1. Reflections on Selected Portraits

Some of my Favourite

Portraits:

Reflections

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T.F.R.

Philip Surrey, *Portrait of My Mother* (1931)

22 x 18 oil on canvas
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Philip Surrey's *Portrait of My Mother* (1931) was the first of his oil paintings exhibited in public: initially at the Seventh Annual Exhibition of Canadian Art at the National Gallery in Ottawa, 22 January 1932 to 23 February 1932 and then at the newly opened Vancouver Art Gallery's inaugural All-Canadian Exhibition of May—July 1932. Despite being the first shown, it is one of the artist's least known paintings, archived in his private collection until his death and in his estate until 2017.

The fact that *Portrait of My Mother* was never acquired by a public gallery (whereas F.H. Varley's hastily executed *Portrait of Kate Alice Surrey* (1937) was accepted by the Art Gallery of Alberta as a donation from Surrey in 1981) says something about the incuriosity of the Canadian Art establishment but nothing about this painting's singularity. The work of a 21 year old artist at the threshold of his

professional career, it isn't juvenilia and is fearless in subject matter. While it's of broad historical interest in its proximity to more celebrated works in the same shows by Harris, Holgate, Jackson, Lockerby, May, Morrice, Morris, Torrance Newton, Nicol, Robertson, Suzor-Cote and Thomson among others, it is uniquely related to two other works in those exhibitions – F.H. Varley's *Portrait Study* aka *Vera 1931*[i] and Vera Weatherbie's *Portrait—F.H. Varley*. Surrey's *Portrait of My Mother* (like their portraits of each other) is deeply indebted to C.W. Leadbeater's Theosophical analysis of pure and mixed colours and their relationship to pure and mixed emotions.

Originally published in 1901 in London in *Thought-Forms: A Record of Clairvoyant Investigation* by A. Besant and C. W. Leadbeater and frequently reprinted as a small pamphlet, Leadbeater's "Colours and Their Meaning" arranged twenty-five "meaningful colours" in 5 rows of 5 and attempted to list the exact shades of the corresponding 25 dominant emotions while acknowledging that emotions were never unmixed: for example, anger is scarlet but anger is most often self-righteous and scarlet is dimmed (as are many others by the brown-grey of selfishness) or tinged by the deep orange that is pride. In his list of "simpler hues", Leadbeater posited these equations: black=malice; blood red=sensuality; brown=avarice; grey=fear; rose=love; green=adaptability; blue=spirituality; yellow=intelligence. Applying this coding (and the couple of dozen further examples of "mixing") to Surrey's palette in *Portrait of My Mother* generates a "profile" of Katherine Alice Surrey (KAS) that suggests a fearful woman who was intelligent, adaptable, sympathetic but capable of acting maliciously and selfishly. Leadbeater's comments on the shapes particular colours/emotions assume is a sharper analytic tool: the black of malice is cloud-like or plumed as smoke; the scarlet of indignation flashes within the environment but outside the body; the brown of avarice arranges itself in parallel bars as does the grey of depression; the yellow of intelligence and the green of adaptability appear as multi-toned spectrums; the blues of spirituality replicate the colours of the night skies and sparkle. The deeper one looks into *Portrait of My Mother,* the more aware a viewer becomes of the interactions between KAS, her clothes and the reflections of shadows upon the background fabrics and of various continuities with the portraits of Varley by Weatherbie and Weatherbie by Varley. Nonetheless, it is unmistakably itself if not yet unmistakably Surrey.

Portrait of My Mother was painted in October 1931 while Surrey and his mother shared two attic rooms at 1250 Davie Street, West Vancouver. KAS, age 57, was a long absent mother suddenly *too* present in her son's life and he was painting intense and conflicting emotions that encapsulated their mutual ambivalence within the close confines of the Davie Street attic. KAS is dressed in an afternoon tea ensemble that was just the thing slightly bohemian women of a certain age wore in that era. It was likely the first "good outfit" KAS purchased on returning to Vancouver in July 1930 after twenty years absence. Like Surrey who made a similar train trip from Winnipeg in September 1929, her status immediately rebounded into the mid-middle class from which a divorce without financial settlement had exiled both in 1920. Once Surrey left her care at 13 to earn a high school diploma in Winnipeg and apprentice at Brigden's of Winnipeg Ltd., Designers and Engravers, they were in regular correspondence but sporadically face-to-face. In May 1930, Surrey had written to tell her that she could stop teaching in rural Manitoba schools – her livelihood for 9 of those 10 years – and live with him:

> I had no idea what I was doing to myself. I still loved my mother and knew how hard she was working and that she was not young. I knew she would meet her own kind of people here. . . . I was happy to be able to write to her at last and say, "I will take care of you."

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His happiness was short-lived. Within less than a month, he discovered how poverty-stricken his mother was and how unwilling she was to realize that he was an adult and a very private person. KAS's presence did have the salutary effect of making him realize that painting was the most important thing in his life. Prior to her arrival, Surrey was living in a bedsitter opposite the Parakantas building, 1087 Bute Street, where Varley and Jock Macdonald shared one studio and graduates of the Vancouver School of Decorative Arts and Design (VSDAD), including Weatherbie, shared others. Based on what he'd drawn and painted in a few evening classes in winter 1930, Varley invited Surrey to join the life drawing group held in his studio on Saturday mornings. Surrey was one of 12 (including Weatherbie) and adapted so well that a later commentator mistook him to be a member of the Varley's first classes at VSDAD in 1926.

Surrey and his mother began to mix socially with the Varleys at their home in the Brock Estate's guest house adjacent to Jericho Beach and at musical evenings in the Vanderpant Galleries

where John Vanderpant ran both his photography studio and a private salon upstairs. To Surrey's dismay, Vanderpant and Varley both found KAS delightful company: she was petite, vivacious and charming. *In Portrait of My Mother*, Surrey applied what he'd learned from Varley about drawing a woman's face as landscape of her inner life, what he'd absorbed from Vanderpant and Weatherbie about lighting a subject from dual electric sources of white light to illuminate both to create the painterly equivalent of photographic perspective with the artist/viewer as vanishing point to capture the lioness he perceived within the oddly endearing gentlewoman of W.H. Best's contemporary photograph.

KAS by W.H. Best, circa 1931/32

Like Vera Weatherbie's *Portrait – F.H. Varley*, Surrey's *Portrait of My Mother* confronts head-on the emotional rollercoaster that young adults ride whenever an older person of the opposite sex takes an overly intense and transgressive interest in their private lives. Faced with crazily possessive behaviours, both drew strength from Theosophy to trust their intuitions and their portraits were

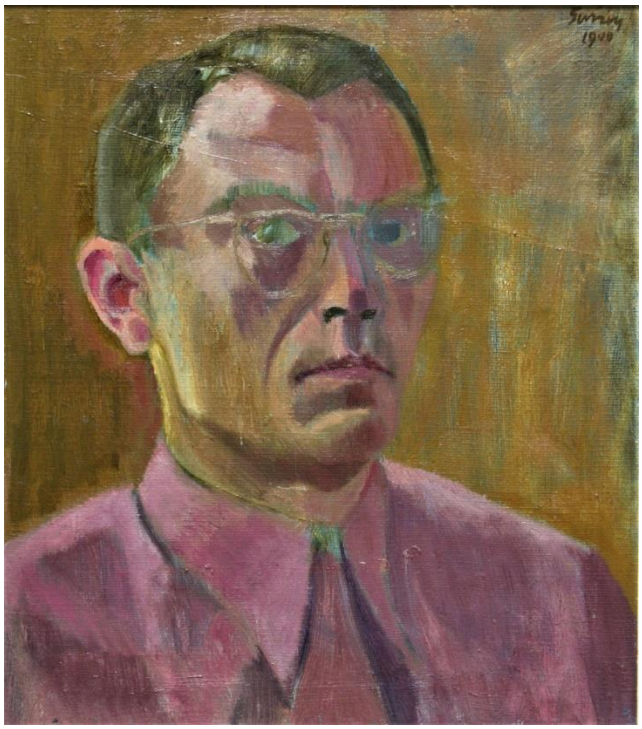
touched but not overwhelmed by its claim to "Wisdom". In Weatherbie's case, the teachings of the Theosophical Society rife at VSDAD were filtered through her knowledge of Chinese Buddhism and particularly its teaching of Buddha-nature possessing three bodies – sensual, soulful and spiritual. In Surrey's case, Theosophy was absorbed from John Varley who was attempting to synthesize its teachings about colours with his personal obsession with scales in occidental music.

Unless you're an adolescent discovering that you do have an inner life to be cultivated, the Theosophy Society's thousands of pages of primary sources are exhausting. But such good secondary sources abound that there's no excuse for Canadian art historians being so inattentive to the spiritual movement that gave the "Group of Seven" its name and more of its rationale than generally credited: to cite just one example, Ross King in *Defiant Spirits: the Modernist Revolution of the Group of Seven* – if it's accurately indexed – spends all of 5 pages of 421 of text discussing Theosophy and then solely in relation to Lawren Harris. For anyone interested in Varley, Jock Macdonald and Harry Täuber and whoever else came under their influence, there are interconnections between them, Theosophy, Rudolph Steiner and Wassily Kandinsky ("On the Spirituality of Art" 1910). Surrey soon abandoned all things Theosophical but the others didn't.

An Endnote

[1] Varley's painting was, in fact if not title, his magisterial *Vera 1931*, "iconic" since 1994 when it was Canada Post's selection for its "Masterpieces of Canadian Art" series. Weatherbie was anything but typecast when she took on the role of the Virgin Mary in *The Christmas Pageant of the Holy Grail* at VSDAD in 1928. Surrey is credited with ironically nicknaming her "Mom." In response, Varley always called KAS "Mother" even though he was a mere 7 years younger. Robert Amos's exhibition catalogue produced in partnership with the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria for the Mortimer-Lamb Exhibition, November 15, 2013 to February 24, 2014, *Harold Mortimer-Lamb: the Art Lover* (TouchWood Editions, 2013) is essential reading for a great deal more than its accounts of Varley's years in Vancouver and the life and works of Vera Weatherbie. Surrey is only mentioned *en passant* but Mr. Amos provided access to his research notes on F.H. Varley and Vera Weatherbie and photographs of a half dozen unknown portraits by Weatherbie relevant to my claims of mentorship, an interpretation that is my own.

