coates, who compared Riopelle and Borduas to the early Orphists in their massing of dappled color and swirling, striated movement. Coates found Riopelle more ambitious, though not always more successful, while Borduas was "less vehemently emotional, solidier, more varied in color application, and with a stronger compositional feeling."<sup>24</sup>

In 1956, Canadian sculpture was introduced in the form of six works by Louis Archambault. These, with seven ink sketches by Jack Shadbolt and eleven lithographs from Toronto's Harold Town, constituted the selection under the stewardship of Commissioner Donald Buchanan and the new

Gallery Director, Alan Jarvis. R. H. Hubbard appears as signatory of the catalogue text. A four-page, loose-leaf, trilingual pamphlet, handed out to visitors at the Giardini site, would be the forerunner of the Canadian Biennale catalogue. Photographs of the three artists and their works, with brief descriptions of the works, were included for the first time.

The selection of artists might be seen as having developed along geographical lines. The foreword refers to western artist Jack Shadbolt, French-Québécois Archambault, and Town, the Torontonion. Starting with reasons why the 1956 Canadian section does not illustrate a single school or tendency in Canadian art, Hubbard emphasized that the "individual contributions of three distinctive personalities" not only described the variety of our art of the day:

They illustrate a phenomenon peculiar to Canada: the isolation of the artists which results when a small population is strung out across a country four thousand miles wide. The artists shown this year live widely apart: Archambault in the east and Shadbolt in the west. It is quite possible for such artists never to meet one another or see each other's work. Yet in spite of the disadvantages of distance and isolation Canadian art partakes of a new spirit which animates Canada today. The discovery of vast mineral resources is paralleled by the opening up of rich new veins of artistic expression.<sup>25</sup>

Hubbard traces the training and artistic development of Shadbolt and of Archambault, noting the latter's studies in Paris and the choice of *Oiseau de Fer* for an outdoor sculpture exhibition in London's Battersea Park in 1951. Subtle, lyrical mysticism, noted Hubbard in his text, pervaded the figures by Archambault. This private mysticism, he continued, was the one quality which the three artists had in common. Animism, or "natural religion," for Shadbolt, was not unlike that inherent in ancient Scythian and Chinese bronzes, the stylized designs of which hid forms of fierce nature. Here Shadbolt is linked to a former Biennale exhibitor, a tendency that would be continued by the subsequent prefaces: "In his early years in Victoria, Shadbolt was influenced by Emily Carr's powerful expression of the fertility of nature

on the west coast and by the brooding animal forms of the Indian totems." This directly unites these two western artists. Emily Carr's *Blunden Harbour*, c. 1929, was reproduced in the general Biennale catalogue. It was, by this time, an icon in the Canadian art canon.

Of the ten artists selected for the first three Biennales, all but Harold Town had studied in New York, London or Paris. The two previous Venice Biennale catalogue texts had implied that Canadian artists go abroad to study, to show, to live and then return to Canada with new ways of presenting the human condition to us. They, and in turn their works of art, would reflect this exposure to new and foreign experiences. Now a new, third option that departs from the ongoing binarism of French and English is introduced.

"Harold Town belongs to quite another category." Hubbard treats Town's work in Toronto, and refers to the city as the headquarters of a national movement in landscape painting from 1913 to 1933, led by the Group of Seven, until the Painters Eleven exhibited in 1954. The new group to which Town belonged is noted as having made the first significant break with this tradition and Hubbard includes this distinctive tribute to Town:

This is evident in his freedom from bondage to nature, to say nothing of nationalism, though curiously enough one feels that Nature is never very far away. This quality allies him to Shadbolt. But in contrast to the Englishness of Shadbolt and Frenchness of Archambault, the quality of Town's work at first glance suggests the Americans. Yet he is different. He has, if not more sensibility, perhaps a little more restraint, subtlety and tenderness. He is unique in Canada in being a printmaker of distinction, for the graphic arts like sculpture have suffered from neglect.<sup>26</sup>

To read the text on Town is to note the third option, away from the English--French polarity so emphasized in the initial two statements by the National Gallery of Canada for the Venice Biennale catalogues. His language is English, and his style is not of England, but rather an innovative North American one. To convey Town's art, the words *sensibility*, *restraint*, *subtlety*, and *tenderness* were used, which distanced it from the choice of earlier descriptions like *vigour*, *strength*, *frenzy* and *wildness*. This notion of a

"third option" is a rather nebulous, undefined premise. It seems to be considered to be a style that is unique. It is not British, or French, or American; could Town's art actually be labelled "Canadian"? There appears, in the Gallery's Biennale texts, to be a hesitancy to be seen as being patently nationalistic, or to use taxonomy to further chauvinistic ends. However, Harold Town's art is seen to be so distinct that putting any form of label on it is problematic.

Could this be taken as the genesis of independence from the two founding cultures of French and English? Could the art selected for Venice be seen as a catalyst for that step away from the beginnings and towards a fresh start? Not American, not French or English, but Canadian. If so, the late fifties could be seen as the time when Canadian artists felt confident and comfortable enough to make their own markings, not completely derivative of the art of other nations. Is the choice of Town indicative of this third possibility, and is it the reason that he was selected a second time as the showcase artist of 1964?

The original typed text for the 1956 catalogue is signed by Hubbard. But in the catalogue version the name "Alan Jarvis: Director: Commissioner" is printed. Hubbard was Assistant Commissioner but Chief Curator of the National Gallery of Canada. Jarvis had recently arrived from Toronto and was well-known in art circles and it is possible that it was Jarvis who wrote about Town, while Hubbard wrote about Shadbolt and Archambault. There will be other examples of this possible sharing of the essay--preface responsibilities.

Journalistic recognition for the third Canadian presentation in Venice appears to have been sparse. Robert Hubbard was again presented by *Canadian Art* magazine in his review titled "Days at the Fair -- A Review of the Venice Biennale."<sup>27</sup> The word *rhapsodic* captures his feeling for the world's greatest art fair, set in the magical city by the Adriatic lagoon. He expresses complaint, not only about the somewhat philistine attitudes towards art in Canada, but also about the lack of any guiding theme in the exhibition, calling it a "vast amorphous thing." Displays by thirty-four nations, with retrospectives of Delacroix, Gris, Mondrian and de Chirico, are all described, until finally Hubbard makes a reference to "our modest collection," the plight of Louis Archambault's broken plasters, and the inclusion of the remarks of the English critic Denys Sutton in an article for the *London Financial Times*:

The ink and casein paintings of Jack Shadbolt with their powerful forms and dramatic lights were singled out for mention. And the single autographic prints of Harold To were remarked upon by many as among the most original contributions in the field of printmaking.<sup>28</sup>

It must be noted that Hubbard extols an event at which he assisted in his position as Chief Curator of Canadian Art at the National Gallery of Canada. Clearly, objectivity was still not a criterion for the Gallery, on behalf of which Hubbard promoted the ideal of a national art. "One *must* believe in the lasting importance of the arts in national life---something the North American environment occasionally tempts one to doubt." The last sentence of Hubbard's article deals with the National Gallery of Canada's plans for future Venetian projects: "Both Alan Jarvis and I were convinced that the inspiration that lies behind Canadian painting today justifies our preparations for a new Canadian pavilion to be ready for 1958. We inspected the site for this building at the end of one of the main alleys of the park, with its superb view of the lagoon." The decision to build the first, and for many decades the only, permanent structure to display examples of our national art work (albeit on another continent) reflects the importance with which the National Gallery of Canada had come to regard the Venice Biennale.

## Endnotes

### Chapter I

#### The Foundation: 1952, 1954, 1956

1. McCurry to Italian art authorities, August 1950, McCurry--Buchanan letters, National Gallery of Canada Fonds. Unless otherwise indicated, all archival materials relating to the Venice Biennale are to be found in the National Gallery of Canada Fonds.
2. Buchanan to McCurry, 20 August 1950.
3. Rosalie Smith McCrea, "J. W. Morrice and the Canadian Press 1888--1916; His Role in Canadian Art" (Master's thesis, Carleton University, 1980), 12.
4. Donald Buchanan, "Report on Exhibition for Europe in 1952 (Venice and possibly Paris)," September 1952, 1.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. McCurry to Lawren Harris, 24 April 1952.
8. R. H. Hubbard, preface to National Gallery of Canada text for *XXVI Biennale Di Venezia Catalogo*, 1952. Canada submitted a text on the Canadian artists for inclusion in this general catalogue. The title of these catalogues would vary throughout the next forty years.
9. Donald Buchanan, "The Biennale of Venice Welcomes Canada," *Canadian Art* 9, no. 4 (Summer 1952): 147.
10. Eric Newton, "Canada's Place in the 1952 Biennale as Viewed by an English Critic," *Canadian Art* 10, no. 1 (Autumn 1952): 21.
11. Ibid.
12. McCurry to A. Y. Jackson, 17 November 1952.
13. Mrs. H. A. Dyde to McCurry, 1952.
14. R. H. Hubbard, National Gallery of Canada text for the *XXVII Biennale Di Venezia Catalogo*, 1954.
15. McCurry to Mrs. H. A. Dyde, 7 February 1954.

16. Mrs. H. A. Dyde to McCurry, 1954.
17. Series of fifteen letters between R. H. Hubbard and B. C. Binning, from 25 January 1954 to 5 April 1954.
18. R. H. Hubbard, Foreward [sic], *Catalogo*, 1954.
19. Ibid.
20. R. H. Hubbard, "Show Window of the Arts -- XXVII Venice Biennale," *Canadian Art* 12, no. 1 (Autumn 1954): 15-19, 35.
21. Ibid.
22. "The National Gallery's Selection -- 'Controversial Art Chosen to Represent Canada in Europe and U.S.," *Saturday Night*, 5 March 1955.
23. Father Couturier organized the "Independents" exhibition in 1941 in Montreal. Dennis Reid refers to him as the "refugee priest" in *A Concise History of Canadian Painting*, 2nd ed. (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 1988), 221.
24. Robert Ayre, "Canada's Representation at Venice Biennale," *Montreal Star*, 10 July 1954.
25. R. H. Hubbard, National Gallery of Canada text for *XXVIII Biennale Di Venezia Catalogo*, 1956.
26. Ibid.
27. R. H. Hubbard, "Days at the Fair -- A Review of the Venice Biennale," *Canadian Art* 14, no. 1 (Autumn 1956): 21-27.
28. Ibid.



## Chapter II

### Presenting in the Pavilion: 1958--1966

The goal of having our own pavilion was realized in 1958, with the construction on a site at the southwest corner of the Giardini Pubblico. All the national pavilions are located in these public gardens, at the east end of the Grand Canal on the San Marco side. The small pavilion was built close to those of the United States, Britain and France and overlooks the lagoon. Donald Buchanan conceived the idea that Canadian money "blocked" in Italy during World War II should be used to construct a pavilion at Venice, and the Canadian government agreed.<sup>1</sup> The sum of \$25,000 came from a reserve of funds held for cultural projects as part of the peace settlement after the Second World War.

Enrico Peressutti of the Milanese firm Belgiosa, Peressutti and Rogers designed the small brick and glass enclosure, of two hundred twenty-one square feet, on the principle of the Archimedes spiral. The Canadian Ambassador to Italy, Pierre Dupuy, came from Rome to officiate at the opening on 14 June. Earlier, a Canadian architect, Geoffrey Massey, son of the former Governor-General Vincent Massey, had written a letter to Gallery Director Alan Jarvis enquiring about the possibility of opening up the process for selecting the architect to design the pavilion. On 14 May 1958, a month before the official opening of the new Canadian pavilion, Jarvis replied: "In fact this has been arranged through External Affairs using blocked funds and we have therefore chosen an Italian architect to do this job. It is Peressutti of Milan, whom I imagine you know. We are sorry that we could not use a Canadian architect for the job."<sup>2</sup> This small building "became the only building anywhere to which the National Gallery of Canada has undisputed title."

To celebrate the inauguration of the pavilion in June, a retrospective of the works of James Wilson Morrice was presented alongside paintings by Jacques de Tonnancour, lithographs by Jack Nichols and sculptures by Anne Kahane. Kahane was the second female artist, and second sculptor, to represent Canada in Venice. All were Montrealers, but their origins were not mentioned in the preface. Although considered a Torontonians, Nichols had moved there from Montreal in 1939.

The selection process for 1958 had begun a year earlier. On 31 October 1957, artist Anne Kahane received a letter from the Commissioner, Donald Buchanan. "Dr. Hubbard and I now plan to present to the Brussels jury for final selection of the works indicated on the attached list. We, however, also will want to send the same choice of works later in the season to our Canadian pavilion at the Biennale in Venice, Italy."<sup>3</sup> On 20 February 1958 Buchanan wrote, "I am now making the final selection of these works." On 6 March 1958, he referred to "the selection committee" without further elaboration, and later the same month (25 March) he stated, "We have now made the final selection for the Morrice exhibition in Venice and discovered we can't show quite as many paintings in the area as we expected." (For reasons of privacy, the National Gallery has now blocked out the name of the correspondent.) Clearly the selection committee, including Hubbard and Buchanan, was effectively in charge.<sup>4</sup>

Hubbard's description of Morrice began the foreword:

He is probably the best painter Canada has yet produced, and his position is enhanced by the fact of his being the first to introduce Canada to modern movements in art. Before him, we were an artistic backwater into which European movements arrived a quarter of a century late; after him, we began to swim in the full stream of western art.<sup>5</sup>

Referring back to the initial premise that early twentieth-century Canadian art derived from the Continent, the next passage is quoted for its significance to that continuity of thought: "In his own time, Morrice could not have been what he was by remaining in Canada.... It was these later paintings which inspired Canadians in the earlier part of the century such as A. Y. Jackson and which caused the Montreal School after 1939 to regard Morrice as the prophet of 'pure' painting in Canada."<sup>6</sup>

Thus Morrice was seen as a bridge between the developing Canadian art scene and the established European community. The admission that he could not have become this "best painter" without the imparting of the European benediction said much about our acknowledgement of a collective lack of self-confidence, and much also about the National Gallery's recognition of the Canadian tendency to look back to the colonial powers for

developing a Canadian identity through art. Commenting about Morrice's work, John Russell, English critic for the *London Sunday Times*, had this to say in "Who's In, Who's Out in Venice":

The Venice Biennale has two functions. One is to provoke that start of recognition which says to us: "This is the new thing that counts." The other is to remind us that painting and sculpture are tragic activities.... And in the Canadian pavilion, one of the prettiest and least pretentious of its kind, there are delightful paintings by Sir [sic] James Morrice who had (and well-deserved) the signal honour of a broadcast obituary by Matisse.<sup>7</sup>

The Canadian preoccupation with European attitudes, trends in international art and the necessity of studying and presenting abroad in order to gain respect in Canada are reiterated in the forewords of the Biennale catalogues. Eurocentrism and international avant-gardism could be read as indices by the Gallery affirming certain trends such as our developing cultural policy.

Jacques de Tonnancour was linked to two of the Biennale participants, Goodridge Roberts and Alfred Pellon, as he was strongly influenced by both painters. Special praise of de Tonnancour's work was given by Sylvia Sprigge in the *Manchester Guardian*: "He gives us landscapes that bring Canada vividly to the imagination. There is love here and great skill."<sup>8</sup>

Of his eleven paintings displayed in 1958, *White Scarf* by de Tonnancour was sold. As well, two of Nichols' *Pierrot* series sold. The idea of sales at the Biennale was often downplayed, but indeed the exhibition was a commercial venture. Fifteen percent of the purchase price was taken by the Biennale authorities. It was against the rules to present a painting without all its preconditions listed. Tight control was exercised by the Biennale bureaucrats, and woe to any who went against them. The National Gallery was not involved in this aspect of the Biennale.

