

also consult other recently published volumes of similar scope as well as the classical works of a more systematic approach to the history of photography.

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A Terrible Beauty: The Art of Canada at War. HEATHER ROBERTSON.
Toronto: James Lorimer, 1977. 240 p. ill. ISBN 0 88862 144 2 \$29.95.

To coincide with Remembrance Day, 11 November 1977, an exhibition of Canadian war art from the two world wars opened at the Rodman Hall Arts Centre in St. Catharines, Ontario. About a month earlier *A Terrible Beauty: The Art of Canada at War*, billed as the official catalogue for the exhibition, appeared in bookstores across Canada. During the next two years the exhibition will be on gallery tour within Canada, coming to rest for its final show from 1 December 1979 through 20 February 1980 at the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa. The book/catalogue together with the gallery tour constitute an ambitious, collaborative undertaking. While chiefly the work of Heather Robertson, author of the book's eight-page introduction and selector of the war writings and the exhibit's 102 works of war art reproduced in the book, the publishing of *A Terrible Beauty* and the mounting of the travelling exhibit awaited the assistance of the publisher James Lorimer and Joan Murray, Director of the Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa. Necessary cooperation also came from the National Museums of Canada.

Those responsible for *A Terrible Beauty* have performed a service for Canadians: the rescue of remarkable works of war art from the oblivion to which most of them had been consigned in a warehouse of the Canadian War Museum. One can only speculate with Heather Robertson that perhaps revulsion from the subject of war kept the war art collection from any major public showing since 1946. Post-World War II books on Canadian art have not, however, completely ignored the work of Canadian war artists.¹ Charles Comfort's own *Artist at War* (Toronto, 1956), parts of which *A Terrible Beauty* uses, presents graphically and verbally one artist's experience of war. But not before *A Terrible Beauty* has so much of the rich legacy of art bequeathed Canadians by our war artists been reproduced in one book.

Art is one of the means men and women have of confronting and transcending the brevity of human life, but war, which cruelly sharpens that brevity, can overwhelm and paralyze an artist. Yet Canadian war artists captured and apotheosized into works of art the experiences of two generations of Canadians caught in the toils of war. From the unspeakable misery, devastation and drudgery, to the compassion and snatched moments of repose and even revelry, the subjects are as varied as the styles. Women artists, protected from combat, showed life behind the front, as in H. Mabel May's glowing "Women Making Shells" from the First World War and, from the Second, Paraskeva Clark's energetic "Parachute Riggers" and Molly Lamb Bobak's gossamer "C.W.A.C. Wedding in the Seminary's Chapel." More directly exposed to the brutality and destruction, male artists of both wars testified, in their most powerful statements, to the staggering horrors of war: F.H. Varley's "Sunken Road" shows a battle-scarred stretch of the First World War's western front, strewn with dead bodies.

1 Helen J. Dow, *The Art of Alex Colville* (Toronto, 1972), pp. 48-52, 54-59; Paul Duval, *Four Decades: The Canadian Group of Painters and Their Contemporaries, 1930-1970* (Toronto, 1972), pp. 74-81; J. Russell Harper, *Painting in Canada: A History* (Toronto, 1966), pp. 283-87, 335-36, 340-41; Peter Mellen, *The Group of Seven* (Toronto, 1970), pp. 70-77, 80.

From the Second World War's Italian campaign Lawren P. Harris' "Battle Ground Before Ortona" is eerily surrealist, and Alex Colville's "Tragic Landscape," 1945, is dominated by the reclining figure of a dead German paratrooper, his feet already stripped of boots.

A Terrible Beauty makes available not only the Canadian war experience as documented and transformed by artists; it also presents an anthology of war writings. These have been culled from articles in *Legion Magazine*, letters, diaries and memoirs preserved in various Canadian archives, transcripts of radio broadcasts, and poems, letters and other personal accounts published in book form. Popular songs and anonymous jokes are also included. Unlike the graphic war art, almost all of which was executed by professional artists, most of the literature is the work of non-professional writers. As with the collection of war art, the cumulative impact of the writings in *A Terrible Beauty* is anti-war. Glorification is absent. In a mood of hatred for "this murderous business," sickened by the excess of agony, mutilation and death he had witnessed, Talbot Papineau vowed, before his own death in the trenches on 30 October 1917: "Never shall I shoot duck again or draw a speckled trout to gasp in my basket — I would not wish to see the death of a spider." (p. 58) Another Canadian soldier wrote from the front in World War I: "There is no glory in it. Just scientific murder." (p. 92) Increased mechanization had intensified the impersonality of combat by World War II. In Donald Pearce's words: "I do not feel as if I were fighting against men, but against machines." (p. 223) Heather Robertson plausibly attributes the urgent tone of many of the servicemen's memoirs to a desperate need they felt to tell it as they had seen it and to set their personal revelations alongside the official versions of the war in an attempt to exorcise the horror and the painful memories. In publishing the edited excerpts from diaries, letters, and memoirs of Canadian servicemen and women, *A Terrible Beauty* is again involved in rescuing from obscurity a part of Canada's cultural and historical legacy. Many of the war writings, such as some of Talbot Papineau's letters,² have never been published and many of the books, such as Donald Pearce's *Journal of a War* (Toronto, 1965), are no longer in print.

