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his Skirmish with the National Gallery's Poster Boys

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PHILIP SURREY, ARTIST: A NEWSLETTER
FOR COLLECTORS
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T.F.R.

Editor's Note:

This double issue of the Newsletter grew out of my visits to the “Colours of Jazz” exhibition of works by the Beaver Hall Group and study of the exhibition’s catalogue: Surrey, it seems, learned a few lessons from some of the women painters in that group that ought to be acknowledged. Unlike any number of his contemporaries, he cared more about *good painting* than about the gender, religion or race of the painter. That said, he also realized far earlier than many in the art world that the very opposition some women faced and fought against gave their works a richness of colour and strength in design that led to an expansiveness of imaginative perception that ought to have been encouraged and celebrated more than it was when it was created in the 1920s and when it could have contributed so much to the morale of servicemen during World War II and so enriched the imaginative life of school children during the Cold War.

Thinking about this led, inevitably, to a reconsideration of the Sampson-Matthews poster project. Surprised by the looks of utter incomprehension whenever I mentioned this self-proclaimed “Great Art Project” that “Helped Canada Discover Itself” that Surrey regarded as more boondoggle than blessing, it seemed worthwhile carrying my reflections forward and republishing his article “Silk Screen Prints Enlist.” There’s more to be said (than I’ve found room for here) about Surrey’s relationships with John Lyman, The Eastern

Group of Painters and The Contemporary Arts Society on the one hand and his wartime work as a journalist on the other: I'm already at work on it.

**Surrey and the Women of Beaver Hall who Emboldened his Skirmish with the
National Gallery's Poster Boys**
By T.F. Rigelhof

Unlike those of deeper musical intelligence, I'm rarely plagued by "ear worms" – fragments of melody that get stuck in the head on a recurrent loop – but whenever I glance at my copy of *The Beaver Hall Group: 1920s Modernism in Montreal* (edited by Jacques des Rochers and Brian Foss, Montreal Museum of Fine Art/Black Dog Publishing 2015), I hear "You are Too Beautiful." The catalogue accompanying the "Colours of Jazz" exhibition of works by the Beaver Hall Group of painters (at The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts October 24, 2015—January 31, 2016; the Art Gallery of Hamilton February 20—May 8, 2016; Art Gallery of Windsor June 24—October 2, 2016; Glenbow Museum, Calgary October 22—January 29, 2017) inevitably triggers the opening verse of the rendition of Richard Rogers' and Lorenz Hart's ballad by Johnny Hartman with the John Coltrane Quartet recorded by Impulse! in 1963 and not Al Jolson's film serenade to Madge Evans in *Hallelujah, I'm a Bum* (1933).

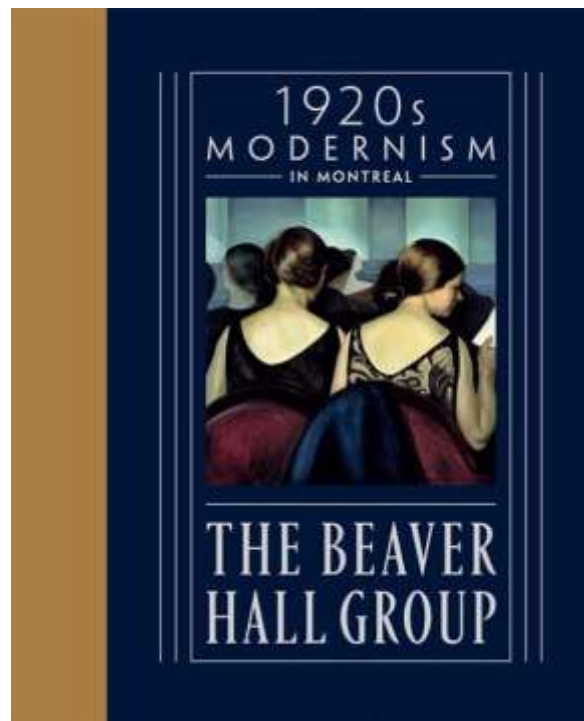
Hartman defined himself as "an interpreter of love songs" rather than "a jazz singer" and his recording with Coltrane is likely the best jazz album by a non-jazz vocal artist in the second half of the twentieth century because (unlike Sinatra) he's believable in every word he sings. So when he tells a woman that she is too beautiful to be true and he is such a fool for beauty that he remains faithful because of her beauty and not out of a sense of duty even when he knows she might not be as faithful to him, you know he's not *living*. Nor is Coltrane in his cadenza: fun may be free for all but beauty is a rare thing. Happily, it was less rare in Canadian art of the first third of the twentieth century than most of us know, misled as we are by the narrow nationalism, paternalism and poster art of A.Y. Jackson and his fellow woodsmen. If des Rochers's and Foss's catalogue is now one of the loveliest objects of my bookshelves, *Art for War and Peace: How a Great Art Project Helped Canada Discover Itself* by Ian Sigvaldson and Scott Steedmans (Red Leaf, 2015)

a catalogue of the A.Y. Jackson—National Gallery—Sampson-Mathews posters is –no contest – the least attractive. As Douglas Coupland, the most widely known of its contributors says, “The prints are homely and slightly spooky – haunted almost. And from each of them we can glean sixteen colour palettes that are remarkable time capsules of the industrial aesthetic of ... whichever year in which a print was created.” He’s spot on but he’d not have been thanked for saying so at the time of their production in industrial quantities.

Part I

Jazz ~ Red Hot and Green:

Some Women of Beaver Hall



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The Beaver Hall Group, as such, was short-lived (1920 to 1923). Their formal association arose from and gave birth to alliances among painters in Montreal that survived into the Depression (and others that didn't) and contributed more toward a broader conception of figurative Modernism than the "untamed landscapes" of the Group of Seven: Beaver Hall artists embraced *all* the public and intimate worlds they inhabited. The "Colours of Jazz" exhibition is so intense and complex, it calls for more visits than most will manage (especially if it draws the crush of people elsewhere that it did in Montreal).