The final paragraph by Hubbard in his 1958 catalogue text refers to the influence Picasso had on the work of Jack Nichols. A five-piece carving, "refreshingly original in conception, and vigorous in execution," was shown

by sculptor Anne Kahane. So ended the brief 1958 National Gallery of Canada preface.<sup>9</sup>

A fair amount of positive press was generated as a result of the opening of the Canadian pavilion at the 1958 Venice Biennale. The *Hamilton Spectator's* critic, Ian Vorres, on 12 July 1958 wrote of the Canadian artistic maturation:

Canada chose an ageless city of history, art and canals to announce officially to the world that its art had come of age. Airy and pleasantly functional the light structure of the Canadian pavilion has now taken its place among the scores of structures of other nations, nestled in a green park by a lagoon where the Biennale is held. The sleek Canadian building's not only an architectural success, but an achievement of ingenious financial thriftiness as well.... A small jewel of a showcase.... No reasonable person could take exception to such a choice [as Morrice] undoubtedly taken under the guidance of Mr. Buchanan, an authority and the artist's biographer. For Morrice, apart from the inherent beauty of his gentle, sophisticated work, gave impetus to Canadian art at home and was the first Canadian artist to be widely recognized abroad.<sup>10</sup>

The *Ottawa Citizen*, on 12 July 1958, commented favourably on the four artists. In contrast, a negative note, and one which would be often reiterated, was first sounded by Walter Homberger for the *Toronto Daily Star* on 30 August:

My reaction to our choice of paintings was one of gloom and depression. Practically all of them were executed in dull colours---green, gray, blue, off-white. There wasn't a bright spot anywhere. Anyone who has never visited Canada must gain the impression that we are a dreary and uninspiring country. Why couldn't we have hung some bright pictures by our famous Emily Carr or by Riopelle, our internationally acclaimed abstract painter? There isn't one

abstract painting in our pavilion whereas with most other countries this art predominates.<sup>11</sup>

This paragraph reveals a fear of Homberger's, and one that has been noted by others in our collective sensibility for many years. That we might appear boring to others, particularly to Europeans, is clearly revealed by Homberger, who comments that "one cannot help but feel that these are countries (Italy, Israel, Greece and France) where there is happiness, gayety and progress. Our pictures, unfortunately, do not give this impression." It reveals, as well, his lack of knowledge of Canada's previous presentations, which had indeed included Carr and Riopelle.

To end the 1958 journalistic coverage more positively, the *Montreal Gazette* titled its article "Canadian Show in Venice Hailed as Major Success." John Steegman, Director of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, remarked that he considered the pavilion as the only advanced building in the entire Biennale complex. Steegman, having talked to President Gronchi of Italy, in turn quoted him as being "strongly attracted" by de Tonnancour's landscapes.<sup>12</sup>

On 26 September 1959, an unsigned "Memorandum to the Trustees of the National Gallery of Canada" proposed the contents of the Canadian representation for the 1960 Biennale and explained the urgency of having a quorum at the Trustees' meeting. Three principles were set out, the first seen in any documents which could be considered official Gallery policy as it affected the Biennale. The Memorandum stated that for the greatest art exhibition in the world, the main purpose was to exhibit contemporary art, and noted that an unnamed journalist had suggested that Jacques de Tonnancour was too old (b. 1917). A defense was made in the Memorandum for special retrospectives of modern classics, such as that which occurred with the showing of works by James Wilson Morrice. The second principle was that each country's representation should be limited to a few artists, with a number of works by each, giving the jury a chance to form a better opinion than would be possible with only one or two works by each artist. Finally, the important consideration in organizing the selection would be to include works of sufficient calibre as to qualify for prizes, adding that Canada had yet to win one.<sup>13</sup>

Several other elements were in play before our fifth Venice exhibition. In a letter dated 13 April 1960 to the Chairman of the National Gallery Board, Trustee Thomas Maher, Buchanan---by then Associate Director---wrote that:

the recommendations submitted by Dr. Hubbard and myself as to work to be shown in the Canadian pavilion in Venice this year, were approved generally by the Trustees except that Mr. Panabaker questioned the inclusion of [Tony] Urquhart and you suggested that we might still consider the possibility of including some Edmund Alleyn in view of the international recognition given him in Sao Paolo last October. Dr. Hubbard and I ... independently came to the conclusion that Alleyn would make a stronger representation this year than Urquhart.<sup>14</sup>

This statement clearly indicated that the actual selection of artists was in the hands of Buchanan and Hubbard. It also emphasized the importance attached to artists winning recognition in other exhibitions as a factor in selecting them for the Biennale.

Further correspondence revealed continued concern by another Trustee, Mrs. H. A. Dyde, who had commented rigorously on past Biennales. She expressed her hope that, having seen *Eskimo Mother and Child* by Frances Loring, the artist would be included in the Venice event, which in fact she was. This suggests that the role of the Board of Trustees was not merely to rubber-stamp those selections put forth by the Gallery's curatorial staff.<sup>15</sup>

"My dear Fulford," begins a letter (10 May 1960) from Buchanan to Robert Fulford, art critic of the *Toronto Star*, explaining that Hubbard was already in Europe. Buchanan was replying to the critic's request for information about the selection of artists. Of note in this examination of the selection process is his response:

The choice of artists is dictated partly by the consideration that Venice authorities prefer the different national pavilions to show the works of only three or four artists at a time and also to place emphasis, when possible, on new work. In addition, we follow the policy that for the first ten

years or so we shall not repeat showings by artists who already have been in our presentations at the Biennale.<sup>16</sup>

Another mention worth noting from the 1960 archival material is the request in March 1960 for an application from a Marcel Cardinal to the Canada Council "to enter in an opening" in the Canadian section of the Biennale. Information had been given to Cardinal from the Canadian Consulate in New York about a national entry form for artists.<sup>17</sup> A letter to J. Russell Harper, Curator of Canadian Art at the National Gallery, came from the Vancouver Art Gallery in November the same year also requesting "entries" for admission to a regional jury for entrance to the Biennale.<sup>18</sup> No further references to applications were seen, nor have any Commissioners indicated any awareness of a competition.

By 1960, Charles Comfort was installed as the new Director of the National Gallery of Canada, and Donald Buchanan, Associate Director, was made the Commissioner of the Biennale for the second time. Another facet related to the position of Commissioner for Buchanan was noted in a letter to the General Secretary of the Venice Biennale, Gian Alberto Dell'Acqua. On 22 March 1960, Buchanan was asked for, and submitted, names of three experts who might be called upon to sit on the restricted international jury for the Biennale: Eric Newton, English art critic; Dr. Kurt Martin, Director of the Bavarian State Museum in Munich; and French sculptor Ossip Zadkine.<sup>19</sup> It is interesting to note that he felt no Canadian was worthy of the honour.

The artists chosen for the 1960 Venice Biennale were Edmund Allenby and Jean-Paul Lemieux (both from Quebec City, and each sending eight pieces), Albert Dumouchel from Montreal (seven prints and drawings) and Torontonians Frances Loring and Graham Coughtry (one stone sculpture and five oils, respectively). This was the largest number of artists yet to represent Canada at the Biennale. Eleven of the nineteen artists thus far were from Quebec, so the issue of geographical equality was clearly not a priority.

Hubbard's catalogue text began, once again, by explaining that contemporary painting in Canada proceeded from two main sources. One was cosmopolitan, the other national, in character. This was a variation of the English/French binarism noted in the first Biennale preface. The former was represented by "pure" painting of James Wilson Morrice. The second source was the "national" style, as seen in the landscapes of the Group of

Seven. Hubbard stated that Loring remained faithful to the ideals of northern regionalism as exemplified by the Group of Seven.<sup>20</sup> (Loring's *Eskimo Mother and Child* was shown in the courtyard of the Canadian pavilion at the Venice Biennale.) But, he theorized, perhaps reflecting the policy of the National Gallery of Canada, the majority of creative painters in 1960 followed the Morrice tradition in rejecting a regional bias and moving in the full stream of modern art. With the subtitle "Foreign Influence," his second paragraph in the catalogue text predictably treated French abstraction and Surrealism, British Romanticism, and American Abstract Expressionism as strong influences upon recent painting in Canada. Hubbard compared "the famous Riopelle" in the vanguard of new developments on a world-wide scale to another artist who arose from the same general milieu. This was Albert Dumouchel, whose pursuit of a different course had led him into independent experiments in printmaking, transformations of still life, landscapes in ink drawings and mixed media. Hubbard concluded the 1960 foreword with comments on Edmund Alleyn's reflection of the impact of the sharp changes of the Canadian seasons on a sensitive painter, and noted that Coughtry's work probed the veiled atmosphere of a darkened interior.<sup>21</sup>

The *Toronto Telegram* art critic took a different tack from other critics of the day, who typically copied verbatim the Hubbard script. Paul Duval, in "Who Put Canada in a Closet?" (9 July 1960), called the Venice Biennale "the biggest show on earth," noting:

The problem of choosing a different group of artists every two years was not an easy one. Artists do not mature as rapidly as crops. Which means that we sometimes send the works to Venice before they have come to maturity. This is a problem shared by all participating nations.... The strongest impact this year was made by the two youngest contributors. Coughtry and Alleyn, both 29 years of age, had studied in Paris before launching their careers in Canada. Apart from this they differ in every respect as artists. Coughtry is essentially a luminist in style and a painter concerned with psychological statements about humanity. He is obviously emotionally involved with whatever human theme he happens to be portraying.



Despite his deep interest in light and color, Coughtry never uses these as an end in themselves. They are the means for expressing a statement about mankind.<sup>22</sup>

Duval referred to *Seated Figure No. II* and *Emerging Figure* as illustrations of this humanity. Allyn's major concerns were in design and although Duval saw his abstractions as among the most subtle being done in Canada, he also felt that his chosen style imposed limitations upon his development. Tribute came from an unusual source for Allyn. A Japanese official, S. Tominaga, asked that his "hommage" be sent to the artist, so impressed was he with his work.<sup>23</sup>

An examination of the 1960 records revealed the presence of two reports. The first, three pages in length, signed by Buchanan, is dated June 1960: the "Report on Canadian Pavilion, Venice Biennale." Buchanan had arrived on 7 June, and after he received and unpacked the artworks he listed all the routine operations of the Biennale. His recommendations were of most importance, for they would help determine the course of Canadian participation in future Biennales. No reception was held, since without free literature, he considered it pointless. For 1962, he projected, it would be better to have only three artists shown with twelve works each, depending on size. The ideal method would be to divide the pavilion into two solo shows and print small illustrated booklets, one for each artist, for free distribution to the press.<sup>24</sup>

The second Report, on National Gallery of Canada letterhead, was filed by Buchanan on 17 October 1960, the day after the Biennale closed. A brief mention of artists and duties preceded his observations. He then noted that, based on the number of requests regarding the availability of the works for purchase, the greatest popular interest was shown in the works of Lemieux. One Lemieux landscape was sold almost immediately to an Italian collector.<sup>25</sup>

Jean-Paul Riopelle gained the signal honour, in the Canadian section of the 1962 Biennale, of being the first contemporary artist to be given a solo exhibition. He was also the first Canadian to win a prize at Venice, the UNESCO Award for Painting. This award was worth \$1,000, plus the royalties from the sale of posters and a full-colour reproduction of a painting. However, the French artist Alfred Manessier was awarded the more prestigious President's Prize.<sup>26</sup>

The 1962 Canadian exhibition was curated by J. Russell Harper, Curator of Canadian Art for the National Gallery, who presented a brief biography of the painter, as well as a discussion of the colours and forms in Riopelle's evocative works. Harper's biographical material in the catalogue recounted Riopelle's return to Paris in 1947, where he had been encouraged by the Surrealists Miro, Mathieu and Breton. A figurative landscape painter until 1944, he then adopted non-figurative tachisme. The work by Riopelle shown at the Biennale included thirty paintings and sixteen bronze sculptures.

Unique to the XXXIst Biennale was the essay by an Italian, Professor Franco Russoli, Director of the Pinoteca di Brera in Milan. Russoli, the only foreigner ever to write for the Canadian catalogue, penned a pleonastic, impassioned piece on Riopelle. (In 1970 he would write the book *Riopelle, ou l'obsession de la peinture*.) A letter on 13 February 1962 from Harper to [probably] Riopelle's dealer in Paris contains a partial explanation of why Russoli wrote the essay on the artist: "I have written to Dr. Russoli in Milan asking him for a couple of paragraphs." The Canadian section of the Biennale catalogue includes the following statement by Russoli:

Colours and forms of an always-evocative landscape which reflects his temperament, dominate Riopelle's pictorial imagination and are the basic elements in his work. He finds them together in his feelings and memory; he senses them as figurative symbols of his various moods. The man is so overpowered and permeated by colour and form that he uses them with passionate ferocity in his paintings, like a flow of words which alternately reveals all that is both violent and gentle in his being.<sup>27</sup>

The catalogue in 1962 was the first professional document that the National Gallery of Canada had produced for the Biennale. Of small scale, it showed a full-colour reproduction of Riopelle's *La Roue # 2* on the cover. Black and white photographs of other exhibition works were included within.

Statistics, of a general nature, and not for each participating country, were made available for the four-month event in 1962; 154,000 people visited the Biennale, a higher number than in 1960. Commercial success was indicated by the sale of 117 paintings, 110 sculptures, 196 graphic works and

211 decorative artworks. Five hundred and eight art critics and journalists attended. Due to the "incessant request of visitors," the Biennale stayed open for an extra week, as a late cable revealed to Charles Comfort, on 3 October 1962. Commissioner J. Russell Harper received a letter from Comfort congratulating him on the grand success of the Canadian selection.<sup>28</sup>

Paul Duval, from the *Toronto Telegram*, reported on 20 July 1962 that "Canada Is Rated High at 'Biggest Art Show'." He commented on the other artists presented---Giacometti, Redon, Gorky, Jack Yeats---but felt that with Riopelle we had a strong contender and a logical choice for our pavilion.<sup>29</sup>

The Director of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Evan H. Turner, wrote for *Canadian Art* that "Canada did well by Europe this summer. The Canadian achievement---in collecting and in creating works of art---has unquestionably received wider recognition abroad."<sup>30</sup> However, Riopelle, despite the positive reception he received, was critical of the pavilion. He derided it as the most anti-art pavilion at the Venice Biennale.

In 1964, for the first time, Canada sent just two artists: Harold Town (for the second time) and Elza Mayhew, from Victoria. Mayhew was by then the fourth Canadian female artist to be selected for Venice, a rather remarkable record for that period. The Town selection comprised fourteen paintings, ten drawings and fourteen lithographs, and Mayhew contributed thirteen sculptures. Citing geography as a factor, Charles Comfort wrote of the great variety of art throughout Canada. Quality would be the tie that bound Canadian art together.

Still trying different ways to accommodate the diverse Canadian art community, changes were made at this, the seventh, exhibition at the Venetian world art fair in which Canada participated. Although the perception was that Harper had done a superb job in 1962, and although he indicated in his report that he would be pleased to handle the next event, W. S. A. Dale, in the new position of Deputy Director of the National Gallery, was named Commissioner. R. H. Hubbard was now, at this XXXII Biennale, Assistant Commissioner and the writer of the text for the preface. Along with Buchanan, he was the most experienced of the Canadian Biennale staff. They had been involved since the beginning of Canadian participation in 1952.

Harking back to the three guiding principles from the unsigned "Memorandum" of 1959, the two artists for the 1964 Biennale could be seen to fit the formula. They were both middle-aged: Mayhew had been born in 1916,

and Town in 1924. In addition, with only two artists the pavilion was able to feature a satisfyingly large number of works. That Town had shown previously was a clear contradiction of the policy, outlined by Buchanan in his letter to Robert Fulford, to send different Canadian artists to each Biennale.

Another innovation for the 1964 Biennale was the division of the catalogue essays between two authors---the independent art writer Elizabeth Kilbourn wrote on Harold Town, and Colin Graham, Director of the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, wrote on Elza Mayhew. Mayhew had offered to write her own script, but the Gallery had declined the offer. Elizabeth Kilbourn's text reflects the emergence, again, of a third option in Canadian art, apart from the traditional English--French binarism. Neither English nor French, neither British, American, nor Québécois, this diverse, non-taxonomic option could be some form of Canadianism. Kilbourn does not define it, so it remains as nebulous as before. This could be seen as an idea the Gallery wanted to disseminate.