Philip Surrey, *Self-Portrait* (1940)



14 x 16 oil on canvas
©Nicholas Simpson

Surrey painted this self-portrait with his friend and mentor F.H. Varley's iridescent colouring while waiting to be called to Ottawa where he hoped he'd be enlisted and, as we now would say, "embedded" as a battlefront war artist – a calling and destiny he felt from the moment a European war became inevitable but one that would elude him.

Surrey's self-portrait is an advertisement for himself that operates on overlapping levels because he painted with three distinct kinds of viewer in mind. In the first instance, he meant it to serve as an example of his skills for formal portraiture: if the military wanted Canada's heroes immortalized in this war as they had been in the Great War, he was up to the job as he demonstrates by deliberately evoking Varley in the non-figurative background, the play of light that accentuates ear and jawline as in, for example, Varley's *Portrait of Captain C.P.J. O'Kelly*, V.C. (1918). In the second

instance, through close cropping to exclude all but his upper torso, Surrey portrayed himself as an art worker ready to shoulder whatever tasks were laid upon him. A face such as this is incompatible with anything less than robust physical well-being, strength of will and unfaltering courage: an infantryman was expected to be capable of marching 20 kilometers bearing a 30 kilogram kit on a day route, a regimen not beyond him. Looking at Surrey, there's still something of the undersized teenager who was invited to play cricket in the senior men's league in Winnipeg and excelled; the young man who took up downhill skiing and ski-jumping in his Vancouver years but there's also a premonition of a man who would continue skiing into his 60s and was capable throughout his life of walking for hours on end without flagging. He was a risk taker and carried that fearlessness over into this painting, daring to display a certain domesticity in his choice of "feminine colours" in his shirt and tie but he wanted to make a point – repeated in print to unhearing ears and unseeing eyes – as old as Homer's *Iliad* and as fresh as the latest press release of Canada's Bureau of Public Information that if combat troops are to retain sanity and stability in the killing fields, their sense of hearth and home must be constantly refreshed.

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John Lyman said of Surrey that he'd never met anyone like him for tackling the most difficult problems in painting. And that self-confidence is the third level of his self-advertisement. This work was painted mere weeks after Surrey was invited to become a member of Lyman's Eastern Group of Painters much to the consternation of Louis Dudek who believed that he deserved the spot Jack Humphries had vacated. When Surrey arrived in Montreal in March 1937 at the urging of the art reviewer and critic Robert Ayre who he had known in Winnipeg, the only artist he knew was Fritz Brandtner, another Winnipeg acquaintance. Much as he loathed the city on first impression, he liked the people he met, especially the French Canadiens. With enormous energy and deep concentration he'd set about becoming able to function well in their language by reading the French press daily, keeping his radio tuned to French stations, attending French films and language classes and accepting help from his mother who was fluent speaker of French, German, Polish and Yiddish. His first Montreal paintings reveal an artist struggling to reconcile diversities in his environment in ways that made him difficult to categorize. The unifying element was that his pictures were always inhabited – even, if only by a solitary man walking on Mount Royal in the vibrancy of his first Spring. From his

first hesitant steps toward becoming a painter while apprenticing in commercial art at Brigden's of Winnipeg 14 years earlier, Surrey drew and painted portraits as a way of getting to know people, including himself: *Myself/Moi-même* (1928) in the Firestone Collection at the Ottawa Art Gallery is the earliest known example. *Self-Portrait* was painted at the same time as he was painting his four great portraits of his recently married spouse, Margaret Day Surrey – *The Pink Sweater*, *The Girl in Grey*, *The Black Portrait* and the NAC's *The Red Portrait*. *Self-Portrait* was painted in a narrow sense for the military men who would have a say in his posting but also, somewhat more broadly, for whoever it was that was going to replace the CWRO (Canadian War Records Office) which had supervised the selection of Canada's War Artists in World War I. But there's also a romantic element: it's a small canvas that Margaret could hang near her bedside while he was abroad. Looking at the painting alongside the wonderful photograph taken of the two of them sometime in the first year of their marriage, it's pretty obvious that, in his absence, he didn't want to be remembered as much for his charm and humour and affection as for his trustworthiness: he would not be lost to her; he would return.

Margaret & Philip Surrey circa 1939

During the few months Surrey lived in New York in 1936—1937, he was befriended by John Groth, the Art & Design editor of *Esquire*, who was almost an exact contemporary. Groth ultimately became a front line presence with US military forces in 5 wars, including Viet Nam. It was Groth who taught Surrey the battlefront technique of "speed lining" in which subjects are sketched using rough, unperfected lines that are filled in with watercolors later. Having mastered that skill specifically for war work, Surrey was impatient to be selected and sent overseas. Instead, he encountered roadblocks. In the first instance, he was prohibited from regular enlistment by virtue of being a journalist – a reserved occupation overseen by the Bureau of Public Information. At the Bureau, awakening patriotic fervour at home trumped reporting on military conditions abroad. The Bureau saw its main task as creating a sense of Canada that promoted pride in Canadians' contributions at home and abroad. The Bureau's successor, the Wartime Information Board believed that support for the war effort ought to be focussed on home front workers.

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Surrey's poster Every Canadian Must Fight brilliantly captured the WIB's central pre-occupation in one striking image. It and the photo stories Surrey was putting together every week convinced Davison Dunton, Surrey's editor at The Standard who was a powerful presence at WIB, that Canadians were better served by keeping Surrey in place at The Standard than in allowing him to be seconded either to the army or navy as their chief information officers or sending him to battlefronts to paint when there was no shortage of painters such as Goodridge Roberts who were unsuited for any other task.

An Endnote

Surrey's relationship with Frederick Varley was more robust than generally recognized. It began in 1930 when he took some evening drawing classes at the Vancouver School of Decorative and Applied Arts. Recognizing Surrey's superior talent and degree of development, Varley invited Surrey to participate in the

Saturday afternoon life drawing sessions he organized for recent graduates of VSDA and other artists at his Bute Street studio. Varley hired "ethnic models", occasionally participated as artist and/or coach but was frequently absent. Because Surrey was one of the few who owned an automobile, he became a frequent visitor to the house in Lynn Valley that Varley shared with Weatherbie after he left his family in squalor in North Vancouver in August 1934. Varley exerted a stronger personal than painterly influence on Surrey in the years 1932 through the first half of 1936 while Surrey read and reread Amédée Ozenfant's Foundations of Modern Art under the tutelage of Harry Täuber, studied design with Jock Macdonald and absorbed cinematic techniques with his friends the artist Jack Shaw and the dancer George Brown. After Surrey and his mother moved from New York to Montreal in March 1937, Varley came from Ottawa for the Easter weekend and became their first house guest. To save rent, Varley moved in with them for the summer months. In 1940, Varley moved to Montreal and rented a room on Sherbrooke Street around the corner from the Surrey's apartment of Ste Famille. Once the Surreys moved out of the Ste Famille artists' ghetto to a Lincoln Avenue apartment near Margaret's mother and sisters in 1941, they saw less of Varley who had outworn his welcome with Margaret with his prolonged bouts of drunken self-pity.

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Philip Surrey, Taverne/The Tavern

(with John Lyman)

(c. 1942)

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16x20 oil on canvas
©Nicholas Simpson

I'm subject to correction because of two distinct provenances but I'm convinced that *La Taverne/The Tavern* is a study for the larger *Taverne Gilt Edge* (1942) which was #1 and hung alongside #2 *Taverne Youville* (1944)in the Surrey Retrospective at the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, 23 Fevrier au 20 Mars, 1966. I'm even more convinced and less willing to be corrected in my assertion that this *Taverne* is a landmark in Canadian Art. At the time of its creation, Surrey was mistaken for an untrained naïf and a primitive by those put off by the "vulgarity" of his subjects. Such viewers overlooked his mathematically precise, geometrically elegant underlying structures or failed to perceive his connection to Poussin or detect Surrey's debt to American artists of the Ashcan School – Robert Henri and John Sloan, in particular.

Almost 30 years after male-only Montreal taverns were outlawed in 1988 and 76 years after Philip Surrey painted *Taverne*, it's easier for people who never downed a beer in one to grasp what

makes this painting more alluring than the reality of its model, The Gilt Edge at 757 St Peter Street, a favourite of *The Montreal Standard*'s reporters, pressmen and truck drivers. Surrey's allure, like Fritz Brandtner's and John Sloan's, arose from a powerful conviction that art is the expression of empathy, not disgust with the human world; a fearless embrace of the day-to-day rather than a romantic reverie. His use of two complementary hues of the "institutional greens" of wartime public buildings as background in this work is brilliant in conception and execution. While attending the Art Students League in New York in 1936—37, Surrey studied painting techniques with Alexander Abel who taught him how to make glue-size and gesso, to paint with egg tempura and hand ground oil colours and to make damar varnish. It is the egg tempura emulsifier in the sombre industrial greens that make this work sparkle as the world was meant to gleam – even in wartime, even inside a tavern.

Surrey's paintings of this period are, as Robert Ayre wrote in *The Standard* of Surrey's first solo show at Antoine's Art Gallery, 950 Victoria Square, Montreal in 1940, "Haunted … Nothing tangible … the loneliness and secrecy of the night, created by still, poised compositions, by sombre colours, by mysterious shadows and, here and there, an eerie light . . . There is a story in most of Surrey's paintings: not an anecdote made obvious but a story implied for your own imagination to complete." At Antoine's, Surrey had exhibited about twenty recent gouaches (opaque watercolours) – eight or so rural Quebec and Vermont landscapes and, more to the point, a dozen cityscapes of the neighbourhood around Ste Famille above Sherbrooke Street where he was living with Margaret after their marriage. To his surprise, David Morrice, nephew of James Wilson Morrice (and an artist in his own right exhibiting at Dominion Gallery) bought one. Reynald (the *nom de plume* of Réginald-Ėphrem Bertrand) of *La Presse* had commented, «Très étrange ce Philip Surrey . . . il fait bien gris dans l'esprit de l'artiste: il ne voit qu'à travers des lunettes noires . . . C'est toujours mystérieusement gris fumée pour lui. » ("Very strange this Philip Surrey….It is very grey in the mind of the artist: he sees only through dark glasses…For him it is always mysteriously smoke grey.")