At first glance, titling the show "The Colours of Jazz" might seem a promotional gimmick since it isn't powered by images most frequently associated with "the jazz age" – flappers and fast cars and speakeasies – but, this is the real deal, the era as experienced in person through the eyes of visually aware Montrealers rather than Hollywood flunkies fantasizing. And there's a precedent: "the jazz wall", a row of "portraits in bright colors against astonishing backgrounds" presented at the Art Association's Spring Exhibition of 1922 by some of the artists now re-presented. The *Montreal Daily Star's* art critic, S. Morgan Powell, who summed the wall up in those words, dismissed it as "an exhibition of posters, minus the originality" and concluded that the creators were "the outcome of the influence exerted upon the students by Mr. R.S. Hewton, Art Director of the Association." (March 27, 1922) Albert Laberge, writing in *La Presse* a few days earlier (March 22, 1922), subtitled his very positive review "Femmes en evidence" and used the jazz metaphor effectively:

"Loud, brilliant, glaring colours . . . dominate and triumph . . . The aim is not harmonious tones but colours that dazzle like the screech of a trumpet . . . The impression these colours create is similar to the feeling when a certain kind of jazz, transported, furiously flings out its most resounding, noisy, piercing notes." (p225)

Laberge admitted to surprise at their charm and at the fact that the boldest, most powerful and original works were by women. He singled out Nora Collyer, Mabel May, Mabel Lockerby, Hortense Douglas, Isobel Wight and Benedicta (Rita) Mount and, two days later, added Sarah Robertson and Liliás Torrance Newton in another piece for the same paper.

The Beaver Hall Group in its entirety was about the size of Paul “the King of Jazz” Whiteman’s Orchestra but had a degree of gender collaboration unrivalled by any other professional artists’ organization in North America in that era: in 1921, for instance, 11 men and eight women contributed to the first Beaver Hall exhibition; ultimately, the group had 14 male and 15 female participants. Like Whiteman’s bands, Beaver Hall was eclectic and included both classical (academic) and independent (modern) members. Surrey was as indifferent (I suspect) to the group as a whole as I know he was to Paul Whiteman’s musical crew. When it came to jazz, Surrey was an aficionado of Red Nichols and his Five Pennies (*aka* The Hottentots, We Three, etc) a “Chamber Jazz” ensemble (generally an octet or nonet) with a cool somewhat detached, yet urban and sophisticated sound that often borrowed players such as the violinist Joe Venuti, the guitarist Eddie Lang, the trombone player Jack Teagarden from the Whiteman Orchestra for recording dates. It was their music that Surrey played on his gramophone while he painted in the studio apartment he rented on Bishop Street from the last quarter of 1937 through the first half of 1939 and it was the female artists of Beaver Hall who were neither academic painters nor commercial illustrators that he found attractive – the same group that Esther Trépanier (best known as the author of *The Jewish Painters of Montreal 1930-1948* (Montreal 1987) concentrates her attention upon in her contribution to the catalogue “The Beaver Hall Group: A Montreal Modernity.” Because her study is shaped by the question “How do these artists works, in the context of the 1920s, illustrate a form of modernity peculiar to Montreal?”, I find it the most compelling of the 8 contributed.

Trépanier states that it’s not possible to determine which paintings occupied that “the jazz wall” and makes her own selection of works that illustrate what she (rightly) considers to be principal examples of Randolph Hewton’s, Edwin Holgate’s and Adrien Hébert’s influences upon works by Emily Coonan, Liliias Torrance Newton, and Prudence Heward. Her aim is “to show that the primary goal of the exploration of the human figure by these artists during the 1920s was *not the representation of reality, but pictorial unity.*” [my italics] By spurning the tonal blending beloved by academicians in favour of powerful contrasting colours and by redefining figure-ground relationships between powerful human subjects and simplified, flattened background these women sought to create remarkable chromatic and compositional unities that have a closer relationship to European expressionism than to North American social realism. Both Emily Coonan Text (except as noted) © 2015 T.F. Rigelhof Surrey Images © Nicholas Simpson

and Liliás Torrance Newton were particularly adept at exploring reds and greens as complementary contrasts. Through close analysis of such works as Hewton's portrait of *Audrey Buller* (1924), Holgate's *Suzy* (1921), Hébert's *Mignonne de LaPlante* (1924), Torrance Newton's *Nonnie* (c. 1920) and *Frances McCall* (c. 1931), Prudence Heward's *Girl on a Hill* (1928) and others, Trépannier captures the "peculiarities" of Montreal Modernism, establishes the "pictorial unities" these artists explored and *en passant* inadvertently captures the enduring chromatic influence of their reds and greens on Surrey's. The des Rochers and Foss catalogue contains 333 illustrations of paintings, drawings and photographs – many more than the actual exhibition – which makes it well worth studying before visiting and essential reading afterward.

How much of what Coonan, Torrance Newton and Hewton accomplished was accessible to Surrey when he arrived in Montreal from New York in the Spring of 1937? He'd been forced to abandon his plan of spending two years studying at The Art Students League before launching himself as a New York painter when his mother imposed herself on him and ran through his savings at so worrisome a pace that he'd reluctantly given in to the art critic Robert Ayre's urging to do as he and their mutual friend Fritz Brandtner (they'd all known one another in Winnipeg) had done and settle in Montreal where rent was low, shared studio space was readily available and jobs in commercial art departments was plentiful. We know from Surrey's own report that he was so initially appalled by his surroundings – Montreal was the ugliest city he'd ever seen – that he immediately sought out the companionship of those who found beauty in it. That quest began with Fritz Brandtner who introduced him to Jori Smith (a student of Hewton's in 1922) and Jean Palardy who immediately invited Surrey to visit them in the Charlevoix. He liked them and other artists he met through them and set about making himself at home among the Francophiles in their *mileaux* by devoting several hours a day to reviving the dormant French of his trilingual (German was the third of his mother's everyday languages) youth and perfecting it. He wrote of those early months,

"I gradually fell in love with it. I no longer found it ugly as I had at first. . . . Montreal became a poetic city for me. The deeper I penetrated the more I loved it. As I had so little time in the day I went back to my old habits and wandered around at night with my sketching pad. My easel was set up permanently, I painted. Every day I worked, painted and drew portraits of my friends, made studies of Montreal at night."

