



National Gallery of Canada

Mayo Graham - Interim Deputy Director and Chief Curator

Annual Public Meeting, Dec. 1, 2008

Good evening,

The acquisitions over the past year at the National Gallery of Canada reflect the range of objectives established for the national collection of art, as outlined in our Acquisitions Policy, including our foremost desire to acquire works of the highest quality and in the best possible condition. Augmenting our purchasing abilities is our success in attracting support from donors.

The National Gallery has long been committed to acquiring the most innovative Contemporary art, both Canadian and international. Joe Fafard's *Running Horses* was acquired with the support of the Distinguished Patrons of the National Gallery of Canada Foundation. This room-sized sculpture captures the essential beauty and untamed power of the horse. With manes and tails streaming out behind, the herd gallops through the gallery. An elegant mare leads, followed by other mares and colts, while a muscular black stallion brings up the rear.

Another contemporary Canadian work, *The Gifted Amateur Nov 10th 1962* successfully combines artist Rodney Graham's practices in performance art, painting, installation art and photography and brings together his interests in art history, pop culture and architecture. The artist stars as the main character in the meticulously staged scene, which he had expressly constructed for the purpose of the photograph.

With the appointment last year of the first Audain Curator of Indigenous Art and the creation of a new autonomous collecting area, and with the support of the Canada Council's 2-year aboriginal curatorial residency, we have seen increased activity in this field. For example, the first resident curator has collaborated on the exhibition "Steeling the Gaze," which is now on view here in the CMCP galleries. Recent acquisition purchases include Robert Houle's *Palisade II*, an homage to the (Six Nations) Haudenosaunee people who joined Pontiac in his campaign against the British during the conflicts of the mid-18th century in the Great Lakes region.



National Gallery of Canada

Our Inuit art collection is part of the Indigenous division, which will benefit also from the expertise of a new Associate Curator of Indigenous Art. In this image we see a ceramic sculpture by Roger Aksadjuak, who learned to work with clay under the guidance of his father, a noted sculptor and ceramicist since the 1960s. *Two Men on a Musk Ox* is inspired by a story recounting how in earlier times, for amusement, young Inuit would try to ride these lumbering animals.

While considerable recent activity has focused on contemporary art, including important new acquisitions from the current exhibition “Caught in the Act,” the fields of Canadian Historical art have been equally important, particularly through the purchase of late 18th-early 19th century works from the late Peter Winkworth’s unique and vast collection of Canadiana.

We were able to acquire paintings such as *Encampment of the Loyalists at Johnstown on the St. Lawrence* by James Peachey. He was a late 18th-century draughtsman, who made three survey trips to Canada to update existing maps. Peachey surveyed the land around Lake Ontario and the lower St. Lawrence to determine lots for the refugee Loyalists. *Encampment* shows the earliest beginnings of one of the settlements, later renamed Cornwall. The scene is idyllic, concealing the harsh realities of the lives of displaced peoples.

Another very different work, also from the former Winkworth collection, is Peter Rindisbacher’s *Indians Dancing round the Scalp of an Enemy Singing their War Song*. Emigrating with his family to the Red River colony in 1821, Rindisbacher was the first resident artist in Canada’s west. His work is considered an invaluable record of the settlers’ life and aspects of indigenous culture in Manitoba. His meticulous pencil and watercolour drawings are appreciated both for their historic and ethnographic accuracy. The clothing in *Indians Dancing* is consistent with Sioux costume.

Also acquired from the Winkworth purchase were extraordinary early sketchbooks by John Elliott Woolford and James Pattison Cockburn.

Here we see one example, *Small waterfall in rocky landscape* from Woolford’s album *Sketches in Canada 1821*.

When the 9th Lord Dalhousie was appointed lieutenant-governor of Nova Scotia in 1816, Woolford, a British military officer, artist, and architect, was invited to be the official draughtsman on Dalhousie’s tours of the region. Later when Dalhousie was Governor-General, Woolford accompanied him on a two thousand mile voyage through Québec and Ontario to Lake Superior.



National Gallery of Canada

Sketches in Canada 1821 contains 97 highly- finished watercolours, all in excellent condition and exquisite colour, recording this extraordinary journey.

