

Heritage Centre been able to mount a glossier, more ambitious exhibit, it is doubtful that such a product could have functioned in the same way.

The fact of the matter is that archivists make assumptions about the ways in which viewers will react to exhibits, but there is no research or evidence to confirm these suppositions beyond what has been personally observed. Museums now regularly conduct studies examining the interests of their clientele. Perhaps archivists should be pooling their resources to study the attitudes and interests people bring with them to archives. Only when we have a clearer idea of the needs of our audience will we truly be able to plan public-awareness projects that fill those needs.

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Santa—The Real Thing at the ROM. ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM. Mounted at the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto. 17 November 1991 - 5 January 1992. No published catalogue.

The stuff of social history is not the 'greatest,' the 'first' or the 'reals,' but rather the observation and analysis of ongoing processes of change and reclamation in the past. The principal problem with the exhibition, "Santa—The Real Thing at the ROM," is that its central proposition is not an hypothesis, but an unfortunate example of hyperbole. There certainly is a place in our museums, archives and universities for the study of advertising as art, as well as economic and social history. This, unfortunately, is not what the Royal Ontario Museum has given us in its oddly bifurcated display of eighteen Haddon Sundblom Santa paintings and twenty-one other examples of advertising art from the 1930s to the 1950s.

The origins of the exhibit, which is beautifully designed to represent Santa Claus' flight through the winter sky and journey down the chimney into a gift-filled parlour, are not made clear, although similar showings of Sundblom's Christmas art (1931-1966) have been presented in Chicago and New York. This exhibition's rather wrong-headed approach to the celebration of both his work and that of the other accomplished artists is doubly disappointing because of the existence of an extensive Coca-Cola Company archives in Atlanta, Georgia, which could provide answers to the many questions that should have been, but were not, addressed here. These archives house documentation on the art purchased by the company, files of advertising copy, records of the company's marketing strategies, and information on distribution and sales from the late nineteenth century to the present.

The problems with the conceptual content of the current display begin before the viewer even enters the main exhibition space. Five examples of "Santa Before Sundblom" are presented in a simple wall display outside the entrance. Clearly, a straw dog is being set up there. The dull black-and-white reproductions indeed compare badly with the magnificent oil originals inside. This inadequate sampling of early Santas, however, gives us too little information to permit of a fair assessment of Sundblom's work. In any case, the notion that there must be one definitive Santa does not wash; surely the essence of myth is its mutability, its mystery—Santa Claus has a long and fascinating history.

Based on the legendary life of a monk who lived in Asia Minor in the fourth century A.D., St. Nicholas early became associated with miraculous and charitable acts. He was revered as the patron saint of women, sailors, scholars and travellers. In medieval times, celebrations of St. Nicholas' Day, on 6 December, included the election of a 'boy bishop' who robed and conducted church ceremonies in place of the real bishop. Thus from early times, St. Nicholas and his festival day became associated with children and the overturning of adult conventions. The 1990s children's rhyme, "Jingle bells/Santa smells/Batman laid an egg . . ." is a current expression of the compelling irreverence that cannot be suppressed in the young at Christmastime. The 'boy bishop' is alive and well.

The secular aspects of Christmas were not immediately recognized in those North American colonies that eventually became the United States of America. The southern states of Arkansas, Louisiana and Alabama were the first to make 25 December a legal holiday, early in the nineteenth century. Similar recognition was not granted in New England until after 1850. In spite of this, Clement Moore wrote the poem, "A Visit from St. Nicholas," in 1822 and published it the following year in the *Troy* (New York) *Sentinel*. It was this poem that began the transformation of St. Nicholas. In 1863, cartoonist Thomas Nast produced illustrations of Moore's poem for *Harper's Weekly* and began calling the central figure Santa Claus. The Moore/Nast figure was a mischievous, fat, rosy-cheeked and white-bearded man laden with toys—not unlike the 'boy bishop', but suited to the sensibilities and sentimentality of the new urban middle class in a rapidly industrializing America.

The contribution of this century's commercial art to the Santa Claus tradition should not be denigrated, but instead should be presented in a believable way that will attract the respect it deserves. This is not accomplished by captions which assert that "Sundblom and the Coca-Cola Company created our modern, North American idea of Santa Claus . . . He is always dressed in the red and white which are, coincidentally, the signature colours of the Coca-Cola Company." This really diminishes both the long-standing tradition of the child-Santa, and the wonderful accomplishment of a fine artist such as Haddon Sundblom.

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