Clearly, the origins of the "third option" premise had been within the National Gallery when Town had first exhibited in Venice in 1956. However, Kilbourn was not associated on a permanent basis with the Gallery, although she was a prominent member of the Canadian art establishment. She wrote: "This decision to paint his way to success from the bastion of Toronto implies an act of faith on Town's part both in his own ability and in the growing maturity of a country still struggling with artistic colonialism."<sup>31</sup>

Colin Graham introduced the artist Elza Mayhew with her own words: "Perhaps mine is an environmental sculpture rather than geometric. It is not pure plastic art. I have never made anything not closely connected with the human being and his environment." Graham saw Mayhew's passionate interest in older civilizations revealed in the ceremonial figures, totemic poles and other hieratic forms through which she asserted the human form.<sup>32</sup>

The press questioned Mayhew's art with the query "Spiritual Bigness, Archaic Forms -- Will They Conquer Venice?" in the *Ottawa Citizen* on 20 June 1964. The comment was made that at the last Venice Biennale, Canada had nearly "made it" when Riopelle had won the coveted UNESCO prize.<sup>33</sup> The implication was that Mayhew might win another award for Canada.

The last example to be considered here of journalistic consideration given in 1964 is from the British critic Charles S. Spencer in an article for *Canadian Art*. He critiqued Mayhew's sculpture as "not of Biennale standard," but stated that Town "made an excellent impression." Perhaps the important phrase here by Spencer is the one which relates to the third option posited by Hubbard in 1956, and then by Kilbourn in 1964: "The scale of Town's imagination and exploitation, the assured professionalism of his handling of the varied media and the overall impact of dynamic vitality, has more in common with the U.S. artists at Venice than the majority of Europeans." This comparison of the work of a Canadian artist with the American artists and the work's simultaneous distancing of itself from European modes can be seen as a variation on the validation of Hubbard's initial premise of a third option.<sup>34</sup>

An interview with an art dealer is included for the first time, to complement a perspective of the Venice Biennale. Rea Montbizon interviewed Montreal art dealer Mira Goddard for the *Gazette* in Montreal, in the article "A View from Venice":

For one, I [Montbizon] want to get insights into the current streams of painting but I also wanted to find out what determines the prizes; what triggers a Biennale choice. I have wondered for a long time how valid these choices really are.... I also learned that whoever expects to find at the Biennale a unified point of view will be disappointed. A point of view is conspicuously absent. There is no overall co-ordination. National exhibits are selected on national levels with the ultimate selection [of the work] often left to the chosen artists themselves. The Montreal dealer is satisfied (and maybe a little disappointed) "that it is never an unknown artist unexpectedly." On the other hand, Biennale prizes are never given without merit. A Biennale prize is always arrived at by political methods. There seems to be support for recognized appeal, opposition is followed by discussion and finally there appear to be votes and compromise arrangements. The prizes go to artists for their past achievements more than for their actual exhibits.

Mira Goddard found the small Canadian pavilion compared quite favourably with the two dozen or so other national pavilions. She was impressed by the air of professionalism reflected in the uniformly high standards of the works by Town and Mayhew. Memorable for her were the many comments from those who remembered Riopelle and, in particular, Borduas.<sup>35</sup>

Goddard also referred to an art scandal that occurred in 1964. Two works of Harold Town had been removed from the walls of the pavilion, at some time during the exhibition. This would be the first patent example of censorship exercised by the Biennale authorities in the Canada--Venice experience. W. S. A. Dale, Canadian Commissioner, in a letter dated 5 August 1964 to Professor Gian Alberto Dell'Acqua, Secretary General of the Biennale, diplomatically requested an explanatory report, albeit somewhat after the fact. One month later, on 3 September, Dell'Acqua replied that:

the drawing by Harold Town "Enigma No. 5," in which some anatomical details are represented with marked plainness, has been withdrawn from the exhibition by the Chairman of the Biennale who saw fit to take such a step, having been aware of the possibility of the drawing being confiscated by the judiciary authorities. I may tell you, confidentially, that we are not dealing with a vague hypothesis without foundation, but, on the contrary, with well-motivated foresight, based on the opinion of a high magistrate who had personally visited the whole exhibition during the week following the opening.<sup>36</sup>

The Venetian logic that caused the removal of a second work, *Enigma No. 2*, was justified, the Biennale authorities wrote, not because the work was offensive, but because a particularly obvious space had been created by just taking down one drawing (*Enigma No. 5*), requiring the removal of the second work to balance the space.

Two years later, in 1966, three artists represented Canada in Venice: Alex Colville (twenty-one paintings), Yves Gaucher (twelve paintings) and Sorel Etrog (twenty-one sculptures). The Commissioner, Robert H. Hubbard, was still Chief Curator for the National Gallery and his Assistant

Commissioner was Willem A. Blom, Research Curator at the Gallery, who was also responsible for the catalogue text. Alex Colville, from Nova Scotia, was the first artist from the Maritimes selected for the Biennale. Sorel Etrog, from Toronto, and Yves Gaucher, of Montreal, would complete this geographical distribution from central and eastern Canada. In retrospect, this exhibition was fraught with problems. Rather than presenting the tepid Blom text, critiques by three Canadian journalists and a report by Deputy Director Dale are used here because they cast significant light on this Canadian showing.

Lisa Balfour's article in the *Montreal Star* on 6 August 1966, "Our Hemisphere's Poor Showing," made mention of the thirty-seven countries and the 300 artists in the exhibition. Her account is included here, almost in its entirety, because it covers many salient points:

The story of the Canadian pavillion [sic] is disappointing too. For although some sophisticated paintings by Alex Colville and Yves Gaucher are shown along with sculpture by Sorel Etrog, the overall impact of the show is ruined by its completely unprofessional presentation. In the first place the Canadian pavilion must be the *bête noir* of anyone faced with the problem of mounting an art exhibition within it. Built in the 1950's by an Italian architect, it imitates the lines of an Indian wigwam. Jean-Paul Riopelle, whose work was shown there in 1962 has christened it the most anti-art pavilion at the Biennale. The lighting is inadequate and the available wall-space so low and stingy that large paintings haven't a hope of being properly displayed. Moreover, a tree trunk pushes its way through one section of the pavilion, thereby obliging visitors to move around it or crane their necks to see any painting hidden behind it. This year the situation is further complicated because several of Etrog's thrusting, vertical sculptures cast shadows on Gaucher's delicately balanced hard-edge canvases. In fact it is very difficult to get a clear, unobstructed view of any of Gaucher's acrylic paintings without going around or through a veritable forest of Etrog

bronzes. To give credit where it is due, though, the National Gallery of Canada which sponsored the show has collected some well-chosen examples of Etrog's convoluted bronzes, of Colville's magic-realist tempera works, and of Gaucher's geometrically pulsating prints and paintings. Altogether the exhibition could have given the public an idea of the quality, variety and individualism of the work being done in Canada just now. But the show is hopelessly arranged and badly lit with the result that Gaucher, for one, feels that "what started out as an honour has turned into a humiliation."<sup>37</sup>

A comparison must be noted here to the contradictory comments by Mira Goddard on the 1964 showing. Balfour finished her criticism by remarking on the catalogue as an unfortunate piece of Canadian image-making with its red, grey and blue maple leaf stamped on the cover.

The same journalist, Lisa Balfour, sent a report on the Biennale for two different publications. The headline on 19 November for a *Maclean's* article---"Our Image in a Venice Wigwam"---differed from that of the *Montreal Star's* in July, although the body of the essay was equally negative. But in the *Maclean's* article the pavilion was described as being like a teahouse, where visitors expected a trolley laden with cakes to roll by. She recalled "Artist Gaucher, who originally felt honoured to be selected for the Biennale, says now he feels 'humiliated by this amateur fiasco'."<sup>38</sup> Blom, the Commissioner, is quoted as saying some radical changes should be made and that he would present a full report to the Gallery's Board of Trustees in the hope that the federal government could be persuaded to "obliterate this blot on Canada's image."

Two other press reports shared similar views. The first was filed on 4 July 1966 by Barrie Hale of the *Toronto Telegram*, and is titled "It's Canadian and It's Terrible." His chief criticism was the restrictive size of the pavilion and its subsequent negative presentation of the chosen art:

...It is rather as if three teepees had been pushed together to form the core of a combination post-office, souvenir stand, and service station somewhere near the U.S.--Canada



border. Instead, the space is stingy, the light dim. There are three Canadians showing here this year, Yves Gaucher, Alex Colville, and Sorel Etrog, none of them to any great advantage. At least one of them, Gaucher, has been scandalously exhibited; the other two are almost equally ill served. Gaucher's paintings are extremely well-made; they are smooth monochromatic color fields on which a spare number of thin lines and small squares have been arranged in delicate geometric balance. They are not seen well at Venice. The Canadian pavilion is divided into three parts, with Coleville [sic] and Etrog having about 40 per cent each, and Gaucher a closet-sized niche in between, dividing them. As well, two of Gaucher's paintings have been hung as backdrops for Etrog's sculpture; one of them, Blues for Peter, a rich vibrant composition, is constantly in shadow from an Etrog. Clearly the Canadian pavilion intended Etrog to be its major presentation ... one about 15 feet high--- it is so demonstrably monolithic that it appears to have nothing to do with the low building crouched behind it. Inside his work is practically piled one on top of the other and gives alternately the appearance of a warehouse sale or a greedy Canadian darkhorse bid for the major sculpture prize....<sup>39</sup>

Hale blamed the National Gallery in Ottawa which first approved the plans for the design of the pavilion and had since maintained it without change. There had, in fact, been small renovations over the years, but nothing substantial to soften Hale's criticism. For the current show, continued Hale, much of the blame must go to Blom, Research Curator of the National Gallery:

Willem Blom installed it. With such facilities at his disposal why make a bad situation worse...? If there is any shame in our performance at Venice it is that those who officiated it don't know who our artists are, or what they do, how they stand up in the international forum, what the

meaning of the international forum is---a collective presentation by individual nations of their own measure of themselves.<sup>40</sup>

This last paragraph indicates an embarrassment at the lack of savvy or sophistication reflected by the cultural bureaucracy in Ottawa. Hale's conclusions reflect the impression, noted earlier, that, on occasion, Canadians were underwhelming in their attempt to present a polished showcase in a global context. Hale questioned whether Canada should attempt to showcase on equal footing with other nations.

On 9 September Carol Kennedy wrote her report for the *Vancouver Sun*. In her opinion, Colville offered some of the most striking and immediately communicative works---boldly realistic, almost three-dimensional, and brilliantly evocative beach scenes and seascapes, and lonely buildings under the wide prairie sky. Etrog was characteristically convoluted in style. Gaucher's works were remarkable for their incandescent colour contrasts and cryptic, sparse use of tiny geometric patterns.<sup>41</sup>

On 15 September 1966, W. S. A. Dale filed his report on the Canadian pavilion at the Venice Biennale. Nothing is worth repeating here, except his reference to a report made by Willem Blom to the Director of the National Gallery, that Blom shared in the consensus of opinion of members of the Gallery staff that a larger pavilion be built on the same site. Dale added that the present campaign against the Canadian pavilion was led by the Toronto art community. Dale's statement could be considered a divisive tactic against a major community in the Canadian art world. He was reacting to the negative tone about his guidance of the 1966 Biennale.<sup>42</sup>

Willem Blom would remain on the Gallery staff for the next Biennale, after which he took up a position in Europe. With such negativity informing the Canadian public, changes in policy from the National Gallery relating to the Venice Biennale were inevitable. Perhaps the brief and unfortunate tenure under Dale became in itself an instrument of change.

## Endnotes

### Chapter II: Presenting in the Pavilion: 1958–1966

1. Jean Sutherland Boggs, preface to *34th International Biennial Exhibition of Art, Venice, 1968 XXXIV*.
2. Jarvis to Massey, 14 May 1958.
3. Buchanan to Kahane, 31 October 1957. In 1958, Canada presented works in the art gallery of her new pavilion in Brussels, Belgium, at the International Exhibition.
4. The Fonds, 1958.
5. R. H. Hubbard, foreword to *XXIX Biennale internazionale d'arte*, 1958.
6. Ibid.
7. John Russell, "Who's In, Who's Out in Venice," *London Sunday Times*, 15 June 1958.
8. "Canada Pavilion at Art Exhibit Wins Praise," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), 24 June 1958.
9. R. H. Hubbard, foreword to *XXIX Biennale internazionale d'arte*, 1958.
10. Ian Vorres, "Art and Reflections," *Hamilton Spectator*, 12 July 1958.
11. Walter Homberger, "Italians Perform Opera Poorly," *Toronto Daily Star*, 30 August 1958.
12. John Steegman, "Canadian Show in Venice Hailed as Major Success," *Gazette* (Montreal), 9 July 1958.
13. "Memorandum to the Trustees of the National Gallery of Canada," 1959.
14. Buchanan to Maher, 30 April 1960.
15. Mrs. H.A. Dyde to Hubbard, 2 December 1959.
16. Buchanan to Fulford, 10 May 1960.
17. Marcel Cardinal to the Canada Council, 7 March 1960.
18. Vancouver Art Gallery to J. Russell Harper, 29 November 1960.

19. Buchanan to Gian Alberto Dell'Acqua, 22 March 1960.
20. R. H. Hubbard, *XXX Biennale internazionale d'arte*, 1960.
21. Ibid.
22. Paul Duval, "Who Put Canada in a Closet?," *Toronto Telegram*, 9 July 1960.
23. S. Tominaga, a Japanese official, to Buchanan at the Canadian pavilion, 1960.
24. Buchanan, *Report on Canadian Pavilion, Venice Biennale*, June 1960.
25. Buchanan, *Biennale of Venice*, 17 October 1960.
26. The Fonds, 1960.
27. Franco Russoli, preface to *XXXI Biennale internazionale d'arte catalogo*, 1962. A pressing time factor was the reason given for the necessity to have the catalogue printed in Switzerland, by Walter Amstutz of Zurich.
28. Charles Comfort to J. Russell Harper, 1962.
29. Paul Duval, "Canada Is Rated High at 'Biggest Art Show'," *Toronto Telegram*, 20 July 1962.
30. Evan Turner, "Canada in Europe--Summer 1962," *Canadian Art* 19, no. 5 (September 1962): 58--60.
31. Elizabeth Kilbourn, preface to *Canada XXXII Biennale di Venezia 1964: Harold Town and Elza Mayhew*.
32. Colin Graham, *Canada XXXII Biennale di Venezia 1964: Harold Town and Elza Mayhew*.
33. "Spiritual Bigness, Archaic Forms -- Will They Conquer Venice?," *Ottawa Citizen*, 20 June 1964.
34. Charles S. Spencer, "XXXII Esposizione internazionale d'arte di Venezia," *Canadian Art* 21, no. 94 (November/December 1964): 346.
35. Rea Montbizon, "A View from Venice," *Gazette (Montreal)*, 1 August 1964, 18-19.
36. Gian Alberto Dell'Acqua to Dale, 3 September 1964.

37. Lisa Balfour, "Our Hemisphere's Poor Showing," *Montreal Star*, 6 August 1966.

38. Lisa Balfour, "Our Image in a Venice Wigwam," *Maclean's*, 19 November 1966: 72.

39. Barrie Hale, "It's Canadian and It's Terrible," *Toronto Telegram*, 4 July 1966.

40. Ibid.

41. David Watmough's "About Art" quotes Carol Kennedy's *Vancouver Sun* report from the Venice Biennale, 9 September 1966.

42. W. S. A. Dale, "The Canadian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale," 15 September 1966.

### Chapter III

#### The Boggs Era

In 1968, a new era for our country at the Venice Biennale was ushered in with the appointment of Dr. Jean Sutherland Boggs as the Director of the National Gallery of Canada. "A fundamental shift occurred when Boggs came," was the phrase used by Brydon Smith.<sup>1</sup> Boggs oversaw the appointment of Smith as the new Curator for Contemporary Art and, as such, he was responsible as our Commissioner at Venice for selecting the art. Boggs made the process of selection clear by stating in her introduction: "Most intimately involved in the Venice Biennale this year has been Brydon Smith, who has selected the works."<sup>2</sup> In addition, under Boggs' stewardship, Joanna Woods Marsden would become the first Commissioner for International Exhibitions. In Venice, she managed many of the problems with installation and accommodation connected with the Biennale.<sup>3</sup> Willem Blom was described in the Canadian Biennale 1968 catalogue text as having "assisted as the vice-commissary." The appellation Honorary Commissioner was also now given to Boggs. The artists chosen by Brydon Smith for the XXXIV Biennale of 1968 were sculptor Ulysses Comtois and painter Guido Molinari.

