

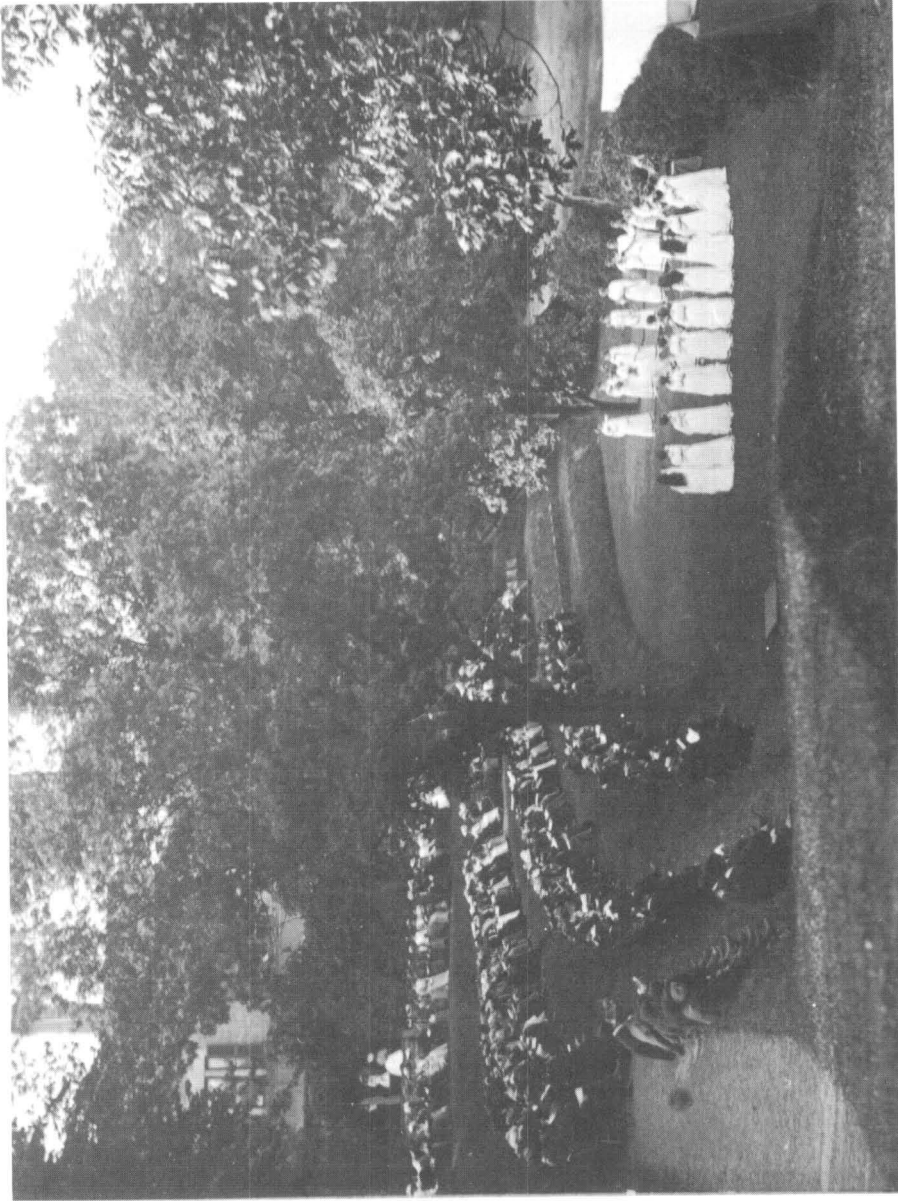
Exhibition Reviews

Dramatis Personae: An Exhibition of Amateur Theatre at the University of Toronto, 1879-1939. THOMAS FISHER RARE BOOK LIBRARY, UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO. Mounted in Toronto, 17 February - 29 May 1992. 32 p. Catalogue.