John Lyman (“Easily the most underrated figure in Canadian art history ,” according to Dennis Reid in the third edition of Oxford University Press’s *A Concise History of Canadian Painting* , 2012)was then the single most important figure in the Montreal art world and remained so until the ascendancy of Borduas ten years later. He took Surrey under his wing not long after his arrival and they became the close friends and collaborators in both The Eastern Group of Artists (Surrey replaced Jack Humphry in 1939 much to the dismay of Louis Muhlstock) and in the formation of the Contemporary Arts Society. But Surrey’s first exposure to Lyman was as a reader of his monthly art column for *The Montrealer*. Lyman was a world class ranter who never tired of reiterating that the Group of Seven’s emphasis on rugged exploration of wilderness as landscape had nothing to do with painting and everything to do with mythologizing Canada as a bush garden. Against the Group’s monolithic Englishness, he famously remarked, “[I]f an association of the spirit of the two races that dominate in Canada can offer any indication of what a Canadian art might theoretically become, Morrice is automatically indicated as its father.” He insisted that the best possible way for Canadian artists to discover that the real adventure took place not in forests and streams but in their imaginations was to follow Morrice’s lead, repeatedly stressing the necessity of seeing the *new* painting emerging in Paris – Matisse, Modigliani, Léger, Braque, Derain, Dufy and Picasso – on view in shows at W.Scott & Sons Gallery (which he anonymously financed and curated). Lyman’s columns also drew attention in the English community to artists who taught at the École du meuble – Maurice Gagnon, Marcel Parizeau, Jean-Paul Lemieux and Paul-Émile Borduas and to Alfred Pellan who was living in Paris but he generally neglected The Beaver Hall Group who rose to prominence while he was living abroad. In an article published on December 1, 1940, in *The Montrealer* that commented upon the exhibition *Art of Our Day in Canada* organized by the Contemporary Arts Society, Lyman noted that more than a third of the contributors were artists who painted “though not all exclusively, with the human subject.” Lyman was delighted that the de-populated “wilderness landscape” had “lost its quasi-monopoly as a motive for free expression.” Less than two decades after the Beaver Hall exhibitions, Lyman “seems to have forgotten (Trépannier is being tactful) . . . that a similarly free attitude to the human figure – one that took little account of the canons of academic painting – had been demonstrated by several members of the Beaver Hall Group.” (p. 222)

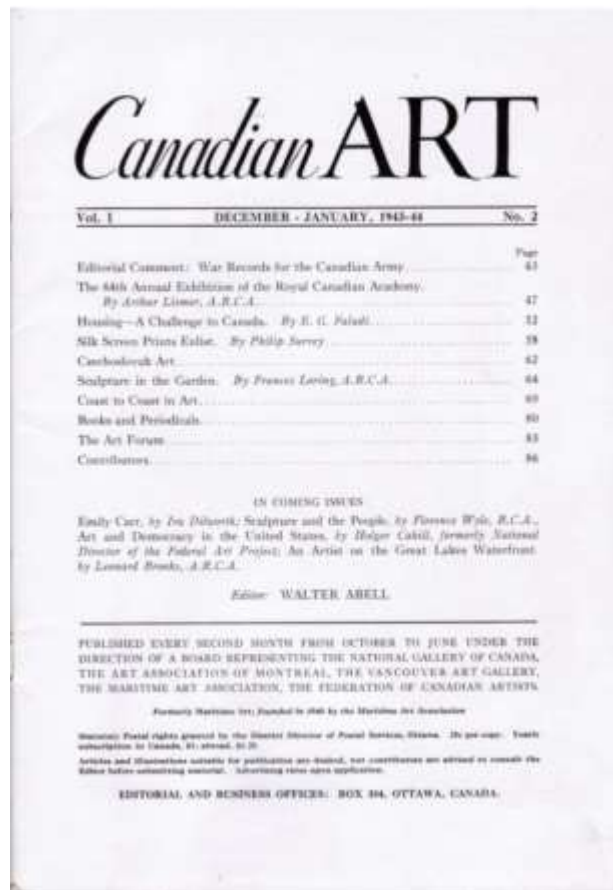
Robert Ayre took more notice of them but saw the Beaver Hall Group, as he wrote in *The Montreal Standard* (November 18, 1939), as "...the forerunner to the next generation of painters 'not thrilled by the True North Strong and Free' . . . [who] want to be critical rather than patriotic . . . and tells itself that it wants to come to grips with life; anyway, it wants more humanity in its work." Surrey, for his part, said little about the impact of Beaver Hall painters on his own work, then or later, for reasons that were personal and not polemical. Shortly after his arrival on the Montreal art scene, Surrey began an affair with a married woman who he never identified, not even by a pseudonym, in his unpublished memoir. He merely noted her presence in his life, his mother's foolish attempts to end the affair, his lover's deep interest and knowledge about painting and that she behaved with the utmost tact and gracefully exited from his private life as soon as he became seriously involved with Margaret, his future wife. He wrote of her, "When my friend saw what was happening she did everything to make things easy for me. No trying to hold on, no trying to make me feel guilty. She was very civilised."