James Pattison Cockburn's *Views of the American and English or HorseShoe Fall of Niagara* comprises 61 sketches. Seen here is Falls of the Rideau on the Ottawa.

Cockburn also was an exemplary military officer and talented artist. This album of Views was presented to Lady Dalhousie in 1828. Linked by a focus on waterfalls, it is remarkable for the variety of landscapes and their compositional treatment.

Another drawing of interest from this period is Lady Georgiana Eyre's *Valley of the Don, Toronto*. Lady Eyre, traveled with her husband, who was Commander-in-Chief of the British forces and acting Governor-General in the mid 19th century. The watercolour, inscribed Sept 1857, is a prime example of Lady Eyre's talents and a historically significant image, particularly since views of Toronto from this period are rare. Robert Field's *Rebecca Byles Almon* dates from about 1810.

Field was among the most talented portrait painters to work in North America during the early 19th century. Born and raised in England, he travelled first to Baltimore and then moved to Halifax in 1808, where he enjoyed a steady stream of commissions from both the local elite and the numerous British military officers stationed in Halifax during the War of 1812.

As well as purchases, over the past year there have been exceptional donations, such as Emily Carr's *Graveyard Entrance, Campbell River* 1912. This painting was among the 31 paintings by Carr included in the important *Exhibition of Canadian West Coast Art, Native and Modern*, which was held in Ottawa in December 1927.

We must keep in mind, of course, that our collection extends far beyond the works of art one sees on the walls and contains many treasures that, for reasons of conservation, are more infrequently exposed. Examples of such works include Picasso's engraving *Man with a Guitar* 1915, another fine donation... and Barbara Morgan's 1940 photograph of *Martha Graham, Letter to the World, "Kick"* which is a powerful depiction of the legendary modernist American dancer, Martha Graham. Morgan succeeds in creating a permanent and timeless image from an essentially ephemeral experience.

Older European art has not been neglected.... Recently we received as a gift the *Portrait of Sientje Tadema*, an early portrait by Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema, from the collection of Dr.



National Gallery of Canada

Dennis Lanigan. It was painted more than ten years before the artist's rise to professional and social prominence in late Victorian London. Sientje was Alma-Tadema's cousin, and the portrait is of particular interest because its intimate quality is so very different from that of the large-scale history paintings he later became famous for. He took considerable effort to capture her physical likeness in a composition that is austere, symmetrical and static. Despite its modest size this portrait is marked by its attention to detail and its sincerity of expression.

In staff news, we are delighted to announce that doctorates were awarded this past year to three National Gallery curators. As well, our Provenance Research Intern continues, thanks to the support of the NGC Foundation, and another graduate was awarded the Sobey Research Fellowship in European and American Art.

In addition to the collections of art, our Library and Archives pursues significant acquisitions, with particular interest in finding and acquiring the complete holdings of artists' archives for the benefit of curators and researchers nationwide. Another major activity for the Library is the awarding research fellowships to encourage and support advanced research in areas of investigation that correspond to the collections of the National Gallery of Canada. Fellowships have recently been awarded in the fields of Canadian and European art, as well as photography and conservation.

Speaking of conservation, recent activity in this department reveals major advances in all areas of interest to the Gallery. In terms of historical art, a variety of Canadian and European old Masters have been conserved, or are in the process of treatment. Supported by the National Gallery of Canada Foundation is the notable restoration of a fragment from the Petrobelli Altarpiece by the Italian Renaissance artist, Veronese.

Yet more unusual and far-reaching is the recent focus by our Restoration and Conservation Lab. on contemporary art/ time-based media issues. An example is Gar Smith's *Notes on Light...* Created nearly 40 years ago, this artwork involves an elaborate installation of slide projectors with over one thousand slides. Shortly after it was acquired, the work was exhibited extensively. Then, when recently requested for loan, and examined, it was obvious that the slides had undergone radical discolouration. Thanks to the smart sleuthing of one of our conservators, the Technicolor Studios Motion Picture Preservation Unit in Los Angeles was contacted. They generously agreed to sit with the artist and conservator to re-colour the images according to the artist's best recollection. After this extensive restoration project, the work is now on loan with the travelling exhibition: "Projections".



National Gallery of Canada

In conservation, as in all its activities, the National Gallery is pleased to be a partner, innovator and leader for Canada, and a bridge to the world.

Thank you.