The trilingual 1968 catalogue contained approximately 150 pages. Pierre Théberge, the Assistant Curator of Canadian Art, wrote the essays on the artists. Théberge's essays are essentially a review of the artists' personal histories, the process of their artistic development and the media used. Boggs emphasized that "Canadian participation in the Venice Biennale is uniquely the responsibility of the National Gallery of Canada," and that the costs of participation were assumed by the Gallery.

In a December 1994 interview with the author, Brydon Smith revealed the presence of a criterion in his selection of Comtois and Molinari: "I wanted to present the most beautiful works the artists had done before the final selection in February 1968; I also wanted to assemble an exhibition in which the two artists would keep their identities."<sup>4</sup> When queried as to whether there was any consideration given to gender in the choosing of the artists, his answer was that the significance, importance and beauty of the art was the "over-riding consideration." Smith recounted the informal discussions he had with colleagues, and the recommendations he received from across the country concerning the artists he should visit and the work he should see.

He readily admitted to vetting his choices with the Director. Most practically he recognized the restrictions imposed by the size of the pavilion. Smith added that acting as Commissioner for two Biennales would provide sufficient experience, but that three times would be excessive, and run the risk of losing a fresh approach, for the same person. However, circumstances called upon him to act as Commissioner for a third time.<sup>5</sup>

With the choice of two Montreal artists, the amount of francophone press coverage was notable and disputatious. "Participation québécoise à la Biennale de Venise," read the 5 July 1968 edition of *Montréal-Matin*: "La musée d'art contemporain du Québec présentera trois œuvres importants de sa collection permanente pour faire partie d'autant d'expositions prestigieuses dont deux en Europe." The rest of the article used the press release from the National Gallery text.<sup>6</sup> "Le peintre canadien Guido Molinari, lauréat à Venise," *LeDroit* (Ottawa, 30 October 1968) stated: "L'artiste-peintre Guido Molinari, a reçu de la fondation David Bright (Los Angeles) le prix d'un million de livres (1 600 \$) octroyé à un peintre de moins de 45 ans et n'ayant jamais obtenu auparavant un prix à la Biennale de Venise. M. Molinari à 34 ans. M. Molinari est la deuxième Canadien a mériter cet honneur: Jean-Paul Riopelle fut le premier, il y a quelques années."<sup>7</sup>

A more negative tone was adopted by *Sept-Jours* (Montreal), on 14 April 1968:

"A Venise sans gondole: Molinari, plus Comtois" Voici une prédiction facile : à la Biennale de Venise (très célèbre en Europe dans le milieu officiel des arts) on parlera peu -- sinon pas du tout -- de la représentation de notre pays. Le choix de la Galerie nationale s'est porté sur neuf tableaux du peintre académique montréalais, Molinari, qui "théorise" dans un maniérisme plat les notions (aujourd'hui primaires) des Mondrian, Albers et compagnie. Les dix sculptures pièces mobiles sur axes simples, d'Ulysses Comtois sont d'un meilleur intérêt mais encore loin d'un art actuel neuf... M. Smith aurait pu découvrir facilement deux inventeurs autrement originaux et plus personnels qu'un Molinari. Mais là encore, le timide conservateur de l'art contemporain, à la Galerie nationale

aurait choisi de grandes images stupide à la manière d'Yves Gaucher.<sup>8</sup>

In contrast with this criticism, the *Toronto Star's* Harry Malcolmson praised the selection with his headline "We Triumphed in Venice Despite Riots" (20 July 1968):

The focus of the Venice Biennale in 1968 turned on the student riots led by young people from Milan and Rome demonstrating against the exhibition as capitalist propaganda. It [the focus on the riots] was Canada's loss because 1968 is Canada's strongest year ever at the Biennale. The new muscle at the National Gallery of Canada, the institution responsible for Canada's participation, was very much in evidence. Everything bore the special stamp of the Gallery's Director, Miss Jean Boggs. The Boggs regime has concentrated on the quality of curatorial appointments. Other directors of other Canadian galleries have appointed strong curators. But at the National Gallery the completely unprecedented accomplishment of Miss Boggs has been the creation of an expert administrative corps.<sup>9</sup>

Malcolmson recounts the situation in 1966 when the Canadian pavilion had "just one curator, [and] the acting director was present for a few days. The inevitable result was an under prepared, understaffed sad little pavilion." This year all the senior Gallery staff arrived---commissioners, curators, the research curator, the director---in an orchestrated attempt to present a professional image.<sup>10</sup> In Malcolmson's opinion, Canada, with Great Britain, Venezuela and Brazil, had the honour of providing the most handsome installation at the Biennale. He concludes by contrasting the two artists:

Molinari is better known in Canada than Comtois, but the educated guess at Venice was that Comtois would make the greater appeal to the European sensibility. Molinari's hard, brilliant colors are not easy going for the uninitiated; they are liable to seem cold, hard and impersonal, and these are



not the qualities the lingering romanticism of Europe admires.<sup>11</sup>

The final journalistic report to be considered here was titled "Exhibition in Venice Offers Canadian Art," by Kenneth Saltmarche, Director of the Art Gallery of Windsor, in an article for the *Windsor Star*, on 10 August 1968. Considering his position, it is rather empty and careless reportage. Saltmarche describes Comtois' sculpture as "notably a stacking of geometric elements up and around a central axis," and with Molinari's "optical vertical striped canvases one would expect [them] to make a happy two-man show." Saltmarche was not "one to equate beef cattle with works of art," and he considered himself more aware than the average individual of the value of works of art which often appear to show little or no return on investment. Still, he wondered if efforts like the Biennale in Venice, which he knew, and the similar show in Sao Paulo, which he didn't know, were really worth the effort involved: "How meaningful is this for Canadian art and for Canadian artists and for Canada's image abroad?" He indicated concern in observing that both times he had been to the Biennale, the crowds were in the Piazza San Marco, not at the Biennale, and only one guard was to be seen.<sup>12</sup>

A report was submitted by Boggs to the Trustees of the National Gallery after the pavilion closed. This is a very important document, for in it---for the first time---a Director of the National Gallery questions participation in the Biennale. Frustration with the entire process of dealing with the authorities is evident, as there had been a noticeable lack of co-ordination among them. Juries still had not been selected on opening day. With constant repairs needed to the pavilion, especially to its leaking roof, Boggs cautioned against spending any more money. Of interest is a repetition of the words "blocked funds." The first reference occurred with the opening of the pavilion, in 1958, which had been financed by "blocked funds" kept in Italy after World War II. Boggs wrote, "If the Biennale seems destined to survive and if there are blocked funds in Italy available to the National Gallery, it would be wise to make any such alterations the summer of 1969." Earlier evidence suggested that the \$25,000 required for the 1958 construction was the total amount of these funds. Otherwise, however, Boggs' report supported the "harmonious and handsome whole" of the selection, and she was pleased

there was no "overcrowding." She felt, however, that the pavilion looked too "decorative" or "over-refined."<sup>13</sup>

The shift from the more traditional media of painting, sculpture and prints to new innovations was made complete by the presentation of Michael Snow's work in 1970. The statement by Boggs for the National Gallery was brief and without any new information. It was in the text of Commissioner Brydon Smith, Curator for Contemporary Art, that the policy of the Gallery may be observed. This was printed in the official XXXV Biennale catalogue as well as in Canada's own catalogue. The cover illustration of the twenty-four page, trilingual, illustrated Canadian catalogue was of a black and white image of a TV screen. Smith's text is detailed and imaginative:

The decision to have one artist represent Canada at the XXXV was based on the effective presentation of the relatively few works in the Canadian pavilion in 1968. Fewer works than in previous years meant that the movable panels, which had fragmented the equiangular spiral sweep of the exhibition area, could be removed; this opened up the interior to more sunlight through the inner fenestrated walls around the small court, and to easier and more continuous movement of visitors through the space. The resulting unity between the art and the pavilion enhanced the exhibition to such a degree that the presence of one artist seemed to be the next logical phase. Also, devoting the whole exhibition to one man's art would give the artist an opportunity to realize concepts at the time of installation and would not limit the exhibition to things past. Our choice of Michael Snow was reconfirmed independently by a number of Canadian artists who had suggested him for the Venice Biennale. During the past year and a half, Michael and I discussed the bases for the exhibition. These are augmented by two constructions, which incorporate framing or optical devices to be looked through rather than at and by three films. Thus the emphasis is on his art since 1967.<sup>14</sup>

This lengthy quotation underlines Smith's reasons for the selection of a single artist, his description of the marriage of the pavilion with the art, and the obvious compatibility of curator and artist.

Another innovation of this 1970 event was that, in order to show three films made by Snow, off-site space would be needed, as the pavilion had no screening facilities. In her role as Commissioner for International Exhibitions, Woods Marsden obtained the Cinema Olimpia, in central Venice, for these screenings.

A great deal of comment was generated by this showcasing of Snow's art. Barry Lord, in *Art and Artists*, cleverly titled his piece "Snow in Venice" to pun the work *Venetian Blind*, which the artist made while in Venice installing his show. Lord's article is mainly a technical evaluation of the artist's transition from his well-known *Walking Woman* image, and he emphasizes that Snow's work is not about photography, but is a study of the limits through which we perceive and record the world: "His is a 'critical' art, in the Kantian sense."<sup>15</sup> More laudatory was Kay Kritzwiser's review in the *Globe and Mail* on 18 August 1970. "Venice 'Best Ever' for Snow." Contrary to previous negative reviews, she referred to the pavilion with the words, "With luck, once in a lifetime an artist finds the perfect arena for his work, and that's what happened to Michael Snow at the Venice Biennale." Erroneously, she touted this experience as "the first time representation was narrowed down to a single artist." (Riopelle had shown alone in 1962.) Kritzwiser's statement that all the National Gallery catalogues on Snow's show were "scooped up opening day" was evidence of his success.<sup>16</sup>

It was, however, her phrase "implicitly crowning Snow king-of-the-artist-castle" that drew ire. A newspaper dialogue was carried on in the editorial pages of the *Globe and Mail* by the Messieurs Smith. Calling the exhibition "anarchy in the fine arts," Bruce Smith of Owen Sound, on 7 September, questioned the:

pseudo-intellectual jargon ad nauseum that is used indiscriminately to bolster the supposed contemporary trends and isms that become tomorrow's flotsam and jetsam, in the frantic search for the new and startling. Surely the National Gallery's Brydon Smith as curator for contemporary art cannot honestly support the sickness that

has overtaken the visual arts. I cannot believe that any serious individual in that position can justify Michael Snow's work as the epitome of contemporary fine art.<sup>17</sup>

Five days later, Brydon Smith replied that the phrase 'king-of-the-artist-castle' in Canada was not representative of the views of the National Gallery. He further defended his selection of Snow's thirteen works as "a harmonious interaction between art and pavilion which unexpectedly reinforced and enhanced the reflective qualities in many of the works." The final paragraph, and the important point of the argument, read: "The artists chosen to represent Canada internationally work in a variety of individual styles and media and should not be categorized as trend followers."<sup>18</sup> This is another reference to international avant-gardism and could be considered an example of National Gallery policy being presented through the daily press.

In the International Programme section of *The Annual Report of the National Gallery* (previously called the *Annual Review*) published in early 1971, reference was made to Dorothy Cameron's piece in *artscanada*. The Toronto art gallery owner's article was provocatively called "The Crisis of Canada International, Part 2: Venice":

For the small gathering of Canadian well-wishers assembled on the noon-hour of June 22, 1970, for Mike Snow's opening of the 35th Venice Biennale; for those of us sunning and celebrating in the glassed-in courtyard, or wandering through the interior of Canada's lens-y many-faceted, camera-like pavilion---an exhibition structure harshly criticized in past years, but in this instance so uncannily empathetic with the vision of the exhibiting artist that certain individual works, already well-known to us, seemed all at once to be freshly revealed, as though we were in fact *seeing* them (and comprehending Michael Snow as image-worker) for the very first time---for each of us present, whether from Montreal, Toronto, Ottawa or Vancouver, this was on one rightful level, a moment of shared chauvinistic pride.<sup>19</sup>

Cameron lamented that Canada had insufficiently publicized participation in the exhibition despite Canadian artists' frequently stated desire to have more effective international promotion of their work.<sup>20</sup> She states that this

demonstrates once again that more than such token gestures must be undertaken and then on a *sustained* basis, by responsible federal agencies, or preferably, by a single agency devoted solely to information-dissemination and promotion of all the arts of Canada abroad. The recent Canadian Conference of the Arts passed a recommendation to the Secretary of State requesting such a central Canadian Arts Information Service. We now await positive action.<sup>21</sup>

Such a strong position carried deliberately in the internal publication of the National Gallery must surely have reached people in positions of authority.

Included in *The Annual Report* were comments garnered from abroad: for instance, Jacques Monnier, the Swiss writer, wrote in *Tribune de Lausanne le matin*: "Michael Snow a suffisamment de poids pour représenter à lui seul le Canada. La photographie est à la fois son instrument d'investigation et son matériau.... Cette recherche qui doit moins à la manipulation qu'à l'imagination, exerce également la souplesse visuelle et mentale du spectateur."<sup>22</sup>

*The Annual Report* also quoted John Russell of the *Sunday Times* in London, concerning *Sink*: "Snow gives an architecture-in-time to what should be monotonous but is paradoxically an immensely varied experience."<sup>23</sup> Jenny Bergin's article for the *Ottawa Citizen* (27 February 1971) was boldly headlined "Young Canadian Artists Win Acclaim Abroad":

Nevertheless, there is a refreshing air of independence emerging and a certain, long-overdue self-confidence. Canadians are no longer feeling it necessary to wear a faintly apologetic attitude about their art in front of strangers for, whether or not one agrees with or likes what is being produced, the fact remains that things are happening, ideas are flowing and the old, rather hidebound attitudes are fading away.<sup>24</sup>

Bergin's observation that growing Canadian self-confidence is evident in both the artist and the viewer had been more obvious in the journalistic and critical reports since 1952. Hubbard's rather humble words about "a young nation being sensitive to what is said of her abroad" had seen this sensitivity mature into a more reasoned and restrained pride.

Woods Marsden filed a three-page report, on 20 October 1970, containing discussion and comments generated from a meeting with her colleagues on 14 October. The first item she addressed was under the rubric *Exhibition and Catalogue*<sup>25</sup> The issue raised was whether the purpose of the Canadian pavilion should be to honour Canadian artists, to give recognition to their careers and achievements or to show what is most vital and alive in Canadian art at any particular moment. Clearly something now threatened the Gallery's initial purpose. In the preface in 1952, McCurry had written that Canada would be presenting the art of its leading contemporary artists; if honour and rewards were corollaries of exhibiting, so much the better. The original purpose at the Biennale was to show what was most vital and alive in Canadian art. In this report, Woods Marsden expressed concern "whether the Canadian contribution should be more in the spirit of the Paris Biennale, or that of some of the other national pavilions."

Dorothy Cameron's suggestions that publicity be much more co-ordinated could conceivably account for the publicity discussion in Woods Marsden's report, where she urged more press releases, longer catalogue runs and doing the printing in Canada, "because of the lack of the necessary facilities in Venice."<sup>26</sup> The Director felt that the exhibition and the catalogue had not been sufficiently available to the public. In the same report, Boggs expressed her belief that more explanatory material, such as a didactic poster, was necessary as a transition between works which could be considered "difficult" and the public. Could the Owen Sound Bruce Smith's editorializing also have played a role in this discomfort? Concern was expressed that the content of the exhibition and catalogue should relate, and be more accessible, to the general public, as teaching tools, rather than directed just to the art cognoscenti.

The report concluded by acknowledging the contribution of a Venetian representative on site who had proved a fine and valuable asset to the Commissioners arriving at the Biennale for the installation period and opening press days. Hiring Marietta Stern-Guetta, who had previously

worked for the American pavilion, was another of the innovations that Boggs put in place to facilitate the various requirements of National Gallery staff members and artists during their time in Venice. In addition, Stern-Guetta provided ongoing contact throughout the year and a half when there was no National Gallery staff in Venice. She tended to the housekeeping, the renovations, the repairs and the constant negotiations, which generated much correspondence. She managed, in 1970, to arrange finally for a telephone installation in the pavilion, especially for the times when there was only one person on duty to respond to visitors' requests. The Giardini, Ca' Giustinian (Biennale office) and the main post office were all far from each other.