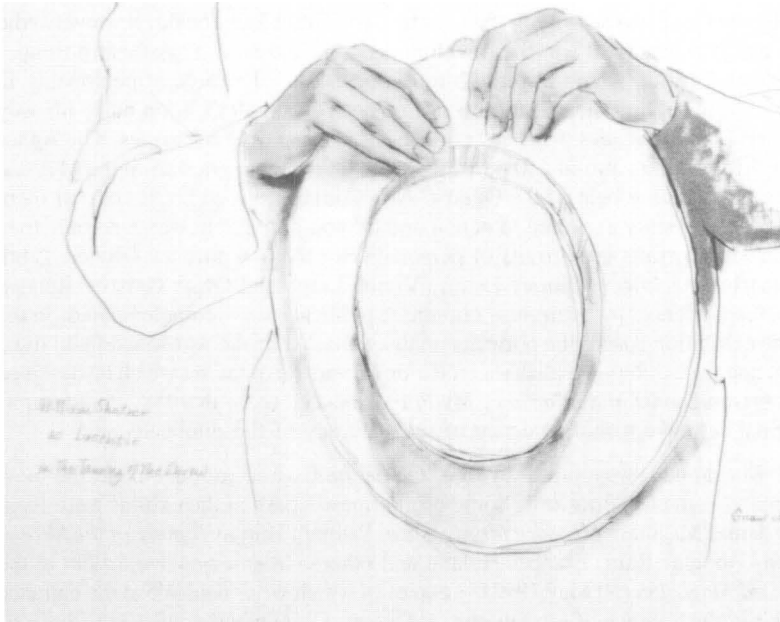
Character Sketches: Theatre Drawings of Grant Macdonald. NEW GALLERY, AGNES ETHERINGTON ART CENTRE. Mounted in Kingston, 31 May - 20 September 1992. No catalogue.

Two exhibits, one focusing on the development of amateur theatre in a university setting and the other on performers on the world stage, provided informative and interesting perspectives on the history of theatre. The first, mounted at the University of Toronto and prepared by Harold Averill, traced theatrical activities at the University from their hesitant beginnings in 1879, through the establishment of the University College Glee Club, until 1939, when amateur dramatics at the university had attained a high level of sophistication. The second, at the Agnes Etherington Art Centre, developed by Theresa Greenwood as guest curator, presented the brilliant portraits by Grant Macdonald of the world stars of English-language theatre from the 1930s to the 1950s.

Amateur dramatics at the University of Toronto probably followed a pattern of growth comparable to that at other universities in English Canada. The catalogue to the exhibit provides, in addition to a description of the items on display, a brief history of theatre at the University of Toronto up to World War II. After a first period during which students directed their dramatic efforts to evenings of light musical entertainment and skits, there followed alternating phases of intense activity and inertia. The first major effort in mounting significant productions followed the creation of a glee club which could provide musical substance to productions, and which usually performed the classical repertoire. As experience was acquired and interest grew, new, more permanent clubs were established and more varied and modern works were presented. Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People*, for example, was performed in 1913. Veterans who returned to the university after having served in World War I brought a new impetus to theatre, as did various women's theatrical groups formed in the first two decades of the century. The last two significant factors in the rising sophistication of theatre at the university were the construction of Hart House Theatre in 1920 and with it the coming of professional staff.



Anonymous. *Production of The Frogs by Aristophanes at Trinity College, University of Toronto, 1902.* Courtesy Trinity College Archives.



1954 portrait of William Shatner in the role of Lucentio in The Taming of the Shrew at the Stratford Festival. Character Sketches: The Theatre Drawings of Grant Macdonald. The Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Kingston, Ontario.

The exhibit began in the eight cases on the main (second) floor of the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library. This is a spectacular location for any exhibit (despite the existence of architectural and other obstacles to reaching the exhibition space), in the rotunda, surrounded by many levels of rare books. Programmes of the annual *conversazione* from 1872 to 1881 were succeeded by photographs of performances and performers, programmes of productions, scripts, posters, minute-books, reports and printed ephemera, most of which were from the holdings of the University of Toronto Archives. Particular themes, such as "Women students take the initiative," were developed in each of the display cases.

Although there was little reference in the materials on display to the directors of Hart House Theatre, or to the theatre itself, a special place was reserved in the exhibit for Frederick Coates, who was appointed art director of the theatre in 1922. One case in the rotunda was devoted to him, displaying, for example, photographs of stage sets and scenes; the exhibit concluded with artwork by Coates displayed in another four cases in the Reading Room and the Maclean Hunter Room. Drawings of set and costume designs, as well as depictions of whimsical characters, reflected his considerable artistic abilities; these drawings, combined with photographs of the corresponding productions, provided a good visual record of performances.