Two years later, from February 14 to 28, 1942, visitors to "Philip Surrey: Exhibition of Paintings in Oil and Gouache" at Contempo Art Studios on Sparks Street in Ottawa (his second ever solo show) were able to measure the accuracy of those judgements against a larger, more substantial

body of work that included *The Tavern*. It is the works from this show that are among Surrey's best known because of their dominance in major public collections – *Portrait in Red*, *Going to Work*, *Little Man Walking* in the National Gallery of Canada; *Children at Night* at the Art Gallery of Ontario; *The Boardwalk* (aka *Le trottoir de bois à Verdun*) in Québec City at Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec; *The Smoker* and *The Alley* (renamed *Night* when it was acquired) in the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts/ Musée des beaux-arts de Montréal. Much to his later regret, Surrey destroyed *Idle Hands* but his pencil study for it is at the Art Gallery of Alberta.

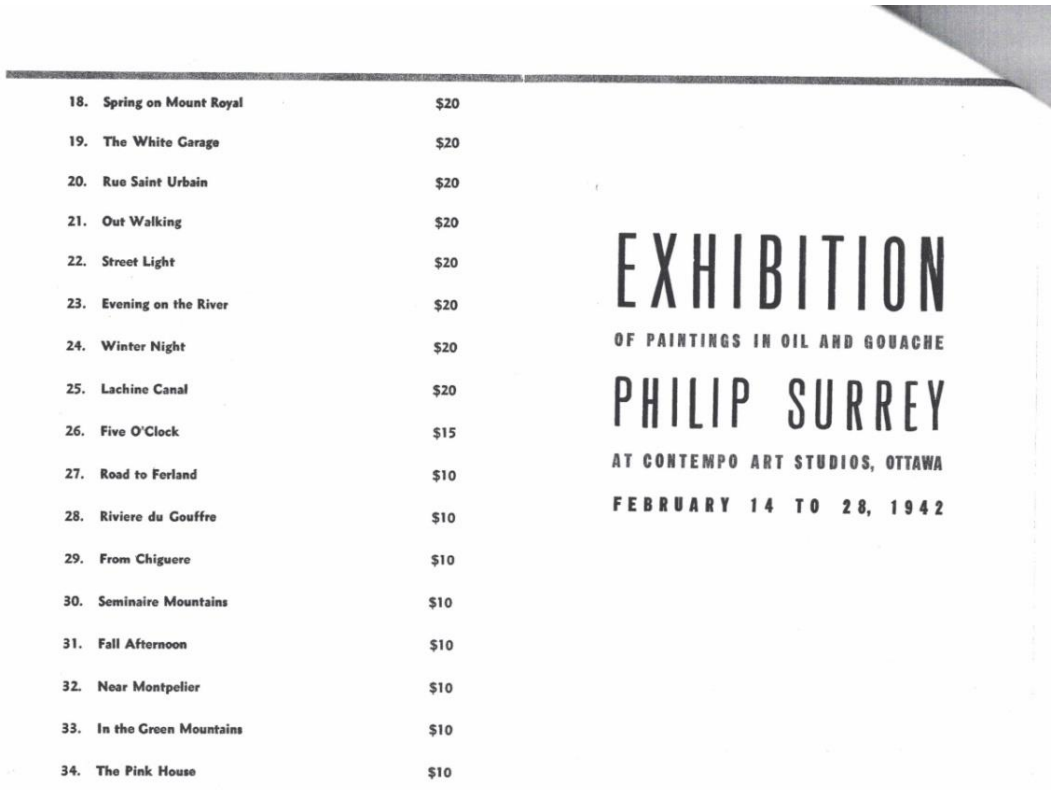
THE PAINTER

Philip Surrey is a painter of sombre moods. " . . . His studies," wrote Graham McInnes in Toronto Saturday Night, "give that same extraordinary feeling of nostalgia and impending doom that you get from the work of Chirico." Of some earlier works, Reynald said in La Presse, "Tres etrange ce Philip Surrey . . . il fait bien gris dans l'esprit de l'artiste; il ne voit qu'a travers des lunettes noires . . . C'est toujours mysteriousement gris-fumee pour lui." Of his first one-man show in Montreal Robert Ayre wrote in the Standard, "Haunted . . . Nothing tangible . . . the loneliness and secrecy of the night, created by still, poised compositions, by sombre colours, by mysterious shadows and, here and there, an eerie light . . . There is a story in most of Surrey's paintings; not an anecdote made obvious but a story implied for your own imagination to complete."

Born in Calgary in 1910, Philip Surrey travelled as a child in Europe and the Orient. His training began while he was still at school in Winnipeg. In 1929 he went to Vancouver where he studied with Frederick Varley, A.R.C.A. His work was first seen in Ottawa at the All-Canadian Exhibition of 1932 and again the following year. In 1936 he studied at the Art Students' League in New York, later coming to Montreal. Since then he has been seen in all leading exhibitions, the Canadian Group of Painters, the Canadian Society of Painters in Watercolour, the Canadian Society of Graphic Art, being represented also in the Societies' exhibits at the New York World's Fair, and was included in the exhibition of "less Independents" organized by Father M. A. Couturier, O.P., seen in Quebec and Montreal last summer. He is a member of the Eastern Group and the Contemporary Arts Society. The Art Gallery of Toronto owns a large oil and a drawing. Other works are owned by A. Y. Jackson, David Morrice, Mme. Gertrude Versaille, Lionel Haweis and the late John Vanderpant.

THE PAINTINGS

1.	Idle Hands	$125
2.	The Alley	$125
3.	The Boardwalk	$125
4.	Portrait in Red	$100
5.	Going to Work	$100
6.	Flowerscape	$75
7.	Sunday Afternoon	$75
8.	Evening on the River	$75
9.	Street Scene	$50
10.	The Smoker	$40
11.	The Tavern	$25
12.	Children at Night	$50
13.	Spring on Lagauchetiere Street	$35
14.	Sorel	$35
15.	Winter on Bleury Street	$20
16.	Leaving Montreal	$20
17.	Little Man Walking	$20



18.	Spring on Mount Royal	$20
19.	The White Garage	$20
20.	Rue Saint Urbain	$20
21.	Out Walking	$20
22.	Street Light	$20
23.	Evening on the River	$20
24.	Winter Night	$20
25.	Lachine Canal	$20
26.	Five O'Clock	$15
27.	Road to Ferland	$10
28.	Riviere du Gouffre	$10
29.	From Chiguere	$10
30.	Seminaire Mountains	$10
31.	Fall Afternoon	$10
32.	Near Montpelier	$10
33.	In the Green Mountains	$10
34.	The Pink House	$10

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This cycle of cityscapes continued into the early mid-1950s and led some contemporaries to label Surrey "the Canadian Edward Hopper." Molly Lamb Bobak, one of the first to promote this view, also considered him a better painter than Hopper. But Surrey was his own man and insisted on going his own way and that way led him to explore a speeded-up post-war Montreal swirling in motion, overflowing with pedestrians and passengers crowded in public transport, a world under threat and in constant tension with automobiles, trucks, motorcycles and dominated by (mostly young) women. Men were increasingly shunted into marginalized roles in these works – solitaries or nonplussed companions of livelier, fiercer women elsewhere – but not in the tavern paintings.

This is a tavern stripped to its essentials: tables, chairs, beer by the glass and bottle. Such places were ubiquitous well into the 1960s for the singular reason that workingmen were paid by the hour and nothing preventable was more disastrous than a bout of dysentery. Given the frequency of epidemics below Ste Catherine and up on the Plateau that never entirely died out, Montreal's drinking water was

long thought unsafe unless ferociously boiled for tea or coffee or distilled in sodas and seltzers but its beers were always safe and nutritious, one of the five major food groups as the old joke went. Taverns opened at eight and closed at midnight. They all stocked peanuts and pickled eggs. If they had a kitchen, it was a grill offering soups, baked beans, ham and eggs, grilled cheese sandwiches. The dominant sound of a tavern was the sound of men talking except when a radio was tuned to newscasts.

In this tavern scene, the faces are unfinished, anonymous with at least one exception. The strongest illumination and eeriest light falls upon the pipe smoker and his coat. A lot can be said about a man and the way he puts his coat on a chair. That coat looks very expensive, likely an iconic Burberry. He wants to show it, he doesn't want it to drag on the floor by putting it on the back of his own chair; he doesn't want to hang it in the cloakroom because he is afraid it might be stolen and he puts it over the chair in full view; his cap – also imported, expensive, iconic lies underneath it. That was his habit and one copied by Surrey when he inherited that cap because the man in the chair is a fellow painter and his mentor John Lyman. Lyman was well-bred and it was bad-mannered (even in a tavern) to light a pipe in front of someone at a table since the person was soon covered in smoke. He was lighting it before his companion sat down in the empty chair at his table – the painter then, the viewer now who imaginatively claims this space within the tableau.

Lyman was proprietorial about this table, the one where the light fell on him almost like a spotlight, because he was a habitué of The Gilt Edge. In addition to his household studio, he kept another in Old Montreal, home to the Lyman Agencies, Lyman Insurance and the Lyman Family Trust that disbursed an annual allowance so substantial that he never settled for less than the best in anything. So it was Surrey not Muhlstock who replaced Jack Humphrey in the Eastern Group of Painters and it was Surrey he chose to paint his portrait after Lyman had viewed *The Red Portrait* – the first major work in oil on canvas painted after the Surreys moved from Ste Famille to the marginally more spacious Apartment 1, 1830 Lincoln where he had a large enough studio to set up drying racks and work on several canvasses simultaneously.