A most revealing "Memorandum" was filed on 11 August 1971 by Pierre Théberge to Boggs, with copies to his colleagues. At issue was the selection of artists for the 1972 Biennale. Five approaches and several themes were suggested and these open up a broader insight into the process of selection. The first proposal was for a one-man show by a "well-known" artist; second was a proposal for two or three shows by "well-known" artists; third was a "theme" exhibition; fourth was the idea that one younger or lesser-known artist be showcased; and the last idea to be considered was an "Environmental" exhibition, without further elaboration.

In his report Théberge wrote: "I feel that a one-man exhibition of works by Ernest Lindner would have the greater impact. He is an artist of great integrity and originality. His work is timely, in terms of the renewed interest in nature by several younger artists." This was both the longest and the most candid document of the behind-the-scenes developments found in the archival material.<sup>27</sup> The Théberge report included Brydon Smith's suggestion for a one-man show by John Boyle, whose "work in a way [is] so totally 'Canadian' home grown, etc. ... and quite impressive in itself, although he is very early in his career." References to Harold Town, and use of the word *Canadian* as an adjective to describe the artist's work, recall the early suggestions by Hubbard and Kilbourn that the intangible "third option" may indeed be defined by the word *Canadian*.

Additional suggestions in Théberge's 1971 "Memorandum" included the names of a number of artists of the "35 years old plus" generation. They were Claude Breeze, Kenneth Lochhead, Greg Curnoe, Claude Tousignant, Jack Chambers, Tony Urquhart, Gershon Iskowitz, Charles Gagnon, Jack

Bush, John Meredith, David Samila, Ed Zelenak, Walt Redinger and Alfred Pellan. (It makes one wish for the emergence of gender equality.) "Any of those could have varying degrees of success, although people like Chambers, Tousignant, Gagnon could perhaps look more striking," wrote Théberge.<sup>28</sup> Other combinations of names were tossed about---Tousignant, Gagnon, Curnoe---searching for "mood, since their work tends to have a brooding introspective character."<sup>29</sup> It was conjectured that a figurative exhibition could look quite original with works by Breeze, Curnoe, Chambers, Boyle and John MacGregor.

Finally, it was Iskowitz and Redinger who presented their art at the XXXVI Biennale in 1972. Applying a criterion set out in 1959 to help determine the selection process, there were only two artists, both in mid-career. Both worked from Ontario studios---Iskowitz from Toronto, and Redinger from West Lorne---which could be seen to balance the Montreal emphasis in 1968 on Molinari and Comtois. Only their prize-winning ability was in doubt as they had not yet achieved the international reputation enjoyed by Riopelle. Their names had, however, been on Théberge's first selection list. The 1972 Commissioners were Brydon Smith and Joanna Woods Marsden; the catalogue text was by Brydon Smith. Iskowitz showed eight paintings and Walter Redinger a fibre-glass sculpture (eight units) titled *Caucasian Totems*, which was placed at the Doges' Palace, off-site of the Biennale in central Venice.

The Canadian catalogue text was personalized by Brydon Smith's obvious knowledge of the artists' work. He began: "Gershon Iskowitz and Walter Redinger are expressionists, in as much as they spontaneously manifest their feelings about nature through their art. But here the similarity ends. Iskowitz paints, as visual illusion induces best his visionary view of existence. Redinger sculpts, as plastic form substantiates his feelings about bodily existence."<sup>30</sup> Smith wrote about his knowledge of the artists' works, making the point that they were intellectual and aesthetic choices. The theme chosen by the Biennale authorities in 1972 was "Work and Behaviour," but this was irrelevant to Smith's choice of artists.

Even before the Biennale opened, Redinger's sculpture *Klonos*, selected for the Biennale and purchased by the National Gallery, had caused a major stir on Parliament Hill and in the press. Three letters in the *Ottawa Journal*, on 17 May 1972, referred to the editorial of 12 May, titled "Bilious



Sculpture," which had printed a photograph of the new Gallery purchase.<sup>31</sup> All three writers demanded to know the price paid by the Gallery, the writers justifying their anger as taxpayers and claiming they had a right to know the details involved in the purchase. It is interesting to note it was not the policy of the Gallery to withhold this information, but was instead the personal decision of Boggs. One month later, on 14 June, just as the Biennale was under way in Venice, Senator Eugene Forsey rose in the Senate to ask the Leader of the Government whether he had seen the "latest acquisition to the National Gallery? It exceeds anything that I have yet discovered that even the 'talented' Director of the Gallery has been able to pick up from the rubbish heaps."<sup>32</sup> Senator Forsey continued with a scathing attack on the secretive policy of the Gallery, with references to Maoist China and the Soviet Union.

One week later, on 21 June, in the House of Commons, the Honourable Member Wallace Nesbitt, Oxford, rose to ask the amount paid by the National Gallery for the eight-piece fibreglass work and if the Gallery intended to exhibit this art in Venice. Gérard Pelletier, the Secretary of State, responded that he had been informed by the National Museums of Canada that the National Gallery "does not announce the prices paid for works of art," an example of politicians not being fully informed by Gallery spokespeople.<sup>33</sup> It should be noted here that this is the only such discussion in connection with the Venice Biennale in the National Gallery of Canada Archives.

Kay Kritzwiser, in the *Globe and Mail*, perhaps in response to this incident, titled her headline from Venice (10 June) "Two Artists do Taxpayers Proud." Kritzwiser's three-page article proclaimed the perceptiveness of Brydon Smith in choosing the art; Woods Marsden was lauded for her installation, in particular the work required to secure Redinger's sculpture *Caucasian Totems* in the ancient piazzetta of the Ducal Palace. In Kritzwiser's description of the International Sculpture Show, representative of twelve countries, "there stood Redinger's earth-coloured *Caucasian Totems* standing up with supreme confidence to the totems of Venice. That's tough competition against the famous granite columns at the edge of the piazza [sic] St. Mark and his bronze lion and St. Theodore and his crocodile.... He rides out the predictable roars of protest from critics on Parliament Hill."<sup>34</sup>

Iskowitz's works, she believed, "measure up to the staggering virtuosity" of Gerhard Richter's paintings in the German pavilion. Iskowitz's paintings, Kritzwiser noted, are "built on space through which float all the

luscious colours of a summery world."<sup>35</sup> Iskowitz, in November 1971, and Redinger, in the spring of 1972, were the subjects of major essays by Peter Mellen in *artscanada* prior to the Biennale. Three thousand copies of these were printed by the Canada Council and handed out to visitors at the pavilion.<sup>36</sup> By 1972, the Council offered financial assistance for travel to artists selected for major international exhibitions like the Biennale. (The Canada Council, which grew out of recommendations from the 1951 Massey Commission, was created to stimulate and help voluntary organizations within the fields of arts, letters, humanities and social sciences to foster Canada's cultural relations abroad. It provides a system of scholarships and grants to encourage artists to pursue their studies.)

Geoffrey James, writing in the Canadian edition of *Time* magazine, lauded the courage of Redinger. According to James, in "Out of the Earth" (7 May 1973), "The artist who tries to move beyond formalism, who rejects the masks of humour, understatement or inscrutability, sometimes runs the greatest risk of all---being considered corny. It is a danger that 33-year-old sculptor Walter Redinger, from West Lorne, Ontario, confronts and overcomes." In reviewing Redinger's works at the Saidye Bronfman Centre in Montreal, James used *monumental scale* and the descriptive words *risk*, *primal* and *visceral*. He referred to the artist being selected for the Biennale, and concluded that the "powerful body of Redinger's work is free of debts to current fashion."<sup>37</sup>

Sol Littman, for the *Toronto Star* (1 March 1974), described the traumatic personal struggles of Gershon Iskowitz. He quoted Iskowitz, who had survived years in concentration camps, as saying: "I was scared to go to Venice for the Biennale. But when I got there I saw something had happened. Before people didn't want to go into the Canadian pavilion because they thought it was a cold province of the United States---but this time they saw the colours of my paintings in the window. For the first time people came and admired Canadian painting."<sup>38</sup> Iskowitz' remark---the most confident statement yet heard from any Canadian artist---and the assurance evident in Redinger's *Caucasian Totems* mark a new measure of self-esteem in Canadian artists at the Biennale.

The archival material for 1972 reveals that the Biennale budget was considerably reduced. Since the student riots in 1968, there had been a feeling that any lavish spending alongside rather poorly paid artists would look both

foolish and ostentatious. The artists received a per diem for expenses of \$30, an artist's fee and their accommodation for five days in Venice, paid for by the National Gallery. Redinger's sculpture cost \$1,300 to install. No large-scale reception, as in 1968, was held in June for the press days. This resulted in a contretemps between Dorothy Cameron and Jean Sutherland Boggs, mainly in the form of letters. Cameron's concern was that these remarkable artists would be diminished in stature if there was no vernissage to honour them. Perhaps to perform damage control, in the end there was a small reception with the Canadian Ambassador present on 11 June at the pavilion.<sup>39</sup>

An innovation begun in 1972, by Brydon Smith, was to combine the press release within a catalogue format. This was both practical and efficient. The thirty-two loose pages had coloured reproductions of the artworks, with biographical data on the verso. These pages were contained inside a sleeve that offered the reader the ease of comparison of the plates and the possibility of framing individual images.

The last exhibition to be examined in this chapter occurred in 1976. For a number of reasons, primarily financial and political, the 1974 Biennale remains classified as "postponed" by the Italian authorities.

Pierre Théberge and Joanna Woods Marsden were Commissioners for this, the XXXVII Biennale. The selection of Greg Curnoe and the discussion of his eight paintings was done by Théberge, now Curatorial Administrator at the National Gallery of Canada. This would be the third time a single Canadian artist was presented. It must be remembered that Curnoe was on the "Memorandum" list that Théberge had drawn up in 1971. A 168-page trilingual catalogue, containing black and white illustrations and one coloured postcard-size reproduction of Curnoe's *Victoria Hospital*, was produced. The concept of the 1976 theme, "Physical Environment," was roundly dismissed by Pierre Théberge, who commented that all the Biennale themes were "fakes, they were just Italian politics."<sup>40</sup>

Théberge felt that "the work of Greg Curnoe should be known internationally, for it shows a sense of time and place that is truly Canadian in its good-natured lack of pretension." Here is another use of the word *Canadian* as a category, perhaps confirming the third option originally conceptualized by Hubbard. The introduction by Théberge about Curnoe is written in an informal, almost popular tone:

Greg Curnoe lives in London, Ontario, where he was born in 1936.... Curnoe is a writer as well as a painter.... Greg Curnoe has also made films.... Greg Curnoe is also an amateur bicycle racer.... All of Curnoe's work is autobiographical. He has deliberately chosen to limit his fields of activity to his region---London, Ontario---and his themes are generally drawn from this source.<sup>41</sup>

This text reflects the simplicity and unpretentiousness of Curnoe; records show that he corrected the introduction.

*Artscanada* ran the byline of Theodore Allen Heinrich in its October/November 1976 issue, summarizing changes that were forced upon the authorities of the Biennale after the cancellation in 1974. His concerns bear repeating for they echo those of Boggs, as expressed in her report of 1968, about the future of Canada's participation in Venice. Heinrich began by asking:

The biggest question about the xxxvii International Venice Biennale was whether after a four-year gap there was any point in trying to revive what, after the self-destruct effort of 1972, appeared to nearly everyone to be a dead duck. It was answered in the event by a strong affirmative. Its postponed re-opening in mid-July raised some new questions, too, but it certainly looks as though this familiar aspect of Venice is to be preserved. The other major question posed by this international showcase and its principal rivals is whether there is any real sign of light on the horizons of the deep crisis in which modern art finds itself.<sup>42</sup>

Although Heinrich answers in the negative, his response acknowledges a list of improvements. He cites significant changes such as the abolition of prizes and awards, thereby eliminating a long-festering sore of scandal and acrimony. Creation of a new management team was also included in the changes, as were repairs to the decrepit internal consultative committee, expansion of acceptable media to include architecture, photography, ballet and other performing arts, greatly increased

decentralization from the historic locus of the Giardini, a tripled budget, and catalogues available in English as well as Italian. Most significantly, he credits the official recognition of the Biennale through the creation of a huge reference library in the Palazzo Giustiniani to meet the need of modern art, with its formidable history, for a major documentation centre.<sup>43</sup>

Where, after this recitation of commendation, was Canada in all this, queried Heinrich. The pavilion was identified by a colossal flag out front, which saved the glass and steel teepee under some big trees from its old fate of being mistaken for a public convenience. Inside, the long curving wall proved a congenial setting for the eight familiar, painted, inscribed, and sometimes tape-accompanied painted views from Greg Curnoe's eight studio windows. Heinrich commented that "these obsessional re-creations of the banal aspects of daily life are obviously appropriate in the context of the environment and make personal statements of some strength." But he derided the catalogue as being "too arch a reflection of the banality of today's paperbacks; it is ugly enough to constitute an act of environmental pollution." He did, however, find the essay by Théberge "delightful."

In London, England, Giles Waterfield's article in *Arts Review* included six studies of Curnoe's bicycles. One may judge the general tone of the article from the following query by Waterfield:

But what for all the sycophantic catalogue and the imposing list of purchasers is the purpose of this work? The result is neutral and bland; expresses only a sphinx-like observation of the mundane and the fashionably mundane at that--- these bicycles recall once again the current romantic obsession with mechanical means of transport as an agent of liberty, the contemporary charger. Mr. Curnoe is without doubt accomplished technically; but if one can forget that he is Canada's painter laureate, one may wonder whether he need be quite so dull.<sup>44</sup>

Montreal's *Parachute* (avril/mai/juin 76), having not sent anyone to cover the show, printed the French press release with no critical review. With such a paucity of reportage in 1976, the question of whether the 1974 postponement cost the Biennale its enviable status needs asking.

## Endnotes

### Chapter III: The Boggs Era

1. Brydon Smith, interview with the author at the National Gallery of Canada, 9 December 1994. To augment the examination of the process by which artists were selected for the Biennale in Venice, a series of discussions was held by the author with the Commissioners from 1968 until the final exhibition under study, in 1986. Brydon Smith was the Commissioner for the Canadian pavilion for three Biennales, from 1968 to 1972.
2. Jean Sutherland Boggs, preface to *34th International Biennial Exhibition of Art, Venice, 1968: Ulysses Comtois, Guido Molinari*.
3. In 1966, an employee of the British Pavilion, Josephine Patterson, periodically inspected our pavilion to check on its condition and to explain Canadian art to tourists. Patterson had a small contract with the NGC. This had proved less than efficient, and Woods Marsden replaced her.
4. Brydon Smith, interview, 1994.
5. Ibid.
6. "Participation québécoise à la Biennale de Venise," *Montréal-Matin*, 5 July 1968.
7. "Le peintre canadien Guido Molinari lauréat à Venise," *LeDroit*, (Ottawa), 30 October 1968.
8. "A Venise sans gondole: Molinari plus Comtois," *Sept-Jours* (Montréal), 14 April 1968.
9. Harry Malcolmson, "We Triumphed in Venice Despite Riots," *Toronto Star*, 20 July 1968.
10. A large party was held at the Hotel Daniele, attended by 470 guests "du monde."
11. Harry Malcolmson, "We Triumphed in Venice Despite Riots," *Toronto Star*, 20 July 1968.
12. Kenneth Saltmarche, "Exhibition in Venice Offers Canadian Art," *Windsor Star*, 10 August 1968.
13. J. S. Boggs, "Report to the Trustees of the National Gallery," October 1968.

14. Brydon Smith, preface to *Michael Snow/Canada XXXV International Biennale Exhibition of Art*, 1970.
15. Barry Lord, "Snow in Venice," *Art and Artists* 5, no. 3 (June 1970).
16. Kay Kritzwiser, "Venice 'Best Ever' for Snow," *Globe and Mail*, (Toronto), 18 August 1970.
17. Bruce L. Smith, "The Chosen One," Letter to the editor, *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), 7 September 1970.
18. Brydon E. Smith, "Canadian Artists," *Globe and Mail*, 12 September 1970. Reply to Bruce L. Smith of Owen Sound.
19. Dorothy Cameron, "Crisis of Canada International, Part 2: Venice," *Artscanada*, (December 1970/January 1971): 41.
20. *Ibid.*, 46.
21. *Ibid.*
22. National Gallery of Canada, *The Annual Report*, 1971.
23. *Ibid.*
24. Jenny Bergin, "Young Canadian Artists Win Acclaim Abroad," *Ottawa Citizen*, 27 February 1971.
25. Woods Marsden, Commissioner for International Exhibitions, "Report to National Gallery of Canada Trustees," 20 October 1970.
26. *Ibid.*
27. Pierre Théberge, "Memorandum on the Venice Biennale 1972," 11 August 1971. The selection process in the Memorandum is a revelation, because, in the author's telephone conversation with him, Théberge did not raise such a wide-ranging approach to the selection process.
28. *Ibid.*
29. *Ibid.*
30. Brydon Smith, preface to *Canada: Gershon Iskowitz, Walter Redinger: XXXVI Biennale 1972*.