The exhibition and the catalogue published to accompany it do not place the developments on campus in the context of theatre throughout the city. In fact, until the flowering of Canadian theatre after World War II, university dramatic societies provided much of the significant theatrical activity in the country. For Grant Macdonald, however, who grew up in eastern Canada, it was the travelling London and New York theatre troupes passing through Toronto which inspired him to document "the force of personality in theatre." He drew his first theatrical portrait in New York in 1933, soon made his way to London and for two decades produced portraits of international celebrities. The Agnes Etherington Art Centre acquired 540 portraits in 1990 through a grant from the McLean Foundation and, with the help of the Ontario Arts Council, placed some sixty of them in this exhibition. Mainly executed in pencil and crayon but also in water-colour, they ranged from self-portraits to portraits of personalities such as Laurence Olivier, Edith Evans, Katharine Hepburn, Maurice Evans, Vivien Leigh and Greer Garson. Related items — correspondence, programmes, clippings, publications — complemented, in the centre of the exhibition space, the portraits on the walls. After the war Macdonald lived in Kingston, and the exhibition includes a scaled-down version of the set which he designed for the Robertson Davies play *Fortune, My Foe*, produced there in 1948. Photographs of the original set gave visual evidence of the accuracy of the duplicate set.

In 1952 Macdonald was hired by the *Globe and Mail* to document the new Shakespearean Festival in Stratford. Some of the finest works in the exhibit were from this period: James Mason in *Measure for Measure*, William Hutt in *Taming of the Shrew*, Don Harron, Douglas Rain, Frances Hyland and others. In an extensive article in the *Whig-Standard Magazine* (30 May 1992) — copies of which were available at the entrance to the exhibit in the absence of a catalogue — Theresa Greenwood emphasizes the continuity between Macdonald's New York and London portraits and his work at Stratford: Tyrone Guthrie and Tanya Moiseiwitsch "shaped the look and philosophy of the festival," and "British performers such as Alec Guinness and James Mason gave it credibility among the artists from New York and London." The Stratford Festival was nonetheless an illustration of how theatre had reached maturity in English Canada, building on

the contributions from abroad but also on such native sources as amateur theatre at universities. These two excellent exhibits complement each other well in depicting aspects of this evolution.

Henri Pilon

*Dictionary of Canadian
Biography/Trinity College Archives*

CANADIAN MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY PHOTOGRAPHY. Ottawa. Director: Martha Langford. Opening exhibitions. **Beau**. 7 May - 14 June 1992. 74 p. catalogue. **Portraits of the Companions of the Order of Canada**. 17 June - 8 September 1992. 162 p. catalogue. **Serge Tousignant: Phases in Photography**. 19 June - 13 September 1992. 82 p. Catalogue.

The Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography (CMCP) opened new facilities in downtown Ottawa on 7 May 1992, welcoming visitors and settling into normal operations. Moving through its public spaces and exhibits provided an opportunity to reflect on the place of photography within Canada's cultural establishment and on the role of this institution.

CMCP now occupies a prestigious location in Canada's capital. At 1 Rideau Canal, it is ensconced between the Parliament Buildings and the Château Laurier Hotel descending below street level alongside the canal locks. While the building materials visually integrate themselves into the adjacent Château, the contemporary look of the glass entrance pavilion distinguishes it from its neighbours. Standing on Confederation Square in front of the CMCP, visitors are surrounded by historic sites, national cultural institutions and the seat of government.

The site itself is enough to command respect for photography, and to entrench the CMCP among the established cultural institutions of the nation. The building's material elements reinforce the identification with prestige. The inner spaces confirm the spare, contemplative atmosphere of gallery presentation. From the sky-lit entrance, visitors descend from the busy street, past the glazed mezzanine and reception area and into a subterranean realm of protective custody. At this visible public intersection, photography now commands a prominent place in the nation's capital. What are the invisible costs of the new museum's prestige and permanence? Does its public presence among the tourist-travelled shrines of Ottawa promote accessibility? What alternatives exist in this country for an institution dedicated to contemporary photography?

We have only to look as far as the CMCP's own roots in the National Film Board of Canada (NFB), founded on John Grierson's belief in film as an active social instrument. In the early 1940s, the NFB absorbed the staff photographers of both the Canadian Government Motion Picture Bureau (which had been doing trade and travel promotion) and the Wartime Information Board. They became the NFB's Still Photography Division — at that time, an active image bank, where both staff and assignment photographers produced government advertising, social documents and public-interest photographs, which appeared in picture magazines and newspapers across the country and abroad. The images were a resource to be seen and used, with little energy devoted to creating and preserving a fonds.