Laudable as the rescue work is, it is a shame that the book's two purposes, anthology and catalogue, have not been brought into greater concert. Although occasionally two pages of text or two pages of plates appear side by side, the basic format of the book is two columns of printed text on a page facing a plate. A well-suited text and plate are mutually enhancing, as in the juxtaposition of Charles Comfort's observations on the imagery of a gun site with the reproduction of his painting "Canadian 5.-5 inch Guns" (pp. 176-77) or in James Pedley's ruminations on "No Man's Land" with Maurice Cullen's painting of the same subject (pp. 38-39). But all too frequently the textual excerpt is at war with the adjoining reproduction. F.H. Varley's compassionate painting of "German Prisoners" accompanies excerpts from "smutty marching songs" (pp. 74-5); Canon F.G. Scott's grim account of a front-line deserter's execution by firing squad faces photographs of two bronze sculptures of women war workers (pp. 82-83); and Tom Forsyth's terse diary entries during the fall of Hong Kong appear alongside Paul Goranson's pencil drawing of men rising, washing, shaving, polishing shoes, and making beds at an army depot in Toronto (pp. 108-9). We have been conditioned to expect congruence between text and graphics and so even the near-misses in *A Terrible Beauty* are distracting.

Perhaps the solution would have been to select only war writings which provided fitting captions or to include only plates which complemented the text. As is, what we

2 I say some, because at least one of Captain Talbot M. Papineau's letters, his open letter to his cousin Henri Bourassa, was published in English and French newspapers in Montreal, Quebec, Toronto, and Ottawa on 28 July 1916 and later in that same year in a pamphlet entitled *Canadian Nationalism and the War* (Montreal, 1916).

have in *A Terrible Beauty* is really two books. James Lorimer's letter to reviewers states that Heather Robertson's initial idea was for a book "on the two world wars through the eyes of ordinary Canadian servicemen and women." Only later was it decided to add reproductions of war art to the text of this book. Joined, both anthology and catalogue suffer. Disjointedness may be an unavoidable feature of anthologies, but here, to serve the graphics, when numerous selections have been made from one source, they are broken up and dispersed among passages from many other writers. The effect is jarring. Making room for the variety of war writings has reduced the book's value as catalogue, for information on the art works and artists was sacrificed. Jennifer C. Watson, Assistant Curator and Registrar of the Robert McLaughlin Gallery, announces in her introduction to the nine-page catalogue at the back of the book: "Only the basic cataloguing documentation is included here; information as to provenance, exhibitions, literature, as well as artists' biographies must await further publication." (p. 230)

Also scantily dealt with is the history of the Canadian war art programme. Although credit is given to Colonel Sir Max Aitken (later Lord Beaverbrook) in his capacity as Canadian War Records Officer for initiating the Canadian war art programme in the First World War, Heather Robertson makes no mention of the important role played by the Right Honourable Vincent Massey, High Commissioner for Canada in London, in reactivating an official tri-service war art scheme for Canada in the middle of the Second War. Nor is it quite accurate for her to say that the war artists "were commissioned into the armed services and divided equally among the army, navy and air force." (p. 14) The original plan provided for six official war artists for the Canadian Army, six for the Royal Canadian Air Force, and three for the Royal Canadian Navy. In February 1944 the number was increased to ten for the Army, ten for the Air Force and six for the Navy. Of the eleven eventually employed by the Army, eight had served in the ranks for varying lengths of time before their appointment as war artists and one, Captain L.P. Harris, had served almost three years as an officer with the fighting forces prior to his war artist appointment. Only two, Major C.F. Comfort and Captain G.D. Pepper, were commissioned directly as war artists without prior active service in the Canadian Army. Robertson also misleadingly implies that the three female painters of servicewomen were official war artists. Only Molly Lamb (later Bobak) was, and her elevation to that status came only after VE Day. Pegi Nicol MacLeod and Paraskeva Clark were hired by the National Gallery.³

The author of *A Terrible Beauty* and her associates decided presumably for reasons of space, aesthetics or marketability, not to burden the book with much scholarship or adequate scholarly apparatus. No page is cluttered by footnotes and a list of credits has been substituted for a full bibliography. Biographies of neither writers nor artists have been supplied. Indeed, not even the rank or unit of service is given for most of the contributors. Moreover, the written selections and plates in the main body of the book are only occasionally identified as to exact place and date. Some of the few dated paintings carry dates from after war's end, which must be confusing to those who do not know, and will not learn from *A Terrible Beauty*, that painters usually made sketches in the field and developed these into finished paintings only later in studios in London or Ottawa, "just as the historian who works in words produces a finished narrative from a mass of documentary evidence."⁴

3 Apparently unconsulted were the more than fifteen files on war artists and the war art programme of the three armed services in World War II. Public Archives of Canada, Records of the Department of National Defence, RG 24, Vol. 2173, file # H.Q. 54-27-45-10, vols. 2 and 3.

4 Draft press release of 18 May 1946 by Colonel C.P. Stacey, Director of the Historical Section of the General Staff, Canadian Army, for exhibition entitled "The Artist as Historian." PAC, RG 24, Vol. 2173, file # H.Q. 54-27-45-10, vol. 3.

In 1973 Peter Robertson of the Picture Division of the Public Archives of Canada put together, under the title *Relentless Verity* (University of Toronto Press), a history of Canadian military photography from 1885 to 1970. In contrast to *A Terrible Beauty*, it passes scholarly muster. Not only does *Relentless Verity* contain adequate notes, an extensive bibliography, and short biographies of the military photographers represented, but also every one of the 158 full-page photographs appears with a detailed and accurate caption. Furthermore, Peter Robertson's introduction gives a well-researched history of the use of photography to record military events and the experience of war. *Relentless Verity* has one other virtue which *A Terrible Beauty* lacks: it is bilingual, French and English, throughout. In *A Terrible Beauty*, even the selections from French-Canadian writers have been translated into English. The choice of English alone is strange for a book whose purpose is to reclaim an important part of the past of all Canadians and which quotes historian Desmond Morton's observation on the conscription crisis of 1917: "If war is one of those shared experiences which transform a people into a nation, Canada indeed became a country of two nations." (p. 11) Was the use only of English, like the weak scholarship, part of the price which had to be paid when the makers of *A Terrible Beauty* decided to present not only an anthology of Canadian war writings but also reproductions of Canadian war art as well?

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From Desolation to Splendour: Changing Perceptions of the British Columbia Landscape. MARIA TIPPETT and DOUGLAS COLE. Toronto: Clarke, Irwin & Co., c1977. 159 p. ill. ISBN 0 7720 1048 X \$19.95.

Perhaps taking their inspiration from such recent exhibitions as "The European Vision of America," Hugh Honour's splendid bicentennial look at the New World through Old World eyes, two young Canadian cultural historians, Maria Tippett and Douglas Cole, have adopted a similar approach to the landscape painting of their native province of British Columbia. The result is not only a very interesting survey of the many painters who for more than two centuries have grappled with western forests and mountains, but also an effective summary of the dominant European aesthetic doctrines which inspired and supported much of British Columbia landscape art right into the twentieth century.

The tradition began with the eighteenth-century explorers and their sailor-artists, who were the first to paint the Pacific coastline. Accustomed to the artfully refined landscapes of Claude and Gaspard Poussin and to the seemingly natural vistas of parkland artificially created by Humphry Repton and Capability Brown in imitation of these Old Masters, Captain George Vancouver found the BC landscape almost totally desolate, a point of view reflected by the topographical artists, who concentrated their attention on the natives and their dwellings. The Europeans could only approach this forbidding terrain through the doctrine of the Sublime, which permitted an awesome admiration or a melancholy contemplation of the overwhelming forces of Nature for the sake of spiritual uplift. The Eden-like site of Victoria, on the other hand, could be universally and enthusiastically admired because of its resemblance to a tamed English landscape garden.

Throughout the nineteenth century, visiting artists from Henry James Warre, a British army officer, to Lucius O'Brien, the first president of the Royal Canadian Academy, focussed on the Rocky Mountains in romantic, picture-postcard views which catered to the Victorian mania for the Picturesque, a sentimental mode of seeing which still holds sway in a much debased form in popular shopping-centre art. Not