31. "Bilious Sculpture," editorial, *Ottawa Journal*, 12 May 1972; and E. M. Kinnard, "How Much?," letter to the editor, *Ottawa Journal*, 17 May 1972.
32. Canada, Senate, *Debates*, 14 June 1972, 487.
33. Canada, House of Commons *Debates*, 21 June 1972, 3338.
34. Kay Kritzwiser, "Two Artists do Taxpayers Proud," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), 10 June 1972.
35. *Ibid.*
36. *The Fonds*, 1972.
37. Geoffrey James, "Out of the Earth," *Time*, Canadian Edition, 7 May 1973.
38. Sol Littman, "Artist Lives, Works in Mean Surroundings," *Toronto Star*, 1 March 1974.
39. Dorothy Cameron--J. S. Boggs correspondence, June 1972.
40. Pierre Théberge, interview with the author, 17 January 1995.
41. Pierre Théberge, introduction to *Canada: Greg Curnoe*, XXXVII *Biennale Di Venezia* 1976.
42. Theodore Allen Heinrich, *Artscanada* (October/November) 1976.
43. *Ibid.*
44. Giles Waterfield, *Arts Review*, London, England, 27, nos 25, 26 (1976).



## Chapter IV

### The Devolution

By October 1977, Commissioner Pierre Théberge had selected Ontario artists Ron Martin and Henry Saxe for Canada's participation in the 1978 Biennale. This was confirmed in a letter to Marietta Stern-Guetta, in which he also informed her that the works would be shown first in New York, at the Center for Inter-American Relations from February to March 1978, and that he was "very happy about this."<sup>1</sup> Like Brydon Smith, Théberge had selected the artists by travelling the country, visiting studios and artists as well as talking to the art community.<sup>2</sup>

When questioned in a letter (7 April 1978) from Canadian painter Robert Jordan, who had seen the works of the two artists in New York, about his reason for selecting Martin, Théberge positioned himself by revealing:

You are arguing that we should wait for an artist to reach greater maturity, before selecting his/her works for an international audience. We have at the Gallery usually preferred to be bolder rather than timid in our choices. We have chosen artists who have been working professionally for 10 to 15 years and who are attaining a first maturity in their work. I would hope that to be chosen for the Biennale, rather than debilitate an artist, as you say, 'be injurious to his career' would be a recognition of achievement to do even better work and greater work in the future. Our pavilion, though beautiful, is very small and the showing of our two artists, Martin and Henry Saxe is the very maximum we could do this time.<sup>3</sup>

The theme determined by the Biennale authorities for the 1978 exhibition ("From Nature to Art, from Art to Nature") would be irrelevant to Théberge.

Rather curious comments were made by the new Director of the National Gallery, Hsio-Yen Shih. In her text for the 1978--1979 *National Gallery Bulletin*, Shih remarked on the Canadian contribution to the XXXVIII Venice Biennale: "While we are gratified by the reception given to our

exhibitions abroad, it must also be said that our resources were strained to the limit in these efforts to reinforce the government's diplomatic activities."<sup>4</sup> Shih's words throw quite a new light on the perceptions of the Director regarding the ambit and responsibilities of the National Gallery of Canada. Rather than seeing it as an international vehicle for our artists, she considered it a financially onerous diplomatic obligation. It was unprecedented for a National Gallery Director to give an opinion of this strength in a publicly available source, although Jean Sutherland Boggs had commented earlier in an internal document on the strain placed by the Biennale upon the Gallery's limited budget. Reference to the Department of External Affairs, in Shih's use of the word *diplomatic*, acknowledged the role played by Canada's embassy in Rome during Biennale years. Ceremonial and, occasionally, hospitality functions were handled by embassy officials for formal events in Venice.

Commissioner Théberge was also responsible for the 1978 catalogue text. Ron Martin, from London, presented nine paintings and two objects, and Henry Saxe, of Tamworth, sent four sculptures. A trilingual catalogue, of 158 pages and in large print, was illustrated with reproductions of their work. A bland catalogue preface by Shih made reference to Canada's pioneering, rural roots. She remarked that the artists' concern lay not with the philosophical question of "What is art?" but rather "What is an artist?" Manipulation and restraint were the essence of this art, according to Shih.

Théberge, at this time Acting Curator of Contemporary Canadian Art for the National Gallery, wrote an introduction that dealt with the technical development of the artists, much like his writing on Curnoe for 1976. Of Martin, he explained: "The use of the black colour---modulated solely in a tonal manner by the way light hits the surface relief---makes the perception of these works difficult. The spectator must necessarily go through a slow and arduous process of deciphering these surfaces, whose blackness are inevitably associated with austerity, psychological gravity, and even death."<sup>5</sup> This profoundly melancholic face of art in Canada recalls Heinrich's fear in 1976 that our image lacked a sense of joy when presented on the world stage.

Reviews by art journalists, two from New York and two from Venice, revealed disparate perceptions. Peter Perrin wrote for *artscanada* in April/May from New York, and Julianna Borsa, from Toronto, contributed her opinion for the September/October issue of *artmagazine*, where three full pages were given over to Martin's and Saxe's work, complete with four photographs.

Incidentally, the writing of press reviews may not have been as spontaneous as it appeared. Correspondence from curators to gallery owners and to critics revealed not infrequently an actual request by National Gallery of Canada officials for coverage in the various Canadian art publications. Advertisements promoting the Biennale that year were also taken by the National Gallery in major art publications such as *Canadian Art* and *artmagazine*.

Perrin described *Sight/Site* by Henry Saxe as the "largest and most fascinating" sculpture exhibited in New York that winter and suggested that Saxe's work, although landscape-based, was intended to be exhibited indoors, with the "landscape only a memory." A lengthy, detailed description refers to a braided steel cable as saying "Look at me, I'm Baroque.... Saxe's sculptures nearly always suggest locomotion---not just a formal motion of lines and areas toward coherence, but actual moving across a space."<sup>6</sup>

It was clear that Borsa had visited the Center for Inter-American Relations in New York in February 1978, before the Adriatic pilgrimage by Canada's National Gallery contingent. She wrote: "In the elegant Park Avenue galleries, the world of Martin and Saxe seemed quite avant-garde. In the context of the Biennale, however, they are thoughtful, sober pieces that reflect the taste of a serious-minded institution like the National Gallery. Only in their broadest sense do they seem to relate to the theme of the Biennale.... More conscious of "art" and less relaxed than our European counterparts, perhaps the Canadian choices represented too much that was art and too little that was nature."<sup>7</sup>

Writing from Venice, Borsa thought our entries tame by comparison to the representation of a bull mounting a cow, along with paint-smearing sheep, in the British pavilion. However, she allowed that the ambiguity of Martin's large paintings' "awesome presence demand attention."<sup>8</sup>

A further mention of the Canadian presentation in 1978 filed from Venice was by Michael Shepherd. On 9 July, "More of Venice" appeared in the *London Sunday Telegraph*: "Canada too aims at art for contemplation rather than passing sensation, with the Quebec-born Henry Saxe and the monochrome relief painter Ron Martin."<sup>9</sup> John Russell, for the *New York Times* (18 March 1978), in his "Houses, Nudes and a Clue to the Biennale," had predicted that "it is conceivable that Mr. Martin's paintings and Mr. Saxe's sculptures will look better there than they do in New York. Those one color

paintings of Mr. Martin use black paint only (and lots of it) and those open-plan accumulative sculptures do not at present look to this observer like art that had to be made. But in the context of committee-fed international effort, who knows?"<sup>10</sup>

Russell continued:

Gifted propagandists will be on hand to assure the visitor that the art of their particular country is alive and well. Catalogs (lavish, weighty, hyperbolic) will be given away free. Reputations will be made and unmade, momentarily, and by the time the visitor heads for the noonday shades he will have seen art from just about every place that produces it. For a foretaste, where the Canadian contribution is on view now, it so happens that the Canadian pavilion at the Venice Biennale is one of the most successful of its kind. Built around a large and still flourishing tree, with tall glass windows that slant upward toward the fresh green of foliage, it has a way of making whatever is shown there look about four times as good as it really is.<sup>11</sup>

This positive observation of the oft-lamented pavilion recalls the praise the building received upon its opening in 1958. Opinions regarding the pavilion have consistently been strongly polarized between great support and utter despair.

While policy regarding the visual arts can be read through the introductory texts of all the Directors at the National Gallery of Canada, references to the Venice Biennale in the House of Commons provide a different insight. (The Gallery reported to the Department of Communications in the federal government.) A telegram was sent to Marietta Stern-Guetta on 2 November 1978 from Pierre Théberge:

Canadian Government is making serious inquiry into Venice Biennale expenses. They are strongly questioning bill from Sattis [transport company] of 1,285,300 lira. National Gallery of Canada must ask for a detailed description of work involved, number of men employed at what rates, numbers of machinery and equipment used,

number of hours worked. Our own estimates for work involved are much lower. We are seriously concerned about extravagance of bill and must ask for a reduction.<sup>12</sup>

Two years earlier Stern-Guetta had refused to pay the account, which she considered exaggerated, to Sattis "for the moving of our cases from the Italian Pavilion (where they had been temporarily stored) to the Canadian pavilion." She had tried to negotiate a reduction during the two years and had written to Théberge on 15 August 1978 to inform him, even having had friends from New York mail the letter because of the dreadful postal service in Venice.<sup>13</sup> Théberge telegraphed back to her on 5 October that Sattis had been paid. The government had been satisfied and the incident resolved.

The XXXIX Biennale in 1980 marked the 100th anniversary of the Biennale. For the National Gallery of Canada, its fourteenth event would open the final decade of this study with a radical turn from its past presentations, both in subject matter and in process. During the planning stages of the 1980 Biennale, Théberge was Curator of Contemporary Canadian Art at the National Gallery. His leaving suddenly in the summer of 1979 to take over as Director of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts saw his assistant, Bruce Ferguson, receive a contract to act as Commissioner for the 1980 Biennale.

More than a year before the 1980 exhibition, artists and media were under consideration. In a letter to Théberge, on 5 March 1979, Peggy Gale, video specialist and distributor, and Chantal Pontbriand, art critic, discussed the two days they had spent together considering "various possibilities of performance related work to be included in the National Gallery's 1980 exhibition."<sup>14</sup> Their three-page missive detailed, in its "central focus," the many facets that made up the world of video. Of the three names from the many on their list, Tom Sherman, Colin Campbell and Pierre Falardeau emerged as eventual finalists.

Ferguson, who wrote the text on video, was emphatic, in a recent interview, that during his short tenure at the Gallery he made a deliberate attempt to "work against the National Gallery way of expressing their own interest in what they had done." Ferguson would be the first Commissioner to adhere to the theme of any Biennale, which that year was "Art Systems Opposed to Accepted Art." Clearly he saw his mandate as compatible with the

theme in 1980. Ferguson had attended a preliminary meeting in Venice at which the theme had been chosen. His goal was to "change the nature" of the institutional attitudes and introduce "a new visibility."<sup>15</sup> Director Shih was assisted by another titled bureaucrat, Commissioner for Canada Joseph Martin. The titular change is noted from the honorific "Honourable" bestowed on Boggs in 1976.

For *Canada Video*, the 1980 Biennale presentation, Colin Campbell showed five tapes; Pierre Falardeau and Julien Poulin presented two tapes each as did General Idea (A. A. Bronson, Jorge Partz and Feliz Zontal). Tom Sherman showed three tapes and Lisa Steele, seven. The soft-cover catalogue, with a black and white TV image on the cover, contained 111 pages of description. The catalogue preface by Shih began:

In keeping with the theme proposed for the 1980 Venice Biennale---the so-called "rebellion of the younger generation" since 1968---Canada has chosen to present an art form which was developed within the last decade and which has already demonstrated a considerable creative strength. Video is a contemporary medium in its use of technological advances, in its situation within the life of our society, and in its philosophical approaches to aesthetics and cultural manifestations generally. As with all forms of art, video plays with visions of reality and illusion. Unlike most visual arts, however, video combines the artist, the work created and the viewer in an [sic] unified act. Detachment is all but impossible for video. It is in this sense that Marshall McLuhan's prediction of a "global village" may have been realized. Film and recording, the television and the radio are so ubiquitous in the contemporary world that their symbols and situations may be thought to be shared world-wide.

The National Gallery of Canada thanks the participants in this exhibition for their engagement with the ideals of liberation and truth.<sup>16</sup>

The standard beginning of the last sentence shifts into a final, almost politically idealistic phrase, which explains its inclusion here. This was the last catalogue preface to be written by Shih and it was noticeably more political than its 1978 counterpart had been.

Ferguson began his essay by acknowledging the support of video, by the Canada Council, since the late sixties. The Council had created a division devoted to the development of video within its Visual Arts Section. Ferguson's regret was that long-range consequences were not considered carefully, and that there had emerged a lack of interaction between the alternative and the institutional art systems, resulting in few venues which could present the medium.

The considerations for Ferguson in his selection of artists varied dramatically from those of the four previous Commissioners. Gender definitely affected his choice of Lisa Steele as video artist. Poulin and Falardeau were from Quebec, and offered a "different cultural consideration, an aesthetic out of Quebec," reiterating the polarity issue yet again. Colin Campbell and General Idea presented work of a sexual context. Campbell saw the idea of homosexuality emerging at this time as a valid contemporary art issue, and his work was responding to this, as was that of General Idea.<sup>17</sup>

Ferguson's view of detachment concerning video is challenged by the following examples of press coverage. In the longest sentence yet, in *The Times* of London on 3 June, John Russell Taylor penned "Venice Gathers Fragments of the Seventies":

The two commonwealth pavilions, Australia and Canada, both seem to be joining an avant garde which has now, mercifully been bypassed; both have tiresome performance artists (the silliest sight of the Biennale is a Canadian lady clad from head to thigh in a multi-coloured pagoda of Venetian blinds, roaming myopically round signifying heaven-knows-what) and the rest of the Canadian exhibit is given over to videotapes of paralysing boredom, which in my experience (extensive on both sides of the art/cinema divide) is just about all one can ever expect from this too easy medium.<sup>18</sup>

In a similarly negative vein, Barry Lord covered the event for the *Canadian Forum* with his "Visual Arts Video in Venice" (August 1980):

In 1980, the theme is "Art Systems Opposed to Accepted Art" but the state and private interests that control patronage in our part of the art world have developed more sophisticated means of support and control in the intervening years so that this summer Venice is able to absorb those who are supposed to be against it. And nowhere is this truer than in Canada's little pavilion. In 1968, Canada's Venice show featured some typical corporation art of the 60's, the hard-edged stripe paintings of Guido Molinari who refused to support the boycott and was awarded a minor prize in return. [In 1968, to support the worker and student uprising in France, Italian artists and students boycotted the 33rd Venice Biennale.] This year the National Gallery of Canada and our External Affairs department---notably assisted by Sony---are responding to the challenge of the theme by presenting six hours of video tapes produced by artists of the 70's. Video is the name given to television tapes when they're produced by people who call themselves artists. It has been developed as an art form almost entirely during the twelve years since 1968. More important, it is almost exclusively a product of the newer means of patronage, which in Canada means the Council. Through its direct grants to video artists, and through its support of parallel galleries and alternate spaces for both production and display of these tapes, the Canada Council has been the most consistent, often the sole, source of funds. As a result, video is hot house art. Conceived as a public form that would go beyond gallery walls, it has in fact lacked the vigour of any substantial contact with an audience.<sup>19</sup>



Thus, 1980 would not be a banner year for Canada, at least in terms of press reaction. Even Commissioner Ferguson regretted his selection of artist Tom Sherman, for he failed to live up to the promise as earlier seen by Ferguson.