But Madame X had a direct impact on his painting in the 15 months they were together. Like Jori Smith, she had been a student of Hewton's but married into wealth and social position and became a patron of women artists she regarded as more dedicated than herself. It's quite likely that she was as tactful with her painting friends as she was with Surrey so that while they might have suspected it, they weren't told that she was the buyer. Her descendants are as discreet as she was and the size, contents and whereabouts of her collection – including a rumoured portrait of her by Surrey – are unknown. Even if we'll never know what she showed Surrey and taught him about colour and design in portraiture, it's likely that the works of her friends Prudence Heward and Liliás Torrance Newton were prominent in their conversations. Torrance Newton's career was long, prolific and prominently displayed in public exhibitions and her chromatic impact can be felt in Surrey's *Red Portrait* (1939) of his wife Margaret in the National Gallery even though the sitter is in an urban setting unlike any in the Beaver Hall show. It was painted in the apartment on Rue Sainte Famille that they were able to rent in October 1939, three months after their marriage. When I look at it, that Hartman-Coltrane worm really begins to wriggle.



Part II

Enough Grey to Give Any Red-Blooded Adult the Blues:
The A.Y. Jackson—National Gallery Poster Project
(1943—1955)



In the winter of 1944, Philip Surrey, writing as the Photo Editor of *The Montreal Standard*, reported to readers of *Canadian Art* in “Silk Screen Prints Enlist” (volume 1, number 2, December 1943—January 1944

pp58—61; full text appended below) that the program A.Y. Jackson devised, the National Gallery (under the direction of H.O. McCurry) was administering and numerous corporations were financing (\$650 subsidized 300 reproductions of a single painting) in order to decorate Canadian servicemen's quarters with serigraph (silkscreened) posters was a wasted opportunity in the war effort. The posters (based on either existing oil paintings or new designs by Canadian artists) demonstrated that the participants were willing to descend from their ivory towers. The question was: Did they know the way?" *No*, Surrey reported more in sorrow than anger, *they did not*.

The selections were uninspired and irrelevant to young men whose lives they were meant to perk up before they descended into the hell fires of the European invasions. For the 50% of Canada that was urbanized and for most farmers as well, Surrey asserted, "a mountain lake is a place in which to swim or fish and a country lane is where you'd go walking with a girl." The A.Y. Jackson—National Gallery artists gave young men – soldiers living in mud in camouflaged staging areas, sailors embedded in grey battleships, airmen shackled together in death's anterooms – pictures of uninhabited, bleak scenes painted in colours as dull as the walls they were intended to decorate. Arthur Lismer's *Isle of Spruce* was representative. The inclusion of Bobs Coghill Haworth's *Port au Persil* – a study of small boats being battered about by sea waves was galling: did no one remember Dunkirk and consider that viewers preparing for another lethal Channel crossing might not want to be reminded of stormy seas at breakfast, dinner and supper? In January 1944, D-Day was the elephant in the room.

Buttressing his argument with illustrations of eleven of the first twenty-two (ultimately there would be thirty-six wartime) colour prints in unnumbered editions produced by Sampson-Mathews Ltd under the artistic direction of Jackson and A.J. Casson and distributed to mess halls and barracks across the Dominion and overseas, to R.A.F. stations in Canada and to American units stationed in Newfoundland by the thousands, Surrey noted that *not one* touched sports – hockey, lacrosse, baseball or others – *or* life in offices and factories *or* home life (a mother bathing her baby or a family having supper, for example) *or* showed illuminated shop windows with pedestrians and motorists *or* picnics, tea-parties, night-clubs, logging-camps, concerts, regattas, beaches, burlesque-houses, movies, churches, coal mines, railroads, ships – even though

all these subjects provided opportunities for powerful figure composition. Nobody – not Jackson, not Casson, not H.O. McCurry, not even the financiers paying the bills – thought about the warriors who were going to look at these pictures. If they had, Surrey insisted that there would have been some attractive women – no subject had a longer or more illustrious tradition in Western Art. Just because *human subject matter* – the exceptions were J.E. Sampson’s old sailors in *Veterans of the Sea*, J.S. Hallam’s rear view of a 19th century farm worker in *The Plowman* and A.Y. Jackson’s rear view of a couple in a sleigh descending on a Quebec village (where no one else was outdoors) – was uninspiring to these “serious artists”, was it necessary to be so inconsequential to the people for whom these posters were made? Canada’s troops were risking their lives for families, friends and communities not for stands of old growth trees, flocks of geese and horses seen from the rear. Surrey had read and absorbed Homer, knew that warriors need to focus on the most domestic of scenes before and after their bloodiest encounters in order to regain any kind of mental balance and retain any semblance of humanity.

Ian Sigvaldson, the owner of Pegasus Gallery on Salt Spring Island, and Scott Steedmans, an adjunct professor in the Canadian Centre for Studies in Publishing at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, report and comment on Surrey’s critique on page 27 of their *Art for War and Peace: How a Great Art Project Helped Canada Discover Itself* (Red Leaf, 2015). It’s the third and final reference to Surrey who they previously identify among those “major artists, including Charles Scott, Anne Savage, Philip Surrey, Pegi Nicol MacLeod and Jack Shadbolt” (p.18) whose proposed designs had been rejected by Jackson and McCurry and a couple of pages later among a group of artists – “Ethel Seath, Anne Savage, Mabel Lockerby, Philip Surrey, Pegi Nicol MacLeod and Rowley Murphy” – whose “designs were shopped around but never printed because no sponsor was found.” (p.21) Having sown the idea that Surrey was a disgruntled, rejected artist, they conclude:

“Seventy years later, it is easy to chuckle at Surrey’s pat assumption that soldiers just need art to cheer themselves up; he didn’t seem to consider that ‘stark and stormy scenery’ might fit the moods of shell-shocked men more than pictures of girls or tea-parties.”

