For the past twenty years I've kept this 1983 photograph of Philip Surrey by Gabor Szilasi at eye level (when seated) in my home office.

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One of the things I most like about it is the way Szilasi mimics and mines Surrey's own strategy of cheekily inserting himself as an element within a composition, seated on his friend's bed with his Leica held at chest level. Surrey painted only two (perhaps three) formal self-portraits but he pops up in any number of his works, usually as a pedestrian in a street scene. When he isn't included inside the frame (at times only as a shadow), his name is printed as a sign on a shop or factory or street sign or even a cast-off newspaper in place of his signature. Although it's smile-provoking, it's not unserious. Surrey is a literary painter, less in the sense of a storyteller than in the overlays, allusiveness, and *designo* of a poet/dramatist. His presence is sometimes poignant, always pointed.

As far as I know, Surrey accepted only one commission: to paint a portrait: Corrine St. Pierre's for one of her husband, John Lyman. There was no commercial consideration playing any part in his others and not much market value attaches to them but I find them an excellent starting point for a fresh approach to his world and what he made of it.

Surrey took considerable pride in being a descendent of Richard Crosse (1742—1810), one of the Miniaturists featured in the Art Gallery of Ontario's exhibition *The English Miniature* (1981) that Szilasi alludes to with the lightest of touches by placing himself within the oval frame of the antique mirror in Surrey's bedroom. It's also worth noting that the only painting Surrey owned by his maternal grandmother, Elizabeth Crosse, a professional watercolourist of the Victorian era, portrays his mother as the infant swathed in a blanket in her amah's arms in one small corner of a Mumbai garden scene.

Surrey disdained discussing his work with non-artists and wrote of it mostly in technical terms with the odd nod to an autobiographical detail. He resisted all labels – especially Social Realist. He conceded that he was a Representational Painter not an Abstract one but sometimes mused that he ought not to have destroyed all his experiments in Abstraction (a small one actually does survive as the verso of a 1936 Vancouver sunset). Although he recorded all the books that shaped his approach to painting in the years before he arrived in Montreal, he never mentions where and when and under whose tutelage he was drawn to the Scottish Philosopher David Hume (1711—1776) whose aesthetics he made his own, especially after 1952. Summed up in one sentence, Hume asserted, "The most lively thought is still inferior to the dullest sensation." Surrey found Hume's empiricism, skepticism and naturalism equally appealing.

Hume rejected the existence of innate ideas (the cosmic consciousness so beloved by Theosophists and others), positing that all human knowledge is founded solely in experience. In his two essays on aesthetics, "Of Tragedy" (1757) "Of the Standard of Taste" (1757), Hume argued that the pleasure we derive from observing even the depiction of tragic events arises from *energy of expression, the power of arithmetic progressions and geometric ratios and the charm of imitation*. He stressed that the technical artistry involved in combining all three in a creative reproduction refines our sense of beauty and cultivates delicacy of taste just as fine cookery enthuses our palates.

Hume argued that artistic judgments are similar to moral judgements in that both are grounded in pleasurable and useful consequences, uniformly emotional rather than universally principled. Insofar as there is a harmonized sense of artistic judgment in humans, it is attributable to "constant conjunctions" rather than any supernatural agency. Insofar as there are differences in artistic judgements, they are attributable to peculiar differences in emotional tempers among us and particular manners and opinions prevalent in a place and time. That said, put bluntly (and Hume could be aggressively blunt), "A purpose, an intention, a design, strikes everywhere even the careless, the most stupid thinker" but cannot be extended beyond this world because we have no pattern of observed correlations between universes and their designers.

Once over an after breakfast coffee in a Toronto hotel restaurant where I'd encountered her quite by chance in the mid-90s, Mavis Gallant (who I'd met more formally on other occasions) told me that when she'd served as a stand-in for Surrey at the Paris vernissage of his retrospective *Philip Surrey: Le Peintre dans la ville* at the Centre Cultural Canadien almost 25 years earlier in January 1972, a French lawyer remarked to her *a propos* the paintings, "I had no idea Montreal has such ugly buildings." She considered this one of the strangest reactions to Surrey's work she'd encountered: "How can anyone be so untouched by their poetry? What a *strange* remark!"

By way of response, I quoted (in those days I was handier with citing things from memory than I am now) John Lyman: "In places where everything is beautiful I come to find everything indifferent; nothing emerges signally enough to strike the faded emotions. Here, in Montreal, where almost all is ugly I see beauty everywhere." I told her that I'd found Lyman's words in the typescript of Surrey's autobiography and said that he noted his strong agreement and commented "Montreal became a poetic city for me. The deeper I penetrated (its duality of languages and cultures) the more I loved it."

"So true," Mavis Gallant said, "so true."