Evidence that the pipe smoker is John Lyman is circumstantial but substantial and not uncharacteristic: another work from this period, *Listening to Music* (1940, inserted Lyman's protégé and

Surrey's best friend Goodridge Roberts alongside Margaret Surrey. Surrey remarked, years later, in private conversation that he would meet Lyman as close to his newspaper's offices as possible whenever they wanted to discuss the activities of the Contemporary Arts Society or a Lyman article for *The Standard*. Surrey's wartime workday often extended from 10 A.M. to 10 P.M. Beyond this, identification is based on gut instinct and common sense moderated by insistence that Robert Ayre was absolutely right: There is a story in most of Surrey's paintings – not an obvious anecdote but a story implied for your own imagination to complete. Surrey invited viewers to enter his world on the same terms as poets address their readers. But – and this is the mark of peculiar ingenuity in his best work – he placed obstacles in the way, often sinister ones. In this tavern, viewers can sit in the empty chair only by manoeuvering around the man who dominates the foreground. What an unexpected presence that person is! He's so temporary a drop-in that his scarf remains unloosened, his overcoat remains buttoned and his hat sits on his head. His beer glass is half empty. He's giving his attention to someone outside the picture. Odd. As odd as sitting indoors in a tavern with that hat on his head – it's a Homburg, the thickest grade of pure beaver felt with a double lining, a heat trap at the top end of a hatters' craftsmanship and *the* status symbol of *la haute bourgeoisie*. What has brought this overheated hot head to this place he ought to leave as quickly as possible? Some monkey business in the black market? Why was Surrey's signature placed at brim level? It could mean little – taverns had a pay phone mounted on the wall with a privacy hood (rather than a separate booth) and the wall around became a *de facto* bulletin board – a cluster of names and messages and phone numbers. This is a minimalist tavern: is *Surrey* one *graffito* that stands for the many? Or, placed right where a dialogue balloon would appear in a cartoon, was it intended to make Surrey the subject of a specific conversation? One possibility: Could this be a caricature of Augustus Bridle, the founder of Toronto's Arts and Letters Club, the *Toronto Star*'s critic-in-residence, Lyman's Nemesis who in 1940 was doing his best to keep The Eastern Group of Painters from being seen whole by attacking and ridiculing Surrey as its weakest link, the most immodest of its "vulgarians"?

In 1952, the multi-talented Gilles Corbeil (who abandoned a promising career as a musical composer to become one of Borduas' apprentices) followed his brother Maurice's lead and started adding Surreys to his private collection. Fifteen years before Surrey became one of the gems of Galerie

Gilles Corbeil, Corbeil (egged on by Borduas) became the loudest cheerleader among Quebec's mostly French non-figurative painters for Surrey's "representational modernism." In English Montreal, Corbeil's advocacy of Surrey as modernist was contemporaneous with the modernist architects at McGill University – notably Hazen Sise and Ray Affleck – making the case for Surrey's relationship to LeCorbusier in terms of design and Amédée Ozenfant's and LeCorbusier's "le Purisme" in color.

By the time McGill-trained James Strutt, the architect for some of the Ottawa region's finest examples (such as his own Strutt House in Aylmer, Quebec) acquired *this painting* from another private collector in the mid-50s, it was easier to look at Surrey's paintings in terms of structure rather than representation. The interplay of curves, circular chair bottoms, rectangular table tops in this work has the same sinuousness as other works of 1940 and seems reason enough, all else considered to date *Taverne* to that year although 1941 is also possible. It doesn't matter much one way or another: Surrey's working practices didn't respect calendars. Years might pass between the beginning and the end of a painting (his portrait of John Lyman wasn't completed until 1946). It was during "the phoney war" of September 1939 till May 1940 that Surrey painted this freely and prolifically.

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After their joint show at Watson Art Galleries in 1951, Lyman and Surrey became estranged as the gap widened between Lyman's life in academia when as was named Director of the Fine Arts Department at McGill in 1952 and Surrey was promoted to Features Editor and became involved in the makeover of *The Standard* into *Weekend Magazine* the same year. The break between them lasted a dozen years. The rift was healed publicly in 1965 when Lyman attended the *vernissage* of Surrey's show at the Galerie Martin. In private, Lyman had begun bestowing gifts months earlier – a fine small painting, a drawing table, a large roll of excellent canvas, the treasured cap in instalments until his death in 1967.

When I came to know Surrey in the 1980s, he would deflect questions I posed about his own work to praise other artists, especially John Lyman. "Lyman is the art critic to read and the painter to study if you want to understand any of us, all of us who painted because it was *necessary* even during wartime," he told me several times.

Endnotes

Surrey's *Sunday Afternoon* (#7 in the Contempo show) was first exhibited at the New York World's Fair in 1939. In Canadian Painting in the Thirties, the catalogue for the 1975 exhibition of the same name at the National Gallery of Canada, Charles Hill wrote that it reflects "[h]is recognition of a growing malaise and the imminence of conflict . . . . The gaunt and awkward figures . . . painted from memory of a veillée at Saint-Hillarion which he attended with the Palardys, are isolated, each caught in his or her tragic situation. He paints with less fluidity and more concern for structure, accentuating the macabre reality of the individual sitters."

In his unpublished memoir, Surrey wrote of the instantaneous and mutual rapport between himself, Jori Smith and Jean Palardy when Fritz Brandtner introduced them. Smith did much to advance Surrey's career in its earliest years; Palardy remained one of his closest friends for life. They'd talked to him of the beauties of the lower St. Lawrence and of their experiences living with habitant families and invited him to spend a few days with them in their tiny, one room house at St. Urbain, near Baie St. Paul. When he had a few days holiday coming, he went by the Canada Steamship line which had a stop at Murray Bay. He was just in time to see the end of a way of life that had been almost unchanged for 200 years: "They were still amusing themselves by themselves, singing their own beautiful, old songs, square dancing to music played by a fiddler, having their veillées, (parties), at each other's houses. I made an oil painting of one when I got back to Montreal. It was exhibited at the New York World's Fair. It has now some historic interest." [My italics]

For Surrey, to paint from memory was to paint from his speed-lined aide memoir sketchpad. The figures in the painting are neither isolated nor macabre and only one is gaunt – the adolescent girl at the extreme right. Four women and a small child are front right; the fiddler is almost dead centre with two female singers to his right with a man standing framed by the closet door and the thin and shy adolescent to his right. The whole grouping is as one would expect it to be in a photograph. There are two figures – a man who'd be more comfortable in a German Expressionist painting – one by Brandtner, for instance, sitting at the top of the stairs and a woman in the deep background of the front parlour – that do seem out of place until you compare them to photographs and portraits of Jean Palardy and Jori Smith. Surrey remarks that "Jean Palardy was a marvellous mimic and loved telling stories, especially stories which made fun of the church. He was a great mangeur de curés (Priest Eater) and his imitations of sermons would have us rolling on the floor." It's not surprising that he is "an alien" here but there's no mistaking his thoroughly distinctive head. No one's situation is 'tragic' except perhaps Charles Hill's. He wasn't the first to misinterpret this painting: it provoked considerable debate about its inclusion in a prestigious world class event, both in Quebec and in Toronto.

The misconception that Surrey's work was not suitable, not dignified, not beautiful was due less to the frequently alleged "snotty provincialism" among Canada's oligarchs than to the vicious campaign launched against Surrey and Jori Smith, as the most vulnerable members of the Eastern Group of Painters, by that staunchest of champions of the Group of Seven, Augustus Bridle. Bridle was so narrow in his views and so maliciously ad hominem in his attacks that he notoriously dismissed Van Gogh as a semi-demented interior decorator whose passion for painting ugly things celebrated only decay, misery, gloom, despondency.

A century later, it's difficult to comprehend the tremendous attraction socially progressive painters who rejected Social Realism felt for the works of Nicolas Poussin (June 1594 – 19 November 1665). What they saw and embraced behind the classical French Baroque subjects drawn from Roman poetry and the Bible was a clarity, logic, and order in designo that paralleled Karl Marx's dialectical materialism. Before the 20th century, he remained a major inspiration for such classically oriented artists as Jacques-Louis David, Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres and Paul Cézanne. Poussin's direct influence on Surrey began in New York and was enhanced in Montreal through his relationship with his employer John McConnell who spent three years at Cambridge University being tutored in French and art history by Anthony Blunt whose works on Poussin in the 1950s strengthened his hold on Surrey till the end of his life.

Surrey felt a greater personal, professional and political affinity with John Sloan than with Robert Henri or Edward Hopper. Both had begun their working lives at 16, both worked in newspaper art departments, both painted men drinking (McSorley's Bar) and women working. Sloan's greatest painterly influence on Surrey is seen in the ways he paints white fabrics. Politically, they equally disdained "careerism" in painters and supported the Socialist Party of America in its campaigns for equal rights.

The registration of the Gilt Edge Tavern at 757 St-Pierre (or St Peter in the days when streets in the financial district bore both English and French names) was announced in Le Devoir of September 8, 1936. In Le Devoir's announcement, the owners are given as Abraham Wexler, John Schlesinger and Louis Levin. Its first appearance in Lovell's Directories is for 1937-38 and the last appearance at that address is for 1955. Starting in 1956, the address is given as 570 Jarry West.

In a series of articles in the *Journal of Canadian Art History*, Hélène Sicotte provided valuable information on several Montreal art galleries. Ateliers Antoine (in English Antoine's Art Repository) opened in March 1936 and was owned by Antoine Ulrich. Quoting an article from *Le Devoir* of November 24, 1949, she writes that the art critic mentions that Surrey's was the first exhibition in that gallery when it moved to 950 Victoria Square.

The Contempo price sheet prints Raynald's text without accents. Michel Brisebois corrected the oversight and provided the English translation. These are only two of the multiple contributions he's made to this essay. Others include checking my research and supplementing it with his own and keeping me focussed with his judicious editorial suggestions. He also has a wonderful eye for what men do with their coats and the etiquette of pipe-smoking.

The Homburg is a style of hat now casually referred to as a "godfather" even by Stetson, its premiere North American distributor. In 1940, a lot could be said about men who wore Homburgs but it seldom referred to the heads of Italian crime families: the exception was Al Capone who wore a dove grey one. At Stetson, it's still officially a "Royal." In Montreal and Toronto in 1940, it was either an "Edward VII" (who claimed to have designed it and who insisted that courtiers wore charcoal grey ones in place of a top hat with morning coats and with black tie evening attire) or an "Eden" (after the Foreign Secretary) who popularized it among the ruling classes of many nations. A Homburg is at the top end of a hatters' craftsmanship – a formal fur felt hat with a gutter crown (a single dent down the middle), a stiff brim shaped in a kettle curl with grosgrain brim trim and hatband. It's more than two hundred steps in the making, impermeable and ideal for winter weather. In Montreal and Toronto, paired with a cashmere overcoat, it was the status symbol of la haute bourgeoisie, industrialists and financiers as well as, rungs financially down their ladder, their arbiters of taste in everything from gilded bathroom fixtures to the Gates of Heaven but especially in art, music and theatre. Toscanini invariably wore the Italian version which some authorities claim predates the British iteration: this man wears the British iteration. A Homburg of this quality is now in the $500--$600 range.