Among all the silly misjudgements of Surrey – and there are some *stunners* – this takes the mudslinging pie. Their reference to “shell-shocked men” in speaking of military personnel enlisted in World War II, the majority of who were not yet engaged in combat, is egregious. For the record, “shell-shocked” was a World War I neologism minted to describe a reaction to intense bombardment, gas attack and/or trench-to-enemy lines combat that produced a physical and/or psychological helplessness that manifested itself in panic attacks that compromised ordinary modes of mobility, communication and sleep. Because the term was so ill-defined during that war with unjustifiable consequences (battlefield executions, drumhead court-martials, long term incarcerations) it was excised from medical and military discourse and replaced in World War II with the term “combat stress reaction.” And as far as “tea parties” go, Surrey was unlikely to be thinking about the same kind of event as these two provincials: in Manhattan, during Prohibition, Quebec-grown Chateaugay Champagne was regularly toked (quite legally until 1937) in the tea rooms of the Upper East Side that he’d visited with young socialites he’d met at The Art Students League where they were part time bohemians. What was passing through Surrey’s mind when he dropped their afternoon gatherings into his list of potential subjects? Surrey’s mind was never easy to read, especially when his tongue was wandering into his cheek.

Under the heading “Contributors” on page 86, the editor of *Canadian Art* notes:

Philip Surrey is the Photo Editor of the *Montreal Standard* by vocation and a painter by avocation. A one-time pupil of L. L. Fitzgerald and F. H. Varley, he is winning an increasingly secure place for himself in the ranks of Canadian painters. The Art Association of Montreal and the Art Gallery of Toronto have both purchased examples of his work. He is also represented in several private collections. Mr. Surrey is a member of the Eastern Group and of the Contemporary Art Society.

Surrey accepted this vocation reluctantly but embraced it wholeheartedly until *The Standard* morphed into *Weekend Magazine* in 1951 and he became its Features Editor. When war was declared, Surrey requested an

overseas posting as a war correspondent, naming his friend John Groth, the Art Director of *Esquire* (who went on to scoop all others by filing the first story on the liberation of Paris), as a reference. His request was denied as were subsequent requests *from* both the Army and the Navy to conscript him as their Chief Information Officer: the War Information Office decreed at least three times that Surrey's skills as one of the founding fathers and foremost practitioners of photojournalism were essential to news management and propaganda on the home front.

Week after week, Surrey judiciously selected photographs and documents from the mounds made available to him by the WIB and collaged them into photo stories. It's unlikely that any other civilian had his level of security clearance or any other print journalist a clearer visual sense of military conditions and morale in the pre-invasion staging areas for the Western Front or in land, sea and air warfare of the Atlantic, the Mediterranean, the North African, and the Middle Eastern theatres. Surrey even knew what was going on with the dominantly French-Canadian expeditionary force sent to protect Canadian interests at the easternmost extremities of the Soviet Union. Davidson Dunton, his editor-in-chief at *The Standard* had been appointed to the Wartime Information Board as second-in-command to John Grierson of the National Film Board and the flow of photographs and field reports from the WIB and NFB to Surrey's office at *The Standard* had the Prime Minister's approval. For Mackenzie King (and the less blinkered of his cabinet), it was crucial that Canadians perceived the war as *our war* (not a colonial excursion at the behest of Great Britain) and as investment that would pay peace time dividends in terms of social renewal without Canada turning into a nation of dreaded Socialists.

When King regained control of the federal government in 1935, our country was closer to civil disorder and political fragmentation than at any subsequent point in the twentieth century, due in no small measure to the support of R.B. Bennett's Conservatives by Canada's press barons, including Lord Atholston. As soon as Atholston died in January 1938, J.W. McConnell – one of Canada's leading financiers – took public control over the four newspapers they'd co-owned (he was a silent partner) since 1925 – *Montreal Star*, *Montreal Standard*, *Montreal Herald* and *Family Herald and Weekly Star* – and switched their political allegiance to King's Liberal Party. Rich as Croesus, McConnell then handed-on command of *The*

Standard to his son John who was being groomed to become his successor as a press baron. A year younger than Surrey, John McConnell hired his closest friends to senior positions at *The Standard*: Dunton as editor, Mark Farrell as promotions manager and Hazen Sise as photo editor. Sise (with Surrey as his assistant) was given the task of transforming the weekly's 8 page roto-gravure section into an integral part of a photo news magazine meant to compete head-on with *Life* (launched a few months earlier). The McConnells were intent on remaking and remarketing *The Standard* as a thoroughly Canadian and explicitly progressive alternative to the American pictorials – not just *Life* but *Look* and *Parade* as well. But Sise's dedication to this project was trumped by commitment to the Republican cause in the Spanish Civil War and eagerness to join Norman Bethune's Canadian battlefield Blood Transfusion Unit. He bailed after the second issue, recommended Surrey as his successor and reassured the remaining triumvirate that Surrey was better equipped to do the job than he was: Surrey had more skills and a better technical background as a commercial artist and graphic designer than the whole of the existing design team.

Although Surrey was known to be a member of the American Socialist Party (since 1931) and a close friend of F.R. Scott (one of the founding fathers of the League for Social Reconstruction and its political arm, the CCF), he was non-doctrinaire, a self-styled Trotskyite who believed people would make responsible choices once they grasped that democracy could not survive capitalism (most of the world's wealth would eventually be controlled by less than 1% of the population and global revolution would be inevitable) and that it was equally threatened by communism (because its leaders would become the most egomaniacal and fascistic of oligarchs). For Surrey, the only path worth following was one that led to equal rights for all and ultimately world peace. In the context of the war, there was as much to be said for supporting Stalin and the Russian People as there was for FDR and the Americans. While Surrey overhauled visual content, Dunton and Farrell worked on a series of articles exposing corruption in the Quebec Liquor Police, Premier Duplessis's private constabulary. The publication of their articles – *The Standard's* first "triumph" – was nearly its ruin. Duplessis was embarrassed – "humiliated" – was the word he used in dressing-down J.W. McConnell. J.W. was furious with his son John and might have padlocked *The Standard* if Surrey hadn't stepped forward with a plan for blanket press coverage of the Royal Tour of the new King George VI and Queen Mary announced for the Spring of 1939. J.W. loved Surrey's ambitiousness.