In profound contrast to the controversial medium of video, painting was selected for the 1982 exhibition. It was curated by Canada's first female Commissioner of the Biennale, Jessica Bradley, Assistant Curator of Contemporary Art at the National Gallery. Although Joanna Woods Marsden had been the Co-ordinator for International Exhibitions from 1968 to 1976, a curatorial role was not part of her mandate. The XL Biennale was under the direction of Joseph Martin, Acting Director of the Gallery. Bradley chose Paterson Ewen to represent Canada, and nine paintings constituted the fourth solo-artist show, in the fifteenth Venice Biennale in which Canada had participated. The catalogue, with thirty-two pages with illustrations in colour, was of a similar size to that produced by Brydon Smith in 1970 for Michael Snow. Nine pages of trilingual text presented each Ewen work and an accompanying description.

Bradley was emphatic, in a recent interview, about her choice of Paterson Ewen as the artist for Canada. When asked if she would stand by her 1982 choice and still present Ewen, "Absolutely" was Bradley's reply. She wanted to show the best painter in Canada, and she sensed that there was a resurgence of painting within the art world. There were no written criteria to which she had to adhere regarding her selection. Considerations such as gender or culture did not affect her decision. Although there appeared to be no specific theme in 1982 to restrict her choice, she has since noted that in any case, "rarely would a theme be over-riding."<sup>20</sup>

Following the interview question whether a trip to Venice for the artist and the Commissioner come automatically with the selection, she replied, "It has to, the artist has to see the pavilion first. The installation is in a difficult space."<sup>21</sup> The cost of these trips was initially covered by the general budget of the National Gallery of Canada.

In the 1982 catalogue essay Bradley makes reference to the influence of Goodridge Roberts, one of the first Canadian Biennale artists, upon Ewen in the late forties in Montreal. The significant move of Ewen to London, Ontario, in 1968, where he was able to devote himself entirely to his art, is remarked upon as a turning point. His experimental technique, the fully formed images

in his mind which preclude preliminary drawings, the electric router used to make his lines, and the prevalence of nature in his œuvre, are all emphasized in Bradley's essay.

Ewen's Biennale presentation was noted by critic John Bentley Mays, in three pages of the *Globe and Mail*, on 12 June 1982. "Ewen Heads for the Top by Way of Venice---Artist's Vivid Works Canada's Only Representation of Chic Art Fair," claimed Mays:

And by the time the prestigious artfair closes chances are this London painter will be better known in Venice than he is here in his home and native land. Which is definitely not an example of the universe unfolding as it should. Aside from the odd appearance of his massive pigment plywood pieces in group shows Ewen has never been given a major retrospective. Yet at 57, he stands first and without peer among Canada's senior representational painters, and is certainly the most important living heir of the physically raw, vivid style of landscape depiction announced in Canada by the Group of Seven.<sup>22</sup>

Doug Bale, in the *London Free Press* (23 April 1982), took a populist approach, but wrote a piece with two factual errors: "Having a London artist in the Venice Biennale is roughly equivalent to having a London athlete in the Olympics. When Canada sends Paterson Ewen to Venice in June, he'll be our whole national team." Perhaps he didn't realize that both Curnoe and Martin had been from London. Bale listed thirteen male artists, but neglected Carr, Mayhew, Loring, et al.<sup>23</sup> Elsewhere, *Art in America* gave slight acknowledgement that "most of the other national exhibitions, except Canada's rough, sincere paintings by Paterson Ewen, show no departure from the modern past."<sup>24</sup> Paterson Ewen himself wrote to Bradley: "I have had much positive feedback from many sources most notably from Jean-Christophe Amman (the Lausanne critic), who phoned Carman Lamanna (his Toronto dealer) from Switzerland to say he felt my show was the best in the Biennale."<sup>25</sup>

Bradley, whose 1982 selection received mostly positive press, continued in 1984 as Commissioner. This procedure of successive commissioning was considered ideal by the Gallery, according to Brydon Smith.<sup>26</sup>

Correspondence between Bradley and Betty Goodwin, from 19 July until 2 August 1983, reveals and substantiates an important aspect of Bradley's criteria. Goodwin, a highly respected Montreal artist, was Bradley's first choice for the 1984 Biennale; however, previous commitments forced Goodwin to decline Bradley's offer. In a letter to Goodwin, Bradley states:

I had no interest or intention to choose 'women' artists. Choice is based first on looking closely at a lot of work over the past years, secondly on the belief that you, as a senior artist, have reached an important point in your work that should be seen and better known.... Liz [Magor], as a more junior artist, has begun to make significant work that evolves from the past decade. I believe you deserve the honour and the exposure Venice gives.<sup>27</sup>

Thus the XLI 1984 Biennale, the 16th for Canada, saw Ian Carr-Harris and Liz Magor, two sculptors chosen by Bradley. Carr-Harris was from Victoria originally, and Liz Magor from Winnipeg. This would mark the first time two western artists were chosen, in strong contrast to the traditional Montreal-Toronto bias. However, at the time of this event they were both producing their art in Toronto. The catalogue preface, by Joseph Martin, stated that:

Although their work differs considerably, both address issues related to the nature of our existence, such as knowledge and identity, creating distinctive physical structures for representing temporal and cognitive processes. Each has developed a personal and original approach to the use of objects, images, narrative structure, and language. By questioning how these function together to convey meaning, Ian Carr-Harris and Liz Magor are engaged in concerns that are central to today's art.<sup>28</sup>

In a letter to Bradley (17 April 1984) months before the opening of the Biennale, Carr-Harris referred to the earlier issue of the commercial aspect of

the Biennale---the selling of works of art presented at the exhibition. In an articulate and reasoned discourse on the problems of pricing Canadian art, he questioned the method of pricing his art.<sup>29</sup> This is included here as an additional, personal consideration by the artists selected for the Biennale. Their concern for remuneration from galleries (including the National Gallery), private owners and dealers was justifiable. For five pages, Carr-Harris analyzed the market forces which complicate the selling of art in Canada. Essentially, "There is no 'real' market for 'serious' art in Canada," replied Bradley, on 31 July, "...yet unfortunately to some extent it is perhaps the generosity of our institutions that perpetuates the dangerous illusion that there is at least an 'unreal' market, setting up false competition and concomitant prices."<sup>30</sup> Any art sales that did take place throughout the history of Canada's participation in the Biennale did so solely through the artists' dealers and neither involved Commissioners nor resulted in profit for the National Gallery.

Bradley introduced the work of Magor and Carr-Harris in a brown, soft-cover catalogue fifty-eight pages long. Many reproductions of the artists' works were included in this small trilingual edition, along with full biographical data:

Familiar objects, and multi-media formats were some of the elements used by Canadian artists Liz Magor and Ian Carr-Harris in their production of sculptures that both question and reconstruct one's perception of reality.... Liz Magor and Ian Carr-Harris pose implicit questions about the role of art and the artist, whether by investigation of the socially encoded structures of language and media imagery, or through personal interpretation of experience and analysis of the record of consciousness that memory is.<sup>31</sup>

When discussing this particular Biennale, Bradley expressed the opinion that a guide for her during the selection of artists was photo-based art. The identity of self, and of issues around the feminine, as they emerged in the mature work of both artists, clearly informed her selection of Carr-Harris and Magor.<sup>32</sup> Bradley hoped that the exhibition would be critically popular; but the review published in the 2 July 1984 edition of *Maclean's* magazine was not

what she had in mind. Lisa Balfour Bowen, *Maclean's* art critic, again caused considerable consternation with her harsh review. Christopher Youngs, who had written for *artscanada*, and who by that time was a gallery owner, was incensed. Youngs wrote a letter on 4 July 1984 to the editor of *Maclean's*:

Your art review concerning the Canadian contribution to the Venice Biennale is inane and inaccurate. When a commercial dealer, Nicoline Pen, is quoted as stating: 'The kind of art the Canadians are showing this year means nothing to us. It is a terrible waste of money,' it is clear that her perceptions of art are clouded with a focus on the commercial potential of a product rather than a consideration for the aesthetic issues which may be raised.

Youngs justifiably went on to challenge the facts used as inaccurate, irresponsible and damaging.<sup>33</sup>

Bradley, in a letter to Liz Magor on 19 July, wrote: "Lisa Balfour Bowen deserves to be strung up for her weak but damaging piece of spurious 'reporting.' I have an urge to make the editorial policy of *Maclean's* public, but it would only sound like sour grapes coming from me."<sup>34</sup> Magor's response, written later from her father's home in Qualicum, British Columbia, was evidence of the reactions the *Maclean's* piece had provoked: shock, anger, sleepless nights, anxiety, and vulnerability. "Canada in this regard can be so pathetic and self-destructive."<sup>35</sup>

Bradley, however, was adamant regarding the benefits of our nation's attendance at the Biennale. Although she allowed that Documenta was the premier art fair, Venice was unique, despite its problems: "The Venice Biennale was, until recent years, a great exhibition and a great occasion," she wrote to Betty Goodwin on 19 July 1983. For Bradley, "the most difficult thing is our own pavilion which is an absurdly irregular octagonal-shaped, late fifties structure resembling a tee-pee with a courtyard that supposedly conforms to the shape of the maple leaf!"<sup>36</sup>

Press coverage of the 1984 show includes a review from England, where the exhibition travelled after the Biennale ended in October. This pattern of showing the same art in two different locations had already been seen in 1976 and 1978. Robin Dutt, of *Artline*, reviewed the 1984 Canada House event:

This is an unusual and highly original exhibition which certainly makes a welcome change from the 'boxed assortments' syndrome of a few months back. While complementing each other's work well, Carr-Harris and Magor do not forget the importance of contrast either. Ian Carr-Harris is what one might call an electronic installation maker. Sculpture seems too grand and inaccurate a term for it.<sup>37</sup>

The XLII Biennale of 1986, Canada's 17th, is the final exhibition to be treated in this thesis. It was also the last to which the National Gallery of Canada sent a Commissioner, and at which the Gallery was in charge of the exhibition. The Commissioner was Diana Nemiroff, Assistant Curator of Contemporary Art. She presented Melvin Charney and Krzysztof Wodiczko, whose *œuvres* were linked together by architectural concerns. Gallery Director Joseph Martin was again the Commissioner for Canada. Nemiroff oversaw the production of the 132-page catalogue, with an intriguing horizontally split cover, illustrated with both colour and black and white photographs.

A journalist's preview was written, almost a year before the event, by local art critic Nancy Baele, for the *Ottawa Citizen*. On 6 September 1985 Baele proclaimed "Art Rebels Win Venice Showing." She quoted Nemiroff as saying, "The Venice Biennale is becoming an aging dowager due to poor administration, insufficient funding, and inefficient organization on the part of the Italian directorate...; [but] there are still enough high quality shows in the 33 foreign pavilions to make it an important international platform for Canadian artists."<sup>38</sup> The Biennale then cost Canada about \$60,000, with \$45,000 coming from the National Gallery of Canada budget and the remaining \$15,000 paid by External Affairs. Baele's reference to External Affairs reveals that Department's increased additional financial support to the Biennale, a change from its earlier, more modest hosting of diplomatic and ceremonial functions. This monetary assistance could be read as a greater recognition of the importance of the arts by the government department.

As the first Biennale in 1952 began with a preface by the Director of the National Gallery, so did the final one in 1986: "Both artists try to situate architecture in space---Charney in a social context and Wodiczko in a

bureaucratic and political one. In addition, their artistic comments on 'built' things seek to depict the lives of human beings in the urban landscape."<sup>39</sup>

Charney exhibited a construction conceived especially for the Biennale, built partly in Canada and partly on-site at the pavilion. This necessitated a preliminary trip to Venice in May of 1985, which in turn resulted in a lyrical, six-page essay treating the historic origins of the Biennale's location as the former site of "convents and monasteries demolished to make way for the series of leafy bowers arranged along a boulevard-like axis. Unfortunately, this intriguing document was not used in the catalogue. During his trip Charney met "the interesting woman" Marietta Stern-Guetta, and expressed surprise at the curious location of the building in a corner by the basement of the British tea-room.<sup>40</sup> The problem confronting the artist--architect Charney was how to reclaim the pavilion, itself a construct of a gallery of art, "dredged" out of a grove of trees, in a forgotten corner of the public gardens, into "the elements of a city, based on the structure of concentration camps built in World War II by the Third Reich."<sup>41</sup>

Nemiroff's essay in the 1986 catalogue raises the debate about the role of public art. Can broadly meaningful public art that is also artistically viable be achieved?: "At issue is the failure of modernism to address the problem of art's place in the forum of public discourse." She claimed:

Both Charney and Wodiczko question the monument; Charney in an effort to recover what has been excluded from representation and Wodiczko in order to reveal what has been concealed. Architecture is the common link; each artist investigates the meanings of architectural language, both overt and symbolic and covert and ideological. As well, each uses existing buildings or monuments as the focus of work that is site-specific and ephemeral.<sup>42</sup>

Nemiroff describes how both Charney and Wodiczko situate their work in relationship to the social space of the street by affirming its collective rituals in the face of a hypnotic will-to-forget, manifest in the bland architecture of the contemporary city. She sees Charney's constructions as a kind of excavation into the city's unconscious. Of the controversial choice of Wodiczko, a Polish-born artist working in New York with only tangential ties

to the Canadian art community, she wrote: "Since 1980 Wodiczko's instrument has been the public projection, a large-scale evanescent montage of image and architecture conducted outdoors and at night while the everyday functions of the buildings are suspended. With the aid of powerful Xenon-arc slide projectors, images that speak the unspeakable language of power are beamed onto the sleeping body of a building whose ideological meaning the artist seeks to divest of its mystery."<sup>43</sup>

A goodly amount of press coverage emanated from the 1986 Canadian presentation at the Venice Biennale. In the *Globe and Mail* on 26 July 1986, art critic Carole Corbeil quoted Charney as saying, "I am not interested in awards. The drama for me is trying to work in a country that really doesn't back up its artists. This is the only country in the world where dealers are running after people of other countries."<sup>44</sup> Charney's plaint articulates the bittersweet polemic, from critic and citizen alike, ensuing over almost fifty years, regarding art sent to Venice. Canadians, in other words, are not seen to support their artists. Criticism appears too often to be the prevailing reaction towards their works presented abroad. Corbeil catches Charney in a revealing mood. His description of the pavilion as "the black hole of Calcutta, dark, dank and damp," is nothing if not alliterative. Despite these shortcomings, he went on to say he did not need ideal conditions to create good work. His criticism of the pavilion published in *Parachute* was used by Corbeil: his solution to the limitations of the pavilion was to create a cluster of columns that reflected a nearby grove of trees that connoted a sacred grove. This column continued into the pavilion as if the pavilion was simply not there. Inside Charney created a kind of banquet scene with tables and chairs, which acted as a model of the city. "I used the pavilion's quality to present a kind of sacred cave, a sanctuary in that dark opening."<sup>45</sup>

Wodiczko was the only artist in the Biennale to step out of the grounds, to comment on Venice itself. In five works, Wodiczko explored the relationship between terrorism and tourism, an apt theme when one considers the U.S. attack on Libya that spring and how American tourists stayed away from Europe during the summer. Corbeil continued her review with political/art references and their relationship with military conquests and tourism.<sup>46</sup> This *Globe* article prompted a reply by Nemiroff, which, she lamented, "unfortunately ... was cut, making it milder than I originally wrote it and omitting the general references to Canadian 'masochism.'"<sup>47</sup>



A second Canadian journalist who toured the Biennale scene that summer was no stranger to Venice. Lisa Balfour Bowen, still writing for *Macleans*, under the title: "New World Artists at the Frontier" (14 July 1986), presented a startling photo of "Wodiczko's Projections on Venice ... the Arsenale: risk, shock, images of chains." And, forty-four years after the first presentation of Canadian art at the Biennale, Balfour Bowen proclaimed that:

Canada is developing a risk-taking reputation in international art circles. For the past few years the National Gallery of Canada curators have selected difficult, even perplexing works to represent the country at the Venice Biennale.... Both [Charney and Wodiczko] stand out among the conventional paintings and sculpture that predominate in the exhibitions from 39 other participating countries. Charney's works make an impact the minute the visitors see the awkward, wigwam-like Canadian pavilion. The artist has transformed the building's appearance by erecting 11 tall rough-hewn wooden columns outside and inside the pavilion. They make an arresting entrance to the wood installation in the pavilion interior.... Several hundred tourists passed through St. Mark's square while the projections took place, and their reactions ranged from bemused to confused. Indeed both Wodiczko and Charney drew complaints that their work was obscure.<sup>48</sup>

Balfour Bowen concluded: "No other country at the Biennale is doing anything like this. But so far, for art lovers, in the city of canals, the shock of the new has scarcely made a ripple."<sup>49</sup> Alan Bowness, Director of London's Tate Gallery, agreed with Balfour Bowen. A member of the Biennale's international panel, Bowness said he felt Charney's work would win few friends for Canadian art. But Daniel Buren, whose installation won a 1986 jury prize for the French pavilion, described the Canadian offerings as "very original and more ambitious than most."