It's possible to detect a wry, private joke in placing his signature in the vicinity of an unseen telephone. When they married, Margaret knew little about painting but much about music and literature. In their first years together, Surrey liked to paint with Margaret in the room, reading. She was a trained singer and elocutionist and sometimes she read passages out loud. Because she wanted to know more about his childhood in India and her mother-in-law's, E.M. Forster's Howard's End was one of the books that succeeded in opening him up early in their relationship. If readers can quote nothing else about it, they do remember "Only connect!" But the whole of the passage is, "Only connect. That was the whole of her sermon. Only connect the prose and the passion, and both will be exalted, and human love will be seen at its height. Live in fragments no longer. Only connect, and the beast and the monk, robbed of the isolation that is life to either, will die." Margaret was well aware of the "beast" in Surrey and the "monk" in her.

Philip Surrey, *Soda Bar*

(with Gabrielle Roy)

(c. 1948)

"

Oil on masonite 16" x 12"

How many Canadian artists have been generous-spirited and self-effacing enough to rejoice in

a friend's success in writing a sexually, politically and socially transgressive best-selling novel that they have portrayed her not as a Muse, some extension of their sexualized selves, but as an incarnation of a European pre-Christian deity, the "White Goddess of Birth, Love and Death" (similar to the Mother Goddess of 1970s feminist theology) hypothesized by Robert Graves in *The White Goddess: a Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth* (1948)? *Soda Bar*, Surrey's tribute to Gabrielle Roy and the enormous international success of *Bonheur d'occasion/The Tin Flute* in 1947, may well be a one off in our art history except that it's possible it exists in two or more iterations.

Between 1964 and 1983, Surrey painted 85 oils on panels in 12x16 and 18 in 16x12. The odds are almost 50/50 (to be precise 54/63 or 46%) that he was satisfied with the results achieved in these smaller formats and saw no reason to enlarge upon them. (The issue of Surrey's use of various sizes in discussed in my Observations on Smaller, Medium and Larger Formats.) Did his art practice in the 40s and 50s follow the same pattern albeit on a more limited scale? Lacking clear provenance, it's guesswork if this is a study for the work rather than the work itself that was hung as #4 *Soda Fountain* in the Surrey Retrospective at the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, 23 Fevrier au 20 Mars, 1966. Whichever the case, *Soda Bar* is a beautiful and generous-spirited homage to Gabrielle Roy and her success (This isn't a wild surmise, there are markers within the painting – including Surrey's muted self-effacing signature) in capturing the Prix Femina in 1947 and numerous subsidiary rights (including a movie deal with Universal Pictures) and that it was likely drawn as early as then and probably painted in autumn 1947 or winter 1948 but 1950 as an end date can't be ruled out. By then, she'd fled Montreal

for Paris.

That's not of paramount importance: this is – the more one looks at it, the more beautiful this work becomes as befits Gabrielle Roy who was, by all accounts, a woman of singular attractiveness whose lush hair was almost as frequently commented upon as the radiance of a personality that seems to have been equally attractive to women and to men. The following passage from *The Tin Flute* in Hannah Josephson's English translation illustrates the aesthetic bond between Roy and Surrey as well as any of the many:

> The street was absolutely silent. There is nothing more peaceful than St. Ambroise Street on a winter night. From time to time a figure slips by, as if drawn to the feeble glimmer of a store front. A door opens, a square of light appears on the snow covered street, and a voice rings out in the distance. . . . [T]he spirit of the night reigns in the deserted street between the pale glow of lighted windows . . . and the dark walls bordering the canal. . .

As Mark Abley wrote in Roy's obituary in *Maclean*'s in July 1983, "Only a few modern writers, notably Isaac Bashevis Singer, could match her gift of portraying warmth without sentimentality, joy without delusion. Even when her work described alienation and loneliness, it also reached out in hope." This too applies to Surrey's paintings. *Soda Bar* is as precisely situated geographically as any

scene in Gabrielle Roy's novel *Bonheur d'occasion* (literally, "chance happiness" or "happiness achieved by accident" or, some have argued, "second hand happiness" in the argot of Saint-Henri of that era). Put this together with the women meeting at the ice cream emporium "Soda Bar" that had opened in 1947 on Avenue Lajoie (literally Avenue of Joy), a darkened street in a residential neighbourhood in Outremont and not at some generic soda fountain and you get something more than a work "of singular documentary value" (a diminishment frequently levelled at *Bonheur d'occasion* by critics who have never thought as long and hard about the book as its creator and her coterie of manuscript readers, including Surrey). Roy and Surrey were equally committed to representing robust and original anti-Fascist art that was immediate, intimate, socially relevant and optimistic despite the powers arraigned against it. Surrey famously used automobiles to represent the dangers posed by militarism and industrialism but here the automobile seems to be withdrawing from the scene perhaps because of the arrival of the second woman whose identity has to be guessed. She's so powerful a presence that "Occam's razor" (the principle that in explaining a thing no more assumptions should be made than necessary) suggests she's the woman who made the novel accessible to American readers and prevented its public persecution in Quebec – Miriam Chapin.

It's not in the least surprising to discover resonances of Surrey in Roy and vice versa since both were enthralled in this period with the few chapters of *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* that its author Johan Huizinga, Holland's most prominent and outspoken anti-Fascist, had personally translated from Dutch into English and sent abroad to be circulated in mimeographed copies. Huizinga was certain he could be imprisoned at any time and would not survive German captivity. (He was arrested in 1942 and died in De Steeg in Gelderland, near Arnhem just a few weeks before Nazi rule ended.) Huizinga insisted that human beings always have a choice between organic, spontaneous *playfulness* (democracy) and *playing state-imposed games* (fascism) where technical and mechanical organisation replaces organic, democratic growth. Those who choose the latter are progressively reduced first to consumers of an absolutist ideology and ultimately to products of that ideology. Huizinga's meditations on the theatre of everyday phenomena led Surrey and Roy to deeper reverence for the modest and the simple. He led them to discover for themselves that by working against bourgeois expectations, it might be possible to create artwork that illuminated rather than castigated:

works free of *ressentiment* – frustration, hostility, powerlessness. Huizinga's few chapters impressed on Roy the necessity of discovering her own play-ground within Montreal and revealing its special rules. Huizinga's impact on Surrey was to extend the boundaries of the Montreal in which he'd been living and painting into the very area Roy became most interested in exploring – Saint-Henri.

Bonheur d'occasion was written during the brief respite of Premier Joseph-Adélard Godbout's Liberal and liberating regime of October 1939—August 1944 before Premier Maurice Duplessis's *Grande Noirceur* descended on Quebec for a second time (August 1944—September 1959) with more comprehensive ferocity than its pre-War incarnation (august1936—October 1939). First published at the end of June 1945 by a small and financially shaky Montreal publisher Les Ėditions Pascal, *Bonheur d'occasion* was priced at a hefty $3 it in a two volume set. Despite poor production qualities that included numerous typographical errors and an author best known for the innovative articles she wrote for *Le Bulletin des agriculteurs* (which was neither as rustic nor obscure as its name suggests), sales outstripped her publisher's meagre resources to satisfy demand. In a brilliant manoeuver, Roy's lawyer recovered all her rights and made her the publisher of the novel and reduced her former publisher to nothing more than its distributor. Roy acquired full control of marketing and began collecting both the publisher's portion and the author's royalties – roughly one third of the selling price – on sales of 9000 copies that first year. There was a second printing at the author's expense that was turned over to a more established firm for distribution when it was announced that English language rights were purchased by the New York Publishing House, Reynal & Hitchcock. Then came the astonishing announcement that it was selected pre-publication as a "Book of the Month" by The Literary Guild and would be published in an edition of at least 600,000 copies. This boosted Quebec sales even more despite a growing chorus of growling complaints by Catholic clergy that the book was "blasphemous."

After *Bonheur d'occasion* became the first Canadian book to be awarded a major literary award in France – the Prix Femina – in Paris on December 1, 1947, Universal Pictures purchased movie rights and Librairie Ernest Flammarion secured rights to future French editions, rights were sold for multiple European translations and The Literary Guild printed an additional 80,000 copies. Much of this would

never have happened except for Miriam Chapin. Chapin, the sister of Curtice Hitchcock, co-owner of Reynal and Hitchcock, always maintained that Roy's novel owed its success to "the impact of St. Henri slums on a delicate, observant" young woman who fearlessly "peered through crumbling arches at the dangling stairways of the courtyard houses, ate at the Woolworth lunch, listened to the strange jargon full of English slang, watched the women with many children trying to keep houses clean in the smoke from the trains" and put on paper "real people, talking as people do talk in Montréal, living as they live" with "passion and political engagement" and discounted her own role. But the fact of the matter is that Chapin wrote the first published review of *Bonheur d'occasion* in English, published in *En Masse* in October 1945, translated sample chapters to present to her brother and his partner to make the case for purchasing American rights, approved of an inexperienced Hannah Josephson as translator because she was sensitive to the book's ironies and so sympathetic to Roy's intentions despite a limited grasp of the idiomatic particularities of Saint-Henri, a technical deficiency Chapin partially rectified in the final edit of the translation. Such was Chapin's dedication to helping this book that she pushed the American publication forward despite her brother's death in an automobile accident in the summer of 1946 and with her sister-in-law did everything possible to make the Literary Guild edition so successful that it went to a second printing.

Bonheur d'occasion was a natural outgrowth of Roy's features writing for *Le Bulletin des agriculteurs*. Despite its unassuming name and its predominantly rural readership, *Le Bulletin* was published in Montreal from offices in the Drummond Building, one of the city's Art Deco masterpieces, in the heart of the commercial district serving the Scots plutocracy of the Golden Mile. With professional guidance and affectionate encouragement from Henri Girard, its editor, Roy rapidly developed and deployed a strikingly original style that owed something to the American manner of reporting from the field favored by John Steinbeck and John Dos Passos but she incorporated more of the devices that are now associated with "The New Journalism" of the 1970s: scene by scene construction in which the journalist recreates for readers what has been witnessed firsthand; dialogue that defines characters and involves the reader; the use of technical details and economic statistics to establish motivation; a "social autopsy" of personal and territorial characteristics that allow readers to see people as they see themselves or, simply put, narration, description, reflection, reminiscence and portraiture that was both

singular and exemplary without being stereotypical. Gabrielle Roy's journalism was astonishingly modern in perception and judgement and expressed her views in an unaffected language dominated by nouns, nominal constructions and precision of observation that ultimately led to the authorial viewpoint in *Bonheur d'occasion*.