In the build-up to the war, Surrey discovered (much to his own surprise) that the least divisive and astonishingly cohesive symbol of peace and equality for Canadians of all backgrounds was King George VI and His Royal Family. Between May 17 and June 15, 1939, King and Queen visited every Canadian province, the Dominion of Newfoundland and spent June 7–10 in the United States. George VI was the first reigning British monarch to visit Canada (and the first English King to set foot in the United States) but he didn't come as a foreign prince: at his coronation in May 1937, he'd assumed the new title King of Canada. The tour was staged to showcase *our* Monarch as an active and engaged participant in the governance of Canada, a symbol of unity. During the 30 days of the visit, Surrey laid out, captioned and proofed photo stories for five weekly editions of *The Standard*. As he sorted through the hundreds of photographs that were sent from all across the country by photographers who travelled on the train and freelancers on the ground, he also designed the cover and layout and wrote the captions for a commemorative edition to be sold separately as a souvenir of the entire tour. Surrey abhorred the British class system and the stupid snobbishness it inspired in people such as his own mother: the Canadians he served – French and English, Jewish and Gentile, British and European – wanted Canada to be *their* country, strong and free of all remnants of colonialism and aristocracy but in an era when the world seemed to be in thrall to larger-than-life leaders, King George VI was a benign substitute. The special issue on the Royal Tour of 1939 conceived by Surrey as a subliminal *reductio ad absurdum* of Royalist and Imperialist pretentiousness and a celebration of the aspirations of ordinary Canadians, became a national bestseller to J.W. and John McConnell's delight and Surrey became indispensable to the war effort on the home front. Knowing his job was safe for some time to come, he married Margaret (Carmela) Day on June 22, 1939, a week after the Royal Party sailed back to England

Sigvaldson and Steedmans seemingly know nothing of this side of Surrey. In their brief discussion of propaganda posters, they neglect to mention Surrey's *Every Canadian Must Fight*: there is more art in it than in most of the things Jackson and H.O. McCurry and their "National Art Gallery Selection Committee" chose for Sampson-Mathews to print. Produced by the thousands in two formats – a standard size for the workplace and a calendar size for kitchen and bedroom walls, Surrey's poster became ubiquitous from one end of the country to the other and handsome enough that it remained taped to barber shop and

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garage walls well into the 50s – and was my first encounter with his art although I never registered his name at the top left. In his article for *Canadian Art*, Surrey insisted that it was possible to make a good design from any subject without sacrificing artistic integrity and he demonstrated it in *Every Canadian Must Fight*: a worker in blue overalls stands behind a Canadian soldier in khaki battledress and hands him a replacement drum cartridge magazine for his Thompson submachine gun. The message is immediate and unambiguous – he who stays home also fights by working hand-in-hand with the troops abroad. The identical facial profiles and body postures suggests twinning, an essential brotherhood between worker and soldier. The worker is backlit in blue, the soldier in red. The black lettering shifts to red for *Must*, a hint that these men are fighting not for patriotic purpose or foreign victory but for a new, more egalitarian society at home and abroad. It's an elegant design of stunning simplicity: a copy is included in the permanent collection of the National Art Gallery.



The second batch of 14 wartime posters offered a bit more life and vibrancy – Leonard Brooks’s *Halifax Harbour*, R. York Wilson’s *Auction Sale* and, notoriously, Fritz Brandtner’s *Potato Pickers* which was attacked both because its creator’s name was too German (Brandtner was in fact Polish, a 15 year resident of Canada, an anti-war radical whose sentiments were widely shared in Montreal where he was a noted teacher of children’s art) and his subjects too German-looking. Never at a loss for words, Brandtner responded,

“The background of these people working in the fields may be European (Poles, Ukrainians, Rumanians, Norwegians, Scotch) but when I painted this picture I only saw Canadian peasants harvesting from the rich soil of Canada. . . . Narrow nationalism will not do the job. Throughout the West of Canada (and that is where our main power lies) you see thousands of these mixed nationalities working together in the fields and on the farms to produce food for this new country they have chose to live in and to me this is the new democracy we are fighting for.”

There are six women portrayed in Brandtner’s work—two more than the number of women artists represented in the wartime collection: Bobs Cogill Haworth, Yvonne McKague Hauser (2 prints), Isabel McLaughlin, Paraskeva Clark or, twice as many as the total number of artists from French Quebec – Clarence Gagnon, J.W. Morrice, Albert Cloutier. Jewish painters? Zero. Seventy years after the fact, Sigvaldson and Steedmans don’t even raise the issue. For Jackson, narrow nationalism was doing a fine job. It still is for these guys, it would seem.

Jackson intended his poster program to extend into Canada’s schools and outlast the war and so it did without extending its range very far. Sigvaldson and Steedmans seemingly know everything that it’s possible to know about the wartime program, its continuation into the Cold War and its afterlives (Sampson-Matthews posters are *inter alia* stock in trade at Sigvaldson’s Pegasus Gallery) – except for one not insubstantial thing: where did the money go and did the artists ever see any of it? Jackson and McCurry intended it to be taken as seriously as an *art* project as these two take it with assistance from a group of additional contributors that includes seven others in addition to the novelist-artist Douglas Coupland.

