

By a Lady. MARIA TIPPETT. Toronto: Viking Press, 1992. 226 p. ISBN 0-670-84458-6.

Feminist art historians in Canada have waited with baited breath for Maria Tippet's *By a Lady*, the first comprehensive history of women artists in Canada. This book—a visual feast rich in images—chronicles the contributions made by women artists in Canada from the earliest religious painters in Quebec to the present day. Although their history has been largely ignored and subsumed by more male-oriented and male-dominated views of Canadian art history, Tippet seeks to “set the record straight” about what women were doing while their male counterparts were being lauded or condemned for their powerful and sweeping expressions of artistic fervour or their careful and intelligent notations of Canadian national identity.

The book is divided into five sections, each building upon the former and culminating in the final chapter, “The Feminist Revolution in Art.” Tippet's narrative reads like a flowing story as she recounts the lives of women previously unrecorded or brushed aside. She charts and connects the framework set up in Canada for women artists from the earliest watercolour classes and artists' societies such as the Women's Art Club in London, established in 1892, to present-day artist-run centres for women only such as Montreal's Powerhouse Gallery and Vancouver's Women In Focus.

This book is a strong historical narrative that brings to light the work of many women previously omitted from the annals of history. Tippet points out how many women artists were trained by or with a family member, and cites specific examples of women whose works were overshadowed by the overwhelming demands of their nuptial vows; women such as Jeanne-Charlotte Allamand (1760-1839), the wife of William Moll Berczy, and Harriet Clench (?-1892), the wife of Paul Kane.

Despite such praiseworthy attributes, *By a Lady* falls short in many areas of concern to the scholarly reader. The book resembles, stylistically and formally, the texts it so eagerly criticizes, such as *A Concise History of Canadian Painting* by Dennis Reid or *Painting in Canada - A History* by Russell Harper. Tippet's archival references are few in number, and much of the research is from secondary sources. This is unfortunate, but understandable, as many repositories do not maintain files on artists of “secondary” importance. However, I was hopeful that this book would do something to alleviate this dilemma. Several of the women artists dealt with in the first chapter “Beginnings: Residents, Visitors and Pioneers,” such as Sister Marie Barbier, Susanna Moodie, Alicia Killaly, and Frances Anne Hopkins, have already been documented in Natalie Luckyj and Dorothy Farr's catalogue *From Women's Eyes - Women Painters in Canada*, as well as other exhibition catalogues published by the National Archives of Canada, the Thunder Bay Art Gallery, and numerous other institutions. Tippet adds nothing new to the discourse in this respect; she only retells old stories. The same can be said for her choice of contemporary artists. There are also several glaring omissions, such as Renée van Halm, Jana Sterbak, Marlene Creates, and Kati Campbell.

Tippet has subtitled her book “Celebrating Three Centuries of Art by Canadian Women.” It is indeed a celebration, but it begs the question, who is invited to this gala fête? In her introduction, Tippet outlines her main goal: to establish women in “...their rightful place in the canon of Canadian art history.” However, female artists excluded from this canon, specifically the “fine” or “high” art tradition, will not find a place in this book. They remain caught in the trap of the past. Native women artists, women working with arts and crafts (so central to and exemplary of women's existence in the domestic realm historically), women photographers, folk artists, and even sculptors (a “high” art form) have either been omitted from this book, or dealt with in a cursory fashion. For example, several Inuit artists including Jessie Onark, Kenoujouak Ashevak, and Pitseolak Ashoona are placed within a minimal historical context and are given only four pages of text in a book of two-hundred-and-two pages. Clearly more coverage is required.

There is a distinct lack of contemporary critical analysis in *By a Lady*. Tippet does not question the exclusion of women artists from the canon of art history. The tone of the book is similar in nature to material written in the 1970s, when critical feminist thinking in the field of art history was just beginning to come to the fore. Instead of questioning the canon, she tries to emplace women within it. Tippet's writing smacks of formalism, a school of thought in which a work of art is judged in a cultural and social void, considered only for its formal elements, and placed within a qualitative hierarchy.

Tippet's analysis of contemporary art in the final chapter creates the illusion that the zenith has been reached and that nothing more needs to be done or said about the art of the past two decades. This creates a serious analytical problem for art historians surveying the twenty years since the feminist revolution of the 1970s. Has the feminist revolution achieved its goals? Into what discourse does the art of contemporary women artists of the post-modern age fall? Tippet claims that most recent critics adopted "deconstructive jargon" as their main methodological and philosophical approach to Canadian art. Tippet quietly asks in her conclusion that all women's art be considered within the context of the circumstances in which it was created. She does not acknowledge that this would not be possible if the feminist revolution was not an ongoing critique of a still-perpetuated canon. The practitioners of the discourse may have changed their vocabulary, but it is still a lively and growing method of enquiry, not a defunct methodology.

What is needed in current Canadian art historical scholarship is a resource book or archival guide of names, dates, and general biographical and bibliographical information on the women that art history has neglected. *By a Lady* does not fulfil this need. Although an interesting and well-researched beginning, it does not put forth enough information about these women artists that needs to be available.

Kate O'Rourke
National Archives of Canada

Passion and Conviction: The Letters of Graham Spry. ROSE POTVIN, ed. Canadian Plains Research Centre, University of Regina, 1992. xii, 278 p. (8 p. of plates) ISBN 0-88977-070-0.

Graham Spry's legacy as the father of public broadcasting in Canada is well established. Margaret Prang's article, "The Origins of Public Broadcasting in Canada" in the *Canadian Historical Review* in 1965, documented and revered the lobbying success of Alan Plaunt and Graham Spry and their Canadian Radio League. Many have reiterated this admiration over the years. Anyone concerned with the fate of public broadcasting regularly, and fondly, evokes the memories of Plaunt and Spry.

Alan Plaunt died in 1941 but Spry continued a life-long mission of monitoring Canadian broadcasting. In the early 1970s, Spry helped to revive the Canadian Radio League as the Canadian Broadcasting League. Until his death in 1983, he wrote and spoke widely about his fears and hopes for Canadian broadcasting. Lectures in Graham Spry's honour are given annually at Carleton University and on CBC Radio's "Ideas" series. A photograph of Spry adorns the lobby of the CBC Head Office building in Ottawa—he is the only non-CBC president so honoured.

Lobbying for, and watching over, public broadcasting does not pay well and Graham Spry held an eclectic variety of jobs throughout his lifetime. He began as a reporter with the Winnipeg Free Press, and briefly was the publisher of the "New Commonwealth." Spry was an active supporter of the CCF, running for election unsuccessfully in 1934 and 1935. To recoup his finances in the 1940s he became Managing Director of Standard Oil in London and personal assistant to Sir Stafford Cripps of the British War Cabinet. From 1947, Spry was Agent-General for Saskatchewan in London, retiring to Ottawa in 1968.