By using daily life as the driving force in his paintings of this period, Surrey broke free of any tendency toward the monumentalism and antiquarianism that were the default settings of the art world and its historians and the most readily absorbed reference points for its patrons. From 1940 onward, Surrey's playfulness moved his painting in a handful of distinct but complementary directions. In retrospect, it's unsurprising that those who wrote about Canadian art didn't know where to place him. Surrey was deeply attached to Roy (Roy had no sexual interest in men so it was Platonic) and absolutely in awe of her talent. You can feel that bond in *Soda Bar*: it *buzzes*.

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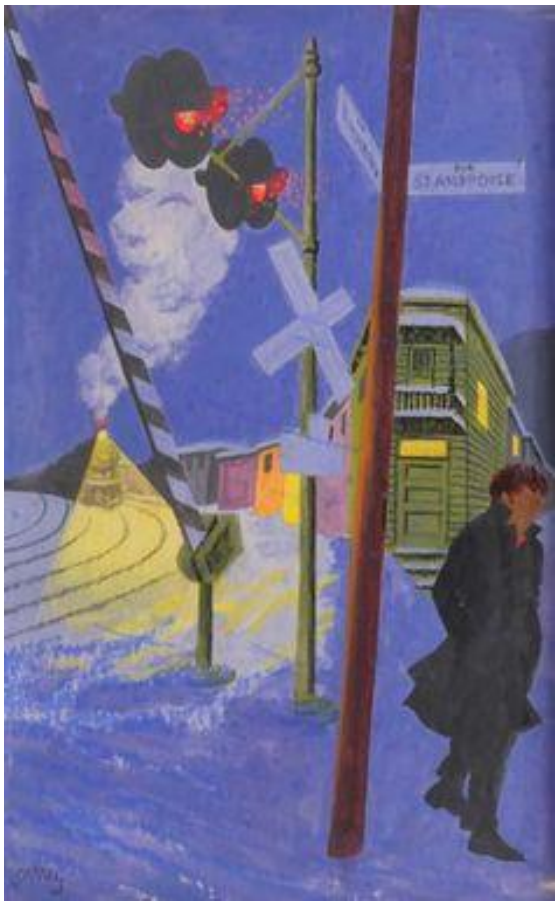
Near the end of October 1975, at the behest of Ara Kermoyan who wanted to celebrate the 30th anniversary of Gabrielle Roy's award of the 1947 Prix Femina for *Bonheur d'occasion* , Surrey began planning a sequence of 15 illustrations (17.5x11) to be lithographed by Kermoyan's Art Global for two portfolio editions (one French, one English) of 150 copies. He started by photographing locales in St-Henri. In addition to the set of illustrations, his forays into St-Henri generated a series of contemporary studies and paintings – especially of railway crossings – such as this one of the smallest house in St-Henri which figures prominently in the novel.



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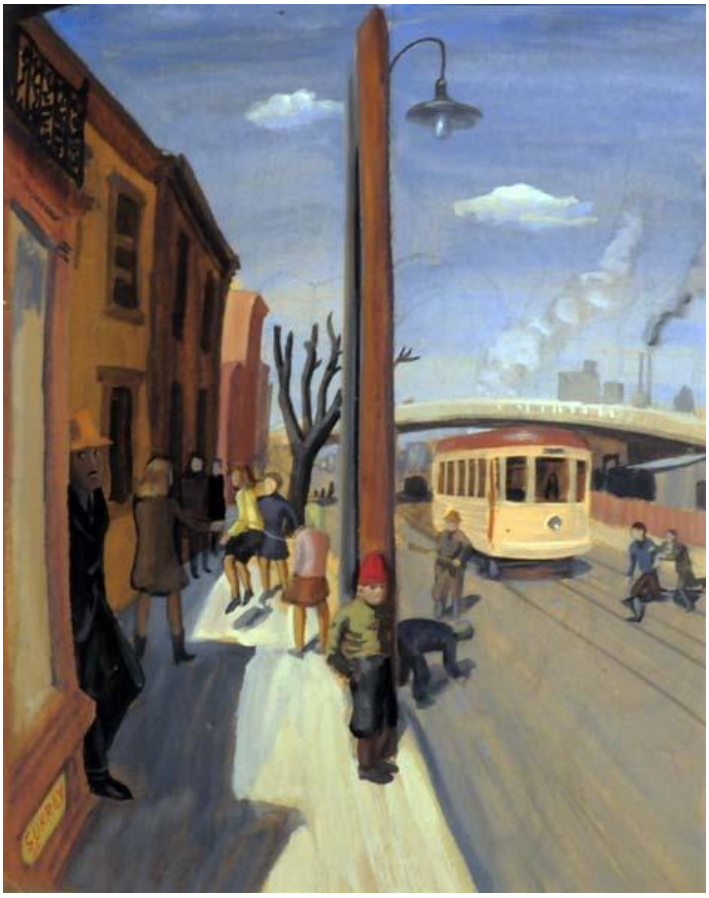
By February 1977, he'd completed the illustrations and began tinting them in ways suited for colour reproduction. But by this point, the project had morphed into using his illustrations in a new edition of *Bonheur d'occasion*, a project rejected by Roy: if there was to be a new edition, she wanted it to restore passages cut from the first French edition but she didn't have the energy to do it. If I've read ambiguous or unclear records correctly, Surrey may have produced one or two full sets in addition to the one for Kermoyan. To date, they've not surfaced in the marketplace. Surrey refused permission for

Kermoyan to use them in the edition Art Global eventually published (with illustrations by Miyuki Tanobe) in 1983 to commemorate Roy's death that year. The best example I've located so far of a St-Henri street scene from the period when *Bonheur d'occasion* was being written is this 14x11 gouache on paper, *Street Scene, St-Henri des Tanneries* (1944)



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Endnotes

Early in my friendship with Surrey, most of our conversations centered on three Canadian writers among his friends that I was interested in writing about – Gabrielle Roy, Mavis Gallant and Brian Moore. Surrey was particularly unguarded and effervescent about his relationship with Gabrielle

Roy. They'd not met in his Winnipeg years but they had a number of friends in common from that era including the producer, director, theatre teacher Charles Rittenhouse and the arts journalist and art critic Robert Ayer who recommended her to Surrey when she arrived in Montreal and was willing to freelance articles in either French or English. Surrey wasn't interested in any of the story proposals she offered but he did like her photographs and bought a few of them before she caught on full time with *Le Bulletin*. What he told me about his relationship with her centered on informal visits he made to her boarding house at 4059 Dorchester which was almost equidistant between his mother's bedsitter at the corner of Greene Avenue and Dorchester and the apartment he shared with Margaret on Lincoln Avenue.

If Gabrielle Roy was sitting in the enclosed sunporch as he returned home from his weekly visit with his mother, he'd stop and listen to her read from her work in progress. After I'd provided them with a digitalized copy of Surrey's memoir, both Mavis Gallant and William Weintraub were surprised to discover that Margaret Surrey had marginalized her husband's relationship with Roy, dating its inception to Roy's appearance at Surrey's 1945 one man show and implying that their friendship included Margaret as an equal partner. Mavis Gallant said to me over the phone from Paris, "Well, you do know, Margaret was inordinately envious of Gabrielle." I had not known this and said so. And she told me other things I had not known about Margaret: she had grown up in St-Henri from infancy like her mother and her grandmother had arrived there as a young immigrant. When her music studies in London were brought to an end by the untimely death of her father and Margaret returned to Montreal and took up a teaching position in St-Henri and a volunteer position with a free public health clinic, she was returning to her roots. What I remember clearest about our conversation was Mavis telling me that Margaret thought she could write about these experiences but she couldn't and then Gabrielle came along, a complete outsider, and wrote as if she had known these people all her life. Gallant and Weintraub were less startled by the complete omission of any reference whatsoever to Miriam Chapin in Surrey's memoir: "When Margaret turned against Marxism," Bill Weintraub told me, "she took up Freud in a big way and shunned those who remained committed to the cause. Patrick Anderson was an exception but that's because he was so beautiful and so willing to turn himself back into a bourgeois poet as soon as the Cold War began. As for Phil, he was gagged by the Official Secrets Act. Did Mavis

tell you that story of hers about him being too cheap to pay the actors she'd used for her photostory of *Bonheur d'Occasion*? He wasn't being a tightwad in this instance, he had to keep it looking like it was a report on a cultural event and not something *The Standard* had commissioned."

Having grown up in Saskatchewan throughout the CCF years, I'm more a child of the Cold War than many in my generation and never tire of digging into its untold stories and reviving its fading grip on our collective consciousness. Much of what follows might say more about that interest than further illuminate Surrey's art. I don't think that is the case, ultimately, but do jump ahead to *Philip and Margaret Surrey at Lake Orford* (1944) on page 38 if you're so inclined.

François Ricard, Roy's authorized biographer and the administrator of the Roy Archives, makes a very odd remark in *Gabrielle Roy: Une Vie* (1996). Citing Roy's 1947 comment to a *New York Times* reporter as his authority, Ricard states it "happened" that Miriam Chapin "who came often to Montreal to stay with friends who saw Gabrielle socially" discovered *Bonheur d'occasion* in September 1945. "Profoundly moved", she "persuaded" her brother to publish it." However, at the time of her death in 1965, Miriam Chapin had been a permanent resident of Montreal for 33 years. Having spent the years 1912 to 1932 on a number of sugar plantations in the Caribbean where her husband worked as an industrial chemist on behalf of Montreal's sugar companies, she'd developed keen insights into colonialism and, specifically, the negative effects of organized religion and industrialization on the lives of women. Trained in Linguistics at the University of Vermont and with a natural aptitude for acquiring a speaking knowledge of many languages and their various dialects, she'd rapidly become so expert in the differing argots of Montreal neighbourhoods and Quebec's regions that in the final decade of her life she undertook – with great success – "translating the untranslatable" *Les insolences du Frère Untel/The Impertinences of Brother Anonymous* (1960/1962)by Brother Pierre, a satirical tract considered one of the triggers of the Quiet Revolution, a book so popular that it sold 130,000 copies and so powerful that it earned its author exile to Switzerland for upsetting Catholic clergy in general and outraging Cardinal Paul-Émile Léger in particular.