Jackson and Casson demonstrated their *artistic* seriousness from the get-go by redrawing (Jackson) and re-pigmenting (Casson) iconic paintings such as J.W. Morrice’s *The Ferry, Quebec* and Tom Thomson’s *Text* (except as noted) © 2015 T.F. Rigelhof

Northern River with so few reductions of tonal complexity that the techniques of seriagraphy and the patience of its technicians were taken further than they'd ever been taken in the advertisements that were the firm's bread and butter. *Art for War and Peace: How a Great Art Project Helped Canada Discover Itself* may well be one of the most ungainly of art books produced in recent memory but it is an essential addition to any basic reference shelf devoted to Canadian Art in the 20th Century. The editors do a very good job of analysing the underlying tension between Jackson's artistic intentions and Sampson's and Matthews' commercial aspirations. The requirement that living artists recruited their own sponsors caused numerous problems – some artists declined the invitation to participate; others discovered that their potential sponsors were unacceptable because not all sponsors were created equal – Southam Newspapers and Eaton's Department Stores trumped Surrey's potential sponsorship by the McConnell Group and Morgan's Department Store. (The only positive response to Surrey's critique might well have been Harry Southam's decision to sponsor Brandtner's *Potato Pickers* to demonstrate his power over Sampson and Mathews who were opposed to its publication and did their best to sabotage the quality of its reproduction.)

Surrey took only a minor risk in speaking out so forcibly: he had gained little and had less to lose from the Art Establishment of Toronto and Ottawa where his works, when noticed, were vilified as the products of a "vulgarian." What he gained from writing it was a clearer sense of the program he would pursue as a painter for the rest of his professional life. Over the next 45 years, he brought hockey, baseball, tennis, brightly lit streets and shops, taverns, night-clubs, restaurants, diners, beaches, burlesque-houses, movie theatres, pedestrians, joggers, bicycles, automobiles, motorcycles, street musicians and a large number of magnificent women (including many who are enhanced not diminished by beauty, grace, sexual vibrancy and youth) into Canadian painting. At the time of writing "Silk Screen Prints Enlist", he wanted to limit whatever damage was done to himself. He could afford it; others couldn't – that's the reason why he proposed no alternative works, invoked only European precedents. He knew that A.Y. Jackson and A.J. Casson knew what the Beaver Hall Group had painted and how much of it was capable of being silkscreened with far less effort and artistic distortion than much of what was selected from other sources.

Evidently (but the evidence is flimsy and likely only anecdotal considering the absence of proper accounting procedures at Sampson-Matthews), J.E. Sampson's *Veterans of the Sea* and J.S. Hallam's rear view of a 19th century farm worker in *The Plowman* attracted the more favourable notices from servicemen. That's easily understood: Samson's old sailors were a pleasant reminder that no matter how arduous the job or perilous the circumstances, some will survive to companionable old age. And Hallam's plowman? One veteran told me that every time he saw that man, plow and horse, he thought of how lucky he was to be off a Saskatchewan homestead for the first time in his life and at a base in England where he was taught to drive everything from jeeps to two-ton trucks and earth movers, rudimentary motor mechanics, and teamwork in construction crews while improving his English fluency and literacy. On the farm, his life had been unremitting toil alongside two ornery brothers working for a unilingual German father driven half-mad by the crop failures of the 30s on the western plains. If part of the advantage of living with good paintings is that they broaden the senses, enlarge the imagination and extend emotional range in ways that work to the advantage of both the individual and society, then he felt privileged to be in the army, eating three meals a day while earning a regular salary that allowed him to put something aside every payday for a tractor if farming was inescapable but more likely for an automobile and a job in a city.

Whenever I place these two catalogues side by side and begin flipping from image to image, I feel some anger but mostly sorrow that our servicemen and women were cheated out of more and deeper reflections on the peace they were all fighting (and too many died) to achieve. If only they'd been treated to Adrien Hébert's *The Mouth Organ Player* (1924), Edwin Holgate's *The Lumberjack* (1924) to remind them of brothers back home on the farm or working in the woods or Holgate's *Suzy* (1921) of a young woman – a sister, a girlfriend? – fallen asleep at a table while looking at photographs or his *The Cellist* (1923) of a serious young woman in musical rehearsal. The sons of homesteaders would have felt less like aliens if they'd had Prudence Heward's pair of young women in *The Immigrants* (1928) as meal time companions. And women painters might have felt as natural companions as nurses if Eric Goldberg's *Portrait of Regina Seiden* (1928) -- a study of his wife at her easel had hung alongside Regina Seiden's own *Dora* (1923). Should not the young men from urban neighborhoods be reminded of such charming sights as the women and children outdoors in Mabel Lockerby's *After a Snowstorm* (1935) or everybody and their dog jammed into Kathleen

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Morris's *Byward Market, Ottawa* (1927)? And it would have been very brotherly to look at Emily Coonan's *Girl and Cat* (1920) or *Girl in Dotted Dress* (1923) and remember not just one's own younger sisters but to remind oneself that, among other things, they were fighting to protect children from premature loss of innocence. All of these suggestions and dozens more like them ought to have occurred spontaneously to the National Gallery's Selection Committee. These were not controversial works except in one sense – they weren't sentimental, soft-edged, platitudinous. And perhaps that was why they were neglected. The women of Beaver Hall – either as painters or as subjects of paintings – were real in an age when too many men were trying much too hard to be appallingly, fantastically *male* by insisting that real women made every possible effort to be *frou-frou* and any who weren't interested in becoming *swish* were best forsaken and forgotten.

Appendix A:

The complete text without accompanying illustrations of “Silk Screen Prints Enlist” by Philip Surrey, *Canadian Art*, Volume 1, Number 2 December –January 1943—44 pp58—61 © The Estate of Philip Surrey, reprinted with permission.