Daniel Soutif singled out the success of the Canadian choices described in "Une Biennale sous anesthésie" in the Paris newspaper *Libération*, on 1 July 1986:

La quarante-deuxième édition consacre la fin des mouvements qui firent, récemment encore, l'actualité du monde de l'art. Exeunt les anachronistes et les néo-expressionistes de tout poil. Maurizio Calvesi, directeur de la Biennale, section arts plastiques, explique pourquoi. "Au chapitre des petites découvertes, malgré la position peu enviable du pavillon canadien coincé entre le Britannique et le Germanique, les fouineurs se seront certainement laissés ravir par la poésie de l'installation de Melvin Charney et par la séduction de ses dessins."<sup>50</sup>

Thus ended the last exhibition at the Biennale under the complete direction of the National Gallery of Canada. In 1988 the new building designed by Moshe Safdie on Sussex Drive, under the new Director, Dr. Shirley Thomson, opened. The decision to transfer the selection process for the Venice Biennale came from several directions. Other art institutions in Canada had harboured some resentment for the total authority vested in the National Gallery and its staff to control the artists representing their country in Venice. Gallery officials, including Brydon Smith and Diana Nemiroff, felt the time had come to share this prestigious responsibility. Following a change in policy, the Department of External Affairs, the National Gallery and the Canada Council organized a competition to which other art institutions could submit their suggestions for the 1988 Biennale. The National Gallery would continue to allow the use of the pavilion and would offer the expertise acquired over the years.

In 1988, the proposal by France Gascon of two artists, Roland Brenner and Michael Goulet, was selected, with assistance from the Musée d'Art contemporain de Montreal and Galerie René Blouin. In 1990 Chantal Pontbriand selected Montreal artist Genevieve Cadieux, assisted by the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts and Galerie René Blouin. In 1993 Robin Collyer, after winning the competition, became, under the aegis of the Art Gallery of Ontario and Commissioner Philip Monk, a recent Canadian participant at the Venice Biennale. Edward Poitras was the solo artist during the 1995 exhibition to represent Canada during the current Biennale which ends in October.

## Endnotes

### Chapter IV: The Devolution

1. Pierre Théberge to Marietta Stern-Guetta, 12 October 1977.
2. Pierre Théberge, interview with the author, National Gallery of Canada, 19 January 1995.
3. Pierre Théberge to Robert Jordan, 20 April 1978.
4. Shih, "Report," *National Gallery of Canada Bulletin*, 1978-79, 15.
5. Pierre Théberge, preface to *Canada: Ron Martin, Henry Saxe: XXXVIII Biennale di Venezia*.
6. Peter Perrin, "Henry Saxe," *artscanada* (April/May 1978): 56.
7. Juliana Borsa, "Ron Martin and Henry Saxe in New York and at the Venice Biennale," *Artmagazine* 25 (September/October 1978): 27.
8. *Ibid.*, 25.
9. Michael Shepherd, "More of Venice," *Sunday Telegraph* (London), 9 July 1978.
10. John Russell, "Houses, Nudes and a Clue to the Biennale," *New York Times*, 18 March 1978.
11. *Ibid.*
12. Pierre Théberge to Marietta Stern-Guetta, telegram, 2 November 1978.
13. Marietta Stern-Guetta to Pierre Théberge, 15 August 1978.
14. Peggy Gale and Chantal Pontbriand to Pierre Théberge, 5 March 1979.
15. Bruce Ferguson, interview with author, 26 February 1995.
16. Shih, preface to *Canada: Ron Martin, Henry Saxe: XXXVIII Biennale di Venezia*, 3.
17. Bruce Ferguson, interview with author, 26 February 1995.
18. John Russell Taylor, "Venice Gathers Fragments of the Seventies," *The Times* (London), 3 June 1980.

19. Barry Lord, "Visual Arts Video in Venice," *Canadian Forum* (August 1980): 41.
20. Jessica Bradley, interview with author, 16 December 1994.
21. Ibid.
22. John Bentley Mays, "Ewen Heads for the Top by Way of Venice--Artist's Vivid Works Canada's Only Representation of Chic Art Fair," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), 12 June 1982.
23. Doug Bale, "Venice Biennale 'Olympics' of Art World," *London Free Press*, 23 April 1982.
24. "National Pavilions," *Art in America Special Issue: Europe '82*: 37.
25. Paterson Ewen note to Jessica Bradley, 13 July 1982.
26. Although as policy it was unofficial, consensus was that the first year brought fresh ideas, while in the second year the Commissioner had valuable experience.
27. Betty Goodwin--Jessica Bradley correspondence, 19 July--2 August 1983.
28. Joseph Martin, preface to *Ian Carr-Harris: Canada XLI Biennale di Venezia 1984*: Liz Magor.
29. Ian Carr-Harris to Jessica Bradley, 17 April 1984.
30. Jessica Bradley to Ian Carr-Harris, 31 July 1984.
31. Jessica Bradley, introduction to *Ian Carr-Harris: Canada XLI Biennale di Venezia 1984*: Liz Magor.
32. Jessica Bradley, interview with author, 16 December 1994.
33. Christopher Youngs to *Maclean's*, 4 July 1984.
34. Jessica Bradley to Liz Magor, 19 July 1984.
35. Liz Magor to Jessica Bradley, Autumn 1984. In an interview, Bruce Ferguson has recently articulated almost the same sentiments: Canadians' lack of confidence, their criticism of art which is not traditional, their almost endemic need to castigate their own---these are troubling qualities in an ambitious nation attempting to position itself to the world.

36. Jessica Bradley to Betty Goodwin, 19 July 1983.
37. Robin Dutt, *Artline* 2, no. 6 (January/February 1984).
38. Nancy Baele, "Art Rebels Win Venice Showing," *Ottawa Citizen*, 6 September 1985.
39. Joseph Martin, preface to *Canada XLII Biennale di Venezia 1986: Melvin Charney and Krzysztof Wodiczko*.
40. Melvin Charney, National Gallery of Canada text for Venice Biennale, May 1985.
41. Melvin Charney to Diana Nemiroff, 22 May 1985.
42. Diana Nemiroff, introduction to *Canada: XLII Biennale di Venezia 1986: Melvin Charney and Krzysztof Wodiczko*, 12.
43. *Ibid.*, 22.
44. Carole Corbeil, "Contemporary Artists Abroad," *Globe and Mail*, 26 July 1986.
45. *Ibid.*
46. *Ibid.*
47. Diana Nemiroff, 1986.
48. Lisa Balfour Bowen, "New World Artists at the Frontier," *Maclean's*, 14 July 1986.
49. *Ibid.*
50. Daniel Soutif, "Une Biennale sous anesthésie," *Libération* (Paris), 1 July 1986: 29.

## Conclusion

To frame a conclusion to this review of the chronicles of the National Gallery of Canada at the Venice Biennale is to tangle with paradox. There were a myriad of strands braided within this fifty-year presentation. Artists, curators, bureaucrats, journalists, citizens, egos, identities, careers, ideas, aspirations, rejections---all became pieces of the entity. In completing this examination, a summation of the facts needs to be presented from which an overall pattern is discernible.

The source of these facts mainly derive from the archival collection, the Fonds of the National Gallery of Canada. This massive assortment, more than six linear feet, comprises files gathered from other government ministries which in the past had peripheral association with the Biennale in Venice. The material includes reports and personal correspondence with the full range of people involved in the various exhibitions, and those from the Department of Communications, Treasury Board, Secretary of State, and External Affairs, as well as press clippings from newspapers, magazines, periodicals and books. The artist-files at the National Gallery offered biographical data on the individual participants at the Biennale.

The Canadian Conference of the Arts had its own file on Canadian participation at the Biennale. With regret, in 1994, Director Keith Kelly had the responsibility of disposing, due to lack of storage space, of this entire collection. I have not consulted publications outside the Fonds collection, as my primary concern has been to reflect on the archival holdings of the governing institution.

This thesis presents a reading of Canadian twentieth-century cultural identity, as it developed through the presentation of Canadian art in a particular context. Patently obvious was the enormous growth within the bureaucratic infrastructure of the National Gallery of Canada. From the informal note by H. O. McCurry introducing this yet untitled member of its staff, D. W. Buchanan, to the Biennale authorities, through to the current phalanx of commissioners, curatorial and administrative staff, honorary commissioners for Canada and public relations people, one could say civil servant tropism appeared.

If "a young nation is sensitive to what is said of her abroad," then we had little to fear. In so far as international reaction to Canadian art went, there

was a dearth of reportage, which, when examined through the global microscope, says merely what is a common truth: that is, that we are always more interested in what we know, rather than in what we do not. Yet, the scant verbiage generated from afar was rather less critical than our own Canadian press, and about as well informed.

The polarities referred to in the text began with the English/French paradigm, and continued with the marked split of opinion about the Canadian pavilion in 1958. This same division developed within the press. In retrospect, there were two strongly opinionated sides, one supporting the art and the pavilion, and the other opposing both.

In reading the Canadian coverage of the Venice Biennale, several early unidentified critics, along with Lisa Balfour Bowen, Theodore Heinrich and Barrie Hale, are memorable for their negative reactions. They shared a general reluctance as journalists and art critics to commit, to commend and to compliment. More gratifying is the fact that the justifiably supportive Harry Malcolmson, John Bentley Mays, Robert Ayre, Kay Kritzwiser and Carole Corbeil outnumber them.

On the international scene, Robert Melville, Robin Dutt, Daniel Soutif, David Sylvester, Sylvia Sprigge and John Russell, through their salutary writing, counter Giles Waterfield's negative position. However, as only the press material located in the Fonds was examined, other opinions might well have been published.

The National Gallery of Canada participated in seventeen Venice Biennales, from 1952 until 1986. Eventually the hegemony of the National Gallery gave way to the demands of other Canadian art institutions that they be allowed to organize the Biennale. Emily Carr in 1952 would be the first of six women artists and the first of two from the West. Elza Mayhew in 1964 was the second westerner. Anne Kahane, in 1958, and Frances Loring, in 1960, waited for two decades before posterity linked them with Lisa Steele in 1980 and Liz Magor in 1984 as members of the group of six Canadian women chosen to represent Canada in Venice. One could say that gender equality started out and finished strongly but was neglected in the middle years.

Quebec, in particular Montreal, saw eighteen of its citizens---from Roberts in 1952 through to Pellan, Borduas, Riopelle, Archambault, de Tonnancour, Morrice, Kahane, Alleyn, Lemieux, Dumouchel, Gaucher,

Molinari, Comtois, Poulin, Falardeau and Charney---exhibit. Riopelle twice showed in Venice, in 1954 and again in 1962.

From Ontario came twelve artists in total, primarily from Toronto. The National Gallery Commissioners chose Milne, Town, Coughtry, Loring, Etrog, Snow, Iskowitz and Carr-Harris for Biennale participation. London was represented by Curnoe, Ewen and Martin. Alex Colville was the sole representative of the Maritimes (1966). Binning, Shadbolt, A. A. Bronson and Magor from British Columbia, and Campbell and Partz from Manitoba were the artists chosen from Western Canada, although Partz and Bronson worked in Toronto with General Idea.

This year, 1995, Canada introduces for the first time a First Nations' artist from Saskatchewan, Edward Poitras, an important and overdue inclusion. The third option, a purely Canadian form perceived decades ago, can now be said to have been completed.



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APPENDIX

NATIONAL GALLERY OF CANADA PARTICIPATION AT THE VENICE BIENNALE  
1952--1986

		<u>(NGC Director)</u>
XXVI	1952 Commissioner: H. O. McCurry	H. O. McCurry
	Emily Carr                      4 paintings	
	David Milne                     8 paintings	
	Goodridge Roberts            5 paintings	
	Alfred Pellan                 5 paintings	
	Site: Giardini central pavilion	
	Text by Hubbard	
XXVII	1954 Commissioner: R. H. Hubbard	H. O. McCurry
	Paul-Emile Borduas          4 paintings	
	Jean-Paul Riopelle            5 paintings	
	Bertram C. Binning          4 paintings	
	Theme: Non-objective surrealism (Artium portus)	
	Text by R. H. Hubbard	
XXVIII	1956 Commissioner: Alan Jarvis	Alan Jarvis
	Asst. Commissioner: D. W. Buchanan	
	(Deputy Director, NGC)	
	One sheet folded, illustrated, bilingual, by Alan Jarvis	
	Louis Archambault          6 sculptures	
	Jack Shadbolt                 7 ink sketches	
	Harold Town                  11 lithographs	
XXIX	1958 Commissioner: Alan Jarvis	Alan Jarvis
	Asst. Commissioner: D. W. Buchanan	
	Jacques de Tonnancour      11 paintings	
	J. W. Morrice                 22 paintings	
	Jack Nichols                 7 lithographs	
	Anne Kahane                 1 5-piece sculpture	
	<i>Canadian Pavilion opened</i>	
	Four-page folded sheet, illustrated, bilingual, by Alan Jarvis	



- XXXV 1970 Commissioners: Brydon Smith and Joanna Woods Marsden Jean S. Boggs  
 Michael Snow 13 works, 3 films  
 Catalogue -- 52 pages, illustrated, trilingual  
 Text by Brydon Smith
- XXXVI 1972 Commissioners: Brydon Smith and Joanna Woods Marsden Jean S. Boggs  
 Gershon Iskowitz 8 paintings  
 Walter Redinger 8-piece sculpture (at the Doges Palace)  
 Catalogue -- 32 loose pages, illustrated  
 Text by Brydon Smith
- 1974 NO BIENNALE - POSTPONED Jean S. Boggs
- XXXVII 1976 Commissioners: Pierre Théberge and Joanna Woods Marsden Jean S. Boggs  
 Greg Curnoe 8 paintings  
 Catalogue -- 168 pages, illustrated, trilingual  
 Text by Pierre Théberge
- XXXVIII 1978 Commissioner: Pierre Théberge Dr. Hsio Yen-Shih  
 Ron Martin 9 paintings, 2 objects  
 Henry Saxe 4 sculptures  
 Catalogue -- 168 pages, illustrated, trilingual  
 Text by Pierre Théberge, Ron Martin and Henry Saxe
- 100th Anniversary for the National Gallery of Canada*
- XXXIX 1980 Commissioner for Canada: Joseph Martin Hsio Yen-Shih  
 Commissioner for exhibition: Bruce Ferguson  
 Commissioner Curator and Text: Bruce Ferguson  
 Colin Campbell 5 tapes  
 Pierre Falardeau  
 & Julien Poulin 2 tapes  
 Tom Sherman 3 tapes  
 "General Idea" 2 tapes  
 (Georges Zontal, A. A. Bronson, Felix Partz)  
 Lisa Steele 7 tapes  
 Catalogue -- 111 pages, illustrated

- XI. 1982 Commissioner for Canada: Joseph Martin  
 Commissioner for exhibition: Jessica Bradley  
 (Curator of Contemporary Art) Joseph Martin  
 (A/Dir.)
- Paterson Ewen 9 paintings  
 Catalogue -- 32 pages, illustrated, colour
- XLI 1984 Commissioner for Canada: Joseph Martin  
 Commissioner for exhibition: Jessica Bradley  
 (Curator of Contemporary Art) Joseph Martin
- Ian Carr-Harris 3 sculptures  
 Liz Magor 3 sculptural installations  
 Catalogue -- 58 pages, illustrated, trilingual
- XI.II 1986 Commissioner for Canada: Joseph Martin  
 Commissioner for exhibition: Diana Nemiroff Joseph Martin
- Melvin Charney architectural installation  
 Krzysztof Wodiczko architectural projections  
 Catalogue -- 132 pages, illustrated, trilingual