Back in 1940, her children grown and Communism once more legalized in Canada – this time reincarnated as the Labour Progressive Party – Chapin began freelancing as a journalist at roughly the

same time as Gabrielle Roy but her connections were better and she contributed articles to *Foreign Affairs*, *Harper's Bazaar* among others including *The Montreal Standard* which published some of the material that appeared in her first book *How People Talk* (1947). Through a discussion of more than 100 languages in *Standard* articles throughout the war years, Chapin built a persuasive argument that "Narrow nationalism has made language an isolating force, in Quebec and Ireland and elsewhere" in ways that must be resisted: "The hope of the modern world is to pass beyond separatism, to move toward larger units and better understanding. Language can cement what politics builds, if we are wise enough." It's likely that it was her equation of the politics of Quebec with the politics of Ireland (and her foreboding that terrorist violence would erupt in both places) that led to the marginalization she suffered at the hands of Ricard and other Quebec writers. That and her avowed Communism.

In the years between 1940 and 1946, Miriam Chapin became very well known in Montreal's literary, theatrical and artistic milieus for her work on behalf of the LPP as its feminist recruiter as Sandra Djwa notes in *Journey with No Maps: A Life of P.K.Page* where she lists some of the more prominent members of the avant-garde group that regularly gathered at Jori Smith and Jean Palardy's flat at 3531 Ste Famille (owned by Alfred Laliberté who built his sculpture studio at the back of the yard and turned the house into a commune) where Suzor-Côté, Maurice Cullen, Robert Pilot, Edwin Holgate, Sheriff Scott, Alfred Pellan and many other painters and poets lived at one time or another. Once Smith moved in, she took charge of social activities and Friday nights became a weekly potluck dinner with beer, charades, folk song singalongs and storytelling. In P.K. Page's reminiscence of these gatherings, she didn't note Gabrielle Roy among a free-floating group that included Philip and Margaret Surrey, Patrick and Peggy Anderson, Goodridge Roberts, Frank and Marian Scott, Hugh and Dorothy MacLennan and Miriam Chapin but Roy's biographer François Ricard asserts that it was at one of these gatherings that Gabrielle Roy met "a very young Mavis Gallant."

In an obscure episode in Canada's literary history, when the famous little literary magazine *Preview* (whose co-founders included Margaret Surrey) ceased publication in early 1945, its editor Patrick Anderson immediately became editor of *En Masse*, an organ of the LPP. *En Masse* only lasted four issues but Miriam Chapin contributed to all of them with a short story, a seminal review of Latin

American literature, one of the many personal declarations about the election of June 1945 that filled the third issue and in the final issue in October 1945, a review of five "Novels of French Canada" that included the first reviews in English of *Bonheur d'occasion* and Roger Lemelin's *Au pied de la pente douce* (*The Town Below*). Michael Gnarowski's article "New Facts and Old Fictions: Some Notes on Patrick Anderson, 1945 and *En Masse*" in *Canadian Poetry*, volume 16 (my primary source) notes that the final issue of *En Masse* printed the disclaimer "*En Masse* no longer has any political affiliation; it is a cultural magazine produced by a group of progressives in Montreal" and that this issue coincided with the release of the first issue of a new literary magazine Northern Review edited by Patrick Anderson. Gnarowski comments that "the Labor-Progressive Party had had its fill of backing a cultural magazine."

There is, of course, an alternative explanation for *En Masse* ceasing to exist – the Igor Gouzenko Affair: Gouzenko was a cipher clerk who defected from the Soviet Embassy in Ottawa on September 5, 1945 with 109 documents on Soviet espionage activities in the West, exposing the Kremlin's efforts to steal nuclear secrets and the KGB technique of planting sleeper agents. Davidson Dunton, the General Manager of the Wartime Information Board banned the publication or dissemination of any reference to it under the Official Secrets Act until February 1946 when the parts of the story that the government wanted Canadians to know would be released. This did not preclude an intelligence officer within the Soviet Embassy advising the LPP to sever ties with those members most vulnerable to RCMP pressure tactics because of their financial fragility or sexual proclivities.

On Christmas Eve 1945, Dunton, erstwhile Editor of *The Standard*, was named to a previously non-existent position, President of the CBC/Radio by the Prime Minister to better control the story. That stratagem worked until Drew Pearson, a Washington reporter, broke the cone of silence when he told his radio audience in the first week of February 1946 that Canada's Prime Minister had advised President Truman of a Soviet spy ring operating in Canada. Pearson's revelations forced the Canadian government's hand and on February 5 Prime Minister McKenzie King informed his Cabinet about the Gouzenko case and then read the text of the order in council appointing a "Royal Commission to Investigate the Facts Relating to and the Circumstances Surrounding the Communication by Public

Officials and Other Persons in Positions of Trust of Secret and Confidential Information to Agents of a Foreign Power" headed by Justice Robert Taschereau and Justice Roy Kellock. No public announcement was made of this inquiry until February 15 – the day that the first arrests were made.

Once Miriam Chapin, who was the most vocal and active member of the LPP in the arts community, secured her personal safety by accepting the previously non-existent position of "Quebec Correspondent" for *The Christian Science Monitor* (her principal platform until her death), she went to work securing a presence in the American media via her connections at *Harper's Bazaar* which billed itself *the* style resource for "discerning ladies" who are "the first to buy the best, from casual to couture . . . . to culture"for those in her group of friends and associates who would benefit most from it, starting with Surrey's favourite freelance photographer, Ronnie Jaques. It was the addition of Jaques to the permanent staff of *Harper's Bazaar* that occasioned the publication of "Above the Crowd in French Canada" in the July issue which was a showpiece for his portraits of Gabrielle Roy and Roger Lemelin (novelists), Alfred Pellan and Paul (sic) Borduas (painters, Robert La Palme (political cartoonist) and Gratien Gelinas aka Fridolin (comedian), Claude Champagne (composer), Rene Garneau (essayist and critic) and the theatre director Pierre Dagenais whose February production of Jean Paul Sartre's *Huis-Clos / No Exit* was a *cause célèbre*. The captions and accompanying text were unsigned but are now attributed to Mavis Gallant. Gallant's March 2, 1946 photoplay "Canadian Story: Gabrielle Roy's First Novel 'Bonheur d'Occasion' deals with the War and a Working-Class District" was prominently printed in the opening eight pages of *The Montreal Standard,* illustrated by Ronnie Jaques's photographs of scenes from the novel stages by seven members of the Montreal Repertory Theatre (Roy and Gallant were both members) directed by Doreen Lewis. Ricard entirely overlooks this notable event and gives all the credit to the *Globe & Mail*'s William Arthur Deacon for initiating English Canada to the book and its author after Hugh MacLennan wrote him an enthusiastic letter: "Beyond the shadow of a doubt, it's the best novel of any large city ever done by a Canadian. . . . This book is every bit as good and valid as Dickens . . . written with terrific verve and a command of Saint-Henri dialect that is literally magnificent." Given that MacLennan did not speak French and was incapable of making any informed judgement on Roy's command of dialect, he was obviously relying on what others told him, most likely his wife's close friend Miriam Chapin.

Given the prominence *Bonheur d'Occasion* so rapidly attained gained outside Quebec, the enmity of individual priests wasn't sufficiently powerful to cause the Duplessis regime to react either on its own behalf or that of the Church. Pierre Hébert's authoritative *Dictionnaire de la censure au Québec: littérature et cinéma* (2006) has nothing concerning Gabrielle Roy or *Bonheur d'occasion* or even Roger Lemelin. The periodical *Lectures* which had a section in which some books were qualified as "MAUVAIS" has 32 entries and none are by Gabrielle Roy or Roger Lemelin.

In 1955, The Ryerson Press in Toronto and Oxford University Press in New York simultaneously published Miriam Chapin's *Quebec Now* which is precisely and accurately sub-titled: *The Problems and the People seen through the eyes of a shrewd and sympathetic observer*. She dedicated it "To Quebec: With Love and Candour" and noted in her ACKNOWLEDGMENT that she "tried to freeze in words a moment in time and space. She succeeded so brilliantly that it received a very chilly reception from all the usual suspects of "La Grande Noirceur" as they scurried about attempting to snuff the candles of hope she found here and there. In Chapter 12, "The Arts and the Artists," she asserted unequivocally that "The best writing done in Canada is done in French." After discussing the culture of eloquence and having drawn attention to the fact that although "only a few thousand will read his work, but with them he will be completely *en rapport*", she pointed to a deeper for the superiority of French to English Canadian fiction: "French Canadians feel themselves in their own country and give it their full allegiance" whereas English Canadians are too deferential to outside influences, too suspicious of their own." After noting, once more, the achievement of Gabrielle Roy's in bringing a new Quebec to literary consciousness, she noted:

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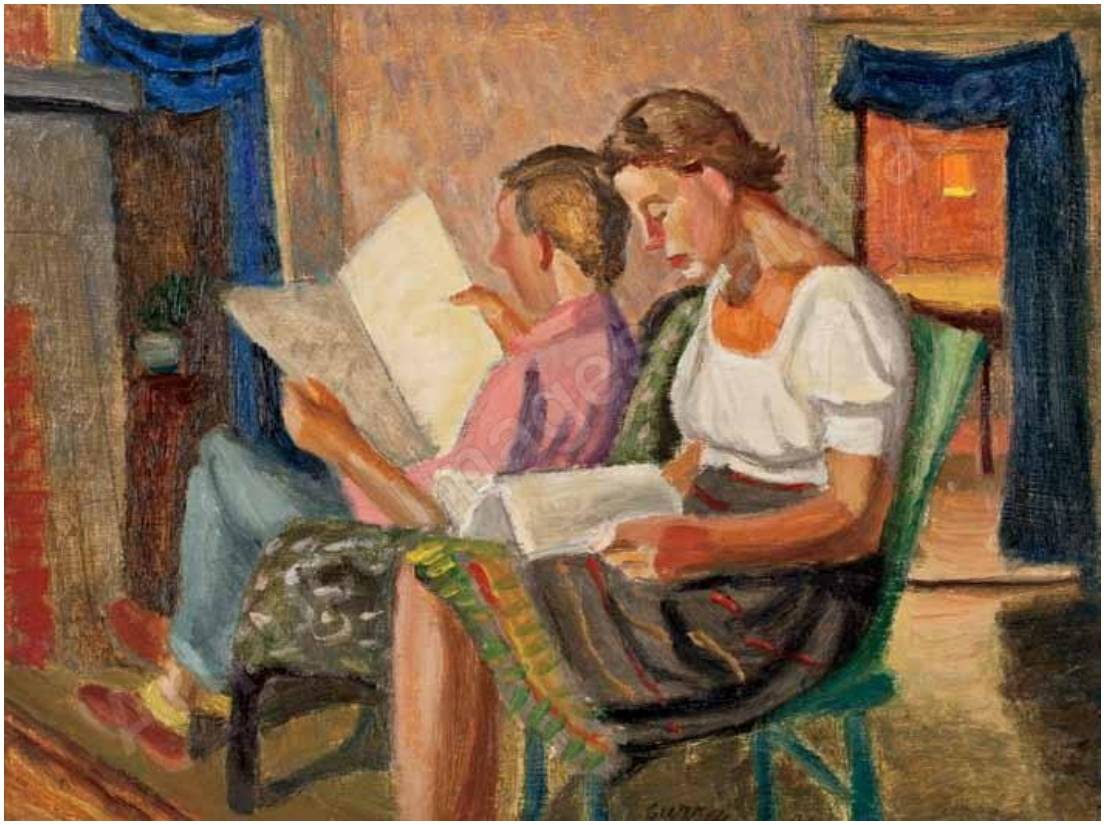
> Gabrielle writes no more with such passion. She has married, lived abroad, and now chooses to recall her western childhood in gentle sketches or to dig deep, like Thomas Mann, into the effect of mortal illness on man's questing soul, in her Alexandre Chenevert. Bur *Bonheur d'occasion* will live long, a flame of human sympathy.

And so it has, more so in English Canada than in Quebec.

When Chapin turned her attention to artists, she noted the pride Quebec takes in its multitude of painters and the seriousness of their work. She championed Paul-Emile Borduas and Robert

Roussil in particular. She noted how easily so many artists, following the example set by John Lyman, moved between the French and English worlds and lived in both: Goodridge Roberts, Stanley Cosgrove, Jacques de Tonnancourt, Alfred Pellan, Jean-Paul Riopelle and Jori Smith in particular. Philip Surrey isn't mentioned. A falling-out between them? Over what? It's unlikely we'll know anytime soon – if ever. Miriam Chapin's papers remain uncatalogued in the University of Vermont's archives.

Philip & Margaret Surrey, Lake Orford **(1944)**



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12 x 16 in
Oil on panel
©Nicholas Simpson

In his memoir, Surrey wrote:

> In the summer of 1944 we took a cottage at Orford Lake in the Eastern Townships. No cars in those days. We went by train and Margaret used to drag our suitcases two blocks to the streetcar to the station. The landscape of that area was all a painter could ask. I settled down every weekend and two weeks of vacation and painted two landscapes a day. The following summer Goodridge Roberts and Jeanne Rheaume rented a cottage close by. Looking back, those Orford days were idyllic. The Post-War had not yet arrived. We were in a sort of happy limbo between the Depression and the approaching end of the war. Overnight we entered the Nuclear World. Surrounded as we were by the peaceful beauty of Orford Lake and its hills, it was difficult to imagine the horror of Hiroshima.

A few months before this picture was painted, in the second issue of *Canadian Art* (Volume 1, Number

2, December-January 1943-1944) in "Silk Screen Prints Enlist", Surrey had argued that the plan to decorate Canadian servicemen's quarters with silk screen prints designed by Canadian artists could have been better executed. Given that one of the aims was to relieve the monotony of service buildings, he found it perverse that dull colours predominated in many of the paintings:

> 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.

Given that another aim was to remind troops of their own land and at least half were homesick city dwellers, there was little evidence of even such rural associations as swimming or fishing in a mountain lake or walking with a girl down a country lane. Surrey conceded that "Most artists feel, and rightly, that the "subject" is not important, by which they mean that it is the harmony of form and colour that constitutes a work of art" but asked "if that is so why are so many subjects taboo?"

Surrey believed that it was possible to make a good design from any subject and that artistic integrity was not sacrificed in the slightest by choosing subjects that appealed to a captive audience of relatively unsophisticated viewers. Among the subjects left untouched by these painters were:

> 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 . . . 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.

In retrospect, this passage reads like an agenda or manifesto for where his own painting was headed and Molly Lamb Bobak's with him. It had no noticeable impact on the jury's following rounds of selection. We do know that both Surrey and Lyman submitted works for consideration and both were rejected but I've not yet located a record of what Surrey might have sent them.

In his comment on the two consecutive Lake Orford summers, he seems to suggest that he

devoted himself to painting two landscapes a day and leaves aside this double portrait as well as his portraits of Margaret (see below). The tony Hermitage Club (established 1912) in Magog acquired at least one of the landscapes and a drawing of a women drinking tea on the long porch of the main clubhouse. It's possible that so few of these landscapes are known in the marketplace because Margaret, acting as his agent, sold a significant number to members of that club and are as widely dispersed as the Hermitage's members. It's a world of which I know nothing but one to which the Surreys gained access.

What I like best about this double portrait is the way Surrey makes the whole picture a bright note by minimizing neutral tones, extending his palette to mine that of John Lyman's younger self. "singing" among neutral tones, but in the present case the whole picture should be the bright note,

The Letter (Margaret at Lake Orford) **(1944)**

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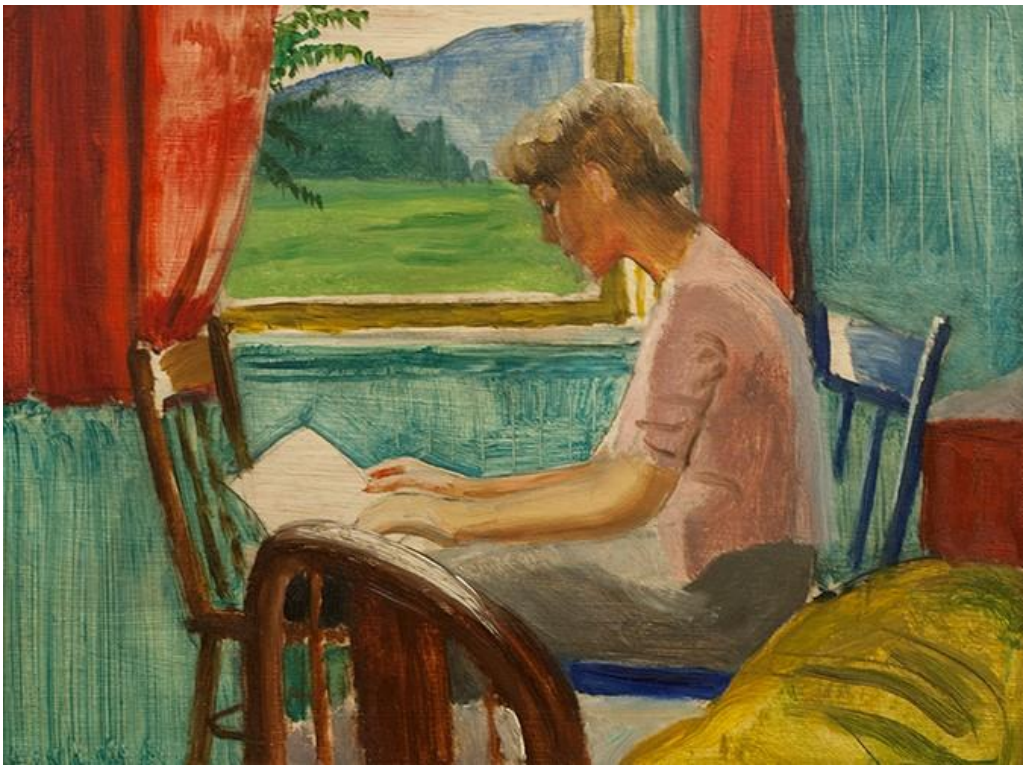

12 x 16 in
Oil on panel
©Nicholas Simpson

The Letter is one of a group of paintings of Margaret (his wife) by Surrey when they took a summer place at Mount Orford in 1944. The best known of the group is *The French Novel* in the Edmonton Art Gallery, acquired when Chris Varley was its Curator. I can't help but wonder if this isn't a study for a silk screen poster. It's more parsimonious in its use of neutrals and "sings" so beautifully that you can imagine the young woman jumping up and singing and dancing around the house with joy that the letter means that the soldier in her life has survived D-Day and there's real hope for reunion. As he said in his article about the war posters, it was possible to make a good design from any subject and that artistic integrity was not sacrificed in the slightest by choosing subjects that appealed to a captive audience of relatively unsophisticated viewers. And what subject was closer to a soldier's heart than the image of the woman he left behind on the home front reading

his letters?

In the early years of their marriage, Surrey did several formal portraits of Margaret, the more widely known being *Red Portrait* (1939) in the National Gallery of Canada. For that one and for *Black Portrait* (1939), artist and model got up at 6:00 every morning so I could get some work done before leaving for the office where his workday began generally at 10:00 because he invariably worked late. Surrey knew of no other way of really getting to know people than by painting them. In his memoir, he wrote,

> "As I got to know Margaret I learned quite a few things about her nature, (and she of mine) that had not appeared before our marriage. One very important trait in her character was her strong sense of the tragedy of existence, of mans' suffering and it overwhelmed her. She fought against thinking about it as it only harmed her but she was never able to shake it off. If she had been physically stronger she would have made herself so busy she would not have had time to think. Only art consoled her – music, poetry, the great writers."

As it was, her health was fragile and she immersed herself in music, books and friendships. The formal portraits capture her in her complexity. In the Lake Orford paintings and elsewhere, it's her simple tastes that come to the forefront – Margaret totally absorbed in reading or listening to music or the sound of water lapping at shorelines.

In the first of their two summers, Surrey also painted *Lake Orford Bathers* (1944), a painting I know only from the preliminary sketches in The Firestone Collection at the Ottawa Art Gallery. The central figure is a woman towelling herself off after swimming. Margaret? I really don't know any more than I know what eventually happened to a painting that a cranky Augustus Bridle (who had twenty years of newspaper work behind him before he joined the staff of the *Toronto Daily Star* in 1922 where he served for 30 years as book reviewer, film and drama editor and art and music critic at large) labelled "the most vulgar painting to be publicly exhibited in Toronto" when it was hung at Eaton's as part of a Contemporary Art Society exhibition. Surrey was constantly astonished at the range of subject matter that Bridle and his ilk – all dyed-in-the-wool supporters of the Group of Seven – found taboo. They simply did not know what to make of female models who weren't immobile objects of contemplation but are captured – as if by a stop-motion camera – in the middle of everyday activities. In thinking that high art was

sacrosanct, elevated beyond the reach of the everyday, they were ill-prepared for the world that was about to be revealed photographically by the cameramen who entered the concentration camps with their liberators and entered Hiroshima as documentarians of the Nuclear Age at its most violent.

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