SILK SCREEN PRINTS ENLIST

BY PHILIP SURREY

THE plan to decorate Canadian servicemen's quarters with silk screen prints designed by Canadian artists has been a big success. Some 7,500 have been distributed to camps and barracks all over the Dominion; another 1,500 have gone to High Commissioner Vincent Massey in London to be distributed to Canadian forces overseas; some have gone to R.A.F. stations in Canada, and the National Gallery, which sponsored the whole scheme, has supplied a considerable quantity to American units stationed in Newfoundland. Now the British government has requested an additional quantity for British army camps. The painters who

gave their time and talent can feel sure that their gift is appreciated.

The project developed out of an effort on the part of the National Gallery to meet an increasing demand for pictures with which to relieve the drabness of military quarters. War conditions created this demand; they also imposed serious difficulties in the way of fulfilling it, for they cut off the supply of reproductions which the Gallery would normally have provided for such purposes. Faced with an intricate problem, and not wishing to lose an opportunity to help meet the challenge of the times, the director of the Gallery consulted A. Y. Jackson. How could

suitable pictures in sufficient quantities be obtained under existing circumstances?

Dr. Jackson promptly suggested the silk screen process and proposed that Canadian artists be invited to prepare a series of designs for the purpose. This proposal the National Gallery immediately accepted, asking Jackson himself to make the first pictures. He did so. His fellow artists also gave ready co-operation. Every painter who was approached in connection with the plan agreed to make and donate a painting.

Cost was a problem, but the National Gallery found the money for the first reproductions, the Department of National Defense gave its cordial approval, and eventually the need was met by securing well known Canadian business firms as sponsors. Each firm pays \$650 for 300 reproductions of one painting. In return it gets credit on a small panel at the base, which also bears the name of the artist who donated the original.

With the necessary financial support provided in this way, the project developed rapidly. Prints by twenty-two artists have already been issued and others are now in the course of production. Before being reproduced, all designs have to be approved by the National Gallery selection committee. The pictures measure 30 by 40 inches—big enough to be seen even in a large mess-hall. They are really in the nature of fine prints, being facsimiles of designs made especially for the silk screen process. As suggested above, the response has been gratifying and the demand far beyond expectations. The artists who gave their time and talent can feel that their gift is appreciated and that in its own way their art has become a part of the national and international fellowship associated with Canada's war effort.

ALTHOUGH a good job has been done with the silk screen prints, it is still possible that it could have been done better. Canadian artists proved by their participation in the project that they were willing to descend from their ivory towers. The question is: did they know the way? Did they bear in mind the purpose for which they were making their pictures?

One of the aims of the series was to relieve the monotony of service buildings. Yet in many of the paintings dull colours predominate. A grey or khaki wall is not relieved by more grey or brown. It is true that happy colour effects are often achieved with one or two bright notes "singing" among neutral tones, but in the present case the whole picture should be the bright note, the neutral tone being supplied in abundance by the vast mass of the wall itself from which the picture is separated only by the thinnest of frames.

Another aim was to remind our troops of their own land. Many of them have been away more than three years and are as homesick as can be. More than fifty per cent of Canadians live in cities. To them as well as to most farmers, a mountain lake is a place in which to swim or fish and a country lane is where you would like to walk with a girl. But there is little evidence of such associations in these paintings.

Most artists feel, and rightly, that the "subject" is not important, by which they mean that it is the harmony of form and colour which constitutes a work of art. But if that is so why are so many subjects taboo? It should be possible to make a good design, a work of art, from any subject under the sun. Artistic integrity need not be sacrificed

in the slightest by choosing subjects which are likely to appeal to this new, large and relatively unsophisticated public.

So many fields of Canadian life have not been touched at all: sports for example—hockey, lacrosse, baseball and the rest. All are magnificent opportunities for powerful figure composition or decorative treatment. What about life in offices and factories? What about home life: a mother bathing her baby or a family having supper? Soldiers in the midst of the English blackout or the wastes of Newfoundland would welcome a glimpse of brightly-lit shops and streets; Manet once painted a picnic. It is still a good subject. We have tea-parties, night-clubs, logging-camps, concerts, regattas, beaches, burlesque-houses, movies, churches, coal mines, railroads, ships. None of these were used. If the ideas submitted lacked variety, could not the selection committee have made a few tactful suggestions?

Though the subject should not be important to the artist, there is no doubt that it is important to the people for whom this project is intended. No painter would feel it unreasonable to be asked that designs for a nursery should be calculated to appeal to children or that designs for a union hall should appeal to labour.

The designs are being used in schools as well as in service quarters. This may have contributed to the artists' confusion, for the two purposes are quite different and it would or should have been pure accident if some were found to be suitable to both. The fact is that nobody thought enough about the soldiers who were going to look at these pictures. If they had, there would have been some pretty girls—no subject has a longer or more illustrious tradition. A Raphael madonna, Botticelli's "Primavera", Vermeer's "Head of a Young Girl", Degas' ballet dancers or "The Millinery Shop"—all of these, though they have no direct relation to his own background, would have more meaning for a young soldier far from home than stark and stormy scenery.

Nevertheless what has been done, is most certainly a long step in the right direction. It is the first step, and too much cannot be expected. It is to be hoped that the idea will develop into a real popular art like the block prints of Mexico, the steel engravings of Hogarth and his contemporaries in England, or the colour prints of eighteenth-century Japan. Let us have quantities of all sizes and prices for schools, factories, nurseries, hospitals, public buildings—but let them be designed for the process and the purpose.

The posters reproduced in black and white to support Surrey's argument were:

Arthur Lismer, *Isle of Spruce*

J.W.G. MacDonald, *B.C. Indian Village*

J.E. Sampson, *Veterans of the Sea*

A.J. Casson, *Ontario Village*

J.E.H. Macdonald, *Mist Fantasy*

Lawren Harris, *Maligne Lake*

J.S. Hallam, *The Plowman*

Jack Humphrey, *Grand Manan*

B. Coghill Haworth, *Port au Persil*

A.Y. Jackson, *Quebec Village*

Thoreau MacDonald, *Wild Geese*

Appendix B: